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Two Notes on Egyptian Script

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"We have written this record according to our
knowledge, in the characters which are called
among us the reformed Egyptian." (Mormon 9:32)

Moroni, at the end of his father's record, states, "we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the *characters* which are called *among us* the reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32). Since the publication of this statement many suggestions have been made concerning the identification of the script.[1] This note is intended to broaden the base of possibilities thus far considered by adding two hitherto unconsidered options.

Abnormal Hieratic

Most discussions of reformed Egyptian deal with demotic. Yet demotic is just one of two writing styles used in Egypt that developed from hieratic. This other style of hieratic script, abnormal hieratic, has not received attention and ought at least to be considered in discussions of reformed Egyptian. Michel Malinine, who did the most work toward deciphering and publishing abnormal hieratic documents, did not like the term himself and preferred to call it *cursive thébaine tardive* (late Theban cursive),[2] while Georg Möller preferred the term *späthieratische Kursive* (late hieratic cursive),[3] but Griffith's term, *abnormal hieratic*, is

the one that has stuck. "'Abnormal hieratic' represents the final stage of the development of cursive writing in the New Kingdom, which was elaborated and used in the southern half of Egypt and, in particular, at Thebes, and whose progressive changes can actually be followed, almost without interruption, from the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty until the penultimate reign of the Saite Dynasty."[4] An adaptation of hieratic characterized by "wild orthography," abnormal hieratic in its second phase was used in Egypt mainly for legal and administrative purposes during the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties (727–548 b.c.), after which time it was replaced by demotic.[5] Though abnormal hieratic is usually thought only to have been used in southern Egypt, it has now been dubiously argued that it was used in northern Egypt as well.[6] Be that as it may, it is yet another modified Egyptian script available in Egypt in Lehi's day.

Carved Hieratic

It is important to realize also that demotic, like hieratic (and abnormal hieratic), was usually written with a brush on papyrus until Ptolemaic times (third century b.c.), when the Greek *kalamos*, or reed pen, began to be used. Hieratic from the beginning was a script adapted for brush on papyrus; for carving, hieroglyphics were used. After the conquest of Egypt by the Libyans ushered in the Twenty-first Dynasty,[7] hieratic began to be used for carving in stone. During the Twenty-second Dynasty, hieratic stelae containing official royal decrees became common; but hieratic disappeared from official decrees with the archaizing fashion of the Saite Period (Twenty-sixth Dynasty).[8] The ductus of hieratic (and demotic) that has been engraved is altered from that found on papyrus—carving tends to be more angular, while the brush adapts itself well to rounded

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forms—which makes it more difficult to read if one is not used to it. When engraved, hieratic and demotic are normally engraved in stone, but there are examples of demotic engraved into metal, including a bronze palette.[9] Though, to my knowledge, no one has raised this objection before, it is worth noting that a tradition of engraving forms of cursive Egyptian is attested by Lehi's day[10] and that engraved forms of cursive do not necessarily coincide with those forms produced by brush and ink.

Research by John Gee, originally published in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies *5/1 (1996): 162–76.*

NOTES

1. A convenient summary of the suggestions is found in William J. Hamblin, "Reformed Eyptian" (FARMS, 1995).

2. See Michel Malinine, "Une affaire concernant un partage (Pap. Vienne D 12003 et D 12004)," *Revue d'Égyptologie* 25 (1973): 192.

3. See Malinine, "L'hiératique anormal," in *Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique: Cent cinquante années de recherches 1822–1972: Hommage à Jean-François Champollion* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1973), 1:31.

4. Malinine, *Choix des textes juridiques en hiératique anormal et en démotique* (Paris: Chamption, 1953), 1:xiv.

5. Ibid., 1:xix–xxi.

6. See Ola el-Aguizy, "About the Origins of Early Demotic in Lower Egypt," in *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, ed. Janet H. Johnson (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 91–94.

7. The importance of this for Old Testament history can hardly be understated. Without the problems caused by its western and southern flanks (Libya and Nubia), Egypt would certainly have pursued its traditional course of dominating the Levantine littoral, which would not have allowed either a united

or a divided Israelite monarchy; the Israelites would have forever been fighting the Egyptians rather than the Philistines. For Egypt's foreign policy, see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), a book unfortunately marred by the author's obvious hostility toward the Bible and the religions that sprang therefrom.

8. For a recent study of the archaizing tendency of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, see Peter Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past: Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-sixth Dynasty* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1994). This tendency is normally noted in the art of the period; see Gay Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 256–57. Although the archaizing tendency of art is normally associated with the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, it started earlier in the Twenty-fifth Dynasty; ibid., 160; W. Stevenson Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 408.

9. See Cairo CG 30691 (Roman period), in Wilhelm Spiegelberg, *Die demotischen Denkmäler* (Leipzig: Druglin, 1904), 1:80–82 and Tafel XXVI. This document is a temple inventory; for other examples see Richard Jasnow, "The Hieratic Wooden Tablet Varille," *For His Ka: Essays Offered in Memory of Klaus Baer*, ed. David P. Silverman, The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, no. 55 (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 1994), 99–112, and bibliography, p. 100 n. 10.

10. See Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie: Die aegyptische Buchschrift in ihrer Entwicklung von der fünften Dynastie bis zur römischen Kaiserzeit* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927–36), 3:8.