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Looking Again at the Anthon Transcript(s)

John S. Thompson

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Abstract: *The official account of Martin Harris's visit to Charles Anthon, canonized in the Pearl of Great Price, suggests that Anthon may have been shown more than one transcript by Harris. The differing responses of Anthon to each of these transcripts may shed light on the kinds of characters he was shown and provide additional perspectives that can help clarify a little more what is happening in the historical sources.*

Some inconsistencies exist in the written historical sources concerning the number and nature of the transcripts Martin Harris presented to Professor Charles Anthon at Columbia College in 1828. Did Harris have with him only a single piece of paper, or did he have two or more? Was there only one copied set of characters? Was a translation included? What exactly was the nature of the characters and translations? Some sources seem to indicate that Harris showed Anthon one document on which was written only a single collection of characters; this has been the standard assumption among historians and lay-members alike.[1] However, the official account of Harris's visit with Anthon, as recorded and published in the *History of the Church*[2] and in the Pearl of Great Price (Joseph Smith — History 1:63–65),

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1. For example, Charles Anthon himself mentions in a letter to E. D. Howe that Martin Harris requested that he "decypher, if possible, a paper [singular], which the farmer would hand me" and that the paper had "crooked characters disposed in columns . . . , and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle." Letter published in Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed* (Painesville, OH: Telegraph Press, 1834), 270–72.

2. "History, 1838–1856, volume A–1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," p. 9, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/11.

and other sources suggest that Harris may have shown Anthon at least two transcripts, as B. H. Roberts had noted.[3] While the number of actual documents presented is unclear in most sources, Martin Harris's report does explicitly state that he presented Anthon two different sets of characters — one set that was translated and another set that was not yet translated. This report, which also includes two differing responses from Anthon regarding these two sets of characters, provides some additional possibilities to consider with respect to Anthon's abilities and the kinds of characters that may have been on the document(s) copied from the plates.[4]

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3. B. H. Roberts indicated that Harris submitted "two papers containing different transcripts, to Professors Anthon and Mitchell [sic], of New York, one that was translated and one not translated." B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1930; reprint, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 1:100. Richard Bennett noted that "Roberts does not identify the source of his information" and seems to suggest a few unlikely possibilities but overlooks Harris's statement in the *History of the Church* itself. Richard E. Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee': Martin Harris and the Three Wise Men of the East," *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 180n4. A thirdhand source in 1831 suggested "Harris with several manuscripts in his pocket, went to the city of New York, and called upon one of the Professors of Columbia College for the purpose of shewing them to him." James Gordon Bennett, "Mormon Religion—Clerical Ambition—Western New York—The Mormonites Gone to Ohio," *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, 1 September 1831, reprinted in Leonard J. Arrington, "James Gordon Bennett's 1831 Report on 'The Mormonites,'" *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (1970): 362. The accuracy of Harris's account has been called into question by some scholars given that it appears to be a later recollection of Joseph Smith's written into the *History* at a time when Martin Harris would not have been present to verify its claims. Moreover, it contains additional (but not contradictory) items that are absent from Joseph Smith's earlier 1832 *History*. See Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, *Martin Harris: Uncompromising Witness of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2018), 94; Stanley B. Kimball, "The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (1970): 338, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol10/iss3/8/. For example, none of the earliest sources mention a translation sent with the characters; however, it still remains to be seen what details, if any, in the 1838 *History* are absolutely inaccurate.

4. A brief mention of this idea first appeared in John S. Thompson, "Lehi and Egypt," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 2004), 275n38.

Some Background

Joseph Smith's history projects do not explicitly mention the number of documents Harris carried with him. His 1832 *History* indicates only that "some of the characters" were copied from the plates for Martin Harris to take with him to the East. No reference to the number of documents created is present.[5]

Joseph Smith's 1838 *History* states: "Immediately after my [Joseph Smith's] arrival there [in Pennsylvania] I commenced copying the characters of ~~all~~ the plates. I copyed [sic] a considerable number of them and by means of the Urim and Thummin I translated some of them."[6] As in the 1832 account, nothing in this version indicates the number of documents made, only that a "considerable number" of characters were copied somewhere and that "some" of these characters were translated. That is as far as these sentences allow one to go when recreating history. It cannot even be determined where the translation itself was written. Was it right next to any of the characters? Was it on a separate document? It is not clearly stated. Note that this text originally stated Joseph Smith copied characters of "all" the plates, but then *all* is crossed out, presumably because it goes too far. However, the initial reading, even with its correction, certainly gives the impression that characters were copied from more than one plate.

The 1838 *History* goes on to say that "Mr Martin Harris came to our place, got the characters which I had drawn off ~~of~~ the plates and started with them to the City of New York."[7] Again, the text does not actually specify the number of documents. It only says he "got the characters" without any reference to their physical context. Orson Pratt's 1840 history is likewise vague.[8]

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5. "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 5, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers. org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/5. Joseph Smith's 1832 and 1838 histories and Anthon's three letters should be given the greatest weight, for they are in the best position to know what was copied from the plates, how many documents were made, whether any were translated, what was said, etc. Joseph Smith's histories appear to be the most internally consistent whereas Anthon's letters do not always agree among themselves as to what happened.

6. "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1," p. 9.

7. "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1," p. 9.

8. "In the mean time, a few of the original characters were accurately transcribed and translated by Mr Smith, which, with the translation, were taken by a gentleman by the name of Martin Harris, to the city of New York, where they were presented to a learned gentleman by the name of [Charles] Anthon, who professed to be extensively acquainted with many languages, both ancient and modern. He examined them; but was unable to decipher them correctly; but

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Joseph Smith likely created more than one copy of characters from the plates while he possessed them — some having different formats or appearances than the others.[9] Joseph Knight Sr. stated that Joseph and Emma Smith "Drew of the Caricters exactly like the ancient," suggesting they took care to render facsimile copies of the characters just as they appeared on the plates.[10]

The 1838 *History* provides (Joseph Smith's recollection of?) Martin Harris's first-hand report wherein Harris explicitly states that he presented two sets of characters to Anthon and received two different responses:

> I went to the City of New York and presented the Characters which had been translated [C1], with the translation thereof [T], to Professor <Charles> Anthony a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthony stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian [R1]. I then shewed him those which were not yet translated [C2], and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldeak, Assyriac, and Arabac, and he said that they were true characters [R2].[11]

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he presumed, that if the original records could be brought, he could assist in translating them." "Appendix: Orson Pratt, *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*, 1840," p. 14, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-orson-pratt-an-interesting-account-of-several-remarkable-visions-1840/14.

9. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, and Robin Scott Jensen, "The 'Caractors' Document: New Light on an Early Transcription of the Book of Mormon Characters," *Mormon Historical Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 131–52; Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2015), 25–38; Michael Hubbard MacKay, "'Git Them Translated': Translating the Characters on the Gold Plates," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World,* ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2015); Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 20–26.

10. Joseph Knight, Sr., "Reminiscences," no date, Church History Library, MS 3470, p. 3, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/37b7b91c-4148-45d6-8f32-df4acf06fe99/0/3. See also Orson Pratt's description that the characters "were accurately transcribed" in footnote 7 above.

11. "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1," p. 9.

Based on these sources, it is possible that Harris could have presented Anthon with any of four options:

1. A singular document (D) with two sets of characters and a translation of one of the sets (D=C1+T+C2)
2. Two documents with a set of characters on each and a translation on one of them (D1=C1+T; D2=C2)
3. Two documents with one containing the two sets of characters and the other the translation (D1=C1+C2; D2=T)
4. Three documents with a set of characters on each of two documents and a translation on the third, (D1=C1; D2=T of C1; D3=C2)

Any of the documents could have writing on the front or back, or both. Harris's report that he "presented" the first set of characters [C1] "with the translation thereof" [T] and received Anthon's reaction to them [R1] but then later "showed" him a second set of characters [C2] and received a second reaction [R2] is more consistent with option 2 or 4, but 2 is the most likely since the first character set was presented "with the translation thereof."

Anthon's Responses to the Two Sets of Characters

When Anthon was presented with the first set of characters and their translation, he, according to Harris, simply identified the characters as "Egyptian." Although Martin Harris or Anthon could have been using this term generically for any ancient script (like the phrase "it is all Greek to me"), the possibility that Anthon actually identified this transcript as having recognizably Egyptian characters should not be ruled out, since one of his main purposes for inspecting the characters was to identify their origin. In his academic position, Anthon had been exposed to various forms of Egyptian writing, notwithstanding his ability-level to translate such.

When Anthon was presented with the second set of characters (those that were not translated), Anthon seems less certain which language the characters represented, stating that some looked Egyptian while others looked "Chaldeak, Assyriac, and Arabac." Even Anthon's own accounts of Harris's visit seem to verify the ancient authenticity of many of the characters because he speculated that they must have

been copied from a book of "various alphabets," albeit in a nonsensical manner.[12]

At face value, the above can be viewed as evidence that two different scripts were shown to Anthon — a script Anthon simply identified as Egyptian and another script containing characters of a less certain origin. Joseph Knight Sr.'s report seems to corroborate the idea of two different scripts for he stated that Harris "found men that could translate *some* of the Carictors . . . But there were *some* Carictors they could not well understand."[13]

The possibility of an Egyptian script that Anthon could readily identify and another script that he could not readily identify would be in harmony with claims within the Book of Mormon itself. Mormon and Moroni, who lived c. 400 AD, created an abridgment of the main Nephite records using a language that had been "altered" over their thousand-year history which they called "reformed Egyptian." It was reformed so much that "none other people knoweth our language" (Mormon 9:32, 34), suggesting that even an ancient Egyptian would not have understood their language in spite of the name given.[14] Mormon, however, noted that as he was creating his abridgment of the main Nephite history, he "searched among the records" and "found" the set of plates that contained the "small account" written by Nephi, Jacob, and others down to King Benjamin. He felt they were important to include and indicates that he would simply "put them" with the remainder of his abridgment (Words of Mormon 1:3–6).[15] Since

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12. "[The] characters . . . had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets. Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, Roman letters inverted or placed sideways . . ." Letter published in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 271.

13. Knight, "Reminiscences," p. 3, emphasis added.

14. Moroni indicates that their reason for using a form of Egyptian (and likely the reason Nephi used Egyptian and why the Brass Plates were written in Egyptian as indicated in Mosiah 1:3–4) is because the plates were not "sufficiently large" (Mormon 9:33). But Egyptian characters are not a space saver because its singular characters are smaller than singular Hebrew characters (you can write either as small as possible). They are a space saver because a single character can represent multiple consonantal sounds in a single word, allowing fewer characters to be used when spelling something. In contrast, Hebrew was strictly alphabetic, meaning each character represents only one sound in a word.

15. That Mormon appears prompted in order to have purposely "searched" for the small account could suggest that the small account was mentioned somewhere in the main records he was abridging. My thanks to Stacey Thompson for this insight.

Nephi and Jacob lived around a thousand years before Mormon and Moroni, the language and characters on this small record would not have been the altered "reformed Egyptian" that Mormon and Moroni used. Rather, Nephi tells his readers plainly that he wrote using "the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2), a language that his father Lehi knew how to read and had taught to his children (Mosiah 1:4). It is known from archaeology that there was a scribal tradition using Egyptian hieratic in Israel during Nephi's day.[16] This Palestinian Hieratic is currently the most plausible candidate for an Egyptian script Nephi would have used to make his own record.

So, if this additional "small account" that Mormon put with the remainder of his abridgment had been written in the Egyptian language of Lehi and Nephi's day, and all the other writings were written in the "reformed Egyptian" of Mormon and Moroni's day, then it would be reasonable to postulate that two different-looking scripts would have been found on the bundle of plates that Joseph Smith received. This could explain the different reactions of Charles Anthon to the two character sets presented to him by Martin Harris — the one when he declared the characters to be Egyptian, and the other that he could not definitively identify but said that they had some features of Egyptian and other ancient languages.[17]

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16. On this, see John S. Thompson, "Lehi and Egypt," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS; Brigham Young University, 2004), 266–67.

17. Don Bradley concludes that Joseph Smith may have sent with Harris a facsimile copy of the last leaf of the plates, which may have contained not only the text currently published as the title page of the Book of Mormon (since Joseph Smith indicated that is from where the Title Page came) but possibly an ancient alphabet and a circular seal as well. (Bradley, *Lost 116 Pages*, 20–26.) While the idea of an alphabet's being inscribed on the last plate is unlikely, given the nature of Egyptian languages and of the Book of Mormon's stated purpose for using one, the idea that Martin Harris may have shown Anthon a facsimile copy of the last leaf is intriguing. If the Egyptian small plates of Nephi were added at the end of Mormon and Moroni's record and thus translated last as most scholars conclude, then the title page, created using the Nephite's reformed Egyptian, would have been right next to the small plates written in the Egyptian of Nephi's day, thus providing contiguous access to both styles of characters. Scholars have argued persuasively for the "Mosiah First" theory of translation, which suggests that Joseph resumed translation in Mosiah after losing the 116 pages, and then translated Nephi's small plates last. However, translation order need not strictly dictate the physical configuration of the plates due to the inspired nature of the translation, and could accommodate the small plates' being first, last, or inserted in the middle. See John W. Welch, "The Miraculous

Anthon himself would later claim the characters were "any thing else but 'Egyptian Hieroglyphics.'"[18] However, it has been noted that Anthon likely did tell Harris at some point that many of the characters looked like Egyptian characters, because after their meeting it began to be circulated among the Latter-day Saints that Anthon told Harris some of the characters appeared to be "short-hand Egyptian."[19] This distinctive term was something the scholars, including Champollion himself, were using in their publications to describe *hieratic* script and was unlikely a term that Harris would have known unless Anthon actually said it to him.[20] This detail is significant in light of the fact that hieratic was the known Egyptian script used in the Jerusalem of Nephi's day as noted earlier.

The Translation

According to Harris's report in the 1838 *History,* Anthon also indicated that the translation "from the Egyptian" characters in the first transcript

Timing of the Translation of the Book of Mormon," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 115–17; John W. Welch, "Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: 'Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten,'" *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 10–50, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol57/iss4/3/; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 2:513–14, 3:76–78; Alan Goff, "Positivism and the Priority of Ideology in Mosiah-First Theories of Book of Mormon Production," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 16, no. 1 (2004): 11–36; John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "How Long Did it Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 1–8; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 99, 223n67; Hyrum L. Andrus, *God, Man, and the Universe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 90.

18. See Anthon's 1834 letter in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*, 272.

19. For example, William Phelps stated in his 1831 letter to E. D. Howe that "at New York, they were shown to Dr. Mitchell, and he referred to them to professor Anthon who translated and declared them to be the ancient short-hand Egyptian." Printed in Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed,* 273.

20. See FARMS Staff, *Martin Harris's Visit with Charles Anthon: Collected Documents on the Anthon Transcript and "Shorthand Egyptian"* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 4–5, archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/martin-harriss-visit-charles-anthon-collected-documents-anthon-transcript-and-shorthand and also Robert F. Smith, Gordon C. Thomasson, and John W. Welch, "What Did Charles Anthon Really Say?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon.*

was "correct." Although translating any Egyptian characters was still in its infancy, Anthon was familiar with Champollion's earliest work and mentioned it in his 1825 reworking of *A Classical Dictionary*. He also had a personal copy of Champollion's 1824 *Précis du système hiéroglyphique des anciens Égyptiens.*[21] In the least, Anthon likely understood from Champollion's work that Egyptian was a phonemic language, having characters representing sounds, not just logograms or symbolic writing, but the means to translate full sentences was not yet published. Consequently, for Anthon to have made any substantive and affirming remarks concerning a "translation" could only have been for something simple, like alphabetic equivalences, rather than the translation of words or sentences. While it is uncertain how deep Anthon's understanding of various Egyptian scripts and their values was, there is evidence in the sources that Joseph Smith may have attempted to create and send something like an alphabet with Harris.[22] Consequently, Anthon's comment to Harris that the translation "from the Egyptian" was "correct" may have been a simple acknowledgement of rudimentary ideas, such as characters having alphabetic features and nothing more.[23]

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21. Kimball, "Anthon Transcript," 337.
22. The original draft of Lucy Mack Smith's history of this event indicates that Joseph "was instructed to take off a fac simile of the ~~alphabet Egyptian~~ charecters <composing the alphabet> <which were called reformed egyptian> Alphabetically and send them to all the learned men that he could find and ask them for the translation of the same" and "it was agreed that Martin Harris should follow him as soon as ~~he~~ <Joseph> should have sufficient time to transcribe the Egyptian alphabet which Mr. Harris was to take to the east." "Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–1845," p. 3, bk. 6 and p. 7, bk. 6, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history -1844-1845/71. Lucy Smith's initial use of "alphabet" in the phrase "characters composing the alphabet which were called reformed Egyptian" seems more like a term she uses to reference the style of characters generally (i.e., the reformed Egyptian style of characters = the Egyptian "alphabet" of the golden plates) rather than some sort of abecedary. However, her text also indicates (more clearly when the insertions are temporarily ignored) that Joseph Smith copied these characters "alphabetically." This suggests his focus may have been on copying single characters. Joseph Smith Sr. is also reported to have mentioned an alphabet in connection with Joseph Smith's work with the plates. See Fayette Lapham's late (1870) recollection of his interview with Joseph Smith Sr., published in *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870): 305–9 and republished in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:462–63.
23. Stanley Kimball speculated that Anthon may have only verified that the "transcription" appeared correct. See Kimball, "Anthon Transcript," 336.

Joseph Smith's initial interaction with the Egyptian characters on the papyri brought to him by Michael Chandler from which the Book of Abraham was translated may have some bearing on this moment. Oliver Cowdery published a letter he had written concerning the initial meetings between the Prophet and Chandler saying:

> While Mr. Chandler was in Philadelphia, *he used every exertion to find some one who could give him the translation of his papyrus, but could not, satisfactorily, though from some few men of the first eminence, he obtained in a small degree, the translation of a few characters.* Here he was referred to bro. Smith. . . .
>
> Mr. Chandler was told that his writings could be deciphered, and very politely gave me [Cowdery] a privilege of copying some four or five different sentences or separate pieces, stating, at the same time, that unless he found some one who *could* give him a translation soon, he would carry them to London.
>
> I am a little in advance of my narration; The morning Mr. Chandler first presented his papyrus to bro. — Smith, he was shown, *by the latter, a number of characters like those upon the writings of Mr. C. which were previously copied from the plates,* containing the history of the Nephites, or book of Mormon.
>
> Being solicited by Mr. Chandler to give an opinion concerning his antiquities, or translation of some of the characters*, bro. S. gave him the interpretation of some few for his satisfaction.* For your gratification I will here annex a certificate which I hold, from under the hand of Mr. Chandler, unsolicited, however, by any person in this place, which will show how far he believed bro. Smith able to unfold from these long obscured rolls the wonders contained therein:
>
> > "*Kirtland, July 6th, 1835.*"
> >
> > "This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, jr. in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters, in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, shown to the most learned: And, from the information that I could even learn, or meet with, I find

that of Mr. Joseph Smith, jr. to correspond in the most minute matters."[24]

An important thing to note in this source is that, according to Chandler, none of the eminent men in Philadelphia could translate the papyri's words or sentences. He even speaks about going to London to find someone who could. These men could only provide rudimentary remarks concerning "a few characters." Consequently, Chandler's comparison of the eminent men's most basic assessment with Joseph Smith's interpretation of "some few," suggests the Prophet must have only provided undeveloped ideas about a few characters as well but not words or sentences. Thus, the certificate can be accurate but not to the degree some may suppose.

In a similar manner, the Anthon episode does not appear to deal with any translation of words or sentences. As noted above, Anthon was not able to do so, but he likely had a simple understanding of a few Egyptian characters. Since the 1838 *History* reports that Joseph Smith only sent with Harris a translation of "some" characters, any assumption that he translated words or sentences at this point goes beyond the text. The Prophet's elementary effort appears to have corresponded in some way with Anthon's limited understanding, and so Anthon, like Chandler, gave a certificate affirming such.

Considering the above, it is reasonable to conclude that Joseph Smith only provided rudimentary interpretations of a few characters on both the Egyptian papyri and on the Gold Plates the first time he engaged with them. According to the reports, the Prophet's basic efforts were somehow in accordance with the very limited understanding of Chandler's eminent men in Philadelphia and Harris's eminent man in New York, Charles Anthon. Neither the Prophet nor the eminent men appear to be translating or affirming the translation of words or sentences at this point. That effort would come later.

One other important detail from Chandler's visit should be noted. Cowdery reports that Joseph Smith pulled out a transcript of "a number of characters" from the Book of Mormon plates to show Chandler. Apparently, the characters of the plates "were like those" upon the papyri that Chandler brought. This overlooked detail becomes important when it is understood that the papyri that Chandler brought were

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24. Oliver Cowdery letter to William Fry published in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 3 (December 1835): 234–35, emphasis added.

written in hieratic.[25] This provides additional evidence that the Book of Mormon plates may have contained hieratic characters — characters that Anthon identified as "short-hand Egyptian," a term used for hieratic characters in the scholarly literature of the day. That Anthon affirmed the first transcript as Egyptian and its translation of a few characters correct but then struggled to identify, and thus translate, the characters on the second transcript again matches Joseph Knight Sr.'s report noted above that Harris "found men that could translate *some* of the Carictors . . . But there were *some* Carictors they could not well understand."[26]

If the 1838 *History* is accurate and two scripts were shown, then Anthon's reports in his letters of a single transcript about which he could not make any sense may be conflating everything into a single collection of characters. In other words, Anthon's inability to discern the origin of the "reformed Egyptian" characters he was shown, coupled with his declared bias against anything involving angelic visitations,[27] may have swayed him to later deny that any of the characters had authentic Egyptian connection. Since the characters he viewed in the second set were unrecognizable to him, being a reformed Egyptian "that none other people knoweth," this would cast doubt on all the characters he saw, even if some did appear to be legitimately like "short-hand Egyptian" as he apparently said to Martin Harris. Many hieratic characters, especially if written in isolation, like in columns as Anthon claimed he saw, can appear to be simple squiggles and flourishes of the pen. It would not be difficult for Anthon to settle into that conclusion for everything he was presented by Harris.

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25. To see the hieratic characters of the extant papyri and facsimile copies see: "Egyptian Papyri," Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts, Revelations and Translations, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/revelations-and-translations/jsppr6/jsppr6-SUB01; "Notebooks of Copied Egyptian Characters," Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts, Revelations and Translations, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/revelations-and-translations/jsppr6/jsppr6-SUB02; and "Copies of Egyptian Characters," Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts, Revelations and Translations, The Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/revelations-and-translations/jsppr6/jsppr6-SUB03.

26. Knight, "Reminiscences," p. 3, emphasis added.

27. Harris indicates that Anthon declared "there was no such thing now as ministring [sic] of angels." "History, 1838–1856, volume A-1."

Conclusions

Considering all the above, the most likely scenario in which the details given in the official 1838 *History* are plausible would be as follows:

1. Martin Harris obtained at least two documents from Joseph Smith, both containing copies of characters from the plates. Some kind of minimal effort of "translation," like an alphabet, was added to the first set of characters.

2. The first set of characters were likely written in an Egyptian script from Nephi's day that Anthon readily identified as "Egyptian" and related them to "short-hand Egyptian," a term being used for hieratic Egyptian in scholarly publications of the day. Indeed, hieratic is attested in the archaeological record of Jerusalem and surrounding areas of Nephi's day, and it is the script on the Chandler papyri that Cowdery said was like the ones on the Book of Mormon plates.

3. For Anthon's comment on the correctness of the translation to have any integrity, it could only be addressing rudimentary ideas relative to individual characters, rather than the translation of specific words or sentences. Anthon appears to have had some exposure to Champollion's early work on Egyptian characters, but it was too early for Anthon to have understood any translation in the fullest sense. It is not necessary to conclude that Anthon was full of hubris, pretending to know whether the translation was correct or not, nor is it necessary to conclude that Joseph did any translation of words or sentences — just as he did not appear to translate words or sentences in his initial interaction with the Egyptian papyri.

4. The second set of characters was a copy of "reformed Egyptian" characters from the hand of Mormon or Moroni that appeared on the greater percentage of the plates. Since "reformed Egyptian" is an altered script and language, Anthon could not readily identify its origins and speculates on several possibilities.

5. When Anthon learned that the characters are from someone claiming miraculous religious experience (and since he could not discern the origin of several of the characters), he concluded that some of the characters must

have been copied from available books on alphabets in nonsensical ways. Any resemblances to Egyptian scripts that he may have noticed before were reduced to random "flourishes" of the pen. He, thus, concluded that none of it was Egyptian.

As scholars have pointed out, Harris's experience with Anthon and others satisfied him enough as to the authenticity of the characters on the plates that he answered the call in Doctrine and Covenants 19:26–27 to freely give a significant portion of his substance to pay for the publication of the Book of Mormon.

In consequence of the above, the Caractors document that has circulated in historical sources cannot be ruled out as a document shown to Anthon solely on the basis that Anthon's own description of what he saw does not appear to match it. If there were more than one document as Harris seems to claim, then Anthon's recollection may be referring to one of the other documents. Having said this, since the Caractors document is not hieratic and Anthon's description seems to rest on characters he could not identify on a document that does not match the formatting of the Caractors document, it is still more likely this document was a copy of characters created for some other purpose other than Harris's visit.

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