

## G. The Translation Process of the Book of Mormon

(Updated September 22, 2021)

### Chronology of the Book of Mormon Translation

The following timeline and articles are based upon the following sources:

John W. Welch's article entitled, "The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," from *Opening the Heavens, Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820-1844*, p.77-213, (2005), Brigham Young University.

Scott Woodward, "Accounts of the Translation Process," and "Book of Mormon Translation Timeline," [https://scottwoodward.org/bookofmormon\\_translationprocess\\_accounts.html](https://scottwoodward.org/bookofmormon_translationprocess_accounts.html) (2018)

Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters*, Museum of the Book of Mormon Press, 2019-2020,

**"Book of Mormon Translation Timeframe"** (FAIRMormon website)

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**1820 Spring.** First Vision

**1823 September 21.** Joseph receives a visit from Moroni.

**1823-27** Joseph goes to the hill each year for instruction, prior to receiving the plates.

**1827 January 18.** Joseph marries Emma Hale.

**1827 September 21-22.** Joseph obtains the plates from the angel Moroni.

**1827 October-November.** Joseph moves with Emma to her parents' house in Harmony, Pennsylvania. They move to Harmony while transporting the plates hidden in a barrel of beans.

**Question:** Where are the Interpreters?

**1828 December 1827-February 1828.** Joseph begins limited translation of the plates with the scribal assistance of his wife Emma and her brother Reuben Hale.

**1828 February.** Martin Harris arrives in Harmony. Joseph gives Martin a copy of some of the characters from the plates with the translation of the same. Martin takes these to Palmyra, Albany, New York City, and Philadelphia and visits with Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill (vice president of Rutgers Medical School in NYC), Professor Charles Anthon at Columbia College, and others regarding the characters and their translation.

*(Translation Process)*

- 1828 April 12.** Martin Harris returns from to New York to Harmony and begins to scribe for Joseph as he translates the book of Lehi.
- 1828 April 12-June 14.** The translation of the book of Lehi is completed, resulting in 116 pages of translated text.
- 1828 June 15.** Joseph and Emma’s first child, Alvin, was born but died shortly thereafter.
- 1828 Late June or Early July.** The 116 pages of the book of Lehi were borrowed and then lost by Martin Harris.
- 1828 July.** Joseph goes to his father’s home in Manchester, New York to check on Martin. Martin confesses that the manuscript is lost.
- 1828 July.** Joseph returns to Harmony. The interpreters and the plates are taken from Joseph by the angel. The Urim and Thummim are returned to him briefly in order for Joseph to receive the Lord’s chastisement in D&C 3. Portions of D&C 10 may also have been received around this time. Moroni promises Joseph that if he will repent and humble himself the Urim and Thummim will be returned to him on September 22 of that year.
- 1828 September 22.** Joseph again receives the Urim and Thummim from Moroni.
- 1828 December.** It is probably during this month that David Whitmer makes a business trip to Palmyra, where he meets Oliver Cowdery for the first time. He also learns about Joseph and the golden plates at this time.
- 1829 February.** Joseph’s parents, Joseph Smith, Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, come to visit him in Harmony. Joseph receives D&C 4 for his father. His parents return to Manchester, NY. Oliver Cowdery, who is boarding with the Joseph Smith Sr. family, hears of BOM. receives a heavenly manifestation, and subsequently is inspired to assist Joseph in the Lord’s work.
- 1829 March.** Emma acts briefly as scribe and a few pages are translated. Martin Harris visits Joseph in Harmony “seemingly for the prime purpose of being permitted to see the plates. According to other testimonies Martin had not seen the plates during the time he was writing for the Prophet, and he wanted to know of their existence” (Wayne C. Gunnell, “Martin Harris—Witness and Benefactor to the Book of Mormon,” (master’s thesis, BYU, 1955, 29-30). This visit precipitates the receipt of D&C 5 on behalf of Martin Harris. In this revelation Joseph is told to translate “a few more pages” and then to “stop for a season” (D&C 5:30).
- 1829 April 5.** Oliver Cowdery arrives in Harmony with Joseph’s brother Samuel Smith. Joseph tells Oliver much about his own history.
- 1829 April 7.** Oliver begins writing as scribe to Joseph Smith. They begin translating at or near Mosiah 1 (where Joseph and Martin Harris had left off)
- 1829 April.** Joseph inquires and receives sections 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the D&C.

- 1829 May 10.** Joseph and Oliver go to Colesville, NY to obtain more provisions but obtaining none, return to Harmony. Joseph Knight Sr. goes to Harmony with writing paper (foolscap) and other provisions. He repeats these visits during May. Joseph receives D& C 12 on his behalf.
- 1829 May 10-15.** The translation gets to the account of the Savior's resurrected ministry in 3 Nephi.
- 1829 May 15.** Joseph and Oliver are ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood and baptize one another. ("Letter I," Messenger and Advocate, October 1834, 15) ([D&C 13](#)) (Joseph Smith—History 1:68).
- 1829 May 15-May 25.** As they near the end of Mormon & Moroni's abridgment, Joseph and Oliver wonder if they are to translate the first 116 pages again. (SEE D&C 10 last part for answer)
- 1829 May 25.** Oliver baptizes Samuel Smith and the translation continues. Hyrum Smith visits a few days later. D&C 11 given in behalf of Hyrum.
- 1829 May 16-31.** Joseph and Oliver may have gone to Colesville during this time. It is most likely that they receive the Melchizedek priesthood from Peter, James, and John during this time. Joseph receives a commandment to ask David Whitmer to bring he and Oliver down to his (David's) father's house in Fayette, New York. After miraculous signs, David arrives in Harmony and is convinced of Joseph's divine inspiration.
- 1829 June 1-3.** Joseph and Oliver move with David Whitmer from Harmony to Fayette, Seneca County, New York, to the home of Peter Whitmer (David's father). Emma Smith comes a short time afterward.
- 1829 June 4-June 30.** Joseph and Oliver recommence translation the day after their arrival in Fayette. The translation was finished in the upstairs room of Peter Whitmer's home by July 1. Some of the Whitmers (John Whitmer especially) help as scribes during this period.
- 1829 June 11.** The copyright for the Book of Mormon is secured. The application contains the title page of the Book of Mormon. This demonstrates that before this date Mormon's entire abridgement (Mosiah-Mormon 7) and Moroni's additions (Mormon 8-9, Ether, & Moroni) have been translated, including the title page inscribed by Moroni.
- 1829 June 5-14.** Joseph receives D & C 14, 15, and 16 on behalf of David Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Peter Whitmer, Jr. D & C 18 is received for Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer.
- 1829 Mid-June.** The translation of the Book of Mormon is complete (see D&C 17:6). Doctrine and Covenants 17 was received around this time.
- 1829 June 20.** The Three Witnesses see the plates around this date. A few days later in Manchester, New York, near the Smith log home, the Eight Witnesses see and handle the plates. Lucy Mack Smith says that she also, at one point, saw and handled the plates.
- 1829 June 26.** The Wayne Sentinel publishes the Book of Mormon title page. Martin Harris approaches E. B. Grandin about publishing the book. Grandin declines.

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- 1829 July.** The printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon is begun by Oliver Cowdery.
- 1829 June-August.** Doctrine and Covenants 19 is likely received around this time.
- 1829 Late August.** Martin Harris mortgages his farm. The contract with E. B. Grandin is signed—five thousand copies would be printed. Harris promises to deliver \$3,000 to Grandin within 18 months. If Harris defaults, his land is to be “sold at public auction to satisfy the demand” (Larry C. Porter, “A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831” (Ph.D. diss., BYU, 1971; *BYU Studies*, 2000), p.88). When asked years later if he ever lost any of the \$3,000 Martin said, “I never lost one cent. Mr. Smith paid me all that I advanced, and more too” (“Testimonies of Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris,” *Millennial Star*, vol. 21, p.545).
- 1829 August 25.** Hyrum Smith delivers the first manuscript installment and typesetting commences. The original typesetter is John H. Gilbert and proofs are printed by J. H. Bortles until December when Grandin hires Thomas McAuley. McAuley and Bortles do the remaining press work until March 1830.
- 1830 March 26.** The printing and binding are finished and the book is offered for sale to the public. Prices at Grandin's Bookstore seem to range from \$1.25 to \$1.75 per book.
- 1830 April 6.** The Church of Christ is organized. On this day the Lord bears witness that He gave Joseph Smith “power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon” (D&C 20:8).

**Some Events and LDS publications with representative remarks about the translation are as follows:**

**1826 Joseph Uses the Seer Stone in response to Moroni's words**

Alexander Baugh, a BYU professor of Church history and doctrine, writes:

Joseph Knight Sr. remembered the Prophet sharing an incident regarding the seer stone that took place in September 1826 during the Prophet's third annual visit to the Hill Cumorah. Knight indicated that during the 1826 interview with Moroni, Joseph was told that he would receive the plates the following year if he brought the right person with him to the hill. Confused, Joseph asked Moroni, "Who is the right Person?" The answer was you will know. Then he looked in his [stone] and found it was Emma Hale."

("Manuscript of Early History of Joseph Smith Finding of Plates," Church History Library, and Dean C. Jesse, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no 1 (1977): 31)

(See Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet," *Devotional Speech at BYU, June 24, 2014.*)

**1827 Joseph receives the gold plates, the breastplate, and the interpreters**

Alexander Baugh writes:

Upon receiving the plates, breastplate, and Nephite interpreters in September 1827, Joseph developed a special affinity for the interpreters, which he called spectacles. [Joseph] Knight [Sr.] was at the Smith home in Palmyra when Joseph returned from the Hill Cumorah, and Knight remembered conversing with the Prophet about the sacred relics the morning after he had obtained possession of them: "It is ten times Better than I expected," Knight remembered the Prophet saying. "He seemed to think more of the glasses . . . [than] he Did of the Plates, for, says he, 'I can see any thing; they are Marvelus.'" ("Manuscript of Early History of Joseph Smith Finding of Plates," Church History Library, and Dean C. Jesse, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no 1 (1977): 33) **Date of Manuscript?**

(See Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet," *Devotional Speech at BYU, June 24, 2014.*)

**1827 Joseph shows the "Key" to his mother, Lucy Mack Smith**

**<https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1844-1845>**

In her *History of Joseph Smith* recorded in 1844-1845, Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith said that when Joseph returned to the house in the morning after retrieving the plates from the hill, but hiding them in the woods rather than bringing them right to the house, she became worried. Sensing this he said to her:

p. [7], bk. 5]

while he was absent Joseph returned I was trembled so much with fear lest all might be lost aging [again?] by some small failure in keeping the commandments that I was under the necessity of [e]aving the room to conceal my feelings Joseph saw this and followed

me Mother said he do not be uneasy all is right see here Said he I have got the **key** I knew not what he meant but took the article in my hands and ~~upon~~ after examing it <\*> <(\*with no covering but a silk handkerchief)> <found> that it consisted of **2 smooth** <3 cornered diamonds set in glass and the glass was set in silver bows>

Page [8], bk. 5

**stones** con[n]ected with each other in the same way that **old fashioned spectacles** are made

**He took them again and left me** but did not tell me anything of the record

Soon after he came again and asked my advice what it was best to do about getting a chest made I told him to go to a cabbinet maker who had been making some furniture for my oldest daughter and tell the man we would pay him for making a chest as we did for the others things viz half money and half produce he said he would but did not know where the money would come from for there was not a shilling in the house. The next day a one man <Mr Warner> came to him from Macedon and requested <Joseph> to go with him to a widow & house <in Macedon by the name of Wells> in that place as She had sent for him to do some work that She wanted done and She <a wall of a well taken up and as she wanted some labor done in a well> would pay him the money for it he put on his linen frock and started went with the <he accompanied> Mr Warner to Macedon and went to <according to> work for Mrs Wells <request> a <this> woman whom not < had never seen> one of the family had ever seen or heard of before although She sent purposely for Joseph we considered it a provision of Providence to enable us to pay the money we were owing the cabinet maker . . .

It now seemed that satan had stirred up the hearts of those who had in any way got a hint of the Matter to search into it and make every possible move towards preventing the work Mr. Smith was soon informed that 10— or 12 men were clu [p. [8], bk. 5]

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bed together with one willard chase a Methodist class leader at their head and what was most rediculous they had sent for a conjuror to come 60 miles to divine the place where the record was deposited by magic art we were apprehensive that the p[l]ates were taken out and secreted some where and <we> were somewhat uneasy least they might like Moses who was hid in the bulrushes be discovered by our enemies . . .

Page [10], bk 5

. . . Emma was soon on her way to her <husband> husband <he was in the well when she arrived but having a sudden impression of to get out of the well he came up and met her> when She found him She informed of the situation of affairs at home and he < went> immediately inform to Mrs. Wells and told her that he must return home to attend to some important buisness She was not willing for him to leave but upon his promising to come back when he was at liberty again She consented and sent a boy to bring him a horse

Page [0]

[paper fragment inserted after page [10] of book 5]<Joseph kept **the urim and thumim** constantly about his person an[d] he could by this means ascertain at any moment whether <if> the plates were in danger or having just looked into them before Emma got there he perceived her coming and came up out of the well and met her. When she informed him of the situ what had occurred he told her that the record was perfectly safe for the pre[s]ent. but he <however> concluded to go home with her and told Wells that his buisness at home made it necessary for him to return>

[p. [12], bk. 5]

. . . When the chest came Joseph locked up the record and threw himself on the bed after resting himself so a little so that he could converse he went out & related his adventure to his father and Mr Knight who had come back from their scouting expedition without seeing any one— he Showed his thumb saying I must stop talking Father and get you to put my thumb in place for it is very painful when this was done He related to our guests the whole history of the record which interested them very much and listened and beleived all that was told them[7 lines blank]

Page [1], bk. 6

Book 6

up to the time when he took <it> out of the stone <cement> box **in the hill of cumorah** which took place the mor[n]ing that Mr Knight [Joseph Knight Sr.] missed his horse and waggon when <Joseph> he took the plates into his hands at this time the angel of the Lord stood by and said now you have got the record into your own hands and you are but a man therefore you will have to be watchful and faithful to your trust or you will be overpowered by wicked men for they will lay every plan and scheme that is possible to get them away from you and if you do not take heed continually they will suceed while they were in my hands I could keep them and no man had power <to take> them away but now I give them up to you beware and look well to your ways— <and you shall have power to keep <retain> them untill the time for them to be translated> The thing which spoke of it had that Joseph termed a **Key** was indeed nothing more nor less than ~~the~~ a **urim and Thummim** by which the angel manifested those things to <him> that were shown him in vision by the which also he could at any time ascertain the approach of danger Either to himself or the record and for this cause he kept these things constantly about his person

Regarding the editing in red, the following is from the Introduction to the transcript of the handwritten draft:

. . . she [Lucy] attempted to prosecute the work, relying chiefly upon her memory. . .  
. There were two Manuscripts prepared, one copy was given to Mother Smith, and the other retained in the Church” (Martha Jane Knowlton Coray, Provo, UT, to Brigham Young, 13 June 1865, Brigham Young Office Files, CHL).

The two completed manuscripts Coray referenced in her letter to Young were preceded by a draft, sometimes referred to as the “rough draft manuscript.” Martha Jane Coray and her husband, Howard, composed this draft as they met with Smith during the fall and winter 1844–1845. Then, in early 1845, utilizing the rough draft and other notes and sources, the Corays apparently penned two revised, or “fair,” copies. The sole extant fair version is titled “The History of Lucy Smith Mother of the Prophet.” Miscellaneous fragments included with the rough draft copy suggest that the Corays may also have produced an intermediate draft prior to transcribing the two fair copies. Assuming an intermediate draft once existed in some form, most of it has been lost.

Smith obtained a U.S. copyright for her manuscript on 18 July 1845. (Copyright for Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith,” 18 July 1845, Robert Harris, Copyright Registry Records for Works Concerning the Mormons to 1870, CHL).

**1827 Joseph puts on the spectacles**

Alexander Baugh writes:

David Whitmer recalled that when Joseph first put on the spectacles, “he saw his entire past history revealed to him.” This experience, Whitmer believed, helped the young seer recognize the greater supernatural power God had given him. (David Whitmer, quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), p. 150.)

(See Alexander L. Baugh, “Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet,” *Devotional Speech at BYU, June 24, 2014*.)

Note\* David Whitmer had NO first-hand experience for this information. This information would have had to have come from Joseph Smith.

**1828 Joseph “translates” the characters from the plates that Martin Harris takes to Prof. Anthon.**

[Martin Harris] returned to me and gave them [the characters transcribed on a paper] to me to translate and I said I cannot for I am not learned but the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book therefore I commenced translating the characters and thus the Prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled. (See Dean Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:9.)

Note\* SEE the Interview of Martin Harris by John A. Clark dated to about 1840 and published in 1842.

**1828 History of the Church as published in *the Times and Seasons*, May 16, 1842**

Note\* This contains a historical prologue to D&C 3, which is dated to July, 1828. However, this prologue account was written much later.

Some time after Mr. Harris had begun to write for me [April 12, 1828] he began to tease me to give him liberty to carry the writings home and shew them, and desired of me

that I would enquire of the Lord through the **Urim and Thummim** if he might not do so. I did enquire, and the answer was that he must not. . . [the account of Martin's losing the manuscript is then given]

I . . . returned to my place in Pennsylvania. Immediately after my return home I was walking out a little distance when behold the former heavenly messenger appeared and handed to me the **Urim and Thummim** again, (for it had been taken from me in consequence of my having wearied the Lord in asking for the privilege of letting Martin Harris take the writings which he lost by transgression,) and I enquired of the Lord through them and obtained the following revelation:

[D&C 3] Revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr. given July, 1828, concerning certain manuscripts on the first part of the book of Mormon, which had been taken from the possession of Martin Harris.

3 Behold, you have been intrusted with these things, but how strict were your commandments; and remember, also, the promises which were made to you . . .

5 And when thou deliveredst up that which God had given thee sight and power to translate, thou deliveredst up that which was sacred, into the hands of a wicked man . . . and this is the reason that thou hast lost thy privileges for a season.

Note\* That Martin Harris wrote for Joseph from April 12, 1828 to June 14, 1828 is supposedly backed up by an affidavit by William Pilkington, dated April 3, 1934 in the Church Archives.

#### 1828 Revelation given to Joseph Smith the Prophet [through the seerstone?]

The heading in D&C 10 reads: "Revelation given to Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, in the summer of 1828. HC 1: 20-23."

1 Now, behold, I say unto you, that because you [Joseph Smith] delivered up those writings which you had power given unto you to translate **by the means of the Urim and Thummim**, into the hands of a wicked man you have lost them.

2 And you also lost your gift at the same time, and your mind became darkened.

3 Nevertheless, it is now restored unto you again; therefore see that you are faithful and continue on unto the finishing of the remainder of the work of translation as you have begun.

(*Book of Commandments*, chapter 9, 1833 (D&C 10:1-3))

Question: How much of the 116 pages were translated by the Urim and Thummim? Martin Harris never viewed them, neither did Emma even though they sat right next to him.

#### 1828 Lucy Mack Smith relates her history of Joseph (Lucy Mack Smith History, 1845)

For nearly two months after Joseph returned to his family in Pennsylvania we heard nothing from him; and becoming anxious about him, Mr. Smith Joseph Smith Sr.]

and myself set off to make him a visit. When we came withing three quarters of a mile of his house, Joseph started to meet us; telling his wife as he left, that “Father and mother were coming.” . . .

And when I entered his house the first thing that attracted my attention was a red morocco trunk, that set on Emma’s bureau, which trunk Joseph shortly informed me contained the Urim and Thummim and the plates.

In the evening he gave us the following relation of what had transpired since our separation:

After leaving you, said Joseph, “I returned immediately home; and soon after . . . I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord, and, as I was pouring out my soul to God . . . an angel stood before me and answered me, saying that I had sinned in delivering the manuscript into the hands of a wicked man; and, as I have ventured to become responsible for his faithfulness, I would of necessity have to suffer the consequences of his indiscretion; and must now give up the Urim and Thummim into his (the angels) hands. This I did as I was directed. . . .

I continued my supplications to God without cessation, and, on the 22d of September, I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim and Thummim; and have commenced translating again, and Emma writes for me, but the angel said that the Lord would send me a scribe, and [I] trust his promise will be verified. The angel He also seemed pleased with me, when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim . . .

**Note\*** Emma presumably NEVER saw the Urim and Thummim. She would make NO mention of it in describing her duties as a scribe—only the stone.

#### **1829 Revelation to Joseph Smith the Prophet**

The heading to D&C 5 reads: “Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, March 1829, at the request of Martin Harris HC 1: 28-31.”

4 And you have a gift to translate the plates; and this is the first gift that I bestowed upon you; and I have commanded that you should pretend to no other gift until my purpose is fulfilled in this; for I will grant unto you no other gift until it is finished.

(*Book of Commandments*, chapter 4, 1833 (D&C 5:4))

#### **1829 Revelation through Joseph Smith [and seerstone?] to Oliver Cowdery**

The heading to D&C 6 reads: “Revelation given to Joseph Smith the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. HC 1: 32-35.”

25 And, behold, I grant unto you a gift, if you desire of me, to translate, even as my servant Joseph.

(*Book of Commandments*, chapter 5, 1833 (D&C 6:25))

**1829 Joseph reads a parchment written by John (by the stone?)**

Alexander Baugh writes:

In discussing Joseph Smith’s role as a translator, it appears he also translated an ancient New Testament text written by John the Beloved. While the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery were engaged in the translation of the plates, they frequently conversed on a number of subjects. On one occasion they reported that “a difference of opinion” arose regarding whether John the Beloved had died or whether he had been permitted to remain on the earth—a subject not clarified in the last verses of the last chapter in John (HC 1: 35-36). To settle the matter the Prophet inquired and received Doctrine and Covenants 7. Significantly, the heading to this revelation in the 1833 Book of Commandments states that the revelation was “translated from parchment, written and hid up by himself,” namely John. (Heading to chapter VI [D&C 7], *A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, 1830* (Zion [Independence, Missouri]: W. W. Phelps and Company, 1833), 18) The English text that Joseph Smith received on this occasion was likely received in a manner similar to the Book of Mormon translation and could therefore be considered another translated work provided by the Prophet.

*(See Alexander L. Baugh, “Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet,” Devotional Speech at BYU, June 24, 2014.)*

The heading to D&C 7 reads as follows:

Revelation given to Joseph Smith the Prophet and Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829, when they inquired through the Urim and Thummim as to whether John, the beloved disciple, tarried in the flesh or had died. The revelation is a translated version of the record made on parchment by John and hidden up by himself. HC 1: 35-36.

**Note\*** What instrument is being referred to as “the Urim and Thummim”?

**1829 Revelation through Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery**

The heading to D&C 8 reads: “Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. HC 1: 36-37.”

1 Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which has been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit.

2 Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

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3 Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation . . .

4 Therefore this is thy gift; apply unto it, and blessed art thou, . . .

11 Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you.

(*Book of Commandments*, chapter 7, 1833 (D&C 8:1-4, 11))

### 1829 Revelation through Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery

The heading to D&C 9 reads: "Revelation given through Joseph Smith the Prophet to Oliver Cowdery, at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 1829. HC 1: 37-38."

1 Behold, I say unto you, my son, that because you did not translate according to that which you desired of me . . .

5 And, behold, it is because that you did not continue as you commenced, when you began to translate, that I have taken away this privilege from you.

7 Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

8 But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.

9 But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.

10 Now if you had known this you could have translated; nevertheless, it is not expedient that you should translate now.

(*Book of Commandments*, chapter 8, 1833 (D&C 9:1, 5, 7-10))

### 1829 Lucy Mack Smith relates her history of Joseph for May 1829 (Lucy Mack Smith History, 1845)

Joseph was 150 miles distant and knew naught of the matter except an intimation that was given through the urim and thumim for as he one morning applied them to his eyes to look upon the record instead of the words of the book being given him he was commanded to write a letter to one David Whitmer this man Joseph had never seen but he was instructed to say [to] him that he must come with his team immediately in order to convey Joseph and his family Oliver [Cowdery] back to his house which was 135 miles that they might remain with him three until the translation should be completed . . .

Note\* What instrument is Lucy referring to, and where did she get this information? If Oliver Cowdery was writing for Joseph, and Oliver did NOT see the Spectacles until the experience of

the three witnesses, what does this say about what Lucy is describing here and what about the translation process?

**1829 The Melchizedek Priesthood is restored in late May.**

According to a detailed and researched article by Larry C. Porter, "all the information we now have, taken together, seems to place the date of the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood between 15 and about 29 May 1829. (See "Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," *Ensign*, June 1979.

Note\* Richard Cowan, professor of Religious Education at BYU estimated that one-half of all the revelations the Prophet received before the Melchizedek Priesthood was restored were received through the Urim and Thummim. After he received the Melchizedek Priesthood, he no longer used the device. (Quoted from the website "Ask Gramps")

Question: What instrument is implied by the term "Urim and Thummim"?

**1829 June 1 to July 1<sup>st</sup> – Due to persecution, David Whitmer moves Oliver and Joseph to his parents' homestead (Peter Whitmer, Sr.) in Fayette.**

**1829 June 11, 1829 – Joseph registers the copyright via the Title Page**

**1829 June 1829 – 3 witnesses, 8 witnesses see the plates.**

**1829 (David Whitmer looks back on this time period in an 1885 interview with Elder Zenas Gurley)**

1 - Q Do you know that the plates seen with the Angel on the table were real metal, did you touch them?

Ans - We did not touch nor handle the plates.

3 - Q Did you see the Urim and Thummim, what was it?

Ans - I saw the "Interpreters" in the holy vision, They looked like whitish stones put in the rim of a bow, looked like spectacles only much larger.

20- Q Did Joseph use his "peep stone" to finish up the translation? If so why?

Ans – He used a stone called a "Seer stone," the "Interpreters" having been taken away from him because of transgression.

21- Q Had you seen the plates at anytime before the Angel showed them to you?

Ans - No.

25- Q Were you present during any of the time of translation, if so, state how it was done.

(Translation Process)

Ans. The “Interpreters” were taken away from Joseph after he allowed Martin Harris to carry away the 116 pages of Mx---of the Book of Mormon as a punishment, but he was allowed to go on and translate by the use of a “Seer stone” which he had, and which he placed in a hat into which he buried his face, stating to me and others that the original character appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in English, which enabled him to read it readily.

Question: If Joseph supposedly said that the angel returned to Urim and Thummim to him in September 1828, and he started translating from that time, how does that square with David Whitmer’s information and also the information about the Melchizedek Priesthood power being restored and thus there was no need for the Urim and Thummim? When, supposedly, did Joseph give the Urim and Thummim (Interpreters) back to Moroni?

### 1829 Joseph gives the seer stone to Oliver Cowdery

Alexander Baugh writes:

Joseph returned the Nephite interpreters to Moroni at the completion of the translation (see *Joseph Smith—History 1:60*). It appears that following the completion of the Book of Mormon translation, the Prophet’s use of the seer stone also declined. “Soon after the translation of the Book of Mormon was complete, Joseph Smith gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery, who possessed the stone until his death in 1848. That same year, Phineas Young visited Oliver’s widow, Lucy Cowdery, and persuaded her to give it to him. He returned to Salt Lake City and presented it to his brother, Brigham Young. The stone has remained in the possession of the Church since that time” (Baugh “Parting the Veil,” 52, note 35).

(See Alexander L. Baugh, “Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet,” *Devotional Speech at BYU, June 24, 2014, endnote #15.*)

Note\* The stone referred to here is apparently a chocolate-colored stone.

### 1829 “Preface” Book of Mormon, about August 1829

“I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi . . . “

### 1829 Jonathan A. Hadley (Printer), “Golden Bible,” Palmyra (NY ) Freeman, August 11, 1829

Republished in the *Niagara Courier*, August 27, 1829.

Republished in the *Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph*, August 31, 1829.

Republished in the *Painesville [Ohio] Telegraph*, September 22, 1829.

“Its proselytes give the following account . . . By placing the spectacles in a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least,) interpret the characters”

“Joseph Smith found the plates “together with a huge pair of Spectacles . . . By placing the Spectacles in a hat, and looking into it, Smith could (he said so, at least,) interpret these characters.”

Note\* Considering the time period and the source, it is possible that Hadley might have conflated the manner of use of the Spectacles and the manner of use of the seer stone.

**1829 “Preface” *Book of Mormon*, 1830**

“In due course the plates were delivered to Joseph Smith, who translated them by the gift and power of God.”

**1829 Witness Statements. *Book of Mormon*, 1830.**

In their statement published with the *Book of Mormon*, the three witnesses testified that the plates “have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true.”

**1829 “A Golden Bible,” *The Gem, of Literature and Science*, Rochester, NY, Vol. I, No. 9, Sept. 5, 1829.**

“A man by the name of Martin Harris was in this village a few days since endeavoring to make a contract for printing a large quantity of a work called the Golden Bible. He gave something like the following account of it. . . . By placing the spectacles in a hat and looking into it, Smith interprets the characters into the English language.”

Source: [www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/ny/miscNYSf.htm](http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/ny/miscNYSf.htm) quoted in Jonathan Edward Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon*, 2021, p. 152-153.

**1829 Letter Oliver H.P. Cowdery to Cornelius C. Blatchly, Nov. 9, 1829, *Gospel Luminary* 2, no. 49 (Dec. 10, 1829): 194.** See Juvenile Instructor (blog), August 21, 2012.

Now Joseph Smith Jr., certainly was the writer of the work, called the book of Mormon, which was written in ancient Egyptian characters,--which was a dead record to us until translated. And he, by a gift from God, has translated it into our language.

**1830 Revelation through Joseph Smith [without the seerstone]**

The heading to D&C 20 reads: “Revelation on Church Organization and Government, given through Joseph Smith the Prophet, April 1830. HC 1:64-70.”

(Translation Process)

6 But after repenting, and humbling himself sincerely, through faith, God ministered unto him [Joseph Smith] by an angel . . .

7 And gave unto him commandments which inspired him;

8 And gave him power from on high, by the means which were before prepared, to translate the Book of Mormon

(*Book of Commandments*, chapter 24, 1833 (D&C 20:6-9))

**1830 Joseph begins the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible [without a seerstone?].**

[SEE Alexander Baugh, 2014]

**1831 “Mormonites,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, Utica, NY, April 9, 1831.**

During the trial it was shown that the Book of Mormon was brought to light by the same magic power by which he pretended to tell fortunes, discover hidden treasures, &c. Oliver Cowdery, one of the three witnesses to the book, testified under oath, that said Smith found with the plates, from which he translated his book, two transparent stones, resembling glass, set in silver bows. That by looking through these, he was able to read in English, the reformed Egyptian characters, which were engraved on the plates.

Question: Did Oliver Cowdery ever assume that Joseph was translating and dictating to him by means of the Urim and Thummim (Interpreters)? Did he ever have first-hand experience with Joseph translating with the Interpreters? Oliver wrote almost the entire Book of Mormon that we now have,

How does his statement square with the testimony of David Whitmer? Oliver married David’s sister, who also viewed the process.

**1831 Josiah Jones, “History of the Mormonites,” Kirtland, Ohio, June 9, 1831.** See also James B.

Allen ed., “The Historian’s Corner,” *BYU Studies* 12, no. 3 (1972): 306-311.

Josiah Jones writes that he takes this from the first missionaries that came through the area (namely Elders Pratt, Peterson, Whitmer and Cowdery. Jones writes that they told him that the Book of Mormon was translated by

“looking into a stone or two stones, when put into a dark place, which stones he said were found in the box with the plates. They affirmed while he [Joseph] looked through the stone spectacles another sat by and wrote what he told them, and thus the book was written. . . .”

“A few days after these men appeared again, a few of us went to see them and Cowdery was requested to state how the plates were found, which he did. He stated that Smith looked onto or through the transparent stones to translate what was on the plates. I then asked him if he had ever looked through the stones to see what he could see in

them; his reply was that he was not permitted to look into them. I asked him who debarred him from looking into them; he remained sometime in silence, then said that he had so much confidence in his friend Smith, who told him that he must not look into them, that he did not presume to do so lest he should tempt God and be struck dead.”

Note\* Oliver Cowdery seems to be allowing for BOTH processes of translation—the Urim and Thummim and also the stone.

**1831 Minutes of the Conference at Orange, Ohio, October 25, 1831 [about Joseph & Hyrum]**

Br. Hyrum Smith said that he thought best that the information of the coming forth of the book of Mormon be related by Joseph himself to the Elders present that all might know for themselves.

Br. Joseph Smith jr. said that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things &c. (See Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983, p. 23.)

**1832 Nancy Towle, *Vicissitudes Illustrated in the Experience of Nancy Towle, in Europe and America*. Charleston: James L. Burges, 1832, p. 138-139.**

Note\* Having visited Kirtland in 1831, Nancy Towle wrote about Joseph Smith:

He accordingly went; and was directed by the angel to a certain spot of ground, where was deposited a “Box”—and in that box contained “Plates,” which resembled gold; also, a pair of “interpreters,” (as he called them,) that resembled spectacles; by looking into which, he could read a writing engraven upon the plates, though to himself, in a tongue unknown.

**1832 History of the Church, circa Summer 1832; josephsmithpaers.org**

[Martin Harris immediately came to Su[s]quehanna and said the Lord had shown him that he must go to new York City with some of the c[h]aracters so we proceeded to copy some of them and he took his Journey to the Eastern Cittys and to the Learned <saying> read this I pray thee and the Learned said I cannot but if he would bring the blates [plates] they would read it but the Lord had fo<r>bid it and he returned to me and gave them to <me to> translate and I said [I] cannot for I am not learned but the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book therefore I commenced translating the characters and thus the Prop[h]icy of Is<ia>ah was fulfilled.

**1833 William W. Phelps, “The Book of Mormon,” *The Evening and the Morning Star*, January 1833.**

Mentions that the Book of Mormon “was translated by the gift and power of God, by an unlearned man, through the aid of a pair of Interpreters, or spectacles—(known, perhaps, in ancient days as Teraphim, or Urim and Thummim)”

(Translation Process)

**1833 Joseph Smith letter to Noah C. Saxton, January 4, 1833.**

The Book of Mormon is a record of the forefathers of our western tribes of Indians; having been found through the ministration of an holy angel, and translated into our own language by the gift and power of God.

**1834 Use of the term “Urim and Thummim”**

**The True Latter Day Saints’ Herald, 26/22 (November 15, 1879).**

The proofs are clear and positive that the story of the Urim and Thummim Translation does not date back for its origin further than 1833, or between that date and 1835; for it is not found in any printed document of the Church of Christ up to the latter part of the year 1833, or the year 1834. The “Book of Commandments” to the Church of Christ, published in Independence, Mo. in 1833 does not contain any allusion to Urim and Thummim; though the term was inserted in some of the revelations in their reprint in the “Book of Doctrine and Covenants” in 1835.

**1834 Oliver Cowdery [letter] to W. W. Phelps [dated Sept. 7, 1834], *Messenger and Advocate*, October 1834, 14.**

These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, “Interpreters,” the history, or record, called “The Book of Mormon.”

**Comment: Did Oliver Cowdery ever translate while Joseph used the “Interpreters”? Wasn’t Joseph using his seer stone with Oliver? Is Oliver conflating the two manners of translation?**

**1835 *Messenger and Advocate*, September 1835, 178. (D&C 17:6) [To Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris in 1829]**

Joseph Smith “has translated the book, even that part which I have commanded him, and as your Lord and your God liveth it is true.”

**1835 Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, “Letter VIII,” *Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 13 (October 1835-September 1836): 198-200. [About Joseph & recorded by Oliver]**

The angel said, . . . they cannot be interpreted by the learning of this generation; consequently, they would be considered of no worth, only as precious metal. Therefore, remember, that they are to be translated by the gift and power of God. By them will the Lord work a great and a marvelous work.

**1836 Truman Coe (reporter?) to Editor, *Hudson Ohio Observer*, August 11, 1836.**

The manner of translation was as wonderful as the discovery. By putting his finger on one of the characters and imploring divine aid, then looking through the Urim and Thummin, he would see the import written in plain English on a screen placed before him. After delivering this to his amanuensis, he would again proceed in the same manner and obtain the meaning of the next character, and so on till he came to a part of the plates which were sealed up, and there was commanded to desist: and he says he has a promise from God that in due time he will enable **him** to translate the remainder.

Note\* This is not a trustworthy account.

**1838 Joseph Smith Interview, *Elders' Journal*, July 1838**

How, and where did you obtain the book of Mormon?  
Moroni, the person who deposited the plates, from whence the book of Mormon was translated, in a hill in Manchester, Ontario County, New York, being dead; and raised again therefrom, appeared unto me, and told me where they were, and gave me directions how to obtain them. I obtained them, and the Urim and Thummim with them, by the means of which, I translated the plates; and thus came the Book of Mormon

Note\* Joseph says only that “by the means of which I translated the plates.” He does not necessarily say that he translated ALL the plates with the Urim and Thummim. Moreover, if we focus on the phrase “by the means of which” and interpret it as a process of learning, then the term might apply to the seerstone.

**1840 Joseph Smith, “History of the Church,” A-1, MS 5-30, Joseph Smith Collection, Church Archives [About Joseph in 1827-28]**

Immediately after my arrival there [Pennsylvania] I commenced copying the characters of all the plates. I copied a considerable number of them and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them which I did between the time I arrived at the house of my wife's father in the month of December [1827], and the February following.

Note\* There is a discrepancy here. Joseph is said to have “translated” some of the characters between December, 1827 and February, 1828. Martin Harris came in 1828 to Harmony and Joseph gave him a copy of the characters which he took to Prof. Anton who said he couldn't read them. Martin states that when he took them back to Joseph, Joseph said he couldn't read them either, but the Lord had given him an instrument to do so.

(Translation Process)

**1840 Mathew L. Davis, letter to his wife (dated Feb. 6, 1840) about Joseph's speech in Washington, D.C. the previous night.**

Throughout his [Joseph Smith's] whole address he displayed strongly a spirit of charity and forbearance. The Mormon Bible, he said, was communicated to him direct from heaven. If there was such a thing on earth as the author of it, the he (Smith) was the author; but the idea that he wished to impress was that he had penned it as dictated by God. (See *History of the Church*, 4:79.)

**1840 Orson Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1840, p. 8-9. (see also *Journal of Discourses*, 19:214.)**

Orson Pratt said that the seerstones [in the spectacles?] "consisted of two transparent stones, clear as crystal."

Note\* In their 2015 book, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*, Michael MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat write that McGee compiled a survey of the various descriptions of the spectacles in this article. (p. 72) FIND McGee thesis

**1842 Interview of Martin Harris by John A. Clark dated to about 1840.**

**John A. Clark, *Gleanings By the Way*. Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842, p. 224, 228, 230-231.**

[Martin Harris said] that there had been a revelation made to him [Joseph Smith] by which he had discovered this sacred deposit, ad two transparent stones, through which, as a sort of spectacles, he could read the Bible [the plates], **although the box or ark that contained it had not yet been opened**, and that by looking through those mysterious stones, he had transcribed from one of the leaves of this book, the characters which Harris had so carefully wrapped in the package which he was drawing from his pocket. . .

Note\* This part is confusing, but it might mean that while Joseph was translating with the Interpreters, he could read the plates which were still hidden in a trunk or box.

. . . [Joseph] was already in possession of the two transparent stones laid up with the GOLDEN BIBLE, by looking through which he was enabled to read the golden letters on the plates in the box. How he obtained these spectacles without opening the chest, Harris could not tell. But still he had them; and by means of them he could read all the book contained . . .

Note\* Here again, John Clark seems to be conflating the stone box in the hill with the box or trunk in Joseph's house that housed the plates.

The way that Smith made his transcripts and transcriptions for Harris was the following. Although in the same room, a thick curtain or blanket was suspended between them, and Smith concealed behind the blanket, pretended to look through his spectacles, or transparent stones, and would then write down or repeat what he saw, which, when repeated aloud, was written down by Harris, who sat on the other side of the suspended blanket.

Note\* This is the ONLY account that describes a blanket being used to shield Joseph from a scribe. Significantly, Martin Harris was one of the first scribes and would have worked at a time when Joseph was using the Interpreters.

Harris **was told** that it would arouse the most terrible divine displeasure if he should attempt to draw near the sacred chest, or look at Smith while engaged in the work of decyphering the mysterious characters. This was Harris's own account of the matter to me.

Note\* Here we get the idea, once again, that Harris is talking about his **initial work** as a scribe, when Joseph was using the Interpreters. In what Clark writes below, Clark (who is a skeptic) leaves us confused as to exactly who "removed to another field of labor." Was it Martin Harris or Clark? Clark has been writing in third person, however he writes: "This was Harris's own account of the matter to me." Then he records what follows below. A plausible case could be made that here Clark wrote Harris's words from his interview notes such that Clark used the word "I" (first-person) instead of "Harris" (third-person). This interview with Harris apparently took place in 1840, and was published in 1842. However, the book of Mormon was published in 1830. Hence, the passage below that "I heard no more of this matter till I learned the Book of Mormon was about being published" does not make sense if the "I" means Clark. Clark writes:

What other measures they afterwards took to transcribe or translate from these metallic plates, I [Martin Harris?] cannot say, as I [Martin Harris?] very soon after this removed to another field of labor where I [Martin Harris] heard no more of this matter till I [Martin Harris?] learned the Book of Mormon was about being published.

**1842 Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 707. (Taken from a letter to John Wentworth, editor of the Chicago Democrat.)**

"Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God."

Note\* What does "through the medium of" imply? One definition is "method." If the "method" is what Joseph means, then it implies that Joseph used the seerstone in the same method as the Interpreters.

**1842 Lucy Mack Smith interview by Henry Caswall**

**Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842*. London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1842, p. 26-27.**

The angel of the Lord appeared to him [my son Joseph] fifteen years since, and shewed him the cave where the original golden plates of the book of Mormon were deposited. He shewed him also the Urim and Thummim, by which he might understand the meaning of the inscriptions on the plates, and he shewed him the golden breastplate of the high priesthood. My son received these precious gifts, he interpreted the holy record, and now the believers in that revelation are more than a hundred thousand in number.

I have myself seen and handled the golden plates; they are about eight inches long and six wide; some of them are sealed together and are not to be opened, and some of them are loose. They are all connected by a ring which passes through a hole at the end of each plate, and are covered with letters beautifully engraved. I have seen and felt also the Urim and Thummim. They resemble two large bright diamonds set in a bow like a pair of spectacles. My son puts these over his eyes when he reads unknown languages, and they enable him to interpret them in English. I have likewise carried in my hands the sacred breastplate. IT is composed of pure gold, and is made to fit the breast very exactly.

**1843 Letter to the editor of ?????, May 15, 1843 by Joseph Smith**

SIR:--Through the medium of your paper, I wish to correct an error . . . There was no Greek or Latin upon the plates from which I, through the grace of God, translated the Book of Mormon . . . Here then the subject is put to silence, for “none other people knoweth our language,” [Mormon 9:34] therefore the Lord, and not man, had to interpret, after the people were all dead.

Note\* Here Joseph Smith seems to be emphasizing that it was the Lord that interpreted the characters, not man (apparently including himself).

**1843 “Joseph Smith to James Arlington Bennett,” *Times and Seasons* 4 (November 1, 1843): 373.**

The fact is, that by the power of God I translated the Book of Mormon from hieroglyphics; the knowledge of which was lost to the world; in which wonderful event I stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom, and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries.

**1848 Reuben Miller, Journal, October 21, 1848, holograph, microfilm, Church Archives.**

At a conference in Council Bluffs, Reuben Miller recorded Oliver Cowdrey's testimony as he spoke to the saints upon his return to activity in the Church.

Friends and brethren, my name is Cowdrey, Oliver Cowdrey. In the early history of this church I stood identified with her. And [was] one in her councils. . . .

I wrote with my own pen the intire book of mormon (Save a few pages) by the gift and power of god, By [the] means of the urum and thummim, or as it is called by that book holy Interpreters. I beheld with my eyes. And handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. I also beheld the Interpreters. That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it. Mr. [Solomon] Spaulding did not write it. I wrote it myself as it fell from the Lips of the prophet.

**1856 Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9 (October 1916): 454**

Note\* Briggs traveled to Nauvoo in December of 1856 and stayed in the Mansion House.

He interviewed Emma Smith Bidamon on December 8, 1856.

When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word *Sarah* he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.

When he stopped for any purpose at any time he would, when he commenced again begin where he left off without any hesitation, and one time while he was translating he stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, "Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?" When I answered "Yes," he replied "Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived." He had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.

**1859 David B. Dille, September 15, 1853 Interview with Martin Harris.**

**David B. Dille, "Additional Testimony of Martin Harris (One of the Three Witnesses) to the coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *Millennial Star* 21 (August 20, 1859): 545.**

"I know that the plates have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice declared it unto us; therefore I know of a surety that the work is true. For," continued Mr. Harris, "did I not at one time hold the plates on my knee an hour-and-a-half, whilst in conversation with Joseph, when we went to bury them in the woods, that the enemy

(Translation Process)

might not obtain them? Yes, I did. And as may of the plates as Joseph Smith translated I handled with my hands, plate after plate.

**1859 Reporter, 1859 Interview with Martin Harris.**

**“Mormonism, “ Tiffany’s Monthly 5 (May 1859): 163 165-66.**

The following narration we took down from the lips of Martin Harris, and read the same to him after it was written, that we might be certain of giving his statement to the world  
...

Joseph did not dig for these plates. They were placed in this way: four stones were set up and covered with a flat stone, oval on the upper side and flat on the bottom. Beneath this was a little platform upon which the plates were laid; and the two stones set in a bow of silver by means of which the plates were translated, were found underneath the plates.

**Note\*** Martin would not have had first-hand knowledge of the above information. Only Joseph could have conveyed such facts.

These plates were seven inches wide by eight inches in length, and were of the thickness of plates of tin; and when piled one above the other, they were altogether about four inches thick; and they were put together on the back by three silver rings, so that they would open like a book. The two stones set in a bow of silver were about two inches in diameter, perfectly round, and about five-eighths of an inch thick at the centre; but not so thick at the edges where they came into the bow. They were joined by a round bar of silver, about three-eighths of an inch in diameter, and about four inches long, which, with the two stones, would make eight inches. **The stones were white, like polished marble, with a few gray streaks.** I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat, because Moses said that ‘no man could see God and live,’ and we could see anything we wished by looking into them, and I could not keep the desire to see God out of my mind. And besides, we had a command to let no man look into them except by the command of God, lest he should look aught and perish.’

These plates were usually kept in a cherry box made for that purpose, in the possession of Joseph and myself. The plates were kept from the sight of the world, and no one, save Oliver Cowdrey, myself, Joseph Smith, jr., and David Whitmer, ever saw them. Before the Lord showed the plates to me, Joseph wished me to see them. But I refused, unless the Lord should do it.

At one time, before the Lord showed them to me, Joseph said I should see them. I asked him, why he would break the commands of the Lord? He said, you have done so much I am afraid you will not believe unless you see them. I replied, Joseph, I know all about it. The Lord has showed to me ten times more about it than you know.”

Here we inquired of Mr. Harris—How did the Lord show you these things? He replied, “I am forbidden to say anything how the Lord showed the to me, except that by the power of God I have seen them.” Mr. Harris continues, I hefted the plates many times, and should think they weighed forty or fifty pounds.

- 1861 David H. Cannon, “1861 Interview with Martin Harris.” Published in Beatrice Cannon Evans and Janath Russell Cannon, eds., *Cannon Family Historical Treasury*. SLC: George Cannon Family Association, 1967, p. 250.**

He [Martin Harris] testified to me in all solemnity, although not a member of the Church at that time, that the angel did appear with the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and testified that they contained a history of the incident inhabitants of this continent, and that they had been translated by the gift and power of God. There was a feeling accompanied his testimony, when he bore it, that I have never experienced either before or since in any many that I ever heard bear testimony.

- 1862 Brigham Young, July 13, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:311.**

“Should the Lord Almighty send an angel to re-write the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation.”

Note\* What this means to me is that when the words appeared in Joseph’s sight, they were partly a matter of his language and thought. He had to somehow focus in order for the phrase to appear and be “correct.”

- 1870 Emma Smith Bidamon Letter to Emma Pilgrim. Nauvoo, March 27, 1870. Emma Smith Papers, Library-Archives, Community of Christ, Independence, Mo.**

“Now, the first part my husband translated, was translated by the use of Urim and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost. After that he used a small stone, not exactly black, but was rather a dark color.

Note\* If this is true, then Emma and Martin somehow experienced Joseph translating with the Interpreters. Emma doesn’t give any specifics here on how that was done.

(Translation Process)

**1870 Reporter, 1870 Interview with Martin Harris. Published as “A Witness to the Book of Mormon,” *Des Moines Iowa State Register*, August 28, 1870.**

There was also found in the chest, the urim and thummim, by means of which the writing upon the plates was translated, but not until after the most learned men had exhausted their knowledge of letters in the vain effort to decipher the characters. It had been revealed to Joseph Smith that the writing upon the tablets contained a history of the aborigines of this country down to the time of Columbus’ discovery, and after all human means had failed to secure a translation, Smith was commissioned to undertake the task. By means of the urim and thummim “a pair of large spectacles,” as Martin Harris termed them, the translation was made, and Mr. Harris claims to have written, of the translations as they were given by Smith, “116 solid pages of cap [foolscap].” The remainder was written by others.

**1870 William E. McLellin report of Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery’s words  
William E. McLellin to “My Dear Friends,!” February 1870. Community of Christ  
Library-Archives**

Note\* On 15 February 1870, Elizabeth Ann (Whitmer) Cowdery (1815-1892), younger sister of David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery’s widow, prepared for an affidavit regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon. That same month, William E. McLellin quoted the affidavit in a letter to friends. Unfortunately, the affidavit is lost, and McLellin’s is the only known copy. In addition, the bottom half of the letter is missing beginning at the fold. Two years later [1872], McLellin mentioned Elizabeth’s affidavit again.

In this letter, McLellin introduced the affidavit with the following:

I staid in Richmond two days and nights. I had a great deal of talk with widow Cowdry [Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery], and her amiable daughter. She is married to a Dr. Johnson, but has no children. She gave me a certificate, And this is the Copy.

“Richmond, Ray Co., Mo. Feb 15, 1870—I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner of Joseph Smith’s translating the book of Mormon. He translated the most of it at my Father’s house. And I often sat by and saw and heard them translate and write for hours together. Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light, and then [read?] to his scribe the words (he said) as they appeared before him.”

Note\* Elizabeth Whitmer was the sister of David Whitmer. She was fourteen years old when the translation was completed at her parents' home in Fayette, New York. She married Oliver Cowdery in 1832. McLellin quoted the affidavit to support his claim that Joseph never had the Urim and Thummim. In his letter, he wrote:

"I am now looking for some man to rise with the Interpreters or Director—those ancient eyes by which hidden treasures can and will come to light. (Joseph in his history and all L.D.S.ism call those interpreters the Urim and Thummim), but I prefer calling it by its proper name—it near [never] was Urim nor Thummim but LDSism nicknamed almost every holy thing which it touched."

[Source: <http://theearlyanthology.tripod.com/18211827/id6.html> in Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate*, 2019, p. 289-290.]

Note\* It is one thing for witnesses to claim that they saw Joseph translating with a "director" or seerstone. It is quite another to say that Joseph NEVER had the Urim and Thummim. Joseph's mother Lucy describes this instrument wrapped in a thin cloth which instrument she felt and described in her history of when Joseph retrieved the plates from the hill.

**1872 Letter from William E. McLellin to Joseph Smith III, President of the RLDS. See Larson and Passey, Eds., *The William E. McLellin Papers 1854-1880, Signature Books, 20i07, p. 492-493.***

Note\* I would have to question some details of this letter until I verify the provenance.

On page 492 of this 2007 book we find the following:

In 1872, McLellin wrote a letter to Joseph Smith III, President of the RLDS. He challenged Joseph Smith Jr.'s role as prophet. Years earlier, McLellin had affirmed that Joseph used the Urim and Thummim, but he wrote this:

Now all L.D.Sism claims that Joseph Smith translated the Book with Urim and Thummim, when he did not even have or retain the Nephite or Jaredite Interpreters, but translated the entire Book of M. by means of a small stone. I have certificates to that effect from E. A. Cowdery (Oliver's widow,) Martin Harris, and Emma Bidamon. And I have the testimony of John and David Whitmer. The Urim was never on this Continent. Its use was to inquire and receive the word of the Lord direct. Num 27:21. I Sam 28, 30:7,8. But was never used to translate languages. The Directors or Interpreters seem to have been prepared for the special purpose of interpreting or translating languages, but not to inquire and get revelations from God . . . The Urim was used alone for the purpose of inquiring of God. The Interpreters were used alone for the purpose of interpreting languages. They were not used interchangeably. Now by this we see how all L.D. Saints have been deceived . . .

Note\* I have yet to see a document by any of the forementioned people that affirms what McLellin claims. It is one thing to claim that Joseph translated large portions of the Book of Mormon with the seerstone. That has been affirmed by multiple testimonies. It is quite another to claim that Joseph NEVER used the Interpreters that were retrieved with the plates. For if Joseph did use the Interpreters, they would have been used out of sight of any scribe. The scribes would have had to depend on the testimony of Joseph Smith that he used them. There is also the possibility that the three witnesses were shown the Interpreters by an angel and told that Joseph used them. We have the testimony of Lucy Mack Smith that she personally felt the Interpreters covered in a thin cloth when Joseph brought the plates back from the hill.

**1878 David Whitmer, as interviewed by P. Wilhelm Poulson (1878).**

**P. Wilhelm Poulson, Deseret Evening News, August 16, 1878.**

I—How did you know Joseph to be at that time? He—As a very humble and meek man, and very simple minded indeed. He did the will of the Lord, and an arduous task it was to translate the Book of Mormon.

I—Did Joseph use the Urim and Thummim when he translated? He—The Urim and Thummim were two white stones, each of them cased in as spectacles are, in a kind of silver casing, but the bow between the stones was more heavy, and longer apart between the stones, than we usually find it in spectacles. Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, Emma and my brother John each at different times wrote for Joseph as he translated.

Note\* David Whitmer did not specifically answer this last question put to him.

**1879 Joseph Smith III (about his mother, Emma Hale Smith) to James T. Cobb, February 14, 1879, Community of Christ Library-Archives.**

She wrote for Joseph Smith during the work of translation, as did also Reuben Hale, her brother, and O[liver] Cowdery; that the larger part of this labor was done in her presence, and where she could see and know what was being done; that during no part of it did Joseph Smith have any Mss. [manuscripts] or Book of any kind from which to read, or dictated, except the metallic plates, which she knew he had.

**1879 “David Whitmer, as interviewed by Thomas Wood Smith,” Thomas Wood Smith, *Fall River Herald*, March 28, 1879; Cited in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 10.**

I personally heard him state, in Jan. 1876 in his own house in Richmond, Ray Co. Mo. . . . that he saw Joseph translate, by the aid of the Urim and Thummim, time and again, and he [David] then produced a large pile of foolscap paper closely written in a very fair hand, which he declared was the manuscript written mainly by Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, as the translation was being read by the aid of the Urim and Thummim of the characters on the plates by Joseph Smith, which work of translation and transcription he frequently saw.

**1879 Joseph Smith III, "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Herald* 26 (October 1, 1879): 289-90. See also *Saints Advocate* 2 (October 1879): 50-52.**

Q. Who were scribes for father when translating the Book of Mormon?

A. Myself, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and my brother, Reuben Hale.

. . .

**Note\*** Emma fails to mention any Whitmers

Q. What of the truth of Mormonism?

A. I know Mormonism to be the truth; and believe the Church to have been established by divine direction. I have complete faith in it. In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.

Q. Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read, or dictated to you?

A. He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.

Q. Could he not have had, and you not know it?

A. If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me.

Q. Are you sure that he had the plates at the time you were writing for him?

A. The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.

Q. Where did father and Oliver Cowdery write?

A. Oliver Cowdery and your father wrote in the room where I was at work.

**Note\*** Was this time period at Harmony?

(Translation Process)

- Q. Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you, Oliver Cowdery and the others who wrote for him, after having first written it, or having first read it out of some book?
- A. Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translation of the plates and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, “a marvel and a wonder,” as much so as to anyone else.

...

- Q. Mother, what is your belief about the authenticity, or origin of the Book of Mormon?
- A. My belief is that the Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity—I have not the slightest doubt of it. I am satisfied that no man could have dictated the writing of the manuscripts unless he was inspired; for, when acting as his scribe, your father would dictate to me hour after hour; and when returning after meals, or after interruptions, he would at once begin where he had left off, without either seeing the manuscript or having any portion of it read to him. This was a usual thing for him to do. It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.

Note\* Joseph Smith III wrote that Emma reviewed the answers he had recorded for her. The answers “were affirmed by her” on the day before he left Nauvoo. Emma’s husband Lewis C. Bidamon asserted that Emma’s answers were “substantially what she had always stated” at times when they discussed the translation of the Book of Mormon.

**1879 J. L. Traughber Jr., “Testimony of David Whitmer,” *Saints’ Herald* 26 (November 15, 1879): 341.**

I, too, have seen the “manuscripts” and examined them. I, too, have heard Father [David] Whitmer say that he was present many times while Joseph was translating; but I never heard him say that the translation was made by aid of Urim and Thummim; but in every case, and his testimony is always the same, he declared that Joseph first offered prayer, then took a dark colored, opaque stone, called a “seer-stone,” and placed it in the crown of his hat, then put his face into the hat, and read the translation as it appeared before him. This was the daily method of procedure, as I have often heard Father Whitmer declare; and, as it is generally agreed to by parties who know the facts, that a considerable portion of the work of translation was performed in a room of his father’s house, where he then resided, there can be no doubt but what Father David Whitmer is a competent witness of the manner of translating. . . .

With the sanction of David Whitmer, and by his authority, I now state that he does not say that Joseph Smith ever translated in his presence by aid of Urim and Thummim; but by means of one dark colored, opaque stone, called a "Seer Stone," which was placed in the crown of a hat, into which Joseph put his face, so as to exclude the external light. Then, a spiritual light would shine forth, and parchment would appear before Joseph, upon which was a line of characters from the plates, and under it, the translation in English; at least, so Joseph said.

**1879 Interview of John Whitmer by Elder Zenos H. Gurley**

**S. F. Walker, Synopsis of a Discourse Delivered at Lamoni, Iowa, "Saints' Herald 26 (December 15, 1879): 370.**

He [John] Whitmer] had seen the plates; and it was his especial pride and joy that he had written sixty pages of the Book of Mormon. . . . When the work of translation was going on he sat at one table with his writing material and Joseph at another with the breast-plate and Urim and Thummim. The latter were attached to the breast-plate and were two crystals or glasses, into which he looked and saw the words of the book. The words remained in sight till correctly written, and mistakes of the scribe in spelling the names were corrected by the seer without diverting his gaze from the Urim and Thummim.

Note\* If this account is true, then people were allowed to see the breastplate and the Interpreters while Joseph translated. What portions of the plates did John Whitmer record for Joseph? Was it the same time as John's brother David was saying that Joseph worked with the seerstone in a hat?

**1880 David Whitmer, as interviewed by Thomas Wood Smith (1880).**

**Thomas Wood Smith, Letter to the editor, "Saints' Herald 27 (January 1, 1880): 13.**

[U]nless my interview with David Whitmer in January, 1876, was only a dream, or that I failed to understand plain English, I believed then, and since, and now, that he said that Joseph possessed, and used the Urim and Thummim in the translation of the inscriptions referred to, and I remember of being much pleased with that statement, as I had heard of the "Seer stone" being used. And unless I dreamed the interview, or very soon after failed to recollect the occasion, he described the form and size of the said Urim and Thummim. The nearest approach to a retraction of my testimony as given in the Fall River Herald and that given publicly in many places from the stand from January, 1876, till now, is, that unless I altogether misunderstood "Father Whitmer" on this point, he said the translation was done by the aid of **the** Urim and Thummim. If he says he did not intend to convey such an impression to my mind, then I say I regret that I misunderstood him, and unintentionally have misrepresented him. But that I understood him as represented by me frequently I still affirm. If Father Whitmer will say over his own signature, that he never said, or at least never intended to say, that Joseph possessed or used in translating the Book of Mormon, **the** Urim and Thummim, I will agree to not repeat my testimony as seen in the Fall River Herald on that point.

**1880 David Whitmer, as interviewed by Eri B. Mullin (1880).**

**Eri B. Mullin, Letter to the editor, *Saints' Herald* 27 (March 1, 1880): 76.**

Mr. D. Whitmer told me in the year 1874, that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim when he was translating. . . .

I for my part know he said that Joseph had the instrument Urim and Thummim. I asked him how they looked.

*He said they looked like spectacles, and he (Joseph) would put them on and look in a hat, or put his face in the hat and read.* Says I, "Did he have the plates in there." "No, the words would appear, and if he failed to spell the word right, it would stay till it was spelled right, then pass away; another come, and so on."

Note\* David Whitmer must have been relying on the words of Joseph Smith or some 2<sup>nd</sup> hand source.

**1881 David Whitmer to the editor, *Kansas City Daily Journal*, June 19, 1881.  
Cited in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 71–72.**

To the Editor of the [Kansas City] Journal. RICHMOND, Mo., June 13 [1881].—I notice several errors in the interview had with me by one of your reporters as published in the Daily Journal of June 5th, '81, and wish to correct them.

. . . In regard to my going to Harmony, my statement was that "I found everything as Cowdery had written me, and that they packed up next day and went to my father's, (did not say 'packed up the plates') and that he, Smith, (not 'we') then commenced the translation of the remainder of the plates." I did not wish to be understood as saying that those referred to as being present were all of the time in the immediate presence of the translator, but were at the place and saw how the translation was conducted. I did not say that Smith used "two small stones," as stated nor did I call the stone "interpreters." I stated that "he used one stone (not two) and called it a sun stone." The "interpreters" were as I understood taken from Smith and were not used by him after losing the first 116 pages as stated. It is my understanding that the stone referred to was furnished him when he commenced translating again after losing the 116 pages.

My statement was and now is that in translating he put the stone in his hat and putting his face in his hat so as to excluded the light and that then the light and characters appeared in the hat together with the interpretation which he uttered and was written by the scribe and which was tested at the time as stated.

**1881 David Whitmer, as interviewed by the *Chicago Times* (1881).  
*Chicago Times*, October 17, 1881;  
cited in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 74–76.**

It was not until June, 1829, that he met the future prophet who visited his fathers house, and while there completed the translation of the “Book of Mormon;” and thus he became conversant with its history, having witnessed Smith dictate to Oliver Cowdery the translation of the characters that were inscribed on the plates, said by Mr. Anthon, our Egyptian scholar, to resemble the characters of that ancient people. Christian Whitmer, his brother, occasionally assisted Cowdery in writing, as did Mrs. Joseph Smith, who was a Miss Hale before she was married. . . .

After the plates had been translated, which process required about six months, the same heavenly visitant appeared and reclaimed the gold tablets of the ancient people, informing Smith that he would replace them with other records of the lost tribes that had been brought with them during their wanderings from the Asia, which would be forthcoming when the world was ready to receive them. . . .

The tablets or plates were translated by Smith, who used a small oval kidney-shaped stone, called Urim and Thummim, that seemed endowed with the marvelous power of converting the characters on the plates, when used by Smith, into English, who would then dictate to Cowdery what to write. Frequently, one character would make two lines of manuscript, while others made but a word or two words. Mr. Whitmer emphatically asserts as did Harris and Cowdery, that while Smith was dictating the translation he had no manuscript notes or other means of knowledge save the seer stone and the characters as shown on the plates, he being present and cognizant how it was done.

- 1881 Martin Harris, 1870 Interview as recorded by Edward Stevenson. Letter to the Editor, November 30, 1881. Published in the *Deseret Evening News*, December 13, 1881.**  
[Similar to Andrew Jenson ed., “The Three Witnesses,” *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887): 216-217.]

By the aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were **read** by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, ‘Written,’ and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.”

Martin said further that the seer stone differed in appearance entirely from the Urim and Thummim that was obtained with the plates, which were **two clear stones** set in two rims, very much resembled spectacles, only they were larger. (see Harris’ 1859 statement that “The stones were white, like polished marble, with a few gray streaks.”)

- 1884 James H. Hart, “About the Book of Mormon,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 25, 1884.**

James H. Hart interviewed David Whitmer and reported the following:

(Translation Process)

In regard to the translation," said Mr. Whitmer, "it was a laborious work for the weather was very warm, and the days were long and they worked from morning till night. But they were both young and strong and were soon able to complete the work.

The way it was done was thus: Joseph would place the seer-stone in a deep hat, and placing his face close to it, would see, not the stone, but what appeared like an oblong piece of parchment, on which the hieroglyphics would appear, and also the translation in the English language, all appearing in bright luminous letters. Joseph would then read it to Oliver, who would write it down as spoken. Sometimes Joseph could not pronounce the words correctly, having had but little education; and if by any means a mistake was made in the copy, the luminous writing would remain until it was corrected. It sometimes took Oliver several trials to get the right letters to spell correctly some of the more difficult words, but when he had written them correctly, the characters and the interpretation would disappear, and be replaced by other characters and their interpretation.

When the seer -stone was not placed in the hat, no characters or writing could be seen therein, but when so placed then the hieroglyphics would appear as before described. Some represented but one word, or name, some represented several, and some from one to two lines.

Emma, Joseph's wife, came to my father's house a short time after Joseph and Oliver came, and she wrote a little of the translation, my brother Christian wrote some, but Oliver wrote the greater portion of it.

**1884 Simon Smith, "Letter to the Editor" (about an interview with Martin Harris) dated April 30, 1884. Published in the *Saints' Herald* 31 (May 24, 1884): 324.**

He [Martin Harris] also said, "I was Joseph Smith's scribe, and wrote for him a great deal; for **he [Joseph] was such a poor writer, and could not even draw up a note of hand as his education was so limited**. I also wrote for him about one third of the first part of the translation of the plates as he interpreted them by the Urim and Thummim.

**1884 From an Interview with David Whitmer, *St. Louis Republican*, July 16, 1884.**

The understanding we have about it was that when the book was discovered an angel was present and pointed the place out. In translating from the plates, Joseph Smith looked through the Urim and Thummim, consisting of two transparent pebbles set in the rim of a bow, fastened to a breastplate. He dictated by looking through them to his scribes.

**1885 Interview of David Whitmer by Elder Zenos H. Gurley, dated January 21, 1885 (Gurley Collection, LDS Church Archives)**

1 - Q Do you know that the plates seen with the Angel on the table were real metal, did you touch them?

Ans - We did not touch nor handle the plates.

3 - Q Did you see the Urim and Thummim, what was it?

Ans - I saw the "Interpreters" in the holy vision, They looked like whitish stones put in the rim of a bow, looked like spectacles only much larger.

20- Q Did Joseph use his "peep stone" to finish up the translation? If so why?

Ans – He used a stone called a "Seer stone," the "Interpreters" having been taken away from him because of transgression.

21- Q Had you seen the plates at anytime before the Angel showed them to you?

Ans - No.

25- Q Were you present during any of the time of translation, if so, state how it was done.

Ans. The "Interpreters" were taken away from Joseph after he allowed Martin Harris to carry away the 116 pages of Mx---of the Book of Mormon as a punishment, but he was allowed to go on and translate by the use of a "Seer stone" which he had, and which he placed in a hat into which he buried his face, stating to me and others that the original character appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in English, which enabled him to read it readily.

While Brother Whitmer was too feeble to write much being unable to write the answers to the foregoing 25 questions in person—Yet it was with his consent and in his presence that I wrote and corrected them, as they appear here.

**1885 "The Book of Mormon," Chicago Tribune, December 17, 1885, p. 3.**

The Tribune correspondent visited and interviewed [David] Whitmer on December 15, 1885, at Whitmer's home in Richmond, Missouri.

. . . Each time before resuming the work all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding. After prayer Smith would sit on one side of a table and the amanuenses, in turn as they became tired, on the other. Those present and not actively engaged in the work seated themselves around the room and then the work began. **After affixing the magical spectacles to his eyes, Smith would take the plates and translate the characters one at a time.** The graven characters would appear in succession to the seer, and directly under the character, when viewed through the glasses, would be the translation in English.

Note\* What does it mean to affix the magical spectacles to his eyes, and where did David Whitmer get this information?

In order to give privacy to the proceeding a banket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress. This, Mr. Whitmer says, was the **only use** made of the blanket, and it was not for the purpose of concealing the plates or the translator from the eyes of the amanuensis. In fact, Smith was at no time hidden from his collaborators and the translation was performed in the presence of not only the persons mentioned, but of the entire Whitmer household and several of Smith's relatives besides.

Note\* This circumstance with the blanket might only apply to the time the translation was done at the Whitmer house. See Martin Harris for another perspective at Harmony.

**1886 Martin Harris Interviewed by Edward Stevenson.**

**"The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *Millennial Star* 48 (June 21, 1886): 389-390.**

[Martin Harris] also stated that the Prophet translated a portion of the Book of Mormon, with the seer stone in his possession. The stone was placed in a hat that was used for that purpose, and with the aid of this seer stone the Prophet would read sentence by sentence as Martin wrote, and if he made any mistake the sentence would remain before the Prophet until corrected, when another sentence would appear. When they became weary, as it was confining work to translate from the plates of gold, they would go down to the river and throw stones into the water for exercise. Martin on one occasion picked up a stone resembling the one with which they were translating, and on resuming their work Martin placed the false stone in the hat. He said that the Prophet looked quietly for a long time, when he raise his head and said: "Martin, what on earth is the matter, all is dark as Egypt." Martin smiled and the Seer discovered that the wrong stone was placed in the hat. When he asked Martin why he had done so he replied, to stop the mouths of fools who had declared that the Prophet knew by heart all that he told him to write, and did not see by the seer stone. When the true stone was placed in the hat, the translation was resumed.

[SEE Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*. SLC: Edward Stevenson, 1893, p. 30.]

**1886 David Whitmer, as interviewed by the Omaha Herald (1886).**

**Omaha Herald, October 17, 1886; See also Chicago Inter-Ocean, October 17, 1886; and Saints' Herald 33 (November 13, 1886): 706.**

[After the loss of the 116 pages, the Lord] took from the prophet the urim and thummum and otherwise expressed his condemnation. By fervent prayer and by otherwise humbling himself, the prophet, however, again found favor, and was presented with a strange oval-shaped, chocolate-colored stone about the size of an egg, only more flat, which, it was promised, should serve the same purpose as the missing urim and thummim. . . . With this stone all of the present Book of Mormon was translated.

**1887 Martin Harris, Address to the Saints, Sunday Sept. 4, 1870.**

**Andrew Jenson ed., "The Three Witnesses," *Historical Record* 6 (May 1887): 216 -217.**

On Sunday, Sept. 4, 1870, Martin Harris addressed a congregation of Saints in Salt Lake City. Martin said that "the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone. Martin explained the translation as follows: By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, "Written," and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place; but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.

Note\* If Martin Harris never saw the Urim and Thummim until he was allowed to view it as one of the three witnesses, then how did he know or have any first-hand experience that Joseph used a urim and thummim in the first place?

[Comment: "Sentences" were apparently the literary limit of translation, but what did the word "sentence" mean to Martin Harris?]

**1887 David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, Richmond, Mo.: n.p., 1887, p. 12.**

"Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man."

(Translation Process)

**1888 David Whitmer, as recorded by the Richmond Democrat (1888). Richmond (Missouri) Democrat, January 26, 1888; cited in Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 228, 230.**

According to Cook, this account was probably borrowed from the Omaha Herald report.

Question: Where did David Whitmer get this information about the spectacles not only being put on by Joseph, but the text appearing ON the lenses? If Joseph supposedly didn't translate with a stone until AFTER losing the 116 pages, then how come we have testimony from Martin Harris that he DID use a stone? This report seems untrustworthy.

**1890 William Smith interview with J. W. Peterson and W. S. Pender, 1890**  
**“Statement of J. W. Peterson Concerning William Smith,” May 1, 1921. Miscellaneous Letters and Papers (p. 508-509), RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri. See also Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, Volume 1.**

“Explaining the expression as to the stones in the Urim and thummim being set in two rims of a bow he said [that] a silver bow ran over one stone, under the other, around over that one and under the first in the shape of a horizontal figure 8 much like a pair of spectacles. That they were much too large for Joseph and he could only see through one at a time using sometimes one and sometimes the other. By putting his head in a hat or some dark object it was not necessary to close one eye while looking through the stone with the other. In that way sometimes when his eyes grew tires [tired] he releaved them of the strain. He also said the Urim and Thummim was attached to the breastplate by a rod which was fastened at the outer shoulde[r] edge of the breastplate and to the end of the silver bow. This rod was just the right length so that when the Urim and thummim was removed from before the eyes it woul<d> reac<h> to a pocked [pocket] on the left side of the breastplate where the instrument was kept when not in use by the Seer. I was not informed whether it was detacha<bl>e from the breastplate or not. From the fact that Joseph often had it with him and sometimes when at work am of the opinion that it could be detached. He also informed us that the rod served to hold it before the eyes of the Seer.”

Note\* This is a really detailed account not only of the appearance, but of how the Interpreters were used and why Joseph started putting them in a hat. Presumably, William got this information from his brother Joseph. There is no account of William ever being shown the breastplate or Interpreters. Additionally, if the Interpreters were meant to be used as spectacles, what does this say about the size of the brother of Jared?

- 1893 Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet and the Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon*. SLC: Edward Stevenson, 1893, p. 30.**

[A Similar story is told by Stevenson in 1886. SEE the text in "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," *Millennial Star* 48 (June 21, 1886): 389-390.]

- 1897 Experience of Sarah (Sally) Conrad in 1829 at the Whitmer home. Recorded by Oliver B. Huntington in 1897.**  
**Oliver B. Huntington, "History of the Life of Oliver B. Huntington," typescript, p. 49-50, Perry Special Collections, BYU, quoted in the *Era*, April 1970, p. 21.**

I conversed with one old lady 88 years old who lived with David Whitmer when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon in the upper room of the house, and she, only a girl, saw them come down from the translating room several times when they looked so exceedingly white and strange that she inquired of Mrs. Whitmer the cause of their unusual appearance, but Mr. Whitmer was unwilling to tell the hired girl the true cause as it was a sacred holy event connected with a holy sacred work which was opposed and persecuted by nearly every one who heard of it. The girl felt so strangely at seeing so strange and unusual appearance, she finally told Mrs. Whitmer that she would not stay with her until she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men. Sister Whitmer then told her what the men were doing in the room above and that the power of God was so great in the room that they could hardly endure it; at times angels were in the room in their glory which nearly consumed them.

- 1906 B. H. Roberts, "Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era* 9 (April 1906): 706-736. [SEE the B. H. Roberts 1907 notation]**

- 1907 Samuel W. Richards Statement, May 21, 1907, holograph, 2-3, Church Archives. (interview With Oliver Cowdery in 1849)**

Oliver said that "Every word was made distinctly visible even to the very letter, and if Oliver did not in writing spell the word correctly it remained in the translator until it was written correctly. This was a Mystery to Oliver, how Joseph being compar[atively] ignorant could correct him in spelling, without seeing the word written."

- 1907 B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*. Salt Lake City: Desert News, 1907. Reprinted in 2002**  
**Part II. Book of Mormon Controversial Questions.**

**“The Manner of Translating the Book of Mormon”**

Of late years the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated is a subject that has been much discussed. Through a misconception, as I think, in relation to the part taken in the work of translation by the Urim-Thummim, it is charged by anti-Mormon writers from first to last, that the verbal errors and errors in grammar which occur in the translation must be assigned to the Lord, a thing unthinkable. The popular understanding among the Latter-day Saints of the manner in which the translation was wrought out by means of Urim-Thummim has been such as to attribute the errors of the translation to equivalent errors in the Nephite original, which, it is held, were brought over literally and arbitrarily into the English translation, a thing most absurd. In view of these conditions the question arises, can such an explanation of the manner of translating the book be given as not to attribute either directly or indirectly these verbal and grammatical errors to the Lord, or to their existence in the original record from which the translation was made; and at the same time preserve as true and not inconsistent with reason, the statements that have been made, respecting the manner of the translation, by Martin Harris and David Whitmer, two of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon? The writer is of the opinion that this may be done . . .

Relative to the manner of translating the Book of Mormon the prophet himself has said but little. “Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God” is the most extended published statement made by him upon the subject. Of the Urim and Thummim he says: “With the record was found a curious instrument which the ancients called ‘Urim and Thummim,’ which consisted of two transparent stones set in a rim of bow fastened to a breastplate.”

[Statements by Martin Harris and David Whitmer are then reviewed and quoted, along with the diversity of the literary talents of prophets—“the style of some is purer, more sententious, more ornate, or more sublime than others.”]

Because a writer or speaker is under the inspiration of God it does not follow that in giving expression to what the Lord puts into his heart he will always do so in grammatical terms, any more than the orthography of an inspired writer will always be accurate. We have many illustrations of this fact among the inspired men that we have known in the Church of Jesus Christ in these last days. . . . The writer of the Acts, at the conclusion of a synopsis of a discourse which he ascribes to Peter, says, “Now, when they [the Jews] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled.” . . .

There can be no reasonable doubt that had Joseph Smith been a finished English scholar and the facts and ideas represented by the Nephite characters upon the plates had been given him by inspiration of God through the Urim and

Thummim, those ideas would have been expressed in correct English; but as he was not a finished English scholar, he had to give expression to those facts and ideas in such language as he could command, and that was faulty English, which the prophet himself and those who have succeeded him as custodians of the word of God have had, and now have a perfect right to correct.

**“Accounting for Evident Transcriptions of Bible Passages in the Translation of the Nephite Record”**

It is objected to the Book of Mormon that there are found in it whole chapters, besides many minor quotations from King James’s English translation of the Bible. Since these chapters and passages in some cases follow the “authorized English version” verbatim, and closely resemble it in others; and as it is well known that in translating from one language into another an almost infinite variety of expression is possible, the question arises, how is it that Joseph Smith, in translating from the Nephite plates by divine assistance, follows so closely an independent translation made in the ordinary way by dint of scholarship and patient labor, and by diligent comparison of former translations?

This objection was most carefully and intelligently stated recently (October 22, 1903) by Mr. H. Chamberlain, of Spencer Iowa, U.S.A., in a letter of inquiry on the subject to President Joseph F. Smith, of Salt Lake City. . . . This communication was referred to the writer by President Smith for an answer, from which [answer] I quote:

. . . When the Savior came to the western world and appeared to the Nephites, he had the same message to present to them that he had presented in Palestine; the same ordinances of the gospel to establish, a similar church organization to found, and the same ethical principles to teach. The manner of the Savior’s teaching would doubtless lead him to present these great truths in the same forms of expression he had used in teaching the Jews . . . With this remembered, I think we find a solution of the difficulty you present in the following way:

When Joseph Smith saw that the Nephite record was quoting the prophecies of Isaiah, of Malachi, or the words of the Savior, he took the English Bible and compared these passages as far as they paralleled each other, and finding that in substance, in thought, they were alike, he adopted our English translation; and hence, we have the sameness to which you refer.

It should be understood also, in this connection, that while Joseph Smith obtained the facts and ideas from the Nephite characters through the inspiration of God, he was left to express those facts and ideas, in the main, in such language as he could command; and when he found that parts of the Nephite record closely paralleled passages in the Bible, and being conscious that the language of our English Bible was superior to his own, he adopted it, except for those differences indicated in the Nephite original which here and there make the Book of Mormon passages superior in sense and clearness. Of course, I recognize the fact that this is but a conjecture; but I believe it to

be a reasonable one; and indeed the only one which satisfactorily disposes of the difficulty you point out . . .

**“Answering the Questions respecting the ‘Manual Theory’ of Translating,”**

A number of questions from their correspondents have been submitted to the writer, by the Editors of the *Era* respecting the manner of translating the Book of Mormon, as set forth in the Senior Manual for 1905-6. In one communication, a president of an association, an aid in a M.I.A. Stake Board, and a bishop’s counselor, join in saying:

“We are not able to harmonize the theory of translation presented in our Manual with the testimony of the Three witnesses, especially Harris and Whitmer. We are not able either to harmonize the theory of the Manual with the following passages of scripture regarding the interpreters: Ether 3:22-25; Mosiah 8:13-18; Mosiah 28:11-15; D&C 130:8-10.

To answer the matter in the above quotation, it is necessary to ask: What is the Manual theory of translating the Nephite record? It is a theory based upon the only statement made by the Prophet Joseph Smith on the subject, viz., “Through the medium of Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God;” and the Lord’s own description of the manner of translating in general by means of Urim and Thummim, contained in his revelation to Oliver Cowdery in the D&C, sections 8 and 9. That is the only theory the Manual has upon the subject. . . .

We could wish that all other persons, necessarily less informed upon the subject than the prophet himself, had been content to leave the matter where he left it. In this, however, they did not follow his wise example; but must needs undertake to describe the manner of the translation; and, from such description has arisen the idea that the Urim and Thummim did all, in the work of the translation, the prophet, nothing; except to read to his amanuensis what he saw reflected in the seerstone or Urim and Thummim, which the instruments, and not the prophet, had translated. The men responsible for those statements, on which said theory rests, are David Whitmer and Martin Harris. The former [David Whitmer] says:

“A piece of Something resembling parchment did appear, (i.e., in Urim and Thummim), and on that appeared the writing, one character at a time would appear, and under it was the translation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Brother Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and then it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct; then it would disappear and another character with the translation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.”

We have no statement at first hand from Martin Harris at all, only the statement of

another, Edward Stevenson, as to what he heard Martin say was the manner of translation. [Stevenson's report is then quoted]

These statements have led to the assumption of the theory, I repeat, that the Urim and Thummim did the translating, not Joseph the Seer. Accordingly, it is held that the translation was a mechanical, arbitrary, transliteration; a word for word bringing over from the Nephite language into the English language, a literal interpretation of the record. The prophet, therefore, it is urged, was in no way responsible for the language of the translation, it was not his, but the divine instrument's, and if there are errors of grammar, or faults of diction, (modern words for which in the nature of things there could be no exact equivalents in an ancient language), New England localisms, modern phrases from the English translation of Hebrew scripture, and other sources—all these must have been in the original Nephite record, say the advocates of this theory, and are arbitrarily brought over into the English language.

This theory of translation led opponents of the Book of Mormon and some who were not opponents of it, but sincere investigators of its claims—to suggest certain difficulties involved in such a theory of translation.

First. The impossibility of such a thing as a word-for-word bringing over from one language into another . . .

Second. The fact that the language of the English translation of the Nephites record is in the English idiom and diction of the period and locality when and where the translation took place, and is evidently but little influenced by any attempt to follow the idiom of an ancient language.

Third. The fact that such errors in grammar and diction as occur in the translation are just such errors as might reasonably be looked for in the work of one unlearned in the English language.

. . .

In the presence of these considerations, it is but natural to ask, "Is there no way by which such a conclusion may be avoided?" Most assuredly. Set aside the theory based upon the statements made by David Whitmer and Martin Harris, (*mark you I say the theory based on these statements, not necessarily the statements themselves*) and accept the more reasonable theory based upon what the Lord has said upon the subject in section 8 and 9 of the D&C. . . .

It is proper to say, as the Manual suggests, that there is no necessary conflict between the statements of these two witnesses and the Manual theory of translation. They say the Nephite characters, to be translated, appeared in Urim and Thummim. We say that may be true, or the Prophet may have looked through the interpreters—since they were transparent stones—and thus have seen the characters. They say the interpretation appeared in English, under the Nephite characters in Urim and Thummim. We say, if so, then that interpretation after being wrought out in the Prophet's mind was reflected into Urim and Thummim and held visible there until written. The English interpretation

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was a reflex from the Prophet's mind. (And may it not be that the peculiar quality of the Urim and Thummim was to reflect **thought**, especially God-given or inspired thought, as other substances reflect objects?) All this is possible, and is not in conflict with what either the Prophet or Oliver Cowdery said upon the subject; nor in conflict with the Lord's description of translation. But to insist that the translation of the Book of Mormon was an arbitrary piece of mechanical work, wrought out by transparent stones rather than in the inspired mind of the Prophet, is in conflict with the Lord's description of translation, and all the reasonable conclusions that may be drawn from the known facts in the cases.

...

**"Correspondence on the Subject of the Manual Theory,"**

- 1909 David Whitmer, as interviewed by Nathan A. Tanner Jr. (1909). Nathan A. Tanner Jr. to Nathan A. Tanner, February 17, 1909, photocopy of typescript, 5, Church Archives. The interview occurred in May 1886.**

He [David Whitmer] said that Joseph was separated from the scribe by a blanket, as I remember; that he had the Urim and Thummim, and a chocolate colored stone, which he used alternately, as suited his convenience, and he said he believed Joseph could as well accomplish the translation by looking into a hat, or any other stone, as by the use of the Urim and Thummim or the chocolate colored stone . . .

He said that Joseph would—as I remember—place the manuscript beneath the stone or Urim and Thummim, and the characters would appear in English, which he would spell out, and they would remain there until the word was fully written and corrected, when it would disappear and another word appear, etc.

- 1909 B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret News. Vol. 2 (1909): 95, 122-123.**

From Volume 2:145-146:

The view of the manner of translating the Book of Mormon here set forth furnishes the basis of justification for those verbal changes and grammatical corrections which have been made since the first edition issued from the press; and would furnish justification for making many more verbal and grammatical corrections in the book; for if, as here set forth, the meaning of the Nephite characters was given to Joseph Smith in such faulty English as he, an uneducated man, could command, while every detail and shade of thought should be strictly preserved, there can be no reasonable ground for objection

to the correction of mere verbal errors and grammatical construction. There can be no reasonable doubt that had Joseph Smith been a finished English scholar and the facts and ideas represented by the Nephite characters upon the plates had been given him by the inspiration of God through the Urim and Thummim, those ideas would have been expressed in correct English; but as he was not a finished English scholar, he had to give expression to those facts and ideas in such language as he could command, and that was faulty English, which the Prophet himself and those who have succeeded him as custodians of the work of God have had, and now have, a perfect right to correct.

[SEE B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* for a more complete perspective]

- 1924 William P. Smith. "Interview by J. W. Peterson and W. S. Pender. *The Rod of Iron* 1, no. 3 (February 1924): 7.**

If the process of translation was simply a matter of reading from a seer stone in a hat, surely Oliver Cowdery could do that as well, if not better than Joseph Smith. After all, Oliver was a schoolteacher. How then do we account for Oliver's inability to translate? Further, regarding the use of a hat in translation, Joseph's brother William Smith explained that the Prophet used the Urim and Thummim attached to the breastplate by a rod that held the seer stones set in the rims of a bow before his eyes. "The instrument caused a strain on Joseph's eyes, and he sometimes resorted to covering his eyes with a hat to excluded the light in part."

- 1924 John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith: Seeker after Truth, Prophet of God*, 1924. Reprinted in 1951 (see citation)**

- 1930 E. Cecil McGavin, *An Apology for the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930, p. 16.**

It is evident that the Prophet Joseph Smith did not see English sentences appear upon the Urim and Thummim, neither did he hear a voice dictating the meaning of the original characters. He simply was inspired as to the meaning of the Nephite writings, but was left to himself to express those ideas in his own words. The language of the Book of Mormon is the language of Joseph Smith, not the language of Deity or of the angelic messengers.

- 1934 William Pilkington, "Martin Harris Interview," Affidavit, April 3, 1934, Church Archives.**

I [Martin Harris] offered my services as a scribe for the Prophet in the work of Translating. Joseph gladly accepted my Offer, it was the 12<sup>th</sup> day of April 1828, when I commenced to write for the Prophet. From this time on until the 14<sup>th</sup> day of June 1828 Joseph dictated to me from the Plates of Gold as the characters thereon assumed

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through the Urim and Thummim the forms of Equivelent modern words, which were familiar to the understanding of the Prophet and Seer. From the 12<sup>th</sup> day of April until the 14<sup>th</sup> day of June he [Martin] said he had written One Hundred and Sixteen pages Foolschap of the translation. He [Martin] said at this period of the Translation a circumstance happened that he was the cause of the One Hundred and Sixteen pages that he had written being lost, and never was found. . . .

**1939 Sidney B. Sperry, "The 'Isaiah Problem' in the Book of Mormon." *Improvement Era* 42 (September 1939): 524-525, 564-569.**

[The] Book of Isaiah [is] not generally accepted by the critics as being the genuine work of the great eighth century prophet. . . . The Book of Mormon not only quotes extensively from those chapters (40-55) called "Deutero-Isaiah," but also from portions of "First" Isaiah which are regarded by the critics as late and not the genuine product of the son of Amoz. The Nephite record accepts all of its Isaiah chapters as the authentic words of that great prophet. If the critics are right the Book of Mormon quotes extensive portions of the sayings of unknown prophets who lived sixty years or more after the Nephites were supposed to have left Jerusalem, and mistakenly attributes them to Isaiah. This is an intellectual jam students of the Bok of Mormon are supposed to find themselves in and constitutes the main problem of Isaiah in that record. A lesser problem, but one that should be thoughtfully considered, is that of explaining why most of the text of Isaiah in the Nephite scripture is in the language of the Authorized version.

Note\* While Sperry cited many details to establish the possibility of a "unified" Isaiah and thus defend the Book of Mormon, he fails to address "the lesser problem"—the language of the KJV Bible in the Book of Mormon.

**1941 Francis W. Kirkham, "The Writing of the Book of Mormon: Concerning the Time, the Place, the Scribes, and the Printing," *Improvement Era* 44 (June 1941): 341-343, 370-375.**

**1951 John A. Widtsoe, "Joseph Smith: Seeker after Truth, Prophet of God, 42**

It was not a word-for-word translation. As nearly as can be understood, the ideas set forth by the characters were revealed to the Prophet. He then expressed the ideas in English as best he could; that is, the language of the English Book of Mormon is to a large degree the language of the Prophet as used in his every day conversation on religious subjects, but brightened, illuminated, and dignified by the inspiration under which he worked. It must be said, however, that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon appears to be far beyond that of an unlettered youth.

**1959 Brigham H. Roberts, "Bible Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in D.L. Green & M.C. Josephson compilers, *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Selections from the Pages of the Improvement Era*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959, p. 173-189.**

**1964 Sidney B. Sperry, "An Answer to Budvarson's Criticisms of the Book of Mormon," in *Problems of the Book of Mormon*. SLC: Bookcraft, 1964, p. 181-192.**

Now we will grant that certain textual changes have been made in the Nephite record and that numerous changes in grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization appear in the later editions, but when Mr. Budvarson says that "all changes regardless of how minor, are disallowed and unauthorized if the 1830 Original Edition of the Book of Mormon is what leaders of Mormonism claim in to be!" he flies in the face of reason, common sense, and history. No responsible authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has ever claimed that God or an angel dictated the physical format of

the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, or directed what the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization of the text should be. Nor has any responsible authority of the Church past or present, said in specific terms that the translation in the Book of Mormon was dictated word for word to Joseph Smith by divine means. . . .

[David Whitmer's statement in *An Address to All Believers in Christ* is quoted]

Now, be it known that when David Whitmer issued his statement, he was not even a member of the Church, let alone being a responsible officer thereof. Moreover, the statement was issued in 1887, about fifty-seven years after the appearance of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. David Whitmer's account of the method of translation makes it appear to have been nothing but a mechanical process in which Joseph Smith had little to do except to read off the God-given translation which would

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automatically appear under each character. Whitmer's explanation would seem to make God responsible for the faulty English grammar which appears in the 1830- edition of the Nephite record! But the Mormon people do not accept as true Whitmer's views of a mechanical translation of the Book of Mormon. In the first place, it should be noted that Joseph Smith gives us precious little first-hand information about the manner in which the Urim and Thummim were used. He even refused to tell his beloved brother Hyrum the details. Indeed, he says that "it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon." And if Hyrum was not permitted to know "all the particulars," why should we believe that David Whitmer or anyone else was in possession of them? There are some matters that are kept sacred between a prophet and his God and the details of the use of the Urim and Thummim are among those things known only to the seer in whose custody they are . . .

[D&C 9:79-10 is then quoted]

Briefly explained, Oliver Cowdery could have translated if he had not expected the Lord to give him the translation word for word. He was expected to exert his own faculties and attempt to express a translation in words that would convey the essential meaning of the original. And isn't it common sense to believe that Joseph Smith translated essentially under the same conditions set forth for Oliver Cowdery in the revelation from which we have quoted? True, the Lord would aid the prophet by means of the Urim and Thummim to get the ideas expressed by the characters on the Gold Plates, but He left it to His servant to express those ideas in the best language at his command. The Lord seldom does for man what man can do for himself. Consequent the Almighty is not to be held responsible for faulty grammar and diction in the First Edition of the Book of Mormon. As long as the prophet Joseph Smith was able to convey to men in understandable English the ideas expressed in the sacred Nephite record the Lord was satisfied. . . .

So we see thus far that David Whitmer is not a safe guide to follow as far as his mechanical views of translation are concerned. . . . let us dispose of the notion that the Lord, the Angel Moroni, or other divine beings are responsible for the punctuation, spelling, capitalization and other details of the dress in which the Book of Mormon appeared in 1830. . . .

Mr. Budvarson is taking that part of President [W. Aird] MacDonald's words very literally where he says, "The angel made fifteen trips . . . to see that this book [The Book of Mormon] was properly translated and printed," assuming that President MacDonald meant that the angel Moroni personally supervised the translating and printing of the Nephite record, doing such a job that the First Edition (1830) could be called God's production in every respect. Hence there could be no need to change any succeeding editions. . . .

- 1973 M. Deloy Pack, "Possible Lexical Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon (Words of Mormon-Moroni)," 29.**

The conceptual theory of translation is more appealing to a twentieth century mentality and the fact that Joseph Smith could translate without the plates being present might be used to support the idea that there was no correlation between the characters in the original and the words of the translation but only a correspondence of ideas or concepts on a much broader level. In such a case one would not expect to find any Hebraic influence in the translation. Taken to its extreme, this position would do away with the need for any writing or plates. The Prophet could simply have been inspired to think in English thoughts corresponding to those which had occurred anciently to the Nephite historians without the need to see their writings at all.

- 1975 Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation: 'Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, a History and Commentary. Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1975, p. 25.**

In this respect the testimony of Lorenzo Brown about the preparation the Prophet made for his translation of the bible may be instructive. He records the Prophet as saying:

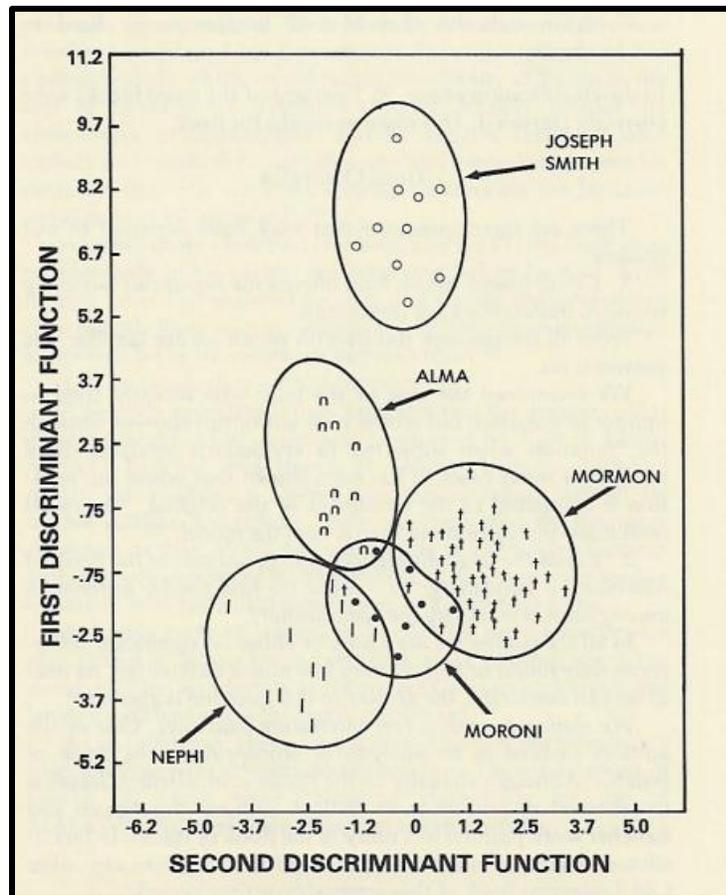
"After I got through translating the Book of Mormon, I took up the Bible to read with the Urim and Thummim. I read the first chapter of Genesis and I saw the things as they were done. I turned over the next and the next, and the whole passed before me like a grand panorama; and so on chapter after chapter until I read the whole of it. I saw it all!"

- 1977 Richard Lloyd Anderson, "By the Gift and Power of God," *Ensign* 7, no. 9 (September 1977): 79-85**

- 1982 Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 2 (1982): 48-68.**

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1982 Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, edited by Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982, p. 157-188.



After describing their methods of stylometric analysis with accompanying illustrations (see above), Larsen and Rencher write:

There are three questions that may have occurred to our readers.

*[Question #1] Could Joseph Smith have altered his wordprint habits by trying to imitate the King James style?*

*[Answer]* From all the research results with which we are familiar, the answer is no. . . .

*[Question #2] Could the large differences among authors in the Book of Mormon be misleading; i.e., could we find similar differences among several works by the same author?*

*[Answer]* In all the studies we are aware of either no significant differences were found or at most very few minor differences. As near as we can determine, the answer to this question is also no. . . .

[Question #3] Can workprints survive translation?

[Answer] A recently completed study indicates that the answer to this question is yes.

...

Subject to the usual statistical assumptions and allowance for error, we make the following conclusions:

[1] The wordprint hypothesis appears to be justified. Based on our analysis of known non-Book of Mormon authors, each writer appears to have a unique set of unconscious style characteristics. This profile of usage habits can serve in many cases to identify a piece of writing as belonging to a particular author, just as a fingerprint or voiceprint can be traced to its owner or originator.

[2] The results of MANOVA, discriminant analysis, and cluster analysis all strongly support multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon. . . .

**Note:** Does this chart favor “tight control” over “loose control” in the translation process?

**1982 Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Credibility of the Book of Mormon Translators,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, edited by Noel B. Reynolds, Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982, p. 213-237.**

After reviewing and documenting the lives and statements of people who participated in the translation process of the Book of Mormon, **Richard Lloyd Anderson** writes the following on page 231:

Religious history is blind without unflinching use of history, but empty if history cannot include religious experience. Knowing God is closely related to knowing love, ethical values, and other inner realities. Did Oliver and Joseph translate by revelation and receive testimony and authority from angels? One must judge their credibility and discern the product of their work. Their activities are verified and their lifetime testimonies unwavering. The translators’ minds harmonize with their prophetic call. Moreover, their claims are phrased with the confident simplicity of men who expect to be believed. What they said is important, but so also is how they said it; lack of overstatement in their first testimonies underlines depth of conviction. Were they sincere but deceived? The counterquestion is whether God and prayer are realities. If so, Joseph and Oliver cannot be faulted in prayerfulness and Christian discipleship. Their words are impressive by every test at the beginning and by the supreme test of enduring to the end, for ridicule and persecution brought no change.

**1984 Stephen D. Ricks, “Joseph Smith’s Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon” FARMS Paper, Provo, Utah, 1984. (5 pages with 3 pages of notes)**

When Joseph Smith wrote the now-famous [1842] letter to John Wentworth outlining the rise and progress of the Church, he described the translation of the Book of Mormon

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as proceeding “through the medium of the Urim and Thummim . . . by the gift and power of God.

...

J.W. Peterson and W. S. Pender interviewed Joseph’s brother William in 1891 and reported:

Among other things we inquired minutely about the Urim and Thummim and the breastplate. We asked him what was meant by the expression “two rims of a bow,” which held the former. He said a double silver bow was twisted into the shape of the figure eight, and the two stones were placed literally between the two rims of a bow. At one end was attached a rod which was connected with the outer edge of the right shoulder of the breastplate. By pressing the head a little forward, the rod held the Urim and Thummim before the eyes much like a pair of spectacles. A pocket was prepared in the breastplate on the left side, immediately over the heart. When not in use the Urim and Thummim was placed in this pocket, the rod being of just the right length to allow it to be so deposited. This instrument could, however, be detached from the breastplate and his brother said Joseph often wore it detached when away from home, but always used it in connection with the breastplate when receiving official communications, and usually so when translating as it permitted him to have both hands free to hold the plates. (J. W. Peterson in *The Rod of Iron* 1:3 (February 1924), 6-7.)

...

A question which naturally suggests itself is why supernatural instruments were used in the translation process at all.

Orson Pratt, who had himself pondered this very matter, reported that the Prophet told him that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim “when he was inexperienced in the spirit of inspiration. But now he had advanced so far that he understood the operation of that spirit and did not need the assistance of that instrument.” (“Two Days’ Meeting at Brigham City June 27 and 28, 1874,” *Millennial Star* 36:323 (August 11, 1874): 499.)

Zebedee Coltrin, an early acquaintance of Joseph Smith, related in 180 that he had once asked Joseph what he had done with the Urim and Thummim and that “Joseph said that he had no further need of it and he had given it to the angel Moroni. He had the Melchizedek Priesthood and with that Priesthood he had the key to all knowledge and intelligence.” (“High Priests Record,” Spanish Fork, Utah, September 1880, p. 128, LDS Archives.)

[Note\* After citing David Whitmer’s explanation of the translation process in his 1887 *Address to All Believers in Christ*, and Martin Harris’s 1870 explanation recorded by Edward Stevenson in 1881, Stephen Ricks writes that] “several things argue against their explanation of the translation process:”

1) Neither David Whitmer or Martin Harris had knowledge of the method of translation of the Book of Mormon from personal experience while Joseph himself seems to have given only the most general outline of the process. Thus, their notions concerning the translation probably derive as much from the inerrantist preconceptions concerning Holy Writ which were common at the time and in which they doubtless shared as from a primary experience which they may have had with the translation.

2) In D&C 9:7-8 Oliver Cowdery was told . . . Had Oliver presumed an effortless automatic translation? These verses suggest that effort was required on the part of the translator to search for and find the appropriate expression, something which would not have been the case if the Book of Mormon had been translated by plenary dictation.

3) The numerous changes made in 1837 by Joseph Smith in the second edition of the Book of Mormon (mostly of a grammatical nature) also argue strongly against the idea that he rendered it into English by automatic translation. If he had, then he would certainly have considered the text inviolate and refrained from making any changes.

4) A contemporary account provides an additional indication that the process of translation was not mere plenary dictation. The Reverend Diedrich Willers, a minister of German Reformed Church congregations in Bearytown and Fayette, New York at the time of the Church's restoration and a celebrated opponent of the Church, wrote in 1830 to two colleagues in York Pennsylvania concerning the rise of the Church. In the letter he included the following concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: "The Angel indicated that . . . under these plates were hidden spectacles, without which he could not translate these plates, that by using these spectacles, he (Smith) would be in a position to read these ancient languages, which he had never studied and that the Holy Ghost would reveal to him the translation in the English language." (D. Michael Quinn, "The First Months of Mormonism: A Contemporary View by Reverend Diedrich Willers," *New York History* 54 (1973): 326.)

On this, D. Michael Quinn comments: "Thus, the English translation with all its awkwardness and grammatical chaos, was according to contemporary reports, a product of spiritual impressions to Joseph Smith rather than an automatic appearance of the English words. This would make Joseph Smith, despite his grammatical limitations, a translator in fact rather than a mere transcriber of the handwriting of god." (Ibid., 321)

Ricks then concludes:

A more reasonable scenario, in my estimation, would be one in which the means at Joseph's disposal (the seerstone and the interpreters) enhanced his capacity to understand the basic meanings of the words and phrases of the book as well as to grasp the relation of these words to each other. However, the actual translation was Joseph's alone and the opportunity to improve it in grammar and word choice still remained open. . . . While it would be incorrect to minimize the divine element in the process of

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translation of the Book of Mormon, it would also be misleading and potentially hazardous to deny the human factor.

- 1986 John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information," FARMS Paper. Provo, Utah, 1986.**  
[Comment: Lists all the early documentation by witnesses to the translation.  
SEE "The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon," by John W. Welch in *Opening the Heavens*, 2005, p. 77-214.]
- 1986 Kenneth H. Godfrey, REVIEW: *Trouble Enough: Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon* by Ernest H. Taves, 1984 and *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* by David Persuite, 1985. In *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Fall 1986): 139-144.**
- 1987 Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 66-123.**  
Ostler suggests that Joseph "provided unrestricted and authoritative commentary interpretation, explanation, and clarifications based on insights from the ancient Book of Mormon text and the King James Bible." [p. 66.]  
See Stephen Robinson's 1989 Review
- 1988 Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 2, Jacob through Mosiah. SLC: Bookcraft, 1988, p. 120.**
- 1988 John W. Welch, "How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?" *Ensign* 18 (January 1988):46-47.**

The translation was a staggering achievement. It was completed within eighty-five days, from 7 April to 30 June. Of course, not all of that time was spent working on the translation. The Prophet and his scribes also took time to eat, to sleep, to seek employment (once, for money when supplies ran out), to receive the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, to make at least one (and possibly two) trips to Colesville, thirty miles away, to convert and baptize Hyrum and Samuel Smith (who came to Harmony at that time); to receive and record thirteen revelations that are now sections of the Doctrine and Covenants; to move from Harmony to Fayette; to acquire the Book of Mormon copyright; to preach a few days and baptize several near Fayette; to experience manifestations with the Three and Eight Witnesses; and to begin making arrangements for the Book of Mormon's publication.

Conservatively estimated, this leaves sixty-five or fewer working days on which the Prophet and his scribes could have translated. That works out to be an average of eight pages per day. At such a pace, only about a week could have been taken to translate all of 1 Nephi; a day and a half for King Benjamin's speech. Considering the complexity,

consistency, clarity, artistry, accuracy, density, and profundity of the Book of Mormon, the Prophet Joseph's translation is a phenomenal feat.

**1989 Stephen E. Robinson, "The 'Expanded' Book of Mormon?" in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 391–414**

In reviewing Blake Ostler's 1987 article that suggested that in Joseph's translation process, he provided additional interpretation, explanation and clarification of the original text, Robinson writes:

. . . it is not that I disagree so much with the logic of the article as with certain assumptions it adopts without discussion and without warning before the logical processes even begin. I think that these hidden assumptions ought to be brought to light before the article as a whole can be properly understood and evaluated.

One hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that there is no predictive prophecy, or at least that predictive prophecy cannot be invoked to explain the presence of "Christian" elements in the portions of the Book of Mormon that happened before Christ was born. According to the theory, prophecy is interpretive rather than predictive; therefore, prophets do not predict for future times; they merely interpret for their own time and in their own terms. It follows then, according to the theory, that the detailed predictions about Christ or his message in the Book of Mormon must be "expansions" added after the time of Christ, and this logic allows the expansionist to identify what came from Joseph and not from the plates. Such revisionism argues that Joseph must be the source of this or that passage because the Book of Mormon prophets who lived before Christ could not have known such things (see Ostler 80–82, 86–87, 101). It is stated this way, "The Christian motifs in the Book of Mormon require either that a Christian has been at work during some stage of the compilation or that it is Christian in origin" (Ostler 87). According to the theory this means that pre-Christian references to and about teachings of Christ must be post-Christian expansions and that these "expansions must [have] come from Joseph Smith" (Ostler 87).

. . .

A second implied assumption of the expansion theory, not totally unrelated to the first, is that our judgement of Nephite civilization and culture must be controlled and limited by our knowledge of pre-exilic Judah and Israel, and conversely that the Book of Mormon alone does not constitute reliable evidence for what Nephites believed anciently. . . . Thus, the Book of Mormon doctrine of the Fall is labelled an expansion because "The fall of Adam was never linked with the human condition in pre-exilic works, as it is in the Book of Mormon" (Ostler 82).

. . .

A third hidden assumption of the expansion theory is that many historical claims of the Book of Mormon are not historical at all.

Some may see the expansion theory as compromising the historicity of the Book of Mormon. To a certain extent it does. The book cannot properly be used to prove the presence of this or that doctrine in ancient thought because the revelation inherently involved modern interpretation. . . . Such a model does not necessarily abrogate either the book's religious significance or its value as salvation history. (Ostler 114; emphasis added)

Note\* In other words, this version of the expansion theory is willing to give up the Book of Mormon as "real" history but leaves it intact as "salvation history."

1990 Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon." *BYU Studies*, Vol. 30 Issue 1 (1990): 41-69.

On pages 50-56 we find the following: [A MUST READ!]

#### TIGHT OR LOOSE CONTROL OVER THE TRANSLATION

This supposed problem of grammatical "errors" leads directly to the question of whether the Book of Mormon text represents the Lord's actual language to Joseph Smith or simply Joseph Smith's own translation using his own language. In other words, does the Book of Mormon represent a direct and exact revelation from the Lord, or did the ideas come into Joseph's mind and then he put them into his own words? If the revelation was specific and exact, then there would definitely be some value in having a text that would directly represent the original language. Of course, from a linguistic point of view, a reader might adopt the second position—that the specific language of the Book of Mormon is not directly from the Lord—but still wish to have the text in Joseph Smith's own impure and ungrammatical language.

It might be worthwhile to consider in more detail the question of loose versus tight control over the translation. There is evidence both for and against the idea of tight control.

#### EVIDENCE FOR TIGHT CONTROL

*Statements on how the translation proceeded.* Unfortunately, neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery have told us much on how the translation took place. But four firsthand statements by observers and participants show remarkable agreement.

Joseph Knight between 1833 and 1847: Now the way he translated was . . .

Emma Smith 1879: In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day. .

David Whitmer (1887: Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into . . .

Elizabeth Anne Whitmer Cowdery Johnson (David Whitmer's sister, Oliver

Cowdery's wife, 1870): I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner . . .

All four accounts mention an instrument of translation in a hat. All refer to Joseph Smith's ability to dictate extensively without using the gold plates or any other physical text. On the other hand, we cannot automatically accept everything in these statements. The testimonies of these witnesses are only valid with respect to what they actually witnessed. They obviously saw Joseph Smith translating, but they could not actually know what Joseph himself saw in the hat since they themselves did not translate.

*Spelling of names.* David Whitmer and Joseph Knight both refer to control over the spelling, but this seems to be only true for the spelling of names in the Book of Mormon. In an 1875 interview Whitmer said that Joseph Smith's spelling out words was restricted to names, that Joseph was utterly unable to pronounce many of the names which the magic power of the Urim and Thummim revealed and therefore spelled them out in syllables, and the more erudite scribe put them together. Actually, Joseph Smith probably spelled out names letter by letter rather than syllable by syllable (although it is quite possible that David Whitmer used the term syllable to mean "letter," the smallest unit of writing).

This spelling out of names is also supported by Emma Smith in an 1856 interview: . . . This spelling out of names would explain, for example, why Nephi is spelled with a *ph* and not an *f*, . . .

Nonetheless, it also appears that Joseph Smith did not continue to spell frequently occurring names, with the result that spelling variation of hard to spell names (like *Amalickiah*) does occur in the manuscripts, but for most names in the Book of Mormon there is little or no variation. It is obvious from the manuscripts that spelling variation of common words was allowed. But there does seem to be spelling control over at least the first occurrence of Book of Mormon names.

Semitic textual evidence. In a number of his books Hugh Nibley has provided many examples of Semitic and other Near Eastern names and phrases in the Book of Mormon. The phrases give evidence for control at the word level . . . We also have the work of John W. Welch on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. His examples demonstrate a tight control on the order of specific words and phrases

**In addition, there are some very interesting textual relationships between Book of Mormon passages and corresponding biblical passages . . .**

#### EVIDENCE FOR LOOSE CONTROL

The most common argument against tight control is that Joseph Smith's grammar is bad.

B. H. Roberts (1906): . . .

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Richard L. Anderson (1977): But many anti-Mormons have seized on the implications of going further; that is, if Joseph Smith only dictated divinely given English from his viewing instrument, then God is the author of some bad grammar in the original. (“By the Gift and Power of God,” *Ensign* 7 (September 1977):81)

These arguments assume that the Lord speaks only proper English, not Joseph Smith’s own language. But which variety of proper English does God speak? The King’s English, Received Pronunciation, Network English, the English of some contemporary grammar guru, or according to the usage of Orson Pratt, James E. Talmage, or Bruce R. McConkie? There is no evidence that God himself prefers one variety of English over another, or for that matter one language over another. In fact, there is evidence that the Lord would have spoken to Joseph Smith in Joseph’s own language:

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. (D&C 1:24)

This same view was expressed by George A. Smith, first counselor to Brigham Young:

The Book of Mormon was denounced as ungrammatical. An argument was raised that if it had been translated by the gift and power of God it would have been strictly grammatical. . . . When the Lord reveals anything to men he reveals it in language that accords with their own. If any of you were to converse with an angel, and you used strictly grammatical language he would do the same. But if you used two negatives in a sentence the heavenly messenger would use language to correspond with your understanding, and this very objection to the Book of Mormon is an evidence in its favor. (*Journal of Discourses* 12:335 (15 November 1863))

A number of writers have referred to D&C 9:8 in support of loose control: “You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall bum within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right.” But the phrases “study it out in your mind” and “you shall feel that it is right” do not necessarily imply a loose control over the text. Joseph Smith had to study it out in his mind till he got it right!

Related to this interpretation is the belief that Joseph Smith used his King James Bible to help him translate biblical passages. Yet there is no direct evidence for this proposal; in fact, it is contradicted by Emma Smith’s statement that Joseph “had neither manuscript nor book to read from.” Given the statements of those who observed the

translation, it seems more reasonable that it was the Lord himself who chose to quote from the King James Version when it agreed with the Book of Mormon.

Finally, we must recognize that Joseph Smith permitted editing of the Book of Mormon. In fact, he is probably directly responsible for many of the editorial changes that are found in the second and third editions. The title page of the 1837 edition states that this edition was “corrected by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.” In addition, Parley P. Pratt and John Goodson, in the preface to this edition, explain: “the whole has been carefully reexamined and compared with the original manuscripts, by elder Joseph Smith, Jr. the translator of the Book of Mormon, assisted by the present printer, brother O. Cowdery, who formerly wrote the greatest portion of the same as dictated by brother Smith.” And in the 1840 edition the title page indicates that the text has been “carefully revised by the translator.”

But there is another way to interpret the grammatical editing of the Book of Mormon—namely Joseph Smith allowed the Book of Mormon to be “translated” from its original language into standard English. In other words, Joseph Smith was perfectly willing to let the Book of Mormon appear in another variety of English (that is standard English) just as the Church today is willing to translate the scriptures into English-based pidgins and creoles (and numerous other languages) so that “every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue and in his own language.” (D&C 90:11).

- 1990 Eldin Ricks, “The Small Plates of Nephi and the Words of Mormon,” in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., ed., *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, to Learn with Joy*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1990, 216.
- 1991 Lyndon W. Cook ed., *The David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*. Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991.
- 1992 John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism 4 vols.*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow. New York: Macmillan Vol. 1 (1992): 210-213.

Regarding the nature of the English translation, its language is unambiguous and straightforward. Joseph once commented that the Book was “translated into our own language.” In several chapters, for good and useful reasons, this meant that the language would follow the King James idiom of the day. It also assured that the manuscript would contain human misspellings and grammatical oddities, implying that if it had been translated in another decade its phraseology and vocabulary might have been slightly different.

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1992 William J. Chritchlow, III, "Manuscript, Lost 116 Pages," in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1992

1992 Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," *Ensign* (July 1993): 61-63.

"the details of this miraculous method of translation are still not fully known. Yet we do have a few precious insights."

1993 Stephen D. Ricks, "Translation of the Book of Mormon: Interpreting the Evidence," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* vol. 2, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 201-206.

[Note\* This is basically a reprint. See Stephen D. Ricks, "Joseph Smith's Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon" FARMS Paper, Provo, Utah, 1984.]

1993 Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Exploration in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993, p. 396-407.

1994 Royal Skousen, "Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* vol. 6, no. 1 (1994): 121-144.

1994 Matthew Roper, "A More Perfect Priority?," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 362-368.

1994 Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* Vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 28-38.

On page 31, Skousen writes:

One important question has been the origin of the ungrammaticality in the original text of the Book of Mormon: if we accept Joseph Smith's claim that the translation was inspired of God, do we have to accept the nonstandard forms as also coming from God? B.H. Roberts argued that such a claim would be tantamount to blasphemy:

[Skousen cites B. H. Roberts from *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 253-311.]

Of course, the implication of this argument is that if God had given the English translation word for word, then he would have given it in B. H. Roberts's proper English and not Joseph Smith's upstate New York dialect. It seems to me that since God is not a native speaker of English nor a respecter of tongues, he is perfectly willing to speak to his "servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24). In fact, internal evidence from the original manuscript as well as statements from witnesses of the translation provide strong

support that the Lord exercised “tight control” over the translation process and that he indeed is the source for the original text of the Book of Mormon. From this perspective, Joseph Smith’s editing for the second edition of the Book of Mormon may be viewed as translating the text into standard English rather than cleaning up grammatical errors.

On page 65 Skousen writes: “Joseph Smith saw specific words written out in English and read them off to the scribe—the accuracy of the resulting text depended on the carefulness of Joseph Smith and his scribe.”

- 1996 David E. Sloan, “The Anthon Transcripts and the Translation of the Book of Mormon: Studying It Out in the Mind of Joseph Smith.” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* Vol. 5, no. 2 (1996): 57-81.**

In his conclusion Sloan writes:

Although the 1839 history clearly records that Joseph Smith translated a number of characters off the plates before the Harris- Anthon encounter, Nephi’s prophetic account and a number of historical accounts indicate that Joseph Smith was initially unable to translate the Book of Mormon and sought the assistance of learned men to help with the translation. Evidence also exists that Joseph referred to experimental and preliminary attempts as translating, regardless of the outcome. For this reason, Joseph could consistently refer to translated characters even at a time when he had been completely unsuccessful in his efforts.

- 1997 Noel B. Reynolds, ed. *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997.**

- 1997 Royal Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* vol. 7, no. 1 (1997) 22-31.**

- 1997 Royal Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript.” In Noel B. Reynolds, ed. *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997, 61-93.**

On page 64-65] Skousen writes:

There appear to be three possible kinds of control over the dictation of the Book of Mormon text:

- 1 Loose Control: Ideas were revealed to Joseph Smith, and he put the ideas into his own language (a theory advocated by many Book of Mormon scholars over the years).
- 2 Tight Control: Joseph Smith saw specific words written out in English and read them off to the scribe—the accuracy of the resulting text depending on the carefulness of Joseph Smith and his scribe.

- 3 Iron-clad Control: Joseph Smith (or the interpreters themselves) would not allow any error made by the scribe to remain (including the spelling of common words).

“One can conceive of mixtures of these different kinds of control. For instance, one might argue for tight control over the spelling of specific names, but loose control over the English phraseology itself.”

Skousen tended to discard the “Iron-clad control” because of the many discrepancies he had come across in his Original Manuscript studies. He questioned “Loose control” with the following on page 64:

A number of writers have referred to D&C 9:8 [the Lord to Oliver Cowdery] in support of loose control. . . . But the phrases “study it out in your mind “ and “you shall feel that it is right” do not necessarily imply a loose control over the text. Joseph Smith had to “study it out in his mind” till he got it right!

Thus, in the end, Skousen favored “Tight control,” citing examples from the Original Manuscript. [see Skousen’s “The Original Language of the book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English or Hebrew?”, p. 31]

- 1997 Richard Lyman Bushman, “The Recovery of the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997, p. 21-38.
- 1997 Neal A. Maxwell, “By the Gift and Power of God,” *Ensign*, January 1997, p. 36-41.
- 1998 Orson Scott Card, “Joseph Smith: Reader or Translator?” *Vigor*, vol. 16 (Sep. 1998) [www.nauvoo.com/vigor/issues/16-extra.html](http://www.nauvoo.com/vigor/issues/16-extra.html)

In my version, the seer is seeing, and possibly hearing, the original text in the original language, exactly as set forth by Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, Moroni, or any of the others who wrote. He is closely tied to that original document. But the English words are **his own**, and depend upon whatever language was available **in his own mind**. . . . Blessed with the seer’s knowledge of “things which are past . . . hidden things,” it is no wonder that whenever Joseph Smith came across a passage or phrase that had a one-for-one correspondence with passages in the King James version, **he would draw from his own preternaturally sharpened memory the exact language that he had already read. Varying from it only where the meaning of the original text would not have been faithfully conveyed. . . . it means that a man, translating by the gift and power of God, made use of preexisting language that was already in his mind as the best language he had available to convey the same ideas.**

- 1998 John Gee, "Choose the Things that Please Me': On the Selection of the Isaiah Sections in the Book of Mormon." In *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch. Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998, p. 67-91.
- 1998 Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1998): 22-31.

#### Conclusion

Evidence from the original manuscript supports the traditional belief that Joseph received a revealed text by means of the interpreters. This idea of a controlled text originates with statements made by witnesses of the translation. The evidence from the original manuscript, when joined with internal evidence from the text itself, suggests that this control was tight, but not iron-clad. The text could be "ungrammatical" from a prescriptive point of view, but the use of nonstandard English is not evidence that the text was not being tightly controlled, or that it did not come from the Lord, who apparently does not share our insistence on "proper English" (see D&C 1:24). In fact, the occurrence of non-English Hebraisms such as the if-and construction strongly suggests that the text was tightly controlled down to the level of the word at least. This tight control is also supported by the consistent phraseology in the original text. And the spelling of names such as Coriantumr suggests that control could be imposed down to the very letter.

All of this evidence (from the witnesses' statements, the original manuscript, the printer's manuscript, and from the text itself) is thus consistent with the hypothesis that Joseph Smith could actually see (whether in the interpreters themselves or in his mind's eye) the translated English text word for word and letter for letter—and that he read off this revealed text to his scribe. Despite Joseph's reading off of the text, one should not assume that this process was automatic or easily done. Joseph had to prepare himself spiritually for this work. Yet the evidence suggests that Joseph was not the author of the Book of Mormon, not even its English language translation, although it was revealed spiritually through him and in his own language.

NOTE: This paper is a revision of "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), pp. 61-93. See that article for additional examples and complete references.

- 1999 Richard L. Bushman, "Joseph Smith as Translator," in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays On Joseph Smith*, edited by Bryan Waterman. SLC: Signature Books, 1999, p. 69-85.

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**2000 Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Jr. as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet." Master's thesis, Utah State University, 2000," p. 309-19.**

Note\* In their 2015 book, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*, Michael MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat write that McGee compiled a survey of the various descriptions of the spectacles in this article. (p. 72) FIND McGee thesis

**2000 Mark Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior As Rodsman, Village Seer, And Judeo-Christian Prophet." Master of Arts Thesis in History. Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 2000, 387 pages.**

**MUST READ!** This appears to be the first reasoned presentation for the use of a white stone in Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon. However, the reasoning is built on supposition, piled on top of speculation, interpretation of words and phrases, opinion, and guesses. Nevertheless, this work is valuable for the ideas and sources so meticulously documented in the presentation and in the bibliography that follows. However, quotes are brought together from opposite ends of a time spectrum of many decades of hearsay and from anti-Mormon sources as well as Mormon sources. Quotes from sources close to the translation are challenged by little-known hearsay reminiscences from up to 60 years later and beyond.

(p. 198) Unraveling the history of Joseph's acquisition of seer stones poses a difficult task. As noted, with precious few exceptions, the source material relevant to this time and topic was not recorded until years or even decades after the fact. As also noted, bias abounds in both Mormon and non-Mormon accounts. The best possible reconstruction of Joseph's development requires careful historical criticism of all relevant sources, with a sharp focus on the earliest possible accounts and on those given by eyewitnesses. By far, the most important of these sources is the record of Joseph Smith's 1826 court appearance.

(p. 203) William D. Purple remembered Joseph discussing his first seer stone in his 1826 court case, but the court record itself does not include testimony to this effect.

(p. 204) Smith Senior was reminiscing from the distance of about a decade, and may himself be the source of confusion.

(p. 210) "Perhaps"

(p. 211) The reliability of Lapham's dating, however, must be questioned. Aside from being a late reminiscence, he confuses Joseph's first and second stones."

(p. 214) Dan Vogel objects to Quinn's chronology on the grounds that the 1826 court record "limits Smith's stone gazing to the previous three years (ca 1823)." To the contrary, the court record states only "that he has occasionally been in the habit of looking through this stone [the brown seer stone] to find lost property for 3 years.

(p. 224) The great lake Purples remembered hearing about may have actually been lake Ontario, about twenty miles from the Smith home.

(p. 226) Joseph may have found the exact location in which to dig for his first seer stone by using his divining rod.

(p. 229) If Lapham's late reminiscence accurately reflects content from the missing portion of the Book of Mormon (or an episode from Lehite history divined in some other way), it could mean one of two things . . . Finally, Lapham's forty-year recollection may be his creation entirely.

(p. 230) Most historians hold that Joseph discovered his brown stone while digging a well on the Chase farm. The stone found there was white and was Joseph's second stone. David Whitmer, who spoke frequently about the brown seer stone, but never the white one, observed . . .

(p. 251) The statement goes on to mistakenly identify "Gazelem," the stone found on the Chase property, as the well-known brown stone that passed from Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young to Brigham Young. However, the unknown author does not attribute this identification to Woodruff; it is a redaction.

Woodruff's own journal shows his correct identification of the stone. On **18 May 1888**, in connection with the dedication of the LDS temple in Manti, Utah, Woodruff wrote, "I consecrated upon the Altar the seers Stone that Joseph Smith found by Revelation some 30 feet under the Earth [and] Carried By him through life." . . .

Woodruff's comment that the stone found at thirty feet had been carried by Joseph "through life" also identifies it as the white stone. According to David Whitmer Joseph gave the brown stone to Oliver Cowdery in 1829, four years before Woodruff ever met Smith. The brown stone, then, could not have been the stone that Woodruff said that Joseph owned through life.

[Note\* This statement ignores the provenance of the brown stone preceding Woodruff's consecration. Oliver Cowdery kept the brown stone until his death in 1850. Soon after, Phineas Young came and asked Maria Cowdery (Oliver's daughter) to let him see the stone. Phineas kept it and gave it to Brigham Young, who kept it until his death in 1877. After Brigham's wife Zina Huntington kept it and it was eventually passed on to John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff. On 24 January **1887**, Oliver Cowdery's daughter Maria L. Cowdery received a letter from David Whitmer asking about the brown stone. By **1888** David Whitmer had written Church historian Andrew Jenson about the brown stone. Could that letter have prompted Wilford Woodruff to focus on the brown stone and consecrate it as part of the temple dedication? Does "through life" have to mean the same as "throughout his entire life"? Question: Does "white" always mean the color white or could it sometimes refer to the quality white (as in purity)? In the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi 30:6 was changed from "white and delightsome" to "pure and delightsome."]

Etc., etc.

- 2002 Daniel C. Peterson, "A Response: 'What the Manuscripts and the Eyewitnesses Tell Us about the Translation of the Book of Mormon'." In *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*, edited by M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts. *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* vol. 11, no. 2 (2002): 67-71. [A MUST READ!]**

Royal Skousen has devoted a decade and a half to intensive study of the text of the Book of Mormon, and most especially to the Original and Printers Manuscripts of the book . . . Let us briefly examine some of the relevant data.

*(Translation Process)*

First of all, the evidence strongly supports the traditional account in saying that the Original Manuscript was orally dictated. The kinds of errors that occur in the manuscript are clearly those that occur from a scribe mishearing, rather than from visually misreading while copying from another manuscript. The Printers Manuscript by contrast, shows precisely the types of anomalies that one would expect from a copyist's errors. . . .

It is apparent that Joseph could see the spelling of names on whatever it was that he was reading from. When the scribe had written the text, he (or she in the case of Emma Smith) would evidently read it back to Joseph Smith for correction. So the Prophet evidently had something with him [or viewing] from which he was dictating, and against which he could check what his scribes had written. But what was it? The witnesses are unanimous that he did not have any books or manuscripts or papers with him during the translation process, which involved lengthy periods of dictation. [p. 67]

David Whitmer repeatedly insisted that the translation process occurred in full view of Joseph Smith's family and associates. The common image of a curtain hanging between the Prophet and his scribes, sometimes seen in illustrations of the story of the Book of Mormon, is based on a misunderstanding. There was indeed a curtain, at least in the latter stages of the translation process. However, that curtain was suspended not between the translator and his scribe, but near the front door of the Peter Whitmer home, in order to prevent idle passersby and gawkers from interfering with the work. [p. 68]

It would seem [from anecdotes previously cited] that Joseph Smith needed to be spiritually or emotionally ready for the translation process to proceed—something that would have been wholly unnecessary if he had simply been reading from a prepared manuscript. . . . A memorized [text also] run[s] into . . . difficulties. Whether it is even remotely plausible to imagine Joseph Smith or anyone else memorizing or composing nearly 5000 words daily, day after day, week after week, in the production of a lengthy and complex book is a question that readers can ponder for themselves. One might also ask the same skeptic why Joseph would not just have written out the text himself if he were indeed faking reception of the text by revelation. . . . [p. 69]

Furthermore, it is clear from careful analysis of the Original Manuscript that Joseph did not know in advance what the text was going to say. Chapter breaks and book divisions apparently surprised him. . . . For instance, at what we now recognize as the end of 1 Nephi, the Original Manuscript first indicates merely that a new chapter is about to begin. In the original chapter divisions, that upcoming text was marked as "Chapter VIII." When Joseph and Oliver subsequently discovered that they were instead at the opening of a wholly distinct book, 2 Nephi, the original chapter specification was crossed out and placed after the title of the new book. This is quite instructive. It indicates that Joseph could only see the end of a section but did not know whether the next section would be another portion of the same book or, rather, the commencement of an entirely new book.

Moreover, there were parts of the text that he did not understand. “When he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words,” his wife Emma recalled of the earliest part of the translation, “he spelled them out.” [p. 69]

Thus we see that Joseph Smith seems to have been reading from something, but that he had no book or manuscript or paper with him. It seems to have been a text that was new and strange to him, and one that required a certain emotional or mental focus before it could be read. All of this is entirely consistent with Joseph Smith’s claim that he was deriving the text by revelation through an interpreting device, but it does not seem reconcilable with [anti-Mormon] claims that he had created the text himself earlier, or even that he was reading from a purloined copy of someone else’s manuscript. In order to make the latter theory plausible, it is necessary to reject the unanimous testimony of the eyewitnesses to the process and to ignore the evidence of the Original Manuscript itself. [p. 70]

**2003 Matthew B. Brown, *Plates of Gold: The Book of Mormon Comes Forth*. American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2003, p. 175-184.**

Note\* This book attempts, in a very good way, to review chronologically the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. One of the nice things that Matthew Brown does is to allocate space in his Appendix 2 for a review of “The Translation Process” in a step-wise documented manner.

#### **APPENDIX 2 THE TRANSLATION PROCESS**

##### *SPIRITUAL PREPARATION*

##### *CONCEALMENT OF RELICS AND PARTICIPANTS*

##### *METHOD OF TRANSLATION*

##### **Manifestation of the Spirit**

##### **Reading the Hieroglyphic Characters**

##### **Appearance of English Words**

##### **Transmittal and Transcription**

##### **Verification of Transcription**

##### **Result of Translation**

##### *VARIATIONS IN PROCEDURE*

##### **Interpreters and Seerstone**

##### **Use and absence of Golden Plates**

(Translation Process)

From his Appendix 2, I will present a few pertinent excerpts which I have arranged to emphasize Brown's helpful explanations **and** the sources:

From page 159 + Notes:

. . . Oliver Cowdery said that on one of the numerous occasions when the angel Moroni visited Joseph Smith, he told the young Prophet that the reformed Egyptian characters "cannot be interpreted by the learning of this generation; . . . Therefore . . . they are to be translated by the gift and power of God." (Messenger and Advocate, vol. 2, no. 1, October 1835, p. 198.)

From pages 159-160 + Notes:

Several requirements had to be met before the work of translation was able to go forward. According to:

David Whitmer, "Each time before resuming the work all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding." (*Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885.)

David Whitmer "declared that Joseph first offered prayer. . . . This was the daily method of procedure" (*Saints' Herald*, vol. 26, 15 November 1879.)

Orson Hyde: "The persons using [the Urim and Thummim] offered their prayers to the Lord, and [then] the answer became visible" (Orson Hyde, *A Cry Out of the Wilderness* [Frankfurt Germany: n.p., 1842]; English translation cited in Paul R. Cheesman, "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Visions," Masters thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965, p. 167.)

David [Whitmer], the Prophet was required to be "just right before the Lord. . . . [otherwise] the Urim and Thummim would look dark: he could not see a thing in them." (see *Saints' Herald*, vol. 31, 21 June 1884.)

David [Whitmer] said on another occasion that Joseph "could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards everyone . . . [long quote] (see *An Address to All Believers in Christ*. Richmond, Mo.: David Whitmer, 1887, p. 30)

From page 163 + Notes:

Orson Hyde, Joseph Knight Sr., and David Whitmer each made statements to the effect that the English translation Joseph saw had a peculiar property; it was written in letters of light or bright Roman letters.

Orson Hyde: The words were "written in letters of light" (Orson Hyde, *A Cry Out of the Wilderness* [Frankfurt Germany: n.p., 1842]; English translation cited in Paul R. Cheesman, "An Analysis of the Accounts Relating Joseph Smith's Early Visions," Masters thesis, Brigham Young University, 1965, p. 167.)

Joseph Knight: "A sentence . . . would appear in bright Roman letters" (Dean C. Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 35.

David Whitmer: “The hieroglyphics would appear, and also the translation in the English language, all appearing in bright luminous letters,” which he also refers to as “the luminous writing” (*Deseret News*, 25 March 1884)

David Whitmer: “The letters appeared on [the Urim and Thummim or on the seerstone] in light, and would not go off until they were written correctly” (*Saints’ Herald* vol. 31 (June 21, 1884). [Comment: The phrase “appear on” perhaps means “appeared through.”])

**2003 Kevin L. Barney, “A More Responsible Critique,” *FARMS Review* 15, Nol. 1 (2003): 97-146.**

On pages 140-142 we find the following about KJV-related variants in translation:

Latter-day Saint scholars of course do not all agree among themselves on these matters, and they sometimes take different views concerning just what the Book of Mormon represents. Royal Skousen introduced these issues by writing about various evidences for “tight” versus “loose” control over the translation.<sup>66</sup> In other words, he explores to what extent the translation is direct and literal, as opposed to a paraphrase or restatement in Joseph’s own words of ideas that came into his mind during the translation process. Suggestive of a “tight” control over the language of the translation are (1) a number of witness statements that suggest Joseph would put his face in a hat to exclude outside light and then would see the wording of the translation, given a sentence at a time as he dictated it; (2) evidence that proper names were not just pronounced but actually spelled out; and (3) Semitic textual evidence such as Hebraisms, names, or structural elements (such as chiasmus). Suggestive of a “loose” Control are (1) the poor grammar of the English text as it was first dictated; (2) the explanation of Doctrine and Covenants 9:8 that Joseph was to “study it out in his mind” and then ask the Lord if it were right; (3) the possibility that Joseph used a King James Version in the production of the text (which bears directly on our issue and to which we shall return); and (4) the reality that Joseph permitted and even participated in the editing of the text. Skousen made it clear that he preferred a tight control model of the translation.

My own approach is to apply the eclecticism of a textual critic to these categories. I acknowledge these various types of evidence spelled out by Skousen, and so I simply do not prejudge the case. I try to keep an open mind about whether a given passage might be on the tighter or looser end of the spectrum. I accept various types of Semitic textual evidence, which does point to tight control, but I also believe that Joseph’s role in the translation involved more than simply reading the English text from a divine teleprompter. Most of the Book of Mormon is a redacted text, and if we read very carefully we can sometimes discern the hand of the redactor (Mormon) in the text. But the Book of Mormon is also a translated text, and I believe that at times we can also discern the hand of the translator. Since I accept Joseph as a prophet in his own right, I see the incorporation of occasional interpretations, explanations, and commentary on

the ancient text by the modern prophet as a positive characteristic of the text as we have it.(67)

67. I would include the possibility of Joseph “expanding” the text with authoritative commentary, interpretation, explanation, and clarification under the rubric of “loose” translation. I would view such an expansion as simply being a little more extensive form of translator’s gloss. The possibility of such expansions in the text has been articulated in Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source,” *Dialogue* 20/1 (1987): 66–123, rejected in Stephen E. Robinson, “The ‘Expanded’ Book of Mormon?” in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 391–414, and clarified in Blake T. Ostler, “Bridging the Gulf,” *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 103–77. I accept the possibility of such interpretive material in the text, but we should be clear that not all Latter-day Saint scholars do.

**2003 Milton V. Backman, “Book of Mormon, Translation of,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*, ed. Dennis L. Largey. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003, p. 157-160.**

On page 158:

Although very little is known about the process of translation, accounts by Joseph Smith and the scribes who assisted him provide some insights into that process. Joseph Smith deliberately did not expound on this subject. During a conference in Ohio in 1831, he said that “it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things” (Cannon and Cook, *Far West Record . . .*, 1983, p. 23)

Joseph Smith repeatedly declared, however, that he translated the Book of Mormon “through the medium of the Urim and Thummim . . . by the gift and power of God” (Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Edited by B. H. Roberts. 7 vols. 1932-1951, Vol. 4, p. 537.)

. . .

When Emma Smith was interviewed in 1879 by her son regarding her knowledge of the translation, she declared that she “wrote day after day” for “your father,” “often sitting at the table close by him.” He dictated to her, she continued, “hour after hour.” Emma insisted that her husband did not have a book or manuscript from which to read, saying, “If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me.” (Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, “Statement to Joseph Smith III,” February 4-110, 1879. *Saint’s Herald* (1 October 1879): 289-90.)

Neal A. Maxwell acknowledged, “We simply do not know the details. We do know that this faith-filled process was not easy, however: This fact was clearly demonstrated in Oliver Cowdery’s own attempt at translation. . . . Whatever the details of the process, it required Joseph’s intense personal efforts along with the aid of the revelatory instruments.” (Neal A. Maxwell, “By the Gift and Power of God.” *Ensign* 27 (January 1997): 34-41.)

- 2003 Dallin D. Oaks, “Book of Mormon, Language of the Translated Text of,” in *Book of Mormon Reference Companion*. Editor Dennis L. Largey. SLC: Deseret Book, 2003, p. 116-119.**

*Note\** Dallin D. Oaks, (not Dallin H. Oaks), specialized in English linguistics at BYU. He suggested the following possibility for the archaic vocabulary in the Book of Mormon:

It is common for rural communities to be conservative in preserving some older forms of speech. Furthermore, some religious groups often deliberately preserve older language forms. By these measures, Palmyra and its surrounding area thus represented a prime region for the presence of many older linguistic forms because it was not only decidedly rural, but contained a substantial number of members of the Society of Friends (Quakers) whose speech, even in normal everyday settings, was highly influenced by older forms of English.

- 2004 Richard Lyman Bushman, “Joseph Smith as Translator,” in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 234.**

Why would Joseph Smith think that he could translate when he lacked all the necessary qualifications? . . . An early revelation said he was to be called “a seer, a translator, a prophet” in the records of the Church ( D&C 21:1). Why did he find the role of translator so congenial when it was so foreign to his education and background? Other religious young men of that time did not think of themselves as budding translators of scripture. The conventional path for young people with a religious calling led from personal conversion to preaching. . . . Instead, at age twenty-three, Joseph translated a lengthy book, virtually another Bible, and made it the foundation of his new religion.

- 2005 Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 2005.**

“The revelations were not God’s diction, dialect, or native language. They were couched in language suitable to Joseph’s time. The idioms, the grammar, even the tone had to be comprehensible to 1830s Americans.” [p. 174] [See Skousen & Carmack, Jan Martin.]

- 2005 John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in John W. Welch and Erick B. Carlson, eds., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844*, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005, p. 76-213.**

2<sup>nd</sup> edition printed in 2017.

“How was this book written? Where did it come from? Joseph Smith testified that he translated the Book of Mormon miraculously, by the gift and power of God. Is that testimony credible? **The following set of over two hundred documents** assembles data pertinent to that ultimate question. In particular, from these contemporaneous

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historical records, this study seeks to determine, as precisely as possible, when the Book of Mormon was translated and how long it took to complete its impressive task.”  
[p. 78-79]

**2006** Royal Skousen, “Translating and Printing the Book of Mormon,” in John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris, eds., *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, BYU, 2006. P. 75-101. **[See Skousen, 1990, 1997]**

**2007** Kathleen Flake, “Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith’s Narrative Canon,” *Journal of Religion* 87, no. 4 (2007): 497-527.

**2011** Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011.

In 2011, Brant Gardner would bring up many details related to the discussion of Joseph Smith’s “translation” that ultimately produced The Book of Mormon . I don’t necessarily agree with a number of his ideas, but whether one agrees with everything Gardner writes or concludes, the chapters in his book are relevant to every person trying to understand the process. **I consider this a MUST READ. Gardner cites over 400 LDS, secular, and anti-Mormon publications in his Bibliography.**

What follows are just a few excerpts from the Contents of his book:

### **What Kind of Translation Is the Book of Mormon?**

Chapter 13: What Does It Mean to Translate?

Chapter 14: Theories of Book of Mormon Translation

Chapter 15: Evidence for Literalist Equivalence

Chapter 16: Evidence for Functional or Conceptual Equivalence

Chapter 17: Structures in the Book of Mormon Involving Biblical Texts

Chapter 18: Joseph’s Translations Involving Biblical Texts

Chapter 19: From Plate Text to English Translation

### **Translating the Book of Mormon**

Chapter 20: Who translated the Book of Mormon?

Chapter 21: How Did Joseph Translate?

Chapter 22: Assembling the Puzzle

Why Was Most of the Translation Functionalist Equivalence Rather than Literal’

Why Were Some Translations Literalist Equivalence?

Why Were Some Translations Conceptual Equivalence?

Why Didn’t Joseph Retranslate the Book of Lehi?

Why Did Joseph Believe the Interpreters or Seer Stone Were Essential?

Why Did Joseph Stop Translating with the Interpreters?

Why Did Joseph Stop Using the Seer Stone For Revelations?

...

Why Do Skousen and Others See Specificity in the Text?

How Does the Book of Mormon Use King James Version Style?

How Did We Get the Isaiah Passages?

How Did We Get the New Testament-Influenced Passages?

How Did We Get Revival Language?

How Did Literary Structures Survive Translation?

Why Couldn't Oliver Translate?

On pages 155-156 Gardner writes:

Although Skousen's schema has become a de facto typology for discussing the nature of the translation, I find that it is not useful due to the particular definition Skousen gives to his idea of tight control, which refers to the transmission of the text from Joseph to Oliver, not from the plate text to English: "Joseph Smith saw specific words written out in English and read them off to the scribe—the accuracy of the resulting text depended on the carefulness of Joseph Smith and his scribe," (see Skousen, "Translating . . . , p. 65)

Although that consideration is important, it is not properly a type of translation. In Skousen's definition, the English exists prior to Joseph's seeing it. Therefore, Joseph reads—but does not translate. Discussing whether Joseph was a reader or a translator is obviously important. However, regardless of the answer, someone made the translation. The question of how the English text relates to the plates text is the same whether Joseph or some other entity translated. Because Skousen's scheme best refers to transmission rather than translation, his schema is not useful in this discussion.

I suggest a slightly different three-fold set of analytical translation types: literalist equivalence, functional equivalence, and conceptual equivalence. Each of these terms describes a relationship between the target and the source languages, with each indicating a greater distance between the two.

A literalist equivalence closely adheres to the vocabulary and structure of the source language. It is essentially a word-for-word equivalence understanding that there are times when syntax or semantics might require changes in the target language to retain sense. It differs from Skousen's iron-clad category in that there is no assumption of inerrant translation. It is more similar to the intent of his tight control category.

The next two categories represent a division of the concepts embodied in Skousen's loose control. Functional equivalence adheres to the organization and structures of the original but is more flexible in the vocabulary. It allows the target language to use words that are not direct equivalents of the source words, but which attempt to preserve the intent of the source text. This would be the category in which B.H. Roberts's theory of translation would fall.

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Finally, conceptual equivalence is further from the source in that it no longer attempts to reserve specific structures or vocabulary in favor of transmitting the sense of the source. It is still tied to the source, but tenuously. Fewer of the features of the original show thorough in the translation. This category allows additions to the plate text that may preserve the original intent while still providing wholly modern additions. For example, in 1987, Blake Ostler argued for the presence of conceptual equivalence when he suggested that parts of the Book of Mormon represented an expansion of the plate text. He suggested that Joseph “provided unrestricted and authoritative commentary interpretation, explanation, and clarifications based on insights from the ancient Book of Mormon text and the King James Bible.”

[Note\* See Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of An Ancient Source,” 1987, p. 66. See also Stephen E. Robinson’s 1989 Review of Ostler’s article.]

- 2011 Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011.
- 2011 Don Bradley, “Written by the Finger of God?: Claims and Controversies of Book of Mormon Translation,” in *Sunstone*, October 17, 2011, p.
- 2012 Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson, “When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (December 2012): 132.
- 2012 Elder Quentin L. Cook, April 2012 General Conference
- “The essential doctrine of agency requires that a testimony of the restored gospel be based on faith rather than just external or scientific proof. Obsessive focus on things not yet fully revealed, such as how the virgin birth or the Resurrection of the Savior could have occurred or exactly how Joseph Smith translated our scriptures, will not be efficacious or yield spiritual progress. These are matters of faith”
- 2012 Samuel Morris Brown, “The Language of Heaven: Prolegomenon to the Study of Smithian Translation,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 3 (2012): 51-71.
- 2013 Brant A. Gardner, “When Hypotheses Collide: Responding to Lyon and Minson’s ‘When Pages Collide,’” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 105-109.
- 2014 Roger Terry, “The Book of Mormon Translation Puzzle,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* Vol. 23, No. 1 (2014): 176-186. Review of Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*. SLC: Greg Kofford Books, 2011.

The academically inclined among believing Latter-day Saints . . . continue to wrestle with the process by which the English text of the Book of Mormon was produced. . . .

Brant Gardner has taken these questions seriously and has written an impressive volume that attempts to account for much of the seemingly contradictory evidence swirling around this cornerstone of the Latter-day Saint faith. First and foremost, let me say that I can wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone interested in thinking carefully, from the perspective of a believer, about how the Book of Mormon found its way into English. . . . The breadth of Gardner's research is remarkable . . .

Along with such praise, however, let me confess that I disagree with Gardner's ultimate conclusions regarding the translation process. Of course, that does not negate the value of what he has attempted. . . . The more I study the Book of Mormon, the more I come to view it as a million-piece jigsaw puzzle. . . . anyone who wants to work on the translation puzzle ought to at least be aware of and account for the following:

- the presence of grammatical errors in the translated text
- second- and thirdhand accounts of the translation from scribes and observers who report that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to read text with his face buried in a hat
- Joseph correcting the scribe's spelling while looking in the hat
- historical anachronisms in the text
- whole chapters of text repeated almost verbatim from the King James Version of the Bible (KJV), despite the fact that witnesses, including Emma, insisted that Joseph never referred to outside sources
- specific terms and quotations from Protestant clergy and publications
- Royal Skousen's numerous discoveries from a quarter century of studying the original and printer's manuscripts, as well as various printed editions
- claims regarding the presence of Hebraisms in the English translation
- intertextual quotations
- modern vocabulary and idioms
- inconsistent usage of second-person pronouns and third person verb conjugations
- a vocabulary apparently far beyond Joseph's at that point in his life (an unlettered young man who, according to his wife, could not even pronounce names such as Sarah)
- complex sentence and textual structures in a dictated document
- New Testament–influenced text

Accounting for all these items and more has eluded every translation theorist to some degree. Some of these puzzle pieces do not seem to fit together. But the more we learn, the more accurate the connections, and sooner or later we may get enough of the pieces in place to have a clearer view of this magnificent and perplexing book and its

translation process. So I welcome Gardner's efforts. Even where I disagree with his conclusions, his analysis helps illuminate important points and raises new questions.

In a nutshell, Gardner's theory involves accepting the accounts that indicate Joseph was reading English text through the seer stone buried in the crown of his hat. But most of that English text did not come from an outside source. It came from Joseph's own brain. "Vision," Gardner explains, "happens in the brain. Additionally, the brain does not passively see; it creates vision" (p. 265). So, although the ideas behind the text originated from a divine source, the English text itself did not. Gardner borrows the term *mentalese* from Steven Pinker to describe "the language of thought . . . , or the prelanguage of the brain" (p. 274). So Joseph received through revelation the content of the Book of Mormon in this form of prelanguage thought. It was then converted in Joseph's brain into an approximation of King James English, the religious idiom of his day. And Joseph's brain produced what he then "saw" with his eyes. In this way, Joseph was not a passive reader but an active participant in the translation process. Much like an ordinary translator who understands the source language and culture and must render a close approximation of a particular text in the target language, Joseph understood at a subconscious level the Nephite language and culture (through revelation) and then had to find English words to express those prelanguage ideas.

Gardner does, however, add two caveats to this theory. The Book of Mormon translation, he claims, was not entirely a product of functional equivalence. Certain pieces of the translation—names in particular—represented literalist equivalence, and at least two elements of the translation denoted conceptual equivalence. These were the connecting text in Words of Mormon 1:9–18 and Martin Harris's visit to Charles Anthon as reflected in 2 Nephi 27:15–20. Gardner considers these and perhaps other sections of text "prophetic expansion" of the plate text.

...

As indicated earlier, I find several problems with this elaborate theory. Let me briefly discuss four.

**First**, Joseph's ability to craft (or dictate) an extensive and intricate English document was rather limited. According to Gardner's theory, Joseph was receiving ideas that he had to formulate in coherent English sentences. But Joseph's formal language abilities at this point in his life were limited. According to his wife, Emma, he could not even pronounce names like Sarah and had to spell them out.

According to Gardner's theory, "As the generation of language moved from Joseph's subconscious to his conscious awareness, it accessed Joseph's available vocabulary and grammar" (p. 308). I would argue, however, that the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon was far beyond Joseph's "available vocabulary" in 1829. . . .

**Second**, the Book of Mormon's sentence structure is quite complex, with long, convoluted sentences that sometimes employ multiple layers of parenthetical statements and relative clauses (see, for instance, 3 Nephi 5:14). Putting mentalese into concrete language at this level of complexity would have exceeded the capabilities of a young man whose wife claimed he "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon." . . .

**Third**, . . . Gardner agrees that the translation was a literalist equivalence in the case of proper names and perhaps long words that Joseph was unacquainted with but insists that the bulk of the translation represented functional equivalence. But this makes the process rather chaotic. If Joseph was receiving exact spelling for proper names and some longer words but not for the rest of the text, that means he was receiving exact revelation for parts of sentences but having to come up with text to express revealed ideas for the remainder of those sentences. The spelling itself is also problematic. Anyone who has read documents handwritten by Joseph knows he struggled with spelling throughout his life. If his brain was responsible for the English text he was reading to his scribes, the very idea of Joseph correcting anyone's spelling based on words his mind was producing is implausible.

**Fourth**, Joseph would have been incapable of reconstructing whole chapters of the KJV from memory, even if assisted by some form of revealed mentalese. Joseph was so famously unacquainted with the Bible that he was unaware Jerusalem had walls; it is therefore untenable that he could have reproduced many difficult chapters of Isaiah from memory and with significant alteration, often involving words that were italicized in the KJV. Gardner admits this is a problem for his theory:

"Although the alterations associated with italicized words suggest that Joseph was working with a visual text, the chapter breaks [which were different in the Book of Mormon than in the KJV] tell us that he was not seeing the KJV with its current chapter divisions. Therefore, what Joseph saw may have reproduced the page with the italics, but did not reproduce the chapter divisions. It is at this point that we invoke the divine" (p. 306).

In other words, at times the "divine" revealed the basic idea of the text in mentalese; at other times, exact wording was revealed. This explanation is far from satisfactory. When examined carefully, Gardner's proposed translation methodology does not hold up well. It becomes far too complex an operation, with too many pieces of the puzzle seemingly out of place. . . .

When examined carefully, Gardner's proposed translation methodology does not hold up well. It becomes far too complex an operation, with too many pieces of the puzzle seemingly out of place. . . .

So how was the Book of Mormon translated? Royal Skousen looks at this question through the lens of control—loose, tight, or ironclad. Gardner chooses a different lens, equivalence, which yields three different possibilities: literalist, functional, and conceptual. Elsewhere, I have proposed a different lens that may shed some light on this question. (See Roger Terry, “Archaic Pronouns and Verbs in the Book of Mormon: What Inconsistent Usage Tells Us about Translation Theories,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 47/3 (2014): 59–63.

I see three different types of possible translation for the Book of Mormon. It was either a human translation, a divine translation, or a machine translation. By machine translation, I mean that the “interpreters” [Urim and Thummim or seer stone] were some sort of heavenly translation device that automatically converted text from the source language to the target language, similar to our computer translation programs but obviously more advanced. When we view the Book of Mormon through this lens, it becomes obvious that the translation is not a machine translation. Even our crude computer translation programs would never make the sort of random errors in second-person pronoun and third-person verb conjugation usage that we find in the Book of Mormon. Nor is it a divine translation. I agree with B. H. Roberts that “to assign responsibility for errors in language to a divine instrumentality, which amounts to assigning such error to God . . . is unthinkable, not to say blasphemous.” That means the Book of Mormon must be a human translation, albeit one aided by divine inspiration. But who, then, was the translator? The bulk of the evidence, in my view, does not point to Joseph Smith. He was the human conduit through which the translation was delivered, but the translation doesn’t appear to be his. Gardner quotes Skousen on this point: “These new findings argue that Joseph Smith was not the author of the English-language translation of the Book of Mormon. Not only was the text revealed to him word for word, but the words themselves sometimes had meanings that he and his scribes would not have known, which occasionally led to a misinterpretation. The Book of Mormon is not a 19th-century text, nor is it Joseph Smith’s. The English-language text was revealed through him, but it was not precisely in his language or ours” (p. 164).

So, in whose language was it written? I want to conclude with a speculative suggestion about an answer that, while it could never satisfy nonbelievers, might satisfy believing readers attempting to complete the translation puzzle. Interestingly, Gardner briefly mentions the same speculative suggestion, which I find more convincing than his own theory. He cites a paper written by LDS member Carl T. Cox, who proposes Moroni as being responsible for the English-language translation. (See Carl T. Cox, “The Mission of Moroni,” in three parts on Cox’s website. See part 3, at <http://www.oscox.org/stuff/bom3.html>.) [But] Gardner quickly dismisses this possibility and moves on to other topics. After conducting an editorial examination of the Book of Mormon and looking at a good deal of other evidence, I independently came to a

conclusion similar to Cox's. I find that the Moroni-as-translator theory explains many of the difficult problems regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon that other theories struggle with . . .

**2014 Alexander L. Baugh, "Joseph Smith: Seer, Translator, Revelator, and Prophet," Devotional Speech at BYU, June 24, 2014. **MUST READ!****

**2015 Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015.**

**A MUST READ.** From my personal perspective, although Michael MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat are highly qualified editors of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, and although Richard Bushman, an eminent LDS historian, writes in his introduction that "the authors base their story firmly on the original sources"—"They get down to what historians consider to be the bedrock of historical construction"; nevertheless, this process of documentation (which the authors have done in a nice manner) can also leave one with questions, as documented accounts are sometimes contradictory, or dated much later in time, or from third or fourth-hand, etc. sources. Additionally, the authors' positioning of quotation marks in a lengthy comment can leave the reader uncertain as to what ideas or wording really comes from the original document. Also, documentation can sometimes mask speculation, or on the other hand discourage some desired speculation. Some examples are as follows:

On page 67:

"Brigham Young remembered Joseph telling him that the stone was found "fifteen feet underground."<sup>34</sup> (On page 68 it says "thirty feet under ground . . . "<sup>38</sup>) On that same page the seer stone is connected with the name Gazelem and the revelation of 1843 where Joseph said, A white stone is given to each of those who come into the celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is the key word."<sup>41</sup>

34. Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5:382-83

38. George A. Smith Papers, box 174, folder 26, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

41. D&C 130.11.

On page 69:

Despite his prior experience with a seer stone, he [Joseph] was left with very little practical understanding of how he could use the seer stones in the spectacles to translate the gold plates.

. . . <sup>45</sup>

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However, Joseph apparently **learned to see translated text in the spectacles**. He apparently noticed this ability before Martin Harris left on his journey and began translating the plates in February 1828, but **he did not know what to make of the text that appeared in the stones.**<sup>49</sup>

[Question: What does it mean to see “in the stones”?]

45. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 79, . . . [multiple sources listed]

49. Though Joseph was not known to have used his seer stones to translate anything before he retrieved the spectacles, he may have seen something like an American Indian pictograph. In Joseph’s 1826 trial, Josiah Stowell was reported to have said that Joseph had once “told about a painted tree, with a man’s head painted upon it, by means of said stone” “A Document Discovered,” *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886. [Another questionable source is also cited]

On page 70:

In 1839, however, Joseph remembered copying both untranslated characters and translated characters onto paper for Harris—all before Harris left for New York City. . . . **Assuming** that what **he saw in the spectacles** was the translation of the gold plates, he apparently sent Harris with a sample of what **appeared in the seer stones**, hoping that the scholars would verify the translation.

On page 71:

With the “gift and power of God” Joseph read the translated words that **appeared on the seer stones and his scribes recorded** them as the text of the Book of Mormon . . .

[Question: What does it mean to see “on the seer stones”? How many words can fit on Joseph’s own dark seerstone that he used in translation? Did the stone become luminous? And if so, would that make it easier or more difficult to read the words?]

On page 85:

Once the translation began, Emma Smith and her brother Reuben Hale were the first of a series of scribes that recorded Joseph’s dictation as he miraculously **read the words** from the ancient text **as it appeared on the spectacles**.

She [Emma] explained that Joseph used the spectacles to translate, **but not by looking through them at the plates**, but instead by placing them in a large-brimmed hat with which he could block out the light. As Joseph excluded the light and **looked onto the seer stones** in the hat, he dictated the words he saw “hour after hour with nothing between us.”<sup>19</sup> Emma explained that he was **not looking anywhere but at the stones** in the hat;

[Comment: Although the writers do a great job documenting, some critical parts of the story are not put in quotation marks so it is difficult to assess what Emma actually said, or about what time period in the translation Emma was talking about relative to the stones. The writers seem to imply that something that was described as “spectacles” (referring to the shape and function of eyeglasses) was beyond the ability of Joseph to ever use in the same manner as eyeglasses, even though they were shaped accordingly. Joseph would look “onto” them but not through them. No mention or speculation is made of a mental or thought process whereby one sees in his mind but not physically.]

19 Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints Herald*, 1 October 1879, 289-90.

On page 89:

From mid-April to mid-June 1828, Martin Harris stayed at Joseph's house in Harmony, recording for him as he dictated **the words that appeared on the spectacles**. . . . Martin Harris marveled at the fact that "Joseph knew not the contents of the Book of Mormon until it was translated."<sup>31</sup>  
[What does it mean for words to "appear on the spectacles"?)

On page 90:

[Harris] further described that by the "aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by [Martin] and when finished he would say, 'Written,' and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected. Though Harris was never able to **look into the spectacles** like Joseph, this process forced Joseph to explain to Martin what was happening, as he required him to change what he had written because it was incorrect or **the text in the spectacles** would not change."<sup>32</sup>

31. Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 21.

32. *Deseret Evening News*, 13 December 1881.

On page 92:

For Wilford Woodruff, this transition from the device containing two stones to a single one was seen as a fulfillment of the prophecy in the Book of Mormon that "Gazelem," a seer stone, [singular] would be used to bring forth the ancient records of the Nephites."<sup>45</sup>  
[Comment: The writers seem to want to push this interpretation of "Gazelem."]

45. See Alma 37:23; Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:144, 8:500; George A. Smith Papers, box 174, folder 26, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

On page 120:

The revelatory words that fell from Joseph's lips read as if **the words shining forth on the seer stone** represented the Lord. They beckoned Cowdery to translate in the same manner as Joseph Smith. The Lord told Oliver, "I am the light which shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not." The Lord had also prophesied centuries earlier to the Book of Mormon prophet Alma that the light shining forth in darkness would unveil the Lord's words. Alma explained to his son Helaman that "the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light."<sup>8</sup> These parallels between the way in which Joseph dictated revelations from **words appearing on the seer stone** and the similar way he translated the pages of the Book of Mormon may have taught Cowdery that the power of the Lord was the driving force behind Joseph's gift.

8. Alma 37:23.

(Translation Process)

On page 124-125:

The gold plates apparently included the small plates of Nephi, and Mormon said that he “put them with the remainder of [his] record” just before the beginning of the large plates.<sup>25</sup>

[Note\* The Large Plates were not part of the Gold Plates that Joseph translated. The translation involved Mormon’s abridgment of the Large Plates. The beginning of Mormon’s abridgment of the Large Plates was what some term the Book of Lehi. This statement does not make sense.]

25. Revelation, Spring 1829 [D&C 10], in *JSP*, D1:37.

Joseph Smith and his scribes described two separate instruments and possibly even three.

Outside of the spectacles given to him by the angel with the plates, Smith had at least two other individual seer stones in his possession. After the summer of 1828, the spectacles were taken from Joseph Smith for a short time as a result of the circumstances surrounding the lost manuscript of Lehi. Around that time, he apparently stopped using the spectacles as a regular means of translation and instead used the individual seer **stones [plural]**, as described in an earlier chapter [???] . . . one [stone] that was dark brown . . . and one that was white . . . The first was reportedly discovered a few years after his First Vision, buried under a tree. The second stone was apparently found **twenty-five feet** below the ground in the process of digging a well. However, it is difficult to know which story applied to which seer stone.<sup>26</sup> Given Emma Smith’s explanation of the translation process, **it is likely that the brown stone was the one referred to as Gazelem**, which the Book of Mormon prophesied had been prepared to help translate ancient Nephite records like the Book of Mormon.<sup>27</sup>

[Question: Is there any report of a white stone in translation? If the stone was the dark brown one, then why push the interpretation of a white stone referred to as Gazelem?]

26. [Here the writers review multiple accounts of finding the seer stones, which is very informative.]

27. She stated, “Now the first that my husband translated, was translated by the use of the Urim, and Thummim [i.e., the spectacles or interpreters], and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather a dark color.” See also Alma 37:24.

**2015 J. B. Haws, “The Lost 116 Pages Story: What We Do Know, What We Don’t Know, and What We Might Know,” in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015, p. 81-102.**

**2015 Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, vol. 1, Joseph Smith Papers. Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015, xx-xxi.**

Images of the seer stone are presented.

- 2015 Richard Bushman, "On Seerstones," *By Common Consent*, August 5, 2015, <https://bycommonconsent.com/2015/08/05/on-seerstones>
- 2016 Daniel C. Peterson, "A Response: What the Manuscripts and the Eyewitnesses Tell Us about the Translation of the Book of Mormon," in Bradford and Coutts, *Uncovering the Original Text*, 2016, p. 67-71.
- 2016 Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016).
- 2016 Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick, with the assistance of Jordan Kezele, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, and Salt Lake City: UT, Deseret Book, 2016.

**MUST READ!** This is a refined, charted, and illustrated presentation similar to the ideas first put forth by Mark Ashurst -McGee in his 2000 Masters Thesis on the seer stones that Joseph used. Their reasoning is still built on speculation, but it is presented in 180 pages. There is a discussion on how Joseph interpreted what he saw in translation. There is also a 50-page "Selected Annotated Bibliography of Seer Stone Sources," arranged alphabetically by the last name of the person being "quoted," which is really valuable.

(p. 77) Sources suggest that Joseph Smith possessed a white seer stone in the 1820s. The earliest possible account comes from the late records of the 1826 trial. In **1873**, Charles Marshall took notes from a record of the trial and published them with a testimony from two men who claimed Joseph Smith had two stones: one white, one brown. . . . [Who was Charles Marshall?]

(p. 82) Most of those who emphasize that Joseph translated with a brown stone did not follow Brigham Young to Utah after Joseph Smith's death. . . . In opposition to the Church, she had a political motive to emphasize Joseph Smith's use of the brown stone because it would lend credence to Mormons who had not followed Brigham Young to Utah. Emma was not alone: David Whitmer also emphasized the importance of the brown stone. Both David and Emma were never recorded giving a detailed description of what the stone looked like [????]

(p. 84) . . . there is evidence that the Book of Mormon translation (done with Oliver Cowdery, covering 1 Nephi to Moroni) could have been done with the white stone rather than the brown stone. . . . the Church has yet to reveal what is known about the white stone . . .

- 2016 Staff, "Why is 'Words of Mormon' at the End of the Small Plates?" *KnowWhy #78, Book of Mormon Central*, April 14, 2016.

(Translation Process)

2017 Neal Rappleye, “‘Dynamically Equivalent’ Translation and the Book of Mormon.”  
[www.studioetquoquefide.com/2017/11/dynamically-equivalent. . .](http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2017/11/dynamically-equivalent. . .)

2017 Staff, “Why Is David Whitmer’s Witness of the Book of Mormon So Compelling?,”  
*KnoWhy* #395, Book of Mormon Central, January 2, 2017.

2018 Jan J. Martin, “The Theological Value of the King James Language in the Book of Mormon,”  
*Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, vol. 27 (2018): 88-124.

As a preface to Jan Martin’s detailed historical analysis of the early 1500s debate between Sir Thomas More and William Tyndale about the importance of the proper language used in the Bible (Tyndale had just translated the New Testament into English, which was against Church policy and tradition), she lays out a number of reasons (citing their sources) that have been put forth for all of the biblical expressions found in the Book of Mormon:

- 1 “One theory is that the seventeenth-century language established the validity and theological credibility of the Book of Mormon with its nineteenth-century readers because the teachings found therein evoked a familiar sound.”
- 2 “A second approach argues that by Joseph Smith’s day, King James language was perceived as ‘scriptural,’ making its presence in the Book of Mormon necessary if the book was to be accepted by readers as the word of God.”
- 3 “A third explanation for why the Book of Mormon reads like the King James Version of the Bible (KJV) insists that the translator, Joseph Smith, had been so profoundly influenced by the King James language prior to his translation efforts that it had become integral to his mode of expression.”

Martin then explains: “As interesting as these arguments may be to some . . . they still reduce the seventeenth-century language to a mode of expression that has little value to the modern reader.” Martin then focuses on what the Book of Mormon itself claims for its composition:

The Book of Mormon indeed asserts a substantial reason for its seventeenth-century prose. In 1 Nephi 13, the principal character and storyteller, Nephi, the son of Lehi, learns that the Book of Mormon will serve two important theological functions. First, it will establish truths already contained in the Bible, and, second, it will restore truths taken or lost from it. (1 Nephi 13:39-40)

Martin then relates the relevance of her analysis of the historical debate: “One of the reasons [Thomas] More initiated the debate with [William] Tyndale was because he understood that

**Theology cannot be separated from the language used to express it.  
Some words carry significant implications for authority, doctrine, and practice.”**

Ironically, it would be the King James Bible, built upon the translation by Tyndale (who gave his life for the cause), and the subsequent Book of Mormon, built on the language of the King James Bible, that would carry the weight of these statements. Jan Martin concludes with the following:

The seventeenth-century language in the Book of Mormon should not be perceived solely as a means of smoothing the way for the volume's acceptance in the nineteenth century, nor should it be viewed as an unnecessary or irritating relic that has long lost its usefulness. Rather, from the Book of Mormon's own perspective, the seventeenth-century language is an indispensable tool that allows the Book of Mormon to clarify and establish the truths in the King James Bible.

- 2018 John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: "Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 11-50.**

John Welch writes on page 12:

"Looking closely at the documents and the dating of all that happened during the three months of April, May, and June 1829 can . . . awaken a greater sense of gratitude and respect for this extraordinary volume of scripture."

[Comment: Over and above all the documents cited, the illustrated charts, the variety of analyses, etc., and while keeping in mind the absolute complexity of the text of the Book of Mormon, I was impressed by the following exercise by John Welch and his wife, Jeannie, and I would recommend it to all readers for a variety of reasons.]

On page 38 Welch writes:

In order to test the feasibility of these calculations of how fast Joseph and Oliver actually could have worked, my wife, Jeannie, and I decided to try it out ourselves. We picked two pages in Royal Skousen's Yale edition of the Book of Mormon, since that version breaks the text lines into thought clauses that would have been about the length of each translational unit. At first, I played the role of Joseph and read the first line slowly and distinctly, while she, playing the role of Oliver, began immediately writing those words down. When she reached the end of that line, she read it back to me, and I confirmed that it was correct or pointed out mistakes. Then I paused, gazed again at the page, uncovered the next line, and read it aloud, which Jeannie likewise recorded and read back. . . . [continued]

- 2018 Scott Woodward, "Accounts of the Translation Process," and "Book of Mormon Translation Timeline," [https://scottwoodward.org/bookofmormon\\_translationprocess\\_accounts.html](https://scottwoodward.org/bookofmormon_translationprocess_accounts.html)**

- 2019 Book of Mormon Central KnoWhys: "Why Do New Testament Words and Phrases Show Up in the Book of Mormon, Part 1," KnoWhy #525, July 18, 2019. Part 2: The Resurrected Jesus As the Source," KnoWhy #528, August 21, 2019. Part 3: Revelations to Nephite Prophets As a Source [Part A]," KnoWhy #528, August 21, 2019. Part 4: Revelations to Nephite Prophets As the Source (Part B)," KnoWhy #531, September 12, 2019. Part 5: How Often Were Scriptures on the Plates of Brass the Common Source?," KnoWhy #533, September 26, 2019. Part 6: Why Do Similar Clusters of Old Testament Texts Appear in Both?," KnoWhy #535, October 10, 2019.**

**Part 7: How Often Did These Commonalities Come Through the Hand of Mormon or Moroni?,"  
KnowWhy #537, October 24, 2019.)**

Book of Mormon Central has written a series of short, but excellent articles that seek to give perspective to the question of why biblical phrases show up in the Book of Mormon. What follows is their overview of the detailed reasoning which they present in those articles.

**A. Similarities Due to a Common Ancient Source:**

1. Far more often than readers usually realize, many New Testament passages are quoting or paraphrasing earlier Old Testament or other ancient texts (such as a version of the Book of Enoch) that could have been available to the Nephites through the plates of brass (for example, Mosiah 16:7–8 and 1 Corinthians 15:54–56 relate to Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14).
2. Some passages in the Book of Mormon have similarities to New Testament passages that themselves are quotations of or allusions to Old Testament texts that post-date Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, making them presumably unavailable to the Nephites. It is possible, however, that these Old Testament expressions could derive from a phase of Hebrew language and literature that dates to before Lehi left Jerusalem. This scenario would make them potentially available to have been included on the brass plates or otherwise passed on to Book of Mormon peoples.

**B. Revelations to Nephite Prophets as the Source of the Similarity:**

1. Before the appearance of Jesus in the New World, Jesus (or his Angel) spoke to Nephi, Jacob, Abinadi, Benjamin, Alma, and others, and they learned New Testament-type phrases directly from Him in these revelations. For example, Nephi was shown a vision of the last days that he was told would later be recorded by an apostle of the Lamb named John (see 1 Nephi 14:18–27). It was even revealed to Nephi that others had received the same or similar vision of "all things" that Nephi had received (v. 26).
2. Revelations that were given in other ways to Nephite prophets could also have revealed doctrines and principles that would subsequently be taught or revealed in New Testament Christianity (see Alma 32:38 and Matthew 13:6).

**C. The Resurrected Jesus as the Source of Some of these Similarities:**

1. Jesus Christ's teachings during His personal ministry among the Nephites can account for a substantial portion of the biblical quotations and phrases in the text. For example, it makes sense that Jesus would repeat, with some variation, His teachings from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament to the Nephites at the temple in Bountiful. Christ's delivery of this sermon among the Nephites might also explain quotations from or allusions to the Sermon on the Mount found later on in the writings of Mormon and Moroni (for example, Matthew 5:22/3 Nephi 12:22 in Mormon 8:17).

2. The presence of Old Testament texts like Isaiah 54 and Malachi 3–4 (found in 3 Nephi 22 and 24–25) are also not hard to explain because they were quoted to the Nephites by Jesus Himself. As Christ explained, “These scriptures, which ye had not with you, the Father commanded that I should give unto you; for it was wisdom in him that they should be given unto future generations” (3 Nephi 26:2).

3. Even after His initial visitation among the Nephites, Jesus continued to meet with and talk to His disciples in the New World (see 3 Nephi 26:13). It is likely that, similar to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus delivered other teachings to them that He had taught during His ministry among the Jews in the Old World. In fact, Mormon said he could not record “even a hundredth part of the things which Jesus did truly teach unto the people” (3 Nephi 26:6). In addition, it should be remembered that Jesus later revealed things directly to Mormon and Moroni. It is thus quite possible that many of Christ’s teachings found in the New Testament were also had among the Nephites, or were delivered directly to Mormon or Moroni, but simply were not recorded in Mormon’s account of Christ’s ministry.

**D. Mormon and Moroni as the Source of the Similarity:**

1. As Mormon in the 4th-century AD abridged the historical Nephite records, he could have inserted words or phrases that Jesus had introduced into Nephite usage (as discussed above). Since the Nephite language or dialect changed over the centuries to such an extent that readers in Mormon’s day could not understand some of the earlier language, one may assume that, on occasion, Mormon may have avoided literal copying and used instead expressions more familiar to his contemporaries (and more similar to New Testament language) so that his readers could better understand (see Matthew 6:25/3 Nephi 13:25 and Alma 31:37).

2. Hypothetically, it is possible that Mormon did not simply append the Small Plates of Nephi to the end of his Plates, but instead copied the words of Nephi, Jacob, and others from the Small Plates onto new plates that he created. We do not know if this was the case, but if it was, Mormon could have used later (New Testament-type) phrases from his day to make the early Nephite teachings more understandable for a future audience that he knew would have the Bible (see Mark 9:31/2 Nephi 25:13; Matthew 9:22/Enos 1:8; John 10:16/1 Nephi 22:25).

3. Some sections in the book of Ether were written by Moroni in the late 4th-century AD as his own editorial insertions, so it should not be unexpected to find “Christian” language in these sections (Matthew 25:28/Ether 12:35). It is also possible that Moroni inserted Christian language into other portions of Jaredite history as he summarized, contextualized, and interpreted its narratives.

**E. The Translation Process as the Source of the Similarity:**

1. Joseph Smith's ordinary language likely included some biblical expressions that were common in the early 1800s. Under the theory that he was responsible to express the ideas on the plates using his own words and phrases, it is possible that some of the biblical phrases could have appeared in the translation without his thinking about (maybe not even being aware of) where they appeared in the New Testament (as perhaps Galatians 5:1/Mosiah 23:13; Ephesians 6:4/Enos 1:1; Philippians 2:12/Mormon 9:27).

2. Joseph Smith may have memorized or learned by heart some common New Testament passages which the Spirit then called up from his mind as they were then woven into the translation because they made good translational sense appropriate in that context.

3. The idea that Joseph Smith opened a Bible, located, and read from the Bible as he went along seems completely unlikely, for several reasons: (1) There is no evidence that he had his own Bible before the end of 1829; (2) eye-witnesses, such as Emma, said that he used no books, notes, or Bible in dictating the English words of the Book of Mormon; (3) no witness or close associate involved in any way in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon ever claimed that Joseph had or used a Bible; (4) no hostile observers ever report or suggest that Joseph had a Bible while translating; (5) if Joseph were using a King James Bible, he would have to have done extensive study and alteration of the text before dictating, due to the complex composite quotations, blending of texts, and sometimes extensive but precise modifications made to the quoted biblical texts.

4. Various lines of scriptural, linguistic, and historical evidence suggest that Joseph Smith was not responsible for the English language of the translation, and that it was instead revealed to him word for word. In this scenario, it is possible that whatever divine process was responsible for producing the English translation was also responsible for extensively integrating relevant New Testament phrasing into the text. This "revealed words" approach accounts well for the fact that not only are there short phrases from the New Testament found in the Book of Mormon but also long verbatim quotes. The complexity of how these longer quotes are sometimes woven in and adapted to the Book of Mormon narrative makes the idea that they were coming from Joseph Smith's memory seem inadequate. Keeping in mind that Joseph Smith was most likely not using a Bible during the translation (as discussed above), the presence and nature of these biblical quotations can be seen to support this theory.

## Conclusion

In sum, there may be many reasons why biblical words and phrases show up in the Book of Mormon. The text of the Book of Mormon, and its relationship to the Bible and to other ancient scriptural texts, is complex in many ways. Although we do not know for sure which of the above explanations, or combination of explanations, stands behind each of the many Old and New Testament phrases and expressions found in the Book of Mormon, it seems clear that several logically plausible sources may stand behind the writing and translation of its various passages.

Above all, it is important to remember that although the Book of Mormon was written by ancient prophets, it was meant to be read by people in our time – people who often know the Bible, especially the New Testament, well and are accustomed to recognizing

KJV literary styles as holy scripture. As such, finding biblical language in the Book of Mormon may very well be a fulfillment of the ancient prophet Nephi's inspired words when he taught that God "speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3; D&C 1:24).

- 2019 Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019. **VERY THOUGHT PROVOKING in many areas**
- 2019 Samuel Morris Brown, "'To Read the Round of Eternity': Speech, Text, and Scripture in *The Book of Mormon*," in *Americanist Approaches to "The Book of Mormon,"* ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, 159-183.
- 2019 Terry Givens *Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Most Controversial Scripture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 188-202.
- 2019 Jonathan Neville, *A Man That Can Translate: Joseph Smith and the Nephite Interpreters*, Museum of the Book of Mormon Press, 2019.
- 2021 Clifford P. Jones, "That Which You Have Translated, which You Have Retained," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* Vol. 43 (2021): 1-64.  
**A MUST READ! I tend to follow this line of thought.**
- 2021 Lee H. Pearson, *David Whitmer: Man of Contradictions—An Analysis of Statements by David Whitmer on Translation of the Book of Mormon*. <https://Josephsmithfoundation.org>, February 10, 2019.

Note\* Compares seeming discrepancies in numerous interviews of David Whitmer concerning the translation of the Book of Mormon in order to cast doubt on the facts of his testimony regarding the means Joseph used in that "translation." This is not an anti-Mormon book. The

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approach appears to be a scholarly attempt to counter the “Seer Stone” theory proposed for the translation of the Book of Mormon. However, Pearson’s arguments can be countered.

**2021 Grant Hardy, “The Book of Mormon Translation Process,” in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60:3 (2021): 203-212.**

Grant Hardy offers some insights relative to the translation process. Hardy demonstrates that while we can study the process, we would agree with Emma Smith, who said that, even as an eyewitness to the process, “it is marvelous to me. ‘a marvel and a wonder,’ as much so as to any one else.”

On the one hand, some perspectives of the translation focus on Joseph’s personal initiative and mental capacity:

- The nonstandard grammar

- The limited vocabulary

- Religious phrases and concepts related to Joseph’s time

- Possible anachronisms

- Biblical phrases

- D&C 9:5-10 about Oliver Cowdery’s failure to translate might reflect on the process with Joseph

- Joseph’s willingness to correct the style and grammar in 1837 and 1840 editions

On the other hand, other perspectives of the translation lend themselves to a script that was tightly controlled:

- The extreme care that Joseph practiced to get the words exactly right.

- Joseph’s spelling out difficult names

- Intratextual quotations (editorial & prophetic promises)

- Quotation of large sections of the Bible

- Complex literary patterns and word forms

- The presence of Early Modern English.

- The Book of Mormon’s own suggestion that the future translator “read the words” (2 Ne. 27:19-26)

**2021 Jonathan Edward Neville, *Infinite Goodness: Joseph Smith, Jonathan Edwards, and the Book of Mormon*, 2021, p. 152-153.**

Note\* By claiming that Joseph was the “actual translator” of the plates (in that Joseph chose the words corresponding to the meaning of each character symbol), he (Neville) believes that he (Neville) “diffuses critical arguments that focus on evidence of composition, such as alleged anachronisms and similarities to the Bible and other books.” “The reason is simple, as I [Neville] mentioned above: evidence of composition is also evidence of translation” (p. x) But is it?

Neville believes that when Joseph personally translated the plates, JOSEPH “was using his personal lexicon” (p. x). While this might be true, I believe that Neville pushes this idea at the expense of diminishing God’s divine help, and in favor of augmenting Joseph’s mental prowess—greatly diminishing God’s role in translating an unknown language to yield the most important book in God’s work of the latter-days.

I believe Neville’s theory falls short because it doesn’t sufficiently address the very complex structural nature of the Book of Mormon text. In less than two pages, Neville dismisses this complex structure of parallelism and indicators of antiquity such as “ancient festivals, legal procedures, thinking patterns, frames of references, proper nouns . . . stylometry . . . [and] Early Modern English” with broad statements such as “repetition is neither unusual nor uncommon,” or “In my view, it is theoretically possible to have an objective study, but usually the results confirm the bias of the study’s authors,” or “I readily accept their data, but they interpret the data in accordance with their assumptions, which I don’t share.” Neville dismisses this divine complexity (and all the testimonies of those who viewed Joseph as lacking in verbal ability at the time of the translation of the Book of Mormon) by saying: “in my view, the text is the only evidence we have of how Joseph spoke.” (p. 312-313) But did Joseph really speak in the structure of the Book of Mormon? The text of the Book of Mormon contains multiple line forms and word forms, with literally hundreds of chiasmic passages and extended alternating parallelisms, some covering whole sections of the narrative? I feel to respond as Isaiah did: “Shall the ax boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against [him] that lift it up . . . ” (2 Nephi 20:15)

**2021 Brian C. Hales, “Joseph Smith as a Book of Mormon Storyteller,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, Vol. 46 (2021): 253-290.**

Of special note, on pages 277 -299, Brian Hales produces a footnoted list of details that provide a fuller picture of Joseph’s dictation process and composition:

The entire dictation required few than 85 days and possibly as few as 57.

The number of words produced would have varied between about 2700 and 4700 a day.

The number of words in the dictated blocks typically involved at least 20 to 30.

Joseph Smith and his scribes checked the accuracy of the recorded text.

Some proper names were spelled out.

According to eyewitnesses, no preexisting manuscripts or books were used.

*(Translation Process)*

Many onlookers (followers and skeptics) were permitted to view Joseph Smith as he dictated to his scribes.

After breaks, Joseph would start where he left off without reading back the previous portion.

Multiple scribes (followers and skeptics) participated.

After dictation, none of the sentences were re-sequenced prior to publication.

The three month project produced a lengthy complex text:

| <u>Characteristic</u>                         | <u>Quality/Quantity</u>   |
|---|---|
| Word count                                    | 269,320   |
| Number of sentences                           | 6,852   |
| Average sentence length                       | 39.3  |
| Reading level                                 | 8 <sup>th</sup> grade   |
| Dialect                                       | Early English   |
| Punctuation                                   | none  |
| Unique words                                  | 5,903   |
| College-level vocabulary words (not in Bible) | dozens  |
| Original proper nouns                         | 1709  |
| Parallel phraseology—chiasms                  | 367   |
| Parallel phraseology—alternates               | 400   |
| Poetic literary forms (other)                 | 911   |
| Stylometric consistencies                     | at least 4 unique authors   |
| Bible intertextuality                         | hundreds of phrases and integrations                                      |
| Named characters                              | 208   |
| Socio-geographic groups                       | 45  |
| Geographical locations (Promised Land)        | over 150  |
| Geographical references (Promised Land)       | over 400  |
| Ecological references                         | 2,065   |
| Monetary system weights                       | 12 distinct values  |
| Chronological references                      | over 100  |
| Storylines                                    | 77 major; additional minor  |
| Flashbacks and embedded storylines            | 5   |
| Sermons                                       | 68 major; additional minor  |
| Sermon topics                                 | dozens  |
| Sermon commentary                             | often intricate and multifaceted  |
| Formal headings to chapters and books         | 21  |
| Editorial promises                            | 121   |
| Internal historical sources quoted            | at least 24   |
| Subjects discussed with precision             | at least 3 (e.g. biblical law, olive tree husbandry, and warfare tactics. |

## Articles Describing Naturalistic Origins of the Book of Mormon

The following authors and publications listed below are some representative selections from a list of over **170 secular / anti-Mormon** authors from 1830 to 2018 that theorized on the nature of Joseph Smith's so-called "translation" or rather composition of the Book of Mormon. The source is the website "Mormon Polygamy Documents," which resulted from a collaboration of Don Bradley and Brian C. Hales. The title of this particular collection is "Articles Describing Naturalistic Origins of the Book of Mormon." <https://mormonpolygamymdocuments.org/articles-describing-naturalistic-origins-book-mormon/>

**Note\*** In **1997**, Louis C. Midgley would chronologically review a multitude of anti-Mormon publications relative to their theories on how the Book of Mormon was translated (or from their perspective composed). (See Louis C. Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories," in Noel B. Reynolds ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*. Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2004, p. 101-140.)

In **2004** Daniel C. Peterson would write a nice article along this same theme of how anti-Mormons had changed their perceptions of how the Book of Mormon came to be. He cited multiple publications. As always, none of these anti-Mormon authors believed Joseph Smith's account, or the accounts of any of the witnesses to Joseph's translation. (See Daniel C. Peterson, "'In the Hope That Something Will Stick': Changing Explanations for the Book of Mormon." *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): xi-xxxii.)

In **2019**, Brian C. Hales, would write a similar article. (See Brian C. Hales, "Naturalistic Explanations of the Origin of the Book of Mormon: A Longitudinal Study," *BYU Studies Quarterly* Vol. 58, No. 3 (2019): 105-148), In this article Hales explained and charted five of the most popular naturalistic theories through the years:

- (1) **S**olomon Spaulding
- (2) **C**ollaborators
- (3) **M**ental Illness
- (4) **A**utomatic Writing
- (5) **J**oseph's Intellect

As you will see in the list below, I have added the colored designation to the publication year according to Hales' chart on pages 140-145 of his article.

### Year    Reference

**1830J** Obadiah Dogberry [Abner Cole], "The Book of Pukei.—Chap. 2." *The Reflector* (Palmyra, New York) 3d series, no. 8 (7 July 1830): 60.

**1830CJ** [Editor The Cleveland Herald] , "The Golden Bible." *The Cleveland Herald* (Ohio) (25 November 1830): 3.

**1831J** Alexander Campbell, "Delusions," *Millennial Harbinger*, February 7, 1831, p. 91, 92.

**1833S** [Editor], "The Mormon Mystery Developed," *The Wayne Sentinel*, vol. XI. No. 14 (December 20, 1833).

(Translation Process)

- 1834**SJ** Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, Painsville: by the author, 1834.
- 1834**J** Isaac Hale
- 1842**J** J. B. Turner, *Mormonism in All Ages: or, The Rise, Progress, and Causes of Mormonism*, New York: Platt & Peters, 1842.
- 1842**S** John A. Clark, *Gleaning by the Way*, New York: W. J. and J.K. Simon, 1842
- 1851**S** Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, Rochester: William Alling, 1851.
- 1867**S** Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, New York: D. Appleton, 1867.
- 1882**S** Robert Patterson, *Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?* Pittsburg: L. H. Everts, 1882.
- 1885**SCJ** Martin Thomas Lamb, *The Golden Bible; or, Book of Mormon. Is it from God?* Salt Lake City, 1885.
- 1891**S** William H. Whitsett, "Sidney Rigdon, The Real Founder of Mormonism," Unpublished manuscript, Library of Congress AC1158.
- 1902**MAJ**I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.*, New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1902.
- 1902**S** William Alexander Linn, *The Story of the Mormons from the Date of Their Origin to the Year 1901*, New York: McMillan Company, 1902.
- 1914**S** Charles Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon*, Cincinnati, Ohio: The Standard Pub. Co, 1914.
- 1919**MA**George Seibel, *The Mormon Saints The Story Of Joseph Smith, His Golden Bible, And The Church He Founded*, Pittsburg: Lessing Co., 1919.
- 1945**J** Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d ed. rev. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971.
- 1957**J** Thomas F. O’Dea, *The Mormons*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957
- 1977**S** Howard A. Davis, Donald R. Scales & Wayne L. Cowdrey, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* Santa Ana: Vision House Publishers, 1977.

- 1981J Wesley P. Walters, "The Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Mormon," Masters Thesis, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, 1981.
- 1992SJ Robert N. Hullinger, *Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon*, St. Louis, MO: Clayton, 1980.
- 1992AJ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.
- 1993J Brent Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in Brent Lee Metcalfe ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993, p. 395–444.
- 1994J Wesley Walters and Michael Marquardt, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1994.
- 2000J David Pursitt, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of The Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed., Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 2000.
- 2002J David P. Wright, "Isaiah in the Book of Mormon: Or Joseph Smith in Isaiah," in Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002, p. 157–234.
- 2004J Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004.
- 2005J H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816–1844*, Longwood, Florida: Xulon Press, 2005.
- 2007S Dale Broadhurst, Review of Terryl Givens's, *By the Hand of Mormon*  
<http://www.solomonspalding.com/Lib/givn2002.htm>
- 2009J Craig Criddle, "Sidney Rigdon: Creating the Book of Mormon," Originally posted: 8 Oct 2005; Revised and updated: 15 Mar 2009, <http://sidneyrigdon.com/criddle/rigdon1.htm>
- 2010J Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith's Plagiarism of the Bible in the Book of Mormon*, Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 2010.
- 2013J Earl M. Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us About Itself*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013.
- 2016J William L. Davis, "Performing Revelation: Joseph Smith's Oral Performance of the *Book of Mormon*" (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 2016), p. 4, 24.

*(Translation Process)*

“The Book of Mormon stands as one of the longest recorded oral performances in the history of American culture . . . The fundamental oral techniques Smith employed were the same techniques common to storytellers, preachers, trance lecturers and other social and political orators in early nineteenth-century America.”

Note\* For a rebuttal, see Brian C. Hales, “Joseph Smith as a Book of Mormon Storyteller,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, Vol. 46 (2021): 253-290.

2016CJ Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Natural Born Seer: Joseph Smith American Prophet 1805–1830*, Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2016.

2017S Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick, “Spalding Research Associates,” at <http://www.solomonspalding.info/>

2020J William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon*. University of North Carolina Press, 2020.