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# “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

## TRANSLATING THE CHARACTERS ON THE GOLD PLATES

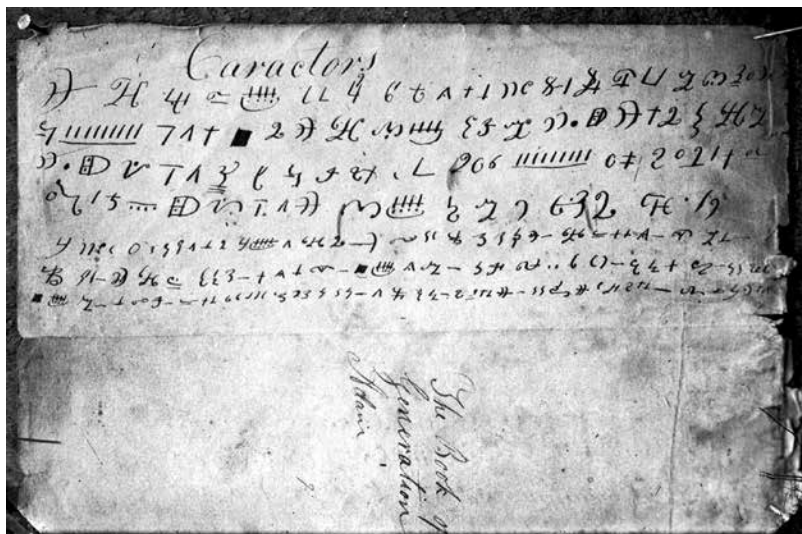
MICHAEL HUBBARD MACKAY

Joseph Smith declared that he translated the Book of Mormon “by the gift and power of God.”<sup>1</sup> His friends and family supported his declaration by explaining that he was utterly incapable of translating “reformed Egyptian” or any other language. They also explained that he lacked the ability that would have been necessary to produce the text of the Book of Mormon creatively. Joseph’s friends’ and family’s accounts emphasized God’s hand in the process and described the translation in miraculous terms.<sup>2</sup> Yet it appears that Joseph attempted a secular translation for at least part of the translation process.

Focusing on the first six months after Joseph Smith reportedly obtained the gold plates, records left by Joseph’s family and friends demonstrate that he took significant steps to find someone other than himself who was able and willing to translate the characters

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Glass plate negative of the “Caractors” document by Jacob H. Hicks, 1886. Photo courtesy of Clay County Museum and Historical Society, Liberty, Missouri.

on the plates. He began by drawing numerous characters on paper, perhaps attempting to compile an alphabet or list of characters.<sup>3</sup> As part of his efforts to produce this list or alphabet, he sent Martin Harris to New York City in search of a translator, which suggests that Joseph Smith may not have envisioned himself, at least initially, dictating the translation of the Book of Mormon simply by the power of God. Rather, Joseph Smith first instructed Harris to turn over the characters to the scrutiny of scholars of ancient languages, natural philosophy, and Native American studies. Of the potential translators with whom Harris met, Samuel Mitchill was likely the one in whom Harris placed the most hope.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter sorts through the polarized historiography and mixed contemporary accounts about Harris’s visit to New York. In the process, it challenges the traditional narrative that Joseph knew from the beginning how he would translate and that he sent Martin Harris to Charles Anthon to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy. By

building upon past scholarship and by taking a fresh look at well-known sources in light of new discoveries,<sup>5</sup> it offers an alternative approach in the face of contradictory claims by both contemporary accounts and later Mormon interpretations.

To proceed in this line of thought, one assumption is made: Joseph Smith was sincere in his belief that the characters he produced were ancient characters. Without this assumption, the account is simply about fabrication and deception, which would require a complete disregard for Joseph’s personal narratives about the experience and the effects his words have had upon the Mormon community since 1828. Nonetheless, this chapter is not an attempt to uncover the reality of the gold plates or the validity of the characters Joseph produced. Instead, it focuses on unwinding the documentary record about Joseph’s early struggles surrounding the translation of the Book of Mormon beginning in late September 1827 when he claimed to have retrieved a set of gold plates.<sup>6</sup>

### **Copying the Characters**

Once Joseph Smith had the plates in his possession, he indicated that he could not show them to anyone, even his friends and family.<sup>7</sup> Though those close to him supported his plan to keep the plates hidden, local residents became hostile, insisting that if he truly possessed the plates then he should display them openly.<sup>8</sup> Under the threat of the theft and the loss of the gold plates, he locked them in a wooden box and hid them in various places on his parents’ property. According to his mother, he even took up the hearth in her house to hide them under the floor.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, he removed them from the grasp of the Palmyrans by leaving town, hiding the plates on his wagon in a barrel of beans before he left. Conveniently, Joseph Smith’s father-in-law offered Joseph and Emma a place to stay in Harmony, Pennsylvania, far away from those who knew about the plates.<sup>10</sup> It was there that Joseph finally had a place to proceed with his plan for the plates.

When Joseph first arrived in Harmony, he evidently did not claim to know the language inscribed on the plates. Even when he retrospectively wrote about this period in his 1838 history, the angel from whom he obtained the plates had told him that they included the history of the ancient inhabitants of the Americas, but did not identify the language in which they were inscribed.<sup>11</sup> Joseph might logically have thought that they were inscribed in a Native American language, but being uneducated, he had no way of knowing for sure even after examining them.<sup>12</sup> The Book of Mormon itself, which Joseph eventually published as the translation of the gold plates, includes descriptions of its original language. However, until he had translated those passages, Joseph had to rely upon the abilities of others to identify the language.<sup>13</sup>

Joseph Smith reported that once he arrived in Harmony, he copied onto paper “a considerable number” of the characters inscribed on the plates.<sup>14</sup> Never revealing to what extent he examined each plate, Joseph produced an unknown number of paper copies with an unknown number of characters on each page. The process for copying the characters is also unclear, though the surrounding documentation indicates that he made the initial copies himself because no one else could see the plates. After creating his copies, he worked with two or three scribes to make additional paper copies.<sup>15</sup> Emma Smith reportedly worked, as one of these scribes, with Joseph Smith’s initial drafts to either duplicate or organize them on additional pieces of paper.<sup>16</sup> During the same period, Reuben Hale, Emma’s brother, may have also helped.<sup>17</sup> Sources describing these events, however, do not have a clear timeline, nor do they make definitive statements about the details of Reuben or Emma’s efforts to copy the characters. Apart from these earlier clues about Joseph making copies of the characters in December 1827 and possibly January of 1828, there is also record of Martin Harris assisting Joseph Smith in making additional copies in February 1828.<sup>18</sup> Knowing that Joseph used scribes

## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

to make additional copies suggests that he was producing more than just a small sample of characters.<sup>19</sup>

Why then was he making copies? This is a difficult question to answer because Joseph’s original purpose is often lost in a sea of accounts given in hindsight. Only a few individuals were in Palmyra and aware of the situation when Joseph Smith first examined the gold plates. Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Knight Sr. were the only two who left accounts about this period and could have been aware of Joseph’s original intentions.<sup>20</sup> Though many of Joseph’s previous associates and residents from Palmyra pried for information and later gave accounts about what Joseph intended to do with the gold plates, only the accounts from Joseph’s mother and Joseph Knight Sr. reflect personal knowledge about Joseph’s early plans for how he would translate the plates. These accounts are not ideal, considering that neither Joseph Smith’s mother nor Joseph Knight were there when he made the copies in Harmony, but they were with him in Palmyra when he was making plans to create copies of the characters, and they claim that Joseph wanted to get these copies translated.<sup>21</sup>

Joseph Knight Sr. had a personal conversation with Joseph, just after Joseph had secured the plates in Lucy and Joseph Sr.’s house. Joseph Knight recalled Joseph Smith excitedly describing the plates to him, saying, “Now they are written in Characters [*sic*] and I want them translated.” According to Joseph Knight’s memory, Joseph Smith recognized that he could not read the characters on the plates, and, in frustration, knowing that the angel had told him that he would translate the plates, he quickly expressed his desire to *get them translated*. When Knight wrote about this experience, Joseph Smith had published the Book of Mormon at least six years earlier, and he thoroughly believed that Joseph Smith was the person who had translated the plates. Though Knight wrote his history years later and there are potential problems with his ability to remember the details of the event, he was in a unique situation that

may have enabled him to recall Joseph Smith's original plan. When Joseph Knight was writing he knew the outcome of the story, which included the fact that Joseph Smith eventually translated the plates himself. Because of that knowledge, Joseph Knight may have been differentiating between what Joseph Smith's original intentions were and what eventually happened. Knight explained that once Joseph Smith had moved to Harmony, he took an additional step to have the plates translated by copying "of[f] the Caricters exactley [*sic*] like the ancient" so that he could send them to scholars for translation.<sup>22</sup>

Knight's record also seems to coincide with Lucy Mack Smith's account, which focused on Joseph Smith's role in the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon. Lucy Smith asserted that as Joseph Smith took "some measures to accomplish the translation . . . he was instructed to take off a fac simile of the . . . characters" and by sending it to "learned men" he could acquire a "translation of the same."<sup>23</sup> Though Lucy Smith focused on the secular translation of just a sample of the characters, both she and Joseph Knight Sr. remembered that Joseph Smith was trying to find someone who could translate the characters. This is striking because both of them knew that Joseph Smith would declare that he had translated the plates by the power of God, as stated in the preface of the Book of Mormon.

Making Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Knight Sr.'s accounts even more probable is the fact that they appear to coincide with the earliest surviving account of the translation. This account is all the more powerful because it comes from a non-apologetic source: local Palmyra printer Jonathan Hadley of the *Palmyra Freeman*. Hadley apparently spoke with Joseph Smith in the summer of 1829, at which time Joseph briefly explained to Hadley what had occurred in the winter of 1828. In the account, Hadley derided Joseph's claims, declaring that Joseph had a friend take some of the characters he had copied from the plates "in search of someone, besides the interpreter [Joseph Smith], who was learned enough to *English* them."<sup>24</sup> Like

Lucy Mack Smith’s and Joseph Knight’s accounts, Hadley knew that Joseph Smith eventually translated the plates, but he also knew about Joseph’s initial attempt to find a translator other than himself.

During this period, Joseph Smith still refused to give anyone access to the plates for formal analysis of the characters. It also appears that he never copied the whole record to paper for a scholar to translate. According to Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Smith told Martin Harris when he left Harmony, Pennsylvania, that he needed enough time to “transcribe” an “alphabet” of characters from the gold plates.<sup>25</sup> Joseph Smith may have never created the document he envisioned and no extant document includes an identifiable alphabet of characters, but Lucy’s account seems to represent Joseph’s earlier idea of drawing characters from the gold plates. It also points toward Joseph’s failed attempts to work toward translating the plates in a secular, instead of miraculous, manner. However, though Joseph could not translate ancient characters and could not ask someone to translate the plates for him, there was a logical possibility revealed in his mother’s account that it could be possible for Joseph to begin translating the plates. This could be done by finding someone to translate each known character on the plates, assuming that this is what Lucy meant by creating an “alphabet.”<sup>26</sup>

### **The Purpose of Harris’s Trip to New York**

It is unclear what Joseph Smith had copied from the gold plates by the time Harris arrived in Harmony in February 1828, but it is known that he had created at least one document outside of Emma and Ruben Hale’s copies, which copies were apparently created before Harris arrived.<sup>27</sup> Whatever Joseph Smith and his scribes had created, his history explained: “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.” As Joseph had already begun translating the plates by miraculous means, at least one part of the documents Harris took

with him included a translation of “some” of the characters.<sup>28</sup> Joseph Smith’s history also explained that Harris took “a considerable number” of untranslated characters with him to New York City.

Just as it is unclear what precisely Harris took with him to New York, questions persist about what Joseph hoped the trip would accomplish since he had apparently begun translating the plates with his seer stones. Harris stated that he “immediately started off with some of the manuscripts that Joseph furnished him on a journey to New York and Washington to consult some learned men to ascertain the nature of the language in which this record was engraven.”<sup>29</sup> Although Joseph had already translated at least something from the plates with the seer stones, Harris still looked for scholars who could translate the characters. With copies (which included a list of the characters and a sample of the translation) of the characters in hand, Martin Harris traveled for weeks around New York State looking for scholars who could translate the characters and identify the language they represented.<sup>30</sup>

The confusion about why Harris took the characters to New York develops primarily because the accounts were recorded years after the event—once Harris and Joseph had relabeled the purpose of the trip. It is clear that most of the accounts were highly influenced by the outcome of the visit, not the original reason for sending Harris. Joseph Smith’s history eventually told the story of Harris’s travels and the people he met on the way as a fulfillment of a prophecy in the book of Isaiah.<sup>31</sup> Although this was accomplished in the trip, Richard Bennett and Richard Bushman have both opened the possibility that Harris’s original purpose for going to New York City was far different from that of fulfilling a prophecy. Bushman explained that each time Harris visited a scholar, he asked him to translate the characters from the gold plates. Bushman also explained that Joseph likely wanted “a check on his work too.”<sup>32</sup> It also seems probable, whether it was discussed with Joseph or not, that Harris was at least partially



## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

seeking assurance from scholars that the characters were legitimate so that he could invest his time and assets in the publication of the Book of Mormon with confidence. Harris may have also been seeking after that same assurance of legitimacy so that he could offer it to his wife and family as he invested his time and land into the project. Verification of the characters could have also been offered to others who would read the book in the future.

At the core of these reasons to go to New York, Martin Harris searched for weeks to find a scholar who could *translate* the characters—a translation that would support the validity of the project and act as a catalyst for belief amongst others. A translation by scholars also had the potential to verify Joseph’s translations, identify the roots of the language, function as a stepping stool for further translation, and even demonstrate that the language was not identifiable, like the text of the Book of Mormon would later state.<sup>33</sup> In any case, though the purpose and scope had expanded since 1827, the purpose of Harris’s visit was to get the characters translated by scholars, just as Lucy Mack Smith and Joseph Knight Sr. had remembered.

### **Martin Harris’s Trip to New York City**

In February 1828, Harris, with documents in hand, left Joseph Smith. Instead of traveling directly to New York City from Harmony, Harris began his search for scholars on his 150-mile journey back to his home in Palmyra before he left for New York City. It is highly unlikely that Harris did not have at least a partial agenda for whom he would visit on his way to New York or with whom he would meet once he arrived. Traveling north toward Palmyra, he first searched for scholars in Ithaca, located on the southern tip of Cayuga Lake. He then traveled to the northern tip of Seneca Lake, where he searched for scholars in Geneva.<sup>34</sup>

Martin Harris continued his journey twenty miles west to Canandaigua, where he may have also stopped, then turned

northward toward Palmyra and the Erie Canal. Harris conceivably spoke with his family and others in Palmyra at this point in his journey. Pomeroy Tucker claimed decades later, as if he gathered his information when Harris arrived back in Palmyra, that Harris went looking for scholars who could offer “interpretation and bibliographical scrutiny” of the characters drawn off the gold plates.<sup>35</sup>

From Palmyra, the Erie Canal likely provided easy travel eastward to Albany and the confluence with the Hudson River going south to New York City. W. W. Phelps wrote that Harris stopped in both Utica and Albany before he arrived in New York.<sup>36</sup> Harris may have shown the characters to individuals first in Utica. He may have also gathered information at the state clerk’s office about obtaining a copyright for the book that Joseph envisioned making from the translation of the gold plates. A copyright for the Book of Mormon would be recorded in that office on June 11, 1829, just before the translation was finished.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, however, if Phelps was correct about Harris’s visit to Utica, it is unknown what he did there, or if he visited anyone who may have been able to translate the characters.

Harris eventually arrived in Albany, where he met with a man named Luther Bradish.<sup>38</sup> Bradish had lived in Palmyra before he became a successful politician. Harris might have visited with his family and friends to gather information about Bradish before leaving Palmyra, or Harris may have contacted him by letter before he arrived. Regardless of Harris’s planning, Bradish spoke with Harris when he arrived in Albany.<sup>39</sup>

Harris probably visited Bradish to gather information from him and possibly get advice about whom to visit in New York. He knew that Bradish was well educated, but he also knew that he was not a scholar, specialist in Native American languages, or someone who would be able to assess the characters from the plates. However, Bradish had a keen enthusiasm for antiquities and was therefore potentially aware of contemporary archeological discoveries.<sup>40</sup> He had

enough experience with languages and classical studies that he may have been able to examine the characters and direct Harris to individuals who could offer a more detailed analysis.<sup>41</sup>

Bradish did not have the scholarly tools to evaluate the characters Harris showed him, but he did, according to Palmyra resident Fayette Lapham, compare the characters with those on “a Pass that had been given . . . when traveling through the Turkish dominions; and he thought the characters resembled those of that Pass.”<sup>42</sup> His passport-like certificate from the Ottoman Empire was written in Turkish and included a Turkish seal that he likely used to compare against the characters.<sup>43</sup> What Bradish derived from his comparison is unknown along with whether he directed him to see others in New York who were more capable of translating ancient languages.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, if Lapham is correct, the characters were compared to Turkish before Harris ever made it to New York City.

Though Harris made his way through several of the major cities in upstate New York looking for scholars who could translate the characters, he likely assumed he would find the most capable scholars in New York City. From Albany, Harris likely took the commonly traveled waterway down the Hudson River to New York City. Once in New York, Harris met with Charles Anthon and Samuel Mitchill. Harris’s itinerary is unclear; some sources have him visiting Anthon first, while others have him visiting Mitchill first. According to Joseph Knight Sr., Harris visited Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at some point.<sup>45</sup> Knight’s account intimates that Harris visited Philadelphia before New York City. Though, if this is true, it is likely that Harris stopped in New York City before traveling to Philadelphia—especially if Harris used the generally traveled route using the Hudson River.

There are no known details about Harris’s trip to Philadelphia or what scholars he sought out. It is possible that he visited the American Philosophical Society, which had been a hotbed for scholarship about Native Americans and the study of their ancient past.

Under the leadership of Thomas Jefferson in the late eighteenth century and Peter Stephen Du Ponceau by 1828, the Society particularly encouraged scholars to pursue research about Native Americans and their origins, culture, and history.<sup>46</sup> Du Ponceau was a leading ethnographer and linguist in the study of the American Indians. He built the society's reputation as a leading institution in Native American studies during his tenure as its president from 1827 until 1844. The society was well known, and their journal *Transactions* distributed much of their work to the reading public. Of any institution within Harris's reach, the American Philosophical Society likely had the most potential and resources to decipher characters taken from an ancient American set of gold plates. Harris might have approached Du Ponceau, because he was researching grammatical systems of Indian languages and could have potentially given Harris insights to the origins of the characters.<sup>47</sup>

If Harris went to Philadelphia, He might also have visited Samuel Rafinesque and Caleb Atwater, who were both leading naturalists and Native American enthusiasts with the Society.<sup>48</sup> Rafinesque had actively studied North American Indians and their languages since 1819. He had been working on deciphering Native American languages, had studied many of the pictographs found in the ancient world, and had begun to develop a translation of the Mayan glyphs.<sup>49</sup> In 1828 he began publishing his research about ancient American languages and writing systems, which compared them to known languages such as Egyptian and Chinese.<sup>50</sup> He was well known through his publications as the editor of the *Atlantic Journal* and would have been an ideal scholar for Harris to approach. Some of Caleb Atwater's academic work also may have captured the attention of Martin Harris because it too focused on Native American languages. In particular, Atwater attempted to uncover the origins of the North American Indians.<sup>51</sup> Numerous scholars, including Rafinesque and Atwater, had similarly tried to uncover the ancient

origins of the Native Americans; some of the scholars even believed that they originated from the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, similar to the seafaring Israelites described in the Book of Mormon.

If Harris did go to Philadelphia, he may have met with numerous individuals at the American Philosophical Society while there, and each of these individuals may have sent Harris to additional members of the Society. Eventually, Harris traveled to New York City to the house of Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, a prominent member of the Society back in New York. Other scholars likely mentioned Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill to Harris numerous times as one of the pre-eminent scholars. Mitchill’s name was likely mentioned due to his expertise in the study of Native Americans in the New York area, where Joseph claimed to have found the gold plates. Mitchill claimed that a race of Native Americans was wiped out by another race of Native Americans in upstate New York—a concept that is found in the Book of Mormon. He was also an avid linguist and the teacher of Samuel Rafinesque. Though scholars may have told Harris about Samuel Mitchill as early as his visit to Ithaca, it appears that Harris may have gone to visit Mitchill after his travels to Philadelphia because Harris was unsure who to visit, and because the Philosophical Society would have given him some direction and would likely have led Harris to Mitchill.<sup>52</sup> Yet the chronology is only hinted at by the one source that claims Harris went to Philadelphia, in which the informant, Joseph Knight Sr., lists Philadelphia before New York.<sup>53</sup>

In an 1831 interview for a newspaper, Harris claimed that he had been told that he “had better go to the celebrated Dr. Mitchill and show [the characters] to him. He is very learned in these ancient languages and I have no doubt he will be able to give you some satisfaction.”<sup>54</sup> When Jonathan Hadley wrote about Harris’s trip in the summer of 1829, he explained that among the numerous scholars that Harris approached, Samuel Mitchill was the central figure whom he visited.<sup>55</sup> Mitchill had conducted over thirty

years of research and experienced a lifetime of political and academic work in New York by the time Harris approached him in early 1828.<sup>56</sup> In particular, Mitchill had participated in the 1788 treaty with Native Americans in New York in which they ceded the Western District of New York, and as a US senator, he was chair of the Indian Affairs Committee. Mitchill was also a well-known expert on the translation of ancient and modern languages.<sup>57</sup> He had gained an abiding interest in all Native American languages, even learning the Mohawk language early in his career. His studies also built upon Alexander Humboldt's theory of the origin of the Native Americans, but further claimed that two other races, in addition to the Asians, had populated ancient America. He believed Polynesians and Scandinavians settled the Americas, but that the Asian populations subjugated and eventually destroyed the other two races in a final battle in upstate western New York.<sup>58</sup>

Although Mitchill's prestige eventually led Harris to him, Mitchill's university positions also played a role in how Harris's trip unfolded. In 1828, Mitchill was serving as the vice president of Rutgers Medical College in New York City. The short-lived college had been formed through the partnership of New York's Queen's College and New Brunswick's Rutgers College to take advantage of New York City's larger population. Mitchill's position there also allowed him to stay in New York City and benefit from the institutes that had been built in the thriving metropolis.<sup>59</sup> This placed Mitchill in New York when Harris arrived there.

Mitchill had already deciphered manuscripts for other laypersons. Despite his prestigious position, Mitchill was amiable enough to allow for such visits. For example, Abraham Edwards of Detroit approached him in 1823 with a manuscript that included foreign characters written on its pages.<sup>60</sup> It was apparently discovered by Edwards "under one of his buildings" and was "a manuscript volume, of between three and four hundred pages."<sup>61</sup> When the manuscript

## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

Edwards found was placed in front of Mitchill, he quickly got to work on identifying the characters and deciphering the language.

Once Edwards sent Mitchill a sample of the Detroit manuscript, Mitchill apparently gathered a few of his colleagues and they began by comparing it with other known language samples in his possession. After realizing that there were few writing samples that matched the Detroit manuscript, Mitchill turned to Noel Antoine Pluche’s books for examples of French paleography. This resource, combined with his knowledge of shorthand and paleographical forms of writing, helped him determine that several different people had produced the manuscript. To gather resources, he also turned to local institutes in New York City such as the American Bible Society Library (ABS), which had been established in 1817. The ABS was interested in languages, and their resources included some information about Native Americans from at least their first project, which had been to translate the Delaware Indian/English Parallel text of the Bible. Just before Mitchill visited them, the ABS had moved to their first permanent home in lower Manhattan, where they housed numerous documents “with types [of] various languages in the collection.”<sup>62</sup> Mitchill wrote, “When we were almost on the point of despair, a large bible, printed about 300 years ago, was produced, and we were enabled to form some idea of the abbreviations and contractions in the text, which threw light upon the MS. Of Detroit.”<sup>63</sup> Mitchill saw his role in deciphering the Detroit manuscript as successful, even though he stumbled through the process, and apparently performed comparisons and eventually found that the manuscript was paleographic.

Just as Mitchill acquiesced to Edwards’s request to translate the Detroit manuscript, Mitchill apparently was willing to examine the gold plate characters. A newspaper reported that Mitchill “looked at his engravings—made a learned dissertation on them—compared them with the hieroglyphics discovered by Champollion in Europe,

and set them down as a language of a people formerly in existence in the East, but now no more.”<sup>64</sup> Though Mitchill may have invested less time into the sample of characters that Harris provided, he did compare the characters with other languages as he had done with the Detroit Manuscript. Unfortunately, accounts about Mitchill’s analysis say very little about what he did or what he thought, and they are all tainted with the fact that Joseph later claimed the characters were “reformed Egyptian.” Jonathan Hadley wrote in August 1829 that Joseph Smith told him that Mitchill “happened not to be possessed of sufficient knowledge to give satisfaction!”<sup>65</sup> Regardless of the efforts Mitchill might have made, and despite his years of experience and training, he was unable to determine with certainty the linguistic origin of the characters. Charles Anthon, another scholar Harris visited, took Mitchill’s assessment to indicate that the characters were indecipherable.<sup>66</sup>

Mitchill reportedly “confessed he had been unable to understand” them and sent Harris with a note “requesting [Charles Anthon] to decipher, if possible, [the characters].” Though it is unclear whether Harris went to Mitchill first, Harris made his way to Mitchill’s former institution, Columbia College, to show the characters to Charles Anthon. Regardless, Anthon declared that Mitchill had already evaluated the characters when he began examining them.<sup>67</sup> It is difficult to understand why Harris ever went to visit Anthon at all, unless Harris was trying to be comprehensive in his visits to scholars or language experts.

It is strange that Harris would approach Anthon for his linguistic abilities in 1828, and particularly perplexing if he was trying to find an expert in Native American languages or Egyptian. Although he was an expert in Greek and Latin at Columbia College in 1820, Anthon was originally educated as a lawyer. He won acclaim for his publication of an updated edition of *Lempriere’s Classical Dictionary* in 1825, but was still just an “adjunct professor” in 1828. While he



would eventually become a professor in the Department of Latin Languages at Columbia, until 1832 he was still only the rector of the children’s grammar school at Columbia.<sup>68</sup> Unlike Samuel Mitchill, Charles Anthon had done no significant academic work on ancient America or Native American languages, let alone Egyptian.

The fact that Anthon claimed that Harris was sent to him by Mitchill poses a serious problem. Why would anyone refer Harris to Anthon for the translation of the Book of Mormon characters knowing his particular background and education? Mitchill, or someone else, may have believed that a Greek and Latin specialist should examine the characters to see if they reflected any roots from those language groups. It is also possible that Anthon had already found some acclaim in his abilities as a linguist in general. All of these and more are possibilities, but there was also an additional reason to approach Anthon that is relative to an interest he had in Native American stories.

Anthon had recently become very interested in Native American stories because of a possible financial enterprise he and an English colleague had undertaken. Washington Irving had recently authored a memoir, “Philip of Pokanoket,” about a Wampanoag chief who had generously aided the early English colonists. The story became popular and warmed many to the idea of Native American stories. To capitalize on this new interest, in the summer of 1828 Anthon began corresponding with Edmund Henry Barker of Thetford, England, about collecting and printing “specimens of Indian eloquence.”<sup>69</sup> Barker wrote to Anthon: “When you have collected a good stock of materials, arrange them, put a preface to them, print the book contract with an American publisher, take one half of the profits & give the other to me—send over the sheets as they come from the press—I will reprint the book here, make some additions, & give to you half the profits. It is a noble subject.” By September of that year, Barker was encouraged by Anthon’s progress collecting Native American stories, but

prompted him to gather the samples more quickly regardless of their “genuineness & authenticity”. Anthon continued looking for Indian stories and speeches. In the middle of December, Barker wrote to Anthon: “I hope that the collection of Indian Speeches is advancing to maturity.”<sup>70</sup> Anthon’s search may have included consulting the prestigious Samuel L. Mitchill, who knew more than anyone else about Native Americans who had resided in New York.

In the midst of Anthon’s ongoing efforts to collect tales and speeches, Harris arrived at the Columbia College with his account of the gold plates containing stories of American Indians and copies of some characters inscribed on the plates. Anthon may have been eager to examine the characters for Harris with hopes of presenting Barker with new material about Native Americans. Like Washington Irving’s essay, Harris’s tale would have been exciting to Americans and Europeans because it was a story about ancient Americans who believed in Christ and who had created a sacred record on gold plates that had only recently been uncovered. Harris’s visit fit right within Barker and Anthon’s plan to collect essays about Native Americans.

This connection, however, may have only been one of the reasons for sending Harris to Charles Anthon. In fact, no one mentions Anthon’s work with Barker in their reminiscences of the event, but we also do not have accounts that are directly from Mitchill describing why he may have sent Harris to Anthon. Anthon himself never told of his interest in collecting Native American stories in connection with his visit with Harris. He derided Harris’s document as a compilation derived from an alteration of “Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, [and] Roman letters inverted or placed sideways.” He claimed it was “decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied after the Mexican Calendar given by Humboldt, but copied in such a way as not to betray the source.”<sup>71</sup> Once Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon and Charles Anthon’s name became attached to Joseph’s story of the retrieval and translation of

the plates, a defensive Anthon felt that he needed to protect his reputation. He wrote a letter to E. D. Howe in 1834 as Howe prepared his book *Mormonism Unveiled* as an exposé to criticize the origins of the church. He again downplayed his involvement by writing to two pastors, one in 1841 and one in 1844, to explain what happened when Harris had visited him.<sup>72</sup>

Martin Harris, on the other hand, told a completely different story that was later recorded in Joseph Smith’s history. Harris explained that after Anthon examined the characters, he told him “that they were Egyptian, Chaldeak, Assyriac, and Arabac, and he said that they were true characters.” Harris recalled, “He gave me a certificate certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters.” Anthon’s certificate had the potential to legitimize Joseph Smith’s translation of the plates and could have been printed along with the Book of Mormon, but Anthon quickly withdrew the certificate. Harris explained that as he was leaving Anthon’s office, Anthon “called me back and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an Angel of God had revealed it unto him. He then said to me, let me see that certificate, I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it [to] him.” Anthon took the certificate and “tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him, he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them, he replied ‘I cannot read a sealed book.’”<sup>73</sup>

Harris and Anthon both wanted to maintain Anthon’s prestige as a linguist. There is no doubt that Anthon later became the scholar primarily associated with examining the characters from the plates, with almost no recognition of the other scholars Harris visited. In the minds of the early Mormons, Anthon’s final words to Harris as he sent him on his way, demanding to have the book brought to him, later made Anthon ironically become the most relevant person

whom Harris had visited. Though the earliest public report of the event mentioned Harris visiting only Mitchill,<sup>74</sup> the text of the Book of Mormon included a passage from the book of Isaiah that interpreted Harris's interaction with Anthon as the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. It stated,

It shall come to pass that the Lord God shall say unto him to whom he shall deliver the book: Take these words which are not sealed and deliver them to another, that he may show them unto the learned, saying: Read this, I pray thee. And the learned shall say: Bring hither the book, and I will read them . . .

And the man shall say: I cannot bring the book, for it is sealed.

Then shall the learned say: I cannot read it.<sup>75</sup>

There are no demonstrative links that show early Mormons making connections with this passage just after the Book of Mormon was published in 1830, but Joseph Smith's 1832 history seems to describe Harris's visit to the east in similar terms. It states that Harris "took his Journey to the Eastern Cittys and to the Learned [near exact phrase] saying read this I pray thee [near exact phrase] and the learned said I cannot but if he would bring the plates they would read it but the Lord had forbid it and he returned to me and gave them to me to translate and I said I cannot for I am not learned but the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book."<sup>76</sup> Even more precisely, Joseph's 1838 history explained that Anthon had actually spoken the words of the prophecy verbatim by saying, "I cannot read a sealed book."<sup>77</sup> Thus Harris's trip to Philadelphia and his interaction with Samuel Mitchill faded over time as they became more and more irrelevant in comparison to his visit with Anthon. Like Mitchill's forgotten role in Harris's trip to New York City, once Harris returned and Joseph began translating the gold plates, the purpose for Harris's trip also began to fade in the minds of those who were involved.

## Conclusion

Interestingly, this was not the last time Joseph Smith copied ancient characters to paper in a secular attempt to find their meaning. In fact, just before Joseph and other Mormon leaders began studying Hebrew, Oliver Cowdery examined a few of the Book of Mormon characters in 1835, apparently identifying the English translation of the “reformed Egyptian.”<sup>78</sup> Additionally, W. W. Phelps began working on an alphabet of ancient characters in early summer of that year, which may have been an attempt to work with the language of Adam and it could even possibly show signs of him toying with some of the “reformed Egyptian” from the gold plates that Joseph preserved on paper in 1828.<sup>79</sup> Labeled “Egyptian Alphabet,” W. W. Phelps and Joseph Smith worked on a secular alphabet of characters taken from an Egyptian papyrus they purchased the summer of 1835, which was later connected with the Book of Abraham. Instead of going to outside scholars, Joseph relied upon Phelps to produce the alphabet. To Joseph, the secular work on the papyri was connected to the translation of the Book of Abraham, just like his attempt to work with characters from the gold plates as connected to the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, Joseph mixed his secular interest in languages and his miraculous translations and revelations together in a handful of other instances, such as his interpretation of the Kinderhook plates, his purported work with a Greek Saltar in Nauvoo, and his use of Hebrew in his speeches.<sup>80</sup> However, his creation of the Egyptian alphabet with Phelps in 1835 demonstrates his sustained interest and expansion of his earlier efforts in bridging his secular and spiritual efforts in the translation of ancient records.

Though generations of Mormons saw the outcome of Harris’s trip to New York City to be the fulfillment of prophecy and a catalyst for Joseph Smith’s miraculous translation, the impetus for the trip was of a secular nature. Additionally, the characters on the plates were not just the object of Joseph’s miraculous translation; some of the

foremost scholars in ancient languages examined the characters. The characters were not limited to the perusal of just Palmyra residents and local pastors. Instead, Joseph offered up his earliest religious experiences to a much broader Jacksonian world and asked renowned American scholars to translate and analyze the Book of Mormon characters. Even before Joseph translated the Book of Mormon, he began to make inexplicit claims about the origins of the American Indians to scholars of anthropology, like Mitchill, through Martin Harris. Though the inexperience of youth may have allowed Joseph to proclaim that he possessed a set of ancient gold plates and offer copies of the characters to scholars, his efforts demonstrated his confidence in their authenticity and welcomed Mormonism into a world far larger than this small and dusty farm town of Palmyra.

## Notes

For a contextualized account within a large narrative, see Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015).

1. Book of Mormon, preface; Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), xxviii–xxxiii; hereafter *JSP*, D1; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 30–31, 151–56, 178, 197, 215; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 21–22; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 69–70, 90, 97, 103, 148, 184; Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American*

## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

*Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16, 25, 32–34.

2. See the following sources for examples of Emma Smith describing Joseph Smith’s inability to produce the Book of Mormon: Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (October 1916): 453–54; Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, October 1, 1879, 289–90. For Oliver Cowdery, another witness of the process, see Samuel W. Richards, statement, May 21, 1907, Samuel W. Richards Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereafter CHL.
3. Joseph Smith later created a similar kind of alphabet to account for the characters found on the Egyptian papyri he purchased in the summer of 1835. “Egyptian Alphabet,” circa July–December 1835, in Kirtland, Egyptian Papers, CHL. See Samuel Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt: Babel, Hieroglyphs, and the Pure Language of Eden,” *Church History* 78, no. 1 (2009): 26–65.
4. Historians have traditionally interpreted Joseph Smith’s translation from two drastically different perspectives. On the one hand, sympathetic historians have assumed that Joseph Smith knew before he ever retrieved the plates that he would eventually translate them with the seer stone spectacles and by the power of God, making it illogical for Joseph to have supported a secular translation. See, for example, Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 79–80. On the other hand, unsympathetic historians view the translation as trickery. They doubt Joseph Smith had ancient plates in his possession and, as a result of that disbelief, they assume he fabricated the characters in his possession. See, for example, Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books), 111–65.
5. For the past scholarship, see Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems,” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 325–52 and Richard 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): 178–216. For examples of new sources and new interpretations see *JSP*, D1: 353–67, and Michael MacKay, Robin Jensen, and Gerrit Dirkmaat, “The

MICHAEL HUBBARD MACKAY

- ‘Caractors’ Document: New Light on an Early Transcription of the Book of Mormon Characters,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 14, no. 1.
6. Smith, History, Vol. A-1, 8, in Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 236; hereafter *JSP*, H1.
  7. The messenger reportedly “delivered them up to [him] with this charge that I should be responsible for them. That if I should let them go carelessly or through any neglect of mine I should be cut off.” Joseph Smith, History, Vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40.
  8. See Lucy Mack Smith, History, book 5, 1–2; Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: Telegraph Press, 1834), 240–48; William H. Kelley, September 17, 1884, 10; Community of Christ Library-and-Archives, hereafter CCLA. In some cases, those who wanted to see the plates also spent time pressuring Joseph Smith to share the plates with them, in hopes to generate wealth from the metal. Local Palmyra residents such as Willard Chase and Samuel Lawrence were among them. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240–48; William H. Kelley, September 17, 1884, 10, CCLA; Lorenzo Saunders to Thomas Gregg, January 28, 1885, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon*, 135. See Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, MS 65.
  9. Sally Parker to John Kempton, August 26, 1838, Family History Library, SLC; “A Journal of Mary A. Noble,” 2–3, CHL; Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–45, book 6, [1].
  10. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–45, book 6, [7]. With financial assistance from Martin Harris, Joseph and Emma Smith moved to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to live on a thirteen-and-a-half-acre farm owned by Emma’s father, Isaac Hale. Joseph Smith, History, ca. summer 1832, 5, in *JSP*, H1:14–15; Joseph Smith, History, Vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40. Martin Harris and Joseph Knight Sr. both stated that the move might have occurred in November. See Dean C. Jessee, ed., “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early



## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 3; Joel Tiffany, “Mormonism,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, August 1859, 170.

11. The text of the Book of Mormon described the language in the last chapter of the Book of Mormon (Book of Mormon, 1830 ed., 538). Joseph Smith likely translated that portion sometime in May 1829. Even Joseph’s later account about an angelic visit lacks any claim to knowledge about the nature of the language on the plates. None of the accounts about the angelic visits claim that the language was identified by the angel Moroni, even though Joseph included a lengthy discussion about his visits in his histories. Joseph Smith’s 1832 history stated, “the Lord. . . revealed unto me that in the Town of Manchester Ontario County N.Y. there was plates of gold upon which there was engravings which was engraven by Maroni & his fathers the servants of the living God in ancient days.” Smith, History, 1832, 4, in *JSP*, H1:14. His 1838 history also left out any reference to the language of the plates, stating that Moroni said, “there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang.” Smith, History, Vol. A-1, in *JSP*, H1:222. According to these two accounts, Joseph was told that ancient American prophets wrote that which was on the plates and that the content described the inhabitants of the ancient Americas, leaving him with very little reason to jump to the conclusion that the plates were written in any form of Egyptian. Joseph also reflected on what is called the “Wentworth letter,” written in 1842. Joseph also reported that the angel “informed [him] concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments. I was told where there was deposited some plates on which were engraven an abridgement of the records of the ancient prophets that had existed on this continents.” Joseph Smith, “Latter Day Saints,” in *JSP*, H1:509. Lucy Smith also wrote in her history that Joseph would “describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent their dress their manner of traveling the animals which they rode,” etc., but not the language of the plates. Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1844–45, book 3.

MICHAEL HUBBARD MACKAY

12. Joseph Smith wrote in this 1832 history that he was “deprived of the bennifit of an education suffice it to say I was nearly instructtid in reading and writing and the ground rules of Airthmatic, which const[it]uted my whole literary acquirements.” Smith, History, 1832, 1, in *JSP*, H1:11. Speaking about the improbability of Joseph actually translating the plates, Emma Smith declared in her old age, “It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this; and, for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible.” “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, October 1, 1879, 289–90.
13. Book of Mormon, 1830 ed., 538. The prophet Mormon wrote, “And now behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge in the characters, which are called among the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.” One portion of the plates was apparently abridged from “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2) by the prophet Mormon. After Mormon died, his son Moroni wrote on the plates. However, there is little indication what language he used.
14. Joseph Smith, History, vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40; Joseph Smith, History, ca. summer 1832, 5, in *JSP*, H1:15. Joseph Smith’s history states: “So we proceeded to copy some of them and he took his Journy to the Eastern Cittys and to the Learned.”
15. Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1873), 104; Jessee, “Recollection,” 3.
16. Emma admitted that she had never seen the plates, but Joseph Knight Sr. explained that she helped her husband make copies. “He now Began to be anxious to git them translated. He therefore *with his wife Drew off*] the Caricters *exactley like the ancient* and sent Martin Harris to see if he Could git them Translated.” Jessee, “Recollection,” 3. Joseph Smith’s history also describes more than one document that Martin Harris took with him to New York City. Joseph Smith, History, Vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40.
17. Blackman apparently interviewed a local resident who stated that Reuben “assisted Joe Smith to fix up some characters such as Smith pretended were

## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

- engraved on his book of plates.” Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania*, 104; Jessee, “Recollection,” 3.
18. Joseph Smith, *History*, Vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40. None of the three, however, saw the plates. Therefore, it was apparently impossible for them to have copied the characters directly from the plates or to have verified the copies with any accuracy.
  19. *JSP*, D1:353–67. See also MacKay et al., “Caractors.”
  20. See Jessee, “Recollection,” for Joseph Knight Sr.’s account. Also, Lucy Mack Smith explained, “The angel of the Lord says that we must be careful not to proclaim these things or to mention them abroad, for we do not any of us know the weakness of the world, which is so sinful, and that when we get the plates they will want to kill us for the sake of the gold, if they know we have them.” See Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844–45, book 3, 12. During that winter, Joseph Smith was reluctant to discuss the plates with anyone outside of his tight circle of family and friends. See Andrew H. Hedges, “‘All My Endeavors to Preserve Them’: Protecting the Plates in Palmyra, 22 September–December 1827,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 14–23.
  21. These two sources are also filled with anachronisms, and it is clear that they too suffer from the fact that they were recorded years after 1827–28. However, the fact that they both seem to agree with each other on this point make their accounts more credible.
  22. Jessee, “Recollection,” 3. According to Martin Harris Jr., Harris insisted that he went to New York City to find someone who could translate the record. Harris Jr. told of his father’s account at his deathbed: “He went by the request of the Prophet Joseph Smith to the city of New York, and presented a transcript of the records of the Book of Mormon to Professor Anthon and Dr. Mitchill and ask them to translate it. He also presented the same transcript to many other learned men at the different schools of learning in Geneva, Ithica, and Albany with the same request but was unsuccessful in obtaining the translation of the transcript from any of them.” “Martin Harris, Jr., Reports Death and Testimony of His Father,” *Adventure* 1, no. 4. This quote could, of course, be read differently. He could have possibly been presenting

the characters as a challenge to prove that the wisdom of God was greater than the learning of the world. Yet this assumes Joseph Smith was overly confident in the characters he produced. At face value Martin Harris's son apparently believed the copies were sent out to get translated.

23. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, 1844–45, book 6, [3].
24. “The Gold Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829.
25. Joseph Smith was apparently instructed by the Lord “to take off a facsimile of the alphabet composing the characters Alphabetically and send them to all the learned men that he could find and ask them for the translation of the same.” See Lucy Mack Smith, *History* 1844–15, book 6, [7]. By February 1828, Joseph Smith’s history explained, Joseph’s purpose for copying the characters was beginning to change. The history explains that as soon as Joseph got to Harmony, in December 1828, he “commenced copying the characters of[f] all the plates.” Interestingly, Joseph’s history indicates that he was attempting to copy “all” the characters, possibly indicating that his original purpose was to create a much larger corpus of the characters. However, the history was later corrected and the word “all” was crossed out. Joseph Smith’s history goes on to explain that at some point between December 1827 and February 1828, he began using his seer stones to translate the characters into English. As Joseph turned to his seer stones for answers about the translation, creating an alphabet or complete manuscript of characters was rendered less important, though consulting with scholars about the characters remained purposeful. *JSP*, H1:238. Lucy Mack Smith wrote her history, reflecting back upon this event with very little documentation, outside of Joseph’s published history and the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. She seems confident about the statement above, but it broadly reflects Joseph Smith’s efforts to understand Egyptian papyri purchased by Church members in the summer of 1835. Nevertheless, she adds several historical details to the statement that may demonstrate that Joseph’s statement was in fact historically accurate. In particular, she explains that the purpose for making copies of the characters was to offer them up to learned men for the translation—a detail that does not match Joseph Smith’s efforts in 1835. Joseph Smith’s 1832 history emphasizes the trip to east in order to

## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

show how prophecy in the book of Isaiah was fulfilled. Instead of mentioning Harris’s preplanned trip to Harmony, it emphasizes that the “Lord appeared unto [Harris] in a vision and shewed unto him his marvius work which he was about to do and he imediatley came to Suquehannah and said the Lord had shown him that he must go to new York City with some of the characters.” Joseph Smith, *History*, 1832, 6. This account is not in opposition to the three accounts above; it simply has a different emphasis that can be reconciled with the other accounts.

26. Charles Anthon described the characters document Martin Harris showed to him in February 1828 as a document organized in columns, which could possibly represent a list of characters (like an alphabet). There is no reason, however, to believe it was an alphabet other than the vague description of columns. One copy of the characters, titled “Caractors,” includes what appear to be dashes in between groups of characters. This too could represent columns of characters that Joseph copied into rows, in which each column was represented by a dash. This too, however, is speculative at best.
27. Jessee, “Recollection,” 3; Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County*, 104.
28. *Manuscript History of the Church*, 20–21.
29. “Gleanings by the Way,” *Episcopal Recorder*, September 5, 1840, 94. The term *ascertain* is defined in Webster’s 1828 dictionary as “to make certain; to define or reduce to precision by moving obscurity or ambiguity.”
30. For a discussion of Harris’s efforts, see *JSP*, D1:353–67.
31. See Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems.” *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 325–52. For earlier work by Kimball, see “I Cannot Read a Sealed Book,” *Improvement Era*, February 1957, 80–82, 104, 106; “Charles Anthon and the Egyptian Language,” *Improvement Era*, October 1960, 708–10, 765. For additional studies, see Edward H. Ashment, “The Book of Mormon and the Anthon Transcript: An Interim Report,” *Sunstone* 5, no. 3 (May–June 1990): 29–31; Daniel Bachman, “Sealed in a Book: Preliminary Observations on the Newly Found ‘Anthon Transcript,’” *BYU Studies* 20, no. 4 (Summer 1980); David E. Sloan, “The Anthon Transcripts and the Translation of the Book of Mormon: Studying

MICHAEL HUBBARD MACKAY

- It Out in the Mind of Joseph Smith,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5, no. 2; Sidney Sperry, “Some Problems Arising from Martin Harris’ Visit to Professor Charles Anthon,” in *Problems of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964); Richard B. Stout, “A Singular Discovery: The Curious Manuscript, Mitchill and Mormonism,” *Evangel*, 2001–2, in six parts.
32. For Richard E. Bennett’s article, see “Read This I Pray Thee.” For Richard Bushman’s views, see *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 64–65.
  33. “But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth our language; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof” (Mormon 9:34).
  34. According to Martin Harris Jr., Harris sought out learned men in Geneva, Ithica, and Albany. “Martin Harris, Jr., Reports Death and Testimony of His Father,” *Adventure* 1, no. 4.
  35. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (1867), 42. Possibly during his return, before he left for New York City, Harris’s wife offered their thirteen-year-old daughter’s hand in marriage to Flanders Dyke. The marriage, however, was contingent upon Dyke’s successful retrieval of a copy of Martin Harris’s copy of the characters. According to Lucy Mack Smith, Dyke was successful. Lucy Mack Smith, *History*, book 6, [9].
  36. W. W. Phelps to E. D. Howe, January 15, 1831, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 273.
  37. See Copyright for Book of Mormon, June 11, 1829, *JSP*, D1:76.
  38. John H. Gilbert, a typesetter in Palmyra, explained that “On his way [to New York City] he stopped at Albany and called on Lt Gov Bradish.” John H. Gilbert, “Memorandum, made by John H. Gilbert Esq, Sept 8th, 1892, Palmyra, N.Y.,” Palmyra King’s Daughters Free Library, Palmyra, New York.
  39. Bennett, “Read This I Pray Thee,”: 186.
  40. Bennett, “Read This I Pray Thee,” 180–85.
  41. See note 31 above.

## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

42. Fayette Lapham, a local Palmyra resident, explained that in a long conversation with Joseph Smith Sr., he told him Bradish juxtaposed Harris’s copy of the characters against those on Fayette Lapham, “Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, Forty Years Ago. His Account of the Finding of the Sacred Plates,” *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870): 305–9.
43. Erin Jennings, “Charles Anthon,” *JWHAJ* (Fall/Winter 2012): 177; Luther Bradish to Thomas Appleton, July 1, 1824.
44. Erin Jennings, “Charles Anthon,” *JWHAJ* (Fall/Winter 2012): 177.
45. See Jesse, “Recollection,” 3. Knight Sr. wrote, “He went to Albany and to Philadelphia and to new york and he found men that Could Translate some of the Carictors in all those places. Mitchel [Samuel L. Mitchill] and Anthony [Charles Anthon] of New York ware the most Larded [learned] But there were some Caricters they could not well understand.” This contradicts James Gordon Bennett, who suggested that Harris met with Charles Anthon first and then left to visit others, such as Samuel Mitchill, before he returned to meet with Anthon again. If Anthon is correct, however, Bennett is in error, because Anthon himself claimed that Mitchill sent Harris to meet with him. James Gordon Bennett, “Mormonites,” *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, September 1, 1831.
46. American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, 4, 1799.
47. See Peter Stephen Du Ponceau, *Mémoire sur le système grammatical des langues de quelques nations Indiennes de l’Amérique du Nord* (Paris: 1838). See also Richard Bennett, “‘A Nation Now Extinct’: American Indian Origin Theories as of 1820: Samuel L. Mitchill, Martin Harris, and the New York Theory,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 2 (2011).
48. Atwater authored *Descriptions of the Antiquities Discovered in the State of Ohio and other Western States in Archaeologia Americana. Transactions and collections of the American Antiquarian Society, Vol. 1* (Worcester, MA: William Manning) 1820, and C. S. Rafinesque wrote *Ancient History, or, Annals of Kentucky: with a Survey of the Ancient Monuments of North America* (Frankfort, KY: 1824).

MICHAEL HUBBARD MACKAY

49. Charles Boewe, "C. S. Rafinesque and Ohio Valley Archaeology," *Ancient America* Monograph Series (Barnardsville, NC: Center for Ancient American Studies), 6.
50. Samuel Rafinesque, *Atlantic Journal* (Spring 1832): 5–6.
51. Caleb Atwater, *Remarks Made on a Tour to Prairie de Chien* (Columbus, OH: Isaac N. Whiting, 1831), 75–97.
52. See Mitchill to Samuel Burnside, *Archaeologia Americana* 1 (1820): 314–15. See *Rochester Advertiser and Telegraph*, August 31, 1831, and *Rochester Gem*, September 5, 1829.
53. Jessee, "Recollection," 3.
54. *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, September 1, 1831.
55. "The Gold Bible," *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829.
56. Much of Mitchill's work focused upon New York State, in which he argued that the pre-history of the region was much older than Europe. In 1818, Mitchill wrote *Observations on the Geology of North America*, which was published alongside the work of the renowned French naturalist and comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier. Georges Cuvier, *Essay on the Theory of the Earth*, (1818).
57. See Robert Hall, *A Scientist in the Early Republic: Samuel Latham Mitchill* (Columbia, 1934); Samuel Latham Mitchill, "Specimens of the Poetry and Singing of the Osages," *Archaeologia Americana*. In 1858, J. W. Francis reflected back upon Mitchill's work and commented that he translated many ancient glyphs. *Old New York*, (1858), 90. Even Mitchill's doctoral dissertation included over 150 translations that he had done between 1804 and 1818, though these are limited to the few that he included to make his point in the dissertation.
58. Samuel L. Mitchill, "No. III: The Original Inhabitants of America Consisted of the Same Races with the Malays of Australia, and the Tartars of the North," *Archaeologia Americana*, 1.
59. See David Cowen, *Medical Education: The Queen's -Rutgers Experience, 1792–1830* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1966).
60. See *Detroit Gazette*, March 7, 1823, 2; *Nile's Weekly Register*, May 3, 1823, 130.
61. *Detroit Gazette*, March 7, 1823, 2.



## “GIT THEM TRANSLATED”

62. *Detroit Gazette*, May 16, 1823, 2.
63. *Detroit Gazette*, May 16, 1823, 2.
64. *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, September 1, 1831.
65. “The Gold Bible,” *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829.
66. In a letter to Thomas Winthrop Coit, on April 3, 1841, Anthon clarified that it was “Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill” who had sent Harris to him (*Church Record*, 1, April 17, 1841, 231–32.) Charles Anthon, whom Harris visited next, wrote on February 17, 1834 to E. D. Howe: “Some years ago, a plain, and apparently simple hearted farmer, called upon me with a note from Dr. Mitchill of our city, now deceased, requesting me to decipher, if possible, a paper, which the farmer would hand me, and which Dr. M. confessed he had been unable to understand.” E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 270.
67. E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 270. This is the earliest source and it is from Anthon, who claims he saw Harris after Mitchill had met with him. This does not negate the fact that there could have been multiple visits, because Harris’s account in Joseph Smith’s history claims that he visited Anthon first.
68. Henry Drisler, “Commemorative Discourse” (New York: 1868), 12–15.
69. Washington Irving, “Philip of Pokanoket: An Indian Memoir,” in *The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia: C. S. Van Winkle, 1819–20). Edmund Henry Barker, Thetford England to Charles Anthon, New York City, July, 9, 1827. Edmund Henry Barker, Letters, 1827–31, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, New York.
70. Edmund Henry Barker, Thetford England to Charles Anthon, New York City, December 11, 1827, Edmund Henry Barker, Letters, 1827–31, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Library, New York.
71. If Mitchill sent Harris to Anthon, he did not likely recognize Native American characters, especially those found in Humboldt’s book, with which he was certainly familiar.
72. See Erin Jennings, “Charles Anthon,” *JWHAJ* (Fall/Winter 2012): 179–87.
73. Joseph Smith, History, Vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40.

MICHAEL HUBBARD MACKAY

74. "Golden Bible," *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829; *Advertiser and Telegraph*, August 31, 1829.
75. 2 Nephi 27:15, 17–18.
76. Joseph Smith, History, ca. summer 1832, 5.
77. Joseph Smith, History, Vol. A-1, 8–9, *JSP*, H1:237–40.
78. *JSP*, D1:359–65.
79. "Egyptian Alphabet," in Kirtland, Egyptian Papers, [1]. See Samuel Brown, "Joseph (Smith) in Egypt: Babel, Hieroglyphs, and the Pure Language of Eden"; and Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 213–15.
80. See Stanley B. Kimball, "The Kinderhook Plates," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:789–90; forthcoming article by Don Bradley and Mark Ashurst-McGee; Henry Caswall, *The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century, or, the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Mormons, or Latter-Day Saints: To Which Is Appended an Analysis of the Book of Mormon* (London: Printed for J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1843), 223; *Three Nights: A Public Discussion between the Revds. C. W. Cleeve, James Robertson, and Philip Cater, and Elder John Taylor of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, at Boulogne-Sur-Mer, France* (Liverpool: John Taylor, 1850), 5; Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons: Or, Three Days at Nauvoo in 1842* (London: Rivington, 1842), 5, 35–36; Kevin L. Barney, "The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant* ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 107–30.