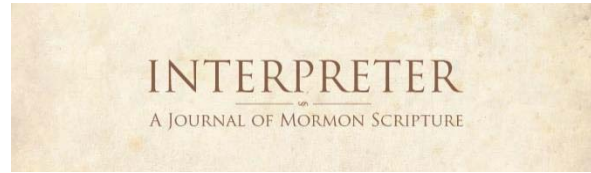




BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL
<http://bookofmormoncentral.org/>



The Interpreter Foundation
<https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/>

The Case of Plural *Was* in the Earliest Text

Author(s): Stanford Carmack

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, Volume 18 (2016), pp. 109-137

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Abstract: Because it is primarily an Early Modern English text (in terms of its English language), the earliest text of the Book of Mormon understandably employs plural *was* — for example, “the words which *was* delivered” (Alma 5:11). It does so in a way that is substantially similar to what is found in many writings of the Early Modern period — that is, it manifests the syntactic usage, variation, and differential rates typical of that era.



The Interpreter Foundation is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Interpreter Foundation.

<https://mormoninterpreter.com/>

INTERPRETER

— § —
A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 18 · 2016 · Pages 109-137

The Case of *Plural Was* in the Earliest Text

Stanford Carmack

Offprint Series

© 2016 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication. Visit us at MormonInterpreter.com
You may subscribe to this journal at MormonInterpreter.com/annual-print-subscription

THE CASE OF PLURAL WAS IN THE EARLIEST TEXT

Stanford Carmack

*Abstract: Because it is primarily an Early Modern English text (in terms of its English language), the earliest text of the Book of Mormon understandably employs plural was — for example, “the words which **was** delivered” (Alma 5:11). It does so in a way that is substantially similar to what is found in many writings of the Early Modern period — that is, it manifests the syntactic usage, variation, and differential rates typical of that era.*

THIS STUDY LOOKS AT A SUBSET of the questionable grammar of the Book of Mormon. It focuses on the use of *was* in contexts where standard modern English requires the verb form *were*. This has been called plural *was* by linguists, as a convenient way to refer to the not-infrequent use of *was* with plural subjects that has been present in the language since Middle English and possibly earlier.¹ Of course we miss these readings in the current LDS text; we must turn to the following edition to see them today: Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009). Indeed, we could not learn about these matters without such a critical text.

Because of the resources that have become available recently, it is a new day in the study of the English-language text of the Book of Mormon. Most of the examples presented here — from both the Book of Mormon and the Early Modern English textual record — will be new to virtually everyone; they should be eye-opening. Here I unapologetically focus on the form of expression, not the content; cases of exceptional usage, not the majority usage. Still, some excerpts provide us with a glimpse of interesting content.

1. Terttu Nevalainen, “Vernacular universals? The case of plural *was* in Early Modern English”, *Types of Variation: Diachronic, dialectal and typological interfaces*, edited by Terttu Nevalainen, Juhani Klemola, and Mikko Laitinen (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2006), 351–69, 355.

Interestingly, syntactic variation in the earliest text of the Book of Mormon at times matches what may be found in the textual record of earlier English. This suggests that implicit knowledge of Early Modern English and its tendencies was part of the translation of the Book of Mormon. When we consider the array of diverse matching, at times obscure, an Early Modern English view is compelling. That is the approach adopted here. Let us now consider why that is the correct approach.

Abstracting away from Hebrew-like expressions and non-English words found in the earliest text, we may reasonably assert, based on evidence, that there are four sources for the English of the Book of Mormon:

1. King James English
2. Standard modern English
3. Modern American dialect
4. Nonbiblical Early Modern English

Numbers 1 and 2 are uncontroversially accepted by everyone, number 3 has been largely accepted and assumed from the beginning, but many reject the possibility of number 4, often resorting to protesting that because it is not readily apparent why nonbiblical Early Modern English would have been used, it cannot be so. Nevertheless, there is abundant evidence for that position. Indeed, pertinent lexical, morphological, and syntactic evidence has been provided for some time by Skousen (1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2004–2009 [*Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*], 2005, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), and more recently also by Carmack (2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016a, 2016b). Volume 3 of the Book of Mormon critical text project contains a large amount of evidence as well. Those who choose to reject the existence of nonbiblical Early Modern English in the earliest text must ignore or dismiss hundreds of pieces of evidence that are mutually supportive.

As for number 3, it turns out that provincialisms such as *drownded*, *massacreed*, and *had ought to* are found in earlier English as well (these three examples are taken from Grant Hardy's introduction to Skousen's *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*, page xx). Here is evidence in support of that assertion:

1656 EEBO A62145 Sir William Sanderson [1586?–1676] *A compleat history of the lives and reigns of, Mary Queen of Scotland, and of her son and successor, James the Sixth*

And finding that he was thus betrayed,
ran into the sea and **drownded** himself.

1672 EEBO A30510 Edward Burrough [1634–1662] *The memorable works of a son of thunder and consolation*

Surely when you are sober you will consider, and when you are come to your selves you will be ashamed, and will not open any more your malice and wrath which hath **drownded** your honesty and civility;

The principal data source used in this study is *Early English Books Online* (EEBO) [Chadwyck-Healey: <<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>>]. Many of these texts can be freely accessed by using the provided EEBO number and entering it after <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/>. The publicly searchable portion of EEBO–TCP (Text Creation Partnership) is <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebogroup>>. Mark Davies provided a very useful corpus and interface: *Early English Books Online, 400 million words, 1470s–1690s* (2013–). I have also derived some of the examples from a 500-million-word corpus of my own elaboration, made from several thousand publicly available EEBO–TCP texts.

■ ■ ■

1655 EEBO A60194 Richard Sibbes [1577–1635] *A learned commentary or exposition: upon the first chapter of the second Epistle of S. Paul to the Corinthians*

how doth he deliver his Children when we see them taken away by death, and oftimes are **massacreed**?

1658 EEBO A64619 James Ussher [1581–1656] *The annals of the world*

some he surprized by treachery, the rest he **massacreed** in one night at a revelling;

■ ■ ■

1535 EEBO A07430 William Marshall, tr. [fl.1535] | Marsilius of Padua [d.1342?] *The defence of peace*

and yf it be not so / than tell thou me, In what thyng he meant, that every soule **shulde** be subiecte to the powers, etc. For yf euery soule **hadde oughte to** be subiecte to Timotheus, and Titus, In suche maner iudgemente he shulde in vayne haue sayde admonysshe them.

1601 EEBO A07982 W. Traheron, tr. [fl.1601] | Remigio Nannini [1521?–1581?] *Ciuill considerations vpon many and sundrie histories*

he suffered them to come into the playne, without making any such resistance, as he **had ought to** haue done, because hee had giuen his word, that he would not stoppe their passage.

The same can be said of *attackt*, *bellowses*, *fraid*, *grievious*, *kinsfolks*, *tremendious*, etc., as well as various phrasal items. All these are cases of the earliest text employing Early Modern English that persisted in dialectal use. Interestingly, this is therefore language that Smith could have been quite familiar with when he saw and read words during the dictation. And it also provides evidence against a common misconception that dialect forms are recent inventions (corruptions of the language) when they are often (less-common) historical forms that

were marginalized. In view of the evidence, we may rewrite the above list as follows:

1. Early Modern English found in the King James Bible
2. Early Modern English that persisted in standard modern English
3. Early Modern English that persisted in modern dialects
4. Nonbiblical Early Modern English that underwent obsolescence

In addition to this, there is a very small amount of 18th-century language (vocabulary and perhaps syntax) in the earliest text, as well as dialectal overlay from dictation and scribal errors (the latter often hard to pin down definitively).

To sum up, the position that the text is **not** Smith's language (mainly Early Modern English) is comprehensive and fully explanatory. On the other hand, the position that the text is Smith's language (quasi-biblical, standard English, and American dialect) is inadequate, failing to explain much textual usage (all of number 4). For the above reasons I adopt the Early Modern English view, as set forth above.

The {-s} plural of Early Modern English

The data presented here are related to what Charles Barber and Roger Lass have called the {-es} or {-s} plural of earlier English (they refer to the present-tense only).² Lass (1999:166) mentions that this particular morphosyntactic phenomenon was a minority alternant, "persist[ing] sporadically into the eighteenth century". Barber (1997:169) wrote that in Middle English

the use of {-es} as a plural inflection is found in Scots, in Northern England, and in part of the North-East Midlands. Its occasional use in the standard southern language may be due to the influence of these northern forms. Alternatively, it may be due to the analogy of the third-person singular {-es} inflection. This is suggested by the fact that plural {-es} is seldom found in the early sixteenth century, and is commonest around 1600, when {-es} had displaced {-eth} as the singular ending.

2. See Charles Barber, *Early Modern English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997 [1976], 169–70; Roger Lass, "Phonology and Morphology", *The Cambridge History of the English Language: Volume III: 1476–1776*, ed. Roger Lass (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 165–66.

Lass (1999:166) takes *is* to be an “{-s} form”, noting heavy plural *is* usage in one late 15th- and early 16th-century northern dialect (the Yorkshire *Plumpton Correspondence* [letters]).

Ten years ago, in an article on plural *was* in Early Modern English, Nevalainen wrote that

the use of *was* with plural subjects was a northern English dialect feature in the 15th and 16th centuries, but it was by no means restricted to the north. In the course of the 17th century the pattern levelled dialectally, and declined, but continued to be used as a minority variant **even by the literate social ranks** *throughout the country*.³ (emphasis added)

So plural *was* was a widespread literate usage. And although plural *is* usage may have reinforced plural *was* usage, there appears to have been a greater tendency in earlier English to use *was* with plural pronouns than *is*.

Here is a passage with close variation exemplifying that tendency (more examples could be given), along with a Book of Mormon match:⁴

1664 EEBO A57970 Samuel Rutherford [1600?–1661] *Joshua redivivus*

the Lord saw YE **was** able by his grace to bear the loss of husband and childe, and that YE **are** that weak and tender

Alma 7:18–19

I had much desire that YE **was** not in the state of dilemma like your brethren, even so I have found that my desires have been gratified.
For I perceive that YE **are** in the paths of righteousness

For many of the Book of Mormon examples discussed here, we can profitably consult Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 6 parts (Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU, 2004–2009).

Adam and Eve

The following passage has frequently received notice as an example of Joseph Smith failing in an attempt to imitate older language:

1 Nephi 5:11

and also of ADAM *and* EVE, *which was* our first parents

The change from “which was” to “who were” was made for the 1837 edition, marked in the printer’s manuscript by Joseph Smith.

3. Nevalainen, “Vernacular universals?”, 366.

4. See also the examples at Nevalainen, “Vernacular universals?”, 358; one of these is provided at Carmack (2014:223).

We can find this phrase criticized in various places today on the internet. In view of that, this is an important one to address at the outset. The relative pronoun here is non-restrictive, providing information that isn't critical to the understanding of the main clause. It is employed with human antecedents, which makes it biblical in nature. The following old syntax, partly nonbiblical, is a close match:

1566 EEBO A06932 Thomas Becon [1512–1567] *A new postil conteinyng most godly and learned sermons vpon all the Soday Gospelles*

not after the maner of ADAM and EUE, *which was* made of the grounde

The author was Thomas Becon (or Becon), a British Protestant reformer. I have not found this language outside of the Early Modern period. So it turns out that in this case Smith actually succeeded admirably in matching older syntax.⁵

The plagiarism argument made against the Book of Mormon is a charge frequently leveled against the text when convenient. In this case, the match is obscure, so a plagiarism charge is inconvenient (hardly any one would believe it), and the argument is not made. That is the case in the majority of instances.

Because of the 1566 example, it is reasonable to view 1 Nephi 5:11 as an instance of Early Modern English, similar to what Thomas Becon wrote 450 years ago. Which being the case, this piece of syntax, pointed out quite often as a glaring blunder — a howler — in fact qualifies as additional evidence of its 16th-century character. That is how it is with the earliest text. When we read language that seems odd or suspect, it almost invariably points us to Early Modern English usage.

Plural “which was” followed by “were”

The following passage has interesting agreement variation:

Mosiah 24:15

[the BURDENS *which was* laid upon Alma and his brethren]
were made light;

The change from *was* to *were* was made for the 1837 edition, marked in the printer's manuscript by Joseph Smith; see Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants*, 2564 (Alma 46:33).

5. During the 16th century, the relative pronoun *which* was used quite often (non-restrictively) to refer to people, and “⟨PLURAL NOUN PHRASE⟩ *which was*” was relatively common. In the 17th century, the non-restrictive use of *which* with personal antecedents continued, although it diminished over time, eventually remaining as a vestigial use, as in “Our Father, **which** art in heaven”.

Singular *was* is used after a relative pronoun whose antecedent is plural (*burdens*); plural *were* is used after a complex subject (in brackets) whose head is plural (also *burdens*). So *burdens* acts as both an antecedent and a head, grammatically speaking.

Large corpora tell us that in earlier English *was* was employed at a relatively higher rate after the relative pronoun *which*, with a plural antecedent, than it was after plural noun phrases. Occasionally that manifested itself overtly, with close variation, as in Mosiah 24:15. Of course, the relative pronoun *which* is invariant in form — and so it doesn't indicate by its shape whether the antecedent is plural or singular. Whether this contributed to a higher degree of plural *was* usage at that time is not our concern here. We simply note that it is not hard to find Early Modern English examples of “which was” preceded by plural noun phrases. Here are three examples:

1605 EEBO A69226 John Dove [1560/61–1618] *A confutation of atheisme*
neither how Moses his rodde devoured the SERPENTS *which was* made
by the sorcerers of Aegipt,

1655 EEBO A52713 James Naylor [1617?–1660] *The royall law and covenant
of God*
and the Apostles which writ the EPISTLES *which was* to be read among
the Saints,

1657 EEBO A56530 Henry, Earl of Monmouth, tr. [1596–1661] | Paolo Paruta
[1540–1598] *Politick discourses*
in such manner as he challenged
all the PRAISES *which was* given unto him,

The usage seen directly above — “which_{plural} **was**” — though not uncommon, was not the dominant syntax of the period, becoming less common with the passage of time. Here is a Book of Mormon excerpt that is similar to these Early Modern English examples:

Alma 9 [HEADING]

The WORDS of Alma and also the WORDS of Amulek *which was*
declared unto the people which was in the land of Ammonihah.

This has received direct criticism, but it is simply an instance of Early Modern English plural *was*.⁶ Here we see a syntacto-lexical match — “words /accusations . . . which was declared”:

6. At Carmack (2014: 226–28), I discussed it as a possible case of proximity agreement.

1692 EEBO A36910 John Dunton [1659–1733] | Frederick Hendrick van Hove [1628?–1698] *The Young-students-library*

he praised God for that the CONTROVERSIES *which was* amongst them, **were** not upon any fundamental Article.

This is reprinted older language, possibly from the 1630s.

This next example is also similar to the above, but the syntax is more complicated because *squadron* is formally singular and because of the prepositional phrase with a plural noun (in braces):

1663 EEBO A33560 Henry, Earl of Monmouth, tr. [1596–1661] | Pier Giovanni Capriata *The history of the wars of Italy*

Moreover, [the SQUADRON { of the Kings Gallies }] *which was* kept in Genoa **were** generally commanded by Genoese Captains,

Despite outward appearances, the verb agreement, in both cases, probably derives from the head noun *squadron*. It is of course semantically plural, and it is probably grammatically plural as well. While “which was kept” doesn’t tell us this, “were generally commanded” suggests it, and unsurprisingly we find that *squadron* could be construed as plural during this time (as in certain varieties of present-day English):

1693 EEBO A37989 John Edwards [1637–1716] *A discourse concerning the authority, stile, and perfection of the books of the Old and New-Testament*

The fourth SQUADRON **were** rank’d under the Standard of Dan, to whom belonged the Tribes of Naphthali and Asher.

This next example involves two conjoined nouns that overtly resolve to plural only in the larger agreement phrase:

1695 EEBO A56253 J. Crull, tr. [d.1713?] | Samuel Pufendorf [1632–1694] *An introduction to the history of the principal kingdoms and states of Europe*

The DIVINITY *and* PHILOSOPHY *which was* professed in these Universities **were** not taught with an intention to make the young Students more learned and understanding,

Plural number resolution is likely in the first instance as well, although it isn’t visible there (“which was professed”). These last two examples from 1663 and 1695 illustrate the complexity of language, and make understandable the emergence and persistence of variation.⁷

7. The following syntax is perhaps distinguishable because the antecedent of *which* is *army*, and that noun was usually grammatically singular in the latter half of the 18th century:

1776 GOOG Granville Sharp *The Just Limitation of Slavery*, p.22

The prodigious ARMY, of a million of Ethiopians, *which was* overthrown by Asa, **were** not all DESCENDANTS of Chus,

In summary, the agreement pattern found in Mosiah 24:15 involves close variation that is an excellent match with no fewer than six examples of earlier usage. In that verse we see the tendencies of the past, with overt plural expression occurring only after the noun-phrase subject, not after the relative pronoun.

“Were” followed by conjoined “and was”

Next we take a look at the agreement variation found in this passage:

Mosiah 7:7

and THEY **were** surrounded by the king’s guard
and **was** taken and **was** bound and **was** committed to prison.

This is straightforward syntax, if unexpected and objectionable to the modern eye and ear. Normal “they were” is followed by three instances of elliptical syntax with conjoined *was*, even though the ellipted subject is clearly *they*. I have found three Early Modern English examples with the same syntactic pattern — that is, with *were* used right after the pronoun, and *was* used in conjoined predicates:

1581 EEBO A06863 John Merbecke [ca.1510–ca.1585] *A booke . . . to those that desire the true vnderstanding & meaning of holy Scripture*

Confirmation was that Ceremonie, which the Apostles did use, when they laide their handes upon those which received the holy Ghost after THEY **were** baptised of them, and **was** likewise ordeined by the auncient Fathers.

1659 EEBO A52921 Humphrey Norton [fl.1655–1659] et al. *New-England’s ensigne*

so we were put in prison again, and some hours after WE **were** called forth again, and **was** had before the Governour John Indicot,

1659 EEBO A44796 Francis Howgill [1618–1669] *The invisible things of God brought to light by the revelation of the eternal spirit*

inwardly THEY **were** ravened from the spirit, and **was** gone from it into the earth, into the world, and served not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own bellies,

Three different writers, from two different centuries, employed the same syntax found in Mosiah 7:7. In every case the syntax is passive in parallel: “they were <PAST PARTICIPLE>” followed by “and was <PAST

If *army* is grammatically singular here, then *were* may agree with the following noun phrase, headed by *descendants*, or “a million of Ethiopians” may be the understood subject of *were*. Alternatively, semantically plural *army* may be construed as grammatically plural throughout, with overt expression only in the larger phrase, as in Early Modern English.

PARTICIPLE›”. The textual match is excellent because of the same pattern of variation, even though we don’t like the sound of the language today.

“Every soul which was . . . were”

Next we consider the following variable agreement pattern:

Alma 14:28

and EVERY SOUL *which was* within the walls thereof,
save it were Alma and Amulek, **were** slain;

In order to accurately analyze the language of this passage, it is helpful to note that “every ‹SINGULAR NOUN›” could be treated as either singular or plural during the Early Modern period. I have placed three examples of “every one was” (standard in modern English) in a note,⁸ providing here two examples of “every one were”:

1597 EEBO A22560 William Burton, tr. [1575–1645] | Achilles Tatius *The most delectable and pleasaunt history of Clitiphon and Leucippe*

one of the passengers . . . got holde of the rope, and almost brought
the boat to the ship side, and EVERY ONE **were** made ready,

1616 EEBO A08882 Anthony Munday, tr. [1553–1633] *Palmerin of England and Florian de Desart his brother*

insomuch as EVERY ONE thought **his** labour well imployed to do him
seruice, and EVERY ONE **were** desirous to question with him,

Notice how in the 1616 example the first instance of “every one” appears to be singular because of the following pronoun *his*, but then it is construed as plural in the second instance. The takeaway from this? At this point in time the language was quite fluid and unpredictable in this regard.

8. Examples of “every one was”:

1599 EEBO A04845 John King [1559?–1621] *Lectures vpon Ionas deliuered at Yorke*
because the portions of the Levites and singers had not beene given to them, and
EVERIE ONE **was** fled to his lande,

1602 EEBO A04680 Tho. Lodge, tr. [1558?–1625] | Flavius Josephus *Works*
For all the porches were double, and EVERIE ONE **was** supported by pillars,

1629 EEBO A11516 Nathanael Brent, tr. [1573?–1652] | Paolo Sarpi [1552–
1623] *The historie of the Councel of Trent*
For the Bores in Germany rebelled against the Princes, and Magistrates, and
EVERY ONE **was** busied with the warre of the Anabaptists,.

As we might expect, there are more examples of “every one which **was**” than there are of its plural counterpart,⁹ nevertheless, here are two 16th-century examples of “every one which/that **were**”:

1579 EEBO A07026 George Gylpen, tr. [1514?–1602] | Philips van Marnix van St. Aldegonde [1538–1598] *The bee hiue of the Romishe Church*

he . . . coniured **EVERIE ONE** *which were* there present, that **THEY** shoulde beware from doing those,

1583 EEBO A13091 Phillip Stubbes *The second part of the anatomie of abuses* to gather the benevolencies, and contributions of **EVERIE ONE** *that were* disposed to give,

This could be an example of indefinite, subjunctive *were*, rather than indicative *were*; in the subjunctive case the verb would convey a sense of ‘might be’.

Here is syntax that is the close to that of Alma 14:28, with variation in verb morphology:

1615 EEBO A23464 Edward Grimeston, tr. | Pierre d’Avity, sieur de Montmartin [1573–1635] *The estates, empires, & principallities of the world*

They carried a hundred mils [i.e. mills] in carts,
[**EVERY ONE** of *which*] **was** turned with a horse,
and **were** brought to grind their corne;

The subject is “every one of which”, the relative pronoun referring to *mills*; the verb phrases (truncated) are “was turned” and “were brought”. Even though *which* is **not** the grammatical subject of *was*, its immediacy may have influenced the choice of the singular by analogy with plural “which was” — syntax that wasn’t uncommon at the time. The alternative interpretation is that there is close variation in number construal, as we have seen above with “every one thought **his** labour” followed closely by

9. The first example of “every one which was” shows consistent use of *was*:

1604 EEBO A16795 George Abbot [1562–1633] *The reasons which Doctour Hill hath brought, for the vpholding of papistry*

and for that **EVERY ONE** *which was* against them **was** ever accounted and reputed for an Heretike.

1654 EEBO A33335 Samuel Clarke [1599–1682] *The marrow of ecclesiastical history*

But Regius did so clearly and fully open the genuine sense of them, that **EVERY ONE** *which was* not wilfully blinde might easily discern the truth:

1675 EEBO A43515 John Hacket [1592–1670] *A century of sermons upon several remarkable subjects*

EVERY SOUL *which was* a thirst drank.

1675 EEBO A45465 Henry Hammond [1605–1660] *Sermons*

That **EVERY SOUL** *which was* to spring from these loins, had been without those transcendent mercies.

“every one **were** desirous”. The same can be said of the Book of Mormon passage under consideration:

Alma 14:28

and [EVERY SOUL *which was* within the walls thereof],
save it were Alma and Amulek, **were** slain;

“Every soul” is the head of the complex subject (in brackets) whose predicate is “were slain”; “every soul” is also the antecedent of *which*. It is impossible to know whether “every soul” is construed consistently as plural, or variably. Under the former view, the intervening relative pronoun *which* led to the use of singular *was*, while the head of the subject phrase, construed as plural, led to *were*.

Absence of plural number resolution

The conjunction *save* usually triggers the subjunctive in the text, as it does in Alma 14:28 (covertly). Otherwise, we would expect *was* in this clause, without resolution of the postverbal conjuncts *Alma* and *Amulek*, akin to what is possible in modern English and the following Book of Mormon examples:

Modern English

The pig was in the corral, and so **was** [the HORSE *and* the DONKEY].

Mosiah 24:16

And . . . so great **was** [their FAITH *and* their PATIENCE]

3 Nephi 6:6

And now **it was** GIDGIDDONI *and* the judge LACHONEUS *and* THOSE
which had been appointed leaders

This is a reasonable position to take because there is lack of resolution in the text even with preverbal conjuncts, as in this obvious example:

Alma 22:32

the LAND of Nephi *and* the LAND of Zarahemla
was nearly surrounded by water

The closest example of this syntax that I have seen is the following, taken from Tyndale’s translation of the Pentateuch (cf. Numbers 32:1):

1530 EEBO A13203 William Tyndale, tr. [d.1536] [*The Pentateuch*]

when they sawe the LONDE of Jaeser *and* the LONDE of Gilead
that IT **was** an apte place for catell

So for Tyndale, “the land of X and the land of Y” didn’t automatically resolve to plural, and neither does it in the Book of Mormon. Here are

two more examples showing a lack of number resolution with singular conjuncts:¹⁰

1607 EEBO A13820 Edward Topsell [1572–1625?] *The historie of foure-footed beastes*

The FAT of Wolues and the MARROW of Swyne **is** good to anoint
bleare-eyes withall

1608 EEBO A02239 Edward Grimeston, tr. | Jean François Le Petit [1546–ca.1615] *A generall historie of the Netherlands*

The TOWNE of Romerswaell, the CASTELL of Lodycke and the SCLUSE
of Creeke **was** all carried away.

10. Here are further examples of no plural resolution with singular conjuncts:

1550 EEBO A15297 John Purvey [1353?–1428?] *The true copye of a prolog wrytten about two C. yeres paste by Iohn Wycklife*

for which the PUPLE of Israell and the PUPLE of Juda **was** thus punishid and
conquerid of heathen men

1572 EEBO A17219 John Coxe, tr. | Heinrich Bullinger [1504–1575] *Questions of religion cast abroad in Helvetia by the aduersaries of the same*

For the WOORDE of God and the INSTITUTION of Christ **was** sufficient for them.

1587 EEBO A68202 Raphael Holinshed [d.1580?] | John Hooker [ca.1527–1601] *The first and second volumes of Chronicles*

For the SERPENT of division, and the FIER of malice, **was** entered into the cite,
manie being inuenomed with the one, but more scaulded with the other.

1593 EEBO A15431 Andrew Willet [1562–1621] *Tetrastylon papisticum, that is, The foure principal pillers of papistrie*

That the BAPTISME of John, and the BAPTISME of Christ, **was** one and the same in
substance, and of the same efficacie and force, we prove it thus:

1602 EEBO A06131 Lodowick Lloyd [fl.1573–1610] *A briefe conference of diuers lawes diuided into certaine regiments*

could not stand before the arke, where the PRESENCE of God, and the FIGURE of
Christ **was**,

1602 EEBO A06143 Lodowick Lloyd [fl.1573–1610] *The stratagemms of Jerusalem*

So the KINGDOME of Judah and the HOUSE of David **was** likewise taken by
Nabuchodonozer in the eleventh yeare of Zedechiah, the last king of Judah.

1602 EEBO A19602 Simon Patrick, tr. [d.1613] | Jean de Hainault [d.1572] *The estate of the Church with the discourse of times, from the apostles vntill this present*

The FALL of Tyles, and the CRY of persons, **was** horrible and fearefull.

1603 EEBO A04911 Richard Knolles [1550?–1610] *The generall historie of the Turkes*

hee determined to returne againe into Thracia, because the RAINE of Autumne,
and the COLD of Winter **was** now come in.

1607 EEBO A12475 Henry Ainsworth [1571–1622?] *The communion of saints*
the REWARD of humility and the FEAR of God, **is** riches and glory and Life.

“That were” followed by “was”

Next we see a different kind of syntax, where the larger agreement employs plural *was*, while the internal agreement is recognizably plural:

Helaman 1:7

[PAANCHI and THAT PART OF THE PEOPLE
that were desirous that he should be their governor]
was exceeding wroth

Here is a close syntactic match with this curious language:

1588 EEBO A01864 R. Parke, tr. | Juan Gonzáles de Mendoza [1545–1618] *The historie of the great and mightie kingdome of China*
 which was the occasion that
 [the CITIE and ALL THOSE *that were* in it],
was not destroyed and slayne:

Because the second part of the complex subject shows plural agreement, we naturally expect plural agreement with the full subject phrase. The foregoing examples suggest that the prominent head of the complex subject governs the larger, singular agreement. Yet it may be the case that the translator simply opted for plural *was* as a contrast with closely occurring *were*, as seems to be the case in the following example:

1580 EEBO A07911 Anthony Munday [1553–1633] *Zelauto. The fountaine of fame*
 [the LADYES and ALL *that were* present],
was stroken into a great maze, some for joy clapped theyr handes,
 and some on the other side began to weepe:

This next excerpt is like the 1588 example except that it has an additional noun phrase:¹¹

1606 EEBO A22474 William Attersoll [d.1640] *The badges of Christianity. Or, A treatise of the sacraments fully declared out of the word of God*
 so [the FIELD and { the CAVE *that was* therin }
 withal { the TREES and APPURTENANCES *that were* therin }],
was made sure to him for a possession.

11. The following is a normal case of *was*, since singular abstract nouns often do not resolve as plural, cross-linguistically:

1608 EEBO A02239 Edward Grimeston, tr. | Jean François Le Petit [1546–ca.1615] *A generall historie of the Netherlands*
 [the KEEPING and POSSESSION of { the GOODS *that were* in them }]
was delivered into the hands of them that tooke them.

The objectionable use of “they was”

Let us consider the five instances of “they was” found in the earliest text of the Book of Mormon. Most readers find this language completely unacceptable. Indeed, had Edward Spencer noticed these in 1905, it is likely he would have added it to his list of shocking grammar.¹² Here they are:

1 Nephi 4:4

Now when I had spoken these words, **THEY was** yet wroth and did still continue to murmur.

Mosiah 18:17

And it came to pass that *whosoever was* baptized by the power and authority of God, **THEY was** added to his church.

Mosiah 29:36

telling them that these things ought not to be, that **THEY was** expressly repugnant to the commandments of God.

Alma 9:31–32

when I Alma had spoken these words, behold, the **PEOPLE were** wroth with me because I said unto them that **THEY was** a hard-hearted and a stiffnecked people. And also because I said unto them that **THEY were** a lost and a fallen people, **THEY was** angry with me and sought to lay their hands upon me,

In the last example we notice close variation, in the following order: “people **were**”, “they **was**”, “they **were**”, “they **was**”. Here is an example of close variation of “they was” and “they were”, in both cases referring to plural *arms*:

1659 EEBO A40651 Thomas Fuller [1608–1661] *The appeal of iniured innocence*

The **ARMS** of the Knights of Ely, might on a threefold title have escaped the Animadvertor’s censure: First, **THEY was** never before printed. Secondly, the Wall whereon **THEY were** depicted, is now demolished.

Here is another example, without variation, but where “they was fitted” clearly references plural *ships*.

12. Spencer, “Notes on the Book of Mormon,” *The Methodist Review*, William V. Kelley, ed., Vol. 87 — 5th ser., Vol. 21 (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1905), 33.

1658 EEBO A62144 Sir William Sanderson [1586?–1676] *A compleat history of the life and raigne of King Charles from his cradle to his grave*

Lewis of France . . . obtained . . . the Merchants consent for six of their own SHIPS to joyn with that; But in the Interim, before THEY **was** fitted for that purpose, K. James dies:

In Early Modern English, “they was” was a minor variant of heavily dominant “they were”, with low but varying rates of use depending on the dialect and other factors. The usage rate in the Book of Mormon is also low, less than 1%.

Mosiah 18:17, shown above, has “whosoever was baptized . . . they was . . .”, which is an interesting complication. “Whosoever was” is singular on its face, but in Early Modern English it could be referenced immediately afterwards by **plural** pronouns. There are, of course, examples where following, referential pronouns are singular,¹³ but more interesting are examples containing *they* and its congeners:

1625 EEBO A03149 Peter Heylyn [1600–1662] *Mikrokosmos A little description of the great world*

But WHOSOEVER **was** the first *Bishop*, certain it is, THEY **were** subject to much persecution,

1671 EEBO A40073 Edward Fowler [1632–1714] *The design of Christianity, or, A plain demonstration and improvement of this proposition*

and WHOSOEVER **was** so, and did those works it enjoined (which THEY might do by THEIR own natural strength) **was** esteemed according to that Law

In the 1625 example singular *Bishop* is immediately followed by plural *they*. Also, the 1671 example goes from singular to plural to

13. Examples of “whosoever was” with following singular pronouns:

1631 EEBO A01974 William Gouge [1578–1653] *Gods three arrowes plague, famine, sword*

And WHOSOEVER **was** yet strong of body and well liking, **him** they presently killed;

1668 EEBO A34964 R.F. | Serenus Cressy [1605–1674] *The church-history of Brittainy from the beginning of Christianity to the Norman conquest*

that WHOSOEVER **was** seen to have it in **his** hands, they foolishly shew'd the same respect and veneration to **him**,

1676 EEBO A46286 Thomas Lodge [1558?–1625] | Arnauld d'Andilly, tr. [1588–1674] | Flavius Josephus *Works*

WHOSOEVER **was** strong of Body, and in good liking they killed; upon presumption that HE had some secret stores, . . .

singular.¹⁴ These passages suggest that the third-person plural pronouns act as INDEFINITE SINGULAR pronouns.¹⁵ Wherefore it is possible that Mosiah 18:17 contains an instance of indefinite singular *they*:

And it came to pass that WHOSOEVER_i **was** baptized by the power and authority of God, THEY_{singular i} **was** added to his church.

If that is the sense, then *was* might signal that fact. In any event, it's an intriguing possibility.

Here are more examples of Early Modern English “they was” with close variation:¹⁶

14. More examples of “whosoever was” followed by plural pronouns:

1578 EEBO A06590 John Lyly [1554?–1606] *Euphues. The anatomy of wyt*

If this order had not bene in our predecessors, Pithagoras, Socrates, Plato, and WHOSOEVER **was** renowned in Greece for the glorie of wisdome: THEY had never bene eternished for wise men,

1583 EEBO A67926 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*

Thou false heretike hast taught plainly against the vowes of Monkes, Friers, Nunnes, and Priestes, saying: that WHOSOEVER **was** bounde to such like vowes, THEY vowed **themselues** to the estate of damnation:

1676 EEBO A61366 Aylett Sammes [1636?–1679?] *Britannia antiqua illustrata, or, The antiquities of ancient Britain derived from the Phœnicians*

Now the Mysteries of these Rites were accounted so Sacred and Powerful, that WHOSOEVER **was** initiated in them, immediatly received, as THEY thought, some extraordinary gifts of Holiness, . . .

15. See the Oxford English Dictionary entry for **they**, *pers. pron.*, definition B2, discussing pronominal use with singular nouns made universal, with quotations from 1526.

16. Here are examples of the syntax without close variation:

1525 EEBO A03315 Hieronymus Brunschwig [ca.1450–ca.1512] *The noble experyence of the vertuous handy warke of surgeri*

And than he wolde put in agayn the guttys / and THEY **was** so sore swollen that they cowde natbe handelyd

1658 EEBO A40227 George Fox [1624–1691] *The papists strength, principles, and doctrines*

when THEY **was** speaking of justifying by faith without the works of the Law,

1659 EEBO A52921 Humphrey Norton [fl.1655–1659] et al. *New-England's ensigne* and the first relation we had was concerning him, and how THEY **was** laboring to save his life;

1663 EEBO A44832 Richard Hubberthorn [1628–1662] *Works*

The judgement did not come upon Corah because THEY **was** Lay-persons,

1665 EEBO A35520 Thomas Curwen et al. *An answer to John Wiggans book*

and though the Disciples were led into all truth by the Spirit, by which THEY **was** to preach the Gospel to all Nations,

1523 EEBO A71318 John Burchier, tr. (Lord Berners) [1466/67–1533] | Jean Froissart [1338?–1410?] *Chronicles*

So THEY **was** a great hoost whan bothe hoostes **were** assembled togyder.

1653 EEBO A70988 F.G., tr. | Madeleine de Scudéry [1607–1701] *Artamenes*

The reason why WE **were** more civilized then THEY **was**, because WE **were** not very far from the Euxime Sea,

1671 EEBO A42277 tr. | Count Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato [1606–1678] *The history of the managements of Cardinal Julio Mazarine*

[the Ships] entred into the River, not knowing THEY **was** departed, and were so far engaged amongst the French Ships before THEY **were** aware,

1679 EEBO A30211 John Bunyan [1628–1688] *A treatise of the fear of God*

by which THEY **were** brought into a bondage fear; yea THEY **was** to remember this especially.

The above excerpts contain close instances of *were*, clearly demonstrating that such variation was permissible. Again, this is like Alma 9:31–32, shown above, which has “they was/were/was”. In the 1523 example, *was* conveys a fairly typical biblical meaning of ‘became’, just as in the last instance of the Alma 9:31–32 passage.

This next example is interesting because there is no expected number resolution:

1691 EEBO A30499 John Burnyeat [1631–1690] *The truth exalted*

and there he did affirm in his preaching to the People, that *both* HE *and* THEY **was** without the Life of both the Law and the Gospel.

Nevertheless, Early Modern English usually employed *were* after this compound subject. This leads us to another example of suspect Book of Mormon grammar.

1673 EEBO A40785 John Faldo [1633–1690] *Quakerism no Christianity. Clearly and abundantly proved, out of the writings of their chief leaders*
and so THEY **was** in the Spirit which is invisible, and not in the flesh.

1678 EEBO A30130 John Bunyan [1628–1688] *Come & welcome to Jesus Christ*
Fifthly, What did Eulalia see in Christ, when she said, as THEY **was** pulling her one Joynt from another;

1678 EEBO A30170 John Bunyan [1628–1688] *The pilgrim's progress from this world to that which is to come delivered under the similitude of a dream*
THEY **was** then asked, If they knew the Prisoner at the Bar?

1678 EEBO A58876 John Davies tr. [1625–1693] | Madeleine de Scudéry [1607–1701] *Clelia*
The danger THEY **was** in was more then ordinary,

Both X and Y was

In the earliest text, there is one striking instance of this syntax — conjoined nouns preceded by the conjunctive adverb *both* — without plural number resolution:

Mosiah 18:14

both ALMA *and* HELAM **was** buried in the water

I have located quite a few instances of this pattern in Early Modern English. With non-abstract nouns, resolution became *de rigueur* during the modern period. Besides the 1691 example, there is this pronominal one as well:

1657 EEBO A28378 Francis Bacon [1561–1626] | William Rawley [1588?–1667] *Works (Resuscitatio)*

In the end, I expresly demanded his Opinion,
as that, whereto *both* HE, *and* I **was** enjoyned

In the previous two examples, and in most that I have found of this type, a past participle is used (almost) immediately after *was*. Here is a sampling of the syntax:¹⁷

17. The following examples might be typical instances of no plural resolution with singular abstract nouns:

1583 EEBO A67926 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*
after dinner, BUTLER *and* SMITH **were** brought to the starre chamber before the privie Counsaile, where *both* SEDITION *and* HERESIE **was** obiected against them

1572 EEBO A14710 John Bridges, tr. [d.1618] | Rudolf Gwalther [1519–1586] *Homelyes or sermons vppon the Actes of the Apostles*
this was an evident and infallible argument, that *both* SINNE *and* DEATH **was** vanquished

1602 EEBO A04680 Tho. Lodge, tr. [1558?–1625] | Flavius Josephus *Works*
but *both* the HOPE of Caesar *and* the FORWARDNES of Aristobulus **was** overthruie

1644 EEBO A57969 Samuel Rutherford [1600?–1661] *A peaceable plea for the government of the Church of Scotland*
both QUESTION *and* CAUSE **was** determined by the Synodicall-Church

1689 EEBO A59082 Nathaniel Bacon [1593–1660] *An historical and political discourse of the laws & government of England*
Both RIGHT *and* POSSESSION **was** now become theirs

1696 EEBO A46926 Richard Johnson [1573–1659?] *The famous history of the seven champions of Christendom*
So *both* TIME *and* PLACE **was** appointed, which was the next morning following, by the King's Commandment,

1560 EEBO A09567 John Daus, tr. | Johannes Sleidanus [1506–1556] *Sleidanus Commentaries*

at certain howres *both* DYNNER *and* SUPPER **was** serued

1600 EEBO A06128 Philemon Holland, tr. | Livy *The Romane historie*

So *both* CITIE *and* CAMPE **was** spoiled and sacked

1650 EEBO A40681 Thomas Fuller [1608–1661] *A Pisgah-sight of Palestine and the confines thereof*

and soon after *both* TEMPLE *and* CITY **was** destroyed, by Vespasian and Titus his son, seventy two years after our Saviours birth

1659 EEBO A26947 Richard Baxter [1615–1691] *A key for Catholicks, to open the jugling of the Jesuits*

there was no monsters of filthiness, or sink, or plague of uncleanness, with which *both* PEOPLE *and* PRIEST **was** not defiled

1660 EEBO A50450 Sir George Mackenzie [1636–1691] *Aretina*

where by *both* ARMY *and* NAVIE **was** maintained

1668 EEBO A53044 Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle [1624?–1674] *The description of a new world, called the blazing-world*

when she saw that *both* CHURCH *and* STATE **was** now in a well-ordered and settled condition

Singular syntax with the conjunctive adverb *both* and **abstract** conjuncts persisted more robustly. The same syntax, with animate or concrete conjuncts (as in Mosiah 18:14), was largely confined to the Early Modern period.

As X and Y was V-ing

The earliest text has no plural number resolution after the subordinating time conjunction *as*, at least this one time:

Alma 20:8

as AMMON *and* LAMONI **was** a journeying thither¹⁸

The following example is different, since it has conjoined **plural** noun phrases:

18. The other two items in Alma 20:8 are biblical: the directional adverb *thither* and the action preposition *a*, meaning ‘engaged in’ (see OED **a**, *prep.*¹ definition 13; cf. “as he was yet **a** coming” [Luke 9:42]). We also see “a journeying” in the following example:

1661 EEBO A42833 Joseph Glanvill [1636–1680] *The vanity of dogmatizing* wherein other spirits are continually **a journeying**.

Helaman 5:2

For *as* their LAWS *and* their GOVERNMENTS **were** established by the voice of the people

Here are late 17th-century examples with plural *was*:

1669 EEBO A66812 Thomas Bayly [d.1657?] *Witty apophthegms*
not long time had passed before it happened, that *as* HIMSELF *and* TRAIN **was** riding through the streets to see how well this order was put in execution

1676 EEBO A53472 Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery [1621–1679] *Parthenissa, that most fam'd romance*

I met the generous Falintus at his Landing, *as* VENTIDIUS *and* I **was** diverting our selves upon a pleasant Strand, not far from his Palace

1682 EEBO A30018 Richard Brathwaite, tr. [1588?–1673] | Heinrich Bünting [1545–1606] *The travels of the holy patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings, our Saviour Christ and his apostles*

as PETER *and* JOHN **was** going into the Temple by this Gate, they healed a man that had been born lame from his Mothers Womb, Acts. 3.

1686 EEBO A56820 John Pearson [1613–1686] *Antichristian treachery discovered*

as HE *and* I **was** speaking together concerning the payment of Tythes

In the publicly available subset of Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO–TCP <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/>>) there are examples of this syntax dated 1718 (“*as* my WIFE *and* I **was** sitting together”) and 1756 (“*as* if HEAVEN *and* EARTH **was** coming together”). So the usage continued into the modern period, dropping off in use in standard modern English.

King and people

Here is another case of unexpected singular *was*:

Mosiah 21:33

[KING Limhi *and* MANY OF HIS PEOPLE] **was** desirous to be baptized

The more common alternative in the textual record is *were*:

1566 EEBO A12943 Thomas Stapleton [1535–1598] *A retur[ne of vn]truthes vpon [M. Jewel]les replie*

the KING *and* HIS PEOPLE **were** conuerted and Christened.

Nowadays we expect *were* after a combination of *king* and *people*; we expect plural number resolution. But we don't always see that in the Early Modern era:¹⁹

1581 EEBO A06481 Thomas Lupton *A persuasion from papistrie wrytten chiefly to the obstinate, determind, and dysobedient English papists*

yet KING Aram *and* HIS PEOPLE **was** not blessed of God,
nor yet **wer** the PEOPLE of God,

1583 EEBO A20370 Thomas Deloney, tr. [1543?–1600] | Bonaventure Des Périers [1500?–1544?] *The mirroure of mirth and pleasant conceits*

that the KINGE *and* ALL HIS PEOPLE **was** so amased with feare,
that they fel downe as deade:

The 1581 example has close variation: “**were** the people” comes right after “king and people **was**”. Many of these examples suggest that such immediate variation was not only permissible, but even embraced in Early Modern English. The Book of Mormon exhibits this same phenomenon quite often, as in this example:

Alma 21:21

And he did also declare unto them that THEY **were** a PEOPLE *which was* under him and that THEY **were** a free people,

In looking for “king and people” agreement syntax, I encountered the following:

1494 EEBO A00525 Robert Fabyan [d.1513] *Chronicle* (1533)

so that whan all THINGES necessarye
to the honoure and nede of the kynge and his people
was redy,

Here are two examples of *was* used right after plural noun phrases:

1523 EEBO A71318 John Bourchier, tr. (Lord Berners) [1466/67–1533] | Jean Froissart [1338?–1410?] *Chronicles*

Whan the frenche kyngis BATAYLS [i.e. battalions] **was** ordred
and every lorde under his banner among their owne men:

19. The following examples containing the preposition *with* more naturally take singular *was* and are usually deemed to be prescriptively correct. This syntax may have contributed to *was* usage after the conjunction:

1533 EEBO A00525 Robert Fabyan [d.1513] *Chronicle* (1533)

and the KYNGE *with* HIS PEOPLE **was** receyved into the cytye.

1583 EEBO A67922 John Foxe [1516–1587] *Actes and monuments of matters most speciall and memorable, happenyng in the Church*

that the KING *wt* [i.e. with] HIS PEOPLE **was** not able to resist them.

1583 EEBO A17698 Arthur Golding, tr. [1536–1606] | Jean Calvin [1509–1564] *Sermons vpon the fifth booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*
GOD sheweth the authoritie of a Father in beyng grieved
when the FAMILIES **was** not maintayned in Israel:

This is low-frequency language in both the Early Modern period and the Book of Mormon, as in the following example (with close variation):

Mosiah 18:26

And the PRIESTS **was** not to depend upon the people for their support,
but for their labor THEY **were** to receive the grace of God,

“So great was” with plural noun phrases

In this next group of examples, the Book of Mormon employs singular *was* after the adjective *great* and before plural noun phrases:

1 Nephi 17:2

And *so great was* the BLESSINGS of the Lord upon us

2 Nephi 3:4

And *great was* the COVENANTS of the Lord which he made unto Joseph.

Mosiah 24:10

And . . . *so great was* their AFFLICTIONS that they began to cry mightily to God.

Alma 4:3

and *so great was* their AFFLICTIONS that every soul had cause to mourn,

There is variation in the text; three times we read plural *were* in this context:

3 Nephi 8:22

for *so great were* the MISTS of darkness which **were** upon the face of the land.

Mormon 5:6

for *so great were* their NUMBERS that they did tread the people of the Nephites under their feet.

Ether 15:16

And *so great were* their CRIES, their HOWLINGS *and* LAMENTATIONS that **it**²⁰ did rend the air exceedingly.

20. The resumption of “cries, howlings, lamentations” as singular *it* is reminiscent of Tyndale, and these other two examples:

Here are several Early Modern English examples of the type “(so) great **was** <PLURAL NOUN PHRASE>”:

1571 EEBO A10649 Richard Rainolde [d.1606] *A chronicle of all the noble emperours of the Romaines*

so great **was** the CALAMITIES of those dayes in the often chaunge of Princes and officers

1660 EEBO A26603 George Monck, Duke of Albemarle [1608–1670] *The declaration and speech . . . to the right honourable the Lord Mayor, aldermen and common-council of the city of London*

Upon which, great **was** the ACCLAMATIONS of the people

1670 EEBO A47947 G.H., tr. | Gregorio Leti [1630–1701] *The history of the cardinals of the Roman Church*

Yet so great **was** the DIFFERENCES amongst them,

1698 EEBO A55340 Andrew Tooke, tr. [1673–1732] | François Pomey [1618–1673] *The Pantheon representing the fabulous histories of the heathen gods and most illustrious heroes*

they are called Hercules Labors, so great **was** the PAINS and so infinite the Toil of them.

These next two excerpts deserve special notice because they contain close variation in verb agreement:

1602 EEBO A19029 William Clowes [ca.1540–1604] *A right frutefull and approued treatise, for the artificiall cure of that malady called in Latin Struma, and in English, the evill*

for great **was** the TROUBLES and DAUNGERS that **was** like to haue followed, but happily **were** THEY preuented through the helpe of Almighty God, &c.

1673 EEBO A41204 Francis Kirkman, tr. [1632–ca.1680] | Jerónimo Fernández *Don Bellianis of Greece, or, The honour of chivalry*

Great **was** the PREPARATIONS that **were** made for the Solemnity of the Wedding betwéen the Prince of Greece and the fair Princess of Babylon

1530 EEBO A13203 William Tyndale, tr. [d.1536] [*The Pentateuch*]
when they sawe the LONDE of Jaeser and the LONDE of Gilead
that **it** was an apte place for catell

1655 EEBO A40897 Ralph Farmer *The great mysteries of godlinesse and ungodlinesse*
So sharp and hot **were** the FLAMES thereof,
that **it** made the maker of the whole creation grone and cry out,

1680 EEBO A26808 William Bates [1625–1699] *The soveraign and final happiness of man*
Such **were** the most precious MERITS of his Obedience, that **it** was not only sufficient to free the guilty contaminated race of Mankind from Hell, . . .

The variation seen in the 1673 example is similar to the following:

Omni 1:27

for *there was* a large NUMBER *which were* desirous
to possess the land of their inheritance;

This next pair of examples also have similar syntax:

1535 EEBO A10349 Miles Coverdale, tr. [1488–1568] *Biblia the Byble, that is, the holy Scrypture of the Olde and New Testament, faithfully translated in to Englyshe*

And they perceaved that it **was** THEY *which were* come agayne out of
captivyte,

3 Nephi 10:12

and it **was** THEY which had not shed the blood of the saints
which were spared.

“There was” with plural noun phrases

There are quite a few instances of “there was + <PLURAL NOUN PHRASE>” in the earliest text. This syntax was not uncommon in the Early Modern period. Here are sets of examples that show a high degree of correspondence:

Ether 13:18

there was many PEOPLE *which was* slain by the sword

1687 EEBO A47127 George Keith [1639?–1716] *The benefit, advantage and glory of silent meetings*

there was many PEOPLE both in that Nation and elsewhere, in whom
there was some true DESIRES *and* BREATHINGS raised and begot

■ ■ ■

1 Nephi 18:25

we did find upon the land of promise as we journeyed in the
wilderness that *there was* BEASTS in the forests of every kind

1598 EEBO A05569 William Phillip, tr. | Jan Huygen van Linschoten [1563–1611] *His discours of voyages into ye Easte & West Indies*

When the Portingales first discovered it, *there was* not any BEASTS,
nor fruite, at all within the Iland

1635 EEBO A01108 Luke Foxe [1586–1635] *North-west Fox, or, Fox from the North-west passage*

for *there was* WHALES, SEA-MORS, *and* SEALES,

■ ■ ■

Alma 4:9

there was ENVYINGS *and* STRIFES and malice *and* PERSECUTIONS and pride,

1688 EEBO A56509 John Partridge [1644–1715] *An astrological judgment on the great and wonderful year 1688*

At that time *there was* MURMURINGS *and* PLOTTINGS against the then Oppressors

▪ ▪ ▪

3 Nephi 8:7

And *there was* exceeding sharp LIGHTNINGS such as never had been known in all the land.

1654 EEBO A91909 John Robotham [fl.1654] *The mystery of the two witnesses unveiled*

And *there was* LIGHTNINGS, *and* VOYCES, *and* THUNDRINGS, and an earthquake, and great haile.

▪ ▪ ▪

Mormon 9:19

And if *there was* MIRACLES wrought, then why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being?

1688 EEBO A56539 Joseph Walker | Blaise Pascal [1623–1662] *Monsieur Pascall's thoughts, meditations, and prayers, touching matters moral and divine*

there was also greater MIRACLES wrought in behalf of Truth.

▪ ▪ ▪

Ether 13:26

And *there was* ROBBERS, and in fine, all manner of wickedness upon all the face of the land.

1667 EEBO A40122 George Fox [1624–1691] *The arraignment of popery when Christ was crucified, there was* two THIEVES crucified, and one of the thieves reviled Christ

Conclusion

The foregoing textual examples show us that the earliest text of the Book of Mormon contains a wide range of diverse expression that matches the Early Modern period, at times unexpectedly. Thanks to the groundbreaking work of Royal Skousen, and texts/corpora provided by EEBO–TCP, ECCO–TCP, Google books, and Mark Davies, this study has been possible. They have provided heretofore inaccessible evidence that it

is reasonable to consider the past-tense verb agreement found in the Book of Mormon to be well-formed Early Modern English. It bears repeating that this view of the earliest text is a comprehensive one that is explanatory. From this rich perspective, the Book of Mormon is full of beautiful old language and intriguing linguistic variation.

References

- Carmack, Stanford. "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar". *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209–62.
- _____. "What Command Syntax Tells Us About Book of Mormon Authorship". *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015): 175–217.
- _____. "The Implications of Past-Tense Syntax in the Book of Mormon". *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 119–86.
- _____. "Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster's 1828)". *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 65–77.
- _____. "The More Part of the Book of Mormon Is Early Modern English". *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 33–40.
- _____. "Joseph Smith Read the Words". *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 41–64.
- Davies, Mark. *Early English Books Online: 400 million words, 1470s–1690s*. 2013–.
- Skousen, Royal. "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon". *BYU Studies* 30.1 (1990): 41–69.
- _____. "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3.1 (1994): 28–38.
- _____. "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript". *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7.1 (1998): 22–31.
- _____. "History of the Critical Text Project of the Book of Mormon". *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*. Ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V.P. Coutts. Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002. 5–21.

- _____. *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*. 6 parts. Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU, 2004–2009.
- _____. “The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon”. *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 25 (2005): 2–6.
- _____. “Conjectural Emendation in the Book of Mormon”. *The FARMS Review* 18.1 (2006): 187–231.
- _____. “Editor’s Preface”. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. Ed. Royal Skousen. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009. xxix–xlv.
- _____. “Appendix: Significant Textual Changes”. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. Ed. Royal Skousen. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009. 739–89.
- _____. “Some Textual Changes for a Scholarly Study of the Book of Mormon”. *BYU Studies* 51.4 (2012): 99–117.
- _____. “The Original Text of the Book of Mormon and its Publication by Yale University Press”. *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 57–96.
- _____. “Changes in the Book of Mormon”. *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 161–76.
- _____. “Restoring the Original Text of the Book of Mormon”. *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 107–17.

Stanford Carmack has a linguistics and a law degree from Stanford University, as well as a doctorate in Hispanic Languages and Literature from the University of California, Santa Barbara, specializing in historical syntax. In the past he has had articles published on object-participle agreement in Old Catalan and Old Spanish, and on Georgian verb morphology. He currently researches Book of Mormon syntax as it relates to Early Modern English and contributes, by means of textual analysis, to volume 3 of Royal Skousen’s Book of Mormon critical text project.

