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## Why was one sixth of the 1830 Book of Mormon set from the original manuscript?

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# INTERPRETER

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# WHY WAS ONE SIXTH OF THE 1830 BOOK OF MORMON SET FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT?

*Royal Skousen*

*Abstract: Evidence from the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon (as well as internal evidence within the Book of Mormon itself) shows that for one sixth of the text, from Helaman 13:17 to the end of Mormon, the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon was set from the original (dictated) manuscript rather than from the printer's manuscript. For five-sixths of the text, the 1830 edition was set from the printer's manuscript, the copy prepared specifically for the 1830 typesetter to use as his copytext. In 1990, when the use of the original manuscript as copytext was first discovered, it was assumed that the scribes for the printer's manuscript had fallen behind in their copywork, which had then forced them to take in the original manuscript to the 1830 typesetter. Historical evidence now argues, to the contrary, that the reason for the switch was the need to take the printer's manuscript to Canada in February 1830 in order to secure the copyright of the Book of Mormon within the British realm. During the month or so that Oliver Cowdery and others were on their trip to nearby Canada with the printer's manuscript, the 1830 typesetter used the original manuscript to set the type, although he himself was unaware that there had been a temporary switch in the manuscripts.*

**P**hysical evidence from the Book of Mormon manuscripts shows that the compositor (that is, the typesetter) for the 1830 edition normally used the printer's manuscript to set the type for the first edition of the Book of Mormon. The printer's

manuscript (P) was the copy of the dictated or original manuscript (O) that the scribes made and took to E. B. Grandin's print shop in Palmyra, New York. But for one sixth of the text, from Helaman 13:17 to the end of Mormon (that is, through Mormon 9:37), the 1830 compositor actually used O to set the type. The question is: Why was O used and not P for that part of the text?

In 1990, I first discovered that the original manuscript had been used to set the type for this part of the text when I noticed that a good-sized fragment of O, from 3 Nephi 26–27 (owned by the LDS Church and housed in the Church's Historical Department) was full of the penciled-in punctuation marks that John Gilbert, the 1830 compositor, frequently added to his copy-text before setting the type. For 3 Nephi 26–27, it appeared that Gilbert had used O to set the type for the 1830 edition. I remember asking Glenn Rowe of the Historical Department if this fragment might have come from P rather than O, but in going home I examined my photographic copy of P and noted that the corresponding leaf in P was fully intact and completely unmarked. The Church's fragment definitely came from O, not P.

When I did my initial transcription of P from the photographic copy, I noticed that the 1830 edition consistently misspelled *Cumorah* as *Camorah* (9 times in Mormon 6–8) while P virtually always read as either *Cumorah* (6 times) or *Comorah* (2 times). For this part of the text, the scribe in P was the unknown scribe 2 (perhaps Martin Harris). It was clear that if P had been used to set the type, then the misspelling *Camorah* shouldn't have occurred in the 1830 edition. On the other hand, we know that Oliver Cowdery frequently mixed up his *u*'s and *a*'s, so for this 1830 misspelling it looked like the compositor set the type from a text written in Oliver's hand, namely O.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in P scribe 2 wrote the first *Cumorah* as *Camorah*,

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1. On Oliver Cowdery mixing up his *u*'s and *a*'s, see Royal Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the*

as it would have been in O, but Oliver Cowdery corrected that misspelling in P to *Cumorah* when he later proofed P against O. Oliver knew the correct spelling, even though he tended to write it as if it had been *Camorah*. On the other hand, the 1830 compositor had no idea that what he read as *Camorah* in O was wrong and thus he set *Camorah*.<sup>2</sup>

In April 1991, I spent two weeks in Independence, Missouri, at the RLDS Church Archives working directly with the printer's manuscript and discovered that for 72 pages of P, from Helaman 13:18 through Mormon, there were no physical signs that those pages had been seen, much less used, by the 1830 compositor. The 72 pages were found in four gatherings of folded sheets, from the 16th through the 19th gathering. In fact, these four gatherings had never been cut up or marked with the compositor's punctuation marks, unlike surrounding gatherings of P. In fact, for these four gatherings the threads holding the folded sheets together had been removed only in the early years of the 20th century. Heavy stains from those threads are found in the center gutter for only these four gatherings. For any gathering of P that the compositor worked on, the threads had been removed upon delivery of the bound gathering to the print shop, in order, it would appear, to facilitate the typesetting from individual leaves of the gathering.

In the summer of 1991, fragments from about two percent of the original manuscript were discovered, and in the fall of that year these fragments of O were conserved by Robert Espinosa and his fellow conservators in BYU's Harold B. Lee Library. These fragments of O are owned by the Wilford Wood family. Some of these fragments come from the last part of

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*Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2001), 22.

2. For a complete discussion of this manuscript evidence, see under Mormon 6:2 in volume 4 of the critical text, Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, part 6 (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2009), 3636–3638.

Helaman and the first part of 3 Nephi and show the 1830 compositor's penciled-in punctuation marks, just like the fragment from 3 Nephi 26–27.

At that point in the critical text project, I tentatively proposed the following reason for why O was being used by the 1830 compositor for this part of the text: namely, the copyists had fallen behind in their copywork and they had instead decided to bring in O to the print shop. Originally, they had been assigned the task of copying the text of O into a second copy, the printer's manuscript (P), and to take only the latter manuscript to Grandin's Palmyra shop for typesetting. This they had faithfully done until they got to Helaman 13, but at that point, I conjectured, they had been unable to produce copytext fast enough for the compositor, so they decided to take in O itself but to still continue copying and producing P. Eventually, in order to catch up with the compositor, the copyists doubled their efforts by having Oliver Cowdery jump ahead to the book of Ether and stop copying from where he had gotten to (3 Nephi 19:21) and letting scribe 2 of P continue from that place in 3 Nephi and finish that part of the text, from 3 Nephi 19:21 to the end of Mormon. I proposed that by the time Oliver and scribe 2 got caught up, the compositor was ready to begin the book of Ether, so they resumed taking in P to the print shop, thus having the compositor set the remainder of the Book of Mormon from P, from the beginning of Ether on to the end of Moroni.

One important question for this scenario is why did the copyists do that part of P that they supposedly fell behind in producing? If they had fallen behind and O was being used by the compositor, why not just skip over what was being typeset from O and work on producing P a few pages further on and thus catch up virtually immediately? In fact, they could have gone back later on to make the copy for that skipped portion of the text. Further, it seems rather strange that it would take them one sixth of the text to catch up. Of course, one could conjecture that

they didn't want Joseph Smith to know they were taking in O to the print shop rather than P (which was apparently against their earlier instructions). The whole point of making P was to have a backup for the text, just in case part of O was lost or stolen. But once some part of the text had been set from O, why worry about making a superfluous copy of the skipped portion? All of this conjecturing adds a conspiratorial aspect to this catch-up process. And one final conundrum: why did Oliver Cowdery proof scribe 2's work in P against O (from 3 Nephi 19:21 to the end of Mormon) if all they needed to do was make Joseph Smith think they had made the copy as instructed?

Another question is whether there is actually any evidence that the copyists ever had a problem in keeping up in their copywork. We only have one point of reference for this question, but that clearly shows that the copyists were at the time over one month ahead in their copywork. Originally, at the beginning of August 1829, there was only the original manuscript. Sometime in August, Oliver Cowdery copied out the first gathering of P, 24 pages of text covering the first 14 chapters of 1 Nephi. Some time later, when Oliver got to Mosiah 25, he was relieved by the unknown scribe 2 of P. And several times this scribe 2 was momentarily relieved by Hyrum Smith. This relief work by scribe 2 and Hyrum went on until scribe 2 got into Alma 13, at which point Oliver took over once more as the main copyist. By 6 November 1829, the copywork had advanced at least up to Alma 36 because on that date Oliver Cowdery wrote a letter to Joseph Smith stating that they had reached that point in the copywork: "I have just got to Alma's commandment to his son in copying the manuscript".<sup>3</sup>

Here I will construct a time-line for the 1829–30 typesetting of the first edition and assume that the typesetting

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3. Printed in Dan Vogel, comp. and ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, volume 2 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1998), 406, spelling and punctuation standardized.

proceeded fairly steadily up to about a week before the bound book was actually available, on 26 March 1830. We get the following approximate time-line for the end of each month:

### Time-line for the 1829–30 Typesetting

Month	Number of Working Days	Running Total	Percent of Text Printed (averaged)	Place in Text (averaged)
August	4	4	2.3	1 Nephi 4:28
September	26	30	17.2	2 Nephi 24:22
October	27	57	32.8	Mosiah 18:30
November	25	82	47.1	Alma 19:35
December	26	108	62.1	Alma 51:6
January	24	132	75.9	Helaman 15:12
February	24	156	89.7	Mormon 6:21
March	18	174	100.0	<end of book>

I would guess that after all 37 signatures had been printed, a few dozen copies could be bound from the printed sheets within a week's time or so. The typesetting began on about 27 August 1829 and continued through, then, to 20 March 1830. I assume here that the printers worked six days a week and took off maybe a couple days (at least for Christmas Day and maybe for New Year's Day). This gives a total of 174 days for typesetting and printing the 37 signatures in the 1830 edition (this analysis is based on the actual 1829–30 calendar). Within these parameters, the printers are therefore averaging about 4.7 days to set and print each signature.

On 6 November 1829, the date of Oliver Cowdery's letter to Joseph Smith, the printers would have been on their 62nd day and setting the text somewhere near Mosiah 26:28. They would have reached Alma 36 on the 95th day, about 15 December 1829, over a month later. So there is no evidence, at least by November 1829, that the copyists were falling behind in their work in producing P.

In January of 1830, Abner Cole illegally published three excerpts from the Book of Mormon, printed in three issues of *The Palmyra Reflector*, including a section from Alma 43, published on 22 January 1830. This last excerpt conclusively shows that the printing of the 22nd signature, covering Alma 41–46, had already been completed by Grandin. The above time-line argues that this 22nd signature would have been completed on about 24 December 1829, right before Christmas.

A recent article by Stephen Ehat discusses the attempts of Joseph Smith in early 1830 to get the copyright of the Book of Mormon secured in Canada. Ehat's article discusses the trip of Oliver Cowdery and Hiram Page (and apparently two others) to Ontario, Canada, sometime from January to March 1830, in order to protect the Book of Mormon's copyright in the British realm.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Joseph was concerned that in Canada either Cole or someone else could print purloined excerpts from the already printed signatures in Palmyra—and with impunity if there were no copyright protection in Canada. Ehat's article provides evidence from an 1879 interview with David Whitmer that the trip took place in early 1830 when the ice on Lake Ontario was frozen over, allowing Cowdery and Page and the others to walk over the ice, at least part of the way.<sup>5</sup> Later, in an 1886 interview published in various newspapers, David Whitmer said that Hyrum Smith had suggested that the brethren “take the manuscript to Canada”.<sup>6</sup> They could not have taken a printed copy of the 1830 edition since that first edition was not yet finished, yet it appears that they felt they needed to have a complete text of the Book of Mormon in their possession.

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4. Stephen Kent Ehat, “‘Securing’ the Prophet’s Copyright in the Book of Mormon: Historical and Legal Context for the So-called Canadian Copyright Revelation,” *BYU Studies* 50/2 (2011): 4–70.

5. Ehat, “Securing the Copyright,” 15. From an interview by John Traughber.

6. See Ehat, “Securing the Copyright,” 16, 24 for the citation.

Thus one possibility is that the Abner Cole affair in January 1830 awakened Joseph Smith to the possible threat of a pirated edition or of unauthorized excerpts being published in Canada. The problem with taking a copy of the Book of Mormon to Canada was that in January 1830 there was still only one complete copy of the text, namely, the original manuscript. And the Palmyra printer needed to have access to a completed copy in order to keep the printing going. It appears that by about the middle of January 1830 Oliver Cowdery, in his normal copy work producing P from O, had gotten up to 3 Nephi 19, the point where scribe 2 of P took over once more for him. According to the above time-line, on 22 January 1830 (the publishing date of Cole's last printed excerpt) the Palmyra printer would have been on the 130th day of printing and up to about Helaman 13:17. But this is precisely where the printer started using O to set the type, although the compositor himself, John Gilbert, seems to have been unaware of the switch in manuscripts. (According to Gilbert's 10 February 1879 letter to James Cobb, "But one copy of the manuscript was furnished the printer. I never heard of but one".<sup>7</sup>) Probably a little before January 22, Joseph Smith had decided to have the printer's manuscript completed as soon as possible and then taken to Canada, just in case it was needed to secure the copyright there. I would conjecture that scribe 2 of P took over the copywork from 3 Nephi 19:21 on and worked to complete P up through Mormon while simultaneously Oliver Cowdery jumped ahead in his copywork to make the copy for the books of Ether and Moroni. In other words, these two copyists seem to have split up the remaining copywork in order to quickly finish the printer's manuscript, the second complete copy of the text. Scribe 2 of P ended up doing the equivalent copywork for 44 pages in the 1830 edition, while Oliver did the equivalent of 54 pages.

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7. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:522, underlining in the original.

In the meantime, the compositor was working from O, namely, that portion from Helaman 13:17 through 3 Nephi 19:21, from the part that Oliver had already copied from O into P.

This physical as well as internal evidence from the manuscripts helps to determine, I think, when Oliver Cowdery and the others went to Canada, namely during the month of February, when it was sufficiently cold for the lake to freeze. They had a complete manuscript in their possession (that is, the printer's manuscript), just in case that was needed as evidence of the book's existence. The time period agrees with the time when Lake Ontario would have been frozen over, and gives four to five weeks for the round-trip.

At the end of February or beginning of March, Oliver Cowdery, Hiram Page, and the others returned from Canada with the printer's manuscript. They had not been able to get a Canadian publisher for the Book of Mormon.<sup>8</sup> Soon thereafter the 1830 Palmyra compositor started to set type once more from P, beginning with the book of Ether, which would have occurred on about the 158th day of printing (around 2 March 1830). This means that overall O was used by the 1830 compositor from about January 22 through March 2. Perhaps Oliver Cowdery, Hiram Page, and the others left a week or so after January 22, after Oliver and scribe 2 of P had completed P. Most importantly, it appears that all this work of quickly finishing up P was done under the instigation and approval of Joseph Smith.

From a textual point of view, the decision to have the compositor set this part of the text from O means that for Helaman 13:17 through the end of Mormon (for one sixth of the text) we have two firsthand copies of the original manuscript, namely, the printer's manuscript and the 1830 edition. For that part of the text, then, we can usually determine the reading of O (even though it is mostly missing here) since there are two

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8. See Ehat, "Securing the Copyright," for what was actually accomplished by this trip to Canada.

independent copies. Where both P and the 1830 edition agree, we can be pretty sure that O read that way. When they disagree, the reading in O is probably one of the two, although determining which one it is in any given case is not automatic and may involve considerable analysis, as can be seen for numerous readings from Helaman 13:17 through Mormon 9:37 in volume 4 of the critical text.<sup>9</sup> Despite some textual difficulties, having two sources for determining O is very helpful in recovering the original text of the Book of Mormon for this part of the text. Indeed, it would have been better if Joseph Smith had always had the 1830 compositor set the type from O. But at least now we have a better understanding of why O was used to set the type for one sixth of the text. It is very unlikely that it had anything to do with the scribes falling behind in their copywork. Instead, I would argue that in January 1830 Joseph Smith decided, probably at the suggestion of his brother Hyrum, that they needed to have a second complete copy of the text in hand when they went to secure the copyright in Canada. During this time period, John Gilbert continued to set the type, but now from the only other complete copy of the text, the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon.

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9. See Royal Skousen *Analysis of Textual Variants*, part five (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2008), 3084–3434 and Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, part six, 3435–3711.

## Notes

This write-up is preliminary and subject to revision. A complete version of this proposed explanation for why the 1830 compositor used the original manuscript for this part of the text will appear in volume 3 of the critical text, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon* (to be published by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies).

Here I wish to acknowledge Stephen Ehat's helpful review of this preliminary write-up. His *BYU Studies* article has done much to provide important evidence for this episode in the history of the Book of Mormon text, although I must add here that the historical evidence argues only for the possibility of what I propose here. Without additional historical evidence, it will be difficult to conclusively demonstrate what actually happened in the printing of the Book of Mormon during the early months of 1830.

For further information on the printing of the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, see my article "John Gilbert's 1892 Account of the 1830 Printing of the Book of Mormon," *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 383–405.

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