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*Revelations and Translations, Volume 3:
Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*
The Joseph Smith Papers
Edited by Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen
Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015

Reviewed by James B. Allen

Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints revere the Book of Mormon as a sacred text that was translated “by the gift and power of God” (D&C 135:3) by Joseph Smith and first published in 1830. Since then it has seen numerous editions, has been translated into around one hundred languages, and is distributed around the world. The story of how the Book of Mormon originated and eventually spread is well known, but the details of its textual history are not widely known.

Anyone seriously interested in that history must be delighted with this important addition to the Joseph Smith Papers, which for the first time makes the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon available, both in print and online, to anyone. Since less than 30 percent of the original manuscript exists, the printer's manuscript is the closest we will ever come to seeing the full original text of the Book of Mormon. It is virtually a complete copy, missing only three lines of text. In this Joseph Smith Papers volume, carefully prepared transcriptions provide not only a clearly readable text but also important notations and other aids that help the reader understand textual changes made during the lifetime of Joseph Smith.

The editors of this volume are well suited to the task. Royal Skousen, one of BYU's preeminent Book of Mormon scholars, has spent most of his career studying and writing about the Book of Mormon text. His more than a quarter century of study has produced the highly lauded Critical Text Project. Robin Scott Jensen is an associate managing editor for the Joseph Smith Papers and has been coeditor of three previous volumes.

This very welcome publication provides photographic facsimiles of the full printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, and opposite each page of the manuscript is a detailed transcription of that page.

Those who peruse this volume will immediately note that in the printer's manuscript there is virtually no punctuation and no division into paragraphs or verses, and capitalization is inconsistent and quite different from the final printed book. Readers will also see the various strikeouts and word changes made by Joseph Smith and others on the manuscript. The editors have carefully color-coded these changes in their transcription in such a way that the reader can identify who made them.

The volume consists of two parts, each of which is a separate book. Part 1 begins with a good introduction to the entire work. There is a short comment about what the Book of Mormon is, followed by a candid discussion of how Joseph Smith obtained the plates and the reaction of some people in the area. It places the reception of Joseph Smith's story in the context of the popular belief in folk magic and buried treasure. The editors attribute, rightly I believe, the fact that Joseph Smith rarely mentioned his own participation in treasure digging to his concern "that his history might prove an obstacle for some to accepting his religious message" (1:xv). There is also a brief but important discussion of several people who actually saw or hefted or somehow felt the plates, including the "three witnesses" and "eight witnesses," whose testimonies appear in all editions of the Book of Mormon.

The editors also discuss the translation of the Book of Mormon and the various ways people reported how it was accomplished. These ways included the use of the "spectacles" (that is, the Urim and Thummim) or a seer stone and Joseph using these items while putting his face in a hat. Over the course of the translation, Joseph used at least seven scribes, at various times, to write the text down as he dictated. Eighty-four percent of the printer's manuscript was inscribed by Oliver Cowdery, about 15 percent was recorded by an unknown scribe (identified in the volume as scribe 2), and a few pages were inscribed by Hyrum Smith. The editors also cover Martin Harris's loss of the original translation of the first part of the book and its consequences as well as the final completion of the translation.

One interesting paragraph comments on various others who visited Joseph's home during the translation process and watched him working with his scribe. The editors observe that the "recollections of these observers suggest that the translation was, in some ways, a shared event, which interested individuals could occasionally witness" (1:xxiv-xxv). This discussion is followed by a brief note on the founding of the Church and then an excellent, though short, section on publishing and

initially distributing the Book of Mormon. Some portions, the editors note, were distributed even before official publication.

The next section of the introduction clearly explains the editorial method, first describing some of the problems involved in transcribing the text. Aging and damaged texts, sometimes imprecise penmanship, and the fact that writers sometimes inadvertently left out letters or formed them imprecisely or incompletely made transcription and verification “an imperfect art more than a science” (1:xxix). Despite these and other problems, the editors clearly have done a marvelous job of rendering a text that reflects the original as closely as possible. As in other volumes of the Joseph Smith Papers, a variety of symbols are used in the transcription to help the reader better understand some aspects of the original text.

One must marvel at the remarkable work of Weldon C. Andersen, the photographer who created the facsimiles of the printer's manuscript pages especially for this publication. His four-shot, high-resolution photos, taken in 2012, produced highly detailed, accurate images. The resolution had to be reduced for publication, but the original full-resolution files are retained by the Community of Christ archives, and copies are retained by the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Credit must also go to Charles M. Baird, who prepared the images for printing. The work of both Andersen and Baird is detailed in a section titled “Note on Photographic Facsimiles” (1:xxxiv).

The source note at the beginning of the manuscript traces the history of its creation, how it was used in the printing of the Book of Mormon, and the interesting and painstaking process of printing. One of the little-known facts about the manuscript is that to produce it, the scribes used eight different types of ruled paper, of slightly differing sizes but generally close to thirteen inches high and sixteen inches wide. By folding six sheets in half, they created twelve sheets, or a twenty-four-page folio, called a gathering. Those preparing the book made twenty-one of these gatherings. After being written upon, each gathering was sewed together by making four holes in the gutter inside the folio and stitching yarn or string through them. Some of the folios were cut into separate sheets during the printing process, but over half remained in booklet form until separated many years later.

Many of the markings on the manuscript were made by the compositor, John H. Gilbert, and include punctuation, capitalization, and pilcrows (characters indicating new paragraphs). Gilbert made additional

editorial changes while he was setting the type so that much of the punctuation, capitalization, and paragraphing incorporated into the early editions of the Book of Mormon are not indicated on the manuscript.

The source note also traces the history of the printer's manuscript as it went through various people, including a manuscript dealer, and finally, in 1903, into the hands of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now the Community of Christ. Interestingly, Joseph F. Smith, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, earlier turned down the opportunity to purchase the manuscript because, he reasoned, the book itself was available in many editions and printings. Since being purchased by the RLDS Church, the manuscript has undergone various preservation and conservation efforts. During the last conservation effort, in 1997, conservators from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in cooperation with RLDS leaders and archivists, "carefully cleaned, washed, deacidified, stabilized, repaired, and encapsulated [the pages] between layers of inert Mylar" (1:7, quoting Ronald Romig, "Community of Christ Church Possession of Book of Mormon Printer's Manuscript," unpublished report).

Part 2 contains no further introductory information but includes, at the end, some worthwhile reference material: a Book of Mormon chronology for the years 1823–30 (from Moroni's first visit to Joseph Smith to the year the book was published); a valuable directory of the scribes and printers involved with the translation and publication of the book; a list of works cited; and an interesting table that provides information about the relationship of the printer's manuscript to the first two editions of the Book of Mormon (1830 and 1837, respectively). The first column provides page numbers, and the second identifies the scribes who wrote on those pages. It is interesting to note that Hyrum Smith's handwriting appears on seven pages, and six of those pages also contain the handwriting of the unknown scribe (scribe 2). The next two columns identify the type of revision made in the two editions, the fifth column identifies the current Book of Mormon chapter that begins on that page, and the last column identifies which of the twenty-one gatherings began on that page.

As readers examine the publication, they will find that each transcription page contains not only an exact textual reproduction of the document but also various interesting and helpful annotations designed to help readers understand the transmission of the text through the various editions of the Book of Mormon printed during Joseph Smith's lifetime (1830, 1835, 1840, and 1841).

Page 49 of part 1 (page 15 of the printer's manuscript) provides a good example of this annotation and other aspects of the editing process. Text at the top of the right side of the page indicates that this page is from chapter 3 in the 1830 edition and 1 Nephi 10:11–11:1 in the current edition. Just below is a box indicating that Oliver Cowdery made the original inscription. This is followed by a color-coded list of individuals who made various revisions. Those revisions are printed in the appropriate color in the transcription. For example, there are a number of strikeouts and word changes on this page, and the color coding lets us figure out who made them. In 1 Nephi 10:11, Nephi speaks of the Jews, saying, in part, "And after they had slain the Messiah, who should come, and after he had been slain. . . ." In the printer's manuscript, this part of the verse originally read, "& after *that* they had Slain the Messiah *which* should come & after *that* he had been slain . . ." (italics added in this and subsequent references). It was printed essentially that way in the 1830 edition, except that "&" was changed to "And," and the word "Slain" was not capitalized. However, on the printer's manuscript both occurrences of the word "that" as well as the word "which" are crossed out and the word "who" is inserted above the line. These changes were made by Joseph Smith himself in preparation for the 1837 edition. He made ten such word changes on this page alone, including the elimination of one "and it came to pass." One scholar has noted that, in all, Joseph Smith made nearly three thousand changes, mostly minor adjustments to grammar or style, in 1837. They included forty-seven deletions of "and it came to pass" and 952 changes of *which* to *who* or *whom*.¹

After the color-coded list is a series of notes pertaining to various items in the manuscript. On page 49 of part 1, a symbol on line seven and note 43 explain that a mark on the manuscript corresponds to the end of page 22 of the 1830 edition. Note 44 refers to a pilcrow in the text placed there by an unidentified scribe or possibly the compositor. Note 45 points to the phrase "and the way is prepared from the foundation of the world," which read, "and the way is prepared *for all men* from the foundation of the world" in the original manuscript and was not changed until the 1840 edition. (It continues to read that way in 1 Nephi 10:18 of the current edition.) The next note refers to the phrase "as well in *this time*," indicating that it read, "as well in *these times*" in the 1830 edition (see 1 Nephi 10:19 in

1. Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, Maxwell Institute Study Edition (Provo, Utah: Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2018), xv.

the current edition). Finally, note 47 refers to a pilcrow, possibly inscribed by the compositor, that corresponds to a new paragraph on page 23 of the 1830 edition. In all, there are 687 such notes, numbered consecutively throughout both parts of the publication. In at least one instance there is a mark on the page that, as the editors say in note 156, “serves no known purpose” (1:133).

Those who peruse this two-part volume will no doubt find themselves comparing what they see in the printer’s manuscript with various editions of the Book of Mormon. In the process, they will find more very interesting differences. In some cases, Oliver Cowdery made some changes in the printer’s manuscript before it went to press in 1830. For example, the beginning of Moroni 10:31 originally read, “And awake, and arise from the dust, *O daughter of Zion*,” but Oliver changed *daughter of Zion* to *Jerusalem* (see 2:407). Most changes came after the publication of the first edition, however, and they were mostly grammatical in nature. For example, the last part of what is now Alma 46:40 read, “diseases which *was* subsequent to man” in the printers’ manuscript and in the 1830 printing, but in 1837 it read, “diseases to which men *was* subject,” and in 1840 it was changed to “diseases to which men *were* subject” (2:51). In what is now 2 Nephi 8:2, the printer’s manuscript referred to Sarah as “she that *bear* you” (1:139), but without being marked in the manuscript, it was changed to “she that *bare* you” in the first and subsequent editions. What is now 2 Nephi 20:2 reads, “To turn *away* the needy,” but the printer’s manuscript and the 1830 edition read, “to turn *aside* the needy” (1:169). We could go on almost endlessly with such examples, but enough has been said to illustrate the variety of things the textual sleuth might find.

Finally, I cannot help but comment again on the incredible nature of the Joseph Smith Papers Project as a whole, and especially in this case, what it provides online. The editors of the printer’s manuscript volume have provided references to all four editions of the Book of Mormon published during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. These four have also been reproduced online by the Papers Project, and each is searchable. If, therefore, the reader wishes to follow through on anything, it is easy to do by going to [josephsmithpapers.org](https://www.josephsmithpapers.org) and selecting “Revelations and Translations,” where they will find the Book of Mormon editions.²

2. See <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/revelations-and-translations/jsppr4>.

James B. Allen was a teacher and administrator in the seminary and institute programs from 1954 to 1963 and then joined the faculty of Brigham Young University. He was Assistant Church Historian, 1972–79; chair of the BYU History Department, 1981–87; and the Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. Chair in Western American History, 1987–92. He retired in 1992. He has authored, coauthored, or coedited fourteen books or monographs and around ninety articles relating to Western American and Latter-day Saint history. He is married to the former Renée Jones, and together they have five children, twenty-one grandchildren, and twenty-three great-grandchildren. They served a full-time Church Educational System mission at the Boston Institute of Religion, 1999–2000, and served as officiators in the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple, 2004–13.