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Title The Book of Mormon Plates

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Abstract Janne Sjodahl discusses how the Book of Mormon would have taken up less space on the plates than in its current translated and printed form. Because the plates were written in a language comparable to Hebrew, Sjodahl had fourteen pages of the English Book of Mormon translated into Hebrew and written out. This Hebrew text covered only one page. According to this finding, the Book of Mormon could be written using as few as twenty-one plates (or even forty-eight if written in larger characters). Sjodahl presents estimates of the size and weight of the plates.

that the question was put to them twenty years after they had actually had it before them; what would the result be? Each would give his own impression, unless, indeed, there had been collusion between them.

David Whitmer, in an interview in the *Kansas City Journal*, not very long before his death, said of the plates:

They appeared to be of gold, about six by nine inches in size, about as thick as parchment, a great many in number, and bound together like the leaves of a book by massive rings passed through the back edges.¹

Martin Harris, according to *Myth of the Manuscript Found*,² estimated the plates at eight inches by seven inches, and that the volume had a thickness of about four inches, each plate being about as thick as thick tin.

Orson Pratt had never seen the plates, but owing to his intimacy with the Prophet and the witnesses, his word has great weight. He tells us that the plates were eight by seven inches, and that the volume was about six inches, each plate being about as thick as common tin. Orson Pratt also tells us that two-thirds of the volume was sealed.

The question therefore is: Could one-third of a volume of metal leaves, eight by seven inches, by four (according to Martin Harris), or eight by seven by six (Orson Pratt), contain enough plates, each as thick as tin, to yield the necessary space for the entire text of the Book of Mormon?

We have been told that this was utterly impossible.

Now look at the accompanying illustration [see the illustration on p. 22, which has been reproduced at actual size]. On a space seven by eight inches, my friend, Brother Henry Miller, a Hebrew by birth, has written with pen and ink fourteen pages of the Book of Mormon text, translated into Hebrew, using the square letters in which the Hebrew Bibles now are printed. That is to say, the entire Book of Mormon,³ fourteen pages of the American text to each page of Hebrew, could be written on 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ pages—21 plates in all.

Brother Miller positively states that, even if the compilers of the Book of Mormon used much larger characters than he has used in this copy, they could

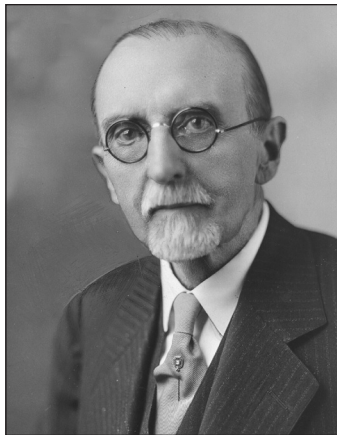
have engraved the entire text on 48 plates.

This may sound incredible to some, but in the first place, the Hebrews anciently did not write the vowels, as we do. They wrote only the consonants and they did not leave a blank space between words. That was an immense saving of space. In the second place, they did not need as many small words to complete a sentence as we do. And frequently the auxiliary words consisted of only one letter, which was attached to the main word, either as a prefix or suffix. Finally, they used many abbreviations and that was another great saving of space.

Now, if we allow fifty plates to an inch, and four inches for the thickness of the volume, we find that one-third which was translated consisted of 66 or 67 plates. But as only 48 were actually needed, there is ample enough margin to allow for large, readable characters, and the necessary thickness of each plate.

It is just as difficult to estimate the weight of the plates as their number. Thirty-five twenty-dollar gold pieces would cover a surface 8 by 7 inches. To make a column four inches high, 48 would be needed. That is to say, thirty-five times forty-eight twenty-dollar gold pieces—1,680 in all—would make up the dimensions of the plates, 8 by 7 by 4 inches. But each of these weighs, as I am informed, 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ pennyweights. That would make a total, if my figures are correct, of 123 pounds avoirdupois.

But from this weight liberal deductions must be made. The plates did not fit as closely together as gold coins stacked up in columns. They were, in all probability, hammered and not cast, and there would be quite a space between each. Further, they were not solid gold but an alloy. Nephi's plates were made of "ore," and Moroni mentions "ore" as the material of which his plates were made (1 Nephi 19:1; Mormon 8:5). The ore certainly was considerably lighter in weight than the refined gold would have been. Then again, some allowance must be made for the metal cut away from every plate by the engraver. Everything considered, the entire volume could not have weighed a hundred pounds even if we accept the dimensions given as the actual measurements. But they were not. They were only approximations.



Janne M. Sjodahl. Courtesy *Deseret News*.

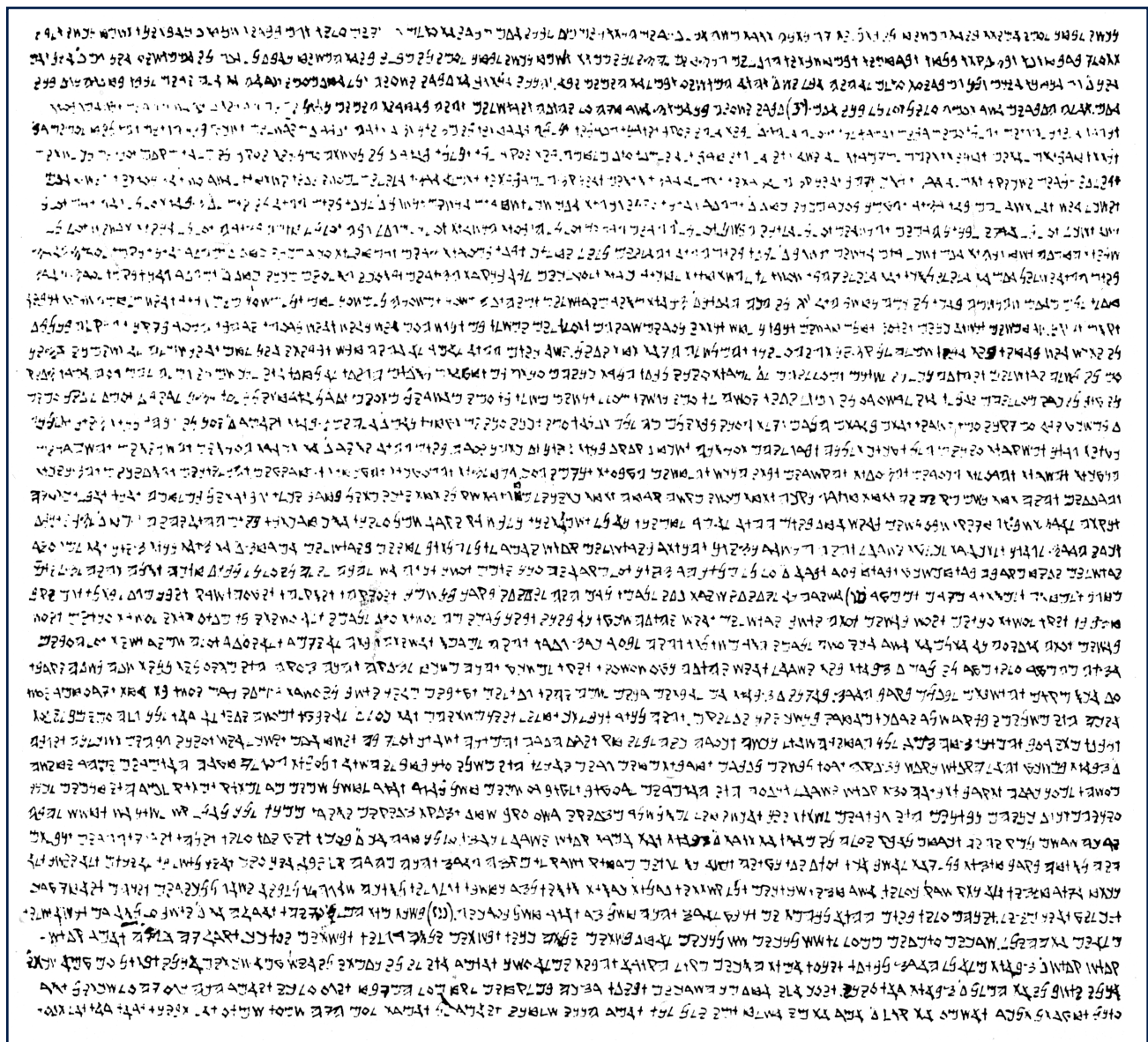
The question may also be approached from a different angle. If the entire text was written on 48 plates, then the book contained only 144 leaves, since two-thirds were sealed up. But if 200 leaves weighed 123 pounds, 144 leaves weighed a fraction over 88 pounds. When the necessary deductions are made from their weight, something like anywhere from 50 to 75 pounds remain, and that, I believe, comes nearer the truth than any estimate made by unfriendly critics.

The plates were not heavier than that the Prophet, who was an unusually strong man, physically, as well as intellectually, could lift them and handle them.⁴ This is the testimony of eye witnesses. And that testimony stands.

But, is it certain that the Prophet Joseph had charge of the part of the plates that was sealed up? That may be the general impression, but is it correct? Orson Pratt⁵ says:

You recollect that when the Book of Mormon was translated from the plates, about two-thirds were sealed up, and Joseph was commanded not to break the seal; *that part of the record was hid up.*

If the words which I have italicized mean that the sealed part of the volume was hidden before the translation of the other part was even begun, then the Prophet did not have the sealed part in his keeping, and the objection based on the weight of the volume rests on nothing. ■



In 1927 Henry Miller wrote a translation of seven pages consisting of 2 Nephi 11:4–16:9 (Isaiah 2–6) in the paleo-Hebrew script used in Lehi's day.

nished a product similar in appearance (see Lechtman, "Pre-Columbian Surface Metallurgy"; and Dorothy Hosler and Guy Stresser-Pean, "The Huastec Region: A Second Locus for the Production of Bronze Alloys in Ancient Mesoamerica," *Science* 257, 28 August 1992, 1215). Moreover, Nephi's original plates might have been of different composition than Mormon's plates.

The Book of Mormon Plates Janne M. Sjodahl

Like the article itself, the following notes are as they appeared in the original article from the April 1923 *Improvement Era*, with the exception that publication data has been added in brackets.

1. This is quoted from [Gregg Thomas,] *The Prophet of Palmyra* [New York: J. B. Alden, 1890] and may or may not be authentic.
2. An excellent little book by George Reynolds [Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883].
3. The American edition, published at Nauvoo, 1842, has 566 pages, 5/8 by 3/4 inches, including the margins.
4. See *History of the Prophet Joseph*, by his mother, Lucy Smith, pp. 85 and 105. The account related must have been given by the Prophet himself to his mother. [The pages cited correspond to the 1902 edition of this book, revised by George A. Smith and Elias Smith and published by the *Improvement Era*.]
5. *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 3, p. 347.

Epigraphic Considerations on Janne Sjodahl's Experiment with Nephite Writing John Gee

1. Robert Deutsch, *Messages from the Past: Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Isaiah Through the Destruction of the First Temple*, Shlomo Moussaieff Collection and an Up-to-Date Corpus (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 1999).
2. "A New Weight from Hamath and Trade Relations with the South in the Ninth–Eighth Centuries BCE," in *The World of the Aramaeans II*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 133–35.

The Book of Mormon Art of Arnold Friberg, "Painter of Scripture" Vern Swanson

1. Vern Swanson, "A Master's Hand: Arnold Friberg, Illustrator," *Southwest Art* 11 (December 1981): 75.
2. Arnold Friberg notes (February 2001), Springville Museum of Art (SMA) Library.
3. John L. Sorenson correspondence with the author (21 May 1999), in the author's possession. Two generations later, Sorenson would issue a book, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, Utah: Research Press/FARMS, 1998), that provided some of the information Friberg had hoped for in 1951.
4. Arnold Friberg notes (February 2001), SMA Library.
5. Ted Schwarz, *Arnold Friberg: The*

Passion of a Modern Master (Flagstaff, Ariz.: Northland, 1985), 54. Schwarz has a background in general commercial studio photography and magazine and book illustration.

6. Margot J. Butler, Special Education Coordinator, Church Education System, Salt Lake Valley North Area, transcript of an interview with Friberg (3 June 1986). This and other quotes from the transcript were modified by Friberg himself upon reviewing this article in manuscript form in February 2001.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Friberg interview with author, 1981.
9. Arnold Friberg notes (February 2001), SMA Library.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Friberg interview with author, 1981.
12. Quoted in Grady Johnson, "Moses and the Mormon Artist," *Instructor*, September 1954. The final nine words in the quotation were added by Friberg in an interview with the author in February 2001.
13. Arnold Friberg notes (February 2001), SMA Library.
14. All the comments are from Butler's 1986 interview, modified by Friberg in February 2001.
15. Friberg statement to Vern Swanson, December 2000.
16. See Noel A. Carmack, "Images of Christ in Latter-day Saint Visual Culture, 1900–1999," *BYU Studies* 39/3 (2000): 40–41, 73.
17. It was exhibited in December 2000 at Williams Fine Art in Salt Lake City on the occasion of a show of Friberg's work.

The Journey of an 1830 Book of Mormon Gerald E. Jones

1. Journal of Samuel Smith, Historical Department Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
2. I have obtained three other 1830 books that closely match my 1830 Book of Mormon and Bible not only in the type of binding but also in the size and placement of the lines of type on the spines. I have not seen a study of book binding (process, materials, suppliers) in America in that era. That study still awaits the work of a serious student.
3. Journal of Orson Hyde, Historical Department Archives, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
4. The only other notations in the book are by Melvin Wilbur. On the top of the first blank page is his very legible signature and beneath it, in two lines, the words "Providence, R.I." The other notation is found at the top of page 574 (the title page for the book of Moroni), where he wrote, again in two lines, "Melvin Wilbur Book."

The Book of Mormon as a Collectible Matthew R. Sorenson and John L. Sorenson

1. This article was prepared using observations by Curt Bench (Benchmark Books), Madelyn Garrett (University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections), Richard Horsley (Pioneer Books), Joan Nay (Sam Weller's Bookstore), Ken Sanders (Ken Sanders Rare Books), Kent Walgren (Sallywag's Used and

Rare Books), and others who choose to remain anonymous.

Other Ancient American Records Yet to Come Forth Monte S. Nyman

1. In *A Guide to Publications on the Book of Mormon: A Selected Annotated Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1996), there is no mention of books or articles about future records to come forth as promised in the Book of Mormon. Some time ago I published a book with a chapter on the subject (chapter 5 of *Two Sticks One in Thine Hand* [Salt Lake City: Gen-Dex Press, 1973], 139–50). Although this publication was included in the FARMS bibliography, the subject of the above chapter was not annotated. Perhaps this subject has been treated elsewhere, but not to my knowledge, although excerpts from an unpublished manuscript that briefly outlined some of these records were printed in the RLDS publication *The Witness* (winter 1992).
2. See Henry J. Cadbury, "The New Testament and Early Christian Literature," *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al. Although I do not agree with the conclusions of the article cited here, it represents the thinking of many Bible scholars regarding the dating of 2 Peter and why scholars reject the authorship of Peter's epistle. The claim that the epistles of John were written after his gospel is much more widely accepted and is probably correct. The dating of John's epistles is also confirmed in the article cited above.
3. The brother of Jared was one of those who had written his vision of the end of the world. The vision was recorded in the sealed portion of the plates given to Joseph Smith. These will be discussed later.
4. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:38. The incident is quoted as evidence of the existence of plates and not as a discussion of Book of Mormon geography. Whether the cave was in New York or was a vision given to Joseph and Oliver is irrelevant to the discussion here.
5. The preceding references are to quotations that were obviously taken from the plates of brass and included in the writings of Nephi or in Mormon's abridgment.
6. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 327.
7. The subheadings of the Book of Mormon books were part of the text written by Mormon and translated by Joseph Smith, while the synopses of chapters were written by various modern-day apostles as new editions were printed. For examples of the subheadings written by Mormon, see the major subheading under the titles of Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, and 4 Nephi; and for examples of subheadings within various books, see the italicized comments preceding Mosiah 9, 23; Alma 5, 9, 17, 21, 36, 38, 39, 45; Helaman 7, 13; and 3 Nephi 11.

8. Jesus also taught more in Jerusalem than is recorded in the New Testament. As John wrote his gospel, he declared, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (John 21:25).
9. Moroni told Joseph Smith that the fullness of the gospel was found in the Book of Mormon plates (Joseph Smith—History 1:34). The Doctrine and Covenants repeatedly states that the Book of Mormon contained the fullness of the gospel (see D&C 1:22–23; 14:10; 20:9; 27:5; 35:12, 17; 39:11; 42:12; 45:28; 66:2). For a definition of the fullness of the gospel given within the Book of Mormon, see 3 Nephi 27:13–21.
10. Some consider 2 Nephi 27 to be partly from the text of Isaiah 29 with Nephi's comments interspersed. Because Isaiah 29 in the Joseph Smith Translation contains almost the exact wording of 2 Nephi 27, I accept the whole chapter of 2 Nephi 27 as the original text of Isaiah except for the introductory verse and a slight paraphrasing of verses 2 and 3. 2 Nephi 28 also implies that Nephi had concluded his quoting of Isaiah and was now adding his commentary.
11. See Sidney B. Sperry, *Doctrine and Covenants Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 305–6. Isaiah speaks of how "in that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and a for diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people" (Isaiah 28:5). The context of that chapter is Ephraim, or northern Israel, in the day of its wickedness prior to being taken into captivity by Assyria in 721 B.C. Typical of Old Testament prophecy, a message of doom (captivity) is followed by a message of hope referring to the restoration of the latter days as "in that day." The residue is probably the remnant of the tribes of the north that would someday return (see Isaiah 6:13; 7:3 [the name *Shear-jashub* means "a remnant shall return"]; 10:20–22).

The "crown of glory" suggests the temple endowment and sealings in other scriptural passages. Enoch was commanded to ascend Mount Simeon, where he was "clothed upon with glory" (see Moses 7:2–3). President Joseph Fielding Smith believed that Peter, James, and John received their endowments on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matthew 17:1–9) when they were given the keys of the kingdom (see his *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999], 2:165). The Lord has often used the mountain for his holy place when there were no temples available (as he did with Moses in Exodus 24:12–31:18 and with Elijah in 1 Kings 19). While we have no direct scriptural statement that the "rich treasures" mentioned in D&C 13 are genealogical records, the above scriptures suggest that such records will constitute at least a part of that legacy. One of the most significant purposes of the latter-day restoration is the