



Type: Journal Article

When Pages Collide: Dissecting the Words of Mormon

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Source: *BYU Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (2012), pp. 120–136

Published by: BYU Studies

Abstract: Careful readers of the Book of Mormon have probably found verses 12–18 of the Words of Mormon to be a bit of a puzzle. For stylistic and other reasons, they do not really fit with verses 1–11, so commentators have tried to explain their presence as a sort of "bridge" or "transition" that Mormon wrote to connect the record of the small plates with his abridgment from the large plates. This paper proposes a different explanation: Rather than being a bridge into the book of Mosiah, these verses were originally part of the book of Mosiah and should be included with it.

This article presents both documentary and textual evidence to show that (1) Joseph Smith had translated some text that he did not give to Martin Harris (the lost 116 pages), (2) Oliver Cowdery, Joseph's scribe, copied from the original manuscript onto the printer's manuscript at the beginning of the book of Mosiah the chapter designation "Chapter III," (3) verses 12–18 of Words of Mormon do not use the first-person pronoun "I" and do not speak of the small plates, as verses 1–11 do, and (4) the book of Mosiah begins abruptly, without an introductory heading and without any mention of the person for whom the book was likely named (Benjamin's father, Mosiah). These and other pieces of evidence support the idea that the last seven verse in Words of Mormon were actually the last verses of what should have been Mosiah chapter 2, but chapter 1 and most of chapter 2 must have been part of the 116 pages lost by Martin Harris.



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help of their King Benjamin by Labanum with all the might of his body & the
power of his whole soul & also the prophets ~~which~~ did once more establish
peace in the land Chapter 1 And now there was no more con-
tention in all the land of Jared among all the people ~~which~~ belonged to King Ben-
jamin so that King Benjamin had continual peace all the remainder of his days & it came
to pass that he had three Sons & he called their names Mosiah & Helaman & Helia-
man & he caused that they should be taught in all the language of his fathers that
passed thereby they might become men of understanding & that they might know concern-
ing the prophecies which had been spoken by the mouth of their fathers which ~~were~~
& not believed them by the hand of the Lord & he also taught them concerning the records
which were engraven on the plates of brass saying my Sons I would that ye should re-
member that were it not for these plates which contain these records & these command-
ments we must have suffered in ignorance even at this present time not knowing the
mysteries of God for it were not possible that our father Lehi could have remembered
all these things to have taught them to his children except it were for the help of these
plates for he having been taught in the language of the Egyptians therefore he could
read these engravings & teach them to his children that thereby they could teach them
to their children & so fulfilling the commandments of ^{God} even down to this present time
I say unto you my Sons read & not for these things which have been kept & preserved by the
hand of ^{God} that we might read & understand of his mysteries & have his command-
ments always before our eyes that even our fathers would have dwindled in unbelief
at & we should have been like unto our brethren the Lamanites ~~which~~ know nothing concern-
ing these things or even do not believe them when they are taught them because of
the traditions of their fathers which are not correct O my Sons I would that ye
should remember that these engravings are true & also that these records are true & he
hold also the plates of Lehi which contain the records & the sayings of our fathers pro-
phets in the time they left Jerusalem until now & they are true & we can know of them
in the city because we have them before our eyes & now my Sons I would that ye should
remember to search them diligently that ye may profit thereby & I would that ye should
keep the commandments of God that ye may prosper in the land according to the prom-
ises which the Lord made unto our fathers & many more things did King Benjamin teach
his Sons which are not written in this Book & it came to pass that after King Benja-
min had made an end of teaching his Sons that he would die & he saw that he
must needs soon go the way of all the earth therefore he thought it expedient that
he should confer the kingdom upon one of his Sons therefore he had Mosiah brought
before him & these are the words which he spake unto him saying my Son I would
that ye should make a proclamation throughout all this land among all this people

Page from the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, showing on line 3 the beginning of the book of Mosiah. Courtesy Community of Christ, Independence, Missouri.

When Pages Collide

Dissecting the Words of Mormon

Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson

Verses 12–18 of the Words of Mormon have always been a bit of a puzzle. For stylistic and other reasons, they do not really fit with verses 1–11, so commentators have tried to explain their presence as a sort of “bridge” or “transition” that Mormon wrote to connect the record of the small plates with his abridgment from the large plates.¹ This paper proposes a different explanation: Rather than being a bridge into the book of Mosiah, these verses were originally *part* of the book of Mosiah and should be included with it. To understand why that is so requires some background information about the Book of Mormon manuscript and the order in which the plates were translated.

The Manuscript

There are actually *two* Book of Mormon manuscripts—the original manuscript and the printer’s manuscript. The original manuscript was written by various scribes (but primarily Oliver Cowdery) as Joseph Smith dictated his translation from the golden plates. The printer’s manuscript is (primarily) Oliver’s copy of the original manuscript; as the name implies, he made the copy for the printer to work from, keeping the original manuscript as a backup.²

Original manuscript

Written by various scribes as Joseph dictated

Printer’s manuscript

Copied primarily by Oliver from the original manuscript

Jack M. Lyon and Kent R. Minson

I (Jack) have been struggling to understand the Words of Mormon for more than twenty years now. I've studied it many times, coming back to it again and again, like a dog worrying an old bone. But until Royal Skousen published his transcriptions of the Book of Mormon manuscripts, I couldn't make sense of the record. When I saw Oliver Cowdery's editing of "III" at the beginning of the book of Mosiah in the color plate in Skousen's volume of the printer's manuscript, I knew immediately that the end of the Words of Mormon must be part of the original Mosiah chapter 2. I wrote a preliminary paper on the subject, and was encouraged by John W. Welch to further pursue the topic. He wanted me to explore other possibilities and provide actual evidence for my conclusions—something more than just my gut reaction to the color plate in Skousen's book. My coworker Kent Minson and I discussed the subject at great length, with Kent finally rewriting the paper. After letting it simmer for several more years, I finally reworked Kent's paper into the version published here. We hope it stands as a worthy example of the kind of textual study that can now be done thanks to Royal Skousen's landmark work.



Jack M. Lyon



Kent R. Minson

The Translation

Joseph Smith began his translation with Mormon's abridgment of the large plates. As he explained in his preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, "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, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon." This account, of course, was lost by Martin Harris when he borrowed the 116 pages to show to his wife and family.³ The book of Lehi was followed

by the book of Mosiah, which Joseph and Oliver continued to translate after the 116 pages were gone, followed by Alma, Helaman, and so on. *After* finishing their translation of Mormon's and Moroni's work, they translated the small plates, beginning with 1 Nephi and ending with the Words of Mormon.⁴ Apparently Joseph read the plates in sequence, without jumping around, and the Words of Mormon was probably the last book to be translated.

Order of Translation

Mormon's Abridgment from the Large Plates of Nephi:

Lehi, Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, 4 Nephi, Mormon 1–7

Moroni's Writings and Abridgment:

Mormon 8–9, Ether, Moroni

Small Plates of Nephi:

1 Nephi, 2 Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, Words of Mormon (at least 1–11)

Oliver's Problem

As Oliver Cowdery copied the text of the original Book of Mormon manuscript into the printer's manuscript, he encountered a problem early in the book of Mosiah (see page 124). He had faithfully copied the chapter designation "Chapter III" from the original manuscript, but where were Chapter I and Chapter II? The previous heading was "The Words of Mormon," with no other chapters intervening. Oliver fixed the problem as best he could, inking out the last two characters of "Chapter III" (making it "Chapter I") and inserting "Book of Mosiah" above the line,⁵ something like this (for clarity, we are using the modern, edited text here; ellipses indicate text omitted for brevity):

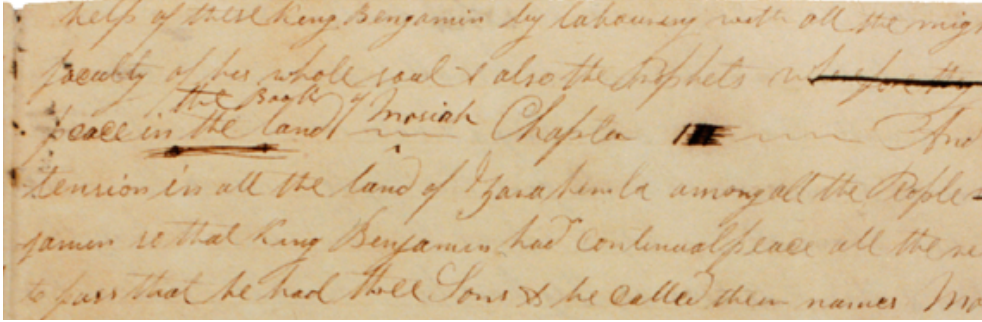
The Words of Mormon . . .

. . . And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written. And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Book of Mosiah

^ Chapter IH

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin. . . .



Detail of page from the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon. Courtesy Community of Christ, Independence, Missouri.

But *why* had Oliver originally written this, as follows:

The Words of Mormon . . .

. . . And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written. And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Chapter III

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin. . . .

Oliver’s unedited copy provides the key to understanding the true structure of the Book of Mormon—something that has been misunderstood even from before the book’s initial publication. Based on the documentary evidence, here is what we believe happened:

The original Book of Mormon manuscript was structured something like this (the *x*’s indicate unknown text):

The Book of Lehi
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX . . .
The Book of Mosiah
Chapter I
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX . . .
Chapter II
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX . . . [end of page 116]

[top of page 117] And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Chapter III

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin . . .

At least, that is what it looked like before Martin Harris lost the first 116 pages of the manuscript. *After* that unfortunate episode, the first remaining page of the original manuscript thus started with this:

[top of page 117] And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Chapter III

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin . . .

Later, to replace the lost 116 pages, Joseph and Oliver put the pages of their translation of the small plates (1 Nephi through Words of Mormon) at the *beginning* of the manuscript, like this:

1 Nephi . . .

The Words of Mormon . . .

. . . And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written. [end of small plates translation]

[top of page 117] And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Chapter III

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin . . .

Thus, what was originally the last part of Mosiah chapter 2 became appended to the Words of Mormon. Oliver copied it that way into the printer's manuscript,

changed “Chapter III” to “Chapter I,” and inserted the title “Book of Mosiah”—and that is how we have the text today:

1 Nephi . . .

The Words of Mormon . . .

. . . And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written. And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Book of Mosiah

Chapter I

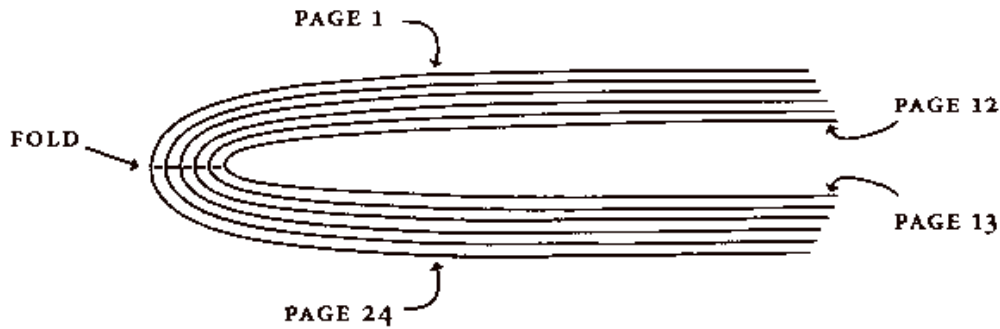
And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin. . . .

But that is not how it should be; the Words of Mormon should end with verse 11. Verses 12–18 should be part of the book of Mosiah.

Royal Skousen explains, “Based on the misnumbering of the chapters near the beginning of Mosiah, I would argue for the following relationship between the large and small plates:

Large Plates	Small Plates
Lehi	Nephi (I) Nephi (II) Jacob Enos Jarom Omni (Amaron, Chemish, Abinadom)
Mosiah “Chapter I”	(Amaleki) [concerning the reign of king Mosiah and the ascension of king Benjamin]
Mosiah “Chapter II”	The Words of Mormon [concerning the reign of king Benjamin]
Mosiah “Chapter III”	[beginning of our present Mosiah]

“Thus the beginning of our current Mosiah corresponds originally with the beginning of the third chapter of Mosiah.”⁶



Drawing of a twelve-leaf gathering. © 2001 Royal Skousen and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. Used by permission.

Pages “Retained”

D&C 10:41 shows that Joseph had translated more than the 116 pages he gave to Martin Harris: “You shall translate the engravings which are on the [small] plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin, or until you come to that which you have translated, *which you have retained*” (emphasis added).⁷ What he had retained was the end of Mosiah chapter 2 (which is now Words of Mormon verses 12–18) and perhaps more. Why did he retain it? Probably because it was written in the next gathering of manuscript pages, which, at the time, was only partially filled.

The original Book of Mormon manuscript was not a stack of separate pages; rather, it consisted of gatherings of (usually) six large sheets of paper folded lengthwise and held together with string. Royal Skousen estimates the original 116 pages to have been five such gatherings, four with six sheets (and thus twenty-four pages each) and one with five sheets (and thus twenty pages). He labels these gatherings A1 through A5 and describes them as containing “the book of Lehi plus the first part of Mosiah.” The following gathering, A6, is also no longer extant, but it probably included (in Skousen’s words) “a few pages from the original first two⁸ chapters of Mosiah, plus the current text from Mosiah 1 into Alma 5.” Skousen also reconstructs the gatherings for 1 Nephi through the Words of Mormon, noting, “After buying some new paper . . . , Oliver put together the last gathering [of the entire translation] (B6), which went from Jacob 5 to the end of the small plates of Nephi and probably included the Words of Mormon.”⁹ Here is another illustration of what was shown above, this time using Skousen’s analysis. Originally the manuscript had this:

Gathering	Contents
A1–A5	“the book of Lehi plus the first part of Mosiah”
A6–A9	“a few pages from the original [second chapter] of Mosiah, plus the current text from Mosiah 1 into Alma 5”

But after A1–A5 were lost and the translation from the small plates was finished, the manuscript had this:

Gathering	Contents
B1–B5	“the text extends from 1 Nephi . . . to Jacob 4:1–4”
B6	“went from Jacob 5 to the end of the small plates of Nephi and probably included the Words of Mormon”
A6–A9	“a few pages from the original [second chapter] of Mosiah, plus the current text from Mosiah 1 into Alma 5”

Textual Evidence

Everything above constitutes the documentary evidence. But textual evidence, too, supports the idea that Words of Mormon verses 12–18 are really the last part of what was originally Mosiah chapter 2:

- The verses do not match the personal style used in the beginning of the Words of Mormon. Instead, they match the narrative style of Mormon’s abridgment as it continues in what is now Mosiah chapter 1.
- The verses do not use the first-person form (“I, Mormon”) seen earlier in the Words of Mormon.
- The verses do not mention the small plates of Nephi (the main focus of the preceding text).
- The verses do not discuss Mormon’s editorial method or purpose (another focus of the preceding text).
- The verses discuss the problem of contention among King Benjamin’s people and how it was resolved: “And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . . Wherefore, . . . king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.” Our current Mosiah chapter 1 is a *continuation* of the same story: “And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla, among all the people who belonged to king Benjamin . . .”
- The transition between verses 11 and 12 is abrupt and disconnected. This is even more evident when reading the unedited text of the

printer's manuscript (the original manuscript text is missing): "there are great things written upon them out of which my People & their Brethren shall be Judged at the great & last day according to the word of God which is written & now concerning this King Benjamin he had somewhat contentions among his own People . . ."

- Verse 12 says that king Benjamin "had somewhat of contentions among his own people." The word "own" implies that the preceding text discussed contentions among *other* people; if that were not so, there would be no need for the word "own." The missing text may have discussed contentions among the people of Zarahemla before they were discovered by Mosiah (see Omni 1:17).
- The end of verse 11 is typical of Mormon's other endings (which often mention future judgment): "And I know that they [the small plates] will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written." (See, for example, Mormon 3:20–22; 7:10.)
- The book of Mosiah is the only book from Mormon's abridgment that lacks an introductory heading.¹⁰ For example, the introductory heading of the book of Alma reads:

The account of Alma, who was the son of Alma, the first and chief judge over the people of Nephi, and also the high priest over the Church. An account of the reign of the judges, and the wars and contentions among the people. And also an account of a war between the Nephites and the Lamanites, according to the record of Alma, the first and chief judge.

The heading for Mosiah probably did exist but appeared before the missing chapter 1.

- Mosiah is the only book from Mormon's abridgment that does not begin with an account of the person for whom it is named: Alma begins with Alma, Helaman begins with Helaman, and so on. The book of Mosiah, however, begins with Benjamin. The missing pages probably discussed the reign of Benjamin's father, Mosiah. Thus, the book's title does not refer to Benjamin's son Mosiah, who is featured later.
- The current beginning of Mosiah is oddly abrupt for the start of a book, in both wording and subject matter: "And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla . . ."
- There is also the obvious question of what comes before "Chapter III." The answer, of course, is "Chapter II." The text at the top of the printer's

manuscript page where the book of Mosiah begins, *before* Oliver did his editing, actually looked like this:

help of these King Benjamin by labouring with all the might of his
 body & the faculty
 of his whole soul & also the Prophets wherefore they did once more
 establish
 peace in the land ~~~~ Chapter III ~~~~ And now there was no
 more con
 -tension in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which
 belonged to King Ben

There is no original indication of a separation between the words preceding “Chapter III” and those following it. Seen in their unedited context, the lines before “Chapter III” clearly constitute the end of what was likely titled “Chapter II” rather than being part of the Words of Mormon.¹¹

In his typographic facsimile of the printer’s manuscript, Royal Skousen includes a color photograph of the manuscript page containing the beginning of the book of Mosiah. Under the photograph, he notes, “Originally, Oliver Cowdery simply wrote *Chapter III* (on line 3). This chapter specification reflects the probable reading of the original manuscript, which is no longer extant for any of the book of Mosiah. *Chapter III* implies that the beginning of the current book of Mosiah was indeed the beginning of chapter 3 of Mosiah in the original Book of Mormon text. The 116 lost pages containing the book of Lehi probably included part of the original first two chapters of the book of Mosiah.”¹²

If the 116 pages included part of the book of Mosiah, what was at the beginning of page 117? Was it the Words of Mormon? No, because that was part of the small plates translation, which occurred later. Was it (at least) part of the book of Mosiah? Yes, because that is how the record continues until it gets to the book of Helaman, and because that must have been the part of the record that Joseph “retained,” as described in D&C 10.

There may be different ways to interpret Oliver’s later editing, but what he originally copied into the printer’s manuscript was this:

The words of Mormon And now I Mormon being about to deliver up
 the record which I have been making into the hands of my Son Moroni
 . . .
 my People & their Brethren shall be Judged at the great& last day according
 to the word
 of God which is written & now concerning this King Benjamin he had
 somewhat co
 -ntensions among his own People & it came to pass also that the armies of
 the Lamanites

... with the
 help of these King Benjamin by labouring with all the might of his body & the
 faculty of his whole soul & also the Prophets wherefore they did once
 more establish
 peace in the land ~~~~ Chapter III ~~~~ And now there was no more con-
 -tension in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged
 to King Ben

So *somewhere* in that text is the end of the Words of Mormon and the beginning of page 117.

It is easy to see why Oliver edited as he did; his only clue to where the break might be was the designation “Chapter III.” But the fact that he had to change it to “Chapter I” and insert “The Book of Mosiah” shows us that the real break was earlier than that. The real question is where?

We believe the break was after verse 11, but other interpretations are possible. On this point, Royal Skousen noted in personal correspondence to Jack Lyon:

It strikes me that it is verse 12 that does not belong to the original Mosiah chapter II, but from verse 13 to the end of the Words of Mormon could be the end of Mosiah chapter II (original chapters). It is also possible that page 117 began with verse 13. Another possibility is that the page began with something dealing with the topic of verse 12, namely, “somewhat contentions”—a very odd expression for the Book of Mormon. I don’t think we have the word “somewhat” occurring right before a noun anywhere else in the text. Maybe we would expect “they had contentions somewhat.” Moreover, there is some novelty in the first sentence of verse 12, “and now concerning this king Benjamin.” The only other time “now concerning X” is used in the text is in Alma 40 (two times), when Alma is speaking to Corianton.

Maybe verse 12 is the basic link between the Words of Mormon and the book of Mosiah. It could have even been added by Joseph Smith to connect things up. You’ve probably already noticed the overlap between Omni 1:24 and the Words of Mormon 1:13–14, with both sounding like original abridged text (the first from the small plates, the second from Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates). It would have been from the original Mosiah chapter II.

There might have been only a part of a sentence at the top of page 117 dealing with the contentions that king Benjamin had to deal with, which could have been ignored by Joseph Smith (and Oliver Cowdery) or perhaps even rewritten as verse 12 of the Words of Mormon.

... As far as how pages of O [original manuscript] can end, it appears that the scribe would write to the end of the page and then continue on the next page, no matter where he was. I went through pages 3–14 of O, as a sample, and found 9 cases where the page begins with a sentence fragment but 3 cases where the page begins with a sentence (pages 5, 7, and 8 of O).

So page 117 beginning with either a sentence or the end of a sentence is possible, with the latter three times more probable (as an estimate).

So it is possible, I think, to go at least with the Words of Mormon 1:13–18 as being the ending of Mosiah chapter II. One little problem, perhaps, is the partial restatement of the ideas in verse 18 with the first verse in Mosiah chapter III, since both refer to the establishment of peace and the end of contention. One could use that for keeping the Words of Mormon [as currently published] intact.¹³

To summarize, Skousen’s analysis here suggests (at least) the following possibilities:

- Page 117 began with verse 13, with Joseph and Oliver adding verse 12 to make the connection with the preceding text.
- Page 117 began with part of a sentence about contentions that was ignored by Joseph and Oliver or perhaps even rewritten as verse 12.
- Page 117 began with “he had somewhat contentions among his own people,” with Joseph and Oliver adding “& now concerning this King Benjamin.” In other words, the break came at the point where the current edition includes a dash: “And now concerning this king Benjamin—” The printer’s manuscript has no dash (indeed, very little punctuation at all), and the first edition used a colon.
- Page 117 began with “contentions among his own people,” with Joseph and Oliver adding “& now concerning this King Benjamin he had somewhat”—forgetting to add the “of” for “somewhat of contentions.” This would explain the odd expression “somewhat contentions” as well as the novelty of the phrase “& now concerning this King Benjamin.”

Oliver’s Other Editing

Oliver’s editing on other nearby pages also shows his confusion about what was going on in the manuscript at this point. For example, after he had written the phrase “The Words of Mormon,” he inserted “Chapter 2.d” (meaning “Chapter Second”) above it, indicating that he may initially have seen the Words of Mormon as a second chapter in the book of Omni.¹⁴ If so, that could also explain the “Chapter III” at the beginning of the book of Mosiah.¹⁵

One must keep in mind, however, that “Chapter 2.d” is a supralinear addition, while “Chapter III” is not, indicating that “Chapter III” was part of the original manuscript. In addition, if Oliver had simply been continuing

the numbering in the printer's manuscript, he likely would have written "Chapter 3.d" rather than "Chapter III."

Most of the remaining chapter numbers in Mosiah (through chapter 11) are in Roman numerals (II, III, and so on), but they were added later, as shown by darker ink. The scribe also often added serifs to the numbers, as if to say, "Yes, that's the right number for the chapter." Unfortunately, none of the book of Mosiah is extant in the original manuscript, so we cannot compare its chapter numbers with those in the printer's manuscript. The fact that the numbers through chapter 11 were added later may indicate Oliver's uncertainty after having had to deal with "Chapter III," but it also argues that the chapters in the original manuscript were numbered III, IIII (Oliver's usage in the printer's manuscript), V, VI, VII, and so on, and that chapters I and II were therefore lost with the 116 pages.¹⁶

Chapter numbers were not part of the original Book of Mormon translation but were added later by Joseph's scribe. As Royal Skousen explains, "Evidence suggests that as Joseph Smith was translating, he apparently saw some mark (or perhaps extra spacing) whenever a section ended, but was unable to see the text that followed. At such junctures, Joseph decided to refer to these endings as chapter breaks and told the scribe to write the word 'chapter' at these places, but without specifying any number for the chapter since Joseph saw neither a number nor the word 'chapter.'"¹⁷ The scribe later added chapter numbers in the original manuscript, as indicated by darker or different-colored ink, and then copied the designations and numbers into the printer's manuscript.

On the specific instance of "Chapter 2.d," Skousen has written:

There is a need for a complete analysis of the chapter insertions and their numbers in both O and P [original manuscript and printer's manuscript] (always later in O). I have commented on these in various places along the way, but I haven't dealt too much with the small books except to say that in each case they were each originally given a chapter specification (but extracanonically) when Joseph dictated the text to his scribe. P shows evidence of the process as it seems to have occurred when O was written down from Joseph Smith's dictation. I will have to deal with the chapter 2.d instance in P and its source. I would say right now that since the "chapter first" is listed for the book of Omni, then Oliver Cowdery simply thought at first that the Words of Mormon were a second chapter for Omni. See what I've written on the general issue in Noel Reynolds' *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*. It's under "The Word *Chapter*" and "Corresponding Chapter Numbers Were Not Part of the Revealed Text," found near the end of my article "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the original manuscript" (61–93).¹⁸

The Original Text

Without the benefit of Royal Skousen’s landmark publications on the original Book of Mormon text, scholars have previously described Words of Mormon verses 12–18 as a “bridge” or “transition” that Mormon wrote to connect the record of the small plates with his abridgment from the large plates. Based on the now-available documentary evidence, that analysis can be seen as faulty—an attempt to explain what should never have needed explaining. There is no “bridge” between the small plates and the rest of the Book of Mormon. There is only the Words of Mormon itself (consisting of verses 1–11), where Mormon simply explains why he is including the small plates with the rest of the record.¹⁹ The verses that follow (12–18) belong in the book of Mosiah.

So, in conclusion, here is the text of the Words of Mormon and the beginning of Mosiah as it should be (and originally was):

The Words of Mormon

And now I, Mormon, being about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni, behold I have witnessed almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites. . . .

And they were handed down from king Benjamin, from generation to generation until they have fallen into my hands. And I, Mormon, pray to God that they may be preserved from this time henceforth. And I know that they will be preserved; for there are great things written upon them, out of which my people and their brethren shall be judged at the great and last day, according to the word of God which is written.

[The Book of Mosiah]

[Chapter 1: In lost 116 pages]

[Chapter 2: First part in lost 116 pages]

. . . And now, concerning this king Benjamin—he had somewhat of contentions among his own people. . . .

Wherefore, with the help of these, king Benjamin, by laboring with all the might of his body and the faculty of his whole soul, and also the prophets, did once more establish peace in the land.

Chapter 3

And now there was no more contention in all the land of Zarahemla among all the People which belonged to King Benjamin . . .

Unless the original manuscript pages for the Words of Mormon and the beginning of the book of Mosiah someday come to light, we may never know precisely what happened to this text during the translation of the Book of Mormon. However, this paper provides a new explanation of what may have occurred—one that makes sense based on the documentary

and textual evidence. This may seem like a small matter, but it could have important ramifications for study and scholarship, and the closer we can get to the original text of the Book of Mormon, the better we will understand the meaning and history of that sacred record.

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1. See, for example, Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 284–85; John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [hereafter FARMS], 1991), 33; Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., *Jacob through Words of Mormon: To Learn with Joy* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 253; Thomas W. Mackay, “Mormon as Editor: A Study in Colophons, Headers, and Source Indicators,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 96. [^]

2. Both manuscripts have been meticulously transcribed and published by Royal Skousen in *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* and *The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS and Brigham Young University, 2001). [^]

3. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 89–94; Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 1:9–10, 287–88; Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 124–32. [^]

4. For details and analysis, see John W. Welch, “How Long Did It Take Joseph Smith to Translate the Book of Mormon?” *Ensign* 18, no. 1 (January 1988): 46–47; and John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2005), 77–213. We are so used to thinking of the small-plate writings (1 Nephi through Omni) as part of the Book of Mormon that we usually forget that they constitute an independent work and deserve to be studied as such. Beginning nearly a thousand years earlier than Mormon’s abridgment, they were originally a completely separate record. Mormon’s abridgment, too, needs to be studied for what it is: a later document that is now incomplete, missing its first book (Lehi) and part of its second book (Mosiah). [^]

5. A photograph of the page in question (coincidentally page 117) is reproduced in Skousen, *Printer’s Manuscript*, part one, plate 3. [^]

6. Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 6, no. 1 (1994): 138–39, available at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=6&num=1&id=137>. [^]

7. See also the preface to the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, available at josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/book-of-Mormon-1830#9. [^]

8. Actually, gathering A6 probably did not include any of the first chapter of Mosiah. If it had, Oliver’s copy would have included a heading for “Chapter II” as

well as “Chapter III.” What we believe Skousen meant to say was “a few pages from the original second chapter of Mosiah, plus the current text from Mosiah 1 into Alma 5.” [^]

9. Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 35–36, plate 4. See also Welch, “How Long Did It Take?” 46. [^]

10. See John A. Tvedtnes, “Colophons in the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. Melvin Thorne and John Sorenson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991), 29–37; Mackay, “Mormon as Editor,” 90–103. [^]

11. John Tvedtnes included the same conclusion as part of a book review, but with only a brief discussion and slightly different details: “I . . . believe that Words of Mormon 1:12–18 is part of the translation from Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, and that these verses were *not* found on the small plates and should therefore not be part of the Words of Mormon.” John A. Tvedtnes, “Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 3, no. 1 (1991): 188–230. See also Skousen, “Critical Methodology,” 137–39. [^]

12. Skousen, *Printer’s Manuscript*, part one, plate 3. See also Skousen, “Critical Methodology,” 138. [^]

13. In an email to Jack Lyon on August 8, 2012, Royal Skousen also suggested another possibility: “It may be that page 117 began with some part of chapter II, which was then crossed out and ignored by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.” This could apply if verses 12–18 are actually part of the Words of Mormon, written to summarize the missing chapters. [^]

14. Thanks to John W. Welch for this insight. [^]

15. As shown by the heavier ink flow, Oliver later crossed out the “2” and added “I.” to indicate chapter 1 (ostensibly of the Words of Mormon). [^]

16. Royal Skousen has more to say about this numbering in “Critical Methodology,” 137–39. [^]

17. Skousen, “Critical Methodology,” 131. See also Royal Skousen, “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), 85–87, available at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=41&chapid=182>. [^]

18. Royal Skousen to Jack Lyon, email, August 5, 2012. [^]

19. As Brant Gardner astutely observes, “When Mormon wrote Words of Mormon, the first two chapters of Mosiah were part of the plate text, and there was no reason to have any verses recapitulate them. . . . As Mormon admits not knowing the reason for including the small plates, he could not have known precisely at what point he would have to supply the connecting narrative between the two.” Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 246, 283. Gardner, however, explains verses 12–18 as a “prophetic expansion” supplied by Joseph Smith: “Because that material so precisely fits the information required to establish the context for the remaining text of Mosiah, it is highly unlikely to represent Mormon’s prophetic fore-knowledge of exactly what had been lost. It is much better seen as Joseph’s [modern] prophetic replacement of the lost chapters of Mosiah.” *Gift and Power*, 283. Gardner is correct in his assessment that the “material so precisely fits” with the remaining text of Mosiah, but, in our view, he is incorrect in his conclusion of what that means. The documentary and textual evidence supports the simpler explanation outlined in this paper. [^]