The ANTHON TRANSCRIPT

An Evidence for the Truth of the Prophet's Account of the Origin of the Book of Mormon

By ARIEL L. CROWLEY, LL.B.

II. THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE CHARACTERS AS EGYPTIAN

"Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians," declared the ancient historian, Nephi, in the opening lines of the Book of Mormon.

Ten centuries later his descendant, Mormon, reiterated: "We have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech." (Mormon 9:32)

Fourteen centuries afterward, Professor Charles Anthon of the language department of Columbia University,* received from the hands of Martin Harris a transcript or copy of seven lines of the characters, laboriously written out by the young Prophet Joseph Smith. The history of that visit and of the transcript itself is related in a preceding article.*

With an erudition which might not have been expected in his day, Dr. Anthon recognized the Egyptian characteristics of the transcript, and recognized also certain Chaldaic and Assyrian forms and Arabic letters.

There can be little doubt that his reference to Chaldaic and Assyrian forms was premised on the striking figure consisting of four perpendicular lines transfixed with a horizontal bar, which recurs frequently in the transcript (Figure 1). The use of such a figure is well known in cuneiform (Chaldaic and Assyrian) writing, occurring frequently in compounded words such as saptu (lip), isdu (foundation), and erinu (cedar).† The absence of the characteristic wedge shape of the strokes is immediately attributable to pen and paper as the media of writing, in lieu of wet clay with a triangular stylus.

The ancient Arabian script to which Dr. Anthon had reference, is best known in scientific circles as Sabean. A considerable number of characters closely approximating letters of the Sabean script occur in the Anthon Transcript (Figure 1). Thus, the Arabian character ")", which roughly corresponds with our English letter "R," appears seven times. The Arabian character for "G," which looks like a crude figure "7," is the third character from the right in the second line. The "ch" sound, which has no equivalent in the English alphabet, was sometimes written like an English letter "W" placed on its side, and sometimes like a figure "3" indiscriminately made to face either left or right, in the Sabean script. It will be found nine times in Figure 1. Similarly, there will be found the guttural character which was written like our letter "O," the perpendicular stroke used as a disjunctive sign, the rectangle divided into two squares, which had the sound of our letter "d," and the zig-zag mark (the 21st and 22nd from the right in Figure 1) which was the Arabian letter "N."‡

It does not in the least discredit the observations of Dr. Anthon that the Book of Mormon, then untranslated, declares the characters used in its preparation to be "reformed Egyptian." The statements of Nephi and Mormon above quoted and the certificate of Dr. Anthon are wholly and readily reconciled in the fact that all of the characters, Chaldean, Assyrian, Arabian and Egyptian, recognized by Dr. Anthon, also occur in "reformed," that is to say, hieratic and demotic Egyptian. The relationship between Egyptian and the Semitic languages in general, which produced the similarity of forms noted by Dr. Anthon, lies outside the scope of this study. It is sufficient to say that the subject is currently being given close and increasing attention as archeological finds multiply.¶


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Demotic Egyptian is a shorthand form for rapid writing which came into popular usage about one hundred years before the Lehite migration, simplifying the hieratic or priestly writing, which was in turn a cursive, or simplified way of easily writing the old hieroglyphic pictures. Dr. A. H. Gardiner, in his excellent Egyptian Grammar, very clearly distinguishes the three types in the following language:

Hieroglyphic writing is only one of three kinds of script which in course of time were evolved in ancient Egypt. Out of hieroglyphic sprang a more cursive writing known to us as hieratic, and out of hieratic again there emerged, towards 700 B.C., a very rapid script sometimes called cursive or demotic, but now always known as demotic. None of these styles of writing utterly banished the others, but each as it arose restricted the domain of its progenitor. In the Graeco-Roman period all three were in use contemporaneously.

It should not be thought that the three kinds of script mentioned by Dr. Gardiner were the only kinds developed in Egypt. The contrary has been established by the 1904 discovery of the celebrated Serabit Inscriptions in Sinai by Sir William Flinders Petrie. This form of written Egyptian, closely allied to Hebrew and other Semitic tongues, is certainly older than the time of Moses, and its close similarity to the writing of the Anthon Transcript is at once apparent, upon even casual examination. (Figure 2) Likewise, there are well-known Egyptian literary and religious writings of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties, which are in a secret script, and “sportive and mysterious” writings of other times, each involving invention of new signs or employing old ones in unusual meanings.

The habitual changing and reforming of Egyptian systems of writing has been the subject of learned comment from remote times. Clement of Alexandria, who lived in the latter part of the second century A.D., at a time when hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic writing were still in use in Egypt and elsewhere, left for posterity an explicit account of the study methods used by Egyptian scholars in learning the varied kinds of writing. He terminated his comments with the following indicative words:

By transposing and transferring, by

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In 1915 R. C. Webb made this copy of the Anthon Transcript and published it on P. 22 of "The Case Against Mormonism." (See THE IMPROVEMENT ERA, Jan., 1942, p. 59.)
THE ANTHON TRANSCRIPT

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If the "Caracters" of the Anthon Transcript are Egyptian, in some cursive form or variant of hieratic or demotic, it should be possible, in the present advanced knowledge of Egyptian papyri, monuments, and engravings, to find those characters in recognized and indisputable Egyptian writings making due and reasonable allowance for differences in handwriting and the unskilfulness of Joseph Smith as a copyst. "Individual hieratic hands differ as all handwriting is apt to differ."

The Anthon Transcript contains about two hundred twenty-five individual characters, treating as single figures those which appear to be compound. Of these, many appear repeatedly, the aggregate number of signs which are clearly distinct probably being no more than about ninety-nine. Of this number perhaps twenty may be variant forms, bearing relation to other characters of somewhat similar shape. The Egyptian texts from which illustrations for this article are taken, should be remembered, were written up to a thousand and more years and many thousands of miles away from the Nephite historians. The

precision and weight of the parallels set forth below is infinitely increased by these circumstances.

Some indication is made above of the variants which characterize the cursive Egyptian scripts. By a "variant" is meant a character which is written in several differing ways, yet is the same character. Examples in English are many. The letter "B" in type, bears only a remote resemblance to the same letter in handwriting, its essential strokes being reversed and their direction altered. The same may be said of virtually every other letter in the alphabet. Typesetting being unknown in Egypt, the variations are not often as great as in our modern languages. Nevertheless some striking changes were commonly made.

In Figure 3 there are reproduced examples of the Egyptian sign of the chessboard. The photographs are all taken from papyri of the Book of the Dead in the British Museum. The chessboard correctly represented shows a plane surface, a line or block, with eight perpendicular strokes, representing the eight chessmen. In the photographs, the number of chessmen is varied from seven to nine. Examples running from five to twelve are not uncommon. In Figure 1, the Anthon Transcript, precision and weight of the parallels set forth below is infinitely increased by these circumstances.

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The bold character resembling a script capital "H" appearing in the first line of the Anthon Transcript (Fig. 1) recurs in the second, fourth, fifth, sixth, and last lines, each time in a slightly different shape. This is the ancient sign of the scribe, having the meanings "writing," "write," "polished tablet for writing," "made bright by scouring," etc. In the papyri, this character takes even more variant forms than in the Anthon Transcript, as is demonstrated by the photographs in Figure 6, compared with those in Figure 7.

Changes which crept into Egyptian writing, even greater than those illustrated above, were often so serious as to destroy the apparent relationship of the characters. "The writings of one period were but half intelligible to the learned scribes of another.""The writings of one period were but half intelligible to the learned scribes of another.""The writings of one period were but half intelligible to the learned scribes of another.""The writings of one period were but half intelligible to the learned scribes of another.""The writings of one period were but half intelligible to the learned scribes of another."

In the face of these formidable obstacles, rooted in the changing nature of the Egyptian tongue, and the yet more positive warning of the Book of Mormon that the script had undergone changes through a thousand years of writing (Mormon 9:32), it is still possible to demonstrate that the "Caracters" are Egyptian in fact.

An attempt to reproduce characters appearing in Egyptian writings by hand drawing, however carefully made, is necessarily beset with the danger of distortion. Consequently, every character appearing in the figures accompanying this article appears by photograph of the character from a recognized non-Mormon work available to the general public, with an accompanying notation of the place where it may be examined. The simpler strokes, which probably would, and actually do occur in other Semitic languages, are not used as the basis of the following examination, for the obvious reason that the comparison would be inconclusive. The most difficult, complex characters appearing in the Anthon Transcript have been deliberately singled out. They are set forth in series as follows:

5 See discussion in Gardiner's Egyptian Grammar, p. 6 et seq.
PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN FROM THE ANTON TRANSCRIPT

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 127, line 6.
Fig. 112.

Anton Transcript, Line 2, Character 4.
Fig. 114.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 54, line 4 (from Rosetta Stone).
Fig. 115.

Anton Transcript, Line 1, Character 12.
Fig. 116.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 181, line 3.
Fig. 119.

Anton Transcript, Line 3, Fig. 9.
Fig. 118.

Photograph from Plate 124, Petrie, Sir W., Researches in Sinai, New York, 1906.
Fig. 121.

Anton Transcript, Line 2, Character 11.
Fig. 120.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 633, line 6.
Fig. 123.

Anton Transcript, Line 7, Character 37.
Fig. 122.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 118, line 21.
Fig. 125.

Anton Transcript, Line 5, Character 24.
Fig. 124.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 48, line 14.
Fig. 127.

Anton Transcript, Line 7, Character 41.
Fig. 126.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 163, line 19.
Fig. 129.

Anton Transcript, Line 7, Character 20.
Fig. 128.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 163, line 19.
Fig. 131.

Anton Transcript, Line 7, Character 47.
Fig. 130.

Photograph from No. 6, Plate 147, Petrie, Sir W., Researches in Sinai, N. Y., 1906.
Fig. 133.

Anton Transcript, Line 5, Character 8.
Fig. 132.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 73, line 21.
Fig. 135.

Anton Transcript, Line 5, Character 18.
Fig. 134.

Photograph from Spiegelberg, W., Demotische Grammatik, p. 65, line 10.
Fig. 137.

Anton Transcript, Line 5, Character 13.
Fig. 136.
Joseph Smith did not have, and, when the Anthon Transcript was prepared, he could not have obtained a dictionary of the demotic Egyptian language, at any price. No such dictionary existed. The works of Brugsch, Spiegelberg, Erman, Grapow, Budge, Petrie, and their colleagues and successors were then still in the distant future. In point of fact, it is not yet possible to procure a dictionary of demotic in English, of any comprehensive value.

Even the fragmentary Rudiments of Thomas Young dates three years after the Anthon Transcript, as does the Coptic work of Tatam. The French works of Lepsius appeared in 1837. Champollion's dictionary in French was published in 1842. And Birch's dictionary dates to 1867. The first really good grammar of Egyptian in English is that of Gardiner, published in 1927.

In the presence of these facts, recognizing Joseph Smith's lack of knowledge of Egyptian in 1827 (which he shared in common with virtually all people of his day), and recognizing the characters contained in the Anthon Transcript as Egyptian, the Anthon Transcript necessarily takes its place as one of the strong external proofs of the divinity of the Book of Mormon, and of the truth of Joseph Smith's account of its revelation to men.