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History of the Critical Text Project o the Book of Mormon

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Abstract Royal Skousen details the history of the critical text project of the Book of Mormon. He describes that project, including his work with both the original manuscript and the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon. After six years of pursuing this venture, Skousen was asked by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to temporarily resign as a professor at Brigham Young University and focus primarily on the project. Skousen agreed, and for the following seven years he continued his work on the Book of Mormon text, often collaborating with the Church Scriptures Committee. In this article, Skousen shares several discoveries that have surfaced because of his research and the meaning that those discoveries have had in his life.

History of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon

ROYAL SKOUSEN

A Critical Text for the Book of Mormon

Critical texts have previously been prepared for important historical and literary works, but until fairly recently, not for the Book of Mormon. The first critical text of the Book of Mormon was published by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (or FARMS) in 1984–86. That first version, although preliminary, helped to establish criteria for the current project, especially the need for direct access to the original and printer's manuscripts as well as the clearest photographs of those manuscripts.

A critical text shows all the substantive changes that a written work has undergone, from its original version to its present editions. The word *critical* is derived from the Greek word *krites,* meaning "judge." When referring to a critical text, the term means that notes accompany the text so that the reader can see how the work has changed over time and thus judge between alternative readings.

There are two main goals for a critical text of the Book of Mormon. The first is to determine, to the extent possible, the original English-language text of the book. The second purpose is to establish the history of the text, including both accidental errors and editorial changes that the book has undergone as it has been transmitted down through time in its many editions.

I use the term *original text* to refer to the English-language text that Joseph Smith received by means of the interpreters and the seer stone. The term will not be used to refer to the actual ancient language that Mormon, Moroni, Nephi, and others wrote on the plates. We have no direct record of their ancient language, but we should also recognize that we actually have no direct record of the original English-language translation either. The closest source for what Joseph received is the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the manuscript that the scribes wrote down as Joseph dictated the English-language text. But we must not assume that the original manuscript is identical to what Joseph Smith received. Joseph had to read off the text, and the scribe had to understand his words and then write them down correctly. As we shall see, even the original manuscript contains errors in transmission.

Fragments of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon (Helaman 15:9–14), with penciled-in punctuation added by John Gilbert, the typesetter for the 1830 edition. From Helaman 13 through Mormon 9, the 1830 edition was set from the original manuscript, not the printer's manuscript. Photograph by David Hawkinson; fragments owned by the Wilford Wood family.

But a more serious difficulty is that most of the original manuscript no longer exists. Of course, the first 116 pages of manuscript were originally lost by Martin Harris during the early summer of 1828. But the Lord prepared for this loss by having Nephi and his successors record a different version of their early history on a second set of plates (the small plates of Nephi). During the spring and early summer of 1829, Joseph Smith finished the translation, including that of the small plates.

In 1841 Joseph Smith placed the original manuscript in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House. When removed by Lewis Bidamon in 1882, the manuscript had largely been destroyed by mold and water seepage. Today only 28 percent of the original manuscript is extant. Most of the surviving leaves and fragments (25 of the 28 percent) are held by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (referred to hereafter in this article as the church). The remaining 3 percent are fragments owned by the Wilford Wood Foundation, the University of Utah, and various individuals.

Joseph Smith directed his scribes to produce a copy of the original manuscript from which the 1830 edition would be typeset. This copy is referred to as the printer's manuscript and was produced from August 1829 to the early part of 1830. For the most part, the printer set the type for the 1830 edition from the printer's manuscript, although for one sixth of the text (from Helaman 13 through the end of Mormon), the type was set from the original manuscript. The printer's manuscript is virtually 100 percent extant and is held by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (recently renamed the Community of Christ).

Errors entered the text in copying the printer's manuscript from the original manuscript. Oliver Cowdery and other scribes made an average of two to three textual changes per manuscript page. The term *textual change* means an alteration in the wording (however minor) or a consistent change in the spelling of a name. The 1830 printer also made various errors in copying the text from the manuscripts. In general, these early transmission errors have not been caught by later editors of the text except by reference to the manuscripts themselves.

We therefore have the following early stages in transmitting the Book of Mormon text:

- Joseph Smith sees the text
- Joseph reads off the text
- the scribe hears Joseph's words
- the scribe writes down the words (the original manuscript)

- the scribe copies the text (the printer's manuscript)
- the 1830 printer sets the type from manuscript, as follows:

    from the printer's manuscript, for five-sixths of the text:

    > 1 Nephi 1 – Helaman 13

    > Ether 1 – Moroni 10

    from the original manuscript, for one-sixth of the text:

    > Helaman 13 – Mormon 9

There is also evidence that for several of these stages the copying process was proofed:

- the scribe read back to Joseph Smith what had just been written down in the original manuscript
- after copying, the printer's manuscript was frequently proofed against the original manuscript (sometimes by a different scribe)
- the 1830 printed sheets were proofed against the manuscript used to set the type, although in one case the sheet was set from the printer's manuscript but then checked against the original manuscript (gathering 22, covering Alma 41–46)

Despite these efforts to assure accuracy, errors still occurred.

Our sources for recovering the original English-language text are the two manuscripts and the first three editions:

1. the original manuscript (28 percent extant)

    largely intact sheets:

    > 1 Nephi 2–13

    > 1 Nephi 15 – 2 Nephi 1

    > Alma 22– 60

    > Alma 62 – Helaman 3

    fragments:

    > 1 Nephi 14

    > 2 Nephi 4–5

    > 2 Nephi 5–9, 23–25, 33

    > Jacob, Enos

    > Alma 10–13, 19–20

    > Alma 19

    > Alma 58–60

    > Alma 61–62

    > Helaman 13 – 3 Nephi 4

    > 3 Nephi 19–21, 26–27

    > Ether 3– 15

2. the printer's manuscript (virtually 100 percent extant)

    includes Joseph Smith's own handwritten editing for the 1837 edition

3. 1830 edition, especially for Helaman 13 – Mormon 9

4. 1837 edition, involving Joseph Smith's editing of the text into more standard English

5. 1840 edition, involving some additional editing by Joseph Smith

   includes the restoration of several phrases that had been accidentally deleted in copying from the original manuscript to the printer's manuscript

All other editions are secondary in recovering the original text. Nonetheless, these other editions are important for establishing the history and subsequent development of the text, especially its editing.

Important Events in the History of the Project

I. The first critical text of the Book of Mormon appears

1984–1986   Under the editorship of Robert (Bob) Smith, FARMS produced the first critical text. This critical text was preliminary in many respects. First of all, only microfilmed versions of the manuscripts were available; in the case of the original manuscript, the microfilm was largely unreadable; in other words, there was no access to clear photographs of the original manuscript, nor was there any access to the manuscripts themselves. Secondly, variants in the text were discovered by visually comparing the editions; there was no computerized comparison of editions.

March 1988   At the Deseret Language and Linguistic Society annual meeting in 1988, a symposium on the FARMS critical text was organized. Participants were John (Jack) Welch, Lyle Fletcher, and myself. In my presentation, I proposed to do a second critical text, one that would rely on clear photographs of the manuscripts and a computerized collation of the manuscripts and editions.

II. Getting access to the basic textual sources

17 May 1988   I met with Jack Welch, John Sorenson, and Noel Reynolds—the executive committee of FARMS at that time—and they agreed to support me in doing a second critical text. Jack agreed to see about arranging with the church to get the best possible photographs for studying the original manuscript.

20 May 1988   Three days later, I received on loan from the church's Historical Department a set of black-and-white ultraviolet photographs of the original manuscript. Most of these photographs had been taken around 1950. During the summer I began using the photos to make a transcript of the original manuscript. At the same time, an independent transcript for the manuscript was made, first by Lyle Fletcher and later by Marcello Hunter.

summer 1988   During that same summer I began selecting the editions of the Book of Mormon for which electronic versions would be produced. Larry Draper, then the rare book librarian at the Historical Department, played an instrumental role in gaining access to most of the editions. Under the direction of Mel Smith, about 15 editions were scanned at the Humanities Research Center at BYU. One was electronically keyed in. The rest

were early 1900 editions that were visually examined for differences. In all, 21 editions have been put into electronic format. Fourteen are LDS editions (from the first edition in 1830 to the current LDS edition, dating from 1981). Six are RLDS editions (from the first RLDS edition in 1874 to a modern-English edition published in 1966). And finally, there is the privately published Wright edition, printed in 1858 in New York City. All these electronic versions have been proofed at least twice.

October 1988

In the fall of 1988, Jack Welch also arranged for the RLDS Archives to loan the project a large photographic reproduction of the printer's manuscript. An independent transcript of this manuscript was made by Lawrence Skousen.

The enlarged photocopy of the printer's manuscript. The photo also shows an original copy of the 1830 edition.

The transcripts of both the original and printer's manuscripts were keyed in directly from the photos themselves. I specifically decided that the transcripts would never be produced by correcting an already keyed-in electronic version of some other early text, such as the 1830 edition or the printer's manuscript (both of which existed at the time). Later, the two transcripts of each manuscript were checked against each other and differences reconciled. Since then, the transcripts have been checked several times by myself, Matt Empey, Christina Skousen, and Lawrence Skousen.

III. Getting access to the actual manuscripts, including newly discovered fragments

April 1991

In the fall of 1990, after completing the initial transcript for the printer's manuscript, I realized that I needed to examine the actual document and compare my transcript with the printer's manuscript itself. Ron Romig, archivist for the Community of Christ, prepared the way by arranging for the manuscript to be brought from the Kansas City bank vault that it was being stored in. Our visit to Independence, Missouri, was scheduled for April 1991. Ron and my wife Sirkku did the physical examination of the manuscript, while I checked the transcript. Seeing the actual manuscript made a huge difference. Photographs do not always tell the truth, especially black and white ones. Originally, we had planned a week-long visit, but I soon realized that the work would take longer, so we ended up spending two weeks in Independence. Even that was barely adequate.
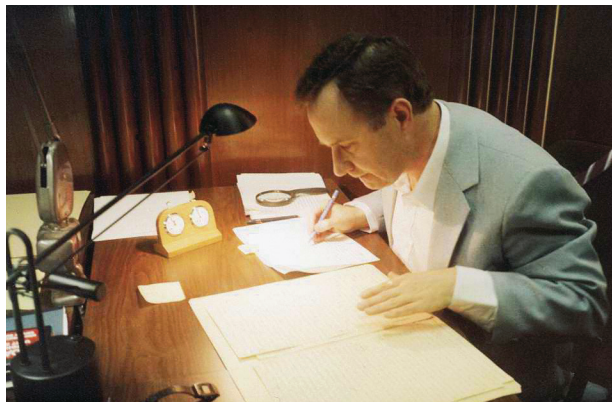
Royal Skousen, the editor of the Book of Mormon critical text project, comparing his transcript against the actual printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, April 1991, Independence, Missouri. Photograph by Ron Romig.

summer 1991   Later that summer, I made several visits to the Wilford Wood Museum in Bountiful, Utah. Bob Smith, in the first critical edition, had noted that the museum had some "unknown very small fragments" of the original manuscript. After examining the fragments—a clump of unreadable pieces of paper wrapped in cellophane—I enlisted the help of Robert Espinosa (then head of conservation at the Harold B. Lee Library) and David Hawkinson (then the photographer for the Museum of Art), and we arranged with the Wilford Wood family to conserve and photograph the fragments at the Harold B. Lee Library.

fall 1991   On 30 September 1991, we began a three-week period of intense work on the fragments in the Harold B. Lee Library. Robert Espinosa, with the help of his assistants, separated the fragments. After being humidified, unfolded, and flattened, the fragments were photographed by David Hawkinson. Black-and-white ultraviolet photography proved the most successful in bringing out the faded ink on the fragments. Robert also identified the paper type for each fragment, except for the very smallest ones. Finally, the fragments were encapsulated in Mylar and returned to the Wilford Wood family. These fragments are from six different places in the original manuscript. They come from 29 leaves (or 58 pages) of the manuscript and account for two percent of the text.

David Hawkinson, then photographer for the Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, preparing to photograph the Lyman Wight petition, one of the Wilford Wood fragments, using reflected ultraviolet light, October 1991. Photograph by Nevin Skousen.
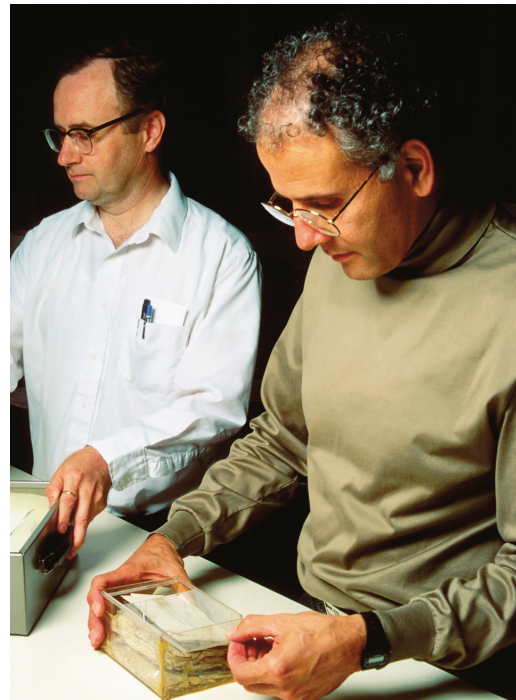
Robert Espinosa, then head of conservation at the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, examining the box containing the Wilford Wood fragments, 30 September 1991. Royal Skousen, editor of the project, is standing by. Photograph by David Hawkinson.

Nevin Skousen, preparing to photograph one of the pages of the printer's manuscript, October 1992, Independence, Missouri. Photograph by Royal Skousen.

Ron Romig, archivist for the Community of Christ, collecting color prints of photographs of the printer's manuscript, October 1992, Orem, Utah. Photograph by Royal Skousen.

November 1991   Later that year Brent Ashworth brought in his fragment from Alma 60 to be conserved and photographed. At that time we also examined three different forgeries of fragments of the original manuscript that Brent had acquired.

October 1992   By 1992 I realized that what I needed was a set of color photographs of the printer's manuscript, so I arranged for a second visit to Independence in October 1992. My brother Nevin Skousen (a professional photographer, now deceased) photographed the entire manuscript at the RLDS Church Library. Later that month, with the assistance of Ron Romig, two sets of prints were made here in Utah, one of which was loaned to the critical text project.

June 1994   Finally, in June 1994, I arranged for a one-week visit to Independence so that Robert Espinosa could make a detailed comparison of the paper types of both manuscripts. The church and the Wilford Wood family provided samples of small fragments from the original manuscript so that an on-site comparison could be made.

November 1995   The following year, the Ada Cheney fragments of the original manuscript were conserved and photographed at the Harold B. Lee Library. These fragments come from two leaves in Alma 58–60.

1993–1996   Throughout this period, I spent considerable time hunting for additional fragments of the original manuscript, especially the Joseph Summerhays fragment, a half leaf from 1 Nephi 14–15. I also made a visit to Florida to check out the provenance of the Ruth Smith fragment (from 2 Nephi 4–5), now held by the church. And more time was spent identifying forgeries of fragments purporting to be from the original manuscript. One striking contrast was observed when the University of Chicago acquisition was examined and compared with the Wilford Wood fragments—namely, the two leaves supposedly from Alma 3–5 showed several dozen unique properties, ones that I had not seen anywhere else in either of the two Book of Mormon manuscripts, whereas the legitimate Wilford Wood fragments from 58 pages of the original manuscript showed only one unique property.

1993–1997   Also during this period, from 1993 to 1997, I compared the initial transcript of the original manuscript against the actual intact sheets of the original manuscript, as well as many fragments, at the Historical Department in Salt Lake City. There were also numerous attempts to rephotograph some parts of the manuscript, but this proved largely unsuccessful. Later, with the help of Gene Ware of the College of Engineering and Technology at BYU, selected parts of the original manuscript were examined using multispectral imaging.

1998   Later, in 1998, Gene was also able to do multispectral imaging for selected parts of the printer's manuscript. This additional examination of the printer's manuscript occurred at the Historical Department, while the manuscript was being conserved for the Community of Christ.

IV. Analyzing the textual variants

From August 1995 through March 1999, I prepared a computerized collation for the entire text of the Book of Mormon. This lined-up comparison lists every variant for the two manuscripts and twenty editions of the Book of Mormon, from the 1830 edition to the current LDS and Community of Christ (RLDS) editions of the book. Not only are textual changes noted, but also every change in punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and versification. During this same period of time, I prepared a preliminary analysis of the changes in the text. This document, 3650 pages long, discusses the evidence for about 1500 proposed changes in the current text.

The large majority of these textual changes involve minor variation in phraseology. For instance, in more than a few cases, the indefinite article *a* has accidentally been omitted, especially when the article is repeated in a coordinate construction. In the following list, we have eight examples involving a pair of coordinated adjectives followed by a noun. For each case, the edition in which the repeated *a* was first dropped is listed in parentheses:

Omni 1:28   a strong and **a** mighty man >
                    a strong and mighty man (1852)

Mosiah 27:7   a large and **a** wealthy people >
                    a large and wealthy people (1840)

Alma 11:26	a true and **a** living God >
	a true and living God (1837)
Alma 11:27	a true and **a** living God >
	a true and living God (1841)
Alma 12:22	a lost and **a** fallen people >
	a lost and fallen people (1852)
Alma 43:6	a more wicked and **a** murderous disposition >
	a more wicked and murderous disposition (1841)
Mormon 9:4	a holy and **a** just God >
	a holy and just God (1830)
Ether 1:34	a large and **a** mighty man >
	a large and mighty man (1852)

In contrast to cases of minor variation, about 100 newly discovered changes are semantically significant. These proposed changes lead to differences in meaning, ones that would show up when translating the text.

V. Information to the Church Scriptures Committee

1994	In 1994, the church requested that I, as editor of the critical text project, take a full-time leave from my teaching responsibilities at BYU and work full time on this project. Such a leave would allow me to get the project done sooner and would also allow me to share my findings with the Church Scriptures Committee.
February 1995	In February 1995 I signed an agreement with the church and BYU that, as editor of the project, I would convey information to the Church Scriptures Committee about possible changes to the text. The agreement specifically provided that the church and BYU would guarantee the independence of the project—as editor, I would (1) hold the copyright to the critical text and (2) exercise complete control over the content of the critical text.
1995–1999	Over the next four years, as the analysis of the textual variants was written, I conveyed this information to the Church Scriptures Committee.
December 1998	Late in 1998, I made a publishing agreement with FARMS, prior to FARMS becoming a part of BYU. In this agreement, I agreed to share the copyright with FARMS. Correspondingly, FARMS agreed to allow the editor full control over the content of the critical text volumes, as well as my approval of all promotional materials.
April 2001	From August 2000 through the spring of 2001, there were additional negotiations between the church, BYU, FARMS, and myself in order to resolve complications that had arisen because FARMS had become a part of BYU. In April of 2001, an amendment to the previous agreements was made, in which I acknowledged that FARMS had become a part of BYU, but that the copyright would continue to be explicitly shared between me and FARMS. Further, it was agreed that, as editor, I would continue to exercise full editorial control, including the right to approve all promotional material.

VI. Publishing the critical text project

May 2001   Finally, in May 2001, the transcripts of the two manuscripts were officially published in two volumes, one for each manuscript:

Volume 1.   *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon:*
             Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text
                  568 pages (including 41 pages of introduction and 16 pages of black-and-white ultraviolet and color photographs of fragments)

Volume 2.   *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon:*
             Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts
                  1008 pages (bound in two parts, including 36 pages of introduction and 8 pages of color photographs of the manuscript)

A typographical facsimile presents an exact reproduction of the text in typescript. The text is transcribed line for line and without any corrections or expansions. Original spellings and miswritings are retained. All scribal changes in the manuscripts—whether crossouts, erasures, overwriting, or insertions—are reproduced. A continuously running text for the extant portions of the original manuscript has been provided, with conjectured text placed sublinearly. Both volumes contain introductions which present a brief history of the manuscripts, the symbols used in the transcription system (plus examples of their use), and a physical description of the manuscripts.

These two volumes present the earliest textual sources for the Book of Mormon. All known fragments of the original manuscript have been identified, interpreted, and pieced together (to the extent possible). With the publication of these two volumes, all the legitimate manuscript sources for the Book of Mormon text are now accessible. Using the first three editions of the Book of Mormon, along with these transcripts, scholars now have all the available information needed for studying the text of the Book of Mormon.

This publication is intended for scholars of all faiths and persuasions: LDS, Community of Christ (RLDS), and all others interested in the text. Both LDS and RLDS versifications have been provided in the identification of manuscript pages and photographs. The critical text project is a scholarly one and has not involved any ecclesiastical approval or endorsement. The transcripts and the textual interpretations represent the editor's own scholarly work, but have involved peer review from other scholars.
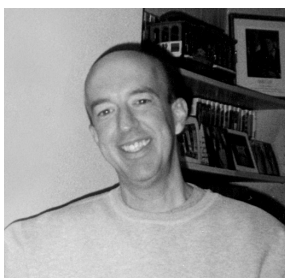
Typographer Jonathan Saltzman, designer and typesetter for the critical text of the Book of Mormon.

The design and typesetting is the work of typographer Jonathan Saltzman and presents the text in an appealing form—one appropriate to the importance of the Book of Mormon.

VII. More to come

Ultimately, there will be four printed volumes and one electronic collation in the complete critical text. In addition to the two now-published volumes, there will be:

Volume 3.   *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon*

Volume 4.   *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*

Volume 5.   *A Complete Electronic Collation of the Book of Mormon*

The third volume will discuss the transmission of the text, from the manuscripts through the major editions. The fourth volume will discuss cases of textual variance and will attempt to determine the original English-language reading of the text. The electronic collation will be a lined-up comparison of the important textual sources and will specify every textual variant in the Book of Mormon. The collation will include the readings of the two manuscripts and twenty editions of the Book of Mormon.

The editor's plan is to have volumes 3 and 4 and the electronic collation available within the next three years.

Important Findings

Now let us consider more of the important findings of this project:

(1) Scribal corrections in the original manuscript support statements made by witnesses of the translation that Joseph Smith sometimes spelled out the unfamiliar Book of Mormon names, at least on their first occurrence. For instance, when the name *Coriantumr* first appears in the book of Helaman, Oliver Cowdery first spelled it phonetically, as *Coriantummer,* then he immediately crossed out the whole name and correctly spelled it, as *Coriantumr.* This name could not have been spelled correctly unless Joseph Smith spelled it out letter by letter (or wrote it out for Oliver). In fact, Oliver ended the final *r* of the correct spelling with a huge flourish of his quill, almost as if to say "How could anybody be expected to spell such a name?"

(2) The original text is more consistent in phraseology and word usage. Many errors have led to various "wrinkles" in the text. One example is the phrase "the word of the justice of the eternal God" (in 1 Nephi 12:18), which in the original manuscript read "the sword of the justice of the eternal God":

> 1 Nephi 12:18
>
> > *original manuscript*
> > & a great & a terable gulph divideth them
> > yea even the **sword** of the Justice of the Eternal God
>
> > *printer's manuscript*
> > & a great & a terrible gulf divideth them
> > yea even the **word** of the Justice of the Eternal God

Elsewhere the text refers only to "the sword of God's justice," never to "the word of God's justice":

Alma 26:19	the sword of his justice
Alma 60:29	the sword of justice
Helaman 13:5	the sword of justice
Helaman 13:5	the sword of justice
3 Nephi 20:20	the sword of my justice
3 Nephi 29:4	the sword of his justice
Ether 8:23	the sword of the justice of the eternal God

Note, in particular, the last example (in Ether 8:23), which has the exact same phraseology as the example in 1 Nephi 12:18.

(3) Sometimes passages of text are the same, word for word, even though they are found in completely different parts of the book. Jack Welch has provided the following example:

> 1 Nephi 1:8
> and being thus overcome with the spirit
> he was carried away in a vision
> even that he saw the heavens open
> and he thought he saw
> *God sitting upon his throne*
> *surrounded with numberless concourses of angels*
> *in the attitude of singing and praising their God*

> Alma 36:22
> yea and methought I saw
> even as our father Lehi saw
> *God sitting upon his throne*
> *surrounded with numberless concourses of angels*
> *in the attitude of singing and praising their God*

Both passages refer to Lehi's first vision and use precisely the same words to describe it.

(4) The original text is not fully recoverable by human effort. Textual errors are generally not found except by discovering the correct reading in the manuscripts. Unfortunately, most of the original manuscript is not extant. Conjecture based on internal analysis of the Book of Mormon text has largely been unsuccessful in recovering the correct reading. Still, some conjectures are probably correct, such as "neither happiness nor misery" in 2 Nephi 2:11 rather than the current reading ("neither holiness nor misery"):

> for it must needs be that there is an opposition in all things
> if not so—my first born in the wilderness—
> righteousness could not be brought to pass neither wickedness
> neither **holiness** nor **misery**
> neither good nor bad

Elsewhere, the text always contrasts *misery* with *happiness,* not *holiness:*

2 Nephi 2:11	*happiness* nor *misery*
2 Nephi 2:13	no righteousness nor *happiness* . . . no punishment nor *misery*
Alma 3:26	eternal *happiness* or eternal *misery*
Alma 40:15	this state of *happiness* and this state of *misery*
Alma 40:15	to *happiness* or *misery*
Alma 40:17	to *happiness* or *misery*
Alma 40:21	in *happiness* or in *misery*
Alma 41:4	raised to endless *happiness* . . . or to endless *misery*

We do not have the original manuscript in 2 Nephi 2:11. Orthographically, *holiness* and *happiness* are similar. Probably, Oliver Cowdery mistakenly read *happiness* as *holiness.* (This conjecture was first suggested by Corbin T. Volluz.)

(5) Even if we had the entire original manuscript, there could still be errors in the text, mainly because the original manuscript itself has some errors. For instance, in 1 Nephi 7:5, the original manuscript reads "Ishmael and also his hole hole," an impossible reading. The correct reading must be something else.

When copying into the printer's manuscript, Oliver Cowdery emended this phrase to "Ishmael and also his household":

> 1 Nephi 7:5
>
> > *original manuscript*
> > the lord did soften the hart of ishmael
> > and also his **hole hole**
>
> > *printer's manuscript*
> > the Lord did soften the heart of Ishmael
> > & also his **household**

Usage elsewhere in the text suggests the word *household* always occurs with a universal quantifier (either *all* or *whole* or none at all in negative sentences, as in the last example listed below):

1 Nephi 5:14	all his household
2 Nephi 4:10	all his household
2 Nephi 4:12	all his household
Alma 22:23	his whole household
Alma 23:3	all his household
Alma 34:21	all your household
Ether 9:3	all his household
Ether 10:1	all his household
Ether 13:20	all his household
Ether 13:21	all his household
Ether 13:22	Coriantumr repented not / neither his household
	[that is, none of his household repented]

Note, in particular, the occurrence of "his whole household" in Alma 22:23. This suggests that the original text for 1 Nephi 7:5 probably read "Ishmael and also his whole household," where the first *hole* in the original manuscript is a homophone for *whole* and the second *hole* stands for the *hold* of *household* (with loss of the final *d* in pronunciation).

(6) Errors in the original manuscript show that the scribe heard the text; that is, Joseph Smith orally dictated the text to the scribe:

	WRITTEN	INTENDED
1 Nephi 13:29	**&** exceeding great many	**an** exceeding great many
1 Nephi 17:48	wither even as a dried **weed**	wither even as a dried **reed**
Alma 55:8	he sayeth unto **him**	he sayeth unto **them**
Alma 57:22	did **meet** the Lamanites	did **beat** the Lamanites

On the other hand, corrected errors in the printer's manuscript show that the text was visually copied from the original manuscript:

	CORRECTION	CONTEXT
Mosiah 15:9	sanctified > satisfied	_____ the demands of justice
Mosiah 27:37	deliver > declare	they did _____ unto the people
Alma 34:10	sacrament > sacrifice	a great and last _____
Helaman 4:25	cause > cease	did _____ to preserve them

(7) The systematic nature of the original text and the spelling out of Book of Mormon names support the theory that the text was revealed to Joseph Smith, word for word and even letter for letter. On the other hand, all subsequent transmissions of the text appear to be subject to human error. At each stage, the accuracy of the transmission has depended upon the carefulness of the transmitter, whether Joseph Smith, his scribes, or later editors and typesetters. (This caveat, of course, equally applies to the critical text itself.) Although all have tried to do their best, every transmission of the text appears to have led to some mistakes. Yet none of these errors significantly interfere with either the message of the book or its doctrine. These textual errors have never prevented readers of the book from receiving their own personal witness of its truth.

(8) The editing of the text (including Joseph Smith's for the 1837 edition) should, in nearly all instances, be viewed as translating the text into a more standard variety of English. Moreover, in his editing of the text, Joseph acted as a human editor; his 1837 and 1840 revisions do not represent any kind of "final authorial intent" since Joseph Smith is not the author of the Book of Mormon. Nor is there any evidence that his editorial revisions represent inspired corrections to the text, especially since he left unchanged dozens of substantive errors that the scribes originally made when they copied from the original manuscript to the printer's manuscript.

(9) The original text of the Book of Mormon reflects the style of Early Modern English—namely, the biblical style from the 1500s. Nonetheless, this biblical style in the Book of Mormon is not identical to the style of the King James Bible except in those Book of Mormon passages which directly quote from the King James Bible (such as Isaiah and Matthew).

(10) The original text shows examples of Hebraistic literalisms that are completely uncharacteristic of English, such as the extra *and* found after the *if*-clause in Moroni 10:4 ("*if* ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent having faith in Christ **and** he will manifest the truth of it unto you"). A whole series of this usage involving the *if-and* construction is found, for example, in Helaman 12:13–21:

13   yea and *if* he sayeth unto the earth move **and** it is moved

14   yea *if* he sayeth unto the earth thou shalt go back that it lengthen out the day for many hours **and** it is done

16   and behold also *if* he sayeth unto the waters of the great deep be thou dried up **and** it is done

17   behold *if* he sayeth unto this mountain be thou raised up and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried up **and** behold it is done

19   and *if* the Lord shall say be thou accursed that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever **and** behold no man getteth it henceforth and forever

20   and behold *if* the Lord shall say unto a man because of thine iniquities thou shalt be accursed forever **and** it shall be done

21   and *if* the Lord shall say because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence **and** he will cause that it shall be so

Beginning with the 1837 edition, all these examples of the extra *and* have been edited out of the text. Such examples of a Hebraistic *if-and* construction in the original text provide further evidence that Joseph Smith received the text word for word. If he had received only ideas, there would have been no reason to have added the non-English use of *and* in all these examples.

Fragment from 2 Nephi 7 of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, quoting from Isaiah 50.
For these biblical quotes, the original Book of Mormon text closely follows the reading of the King James Bible.
Photographs by David Hawkinson; fragment owned by the Wilford Wood family.

(11) The original text also shows examples of Joseph Smith's upstate New York English, which is characteristic of general American dialects, even to our own time. Over the years, this dialectal English has also been edited out of the text. Some students of the text have claimed that the Lord himself never would have revealed an ungrammatical text to Joseph Smith. It would be "blasphemy," according to B. H. Roberts, to think that the Lord would reveal his word in incorrect English. However, this argument presumes that if the Lord literally revealed the Book of Mormon text word for word, then the language would have to be in, say, B. H. Robert's "correct" English rather than Joseph Smith's own dialect. I would rather think that the Lord is no respecter of tongues (see Doctrine and Covenants 1:24).

(12) The errors in copying from the original to the printer's manuscript go against the supposed rules of textual transmission. The readings in the printer's manuscript tend to be more difficult and shorter than those in the original manuscript (rather than easier and longer, the presumption of traditional textual criticism).

(13) In copying the Isaiah quotations, the scribes frequently tended to misread individual words, as in these examples from 2 Nephi:

	ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT	PRINTER'S MANUSCRIPT
7:2	I make **the** rivers a wilderness	I make **their** rivers a wilderness
7:5	hath **opened** mine ear	hath **appointed** mine ear
23:4	the **host** of the battle	the **hosts** of the battle
24:25	I will **break** the Assyrian	I will **bring** the Assyrian

In each case, the reading of the original manuscript is the same as that found in the King James text. This finding suggests that if there is only a single isolated word difference between the King James reading and the current reading in the Book of Mormon, we may very well have an example of a scribal error. In the following examples from 2 Nephi, the original manuscript is not extant, but may have read identically to the King James text:

	KING JAMES BIBLE	PRINTER'S MANUSCRIPT
23:15	every one that is **found**	every one that is **proud**
24:19	**raiment** of those that are slain	**remnant** of those that are slain

(14) The 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon was directly used to revise the text of the book of Isaiah in the Joseph Smith Translation (or JST) of the Bible, thus introducing errors into the JST that had earlier crept into the Book of Mormon text during its transmission. For instance, in 2 Nephi 7:5, the King James Bible and the original manuscript read "the Lord God hath opened mine ear," while the printer's manuscript, the 1830 edition, and the JST incorrectly read "the Lord God hath appointed mine ear(s)."

(15) Joseph Smith acted as scribe for 28 words of the original manuscript (in Alma 45:22). These words are apparently the earliest extant writing in Joseph Smith's own hand. Here Joseph seems to have temporarily taken over for Oliver Cowdery. The number of words copied by Joseph agrees with other evidence we have that Joseph Smith could see from 20 to 30 words at a time. For instance, the following example of scribal anticipation (immediately crossed out) shows that Joseph must have attempted to dictate 20 words at one time to his scribe, Oliver Cowdery:

Alma 56:41

    & it came to pass that again <we saw the Lamanites>
    when the light of the morning came we saw the Lamanites upon us

(16) The word *chapter* was not original to the Book of Mormon text, but was apparently added whenever Joseph Smith saw some indication of a break in the text. The chapter numbers themselves were often added months later. The break at the beginning of 2 Nephi shows that Joseph was not immediately aware that 1 Nephi had actually ended:

<Chapter <{V|I}> VIII>
second   Chapter I
The ^ Book of Nephi ^ An account of the death of Lehi . . .

Further, the specification of a chapter number for the small books of Enos, Omni, and Jarom shows that Joseph Smith was reading off the text and did not know in advance how long a book would be or how many chapters it would contain.

(17) Along with the loss of the first 116 pages of the original manuscript (which contained the book of Lehi), most of the original first two chapters of the book of Mosiah were also apparently lost. In the printer's manuscript, the beginning of Mosiah was originally designated as chapter III. In addition, the title of the book ("the Book of Mosiah") was later inserted between the lines:

        the Book of Mosiah
peace in the land ~~~~~ Chapter I<II> ~~~~~ And now there was no more . . .

The loss of the first two chapters explains why the book begins in the middle of things:

Mosiah 1:1

    and now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla
    among all the people which belonged to king Benjamin
    so that king Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days

All other books start their account with the person for which the book is named, yet here the book of Mosiah begins with king Benjamin. The original book undoubtedly began with the account of a Mosiah—namely, king Benjamin's father, the first Mosiah. Further, this book is missing the initial book summary that typically begins all the other longer books.

Conclusion

There has also been a spiritual dimension to this work, although my own testimony of the Book of Mormon is not based on my work on the critical text project, but rather on my own personal witness that this book records events which really happened. About twenty-five years ago, as I was reading the Book of Mormon during a time of personal difficulty, I reread the account of Ammon, king Lamoni, and the queen in Alma 19, which records the moment when the servant woman Abish raises the queen from the ground:

> Alma 19:29–30
>> and it came to pass that she went and took the queen by the hand
>> that perhaps she might raise her from the ground
>> and as soon as she touched her hand
>> she arose and stood upon her feet
>> and cried with a loud voice saying
>> O blessed Jesus who has saved me from an awful hell
>> O blessed God have mercy on this people
>> and when she had said this she clapped her hands
>> being filled with joy
>> speaking many words which were not understood

As I was reading this passage, the spirit personally witnessed to me, "This really happened." I have always cherished this moment in my life, and have been grateful to the Lord for the sure knowledge that the Book of Mormon is the word of the Lord.

Nonetheless, it has been a delight to have discovered evidence in the original manuscript to support what witnesses said about how Joseph Smith translated. In my initial work on the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, I was always excited to discover the occasional error that had crept into the text. But over time I have become more amazed about the nature of the original text of the Book of Mormon. In particular, the original manuscript provides important evidence that the Book of Mormon is a revealed text from the Lord. Indeed, the consistency of the original language supports the argument that the text was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith, word for word. ■