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Royal Skousen

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Report on The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project

Royal Skousen
Brigham Young University

Current status of computerized collations of the manuscripts (original O, printer's P) and 17 editions of the Book of Mormon:

js: O, P, 1830, 1837, 1840 <through Alma 20>
(to check letter variants)
ear: 1830, 1837, 1840 <through Alma 29>
(to check punctuation and capitalization)
kir: 1837, 1841, 1849, 1852 <completed>
nau: 1840, 1858W, 1874R, 1892R <completed>
lds: 1879, 1905, 1911, 1920, 1981 <completed>
reo: 1908R, 1953R, 1966R <completed>

Some recently discovered changes (from O to P):

1 Nephi 8:27

and they were in the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers towards those which had came up
and were partaking of the fruit > at

1 Nephi 12:18

and a great and a terrible gulf divideth them yea even the sword of the justice of the eternal God >
word

1 Nephi 15:16

yea they shall be numbered again among the house of Israel > remembered

1 Nephi 15:20

and it came to pass that I did speak so many words unto my brethren that they were pacified and did
humble themselves before the Lord > Ø

2 Nephi 5:12

and I Nephi had also brought the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass and also the
ball or the compass which was prepared for my father > Ø

Alma 11:21,28 (not the 1st occurrence of Zeezrom)

now Zeezrum was a man which was expert in the devices of the devil > Zeezrom

now Zeezrum saith is there more than one god > Zeezrom

[The evidence in O: other occurrences in Alma 10-15 are either missing or illegible; both occurrences
in Alma 31 are Zeezrom, but Alma 56 has Zeezrum. The correct reading is probably Zeezrom.]

Status of "recent" acquisitions:

Ruth Smith acquisition (a fragment from 2 Nephi 4-5):

July-August 1974; this acquisition includes other items deposited in the cornerstone of the Nauvoo house: Times & Seasons fragments (February 1840), Bible fragments (Isaiah, Ezra-Nehemiah)

[The Ruth Smith fragment may be part of the material from the cornerstone of the Nauvoo house originally sent by Major Bidamon to Joseph Smith III. This fragment from O appears to be fully authentic, despite an extraordinary provenance.]

University of Chicago acquisition (two sheets from Alma 3-5):

1983-84; handwriting intended to represent Oliver Cowdery's

[The University of Chicago acquisition appears to be a forgery. There is no firm provenance; and the document itself contains many spellings that are highly unlikely for Oliver Cowdery to have produced. In addition, the handwriting is too large, there is no space for headings, there are too many lines on each manuscript page, and it is doubtful that surviving fragments in Alma 3-5 would be that complete.]

1r line 17 and
22 and

(In all legitimate parts of O and P in Oliver Cowdery's hand, either & or And occur, but never and. The corresponding part in P is in scribe 2's hand, not Oliver Cowdery's, and has a mixture of & and and; in fact, these two occurrences in P are and. It looks like P itself may be the source for creating "O".)

2r line 6 t[h]r[u]out

(Through is never spelled as thru; in O we have through 25/25, and in P 121/121.)

11 Reccord

(Oliver Cowdery never spells record with cc, although ck does occur, as well as c: out of 14 occurrences in O, c occurs 7 times and ck also 7; out of 160 occurrences in P, c occurs 159 times and ck only once. The spelling cc does occur twice in P, but only in the hand of scribe 3 [Hyrum Smith] in Mosiah 28:20, not far away from Alma 3-5.)

16 [M]orman
17 Morman

(This spelling represents a clear attempt to show that the traditional spelling Mormon is incorrect; although Oliver Cowdery's a and o are often identical, the a's here are made very distinctly; this spelling is probably the "teaser" in this document and was intended to increase interest in it.)

2v line 26 [g]{uli}lt
27 gilt

(Oliver Cowdery's spelling is always guilt; in O 5/5 and in P 29/29.)

Major findings:

(1) O is a dictated manuscript:

mishearings

Alma 56:37 and as we suppose that [= supposed that] it was their intent to slay us before Antipus should overtake them

corrected spellings of names [supports witnesses' claims that Joseph Smith spelled out names]

<Zenock> Zenoch (Alma 33:15)

<Coriantummer> Coriantumr (Helaman 1:15)

(2) Joseph Smith spells out the first occurrence of Book of Mormon names and apparently respells names later on if necessary.

(3) Joseph Smith dealt with 20-30 words at a time:

crossouts showing Oliver Cowdery skipping ahead

20 words (Alma 56:41):

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

Joseph Smith acts as scribe

28 words (Alma 45:22) <actual spelling>:

yea in every city throughout all [the land whic]h was possessed by the people of Nephi and it came to pass t[h]at they did appoint priests and teachers

[Differences from Oliver Cowdery's handwriting: and is written out, c occurs without loops, and p does not close. The ink of the text is darker, and written very carefully.]

(4) There is little or no evidence of Joseph Smith changing his mind [providing we (correctly) interpret the or explanations as originally in the plates].

(5) The word "chapter" did not appear at section breaks, yet there was apparently some indication of a break in the text:

the word chapter never appears within the text itself

Chap(ter) is written whenever there is a break in the text

single chapters are assigned to small books (Enos, Jarom, Omni, Words of Mormon, 4 Nephi)

the numbers for the chapters are added later (in darker ink and more carefully written);

wrong numbers are sometimes inserted and then corrected

the word chapter is incorrectly inserted (and incorrectly numbered) at the beginning of a new book (2 Nephi):

<Chapter <V> VIII>

second Chapter I

The^Book of Nephi^An account of the death of Lehi ...

(6) The punctuation marks made by John Gilbert (the compositor of the 1830 edition) appear on the fragment from 3 Nephi 26-27. Thus O was sometimes used as the "printer's" manuscript.

maximal potential use of O as the "printer's" manuscript (according to the missing punctuation marks on P):

Helaman 13 through Mormon

In addition, the 1840 edition may also serve as a potential source for recovering the text of O (since O was occasionally used to correct the text for that edition).

(7) In copying P from O, Oliver Cowdery made an average of about 3 textual changes per manuscript page. Thus far nearly 300 textual changes have been noted for the extant portion of O (about 25% of the original text). Most of these changes are natural transcriptional errors and have not been known before. Nonetheless, these errors do not significantly change the Book of Mormon text. Nor will conjectural emendation be of much help in discovering errors that might have occurred in transcribing the missing portions of O (about 75% of the text).

(8) There is little evidence of conscious editing in producing P from O. The text of P introduces many hard readings and is not expansionary, contrary to the normal assumptions of textual criticism. Later editing of the Book of Mormon text does show the normal development of text (namely, introduction of easier readings and, in many instances, an expansionary text).