

Uncovering the Author's Fingerprints

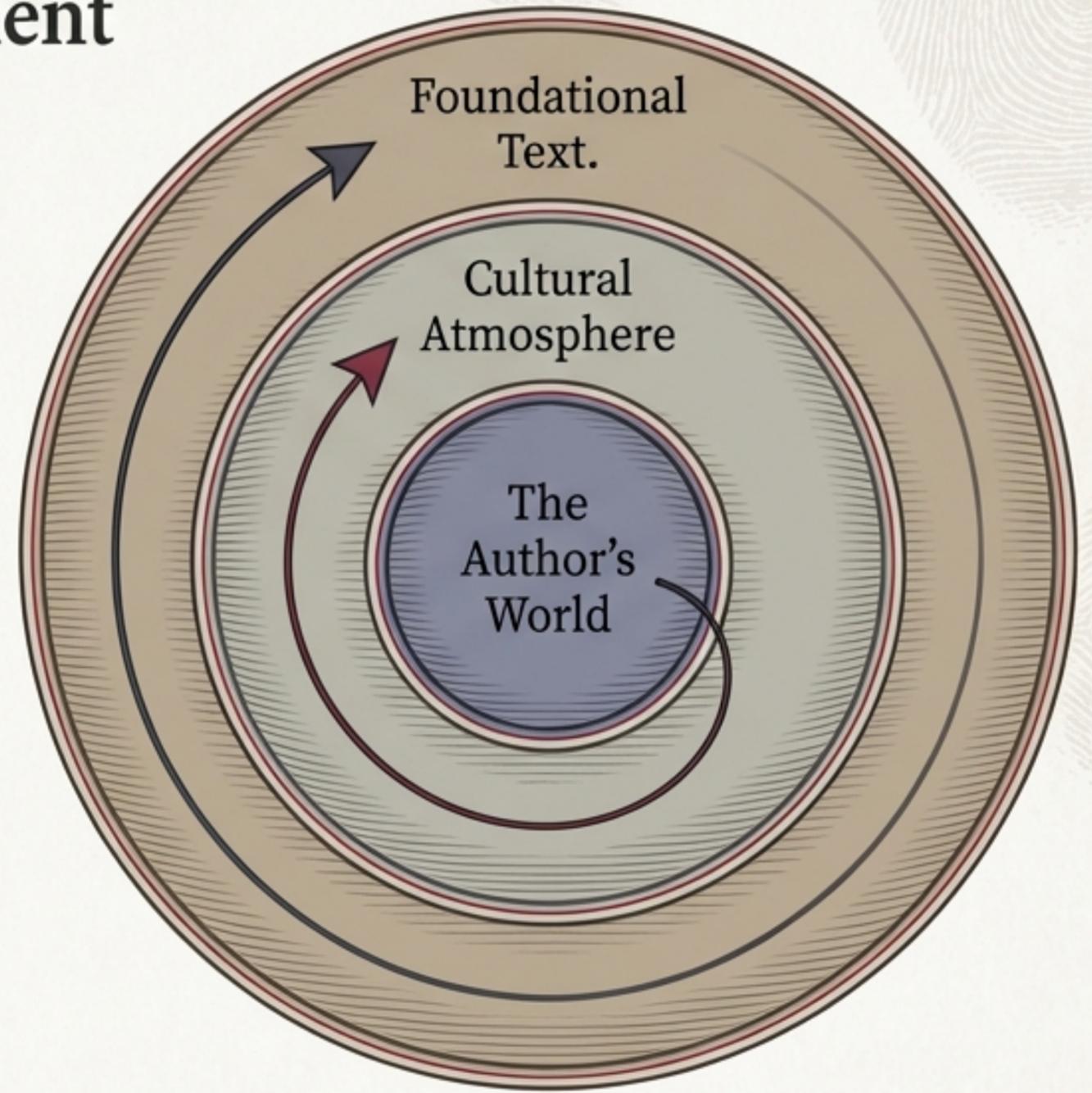
A Textual Investigation into the 19th-Century Origins of the Book of Mormon



If the Book of Mormon isn't an ancient translation, then what is it?

The book itself provides the answer. Like any author, its creator left unmistakable “fingerprints” on the text—clues that point directly to a specific time, place, and personal worldview.

This presentation examines the textual evidence that reveals the Book of Mormon as a product of Joseph Smith's 19th-century American environment. We will follow these fingerprints from the book's foundational text to the cultural myths of its day, and finally, to the author's own life.





Fingerprint #1: An Impossible Foundation

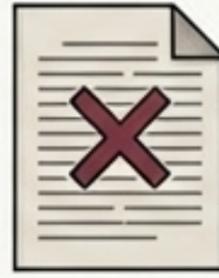
The Book of Mormon's foundational text is the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, a 1611 translation (likely the 1769 edition) unavailable to its purported ancient authors.

Key Problems



Anachronism

The text quotes extensively from a Bible translation that wouldn't exist for over 1,000 years after the Book of Mormon was supposedly completed.



Copied Errors

It incorporates translation errors and material not original to the biblical text, which Joseph Smith would have believed were authentic. A divine translation would not replicate human mistakes.



Mythical History

It treats mythical stories from Genesis (Adam and Eve, Tower of Babel, Global Flood) as literal history in the Americas.

The reliance on the KJV establishes that the Book of Mormon, in its current form, is a modern creation.

🔍 Fingerprint #2: The Dominant Myth of the Era



In Joseph Smith's time, a popular myth sought to explain the thousands of large earthen mounds found across North America. European settlers, viewing contemporary Native Americans as "savages," could not believe they were capable of such sophisticated works.

The Mound Builder Myth

- A lost, superior race of "white" people built a great civilization in ancient America.
- This civilized race was exterminated in a series of brutal wars by a dark-skinned, "savage" race.
- These savages were the ancestors of the modern Native Americans.

This myth provides the exact narrative template for the **Book of Mormon's** story of the civilized, light-skinned **Nephites** being destroyed by the savage, dark-skinned **Lamanites**.

A Myth Embedded in the Landscape and Culture



The mounds were a constant, visible mystery in Joseph Smith's world.

“I assume the fact that they were compelled to fly from a more numerous or more gallant people. No doubt the contest was long and bloody... their last effort at resistance was made on the banks of the Ohio.”

— William Henry Harrison, 9th U.S. President

Harrison's analysis posited a **populous, civilized nation** with a **priesthood and national religion**, which was ultimately **destroyed and forced to flee**—a story that directly parallels the Book of Mormon's narrative.

More Than a Myth: A Justification for Conquest

The Mound Builder myth served a crucial political purpose. It provided a rationale for dispossessing Native Americans of their land by claiming they were violent usurpers who had stolen it from a previous “white” race.



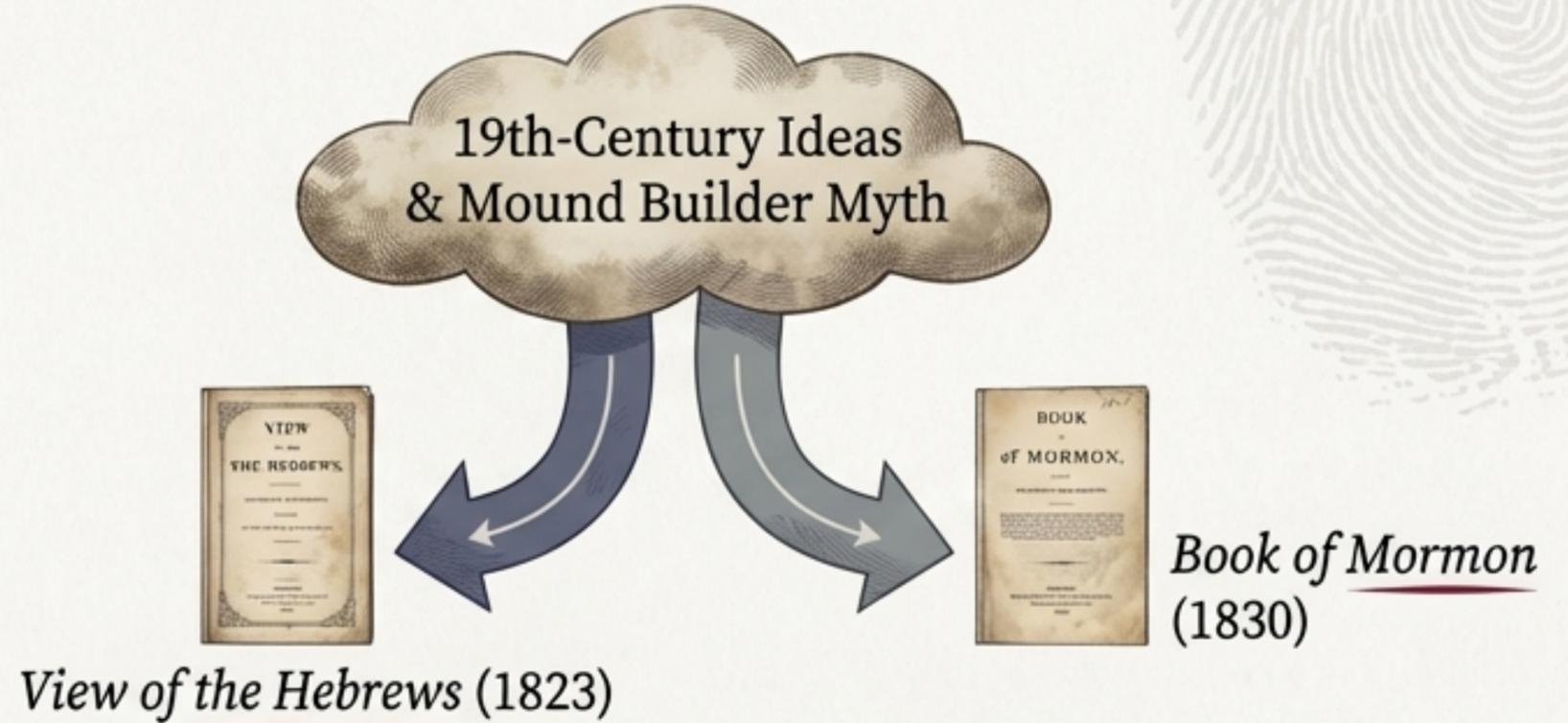
“By the time Andrew Jackson became president in 1829... that idea had become an inconvenient truth. In his efforts to remove American Indian tribes... Jackson claimed that the mounds had been built by an unknown people who were exterminated by the existing ‘savage tribes.’ Therefore, the United States government was perfectly justified in removing those tribes from the lands that they had stolen...”

— Bradley Lepper, Archaeologist, *The Columbus Dispatch*

The Book of Mormon’s narrative reflects and reinforces this justification, framing the Lamanites as a cursed race deserving of punishment.

A Shared Worldview: The Case of *View of the Hebrews*

Published in 1823 by Ethan Smith (pastor in Oliver Cowdery's hometown), *View of the Hebrews* is another text born from the same cultural environment. While not a source of direct plagiarism, its parallels with the Book of Mormon are striking because both books draw from the same pool of 19th-century ideas.



Shared Themes

- ✓ Migration of ancient Hebrews to the Americas.
- ✓ Division into "civilized" and "uncivilized" groups.
- ✓ Wars resulting in the annihilation of the civilized group.
- ✓ The belief that Native Americans were descendants of the Lost Tribes of Israel.
- ✓ A buried book detailing their history.

An Insider's Alarm: B.H. Roberts' Troubling Discovery

In the 1920s, LDS General Authority and historian B.H. Roberts conducted an internal study on the origins of the Book of Mormon. He was deeply troubled by the parallels with *View of the Hebrews*.

> “Did Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews* furnish structural material for Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out... that there are many things in the former book that may well have suggested many major things in the other... it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith’s story of the Book of Mormon’s origin.”

🔍 Fingerprint #3: The Family Dream

Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, recorded a detailed vision her husband, Joseph Smith Sr., had in 1811. This dream appears, with remarkably similar details and phrasing, as Lehi's foundational "Tree of Life" vision in 1 Nephi, written nearly two decades later.

Joseph Smith Sr.'s Dream (1811)	Lehi's Dream (1 Nephi 8)
Traveling in an open, desolate field	Beheld a large and spacious field
A narrow path	A strait and narrow path
A beautiful stream of water	A river of water
A rope running along the bank	A rod of iron... along the bank of the river
Stood a tree, exceedingly handsome	Beheld a tree... beauty was far beyond... all beauty
Fruit... white as snow	Fruit thereof was white to exceed all whiteness
I must bring my wife and children	Desirous that my family should partake of it
A spacious building... reach the very heavens	A great and spacious building... high above the earth
Filled with people... finely dressed	Filled with people... dress was exceedingly fine
They pointed the finger of scorn at us	In the attitude of mocking and pointing their fingers

More Than a Retelling: A Theological Correction

Joseph Smith didn't just copy his father's dream; he used the Book of Mormon to correct it. Joseph Sr.'s dream supported his Universalist belief that all would be saved. Later in 1 Nephi, the dream's meaning is reinterpreted to align with more orthodox theology, resolving a point of religious contention between his parents.



Lehi's original vision  Nephi's interpretation
The Correction

The Correction in Nephi 15:26-29

- Lehi's original vision: Simply saw a "river of water."
- Nephi's interpretation: Clarifies that his father's mind was "swallowed up" and he "beheld not the filthiness of the water." The river is revealed to be an "awful gulf which separated the wicked from the tree of life... a representation of that awful hell."

Joseph used the voice of an ancient prophet to correct his own father's theology and bring it in line with his mother's.

🔍 Fingerprint #4: The Author's Vocation

Before producing the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith was known as a “seer” who used a stone to find buried treasure. This unique folk magic worldview appears directly in the text.

Treasure Digging Lore

A common element in failed treasure digs was the claim that enchanted treasures would “slip” or be pulled deeper into the earth by guardian spirits just before being reached.



Helaman 13:31

“...he curseth your riches, that they become slippery, that ye cannot hold them...”

Mormon 1:18

“...they began to hide up their treasures in the earth; and they became slippery, because the Lord had cursed the land, that they could not hold them, nor retain them again.”

This specific concept of “slippery” treasures is not found in the Bible but is a hallmark of 19th-century American folk magic.

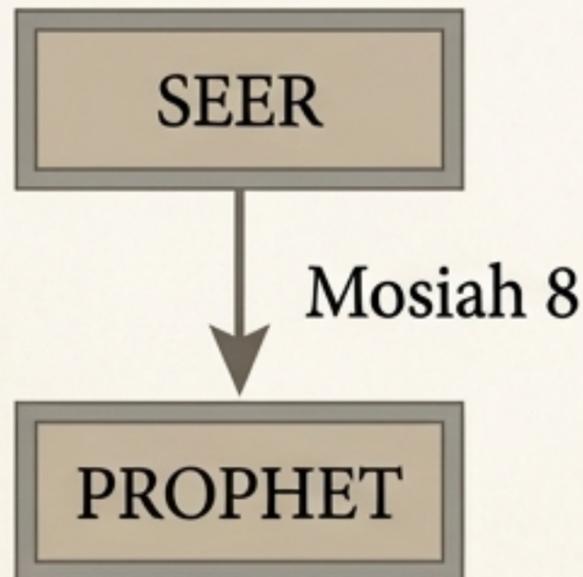


Fingerprint #5: Prophecies of the Author

The *Book of Mormon* contains passages that appear to prophesy of its own translator, Joseph Smith.

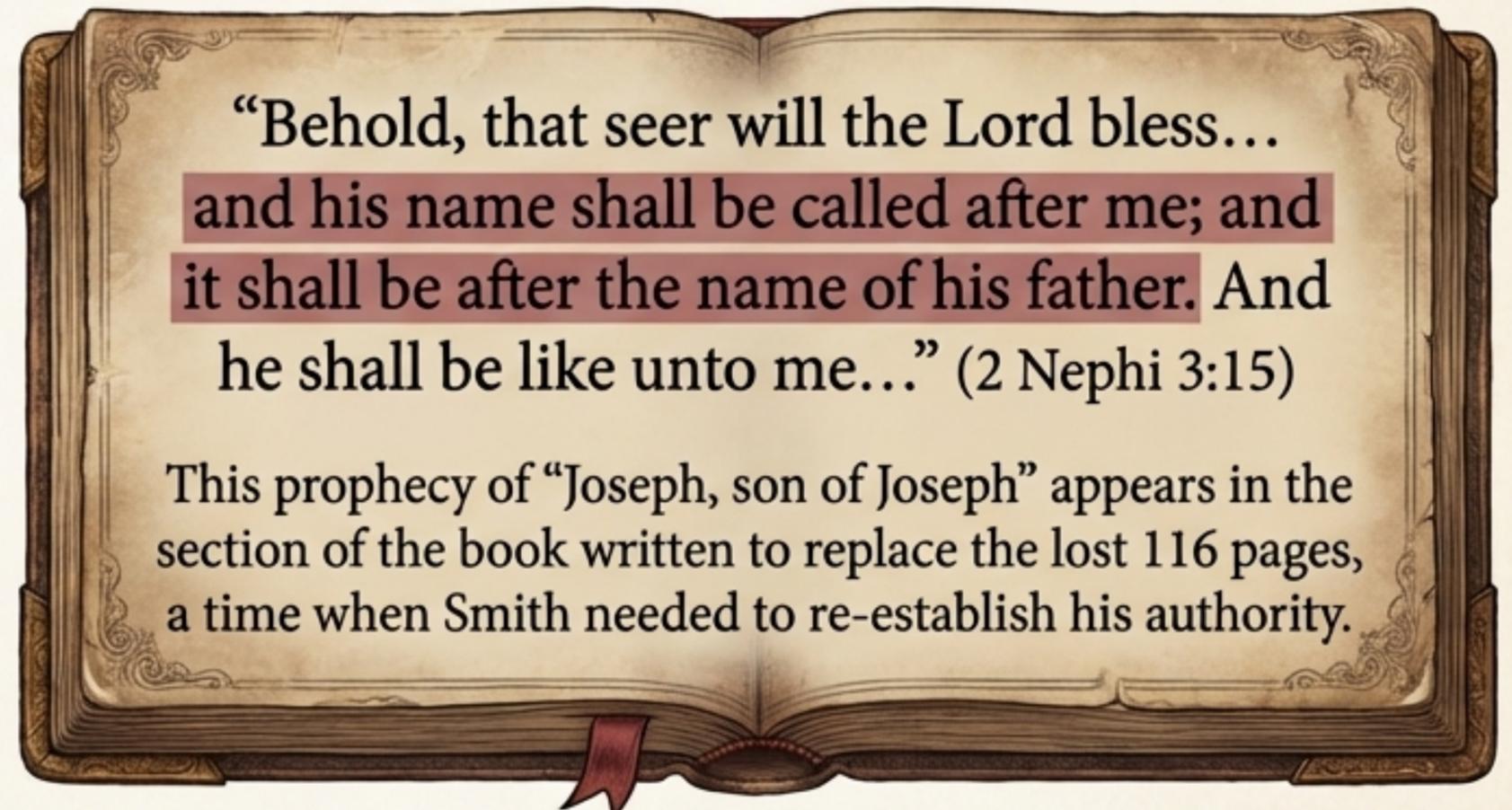
Elevating the “Seer”

In Mosiah 8, the text declares a “seer” is greater than a prophet. “Seer” was the term used for a folk magic practitioner or “glass looker” in Smith’s day. The text elevates his own folk magic title above the traditional biblical one.



A Prophecy of Himself

An ancient prophet (Lehi, quoting Joseph of Egypt) gives a prophecy so specific it leaves no doubt as to its subject:

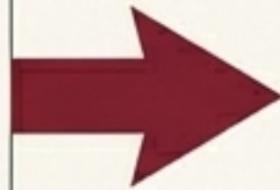


Fingerprint #6: Retrofitting Recent Events into Prophecy

In 1828, Martin Harris took a transcript of characters to Professor Charles Anthon in New York City. The event, as recounted by Harris, was then written into the Book of Mormon as the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy.

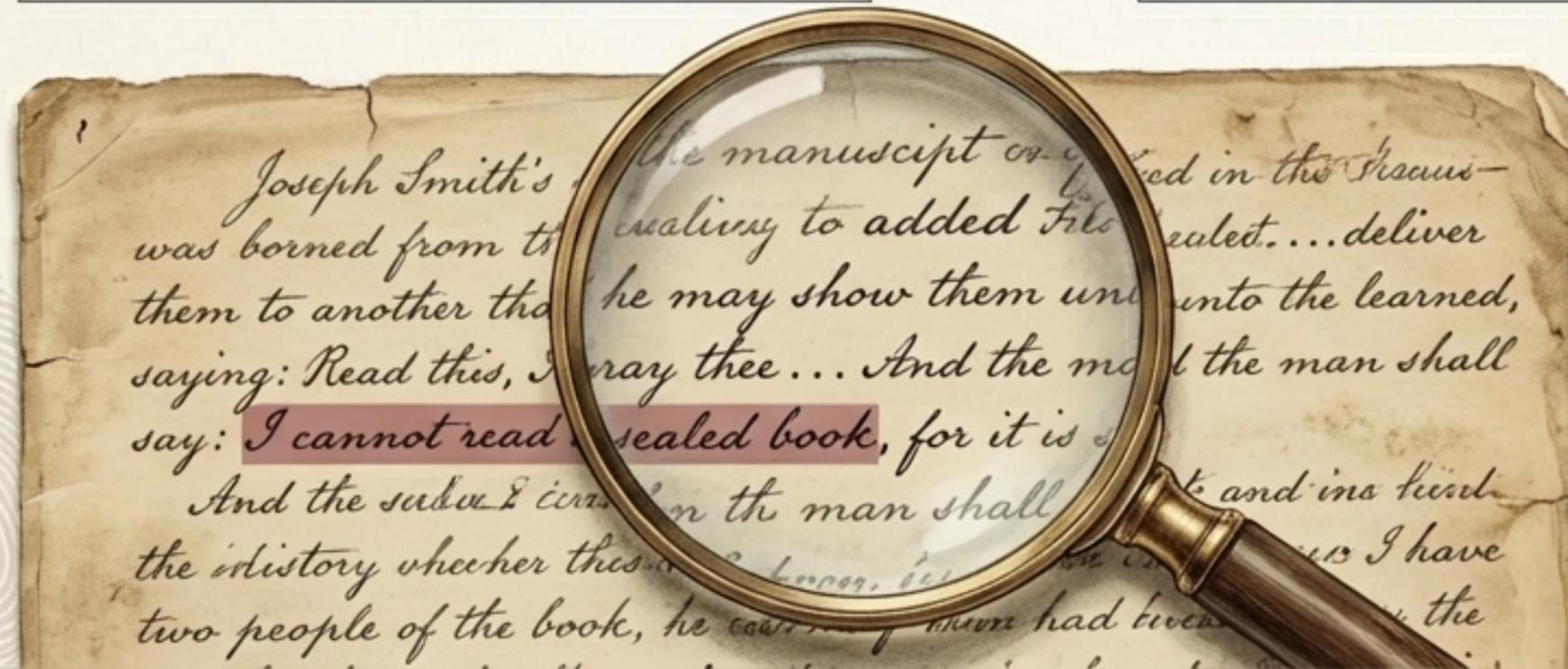
1. Event (1828)

Martin Harris claims Anthon said he could not read a “sealed book.”



2. “Prophecy” (written after 1828)

In 2 Nephi 27, an ancient prophet foretells the encounter almost verbatim: “...*deliver them to another that may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee... And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed.*”



The key phrase, “I cannot read a sealed book,” was physically added between the lines in Joseph Smith’s 1838 history, refining the story years after the fact to better match the “prophecy” he had already written.

🔍 Fingerprint #7: The Political Panic of the Day

In 1826, the disappearance and presumed murder of William Morgan, who threatened to expose Masonic secrets, ignited a massive anti-Masonic movement in Western New York. This panic and its specific language permeate the Book of Mormon.

“Secret Combinations”

The book warns repeatedly against “secret combinations” that administer secret oaths and seek to overthrow governments—the exact accusations leveled against the Masons.

Contemporary Recognition

The connection was obvious at the time. The *Ohio Star* newspaper noted in 1831, “The book of Mormon is anti-masonic and it is a singular truth that every one of its followers... are anti-masons.” Martin Harris himself publicly declared the book the “anti-Masonic bible.”

The focus on “secret combinations” dates the text’s core concerns precisely to the period after 1826.

🔍 The Cumulative Weight of the Evidence

One or two of these fingerprints might be dismissed as coincidence. But their combined weight points to a clear conclusion. The Book of Mormon is not an ancient record, but an intricate product of its time and place, bearing the unmistakable marks of its author.



The text doesn't just contain its author's fingerprints; it is a complex self-portrait of Joseph Smith and his world.