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Title Recovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: An Interim Interview

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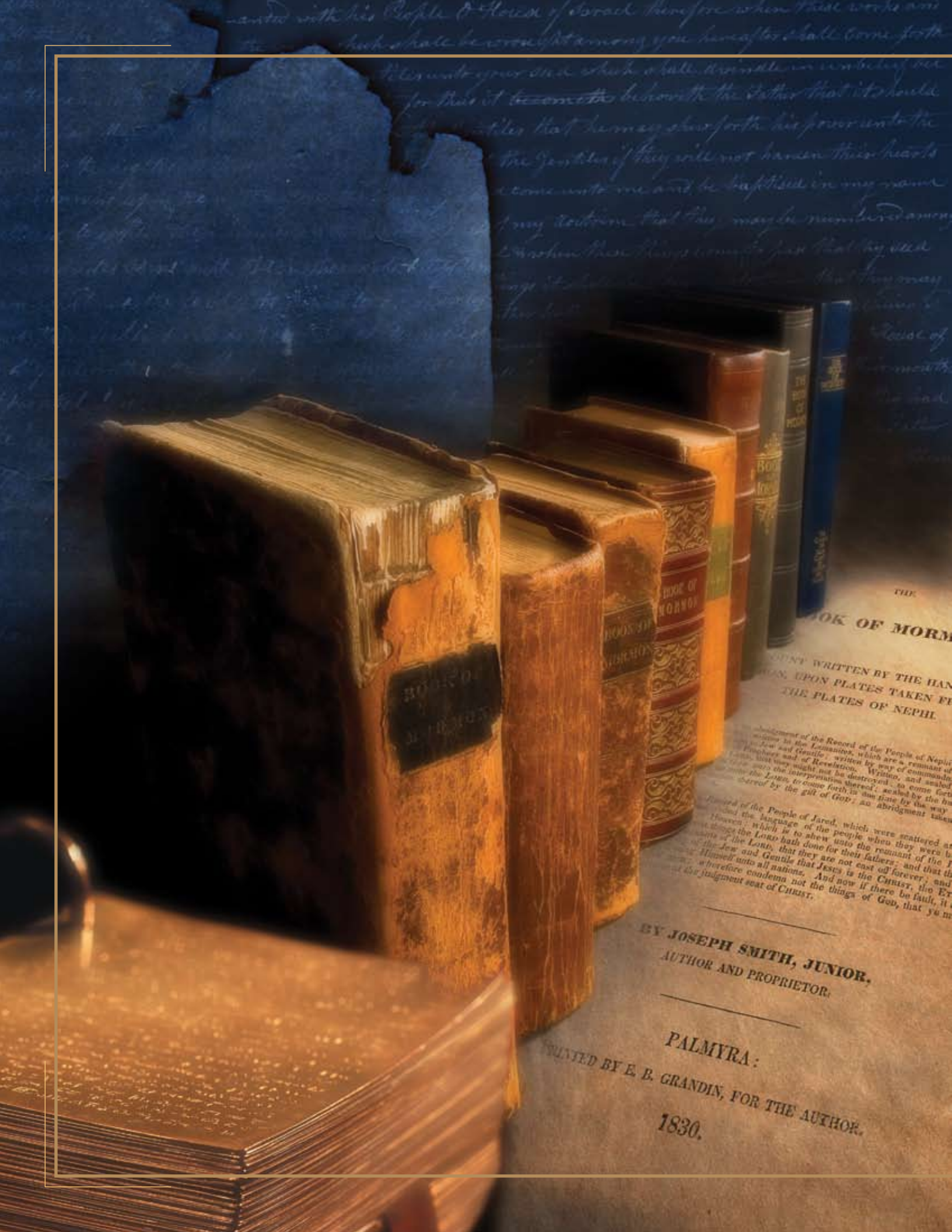
Abstract Bradford introduces reviews of Royal Skousen's work on the critical text project.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THE PLATES OF NEPHI
BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUNIOR,
AUTHOR AND PROPRIETOR.
PALMYRA:
PRINTED BY E. B. GRANDIN, FOR THE AUTHOR.
1830.

Recovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: An Interim Review

INTRODUCTION

M. GERALD BRADFORD

In 2001 Royal Skousen published carefully prepared typographical facsimiles of the original and printer's manuscripts of the Book of Mormon[1] and thereby launched a long-term study of the text.[2] Other scholars, doing comparable work with original manuscripts of other Latter-day Saint scripture, in particular the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham, are following in Skousen's footsteps.[3]

By studying the Book of Mormon manuscripts and 20 significant editions of the text from 1830 to 1981, Skousen is seeking to determine, as accurately as possible, the English-language translation of this scripture as Joseph originally received it.

Following Skousen's initial publications on the manuscripts are his analytical studies that will eventually treat all significant textual variants in the publishing history of the Book of Mormon. The first of these, published by FARMS in 2004, is *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part 1: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 10*. The *Journal* invited five scholars to review this volume. Each one brings a distinctive point of view when assessing the quality and character of Skousen's investigations. On one level, these reviews celebrate the essential bedrock nature of Skousen's work. On another, they signal that serious students of the Book of Mormon cannot afford to overlook his findings, especially when undertaking any kind of study based on the text itself.[4]

the beginning of his abridgment of Nephi's large plates is not known since the initial portion of his narrative was among the 116 pages of translation lost when Martin Harris borrowed the manuscript from Joseph Smith to convince his wife of its authenticity. On the loss of the manuscript, see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 66–69.

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Introduction
M. Gerald Bradford

1. About 28 percent of the original manuscript (dictated by Joseph Smith) is extant. The printer's manuscript (copied by Oliver Cowdery and two other scribes) is nearly fully extant (missing are about three lines of text at 1 Nephi 1:7–8, 20).
2. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001); *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001).
3. Recent studies of the Book of Moses began with work on the Joseph Smith Translation. See *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*, edited by Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews and published by BYU's Religious Studies Center in 2004. Jackson subsequently prepared a critical edition of the Book of Moses entitled *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*, published by BYU's Religious Studies Center in 2005. A comparable study of the Book of Abraham is under way, known as *A Textual Study of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions*, edited by Brian M. Hauglid. It will result in a comprehensive study of the four sets of Abraham manuscripts, a detailed historical comparison of the extant Book of Abraham text with all available manuscripts and editions, an analysis of significant variants in the text over time, and an analysis of the Egyptian characters in the Book of Abraham. The work will be published in the FARMS series Studies in the Book of Abraham.
4. One can already see the impact of Skousen's efforts in J. Christopher Conkling's recent article "Alma's Enemies: The Case of the Lamanites, Amlicites, and Mysterious Amalekites," *JBMS* 14/1 (2005): 108–17.

The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project
Terryl L. Givens

1. Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (first published in 1840).
2. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art, and Other Writings on Art and Culture* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), 23.
3. Quoted in David J. Voelker, "The Apologetics of Theodore Parker and Horace Bushnell: New Evidences for Christianity," http://history.hanover.edu/hhr/95/hhr95_4.html.
4. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts, eds., *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 5.
5. *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*, 18.
6. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 10* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004), 3.
7. Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants, Part One*, 3.
8. *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*, 18.
9. *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*, 19.
10. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1946), 1:252.

Joseph Smith and the Text of the Book of Mormon
Robert J. Matthews

1. See the Wentworth Letter, in *History of the Church*, 4:537; Doctrine and Covenants 1:29; and "The Testimony of Three Witnesses," in the forepart of the Book of Mormon.
2. See *History of the Church*, 1:220.
3. Cited in J. Reuben Clark Jr., *Why the King James Version* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1956), xxxiv.
4. Minutes of the School of the Prophets, Salt Lake City, 14 January 1871, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Scholarship for the Ages
Grant Hardy

1. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 415–16.
2. Skousen's running dialogue in this volume with David Calabro, another close reader, is a pleasure to overhear.
3. I am a great fan of Hugh Nibley—he is often provocative and always entertaining—but Skousen's precision and rigor put him to shame. See, for example, Skousen's discussion of Nibley's explanation of the phrase "or out of the waters of baptism" at 1 Nephi 20:1.
4. A similar project, dealing with more modern materials, is the Joseph Smith Papers, a scholarly edition of documents associated with the Prophet that will be published jointly by Brigham Young University and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 26 volumes over the next decade.
5. Similarly, outside of translators, how many Latter-day Saints have read 2 Nephi 3:18 carefully enough to notice that there is a direct object missing: "I will raise up unto the fruit of thy loins [something or someone?] and I will make for him a spokesman"? Skousen not only notices this, but he devotes six pages to resolving the difficulty created by the grammatical lapse.
6. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts, eds., *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

Seeking Joseph Smith's Voice
Kevin L. Barney

1. This difference in perspective can be seen by comparing on the one hand Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 381–82, with David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 159–69. Skousen alludes to this issue on page 426 of *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon, Part One: Title Page, Witness Statements, 1 Nephi 1 – 2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004) but reserves full discussion for volume 3.
2. Skousen shows his age by using the letters *DHC* (p. 14) as an abbreviation for what used to be called the *Documentary History of the Church*. The contemporary practice is to use the abbreviation *HC* for *History of the Church*.
3. Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen, "Was the Path Nephi Saw 'Strait and Narrow' or 'Straight and Narrow'?" *JBMS* 10/2 (2001): 30–33; and John W. Welch and Daniel McKinlay, "Getting Things Strai[gh]t," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 260–62.
4. See James Muilenburg, "A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 1 (1953): 99.
5. See William R. Watters, *Formula Criticism and the Poetry of the Old Testament* (New York: de Gruyter, 1976); and Kevin L. Barney, "Poetic Diction and Parallel Word Pairs in the Book of Mormon," *JBMS* 4/2 (1995): 15–81. In the terminology of James T. Duke, "strait + narrow" would be a "synonymous conjoined pair" (James T. Duke, "Word Pairs and Distinctive Combinations in the Book of Mormon," *JBMS* 12/2 [2003]: 32–41).
6. K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977).
7. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1975).
8. Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of