

The Publication History of the Book of Mormon

Bruce Satterfield

Department of Religious Education,
Brigham Young University - Idaho

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Joseph Smith declared that “the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book.”¹ To accurately reflect the correctness of its teachings, Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the “gift and power of God.”² He then published this translation so that the world would have access to those teachings that would bring one “nearer to God.” A study of the history of the publication of the Book of Mormon reveals that great effort has been made to accurately reproduce the translation of the Book of Mormon, and to offer the reader a variety of aids that will help in understanding the message found on its sacred pages.

1830 Edition (Palmyra, NY)

Immediately upon the completion of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith had Oliver Cowdery copy the original manuscript.³ This copy, known as the printer’s copy, was used by E. B. Grandin of Palmyra, NY, a printer whose skill at printing was equal to any in the largest commercial centers along the Atlantic seaboard, to print the Book of Mormon.

Oliver Cowdery, accompanied by a select guard, brought a small number of pages of the printer’s copy each day to John H. Gilbert, Grandin’s chief compositor. It was then composed, set in gallery and page forms, checked out, and proofread. The portions of the printer’s copy brought each day were always removed each evening by Oliver Cowdery and a small guard. Typesetting began in the last week of August 1829 and continued through March 1830.

The original manuscript and the printer’s copy were without capitalization, punctuation and paragraphs. These were added by Gilbert in the first edition. No versification appeared in original edition.

On the title page, Joseph Smith appeared as Author and Proprietor because of a federal law enacted in 1790 requiring that anyone seeking a copyright must claim to be author or proprietor of the material.⁴ Other translators also used the term author when publishing a foreign book into English.

The 1830 edition included a preface by Joseph Smith. The testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses were placed at the end of the book. 5,000 copies were made of this edition which was bound in leather and sold for \$1.50 dollars.

1837 Kirtland Edition

The Book of Mormon played a major role in the missionary efforts of the early church. As proselyting increased, another printing of the Book of Mormon was needed.⁵ In 1837, while the Church was headquartered in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith began the process of reprinting the Book of Mormon. In preparation for this edition, Joseph Smith compared the 1830 edition to the printer’s manuscript and corrected hundreds of typographical, grammatical, and syntactical errors found in the first edition. He also emended the text in nearly 100 cases. No subsequent revision of the text was more extensive than produced in this edition. Joseph Smith also had his named changed from Author and Proprietor to Translator to lessen confusion about who authored the book. There were 3,000-5,000 copies printed.

1840 Nauvoo Edition

By 1840, more Book of Mormons were needed. Preliminary to a new edition, Joseph Smith compared the 1837 version with the original manuscript and discovered a number of errors made by Oliver Cowdery when making the printer's copy.⁶ Joseph corrected these errors in the 1840 edition. 2,000 copies were printed by Shepard and Stearns, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

British Editions

In 1837, missionary work in England began under the direction of Heber C. Kimball. These efforts increased in the 1840's as the majority of the Twelve Apostles were in England doing missionary work. The need for Book of Mormons was keenly felt. In 1841, Brigham Young, using the 1837 edition, had 4,050 copies of the Book of Mormon printed by J. Tompkins publishers in Liverpool. Though they had Joseph Smith's permission, they were unaware of the revisions Joseph Smith made in the 1840 edition. The only difference between this first British edition and the 1837 edition was the use of British spelling.

As missionary work continued in England, two other British editions were produced: Orson Pratt's 1849 edition and Franklin D. Richards' 1852 edition. Though it was not a true versification, Richards added numbers to each paragraph in order to aid in finding passages. Richards also included chapter indicators in the running titles.

It was during this same period that the Book of Mormon began to be translated and published in languages other than English. It was published in Danish in 1851, in Welsh, German, French, and Italian in 1852, and Hawaiian in 1855.⁷

1879 Edition

In 1879, with the blessing of the First Presidency, Orson Pratt produced an edition of the Book of Mormon with a thoroughly revised structure. In this edition, the structure of the text was altered by creating more and shorter chapters. A true versification was employed (which has been followed by all subsequent editions). He also added footnotes for cross-reference, information, and explanation. Changes in spelling and grammar were made as well as some wording in an effort to clarify meaning. To publish this new edition, Orson Pratt journeyed to London, England, where he had the book electrotyped. He then traveled to Liverpool to have the book printed and bound. He took a set of duplicate electrotype plates to Salt Lake City. These plates were the primary source for the majority of Book of Mormon's printed until 1920.

The Book of Mormon continued to be translated into other languages: in Swedish in 1878, in Spanish in 1886, in Maori in 1889, in Dutch in 1890, in Samoan in 1903; in Tahitian in 1904; in Turkish in 1906; and in Japanese in 1909.⁸

1920 Edition

In 1920, a committee of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was appointed to examine the previous editions of the Book of Mormon and create a new edition that would correct a few errors caused by bad proof-reading. James E. Talmage took the leading role. The errors were not only corrected but punctuation and capitalization were revised. The text was placed into double columns, chapter summaries and additional footnotes were added. Further, additional introductory material was included consisting of a "Brief Analysis of the Book of Mormon" and a summary of the "Origin of the Book of Mormon." Added to the book was an index and a pronouncing guide. New electrotyped plates were made and all former plates destroyed. All printings of the Book of Mormon

in the Church came from copies of these plates.

1936 Braille Edition

Though the Book of Mormon continued to be translated into variety of other languages, there was no braille edition for the blind. Finally, in 1936, a braille edition of the Book of Mormon was produced. It consisted of seven volumes and was printed by the American Printing House for the blind, the same company that printed Bibles in braille. It was given to larger libraries throughout the United States.⁹

1981 Edition

The last major revision of the Book of Mormon occurred in 1981.¹⁰ Some years earlier, a committee headed by members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was assigned to do a major revision of the all four standard works. Like the other standard works, added to each page of the Book of Mormon were running page heads that listed first and last verse on page. Each chapter was given a new summary that was descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory. A new footnoting system was applied that (1) linked cross-references to all four standard works, (2) referred to subjects in a topical guide found at the back of the Bible, and (3) offered specific aids to help the reader understand a word or phrase within a verse. A one-page introduction that briefly explains what the Book of Mormon is about was added. Also, added to the Three Witnesses and Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon was an article concerning Joseph Smith's testimony. The Pronouncing Guide found at the end of the Book of Mormon was revised. Finally, there was also about twenty significant textual changes made that corrected errors made in printer's copy by reference to original manuscript.

One year after the 1981 edition was produced, there was one final significant change made to this edition of the Book of Mormon. The title of the Book of Mormon would appear with a subtitle. The book would now be called, "The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ."¹¹ This was done to emphasize the purpose of the book as stated on the title page: "...to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ..."

1. Book of Mormon Introduction.

2. Smith, Joseph Fielding, ed. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Press, 1938, p. 17.

3. Concerning the 1830 edition, see, Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Gold Plates and Printer's Ink," *Ensign* (Sep 1976), 71-76; Gayle Goble Ord, "The Book of Mormon Goes to Press," *Ensign* (Dec 1972), 66-70; "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (Dec 1983), 39-43; Donald L. Enders, "Two Significant Sites of the Restoration," *Ensign* (Dec 1998), 30-37; Kenneth W. Godfrey, "A New Prophet and a New Scripture," *Ensign* (Jan 1988), 6-13; George Horton, "Understanding Textual Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (Dec 1983), 24-28.

4. "Joseph Smith: 'Author and Proprietor'," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. by John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 154-157.

5. Concerning the publication of editions of the Book of Mormon between 1837 to 1920, see, See Hugh Grant Stocks, *The Book of Mormon in English, 1870-1920: A Publishing History and Analytical Bibliography* (Doctoral dissertation, UCLA, 1986), pp. 85-119; Royal Skousen, "Book of Mormon Editions (1830-1981)," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* 4 Vols., ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:175-176; Stan Larson, "Changes in Early Texts of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (Sep 1976), 77-82; George Horton, "Understanding Textual Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (Dec 1983), 24-28.
6. For a discussion concerning differences between the original manuscript and the printer's edition, see "The Original Book of Mormon Transcript," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. by John W. Welch (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1992), 9-12.
7. George Albert Smith, Conference Report, April 1936, 13-16.
8. George Albert Smith, Conference Report, April 1936, 13-16.
9. George Albert Smith, Conference Report, April 1936, 13-16.
10. See Boyd K. Packer, "Using the New Scriptures," *Ensign* (Dec.1985), 49-53; Bruce T. Harper, "The Church Publishes a New Triple Combination," *Ensign* (Oct 1981), 8-19; Robert J. Matthews, "The New Publication of the Standard Works," *BYU Studies* (Vol. 22, No. 4), 387-424.
11. Boyd K. Packer, "Scriptures," *Ensign*, (Nov 1982) 53.