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Royal Skousen and Robin Scott Jensen, eds. *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3, Parts 1 and 2: Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*. Facsimile edition. Vol. 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015.

Reviewed by Janiece Johnson

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IN EARLY AUGUST 2015, the Church History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held a press conference for the forthcoming two-part volume 3 of the Revelations and Translations series of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. While a public event was standard, an actual press conference was a little out of the ordinary. The highlight of the press conference was two pages of photographs included in the volume—beautiful high-resolution photographs of Joseph Smith's brown seer stone. Though the original stone continues to reside in the LDS First Presidency's vault, the photographs started a rumble through the Mormon studies community that would quickly reach the larger church. The general absence of seer stones from the devotional church narrative meant that for many, these photographs were a complete surprise. And while the existence of this stone was not surprising for many historians, this was certainly not a predictable part of the larger continued efforts at transparency by the LDS Church History Department. It seemed as though a mystical object of a supernatural past realm suddenly broke through the mundane surface of the present.

This volume of the Joseph Smith Papers Project is the third in the Revelations and Translations series, perhaps the most important in the Smith Papers series. The first volume included the two manuscript revelation books offering unprecedented access to revelation manuscripts. The second included all the earliest published versions of the revelations, and now volume 3 reproduces the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon. Each of these volumes has contained beautiful high-resolution color images of the originals. For those who might question the value of the printer's manuscript, this is the earliest extant manuscript for more than 70 percent of the Book of Mormon text. In October 1841, Joseph Smith decided to place the original Book of Mormon manuscript into the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House; though this move was historically minded, it was ultimately a lamentable idea that resulted in the loss of a majority of the manuscript.¹ This volume is particularly significant, both for its historical narrative of the translation and printing of the Book of Mormon as well as for being a precise documentary edition of the printer's manuscript. The latter builds on the decades-long work of Royal Skousen with the Book of Mormon critical text project.

Creation and translation

Any substantive documentary editing project will focus on the history of the document's creation. For Latter-day Saints believing in the divine origins of the Book of Mormon, the narrative of its creation has always been weightier than the mere process of transcription. The historical introduction to the printer's manuscript offers a brief but significant narrative of the creation of the Book of Mormon, including Joseph's brown seer stone. This is particularly remarkable considering that no one who had actually seen the stone had talked about it publicly since the 1970s.²

1. Joseph Smith, Journal, Dec. 1841–Dec. 1842 in “The Book of the Law of the Lord,” Record Book, 1841–1845, Church History Library, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1841-december-1842/8>.

2. See Michael MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones* (Salt Lake City: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2016), 181, 190.

The introduction notes that a more precise history of the translation process will be forthcoming, perhaps with the future publication of the extant original manuscript. The brief yet illuminating history of the creation of the manuscript places the stone in its context; explaining the process of translation begins the process of understanding the function of the stone. This also means acknowledging the truthful elements of the long-term accusations of money digging and treasure seeking aimed at Joseph Smith. Critically, the introduction argues that when Joseph Smith was “faced with rumors that he was an active or even leading participant in local treasure-digging activities and concerned that his history might prove an obstacle for some to accepting his religious message, Joseph Smith rarely mentioned his participation in treasure digging and never in great detail. But neither did he deny his early activities” (p. xv). With nuance and brevity, the introduction notes the intersections of what Joseph Smith would later distinguish as a gift from God and the “d____d nonsense” of treasure seeking.³

The photographs of Joseph Smith’s brown seer stone begin to reconstruct a too-often-missing element of the narrative, as well as to illustrate the manner in which Smith took the mundane and the earthly and made it sacred. In 2013, Joseph Smith Papers historians Michael MacKay and Mark Ashurst-McGee first requested photographs of the brown seer stone of then managing director of the LDS Church History Department, Richard E. Turley, without success.⁴ Now, the photographs of the chocolate-colored stone are published in gorgeous, full-color images with a very clear provenance. Joseph Smith first gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery after finishing the Book of Mormon translation. After the death of Cowdery, his wife Elizabeth Whitmer Cowdery passed the stone to Phineas Young, who passed it to his brother, Brigham. It was almost sold in an estate sale after the death of Brigham Young only to be saved by his wife Zina D. H. Young and then preserved in a small box by her daughter Zina Young Williams Cardall to be later gifted to

3. Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling: A Cultural Biography of Mormonism’s Founder* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 51.

4. MacKay and Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*, ix.

the then church president, John Taylor. The egg-shaped stone appears to be a genesis stone of swirled jasper and iron ore. The stone is photographed from four different angles; the custom leather pouch crafted for the stone by Emma Smith also appears in two of those photographs.

Encountering the historical record about the translation requires broadening definitions beyond a strict translation from one known language to another known language. As several different academics have considered the process of translation, they have spanned the distance between a process lacking any volition on the part of Joseph Smith other than the act of seeing—looking at the stone—to those who would argue for considerable volition in the process—from finding vocabulary to the necessary construction of abstract ideas. The introduction and body of this volume begin to require those scholars to consider both the historical record of the process and the text itself.

Moreover, the entry of the stone into the history of the restoration of the church exemplifies significant recent efforts at transparency first modeled with LDS Church History Department sponsorship of the monograph *Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.⁵ That effort at transparency has continued and expanded with the release of the seer stone photos and has marked the beginning of a major shift in how Latter-day Saints tell the story of the restoration. The fall 2015 completion of a new LDS Historic Site at Harmony, Pennsylvania, the location of most of the Book of Mormon translation, came almost concurrently. The rebuilt home of Joseph and Emma includes a hat (in which to place the seer stone) near covered plates and Book of Mormon manuscript pages on the kitchen table; they seem to be just waiting for Joseph to pick up the translation again. That October the seer stone photographs were likewise published in both the *Ensign* and the worldwide *Liahona* in the article “Joseph the Seer.” The same month, the new central exhibit of the LDS Museum of Church History opened telling the narrative of the restoration and featuring the seer stone photographs prominently. In the latter part of 2016 the Joseph Smith Papers Project released additional images of the

5. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

brown seer stone online.⁶ The February 2017 *Friend*, the official LDS children's magazine, included a game: "From Gold Plates to Book of Mormon." One of the steps in the game recognizes Joseph's primary use of the seer stone in translation.⁷ Beginning with the presentation of these seer stone photographs in *Revelations and Translations, Volume 3*, we are witnessing a sea change in the devotional origin narrative of the Latter-day Saints.

A precise documentary edition

The color photographs of the text replicate the 466-page manuscript created by Oliver Cowdery, an unknown scribe, and Hyrum Smith as they prepared to publish the first edition Book of Mormon. After Martin Harris lost Book of Mormon manuscript pages in 1828, Joseph Smith worried about repeating history and possibly losing more manuscript pages. After negotiating the printing of the Book of Mormon, the printer's manuscript was created as needed between August 1829 and March 1830. At only one point in the printing process was the original manuscript taken to the printing office. In the manuscript we find the punctuation, paragraph, and printing marks of the compiler John H. Gilbert, editing done by the scribes, as well as later edits done by Joseph Smith and others after the publication of the first edition in preparation for later editions. We also learn of a significant loss for the LDS Church when Joseph F. Smith turned down an opportunity to purchase the original manuscript for the Book of Mormon.

Decades in its production, Royal Skousen worked assiduously with other members of the Book of Mormon critical text project to produce a critical text of the Book of Mormon—the first volume was published in 2001.⁸ Long before the inception of the Joseph Smith Papers Proj-

6. "Seer Stone," Glossary, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/seer-stone>.

7. "Golden Plates to Book of Mormon," *Friend*, February 2017, 24–25.

8. Royal Skousen, *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts*, parts 1 and 2 (Provo, UT: The Maxwell

ect, Dean Jessee worked on the documents of Joseph Smith's life, first published as *The Papers of Joseph Smith* in 1989.⁹ His work has been more completely realized through the Joseph Smith Papers. Though the two projects have significant similarities, in reality there is a space between a critical scriptural text integrating multiple manuscripts and editors and a historical documentary-editing project. This volume seeks to satisfy both desires and approaches and has the considerable benefit of complete full-color facsimile reproductions—something that is rarely seen in documentary editions because of prohibitive costs.

In 2009, Skousen produced *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*—a clear text edition merging the earliest manuscripts.¹⁰ The clearer the text, the more accessible the text. However, less detail in the manuscript means less transparency. The Smith Papers' transcription here is not a clear text edition. As the introduction notes, the Joseph Smith Papers "represents the manuscript more liberally" than did Skousen in his critical text project (p. xxx). Nevertheless the transcription is tighter in comparison to other Joseph Smith Papers' transcriptions and presented with careful attention to detail. The introduction also adds, "Deference is given to the scribe's final intent" (p. xxx). Lest some question the liberties taken, all documentary editing projects involve significant judgment calls no matter how detail-oriented and literal the project. Any documentary volume must decide how it will balance literality and emendations. At the cost of much paper and a complicated transcription key, Skousen worked to make his original transcription as literal as possible. In contrast, in other volumes the Smith Papers consistently use emendations to make the transcriptions accessible while still working to maintain the anthropology of the document. This volume endeavors a precarious balance between transcription literality and accessibility; however, this balance finds solid support in the images. Through the

Institute, 2001).

9. Dean Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989).

10. Royal Skousen, *Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

high-resolution color photographs, the color editorial insertions, and the more compact transcription guide, this edition is eminently accessible and offers ready access to the literal.

The beauty of the immaculate images almost completely collapses that space between reading the text and the physical document itself. The introduction to the text reminds the reader of the limited nature of any transcription: “No matter the care put into transcribing a text, a gap still remains between the reader and the physical document” (p. xxiv). Any loss of specificity in the transcription is almost entirely restored with the color photographs. The introduction includes specifics on capturing and editing images, yet it also reminds us that some of those elements cannot be reproduced nor can the photographs restore damaged portions of the initial manuscript page. Photos of a 1923 negative image helped to re-create some lost text on the initial manuscript page (p. xxxvi). Many readers will need to pull out their reading glasses as they approach the source notes relating the provenance of the printer’s manuscript as the point of the typeface shrinks dramatically.

The text also enables the reader to clearly see the evidence of some of the claims about the creation of the document as well as translation and editing processes. A reader can see John Gilbert’s punctuation of one-third of the manuscript and his grammatical corrections and recognize that the majority of those additions were done on the fly as he was typesetting the book. A reader can clearly distinguish the work of Joseph Smith and others to edit the manuscript in preparation for succeeding editions, as well as study the work of the enigmatic second scribe. The identity of this scribe remains a mystery, though her or his spelling skills shine, particularly in comparison with the spelling of Oliver Cowdery and yet even more so in comparison with Hyrum Smith’s absolute lack of spelling ability. A reader may closely examine the original manuscript where there are contested words as well as reference Skousen’s prior work as needed.

Future perspective

These are Joseph Smith's papers—the papers of a man; however, this volume particularly missed an opportunity to better single out the contributions of women related to the creation of the Book of Mormon and the preservation of the physical objects connected to it. There are those who contributed to the manuscript even though they never marked it themselves; it is never just Joseph working alone. Emma Smith created the leather pouch in which Joseph and later others kept the seer stone. Since it is unlikely that public examination of the pouch will be forthcoming, additional information could further highlight that contribution. The additional images of the seer stone included in the Joseph Smith Papers' glossary also include the box where Zina Cardall safeguarded the stone as she handed it over to John Taylor. Including the box provided to protect the stone in the volume would also bring to our attention the valuable contribution of Cardall and her mother Zina D. H. Young in saving the stone from sale or loss.¹¹ Hopefully, the publication of the extant portion of the original Book of Mormon manuscript will prominently spotlight Mary Whitmer's string used to tie the manuscript together.¹²

Beyond their scholarly appeal, those working on the Joseph Smith Papers never assumed that the volumes would be highly attractive as bedtime reading to average members of the LDS Church but harbored the hope that their work would distill to a wide church membership through the work of other scholars. With the publication of four photographs of a swirled stone, that goal has been clearly realized. We can already measure how this work has reached a much broader audience. It may be more difficult to measure the impact of other portions of the Smith Papers' work, but I am also hopeful that the Joseph Smith Papers will continue to be valuable to scholars as well as to the general membership of the LDS Church. This volume is eminently valuable for what

11. "Seer Stone," Glossary, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/seer-stone>.

12. Robin Jensen, "A Bit of Old String: Mary Whitmer's Unheralded Contributions," April 25, 2013, <https://history.lds.org/article/mary-whitmer-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>.

it has done, but its value will expand as others utilize it in the future and build on the transparency it represents.

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Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick. *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2016.

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THIS IMPORTANT NEW BOOK from Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick is intended as a “friendly introduction” to Joseph Smith’s possession and use of seer stones (p. xiii). Aimed explicitly at a Latter-day Saint audience, the authors—both assistant professors of religious education at Brigham Young University—attempt “to locate and explore the role of seer stones in Joseph Smith’s Restoration theology” (p. 3). To that end, MacKay and Frederick not only provide the single best historical overview of the function and role of seer stones in early Mormon history, but also offer a provocative (if not necessarily wholly convincing) reading of the significance of seer stones to Mormon theology.

Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones serves as a sort of sequel to another volume coauthored by MacKay and Gerrit Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto*