



7-31-2001

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Williams, Clyde J. (2001) "More Light On Who Wrote The Title Page," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 10 : No. 2 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol10/iss2/5>

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Title More Light on Who Wrote the Title Page

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Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 28-29, 70.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

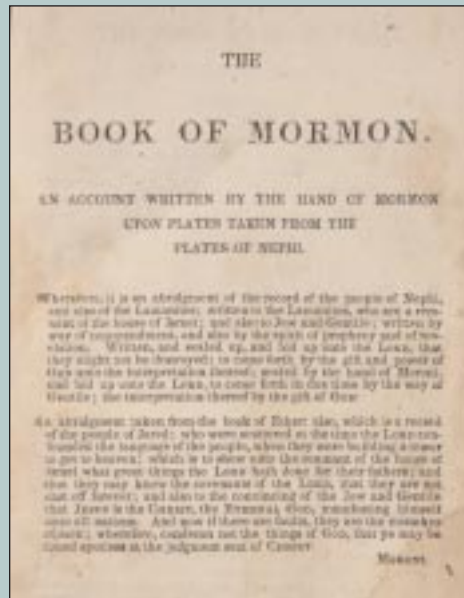
Abstract The title page of the Book of Mormon was most likely written by Moroni, but in recent years scholars have suggested that Mormon, Moroni's father, may have written the first six lines of the title page, with Moroni writing the rest. However, a more in-depth analysis of the text on that page and the specific language that is used provides evidence supporting the notion that the title page was, in fact, written solely by Moroni.

TITLE PAGE

CLYDE J. WILLIAMS

TRADITIONALLY, Moroni, son of Mormon, has been the recognized author of the title page of the Book of Mormon. Before the late 1980s most Latter-day Saint church leaders and scholars who wrote on the issue attributed the title page to Moroni.¹ Official church publications have supported that view, stating, for example, “It is believed that the title page was written by Moroni.”² In recent years there has been renewed discussion among some LDS scholars about the authorship of the title page. The suggestion has been made that Mormon is the author of the first six lines and that Moroni is the author of the remainder. The most complete explanation of this proposal was published in 1988.³ Others have since agreed with the idea.⁴ However, a careful look at the text of the title page, its historical context within the Book of Mormon, and the arguments marshaled to support Mormon’s involvement will demonstrate the likelihood that Moroni is the sole author of the title page.

It seems clear that Joseph Smith understood Moroni to be the author of the title page. We know from Joseph’s words that the title page “is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates.”⁵ Since Moroni was the last person to handle the plates before he buried them (see Moroni 10:2), he likely engraved “the very last leaf.” In the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon, which Joseph Smith helped prepare, Moroni’s name as author was added at the end of the title page (see photo above). We can safely assume that this change was done under Joseph’s direction, because he indicated that he was still making corrections to the scripture as late as January 1842.⁶



Title page of the 1840 Book of Mormon. Photograph by Mark Philbrick.

Moroni’s name was probably added to avoid confusion about the actual authorship of this page, for some had thought that Joseph Smith originated it. The addition of Moroni’s name to the title page was not unique to the 1840 edition; it also appeared in a facsimile of the title page in *Times and Seasons* in 1841,⁷ the second printing of the 1852 edition of the Book of Mormon, the 1858 Jas. O. Wright edition, and the 1874 and 1892 RLDS editions.⁸ If anyone would have noticed differences in the engraving styles, or the marks left by engraving

tools, as they might have been used differently by Mormon and Moroni on that last plate, it would have been Joseph Smith. Apparently he saw no reason to suggest two authors.

Another issue raised by those who propose dual authorship is that the last two lines of the first paragraph are very similar to the two previous lines. I reproduce them as follows:

Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof—

Sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by way of the Gentile—The interpretation thereof by the gift of God.

If the same author wrote both sentences, the question arises, “Why would he have repeated himself so closely?”⁹ It seems likely that, rather than being a repetition, the second sentence, in the form of

poetic parallelism, is a purposeful clarification of the first. By whom was the book sealed up? How long would the record be hidden up, and who would bring it forth? How would the interpretation be given? It is entirely possible, indeed probable, that Moroni wrote both statements, not out of redundancy, but to further illuminate the divine destiny of this important record.

It may be that these two statements were written by Moroni at different times, as Dr. Sidney B. Sperry has proposed, although we cannot be certain.¹⁰ If Moroni wrote the first portion of the title page in A.D. 400 (see Mormon 8:5, 12–14, where Mormon appears to be ending his record the first time) and added the rest sometime in the next 20 years, by then he certainly would have received more understanding concerning the coming forth of the book. Indeed, he wrote: “The Lord hath shown unto me great and marvelous things concerning that which must shortly come, at that day when these things shall come forth among you. . . . Behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:34–35). This statement would account for the clarifications given in the last two lines of the first paragraph of the title page.


It has been suggested that Moroni’s words in Mormon 8:5—”my father hath made this record, and he hath written the *intent* thereof”—are a direct reference to Mormon’s writing on the title page. However, Mormon’s final words in Mormon 7 are a statement of the intent for which the Book of Mormon was written:

For behold, this [the Book of Mormon] is written for the *intent* that ye may believe that [the Bible]; and if ye believe that ye will believe this also; and if ye believe this ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them. And ye will also know that ye are a remnant of the seed of Jacob; . . . and if it so be that ye believe in Christ, . . . following the example of our Savior, . . . it shall be well with you in the day of judgment. (Mormon 7:9–10; see 5:14–15)

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for Moroni’s authorship of the entire title page comes from a study of two unusual words or word combinations that appear infrequently in the Book of Mormon. The word *interpretation* appears 7 times in the Book of Mormon text, written once by Nephi and 6

times in the writings of Moroni (Mormon 9:7, 34; Ether 2:3; 4:5; 15:8; Moroni 10:16). The words *seal(ed) up* occur only 14 times in the Book of Mormon, 5 times by Nephi and 9 times in Moroni’s writings (Ether 3:22–23, 27–28; 4:5; 5:1; Moroni 10:2). Those expressions do not appear anywhere in Mormon’s translated writings, yet they do occur in the very portions of the title page that some scholars have attributed to both Mormon and Moroni. The distribution of those expressions weighs heavily in favor of Moroni as the sole author.

There is another issue in considering whether Mormon wrote the first portion of the title page. Could the statement “written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord” have come from him? It is clear from Mormon’s own words that he intended to hide up all the Nephite records “save it were” the abridged set of plates he had written (see Mormon 6:6) and the small plates of Nephi (see Words of Mormon 1:5–6). Mormon did not intend to seal and hide up these last plates personally, for it was his feeling and desire that his son, Moroni, would “survive, . . . that he may write somewhat concerning [the Nephites], and somewhat concerning Christ” (Words of Mormon 1:2). Thus Mormon did not envision the Book of Mormon plates being sealed up or buried during his own lifetime. Moroni confirmed this point when, some 16 years after the final Nephite-Lamanite battle, he declared he would write a few things that his father had commanded him to write (see Mormon 8:1, 6; 6:5). It was at this time that Moroni first mentioned burying or sealing up the plates (see Mormon 8:4, 14). Fortunately for us, Mormon’s intuition was right and Moroni lived for at least 36 years after the final battle. He recorded much of importance pertaining to the Savior and his gospel before burying the plates.

Ultimately, all who have taken the time to comment on or study the issue of authorship of the title page would likely be happy with either Mormon or Moroni as the author, or even both as coauthors. However, when the information presented in this article is joined with what was recognized by earlier writers, perhaps we might now consider the question answered definitively: Moroni himself wrote the title page while faithfully echoing what he had learned from his father, Mormon. 

More Light on Who Wrote the Title Page
Clyde J. Williams

1. Some examples are James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 258; B. H. Roberts, *New Witness for God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 2:60; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 4:39; Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 226; Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 277; and Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 42.
2. *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122* (Salt Lake City: Church Educational System, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 1.
3. See Daniel H. Ludlow, "The Title Page," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center), 19–33.
4. See John A. Tvedtnes, review of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 202; and David B. Honey, "The Secular as Sacred: The Historiography of the Title Page," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 95 n. 2.
5. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1946), 1:71.
6. *Ibid.*, 4:495.
7. *Times and Seasons* 2 (15 March 1841): 354–55.
8. Personal correspondence with Royal Skousen provided this information. It is my opinion that the omission of Moroni's name from the first 1852 printing was an oversight that was corrected in the second printing. That correction indicates it was the feeling to follow the addition of Moroni's name that Joseph had made.
9. Ludlow, "Title Page," 31.
10. Sidney B. Sperry, "Moroni the Lonely: The Story of the Writing of the Title-Page to the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era*, February 1944, 83, 116, 118. Sperry suggested that Moroni may have written the first paragraph of the title page in A.D. 400, 16 years after the final battle, because he appeared to be ready to seal up the plates (Moroni 8:4). Then, sometime between A.D. 401 and 421, he came back to the hill where he had buried the plates, wrote the books of Ether and Moroni, and added the second paragraph to the title page.