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Abner Cole and *The Reflector*: Another Clue to the Timing of the 1830 Book of Mormon Printing

Robin Scott Jensen

ON 22 JANUARY 1830, EDITOR ABNER COLE, who published under the pseudonym Obediah Dogberry, issued an extra of his newspaper the *Reflector*. This extra included an unauthorized “Extract from the Book of ALMA, Chapter XX.”¹ Cole’s pirating of the passages of the Book of Mormon has long been recognized as an example of the persecution heaped upon Joseph Smith because of his experiences of discovering the gold plates and publishing the Book of Mormon. Smith’s own mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recorded this episode in her memoir, offering such an interpretation. She described the culminating confrontation between her son Joseph and Cole, wherein Joseph Smith, as the copyright owner, successfully persuaded Cole to cease publishing unauthorized passages from the Book of Mormon.² Other scholars have treated the episode couched either within a biographical study of Cole or from a study

1. Book of Mormon. [Extract from the Book of Alma, Chapter XX],” *Reflector* [Palmyra, New York], 22 January 1830 (hereafter *Reflector*), 27. Because the *Reflector* was paginated, this piece will cite the page numbers of the newspaper as well as the date of the issue. The *Reflector* was published “on such days as may suit our own convenience”; it is assumed the 22 January date represents when the paper was actually published. The previous issue, however, is dated both 13 January 1830 on the masthead and 11 January 1830 within the newspaper itself. (13 [11?] January 1830, *Reflector*, [17] and 20). Cole published what is currently Alma 43:22–40 of the LDS edition.

2. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845, bk. 9, [9]–[11], Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter CHL.

exploring the legality of printing the pages.³ This study, however, explores Cole's publication of the excerpts—particularly the chapter from Alma—and highlights an important insight into the dates of the printing of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. The purpose of this brief article is to alert readers to this new connection, which was gleaned from research and production of the third volume of the Revelations and Translations series of the *Joseph Smith Papers*.

Abner Cole published his newspaper in the same printing office where the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon was printed, giving him access to proofs of the sheets as they came off the press.⁴ Cole published the first chapter of Nephi in two consecutive issues beginning on 9 January 1830.⁵ Cole typeset the excerpt from a completed, unbound sheet of the 1830 edition. Because minor errors or changes of punctuation occur in Cole's excerpt, it appears that Cole reset the type for the excerpt when he prepared it for publication in the *Reflector*.⁶

3. See, for instance, Andrew H. Hedges, "The Refractory Abner Cole," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 447–76; Nathaniel Hinckley Wadsworth, "Copyright Laws and the 1830 Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 45/3 (2006): 77–99; and Kimberley Mangun and Jeremy J. Chatelain, "For 'The Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty': Abner Cole and the Palmyra, New York, *Reflector*," *American Journalism* 32/2 (2015): 184–205.

4. See Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Part 1: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015), 47. Hereafter *JSP*, PMBoM.

5. See "The First Book of Nephi," *Reflector*, 2 January 1830, 9; and "The First Book of Nephi," *Reflector*, 13 January 1830, 17.

6. The known differences between the 1830 edition and the 2 January 1830 issue of the *Reflector* are the 1830 edition's "his lustre was above that to the sun," compared with *Reflector*'s "his lustre was above that of the sun" (emphasis added); the 1830 edition's "he read, saying," compared with *Reflector*'s omission of the comma; 1830 edition's "faithful and declared," compared with *Reflector*'s "faithful, and declared." The known differences between the 1830 edition and the 13 January 1830 issue of the *Reflector* are 1830 edition's "in the borders," compared with *Reflector*'s "on the borders"; 1830 edition's "Sariah," compared with *Reflector*'s "Sarah"; 1830 edition's "river of water. And . . .," compared with *Reflector*'s "river of water; And . . ."; 1830 edition's "emptied," compared with *Reflector*'s "emtiied"; and 1830 edition's "in the borders," compared with *Reflector*'s "on the borders."

A close comparison between the Alma excerpt and the 1830 edition, however, shows a different set of circumstances. The errors that appear in the excerpt actually indicate that Cole did not reset the type for that portion. Instead, Cole took the type already set for the 1830 Book of Mormon and rearranged those lines, words, letters, and spaces for the narrower column width of the *Reflector*. The excerpt in the *Reflector* has five instances where two words are run together without a space (see underlined words on pages 240 and 242).⁷ Each of these five errors occurs when the words that are run together appear on either side of a line break in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon (see underlined words on pages 241 and 243). Cole failed to insert a blank type for the space between the words that spanned a line break when he rearranged the type, resulting in the joined words in the *Reflector*.

In addition to these errors, similarities in nicked or worn type have been identified between the two printed versions, indicating that the type was simply rearranged rather than reset. For instance, the *o* in

7. The words are “thereforethey,” “preparedagainst,” “cameto,” “apart,” and “tocross.”

y future prospects, and were about to retire, in “peace and harmony,” when it was discovered that the principal manager—a descendant from the first martyr burnt at Smithfield—had robbed the money, and took himself O-P-H! G.

BOOK OF MORMON.

[Extract from the Book of ALMA, Chapter xx.]

Behold, now it came to pass, that they durst not come against the Nephites in the borders of Jershon; therefore they departed out of the land of Anthonum, into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river Sidon, that they might come into the land of Manti, and take possession of the land; for they did not suppose that the armies of Moroni would know whither they had gone. But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness, Moroni sent spies into the wilderness, to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring whither the armies of the Nephites should go, to defend themselves against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma; and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the more weak part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni.

Now Moroni, leaving a part of his army in the land of Jershon, lest by any means, a part of the Lamanites should come in to that land and take possession of the city; and Moroni took the remainder part of his army and marched over into the land of Manti. And he caused that all the people in that quarter of the land, should gather themselves together to battle, against the Lamanites, to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties; therefore they were prepared against the time of the coming of the Lamanites. And it cameto pass, that Moroni caused that

the people of Nephi, or that Moroni had prepared his people with breast-plates, and with arm-shields; yea, and also shields to defend their heads; and also they were dressed with thick clothing. Now the army of Zerahemnah was not prepared with any such thing. They had only their swords, and their cimeters, their bows and their arrows, their stones and their slings; but they were naked, save it were a skin which was girded about their loins; yea, all were naked, save it were the Zoramites and the Amalekites. But they were not armed with breast-plates, nor shields; therefore they were exceedingly afraid of the armies of the Nephites, because of their armour, notwithstanding their number being so much greater than the Nephites.

Behold, now it came to pass, that they durst not come against the Nephites in the borders of Jershon; therefore they departed out of the land of Antionum, into the wilderness, and took their journey round about in the wilderness, away by the head of the river [Sidon], that they might come into the land of Manti, and take possession of the land; for they did not suppose that the armies of Moroni would know whither they had gone. But it came to pass, as soon as they had departed into the wilderness, Moroni sent spies into the wilderness, to watch their camp; and Moroni, also, knowing of the prophecies of Alma, sent certain men unto him, desiring him that he should inquire of the Lord whither the armies of the Nephites should go, to defend themselves against the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came unto Alma; and Alma informed the messengers of Moroni that the armies of the Lamanites were marching round about in the wilderness, that they might come over into the land of Manti, that they might commence an attack upon the more weak part of the people. And those messengers went and delivered the message unto Moroni.

Now Moroni, leaving a part of his army in the land of Jershon, lest by any means, a part of the Lamanites should come into that land and take possession of the city; and Moroni took the remainder part of his army and marched over into the land of Manti. And he caused that all the people in that quarter of the land, should gather themselves together to battle, against the Lamanites, to defend their lands and their country, their rights and their liberties; therefore they were prepared against the time of the coming of the Lamanites. And it came to pass, that Moroni caused that his army should be secreted

the first instance of “Sidon” in the *Reflector* (line 8) has a worn bottom edge. This worn edge can also be seen in the 1830 edition, indicating that the same type was used for both publications.⁸ Similarly, the s in “durst” in the *Reflector* (line 2) is misshapen, just as the s is in the 1830 edition (see outlined words on pages 240–41). The fact that the same type was used for both printings raises important implications, which will be explored only briefly here.

For many years, scholars have wondered about the duration and pace of the printing of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. The only date that can be established with certainty is the date of completion: the volume was complete and ready for purchase by 26 March

8. A careful letter-by-letter comparison has not been done for this piece. One challenge of comparing any two versions is that there were multiple printings of each version and mid-press changes were known to have happened with the 1830 edition. A comparison of the *Reflector* and multiple states, or versions, of the 1830 edition may answer one question about this episode: Did Cole use this type in the middle of printing that section, or was the printing for the 1830 edition finished for this portion when Cole repurposed it for his own publication?

his army should be secreted in the valley which was near the bank of the river Sidon which was on the west of the river Sidon, in the wilderness, that he might know when the camp of the Lamanites should come.

And now as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage, that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves, over all the land; and he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem; therefore he found, by his spies, which course the Lamanites were to take. Therefore he divided his army, and brought apart over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah; and the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti. And thus having placed his army according to his desire, he was prepared to meet them.

And it came to pass that the Lamanites came up on the north of the hill where a part of the army of Moroni was concealed. And it came to pass that as the Lamanites had passed the hill Riplah, and came into the valley, and began to cross the river Sidon, the army which was concealed on the south of the hill, who was led by a man whose name was Lehi; and he led his army forth and encircled the Lamanites about, on the east, in their rear.

And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about, and began to contend with the army of Lehi; and the work of death commenced, on both sides; but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites; for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites, with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke; while on the other hand, there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites, by their swords, and the loss of blood; they being shielded from the more

in the valley which was near the bank of the river Sidon, which was on the west of the river Sidon, in the wilderness. And Moroni placed spies round about, that he might know when the camp of the Lamanites should come.

And now as Moroni knew the intention of the Lamanites, that it was their intention to destroy their brethren, or to subject them and bring them into bondage, that they might establish a kingdom unto themselves, over all the land; and he also knowing that it was the only desire of the Nephites to preserve their lands and their liberty, and their church, therefore he thought it no sin that he should defend them by stratagem; therefore he found, by his spies, which course the Lamanites were to take. Therefore he divided his army, and brought a part over into the valley, and concealed them on the east, and on the south of the hill Riplah; and the remainder he concealed in the west valley, on the west of the river Sidon, and so down into the borders of the land Manti. And thus having placed his army according to his desire, he was prepared to meet them.

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And it came to pass that the Lamanites, when they saw the Nephites coming upon them in their rear, turned them about, and began to contend with the army of Lehi; and the work of death commenced, on both sides; but it was more dreadful on the part of the Lamanites; for their nakedness was exposed to the heavy blows of the Nephites, with their swords and their cimeters, which brought death almost at every stroke; while on the other hand, there was now and then a man fell among the Nephites, by their swords, and the loss of blood; they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites, by their breast-plates, and their arm-shields, and their head-plates; and thus the Nephites did carry on the work of death among the Lamanites. And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened, because of the great destruction among them, even until they began to

1830.⁹ The beginning date and points of progress of the printing of the Book of Mormon, however, have proven elusive. John H. Gilbert, who did much of the typesetting, stated later in life that the work did not commence until after “Harris had promised to insure the payment” and after Grandin “went to New York and bought the type.”¹⁰ Martin Harris mortgaged his farm on 25 August 1829, and it seems reasonable to assume that Grandin would not have purchased new type without having first secured payment from Harris. Grandin went to New York City to buy new type in early fall 1830, so the typesetting for the Book of Mormon likely did not commence until after his return, perhaps sometime in the first half of September.

A letter from Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith indicates that printing was actively occurring by November, though it was encountering obstacles.¹¹ Cowdery reported to Smith that “the printing goes rather Slow yet as the type founder [likely the typesetter or compositor] has been sick but we expect that the type will be on and Mr, Granden [Egbert B. Grandin] Still think[s] he will finish printing by the first of february.”¹²

In addition to recalling the approximate beginning point of printing, Gilbert also leaves important clues regarding the average time it took to set the type for each form (or a series of pages of typeset text). Gilbert recalled that before December 1829, the staff at the printing shop could produce one form in three days. He further recalled that the workers at the printing staff worked on the Book of Mormon four days of the week (the other two days were spent on the local newspaper the

9. The 19 March 1830 issue of the *Wayne Sentinel* noted that “the ‘Book of Mormon’ will be ready for sale in the course of next week.” And the next issue announced its availability: the Book of Mormon “is now for sale, wholesale and retail.” Notice, *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, NY), 19 March 1830, [p. 3] and “The Book of Mormon,” *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, NY), 26 March 1830, [p. 3].

10. “Mormon Leaders at Their Mecca,” *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, 12. Grandin considered Harris’s 25 August 1829 mortgage to be payment for the printing. (See Revelation, ca. Summer 1829, in *JSP*, D1:85 [D&C 19].)

11. Oliver Cowdery, Manchester New York, to Joseph Smith, Harmony, Pennsylvania, 6 November 1829, in *JSP*, D1:98–101.

12. *JSP*, D1:100.

Wayne Sentinel). By December 1829, Grandin hired an additional pressman to assist in the printing of the Book of Mormon. This increased the productivity of the office staff so that they produced two forms per week instead of one and a third.¹³

In order to offer a clearer reconstruction of the printing timeline for the first edition of the Book of Mormon, one additional data point is necessary. When Abner Cole rearranged existing type for his newspaper, he was very likely using type that had already been set and used to print the sheets by Grandin, Gilbert, and other workers on the Book of Mormon. Cole may have felt safe in using the type because it was ready to be distributed back into the type cases for a new form. It seems difficult to believe that Cole would have upset the printing schedule of the owner of the printing press on which he also depended. If we assume that by the time Cole rearranged type for the Alma excerpt, it was already set and printed for the 1830 edition and ready for distribution, we can also assume that by 22 January (a Friday), the Book of Mormon publishers were finished with the twenty-second sheet of the Book of Mormon, which also held the same portion of Alma. A reminiscence stated that Wednesdays and Saturdays were spent publishing the *Wayne Sentinel*.¹⁴ This would mean that five thousand copies of the twenty-third and twenty-fourth gatherings were printed the week of 25 January, the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth forms were completed the week of 1 February, and so on. At this pace, the thirty-seventh and final form of the Book of Mormon would have been completed during the first part of the week of 15–19 March. This is a week and a half before the books were available for purchase. Given that collating, sewing, and binding of at least some of the books would have had to take place before the announcement stating the book was available, a two-week grace period seems ambitious but not impossible.

Working backward from the 22 January date—the date the Alma excerpt appeared in the *Reflector*—gives us a similar picture. If we work

13. John H. Gilbert, Memorandum, 8 Sept. 1892, photocopy, CHL; *Wayne County Journal*, 3 May 1883, in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 2:545n10.

14. *Wayne County Journal*, 3 May 1883.

from a very generous estimate that the compositors of the 1830 edition were finished with the twenty-second form during the week of 11 January, Cole would have had an entire week to rearrange the type. If we allow for a second gathering to be finished that same week (the twenty-first gathering), the schedule can be worked backward just as it was worked forward. By the week of 4 January, the workers would have finished the nineteenth and twentieth forms. Gilbert did not mention precisely when Grandin hired another pressman in December, but if we work from a conservative estimate that he hired that person on 31 December, the workers during the months of November and December would have produced twelve forms, and work on the seventh form would have begun on the week of 2 November. At a rate of one and a third forms per week, work on the first form would have been begun in the middle of the last week of September. This final week of September, however, is well past the time when Gilbert said Harris offered payment in full and well past the conservative estimate of Grandin's return with new type from New York City during the first part of September. But this extra time could be explained by the delay mentioned by Cowdery in the November 1829 letter to Joseph Smith.

Other implications arise from this one pirated excerpt of the Book of Mormon, which are not explored in this short paper.¹⁵ But perhaps more important than adding an additional data point to the dating of the timeline of printing the first edition of the Book of Mormon, this piece introduces and explores the importance of closely scrutinizing all sources to better understand texts from the past. A full bibliographic treatment of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, with particular attention to detail such as typography, binding, differing states, and the variants between those states, will continue to yield previously unforeseen insights into the Book of Mormon. These insights and their repercussions that are not yet fully understood will provide further context to

15. For instance, the known date of when the twenty-second form was printed also helps scholars determine when the thirteenth gathering of the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon would have been finished. See *JSP*, PMBoM:47.

the Book of Mormon not just as a religious text, but as a material object occupying a frequently contested religious space.

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