Lehi and Egypt

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Chapter 9

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John S. Thompson

The Book of Mormon declares that Lehi and members of his family, faithful Israelites living near Jerusalem about 600 B.C., learned the Egyptian language and then used this knowledge to read holy scriptures and keep personal records.[1] It also makes it clear that these faithful Israelites called their children and places in their promised land by Egyptian names.[2] Such propositions would likely have been scorned in Joseph Smith's day; doctors of theology in the early 1800s would have based their views of Egyptian-Israelite relations primarily upon the Israelites' seeming disdain for Egyptian culture as reflected in the Bible. However, as Hugh Nibley pointed out a few decades ago, the abundance of archaeological and literary records then coming forth from the Near East was causing scholars to rethink the nature of Egyptian-Israelite cultural relations, bringing their ideas closer to the Book of Mormon's portrayal.[3]

More recent finds continue to alter or at least sharpen our views as to the conditions in and around Jerusalem during the latter half of the seventh century. What follows summarizes the

present state of understanding among the scholars. First, I will review the current understanding of Egyptian interactions with the land of Canaan to show that Egyptian political and cultural influence was at a high point in Lehi's day, and I will discuss the nature of those interactions in order to explore the degree of Egyptian cultural assimilation by Syro-Palestianians. Second, I will review the scholars' views on some of the specific epigraphic evidence that has been recently uncovered, suggesting that Lehi would indeed have had opportunities to learn Egyptian near his home in Jerusalem and to use it not only to read Egyptian but to keep records and teach his posterity. As the prevalence of Egyptian influence in and around Lehi's Jerusalem is made apparent, it becomes clear that the Book of Mormon has indicated all along what the scholars are increasingly coming to understand.

Egypt and Israel

When the current view of Egyptian political interaction with the land of Canaan during the decades surrounding Lehi's day is placed within its broader context of Egyptian-Israelite history, we discover that Egyptian political domination over the area was at a high point at that time. During the early New Kingdom period of Egyptian history (particularly the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, about 1539–1190 B.C.), Egypt had a strong imperial presence in the land of Canaan; however, subsequent dynasties leading up to Lehi's day were times of political disunity and comparative weakness in Egypt as foreigners ruled the land.

Under Ramses XI, in the eleventh century B.C., the Twentieth Dynasty collapsed and the political structure of Egypt was divided. Northern Egypt came under the rule of Egyptianized Libyans (the Twenty-first Dynasty), centered at Tanis.[4] However,

southern Egypt was controlled for the most part by high priests of Amun at Thebes. Mainly due to the constant internal conflicts caused by this division, the pharaohs of the Twenty-first Dynasty could not maintain any consistent political control over the Levant.[5] However, they did attempt from time to time to exert their influence in that area. For example, a successful campaign against the city of Gezer in Palestine eventually led to a diplomatic marriage between King Solomon and an Egyptian princess.[6] But in spite of small victories such as this, Egyptian political weakness in the region was evident.[7] Consequently, less Egyptian material culture is found in Israel during this time than during the earlier New Kingdom period; however, economic and cultural contact was maintained with Canaan and other parts of Asia through commerce with the Mediterranean coastal states such as Phoenicia.[8]

At the beginning of the Twenty-second (Bubastid) Dynasty (1069–945 B.C.), Sheshonq (the biblical Shishak) sought to resurrect the early Ramesside glories of Egypt by unifying the land and expanding its borders.[9] However, in the wake of major internal Theban rebellions during the ninth century (bringing about the existence of the Twenty-third Dynasty in southern Egypt) and divisions within the Bubastid family itself, this dynasty eventually proved incapable of controlling foreign lands. Ironically, "despite its political weakness," Donald Redford observes, "Egypt remained a repository and a source of wealth . . . [and] the inhabitants of western Asia welcomed trade in the exotic products Egypt had to offer."[10] It was during this time that contemporary Hebrew glyphic art employing the winged scarab, an icon strongly associated with Bubastid land around Sile, began to appear in Caanan.[11]

During the Twenty-fifth (Kushite or Nubian) Dynasty and the subsequent decades surrounding Lehi's time, political and

cultural relations between Egypt and Israel reached a new high. Because they were initially able to unite Egypt and obtain a relative stability at home, the Kushite rulers adopted a more rigorous political policy in Syro-Palestine than their Libyan predecessors. However, this expansion of influence caused the Egyptians to bump up against the Assyrians, who were growing from the east. Egypt and Israel, among others, soon became allies to combat this new imperial force. Several attempts by Egypt to resist Assyrian invasion eventually led to its fragmentation. Assyrian overlords were installed over northern Egypt, and in time the Kushite rulers withdrew back into Nubia, marking the end of their dominance over Egypt.

Historian John Taylor states that "the bloodshed and destruction that followed from the Kushite opposition to Assyria proved to be a cloud with a silver lining: it emphasized the necessity for military and civil cooperation by the rulers of the [Egyptian] principalities."[12] This cooperation enabled the Pharaoh Psammetichus I (Psamtik I) to unify all of Egypt. He drew upon mercenaries from surrounding nations, including Israel, for unification purposes as well as for defense against further conflicts with Assyria, and he maintained trade links with the Levant—primarily Phoenicia—and with Greece in order to strengthen his country economically. This, of course, encouraged Egyptian cultural influence in the land of Canaan.

Psammetichus quickly gained independence from Assyria, which had turned its attention to internal conflict and to its eastern and southern neighbor nations, which were growing in power. Once free from Assyrian rule, the Twenty-sixth Dynasty pharaohs continued to play an active role in the politics of the Levant. In fact, as Assyria began to weaken and withdraw from Egypt and Syro-Palestine, Psammetichus quickly filled the void.[13]

Psammetichus's son, Necho II, continued his father's political ambitions in the Levant, sending campaigns east of the Euphrates against the Chaldean armies. En route Necho II defeated and killed King Josiah in 609 B.C. at Megiddo and set up the Egyptian border near the Euphrates; after dealing with the Chaldeans, he returned to establish hegemony over Israel. In the interim, Josiah's son Jehoahaz had ascended the throne for a three-month reign. However, because of his anti-Egyptian sentiments—and probably also through the schemings of his older brother, Eliakim/Jehoiakim, who should have been the heir—Jehoahaz was exiled by Necho II to Egypt, where he died. Necho II placed Jehoiakim on the throne. Not only was the king of Judah installed by Pharaoh, but other officials seem to have been installed as well. Biblical scholar Ephraim Stern, basing his remarks principally upon more recent archaeological evidence, declares, "Through the years from Josiah to the coming of the Babylonians, Egyptian officials ruled both in Philistia and Judah."[14] The exiling of Jehoahaz, the subsequent appointment of Jehoiakim, and the seeming appointment of other officers in the land of Judah by Pharaoh all suggest Egypt's very strong political presence in Israel in the decade prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. This dominance, however, did not last long, for in 605 B.C. the Chaldeans defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish and pushed them back to their own land. Later, Psammetichus II, Necho II's successor, arranged a revolt against the Babylonians with the aid of Zedekiah, then king of Judah, but the Babylonians prevailed and eventually razed the cities of Judah and Palestine to the ground.[15]

As the above historical outline demonstrates, the alliances of Egypt with Israel during the late Twenty-fifth and early Twenty-sixth Dynasties and the subsequent political desires of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty for imperial expansion[16] caused

Egypt's political influence in Israel to reach unprecedented heights. Such was the immediate contemporary political situation in which Lehi and his family existed. This strong political influence surrounding Lehi's day surely would have emphasized those Egyptian cultural features that were already embedded in Canaan during the New Kingdom empire—and even those embedded in subsequent times of political weakness as noted above. But more importantly, this political ambience provided a climate in which contemporary Egyptian cultural influence would flourish.

Gregory D. Mumford, in examining the heretofore largely ignored archaeological picture of Egyptian artifacts in southwestern Asia from 1550 to 525 B.C., has shown that Egyptian cultural influences in Syro-Palestine seem to peak four times in nineteen time divisions—namely, in 1450–1400 B.C. (Eighteenth Dynasty time period), 1250–1150 B.C. (Nineteenth Dynasty time period), 925–850 B.C. (Twenty-second [Bubastid] Dynasty time period), and 750–600 B.C. (Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasty time periods).[17] In addition, Ephraim Stern has recently demonstrated that Egyptian material culture in Israel from the reign of Psammetichus I to that of Psammetichus II (ca. 664–589 B.C.) was plentiful, attesting to the close political interactions that Egypt had with Israel as Assyria dwindled in strength.[18] Thus, as seen above, the more recent historical and archaeological studies demonstrate and emphasize even more that Egyptian political and cultural influence in Canaan was at one of its peaks in the immediate decades leading up to Lehi's time.

While this certainly seems to be an environment that would justify the numerous Egyptian manifestations found in the Book of Mormon, trying to understand the actual nature of the cultural influence of Egypt upon Israel is problematic.

One of the principal questions scholars have debated is whether Egyptian cultural manifestations in other lands suggest that Egypt typically established itself as a direct ruling empire or whether it simply controlled the area politically or economically from afar, using vassal-treaty agreements with Egyptianized or non-Egyptianized local elites ruling under the auspices of Egypt.[19]

Direct rule would imply the annexing of conquered territory and the establishing of Egyptian settlements within their boundaries—not only military garrisons but also civilian settlements, where Egyptian administrators would be permanently stationed in order to impose laws, collect taxes, and so forth (similar to those seen in Egypt's expansion into Nubia).[20] This degree of infiltration would provide strong cultural influences, for the Egyptians themselves would build and settle these sites, bringing with them their culture and ideologies in both domestic and workplace settings.

On the other hand, if Egypt used the local elite to rule conquered territory, then the cultural influence would seemingly be less than that under direct rule; however, it would likely still be present, especially if these local leaders adopted, to one degree or another, the culture of their overlords. The cultural assimilation of things Egyptian by an Egyptianized local elite would most likely be reflected in prestige goods that locals acquired from Egypt or through comparatively minor borrowing of Egyptian features of art and architecture adapted or synthesized into the local culture. This view of Egyptian imperialism, which has become the more popular view defended in recent years,[21] should be of continuing interest to Latter-day Saint audiences, for it suggests that many of the Egyptian artifacts in Syro-Palestine that have shown up in the current archaeological record reflect real assimilation of Egyptian culture by upper-class natives rather than, or in addition to,

Egyptian occupation of the land. Laban and Lehi would certainly qualify among the elite of Jerusalem, as evidenced by references to their position and wealth (see 1 Nephi 3:22–25, 31; 4:20–22).

Egyptian Writing in Israel

Some of the specific cultural artifacts that have recently been uncovered in and around the land of Judah provide good evidence that Lehi would indeed have had opportunities to learn Egyptian near his home in Jerusalem. Archaeologists in Canaan are unearthing a growing body of artifacts that feature Egyptian writing on them.[22] The nature of some of these artifacts, as postulated by the scholars, suggests an adoption by Syro-Palestinian locals of Egyptian script for accounting purposes.[23] Still other artifacts suggest the presence of Egyptian scribes in the area.[24] Due to its prominence, Orly Goldwasser states that Egyptian writing was the more progressive form of Egyptian cultural influence attested in Israel in the eighth and seventh centuries.[25]

The kind of Egyptian script being employed on those artifacts dating around the time of Lehi is hieratic,[26] but since Demotic was the script of the day in northern Egypt and "abnormal hieratic" was predominant in southern Egypt, the normal hieratic tradition in Canaan must have been adopted from an earlier time—possibly, Goldwasser suggests, during the reigns of David and Solomon or even earlier in the tenth century B.C.—and was in continued use in Israel.[27] This last point may have some bearing upon the script that Lehi and Nephi used when making their records. It has generally been assumed that Demotic was the script of choice for Lehi and Nephi, for it is the most compact of the Egyptian characters and was the most predominant in Egypt at this time; however,

the archaeological record to date reveals that hieratic was the more commonly used Egyptian script in Israel.[28]

This use of hieratic script in Canaan has led Goldwasser to postulate further that during the height of the New Kingdom's cultural influence in Canaan, many scribes and teachers made their way into the Levant to set up businesses. However, "after the decline of the Egyptian Empire . . . many Egyptians, or Egyptian-trained Canaanite scribes lost their means of existence, and may have offered their scribal and administrative knowledge to the new powers rising in the area, first the Philistines and then the Israelites. . . . We would like to suggest that these Egyptian or Egyptian-trained scribes, cut off from their homeland, well acquainted with Egyptian decorum as well as the Canaanite language, educated local scribes, who in their turn passed on their knowledge to their successors."[29] Such a view, bolstered by the Egyptian title "scribe" appearing in hieratic on an artifact from Lachish,[30] suggests the possibility that by Lehi's day, scribes having a knowledge of Egyptian had existed in the area for quite some time and had maintained a tradition of writing Egyptian.[31] The fact that an Egyptian scribal tradition existed locally could imply that Lehi learned Egyptian from a local scribe or even from his own father, just as Lehi presumably taught Nephi (see 1 Nephi 1:1–2).[32]

Conclusions

At the very beginning of the small plates, Nephi informs the reader: "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" (1 Nephi 1:2). Various interpretations have been given concerning this verse, and the accepted understanding is that Nephi's record was written using at least an Egyptian-based script.[33] It is also possible that Nephi is here

informing the reader that he is making a record using his father's system of writing ("the language of my father") and that this system, as he goes on to tell us, consists of Jewish learning and Egyptian language.[34] This would further imply that Lehi's own personal record, which Nephi had previously copied onto his large plates and was now about to abridge onto his small plates (see 1 Nephi 1:16–17; 10:1; 19:1),[35] may also have been written using Egyptian.[36]

Using aspects of Egyptian language for record keeping among Lehi's posterity continued all the way to the days of Mormon and Moroni. By that time, however, Mormon informs us that the language had been "altered"—presumably the spelling, syntax, and grammar changed according to speech patterns, as Mormon tells us, but it is also likely that the script/characters employed were also altered over time so that it could be read only by the Nephites (Mormon 9:32, 34).[37] Still, reason dictates that when Lehi and Nephi initially wrote their records, they used aspects of the Egyptian language that would have been recognizable to the Egyptians of their day.[38]

Of course, every detail concerning the nature and extent of Egyptian cultural influence in Israel, particularly writing, has not yet come forth; for instance, long historical Israelite narratives in Egyptian are not currently attested. Consequently, the relationship between Egypt and Israel and the cultural influence that Egypt had upon Lehi's world deserves greater exploration in the coming years, especially as new archaeological and textual finds continue to change our views as to what occurred during this time period. For now, however, the evidence attests to a solidly established relationship between Egypt and Israel. Egyptian political and cultural influence in Israel surrounding the time of Lehi was at a peak, Egyptian language was being employed for record-keeping purposes,

and the possibility of an Egyptian scribal tradition existing in the area of Jerusalem gives plausibility to the Book of Mormon's claim that Lehi and his posterity learned and used Egyptian for record-keeping purposes. The authenticity of the Book of Mormon continues to be sustained as the picture of Lehi's Jerusalem becomes clearer.

Notes

1. In the opening verses of that portion of the abridged large plates of Nephi of which we have a translation, Mormon informs us that Lehi was taught "in the language of the Egyptians" (Mosiah 1:4). We also learn in this passage that at least a part, if not all, of the brass plates that Laban possessed and Lehi later obtained were written in Egyptian, for Lehi had to use his knowledge of the Egyptian language to read them. The opening verses of the small plates of Nephi seem to imply that Lehi's children were taught Egyptian and used this knowledge to keep a record (see 1 Nephi 1:1–2).

2. Many of the proper names mentioned in the Book of Mormon—including Nephi, Sam, Paanchi, Pahoran, Ammon, and Sidon—may have Egyptian origins. See Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 25–42; John Gee, "Four Suggestions on the Origin of the Name Nephi," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon,* ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 1–5; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "What's in a Name? Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 64–65.

3. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert,* 6–13.

4. The major work on this period and subsequent dynasties (22nd–25th) remains Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B.C.),* 2nd ed. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1986).

5. See the cogent comments of Anthony Leahy, "The Libyan Period in Egypt: An Essay in Interpretation," *Libyan Studies* 16 (1985): 51–65.

6. Kitchen argues that this was a beneficial move for both Egypt and Israel by removing the Philistines in this city and was not motivated by any Egyptian desire to control the area including Jerusalem; see his *Third Intermediate Period,* 281–82.

7. Again, see Leahy, "The Libyan Period in Egypt," for why it was weak.

8. Jean Leclant, *The Role of the Phoenicians in the Interaction of Mediterranean Civilizations,* ed. William A. Ward (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 9–31.

9. See Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 314–15.

10. Ibid., 336–37.

11. Anson F. Rainey, "Wine from the Royal Vineyards," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 245 (1982): 57–62; A. D. Tushingham, "A Royal Israelite Seal(?) and the Royal Jar Handle Stamps (Part One)," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 200 (1970): 71–78 .

12. John Taylor, "The Third Intermediate Period," in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt,* ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 359.

13. See A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin, 1975), 90–96.

14. Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2:229. Conversely, Anthony Spalinger, "Egypt and Babylonia: A Survey (c. 620 B.C.–550 B.C.)," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 5 (1977): 227–30, argues that Egypt maintained two different policies toward Judah and the surrounding Philistine cities respectively: Judah remained relatively free and autonomous even after Josiah's defeat at Megiddo, while Egypt maintained strong control over the Philistine cities.

15. Abraham Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum,* vol. 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 123–45, provides nice detail about the final years of the kingdom of Judah, including its political fluctuations as

it changed loyalties six times between Egypt and Babylon between 609 and 587 B.C.

16. Conversely, Donald B. Redford, "The Relations between Egypt and Israel from El-Amarna to the Babylonian Conquest," in *Biblical Archaeology Today* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985), 196, believes that Egypt's interest in the Levant at this time was chiefly concerned with simply maintaining the route through the Philistine plain and was not for the purpose of imperial expansion or control.

17. Gregory D. Mumford, "International Relations between Egypt, Sinai, and Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age to Early Persian Period (Dynasties 18–26: c. 1550–525 B.C.): A Spatial and Temporal Analysis of the Distribution and Proportions of Egyptian(izing) Artifacts and Pottery in Sinai and Selected Sites in Syria-Palestine" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1998).

18. Stern, *Archaeology,* esp. chap. 8, "Egyptians in Palestine in the 7th Century BCE," 228–35.

19. Recent studies that specifically discuss Egyptian imperialism in relation to Israel include Carolyn R. Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Bernd U. Schipper, *Israel und Ägypten in der Königszeit: Die kulturellen Kontakte von Salomo bis zum Fall Jerusalems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999); A. B. Knapp, "Independence and Imperialism: Politico-economic Structures in the Bronze Age Levant," in *Archaeology,* Annales, *and Ethnohistory,* ed. A. Bernard Knapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); William G. Dever, "The Late Bronze–Early Iron I Horizon in Syria-Palestine: Egyptians, Canaanites, 'Sea Peoples,' and Proto-Israelites," in *The Crisis Years: The 12th Century B.C.: From beyond the Danube to the Tigris,* ed. William A. Ward and Martha S. Joukowsky (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1992), 99–110; Itamar Singer, "The Political Status of Megiddo VIIA," *Tel Aviv* 15–16 (1988–89): 101–12; Redford, "Relations between Egypt and Israel," 192–205; E. D. Oren, "Governors' Residences in Canaan under the New Kingdom: A Case Study of Egyptian Administration," *Society for the Study of*

Egyptian Antiquities Journal 14 (1984): 37–56; James A. Weinstein, "The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 241 (1981): 1–28. Other studies of Egyptian imperialism include Ellen F. Morris, "The Architecture of Imperialism: An Investigation into the Role of Fortresses and Administrative Headquarters in New Kingdom Foreign Policy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001); José M. Galán, "Victory and Border: Terminology Related to Egyptian Imperialism in the XVIIIth Dynasty" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); E. L. Bleiberg, "Aspects of the Political, Religious, and Economic Basis of Ancient Egyptian Imperialism during the New Kingdom" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1984); Paul J. Frandsen, "Egyptian Imperialism," in *Power and Propaganda: A Symposium on Ancient Empires,* ed. Mogens T. Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1979), 167–92; B. J. Kemp, "Imperialism and Empire in New Kingdom Egypt (c. 1575–1087 B.C.)," in *Imperialism in the Ancient World,* ed. P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 7–57; David Lorton, *The Juridical Terminology of International Relations in Egyptian Texts through Dyn. XVIII* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

20. See R. G. Morkot, "Politics, Economics, and Ideology: Egyptian Imperialism in Nubia," *Wepwawet* 3 (1987): 29–49; Stuart T. Smith, *Askut in Nubia: The Economics and Ideology of Egyptian Imperialism in the Second Millennium B.C.* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1995).

21. See in particular Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation;* and Morris, "The Architecture of Imperialism."

22. For further information on the kingdom of Judah's connections with scribal traditions in Egypt, see Aaron P. Schade, "The Kingdom of Judah: Politics, Prophets, and Scribes in the Late Preexilic Period," in this volume, pages 299–336.

23. Shlomo Yeiven, "An Ostracon from Tel Arad Exhibiting a Combination of Two Scripts," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 55 (1969): 98–102; Yohanan Aharoni, "The Use of Hieratic Numerals in

Hebrew Ostraca and the Shekel Weights," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 184 (1966): 13–19.

24. Orly Goldwasser, "An Egyptian Scribe from Lachish and the Hieratic Tradition of the Hebrew Kingdoms," *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 248–53.

25. Ibid., 251.

26. While it is difficult to tell the difference between hieratic and Demotic numerals, the accompanying text on some of these artifacts containing numerals is clearly hieratic, suggesting that the numerals should also be considered hieratic and not Demotic.

27. For studies on Egyptian script of this period, see Michel Malinine, *Choix des textes juridiques en hiératique anormal et en démotique* (vol. 1, Paris: Champion, 1953; vol. 2, Cairo, IFAO, 1983).

28. In addition to the above, see Shlomo Yeivin, "A Hieratic Ostracon from Tel Arad," *Israel Exploration Journal* 16/3 (1966): 153–59. This lends further support to the possibilities raised by John Gee in his "Two Notes on Egyptian Script," in *Pressing Forward,* 244–47.

29. Goldwasser, "An Egyptian Scribe," 251–52.

30. Ibid., 248.

31. See also John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, "Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters," in *Pressing Forward,* 237–43.

32. Aharoni, "Use of Hieratic Numerals," 19, further remarks that the evidence shows that the use of Egyptian for record keeping was practiced in both Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This is an important insight as it relates to the plates of brass. It has been suggested that these plates were an official document of the northern kingdom of Israel prior to making their way to Jerusalem. See Sidney B. Sperry, "Some Problems of Interest Relating to the Brass Plates," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 185–91; Robert L. Millet, *The Power of the Word: Saving Doctrines from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 20–46.

33. The majority of scholars believe that Nephi's small plates were written using Hebrew vocabulary, syntax, and grammar but some form of Egyptian script. For example, see John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 22–24. Other scholars posit that the

Egyptian language (script, grammar, and vocabulary) was fully employed by Nephi; for example, see Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert,* 16–17.

34. It is wholly possible to interpret "the language of my father" as a unique language system that Lehi used when writing—a sort of personal shorthand. If Lehi as a scribe used or developed a modified language system that employed both Jewish learning and Egyptian language, then it can be said that he was using a "language" to write his records, even though it is not a language that he spoke or typically wrote. This does not mean that the characters, grammar, syntax, or vocabulary that Lehi employed in his writing system were unique to him but simply that he used aspects of the Egyptian language in a unique way with the learning of the Jews. It is also important to note that Nephi states that he is making a record *in* the language of his father as opposed to making a record *of* the language of his father. In both Semitic and Egyptian languages, the word or character typically translated as "in" can also convey the idea of "with" or "by means of." Thus Nephi seems to be stating, at least in this verse, that he is making a record with or by means of his father's language or writing system and not that he is simply making a record of his father's words, as suggested elsewhere. See Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert,* 14.

35. S. Kent Brown, "Nephi's Use of Lehi's Record," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon,* ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3–4, quotes 1 Nephi 1:16–17 and assumes that Nephi abridged his father's record and then recorded the abridgment on the large plates and quoted portions of it on the small plates; however, there is nothing in the text to indicate that the large plates contained Lehi's record in an abridged form. Rather, it may be that the large plates contained a full copy. The phrases "I *make* an abridgement" and "after I have abridged the record of my father then will I . . ." in 1 Nephi 1:17 do not seem to convey any completion of an abridgment up to that time. Since the large plates were created and engraved with Lehi's record prior to the creation of the small plates (see 1 Nephi 19:1–3; cf. 2 Nephi 5:30–31), Nephi would have referred to these plates, as well as the

abridgment (if it were done at that time), as a completed action, describing it with the past tense. Conversely, note his use of the various past tenses when referring to the small plates, which obviously were made prior to his engraving upon them (1 Nephi 1:17: "upon plates which I *have made*"), and also to the large plates and Lehi's record, which was recorded on them (1 Nephi 19:1: "upon the plates which I *made* I *did engraven* the record of my father"). Since an abridgment of Lehi's record does not seem to have been made until after the small plates were made, it is more likely that Nephi simply copied his father's record in full on the large plates (1 Nephi 19:1) and then abridged his father's record for the purpose of recording the "most precious things" on the small plates. See also David E. Sloan, "The Book of Lehi and the Plates of Lehi," in *Pressing Forward,* 59–62.

36. Nibley assumes that Lehi's personal record was written in Egyptian but provides no basis for this assumption. He asserts that Lehi's "language" in 1 Nephi 1:2 refers to Lehi's words as arranged in a speech (as it is used in 1 Nephi 1:15) and not to an actual spoken or written system of communication. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert,* 14. He also concludes that the phrase "which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" modifies Nephi's "record" as opposed to Lehi's "language." Ibid. These two points remove any positive connections between Egyptian language and Lehi's personal record. However, if Lehi's "language" is interpreted as a unique writing system that Lehi employed, as discussed in note 33 above, then it can be concluded that Lehi used Egyptian to some extent in his own personal writings.

37. Moroni referred to the script that he used, calling it "reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32).

38. Assuming that Mormon simply inserted Nephi's small plates intact into the compilation of gold plates that Joseph Smith later received—a point that can be argued from Words of Mormon 1:6, in which Mormon states that he "shall take these [small] plates . . . and *put* them with the remainder of my record" (note that he does not mention "copying" or "abridging" these plates)—then the plates that Joseph Smith received may have been written using two different

scripts. One—containing regular, identifiable features of the Egyptian language contemporary to Lehi—would have been used by Nephi on the small plates. The rest of the record (Mormon and Moroni's abridgment of Nephi's large plates and the plates of Ether) would have been written using the altered script of Mormon's day. A variant reading of the Charles Anthon incident also supports this conclusion. According to Joseph Smith—History 1:64, Martin Harris went to see Anthon with at least two texts—a copy of a text with a translation and a copy of a text that had not yet been translated. For other possibilities, see John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 414–17, 453–55, 496–98. Harris informs us that Anthon declared the translation from the first copied selection better than any other translation he had seen "from the Egyptian." Though Anthon was likely not able to truly check the accuracy of translation, as he pretended (the ability to translate Egyptian was a brand-new scholarly ability in Europe that had not quite made its way to America at this time), it is very likely that he was familiar with the look of Egyptian script. His remark to Martin Harris clearly identifies the source of the translation as being "from the Egyptian"; however, when he was shown the second copied selection, Anthon declared the characters in it to be from a mixed variety of languages, suggesting that perhaps he was trying to ascertain their origins but could not be sure. So perhaps Joseph provided Martin Harris with a text from the small plates of Nephi, which was written using Egyptian script, and a text from Mormon's abridgment of the large plates, which would have been written in an "altered" script.