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## Chapter 3: Mormon's Use of the Archive

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## Chapter 3: Mormon's Use of the Archive

Understanding how Mormon used the Nephite archive is an exercise in deduction. One exception is found in Words of Mormon, where Mormon inadvertently describes an important aspect of his work: “And now, I speak somewhat concerning that which I have written; for after I had made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin, of whom Amaleki spake, I searched among the records which had been delivered into my hands, and I found these plates, which contained this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi” (W of M. 1:3).

From this we learn that Mormon would take a source from the archives and work with it. When he finished with that source, he went for the next source. That he had to search through the archives strongly suggests that when they were hurriedly taken from the hill Shim and then deposited in a new location, whatever orderly arrangement they might have had previously fell prey to the need for speed. There was clearly no easy index that allowed Mormon to find what he was looking for.

Mormon used the archive in at least two ways. The obvious use was for the source material from which he selected the contents of the Book of Mormon. The second is Mormon's adoption and adaptation of features on the plates to his own literary creation.

### Mormon's Use of Outline (Synoptic) Headers

Each book Mormon edited begins with a synopsis of the book that is separate from both the title and the beginning of the first chapter (except the book of Mosiah<sup>45</sup>). In the original manuscript, the only remaining synoptic header comes at the beginning of the book of Helaman. It

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45. When the book of Lehi was lost, so too was the beginning of the book of Mosiah. There surely was a synoptic header at the beginning of the book of Mosiah, but it was lost when the original opening chapter was lost. I will examine what might have been lost later in this book.

has a long line drawn to separate the header from the beginning of the first chapter.<sup>46</sup> Oliver and other scribes copied the text of the original manuscript to create a second copy, commonly called the printer's manuscript. When the header for Helaman was copied onto the printer's manuscript, a line was also drawn to separate the header from the text.

On the printer's manuscript there is a line between the header and the beginning of the chapter, suggesting there was a line on the original manuscript that was being copied.<sup>47</sup> A line clearly separates 3 Nephi's header from the beginning of the chapter in the printer's manuscript, but the book title is not clearly separated from the header.<sup>48</sup> There are clear outline headers for 1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, and Jacob, but there is no indication of where the header should end and the text begin. Thus, John Gilbert (the compositor for Grandin Publishers) initially created the divisions based uniquely on the content, not a visual indicator.<sup>49</sup>

Nephi was the author of both the small and large plates. Our text beginning with 1 Nephi and continuing through the end of Omni comes directly from the small plates without any editorial hand. Therefore, when we see outline headers for 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi, we may assume that Nephi created them. There is also a synoptic header for Jacob but beginning with Enos the practice of the synoptic header fell into disuse on the small plates.

Mormon created outline headers. It is probable he did so because there were outline headers on the large plates (assuming that Nephi created them on the small plates because it was part of the style he had already incorporated for the large plates). While Mormon probably saw a header for each named book he edited, the specific headers he included were his own text, not copies of what was on the large plates. Mormon's headers are specific to the selections he made from the large plates. Therefore, Mormon copied the concept of the headers, but not the text of the headers.

For example, the header for Helaman is descriptive of that book's content, specifically content referencing the coming of Christ that does not appear in the book of Helaman:

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46. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 1:487.

47. The Joseph Smith Papers, *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, eds., Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015) 1:356–57.

48. *Ibid.*, 1:356–57, 2:206–7.

49. *Ibid.* 1: 20–21, 110–11, 208–09.

An account of the Nephites. Their wars and contentions, and their dissensions. And also the prophecies of many holy prophets, before the coming of Christ, according to the records of Helaman, who was the son of Helaman, and also according to the records of his sons, even down to the coming of Christ. And also many of the Lamanites are converted. An account of their conversion. An account of the righteousness of the Lamanites, and the wickedness and abominations of the Nephites, according to the record of Helaman and his sons, even down to the coming of Christ, which is called the book of Helaman, and so forth.

This header certainly suggests a knowledge of the contents that would be included in Helaman but also a knowledge of the events recorded in 3 Nephi.<sup>50</sup> When Mormon created his masterwork, he repurposed the idea of the outline headers without copying the content of the headers as they might have been on the large plates of Nephi. Interestingly, Mormon's outline headers deal only with the information taken from the large plates. Any information from an alternative source was not included in the header.

### **Mormon's Alternative Sources**

As Mormon wrote, he consulted his sources from the Nephite archive.<sup>51</sup> Thomas W. Mackay noted: "That Mormon scrupulously names his sources is a stunning feat."<sup>52</sup> His main source was the large plates of Nephi, but

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50. The information taken from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal record is not included in the synoptic header for the book of Alma. Similarly, the header for the book of Helaman synthesizes the information from the large plates, but not Nephi<sub>2</sub>'s personal record that is entered under a separate header, nor for the prophecy of Samuel the Lamanite.

51. Holzapfel, "Mormon, the Man and the Message," 119:

Mormon used a range of introductory and inserted notations to guide his readers: such as the names of authors for records, speeches, and epistles that are quoted or abridged — imbedded source indicators; genealogical or other authenticating information about the authors; and brief or extended summaries of contents, including subheadings for complex inserts or documents. Mormon's contribution as editor like in the fact that he assiduously presents source documents and texts while retaining a unity of narrative flow in his historical account.

52. Thomas W. Mackay, "Mormon as Editor: A Study in Colophons, Headers, and Source Indicators," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 91–92.

there are other records he consulted. When he used a different source, he indicated the change with a synoptic header for a chapter, similar to those he used for books.<sup>53</sup> Most often, these specifically declare the new source for the chapter's material, but at times the source is only implied by the content of the header.

Understanding the relationship of headers and chapters requires that we examine the chapters as they existed for the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Those chapters replicated some indication that Joseph saw as he translated which had him indicate to his scribe that a new chapter was to begin.<sup>54</sup> The chapters, as well as the versification, in our modern editions were first created for the 1879 edition. In order to discuss the original chapters but retain the ability to look up verses in the modern editions, I follow the convention of using Roman numerals for the 1830 chapters and Arabic numerals for the modern chapters. Thus 1 Nephi I (1–5) indicates that the 1830 chapter I covered what we now number chapters 1–5.

The most obvious marking of a new source record comes before Mosiah VI (9–10): “The Record of Zeniff — An account of his people, from the time they left the land of Zarahemla until the time that they were delivered out of the hands of the Lamanites.” Chapter VI (9–10) is a copy from Zeniff's record onto Mormon's plates. Beginning in chapter VII (11–13:24), Mormon continues to use that source, but changes to intermixing his own narrative of Abinadi's story with quotations from Abinadi's discourse that must have come from Zeniff's record.<sup>55</sup>

We know when Mormon ceases to use the record of Zeniff as a source because he writes a synoptic header for chapter XI (23–27) which reads: “An account of Alma and the people of the Lord, who were driven into the wilderness by the people of King Noah.” That chapter no longer uses the record of Zeniff, but changes to a record Alma's people kept.

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53. J. N. Washburn, *The Contents, Structure, and Authorship of the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 43 notes:

I believe it was Dr. Sidney B. Sperry who first called to my attention the fact that there is a concentration of chapter superscriptions in the Book of Alma. The fact is that in the entire volume of 239 chapters, in our modern editions, there are twenty-one introductory explanations before chapters. Ten of them are in the Book of Alma with its sixty-three chapters.

While Sperry and Washburn noticed the chapter headers, they apparently did not associate them with a change in source, or, indeed, any other specific function.

54. Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” 137.

55. The record of Zeniff is also a dynastic record, including the text Mormon copied from Zeniff, but also served as the source of Mormon's information on Noah and Limhi.

The book of Alma began with Alma<sub>2</sub> as both the chief judge and the Nephite recordkeeper. When Alma<sub>2</sub> abdicated the chief judgeship, he retained the function of Nephite recordkeeper, at least for the book of Alma (the new dynastic book).<sup>56</sup> When Alma<sub>2</sub> began his proselytizing tour, he kept a second record. In that record, we have the accounts of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s sermons and missionary journey to Ammonihah and later to Antionum (a city of the Zoramites). Mormon used Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal record up through and including the chapters containing his final charge to his sons (chapters XVII–XIX (36–42)).

Mormon marked the beginning of his use of Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal record in the header to Alma chapter III (5): “The words which Alma, the High Priest according to the holy order of God, delivered to the people in their cities and villages throughout the land.” That header doesn't state the source, but verse 2 clarifies that it is from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s record. It is explicit in chapter V (7): “The words of Alma which he delivered to the people in Gideon, according to his own record.”

The header for chapter XII (17–20) declares that it is: “An account of the sons of Mosiah, who rejected their rights to the kingdom for the word of God, and went up to the land of Nephi to preach to the Lamanites; their sufferings and deliverance — according to the record of Alma.” This information comes from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s record, but the original source was a separate “account of the sons of Mosiah.” Alma<sub>2</sub> had access to that record and copied — or abridged — it onto his own record. Mormon still marked the ultimate change in the source of the information. It is an important distinction as Alma<sub>2</sub> could not have known this information without the record (or records) of the sons of Mosiah.

The information from Ammon's record is recorded in chapter XII (17–20). I believe that it was also found on Alma<sub>2</sub>'s record. The very next chapter, XIII (21–22) begins with a new header: “An account of the preaching of Aaron, and Muloki, and their brethren, to the Lamanites.” This information recounts the experiences of the brothers who were not with Ammon, and therefore could not have originally been part of Ammon's account.

Mormon doesn't list a separate source for chapter XIV (23–26), where he tells the story of the conversion of those who would be called

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56. “And it came to pass that in the same year that the people of Nephi had peace restored unto them, that Nephiah, the second chief judge, died, having filled the judgment-seat with perfect uprightness before God. Nevertheless, he had refused Alma to take possession of those records and those things which were esteemed by Alma and his fathers to be most sacred; therefore Alma had conferred them upon his son, Helaman” (Alma 50:37–38).

the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. Nevertheless, the brothers had apparently been united by this time, and this information came from an account that could include all of them. The final statement of chapter XIII is “And now I, after having said this, return again to the account of Ammon and Aaron, Omner and Himni, and their brethren” (Alma 22:35). Who is “I” in this verse? Mormon is still citing from Alma<sub>2</sub>’s personal account. It appears that the story of the brothers had been copied onto Alma<sub>2</sub>’s personal record, and thus the “I” in Alma 22:35 was Alma<sub>2</sub>. The prominence of Ammon suggests that it was his journal that Alma<sub>2</sub> copied.

Chapter XVII (36–37) contains “the Commandments of Alma to his son Helaman.” Chapter XVIII (38) contains “the Commandments of Alma to his son Shiblon.” Chapter XIX (39–42) contains “the Commandments of Alma to his son Corianton.” Certainly, each of these chapters came from Alma<sub>2</sub>’s personal record, and our chapters appear to copy them as Alma<sub>2</sub> recorded them. As an interesting possible exception to this copying, Mormon may have altered the names of the sons for his own purposes (see the section “Fitting Names into Narrative Types”).

When Mormon began using a new source, he created a new chapter. He did not mark times when that same source was used for more than one chapter. Sometimes he notes that he is finished with a source and is returning to the large plates. For example, after he finished copying from Alma<sub>2</sub>’s personal record, we can see Mormon returning to the large plates in chapter XX (43–44). After two verses that provide the necessary transition between the text from Alma<sub>2</sub>’s personal record and the political history from the large plates, Mormon specifically stated: “And now I return to an account of the wars between the Nephites and the Lamanites, in the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges” (Alma 43:3).

I suggest that when we see Mormon saying, “and now I return to an account,” that this was not a figurative change in subject but an indication of an actual physical event.<sup>57</sup> There is a change in source material, which was likely a physical process. Mormon had to move one set of plates from a position of easy reference to another location and then put the current source in place. For Mormon, it was literally a physical return to the large plates. That he returned to the large plates is signaled by the phrase “an account of the wars,” which intentionally echoes part of the

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57. The phrase indicates a change of source in this context. It also appears to indicate a change of source in Alma 22:1, though the “return” to a different account is not the large plates. In that same chapter, however, the phrase indicates Mormon’s “return” from an aside to the original record (Alma 22:35).

charter for the large plates.<sup>58</sup> From this point on, the book of Alma dwells extensively on war, consistent with the type of information that would have been on the large plates.

Mormon does not, however, always tell his readers if he is returning to the large plates. Most notably, Mormon used Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal record in Alma X (13:10–15) and uses it again in Alma XII (17–20) which begins with a header. Chapter XI (16) is not taken from Alma<sub>2</sub>'s personal record but rather from the large plates. There is no header and no statement of returning. The source is indicated by the content that parallels other material taken from the large plates: a beginning marking the year and the more historical rather than religious content.

The header to Helaman V (13–16) gives notice of a separate source: “The prophecy of Samuel, the Lamanite, to the Nephites.” As with Zeniff’s dynastic record that recorded the reigns of Noah and Limhi, Mormon uses the new source but does not quote it in its entirety. Rather than the first-person narrative in Zeniff’s record, Mormon’s narration is all in third person. Mormon also apparently returns to his large plate source inside chapter V. Mormon ends working with that source at Helaman 16:8. At that point, Mormon notes: “And thus ended the eighty and sixth year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi. And thus ended also the eighty and seventh year of the reign of the judges, the more part of the people remaining in their pride and wickedness, and the lesser part walking more circumspectly before God” (Helaman 16:9–10). That marks the shift back to the large plate material. Changing sources marked the beginning of a chapter but did not trigger the end of a chapter if the source change was a return to the large plates.

### **Mormon’s Named Books and Their Sources**

The most recognizable organizational structure in Mormon’s creation of The Book of Mormon is the division of the text into books that bear a person’s name. Evidence from the original manuscript indicates that these book divisions were part of the dictated text, and therefore represent organizational structures that existed on Mormon’s plates. Although we do not have the complete original manuscript, there are places in what we do have where we can see how the transition to a new book was handled during dictation. At the transition from the book of Alma to the book of Helaman, Oliver Cowdery continued to write on the same page. However, he drew a horizontal line covering

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58. 1 Nephi 9:3–4, 10:1, and 19:3–4.



most of the page following the end of Alma and just prior to beginning Helaman. Below this solid ink line is a slightly indented title “The Book of Helaman.” The next line has a roughly centered “Chapter I” and the following line begins the chapter synopsis.<sup>59</sup>

The solid line appears before the information that there is a new book beginning.<sup>60</sup> It appears there was some indication on the plates that a break was coming, which Joseph indicated to Oliver.<sup>61</sup> Oliver used a line to indicate the break, but it is doubtful Joseph told him to draw a line. It is more likely that Joseph indicated the break in some way, and Oliver elected to use a line.

If we had the Book of Mormon that Mormon created, it would have had the following divisions (names are given as they appear in the 1830 edition, including capitalization):

- The book of Lehi<sup>62</sup>
- The book of Mosiah
- The book of Alma, the Son of Alma
- The book of Helaman
- The book of Nephi, the Son of Nephi, which was the Son of Helaman
- The book of Nephi, which is the Son of Nephi, One of the Disciples of Jesus Christ
- The book of Mormon
- Appendices: Words of Mormon, Small Plates, Moroni’s editing of Ether<sup>63</sup>

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59. Skousen, *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 1:487.

60. While there are no other book markers preserved in the original manuscript for Mormon’s text, there are two more examples in the 1 Nephi to Omni section. The extant manuscript preserves the change from 1 Nephi to 2 Nephi and a damaged page where Jacob changes to Enos. Neither of those two book breaks employs the horizontal line divider. This evidence tells us that there was something in the small plates of Nephi that indicated a book change as well as in Mormon’s text. However, with so little information, we cannot suggest that the line used on the one instance extant from the large plates of Nephi indicates a different type of book marker, or simply that Oliver’s convention changed over time.

61. Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” 137.

62. Smith, “Preface,” 1: “I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon.” Note that the facsimile reprint shows this page as 1, but the next page as iv. The First Book of Nephi begins on page 5.

63. I have labeled these as appendices because there is evidence that Mormon intended to include them, but they were not integral to his own work. Words of

The use of numbers to differentiate between the two books of Nephi is a later addition to the text and was not part of Mormon's plates. Our books from 1 Nephi to Omni were translated from the small plates which Mormon included but did not edit. Words of Mormon 1:3–5 tells us he added them intentionally, but they were not part of what Mormon conceived for his masterwork. Similarly, Mormon declared that an account of Ether's record would "be written hereafter" (Mosiah 28:19), although there is no indication that he did any work on it. It was left to Moroni to fulfill that declaration.

Where did the names of the books come from? Were they part of the large plates of Nephi, or did Mormon invent them? As with most questions about the original composition of the Book of Mormon, the answer must be deduced from clues Mormon left in the text. When John L. Sorenson analyzed the nature of the Nephite record, he suggested:

Nephi could not have anticipated how many metal plates this secular history would eventually require, so blank sheets of hammered metal must have been added periodically to his original set to accommodate the writings of later generations of historians; but the name of the record, "the plates of Nephi," was retained for the enlarged set in honor of the founder of the tradition.

There is reason to believe that when successive portions of the master record were added, they were labeled "the book of so-and-so" even though they were integral parts of "the plates of Nephi." While named after the principal individual who began each section, they sometimes also included records kept by that person's descendants (e.g., Alma 63:17, "the account of Alma, and Helaman his son, and also Shiblon, who was his son").<sup>64</sup>

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Mormon is its own evidence, being an introduction to the small plates. It explains that they were interesting, and Mormon wanted them to be known, but Mormon did not write on them, nor do any editing of the material. Thus, they were to be included, but as an appendix. They became more than that after the loss of the 116 pages. Moroni's editing of Ether fulfills Mormon's promise in Mosiah 28:19, but there is no indication that Mormon intended to do anything more with the plates of Ether than what he had already integrated into his text.

64. John L. Sorenson, "Mormon's Sources," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no.2 (2011): 5. Sorenson continues: "It seems reasonable that each of the component books represented a number of metal plates manufactured at the onset of the named scribe's tenure; these would have

Sorenson's suggestion is a commonly held assumption: the books were named for the "principal individual who began each section." That, however, is an insufficient reason to explain why a new book with a new name was created.

Mormon's first three books (Lehi, Mosiah, and Alma) provide the essential pattern. Note that this analysis deals with the books on the large plates of Nephi from which Mormon took his account. A different process lies behind the books on the small plates, consistent with their different transmission line.<sup>65</sup>

Each book is associated with multiple writers. The book of Lehi covered nearly four hundred years, requiring many different scribes (Lehi was not one of them).<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the book of Mosiah contains writings of Benjamin and Mosiah<sub>2</sub> (and presumably Mosiah<sub>1</sub> in the lost chapter or chapters). The book of Alma contains information scribed by both Alma<sub>2</sub> and his son, Helaman<sub>1</sub>.

The book names clearly do not change to indicate a new writer. Rather, a book name changes to represent a change in the political dynasty. Given Nephi's charter to record the deeds of the kings, such

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been filled up by him and his descendants, after which a new major writer would craft new plates and begin another installment of the ongoing historical record." I would disagree with that statement. Certainly, scribes created a number of plates, but there was no reason to worry about the number of the plates. With ties to the government, new plates could be created as needed, and one must suppose that even had they been bound with metal rings, those rings might be opened to add or remove plates as might be needed. It is doubtful, for example, that there were blank plates at the end of one record that remained blank because the next scribe created a new set of empty plates.

65. The large plates followed the kings, and specifically dealt with the reigns of the kings. Hence, the naming convention following something in the political line is appropriate. The small plates were given to Nephi's brother, Jacob, and followed Jacob's descendants, who were not in the political arena. Hence, they wrote books under their own name, until Omni, which collects multiple authors.

66. Here I disagree with Ricks, "The Small Plates of Nephi and the Words of Mormon," 211: "The book of Lehi title evidently originated with Lehi's journal, or sacred personal record, that Nephi transcribed at the beginning of his large plates of Nephi (1 Nephi 19:1)."

Nephi certainly named the book for his father, and clearly entered information about his father and their journey to the New World, just as he did in his eponymous book on the small plates. However, the naming convention had to have a different meaning that simply following the title of Lehi's record, since it persisted for about four hundred years. The analysis of how Nephi incorporated Lehi's record is covered in the section discussing Nephi.

a naming system fits with the more political nature of the large plates. When there was a direct continuation from ruler to ruler (typically father to son, although at times brother to brother), then the new writers continued in the book named for the man associated with the beginning of the dynasty. The name changes when there is a disruption in the ruling line and a new dynasty begins.

The book of Lehi is not extant, but there is nothing in the small plates text that replaced it that suggests that there was a king who was not a lineal descendant of Nephi. Nephi's father, Lehi, was never a Nephite. The people of Nephi were created only after Lehi's death and the departure of Nephi and his followers from Nephi's brothers. It appears that Nephi considered his father to be the beginning of the dynasty and therefore named the lineage for him. Perhaps Nephi saw this as a way of reinforcing the ties the records and the Nephites had to the Old World, which would have been a prestigious connection.

The Lehite dynasty ruled in the city of Nephi until a Lamanite invasion caused the Lord to warn Mosiah<sub>1</sub> to flee. When the Nephites entered the new land of Zarahemla and established a new overarching government for Nephites and Zarahemlaites, a new dynastic record began. The end of the book of Mosiah records another major political upheaval. The reign of the kings was dissolved, and a new form of government by judges was instituted. As the first chief judge, Alma<sub>2</sub> began a new record under a new name.

The nature of the books becomes more complicated in the book of Alma. Although created according to expectation, Alma<sub>2</sub> complicates the transmission line when he abdicates his position as chief judge to concentrate on a more religious mission (Alma 4:16–18). At that time, the newly appointed chief judge, Nephihah, declined to accept the records (Alma 50:38). If Nephihah had his own dynastic record, we have no evidence for it in what Mormon edited. What we know is that the book of Alma left the political realm, although Alma<sub>2</sub> continued to write in it according to the large plate charter. When his son, Helaman<sub>1</sub>, wrote on the plates, they continued to be outside of the line of political inheritance.

The book of Helaman does not begin with Helaman<sub>1</sub> but rather with Helaman<sub>2</sub>. Helaman<sub>2</sub> is appointed to be chief judge (Helaman 2:2), and therefore the plates reenter the political line with a new dynastic name. Helaman<sub>2</sub> received the plates from his father, Helaman<sub>1</sub>, as recorded in Alma 63:11. Although the transfer of the plates had already occurred,

the book of Helaman is probably not named as a separate book until Helaman<sub>2</sub> is seated as the chief judge.<sup>67</sup>

The nature of the book divisions becomes further complicated with the final two books Mormon edited (3 Nephi and 4 Nephi). Mormon clearly indicates the termination of his source for the book of Helaman: “and thus ended the book of Helaman, according to the record of Helaman and his sons” (Helaman 16:25). What we expect is that early in the book of 3 Nephi we should have an indication that the writer is ruler and starting a new dynasty. We don’t get that. What we get are some unusual statements about the text.

The first unusual aspect of 3 Nephi is the synoptic book header. These have typically told us something about the contents of the book. The book header for 3 Nephi is: “And Helaman was the son of Helaman, who was the son of Alma, who was the son of Alma, being a descendant of Nephi who was the son of Lehi, who came out of Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, the king of Judah.” The header is unusual in its content, which may be due to the compositor’s decision to create a book header similar to other books. In this case, it is possible that what we have typeset as a header was intended to be a continuation of the title. Rather than a title and header, it is possible the name should be: “The book of Nephi, the son of Nephi, who was the son of Helaman. And Helaman was the son of Helaman, who was the son of Alma, who was the son of Alma, being a descendant of Nephi who was the son of Lehi, who came out of Jerusalem in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, the king of Judah.”<sup>68</sup>

I suggest this unusual title serves two purposes. First, it signals a shift in the way Mormon is sourcing his material. A book name change has signaled a change in dynasty, but this book does not. Secondly, the long title emphasizes both genealogy and continuation. As I will discuss in the section “Fitting Names into Narrative Types,” the unusual replication of names with Nephi, son of Nephi, son of Helaman, son of Helaman, son of Alma, son of Alma, has a narrative function to indicate the religious continuity among political turmoil. This title reinforces that and makes the linking clear by associating the later Nephites with the original “Nephi who was the son of Lehi.” These unusual features suggest there was no book of Nephi, son of Nephi, son of Helaman on the

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67. Mormon modified what was recorded at the end of the book of Alma and the beginning of the book of Helaman to highlight a significant year marker. See Chapter 15.

68. I owe this insight to Mark A. Wright, personal email in my possession.

large plates. This is a book Mormon has created to isolate and emphasize the appearance and teachings of the Savior in the New World.

Mormon had ended the book of Helaman with two inserted sources not part of the book of Helaman as written on the plates of Nephi. The political situation became murky with the advent of Gadianton influence and dominance in Nephite politics, and the inserted “prophecy of Nephi” (Helaman 7, beginning of III) section clearly shows Nephi<sub>2</sub> outside the political leadership. Nephi<sub>3</sub> not only continues to be outside of the ruling clan, but he also witnesses the complete dissolution of Nephite government as the Nephites dissolve into separate tribes (3 Nephi 7:2–3).

The Nephite record must have continued because Nephi<sub>3</sub> had been given charge of the records. Mormon gives us the solution when he notes that he is taking the information in 3 Nephi from a different source: “But behold there are records which do contain all the proceedings of this people; and a shorter but true account was given by Nephi” (3 Nephi 5:9). Given dominance of the Gadiantons that resulted in Nephi<sub>2</sub>’s prophecy recorded in Helaman, there is little chance that official historical records would have been particularly sympathetic to either Nephi<sub>2</sub> or Nephi<sub>3</sub>. To get the non-Gadianton version of history, Mormon used different sources — a separate record he calls “the prophecy of Nephi,” in Helaman and the “shorter but true” account of Nephi<sub>3</sub> for 3 Nephi. The name of this book of Nephi comes from the separate record, and not the large plates. Those plates might have had a different new dynastic name, but Mormon doesn’t give us any information about that record at all.

The book of 4 Nephi is even more enigmatic. Because it follows 3 Nephi, it has been posited that there was another Nephi for whom that book was written. Clyde James Williams wrote the paragraph on Nephi<sub>4</sub> in the *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*:

The son of Nephi<sub>3</sub>, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Nephi<sub>4</sub> inscribed the record of his people on the plates of Nephi (4 Nephi 1:19; circa AD 34). He lived during the era of peace and unity that followed the ministry of Jesus Christ among the Nephites (4 Nephi 1:15–17). After Nephi’s death, Amos, his son, kept the record.<sup>69</sup>

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69. Clyde James Williams, s.v. “Nephi<sub>4</sub>,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 589. Note that the *Book of Mormon Reference companion* uses superscripts to differentiate people with the same name. I standardized the superscript to the convention I use in this book.

That is the sum of what might be known for Nephi<sub>4</sub>. I suggest that it is incorrect. There was no Nephi<sub>4</sub>. First, we need to understand the listed genealogy. Because it is separated into two books, we should examine it carefully. First, we have the basic descending lineage that is quite complete: Alma begets Alma, who begets Helaman, who begets Helaman, who begets Nephi, who begets Nephi. At the beginning of 4 Nephi we have: “The Book of Nephi, Who is the Son of Nephi — One of the Disciples of Jesus Christ.” That might indicate that we have yet another Nephi (Nephi<sub>4</sub>, son of Nephi<sub>3</sub>, son of Nephi<sub>2</sub>), but there is no indication of his birth and no indication that his father passed away and gave him the records. It would be the only time we had three related men with the same name. While possible, it would not only be unusual, it would break the very clear pattern up to this point.

We do learn that this particular Nephi was one of the disciples of Jesus Christ. That was clearly true of Nephi<sub>3</sub>: “And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve)” (3 Nephi 12:1). It is difficult to see Nephi<sub>3</sub> separate from the called twelve, given his apparent priority in this verse. The book of 4 Nephi also begins within a few years of Christ’s appearance in Bountiful. Nephi<sub>3</sub> was certainly alive at that point, and having been the recordkeeper, was likely to have continued to be the recordkeeper.

The biggest complication in considering that it is the same Nephi in both books is that there would be only four recordkeepers from the time of Christ until Ammaron gave up the records in the Nephite year 320 (from Christ’s birth). Frankly, the addition of another Nephi doesn’t help with that timeline.

It is possible that the number of recordkeepers is intentional. Mormon is recounting four centuries and gives us a recordkeeper for each of the four centuries, until Mormon becomes the final recordkeeper. Thus, Nephi<sub>3</sub> is the recordkeeper for the first hundred years, Amos<sub>1</sub> for the second, and Amos<sub>2</sub> for the third. In the fourth hundred years we have Ammaron, who in turn gives the final recordkeeper, Mormon, the plates and the responsibility. This is a symbolic correlation only, as the lifespans of these men could not fit within their assigned centuries. Still, a man named Nephi covers the beginning, and there are only three

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J. N. Washburn, *The Contents, Structure, and Authorship of the Book of Mormon*, 49, used letters to identify the different men of the same name. He noted: “But Nephi X also had a son Nephi, the leading character in 4 Nephi. He would, of course, be Nephi Y.”

more men named prior to Mormon's receiving the plates. It appears that Mormon is working more symbolically than literally in 4 Nephi (born out in the minimal history included in the book).

I also suggest that 4 Nephi is where Mormon returns to the plates of Nephi as a general source. The header for the book notes that it is "[a]n account of the people of Nephi, according to his record." Who are the "people of Nephi?" The term *Nephite* had been used as a political designation since Jacob's time (Jacob 1:14). After the dissolution of the Nephite nation (3 Nephi 7:1–4), there was no government but only tribes. At some point after Christ came, the people re-established a government. I suggest that Nephi<sub>3</sub> was the leader and that "people of Nephi" could refer to those who followed Nephi<sub>3</sub> as the head of the new government. Hence the phrase "according to his record." A new ruler would have a new book on the plates of Nephi — and the name for the new dynasty was Nephi. I suggest this hypothesis is confirmed when Mormon records: "And it came to pass that Amos died also, (and it was an hundred and ninety and four years from the coming of Christ) and his son Amos kept the record in his stead; and he *also kept it upon the plates of Nephi; and it was also written in the book of Nephi, which is this book*" (4 Nephi 1:21). Further confirmation would be the return to a heavy use of dates in the record, although many of them are unrelated to any event.

### **Years as an Organizational Framework**

The small plates have a general chronological organization but not one which required strict adherence to a single timeline. For example, the end of 1 Nephi 9 leaves the historical narrative to insert comments about the plates upon which Nephi is writing almost 30 years later. The fundamental organization is chronological only in that the text tends to move through events as they occurred. However, neither Nephi nor the other small-plates writers insert the specific years very often. Thus, the organization follows the timely order of events, but it rarely tied events to a larger structure or a specific year in which they occurred. Time is even less of an organizational principle in 2 Nephi because 2 Nephi itself departs from primarily historical narrative to primarily timeless religious principles. When the small plates do specify time, they do so by marking years from the Lehi departure from Jerusalem.

When we return to text taken from the large plates, we find the book of Mosiah follows the same conventions about time as we see in the small plate books. The book of Mosiah periodically mentions the number of years that had passed from the ethnocentric beginning point



of the departure from Jerusalem. This method allows the modern reader to place the events in a general timeframe, while the described events occur in narrative order.

This method of marking time works in general, but because it occurs sporadically, there are times when it is difficult to work out when certain events took place. This is particularly true in the book of Mosiah, when Mormon tells two different stories which overlap in time. He tells both about the Nephites in Zarahemla and a small group which returned to the land of Nephi. The stories of Zeniff, Noah, Limhi, Abinadi, and Alma<sup>1</sup> all take place in a different location but at the same time as other described events in Zarahemla. There are too few dates listed to be precise about many elements of these stories.

Had those stories occurred perhaps fewer than 50 years later, it might not have been quite so difficult. Beginning with the book of Alma, a different method of using years to structure texts was introduced. We are never told why. We see only the result of the change. The book of Alma changes both the ethnocentric base from which years were counted as well as the way years are used to record history.

The very first verse of the first chapter in the book of Alma presents both changes: “Now it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi...” (Alma 1:1). From this point through the end of the book of 4 Nephi, the passage of years is a narrative structure that frames events and therefore the way the text represents those events. We even find Mormon including years without accompanying text, such as in 4 Nephi 1:6, which declares: “And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.”

Grant Hardy noticed: “Almost every year is mentioned individually, even if Mormon does not give them equal coverage. Sometimes nothing of note seems to have happened and a year is passed by in a sentence or less. Often, however, the dates come in pairs as Mormon indicates both the beginning and ending of a particular year. These references can be separated by only a few verses, but frequently they are several chapters apart (e.g. 83 B.C., the eighteenth year of the reign of the judges, begins at Alma 35:13 and ends at 44:24).”<sup>70</sup>

John L. Sorenson describes this organizational feature:

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70. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 103.

The fundamental format of the plates of Nephi was that of annals. Annals are yearly summaries of salient events. This format is clearly reflected at many points in the Book of Mormon, for example in Helaman 6:15: “And it came to pass that in the sixty and sixth year of the reign of the judges, behold, Cezoram was murdered by an unknown hand as he sat upon the judgment-seat. And it came to pass that in the same year, that his son, who had been appointed by the people in his stead, was also murdered. And thus ended the sixty and sixth year.” That is how Mormon chose to summarize the record for that year.

Generally these annalistic entries were succinct. As an example, Mormon’s record for the twenty-six years documented in Helaman, chapters 2 through 6, averages fewer than seven verses per year.<sup>71</sup>

Hardy and Sorenson correctly note the pattern but do not clarify that earlier books do not follow the annalistic pattern. The way time is used changes between the book of Mosiah and the book of Alma — both books Mormon edited. Therefore, it is unlikely that this is Mormon’s convention but rather a reflection of a difference in his sources.

There are insufficient data to suggest a cultural influence, but it is important to note that this method of recording annalistic history was part of the cultures of Mesoamerica, which I consider the most plausible location of the Book of Mormon events. Perhaps the change to the way time was recorded was influenced by the introduction of the long count among the Maya. That took a calendar that repeated dates in cycles and tied it to a beginning point. It allowed for a more absolute construction of time.

Whether or not that influenced the change in Alma, we do see the parallel use of annalist histories for both the Aztec and Maya peoples. Although both known examples postdate the Book of Mormon, they show that a historical document anchored in the passage of years existed in the region where most scholars believe the events in the Book of Mormon took place. Two texts have been preserved in their respective native language, although written in western script. One was written by Central Mexican Aztec historians, and one comes from the Cakchiquel Maya.

The *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* is a historical document originally written in Nahuatl, the Aztec language. The extant copy is a transcription from an earlier document. The orthography provides the earliest possible date

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71. Sorenson, “Mormon’s Sources,” 4.

for the copy as 1590.<sup>72</sup> The entire document is organized around years, and just as we saw in 4 Nephi 1:6, there are several years listed where no event accompanies the year. In the following excerpt from the history of the fall of Tollan (an important city state from around AD 900), the years are noted according to the Mesoamerican method of designating years. In the following, 2 Flint, 3 House, 4 Rabbit, etc. are years as represented in the Mesoamerican system:

[The fall of Tollan: AD 896–1070]

2 Flint. 3 House. 4 Rabbit. 5 Reed. 6 Flint. 7 House. 8 Rabbit.  
9 Reed.

10 Flint. 11 House. 12 Rabbit. 13 Reed. 1 Flint. 2 House. 3  
Rabbit.

4 Reed. 5 Flint. 6 House. 7 Rabbit. 8 Reed. 9 Flint. 10 House.

11 Rabbit. 12 Reed. 13 Flint. 1 House. 2 Rabbit. 3 Reed. 4  
Flint.

5 House. 6 Rabbit. 7 Reed. 8 Flint. 9 House.

10 Rabbit [A.D. 930]. Ayauhcoyotzin, ruler of Cuauhtitlan, died in that year. He had ruled for 55 years. Matlaxochitzin, ruler of Tollan, also died then, and Nauhyotzin was inaugurated, succeeding him as Tollan's ruler.

11 Reed [931]. The Cuauhtitlan ruler Necuamexochitzin was inaugurated in that year. His palace was in Tepotzotlan Miccalco. The reason it was called *Miccalco* [At the House of the Dead] is that lightning struck there, killing noblemen and ladies, and so they changed residence. Nothing was left standing but the Chichimec rulers' straw-house. They did not dare go back to their palace.

12 Flint. 13 House. 1 Rabbit. 2 Reed. 3 Flint. 4 House.  
5 Rabbit.

6 Reed. 7 Flint. 8 House. 9 Rabbit. 10 Reed. 11 Flint.

12 House [945]. It was the year the Cuauhtitlan ruler called Necuamexochitzin died. He had ruled for 15 years. Also at that time the Tollan ruler, Nauhyotzin, died, and Matlaccoatzin was inaugurated, succeeding him.

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72. John Bierhorst, trans., *History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 12.

13 Rabbit [946]. In that year Mecellotzin was inaugurated as ruler of Cuauhtitlan. His palace was built in a place called Tianquizzolco Cuauhtlaapan.<sup>73</sup>

The second document is from farther south, from the Maya rather than the Aztec. Written in the *Cakchiquel* Maya language, the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* shows a similar structure, but in this case listed by days rather than years:

A little less than two years after the death of the Tukuchés, the Zutuhils were killed in *Zahcab* on the day 1 Ah-mak [July 10, 1495]. The Zutuhils were killed and annihilated, and their chiefs *Nahtihay* and *Ahquibihay* surrendered. Only the lord Voo Caok, the Ahtziquinahay, did not surrender, but his heart was full of evil intentions toward the Cakchiquels.

On the day 5 Ah [ July 27, 1495] ended the second year after the revolution.

On the day 2 Ah [August 30, 1496] ended the third year after the revolution.

On the day 3 Queh [September 13, 1496, or May 31, 1497] there was a revolt in the Quiché. The Tukuchés went to take part in it there in the Quiché.

On the day 12 Ah [October 4, 1497] ended the fourth year after the revolution.

During the fifth year those of *Mixcu* died, subjects of the king Cablahuh Tihax, who wished to assume power. On the day 7 Camey [December 16, 1497] the warriors fell on the city of those of *Mixcu* and annihilated them.

Then the Yaquis of *Xivicu* died who had joined the king Voo Caok, lord of the Akahals, when the Akahal people revolted, wishing to take command of that place.<sup>74</sup>

The obvious difference between the Nephite annals and the examples from the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan* or the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* is that the latter two had extremely abbreviated entries. Mormon clearly had

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73. Ibid., 37. The Mesoamerican calendar rotated a set of named days through numbers. The nature of the cyclical repetition was such that a certain number and day could only occur once every 260 days.

74. Dioniso José Chonay and Delia Goetz, trans., *Annals of the Cakchiquels and Title of the Lords of Totonicapan* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 110.

more to work with. Nevertheless, all three (*Annals of Cuauhtitlan*, *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, and Mormon's abridgement of the large plates) mark years in which no events are listed. Both the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* and Mormon's abridgement often note the ending of a year. Note that in the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* there is a count from a specific event rather than a single fixed origin point for dating ("the second year after the revolution" and "the third year after the revolution").

The very strict annalistic structure of the large plates may also serve as a textual diagnostic for when Mormon is using the large plates as his source. It cannot be an exclusive diagnostic because Alma<sub>2</sub> records some years in his non-large-plate personal record. However, when we know we are using a separate source that marks a few years, and then a new chapter begins with the annalistic year counts, we may be sure that Mormon is taking that information from the large plates.

That this was a plate-based convention is suggested by the way Mormon treats years when he is no longer abridging. When he writes his own history, he returns to a more sporadic notification of the years, if he notes them at all. For example, Words of Mormon simply indicates: "And it is many hundred years after the coming of Christ that I deliver these records into the hands of my son" (Words of Mormon 1:2).

### **Mormon's Outline**

It is likely that Mormon worked from at least an outline as he wrote. Textual hints support this supposition. An important confirmation that Mormon understood what was to come in his text is found in his promises of future content. To make such promises, Mormon must have known that he already planned to include them later.

John A. Tvedtnes writes of seven times Mormon promised future content:

1. Mormon spoke in Mosiah 21:35 of Limhi's people, saying that "an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter." Almost a hundred verses followed before he told in Mosiah 25:17–18 about that ordinance being performed.
2. The preaching mission of the sons of Mosiah was related in Alma 17–25, eighteen chapters after Mormon had said in Mosiah 28:9 and 19–20 that he would later tell about it.
3. In Alma 35:13, Mormon promised to describe the Nephite-Lamanite war that began in the eighteenth year. But, since he proposed first to copy Alma's teachings to his sons, he postponed the story of the war until Alma 43, where in verse

three he introduced the topic with the words, “And now I return to an account of the wars.”

4. Writing in Mosiah 28:11–19, Mormon said that he would later give the story of the Jaredites. He made this statement at the point where he mentioned that King Mosiah had translated the record of that people. Apparently the problems he faced in his role as commander of the Nephite armies in his people’s battles against the Lamanites kept him from abridging the Jaredite record. But his son, Moroni, fulfilled the promise by giving us the Book of Ether. So Moroni preserved the Book of Mormon editorial pattern of not failing to cover what was promised, even though it took a generation.<sup>75</sup>
5. Third Nephi 18:36–37 contains Mormon’s statement that Jesus had given his twelve disciples “power to give the Holy Ghost.” He added, “I will show unto you hereafter that this record is true.” In the next chapter, verse thirteen, he described how the Holy Ghost fell on the twelve after their baptism. Then at 4 Nephi 1:1, he wrote that those baptized by the twelve “did also receive the Holy Ghost.” Further consistency was shown in Moroni’s later quotation of Christ’s words to the twelve, which Mormon had left out in 3 Nephi 18 where they logically might have been given: “Ye shall have power that to him upon whom ye shall lay your hands, ye shall give the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 2:2). He then added, “On as many as they laid their hands, fell the Holy Ghost” (v. 3). The reporting of the matter involved two prophets and four distinct passages of scripture, but eventually nothing was left out of the story.
6. What is in our present scripture under the title the Words of Mormon serves as an editorial bridge between the book of Omni on the small plates and the book of Mosiah in Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates. In verse two of Words of Mormon, Mormon said he hoped that his son Moroni would write “concerning Christ.” That hope was realized about 350

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75. I differ with Tvedtnes’s interpretation of Mormon’s intention to include Ether. I see no indication that Mormon intended that he himself include it. I see Mormon as having known he would assign Moroni to complete the editing of Ether. John A. Tvedtnes, “Mormon’s Editorial Promises,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991), 29–31.

pages later when Moroni told important matters concerning the Savior in Ether 3:17–20 and in 12:7, 16–22, and 38–41. At the very end of the whole volume (Mormon 9 and Moroni 2, 6, 7, 10), the son included his own testimony of Christ.

7. In Helaman 2:12–14, Mormon said that he would speak more of Gadianton and his secret band “hereafter.” Indeed, he did. The problems caused by the robbers and much about their characteristics were detailed in Helaman 6; 3 Nephi 1:27–29; 2:11–18; 3:1–4:29; and beyond in 4 Nephi and Mormon.<sup>76</sup>

Tvedtnes skipped Mosiah 28:9 which promised the account of the preaching of the sons of Mosiah, which Mormon covered in Alma 17–27. Grant Hardy explains that Mormon used narrative foreshadowing, such as:

“I will show unto you that they were brought into bondage, and none could deliver them but the Lord their God” (Mosiah 23:23).

“But behold, we shall see that his promise which he made was rash” (Alma 51:10).

“Now behold, I will show unto you that they did not establish a king over the land” (3 Nephi 7:1).<sup>77</sup>

Each of these editorial promises was fulfilled (though the promise to include the record of Ether was fulfilled by Moroni, not Mormon). Each required the editorial knowledge of what was to come.

Knowing what was to come indicates that prior to writing, Mormon had already decided what was going to be included. When he began writing, he wrote in the order that we read the text. The “I will show you” statements only make sense as inclusions that referenced what he knew he would later write.

Having access to all the Nephite records meant it was theoretically possible for him to begin with the earliest of the large plates and simply abridge to the end. He didn’t do that. What he did can be seen in Mosiah 17: 4, which speaks of Alma: “But he fled from before them and hid

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76. Ibid. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 97, also notes editorial promises as a feature of Mormon’s editing.

77. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 98. We may add 3 Nephi 10:18 “And it came to pass that in the ending of the thirty and fourth year, behold, I will show unto you that the people of Nephi who were spared, and also those who had been called Lamanites, who had been spared, did have great favors shown unto them, and great blessings poured out upon their heads, insomuch that soon after the ascension of Christ into heaven he did truly manifest himself unto them.”

himself that they found him not. And he being concealed for many days did write all the words which Abinadi had spoken” (Mosiah 17:4).

This is the final verse of an aside Mormon inserted into his record of Abinadi before Noah. Verses 2 and 3 simply tell that Alma believed Abinadi and was cast out. It is possible the information written in verses 2 and 3 could have come from the official court records. However, knowing what Alma<sub>1</sub> did after he had been cast out could not have been in the court records. The only way Mormon would know was to have read Alma<sub>1</sub>'s personal account. Mormon includes that account later in Mosiah 23 and 24. However, including this little snippet of information in Mosiah 17 required that Mormon had already found and read Alma<sub>1</sub>'s personal record of those events. Mormon did not integrate information as he found it but first searched through all the records to find the stories that would best communicate the messages he wanted to tell. Mormon did not just record history, he transformed the records of history into subtle lessons.



