NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title New Light: The Book of Mormon as a Written (Literary) Artifact

Author(s) Grant Hardy

Reference *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/2 (2003): 107–9, 118.

ISSN 1065-9366 (print), 2168-3158 (online)

Abstract Hardy hypothesizes that the misplacement of Alma 13:16 (which, he proposes, actually belongs three verses earlier) is an example of a mistake in handwriting and copying known as *homoeoteleuton*.

NEW LIGHT

The Book of Mormon as a Literary (Written) Artifact

By Grant Hardy

Witnesses to the translation of the Book of Mormon are in agreement that Joseph Smith dictated the text, one time through, to scribes who took down his words as fast as they could. While some might see the resulting book as a work of oral literature—with Joseph having improvised the narrative as he went along—the intricate structure and ancient editing evident in the Nephite record are consistent with Joseph's claim that the Book of Mormon is actually a translation of an ancient book that itself had a long history as a written document.

One new piece of evidence for the literary nature of the book comes from a close reading of Alma 13, where it appears that verse 16 is out of place. Because there is no indication of a problem here in the English manuscripts,[1] the transposition must have predated the dictated translation, and it is exactly the type of transmission quirk that shows up regularly in other ancient books that have been edited, copied, and recopied by hand.

Look at verses 15–17:

> And it was this same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes; yea, even our father Abraham paid tithes of one-tenth part of all he possessed.
>
> Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.
>
> Now this Melchizedek was a king over the land of Salem; and his people had waxed strong in iniquity and abomination; yea, they had all gone astray; they were full of all manner of wickedness.

The first thing to notice is that if verse 16 were omitted, we would never miss it. In fact, it interrupts the smooth flow of ideas in the discussion of Melchizedek (verses 14–20). The second clue is that the expected connections do not make sense. The phrase *these ordinances* in verse 16 must refer to something earlier, and though we might in some way conceive of tithing as an ordinance, it is not clear at all how tithing might encourage people to look forward to the remission of sins associated with the Son of God. Even more problematic would be efforts to connect the "manner" of tithing with the order of the Son of God.

But the cryptic elements of verse 16 are intelligible if it is read in the context of the discussion on priesthood ordination that appears earlier in the chapter. Verse 2 introduces the basic terms:

> And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption.

The verses that follow explain how ordination to the priesthood is symbolic of Christ's redemption in at least two ways. First, both were "prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God" (as was the priesthood itself); and second, verses 11–12 suggest that, at the time of ordination, a number of these new priesthood holders underwent a redemptive experience (perhaps the "preparatory redemption" of verse 3):

> Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb.
>
> Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

It is here that verse 16 belongs:

> Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord.

The term *ordinances* at the beginning of the verse refers to priesthood ordinations (as in verse 8, which starts with "Now they were ordained after this manner . . ."), the references to remission of sins and the order of the Son of God pick up the terms set in verse 2 and round out the entire discussion, and the phrase *rest of the Lord* nicely echoes the conclusion of verse 12.

There is a shift in focus with the next verse as Alma ends his theological explanation and directly exhorts his brethren to humble themselves:

> And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves fore God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest.

The phrase *that rest* demands an antecedent, which verse 16 provides just as well as verse 12. (It is remarkable that verse 16 connects better with both what came before and what follows if it is shifted to a position between verses 12 and 13). From here Alma takes his listeners into a discussion of Melchizedek, since that king's people are cited as examples of humility and repentance, but the transition here is not unduly abrupt. Melchizedek, after all, held the priesthood that was the subject of the earlier passage. And without the odd break in verse 16, the discussion of Melchizedek proceeds smoothly from verse 13 to the end of Alma's speech in response to Antionah's question.

If we accept that Alma 13 reads better with verse 16 moved forward by three verses, the next question is, does this sort of thing happen with other authentic ancient texts? The answer is, absolutely. I offer four examples that scholars generally agree upon, all from the Bible (most scholarly commentaries discuss these passages):

1. Judges 20:23 is out of place (hence the parentheses in the King James Version). It should probably be moved to precede verse 22.

2. Isaiah 38:21–22 should be moved between verses 6 and 7 (thus bringing Isaiah 38 in line with 2 Kings 20:6–11).

3. Some New Testament manuscripts put Romans 16:25–27 after 14:23, one has these verses following 15:33, and others include them at the end of both chapters 14 and 16.

4. A few manuscripts place 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 after verse 40.

In some cases it is the disruption of narrative flow that alerts us to textual problems, while for other passages there are variant readings in the manuscripts that suggest scribal errors.

Of course, the fact that such mistakes happen challenges scholars to try to determine the cause. How could a block of text come to be misplaced, and why would that error be carried forward? The science of textual criticism is quite sophisticated, and errors in a given manuscript are often due to problems specific to a particular language, writing technique, or scribal tradition. But in general such errors can be the result of (1) scribal additions; (2) editorial comments in margins becoming part of text; (3) the splitting of paper, especially at the ends of rolls; or (4) mistakes by scribes as they looked back and forth from the manuscript they were copying to the one they were writing.[2]

How could such an error have gotten into a text written on metallic plates? Unfortunately, here we have so little evidence that we are forced to speculate. Errors might have crept in before the text was committed to metal (Alma 14:8 speaks of scriptures being burned; were they written on cloth or paper? Were drafts written out on more perishable materials before they were inscribed on plates?), there may have been something in reformed Egyptian that confused a copyist,

or perhaps someone in transcribing the passage onto metal forgot verse 16, caught his mistake three verses later, and then wrote in verse 16 with an arrow or similar sign—which Joseph Smith did not reproduce in English—or in the margins. I imagine that erasing mistakes from gold plates would have been quite difficult.[3]

In this particular case there is something that would immediately catch the attention of textual scholars—verses 12 and 16 both end with virtually the same phrase: *enter(ed) into the rest of the Lord.* A copyist could have read verse 12 and looked down to write it out, but then as he looked back at the original, his eye could have skipped to the next *rest of the Lord* (at the end of verse 16, which I am hypothesizing was the next verse), resulting in the inadvertent deletion of an entire sentence. Realizing his mistake three verses later, he then copied what he had missed, out of order, so as not to lose any of the precious words. This process happens often enough in hand copying that scholars have a name for it—*homoeoteleuton*—and it is in fact the explanation for an entire verse being omitted just after Alma 32:30 in the 1830 edition (the missing words were finally restored only in 1981).[4] This latter example, however, was a mistake in the transmission of the English translation, whereas Alma 13:16 seems to be a problem that predated the translation; that is, it was on the gold plates themselves.

The misplacement of Alma 13:16 appears to be the result of some kind of mechanical problem in copying at a particular time in the ancient history of the text. Such errors are fairly common when people are working with handwritten materials (e.g., the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible offers 9 instances of verses being transposed, and the Revised English Bible suggests 20),[5] but it is difficult to see how such shifts of textual blocks could have occurred if the work was originally an oral composition (as critics must assume of the Book of Mormon if they imagine that Joseph Smith was making it up as he went along). This particular irregularity in the text is best explained as the result of ancient copying of written materials, long before Joseph Smith ever came in contact with the plates.

The writers of the Book of Mormon acknowledged the possibility of human errors in their record; hence the title page warns that "if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God." I'm not sure they realized, however, that some mistakes could actually strengthen the book's claims to be an ancient written text.

Zedekiah" spoken of in 1 Nephi 1:4 does not refer to 21-year-old Zedekiah's installation by Nebuchadnezzar, but to the year 609 BC, theorizing that following the death of Zedekiah's father, Josiah (see 2 Kings 23:29–30), and the Egyptian removal of Zedekiah's older full brother Jehoahaz from the throne (see 2 Kings 23:30–34), the young 8-year-old Zedekiah was recognized by Judah as legitimate heir to the throne, even though the Egyptians installed his older half brother Jehoiakim (see 2 Kings 23:34). This solution further theorizes that the exilic or postexilic composer of the last segment of 2 Kings (comprising 2 Kings 23:26–25:30) was unaware of the situation with young Zedekiah and reported only the tenure of the Egyptian vassal Jehoiakim, first mentioning Zedekiah at his installment by the Babylonians at age 21. However, it would have been the young 8-year-old Zedekiah in a 609 BC context of whom Nephi was speaking in 1 Nephi 1:4, with Lehi prophesying some three years in the context of 1 Nephi 1 before leaving Jerusalem in 605 BC.

25. John L. Sorenson, "The Mulekites," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 8.
26. Sorenson, "Mulekites," 8.
27. One interpretation of Lachish Letter III is that the commander of Judah's army went to Egypt during this window of opportunity. See John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 330.
28. Sorenson, "Mulekites," 9.
29. See Sorenson, "Mulekites," 9.
30. Although the northern Sinai trail to Egypt was a desert, the Bible does not generally refer to the relatively short trip from Judah to Egypt along that route as a "wilderness" event. Since Omni 16 uses the term *journeyed,* a longer and more arduous desert trek could be indicated, and North Africa would represent a wilderness journey as difficult and long for Mulek's party as Arabia had been for Lehi's party. Sorenson suggests Carthage (in modern Tunisia) as a possible port of embarkation for America (see "Mulekites," 9). But perhaps the journey in the wilderness went all the way across the continent, past the Atlas Mountains. The further west Mulek's party traveled across North Africa, the shorter the sea voyage would have been, so that a port west of the Straits of Gibraltar, on the coast of modern Morocco, would have spared Mulek's party a complicated sail across the Mediterranean.
31. A theophoric element means a word particle that utilizes all or part of a divine name. The theophoric element *-yahu* is an adumbrated form of the full divine name *Yahuweh* (יהוה), which is rendered in King James English as Jehovah.
32. For example, *Ge'alyahu ben hamelek*, who seems to have owned at least two different seals (*Corpus* nos. 412 and 413), and *Neriyahu ben hamelek*, who seems to have owned at least three (*Corpus* nos. 17, 18, and 415). See Avigad and Sass, *Corpus*, 55–56, 174–75, and endnote 14 above.

A Test of Faith: The Book of Mormon in the Missouri Conflict
Clark V. Johnson

1. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 62–88.
2. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* 2nd rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951), 1:390–91; also cited in Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon,* 68.
3. Consult the account of John P. Greene in Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 22.
4. The affidavits used in this paper describe the settlement and persecution of the Mormons in western Missouri from 1831 through 1839. These 773 documents were written and sworn before county officers in ten counties in Illinois and two in the Iowa territory between 1839 and 1845. The documents used in this paper are sometimes referred to as "affidavits" or "petitions." When Joseph Smith presented them to the United States Congress in 1839–40, he referred to them as "claims."
5. The known petitions are in the Family and Church History Department Archives in Salt Lake City and in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. All quotations in this study are exactly the same as the original petitions, including the punctuation and spelling.
6. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 685–86.
7. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 423.
8. In addition to the personal abuse that Truman Brace suffered, the mobbers took from him two horses, one steer, a sheep, two guns, four pistols, and household furniture, and they destroyed his crops and garden (Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 45).
9. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 144–45.
10. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 431–32. By Cole's account, he and his family lost 40 acres of land as a result of persecution.
11. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 652–54.
12. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 22.
13. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 652–53.
14. Johnson, *Mormon Redress Petitions,* 22.

[What's in a Word?]
The Language of the Scriptures
Cynthia L. Hallen

1. Marion G. Romney, address given at Seminary and Institute of Religion Coordinators' Convention, 3 April 1973, quoted in *Book of Mormon (Religion 121–122) Student Manual,* 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 437–38.
2. *Oxford English Dictionar*y (Cambridge: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), http://dictionary.oed.com/.

[New Light]
The Book of Mormon as a Written (Literary) Artifact
Grant Hardy

1. Both the original and the printer's manuscripts have verse 16 placed exactly where it has always been in all printed editions of the Book of Mormon; there is no indication of an error in the dictation or the transcription. For more information on the transmission of text of the Book of Mormon, see George A. Horton Jr., "Book of Mormon Transmission from Translator to Printed Text," in Paul R. Cheesman, ed., *The Keystone Scripture* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 237–55; and M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts, eds., *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).
2. For more details about the discipline of textual criticism, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992); or L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).
3. Daniel Ludlow has suggested that the strange reading in Alma 24:19—"they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace"—might be the result of an engraving error that could not be erased but was nevertheless immediately corrected. Other possible examples he points to include Mosiah 7:8, Alma 50:32, Helaman 3:33, and 3 Nephi 16:4. See Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 210. Another instance may occur in Alma 13:16, the subject of this essay, when the writer decides midsentence that the manner of priesthood ordinations is not just a type or symbol of God's order; it is actually the order of God itself.
4. See Robert J. Matthews, "The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981," *BYU Studies* 22/4 (Fall 1982): 387–424.
5. By chapter, the references are as follows: *New Revised Standard*—Exodus 18, 22; Judges 20; Ezekiel 21, 22; Zechariah 5; John 8; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 14; *Revised English Bible*—1 Samuel 9; 2 Samuel 14; Judges 20; Job 3, 14, 20, 24, 29, 31 (twice), 33, 34, 35, 37; Ecclesiastes 2; Isaiah 10, 38, 40; John 8; Romans 16.