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An Approach to the Book of Abraham

Hugh Nibley

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Key to Abbreviations

<i>AfO</i>	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
<i>ASAE</i>	<i>Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte</i>
<i>BD</i>	Book of the Dead
<i>BE</i>	Bibliothèque égyptologique
<i>CdE</i>	<i>Chronique d'Égypte</i>
<i>CT</i>	Coffin Text, as appearing in Adriaan de Buck, <i>The Egyptian Coffin Texts</i>
<i>CWHN</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley</i>
<i>IE</i>	<i>Improvement Era</i>
<i>IFAO</i>	Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JEOL</i>	<i>Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genoot- schap (Gezelschap): Ex oriente lux</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSP</i>	Joseph Smith Papyrus (Papyri)
<i>MDAIK</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts—Abteilung Kairo</i>
<i>MIFAO</i>	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire
<i>MMAF</i>	Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mis- sion archéologique française du Caire
<i>PG</i>	J.-P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca</i> , 162 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1857–86)
<i>PL</i>	J.-P. Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina</i> , 221 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1844–64)

- PO François Nau and René Graffin, eds., *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris: Librairie de Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1903–)
 PT Pyramid Texts
 RdE *Revue d'égyptologie*
 REJ *Revue des études juives*
 RT *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et à l'archéologie égyptiennes et assyriennes*
 TB Babylonian Talmud
 UGAÄ Kurt Sethe and Hermann Kees, eds., *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Altertumskunde Ägyptens*, 15 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896–1939)
 Urk Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums
 Wb Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache*
 ZÄS *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

Editor's Introduction

Hugh Nibley and the Joseph Smith Papyri

The title for this work, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*, is an adaptation of one of Hugh Nibley's works on the Book of Mormon, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*.¹ The essays contained herein provide part of Nibley's early approach to the Book of Abraham. What Nibley thought of the studies gathered in this book is reflected in the titles of two essays that he wrote about the Book of Abraham, both of which appeared in *Brigham Young University Studies*, one each in the Winter and Spring 1968 issues. The first was "Prolegomena to Any Study of the Book of Abraham,"² and the second was "Getting Ready to Begin."³ Both of these titles reflect Nibley's understanding that the work on the Book

1. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: The Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957); 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964; reprinted 1976); 3rd ed., CWHN 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988). We wish Nibley had been available to consult on the title of the present volume.

2. Hugh Nibley, "Prolegomena to Any Study of the Book of Abraham," *BYU Studies* 8/2 (1968): 171–78.

3. Hugh Nibley, "Getting Ready to Begin: An Editorial," *BYU Studies* 8/3 (1968): 245–54.

of Abraham was just beginning and that his studies were preliminary and provisional. The English word *prolegomenon* was borrowed directly from a Greek term that refers to something that needs to be said beforehand in a discussion. It was frequently used as a title for Latin introductions to a subject and was particularly popular for English titles in the late nineteenth century, an example being the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*,⁴ a work that heavily influenced Nibley's approach in several of the studies included in this book. These studies reflect Nibley's early attempts to grapple with the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri. They still remain important discussions of things that must be understood before one can profitably discuss or study the Book of Abraham and its relationship to the Joseph Smith Papyri.

Nibley's work on the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Book of Abraham spanned four decades, resulting in an average of one book per decade. This book comprises mainly the preliminary studies of the first decade, the 1960s. First published in the middle of the 1970s, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*—an edition, translation, and largely Egyptological commentary of Joseph Smith Papyri X and XI—marks the second decade.⁵ The 1980s began with the original publication of *Abraham in Egypt*,⁶ revisiting and clarifying what he said on the subject earlier. After that time, up until about the time of his death, Nibley worked on what he came to call *One Eternal Round*. He turned the manuscript over to the editors on 10 October 2003. The

4. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

5. Hugh Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); 2nd ed., CWHN 16 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005).

6. Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); 2nd ed., CWHN 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000).

manuscript filled four rooms in his house and totaled 31 file boxes. Additionally, there were nearly 650 electronic files of drafts of chapters and outlines. On 23 February 2005, the day before he died, it was decided in Nibley's presence that Michael Rhodes would edit and complete Nibley's work on the volume. If the delay seems long (publication is scheduled for 2010), at least the reader has some idea of what Rhodes has been up against.

For Latter-day Saints, Nibley's decades-long work on the Joseph Smith Papyri has made his name almost synonymous with the subject. Nibley's involvement with the papyri is not something that seems intuitive from his publications at the time the papyri were made available to the Church in late 1967. His academic work to that point had concentrated on the Roman world of the fourth century A.D. as well as on early Christianity. A historian trained in Classics is not an obvious choice to elucidate the meaning of a handful of Ptolemaic Egyptian papyri in hieratic. To see why Nibley was the only man for the job, one needs to know something of Nibley's preparation during the decade or so before.

Nibley and Things Egyptian

Hugh Nibley had tried to study Egyptian when he was a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley in Classics and history. The Egyptian expert there at the time was Henry Lutz, who was of the generation of orientalists who studied everything about the ancient Near East and dabbled in all the languages. Lutz and Nibley were not on good terms when Nibley was a student because Lutz did not like Mormons. Nibley took most of his Near Eastern language courses in Hebrew and Arabic from William Popper. Nibley tried to teach himself from the then recent first edition of Alan Gardiner's classic *Egyptian Grammar*.⁷ When teaching at Claremont, he lived next to the widow

7. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

of James H. Breasted, the founder of American Egyptology, and had long talks with her.⁸ He used Egyptian in his dissertation and in the spin-off article, "Sparsiones," which he published during World War II.⁹ He also used it in articles on the Book of Mormon,¹⁰ the origin of political institutions,¹¹ the corrupting influence of rhetoric,¹² and on Book of Mormon names.¹³

In 1946 when Nibley arrived at Brigham Young University, he reported that "I found on the shelves just one Greek book (Homer) and one Latin book (Manilius), and I soon found out that nobody in Provo could read a line of either one."¹⁴ In time Nibley changed both the library and the general knowledge of the ancient world at BYU. The Ancient Studies Room in the library is now appropriately named after him. In 1951, thanks in part to Nibley's army buddy, the rare-book dealer Lucien Goldschmidt, "Brigham Young University acquired both the Greek and Latin *Patrologiae* and the Egyptian collection of the venerable Samuel A. B. Mercer, he who had spearheaded the attack on the Book of

8. Boyd J. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 139–40.

9. Hugh Nibley, "Sparsiones," in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 148–94. The article originally appeared in *Classical Journal* 40/9 (June 1945): 515–43.

10. Hugh Nibley, "The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East," *IE* 51 (1948): 115–20, 122–25; essentially reprinted as "Men of the East," in Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, CWHN 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 25–42.

11. Hugh Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10:1–32. The article originally appeared in *Western Political Quarterly* 2/3 (1949): 328–44.

12. Nibley, "Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else," in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10:269–70. The article originally appeared in *Western Speech* 20/2 (1956): 56–82.

13. Hugh Nibley, "Egypt Revisited," in *Lehi in the Desert*, CWHN 5:308–49.

14. Hugh Nibley, "Nobody to Blame," in *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, CWHN 17 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 133.

Abraham back in 1912.”¹⁵ This made BYU's library at the time the best Egyptian collection west of the Mississippi.

In the 1950s Nibley was at the top of his game, controlling the sources in Classics, history, patristics, and Arabic. One day in the stacks, he received a prompting: he should go back to Berkeley and study Egyptian. In practice this would include both the classical hieroglyphic stage and the later alphabetic stage of the language used by Christians called Coptic. Nibley thought, “The Coptic would be useful, but Egyptian?”¹⁶ Nibley had kept up a punishing reading schedule that would make it difficult to fit another subject in, but about this time, his schedule cleared slightly:

For many years the regular reading of the Old Norse sagas was part of a self-inflicted curriculum to which I faithfully adhered. Then one day in the midst of a typical tale of family feuds and mayhem I suddenly admitted to myself a proposition I had known all along, but out of loyalty to my own cultural heritage had refused to acknowledge: “Let's face it,” I said aloud, “these people are not interesting.” From that day to this [1963] I have not read a word of Icelandic.¹⁷

Nibley applied for a sabbatical and spent the 1959–60 academic year in Berkeley teaching classical rhetoric as a consequence of writing a little essay he called “*Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else*,” which had been published three years earlier.¹⁸ Although he was very skilled at rhetoric, he thoroughly detested the subject, for rhetoric—“the power or faculty or skill of persuading”¹⁹ (in modern times it encompasses the

15. Hugh Nibley, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in *Eloquent Witness*, CWHN 17:15.

16. *Ibid.*, 17.

17. Hugh Nibley, “Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic,” in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10:312.

18. Nibley, “*Victoriosa Loquacitas*,” 243–86.

19. *Ibid.*, 244.

fields of law, advertising, public relations, and the media)—has a corrupting influence: “The worst people took to rhetoric like ducks to water. For rhetoric preached the gospel of success.”²⁰ To the rhetor, “everything must be accommodated to the common judgment and popular intelligence,”²¹ which made him “the slave of a thousand masters”²² and, like Hermodorus, who was banished for excelling at something (“If he must excel, let him go and excel over somebody else!”),²³ real learning was banished as the rhetors turned “from the honest search for truth to the business of cultivating appearances.”²⁴ For Nibley, who eschewed the rhetorical approach, there was nothing to do but sweat at things the hard way, which meant actually trying to learn and master the Egyptian language.

He arrived resigned to study under Lutz only to find the day he arrived that Lutz had retired and was packing up his office. Moving into it was Klaus Baer (with a newly minted Ph.D. from the University of Chicago), whom Nibley described as “a very able and eager young professor.”²⁵ Nibley became Baer’s first and soon only student in Egyptian and Coptic. Baer and Nibley were both fans of hiking in the wilderness and struck up a friendship that would last the rest of Baer’s life. Nibley described the process as being “badgered and bullied six hours a week by a fellow twenty years my junior, who was trying to knock the simple *elements* of Egyptian and Coptic into my head. It was all very elementary: my teacher would say after he had given a particularly brilliant demonstration that any Egyptian child of ten would probably laugh himself sick at our solemn and laborious attempts to reconstruct the language. He knew the

20. Ibid., 253.

21. Ibid., 260, citing Cicero, *De Oratore* II, 36.

22. Nibley, “Victoriosa Loquacitas,” 259, citing Philo, *On Joseph* XIII–XIV (64–68).

23. Nibley recounts the story in “Victoriosa Loquacitas,” 260.

24. Ibid., 246.

25. Nibley, “Intellectual Autobiography,” 17.

whole thing was not on an advanced but a childish level."²⁶ Baer taught Nibley Egyptian and Nibley gave Baer teaching tips (which, for those who attended Nibley's classes, can only seem ironic). Nibley was a full professor when he started studying Egyptian. Baer was still "a young man recently out of graduate school"²⁷ when the Joseph Smith Papyri were first published.

Nibley used the Coptic in his articles on early Christianity but wondered what good the Egyptian could possibly be. Nevertheless, he kept plugging away at learning the language. The Metropolitan Museum of Art always knew that in 1947 they had acquired papyri once owned by Joseph Smith. They made this fact known and even circulated photographs to some Egyptologists and other individuals. Baer recalled that he "saw photographs of them [the Joseph Smith Papyri] for the first time in 1963, I believe, and was asked at the time, on my honor not to tell anyone where they were and to keep the whole thing confidential."²⁸ Baer's memory may have been off a year, because he started asking Nibley questions about the papyri and the Book of Abraham in 1962.²⁹ Nibley answered with his usual candor: "I have always steered clear of the P.G.P. [Pearl of Great Price] which, as you can well imagine, has been a Happy Hunting-Ground for crack-pots."³⁰ Nibley then spent another seven single-spaced pages with references answering Baer's questions about the facsimiles, which Nibley described as "inexcusably long—it was also (necessarily)

26. Nibley, "Nobody to Blame," 133–34.

27. Below, p. 571.

28. Klaus Baer, letter to Jerald Tanner, 13 August 1968, quoted in Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 316.

29. Klaus Baer, letter to Hugh Nibley, 6 July 1962. The original to this letter is in mss. 2721; Hugh W. Nibley Papers; Brigham Young University; L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, boxes 40–41. All citations of the correspondence between Baer and Nibley come from this collection unless published, in which case the published source is also given.

30. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 2 August 1962.

hasty and superficial."³¹ He also answered another question from Baer: "It is commonly believed that the originals of the P.G.P. were destroyed in the Chicago fire, though recent evidence has been claimed that they escaped the fire & are still kicking around somewhere. As a collector's item they would fetch a lovely price."³² In March of 1963, Nibley could report that he was "still plugging away at the Coffin Texts (*absit omen*), and finding them more diverting and far more edifying than crosswords or Agatha Christie."³³ The next year he told Baer, "I have kept steadily plugging away at the Coffin Texts in the evenings (Lord knows why), and think I am getting pretty good at the Nag Hammadi stuff, which I find really significant."³⁴ A year later, he was again reporting to Baer, who by that time had moved from Berkeley to the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago:

I have kept up regular reading in Coptic and by now the Gnostic idiom has become fairly familiar—what it is all about is another question, but at least I have become largely independent of the dictionary and the grammar. With Egyptian it is another matter of course; I plug away but never come out of the jungle. The formulaic nature of the Coffin Texts makes them fairly readable by now, but just the same I never know quite where I am. Fortunately our library makes it possible for one to follow things up, and like everybody else who dabbles in this intriguing field I am prone to have my own theories about everything. Which is all right, I suppose, as long as I keep them to myself.³⁵

In 1966 Nibley used the Coptic sources extensively in an article that appeared in one of the premier journals on early

31. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 17 August 1962. At least three drafts of this letter survive.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 28 March 1963.

34. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 1 June 1964.

35. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 28 September 1965.

Christianity.³⁶ Nibley spent a sabbatical year in 1966–67 at the University of Chicago studying under Baer; Baer's teacher, John A. Wilson; and George R. Hughes.³⁷ One day, Nibley dropped by one of the professor's offices and saw something he was not meant to see—a photograph of the original of Facsimile 1, now known as Joseph Smith Papyrus I, lying on the desk.³⁸ Though Nibley did not know the location, extent, or exact contents of the papyri, he now knew for certain that they existed. He then began preparing in earnest: "Well, of course I had anticipated something like it, and saw that everything would pivot around the Book of the Dead. So I started reading same a year ago, getting through the Nesikhonsu version just when these Metropolitan [Museum of Art] scraps turned up—and that was a good thing since as you know it turned out to be just more of the same."³⁹ Nibley also anticipated the debate that would take place and thus read up on the 1912 attack on the Book of the Abraham. He started writing articles about it and giving talks on the subject, one as early as 14 March 1967.⁴⁰

The "Rediscovery" of the Papyri

While Nibley was in Chicago, something happened from another quarter that changed things even more. As Aziz S. Atiya, both a Copt and a Coptic scholar at the University of Utah, prepared to attend the American Research Center in Egypt meetings in Baltimore, he decided that while he

36. Hugh Nibley, "Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 10–44. The article originally appeared in *Vigiliae Christianae* 20/1 (1966): 1–24.

37. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 307. For Nibley studying under Hughes, see Hugh Nibley, personal communication.

38. Hugh Nibley, personal communication.

39. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 12 February 1968.

40. Louis C. Midgley, comp., "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:xliv.

was on the East Coast, he would do some research at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan; he wrote ahead to make arrangements with the curator of the Department of Egyptian Art, Henry Fischer, "to go to New York afterwards and hope to steal a little of your time for lunch."⁴¹ In writing back, Fischer told Atiya that he was "particularly glad that there will be an opportunity to see you while you are in New York."⁴² Fischer showed Atiya the papyri once owned by Joseph Smith and asked him if he would be willing to act as a go-between with the Church to find out if the Church wanted the papyri back. "We knew," Fischer said, "since he worked in Salt Lake City and was acquainted with leaders of the Mormon Church, that he might very tactfully find out how they felt about it. So we simply informed him about this in confidence, and I think he handled the matter very nicely."⁴³ Atiya did so on his return to Utah. Then the Museum began the nearly year-long process of deaccessioning the papyri. This process was described by Thomas Hoving, the director of the Museum, as follows:

After lengthy discussions with [Theodore] Rousseau [the vice director] and our lawyers, we spelled out for ourselves the specific steps in the disposal process, steps that were more strict than those recommended by the American Association of Museums. I insisted on two appraisals, one by a dealer and another by one of the auction houses. The checks and balances were tough, and there would be one full set for deaccessioning and another for actual disposal. I wanted time for all parties who had a vital role—curators, the administration, and the three committees of

41. Aziz S. Atiya, letter to Henry G. Fischer, 18 October 1966, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 8, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. All citations of the Atiya correspondence come from this collection.

42. Henry G. Fischer, letter to Aziz S. Atiya, 2 November 1966, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 8.

43. Norman Tolk, Lynn Travers, George D. Smith Jr., and F. Charles Graves, "An Interview with Dr. Fischer," *Dialogue* 2/4 (1967): 58.

the board of trustees—to slow down the process, stop it, have another look, and change any direction.

The procedures were ponderous. The curator showed the piece to me [the director] and Ted [Rousseau, the vice director]. We would discuss it. The lawyers would search for legal restrictions. The piece would then be presented at a meeting of all curators for approval. If Rousseau and I concurred, the curator would then present the piece to the Acquisitions Committee. After that the trustees heard Ted's or my recommendation. The committee then voted on whether or not to remove the object from the museum's general catalogue. This was followed by a cooling-off period. If the appraised value was under twenty-five thousand, the Acquisitions Committee vote to get rid of the piece would be final. If more, the piece would have to be taken to the next meeting of either the Executive Committee or the full board, whichever came first.

After all that bureaucratic movement, there was a second cooling-off period. Then further steps were taken to decide how to dispose of the object.⁴⁴

Fischer made periodic reports to Atiya on the progress. Thus on 27 December 1966, he wrote, "the proposal I have made to our Administrative Committee has been endorsed by them. It will be recommended to the Executive Committee of our Board of Trustees at the beginning of February, and the moment that I have their approval, I shall be in touch with you again."⁴⁵ February came with no progress: "I regret to say that my proposal has not yet been endorsed by the Board of Trustees. They considered the matter last night, but referred it to the President and Director-elect for

44. Thomas Hoving, *Making the Mummies Dance: Inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 291–92. Hoving is vague about when these procedures were put in place, and it may have been as late as 1974. Fischer's description makes it sound as though the procedures in 1966–67 were somewhat different.

45. Henry G. Fischer, letter to Aziz S. Atiya, 27 December 1966, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 8.

further deliberation. It seems likely that the documents will be transferred to your Mormon friends eventually, but that is all I am authorized to say."⁴⁶ Summer passed without a word, and Atiya complained: "It has taken me a great deal of time and effort to reach the Church Presidents personally, and I shall feel somewhat belittled if things do not work in the direction which we both had carefully planned."⁴⁷ Although the plan was approved by mid-September, it was difficult to find a time when all the participants would be available to meet together. At the same time, anti-Mormons had also obtained photographs of the papyri and were trying to find out which museum housed them.⁴⁸ On 27 November 1967, the Metropolitan Museum of Art formally gave the papyri to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Fischer was miffed that the newspapers gave credit to Atiya for discovering papyri that were known, albeit not by many. He told Atiya: "Although I was already aware that your version of the 'discovery' of these documents had caused considerable confusion, it was startling to read that you had informed me of their existence. While I have taken pains to avoid any outright contradictions of what you said, I do not see why either I or the other members of my department—past and present—should be put in the position of being ignorant about facts we could not fail to have known."⁴⁹ Fischer was an extremely meticulous scholar and made copious notes on every object in the Museum's Egyptian collection. He might not have known everything about each item in their

46. Henry G. Fischer, letter to Aziz S. Atiya, 15 February 1968, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 8.

47. Aziz S. Atiya, letter to Henry G. Fischer, 10 August 1968, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 8.

48. Wesley P. Walters, letter to Aziz S. Atiya, 23 November 1967, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 12.

49. Henry G. Fischer to Aziz S. Atiya, 2 January 1968, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 1.

vast Egyptian collections, but the idea that he did not know what the Department of Egyptian Art held is incredible.

What the Museum thought they were giving the Church was just another set of scraps from the Book of the Dead since their acquisitions list registered that they had "papyrus fragments of hieratic Books of the Dead, once the property of the Mormon leader Joseph Smith."⁵⁰ Fischer said, "We know for a certainty, however, that they are parts of several copies of the Book of the Dead. The texts probably vary in date, but most of them are pretty late in terms of ancient Egyptian history. . . . There are many, many copies of these texts. Of course, a very beautiful example would be of great interest to us, and we do normally have some fine examples on display. Let's say that these fragments are reduplications in that sense. Such reduplications are of interest to specialists in funerary texts but are not useful to us in terms of our exhibition."⁵¹ The Museum had not bothered to read all the papyri. Nibley had the task of identifying the papyri for the Church and was the first to actually read the documents and recognize that Joseph Smith Papyri X and XI were not copies of the Book of the Dead but a different document, known then as the Book of Breathings. "Let's face it," Baer told a critic, "It was Nibley and not the Egyptologists who noticed that the sensen fragments were not from the Book of the Dead."⁵² Ironically, the Museum rid themselves of one of only two copies in the United States of what is now called the Document of Breathings Made by Isis and what seems to be the earliest manuscript of this text in existence. Fischer's comment is quite revealing about attitudes still widespread among Egyptologists about the Book of the Dead

50. "Review of the Year 1947," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 7/1 (1948): 17.

51. Tolk, Travers, Smith, and Graves, "An Interview with Dr. Fischer," 58.

52. Klaus Baer to Jerald Tanner, 8 August 1968, as quoted in Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 318.

and Egyptian religious texts in general. If it is not beautiful, it is redundant.

A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price

The Church published the images of the papyri within two months after they received them,⁵³ which, at the time, was as fast as they could get issues with the talks from general conference out. Normally, materials in Church magazines took (and still take) much longer to get into print. Nibley, who had been an editor at the *Improvement Era* and had a long history of writing series of articles for the publication,⁵⁴ started a new series of articles on the Book of Abraham months before the papyri were given to the Church. Because Nibley did not know what the exact content of the papyri would be, he titled the series "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," giving himself the latitude to cover whatever he might need to whenever the papyri actually appeared. His articles began to be published in January 1968. Notice of the existence of the papyri was published in February, and Nibley was finally able to discuss the papyri themselves in the eighth installment in September, several months into the publication of the series.

The series was broken into a number of parts, each of which had its own name, and the parts into article installments, each covering about eight pages of triple-columned small print. He started his series with the 1912 episode. The first sections—"Challenge and Response" (January–April 1968), "May We See Your Credentials?" (May–June 1968),

53. Doyle L. Green, "New Light on Joseph Smith's Egyptian Papyri," *IE* 71 (February 1968): 40–40I. The fact that they had to add extra pages shows that the issue was already typeset.

54. "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," "Lehi in the Desert," "The World of the Jaredites," "The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph," "New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study," "The Way of the Church," "There Were Jaredites," "'Mixed Voices': A Study in Book of Mormon Criticism," "Censoring the Joseph Smith Story," and "Since Cumorah" had all appeared as series in the *Improvement Era*.

"Empaneling the Panel" (July 1968), and "Second String" (August 1968)—all deal with Reverend Spalding and his solicited Egyptologists, many of whom belonged to Spalding's sect. "The antics of the Gelehrten of 1912 prove most instructive—it is amazing what they got away with, and at the risk of being negative, I have devoted some articles to the subject."⁵⁵ Baer did not think Nibley's articles were negative, although he thought that since they did not deal with the papyri directly, they were beside the point.⁵⁶ After Nibley had the papyri to work with, he discussed Facsimile 1, the only one of the facsimiles preserved in the papyri that had been given to the Church, and its similarities and differences with other lion-couch scenes in "Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document" (September–December 1968). In 1912, the magisterial E. A. W. Budge had weighed in on the Book of Abraham—he claimed that it was simply stolen from apocryphal sources which, as it turned out, only Budge had access to. Nibley took a tip from that and dealt with about a dozen apocryphal sources on Abraham in "The Unknown Abraham" (January–July 1969). These apocryphal sources parallel the Book of Abraham, but few of them were available in Joseph Smith's day, and even fewer of them were taken seriously. Nibley returned to Facsimile 1 in "Facsimile No. 1, By the Figures" (July–October 1969). Here Nibley takes the reader on a trip with Dick and Jane through an imaginary museum where all the lion-couch scenes have been gathered together in one location. In "Setting the Stage—The World of Abraham" (October 1969–January 1970), Nibley returned to the apocryphal Abraham accounts to show how in them Abraham was offered up on an altar and argued that the conditions described match the historical Abraham's time. Continuing

55. Nibley, letter to Baer, 12 February 1968.

56. Klaus Baer, letter to Hugh Nibley, 10 August 1968. Baer wrote his letter just before the papyri began to make their appearance in Nibley's articles.

the sacrifice theme, Nibley then inserted two thoughtful pieces on "The Sacrifice of Isaac" (March 1970) and "The Sacrifice of Sarah" (April 1970), showing how the various sacrifices of Abraham affected other members of the family. He ended the two-and-a-half-year series with a closing essay called "Conclusion: Taking Stock" (May 1970).

Nibley's correspondence ballooned when the papyri were returned to the Church, as did the correspondence of everyone involved in the transfer of the papyri to the Church. Inquiries came from the curious general public, but mainly from Latter-day Saints and anti-Mormons. Nibley had earlier enumerated the consequences when he discussed the four obvious ways in which those who accepted the gospel might meet the challenge of the learned world:

1. "We can ignore them. This is often a good idea, since the two greatest nuisances in the Church are (a) those who think they know enough to disprove the claims of Joseph Smith, and (b) those who think they know enough to prove them. Actually, nobody knows nearly enough to prove or disprove the gospel."⁵⁷ The Joseph Smith Papyri still attract hucksters who think they can use them to disprove the Church.

2. "We can run away from them. That is, we can claim to be scholars in the full and proper sense of the word and yet refuse to meet other scholars on their own ground."⁵⁸ Usually this takes the form of posing as an expert to Latter-day Saints for fame or gain without engaging the scholarly world outside the Church. "We respect our local *Gelehrten* (learned) for that knowledge and proficiency which they have demonstrated to the world, but when they go out of bounds and attack the Church with specious learning, they invite legitimate censure. They are like dentists who insist on performing delicate brain surgery because that is more

57. Nibley, "Nobody to Blame," 130–31.

58. *Ibid.*, 131.

interesting than filling teeth. Nice for them—but what about their patients?"⁵⁹

3. "We can agree with the world. This has always been the standard procedure with our Mormon intellectuals. What else can they do, since they cannot stand up to the opposition and cannot afford to run away? Nothing is more prevalent among the LDS schoolmen than the illusion that they can enroll themselves in the company of the experts and gain their respect and recognition simply by agreeing with whatever they say. Naturally our poorly equipped scholars tend to panic when anyone threatens to substitute serious discussion for professional camaraderie."⁶⁰

Finally, 4. "We can meet the opposition on their own grounds, publishing in their journals (which are open to all) and presenting the clear evidence of the original sources. This is exactly what we have not been doing."⁶¹ Ironically, Nibley had given up publishing in the academic journals by the time the papyri came out, so none of his Egyptological articles ever appeared in Egyptological venues. His reasoning was as follows: "To be taken seriously one must publish, and I soon found out that publishing in journals is as easy and mechanical as getting grades: I sent out articles to a wide variety of prestigious journals, and they were all printed. So I lost interest. What those people were after is not what I was after. Above all, I could see no point to going through the years marshalling an ever-lengthening array of titles to stand at attention some day at the foot of an obituary."⁶² Still, publishing has its place: "'Publish or perish' is too mechanical and unimaginative a rule to apply everywhere, but it is not too much to insist on the rule, 'Publish or shut up!'"⁶³ "We have fondly supposed through the years that we could

59. *Ibid.*, 139.

60. *Ibid.*, 131–32.

61. *Ibid.*, 132.

62. Nibley, "Intellectual Autobiography," 15–16.

63. Nibley, "Nobody to Blame," 136.

mask our inadequacy behind the awesome façade of titles and degrees; our intellectuals rest their whole case on that very authoritarianism of rank and protocol which they have always affected to despise."⁶⁴ But it is not just Latter-day Saint intellectuals who suffer from authoritarianism.

In 1968, the editors of the fledgling journal *Dialogue* came up with the idea of sending the papyri to various Egyptologists to have them provide translations. Joseph Jeppson, one of the editors, believed he would "set in motion the event which reduced the Book of Abraham to an absurdity."⁶⁵ (Back in 1912, the Reverend F. S. Spalding thought he was doing the same thing. When that did not happen, Jeppson could only "marvel that it is still up and kicking.")⁶⁶ Unaware of Jeppson's motives, Nibley reported this turn of events to Baer with enthusiasm: "Stop the press! At the moment a phone-call from Dick Bushman tells me that Eugene England can report that at last some really competent people have agreed to translate the papyri! O joy. You will be doing an immense service to all concerned."⁶⁷ Baer understood that the Egyptologists were not supposed to contact or collude with each other on their work on the papyri.⁶⁸ Three Egyptologists participated: Richard Parker of Brown University,⁶⁹ and John Wilson⁷⁰ and Klaus Baer of the University of Chicago.⁷¹ Most Egyptologists, including the now retired Henry Lutz and Leonard Lesko of the University of California at Berkeley,

64. *Ibid.*, 132.

65. Joseph Jeppson, "A Context for Change," *Dialogue* 36/3 (2003): ix.

66. *Ibid.*, ix.

67. Nibley, letter to Baer, 12 February 1968.

68. Klaus Baer, letter to Hugh Nibley, 1 August 1968.

69. Richard A. Parker, "The Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 86–88; Richard A. Parker, "The Book of Breathings (Fragment 1, the 'Sensen' Text with Restorations from Louvre Papyrus 3284)," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 98–99.

70. John A. Wilson, "A Summary Report," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 67–85.

71. Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 109–34.

were inundated with inquiries.⁷² Some of the Egyptologists in 1968 were as hasty and superficial as those in 1912.

An Impressive Achievement

Nibley's success in his work with the Joseph Smith Papyri is revealed not only in his preparation and serious treatment of the papyri, but in the sheer quantity of his production. In the course of three years, Nibley published forty-one articles and three books⁷³ and gave what his son recalled as "numerous speeches, and innumerable family home evening lessons that were (I have on excellent authority) boring to teenage girls."⁷⁴ Nibley wrote in such a way that he was able to explain esoteric subjects to an audience to whom those subjects were entirely foreign. As he once noted in a passing nod to his role as a father: "Many years ago this writer learned that if he could not make a thing clear to a five-year-old child it was because he did not really understand it himself. Professional jargon and phraseological mazes are the scholar's refuge from the importunities and the too-searching questions of the layman."⁷⁵ Nibley's mastery of the dialogue format, born of long familiarity with Shakespeare and Plato and exhibited here in the exchanges between Dick, Jane, and Mr. Jones or in the tennis question-and-answer matches, help lead the reader through difficult material in an engaging way. Nibley's string of articles is all the more impressive when one realizes that he produced this phenomenal output on top of his regular research, correspondence, and teaching load.

72. Stan Larson, *The Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 1996), 92–93.

73. Midgley, "Nibley: Bibliography and Register," 1:xliv–xlix.

74. Tom Nibley, "A Look at Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 274.

75. Nibley, "Getting Ready to Begin," 7.

In all of this, Nibley was forced to work with publishing outlets that had difficulty dealing with scholarly material. Nibley continually expressed his frustration about the process of producing his early articles on the subject: "The local editors are very hard to deal with—eager for sensationalism, insisting on doing everything their way, re-writing everything I give them, to make me look even sillier than I have to be."⁷⁶ Some things have not changed. For example, Nibley reported about one of the articles appearing in *BYU Studies*:

I hesitate to send you this business about the "Salt Lake Fragment." I was very sick with the flu & strep and the editor wanted a rush job, so I *dictated* much of it to him from my bed of pain—never again. I didn't even have time to look at the Dictionary, and so have been suffering from misgivings and remorse ever since I let the thing go. Still, they HAD to have something in a hurry to get a scoop. I guess it won't do too much harm what with our small circulation.⁷⁷

We have followed Nibley's misgivings and omitted the piece he discussed as it contributes little and is covered better in other chapters.

Please discount almost everything in the October Era. The editors were determined to eliminate all footnotes henceforward, declaring (I lie not) that they infringed on advertising space. When the Brethren got the notes restored there was considerable confusion. All the illustrations are wrong and (you will notice) the piece of resistance in which we Cf. J.S. Pap. No. 1 with the drawing we think most closely resembles it, is missing entirely. The captions to the illustrations were supplied by the editors without my knowledge. The reason you did not find f.n. 54 in the Sept. issue, was that the article was cut in half

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

(more room for advertising), needless to say, without my approval.⁷⁸

One can appreciate some of what the source checkers and the editors have faced in producing this volume. From the editor's perspective, Nibley has never been one of the easiest authors to work with, and some of the things he blamed on editors were actually his own fault.

The Influence of the Cambridge School

Nibley's articles, though they were certainly not helped by the local editors, have had some of their own problems that Nibley brought to them. The articles were products of their time; therefore it might be useful to know some major points that are dated and why. Nibley was heavily influenced by a group called the Cambridge School, the Myth and Ritual School, or the patternists. This was a movement in Classics fueled by the likes of Jane Harrison, Gilbert Murray, A. B. Cook, and Francis Macdonald Cornford. The Myth and Ritual School tried to explain Greek and Roman myths and dramas as originating in ritual, particularly the ritual killing of the year-king. Much of their work was an extension of James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.⁷⁹ Authors such as Theodor Gaster expanded the work of the Cambridge School into the ancient Near East.⁸⁰ Nibley's doctoral dissertation on "The Roman Games as a Survival of an Archaic Year-Cult" is a patternist work. Unfortunately, Nibley shifted his attention from Classics to Egyptian just when the Cambridge School was being abandoned by classicists. The Book of Abraham begins with a thwarted human sacrifice, and

78. Hugh Nibley, letter to Klaus Baer, 4 October 1968.

79. James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890). I quote from the 1981 reprint edition.

80. Theodor Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961). Gaster also brought out a new edition of Frazer's *Golden Bough* (New York: Criterion Books, 1959) with his own additional notes.

human sacrifice is the beginning premise of Frazer's *Golden Bough*.⁸¹ So when Nibley sought for an explanation of the human sacrifice, he reached for the one case in which ritual human sacrifice was thought by Egyptologists of the 1960s to be practiced, the *sed*-festival. The influence of the patternists is reflected in Nibley's discussion of the Egyptian *sed*-festival. His discussion echoes the opinions of Egyptologists on the *sed*-festival at the time he wrote it. The Egyptologists too had been overly influenced by Frazer's *Golden Bough*; Frazer certainly used Egypt as an example of the ritual sacrifice of a substitute king⁸² and was cited by the Egyptologist Margaret Murray in 1914 in connection with her argument that the *sed*-festival involved the ritual slaughter of the king.⁸³ This view became very dated after Erik Hornung and Elisabeth Staehelin's 1974 study of the *sed*-festival failed to find any evidence of human sacrifice in association with the festival.⁸⁴ In this case, Nibley was asking the right questions and answering them with the best evidence and theories available at the time. Latter-day Saint Egyptologists have more recently moved to explanations of human sacrifice from Egypt for which there is now secure legal, histori-

81. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 1:2: "In this sacred grove [at Nemi in Italy] there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day and probably far into the night a strange figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him he held the office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier."

82. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, 1:231, 237, 306–18.

83. M. A. Murray, "Evidence for the Custom of Killing the King in Ancient Egypt," *Man* 14 (1914): 17–23.

84. Erik Hornung and Elisabeth Staehelin, *Studien zum Sedfest, Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 1 (Basel: Ägyptologisches Seminar der Universität Basel, 1974).

cal, ritual, and archaeological evidence. This is one case in which Nibley's argument is definitely dated.

Another example of the preliminary aspects of Nibley's investigation may be found in some of his long arguments about Facsimile 1. Nibley examined the original papyri closely over a long period of time, perhaps longer and more carefully than anyone else ever has, but he did not catch everything, and his predilections sometimes led him astray. For example, Nibley was influenced by an article written by the Egyptologist Adriaan de Buck on Coffin Text 312, the antecedent to Book of the Dead 78,⁸⁵ in which de Buck proposed that the piece was a play and that there was a true and a false Horus messenger confronting the double-lion god Ruty. Because Nibley was in favor of the Myth and Ritual School, and because of his extensive early work in drama, de Buck's interpretation appealed to Nibley. This interpretation also dominated the Egyptologist R. O. Faulkner's translation of the text⁸⁶ and is still used by Jan Assmann,⁸⁷ so Nibley was and still is in good company. From de Buck, Nibley got the idea that the falcon served as a messenger for the ancient Egyptians and thus to Nibley it made the greatest sense to see figure 1 in Facsimile 1 as a bird with a bird's head. That there might be other forms of messengers in ancient Egypt and that the head on the bird did not need to be a bird are not entertained in his writings. Nibley's interpretation of the head on figure 1 has not stood the test of time particularly well.

Although some of Nibley's treatment of individual topics may be dated, he raises many important points, makes

85. Adriaan de Buck, "The Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78," *JEA* 35 (1949): 87–97.

86. R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1973), 1:229–33.

87. Jan Assmann and Andrea Kucharek, *Ägyptische Religion: Totenliturgie* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2008), 421–27, 828–29.

many perceptive observations, and advances many crucial arguments—his work is not simply a museum piece. Nibley often saw and explained clearly issues crucial to an understanding of the Joseph Smith Papyri. No one is in a position to discuss the papyri or their relationship with the Book of Abraham who has not come to grips with Nibley's treatment of the issues. As Baer told a critic who wanted to dismiss Nibley:

Nibley should not be underestimated. He is not a fully trained Egyptologist, but he knows a great deal in a great many fields, writes well, and is a skilled debater. His articles in [the *Improvement*] *Era* hit very close to home if you know something about the field. It is, unfortunately, true that Egyptologists have behaved like pompous asses with a claim to infallibility, that they have restricted themselves to ill-considered snap judgments in dealing with Mormons that they never would have ventured to produce if there had been a risk of critical examination by their colleagues, evaded problems, and insisted that the layman accept their opinions without question.⁸⁸

Some things have not changed.

This Collection

The essays gathered in this collection mainly reflect articles that Nibley produced beginning in 1968 and running through the early 1970s up to the first publication of *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*. They are gathered from Latter-day Saint periodicals, and Nibley published something on the subject in all of the major ones of the time: the *Improvement Era*, the *Ensign*, *Brigham Young University Studies*, *Dialogue*, and *Sunstone*. The most significant of these early writings are included here. The bulk of the collection comes from a two-and-one-half-year series in

88. Klaus Baer, letter to Jerald Tanner, 3 August 1968, quoted in Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 322.

the *Improvement Era* entitled "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price." For this volume, we have included all the articles that have not appeared elsewhere in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, combining various parts into single chapters and leaving them under their individual titles. The beginning sections, "Empaneling the Panel," "Second String," "The Appeal to Authority," and "May We See Your Credentials"—which deal with the 1912 attack on the Book of Abraham by Reverend F. S. Spalding and his panel of experts—were incorporated, according to Nibley's wishes, in the second edition of *Abraham in Egypt*,⁸⁹ as were the later sections "Setting the Stage—The World of Abraham,"⁹⁰ "The Sacrifice of Isaac,"⁹¹ and "The Sacrifice of Sarah."⁹²

We have included "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham," a response Nibley gave to a young graduate student in Egyptology who has since left the field.⁹³ In what was doubtless the only serious piece of scholarship this young man ever produced, the graduate student provided one of the first considered interactions with Nibley's discussions in "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price." As is often the case, he pointed out many of Nibley's errors while making several of his own. Nibley, by then emeritus, tried to go easy on the young man.

Also included in this volume is Nibley's foundational study of what he called the Kirtland Egyptian Papers.⁹⁴ This still inadequately published group of manuscripts is often

89. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, CWHN 14:86–162. See the appendix of this volume, CWHN 18:600–602, for the various articles in the series "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" and where they appear in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*.

90. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, CWHN 14:163–218.

91. *Ibid.*, 319–42.

92. *Ibid.*, 343–81.

93. See below, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," CWHN 18:493–501.

94. See below, "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," CWHN 18:502–68.

claimed by critics to be some sort of smoking gun proving that Joseph Smith produced the Book of Abraham by means of a process that (as they are at great pains to show) no one (including Joseph Smith) could possibly use to produce a coherent text. Nibley shows that their theories often rest on a misunderstanding of the material and the historical situation around its production. Although Nibley, like the critics, assumes that all the manuscripts were produced at the same time, this assumption is dubious. Nevertheless, Nibley's work is foundational to understanding these manuscripts, and any treatment of them that does not take his work into account is deficient.

Nibley was publishing in a number of venues on material that was new at the time because all the editors wanted something authoritative on the subject for their readers; he found himself repeating a great deal, and so several of the essays published in these sources repeat what is said elsewhere. Since Nibley, when he was alive, expressed concern that collections of his work on a subject essentially repeated the same thing, we have selected the most significant of these essays and eliminated those that merely repeat what is said better elsewhere—this is, after all, the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* and not the *Comprehensive Works of Hugh Nibley*. We have attempted to organize the materials into some semblance of coherence, although the volume lacks the overall guiding mind that Nibley would have given it.

Books do not just happen. They are conscious, intentional acts and often reflect, as in this case, the concerted effort of many behind the scenes. While those involved in the publication of this volume have tried to make it as accurate as possible, we, like Nibley, are human and may have made mistakes. We have despaired, for example, of harmonizing all the various spellings of ancient personal and place-names used by Nibley and his sources. Still, the volume has been much improved through the efforts of several individuals: Shirley Ricks's editing, as usual, has been top-notch and has

meticulously kept track of innumerable details through production. Jacob Rawlins has typeset and improved the look of the volume. Alison Coutts, the director of publications at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, has performed numerous essential tasks necessary for the publication of the volume. Michael Lyon has lovingly managed the illustrations, which have been redone to improve their quality and legibility. Brian Hauglid has checked the still-unpublished manuscripts among the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and done much of the editorial work on chapter 11. Paula Hicken obtained permissions and directed the source checking and proofreading. Suzanne Brady at Deseret Book managed the final details of bringing the book into print. The following have helped with reading, source checking, and proofreading: Caitlyn Ainge, Brenna Anderson, Lauren Barlow, Daniel Becerra, M. Gerald Bradford, Chris Brinkerhoff, Jordan Hanavan, Paul Y. Hoskisson, Jacob Johnson, Sam Keele, Phyllis Nibley, Linda Sheffield, Marisa Snyder, Sandra Thorne, John W. Welch, Landon Wiest, and Charlotte Wood.

John Gee



1

As Things Stand at the Moment

The most widely syndicated article on the Joseph Smith Papyri to appear to date is a typical performance of Mr. Wallace Turner which first appeared in the *New York Times* of 15 July 1968. It is one of those high-flown insinuating reports breathing an aloof superiority, studiously evasive of anything specific. First we are told that there has been “bitter wrangling among intellectuals of the Mormon world.” If an intellectual is anybody willing to argue, what is meant by the “Mormon world”? If the Church is meant, why not say Church? “The attack,” Mr. Turner continues, “has come from within the Mormon community.” Again, why “community” instead of “Church”? Because, to be sure, there has been no attack and no wrangling whatever within the Church. Later on Mr. Turner mentions “two heretics notorious to the church establishment” (a term dear to the heart of Mr. Turner), unaware that there are no heretics in a church where every member is supposed to have his own personal, nontransferable testimony, and that to be a heretic in any church one must be a member: the two in question are not members of the Mormon Church and were not members at the time they are supposed to have attacked from “within

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the community.”¹ A favorite means of lending authority to attacks on the Mormon Church has ever been the announcement that the attacker was himself once a good and active Mormon. But since the only qualification for such a title is one’s demonstrated capacity to remain true and faithful to the end, no backslider can claim it. Mr. Turner’s problem is to tell the world that the question of the papyri has split the Mormons, without actually saying so—an assignment for which he is peculiarly well-fitted.

“There is no question,” writes the reporter, “that Smith worked from these papyri; the question is whether his writings based on them were actual translations or pure fabrication.”² We know that he worked *with* the papyri, but what can working *from* them possibly mean? Or what can be meant by “his writings *based* on them”? Were they actual translations? Then why not say so? How could a very meaningful text be both derived from and based on something that makes no sense at all? A vivid flashback to 1912 is the skillfully garbled statement that Joseph Smith in the Pearl of Great Price presents “hand-drawn copies of three groups of hieroglyphs, together with his translation of them.”³ There were not three groups of hieroglyphs and no translations of hieroglyphs. Later we are told that the Prophet “also had work papers, in which it seemed that sections of the Book of Abraham were attributed to specific symbols.” Again the escape word is “seemed.” “Also had work papers”? What were the other papers? If the “work papers” were Smith’s, why are none of them in his handwriting? Again, we learn that the eleven newly found documents were “involved in the production of the Book of Abraham.” Just how is one to understand “involved”? Some of the eleven documents have no visible relationship whatever to the Book of Abra-

1. Wallace Turner, “Papyri Spur Mormon Debate over Basis for Discrimination against Negroes,” *New York Times*, 15 July 1968.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

ham, and what the connection of the others is remains to be determined. Joseph Smith, according to the two “heretics” as quoted by Mr. Turner, “apparently translated many English words from each Egyptian character.” But there is no place for an equivocal “apparently” in the vaunted rigor of their demonstration; “apparently” leaves the door open to the many objections that arise and the swarm of questions that must be answered before the pair can announce for the final time their longed-for “Fall of the Book of Abraham.”

One threat to the Mormons of these findings, according to Mr. Turner, who obligingly does the Mormons’ thinking for them, is that they “could turn sociological by undermining the scriptural basis for the Mormons’ discrimination against Negroes.”⁴ The scriptural basis of Mormon belief rests wholly on inspired English translations of the scriptures—not a single original version of any holy book is known to exist anywhere in the world today, and scholars have never been able to agree on what the ancient texts they do possess are trying to convey. In such a state of things nothing can take the place of an inspired translation as far as the LDS members are concerned, and no study of Egyptian or any other ancient texts could ever “undermine the scriptural basis” for any Mormon belief.

Whatever translation comes by the gift and power of God is certainly no translation in the ordinary sense, and Joseph Smith never put forth the translation of the Book of Abraham as an exercise in conventional scholarship. But when Mr. Turner concludes his article with our statement that “Today nobody claims that Joseph Smith got his information through ordinary scholarly channels,”⁵ he uses it as a punch line to make it sound like a declaration that the Mormons have abandoned a previously held belief, than which nothing could be farther from the mark. In every case in which he has produced a translation, Joseph Smith

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

has made it clear that his inspiration is by no means bound to any ancient text but is free to take wings at any time. To insist, as the critics do, that “translation” may be understood only in the sense in which they choose to understand it, while the Prophet clearly demonstrates that he intends it to be taken in a very different sense, is to make up the rules of the game one is playing as well as being the umpire. To stick to the same specifications would brand either Pope’s or Chapman’s or Rouse’s *Iliad*, or all three of them, fraudulent, so wide is their range.

Book of Abraham Makes Good Sense

We agree with Mr. Turner that there is a significant parallel between the case of the Book of Abraham and that of the Book of Mormon. Since the beginning the world has been asked to dismiss both books as impostures not because of what is in them, but because of the strange way in which each was supposed to have been produced. It is as if someone pretending to be a cook but without credentials or experience were to turn out a banquet worthy of the *cordon bleu* only to be condemned unanimously by the cooking profession because he had not cooked according to their rules. Whether the *sensen* papyrus or the Kirtland Egyptian Papers (hereafter cited as KEP)⁶ makes sense or not, the Book of Abraham makes very good sense and, like the Book of Mormon, can thoroughly be tested in the light of a wealth of ancient documents. We have more than enough viable material to put the Prophet to the test where he specifically claims revelation without having to rummage in dubious papers which were never meant to be included among inspired writings.

6. [In this article, Nibley identified this set of papers as the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar, which is the name the Tanners gave to them; however, to accord with Nibley’s later study, “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 350–99; reprinted in this volume, *CWHN* 18:502–68, we have chosen to identify them as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers—eds.]

Year in and year out one must repeat the old refrain that the arguments of the world against the inspired scriptures of the Latter-day Saints collapse because they rest on a completely false idea of the Mormon conception of revelation. Can a book with a misspelled word in it possibly be the product of divine revelation? If not, says the Mormon, there never was a divinely inspired book. Can a man who makes mistakes and learns by trial and error like other people possibly be a prophet? If not, we reply, then no man ever was a prophet. Can one who doubts and speculates and meditates about a thing later receive revelation about it? He is more apt to receive revelation, we say, than one who does not. We know that Joseph Smith studied reports about the ancient civilizations of central America and speculated about them with lively interest—but *that was after the Book of Mormon appeared*. There is every indication that the free-wheeling conjectures of the KEP were made after the Book of Abraham was completed, so that even the irrelevant argument of the book's dubious documentary background remains unfounded.

Two basic questions that confront us in evaluating the Pearl of Great Price are (1) Did the Egyptians really have something? and (2) Did Joseph Smith really have something on the Egyptians? Both propositions have been relegated to the limbo of superstitious nonsense by all respectable scholars. But the first proposition has come in for some serious rethinking by quite sober Egyptologists and other scientists, who tell us that the Egyptians may really have had something after all. And what they had turns out to be something that suspiciously resembles what Joseph Smith said they had. Which puts us in the way of answering our second question, which is not whether Smith was inspired or not, but whether his writings may be checked against those of the real world of Abraham. The real work has not even begun.

From the beginning there has been considerable misunderstanding about the exact nature of the Joseph Smith

Papyri. If the Mormons really believed them to be the very handwriting of the patriarch Abraham, they would have made a good deal of that in their preaching and missionary work; they would have made frantic efforts to keep them in their possession; they would have guarded them like the golden plates; and they most certainly would have done everything to get them back from Emma and William Smith. But the Saints never played up the idea of having autographic writings of Abraham, preferring to understand the term *writings of Abraham* in the broad and familiar sense in which the term is applied to other scriptures, like the writings of Moses, John, or Ether, none of which pretend to be autographic.⁷ In 1912 their spokesmen were quite outspoken: "There is no evidence that Abraham himself wrote in his own hand any part of the papyri found with the mummies, certainly not the hypocephalus."⁸ They looked at the Church historian's statement that "As the work proceeded, he [Joseph Smith] became convinced that one of the rolls of papyrus contained a copy of a book written by Abraham"⁹ and made capital of the idea that Abraham was the very scribe who wrote the papyri, for that made their debunking assignment very easy, in view of the late provenance of the documents.¹⁰

7. Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *IE* 71 (February 1968): 20–21; reprinted in this volume, *CWHN* 18:63–65.

8. Osborn J. P. Widtsoe, "The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding," *IE* 16 (April 1913): 600.

9. J. M. Sjodahl, "A Final Word," *IE* 16 (September 1913): 1103. "Some of the Latter-day Saints seem to have believed that the papyri in question represented the actual autographic work of Abraham and Joseph—that the hand of Abraham had pressed the very papyrus handled by Joseph Smith. Such a conclusion, however, does not seem to be involved in the text of Smith's account, and need not be considered authoritative." See Robert C. Webb, "A Critical Examination of the Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham," *IE* 16 (March 1913): 440.

10. Pointed out by Widtsoe, "The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding," 599, and Robert C. Webb, "Truth Seeking: Its Symptoms and After Effects," *IE* 16 (September 1913): 1090.

But the Mormons have never displayed any particular reverence or awe for the facsimiles. Whereas the editing of the standard works has ever been an object of meticulous care, even a cursory examination of successive reproductions of the plates of the Book of Abraham shows the work to be amazingly slapdash and slipshod, as if a mere approximation of the general idea were quite enough to satisfy the Brethren.¹¹ Though the explanations that accompany the facsimiles have the authority of inspiration, we are explicitly told that the ancient drawings themselves were nothing but purely human attempts to illustrate what Abraham was talking about: “That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning” (Abraham 1:14). No claim of inspiration is made for the drawings, which used the peculiar conventions and symbols of one particular culture: “as understood by the Egyptians . . . but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau” (Fac. 1, figs. 11–12 explanation), etc. Even the cosmic splendors of Facsimile 2 purport to be nothing but the conventional treatment of certain themes in the traditional symbolic idiom of a people denied the priesthood. There is nothing particularly holy about them.

By the Hand of Abraham

When the Book of Abraham was first published, being personally edited by Joseph Smith, it was designated by him as “A translation of some ancient Records . . . , from the Catacombs of Egypt, *purporting* to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, *called* the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.”¹² Note that Smith himself designates the writings only as “some ancient Records,” then he tells us what they are purported to be, and finally

11. See our comments in “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” *IE* 71 (April 1968): 65; reprinted in this volume, *CWHN* 18:84–86.

12. *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1842): 704 (emphasis added).

gives us the *title* of the document. Here “written by his own hand” is not Joseph Smith’s verdict but part of the original title of the document translated. Such long explanatory titles are characteristic of Egyptian writings.¹³

Two important and peculiar aspects of ancient authorship must be considered when we are told that a writing is by the hand of Abraham or anybody else. One is that according to Egyptian and Hebrew thinking any copy of a book originally written by Abraham would be regarded and designated as the very work of his hand forever after, no matter how many reproductions had been made and handed down through the years. The other is that no matter who did the writing originally, if it was Abraham who commissioned or directed the work, he would take the credit for the actual writing of the document, whether he penned it or not.

As to the first point, when a holy book (usually a leather roll) grew old and worn out from handling, it was not destroyed but *renewed*. Important writings were immortal—for the Egyptians they were “the divine words,” for the Jews the very letters were holy and indestructible, being the word of God. The wearing out of a particular copy of scripture therefore in no way brought the life of the book to a close—it could not perish. In Egypt it was simply renewed (*m3.w, sm3.w*) “fairer than before,” and so continued its life to the next renewal. Thus we are told at the beginning of what some have claimed to be the oldest writing in the world, “His Majesty wrote this book down anew. . . . His Majesty discovered it as a work of the Ancestors, but eaten by worms. . . . So His Majesty wrote it down from the beginning, so that it is more

13. Thus a work we happen to be studying at the moment has the title: “Translation of the Secrets of the Ritual for repelling the Raging One, made in the Temple of Osiris of Abydos, to keep Seth away . . . from Osiris. . . . This book will protect against the enemies of Osiris for seven days, and is beneficial to whoever recites it,” in Siegfried Schott, *Urkunden Mythologischen Inhalts*, *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums* 6.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929), 61. [The title was abbreviated by Nibley—eds.]

beautiful than it was before.”¹⁴ It is not a case of the old book’s being replaced by a new one, but of the original book itself continuing its existence in a rejuvenated state. No people were more hypnotized by the idea of a renewal of lives than the Egyptians—not a succession of lives or a line of descent, but the actual revival and rejuvenation of a single life.

Even the copyist who puts his name in a colophon does so not so much as publicity for himself as to vouch for the faithful transmission of the original book; his being “trustworthy (*iqr*) of fingers”—that is, a reliable copyist—is the reader’s assurance that he has the original text before him. An Egyptian document, Joachim Spiegel observes, is like the print of an etching, which is not only a work of art in its own right but “can lay claim equally well to being the original . . . regardless of whether the individual copies turn out well or ill.” Because he thinks in terms of types, according to Spiegel, for the Egyptian “*there is no essential difference between an original and a copy*. For as they understand it, all pictures are but reproductions of an ideal original.”¹⁵ Being itself but a copy of “an ideal original,” the first writing of a document enjoys no special superiority over later copies.¹⁶ Thus an Egyptian who handed us a writing or drawing of Abraham’s would be nonplussed if we asked him whether Abraham really made it. Who else?

This concept was equally at home in Israel. An interesting passage from the book of *Jubilees* recounts that Joseph, while living in Egypt, used to read to his sons “the words which Jacob, his father, used to read from amongst the words of

14. Kurt Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen: Das “Denkmal memphitischer Theologie” der Schabakostein des Britischen Museums*, UGAÄ 10.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1928), 20; see Hugh Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, CWHN 12 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 180–81, fig. 43.

15. Joachim Spiegel, “Typus und Gestalt in der ägyptischen Kunst,” *MDAIK* 9 (1940): 160.

16. *Ibid.*

Abraham.”¹⁷ Here is a clear statement that “the words of Abraham” were handed down in written form from generation to generation and were the subject of serious study in Joseph’s Egyptian family circle. The same source informs us that when Joseph died and was buried in Canaan, “he gave all his books and the books of his fathers to Levi his son that he might preserve them and *renew* them for his children until this day.”¹⁸ Here “the books of the fathers,” including “the words of Abraham,” have been preserved for later generations by a process of renewal.

In this there is no thought of the making of a new book by a new hand. It was a strict rule in Israel that no one, not even the most learned rabbi, should ever write down so much as a single letter of the Bible from memory: always the text must be copied letter by letter from another text that had been copied in the same way, thereby eliminating the danger of any man’s adding, subtracting, or changing so much as a single jot in the text. It was not a rewriting but a process as mechanical as photography, an exact visual reproduction, so that no matter how many times the book had been passed from hand to hand, it was always the original text that was before one. To make the illusion complete, the old worn-out copy was never kept around—the renewed book *was* the original; the old one was not reused, cut up, burned or even buried, for a writing containing the ineffable name of God could not be destroyed. It simply disappeared without trace; with the completion of the process of rejuvenation, the old corruptible shell ceased to exist. It was quietly and unobtrusively walled up in a sacred building, in a *genizah* whose very existence was ignored by the congregation.¹⁹ Thus the holy book continued its life, ageless and

17. *Jubilees* 39:6.

18. *Ibid.*, 45:16 (emphasis added).

19. Ismar Elbogen, “Genisa,” in *Jüdisches Lexikon*, 4 vols. (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1928), 2:1014–15; Elkan N. Adler, “Genizah,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1925), 5:612–13.

unchangeable, through the centuries, with never a thought of its being anything but the sacred original.

But “written by his own hand”? This brings us to the other interesting concept. Let us recall that one of the oldest of Egyptian writings, the so-called Shabako Stone,²⁰ begins with the announcement that “His Majesty wrote this book down anew.” This, Professor Kurt Sethe obligingly explains, is “normal Egyptian usage to express the idea that the King ordered a copy to be made.”²¹ Yet it clearly states that the king himself wrote it. Thus when the son of King Snefru says of his own inscription at Meidum, “It was he who made his gods in [such] a writing [that] it cannot be effaced,”²² the statement is so straightforward that even such a student as W. Stevenson Smith takes it to mean that the prince himself actually did the writing. And what could be more natural than for a professional scribe to make an inscription: “It was her husband, the Scribe of the Royal Scroll, Nebwy, who made this inscription”?²³ Or when a noble announces that he made his father’s tomb, why should we not take him at his word? It depends on how the word is to be understood. Professor John Wilson in all these cases holds that the person who claims to have done

20. [At the time Nibley wrote this, Egyptologists thought it was the oldest; in 1973, Friedrich Junge proved that it was not and that it could not be earlier than the Nineteenth Dynasty (Junge dated it to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty). See Junge, “Zur Fehldatierung des sog. Denkmals memphitischer Theologie oder der Beitrag der ägyptischen Theologie zur Geistesgeschichte der Spätzeit,” *MDAIK* 19 (1973): 195–204. Since BYU’s subscription to the *MDAIK* did not extend past World War II when the journal went on hiatus and the library never subscribed to it after the journal revived, Nibley never learned about Junge’s work and continued to follow and teach the older view to the end of his life—eds.]

21. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte*, 20.

22. John A. Wilson, “The Artist of the Egyptian Old Kingdom,” *JNES* 6 (1947): 239; a review of some phases of W. Stevenson Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946).

23. Wilson, “Artist of the Egyptian Old Kingdom,” 240, from a stela of the woman Irit (*Urk* I, 119).

the work does so “in the sense that he commissioned and paid for it.”²⁴ The noble who has writing or carving done is always given full credit for its actual execution; such claims of zealous craftsmanship “have loftily ignored the artist,” writes Wilson. “It was the noble who ‘made’ or ‘decorated’ his tomb,” though one noble of the Old Kingdom breaks down enough to show us how these claims were understood: “I made this for my old father. . . . I had the Sculptor Itju make (it).”²⁵ Dr. Wilson cites a number of cases in which men claim to have “made” their father’s tombs, one of them specifically stating that he did so “while his arm [was] (still) strong” —with his own hand!²⁶

Credit for actually writing the inscription of the famous Metternich Stela is claimed by “the prophetess of Nebwen, Nest-Amun, daughter of the Prophet of Nebwen and Scribe of the Inundation, ‘Ankh-Psantik,’” who states that she “renewed (*sm3.w*) this book [there it is again!] after she had found it removed from the house of Osiris-Mnevis, so that her name might be preserved.”²⁷ The inscription then shifts to the masculine gender as if the scribe were really a man, leading to considerable dispute among the experts as to just who gets the credit. Certain it is that the lady boasts of having given an ancient book a new lease on life, even though her hand may never have touched a pen.²⁸

Nest-Amun hoped to preserve her name by attaching it to a book, and in a study M. A. Korostovtsev notes that “for an Egyptian to attach his name to a written work was an infallible means of passing it down through the centuries.”²⁹ That may be one reason why Abraham chose the peculiar

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 243.

26. Ibid., 240.

27. Constantin E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1956), 48 (Spruch VIII); see below, p. 436, fig. 57.

28. Ibid., 49.

29. Dimitri Meeks, review of *Pistsy Drevnevo Egipta*, by M. A. Korostovtsev, *RdE* 19 (1967): 191.

Egyptian medium he did for the transmission of his record—or at least why it has reached us only in this form. Indeed Theodor Böhl observed that the one chance the original patriarchal literature would ever have of surviving would be to have it written down on Egyptian papyrus.³⁰ Scribes liked to have their names preserved, too, and the practice of adding copyists' names in colophons, Korostovtsev points out, could easily lead in later times to attributing the wrong authorship to a work. But whoever is credited with the authorship of a book remains its unique author, alone responsible for its existence in whatever form.

So when we read "The Book of Abraham, written by his own hand upon papyrus," we are to understand, as the Mormons always have, that this book no matter how often "renewed" is still the writing of Abraham and no one else; for he commissioned it or "according to the accepted Egyptian expression" wrote it himself—with his own hand. And when Abraham tells us, "That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning," we do not need to imagine the patriarch himself personally drawing the very sketches we have before us. In fact, the remark may well be the insertion of a later scribe. To the Egyptian or Hebrew mind the sketches could be twenty-seventh hand and still be the authentic originals, as long as Abraham originally ordered them and put his name to them. Still less are we to see in these helpful little diagrams anything pretending to be a supernatural or sacrosanct performance.

The publication of the original Joseph Smith Papyri, if it has done nothing else, has put an end to one of the most ridiculous games ever played. In this game the experts were wildly cheered as they scored point after point against Joseph Smith (they being both the judges and the scorekeepers), with the strict understanding that under no circumstances

30. Theodor Böhl, "Babel und Bibel," *JEOL* (1963): 134–35.

could the Prophet be permitted ever to score a point against them. Indeed our non-Mormon friends still feel morally and intellectually obligated never to admit even for the sake of argument that Joseph Smith could possibly be right in the sense in which he claimed to be right. It is an unassailable axiom of the learned that no matter how long the game goes on or how many matches are played, Smith's score must always be zero. While the Mormons have freely if not enthusiastically acknowledged the fallibility of the Prophet and have actually conceded points to the opposition, there has never been any thought of the challengers' ever conceding a point to them. It was not just an absurdly one-sided game; it was no game at all, though the players went on solemnly pretending to be testing and exploring a proposition that they would not even consider.

Tennis, Anyone?

But now original Egyptian documents invite us to a more serious game. The scholars no longer dodge the issues or flaunt their credentials. Our first article to take serious issue with the experts on tangible grounds met with immediate and gratifying response.³¹ The letters have not been complimentary, but they have been better than that—constructive. Those who promptly batted our balls back across the net have not been carping or picayune in their objections, but eminently reasonable and well informed. After the giants of 1912 passed away, the field was left to zealous amateurs whose antics have been dictated by hysterical partisanship and an uncontrollable desire to shine (with what a splash some of them now announce that they have actually got their names into the *New York Times*); such human weakness is pardonable if they only wouldn't carry it so far—throwing confetti, leaping over the net, and forming a victory parade

31. Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *IE* 71 (September 1968): 66–80; reprinted in this volume, *CWHN* 18:115–39.

every time their team scores a point, or with equal fervor blowing the whistle, calling a fault, halting play, and declaring the game forfeit every time they think their opponents have muffed a play. After that it is a relief to be dealing with sensible people. Let us see how the game goes now.

IT BEGAN WITH JOSEPH SMITH SERVING THE BALL: Here are things, he said referring to the papyri, which go back to Abraham.

THE OPPOSITION RETURNED THE BALL: Nothing of the sort! These are perfectly ordinary funerary motifs for which thousands of identical examples could be supplied.

WE RETURN IT TO THEM: You are overlooking a number of oddities in the papyri which definitely are not ordinary.

AND THEY RETURN IT TO US: There are all sorts of irregularities in Egyptian drawings; funerary papyri are full of such peculiarities.

AND WE: That fact does not impugn the oddities in these particular documents, but rather substantiates them. These are not exactly like any other documents, though that was precisely your contention.

AND THEY: No. That was the contention of the scholars of 1912; you are fighting a straw man. Students today do not take such extreme views.

WE: True enough, but the public and the Mormons do not know that. The men of 1912 are straw men only if we have revived them. But we have not done that; that is the work of busy propagandists in our midst who still have most people believing that the men of 1912 spoke the final word. We cannot be beating a dead horse if the horse is far from dead.

THEY: But you say the experts deliberately overlooked important oddities like the clothing and hand position of the figure on the couch. Professor Parker mentioned the hands, so you are wrong.

WE: He mentioned them only to deny that they exist. He will not even consider the hands as such, and that is the only mention they ever get. As to the clothing, the question

is not who drew it but the mere fact that it is there. We find it strange that none of the experts ever mentioned that undeniable and striking fact.

THEY: You have your silences too. You mention only three hypotheses to account for the irregularities in the papyri. You have not considered all the possibilities.

WE: We did not say that only three hypotheses were possible, but only that three and no more were put forth by the experts. We have always shared Popper's opinion that there is always an infinity of logically possible solutions to every problem. If you have another theory, it's your serve.

THEY: So it is. Here goes: "One thing we learn from the original papyri that no one would have guessed before 1967 is that the Pearl of Great Price woodcuts *include restorations*."³² The irregularities in the facsimiles about which you make such a fuss are largely the result of Mormon attempts to restore the damaged papyri.

WE: We grant your first proposition, but the second remains to be demonstrated.

THEY: Who else would restore them but the Mormons? There is evidence for that in the penciled sketching that is still to be seen on the backing of the No. 1 papyrus. We believe that was done by the Mormons and not by later owners.

WE: Why would the Mormons make a reconstruction that differs drastically from the official Mormon version?

THEY: We can explain that. Since "the Mormon connections of the papyrus were always known to its successive owners," *any* later attempt to restore it would have followed the Pearl of Great Price. But this penciled doodling does not follow it; therefore it is not later but earlier, representing "a first attempt at restoration, rejected as unsatisfactory."

WE: I am afraid you knocked that one clear out of the court. Your suggestion that any non-Mormon owner would

32. [We have been unable to identify the source of the following quotations—eds.]

have followed the Pearl of Great Price just like any Mormon is indeed refreshing: since when have non-Mormons felt bound by Mormon opinion or obligated to make a reconstruction that would vindicate the Mormon scripture? You say the drawing was “rejected as unsatisfactory” right at the beginning—which means that it was allowed to stand untouched from ten to twenty years, a constant reminder of the ineptness of the Brethren and a constant refutation of their later official reconstruction, when it would have been the easiest thing in the world—and perfectly legal—to retouch or erase it: it wasn’t even drawn on the papyrus and made no pretense to being ancient. And the Mormons were not only crazy enough to let this highly unacceptable performance stand as it was, but their friends and enemies were blind enough never to notice it, either to explain it or to make fun of it.

As is well known (from the labors of Robert Eisler and others), the first and most urgent thing to be done whenever the official version of a document, sacred or otherwise, is decided on is to destroy all other versions. Yet you want us to believe that the Mormons saw no advantage to removing, replacing, or even retouching this incriminating document. Or if you insist that the Mormons had such perfect integrity as to leave this foolish and unfortunate drawing untouched by pencil or eraser and resisted every temptation to draw a single line more on that empty backing for twenty years, then the wholesale restorations that you suggest for the rest of the papyri are entirely out of the question. That the space on the modern paper backing, which had no claim to sanctity, was never used for any more speculative sketching after that first awkward and highly unsatisfactory attempt is a strong indication that its inviting surface was not available until later. The pattern of the exposed patches of glue on the backing still remains to be explained: the mere presence of those ugly patches, where the mounting was otherwise so very neatly done, casts serious doubt on your theory



Figure 1. Close inspection of JSP I mounted on its backing shows rough patches of glue where papyrus fragments have flaked off. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

that the surviving parts of the Facsimile 1 papyrus are all that the Mormons ever saw of it (fig. 1). We simply cannot believe that in years of busy speculation and study in which they were concerned with everything else, the Saints never so much as breathed on that first unfortunate, discredited, embarrassing, profane, and highly unwelcome bit of sketching. It is both interesting and reassuring to find such a naive suggestion coming from so distinguished a source.

THEY: Speaking of naive suggestions, when you used that portrait of Lucy Mack Smith to guarantee the integrity of Facsimile 1 “before it was damaged,” why didn’t you call attention to the numbers indicating some of the figures in the pictures? The numbers weren’t part of the original papyrus, you know (fig. 2).

WE: We completely overlooked the numbers until after the article went to press. Only then did we get our first good look at the picture. So you win a point. We now assume that the artist consulted the Hedlock reproduction. But in



Figure 2. In this detail of the Lucy Mack Smith water-color portrait (see p. xl), it is clear that the numbers on Facsimile 1 have been added to a depiction of the original papyrus.

examining the portrait closely we discovered something of importance that is not discernible in the *Improvement Era* reproduction, something that is *not* in the Hedlock drawing. The artist has drawn a jagged line right across the top of the facsimile, cutting off the top both of the priest's head and of the bird's head but leaving the rest, including the knife in the priest's hand, untouched. The area above the jagged line is of a slightly lighter shade than that below, and in the original may be of a different color. It seems to mark the limit of the papyrus—that is, of the damage to the thing, at some time *after* the Mormons had acquired it. It is nearly all there. In other things also the painter of Mrs. Smith's portrait departs from the Hedlock engraving.

THEY: What about the wrinkling? It seems to us that some of the wrinkles supposedly in the papyrus extend right out beyond and include the picture frame.

WE: The paint could have run where the artists made extra-heavy vertical markings (providing he used water-colors), or else the wrinkles could belong to the big portrait itself, of which we have only a photograph. But the picture frame is clearly a frame, closely resembling the one in which other papyri are still mounted, and most of the wrinkling is

definitely confined within its borders as if it really belonged to the papyri.

THEY: If the papyrus was intact almost to the top, how does it happen that the short inscription above the priest's arm was never produced in any of the engravings (see pp. 126–27, fig. 10)? It would have been, had it been there, "since Joseph Smith had no objection to having hieroglyphics reproduced."

WE: He also had no objection to supplying missing parts of inscriptions; why has he not done so here, especially since the inscription was a very short one and it is still perfectly obvious that there was an inscription there? You see it works both ways, but you miss the main point, which is that *all* hieroglyphs have been deliberately omitted from this particular plate. There is clear evidence that the whole inscription on the right was folded under when the thing was mounted. In view of the avoidance of all the hieroglyphs, the omission of the shortest one of all can hardly be viewed as proof that it was not there. And speaking of arguments of silence, while you claim that the penciled sketching on the backing shows that the parts supplied were missing from the beginning, you never bother to explain why the bird's head was not drawn in at the same time, though you say that was also missing.

What Kind of Head?

THEY: There was no missing head. The head is still there; there is still "clearly a human head in the original (the beard, hairline, nose still show, and the official center location of the head over the wing is also evidence)."

WE: "*Clearly* a human head"? But of the thousands of people who have looked at it, it took a shrewd and determined observer to detect that. The most characteristic feature of the *ba*-birds we remember to have seen is the large soulful eye. But here is no eye, no brow, no nose (if that is a nose, anything is), no mouth, no chin, no neck, no ear. With

the hairline intact the face should be virtually complete, but after looking up a lot of human-headed birds for comparison this still continues to tax the imagination. The other heads are quite different.

THEY: If Hedlock was copying an Egyptian bird's head he would hardly have done such a poor job of it.

WE: Rather say if he was inventing one, being an expert draftsman, he would have done a far better job. But if bad drawing is an argument against an Egyptian bird's head, what does it do to your much worse drawn human head?

THEY: The artist knew that the viewer would expect a human head; he did not have to lean over backwards to indicate one—the merest daubing would do the trick. Devéria expected a human head and was disturbed at not finding one. So are we.

WE: Devéria expected a human head, but the good Professor Parker did not: *He* saw not your clearly drawn human head, and he had excellent reason for seeing a bird's head instead. Take the large sampling of lion-couch scenes in Budge's *Osiris*,³³ for example: what do you find there? Men lying on lion couches and flying birds all over the place, but not a single human-headed bird.³⁴ You must admit that statistics are overwhelmingly in favor of giving the bird a bird's head.

THEY: Oh, but there are some lion-couch scenes with human-headed birds flying overhead.

WE: Yes, and in every such case the bird is holding either life-symbols or breath-feathers in each outstretched claw. This bird does not even have claws: in other lion-couch scenes (e.g., Denderah) the flying bird is shown without claws, but the human-headed bird never, which makes

33. For references to lion-couch scenes, see "Facsimile 1: A Unique Document," in this volume, *CWHN* 18:145–46 n. 64.

34. [Though not reproduced in E. A. Wallis Budge's *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection* (New York: Putnam's, 1911), the Denderah temple reliefs do contain a human-headed bird—eds.]

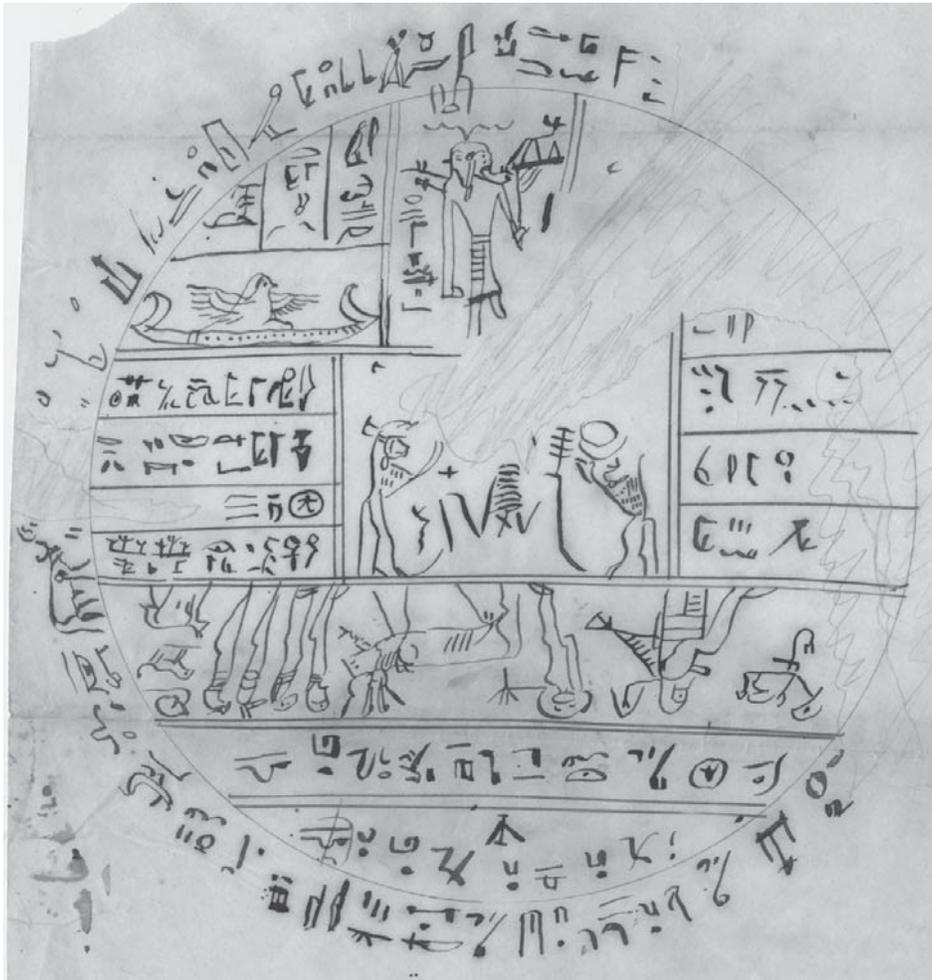


Figure 3. Known as the Church Historian's copy of Facsimile 2, this version shows evidence of restoration. Neither the artist nor the date is known. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

this one of the rarest objects in all of Egyptian funerary art. Admittedly it is a bad bird's head and an even worse human head. So where does that leave us? I would say with a fifth hypothesis, one that we have been plugging all along: it is the poor Egyptian artist who is in trouble—out of his depth with this strange assignment.

THEY: Let's turn to Facsimile 2, where we have much clearer evidence of restoration. In the Church Historian's

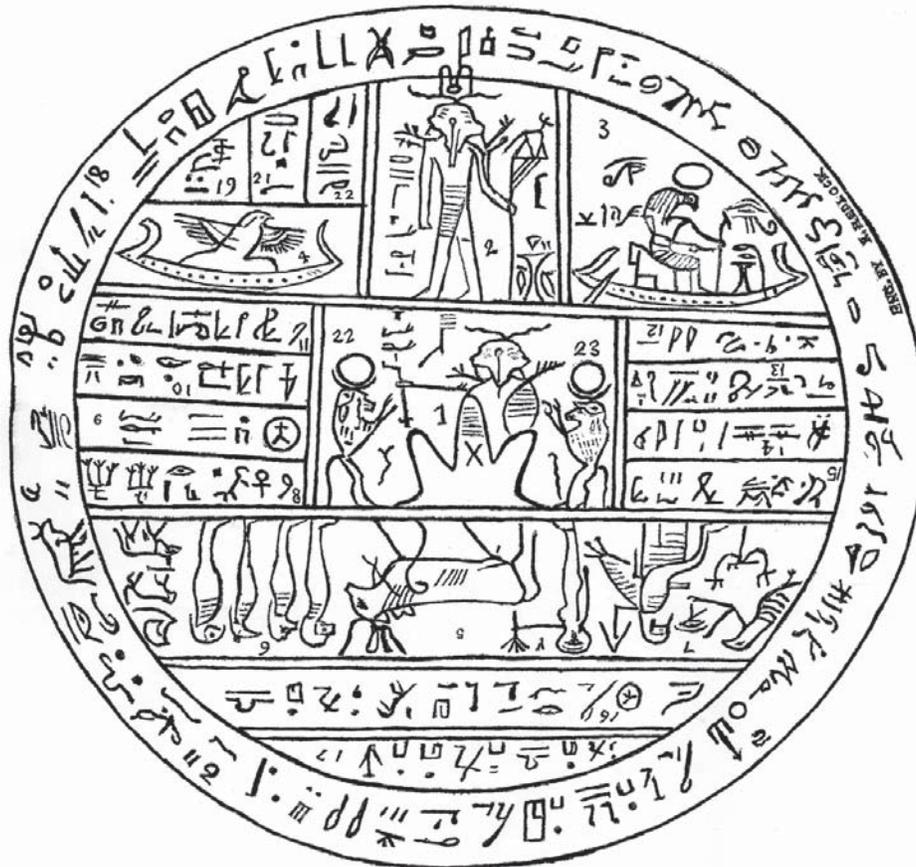


Figure 4. The Hedlock cut of Facsimile 2, as it appears in the 15 March 1842 *Times and Seasons*, shows that the head of figures 1 and 2 are not on the same axis. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Office among the papers of the KEP is a rather well-done pen-and-ink sketch of the facsimile made by some Mormon at an early date (fig. 3). This, we believe, is the way the hypocephalus looked when it came into Joseph Smith's hands; and in it there are certain parts missing and we are shown exactly what they are. Now these parts are *not* missing in the official engraving of the hypocephalus, Facsimile 2 (fig. 4), which can only mean that they have been supplied later. You will notice that a large part of the inscription around the rim is missing, and this has been filled in with hieratic

characters from other papyri definitely known to have been in the possession of Joseph Smith. So there you have it.

WE: Since the restored portions of the rim with their crude repetitions (hardly an attempt to be subtle) are not a subject of inspired commentary, we don't think that is too important.

THEY: But two of the most important figures *are* the subject of "inspired commentary"—namely, figures 1 and 3. They are both entirely missing in the KEP drawing and have both been supplied from other figures contained in papyri in Joseph Smith's possession. Look at the head of figure 1: it is absolutely identical with that of figure 2!

WE: Absolutely? It seems to us that in the first Hedlock engraving the two (or should we say four?) heads have a number of points in which they differ—the eyes, the vertical line, the beards.

THEY: These are very minor differences you must admit. But note how far out of line the two heads of figure 1 are—that is a clear indication that they have been daubed in.

WE: But consider that these two figures were drawn at the same time by the same hand, side by side on the same piece of paper. Why should the artist indicate all those minor differences if they did not exist?

THEY: To make it appear that the heads were different, of course—that he was not just copying.

WE: But in that case he would have gone much further and made them really different. The Egyptians themselves, you know, were anything but averse to repetition in their funerary designs. As to the heads of figure 1 being out of line, is it not more likely that that indicates not that they were being faked but that some of the papyrus had become loose and been awkwardly replaced? If, as you maintain, it was simply a matter of copying borrowed heads onto the neatly symmetrical trunk of figure 1, which still sits dead center in the panel, nothing could be easier than to put it on *straight*. But Hedlock did not do that; he was struggling with

something that definitely was out of line. The phenomenon occurs a number of times in Facsimile 2.

THEY: But look at figure 3. This is no case of shifting pieces of papyrus. The whole thing is completely missing in the KEP drawing and is replaced by borrowing the boat shown in the framed papyrus from the Book of the Dead.

WE: Granted. But the same boat with the same figure in it appears just in that spot, and *only* in that spot, in a number of other hypocephali. Remember, some fifty-odd other round hypocephali enable us to judge pretty well how good a job of reconstructing the Mormons did. In some cases it was altogether too good—that is, Facsimile 2 comes nearer to the other “normal” hypocephali than the battered KEP version does, and this indicated to us at least that the thing was in a better condition when Hedlock made his engraving than when the KEP copy was made, so that the latter cannot be used as a measure of the extent of reconstruction in the former.

THEY: But in the corresponding boat in the other hypocephali there are other occupants of the boat that are missing in figure 3.

WE: The occupants of the boat vary, and all of them are missing in one drawing or another, with one exception: the scarab beetle (*hprr*), which is interchangeable on the hypocephali with the solar disk on the head of the enthroned figure. Since no two of the figure 3 boats are exactly alike we can be satisfied that Hedlock has got all the essentials.

THEY: But Miss Elizabeth Thomas says the boats should always be prow to prow.³⁵

WE: Not these boats. Look at the British Museum Hypocephalus EA 8445 where the stern of the boat and the figure in it fit right up against the panel, exactly as in our figure 3.

THEY: But there are two boats there, one above the other.

WE: In many hypocephali there is only one—which shows that we must always allow for differences.

35. Elizabeth Thomas, “Solar Barks Prow to Prow,” *JEA* 42 (1956): 74.

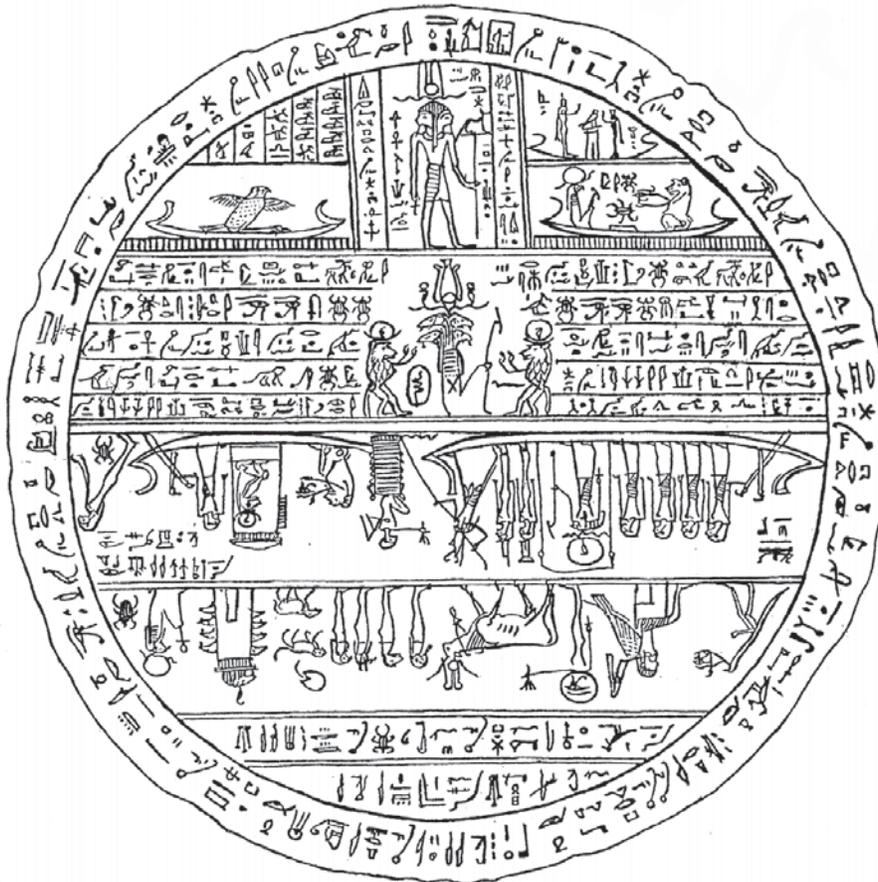


Figure 5. Unlike Facsimile 2, the Meux hypocephalus clearly shows hieroglyphs behind the seated figure in the boat. Courtesy of Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis Brussel.

THEY: But your figure 3 is most obviously identical with the boat shown in the Joseph Smith framed papyrus.

WE: Of course, it is the same boat! But was it necessarily taken from there? Note that there are certain hieroglyphs behind the seated figure in the boat which do *not* appear in our framed papyrus, but *do* appear on some of the other hypocephali, for example, the Florence and Meux hypocephali (fig. 5).

THEY: But since the other hypocephali of which you make so much all have a central figure with four ram's heads, is it not far more likely that it was such a figure and not a repeat of figure 2 that was out of line?

WE: More likely, yes. But if there is anything a study of hypocephali should teach us, it is to look out for exceptions *and* repetitions—we find them everywhere. Thus the ram’s-horn headdress of figure 1 is unusual—the four-headed ram usually wears a magnificent and complex crown, but in some instances (e.g., British Museum EA 8446) he wears only the plain ram’s horns. That could be an authentic crown. On the other hand there was plenty of room above the body of figure 1 to have included the headdress of figure 2 if Hedlock was borrowing the whole head. Yet he avoided that crown, which would have been incorrect (i.e., not justified by any example known to us), in favor of a correct one. Incidentally, there is *not* room above the body of figure 1 for the very high and ornate crown worn by the four-headed ram.

THEY: But there is no other instance in which a two-headed figure sits in the center of the circle.

WE: None that we know of. But there are hypocephali in which the central figure is missing entirely, others in which it has only a single instead of a double body, in which it holds only one scepter instead of two or holds only simple *was*-scepters instead of the usual threefold *ankh-was-djed*-scepter, or in which it holds no scepter at all.

THEY: Speaking of scepters, the KEP drawing definitely has the edge over the Hedlock.

WE: In quality, but not in quantity. Hedlock had more to look at, though he muffed it. In the KEP drawing the remains of one of the scepters is clearly shown as the four horizontal lines of the *djed*-symbol  on a staff. These lines so closely resembled the horizontal strokes on the body of figure 1 immediately adjacent to them that Hedlock ended up making them look like another body—perhaps. On the other side, however, the *was*-scepter  is clearly visible, which is lacking (all but the bottom stroke) in the KEP copy. This awkward attempt to give meaning to the triple scepter (than which no figure could look more meaningless to a layman) could be fairly called an attempt at restoration—not an

invention but a fixing up of something that was there. The feet of figure 2, on the other hand, facing as they do in the wrong direction, we agree to call a restoration. Still, Hedlock drew the jackal-staff correctly, completing it right down to the ground; while the KEP shows a shorter but equally practical and plausible staff. It is Hedlock who gets it right. Note how neatly and correctly (according to all the other hypocephali) Hedlock joins the four panels right in the middle of what is only a great blank space for the KEP artist.

THEY: Any clever draftsman could have figured that out.

WE: Not necessarily. The KEP artist was at sea: he continued the right-hand boundary of the central panel up well beyond the point of juncture and drew the right-hand border of panel two at an impossible angle. As he saw it, the baseline that runs beneath the two ships and figure 2 does not run straight across. That is, with those parts missing he was not at all sure how the original looked, but Hedlock draws everything in with deft confidence, exactly as we find in other hypocephali.

Again, the KEP artist did not see and recognize the headdress of figure 2, which is correctly represented by Hedlock. The KEP drawing shows only one serpent beside figure 1, while Hedlock and many other hypocephali show two, one on either side. In the middle of the body of figure 1 the KEP artist has drawn a rather noncommittal *tau*-cross, while Hedlock has put a bold and uncompromising crisscross, which, according to the other document, is as it should be. Hedlock shows hieroglyphs to the left of the head of figure 1, which are entirely missing from the KEP drawing but vindicated by other hypocephali—for example, the Leyden hypocephalus. In the KEP picture what looks like a *h**t**p* \rightleftharpoons hieroglyph is just touching the shoulder of figure 2. This is not matched by any like protrusion from the other shoulder. The Hedlock engraving, on the other hand, shows odd winglike protrusions, two of them on either shoulder. According to your theory these can only be later additions;

yet just such queer double “wings” appear on the shoulder of the corresponding figure in British Museum Hypocephalus EA 8445a. Then again, the KEP artist can’t make heads or tails of whatever it is facing the seated figure 7. The other hypocephali tell us that it is a serpent presenting the *wedjat*-eye, and Hedlock clearly shows such a presentation.

THEY: We grant you that, but the figure in your facsimile looks more like a bird than a snake.

WE: Sure enough, and in some hypocephali (e.g., from the Louvre, Florence, British Museum EA 8445a) the creature has a bird’s head just like this one. If this is a mere reconstruction, how does it happen that the Mormon engraver hit upon the right figure—which was also the most unlikely figure imaginable? Either he was indeed inspired or he had more of the hypocephalus before his eyes than the other artist did. Here is another case, even clearer: Hedlock shows the sun-moon crowns of the two baboons intact and resting squarely atop the animals’ heads which, according to many other hypocephali, is exactly where they belong. But the KEP artist does not know what to do with them: the one on the left is so completely destroyed that he cannot even make it out, while he places the one on the right in the baboon’s upraised hands instead of on his head.

This dislocation of the sun-moon symbol as well as the disruption of the crown of figure 2 in the KEP copy is an important point, for it shows that pieces of the papyrus were loose and shifting around. It may account for some aspects of our figure 1.

THEY: But can you deny that both figures have essentially the same head?

WE: Why shouldn’t they have since according to the Prophet’s explanation they perform practically identical functions? May we call your attention to a transposition of heads and bodies between these two figures in *other* hypocephali? In the Nash hypocephalus the head of our figure 2, with its double human face and double feather-crown, is

placed on the body of our figure 1, the double seated figure holding the two scepters (see p. 129, fig. 11B). In the hypocephalus from the Myers collection two *identical* standing figures seem to be taking the place of our figures 1 and 2 (see p. 128, fig. 11A). In a Berlin hypocephalus (No. 7792), figure 1 has a single body, like figure 2, instead of his usual double body. In some cases figure 1 appears without figure 2; in others the reverse is true. If the figures are thus transposable, and if figure 2 can borrow the body of figure 1, why can't figure 1 borrow the head of figure 2 in our version? Such identity would be in keeping both with Egyptian practice and with Smith's interpretations.

So the game goes on. These are only some of the issues arising from one short, mangled (only half of it was published) installment representing a first tentative approach to the subject. The ball goes back and forth—sometimes “they” make a point, and sometimes “we” do, but the final score is far in the future. The first thing everybody asked when the discovery of the papyri was announced was either, Does this prove the Book of Abraham? or Doesn't this show that Joseph Smith was wrong? Does a falling apple prove Newton's laws? Only to people with an awful lot of training and preparation, and no longer to many of them. The scholar is not alive today who can tell us all there is to be known about the facsimiles, and until we know that the game must still go on. As things stand at the moment, but only at the moment, we may venture a few observations:

1. There are many questions raised by the finding of the Joseph Smith Papyri—not just one question. The Kirtland Egyptian Papers cannot be used as a close check on the Book of Abraham until a great deal more is known about both documents. We do not yet know just what the KEP is or in what light Joseph Smith regarded it.

2. The dating of these particular papyri is of no conclusive significance as far as possible relationship to Abraham is concerned.

3. The facsimiles were originally intended as visual aids for an unspecified audience. Nothing supernatural, inspired, or sacrosanct is claimed for them. The Latter-day Saints made no special efforts to retain them in their possession, and after they were lost were careless and indifferent in the manner of their reproduction.

4. The Hedlock engraving when compared with an early sketch showing parts of Facsimile 2 to be missing shows definite signs of attempted restoration.

5. The restoration was not as extensive as the other sketch would indicate, and no clear instances of such have been demonstrated on Facsimile 1.

6. The restorations on Facsimile 2 are limited to the filling in of gaps, not the alteration of existing symbols. They were not made with an eye to supporting Smith's interpretations: for example, two heads do not express the idea of a universal God better than four heads; in Facsimile 1 a clothed sacrificial victim is no more convincing than an unclothed one; a priest with a mask is no more authentic than one without a mask, etc.

7. The only restorations that might affect the interpretations, figures 1 and 3, are paradoxical, in that the latter is astonishingly fitting, not only to the interpretation given but in the light of comparison with other hypocephali, while the former is so far out of line that it is hard to see in it the faking of a skillful artist.

8. In many details Hedlock shows a better knowledge of the hypocephalus than the artist who is supposed to furnish the evidence for the state of the thing when Hedlock made his copy. Hence the latter is not a reliable control.

As the game progresses, our ideas about the Pearl of Great Price are bound to change, even as our ideas about the Book of Mormon have changed through the years as new evidence has steadily been brought to light. Throughout the Doctrine and Covenants the Saints are constantly reminded of two things: (1) of what they have received and (2) of what they are expected to seek after. The seeking part

is the proper sphere of schools and universities, and in the matter of the facsimiles to the Book of Abraham in particular we have all been invited to seek. It is time we were getting down to business.

Addendum (Showing That the Game Never Ends)

Since the above sport sheet went to press, Professor Klaus Baer's invaluable study, the first thorough and complete examination and translation of a Joseph Smith papyrus so far undertaken, has appeared in the pages of *Dialogue*.³⁶ The many questions this work raises, far from bringing the game to a close, have merely stepped up the tempo as it becomes possible, thanks to Dr. Baer's efforts, for contestants on both sides of the net to become more familiar with the real nature of the game. So here is a bit of overtime:

THEY: Joseph Smith thought that this papyrus (the *sensen*) contained the Book of Abraham.

WE: Reading Joseph Smith's mind has always been the last and usually the first resort in refuting his claims. By what divination do you know what he thought?

THEY: By no divination. Here are the characters from the papyrus on the left hand and set over against them on the right are lengthy passages from the Book of Abraham. What more do you want?

WE: A lot of information, such as, who juxtaposed the texts in this amusing way?

THEY: Who else but Smith? He owned the papyrus and wrote the "translation."

WE: But the exercise is in the hands of a number of different people, and none of it seems to be in Smith's hand. The English text appears here in its final unaltered state. Do you mean to say that this actually represents Smith's

36. Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 109-34.

first attempt at “translating” it? Here there are no signs of speculation and head scratching, as in the other sign list.

THEY: This doesn’t have to be the first attempt of all. It could be later copy.

WE: A later copy of what? If all that was wanted was to produce a copy, why doesn’t one person copy the thing through? Instead of that there are a few lines of translation in one hand, and then a few in another, and so on. Surely each copyist would not become exhausted at the end of half a dozen lines of English or less.

THEY: They would if the few lines meant a slow and exhaustive effort by the one who was dictating.

WE: Such an effort would necessarily show in the state of the text. But this is a completely finished text without changes or corrections. Therefore it does not represent the first appearance of the translation, but the use of the completed text in some sort of special exercise. This matching-up business does *not* represent the process by which the text was produced.

THEY: But would Smith’s followers have the kind of imagination that would match up the Egyptian and English texts in such a fantastic way?

WE: Not imagination—lack of imagination! The matching is quite impossible.

THEY: But you have been saying all along that these writings may represent Smith’s own private speculations.

WE: And we still do! For all we know they *may* represent anything. That is just the point: we simply do not know, and until we do our work is not done. Your reading of Joseph Smith’s mind settles nothing.

THEY: But how about the facsimiles? The many irregularities they contain certainly indicate Mormon manipulation, since an Egyptian copyist would have done things differently.

WE: Would he? The original papyrus shows that some of the worst mistakes are not Mormon but Egyptian. You

accept the “small offering stand” as Egyptian, though it is found in no parallel instances; you say frankly, “I know of no representations of Osiris on a couch with both hands in front of his face”;³⁷ you attribute a human head to a legless bird, a thing so far as we have been able to discover without parallel in the funerary art. These undoubtedly Egyptian touches are not conventional by any means, yet you continue to abuse the principle by attributing every oddity to Mormon “restorations” until proved otherwise.

THEY: Do we go so far?

WE: Well, you do go so far as to assume without question that the priest in Facsimile 1 should have a jackal’s mask. And you are quite right—he *should* have, and the human head is an error. But whose error?

THEY: Whose could it be but Smith’s?

WE: Smith didn’t need an unmasked priest—a mask would have been just as impressive perhaps. But let us call your attention to at least three Ptolemaic lion-couch scenes closely paralleling this one in which the artist has deliberately drawn the embalming priest without a jackal-mask.

THEY: Deliberately?

WE: Yes. In one case the mask has been carefully erased, and in the other two it was carefully not drawn in; in all three scenes all the other figures are entirely complete and intact—only the jackal’s mask of the priest is missing.³⁸ We do not at present know why the Egyptians preferred here to dispense with the mask, but it is at least conceivable that the artist of Facsimile 1 had his reasons too. It will not do to attribute to the Mormons everything that puzzles us.

THEY: You admit that the sketch of Facsimile 1 in the Lucy Mack Smith portrait has the Hedlock numbers on it;

37. Ibid., 119.

38. O. H. Myers and H. W. Fairman, “Excavations at Armant, 1929–31,” *JEA* 17/3–4 (1931): plates LVI, LVII. [The two scenes on plate LVI are part of the same cartonnage. Apparently BM EA 6968 is the scene Nibley refers to on plate LVII.]

yet you think it significant that it may indicate the actual state of preservation of the papyrus at the time the portrait was made. How do you reconcile the two propositions?

WE: Well, naturally the artist would not keep his model sitting and suffering while he sketched in the little picture on the wall; with plenty of Hedlock reproductions going around he could easily fill in that part at his leisure—so he did. But at the same time he made an undeniable effort to indicate that the framed thing on the wall really was the original. Better photographs accent the wrinkling and the frame, and it still remains unthinkable that the old lady should have displayed a mere printed copy—the only “original” Hedlock would be the original engraving! So the jagged line along the top may be significant. Incidentally, you people brush aside valuable contemporary testimony as of no significance when it does not suit your purposes. The contemporary record both by its assertions and its silences is quite unsuspecting of the sort of manipulating you see everywhere.

THEY: After all, the case at issue is: what *are* the facsimiles?

WE: Agreed. And after reading your latest and best account (the article which called forth this addendum), we still do not know the answer. Your notes are immensely valuable and must supply the standard handbook for which all of us were hoping. But they tell us what the Egyptologists think and not what the Egyptians thought. What do *you* say Facsimile 1 is, for example?

THEY: It “shows the resurrection of Osiris (who is also the deceased owner of the papyrus) and the conception of Horus.”³⁹

WE: There you have it. Former Egyptologists said that it could not possibly represent Abraham because it was supposed to be Osiris, but now you tell us that it can be both Osiris and a human being at once; again, they said it could

39. Baer, “Breathing Permit of Hôr,” 118.

not be a sacrificial scene because it was an embalming or resurrection scene, but now you tell us that it can be *both* a resurrection scene and a conception. This all shows what we mean when we repeatedly affirm that we cannot answer the question, "What are the facsimiles?" until we know *everything there is to know* about them.

THEY: Yes, but we know a great deal about them that does not fit in with Joseph Smith's ideas.

WE: If you will excuse us for saying so, the only point you have made so far against Joseph Smith has been by a bit of sleight-of-hand—not intentional, we are sure, but quite effective. The secret of successful conjuring tricks, as everybody knows, is to occupy the attention of the audience with an absorbing display of colorful skill while manipulating the essential properties of the trick unobtrusively on the side. Thus while lost in admiration, as we have often been, of your mastery of a formidably difficult idiom, we run the risk of overlooking the casual manner in which the real trick is pulled off—that having nothing whatever to do with the translation of Egyptian. You open your article by observing in passing that "Joseph Smith thought that this papyrus contained the Book of Abraham," and you end it with an even more casual subordinate clause about "the document that Joseph Smith considered to be a 'roll' which 'contained the writings of Abraham.'"⁴⁰ But how do you know what Joseph Smith "thought" and what he "considered"? This of course is the crux of the whole matter, but you do not discuss it—you merely state it as your opening and closing shots. You quote his very words as if he meant them to apply to the Breathing document; but how do you know he did?

By way of answer you have gone to all the trouble of placing the *sensen* symbols and the Book of Abraham side by side, and thereby presented us with the most effective possible refutation of your settled belief that Smith thought

40. Ibid., 111, 133.

he was translating this particular document. Neither he nor anyone else could have thought it. You say that other people in his day tried to interpret Egyptian that way, but you are wrong; this translation of two or three short strokes and a dot with a 200- or 500-word history is not just exaggerated Kircherism—Horapollo (fifth century AD), Athanasius Kircher (c. 1601–80), Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716), and others based their interpretations, however fantastic, on rational and allegorical principles; but no conceivable amount of rationalizing can match up the two columns here: this goes completely out of bounds. Long before anyone suspected the real meaning of the hieratic symbols in the KEP, students were pointing out to each other that the column on the right could by no effort of the imagination be viewed as a *translation* of the column on the left. You can see it, and I can see it, and Mr. Heward can see it, and any ten-year-old child can see it. But Joseph Smith, who was clever enough to make up the story of the Book of Abraham in the first place, was too dense to see that the story—*his* story—was not *really* a translation of a page of senseless squiggles! Yet unless he believed that there is no case against him. We still suspect that there is a relationship between the two documents, but we don't know what it is.

On 12 October 1968, two graduate students in Near Eastern studies at the University of Utah, Richley H. Crapo and John A. Tvedtnes, presented an interesting hypothesis to explain the relationship between the Breathing Certificate and the Book of Abraham. We have it only secondhand and await their publication,⁴¹ but it seems that the idea is that if one takes the actual meaning of the hieratic signs in the order in which they occur, they can be roughly matched up with

41. See Richley H. Crapo and John A. Tvedtnes, "A Study of the Hor Sensen Papyrus," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA*, no. 109 (25 October 1968): 1–6; and Crapo and Tvedtnes, "The Hor Sensen Papyrus as a Mnemonic Device: A Further Study," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA*, no. 114 (2 June 1969): 6–13.

certain general themes of the Book of Abraham which occur *in the same order*. This indicates to Crapo and Tvedtnes that what we have here is a mnemonic device to aid in an oral recitation. This would make the *sensen* papyrus a sort of prompter's sheet. True, the document tells a connected and consistent story, but then it would have to do that in order to serve as an effective aid to memory by itself being easily memorized.

Far-fetched as it may seem, there are many ancient examples of this sort of thing, the best-known of which is the alphabet itself. By merely reciting the oldest alphabet one intoned a little sermonette on man's earthly calling, a mnemonic device which helped the rapid spread of the West Semitic system of writing.⁴² The classic example of a work which condenses the meaning of whole chapters into a single letter is the *Sefer Yetzirah*, "the oldest and most respected book of Jewish mysticism," whose authorship is persistently attributed to Abraham. We are now being advised that "if we are to understand the Jewish authors correctly, we must examine their works carefully to see whether they contain a *gematria*"—that is, condensed and hidden code-writing, which turns up in the most surprising places.⁴³

The condensing of matter on prompting sheets is a very old practice. Sethe suggested that the Memphite dramatic text was really an abbreviated directive, in which, though the text seems quite complete, the full content of the speeches and the action is merely hinted at.⁴⁴ Heinrich Schäfer noted that the famous Stele C14 in the Louvre "consists of sentences which read like the headings of chapters," though they also make a connected text.⁴⁵ We could, and in time

42. See H. Tur-Sinai, "The Origin of the Alphabet," *JQR* 41/3 (1951): 288–89, 296.

43. Eliyahu Rosh-Pinnah, "The *Sefer Yetzirah* and the Original Tetragrammaton," *JQR* 57 (1967): 212, 214.

44. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte*, 18.

45. Heinrich Schäfer, "Einiges über Entstehung und Art der ägyptischen Kunst," *ZÄS* 52 (1914): 17.

probably will, furnish many examples of this sort of thing. In a preliminary statement in *Dialogue* it was suggested that the hieratic symbols placed over against the long sections of the Book of Abraham might be viewed not as texts but as topic headings. We still don't know what the connection is, but one thing is certain—that the relationship between the two texts was never meant to be that of a direct translation. If it were we can be sure that Joseph Smith would have published the Egyptian text along with the facsimiles and the translation.

2

Challenge and Response

Unsettled Business

The 1965 reissuing of Bishop Franklin S. Spalding's little book, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*,¹ though not meant to revive an old discussion but rather to extinguish any lingering sparks of it, is nonetheless a welcome invitation, or rather challenge, to those who take the Pearl of Great Price seriously, for long experience has shown that the Latter-day Saints only become aware of the nature and genius of their modern scriptures when relentless and obstreperous criticism from the outside forces them to take a closer look at what they have, with the usual result of putting those scriptures in a much stronger position than they were before. We have all neglected the Pearl of Great Price for too long and should be grateful to those who would now call us to account.

In this introductory study we make no excuse for poking around among old bones since others have dug them

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1. Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow, 1912; reprint, Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1965). [Spalding (1865–1914) served as bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Utah for ten years in the early 1900s—eds.]

up to daunt us. We should, however, warn them that if they insist on bringing up the ghosts of the dead, they may soon find themselves with more on their hands than they had bargained for. A lot of water has gone under the bridge since 1912, and of course many things that were said and written then with great confidence and finality would have to be revised today.

On the other hand, a careful survey of the journals will, we believe, show that the year 1912 saw more significant studies published in the field than any other year before or since; Egyptology reached a peak in 1912—it was the age of the giants. So if it should now turn out that the giants were anything but infallible, that should teach us to be wary of the scholarly dogmatism of our own day.

Nothing could be more retrograde to our desire than to call up the bearded and frock-coated savants of 1912 to go through their pompous paces all over again. But it is others who have conjured up the ghostly jury to testify against the Prophet; and unless they are given satisfaction, their sponsors can spread abroad, as they did in Bishop Spalding's day, the false report that the scholars have spoken the final word and "completely demolished" (that was their expression) for all time the Pearl of Great Price and its author's claim to revelation.

The silence of the Latter-day Saints in a matter that concerns them so vitally can only be interpreted as an abashed silence, leading many of the world and of the Saints to conclude that there is nothing to be said in Joseph Smith's behalf; nothing could be further from the truth. And so the sorry little saga of 1912 must needs be retold if only to forestall indefinite repetitions of what happened then as well as in 1845, 1865, and 1903.

The situation today is essentially the same as it was on all those occasions, with the Mormons, untrained in Egyptology, helpless to question on technical grounds the assertions of such experts as Théodule Devéria and E. A. Wallis Budge,

who grandly waved their credentials for all to see, impatiently stated their opinions, and then gingerly decamped, refusing to be led into any discussion with the ignorant opposition.

And so the debate has never really come to the floor, the challengers being ever satisfied that the mere sight of their muscles should be sufficient to settle the issue without a contest. “These ‘experts’ have given us a lot of opinions,” wrote the outsider Robert C. Webb of the 1912 affair, “which they have not attempted to prove by authoritative demonstration. . . . We are concerned wholly with opinion, pure and simple, and not with anything that may be proved conclusively.”²

For the benefit of those readers who may have forgotten some of the details of 1912, it may be recalled that Bishop Spalding asked eight Egyptologists what they thought of Joseph Smith’s interpretation of the facsimiles in the Pearl of Great Price. You can imagine what their answers were. Now let us take it up from there.³ [Rev. Spalding maintained that the authority of these experts made their opinions “unassailable.”]

This arrangement is basic to the prosperity of most of the learned professions. Long ago the Jesuits devised a special vocabulary and a special discipline of theology, which, they announced, only one of their faith could really understand; for any outsider to risk criticism of anything they

2. Robert C. Webb, “Truth Seeking: Its Symptoms and After Effects,” *IE* 16 (1913): 1077. [On Webb as a pseudonym for J. C. Homans, see Sidney B. Sperry, “The Story of Research on the Pearl of Great Price,” in *The Pearl of Great Price Conference, December 10, 1960* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1964), 9—eds.]

3. [The section of the *Improvement Era* series with the subheading “The Appeal to Authority,” which introduced the Spalding discussion, was published in Hugh Nibley, “Joseph Smith and the Sources,” in *Abraham in Egypt*, *CWHN* 14:86–91. The following two paragraphs belonging to that section were not used in *Abraham in Egypt*. See also chapter 3, “Joseph Smith and the Critics,” in *Abraham in Egypt*, *CWHN* 14:127–62, for more information on Spalding’s experts—eds.]

chose to propound in that recondite jargon could only be the sheerest folly, as Arnold Lunn reminded the great scientist J. B. S. Haldane when the latter ventured to point out certain weaknesses in his theology.⁴ But then the scientists have played the same game for all it is worth. Thus, when “the main objections [to the evolutionary hypothesis] were clearly stated in its very early days,” they were quickly overruled because “many of them came from people who were not trained biologists. . . . Their objections could be countered summarily on the grounds of ignorance, despite the fact that Darwin’s hypothesis appealed so largely to the evidence of common observation and experience.”⁵ Common observation and experience, no matter how clear and convincing, were no match for official credentials.

Even while Sir Gavin de Beer boasts that “the fundamental principle of science is that it concerns itself exclusively with what can be demonstrated, and does not allow itself to be influenced by personal opinions or sayings of anybody. . . . The motto of The Royal Society of London is *Nullius in verba*: we take no man’s word for anything,”⁶ he is guilty of seeking to overawe or at least to impress us with the authority of men of “science” in general and of the Royal Society of London (all stand, please) in particular.

A word from such great men should be enough to settle anything, but still *we* insist on appealing to the slogan of the Royal Society. Many eminent scientists, in fact, are today calling attention to the crippling effect of appeal to authority and position in science, a professional complacency that “may in fact be the closing of our eyes to as yet undiscovered

4. Arnold Lunn, *Science and the Supernatural: A Correspondence between Arnold Lunn and J. B. S. Haldane* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1935), 94, and Lunn, *The Flight from Reason* (New York: Dial, 1931), 106–7.

5. Ronald Good, “Natural Selection Re-examined,” *Listener*, 7 May 1959, 797.

6. Sir Gavin de Beer, “Natural Selection after 100 Years,” *Listener*, 3 July 1958, 12.

factors which may remain undiscovered for many years if we believe that the answer has been already found.”⁷ Thus a great biologist reminds us that “it is important to combat the assumption” that we know what primitive conditions of life were like (every scientist knew that in 1912), since “as long as this is assumed, insufficient effort will be put into the attempt to find ways to obtain genuine evidence.”⁸

Now, part of the secret of the unusual productivity of the Egyptologists of 1912 was a buoyant adolescent confidence in their own newly found powers, which present-day scholars may envy, but which they can well do without—there is something decidedly sophomoric in their lofty pretensions to have plumbed the depths of the human past after having taken a few courses, read a few texts (bristling with question marks), and broken bread with the learned at a dig or two. Their inexpressible contempt for Joseph Smith as an ignorant interloper is a measure of their pride in their own achievement.

In 1912 the Egyptologist T. Eric Peet took to task all laymen who “mistrust a process in which they see a critic assigning half a verse to Source E and the other half to Source J.” Time has more than vindicated the skeptical laymen, but in those days Dr. Peet laid it on the line:

Have these people followed the developments of modern philology, and do they realize that the critics . . . are men whose whole lives are devoted to the study of such problems, and whose knowledge of Hebrew and of the Semitic languages in general is so great that the differences of style . . . are as patent to them as they would be in English to a layman?⁹

7. G. A. Kerkut, *Implications of Evolution* (Oxford, England: Pergamon, 1960), 154.

8. Norman W. Pirie, “Some Assumptions Underlying Discussion on the Origins of Life,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 69 (1957): 373.

9. T. Eric Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament* (Liverpool: University Press, 1922), 30.

Professor Peet would have done well to hearken to what Bishop Spalding's own star witness, Professor A. H. Sayce, had written some years before:

How then is it possible for the European scholars of to-day to analyse an old Hebrew book into its component parts? . . . Hebrew is a language that is very imperfectly known; it has long ceased to be spoken; only a fragment of its literature has come down to us, and that often in a corrupt state; and the meaning of many of the words which have survived, and even of the grammatical forms, is uncertain and disputed. In fact, it is just this fragmentary and imperfect knowledge of the language which has made the work and results of the higher criticism possible. The "critical" analysis of the Pentateuch is but a measure of our ignorance and the limitations of our knowledge. . . . With a fuller knowledge we would come to a recognition of the futility of the task.¹⁰

Subsequent discoveries have proven him quite right, but Sayce's early protest was a voice in the wilderness. Soon the higher critics were having it all their own way, and none ran more eagerly with them than Sayce himself. B. H. Roberts, a personal friend of Spalding's, admitted that the bishop held the whip handle:

I think the bishop is entitled to have it known by those reading these "remarks" how eminent is the jury pronouncing on the case against the "Mormon" Prophet. . . . One who can lay no claim to the learning of Egypt at first hand . . . may well pause before such an array of Egyptologists. . . . In their presence it is becoming in me, and all others unschooled in ancient Egyptian lore, to speak with modesty and behave with becoming deference.¹¹

10. A. H. Sayce, *Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Revell, 1904), 19.

11. B. H. Roberts, "A Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 December 1912; *Deseret Evening News*, 19 December 1912, 11; reprinted in *IE* 16 (1913): 311.

One may wonder how an admittedly unqualified party could pass on such recondite qualifications in others, but it is the credentials of the specialists that impress Roberts, not their knowledge, which he is in no position to judge. Faced by a solid phalanx of Ph.D.'s, the Mormons were properly overawed; they had no David to go against these Goliaths, and for that they had only themselves to blame.

The Mormons Default

From the first the Latter-day Saints had good reason to expect the Pearl of Great Price to come in for some rough treatment. "Here, then," wrote Parley P. Pratt in 1842, "is another subject for the Gentile world to stumble at, and for which to persecute the Saints."¹² Within three years of that remark the world was firing the same scholarly blasts against the facsimiles and demolishing their claims with the same devastating finality as was to delight the intellectuals again in 1865, 1912, and 1968.

The figures in the facsimiles, it was announced in 1845, were "familiar and now understood," and it served Joseph Smith right for "confidently defying inevitable exposure," now that "the Champollions of the Bibliothèque de Rei [of course, they got that absolutely wrong; there's no such bibliothèque] and the British Museum" had the subject well in hand. It was already apparent to the learned that "the whole thing is too gross to bear patiently, too painful to laugh at."¹³ That should have settled the matter, but the Mormons were not convinced and would have done well in undertaking some study of Egyptian on their own.

Again and again, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had pointed the way for the Latter-day Saints to prepare themselves for just such eventualities, pleading with them to take heed to themselves and to use their brains. Even during

12. Parley P. Pratt, in *Millennial Star* 3/3 (July 1842): 47.

13. Tho's C. Sharp, editorial in *Warsaw Signal*, 10 September 1845, 2.

the grim days of December 1844, the leaders of the Church “advised the elders to get up schools, that all . . . might be taught in the branches of education, and prepare themselves, that the least might be fully competent, to correspond with the wise men of the world.”¹⁴ They were to meet the scholars of the world on their own grounds; but instead of that, human nature saw fit to expend its energies elsewhere: “There are hundreds in this community,” said Brigham Young in 1860, “who are more eager to become rich in the perishable things of this world than to adorn their minds with the power of self-government, and with a knowledge of things as they were, as they are, and as they are to come,”¹⁵ and he rebukes the Saints for being satisfied “to remain fixed with a very limited amount of knowledge, and, like a door upon its hinges, move to and fro from one year to another without any visible advancement or improvement, lusting after the grovelling things of this life which perish with the handling.”¹⁶

Those Latter-day Saints who have gone on to higher studies have either pursued the physical and biological sciences or coveted bread-and-butter certificates that have rendered them all the more subservient to mere office and authority. To this day no one has engaged in the type of study necessary to come to grips with the Pearl of Great Price, though that great book openly invites such study: “If the world can find out these numbers, so let it be. Amen” (Fac. 2, fig. 11 explanation).

Up to the present, all studies of the Pearl of Great Price without exception have been in the nature of auxiliary studies—compendiums, historical background, and so forth—or preliminary surveys.¹⁷ In 1879 George Reynolds

14. George Albert Smith, in *History of the Church*, 7:325–26 (15 December 1844).

15. *Journal of Discourses*, 8:9.

16. *Ibid.*, 10:266.

17. This will become immediately clear to one inspecting James R. Clark, *Pearl of Great Price Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University

noted that in spite of all provocation, “very little has ever been said by the Elders of the Church in advocacy of its claims as an inspired record” and that while “outsiders have vigorously attacked it, . . . styled its language ‘gibberish,’ and classed it among the ‘pious frauds’ . . . the people of God have said or written little in its defense.”¹⁸ His own book furnishes a clear demonstration of just why the Saints had never been able to get off the ground—they just didn’t have the knowledge.

The authors of a long procession of articles in the *Improvement Era* in 1912, 1913, 1914, and 1917 frankly admitted their ignorance and pleaded that they had been caught by surprise. Their studies are nonetheless by far the best to appear to date; the books, articles, and master’s theses turned out since then have largely repeated what they had to say, with perhaps an item or two added to the bibliographies where it was felt necessary to justify a degree in the seven arts. Even the extensive labors of James R. Clark, valuable as they are, are all of an introductory nature, clearing the decks as it were for the real action to come.

Full-scale college and extension courses, graduate seminars, Churchwide lecture series, stately public symposiums, books, pamphlets, monographs, newsletters, and articles, all done up in fancy bindings usually adorned with reproductions of the facsimiles from the Pearl of Great Price or with faked Egyptian symbols to intrigue and beguile the public, have all failed to get beyond the starting point of the race, which after all must be run on the long hard obstacle course of Egyptian grammar and epigraphy and not on the lecture platform. The Mormons, it seems, have gone all out for the gimmicks and mechanics of education, but have

Extension Publications, 1965), every single item of which deals only incidentally and peripherally with the basic issues of authenticity raised by the facsimiles.

18. George Reynolds, *The Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1879), 1.

never evinced any real inclination to tackle the tough, basic questions of evidence raised by the Pearl of Great Price.

A new school of interpretation some years ago attempted to meet the challenge to and of the Pearl of Great Price by the face-saving thesis that the Book of Abraham was not written in Egyptian after all, but in some Semitic language, and hailed this shifting of the discussion to more familiar grounds as putting “Book of Abraham investigation on a more sound and scholarly basis.”¹⁹ But no studies were forthcoming on the new foundation save a few “primarily for the layman[, making] no claim of being . . . learned or scientific.”²⁰ How, the ingenuous student may ask, can any study hope to be “sound and scholarly” without being at least a little learned and scientific? One should not enter the arena unless one is willing to meet more formidable opposition than the gullible student and tractable layman.

Amateurs All

The ever-increasing scope of knowledge necessary to cope with the great problems of our day has led to increasing emphasis on a maxim that would have sounded very strange only a few years ago: “There are no fields—there are only problems!”—meaning that one must bring to the discussion and solution of any given problem whatever is required to understand it: If the problem calls for a special mathematics, one must get it; if it calls for three or four languages, one must get them; if it takes twenty years, one must be prepared to give it twenty years—or else shift to some other problem. Degrees and credentials are largely irrelevant where a problem calls for more information than any one department can supply or than can be packaged into any one or a dozen degrees.

19. Charles E. Haggerty, “A Study of the Book of Abraham” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1946), 84.

20. *Ibid.*, 82.

Now the Pearl of Great Price presents a number of big problems with which no Egyptologist has ever coped. A knowledge of Egyptian is the first step toward a solution of such problems, but it is by no means the last. Still, first things come first: "Ancient Egypt," wrote one of the earliest modern researchers in the field, "is accessible only to a small number, because of the length and the difficulties of the initiation into the language of the hieroglyphs. . . . But can a historian . . . renounce the direct examination of the original documents, which become every day more varied and more numerous, without violating the first rule of his discipline?"²¹

Like it or not, we are stuck with Egyptian, and it is only fair to note, in defense of the specialists, that if authoritarianism can be a great mischief, the quackery to which it gives rise can be even worse, a quack being anybody posing as an authority—a shadow of a shadow. There is a place in the world for professionalism and even for "authority" in science, as Thomas S. Kuhn has explained at great length; every field has its "paradigms" that must be mastered thoroughly so that they can be used as tools, quickly, deftly, with unconscious skill, in the processes of problem solving. The expert is one who knows how to use those tools, and because the doctors have not chosen to *use* their knowledge in a serious study of the Pearl of Great Price, it does not follow that such knowledge is not important for such study—rather, it is indispensable.

Any ancient text is utterly without meaning to one who does not know the language in which it is written. Egyptian, however, being written in pictures, has been held to enjoy a unique status among the mysteries. Away back in the fourth century, Horapollon had the idea that by attributing a symbolic meaning to each little picture and putting the symbols together, one could discover the meaning of any Egyptian

21. Maxence de Rochemonteix, "Le temple égyptien," in *Oeuvres diverses de Rochemonteix*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 3 (Paris: Leroux, 1894), 3.

text. This theory was adhered to by would-be translators of Egyptian right down to the time of Champollion and still has its advocates among Latter-day Saints who would discover ever new secrets in the facsimiles and identify battered Indian rock carvings with Egyptian glyphs.

The attempt to give one's own interpretation to picture writing is hard to resist. At the general conference in April 1967, for example, somebody circulated a document bearing the frank and forthright title, "Why Would Anyone Want to Fight the Truth?"²² The "truth" in this case consisted of the author's commonsense observations on the nature of Egyptian, such as that an Egyptian symbol written with four elements "could be no more than a single Egyptian word." But ancient languages have a way of ignoring our modern commonsense rules; the Egyptians in particular had an incurable weakness for abbreviations, omissions, transpositions, puns, and cryptograms, and their writings are full of signs which, even when we know their meaning (which is by no means always the case), require at least a sentence or two to explain them. Anyone is free to guess at the meaning of any Egyptian phrase, and one of the most picturesque aspects of the discipline is a process that never ceases, day and night, year in and year out, by which Egyptologists are constantly altering and improving on each other's translations. But one is *not* free to present his interpretation as "the truth" and then ask in hurt and accusing tones, "Why Would Anyone Want to Fight the Truth?" "I have acted upon a principle to which I attach the greatest importance," wrote Alan H. Gardiner, the dean of Egyptian grammarians. "Even a wrong idea is better than no idea at all, and progress in translation can only come by presenting to the critics some definite

22. Grant S. Heward, "Why Would Anyone Want to Fight the Truth?" published in Midvale, Utah, in 1967; cf. note 121 below, where he is mentioned as one making a fake translation.

objective to tilt at."²³ So far was he from thinking that the experts ever have a corner on truth!

The specialists, however, can hardly be blamed for hesitating to become involved in arguments with just anybody, for they are daunted by a peculiarly insidious occupational hazard.²⁴ The air of mystery and romance that has always surrounded things Egyptian has never failed to attract swarms of crackpots, cultists, half-baked scholars, self-certified experts, and out-and-out charlatans. The poor Egyptologist, constantly confronted with such characters and their antics, is understandably on his guard, quick to suspect and ever alert to the slightest signs of wishful thinking or free and easy logic. At the same time, every Egyptologist is something of a crusader who feels bound to foster and encourage interest in his important but neglected field; he is naturally and humanely hesitant to give any sincere seeker the brush-off, or to offend any possible future donor or patron of his art. In addition, the Egyptologist is himself a romantic at heart, or else he would never have chosen such a field for himself, and has a secret and sometimes rather obvious kinship with the glamour hunters. That, of course, makes him even more circumspect in his behavior; he can't afford to get involved or identified with such creatures, he shies like a thoroughbred horse at every rag and tatter of nonsense in the breeze, and he avoids religious controversies like death itself. To expect a

23. Alan H. Gardiner, "The Eloquent Peasant," *JEA* 9 (1923): 6.

24. This theme was often discussed by Gaston Maspero, e.g., in "Matériaux pour un livre sur les déformations de l'historiographie égyptienne," in *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes*, BE 29 (Paris: Leroux, 1913), 269–76; and "Avertissement," in *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes*, BE 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1893), v–x, in which Maspero discusses his own changing ideas. On the dangerous appeal of Egypt to amateurs, see Arthur Weigall, "The Morality of Excavation," in *Tutankhamen and Other Essays* (London: Butterworth, 1923), 84–108; and Weigall, "The Future of Excavation in Egypt," in *The Glory of the Pharaohs* (London: Putnam's Sons, 1923), 62–79.

sympathetic word for Joseph Smith from such people is, of course, asking too much—a serious Egyptologist just can't risk it. Even to display too lively an interest in the Pearl of Great Price or the Book of Mormon has been known to jeopardize one's professional standing.

Bishop Spalding Prepares His Surprise

Bishop Spalding (fig. 6) is described by those who knew him as a charming man, a convincing speaker, "a controversialist by nature,"²⁵ an enthusiastic intellectual who "follows those who go to the farthest frontiers of research in modern, or higher, criticism . . . and fearlessly accepts the results of that school of thought,"²⁶ and an ardent social reformer who, while urging the Mormons to come over to his one "historic faith," regrets that the same Mormons are actually doing what he only wishes his own people would do in the way of organized activity, while he labors "to help 'sweep and garnish' the house of faith with the whisk broom of Marxian sophistries."²⁷

This man simply could not square the supernaturalistic claims of Joseph Smith with the enlightened thinking of 1912. He made such a show of fair play and was so diligent in procuring the support of the most eminent scholars in putting the Prophet to the test that even B. H. Roberts felt



Figure 6. In 1912 Bishop Franklin S. Spalding solicited the opinions of eight Egyptologists on Joseph Smith's interpretation of the facsimiles in the Pearl of Great Price.

25. Robert C. Webb, "The Galileo of Sociology," *IE* 17 (1914): 565; see 565–80, where Webb paints an intellectual portrait of Spalding.

26. Roberts, "Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions," 324.

27. Webb, "Galileo of Sociology," 569.

constrained to confess that “his method . . . is entirely legitimate, and the spirit of it [is] irreproachable.”²⁸

But others, taking a closer look, were not so sure: “While the bishop appears to treat his subject with fairness,” wrote Osborn J. P. Widtsoe, and “while he tries to impress his reader with his openness, his frankness, his candor, his honesty, yet his every argument is based upon some unfair implication, some false premise. . . . His fairness is but surface deep.”²⁹ This grave charge is fully borne out in an interview published in the *New York Times* in which the bishop’s magnanimous spirit of love and affection for the Mormons takes on a decidedly greenish tinge: “The breaking up of Mormonism through the desertion of the intelligent part of its membership is the failure for the Prophet Smith’s church which Bishop Spalding foresees. It is for that reason that he prefers to address the Mormons as his friends rather than to attack them.”³⁰

Spalding’s friend Dr. Frederick J. Pack perceived the wily stratagem thus freely admitted by Bishop Spalding when he was far away from Utah and commented on its effectiveness: “The apparent fairness shown by Dr. Spalding made far into the ranks of the Latter-day Saints a well prepared path along which the conclusions of his article might readily follow.”³¹ And when a banker friend from the East asked the good bishop, “Why not leave the Mormons alone?” he replied, “Well, I must feel about their acceptance of what is intellectually and morally untrue, just as you would feel if you knew a group of people were coining . . . counterfeit money.”³² If Dr. Spalding had ever heard of the Constitution,

28. Roberts, “Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions,” 310.

29. Osborn J. P. Widtsoe, “The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding,” *IE* 16 (1913): 603, 594; examples on 595–97.

30. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1912, 3.

31. Frederick J. Pack, “The Spalding Argument,” *IE* 16 (1913): 333–34.

32. Webb, “Galileo of Sociology,” 566, quoting from Spalding, “Making New Friends in Utah,” *Spirit of Missions* 78 (October 1912): 767.

which explicitly provides that holding a wrong opinion about anything is not a crime, as counterfeiting is, he still could not, for all his vaunted liberalism, stand the thought that a religion whose teachings he believed to be false should be permitted to stay in operation.

As he went about with his sweet strategic smile (“He writes to the Mormons in a kindly mood,” says the *Times*), the bishop was working hard on his demolition project. “Much of Bishop Spalding’s work,” according to the interview in the *Times*, “was done in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in this city.”³³ This suggests that the final scheme took shape only after a number of other approaches had proven ineffectual. Many a better scholar than Dr. Spalding has discovered that the revelations of Joseph Smith that look so delightfully vulnerable at first sight become more difficult to refute the more carefully one studies them. “The Bishop, it is said, gave a liberal portion of his time and thought for some years to this literary production, fully expecting that when it should appear in print, it would signal the end of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”³⁴ To compile the little book of but eight very brief letters would take no very great amount of time or effort—what was Dr. Spalding doing all those years? That his long and zealous labors should have brought forth so little is in itself a strong point in Joseph Smith’s favor.

But Spalding made the best psychological use of the little that he had (an old game with ministers), catching the Mormons completely off guard when he finally “fired [his] broadside at us,” as Professor N. L. Nelson put it: “Think, man,” he wrote to his old friend, the bishop, “of the ‘imprudence’ of it! without a declaration of war, and in a time of profound peace.” Dr. Spalding was counting on just that surprise to spread dismay and confusion, but though the burst

33. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 1.

34. Janne M. Sjodahl, “A Final Word,” *IE* 16 (1913): 1100.

was impressive, “as regards three-fourths of us, the effect was purely spectacular—a compound of smoke and noise.”³⁵

Spalding’s avowed purpose was to save “thousands of young men and women” from “the hopelessly illogical, untruthful, unspiritual, and immoral system of Joseph Smith, Jr.”³⁶ And though he denied that his brochure was “circulated especially among the students of the Latter-day Saints high schools,” he did admit putting it in the hands of those who would see that it got there.³⁷ The appeal to intellectual honesty without any insistence on hard study can always count on having some effect among those who wish to be thought intellectual, and Webb noted that the Spalding plan capitalized on that snob appeal which is never lost in academic circles.³⁸ Hence it was not surprising that when a valedictory speaker at the University of Utah two years later issued the routine call for greater freedom of thought, his boldness was nationally advertised by a visiting professor to the university as the direct fruit of Spalding’s demonstration to the Mormons that “one of the sacred books is spurious.”³⁹ Miffed when the Mormons refused to lie down because he said “bang,” Bishop Spalding declared that his project “has become not only a test of the competency of the First Presidency of the Church, but also of the reliability of the present head of the church” since the latter had been unwise enough to believe Joseph Smith instead of Spalding’s experts.⁴⁰ But it is high time to take a closer look at the famous test.

35. N. L. Nelson, “An Open Letter to Bishop Spalding,” *IE* 16 (1913): 603.

36. Webb, “Galileo of Sociology,” 565.

37. Joseph F. Smith, “Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator,” *IE* 16 (1913): 378; cf. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 3.

38. Webb, “Truth Seeking,” 1071. See the remarks of Edgar J. Banks, in “The Revolt of Young Mormonism,” *Literary Digest* (10 July 1915): 66–67.

39. “Revolt of Young Mormonism,” 66–67; Edgar J. Banks, “The ‘Sacred Books’ of the Mormons,” *Christian Herald* (29 January 1913): 83–84, is fully discussed by Sterling B. Talmage, “A Letter and a ‘Protest against Misrepresentation,’” *IE* 16 (1913): 770–76.

40. Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” *IE* 16 (June 1913): 611.

“Just the Test We Need”

The Reverend Spalding’s book is dedicated “To my many Mormon friends—who are as honest searchers after the truth” as he hopes he is himself. This humane and generous approach caught the Mormons off guard, as it was meant to do. “The manifest fairness of the inquiry and the apparently well founded conclusions,” wrote Professor Pack, “came as somewhat of a surprise to the ‘Mormon’ people,” who were not accustomed to the soft sell.⁴¹ The book opens with the magnanimous admission that others have been impetuous, ill-informed, discourteous, and unfair in judging the Mormons and that the time has come for a cool, fair-minded, objective testing of the claims of the Prophet. In particular, the Book of Mormon “has never had the serious examination which its importance demands.”⁴² To correct this oversight, the author then launches into as rigged and spurious a test of prophetic inspiration as was ever devised by the scribes and Pharisees.

Beginning with the statement, “If the Book of Mormon is true, it is, next to the Bible, the most important book in the world,” Spalding notes that no definitive test of that book’s authenticity is possible at this time, but suggests that it would be quite possible to test Joseph Smith’s competence as a translator by examining not the Book of Mormon but another of his translations, that contained in the Pearl of Great Price under the title of the Book of Abraham. In this document, according to Spalding, “we have just the test we need of Joseph Smith’s accuracy as a translator.”⁴³

And he is right. Here we have at our disposal all the necessary resources for making an almost foolproof test. Moreover, it was Joseph Smith himself who first proposed and submitted to the test. When the papyri of the Book of

41. Pack, “Spalding Argument,” 333.

42. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 4.

43. *Ibid.*, 18.

Abraham first came into his hands, the Prophet, having learned that their owner, Michael H. Chandler, had gone out of his way to solicit the opinions of the experts in the big cities where he had exhibited his mummies, went into a room by himself and wrote out his interpretation of some of the symbols; then he invited Mr. Chandler to compare what he had written with the opinions of "the most learned." Chandler did so and was properly impressed, voluntarily giving Joseph Smith a signed statement:

To make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, showed to the most learned; and, from the information that I could ever learn, or meet with, I find that of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., to correspond in the most minute matter. [Signed:] Michael H. Chandler.⁴⁴

Parley P. Pratt suggests that Chandler might have, "on one occasion, met with an individual who was enabled to decipher a small portion, or, at least, to give an opinion of what he supposed its meaning to be" since nobody in America could really read the stuff.⁴⁵ Orson Pratt put it differently: "Mr. C[handler] had also obtained from learned men the best translation he could of some few characters, which however, was not a translation, but more in the shape of their ideas with regard to it, their acquaintance with the language not being sufficient to enable them to translate it literally."⁴⁶

Strangely enough, this last statement exactly fits Dr. Spalding's own eight experts, as we shall see. But whatever the competence of the informants, in Chandler's day or Spalding's, the point here is that it is Joseph Smith who actually

44. *History of the Church*, 2:235.

45. Pratt, in *Millennial Star* 3/3 (July 1842): 46.

46. *Journal of Discourses*, 20:65.

suggests and carries out the very test the bishop devised. It was also Joseph Smith's idea, it will be recalled, to submit copies of the original writing from the plates of the Book of Mormon to the best scholars in America for their frank opinion. Granted again that nobody could read the Anthon transcript either then or today, it was still very important for the leading antiquarians in the country to be given a chance to speak their piece, lest the world say forever after: "Joseph Smith never dared to show his mythical manuscript to *real* scholars; he never gave the experts a chance to express an opinion about it!" Whatever opinions Professor Anthon expressed about the transcript, his letters show that he was indeed given ample opportunity to study the characters and express an opinion about them.

The Prophet Joseph, then, is willing enough to undergo the most objective tests, but Bishop Spalding will not let him. The least the latter could have done would have been to follow the classic procedure used in the vindication of the cuneiform scholars many years before. In 1857 that same Ernest Renan who was loudly declaring Jesus to be a myth was telling the public that nobody could read cuneiform—that the Assyriologists were simply fooling themselves and others. So to put everyone's mind at ease, Sir George Grote sent a cuneiform text to four scholars, requesting each one to give *his* interpretation of the thing; then it was a simple matter to compare the answers and let the public decide whether these men really knew what they were doing or not.⁴⁷

This was obviously the procedure indicated for dealing with the facsimiles. Joseph Smith had given his interpretation of the three ancient Egyptian documents and had challenged the world to give its own interpretation of the same. So one had only to do what Sir George did—that is, send

47. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (1910–11), 6:308, s.v. "Chronology." [For a comparison of the translations, see C. W. Ceram, *The March of Archaeology* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 209–10—eds.]

the three facsimiles from the Pearl of Great Price to various Egyptologists without comment, requesting each one to give *his* interpretation of them. Then Bishop Spalding could open the envelopes publicly and invite the world to compare the readings of the experts with each other *and* with Smith's ideas. What could be fairer and simpler? Joseph Smith had put all the ingredients for a clear and foolproof test into Spalding's hands and even shown him how to go about it—and Spalding threw it all away. Webb observed, "it might have occurred to an 'honest searcher after truth,' . . . to have removed the captions from these figures. . . . Such an 'honest searcher' should have known perfectly well that 'scholars' would object to and denounce Smith as a 'scab translator.'"⁴⁸ That is, it was absolutely imperative to get the experts' opinions *before* showing them Smith's answer, just as the Prophet had handed his interpretations to Chandler *before* he knew what the others had said, leaving it to Mr. Chandler to compare them.

But instead of calmly asking each scholar for his reading and then letting the public judge for itself, Bishop Spalding, as he reports it, sent "the original texts, together with his [Smith's] interpretations, . . . to competent scholars," with the idea that "if they declare[d] his translation to be correct, then it must be accepted as true."⁴⁹ The question put to the specialists was not "What is your interpretation of these things?" but instead, "Here is what the notorious Joseph Smith says about these Egyptian documents; is he right or wrong?" Stating the question thus not only made it very easy for the doctors to answer with a terse "yes" or "no," but also carefully set the stage to avoid any possible danger that one of the correspondents might in an unguarded moment drop a word in favor of Smith. Professor Pack observed that since Bishop Spalding "has evidently written for opinions to a large number of scholars,"

48. Webb, "Truth Seeking," 1078.

49. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 13.

it might be in order to ask whether any replies more or less favorable to Joseph Smith had been withheld, “whether any disharmonious statements may have been received and not published,” since the published letters are very few and very brief.⁵⁰ Even with such precautions, the bishop does not trust his jury, but prefaces their remarks with seventeen pages of elaborate argument to demonstrate the impossibility of Joseph Smith’s being a true prophet no matter *what* the experts may say.

Of the letters that make up his book, Dr. Spalding reports: “It seemed necessary . . . to copy in full the letters from the experts exactly as I secured them.”⁵¹ With such meticulous and commendable care to see that the reader knows just what is going on, it is strange indeed that the most important letter of all is missing—namely, the cover letter that went with the request for an opinion from each of the authorities. For that is the letter to which they are replying, the letter that set up the experiment and determined the state of mind in which each of the participants approached the problem. “This inquiry you claim to be of transcendent importance to the world,” wrote Dr. John A. Widtsoe to Bishop Spalding later. “If you were sincere in this, . . . you certainly would not be ready to pronounce final judgment on the basis of eight or eleven letters written in answer to, only Heaven knows, *what questions you propounded*.”⁵² As a scientist, Dr. Widtsoe knew that the most important thing in writing up an experiment is a minute and accurate account of the exact procedure followed, and that is precisely the part of the report that Dr. Spalding chose to omit.

Whatever the cover letter said (and none was ever made public), it or they completely destroyed that atmosphere of cool and detached impartiality which Dr. Spalding

50. Pack, “Spalding Argument,” 335.

51. Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 611.

52. John A. Widtsoe, “Dr. Widtsoe’s Reply to Rev. Spalding,” *IE* 16 (1913): 617 (emphasis added).

declared himself so anxious to achieve. Dr. Samuel A. B. Mercer, the leader of the band, admits that “ill-temper was shown” and that “several of the scholars were disgusted at what they sincerely believed to be an imposition—‘righteous wrath,’ perhaps.”⁵³ But he insists that religion has nothing to do with this righteous wrath—“the letters were not prejudiced,” and he testifies as one of the jury “that Bishop Spalding did not in any way, whether intentionally or unintentionally, prejudice the witnesses.”⁵⁴ All he had to do to prejudice the whole company was simply to mention the name of Joseph Smith, but no, these men, though three of them are ministers of Spalding’s church, expressed only “a scorn which was due to the crudeness of the linguistic work of the Prophet. . . . They condemned it purely on linguistic grounds.”⁵⁵ To labor the point, since Mercer admits that it is a very important one, “the animus evident in the communications of Sayce and Petrie is purely because of linguistic, and not because of religious reasons.”⁵⁶ Why linguistic *animus* in a field in which the experts are constantly correcting each other’s translations? Is scientific animus any less prejudiced than religious animus? Mercer isn’t kidding anybody: by bringing Joseph Smith into the picture from the very first, Bishop Spalding effectively loaded the dice—from then on only one game was possible.

Some Basic Misconceptions

Not only do all of Spalding’s jury labor under certain serious misconceptions, but their verdict is in every case determined by those misconceptions. Osborn Widtsoe wrote:

53. Samuel A. B. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian,” *Utah Survey* 1 (September 1913): 30–31.

54. *Ibid.*, 30.

55. *Ibid.*, 8.

56. *Ibid.*, 9.

All the learned doctors . . . seem to have labored under the impression that the original manuscript of the Book of Abraham was available, that the three facsimiles . . . constitute that original manuscript, and that the inscriptions on those fac-similes were “written by his (Abraham’s) own hand.”

To one who is acquainted with Church history, there could be made no representation farther from the truth than this of Bishop Spalding’s concerning the Book of Abraham.⁵⁷

Yet it was on these three incorrect assumptions that the experts based all their arguments against Joseph Smith. Consider the following points. First of all, Joseph Smith did *not* draw the facsimiles; they were the work of a professional engraver, Reuben Hedlock, who undertook the job on 23 February 1842 at the Prophet’s request and finished it just a week later.⁵⁸ It was, as we shall see, a very creditable piece of work, but the miserable copies that Bishop Spalding circulated among his jury of experts made a very poor impression, and their raw clumsiness was in every case attributed to the Prophet himself. Some critics have noted that some of the numbers that have been added to Facsimile 2 are upside down and have again assumed that Joseph Smith put them that way; but as Webb points out, “There is no evidence before us that Smith is responsible for it.”⁵⁹

The most common objection to the authenticity of the facsimiles is that they are of too late a date to have been drawn by Abraham. But Joseph Smith never claimed that they were autographic manuscripts or that they dated from the time of Abraham. “With W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery as scribes,” he writes as of July 1835, “I commenced the translation of some of the characters of hieroglyphics, and much to

57. O. Widtsoe, “Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding,” 599.

58. *History of the Church*, 4:518–19.

59. Robert C. Webb, “Have Joseph Smith’s Interpretations Been Discredited?” *IE* 17 (1914): 324.

our joy found that *one* of the rolls contained the *writings* of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt.”⁶⁰ It is and was common to refer to any author’s works as his writings, whether he penned them himself or dictated them to others. The Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price itself, for example, are both writings of Joseph Smith, though written down entirely by the hands of other men and women.

Men of such importance as Abraham and Joseph in Egypt would surely have followed the accepted custom and dictated their “writings” to scribes. The system is clear in the book of Jarom 1:14, where we are referred to “the writings of the kings, or those which they caused to be written”; elsewhere in the Book of Mormon we are told of writings even “by the hand of” Mormon, Nephi, Moses, Omni, and others, and even “by the finger of God” (Alma 10:2), and also of a letter of Giddianhi sealed with his own hand (see 3 Nephi 3:5)—yet the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated were largely the work of Mormon and were never seen by some of the men whose very hands supposedly had written them. As George Q. Cannon explained, “These constituted the writings of Abraham—the text by Abraham’s own hand; though there is nothing to show that this text had not been widely copied, and that this particular [manuscript] may not, in fact, have been a copy 500 years after Abraham’s day.”⁶¹ Janne M. Sjodahl assumes that it was a copy: “As the work proceeded, he [Joseph Smith] became convinced that one of the rolls of papyrus contained a copy of a book written by Abraham.”⁶² And Osborn Widtsoe opined that “this particular roll [the Book of Abraham] may or may not have been written by

60. *History of the Church*, 2:236 (emphasis added).

61. George Q. Cannon, quoted by Nelson, “Open Letter to Bishop Spalding,” 606.

62. Sjodahl, “A Final Word,” 1103.

Abraham's own hand. Possibly it was a copy of Abraham's original manuscript."⁶³

From the way the expression is used in the scriptures and by the brethren, it is clear that when a piece was said to be by its author's "own hand," what is meant is that he originally wrote or dictated it. Even when Wilford Woodruff reports in his journal for 18 February 1842 that "Joseph the Seer has presented us some of the book of Abraham, which was written by his own hand," it means that the Book of Abraham is not merely a book *about* Abraham, of which many are known in the apocryphal literature, but one actually written *by* him. Actually, what the Prophet "presented" to the Saints, who had seen the papyri a hundred times, was his own rendering of the book, which of course was not *literally* written by the hand of Abraham.

It was only to be expected, human nature being what it is, that the announcement that the writings of Abraham and Joseph had been found with some mummies should have promptly given rise to the rumor that Joseph Smith was in possession of "the bodies of Abraham, Abimelech (the king of the Philistines), Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, &c., &c." And it was just as natural that the enemies of the Prophet should circulate the charge "that the purchasers of these antiquities" were spreading such rumors "for the purpose of attracting the attention of the multitude, and gulling the unwary." These reports, Oliver Cowdery wrote in December 1835, were "utterly false. Who these ancient inhabitants of Egypt are, we do not pretend to say."⁶⁴ Joseph was not leaping to conclusions or claiming revelations on all things; indeed, the mummies did not particularly interest him, and he only consented to let Chandler have the high price he asked for them because he could procure the papyri in no other way: "Mr. Chandler told him that he

63. O. Widtsoe, "Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding," 600.

64. Oliver Cowdery to Wm. Frye, *Messenger and Advocate* 2/3 (December 1835): 233; cf. *History of the Church*, 2:348.

would not sell the writings, unless he could sell the mummies.”⁶⁵ The mere sight of the mummies did not excite Joseph Smith, and neither did the rolls of papyri before he knew what was on them: they were just “something rolled up . . . which, when examined, proved to be two rolls of papyrus.” It was only after the mummies had been bought and the rolls examined that the brethren discovered, “much to our joy,” how important they were.⁶⁶ “The characters,” Joseph Smith reported, “are such as you find upon the coffins of mummies—hieroglyphs, etc.”—that is, quite ordinary stuff, to look at them.⁶⁷ It is amusing to see how the Spalding specialists petulantly declare the facsimiles, which they confess themselves unable to read, to be to all appearances nothing but perfectly ordinary Egyptian documents. Joseph Smith could have told them that.

The Prophet made no dogmatic statement as to how the writings got in with the mummies, and Church members speculated freely on the subject. “It is supposed,” wrote Parley P. Pratt, “they were preserved in the family of the Pharaohs and afterwards hid up in the embalmed body of the female with whom they were found.”⁶⁸ The reporter of a local newspaper, after being shown the mummies by Mother Smith, wrote a satirical account of how Joseph in Egypt had a roll of papyrus delivered to him in a wooden box—by an angel, of course—“which was to be buried by him with the family of one of the patriarchs. . . . Joseph . . . depositing the case on the Queen’s breast, where it lay until the discovery of the ‘brass plates.’”⁶⁹ Behind the usual garbling of the

65. *Journal of Discourses*, 20:65.

66. *History of the Church*, 2:236.

67. *Ibid.*, 2:348.

68. Pratt, in *Millennial Star* 3/3 (1842): 47.

69. *Warsaw Signal*, 10 September 1845, 2, cited by Calvin D. McOmber Jr., “A Study of the Criticisms of the Book of Abraham” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960), 17–18.

familiar motifs, one may detect another version of Brother Pratt's speculation.

Actually, ancient Egyptian documents have been found buried with mummies of later date. The manuscript of the famous Ramesseum Dramatic Text, written to be buried with a king, was found laid away on the mummy of a private citizen two hundred years after the time it was written—and even then it was copied down from still older sources. "How this manuscript . . . came into the private library of the . . . Theban in whose grave it was found," wrote Professor Sethe, "is a question which of course can never be answered."⁷⁰ It may not be without significance that our Pearl of Great Price mummies were also found in Thebes and that some other mummies found there, notably those accompanied by those rare and peculiar documents known as hypocephali (Facsimile 2 is a hypocephalus), had lying on their breasts just such rolls of papyrus, apparently documents of considerable importance, but not well enough preserved to be read. Mummies themselves were "often re-embalmed by the priests and toted from tomb to tomb—for centuries."⁷¹ Furthermore, when documents became worn out from age or use it was quite proper to make a copy, which was thenceforth regarded exactly as if it were the original writings.⁷²

70. Kurt Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen*, 2 parts (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1928; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), 2:99.

71. C. W. Ceram, *A Picture History of Archaeology*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), 138.

72. A classical instance is found in the introduction to the famous Shabako Stone, where the king "orders a copy to be made which should be better than the earlier [original] one [lit., 'than its earlier condition']," in Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen*, 1:20. "Many very ancient books appeared in later transcriptions throughout Egyptian history," e.g., the Admonitions (Precepts) of Ptah-Hotep; "If, then, in similar fashion, Abraham also wrote a book, there is no essential absurdity in the supposition that a copy of it was found in the tomb of some persons who died even 1,000 or 1,500 years after his day." Webb, "Joseph

Bishop Spalding's announcement that he submitted to the specialists "the original text" and that "the original texts with the Prophet's translation are available for our investigation" is simply not true. It makes all the difference in the world what particular text a scholar has to work with, as a comparison of the recently discovered original of Facsimile 1 with the copies of it that Spalding sent to the critics should make clear to anyone.

Some Spurious Propositions

1. While the experts judged the facsimiles in light of certain basic misinformation, the general public was also beguiled by a number of specious propositions. The first of these was that the test of the engravings in the Pearl of Great Price effectively destroyed all claims of the Book of Mormon to authenticity.

It may seem rather odd that Spalding's purpose in his great campaign against the facsimiles was to discredit not them but the Book of Mormon. Yet such is the case, as the first sentence of his book proclaims. In going about his work in such a devious way, our author pays high tribute indeed to the Book of Mormon, a purportedly historical work of over five hundred pages in length in which, it would seem, he can discover no direct or obvious proof of fraud to save him all this trouble.

Devious is the word: The Mormons must abandon their faith, so ran the argument, because Joseph Smith was not a true prophet; he was not a true prophet because the Book of Mormon was not divinely inspired; it was not divinely inspired because it was not translated correctly; we know it was not translated correctly because Joseph Smith could not read Egyptian; we know this because he translated the Book of Abraham incorrectly, and both it and the Book of

Smith's Interpretations," 314. Whatever others, such as Wilford Woodruff, may have thought as to the age of the facsimiles, Joseph Smith left no clear pronouncement.

Mormon “were translated from the same Egyptian language, and if the translator be found to have completely failed in the translation of one book, our faith in his translation of the other must necessarily be impaired”;⁷³ we know he translated the Book of Abraham incorrectly because he did not understand the facsimiles in the Pearl of Great Price; we know that he did not understand the facsimiles because eight scholars gave interpretations that differed from his. “Here is a string of inferences for you!” wrote John Henry Evans. “Never was a conclusion more tortuously reached. Never was man asked to give up a belief that satisfied him, on slighter grounds.”⁷⁴

Concealed in the Spalding syllogism are yet more spurious propositions. Take his main argument, for example: “If . . . the translation of the ‘Book of Abraham’ is incorrect, then no thoughtful man can be asked to accept the Book of Mormon, but, on the other hand, honesty will require him, with whatever personal regret, to repudiate it and the whole body of belief, which has been built upon it.”⁷⁵ Now it is not just the Book of Mormon that must be thrown out because eight men fail to see what Joseph Smith saw in three ancient engravings, but everything the Prophet ever taught. By the same token the good bishop has no choice—when he learns from the higher critics, whom he so ardently endorses, that the Old and New Testaments are not what they pretend to be, but laborious compilations swarming with historical and philological misconceptions—but to renounce the Bible as a whole (for after all, if one verse is faulty, must not our faith in the others “necessarily be impaired”?) and with it “the whole body of belief, which has been built upon it.”

73. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 5.

74. John H. Evans, “Bishop Spalding’s Jumps in the Logical Process,” *IE* 16 (1913): 346.

75. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 18.

We are further asked to believe that if Joseph Smith could have made a wrong translation on one occasion, it would follow inevitably that he had never at any time had a true gift of translation. But as an editorial in the *Deseret News* pointed out, "If a mistake should be proved in the translation of the Egyptian documents, that would not in any way affect the translation of the Book of Mormon."⁷⁶ Spalding insisted, as Professor Pack noted, under what is termed the spirit of fairness, that Joseph Smith be declared a false prophet if he makes a single failure: all his successes must be repudiated.⁷⁷ Pack further observed that "the Latter-day Saints should not, and for that matter do not, maintain that Joseph Smith was infallible."⁷⁸ And Sjordahl explained that the Prophet like any other mortal was free to make mistakes "in the translation of the Egyptian documents."⁷⁹ Indeed, Mormonism was introduced to the world with the unheard-of announcement, on the title page of the Book of Mormon, that it is quite possible for a book of holy scripture to contain "the mistakes of men."

Here we touch upon a basic misunderstanding that is at the root of most criticism of Joseph Smith. The sectarian world simply cannot understand how it is possible that a prophet would need to experiment with sugar beets or silkworms: why should a prophet experiment? Shouldn't God reveal to him exactly what to do in every instance, so that he need never, never make a mistake? They could never see, for example, why Brigham Young, if he was really a prophet of God, could make a mistake. A glance at the Bible would have shown any searcher that that is not the way God works. But for conventional Christianity the Bible itself was an all-or-nothing proposition, absolutely perfect

76. Janne M. Sjordahl, "The Book of Abraham," editorial in *Deseret News*, 17 December 1912, 4; reprinted in *IE* 16 (February 1913): 327.

77. Pack, "Spalding Argument," 337–40.

78. *Ibid.*, 339.

79. Sjordahl, "Book of Abraham," 327.

and complete, devoid of the slightest suspicion of human error. It had to be that way, since revelation had ceased; and if one started questioning any verse of the Bible, all the others automatically became suspect. The absurd notion that any human being, prophet or not, can be always right or always wrong is a holdover from the absolutes of scholastic thinking. If God ever permits a prophet to be wrong or to learn by trial and error as the rest of God's children do, how can we ever be sure whether he is right or not? That, of course, is where revelation comes in. Every individual must get a testimony for himself and be guided by the Spirit entirely on his own; then, and only then, as Brigham Young so often and so emphatically declared, can the people of God be led by revelation. In the light of such a doctrine, whether Joseph Smith ever made mistakes or not becomes completely irrelevant; the Doctrine and Covenants leaves us in no doubt at all as to his fallibility, a thing that the Prophet himself freely admitted. What mortals have ever been more keenly aware of their weakness and shortcomings than the prophets?

On 2 November 1837, Phineas Richards and Reuben Hedlock, the engraver, were appointed to "transact business for the Church in procuring means to translate and print the records taken from the Catacombs of Egypt."⁸⁰ Far from expecting the Lord to do everything for him, or trying to do it all himself, the Prophet was soliciting human aid in the enterprise. This is enough to show what many of the brethren were quick to point out to Bishop Spalding, that the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham were not translated in exactly the same way. Indeed, there are many thousands of people in the world who believe that while the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, the translating of the Book of Abraham was not inspired at all; at any rate, the Reorganized Church of

80. *History of the Church*, 2:520–21.

Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [now the Community of Christ] has never accepted it as scripture.⁸¹ Some of Joseph Smith's contemporaries claimed that he used the Urim and Thummim in translating the Book of Abraham, but others denied it.⁸² Who can draw the line between insight and inspiration, believing, as the Latter-day Saints do, that all knowledge comes from God at various levels of revelation? "Joseph studied diligently and worked the figures over, bit by bit, quite as an uninspired translator might have done," wrote Nelson.⁸³ "He now redoubled his efforts," wrote Sjordahl, a Church historian, "to understand them, . . . and in seven years his translation of the Book of Abraham was ready for the press."⁸⁴ The idea that "the translation came to him very largely as the result of persistent study"⁸⁵ is borne out in a story that the late Preston Nibley used to tell of how in 1906 he visited the Nauvoo House in company with President Joseph F. Smith. President Smith (as Elder Nibley recollected with his remarkable memory) recalled with tears the familiar sight of "Uncle Joseph" kneeling on the floor of the front room with Egyptian manuscripts spread out all around him, weighted down by rocks and books, as with intense concentration he would study a line of characters, jotting down his impressions in a little notebook as he went.

"This afternoon," the Prophet reported, "I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and ancients unfolded to our understanding."⁸⁶ Here

81. Haggerty, "Study of the Book of Abraham," 21.

82. See *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 2:155 (19 February 1842).

83. Nelson, "Open Letter to Bishop Spalding," 604.

84. Sjordahl, "Final Word," 1103.

85. Pack, "Spalding Argument," 335.

86. *History of the Church*, 2:286.

the Prophet received information on two different levels, according to a procedure prescribed by revelation: "You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right" (D&C 9:8). The revelation may or may not confirm one's studied conclusions. Joseph Smith's work, here mentioned, on the Egyptian alphabet was never accepted or even presented to the Church as revelation, and no one is bound by it.⁸⁷ However, the zeal and application of the brethren was rewarded by a revelation that far transcended any intellectual efforts of man. It is this revelation that is comprised in the Pearl of Great Price, and it is by it and others like it that one may judge the Prophet Joseph, and *not* by such preliminary gropings as the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,⁸⁸ which was never completed, never released for publication, and, so far as we have been able to discover, never even mentioned in public. Granted that diligent searching and study may be a preliminary to receiving revelation, the revelation when it comes is certainly not to be judged by them. We are not only permitted but also instructed to cast about for possible solutions in our minds before the real solution is given us, and if we find Joseph Smith doing just that, we should not rush to point out possible flaws in his preliminary speculations as proof that he was not inspired.

Where translation is concerned, Joseph Smith also operated on two levels, with no danger of confusing the two. At no time did he claim that the gift of tongues is constant or permanent; like all gifts of the Spirit, it is bestowed when and as God chooses. The Prophet stated publicly more than once that he had to study languages the hard way, like anyone else,

87. See Hugh Nibley, "Getting Ready to Begin: An Editorial," *BYU Studies* 8/3 (1968): 245–54.

88. [In later writings, Nibley referred to this as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers—eds.]

when not actually receiving revelation.⁸⁹ And so we must allow him the luxury of having his own ideas about things and making his own mistakes and his own translations as long as he plays the game fairly and never presents them as binding on others.

Since Bishop Spalding's avowed purpose is to test the Book of Mormon with the strictest objectivity and scientific rigor, he is off to a poor start in asking us to judge it entirely on the merits of another translation, undertaken under different circumstances and by a different method, and in turn to judge that *other* translation solely on the basis of a third source, the three facsimiles, which were *not* an integral part of the Book of Abraham. But what has all this got to do with translating anyway? This brings us to . . .

2. Bishop Spalding's second spurious proposition, which is that he is testing the Prophet's competence as a *translator*; indeed, the title of this book is *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*. His whole object, as he explains it, is to show that "the whole body of belief" based on Joseph Smith's teachings must be "repudiated" because "the *translation* of the 'Book of Abraham' is incorrect."⁹⁰ What, then, are we to think when we search through the interpretations of Joseph Smith that Spalding submitted to the authorities, and also the interpretations that they sent back to him in reply, and discover that in all of them *there is not a single word of translation!* "It may be said," wrote Mercer in summing up the position of the critics, "that not one of the jury pretended to translate the poorly copied hieroglyphics," instead of which they "interpreted the figures," a very different thing, as Mercer admits.⁹¹

89. See Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, CWHN 11 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 385–87. The whole Caswall story was an attempt to discredit Joseph Smith as a translator.

90. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 18.

91. Mercer, in Spalding, "Rev. Spalding's Answer to Dr. Widtsoe," 612.

Dr. Spalding's experts, with Dr. Mercer in the lead, insist from first to last that the whole issue is a linguistic one. "I speak as a linguist," wrote Mercer, "when I say that if Smith knew Egyptian and correctly interpreted the facsimiles, . . . then I don't know a word of Egyptian, and Erman's Grammar is a fake, and all modern Egyptologists are deceived."⁹² As for the others, they "did not condemn the Prophet's translations because of religious prejudices. . . . They condemned it purely on linguistic grounds," expressing "a scorn which was due to the crudeness of the linguistic work of the Prophet."⁹³ Almost everyone, including the Mormons, has been fooled here,⁹⁴ taking it for granted that we have a band of learned linguists carefully examining the work of Joseph Smith as a translator. We have nothing of the sort. There is a serious discrepancy here between the claims of the experts and their performance.

In the first place, it is claimed that Egyptologists (and Spalding's experts are supposed to be tops) can read Egyptian with the greatest of ease. Professor Edgar J. Banks, who spent some time in Salt Lake City in 1915 in a mopping-up operation for Bishop Spalding, made much of this. "At the time Smith's translation was made," he wrote in the *Literary Digest*, "no man could prove that it was not correct, for the hieroglyphics could not then be read; but now they are as easily read by scholars as the page on an English book."⁹⁵ "The Book of Abraham was Smith's weak point," he wrote elsewhere, propounding a

92. Mercer, in *ibid.*, 615.

93. Mercer, "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter," 8.

94. See Haggerty, "Study of the Book of Abraham," 22. T. Edgar Lyon, *Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1948), 221, holds that since the engraver of the facsimiles was "unfamiliar with the Egyptian language," the inaccurate results attest only "the reality of the existence of the manuscript, and the translation" rather than the authenticity of the one and the correctness of the other.

95. Banks, "Revolt of Young Mormonism," 66.

thesis that was to be repeated in our own day: "He did not foresee that in time the Egyptian hieroglyphics . . . would become as clear as English characters; that the Egyptian drawings would be perfectly intelligible, and that the deception would become like an open book."⁹⁶ And then comes the announcement: "Since then the Egyptian language has become perfectly intelligible."⁹⁷ One member of Spalding's jury declared that "Egyptian characters can now be read almost as easily as Greek,"⁹⁸ and another (Mercer) could say, "We have many documents from all Egyptian periods, from earlier than 3,000 B.C. down, and they can all be read with comparative ease."⁹⁹

Well, then, why didn't they translate the hieroglyphics on the facsimiles? Only B. H. Roberts took them to task on this. "It should also be remembered," he wrote, "that these savants in their interpretation of the facsimiles . . . give us no translation of what might be thought, by the layman, to be the 'script' of the text, namely, the small characters around the border."¹⁰⁰ "If, as one of the jury declares, 'Egyptian characters can now be read almost as easily as Greek,' one wonders how it is that one or [the] other of the plates was not completely translated, and its story exhaustively told. Can it be that the Egyptologists are not as sure of their knowledge of ancient Egyptian script as . . . Dr. Mace would lead us to think they are?"¹⁰¹

Professor Mercer's angry reply to this was to accuse Roberts of being an amateur: as "a layman in things Egyptian, he confuses the interpretation of figures with the

96. Banks, quoted in Talmage, "Letter and a 'Protest against Misrepresentation,'" 774.

97. Talmage, "Letter and a 'Protest against Misrepresentation,'" 775.

98. Arthur C. Mace, quoted by Roberts, "Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions," 332.

99. Mercer, quoted in Spalding, "Rev. Spalding's Answer to Dr. Widtsoe," 612.

100. Roberts, "Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions," 321–32.

101. *Ibid.*, 322.

translation of hieroglyphics"¹⁰²—which is exactly what Mercer did when he repeatedly declared, on the basis of the interpretation of figures alone, that the experts had proven that Joseph Smith had failed as a translator of hieroglyphics. Mercer went on to explain that “while the translation of ignorantly copied hieroglyphs is a precarious proceeding, the interpretation of Egyptian figures is a comparatively simple matter.”¹⁰³ Precisely, and that is exactly why we are pleased that Dr. Spalding has called upon the world’s foremost authorities, the few men who *can* master the more “precarious proceeding” while leaving the “comparatively simple” guessing games to the less magnificently endowed. “It would be an excellent move,” Webb suggested, “if some of these experts should make a translation of these inscriptions, of which they know so much, but which, according to others again, are illegible.”¹⁰⁴ He also pointed out the interesting fact that Joseph Smith did not rush into giving a translation of any of the hieroglyphs—why not, since in his day they were perfectly meaningless anyway, and no one could call him to account? This, combined with the exceedingly *unobvious* interpretations that the Prophet gave to many of the more obvious figures, suggests to Webb that Smith was neither one of those naive enthusiasts who interpret Egyptian inscriptions like simple picture writing nor a sly deceiver who could easily have exploited those illegible little squiggles that made no sense even to Spalding’s experts.¹⁰⁵

But why didn’t any of the Spalding jury translate any of the hieroglyphics on the facsimiles? It was an embarrassing question. Of course they protested that the figures were too

102. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 25; and Mercer, in Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 612.

103. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 25.

104. Webb, “Truth Seeking,” 1079.

105. Robert C. Webb, “A Critical Examination of the Fac-Similes,” *IE* 16 (1913): 436.

badly copied to be legible¹⁰⁶—that was their escape hatch; but unfortunately they were very careless about locking it, for there was no agreement as to what was legible and what was not. “Did you not notice in the letters received by you,” Dr. Widtsoe asked Bishop Spalding, “that some of the scholars were unable to read the characters surrounding the main picture, while one declares them to be the usual funeral inscriptions? Did you not know that M. Deveria seemed able to decipher many of them? As a scientific investigator, why did you not satisfy yourself and us on this point?”¹⁰⁷ “How can it be,” he asked elsewhere, “that from Mr. Deveria to Dr. Barton, some imply that they are able to read the hieroglyphics easily; others only with difficulty, and some not at all? . . . Why is such Egyptian darkness hovering over the translation of Plate 2? Is it probable that Egyptologists cannot read it? Some have so stated.”¹⁰⁸ Mr. Webb struck close to home when he said,

We may judge of the finality of the “scholarly” conclusions, which are now being featured as the “death warrant” of Smith’s reputation as a translator, by the ability of these scholars to translate on their own account. . . . I want to call your attention to the Professor’s [Mercer’s] easy avoidance of . . . the question of whether the hieroglyphic figures on Plates 2 and 3 are really legible or not.¹⁰⁹

And he goes on to point out that whereas Sayce and Petrie declared the characters totally illegible, Professor Breasted believed they could be readily identified.

The Mormons were well within their rights when they chided the critics for giving up so easily: to ask them to

106. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 24. We treat this theme later.

107. John A. Widtsoe, “Comments on the Spaulding Pamphlet,” *IE* 16 (1913): 457.

108. Widtsoe, “Dr. Widtsoe’s Reply to Rev. Spalding,” 618.

109. Webb, “Truth Seeking,” 1078.

give up their religion on the authority of a test which the experts themselves were unwilling or unable to carry through to the end was too much. After all, “ignorantly copied” hieroglyphs are nothing new in the experience of any Egyptologist—they are the rule rather than the exception, an occupational hazard with which the specialist must live on familiar terms. “Scholars should not shrink from translating difficult texts,” Gardiner admonishes his colleagues. “At the best they may be lucky enough to hit upon the right renderings. At the worst they will have given the critics a target to tilt at.”¹¹⁰ But to set themselves up as targets was the one thing that the Spalding jury was determined to avoid. They placed themselves in a very awkward position by speaking with great confidence, even arrogance, of documents they could not read; they would flunk Joseph Smith in a test they could not pass themselves. They could not very well refuse to take the test either, because in claiming intimate familiarity with the material they provided the solution to the problem of the badly copied hieroglyphs.

If the hieroglyphics were so badly copied as to be totally illegible, B. H. Roberts asked, “how may the learned gentlemen pronounce upon them with such certainty?”¹¹¹ “None of them offers an interpretation of the inscription [of Facsimile 2],” Sjodahl observed. “This is all the more remarkable because they all agree that the object is very familiar to Egyptian scholars.”¹¹² The experts weren’t so helpless after all. In fact, the solution was staring them in the face: the pictures could be easily interpreted, Dr. Mercer observed, “because the same figures . . . are to be found on many similar Egyptian papyri where the text can be easily read.”¹¹³ If a scene is badly drawn, we have only to go to

110. Alan H. Gardiner, “The Great Speos Artemidos Inscription,” *JEA* 32 (1946): 56.

111. Roberts, “Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions,” 314.

112. Sjodahl, “Book of Abraham,” 329.

113. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 9.

many better-executed drawings of the same scene to discover how it should look and how it should be interpreted. And the same, of course, holds true of the hieroglyphics that go along with the pictures. Many important Egyptian writings occur in numerous copies found in tombs or on the walls of temples; literary classics, copied over and over again as exercises by schoolboys, have often come down to us in a variety of hands. So every Egyptologist is bound at some time in his life to spend a good deal of time comparing badly written or damaged texts with better ones to find out what the clumsier scribe is trying to convey.

Hence, Bishop Spalding's learned jury hardly needed Dr. Widtsoe to suggest that since "the museums on both sides of the water" are stocked with papyri identical to those in the Pearl of Great Price, "they might have been examined to secure the counterparts of Joseph Smith's 'hieroglyphs.'"¹¹⁴ Isaac Russell, another layman and a non-Mormon, suggested the same procedure in cracking the code of the hypocephalus (Facsimile 2): "Another worth while phase of the matter would perhaps be now to turn to hypocephali and collect and compare *all* of [them]."¹¹⁵ That, after all, would be the sensible way to go about it. Since Professor Breasted had stated as his principal objection to the claims of Joseph Smith that the scene in Facsimile 1 occurs "unnumbered thousands of times" and that of Facsimile 3 "is depicted innumerable times" in Egyptian art,¹¹⁶ it was only fair of the Mormons to ask him to supply them with just *one* such identical scene for study: "If the doctor would kindly refer such to any books or museum collections in which a few of these 'scores' could be found and studied, he would confer a distinct favor."¹¹⁷ But no such

114. Widtsoe, "Comments on the Spaulding Pamphlet," 456–57.

115. Isaac Russell, "A Further Discussion of Bishop F. S. Spalding's Pamphlet," *IE* 16 (1913): 1099 (emphasis added).

116. James Breasted, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 26.

117. Webb, "Truth Seeking," 1079.

assistance was forthcoming, though Breasted had declared himself to be immensely interested in the subject. Dr. Mercer gives himself away when he announces that “while the *figures* are copied fairly well, the *hieroglyphics*, with the exception of some simple signs, are incorrectly copied. . . . [T]he unusual and complicated signs are always wrongly copied.”¹¹⁸ This means that Mercer is in a position to give us the correct version of the badly copied texts since he knows what the proper characters should be, and with it, of course, a translation. Why doesn't he? Here a word is in order on the translation of Egyptian in general.

Professor William F. Albright writes in his “Introductory Article”:

It is unsafe to rely on any translations of Egyptian historical texts which appeared before Breasted's *Ancient Records* (1906), since Breasted was the first historian to take full advantage of the tremendous progress in the knowledge of Egyptian achieved by Erman and Sethe after 1880. It is equally unsafe to depend on any translations of Egyptian religious texts made before about 1925, since that year marked the publication of the first volume of the great Berlin dictionary. . . . The first reliable English translations of Egyptian religious texts appeared in Blackman's *Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* (1927), and Breasted's *Dawn of Conscience* (1933).¹¹⁹

Since that was written there have been more important changes, but where does that leave our experts of 1912? Elder Richard W. Young pointed to the current issue of the *Britannica*, which stated that the Egyptologist who has long lived in the realm of conjecture “is too prone to consider any series of guesses good enough to serve as a translation” and forgets to insert the notes of interrogation which would warn

118. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 8–9.

119. William F. Albright, “Introductory Article,” in George E. Wright and Floyd V. Filson, *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956), 12.

workers in other fields from implicit trust.¹²⁰ Implicit trust in his eight Egyptologists is exactly what Dr. Spalding had and what he demanded of all others: with anything less than implicit trust his whole project collapses. And they never did get around to testing Joseph Smith as a translator.¹²¹

120. Richard W. Young, "Scientists Not Always Correct," *IE* 16 (1913): 462, citing *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed., 9:55, s.v. "Egypt."

121. A sidebar entitled "We Should Explain" appeared in *IE* 71 (April 1968): 65–66:

The first draft of this series of articles was written some years before the Church came into possession of the recently acquired papyri, and had already been slated to appear in the *Era* when big news broke. They were never meant as an examination of the new evidence, although they do provide a necessary approach to it. Since the new problems could not be dealt with instantly, and the preliminary material was already at hand, it was decided to release the historical background material while working on the other.

Many people have asked impatiently why the Church has not put the papyri into the hands of the learned. The answer is simple: it is because they have already been in the hands of recognized scholars for many years, although no Latter-day Saint was even aware of their existence until about two years ago. At no time have the manuscripts not been just as available to Egyptologists as they are now to members of the Church. Since the Church obtained them, they have been made available to everyone. It is not the Mormons who have kept the documents out of the hands of the scholars but the other way around. If it had not been for Professor Aziz S. Atiya, we should still know nothing about the papyri; he is in a very real sense their discoverer.

With the sudden appearance of the long-lost papyri and the great surge of popular interest in the Pearl of Great Price and things Egyptian, it was necessary, before everything else, to take precautions against certain basic misunderstandings. First of all, a preliminary notice was in order—just enough to make it clear that we were quite aware that some of the fragments were obviously from the Book of the Dead and that Joseph Smith had engaged in extensive speculation about some of the writings which, in the present state of our knowledge, no one is obligated to accept as scripture. Along with this we took the calculated risk of offending both defenders and critics of the Book of Abraham in order to forestall premature speculations and hasty conclusions.

The critics of the Pearl of Great Price, like those of the Book of Mormon, have always had a weakness for instant solutions. As soon as anyone starts

3. The third spurious proposition is Bishop Spalding's announcement that the "original text with the Prophet's

putting a long equation on the blackboard or begins to demonstrate the steps in the solution of an involved problem, these students cry out, "Never mind all that—you are only stalling; give us the answer!" They would prefer to have the teacher say, "Students, I am a mathematician, and the answer is zero because I say so. Class dismissed." This has been the ingratiating method of the Pearl of Great Price critics from the beginning. But it is not enough to tell people what we think the answer is to this particular problem; we want them to see why we believe our answer is right and to understand how it has been derived. We have been taken to task for quoting in reply to the Egyptologists of 1912 the observations of Mormons who were not Egyptologists. We quoted them because what they said was to the point, and the Egyptologists never answered them. One does not have to be a meteorologist to report that the sky is clear or that it is snowing.

As an example of how complicated the issues can become, we call attention to the March 1968 issue of a privately but widely circulated news sheet, "The Salt Lake City Messenger," announcing in characteristically sensational headlines "The Fall of the Book of Abraham." At last!

The publishers of the news sheet were kind enough to provide the reader with a demonstration of their Egyptology at work, in the form of a transcription and translation by a Mr. Heward of a section of one of the LDS papyri. The picture of a swallow on the fragment makes it possible for even the rankest amateur like this writer to spot at once the corresponding passage in Budge's much-published translation as chapter 86 of the Book of the Dead. The student who takes the pains to compare Budge's translation of Ani, Mr. Heward's purported translation of the LDS fragment, and the LDS fragment itself will soon discover that Mr. Heward is not translating the LDS fragment at all, but simply paraphrasing Budge. The Papyrus of Ani and the LDS fragment are much alike but they are far from identical, and whenever the two differ it is the text of Budge that Mr. Heward translates, in the language of Budge, and *not* the LDS manuscript, which he claims to be reading. Space will not allow here the presentation of the many passages in the translation in which this is glaringly apparent.

This is another example of a principle that has been only too fully illustrated in Pearl of Great Price criticism, namely, that it is easy to fool the public on matters of which the public knows nothing. No one is more eager than this writer to get out of the critical "slough of despond" and start discussing the wonderful discoveries that are now casting a strange new light on the Book of Abraham. But before we can do that, we must deal with a lot of preliminary questions that others have raised.

translation are [is] available for our investigation.”¹²² This statement, as Professor Pack noted, “is a very misleading one. In the first place, we do not have the original text, at most only three small fragments of it. . . . In the second place these fragments cannot be considered as forming part of the text of the Book of Abraham.”¹²³ But Dr. Pack has overlooked the most important point of all, which is that the “three small fragments” themselves are by no means the *original* text. And that is an all-important point, since if our experts are to pass judgment on Smith’s understanding of any document, they must absolutely see what it is that he is interpreting or translating. As we shall see, the experts accused Joseph Smith and the Mormons of making significant alterations in their reproductions of the facsimiles and even of out-and-out invention of some of the figures: without the originals we cannot test these very grave charges. Banks, discoursing at the University of Utah, pontifically declared that “the Mormon elders made a fatal mistake” when they talked about papyri because “the inscriptions are not upon papyrus, but upon small clay objects,” which news went abroad to the world in the pages of the eminent *Literary Digest*.¹²⁴ Again, only if we have the originals can we give a definitive reply to such wild accusations. In 1842 an article in the *New York Herald* actually declared that the papyri did not come from the catacombs in Egypt, but were “discovered, we presume by Joseph Smith, the grandfather, . . . in upper Egypt.”¹²⁵ Only the original documents could prove to the world that they were not forgeries.

When we come to discuss the facsimiles one by one, we shall have occasion to note what drastic alterations they have suffered through the years at the hands of their various

122. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 18.

123. Pack, “Spalding Argument,” 335.

124. Banks, “Revolt of Young Mormonism,” 66.

125. James G. Bennett, “The Mormons—A Leaf from Joe Smith,” *New York Herald* (3 April 1842): 2.



Figure 7. As an example of how subsequent engravers altered the original Hedlock cut of Facsimile 1, this reproduction from the July 1842 *Millennial Star* shows how quickly artists made changes in it (see Fac. 1, fig. 9). This version was later used for the 1851 English edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*.

copyists. Here let us briefly indicate by way of illustration the sort of indignities that these much-reproduced documents have had to put up with. To cite one example, the 1965 printing of George Reynolds and Sjudahl's valuable *Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price* is adorned by a dust jacket depicting in greatly magnified form the impressive figure of a lion-headed deity seated on a throne in a boat—obviously figure 3 in Facsimile 2. But in earlier engravings of the facsimile, as well as in other hypocephali resembling it, the figure has not a lion's head, which makes no sense, but the head of a hawk, which makes very good sense. Again, the crocodile that lurks at the bottom of Facsimile 1 was actually turned into a *cat* in the official English reproduction of 1842 (fig. 7)! In earlier reproductions figure 2 in Facsimile 2

is seen holding a long staff, surmounted by the well-known jackal standard, but in later editions of the *Pearl of Great Price*, including the one in use today,¹²⁶ the staff has disappeared with the result that many Latter-day Saints insist on seeing in the jackal (turned upside down!) the figure of a bird. It is as if the Mormons had felt that these drawings, since they are mere symbols anyway, may be copied pretty much as one pleases.

But when Bishop Spalding sent by far the worst copies of all to his eight judges with the announcement that they were in a position to criticize “the original text,” he was way out of bounds. As recently as 1963 an eminent Egyptologist mistook the *wedjat*-eye of figure 7 in Facsimile 2 for a *fan*—an egregious blunder justifiable solely on the grounds of bad copying. Until scholars have access to the original documents, their conclusions based on the old engravings can only be regarded as tentative.

4. Another mistaken premise, and one by which almost everybody is taken in, is, in the words of the *New York Times*, that “the sacred Mormon text was susceptible of accurate and complete analysis” and had actually received the “thoughtful consideration of the world’s foremost Orientalists.”¹²⁷ How much thoughtful consideration they gave is apparent in the exceeding brevity of their letters, in which they still had time to drop such revealing tags as “It is difficult to deal seriously with Joseph Smith’s impudent fraud.”¹²⁸ “Notes to his fac-similes cannot be taken seriously by any scholar.”¹²⁹ “The ‘Book of Abraham,’ it is hardly necessary to say, is a

126. [That was in 1968. In 1981, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints issued a new edition of *The Pearl of Great Price*, which returns to Reuben Hedlock’s original cuts of the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham, which, by the way, were traced and not drawn freehand—eds.]

127. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 1.

128. A. H. Sayce, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 23.

129. Samuel A. B. Mercer, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 29.

pure fabrication."¹³⁰ "His interpretations are of course all rubbish!"¹³¹ "The professed explanations, are too absurd to be noticed,"¹³² "rather comical . . . amusing ignorance."¹³³

If such individuals could not take the thing seriously, they should have turned the assignment over to others who would be willing to do so if only for the sake of argument. When the Mormons objected to the offhanded and contemptuous treatment this very important subject was getting, Dr. Mercer replied by admitting that "ill-temper was shown," that "animus [was] evident," and that "several of the scholars were disgusted with what they sincerely believed to be an imposition."¹³⁴ He also admitted that "the reply of each scholar was brief, very little time being devoted to a study of the Prophet's work in general." He could however, readily explain both their haste and their superficiality: as to the first, "it required only a glance to find out that the interpretation and the translation were absolutely wrong in every detail." As to the second, "the scholars felt that linguistically . . . the subject was not worth much of their valuable time. Hence their brief replies."¹³⁵ However, the Mormons could rest assured that they had received the full treatment since the final estimate, presented by Mercer himself, was given "as sincerely and as scientifically as possible."¹³⁶

How strange then, that Bishop Spalding, joining his voice with Mercer's in the final benediction, defends himself by declaring that his "pamphlet makes no pretension of being a scientific treatise."¹³⁷ Widtsoe the scientist was

130. Arthur C. Mace, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 27.

131. For H. Woodward's comments, see Junius F. Wells, "Scholars Disagree," *IE* 16 (1913): 342.

132. W. M. Flinders Petrie, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 24.

133. John Peters, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 28.

134. Mercer, "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter," 30, 9, 30–31.

135. *Ibid.*, 8.

136. *Ibid.*, 4.

137. Spalding, "Rev. Spalding's Answer to Dr. Widtsoe," 611.

properly amazed. Here, surely, is a strange turn of things after all that talk of “thoughtful consideration” and “accurate and complete analysis.” “I was amazed, therefore, to read in your letter, your vigorous refusal to become classed as scientific, and your denial of any intent to conduct such an inquiry.” This opens the panel of judges to the charge of “careless superficiality. . . . Your work has only begun. You must either admit defeat or you must carry it on to the end.”¹³⁸ Again the impulsive Mercer admitted that there was more to be done but met the challenge only with the clumsy evasion in the declaration “that many proofs of the correctness of his conclusions could be furnished if desired.”¹³⁹ But when the Mormons were most outspoken in their desire, none of the many proofs were forthcoming.

The Spalding party cannot have it both ways. They cannot claim a calm, thorough, scientific investigation while admitting ill-temper, haste, and indifference. We are not interested in the reasons, however valid, for denying “accurate and complete analysis” to the facsimiles; we are only interested in the fact that it was denied. Granted that the experts had the best reasons in the world for not bothering to give thoughtful consideration to the documents, by discussing those reasons Mercer has effectively refuted Bishop Spalding’s claim that thoughtful consideration *was* given. Also we are not interested in *why* the authorities could not read the hieroglyphs; their excuses are perfectly legitimate, and what they amount to is an admission that the problem is too hard for them—they have flunked the test. Very well, we may dismiss them without prejudice; they cannot be held responsible if they are given a text to read that is, for whatever reason, beyond their capacity. But in leaving the room, let them not boast of their triumphs and gloat over what they consider the manifest incapacity of others. After Mercer’s long reply, the experts absolutely

138. Widtsoe, “Dr. Widtsoe’s Reply to Rev. Spalding,” 616–17, 619.

139. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 11.

refused to discuss the matter any further; even Professor Breasted, who “seems very much interested in the matter,” according to Mercer, “thinks that there is nothing further to add, . . . thinks it almost useless to reply.”¹⁴⁰ “Almost” is not good enough with so much at stake; Dr. Widtsoe could make allowances for the scholars, “busy men who are anxious to get back to their work,” but hardly for Bishop Spalding, who had started and engineered the whole thing: “It was your investigation, not theirs.”¹⁴¹ Just when the Mormons “hoped for an exhaustive discussion” after the very brief preliminaries, Spalding banged the door, deftly evading all the real questions, as Sjordahl observed, while “at the same time the pamphlet is being circulated, and the impression goes out with it that it is unanswered and unanswerable. . . . This, we say, is the impression which the Bishop permits to go forth, by ignoring the other side of the argument.”¹⁴²

5. Another basic proposition of Dr. Spalding, and one that is vital to his case, is that among the experts there is practically complete agreement as to the real meaning of the hieroglyphics.¹⁴³ Aside from the fact that none of the hieroglyphics had been read is the minor consideration that the experts agreed on one point only—and they were agreed on that before they ever heard from Bishop Spalding. They “join without a dissenting paragraph in the condemnation” of Smith.¹⁴⁴ That is easy enough to explain without even any reference to religion: Joseph Smith as a rank outsider was bound to call forth “sundry expressions of

140. Mercer, in Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 611.

141. Widtsoe, “Comments on the Spaulding Pamphlet,” 458.

142. Sjordahl, “Final Word,” 1100–1101.

143. Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 615–16, labors this point. “Their comments do not vary in any consequential particular,” in “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 3.

144. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 1.

contempt at the efforts of a non-professional translator,"¹⁴⁵ for as Webb observes, it is only natural "that a person trained in any given line should view with impatience the efforts of one not so trained."¹⁴⁶ This is particularly so in the case of Egyptologists, for reasons already noted; also, they are incurable individualists, and even more impatient of each other's ignorance than most professionals—the one thing that could make them close ranks and agree was the intrusion of an outsider.¹⁴⁷ "They agree, to be sure, in denouncing Smith's captions," wrote Webb, "but this is not surprising—denouncing Smith is a sort of habit—but they disagree on all other points."¹⁴⁸

Presidents Francis M. Lyman and Joseph J. Cannon in the British Mission had commented on this interesting phenomenon some years before, when some English Egyptologists had given their opinion of the interpretation of the facsimiles: "We were very much struck by their unity in declaring the Prophet's interpretation bosh, rubbish, and the extremely wide difference between their own interpretations."¹⁴⁹ It was the same in 1903 as in 1912: perfect

145. Webb, "Critical Examination of the Fac-Similes," 435. As an outsider Joseph Smith could only prejudice the experts by not using their terminology, even when giving the same interpretation as theirs; Webb, "Truth Seeking," 1079.

146. Webb, "Truth Seeking," 1077.

147. In 1947 an attempt was made to organize an international society of Egyptologists, such a society as exists in almost all professions; the attempt was a complete failure. [For more on this, see below, p. 97 n. 6—eds.] For an example of Egyptologists speaking of each other in much the same terms in which Spalding's jury spoke of Joseph Smith, see Karl Piehl, "A propos de l'article de M. Wiedemann," *RT* 8/1-2 (1886): 74-83; Alfred Wiedemann, "Zu der sogenannten saitschen Formel," *RT* 8/3-4 (1886): 143-50; and Piehl, "Observations sur plusieurs pons d'un article intitulé 'Zu der sogenannten saitschen Formel,'" *RT* 9/3-4 (1887): 191-96; with a response by Wiedemann in *RT* 9/3-4 (1887): 196; and Émile Chassinat, "Critique d'une critique," *RT* 20 (1898): 1-31.

148. Webb, "Joseph Smith's Interpretations," 321.

149. Wells, "Scholars Disagree," 342.

unanimity in denouncing Joseph Smith and disagreement in everything else. Here we see the wisdom of having no collusion among the experts—Spalding leads them in a chorus of denunciation of the Prophet sung in perfect unison, but when the parties undertake to sing solo without his direction, strange things begin to happen.

Professor George Barton innocently gave the game away when he wrote: “In reality these disagreements are simply marks that the scholars wrote without collusion.”¹⁵⁰ Precisely; on particular points on which they comment without collusion and without reference to Joseph Smith, they fail signally to agree; but when they mention Joseph Smith, it is in a context of prior understanding in which they have seen eye to eye all their lives.

The Mormon amateurs had a field day listing the points of disagreement that emerged every time the authorities ventured to give scholarly opinions of their own—apart from their one common article of faith about Joseph Smith. In reply, the Spalding party was forced to fall back on the most desperate and bankrupt authoritarianism, insisting that while to the amateur the differences might appear glaring enough, the expert sees no discrepancy—an argument, writes Webb, “unworthy of him [Mercer] or of any person professing to be a careful scholar.”¹⁵¹ We need not list all the points of disagreement here.¹⁵² It will be enough to give a sampling of opinions regarding Facsimile 1:

Devéria (whose authority is later accepted by Spalding): “The soul of Osiris under the form of a hawk, . . . Osiris coming to life on his funeral couch. The god of Anubis . . . effecting the resurrection of Osiris.”¹⁵³

150. George Barton, in Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 614.

151. Webb, “Truth Seeking,” 1080.

152. There are lists in Roberts, “Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions,” 320–21.

153. Théodule Devéria, quoted by Roberts, “Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions,” 321.

Petrie: "the well known scene of Anubis preparing the body of a dead man. [Figure] 1 is the hawk Horus. [Figure] 2 is the dead person. [Figure] 3 is Anubis."¹⁵⁴

Breasted: "Number 1 depicts a figure reclining on a couch, with a priest officiating. . . . The reclining figure . . . represents Osiris rising from the dead. Over his head is a bird, in which form Isis is represented."¹⁵⁵

Peters: "Apparently, the plate . . . represents an embalmer preparing a body for burial. At the head the soul (Kos) is flying away in the form of a bird. . . . In the waters below the earth I see a crocodile waiting to seize and devour the dead if he be not properly protected by ritual embalming."¹⁵⁶

Meyer: "the body of the dead lying on a Ba' (bier) . . . the soul in the shape of a bird flying above it, and a priest approaching it."¹⁵⁷

Lythgoe: "merely the usual scene of the mummy upon its bier. The idolatrous priest . . . was [Dr. Lythgoe explained] merely the familiar figure of the god Anubis, 'protector of mummies' . . . leaning over it in a position as if to keep it from harm."¹⁵⁸

Professors Sayce, Mace, and Mercer have nothing whatever to say about Facsimile 1, which made the Mormons wonder, since precisely these three were the most outspoken of all in denouncing Joseph Smith, thus seeming to confirm the rule that the less real knowledge one has, the more one must rely on bluster and invective.

154. Flinders Petrie, letter reproduced in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 23.

155. Breasted, letter reproduced in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 26.

156. Peters, letter reproduced in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 28.

157. Edward Meyer, letter reproduced in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 30.

158. Albert M. Lythgoe, in "Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet," 1.

This leaves us with six brief statements (one by the outsider Devéria) pointing out only the salient and obvious feature of a thoroughly familiar scene. On not a single point do all the authorities agree, and no two of them agree on all points. What to some is just a dead man is to others Osiris himself; what to some is an ordinary priest or embalmer about to cut open a cadaver is to others Anubis himself, leaning over the body to protect it; what to some is a body being laid away is to others a man rising from the dead; what to some is a man's soul flying away is to another the Horus hawk approaching and to yet others the lady Isis.

It was entirely fitting and proper for the Mormons to make the most of these discrepancies, for they are by no means minor ones. The scholars go out of their way to hammer home the point that the things which Joseph Smith had misinterpreted were painfully obvious to any scholar. The learned jury had been allowed to make the problem as easy as possible for themselves—and us—and had chosen to interpret only the easiest, most familiar, and most important figures in the drawings, telling us that if Joseph Smith had known the first thing about Egyptian he could not possibly have missed the meaning of everything as he did. They felt, as the critics of 1845 felt, that “the whole thing is too gross to bear patiently, too painful to laugh at,” in view of the “familiar and now understood ideographic character of Egyptian.” That is why Mercer could write: “It is complained that the scholars did not interpret all the figures of these facsimiles. . . . They probably felt as I did, that their time was too valuable to spend on such scientific work as that of Joseph Smith's guesses, [which] . . . ‘cannot be taken seriously by any scholar.’”¹⁵⁹

What we have here, the experts assure us, is a well-known scene,¹⁶⁰ “merely the usual scene,”¹⁶¹ “figures . . . well

159. Mercer in Spalding, “Rev. Spalding's Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 613.

160. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” 9.

161. Lythgoe, in “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 1.

known to Egyptologists and . . . easy of interpretation,"¹⁶² "depicted . . . unnumbered thousands of times."¹⁶³ Since all our authorities have seen untold thousands of reproductions of this very scene, one might suppose that they had long since come to perfect agreement as to just what it represents. Even the layman, we learn, is without excuse in such a simple matter, for "five minutes study in an Egyptian gallery of any museum should be enough to convince any educated man of the clumsiness of the imposture,"¹⁶⁴ while "by comparing his notes . . . with any elementary book on Egyptian language and religion," Smith's folly "becomes unquestionably evident."¹⁶⁵ The whole thing is just too easy for words, and that is why we may be permitted to raise an eyebrow when the authorities start giving their various opinions, or hesitating to give them. "The things that puzzled the inspired Mormon translator," the *Times* article reports, "were no puzzle at all to Dr. Lythgoe."¹⁶⁶ Three cheers for Dr. Lythgoe. Only why do his explanations sound so radically different from those which were propounded by his learned colleagues?

162. Mercer, "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter," 16.

163. Breasted, in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 26.

164. Mace, letter reproduced in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 27.

165. Mercer in Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 29.

166. "Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet," 1.

3

Qualified for What?

“But surely,” we hear again and again, “such great scholars should be able to decide on this particular case without any trouble.” Should they? Being a great scholar, while it gives people the impression that one is an authority on many things, is possible only because one is an authority on a few things. It is precisely the great authority, C. S. Lewis reminds us, that we should mistrust: “It sounds a strange charge to bring against men who have been steeped in those books all their lives,” he writes of the leading New Testament scholars, “but that might be just the trouble. A man who has spent his youth and manhood in the minute study of New Testament texts and of other people’s studies of them . . . is, I should think, very likely to miss the obvious things about them.”¹ Lewis then proceeds to cite examples in the field of

This chapter consists of the remainder of parts 3 and 4 of “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” that were not reprinted in Abraham in Egypt, CWHN 14. “Part 3: Empaneling the Panel” originally appeared in the series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” in IE 71 (July 1968): 48–55; most of part 3 appeared in Abraham in Egypt, CWHN 14:127–44. “Part 4: Second String” originally appeared in the series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” in IE 71 (August 1968): 53–64; the first section of part 4 appeared in Abraham in Egypt, CWHN 14:144–56.

1. C. S. Lewis, “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism,” in *Christian Reflections* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 154.

biblical scholarship, but the best examples of all must surely be furnished by the Egyptologists.

Every Egyptologist is by necessity a specialist, if only because Egyptian is written in three totally different scripts, and as the outpouring of specialized studies has steadily increased in volume, especially since World War II, the specialists have become even more specialized. Jean Leclant noted in 1966 that the last of the real “all-round” Egyptologists are fast dying off.² Shortly before his death, Sir Alan Gardiner, who was certainly one of those great ones, complained that it was “impossible for any student to keep abreast of all that is written save at the cost of abandoning all hope of personal contributions.”³ And those contributions become ever more personal, according to Jean Capart, things having reached the point where “the authors sometimes confine themselves to reading nothing but their own works while systematically turning their backs on those of their colleagues.”⁴ Many years ago Capart cited Heinrich Schäfer’s complaint that the study of Egyptian religion had made little or no progress through the years because the experts, like the blind wise men examining the elephant, were each content to study and report on one limited department only; all their lives, Capart notes, Gaston Maspero and Alfred Wiedemann had protested against that sort of thing—but in vain.⁵

In 1947 an attempt to organize an international society of Egyptologists (a thing that any sensible person would think to be totally inevitable in such an ancient and peculiar brotherhood) fell through completely—for specialists are a

2. Jean Leclant, “Pierre Lacau,” *AfO* 21 (1966): 272.

3. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 16.

4. Jean Capart, “Le Cheval et le dieu Seth,” in *Mélanges Maspero* 1 (Cairo: IFAO, 1935), 227.

5. Jean Capart, *Bulletin critique des religions de l’Égypte*, *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 1904 (Brussels: Misch et Thron, 1905), 6–7.

jealous lot.⁶ Adriaan de Buck even charged Egyptologists with discouraging others from studying Egyptian;⁷ and Günther Roeder reports that his translations of religious texts had to buck the “current of opinion and the sovereign personalities in the field,” who opposed his ideas “with much head-shaking and rude condemnation” before they finally began to give way.⁸ The very nature of Egyptian studies, in which the unknown so completely overshadows the known, has always encouraged specialization, for as François-Joseph Chabas noted a hundred years ago, it is possible for each student to find in Egypt “whatever sustains his particular views.”⁹

Today even the specialist, according to Siegfried Morenz, “is in constant danger of losing his grasp even of a special area, such as Egyptian religion.”¹⁰ How specialized Egyptian studies have always been may be inferred from the report of Georges Goyon in 1963 that the problems of the Great Pyramid, which have had enormous popular appeal for more than a century, remain unsolved because “the scholars who have really studied it on the scene can be counted on the fingers of one hand.”¹¹

6. [The attempt apparently was eventually successful as the International Association of Egyptologists dates its founding to 1947. Nibley may not have known about this because the American Egyptologists have generally had very little participation with the international association—eds.]

7. Adriaan de Buck, “Défense et illustration de la langue égyptienne,” *CdE* 23 (1947): 23.

8. Günther Roeder, *Volks Glaube im Pharaonenreich* (Stuttgart: Speemann, 1952), 7.

9. François-Joseph Chabas, “Sur l’étude de la langue égyptienne,” *Verslagen en Mededeelingen* (1865): 195; reprinted in *Oeuvres diverses*, BE 11 (Paris: Leroux, 1903), 47.

10. Siegfried Morenz, review of *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, by Hans Bonnet, *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 48 (1953): 342.

11. Georges Goyon, “Le mécanisme de fermeture a la pyramide de Chéops,” *Revue archéologique* 2 (1963): 1.

The Book of the Dead¹²

The largest part of the Joseph Smith Papyri in the possession of the Church consists of fragments from the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the fragments having been translated and discussed by no less a scholar than Professor John A. Wilson of the Oriental Institute.¹³ “Scholars had barely begun the study of the Book of the Dead,” Edouard Naville recalled, “when they saw that the text swarms with difficulties. . . . The prevailing mysticism, the abundance of images, the oddity of the pictures, the impossibility of knowing how the Egyptians expressed even the simplest abstract ideas—all offer formidable obstacles with which the translator is continually colliding.”¹⁴

These points can be illustrated by the most easily recognized section of the Joseph Smith Papyri, namely the fragment with the picture of a swallow (fig. 8), chapter 86 of the Book of the Dead. It is, according to the rubric (the title in red ink), “A Spell for Becoming a Swallow.” But what do we find? To this day Egyptologists cannot agree on just what is meant by “spell”—is it a recitation? an ordinance? an act of meditation? an incantation? merely a chapter? Neither does anyone know for sure in what sense the “transformation” is to be understood—whether it is a change of form, a transmigration, a passage from one world to another, a mystic identification, a ritual dramatization, or whatnot. And what about this business of becoming a swallow? In the same breath the speaker announces that he is a scorpion, and after the title there is nothing in the text that even remotely suggests anything having to do with a swallow—literal, typological, allegorical, or mystical. Certainly what the subject does is most unswallow-like and unscorpion-like as he advances on his two legs and

12. Part 4 of “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” began here.

13. John A. Wilson, “The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations: A Summary Report,” *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 67–85.

14. Edouard H. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie* (Berlin: Asher, 1886), 2.



Figure 8. The swallow vignette of JSP VI shows that this is Book of the Dead 86. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

stretches forth his two arms in the accepted human fashion.¹⁵ Strangely, the titles are often easier to understand than the sections that go with them, as if, T. George Allen points out, the two were of different origin and history.¹⁶

Such confusion may in part be explained by the alarming fact that the ancient scribes who produced these documents were often unable to read what they were writing. By the Twenty-first Dynasty, Naville noted, the “ignorance of the scribes” reached the point (toward which it had long been steadily tending) of complete miscomprehension of their own texts, betrayed by the “common habit of copying entire sections backwards.”¹⁷ “Even in their original state,” however,

15. Wilson, “Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri,” 79–80.

16. T. George Allen, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3.

17. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 41; cf. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life: Egyptian Religion* (New York: University Books, 1959), 45.

Professor Allen assures us, “the sanctity of the spells proper was furthered by intentional obscurities,”¹⁸ so that no matter how far back we go we will always be in trouble.

At all times, Wilhelm Czermak observes, “the concrete wording of the Book of the Dead” is illogical and “fantastic,” but its religious sense, he insists, is not; if we confine our researches, therefore, to the examination of the text, as almost all students do, we are bound to get nowhere.¹⁹ This is not a paradox: the divine words don’t need to make sense in order to be taken seriously. For some years this writer taught classes of Moslem students who gloried in the thrilling sound of the Koran while resenting, some of them fiercely, any suggestion that a mortal listening to those words might possibly understand their meaning—their incomprehensibility was a stamp of divinity.

The Book of the Dead is a huge Chinese puzzle. In the first place, no two copies are just alike, and most of them differ widely, so widely, in fact, that if we were to gather together all the materials in all the various copies and reconstruct from them a single standard text, “the whole would make an ensemble that would be hard to reproduce and even harder to use.”²⁰ The pictures often have nothing to do with the texts they accompany and sometimes illustrate things not found in the book at all.²¹ Texts and pictures (they are usually called vignettes) were sometimes done by different persons, and, “generally speaking, the beauty of the vignettes runs counter to the goodness of the text.”²² By

18. Allen, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 3.

19. Wilhelm Czermak, “Zur Gliederung des 1. Kapitels des ägyptischen ‘Totenbuches,’” *ZÄS* 76 (1940): 9–10.

20. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 10. The various texts and interpretations were introduced with no idea of trying to “add to a composite design.” Rudolf Anthes, review of *The Shrines of Tut-ankh-Amun*, by Alexandre Piankoff, *Artibus Asiae* 20 (1957): 93.

21. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 39.

22. Theodore M. Davis, *The Funeral Papyrus of Iouiya* (London: Constable, 1908), 1.

the same token some of the most beautifully written texts are among the worst in grammar and spelling, for everything seems to go by mere appearances, so that the relation between the effectiveness of a certain spell and the actual contents of the spell is “often incomprehensible.”²³ Texts were valued long after their real meaning was lost from sight because “the magical use of these old religious texts is based on their eternal aspects; it is magic, not religion that loves learned obscurity, actually taking pleasure in what is incomprehensible because of its mysterious allure.”²⁴ This means that the documents defy classification, each being an agglomeration of texts related in content but coming from different epochs and backgrounds.²⁵

Anything goes!

Since the Egyptians were, as is well known, the most conservative of people, and since funerary rites, as is equally well known, belong to the most tradition-bound and conservative department of human activity, it is quite baffling to find just in this particular branch of this particular culture what seems to be a total lack of official or social control. Everything is up to the individual choice: some vignettes drawn to order for a particular buyer might in the end be bought by somebody else ordering completely different texts to go with them;²⁶ sometimes a text chosen by one person would catch the fancy of others who would order the

23. Hans Schack-Schackenburg, *Das Buch von den Zwei Wegen des seligen Toten (Zweiwegebuch): Texte aus der Pyramidenzeit nach einem im Berliner Museum bewahrten Sargboden des Mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 9. Thus the magnificent Turin Papyrus “swarms with every kind of mistake.” Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 3.

24. Schack-Schackenburg, *Buch von den Zwei Wegen des seligen Toten*, 10.

25. “An arrangement of the manuscripts in classes and lines of descent is not possible, so that we must fall back on an eclectic method.” Hermann Grapow, *Das 17. Kapitel des ägyptischen Totenbuches und seine religionsgeschichtliche Bedeutung* (Berlin: Paul, 1912), 51.

26. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 39.

same for themselves;²⁷ individuals would for their private funeral texts borrow, “apparently without a qualm, many of the Pyramid Texts, including their implications of royalty,” while at the same time blithely composing new chapters on the spot to suit their fancy.²⁸ If a person did not understand an old text, that made little difference—he would simply latch on to something in the manuscript that caught his fancy, even if it was only a single word or symbol, and put it down for its magical use.²⁹ “Sometimes, also, space was kept blank for a vignette which was to record some special feature of the deceased.”³⁰ As to the order in which the texts occurred, there was no fixed order, and different general arrangements were popular at different periods.³¹

It will be useful to keep all this in mind when we consider the facsimiles, which have been brushed aside as “typical” Egyptian funerary documents, though uniqueness is a conspicuous characteristic of such documents, and the facsimiles are among the strangest. Completely counter to what one would expect in an ancient and venerable tradition of ritual documentation, each individual was free to impose his private taste and his personal history into the record whenever he saw fit. “Each copy,” according to Allen, “comprised a collection of spells both selected and arranged on a more or less individualistic basis.”³² And this goes for the oldest funerary monuments as well as the latest crude papyri. “Not one of the Mortuary Temples hitherto excavated has proved to be an exact

27. *Ibid.*, 40.

28. T. George Allen, “Additions to the Egyptian Book of the Dead,” *JNES* 11/3 (1952): 177.

29. Hermann Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter: Grundlagen und Entwicklung bis zum Ende des mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926), 254.

30. Davis, *Funeral Papyrus of Iouiya*, 2.

31. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 25.

32. Allen, “Additions to the Egyptian Book of the Dead,” 177.

replica of any other known example.”³³ Typical is the representation of the rite of the Opening of the Mouth, depicted in some 80 tombs over a period of more than 1500 years. All but seven of the tombs offer only “an extremely curtailed representation,” no single tomb shows the entire rite, and what one tomb shows another does not; also, during the long centuries of transmission no “systematic variation” appears.³⁴

It was at first assumed that the Book of the Dead was a ritual text, and Champollion gave it the name of the Egyptian Funeral Ritual; but that interpretation was given up when it was recognized that no ritual is described. There is not a single mention in the Book of the Dead of anything that the dead person or any priest or any member of the family is required to do.³⁵ Taken as a whole or a part, “one gathers the impression that the compilers of the Book of the Dead have included any religious text suitable for recitation as a spell regardless of its contents.”³⁶

As an illustration of this puzzling unconventionality, we may take the best-known picture from the Book of the Dead, the well-known judgment scene of “psychostasy,” a fine example of which is found among the Joseph Smith Papyri (fig. 9). This judgment of the dead is the sort of thing that any amateur expert could explain at first glance, but

33. I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1952), 114.

34. Svein Bjerke, “Remarks on the Egyptian Ritual of ‘Opening the Mouth’ and Its Interpretation,” *Numen* 12 (1965): 202–3.

35. Richard Lepsius, *Älteste Texte des Todtenbuchs nach Sarkophagen des altägyptischen Reichs im Berliner Museum* (Berlin: Hertz, 1867), 6; Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 19. [Nibley rejected this idea later; see Hugh Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, CWHN 16 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 12–15; see also the quotations from the Book of the Dead discussing its use by the living collected in John Gee, “The Use of the Daily Temple Liturgy in the Book of the Dead,” in *Todtenbuch-Forschungen*, ed. Burkhard Backes, Irmtraut Munro, and Simone Stöhr (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 75–80.—eds.]

36. Alan Shorter, *The Egyptian Gods* (London: Paul, 1937), 64–65.

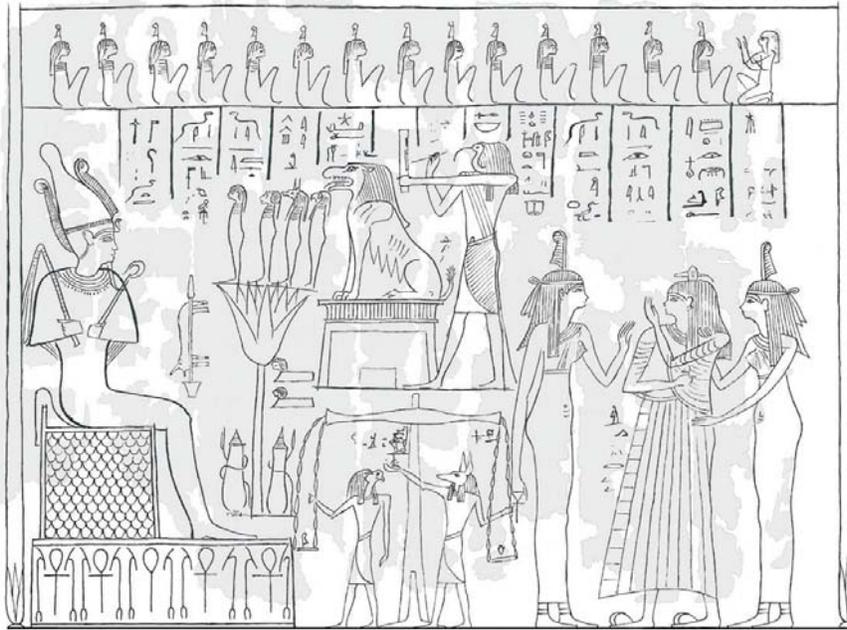


Figure 9. JSP III is an example of the well-known psychostasy, or judgment scene, from the Book of the Dead. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

those with experience tell us that “we do not even know what significance it may have had for the dead.”³⁷ Though the scene occurs in many copies of the Book of the Dead, it is by no means found in all of them, and it would seem that “not all the dead are required to stand judgment.”³⁸ What is more, there is no indication anywhere that standing trial successfully will lead to any kind of blessedness, nor any certainty whatever about what is supposed to happen to the wicked in the hereafter. Except for its occasional representation in the Book of the Dead, the idea of judgment is nowhere so much as hinted at in all of the Egyptian documents. The dead person is tried for 42 sins; Naville notes that the 42 sins are not the same in all the texts.³⁹

37. Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 22.

38. *Ibid.*, and Alfred Wiedemann, *The Ancient Egyptian Doctrine of Immortality of the Soul* (New York: Putnam’s, 1895), 55–57.

39. See Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 161–62.

We often read of transformations, the capacity of the dead to assume whatever form he will, “but not all the dead take advantage of this privilege and nothing obliges them to do so.”⁴⁰ Transmigration may be indicated, but there is “no doctrine of compulsory transmigration.”⁴¹ In fact, in all this vast literature of the beyond, “there is neither a system nor any definite ideas about the fate of the dead beyond the grave. . . . In the Book of the Dead the goal is as uncertain as is the way to get there. . . . There is no compulsion and no necessity.”⁴² Down through the centuries of tradition there is not the slightest indication “of any authoritative transmission of theological interpretations.”⁴³ And yet, in spite of this lack of controls, we cannot learn from these sources what the Egyptians really thought of death, for all thoughts on the subject such as occur in their secular writings have been rigidly excluded.⁴⁴ The one safe, or at least what Gardiner calls the “most valuable,” guideline to the understanding of Egyptian texts—that is, “the logic of the situation”—is denied us here in this timeless, spaceless story without a development and without a plot.⁴⁵

The Book of the Dead stands in line of descent of a very ancient corpus of writings beginning with the Pyramid Texts. The so-called Coffin Texts, standing midway between the Pyramid Texts and the Book of the Dead, “contain in

40. Naville, *Das ägyptische Tottenbuch*, 22.

41. Wiedemann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 66.

42. Naville, *Das ägyptische Tottenbuch*, 21–22; cf. Wiedemann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 49–50: “The Egyptians never attained to any clear idea of the Osirian underworld; the same confusion and obscurity reigned over it as over the whole conception of the unseen world and of deity. . . . Each was at liberty to form for himself a more or less modified conception of the characters of the underworld.”

43. Anthes, review of *Shrines of Tut-ankh-Amun*, 95.

44. Émile Suys, “Le dialogue du désespéré avec son Âme,” *Orientalia* 1 (1932): 65, notes that the average Egyptian seems to have been rather skeptical about the whole business.

45. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 24.

about equal number" chapters found on the one hand in the Pyramid Texts and on the other in the Book of the Dead, while there are many passages in the Coffin Texts that are found in neither of the other two,⁴⁶ some of these being nonetheless just as old as the Pyramid Texts themselves.⁴⁷ "The Coffin Texts," says Pierre Lacau, "overwhelm us with unanswered questions,"⁴⁸ mostly the same questions that confront us in the Book of the Dead.⁴⁹ It seemed to James Breasted that "the priests to whom we owe these Coffin Text compilations allow their fancy to roam at will," so that "it is difficult to gain any coherent conception of the hereafter which the men of this age thus hoped to attain."⁵⁰

Thus, we see that the problems of the Book of the Dead are not merely the result of decadent and sloppy thinking; in fact, the same problems meet us in the very beginning, where the priests of Heliopolis in compiling the Pyramid Texts selected those "sayings" which they considered most desirable for particular individual kings.⁵¹ The Pyramid Texts were used in ritual, but already "the Coffin texts have deserted the firm ground of ritual," presenting a "kaleidoscope of ideas that do not reflect the cult but are very free."⁵² Though the Coffin Texts differ widely from coffin to coffin and follow no plan of organization, they

46. Pierre Lacau, "Textes religieux," *RT* 26 (1904): 59.

47. Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter*, 13–15, noting that the content of the Coffin Texts in general suggests freely selected pieces from a corpus of Pyramid Texts.

48. Lacau, "Textes religieux," 61.

49. Quoting Lacau in Jean Capart, *Bulletin critique des religions de l'Égypte, 1904–1909* (Leiden: Brill, 1939), 31.

50. James H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1912), 278.

51. Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter*, 15. According to Kees, not only the Book of the Dead, but the Coffin Texts and Pyramid Texts as well, are all "entirely disorganized collections of unrelated sayings." *Ibid.*, 14.

52. Rudolf Anthes, "Atum, Nefertem und die Kosmogonien von Heliopolis: Ein Versuch," *ZÄS* 82 (1957): 7–8.

do all have certain ideas in common, according to Louis Speleers—namely, (1) the idea of a physical resurrection and a spiritual existence in eternity, and (2) the reception of the dead by Osiris.⁵³ The doctrine of Osiris lies at the heart of the business, yet in all of the Egyptian literature “no systematic exposition of this myth is known,”⁵⁴ and we would know nothing whatever about it were it not for the remarks of some poorly informed Greeks.⁵⁵ As in the Book of the Dead, the Coffin Text owner is always going somewhere, “but where he is going on his long road is not to be clearly discerned from the spells.”⁵⁶

“Yet there is method in it”

The scholars who condemned the facsimiles in 1912 by labeling them scenes from the Book of the Dead never bothered to answer the urgent question of Janne M. Sjodahl, “What is then the Book of the Dead?”⁵⁷ The question is still in order. Since the beginning, “the idea has prevailed that the Book of the Dead is nothing but a conglomeration of fantastic ideas,” but that, as leading Egyptologists are pointing out today, was just the easy way of escaping a humiliating confession of ignorance and a crushing commitment to years of hard work.⁵⁸ As a result, “the ‘illogic’ of the Egyptians has almost become an article of faith in our

53. Louis Speleers, *Textes des cercueils du Moyen Empire égyptien* (Brussels: n.p., 1946), xxxii–xxxiii.

54. Jaroslav Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1952), 35.

55. For an estimate of the limitations of Greek knowledge on the subject, see Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 1–10.

56. Schack-Schackenburg, *Buch von den Zwei Wegen des seligen Toten*, 15, noting also that the real meaning of the “Two Ways” was entirely lost by the Middle Kingdom. *Ibid.*, 14.

57. Janne M. Sjodahl, “The Book of Abraham,” *IE* 16 (1913): 331.

58. Czermak, “Zur Gliederung des 1. Kapitels des ägyptischen ‘Totenbuches,’” 9.

science—much to its loss.”⁵⁹ We have been told ad nauseam that things that supposedly intelligent Egyptians took seriously were “unmitigated rubbish,”⁶⁰ that Egyptian religion is “inarticulate, fuzzy, and incoherent from the logical point of view,”⁶¹ that the mentality of the East will forever escape us logical Westerners,⁶² that the Egyptians “like all primitives emerging from the night of prehistoric times had yet to discover and explore the real world,”⁶³ that “ancient Egyptian religion . . . [was a] motley mixture of childish crude fetichism and deep philosophic thought,”⁶⁴ “a hotchpotch of warring ideas, without real unity of any kind.”⁶⁵

Perhaps the most enlightening discourse on this theme is that of Professor Speleers, who in his work on the Coffin Texts takes the Egyptians to task with great feeling for holding religious beliefs that clash at every point with the teaching of Roman Catholic scholastic philosophy. He is shocked to find among the Egyptians “the total absence of the idea of an Absolute Being,” but in its place the concept of a God who is “but man on a higher scale.”⁶⁶ Their unpardonable sin is to prefer concrete to abstract terms: they “ignore the Absolute Good” to describe eternal bliss “in terms of earthly objectives.”⁶⁷ In their thinking, “everything is as material and concrete as the Christian metaphysic is abstract and

59. Wilhelm Czermak, “Vom großen Gedanken Ägyptens,” *Archiv für ägyptische Archäologie* 1 (1938): 205.

60. Speaking of certain hymns, Alan Gardiner, “Hymns to Sobk in a Ramesseum Papyrus,” *RdE* 11 (1957): 55.

61. Raymond Weill, “L’invasion de la réalité dans la pensée religieuse de l’Égypte ancienne,” *Egyptian Religion* 3 (1935): 121.

62. Werner Kaiser, review of *Die Geisteshaltung der Ägypter in der Frühzeit*, by Hermann Junker, *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 58 (1963): 341, citing Hermann Junker.

63. Weill, “L’invasion de la réalité,” 119.

64. Wiedemann, *Immortality of the Soul*, 1.

65. H. R. Hall, review of *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*, by A. H. Sayce, *JEA* 1 (1914): 77.

66. Speleers, *Textes des cercueils*, lxii, lxx.

67. *Ibid.*, lxx; cf. xxxi, xix, xviii.

spiritual.”⁶⁸ Even worse, if possible, they fail to place rigorous logic before all other considerations: “These ancients always proceed by simple affirmation and negation. . . . They don’t think, they only ‘feel’ . . . no critical sense, no method.”⁶⁹ Thus, they “expect to live forever with their neighbors and the delights of material things while at the same time sharing the life of gods and spirits.”⁷⁰ “It is as if the principle of contradiction . . . did not exist for them.”⁷¹ The ancients are disgustingly egocentric, too, with the individual clinging to his personal identity throughout the eternities,⁷² which is highly unscientific to the bargain, what with the “transposition of earthly things to a divine existence and of a dead person to another world” and otherwise “accepting the most improbable miracles, denying the laws of nature as we understand them.”⁷³ It all bespeaks “a disorder of the brain . . . which provokes in us a horror of everything that offends our more or less innate sense of logic.”⁷⁴ “As to their cosmology . . . there is nothing in common between certain of their cerebral conceptions and our own intellectual operations”; where Christian thinking “applies the most rigorous logic,” the Egyptian “accepts the most shocking contradictions” of the most “rudimentary and childish thinking.”⁷⁵

Significantly enough, Dr. Speleers admits that the early Christians were guilty of the Egyptian type of thinking, regarding heaven and hell, for example, as definite places, “and it was only in the course of the Middle Ages [that is, thanks to the efforts of scholastic philosophy] that they were

68. *Ibid.*, xxxii.

69. *Ibid.*, lxviii; cf. “no concern for ontology or causality,” lxix.

70. *Ibid.*, xviii.

71. *Ibid.*, lviii.

72. *Ibid.*, lxx.

73. *Ibid.*, lxii–lxiii, lxix.

74. *Ibid.*, lxxiii.

75. *Ibid.*, lxiv, xxxi: In short, “their cosmology is simplistic; they do not state clearly what they mean by life and nature,” but simply accept such things as given quantities (*ibid.*, lxix).

recognized as a 'psychic state' of human existence."⁷⁶ And even as the Egyptians could not think of existence without some physical base, "one must recognize that the Christians themselves could not free themselves from this idea until a certain period of time had passed, and even then only to a certain degree."⁷⁷ To bring out their glaring contrast, Speleers places certain of his own beliefs side by side with their Egyptian opposites. Given the choice between the two, there can be little question but that the Latter-day Saint would choose the Egyptian version every time. Indeed, Catholics are becoming rather cool to the appeal of scholastic philosophy, and many Egyptologists are beginning to ask whether the Egyptians were such fools after all. As examples of some of his own impeccable logic, Speleers tells us how "God through the mediation of his creatures becomes aware of that which He is not,"⁷⁸ and how the human soul "requires to be resurrected in a body, but . . . purged of all necessity of organs."⁷⁹ And he calls the Egyptians confused!

From the first there were eminent Egyptologists who suspected that people as clever as the Egyptians could not possibly have been as illogical as they seem to be from their writings. What we have in the texts, they argued, must represent the breakdown of a religion which in the beginning was entirely logical.⁸⁰ The most widely accepted explanation for all the confusion was the well-known determination of the Egyptians to throw nothing away: ideas, images, and stories originating in remote times and places were all welcomed by the Egyptian community and retained side by

76. Ibid., xvii.

77. They accept "the most improbable miracles," Speleers, *Textes des Cercueils*, lxix, and "persistently confound the body and soul," lxx. These are stock charges of the ancient pagan philosophers against the early Christians.

78. Ibid., xxx.

79. Ibid., ix.

80. Gaston Maspero, "A propos de deux ouvrages de M. Pierret," in *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie*, BE 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1893), 124.

side, with ingenious efforts to explain their clashing coexistence and, when these failed, a good-natured and permanent hospitality, that “liberal” or “additive” attitude that allowed room for everybody in the temple.⁸¹

Along with this, we have today an increasing tendency to seek the explanation of many paradoxes not in Egyptian intransigence but in our own ignorance of what was really going on. “We cannot subscribe,” wrote Henri Frankfort, “to the prevalent view that . . . the Egyptians held a number of incompatible ideas in a hazy or muddleheaded confusion,” this false idea being “founded on a discrepancy between our own outlook and the views and intentions of the ancients.”⁸² Alan Shorter seconds this: “We are apt to stigmatize as ‘contradictory’ the apparently confused ideas which run through . . . many Egyptian texts, when perhaps it is ourselves who are interpreting them too literally.”⁸³ François Daumas lays down some rules to be observed in the reading of Egyptian religious texts: (1) Assume a minimum of errors in a text, always giving the Egyptians instead of ourselves the benefit of the doubt. (2) “Believe that if we do not understand it is because we are badly informed, rather than imputing a shortage of intelligence to the Egyptians. . . . Let us not be hasty to condemn what on first sight looks chaotic and confused.”⁸⁴ It was for failing to observe these principles, it will be recalled, that Professor Samuel A. B. Mercer was taken severely to task by his reviewers.⁸⁵ “Our attitude toward the Egyptians,” wrote Daumas, “has been that of children who find their parents

81. Kaiser, review of *Die Geisteshaltung der Ägypter*, by Junker, 342, discussing Junker’s theories.

82. Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 91, 125.

83. Shorter, *Egyptian Gods*, 86.

84. François Daumas, “Le sens de la royauté égyptienne à propos d’un livre récent,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 160 (1961): 147–48.

85. See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed., CWHN 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 94–109.

to be outmoded and old-fashioned and conclude from that that they must be absolute nincompoops." To fall back on Egyptian unreason to explain what we cannot understand is not a sound practice: "It is a vessel that leaks on all sides, and it leads quickly . . . to the conviction that the Egyptians were utterly stupid."⁸⁶ In the same vein the eminent Egyptologist Adriaan de Buck chided those who find fault with the Egyptian language as primitive and defective: the real fault with the language of the Egyptians, de Buck points out, is, after all, simply that it is not *our* language.⁸⁷

"I have never met a specialist," writes Professor Rudolf Anthes, "who did not have the highest respect for the Egyptian craftsmanship, and all agree in classifying the best Egyptian work as perfect in form and timeless in appeal." Moreover, Anthes continues, we judge Egyptian military and political history by the same measures we use for modern history, never claiming Egyptian leaders to be naive or primitive in their thinking. In everything militarily they come up to the highest standards and often surpass the best the later world can produce. Yet we give these same people no credit for brains whatever when it comes to the subject that interested them most, religion!⁸⁸ A century ago Eugène Revillout called attention to this strange bias.⁸⁹ What is behind it? Anthes and Frankfort suggest not a different level of intelligence but a different method of solving problems.

We get neat final solutions to our problems by isolating them in artificially closed systems. Thus we find a tidy

86. Daumas, "Le sens de la royauté égyptienne," 139–40.

87. De Buck, "Défense et illustration de la langue égyptienne," 26, 28, 34.

88. Rudolf Anthes, "Mythologie und der gesunde Menschenverstand in Ägypten," *Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 96 (1966): 5–6; cf. Rudolf Anthes, "Remarks on the Pyramid Texts and the Early Egyptian Dogma," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74/1 (1954): 36.

89. Eugène Revillout, *L'ancienne Égypte d'après les papyrus et les monuments*, 4 vols. in 2 (Paris: Leroux, 1907), 1:103, noting also that Egyptian piety in no way differs from orthodox Christian piety in nature. *Ibid.*, 31–65.

correlation between the consumption of cholesterol and heart disease and immediately announce that all cholesterol is deadly. We get quick answers by drastic oversimplification. The Egyptian, on the other hand, "did justice to the complexity of a problem by allowing a variety of partial solutions."⁹⁰ After a statement in a funerary text, for example, it is common to find the phrase, "Some say this means so-and-so," followed by another, "Others say it means so-and-so," and so on, the reader being given his choice among a number of "official" explanations.⁹¹ What we have here is "liberality in dogmatics rather than inability for clear thinking."⁹² Why settle for a final answer before we know all the facts? If two pieces of the jigsaw puzzle did not fit together, the Egyptians did not, as we so often do, pronounce one of them to be a fraud and throw it away, but they allowed for the possibility that there might be missing pieces that in the end would link up the two apparent contradictions.

This attitude some have called the "multiplicity of approaches": "Ancient thought . . . admitted side by side certain *limited* insights, which were held to be *simultaneously* valid."⁹³ Hence, "quasi-conflicting images . . . should not be dismissed in the usual derogatory manner"⁹⁴ since they are expressions of the "habit of using several separate avenues of approach to subjects of a problematical nature."⁹⁵ The modern single-line approach is neater and

90. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 92.

91. According to Anthes, review of *Shrines of Tut-ankh-Amun*, 93, this formula is "no allusion to any authoritative transmission of theological interpretation," but rather acknowledges the validity of individual judgment.

92. Anthes, "Remarks on the Pyramid Texts," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74/1 (1954): 39: "It was dogma, and not the transmission of earlier myths."

93. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 4.

94. *Ibid.*, 19.

95. *Ibid.*, 91–92. The idea is discussed by Rudolf Anthes, "Zum Ursprung des Nefertem," *ZÄS* 80 (1955): 85; and Helen Wall-Gordon,

easier to understand, but the history of Christian dogma has shown only too clearly how brittle and bigoted its solutions are.

review of *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter*, 2nd ed., by Hermann Kees, *RdE* 13 (1961): 145.

4

Facsimile 1: A Unique Document

A Doubtful Coup-de-grâce

It was the finding of the original papyrus from which Facsimile 1 in the Book of Abraham was taken that reopened the case of Joseph Smith versus the scholars by making it possible to give definite answers to questions of fundamental importance that have heretofore been viewed by the Mormons as remaining in the twilight zone of speculation and by the non-Mormons as absolutely settled and sealed for all time.

What was felt to be by far the strongest argument against the authenticity of Joseph Smith's interpretations was the claim that the three facsimiles were not unique documents at all, but thoroughly conventional representations of well-known Egyptian scenes, identical copies of which could be produced in unlimited quantities: Joseph Smith had mistaken ordinary glass buttons for the crown jewels. This was the point that the experts labored with might and main. It would be hard to state it more bluntly and emphatically

"Part 5: Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document" originally appeared in the series "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" in IE 71 (September 1968): 66–80; and (October 1968): 73–81. "Part 6: Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document (cont.)" originally appeared in the series "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" in IE 71 (November 1968): 36–38, 40, 42, 44; and (December 1968): 28–33.

than James H. Breasted did again and again: "Joseph Smith was attributing to Abraham not three unique documents of which no other copies exist, but was attributing to Abraham a series of documents which were common property of a whole nation of people who employed them in every human burial, which they prepared."¹ As to the first facsimile, "If desired, publications of fac-similes of this resurrection scene . . . could be furnished in indefinite numbers."² And again, "the three facsimiles in question represent equipment which will be and has been found in unnumbered thousands in Egyptian graves. In accepting them, then, as parts of the 'Book of Abraham,' let it be understood that they were in universal use among the pagan Egyptians."³ Dr. Breasted cannot insist too strongly on this: The scene in Facsimile 3 "again is depicted innumerable times,"⁴ and "to sum up, . . . these three facsimiles . . . depict the most common objects in the mortuary religion of Egypt. . . . Not to repeat it too often the point which I wish to make is that Joseph Smith represents as portions of a unique revelation through Abraham, things which were commonplaces and to be found in many thousands in the everyday life of the Egyptians."⁵ Is that clear enough?

Eduard Meyer had already made the same point in his book on the Mormons, observing that the plates in the Book of Abraham were nothing but "the usual representations from the Book of the Dead. . . . The most amusing thing about it is the explanations of the pictures. . . . There is the usual scene of the dead person being conducted into

1. Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow, 1912; reprint, Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1965), 25.

2. *Ibid.*, 26.

3. *Ibid.*, 25.

4. *Ibid.*, 26.

5. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

the presence of Osiris by the Goddess of Truth.”⁶ It is all so perfectly ordinary and familiar—that is what makes Joseph Smith’s version so amusing. Petrie joins the chorus: the facsimiles “are copies (very badly done) of well known Egyptian subjects of which I have dozens of examples.”⁷ For Dr. Lythgoe, Facsimile 1 was “merely the usual scene of the mummy upon its bier. The idolatrous priest . . . was . . . merely the familiar figure of the god Anubis. . . . [The facsimiles] were thus stock scenes, and in no way individual to any particular mummy. . . . There is nothing so certain as that the Mormon prophet got hold of pictures showing the common mortuary ritual of the Egyptians, and that these pictures recur again and again throughout the whole period of Egyptian burials.”⁸ Even the hypocephalus (Facsimile 2) was for A. H. Sayce and Breasted just “an ordinary hypocephalus” (as if any hypocephalus was ordinary!) found “under the head of the mummy.”⁹ For Samuel A. B. Mercer these were all “the most commonplace Egyptian figures,”¹⁰ and for the confident Banks, “The original of Smith’s crude drawing is a common stock picture from the tombs; its meaning is thoroughly understood.”¹¹

Finally, Dr. Lythgoe’s present-day successor at the Metropolitan Museum of Art repeats the refrain: “The three scenes belong to three common classes of inscription of which many hundreds of examples exist today. . . . Any textbook

6. Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1912), 64–65.

7. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 23.

8. Albert M. Lythgoe, in “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1912, 1; the quotations are not in the order in which they appear in the article.

9. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 23, 26.

10. *Ibid.*, 29.

11. Edgar J. Banks, in Sterling B. Talmage, “The Sacred Books of the ‘Mormons’: A Letter and a ‘Protest against Misrepresentation,’” *IE* 16 (1913): 775, speaking of Facsimile 3.

on Egyptian religion or funerary customs . . . would give you information on these objects.”¹²

Here the experts have their surest arguments, and they are determined at any price to deny any slightest glimmering of originality or uniqueness to the three facsimiles, the concession of which would be bound to raise all sorts of difficult questions. In view of this challenge, the Mormon position was forthright and ingenuous: they simply asked for a demonstration of the proposition that the critics were loudly declaring to be supremely demonstrable: “A sample ‘facsimile’ or two from the doctor’s ‘scores’ would be exceedingly enlightening. It would cost him little time and trouble to give us a few titles and page references.”¹³ After all, it was hardly asking too much of the men who insisted they knew of the very parallel documents that would settle the case once for all to produce a few of those all-important items for the benefit of the ignorant. But they never did. Why not? Some of the experts hedged a bit: “You will find *practically* the duplicate of this drawing over and over again,”¹⁴ and you can also find “*almost* exactly a duplicate of the disk [Facsimile 2].”¹⁵ But a duplicate is not an approximation; it is not practically or almost like something else, and today it is being pointed out with increasing frequency that apparently minor differences in otherwise identical Egyptian documents can be extremely significant.¹⁶ Thus, to say with Dr. Eric Young that the facsimiles “belong

12. Dr. Eric Young of the Metropolitan Museum in a letter to LaMar Petersen, dateline of 1959. [We have been unable to locate the Peterson letters mentioned in this chapter—eds.]

13. Robert C. Webb (J. C. Homans), “Truth Seeking: Its Symptoms and After Effects,” *IE* 16 (1913): 1079; see Robert C. Webb, “A Critical Examination of the Fac-Similes in the Book of Abraham,” *IE* 16 (1913): 436–37 (from the *Deseret News*, 5 July 1913).

14. Banks, in Talmage, “Letter and a ‘Protest against Misrepresentation,’” 775 (emphasis added).

15. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 3 (emphasis added).

16. See below, notes 68–73.

to three common *classes* of inscription” is almost the equivalent of saying that the three are not unique because they all contain recognizably Egyptian material.¹⁷ In their zeal to damn the Mormon documents as utterly commonplace, the doctors soon found themselves in a rather awkward, not to say ridiculous, position.

Plus c’est la même chose, plus ça change!¹⁸

No sooner have the authorities announced with all the majesty at their command that all three facsimiles are the most ordinary stereotyped documents imaginable, than they start protesting that everything about the pictures is wrong, irregular, and out of order—“incorrect,” as Dr. Sayce puts it. And they are right: anyone who follows the advice of our experts and duly spends some time looking through “any textbook on Egyptian religion or funerary customs”¹⁹ will recognize the facsimiles at first glance as old friends, for they do look reassuringly familiar. But whoever risks the indiscretion of a second glance is suddenly not so sure—there is something strange going on! At this point the conscientious student should do what nobody seems yet to have done and what the Mormons begged the experts to do—namely, to go back and check all available parallel documents.²⁰ This is what we have to do. The admitted haste and brevity of all reports made to date on the facsimiles by professional Egyptologists, and their invincible reluctance to engage in

17. Letter from Young to Petersen.

18. The more things stay the same, the more they change.

19. Letter from Young to Petersen.

20. “The museums on both sides of the water . . . are filled with papyri . . . that might have been examined to secure the counterparts of Joseph Smith’s ‘hieroglyphics.’” John A. Widtsoe, “Comments on the Spaulding [*sic*] Pamphlet,” *IE* 16 (1913): 456–57. “Another worth while phase of the matter would perhaps be now to turn to hypocephali and collect and compare all of those interesting circular discs to be had in the museum.” Isaac Russell, “Joseph Smith Jr., as a Translator: A Further Discussion of Bishop Spaulding’s Pamphlet,” *IE* 16 (1913): 1099.

any discussion of the problems that their own pronouncements have raised, have limited their contribution to statements of first impressions; but in their petulant complaints of annoying irregularities in the pictures, we have an indication that they could not avoid some rather disturbing moments of doubt. There is something comical in proclaiming in a single breath that a disgustingly ordinary document is full of peculiarities that just should not be there, and what Robert C. Webb wrote in 1914 still applies. Every one of the interpretations of Facsimile 1 “involves . . . some change more or less radical.”²¹ “It is perfectly evident that several of these Egyptologists, if not all of them, are not telling the public just what this plate is, as it stands, but rather what, as they state, it should be, provided sundry changes were made to render it ‘correct.’”²² They would make it ordinary and then denounce it for being such. The need for having the plates conform to the assigned categories explains the coolness of Spalding and his jury toward Devéria,²³ whose important study was largely devoted to showing that the Mormon papyri were *not* the usual thing at all—which is exactly what the experts of 1912 and today [the 1960s] are particularly eager to have everybody not notice.

Théodule Devéria was convinced that the papyri had been substantially altered by somebody. Of Facsimile 1, he wrote: “The soul of Osiris . . . *should* have a human head,” while “Anubis *should* have the head of a jackal.”²⁴ In Facsimile

21. Robert C. Webb, “Have Joseph Smith’s Interpretations Been Discredited?” *IE* 17 (1914): 319–20 (from the *Deseret News*, 15 November 1913).

22. *Ibid.*

23. Later Bishop Spalding joyfully welcomed Devéria as the eleventh member of his team after he reportedly declared that “the translation was . . . entirely incorrect.” Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 19. Though Spalding has the effrontery to accuse the Mormons of neglecting Devéria’s work, that work is never quoted in the Spalding discussion except by the Mormons and Robert C. Webb.

24. Théodule Devéria, “Fragments de manuscrits funéraires égyptiens considérés par les Mormons comme les mémoires autographes

2, figure 1 is elsewhere “*always* represented with four ram’s heads, and the picture here *has certainly been altered*.”²⁵ Figure 7 in the same Facsimile “*has certainly been altered* on the hypocephalus of the Mormons.”²⁶ Of Facsimile 2 in general, Devéria concludes, “It is plain to me that *several* of the figures which are found on various fragments of other Egyptian manuscripts have been *intentionally altered*.” Speaking of “Shulem” (Fac. 3, fig. 5), he writes: “An unknown divinity, probably Anubis, *but they have changed the head, which should be that of a jackal*.”²⁷ Speaking of this last scene, the great Gaston Maspero wrote:

M. Deveria notes, with regard to this papyrus, that he has never seen the resurrection of Anubis represented in funerary manuscripts. He believes that if it exists it is extremely rare, and that if this is not a modern imitation of the great bas-reliefs in which this mythological scene is represented, it has in any case been altered, since Anubis should have a jackal’s head.²⁸

That is, this unique picture of the Mormons would be even more unique if they had not altered it. No wonder the authorities soft-pedal the work of Devéria!

To bring things up-to-date, Professor Richard Parker now sees in the damaged papyrus (cf. Facsimile 1) “a well-known scene from the Osiris mysteries,” his interpretation requiring that the missing parts be replaced by a jackal’s head or mask and a second bird.²⁹ Though Professor Parker is not concerned with Facsimile 1 and does not mention it, his conclusion of necessity requires that Facsimile 1 as it

d’Abraham,” in *Memoires et fragments, I*, ed Gaston Maspero, BE 4 (Paris: Leroux, 1896), 195–96 (emphasis added).

25. Ibid., 197 (some emphasis added).

26. Ibid., 199 (emphasis added).

27. Ibid., 200–201 (emphasis added).

28. Ibid., 196.

29. Richard A. Parker, “The Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report,” *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 86.

stands is *not* a faithful copy of the original. If it were, then the original would certainly have been a unique document; but even if his reconstruction were correct, the document, as we shall see, would be no less unique.

Looking for a Way Out

The presence of unique and embarrassing elements in documents that are supposed to have nothing unique about them has been readily explained away on three hypotheses: (1) either the Mormons deliberately altered the *original* documents, (2) or else they made deliberate changes in the *copies* they prepared for the press, (3) or else their copying was so bad that the irregularities were produced *unintentionally*.

The first of these theories, that the original documents in possession of Joseph Smith were themselves faked, was maintained by Professor George A. Barton when he insisted that "Joseph Smith was trying to imitate" Egyptian characters and that the resulting characters "do not faithfully represent any known writing."³⁰ Dr. Peters was even bolder: "The plates contained in the 'Pearl of Great Price' are . . . a poor imitation of Egyptian originals, apparently not of any one original, but of Egyptian originals in general."³¹ This made the facsimiles anything but the unimaginative stereotypes that the other experts were looking for and at—it saw in them an unorthodox and unique jumble of authentic Egyptian motifs. With characteristic finality, Professor Budge dismissed both the explanations and the facsimiles themselves as "idiotic"—that is, anything but authentic.³² Though Devéria was convinced that important changes had

30. George A. Barton, quoted in Franklin S. Spalding, "Rev. Spalding's Answer to Dr. Widtsoe," *IE* 16 (1913): 614.

31. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 28.

32. Junius F. Wells, "Scholars Disagree," *IE* 16 (1913): 342, quotes E. A. Wallis Budge, in a letter dated 10 September 1903, saying, "The letter press is as idiotic as the pictures." Naturally an Egyptian original, no matter how badly done, would not be called "idiotic."

been made, he did not specify whether the Mormons operated on the original documents or made their changes in the process of copying.

The second theory is that in copying the Egyptian things, Joseph Smith has altered the drawings to suit his purpose.³³ All of Facsimile 3, for example, is a “falsified copy,”³⁴ and in figure 2 of Facsimile 1 “a knife has been drawn into the god’s hand,” while the god himself has “a strangely un-Egyptian head, instead of the jackal’s head.”³⁵ Though Professor Parker does not comment on the facsimiles, his interpretation of Facsimile 1, as we have just noted, implies that significant changes were made in the copies published by the Mormons.

Interestingly enough, it was the third of the three explanations—that is, that clumsy copying alone was responsible for irregularities in the facsimiles—that was favored by the jury of 1912. Dr. Mercer was quite emphatic on this: The culprit, he writes, was “the bad copying (though not ‘purposely altering’ as Mr. Roberts would try to make his readers believe the scholars to have said—but the scholars were careful not to use such a phrase since they hold the bad copying to be due to ignorance).”³⁶ Why were Mercer and his colleagues so anxious to disclaim a charge that B. H. Roberts seems equally anxious to publicize, preferring an accusation that was by far the least convincing of the three assumptions on the face of it, and by far the least damaging to the Mormons on ethical grounds? It was because the arguments against deliberate faking are direct and convincing, whereas the charge of bad copying, no matter how fantastically bad the copying would have to be, could not be discredited in the absence of the original documents.

33. Edgar J. Banks, “The Revolt of Young Mormonism,” *Literary Digest* (10 July 1915): 66–67.

34. Budge, in Wells, “Scholars Disagree,” 342.

35. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” 3.

36. Samuel A. B. Mercer, quoted in Spalding, “Rev. Spalding’s Answer to Dr. Widtsoe,” 612.

With the finding of the papyrus of Facsimile 1, however, the picture changes. Though theory number 2, the altering of the copy, suffers a severe setback, theories 1 and 3 collapse completely. No scholar has been denied access to the original, all of whose peculiarities, no matter how disturbing, must now be attributed to an Egyptian hand. Though some of the other fragments are glued together in wild disarray, there is no sign of tampering anywhere with any of the writing or drawing on any of the Joseph Smith Papyri. If any alterations were made, it was not on the original documents. The clumsy “pencilled restoration” that Professor Parker rightly condemns as “incorrect”³⁷ is, of course, not a forgery, since no attempt is made to conceal its true nature. Also, it can hardly have been the work of a Mormon hand, since it differs completely from the official copy of the papyrus that was circulated in many thousands of copies both during and after the lifetime of Joseph Smith and was well known to every responsible Latter-day Saint. While what they considered a sacred document was still in the hands of the Prophet, or at least of the Mormons, no one could have taken such outrageous liberties with it. It is a perfectly legitimate and universal practice to restore missing parts of ancient texts and pictures, always, of course, giving clear indication of the nature and extent of the restoration. The fact that this attempt to indicate the missing parts of Facsimile 1 is exceedingly crude and half-hearted, done without the slightest attempt to be accurate or convincing (there is no redrawing, no erasing, no elaboration or detail, no correcting) shows that this is no Mormon attempt to doctor the manuscript. And since this is the *only* attempt to indicate the missing parts, it would seem clear that the parts were not missing when the Mormons still had the thing in their possession. This is borne out by the clear traces left behind in the dried glue by those parts of the papyrus that crumbled

37. Parker, “Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report,” 86.

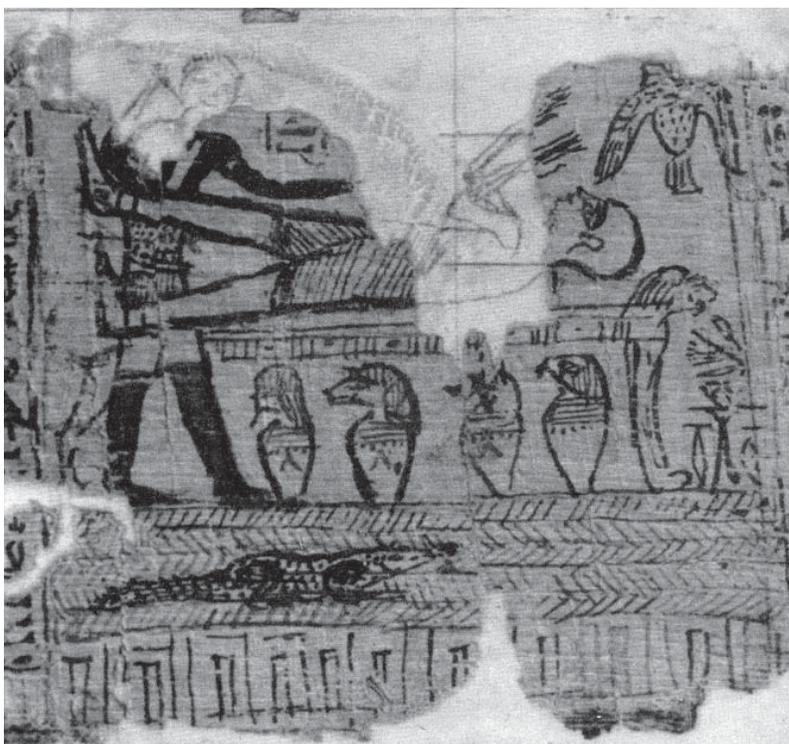
away after it was mounted; they show that at the time of the mounting there was room on the papyrus for the complete head and hand of the priest.³⁸

The third charge, that of unconscious disfigurement through ignorant copying, also breaks down if one only compares the original of Facsimile 1 with Reuben Hedlock's engraving of 1842, which should convince anyone that the engraver did a very creditable job (fig. 10). Also, if one takes the trouble to compare Facsimile 2, the "hypocephalus," with reproductions of other hypocephali in prestigious nineteenth-century journals (fig. 11), one will discover that Hedlock's engraving is not only quite as good as the others, but that the sloppiness of his hieroglyphics is the very kind of sloppiness we find on other hypocephali, where it is sometimes quite as bad or even worse (fig. 12).³⁹

There is, however, one significant discrepancy in the copying of Facsimile 1. In the 1842 engraving a figure is lying on a couch and a priest is standing on the opposite side of the couch *and* its occupant, which is the natural and normal way of seeing things—either the priest is on this side of his victim or on the other side. But in the original papyrus he is

38. It is interesting that no attempt was made to sketch in the bird's head and also that there are no traces on the mounting paper of the head's having been broken off after the mounting. This would indicate that the "pencilled restoration" of the more recently missing parts, being an attempt to supply what had been destroyed after the mounting, and also being done by a person unfamiliar with the facsimiles and certainly unfamiliar with the original, belongs to the "post-Mormon" career of the papyrus. It must not be forgotten that the papyri had been in non-Mormon hands for 111 years.

39. Examples may be found in "Hieroglyphic Inscriptions from Different Parts of the Mummy Unrolled at Florence," *Archaeologia* 36 (1855): 174, plate XV; Albert Burnet, "Enquêtes," *CdE* 27 (1951): 111; Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1952), 390, fig. 98; British Museum, *A Guide to the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Egyptian Rooms, and the Coptic Room* (London: Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, 1922), 272; and W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Amulets* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1914), plate XX.



A



C

TIMES AND SEASONS.

"Truth will prevail."

Vol. III. No. 9.] CITY OF NAUVOO, ILL. MARCH, 1, 1842. [Whole No. 45.

A FAC-SIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.
NO. 1.

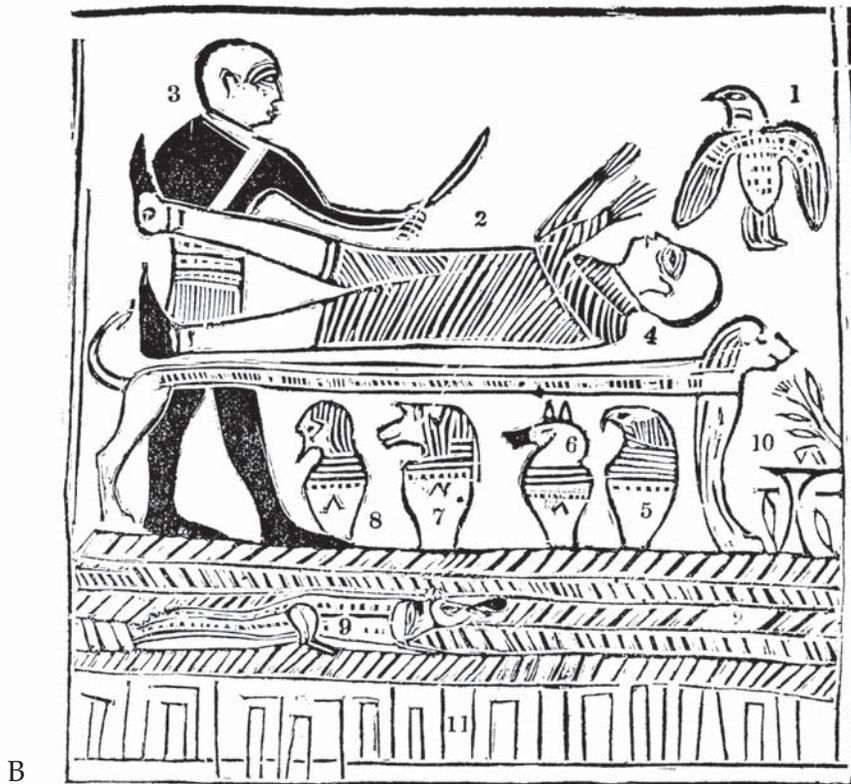


Figure 10. Comparison of the original JSP I (A) with the earliest facsimile printed in the 1842 *Times and Seasons* (B) and the reproduction used in the 1907 edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* (C) shows that any copies must be used with caution. Today the original 1842 version is used. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

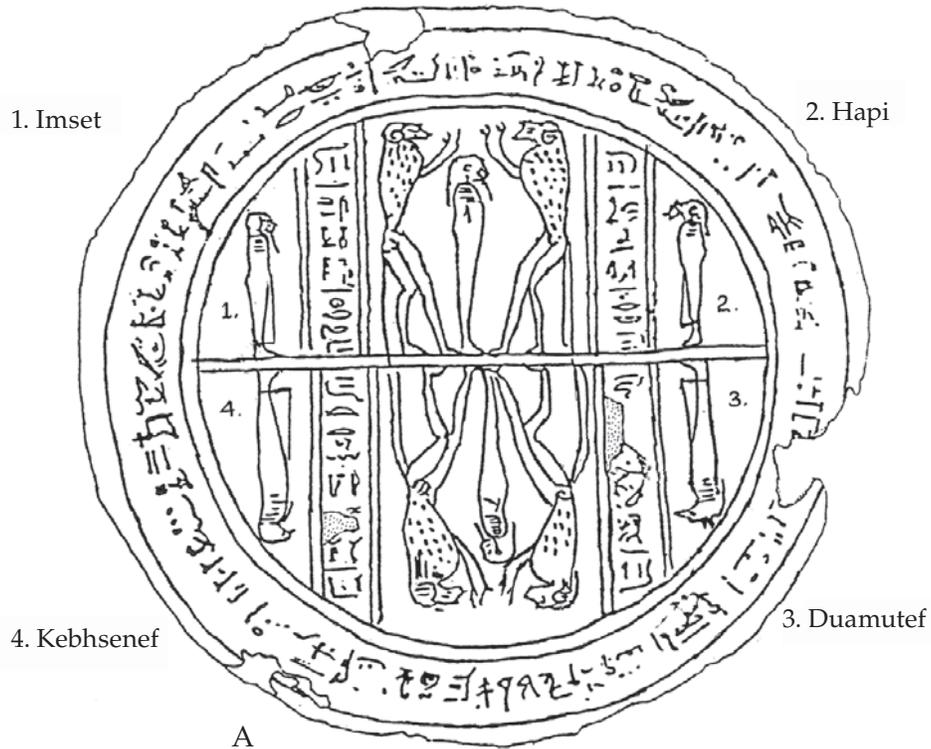


Figure 11. The Myers (A) and Nash (B) hypocephali appeared in the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* in 1885 and 1897 respectively.

on neither! He stands in an astonishingly awkward position between the couch and the legs of the man on the couch. By correcting this “blunder” and saving himself a lot of trouble, Mr. Hedlock neatly reversed the charge that it was the Mormons who introduced absurdities into perfectly conventional Egyptian drawings. It is not the engraver but the Egyptian artist who is having trouble here, and he seems quite aware of being challenged to depict something out of the ordinary, departing from the familiar canons of his art to carry out special instructions. Plainly puzzled as to how to go about it, he makes no effort to complete either the side of the couch that normally *should* be there or the priest’s apron that somebody wants to put in its place. In his perplexity the artist simply leaves the space empty and thus proclaims,



B

by avoiding, his predicament.⁴⁰ Brother Hedlock's attempt to help out the artist and save himself the same embarrassment is the only deliberate alteration in copying the papyrus; it can easily be explained on the most obvious common-sense grounds and is anything but an attempt to distort the original to make it fit Joseph Smith's interpretations. On the contrary, the Mormon engraver was covering up a peculiarity in the original that actually supported Joseph Smith's ideas. Other examples can be found in which Egyptian artists draw people in awkward and unusual positions, but in

40. The normal procedure would be to draw first the central figure on its couch. If, however, the priest were accidentally drawn before the couch, the error could have been quickly corrected by simply finishing the horizontal lines that marked the side of the couch, thus automatically putting the priest behind it. This could be done easily, since the priest's kilt was never filled in below the hips as it was above. And yet the artist did not do it: he finished neither the skirt nor the couch.



Figure 12. A comparison of Facsimile 2 (A) side by side with a hypocephalus in Vienna (B) shows that Reuben Hedlock's engraving is a fairly reliable reproduction and that imperfections of the work are to be

these cases it is also apparent that the artist is consciously *trying* to show something unusual, and we may safely assume that the oddities in the lion-couch papyrus are neither accidental nor meaningless.⁴¹

41. Thus in Ridolfo V. Lanzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, 5 vols. in 3 (Turin: Doyen, 1881–85), 1–2: fig. XXX, Anubis is standing on the far side of the couch but with both hands and arms on the foreshortened side of the mummy, with an awkward foreshortening of one arm—awkward, but quite deliberate. Another such figure is reproduced in Heinrich Schäfer, *Von aegyptischer Kunst besonders der Zeichenkunst* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1963), 129, fig. 91. The principle is discussed by Heinrich von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil in der Zeichenkunst der alten Ägypter," *ZÄS* 63 (1928): 27–30.



imputed to the Egyptian rather than to the American copyist. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (A). Wien 253 a/2, Kunsthistorisches Museum (B).

The experts who attributed to bad copying their inability to make anything of the hieroglyphics on the plates cannot get off so easily, for they were supposed to be thoroughly at home with the worst Egyptian penmanship and by their own assertion had access to unlimited numbers of identical documents, by which the texts in the facsimiles could have been easily reconstructed and checked. Then too, we must recognize that there really are sections of hieroglyphic text in Facsimile 2 that present-day Egyptologists read without too much trouble. Since these legible portions are found to be correct and conventional Egyptian, it is perfectly plain

that nobody has falsified or jumbled them, as was charged. That is to say, whenever the text *can* be checked, everything is found to be in order.

What makes the constant protestations of bad copying appear as an obvious attempt to minimize the uniqueness of the documents is the strange silence of all the authorities on the really glaring irregularities in the plates. If the gentlemen want something to make fun of, why don't they ever call attention to the hilarious incongruity of having the figure on the couch fully clothed? In all the other lion-couch scenes,⁴² the person on the bed is either a properly encased mummy or completely nude, and never does the man on the couch wave both arms. Why the total silence on what should have been Joseph Smith A-Number-One howlers? Such things cry for an explanation and are always good for a laugh, but our experts will not even mention them. For here they cannot escape with the charge of "bad copying"—bad copying never went that far, and we now have the original to show who invented the clothing and the upraised hands, and it was not the Mormons.

Was Facsimile 1 Altered in the Copying?

If the presence on the scene of the original subject of Facsimile 1 deals fatal blows to theories 1 and 3, it is hardly less damaging to theory 2, the sole survivor, which assumes that somebody has deliberately changed certain features in the process of copying the papyri. We have observed that the scholars of 1912 fought shy of this argument, and the reasons for that are not far to seek; consider some of the holes in the sieve:

1. It is significant that the charge of false copying today centers on those parts of the document which happen to be *missing* and thus offends the first principle of textual criticism, which is, always, to give a document the benefit of the

42. See below, note 64, which lists lion-couch scenes.

doubt. If the copyist is perfectly reliable in the four-fifths of the sketch that have survived, why should he go berserk in the particular fifth that is missing? Could that fifth have been deliberately removed to cover up the fraud? Hardly: (a) the breaking off of the fragile papyrus takes place in every case only along lines of folding and around the edges, where ancient documents always suffer; (b) the most important parts were broken off, as the marks in the glue show, after the papyrus was mounted and, as we have noted above, in all likelihood after it had fallen into non-Mormon hands. To the charge that the Mormons may have destroyed evidence, one can only ask, What evidence? Consider our next point.

2. If a crime was committed, we must look for a motive. If Joseph Smith “altered the drawing to suit his purposes,”⁴³ why don’t they suit his purposes? As Mercer points out, no one would dream that the figures as they stand represent what Joseph Smith says they do—indeed, the experts agree that his explanations are quite hilarious.⁴⁴ And why bother to make any changes at all? In a world in which nobody knew anything about Egyptian, Joseph Smith was free to give any interpretations he pleased, and they would appear no more absurd than the ones he did give. What possible point or advantage, then, could there be to distorting, elaborating, or recomposing perfectly meaningless symbols or falsifying genuine texts by rearranging them in different but equally meaningless combinations? Take the two-headed man in Facsimile 2, figure 1, for example, who, we

43. Quoted and discussed in Talmage, “Letter and a ‘Protest against Misrepresentation,’” 771.

44. “No one would ever take the figure to be that of the patriarch Abraham.” Samuel A. B. Mercer, “Joseph Smith as an Interpreter,” *Utah Survey* 1 (September 1913): 18. “Of course, an Egyptologist would not subscribe to anything in the ‘explanations’ provided for the drawings which you enclose.” Professor George R. Hughes, in a letter dated 29 January 1959, to LaMar Petersen. [Again, we have not been able to locate this correspondence—eds.]

are told, *should* be a four-headed ram.⁴⁵ A four-headed ram, however, is ridiculous—whoever saw a four-headed ram? So Joseph shrewdly redraws the figure to make something more plausible—an ordinary two-headed man? Or take the hawk-headed hawk that the experts insisted should be a human-headed hawk—which would be the more appropriate to represent an angel in the thinking of Joseph Smith's time? The well-established conventions of Christian art had long accustomed the pious to represent angels by a symbolic combination of human factors and feathers—but a one-hundred-percent bird would have been out of the question. If the crime of forgery has been committed here, it is by one who went to great trouble and risk to alter documents that had far better been left unaltered as far as Joseph Smith's interests were concerned.

3. Then there is the matter of style. If we attribute the irregularities in the figures to deliberate transformation, we must still admit that the alterations are by no means such as a modern artist would make. Thus, when our impostor drew a hawk's head instead of a human one, he managed to draw a good Egyptian hawk's head and not an American type. And when he puts human heads in the place of ram's heads, how does it happen that he draws the kind of double human heads that only Egyptians draw (fig. 13)? And after copying the other figures as well as he did, couldn't the rascal who substituted a human head for a jackal's head on "Shulem" (Fac. 3, fig. 5) have drawn a better head than that? If all the faces in Facsimile 3 are rather grotesque, it is still an Egyptian type of grotesqueness. If "Pharaoh" and "the Prince of Pharaoh" in Facsimile 3 were being drawn to order, why on earth were they not drawn as princes or at least as men instead of being so obviously women—is this cunning alteration to suit Joseph Smith's interpretation? And while the artist is at it,

45. "This god is *always* represented with four . . . heads, and his image has certainly been altered here." Devéria, "Fragments de manuscrits funéraires égyptiens," 197; Devéria has emphasized the "always."

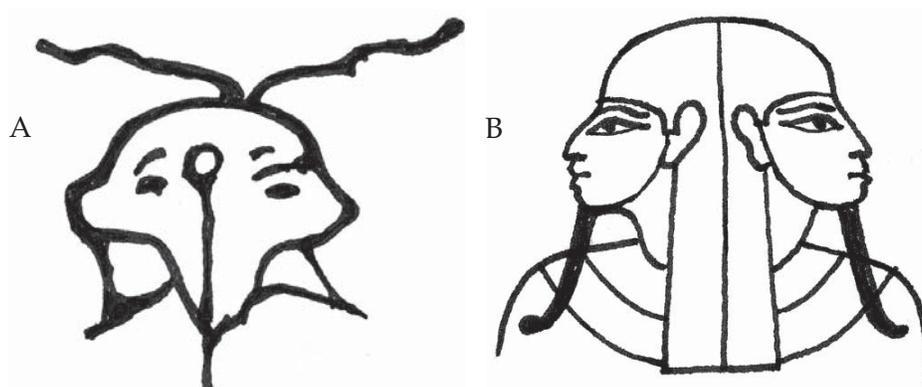


Figure 13. It has been claimed that Joseph Smith invented the double head of Facsimile 2, figure 1 (A), and substituted it for four rams' heads (see p. 131, fig. 12B). Comparison with other double-headed Egyptian figures makes it clear that the Prophet was not indulging in fantasy or forgery (B). Note also the two-headed figure in the top of the Nash hypocephalus (see p. 129, fig. 11B). Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (A). Tomb of Seti I, ca. 1220 B.C. (B).

why not make an “altar” that looks like an altar? (See Fac. 1, fig. 4.) Though we are told that much has been changed in the drawings, plainly nothing has been Americanized in the process, and nothing has been redrawn to fit with a particular interpretation. The criminal has failed to leave any traces of his personality and style.

4. Besides a motive, we are told, the perpetrator of a crime needs an opportunity—that is, a chance to escape detection. It would be easy enough to falsify copies of the facsimiles in the upper room of the Mansion House some dark night, but what happens when one puts the results on display the next day side by side with the unchanged originals? Any altering of the figures or texts, as B. H. Roberts pointed out, “is out of the question, since . . . the mummies . . . and the papyri, were on exhibit in the home of the Prophet’s parents in Nauvoo, subject to the inspection of all who might choose to examine them.”⁴⁶ Joseph Smith had printed copies of the facsimile

46. B. H. Roberts, “A Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions,” *IE* 16 (1913): 314, noting also that “forty-three days before the death of the Prophet, in 1844, they were examined by Josiah Quincy.”

circulated in large numbers in and around Nauvoo, while at the same time the originals were on exhibition. "They were seen by all the Church that saw proper to visit the house of the Prophet Joseph," Orson Pratt recalled, "and also by hundreds of strangers."⁴⁷ Most of the strangers were critical and suspicious, and some of them, like Josiah Quincy, Henry Caswall, and the reporter from the *Warsaw Signal*, were keenly on the lookout for any sign of trickery.⁴⁸

We must bear in mind that the alterations that Professor Parker's interpretation requires—the jackal's mask of the priest, the hovering bird, and the reproductive activities indicated—not only occupy the most conspicuous position, front and center on number 1 papyrus, but by their unusual, not to say shocking nature (and many visitors to Nauvoo were looking for something shocking), would be most certain to command the attention of any observer. How does it happen that during all the years when the papyri were being shown by old Sister Lucy Mack Smith for a small admission fee to any interested parties, nobody ever noticed that they differed drastically from the well-known printed copies that the visitor was invited to take away with him? Could Joseph Smith and the Mormons have overlooked anything so glaring (none of *them* ever mentions it) or invited hostile outsiders to discover it for themselves? It does not help things to assume that the vital parts of the papyrus

47. *Journal of Discourses*, 20:65.

48. The Reverend Henry Caswall, who came to Nauvoo expressly to expose Joseph Smith in the matter of hieroglyphics, tried desperately to get something against him. While Mrs. Smith was showing the mummies and papyri to him, he reports, "I fixed my eyes steadily upon her. She faltered, and seemed unwilling to meet my glance. . . . The melancholy thought entered my mind, that this poor old creature was not simply a dupe of her son's knavery; but that she had taken an active part in the deception." Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons* (London: Rivington, 1843), 27; cf. review of *The City of the Mormons*, by Henry Caswall, *Weekly Visitor* (1842): 408. So far would he go to dig up "evidence"—yet he detected no faking of the documents.

were already missing when the thing was put on display or even before it came into Joseph Smith's possession, for the total absence of the key features of the sacrificial scene could hardly have gone unnoticed by all the Mormons and Gentiles alike: that would have been as glaring and as disturbing as any discrepancies between the original and the printed copy. But nobody ever noticed it, as many gladly would have, had it been there to notice. Thus, in a letter written on 5 February 1838, at Kirtland, in an all-out attempt to expose Joseph Smith as a fraud, Warren Parrish writes: "I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven."⁴⁹ Here was a man in a position to detect any manipulation or trickery in the composing of the Book of Abraham, and eager to expose such; yet he, like everybody else, seems completely unaware of the outrageous document and the printed copies of it that the present explanation of Facsimile 1 requires.

5. Those who maintain that important parts of the papyrus, now missing, have been changed to give it its present unique aspect are careful not to call attention, as we soon shall, to equally odd and unusual features in the *surviving* parts. What is the big crocodile doing there? The "pillars of heaven"? The strange inscriptions? Such elements do not occur in any of the supposedly identical parallels to Facsimile 1, yet there they are before us, and that not by any modern manipulation. Dr. Lythgoe makes the good point that the head of the priest and his knife look suspiciously un-Egyptian. They do, in the very poor reproduction that Dr. Spalding supplied him with, but in the better engraving of 1842 the knife is quite different, and the head of the priest is no more nor less "Egyptian" than of the man on the altar who, we know now, is an authentic Egyptian type.

49. This letter, brought to our attention by Dr. Richard L. Anderson, was published in the *Painesville (Ohio) Republican*, 15 February 1838, and later quoted in Warren Parrish, *Zion's Watchman*, 24 March 1838.

An Impartial Witness

6. Further evidence that Facsimile 1 has been honestly reproduced is found in an early independent copy of it by an artist (very probably non-Mormon) who was using it for purely decorative purposes and without the intention of proving anything. It is to be found in an old portrait of Lucy Mack Smith, the Prophet's mother (see p. xl), who was given custody of the Egyptian antiquities in Nauvoo and took possession of them at Joseph Smith's death.⁵⁰ The picture was located by President Joseph F. Smith and Preston Nibley in a farmhouse near Nauvoo.

In 1942 President George Albert Smith, accompanied by Elder Preston Nibley (who is the authority for this account), visited a relative, Salisbury Smith, a respected citizen and banker in Carthage, Illinois. Mr. Smith took the brethren to a farm near Carthage to see "Aunt Clara," the 83-year-old daughter of Lucy, the youngest daughter of Lucy Mack Smith. She showed them a picture of her grandmother, which she said she had inherited from her mother. She refused to part with the picture but allowed the brethren to have it photographed, and the photo now hangs on the walls of the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City.⁵¹

In the portrait the artist has decorated the wall space behind his subject with her most prized possession—the original of Facsimile 1. He has used his artist's license to enlarge the object (the original is no larger than a post card, being a square of only 4¼ inches on a side) and to preserve clarity of detail. But there can be no doubt that it is the original papyrus hanging on the wall, for the artist has taken pains to show the bent and wrinkled surface—a copy would be mounted smoothly and evenly. Moreover,

50. See James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 148–49, 151–53, 155.

51. The account was related by Preston Nibley to the author and written down at the time. [The picture is now in the possession of the Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City—eds.]

the frame depicted is like the one that encloses some of the other papyri now in possession of the Church. That is, the rather elegant frames were used for displaying original and valuable documents, and Mrs. Smith would certainly not have gone to the expense and trouble of framing, and then have proudly displayed, a printed copy of no value whatever (they existed by the thousands) while she still had the original in her possession. The artist, like Hedlock, has done the reasonable thing and not bothered to fight with the problem of the legs; what interested him was to get a good likeness of Mrs. Smith and her impressive document (the Egyptian things were always her special concern), and in so doing he has given us a rapid, fairly accurate, and unbiased sketch of what the papyrus looked like before it was damaged. It matches our printed reproductions and not the proposed restoration.

Hand or Wing?

The earliest and latest scholarly critics of the facsimiles have insisted that the bird in Facsimile 1 should have a human head.⁵² Though the bird's head, being on the edge of the papyrus, was broken off even before it was mounted, enough of the neck fortunately remains to show that it never bore a human head. And so the original again comes to the rescue to refute the approved school solution.

Another near miss has preserved just enough of "Abraham's" hands to show us that they *were* hands—both of them. This is a critical point on which Professor Parker's interpretation must stand or fall. He tells us that "the apparent upper hand is part of the wing of a second bird."⁵³ In favor of such an interpretation is only the fact that two birds are represented in approximately the positions indicated in a number of other drawings showing men on lion couches.

52. Devéria, "Fragments de manuscrits funéraires égyptiens," 195; and letter from Hughes to Petersen.

53. Parker, "Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," 86.

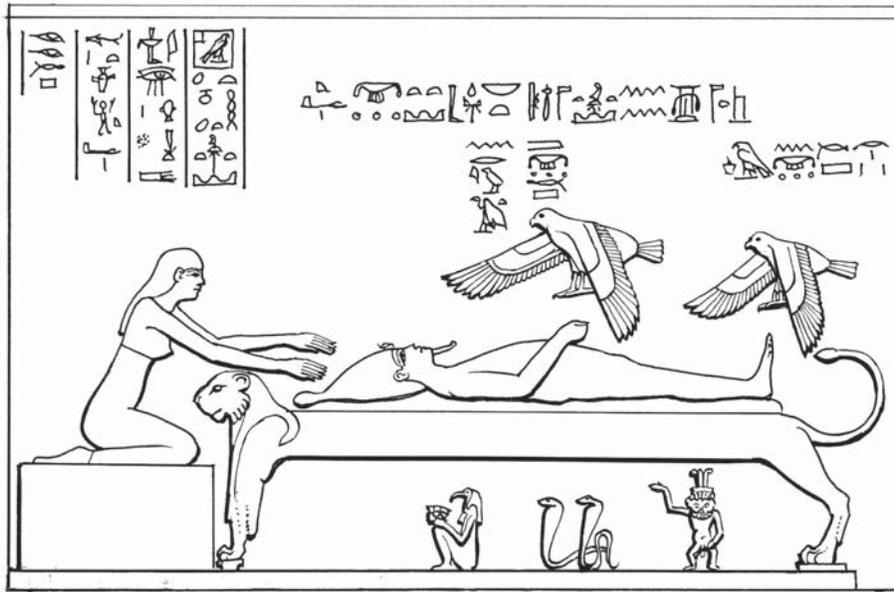


Figure 14. This illustration shows how closely the two birds, Isis and Nephthys, resemble each other when they appear together as a pair. Roof chapel of Osiris, Denderah, ca. 50 B.C.

Of course, if all lion-couch figures were accompanied by two birds, then we would be pretty well stuck with a second bird; but actually the two birds are the rare exception, one bird being the rule, though three are fairly common.⁵⁴ More to the point, in all documents obtainable in which birds appear regardless of their number, their wings are drawn according to the same artistic convention, exactly as the wings on our Facsimile 1 have been drawn, and no wings are to be found done in the manner of Professor Parker's hypothetical second bird.

But if we are not required by statistics to supply a second bird, the same statistics are even less in favor of a second hand, which if it really exists makes our picture quite unique. So the issue is still in the balance until we take a closer look—then the wing disappears.

54. In the copies at our disposal (see note 64 below) are only *two* scenes with two birds in them, as against seven with three birds, twenty-two with one bird, and one with five birds.

1. First of all, the immediate proximity of a real bird to the imaginary one shows us clearly enough how this particular artist draws wings, and his method is in total agreement with all wing-drawing in those compositions which show hawks hovering over people's middles. Dr. Parker himself tells us that the two birds in this particular picture are sisters, and indeed, they usually figure as identical twins (fig. 14).⁵⁵ Why then should they be drawn, as nowhere else, according to different conventions and as different types?

2. The position of the priest's arm and whatever he is holding interferes drastically with the act of procreation described by Professor Parker. There is nothing like the feet on the figure on the couch scenes; when the central bird is present, the Anubis priest always stands well off to one side, beyond the feet of the figure on the couch, holding his hands upraised before his face, or bearing oil and bandages.

When the priest stands by the supine figure, as he does here, there is never a second bird present.⁵⁶ Indeed, one can hardly reconstruct the scene according to Professor Parker's directions without getting a startling, unique, and original result.

3. But if our two birds' wings do not match, the two hands most certainly do: (a) By an odd coincidence, they are exactly in the right angle to represent a pair of hands (fig. 15). (b) As a magnified view of the hands will show, they are drawn exactly alike: the upper hand has strange twiglike fingers—six of them, not counting the thumb—and so also the lower hand, which no one will deny *is* a hand, has the same number

55. Parker, "Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," 86; E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1904), 2:254–58. "Isis and Nephthys were . . . associated inseparably with each other . . . and in all the important matters . . . they acted together." *Ibid.*, 258.

56. The reproduction here given (see p. 152, fig. 18), originally in Auguste Mariette, *Dendérah: Description generale du grand temple de cette ville*, 6 vols. in 3 (Paris: Franck, 1875), 4: plate 90, is the nearest thing to the Mormon papyrus.



Figure 15. A close examination of JSP I shows that the remaining lines are clearly Abraham's hands and not the wings of another bird. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

of just such twiglike fingers. (c) Furthermore, examination of the original document makes it clear that the fuzzy or dotted sketching of part of the fingers of the upper hand is due entirely to the fraying of the papyrus fibers near the broken edge and is not an attempt to represent feathers. (d) The thumbs of both hands are strongly and unmistakably marked and drawn just alike, both being designated by short, heavy lines standing well apart from the fingers and properly curved as

thumbs should be. The thumb of the upper hand is especially clearly and emphatically delineated. An Eighteenth Dynasty "canonical master-drawing" in the British Museum shows how thumbs should be drawn, Egyptian style (fig. 16), and leaves not the slightest doubt that the heavy line on the upper hand is a thumb and not a feather.⁵⁷ Where in such scenes, or in Egyptian art in general, does one ever find the lowest pinion of a hawk's wing so strangely designated? Eminent Egyptologists are used to studying original documents, and Dr. Parker was understandably reluctant to base interpretations on poor reproductions; properly photographed or magnified, the two hands stand out clearly for what they are.

4. But if only one hand is raised by the reclining figure, where is the other hand? Professor Parker knows where

57. Reproduced in Erik Iversen, "A Canonical Master-Drawing in the British Museum," *JEA* 46 (1960): 71-79, plate XVI.

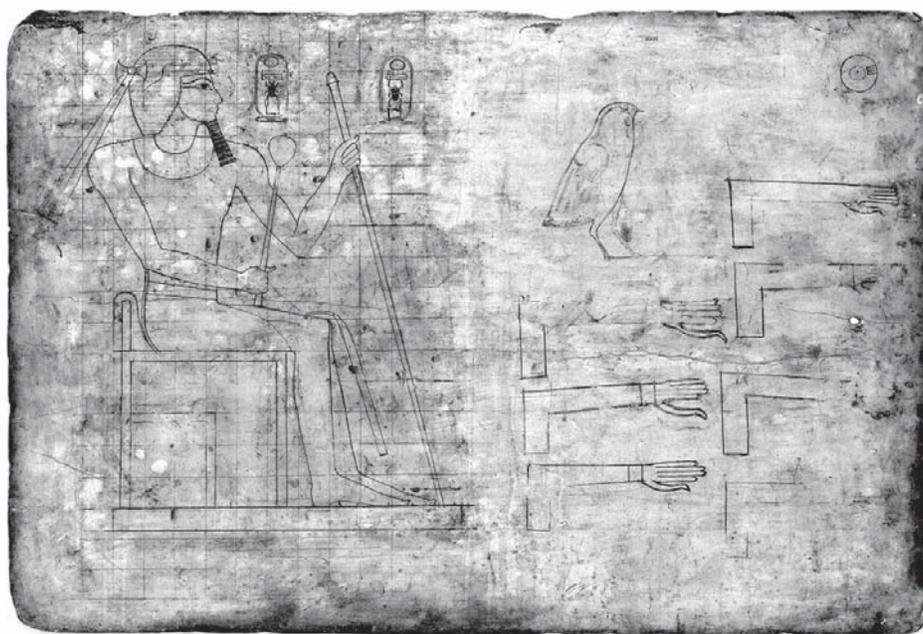


Figure 16. A rare surviving canonical drawing by an Egyptian artist shows the care with which these royal drawings were constructed. On the left is an enthroned Thutmose III carefully drawn on a grid. The right side shows the strokes necessary to draw hieroglyphs such as the quail chick and the arms, hands, and thumbs. Eighteenth Dynasty plaster-covered wooden tablet. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

it should be: “The left arm of Osiris is in reality lying at his side under him.” In reality? In all the representations in which Osiris raises a hand, the other hand and arm are clearly shown beneath the body, the fingers reaching well down below the hip almost to the knee in an ample space provided for them between the body and the couch. And all that is precisely what we do *not* find in our papyrus here; “in reality,” there is no arm or hand under the body, and no room is provided for them, though more than enough of the papyrus is preserved to show where they should be.⁵⁸

58. There is one representation, from Denderah, in which the lower hand is not beneath but laid alongside the body, but hand and arm are very clearly depicted, the fingers reaching well down almost to the knee, in Philippe Derchain, “La pêche de l’oeil et les mystères d’Osiris a Dendara,” *RdE* 15 (1963): 17, fig. 4.

5. And then there is the matter of the knife. Since Professor Parker's attention was directed entirely to photographs of the papyrus, as was proper, and not to the facsimile, he makes no mention of the knife in the priest's hand, and we must allow Dr. Lythgoe's claim that the Mormons have drawn it into the hand of the priest. But the other experts saw nothing wrong with the knife. Back in 1903 Budge's colleague at the British Museum, Henry Woodward, saw in Facsimile 1 "an embalmer, knife in hand, preparing to disembowel a dead body to embalm it!"⁵⁹ Von Bissing saw "the soul leaving the body the moment when the priest is opening the body with a knife for mummification."⁶⁰ And at the present time Professor George R. Hughes of the Oriental Institute at Chicago obliges with an explanation: "The embalming of a deceased person, or rather the operation preparatory to mummification. (1) The deceased's soul or spirit . . . it is usually shown as a human-headed bird. . . . [Fac. 1, fig. 3] is embalmer-priest who is usually shown wearing a jackal-headed mask. . . . He has in his hand a knife ready to make an incision in the abdomen."⁶¹

Thus, the knife remains a respectable object and fits nicely into an embalming scene. What made Lythgoe suspicious was the peculiar form of the knife, and rightly so, since it was badly copied in the reproduction Spalding sent to him. In the 1842 engravings the thing has a different shape, like a thin crescent moon. Here we are speculating, to be sure, but not without some reason, for Hermann Kees suggested that the knife used by the Egyptians for human sacrifice had to be shaped like a thin new moon,⁶² and in one of the oldest Abraham legends we are told that the knife used by the patriarch to sacrifice Isaac "was a sharp knife,

59. Woodward, cited in Wells, "Scholars Disagree," 342.

60. In Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator*, 30.

61. Hughes, in letter cited above.

62. Hermann Kees, "Die Feuerinsel in den Sargtexten und im Totenbuch," *ZÄS* 78 (1942): 47–48.

lusting after the flesh, and crescent-shaped like the new-moon."⁶³ But more of this later.

Unique, Uniquer, Uniquest

At this point, we are not ready to discuss the significance of the oddities in the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham; our first concern is simply to show that such oddities do exist and thereby refute the most serious charge against Joseph Smith, that of mistaking thoroughly typical and commonplace documents for something unusual. The facsimiles are in fact most unusual documents, all three of them. The only one over which we have any real control at present is Facsimile 1, and of this we have not been able to discover a single one of the supposedly "innumerable" and "identical" parallels. We are not referring to minute differences of detail, but to major and conspicuous discrepancies. We have dug up over a hundred lion-couch scenes, many of which may be considered significantly like our papyrus.⁶⁴ But how do they compare with it? That is the question.

63. Umayya ibn Abi al-Salt, ed. Friedrich Schulthess (Leipzig, 1911), 39, cited in Joshua Finkel, "Old Israelitish Tradition in the Koran," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 2 (1930–31): 11.

64. The best source of "lion-couch" scenes is Mariette, *Dendérah*, 4: plates 65–75, most of which is reproduced in Lanzzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, plates XXX, LXIII–LXIV, CCLXI–CCLXII, CCLXV, CCLXVIII–CCLXXIV, CCLXXVI–CCLXXXII, CCLXXXV–CCXCI. Sixteen of these are reproduced in Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 2:132–37, and there are others in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris; The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection*, 2 vols. (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1961), 2:22–56, including some not found in Lanzzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, i.e., on 22–24, 30, 45, 48–49, 51, 53. More in Alexandre Moret, *Mystères égyptiens* (Paris: Colin, 1913), 51, 53, 57, 60, plate facing 64. In this source and many of the following, sometimes multiple scenes appear on a given page. Other examples may be found in Howard Carter and Alan H. Gardiner, "The Tomb of Ramesses IV and the Turin Plan of a Royal Tomb," *JEA* 4 (1917): 143; *JEA* 17 (1931): plates 56–57, following page 231; Nina M. Davies, "Some Representations of Tombs from the Theban Necropolis," *JEA* 24 (1938): 30, fig. 9; in Jean

In the past those who have really wanted to blast the Pearl of Great Price out of the water have printed reproductions of just any hypocephalus or lion-couch scene with the calm assurance that the mere sight of anything that looks like any of the facsimiles would be enough to spread consternation among the Saints and forever disqualify any and all

Capart, "A propos du cercueil d'argent du roi Chechonq," *CdE* 19 (1943): 195–97, figs. 27–30, and Philippe Derchain, "ENQUÊTE: Religion égyptienne et sculpture romane?" *CdE* 34 (1959): 74, fig. 5; also in Max Burchardt and Günther Roeder, "Ein altertümlicher Grabstein der Spätzeit aus Mittelägypten," *ZÄS* 55 (1919): 51; Philippe Virey, "La tombe des vignes a Thèbes," *RT* 21 (1899): 146; Gustave Jéquier, "Notes et remarques," *RT* 37 (1915): 121, 125; "Chambre du Nord," in *Oeuvres diverses de Rochemonteix*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 3 (Paris: Leroux, 1894), plate XI, near the end of the volume; Bernard Bruyère, "L'enseigne de Khabekhnet," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* 28 (1929): 47; Alexandre Piankoff, "The Funerary Papyrus of the Shieldbearer Amon-m-Saf in the Louvre Museum," *Egyptian Religion* 3/3 (1935): 144; "Egyptian Beliefs in a Future Life," *Ancient Egypt* 1 (1914): 21, fig. 17. Lion-couch scenes are most easily found in large editions of the Book of the Dead: Richard Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter nach dem hieroglyphischen Papyrus in Turin* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1842), plates 8, 33, 74–75; Edouard H. Naville, *Papyrus funéraires de la XXI^e Dynastie* (Paris: Leroux, 1912), plate 1, and Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie* (Berlin: Asher, 1886), 1: plates I, III, V, XXVIII, CLXXXIII–CLXXXIV, CLXXXVII, CCVIII; T. George Allen, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), plates XXVI, XLVIII–XLIX, LX, LXX, XCIV; E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani, Scribe and Treasurer of the Temples of Egypt, about B.C. 1450*, 3 vols. (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1913), 3:7, 17, 34. Unusual versions may be found in Heinrich K. Brugsch, *Thesaurus inscriptionum aegyptiacarum: Kalendarische Inschriften altägyptischer Denkmäler*, 6 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1883), 2:749–50, 784, 789; also in Tom Prideaux, "Ancient Egypt: Part V," *Life* (7 June 1968): 69, 77, one discussed in Eberhard Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1960), vol. 2, Abb. 12 (at end of book and referring to p. 74); and in Adolf Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter: Ihr Werden und Vergehen in vier Jahrtausenden* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1934), 293, fig. 121. There is a small lion-couch vignette in Joseph Smith Papyri VI. An actual lion-couch was found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (see p. 219, fig. 24); its ritual significance is noted by Alexandre Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon* (New York: Harper Torch, 1962), 36.

statements of the Prophet. The idea that these various documents might be subjected to serious comparative study with a real interest in the myriad questions they raise was the farthest thing from the minds of those who published them.

Whenever like but not identical documents are placed side by side for study, two problems present themselves: (a) to explain the resemblances between them, and (b) to explain the differences. The favorite game of comparative scholarship since the mid-nineteenth century has been the hunt for resemblances while discounting differences, a practice cultivated to a fine art by the evolutionists and very well and clearly demonstrated by the critics of the Book of Abraham. These latter constantly pointed to the general resemblance of the facsimiles to other documents while stubbornly refusing to acknowledge any of the conspicuous points of difference, attributing everything simply to bad copying. But however "suspicious" and even "damning" the resemblances may appear, it is not enough for us to say, for example, that since ancient myth and ritual are full of remarkable parallels to the death and resurrection of Christ, the New Testament must be rejected as history. To do that is to overlook both the great number of interesting hypotheses capable of explaining the supposedly devastating resemblances and the no less numerous questions raised by the swarming discrepancies and contrasts.

"Well known" was the favorite expression of these critics, and we are still being told that Facsimile 1 is "a well-known scene from the Osiris mysteries"⁶⁵ and that it belongs to "a well-known class of documents,"⁶⁶ as if that explained everything. But we cannot drop the discussion there; just as Egyptologists had to learn by long experience that it was unwise to label everything found in a tomb as funerary in nature, so the student is admonished today not to leap to conclusions every time he sees a lion couch. A useful study

65. Parker, "Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," 86.

66. Letter from Young to Petersen.

reminds us that the expression “he who is on his couch” can refer to anything from Osiris in the underworld to a solid citizen taking twenty winks on a warm afternoon.⁶⁷ It is surprising how often an otherwise well-known scene is converted by a few minor alterations into something not as well known, as when by altering the names of participants “the Cairo papyrus has seriously distorted the meaning of the ritual,” which is otherwise a well-known scene,⁶⁸ or when a well-known scene from the Book of the Dead loses its well-known meaning by another such change of names: “It would be easy to find numerous parallels to each of these figures,” writes George Nagel of the scene, “but that would not mean much”⁶⁹—that is, the numerous parallels, no matter how well known, are not enough in themselves to identify every scene in which they occur. Nina M. Davies reports on another document, “wholly conventional in its subjects,” which isn’t conventional at all because it “displays certain details and peculiarities of treatment that are, so far as my knowledge goes, unique.”⁷⁰ The substitution of one divinity for another in a series of lion-couch scenes changes the normal resurrection motif, according to Derchain, to “an astral or calendrical myth” with special emphasis on the flooding of the Nile,⁷¹ and by another such alteration the figure

67. Vladimir S. Golenishchev, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire, Papyrus hiéroglyphiques* (Cairo: IFAO, 1927), 133. Here the hieroglyph for “couch” is the lion couch. “It is difficult to say,” writes Golenishchev, “whether the designation of the ‘he who is on the couch’ refers to the dead god Osiris. One could just as well think of the king (or, less probably, of some ordinary individual), who was thus placed while he slept under the protection of the gods.”

68. Alan H. Gardiner, ed., *Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: Third Series: Chester Beatty Gift*, 2 vols. (London: British Museum, 1935), 1:101.

69. George Nagel, “Un papyrus funéraire de la fin du Nouvel Empire (Louvre 3292 [inv.],” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 29 (1929): 30–31.

70. Nina M. Davies, “An Unusual Depiction of Ramesside Funerary Rites,” *JEA* 32 (1946): 69; cf. plate XIII, between pages 68 and 69.

71. Derchain, “La pêche de l’oeil,” 13.

on the couch ceases to be Osiris and becomes a dead person “identified with a complex entity” who remains quite mysterious.⁷²

Such alterations, which convert familiar scenes into unfamiliar ones, are by no means more radical than those that confront the student who looks over a hundred or so lion-couch scenes, which student will readily recognize that they fall into a number of clear-cut categories, the principal ones being these:

1. First, there are a number of drawings, usually small ones, of a mummy reposing on a lion couch all alone, unaccompanied by any other figure, peacefully awaiting the resurrection as it lies in state. It is simply the mummy on its bier.

2. There are quite a few embalming scenes, often plainly labeled as such, with Anubis approaching with bandages or ointment, or working with his hands on or over the mummy. This scene is not to be confused with Facsimile 1 and is sometimes shown as a sequel to it.

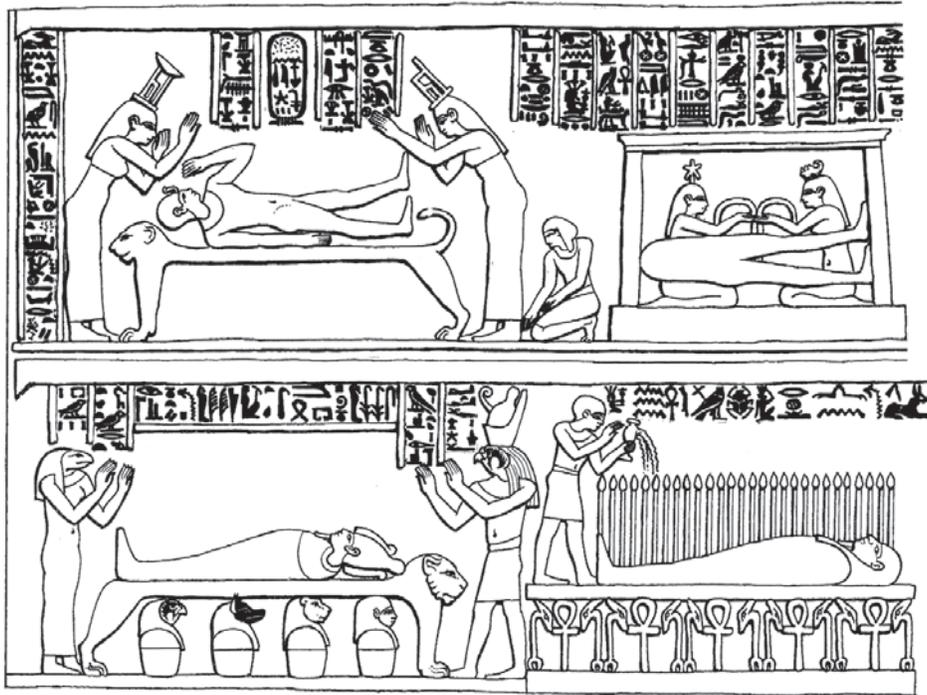
3. Then there are many resurrection or resuscitation scenes, such as the famous “Awakening of Osiris” in the temple of Opet at Luxor: “The Neter [god] is beginning to move himself, bending his right arm and raising his left foot.”⁷³

4. There are a number of procreation scenes in which the mummy is begetting his divine successor or reincarnation.

Now the question is, to which of these well-known scenes or classes does our Facsimile 1 belong? This is exactly what the experts have never been able to agree on. Some have designated it most emphatically as an embalming scene; others like Breasted saw in it a resurrection; and now Professor Parker tells us it is a mystic marriage (fig. 17). All the authorities have good reason for their opinions; the elements of all the episodes are undeniably present in our little sketch, or

72. Capart, “A propos du cercueil d’argent du roi Chechonq,” 194.

73. Alexandre Varille, “La grande porte du temple d’Apet à Karnak,” *ASAE* 53 (1956): 110.



else experienced scholars would not have seen them there so clearly. But which is the predominant theme? The difficulty of answering that question is quite enough in itself to brand our document as unique. And now some European scholars are suggesting a new and neglected category for some of the lion-couch spectacles—namely, that they are really *sacrificial* scenes. This, of course, rings a tiny bell for Joseph Smith, and we shall have to look at these new studies quite closely. Until now none of the critics of the Joseph Smith Papyri has bothered to mention them.

To show how hard it is to pin down our facsimile, we invite the reader to compare it with the *closest* parallel in our collection (fig. 18).⁷⁴ An Egyptologist may be able to explain the significance of an arm or a bird (though it is precisely in matters of significance that the experts have always disagreed most widely among themselves, and still do), but

74. Mariette, *Dendérah*, 4: plate 90.



Figure 17. Numerous lion-couch scenes from an inner sanctuary inform us that not all such images depict embalming. Critics have scoffed at Joseph Smith's declaration that Facsimile 1 is a sacrificial scene, not an embalming scene. Roof chapel of Osiris, Isis Temple at Philae, ca. A.D. 170.

any intelligent child can usually spot an arm or a bird when he sees one in a picture, and it needs no trained specialist to recognize at least a dozen points of difference between our two sketches when they are placed side by side. Notice that in the non-Mormon scene (1) the bird is in a different position, there being no bird at the head of the mummy; (2) Anubis has both hands raised, not one hand lowered; (3) the figure on the couch has only one hand raised, while (4) the bird above him has a proper wing, not something that looks like a hand; (5) the man on the couch wears no clothes (6) but does wear the *nemes*-headdress and rests his head on a pillow; (7) his left arm and hand are plainly visible, held well apart from his body; (8) two ladies are in attendance; (9) a figure with a Horus mask is also assisting; (10) there are no canopic jars under the couch; there is no crocodile, no pylons, etc.; (11) stereotyped and familiar inscriptions accompany the drawing—the inscriptions on the Mormon papyrus are completely different; (12) Anubis is quite



Figure 18. The Isis hawk hovers over the stirring figure of Osiris on the lion couch while Anubis in an unusually long robe raises both hands over him. Roof chapel of Osiris, Denderah, ca. 50 B.C.

differently attired in the two pictures. One could easily add to the list, but it might well be objected that this is only one document chosen for comparison, even if it is the nearest one in general appearance, and that among the numerous other lion-couch scenes are those in which each single element in Joseph Smith Papyrus I could be matched. But this is not so; on many points our little sketch remains quite unique (see pp. 126–27, fig. 10). Here are some of them:

1. Of the hundred other figures on lion couches, how many have both hands raised? None. Professor Parker is therefore statistically justified in being suspicious. So we pursue our statistics further.

2. How many of these figures have one hand upraised without having the other clearly visible, placed under the body in a space provided for it? None, though we know of one example in which the hand is shown beside the body, but very clearly shown almost touching the knee.

3. How many other scenes show the figure on the couch clothed in the manner here shown? None. All are either nude or fully invested as mummies.

4. In how many is this figure wearing anklets or slippers? None.

5. In how many are the couch, the figure on the couch, and the priest out of line with each other in the strange manner of the Abraham papyrus? None; we have no replicas in which the artist has made any such blunder or anything comparable to it.

6. How many have crocodiles beneath the couch? None.

7. How many have hatched lines designated as “expanse, or firmament”? None of the others has such a design.

8. How many have the twelve gates or “pillars of heaven” or anything like them? None.

9. How many show the lotus and offering table, otherwise common in Egyptian religious and secular scenes? None.

10. How many show the resurrection, procreation, or embalming scene without the presence of the two ladies (Isis and Nephthys) and/or other dignitaries? None.

11. Granting Dr. Parker’s reconstruction, when a bird is shown flying over the middle of the couch, how often is Anubis in the position shown? Never.

12. How often is any bird shown with wings drawn in the manner Professor Parker indicates? Never.

13. How many have inscriptions matching those in the Joseph Smith papyrus? None, though nearly all of them have stereotyped inscriptions designating the nature of the scene.

So our manuscript is different. But is it significantly different? In looking at it beside the others, we miss the august figures of the gods standing by, the solemn religious dignity they give to the other compositions as they kneel in mourning, stand guard, raise hands in praise, or make magical passes. At the same time we are impressed by the rather massive additions—the unfamiliar writing that frames the scene on either side and the stagelike foundation of elements found in none of the other papyri. True, every individual sign and figure can be matched rather easily somewhere else, just as every word on this page can be found in almost

any English book, but it is the combination of perfectly ordinary signs that makes extraordinary compositions, and we may well repeat the words of Professor Nagel: "It would be easy to find numerous parallels to each of these figures, but that would not mean much."⁷⁵ For the combination here is different. We have just noted that for an Egyptian document to be considered unique, it does not have to be spectacularly different from all others. It can resemble scores of others in almost every particular and still have a message to convey that is quite distinct from theirs. Whether our facsimiles belong to this maverick type remains to be seen. But what we have seen is that one of them, at least, the one with which we are at present concerned, departs from the standard patterns in so many particulars as to render it worthy of closer attention than anyone has so far been willing to give it.

Stating the Question⁷⁶

The two-page spread in the 29 December 1912 issue of the *New York Times*,⁷⁷ to which we have often referred in the course of these articles, finds an authentic echo in an article by Wallace Turner appearing in the same newspaper under the dateline of 15 July 1968.⁷⁸ The crux of the article is Mr. Turner's statement concerning the newly acquired papyri: "There is no question that Smith worked from these papyri; the question is whether his writings based on them were actual translations or pure fabrication."⁷⁹ But what Mr. Turner calls *the* question is itself meaningless until we know exactly what is meant by "worked from" and "based on"—that is, until it can be shown whether the Book of Abraham really depends for its existence on these papyri and if so, exactly

75. Nagel, "Un papyrus funéraire," 30–31.

76. Part 6 of "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" began here.

77. "Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet."

78. Wallace Turner, "Papyri Spur Mormon Debate over Basis for Discrimination against Negroes," *New York Times*, 15 July 1968, 11.

79. *Ibid.*

how and to what extent Joseph Smith made use of them. The evidence in known documents is entirely inadequate to permit a definitive answer to these questions, all answers to date resting on the capacity of the critics as mind readers.

From the very beginning this writer has been rightly accused of an almost callous unconcern for the newly located papyri (all except the one matching Facsimile 1) as evidence for or against the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. Equal indifference to the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar⁸⁰ springs neither from misgivings nor indolence, but from a principle which has been taught in the Church from the beginning and which cannot be too strictly enjoined on all students of the gospel—namely, that a Latter-day Saint is bound to accept as true scriptures *only* the standard works of the Church.⁸¹ The wisdom of such a rule is readily apparent to anyone who considers what endless

80. [In later writings, Nibley referred to this as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers—eds.]

81. The position of the Church was stated officially by Elder James E. Talmage in 1905 before a senatorial investigation committee in Washington, DC:

“Mr. Worthington. What are the accepted standard works of the church which bind all of its members?”

Mr. Talmage. The standard works are four in number—the Bible, King James version or translation; the Book of Mormon; the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. . . .

Mr. Worthington. Now . . . let me ask you about this work which you are the author—the Articles of Faith. You say you were authorized by the high church officials to prepare such work. . . . Is that work, or anything in it, binding upon any member of your church?

Mr. Talmage. Oh, in no sense. . . .

Mr. Worthington. Is there any publishing house authorized to publish works and send them out, which works bind the church as an organization?

Mr. Talmage. No such publishing house could be named. . . . The only supervision exercised by the church . . . is in regard to reissuing standard works—three of the standard works.” *Proceedings before the Committee on Privileges and Elections of the United States Senate in the Matter of Protests against the Right Hon. Reed Smoot, a Senator from the State of Utah,*

confusion would reign without it in a church in which all are encouraged to seek and receive personal revelation and are also enjoined before receiving that revelation to indulge freely in vigorous speculation and exploration on their own: "You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it is right" (D&C 9:8).

One of the standard works is the Pearl of Great Price, in which the explanations of three Egyptian drawings are presented for our acceptance as inspired scriptures. The drawings themselves are introduced as supplementary aids to the ancient reader and were not necessarily inspired. We know that the Prophet was in possession of other Egyptian documents as well, but the fact remains that only the three facsimiles were published as ancient records directly relating to an inspired interpretation. Whatever use Joseph Smith may have made of the other manuscripts, whatever he may have thought or said or written about them, is *not* scripture and is not binding on anyone; nor can it be used as a test of his inspiration, not only because he was as free to speculate and suggest as anyone else, but also because all these other writings, ancient and modern, have been pointedly omitted from the body of books passing as scripture.

Accordingly, in the following chapters we are going to discuss *only* the facsimiles and the interpretation thereof, passing by in silence those writings which do not belong to the Book of Abraham, even though that book may have been the end product of a process in which they had a part. Like the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham must be judged on its own merits, and not on the way men choose to re-create and interpret the baffling and fragmentary episodes of its creation. While we can only encourage those scholars competent to deal with the Egyptian texts to play to their hearts' content with those fragments which give them a specialist's advantage over the rest of us, we ourselves must resolutely

to Hold His Seat, 4 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1905), 3:24–25.

resist the allurements of that succulent diet of red herring which has long been the staple of those who would discredit the claims of the Prophet. Unable to get at him directly, they find grounds for complaint in all sorts of interesting if irrelevant things. Typical of this has been the reaction of some of our learned friends to the crushing discovery that among the papyri belonging to Joseph Smith was one document in Arabic. This was immediately pointed out to us as another proof of Smith's imbecility. True, he never included this Arabic writing among his Egyptian studies, never said it was Egyptian or offered to translate it, nor indeed have we any record of his ever mentioning it. Yet somehow the incongruity of an Arabic text among writings supposedly connected with Abraham is supposed to discredit Joseph Smith.⁸² In the same spirit, snatches of the Book of the Dead, to say nothing of the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar, are now being treated exactly as if they were integral parts of the Mormon scriptures.

For those who wish to attack or defend the Pearl of Great Price, there is quite enough material contained in the facsimiles to keep things lively for some time to come, without having to wrangle about hypothetical claims while the clear-cut claims of the facsimiles go unheeded. What are these clear-cut claims? One question embraces them all: *Were the originals of these three facsimiles ever used anciently to explain or illustrate historic events or teachings going back to Abraham?* If that can be answered in the affirmative the Book of Abraham is in the clear; if it can be answered in the negative—an emphatic negative—then it is discredited. Either solution depends upon an affirmative answer to an appalling preliminary question: Do you know *all there is to know* about these three documents? That admittedly is a

82. [Subsequent investigation shows that the Arabic document that appears on the microfilm roll published by the Tanners as the so-called "Alphabet and Grammar" is completely unrelated to anything else on the roll—eds.]

poser, but none should know better than Egyptologists that where that challenge of omniscience cannot be met, almost anything can happen: He who knows not all things is ignorant of all things.

That Fearful Symmetry

The most obvious thing about the facsimiles is that they are pictures, but rather strange pictures. Not many people in frontier America had ever seen pictures like these at the time they turned up in Kirtland. Laymen like the writer still need expert instruction on how to view these quaint vignettes, and when Mr. Robert Webb protested long ago that "the known habits of the ancient Egyptian artists have not been taken into consideration" by those who pronounced judgment, he was well within his rights. For it is only more recently that the grossly neglected study of the canons of Egyptian composition has begun to receive the attention it deserves.⁸³ Early in the century Professor E. A. Wallis Budge could still claim in all seriousness that it is possible that the Egyptians really believed in the existence of composite animals such as they depict in the funerary literature, the error of which proposition has been properly aired in our own day by Heinrich Schäfer.⁸⁴ It is not that simple.

As anyone can soon discover for himself, Egyptian hieroglyphic is not a naive picture writing, but a special code governed by strict rules, without a knowledge of which it cannot be read. Not only must certain conventions, which some describe as rules of grammar, be observed in writing and reading it, but all the little pictures that convey the ideas and sounds must be executed according to strict canons of proportion that remained unchanged for thousands

83. So Henry de Morant, "Statuaire et frontalité dans l'art Égyptien," *CdE* 10 (1934): 207; see esp. Abd-el-Mohsen Bakir, "Brief Communications: Remarks on Some Aspects of Egyptian Art," *JEA* 53 (1967): 159–61.

84. Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, 1:61; Heinrich Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 33.

of years. From at least the Third Dynasty on, such strict controls “are canonical for the whole of Egyptian art . . . from the representation of human beings in relief and sculpture to the forms of pottery.”⁸⁵ The general impression is that everything follows established rules “from age to age . . . without the slightest deviation.”⁸⁶ Because of this system or convention the carvings and paintings on the walls of temples and tombs, no matter how vivid and how familiar they may seem to us, are, Heinrich von Recklinghausen reminds us, “by no means self-explanatory. . . . One had to be taught their meaning in order to understand them, exactly as one must be taught the alphabet in order to read a written text.”⁸⁷ This puts writing and drawing in the same class, and it has often been noted that it is impossible to draw a line between the Egyptian scribe and the graphic artist: “was not drawing as much a part of the training of a scribe as writing itself?” asks Dimitri Meeks.⁸⁸ If Egyptian writing is a kind of graphic art, “Egyptian graphic art is also a kind of writing,” says von Recklinghausen, so that “an Egyptian picture must accordingly be not viewed but read.”⁸⁹

Even Professor Kurt Sethe, who took it for granted that “pictographs are the prelude to writing throughout the entire world” (a proposition by no means confirmed by the evidence), assures us that though the Egyptians were the only people in the world who retained the primitive form of writing throughout, the oldest known Egyptian pictographs are already firmly established conventional conceptual symbols,

85. Alexander Scharff, “Geschichte Ägyptens von der Vorzeit bis zur Gründung Alexandrias,” in *Ägypten und Vorderasien im Altertum* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1950), 73.

86. So Maxence de Rochemonteix, “Le temple d’Apet où est engender l’Osiris de Thèbes,” *RT* 6 (1885): 21.

87. Von Recklinghausen, “Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil,” 34.

88. See Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 6.

89. Von Recklinghausen, “Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil,” 34.

whose meaning is not to be divined by looking at them as pictures.⁹⁰ It is a contrived system from the beginning, so that an Egyptian drawing is not a picture in the present-day sense of the word. "Every figure," writes Siegfried Schott, "signifies more than its appearance would suggest and can only be understood when its deeper meaning is recognized." Schott regards the ingenious method of conveying information by related techniques of writing and drawing in code as one of the sudden and phenomenal developments that marked the almost explosive emergence of a full-blown Egyptian culture on the scene.⁹¹ According to Maxence de Rochemonteix, we must look upon the figures on the walls of temples and tombs as "gigantic ideograms" whose form and meaning were developed along with and as part of the concept of hieroglyphic writing.⁹² Indeed, Schäfer went so far as to insist that one cannot understand Egyptian art without understanding the Egyptian language.

By the Fifth Dynasty at the latest, "the many traditional rules had come to be fused," observed Eduard Meyer, "into an inviolable canon of proportions that had to be learned in the school and schematically applied to every drawing" (fig. 19).⁹³ Such a conclusion was justified by the readily discernible uniformities of Egyptian composition, as well as by the testimony of Diodorus,⁹⁴ though "the Egyptians themselves," as Pierre Lacau informs us today, "have told us nothing concerning their belief in the efficacy of drawing. It is up to us to understand how their system of decoration . . . could express their ideas as well or even better

90. Kurt Sethe, *Vom Bilde zum Buchstaben: Die Entstehungsgeschichte der Schrift*, UGAÄ 12 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1964), 17–18; cf. 19–41.

91. Siegfried Schott, *Hieroglyphen: Untersuchungen zum Ursprung der Schrift*, in *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, 1950.24 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1950), 52.

92. Rochemonteix, "Le temple d'Apet," 29; cf. 24.

93. Eduard Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1909), 1.2:198.

94. Diodorus, *Library* 1.98.5–9.

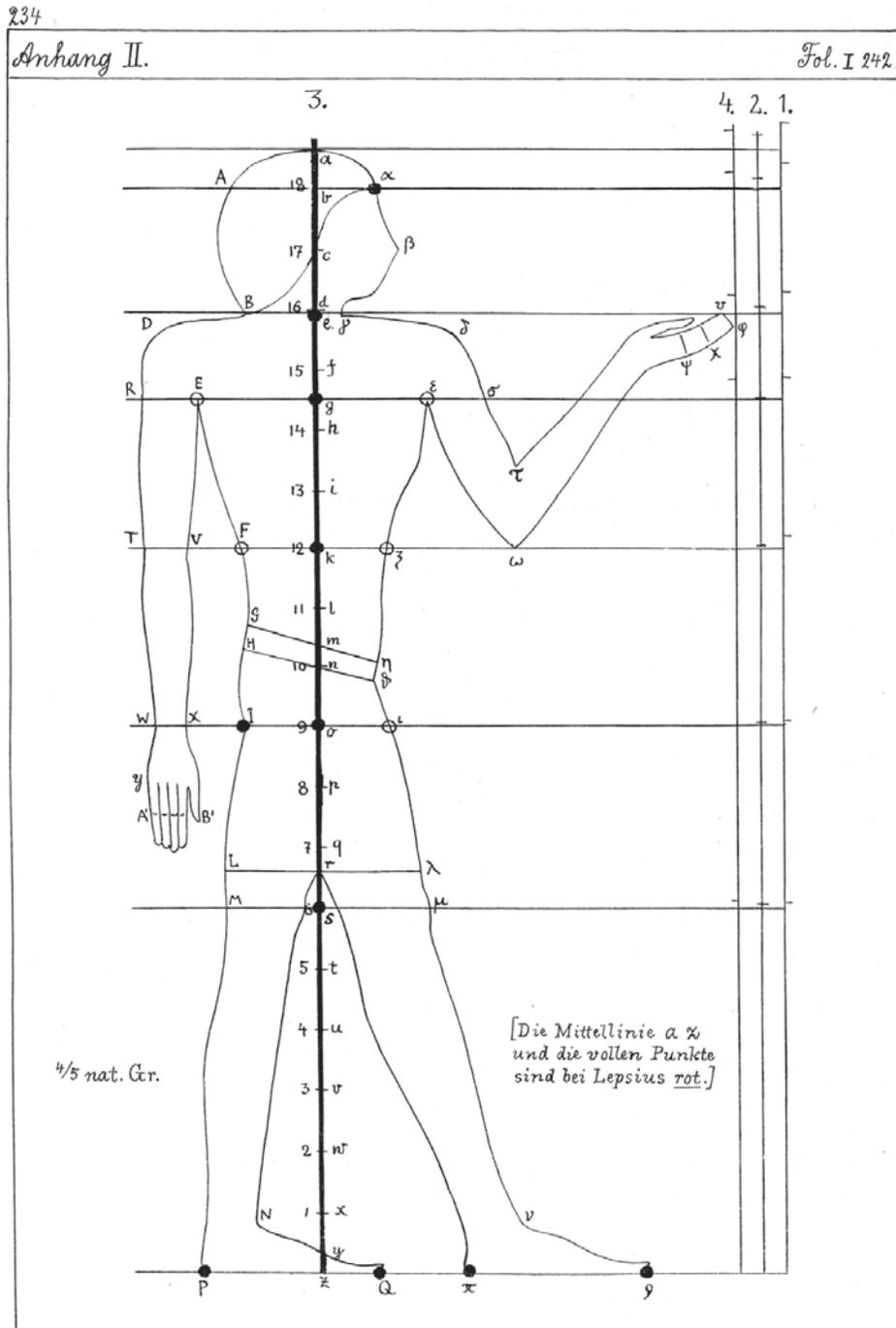


Figure 19. The most famous example of an Egyptian canonical drawing is this figure with guidelines from the tomb of Ma-nefer at Saqqara. Lepsius and Sethe, *Denkmäler* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 1:234.

than a written inscription."⁹⁵ Professor Samuel A. B. Mercer was wrong when he wrote that Egyptian pictures are easier to understand than inscriptions—they only look that way. Many students of Egyptian art have tried to work out the rules by which it was constructed, but there is still little agreement among them. Peculiarities long attributed to the primitive or infantile mentality of the Egyptians, lacking the sophistication to see things as they are, are now generally recognized as the expression of a shrewd and calculated system of communication.

Lacking an Egyptian thesis on the subject, the basic issues are still being debated: What were the proper proportions? How were they related to the Egyptian standard measurements of length? Do repeated pictures signify repeated action?⁹⁶ Why the strong predilection for profiles? Why do the Egyptians always favor the right profile?⁹⁷ Was the law of frontality⁹⁸ inviolable⁹⁹ or could it be broken when necessary?¹⁰⁰ Did the Egyptians have a true perspective¹⁰¹ or not?¹⁰² Why is the leg opposite the viewer always thrust forward? Were the canons of a religious nature?¹⁰³ Why does the Egyptian always view things either from the front or the

95. Pierre Lacau, "Le tableau central de la stèle-porte égyptienne," *RdE* 19 (1967): 50.

96. Heinrich Balcz, "Symmetrie und Asymmetrie in Gruppenbildungen der Reliefs des alten Reichs," *MDAIK* 1 (1930): 137.

97. Von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 14, 27, 33.

98. Attributed to Julius Lange, *Darstellung des Menschen in der älteren griechischen Kunst* (Strassbourg: Heitz, 1899).

99. Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 316, refers to the "rule of directional straightness."

100. Herbert Senk, "Von der Beziehung zwischen 'Geradvorstelligkeit' und 'perspektivischem Gehalt,'" *ZÄS* 74 (1938): 125–32.

101. See Luise Klebs, "Die Tiefendimension in der Zeichnung des alten Reiches," *ZÄS* 52 (1915): 19–34.

102. Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 269–76.

103. Gaston Maspero, "The Stèle C14 of the Louvre," *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 5 (1877): 555–62.

side, never from other angles?¹⁰⁴ Why did the Egyptians in inscriptions and drawings not use the guidelines offered by the joints between building stones and bricks as other ancient people did? Why with a strong feeling for perspective did the Egyptians never develop any rules for perspective?¹⁰⁵ Why would Egyptian artists sometimes add the usual grid work of guidelines to a composition *after* the drawing was completed? Why did the Egyptians continue to ignore true perspective after the Greeks in Egypt had amply demonstrated its use? Can the peculiarities of Egyptian art be explained on psychological grounds¹⁰⁶ or not?¹⁰⁷ Have we a right to say that the Egyptians were observing rules when we cannot agree on what those rules were and the Egyptians do not mention them?¹⁰⁸ Did the Egyptians deliberately avoid drawing true to life?¹⁰⁹ Did their canons scorn real appearances?¹¹⁰ Was the geometric style basic or incidental? Is *the* sovereign law of Egyptian composition Schäfer's *Geradansichtigvorstelligkeit* (the word is too good to miss!)?¹¹¹ Did the Egyptians regularly employ instruments to preserve the accuracy of the canons?¹¹² Does symmetry of composition indicate regularity of motion?¹¹³ Why was the height of a man 13 units in the Old Kingdom, 19 units in the Eighteenth Dynasty, and 22 $\frac{1}{3}$ units

104. See Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 324–25.

105. Klebs, "Die Tiefendimension," 34.

106. See Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, 269–76.

107. Idea attributed to Friedrich Matz.

108. Von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 32.

109. See Willem van Os, "Een Kunstenaar over de Egyptische Kunst," *JEOL* 6 (1939): 28–35; and van Os, "De Romp in de Egyptische Teekenkunst," *JEOL* 8 (1942): 602–7.

110. Joachim Spiegel, "Typus und Gestalt in der ägyptischen Kunst," *MDAIK* 9 (1940): 156–57.

111. Herbert Senk, "Zu H. Schäfers Lehre von den zwei Schichten des ägyptischen Kunstwerkes," *ZÄS* 75 (1939): 106–12.

112. Rainer Hanke, "Beiträge zum Kanonproblem," *ZÄS* 84 (1959): 118.

113. Balcz, "Symmetrie und Asymmetrie," 152.

in the Twenty-sixth Dynasty?¹¹⁴ Are these units (the grid squares) measured by the extended five-fingered hand, the fist, or four fingers?¹¹⁵ Why after experimenting with naturalistic positions in the Old Kingdom did the artists abandon and never return to them?¹¹⁶ Is the direction in which figures face originally determined by the direction of hieroglyphic writing?¹¹⁷ Is it determined by the medium—the pen favoring left to right, the chisel right to left?¹¹⁸ Are the standards of length all based on the human body?¹¹⁹ Did the Egyptians fear figures that looked directly out of the picture at one?

Luise Klebs has argued that the only real rule of Egyptian art was to make everything as unmistakably clear and simple as possible. That, according to her, would explain Lange's famous "law of frontality," according to which everything is always drawn in its most readily recognizable position, so that on a single figure the eyes and shoulders are seen from the front—their most expansive and characteristic image—while the nose and feet are drawn in their most striking dimension—seen in profile. The main thing is to show each thing as it essentially is and not as it happens to look at a particular moment from a particular angle: if you are drawing a square pool or tank in a garden, you always draw a square with a water-sign inside and trees around it, not because the pool always *looks* square, but because it always *is* square. A distant horse or ox and one close up are drawn the same size because they *are* the same size; that one of them is farther away is indicated by placing it higher upon the scene.¹²⁰ Such

114. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Wisdom of the Egyptians* (London: British School of Archaeology, 1940), 54.

115. Erik Iversen, *Canon and Proportions in Egyptian Art* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1955), 29–43, 53–59, 69.

116. Henry Madsen, "Ein künstlerisches Experiment im alten Reiche," *ZÄS* 42 (1905): 65–69.

117. Von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 15, 33.

118. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

119. Iversen, *Canon and Proportions in Egyptian Art*.

120. Klebs, "Die Tiefendimension," 19.

arbitrary devices, once understood, make for great simplicity and clarity of representation and require us to view Egyptian pictures as a sort of mechanical drawing, with all the advantages and disadvantages of such. "This typification," writes a modern Egyptian, "is said to be both the strength and the weakness of the whole of Egyptian art." Its weakness, like that of all mechanical drawing, is its inability to grasp "the photographic, the perceptual, the candid, the real, the momentary, and the narrative," while its strength was (in Professor John A. Wilson's words) its genius for conveying "the diagrammatic, the conceptual, the ideal, and the static."¹²¹

Professor von Recklinghausen would have us compare a hunting scene by Rubens with one of Pharaoh's royal hunting reliefs: in the former all is color, movement, confusion, excitement—one catches the spirit of the moment and feels oneself in the midst of the melee, but one would be at a complete loss to report just what happened on the hunt. The Egyptian picture, on the other hand, shows men and animals in neat geometrical array, with an oversized pharaoh (the exact equivalent, says von Recklinghausen, of putting the king's name in giant capital letters), middle-sized officials, tiny servants, and little stylized lions. It is quite quaint, but with a little training anyone can tell at a glance what took place on the hunt. A supposedly childlike and unrealistic picture is thus far more clear and informative than Rubens's inspired explosion of form and color.¹²² "It is the purpose of such art," says our guide, "to present objects more correctly than they appear to the passing impression of the senses."¹²³ Or, as W. M. Flinders Petrie put it, "Thus the Egyptian was accustomed to see in one view only what we see in different views, and this prevented his regarding such figures as

121. Waley el-Dine Sameh, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 151; John A. Wilson, "The Artist of the Egyptian Old Kingdom," *JNES* 6 (1947): 247.

122. Von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 35–36.

123. *Ibid.*, 35.

unnatural. . . . His drawings are a portrayal of facts and not a perspective scene."¹²⁴ The Egyptian was not depicting but describing; he was not deliberately making his pictures as unreal as possible, as some have maintained, but conveying information as clearly, correctly, and economically as possible. "For the Egyptian," wrote Joachim Spiegel, "there can be only one true representation of anything; for this it was necessary to have a single standard symbol for each object and to use this object in every context," no matter how incongruous it might look in the picture.¹²⁵ Thus "a fixed system of symbols was maintained with marvelous tenacity for 4,000 years," the Egyptians continuing to draw things their way even after they knew all about our modern Greek canons of perspective.¹²⁶

See the Big Picture

All this is important in viewing the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham, where nothing is more incongruous to Western eyes than the telling of an intensely dramatic and thrilling story in dry, stiff, scanty little sketches borrowed apparently from the handbooks of funerary art. Does it disturb us to see a man supposedly lying on a couch without touching it, or holding out a vessel that hovers half an inch above his hand? Or a line of deities sitting in state without any visible thrones or chairs to support them? Here the mere lying, holding, or sitting position is enough to show us what is going on.¹²⁷ A man being doused with water does not need to have the water touch him at all when the

124. Petrie, *Wisdom of the Egyptians*, 52.

125. Spiegel, "Typus und Gestalt," 157 n. 3.

126. Von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 35 (for quotation); Heinrich Schäfer, "Scheinbild oder Wirklichkeitsbild? Eine Grundfrage für die Geschichte der ägyptischen Zeichenkunst," *ZÄS* 48 (1911): 142.

127. Spiegel, "Typus und Gestalt," 157; Senk, "Zu H. Schäfers Lehre," 110, 112.

position of the vase makes it perfectly clear that he could not possibly avoid getting wet. When mere position is enough to indicate a situation, why clutter up the scene by insisting on absolute fidelity to detail that can never be attained anyway? "A scene as represented by an Egyptian artist," writes William S. Smith, "is to be looked at as a more or less diagrammatic rendering of the facts as he knew them to be. . . . He seeks to portray a generalization of an action, not its transitory aspect."¹²⁸ Only the permanent and the universal interested him, all else being mere passing impressions—a trick, a game, an illusion. In his effort to represent the ultimate, the essential, basic nature of whatever he is drawing, the Egyptian artist dispenses with all needless detail, "striving to give every body and every situation the character of a totality."¹²⁹

Idealized and generalized types of things are bound to be impersonal in nature, devoid of individual quirks and differences. In the marvelous royal portraits, even "all the heads," according to C. C. Edgar, "are practically of the same type. It is not a portrait, but a rather characterless ideal countenance, which was no doubt used indifferently for successive kings as well as various deities."¹³⁰ As impersonal as his subject, the Egyptian artist himself never seems to expect or seek public recognition. Why should he? For one thing, he always worked in corroboration with other craftsmen on any masterpiece (one man drew, another carved, and another colored the same relief); and for another his work was designed from the beginning to be hidden in dark tombs and temples and not put on public display. But, most important, the Egyptian artist thought of himself as

128. William S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (Boston: Oxford University Press, 1949), xiii.

129. Senk, "Von der Beziehung zwischen 'Geradvorstelligkeit' und 'perspektivischem Gehalt,'" 126.

130. C. C. Edgar, "Remarks on Egyptian 'Sculptors' Models," *RT* 27 (1905): 138; cf. Spiegel, "Typus und Gestalt," 168–70.

working in the sphere of an eternal order, independent of time and place and human awareness, in which “the visual arts, mythology, and ritual were facets of one reality.”¹³¹ His reward was in the eternities, for his art “embraces the great structure of the cosmic order in the most literal sense of the word.”¹³² Indeed, his drawing and carving are, as Philippe Derchain puts it, simply a continuation of the original idea of hieroglyphic writing, an application of the rules of analogical thinking to which we owe all the cosmological systems and pre-Greek theological systems.¹³³ Egyptian art and writing went forth together from the great cult centers of Memphis and Heliopolis as the means of conveying their inspired eschatological teachings.

Though we do not know what the connection was “between the units of the Egyptian system of linear measurement and the units of the canon of proportions,” both were sacred and of cosmic and ritual significance.¹³⁴ The perfect squares by which every human figure must be drawn are the artist’s way of taking his bearing on the universe, like the guidelines used in astronomical charts.¹³⁵ The basic rule of frontality, we are now told, “has its origin in the position of religious worship and is not, as so often supposed, a heritage of the archaic period.”¹³⁶

131. Philippe Derchain, *Rites égyptiens: Le sacrifice de l'oryx* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique reine Élisabeth, 1962), 1:38; cf. Spiegel, “Typus und Gestalt,” 164–65.

132. Spiegel, “Typus und Gestalt,” 172; cf. Smith, *History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting*, xiii.

133. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:38.

134. Iversen, *Canon and Proportions in Egyptian Art*, 19; cf. Edgar, “Remarks on Egyptian ‘Sculptors’ Models,” 138, 148.

135. See the many charts in “Astronomie égyptienne,” *CdE* 7 (1931): 41–53, and Eivind Lorenzen, *Technological Studies in Ancient Metrology* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1966).

136. Sameh, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*, 154; cf. Alexandre Badawy, “La loi de frontalité dans la statuaire égyptienne,” *ASAE* 52 (1952): 275.

The Long Tether

Once the set, prescribed, ritual nature of Egyptian art is understood, it is necessary to take the next step and show how the Egyptian artist was like every true artist an individualist after all, for whom the rules served as a guideline rather than a straitjacket. As Professor Wilson puts it, "a man could roam about at the end of a long tether, but the tether was always there."¹³⁷ Men with real artistic talents could and did constantly deviate from the set canons whenever they felt that the ideal type they sought was not adequately represented in the book of models. The run-of-the-mill craftsmen, on the other hand, were only too glad to have their official books of models to fall back on and thereby avoid the risks and pitfalls of creativity.¹³⁸ By consulting these "holy books," the artist gave his figures the flawless perfection which things designed to endure for eternity must have. "Everything was fixed in advance," writes Jean Capart; "the draftsman, formed by the training of the school, knew the canonical proportions of the figures by heart; he leaved through the book of models in order to extract each element he wished to employ in the scene he was about to draw."¹³⁹

Yet with their great artistic feeling the Egyptians were bound to be as offended by mere mechanical repetition as anyone else. "I was no mere copier of models," boasts one artist, "but followed my own heart; no director had to give me instructions . . . for I understood every aspect of my art." He was not free of the rules, but free because he had the rules by heart. On the other hand, we have the record of a self-taught scribe of the New Kingdom who developed his

137. Wilson, "Artist of the Egyptian Old Kingdom," 249.

138. Spiegel, "Typus und Gestalt," 156–57; cf. Edgar, "Remarks on Egyptian 'Sculptors' Models," 146; Marcelle Baud, "Caractère du dessin égyptien," *MI-FAO* 66 (1935–38): 18–19; Balcz, "Symmetrie und Asymmetrie," 148.

139. Jean Capart, "Pensées d'éternité sur un mode plaisant," *CdE* 32 (1957): 162.

own canons of writing and drawing!¹⁴⁰ A Middle Kingdom inscription praises the prince “who distinguishes the true artist and turns his back on mediocrity,”¹⁴¹ and already in the art of the pyramid age there is a conscious avoidance of mere repetition, of perfect symmetry, of mechanical reproduction.¹⁴² In the use of color the artist of the Old Kingdom seems “sometimes actuated by a perverse and antic impulse” to play around, so that things are sometimes very oddly colored, and the three identical pots that make up a well-known ideogram may as well as not be each of a different color.¹⁴³

It is always important to remember that nearly all the objects and documents for our examination come from funerary settings, in which a rigid conventionality is to be expected; there is every indication that the secular everyday art of the Egyptians was much freer, more spontaneous and naturalistic.¹⁴⁴ It must also be borne in mind that not every object found in a tomb or with a mummy is necessarily a funerary object, and we have yet to consider whether the facsimiles are really funerary or not.

In viewing any Egyptian composition, such as Facsimile 1, it is quite natural to pronounce it “typical,” since in a way every work of art that is recognizably Egyptian is by that token typical. But at the same time, since the Egyptian draftsman was free to deviate from the norm in special cases, we

140. Cited by Wilhelm Spiegelberg, “Eine Künstlerinschrift des Neuen Reiches,” *RT* 24 (1902): 185–87.

141. Louvre C 26, line 13, in Karl Piehl, *Inscriptions hiéroglyphiques recueillies en Europe et en Égypte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1886–88), 1:10; also plate VII.

142. Balcz, “Symmetrie und Asymmetrie,” 146–47; cf. Herbert Senk, “‘Kontaktfigur’ und ‘Kontaktgruppe’ in der ägyptischen Flachbildnerei (II),” *ASAE* 53 (1956): 290.

143. Quotation from Wilson, “Artist of the Egyptian Old Kingdom,” 249; cf. Wolfgang Schenkel, “Die Farben in ägyptischer Kunst und Sprache,” *ZÄS* 88 (1963): 131–47.

144. Badawy, “La loi de frontalité,” 306–7; de Morant, “Statuaire et frontalité,” 108–9.

should not be surprised or distressed by deviation, but we should be interested. Even minor irregularities, von Recklinghausen admonishes us, are not to be regarded as mere slips, but as an "*avis au lecteur*," intentionally put in to call our attention to some unusual aspect of the situation depicted.¹⁴⁵ It should be clear by now that no conclusive evidence can be deduced from the fact that the facsimiles are typical on the one hand (though that has ever been the favorite target of the critics), or on the other hand that they contain irregularities. The mere existence of oddities in the drawings means little until we examine the nature of those oddities.

At first glance it is obvious that the draftsman who made Facsimile 1 has observed the canons, telling his story with strict observance of the conventions. That is what one would expect. The great market for the skill of scribe and artist in Egypt was the funeral business, and one of them boasts on a stela in the Louvre that he controls the full repertoire of a trained draftsman but is especially skilled in drawing scenes for the Book of the Dead—naturally, that was what paid.¹⁴⁶ Anyone wishing to procure the services of an Egyptian artist-scribe would be almost sure to get one who was more familiar with Book of the Dead motifs than anything else, they being his normal source of income. And anything he drew would necessarily betray his background. But we have also seen that Egyptian scribes could use the old familiar school stereotypes when necessary to convey a message or tell a story that was quite different from those to which the well-known forms usually applied. That could happen and did; it was a risky business, we are told, and could get the artist into trouble artistically. As Marcelle Baud explains it, the struggle between what the eye sees in an object and what the brain knows about it leads to a "fierce conflict" between the two for control of the hand, which puts the

145. In von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 31; cf. Davies, "An Unusual Depiction of Ramesside Funerary Rites," 69, plate 13.

146. Discussed by Maspero, "Stèle C14 of the Louvre," 555–62.

artist in an embarrassing position.¹⁴⁷ The eye sees the plate on the table as an oval, but the brain knows it is a circle—which shall it be?

Finding himself faced with a new and unusual situation, the ordinary Egyptian artist would naturally try to play it safe and stick to his book of models as closely as possible, confining his innovations to details, such as the position of an arm or leg, or an attempt at a complicated crossing of arms or legs.¹⁴⁸ Or, the Egyptian sacrifices common sense to indicate exceptional situations, and this often leads to contradictions.

Isn't this very much the situation in Facsimile 1, where the artist does very well until he must indicate the struggle on the altar, when he leaves the victim's legs, the couch, and the priest hopelessly out of line without making any effort to correct them—which could easily have been done in view of the vacant spaces left in the critical area? That he is having trouble with the legs is further indicated by another significant anomaly. "The greatest feature of Egyptian drawing," wrote Petrie, "is the beauty of line. There was no tentative touching and smudging. Each line was drawn in one sweep. . . . There [was] never a quiver or hesitation. The artist must have had the precise form in imagination on the surface before him, and followed with his hand what his mind already saw in place."¹⁴⁹ Now when the composer of Facsimile 1 is dealing with familiar and conventional objects, such as the couch and the bird—that is, when he has "the precise form in imagination," his line is simple and sure; but when he gets to the figure on the couch, and especially the legs, he loses confidence. Here we do find "tentative touching and smudging"—the lines are heavy and overdrawn again and

147. Baud, "Caractère du dessin égyptien," 14–15; cf. von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 30–31.

148. Spiegel, "Typus und Gestalt," 162–63, 166; von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil," 27, 30.

149. Petrie, *Wisdom of the Egyptians*, 53.

again, almost scrubbed into the paper. Plainly the artist is not here tossing off the well-known scenes that he could do with his eyes closed.

Solving a Problem

In Facsimile 1 the first problem that faced the artist-scribe, according to our text (Abraham 1:15), was to represent a man who was both “fastened upon an altar” *and* praying. He solved his problem with strict obedience to the canons of his art in the only way it could be solved. The man is supine, to indicate his incapacity and helplessness; his body does not touch the altar—its position alone is enough to show that he is on it; nor are the binding ropes shown, for the supine position tells us, according to the Egyptian formula, that he is helpless. So far everything is expressed diagrammatically, not realistically. But even though the man is flat on his back, he is taking the correct and conventional attitude of prayer or supplication. We now see why it is important to make clear that Abraham in this scene has both hands before him, for that not only makes this particular lion-couch scene unique, but it also gives the whole drama its meaning. M. Korostovtsev has pointed out that the Egyptians placed peculiar emphasis on hand positions to convey ideas, and in Klebs’s catalog of “Formal Gestures of the Egyptians,” the “Gesture of Praying”—right foot forward, hands raised before the face—has the honor of being number one.¹⁵⁰

From the point of view of graphic art, this is indeed an incongruous combination—a man bound and helpless but at the same time waving his arms and legs around—but actually it seems to be a rather sensible employment of the canons of a particular art.

150. M. Korostovtsev, “Le main dans l’écriture et la langue de l’Égypte ancienne,” *Bulletin de l’Institut égyptien* 28 (1948): 1–10. On the gesture, see especially Hellmuth Müller, “Darstellungen von Gebärden auf Denkmälern des Alten Reiches,” *MDAIK* 7 (1937): 60–61.

Facsimile 1 Is Not a Picture

A most serious oversight by the critics of Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles has been failure to read with care what is said in those explanations. As a rule one glance at the facsimiles has been enough to assure any scholar that they are familiar Egyptian stuff, and a second glance has made clear that the Prophet's interpretations have no resemblance to those of modern Egyptologists. It has never occurred to any of the experts to ask whether there might after all be something instructive or significant in the explanations. Had they taken the pains to do so, they could have discovered right at the outset that Joseph Smith does not describe the facsimiles as *pictures* of anything; they are symbolic diagrams describing not so much unique historical occurrences as ritual events. Let us explain this more closely.

If we follow the official explanations, some of the most important elements in Facsimile 1, such as "the Angel of the Lord," "Abraham in Egypt," "the pillars of heaven," etc., do not have even the remotest resemblance to what they are supposed to represent; they are strictly symbolic and cannot possibly be thought of as pictures until their meaning has been explained. Moreover, we are explicitly told that figures in the facsimiles are "*designed to represent*" such and such a thing, not to depict it as it appears, for what it is is apparent only to the initiated: "*as understood* by the Egyptians." It is an arbitrary interpretation that is given to these things—for example, the hatched lines in Facsimile 1, figure 12, "*signifying* expanse, or the firmament." One does not draw a picture of "expanse"—one can only "signify" it by symbols, whose meaning can only be understood in the context of a particular time and culture: "*but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify* [what we Semites would call] Shaumau, to be high" (Abraham, Fac. 1, fig. 12 explanation, emphasis added). The whole thing is culturally conditioned; Abraham is trying to explain the figures to

non-Egyptians, and he tells them that they cannot be understood unless they are viewed through trained Egyptian eyes. There are various levels of symbolic representations, since every symbol necessarily has some point of visual contact with the thing it is supposed to represent, and some of the figures in the facsimiles are accordingly nearer to true pictures than others: "And that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation . . ."—here we expect something like a picture, and get one. Likewise, "That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in figures" (Abraham 1:12, 14) refers us to the familiar images by which these particular gods were identified to their worshippers.

But when we are told that figure 1 in Facsimile 2 is "*signifying* the first creation," we are dealing with the purest symbols; and when we learn that figure 3 is "*made to represent* God sitting upon his throne," we can be sure that the artist did not for a moment suppose that God on his throne really looked like that, ibis-head and all. If we doubt it, we are told that figure 7, a totally different image, *also* "represents God sitting on his throne," so that these two cannot possibly be thought of as pictures of anything. Figure 4 "*answers to*" whatever is conveyed in another culture by the word "*Raukeeyang*," yet at the same time it is "*also* a numerical figure, in Egyptian signifying one thousand," a clear demonstration of the principle that these figures are not supposed to be pictures of anything but may represent whatever the Egyptians choose to see in them.

To modern eyes it has seemed naive and even comical for Joseph Smith to have Abraham tell a vivid and exciting story and illustrate it with doll-like and lifeless little caricatures of people, making no attempt at aesthetic or emotional appeal. But that was the Egyptian way, as it is the way of Indian glyphs and of ancient oriental art in general. The tableaux on the walls of Egyptian temples, as Rochemonteix noted long ago, "are not real people: one has the impression of having

before his eyes symbolic abstractions rather than human beings.”¹⁵¹ Economy is the watchword: “almost always in his drawing [the Egyptian] seeks to portray a generalization of an action. . . . The narrative element is conspicuously absent.”¹⁵² There is no need to worry about bad draftsmanship as long as a drawing is adequate to convey its message. Dr. Mercer contemptuously observed that there was nothing whatever about figure 2 of Facsimile 1 or figure 3 of Facsimile 2 to remind him of Abraham. If there had been, the drawings would not have been authentic; a real portrait of Abraham or the priest would be as far from Abraham’s way of doing things as would be a portrait of the angel. The meager, stiff, lifeless figures apparently do not disturb Joseph Smith, who goes right ahead and gives us Abraham’s explanation of the things as purely symbolic quantities.

It Is All Ritual

What made it possible and easy to tell Abraham’s story in formal and conventional designs is the fact that the scenes presented and the episodes recounted are *strictly ritual*. This is an extremely important point that must never be lost sight of. These documents are less historical than ritual, though the two naturally go together in Egyptian thinking. Thus it has been shown that while certain important battles immortalized in Egyptian literature and art really did take place, still the accounts of them on papyrus and stone are largely ritualized—that is, they describe an ideal battle in which Pharaoh, as God’s representative on earth, comports himself in a godlike manner and with a devastating strength and wisdom that belong to the victory motif of the year-rites rather than to the cold facts of history.

The theme of the Book of Abraham is the transmission of priesthood and authority—a subject with which the

151. Rochemonteix, “Le temple d’Apet,” 21.

152. Wilson, “Artist of the Egyptian Old Kingdom,” 247.

Egyptians were positively obsessed and which therefore lends itself with special force to Egyptian treatment. The facsimiles illustrate the most significant moments of the patriarch's Egyptian career—his confrontation with Pharaoh as a rival claimant to the supreme authority of God on earth. The battle stories just referred to remind us that there was no such thing as a secular history of the doings of Pharaoh—everything he did, from his morning toilet to victory on the battlefield, was an act of transcendental importance for the human race; his whole life from birth to death was one progressive ritual. Accordingly, the dealings of Abraham with the divine pharaoh could not be of a wholly temporal or secular nature; everything about them partakes of the nature of ritual, as is made very clear in the Book of Abraham.

Thus in Facsimile 1 we are introduced first to “the Angel of the Lord,” then to “Abraham fastened upon an altar” to be offered up “as a sacrifice” to gods to whose idols we are introduced. Abraham is not simply being executed; he is the central figure of an extremely important ritual in which “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh” figures conspicuously, and the competing powers of heaven and hell come into conflict both in their superhuman and their appointed representatives.

Turning to the text of the Book of Abraham, we find the patriarch's whole concern to be with rites and ordinances: the blessings of the fathers, the sacrifice of children to idols, the complicated holding of priestly office in the mixed cults of Egypt and Asia, local customs of sacrifice. “Now *at this time* it was the *custom . . .*”—strange gods, strange rites, strange names. After an introduction devoted to briefing the reader on the ritual practices of the heathen, Abraham in verse 12 gets down to cases. He, too, was expected to play the game and provide a victim for the rites. He describes the altar, as if that were very important, and then tells how he was delivered from the knife, receiving at the same time promise of

priesthood for himself (see Abraham 1:18). Then he goes into a long explanation of Pharaoh's rival priesthood.

All this shall be duly considered in time, but the thing to note here is that the Book of Abraham, far from being merely a diverting or edifying history, is a discourse on divine authority, which also is the theme of the three facsimiles. The explanations to the three plates make it perfectly clear that they are meant as diagrammatic or formulaic aids to an understanding of the subject of priesthood on earth. Awareness of this may help substantially in understanding the details of the papyri, to which we now turn our attention.

5

Facsimile 1: By the Figures

O, Dry Those Tears

But what about the Egyptian sources? After all, the facsimiles are Egyptian. First of all, we look, of course, for *lion-couch* scenes and soon discover that they are available in quantity. We also discover that there is quite a variety of such scenes, of which only a few resemble our Facsimile 1. It is these that interest us particularly, and it is gratifying to learn that a number of highly qualified Egyptologists have turned their attention to just these particular items and discovered first of all that they are *not* properly funerary. Indeed, a growing number of studies are now correcting the “other-worldly” myopia of Egyptological thinking in general, showing us that “Egyptian art is not essentially a funerary art” but is “entirely oriented towards the living,”¹ that rites performed for the dead king were really “a replica

This chapter consists of the last portion of “Part 7: The Unknown Abraham,” and “Part 8: Facsimile No. 1 by the Figures,” which originally appeared in the series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” in IE 72 (May 1969): 89–91; (June 1969): 126–28, 130–32; (July 1969): 97–111; (August 1969): 75–87; (September 1969): 85–95; and (October 1969): 85–88.

1. Jean Capart, “Pensées d'éternité sur un mode plaisant,” *CdE* 32 (1957): 177.

of the daily ceremonial toilet of the living king,"² that even such thoroughly funerary stuff as the Coffin Texts were largely "of a non-funerary character," and that "many, if not all, of the Coffin Texts were primarily used in *this* life."³

These nonfunerary materials turn up in graves and coffins only because they have been adapted to the funerary situation. Kurt Sethe explains how an old Heliopolitan coronation text could be converted into a "typical text for the dead" by describing the king's ascension to heaven in terms of his coronation⁴ and notes that though the Pyramid Texts are all found in tombs, many of them are not *Totentexte* at all but describe birthday celebrations, royal banquets, and royal progresses.⁵ The freedom with which the Egyptians borrowed texts and pictures originally describing one situation to illustrate a totally different situation provides the student with unlimited opportunities for speculation and reconstruction,⁶ in which, to quote Siegfried Schott, "it is often difficult to distinguish pictures of this world from those of the eternal world, since death itself passes as 'repetition of life' and the

2. Aylward M. Blackman, "Sacramental Ideas and Usages in Ancient Egypt," *RT* 39 (1921): 47; and Blackman, "Some Notes on the Ancient Egyptian Practice of Washing the Dead," *JEA* 5 (1918): 124; Jaroslav Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952), 102.

3. Walter Federn, "The 'Transformations' in the Coffin Texts: A New Approach," *JNES* 19 (1960): 245–46, 250.

4. Kurt Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar zu den altägyptischen Pyramidentexten* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1934), 1:118; cf. 119, 121.

5. Thus coronation rites in PT 220 (§§194–95), 222 (§§199–206); birthday celebrations in PT 220 (§195); banquets in PT 223 (§214); a royal progress in PT 223 (§§215–17) and PT 224 (§§218–20).

6. Thus, while some say that the famous Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus was originally a coronation rite for Sesostris I and later adapted to the funeral of Amenemes I, others reverse the interpretation: it was Sesostris's funeral and Amenemes's coronation! Wolfgang Helck, "Bemerkungen zum Ritual des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus," *Orientalia* 23 (1954): 383; Hartwig Altenmüller, "Zur Lesung und Deutung des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus," *JEOL* 19 (1965–66): 440.

dead participate actively, especially in the great festivals, just as they would during their earthly existence.”⁷ Of particular interest is the study of Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, who, after examining the early tomb pictures in general, comes to the surprising conclusion that “there is no evidence that a connexion is intended with the hereafter. What is intended is rather a record of the deceased’s activities in this world, the purpose clearly being to establish the *identity* of the owner of the tomb, and to provide a biographical survey of his achievements.”⁸ It was considered especially important to record “activities connected with the deceased’s office in this world,”⁹ in particular (as we learn from numerous funerary stelae and biographical tomb inscriptions) those occasions which brought him into proximity with the pharaoh—always the height of human bliss and attainment.

Now according to the Book of Abraham and the legends, the patriarch enjoyed at least two significant contacts with Pharaoh, and that is the sort of thing that no Egyptian would fail to immortalize in some sort of biographical text—funerary or otherwise. We learn from *Jubilees* that the descendants of Abraham living in Egypt used to *read* his story to their children,¹⁰ and there is no reason to deny the many reports

7. Siegfried Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstentale: Festbräuche einer Totenstadt*, in *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, 1952.11 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1952), 7. It has been shown that Papyrus Salt 825a, heretofore dismissed as “a somewhat uninteresting manual of magic,” actually “contains the remains of an authentic ritual” of considerable interest and importance. J. Gwyn Griffiths, review of *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B.M. 10051)*, by Philippe Derchain, *JEA* 53 (1967): 186; Hartwig Altenmüller, review of *Le Papyrus Salt 825 (B.M. 10051)*, by Philippe Derchain, *CdE* 42 (1967): 81.

8. Abd el-Mohsen Bakir, “Remarks on Some Aspects of Egyptian Art,” *JEA* 53 (1967): 160. The “series of depictions” was “tantamount to the use of narration,” being elaborated “according to the theme and according to the space available.”

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Jubilees* 39:6.

that Abraham did write a biography—a number of early apocryphal writings claim the honor of being that book, which is now lost. Could the facsimiles be biographical in nature? If so, their obviously ritual “canonical” appearance would effectively obscure the fact. Alan H. Gardiner is suspicious of all hackneyed representation put forth by the Egyptians as historical pictures, because they “may merely belong to the world of imagination and make-believe.”¹¹ By the same token, however, they *may* be authentic history; the great battle and festival reliefs, no matter how hackneyed and unreliable in their details, are at least the best evidence that certain important battles and festivals really did take place. For all their stereotyped monotony, they are recollections of actual historical events. Likewise, if our facsimiles seem rather conventional and unimaginative, it is because, as we have insisted all along, the events they indicate are (aside from the restricting conventions of Egyptian art) of a strictly ritual nature, but that does not prevent their being historical as well. The long-established article of faith—that pictures found in tombs represent “never the real world, but only the Other World, the land of religious imagination”¹²—must now be abandoned in favor of the proposition that most of those pictures show things that really took place in the world of the living.

The “Lion-couch” Museum

It is a happy coincidence that leading Egyptologists should have chosen the lion-couch motif as a specific lead to exploring the baffling relationships between history, ritual, and myth in the Egyptian record. Let us imagine that the most important lion-couch scenes have all been gathered together in a single hall of the museum, where we have gone to view them. Dick and Jane are being conducted through

11. Alan H. Gardiner, “The Baptism of Pharaoh,” *JEA* 36 (1950): 7.

12. Edouard Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie*, 3 vols. (Berlin: Asher, 1886), 1:20.



Figure 20. Over the reclining figure of the pharaoh on the lion couch hovers a human-headed bird, a form of the god Amon-Re. This central panel from the shrine of Opet closely resembles the composition of JSP I. The most recent studies of this figure agree that the man on the couch is *not* being embalmed but is plainly in the act of arising from the couch. The bird represents his father, his mother, his son, and himself! This should be a warning against the dogmatic simplicity with which scholars have sought to explain figure 2 of Facsimile 1. Temple of the goddess Opet at Karnak, ca. 120 B.C.

the museum by the curator, Mr. Jones, who shows them things and tells them stories. Mr. Jones has a handbook that tells him everything.

Dick: Look, Jane, look! Here is a wonderful picture of a man on a bed that looks just like the man and the bed in Facsimile 1.

Mr. Jones: That is a famous relief, found in the temple of Opet at Karnak (fig. 20).

Jane: But why is it in this dark room?

Mr. Jones: This is one of three chambers, arranged (according to the infallible handbook) “like three stations in the divine epoch” (see p. 271, fig. 34).¹³

Jane: What’s an epoch?

Mr. Jones: An important story. These pictures tell a story. If you will come here to the opposite chamber, the one on the south side, after passing through the middle room (which

13. Maxence de Rochemonteix, “Le temple d’Apet où est engendré l’Osiris Thébain,” in *Oeuvres diverses de Rochemonteix*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 3 (Paris: Leroux, 1894), 185.

has a special meaning of its own), you will notice that it is a counterpart of the first room; only here, instead of lying on a bed, the man is sitting on a throne. This is the happy ending of the story that seems to be going so badly in the other room. Let us go back there again: According to Professor Alexandre Varille, "a famous scene in the sanctuary shows 'Osiris who is in the midst of Thebes' [that's what he is called in the inscription] in the aspect of a young man stretched on a bed which had the form of a lion; he is in the act of reviving." You can tell that, because he "begins to bestir himself, bending his right arm and raising his left foot."¹⁴

Dick: Why does he hold his hand like that?

Mr. Jones: Because he is praying as well as waking up. In a little while we shall read his prayer. Notice also that the position of the hand and even the feet, according to the handbook, is "the position of prayer."¹⁵ Prayer is indicated whether the hands are turned in or out; the accepted way is to show both hands in the same position.¹⁶

Jane: This is much nicer than the Abraham pictures. The hands there are a mess.

Mr. Jones: Yes. In Egyptian pen-pictures "the hand is rarely drawn true to nature. . . . In hasty drawings . . . many times . . . there is no means of distinguishing a right hand from a left hand"—it is that bad.¹⁷

Jane (pointing to figures in the forecourt): The ladies are raising their hands like that, too. Are they praying?

Mr. Jones: Some have suggested that the hands of the man in Facsimile 1 are in the position of "bereavement," but that is silly, since the dead person is never the bereaved.

14. Alexandre Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," *ASAE* 53 (1956): 110.

15. Luise Klebs, *Die Reliefs und Malereien des mittleren Reiches* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1922), 177.

16. Hellmuth Müller, "Darstellungen von Gebärden auf Denkmälern des alten Reiches," *MDAIK* 7 (1937): 70, 94.

17. *Ibid.*, 60.

Look, sometimes they're weeping but not always: at Denderah the lady standing by the couch with her hand in the same position says, "I raise my hand to protect thy members."¹⁸ Sometimes the ladies are neither praying nor weeping but making magical passes to restore the dead.

Dick: Is the man dead?

Mr. Jones: He is and he isn't; that's just the wonder of it. It says here that the death chamber is also the birth chamber, or rather "the place where Osiris is begotten . . . where he dies to be reborn."¹⁹ Here "death is conceived as the beginning of a new life." In other words, the man on the couch is both the dead king, Osiris, and the living king, Horus.²⁰

Jane: How can he be both? Who is he, anyway?

Mr. Jones: Perpend. "The temporal father of the young Horus is Osiris who revives *in* his son, whose spiritual father, however, is the life-giving Amon."²¹

Dick: So he's three people at once?

Mr. Jones: He's more people than that—he's the king, too!²²

Jane: That's silly.

Mr. Jones: No. The picture is telling us more than just what happened at one moment. This one picture recounts a whole series of events. The man on the couch is in great distress, he has been beaten by his enemy, he is on the point of death. He cries out to his father Amon to come to his aid, and sure enough, there is Amon, the bird flying above him. Some say it is his own soul returning to him, and it can be that also. That is the nice or annoying thing about Egyptian, as Professor Louis Speleers says: one thing can be a number

18. Rochemonteix, "Temple d'Apet," 276.

19. *Ibid.*, 317.

20. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 110.

21. *Ibid.*, 111. He is Osiris, Re, "the king himself," and several versions of Amon, according to Rochemonteix, "Temple d'Apet," 272, 274–75.

22. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 111.

of different things at the same time²³—which doesn't make very good sense to us. But the man's return to life is only part of the answer to his prayer: notice that just behind the lady Isis a real fight is going on. A man with the head of a hawk is about to club the daylights out of a contemptibly small long-eared creature whose arms are tightly bound to his sides. He is the Typhonian beast, the Seth animal, Death, the archenemy of the man on the couch, and he is now about to get the same type of punishment he handed out—the tables have been turned, the prayers have been answered, the hawk Horus has come to rescue his father from death. It is very much the same drama that meets us in Facsimile 1.

Dick: How do you know all that?

Mr. Jones: Because this is not the only lion-couch picture. If you will step over here, you will notice a number of reliefs in which the lion couch appears not just in one scene but in a number, and also that these scenes go together and show the unfolding of some sort of ritual or drama. Here is the most famous of all, the series discovered by Auguste Mariette at Denderah,²⁴ and here are others from the tombs of nobles at Thebes,²⁵ and more from the tombs of Ramses VI and Ramses IX.²⁶ This should teach you when you have seen one lion-couch scene not to take it for granted that you have seen them all. Any one of them can be understood only as part of a longer story. Look, here is a coffin with three

23. Louis Speleers, *Textes des cercueils du Moyen Empire égyptien* (Brussels: n.p., 1946), x–xvii.

24. Auguste Mariette, *Dendérah: Description generale du grand temple de cette ville*, 6 vols. in 3 (Paris: Franck, 1870–80), 4: plates 65, 68–72, 75, 88–90; reproduced in Ridolfo V. Lanzzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, 5 vols. in 3 (Turin: Doyen, 1881–85), 5: plates CCLXVIII–CCXCI, along with other lion scenes, and in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Osiris: The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection*, 2 vols. (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1961), 2:21–56.

25. Philippe Virey, *Sept tombeaux thébains*, MMAF 5 (Paris: Leroux, 1891–94), pt. 3:446 (tomb of Montouhikhopshouf), pt. 3:515 and plate III (tomb of Neferhotpu), and pt. 4: plate IX (tomb of Aba).

26. [On the ceiling—eds.]

lion-couch scenes on it, and here is another with the same three scenes. Notice how different the episodes are: in one the mummy simply lies in state; in the second, Anubis is working busily over it; and in the third, the lion has started to walk with bold strides; the figure on the couch is also walking, and grain is springing up exuberantly all around him—a very different story from pictures one and two!²⁷

Jane: It looks dark and scary.

Dick: This Opet room is dark and scary too!

Mr. Jones: It is supposed to be. It “represents the western heaven in which the god is supposed to die and which will also be the tomb in which he will rest.”²⁸

Dick: That’s gloomy enough.

Mr. Jones: But that isn’t the whole story—let us read on: “But he only dies in order to be reborn; he falls beneath the blows of his enemies only to triumph with greater splendor.”²⁹

Jane: But are these real people?

Mr. Jones: This one is. Come over here to this other temple, the temple of Seti I. Here you see the very same lion-couch scene, only in this case we know that the man on the couch is a real person; it is King Seti I himself. “Seti,” says the handbook, “dressed in a shroudlike garment . . . stretched out on a bed ornamented with lion heads.”³⁰

Jane: Why is his face green?

Mr. Jones (reading): “The king’s face is shown painted green because he was considered dead.”

Dick: So he was dead after all.

Mr. Jones: Not so fast! That one word written above the bed is “Awake!” And the man is doing just that. Here in the

27. Jean Capart, “A propos du cercueil d’argent du roi chechonq,” *CdE* 19 (1943): 195, figs. 26–28 (Coffin of Moutardis), 29–30 (Djed-Bastet-Ioufankh).

28. Rochemonteix, “Temple d’Apet,” 268.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Eric Uphill, “The Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites,” *JNES* 24 (1965): 379.

lower register “the king has turned from his back, and the posture resembles that of a sphinx rather than a mummy or a dead person.”³¹ He is just about to get up and dress; in fact, look how “below the bed there are spread out the royal regalia . . . of which the king would presently take possession after his rebirth.”³² And what do you think he is going to do after he puts on all that royal regalia?

Dick and Jane: Sit on the throne.

Mr. Jones: Right. That is the next act. Now look at this scene. It is the same thing again, this time much older, from the great shrine of Niuserre (see p. 409, fig. 55B). Remember that was a center of sun-cult, with its imposing Hill of the Sunrise and its altar of sacrifice and all the rest.³³

Dick: Just like “Potiphar’s Hill” in the Book of Abraham, eh?

Mr. Jones: It certainly looks like it.³⁴ Do you see what that suggests? That this lion-couch business took place on just such a great ritual occasion and at just such a place as that described in the Pearl of Great Price. The guidebook says this relief of Seti I showing the king on his back represents nothing less than “the supreme moment of the Sed-festival . . . the climax of the festival.”³⁵

Dick: If it was so important, why don’t we find it everywhere?

Mr. Jones: We do, if we know what to look for, but they deliberately covered it up; our guidebook says the event

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 177–78; Heinrich Schäfer, “Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen bei Abusir im Winter 1898/99,” *ZÄS* 37 (1899): 1–9; and Ludwig Borchardt, “Das Re^c-Heiligtum des Königs Ne-woser-re^c,” *ZÄS* 38 (1900): 94–100.

34. See maps on Schäfer, “Vorläufiger Bericht,” 1; and Borchardt, “Das Re^c-Heiligtum,” 94.

35. Uphill, “Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites,” 377, 379.

“was perhaps rarely illustrated.”³⁶ It is only found in royal tombs and shrines that were strictly closed to the public.

Jane: What is the *sed*-festival?

Mr. Jones: It was the greatest of all the Egyptian celebrations, “the great national *panegyris*,” when men and gods met at the sun-shrine of Memphis to renew the corporate life of the nation and the world.³⁷ It was *the* year-rite, beginning on “the first day of the first month of [the year],”³⁸ and the most ancient and venerable of rites, amply attested to in prehistoric documents;³⁹ it celebrated the founding of the kingdom and the creation of the world.⁴⁰ It was also the most persistent of traditions, and though, of course, during the many times it was put on, the five-day show was bound to undergo many alterations and adjustments,⁴¹ by virtue of deliberate archaistic revivals based on the study of old records it was possible to celebrate the *sed*-festival in the very last dynasties of Egypt in a manner “astoundingly” like that of the very first dynasties.⁴² It was the king’s own show: “For the nature of kingship in Egypt, it is, above all, the *sed*-festival which is instructive,” writes Henri Frankfort;

36. Ibid., 379.

37. Alan H. Gardiner, “Horus the Beḥdetite,” *JEA* 30 (1944): 28.

38. Ibid., 30.

39. See H. de Meulenaere, “La famille des vizirs Nespedou et Nespakachouty,” *CdE* 38 (1963): 73; and Gerald A. Wainwright, *The Sky-Religion in Egypt: Its Antiquity and Effects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 23–24.

40. Siegfried Schott, *Die Deutung der Geheimnisse des Rituals für die Abwehr des Bösen: Eine altägyptische Übersetzung*, in *Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse*, 1954.5 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1954), 167–68.

41. Georg Möller, “Das Ḥb-śd des Osiris,” *ZÄS* 39 (1901): 71–72; Helck, “Bemerkungen zum Ritual des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus,” 383, 385; Altenmüller, “Zur Lesung und Deutung des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus,” 442; Hermann Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1941), 379.

42. Hermann Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter: Grundlagen und Entwicklung bis zum Ende des mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926), 16; Alan H. Gardiner, “The House of Life,” *JEA* 24 (1938): 165.

everything centers on “the solitary figure on the throne of Horus.”⁴³ As “the founding of the kingdom, in which all the gods and potentates of the land participated,” it corresponded, of course, to the coronation rites.⁴⁴ Every coronation could not be expected to fall smack on the thirty-year jubilee of the rule, but that was the sort of problem that gave the Egyptians no trouble.⁴⁵

Dick: Thirty-year jubilee?

Mr. Jones: Yes, that is what the *sed*-festival was. You will notice that Hans Bonnet in the handbook lists it only under that title: Thirty-year festival.⁴⁶ The usual explanation is that originally, since the prosperity of the land in every sense depended on the king, he could not be allowed to become weak, so that when he showed signs of running down at the end of thirty years of rule, it was necessary to renew his powers, and so he was “ceremonially put to death.”⁴⁷

Dick: That’s a funny way to renew anybody’s powers—to kill him!

Jane: Yes, what could he do if he was dead?

Mr. Jones: Well, he would just get up again, renewed and invigorated, succeeded by himself in the person of his son, in whom he was reembodyed. It was “abdication followed by replacement . . . a renewal,” says Professor Alexandre Moret.⁴⁸ According to Professor Frankfort, we should

43. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 79.

44. Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten*, 296: though every *sed* has a coronation, the reverse does not apply.

45. Altenmüller, “Zur Lesung und Deutung des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus,” 441.

46. Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1952), 158–61.

47. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 4; quotation is from I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1952), 56.

48. Alexandre Moret, *La mise à mort du dieu en Égypte* (Paris: Geuthner, 1927), 49.

not even use the word *succession*. "It is not a succession," he said, "but a renewal, . . . a true renewal of kingly potency, a rejuvenation of rulership."⁴⁹

It was especially the occasion on which the king's divine authority was proclaimed, "a periodic commemoration festival," as Hermann Kees puts it, "in which special rights were conceded and energetically brought to mind for the benefit of the ruling house."⁵⁰ Authority is the big thing; the king always appears as a victor in the rites, and many scholars believe that the *sed*-festival was, in fact, a prehistoric celebration of victory over the rebels of the north, with the king as the conquering Horus.⁵¹ The other theory is that the *sed*-festival originally belonged to Osiris, the king of the dead, which of course complicates things.

Dick: Why do they always have to drag that old Osiris into the picture?

Mr. Jones: Nobody drags him in—he is always there. But, as Heinrich Schäfer says, Egyptologists don't need to go overboard and think he is the whole show just because of that.⁵² Some, like Georg Möller and Wolfgang Helck, think that the *sed* originally belonged to the king alone and that Osiris later moved in on him: the king's rites were reinterpreted in terms of Osiris.⁵³ Yet Moret saw in the *sed*-festival nothing less than the "Osirification of the king."⁵⁴ The trouble is that in the

49. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 79.

50. Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten*, 191.

51. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 159; Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten*, 207.

52. Heinrich Schäfer, *Die Mysterien des Osiris in Abydos unter König Sesostris III nach dem Denkstein des Oberschatzmeisters I-cher-nofret*, UGAÄ 4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), 21.

53. Möller, "Das Hb-śd des Osiris," 73; quotation is from Helck, "Bemerkungen zum Ritual des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus," 383; cf. Constant de Wit, review of *Osiris und Amun: Kult und heilige Stätten*, by Eberhard Otto, *CdE* 42 (1967): 78–80.

54. Alexandre Moret, *Mystères égyptiens* (Paris: Colin, 1913), 73.

earliest representations of the rites the king wears exactly the same festival costume as Osiris.⁵⁵

Dick: So the king is Osiris after all.

Mr. Jones: That is what Professor James G. Frazer thought, of course, but Gardiner and Kees and G. A. Wainwright and others thought it was just the other way around—it is Osiris who is borrowing the king's costume; he came later and took it over. But there was nothing wrong with that, because *as a king* Osiris would have a perfect right to the royal duds as well as the privilege of having countless *sed*-festivals of his own.⁵⁶

Dick: What difference does it make which comes first?

Mr. Jones: Bravo! That is just what an Egyptian would say. After all their arguing, the same experts agree: "Yet it seems likely that the accession of Horus was *equivalent* to a renewal of the reign of Osiris himself, since . . . every Horus-king was a potential Osiris."⁵⁷ Osiris and Horus—the royal funeral and the royal succession—"coalesced into a single celebration."⁵⁸ Even though the king is no Osiris, "the two are thought of as equivalent [*entsprechend*]" in this particular operation.⁵⁹ King, Horus, Osiris—all the same. And you can see why, if you just think about the meaning of the rites. A *sed*-festival had to be immediately preceded by a funeral: "The old king must be buried so that the 'new king' can mount the throne."⁶⁰ They had to come so close together as to belong to the same celebration.

55. Möller, "Das Hb-šd des Osiris," 74.

56. Alan H. Gardiner, review of *The Golden Bough*, by James G. Frazer, *JEA* 2 (1915): 124, criticizes Frazer and cites Kees; cf. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 20.

57. Gardiner, review of *The Golden Bough*, 124 (emphasis added). Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 35, suggests that Osiris was "originally a human king who became deified after his death."

58. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 194.

59. Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, 1:84, on PT 219 (§167b).

60. Altenmüller, "Zur Lesung und Deutung des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus," 441.

Jane: Why so close? Couldn't they wait a while after the funeral?

Dick: "Thrift, thrift, Horatio!"

Mr. Jones: No, it wasn't that. During the transition from one reign to another, there was always a moment during which the throne was empty, when the world was without a ruler; it was, as Hartwig Altenmüller says, "the moment of utmost danger" to the whole world order, and so it had to be made as short as possible.⁶¹ So the funeral impinges on the rites from the first, and that led scholars to confuse the *sed*-festival with the mysteries of Osiris: From the very first, says Helck, the old prehistoric mysteries of Abydos necessarily included both the funeral of the dead king and the installment of his successor.⁶² It was always assumed accordingly that the Osirian mysteries originated as prehistoric royal funeral rites, but "more recently," according to Professor Barry J. Kemp, "connection with the *sed*-festival has been suggested."⁶³ This is a recent development, as the man says, and it is an important one.

Dick: Why important?

Mr. Jones: Because it explains the lion couch. To be renewed instead of succeeded, the king had to do two things. One, he had to stay alive, and two, he had to get a transfusion from somewhere. Remember, there *had* to be a funeral as part of the show, and it had to be his funeral: how do you think he could manage that and still stay alive?

Jane: By having a make-believe funeral. Kids like to play that.

Dick: By getting a substitute to get killed for him.

Mr. Jones: You are both right. Here we see King Seti I on his lion couch; what the whole scene suggests to Professor

61. Altenmüller, review of *Le Papyrus Salt 825*, 81.

62. Wolfgang Helck, "Die Herkunft des Abydenischen Osirisrituals," *Archiv Orientalni* 20 (1952): 72–85.

63. Barry J. Kemp, "Abydos and the Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty," *JEA* 52 (1966): 14.

Eric Uphill is that there was a “mock funeral and burial, followed by a reawakening ceremony, taking place after the king had entered his tomb.”⁶⁴ Even earlier, Dr. I. E. S. Edwards, the great authority on the pyramids, suggests that a special tomb chamber connected with the earliest stone building in the world may have contained “a dummy, designed for use in the symbolic sacrifice of the king during the *heb-sed*.”⁶⁵ So you see, the idea of an imitation sacrifice occurred to the Egyptians very early. So did the idea of a substitute, and that is not surprising either, for who, as Homer might say, enjoys being sacrificed?⁶⁶ Already in the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom we read of kings who were lucky enough or clever enough to “[escape] his day of death.”⁶⁷ Sometimes a king would pointedly ignore the priests who ordered him to submit to sacrifice, as did Pepi II, who “had no intention of being sacrificed,”⁶⁸ and sometimes a king would openly defy them, or even turn the tables and make *them* the sacrificial victims.⁶⁹ And why not, if the Pyramid Texts themselves are, as Professor James H. Breasted called them, a “passionate protest against death”?⁷⁰ All the great pyramid builders from King Zoser on were able to beat the game and evade the summons of ritual death, until the last one, King Mycerinus,

64. Uphill, “Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites,” 379; PT 20–21 (§§12–13), 25–30 (§§17–21), 32 (§§22–23).

65. Edwards, *Pyramids of Egypt*, 61–63; cf. Alexandre Moret, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte* (Paris: Leroux, 1902), 224.

66. On “the sacred king’s unwillingness to resign,” see Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1955), 21:153, *passim*.

67. PT 570–71 (§§1453–55, 1467–68). M. A. Murray, “The Dying God,” *Ancient Egypt* (1928): 8, was first to comment on the significance of these passages.

68. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 28.

69. *Ibid.*, 52. A dramatic turning of the tables is recounted in Diodorus, *Library* 3.6, in Theodor Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae* (Bonn: Marcus and Weber, 1922), 139–40.

70. James H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 91.

who gave in to the priests and got himself sacrificed.⁷¹ As a reward, Mycerinus was hailed forever after in the priestly annals of Egypt as the greatest, noblest, and holiest of all the kings, the restorer of the temples and the rites which those wicked apostate pharaohs, Cheops and Chephren, had abolished.⁷² Well, the one way a king could fulfill the funerary requirements of the *sed*-festival and still stay alive was to have a substitute be put to death in his place, and this device was early adopted and forever retained. For you see, it fulfilled all the requirements at once: it got the king out of a tight fix, it supplied the blood necessary for his transfusion, and it gave him victory over his enemies—remember, the *sed*-festival had to be a victory celebration.

Dick: But where does the victory come in?

Jane: And the transfusion?

Mr. Jones: It is the person of the sacrificial victim that makes all the difference. The most obvious substitute for a man is his son, and there are cases of pharaohs whose sons were sacrificed on their behalf.⁷³ But that was hardly more satisfactory than liquidating the king himself. No, there was a much better solution since time immemorial: “Foreigners, and especially prisoners of war all the world over, have provided an obvious supply of substitutes.”⁷⁴ The enemy, and

71. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 88, 65–66.

72. Herodotus, *History* 2.127–30, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 26–27.

73. Gerald A. Wainwright, “Seshat and the Pharaoh,” *JEA* 26 (1941): 38. Conversely, Alexander the Great regarded himself as the son and reincarnation of Pharaoh Nectanebos, whom he sacrificed by throwing over a cliff, Pseudo-Callisthenes, *History of Alexander* 1.34, and 1.14, in E. A. Wallis Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great, Being the Syriac Version of the Pseudo Callisthenes* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2003), 15–16. Cyril Aldred, “The Second Jubilee of Amenophis II,” *ZÄS* 94 (1967): 2–3, notes that every king of the Eighteenth Dynasty had a junior partner whom he completely ignored and who may have been his double and substitute in the *sed*-festival.

74. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 60–61.

especially the enemy chief, who had placed himself in open rivalry to Pharaoh, was a natural candidate for his sacrificial sword or ceremonial mace, and in many a monument the king of Egypt is seen personally dispatching his rival. Right out here in the hall you will see Ramses II personally executing defeated enemy kings and princes, and here are other pharaohs doing the same thing, right back to the beginning. The scene “occurs over and over again in reliefs of all periods.”⁷⁵

Dick: Isn't that just for fun?

Mr. Jones: Hardly. For the Egyptians, there was a holy necessity behind it. Actually, the Egyptians did not like bloody sacrifice, and they detested human sacrifice, so that for a long time scholars seriously debated whether they ever practiced human sacrifice at all.⁷⁶ But that question has been settled for good: they did, but it was a ritual business from which even cannibalism was not excluded.⁷⁷ The idea

75. Walter Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1923–36), 2:i:57a, 2:iii:16–64, 184a; quotation is from Budge, *Osiris: The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection*, 1:197–98.

76. M. G. Kyle, “Egyptian Sacrifices: A Study of Sacrificial Scenes in Painting and Sculpture,” *RT* 27 (1905): 161–69, vigorously denied human sacrifice in Egypt. The idea of cannibalism at any time is rejected by Georg Ebers, “Menschenfresserei in Ägypten?” *ZÄS* 36 (1898): 106–7; by Siegfried Schott, “Das blutrünstige Keltergerät,” *ZÄS* 74 (1938): 93; and by E. A. Wallis Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians or Studies in Egyptian Mythology*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1904), 1:28.

77. Gaston Maspero, “Fouilles exécutées en Egypte,” in *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 1 (Paris: Leroux, 1893), 156: “Human sacrifice was never completely abolished in Egypt.” Human sacrifice to Osiris is treated by Eugène Lefébure, “Le sacrifice humain d'après les rites de Busiris et d'Abydos,” in *Oeuvres diverses*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 36 (Paris: Leroux, 1915), 287–88. See the important studies of Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 51–55, and Virey, *Sept tombeaux thébains*, pt. 3:439–46 (Tombeau Montouhikhopshouf). The “immolation of servants” is apparent in early royal tombs of Abydos. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 409–10. W. M. Flinders Petrie, “Egyptian Beliefs in a Future Life,” *Ancient Egypt* (1914): 18, reports evidence of cannibalistic rites, as does Jean Sainte

centered around “the eating of the flesh and blood of the enemy, whose powers are regenerated in the eater.”⁷⁸ That’s well known. Look, here is the oldest of all the royal sacrifices, in which the king personally offers a gazelle. But from the liturgy that accompanies the rites, it is clear that the gazelle represented the enemy of the king, an enemy chief, in fact, nay, his archrival Seth himself. During the sacrifice the king says: “Long live the fair god . . . the hero who slaughters his adversaries.” And as the royal “butcher slaughters his enemy before the divine throne,” the cry is raised: “Long live the fair god . . . rejuvenated youth!”⁷⁹ The rite is entitled “Slaying the antelope . . . that the king might be endowed with life,” and in preparation the officiant says to the king: “I sharpen thy knife to slay thine enemies,” announcing that the officiant will be “appeased when she has drunk their blood.”⁸⁰ As Moret puts it, “the king got a substitute for the *sed* killing, whom he decapitated with his own hand, or had a priest shed the blood of a prisoner of war, whose throbbing life assured a new lease on life to the senile monarch.”⁸¹ Here we have the transfusion taken care of at the same time that the enemy is punished.

Jane: But if the victim is a substitute for the king, then the king must be killing himself!

Mr. Jones: That is another interesting thing. The victim is the substitute for the king. By his death he does the king a great service—only through him, in fact, can the king achieve

Fare Garnot, *La vie religieuse dans l'ancienne Égypte* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), 3; cf. especially Jules Baillet, “L’anthropophagie dans l’Égypte primitive,” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 30/1 (1931): 65–72. The fullest treatment is in Budge, *Osiris: The Egyptian Religion of Resurrection*, 1:167–230.

78. Gertrud Thausing, *Der Auferstehungsgedanke in ägyptischen religiösen Texten* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1943), 25–26, citing PT 460.

79. Philippe Derchain, *Rites égyptiens, I: Le sacrifice de l’oryx* (Brussels: Fond Reine Elisabeth, 1962), 1:54; cf. PT 510 (§1138).

80. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:53; cf. 40.

81. Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 191.

his great goal; and so in dying he is purged of all the evil of his former nature; he has atoned.⁸² The qualifications for the royal substitute make that clear: he must be a stranger (thus representing the original hostility that Pharaoh is to subdue), he must be of royal blood (to be the real rival and substitute for Pharaoh),⁸³ and he must be blond or redheaded.

Dick: Come again?

Mr. Jones: From the earliest times the enemy of Horus who tried to slay him was his brother Seth, or Typhon, who is always represented as being redheaded. That is why red-headed victims were sacrificed on the solar tomb at Heliopolis and at Busiris.⁸⁴ These were the "Typhonian men put to death

82. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 117. The victim becomes the benefactor of gods and men. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:21–23. Though according to Kurt Sethe, "Das Fehlen des Begriffs der Blutschande bei den alten Ägyptern," *ZÄS* 50 (1912): 57–60, the idea of blood vengeance (*Blutschande*) was not Egyptian, the earliest Egyptian sacrificial victim was treated as a kind of scapegoat. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:17, citing Herodotus, *History* 2.39, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 8. "Smiting a man, or an animal . . . was an act of consecration or dedication" imparting special virtue to the victim. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of Opening the Mouth*, 2 vols. (London: Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1909), 1:39. In Babylonia, about 1800 years later, a "purely human victim" was "slain as atonement (zur Strafe) and for the creation of new beings." Dietrich Opitz, "Der geschlachtete Gott," *AfO* 5 (1928–29): 88. The word *hṯp* in its meaning of "peace" or "satisfaction" may "point to a remote period when the true idea of expiation for sin . . . may have been represented in the Egyptian sacrifices." Kyle, "Egyptian Sacrifices," 169. The idea of expiation is clear in CT 69, in Adriaan de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935–61), 1:295 (variant T1C). "The wounding [of the Eye] which is in thee is made good by him who caused it." See Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 43–44, 191, 193.

83. If a real king was not available, the substitute would still have to dress up in the proper royal regalia—a substitute substitute king! Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 4–5.

84. Lefébure, "Le sacrifice humain," 280–85, citing Manetho and Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, (*On Isis and Osiris*) 73; cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnos* 4.172, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 166; Herodotus, *History* 3.28, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 40.

by Pharaoh";⁸⁵ this is what Professor Moret said: "A victim was sacrificed and its life taken, in order that this life . . . might enter the body of Osiris. Sometimes the victims were men, prisoners of war, Libyans with red hair, recalling the image of Seth, who had red skin and hair."⁸⁶ The Greeks told many stories of pharaohs who seized noble Greek visitors to Egypt, where blonds were hard to come by, as sacrificial victims.⁸⁷

Dick: Yes, but those are just myths.

Mr. Jones: Come over to the case here. Do you know what this is? This is a seal for marking sacrificial animals in Egypt, to show that they had passed the rigorous qualifications for a holy offering.

Dick: A sort of government inspection, eh?

Mr. Jones: Yes, and a very necessary one. A priestly medical doctor also examined the blood to make sure it was ritually "pure."⁸⁸ Herodotus says that in his day it was a capital offense to sacrifice an animal that had not been properly stamped or sealed.⁸⁹

Jane: Why?

Mr. Jones: Because every animal had to be very carefully inspected to make sure that it was the right *color*. If it had just *one* black or white hair, it was disqualified! It had to be all red—light brown.⁹⁰ Now what do you see on the seal?

85. Moret, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte*, 135 n. 1; Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 32, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 235; Diodorus, *Library* 1.88; Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 53.

86. Alexandre Moret, *Kings and Gods of Egypt* (New York: Putnam, 1912), 85–86.

87. J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Human Sacrifices in Egypt: The Classical Evidence," *ASAE* 48 (1948): 410–16; see Lefébure, "Le sacrifice humain," 295, 301; Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 41–45.

88. Joseph Leibovitch, "Une scène de sacrifice rituel chez les anciens égyptiens," *JNES* 12/1 (1953): 59–60.

89. Herodotus, *History* 2.386, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 7–8.

90. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 31, discussed by Theodor Hopfner, *Plutarch über Isis und Osiris*, 1. Teil, Die Sage (Prague: Orientalisches Institut, 1940), 23–25.

Dick: A man kneeling down with his arms tied behind him and a great big knife—I guess it's a knife—at his neck.⁹¹

Mr. Jones: It is a knife, and you see that it means the victim was originally human. The Egyptians, like other people, early substituted cattle for people in their sacrifices (the gazelle, for example); Osiris is said to have abolished the sacrifice of humans and put oxen in their place, and finally the people ended up sacrificing wax models and even oxen made of bread—once you admit the principle of substitution, there is no limit to how far you can go.⁹²

Jane (yawning): What has all this to do with Abraham?

Mr. Jones: A great deal, as you will soon find out if you can only be patient. Let's get back to the man on the lion couch. What is going on here is called the climax, the supreme moment of the *sed*-festival, no less.⁹³ And the man who says that hastens to add that it is *not* a funerary scene, really: "Although the context of this scene is undoubtedly funerary, it also depicts a ceremony that would be difficult to enact unless the king was really alive."⁹⁴ It is a funeral with a happy ending, a funeral at which the king only pretends to be dead.

Jane: But why do they go to all that trouble—couldn't they just say "Presto!" instead of making such a fuss?

91. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 31, describes the seal, for which Theodor Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter nach den griechisch-römischen Berichten und den wichtigeren Denkmälern* (Vienna: Hölder, 1913), 73, supplies illustration. Manetho reports that at Heliopolis human victims were examined and stamped exactly like the animals. Lefébure, "Le sacrifice humain," 280–81.

92. *In sacra simulata pro veris accipi* ("substitute sacrifice is acceptable") is the universal rule. Servius, *Ad Aeneid* 2.116, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 612; Athenaeus, *Deipnos* 4.172D, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 166. The use of wax images is the commonest aspect of Egyptian magical practices.

93. Uphill, "Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites," 379; Gustave Jéquier, "Notes et remarques," *RT* 37 (1915): 122, says that this particular scene "is not funerary at all."

94. Uphill, "Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites," 379.

Mr. Jones: Oh, but the fuss is the most important thing! That is what proves to the world that the king is the king: He proves that he has the life-sustaining power by overcoming the supreme enemy—death itself; he enters the dark chamber of the tomb, and he emerges triumphant.

Dick: That sounds like Easter to me.

Mr. Jones: Well, a highly respected Egyptologist has put it this way: he said that the coffins and mummy cases of the Egyptians teach a double lesson, expressing the reality of both earth and resurrection, “which may be summed up in the words of the Christian creed, ‘He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven.’”⁹⁵ After all, the primitive Christians did not hesitate to find the most convincing demonstration of the resurrection in Egypt.⁹⁶ Now here we are facing some royal lion-couch scenes that look just like the picture in the Joseph Smith Papyrus; they are from the shrines of Niuserre, Seti I, Tutankhamun; the tombs of nobles at Thebes; the temples of Opet and Denderah, and they are all found in dark inner chambers, secret crypts. The oldest one here is King Niuserre’s and represents “the climax of the festival”—the *sed*-festival—when the king goes down into his tomb where a lion couch awaits him, above which is a damaged inscription about the resurrection of the flesh.⁹⁷ Remember Edwards’s suggestion that the granite tomb chamber of one of the earliest pharaohs was “designed for use in the symbolic sacrifice of the king during the *heb-sed*”; that shows how old the idea is. Both these chambers were found in complexes of what

95. John Bennett, “The Symbolism of a Mummy Case,” *JEA* 53 (1967): 166.

96. Clement, *Epistola I ad Corinthios* (First Epistle to the Corinthians) I, 25, in *PG* 1:265; and *Apostolic Constitutions* V, 7, in *PG* 1:845 both use the death and resurrection of the phoenix-bird “on the so-called altar of the Sun at Heliopolis” as the most potent proof of the resurrection of the flesh.

97. Uphill, “Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites,” 377–78.

we have called the “Potiphar’s Hill” variety.⁹⁸ But for the climax of the whole business, the crypt was the thing, the tomb chamber, the *abatón*.

Jane: What is an *abatón*?

Mr. Jones: The same as an *adyton*—the most inaccessible shrine of a temple, an inner chamber in which no mortal may set foot. In Egypt it represented the tomb of Osiris, the chamber between the upper and lower worlds, the place of both death and resurrection.⁹⁹ Notice here how the tomb of Tutankhamun dramatizes the king’s rebirth by a series of chambers, passages, and doors—the king must pass through some sort of underworld before he can emerge triumphant; here King Tutankhamun “comes as Osiris into his tomb, where a cycle of transformation is going to begin.”¹⁰⁰ It is not just one event, but a series of events that takes place. Here at Denderah, for example, are three surviving tableaux showing funeral, resurrection, and coronation, in that order, though Professor Philippe Derchain reminds us that these pictures probably bear little, if any, resemblance to what really went on.¹⁰¹

Dick: Why is that?

98. At Abydos in predynastic times the rites were held at such a complex, the prototype of the step pyramid. Kemp, “Abydos and the Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty,” 21–22. There are also in prehistoric times “allusions to the Osiris cult celebrated in front of the necropolis mounds” at “the Field of the Ancestors.” E. A. E. Reymond, “The God’s *ỉḥt*-Relics,” *JEA* 53 (1967): 106. The mound was a form of the primeval hill “from which creation proceeded . . . obviously a depository of creative energy.” Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 152–53.

99. See Hermann Junker, *Das Götterdekret über das Abatón* (Vienna: Hölder, 1913), 21–23, 31, 86. The concept intrigues the classical writers, for example, Lucan, *Pharsalia* 10.323; Virgil, *Aeniad* 6.329; Diodorus, *Library* 1.22.3; Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales* 3.12.2, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 177–79.

100. Alexandre Piankoff, *The Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon* (New York: Harper Torch, 1962), 23.

101. Philippe Derchain, “La pêche de l’oeil et les mystères d’Osiris à Dendara,” *RdE* 15 (1963): 19.

Mr. Jones: Because the scenes are very abbreviated—they haven't any intention of being complete—and sometimes they are all jumbled around, being adapted to expressing several ideas at once.¹⁰² Here are four successive scenes from the tomb of Ramses IX, where the king, who starts out as Osiris, is resurrected in four stages: first he is lying on his back, then he has turned over on his face, then he is moving his arms and legs, and finally he is standing upright.¹⁰³ A "very rare" vignette from the Book of the Dead shows such "rites of rebirth" using three lion couches in succession.¹⁰⁴ A complete illustration would perhaps call for twenty-four pictures, because each hour of the day represented a phase in the rites of Osiris.¹⁰⁵

Dick: How can we really know what went on, then?

Mr. Jones: By the written records and by comparison with what went on in other places. Let us take this crypt business, for example. Many Greek and Roman writers tell us that it was still the custom in Egypt in their day for the people yearly to go into mourning for Osiris, hidden away in the earth in a dark crypt.¹⁰⁶ There is evidence for such practices at every period of Egyptian history—this crypt of Tutankhamun, for example, into which the king and even the sun-god Re himself must enter, is labeled "the cavern which

102. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:23, 25, following Junker.

103. Felix Guilman, *Le tombeau de Ramsès IX*, MIFAO 15 (Cairo: IFAO, 1907), plate LVI. The upright figure, being a mummy, may not belong to the series.

104. Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 56, 57 fig. 19.

105. *Ibid.*, 19, 21–23.

106. Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanorum religionum* (*The Error of the Pagan Religions*) 2.1–7, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 518–19; *in adytis habent idolum Osiridis sepultum, cum annuis luctibus plangent* ("Buried in their shrines they keep an image of Osiris, over which they mourn in anniversary lamentations"), translation from *Ancient Christian Writers: Firmicus Maternus: The Error of the Pagan Religions*, trans. Clarence A. Forbes (New York: Newman, 1970), 45. Cf. below, note 118.

is in the Place of Annihilation.”¹⁰⁷ In Babylonia the king at the great coronation and New Year’s rites was hidden away for three days in an underground chamber, where he suffered the utmost degradation. During that time a make-believe king sat on his throne; then the substitute (who, of course, was treated exactly like the real king) was put to death, and the real king emerged triumphant from the tomb, where he had suffered an imitation death. Anton Moortgat noticed that many of the early royal graves of Sumer had the bricks removed from the crypt just over the king’s head and that in every such case the king’s body was missing, even though the treasures of the tomb are left untouched—and this only happens in the case of kings, never of other people, including queens. This suggests to Professor Moortgat that this is not the work of tomb robbers, but an attempt to make it look as if the king had indeed risen from the tomb.¹⁰⁸ After the sacrifice, when the coast is clear, “the old king who has been shamming dead in a tomb” emerges safe and sound.¹⁰⁹ The same sort of thing seems to have been going on in Egypt from early times.

Dick: What makes you think so?

Mr. Jones: Well, look here, for example—the so-called Bent Pyramid, one of the early experimental monuments of the pharaohs. Here the tomb chamber was found broken open—but not robbed! And the king was missing.¹¹⁰ Here in a Pyramid Text a resurrection rite is compared with the

107. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 125 n. 2. For the prehistoric rites, see Reymond, “The God’s ȝt-Relics,” 106; Alexander Scharff, *Das Grab als Wohnhaus in der ägyptischen Frühzeit* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1947).

108. Anton Moortgat, *Tammuz: Die Unsterblichkeitsglaube in der alt-orientalischen Bildkunst* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1949), 53–80, discussed by E. Douglas Van Buren, “Ancient Beliefs and Some Modern Interpretations,” *Orientalia* 18 (1949): 499.

109. Graves, *Greek Myths*, 1:153. Cf. Wolfgang Helck, “*Rp*^ct auf dem Thron des Gb,” *Orientalia* 19 (1950): 430.

110. See Edwards, *Pyramids of Egypt*, 72.

removing of bricks from the royal vault.¹¹¹ Coming down a little later, here is a Coffin Text that reads, “O Osiris So-and-so [naming the king or noble], . . . the walls about thy tomb are knocked down.”¹¹² “Awake, arise! All thy members are restored. Thou are not dead!” The classical writers have described the wild rejoicing that followed the mourning for Osiris when his faithful followers discovered “the empty tumulus of Osiris.”¹¹³ If this sounds surprisingly Christian, let me refer you to a very early Jewish-Christian writing of Barnabas, which says that the king at the New Year had to be represented by *two* ritual animals because he “on the same day wore a royal robe *after* he had been cursed, ridiculed, and crucified.”¹¹⁴ That is, the old Jewish rites represented this very sort of thing, which in Barnabas’s belief prefigured the sufferings and victory of the Lord.

Dick: More Easter business.

Mr. Jones: The atmosphere of excitement and wonder in the rites of Osiris certainly does remind one of an oriental Easter celebration of a medieval Holy Week. It is terribly dramatic and, in fact, took the form of a real play. I can’t tell you about it now, but the most dramatic moment of all, the crucial moment of truth on which the whole story hinges, was that unbearably tense instant in which the world held its breath awaiting the decision of eternal life or death. Come over here and look at these writings all over these big coffins: these are Coffin Texts, and they tell us all about it. These texts on the wall from the Book of the Dead and the classical writers will eke out the story. Let us take it step by step.

111. PT 355 (§572).

112. CT 159, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 2:369.

113. Minucius Felix, 22.1/2, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 295; Firmicus Maternus, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, in *ibid.*, 519–20; *Carmen in Paganos*, in *ibid.*, 719; *Mythographus Vaticanus II*, Prooemium 91 in *ibid.*, 728, etc.

114. Barnabas, *Epistola Catholica* 7, in PG 2:745.

First of all, there lies the king on the lion couch in the *adyton*. He is defeated and beaten, hiding out from his opponent.¹¹⁵ “It is a moment of extreme distress; . . . the god has fallen beneath the blows of the evil one,”¹¹⁶ exhausted. He is the “the Weary One who sleeps,”¹¹⁷ “the Lord of sleep upon his bed”—the lion couch.¹¹⁸ Not only must Osiris face serious charges brought against him by relentless and well-equipped enemies,¹¹⁹ but they also do their best to do him physical harm: Wilhelm Czermak has commented on the really terrifying nature of the ordeal that an Osiris initiate had to pass through.¹²⁰ Here are some pictures of the young king in the formal attitude showing him to be “the prey of a holy terror” as he sits on a throne representing both the horizon and an altar “on the eve of reigning or the threshold of Hades”—which shall it be? It is the moment of decision: “a guide of redoubtable name and terrifying aspect,” wearing a “lion mask and bearing a huge sacrificial knife,” with a majestic gesture beckons the prince to follow him across “the threshold of the other world . . . through the door which conceals the agonizing mystery of the beyond.”¹²¹

115. The hiding motif is vividly depicted in CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:70; in BD 78, in Naville, *Das ägyptische Todtenbuch*, 2:164; and in Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Life of Alexander* 1.3.

116. Rochemonteix, “Temple d’Apet,” 79.

117. CT 74, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:306.

118. *Horus and Seth*, 23, P. Louvre 3129, in Das Buch vom Sieg über Seth, in Siegfried Schott, *Urkunden mythologischen Inhalts*, vol. 6 in *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929), 119.

119. For example, CT 8, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:25–27.

120. Wilhelm Czermak, “Zur Gliederung des 1. Kapitels des ägyptischen ‘Totenbuches,’” *ZÄS* 76 (1940): 23.

121. Bernard Bruyère, “Neb-nerou et Hery-Mâat,” *CdE* 27/53 (1952): 36–37; also in the tomb of Queen Thiti, where a prince (wearing the uraeus) faces a door to which a lion-headed man, holding a knife, is pointing; on the other side of the door a lion crouches on a tomb. Virey, *Sept tombeaux thébains*, pt. 3: plate V, following “Tombeau de la reine Thiti,” 381–411. The king had to undergo other physical risks, such as swimming in dangerous waters. Lucan, *Pharsalia* 9.153–61, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis*

It is enough to scare anybody—and notice the lion motif. So everybody is feeling bad; with fear and despair comes the bitterness of hell.¹²² It is a time of mourning: the Two Ladies, Isis and Nephthys, are weeping at the head and foot of the lion couch; Anubis appears with oil and bandages to embalm the dead and announces his horror and grief at the great crime that has taken place.¹²³ It is all over—the earth has opened its mouth to receive Osiris.¹²⁴

But hold on! There is still a tiny spark of hope: the great sleeper may be exhausted and inert, but still, as Gertrud Thausing puts it, “he is not dead but sleepeth.”¹²⁵ Like the moon, “the Lord of sleep upon his bed . . . never sleeps, he never comes to rest,”¹²⁶ but fades only to appear again, “young on the day of the new moon, repeating the illuminations of the left eye.”¹²⁷ Equally reassuring is the example of the sun, who “only dies to be reborn” at the New Year,¹²⁸ and of the grain which springs up anew from the fallow earth, as you see in these so-called Osiris beds—real beds with real grain growing on them in the form of a man, life-sized: these have been found perfectly preserved in some

aegyptiacae, 186. In the stories of Khamuas the pharaoh passes through physical danger and humiliation during the rites. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, 51–66.

122. CT 30, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:82–89; cf. Moses 1:20.

123. CT 49, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:215–21.

124. CT 4, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:11.

125. Thausing, *Der Auferstehungsgedanke in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, 1: “The death is merely the birth to a new life”; see Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 22 n. 48.

126. Das Buch vom Sieg über Seth, in Schott, *Urkunden mythologischer Inhalts*, 119.

127. Derchain, “La pêche de l’oeil,” 22. The left eye is the moon.

128. Moret, *Mise à mort du dieu en Égypte*, 15. “Open thy door to Ra . . . and he shall bring light into the hidden dwelling.” Eugène Lefébure, “The Book of Hades (From the Sarcophagus of Seti I),” in *E. Lefébure Oeuvres diverses*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 34 (Paris: Leroux, 1910), 1:83, an inscription from the tomb of Seti I.

tombs.¹²⁹ The same texts that announce the death of the king are quick to give encouragement—he is justified, qualified to become a divine youthful Osiris, eligible for renewal.¹³⁰ If he has run and hidden from his relentless enemy, he will soon return younger and stronger than ever, to certain victory.¹³¹ Even as they weep for the king in the tomb, the mourners diligently search for him—they haven't given up hope after all.¹³² Everyone has a premonition that the show is not over;¹³³ “he perishes only that he may live . . . and so he *wants* to die in order to be born!”¹³⁴ Here is a stela from Buto that pretty well sums up the whole drama. It is addressed to the pilgrims who come from far and near to celebrate the rites “in the Field of God when the plants are green,” gathered “to worship during the festival of Horus [in this text he is designated as Min], and to bring succor to Min when he goes forth to his bed.”¹³⁵

Jane: What's succor?

Mr. Jones: To rescue. You see, all these people have come to a special field or plain—the inscriptions always say this

129. Theodore M. Davis, *The Tomb of Iouiya and Touiyou: The Finding of the Tomb* (London: Constable, 1907), 45. A photo is in Moret, *Kings and Gods of Egypt*, plate XI, opp. p. 96.

130. CT 4, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:11.

131. Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Life of Alexander* 1.3. The close resemblance of this text to the Coffin Text in the preceding note vindicates its authentic Egyptian background.

132. Tertullian, *Adversus Marcion* 1.13, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 382, and others in note 118 above.

133. *Stirb und werde!* is the theme. Wilhelm Czermak, “Vom großen Gedanken Aegyptens,” *Archiv für ägyptische Archäologie* 1 (1938): 212.

134. . . . *nam perit, ut vivat, se tamen ipsa creat; ut possit nasci, appetit ante mori* (Then she builds herself a nest or rather, a tomb. For she dies so as to live since she can re-create herself). Lactantius, *De ave Phoenice* (*On the Phoenix*) 77, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 491, 493; translation from Carolinne White, *Early Christian Latin Poets* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 30.

135. Étienne Drioton, “Les fetes de Bouto,” *Bulletin de l'institut d'Égypte* 25 (1943): 11.

particular rite takes place “in the field”—to save some divine person from some danger connected with a bed. Let us read on: “at the time when all those who stand before the sleeping place [or lying-down place] are trembling because they see the danger he is in. But he escapes unharmed; he who was discouraged and paralyzed raises himself, seizes the spear, and attacks his enemies.”¹³⁶

Dick: How does he manage that?

Mr. Jones: Canon Étienne Drioton explains that his supporters suffer *for* him—the substitute motif again. But always there comes a wonderful and exciting moment when all the actors’ roles are suddenly reversed. After the awful ritual hush comes the cry of joy. What could be more stirring than this Coffin Text: “Be silent, be silent, O ye people. Give heed, give close attention—what is here? Here is great news, O ye people,” Horus has an announcement to make: The king is *not* dead! He is going to live, he will never die again!¹³⁷ All are stunned with amazement when Osiris begins to shake the dust from his face;¹³⁸ the thing is so unexpected that it is quite frightening: “The Watchers tremble when Osiris rises from the dead like a bird; they are taken by surprise.”¹³⁹ The dark night of despair is rent by the glad cry which marks the climax of the mysteries: “We have found him! Let us rejoice together!”¹⁴⁰ With the first ray of hope, everyone’s mood changes abruptly: “N. [the king] is intact. . . . N. lives, N. lives! The Eye of Heliopolis lives!” There is still a spark of life, and that makes all the difference.¹⁴¹ The Two Ladies who come to mourn are now galvanized into new action: “Come,” they say, “let us gather his members; let us restore him

136. Ibid., 6. The text should be studied in detail.

137. CT 29, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:81.

138. CT 30, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:82–91.

139. CT 30, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:90–93.

140. See above, note 118.

141. PT 683 (§2050); cf. CT 69, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:292.

completely!"¹⁴² And so they start making life-giving passes, reciting formulas, and speaking words of encouragement and instruction to the late object of their tears.¹⁴³ Anubis, who arrived as a crepe-hanging undertaker, suddenly hears Isis cheering outside, and he gets the point: "Arise and live," he tells the man on the couch, "that you may *reverse* the damage inflicted on you!" "You live!" he cries. "Arise and live! You are *not* dead!"¹⁴⁴ The dread embalmer, without changing his jackal mask, instantly assumes the role of the healing physician; it is his hands that now impart the fluid of life to the erstwhile cadaver.¹⁴⁵ Naturally, the king's own role is reversed: "The Weary One awakes and arises. The god stands up and resumes his body."¹⁴⁶ "Today Osiris N. comes out of Heliopolis, his heart is in his body," returned to him.¹⁴⁷ "O Osiris, thou didst depart but thou hast returned; thou didst sleep but thou hast awakened; thou didst die, but art revived!"¹⁴⁸

Dick: A neat trick, if you can do it. Who makes all this happen?

Mr. Jones: Everybody—that is an important point. Though the whole thing is miraculous, everybody must work like mad to bring it about! The devotees search diligently even while they mourn, and the joyful finding is in

142. CT 74, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:306–7.

143. CT 49, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:215–16. See the lively depiction from the temple at Philae, Georges Bénédict, *Le temple de Philae*, part 1, vol. 13 of MMAF (Paris: Leroux, 1893), plate xl (see below, pp. 150–51, fig. 17), and from the temple of Seti I at Abydos, photo in Moret, *Kings and Gods of Egypt*, plate X, opp. p. 80.

144. CT 49, 51, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:221, 237.

145. Federn, "'Transformations' in the Coffin Texts," 251; cf. CT 341, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:344–45; Thausing, *Der Auferstehungsgedanke in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, 88.

146. PT 690 (§§2092–93).

147. Constantin E. Sander-Hansen, *Die religiösen Texte auf dem Sarg der Anchnesneferibre* (Copenhagen: Levin and Munksgaard, 1937), 16.

148. PT 670 (§1975), cited by Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 22.

part a reward of their efforts. Even the morbid magical exercises that make up such a large part of the late Egyptian documents are nearly all positive efforts toward achieving one great goal—restoration of life.¹⁴⁹ Along with strange ordinances, gestures, and passes by the officiants, “mourning, dancing, and eating assist in the resurrection,” and in these all must participate.¹⁵⁰ As the Two Ladies work feverishly to restore the dead Osiris, they talk to him constantly, chiding him into action; with renewed hope comes a spirit of jollity and banter as they tell the man on the couch that he is quite able to move himself if he will only make an effort. “You have been placed on your back,” they tell him. “Now arise on your side!” “I am Isis, I am Nephthys!” They commanded the Great Weary One to arise and defend himself.¹⁵¹ He must put up a fight, make every effort to turn himself over and push himself up by his own power.¹⁵² “Awake Osiris, awake O thou who hast become weary! Arise, stand up and have power over thy members!”¹⁵³ At every hour of the day and night in the local cults the challenge rings out:

149. The texts in Georges Daressy, ed., *Textes et dessins magiques* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1903), almost all deal with this theme. In Porphyrius, *De abstinencia* (*On Abstinence*) 2.47, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 465–66; and Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 6.14/15, in *ibid.*, 457–58, it is almost frightening.

150. Thausing, *Der Auferstehungsgedanke in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, 35; see 28–36; cf. PT 683–86 (§§2047–73). “It was necessary to have recourse to summary and potent rites, in order to bring about an instantaneous resurrection of the dismembered god.” Moret, *Kings and Gods of Egypt*, 85. “Arise! . . . Stand up, . . . rejoice, being washed with the four pure pitchers with which Horus was washed,” and clothed in the garment that protects you against all things. The vows are completed (or fully made) in the house. CT 67, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:287–88.

151. CT 74, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:308–9.

152. Alexandre Piankoff, “Le naos D29 du musée du Louvre,” *RdE* 1/3–4 (1933): 173, fig. 13. “Lift thyself on thy right (side), . . . Osiris, . . . stand up, and come out!” Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 59.

153. Sander-Hansen, *Die religiösen Texte auf dem Sarg der Anchnesneferibre*, 14.

“Arise, awake, Osiris; thou art triumphant, thine enemies are overthrown!”¹⁵⁴ It is Anubis, the erstwhile mortician, who now cries out, “You live! . . . Arise and live! You are not dead. . . . You live, receiving endowment in the temple (*ḥw=k sḥ.t m ḥw.t-nṯr*)!”¹⁵⁵ It is a painful operation: “Thy corpse lies on the ground.” “Geb opens thy blind eyes, stretches thy stiffened limbs, returns thy heart to thy body.”¹⁵⁶ But with divine assistance, especially of Anubis, “The Weary One awakes and arises. The god stands up and resumes his body. Horus stands there [assisting], he had clothed N. [the king] in a fabric of himself.”¹⁵⁷

Dick: So they’re right back where they started from.

Mr. Jones: Not quite. This is not just a return to the old order. Something has been gained by all this suffering and toil. The living king has been permitted to “suffer serious physical damage,” as Edouard Naville put it, “for the sake of the experience that it will give him”; having willfully consorted with evil, he has paid a terrible price, but in the end is the wiser for what he has been through.¹⁵⁸ His narrow escape is quickly followed by a magnificent coronation scene, “a great one falls on his side,” but rises like a god and takes the crown when the Two Ladies order him to arise and mount the throne.¹⁵⁹ By passing the tests he has shown himself “justified” —qualified to take the throne.¹⁶⁰ “Our play proclaims that at the coronation . . . whatever harm he may have suffered is undone,”

154. Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 23.

155. CT 51, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:237; cf. 233.

156. CT 20, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:56.

157. PT 690 (§§2093–94). After much toil and effort, under the hand of Anubis, “the *ba* finally returns to the body.” Thausing, *Der Auferstehungsgedanke in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, 19.

158. Edouard Naville, “Le chapitre 112 du *Livre des Morts*,” *Revue de l’Égypte ancienne* 1 (1927): 245–49.

159. CT 50, 69, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:223–32, 292; PT 676–77 (§§2007–28).

160. CT 2–3, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:9–10, ending with the usual acclamation, CT 33, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:111–21.

writes Frankfort; “with [his Eye], Horus has regained his full strength.”¹⁶¹ As Miss Thausing puts it, “the period of transition ends up on a new plane of existence,” with body and spirit on a higher level than before.¹⁶²

Jane: I’m getting tired. Why do we have to go through all this?

Mr. Jones: I’ll tell you why. Because we have to proceed from the known to the unknown.

Dick: What does that mean?

Mr. Jones: That it is foolish to rest a hypothesis—let alone a conclusion—on a premise which itself rests on dubious evidence. If we want to test a claim of Joseph Smith, we must first of all make sure that we know just what that claim is. Now, is there anything we can be sure of? There is—namely, that Joseph Smith published and widely circulated “the above cut” known as Facsimile 1 on the same page as his own explanation of that cut. He definitely claims that the interpretation goes with the picture—that is something we can test. But when you show me the sign for the single syllable, *Khons* (if it is a single syllable), and say that Joseph Smith “translated” that one monosyllable by a paragraph of 173 words, you raise an issue that fairly bristles with unanswered questions. The first proposition can be called a “known,” the second certainly cannot. So why not begin with the first proposition, about which all see eye to eye, and ask concerning it: Was Joseph Smith’s explanation of Facsimile 1 correct? Before we can answer that question, we must know what Facsimile 1 *really* represents. Until now, anyone who could recognize an Egyptian symbol or two has promptly come up with an answer, but that won’t do anymore. One of these days this question is going to be answered by a computer, and before that answer can mean anything, the computer has got to be fed with a hundred

161. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 126.

162. Thausing, *Der Auferstehungsgedanke in ägyptischen religiösen Texten*, 18–19, citing PT 366 (§632).

times more information than any Egyptologist has brought to the problem so far. Meanwhile, after lunch, let us consider one of the truly important clues to the meaning of Facsimile 1—the lion couch. What does Joseph Smith’s official explanation say the lion couch was?

Facsimile 1, Figures 2 and 4

“Abraham fastened upon an altar.” “The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah,” etc. To Abraham’s readers, for whom he must translate Egyptian terms and explain Egyptian gods, this altar needed a bit of explaining: “and that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record” (Abraham 1:12). It was the established practice of Egyptian nobles, when telling in their tomb inscriptions of such technical accomplishments as feats of transportation or building, to accompany their reports with illustrations, “mechanical drawings,” as they have been called, which make some tombs mines of valuable technical information.¹⁶³ In this spirit of technical enlightenment we have “Abraham’s” helpful sketch of a particular altar, with the fuller explanation that “it was made after the form of a bedstead, such as was had among the Chaldeans, and it stood before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash,” etc. (Abraham 1:13). The thing Abraham is emphatic about is that it looked like a bedstead—that is, an ordinary bed.

Jane: A Chaldean bed (figs. 21–22).

Mr. Jones: Another way of telling *his* readers that it was an ordinary bed, since Chaldean beds were the kind they knew about. But here the priest of Pharaoh is using it to perform a sacrifice “after the manner of the Egyptians.” One Egyptian royal bed has survived, from a dynasty strongly under Chaldean or Asiatic influence, and it is a lion couch (for lion

163. See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed., CWHN 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 272–73, fig. 37 (moving the stone colossus of Djehutihotep).

couches over time, see figs. 23–25).¹⁶⁴ If the lion couch was not the normal everyday Egyptian bed, it was the usual bed of those who could afford it.¹⁶⁵ But a lion couch in a tomb is something special; when you see one there, as Professor Alexandre Piankoff warns us, you can be sure that some process is under way that is going to lead to resurrection (fig. 26).¹⁶⁶ You see, all the great crises of life, those crucial events officially noted by what the folklore people call *rites de passage*, mark a passage from one phase of existence to another, and if you will think about it, nearly all these great crises take place in bed. Thus Piankoff assures us that while “associated with resurrection,” the lion couch “appears in all representations of royal birth.”¹⁶⁷ That is, kings, like other people, are born in a bed, and as we see in the famous reliefs of Hatshepsut from Deir el-Bahri, the king’s birthday bed was a ceremonial lion couch (fig. 27).¹⁶⁸

People also die in beds. The famous bed of Osiris found at Abydos is also called the tomb of Osiris (see p. 220, fig. 25B); the bed is a big black granite monument, but its sides

164. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, plates 15–17, 59.

165. Ludwig Keimer, “La vache et le cobra dans les marécages de papyrus de Thèbes,” *Bulletin de l’Institut d’Égypte* 37/1 (1956): 254, fig. 48; Pierre Montet, *Everyday Life in Egypt in the Days of Ramesses the Great*, trans. A. R. Maxwell-Hyslop and Margaret S. Drower (London: Arnold, 1958), 29.

166. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 36–37: “These couches represent three stages of the process of rebirth,” culminating with “finally, the lion couch associated with resurrection”; cf. 51, fig. 11, and Gustave Jéquier, *Considérations sur les religions égyptiennes* (Neuchâtel: Baconnière, 1946), 217–18.

167. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 36–37, and Jéquier, *Considérations sur les religions égyptiennes*, 217–18. In the symbolic royal conception, birth, and nursing scenes from Luxor, Denderah, Deir el-Bahri, and Philae, the lion couch dominates the scene; Fritz Weindler, *Geburts- und Wochenbettsdarstellungen auf altägyptischen Tempelreliefs: Ein Beitrag zur prähistorischen Urgeburtsilfe* (Munich: Beck, 1915), Abb. 3, 7, 14, 18, 21, 27, 28.

168. Weindler, *Geburts- und Wochenbettsdarstellungen*, Abb. 3, 7, 14, 18, 21, 27, 28.

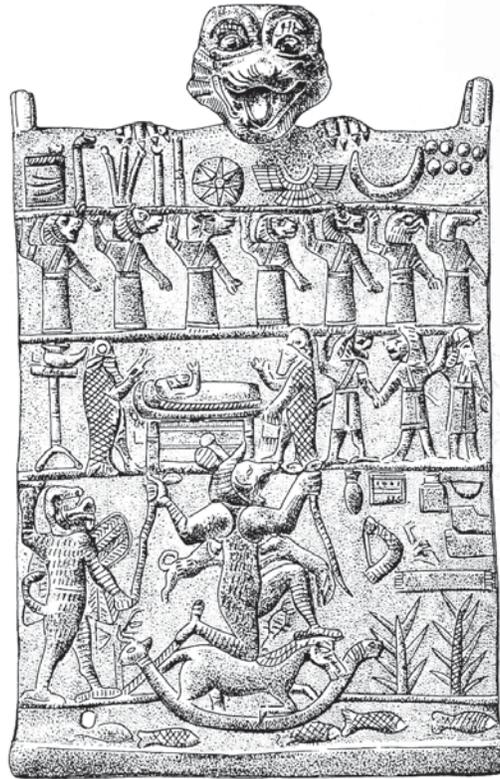


Figure 21. An old Assyrian bronze amulet with a lion-couch scene shows that the theme is to be found in the Chaldean as well as in the Egyptian spheres of influence; see the third register from the top. Lion-masked dancers in the second and third registers turn away evil. Courtesy of the Louvre Museum.

and ends are carefully cut to represent a lion couch, and Osiris is lying on top of it, which is proper, since he is going to be resurrected on it, even as he was conceived on such a bed. Almost identical scenes from the temple of Seti I and the temple of Opet show birth, death, conception, and resurrection, the smitten helplessness and the healing of the king, all clearly depicted in a single scene, and the common element and central object of them all is the lion couch.¹⁶⁹ We have

169. The close resemblance between the bed of Osiris and the lion-couch scene in the temple of Seti I was noted by Émile Amélineau, "Le lit d'Osiris," *Revue égyptologique* 13 (1910): 181, with photo following 184.

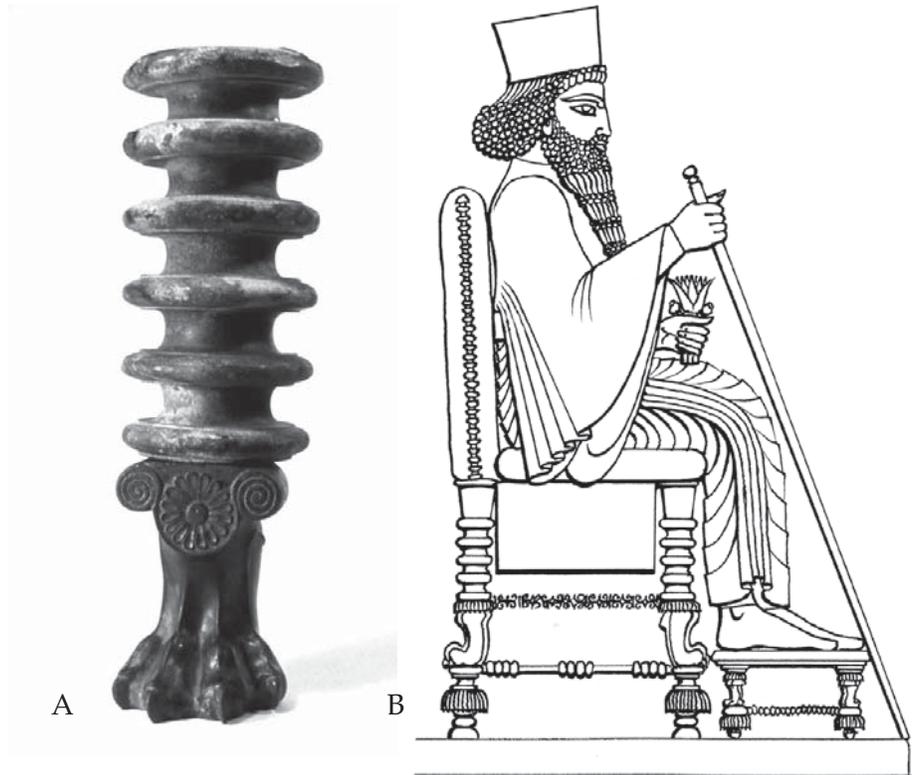


Figure 22. A Persian-style lion-paw throne leg (A) was found in Samaria, showing the influence of the Persian court. The excavator believes it was cast locally. A bas-relief from the Treasury at Persepolis shows Darius enthroned on a lion-footed chair and footstool (B). Ca. 470 B.C. © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (A).

seen a number of cases in which a *series* of lion-couch scenes was shown. Here in the tomb of Tutankhamun we have three real life-sized couches which represent, according to our guidebook, “three stages of the process of rebirth,” the final stage being that of the lion couch.¹⁷⁰ Professor Moret noted that in the mysteries “a dead person is reborn when he

The lion-couch scene in the temple of Opet is discussed by Varille, “La grande porte du temple d’Apet à Karnak,” 118, with photo, plate XIX.

170. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 36–37. The most impressive *series* of lion-couch scenes is to be found in Henri Frankfort, *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, 2 vols. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1933), 2: plates LXXIV–LXXVIII.

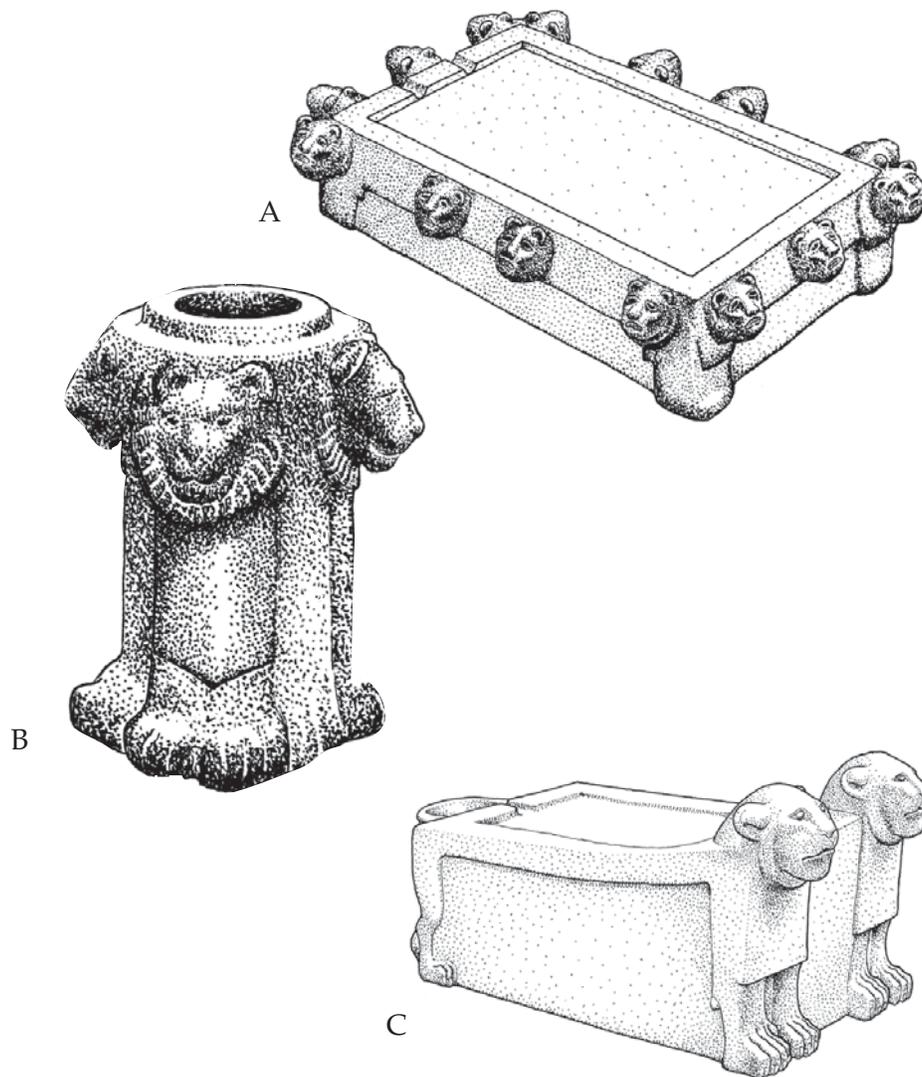


Figure 23. Starting with these three Old Kingdom examples, the lion couch has taken many forms throughout Egyptian history. This limestone libation table, throne base, altar, or embalming table shows that the lion altar should be facing in four directions (A) just as the four canopic jars (Fac. 1, figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8) represent the four cardinal directions. 3½ feet in length, ca. 2650 B.C. Another type of lion altar in granite faces the four directions (B). There are traces of burning in the bowl. Ca. 15 inches in height. "The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests" (Fac. 1, fig. 4): Here is a very ancient Egyptian altar, dating from the Third Dynasty. As anyone can see, it is shaped like a lion couch. Veined alabaster, 3 feet in length (C). Courtesy of the Louvre Museum (B) and the Cairo Museum (A, C).

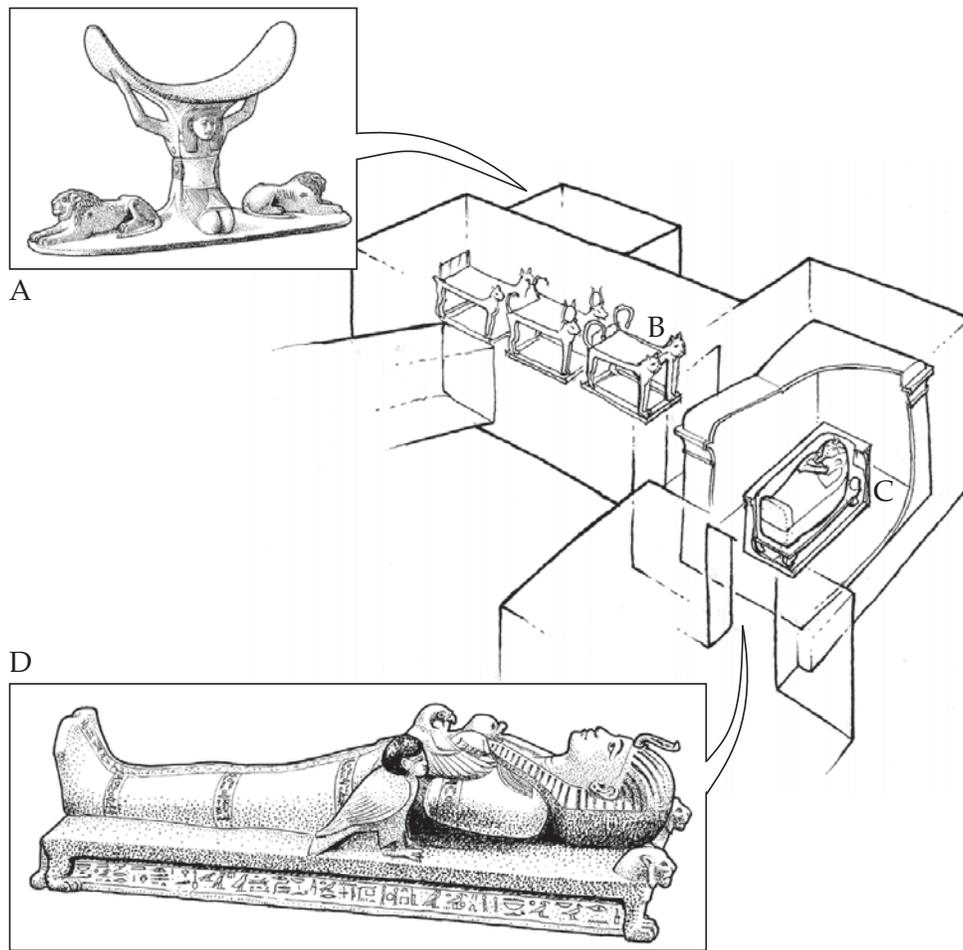


Figure 24. Placed in Tutankhamun's tomb more than a thousand years later, this ivory headrest is supported by a figure of "Shu, the void, the god of air," who is flanked by two crouching lions (A). A gold-covered wooden lion couch (B) belongs to a series of three beds, including a cow bed and a hippopotamus bed. This particular couch, though having the form of an ordinary bed (see Abraham 1:13), represents, according to Alexandre Piankoff, the final stage in a lion-couch drama that culminates with the king's resurrection. The body of the king rested on the final gold-covered lion couch that supported more than 1½ tons for over three thousand years without collapsing (C). A high official named Maya gave a beautifully carved small wooden offering showing his king resting on a lion couch (D). Thus, whether we view the lion couch as an altar, a bed, or an embalming table, it always stands "in *this* case, in relation to *this* subject" (Fac. 1, fig. 12 explanation), as a liberation from a death that was ritually and symbolically sacrificial and violent. Courtesy of Cairo Museum (A, D).

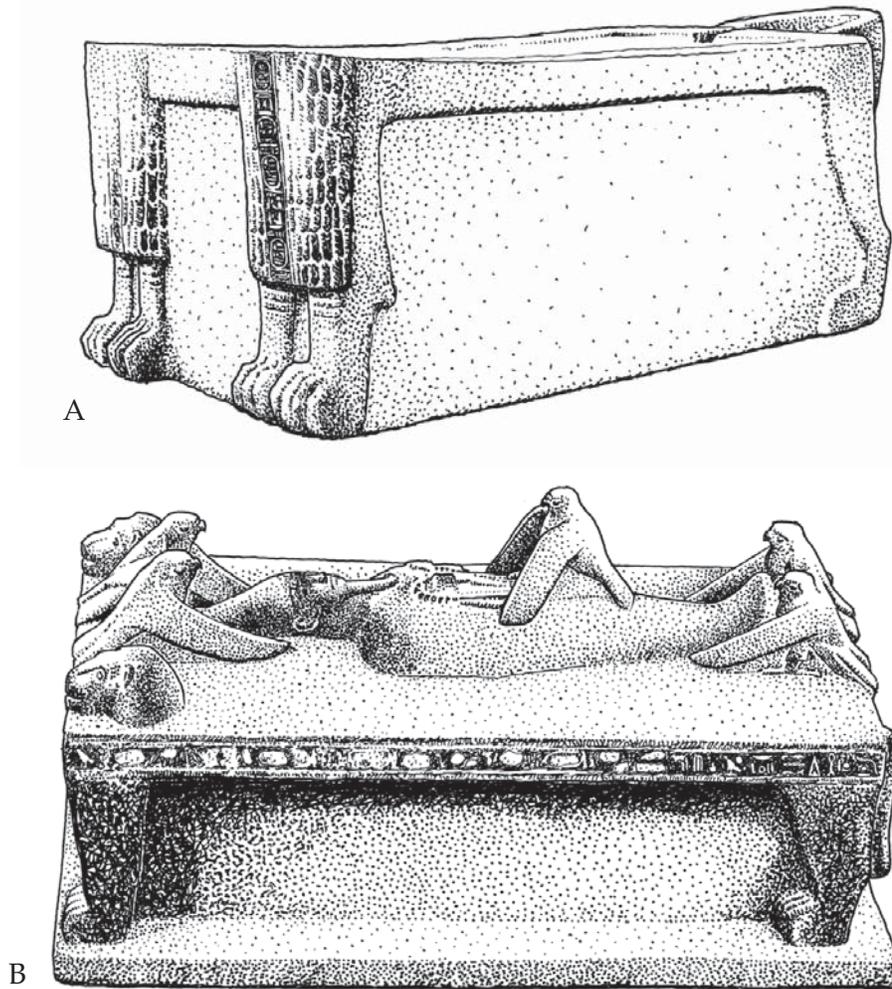


Figure 25. In this limestone altar, the heads are missing, but the lion bodies are clearly accounted for (A). Pharaoh Horemheb's titles are inscribed down the front of their manes. Ca. 1300 B.C. This massive black granite monument has been called both the tomb of Osiris and the bed of Osiris (B). The presence of no less than five hawks is another warning against oversimplification. Sleep, death, procreation, birth, transformation, and resurrection are all represented in this imposing memorial. Ca. 1750 B.C. (?). These very late limestone and alabaster Egyptian altars still faithfully preserve the likeness of the lion couch (C). Mit Rahina. Photograph by Kevin Smith. It is quite apparent by now that the proper form for an altar of sacrifice among the Egyptians was the lion couch, as represented and explained in JSP I and Abraham 1:13.





Figure 26. "Abraham fastened upon an altar" (Fac. 1, fig. 2): This reproduction of an archaic funeral rite shows the lion couch figuring in a variety of situations or episodes. The elaborate ritual here illustrated

lays himself down, clothed in a skin or a shroud, on a bed."¹⁷¹ The bed is important, but which bed—a bed of (re)birth, conception, suffering, healing, death, or resurrection?

Dick: That all depends.

Mr. Jones: Yes, the same bed changes roles, just as the people do, from one episode to the next. And there are some we haven't considered yet. The bed in which the dead Egyptian lay in state awaiting his funeral preserved the same form right down into Roman times, and what form do you think it was?

Dick and Jane: A lion couch!

Mr. Jones: How did you guess?¹⁷² Then there is another form of lion couch with short legs, once thought to be an embalmer's table. Do you see the sense of that? Look at this so-called later dynastic embalmer's table. It went unrecognized for many years, it says here, because "at the first glance the slab will be recognized as taking the form of a funerary couch, with lions' heads and legs and elongated lions' bodies merged into the cavetto cornice which make the frame. . . . I suggest that this object is an embalmer's

171. Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 61.

172. Klaus Parlasca, review of *An Egyptian Funerary Bed of the Roman Period in the Royal Ontario Museum*, by Winifred Needler, *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 60 (1965): 246.



has never been explained to everybody's satisfaction and shows that we are dealing here with a very obscure and complicated business. P. Muthetepti, ca. 1050 B.C. Courtesy of the British Museum.

table.”¹⁷³ That is, the embalmer's table could not be distinguished from a normal bed. But later it turned out that the embalmer's table was really an altar.

Dick: How come?

Mr. Jones: Not only was a real “embalmer's table of the XXVI Dynasty” found, having the form of “a wooden lion couch,”¹⁷⁴ but another stone bed turned up of the very same type as the first one, only this time found *in situ* within a ceremonial complex, which left not the slightest doubt that it was an altar of sacrifice.¹⁷⁵ All the Egyptian altars are solid stone with lions' legs, heads, and tails put in by the sculptor to make it clear that the altar is still a lion couch. And here, at last, we have the explanation for the awkward legs of the priest and Abraham in Facsimile 1. You will notice that the priest in ordinary embalming scenes stands on the other side of the couch so that his legs can be clearly seen by looking under the bed. That would have been the habitual and easy way of drawing the scene, and it is apparent that the artist

173. Herbert E. Winlock, “A Late Dynastic Embalmer's Table,” *ASAE* 30 (1930): 102, with photo between pages 104 and 105.

174. *Ibid.*, 103.

175. Ursula Schweitzer, *Löwe und Sphinx im alten Ägypten*, *Ägyptologische Forschungen* 15 (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1948): Tafel VIII; Mustafa el Amir, “The ΣΗΚΟΣ of Apis at Memphis: A Season of Excavations at Mit Rahīnah in 1941,” *JEA* 34 (1948): plates 15, 16.

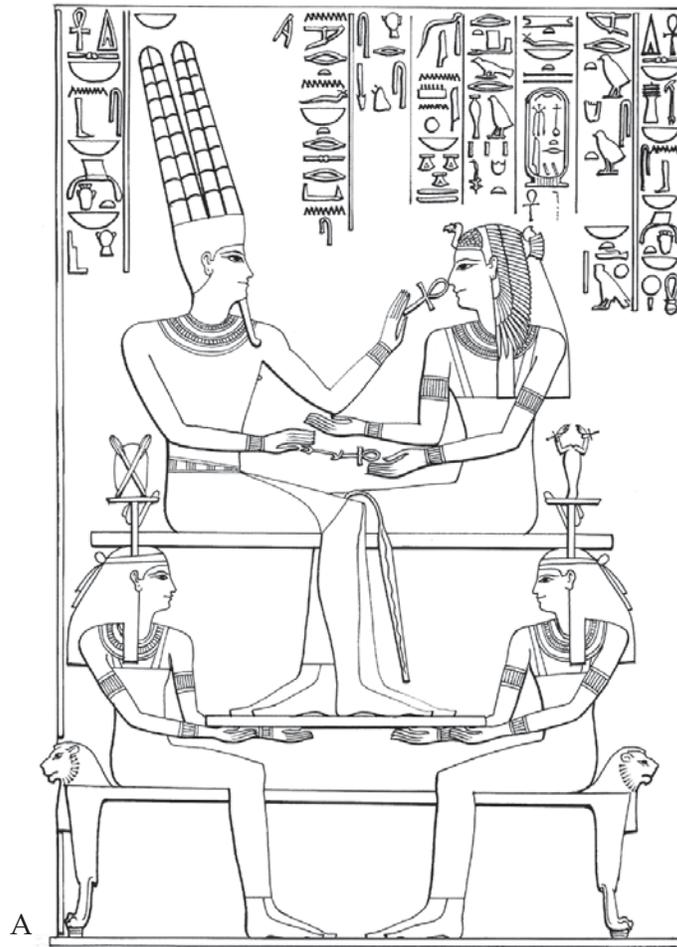
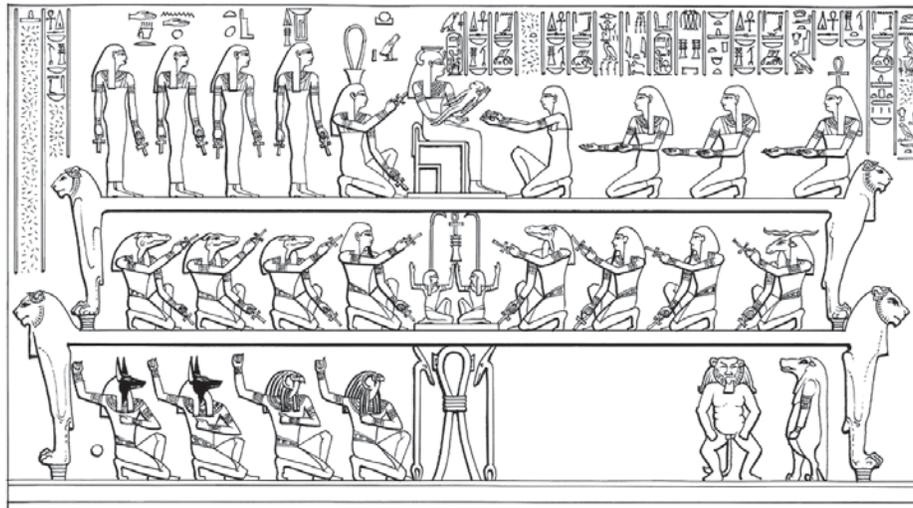
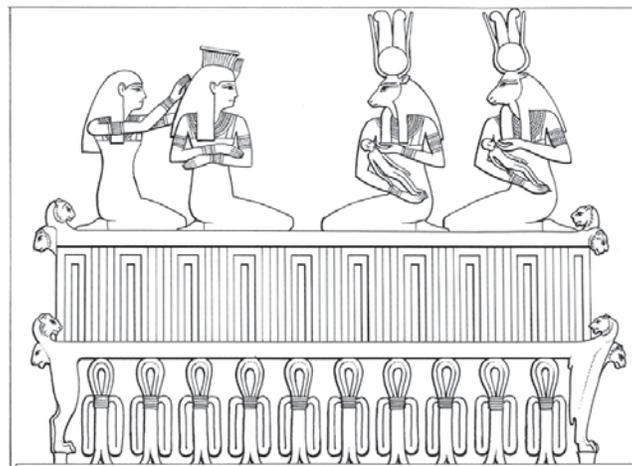


Figure 27. The conception, birth, and nursing of the famous Queen Hatshepsut all take place on lion couches. Above, the god Amon-Re gives life 𓂏 and dominion 𓂏 to Queen Ahmes while supported by Neith and Selkit (A). Two double-headed lion couches resting one on top of

of Joseph Smith Papyrus I started out in the usual manner. But then, at the risk of making nonsense of his composition, he put *everything* on *this* side of the bed; why, if it is just a bed? He could not omit the legs of the priest—convention demands them—but neither could he let us see under the bed, because it is a solid stone altar. We *now* know beyond a doubt that Egyptian altars looked just like that, faithfully cut to imitate “the form of a bedstead”—but nobody knew it



B



C

the other support the queen holding the infant Hatshepsut (B). In the third scene, the artist has added more lion heads in an unusual manner, perhaps to guard all four directions (C). Deir el-Bahri, ca. 1460 B.C.

in Joseph Smith's day or for a long time after, and on the face of it it looks just too silly for words.

Dick: But why should an altar be a bed?

Mr. Jones: We saw that the bed of Osiris is also the tomb of Osiris, and Diodorus tells us that "the kings of Egypt used to sacrifice men of the color of Typhon *on the tomb* of Osiris,"¹⁷⁶ which made it also an altar. But there is more to

176. Diodorus, *Library* 1.88.4–5.

it than that. In the oldest pictures of altars, they seem to be nothing but mere chopping blocks,¹⁷⁷ and it has been long debated whether sacrifice originated from the practical butchering of animals for meat (as Professor Gustave Jéquier believed),¹⁷⁸ or as a way of punishment for rebels and enemies, or as something with a deeper meaning. Some have maintained that the original idea of an altar was to represent the seat of a divinity, “often designed like a chair or seat. In early Babylonia the altar actually is a comfortable seat for the god”; that is why the sides are raised.¹⁷⁹ The seat-type of altar is also found in Egypt—small altars shaped like cushions on the top, with protruding bulges on either side, which are thought to represent the horizon—“symbols of the desert rim of the western horizon.”¹⁸⁰ The person who sits on this altar was thus on the threshold of a new life, about to cross “the desert threshold of the western horizon” to the next world.¹⁸¹

Dick: The hot seat, eh?

Mr. Jones: Quite possibly. Remember when we told of the terror of the prince who has to sit on that seat and also how he was being conducted over the threshold *by* a lion-headed man with a big knife and *to* a lion behind the door? As we enter the shrine of Opet to view the most instructive of all lion-couch scenes (fig. 28), we pass by one of these altars, and right in front of it stands the big and forbidding statue of a lion-headed lady with a big knife.¹⁸² Professor Varille is not sure about the origin of the altar, but he *is* sure that the traces of fire and the runnels for blood indicate some sort of

177. Gustave Jéquier, “Petites critiques,” *Sphinx* 14 (1910–11): 179.

178. *Ibid.*, 179.

179. Dietrich Opitz, “Ein Altar des Königs Tukulti-Ninurta I. von Assyrien,” *AfO* 7 (1931–32): 88.

180. Bruyère, “Neb-nerou et Hery-Mâat,” 38, fig. 3.

181. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

182. See Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed., CWHN 16 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 369, fig. 118.

sacrifice.¹⁸³ In the Babylonian altars, instead of lions we have semi-lion or griffin altars, which amount to the same thing.¹⁸⁴ But we haven't yet said anything about the meaning of this bed-altar equation that Abraham found so important.

As you well know by now, Osiris died of the deadly blows inflicted on him by his rival Seth.

Jane: Only he didn't die.

Mr. Jones: He was "officially dead." The Egyptians believed that one could die by degrees, each of six steps being a genuine death; this is something that is hard for us to understand.¹⁸⁵ The point is, however, that the death of Osiris was a sacrificial death, preparing the way for his resurrection. And just as Osiris had to die in order to be resurrected, so the initiate in his mysteries "had to experience the fate of his god in his own person."¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, various drugs, lighting effects, hypnosis, and so forth were used to make the mock death as real as possible. The initiate was rendered unconscious and laid in a coffin, or else he was shrouded, crowned, and led into a deep crypt, representing the world of the dead.¹⁸⁷

Jane: Just like the king.

Mr. Jones: So it would seem. He could become an Osiris only when he was dead and only if he had suffered the same violent sacrificial death as Osiris: "If thou slayest me," says an incantation, "I am Osiris!"¹⁸⁸ The dead person "is a kind of Osiris," wrote Sethe, by virtue of "repeating the case of Osiris."¹⁸⁹ In the Opening of the Mouth rite the symbolic

183. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 107–9.

184. Opitz, "Ein Altar des Königs," 86.

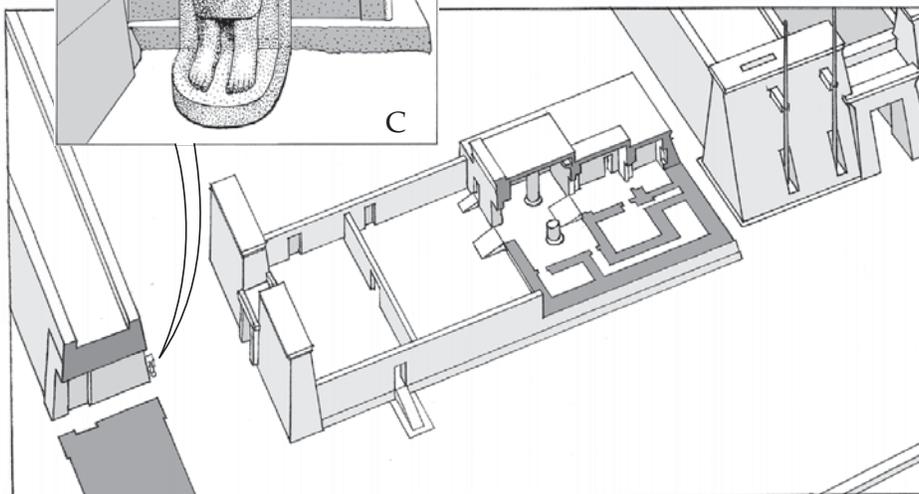
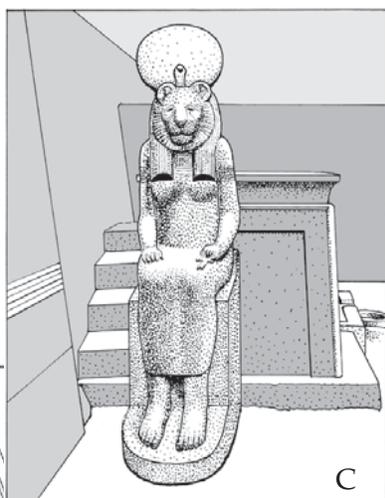
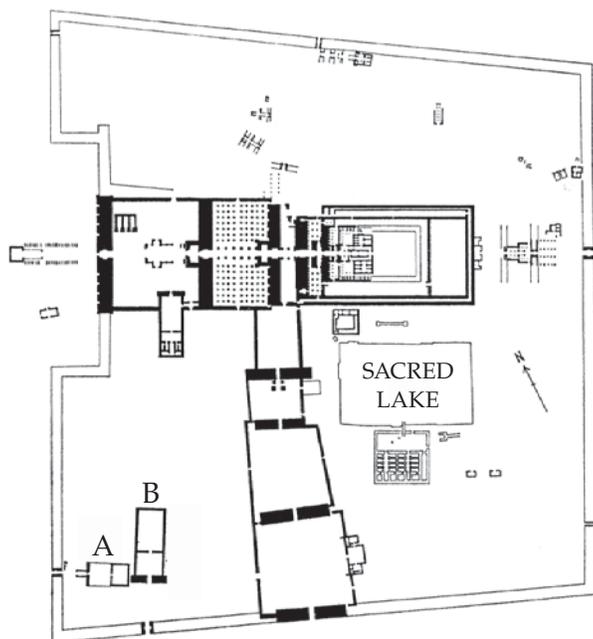
185. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 42 n. 3; cf. 22 n. 48.

186. Theodor Hopfner, "Mysterien: Die orientalisches-hellenistischen M. Auswahl aus der Literatur," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Druckenmüller, 1933), Suppl. 16:1331.

187. *Ibid.*, 1332.

188. A. W. Shorter, "A Magical Ostrakon," *JEA* 22 (1936): 165 (emphasis added).

189. Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, 1:78–79.



“smiting of the body of the god [Osiris]” was “also the smiting of the mummy of the deceased, whereby each was made a *divine victim*.”¹⁹⁰ For “the dead to become Osiris,” according to Gustave Jéquier, means nothing less than “to pass through *all* the vicissitudes of the god,” which is what the king is doing on the lion couch of Seti I.¹⁹¹ But how could one fulfill the most conspicuous aspect of the Osiris experience, the *violent* sacrificial death, if one had died quite normally?

Dick: That’s no problem. You’d imitate it, of course.

Jane: Like Christians “taking up their cross.”

Mr. Jones: I think that is the answer. Here Diodorus is very helpful: First, he says, a priest marks on the lower left side of the body the place where an incision is to be made. Then one called the “ripper” takes an Ethiopian stone knife, makes the ritual cut prescribed by law, and runs like mad.¹⁹²

Jane: Why?

Mr. Jones: Because everybody is chasing him and throwing stones at him and cursing him. Plainly he is a murderer, and the primitive flint knife he uses (the same type, as we shall see, that was used in sacrificing living victims) is the murder weapon of Seth (fig. 29). The dead, having undergone sacrificial violence, is a true Osiris. The dead person on the embalming table is Osiris on the altar, and the embalming operation is a mimicking of the sacrificial death of Osiris. And just as the members of Osiris were scattered all over the world

190. Budge, *Book of Opening the Mouth*, 1:39 (emphasis added).

191. Jéquier, “Notes et remarques,” 122.

192. Diodorus, *Library* 1.91.4.

Figure 28. Several Ptolemaic pharaohs built and decorated this small temple (A) to the goddess of fertility and childbirth, Opet, at the corner of the older temple of Khonsu (B). In it, ceremonies were performed to bring about his safe birth. All this was connected with the cycle of Osiris’s death, resurrection, and enthronement. A black granite statue of the goddess Sekhmet (C) sits before a large altar with steps outside the entrance. Karnak, ca. 120 B.C.

and had to be brought together again before his resurrection could be accomplished, so those four canopic jars before the couch, containing the viscera of the defunct, represent "the earth in its four quarters," exactly as Joseph Smith says they do (Fac. 2, fig. 8), as well as the four elements taken from those four quarters to make up the body of man. They represent both the dissolution and scattering of the elements of the body and then the gathering in of those parts and elements for the resurrection. But what makes the sacrificial nature of the couch and the scene plainest of all is the lion motif.

All about Lions

Dick: Why should that be, if lions go with ordinary beds?

Mr. Jones: There is no conflict there, because *lions* have always had two main functions as far as pharaohs are concerned: the one protective, the other aggressive.

Dick: Like protecting people in bed.

Mr. Jones: Or anywhere else. In the earliest representations the couch or settee of the sacrificial victim has bulls'

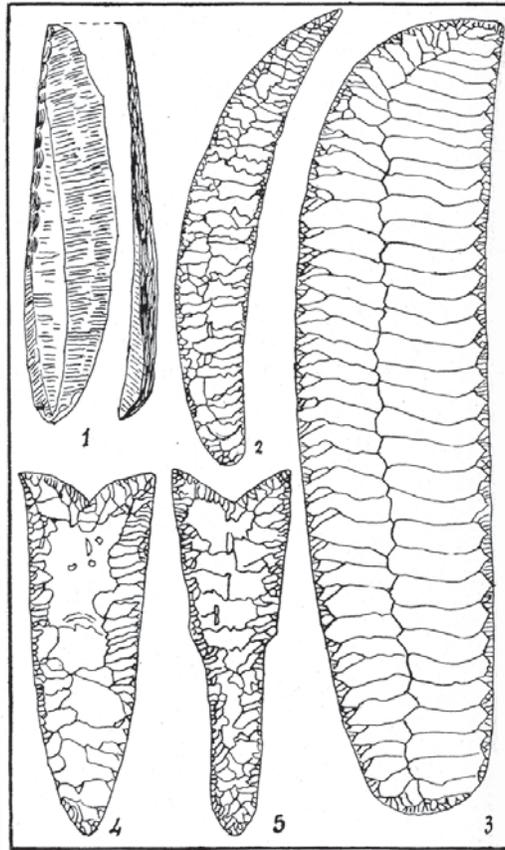


Figure 29. "The idolatrous priest of Elk-enah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice" (Fac. 1, fig. 3): Egyptians used flint knives of prehistoric design both in sacrificing and in embalming rites, which were symbolically identical. The long thin crescent-shaped knife (no. 2) is the type resembling the knife held by the priest in the facsimile. Massoulard, *Prehistoire et protohistoire d'Égypte*, plate LX.

feet;¹⁹³ but already in the Old Kingdom we find funeral couches with bulls' feet *and* lions' heads,¹⁹⁴ or lions' feet *and* bulls' heads.¹⁹⁵ In the great shrine on the Capitol at Rome the Lady of Heaven sat between two lions, while her husband Jupiter sat between two bulls;¹⁹⁶ but away back in the Pyramid Texts the two animals meet in the royal throne, "whose faces are those of *maḥs*-lion (*mꜣḥz*), whose feet are those of the great bull."¹⁹⁷ Can you tell me what lions and bulls have in common?

Jane: They are both fierce . . . and dangerous.

Mr. Jones: Yes, both lion and bull fights seem to have been royal sport around the Mediterranean for a long time.¹⁹⁸ Here on the Palette of Narmer, one of the oldest documents in the world, we see "a 'powerful bull' is goring to death a . . . 'Libyan'; the bull is the king," Professor Gardiner explained, "since precisely that epithet is constantly applied to the reigning monarch."¹⁹⁹ But from almost every picture of a royal throne it appears that the king also fancied himself as a lion. From the early domination of the bull the lion gradually takes over.

Dick: Why was that, I wonder?

Mr. Jones: Because power has two uses, as I said—aggressive and defensive. Bulls, like generals, are very good at aggression, but they are poor defenders.

193. [See, for example, the panel of Hesire, JE 28504 = CG 1426–28, in Francesco Tiradritti, *Egyptian Treasures from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo* (New York: Abrahams, 1999), 48—eds.]

194. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Denderah 1898* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900), plate III.

195. Gaston Maspero, *Sarcophages des époques persane et ptolémaïque*, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire (Cairo: IFAO, 1914–39), 119 (CCG 29318); cf. PT 509 (§1124).

196. B. Vandenhoff, "Die Götterliste des Mar Jakob von Sarug in seiner Homilie über den Fall der Götzenbilder," *Oriens Christianus* 5 (1915): 244–45.

197. PT 509 (§1124).

198. Aelian, *De Natura Animalium* (*On the Nature of Animals*) 12.7.11.

199. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 396.

Dick: Are lions much better?

Mr. Jones: The Egyptians certainly thought so. Plutarch says that Horus considered the lion to be the most efficient of all creatures not in attack but in defense.²⁰⁰ And Horapollo sees the point when he says that the lion under the throne of Horus is always on guard, its eyes never shutting.²⁰¹ It was the lion that guarded Egypt as the god Nefertem, and the main fortress facing Canaan was called “the Dwelling of the Lion.”²⁰² The best-known guarding lions are those in front of public buildings. Plutarch says that the Egyptians “honor the lion and adorn the entrances to temples with open lions’ mouths.”²⁰³ It was more than mere ornamentation, however; if we want to see the lions really on guard, the best place is right here at the entrance of the temple of Opet, housing our prize lion-couch exhibit. The bolts of the great doors of the temple were crouching lions to whose mouths chains (for pulling out the bolts) were attached with human hearts as weights on the end of them—“It is surprising how perfect the symbolism is,” Varille remarked.²⁰⁴ The guardian lions drink the blood and eat the livers of unauthorized persons attempting to enter the shrine.²⁰⁵ Aelian says that real lions were kept and fed at the gates of the great shrine at Heliopolis, as guardians and champions of the sun, and that they took vengeance on all who broke the oaths taken at the mysteries.²⁰⁶ In the courtyard of the Opet temple, right at the entrance, stood this

200. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 19.

201. Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica* 1.19, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 583.

202. Alan H. Gardiner, “The Ancient Military Road between Egypt and Palestine,” *JEA* 6 (1920): 106.

203. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 38.

204. Varille, “La grande porte du temple d’Apet à Karnak,” 87–89, discussing the symbolism at length.

205. *Ibid.*, 96.

206. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 12.7.

frightful black granite statue of Sekhmet as guardian, the lion-headed lady-goddess, painted all red.²⁰⁷

The lion couch is matched by the lion throne: "The adornment of the king's throne with lions' heads and feet was the custom in Egypt from the earliest times."²⁰⁸ And here the symbolism is quite clear: not only is the throne mounted on lions' legs, as if a lion were carrying the king forward on his conquests (a common idea in the ancient world), but beneath the armrest we usually see the king himself represented as a human-headed lion treading on his Asiatic foes: "In Egypt the human-headed lion is the embodiment of conscious supremacy."²⁰⁹ The king sits in state on his lion throne,²¹⁰ with the enemies of Egypt bound under the seat, while beneath the armrest the king himself is shown as a lion slaying the Asiatics.²¹¹ Lions are first-class defenders because anybody approaching them fears an attack. The pharaohs kept pet lions, which would accompany them on the hunts or crouch like dogs beside the throne. Here is a contemporary picture of a pet lion crouching before the throne of Ramses II while the king himself personally dispatches the Libyan king with a ceremonial sword.²¹² This is a reminder of the ritual function of the lion in slaughtering the king's enemies. Pharaoh himself is the "glaring lion with raging claws" who "licks up the might and blood (?) of him who attacks him."²¹³ As the

207. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 107.

208. Marion Pogracz, "Löwendarstellungen an Podesten der Königs-throne," *MDAIK* 15 (1957): 213.

209. G. M. Crowfoot and Norman de G. Davies, "The Tunic of Tut'ankhamün," *JEA* 27 (1941): 128.

210. Ludwig Borchardt, "Jubiläumsbilder," *ZÄS* 61 (1926): 30–51.

211. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 1:1:88–89; pt. 2, Tafel 203.

212. *Ibid.*, 2:3, Tafel 164. For other royal pet lions, see Mahmud Hamza, "Excavations of the Department of Antiquities at Qantîr (Faquûs District)," *ASAE* 30 (1930): 45–51.

213. [We have been unable to find the source from which Nibley quoted—eds.]

king cuts the throats of his victims (represented by an oryx) in formal sacrifice, the Lady Hathor tells him: "I have given you the heart of a lion to repel your enemies."²¹⁴ Rebels *and* oath breakers—that is, any who defied the king—were fed, as in Rome, ritually "to the lions."²¹⁵ It is the lioness who puts all rebels to death by fire and knife. At the entrance to temples the guardian lion is seen crouching with such a super knife as that held by the grim lion lady at the entrance of the temple of Opet; "the terrible lioness" means just one thing—sacrifice.²¹⁶ Here the lion's personality is intimately bound with the lion couch. When the tail of the lion couch is "long and curiously curved," one can be sure that the figure on the couch is showing signs of life, while the tail is straight and drooping when the person on the couch has and is given up.²¹⁷ Here in this series of scenes the completely embalmed mummy is lying supine and inert on a lion couch, while in the next scene he has turned over on his face and is vigorously doing push-ups—and the lion's head of the couch has changed to a *jackal's* head.²¹⁸ Doesn't that suggest to you that the lion's head on the couch has a definite significance—that it is the harbinger of death? Remember how when the dead shows signs of life Anubis suddenly becomes the great

214. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:54.

215. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 12.7. See the many illustrations of lions in Schweitzer, *Löwe und Sphinx im alten Ägypten*, Tafel IX, figs. 1–2, 4; XII, figs. 1–4, 6; XV, figs. 5–6.

216. Rochemonteix, "Temple d'Apet," 254; and the tomb of Seti I, in Eugène Lefébure, *Les hypogées royales de Thebes: Le tombeau de Sêti I^{er}*, MMAF 2 (Paris: Leroux, 1886), plate XLIII. In *Das Buch vom Sieg über Seth*, in Schott, *Urkunden mythologischen Inhalts*, 52–53, Nut describes the wholesomely destructive office of Sekhmet with her flame and sword. See below, note 232.

217. This is only a general impression, but the theme is discussed ingeniously in Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 93–94, 110–11.

218. Campbell C. Edgar, *Graeco-Egyptian Coffins, Masks and Portraits*, *Catologue general des antiquités égyptiennes* (1905; repr., Osnabrück: Zeller, 1977), plates 31, 32.

healer? Here we see the same transition from lion to jackal. In the Coffin Text the person who is told to arise from the lion couch is escaping the lion Aker.²¹⁹

Jane: Who is Aker?

Mr. Jones: He is the double-headed lion, also called Ruty (see p. 373, fig. 53A), who controls all goings and comings to and from the castle of Osiris—the other world.²²⁰ But mostly the lion has to do with the bed: Here is one who says as he arises from the lion couch: “I have removed the lions from me. . . . I have vivified the vivified. I have thrown off all my evil. . . . My horror is blood.” Plainly he has reversed the lion power.²²¹ Apollonius of Tyana, the famous wandering wise man from the time of Christ, had a pet lion whom he claimed to be the reincarnation of Pharaoh Amasis; it was regarded as a miraculous beast because it refused to eat the blood of sacrifices, that being apparently the proper function of pet lions.²²² In some cases the lion couch itself is shown as a rampant beast trampling its victims,²²³ and a fragment from Deir el-Bahri shows the lion couch as a sphinx,²²⁴ a reminder that the king as a sphinx on the sides of the throne treads on his enemies and also that sphinxes like to sacrifice their guests.²²⁵

Jane: What are all these lion couches doing on sleds?

219. CT 66, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:280.

220. Hellmut Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 111 (1961): 442; this is treated below, in this volume, CWHN 18:280–82.

221. CT 75, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:385, 392–93.

222. Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii (The Life of Apollonius of Tyana)* 5.42.

223. For example, Uvo Hölscher, “Gessodekorationen Intarsien und Kachelbekleidung in Medinet Habu,” *ZÄS* 76 (1940): Tafel 4, opp. p. 44.

224. I. E. S. Edwards, “Lord Dufferin’s Excavations at Deir el-Bahri and the Clandeboye Collection,” *JEA* 51 (1965): plate XII.5, opp. p. 25. For a sphinx throne, see Günther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen, 1956), 58–59 (Tafel 87); and Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, CWHN 16:394, fig. 126.

225. Edwards, “Lord Dufferin’s Excavations,” plate XII.5, opp. p. 25.

Mr. Jones: You will notice that quite often the lion couch is taking the mummy for a ride. Here in the tomb of Montouhikhopshuf, in a sequence in which Gaston Maspero definitely detected human sacrifice, the dead person is brought to the tomb on his lion couch, which is mounted on a sled; in the next two scenes it has been removed from the sled and put aside.²²⁶

The same sequence is shown here in the tomb of Aba, where the lion couch also rides on a ship;²²⁷ in this Old Kingdom tomb the funeral ship itself has the lion head!²²⁸ And here in the third of three lion-couch scenes, as soon as the man on the couch stirs to life and starts walking, the lion couch itself starts walking too!²²⁹ Thus the lion is a conveyor; thrones are often shown as borne on the backs of lions.²³⁰ Here at Edfu both Horus and the king are seen riding on platforms mounted on the backs of lions.²³¹ The lion is the supernatural conveyor to the other world; in the mysteries he is the psychopomp.

Dick: What's a psychopomp?

Mr. Jones: Somebody who conducts spirits from one place to another. The lion-headed lady Sekhmet, or the priest with the lion mask, usually holds a big sacrificial knife in one hand while pointing the way imperiously with the other. In "Chaldea," the lion started out as the dangerous and evil enemy of the gods—an understandable role when lions were still a real danger—but in time it became "a symbol of

226. Virey, *Sept tombeaux thébains*, pt. 3:446, fig. 5 (tomb of Montouhikhopshuf). The sacrificial scenes are described on *ibid.*, 452–54, fig. 7.

227. *Ibid.*, pt. 4: plate IX (tomb of Aba).

228. Étienne Drioton, "La cryptographie égyptienne," *CdE* 10 (1934): 202–3.

229. Jean Capart, "Le cercueil d'argent du roi Chechonq," *CdE* 19 (1943): figs. 28–30.

230. Paul Perdrizet, "Antiquités de Léontopolis," *Monuments et Mémoires* 25 (1921–22): 362, fig. 3.

231. Émile Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou*, part 14, MMAF 31 (Cairo: IFAO, 1934), plate DLVI.

submission to higher powers or their ally" (see p. 216, fig. 21),²³² which is what it means in Egypt, where it represents the irresistible order that the victim cannot evade. The lion-headed lady Sekhmet, the big black granite figure all painted red that stands at the door of the Opet Shrine, is, according to Varille, "a principle of fire *which destroys in order to regenerate*"—she destroys but with a purpose; it is necessary destruction.²³³ That may sound paradoxical, but it is the whole idea behind the lion couch, best represented by the dangerous but beneficent lion.

Dick: But why do there have to be so *many lions* on these beds?

Jane: And on the altars?

Mr. Jones: I am glad you noticed that. Here, for example, is a small altar that our guidebook says is "Mios quadrifrons with lion faces in granite,"²³⁴ and here is a "lion throne" facing in the four directions.²³⁵ This low limestone table with the lions' heads protruding in the four directions "is a representation in stone of some kind of seat or throne."²³⁶ And here we see King Seti I presenting a four-headed lion-couch seat in the temple.²³⁷ And notice these stone altars with lions' heads facing in all four directions (see p. 218, fig. 23B).

Jane: Why is that, do you think?

Mr. Jones: Well, there must have been an important reason, because it meant a lot of extra work and was a clumsy thing to handle. It goes back to the fourfold obsession of the *sed*-festival. Professor Kees believed that the great moment

232. Crowfoot and Davies, "Tunic of Tut'ankhamūn," 128.

233. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 107–8 (emphasis added).

234. Perdrizet, "Antiquités de Léontopolis," 377, fig. 11.

235. Borchardt, "Jubiläumsbilder," 30–37.

236. M. Cecil Firth, "Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Saqqara (1925–1926)," *ASAE* 26 (1926): 100, fig. 2.

237. Alan H. Gardiner, ed., and Amice M. Calverley, copiest, *Temple of King Sethos I at Abydos*, 4 vols. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1933–59), 3: plate 60b (partially destroyed).

of the *sed*-festival, the climax of the whole business, was when the king “shot the victorious arrows in the four directions of heaven, to destroy all his enemies symbolically,”²³⁸ and Bonnet thinks the great moment was when Horus and Seth handed the king the scepter, bow, and arrows that showed him conqueror and ruler of the world.²³⁹ On the same occasion the king not only shot the four arrows but was enthroned four times, each time facing a different direction, “upon a curious throne base, ornamented with twelve *lion*-heads.”²⁴⁰

Remember, we said that at first the lion- and bull-thrones were interchangeable, and the king sitting on twelve lions certainly suggests the twelve oxen of Solomon. Now here is the most spectacular altar ever found in Egypt, or rather the base of it: the gigantic fourfold altar of Abusir; you will notice that everything about it is fourfold, emphasizing the four-directional orientation.²⁴¹ Here is Alexander Badaway’s comment about it: “Even cosmic symbolism is implied in the square altars [this is not the only one] accessible from four stairways rising from the four directions to the four sides,” and the symbolism includes that of the primeval hill.²⁴²

Jane: Should the lion couch always face four directions like that?

Mr. Jones: I think so. That is, when it is thought of as an *altar*, it should.

Dick: Then why doesn’t it in the Joseph Smith Papyrus?

Mr. Jones: Oh, but it does—most vividly! It is not *drawn* fourfold, because that would be extremely difficult and

238. Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten*, 197.

239. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 159.

240. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 88 (emphasis added). [Nibley cited Frankfort accurately, but the artifact originally had fourteen heads (see p. 218, fig. 23A)—eds.]

241. Schäfer, “Vorläufiger Bericht,” 5, Abb. 2; Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 308–9, 313, fig. 57.

242. Alexander Badawy, “The Symbolism of the Temples at Amarna,” *ZÄS* 87 (1962): 95.

clumsy, but they had a way of getting around that. Gardiner noted that the coronation and royal funeral rites were all “quadrilateral”—repeated four times, a basic requirement but exceedingly difficult to depict in art. Therefore, according to Gardiner, the Egyptian artist resorted to his typical and ingenious tricks. How, for example, would you show Pharaoh being baptized by four officiants, each dousing water on him from a different side and all at once? Any way you arranged it, your picture would be a mess. So the Egyptian artist simply had two priests baptizing the king, one standing on either side, but they dressed up one of these figures as *Thoth*, who can and in this case does signify the gods of all of the four directions in this single person.²⁴³ In lion-couch scenes the Egyptian artists had a special trick to show the four heads without hopelessly scrambling their drawings: in the birth and nursing scenes it was usual to show *two* lion couches, one standing directly on top of the other, and to adorn each bed with *two* lion heads, one on each end (see p. 225, fig. 27B). It was, as you can see, a perfectly fantastic arrangement, which can have had only one purpose—to show all four lion heads distinctly in a tidy design.²⁴⁴ That trick is never used in funerary lion-couch scenes, where the four canopic jars are used instead. Along with the many other things they could represent, those four, as we shall soon see, always stood in the eyes of the Egyptians before everything else as representative of “this earth in its four quarters,” exactly as Joseph Smith says.

Dick: But aren't they jars for holding the insides of the dead person?

Mr. Jones: Certainly, and those insides were thought of as composed of the four elements, brought together to form the body of man from the four quarters of the earth.

Jane: But they also represent idols.

243. Gardiner, “Baptism of Pharaoh,” 11–12.

244. Weindler, *Geburts- und Wochenbettsdarstellungen*, Abb. 27, 28, show this distinctly.

Mr. Jones: Yes, idols of gods of the four quarters. We'll talk about them later. But first, since we are talking about lions, we might as well get rid of the *crocodile*, the savage companion of the lion, whose appearance in the Joseph Smith Papyrus is quite significant, I think.

Facsimile 1, Figure 9

"*The idolatrous god of Pharaoh.*" First of all, I find it odd that the crocodile never turns up in any of the nearly two hundred other lion-couch scenes I have looked at, though he often turns up in an adjacent scene—but always and only when there is sacrificing going on. The prominence of the animal in Joseph Smith Papyrus I therefore calls for some serious study. What do you think of first when you see a lion?

Jane: Get out of the way!

Mr. Jones: Yes. The first reaction to the sight of old Leo is that this is a dangerous and powerful beast. But that is not all you think of—as you get to know the animal and his habits better, he comes to mean all sorts of things to you, as we have just seen. Well, what is the first thing you think of when you see a monster crocodile?

Jane: Even more get out of the way!

Mr. Jones: That's true. A crocodile is even more alarming than a lion and harder to get to know. The Egyptians assigned the same primary functions to lions and crocodiles as you just did: their business is to chase people. If the lion fortress guarded the northeast frontier of Egypt, the crocodiles that swarmed in the lakes and marshes there actually did keep unwelcome Arab and Libyan invaders from crossing over without authorization, or fugitives from Egypt from escaping.²⁴⁵ In the Egyptian romances the hero's crossing to the other world is barred at the desert by lions and at the waters by crocodiles.²⁴⁶ In the temple of Seti I two crocodiles kneel

245. Diodorus, *Library* 1.89; Pliny, *Natural History* 37.26–28.

246. The Tale of the Two Brothers 6/6–7, in Alan H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories* (Brussels: FERE, 1932), 15.

under two lion-headed gods holding huge *sacrificial* knives, with the sacred head of Osiris on a pole before them,²⁴⁷ and here is a funeral scene in which Nefertem the lion sacrifices the enemy of Egypt in rites at which Sobek the crocodile presides.²⁴⁸ A terrible duo, but just as the Egyptians through long familiarity began to value certain traits of the lion, so they saw that the crocodile was not without its virtues.

Dick: What virtues, I would like to know.

Mr. Jones: Ferocity, fecundity, and above all rapacity were the conspicuous qualities of the beast,²⁴⁹ and if those qualities in the crocodile, the lion, and the wolf in that order inspire a sort of awe,²⁵⁰ they are not without their usefulness—the world needs scavengers, especially in exuberantly fertile subtropical regions such as Egypt. But still, Dick is right. The good done by marauding and predatory beasts is not very obvious. Philo, who lived all his life in Egypt, scratched his head in wonder and protested that it was reasonable enough to venerate useful and gentle animals if you must venerate animals at all, “But why crocodiles and lions? What could be more ridiculous?”²⁵¹ And Origen, a native Egyptian, says that he has never been able to find an explanation for such foolishness²⁵²—because the Egyptians did worship the crocodile, you know, even though they hated it.

Jane: They hated it and still they worshipped it?

Mr. Jones: Yes, and visitors to Egypt just couldn’t understand it. It was a prize paradox even for Egypt. From the earliest times the crocodile was worshipped in some parts of Egypt, and at all times his cult was one of the most

247. Gardiner and Calverley, *Temple of King Sethos I*, 3: plate 12.

248. Lanzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, 1: plates XV and XVII.

249. Horapollo, *Hieroglyphica* 1.67, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 589.

250. Alexander of Lycopolis, *On the Manichaeans* 14, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 461–62.

251. Philo, *De posteritate Caini* 48 (165), in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 167.

252. Origen, *Contra Celsum (Against Celsus)* V, 39, in PG 11.

important in the land.²⁵³ Priests would feed and groom the beasts lovingly at their shrines, where sometimes they became quite tame.²⁵⁴

The Egyptians were quite aware of the more unlovely attributes of the crocodile. In some parts of the country it was considered the vilest of creatures and hunted down, and yet “others,” wrote Strabo, “though aware of its dangerous and hateful nature, still worship it—and keep their distance!”²⁵⁵ Those who hunted and even ate the crocodiles justified their action by saying that the beast was everything evil, a creature of Typhon, the mortal enemy of *Horus*.²⁵⁶ In some parts of Egypt people would swim along with the crocs, but not far away others would not even approach the shore where crocodiles might be found.²⁵⁷ While at Crocodilopolis the animals were sacrosanct, a few miles away at Apollinopolis the populace waged systematic war against them.²⁵⁸

Dick: The usual Egyptian confusion.

Mr. Jones: Plutarch says the explanation must be sought not in logical thinking but in some mantic power attributed to the animal, and that one pharaoh died for scorning that particular power.²⁵⁹ “Terrifying is the crocodile which the

253. Heinrich K. Brugsch, “Der Möris-See,” *ZÄS* 31 (1893): 24–25; cf. Charles Kuentz, “Quelques monuments du culte de Sobk,” *Bulletin de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale* 28 (1929): 117; László Kákósy, “Krokodil mit Menschenkopf,” *ZÄS* 90 (1963): 66. For mummified crocodiles, see X. de Gorostarzu, “Lettre sur deux tombeaux de crocodiles découverts au Fayoum,” *ASAE* 2 (1901): 182–84.

254. Plutarch, *De solitudine animae* (*The Solace of the Spirit*) 23 (976B/C), in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 265. Strabo, *Geography* 38, describes a visit to one of the sacred preserves where tourists would feed the crocodiles.

255. Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.44.

256. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 50.

257. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 10.24.

258. Strabo, *Geography* 12.1.47.

259. Plutarch, *Solace of the Spirit* 34 (982C), in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 265–66.

gods fear," says a Coffin Text,²⁶⁰ and Drioton notes that the only reason the dead might want to change into a crocodile is to inspire fear.²⁶¹ It stands for all the worst human attributes; Theodor Hopfner has collected Egyptian terror stories of the bloody crocodiles, which could be scarier than any ghost stories, for the real crocodiles were not far away!²⁶² Naturally there were lots of charms against crocodiles, especially to render them harmless while one passed by the places where they lurked.²⁶³

But still the Egyptians revered the beast. It wasn't just that some Egyptians worshipped crocodiles and some hated them, but that the same people felt mixed emotions. W. M. Flinders Petrie insisted that the Egyptians all hated the crocs, but were so terribly afraid of them that they *had* to worship them to propitiate them. "The crocodile," he wrote, "was always feared, and only worshipped in depreciation."²⁶⁴ This is borne out by this text from the famous Papyrus of Ani where "bowings and prostrations are made"

260. CT 148, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 2:209.

261. Étienne Drioton, review of *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, by Adriaan de Buck, *Bibliotheca orientalis* 10 (1953): 167, citing numerous Coffin Texts.

262. Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter*, 107.

263. Alexandre Moret, "Du musée Calvet à Avignon," *RT* 35 (1913): 55–59; E. A. Wallis Budge, *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*, 2nd ser. (London: British Museum, 1923), 23–24, col. ii–iii. On late charms against the crocodiles, see François Chabas, "Horus sur les crocodiles," in *Oeuvres diverses*, ed. Gaston Maspero, *BE* 12 (Paris: Leroux, 1905), 12. There is a frightening picture of a lady drinking from a stream in the sacred preserve of Amon with a big crocodile watching her on the other side (see Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, *CWHN* 16:92, fig. 21D); the inscription reads, "If I go to the great pool of Amon to drink, may nothing resist me." Kuentz, "Quelques monuments du culte de Sobk," 163–64; Alexandre Piankoff, "Les Deux Papyrus 'Mythologiques' de Her-Ouben au Musée du Caire," *ASAE* 49 (1949): 153, plate 5. A picture from the Fifth Dynasty shows a terrifying crocodile watching a boat go by. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 1:3:401.

264. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Religious Life in Ancient Egypt* (London: Constable, 1924), 85.

to the “terrible crocodile, ravening and dangerous.”²⁶⁵ As Strabo put it, “They worship the most hateful of all animals, the crocodile . . . and avoid it!”²⁶⁶ The equivocal position of the poor Egyptians was like that of the people of India toward their expensive sacred cows: “The country simply swarms with crocodiles,” Diodorus reported, because the people would not catch them, considering them to be sacred, and yet they very much appreciated the work of the little ichneumon in destroying and feeding on crocodile eggs.²⁶⁷ When the son of the first governor of Alexandria was eaten by a crocodile, the priests paid an enormous fine to the governor to keep the animals from being hunted, for they revered the crocodile and did not want it killed.²⁶⁸ There were mixed emotions, you see, though some made an issue and took sides for and against the crocs, as Herodotus and Athanasius report.²⁶⁹ Pliny and Ammianus say the same crocs would be well-behaved during certain ceremonial occasions but dangerous the rest of the time.²⁷⁰

Dick: Like snakes at the Hopi snake dance, I suppose.

Mr. Jones: Gardiner wrote: “We find ourselves plunged into a world of imagery barely credible to the modern mind,” when we consider the Egyptian attitude to the crocodile, and regard this as an instructive lesson in just how perverse ancient thought can be.²⁷¹ But it makes good sense if we consider a number of things. First of all, the crocodile

265. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead: Papyrus of Ani*, 3 vols. (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1913), plate 27, ch. 88.

266. Strabo, *Geography* 17.1.44.

267. Diodorus, *Library* 1.35.7.

268. Aristotle, *Economics* 2.33.

269. Herodotus, *History* 2.69; Athanasius, *Contra Gentes (Against the Pagans)* 23, says this was an excuse for feuding between the towns, though most Egyptians detested crocodiles.

270. Pliny, *Natural History* 8.46 (184–86), in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 192–93; Ammianus, *Res gestae* 22.15 (17), in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 552.

271. Alan H. Gardiner, “Hymns to Sobk in a Ramesseum Papyrus,” *RdE* 11 (1957): 55.

was exactly what Joseph Smith calls him in Facsimile 1, figure 9: “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh.” What most surprises Gardiner, in fact, is that for all its “less attractive aspects” it was this “voracious creature whom an accident of history had raised to the position of the chief divinity of Egypt.”²⁷² He was not only the chief divinity—and that already in the Middle Kingdom—but peculiarly the special god of Pharaoh. It was not only the *most* unloved of creatures, it was also the *most* highly venerated!

Dick: More than any other animal?

Mr. Jones: Much more—in one special connection. It was exclusively and particularly the king’s own totem. Or rather, since there has never been any agreement about totemism in Egypt—

Jane: —or anywhere else, for that matter.

Mr. Jones: Right, but don’t interrupt. Let’s see just how the crocodile was related to the pharaoh; that won’t be hard to find out since our guidebook has a good deal to say about it. The crocodile exhibits in this hall are chronologically arranged; let us begin at the beginning. Crocodilopolis was always one of the top cult-places in Egypt,²⁷³ and the crocodile cult was always important throughout the entire land.²⁷⁴ The story was told at Crocodilopolis that Menes, the first king of a united Egypt, was once pursued by his own dogs while hunting and was rescued and carried to safety across the waters by a crocodile.²⁷⁵ Here is a Pyramid Text that actually says that the king *is* Sobek the croc,²⁷⁶ even though we read in another Pyramid Text that

272. Ibid.

273. Paul Bucher, “Les hymnes à Sobk-Ra, seigneur de Smenou, des papyrus nos 2 et 7 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Strasbourg,” *Kêmi* 1 (1928): 41; Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter*, 125.

274. Stephanus Byzantius, s.v. *Krokodeilon polis*, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 675.

275. Ibid.

276. PT 317 (§§507–10). PT 308 (§489c) and 317 (§510) call Sobek the Son of Neith, and she is sometimes shown nursing two crocodiles. Siegfried

this same Sobek is a vile and licentious beast.²⁷⁷ Still other Pyramid Texts show that in those early times “the deified King appears in vital power in the water as a crocodile,” which Kees calls a concept of prehistoric antiquity.²⁷⁸

Jane: I thought the king was supposed to be a bull in those early times.

Mr. Jones: Here in the Pyramid of Unas (the last king of the Fifth Dynasty), he appears as a wild bull, “but along with that the king is also Sobek,”²⁷⁹ which Joachim Spiegel thinks is a Lower Egyptian idea; at any rate, it was accepted everywhere. Here in this Middle Kingdom mural from Medinet Habu, “the king is the bull of the desert, but he wears the costume of Sobek (the crocodile).”²⁸⁰ By the Fifth Dynasty the anthropomorphic or crocodile-headed Sobek appears wearing various royal crowns, and by the Twelfth Dynasty he is attached to and even identified with the sun-god Re.²⁸¹ Here is a Middle Kingdom hymn to Sobek: “Sobk the Shedite appears gloriously, he has taken rulership of heaven and has filled the Two Lands with his power”; it goes on to say that he wears the *wrrt*-crown and is worshipped by “the sun-folk in Heliopolis,” that he “seizes

Schott, “RS-N.T und MH-N.T als Häuser der Neith,” *RdE* 19 (1967): 107; Hermann Kees, “Mythologica—Suchos der *itj* und Osiris, König (*itj*) zu Gast im Seeland,” *ZÄS* 88 (1963): 30, making them fellow-infants with Pharaoh. In a poem called “the Works of Shu,” Pharaoh himself in an exciting adventure becomes a crocodile, in Georges Goyon, “Les travaux de Chou et les tribulations de Geb d’après le Naos 2248 d’Ismailia,” *Kêmi* 6 (1936): 36.

277. PT 317 (§510).

278. Kees, “Mythologica,” 30.

279. Joachim Spiegel, “Das Auferstehungsritual der Unaspyramide,” *ASAE* 53 (1956): 434, this being part of the “resurrection-ritual of the Pyramid of Unas.”

280. Paul Barguet, “Le rituel archaïque de foudation des temples de Medinet-Habou et de Louxor,” *RdE* 9 (1952): 11.

281. *Ibid.*, 11 n. 5.

the *mks*-scepter and the *Wrrt*-crown . . . ruler among the gods . . . who steals the *Wrrt*-crown."²⁸²

Jane: But how could a dirty old crocodile ever be the sun?

Mr. Jones: In the hymns it calls him the "Duplicate of Re, great luminary that came forth from the flood, . . . son of Neith in Abydos."²⁸³ I think that explains it. Sobek is understandably the god of the shallow waters from which life emerged in the beginning; he appears out of the water even as the sun appears rising from the primordial waters on the first day "in splendor."²⁸⁴ He is the only animal I know of that spends half his time basking in the tropical sun and the other half basking in the tropical water.

Jane: "How doth the little crocodile . . ."

Mr. Jones: To be sure. Here is a Coffin Text that describes a monster crocodile, "the Lord of Bakhu (*B3ḥw*)," holding out with the huge serpents of primordial times in sacred and dangerous haunts above the river—it is the sort of thing that could go way back.²⁸⁵ In this text the first of all thrones, the throne of "the king of everything," is established "at the place of the four crocodiles," the king explaining to the crocs who occupy the four regions that he is going to create the realm of Re anew on earth and asking for their approval.²⁸⁶ It is as if the crocodiles as the original inhabitants of the land must grant permission to the king himself to settle and take over.²⁸⁷ At any rate, by the Middle Kingdom the Sobek element in the royal names shows "that the crocodile-god was still thought of as somehow connected with the monarchy," according to Gardiner.²⁸⁸ This was a survival of older

282. Gardiner, "Hymns to Sobk in a Ramesseum Papyrus," 52–54.

283. *Ibid.*, 46–47.

284. Giuseppe Botti, *La Glorificazione di Sobk e del Fayyum in un papiro ieratico da Tebtynis* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959), 5–6.

285. CT 160, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 2:375–77.

286. Goyon, "Travaux de Chou et les tribulations de Geb," 37.

287. *Ibid.*

288. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 151.

times, but it carried right over until the end—in fact, in the later dynasties the kings of Egypt were especially devoted to the crocodile. Bonnet has given us a useful summary of the whole story. In the Twelfth Dynasty, it says, Sobek “became a god of the residence, and as such came to be very close to the royal house,” and “also the kings of the Thirteenth to Seventeenth Dynasties [where most scholars put Abraham, incidentally] . . . prefer names containing homage to the crocodile.” Note that: “homage to the crocodile.”²⁸⁹

Jane: What’s homage?

Mr. Jones: Submission. Here on a crocodile statue it says that Sobek is “the Horus who resides at Crocodilopolis” and that the king is a unique friend of Sobek.²⁹⁰ Here it says “May the king make offerings to Sobek of Crocodilopolis,” who is described as a depository of all the attributes of power and authority.²⁹¹ Gardiner is right—the croc has something very special to do with royal power; here is a papyrus from the Fayyum that depicts the crocodile not as Pharaoh but as the god of Pharaoh.²⁹² According to Bonnet, the submission of Pharaoh to the crocodile down to the latest times is attested “by the association of the crocodile with the royal image on the monuments and in annals. Hence even the Ptolemies revered the crocodile *as their ancestor*.”²⁹³ And so Bonnet sums it up: “Sobek absorbs the god of the king into himself” (“*Sobek nimmt also den Königsgott in sich auf*”), so that “hymns of praise to the king and his crowns can be addressed directly to Sobek”—that is, the croc *is* the god of Pharaoh. Bonnet believes that it all goes back to the early

289. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 756.

290. Robert-P. Charles, “Le Statue-Cube de Sobek-Hotep, Gouverneur du Fayoum,” *RdE* 12 (1960): 17, 15.

291. *Ibid.*, 14–15.

292. Percy E. Newberry, *The Amherst Papyri* (London: Quaritch, 1899), P. Fayûm I–II (plates XV–XVI).

293. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 756 (emphasis added).

identity with the rising sun-god, which explains why the Egyptians “were fond of designating Sobek as nothing less than ‘the living image’ or even more popularly, the *ka* (the power and essence) of Re,” so that he finally ends up like Pharaoh as nothing less than the Universal God.²⁹⁴

Dick: Pretty good for an old croc. Don’t any of the other animals rate the same sort of promotion?

Mr. Jones: No. Though other beasts are honored in different ways, only the crocodile gets to wear all the royal *crowns*. He is uniquely and exactly what Joseph Smith calls him, “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh.”

Dick: In that case, what’s he doing snooping around the altar?

Mr. Jones: Well, for one thing he shows that it *is* an altar. You will never find a croc like that in an embalming scene—what good would he do there? But in a sacrificial setting he is right at home.

Dick: Why?

Mr. Jones: In an embalming operation the whole idea is to *preserve* everything possible of the remains; but sacrifice aims at transmitting the life and substance of the victim to somebody else, and that requires transforming it. Your little old crocodile was just the party to take care of that operation. We talked about the idea of a transfusion in the lion-couch complex. Who received the life-giving transfusion of the victim’s blood?

Dick and Jane: The king did.

Mr. Jones: But how? It is easy enough to shed blood all over the place—the human race excels at that—but how can a king or anybody else absorb it?

Dick: By eating it. He used to be a cannibal—everybody knows that!

Mr. Jones: Back in 1912 the one professor who ventured a guess about the crocodile in Facsimile 1 said, “I see a crocodile

294. Ibid., 756–57, 759.

waiting to seize and devour the dead if he be not properly protected by ritual embalming against such a fate."²⁹⁵ That's a pretty good guess, wouldn't you say? The croc is there to devour something because that is the one thing he is good at. It is not surprising that crocodiles infested places where sacrifices were going on, is it? They are scavengers. They share that activity with lions: Here the Nefertem lion *kills* an enemy *prisoner* at a rite at which *Sobek* presides;²⁹⁶ here two crocs kneel before two lion-headed gods, all holding huge sacrificial knives, and all facing the severed and enshrined head of Osiris on a pole.²⁹⁷ We have seen that a royal sacrificial victim was necessarily an enemy, and Hermann Junker showed "that even when a sacrificed animal is identified with an evil power . . . it must be *eaten* by the God."²⁹⁸ How could the king do that once he had given up cannibalism, in the days of Osiris?

Dick: By substitution, of course, just as he avoided being sacrificed himself.

Mr. Jones: And who would his substitute be? Before you answer that impulsively, let me give you some hints. Plutarch says that long before his day the head of the Typhonian victim was thrown into the river;²⁹⁹ and long before him Herodotus reported that the Egyptians believed that the royal sacrifice had to be consumed by a beast.³⁰⁰ Here is a text from the Louvre addressing the sacrificed Seth: "Thy heart is given to Khentesktai, who hands it over to the

295. Dr. John Peters, in Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow, 1912; reprint, Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1965), 28.

296. Lanzone, *Dizionario di mitologia egizia*, 1: plates XV–XVIII.

297. Gardiner and Calverley, *Temple of King Sethos I*, 3: plate 12.

298. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:26, citing Junker.

299. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 31.

300. Herodotus, *History* 3.16, the beast being equivalent to fire in that capacity. In early Jewish and Christian apocrypha "the ravening lion" is the inexorable process by which all material things suffer oxidation and destruction.

crocodile,” while intestines are fed to the cat Bast.³⁰¹ In the archaic rites of Kom Ombos, a hawk (Horus) was crucified and mourned as the victim of the crocodile.³⁰² At Heliopolis in the resurrection rites “the snatcher” was a sacred crocodile with a feather in his head.³⁰³ The old croc is right in there at the great local cult centers because he has an indispensable function to perform in the sacrifices. In prehistoric times he was especially important as Souchos, the lord of the famous shrine of Osiris at Busiris—and you know what that means.

Jane: What does it mean?

Mr. Jones: Human sacrifice. Busiris was at all times the legendary and historical headquarters of human sacrifice in Egypt, and who presides there? “Busiris is given to Suchos,” says this Coffin Text; Souchos is “lord of Busiris,” says another; and another calls him “the fatherly sovereign.”³⁰⁴ And so we get more crocodile *paradoxes*: Here in the tomb of King Tutankhamun he sits enthroned as a king—but with two powerful wedges driven into his head so that he can’t harm anybody!³⁰⁵ In the Ninth Dynasty the wicked king Achthoes, “more cruel than all his predecessors . . . was smitten with madness and killed by a crocodile.”³⁰⁶ Here the crocodile turns the tables on a wicked king who practiced human sacrifice and so performs a worthy service. However, in other cases it is the other way around, when a righteous pharaoh overcomes the evil principle, embodied as a crocodile.³⁰⁷ We have a dual personality here: a hymn of Kom

301. Book of Repelling the Angry One (Louvre N. 3129) 8/49–53, in Schott, *Urkunden mythologischen Inhalts*, 81.

302. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 10.24, noting that at Coptus “they reverence the hawk as the enemy of the crocodile.”

303. Horapollon, *Hieroglyphica* 1.67, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 589.

304. All in Kees, “Mythologica,” 32–33.

305. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, fig. 32 no. 3.

306. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 107.

307. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:8.

Ombos that hails, "Sobek, Re, Lord of Ombos, who loveth to show *mercy* after his *anger*."³⁰⁸ The most striking example of the double role of the crocodile is its function *as Horus*; Kees wrote an article about it.³⁰⁹ While one tradition makes the crocodile the Typhonian beast Seth that rent and scattered the members of Osiris all over the landscape, another makes it Horus, the gatherer and preserver of those very same scattered members.³¹⁰ The crocodile, says Junker, is both Horus who finds and assembles the members of Osiris, *and* the destroyer who, Isis fears, has eaten Osiris.³¹¹

Dick: How could it be both?

Mr. Jones: Kees considered this a prize example of Egyptian paradox. The crocodile "Sobk is the sun, but *also* a divinity of darkness";³¹² he is the adversary Seth of Osiris, yet it is he who bears the body of Osiris reverently to Philae (fig. 30).³¹³ In the great festival of Khoiak, Horus "comes bringing on the water . . . the members of Osiris in his form of a crocodile. A *transformation* takes place in the temple of Osiris in his name of Crocodile, Lord of Amu," and all this takes place as part of a lion-couch rite.³¹⁴ Here is an inscription from the *abaton* of Philae: "Horus came and brought the limbs of Osiris out of the water in his (Horus's) form of

308. Hermann Junker, "Ein Doppelhymnus aus Kom Ombo," *ZÄS* 67 (1931): 55. The crocodile is besought to "be merciful to King Ammenemes, through whom thy face is happy on this day." Gardiner, "Hymns to Sobk in a Ramesseum Papyrus," 48.

309. Hermann Kees, "Kulttopographische und mythologische Beiträge," *ZÄS* 64 (1929): 107–12, noting that nothing could be more repugnant "to our feelings" than to identify Horus with a crocodile, *ibid.*, 107.

310. Eberhard Otto, "Thot als Stellvertreter des Seth," *Orientalia* 7 (1938): 75.

311. Junker, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, 43.

312. [Source unidentified—eds.]

313. Friedrich Zimmermann, *Die ägyptische Religion nach der Darstellung der Kirchenschriftsteller und die ägyptischen Denkmäler* (Paderborn: Schöningh 1912), 108.

314. Victor Loret, "Les Fêtes d'Osiris au Mois de Khoiak," *RT* 4 (1883): 31; Victor Loret, "Fêtes d'Osiris au Mois de Khoiak," *RT* 5 (1883): 90–91.

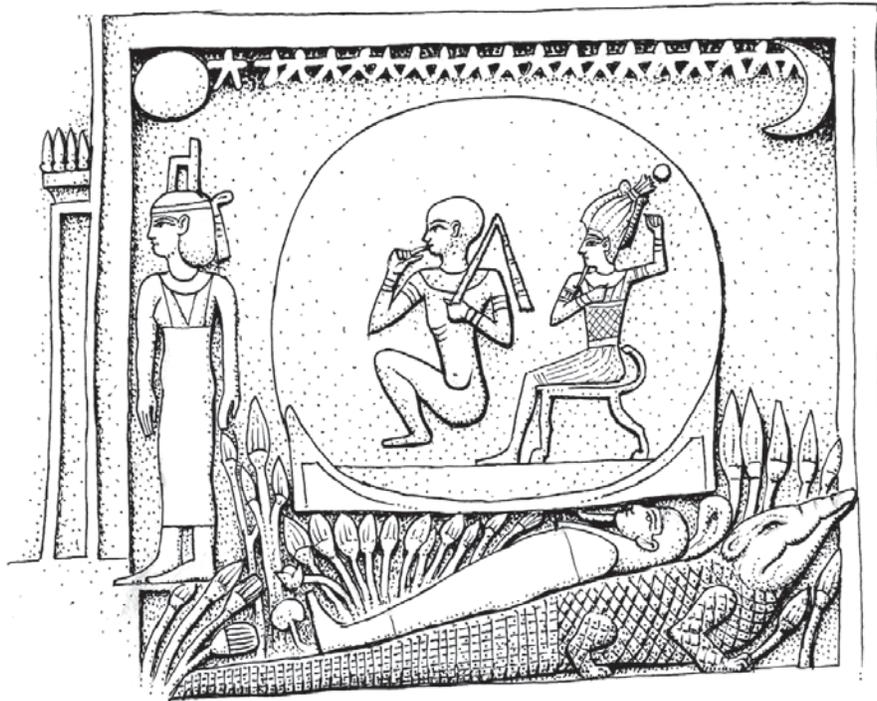


Figure 30. The mummy of Osiris is carried obligingly through a papyrus marsh by a crocodile. As usual, Isis stands at the gateway. The sun disk on the horizon above him contains divine figures representing new life. Gate of Hadrian at Philae, ca. A.D. 170.

a crocodile, to join them together in the House of Osiris.” There you have it: the crocodile kills and scatters the members, which he then gathers together again as a special favor. Professor Eberhard Otto finds that very strange.³¹⁵

Dick: So do I.

Mr. Jones: But it is quite logical if we understand the very useful function that the terrible crocodile must perform in sacrificial rites. How was Menes, the first king of Egypt, saved by a crocodile?

Jane: By being carried across the water.

Mr. Jones: Yes. The Greek version says he was being saved from his dogs—an idea familiar from Greek mythology—but

315. Otto, “Thot als Stellvertreter des Seth,” 75, quoted by Junker, *Das Götterdekret über das Abaton*, 43.

the much older Egyptian version says Menes was actually killed by a hippopotamus (the kings used to indulge in dangerous ritual hippo hunts), but that a crocodile saved him from death.³¹⁶ Now this business of a dead person being carried over the waters is very familiar in Egyptian literature. Just as the crocodile bore the body of Osiris to Philae, a sacred island forbidden to mortals and cut off from the earth by surrounding waters, so, it was taught, the crocodile would “bear the body . . . of every person through the heavenly waters” after death.³¹⁷ In the story of the Two Brothers, the elder brother weeps for the younger, who after his sacrificial death cannot be reached because of the crocodiles in the waters that separate them.³¹⁸ You see what this means: What is the service performed by the crocodile in these cases?

Dick: He carries people across to the other world.

Mr. Jones: Yes, he transports them; he provides the means of making the transition. As in the rites of Khoiak, he makes a “transformation” of the body of Osiris possible. Herodotus says that when any Egyptian was carried away either by a crocodile or by the Nile, he was deemed so sacred that no one but a priest could touch him, and his city had to bury him with sacred rites.³¹⁹ The “Ombites considered it a great honor to be eaten by a crocodile and believed that people thus sacrificed were the darlings of the god.”³²⁰ Josephus says that the Egyptians of his day considered anyone carried away by crocs to be “most blessed and worthy of the god.”³²¹ Aelian reported that the Egyptians rejoiced to have their children carried off by crocodiles and that the mother of such a child was highly honored in her commu-

316. Stephanus Byzantius, above, note 273.

317. Zimmermann, *Die ägyptische Religion*, 108.

318. Tale of the Two Brothers 8/1, in Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, 17.

319. Herodotus, *History* 2.90.

320. Zimmermann, *Ägyptische Religion*, 106.

321. Josephus, *Contra Apionem (Against Apion)* 2.7.86.

nity;³²² Maximus of Tyre tells about an Egyptian woman who rejoiced when her son was eaten by a pet crocodile that she herself had raised up, deeming him “a fitting gift to the local god.”³²³

In all these cases the victims were considered as sacrifices and as happily transported across the waters to a better world; the crocodile, as Frankfort puts it, is really “a set of functions,” one of which is transportation and transformation, exemplified in the efficient way in which it removes its clients out of this world.³²⁴ Down until late times the Ombites would throw the heads of all sacrificial victims to the sacred crocodiles, which would make short work of the remains; at the same time, according to our informant, the people of a neighboring city said that the crocodiles were the embodiment of Typhon, the destroyer.³²⁵ Well, why not? Seth or Typhon dispatched Osiris and sent him out of the world—that was a necessary function if there was to be a resurrection, a valued and necessary service that needed to be done, and as such the Egyptians appreciated it and the crocodile. That is why “the crocodile appears to the Egyptians as a mighty symbol of the resurrected divine king. The Osiris myth was able to exploit the idea. . . . [Osiris] became ‘Suchos, the Lord of the marsh.’”³²⁶

Dick: So now the crocodile is not only Seth who killed Osiris, and Horus who saved him, but he is also Osiris himself. Isn't that a bit steep?

Mr. Jones: He doesn't have to be everything *at once*. In the feast of Osiris the *fekty* priest says, “I am Horus, I have come to thee, mighty goddess, bringing the body of my father. . . .

322. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 10.21.

323. Maximus of Tyre, *Philosophy* II, 5f/I (26a), in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 351.

324. Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 25.

325. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 10.21.

326. Kees, “Mythologica,” 30 (emphasis added).

A model is then placed on a lion couch in a special chamber." It is explained that "Horus in the form of a crocodile brings his father's members, for on *this* day he is to be *transformed*."³²⁷ The model is then placed on its back.

Dick: The good old lion-couch drama.

Mr. Jones: Yes, and a crocodile as Horus, the living king, is one of the actors. The Osiris figure is then removed from the bed and set upright on a golden stand, to be exposed to the sun and painted green—obviously Osiris coming to life again.³²⁸ Here are a lot of later amulets showing Horus treading on the crocodiles while holding dangerous lions by the tails (see p. 434, fig. 57)—it is a charm to protect people and houses against these beasts and represents the "renewal of youth," the overcoming of the most dangerous threats to life by the reborn Horus.³²⁹ As Seth seeks to destroy the newly born Horus, his mother is told to flee across the waters until she reaches "the house of the crocodile" in the Delta, where she and her son will be safe.³³⁰ If you want a shockingly literal concept of resurrection, Pliny says that though the crocodiles of Egypt are a terror to the wicked, they can even be ridden by the righteous and can by the proper treatment be induced to regurgitate their victims for burial.³³¹

Jane: How nasty!

Mr. Jones: The Egyptians thought it was a salutary performance. Dick, would you say the crocodile's power was, on the whole, good or bad?

Dick: That depends on how it is used.

Mr. Jones: Exactly. Kees says that it was precisely because the crocodile was so dangerous that its power was

327. Mariette, *Dendérah*, 4:37.

328. Loret, "Fêtes d'Osiris au Mois de Khoiak," 90–91.

329. Chabas, "Horus sur les crocodiles," 12–13.

330. Constantin E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1956), 50 (Spruch IX, lines 89–90). 41 (Spruch VI, line 53).

331. Pliny, *Natural History* 37.92–93.

coveted—to do what? For one thing, according to Kees, to do just what the lion did and play the part of “a dangerous guardian.” It specialized in guarding the severed head of Osiris, as in this impressive scene from the tomb of Seti I.³³² Since the heads and hearts of sacrificial victims were in early times thrown to the crocodiles, we can pretty well guess where this idea came from.

Dick: The croc would “take care” of those items, all right!

Mr. Jones: Yes, by properly disposing of them. There is a Middle Kingdom offering tablet of which Kees makes a good deal, which declares that anyone who damages the offerings must come under the dread knife of the Horus-crocodile himself.³³³ So it is clear that the dire talents of the crocodile were in special demand in sacrificial situations. In the Joseph Smith Papyrus it makes little difference whether we think of the crocodile as Horus or Seth: in either case he provides an unmistakable clue to the *kind* of death the person on the couch must face. As “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh,” he is the form in which Pharaoh is able to consume the flesh and blood of his victims (an idea often expressed in the sacrificial liturgy) and to be refreshed and renewed by them. Remember those early sacrificial texts we read in which the king was told that the enemy’s blood was being shed so that *he* could be revived and rejuvenated by it? It was not enough merely to shed blood—it had to be consumed in some way, and by whom more effectively than by the efficient scavengers to whom the hearts and heads of sacrificial victims were thrown, the terrifying embodiment

332. Kees, “Kulttopographische und mythologische Beiträge,” 110. In the tomb of Seti I a huge crocodile lies on a grave mound facing a sacrificial head, directly under which is a *lion couch*. Lefébure, *Les hypogées royaux de Thebes*, 2: plate XLVI.

333. Kees, “Kulttopographische und mythologische Beiträge,” 108, identifying the god on p. 109. The text is in Kurt Sethe, *Erläuterungen zu den Ägyptische Lesestücken: Texte des mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927), 145–46.

of primordial kingship that swarmed in sacred immunity around the oldest sacrificial altars of the land? So it is anything but fantastic to designate the crocodile in Facsimile 1 as “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh” in his capacity of participating in a sacrificial scene.

But let us get back to the main stream of our story. The man on the altar, being in mortal peril, prays for deliverance, and God sends an angel and rescues him. Now before we get into the extensive literary treatments of that theme, there is a little item that it would be well to get out of the way, and that is what we should have started with.

Facsimile 1, Figure 1

“*The Angel of the Lord.*” What we want to ask is, since when is a hawk an angel? Some have maintained not only that figure 1 in the papyrus *should* have been a human head, but that it actually *does* have one (fig. 31).

Dick: Wouldn't that make a better angel than one with a hawk's head?

Mr. Jones: By the conventions of Christian art it would. But there are serious objections to accepting a human head on the Egyptian bird.

Dick: Why? I've seen lots of Egyptian soul-birds with human heads.

Mr. Jones: Yes, but none as hard to recognize as this one, I'll wager. And if you go and dig up all those human-headed birds, you will find that every one of them has conspicuous legs and claws in which he is holding *ankh*-signs or *shw*-feathers, and in many cases arms have been added to the legs—arms upraised in prayer. But this bird has no legs at all, let alone arms—he is another kind of bird. Joseph Smith was on very solid ground in identifying the hawk in Facsimile 1 (no matter who drew it!) as “the Angel of the Lord,” because according to Egyptian thinking the very best way to show an angel was by a hawk. The trouble with interpreting Egyptian birds is that there are so many of them and



Figure 31. “The Angel of the Lord” (Fac. 1, fig. 1): In the many representations of a bird flying over a figure on a lion couch, the bird almost always has a bird’s head instead of a human head. This seems to disturb Egyptologists, who prefer a human-headed *ba*-bird to something else. Professor T. G. Allen refers to this figure as one having “an unerased falcon head.” This particular vignette accompanies Book of the Dead chapter 85, in which the deceased prays to be delivered from a sacrificial death. P. Ryerson. Early Ptolemaic. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago.

birds seem to be just naturally symbolical—mantic, if you will. If you look over a hundred or so lion-couch scenes, you will find that the birds perform in a great variety of roles—sometimes there are five, sometimes only one, but they are all there for a purpose, though not for the same purpose. That is what makes it so confusing. The experts back in 1912 disagreed about the bird in Facsimile 1 more than anything else—one scholar said it was one thing and another said it was another, and this is one time when comparison with *other* lion-couch scenes only confuses the issue.

Dick: Why?

Mr. Jones: Because you will find among the others not one consistent bird pattern, but all kinds of birds doing all

kinds of things. Just look at this lion-couch scene in the shrine of Opet (see p. 183, fig. 20): There is only one bird there, flying above the man on the couch—but what a bird! Varille recognized it as a *ba*-bird.³³⁴

Jane: What is a *ba*-bird?

Mr. Jones: That is the part of a person that enters his body when he is born and leaves it when he dies.

Dick: It must be his spirit, then.

Mr. Jones: That is what the *ba* is—a representation of the human spirit. Not because human spirits look like birds, but because the idea of a bird best represents the spirit's lightness and its ability to move freely and spurn the heavy gravity of the earth. As Drioton wrote, "Nothing was ever farther from the Egyptian mentality than metempsychosis."

Jane: What's metempsychosis?

Mr. Jones: That is when human beings actually take over forms other than human: this depicting of gods and men in animal form is never to be taken literally, according to Drioton.³³⁵

Jane: But if they always drew spirits like birds, wouldn't people come to think they were birds?

Mr. Jones: Frankfort suggests that it was to avoid that very mistake that "in tomb designs the dead are depicted as birds with human heads—possibly a graphic device to distinguish them from real birds."³³⁶ Some people have insisted that the bird in Facsimile 1 should have a human head, or even that it does have one. But is it necessary? Look at all these other lion-couch scenes: how many birds do you see?

Dick: About a hundred, I guess.

Mr. Jones: And how many of them have human heads?

Dick: I can see only four.

334. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 111 and plate XIX.

335. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 167.

336. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 97.

Mr. Jones: You see, statistics are all in favor of giving our bird a hawk's head. But statistics aren't everything. Look—in our prize exhibit, the Opet scene, the bird does have a human head. It has been recognized, of course, as a *ba*-bird, but that is only the beginning of the story. Notice that the bird has the body of the vulture *Mwt*, showing that it is Osiris's *mother*, but it has the claws of the inundation-bird, *bḥ*, showing that it is the beginning of life. At the same time it wears the beard and feather-crown of Amon, and the inscription tells us that it is "Amon-Re, the sublime soul of Osiris, which alights on his corpse in his place of birth." That means, according to Varille, that "the figure on the lion couch is the counterpart of the bird above."³³⁷ Now tell me how many people that one bird is!

Jane: First of all, if it is a *ba* it must be the soul of Osiris. Oh yes, it even says so: "The sublime *ba* of Osiris . . ."

Dick: It's only his counterpart.

Mr. Jones: It says here, "The august spirit (*ba*) of Osiris is coming to unite itself with his body." For a bringing together of spirit and body, both father and mother are necessary. And who is the king when he is reborn?

Jane: Oh, I know. It's Horus. Is the bird Horus, too?

Dick: But Horus is always a hawk, don't you know? Say! Maybe that's why they don't draw a hawk's head on the bird—because if they did everybody would think it was only Horus and nothing else.

Jane: But then what do they do when they want to show that the bird *is* Horus too, along with all those other things?

Dick: Draw another bird, I suppose—a real hawk.

Jane: But that's too complicated.

Mr. Jones: Is anything more complicated than what we have here? That seems to be exactly the kind of complication we get in these lion-couch scenes. If you will just look

337. Varille, "La grande porte du temple d'Apet à Karnak," 111.

in the south sanctuary at Opet, you will see a scene showing how “little Horus” takes hawk form during a gestation period in the marshes, “his temporal father being Osiris who revives in his son, but whose spiritual father is the life-giving Amon.”³³⁸ The hawk can be Osiris as well as his father, his mother, and his son! The whole amazing operation takes place on the lion couch, and to put over the whole message, a variety of birds is necessary. It is as silly to think that a bird can have only one significance as to think the same of a lion couch. Our guidebook says that the original soul-bird of Osiris was the *benu*-bird, nothing less than the phoenix of Heliopolis, but that ordinary spirits were usually represented by the crested ibis, the *akh*-bird, and that from the Middle Kingdom on soul-birds were shown without human heads as herons, storks, swallows, lapwings, geese, and falcons—that is, always by *migrating* birds.³³⁹

Dick: Because spirits migrate, I suppose.

Mr. Jones: But here is a study that says that the spirits of the dead are represented by falcons only *after* the Middle Kingdom.³⁴⁰ Before that the hawk and falcon were reserved for the royal Horus alone:³⁴¹ there is certainly no shortage of evidence for that! Only in the latest period is “the falcon sometimes confused with the soul-bird.”³⁴² Here Luise Klebs tells how the soul-bird can signify that the soul is flying away or that it can serve as a protector or a guide; or brood upon the body as an egg, looking forward to future resurrection; or fan it with its wings to preserve or restore

338. Ibid., 111–12.

339. Luise Klebs, “Der ägyptische Seelenvogel,” *ZÄS* 61 (1926): 105–7.

340. Wilhelm Spiegelberg, “Die Falkenbezeichnung des Verstorbenen in der Spätzeit,” *ZÄS* 62 (1927): 27–29.

341. Ibid., 29. Klebs, “Der ägyptische Seelenvogel,” 104–5, found that human-headed soul-birds never appear in the Book of the Dead until the Eighteenth Dynasty, when, though some of them are water-birds, most are falcon types.

342. Spiegelberg, “Die Falkenbezeichnung,” 29.

the breath of life, etc.³⁴³ While the hawk on the ceiling of Tut's tomb may be the king's soul flying away *to* heaven,³⁴⁴ he can just as well be flying "*from* heaven as a hawk."³⁴⁵ If he can go one way he can go the other; that perhaps is why the hawk is the *only* symbol to appear in all the known pre-dynastic palettes and maces—because he alone represents the certain tie between heaven and earth.³⁴⁶

Dick: How come?

Mr. Jones: Because of his special qualifications. For the ancients, the hawk, which could soar out of sight in the sky, was the only bird that could fly between heaven and earth, that could go to the sun and return.³⁴⁷ If the king was going to heaven, it would have to be as a hawk or falcon, chosen to represent both the soul of the king and the sun to which he returned, "because it excelled all other birds known to the Egyptians in its ability to fly at a very great height."³⁴⁸ That is why we find on the seals of the very earliest kings the majestic image of "the hawk dweller in the heaven" sitting above the archaic *serekh*, the palace gate, as the one who communicates between the earthly and the heavenly dwelling of royalty.³⁴⁹ From the beginning, "every king placed great importance on his identification with the Horus hawk," emphasizing that he had come from afar, from heaven itself.³⁵⁰ The name Horus comes from *ḥry*, "to be far

343. Klebs, "Der ägyptische Seelenvogel," 105.

344. So Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 44.

345. Siegfried Morenz, *Ägyptische Religion* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 159.

346. Werner Kaiser, "Einige Bemerkungen zur ägyptischen Frühzeit," *ZÄS* 84 (1959): 122–24.

347. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 10.14; Hopfner, *Der Tierkult der alten Ägypter*, 111.

348. Edwards, *Pyramids of Egypt*, 25.

349. Peter Kaplony, "Eine Schminkepalette von König Skorpion aus Abu 'Umûri (Untersuchung zur ältesten Horustitular)," *Orientalia* 34 (1965): 146; cf. 145, 150.

350. *Ibid.*, 153.

off,' sometimes, 'to betake oneself to a distance.'" The first king of a united Egypt designated himself as "he who is in the distant heaven" to emphasize the heavenly and supernatural nature of his power as that of "Great God, Lord of the Heavens," which of course got him identified with the sun-god Re in short order.³⁵¹ The idea behind the early seals seems to be expressed in Coffin Text 148: "See Horus, you gods! I am Horus, the Falcon who is on the battlements of the Mansion of Him whose name is hidden. My flight aloft has reached the horizon, I have overpassed the gods of the sky. . . . I go up in my flight, and there is no god who can do what I have done. . . . I am Horus, more distant of place than men or gods."³⁵² Here is a still earlier one: "The king is no longer on earth but in heaven. . . . He sails to heaven like the flamingo and kisses the sky like a hawk."³⁵³ Here is a study by the renowned Professor Schott in which he tells us that the hawk offers the student a particularly useful insight into the relationship between speculation and image in Egyptian thinking.³⁵⁴ He cites inscriptions telling how the hawk "flies up even to heaven," "opens [his] wings to the limits of the world," and "speeds through this world to the place of light."³⁵⁵ In this capacity he bears the names of "Announcer" (*Ausspruch*, Hw) and "Knower" (*Erkenntnis*, Sia), showing him to be the messenger of messengers.³⁵⁶ Now as the one being that can pass freely between the remotest reaches of the universe and the earth, the hawk is preeminently qualified—in fact, he is the only fully qualified candidate—for the job of heavenly messenger (fig. 32).

351. Hermann Junker, *Giza: Bericht über die von Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, 12 vols. (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1934), 2:51–52.

352. CT 148 (in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 2:222–25), cited by Raymond O. Faulkner, "The Pregnancy of Isis," *JEA* 54 (1968): 41.

353. PT 476 (§§890–91).

354. Siegfried Schott, "Falke, Geier und Ibis als Krönungsboten," *ZÄS* 95 (1968): 55.

355. *Ibid.*, 55, 62, 61.

356. *Ibid.*, 55, 56.

Jane: You mean like the angels in the Bible?

Mr. Jones: If you will look up all the references to wings in the Bible, you will find that wings are never found on angels, but are often referred to in a purely symbolic sense. Just so the Egyptians, as Drioton noted, did not for a moment believe that an angel would really take the form of a hawk, but thought that a hawk was a very expressive symbol of the way in which angels get around.³⁵⁷ Gardiner, who says that “the concept of ‘messengers’ who performed the behests of the gods is known from the Book of the Dead and elsewhere, e.g. Pyramid Text, ed. Sethe, 1252.b,”³⁵⁸ is also good enough to point out that the Greeks called such a messenger an “angelos,” from which our own word *angel* is derived.³⁵⁹ The sign of such a messenger is and always was the hawk or falcon. “The hawk is the divine messenger who brought the book of Wisdom to Thebes,” according to Diodorus; “though they understand this *symbolically*,” he explains, “it is said at Thebes that a hawk brought the divine book from heaven to the priests”; for that reason “the priestly scribes [*hierogrammateis*] wear a red *ramma* and a hawk’s feather on their heads.”³⁶⁰ Either the god or his representative could be the messenger—indeed, the messenger as an ambassador was necessarily an embodiment of him who sent him: “He comes for life as a Messenger of Horus,” says a Pyramid Text, in which messengers are sent “on the wing of Thoth.”³⁶¹ Aelian reports that “the Egyptians say that the living hawk is a blessed bird and that after death it can prophesy and send prophetic

357. The winged creatures in Daniel and Revelation and Ezekiel 1 and 10 do not function as messengers. Elsewhere “wings” is used in a frankly figurative sense.

358. Alan H. Gardiner, *The Library of A. Chester Beatty Papyri, No. 1* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 25 n. 3.

359. *Ibid.*

360. Diodorus, *Library* 1.87.8.

361. PT 531 (§1254): here the messenger is both Horus and Thoth.

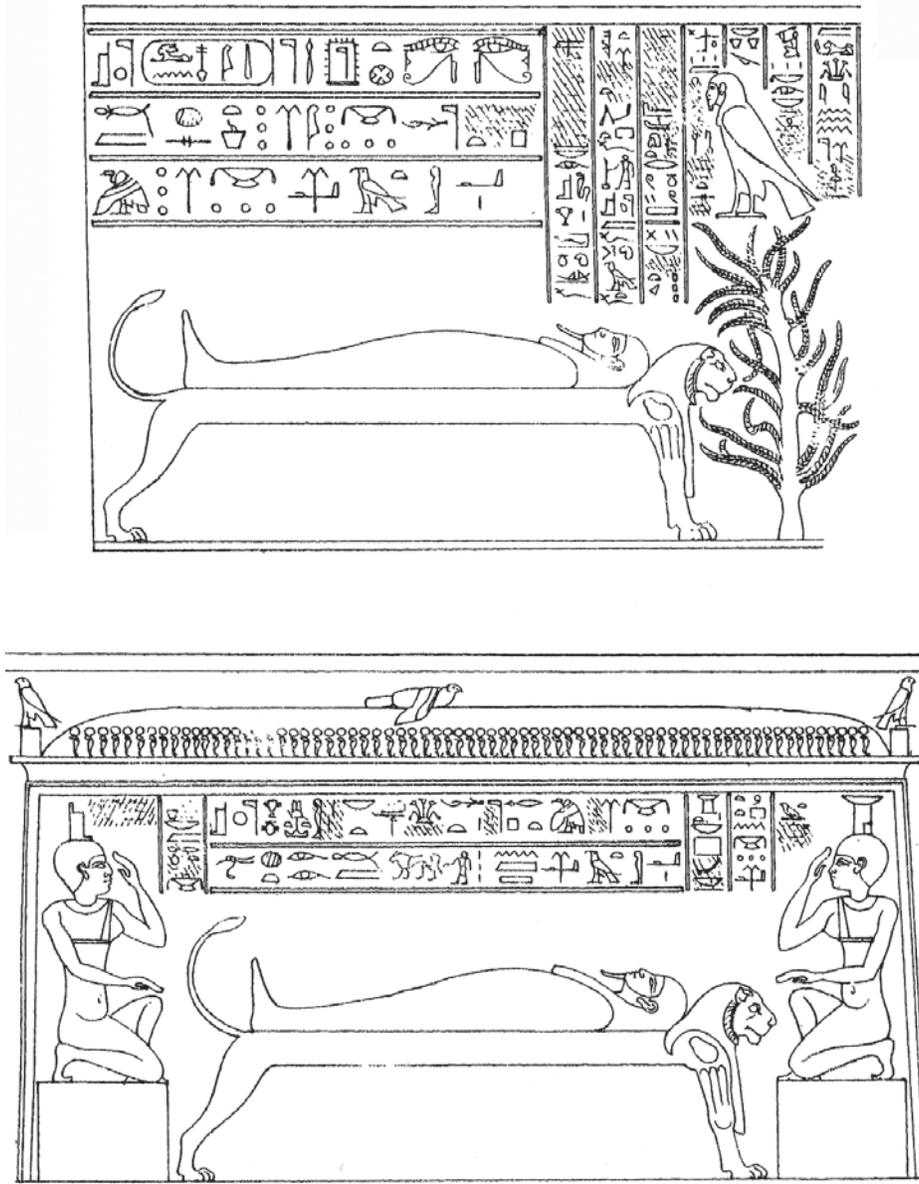
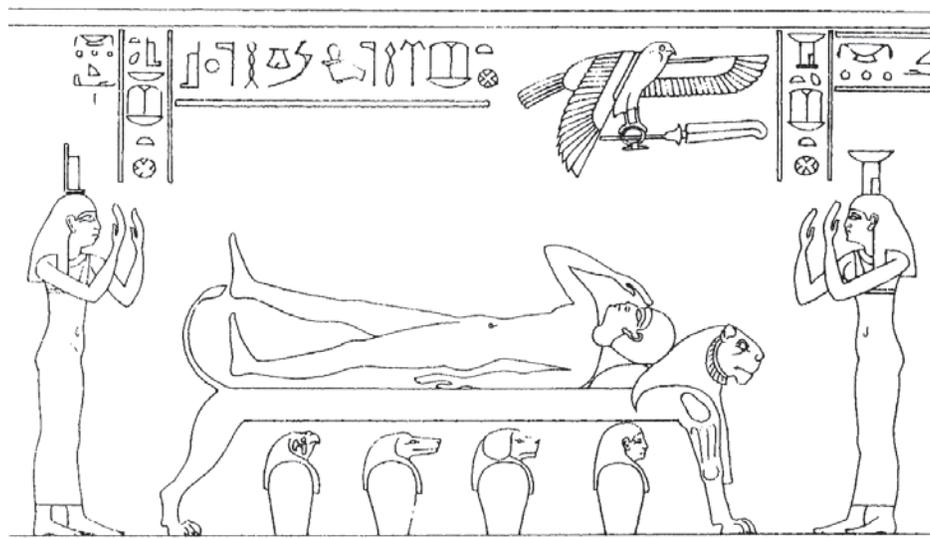
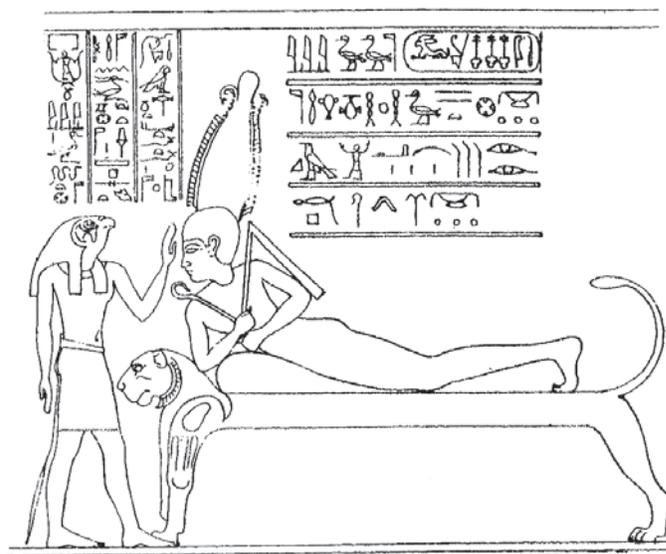


Figure 32. These lion-couch scenes all represent episodes of a larger drama of Osiris involving the lion couch in a number of different situations. Here are typical scenes in which the dead lies inert, but also bestirs himself and begins to rise up from the couch. In such scenes it is a *hawk* who liberates the dead man by his potent magical gestures or



with his spear or club that beats down the adversary. In this scene the hawk is described as the one who avenges, vindicates, or rescues his father. The point is that the delivering "angel" is a hawk. Roof chapel of Osiris, Denderah, ca. 50 B.C.

dreams; being pure spirit stripped of the flesh it can bring healing prescriptions to believers." Diodorus also reports that the Egyptian hawk is the great mantic and prophetic bird.³⁶² Its most famous embodiment is the great magician Pharaoh Nectanabos, who, to apprise Philip of Macedon of the divine conception of Alexander, "flew and appeared to him as a hawk speaking to him in dreams" from Egypt. At the same time he visited the queen in the form of a hawk and so begot the divine Alexander—which, of course, is another Egyptian idea, conspicuous among our lion-couch episodes.³⁶³ When Philip asked a seer about his dream, he was told, "Thy wife shall conceive for thee a son, who shall rule over the entire world."³⁶⁴ Here the messenger hawk was the divine king himself, but sometimes he could be just an extension of the king or of the powers of heaven.

Dick: What does that mean?

Mr. Jones: Well, here is a hawk picture from the *First Dynasty*, the famous ivory comb of the king Djet: the spread-out wings represent, it is agreed, the protecting powers of heaven extended to those dwelling on earth.³⁶⁵ This idea of the hawk as an earnest of heavenly protection carries right on into the tombs and coffins of later times when the outspread wings of the bird of heaven protect the dead from corruption or other harm or even extend healing influence.³⁶⁶ Throughout the ancient world we meet with the bird who

362. Diodorus, *Library* 1.87.7.

363. Aelian, *On the Nature of Animals* 11.39.

364. See Pseudo-Callisthenes, *Vita Alexandri* 1.708, in Budge, *History of Alexander the Great*, 9.

365. Junker, *Giza*, 2:48–49; Rudolf Anthes, "Mythologie und der gesunde Menschenverstand in Ägypten," *Mitteilungen der deutschen Oriental-Gesellschaft zu Berlin* 96 (1965): 12, Abb. 2; see *Abraham in Egypt*, CWHN 14:509, fig. 86.

366. Klebs, "Der ägyptische Seelenvogel," 105. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele*, 73 (Spruch XIV): "Horus, Horus! Thy nature gives thee protections . . . the poison is counter-acted, the fever is destroyed."

flies ahead of the king and reports to his lord and master all that is going on in it.

Jane: A watchbird, eh?

Mr. Jones: A very familiar concept. In the Ramesseum Papyrus, Horus says to Thoth: "Take possession of thy two falcon standards that go before thy face," these being "the two eyes," the king's spies.³⁶⁷ Well, it should be apparent by now that according to Egyptian thinking the proper embodiment of a divine messenger or angel should be by all means a hawk. But we still don't know enough about the hawk in the Joseph Smith Papyrus. I think it would be a good idea at this point to quit the museum for a while and go over to the library. Museum people have a way of neglecting libraries, and vice versa, which is quite understandable. But we have some wonderful texts that can really help us out with our facsimiles. I will meet you again in the museum after I have dug around a bit in the papyri.

A Hawk with a Message

If we really want to know what Facsimile 1 is depicting, the hawk in the picture is our best clue yet. For the hawk has turned out to be the hero of a significant little drama that ties many things together. From here on the reader might as well know that this writer intends to show that the Book of the Dead fragments, the Breathing Papyrus, and the three facsimiles—that is, all the available Egyptian materials that were once in the possession of Joseph Smith, contain the elements of a single story (figs. 33–34), which happens to be the story of Abraham as told in the Book of Abraham and the early Jewish legends. Such a statement sounds wild enough at this point, but let us follow the bird as he leads us into a twilight zone of myth and ritual.

367. Kurt Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen: Der dramatische Ramesseum-papyrus, Ein Spiel zur Thronbesteigung des Königs*, vol. 10, pt. 2 of UGAÄ (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1928), 192, 194.



Facsimile 1



Facsimile 2



Facsimile 3

Figure 33. The three facsimiles tell a coherent story. In Facsimile 1, the emphasis is on the prayer of Abraham for deliverance from a sacrificial death and his salvation by the Angel of the Lord. Facsimile 2, as a revelation of God's plan, shows Abraham his place in the universe by giving him a map of the heavens and the earth. Figure 6 "represents this earth in its four quarters." In this coronation scene of Facsimile 3, Abraham is teaching the gospel through the principles of astronomy. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

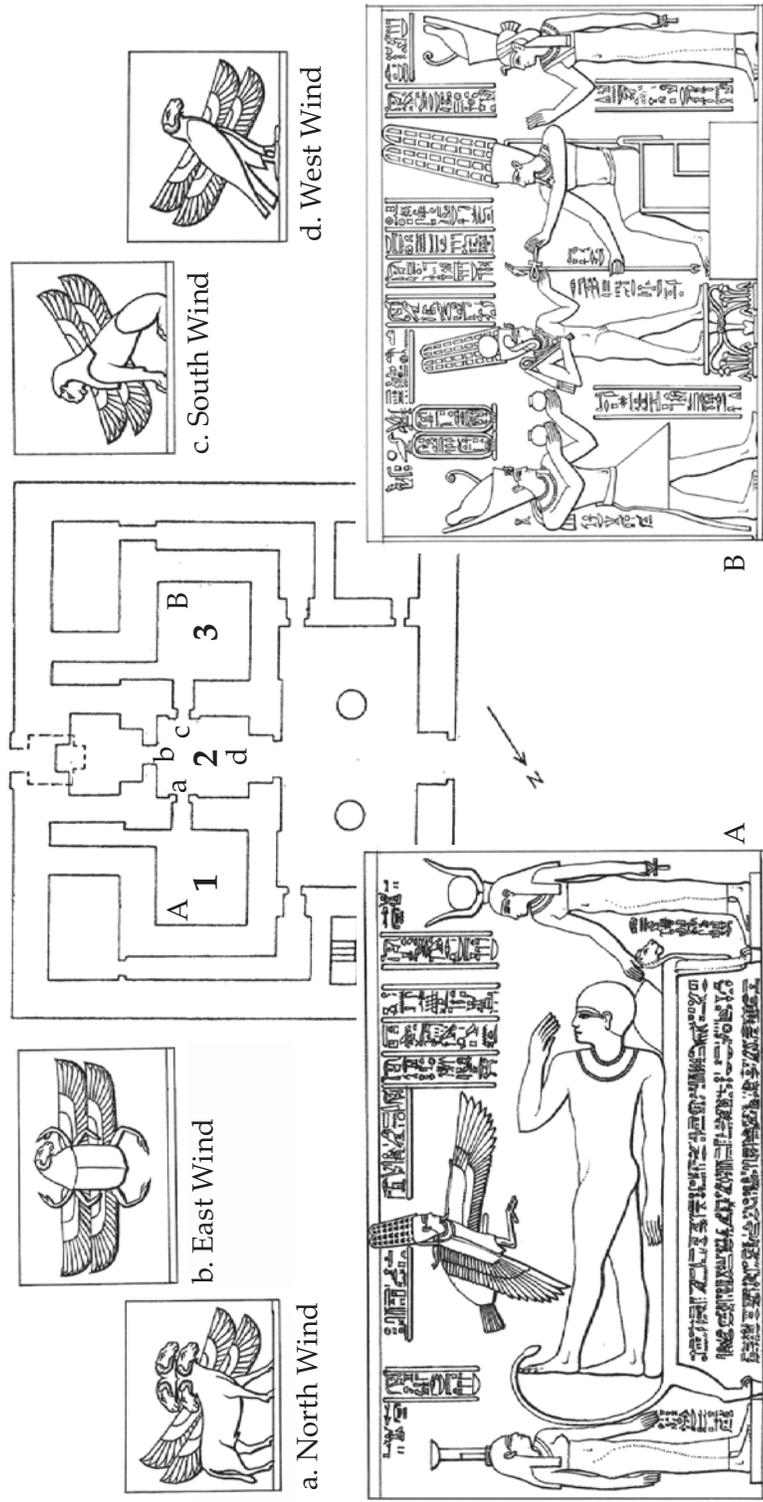


Figure 34. Within the temple of the goddess Opet, Rochemonteix saw these three rooms as forming a unified story, progressing from death to resurrection and exaltation. In room 1 the sacrificial figure on the lion couch overcomes death and is reborn (see p. 183, fig. 20). Room 2 displays bas-reliefs of the gods of the four winds. Multiple scenes of enthronement and exaltation appear in room 3. Karnak, 120 B.C.

One of the longest and most important chapters of the Book of the Dead is number 78, an “interesting but elusive spell,” as Professor Adriaan de Buck called it, having the title “Spell for assuming the form of a divine falcon.”³⁶⁸ E. A. Wallis Budge appended to his own edition and translation of the Ani manuscript “the text of the LXXVIIIth Chapter given by Naville . . . reproduced in full” because that document was, in his opinion, “so very important for the right understanding of this very interesting Chapter.”³⁶⁹ Budge’s confidence in his right was, to say the least, premature if we take the later studies of the same chapter by de Buck (1949), Drioton (1953), and Brunner (1961) as a standard, for unless that trio are hopelessly at sea, Budge had no understanding of the text whatever.

It was in 1949 that de Buck, in the process of editing the Coffin Texts, called attention to his discovery that what he called “the earliest version of the Book of the Dead 78” was to be found in a much earlier Coffin Text, Spell 312.³⁷⁰ As everyone knows, the Book of the Dead is a relatively late production in Egypt, and the Joseph Smith Papyrus belongs to a late period. But de Buck’s find showed that what we have in these documents is not a late composition but only a late *copy*. The Coffin Text version of chapter 78 can be traced clear back to the Twelfth and even the Ninth Dynasties,³⁷¹ and it is remarkably close to the much later Book of the Dead copy.³⁷² Politely and cautiously, de Buck pointed out that in

368. Adriaan de Buck, “The Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78,” *JEA* 35 (1949): 87. The title is that given by T. George Allen, ed., *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 150.

369. Budge calls it “The Chapter of Changing into a Divine Hawk.” Budge, *Papyrus of Ani*, 2:535.

370. De Buck, “Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78,” 87–97; the text is in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:68–86.

371. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 171.

372. If one underlines all BD 78 passages in Naville, *Das ägyptische Totenbuch*, 2:164–71, which are identical with those in CT 312, more than four-fifths of the material will be found to be the same in both texts.

view of the new understanding of chapter 78 of the Book of the Dead as provided by the older Coffin Text version, “it is difficult to suppress a feeling of scepticism as to the intelligibility of the [Book of the Dead] version, not so much of its separate sentences, which as a rule are not difficult to translate, but above all things of the plot and story of the spell as a whole.”³⁷³

Budge had had no trouble translating the separate sentences, but the sentences put together made no sense, or rather made the kind of sense habitually attributed to the Egyptians. Contrary to what one might suppose, to possess a real clue to what de Buck calls “the plot and story of the spell as a whole” is far more important than having a well-preserved text.³⁷⁴ Every student knows that if he is aware of what is going on in a text, it is not too difficult to piece together the scattered fragments of it even when they are very small and few—Professor John A. Wilson demonstrated this in his skillful reconstruction of the Book of the Dead fragments of the Joseph Smith collection.³⁷⁵ But if one is not aware of what is going on, even a complete text only befuddles and confuses—and this is clearly illustrated in the case of Budge, who had in his possession fully ninety percent of the story as it is told in Coffin Text 312 and yet was totally unaware of the plot and story, characters, dialogue, setting, and significance of the drama. He didn’t even suspect that what lay before him in Book of the Dead chapter 78 were the remains of a well-constructed drama. For him such a thing simply did not exist, but instead he saw only a disconnected jumble of primitive charms reflecting

373. De Buck, “Earliest Version of the Book of the Dead 78,” 87.

374. *Ibid.* (emphasis deleted).

375. John A. Wilson, “The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations: A Summary Report,” *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 67–88. Thus it is easier to assemble a jigsaw puzzle even when many pieces are missing if one has a completed sketch before one than it is to put together a complete set of pieces without a guide to follow.

an infantile and half-savage mentality. Lacking the key that was later discovered, Budge, a giant of scholarship if there ever was one, goes on solemnly and diligently adding sentence to sentence and note to note as he builds up his imposing edifice of laborious nonsense, nonsense that the world has been taught to think of as quintessentially Egyptian.

There is a fable for critics in this, but also a lesson for those who would criticize the critics. For Budge was, in fact, following his Egyptian scribes where they led him, and *they* had long since lost the trail—they too were quite unaware of the nature of the document they were perpetuating.³⁷⁶ Even de Buck, when he went back to what he called “the original version of the Book of the Dead 78,” was quite aware that though the more ancient texts were “more correct” than any Book of the Dead version, they were still far from being the true original of the story. Granted “that the contents of the spell were already enigmatic and obscure to the writers and readers of the Book of the Dead,”³⁷⁷ the errors that led them astray and the attempts to correct those errors (attempts that only made things worse) were already of great age: “Already in the manuscripts of the Coffin Texts this process is in full swing.”³⁷⁸

Drioton, following up and reviewing de Buck’s work, saw in Coffin Text 312 instead of an original composition the work of a compiler, whose object was to supply a bundle of magical-sounding writings (regardless of sense or meaning) for the funerary market, and who to do so busily rummaged among heaps of old religious books, the accumulated debris of the ages, and came up at random with this

376. De Buck discusses the merits of Gunn’s assertion that it is sufficient for the student to confine himself to the text at hand without reference to what form it may have had in the remote past—a pointed commentary on the willful myopia of scholarship. De Buck, “Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78,” 87.

377. *Ibid.*, 88.

378. *Ibid.*, 89.

particular dramatic text.³⁷⁹ In butchering the text to suit his purpose, the writer of Coffin Text 312, with characteristic sloppiness, spared “by inadvertence a few designations of persons and scenic indications,” which are enough to supply modern scholars with the key to the story, but were of course overlooked by the later copyists of the Book of the Dead.³⁸⁰ Professor Brunner in the latest study notes that “the literary character of the text has suffered frightfully in being taken over into the corpus of funerary literature,” whether of the Coffin Texts or the Book of the Dead, its dramatic form having been effectively obscured.³⁸¹ “Actually,” he observes, “our Coffin Text was originally no funerary text at all,” being “clumsily” adapted as such.³⁸²

But now to our story. The leading character is the messenger-bird, who is dressed as a hawk in imitation of Horus. Drioton prefaces his discussion of the play with a very informative lecture on what the Egyptians did and did not mean by a “transformation,” the upshot of which is that the Egyptians never at any time conceived of the transformations into animal, bird, or other forms as being *literal*, “for nothing was ever farther from their mentality than ideas of metempsychosis.”³⁸³ So in what follows we are to show the Egyptians the courtesy of never imagining our messenger-bird as a *real* hawk. Drioton would entitle the play “The Misadventures of a Messenger of Horus,” which makes it a comedy.³⁸⁴ De Buck designated the leading character as “the messenger or mediator,”³⁸⁵ while Brunner prefers to call him “der ‘Lichtgeist’” or Spirit of Light,³⁸⁶ as the messenger calls himself.

379. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 168.

380. *Ibid.*, 171.

381. Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” 442.

382. *Ibid.*, 445.

383. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 167.

384. *Ibid.*, 171.

385. De Buck, “Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78,” 90.

386. Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” 442.

The play opens with "Osiris stunned by the blows of Seth, hiding out in Busiris." And so the scene is set in Busiris, the place of Osiris's sacrificial death and the center of human sacrifice in Egypt from the earliest to the latest times. There we find the god laid out for burial in his underground crypt ("*enseveli sous terre*"), lying helpless, dazed, beaten, exhausted, but not quite dead, for as the play opens he is praying desperately for deliverance: "O Horus, come I beseech thee to Busiris and rescue me!"³⁸⁷ He begs the god to behold him in his dire distress and to restore his power and dominion, "that the gates of hell might not prevail against me."³⁸⁸ This last is as good a rendering as any of what is translated, that "their gates [may] beware of me," "defend me from the gates of Dat [the Underworld]," or "that the gates be vigilant in my behalf"; all having the common idea that the gates of the underworld shall operate for and not against the hero.³⁸⁹ He then prays that his relentless enemy be not allowed to pursue him further or discover how helpless he really is in his hiding place.³⁹⁰ In one of the Coffin Text inscriptions (T1C) the ideogram for the helplessness of the god shows him on the lion couch;³⁹¹ that this is more than a meaningless convention is indicated in T. George Allen's edition of the Book of the Dead, where chapter 85 is headed by a vignette of a figure on a lion couch under the *ba*-bird with an unerased falcon head and is entitled "Spell for assuming the form of a Soul and not entering the place of execution" (see p. 259, fig. 31). "Dying is

387. Line 68c, rendered "govern for me" (Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 169); "watch over me" (Brunner, "Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte," 439), and "clear my ways" (de Buck, "Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78," 92), the common idea being "relieve me from my helplessness!"

388. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:69–70.

389. De Buck, "Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78," 88; Brunner, "Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte," 440; and Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 169.

390. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:69g–70b.

391. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:70b.

my abomination," says the figure on the lion couch; "I enter not into the execution-place of the Nether World."³⁹² Here the lion-couch vignette matches the lion-couch scenes of the temples of Opet, Seti I, Philae, and so forth, as well as the situation in the play. It is not an embalming but an attempted execution that concerns us.

To the prayer of the one on the couch, a chorus of gods (or in manuscript D1C of common people)³⁹³ adds a fervid "Amen!" (*ir myy*, "let it be done accordingly"),³⁹⁴ and then a sort of choregos appears and cries, "Be silent, O ye people [or gods] while a god speaks to a god!"³⁹⁵ The dialogue that follows is as astonishingly like a piece of Greek drama as what has gone before, for Horus appears dressed as a hawk and begins with an aside expressing his hope that the suffering Osiris will heed the truth. He advises Osiris to consider his condition most carefully and specially to make an effort to free himself,³⁹⁶ even joking about his helplessness and shaming him into action.³⁹⁷ This reminds one very much of the pep talk the Two Ladies give to Osiris as they help him revive on the lion couch, and Drioton and Brunner both detect a distinct note of challenge and banter in the speech.³⁹⁸ But then comes the surprise. Having done the best he can to boost his father's morale, Horus announces that he is going back to heaven to "beg and request of the Lord of All"³⁹⁹ that he be endowed with the necessary authority to carry out the mission his father desires of him.

All our editors are surprised and puzzled by this: Horus comes as a hawk in answer to his father's prayer and apparently

392. Allen, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 160, plate XXVI.

393. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:70e.

394. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:70c.

395. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:70e–71a.

396. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:71c–72f.

397. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:72g–73b.

398. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 168–69, and Brunner, "Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte," 440, 445.

399. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:73d (B6C).

refuses to help him! Brunner, who gave the closest thought to the problem, concluded that Horus could not help his father until he had obtained a certain crown, representing plenary power in heaven and on earth, which he could only get by going to heaven and petitioning “the Lord of All”; this, Brunner avers, is the crux of the whole drama.⁴⁰⁰ Actually, Horus does not refuse his father’s request, since in the end he faithfully carries it out, but first he explains that he must “go hence to the limits of the heavens to speak a word with Geb [the second of the godhead] and to request and beseech the Lord of All to grant me *ḥwi*,”⁴⁰¹ where *ḥwi* means, according to Brunner, “*Befehlsgewalt*”—the authority to give orders.⁴⁰²

In Brunner’s analysis the real drama is enacted between Horus and Osiris, the true leading characters, who appear only twice, first at the beginning, when their dramatic dialogue provides a clear exposition of the play, and again at the end, when Horus returns to the scene and repeats word for word the prayer with which Osiris opened the drama—the prayer that he is now at last qualified to fulfill. “The text begins,” he writes, “with the plaintive supplication of Osiris that Horus come to his aid. . . . It ends with a coronation hymn to Horus as heir to the throne.”⁴⁰³ Such is the gist of the story: Osiris in his crypt cries out for deliverance, and a heavenly messenger, describing himself as a hawk, appears, whereupon the hero is rescued and triumphantly enthroned. It is our well-known *sed*-festival and lion-couch theme.

400. Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” 443.

401. CT 312., in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:73c–e (B2Bo).

402. Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” 440; de Buck, “Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78,” 93, renders *ḥwi* as “Command,” while Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 169, paraphrases the passage: “He must go and ask for a decision from the supreme Lord.”

403. Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” 442, 444.

But in between the prayer and its fulfillment there is a hitch, a real problem of such stuff as plays are made of. It is no small thing to raise the dead and the question of Horus's power to do so as a junior member of the firm gives an opportunity for an interesting development of the theme. It is a third party, "the Messenger of Horus," as Drioton calls him, who takes over and provides the real entertainment and fully two-thirds of the spoken lines of the play.⁴⁰⁴ This character is also dressed as a hawk and wants very badly to be taken for Horus. Who *is* he? Bearing in mind that in *all* known versions of the play and in *all* the translations there is a great shuffling and conflicting of personal pronouns, with no two copyists or translators agreeing as to exactly who is speaking or doing what or to whom most of the time, I believe that the second hawk can still be identified clearly by his words and actions.

As soon as the true Horus has left the crypt of the helpless Osiris to charge himself with new power in the courts on high, another hawk appears. He is called "the Messenger of Horus," "the Mediator," "the Spirit of Light," by our translators, but never is designated, as he would like to be, as just plain Horus. He begins by announcing that he is "one who dwells in radiance,"⁴⁰⁵ boasts that he has priority in age and honor over the real Horus,⁴⁰⁶ vaunts his great magical powers,⁴⁰⁷ claims to be no less than the "elect and appointed" one, *first* among "the beings who dwell in the radiance,"⁴⁰⁸ and that he enjoys the highest glory in the preexistence among those begotten in the spiritual creation,⁴⁰⁹ having received even at that time the full authority of Horus.⁴¹⁰ "He is really too much of a braggart,

404. Ibid., 442.

405. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:74g.

406. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:76b–c.

407. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:76d–g.

408. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:76f.

409. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:76f–g.

410. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:76i–77a.

this Messenger of Horus," writes Drioton. "That is no doubt the comic element in the play."⁴¹¹

The messenger swaggers up to the gate and demands access to Osiris, but he is firmly checked and put in his place by Ruty (*Rwty*), the doorkeeper. Ruty is the double-headed lion who guards the entrance (one head) and exit (the other) to the other world—we have already noted the Egyptian conceit that holy and inapproachable places are guarded by lions. Ruty points out to the messenger that though he may *look* exactly like Horus, he can't get by because he lacks the *nemes*-crown, "the insignia of gods and men."⁴¹² The *nemes*-crown, which Drioton characterizes as a "*cache-perruque*" and Allen calls a turban, seems to have been a sort of white cloth cap.⁴¹³ Brunner, as we have seen, considers it the main property of the play since it represents the authority without which the mission of the Horus-messenger cannot be carried out—lacking this badge of authority the true Horus is helpless, and the false one is a fraud.

Instead of producing the cap, however, or going to fetch it as the first Horus did, "the messenger backs down,"⁴¹⁴ covering up his embarrassment with bluster, insisting that he is the authentic representative of Horus and is entrusted with awesome knowledge, having been made privy to the great secrets imparted by Osiris to his son "through the partition."⁴¹⁵ His foolish indiscretion is at once challenged by

411. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 170.

412. *Ibid.*, 169.

413. *Ibid.*, 169; Allen, *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 151. It reminds one very much of the all-important turban in the Mandaean initiations: "Sam-Haije sent me with the turban of radiance . . . to be a garment for the king . . . so that the Uthras might shine through him." Mark Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1966), 206; *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*, trans. E. S. Drower (Leiden: Brill, 1959), prayers 191–92, 194, on pp. 167–68.

414. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 169.

415. This expression has caused all the translators trouble; two of them take it as a mistake, while Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*,

Ruty: “Repeat to me then what Horus said as his father’s word through the partition . . . and I will give you the *nemes*-crown,’ so said Ruty.”⁴¹⁶ His bluff is called again; the messenger is speechless, saved from his painful or comical predicament only when the real “Horus appears, he who is behind the injured eye,”⁴¹⁷ which Brunner interprets as “*hinter seiner geraubten Herrschaft*,” indicating that someone, plainly the other hawk, has stolen his authority.⁴¹⁸ By command of a voice from above, the true Horus is passed by the doorkeeper and goes on his way singing a lyric ode right out of Aristophanes’ *Birds* on the exhilaration of travel through space—another indication that he is the true Horus-hawk.

It is odd that the scholars studying the text did not recognize the wild-blue-yonder motif: the joyful, untrammelled motion through the void,⁴¹⁹ mounting to the heights as a hawk,⁴²⁰ endowed by Ruty with wings,⁴²¹ sitting on a dizzy perch amidst the four mighty winds,⁴²² undismayed by fear of falling in empty space,⁴²³ confident in one’s power

169, says it refers to some lost episode of the drama. That it is not a mistake in Ms. B2Bo, where it occurs twice (4:78c, e), should be apparent when one considers that Egyptian scribes in a hurry do not go out of their way to dig up forgotten archaic ideograms and words when modern alternatives are at their disposal. Here the expression is “through the partition,” *Wb* 4:14,4 (cf. also 14,10 “Wand im Tempel”); and the ideogram represents the archaic door or screen made of rushes and rolled up from the bottom; see Hugh Nibley, *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple*, *CWHN* 17 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2008), 377, fig. 7. One is also reminded of the “reed wall” through which God was said to have spoken to Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah, warning him of the flood and giving him the instructions necessary for his escape from it.

416. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:78d–g.

417. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:79c–d.

418. Brunner, “Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte,” 441.

419. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:80a.

420. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:80b.

421. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:80d.

422. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:80e.

423. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:80f.

and beauty,⁴²⁴ never losing one's way through the trackless skies,⁴²⁵ buoyed and sustained by the very winds that terrify mortals,⁴²⁶ undeterred and undaunted by the raging tempest.⁴²⁷ It has all the makings of a lovely Euripidean ode.

When the true Horus has departed, the rascal restores his self-confidence by remarking, probably to himself, that of course he could not tell the secret words, because if he did "the pillars of heaven would pursue me, after punishing my presumption."⁴²⁸ And so, as impudent as ever, he resumes his boasting: "I am the hawk who dwells in glory,"⁴²⁹ enjoying my own authority and my own princely crown!⁴³⁰ "But," as Drioton puts it, "this gets him nowhere";⁴³¹ he is checked again, this time by Aker (*ꜥkr*), another gate-keeping lion.⁴³² But again the real Horus shows up and again is cleared by the imperious voice of "the Supreme Lord" speaking from heaven and demanding clearance for his ambassador: "let no one oppose this spirit [my?] alter-ego, representative, member of the staff, the top-ranking Horus!"⁴³³ The voice continues to vouch for the true Horus in no uncertain terms,⁴³⁴ stating that he is under orders to see Osiris in Busiris and is under no circumstances to be detained, since he comes on assignment from "the Great Palace" itself,⁴³⁵ and is to be denied no aid and assistance wherever he comes on pain of severe displeasure in heavenly places.⁴³⁶

424. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:80g.

425. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:81a.

426. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:81b.

427. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:81c.

428. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:82a.

429. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:82b.

430. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:82c.

431. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 170.

432. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:83e.

433. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:82e–f.

434. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:82g–k.

435. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:82l–p.

436. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:83a–d.

The false messenger, in the manner of the clever slave of the New Comedy, gleefully arrogates all this authority to himself—after all, isn't he the very image of Horus? More obnoxious than ever, he begins to lord it over everybody in sight. That at least is one way of interpreting the speech that follows, beginning "Down on your faces!" and ending with a resounding "Horus has spoken!"⁴³⁷ In the following speech he describes himself as a follower of Horus, the Lord of All,⁴³⁸ a companion of Horus rather than Horus himself. Of course it is the real Horus who finally penetrates into the crypt, passing the guardians of the underworld castle of Osiris⁴³⁹ and carrying out all instructions.⁴⁴⁰ The rival, however, still seems to be at it, claiming that he too has the power to go below: "Horus has invested me with his *ba*; I have his authority!"⁴⁴¹ and demanding that the mysteries and secret places of the lower worlds be opened to him, since he has a message from Horus to his father.⁴⁴² The keepers of the underworld announce the arrival of a visitor to Osiris,⁴⁴³ whose reply is not preserved. From here we go directly to the final acclamation and coronation scene, as the proper windup to any ancient comedy or mumming.

Who is the comic character who tries to crash the gates of Ruty, Aker, Isis, and Osiris in that order?⁴⁴⁴ His "clumsy personal behavior," the "burlesque intermezzi" in which he struts "*in pathetisch-karrierender Weise*," makes good theater, according to Brunner,⁴⁴⁵ and his presence introduces the dramatic elements of intrigue, dilemma, and pungency into the

437. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:83i–l. So Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 171.

438. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:84l.

439. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:85m–85f.

440. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:85h.

441. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:85i–j.

442. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:85l–p.

443. CT 312, 86c–g, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86c–g.

444. Brunner, "Zum Verständnis des Spruches 312 der Sargtexte," 442.

445. *Ibid.*, 443–44.

play, according to Drioton.⁴⁴⁶ But he is a clown and an incompetent; by what right does he usurp the honors of Horus in a religious drama? His epithets at first sight suggest his identity: Who is the Spirit of Light but Lucifer, the Son of the Morning, boasting of his preexistent glory, first in the councils of heaven, claiming priority of age and honor over Horus himself, boasting of his knowledge and power, his kingdom and great glory, who would fain claim the crown but does not have it; who claims to know the answers but cannot deliver when they are required of him at a certain time and place? Who but the Adversary, the Deceiver, "Satan . . . transformed into an angel of light"? (2 Corinthians 11:14). As if to leave us in no doubt, he describes himself as one of a serpent host who was on hand "before Isis came into being."⁴⁴⁷ Strange that he should mention himself as a serpent stealing the march on Isis, the Egyptian Eve. He covets the honors of the son: "(To be sure), you are equipped with the *form* of Horus," says Ruty to him (de Buck's translation), "but you do not possess the *nemes*-crown."⁴⁴⁸ He never gets it.

But how can the Messenger of Light be an impostor if, as we are expressly told, he was commissioned by the real Horus to take his place, assume his form, and exercise his authority?⁴⁴⁹ The men who copied down our texts, being as far removed from the original version as we are, had to explain the close resemblance between the two hawks as best they could. The readiest explanation was, of course, that hawk number 2 had been duly authorized to double for hawk number 1. Indeed, how could the other hawk get away with his masquerade save by express permission of the real Horus? Actually, that is by no means the only possible explanation or even the best, since the messenger's masquerade

446. Drioton, review of de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 168–71.

447. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:76c.

448. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:77d–e; De Buck, "Earliest Version of Book of the Dead 78," 94 (emphasis added).

449. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:73f–74f.

was after all *not* successful, but constantly got him into awkward and comical predicaments. It was plainly his idea, not that of the real Horus, to pass himself off as the true son and heir; the clever, vicious imposture is a basic part of the ritual drama, in which Seth rivals Horus at every point. In this version of the story he struts and clowns as a Lord of Misrule while the king lies in the tomb, but he constantly stubs his toe, to the delight of the crowd, and is put in his place when the real heir appears and takes the throne.

All this is pertinent to the lion-couch story. In all the Jewish legends telling of the rescue of Abraham, the hero's prayer from the altar is answered by the appearance of an angel, usually Gabriel, sometimes Michael, who asks whether he should save him from his fate. Invariably the patriarch replies by declining the offer of assistance with the explanation that he expects God and God alone to save him. In some cases (to be treated below) he even tells the angel that he refuses to deal with one having inadequate authority. This, of course, is the final test for Abraham, who at this point has demonstrated that he trusts God all the way, and so at this moment he hears the voice of God speaking to him and at the same time is delivered from a sacrificial death. In the Book of Abraham we meet with the same peculiar and therefore significant complication: "And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold, I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard . . . and the angel of *his* presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands; And *his* voice was unto me: Abraham, Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and *I* have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee" (Abraham 1:15–16). Just what is the angel's role in this? Whenever the real hawk appears in the version of Coffin Text 312, the voice of Atum is heard from the heavens and the bird passes on without speaking.

But that is not the only complication. The legends all agree in telling of how at the last moment before the sacrifice, just before the angel appeared to Abraham, another party stood by the altar—Satan, no less, magnificently attired in black silk—and offered to deliver the patriarch and bestow great power and dominion upon him if he would only recognize his authority and do obeisance to Nimrod, his protégé. He was, of course, denounced and dismissed by Abraham without argument, but could we not have here an echo of the two delivering angels, one true and one false? The plain designation of the false messenger in Coffin Text 312 as “the Spirit of Light” and his failure to pass any of the tests of the true messenger from God provide an impressively close parallel.

The drama of Coffin Text 312 closes with the usual acclamation and coronation: “O Osiris, thou art exalted upon thy throne; thy heart liveth! Thy members are rejuvenated, thy heart rejoiceth!”⁴⁵⁰ “Thou hast overcome Seth: Geb hath placed thee on the throne of succession.”⁴⁵¹ Let there be a roll call of all the followers of the god and all their offerings,⁴⁵² “while the Great President sits at the head of the Council of the Gods, having turned over all this authority [*hwi*, power to command] to Horus, the Son of Osiris,”⁴⁵³ “who accordingly has taken over the government of Egypt; all are subject to him.”⁴⁵⁴ “And now he feasts with the multitude—he gives life to millions, he alone through the Eye of the Mistress of the Universe.”⁴⁵⁵ All of this reads exactly like the liturgy of an early Roman year-rite⁴⁵⁶ and fits nicely into the

450. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86h–j.

451. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86k–l.

452. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86m–n.

453. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86r–s.

454. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86u.

455. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:86v–w.

456. Such as this writer discussed long ago in Hugh Nibley, “Spar-siones,” in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 148–94.

sed-festival. Not the least important aspect of the winding-up scene is the application of the whole thing to the ruler of Egypt. It is for his benefit that the whole thing is staged.

The fragments that make up Coffin Text 312 are from, I believe, the third part of a trilogy in which the first play or act was the famous prologue in heaven, the second the conflict with Seth from its beginning to its direful end, from which the hero emerges in his parlous plight at the beginning of the third act. The two earlier episodes are clearly alluded to in the text, in the vivid little flashbacks to the messenger's role in the preexistence and in the passing reference to Seth as the enemy (the only time he is mentioned).⁴⁵⁷ The first two acts or plays are well represented in Egyptian literature—that is, in the Shabako text⁴⁵⁸ and in the stories of Horus versus Seth,⁴⁵⁹ but the third one has been hidden behind the veil of the Osiris mysteries. A great deal of work remains to be done here. But now it is time to consider the next figure of the Joseph Smith Papyrus.

Facsimile 1, Figure 3

“The idolatrous priest of Elkenah, attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice.” The first thing to notice is that “the priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh” (Abraham 1:7), since “at this time it was the custom [a peculiar custom, apparently, and one of limited duration] of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea. . . .” (Abraham 1:8). A priest was taking the place of Pharaoh in this operation.

Question: Because Pharaoh was away in Egypt?

Answer: Not necessarily. Rather, because it was the custom for a priest to do so. The office was properly the king's, but of course he needed assistance. A study explains that “pharaoh also acted as high priest. Being a son of a god he

457. CT 312, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 4:85k.

458. See Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen*.

459. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, 37–60.

could mediate between heaven and earth. Theoretically each offering was done by the pharaoh."⁴⁶⁰

Q: The priest was his only helper?

A: Yes. As Drioton and Jacques Vandier put it, "only the king could offer sacrifices. . . . Actually the clergy carried on for him . . . but only as a substitute for the royal person."⁴⁶¹ We have seen that the picture of Pharaoh personally sacrificing the enemy chief "is found again and again in every period" of the Egyptian record, and the sacrificial liturgy makes it perfectly clear that the priest is merely taking the king's place.⁴⁶² Hence the showdown between Abraham and the man with the knife is really the encounter between the prophet and the monarch, no matter who holds the weapon. Likewise the priest could either wear a jackal mask⁴⁶³ or simply be bald, as shown in the facsimile; the Salt Papyrus, in fact, specifies that the sacrificing priest be bald (*fkty*).⁴⁶⁴ No matter how you view him, he is a hostile figure.

Q: Why do you say that?

A: I am thinking of that striking passage from Diodorus which tells how the embalming priest who made the first incision in the body with a prehistoric flint sword was cursed, stoned, and driven out as a murderer.⁴⁶⁵ Whether the priest in the picture is an undertaker or not, he is still wielding the sacrificial knife. In Egypt all sacrifices were ritual murder.

460. C. J. Bleeker, "The Pattern of the Ancient Egyptian Culture," *Nu-men* 11 (1964): 80.

461. Etienne Drioton and Jacques Vandier, *L'Égypte: Des origines à la conquête d'Alexandre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1938), 90.

462. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:40, 52.

463. He wears the mask both as executioner and healer, Appian, *Bellum civile* (*The Civil Wars*) 4.47; Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) 5.92, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 359; Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* (*The Golden Ass*) 11.11, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 322–23; see Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, CWHN 14:421, fig. 67.

464. Hartwig Altenmüller, "Le Papyrus Salt 825," *CdE* 42 (1967): 81.

465. Diodorus, *Library* 1.91.1–4.

Q: Even of grains or vegetables?

A: Even over grains and vegetables the priest would wave the king's ancient battle mace as a reminder that whatever was being sacrificed was the pharaoh's enemy and victim.⁴⁶⁶

Q: Where is the knife in the Joseph Smith Papyrus?

A: That part of the document has been destroyed, but there is ample reason for believing that it was there when the facsimile was engraved.⁴⁶⁷ If every embalming was a sacrifice, every sacrifice was also an execution, as we have just seen. The priest who sacrifices the oryx says to the king: "I make thine arm victorious over the rebels, I place thine enemy under thy knife."⁴⁶⁸ In the mysteries of Osiris the emphasis is on violence as the figure on the couch is surrounded by demons with drawn knives—a peaceful embalming operation is not the idea.⁴⁶⁹

Q: I can see that a knife might be the most likely thing for the priest to be holding, but doesn't he hold other things instead in the other Anubis scenes?

A: Anubis standing by the bier usually holds a jar of ointment or a bandage in his upraised hand, but I think this figure was different.

Q: How different?

A: In all the scenes I have ever seen in which the Anubis priest holds those objects in his left hand, his right hand is equally conspicuous, stretched out lower than the other arm over the body, palm down, in a stock ritual gesture strictly prescribed by the canons of funerary art. But what have we in our papyrus? No right arm at all! It is hard, in view of the rigidly established standard forms, to avoid the impression

466. Drioton and Vandier, *L'Égypte*, 94.

467. Hugh Nibley, "As Things Stand at the Moment," *BYU Studies* 9/1 (1968): 81–85; reprinted in this volume, *CWHN* 18:16–20.

468. Derchain, *Rites égyptiens*, 1:52.

469. Hermann Junker, *Die Stundenwachen in den Osirismysterien: Nach den Inschriften von Dendera, Edfu und Philae* (Vienna: Hölder, 1910), 2; Jéquier, "Petites critiques," 179–80.

that the artist is consciously avoiding that other arm. The priest is *not* an embalmer.

Q: But why does he hold the knife in his *left* hand?

A: He really doesn't. It is just shown that way. A number of studies have demonstrated that the Egyptian artist always drew people in the right profile whenever he could, "while the left profile is shown as a mirror-image."⁴⁷⁰ So our priest is properly shown in right profile. But at the same time "in a two-dimensional drawing the Egyptian artist was afraid of criss-crossing,"⁴⁷¹ so he simply put the knife in the other hand. Comparison of Egyptian drawings and statues reveals that when a figure is shown as left-handed in a drawing, the same figure in the same attitude is seen to be right-handed in his statue, which proved to Professor Hellmuth Müller that the left-handedness of the drawn figures is merely a convention to avoid the crossing of arms.⁴⁷² In Joseph Smith Papyrus I the left-handedness of the priest, like the awkward position of his legs, is an unavoidable consequence of telling a particular story; it comes from the necessity of having the two main figures oppose each other. The preference of Egyptian artists for the right profile is one of the canons of their art and belongs to the same order that requires hieroglyphic figures to face toward the beginning of a text, so that the procession seems to move backwards.

Q: Why is that?

A: Supposedly because the processions must start from a holy shrine or person, and since no one may turn his back on divinity, gods and mortals must always *face* each other—that is, they must face in opposite directions. Hence the rule that while mortals are drawn in right profile, gods must be shown in the left.⁴⁷³ It has been increasingly clear

470. Müller, "Darstellungen von Gebärden auf Denkmälern," 59.

471. Ibid.

472. Ibid., 58–61.

473. Heinrich von Recklinghausen, "Rechtsprofil und Linksprofil in der Zeichenkunst der alten Ägypter," ZÄS 63 (1928): 15; Rochemonteix,

that the direction in which figures face is something to be taken seriously in understanding Egyptian art, and it may furnish an important clue to the meaning of the Joseph Smith Papyrus.

Q: What do you mean, important clue?

A: Notice that the priest, the lion, and the crocodile all face in the same direction, showing their right profiles. What do they all have in common? They take life, they are sinister figures—literally *sinister*, “on the left”! In Egyptian common speech, “to see the face of the crocodile” was to die,⁴⁷⁴ and priest, lion, knife, and crocodile all show the man on the couch to be in grave jeopardy. All the other figures, on the other hand, face in the opposite direction, the direction in which the immortals face, all of them being invested with divine power to save life: The hawk comes to rescue the hero; the four canopic figures have always the function of protecting the body from harm and assisting in its resurrection; the lotus (as we shall see) revives the dead and protects the living; finally, the figure on the couch is brought face to face with his rival and would-be destroyer. The whole composition proclaims the conflict of two forces. This is emphasized deliberately by the introduction of figures *not* found in other lion-couch scenes—the lotus and the crocodile, which to the Egyptian mind represent the ultimate extremes respectively of destruction and preservation. Having taken such special pains to give a particular interpretation to the scene, the artist cannot be denied the privilege of putting such an object as a knife in the priest’s hand. Notice in the facsimile how that knife dominates the picture—it is exactly in the center of vision and exactly halfway between the eye of Abraham

“Temple d’Apet,” 183–85, 248; Heinrich Schäfer, *Von ägyptischer Kunst* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1963), 308–10.

474. Adolf Erman, *Gespräch eines Lebensmüden mit seiner Seele, aus dem Papyrus 3024 der Königlichen Museen* (Berlin: Reimer, 1896), 79–80, cited in Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction of the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1966), 317.

and the eye of the priest; it is the focal point of the whole scene, as it should be.

Q: You spoke of a sacrificial knife as a primitive flint sword. Is this that kind of knife?

A: The knife depicted in the first Hedlock engraving has very much the shape and size of some of the prehistoric ceremonial knives used by the Egyptians. In chapter 71 of the Book of the Dead the sacrificial knife is described as representing the crescent moon, the officiant being Thoth, the moon-god.⁴⁷⁵

Q: You have said that the lion and the crocodile have a necessary and sacred function to perform in the lion-couch situation. Does that apply also to the knife?

A: Yes, and to the priest too, as we shall see. According to Kees, the deadly wounds inflicted by the knife are really the victim's introduction to great things—to hidden knowledge and to immortality—so that the knife is really an instrument of transfiguration.⁴⁷⁶ This is shown, I think, in the late Egyptian story of the contest between Truth and Falsehood, who, of course, are brothers. Falsehood accuses Truth of stealing from him a knife that has miraculous powers, hails him into court, and has him blinded and banished for his supposed crime; but later on the knife itself turns the tables and inflicts the blows of death—this time real and final—on Falsehood, thereby vindicating Truth. So you see it is both a good knife and a bad knife.⁴⁷⁷

Q: What about the wicked priest—is he good too?

475. In PT 674 (§1999), "they who are before Thoth are slaughtered with the knife belonging to Seth." For the type of knife, Émile Massouard, *Prehistoire et protohistoire d'Égypte* (Paris: Institut d'éthnologie, 1949), plates 43, 59–60; see above, p. 230, fig. 29.

476. Cf. Hermann Kees, "Die Feuerinsel in den Sargtexten und im Totenbuch," *ZÄS* 78 (1942): 47–48.

477. "The Blinding of Truth by Falsehood" in Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Stories*, 30–36. There is a remarkable parallel to this in the Norse folktale of True and Untrue, in George W. Dasent, Peter C. Asbjørnsen, and Jørgen E. Moe, *Popular Tales from the Norse* (Edinburgh: Douglas 1888), 1–7.

A: Good or bad, we couldn't do without him. Who, in the end, turns out to be the real victim of this ritual violence? It is not Abraham but the priest. And that is very significant, for according to the Egyptian stories collected by Wainwright, it was the priests who were always urging Pharaoh to sacrifice himself or a substitute, and in the stories in which the intended victim escapes it is always the priest himself who ends up getting sacrificed. This is clearly expressed in the Book of Abraham. When "the Lord broke down the altar," he also "smote the priest that he died" (Abraham 1:20), for he said, "I have come down . . . to destroy *him* who hath lifted up his hand against *thee*" (Abraham 1:17). In the Jewish legends too it is always the priest who gets killed. Instead of going into sources here (that will come later), let us only consider the famous Busiris vase, a sixth-century hydria depicting with typical Greek irreverence and love of fun the climax of the favorite Greek Egyptian story—the story of King Busiris (fig. 35).⁴⁷⁸

Q: Wasn't Busiris a place?

A: From prehistoric times down to the Middle Ages Busiris was the traditional center of human sacrificial rites in Egypt, and it is from that that the mythical King Busiris gets his name. For it was his custom to sacrifice strangers on his "cruel altars," especially Greeks. This practice began during a terrible drought when the people were starving and the king was, of course, held responsible. A wise man and priest coming from Cyprus told the king that if he would sacrifice a man every year, the land would prosper. That got the king off the hook, and his first victim was appropriately enough the very priest—blond, noble, and a stranger—who suggested the operation to him.⁴⁷⁹

478. *The Expansion of the Greek World, Eighth to Sixth Centuries BC*, ed. John Boardman and N. G. L. Hammond, in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 3, part 3, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 53; see also the accompanying set of volumes of plates, 1:382–83.

479. For a complete bibliography of the classical sources, see Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 821.



Figure 35. On the famous Busiris hydria, we see a stone platform before the altar with Pharaoh, identified by his headdress and his beard, bound and helpless (as in Fac. 1, no ropes are necessary to show this). On top of the altar the priest is pleading for his life, while the mighty Heracles, who at the last moment burst his bonds and rose from the altar, is wreaking havoc among Pharaoh's retainers. This was the favorite Egyptian story of the Greeks, who here make typically Greek fun of the whole business. Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Q: And it served him right, too.

A: That was the very idea—the priests are asking for it. Well, Hercules heard about this and he didn't like it at all, so he went to Egypt, and being both foreign, blond, and of royal—even divine—lineage, he easily became a candidate for the sacrifice, allowing himself to be bound and put on the altar. But being a demigod with super strength, he burst his bonds at the last moment and turned the tables, and that is what we see in this clever parody on the Busiris hydria. Hercules is making havoc among the panic-stricken priests while the terrified high priest, kneeling on the altar, is praying for his life. And lying bound and helpless on the step at the foot of the altar is none other than Pharaoh himself, identified readily by his uraeus headdress and his beard. Here, then, in an early Greek vase quite unknown to the world of Joseph Smith is another telling of the story of the noble captive

miraculously escaping death on the altar of Pharaoh at the last moment, turning the tables and killing the priest. Most Greek versions of the story say that Hercules killed Pharaoh Busiris too, but some deny it.⁴⁸⁰ It is the priest in the end who pays the price. Busiris got himself out of a jam by sacrificing the very priest who recommended such a welcome substitute. There are cases in which the king deliberately “avenged the insult to himself” resulting from the escape of an intended victim “by having the priests put to death as sacrifices” instead.⁴⁸¹ Wainwright has explained how the pharaoh who thus saves himself by sacrificing his priest (who is his proxy anyway!) fulfills the sacrificial requirements so that neither he nor any intended victim need suffer—with the death of the priest, the full price has been paid.⁴⁸² This device is also essential to the Abraham story.

Q: How essential?

A: As soon as “the Lord . . . smote the priest that he died” (Abraham 1:20), the tension between Abraham and Pharaoh was released. As we have often pointed out, Abraham was taking Pharaoh’s place on the altar as his enemy, his rival, and his “tanist.” But suddenly another substitute for the king, his own high priest, “the priest of Pharaoh,” and as such “nothing but a substitute for the royal person,”⁴⁸³ had died at the altar instead: Abraham’s services were no longer needed, the king’s honor had been satisfied, and no obstacle remained to his paying Abraham the respect that he now realized (and had long suspected) was due him. There is thus no contradiction in having Facsimile 1 followed by

480. Ibid., lists fifteen sources that have Hercules put Busiris to death and two that deny it. Three writers claim that the Busiris story is only a mythical presentation of the rough treatment afforded strangers in Egypt.

481. Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 63.

482. Ibid., 60, 62; Herodotus, *History* 2.139.

483. Drioton and Vandier, *L’Egypte*, 90.

Facsimile 3. The whole Abraham story, strange as it is, is quite in keeping with ancient practice and tradition.

Facsimile 1, Figures 5–8

The Four Idolatrous Gods. We return to our imaginary dialogue between a curator and two students:

Mr. Jones: These four figures, the canopic jars before the altar, tie everything together (fig. 36). First of all, what does the Book of Abraham say these four figures are?

Jane: "Idolatrous gods." They have funny names.

Mr. Jones: Are those the names of the gods? Look again.

Dick: It says here, "The idolatrous god *of* Elkenah" (Fac. 1, fig. 5).

Mr. Jones: And what does it say in the preceding sentence?

Dick: "the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah . . ."

Mr. Jones: Yes, these are the gods *of* such and such places or persons. Which do you think it was—places or persons? I'll give you a hint: in Facsimile 2, figure 6, we get the same four critters. What are they there?

Jane: "Represents this earth in its four quarters."

Mr. Jones: So these fancy names probably belong to geographical regions, wouldn't you say?

Dick: Unless the geographical regions are also people.

Mr. Jones: Thanks for that. As far as the Egyptians were concerned, the four quarters of the earth *were* people. If the Book of Abraham wants to think of the four canopic jars as representing idolatrous gods *and* the four regions at the same time, that is entirely in keeping with the way the Egyptians thought about it. Now right here in the temple of Opet where we are so much at home "the genies of the four winds" enjoy a conspicuous display, and why are they there? The four winds, according to our handbook, head the list of more than fifty ritual appearances of the sacred four—it all began

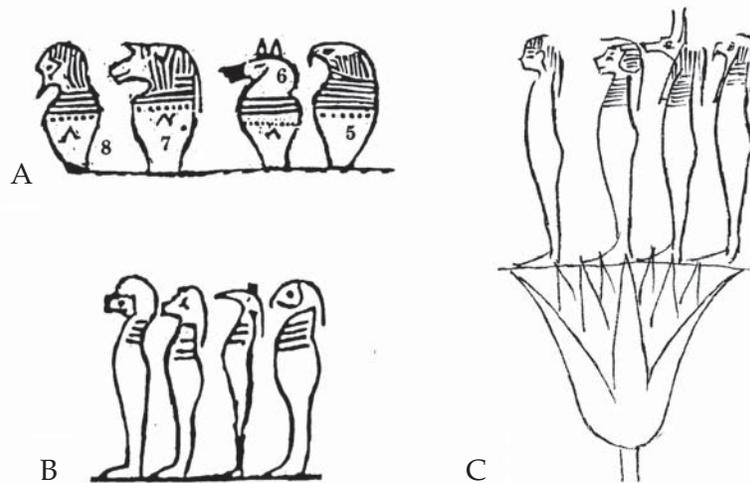


Figure 36. In the explanation to Facsimile 1, figures 5–8, we are told that the canopic figures represent regional deities (A); in Facsimile 2, figure 6, we also learn that the quartet “represents this earth in its four quarters” (B). JSP III contains this representation of the four canopic figures standing upon a symbolic lotus, signifying all the regions of the earth over which Pharaoh holds sway (C). Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

with the four winds and the four directions, represented as early as the Pyramid Texts by the four canopic vases.⁴⁸⁴

Jane: What are canopic vases?

Mr. Jones: The four idols before the lion couch in Facsimile 1 are the four canopic vases. As we have seen, they contained the insides of the person on the couch, precisely *because* they represent the four directions. Let us recall the famous legend of the Jews that Adam was made of the four elements, gathered together as dust from each of the four quarters of the earth; that when one dies the elements are scattered to the four directions; and that when one is resurrected they are brought together again.⁴⁸⁵ Well, the

484. Constant De Wit, “Les génies des quatre vents au temple d’Opet,” *CdE* 32 (1957): 35–37.

485. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908–38), 1:54; 5:71–72, with sources; Micha J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt: Rüt-

Egyptians had the same idea: Man was made in the beginning by four gods who represented or rather, according to Heinrich K. Brugsch, *were* the four elements.⁴⁸⁶ Now here at the Opet shrine in what is called the chamber of spirits, the hero at his rebirth is being approached by good spirits bringing him good wishes and protection on his birthday, and at the head of the parade come the gods of the four elements, sometimes eight of them, sometimes fourteen.⁴⁸⁷

Jane: Just like the good fairies in the fairy stories.

Mr. Jones: Yes, the same tradition is behind both. Now the mixing up of the four canopic idols with the four regions of the universe is found in Egyptian funerary cult at all times, as Budge noted: "The four children of Horus played a very important part in the funeral works of the early dynasties; they originally represented the four supports of heaven, but very soon each was regarded as the god of one of the four quarters of the earth, and also of that quarter of the heavens which was above it."⁴⁸⁸ Whether that is the right explanation or not, the thing to notice is that the four figures represent a number of concepts at once (see p. 319, fig. 40). They are personalities, "gods," points of the compass, and also kings and divine patrons of geographical regions; at the same time they represent the four main stars of the Dipper, and the four primal elements of which man and the universe are made.⁴⁸⁹ It

ten and Loening, 1913–27), 1:101; also a popular early Christian concept, Sebastian Euringer, "Die neun 'Töpferlieder' des Simeon von Gesir," *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1913): 225.

486. Émile Chassinat, "La mise à mort rituelle d'Apis," *RT* 38 (1916): 39–40.

487. Rochemonteix, "Temple d'Apet," 249.

488. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1958), 90–91.

489. Gertrud Thausing, "Der ägyptische Schicksalsbegriff," *MDAIK* 8 (1939): 59, 60. On a shrine from Medinet Habu four kings supporting the sky stand on pillars of heaven (see p. 364, fig. 48) as depicted in JSP I. The Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu: Festival Scenes of Ramses III*, 8 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 4: plate 229, cf. plate 217. The idea of the four as stars survives in Cyprian, *De Sina et Sion (From Sinai*

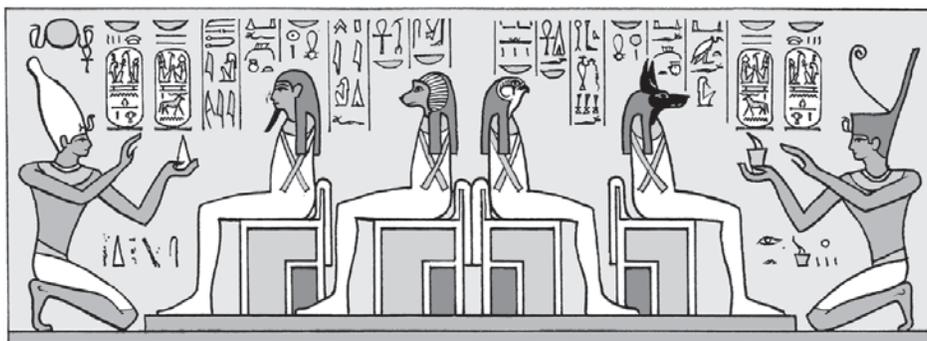


Figure 37. Pharaoh Merneptah worships the four canopic figures as deities—“idoltrous gods.” This plainly shows that the four sons of Horus are more than mere funerary furniture, as Joseph Smith’s critics have maintained. Cenotaph of Seti I, Abydos, ca. 1220 B.C.

is interesting that this very temple of Opet was built of four kinds of stone representing the four basic elements of which the universe was made.⁴⁹⁰ The canopics must participate at the king’s resurrection: “Crossing the waters to the place of rebirth” is explained by an Egyptian gloss as meaning that “it is Anubis who is behind the vessel containing the organs of Osiris.”⁴⁹¹ Our canopic jars are both for preservation and resurrection. “All four gods of the Cardinal points officiate at the baptism of pharaoh,” which, as we have seen, was quadrilateral. “What was in fact poured out over the King’s head,” according to Gardiner, was “divine power . . . the specific power of each of the gods of the cardinal points” (fig. 37).⁴⁹² We have seen that the *sed*-festival is a coronation, and that according to some the climax of the festival was the moment when the king released four birds “toward the four cardinal points, to announce the coronation of the king to the four corners of the earth,” which four corners, according

and Zion), in *PL* 4:994, that Adam’s name is taken from the initials of four stars that God placed in each of the cardinal points.

490. Varille, “La grande porte du temple d’Apet à Karnak,” 90.

491. Jules Baillet, “Contribution à l’histoire des origines de la momification,” *RT* 22 (1900): 193.

492. Gardiner, “Baptism of Pharaoh,” 10–12.

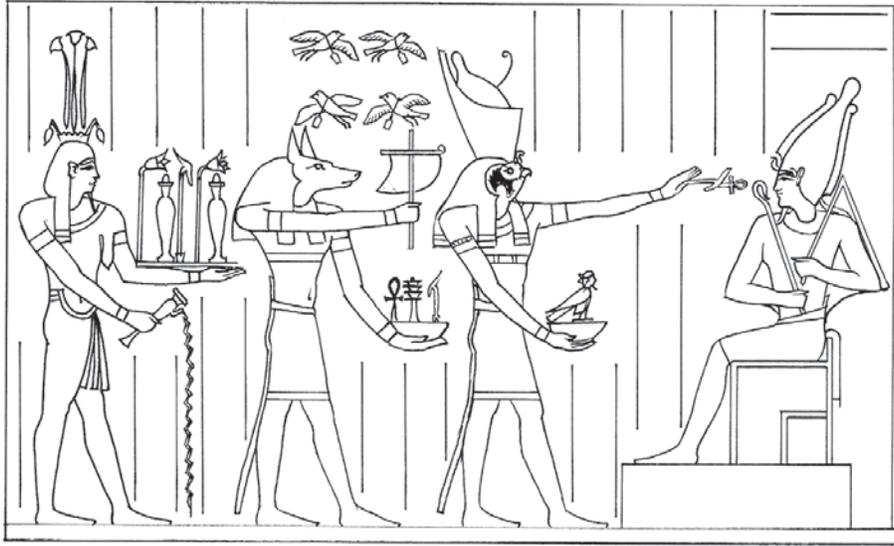


Figure 38. As Horus offers life and dominion to his enthroned father, Osiris, birds are released to the four directions. Later, Horachty before the enthroned Horus releases four birds, like carrier pigeons, with the

to this authority, are none other than the four sons of Horus, represented by the four canopic jars.⁴⁹³

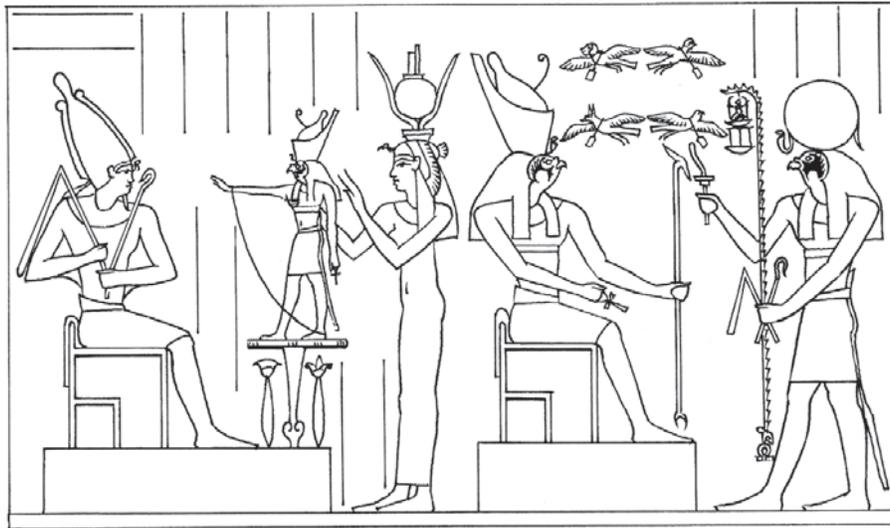
Jane: They were sure crazy about four.

Dick: Just like the Hopis. With them the four worlds are everything.

Mr. Jones: The number four seems to have been a sort of obsession with some ancient people.⁴⁹⁴ If you look up the

493. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 37–38.

494. At the end of the *sed*-festival the order "Silence" was repeated four times, the four arrows were shot, the king sat on four thrones, one facing each direction. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 88. When the king is ordered by Osiris to appear as the second Horus, "the four spirits of Heliopolis" write his name (PT 303 §467), and when Osiris comes out of heaven "the four pure poles are set up for him." (PT 303 §464). Only two poles (the solstices) are set up for Re, but they are set up four times (PT 263–64 §§337, 342). In the purification rite the *sem*-priest goes around the statue four times, called *shenen*. Moret, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte*, 203; Book of the Dead 34:2. In a mimic human sacrifice four red animals were slain at a round hole representing the mouth of the underworld, like the "*mundus*" or "*orcus mundi*" in the center of *Roma quadrata*. Lefébure, "Le sacrifice hu-



heads of the sons of Horus to announce that he now wears the double crown of Egypt. Roof chapel of Osiris, Denderah, ca. 50 B.C.

four figures represented in the canopic jars, the first thing you will learn is that they are supposed to be the *four sons of Horus*, and Moret says the four birds released at the coronation are also the four sons of Horus (fig. 38).⁴⁹⁵ The four children of Horus began as stars in the northern sky;⁴⁹⁶ their names *Imsty*, *Hpy*, *Dw3-mwt-f*, and *Qbh-snw-f* designated the four stars of the Dipper bowl and seem to go back to the earliest times (see pp. 332–33, fig. 42),⁴⁹⁷ when they are also identified with the major cosmic deities.⁴⁹⁸

main,” 288. In taking possession at his coronation the pharaoh would pass through the land, “touching the four sides. . . . [He] ran across the ocean and the four sides of heaven.” Hermann Kees, “Nachlese zum Opfertanz des ägyptischen Königs,” *ZÄS* 52 (1914): 68–69, from an inscription in Edfu. Not only power but danger comes from the four directions, “the enemies that converge from the four cardinal regions of the world”; Janine Monnet, “Les briques magiques du Musée du Louvre,” *RdE* 8 (1951): 152.

495. Moret, *Le rituel du culte divin journalier en Égypte*, 27–28.

496. Hermann Grapow, *Das 17. Kapitel des ägyptischen Totenbuches und seine religionsgeschichtliche Bedeutung* (Berlin: Paul, 1912), 43.

497. Thausing, “Der ägyptische Schicksalsbegriff,” 52–53; PT 573 (§1483).

498. A very old tradition has Geb sitting on the throne of the universe “at the place of the four crocodiles, Sobak-Ra, Shu, Geb, Osiris-Ra,” as

Let's go back to our shrine at Opet, our lion-couch temple. Here in the central chamber between the lion-couch room and the coronation room, above each of the four doors, is a picture with an inscription telling what it is. Above the north door is a *four-headed* ram with four wings, and the inscription tells us that he is the north wind in its capacity of giving the breath of eternal life to Osiris. Above the south door we see a seated lion with four wings, and he is called the south wind; above the east door a scarab with a ram's head and four wings—the east wind, of course—and above that west door a hawk with the head of a ram with four wings (see p. 271, fig. 34).

Dick: That's a lot of fours.

Mr. Jones: The ram, whether one- or four-headed (fig. 39), takes care of that, and he belongs to Facsimile 2. A study of the four winds shows them taking all sorts of forms. Sometimes the north wind has two cows' or bulls' heads plus two human heads; sometimes it is a ram-headed man with two wings accompanied by a ram-headed hawk or else by a four-headed ram; sometimes it is a ram with four human heads; or else the south wind is a four-winged lion—that is when it is a hot wind. Though most of the exotic variations belong to the later period, the four winds idea itself goes back to early times and is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts.⁴⁹⁹

Dick: You name it, we've got it! What's it all about?

Mr. Jones: It has been found that all these combinations have one thing in common—what Professor Constant de Wit calls the "quaternary principle"; he suggests that the whole business originally goes back to the four winds and probably started at Heliopolis.

Dick: Naturally.

Mr. Jones: On good evidence. Even one of the Joseph Smith Papyri shows that.

they planned the creation of the world. Goyon, "Travaux de Chou et les tribulations de Geb," 37.

499. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 29.



Figure 39. Some hypocephali show the gods of the four winds. The most often used images are the four-headed ram of the north wind on the upper right and the ram-headed winged scarab of the east wind on the left. Louvre N 3525. Courtesy of the Louvre Museum.

Jane: Which one?

Mr. Jones: Fragment No. 8 in the *Era* listing, corresponding to chapter 5 of the Book of the Dead.⁵⁰⁰ Allen has rendered it: "His nose is open in Busiris. He rests in Heliopolis. . . . If north winds come, he sits in the south; if south winds come, he sits in the north; if west winds come, he sits in the east; if east winds come, he sits in the west."⁵⁰¹

500. *IE* 71 (February 1968): 40-G.

501. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 39; cf. *IE* 71 (February 1968): 40-G; translated by Wilson, "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri," 75.

Heliopolis is certainly the center of the system, though the god is revived in Busiris, the place where he was put to death. Both motifs, execution and rescue, are conspicuous in Joseph Smith Papyrus I—the lion-couch scene.

Dick: Do the four winds resurrect people?

Mr. Jones: Yes. Each wind is described in some inscriptions as bearing life both to the vegetable world and to Osiris—especially it brings rebirth.⁵⁰² And to achieve this rebirth, the four must unite into a single entity, bringing the four elements into one body.⁵⁰³ Now with reference to our papyrus it is interesting that when the four thus come together, each one is designated as “the god of Such-and-such a district,” just as our four canopic jars are designated by the Prophet as “the idolatrous god of So-and-so.”

Dick: Is So-and-so a person or a country or what?

Mr. Jones: Well, we know that as far as the Egyptians are concerned the canopic jars do stand for “the earth in its four quarters,” just as Joseph Smith said they did. We also know that for the Egyptians the cardinal points and the canopic figures as well definitely stood for four regions of the earth and the four races that inhabited them.

Dick: But here they are Egyptian gods. Were all the four races Egyptians?

Mr. Jones: Yes, when they knew their place—countless inscriptions explain that point of view. But we must understand how the Egyptians thought of it. In early times the basic division of Egypt was not as you might suppose.

Dick: I know, into north and south, lower and upper Egypt, the red and the white—

Mr. Jones: Yes. It was not divided that way but into the four regions—NSEW. The Egyptian ideogram for “city” is also a circle divided into four—each city having a “quarter”

502. De Wit, “Les génies des quatre vents au temple d’Opet,” 25.

503. Ibid., 31, citing a hymn to Khnum in which the four gods must come together and unite into one to give eternal life to Osiris.

and so following the same plan as the universe itself.⁵⁰⁴ For that “quadrilateral” division of space does not, of course, stop with Egypt. The outer world was also divided up into four main parts. The concept was equally familiar to the Babylonians, who thought of the city and the land as being fourfold, but also thought of the four cardinal points of the compass as being identified with particular nations, races, and colors.⁵⁰⁵ Remember, we are dealing here with a Canaanite version, in which the “idolatrous god of Pharaoh” is only one of the party; the others do not have to be Egyptian.

Jane: But don't the animal heads make them Egyptian?

Mr. Jones: The animal heads seem to have been borrowed by the Egyptians in the first place. Originally the canopic vases didn't have the animal heads; they were just plain jars.⁵⁰⁶ Scholars believe “that the theriomorphic vase in Egypt, as elsewhere, can be traced to an origin in North Syria.”⁵⁰⁷ Yet the four heads are already canonically prescribed in the Pyramid Texts, so that it is suggested that their appearance in Egypt in the Nineteenth Dynasty was actually a return to the old idea.⁵⁰⁸ The idea behind the canopic figures was certainly familiar to Canaan, where, according to the rabbis, the princes of the various nations were typified by animals, just as were the princes of Israel.⁵⁰⁹

504. Sethe, *Übersetzung und Kommentar*, 1:96.

505. P. Neugebauer, “Die Himmelsrichtungen bei den Babyloniern,” *AfO* 7 (1931–32): 269–71.

506. Kurt Sethe, *Zur Geschichte der Einbalsamierung bei den Ägyptern und einiger damit verbundener Bräuche* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1934), 217.

507. S. R. K. Glanville, “Egyptian Theriomorphic Vessels in the British Museum,” *JEA* 12 (1926): 57.

508. Adolf Rusch, *Die Entwicklung der Himmelsgöttin Nut zu einer Totengottheit* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1922), 46.

509. Leopold Cohn, “An Apocryphal Work Ascribed to Philo of Alexandria,” *JQR* 10 (1898): 316–17.

Dick: But only four of them?

Mr. Jones: That was just a concession to the system. Thus, though from time immemorial the Egyptians spoke of the other nations as the “Nine Bows,” they believed that at the judgment the *four* races of mankind would stand in their proper positions.⁵¹⁰ Professor Georges Posener has shown that the Egyptians named the peoples and countries of the world after their *directions* and hence conceived of the *four* great races as the inhabitants of the four cardinal directions; to each of the cardinal directions they also gave cardinal colors—red, white, black, and green.⁵¹¹ They knew that there were many countries, of course, but they insisted on fitting everything into the system—a sort of cosmic plan that seems to have hypnotized many ancient people.⁵¹²

Dick: So nobody had to borrow from anybody.

Mr. Jones: So the various ideas could easily meet and fuse—in Canaan, especially, the newly found Brooklyn Papyrus shows the people familiar with the same ideas: “The invoking of four Babylonian deities is certainly evidence of

510. Eugène Lefébure, “Les quatre races au jugement dernier,” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 4 (1876): 44–48.

511. Georges Posener, “Sur l’orientation et l’ordre des joints cardinaux chez les Égyptiens,” in *Göttinger Vorträge vom Ägyptologischen Kolloquium der Akademie am 25. und 26. August 1964* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1965), 76–77. Professor Moret cites PT 457ff., which he claims invokes “the four gods of the four regions who make their vigilant rounds of the four parts of the earth,” which he equates with the four *kibrātu* of the Cuneiform texts. [Professor Moret’s citation appears to be incorrect—eds.] The Egyptian underworld is depicted as a pool of fire with a cynocephalus ape guarding each of the four sides. Alexandre Moret, *Le jugement du roi mort dans les textes des pyramides de Saqqarah* (Melun: Imprimerie administrative, 1922), 22, 26; BD 125. Up above, the four sons of Horus open and close the four gates of heaven, Moret, *Le jugement*, 13, and PT 688 (§2078–86).

512. A bibliography of works relevant to this subject may be found in the footnotes in Hugh Nibley, “Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10:41–46, 76–83. See also Werner Müller, *Die heilige Stadt: Roma quadrata, himmlisches Jerusalem und die Mythe vom Weltnabel* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961).

the presence of a Babylonian cult in this area." The four gods in question happen to be Bel, Nabu, Shamash, and Nergal,⁵¹³ corresponding closely to the four great gods of the Egyptian four directions. Just as we find in the secret place of resurrection in Egyptian temples a special central room in which the four winds were depicted, so a newly discovered Assyrian text tells of a "high chamber" within a ziggurat in which were found the images of the four winds, each being related to one of the four waters.⁵¹⁴ A Hyksos tomb at Gaza, supplying a link between Egypt and Asia in these things, contains four chambers in each of the four directions, with each containing a human sacrifice.⁵¹⁵ The Mandaean supply another link, and they have the same "quadrilateral" obsession as the Egyptians and Babylonians: their four rulers of the underworld—Krun, Shdum, 'Ur, and Gaf—represent the soft parts and effusions of the body, just as the canopic jars do.⁵¹⁶ Still another link is provided by a coffin from the land of Goshen, depicting the four sons of Horus, entirely human, raising their arms in praise or support beneath a lion couch on which the king lies prone—that is, in the act of arising, while six royal crowns await him before the couch and behind the four figures are four times three arrows and the

513. Emil G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri* (New York: Arno, 1969), 86; cf. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 31.

514. J. Nougayrol, "Brèves communications," *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 60 (1966): 72–74.

515. Zecharia Mayani, *Les Hyksos et le monde de la Bible* (Paris: Payot, 1956), 92, fig. 17.

516. Ethel S. Drower, *The Thousand and Twelve Questions* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1960), 240. The Mandaean also had the idea that "the four winds . . . are four supports . . . which hold up the skies." *Ibid.*, 213. To the Egyptian mind "the intestines were necessary for digestion over which the four sons of Horus watched and whose four heads are on Canopic jars." Jan Zandee, review of *Aegyptische Religion*, by Siegfried Morenz, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 19 (1962): 39. The concept goes back to prehistoric times, according to Sethe, *Zur Geschichte der Einbalsamierung*, 220, though Rusch, *Entwicklung der Himmelsgöttin Nut*, 45, holds that the original function of the four canopic figures was to guard against hunger.

number 400. The location as well as the motifs are reminders of the four-and-twelve obsession of ancient Israel.⁵¹⁷ A literary link between Egypt and Canaan is Philo of Byblos, who says that the god Bethel-Baityl was “the second of four brothers, begotten by heaven and earth: El, Baityl, Dagon, and Atlas.”⁵¹⁸ A study of these concludes that three of them were actually Phoenician-Palestinian divinities—that is, idolatrous gods of the Canaanites—while the fourth, Atlas, represents an Egyptian deity who descends as a lion into his tomb.⁵¹⁹

Jane: But didn’t Atlas hold up the world?

Mr. Jones: Exactly. And Baityl means pillar—they were pillars of heaven. The Mesopotamian and Egyptian ideas met in Canaan: “The pharaohs also served Syrian gods,” writes Siegfried Morenz, “who made their countries tributary to the Egyptian kings. Gods from Syria . . . were created in Egypt . . . also in settlements of immigrants.”⁵²⁰

Dick: So it worked both ways.

Mr. Jones: Yes. The Egyptians, “very tolerant at all times toward strange gods, . . . undertook to adopt those of Byblos,” while the Syrians called their solar god Re, just like the Egyptians, giving him special epithets to keep from confusing him with the Egyptian Re.⁵²¹ A text from Ras Shamra baffled everybody for a while until it was realized that it was composed in the manner of an Egyptian coronation ode in honor of “the Egyptian overlord of Ugarit.”⁵²² And while “Egyptian officials and soldiers in the cities of Palestine and Syria” addressed the local gods “with the same confidence as

517. Edouard Naville, *The Shrine of Saft el Henneh and the Land of Goshen* (1885) (London: Trübner, 1888), plate 7.

518. Kraeling, *Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri*, 89.

519. Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, “Le groupe des dieux ÉI, Bétyle, Dagon et Atlas chez Philon de Byblos,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 169 (1966): 37–49.

520. Morenz, *Ägyptische Religion*, 247–48.

521. Pierre Montet, *Le drame d’Avaris* (Paris: Geuthner, 1941), 24.

522. Theodor H. Gaster, “An Egyptological Text from Ras Shamra,” *Egyptian Religion* 3 (1935): 97.

they displayed towards their own home gods," Asiatics living in Egypt worshipped their own Asiatic gods, especially the lady Astarte in the Hittite quarter of Memphis.⁵²³ In fact, "it became the fashion among the Egyptians themselves to imitate Asiatic customs," and in the worship of foreign gods "the Pharaohs themselves took the lead."⁵²⁴ A Memphite papyrus lists the names of the Memphite gods and right along with them the Canaanitish gods with their outlandish names.⁵²⁵ So we should not be too surprised by the strange un-Egyptian but patently Semitic names of our four idolatrous gods; Egyptian idols often received such Asiatic names, though interestingly enough the reverse is not true: "While the Egyptians so readily accepted Semitic deities into their midst," wrote Jaroslav Černý, "there is no sign that their subjects in Palestine and Syria showed the same attitude towards the Egyptian gods."⁵²⁶ Consistent with this arrangement, "the idolatrous god of Pharaoh" appears among the other idolatrous gods as a sort of fifth wheel, tolerated because he must be—Pharaoh is calling the tune in Asia at the moment and must be shown due respect, but at best the Egyptians intrude on the local rites with "a god like unto the god of Pharaoh." Fortunately, this complicated theme is the subject of a book by Rainer Stadelmann, who assures us that the Egyptians believed, like everybody else, that throughout the Near East "the native gods were the mightiest, and that without their help and support Pharaoh could not rule these lands."⁵²⁷ This would explain the persistence of "the idolatrous god of Pharaoh" as depicted in the Book of Abraham.

Dick: Even if the Egyptians conquered them?

523. Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 126–27.

524. *Ibid.*, 126.

525. *Ibid.*, 127; and cf. Petrie, *Religious Life in Ancient Egypt*, 58–59.

526. Černý, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 128.

527. Rainer Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten in Ägypten* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 23.

Mr. Jones: That is just the point; it was a fundamental belief, and one consistently overlooked by scholars, according to Stadelmann, that every god had an inalienable right to his own territory; hence, without the recognition and approval of the immemorial local divinity or a region “no power was legal”: Pharaoh himself rules everywhere in Canaan only by permission and with the aid of the local *Landsgott*, who is never destroyed or even suppressed, though often he becomes quickly Egyptianized.⁵²⁸ Please note that the four idolatrous gods of Facsimile 1, though having Canaanite names, appear in conventional Egyptian dress; that, to judge by other examples, was quite a correct procedure.⁵²⁹ Look now at this picture of the camp of Ramses II in Canaan: here before a shrine in the midst of the camp, a shrine that looks very much as the ark of the covenant must have looked when the Israelites brought it out of Egypt, we see men of five different races praying, and over here the king himself is seen bringing his captives before another shrine in which four gods are sitting.⁵³⁰ Do those four gods look familiar? Look at their heads!

Jane: One has a hawk’s head, and one is human.

Mr. Jones: Notice that it happens to be the head of Ramses himself.

Dick: But the others are a lion and an ape—at least it *could* be an ape.

Mr. Jones: Well, we have seen that the heads could change, though the significance of the four figures remains the same. Here Pharaoh’s enemies in Palestine are duly submitting to them—and him. The Egyptian and Asiatic meet and mingle in Palestine and Syria from early times; at Byblos, for example,

528. *Ibid.*, 17–18.

529. The classic example is the Lady of Byblos, who though appearing in completely Egyptian dress and insignia retains nonetheless her old *non*-Egyptian name and personality. *Ibid.*, 11.

530. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 2:3, Taf. 169–70, 179–80.

we find our familiar Egyptian lions and lotuses adorning royal coffins and thrones, but with a very strong Asiatic intermixture.⁵³¹ The idols of Canaan tend to become stereotyped, though retaining a great variety of names.⁵³²

Dick: Do you mean that all they had to do to change the identity of an idol was to change its name?

Mr. Jones: The situation seems to have been remarkably fluid, to judge by Albrecht Alt's studies. According to him the strange gods were constantly coming and going, especially in the desert. A certain idol would pass for a time as "the god of So-and-so," So-and-so being the name of the man who introduced the cult of that god into an area.⁵³³ The Egyptian expressions "god of Ramses" and "such-and-such god of Ramses" have long puzzled scholars; Pierre Montet has suggested that "god of Ramses" has a geographical significance, and the expression definitely belongs to the overlapping areas of Egypt and Canaan.⁵³⁴

Dick: Why couldn't they just call the god by his own name?

Mr. Jones: Perhaps because his name was secret; according to a very widespread belief in the East, to know the name of a god or a demon gave one a measure of control over him. But whatever the reason, it is an interesting fact that when an idol is called "the god of So-and-so" in an inscription, he is never designated by a proper name of his own.⁵³⁵

Dick: The idols in the camp of Ramses would certainly explain how the four canopic figures got to be known in Palestine.

531. Noël Aimé-Giron, "Adversaria Semitica (IV). Essai sur l'âge et la succession des rois de Byblos d'après leurs inscriptions," *ASAE* 42 (1943): 290, 294–95, with many illustrations.

532. Emil Kraeling, "The Significance and Origin of Gen. 6:1–4," *JEA* 6 (1947): 201–8.

533. Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 37–39.

534. Montet, cited in Bernard Couroyer, "Dieux et fils de Ramsès," *Revue biblique* 61 (1954): 108–9.

535. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, 34.

Mr. Jones: It shows *that* they were known, but not necessarily *how*. After all, it has been suggested, as we have seen, that the four canopic figures were Syrian to begin with. The Jews had their own four figures, whether the evil spirits ruling the four winds and seasons—the four “Devil-Mothers”⁵³⁶—or the primordial Tohu, Bohu, Choshekh, and Ruach, which correspond exactly to the Egyptian *Nw*, *Hh*, *Kkw*, and *Šw*, indicating to Jéquier that the writer of Genesis had access to the very ancient Hermopolitan records.⁵³⁷

Jane: In seminary we learned about the four beasts in Daniel 7:2–8; they were winds too, and one was a winged lion.

Dick: And in Revelation 7:1 it says, “And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth.” Isn’t this just the same as the Egyptian canopic idea?

Mr. Jones (impressed): Alice Grenfell noted long ago that the imagery of the four angels in Revelation is the same as that of the Egyptian canopic jars, so you needn’t be so smart.⁵³⁸ And what about the strange heads?

Dick: Oh, they are there, too! “And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes [looking] before and behind” (Revelation 4:6).

Jane: They were like a lion, a calf, an eagle, with one having the face of a man (see Revelation 4:7).

536. The four sons of Horus are matched by the four evil murderers of Osiris. Sethe, *Zur Geschichte der Einbalsamierung*, 214, corresponding to the four fevers matching the four humors in man. Hippocrates, *De Natura Hominis (Nature of Man)* 15.1–5. These correspond to the four Devil-Mothers ruling or misruling the seasons. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 1:337. Like the Egyptians, the Jews also taught that mankind was saved from destruction by the south wind by a falcon which came and spread out its protecting wings, *ibid.*, 1:54.

537. Jéquier, *Considérations sur les religions égyptiennes*, 155–56.

538. Alice Grenfell, “Egyptian Mythology and the Bible,” *Monist* 16 (1906): 184–92.

Mr. Jones (bemused): And to think that in Israel today kids your age actually *do* talk like that. But only two of the heads are canopics, please note—the man’s and the eagle’s.

Dick: Don’t you remember that in some temples the ape’s and the jackal’s heads were replaced by those of an ox and a ram?

Jane: Or a beetle’s, for that matter.

Dick: Only the human head and the bird’s head remain unchanged all the time. Also, John is describing a throne scene, in which lions are a “must.”

Mr. Jones: Yes, and the Egyptians usually represented the south by a lion and the north by a head of bull or a cow. So the four heads in John’s vision are actually the standard Egyptian symbols of the four directions. So our four “idolatrous gods” which “represent the earth in its four quarters” aren’t so far from the Bible after all!

Dick: But what about their fancy names? They aren’t Egyptian and they aren’t found in the Bible either.

Mr. Jones: Ah, but they *are* found elsewhere; that is the point. Let us take them in order. First, the hawk-headed canopic, “the idolatrous god of Elkenah.” We learn in Abraham 1:7 that “the priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh”—one priest serving two masters: since one of the masters was a king, the other may also have been. Bearing in mind that in the common expression “god of So-and-so” the So-and-so is the name of the king or chieftain who established the idol’s worship in a district, I would say that Elkenah was a man—but a man with a theophoric name.

Jane: What’s that?

Mr. Jones: It’s the name of a person made by combining the name of a god with some other element—like Uriah or Jezebel. In Palestine and Syria it is common to find such names combining Egyptian and West Semitic elements. Well, one of the favorite words of the Egyptians in building such names was *gen-* or *geni* (usually written with a “k”), which means “mighty,” “powerful,” or “brave.” This element is

“often used in the first names of various kings,” according to the *Berlin Dictionary*, and is especially appropriate for the conquerors of foreign lands.⁵³⁹ A typical example is the name Amon-qen(i) or Qen(i)-Amon,⁵⁴⁰ meaning “Amon is mighty.” According to the dictionary,⁵⁴¹ it is not possible to distinguish the forms *qnt*, *qni*, *qntw* as to meaning, and the Egyptians often leave the final vowel or consonant unwritten. The “q” here represents a very hard “k” sound, which is impossible to express in English, and I find it most interesting that Joseph Smith sometimes spelled Elkenah with a double *kk*—a very odd and unusual spelling by all accounts, which justifies us in equating *ken* with *qen*. If we go back to the great camp scene of Ramses II, we find that among the four canopic figures in the shrine the *hawk* is represented as saying to the king: “I give thee power (*qn.t*) against the Southland, victory against the North. . . . I give thee the lands of the earth.”⁵⁴² As a conqueror Ramses was, we might say, *qen*-conscious, and since *qen-i*, *-u*, *-t* was commonly used “as an appendage of vague and general significance to names of gods, designations of kings, and the like,”⁵⁴³ it is a natural for the name of an idol. Since it was common in Palestine and Syria to combine Egyptian and Canaanitish elements in the same names, nothing could be more in order than to call an idol El-kenah, meaning “the god El is mighty.” Canaan in Abraham’s day was full of what E. C. B. MacLaurin calls “synthesized titles,” and he calls special attention to the name El-qanna.⁵⁴⁴ The commonest element in such names was some word for “strong” or

539. *Wb* 5:42.

540. *Wb* 5:41.

541. *Wb* 5:45.

542. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 2:3, Tafel 169–70, 179–80.

543. *Wb* 5:42.

544. E. C. B. MacLaurin, “The Development of the Idea of God in Ancient Canaan,” *Journal of Religious History* 2 (1963): 286; though the expression El Qanna appears in the Old Testament, only the Canaanitish records show it to be the proper name of a local idol.

“mighty” coupled with the name of the god. Thus El Elyon or Baal Aleyan means that the god is “victorious,” a “powerful hero.”⁵⁴⁵ Equally common is the Egyptian *kn* or *kny*, and the well-attested name *kny-ra* of *Ra-qni* is the exact equivalent of El-kenah, the Egyptians being much interested in identifying their Ra with the Canaanite El.⁵⁴⁶

Dick: But what about the *-ah* ending?

Mr. Jones: It is a characteristic of Canaanite proper names written in their Egyptian form. Thus the well-known name Horan is written in Egyptian *Hwrwn3n3*, a personal name, and as a place name it is *Hrwn3*.⁵⁴⁷ The name Ba'al itself is often written in Egyptian with final *-r* instead of *-l*,⁵⁴⁸ and sometimes the *-r* is omitted to give Ba'ah. This shift between final *-r* and *-ah* is interesting because Joseph Smith himself hesitates between El-kenah and Elkkener. We shall consider this *-r* trouble when we get to some other names. Meanwhile, here is a suggestive report by Bar Hebraeus that “in the days of Tarh”—that is, of Abraham’s father, Terah—“the Egyptians learned Chaldaeism.”

Dick: Rather a neat point for the Book of Abraham, I would say—having the Egyptians go Chaldaean in the days of Abraham, or rather of his father.

Mr. Jones: True, but that is only incidental to the main point, which is that in adopting Chaldaeism the Egyptians of Abraham’s day “made an image of gold in honour of Kînôs, the idol.”⁵⁴⁹ Bar Hebraeus has given the name its Greek form as found in his sources, but from this it would appear that in their “Chaldaean” sphere the Egyptians really did honor an

545. Ibid., 284.

546. Hermann Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, 3 vols. (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1935–77), 1:220, n. 5; 335, nn. 2, 7–10, 15, 18.

547. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten*, 86.

548. Ibid., 13.

549. Bar Hebraeus, *Chronology* 1.10; translated by E. A. Wallis Budge, in *The Chronography of Gregory Abû'l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 1:9.

idol named Kenah or something very like it. Whatever the name meant, it was there.

Dick: Could it designate a region—El-kenah, “the god of Kenah,” or something like that?

Mr. Jones: That is a distinct possibility, in view of the latest study by Father Roland de Vaux. According to him, the land of Canaan is designated in the Amarna letters as the land of Kinahni or Kinahhi.⁵⁵⁰ The Amarna letters, you may recall, were written in Babylonian cuneiform but discovered in the library of a famous pharaoh.

Dick: What happened to the second “n” in Canaan?

Mr. Jones: Most of the time it is missing. At Ras Shamra—a Canaanitish library contemporary with the Amarna letters—the name is written Kinahi, and a Canaanite is called a *kinahaiu*.⁵⁵¹ A letter of Ramses II calls Canaan Kinahhi, though the Egyptians prefer Kn’n. But in the Amarna Letters the *ain* turns into rough “h” and the final “n” is dropped. The form Kinahi, found both at Ras Shamra and on Cyprus, was once wrongly thought to be Hurrian.⁵⁵² The point is that all over the Egyptian-Syro-Palestinian area Kinah was a common designation for Canaan, and the name El-kenah could certainly mean “God of Kenah” or Canaan. But this suggests a third possibility. It so happens that each of the four canopic jars represented not only one of the four winds or four directions of the compass, but also that particular part of the inhabited world which lay in that particular direction. It also happens that the hawk-headed canopic figure always stood for the lands to the *east*.

Jane: East of what?

Mr. Jones: Of Heliopolis, in all probability, since some scholars hold that the canopic idea originated there, and the Egyptians themselves always regarded it as the exact

550. Roland de Vaux, “Le pays de Canaan,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88/1 (1968): 23–24.

551. *Ibid.*

552. *Ibid.*

center of the world, the place of the beginning, from which life went forth in all directions to fill the world.⁵⁵³ The four birds went forth from there to announce the king's coronation to "the Nomads of Nubia" in the south, the Libyans of the west, and the bedouins of Asia, but the fourth nation is Egypt.⁵⁵⁴ The king claims the earth "south to the wind, north to the sea, . . . east to the lands of the gods, west to the limits of the sun's journey."⁵⁵⁵ There is some confusion here because since prehistoric times the pharaohs claimed Sinai as part of Egypt, but beyond that everything to the east was Kenite country. The Kenites were those people "concerning whose territory a covenant was made with Abraham, and who have not yet been conquered"—that is, of all the vast area described as Abraham's heritage in the *Genesis Apocryphon*.⁵⁵⁶ The rabbis identified Kenite country with the deserts stretching all the way from the southern tip of Arabia to Asia Minor.⁵⁵⁷ In the prophecies of the last days the Kenites are identified with the Ishmaelites,⁵⁵⁸ and Nelson Glueck equated them to the Rechabites, the ancient sectaries of the Arabian deserts.⁵⁵⁹ Jethro was called "the Kenite," and his Midianite countrymen called themselves the Kenim.⁵⁶⁰ Some have seen in these latter the beni Kain, or sons of Cain, traveling smiths and metal casters, with their wandering habits and their blackened

553. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 39. See the inverted triangle in Jay M. Todd, "Background of the Church Historian's Fragment," *IE* 72 (February 1968): 40-G.

554. Schott, "Falke, Geier und Ibis als Krönungsboten," 58–59.

555. *Ibid.*, 60.

556. Hyman Klein, *The Code of Maimonides, Book Eleven: The Book of Torts* (New Haven, NY: Yale University Press, 1954), 219.

557. *Genesis Rabbah* 44:23.

558. Bernard Lewis, "An Apocalyptic Vision of Islamic History," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13/2 (1950): 312–13.

559. Nelson Glueck, "Kenites and Kenizzites," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (January 1940): 24.

560. Mayani, *Les Hyksos et le monde de la Bible*, 184; Robert Eisler, *Die Kenitischen Weihinschriften der Hyksoszeit im Bergbaugebiet der Sinaihalbinsel* (Frieburg im Breisgau: Herders, 1919), 86.

faces.⁵⁶¹ According to Horst Seebass, the Kenites provide the link between the patriarchal period and the desert period of Israel, their original home being the Negev.⁵⁶² Whatever else they are, the Kenites are from the Egyptian point of view the people to the *east*, and since the canopic hawk represents the East, its name El-kenah might well refer to the god of an eastern region or people.

Dick: So we have three choices. Doesn't that leave us up in the air?

Mr. Jones: No more than students of the Canaanites have always been. There is still no agreement on the meanings of the names Canaan, Kenite, and how they are related. Remember, our business is not to provide final answers—we do not close doors, but open them. All we can do here is to show that the name El-kenah, far from being an absurdity, is a very promising candidate for research. Before we go any further, it would be well to make a chart to show these four canopic idols in their symbolic perspective. The possible variations on the chart will remind us how very fluid the interpretation of things still is and how very little is really known about any of this business (fig. 40).⁵⁶³ Notice that in Egyptian thinking

561. Eisler, *Kenitischen Weihinschriften*, 81. According to the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 1942), s.v. "Kenites" (6:361), the Midianites into whose people Moses married were Kenites, and their eponymous ancestor was Cain. They later became completely absorbed into the tribe of Judah. See Robert North, "The Cain Music," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83/4 (1964): 373–89.

562. See Brevard Childs, review of *Erzvater Israel und die Einführung der Jahweverehrung in Kanaan*, by Horst Seebass, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86/1 (1967): 120.

563. The chart is partially based on Edouard Naville, "La dieu Thoth et les points cardinaux," *ZÄS* 15 (1877): 29–30; cf. 25–32. The parts of the body follow the later interpretation. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 19 n. 39. Another system has *East*: Hawk-headed disk, Re-Harakhty Lord of Heaven; *West*: Scarab-headed Khepri coming out of the ocean; *North*: Ram-headed Mendes the life (*ka*) of the king; *South*: Human-headed Atum of Heliopolis. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 31–32. At the purification of the king, the east is the hawk, the west is the

these figures are gods, races, nations (fig. 41), directions of the compass, and parts of the body all at once; it is the same free-wheeling type of interpretation we find in the Pearl of Great Price. Of course when we think in cosmic terms the four canopics are stars—the four stars of the bowl of the Big Dipper, spirits that “carry Osiris in the procession” to heaven.⁵⁶⁴

Fac. 1 Number and Name	Figure	Egyptian Name	Part of the Body	Direction	People
5. Elkenah (Elkkener)	hawk	(4) <i>Dwt-mwt-f</i> (Duamutef)	stomach	east	Desert People (‘Amu)
6. Libnah	jackal	(3) <i>Qbh-snw-f</i> (Kebhsenef)	intestines	west	Libya (Temhi-land)
7. Mahmackrah	ape (bull or cow)	(2) <i>Hpy</i> (Hapi)	lungs	north	Palestine & Syria (Retjenu)
8. Korash (Koash)	human	(1) <i>Imsty</i> (Imset)	liver	south	Nubia (Nehsy)

Figure 40. The four sons of Horus represent many aspects of four.

Dick: Why are the figures in Facsimile 1 numbered backwards?

Mr. Jones: Some people have objected to the numbering and have even seen in it evidence of fraud. But if you will look very closely you will see that the numbers are not written in ancient Egyptian at all, but in modern American. They have been put in purely for convenience in identifying

ibis, the north is the jackal-like Seth-animal, and the south is Horus the Hawk. Otto, “Thot als Stellvertreter des Seth,” 71. The doubling of the hawk, which occurs in the story of the Messenger-Hawk (above), has been noted by Peter Munro, “Nefertem und das Lotos-Emblem,” *ZÄS* 95 (1968): 37. The fullest discussion of the system is the oldest, Heinrich Brugsch, *Die Geographie des alten Ägyptens nach den altägyptischen Denkmälern* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1857), 30–34.

564. Sethe, *Zur Geschichte der Einbalsamierung*, 218; cf. Naville, *Shrine of Saft el Henneh*, plate 7 (second register from top = fourth register).

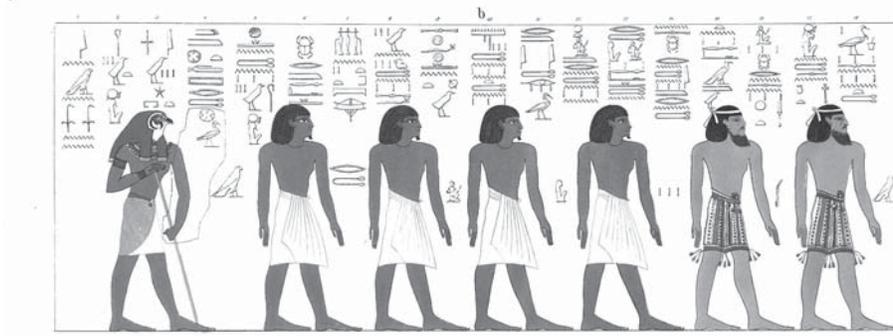


Figure 41. The nations of man are represented by four groups of four each. Reading from right to left, we see Libyans with long robes and tattoos, Nubians with their finely woven linens, and Asiatics with tasseled

the various figures under discussion. And just as those figures can be discussed in any order, so there is no mystic or symbolic significance whatever intended in the numbering. The first eight figures are numbered in a perfectly consistent order from right to left. The animated figures naturally come first, being the actors of the play rather than mere properties—that is why the crocodile, figure 9, has precedence over the purely symbolic lotus, figure 10, and why the “gates of heaven,” being far more conspicuous and specific than the vague hatch-lines “signifying expanse,” figure 12, are given priority over them.

Dick: But why does the numbering of the four jars go from right to left?

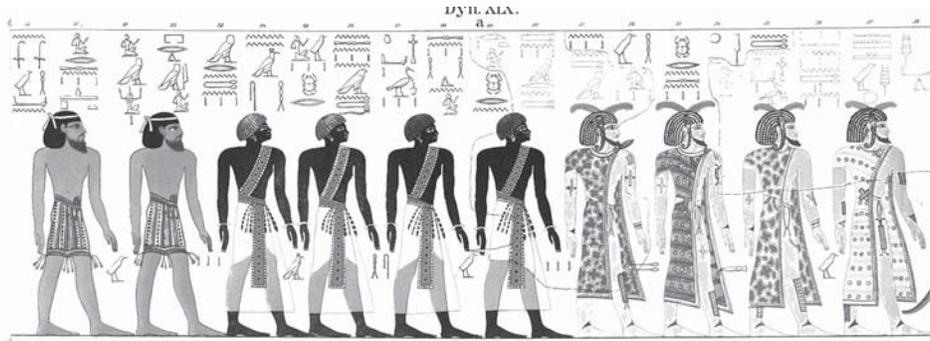
Mr. Jones: The natural transition from figure 4 is to the nearest jar, figure 5. That, I think, is all there is to it. Actually, the canopic jars are numbered in the correct order of their importance, but that is probably a mere coincidence.

Dick: How about the next figure?

Mr. Jones: The jackal head, called here “the idolatrous god of Libnah.” That is the most easily recognized of all the names.

Jane: Why is it so easy?

Mr. Jones: Because the name has actually turned up in the Egyptian records and been obligingly transposed



garments, followed by the Egyptians, all of them protected by Horus leaning on a staff. Book of Gates, Fifth Hour, tomb of Seti I, ca. 1220 B.C.

into good Canaanite by Professor Max Burchardt as plain and simple Libnah, designating an unknown geographical region.⁵⁶⁵ Also, however you look at it, it always means the same thing. Take the Semitic root *lbn*: what do Mount Lebanon (the snow-covered), *leban* (which is Arabic for milk), and *lebanah* (which is Hebrew for moon) have in common?

Dick: That's easy. They are all white.⁵⁶⁶

Mr. Jones: Shining white. And according to the rabbis the name of Abraham's relative Laban means white-face or blond—another indication of blondness in Abraham's family.⁵⁶⁷ And in the Indo-European family what do Alps, lamps, Olympus, and all limpid and lambent things have in common? They too are shining white. The ending *-ah* would normally be the feminine ending designating a land or region "as the mother of its inhabitants," as the formula goes. Libnah would be the White Land, and there were places in Palestine in Abraham's day called Libnah,

565. Max Burchardt, *Die altkanaanäischen Fremdworte und Eigennamen im Ägyptischen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1909–10), 2:32 (#611), 73 (#611).

566. Egyptian and Semitic names for Lebanon are discussed by Séb Ronzevalle, "Lettre à M. Daressy sur le nom Égyptien du Liban," *ASAE* 17 (1917): 261–64.

567. Bernhard Beer, *Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig: Leiner, 1859), 81.

“whiteness”;⁵⁶⁸ then, too, Levi had a son Libni, whose name meant white (cf. Exodus 6:17; 1 Chronicles 6:20, etc.).

Dick: So Joseph Smith could have got the name from the Bible and found out what it meant from a dictionary.

Mr. Jones: Indeed he could have, but does he ever make capital of the name? Does he ever connect it up with whiteness or anything else? Neither he nor any of his contemporaries knew that the Egyptians always identified the jackal-god of figure 6 with the White Land.

Dick: Did they?

Mr. Jones: Most certainly and emphatically. Our friend Anubis of the jackal’s head at all times enjoyed two constantly recurring epithets.

Jane: What’s an epithet?

Mr. Jones: It is a descriptive tag put to the name of some famous person or thing, like “Long-haired Achaeans,” or “Honest Abe,” or “Mack the Knife.” An epithet is used so often and so automatically that it is practically part of the name—a sort of title. Well, from first to last Anubis always had two special epithets: he was “Lord of the White Land” and “Chief of the Westerners.”⁵⁶⁹ If you will look at the chart you will notice that the jackal-headed jar also represents the west.

Jane: What is the White Land?

Mr. Jones: That is just what Kees asked himself. He decided that “Lord of the White Land” (*nb t3 dsr*) is derived from the idea of “Lord of the shining, sanctified [*prächtigen, geheiligten*] land,” that being a euphemism for the necropolis.⁵⁷⁰

Dick: And everybody knows that the necropolis is in the *west*. That would make him Lord of the Westerners!

568. Cf. Numbers 33:20–21; Joshua 10:29–32, 39; 12:15; 21:13; 2 Kings 8:22; 23:31; Jeremiah 52:1, etc.

569. [Nibley is giving his own idiosyncratic translations of *nb t3 dsr* “Lord of the Sacred Land” and *hnty-ı̄mntyw* “Chief of the Westerners.” The latter is usually an epithet of Osiris—eds.]

570. Kees, “Kulttopographische und mythologische Beiträge,” 155.

Jane: But wasn't Upper Egypt the southern kingdom, the land of the white crown and the white palace and the white mace, and all that?

Mr. Jones: There was a strong temptation once to locate the White Land of Anubis in Abydos, but Kees showed that White Land does not necessarily refer to Upper Egypt, though he admitted that the meaning of the term remained obscure. But very early, Brugsch noted that of the four canonical colors the official color of the west is, surprisingly, white—instead of a red sunset.⁵⁷¹ On the other hand, the Libyans to the west of Egypt—noted for their white skin and blue eyes⁵⁷²—were identified by Josephus with the Lehabim, from a root *lhb*, meaning “shining,” “flashing,” Arabic *lubhah*, “a clear, white colour, brightness of the complexion or colour of the skin,” according to Lane.⁵⁷³ But let's avoid too much playing around with words and sounds, which is altogether too easy, and settle for a few fairly certain points: (1) Libnah *does* mean White Land; (2) “the idolatrous god of Libnah” *does* have the mask of Anubis; (3) the jackal-headed canopic figure *does* stand for the west; (4) Anubis *is* the lord of the west; (5) he *is* also “Lord of the White Land”; (6) white *is* the ritual color of the west. That's enough, without bringing in the white Libyans, to give you something to play with. It doesn't prove anything, except, perhaps, that Libnah is a very appropriate name to use if you want to divide up the world into four regions or races according to Egyptian practice.

571. Heinrich K. Brugsch, *Die Geographie der Nachbarländer Ägyptens nach den altägyptischen Denkmälern* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1858), 90–91.

572. Ernst Honigmann, “Libye,” in *Paulys Realencyclopädie*, 13.1:150.

573. A. Epstein, “Les Chamites de la table ethnographique selon le Pseudo-Jonathan,” *REJ* 24 (1892): 96; Genesis 10:13; 1 Chronicles 1:11. Cf. Honigmann, “Libye,” 150–51; and Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon: Derived from the Best and the Most Copious Eastern Sources* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863–93).

Dick: But how about Mahmackrah? That's a beast of a different color.

Mr. Jones: But even more interesting because of its unusual name. Figure 7, "the idolatrous god of Mahmackrah," has an ape's head, though sometimes it is shown with the head of a bull or cow; the Egyptians placed it at the northern quarter of the horizon. What makes its name so intriguing is that it makes sense almost any way you divide it up. We must always bear in mind when confronted with the often exotic-looking foreign names that occur in the writings of Joseph Smith that it is the sound and not the sight of the name that is being conveyed. Baurak Ale and Shaumahyeem are perfectly good Hebrew if you read them out loud; though they *look* absolutely outlandish, it would be hard to give a better rendering of the old sounds without the use of a phonetic alphabet. The names of our canopics are addressed to the ear and not the eye—that is why it is possible to fluctuate between Elkenah and Elkkener, Korash and Koash. Mahmackrah suggests all sorts of things to the ear, and it would take us a long time to ring all the possible combinations that Semitic and Indo-European dictionaries could give us on the syllables *mah*, *mack*, and *rah*, all of which are full of meaning in any language. What grabs me, for example, is the middle syllable, not plain *mack* but *mackr*—and of course the final *-rah*. What I hear is "*mah-mackr-rah*." That means a lot to me.

Jane: Why *mackr*-, of all things?

Mr. Jones: Because it reminds me of an element occurring in some important Canaanite names. *Mhr-ʿnt* (Mahr-Anat), for example, means "champion or upholder of the goddess Anat";⁵⁷⁴ and Ramses II called himself *Mhr-Bʿl* (Mahr-Baal), meaning upholder of Baal, the Canaanite god.⁵⁷⁵ *Mhr-Rʿ*

574. Bernard Couroyer, "Trois epithets de Ramsès II," *Orientalia* 33 (1964): 446; see 443–53.

575. *Ibid.*, 448.

(Mahr-Rah) would be the champion or upholder of Rah, the Egyptian equivalent of Baal.

Dick: But this *-mackr-* is spelled with a *-ck-* instead of an *-h-*.

Mr. Jones: The *-h-* in *mahr* belongs to the root, and must have a heavy sound in order not to be swallowed up by the following *-r*. You can see the shift between a *-k-* and a heavy *-h-* sound in our writing of Mi-cha-el, which the Jews wrote Mi-ka-el. Incidentally, the form of the name rather neatly parallels our Mah-mackr-rah. Mi-cha-el, like Mi-ca-iah (1 Kings 22), means “Who is like God?” or “He who is like God.” *Ma-* (written *Mah-* to lengthen the vowel according to the invariable practice in Mormon scriptures) is the exact Egyptian equivalent of the Hebrew *Mi-*, so that Mah-mackr-rah would mean “Who is the upholder of Rah?” or the like—a very appropriate title for an idol whose worshippers were doing everything they could to equate and associate the gods of Canaan and Egypt. But here is another possibility. Among the Old Canaanite names found in Egyptian is *mq^cr* (ma’gar), plus a vowel ending, transposed into Canaanite as *Maq’arah*, meaning “place of burning.”⁵⁷⁶ Since Abraham was known anciently as “he who escaped the burning,” Mah-mackrah could be the local deity of the place of sacrifice. Though “no precise geographical location is provided” for some of Abraham’s most important experiences,⁵⁷⁷ a good deal is being written today (as we shall see) about his many confrontations with local gods in Canaan. Here is the idolatrous god of Beth-shan who is called *Mkl*, “the great god.”⁵⁷⁸ The first element in his name, *Mkl-*, is Canaanite, but the second, *-^ca*, is Egyptian; the first refers to the Canaanite god *Mkl*, whose name, according to L. H. Vincent, means “he who is able,” “the Omnipotent,” while the second is the Egyptian

576. Burchardt, *Die altkanaanäischen Fremdworte*, 2:27 (no. 517).

577. Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis XV and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (London: SCM, 1967), 24.

578. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten*, 53, 62.

word for great—practically the same thing; so that the combination gives us a very powerful figure indeed—*Mkl* the Mighty, “the god of power.”⁵⁷⁹ Incidentally, since Semitic *-l-* is regularly written as an *-r-* in the Egyptian renderings, the Egyptian form of this name would be *Mkr-ʿa*.⁵⁸⁰

Dick: And since *ma-* is Egyptian too, Mah-mackr-rah would be the full name, I suppose. “Who is mighty like Re,” or “How mighty is Rah,” or something like that.

Mr. Jones: We must be careful not to go overboard—it is all too easy. But I do think it is in order to point out that the well-documented name *Mkl-ʿa* (*Mkr-ah*) exactly parallels El-kenah; in each case the name of a Canaanite god is followed by an Egyptian epithet meaning mighty. I can think of a better Egyptian name, though. Hermann Ranke gives the name *Mai-m-hqa* as meaning “the Lion is ruler.”⁵⁸¹ On this pattern *Mai-m-akr-ʿah* would mean “the Lion is Aker the great,” Aker being the earth-god as a lion. At any rate, we are free to guess as long as we don’t preach.

Jane: But what’s it got to do with an ape’s head?

Mr. Jones: Don’t you remember? The jar with the ape’s head signifies *north* for the Egyptians—that is the purpose of this particular symbol. For the Egyptians, Palestine and Syria were the lands of the north.⁵⁸² So now we have idols for the east, west, and north—

Dick: —so the only one left must belong to the south.

Mr. Jones: With a tip-off like that, we are naturally prejudiced, so we should proceed with care. Our last canopic, figure 8, is the human-headed Imset, who in the Egyptian system stood for the south. All that remains to test in the

579. Citing Vincent, in *ibid.*, 55; the whole problem is discussed, 52–63.

580. *Ibid.*, 55.

581. Ranke, *Ägyptischen Personennamen*, 1:144, nn. 4–5.

582. In the broadest sense, the “Asiatics” of the north began already in Lower Egypt and included the islands of the sea. Schott, “Falke, Geier und Ibis als Krönungsboten,” 58–59.

Book of Abraham is his name, which is given as Korash or Koash.

Jane: Which is it?

Mr. Jones: The different spellings given to proper names in the Book of Abraham are plainly an effort to approximate their sounds. As might be expected, it is especially the *-r-* that causes trouble: Elkenah appears as Elkkener, and Korash as Koash, also Jershon as Jurshon and Potiphar as Potipher—your *-r-* is a great troublemaker in ancient as well as in modern languages.⁵⁸³ If you ask me which of the forms is correct, I unhesitatingly answer—they all are! Anybody who knows anything about Arabic also knows that you can't insist dogmatically on one official pronunciation for any single word—and it has always been that way in the East. Here is an Egyptian-Canaanite deity whose name can be read as Qesrt, Qeserti, Qsdt, Kousor, and Chrysor—and that is typical.⁵⁸⁴ But what does Koash remind you of—a Bible land far to the south of everything?

Jane: The land of Cush?

Mr. Jones: Of course. The most succinct essay on Cush is in the *New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, which defines Cush as “Region S of Egypt” (Nubia, Ethiopia) in Hebrew and other ancient languages. “It extended S from Elephantine and Syene (Aswan).”⁵⁸⁵ It has also been identified with

583. Collating the texts in the original English, Walter L. Whipple, “An Analysis of Textual Changes in ‘The Book of Abraham’ and in the ‘Writings of Joseph Smith, The Prophet’ in the Pearl of Great Price” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1959), 18–32, made the sensational discovery that we find both Elkenner and Elkenah, Koash and Korash, Potipher and Potiphar, Abram and Abraham, Zeptah and Egyptus, Egyptes and Egyptus, Nahor and Nehor, Jurshon and Jershon, Thummim and Thummin. There is no reason for doubting that all these forms were used anciently.

584. Joseph Leibovitch, “Un nouveau dieu Égypto-Cananéen,” *ASAE* 48 (1948): 435–44.

585. Cecil Roth and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds., *New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 511.

southern Arabia and even India. The names of the four brothers, Mizraim, Punt, Canaan, and Cush certainly remind us of the division of the world into four regions. There is still no agreement as to where the lands of Punt and Cush really were, but the queen of Punt, who had dealings with Queen Hatshepsut, certainly lived in the south.

Jane: Wasn't the Queen of Sheba the queen of the south, too?

Mr. Jones: These mysterious southern queens have caused considerable perplexity. Saba was on the other side of the Red Sea, the Arabian side, where some people put Cush.⁵⁸⁶ But however Sheba, Punt, Cush, and Korash-Koash may be related, the one thing they have in common is that they are all in the deep south.

Dick: Including Korash?

Mr. Jones: Consider. The natives of Saba, way down there at the south end of Arabia, worshipped a goddess Iagouth; and where do you think she came from? Heliopolis!

Dick: We might have known.

Mr. Jones: In fact, she was simply a local form of the Egyptian lady Hathor, "the regent of Heliopolis," worshipped not only in Saba but also in Punt.⁵⁸⁷ But the interesting thing is that her worshippers were known as "the people of Koraish" and also as the Beni-Qananee or sons of Canaan. Back home at Heliopolis the lady went by the name of Wadjit, which was semiticized into Ozza, under which title she turns up as one of the principal idols of the Qoreish in Mekkah.⁵⁸⁸

Dick: Which puts her in the south again. But weren't the Qoraish the tribe of Mohammed, and didn't they come much later?

586. 2 Chronicles 21:16 has "the Arabians, that were near the Ethiopians," invading Judea. The problem is treated in the *New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. Cush, 511.

587. A. B. Kamal, "Les idoles arabes et les divinités égyptiennes," *RT* 24 (1902): 23.

588. *Ibid.*, 24.

Mr. Jones: Well, A. B. Kamal believed that even the religion of the classical Qoreish was strongly influenced by Heliopolis. He sees a connection in the tradition that an ancestor of Mohammed converted the tribe of Khozaa and the Kimyarites (an early desert kingdom) to the worship of Sirius, which they called Sh'ri, the middle sound being something between a deep guttural and a cough.⁵⁸⁹ You may remember that Shagre-el, meaning "Sirius is god," was worshipped by the people who tried to sacrifice Abraham.⁵⁹⁰ As to the Qoreish coming later, the name is the diminutive of an older Korash. As you know, the Jews held the Persian Koresh (Cyrus) in great esteem,⁵⁹¹ but there was another—Kharush, a legendary king of Babylon—who destroyed Jerusalem: his name is interesting because it is the reverse of Korash, and means "big bad Korash."⁵⁹² Finally, a tradition preserved by the Arabic writers designates by the name of Korash (Kusch) the father or grandfather of the very king who tried to put Abraham to death.⁵⁹³ The root *krš* can be tied to a great number of meanings, but as a proper name it is peculiarly at home in the south and tied to the worship of the most important Egyptian goddess. Since the south is the only direction we have left, and the human-headed canopic jar does stand for the south, we may as well let it stand there for the present. Remember—we are not settling but raising questions, not shutting but opening doors. There are plenty of doors that need to be looked into.

Dick: But what about the next figure, number 9, "the idolatrous god of Pharaoh"? Doesn't he sort of spoil the four-brothers act?

589. *Ibid.*, 20.

590. Abraham 1:9; cf. below, in this volume, *CWHN* 18:416–17.

591. W. Bacher, "Sur les deux lettres: De l'époque du dernier exilarque," *REJ* 55 (1908): 251–63.

592. According to a saying attributed to Jesus, in *PO* 19:584–85 (No. 195 of the early Arabic Logia).

593. Heinrich Schützinger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der arabischen Abraham-Nimrod-Legende* (Bonn: Oriental Seminar, 1961), 31, 64, 118–20.

Mr. Jones: On the contrary, he is indispensable to it. In the “quadrilateral” geographical patterns of the Egyptians, Maspero observed, “we find the four cardinal points who with the Creator formed the *Five*.” That is why the primal Ogdoad of Heliopolis, composed of the four gods of the universe with their wives, ends up as an Ennead, an odd number—they have to have one president at their head, and he makes it nine.⁵⁹⁴

Dick: Why do they have to have just one at their head?

Mr. Jones: Because he is the One in the Center, and the center, which is a perfect and invisible point and the pole of everything, can only be *one*. Posener notes that to the four directions is added “the center of the earth, *ḥrj-ḥb t3*,” so that we sometimes read of the “five parts” of the world instead of four.⁵⁹⁵ Sethe has discussed the psychological reason for this: No matter where you are, there are always four main directions—from where? From you! You are the one in the middle, and the four directions exist only by virtue of your awareness.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, Friedrich Ratzel once made the statement, “Every man regards himself as the center point of the universe around him.”⁵⁹⁷ The Egyptians were keenly aware of this. In the Papyrus Salt 825, for example, we see the four houses of the world, the four gates, and the four cardinal points all arranged around a fifth sign in the middle, the *ankh*-sign of life, signifying the presence in the center of the Hidden-One, Great-One, Unknown-One, Unseen-One, Amon the Father of All Life.⁵⁹⁸ In the ideal House of Life, according to the Egyptians, the four houses surround “the hidden one who rests within, . . . the Great God. . . . It shall

594. Gaston Maspero, “Sur l’Énéade,” in *Études de mythologie et d’archéologie égyptiennes*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 2 (Paris: Leroux, 1883), 367, 369.

595. Posener, “Sur l’orientation et l’ordre des joints cardinaux,” 74.

596. Sethe, *Zur Geschichte der Einbalsamierung*, 217.

597. [Nibley cited no source, and we have been unable to locate the quotation in Ratzel’s voluminous output—eds.]

598. Budge, *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri*, 20.

be very hidden, very large. It shall not be known, nor shall it be seen."⁵⁹⁹

Dick: What's it all about?

Mr. Jones: A basic reality of existence. The four sons of Horus, as you know, were the stars of the Big Dipper, pointing ever to the pole of the universe—the most important object in the cosmos. Yet there was nothing there!

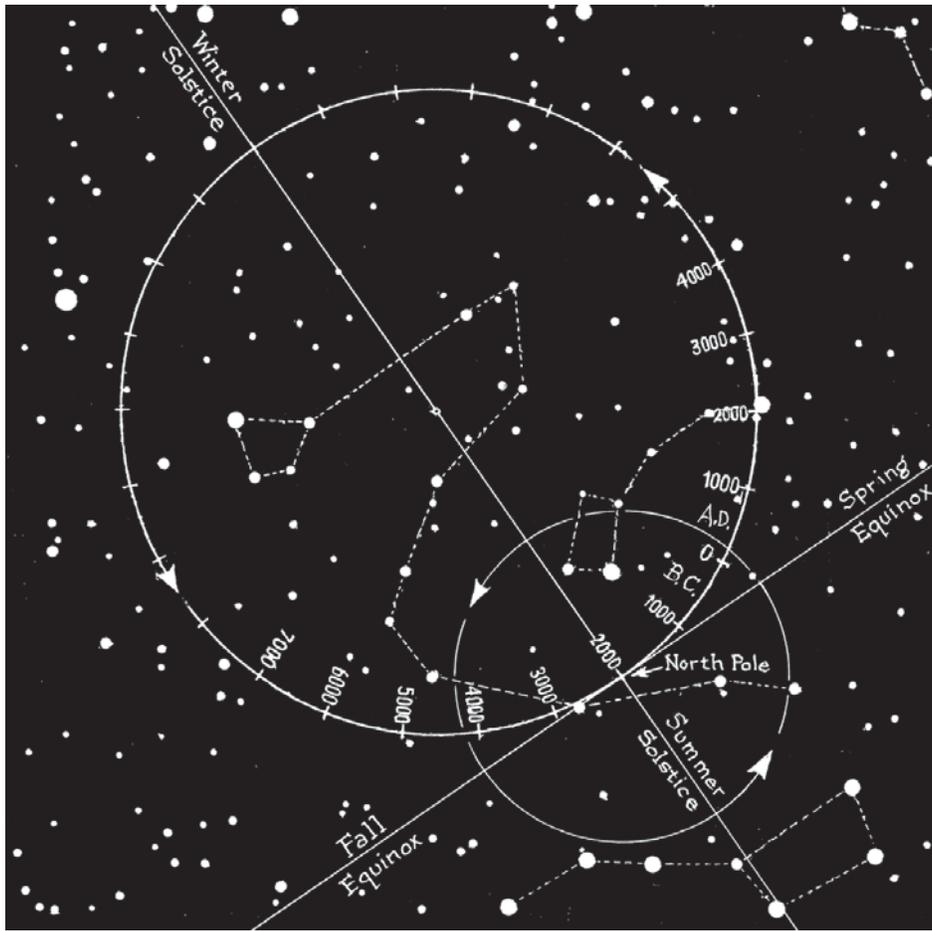
Jane: Why not?

Mr. Jones: Because in the days when the Egyptians first took their bearings on the universe, there was no North Star such as we know it today—there was just empty space, as far as mortal eye could see, and that just at the point where all things come together and around which all things move, as around the throne of God (fig. 42). The idea of the complete absorption of the four in the one is most often expressed by the symbol of the four-headed ram sitting in the middle of the cosmic circle (we will get to that when, if ever, we talk about Facsimile 2). The "four heads on a single neck" show that the four by uniting create a perfect unity, a single individual to whom in turn they owe their own identity. They are thus the four great gods uniting to create the universe (the ram-headed god is always the Creator) and also to *re*-create Osiris by giving him eternal life.⁶⁰⁰ They bring completion and perfection to the *ba* of Osiris when they all meet together to pool their natures and their powers.⁶⁰¹ The idea is compellingly

599. Gardiner, "The House of Life," 168.

600. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 31; Budge, *Papyrus of Ani*, 1:240. By day the ram-headed god joins the four canopics to tow the sunboat. Selim Hassan, *Excavations at Giza: The Solar-Boats of Khafra, Their Origin and Development* (Cairo: Government Press, 1946), 117, fig. 38b.

601. Since *ba* means "ram" as well as "soul," the ram was the normal expression of the idea. De Wit, "Les génies des quatre vents au temple d'Opet," 30. Thausing, "Der ägyptische Schicksalsbegriff," 59–60, identifies the four children of Horus with the four stars of the Dipper, the four glorious *Akhu* spirits, the four guardian apes of the Underworld, the four primal elements, and the four divine couples that make up the *nine*.

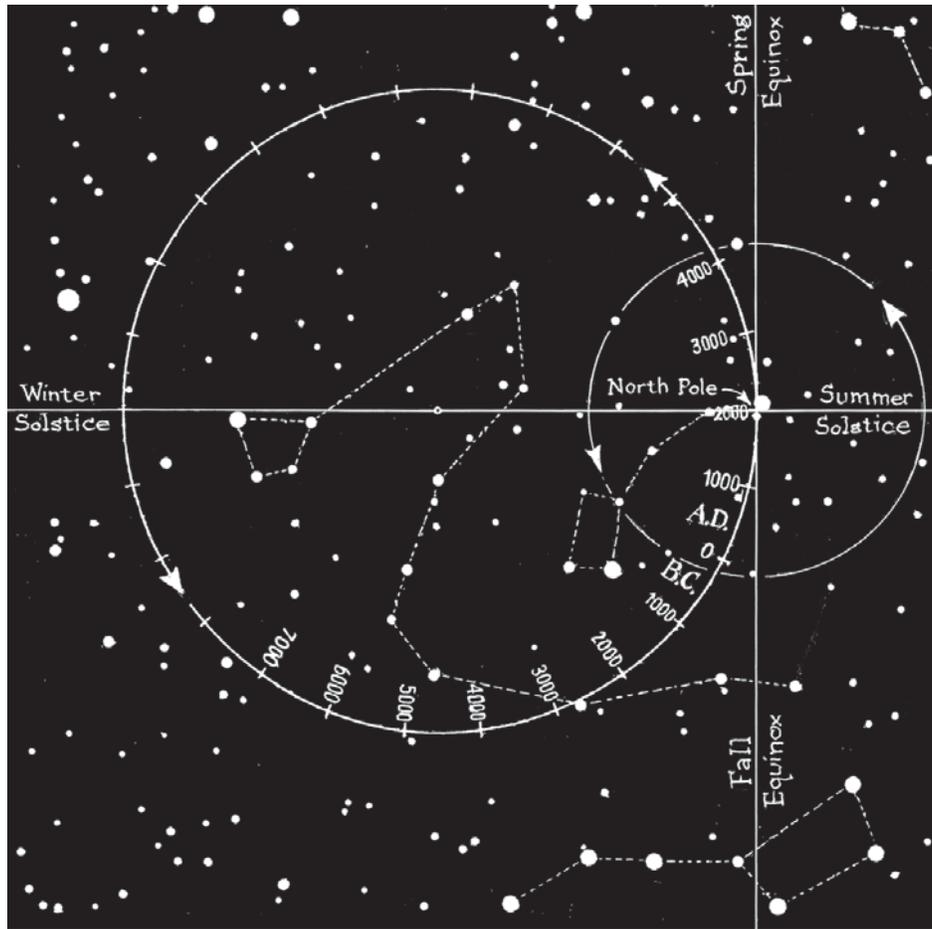


Northern polar stars, 2000 B.C.

Figure 42. There was no bright star near the North Pole at this time, but nearby stars helped point to it. The four stars of the bowl of the Big Dipper were seen as the four sons of Horus.

expressed in the pyramid and obelisk, which designate “dominion over the four quarters of the world and the zenith,” the zenith being the point on top at which four planes, lines, and solids all come to a single point.⁶⁰² Now to the Egyptians, who on earth is the one in the center, in whom the life of the race is concentrated and by whom it is sustained? I’ll give you a hint: The sarcophagus of King Tutankhamun shows that

602. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, 3rd amended and enl. ed. (London: Faber, 1959), 409.



Northern polar stars, A.D. 2000

In our time, Polaris is closest to the North Pole, but it is only a temporary honor. The North Pole will pass through every point on the large circle in its 26,000-year cycle, due to a change of the pointing angle of the earth's axis known as the precession of the equinoxes.

Egyptian kings were buried in four coffins, one within the other.⁶⁰³ Also, the pharaoh sat on a fourfold throne, and the Pyramid Texts describe the "four children of Geb" having a feast while in their midst sits "the king on his throne, incorruptible, unspoiled, unassailable."⁶⁰⁴

603. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 41, 21.

604. PT 576 (§§1510, 1514–15). One came to Heliopolis "to be purified, resurrected, deified, to behold the god face to face." Gaston Maspero, "Le Livre des Morts," in *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes*, BE 1

Dick: What has this to do with the idolatrous god of Pharaoh?

Mr. Jones: As everyone knows, the Egyptians carried their cosmic imagery over into the affairs of earthly government—or vice versa. Whereas in Canaan, as Stadelmann has shown, there was “no fixed and established ‘Canaanite religion’” common to all the regions under Egypt, there was a single centralized Egyptian cult, centering in Pharaoh.⁶⁰⁵ The gods of Syria and Palestine are extremely hard to study, he says, because their relations to each other are “constantly changing from time to time and from place to place,”⁶⁰⁶ and though we know of their existence, we know almost nothing about their cults.⁶⁰⁷ The one thing that brings them together in a sort of order is “the dogmatic position of the Egyptian king as overlord of the Syro-Palestinian area.”⁶⁰⁸ And that is the situation we find in the explanation to Facsimile 1, where everything eventually comes back to Pharaoh and where “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh” (and we have seen that the crocodile was just that) takes his place among the Egyptianized gods of Canaan. This is a reminder that our lion-couch papyrus is a political as well as a religious document, and indeed the ancients never separated the two departments, least of all the Egyptians. This point is brought home with great force if we closely examine the next figure in the papyrus, which is figure 10: “*Abraham in Egypt.*”

Facsimile 1, Figure 10

Dick: If that’s Abraham, I’m Julius Caesar.

(Paris: Leroux, 1893), 378; cf. 370, and CT 125, 124, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 2:147: “I have come as your fourth . . . to see Tnm, the fifth of the stars of Sahu (Orion)”; PT 264 (§§347–48): “Teti has summoned them, and each of the four gods brings those summoned . . . to come and tell their names to Re and Horus”; cf. PT 214 (§139).

605. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten*, 24.

606. *Ibid.*, 26.

607. *Ibid.*, 146.

608. *Ibid.*, 140.

Mr. Jones: Hail, Caesar! Haven't you learned yet that the Egyptians have their own special ways of indicating things? Notice how this same design is identified in figure 3 of Facsimile 3: "*Signifies Abraham in Egypt.*" It is not a portrait but a symbol, pure and simple. In all symbolism there are varying degrees of realistic representation, ranging from near portraits to pure abstraction. The Egyptian could give a reader a pretty good idea of *a* man on *an* altar, but how would he indicate a *particular* individual and no other on a *particular* altar in a *particular* country? For that he would either have to accompany his drawing by an explanatory text, as Abraham has done, or else show everything symbolically, which has been done in this case with considerable clarity and economy.

Dick: I don't see it—Abraham in Egypt!

Mr. Jones: Of course you don't. Even an Egyptian would not see it unless he had been initiated into the elements of the symbolism involved, but I think most Egyptians would get the point of the lotus (fig. 43). When the Egyptologists of 1912 explained that the odd things called "Abraham in Egypt" were merely "an offering table covered with lotus flowers," they considered their job done—as if that explained everything.⁶⁰⁹

Dick: As if Joseph Smith couldn't recognize the flowers too.

Jane: He *said* it was a symbol, didn't he?

Mr. Jones: The experts who brushed the thing aside so easily seem to have been completely unaware of the vast richness and variety of the lotus symbol in Egypt. No subject has been the object of more study and publication since 1912 than the meaning of the lotus to the Egyptians, and the very latest study, that of Peter Munro, concludes with the declaration that the many identifications of the lotus with this and that "are still imperfect and only tentative" and that we do

609. "Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet," *New York Times*, 29 December 1912, 3.

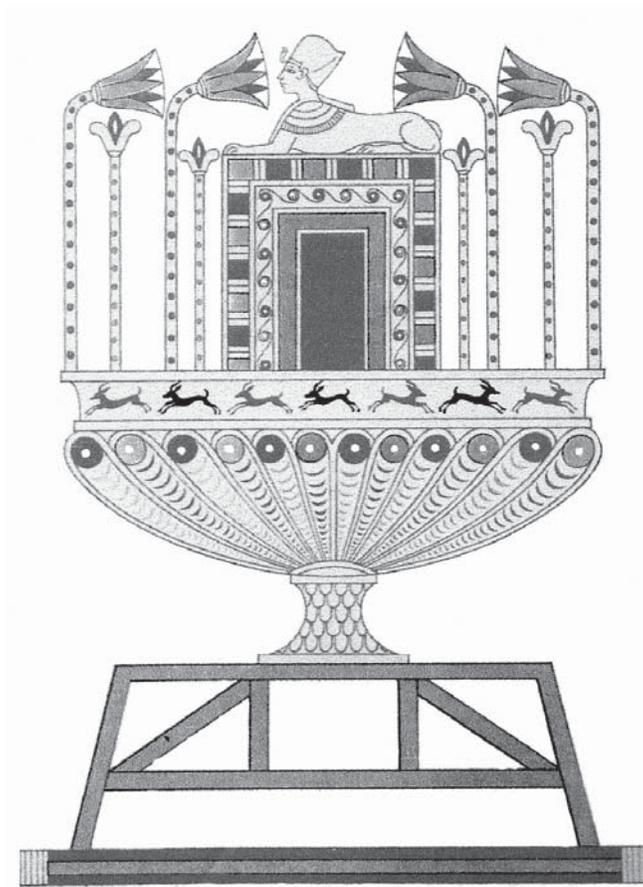


Figure 43. Compared to Facsimile 1, figure 10, the four lotuses on this elaborate gold vessel frame the palace gate on which Pharaoh himself reposes as a lion. These vessels are of a type brought by foreign visitors to Egypt as gifts to Pharaoh. Here the lotus may well symbolize the exchange of courtesies between the court of Egypt and its guests. Tomb of Nebamun and Imseba, Thebes, ca. 1460 B.C.

not yet know how or when or where the lotus came to be associated with so many different ideas and individuals in the Egyptian mind.⁶¹⁰ Our job is to find out, if we can, what the particular lotus design in Facsimiles 1 and 3 represents, and it is not going to be easy. Dr. Franklin Spalding's informants were also apparently unaware that Jéquier had at the time just made a special study of Egyptian lotus symbolism

610. Munro, "Nefertem und das Lotos-Emblem," 40.

and declared of this particular lotus arrangement: "Nobody . . . has given a satisfactory explanation of this type of monument."⁶¹¹ The work still remains to be done, but at least we can find out what possible interpretations of the symbol an Egyptian would find acceptable.

To begin with, in both Facsimile 1 and Facsimile 3 we see an open lotus with buds above and below it arching over a small stand with a fat little pitcher on it. In Facsimile 1 the stand is flanked by two thin jars which are missing in Facsimile 3, and since the two drawings are given the identical interpretation, our attention is drawn to what they have in common—the lotus and the buds. Now this lotus combination is common enough in coronation and court scenes, so it is quite at home in Facsimile 3, but so far as I know this is the *only* lion-couch scene adorned by the presence of a lotus stand. That in itself should be enough to make Egyptologists sit up and ask whether there might not be something special to this picture after all. If you will step into our Opet shrine, you will notice that there are no lotuses in the lion-couch scene. But look around you at the other walls—what do you see?

Jane: Lotuses everywhere!

Mr. Jones: So conspicuous, in fact, that Professor Maxence de Rochemonteix concluded that the lotus must somehow express the basic idea of the Osiris cult as celebrated at this place.⁶¹² He even goes so far as to declare that "the lotus and the papyrus are the emblems par excellence of Egyptian religion, exactly as the crescent is for the Moslems, and the cross for the Christians," the symbolism being by no means confined to funerary situations.⁶¹³

611. Gustave Jéquier, "Les tables d'offrandes égyptiennes," *Sphinx* 13 (1910): 206.

612. Rochemonteix, "Temple d'Apet," 177–78; and Maxence de Rochemonteix, "Le temple d'Apet, où est engendré l'Osiris de Thèbes," *RT* 3 (1881): 76.

613. Rochemonteix, "Temple d'Apet," 177–78.

Dick: Lotus *and* papyrus?

Mr. Jones: The exact identification of these flowers has been the subject of endless discussion. Some have maintained that the papyrus of Upper Egypt is a lotus and the lotus of Lower Egypt a papyrus, some that both flowers are lotuses, others that both are papyruses—and this confusion seems to go right back to the Egyptian artists themselves who “constantly and deliberately interchanged lotus and papyrus.”⁶¹⁴ But whatever their botanical classification may be, these two flowers enjoy a position of unique importance in Egypt, especially the lotus, which turns up everywhere in Egyptian art.

Jane: Then it’s just a decoration.

Mr. Jones: Far from it! Though some scholars have insisted that “there is no serious religious or symbolic significance,” no rebus or code in the use of the lotus in decoration, the same authorities admit that apparently decorative use of the lotus may often conceal a sort of hieroglyphic code.⁶¹⁵ “If

614. W. Krönig, “Ägyptische Fayence-Schalen des Neuen Reiches (Eine motivgeschichtliche Untersuchung),” *MDAIK* 5 (1934): 151. Drioton, “La cryptographie égyptienne,” 205, notes that lotus and papyrus are also confused in hieroglyphic. Karl Appelt, “Lotosfrucht als Ornament,” *MDAIK* 1 (1930): 153–57, gives a classification of Egyptian lotuses. Botanical identification is also treated by Georges Bénédite, “La cueillette du lis et le ‘Lirinon,’” in *Monuments et mémoires publiés par l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres* 25 (1921–22): 1–28, and Marcel Jacquemin, “Sous les lotus roses,” *Mélanges Maspero* 1.2, *MIFAO* 66 (Cairo: IFAO, 1935–39), 799–803. On the various esoteric symbols of the lotus, Edouard Naville, “La plante magique de Noferatum,” *Revue de l’Égypte ancienne* 1 (1925): 31–44, and Ludwig Keimer, “Nouvelle recherches au sujet du Potamogeton Lucens L.,” *Revue de l’Égypte ancienne* 2 (1929): 210–53; Richard Lepsius and Kurt Sethe, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien herausgegeben und erläutert von Richard Lepsius* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), 2:74–76, and W. D. Spanton, “The Water Lilies of Ancient Egypt,” *Ancient Egypt* (1917): 1–20, and W. M. Flinders Petrie, “The Egyptian Lily,” *Ancient Egypt* (1929): 65–73, who treats botanical types and decorative uses.

615. Herbert Senk, “Zum Wandel der Ausdrucksform in der ägyptischen Kunst,” *ZÄS* 72 (1936): 71–73, conceding that there *may* be hid-

we know the value of these symbols," wrote Rochemonteix long ago, "these ideograms, we can discover the dogmatic sense pursued by the designer, . . . his piling up of emblems which at first sight simply astonished us."⁶¹⁶ Thus the lotus-and-stand combination in the tomb of Seti I "has adapted itself completely to the pattern of written symbols," as if it was trying to tell us something,⁶¹⁷ and the same design in tombs of the Pyramid Age may "represent titles of the dead written in a specialized way," according to Edwards.⁶¹⁸

Dick: So our lotus and stand may be trying to tell us something special after all.

Mr. Jones: It is the monopoly of a particular lotus that makes one suspicious. If all the Egyptians cared about was their decorative effect, what about all the other equally beautiful flowers they ignore? How is it that hieroglyphic flowers are almost exclusively lotuses?⁶¹⁹ That only the blue and white lotuses are represented, though the rosy lotus was more decorative and more popular?⁶²⁰ That the lotuses, instead of being depicted in the free-and-easy manner of the Egyptian artists, are almost always drawn after "a very rigid pattern"?⁶²¹ That other plants never appear to compete with the lotus in heraldic contexts?

den significance in various lotus designs. J. J. Clere, "Un fragment de stèle du début de Nouvel Empire (Berlin 22485)," *ZÄS* 68 (1932): 45–47, and Schäfer, *Von ägyptischer Kunst*, 21–22 (from which we quote), both minimize the importance of symbolism, though the latter (*ibid.*, 23) admits that the lotus is almost never used "as pure ornament." Krönig, "Ägyptische Fayence-Schalen des Neuen Reiches," 154, suggests that since there is no decorative or logical explanation for the monopoly of lotus and papyrus, it must have a hidden meaning which escapes us.

616. Maxence de Rochemonteix, "Le temple d'Apet," *RT* 6 (1885): 24.

617. Krönig, "Ägyptische Fayence-Schalen des Neuen Reiches," 151.

618. I. E. S. Edwards, review of *Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit*, by Peter Kaplony, *JEA* 52 (1966): 182.

619. Ludwig Keimer, "La signification de l'hiéroglyphe RD," *ASAE* 48 (1948): 96–97.

620. Appelt, "Lotosfrucht als Ornament," 157.

621. Keimer, "Nouvelle recherches," 248.

Jane: What are heraldic contexts?

Mr. Jones: When the lotus appears as somebody's coat of arms. "The lotus is the flower of Egypt par excellence," wrote Grenfell; "also it is the symbol of Lower Egypt. . . . The lotus is the typical 'arms' of Egypt."⁶²² On the other hand, in the earliest times it would seem that the lotus stood for Upper Egypt and the papyrus for Lower Egypt,⁶²³ though Maspero and Moret held that the plants were both lotuses.⁶²⁴

Dick: So the lotus can stand for both the land of Egypt and dead people.

Mr. Jones: That isn't even the beginning of it. We seem to have a whole language of the lotus. Professors Siegfried Morenz and Johannes Schubert wrote a book about it and concluded that the various interpretations of the Egyptian lotus are in a state of hopeless confusion today.⁶²⁵ And Professor Rudolf Anthes has made a whole list of unanswered questions about the lotus.⁶²⁶ It is easy and pleasant to speculate, and there can be no doubt that there is something very fundamental about the lotus. It is easy to see why, for example, the lotus and papyrus always stood for Egypt in the minds of the people, since "lotus and papyrus were essential constituents of this unchanging significant 'landscape

622. Alice Grenfell, "The Rarer Scarabs, etc., of the New Kingdom," *RT* 32 (1915): 129, 130.

623. So Ludwig Keimer, "Bemerkungen zur Schiefertafel von Hierakonpolis (I. Dynastie)," *Aegyptus* 7 (1926): 169–70, 175–76; Kurt Sethe, *Urgeschichte und älteste Religion der Ägypter* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1930), 165. Jean Capart, "Au pays du symbolisme," *CdE* 32 (1957): 229–31, says the southern plant can be "a liliaceous plant, . . . a palm, or sometimes a lotus."

624. Gaston Maspero, "Le lotus," in *Études de mythologie et d'archéologie*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 28 (Paris: Leroux, 1912), 61–62; Moret, *Mystères égyptiens*, 166.

625. Siegfried Morenz and Johannes Schubert, *Der Gott auf der Blume: Eine ägyptische Kosmogonie und ihre weltweite Bildwirkung* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1954), 13.

626. Rudolf Anthes, "Atum, Nefertem und die Kosmogonien von Heliopolis: Ein Versuch," *ZÄS* 82 (1958): 6, 1.

of the first time," as Frankfort puts it.⁶²⁷ And because the lotus growing wild "afforded ordinary food for the poor," it represents the prodigal life-giving abundance of the land.⁶²⁸ Also, the first life that appeared from the primordial waters of chaos was the lotus, emerging pure and white at Heliopolis out of the primordial ooze of the first land.⁶²⁹ That is why at On the lotus went by the special name of Nefertem, the god "who represents the universe, who was before life existed and who will be when life has vanished," as Anthes puts it.⁶³⁰ It is the lotus that holds the secret of life springing up spontaneously, apparently out of nothing; during the long ages of desolation when only the empty waters existed, the seed of life slept in the lotus, ready to come forth on the First Day. Within the lotus was Re, the sun, waiting to be born as Khepri, according to a hymn from Edfu: "The Sleeper shall awake when the light comes forth from it."⁶³¹ Hence the idea that all life finds earnest of the resurrection in the miracle of the lotus.⁶³² The king is described in the Pyramid Texts as being "in the lotus" at the moment he awakes from the sleep of death.⁶³³ As Anthes puts it, "the lotus at Re's nose gives

627. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 154; so also Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 16.

628. Spanton, "Water Lilies of Ancient Egypt," 8. The idea is depicted in endless friezes from the walls of temples, showing lotus-crowned goddesses with huge breasts and bellies moving among lotus and papyrus plants.

629. Naville, "La plante magique," 33; Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 16, 46, noting the peculiarly water-repellent nature of the lotus, which keeps it miraculously free of mire and filth. *Ibid.*, 109.

630. Rudolf Anthes, "Zum Ursprung des Nefertem," *ZÄS* 80 (1955): 81.

631. See E. A. E. Reymond, "A Late Edfu Theory on the Nature of the God," *CdE* 40 (1965): 61–62. See especially Alexandre Moret, "Le lotus et la naissance des dieux en Égypte" *Journal Asiatique* 11/9 (1917): 502.

632. Moret, "Le lotus et la naissance," 502; Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 106, see in the lotus the basic idea of "self-containment," "self-creation."

633. Moret, "Le lotus et la naissance," 507–8. It was said that the soul of Osiris hid in a lotus awaiting the resurrection. Rochemonteix, "Temple

him life for his daily journey; . . . this refers to the first day of the primal time, . . . when the primal lotus gave the sun the power to live and create."⁶³⁴ You can readily see why the lotus gets a big play in funerary scenes.

Jane: Like lilies today.

Mr. Jones: Botanically the Egyptian lotus was a real lily.⁶³⁵ And since Re and the king and Osiris were restored by the power of the lotus, so it was believed that everybody might enjoy the same privilege.⁶³⁶ But the funeral lotus is only part of the picture. In the latest lotus study, Munro shows how the lotus being identified with Re is also the highest god, Atum-Re, at Heliopolis; and how as the father of the living king he must also be Osiris; and how as a living king he must also be Horus; and how father and son and Re-Harakhty "fuse in the composite form of Nefertem."⁶³⁷ This Nefertem seems to be the key to the whole business; a lot of studies have been written about him, one emphasizing one aspect of his nature and another another. Nefertem is the king at Heliopolis, represented as a lotus and embodied as a lion.

Dick: Lotus *and* lion?

Mr. Jones: You will notice that the guardian lion with the big knife always has a huge lotus on his head or behind his back (fig. 44)—we shall soon see why. As Nefertem, the king

d'Apet," 177–78, and that Horus's two eyes were restored by becoming lotus-bulbs. Gardiner, *Chester Beatty Papyri*, No. 1, 21; cf. Senmut's poem in Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, "Hommage d'un poète à la princesse lointaine," *Kêmi* 12 (1952): 35. The oldest texts tell how Re by smelling the lotus is revived every morning, and so "the primeval beginning is reiterated." Rudolf Anthes, "Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.," *JNES* 18 (July 1959): 176. The king made a lotus offering to the sun every morning in the temple of Heliopolis, PT 249 (§264–66), cited by Anthes, "Zum Ursprung des Nefertem," 81–82.

634. Anthes, "Zum Ursprung des Nefertem," 82.

635. See Capart, "Au pays du symbolisme," 229–31; Maspero, "Le lotus," 61–62, following the botanist Goodyear.

636. Moret, "Le lotus et la naissance," 506; Émile Chassinat, *Le mam-misi d'Edfou*, MMAF 16 (Cairo: IFAO, 1939), 16, plate 46.

637. Munro, "Nefertem und das Lotos-Emblem," 37.

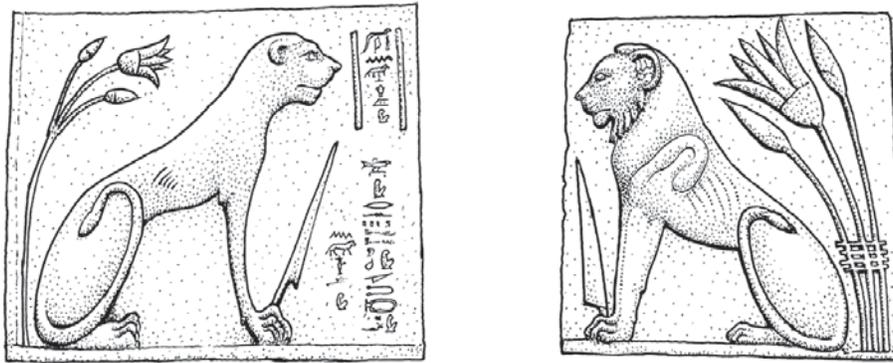


Figure 44. The lion Nefertem guards Egypt's northeast frontier with his big knife and his lotus—the welcoming committee for those who came to Egypt from Abraham's Canaan. The lotus is the official symbol of the border control and of permission to enter the country. Ptolemaic birth temple at Philae.

comes down from heaven to rule among men, bearing the lotus scepter that gives him all power on earth and below earth.⁶³⁸ But it is important to note that his lotus power is limited to his earthly kingdom alone—Nefertem is “the representative of purely earthly kingship,” as Anthes puts it.⁶³⁹ The pharaoh sits on a throne on which the intertwined lotus and papyrus shows his rule over the Two Lands,⁶⁴⁰ their stems also binding Asiatic and African prisoners back to back, showing that foreign lands are also brought under the beneficent sway of Pharaoh.⁶⁴¹ On the same throne designs you will see the king himself depicted as a lion treading

638. PT 213 (§§134–35). “The King NN is on the nose of Great Power . . . he appears as Nefertem, the lotus-flower at the nose of Re.” PT 249 (§§265–66), discussed by Kees, “Die Feuerinsel,” 44.

639. Anthes, “Atum, Nefertem und die Kosmogonien von Heliopolis,” 4–5.

640. Ludwig Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'azhu-Re*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), Bd. 2, pt. 2, plate 42, is a good example, though almost any throne picture will do, e.g., Lepsius and Sethe, *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien*, 2:136.

641. An extremely common motif, Capart, “Au pays du symbolisme,” 228–29; for a bibliography, Spanton, “Water Lilies of Ancient Egypt,” 13. The tied lotuses on the throne of Thothmes III even without human figures “may be something in connection with this king's Syrian victories.”

on his foreign enemies.⁶⁴² The lotus and lion are constantly found together in such contexts because they perform the same two functions: one protective, the other aggressive.

Jane: Lotuses attack people?

Mr. Jones: Yes, but first of all they protect them. The gift of a lotus is often accompanied by the hieroglyphic symbols for protection.⁶⁴³ In the broadest sense Nefertem, the lotus-lion, “protects the individual against anyone who might do him harm.”⁶⁴⁴ That is why the lotus-sign was put by the Egyptians on everything they wanted to protect—on utensils, clothes, houses, on their dresses, furniture, chairs, boats, fans, while in the tomb of the dead the lotus-sign was used “as a talisman assuring . . . an effective protection against its enemies.”⁶⁴⁵ The power of the lotus, though formidable, is ever benign and protective in nature, as might be expected from its life-giving power.⁶⁴⁶

Dick: But you said it was aggressive.

Grenfell, “The Rarer Scarabs,” 133; cf. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'asḥu-Re*, 36, Abb. 30 and plate 16.

642. [For example, see Boston MFA 03.1131, throne of Thutmosis IV, in *Ägyptens Aufstieg zur Weltmacht* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1987), 362–63—eds.]

643. Albert Gayet, *Temple de Louxor* (Paris: Leroux, 1894), plate XXII, figs. 78–79. At Edfu the lotus-staff is presented to the queen with the words, “Protection and life-giving.” Émile Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou*, part 13, MMAF 30 (Cairo: IFAO, 1934), plate CCCCXLV; cf. Chassinat, *Le temple d'Edfou*, part 12, MMAF 29 (Cairo: IFAO, 1934), plate CCCXXXIV, where the king says the same in presenting a lotus to a god.

644. Naville, “La plante magique,” 41.

645. *Ibid.*, 44.

646. Some have maintained that the power of the lotus lay in its smell, which counteracted the smell of death and decay and therefore demonstrated the power to overcome death. Kees, Morenz, Anthes, and others suggest that Nefertem began as a god of perfume. Siegfried Morenz, “Ein Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte,” *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 48 (1953): 348. Anthes, “Atum, Nefertem und die Kosmogonien von Heliopolis,” 1, 7. But as Munro, “Nefertem und das Lotos-Emblem,” 35, notes, Nefertem is far more than a Duftgott. Other Egyptian flowers have far stronger scents than the lotus, and the normal opposition to

Mr. Jones: Whenever you see a big lion with a knife, you can be almost sure of seeing a huge lotus on its head or back.⁶⁴⁷ The connection is explained by their common home in the marshes of the northeastern frontier of Egypt, where they both guarded the land against marauding Asiatics of the desert. The lion Nefertem and his companion or double, Myesis, both “worshipped in a lotus-flower,” were at home on the extreme northeastern borderlands, the home of Sopdu, right up against Arabia.⁶⁴⁸ You will recall that the great fortress there was called the Dwelling of the Lion and stood amidst the shallow lotus-filled lakes that, along with the crocodiles and the lions of the surrounding deserts, effectively discouraged unauthorized entry and exit. Right down to the time of the Caesars it was one of the main duties of Pharaoh to protect this all-important gateway, and it was the custom to “venerate the protector of this frontier of the land.”⁶⁴⁹ At nearby Heliopolis the king himself was Nefertem, both lotus and lion, “the guardian”; “not only does the sight of him make the mountains [that is, the Asiatics] to flee,” wrote Professor Naville, “but he is the protector of the other divinities.”⁶⁵⁰ His specialty is terrifying would-be invaders from the east, in which capacity he is also identified with the other lion-god Myesis, who also wears the lotus.⁶⁵¹ An inscription

strong odors was not the delicate fragrance of the lotus but the powerful influence of burning incense.

647. Varille, “La grande porte du temple d’Apet à Karnak,” 94, figs. 4–6; Schweitzer, *Löwe und Sphinx im alten Ägypten*, Tafel XV, figs. 5, 6; R. T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Grove, 1960), 66–67, holds the lotus to be “the symbol for the final defeat of the powers of the Abyss.”

648. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 509; Naville, “La plante magique,” 36; Hermann Kees, “Ein alter Götterhymnus als Begleittext zur Opfertafel,” *ZÄS* 57 (1922): 117–18.

649. Victor Chapot, “L’Horus garde-frontière du nome Sethroïte,” *Mélanges Maspero* 2 (1934): 230–31.

650. Naville, “La plante magique,” 39.

651. Anthes, “Atum, Nefertem und die Kosmogonien von Heliopolis,” 7, on the king as Nefertem at Heliopolis; cf. Alexandre Piankoff, “Nefer-



Figure 45. In his tomb at Beni Hassan, Khnumhotep, lord of the Oryx Province, had himself depicted approving the passport of thirty-seven Semitic nomads. Their leader brings two desert oryx as gifts, while their donkeys carry bellows and metal-working tools. Their brightly

tells how Horus himself turns into a lion to drive the enemies of Egypt out of Heliopolis and back to the lion-house on the border.⁶⁵² Seth, the archetype of the wicked rebel and invader from the north and east, is stopped cold at the border by the lotus “Nefertem, who emerged from the primordial waters, . . . who turned back Seth, who opposed the foreign countries when the heaven was overcast and the earth wrapped in mists.”⁶⁵³

Dick: I can understand why a lion would chase strangers, but why a lotus?

Mr. Jones: Kees found that odd too and suggested that it might be because a lotus stem will cut the fingers of anybody who tries to pull it up.⁶⁵⁴ But whatever the reason for

Toum et Mahes,” *Egyptian Religion* 1 (1933): 100–102. The Sphinx of San is a mixture of the Egyptian and the Asiatic lions. Montet, *Drame d’Avaris*, 64. Shu also is the king’s good companion and “the living lion who keeps (enemies) away. Kurt Sethe, *Zur altägyptischen Sage vom Sonnenauge das in der Fremde war* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912), 25. Nefertem “confronts alien nations that they retreat . . . guarding Sopdu, the Lord of the Eastern Land,” according to a hymn in Hermann Kees, *Ägypten, Religionsgeschichtliches Lesebuch* 10, ed. Alfred Bertholet (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928), 13.

652. Chapot, “L’Horus du nome Sethroïte,” 231. The lotus-crowned lion is often represented attacking Asiatics from the rear. Schweitzer, *Löwe und Sphinx im alten Ägypten*, Tafel XV, figs. 5–6; and Piankoff, “Nefertoum et Mahes,” 103–5.

653. Kees, “Ein alter Götterhymnus,” 97.

654. Kees, *Der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten*, 90.



colored robes and unusual instruments and weapons were an exotic novelty. Khnumhotep may have chosen this scene as a testament to his power and compassion, even to foreigners, ca. 1900 B.C. Modified scale.

it, this hostility brings the lotus, according to him, into a “syncretistic relationship to the guardian deities of the eastern Delta [Sopdu], who make him too a frontier guard.”⁶⁵⁵ It is obvious that the lotus is more “symbolic” than the fierce lion, but it plays an equally conspicuous role in the guarding of the northeast frontier. To the people in the hungry lands to the east, Egypt was something special: it was their last chance when they were starving, but while they were there they hated the place and yearned to get back to their old bang-up life in the desert.⁶⁵⁶ They were a dangerous lot, and the Egyptian records show that they were carefully checked at the border⁶⁵⁷ and that their every move was watched while they were in Egypt. Ephraim A. Speiser has spoken of a “societal curtain that separated Egypt and Mesopotamia, call it the lotus curtain, if you will”—he too perceived the symbol of the lotus.⁶⁵⁸

Dick: But why did the Egyptians let the Asiatics in at all? Couldn't they keep them out?

Mr. Jones: They not only didn't keep them out—they actually offered them protection (fig. 45). Therein I think we

655. Ibid.

656. Siegfried Hermann, “Israel in Ägypten,” *ZÄS* 91 (1964): 74.

657. See Israel Lévi, “Le prosélytisme juif,” *REJ* 51 (1906): 38, discussing P. Anastasi VI 6/14.

658. Ephraim A. Speiser, “Three Thousand Years of Bible Study,” *Centennial Review* 4 (1960): 218.

can see the unique greatness of Egypt. Montet pointed out that the Egyptians, contrary to what we have been taught to think, were really great travelers and, what is even more surprising, that the two main duties of Pharaoh were (1) to keep the movements of the Asiatics into and within Egypt under strict control, and (2) to protect Egyptian travelers, missionaries, merchants, and artisans abroad.⁶⁵⁹ Now the concern for the helpless in a strange place is the special concern of Nefertem. In funerary reliefs the dead, newly arrived in the netherworld, are drawn without arms, to show their condition of utter helplessness in a strange and frightening world. While they are in that condition, Nefertem comes to their rescue, puts his arms around them, and finally gives them a new set of arms, saying, "There now, you have become whole and complete, now you have your arms!" meaning, as Naville put it, that the dead person "is now a complete person who has been entirely reconstituted. He lacked arms, but the gods of the east have given him theirs."⁶⁶⁰

Jane: Who are the gods of the east?

Mr. Jones: None other than the two lions Nefertem and Myesis, with their huge lotus-crowns. The concern for strangers is very significant, for in many scenes and inscriptions the lotus stands for both guest and host. The lotus-god Har-somtous is called "a guest in Denderah,"⁶⁶¹ and if you were invited to a party in Egypt, especially at the royal palace, etiquette would require you to bring a lotus with you and present it to your host. There is a regular formula for "coming with a bouquet of Amon, Lord of the Thrones of the Two

659. Montet, *Drame d'Avaris*, 19.

660. Naville, "La plante magique," 40. The helpless armless dead are shown in Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Puyemrê at Thebes*, 2 vols. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1922-23), 2: plate XLVII; and in the tomb of Ramses IX someone is bringing two lotuses to an armless spirit who has just arrived in the Lower World by ship and stands waiting helplessly. Guilmant, *Le tombeau de Ramsès IX*, plate LXXII.

661. Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 37.

Lands in Karnak, after doing all that is commended,” and a proper way to address one’s host: “To thy *ka*, happy king, Lord of the Two Lands, whom Re loves, a bouquet of thy father Amon. . . . Mayest thou remain on the throne of the living Horus like Re forever.”⁶⁶² This is plainly a New Year’s gift for the throne, which seems to have been the origin of the idea—remember that the lotus represents the birth of everything at the cosmic New Year. Another formula is, “Coming in peace with a bouquet of Amon with the compliments of his beloved son,” this being followed not by the name of Horus, as you might expect, but by the name of the donor.⁶⁶³ When the king appears in a reception on the throne, people bring him their Amon-bouquets with wishes for “a happy lifetime in the royal dwelling.”⁶⁶⁴ It was a birthday gift as well as a New Year’s gift.

Dick: But why should anybody have to give lotuses to the king if they belonged to his father Amon in the first place?

Mr. Jones: No idea was more familiar to the ancients than the pious truism that the god who receives the gifts of the earth as offerings is after all the real source of those same offerings. An inscription has the king bring a lotus to Horus, who himself arose from the lotus,⁶⁶⁵ and Rameside stelae show people bringing lotuses to a queen who is already holding a lotus and stands completely decked and surrounded with lotuses!⁶⁶⁶

Jane: But would you have to bring a lotus to the party—couldn’t you bring something else?

662. Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 115–16.

663. *Ibid.*

664. *Ibid.*, 117.

665. See Gustave Jéquier, *Fouilles à Saqqarah: La pyramide d’Aba* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1935), plate XVIII; plate XXII, fig. 16. There is a formula “for receiving bouquets that were raised in the temple of Amon at Karnak,” Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 119, and bouquets “for Amon and for Hathor, the Lord of the Desert,” *ibid.*, 104.

666. Jéquier, *La pyramide d’Aba*, plate XVIII.

Mr. Jones: No—it is always a lotus, and that shows clearly that it is a ritual and symbolic thing. Naturally the people who got invited to court, high nobility and officials for the most part, vied with each other in the splendor of their offerings and flatteries, until in the Eighteenth Dynasty the Amon-bouquets finally got too big to handle.⁶⁶⁷ But no matter how showy and vulgar they got, the bouquets always had a lotus as a centerpiece. An inscription on the tomb of Amenemhab says of a lotus-bearer, “He comes as one welcome, bringing the life [?] of Amon,” to which his host replies, “To thy person the symbol of life [?] of Amon, who is pleased with thee, who loves thee and admits thee.”⁶⁶⁸ Here the word for “admit” is *s.w3ḥ-k*, meaning to make a place for a person, like the Arabic *Marḥaban*—welcome to the party!

Dick: So the lotus is really a sort of ticket then.

Mr. Jones: Yes, like the *tesserae hospitales* of the Greeks and Romans. Every guest brings a token for his host and receives one in return—often the identical gift!⁶⁶⁹ Thus the Egyptian brought a lotus to Pharaoh as “a sign of submission and love,” which lotus he professed to have received from the king’s father Amon, the giver of all blessings including life itself.⁶⁷⁰ All were expected to bring such a gift “coming in peace to that place where the king is.”⁶⁷¹ With the expansion of empire, Amon became the god of all the lands under Egyptian sway, and the Egyptian lotus is as conspicuous in throne scenes from Palestine and Syria as it is in Egypt itself. Indeed, the object of Morenz and Schubert’s cooperative

667. Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 56–57, 62.

668. Virey, *Sept tombeaux thébains*, pt. 2 (Theban Tomb 85 = tomb of Amenemhab); see Urk IV 916. Such a flower was in fact called *‘ankh* and was a symbol of life, according to Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 56.

669. We have treated the concept at length in Nibley, “Sparsiones,” 515–43, in *CWHN* 10:148–94.

670. Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 56–57. In the temple of Seti I the royal lion is seen with a hawk on its head, while on the hawk’s head is an enormous lotus—the king is a lotus too. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

671. *Ibid.*, 115.

study is to trace the spreading of the royal lotus motif from Egypt all over the Old World. Among the Joseph Smith Papyri is one very fine picture of the four sons of Horus, the canopic figures, standing on an enormous lotus before the king on his throne.⁶⁷² Here the lotus represents all the regions of the earth brought under the sway of Egypt.⁶⁷³

Dick: So Abraham would have known all about the lotus in Palestine.

Mr. Jones: And so would everybody else. On scarabs of the First Intermediate Period (to which Abraham is commonly assigned) we see the *non*-Egyptian Hathor, the type of the lady Qudshu, the hierodule and hostess to all the world, bearing the lotus as her special insignium.⁶⁷⁴ Later she is represented standing on a lion with a bunch of lilies (lotuses) in her hand;⁶⁷⁵ she rides her lion when she visits Min (Amon) in Egypt too, and she wears the Hathor wig, but for all that, according to Stadelmann, she is still “a Near Eastern and *un-Egyptian*” figure.⁶⁷⁶ But we also have the hospitable lotus-queen in Egypt; the cow-head of the lady Hathor is always seen emerging from a lotus stand of capital,⁶⁷⁷ and people who brought lotuses to the party would describe them as gathered by the queen’s own hand in her own garden.⁶⁷⁸

Jane: Some nerve!

672. “New Light on Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papyri,” *IE* 71 (February 1968): 40-B.

673. Cf. Lefébure, *Les hypogées royales de Thebes*, plate XXXVIII. The lotus-design is common in the East representing a geographical map of “the earth and its parts.” Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 127, as well as a map of the whole cosmos, *ibid.*, 104.

674. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten*, 15; on the lady as hostess, 150.

675. *Ibid.*, 110.

676. *Ibid.*, 118–19. The Canaanitish Rashap is also accompanied by a parasol or lotus, 64.

677. Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 34; Rochemonteix, “Temple d’Apet,” 177–78.

678. Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 56.

Mr. Jones: Not at all—just giving honor where honor was due. In the temple of Seti I the king himself is greeted by a lady wearing a magnificent lotus crown; she identifies herself as the hostess when she hails his majesty with “Welcome! Welcome!”⁶⁷⁹ In putting their arms around the armless and defenseless stranger, the two lotus-lions of the east were, according to Naville, simply performing the office of the Lady, “the Protectress.”⁶⁸⁰ I think it is significant that we find the same sort of lotus-hostess in archaic Greece as well as in Palestine: “it was said of the lotus-crowned Goddess of the Corinthian Mysteries. . . . ‘Her service is perfect freedom’; and, indeed, her habit [was] . . . always to grant or withhold her favours according as her sons . . . came to her with exactly the right gifts in their hands—gifts of their own choice, not of her dictation.”⁶⁸¹ Thus Robert Graves reports—and we can guess—what gift would most please the lotus-crowned goddess.⁶⁸² As a token of admission, the lotus is a sort of certificate, without which no one is admitted to the region of truth.

Dick: I suppose that everything you have said has some sort of reference to Abraham, but it would sure help if you would sort of pull things together for us.

Mr. Jones: I’ll try, but we still have nothing to work with but a lot of loose ends, or rather an “inextricable tangle (*als verworrenen Knäuel*),” as Morenz and Schubert put it.⁶⁸³ And Anthes has concluded that such fundamental questions as whether the primal lotus was a prehistoric idea, whether it originated with Nefertem, how it was related to the sun, in what form the sun originally emerged from the lotus, etc., are insoluble.⁶⁸⁴ But still the very richness and variety

679. Gardiner and Calverley, *Temple of King Sethos I*, 2: plate 29.

680. Naville, “La plante magique,” 39.

681. Graves, *White Goddess*, 477.

682. See Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstentale*, 50–51.

683. Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 13.

684. Anthes, “Atum, Nefertem und die Kosmogonien von Heliopolis,” 6.

of Egyptian lotus symbolism gives us hope—since we are not closing but opening doors. We must realize, as Morenz and Schubert remind us, that nothing expresses more completely than the lotus “the astonishingly extensive possibility of association of ideas which the Egyptian possessed.”⁶⁸⁵ So nothing could be more rash or foolish than to insist that a lotus in a particular picture cannot possibly be one thing because it happens to symbolize something else.

Now of one thing there is no doubt at all, and that is that the lotus is the symbol of the land of Egypt, in particular of Lower Egypt, where Abraham was visiting. Also, the lotus is the embodiment of Pharaoh as the ruling power of Egypt, a beneficent and hospitable power. Characteristic of the lotus is that it is most at home in situations of hospitality, where it represents both guest and host. In both capacities it can represent individuals, including foreigners in Egypt—a wall painting from an Eighteenth Dynasty tomb shows a Syrian bringing a magnificent lotus offering to Pharaoh, just as any good Egyptian would.⁶⁸⁶ According to Joseph Smith, the lotus in figure 10 represents *two* entities and specifies their *relationship*: It is “Abraham in Egypt,” Abraham as a guest and Egypt as host. We can refine the image by bringing in a good deal of interesting and relevant data—the special function of the lotus in protecting strangers, the lotus as the stamp of official protection and safe conduct (a sort of visa, as it were), the lotus as the mark of the frontier control station through which Abraham would have to pass (that customhouse is the scene of an important Abraham legend), the oddity of the lotus in this particular scene.

Dick: Odd is right. The welcome guest is being murdered.

Mr. Jones: All the more welcome for that. Remember, it was considered the highest honor to substitute for the

685. Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 42.

686. Heinrich Schäfer, *Die altägyptischen Prunkgefäße mit aufgesetzten Randverzierungen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 13, Abb. 26.

pharaoh in any operation. Incidentally, the little spouted jug on the tall stand is, according to Schott, an ointment jar for the use of honored guests.⁶⁸⁷ You must admit this is a strange place to find one, and I can't think of a better explanation than the one given. But along with all the details, there is a broader symbolism to the lotus that I think would have been widely recognized almost anywhere in the ancient world; it is the subject of Morenz and Schubert's fascinating little book—the wandering of the lotus. Those two scholars have combined their formidable specialties to show how the lotus symbol spread from Egypt throughout the Old World. In one important context the lotus marks the trail of the righteous man, the messenger of truth, bearing his light into dark and dangerous places. The lotus was identified with Hercules as the wandering benefactor of mankind, the perennial stranger and guest,⁶⁸⁸ it sprang up in the footsteps of the Bodhisattva when he went forth to bring light into a benighted world;⁶⁸⁹ the "God of Wisdom" held the lotus in his hand as he rode on his lion into China to take the shining truth to the ends of the earth.

Jane: Lotus and lion again!

Mr. Jones: Which is certainly a broad hint as to the Egyptian origin of the business. But let me ask you, who is the archetype of the righteous man, the bearer of revelation and preacher of righteousness, the courageous stranger in alien and hostile countries and courts? Who but Abraham the Wanderer? In the very early Judaeo-Christian *Hymns of Thomas* the righteous man in the world is compared with a king's son spending a dangerous sojourn in "the Land of Egypt," following the ancient and established prototype of "Abraham in Egypt." Abraham is qualified if anyone is for that distinguished company of wandering inspired teachers whose symbol is the lotus, and so I don't know just

687. Schott, *Das schöne Fest vom Wüstantale*, 67–68.

688. Morenz and Schubert, *Gott auf der Blume*, 39–40.

689. *Ibid.*, 134–35.

how surprised we should be to find a nineteenth-century prophet designating the lotus as the symbol of “Abraham in Egypt.”

Dick: Here are some more fancy abstractions—

Facsimile 1, Figure 11

“Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians.”

Mr. Jones: How could anyone possibly make it clearer that this is supposed to be not a picture but a representation, with a meaning ascribed arbitrarily and culturally? Long ago Théodule Devéria condemned Joseph Smith for giving any interpretation at all to the pillars, which he calls a “characteristic ornament in Egyptian art, having no known significance.”⁶⁹⁰

Dick: “Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.”⁶⁹¹

Jane: Hamlet.

Dick: No, Gertrude. When will they learn?

Mr. Jones: If we want to know whether Devéria really saw everything, we’ve got to do a little seeing ourselves. Let’s find out how this particular ornament is used by the Egyptians.

Dick: What an ornament!

Mr. Jones: I’m afraid the successive engravers of Facsimile 1 have done us all a disservice by turning the “gates of heaven” into a meaningless and untidy jumble of vertical lines arbitrarily and irregularly connected by crude horizontal strokes. But the original papyrus is a different story: it shows us ten clearly drawn gates or a series of pylons. If we are looking for parallels, we don’t have to go far—Egyptian art is full of them. The characteristic of the earliest royal tombs

690. Théodule Devéria, “Fragments de manuscrits funéraires égyptiens: Considérés par les Mormons comme les mémoires autographes d’Abraham,” in *Mémoires et fragments*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 4 (Paris: Leroux, 1896), 196.

691. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 4.

is the decorations of their outer surfaces with what is called the “palace façade” style of recessed paneling (fig. 46)—a long line of imitation doors flanked by square pillars. The structure is abundantly illustrated on the earliest seals, showing the elaborate palace-gate or “*serekh*” design.⁶⁹²

Jane: What’s a *serekh*?

Mr. Jones: The picture of the entrance to a tomb or palace—a rectangular door flanked by massive supports sometimes extended into towers on each side, usually with a big hawk perched right above the gate between the pillars. Heinrich Balcz has collected over a dozen different types for comparison; to him the structure suggests a fortress—“Wehrbau.”⁶⁹³ But he has no doubt that the central panel is always a door.⁶⁹⁴ The label *sbḥt-tꜣwy*, “Gate of the Two Lands,” shows that the door was identified with the palace gate, though high officials were sometimes allowed by special courtesy to employ the motif in their own tombs.⁶⁹⁵ The same design was employed in the tomb as in the palace, especially in the earliest dynasties, and Balcz maintains that the false door of an Old Kingdom tomb was really a niche “to which the significance of a passage for the dead was attributed.”⁶⁹⁶ The earliest stelae, which were certainly not houses, also have the same false door and panel design,⁶⁹⁷ which is also

692. For lavish and easily available illustrations, see Walter B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1961), 178. Cf. Adolf Rusch, “Die Entwicklung der Grabsteinformen im Alten Reich,” *ZÄS* 58 (1923): 101–24. Kemp, “Abydos and the Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty,” 13–22.

693. Heinrich Balcz, “Die altägyptische Wandgliederung,” *MDAIK* 1 (1930): 60–61; on fortresses, 65–68.

694. *Ibid.*, 69.

695. Ludwig Borchardt, “Das Grab des Menes,” *ZÄS* 36 (1898): 100; Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 3:136.

696. Balcz, “Die altägyptische Wandgliederung,” 69. Egyptian variations on the recessed-panelling theme are illustrated by Rusch, “Entwicklung der Grabsteinformen,” 101–24.

697. Philip D. Scott-Moncrieff, *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae* (London: British Museum, 1911), part 1 throughout.

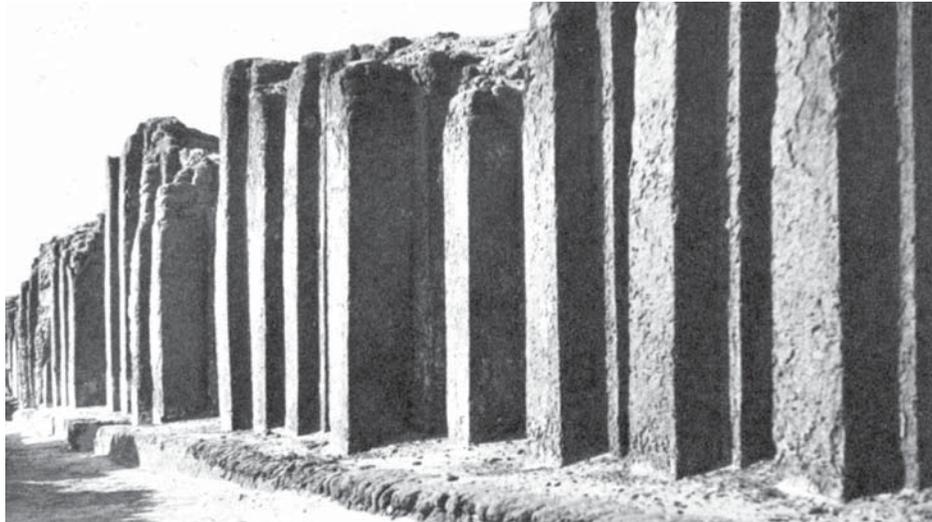


Figure 46. The bold and dramatic vertical panels and pillars form the walls of sacred buildings in Mesopotamia and are characteristic of the earliest palace façades and tombs of Egypt, indicating the other-worldly nature of those structures. In Egypt the recessed panels represent gates to the other world, and the pillars flanking them the pillars of heaven. East façade of the tomb of Queen Her-nit at Saqqara. Emory, *Archaic Egypt*, plate 4.

repeated on the sides of wooden coffins, where we find the same vertical lines with empty spaces in between, designated by the experts as “pillars” with “false doors” between them.⁶⁹⁸ And the same motif is used to decorate the sides of boxes and chests designed to hold any precious objects.⁶⁹⁹

Dick: Is the idea always the same?

Mr. Jones: We cannot say until we know what the idea was. Professor Balcz reaches the sensible conclusion that the false door on funerary objects must represent “a passage for the dead.”⁷⁰⁰ We still do not understand the undoubtedly religious significance of such a curious architectural phenomenon. While some maintained that the peculiar structure of

698. Emory, *Archaic Egypt*, plates 24a–b, 25b; Erwin Zippert, “Medûm,” *AfO* 7 (1931): 299.

699. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, 1:85b.

700. Balcz, “Die altägyptische Wandgliederung,” 70.

the palace-façade style was the result of building in brick, others held that the design was imported into both Egypt and Mesopotamia from northern Syria, where they built in wood.⁷⁰¹ And while some suggested that all the vertical rills were for drainage, others pointed out that there was no need for drainage in Upper Egypt and that the pylons and pillars must therefore have a special significance.⁷⁰² This is indicated by the fact that in Mesopotamia this particular building style, which closely resembles the Egyptian structures of the Thinite and Predynastic periods, is employed *only* in temples.⁷⁰³ Surveying the phenomenon throughout the whole ancient East, Stuart Piggott writes: "An essential part of the temple décor was an elaborate system of niches and reveals which appear to have been a mark of religious as opposed to secular architecture."⁷⁰⁴ In Egypt, whether the false door of the palace façade is "the gate of the house of the dead," as Balcz calls it, or the door of the divine residence, as Ludwig Borchardt calls it, it is always a passageway into another world, a sacred ceremonial gate of heaven or the underworld.⁷⁰⁵

Dick: And what about the pillars?

Mr. Jones: They make the gates, of course. The Egyptians, like other people, talk of the *four* pillars of heaven;⁷⁰⁶ but also of *one* world pillar, like the ancient German Irminsul,⁷⁰⁷ and of

701. Ibid., 70–83, 86–87.

702. M. Pillet, "Comptes rendus," *RdE* 7 (1950): 139.

703. Balcz, "Die altägyptische Wandgliederung," 86.

704. Stuart Piggott, *The Dawn of Civilization: The First World Survey of Human Cultures in Early Times* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 86.

705. Balcz, "Die altägyptische Wandgliederung," 69; Borchardt, "Das Grab des Menes," 100.

706. See the note in Grapow, *Das 17. Kapitel des ägyptischen Totenbuchs*, 38, if you can find the work.

707. Pharaoh is hailed as "the Atum of humanity, . . . the pillar of heaven, the beam of the earth." Kees, *Ägypten*, 41. The central pillar is added to the four in the primitive sacred booth. Herbert E. Winlock, "The Tomb of Senebtisi at Lisht," in Arthur C. Mace and Herbert E. Winlock, *The Tomb of Senebtisi at Lisht* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1916), 37.

two, as in an inscription from the temple of Hathor at Philae that says, “even as the heaven is fixed upon its two pillars.”⁷⁰⁸ That is, there is no fixed number for the pillars of heaven—sometimes the four are increased to many more.⁷⁰⁹ Indeed, the ceiling of an Egyptian temple represents the sky, and the columns supporting it, no matter how many, stand for the pillars of heaven.⁷¹⁰ Here the coffin of Prince Min-Khaf of the Fourth Dynasty has pillars of heaven all around it; on each side there are “eight vertical columns on the panels alternating with the seven false-doors”; in this as in a coffin from a neighboring tomb, the number of gates seems to be determined by the space at the artist’s disposal.⁷¹¹ If I were to choose a significant number for the gates, I think I would pick some multiple of five.

Dick: Why of five?

Mr. Jones: Well, in the coffin of Prince Min-Khaf there are twenty gates or niches; here in a lion-couch scene from Abydos there are five *serekh* gates under the couch;⁷¹² and again in our old familiar temple of Seti I we see the god Shu holding five such gates between the arms of his *ka*.⁷¹³ In another lion-couch scene, from the tomb of Puyemrê, are ten such gates, and also a chest on a lion couch under which are nine or ten “gates.”⁷¹⁴ Here in a later scene are three *serekh* patterns supported by fifteen such gates.⁷¹⁵ All multiples of five, you see.

Dick: That may be all right for the later period. But in the good old days when recessed paneling was in its glory, there

708. François Daumas, “Les propylées du temple d’Hathor à Philae,” *ZÄS* 95 (1968): 2.

709. Cecil M. Firth and Battiscombe Gunn, *Excavations at Saqqara: Teti Pyramid Cemeteries* (Cairo: IFAO, 1926): plate 57, figs. 1, 6–7; plate 3; p. 15.

710. Rochemonteix, “Temple d’Apet,” 187.

711. W. Stevenson Smith, “The Coffin of Prince Min-Khaf,” *JEA* 19 (1933): 151; plates XXI–XXIV.

712. W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Abydos* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1902–4), pt. 1, plate LXXII.

713. Gardiner and Calverley, *Temple of King Sethos I*, 2: plate 29.

714. Davies, *Tomb of Puyemrê at Thebes*, 2: plate XLVII.

715. *Ibid.*, plate LX.

was a distant preference for multiples of twelve gates—a cosmic number that strongly supports the heavenly nature of the pylons.

Mr. Jones (miffed): What makes you say that?

Dick: I bought Professor Walter B. Emery's paperback on archaic Egypt at the entrance of the museum, and I too have been counting doors or windows. Of the eighteen archaic tombs depicted in the book, nine have twenty-four niches each and one has twelve,⁷¹⁶ and one and possibly another has six (fig. 47).⁷¹⁷

Mr. Jones: And what about the others?

Dick: Some of them are multiples of ten, I'll admit. One has ten doors, if you count the half-doors, and there are two with thirty panels and one with forty.⁷¹⁸ Interestingly enough, of all the tombs there are only two that do not have pylons that are multiples of ten or twelve, and they have thirty-eight and twenty-two doors.⁷¹⁹

Mr. Jones: They wouldn't be good Egyptians if they didn't break the rule sometimes, but the rule is there, all right. In Joseph Smith Papyrus I, ten doors are clearly drawn. So everything is in order. But are these the pillars of heaven? Dr. Samuel A. B. Mercer scoffed at the idea when he wrote, "Figure 11 represents rather the pillars of earth than 'the pillars of heaven.'"⁷²⁰ But where, I ask you, do the Egyptians speak of "the pillars of earth"?

Dick: Didn't they have the *djed*-pillars?

716. Emery, *Archaic Egypt*; the twenty-four-niche tombs are on pages 55, 64, 67, 83, 132, 136, plate 24b and p. 146; the tomb on p. 89 has one side un-niched: if the pattern were finished here it would give twenty-four niches. The twelve-panel tomb is on p. 137.

717. *Ibid.*; the one on p. 148 has six panels, though one wall is not niched. The coffin in plates 24a and 25b has six panels if one does not count the half-doors.

718. *Ibid.* Ten panels in plate 24a, 25b; 30 on pp. 72 and 141; 40 on p. 77.

719. *Ibid.*, 48 and 146 respectively.

720. Samuel A. B. Mercer, "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian," *Utah Survey* 1 (September 1913): 19.

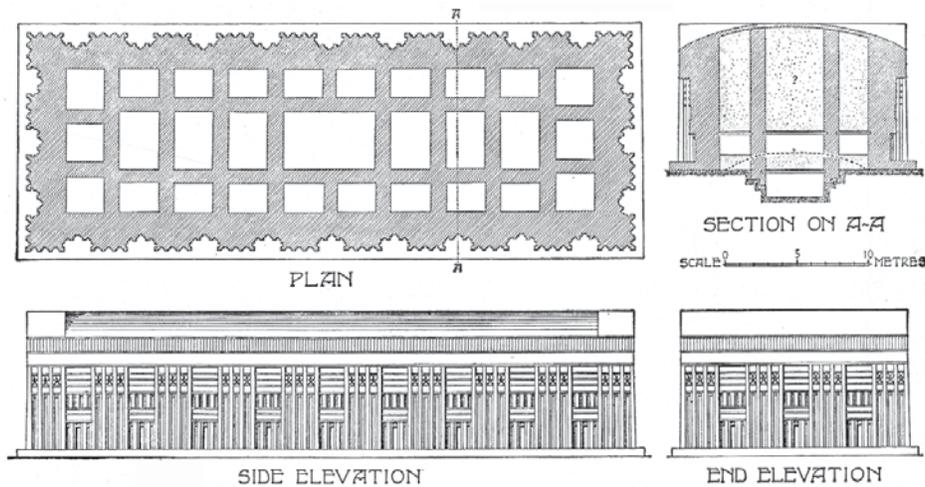


Figure 47. Most of the great early tombs are surrounded by twenty-four pylons and their niches, possibly signifying their natures as “pillars of heaven” (Fac. 1, fig. 11). Emory, *Archaic Egypt*, opp. p. 137.

Mr. Jones: If any Egyptian pillars could qualify as pillars of earth, the four-in-one *djed*-pillar, as the symbol of enduring solidity, would be it—it has its place in the Osiris cult and the underworld, yet that would seem to be secondary, for Bonnet is emphatic in his conclusion that the original and only function of the compound *djed*-symbol is to denote the pillars of *heaven*.⁷²¹ Walter Kornfeld has reexamined the *djed*-pillar and found it to be the prehistoric symbol of durability both of the temple itself and of the dynasty that erected it; as such it always has a cosmic, astral significance and is to be identified with the pylons of the temple façade.⁷²² Busiris is the city of the *djed*-pillars, which play a prominent role both in the coronation of the king and in the raising of Osiris from the dead; the raising of the *djed*-symbol represents the establishing of the world order, since the multiple-pillar symbol itself stands for the cosmic supports that extend from earth to heaven. Since Mercer’s day the palace façade and *serekh*

721. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 150, 153.

722. Walter Kornfeld, “Der Symbolismus der Tempelsäulen,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1962): 56–57.

design have come to be understood in a new light: they represent the gate by which the big Horus-hawk passes between earth and heaven,⁷²³ by which the spirits pass between worlds above and below: "This communication," wrote Pierre Lacau, "was one of the great preoccupations of the Egyptian. The stele was the instrument of this communication."⁷²⁴ In the first chapter of the Book of the Dead we stand before the gate of the underworld,⁷²⁵ but who is the figure in the tomb of Seti I between the uplifted arms of whose *ka*-crown are five of our gates? It is Shu, the god of the upper regions, and what he holds are the pylons of the heavens.⁷²⁶ Their nature is clearly and unmistakably indicated on two portable shrines, depicted on the walls of the great temple of Amon at Karnak. One shows Ramses III as four men standing in a row supporting the symbol for heaven (𐀓) with upraised arms. The arrangement and attitude of the four portraits, in which the pharaoh appears once as a priest and three times as king, show that he is meant to represent the four sons of Horus supporting the sky; the figures all stand on a palace-façade design with the familiar row of pylons.

Jane: How many gates are there?

Mr. Jones: Just as many as the artist has room for. When he reaches the end of his space he does not hesitate to cut one of the gates neatly in two, making 16½ in all (fig. 48).⁷²⁷ In the other picture a later pharaoh appears as three kings—the priest is missing this time—supporting the heaven-symbol in the identical manner of Ramses, only this time the *pt*-sign is adorned with stars and the king himself is a heavenly being, "beloved of Amon-Re," as the inscription says, "endowed with life like Re." The three kings here stand on a row of nine

723. Bennett, "Symbolism of a Mummy Case," 166.

724. Pierre Lacau, "Tableau central de la stèle-porte Égyptienne," *RdE* 19 (1967): 40.

725. Piankoff, *Shrines of Tut-Ankh-Amon*, 93–94.

726. Pillet, "Comptes rendus," 139.

727. Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu*, 4: plate 229.

pylons (fig. 49).⁷²⁸ In our 24-niche archaic tombs, incidentally, there were often nine niches on a side with three at either end, so this probably harks back to the ancient form, and there cannot be the slightest doubt that the row of gates is supposed to be supporting the heavens. In many gate-and-pillar designs the top rim is decorated with stars, showing that the pillars are supporting the heavens.⁷²⁹

Dick: You say that the Egyptians don't talk about the pillars of earth, as far as you know. Do they ever talk about the pillars of heaven?

Mr. Jones: Indeed they do, and they leave us in no doubt as to what they refer to. An inscription in the temple of Amenophis III at Luxor tells how the temple's "pylons reach to heaven, joining themselves with the stars."⁷³⁰ This is a stereotyped expression, and here is another: "Its pylons reach to heaven like the four pillars of heaven." Also the tall cedar flagpoles that flanked the pylons were said to reach the stars.⁷³¹ Such expressions make it perfectly clear that the temple pylons, going back to the old palace façade, were, in the words of the Book of Abraham, "designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians." Another feature of the palace façade was the "window of apparition."

Jane: What was that?

Mr. Jones: A ceremonial window-and-balcony arrangement to provide a theatrical appearance for the pharaoh and the royal family. The window was a sort of elevated

728. Ibid., 4: plate 217.

729. Thus Edouard Naville, *Temple of Deir el-Bahari*, 7 vols. (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1894–1908), pt. 1; and pt. 5, plate 138, 35c; Borchart, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'as̄hu-Re*, Bd. 2, pt. 2, plate 45; Firth and Gunn, *Excavations at Saqqara*, plate 57.

730. Wilhelm Spiegelberg, "Die Bauinschrift Amenophis' III auf der Flinders Petrie-Stele," *RT* 20 (1898): 45 n. 19 (text p. 41, line 11).

731. Ibid., 46 (p. 42, line 22); Theodor Dombart, "Der Zweitürmige Tempel-Pylon altägyptischer Baukunst und seine religiöse Symbolik," *Egyptian Religion* 1 (1933): 98. The poles as well as the pylons represented the supports of heaven; see Nibley, "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing," 41.

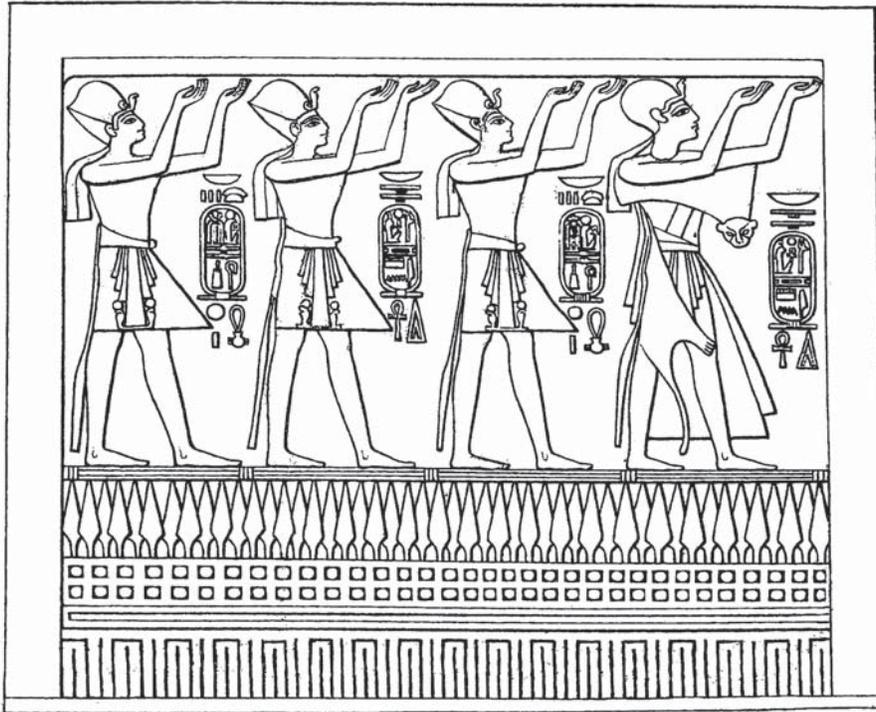


Figure 48. Here a line of pylons resembling those in Facsimile 1, figure 11 (where the pylons are quickly sketched; see p. 126, fig. 10A), supports four images of Ramses III, who is very obviously holding up the sky (ca. 1160 B.C.). The pylons are assisting him in this function as pillars of heaven. Redrawing based on Wilson and Thomas, *Medinet Habu*, 4: plate 229.

stage above the great gate; there the king would appear to his worshipful subjects in the court below to cast down golden gifts among them in the manner of the beneficent sun appearing at the windows of heaven.⁷³² In design the ceremonial window of apparition is plainly modeled on the pattern of the archaic *serekh*, the king appearing in the same place, between the flanking pillars of the gate beneath, as the archaic hawk of heaven once occupied.⁷³³ This is only to

732. The most dramatic representation is the famous scene from the tomb of Ay, in Norman de Garis Davies, *Rock Tombs of El Amarna: Part VI—Tombs of Parennefer, Tutu, and Ay* (London: Archaeological Survey of Egypt, 1908), plate XXIX; see Nibley, "Sparsiones," in *CWHN* 10:156–57, fig. 14.

733. The design is discussed by Uvo Hölscher, "Erscheinungsfenster und Erscheinungsbalkon im königlichen Palast," *ZÄS* 67 (1931): 43–51.

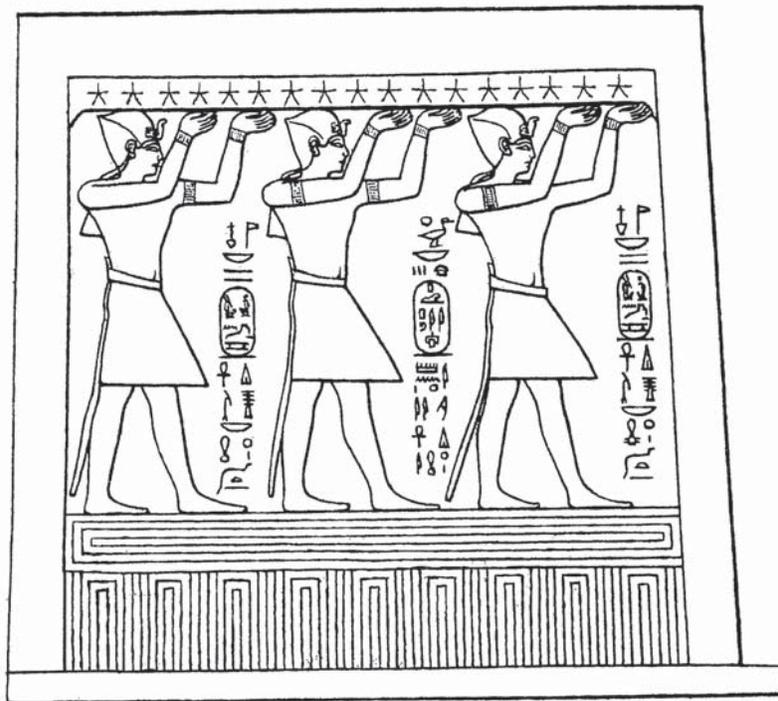


Figure 49. More than eight hundred years later, across the Nile at Karnak, the Ptolemaic king Philip Arrhidaeus was shown in a similar pose three times. Redrawing based on Wilson and Thomas, *Medinet Habu*, 4: plate 217.

be expected, since his appearance “between the entrance-towers—that is, at the gate of the temple [was] . . . conceived as the entrance of the sun-king into his ‘heaven,’—that is, the temple,” as Wilhelm Spiegelberg puts it.⁷³⁴ Egyptian temples were so oriented that the sun actually rose directly between the pillars of the main pylon on a certain day, so that the pylons “are not a purely abstract-free theological speculation,” but a physical arrangement corresponding to the two mountains of the horizon between which the sun rose on the day of creation.⁷³⁵ And since the sunrise shifts its position every day, Friedrich Jeremias suggested that the

734. Wilhelm Spiegelberg, “Varia,” *ZÄS* 53 (1917): 101.

735. *Ibid.*, 100–101; see *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, CWHN 16:256, fig. 81.

rows of columns that mark the processional ways of Egyptian and other temples may well represent “the way of the sun between the solstices.”⁷³⁶ Jéquier and others have seen Egyptian inspiration in the two lotus-crowned pillars, Boaz and Jakin, that flanked the main entrance to Solomon’s temple.⁷³⁷ The latest study of these concludes that “the sun must have risen between the columns” at the equinoxes and that they were “symbols of the cosmic pillars,” being derived from the temple pillars and obelisks of the Heliopolis.⁷³⁸ And here are some newly discovered capitals from pillars belonging to the old Judean palace at Ramat Rahel, which are not only the prototypes of the later Aeolic order in Greece, but also sport the Egyptian thunder-signs.⁷³⁹

Dick: What thunder-signs?

Mr. Jones: Oh, didn’t I tell you? The pillars flanking the pylons from the earliest times are often represented as crowned with a line of what look like the classic double-axe symbols—the well-known thunder-axe found throughout the ancient world.⁷⁴⁰ It has been suggested that they originated as two lotuses bound together to recall the uniting of a prehistoric kingdom in the Delta, but they were early confused with the well-known thunder emblem.⁷⁴¹ Also, the pylons are often covered with zigzag designs which sometimes represent

736. Friedrich Jeremias, “Semitische Völker in Vorderasien,” in *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Alfred Bertholet and Edvard Lehmann, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1925), 1:618.

737. Jéquier, *Considérations sur les religions égyptiennes*, 92, cf. 88–89, relating the pylons to the Bull of Heaven.

738. Kornfeld, “Der Symbolismus der Tempelsäulen,” 53–54. Buisson, “Le groupe des dieux,” 45, who discusses the pillars of heaven in the Near East in general, associating them especially with the heavenly lion. *Ibid.*, 45–48.

739. Yohanan Aharoni, “The Citadel of Ramat Rahel,” *Archaeology* 18 (1965): 18.

740. The lotus origin of the design is apparent in Emery, *Archaic Egypt*, 178, fig. 100, and p. 181, fig. 103.

741. See *ibid.*, 189.

woven screens but are sometimes quite obviously water symbols, showing the life-giving waters descending from heaven.⁷⁴² We mustn't get too involved with this sort of symbolism—it would take us all over the world. But it is in order, I think, to point out that the line of pillars that we always associate with Greek temples were called the *koina ourania*, “the pillars of heaven.”⁷⁴³ I think we have said enough to make it clear that it is quite correct and proper to refer to the line of pylons in JSP I as “representing the pillars of heaven.”

Jane: But if they are the pillars of heaven, then all those zigzaggy lines above them must be heaven!

Dick: It looks more like water, if you ask me.

Facsimile 1, Figure 12

Mr. Jones: And water is exactly what it is supposed to be. Any doubt about that is removed by a fragment from an Eleventh Dynasty tomb which shows just such a crocodile as this one against just such a zigzag background as that shown here (fig. 50).⁷⁴⁴ These horizontal rows of hatchings in alternating directions are a common Egyptian way of showing big waters. On the sarcophagus of Seti I they are used to depict the waters of the cosmic ocean (fig. 51).⁷⁴⁵ But

742. Most strikingly illustrated in Gustave Jéquier, *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II* (Cairo: IFAO, 1936), plate XXVI, and Gustave Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II* (Cairo: IFAO, 1929), plates 3, 6, 11, 12, 14, 16. When the zigzags are drawn horizontally down the whole length of a pillar, the meaning is unmistakable. Hans Bonnet, “Ägyptische Religion,” in *Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte*, ed. Hans Haas (Leipzig: Deicher, 1924), no. 137. With the 15 pylons in Davies, *Tomb of Puyemrê at Thebes*, 2: plate LX, goes the inscription: “Thy mother bestows the waters of heaven in her capacity of sšt of heaven.” Cf. CT 61, in de Buck, *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 1:263–64.

743. Jürgen Trumpf, “Stadtgründung und Drachenkampf,” *Hermes* 86 (1958): 131–32.

744. Edouard Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el-Bahari*, 2 pts. (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1907), pt. 1, plate 16, D.

745. Frankfort, *Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, 2: plate XLIX; cf. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, CWHN 16:120, fig. 31.

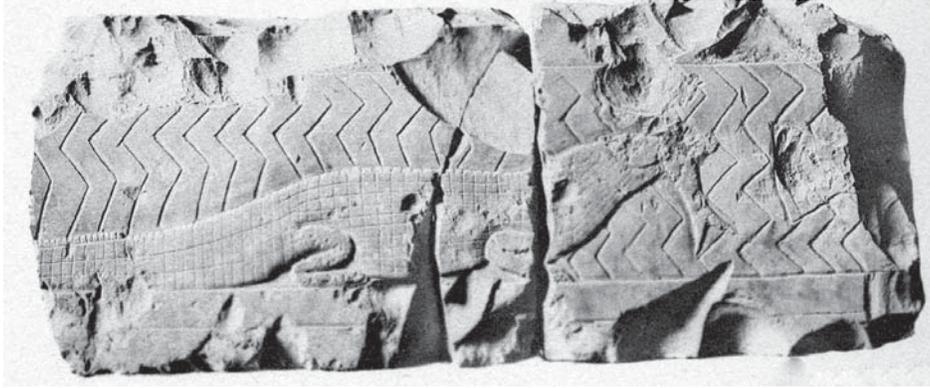


Figure 50. Here we see a crocodile surrounded by zigzags, as in Facsimile 1, figure 12. This carving from the Middle Kingdom demonstrates both the antiquity of the motif and the difficulty that artists had with keeping their zigzags neat and regular without the aid of guidelines. That is why the scribe of JSP I, not interested in producing a work of art, did not hesitate to draw in the horizontal lines to enable him to finish the zigzags in a hurry. Tomb, Deir el-Bahri, ca. 2000 B.C. Naville, *The XIth Dynasty Temple at Deir el-Bahari*, pt. 1, plate 16, D. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.

the most instructive parallels to our papyrus, I think, are found in the tomb of Ramses IX (fig. 52). Here in one scene above just such a series of pylons as our “pillars of heaven” we find a series of five to seven long horizontal bands of hatched lines, the strokes moving in contrary directions to give a zigzag effect representing water. Upon this mass of zigzags the heavenly barks are sailing. It is very neatly done, for this was being put on the wall of a great king’s tomb. The horizontal bands are perfectly straight, and the hatching-strokes perfectly even and regular—it was all done with rulers, though the guidelines today are invisible.⁷⁴⁶ In some scenes, however, the artist tried to do the job freehand, and though he was very skillful, he got tired before he finished and his horizontal zigzag strips got all out of line. Now the artist of Joseph Smith Papyrus I was not making a carefully supervised adornment for an everlasting royal memorial

⁷⁴⁶ Guilmant, *Le tombeau de Ramsès IX*, plate LXIII; details on plates LXV–LXVII, LXXI–LXXV.

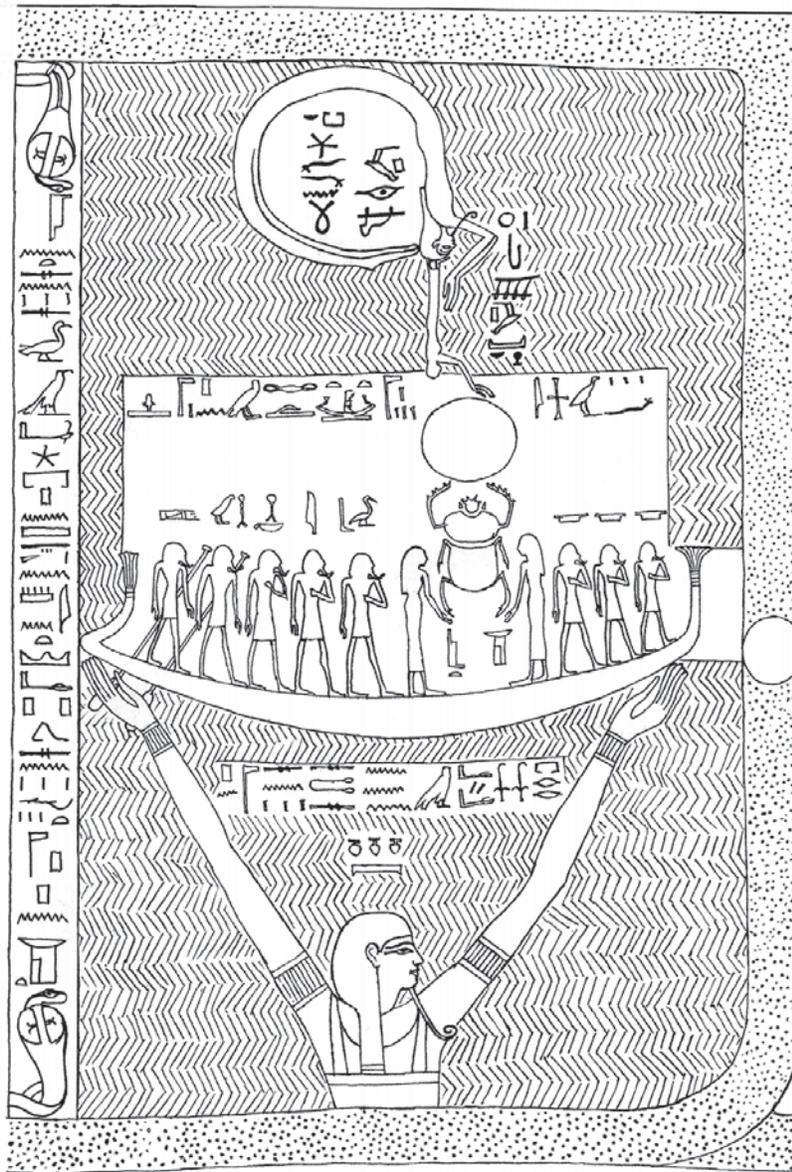


Figure 51. Here the zigzag lines represent the expanse of the heavens. The inscription above the head of the deity with upraised arms tells us that it is *Nw*, supporting the sun-bark as it passes over the heavenly sea. The Egyptians always identified the figure of *Nw*, the primordial waters, with "the firmament over our heads." In the careful and accurate carving of the zigzag series, guidelines were obviously used but later erased, not drawn in as they are in the small and hasty sketch of JSP I. Alabaster sarcophagus of Seti I, ca. 1220 B.C. Courtesy of Soane Museum, London.

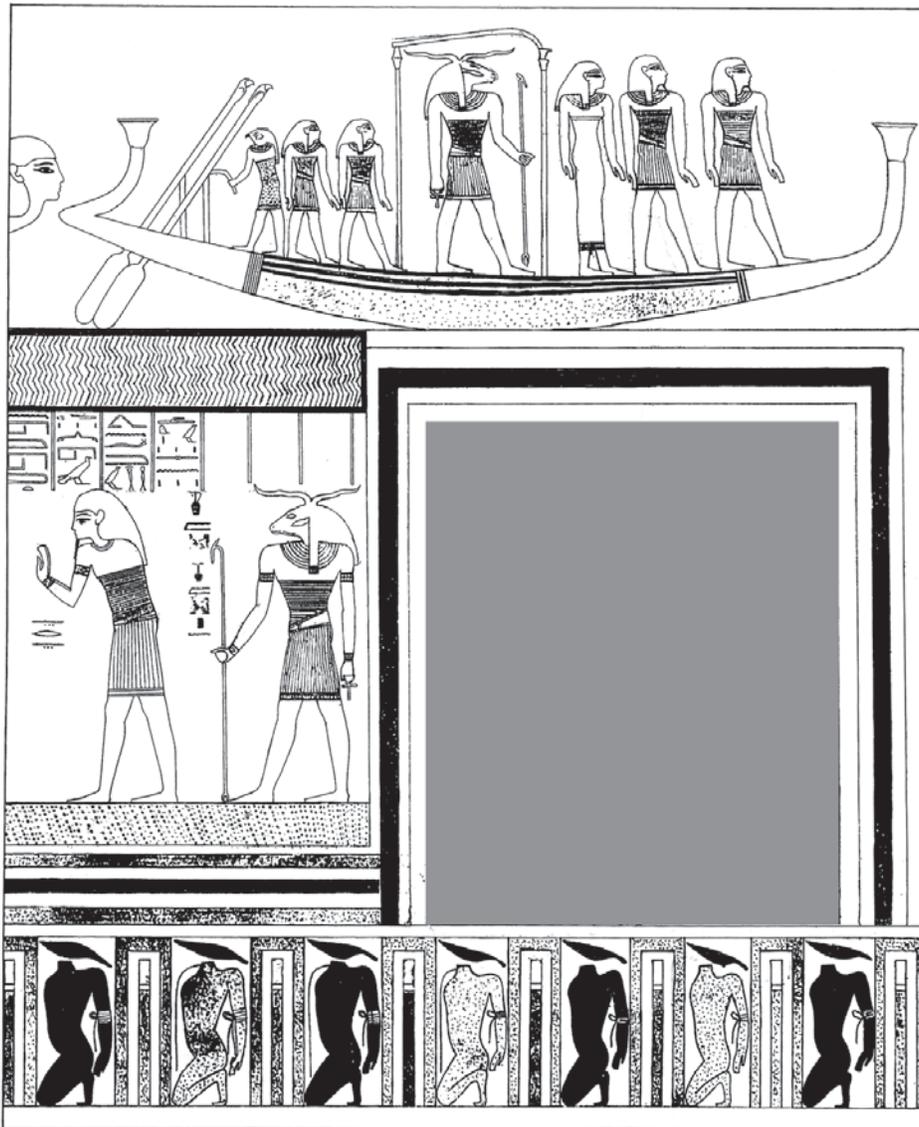


Figure 52. Teams of talented craftsmen carved and painted the walls of the royal tombs. Here we see the heavenly barks sailing on water symbolized by a panel of zigzag lines. When the artist does not pay sufficient attention to the guidelines, the zigzags get out of line, as can be seen at the right end. Note also the line of doors or pylons below as in Facsimile 1, figure 11, and the indication of human sacrifice in the beheaded figures. Tomb of Ramses IX. Guilmant, *Le tombeau de Ramsès IX*, plate LXIII.

but merely dashing off a small freehand sketch, so to get his five lines of hatching straight he does not hesitate to draw in guidelines. The neat way would have been to use a ruler, but that would also have been the hard way, and there can be no doubt that the same waters are being represented in the papyrus as in the tomb.

Jane: What waters?

Mr. Jones: Ah, that is just the point. Notice the ship that is sailing on the waters in the tomb drawings; it is the heavenly solar bark, and the deity who kneels before the huge sun-disk in the center of the ship is Shu himself, the god not of the lower but of the upper spaces. These are the waters of *Nw*, the primordial heavens. You may recall that it was from these heavenly waters that the crocodile emerged in the manner of the sun-god Re. And these were, of course, matched by the waters of the underworld.

Dick: Why “of course”?

Mr. Jones: Because the sun spends half his time in the heavens above and half in the heavens below—he must negotiate both by ship.⁷⁴⁷ Everybody knows that water comes out of the ground from below and out of the heavens from above (fig. 53). The Egyptians devised some very sophisticated ways of describing these heavenly phenomena, of which Anthes wrote, “If any simple Egyptian wanted to view these images as actual pictures of the heavens, he would necessarily become totally confused.”⁷⁴⁸ We can avoid confusion by sticking to one well-known and firmly established idea—namely, that the Egyptians started out with the commonsense conception of heaven as “a flood, spreading its expanse of blue waters above the earth,” the lady Nut and the Hathor cow, though quite primitive, being “nothing else but personifications” of

747. De Wit, “Les génies des quatre vents au temple d’Opet,” 31. At night the boat is towed by a pair of jackals assisted by Anubis; by day the ram-headed god joins the four canopics for the same purpose. Hassan, *Solar-Boats of Khafra*, 117, fig. 38b.

748. Anthes, “Mythologie und der gesunde Menschenverstand,” 12.

this “great flood.”⁷⁴⁹ This remained the basic Egyptian theory of the firmament forever after—it was a vast expanse of waters, the very waters depicted in the tomb drawings and in our identical design on the Joseph Smith Papyrus. The “expanse, or the firmament over our heads” is exactly what these hatched horizontal strips were meant by the Egyptians to signify. The explanation adds a special, secondary meaning to the design and explains that this is *not* the ordinary one: “*but* in this case, in relation to *this* subject, the Egyptians *meant* it to signify *Shaumau*, to be high” (Abraham, Fac. 1, fig. 12 explanation)—that is, they wanted to emphasize in the special context one particular aspect of the heavens—their height and aloofness.⁷⁵⁰

Dick: Would the Egyptians do that—just pick out certain things like that from all the rest?

Mr. Jones: They were up to that sort of thing all the time. Here is a votive statuary offering of Ramses II depicting a typically Egyptian combination of a solar disk, a child, a reed, and a falcon. Do you get the message?

Dick: You mean that each figure symbolizes something?

Mr. Jones: It goes farther than that—the composition actually spells out a name. A smart Egyptian would realize that the sun-disk was *Ra-*, the child *-mes-* (an Egyptian word for child), and the reed *-ses*.

Dick: Spelling Ramses, of course; but what’s the hawk doing?

Mr. Jones: He signifies, according to Stadelmann, “that Ramses places himself under the protection of the Near

749. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 302–3.

750. “Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify *Shaumau*, to be high, or the *Shaumahyeem*” (Abraham, Fac. 1, fig. 12 explanation). While “*Shaumahyeem*” is given as a Hebrew word, no indication is given of the origin of “*Raukeeyang*” and “*Shaumau*”—neither is put forth as Egyptian, and it needs no demonstration to show that both of them, written with meticulous care to indicate pronunciation, are meant to be Hebrew.

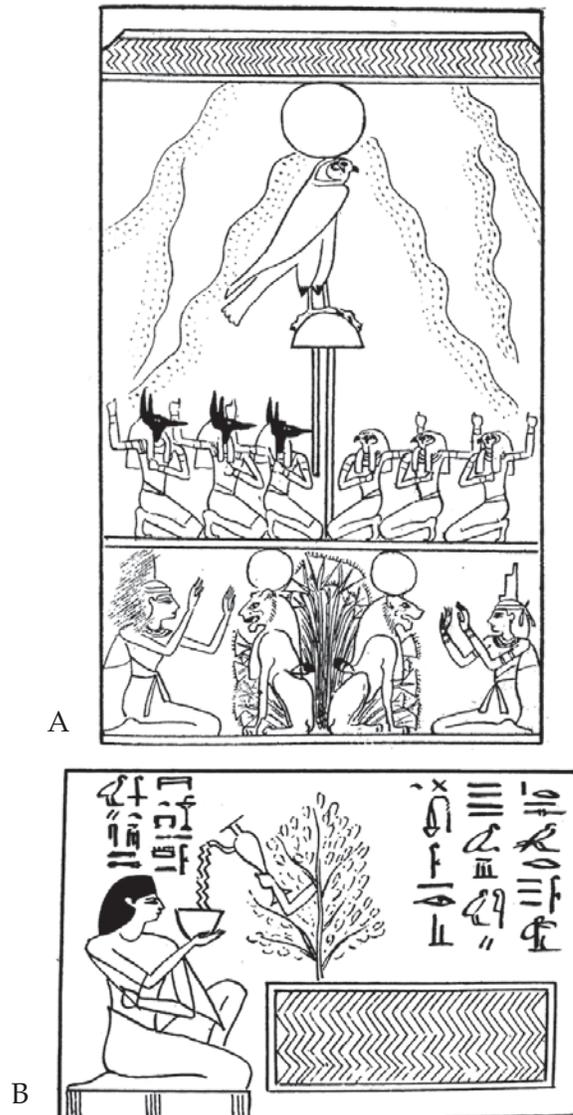


Figure 53. Here the panel of zigzag lines is under the symbol of heaven  (A). There is no doubt whatever that Facsimile 1, figure 12, represents water and that the Egyptians always thought of the “expanse, or the firmament over our heads,” or the high heavens to be a vast sea of water. The Egyptians thought of two such primordial seas, one above and one below the earth, meeting at the horizon. The concept is perhaps reflected in the word *Shaumahyeem*, which is a Hebrew dual. Below, a series of five bands of zigzag lines is plainly meant to indicate the waters of life (B). Exactly such a series is represented in figure 12. The tree is pouring out the waters of life. P. Sutimes (B). Naville, *Todtenbuch*, plates 22, 73. Used by permission Asher Rare Books.

Eastern god Horon," just as the kings of the Fourth Dynasty (whose style is being imitated here) used to place themselves under Horus.⁷⁵¹ So here we are back in Canaan again, with the Egyptians playing charades. There is nothing at all to exclude any of the interpretations given by Joseph Smith to the various figures in Joseph Smith Papyrus I, and a great deal to substantiate them. I'm not claiming for a minute that any of this is proven, but I am claiming that the experts who condemned the Prophet without a hearing were not playing a very honest game.

Jane: But why would anybody bring the pillars of heaven and the expanse of heaven into this particular Abraham episode?

Mr. Jones: Because what we have here is not merely the telling of a story, but the placing of that story in its proper context of timeless significance. What happens to Abraham and what he does is of enduring effect in the history of the whole human race—past, present, and future. He is one of those key figures in whom all the events of the past are brought into focus as by a burning-glass, and whose actions are in turn projected into the future as an ever-expanding image. What we see here is a moment of immeasurable significance in the history of the race: the messenger-bird is there to represent the Ruler of All; the crocodile is no less necessary to represent the ancient opposition in all things; the lion is (in early Jewish and Christian parlance) the relentless force that consumes all material things; the lotus is the symbol of the righteous man's pilgrimage through a hostile and dangerous world—everything has a meaning, and the pillars and expanse of heaven remove the whole story from this transient world to its proper relationship to the eternal plan of things. That's one way of looking at it.

751. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palästinensische Gottheiten*, 87.

6

The Unknown Abraham

Neglected Evidence

Until now, all discussions of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham have been based on the assumption that we have to deal with only *two* really important sources of information: the Book of Abraham and the papyri.¹ Everyone, it would seem, has taken for granted that if we know what the papyri really say, we are in a position to pass judgment on the authenticity of the Book of Abraham—a proposition diligently cultivated by some who have assumed that a knowledge of Egyptian qualifies one to pass judgment on matters that lie completely outside the field. Such a case might stand up if Joseph Smith had specifically designated particular papyri as the source of his information, but he never did so. Professor Klaus Baer begins and ends his exceedingly valuable study with the assertion that Joseph Smith *thought* he was actually translating the so-called “Breathing Permit.”² Such testimony would not hold up for three minutes in any

“Part 7: The Unknown Abraham” originally appeared in the series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” in IE 72 (January 1969): 26–33; (February 1969): 64–67; (March 1969): 76, 79–80, 82, 84; (April 1969): 66–72; May 1969): 87–89.

1. See above, in this volume, CWHN 18:49–68.

2. Klaus Baer, “The Breathing Permit of Hôr,” *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 111, 133.

court of law. The only evidence for what the Prophet *thought* is the arrangement side by side of very brief Egyptian symbols and some lengthy sections of the Book of Abraham, which has led some to the hasty conclusion that the one column is a would-be *translation* of the other. But the strange juxtaposition of the two texts is itself the best refutation of the argument that it is supposed to present: everyone we know who has ever looked at the two columns (and that includes many a puzzled student long before anybody knew what the Egyptian characters really meant) has been satisfied that the one could not by any effort of the imagination be a translation of the other. But what Mormon ever said it was? The opposition simply assumed it in the face of the clearest evidence to the contrary; and on their own assumption, to which a knowledge of Egyptian has no relevance whatever, they have declared the Book of Abraham a fraud.

Fortunately we have much broader and firmer grounds for testing the Book of Abraham than parapsychological reconstructions of schemes and devices 140 years old. Those grounds are furnished by a wealth of apocryphal sources, mostly Jewish, and an impressive mass of Egyptian and classical references and archaeological material to back them up. The nature of these sources will become evident in the course of discussion, but it will be well to point out some significant aspects of their study at the outset.

1. It is now fairly certain not only that the Bible account of Abraham's life is very sketchy indeed but also that there existed anciently much fuller written records of his activity. As Father Roland de Vaux noted in an important study, "We could never write a historical biography of Abraham . . . nor even write a real history of the patriarchal period" on the evidence supplied by the Bible alone.³ "There is, strictly speaking," wrote Frederick J. Foakes-Jackson years ago, "no material for a connected biography of Abraham, the

3. Roland de Vaux, "Les patriarches Hébreux et l'histoire," *Revue biblique* 72 (1965): 27–28.

records being taken from a variety of sources."⁴ It is those lost sources that make up the records to which we referred above: Theodor Böhl observed that there is obviously a vast body of source material behind the history of Abraham, but that it is nearly all lost.⁵ The discovery of the so-called *Genesis Apocryphon* among the Dead Sea Scrolls not only confirms the existence of a very ancient nonbiblical history of Abraham, but also gives us a peep into its contents, which present really surprising parallels to the Book of Abraham.⁶ The world is now willing to accept a proposition that it denounced as blasphemous in Joseph Smith's day: "We must not lose sight of the fact," wrote Geo Widengren, "that the Old Testament, as it is handed down to us in the Jewish Canon, is only part—we do not even know if the greater part—of Israel's national literature."⁷

2. Both the biblical and apocryphal stories of Abraham contain at least kernels of historical truth. The character

4. Frederick J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Biblical History of the Hebrews* (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, 1917), 22.

5. F. M. Theodor de Liagre Böhl, "Babel und Bibel (II)," *JEOL* 17 (1963): 126.

6. Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin, eds., *A Genesis Apocryphon* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1956), 23: "The scroll explains the story of Sarai and the King of Egypt in a manner different from that of all the midrashim on the subject. . . . This interesting legend which is not found in Midrashic or Apocryphal literature and of which there is no other version known to us, should be studied very thoroughly." Coming from the same Essene and Ebionite environment as the Dead Sea Scrolls are the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the *Testament of Abraham*; also first appearing in this century are the *Cave of Treasures* and the writings on Abraham by Ka'b el-Ahbar. First published in 1956 in Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 6 vols. in 2 (1853–77; reprint, Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), are the *Ma'ase Abraham Abinu*, an important midrash on Abraham our Father (1:25–34; 2:118–19), and a *History of Abraham* from the Pentateuch commentary of Bekhayi ben Ashi.

7. Geo Widengren, "Early Hebrew Myths and Their Interpretation," in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Kingship in the Ancient Near East and in Israel*, ed. Samuel H. Hooke (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1958), 158.

of Abraham is so vivid and clear-cut in both traditions, according to Otto Eissfeldt, that he must have been a historical personage.⁸ While “the nineteenth century excluded the possibility that the man Abram or Abraham could have been a real historical person,” wrote Martin Buber, today “everyone sees . . . a living person,” whose true history, however, “science, lacking other evidence, will only be able to surmise.”⁹ Gerhard von Rad describes this peculiar state of things, which leaves us in the position of the medieval schoolmen, who were completely certain *that* God is, but completely uncertain as to *what* he is: so it is with Abraham today—in spite of the unprecedented progress of modern archaeology, there is still complete disagreement as to the historical reality underlying the patriarchal narratives.¹⁰ Yet there is no more any doubt that there was and is a historical reality. In a study of “the legend of Abraham,” Marcel Mauss concluded that “a number of scholars are beginning to recognize historical foundations to important parts of the tradition.”¹¹ Today there are at last enough documents in the apocryphal area to be checked against each other so that the resemblances and differences among them really add up to something. Even apparent contradictions are now constructive, as William F. Albright has pointed out: “reconstructing history is quite impossible unless we have different views of just what happened at given times and different reactions of contemporaries or successors. . . . Minor discrepancies do

8. Otto Eissfeldt, “Achronische, anachronische und synchronische Elemente in der Genesis,” *JEOL* 17 (1963): 160.

9. Martin Buber, “Abraham the Seer,” *Judaism* 5 (1956): 291–92. By the time of World War I, “practically all scholars of standing in Europe and America considered these stories fictitious.” Siegfried H. Horn, “Recent Illumination of the Old Testament,” *Christianity Today* 12/19 (1968): 925.

10. Gerhard von Rad, “History and the Patriarchs,” *Expository Times* 72 (1961): 213–16.

11. Marcel Mauss, “Critique interne de la ‘Legende d’Abraham,’” *REJ* 82 (1926): 35.

not invalidate historicity; they are necessary concomitants of any true history of man."¹²

3. Taken as a whole, the apocryphal accounts of Abraham—whether in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Greek, Old Slavonic, etc., and whether recorded in manuscripts of early or later date—agree in telling *essentially the same story*. This story is *not* found in the Bible, but *is* found in the Book of Abraham—which means that our next point is very important.

4. Joseph Smith knew nothing about these extracanonical sources for the life of Abraham. They were not accessible to him: E. A. Wallis Budge made the significant remark that “the letter press [in the Book of Abraham] is as idiotic as the pictures, and is *clearly* based on the Bible and some of the Old Testament Apocryphal histories.”¹³ But what could Joseph Smith have known about Old Testament apocryphal histories? Budge was possibly the greatest authority on apocrypha of his day, but that was because he spent his days, mostly in the British Museum, among original manuscripts to which nobody else had access. There were indeed a number of important apocrypha published in Budge’s day—but in the 1830s?¹⁴ Who has access to the apocryphal Abraham materials even today? The first important collection of them was Adolph Jellinek’s *Bet ha-Midrash*, first published in 1856, and so rare that we had never seen a copy of it until its reprinting in Israel in 1967. Many Abraham sources were first made known to the world in Bernhard Beer’s *Leben Abraham’s*, which did not appear until 1859. The extensive

12. William F. Albright, “Archaeological Discovery and the Scriptures,” *Christianity Today* 12/19 (1968): 917.

13. E. A. Wallis Budge, cited in Junius F. Wells, “Scholars Disagree,” *IE* 16 (1913): 342.

14. Reverend William Hales, *A New Analysis of Chronology and Geography, History and Prophecy*, 4 vols. (London: Rivington, 1830) was the most complete and conscientious work available to contemporaries of Joseph Smith (see p. 382, fig. 54). None of the oriental sources of episodes of the Abraham story appear in this work. It would have been of no help whatever in writing the Book of Abraham.

Arabic sources were first studied by Heinrich Schützinger in 1961. Though Hebrew has been taught on the “graduate level” at BYU for many years, until the late 1960s none of the basic sources have been available there.

The apocryphal Abraham literature was not read in Joseph Smith’s day. As a specialist many years later, Budge recognized authentically apocryphal elements in the Book of Abraham and duly charged Joseph Smith with having *clearly* drawn on them. Yet those sources were unknown to any of his fellow critics of the Book of Abraham; for them, Joseph Smith’s account rang no familiar bells. Over and over again they declared the history to be nothing on earth but the purest product of the Prophet’s irresponsible imagination and repeated with monotonous regularity that there was “not one word of truth” in anything he put down. But if the most learned men in the world detected no other source for the Book of Abraham than Joseph Smith’s untutored imagination, what are the chances that the young farmer himself would have had any knowledge at all of an obscure and recondite literature never translated into English? Professor Louis C. Zucker of the University of Utah has done us the service of showing that the influence of Joseph Smith’s Jewish friends and instructors, Joshua Seixas and Alexander Neibaur, came much too late to have had any influence on the Book of Abraham¹⁵ and that the Prophet’s knowledge of things Jewish before then was less than elementary; indeed, as Zucker puts it, “A Jew was exceedingly rare in northeastern Ohio in those days; before November 9, 1835, few of the Mormons had ever knowingly beheld a Jew.”¹⁶

To come down to 1968, a Jewish rabbi wrote “A Critical Analysis of the Book of Abraham in the Light of Extra-Canonical Jewish Writing,” a BYU dissertation, in which for the life of Abraham he draws upon the Midrash, Mishnah,

15. Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 44, 47.

16. *Ibid.*, 44.

Talmud, Josephus, *Jubilees*, and *Sefer Yetzirah* but makes no mention of any of the sources noted so far in this article or many to follow.¹⁷ Even Robert C. Webb, in chapter 8 of his *Joseph Smith as a Translator*, is impressed only by the *contrast* between the Book of Abraham and the noncanonical sources available to him, which do not include those really important items.¹⁸ So we ask, if rabbis and researchers in the twentieth century can be excused for not knowing about significant writings about Abraham, what were the chances of Joseph Smith's knowing anything about them (fig. 54)? They were nil, though we can confidently predict from past experience that as surely as it begins to appear that the story of Abraham in the Book of Abraham can be matched even in particulars by a number of ancient sources, those same critics who have poured contempt on the total ignorance of Joseph Smith will join Professor Budge in charging the Prophet with having lifted extensively from obscure and recondite sources that even the most learned rabbis had never heard of in the 1830s.

The Great Debate

The main theme of the drama of the Book of Abraham is the rivalry between Abraham and a mysterious unnamed king. The king is of "Canaanitish" blood, but he also has enough Egyptian blood to claim the crown of Egypt legitimately. Though four other gods have precedence over "the god of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Abraham 1:6, 17), it is through his Egyptian connections that he "would fain claim . . . the right of the Priesthood" through the line of Ham (Abraham 1:27). Abraham's father was convinced that the

17. Nissim Wernick, "A Critical Analysis of the Book of Abraham in the Light of Extra-Canonical Jewish Writings" (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1968).

18. Robert C. Webb, "The Book of Abraham and Ancient Legends," in *Joseph Smith as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1936), 106–17.



Figure 54. Herman Witsius's *Aegyptiaca*, 2nd ed. (1717) is perhaps the first extensive treatment of the subject of Abraham and the Egyptians; William Hales's *Chronology* (1830) contained everything available to Western scholars in Joseph Smith's time. Neither work would have been of much help to anyone composing the Book of Abraham. Photograph by Mark A. Philbrick.

claims of the king were legitimate and followed him and his gods.

The rulers of Egypt from the very beginning rested their claim to divine dominion in the earth on the possession of certain documents proving their legitimacy. The most important of such documents were those containing the royal genealogy: it was to preserve them that the "House of Life" was built, and Alan H. Gardiner even suggested that the main purpose of the Great Pyramid was to house the royal genealogical records on which rested the authority of the king.¹⁹ A recurrent motif in Egyptian literature is the story of the king who spends his days in the temple archives diligently searching for the document that will establish

19. Alan H. Gardiner, "The Secret Chambers of the Sanctuary of Thoth," *JEA* 11 (1925): 3–4.

his sure relationship with the gods. The document is never found.²⁰ Why not? According to the Book of Abraham, the Pharaoh did not possess the all-important papers—because Abraham had them! “But *I* shall endeavor, hereafter, to delineate the chronology running back from *myself* to the beginning of the creation, for the *records* have come into *my* hands, which *I* hold unto this present time” (Abraham 1:28). This, then, was a rebuff and check to the ambitions of the king: it was Abraham who actually held the authority he claimed, and the story in the Book of Abraham tells of the showdown between these two rivals for the honor of bearing God’s authority on earth.

This brings us to the main theme of the noncanonical traditions of Abraham, which have become the subject of special research. The theme of these legends is the mortal rivalry between Abraham and an awesome and sinister would-be cosmocrat who is usually designated by the name of Nimrod. The rivalry begins even before the birth of Abraham, when Nimrod’s wise men, studying the stars, foretell the birth of one who will in time completely overshadow the power of Nimrod and possess that divine dominion which Nimrod himself has always coveted.²¹ “The wise men of Canaan said:

20. We discuss this theme later. A classic instance is found at the beginning of the Neferhotep story, with the king and his court diligently searching the archives. Max Pieper, *Die grosse Inschrift des Königs Neferhotep in Abydos: Ein Beitrag zur ägyptischen Religions- und Literaturgeschichte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929), 8. “The impression made on the modern mind is that of a people searching in the dark for a key to truth . . . retaining all lest perchance the appropriate one should be discarded.” I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1952), 27–28.

21. A useful collection and discussion of this phase of the story is found in Heinrich Schützinger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der arabischen Abraham-Nimrod-Legende* (Bonn: Oriental Seminar, 1961), 23. The most instructive single source is the *Ma‘ase Abraham Abinu*, in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 1:25–34; cf. 2:118–19. The most valuable Arabic version is attributed to Ka‘b el-Ahbar in Bernard Chapira, “Légendes bibliques attribuées a Ka‘b El-Ahbar: Qissat Ibrahim Abinu,” *REJ* 70 (1920): 37–43.

‘Behold, Terah will beget a son who will pervert and destroy the precepts of Canaan.’” This is an interesting indication that the issue is to be between Abraham and the people and religion of Canaan, as in the Book of Abraham account. “In the night of Abraham’s birth” the astrologers at Terah’s feast saw a “great star [that] came from the east . . . and swallowed up the four stars at the four corners”—that is, Nimrod’s world dominion.²² In his eagerness to eliminate the infant Abraham, Nimrod authorized a “slaughter of the innocents” in which, according to some accounts, seventy thousand male babies perished.²³ At once we think of Joseph’s dream and the birth of Jesus and are confronted with the most baffling and fascinating aspect of comparative religious studies: One sees parallels everywhere; what is one to make of them? Each must be judged on its own merits. History itself is full of the most disturbing parallels—a new classic example is that of the tragic deaths of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy—which would seem to show that things do tend to fall into patterns. One does not need to regard the star in the east at the birth of Abraham as a borrowing from the New Testament: according to ancient and established teaching, everyone born into the world has his *tāli’*, his star in the east; and at no time or place was astrology more diligently cultivated than in Abraham’s world. As we shall see, the sacrificing of babies on a huge scale was also part of the picture—no need to trace it to King Herod’s outrageous behavior centuries later. Among those things which fall into well-known historical patterns are the atrocities committed by rulers determined to secure their thrones—whole scenes from *Macbeth* and *Richard III* could be switched without jarring the structure of either play.

The most complete collection of Abraham apocrypha is by Micha J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt: Rütten and Loening, 1913–27); the Abraham material is mostly in volume 2 (1914).

22. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold et al., 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1908–38), 1:207.

23. *Ibid.*, 187.

In all accounts Terah, the father of Abraham, is solidly on Nimrod's side, as in the Book of Abraham version, and is usually presented as a high official at the court. According to the Book of Abraham, Abraham's family had long been following idolatrous practices: "My fathers, having turned from their righteousness . . . unto the worshiping of the gods of the heathen, . . . turned their hearts to the sacrifice of the heathen in offering up their children unto these dumb idols" (Abraham 1:5, 7). There is much apocryphal substantiation for these statements. "Abraham," says the Midrash, "had no trust either in the words of his father or in the words of his mother."²⁴ "When he said to his father and his people: 'What are these images to which you are so devoted?' they said, 'We found *our fathers worshipping them.*' He said: 'Indeed you yourselves as well as your fathers have been in manifest error.'²⁵ It was especially in the days of Serug, Abraham's great-grandfather, that "the fear of idols came into the world and the making of idols," the people being at that time subjected to the terror and confusion of the great migrations, "without teachers or leaders."²⁶ And it was especially at Ur that "the prince Mastemah [Satan] exerted himself to do all this, to make the people zealous in the business of idols, and he sent forth other spirits . . . therefore Seroh was called Serug, 'for everyone was turned to do all manner of sin and transgression.'²⁷

There is a strange, almost obsessive, concern with "the fathers" at the beginning of the Book of Abraham: "It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, . . . [from our] first

24. William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), Psalm 118:11, discussed on p. 238.

25. Qur'an 21:52–54 (emphasis added). Traditions recorded in the Qur'an often go back to very ancient independent Jewish sources. Gerald Abrahams, *The Jewish Mind* (Boston: Beacon, 1961), 49 n. 1.

26. *Cave of Treasures*, fol. 23a, col. 1; cf. E. A. Wallis Budge, trans. *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927), 137.

27. *Jubilees* 11:2–6.

father, through the fathers unto me," etc. (Abraham 1:3). This is just as conspicuous in our extracanonical sources, and Theodor Reik would trace this fervid appeal to the fathers to an ancestor cult closely resembling the Egyptian system, which crops up in the earliest Jewish tradition but has been consistently discredited and suppressed by the rabbis.²⁸ The *Genesis Apocryphon* lays great emphasis on "the line of the fathers,"²⁹ and the *Rule of the Community* designates the righteous in Israel as "those who have a claim on the fathers."³⁰ Studies of the name of Abraham point to the dominance of the concept. According to de Vaux, Abraham is a contraction of Abiram, "My father is exalted," the name being found not only in the Canaanitish Ras Shamra texts but even in Egypt and Cyprus.³¹ Albright sees in it Abam-râma, a West Semitic name meaning "he is exalted with respect to father"—that is, "he is of distinguished lineage."³²

But "in the case of Abraham," as Cyrus H. Gordon puts it, "there can be no God of the fathers, because his father Terah is the pagan parent of the first true believer according to tradition."³³ Several studies have placed increasing emphasis on Abraham instead of on Moses as the true founder of the Jewish religion, but according to the older traditions, he was the restorer rather than the first founder of the faith—the first true believer *since Noah*: "Ten generations from Noah to Abraham," said Rabbi Nathan, "and there was not one of them that walked in the ways of the Holy One until

28. Theodor Reik, *Pagan Rites in Judaism: From Sex Initiation, Magic, Moon-cult, Tattooing, Mutilation, and Other Primitive Rituals to Family Loyalty and Solidarity* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964), 31, 35–39.

29. *Genesis Apocryphon* 2:19–25; see Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 449–50.

30. 1QS 2:9; see Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 100.

31. De Vaux, "Les patriarches Hébreux et l'histoire," 7–8.

32. William F. Albright, "The Names *Shaddai* and *Abram*," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54 (1935): 197, 202; cf. 193–203.

33. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Before the Bible* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 257.

Abraham our father." The tradition is frequently mentioned, making Abraham the founder of a dispensation, the first man to receive revelation after Noah.³⁴ Abraham is depicted as Noah's successor, and even as his student, in some of the earliest sources, which report that Abraham studied with Noah and Shem for thirty-nine years.³⁵ It is therefore interesting that Abraham is described specifically as the successor of Noah, the new Noah: "I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy father, and my power shall be over thee. As it was with Noah so shall it be with thee" (Abraham 1:18–19).

Many stories are told of how the infant Abraham was born in a cave and spent his first days, weeks, and even years still concealed in a cave to escape the wrath of Nimrod.³⁶ At the very first the babe was saved when a slave child was sacrificed by Nimrod, who thought it was Abraham, thus introducing us to the *substitute sacrifice*, which plays such an

34. August Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Bereschit Rabba* (Leipzig: Schulze, 1881), 175. The ten generations of silence followed the first ten generations of patriarchs; see Fritz Hommel, "The Ten Patriarchs of Berosus," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 15 (1893): 243. A much-discussed topic among the rabbis was, "When did the Fathers cease to be worthy?" *TB Shabbat* 55a.

35. *Sefer ha-Yashar, or the Book of Jasher referred to in Joshua and Second Samuel* (Salt Lake City: Parry, 1887), 19 (IX:5–6). The *Pseudo-Enoch* makes Terah a flood hero, according to Emil G. Kraeling, "The Earliest Hebrew Flood Story," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 (1947): 292, whose "name could be an abridgement of *Atraḥasis* or *Atarḥasis*," the Babylonian flood hero. In Arabic sources, Terah is regularly called Azar.

36. Cave stories are collected by Bernhard Beer, *Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig: Leiner, 1859), 2–4, 102; Bernard Chapira, "Légendes bibliques attribuées à Ka'b el-Ahbar," *REJ* 69 (1919): 95; Bernard Heller, "Récits et personages bibliques," *REJ* 85 (1928): 117; Giovanni Pozzoli, Felice Romani, Antonio Peracchi, comps., *Dizionario*, 7 vols. (Livorno: Vignozzi, 1852), 1:33. The motif is part of the tradition of divine kingship. Gerhard Binder, *Die Aussetzung des Königskindes: Kyros und Romulus* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1964), 27. Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 187, says "he was hidden under the earth for thirteen years without seeing sun or moon."

important role in the Abraham epic.³⁷ Being miraculously nourished in the cave, Abraham grew physically and mentally with supernatural speed, and in a matter of days or weeks he was searching in his mind to know who might be the true creator of things and the god he should worship. He was moved to such contemplations by the sight of the heavenly bodies that he first beheld upon coming out of the cave. Nimrod, apprised by his soothsayers, sent a great army to the cave to destroy Abraham, but a violent sandstorm (described as a dark fog, haze, or mist) screened the child from their view and threw them into such confusion and alarm that they retreated in panic back to Babylon—a forty-day march from the cave.³⁸

All the cave stories—the desertion by father and mother, visitation and instruction by angels, lone vigils under the stars, miraculous feeding, and so forth—aim at emphasizing the all-important point that Abraham was alone with God, dependent on no man and on no tradition, beginning as it were from scratch. Thus, the babe was nourished by sucking milk and honey from his own fingers, even as he acquired wisdom: When a Jewish child displays great precocity or unaccountable knowledge or insight, it is said, “He gets it out of his fingers, like Abraham.”³⁹ Everything

37. *Sefer ha-Yashar, or the Book of Jasher*, 19 (VIII:33–34); Friedlander, *Pirḳê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 186–92; Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 2.

38. Sources in Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 3–5 (p. 102 nn. 29–30); Chapira, “Légendes bibliques,” 94–96, 103; Wolf Leslau, trans., *Falasha Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 26; cf. Thaʿlabi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (Cairo: Mustāfā al Bābi al-Halabi wa-Awlāduhu, A.H. 1345), 51; for an English version, see William M. Brinner, trans., *ʿArāʾis al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ or “Lives of the Prophets”* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 126. On the importance of Thaʿlabi as an early Jewish source, see Hugh Nibley, “Qumran and ‘The Companions of the Cave,’” in *Old Testament and Related Studies, CWHN 1* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 254–55.

39. It is even said that God “appointed the two reins of Abraham . . . to act as two teachers and they . . . taught him wisdom every night.”

points up Abraham's complete break with the past; having no human teachers, he must think things out for himself, until he receives light from above.⁴⁰ Intellectually oriented rabbinical Jewry liked to think that Abraham, by purely rational mental processes, arrived at a knowledge of the true nature of God in the manner of the medieval schoolmen, and they depict him demonstrating his wit and his knowledge in formal disputations in which he confounds Nimrod and his wise men with all the old familiar chestnuts of the schools.⁴¹ In the older accounts, however, it is by the light of revelation that he arrives at a knowledge of the truth.⁴² But all emphasize that sublime independence which alone qualifies Abraham to stand "as the most pivotal and strategic man in the course of world history."⁴³

When Nimrod's army got back to Babylon, they found that Abraham had already arrived there before them, miraculously transported by the angel Gabriel, and was busy going about preaching the true God to the people, including his own family, who were duly shocked and alarmed:

Judah Goldin, *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 131.

40. Bereshit Rabbah 39:1; see Ephraim A. Speiser, "The Biblical Idea of History in Its Common Near Eastern Setting," *Israel Exploration Journal* 7 (1957): 210–11.

41. Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: Dutton, 1949), 1–2; Tha'labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 52–53 (Brinner, "Lives of the Prophets," 127–29); cf. Qur'an 6:79–81.

42. Convinced that his father was in error, "he began to pray to the Creator of all things that he might save him from the errors of the children of men" (*Jubilees* 11:16–17). The early sources of Abraham's conversion are given in George H. Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham* (New York: SPCK, 1918), 89–96. "But how Abraham became a worshiper of the Lord, or why God singled him out . . . is left to surmise." *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1901), 1:85.

43. J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman, 1946), 187. The whole world was in error until Abraham came and preached the doctrine of immortality; "he was the first to preach the faith." *Nishmat Hayyim*, fol. 171.

“Who rules me?” he asked his mother. “I do,” she replied. “And who is your lord?” “Azar [Terah] your father.” “And who is the Lord of Azar?” “Nimrod.” “And who is the Lord of Nimrod?” “It is dangerous to ask more!”⁴⁴ To counteract Abraham’s dangerous influence, which was already undermining his authority, Nimrod, on the advice of his public relations experts, decided to hold a great seven-day feast at which all were required to be in attendance. The officious Terah brought his son to court “to worship Nimrod in his palace,” but instead the youth disputed with the doctors and rebuked Nimrod for not acknowledging God’s authority. When Abraham placed his hand upon the throne of the king, he caused it to shake violently, so that Nimrod and all his court fell on their faces in terror. After lying paralyzed for the space of two hours, the chastened Nimrod raised his head and asked, “Is it thy voice, O Abraham, or the voice of thy God?” And when he learned the truth he declared, “Verily, the God of Abraham is a great and powerful God, the King of kings.”⁴⁵ So Abraham was allowed to depart and secretly spent the next thirty-nine years studying with Noah and Shem.⁴⁶

Thus Nimrod was again bested in his great debate with Abraham on the subject of divine authority. At their first face-to-face meeting, Nimrod cried out to the youth: “My power is greater than that of your God!” And when Abraham observed that his God had power to give life or death, Nimrod in reply uttered his terrible and blasphemous boast: “It is I who give life, and I who take it away!” and

44. The dialogue is in Pozzoli et al., *Dizionario*, 1:33. See Schützinger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 86; Chapira, “Légendes bibliques,” 96; cf. *Ma‘ase Abraham Abinu*, in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 1:25–30.

45. *Ma‘ase Abraham Abinu*, in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 1:25–30; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:194; Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 5, 103 n. 31, citing Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer and *Jubilees*; Chapira, “Légendes bibliques,” 91, citing a twelfth-century geniza.

46. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 5, 103 nn. 32–33.

demonstrated to Abraham that he had the power to spare the life of a prisoner, subject, or any other human being, or to take it, as he chose. This was the secret of his ancestor Cain and was anciently regarded as the ultimate blasphemy, the unholy power of the man with the gun (Nimrod's bow) to take or spare life as he chooses. The point of the story, as Heinrich Schützing observes, is that Nimrod is the reverse image of Abraham in everything, being "a projection of the sins of Canaan."⁴⁷ At their first meeting, Nimrod even offered to make Abraham his successor if he would only bow down and worship him—a familiar motif!⁴⁸ And of course Nimrod is haunted by dreams in which he sees Abraham push him from his throne.⁴⁹ According to the Midrash, Abraham and Nimrod are the archetypes of the righteous and the wicked in this world.⁵⁰ The two wage a whole series of combats, with Nimrod always the challenger, culminating in his mad attempt to fly to heaven (or reach it by his tower) and dispatch the God of Abraham with his arrow. But always his monstrous pretension collapses ludicrously and pitifully; his flying machine falls, breaking his arms and legs; his throne collapses; his tower is overthrown by a wind or an earthquake, and so forth. The classic conclusion is when God sends a tiny gnat (the weakest and poorest of creatures) up the mighty Nimrod's nose while he is asleep to tickle his brain and so bring insanity and death.⁵¹ Though

47. Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 115; see 28, 93–94, 113–14, 126; Tha'labi, *Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 52–53 (Brinner, "Lives of the Prophets," 129). For sources on Nimrod's boast, see Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 106; discussed in Hugh Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," in *The Ancient World*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 14.

48. Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 178.

49. *Ibid.*, 71–74.

50. See Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:17.

51. For the series of combats, Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 96–100, 38–39, 110–11; for Nimrod's childishness, Gustav Weil, *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner: Aus arabischen Quellen zusammengetragen und*

he must admit Abraham the victor in the contest, even in his humiliation Nimrod stubbornly insists that his opponent has won not by real divine power but only by trickery and magic—for that is the issue: who has the real priesthood.⁵² “I have a better right to the city than you,” Abraham tells Nimrod in the Antar legend, “because it was the seat of my father and my forefathers, before Canaan came and settled here without right.”⁵³ And so the issue is drawn, each accusing the other of being a false ruler and usurper.

The real showdown with Nimrod began with the affair of the idols, the most famous episode from the youth of Abraham. In *Jubilees*, Terah secretly agrees with his son in deploring the worship of idols; but like many another, he is afraid to buck public opinion and advises Abraham to keep his thoughts to himself and avoid trouble.⁵⁴ But Abraham was of sterner stuff and protested in public and in private against the errors of the time, so that he finally had to leave home: “thinking upon his father’s anger, [he] left him and went from the house.”⁵⁵ As long as he was in Mesopotamia, “the Chaldeans and other peoples of Mesopotamia raised a tumult against him”;⁵⁶ in particular “the wise men of

mit jüdischen Sagen verglichen (Frankfurt am Main: Literarische Anstalt, 1845), 51–52; English source: Gustav Weil, *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud; or, Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans* (New York: Harper, 1846), 76–78. Sources for the gnat story are given by David Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes* (Paris: Geuthner, 1933), 41.

52. See Sidersky, *Origines des legendes musulmanes*, 31–41. Cf. the fallen Goliath’s protest that he has been tricked, in M. R. James, ed., *Biblical Antiquities of Philo* 61:8 (London: SPCK, 1917), 235. Terrified by Abraham’s challenge, Nimrod cries, “This man is crazy—take him away!” though he is the crazy one. Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 38.

53. Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 103.

54. *Jubilees* 12:1–8.

55. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:211.

56. Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 89.

Chaldea attacked Abraham, our father, for his belief."⁵⁷ It was Abraham against the whole society: "When the people of the land led astray, every man after his own devices, Abraham believed in me and was not led aside after them."⁵⁸

Archaeology reveals clues about Abraham in our own day. "That Abraham the iconoclast is not merely a children's tale is suggested by the extensive finds of Mari gods and goddesses, revealing an elaborate and pervasive cult of idolatry."⁵⁹ It was indeed a land of "crass polytheism and demonology, governed by a multitude of priests, diviners and magicians under the rule of the great temples and their hierarchies. There was no room in that Mesopotamia for an individual who could not join in the worship and in the magical practices of his fellows. Abraham must have felt early the pressing need to remove himself from such a stifling environment."⁶⁰ This is exactly the situation when the Book of Abraham opens: "In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence" (Abraham 1:1). "Abraham was alert to the contaminating pagan influence of the ethnic stock from which he came," wrote David M. Eichhorn,⁶¹ and Leo Trepp reflects that "Abraham's early migration established a great principle: to follow the truth is better than culture . . . the motto of Jewish history."⁶² We must bear in mind in reading the reflections of modern Jewish scholars on the subject that "nowhere in Genesis is there reference to a battle with idolatry, nor do the

57. Rabbi Saadia, quoted by Adolphe Franck, *The Kabbala* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1967), 31.

58. *Biblical Antiquities of Philo* 23:5.

59. Emanuel Feldman, "Changing Patterns in Biblical Criticism: Their Implications for the Traditional Jew," *Tradition* 7/4–8/1 (Winter 1965–Spring 1966): 72.

60. M. H. Segal, "The Religion of Israel before Sinai," *JQR* 52/1 (1961): 45.

61. David M. Eichhorn, *Conversion to Judaism* (New York: KTAV, 1965), 14.

62. Leo Trepp, *Eternal Faith, Eternal People: A Journey into Judaism* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 6.

patriarchs ever appear as reproaching their contemporaries for idolatry. The tension between Israel and the pagan world arises first with Moses."⁶³ Thus, the opening verses of the Book of Abraham strike off in a direction completely unfamiliar to biblical tradition.

Abraham's particular objections, according to the Pearl of Great Price account, were to idolatry and human sacrifice, which went together in the system: they were "offering up their children unto these dumb idols, and hearkened not unto my voice, but endeavored to take away my life" (Abraham 1:7). According to the traditions, "in the days of Terah the people began to sacrifice their children to the Devils and to worship images."⁶⁴ In one account Abraham sees a vision of human sacrifice on an altar and receives the surprising explanation: "This is God's temple, but the image in it is my wrath against the people who sprung from me, and the officiating priest is he who allures people to murderous sacrifices."⁶⁵ The episode might almost be illustrated by our own Facsimile 1. It was in the days of Serug, Abraham's great-grandfather, that the people "began to look upon the stars, and began to prognosticate by them and to make divination, and to make their sons and daughters pass through the fire."⁶⁶ So here they were, as the Book of Abraham reports, "offering up their children unto these dumb idols" (Abraham 1:7), with Abraham protesting and thereby getting himself into serious trouble. Nimrod's sacrifice of 70,000 babies may well be an echo of the practice and have nothing to do with the story of Herod.

J. G. Février's study quotes an ancient source describing how the sacrificing was carried out and traces the survival

63. A. D. Matthews, "The Prophetic Doctrine of Creation," *Church Quarterly Review* (1965): 141.

64. *Cave of Treasures*, fol. 23b, col. 2; cf. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, 140.

65. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 25:2-7, author's translation.

66. *Biblical Antiquities of Philo* 4:16.

of the atrocious practices among Semitic peoples right down to the end of the ancient world.⁶⁷ Indeed, there has been considerable discussion as to whether the sacrifice of Isaac is not itself clear evidence of a custom of human sacrifice prevailing in Abraham's time, a custom to which he put an end.⁶⁸ As the rite is described in the Février document, the parents would "hand the child to a priest who would dispatch it in a mystic manner, i.e. according to a special rite; after the child had passed down the length of a special trench . . . then he placed the victim on the extended hands of the divine statue, from which it rolled into a brazier to be consumed by fire," while the crowd went wild.⁶⁹ It is not a pretty picture. Indeed, Albright finds the picture in Egypt shortly after this time "singularly repulsive. . . . Ritual prostitution . . . was rampant. . . . Snake worship and human sacrifice were rife."⁷⁰

Abraham's two attacks on the idols are both very well attested in the documents. In one story the hero at the age of ten or twelve or twenty or forty or fifty or sixty goes forth to sell the idols that his father and brother have made in order to help out the stringent finances of the family; in discussing things with his customers, he points out to them the folly of worshipping "dumb idols" made by men and ends up converting some of them and even dragging the idols in the

67. J. G. Février, "Les rites sacrificiels chez les Hebreux et à Carthage," *REJ* 3 (1964): 7–18.

68. Already in the seventeenth century Herman Witsius, *Aegyptiaca*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Gerardus Borstius, 1717; 1st ed., 1683), 299, saw the main theme of the Abraham story to be "God's disapproval of human sacrifice among the Phoenicians, Egyptians, and surrounding people" (see p. 382, fig. 54). The theme is much discussed today, for example, in Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development* (New York: Holt, 1932), 3; and David S. Shapiro, "The Book of Job and the Trial of Abraham," *Tradition* 4/2 (1962): 218.

69. Février, "Les rites sacrificiels chez les Hebreux," 16.

70. W. F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), 16–17.

dirt.⁷¹ In the other story Abraham arises by night and burns all the idols in the shop, and even the house and family! This, according to some, was when the lukewarm Nahor, the brother of Abraham, who had announced that he would wait to see who came out on top in the struggle between Abraham and Nimrod and declare his allegiance to the winner, was burned to death trying to put out the fire.⁷² But the most common version has Abraham plead sickness when the family goes off to the great festival at Nimrod's palace; being left behind and finding himself alone with the idols, he destroys them. Terah on his return is enraged, and Nimrod even more so when he learns what has happened; but Abraham answers all questions by insisting that the idols fought among themselves and destroyed each other. If the objection to that is that the idea is impossible and absurd, then Abraham's accusers have called the idols helpless with their own mouths.⁷³ This is the sort of clever aggadah that the schoolmen love; in one tradition Abraham goes right in to the national shrine and smashes idols.⁷⁴ The soberest version is that of Maimonides: Abraham, when he was forty, "began to refute the inhabitants of Ur of the Chaldees. . . . He broke the images and commenced to instruct the people. . . . When he had prevailed over them with arguments, the king sought to slay him. He was miraculously saved and

71. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 9–11; Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 97–98; E. A. W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek . . . A Complete Translation of the Kebra Nagast* (London: British Museum, 1922), 9–10.

72. According to *Jubilees* 12:12–14, this was when Abraham was sixty years old.

73. Tha'labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 53 (Brinner, "Lives of the Prophets," 129–31), on Qur'an 37:88–95; 21:56–61; *Ma'ase Abraham*, according to Elia Cohn, in Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 13–14, 110 n. 107; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 5:4, 9–11; 6:7.

74. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 1:3–6.

emigrated to Haran.”⁷⁵ The stories of selling the idols or of smashing them in the shop or the shrine may be regarded as aetiological tales (*aggadah*), explaining how it was that Abraham came to argue with the people and how he finally came to his dramatic confrontation with Nimrod. Everything leads up to that.

At first Nimrod tried to silence Abraham by locking him up in prison to starve to death. There Gabriel sustained him for ten days, or an entire year—or for three years or seven or ten.⁷⁶ Maimonides says that Abraham continued to combat false doctrine while in prison, so that the king finally had to banish him to Syria after confiscating all his property.⁷⁷ But the usual story is that Abraham was taken out of prison only to be delivered for sacrifice. It is said that with the aid of Jectan, a sympathetic official in the court of Nimrod, twelve of Abraham’s companions who were in the prison with him were able to escape to the mountains until the anger of the populace should cool, but Abraham refused to escape with them.⁷⁸ Abraham was to pay for his opposition to the local cult by himself becoming a sacrificial victim of that cult. According to the Book of Abraham, he was not the first to be punished in such a manner, for “this priest had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time . . . because of their virtue; they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or of stone, therefore they were killed upon this altar, and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians” (Abraham 1:11). Accordingly “the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this

75. Maimonides, cited by Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *The Judaic Tradition* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 313.

76. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:199 (1 year); Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 14, for the other lengths of time.

77. Maimonides, *Dalalat III*, chap. XXIX, trans. S. Munk (Osnabrück: Zeller, 1964), 220.

78. *Biblical Antiquities of Philo* 6:5–15. In contrast, the twelve servants of the hesitant Haran were consumed by fire. Jelinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 1:32–34.

altar" (Abraham 1:12). The three virgins, we are assured, were "of the royal descent directly from the loins of Ham, . . . and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians" (Abraham 1:11). It is necessary to specify this last point repeatedly, because the drama is unfolding not in Egypt but in Canaan, and indeed the particular rites we are discussing seem to have been common to Egypt and Syria if not the whole Near East.⁷⁹ What rites? Rites in which young women were obviously supposed to act as hierodules.

One of the oldest Abraham sources reports that it was Nimrod's *courtesans* who persuaded him to get the best of Abraham by inviting him to attend a great year-feast that the king and his court were wont to celebrate in the territory of Koutha-Rya but that Abraham refused to come, pleading sickness.⁸⁰ This gives us the larger ritual setting of the drama—the now well-known year-rites in which we are on more or less familiar ground. Then while Abraham was in prison for his recalcitrance, the courtesans and the court again met for the year-feast, and this time they advised Nimrod to make a sacrifice of Abraham by throwing him into an immense brazier.⁸¹ It is interesting that in the Egyptian royal rites it is the lady and courtesan Hathor who advises the king to sacrifice his enemies: As the throat of the victim is cut, Horus (the king) says: "I have slain thine enemies who are massacred by thy knife . . . slain upon the altar!" To this the lady replies: "Your Majesty! I burn . . . thine enemies. This is Hathor . . . the Lady of Heaven, *Wrst*, the burning flame against thine enemies."⁸²

Classical writers have described Egyptian sacrificial rites as witnessed in various lands. In Ethiopia, Achilles

79. Giovanni Rinaldi, "Osservazioni sul testo ugaritico del dio lunare (Jrh) e Nikkal," *Aegyptus* 34 (1954): 193–210.

80. Cited in Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 98–99.

81. Ibid.; see Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, CWHN 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 196, fig. 32.

82. Philippe Derchain, *Rites égyptiens I: Le sacrifice de l'oryx* (Brussels: FERE, 1962), 43.

Tatius reports, a virgin with hands bound behind was led around an altar by a priest chanting an Egyptian hymn; then "all retired from the altar at a distance," the maiden was tied down, and a sword was first plunged into her heart and then slashed her lower abdomen from side to side, after which the remains were burned, cut to pieces, and eaten."⁸³ Pseudo-Plutarch tells how the first pharaoh in bad years was ordered by the oracle to sacrifice his own daughter and in grief threw himself into the Nile.⁸⁴ This may be an indication of the antiquity of the rite. As Heliodorus explains it, the Egyptians of the late period selected their sacrificial virgins from among people of non-Egyptian birth, and so the Greek heroine of Heliodorus's romance is chosen to be sacrificed to Osiris.⁸⁵ The rule was that men were sacrificed to the sun (so Abraham, in Abraham 1:9), women to the moon, and virgins to Osiris, equated here to Bacchus.⁸⁶ Here the girls are plainly meant as consorts of the god in the usual ritual marriage of the year-rite, common to Egypt and Syria. Indeed, there is a legend that Nimrod's own daughter Radha fell in love with Abraham and tried to come to him in the sacrificial fire.⁸⁷ The name is interesting: since Rhodha, Rhodopis, a name popularly given the sphinx in late times, was the Egyptian sacred hierodule. This is a reminder that from the

83. Achilles Tatius, 3.15. Among the Scythian Taurians, a "princely stranger . . . is killed with a sword by the goddess's virgin-priestess; and she throws the corpse into the sacred fire," though some say it is not the priestess that does the killing. The rite was Egyptian, and the sources are given in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1955), 2:74, 77.

84. Pseudo-Plutarch, *De fluviis* 16.1, in Theodor Hopfner, comp., *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae* (Bonn: Marcus and Weber, 1922), 397.

85. Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 1.18; 10.1–2, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 454–55, 460; discussed by Eugène Lefébure, "Le sacrifice humain: D'après les rites de Busiris et d'Abydos," in *Oeuvres diverses*, ed. Gaston Maspero, BE 36 (Paris: Leroux, 1915), 275.

86. Rinaldi, "Osservazioni sul testo ugaritico," 193–210.

87. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 112 n. 135; Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Musulmans*, 75–76.

Twenty-first Dynasty onwards, the title “God’s Wife,” formerly reserved for the wife of the pharaoh, was “transferred to a king’s daughter who became the consecrated wife of the Theban god, and to whom human intercourse was strictly forbidden.”⁸⁸ This was “the line of virgin priestesses . . . who enjoyed a position which at Thebes was virtually royal.”⁸⁹ So here we have the august virgins of the royal line set apart as spouses of the god, and as such expected to engage in those activities which would make them ritual hierodules. Strabo says that “the Egyptians sanctified the fairest princess, a virgin of the royal line, to be a hierodule until her physical purification, after which she could marry.”⁹⁰ Here is plain indication that such princesses “of the royal descent” as described in Abraham 1:11 were expected to jeopardize their virtue, and if they refused to do so they could still be forcibly dispatched in the manner of the hierodules. Herodotus and Diodorus tell of the king of Egypt named Pheros (here Pharaoh is actually the *name* of the king) who exactly like Nimrod desired to rule not only the human race but the elements as well, and was chastised for his presumption with blindness. A seer from Bouto told the king that his only hope of cure would be through a woman of perfect and proven virtue. The king’s wife failed the test and so did many others: only one woman passed with flying colors and the king married her, subjecting all the pretenders to a sacrificial death “in the city of the Red Soil.”⁹¹

88. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 343.

89. J. W. B. Barns, review of *Recherches sur les monuments thébains de la xxv^e dynastie dite éthiopienne*, by Jean Leclant, *JEA* 52 (1966): 191.

90. Strabo, *Geography* 17.1, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 816.

91. Herodotus, *History* 2.111, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 23–24; Diodorus, *Library* 1.59. It is interesting that Herodotus calls the place of sacrifice “red soil,” while Diodorus calls it “sacred soil,” indicating access to separate—and Egyptian—sources, since the words for “red” and “sacred” are the same in Egyptian in this case, *dsr.t*.

According to Gerald A. Wainwright, the ladies in the story represent the spirit of fertility; an adulteress is one in whom this spirit is emphatically incarnate.⁹² In the annual fertility rites, Wainwright explains, royal princesses, even the queen herself, were expected to function as courtesans. The rationale for such behavior has become household knowledge since James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*—we need not expatiate on it here. An example would be Nephthys, “a fertility-goddess of the Old Religion, and very reminiscent of [the later] Nitocris, who . . . accomplished the sacrifice in the fire . . . and was later thought to have been a courtesan. . . . Seshat [the king's private secretary] . . . was one of her forms.” In the beginning she was no less than the mother goddess herself, and as such, consort to the king.⁹³ In short, “after the manner of the Egyptians,” royal princesses sacrificed both their virtue and their lives on ritual occasions as indicated in the Book of Abraham.

In the Jewish legends are a number of remarkable parallels. Thus, we have a pharaoh who treats Moses exactly as Nimrod does Abraham, who builds a great tower as does Nimrod, which falls as does Nimrod's, who is alarmed by Moses' preaching against him and puts to death Moses' converts, etc., sacrificed his own daughter “because she no longer honored him as a god”—again the uncooperative virgin put to death. One thinks here of the daughter of Nimrod with the Egyptian name of Ratha (Radha) who fell in love with Abraham, a treasonable virgin if there ever was one, and sought to join him in the sacrificial flame.⁹⁴ Most suggestive is the account of how the three virgin daughters of

[Nibley seems to have confused *dšr* “red” with *ḏsr* “holy,” as apparently his Greek informants have done. They at least have the excuse of not being able to distinguish the two phonetically in Greek—eds.]

92. Gerald A. Wainwright, *The Sky-Religion in Egypt: Its Antiquity and Effects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), 89–90.

93. Gerald A. Wainwright, “Seshat and the Pharaoh,” *JEA* 26 (1941): 30–31.

94. Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, 75–76.

Lot were sacrificed (burnt upon a pyre) in Sodom because the eldest of them would not follow the wicked customs of the land.⁹⁵ The first daughter was called Paltit, a name that clearly designates her as set apart to be a ritual hierodule.⁹⁶ According to the book of *Jubilees*, Tamar (a doublet of Paltit) was condemned to death by fire for playing the harlot with Judah, "according to the judgment of Abraham."⁹⁷ The *three* virgins remind one of the three daughters of Minyas who, when they refused to join in the Dionysian revels, were driven mad, one even devouring her own son in a cannibalistic rite of human sacrifice.⁹⁸

Diligent research into the pattern of ritual and myth in the ancient Near East has made it clear just what sort of goings-on are here indicated; but until the efforts of the Cambridge school began to introduce some sort of sense and order into a scene of wild and meaningless confusion, such passages as those about the virgins in the Book of Abraham could only appear as the most wanton fantasy:

95. Friedlander, *Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer*, 182–85; Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:255; Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 40–41. Another virgin, the daughter of Admah, was ritually executed (stung to death by bees) for refusing to conform to the evil practices of the Sodomites. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:250. Pilath, Lot's daughter, is stoned for giving bread and water to a poor stranger. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:220–23, 226–28. Also, Abraham's first convert was a woman who denounced Nimrod as a fraud and was sacrificed. *Ma'ase Abraham Abinu*, in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 1:31.

96. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:249. Paltit is the same as Palakis, whence the name Bilqis, borne by the Queen of Sheba as royal companion of Solomon in a large cycle of tales dealing with ritual prostitution.

97. *Jubilees* 41:28. The Tomyris of the Cyrus story, Herodotus, *History* 1.205–6, 212–14, is the Bilqis (Tadmor-Tamar) of the Solomon cycle, in Tha'labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 216–24 (Brinner, "Lives of the Prophets," 519–37); also published in Rudolf-Ernst Brünnow, *Chrestomathy of Arabic Prose-Pieces* (Berlin: Reuther and Reichard, 1895), 1–22.

98. Graves, *Greek Myths*, 1:105–6, citing Plutarch, *Greek Questions* 38. The Minyans were people living in the area of Sodom and Gomorrah.

“Now, this priest had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time . . . because of their virtue; they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or of stone, . . . and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians” (Abraham 1:11). What nonsense, to be sure—but historical nonsense just the same.

The ancient and honorable designation of Abraham as “he who came forth from the fire of the Chaldees” has been explained by almost anybody who has had access to a Hebrew dictionary as a misunderstanding of the expression “Ur of the Chaldees.” Thus, one of the latest commentators writes, “Ur of the Chaldees, not then known to be a place-name[!], was translated by the Rabbis into ‘the fire of Chaldea.’”⁹⁹ But the fiery element is not so easily brushed aside; references to sacrificial fires in the Abraham traditions (such as the Haran episode and the story of the firebricks) are much too numerous and explicit and the historical parallels too many and too obvious to be traceable to the misunderstanding of a single monosyllable.¹⁰⁰ The constant references to both the sacrificial knife and the fire make no difficulty, however, since the normal procedure in human and animal sacrifice in Egypt, as elsewhere, was to cut the victim’s throat and then cast the remains on the fire.¹⁰¹ Hermann Kees notes

99. Abrahams, *Jewish Mind*, 49.

100. Abraham was thrown into a furnace of firebricks for refusing to make bricks. *Biblical Antiquities of Philo* 6:3–5. George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 2:106, notes suspicious parallels between Nimrod’s furnace and the three youths in Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace—both were in the plain of Dura. John Garstang, “Excavations at Hierakonpolis, at Esna, and in Nubia,” *ASAE* 8 (1907): 146–48, discusses the ritual conflagrations in the brick royal tombs of the Twentieth Dynasty.

101. Lefébure, “Le sacrifice humain,” 283; a typical instance is given in Herodotus, *History* 2.40, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 8. Amon’s enemies are slaughtered each morning on a sacrificial block at the place of burning. Siegfried Morenz, “Rechts und links im Totengericht,” *ZÄS* 82 (1957): 64. The adversary is pierced with a spear

that the Typhonian enemy of Osiris is always slaughtered and then burned, both rites being considered sacrificial.¹⁰² In the Levitical sacrifices, the *zebah* (with the knife) and the *kalil* or *‘ola* (holocaust) did not usually go together,¹⁰³ but then Abraham is careful to specify that everything he is reporting is “after the manner of the *Egyptians*.” There is evidence that the Egyptians practiced dedicating victims by passing them through the fire and even knew the practice of ritual fire walking.¹⁰⁴ This point deserves mention because of the peculiar persistence of strange fire motifs in the story of Abraham, biblical and legendary. It is interesting, however, that the Book of Abraham makes no mention of fire in connection with the attempted sacrifice of Abraham; the *earliest* sources likewise make no mention of it and nearly all scholars agree that it is a later addition.¹⁰⁵

and “placed . . . in the fire every day.” E. A. Wallis Budge, *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum: With Descriptions, Translations, etc.* (London: British Museum, 1910), 14–18. The main year-rites of the Egyptians were called “the Great Burning” and “the Little Burning,” according to Alan H. Gardiner, “The Problem of the Month-Names,” *RdE* 10 (1955): 29. In Babylonia the cutting of the throat and sacrifice by burning “seem to have been in use absolutely contemporaneously.” E. Douglas Van Buren, “How Representations of Battles of the Gods Developed,” *Orientalia* 24 (1955): 30.

102. Hermann Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Ägypter: Grundlagen und Entwicklung bis zum Ende des mittleren Reiches* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926), 44–45, noting however that royal cremation was an “unegyptian” practice.

103. Février, “Les rites sacrificiels chez les Hébreux,” 9.

104. Gustave Jéquier, “Notes et remarques,” *RT* 32 (1910): 169; Gerald A. Wainwright, “The Attempted Sacrifice of Sesostris,” *JEA* 27 (1941): 139–40; Wainwright, *Sky-Religion in Egypt*, 55, 89; and Wainwright, “Letopolis,” *JEA* 18/3–4 (1932): 164–67.

105. *Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, 46, notes that the older work of *Jubilees* seems to show an intentional avoidance of the fire theme. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 114 n. 136, notes the absence of the fire motif in the earlier versions and cites Nachmanides as saying that Abraham was rescued “from great danger [and from Nimrod] in the land of the Chaldees,” but that we do not know what the danger was.

Potiphar's Hill

One of the most interesting aspects of the many stories of Abraham's narrow escape from a sacrificial death is the strange and puzzling setting of the drama. There has never been any agreement among commentators as to just where all this is supposed to have happened. The Book of Abraham puts it on Asian soil under Egyptian hegemony. To Dr. John Peters, who had actually supervised archaeological diggings in Babylonia, the overlapping of Egyptian and Chaldean elements in the Book of Abraham "displays an amusing ignorance," since "Chaldeans and Egyptians are hopelessly mixed together, although as dissimilar and remote in language, religion and locality as are today American and Chinese."¹⁰⁶ Though Mercer rushed to the defense of Peters, his unfortunate remark played right into the hands of the Mormons, for with the progress of archaeology, the cultural and religious ties between Egypt and Mesopotamia have become steadily more conspicuous and significant. Within a few years of Peters's pronouncement, Jacques de Morgan entitled an epoch-making study of the early royal tombs of Abydos "The Chaldean Origin of Pharaonic Culture in Egypt."¹⁰⁷ In this vast field of comparative study, all that concerns us here is the situation depicted in Facsimile 1, the location of the story being pinpointed for us in graphic detail in Abraham's account.

First we are taken to the far-flung area known as Chaldea (see Abraham 1:20, 30; 2:1) and then to what would seem to be a more limited territory designated as the "land of Chaldea" (Abraham 1:8). The common expression "the land of So-and-so" nearly always limits an area to the region

106. John Peters, quoted in Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow, 1912; reprint, Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1965), 28.

107. Jacques de Morgan, "L'origine chaldéenne de la culture pharaonique en Égypte," in *La préhistoire orientale*, 3 vols. (Paris: Geuthner, 1926), 2:248-338.

around a particular religious or political center, and this would appear to apply in the present case as the camera brings us closer to a still more limited area within the land of Chaldea, namely “the land of Ur, of Chaldea” (Abraham 1:20). This is not the well-known city of Ur, for what we see is an open plain, the “plain of Olishem” (Abraham 1:10), and as the camera zooms in still closer we are swept to one end of the plain and our attention is directed to a hill; finally at the foot of the hill we are brought to rest before an altar at which a priest is in the act of making a sacrifice (Abraham 1:9–11). According to the other accounts, the plain was full of people at the time, and Abraham was the victim.

Attention has been drawn increasingly to the significant fact that all the main events of Abraham’s life seem to take place at ancient cult-centers.¹⁰⁸ The patriarchs, Eissfeldt observes, “seem to have worshipped at established cult-places, where they set up their own altars,” and though many problems are raised by this strange situation, the study of those cult-places and their activities offers “a great deal that gives the authentic picture of the patriarchal age.”¹⁰⁹ J. C. L. Gibson suggests that Abraham’s family probably only visited Ur as pilgrims and observes that such a world-famous center of pagan worship offered a peculiarly “appropriate setting . . . for Abraham’s confrontation by a God who was greater than Sin.”¹¹⁰ Professor Albright has pointed out that

108. The relationship of the patriarchs to these ancient centers raises many problems, discussed by Albrecht Alt, “The God of the Fathers,” in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 3–77.

109. Eissfeldt, “Achronische, anachronische und synchronische Elemente,” 161.

110. J. C. L. Gibson, “Light from Mari on the Patriarchs,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7 (1962): 58. The importance of the moon-cult in the Abraham histories has been greatly overdone, according to Eduard König, “The Modern Attack on the Historicity of the Religion of the Patriarchs,” *JQR* 22 (1931–32): 124. Actually the legends say nothing of the moon-cult but tell only of a showdown between Abraham and a king to whom he

in all the wanderings and vicissitudes of Abraham's career, "only places are mentioned which are known to have been important in the donkey caravan trade of that age."¹¹¹ These would also be cult-places. But one must distinguish between the daily liturgies of local shrines and temples and the great year-rites at which vast numbers of people assembled. According to all the traditions, it was at the latter type of celebration that Abraham was offered up, and the legends throw some light on the kind of place chosen for the rites. The main fixtures are a plain and an elevation.

In one account we learn that the king of Sodom and the other kings round about used to repair "to the valley of Sava, the place where all the star-worshippers were wont to assemble," and that there on one occasion Abraham was honored by being placed upon a high towerlike structure made of cedar while the people hailed him as "their king, a lord and a god"; Abraham, however, refused to play the game, telling the people that they should take God for their king instead of a mortal.¹¹² The fact that the people already had kings presiding at the ceremonies, and the ritual setting of the event, including the cedar tower—which ample parallel instances show to be a sacrificial pyre—make it quite clear what kind of king Abraham was expected to be: a substitute and sacrificial king. We are reminded of Abraham the royal victim in Facsimile 1, followed by Abraham on the royal throne in Facsimile 3. Even more striking is the resemblance to King Benjamin on his tower at the great year-rite of Zarahemla, laying down his office and telling the people that instead of

was obnoxious. König notes in this connection that "it is not at all true . . . that the importance of the Bible lies in monotheism." *Ibid.*, 125–26.

111. William F. Albright, *Archaeology, Historical Analogy, and Early Biblical Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 38.

112. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:170–71, citing Midrash Bereshit Rabba, 42:4, 7, 8; 53:2–4, in Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Bereschit Rabba*, 173.

him they should take God for their king (Mosiah 2:21, 41).¹¹³ This is another reminder that there are probably far more authentic Hebrew traditions in the Book of Mormon, including extensive quotations from ancient writings (Benjamin's speech is full of them), than anyone has so far suspected.

Another report of what seems to be the same tradition tells us that south of Sodom and Gomorrah there was a broad plain half a day's journey long, where every year the people of the whole region would gather at a spot marked by green meadows and a spring to indulge in four days of promiscuous and orgiastic rites during which every young woman was expected to make herself available to any who approached her.¹¹⁴ This is the well-known fertility aspect of the year-rite, not overlooked in the Book of Abraham, which tells of princesses being sacrificed "because of their virtue" as part of the ceremonies.

In these accounts the setting is typical of the ancient cult-places with their broad "plain of assembly"; the elevated mound, hill, or tower (hence pyramid and ziggurat); and the altar for sacrificing (fig. 55). As we have noted, the legends emphasize the importance of having the sacrifice of Abraham take place at the great New Year assembly, with Abraham as a more or less routine victim, a situation clearly reflected in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1:10–12).

But why *Potiphar's Hill*? As Richard Durham observes, "this would indeed seem (at least in the thinking of a good many adverse critics of Joseph Smith) to be a highly unsophisticated borrowing from Genesis 37:36"—a desperate attempt to fill up the story with something that sounds

113. We have treated the subject at length in Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed., CWHN 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 295–310; and in Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed., CWHN 7 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1967), 247–51.

114. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:211–12.

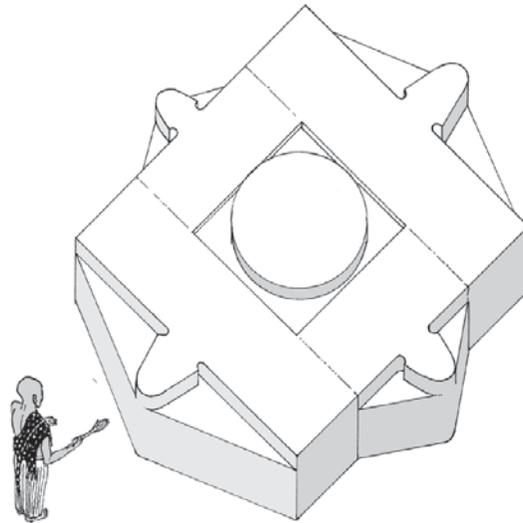
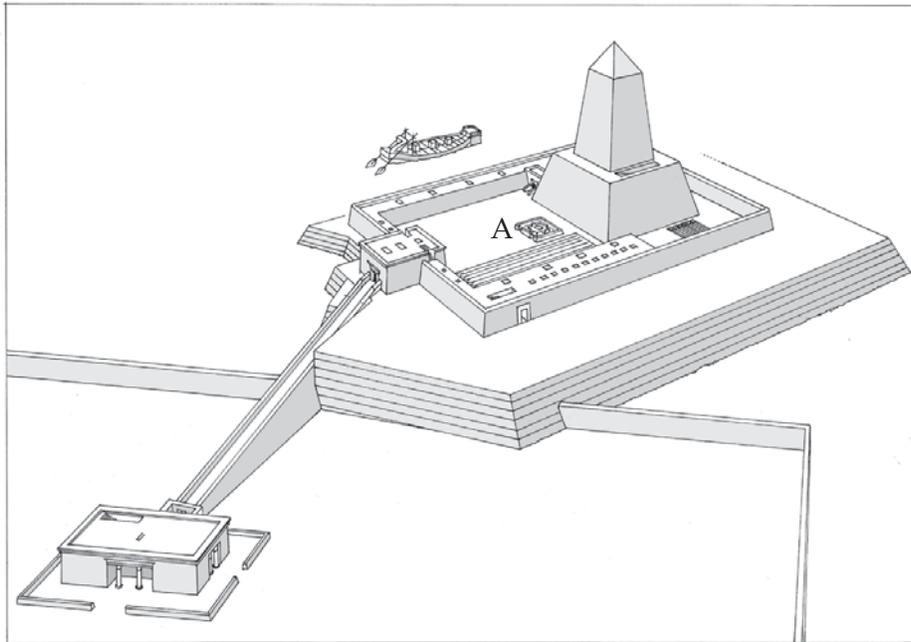


Figure 55. The shrine of the sun-god Re at Abusir was a massive obelisk-shaped monument imitating the one at Heliopolis. This sun-stone stands upon an artificial mound or hill, with a spiral ramp within so priests could climb up to greet the sun. A large alabaster altar was erected to the east (A). Its circular center was surrounded by four stone hieroglyphs, *htp* , meaning altar, but also peace and satisfaction. This may have meant that the sacrifice at the center filled the four corners of the world. The setting is like that described in Abraham 1:8–10. Sun temple of Pharaoh Niuserre, Abu Gurob, ca. 2430 B.C.

Egyptian.¹¹⁵ But the name is not confined to the Bible and seems to have definite ritual associations.¹¹⁶ It is found on a small limestone stela of the early Twenty-first Dynasty belonging to one Putiphar and containing also the names of his sons Petusir and Petuneit.¹¹⁷

This illustrates well the nature of those names beginning in Pete-, Petu-, Puti-, Poti- (e.g., *p3-di*), meaning "given of" or "appointed by" such-and-such a god. Putiphar means "The one whom the god Re has given" or has appointed, while his sons Petusir and Petuneit are the gifts of Osiris and Neith respectively.¹¹⁸ Scholars have not been able to agree as to whether the Potiphar who bought Joseph (Genesis 37:36; 39:1) has the same name as the Potiphara whose daughter he married (Genesis 41:45; 46:20). F. Cook suggested that the last syllable of the latter name may refer not to Re but to Pharaoh, "if we take *pr* here in the meaning of the Palace or metaphorically the Sovereign."¹¹⁹ But it is agreed that the name of Joseph's father-in-law should be "Given of Re" because he was the high priest of Heliopolis or On, the center of prehistoric Egyptian sun worship.¹²⁰ The cultic significance of the name is also indicated by its appearance on a sacred *wedjat*-eye amulet, cut in Aramaic letters which date

115. Richard Durham, "Potiphar's Hill" and the "Canopic" Complex of Gods (private issue, 1960), 1-2. This work should be better known; it is located in the Americana Collection of the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU.

116. Because it is found only in late Egyptian documents, scholars have concluded that the biblical story of Joseph must contain anachronisms, but Abdel H. Hamada, "Stela of Putiphar," *ASAE* 39 (1939): 273-76, and Joseph Leibovitch, "Une amulette égyptienne au nom de Putiphar," *ASAE* 43 (1943): 89, show that the Egyptian forms of the name they study indicate that the name has come down from much earlier times.

117. Hamada, "Stela of Putiphar," 274.

118. *Ibid.*, 275.

119. *Ibid.*, 276, with disapproval.

120. Leibovitch, "Une amulette égyptienne," 89.

it to the end of the seventh century B.C., about the same time as the Putiphar stela.¹²¹

Potiphar's Hill would be "the hill of the one whom Re has given, or appointed," which makes good sense since Re is the sun and we are explicitly told that Potiphar's Hill was a sun shrine, the "god of Pharaoh" being worshipped there in company with a god who definitely was the sun (Abraham 1:9). Classical historians have recorded that the Egyptian name of Joseph,¹²² son-in-law of the priest of On, was Peteseeph, and that Moses not only went by the name of Osarsiph but was himself "a priest of Heliopolis."¹²³ Peteseeph, plainly suggested by Io-seph, could mean "He (God) has given increase," while Osarsiph would be "Osiris is increase." What is noteworthy here is the intimacy between the family of Abraham and the Potiphar complex. We must not overlook the fact that the name *Iwnw* or Heliopolis, occurring three times in the inscription around the rim of Facsimile 2, definitely associates the facsimile with the Heliopolitan cult.

The Jews and early Christians alike had a special reverence for Heliopolis. When the Jews in Egypt under the leadership of Onias undertook to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 19 by building a temple in Egypt after the pattern of that at Jerusalem, the spot they chose for the sacred edifice was the site of a ruined temple at Heliopolis.¹²⁴ And the early Christian Clementine writings go to "the altar of the sun" at Heliopolis to find their most compelling illustration and proof of the reality of resurrection in the tradition of the phoenix bird.¹²⁵

121. Ibid., 87–90.

122. Chaeremon of Alexandria, cited by Josephus, *Contra Apionem* (*Against Apion*) 1.290, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 281.

123. Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.286, 238.

124. Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.3.1–3.

125. Clemens Romanus, *Epistola ad Corinthios* (*Epistle to the Corinthians*) 1.25, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 255; *Constitutiones*

Heliopolis ("Sun City"), the On of the Old Testament (Eg. *lwnw*), was "the most important cult-center of Egypt."¹²⁶ A great "Megalithic" complex of prehistoric antiquity, it was the model of the "normal pyramid complex" of later times, though instead of the usual pyramid at its apex, it had "a rather squat obelisk perched on a square base like a truncated pyramid. The obelisk recalled a very ancient stone at Heliopolis known as *bnbn*, etymologically perhaps 'the radiant one,' which undoubtedly symbolized a ray or rays of the sun."¹²⁷ Here at "the periodic renewal of the kingship . . . the gods of the two halves of the country assembled to do honour to the Pharaoh," their images taking up their positions in a row before the altar in the "vast Jubilee court," the place of assembly.¹²⁸

The great central stone and its bases, from which the later pyramids were derived, "was the specific Heliopolitan form of the Primeval Hill," either resting on or representing the "High Sand," the first solid ground to emerge from the waters of the flood on the day of creation.¹²⁹ Though the design of this monument differs from place to place, it is always the primeval hill from which the sun arose on "that momentous sunrise of the First Day."¹³⁰ The common Egyptian verb *h'î*, used to signify the appearance of the king in glory, "is written with the hieroglyph depicting the sun rising over the Primeval Hill," for "the concepts of creation,

Apostolicae (Apostolic Constitutions) V, 7, in PG 1:845; cf. Pliny, Natural History 10.2 (3–5), in Hopfner, Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae, 193.

126. Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1952), 543.

127. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 85.

128. *Ibid.*, 86, and Alan H. Gardiner, "Horus the Beḥdetite," *JEA* 30 (1944): 27.

129. Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 153.

130. *Ibid.*, 154; cf. H. R. Hall, review of *De Egyptische Voorstellingen betreffende den Oerheuvcl*, by Adriaan de Buck, *JEA* 10/2 (1924): 187.

sunrise, and kingly rule are continually merged.”¹³¹ Not only was the hill the central object of every solar shrine, but “each and every temple was supposed to stand” on the primeval hill.¹³²

Nothing of the old Heliopolitan complex has survived, and its reconstruction is based on copies of it (as Gardiner calls them) in other places.¹³³ But Egyptian ritual and literature often give us fleeting glimpses of the setup at On. Thus a late Egyptian romance tells of a fierce contest between the champions of Pharaoh and the ruler of Ethiopia, both rivals bearing the name of Hor, in which the false pretender from the south is “cast down from upon the hill on the east of On” to sink into the waters of death at its foot.¹³⁴ The losing ruler must in the end submit to a terrible beating, which was originally meant for Pharaoh himself—that is, the king’s rival is sacrificed in his place after a ritual combat at the sun hill of On.¹³⁵ We see the same motif in the Metternich Stela (see p. 434, fig. 57), which tells how “Hor was pierced in the field of On” on the north of the altar but was miraculously healed. This refers to the New Year’s combat between Horus and Seth for the rule of the world, only instead of the hill, it is the plain and the altar which receive mention.¹³⁶

131. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 57, 150–52; cf. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 489, sign-list N28.

132. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 152; Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 85–86; *Apostolic Constitutions* V, 7, in *PG* 1:837–52.

133. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 85.

134. Francis L. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1900), 62. The waters were the great Acherousian marsh bordering on Heliopolis, the Gate of the Sun. Diodorus, *Library* 1.96.

135. Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis*, 62.

136. Constantin E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstela* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1956), 50 (Spruch IX, lines 89–90). *Wb* 3:183 renders Hotep as “the place of the altar,” the basic meaning of the *h̄tp*-sign being “altar”; it is also a proper place-name.

If Heliopolis was the most venerable of sun shrines, it was by no means the only one; at least six kings of the Fifth Dynasty are known to have constructed their own complexes, “each with its own name like ‘Pleasure of Re,’ ‘Horizon of Re,’ ‘Field of Re.’”¹³⁷ Note that all the names end with Re. So does the name of Potiphar, “Given of Re.” The predominance of the name of Hor or Horus in the stories (Horus being the type of the living pharaoh mounting the throne) suggests another cult-place and one closely tied to Abraham. For Phathur or Petor—if it is not actually a corruption of Potiphar—means perhaps “Given of Horus” and was originally the name of Aram-naharaim, Abraham’s native city, when it was first settled by Aram and his brother Rekhob. There is much in the story to indicate that Phathur was an old cult-place.¹³⁸ If the story shows a fine disregard of chronology, we must remember that nothing makes a hash of chronology like ritual does, since ritual deals with real but repeated events.

It is clear enough that Abraham’s escape from the altar took place on Asiatic soil, which was at the time under Egyptian domination. The officiating priest, though properly “the priest of Elkenah,” was “*also* the Priest of Pharaoh” (Abraham 1:7). This was only a temporary state of affairs, however, for Abraham’s “now at *this* time it *was* the custom” definitely implies that at the time of writing it was no longer so. Böhl’s observation that when the curtain rises on the patriarchal dramas Egypt no longer rules Canaan suits well with the

137. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 85.

138. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:299. The name of Rekhob alone would guarantee its religious background. On the origin of Near Eastern cities as cult-places, see our study in Hugh Nibley, “Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10:33–98. Certainly the old center of Ptho (Pitru) from which abominable rites of prostitution of the cult of Balaam were imported into Israel and which lay “towards the borders of Anatolia” was a cult-center; see Zecharia Mayani, *Les Hyksos et le monde de la Bible* (Paris: Payot, 1956), 188. Pthor would be the later (Coptic) form of Pet-hor.

picture in the Book of Abraham where Pharaoh rules in Canaan only at the outset.¹³⁹ Also consistent with the modern reconstruction of the picture is the mixture of outlandish “strange gods” (Abraham 1:5–6, 8), among whose number was counted “a god *like unto* that of Pharaoh” (Abraham 1:13), a clear implication that Pharaoh’s authority is being honored on non-Egyptian territory. We are reminded of the situation in Byblos, where Pharaoh’s god and glory came and went in the temples, depending on whether Egypt had power locally or not.

That we have to do with an overlapping of Egyptian and Canaanitish or Amorite customs is apparent from the double nomenclatures used in Abraham’s story. The holy place was “*called* Potiphar’s Hill,” a very proper designation for the indispensable central object, the sun hill, of a shrine operating on the pattern of Heliopolis under the auspices of Pharaoh. But the plain itself, having existed from time immemorial, bore its local Semitic name, “the plain of Olishem” (Abraham 1:10). But since Olishem can be readily recognized by any first-year Hebrew student as meaning something like “hill of heaven,” “high place of heaven,” or even possibly “sun hill,”¹⁴⁰ the Plain of the High Place of Heaven was probably a holy center before the times of Egyptian influence. This is borne out by Abraham’s careful specification that the sacrifices were made “even after the manner of the Egyptians” (Abraham 1:9), clearly implying that there was another tradition. We learn in verses 8 and 9 that “at this time” *two* deities shared the honors of the great shrine, the one “the god of Pharaoh” and the other

139. Böhl, “Babel und Bibel (II),” 131–32.

140. Gesenius, *Hebrew-English Lexicon* (1952 ed.), s.v. “‘al,” meaning “height,” and “Shami, Shamah,” meaning “visible heavens, sky,” etc.; see Philo, in Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* (*Preparation for the Gospel*) 10, which says that the Egyptians think the Sun is the only God, and call it Beel-sham, meaning Lord of heaven but definitely designating the sun.

“the god of Shagreel,” who, we are flatly told, “was the sun” (Abraham 1:9).

Note, however, that it was not Shagreel who was the sun but “the god of Shagreel.” And who was Shagreel himself? Another happy guess: The old desert tribes—whose beliefs and practices, as Albrecht Alt has demonstrated at length, are of primary importance in understanding the background of the Abraham traditions¹⁴¹—worshipped the star Sirius under the name of *Shighre* or *Shaghre*, and Shagre-el in their idiom means “Shagre is God.” Sirius is interesting in ritual because of its unique association, amounting at times to identification, with the sun. *Shighre*, according to Lane’s *Dictionary*, designates *whatever* star is at the moment the brightest object in the heavens, and it has been discovered, as Rudolf Anthes notes, that “the heavenly Horus was a star as well as the sun,” whatever body happens to be presiding over the sky.¹⁴² The king of Egypt in the rites of On is able, “with the Dog Star (Sirius) as guide,” to find the place of resurrection at “the Primeval Hill, an island . . . pre-eminently suitable for a resurrection from death.”¹⁴³ The most important event in the history of the universe, according to the Egyptians, was the heliacal rising of Sirius, when Sirius, the sun, and the Nile all rose together on the morning of the New Year, the day of creation, as officially proclaimed from the great observatory of Heliopolis.¹⁴⁴ Without expanding on the theme, it will be enough here to note that the sun,

141. Alt, “The God of the Fathers,” 31–45.

142. Rudolf Anthes, “Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.,” *JNES* 18 (1959): 171. Already James H. Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 101, noted that the rising dead is a star—the brightest star, but he is also the sun.

143. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 120.

144. Plutarch, *De solitudine animae* (*The Solace of the Spirit*) 20, in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 265; Diodorus, *Library* 1.11. Chalcidius, cited in Hopfner, *Fontes historiae religionis aegyptiacae*, 512, says the Egyptians measured the small and the great year by Sirius, which they called *Ach*, i.e., the symbol of the sun rising over the primeval hill. See

the hill, and Sirius are inseparably connected in the rites, as they are in the Book of Abraham, where we find “the god of Pharaoh, and also . . . the god of Shagreel . . . the sun” receiving sacrifices side by side at Potiphar’s Hill (Abraham 1:9).

If we have not yet located the site of the doings indicated in Facsimile 1, we have at least been given a pretty good idea of where to look and an even better idea of what to look for. “Much careful thought has of late been devoted to . . . questions connected with the sun-temples,” wrote Gardiner, “but only with limited success through the lack of positive evidence.”¹⁴⁵ Certain main features stand out clearly, however, and if we are not obliged to leap to conclusions, we are obliged by what little we have seen to look further. At the great complex of Niuserre (see p. 409, fig. 55), examined by Ludwig Borchardt, we see all the gods from all over the land standing in order before the altar that stands at the foot of the Hill of the Sunrise.¹⁴⁶ Is that not much the situation that meets us in the Abraham story? In both cases there is a shrine devoted to the worship of the sun, entirely under the auspices of Pharaoh, held at a sacred hill of the sun whose theophoric name ends in Re, which stands at the head of a vast flat assembly place, by a sacrificial altar, before which stand the images of the deities of the whole land (Fac. 1, figs. 5–8; Abraham 1:13; Fac. 2, fig. 6). All such holy places have their origin and prototype in Heliopolis, and that goes for Abraham’s shrine as well, as the name Potiphar makes clear; as at On, so at Potiphar’s Hill the sun and Sirius were worshipped side by side.

The common meeting ground of Mesopotamian and Egyptian religion has become vaguely discernable—in Canaan. Until 1929 no direct connection was known between the cults of Mesopotamia and Egypt, but in that year was

Raymond O. Faulkner, “The King and the Star-Religion in the Pyramid Texts,” *JNES* 25 (1966): 159–60.

145. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 86.

146. *Ibid.*, 85–86, citing Borchardt.

discovered at Tel el-Ghassul, in what was once Canaan, the now famous mural with its eight-rayed disk representing either the sun or Sirius in an impressive cult-scene.¹⁴⁷ Martin H. Segal suggests that it was the Israelites, and Abraham in particular, who furnished an important link between the great year-rites of Babylonia and Egypt since “it may be conjectured that the principal beliefs associated with these two festivals [the principal year-rites] in Judaism were already well known to ancient Israel in Egypt from their Mesopotamian heritage.”¹⁴⁸ Abraham, Gordon reminds us, “was not an isolated immigrant, but part of a larger movement from Ur of the Chaldees (and similar communities) into Canaan,” which carried strange gods to Ugarit on the Syrian coast “and even penetrated through Canaan to Egypt.”¹⁴⁹ The mixing of gods and nations, especially those of Egypt and Canaan, was the order of the day in Abraham’s time, and nowhere is the phenomenon more clearly in evidence than in the Book of Abraham.¹⁵⁰

Which Ur?

But we have still to deal with Ur of the Chaldees—where was that (fig. 56)? It is interesting that the Book of Abraham only speaks of “the land of Ur, of Chaldea” (Abraham 1:20), as if to distinguish it from other Urs, and takes us not to the famous city or to some great temple for the sacrifice, but to a typical panegyris in an open plain. Though the Bible does not tell us where “Ur of the Chaldees” was, commentators ancient and modern have generally agreed with Beer’s

147. Alexis Mallon, “Le disque étoilé en Canaan au troisième millénaire avant Jésus-Christ,” in *Mélanges Maspéro I: Orient ancien*, ed. Pierre Jouguet, MIFAO 66.1 (Cairo: IFAO, 1935–38), 55–59.

148. M. H. Segal, “The Religion of Israel before Sinai,” *JQR* 53 (1962): 254.

149. Gordon, *Before the Bible*, 56.

150. The situation is dramatically described by Cyrus H. Gordon, “The Patriarchal Narratives,” *JNES* 13 (1954): 58–59.



Figure 56. Every city labeled at the southern and northern extremities of Mesopotamia has been claimed by scholars as the authentic birthplace of Abraham. All are agreed that he sojourned at the places indicated in Palestine. His stopping places in Egypt are obscure, although there is a tradition that he taught in Heliopolis. The relationship between the three areas in the life of Abraham has proven as devious and complicated as the astronomical problem of three bodies. Map by John Gee and Jacob Rawlins.

dictum that “the sense of the biblical information definitely points to Abraham’s birthplace in northern or northeastern Mesopotamia.”¹⁵¹ Gibson concludes that Genesis 24:4, 7 “seems unmistakably to imply that the place of Abraham’s nativity was Aram Naharaim,” in northern Mesopotamia.¹⁵² A famous commentary of Eupolemus states that Abraham

151. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 99.

152. Gibson, “Light from Mari on the Patriarchs,” 55.

was born in “Camarina, which some call Urie,” meaning “city of the Chaldaeans,” following which many scholars have sought the prophet’s birthplace in Urfa, once called Urhoi, near Edessa.¹⁵³ “The learned disagree as to the place where Abraham was born,” wrote Tha‘labi, following the learned Jewish informants of his day. “Some say it was in Susa in the land of Ahwaz [Ahwaz in Kusistan, ancient Susiana], while some say it was in Babylon in the land of Suwadi in the region called Kutha; and some say it was in Warka [Uruk, Erech]. . . . Others say he was born in Harran, but that his father took him to Babel.”¹⁵⁴ While some have located his birthplace at Kamarina in Armenia or Asia Minor, others have found it at the other end of the world in distant Susa.¹⁵⁵ Maimonides read in the books of the Sabaeans that Abraham grew up in Koutha, which some locate just south of Baghdad and others in the heart of Iran.¹⁵⁶

What adds to the confusion and the license of speculation is the high mobility of Abraham’s people, *habiru*, meaning “‘refugees’ or ‘displaced persons,’” as Gibson notes, for which reason he would view them either at Ur or Haran as mere temporary residents—campers, in fact.¹⁵⁷ Typical of the confusion is the momentous debate about the young Abraham’s ten-year imprisonment: one school says that he was in jail seven years in Kardi and three in Kutha, and the other that it was three years in Kardi and seven in Kutha.¹⁵⁸ It is interesting that the youthful Abraham—like the youth-

153. Ben Zion Wacholder, “Pseudo-Eupolemus’ Two Greek Fragments on the Life of Abraham,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963): 99–100.

154. Tha‘labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, 51 (Brinner, “*Lives of the Prophets*,” 124).

155. Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, 68. The Eupolemus text is in Paul Riessler, *Altjüdisches Schrifttum ausserhalb der Bibel* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1966), 11.

156. Maimonides, *Dalalat III*, chap. XXIX, 219.

157. Gibson, “Light from Mari on the Patriarchs,” 58.

158. Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 151–52; Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 14.

ful Joseph Smith (and even the youthful Jesus)¹⁵⁹—seems to have been in trouble with his society, and though today the legends reach us only through the pro-Abraham channels, it is obvious that he caused a great stir and annoyance in his society. When we read of an obscure and innocuous young man exciting general uproar throughout the length of Mesopotamia or causing a mighty monarch to spend sleepless nights, we smile and brush the thing aside as the stuff of legend; the overwhelming verdict of scholarship for the nineteenth century, in fact, has detected in the name of Abraham only a code word to designate a large tribal movement. Such things, we say, just don't happen in real life. Only oddly enough, there is an exception—in the case of real prophets they do happen, as modern history attests. What would students say 3,500 years from now to the proposition that thousands of years before there lived a naive, uneducated, and guileless country boy in a small village somewhere in the woods beyond what were known as the Allegheny Mountains, who by a few tactless and unbelievably artless remarks created the greatest excitement in the large seaboard cities of the continent, was hotly denounced in thousands of pulpits throughout the civilized world, and was given front-page coverage in the major newspapers of the capitals of Europe? Could a less plausible story be imagined? Abraham probably had a much smaller and more compact population to impress, and in the great cult-places he had a perfect means for spreading his teaching throughout the world.

Nachmanides and Tha'labi report respectable traditions that Abraham was born in southern Mesopotamia, but that his family moved north immediately after his birth.¹⁶⁰ Another tradition, reported by Tha'labi, reverses the order:

159. See Hugh Nibley, "Early Accounts of Jesus' Childhood," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 1–9.

160. Tha'labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, 51 (Brinner, "Lives of the Prophets," 124); Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 98.

“some say he was born in Harran, but that his father took him to Babel.” Still other traditions have it that for fear of Nimrod the family took the newborn Abraham south and settled at Warka.¹⁶¹ The very old book of Judith supports the story of a flight to the south after a birth in the north.¹⁶² A common legend is that Nimrod’s army, after failing to catch young Abraham at home, returned to Babylon by a march of forty days, a march which Ka’b al-Ahbar describes in terms of a genuine migration of Nimrod’s people, “with their goods and their families and their children . . . to the land of Iraq”—that is, from the north.¹⁶³ In all accounts the journey between Abraham’s childhood home and Babylon is a long one. Just as there are episodes and aspects of early Latter-day Saint history which may never be cleared up because of the individual and collective mobility of the people, so, Böhl reminds us, “we must not underestimate the great mobility and historical memory of the patriarchs.”¹⁶⁴

At the same time Böhl observes that “the key figure” to the patriarchal history is Nimrod¹⁶⁵—and in the history of Nimrod two things are outstanding, Martin Gemoll discovers: (1) “he always turns up as a contemporary of Abraham,” and (2) his activities take place in the north countries.¹⁶⁶ This is a reminder that “the valley *northward*” from the Plain of Shinar (Sinear) in very early times was called “Nimrod . . . after the mighty hunter,” in all probability an ancestor of our friend (see Ether 2:1). Most commentators in the past identified Ur of the Chaldees with Babel simply because Nimrod, who plays such an important role in the early life

161. Tha‘labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’*, 51 (Brinner, “*Lives of the Prophets*,” 124).

162. Judith 5:6–8.

163. Chapira, “Qissat Ibrahim Abinu,” 39; Chapira, “Légendes bibliques,” 97, 103–4.

164. Böhl, “Babel und Bibel (II),” 131.

165. Ibid.

166. Martin Gemoll, *Israeliten und Hyksos: Der historische Kern der Sage vom Aufenthalte Israels in Ägypten nebst einem Anhang Indogermanische Mythologie im alten Orient* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1913), 31.

of Abraham, ruled at Babel;¹⁶⁷ but he ruled there only after having conquered the land and added it to his empire, his home base being to the north.¹⁶⁸ Micah 5:5–6 places “the land of Nimrod” in Assyria, and the Sibylline writings say that he built his famous tower in Assyria.¹⁶⁹ His original kingdom was Shinar, and there are a number of very old traditions that after the generation of Noah the people deserted the inspired leadership of Shem, “migrated east to the land of Sinear, a great plain, and there threw off the government of heaven and made Nimrod their king.”¹⁷⁰ Tradition has it that Shinar is the plain of northern Mesopotamia, ruled over by Nimrod.¹⁷¹ Though Alexander Altmann maintains that the name Shinar designates Babylonia in general whenever it appears in the Bible, he goes on to point out that “the classical Singara,” Ğebel Singar, was in northeastern Mesopotamia, being in the time of Abraham “an integral part of the kingdom of Mitanni.”¹⁷² Nachmanides says that when Terah left the “Hamitic” land of Shinar, he went south to Mesopotamia, and again after the birth of Abraham he returned to “the land of the Chaldees in the north.”¹⁷³ Böhl says that in Abraham’s day Shinar denoted not the Babylonian plain but a city-state on the middle Euphrates.¹⁷⁴

167. The Talmud, Midrash, and Arabic sources follow this line of reasoning, according to Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 97–98.

168. “Nimrod became king over the children of Ham” and founded his “empire in Babel, Erech, Akkad and the Land of Sinear.” Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:25; Bar Hebraeus, I, 8, in *The Chronography of Gregory Abû’l Faraj, the Son of Aaron, the Hebrew Physician, Commonly Known as Bar Hebraeus*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), 8.

169. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.116.

170. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 7; cf. *Pseudo-Philo* 7:1–8:1.

171. See Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 98.

172. Alexander Altmann, *Biblical Motifs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 76.

173. Cited in Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 98.

174. Böhl, “Babel und Bibel (II),” 131–32.

One may hold with T. Eric Peet that there may originally have been separate Ur and Haran traditions about Abraham that have nothing to do with each other,¹⁷⁵ but none may deny the importance of Haran and the north country in the early family background of the patriarch. Haran and Nahor are twin cities in the north, and Haran was the name of Abraham's brother while Nahor was his grandfather; Terah, Serug, and Peleg are all names of towns near Haran (Genesis 10:25; 11:20–23, 16–19). However dubious the status of the southern Ur, "there can be little doubt," Gibson reminds us, "concerning the authenticity of the tradition connecting the Patriarchs with the Harran district."¹⁷⁶ Kordu-Qardi, where Abraham was imprisoned, has been identified with Hatra and with a place called Ur near Nisibis; Moses Landau said it was Kardi in Bithynia, and others identify it with the Kurdish country.¹⁷⁷ Though from the Cassite period on, all of Babylonia was known as *Ḳardu*, *Kardunaish* (which is also the rendering of Chaldea in the Amarna Tablets),¹⁷⁸ "the appearance of the Kaldu in southern Babylonia is considerably later than the vaguely accepted but unprovable dating of Abraham," according to C. J. Gadd, who points out that "if Abraham lived about the time of the First Dynasty of Babylon, the Babylonian Ur was not then 'of the Chaldees,'" while on the other hand "if his time was later, the Babylonian Ur was . . . of little importance, and the northern orientation of the Abraham stories would then correspond better with the historical situation."¹⁷⁹ Any way we look at it, Abraham's "Ur of the Chaldees" was not the great city of the south identified

175. T. Eric Peet, *Egypt and the Old Testament* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1922), 57.

176. Gibson, "Light from Mari on the Patriarchs," 54.

177. Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolemus' Two Greek Fragments," 99–100.

178. Fritz Hommel, *Ethnologie und Geographie des alten Orients* (Munich: Beck, 1926), 241, 1013.

179. C. J. Gadd, "Ur," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study: Jubilee Volume of the Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 94.

in the 1920s by Sir Leonard Woolley. As Gordon points out, “there are two Chaldean localities quite distant from each other,”¹⁸⁰ and while the northern Chaldea seems to go back to prehistoric times, the “Chaldees” held sway in the south of Sumer only in later times—long after Abraham.¹⁸¹ The Chaldeans are designated as *Kesed* in the Hebrew Old Testament, and that name also points to the north, where the descendants of Kesed “established themselves opposite to Shinear, where they founded the city of Kesed, the city whence the Chaldees are called Kasdim.”¹⁸² Gesenius identified Ur of the Chaldees with the northern Assyrian province of Arpakshad—Arpa-Kesed or “Chaldean Country.”¹⁸³

The Genesis account, according to Emil G. Kraeling, has the line of Shem begin in upper Mesopotamia and pass through Eber “and his son Peleg to Terah and his son Haran.”¹⁸⁴ The *Cave of Treasures* recounts that in Terah’s time the black arts appeared “in the city of Ur, which had been built by Horon, the son of Eber.”¹⁸⁵ A Sabaean source reports that it was Noah who built the city of Haran upon leaving the ark and that “near Harran is the Sabaean temple on the hill which was raised by Abraham”—another early high place connected with Abraham.¹⁸⁶ Though the name of Jacob is at home in northern (not southern) Mesopotamia, that of

180. Cyrus H. Gordon, “Abraham and the Merchants of Ura,” *JNES* 17 (1958): 30.

181. C. Virolleaud, “L’Asie occidentale avant Alexandre le Grand,” *L’Ethnographie* 48 (1953): 3–5, insists that the idea that Chaldea was always a designation of Sumer and that its inhabitants were always called Chaldeans rests on a circular argument.

182. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:299.

183. Cited in Gemoll, *Israeliten und Hyksos*, 35.

184. Kraeling, “Earliest Hebrew Flood Story,” 290.

185. *Cave of Treasures*, fol. 23b, col. 1; cf. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, 139.

186. Daniil A. Chwolsohn (Khvol’son), *Die Ssabier und der Ssabismus*, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg: Buchdruckerei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1856), 2:554.

Abram "is commoner in the Phoenician than in the Aramean group,"¹⁸⁷ and in one of the oldest Abraham stories the two counselors of Nimrod are Jectan of the line of Japheth (a humane person and the friend of Abraham) and Phenech, a Phoenician,¹⁸⁸ putting the story in the Syro-Phoenician area. Terah's second wife and the mother of Sarah was Nahariath, "the Naharaim woman"¹⁸⁹—wherever we look the family names take us to that part of western Asia from which the blood of the pharaohs was replenished from time to time.

There have always been arguments for placing Abraham's Ur both in the south and in the north; "traditions of respectable antiquity exist in favour of both places," as Gadd puts it, both in the Ur of southern Sumer and "in the north-west, the neighbourhood of Harran."¹⁹⁰ E. G. Kraeling, H. W. F. Saggs, E. A. Speiser, R. de Vaux, and W. F. Leemans are among the defenders of a southern Ur,¹⁹¹ while H. Gunkel, W. F. Albright, M. Parrot, C. Gordon, and Z. Mayani are for the north, as were formerly B. Beer, M. Gemoll, and F. Oppert.¹⁹² As to the meaning of the word Ur, "modern opinion is equally divided," according to Ben Zion Wacholder, between the Sumerian (southern) *uru*, "city," and the Babylonian *uru-uniki*, "the seat of light" (cf. Olishem and Potiphar's Hill).¹⁹³ One may realize how foolish it is to dogmatize at this point when one considers that while Thebes

187. Gibson, "Light from Mari on the Patriarchs," 51.

188. *Pseudo-Philo* 6:14.

189. *Cave of Treasures*, fol. 25b, col. 1; cf. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, 149.

190. Gadd, "Ur," 93–94.

191. De Vaux, "Les patriarches Hébreux et l'histoire," 19; cf. Emil G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine* (New York: Arno, 1969), 6; and W. F. Leemans, "Marduk-apal-iddina II, zijn en zijn geslacht," *JEOL* 3/10 (1945–48): 436–37.

192. Gemoll, *Israeliten und Hyksos*, 32–35; Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 99; Mayani, *Les Hyksos et le monde de la Bible*, 218–23.

193. Wacholder, "Pseudo-Eupolemus' Two Greek Fragments," 101.

was the capital of Egypt for 200 years, the great city of Tanis, which may have been Abraham's Egyptian residence and which was the capital for 350 years, has to this day never been located.¹⁹⁴

What leaves the door wide open to discussion is the existence in western Asia of a number of different Urs. Ur in the south was a great trade center once, and since Abraham was a merchant, one should expect to find him there. But on the other hand that same Ur had founded merchant colonies far to the north and west at an early date, and some of those settlements, as was the custom, bore the name of the mother city.¹⁹⁵ Hence, Gordon maintains that "the Ur of the Chaldees where Abraham was born seems to have been one of the northern Urs," a commercial settlement in the general area of Haran, founded by the mother city about 2000 B.C.¹⁹⁶ That would explain Abraham's association with a city of Ur as well as the inescapable northern affinities of the Abraham traditions. What suggested a northern Ur in the first place was the impossible detour of a route from Ur in Sumer to Canaan via Haran.¹⁹⁷ The best-informed scholars of Joseph Smith's time thought of Ur as lying about 150 miles due east of Haran.¹⁹⁸ The legends also have the young Abraham living on the northern route: the best customers of his father's idols, we are told, were caravaneers on their way from Fandana in Syria to Egypt to barter Syrian goods for papyrus.¹⁹⁹ According to the *Pseudo-Philo*, Abraham migrated directly

194. See J. von Beckenrath, *Tanis und Theben* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1951), 31.

195. A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Seafaring Merchants of Ur," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 74 (1954): 6–13; Gordon, *Before the Bible*, 27, 288–89.

196. Gordon, *Before the Bible*, 27, 56; Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," 28–31.

197. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 99; Gordon, "Abraham and the Merchants of Ura," 30.

198. Hales, *New Analysis of Chronology and Geography*, 2:108.

199. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 2:3.

west from the scene of Nimrod's tower into Canaan,²⁰⁰ and the book of *Jubilees* reports that when Abraham had to get out of the country in a hurry after destroying the idols, he fled directly to Lebanon.²⁰¹ All of which puts Abraham's home squarely on the northern route. Even in the Bible, Gordon insists, "all the connections of the Patriarchal narratives are northern, with no trace of direct contact with Sumer and Akkad," and the accumulation of new documents tends ever more to favor the northern Ur.²⁰²

Nimrod-Pharaoh

In getting Abraham onto Egyptian territory, we have also to consider the question: What can Nimrod the Asiatic terror possibly have to do with Pharaoh? A good deal, to judge by the legends, in which the two are constantly confused and interchanged. In the *Clementine Recognitions* the dispensations of the gospel, following an ancient Jewish formula, are given as ten, each being established by a prophet and revelator who finds himself opposed by a satanic rival and pretender;²⁰³ when we get to Abraham (the third dispensation), we expect his opponent, in view of the rabbinic traditions, to be Nimrod, but it is not: it is Pharaoh. Why is that? In the legends, Bernard Chapira notes, "Nimrod has become the equivalent of Pharaoh," yet he is already Pharaoh in the oldest of the legends, the one edited by Chapira himself.²⁰⁴ Wacholder has noted that while Nimrod is indeed the archenemy in the rabbinical accounts, in the *older* Hassidic versions he is Pharaoh, a clear indication that the original stories go back to a time "when Egypt was a major power," when "the encounter between Pharaoh and the traveler from Ur of the Chaldees seemed as a crucial event in the history of mankind." Only

200. *Pseudo-Philo* 7:2–8:1.

201. *Jubilees* 12:12–15.

202. Gordon, *Before the Bible*, 287.

203. *Clementine Recognitions* III, 61, in *PG* 1:1157.

204. Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 101.

later, in the “rabbinic sources, Abram’s journey in Egypt is relatively ignored.”²⁰⁵ Werner Foerster has observed that “the highlights of . . . divine action” in the history of Israel are “firstly, the basic event of Abraham’s call, God’s covenant, . . . secondly, the deliverance from the ‘furnace of Egypt.’”²⁰⁶ The furnace of Egypt here is the equivalent of the “furnace of the Chaldees,” the most venerable epithet of Abraham being “he who was delivered from the furnace of the Chaldees.”²⁰⁷ Of the moment of delivery a very old account says, “From that day until today it is called Kalādēwon, [signifying] what God said to the children of Israel: ‘It is I who brought you forth from Egypt!’”²⁰⁸ The confusion of Egypt and Chaldea in the Abraham story is typical.

The legends make Hagar an Egyptian woman of the royal court and even a daughter of Pharaoh,²⁰⁹ so that when the old Jerusalem *Targum on Jeremiah* says that Hagar belonged to those very people who threw Abraham into the furnace, we are obliged to view his attempted sacrifice as an Egyptian show.²¹⁰ Even more specific is the *Pseudo-Jonathan*, which reports that Hagar was “the daughter of Pharaoh, the son of Nimrod,” which makes Nimrod, if not a Pharaoh, the father of one.²¹¹ It is interesting that there is no sign of Pharaoh on the scene in Facsimile 1, while in Facsimile 3 the royal family fills the stage: it is quite possible that after overcoming the antipathy of the father in Asia, Abraham should sometime later have been royally received by the son in Egypt—but this is the merest speculation. In one of

205. Ben Zion Wacholder, “How Long Did Abram Stay in Egypt?” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 35 (1964): 43.

206. Werner Foerster, *From the Exile to Christ: A Historical Introduction to Palestinian Judaism*, trans. Gordon E. Harris (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 141.

207. For example, in the Song of Deborah and Barach, in *Pseudo-Philo* 32:1.

208. Leslau, *Falasha Anthology*, 28, 151 n. 195.

209. Chapira, “Légendes bibliques,” 94; Israel Lévi, “Le lait de la mère et le coffre flottant,” *REJ* 59 (1910): 5; bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:188.

210. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 148 n. 341.

211. *Ibid.*

the better known stories, when Sarah lost her temper with Hagar (and it is significant that we have here the same sort of rivalry between Sarah, the true “princess,” and Hagar, the Egyptian woman, as we do between Abraham and Nimrod), she complained to Abraham, accusing her rival of being “the daughter of Pharaoh, of Nimrod’s line, he who once cast thee into the furnace!”²¹² Having Pharaoh as a son or descendant of Nimrod neatly bridges the gap between Asia and Egypt: one of the most famous foreign potentates to put a son on the throne of Egypt did in fact bear the name of Nimrod—we shall have more to say of him later.

The sort of thing that used to happen may be surmised from an account in the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, according to which “at the time Abraham went into Canaan there was a man in Sinear called Rakion [also Rikyan, Rakayan, suggesting the famous Hyksos ruler Khian]. . . . He went to King Asverus [cf. Osiris] in Egypt, the son of Enam. . . . At that time the king of Egypt showed himself only once a year.” In Egypt this Rakion by trickery raised a private army and so was able to impose a tax on all bodies brought for burial to the cemetery. This made him so rich that he went with a company of a thousand richly dressed youths and maidens to pay his respects to Asverus, who was so impressed that he changed the man’s name to Pharaoh, after which Rakion judged the people of Egypt every day while Asverus only judged one day in the year.²¹³ This would not be the first or the last time that a usurping Asiatic forced a place for himself on the throne, but the ritual aspects of the tale—the annual appearance of Osiris, the rule over the necropolis, the thousand youths and maidens (as in the story of Solomon and Queen Bilqis)—are also conspicuous. We are also told that that wily Asiatic who came to the throne by violence and trickery was the very pharaoh who would take Sarah

212. *Ibid.*, 35.

213. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:148–53.

to wife.²¹⁴ Since the pharaonic lines all went back to Asiatic or Libyan families, the question of legitimacy could be handled, and no one disputes that Nimrod was of the blood of Ham through Canaan, or that the pharaohs were also of the blood of Ham—on those points all sources agree.

The close resemblance between Nimrod's treatment of Abraham and Pharaoh's treatment of Moses has often been noted.²¹⁵ And just as the careers of Abraham and Moses can be closely and significantly matched (which is not surprising, since the founders and makers of dispensations of the gospel necessarily have almost identical missions), so in the Qur'an, Nimrod and Pharaoh represent a single archetype—that of the supremely successful administrator who thinks he should rule everything.²¹⁶ Likewise in the Qur'an it is not Nimrod who builds the tower to get to heaven, but Pharaoh—a significant substitution.²¹⁷ Even in the Jewish accounts, Pharaoh and Nimrod are like identical twins. Both call themselves "the Great Magician,"²¹⁸ try to pass themselves off as God, order all the male children to be put to death, study the heavens, pit the knowledge and skill of their wise men against the powers of the prophet.²¹⁹ The palace in which Nimrod shuts up the expectant mothers has conspicuous parallels in Egyptian literature and is designated in the Jewish traditions as the Palace of Ahasuerus—the Osiris or King of Egypt in the Rakion story above.²²⁰ When the young Moses refuses to worship Pharaoh as the young Abraham does Nimrod, the idolatrous priests accuse both heroes of magic and trickery, the converts of both are put to

214. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 128 n. 223.

215. Especially by Lévi, "Le lait de la mère et le coffre flottant," 9–11.

216. Bernard Heller, "La légende biblique dans l'Islam," *REJ* 98 (1934): 17.

217. Qur'an 40:36.

218. Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 94; Yalkut Shim'oni 182 on Exodus 7:11.

219. Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 94; Isodore Loeb, review of *Le mystère du Viel Testament*, *REJ* 4 (1882): 304.

220. Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 94 n. 3.

death by the king, the subjects of both rulers offer up their children to idols, and Pharaoh like Nimrod finally declares war on God and builds a great tower, which falls.²²¹

One can appreciate the wisdom of the rabbinic distinction between Pharaoh and Nimrod, without which the wires would be hopelessly crossed between a Moses and an Abraham who go through identical routines with the same antagonist—Pharaoh. Yet in the original versions it was Pharaoh in both cases. The Nimrod who calls his magicians and wise men to counter the claims of Abraham, who loses the contest and ends up bestowing high honors on his guest, turns up as Pharaoh in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, the oldest known version of the story.²²² But we have to do here with a characteristic and repeated episode—this repetition of motifs does not begin with Jewish speculations. The battle of the magicians, in which Pharaoh's authority is defended against the pretensions of a dark adversary, is a favorite theme of Egyptian literature and goes back to the prehistoric ritual rivalry of Horus and Seth. It also happens that the pharaohs really *were* concerned with the validity of their claim to divine authority, so that the actual history of Egypt can be partially interpreted in terms of Pharaoh's dealings with those who presume to challenge his right and power—the documents of Ramses II are eloquent on this subject, but no more so than those of the kings of Babylon and Assyria, so that we need not assume that the stories of Abraham are simply borrowings from late Egyptian romances. Kings have always been hypersensitive to the operations of rivals, pretenders, relatives, and popular religious leaders.

More in the nature of myths are the extravagant infancy stories of Abraham and Moses, parallels of which may be found in India and Java, though the Egyptian versions are

221. Weil, *Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans*, 143–45.

222. *Genesis Apocryphon* 20; see Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 454–55.

the oldest known.²²³ There are close resemblances between the infancy tales of Moses and the infant Horus (fig. 57),²²⁴ but even closer between the latter and the infancy tales of Abraham: Horus's mother, like Abraham's, hides the newborn child and goes about "as a vagabond and beggar for fear of the Evil One, seeking support for the child."²²⁵ Both babies are sustained in the cave by being given a finger to suck, and it is common knowledge that the baby Abraham was miraculously supplied with milk and honey either from his own fingers (and the infant Horus is commonly represented sucking his finger), those of an angel, or from the dripping stalactites of the cave.²²⁶ Now, though Abraham's mother goes by many names, the commonest one is Emtelai, which scholars early recognized as a form of Amalthea, Amalthea being the goddess who took the form of a goat and suckled the infant Zeus with milk and honey in the Dictaeon Cave.²²⁷ Though the mothers of Horus and Abraham both fear that their child has expired of hunger in the cave, they find the babes filling the place with a miraculous radiance shining from the infant faces.²²⁸ Bernard Heller noted that while the stories of the infant Jesus are also very close to those of Moses and Abraham, they come closest of all to the cycle of the infant Joseph.²²⁹ In every case the tales point to Egypt—even Jesus immediately after his birth is taken to Egypt, which is the scene of the Infancy Gospels.²³⁰

223. M. Cosquin, who discovered the legends in the Far East, believes them to have originated there. Lévi, "Le lait de la mere et le coffer flottant," 11.

224. Vladimir Vikentiev, "Horus et Moïse, Heryieb et Horeb," *ASAE* 48 (1948): 21–41.

225. Sander-Hansen, *Texte der Metternichstele*, 11 and 70 (Spruch XIV).

226. For the finger stories, see Chapira, "Légendes bibliques," 95.

227. Ernst Fürstenthal, *Abraham* (Berlin: Jüdische Buch-Vereinigung, 1936), 26–125, contains the fullest collection of Emtelai stories, in romantic form.

228. Sander-Hansen, *Texte der Metternichstele*, 70–71 (Spruch XIV).

229. Heller, "La légende biblique dans l'islam," 16.

230. Nibley, "Early Accounts of Jesus' Childhood," in *CWHN* 4:1–9.

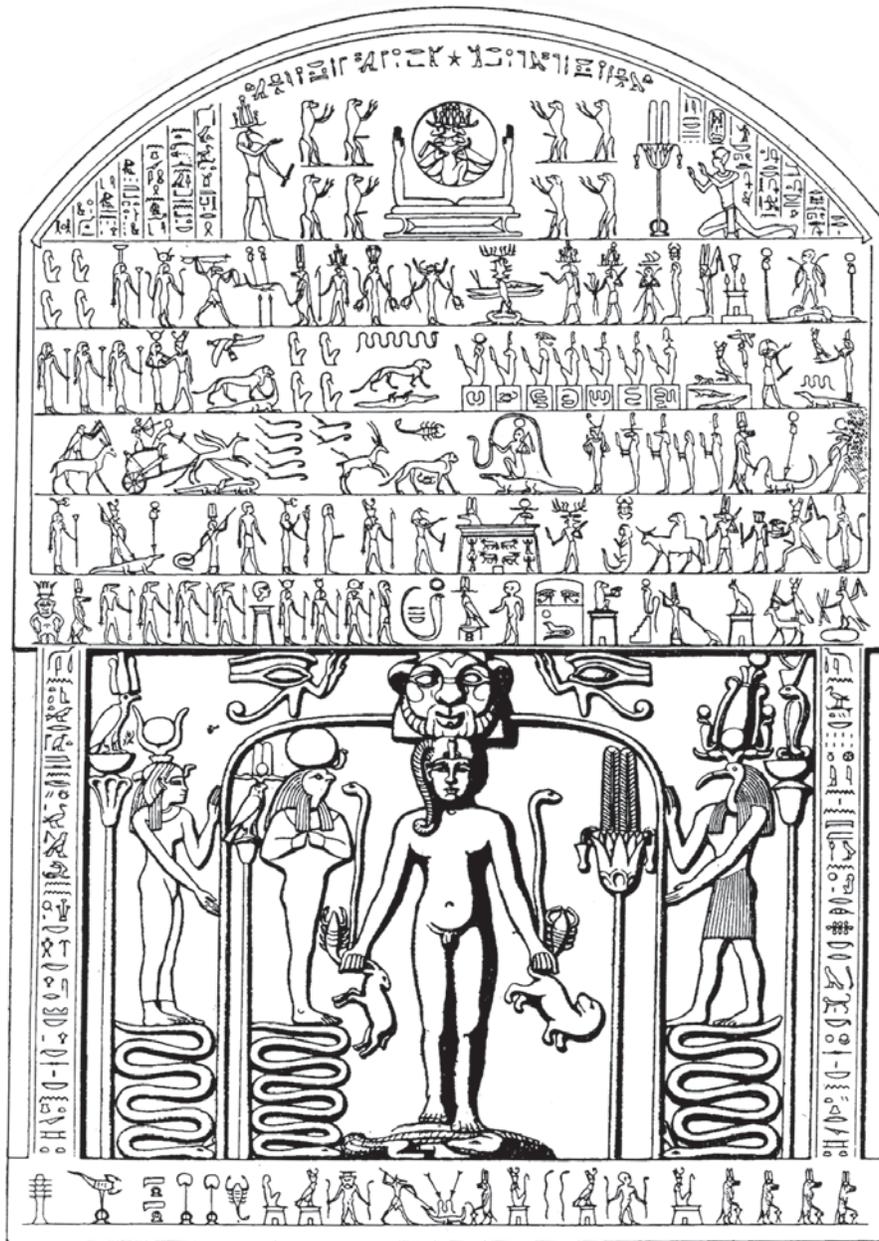


Figure 57. This skillfully carved dark stone monument features the young Horus standing on two crocodiles and holding venomous beasts. At the very top we see Pharaoh Nectanebos II and eight baboons worshipping the sun-god with four ram's heads, a hypcephalus motif (see p. 131, fig. 12B). The text of the stele contains dramatic episodes from the childhood of Horus that closely match legendary accounts of the infancy of Abraham. Ca. 350 B.C. Golénischeff, *Metternichstele* (Leipzig, 1877), Tafel 1.

Where we get these characteristic and repeated stories, the ritual element is not far from the surface. Thus, when Abraham is washed, anointed, clothed in a garment, and fed with bread and wine and/or milk and honey in the cave, we cannot escape reference to the basic ordinances of the temple and Church.²³¹ Or when Abraham, after escaping death on the altar, an event which he is said to have considered as the equivalent of his own resurrection,²³² goes to his eleven companions who are hiding out in the hills and there instructs them for forty days in the mysteries,²³³ who can fail to recall the “forty-day” accounts of the resurrected Lord? And what are we to make of it when we find the most complete version of the story of the attempted sacrifice of Abraham in an early Eastern Christian tale in which the hero is not Abraham but St. Elias?²³⁴ The fact that the St. Elias story turns up in the very place where Abraham is supposed to have suffered offers another illustration of the astounding survival of very ancient history in local legends throughout the Near East. But the ritual infancy stories? There is no reason in the world why we should regard them as originating with Abraham or Moses, to whose biographies they have been conveniently annexed. Such doublets and repetitions are, as Gordon reminds us, “typical of ancient Near East literature; . . . the tastes of the Bible World called for duplication,” as when Joseph and Pharaoh have identical prophetic dreams²³⁵—to say nothing of Nephi and Lehi.

However annoying we may find it, it is important to realize that we are dealing here with neither pure history nor pure myth—indeed, in the strictest sense neither history nor

231. Chapira, “Légendes bibliques,” 95.

232. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 113 n. 136.

233. *Pseudo-Philo* 6:18.

234. George Foucart, *Bibliothèque d'Études Coptes* (Cairo: IFAO, 1919), 1:97 (Fol. IV recto to XIII).

235. Cyrus H. Gordon, “Higher Critics and Forbidden Fruit,” *Christianity Today*, 23 November 1959, 4.

myth is ever completely pure. How the two may be mixed is dramatically illustrated in the case of Nimrod's notorious boast: It was when Abraham called upon Nimrod to acknowledge God as the giver of life that the latter intoned what has ever since been his slogan and device: "It is I who give life and who take it away!" The historical part of the thing is that this actually was the slogan of the pharaohs from the earliest times. When the king first appears in the Pyramid Text as the conquering hero from the East spreading terror before him, his heralds announce to all the world: "If he wants you to live, you live! If he wants you to die, you die!"²³⁶ And at the coronation of later kings the pharaoh was introduced to his subjects as "the Merciful One who gives you back your heads!"²³⁷ Finally, in the silver sarcophagus of Sheshonq I, the founder of the Twenty-second Dynasty, is a cryptogrammatic inscription in which the king boasts that (as Horus) he slays the slayers of Osiris and also is "the Great One who grants life as the Living One."²³⁸ This particular Sheshonq was son of a great warlord named Nimrod, whom Petrie believed to be an Elamite from Asia, the leader of a band of warriors, who made himself useful to Pharaoh and finally seized the throne. He was noted for his piety, and in founding a new dynasty also restored the old rites of human sacrifice; he also was the one pharaoh most closely tied to Israel, marrying his daughter to King Solomon and later conquering Palestine and financing his empire with the plunder of the temple of Jerusalem. It is an interesting coincidence that the name of Sheshonq (or Shishaq) is the one hieroglyphic word readily identified and unanimously agreed upon by the Egyptologists who have commented on

236. PT 217 (§§153c, 155d, 157d, 159c).

237. Hartwig Altenmüller, "Zur Lesung und Deutung des Dramatischen Ramesseumpapyrus," *JEOL* 19 (1965–66): 433.

238. Étienne Drioton, "Inscription énigmatique du tombeau de Chéchanq III à Tanis," *Kémi* 12 (1952): 28, 33.

Facsimile 2, where the name appears as figure 8. How all this fits into the picture remains to be seen.

The Paradox of Abraham and the King

In one translation and commentary on the so-called *sensen* papyrus of the Joseph Smith collection,²³⁹ Professor Klaus Baer of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago pointed out that “Facsimile No. 3’ reproduces a part of the same manuscript that ‘Facsimile No. 1’ does,” and that No. 3 follows No. 1 in normal sequence.²⁴⁰ This is very important in view of the wondrously strange interpretation given to both vignettes in the Book of Abraham, the equally strange turn of events in Jewish Abraham traditions, and the peculiar way in which lion-couch scenes of the type of Facsimile 1 are regularly followed by a coronation scene in the Egyptian record. In the Pearl of Great Price version we first find Pharaoh’s agents somewhere in Canaan trying to sacrifice Abraham on an altar, and in the next scene we see the hero not only safe and sound but actually sitting on Pharaoh’s throne in Egypt, wearing *his* crown and bearing *his* royal insignia!

Here, if ever, is a paradox. And yet the *same* paradox meets us in the old stories of Abraham’s dealings with Nimrod and Pharaoh. In one scene we find both Nimrod and Pharaoh doing their level best to put Abraham to death, and in the very next scene, behold, Nimrod and Pharaoh are loading their erstwhile victim with royal gifts and honors! In the Egyptian presentations, we are shown the king or god lying helpless upon the lion couch, beaten by his cruel rival and at the very point of death, praying desperately for deliverance; and in the very next scene, the scene that always follows, the same king is sitting safely restored and triumphant on his throne.

239. See Jay M. Todd, “Background of the Church Historian’s Fragment,” *IE* 72 (February 1968): 40–I.

240. Baer, “Breathing Permit of Hôr,” 127; cf. 113, 133–34.

What has brought about this miraculous turning of the tables? In every case it is the same thing—the direct intervention of God, who sends a delivering angel in response to the prayer of the man on the altar. The reader can study the story for himself in the Book of Abraham; now let us see what happens in the Nimrod legends and their predecessor, the *Genesis Apocryphon*.

Briefly, this is the story. Abraham is bound on a specially constructed altar and raises his voice in prayer to God. As the priest brings the knife near to the victim's throat, God sends an angel who offers to rescue him from his dire predicament; but Abraham refuses the proffered help, saying that it is God and God alone who will deliver him. At that moment God speaks to Abraham, the earth trembles, fire bursts forth, the altar is overthrown, the officiating priest is killed, and a general catastrophe fills the land with mourning. All this is so close to the Book of Abraham story, in which we are even told how "the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them, and smote the priest that he died; and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the court of Pharaoh" (Abraham 1:20), that one is tempted to play a game with the reader: we have deliberately omitted all footnotes at this point—they will come later—so that the reader can amuse himself by locating sources for the story just told among writings available to Joseph Smith. We know of none.

But back to our tale of wonder, for what happens next is stranger yet. Nimrod, baffled in every attempt to dispatch his archrival, is convinced at last that Abraham possesses a power greater than his and suddenly turns from cursing the prophet to honoring him, humbly soliciting the privilege of personally offering sacrifices to the God of Abraham. More surprises: Abraham refuses the astonishing offer, saying, "God will not accept from thee after the manner of thy religion." To this Nimrod replies, "O Abraham, I cannot lay

down my kingship, but I will offer oxen,²⁴¹ and after that time [he] left Abraham, whom God had delivered from his power, in peace."²⁴² Here we have the strange paradox of a king who was, as the Book of Abraham puts it, blessed in the kingship "with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed . . . as pertaining to the Priesthood" (Abraham 1:26). This puts everybody in an embarrassing situation: the proud monarch has made an unheard-of concession to Abraham, but Abraham refuses to meet him halfway—he *cannot* give him what he wants. It was a painful and awkward impasse to which there was only one solution: Nimrod loaded Abraham with royal gifts and ordered his entire court to pay obeisance to him, after which the king dismissed Abraham.²⁴³ In the oldest version of the story, Pharaoh, after being rebuffed and offended by Abraham, whom he had "sought to slay," swears a royal oath to him, loads him with the highest honors, and orders him out of the country.²⁴⁴

We can appreciate the king's position, which is well explained in an apocryphal story of Joseph in Egypt. Pharaoh complains to Joseph that when the two of them ride out together in the royal chariot, the king cannot tell whether the people are cheering him or Joseph. This is an impossible situation, since there can be only *one* king in Egypt; and so

241. Thaʿlabi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, 55 (Brinner, "Lives of the Prophets," 133–34).

242. Schützing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 30–31.

243. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 18.

244. *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:9. Pharaoh seeks to slay Abraham to possess Sarah (v. 22); he is told that Abraham cannot pray for him unless he gives up Sarah (vv. 26–27); he angrily complains that Abraham has tricked him (as Nimrod does) and orders him to leave the country, but first beseeches him to give him a blessing (v. 28), in return for which he heaps royal honors upon Abraham (vv. 30–32). The *Genesis Apocryphon* represents portions of one of the original seven scrolls found near the Dead Sea in 1947 that have been translated and appear in Avigad and Yadin, *Genesis Apocryphon*; see also Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 454–55. The book tells part of the story of Abraham's sojourn into Egypt.

the pharaoh regretfully orders Joseph to descend from the chariot. Even so, Nimrod-Pharaoh cannot deny that Abraham's power is superior to his own, yet he *cannot* give up his kingship, nor can he take second place to any man in his own kingdom. And so he does that strange and paradoxical thing: he bestows the highest honors—kingly honors, including a purple robe and a royal escort—on his guest and then banishes him from the country. Abraham must leave, even if he leaves with the honors of victory and the trappings of a king. Such was the equivocal position and baffling behavior of a ruler who was, according to the Pearl of Great Price, both blessed and cursed.

7

The New Abraham

Abraham the Missionary

The Book of Abraham refers specifically to Abraham's work as a missionary. "I . . . was sixty and two years old when I departed out of Haran. And I took Sarai, whom I took to wife when I was in Ur, in Chaldea, and Lot, my brother's son, and all our substance that we had gathered, and the souls that *we had won* in Haran . . . and dwelt in tents as we came our way" (Abraham 2:14–15). The corresponding Bible text reads: "Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls [lit., living things] that they had gotten [lit., made] in Haran" (Genesis 12:4–5). The puzzling "living things they had made" was interpreted by the rabbis exactly as it stands in the Book of Abraham, the Midrash explaining that it means the people converted in Haran.¹

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1. Genesis Rabbah 39:14, in *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, trans. Harry Freedman, 10 vols. (London: Soncino 1939), 1:324; D. M. Eichhorn, ed., *Conversion to Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1965), 14.

It goes even further to explain that when we are told that Abraham “called upon the name of the Lord” in Shechem, it means that “he summoned people to the name”—that is, began to preach the gospel to them and convert them.² According to the *Sefer ha-Yashar*, “The people of the land of Haran saw that Abram was good and just towards God and man. . . . Men from among the inhabitants of the land of Haran came to him, and attached themselves to him, and he taught them the discipline of the Lord and His ways.”³ As he moved on his way, “each altar raised by him was a centre for his activities as a missionary,” he and Sarah diligently preaching and making proselytes wherever they pitched their tents.⁴ “Abraham converted the men,” according to the Midrash, “and Sarah the women,”⁵ and there was a tradition that “all proselytes and pious heathen are the descendants” of the infants of pagan mothers, whom Sarah nursed.⁶

The Book of Abraham clearly states that it was his preaching that got Abraham into trouble in the first place—they “hearkened not unto my voice, but endeavored to take away my life” (Abraham 1:7). The oldest traditions agree with this: “Abraham having overcome them by argument, the king wanted to put him to death; but thanks to a miracle, he removed to Haran, where he began to declare unto the multitude with a loud voice.”⁷ Abraham, says a famous

2. Genesis Rabbah 39:16, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 325.

3. Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*, 2nd rev ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 74.

4. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols., trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946–47, 1909–38), 1:219.

5. Genesis Rabbah 39:14, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 324.

6. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:263. “Abraham our father used to bend men to and lead them under the wings of the Shekinah. And not Abraham alone did this, but Sarah as well.” Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1956), 68.

7. Ka’b el-Ahbar, cited in Bernard Chapira, “Légendes bibliques attribuées à Ka’b el-Ahbar,” *REJ* 69 (1919): 104; see n. 2.

passage in the Midrash, was at home like a vessel of precious perfume lying tightly closed in a corner: God wanted the precious fragrance as widely disseminated as possible, and so he said to Abraham: "Travel from place to place, and thy name will become great in the world."⁸ Thus from the outset Abraham was "the archetypal evangelist . . . whose reputation became diffused by his migration from his original home even as a vessel of ointment diffuses its perfume when it is moved."⁹ Himself the archproselyte, he became "the father of . . . all the Proselytes."¹⁰ He made no distinction between men, since all alike were without the faith, and to convert a soul was to give it a new life and a new being: "one who brings a foreigner near and makes a proselyte of him is as if he created him."¹¹ Hence it is Abraham the missionary who "made brothers of all the world; who abolished the differences between the nations and races. . . . In his hand God placed the power to bless all the world: this blessing descended to the patriarchs and the priesthood."¹²

The missionary concept is not a modern one. It is interesting that in Abraham's time Canaan and Egypt were the scenes of extensive missionary activities propagandizing for various deities,¹³ and it may have been for that, among other

8. Genesis Rabbah 39:2, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 313.

9. Raphael Loewe, "Apologetic Motifs in the Targum to the Song of Songs," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 179 n. 91.

10. Nahum N. Glatzer, ed., *Faith and Knowledge: The Jew in the Medieval World* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 119–20.

11. George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1:344.

12. Ferdinand W. Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie aus Targum, Midrasch und Talmud* (Leipzig: Dörffling and Franke, 1880), 257.

13. Pierre Montet, *Le drame d'Avaris* (Paris: Geuthner, 1941), 33: "At Beirut, Qatna, and Ugarit sphinxes and statuettes have been found, left there by missionaries."

reasons, that Abraham's mission at the time won very few converts.¹⁴

Abraham and the Dead

One of the most remarkable manifestations of Abraham's universal concern for man is seen in his championing of those sinners who have died without redemption. As everyone knows, the poor man in the story of Lazarus and Dives was seen resting in *Abraham's* bosom. This is because the Jews believed that he was in special charge of the spirits between the time of death and the judgment and resurrection. "Lazarus was taken to the paradise where Abraham had gone," writes a modern Catholic scholar, "where he rejoiced while awaiting the Great Day; the poor celebrate with him there in a place of honor." So the penitent thief will go to the same paradise, which is *not* heaven, but a place where certain spirits await the resurrection and the judgment.¹⁵ Whether the Christian world wants to believe this or not, it was, according to this scholar, certainly the "current mythical concept" held alike by Jesus and the people he taught.¹⁶ The idea that it is Abraham who does all in his power to rescue every unredeemed spirit in his great concern for the welfare of the whole human race is actually very old and, according to K. Kohler, "has not a tinge of either Christian or of late Rabbinical colour about him."¹⁷ Abraham, according to the tradition, fearful for the souls of the wicked who died in his generation, proposed to Michael, who has charge of all the dead, that the two of them unite their faith in prayer and supplication to the Lord in behalf of those spirits.¹⁸ For

14. F. M. Theodor Böhl, *Das Zeitalter Abrahams* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1930), 41–42.

15. Pierre Grelot, "Aujourd'hui tu sera avec moi dans le paradis," *Revue biblique* 74 (1967): 203; cf. Luke 23:46.

16. Grelot, "Aujourd'hui tu sera avec moi dans le paradis," 203.

17. K. Kohler, "The Pre-Talmudic Haggada," *JQR* 7 (1894–95): 589.

18. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:304–5.

he had beheld their miserable state in a vision, wept at the sight, and said, "I had hoped that they would come to me; but they would not give me their love, but rather praised alien things and clung to things which did not belong to them"—that is, the things of this world.¹⁹ He asks Abel, the great judge, whether there is anything he can do to help the spirits which remain in "the middle state" awaiting the final judgment, and he is informed that the work that will save them cannot be done "until God the Judge of all, comes at the end of time and decides [their] fate."²⁰

Though proper "work for the dead" was only to come with the Messiah, Abraham was assured that it surely would come and that his prayers on behalf of the dead would in time be answered. "Abraham's activity did not cease with his death, and as he interceded in this world for sinners, so will he intercede for them in the world to come. On the day of judgment he will sit at the gate of hell, and he will not suffer those who keep the law of circumcision to enter therein."²¹ At once we think of "the gates of hell" and the promise to Peter, the other Rock (Matthew 16:18); indeed, Genesis 12:3 might be taken as another form of the promise that what is bound and loosed on earth is bound and loosed in heaven. Abraham and Michael fell on their knees together when they were shown the broad and the narrow gates of which the Lord speaks in the New Testament and prayed on behalf of the dead that they might yet enter into salvation.²² In answer to their prayer, God sent an angel to take the spirits to an intermediate place, paradise, upon which Abraham rejoiced and praised God for his boundless mercy.²³ A significant aspect of these other-worldly accounts is the way Abraham and Enoch can trade places—even as

19. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 31:7–8.

20. Kohler, "Pre-Talmudic Haggada," 587.

21. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:306.

22. Kohler, "Pre-Talmudic Haggada," 587.

23. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:304.

they do in the Pearl of Great Price. There, it is Enoch who makes the great appeal for the sinners, while he in turn is merely following the example of a higher one (Moses 7:39).

In the Jewish traditions Abraham claims the right of taking the place of both Enoch and Abel in sitting at the gate to examine those of his own dispensation who received the covenant from him.²⁴ In the shorter version of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, it is Enoch who keeps the records by the side of Abel the judge, while Abraham stands before them to plead as an advocate for each spirit.²⁵ "Abraham's bosom" has been interpreted by the rabbis as "a euphemism indicating the sign of circumcision," the sign that each of his children has received the covenant—that is, the assurance that he will give them his comfort and support in the hereafter.²⁶ In the ecstatic manner of the *Thanksgiving Hymns of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, the author of a midrash bursts into songs of praise when he contemplates "the wondrous works and thoughts Thou didst conceive, [to make Abraham choose] the yoke of the kingdoms for himself, . . . for our sake, that we might . . . possess life in the world-to-come."²⁷

In traditional Judaism, according to Kohler, "the *main power* of Abraham" is in his constant intercession for the spirits who have passed on and are awaiting the judgment in another world; and this is considered "a specimen" of the type of work Father Abraham will do "after having entered paradise. He will *always* be the *milakh melitz* (the intercessor). This is the idea underlying our apocalypse. And on it the Kaddish or mass for the dead rests." Abraham is the great

24. Kohler, "Pre-Talmudic Haggada," 594; Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:306.

25. Kohler, "Pre-Talmudic Haggada," 588.

26. Bernhard Beer, *Leben Abraham's nach Auffassung der jüdischen Sage* (Leipzig: Leiner, 1859), 204.

27. *Midrash on Psalms* 40:4, in *The Midrash on Psalms*, ed. William G. Braude, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:434.

champion of the dead.²⁸ Because of this work, each soul at the resurrection will be given a personal interview by one who will “effect a *Tiqqun* for him, pray for him, and uplift him.”²⁹ Theodor Reik has argued that the Kaddish is the survival of an old “ancestor worship and devotion to the dead,” which was actually suppressed by Moses and the prophets but has emerged whenever Israel was in particularly close contact with Egypt, for “they felt an emotional and mental affinity with the Egyptians.”³⁰ That Moses withheld many teachings from the Jews is well known,³¹ but it was not because those teachings were Egyptian, but because they were not ready to receive them.

Thus Abraham remains throughout eternity preeminently the friend of man; the kind father, husband, and host; the earnest and self-effacing advocate; the rescue worker; the zealous missionary; and finally the devoted worker for the dead. In this last capacity he is concerned as ever that the weak and helpless shall not be neglected; for as he checks the signs and tokens of those Israelites who come to him at the gate, he will take away those signs and tokens which the wicked and unworthy have received and give them to those poor souls, especially children, who died without receiving them. Plainly we have to do here with a tradition dealing with what the Latter-day Saints call “work for the dead.” This leads us to consideration of the broader subject of Abraham and the ordinances, in which the history of Abraham on the altar, which figures so prominently in the Book of Abraham, takes on a new and startling significance.

28. Kohler, “Pre-Talmudic Haggada,” 603 (emphasis added).

29. J. G. Weiss, “The Kavvauoth of Prayer in Early Hasidism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (1958): 170–71.

30. Theodor Reik, *Pagan Rites in Judaism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1964), 37.

31. Abraham Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud* (New York: Dutton, 1949), 364–65.

Abraham and the Ordinances

Today, with the study of newly found documents that give a wholly new perspective on the early Jewish and Christian religions, the importance of Abraham has suddenly become enormously enhanced. Whereas the conventional Jewish view has been that "of only one mortal being, Moses, does the Holy Scripture state that God spoke to him face to face . . . with all the other prophets . . . the Deity speaks in dreams, in visions, in riddles,"³² today we are told that the covenant made with Moses on Sinai was but "the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham," which is the true "foundation of the . . . life of Israel" ever since.³³ Whereas it has hitherto been taken for granted that everyone knows that "it was Moses who first knew the Eternal One,"³⁴ we now learn that "Abraham and not Moses was the founder of Israel's monotheism. . . . God is always described as the God of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob," not of Moses.³⁵ The covenant of the B'nai B'rith is today considered to be "the covenant that God made with Abraham, the first Jew, and afterward renewed with Moses . . . the central and deathless theme and constitution of Judaism."³⁶

Abraham seems to be regaining the matchless esteem in which he was once held by the Jewish doctors, who called him "Arba, the greatest of the faithful,"³⁷ *ṣaddiq tamim*, "the perfect one,"³⁸ the first proselyte, first of his generation to

32. Harry Torczyner, "The Riddle in the Bible," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1 (1924): 140.

33. Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis XV and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (London: SCM, 1967), 75, 77.

34. David de Gunzburg, "Le nom d'Abraham," *REJ* 47 (1903): 7.

35. M. H. Segal, "The Religion of Israel before Sinai," *JQR* 52 (1961): 41.

36. Edward E. Grusd, *B'nai B'rith: The Story of a Covenant* (New York: Appleton, 1966), 19.

37. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 187 n. 793.

38. Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1922–56), 1:386; Genesis 17:1; Matthew 5:48; 19:21. He was the perfect one after Noah.

follow God, who brought man near to God, the eye of the world,³⁹ “the saintly man [who] . . . justifies the creation of man. Because of him, man is vindicated.”⁴⁰ He is the first and greatest of those “whose coinage was current in the world,”⁴¹ who colonized the world for God, so that whereas “before Abraham the Lord was the king of heaven only, with Abraham he became the king of heaven and earth.”⁴² Abraham “entered into the covenant on which the world is based,” says the Zohar, “and thus the world was firmly established for his sake.”⁴³ There was a Hasidic teaching that “man is possessed of a ghost, a spirit, and a soul in this order of importance” and that “Abraham is the ghost of Israel; Moses, his spirit, and the Messiah, his soul.”⁴⁴ When at the council in heaven serious doubts were expressed as to the wisdom of creating the world, because of all the wickedness that would fill it, the view of Abraham and his few righteous descendants determined the deciding vote: “Forthwith the world was established for his sake.”⁴⁵ Through his progeny and his missionary work, “Abraham . . . united the whole world for us . . . like a person who sews a rent together.”⁴⁶ Abraham, Adam, Noah—that is, the fathers of the great dispensations and their faithful descendants, are the real “kernel”

39. Abraham Cohen, *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud*, 2 vols. (London: Soncino, 1965), 1:76, 156; 2:446–47, 612, for these various epithets.

40. David S. Shapiro, “The Book of Job and the Trial of Abraham,” *Tradition* 4 (1962): 214.

41. Genesis Rabbah 39:11, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 320.

42. Micha Josef bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden*, 5 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten and Loening, 1914), 2:139.

43. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 91b; in *The Zohar*, trans. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, 5 vols. (New York: Bennet, 1958), 1:299.

44. Louis I. Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology: Tales and Teachings of the Hasidim* (New York: Scribner’s, 1934), 452.

45. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 86b, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:288.

46. Genesis Rabbah 39:3, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 314.

of the human race; all the others are merely the "shell" of mankind.⁴⁷

"The figure of Abraham today is enjoying great favor," writes E. Jacob. "History and faith, returning to their sources, regard him as their father. Scholars are searching for the real Abraham as never before."⁴⁸ The great appeal of Abraham, he points out, is the way in which he unites all men in a religion of love.⁴⁹ The motto of the Institutum Judaicum for the combining of Jewish, Christian, and Moslem studies and interests at Tübingen is "Abraham Our Father."⁵⁰ If Abraham is now being hailed as "the most pivotal and strategic man in the course of world history,"⁵¹ the vindication for such an apparently extravagant claim is found in the Book of Abraham: "for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after *thy* name, and shall be accounted *thy* seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father; . . . and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood) . . . and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel . . . even of life eternal" (Abraham 2:10–11).

Most surprising is the way in which certain Roman Catholic writers are now giving Abraham priority over Peter himself as "the Rock." This goes back to an old Jewish tradition that "when God sought to create the world, . . . when he saw Abraham who was to arise, he said, Now I have a rock [*petra*] on which to build and establish the world. For this

47. Alexander Altmann, "Notes: The Motif of the 'Shells' (Qelipoth) in 'Azriel of Gerona,'" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (1958): 78.

48. E. Jacob, "Abraham et sa signification pour la foi chrétienne," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 42 (1962): 148.

49. *Ibid.*, 156.

50. G. Baumbach, review of *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel*, ed. Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, and Peter Schmidt, *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 61 (1966): 365.

51. J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible: A Survey of Archaeological Evidences* (Nashville: Broadman, 1946), 187.

reason he calls Abraham a rock."⁵² And just as Abraham the fugitive became nothing less than the rock on which the entire house of Israel was founded,⁵³ just so the outcast Peter became the foundation of the new house of Israel. Today Roman Catholics not only write about "Thou art Abraham, and upon this rock"⁵⁴ but see in Abraham a figure of the Messiah who comes "to establish the kingdom of God on earth,"⁵⁵ who is more than a mere anticipation of the kingdom, as other prophets are, but actually "recapitulates" all of Israel's history in himself, focusing all the past and future in his person, being a restorer as well as a founder. Such a figure, Sofia Cavalletti concludes, can only be a messiah.⁵⁶

Along with the mounting prestige of Abraham goes the growing feeling that there was something very special, something most strange and wonderful, in his relationship with God. The face-to-face conversation in Genesis 18 is "as magnificent as it is strange," writes André Parrot.⁵⁷ The strangest thing of all is the way in which God seems to talk to Abraham on an equal footing as one man to another.⁵⁸ This suggests to Solomon Schechter what he calls "a sort of *Imitatio hominis* on the part of God. He acts as best man at the

52. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries*, 1:538. The sources are treated in Robert Eisler, *Iésous basileus ou basileusas*, 2 vols. (Heidelberg: Winters, 1929–30), 2:286–88.

53. Eisler, *Iésous Basileus ou basileusas*, 2:287–88.

54. So J. Massingberd Ford, "Thou Art 'Abraham' and upon This Rock . . .," *Heythrop Journal* 6 (1965): 289–301; Ford, "The Jewel of Discernment," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 11 (1967): 109–16; Ford, "You Are 'Abraham' and upon This Rock," *Theology Digest* 15 (1967): 134; N. A. Van Uchelen, "Abraham als Felsen," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80 (1968): 183–91.

55. Sofia Cavalletti, "Abramo come messia e 'ricapitolatore' del suo popolo," *Studi e Materiali* 35 (1964): 254.

56. *Ibid.*, 254–56, 262–65.

57. André Parrot, *Abraham et son temps* (Neuchâtel: Suisse, Delachaux and Niestlé, 1962), 104.

58. *Midrash on Psalms* 18:22, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:250–51.

wedding of Adam. . . . He visits Abraham on his sick-bed.”⁵⁹ “To Abraham God appeared in the form of men,” says Maimonides, “but to Lot, whose faculties were feeble, they appeared in the form of angels.”⁶⁰ No one was more opposed to any form of anthropomorphism than Maimonides, and one cannot help asking, to which of the two men, Abraham or Lot, would God be more likely to appear as he *really* is? It would be hard to find a clearer, more unequivocal statement than Genesis 18:8: “and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat”; yet the doctors have always declared in a single voice that they did *not* eat, since heavenly beings are immaterial.⁶¹ “When we read of intercourse between God and Abraham,” one scholar tells us, “we must not think (in spite of the form of the words) of verbal speech, but rather of such intercourse as God has with men now.”⁶² Against this spiritual uniformitarianism, students are now realizing that the whole value of the Abraham story is that it does *not* deal with ordinary occurrences—it is completely removed from the world of everyday experiences. Learned rabbis now confess that they cannot “imagine the divine nature of the whole . . . in any other sense than of Rabbi Nobel’s powerful . . . sermon on God’s appearing before Abraham’s tent: ‘And God appeared to Abraham . . . and he lifted his eyes . . . and behold: *three men*.’”⁶³ However distasteful such literalism may be to the schoolmen, E. L. Cherbonnier points out, the Old Testament allows us no way out of it, for there man is seen to “share the same kind of existence which God him-

59. Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 37.

60. Maimonides, *Dalalat II*, chap. VI, trans. S. Munk (Osnabrück: Zeller, 1964), 73–74.

61. Even Qur’an 11:70 shows its dependence on the schools by taking this position.

62. John R. Mozley, *The Divine Aspect of History*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1916), 1:277.

63. Jacob B. Agus, *The Vision and the Way: An Interpretation of Jewish Ethics* (New York: Ungar, 1966), 315 (emphasis added).

self enjoys. To learn this is like learning that one has won the sweepstakes. It made the Israelite cry, 'Hallelujah!'"⁶⁴

Abraham's epithet, "the friend of God," suggests both intimacy and equality. When he pleads for his fellow sinners, Abraham almost seems to defy God, as when he asks him, "If you put evil into the heart of men, why are you angry with them when they do evil?"⁶⁵ These strange dialogues with God that still reverberate in Jewish tradition form an important part of the Pearl of Great Price, in which Abraham, Moses, and especially Enoch discuss with the Lord the state of man and God's dealings with him. It is interesting, since J. Massingberd Ford suggests that Matthew 16:16–19 "may have an Aramaic background" and go back to "Biblical and non-Biblical material concerning Abraham,"⁶⁶ that the Lord tells Enoch in the Pearl of Great Price: "I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the *Rock* of Heaven, which is broad as eternity; whoso cometh in at the *gate* and climbeth up by me shall never fail" (Moses 7:53). Another significant parallel is when Abraham, faced with a hard assignment, *said in his heart*: "Thou didst send thine angel to deliver me from the gods of Elkenah, and I will do well to hearken to thy voice" (Abraham 2:13). In the newly discovered *Genesis Apocryphon*, when Abraham is being confronted with the same task, "God reminds Abraham of all the favours which He has granted him since his departure from Haran, and then promises him His protection in the future."⁶⁷ And when he was in doubt about undertaking the unpleasant business of circumcision, his friend Mamre said to him, "When did He

64. E. L. Cherbonnier, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 206.

65. See A. Rubenstein, "A Problematic Passage in the Apocalypse of Abraham," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 8 (1957): 45–46; Rubenstein, "Hebraisms in the Slavonic 'Apocalypse of Abraham,'" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4 (1953): 112.

66. Ford, "You Are 'Abraham' and upon This Rock," 134.

67. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 120.

not stand by you—in the fiery furnace, in famine, and in your war with the kings? Will you not obey Him then in this matter?”⁶⁸ Here we have a single tradition that is also reported in the Book of Abraham, though Joseph Smith could have known nothing of it. Though intimate meetings occur, in the Book of Abraham as in the legends, God reveals himself to the patriarch in many different ways and at many different levels, even as he did to Father Lehi.⁶⁹

God was not offended by Abraham’s boldness in defending his children; he was pleased with it, for he came to the Lord with a sound heart.⁷⁰ He was one of those “of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness,” to whom the angels administer directly, according to Moroni 7:30. And so God treats him as an equal: “My Name was not known among My creatures, and thou hast made it known among them: I will regard thee as though thou wast associated with Me in the creation of the world.”⁷¹ The boldness of this statement is supported by others: “R[abbi] Nehemiah taught that God turned over the bestowal of blessing[s] to Abraham, saying to him: ‘Until now it was My responsibility to bless My world. From now on, the bestowal of blessings is turned over to thee. Whom it pleases thee to bless, thou shalt bless!’”⁷² Another version has it, “From the Creation of the world I planned to bless my creatures. I blessed Adam and Eve and Noah and his sons; from now on it is you who

68. Genesis Rabbah 42:8, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 351.

69. Johannes Lindblom, “Theophanies in Holy Places in Hebrew Religion,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 (1961): 93–97; Segal, “Religion of Israel before Sinai,” 48–49. A classic point of discussion has always been whether the three men in Genesis 18 were all angels or whether one of them was the Lord. A compromise makes him “the Angel Yahoel.” Gershon G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Schocken Books, 1941), 68.

70. See Qur’an 26:89.

71. Genesis Rabbah 43:7, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 357.

72. *Midrash on Psalms* 1:5, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:8.

shall impart blessings!"⁷³ One is strongly reminded of the promise to Peter, for here God is endowing a man with his own powers. The Midrash goes even further: "If Abraham had not sought to rival God, he would not have become possessor of heaven and earth."⁷⁴ It even asks us, Why should not the world have been "created solely because of the merit of Abraham?"⁷⁵ and claims that God "would not have created His heaven and His earth had it not been for Abraham."⁷⁶ Nay, Abraham appears well on the way to becoming a creator in his own right, for to bring people into the covenant is the equivalent of giving them a new life—it "is as though he created [them]";⁷⁷ and though "not all the inhabitants of the world together can create even a single gnat," yet God "accounted it to Abraham and Sarah as though they had made them."⁷⁸

Altar and Temple

Today Abraham is being described as the *restorer* rather than the initiator of the knowledge of God and his holy rites and ordinances. He both "recapitulates" all that went before and anticipates all that is to come.⁷⁹ This is in perfect agreement with the declaration at the opening of the Book of Abraham that Abraham's immediate ancestors had fallen away from "the order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign" (Abraham 1:26). According to Maimonides, "it was Abraham who found his way back from idolatry to monotheism."⁸⁰ This return to the old faith is symbolized by his rebuilding of the

73. In bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:137.

74. *Midrash on Psalms* 37:1, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:422.

75. *Midrash on Psalms* 104:15, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 2:173; Genesis 2:4.

76. *Midrash on Psalms* 104:15, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 2:173.

77. Genesis Rabbah 39:14, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 324.

78. Goldin, *Rabbi Nathan*, 68.

79. Cavalletti, "Abrahamo come messia," 257.

80. Glatzer, *Faith and Knowledge*, 37.

ancient altar of the first fathers, especially Noah. According to Samaritan tradition, in Abraham the covenant of Noah is renewed,⁸¹ just as the covenant of Adam was renewed by Noah when he built his altar after the flood.⁸² In the Book of Abraham, that patriarch is also represented as resuming the work of Noah (Abraham 1:19; cf. 26–27). Like Noah, Abraham’s work represents the “restoration of the harmony that was broken” when men fell away in the preceding dispensation.⁸³

“According to Jewish theology, Mt. Zion,” on which Abraham built an altar to offer up Isaac, “is the cosmic rock uniting heaven and earth, and all the great sacrifices of the past were offered there” on an altar which was “demolished by the generation of the Division” but restored by Abraham.⁸⁴ This was supposed to be the very spot “whereon Adam had brought the first sacrifice, and Cain and Abel had offered their gifts to God—the same whereon Noah raised an altar to God after he left the ark; and Abraham . . . knew that it was the place appointed for the Temple.”⁸⁵ There were seven who built altars before the temple existed—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron.⁸⁶ The most important of these was Abraham: It was he, according to Maimonides, who recommended that Mt. Moriah be consecrated as the place of the ordinances forever after, and who dedicated the spot for the future temple⁸⁷ (as did Moroni at Manti, Utah). For when Abraham was shown all the dispensations of the future in a vision, God also showed him the future temple

81. John Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 243–44.

82. *Ibid.*

83. Böhl, *Zeitalter Abrahams*, 34–35.

84. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition*, 209.

85. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:285; Mendell Lewittes, *The Code of Maimonides* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 8:10.

86. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:376.

87. Maimonides, *Dalalat III*, chap. XLV, 349–50.

service and the law.⁸⁸ Sabine Baring-Gould wrote that before he went down into Egypt, Abraham was shown the entire temple worship by God, after which he returned to Haran and instructed people in the true religion: he erected three altars and gave thanks to God.⁸⁹

On this theme the Zohar (Sperling and Simon's translation) is full of remarkable hints and suggestions. It tells us that Abraham in building his altars "proceeded from grade [or step] to grade until he reached his own rightful grade."⁹⁰ Thus when Abraham entered Canaan, "God appeared to him and he received a *nefesh* [became a living body], and built an altar to the corresponding grade (of divinity)." Then he went on southward and received a *ruah* (spirit); then he rose to the "medium of the *neshamah*," which is the highest degree. After this it was necessary for him to recapitulate all three steps "to test himself," and this was represented by his journey into Egypt.⁹¹ It was only after his returning from Egypt and reviewing all the rites over again "so as to fix all in its proper place" and keep the whole system united that Abraham was "fully endowed, and he became the lot and the portion of God in real truth,"⁹² the whole thing culminating in the assurance that the "perfect faith which he had acquired on his first passage through the land would not depart from him and his descendants for ever."⁹³ An indication of the antiquity of this teaching is given in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, the twenty-first column of which begins: "In each place I pitched until I reached even to Beth-el, unto the place where I had built the altar, and I built it again."⁹⁴ Thus

88. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 20.

89. Sabine Baring-Gould, *Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets, and Other Old Testament Characters from Various Sources* (New York: Alden, 1885), 164.

90. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 80a, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:270.

91. *Ibid.*, 83b, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:278–79.

92. *Ibid.*, 84a, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:280.

93. *Ibid.*, 85a, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:284.

94. *Genesis Apocryphon* XXI (author's translation).

the Zohar recounts that he reversed his course “to revisit his place and his grades, until he reached the first grade where the first revelation had taken place,” back to Bethel, “the perfect stone.”⁹⁵ The parallel to the Hopi system of *pasos* is quite astonishing.

Modern scholars tell us that Abraham’s altars “had no use or significance except as a means of sacrifice” and that “nothing is known of the motives prompting these sacrifices, nor of the sacrifices themselves. . . . The type of sacrifice offered is not stated.”⁹⁶ But the claim of the Pearl of Great Price is that “the Gospel began to be preached, from the beginning, being declared by holy angels sent forth from the presence of God, and by his own voice, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. And thus all things were confirmed unto Adam, a holy ordinance, and the Gospel preached, and a decree sent forth, that it should be in the world until the end thereof” (Moses 5:58–59). This teaching is certainly borne out by the Jewish traditions, which taught that “Abraham knew the entire Torah” and even the Halakhah, which “God gave to the heavenly Sanhedrin”—that is, the council in heaven, though the Jewish doctors confess themselves at a loss to explain how he came to know it all before the revelation on Sinai.⁹⁷ Thus it is certain that Abraham was baptized,⁹⁸ for anyone entering the covenant of Abraham, “when he has immersed himself and ascended from the water he is an Israelite in every respect.”⁹⁹ It was only to discredit Christian baptism, according to S. B. Hoenig, that

95. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 83b–84a, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:279.

96. R. J. Thompson, *Penitence and Sacrifice in Early Israel outside the Levitical Law* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 53–54, citing J. Skinner for the first quotation.

97. Weber, *System der altsynagogalen palästinischen Theologie*, 255.

98. E. A. Wallis Budge, trans., *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 147 (citing Fol. 74a, col. 1).

99. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 65, citing Jeb. 47a–b. No one could receive Abraham’s hospitality who “refrained from taking the prescribed

the rabbis finally came to insist that circumcision alone was the “Covenant of Abraham,” though actually it never was the covenant but only “a token or sign marking the Covenant.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, though the locating of all the ancient altars on the site of the later altar of the temple at Jerusalem led to all sorts of geographical complications and speculations, its purpose was plainly to emphasize the continuity of the religion of Abraham and the other patriarchs down to Christ. Thus the tradition that Adam was made of the soil of Mt. Moriah binds all mankind “to the mountain on which Abraham would expiate his forefathers’ sins.”¹⁰¹

Expiation is atonement, and it was the Christian who made the most of the unbroken ritual line from Adam to Christ: “In that very place where Melchisedek ministered as a priest and where Abraham offered up his son Isaac as an offering, the wood of the Cross was set up” at the place where “the Four Quarters of the earth meet each other.”¹⁰² No concept was more appealing to the Christians than that which identified Isaac carrying the wood for his sacrifice with the Lord bearing the cross—to the very same spot, so it was held, and still is.¹⁰³ As Abraham stood on that spot, “he saw the Cross, and Christ, and the redemption of our father Adam.”¹⁰⁴ There is no better known Christian legend than that which describes the cross of Calvary as resting squarely on the skull of Adam to represent the beginning and the

ritual bath in the spring that flowed” before his tent. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:242.

100. S. B. Hoenig, “Circumcision: The Covenant of Abraham,” *JQR* 53 (1963): 325, 322.

101. Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 60.

102. *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927), 224.

103. L.-H. Vincent, “Abraham à Jérusalem,” *Revue biblique* 58 (1951): 371, accepts this in the most literal sense.

104. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures*, 149–50.

ending of the process of redemption.¹⁰⁵ And Abraham stands exactly between them. There are five things, according to the *Pirke Aboth*, that God himself acquired in this world—the Torah, heaven and earth, Abraham, Israel, and the temple;¹⁰⁶ these make up the main ingredients of the plan of eternity, and Abraham stands squarely in the middle. Everything he does, Israel does later!¹⁰⁷

Abraham and Adam

Everything that Abraham does Adam did before him. As Adam left his Father's heavenly home for an earthly paradise, so also did Abraham (Genesis 13:10). "Get thee forth" meant for Abraham a new opportunity for advancement, says the Zohar, "for thine own advantage, to prepare thyself, to perfect thy degree."¹⁰⁸ Finding himself in the new land, Abraham was instructed by the Lord, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Genesis 13:17),¹⁰⁹ just as Adam was given the same order, to go forth and inspect the garden, possess it, and take care of it. And as Adam was given charge of the animals to see to it that every form of life should flourish in its proper sphere and element and have joy therein, so God said to Abraham: As I put Adam and then Noah in charge of all my creatures, I now put you in charge of them, and order you to give my blessing to them.¹¹⁰ So Abraham like Adam has his Eden, his mystic garden,¹¹¹ where he protects all creatures from the withering light of the empty spaces without.

105. Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 62–65; Viktor Aptowitzer, "Les éléments juifs dans la légende du Golgotha," *REJ* 79 (1924): 145–62.

106. *Pirke Aboth* 6:10.

107. Genesis Rabbah 40:6, in *Midrash Rabbah*, 330.

108. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 77b, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:263.

109. *Genesis Apocryphon* 21:8–10.

110. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:137–38.

111. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 174–75.

Both Adam and Abraham, when forced to go forth into a lone and dismal world, are designated by the code name of Jared, which Robert Eisler points out means “fallen from high estate.”¹¹² They become the ancestors and the type of the “remnant saved and saving . . . the chosen tribe of Levi and . . . the suffering Jewish people,”¹¹³ dramatically embodied in the sectaries of the desert, who in their way of life considered themselves “the free seed of Abraham” preserving their integrity in a real wilderness.¹¹⁴ One remarkable episode in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* shows us the hero lying unconscious on the earth while a voice says, “Go Jaobel [a sectarian name for Jehovah] in the power of my unutterable name, and raise that man up for me!”¹¹⁵ Then, says Abraham, speaking in the first person, “the angel whom He sent to me came to me in the likeness of a man, took me by the right hand, and raised me to my feet saying, ‘Abraham, arise! . . . I have been sent to thee to strengthen thee and bless thee in the name of the Lord . . . the creator of heaven and earth.’”¹¹⁶ “Jaobel” tells Abraham, “I have been commissioned to visit you and your posterity, and *along with Michael* to give you our blessing eternally. Be of good cheer and go to!”¹¹⁷ As George H. Box explains the passage, “The archangel Jaobel . . . here seems to play the part of Metatron-Michael. . . . The archangel Jaobel was specially sent by God to instruct him [Abraham] and initiate him into the knowledge of heavenly mysteries.”¹¹⁸ The fact that the confusion of the names Jehovah, El, Michael, and Metatron is permitted to stand by the rabbis, who do not pretend to understand

112. Eisler, *Iêsous Basileus ou basileusas*, 2:180.

113. E. I. Watkin, “New Light on Philo,” *Downside Review* 86 (July 1968): 293.

114. Eisler, *Iêsous Basileus ou basileusas*, 2:66, cf. 246.

115. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10:3–4.

116. *Ibid.*, 10:5–7.

117. *Ibid.*, 10:16–17 (emphasis added).

118. George H. Box, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: SPCK, 1919), vii–viii.

their relationships, is an indication of the high authority and antiquity of the text.

These words of cheer to Abraham follow immediately upon instructions that he is to build an altar and offer sacrifices.¹¹⁹ In the very old *Pseudo-Jonathan*, the Lord says to Abraham: "This is the spot where Adam, when he was driven out of Paradise, built an altar, and offered up the first sacrifices to me. . . . It is now thy duty, Abraham, to build it again!"¹²⁰ Having built his altar as instructed, "Abraham opened his mouth and spoke in the Adamic language, which had ceased from the earth since the time of Babel," calling upon the Lord.¹²¹ This, it is claimed, was the beginning of Jewish liturgy,¹²² and the sacrifice offered by Abraham was identical with that offered by Adam and Noah before him.¹²³ It was up to Abraham to make the first move, since "there is no stirring above till there is a stirring below. . . . We do not say grace over an empty table."¹²⁴ But the prayer did not go unanswered; again Abraham was visited and received yet more light and knowledge, thereafter building three altars for the specific purpose of instructing his children and warning them against apostasy.¹²⁵ The last time Michael called upon him, Abraham the patriarch—in washing his guest's feet—recognized them as the feet of one of the three men who had visited him in Mamre long before (Genesis 18), whereupon he said, "Now I know thou art an angel [lit., messenger] of the Lord, and wast sent to take my soul," but he hesitates to go with him save on certain conditions;

119. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 10:16.

120. Beer, *Leben Abraham's*, 66.

121. *Jubilees* 12:25–27 (of course the language is Hebrew).

122. Abraham Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development* (New York: Holt, 1932), 3.

123. Goldin, *Rabbi Nathan*, 14.

124. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 88a–b, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:293–94.

125. August Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Bereschit Rabba*, Bibliotheca Rabbinica: Eine Sammlung alter Midraschim 1 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), 181, on Genesis 12:8.

“Michael returned to heaven” and reported to God, who told him, “Go and take up Abraham in the body and show him all things, and . . . do to him as to My friend.”¹²⁶

In these accounts “Abraham is here the prototype of the novice who is initiated into the mystery, . . . just as in the *Sefer Yetsirah* he is allowed to penetrate into the mysteries of its cosmological speculation,”¹²⁷ in which the Book of Abraham is so rich. The Talmud explains that in choosing Abraham rather than Adam to transmit the teachings, he reasoned, “should Adam become corrupt, then Abraham will come to restore order.”¹²⁸ It goes even further than that: “The Jews even attributed a Messianic character to Abraham, as completing or correcting the work of Adam,” so that in Genesis 14:6, Abraham restores what Adam had lost.¹²⁹ If many studies have appeared discussing the early Christian equation of Adam and Christ, it must also be admitted that Abraham too partakes of the nature of both. There is no doubt that Christ and Abraham in the historical and doctrinal records alike (*geschichtlich und überlieferungsgeschichtlich*) present striking parallels, J. Alberto Soggin admits, though he is reluctant to admit any significant resemblance.¹³⁰ When Satan says to Abraham, “Why are you on the top of this dangerous mountain? You will be consumed!” trying to intimidate and coerce him;¹³¹ or when Abraham is described as “one despised and smitten”,¹³² or when the jailer calls in a loud voice at the mouth of the pit: “Abraham, are you living or dead?”¹³³ or when we are told that “the

126. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:302–3.

127. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 69.

128. *Midrash on Psalms* 34:1, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:408.

129. Cavalletti, “Abrahamo come messia,” 251–52.

130. J. Alberto Soggin, “Geschichte, Historie und Heilsgeschichte im Alten Testament,” *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 89 (1964): 733.

131. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:4–9.

132. *Ibid.*, 29:7.

133. *Ma'ase Abraham Abinu*, in Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 6 vols. in 2 (1853–77; reprint, Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1967), 1:33.

act of Abraham [the covenant and circumcision] remains a never-ceasing atonement for Israel,"¹³⁴ we naturally think in terms of Jesus Christ, as the New Testament bids us. One of the earliest Christian writings insists that it was Christ, "the True Prophet," who "appeared to Abraham and taught him the knowledge of the godhead; showed him the origin of the world and its end; revealed to him the immortality of the soul and the manner of life which was pleasing to God; declared also to him the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, of the future judgments, and of rewards and punishments to come. And then He departed again to the invisible abodes."¹³⁵ This agrees with the report of *4 Ezra* that Abraham alone was favored by God with a full revelation of "the end of the times, secretly by night."¹³⁶

To make the story complete, Satan deals with Abraham exactly as he does with Adam. He was waiting for Abraham in the land of Canaan just as he was waiting for Adam in the Garden: "The wicked serpent that was cursed . . . held sway over the land" of Canaan, although "it was in that land that Abram drew near to God."¹³⁷ It is significant that Satan in this particular context should be designated as the serpent. When Michael comes to make Abraham "acquainted with the higher wisdom, which he had not known previously"—that is, to give him further light and knowledge,¹³⁸ he recognizes Satan as the old enemy whom he had cast out of heaven and rebukes him.¹³⁹ In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* it is Jaobel who rebukes the devil, telling him, "God will not permit you to possess the bodies of the

134. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:240.

135. *Clementine Recognitions* I, 33, in *PG* 1:1227.

136. *4 Ezra* 3:13–14, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:528.

137. *Zohar*, *Lech Lecha* 79b, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:269.

138. *Ibid.*, 80a, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:270.

139. Gerald Friedlander, *Pirḳê de Rabbi Eliezer* (New York, Hermon, 1965), 193–94.

righteous. . . . Depart from this man! For there is enmity between him and all that follow thee. . . . For behold, thy garment which was thine in heaven, is now reserved for him, and the perishable corruption that was his has gone over to thee!"¹⁴⁰ This, incidentally, offers a significant parallel to the story of the *two garments* of Moroni (Alma 46:23–26) and Tha'labi. After dismissing Satan, the Lord commands Abraham not to consort with him anymore, "lest he fall under the influence of his powerful mind."¹⁴¹

The Satan of the Abraham traditions is no fantastic monster with claws and horns; he is a handsome, well-dressed man and a persuasive speaker. As such he appears to the troubled king to instruct him on how to deal with Abraham; as such he appears to Abraham on the altar, advising him to yield sensibly to the monarch; as a venerable sage he argues with Abraham and Isaac and, approaching Sarah when she is alone, tries by convincing arguments to weaken her faith in the religion of her husband. He can be recognized not by frightful deformities but, according to the *Pirke Aboth*, by (1) a disturbing eye, (2) a haughty spirit, and (3) a proud mind, whereas a disciple of Abraham has a good eye, a lowly spirit, and a humble mind.¹⁴² Such signs of recognition were considered important. Thus we are told that when Joseph revealed his identity to his brethren in Egypt, it was by showing them "the sign of the covenant, and [he] said to them: 'It is through this that I have attained to this estate, through keeping this intact.'"¹⁴³ The Zohar explains that "this" is a sign imprinted in the flesh, and that "whenever a man is stamped [sealed] with this holy imprint, through it he sees God. . . . So if he does not guard it, . . . 'they lose

140. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:11–14.

141. *Ibid.*, 14:10–13, a fairly free translation. An even freer would be, "I would advise you to get out of his employ!"

142. *Pirke Aboth* 5:22.

143. Zohar, *Lech Lecha* 93b, in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:308.

the soul (*neshamah*) given by God.”¹⁴⁴ We are told that Jacob recognized the garment of Joseph when it was brought to him by “three marks or tokens” that were on the garment, which showed it to be “the very one that had belonged to Abraham, having already had a long history,” going clear back to the Garden of Eden.”¹⁴⁵

That Abraham had the priesthood is perfectly clear from the Book of Abraham and the Jewish traditions alike. The only problem for the learned rabbis is just how and when he could have obtained it. One account tells us that Isaac asked his father as they climbed the mountain together, “Are you a priest, to make a sacrifice?” to which Abraham replied, “Shem the High Priest will make the sacrifice.”¹⁴⁶ In another version Abraham asks himself, “Am I fit to perform the sacrifice, am I a priest? Ought not rather the high priest Shem to do it?” and God replies, “When thou wilt arrive at that place, I will consecrate thee and make thee a priest.”¹⁴⁷ Still another has it that when Abraham asked, “Where is the priest to officiate?” the voice of God answered: “Henceforth thou art clothed with that dignity, as was formerly Shem, Noah’s son.”¹⁴⁸ According to the Midrash, Melchizedek himself instructed Abraham in all the functions of the high priest,¹⁴⁹ and we can easily surmise from this how Shem and Melchizedek came to be identified as one, though living centuries apart: It was indeed the priesthood of Shem that Abraham inherited (Abraham 1:19, 28), but since the practices of the priesthood had fallen into disuse in his family

144. Ibid., 94a, , in Sperling and Simon, *Zohar*, 1:309–10.

145. Tha‘labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlāduhu, A.H. 1314), 80–81, discussed in Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed., CWHN 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 218–19.

146. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 64.

147. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:272.

148. Beer, *Leben Abraham’s*, 60.

149. Numbers Rabbah 44:8, in August Wünsche, *Der Midrasch bemidbar Rabba*, Bibliotheca Rabbinica 4 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967), 293.

(Abraham 1:5), it was Melchizedek who gave him the necessary instructions.

It is common to trace the priesthood of Abraham back to Adam: "The Lord said to Abraham: 'Follow me, and I will make thee a High Priest after the order of Adam, the first man.'"¹⁵⁰ "The Zohar presents Elihu as a descendant of Abraham and also as a priest," having by his "exemplary behavior earned . . . the honorable name, 'man' (Adam)," Adam being the archetype of the high priest.¹⁵¹ The garment of Abraham just referred to was nothing less than "the garments of skin which God gave Adam," which was handed down as "a High-priestly robe" in a direct line to Seth, Methuselah, Noah, Japheth, Shem, and Abraham, and so on to Moses.¹⁵² What has been called the peculiar emphasis on covenants in Abraham's career¹⁵³ is closely connected both with Abraham's priesthood and with his celebrated hospitality. For hospitality is the receiving into one's own tent or family (the Hebrew word for *tent* is the Arabic word for *family*) of a stranger and outsider, that being the express purpose of the covenant. It was as a guest in Abraham's tent that the Lord covenanted with him (Genesis 18:10, 14). When by circumcision 318 strangers became members of Abraham's family, they were simply repeating Abraham's own covenant with the Lord, following his example as the type *convert*.¹⁵⁴ The circumcision itself was not the covenant, as many have falsely assumed, but only "a token or sign marking the Covenant,"¹⁵⁵ and as such subject to being supplanted in time by other signs and tokens. But whatever the signs or tokens may be, the important thing about them, as

150. Bin Gorion, *Sagen der Juden*, 2:141.

151. Nahum N. Glatzer, "The Book of Job and Its Interpreters," in Altmann, *Biblical Motifs*, 219.

152. Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Mythology*, 70, 78.

153. Discussed by Thompson, *Penitence and Sacrifice*, 54, 56–57.

154. See *Midrash on Psalms* 17:12, in Braude, *Midrash on Psalms*, 1:225.

155. Hoening, "Circumcision: The Covenant of Abraham," 322.

about the covenant itself, is that no one is born to them. They cannot be acquired unconsciously or automatically; everyone, including Abraham himself, is a convert. He inherits the kingdom not by birth but by willingly and knowingly entering a covenant. As far as birth is concerned, as Lehi told his haughty sons, “the Lord esteemeth all flesh in one; he that is righteous is favored of God” (1 Nephi 17:35).

8

Judging and Prejudging the Book of Abraham

An international symposium of scholars held in Los Angeles in 1972 was devoted to the discussion of ancient autobiographical writings attributed to Abraham which, until recently, have lain in a state of total neglect.¹ The most important of these writings, the so-called *Apocalypse of Abraham*, was first translated into English in the pages of a Latter-day Saint periodical, the *Improvement Era*, in 1898, the year in which G. Nathanael Bonwetsch first edited the text and translated it into German. At that time some striking points of resemblance were noted between the ancient writing and Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham. With renewed interest after eighty years, the parallels appear more impressive than ever and are being seriously considered by non-Mormon scholars. The point of this is not that either the ancient texts or the Joseph Smith version need be accepted as authentic,

This 1979 manuscript appeared as an appendix in Robert L. and Rosemary Brown, They Lie in Wait to Deceive, ed. Barbara Ellsworth, rev. ed. (Mesa: Brownsworth, 1982), 1:236–45.

1. In September 1972 the Society of Biblical Literature Pseudepigrapha Seminar at the International Congress of Learned Societies in the Field of Religion organized a symposium on "The Testament of Abraham and Related Studies."

but that the latter is a work of real substance and should be carefully read by those who would judge it. Instead of which it has been noisily denounced as a complete fraud on the grounds that it could not have been translated in a certain way. In what way? By a fantastical procedure which the critics themselves have invented and palmed off on Joseph Smith. Did the Book of Abraham come out of nothing? Was it the product of worse than nothing, a farrago of philological gropings which Joseph Smith himself threw up as an insuperable obstacle to his own work of translation? Let us look more closely.

Q. The “Fall of the Book of Abraham” routinely proclaimed throughout the land for the last 145 years has been heralded anew in the present decade [the seventies], and the contemporary critics announce that some Mormon students are in agreement with them. How is that?

A. That claim clearly demonstrates their methods. It is perfectly possible for Latter-day Saint students to applaud their willingness to discuss matters, and the zeal and dedication with which they go about it, but that by no means is to be taken as an endorsement of their opinions—which is the way they make it seem. In commending the diligence of the critics (and deploring the unpreparedness of the Latter-day Saints to deal with materials with which they should be thoroughly familiar), one does not for a moment find the results of their work in the least convincing—quite the contrary, the evidence which their hostile voices have supplied goes far to disproving their assertions.

Q. What are the specific charges?

A. (1) We are asked to see Joseph Smith diligently composing an alphabet and grammar of the Egyptian language, (2) by employing which he works out the translation of the Book of Abraham from certain Egyptian characters in his possession. (3) The source of those characters, and the Egyptian writing called the Book of Breathings, suddenly surfaces in 1967, and it does not contain anything suggesting

the Book of Abraham. (4) Therefore the Book of Abraham is a fraud.

Q. Isn't that evidence enough to convict?

A. Only if the charges are true. But none of them will hold water. Let us consider them in order.

1. Joseph Smith never produced an alphabet or grammar of the Egyptian language.² What was repeatedly and falsely put forth as "Joseph Smith's Original Alphabet and Grammar" was an enterprise in which a number of men engaged. The leader of the project was W. W. Phelps, and by far the greatest part of the writing is in his hand. Phelps had an ambitious plan for methodically working out an Egyptian grammar and alphabet, but it quickly became apparent that the approach was not a fruitful one, and it was at once dropped for good.

Q. But wasn't Smith in on it?

A. He was indeed, sharing his ideas with the others, for both works were purely speculative and exploratory.

Q. How do you know that?

A. Because of the six men participating, each makes his own contribution; no two of their interpretations are identical. The whole thing is quite fluid. The men are admittedly exploring and interpreting. Most importantly, the project never got off the ground. The most ambitious version of the grammar, that of Phelps, ground to a halt after a single page, and his equally ambitious alphabet was given up after a page and a half, before the second letter was completed.

Q. Then what is behind it?

A. Obviously they were doing what they explicitly stated they were doing—that is, trying to produce an alphabet and grammar of the Egyptian language; nothing was said about a project of translating the Book of Abraham. Their interest in such an enterprise was perfectly legitimate and

2. For a fuller treatment of the alphabet and grammar (or, more correctly, the Kirtland Egyptian Papers), see "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," in this volume, CWHN 18:502–68.

understandable. They had priceless Egyptian manuscripts in their possession and were irresistibly drawn to search for clues. The decipherment of Egyptian was a problem which excited many at the time, and the School of the Prophets had a legitimate and honest interest in the study of biblical and related languages. At the time Phelps made independent attempts at translating parts of the Bible; Oliver Cowdery, one of the group, had eagerly sought some years before to translate “the engravings of old records, which are ancient” (D&C 8:1). The instructions given Cowdery in the matter are extremely important; he is not to expect the power to translate to come to him as a gift: “you must [first] study it out in your mind,” and only “then you must ask me if it be right,” with no guarantee of acceptance (D&C 9:7–8). This is the process we see going on in the Egyptian exercises.

Q. The critics say that the grammar proves that Joseph Smith did not know Egyptian.

A. Nobody ever said he did; his translations were “given to him” as the expression went, by direct revelation. If he did know it, why would he be sweating over a grammar and alphabet?

Q. Then Joseph Smith did write an Egyptian grammar?

A. He did not. He would very much have liked to, for the subject intrigued him to the end of his life, when he suggested the possibility of such an undertaking in the future.

Q. But why should he have been so interested in alphabets and grammars if not to help him translate?

A. This brings us to our second point which is that:

2. The alphabet and grammar were not used in any translation. It is important to note that the Prophet had a real interest in ancient languages and studied them the hard way, but only after he had completed all his inspired translations. Thus he studied Hebrew and German along with the brethren and looked about for a teacher of Greek, but that lively interest in languages blossomed in Kirtland only after he had finished his new translation of the Bible, translating

the Book of Abraham at the same time. Greek and Hebrew dictionaries and grammars were available for their studies, but what about Egyptian? They would have to do what students of exotic languages have always done, what the scholars of the sixteenth century did when confronted by strange Greek, Syriac, or Coptic texts—they would have to make their own dictionaries and grammars. Joseph Smith's translation of the Old Testament was one thing; his Hebrew and German lessons long after were something else entirely. Likewise, his translation of the Book of Abraham was one thing, while his discussions and speculations and intellectual flights with the brethren in Kirtland were again something else.

Q. You mean they were interested only in making a grammar? Wouldn't they need it for translating the Book of Abraham?

A. That suggestion is the wildest of all in view of the evidence. Just look at those documents—could anyone possibly use them for anything? Just try it. The opposition have loudly proclaimed that the grammar and alphabet shows exactly how Joseph Smith did his translation, the precise *modus operandi* he followed, as they put it. Well, let someone show us how the *modus operandi* works. To date no one has tried to turn the key—understandably, since it won't fit the lock. Aside from the wild nature of the stuff, we have seen that there isn't nearly enough alphabet or grammar to be of any use to anyone; they didn't really get started on them before they gave them up. But aside from that, the characters that meet us in the alphabet and grammar never turn up in the attempts at fitting Egyptian characters to the Book of Abraham. The 125 proper names and 79 numerals in the alphabet and grammar nowhere appear in Abraham's book. Even if the alphabet and grammar could have been used as an aid to translation, it was not so used.

This brings up the matter of those other documents that do look very much like an attempt at translation—that is,

where Egyptian characters appear in a margin on the left-hand side of the page while the rest of the page is filled with writing from the Book of Abraham.

At first glance it looks as if it may have been a translation, but a second glance wipes out even the remotest possibility of such a thing, as the critics themselves have been at pains to point out. A certain Mr. Heward went to the trouble of passing out handbills on Temple Square at a general conference, asking the Mormons to accept as sacred truth from him that the juxtaposition of Egyptian characters and English text proves that the one could not possibly by any stretch of the imagination be a translation of the other. The disproportion between the characters is staggering: How could one dot tell the whole story of Little Red Riding Hood in all its harrowing details? Mr. Heward asked. There is only one answer; everything shows that this was not a translation and was not viewed as such.

Q. Even when the two texts are found side by side?

A. If the juxtaposition made sense translation-wise, then it might be used as evidence that this was intended as a translation. As it is, the juxtaposition effectively refutes the thesis. First there is that absurd disproportion between, for example, three short strokes of a scribe's brush and a whole paragraph of English text—including parenthetical remarks and at least a dozen proper names—all in three strokes and a dot! Along with that there is the meaningless spacing of the characters opposite the English Abraham text: characters where none should be, intruding in the middle of a phrase or word; no characters where such are indispensable, as at the beginning of a new paragraph or episode; characters placed squarely between lines so that no one can tell which line they are supposed to go with. Then there is the sloppy and indifferent drawing of the characters; though each tiny detail is supposed to contain whole sentences of meaning, each of the researchers draws his own symbols, putting in or leaving out lines and dots with easy abandon.

All this is understandable only if the characters are treated as expendable, consulted in the process of trying out various possible clues to help in the composing of an Egyptian grammar and abandoned when they failed to work. We know they were considered expendable because they were dispensed with four-fifths of the time. Of the three "translation" texts, one of them has no Egyptian characters whatever, though like the others it is labeled "Translation of some ancient records," etc., as is the present-day Book of Abraham, showing that the word *translation* does not refer to those particular characters. Even in the two manuscripts in which they appear, those of Phelps and Parrish, the Egyptian characters put in an appearance only part of the time: both these exercises dispense with them and preempt their margins when they become a nuisance. In all there are only eighteen Egyptian words employed in the "translation," all taken from the first two lines of a text of forty-five lines.

We do not have here the process of deriving one text from another, but simply that of placing two completed texts side by side for comparison.

Q. Completed?

A. Certainly. The Egyptian characters are copied from a Book of Breathings text, and the Abraham passages from a completed text of the Book of Abraham, as is perfectly apparent from the state of all the manuscripts. The Abraham sections are found in three manuscripts and are the same in all three, copied out each time in a fair hand without erasures, corrections, substitutions, or alterations, without the slightest indication of the laborious business of translation—there is nothing here but the simple mechanical task of neatly copying out a finished text. The margins should also be noted: they were drawn in before either text was written down: the English was easily accommodated to them, but the Egyptian was not. If any attempted translation was going on, the English side of the ledger would have been very messy indeed instead of a model of tidiness.

There is one notable exception to the obvious lack of any rational attempt to match up the English and Egyptian.

Q. What is that?

A. Phelps made a bold and ambitious start with his copy; beginning with the top line he starts out by placing numbers beside the Egyptian characters, matching each one by the same number marking an English word opposite. This looks like business; Phelps is determined on a systematic study even as he was working away at the alphabet and grammar. And that is what makes this so significant, for Phelps never got any further than the number three—after the first three characters he gives up, while the neat four columns of classification into which he has divided the page are abandoned at the same time—the whole thing collapses before our eyes before it has even gotten properly started. It was a nice try, but Phelps could see that it was getting nowhere.

Q. Can we be sure of that?

A. We can. If the men of Kirtland knew they had a real thing going in this operation, they would have stuck with it; if they were getting anywhere at all with their exciting project, they would have carried on for more than a mere two pages of alphabet and grammar and ventured beyond barely two lines of Egyptian characters from a text containing 45 lines. If their studies were making progress, they would have continued them; and if they had hit upon something valid, they would have announced it. As it is, nothing is more impressive than the promptness and finality with which the alphabet, grammar, and “translation” projects were dropped the moment it became apparent that they were up a blind alley. The state of the manuscripts makes that perfectly clear. Equally significant, however, is the care that was taken to avoid misleading anyone, raising false hopes, or giving false impressions. The whole business was strictly confidential in nature; these speculations and probings never got out of a closed academic circle. Again it is the

opposition who make this clearest when they play up their own role in bringing to light “hidden documents,” as they put it, writings “suppressed for 130 years.” Well, they were suppressed and forgotten; they were never publicized or circulated. No claims were ever put forward for these writings, no explanation ever given for them. It was not the Prophet’s habit to suppress anything he felt was true and relevant to the gospel. On the contrary, his calling was to make everything known. He translated and published the Book of Mormon to the world in the face of universal opposition and contempt, and he told everyone just how he got it and how he translated it. He was not one to hold anything back. If the Kirtland Papers were thought of as inspired or even reasonably helpful, they would have been expanded, used, and their worth announced to the world. The strictly confidential nature of the work tells us just what kind of an exercise it was—never circulated, never given out to the members of the Church or the general public—no one was corrupted by it. Now if the brethren had continued after they saw they were going nowhere, then we might charge them with deceiving themselves if not others. But they did not. They were pursuing the same trial-and-error course that scholars and scientists must needs follow. And the results were not more fantastic than the speculations, translations, and interpretations of the facsimiles brought forth by students both inside and outside of the Church to this very day, and that in an environment of graduate study and large university libraries such as the men of Joseph Smith’s day never dreamed of.

The behavior of the participants in the philological exercises of Kirtland after the project was abandoned is also not without significance. At the very time the work on the alphabet, grammar, and translation came to a halt, all but one of the five men engaged in it with Joseph Smith turned against the Prophet, denounced him in the strongest terms, and were cut off from the Church. Why? Mostly because they

were jealous of him—especially Phelps, who was far better educated than the Prophet, had studied classical languages, and at that time had tried his own hand at translation. All but one of these men returned to the Church and begged the Prophet's forgiveness, which he freely granted. But though these temporary renegades told every manner of lie to make the Prophet seem ridiculous and deluded in the eyes of the world, they never mentioned any indiscretions in the matter of the Book of Abraham.

Q. Wouldn't that be because they were in it together with him?

A. On the contrary, they exploited to the hilt precisely those secrets which they claimed to have shared most intimately with him. If they mention no dubious activity in this case, it is because there was none. Warren Parrish, the one who never came back, said later in an interview, "I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration of Heaven."³ Direct revelation is not the same thing as grammar-making; it is the same way all Smith's other inspired translations were made. It should be clear to anyone who has looked into the ample evidence available on the subject of Joseph Smith's activities as a translator that we are wasting our time trying to figure out the laborious exercises of the brethren at Kirtland. For that was not Smith's way of translating at all. We may not ignore such decisive information as that when the Prophet translated the Book of Abraham he had already done the immense Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses, and the new translation of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments—all done by revelation, as it needs must be. He was making his final review of the inspired translation of the Bible at the very time he brought out the Book of Abraham, and the Church acquired the *Times and Seasons* for the express purpose of publishing

3. Warren Parrish, letter to the editor, *Painesville Republican*, 15 February 1838.

the two—the Bible translations and the Book of Abraham—together as parts of a single project. Since he used no grammar or dictionaries in rendering the corrected Bible text, even though such aids were available in abundance, why should he mock the Spirit and give himself the enormous handicap of constructing a preliminary handbook of grammar to aid him in an activity in which he had been successfully engaged for years?

Q. Then what is the connection between the Book of Abraham and the Book of Breathings, from which all are agreed it cannot possibly have been derived?

A. This is our third point.

3. It was an exploratory and experimental exercise. The men of Kirtland, when they wanted to know more about Egyptian, did what any scientist or scholar will do to solve a difficult problem—that is, he must try any and every approach to the problem. If he is completely in the dark, every possibility and suggestion, no matter how absurd it may appear, must be considered. You cannot make a grammar or alphabet of any language if you don't have at least one example of a translation—without a Rosetta Stone you will get nowhere. And the Book of Abraham offered the brethren the only exemplar of a sure translation from the Egyptian. They compared it with various texts, trying it on for size.

Q. How do we know that?

A. Because Smith explicitly describes another Egyptian manuscript which he says was the real Book of Abraham. It was, he reports, (a) perfectly preserved, (b) beautifully written, and (c) containing rubrics—passages in red ink. On each of these points the Book of Breathings manuscript fails conspicuously to qualify.

Q. Then where is the other manuscript?

A. That is one of those questions that should have been asked the moment it became apparent that nobody could have taken the Book of Breathings connection seriously. The

fact is that the manuscripts at present in the possession of the Church represent only a fraction of the Joseph Smith Papyri. As President Joseph F. Smith stood in the front doorway of the Nauvoo House with some of the brethren in 1906, the tears streamed down his face as he told how he remembered “as if it were yesterday” his “Uncle Joseph” down on his knees on the floor with Egyptian manuscripts spread out all around him, peering at the strange writings and jotting things down in a little green notebook with the stub of a pencil. When one considers that the eleven fragments now in our possession can be easily spread out on the top of a small desk, without straining the knees, back, and dignity, it would seem that what is missing is much more than what we have. Another indication of this has recently come forth. In the summer of 1979, there was brought to light an old legal document transferring ownership of the Joseph Smith Egyptian effects, in which it was stated that the original materials were divided into four parts, one part being kept in a box, and the rest divided into three portions that went to three different parties. Now what the Church obtained in 1967 was one facsimile out of three, and the Book of the Dead fragments that would seem to represent about a third of the standard text; this was the portion that went to the son of Major Bidamon’s housekeeper, it being her share from the Major, who had the whole lot from his wife Emma, who had it from the Prophet—a fair estimate is that we have here but tattered remnants of some of the three (equal) parts not kept in the box.

Q. But the part that showed up in 1967 must contain the original Abraham text, for your Facsimile 1 was attached to it.

A. And what were the other two facsimiles attached to if not the Book of Abraham? There is a certain detachment of the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham from the text. Thus, the Book of Abraham is written in the first person—“I Abraham”—as the *Testament* and *Apocalypse of Abraham* happen to be. This is a rare and surprising phenomenon, while

the explanations to the facsimiles designate Abraham in the third person—they are Joseph Smith's own explanations. This, incidentally, follows the Egyptian usage.

Q. What is that?

A. The vignettes that accompany Egyptian texts often seem to have no apparent connection with them. Some recent studies have shown how common pictorial compositions, in particular the one made familiar to us by Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham, could be borrowed by ordinary Egyptians to be used, with minor alterations, as illustrations to their own autobiographies. That is certainly what is suggested in the facsimile to the Book of Abraham. From papers delivered in the above-mentioned symposium of 1972, one gathers that the *Testament of Abraham* is to be traced back to Hebrew writings of the first or second centuries A.D., showing strong Egyptian influence and aimed at reporting what Abraham would have revealed to his own children,⁴ as one writer puts it, in his missing autobiography. Most significant is the thesis of one scholar that the contents of the apocryphal autobiography of Abraham were actually inspired in the first place by the contemplation of vignettes from the Egyptian Books of the Dead—making the story explain the pictures rather than the other way around. That means that we would have a Hebrew transmitter of an Abraham autobiography using the very same Egyptian picture book that Joseph Smith did to supply illustrations for his story. Obviously we are only beginning to get a glimmering of what is going on here.

4. But so far we have not paid any attention whatever to the actual charge brought against the Book of Abraham! The real question is not whether Joseph Smith knew Egyptian—no one has claimed that he did; or whether the Book of Abraham is translated from the Book of Breathings—that, by universal admission, is impossible; or whether Joseph

4. See George W. E. Nickelsburg Jr., ed., *Studies on the Testament of Abraham* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976).

Smith was interested in producing an Egyptian grammar—he emphatically says that he was; or that the alphabet and grammar came to nothing—the men of Kirtland found it useless almost immediately and forgot it; or who is an Egyptologist and who is not—no one challenges their translations, but the true significance of the old texts and pictures remains a mystery to the expert and layman alike. It should be understood that the translations made of the Joseph Smith Papyri by Egyptologists were accepted without hesitation or reservation by the Mormons. This was not a case of secret documents being brought to light by the diligence of crusading scholars or of experts being given special access to carefully guarded documents or commissioned to make official translations of them, as the public has been misled to believe. As soon as the Church got the documents, leaders invited all the world to look at them, circulated excellent reproductions of the lot, and readily accepted the translations of the learned. There has never been any need for self-appointed experts to “expose” anything.

Q. Then what has been discovered?

A. That the men of Kirtland, after at least parts of the Book of Abraham had been translated, tried their hand at using those passages in the construction of an Egyptian grammar. That in no way impugns the validity of the Book of Abraham that is on trial.

Q. But doesn't it amount to the same thing? If the man used questionable methods and engaged in far-out speculations, doesn't that discredit his claim to translating by direct revelation?

A. On the contrary, the most singular contributions in every field of human endeavor have been made by persons who outraged the establishment by transcending the current rules. The productions of genius, to say nothing of divine revelation, are necessarily unconventional in method and offensive to the scholar, whose expert testimonies are highly prejudiced and, after all, only opinions. If the bringer

of ill news does not deserve the wrath of the king, neither is good news to be rejected out of hand because one suspects that the messenger is illiterate—all the better, since he cannot fake the thing. Let us assume, for example, that a reporter publishes what he calls an eyewitness account of the sinking of the Titanic, and it later turns out that the man was never on the Titanic. That shows him to be a rascal, but does it follow that his account is a fraud? Or does it follow from his deception that there never was a Titanic and that the whole story is a newspaper hoax? Actually the man's account may be accurate in the highest degree, based on careful research and scrupulous reporting by himself or others. That his claim to have been on the Titanic is fraudulent indeed makes his story suspect, but actually proves nothing as to its correctness. That must be checked from other, outside sources. The analogy is faulty, for Joseph Smith never made false claims; he never pretended to know Egyptian though his critics have always pounced on the assumption as an Achilles' heel. But he did put the Book of Abraham before the world as a true history, and that is a position that can be tested by tried and established methods.

Meantime, it is not the work of a fool. One must read it for oneself—to imagine the author painfully squeezing out this bold, forthright, original, and lucid narrative drop by drop from a meaningless jumble of hieratic characters painfully processed through a little scrap of alphabet and grammar makes no sense to anyone. The Book of Abraham invites the most rigorous and objective testing that comparative scholarship can apply. The noisy and protracted campaign to condemn it before such tests have been considered and to evade the real issue on the most fragmentary and controversial of evidence must now be succeeded by the serious study which this great scripture deserves.

9

What, Exactly, Is the Purpose and Significance of the Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham?

Since the purpose of the facsimiles depends on their significance and vice versa, as well as on the authenticity of the explanations given by the Prophet Joseph, a number of preliminary questions must be answered to lay a foundation for scenes vastly removed from our own experience. Since the writer is expected to answer this question standing on a street corner, so to speak, he will have to forego his usual passion for footnotes; but be assured, all propositions can be substantiated.

Q: Are the three facsimiles related to each other?

A: Definitely, by all being attached to one and the same document—namely, the Joseph Smith Papyri X and XI, which contain a text of the Egyptian Book of Breathing. Facsimile 1 is followed immediately on its left-hand margin by Joseph Smith Papyrus XI, which begins the Book of Breathing. Someone cut them apart, but the fiber edges of their two margins still match neatly. Facsimile 1 thus serves as a sort of frontispiece.¹

Nibley addressed this question in the Ensign 6 (March 1976): 34–36.

1. See Hugh Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2nd ed., CWHN 16 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 33, fig. 5.

Q: How about the others?

A: A Book of Breathings text that closely matches the Joseph Smith version (and there are precious few of them) is the so-called Kerasher Book of Breathings.² It too has a frontispiece, only in this case it is the same as our Facsimile 3, showing that it too is closely associated with our text.

Q: Where does Facsimile 2 come in?

A: It is a “hypocephalus,” placed under the head of a mummy to preserve the heat of life in it. Books of Breathings were designed for the very same purpose.

Q: In the Book of Breathings do the pictures actually illustrate the text?

A: They may, but usually don't. The Egyptians did not seem to expect it.

Q: But according to Joseph Smith, the facsimiles do illustrate episodes from the life of Abraham.

A: Two of the facsimiles, Nos. 1 and 3, are episodic; No. 2, as the Prophet explains, was drawn to teach Abraham's non-Egyptian associates some Egyptian ideas about astronomy. It is 1 and 3, therefore, that concern us as history.

Q: Are they history?

A: Facsimile 1, we are told, represents Abraham's rescue from the sacrificial altar by an angel in response to his prayer . . . (fig. 58).

Q: May I interrupt here? Some important elements of the picture in our modern Book of Abraham are missing from the original. Where did they come from?

A: I have treated that matter elsewhere,³ but let me just make two points: (1) The papyri were in public display for years, during which time Reuben Hedlock's printed engraving was also diligently circulated. Those who viewed the Egyptian artifacts were often hostile; but as nobody

2. See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. *CWHN* 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 436–37, fig. 74.

3. See “Facsimile 1: A Unique Document,” in this volume, *CWHN* 18:115–78.



Figure 58. Facsimile 1. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

ever pointed out discrepancies between the engraving and the original; we need more proof to show there were any. (2) Quite enough of the original remains to allow for meaningful study. The critics who worked hard to prove what the missing parts should be were wasting their time because they were determined to identify Facsimile 1 with an embalming scene. It can't be done.

Q: Why not?

A: Because there are literally hundreds of lion-couch scenes that more or less resemble this one, and yet they are not all the same scene. No two Egyptian tombs, temples, or

texts are exactly alike. Even in ritual compositions the artist was free to emphasize or minimize any aspect of a stereotyped scene. Since slavish copying is far easier than even limited originality, the differences are certainly intentional.

Q: Wouldn't that be terribly confusing?

A: Not to people grounded in the fundamentals. The Egyptian, wrote Henri Frankfort, "considered it a particular nicety that symbols should possess multiple significance—that one single interpretation should not be the only possible one."⁴ Hence one cannot say dogmatically that a certain Egyptian drawing depicts such-and-such an event and nothing else. A lion couch represents a standard Egyptian embalming table, but at the same time it is a standard domestic bed and a standard altar of sacrifice. And why not? One is put to sleep on all of them, and with the same intent—that of rising again. Of all the scenes resembling our Facsimile 1, the most striking are those found in the temple of Opet (see p. 228, fig. 28) and the funerary tomb of Seti I. The king lies dead on the lion couch in both cases, having been overcome by the powers of death, but also in both cases he is shown just on the point of stirring to life again. A historical event? Yes, indeed.

Q: How, historical?

A: It took place as a dramatic presentation, a ritual—not once but countless times. Whatever Pharaoh does, from washing his mouth in the morning to leading an army into Asia, follows prescribed ritual forms and is recorded as an organic part of the history of the universe.

Q: And what has this got to do with Abraham?

A: Surprisingly, everything. Here the coincidences begin to pile up in a spectacular manner. Important early Jewish, Christian, and Moslem texts tell of the attempted sacrifices of Abraham and Sarah, heretofore unknown, but precisely the main concern of Joseph Smith's Abraham. At the same

4. Henri Frankfort, *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, 2 vols. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1933), 1:29.

time comparative studies have brought to the fore certain dominant ritual and mythological patterns that pervade all of the ancient Near East, foremost among them the sacrificial death and miraculous revival of the king.

Q: And where is Abraham?

A: Just two steps away. First, the king at the end of a certain period had to undergo sacrificial death, being ritually resurrected in the person of his son. That was not pleasant, but there was a way out: a substitute on the altar of sacrifice. This was done often and regularly, at the completion of a set cycle. And now we come to Abraham.

The oldest Abraham legend describes a great king who aspires to rule the world. Abraham insists that it is God who really rules the universe; for this irreverence to authority the hero is made to serve as a sacrificial victim. But on the altar Abraham prays and God sends an angel to deliver him; the altar is overthrown (by an earthquake in some versions) and the officiating priest perishes. The king is now convinced and reverences the patriarch. Which takes us to Facsimile 3 (fig. 59).

Q: How?

A: Countless studies of the substitute king have noted that the business of the substitute was to sit on the king's throne while the real king was being held by Death and the Underworld. During that dark interval the false king, representing the adversary, ruled the world, only to be put to death at the end of the appointed time. Well, Abraham is the substitute king.

Q: Specifically Abraham?

A: The substitute was not just anybody but the most exalted adversary that could be found. He had to be an outsider, a prince, and have red or brown hair.⁵ According to the legends, Abraham was all of these.

5. [Red, brown, and yellow (blond) are all called by the same term in Egyptian—eds.]



Figure 59. Facsimile 3. Courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Q: Hold on! You said the substitute sits on the throne before being dispatched. Abraham sits on the throne afterwards.

A: Which is exactly as it should be; the false king first claims the throne, then suffers; the real king is first humiliated, then glorified. Abraham represents true divinity and kingship, while the tyrant is only a pretender. This is the lesson of the facsimiles also.

Q: Abraham on the throne?

A: Yes, in the rabbinical version the king is so overwhelmed by Abraham's miraculous delivery that he orders a special throne erected for Abraham and commands all his courtiers to bring their children to be instructed in astronomy by the man on the throne. This is the same queer situation we find in Facsimile 3, with "Abraham sitting upon Pharaoh's throne, by the politeness of the king," even while "Abraham is reasoning upon the principles of Astronomy, in the king's court" (Abraham, Fac. 3 explanation).

Q: Does it make sense to have Pharaoh allow someone else to sit on this throne?

A: To us it doesn't, but when we look a bit further, we discover that the Pharaohs actually did let other people sit on the throne.

Q: How come?

A: According to an important study on the subject by Wolfgang Helck,⁶ when the king in the Old Kingdom needed someone to represent him in an important assignment he was unable to officiate in personally, he would endow his chosen agent with his own kingly power and authority by allowing him to function as "Rep'at on the throne of Geb." At first only the king's son and heir, the true Rep'at, was entrusted with such awesome dignity; but soon, with growing administrative pressures, some of the great lords were allowed the privilege.

Q: I can see the need for such authority, but what was the rationale?

A: The principle of substitution, of course. The Rep'at figured as the substitute for the king after his "ritual murder" in the *sed*-festival.⁷ In theory the throne must always pass from father to son, and so the Rep'at who sat on it bore the royal insignia and held a written document bestowing on him plenary power to rule the world. But since the regent had to be a legitimate Rep'at, and since the regent was often a queen mother, many, if not most, of the Rep'ats were women!

Q: Does that explain those two ladies, labeled "Pharaoh" and "Prince of Pharaoh"?

A: Yes. I have asked very young children to point out the ladies in the picture, and they have never failed. So you may well ask, couldn't Joseph Smith recognize a female when he saw one? Have you ever wondered why the Egyptologists

6. Wolfgang Helck, "Rp't auf dem Thron des Gb," *Orientalia* 19 (1950): 416-34.

7. *Ibid.*, 432.

who were so eager to get rid of Joseph Smith never pointed to this egregious indiscretion? I strongly suspect that it was because they sensed that he was very much on the right track. The “Prince of Pharaoh” here is the lady Maat, who can represent anyone while acting as “lieutenant” for Pharaoh and is the very embodiment of legitimate rule and succession. The woman designated as “Pharaoh” is the lady Hathor-Isis, mother, sister, and bride of the Pharaoh, and the ultimate source of his authority. These two ladies must be present in any coronation scene, when there is a transmission of royal power. To show Pharaoh and the prince in their own persons would actually confuse the issue. All very interesting, but you had best wait for a book.⁸

Q: To appear maybe in 1990?⁹ Where would you say we stand at present?

A: Today Abraham is being hailed by scholars of all denominations as the key figure, next to Christ, in the story of God’s dealings with men. The facsimiles confirm the Book of Abraham and place before our eyes a present and tangible tie with the patriarch himself. It is not far-fetched. Joseph Smith’s presentation is now receiving powerful confirmation from four directions: (1) the newly published Abraham documents and legends, (2) the classical sources which, now read in a new light, back them up, (3) the Egyptian ritual sources disclosing heretofore unsuspected riches, and (4) the vast spread of studies in comparative religion and literature, showing that the events set forth in the text and facsimiles of the Book of Abraham actually belong to well-established routines found all over the ancient world.

Q: What would you say is the significance of the whole thing?

8. Nibley is likely referring to his *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); reprinted in a second edition as *CWHN 14* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000).

9. [Perhaps this should read 1980 instead of 1990—eds.]

A: Without such documents as the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price, as Eduard Meyer observed,¹⁰ the Mormons would be just another church. The purpose of such books is not to “prove” Mormonism to the world, but to proclaim and elucidate the universal vastness and scope of its teachings.

10. See Eduard Meyer, *The Origin and History of the Mormons*, trans. Heinz F. Rahde and Eugene Seach (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1961).

10

The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response

Three cheers for Brother Ashment!¹ I am glad to see we are making progress. He has very correctly titled his paper “A Reappraisal of the Facsimiles.” We need it all the time. If there is any other thing that characterizes the recent appearances in the journals and periodicals today, it is reappraisal.

Everything in Egyptian is being reappraised. The old stories that students have sputtered over for years, or have bluffed their way through, are all being reread and reappraised, especially with an eye to religious, political, historical, philosophical intent and content that may have escaped former generations. What Brother Ashment has shown us is that we do not look with care and we do not read with care. This was all available; you did not need to be

Nibley's response to a criticism of the historicity of the Book of Abraham by Edward H. Ashment at the Sunstone Theological Symposium at the University of Utah on 24–25 August 1979 appeared in Sunstone, December 1979, 49–51.

1. [On the way to Salt Lake City for the symposium, Nibley complained in considerable detail to Louis Midgley about what Ashment had written. But he also indicated that since Ashment was a young fellow just getting his feet wet (he was a graduate student), it would therefore be inappropriate to dash his youthful illusions; instead, he would let him have his moment in the sun—eds.]

an Egyptologist to know any of that, for it was just common sense—except for the interpretation.

I refuse to be held responsible for anything I wrote more than three years ago. For heaven's sake, I hope we are moving forward here. After all, the implication that one mistake and it is all over with—how flattering to think in forty years I have not made one slip and I am still in business! I would say about four-fifths of everything I put down has changed, of course. That is the whole idea; this is an ongoing process, and I have some interesting examples of that.

There is a doctoral dissertation that has just come out of Germany by a young man who has taken over a hundred facsimiles matching our Facsimile 3, private and so forth, and compared them.² The results show that they all look very much alike. But the accompanying inscriptions show that they tell the widest variety of stories. They use the same images to tell all sorts of stories with great freedom. Not uncommonly in a scene in which all is ordinary and familiar, or seems so, a completely unexpected and unorthodox figure will appear, and it changes the interpretation of the whole thing.

Now, Facsimile 1 is a unique document. I dispute the idea that it is not. There are plenty of things that are different about it, and they are essential things. Most of them may be due to sloppiness, but, whatever the reason, there are things there that cannot be found in that order and combination anywhere else.

Here is one example: The proposition that Anubis is never drawn with a human head. How can we say "never"? Even in Helck and Otto's *Lexikon* you can find Anubis drawn with a human head (with the head of a priest clearly drawn

2. See Ali Radwan, *Die Darstellungen des regierenden Königs und seiner Familienangehörigen in den Privatgräbern der 18. Dynastie* (Berlin: Hessling, 1969).

beneath the Anubis mask);³ every Egyptian who looked at it knew that this was a man, a human priest wearing a mask. The point is that it shows that a figure standing in the position of Anubis and wearing the same outfit Anubis does, does not have to be Anubis or have his head. However, in this case I think it was Anubis.

The man with the Anubis head is a priest; he is the priest of Pharaoh, and he is sacrificing. That is Anubis's business: he is to wrap up the dead and send him on his way. And this is regarded as a form of sacrifice, too. With the incision he makes, the embalming priest is performing a sacrifice. The person has to follow the example of Osiris being sacrificed, and so forth.

You can never say, and I will keep repeating everlastingly, that the final reports are in and we have heard from all the precincts. The thing is full of surprises.

One of Brother Ashment's good contributions here is the reminder that the state of mind of the people—both ancient and modern—who produced the Book of Abraham must be taken into consideration when evaluating it. Also, he makes a valuable contribution to remind us that the Book of Abraham, written by him [Abraham], is a document in itself, the facsimiles being attached by way of explanation. He showed us that attached nature; the explanations of the papyri are given as Joseph Smith's own and not as Abraham's. One of the most interesting things about the new *Apocalypse of Abraham*, discovered in 1895, was that it is written in the first person. It starts out: "I, Abraham," and so forth. The same phenomenon marks our Book of Abraham, which begins: "I, Abraham." But in the explanations to the cut, Abraham is in the third person, and Brother Ashment has shown us other reasons for accepting its detachment from the text of Abraham.

3. Wolfgang Helck and Eberhard Otto, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 1: s.v. "Aspektive," Abb. 9.

It is not “myself on the altar,” but “this shows Abraham on the altar,” with a comfortable detachment. The purpose of the pictures is to illustrate the Abraham story; they are being used as such in the manner of which hundreds of Egyptian autobiographies are illustrated, using conventional scenes with minimal alteration; sometimes they use more, such as in the study I was referring to from Germany. For example, they would use the reception scene again and again and again to describe totally different events taking place. That is, the main theme is the same, but it is a different family, a different occurrence, on a different occasion, for a different reason, and so forth—different things are going on.

So the Egyptians were much freer than we think. This is a thing we overlook, too. We think of them just as the popular artists, dancers, and so forth. We think of the Egyptian people as always moving in painfully angular and strained positions; everything has to be at a forty-five degree angle or an Egyptian cannot do anything. In the same way Egyptology has always confined Egyptian to a painfully limited scope of ideas and expressions. But they were much freer than we think.

Incidentally, concerning the last thing Brother Ashment said: It is a very good conclusion of what went on. I have written material which is just a continuation of what he has told us. It goes along like this: But was not Smith in on it? He was indeed sharing his ideas with others for both works—the Kirtland Egyptian Papers (KEP)⁴ and the translations (connected with it) were purely speculative and exploratory. How do we know that? Because each of the five men participating makes his own contribution, no two of their interpretations are identical, and the whole thing is quite fluid as Brother Ashment says, for corrections were made with the Phelps manuscript.

4. [Earlier Nibley called this collection of papers the Alphabet and Grammar, but in his later publications he identified them as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers—eds.]

The most ambitious version of the KEP, Phelps's of course, ground to a halt after a single page. His equally ambitious alphabet was given up after a page and a half, before the second letter was completed.⁵ Then what is behind it? Obviously, they are trying to do what they say they are—to produce an alphabet and grammar of the Egyptian language. Nothing is said about the translation of Abraham. Their interest in such an enterprise was perfectly legitimate and understandable. They had priceless Egyptian manuscripts in their possession and were irresistibly drawn to search for clues. The decipherment of Egyptian was a problem which excited many at that time. Brother Ashment hit it on the head when he wrote, "It seems that he [Joseph Smith] still felt challenged by the papyri to decipher ancient Egyptian."⁶

This is more than a surmise. Among the KEP we have some of Phelps's independent attempts at a translation of the Bible. In Section 8 of the Doctrine and Covenants we learn how eager Oliver Cowdery was—one of that group—to get into the engravings of ancient records. The instructions given Cowdery in the matter are extremely important. He is not to expect power to translate to come to him as a gift, but must first study it out in his mind and only then must he ask if it be right—no guarantee of acceptance (see D&C 9). This is the process we see going on in these Egyptian exercises. They were studying it out in their own minds. They got a blind alley here, and they immediately dropped it. This is very important.

It is also important to note that the Prophet had a real interest in ancient languages, perfectly legitimate, and studied them the hard way, but only after he had completed all of his inspired translations. Thus, he studied Hebrew and German along with the brethren and looked about for a

5. See "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," in this volume, *CWHN* 18:516–24.

6. Edward H. Ashment, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Reappraisal," *Sunstone*, December 1979, 44.

Greek teacher. But that lively interest in ancient languages blossomed in Kirtland only after he finished his new translation of the Bible, translating the Book of Abraham at the same time—by the same method, incidentally. Greek and Hebrew dictionaries and grammars were available for their studies, but what about Egyptian? They would have to make their own, exactly as the great Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609) urged his students to make their own dictionaries and grammars of Greek, Latin, and more exotic languages.

Joseph Smith's translation of the Old Testament is one thing; his Hebrew and German lessons from my great-grandfather long after were something else. Likewise, his translation of the Book of Abraham was one thing while his discussions and speculations and intellectual flights with the brethren in Kirtland were again something else. You mean they were interested only in making a grammar? Well, that is the wildest suggestion of all! Just look at the documents. Could anyone possibly use them for anything? Just try it! It has been wildly proclaimed that the grammar showed how Joseph did his translations—the precise *modus operandi*. Let someone show us how the *modus operandi* worked. To date no one has tried to turn the key, understandably, since it will not fit into any lock.

Aside from the wild nature of the stuff, we have seen that it is not nearly enough alphabet and grammar to be of use to anyone. The point is that they were giving it the old college try. Joseph Smith always did. They were challenged to do it. The Lord said “do your best” to Oliver Cowdery; “you wanted to translate—you have to work on it first and then I will let you know” (see D&C 9:8).

Since hearing Brother Ashment, I have to make some changes in what I have already said. Do I have to hang my head and go hide or something like that because I have been discredited? These things are being found out all the time. There are lots of things that Brother Ashment pointed out

that I should have noticed, but I notice I could point out a lot of things that he has not.

But who can do all that stuff? We, like them, have to do what we can, and certainly the main thing is to move on into unexplored territory and go into it with the careful, meticulous examination that he has. Thank you, Brother Ashment! That is all I will say for now.

[Sunstone] Editors' Note

The preceding response has been printed as given at the 1979 Sunstone Theological Symposium by Dr. Nibley. However, he wished to make some additional comments and to clarify a couple of his points made earlier. Therefore, some paragraphs were omitted from the oral response as given and have been altered slightly for inclusion in this addendum. This was done primarily for the purpose of elucidation, not for altering the position or point of view. The following, then, constitutes a written addition to Dr. Nibley's response, which we publish at his request.

The Sunstone Symposium on 24–25 August 1979 was not the time or place for a serious discussion of things Egyptian. We could have gone on for days arguing about what *might* have been contained in the missing parts of the three facsimiles in the Book of Abraham, while ignoring the parts of the facsimiles that are not missing. In view of the enormous mass of documentary material which Joseph Smith has put into our hands for testing, this business of going far out of the way to dig up highly dubious information is inexcusable.

The two rules to follow here are (1) to ask the right questions and (2) to keep looking. What is the one question which the Book of Abraham confronts us with before all others? Simply this: Is it a true history? I believe that it is and have always believed it. I am biased. Other people believe that it is not and have always believed that: they have never been able to take the question seriously, let alone look for

an answer. So there is a deadlock—we can stop there. But if either side from idle curiosity should feel inclined to step away from square one, the Big Question must be broken up into little questions that are easier to handle.

For example, at present some non-Latter-day Saint scholars are taking very seriously such questions as, Is there anything to the proposition [suggested long after Joseph Smith published it] that Abraham wrote an autobiography in Egypt or under very strong Egyptian influence? Are the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* attempts (cir. A.D. first century) to reproduce the autobiography? Was it originally illustrated by vignettes from the Egyptian Book of the Dead? Believe it or not, all these questions are being answered in the affirmative today by serious students. Has anyone noticed that the first appearance in English of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, in the same year it was rendered by G. Nathanael Bonwetsch into German, was in the pages of the *Improvement Era*, with due notice of resemblances to the Book of Abraham?⁷

Egyptologists, even more than other scientists, have always lived in a world of invidious comparison, every one of them concerned first and foremost with the impression he is making on others. Moreover, because very few people study Egyptian, which is not even written in a decent alphabet but with mysterious little pictures, it has always been easy for students of the subject to bamboozle the public. With Joseph Smith, they have had a field day, never being required to produce any evidence beyond their credentials.

So to our point number two: *keep looking!* One eminent Egyptologist objected that the idea of the hawk as a messenger, “the angel of the Lord” in Facsimile 1, was alien to the Egyptians. Just as he made that statement an article appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache* on the

7. G. Nathanael Bonwetsch, “The Book of the Revelation of Abraham,” trans. Edward H. Anderson and R. T. Haag, *IE* 1 (August 1898): 705–14, 793–806.

subject of the hawk as a messenger in Egyptian tradition.⁸ Again, competent Egyptologists protested that nothing is known of an Egyptian interpretation to match that given for figure 4 on Facsimile 2: (1) Raukeeyang expanse or firmament of the heavens, (2) a numerical figure . . . signifying 1,000, (3) functioning in the measure of time in the cycles of the universe. A trip to the *Wörterbuch* would have shown the word, (1) meaning “its soul is a thousand fold,” (2) measuring the passing of time at the New Year, and (3) representing the expanse of the starry heavens.⁹ Of these things and much, much more we speak in what we hope is a forthcoming book.¹⁰

If there is a possibility that the Book of Abraham is authentic, then there is something seriously missing in our knowledge of the Egyptians. The latter possibility has always haunted Egyptologists and intrigued the public.

The Egyptian *abaton* has always had an irresistible fascination for any who have come in sight of it, inviting the wildest excesses of speculation. To put Egyptology on a sound footing, it was felt necessary to call a halt to this sort of thing: The Ermans and the Gardiners shut the door with a resounding bang. Unfortunately, in so doing they also locked themselves out of the temple and threw away the key. How can we expect a science to make progress when the inviolable rule of research is to limit all inquiry to what we already know? Is it any wonder they have so little to teach us?

8. See Jan Zandee, “Sargtexte, Spruch 75 (Coffin Texts I 314–348a),” *ZÄS* 97 (1971): 155–62; Zandee, “Sargtexte, Spruch 75: Fortsetzung (Coffin Texts I 348b–372c),” *ZÄS* 98/2 (1972): 149–55; and Zandee, “Sargtexte, Spruch 75: Schluss (Coffin Texts I 372d–405c),” *ZÄS* 99/1 (1972): 48–63.

9. *Wb*, 3:230.

10. He is probably referring to *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981).

11

The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers

Insufficient Evidence Is the Best Kind

Filed together in a gray cardboard box in the Church Historian's Office is a strange batch of early Church papers, all in the handwriting of men associated with Joseph Smith in Kirtland 1835–37 and in Nauvoo 1841–42, and all classified for one reason or another as “Egyptian” (fig. 60). We shall therefore call them the “Kirtland Egyptian Papers.”¹ Along with a number of odds and ends are two impressive documents: one a bound manuscript commonly and falsely designated as “Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,”² and the

This paper appeared originally in BYU Studies 11/4 (1971): 350–99. [Brian M. Hauglid was the principal editor of this article.]

1. [The classification “Kirtland Egyptian Papers” is somewhat a misnomer. The papers that focus strictly on Egyptian grammar, alphabet, and numbers were all produced in the Kirtland period and can rightly be identified as the “Kirtland Egyptian Papers.” However, the papers that focus on the Book of Abraham text were produced in both the Kirtland and Nauvoo periods and are quite different from the Egyptian papers. Therefore, it would be more correct to designate these papers as the “Book of Abraham Papers” or “Book of Abraham Manuscripts”—eds.]

2. [This bound volume is “falsely designated” in two ways: (1) it is not conclusively tied to Joseph Smith, and (2) its actual title is “Grammar & Aphabet [*sic*] of the Egyptian Language”—eds.]

other purported to be the first chapter and a half of the Book of Abraham as translated from a number of accompanying hieratic symbols.³ A photographic record of some of these documents was made on a single filmstrip by the Church Historian's Office some years ago, but nothing was put on the strip to indicate the nature, number, or relationship of the various items included. So when the film was purloined, reproduced without permission, and copies sold in Salt Lake City in 1966, the publishers had no means of knowing what they were dealing with, but joyfully accepted the signature of Joseph Smith on one piece of paper as proof that the whole batch was his own handiwork.⁴

The public was only too glad to go along with the ruse, which went unchallenged by the Mormons, who had unconsciously laid the foundation of a massive misunderstanding many years before. In February of 1935, when a bound manuscript captioned "Grammar & Aphabet [*sic*] of the Egyptian Language" turned up in the Church Historian's Office, the finders were understandably eager to claim the discovery of a major writing of Joseph Smith himself; they not only accepted the thing as his work without question or examination, but even went so far as to label it "Joseph Smith's Translation of Abraham's Alphabet and Grammar."⁵ Small

3. [Nibley points to three manuscripts from fall 1835 that contain roughly Abraham 1:1-2:18. Another manuscript (1841-42) also covers Abraham 1:1-2:18 but does not contain any hieratic characters (cf. chart for details)—eds.]

4. [Cf. chart for details of scribes. The microfilm Nibley refers to here was produced in the 1950s for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and included all the Egyptian papers and only Abraham Mss. #2 and #3 (and also some unrelated Arabic documents). An unidentified individual made the microfilm accessible to Jerald Tanner, who published it in 1966 under the title "Joseph Smith's Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar"—eds.]

5. James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 156. Clark's suggestion (pp. 109-10) that this may be a translation of a grammar written by Abraham meets with many objections, not the least of which is that the Prophet records in the "Joseph Smith 'Diary'" kept by Willard Richards, 1842-44, under the date of "Wednesday Nov 15 1843. . . . P. M. at the office. Suggested the idea of preparing a grammar of

Egyptian Manuscripts (Ms. 1295)

Folder Number	Date [Editor's]	Physical Description	Dimensions
#1	ca. 1837 [1836/37]	1 vol., 34 pages + 186 blank	31 x 20 cm
Manuscript entitled "Grammar & Alphabet [<i>sic</i>] of the Egyptian Language," in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish.			
#2	ca. 1837 [1836/37]	1 sheet, 2 pages	33 x 20 cm
Manuscript entitled "Egyptian counting," in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps. Characters with English explanations.			
#3	ca. 1837 [Oct. 1835]	2 sheets, 4 pages	32 x 20 cm
Manuscript entitled "Egyptian alphabet," in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps.			
#4	ca. 1837 [Oct. 1835]	5 sheets, 9 pages	33 x 20 cm
Manuscript entitled "Egyptian alphabet," in the handwriting of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.			
#5	ca. 1837 [Oct. 1835]	4 sheets, 4 pages	various sizes
Manuscript in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. Top has deteriorated, similarity to Mss. 3 and 4 indicates it was probably titled "Egyptian alphabet."			
#6	ca. 1837 [Oct. 1835]	1 vol., 3 pages, 9 pages blank	20 x 15 cm
Front cover titled "Valuable discovery of hidden [<i>sic</i>] records." Signature in the handwriting of Joseph Smith. English contents are in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. Signature on the cover F. G. Williams.			
#7	ca. 1837 [1836/37]	1 vol., 3 pages, 8–9 blank	20 x 16 cm
English contents in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps. Back cover has "F.G.W." and "Williams" inscribed on it.			
#8	ca. 1837 [1836/37]	1 sheet (1 fold)	32 x 40 cm
Egyptian characters and hieroglyphs.			
#9	ca. 1837 [1836/37]	1 sheet	39 x 19 cm
Characters by unknown person.			
#10	n.d.	1 sheet	33 x 20 cm
Egyptian Papyrus attached to a sheet of paper. Present location unknown. [Only nine folders remain at present—eds.]			

Book of Abraham Manuscripts (Ms. 1294)

Folder Number	Date	Physical Description	Dimensions
#1	ca. 1837 [1835]	5 sheets, 10 pages	32 x 20 cm
Translation of the Book of Abraham, 1:1 to 2:18, in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish. Obtained from Wilford C. Wood.			
#2	ca. 1837 [1835]	2 sheets, 4 pages	33 x 19 cm
Book of Abraham, 1:4 to 2:6, in the handwriting of Phelps [F. G. Williams—eds.].			
#3	ca. 1837 [1835]	3 sheets, 6 pages	32 x 19 cm
Book of Abraham, 1:4 to 2:2, in the handwriting of Warren Parrish.			
#4	1841 [1841/42]	13 sheets, 14 pages + 1 sheet, 2 pages	29 x 20 cm
Book of Abraham, 1:1–2:18, 3:18–26 [separate sheet], Fac. 1 with explanation, reverse of p. 2, in the handwriting of Willard Richards.			
#5 Fac. 2	ca. 1841 [1841/42]	3 pages	various sizes
Includes explanations in the handwriting of Willard Richards.			
Fac. 2	ca. 1843 [1842]	broadside	32 x 19 cm
Engraved by Reuben Hedlock [or Willard Richards—eds.]			
Fac. ??? ⁶			
With explanation of the characters. Present location unknown.			

Figure 60. Manuscripts in the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

wonder that the parties who since 1966 have diligently exploited this document as a weapon against the Prophet

the Egyptian language." Scott H. Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 427. [A few of the sources in this article have been updated—eds.]

6. [Nibley here notes a facsimile manuscript "from the Book of Abraham with explanation of the characters. (On the back is a letter, Aug. 1, 1843, to Clyde Williams & Co., Harrisburg, Pa., signed by Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps.)" At present it is unclear which manuscript Nibley is referring to and where it is now located. The updating here is based on what is currently in the archives of the Church Historian's Office. However, while some of the above data is unknown, Nibley's chart is still essentially correct—eds.]

have been only too happy to accept, on the authority of the Mormons themselves, the quite untested and untenable propositions that Joseph Smith actually wrote the thing and that he also translated that other text (the first chapter and part of the second chapter of the Book of Abraham) from the Egyptian symbols that accompany it.

The crucial documents upon which these false assumptions are based are

- the one which has been misleadingly dubbed “Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar” (Egyptian Ms. #1, hereafter referred to as A&G),⁷
- three manuscripts of Abraham containing roughly Abraham 1:1–2:18 (designated as Book of Abraham Mss. [#1,] #2, and #3 by the Church Historian’s Office),⁸ and
- a piece of paper (Egyptian Ms. #6) bearing the signature of Joseph Smith, thus incriminating him as the author of everything.

When in 1967 the original Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri became available and it was found that they contained some of the same characters as those accompanying the English texts of the above-mentioned Book of Abraham Mss. #1, #2, and #3, the “Fall of the Book of Abraham” was proclaimed with the usual orgiastic ecstasies of the *Salt Lake City Messenger*. Mr. Richard P. Howard of the Reorganized LDS Church

7. Obtainable under the title of *Joseph Smith’s Alphabet and Grammar*, from the Modern Microfilm Company in Salt Lake City, published in 1966. [Nibley objects to the use of Joseph Smith’s name in the title—eds.]

8. [See chart for details on how much Book of Abraham text each of the three manuscripts specifically covers. The omission of Book of Abraham Ms. #1 suggests Nibley focused on the microfilm, which contained only Mss. #2 and #3, to answer the critics. Wilford Wood purchased Ms. #1 from Charles Bidamon in 1935 and donated it to the Church in 1937. See “Joseph Smith Manuscript Given Church,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 22 July 1937. Ms. #1 covers Abraham 1:1–2:18, has Egyptian characters, and is dated to the same general time period as Mss. #2 and #3 (1835). Since the critics are now very aware of this manuscript, it will be included throughout this paper with its counterpart manuscripts—eds.]

[now called Community of Christ] then took up the theme—receiving national attention through an article by Mr. Wallace Turner published in the *New York Times*—and claimed that the discovery and publication of fragments of the original papyri from which Joseph Smith produced the Book of Abraham “has given us the key to an authentic appraisal of the process by which the Book of Abraham text was formulated by Joseph Smith.”⁹ Howard assumed without question or examination that Joseph Smith “produced the Book of Abraham” from these very papyri, and he argues that any such derivation would be impossible. But what do we know of the “process by which the Book of Abraham was formulated”? For that, according to Howard, we must go to “Joseph Smith’s Original Alphabet and Grammar,” where even “a quick glance . . . discloses the *modus operandi* of Joseph Smith in determining its contents.” He assures us that “all of the text from Abraham 1:4–2:18 has been verified as having originated in this way.”¹⁰ In *what* way? What is the “process,” the *modus operandi* which Mr. Howard finds so obvious? If he knows so well how it was done, let him give us an independent translation of some of these texts using the same method. Anyone undertaking such an exercise will quickly begin to ask himself, “Is this really the very text, is this the very Alphabet and Grammar, is this the very process?” And if he honestly wants an answer he will soon discover the fatal defect in these documents—namely, that they are both random and fragmentary. There is a lot more to the story than they alone can tell us. Mr. Howard’s unawareness shows when he clinches his argument with an entry in the Joseph Smith History: “The remainder of this month I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet

9. Richard P. Howard, “The ‘Book of Abraham’ in the Light of History and Egyptology,” *Courage* (April 1970): 38; cf. Wallace Turner, “Mormon’s Book of Abraham Called Product of Imagination,” *New York Times*, 3 May 1970, 43; and Wallace Turner, “Scholar Questions Basis of LDS Negro Position,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 4 May 1970, 12B.

10. Howard, “‘Book of Abraham,’” 41.

to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar.”¹¹ For Howard this is “an indication of how and when he proceeded to do it.”¹² But no matter how carefully one reads the passage, it tells us neither when, how, nor by whom the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were produced. The period referred to was only ten days in July 1835, while our papers were turned out years later;¹³ the Egyptian materials found in the A&G are, as we shall see, *not* those used in the purported translations labeled Book of Abraham Mss. #1, #2, and #3; and where does Joseph Smith come into the picture? By persistent repetition of his name in every other line and in every context, and by strict avoidance of the names of the men who actually wrote the documents, it is an easy matter to stick Joseph Smith with the whole thing.

The trouble is that the stolen film¹⁴ was both an incomplete and an indiscriminating document, though repeated reference to it as “the original film” seeks to cover up these fatal defects. There is nothing in the film to show what the various documents included in it have to do with each other; where each begins and ends; how many there are; what the purpose of each is. Above all, these few items do not represent the whole collection of Kirtland Egyptian documents: Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3, for example (which are included in the film), are far less important than Book of Abraham Mss. #1 and #4 (which are not), which alone can tell us what #2 and #3 are about.¹⁵ It is the missing documents that make all the difference, and had the critics been

11. *History of the Church*, 2:238.

12. Howard, “Book of Abraham,” 37, quoting from *Millennial Star* 15 (7 May 1853): 297.

13. [This point is now considerably more complex. Note the new dating suggested in Nibley’s accompanying chart, pp. 504–5—eds.]

14. [Cf. note 4 above—eds.]

15. [What Mss. #1 and #4 tell us is that Mss. #2 and #3 (ca. 1835) are the earliest of the four manuscripts and are more significant than was earlier thought. It is also clear that Ms. #1 (ca. 1835) is a copy of Ms. #3 and that Ms. #4 is the latest of the four Book of Abraham manuscripts

honest, they would have asked themselves from the first whether the odd and contradictory stuff that fell into their hands really told the whole story.

An Extended Production Schedule

The Kirtland Egyptian Papers are written in the handwriting of six men: W. W. Phelps, Frederick G. Williams, Warren Parrish, Oliver Cowdery, Willard Richards, and Joseph Smith.

The document in Willard Richards's handwriting (Book of Abraham Ms. #4) is dated 1841—the date is written on the back of it in the hand of Thomas Bullock—and contains no Egyptian characters. F. G. Williams's contribution is little more than a signature on the cover of Egyptian Ms. #6.¹⁶ This leaves Phelps, [F. G. Williams],¹⁷ Parrish, and Cowdery as the key operators. Cowdery and Phelps could have done their work between July 1835 (when the papyri reached Kirtland) and early 1838 (when both men broke with the Prophet). It is Parrish, who worked closely with Phelps, who limits the time span: he became a scribe to the Prophet on 29 October 1835 and was dismissed in December 1837 when Joseph Smith discovered that he had been working against him. Soon afterwards Parrish was excommunicated and never returned to the Church. This means that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were produced no earlier than fall 1835 and no later than 1837.¹⁸ For all these matters the reader is referred to Dean Jessee's article in *BYU Studies*.¹⁹

(1841/42) and is likely the printer's copy for the first installment of the Book of Abraham in the *Times and Seasons*—eds.]

16. [Book of Abraham Ms. #2 was initially thought to be in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps. It has since been determined that Ms. #2 is in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams—eds.]

17. [Bracketed insertions in the text are editor's changes—eds.]

18. [Although Egyptian Mss. #3–#5 (Egyptian Alphabet) may have been created as early as July 1835—eds.]

19. Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 439–73.

Joseph Smith first heard of the papyri on about 1 July 1835. After 19 July 1835, the Prophet, according to his journal, spent “the remainder of this month . . . continually engaged in . . . arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients.”²⁰ On 1 October 1835, he stayed at home and “labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding.”²¹ Then on Tuesday, 17 November 1835, he “exhibited the alphabet of the ancient records, to Mr. Holmes, and some others. Went with him to Frederick G. Williams’, to see the mummies.”²² There is no mention of his working on a grammar or alphabet on the last day named; indeed, in the whole daily record of his activities only twelve days are mentioned on which he worked in those fields, and the work could hardly have been more than a preliminary speculation and blocking out of approaches. After the initial excitement, other concerns had priority, and a bare six weeks after the work had begun Phelps wrote to his wife: “Nothing has been doing in the translation of the Egyptian record for a long time, and probably will not for some time to come.”²³ In December 1835 Oliver Cowdery wrote a long and enthusiastic article on the Egyptian papyri for the *Messenger and Advocate*, promising more to come. Yet the subject is never mentioned again in Church publications until 1842, even though articles continued to appear by the same

20. *History of the Church*, 2:238.

21. *Ibid.*, 2:286 (also recorded in a number of other sources).

22. *Ibid.*, 2:316.

23. W. D. Bowen, “The Versatile W. W. Phelps—Mormon Writer, Educator, and Pioneer” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, August 1958), 68 (letter of 11 September 1835). [Cf. also Bruce Van Orden, “W. W. Phelps: His Ohio Contributions, 1835–1836,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: Ohio*, ed. Milton V. Backman Jr. (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1990), 51—eds.]

brethren—Phelps, Cowdery, and Parrish—on such subjects as “Ancient History—Egypt” (in two parts) and “An Account of Abraham.”

Moreover, we nowhere find mention of Joseph Smith engaged in translating the Book of Abraham itself before October 1840, when he reports that though the papyri had been “unrolled and preserved with great labor and care, my time has been hitherto too much taken up to translate the whole of them.”²⁴ After five years the work had hardly got beyond the physical manipulation of the documents. By the end of 1837 the chapter and a half that appear in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers had been translated, but in November of that year the Prophet still sought “means to translate and print the records taken from the Catacombs of Egypt.”²⁵ Most of the work, that is, was still to be done long after the men who wrote the Kirtland Egyptian Papers had left the Church, and none of it was published until 1842, five years later. Wilford Woodruff was thrilled when in February 1842 “Joseph the Seer . . . presented . . . some of the Book of Abraham” to a group of the Saints. It was exciting news: “Joseph has had these records in his possession for several years but has never presented them before the world in the English language until now.”²⁶ Ten days later the Prophet corrected Reuben Hedlock’s engraving for the issue of the *Times and Seasons* appearing on 15 March 1842,²⁷ and on the following day read proof of “the commencement of the Book of Abraham.”²⁸ Two days later he was again studying the original papyri with Hedlock “so that he might take the size of the

24. *Quincy Whig* 3/1 (17 October 1840), cited by Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 112. [Although the three 1835 Abraham manuscripts attest that Joseph must have done some translation before 1840—eds.]

25. *History of the Church*, 2:520–21.

26. Wilford Woodruff Diary (Ms.), 19 February 1842, cited in Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 168–69.

27. *History of the Church*, 4:519.

28. *Ibid.*, 4:542.

several plates or cuts.”²⁹ Then after three days he “recommenced translating from the Records of Abraham,” and on the afternoon of the following day “continued the translation of the Book of Abraham,” and after some Church business “continued translating and revising, and reading letters in the evening.”³⁰ Thus we see that even the rare occasions on which he found time to translate were interrupted by business of various sorts. James R. Clark posits that “the five chapters or 13 pages of the Book of Abraham” were all turned out in the thirty days between 19 February and 19 March 1842; compared with the size of the Book of Mormon and its rate of production, this is quite a minor performance.³¹ Clark suggests that “Joseph Smith had not until February of 1842 seriously undertaken the translation of the *texts* of the papyrus rolls, but had concentrated on Abraham’s *Alphabet and Grammar* from 1835 to 1842.”³² But to say that he worked *only* on the grammar is not to say that he worked long and hard on it; we know from his journal histories that he hardly got started on the project and could devote very little time to it. A note written by Willard Richards at the dictation of the Prophet, for an entry on Wednesday, 15 November 1843, states: “P.M. at the office. Suggested the idea of preparing a grammar of the Egyptian language.”³³ It

29. *Ibid.*, 4:543.

30. *Ibid.*, 4:548.

31. Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 173–74.

32. *Ibid.*, 173. [Since Book of Abraham Mss. #1–#3 date to fall 1835, it is reasonable to suggest that the Prophet had at least translated up to Abraham 2:18 by October–November 1835. In addition, the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants was sustained in August. In this edition code names were used to protect the identities of Joseph Smith and others. One of the code names “Shinehah” implies that the Prophet may have at least translated up to Abraham 3:13 by August 1835. In *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 4–5, John Gee postulates that in July 1835 Joseph Smith likely had translated all of what was published and much more—eds.]

33. *History of the Church*, 6:79.

is quite clear that any Egyptian grammar by Joseph Smith never got beyond the planning stage. The translation was never completed either, and in February 1843 the editors of the *Times and Seasons* could announce, “we had the promise of Br. Joseph, to furnish us with further extracts from the Book of Abraham.”³⁴ Certainly translation had never had to wait on the completion or even the beginning of a grammar. In all, Brother Joseph spent barely ten days “arranging” a grammar, which along with his many other duties would allow him only time to line up a few ideas. Most significant, the only grammar in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers is merely a page-and-a-half long, is a work of no practical value whatever, and was never employed in any translation.

Scripture or Stepchild?

Mr. Howard has informed the nation that “it may be helpful to suggest that the Book of Abraham represents simply the product of Joseph Smith Jr.’s imagination wrought out in the midst of what to him must have been a very crucial and demanding and complex set of circumstances.”³⁵ He generously concedes the Prophet the privilege of making a fool of himself in view of the severe pressure under which he was operating, the Book of Abraham being a sort of crash program undertaken in time of crisis. But this will never do. We have seen that the Prophet Joseph only worked on the Egyptian things when his time was not “too much taken up” with other things—that is, when he was *not* working in a crisis; such happy times did not come often, but they were spread over a period of eight years, so that whether he worked intensively on the project or not, he had plenty of time to consider what he was doing. It was not a rushed and crowded project but one reserved for scattered periods of relative leisure; Joseph Smith never did anything more calmly and deliberately. Even

34. *Times and Seasons* 4/6 (1 February 1843): 95.

35. Howard, “Book of Abraham,” 45.

if the whole thing was done at Nauvoo in the spring of 1842, the plan was conceived at the very beginning, in 1835, giving the Prophet years to think it over.

Again, Mr. Howard looks no farther than his own rhetoric for proof when he solemnly informs us that the Book of Abraham was not “any kind of ‘inspired’ translation, as the church has traditionally considered the Book of Mormon to have been,” and applauds his church for “trying to divorce Joseph Smith from the ideas expressed in the Book of Abraham.”³⁶ That argument concedes the Prophet’s ability to deal with reformed Egyptian but places ordinary Egyptian hopelessly beyond his reach.

Yet from the very beginning the Book of Abraham was viewed and discussed by the Latter-day Saints as authentic scripture. As soon as the Prophet got possession of the papyri, Phelps wrote to his wife that “the ‘rolls of papyrus’ contained the sacred record kept of Joseph in Pharaoh’s Court in Egypt, and the teachings of Father Abraham. God has so ordered it that these mummies and writings have been brought in the Church, and the sacred writing I had just locked up in Brother Joseph’s house when your letter came.” Moreover, these sacred records “will make a good witness for the Book of Mormon.”³⁷ In the envelope with this letter, the Prophet Joseph enclosed his own kind and comforting note to Sister Phelps back at the farm in Missouri, promising her that her husband would in time be able to teach her “hiden things of old times,” even “treasures hid in the sand” (citing Deuteronomy 33:19).³⁸ On 17 November 1835, the Prophet reported that an inspection of the same

36. *Ibid.*, 44–45.

37. Leah Y. Phelps, “Letters of Faith from Kirtland,” *IE* 45 (1942): 529. The letter is dated 19 July 1835. [Cf. also Van Orden, “W. W. Phelps: His Ohio Contributions,” 51. Van Orden’s citation does not include the phrase “in Brother Joseph’s house”—eds.]

38. A photograph of this letter in the Prophet’s hand accompanies Phelps’s article, “Letters of Faith from Kirtland.”

documents left his visitor, Mr. Holmes, “strong in the faith of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”³⁹ In his long article in the *Messenger and Advocate* a month later, Oliver Cowdery hailed the documents as “an inestimable acquisition to our present scriptures.”⁴⁰ The Prophet told another visitor, Josiah Quincy, according to the latter, that “these ancient records . . . throw great light on the subject of Christianity,” and though he never got around to demonstrating the point in detail, it is nonetheless true.⁴¹ Years later Orson Pratt recalled that “the Lord told him [Joseph Smith] they were sacred records, containing inspired writings of Abraham.”⁴² Indeed, how could writings of Abraham be considered anything but sacred? This “Book of Abraham,” as it was always called, “that is to be presented to the inhabitants of the EARTH in the LAST DAYS,” as Wilford Woodruff wrote just after a session with the Prophet Joseph,⁴³ can no more be dismissed as a secular aberration than its sponsoring as scripture can be denied to Joseph Smith, its principal enthusiast.

The Alphabet and Grammar

We have seen that Joseph Smith as early as 1835 and as late as 1843 “suggested the idea of preparing a grammar of the Egyptian language” and made some preliminary exploratory motions. They could not have been more than that—there was too much else going on and, as the journal history shows, chances for serious work were few and far between. We also know that he worked “in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps” and sought their advice and help. Also we know from the letters and journals of all those

39. *History of the Church*, 2:316.

40. *Messenger and Advocate* 2/3 (December 1835): 236 (emphasis added).

41. *Quincy Whig* 3/25 (17 October 1840): 1, cited in Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 112.

42. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 20:65.

43. Wilford Woodruff Diary (Ms.), 19 February 1842, cited in Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 169.

men that they were strong-minded, independent, and (all but one) ambitious to shine as revelators and translators in their own right. So when a document like the so-called “Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar” comes into our hands, before leaping to conclusions and inventing a title that is calculated and bound to cripple serious research, the first question to ask is, just who produced this? And right away we begin to notice a number of interesting things.

1. None of this is written by the hand of Joseph Smith, but it is all in the handwriting of William Wines Phelps, with the exception of five short appendages to certain sections written by the hand of Warren Parrish.

2. The A&G has no title page. It lies before us complete and undamaged in the original binding, but instead of a title page the writer did not even leave room for a title, so that the words “Grammar & Aphabet [*sic*] of the Egyptian Language” have to be awkwardly and unevenly crammed in at the top of the first page, as an afterthought when the page was completed (fig. 61). What makes this interesting is that Joseph Smith was a stickler for titles, as his publications will show.⁴⁴ Indeed, the one proper title page among

44. Apart from examples in the standard works, the indefatigable Dean Jessee, in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), calls our attention to documents dictated or written by the Prophet, for example, JS 1832–34 Diary: “Joseph Smith Jr- Record Book Bought for to note all the minute circumstances that comes under my observation (pp. 15, 39); JS 1835–36 Diary: “Sketch Book for the use

Figure 61. Egyptian Ms. #1. The entire grammar section of the “Grammar and Alphabet,” in the hand of W. W. Phelps, consists of this page and half of the following. [Nibley refers here to Egyptian Ms. #1, pp. 2–3 in the A&G. Grammar points are also discussed on the following pages of the A&G: 15, 16 (top), 17, 20, 21—eds.] The reader can decide for himself whether any of this material was used in the composition of the Book of Abraham, and if so how. All images in this chapter are courtesy of the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Grammar & Alphabet of the Egyptian Language

This is called *Za* known *hik*, or *Shal* *dicton* *hik*. This character is in the fifth degree, independent and arbitrary. It may be preceded in the fifth degree while it stands independent and arbitrary. That is, without a straight mark inserted above or below it. By inserting a straight mark

2

E

3

E

4

E

over it thus (2) it increases its signification five degrees: by inserting two straight lines, thus: (3) its signification is increased five times more. By inserting three straight lines thus (4) its signification is again increased five times more than the last. By counting the number of straight lines and preserving them, or considering them as qualifying adjectives we have the degrees of comparison. There are five connecting parts of speech in the above character, called *Za* or *hik*. These five connecting parts of speech, for verbs, participles, prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs.

In translating this character, the subject must be continued until there are as many of these connecting parts of speech used as there are connections or connecting parts found in the character. But whenever the character is found with one horizontal line, as at (2) the subject must be continued until ^{five times} the number of connecting parts of speech are used; or, the full sense of the writer is not conveyed. When two horizontal lines occur, the number of connecting parts of speech are continued five times further - or five degrees. And when three horizontal lines are found, the number of connections are to be increased five times further. The character alone has 5 parts of speech: increase by one straight line thus $5 \times 5 = 25$

the Kirtland Egyptian Papers was penned by Joseph Smith himself (see p. 531, fig. 64). Why, then, does this most ambitious work have no title page if Smith wrote or dictated it?

3. Stranger still, Joseph Smith is nowhere designated as the author. He always took full responsibility for what he wrote or dictated, as when in taking over the editorship of the *Times and Seasons* he took pains to make clear just who was responsible for what.⁴⁵ Even scriptures revealed through him bear his name conspicuously at their head. However reticent his disciples may have been, the Prophet knew that it was important to establish the authorship of any inspired writing.

4. The grammar and spelling throughout the book are very nearly perfect, which means that they are not Joseph Smith's. This book is in the hands of a literate writer, Phelps, the best-educated man in Kirtland. How much of it is his and how much Smith's remains to be seen and calls for investigation.⁴⁶

5. It was not the habit of Joseph Smith to suppress his revelations. He made every effort to see to it that each excerpt from the Book of Abraham was published to the world the moment it was presentable. "One cannot read the pages of the early periodicals of the Church," writes Clark, ". . . without being impressed with the fact that to Joseph Smith, availability of the new revelations of God where people could read them and immediately profit by their instruction was more important than the technicality of having a *complete text* of these ancient records at the start." Hence, Clark notes, it was

of Joseph Smith, jr." (pp. 58, 188); 1832 History: "A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr." (pp. 4, 9).

45. *Times and Seasons* 3/9 (1 March 1842): 710.

46. [Egyptian Ms. #4 is partially in the handwriting of Joseph Smith, which can be dated as early as October 1835. Ms. #6 is a notebook with Joseph Smith's signature. This too could be as early as October 1835. Presently the level of Joseph Smith's influence in the other Egyptian mss. cannot be determined with certainty—eds.]

his custom to publish them in the form of extracts as he went along.⁴⁷ But none of our Kirtland Egyptian Papers was ever published in any form; no one is challenged to put these writings to the test, as all the world was invited to examine the facsimiles and their explanations; no claims of revelation are made for them; no one claims authorship for them; no one is invited to inspect or comment or criticize. Those who have peddled the papers publicly have advertised them as “suppressed for 130 years.” If they were suppressed they can hardly be given the status of official documents, let alone that of a standard work. If the brethren were invited to try a hand at inspired writing and translation, to “study it out in your mind; then . . . ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:8), we need not be surprised if all sorts of speculative papers, diagrams, and word jugglings turn up as remnants of such preliminary study. It would be surprising, rather, if they did not. Even if the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were the work of Joseph Smith, their existence would not refute his claims to revelation unless by his own declaration they represent his own inspired translation of specific Egyptian texts. As it is, the A&G in the handwriting of Phelps was published by indiscriminating editors, who mingled it with the pages of three *other* versions of an A&G which we must consider before we decide which, if any, is the responsibility of Joseph Smith.

Egyptian Mss. #3, #4, and #5

In addition to the *bound* A&G, the Church Historian’s Office possesses three other documents which have been labeled Egyptian Mss. #3, #4, and #5. All share common contents with each other and with the A&G, but each has its own special interpretations. Ms. #3, in the handwriting of Phelps, consists of four pages, 7¾ by 12½, each written on one side of the paper only. It starts out bravely on page 1 with what it calls “Egyptian Alphabet first degree”; the page is carefully ruled into four

47. Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 173–74, 99.

columns which are headed, from left to right “Character,” “letter,” “sound,” and “Explanation” (fig. 62). Twenty-three hieratic signs are listed in the “Character” column; each one to be transliterated in the “letter” column into our alphabet, given its phonetic value in the next column, and finally received a single “explanation” of one short line. The system is quite different from the one followed in the A&G. The one-line explanations are carried on for the first page and for ten characters on the second page, but there they come to a stop: the next nineteen characters (the list of twenty-three being repeated over and over again under different “parts” and “degrees”) have their “sound” indicated, but no equivalent English “letter,” and no “explanation” is offered for any of them. For the next seventeen characters, including the first seven on page 3, not even the sounds are given. Thus—as in the A&G proper—this great project begins to fizzle out on the second page, and grinds to a halt on the third. It is significant that this document, like the A&G, is in the handwriting of Phelps.

An alphabet designated by the Church Historian’s Office as “Egyptian Ms. #4, cit. 1837” may well be in Joseph Smith’s own hand (fig. 63). It is on the same type and size of paper as Phelps’s Egyptian Ms. #3 and, like it, occupies four pages.⁴⁸ But there is an important difference between the two texts.

48. [The alphabet appears on only four of the nine pages of Egyptian Ms. #4—eds.]

Figure 62. Egyptian Ms. #3, p. 1. This “Egyptian Alphabet” by W. W. Phelps treats only twenty-three symbols, and the explanations cease after only a page and a half. It differs considerably from Phelps’s treatment of his “Alphabet” in his “A. & G.” as well as from the Joseph Smith “Alphabet.” Note that ambitious four-column beginning that is never followed through. Note especially that each character is interpreted in so few words that the basic idea can be expressed in two different ways in less than a line of text. This is in complete disagreement with the supposed translation of the characters in the Book of Abraham mss., in which each symbol requires a paragraph of 50 or 100 or more words for its interpretation, according to some critics.

10

- V Ah the first being who exercises Supreme power
- L pha the first man or one who has Kingly power or
- h pha a more universal reign having greater dominion or power
- JK ^{royal} ~~royal~~ family royal blood or pharaoh or supreme power king
- E ^{no sup hat} crown of a prince or queen or stands for queen
- + Kirgen unmarried or the principle of virtue
- 9010 O Kakh tou man the name of a royal family in female line
- Zii oop hah An unmarried woman and a virgin prince
- ho ee oop young unmarried man a prince
- Zip Zi woman married or unmarried or daughter
- o hore oop hah crown of a prince or King
- one whe or she the Earth
- o tone take or the tone ton-es beneath or under wa
- Iota the eye or to see or sight sometimes me myself
- o Iota ton-es Zip Zi the land of Egypt first ^{water} seen under
- L Sue Eh ni what other person is that or who
- T ho ee oop pha bak pha a government power or Kingdom
- L Zub Zool one the beginning first before pointing to
- H Zub Zool Eh in the beginning of the Earth Creation
- Zool Eh signifies to be in any as light in it
- L Zub the first Creation of any thing first ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{time}
- H Zub Zool from the first to any stated period ^{after}
- + Zool from any or some fixed period of time ^{each of the creation} to the beginning

The second part first degree

- A Ahmaos God without beginning or end
- V Aleph in the beginning with God the ^{first} ~~son~~ ^{born}
- o Albeth Angels or disembodied spirits ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{state} ~~state~~
- h Alcutbeth Angels in an unalterable immortal ^{state}
- h Achibeth ministers of God high precepts kings
- L Alchibeth ministers of God under or the legs
- L Alchorbeth ministers not ordained of God ^{simple}
- o Alehibeth ministers who are less sinful ^{persons} for want of
- o Baeth the name of all mankind man or ~~man~~
- o Baeth Ka Adam or the first man or first thing
- o Baeth Ke the next from Adam or ordained ^{under}
- o Baeth Ki the third patriarch
- o Baeth Ko the fourth from Adam
- o Baeth Ku



Figure 63. Egyptian Ms. #4, pp. 1, 2. An “Egyptian Alphabet” [partially] in the handwriting of Joseph Smith. Note (1) that the Egyptian signs are arranged according to form—vertical, horizontal, diagonal, etc.—and that the explanations are systematic classifications (a) of the hierarchy of royal power and its establishment in the land (part one), and (b) of heavenly power and its transfer to mankind (second part); (2) that the text differs in many particulars from that of W. W. Phelps; (3) that only twenty-three symbols are considered in each part, while the “second part” does not go beyond Aleph and Beth, the first two letters of the alphabet. From this it would appear that we have here a perfectly sane and rational approach to a problem, that the approach is experimental and not authoritarian, and that it was abandoned at an early stage.

In the “Joseph Smith” version the columns for “letters” and “sounds” are entirely missing.⁴⁹ The Phelps project is plainly the more ambitious of the two.

A third alphabet text (Egyptian Ms. #5) is, like the others, of four pages only, on the same paper and obviously produced as part of the same campaign. It is in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. The interesting thing is the way the three men disagree in their interpretations, each going his own way. Take for example the one sign that is constantly being rehashed in all the grammar and alphabet writings, the well-known reed-sign β , perhaps the most important and certainly the commonest of all hieroglyphic symbols. A special treatment of the reed-sign is tacked on at the end of each of the three copies. A comparison of the three texts is instructive.

Egyptian Ms. #3, p. 4 (Phelps):

Za ki on=hish, ^{Or} Kulsidon hish, The land of the Chaldees⁵⁰

Za ki an hish Ah=brah oam, the father of the faithful
thrones

~~the first right, unto whom is com~~
~~mited~~⁵¹

Egyptian Ms. #4, p. 4 (Smith):

Ah broam

~~^Ah-bra-oam. Signifies father of the faithful. The~~
~~first right-The elder~~⁵²

Egyptian Ms. #5, p. 3 (marked as p. 4) (Cowdery):

Zakiean-hi[^]sh, or Kulsidoan hiash—The land of the
Chaldeans.⁵³

49. [Although not titled “sounds,” in the Joseph Smith version, the characters are transliterated. It is evident another line for a column is drawn later as it overwrites the explanations—eds.]

50. [This line appears to be treating the character before the reed-sign—eds.]

51. [Minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

52. [Minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

53. [Minor transcription errors corrected. This line appears to be treating the character before the reed-sign. “Kulsidoan hiash” has been mended—eds.]

Each of these is interpreting the same sign, with no sovereign mastermind to bring them to a unity of the faith. Cowdery and Phelps hear different sounds and come up with different meanings. And Joseph freely lets them go their way while he goes his, each under obligation to “study it out in your mind” *before* asking for revelation. This is something that anti-Mormon writers have willfully misinterpreted from the first. Why, they have asked, would a prophet have to speculate and sweat like anybody else? Here is Brigham Young undertaking long and costly experiments to see whether corn or peaches or sugar beets or silkworms would thrive in the Great Basin. Some crops withered away, and others, contrary to the predictions of all the experts, flourished magnificently. If Brigham was a prophet, his enemies said, why didn’t God spare him the trouble of all that trial and error by giving him all the answers right at first? To which he answered, Why should God do that? Brigham and the people were all the wiser for their experience and, as the Mormons have always taught, our express purpose in coming to this earth is to gain just such experience. All his life Joseph Smith dealt with ancient documents, constantly stretching his own mind to bridge the gap of the unknown and then calling upon the Lord when a problem exceeded his powers. It is thus that we grow in knowledge and understanding.

Not a Key to Translation

All the grammar and alphabet projects viewed so far aborted dismally; none of them could ever have been used even as an imaginary basis for constructing the story of Abraham. Consider a few points:

1. The A&G (Egyptian Ms. #1) is a bound book, still complete with no pages missing.⁵⁴ Yet only 34 pages have writing on them while 186 are left blank. The written pages

54. [Subsequent research has revealed that the bound book does have signatures missing—eds.]

do not, however, run consecutively, but are scattered at intervals throughout the book, an average of 3 written pages being followed by 18 to 20 blank ones. Thus only about one-sixth of the intended operation was completed. The blank pages, carefully arranged and set apart for the other five-sixths, were never used. The A&G is thus a work barely begun, but that is not all—even the written part is but a timid preliminary, for

2. the A&G contains only *one* page of grammar, and that is limited to a discussion of degrees of comparison. These degrees are referred to in dealing with the symbols that make up the alphabet, and yet

3. the alphabet that follows consists of only thirty symbols. With hundreds of hieroglyphic and thousands of hieratic symbols to choose from, the author limits himself to only thirty of them. Why, since he is by no means bound by the conventional definition of an alphabet, does he stop with thirty?

4. And why, of the thirty symbols, is only *one*—the first one—completely explained? And why does he exhaust his ingenuity explaining that one (the reed-symbol, of course) no less than fifteen times, each time with a different shade of meaning? Some of the other symbols get short explanations, and these too are explained over and over again, each in its various “parts” and “degrees” while retaining its basic meaning. Even so, only half a dozen hieratic symbols are explained and all the rest of the magnificent accumulation of signs at the disposal of our scholars is ignored.

5. Stranger still, the signs that are explained are not found in the actual Egyptian documents, where there is no evidence of the placing of one, two, or three strokes above a sign, for example, and where there is nothing whatever to indicate the remarkably ogham-like arrangement of symbols in the A&G. And while the fascinating hieroglyphs that flank Facsimile 1 are duly noted and repeatedly listed, they receive no treatment at all, even though they are real

pictures and far more suggestive of ideas than anything in the hieratic lists. What is more, the signs treated in the “grammatical” texts are not the signs that turn up in the margins of Book of Abraham Mss. #1, #2, and #3, from which signs the Book of Abraham is supposed to have been copied. The point we wish to make here is not that the stuff is confused and nonsensical, but that it never came anywhere near approaching a point at which its author could pretend that the one-page grammar and the six-letter alphabet were serviceable.

6. It is maintained by Howard and others that the A&G is “Joseph Smith’s working papers,” showing us the toilsome and tedious steps of a creative work in progress. Working papers in the form of a bound volume, neatly written out in final and unalterable form? Working papers in a fair hand, without smudging, erasing, rewriting, without additions or alterations? Working papers without a dot set down by the intervening hand of Joseph Smith? In short, working papers that show no signs of any work, but rather reflect the scribal exercise of copying down an already completed text, free of any evidence of hesitation or deliberation? We have in the whole A&G fewer words than are contained in the average magazine feature-story—about thirteen typewritten pages. Can this represent long years of coming to grips with the Book of Abraham? This might be the final result of a lot of work—but the actual process of years of toil, the working papers of Joseph Smith? That is utter nonsense.

7. For what has the A&G to do with the Book of Abraham? In the “explanations,”⁵⁵ six incomplete and disconnected phrases from the text of the Book of Abraham are quoted, and that is all (Abraham 1:2, 3, 23, 26; 2:3, 5).⁵⁶ These are not sentences but simply very brief expressions taken

55. [Nibley is referring to the unmarked column to the right of the characters—eds.]

56. [See for example, Abraham 1:2 = A&G p. 3; Abraham 1:3 = A&G p. 3; Abraham 1:23 = A&G pp. 4, 5; Abraham 1:26 = A&G p. 5?; Abraham 2:3

out of context. They appear with proper meaning and context in the Book of Abraham, but only in a fragmentary and disconnected state in the A&G, which makes it perfectly clear that the Abraham text was already completed at the time these expressions were borrowed from it to help make the grammar. All the words quoted from the Book of Abraham in the A&G put together make up less than the bulk of the single verse Abraham 1:2. The idea that the Book of Abraham was worked out from, or even with the aid of the A&G, is simply ridiculous.

8. Because of the peculiar system of classes and degrees, almost every passage in the A&G appears more than once, and most of the symbols are given more than one interpretation. Thus Parrish gives five different explanations of the "Kolob" sign. Whatever the nature of the game these gentlemen are playing, it is of no help to a translator when any symbol can, without the slightest alteration, take on half a dozen different meanings. Which are we to take as the official translation?

9. Where do we find any evidence that any of the apparatus of the A&G was ever put to use? What are we to make of the total neglect of the more than 120 exotic names found in the pages of the A&G, none of which ever finds its way into the Book of Abraham?⁵⁷ The Book of Abraham is much concerned with numbers: why do none of the 79 surviving

= A&G p. 5; Abraham 1:11 (Onitah) = A&G p. 5 (Onitas); Abraham 1:15 = A&G p. 6; Abraham 1:26 = A&G p. 6; Abraham 2:11 = A&G p. 7—eds.]

57. Seven of the names appear in the explanation to Facsimile No. 2, but that is a modern explanation and not a translation of an ancient text. The point is not whether the names are supposed to be authentic but whether they were used in composing the Book of Abraham. [Only "Kolob" is used in the A&G (pp. 24, 25, 28, 30, 32), the Book of Abraham (3:3, 4, 9, 16; 5:13), and in the explanation to Facsimile 2 (figs. 1, 2, 5). Six other terms are used in the A&G and in Facsimile 2 (but not in the Book of Abraham): fig. 1, "Jah-oh-eh" (A&G pp. 24, 27, 29, 31, 33); fig. 2, "Oliblish" (A&G 24, 31); fig. 5, "Enish-go-on-dosh" (A&G pp. 24, 30), "Kae-e-vanrash" (A&G pp. 24, 27), "Floese" (A&G pp. 25, 27, 30, 31),

symbols or the ingenious names which designate the Egyptian numerals in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers ever show up in the Book of Abraham? Why, if the “alphabet” was devised for the translating of the book, do none of the 30 symbols of that alphabet have anything to do with it, except for 5 astronomical symbols in Facsimile 2? A Homeric grammar is based on Homer, a New Testament grammar on the New Testament; but the A&G and other papers supposedly based on the Egyptian texts of the Book of Abraham are almost entirely filled with stuff that has no relationship to the Book of Abraham as we have it.

Translations with Egyptian Symbols

Now we come to the critics’ Exhibit A, those manuscripts taken from the stolen film and published to the world as absolute proof that Joseph Smith did not translate Egyptian but mistook the Book of Breathings for the story of Abraham. We refer to two manuscript copies of the first chapter and part of the second chapter of the Book of Abraham which contain in their left-hand margins a number of hieratic symbols. The critics assume the English text to be a translation of the Egyptian characters. This is taking a lot for granted, even on the evidence of the two manuscripts, which go in the Church Historian’s Office under the titles of Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3.⁵⁸ Let us consider them before turning to the more important Book of Abraham Mss. #1 and #4,⁵⁹ which were not available to our pirates.

1. The first thing we notice about the Egyptian symbols in the margins is that they are not the symbols found in the A&G and related works. If the Book of Abraham is supposed to be based on the latter, then these hieratic characters cannot be considered as its source. And there is

and “Kli-flos-is-es” (A&G pp. 25, 28, 30, 32). These six names have no relationship to the Book of Abraham—eds.]

58. [Ms. numbers corrected—eds.]

59. [Ms. numbers corrected—eds.]

no reason why they should be, aside from the argument of mere juxtaposition.

2. But the position of the symbols raises more doubts than confidence: there are not nearly enough of them; they are much too far apart. Much capital has been made of the ridiculous disproportion between the eighteen brief hieratic symbols, which take up just two short lines of the Book of Breathings, and the long and involved history of Abraham which is supposedly derived from them. It is as if one were to detect evidence of fraud in the absurd disproportion between the page number on this page and the mass of print that goes along with it—can a little number possibly contain all that information? Well, is it supposed to? The clever men in Kirtland who wrote these strange documents had studied ancient languages and were quite as capable of noticing and pointing out such discrepancies as are the learned editors of the *Salt Lake Messenger*. For this we have good evidence in two Kirtland documents which deserve a brief side trip.

The "Valuable Discovery" and Its Twin. The only document among the Kirtland Egyptian Papers that bears the signature of Joseph Smith is a booklet (Egyptian Ms. #6) that has been made by doubling over six strips of tough, thin, unlined paper to form a brochure of 12 pages, 6 by 7 7/8 inches, sewn together along the fold. On the outside of the binding, which is made of a sheet of thinner and darker tissue paper and has slightly larger dimensions, is written in a bold scrawl: "Valuable Discovery of hidden records that have been obtained from the ancient burying place of the Egyptians. Joseph Smith Jr." (fig. 64). On the first of the following pages are 17 lines of Egyptian text, rather poorly copied hieratic characters from a funeral document. Under this in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery is a brief note stating where the text was found. There is no attempt at translation or interpretation. The next page contains seven more lines of the same Egyptian text and nothing else—not a word of English. The third and last page contains two brief notes in Cowdery's hand on the chronology

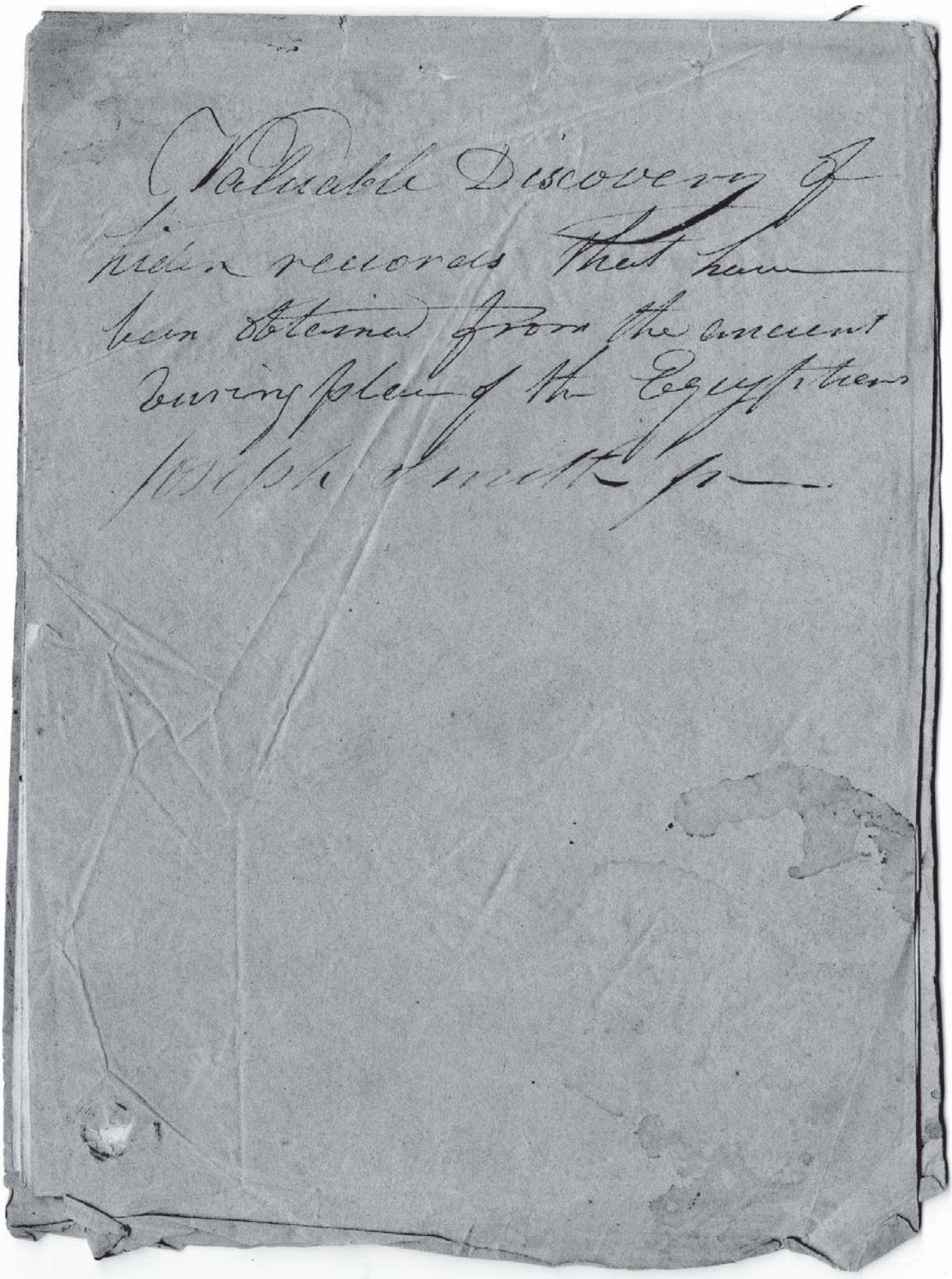


Figure 64. Egyptian Ms. #6. Joseph Smith has put his signature on the front cover of an Egyptian text which he labels a "Valuable Discovery." The text itself, however, consists of only two pages of hieratic copied down in a modern hand, without any translation, and a note, in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery, about a princess "Katumin" who is supposed to have lived a thousand years after Abraham and so has nothing to do with his story.

of a certain Princess Katumin, the first note preceded by three and the second by two unrecognizable characters. Since each note begins with the name of Katumin, one wonders how the name could be derived from totally different symbols. Was it supposed to be?

Along with the “Valuable Discovery” booklet goes another (Egyptian Ms. #7) made exactly like it of the same kind of paper and with the same type of cover, this time bearing the scrawled name of “Williams” on the back, as well as the initials “F G W.” So this would seem to be Frederick G. Williams’s work—only it is not, for the book inside is written in the hand of Phelps. Cowdery may have been acting as Joseph’s scribe in creating Egyptian Ms. #6; was Phelps the scribe for Williams? We can’t take the name on the cover of either of these books as proof of authorship.

On page 1 of Egyptian Ms. #7, in Phelps’s hand, we find word for word the same two statements about the Princess Katumin as appear on the last page of the Cowdery version (Phelps calls her “Kah-tou-mun” in his alphabet or Egyptian Ms. #3); only this time the enigmatic characters supplied by Cowdery are missing—Phelps has none of them. Instead he adds an extremely important note by entitling his treatise on the princess “*A Translation of the next page*” (fig. 65). Here at last is the only known case in which a specific English text is said to be a translation of a specific given Egyptian document. The “next page” in question is a numbered page in a bound book, so there can be no mistake about it. Phelps wants us to believe that the Egyptian text on that page is the original story of Katumin.

Figure 65. Egyptian Ms. #7, pp. 1, 2. Though the cover bears the name “Williams” and the initials “F.G.W.” this document is in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps. It is the only instance in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers in which a specific English text is stated to be the translation of a specific Egyptian document. Note that the bulk of the two texts is pretty well balanced, with none of that grotesque disproportion which critics have read into the Book of Abraham mss. and have diligently exploited as Joseph Smith’s folly.

A Translation of the next page in part ↓
 Natumin, Princess, daughter of On-i-tas of Egypt, who
~~reign~~ began to reign in the year of the world, 2962.
 Natumin was born in the 30th year of the reign of her
 father, and died when she was 28 years old, which was ^{the year} 3090

70. 2. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20.
 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40.
 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60.

(Over this stood the figure
 of a woman.)





2 100
 25

And it gives us a pleasant surprise when we turn to it, for to match the four short lines of Phelps's English text he gives us a good three-plus lines of Egyptian text, thus preserving a very nice balance between the number of words in each. Here he leaves no possible doubt that he considers a decent proportion advisable between his Egyptian and English texts.

This is important because the disproportion between the length of Egyptian signs and English sentences is labored as the principal argument against the Book of Abraham, and the most important evidence for this is Book of Abraham Ms. #2 in the handwriting of the astute and sensible Phelps [Frederick G. Williams].⁶⁰ One needs no knowledge of Egyptian to point out that a dot and two strokes can hardly contain the full message of an English paragraph of a hundred words or more. In 1967 a Mr. Heward passed around handbills at a general conference pathetically asking, "Why should anyone want to fight the truth?"—the "truth" being his own great discovery that if somebody translates a single dot as the story of Little Red Riding Hood something must be out of joint: "Could a single dot carry that much meaning?" Mr. Heward asked with eminent logic. We are asked to believe that this point escaped all the smart men of Kirtland, who persisted for no reason at all in deriving a whole book from less than two dozen signs, when they had thousands of such signs to draw from, and thereby achieved such monumental absurdity as no child could fail to notice. In 1970 Messrs. Howard and Turner bring forth as the crowning evidence against Joseph Smith Mr. Dee J. Nelson's sensational

60. [In the original *BYU Studies* article Book of Abraham Ms. #4 was noted. However, this was likely an error as Ms. #4 comes from the Nauvoo period, contains no hieratic characters, and is in the handwriting of Willard Richards. It is quite certain that Nibley meant Ms. #2 here, of which at that time W. W. Phelps was thought to be the scribe. But recent research has determined that the handwriting of this ms. actually belongs to Frederick G. Williams. Where Phelps is mentioned as the scribe of Ms. #2 it will be followed by Williams in brackets—eds].

find that the hieratic word *ms.t* is translated by Joseph Smith with a paragraph of 132 words.⁶¹ It never occurred to anyone to ask, in the glad excitement, whether this was really Joseph Smith's work and whether *ms.t* was ever believed by anyone to contain a story of 132 words. Actually, the text from which Mr. Nelson got his *ms.t* was written by Phelps [Williams] (it is Book of Abraham Ms. #2), and we have just seen that Phelps knew very well how the texts should balance up.⁶² Maybe there is something the critics don't know about.

3. Looking at the first page of each of our two Abraham manuscripts (Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3), we note that both are numbered "page 1"—the story begins here (figs. 66–67). But what do we find? The first line is introduced by

61. [Nibley seems to be referring to bottom of p. 3 and beginning of p. 4 of Ms. #2—eds.]

62. [Nibley is following Dean Jessee's designation of Phelps as the scribe of Ms. #2. We now know Frederick G. Williams was the scribe. Despite Williams being the scribe (instead of Phelps), Nibley's argument that these men understood proportion still holds—eds.]

Figure 66. Book of Abraham Ms. #2. In the handwriting of W. W. Phelps [F. G. Williams]. The finished state of the English text, showing no sign of correction or hesitation, shows that it was simply copied down and in no wise indicates a process of translation; while the conspicuous failure of the margin to adapt to the Egyptian characters indicates that they were added later. At the bottom of the page the whole last section (Abraham 2:3–5) is repeated without the benefit of the Egyptian symbols, implying that the impatient copyist has decided that he can do as well without them.

Figure 67. Book of Abraham Ms. #3. Though this is numbered page 1, it begins with a note on grammar, immediately followed *not* by the beginning of the Book of Abraham but by a passage well along in the story (Abraham 1:4). Note that this is a "fair copy" of an already finished text. Note also how the character in the middle of the page marks a new phase of the writing but has no reference whatever to meaning or content. Note that none of the other signs can be matched up with specific ideas or episodes or proper names, the latter occurring and reoccurring without the slightest regard for the Egyptian symbols.

Therefore a knowledge of the beginning of creation
and also of the planets, and of the stars, as it was
made known unto the fathers, have I kept even
unto this day.

ME And I shall endeavour to write some of these things,
upon this record, for the benefit of my posterity,
that shall come after me.

SVL. Now the Lord God caused the famine to be sore in the land
of Haran inasmuch that Haran my brother died; but
Terah my father yet lived in the land of the
Chaldees. And it came to pass; that Lebron
took Sarai to wife, and Nahor my brother took
Milcah to wife.

2
SVL. Who was the daughter of Haran
Now the Lord had said unto me Abram yet the out of
thy country, even from thy kindred, even from
thy father's house, unto a land that I will show
thee: Therefore I left the land of the Chaldees
to go into the land of Canaan; and I took Lot
my brother's son, and his wife, and Sarai my
wife; and also my father followed after me into
the land which I did nominate Haran, in the
famine abated, and my father turned in
Haran and dwelt there, as there were many
flocks in Haran; and my father turned again
unto his idolity: Therefore he continued in
Haran.

Now the Lord had said unto Abram yet the
out of thy country, even from thy kindred, even from thy
father's house, unto a land that I will show thee, therefore I left
the land of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan, and I took
my brother's son and his wife, and Sarai my wife, and also my father
followed after me into the land which I did nominate Haran, in the
famine abated, and my father turned in Haran and dwelt there as there were
many flocks in Haran, and my father turned again unto his idolity.
Therefore he continued in Haran with Abram, and Lot my brother's son
prayed unto the Lord, and the Lord appeared

+ sign of the fifth degree of the ^{second} part
I sought for ^{mine} ~~the~~ appointment ~~unto~~
~~unto~~ the priesthood according
to the appointment of God unto
the fathers concerning the seed
my fathers having turned from their
righteousness and from the holy
commandments which the Lord
their God had given unto them
unto the worshiping of the gods
of the heathens.

utterly refused to hearken to my
voice for their hearts were set to do
evil and were wholly turned to the
God of Elkenur and the god of
Yitnah and the god of mats
machrah and the god of Pharaoh
King of Egypt.

Therefore they turned their hearts
to the sacrifices of the heathens
in offering up their children unto
these dumb idols, and hardened
not unto my voice, but endeavoured
to take away my life, by
the hand of the priest of Elkenur
The priest of Elkenur was also the priest
of Pharaoh now at this time, it
was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh
the King of Egypt to offer up, upon the
altar which was built in the land

an Egyptian symbol, right enough, but opposite that symbol is not a line from the Book of Abraham but the words

second
sign of the fifth degree of the first_^ part.

And then the next line is introduced by another Egyptian symbol and begins with the words

mine
I sought for _^the appointment whereunto unto the priesthood⁶³

Page 1 of both texts begins not with the story of Abraham but with the fourth verse—a whole column left out. What comes before is not the Abraham story but something about grammar, leaving no room for the preceding verses even if this were not marked “page 1.” Is this the way one begins translating a book?

4. Next we note that sign no. 3 (the third from the top) is placed over against the English text right in the middle of a sentence and squarely between two lines of “translation,” the writer thus leaving us in complete doubt as to just what lines are supposed to be translated from that sign. As it stands, the hieratic symbol cannot possibly be matched up with any particular sections, paragraph, sentence, or line of the Abraham story.⁶⁴

5. Compare this same symbol as it appears in Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3. In the latter we see within the bent arm of power a conspicuous circle with a dash inside it; circle and dash are completely absent, however, from Ms. #2. Can such a prominent feature be blithely ignored where every little dot and line necessarily speaks volumes? It seems

63. [On the first line, Nibley is using Ms. #3 for the spelling of “second.” In Ms. #2 it is spelled “second.” On the second line, two carats are added. In Ms. #2 the second carat is placed before “the”; in Ms. #3 the carat is after “the”—eds.]

64. [The third sign on the Ms. #3 is placed between Abraham 1 verses 4 and 5—eds.]

that accuracy of detail means little to our copyists, who are satisfied as long as the general configuration of a symbol is recognizable—not for translation purposes, patently, but as some sort of marker. In both manuscripts the Egyptian characters are placed throughout in exactly the same position with relationship to the English text, while considerable license is taken with the manner in which they are drawn, which indicates that they are meant as guides or markers of some sort rather than as containing every detail of the long and involved text. This is borne out if we consider the next symbol.

6. Symbol no. 4 in Book of Abraham Ms. #3⁶⁵ stands opposite what looks like a new paragraph or section. The preceding line ends abruptly in the middle of the page and even has a period to finish it. And sure enough there is a brand-new Egyptian symbol in the margin to start us off with a new idea or story. Only one thing is wrong: what should be the new section or paragraph begins right in the middle not just of a sentence but of a clause, its opening words being “utterly refused to hearken . . .” What our Egyptian character marks in this case is not an idea, a word, a phrase, sentence, or paragraph, but the point at which a scribe takes up his pen—right in the middle of a sentence. Again, the writers of Mss. #2 and #3 make no effort to have their hieroglyphic signs agree in anything but general appearance: a carefully partitioned circle in one is but a hasty loop in the other.

7. Seven lines down from this symbol in Ms. #3 our scribe (Warren Parrish) begins a new paragraph,⁶⁶ and rightly so, since at this point a new theme is introduced, a discussion of human sacrifice (Abraham 1:7). Here if ever is the proper place for an Egyptian symbol to tell the new story—but there is none! The author of the English version is utterly

65. [Ms. number corrected—eds.]

66. [Although Ms. #2 does not begin a new paragraph at this same point, both mss. do match a new paragraph with the next sign—eds.]

indifferent to any possible Egyptian writing that might supply him with the needed information. First a character where none should be and then no character where such is indispensable—our scribes make not even the crudest, most elementary effort to match up their “translations” with their purported sources.

8. Look at the next sign, no. 5. It is placed in Abraham Ms. #3, p. 1, exactly between the lines:

“ . . . the hand of the priest of Elkkener
Sign
the priest of Elkkener was also the prie=⁶⁷

Plainly it does not mark the beginning of a new section or the introduction of a new idea, for the two lines practically repeat each other. But turning to Ms. #2 and the same sign we find that this scribe begins a new section at this point: he does not end the preceding section with a period, but simply breaks off in the middle of a line; and he does not begin the next line with a capital,⁶⁸ but he does indent it. Why no punctuation? Because there is no break in the meaning. Why then the interrupted line and the new indentation, both completely ignored by the writer of Ms. #3? Because at this point the writer resumes operations—[i.e. the character is a marker for the point at which the scribe takes up his pen—eds.]. Again the two copyists make no effort to have their Egyptian symbols match in detail; indeed one must look twice to detect the resemblance between their marks—an unthinkable situation if they thought that every Egyptian squiggle and dot was loaded with detailed information. Halfway between symbols nos. 4 and 5 Parrish has marked what looks like a small equal sign in his margin, but there is no such mark in the other

67. [Minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

68. [The two lines in Ms. #2 read as follows: “of the priest of Elk=kenner/ The priest of Elk=Keenah was also the priest” Note that the second line does begin with a capital—eds.]

manuscript—another indication that the marginal signs do not supply the meaning of the text.⁶⁹

9. If we look to these symbols for our translation, symbol no. 4 [in Ms. #3—eds.] showers us with a generous catalogue of exotic proper names—Elkkenir [Elkkener],⁷⁰ Libnah [Zibnah],⁷¹ Mahmachrah,⁷² and the god of Pharaoh King of Egypt—and tells us how the people hardened their hearts to the preaching of Abraham, how the heathen offered their children to idols, how the priest of Elkkena [Elkkener] (mentioned for the second time, with an alteration in spelling)⁷³ tried to put Abraham to death, etc. It is quite a story for one little picture to convey, especially when the copyists don't particularly care about details in drawing it. The next sign, no. 5, is a very simple affair—two straight dashes, a circle, and a tiny T-shaped figure—but it manages to convey the name of Pharaoh no less than four times, once specifically as “Pharaoh King of Egypt” (without giving any credit to sign no. 4); then it goes on to tell about an altar built in the land of Chaldea, about human sacrifice to “the god of Pharaoh” (another steal from sign no. 4), about Shagreel (his name repeated twice) who was identified with the sun, about the rites at Potiphar's Hill in the Plain of Olishem—all that jammed into four strokes and a circle—a circle which the two manuscripts draw quite differently. The same phrases and images seem to be represented by a series of quite different signs, and when we get to sign no. 8, though it is quite different from the other characters, it brings us right back to our old friends Elkkener, Zibnah,⁷⁴ Mahmachrah,

69. [This likely unintentional mark on Ms. #2 does not appear to be an equal sign—eds.]

70. [Transcription of name corrected—eds.]

71. [Both Williams and Parrish render “Libnah” as “Zibnah”—eds.]

72. [Transcription of name corrected—eds.]

73. [Nibley renders the second occurrence of “Elkenah” at the end of the line as “Elkkena.” However, the reading should be “Elkkener.” Although Elkenah is spelled consistently as “Elkkener” in Ms. #3, there are variant spellings of the name in Ms. #2—eds.]

74. [Transcription of “Elkenah” and “Libnah” corrected—eds.]

and the god of Pharaoh King of Egypt, with the Chaldeans thrown in for good measure. What goes on here? Couldn't the translator remember what he had just translated? He didn't need to, for it was right on the page before his eyes in his own handwriting. Yet he keeps on reading the same list of names and epithets by way of rendering totally different Egyptian characters, and having achieved a miracle of economy by squeezing gallons of juice out of one tiny lemon he does not make use of his precious symbol when he needs to express the same things again, but simply picks up any symbol that happens to be at hand and makes use of that. The basic rule of this grammar is that any Egyptian character will express any name or situation or combination of names or situations imaginable. If sign no. 5 tells us about the sacrifice of three virgins, sign no. 6 can tell us the same story all over again while assuming quite another shape. On the other hand, don't ever worry about needing another symbol after one symbol has been milked for a minor epic—though there are thousands of characters available, you can forget about them and go on adding episode after episode to your one-symbol story: there is no limit to what you can read into it—one small symbol is “translated” by over 180 words. With such principles in operation, who cares about grammar? Why all this head-splitting about symbols when any symbol will do?

10. The fact is that there is no head-splitting. Nobody pays any attention to the Egyptian symbols; no Egyptian character is ever redrawn or corrected, or discussed or ever referred to in whole or in part. True, some symbols are discussed in the A&G, but not these symbols, and if one can imagine any principles of translation deducible from the A&G, it is impossible to discover any sign of their being applied in Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3.⁷⁵

11. Prolonging our second glance at Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3, we are surprised and puzzled to note that

75. [Ms. numbers corrected. Nibley's argument here would also apply to Ms. #1—eds.]

the text of the Book of Abraham before our eyes is written down in a neat, flawless hand, without any signs of hesitation or exasperation. Only a few minor touches distinguish it from our printed text of Abraham. As in the A&G, everything is tidy and correct, with no signs of creativity or normal pangs of composition, to say nothing of laborious translation. No "working papers" of a difficult translation ever looked like this. The copyists were writing down the finished or nearly finished text of the Book of Abraham in a fair, flowing, and uninhibited hand. They were not deriving that text from, of all things, eighteen hieratic symbols written in the margins.

12. The margins themselves show this: the margins of the English text are remarkably straight and neat, and it is at once apparent that the hieratic symbols must adapt themselves to those margins, and not the other way around. Thus on the last page of Book of Abraham Ms. #2, Phelps [Williams] has kept a neat margin but one more than twice as wide as necessary to accommodate the Egyptian characters; this waste of space and paper would have been avoided had he been adapting his margin to the hieratic signs. On the other hand, on the last three pages of Ms. #1 some Egyptian characters are squeezed right off the page by a margin that is not wide enough for them, and one jumps over the margin and intrudes a whole inch on the space of the English text. Thus the margins always accommodate the English text, but not the Egyptian symbols. This can only mean that the English of the Book of Abraham was here copied down *before* the Egyptian signs were added. This was borne out further by the fact that all the marginal Egyptian writing is supplied by a single hand, an expert at copying them, and not by the writers of the English text.⁷⁶ There is no evidence that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham from Egyptian symbols in

76. There are two styles of writing, a thin line drawing and a heavy brushlike stroke, a good imitation of the original. At least all the draw-

these documents—they were not written by him, and the Abraham text is not derived from them.

13. In Book of Abraham Ms. #2 the writer, after reaching Abraham 2:5, decides to dispense with Egyptian writing altogether. He gives up the margin in the middle of the page and even goes back and recopies verses 4 and 5 without margins, after which he goes on with the Abraham story without the benefit of margins or hieroglyphs. How could he thus depart from his source? What source? Ms. #2 drops the Egyptian at Abraham 2:5, and Ms. #3 ends abruptly in the middle of the page with the end of verse 2. In no known document is the exercise with Egyptian characters carried beyond the middle of chapter 2. What, then, is the source of the *other* two-thirds of the Book of Abraham? From what Egyptian text was the rest derived? Certainly not from the Book of Breathings, whose limits are clearly marked. If Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3 are to be accepted as evidence of Joseph Smith's folly, we still have to explain the bulk of the Book of Abraham.

A strange line of reasoning sees in the *sequence* of the signs in the margins "the key to an authentic appraisal of the process by which the Book of Abraham text was formulated by Joseph Smith."⁷⁷ The discovery that those signs not only come from the Book of Breathings but actually occur alongside the English text in the same *order* as in the Egyptian was hailed as a triumph of perspicacity. But if the Mormons decided to use Egyptian symbols for any purpose, what could be more natural than to take them from the Egyptian documents in their possession—where else would they get them? And in making use of such symbols what easier and more natural way than just to copy them down in order? The most interesting characters of all—those which are not meaningless hieratic hen tracks, but real pictures—are repeatedly reproduced in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, in the order in which they occur on

ings of each type are by the same person, who may have tried his hand at both styles.

77. [See note 9 above—eds.]

the papyrus along with Facsimile 1 (the “lion couch”). Yet no attempt is made to translate any but two of the signs—the two (reed and “w,” of course) that are not recognizable pictures of anything. Why doesn’t Joseph Smith or anybody else ever attempt the easy, fun task of reading meaning into those that are eloquent little pictures? There seems to be an actual aversion to the idea of “translating” Egyptian symbols.

Book of Abraham Ms. #1

The text designated by the Church Historian’s Office as Book of Abraham Ms. #1 (fig. 68) gives every indication of being the parent and original of the series to which Mss. #2 and #3, just discussed, belong.⁷⁸ Obtained by the Church from the late Wilford C. Wood, it is ten pages long, on paper 7¾ by 12 inches. It has never been published. At the top of the first page it bears the title: “Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the Catacombs of Egypt.” And to give it further precedence over Mss. #2 and #3, this manuscript begins properly, with verse 1.⁷⁹ It is, in fact, a most ambitious and impressive beginning. A three-quarter-inch margin is ruled off on the left and headed “character,” and the first two characters to appear in it are the ubiquitous reed and “w”-loop, which happen to be the signs with which the intact de Horrack papyrus of the Book of Breathings (Louvre No. 3284) begins, and the signs with which in all probability the damaged Joseph Smith Papyrus XI also began. To these two characters the writer of Book of Abraham Ms. #1 gives numbers 1 and 2, using those same numbers to designate particular

78. [Further examination has determined that Mss. #2 and #3 are earlier than Ms. #1. It is also possible that Ms. #2 is the earliest of the three mss. and that Ms. #1 is a copy of Ms. #3—eds.]

79. [Ms. #1 exhibits the handwriting of W. W. Phelps for Abraham 1:1–3. But the remainder of the ms. is in the handwriting of Warren Parrish. It is possible that Phelps’s part predates Mss. #2 and #3—eds.]

Translation of the book of Abraham written
by his own hand upon papyrus and found
in the catacombs of Egypt

F^o
82
7
In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my
father, I, Abraham, saw, that it was needful
for me to obtain another place of residence, and see-
ing there was greater happiness and peace and rest,
for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and
the right wherewith I should be ordained to admin-
ister the same: Having been a follower of righteousness,
desiring to be one who possessed great
knowledge; a greater follower of righteous-
ness; a possessor of greater knowledge;
a father of many nations; a prince
of peace; one who keeps the commandments of
God; a rightful heir; a high priest, holding
the right belonging to the fathers, from the be-
ginning of time; even from the beginning, or
before the foundation of the earth, down to
the present time; even the right of the first
born, or the first man, who is Adam,
or first father, through the fathers, unto me.
I sought for mine appointment unto the
priesthood according to the appointment
of God, unto the fathers, concerning the
seed.

83
my fathers having turned from their
righteousness, and from the holy com-
mandments, which the Lord their
God had given unto them, unto the
worshipping of the gods of the heath-
ens.

84
utterly refused to hearken to my voice,
for their hearts were set to do evil, and
were wholly turned to the god of Akkenu,
and the god of Sidon, and the god of

words in the English text appearing directly opposite these signs, so that we get this:

β ¹ ¹In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my
 “w”² fathers, I, ²Abraham, ¹saw, that it was needful
 for me to obtain . . .⁸⁰

Now throughout all the grammar and alphabet papers, the reed sign is given two meanings—namely, (1) “land of the Chaldeans” and (2) the act of seeing, while the loop or “w”-symbol is always said in some way or other to refer to Abraham. Hence there cannot be the slightest doubt that the writer here intends to relate *specific* Egyptian characters to specific English words and ideas. Now, this is the sort of demonstration for which we have been looking, in which things are properly pinned down. But alas, if this is the beginning of a rigorous demonstration, it is also the ending; for with the second line of the text the project is lamely given up—at that early stage of the game any further attempt to number Egyptian symbols by way of matching them with definite English equivalents is abandoned. The next four lines of text have no matching Egyptian symbols at all, and from then on such signs are scattered at the usual meaningless intervals

80. [A few minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

Figure 68. Book of Abraham Ms. #1. An attempt by W. W. Phelps to match Egyptian characters with specific English words is evident from the numbers placed beside the first two hieroglyphs (*j* and *w*), the same numbers appearing before the English words *In the land*, *Abraham*, and *saw*, the basic meaning of the *j* and *w* signs according to the alphabet studies. It is quite evident that the plan was quickly given up, none of the following signs being treated in such a manner, which means that they are not being translated at all. W. Parrish takes over the writing in the middle of the page and marks his beginning with an Egyptian symbol, though he begins in the middle of a sentence. There is no discernible relationship between the symbols and the contents of the various sections of the text.

(that is, with no visible relationship to the *meaning* of the text) as in the other Book of Abraham manuscripts. Need we say that this auspicious but brief beginning to Book of Abraham Ms. #1 is in the hand of Phelps? And is it surprising that he peters out at line 18 of the first page, after which Warren Parrish takes over and completes the remaining fourteen lines on the page as well as the remaining nine⁸¹ pages of the manuscript? Phelps's last symbol is three little strokes which go with twelve lines of text, and Parrish begins with a dot and three lines set against fourteen lines of English. That is *not* how the thing started out, with the first two symbols opposite consecutive lines with numbers to indicate just what in those lines the symbols were supposed to stand for. No, the serious business of "translation" has been given up, and what we have thereafter is either mere eyewash or the use of mysterious symbols to help the copyists in coordinating their work, or both. The brethren at that time were not averse to the use of code names and kabbalistic symbols in carrying on their business.

It is quite clear what happened on page 1 of Book of Abraham Ms. #1. The enterprising Phelps set out to apply the principles set forth in his copy of the A&G to *his* copy of the Book of Abraham and didn't get to first base. In the same way he starts out grandly and folds up miserably with his impressive four-column "Egyptian Alphabet" (Egyptian Ms. #3). In view of his performance (and he is certainly our number one performer), it is impossible to maintain that he seriously attempted to carry on either his grammar or his translation beyond *two symbols* alone; only the first two—the reed and the "w"—were fully explained either in the grammars and alphabets or the Pearl of Great Price copies, and even Joseph Smith could not derive the whole Book of Abraham from those two symbols. When Parrish in Book of Abraham Ms. #1 places the "Chonsu"-sign beside 19 lines—182 words—of

81. [Corrected from "nineteen"—eds.]

been inserted not to change but to clarify meanings. The end result is exactly as we find it in the printed edition of the Pearl of Great Price. Was the final text, then, taken from this copy? The next two pages show us that it was not, for there the following passages occur:

. . . And I took Sarai, whom I took to
~~wife in Ur of Chaldea~~ wife when I was . . .
 Jer Jurshon, to come to the land of Can
 aan.⁸⁶ (page 9)

This is quite different from the final text of Abraham 2:15:

And I took Sarai, whom I took to wife when I was in Ur,
 in Chaldea . . . and came forth in the way to the land of
 Canaan.

Only at the end of the next verse do we get the rest of the sentence:

. . . by the way of Jershon, to come to the land of Canaan.⁸⁷

And on the last page we read:

borders land of the
 . . . into the ~~land~~ of the ^ Canaanites, and
 . . . the land of this idolitrous nation.⁸⁸

Compare this with Abraham 2:18:

. . . into the borders of the land of the Canaanites, and I
 offered sacrifice there in the plains of Moreh, and called

86. [Ellipses have been added to show that there is a large amount of text missing between “when I was” and “Jer Jurshon,” which corresponds to the published text. Line breaks have been added and minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

87. [This text is also several lines down in the ms.—eds.]

88. [Ellipses have been added to show there is missing text (that matches Abraham 2:18) between “and” and “the land of.” Minor transcription errors have been corrected—eds.]

on the Lord devoutly, because we had already come into the land of this idolatrous nation.⁸⁹

The end result in Ms. #1 is definitely not the official text.⁹⁰

Thus Book of Abraham Ms. #1 has the marks of a work in progress, and we can be sure that the final confused and jumbled verse is as far as it got. It begins with Phelps's setting out to give us a genuine analytical translation, but fizzles out on the first page; what follows is a simple straightforward copying of Abraham chapter 1 by Warren Parrish; with chapter 2 the writer begins casting about for better wording, rearranging but never changing words; on the last two pages his text differs from the present official version and ends up in a state of confusion, marking the end of the project at Abraham 2:18. It was copying, but copying with discussion. When a reading is changed in one of the three copies of Book of Abraham Mss. #1, 2, and 3, it is usually altered in the other two as well, showing that men were working together; but the end results are not always the same, as in Abraham 2:15, where the writer has written and then struck out the words that stand in Book of Abraham Ms. #4 *and* in the present official version. It is as if the scribes were being encouraged to think for themselves.

Book of Abraham Ms. #4

The Church Historian's "Book of Abraham Ms. #4" bears on the back of it the date 1841 in the hand of Thomas Bullock, though the document itself is in the handwriting of Willard Richards (fig. 69). This writing, coming years after the others, is, as might be expected, closer to our present-day version than the others. It bears the title later appearing

89. [One typo corrected—eds.]

90. [Nibley's reasoning is not altogether sound based on the above misreading of Ms. #1. Most of the corrections in the examples cited above, in the missing text too, are reflected in the published version. However, Nibley is still correct that Ms. #1 is not the official version—eds.]

4. Translation of Some
ancient Records: that have fallen
into our hands, from the Catacombes of
Egypt, purporting to be the writings
of Abraham, while he was in Egypt,
called the Book of Abraham, written
by his own hand upon papyrus.

THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.

In the Land of the Chaldeans, at the
Residence of my father, I, Abraham,
saw that it was needful for me
to obtain another place of Residence,
and ~~finding~~ ^{finding} there was greater happiness
and peace ~~to~~ ^{to} Rest for me, I sought
for the blessings of the fathers & the
Right whereunto, I should be ordained
to administer the same; having been
myself a follower of Righteousness, desiring
also to be one who possessed great
Knowledge, and to be a greater follower
of Righteousness, and to possess a greater
Knowledge,

in the *Times and Seasons* version of 1 March 1842, and the 1851 version published by Richards's nephew Franklin D. Richards:

A Translation of Some
 ancient Records that have fallen
 into our hands, from the Catacombs of
 Egypt, purporting to be the writings
 of abraham, while he was in Egypt,
 called the Book of Abraham, written
 by his own hand upon papyrus.

THE. BOOK. of ABRAHAM.⁹¹

On the back of the second page of Book of Abraham Ms. #4 is written: "A Fac-Similee from the Book of Abraham— / Explanation of the [^]above cut."⁹² The twelve explanations to Facsimile 1 then follow as they stand in the present Book of Abraham, except that the much-discussed philological explanation of item 12 is missing.⁹³ Filed with Ms. #4 are also four pages, 8 by 10 inches, in the hand of Willard Richards, containing the explanations of Facsimile 2 exactly as found in our Pearl of Great Price. There is also a copy of the damaged Facsimile 2 on a slightly larger sheet of paper.

Book of Abraham Ms. #4 differs both from the other Book of Abraham manuscripts and from the final printed

91. [Line breaks added and minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

92. [Line break and carat added—eds.]

93. [It is unclear what "much-discussed philological" material Nibley is referring to here. The explanation for item 12 is not missing in Ms. #4—eds.]

Figure 69. Book of Abraham Ms. #4, 1841, in the handwriting of Willard Richards. Not properly one of the "Kirtland Egyptian Papers," this manuscript shows that the text is still fluid in the Nauvoo period, though alterations are very minor. Here Richards changes the "seeing" of the earlier versions to "finding." With the same freedom, the phrase "purporting to be" has been dropped from the official title in our present-day edition.

text. Thus we find Abraham 1:4 first disagreeing with the other versions and then corrected to agree with them:

I sought
 unto the Presthood
 for mine appointment [^]according to the
 ~~unto the Priesthood, according unto the~~
 the appointment[^] of God unto the⁹⁴

It is nothing more than the usual adjusting of the text, without the removal or changing of a single word, to get the clearest expression. Throughout this text are inserted pencil notations of page numbers from another manuscript,⁹⁵ which included most of the third chapter of Abraham, parts of which are quoted with page numbers on an extra sheet (page 14) that has been added to our Ms. #4.⁹⁶ Though Richards's translation comes to a halt where the others do, the quoting of verses 18 through 22 of chapter 3 confirms that he is not here engaged in translation but, like the others, is copying from another manuscript, in which, however, all the copyists are allowed to introduce improvements.

The most significant thing about the Willard Richards manuscript is that while it is most explicitly designated as a translation of certain specific Egyptian records—and is accompanied by reproductions of Egyptian writings (the facsimiles) along with explanations of the same, showing the writer's concern to give the fullest possible documentation—it contains not a single one of the hieratic symbols found in the margins of the 1835 manuscripts. This confirms, as noted above, that those marginal characters were not regarded as

94. [Line breaks added and minor transcription errors corrected—eds.]

95. [The inserted pencil notations are not page numbers from another ms., but are instead paragraph numbers that correspond to the paragraphing in the published version in the *Times and Seasons*. This ms. could be the printer's copy to the initial installment—eds.]

96. [This extra sheet contains Abraham 3:18b–26a, is numbered pages 7 (recto) and 8 (verso), and is a separate ms. from Ms. #4, albeit it is kept in the same folder—eds.]

the Egyptian source of the text; if such an idea was ever entertained, by the time Richards produced Ms. #4, the latest and most authoritative of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, it had been completely abandoned.

All in all, Ms. #4 is the most “official” of the four copies and shows clearly the independence of these “translations” from the few Egyptian symbols that accompany the other versions. The rewording in all these manuscripts, far from showing the work of translation in progress, never changes a meaning or touches upon any basic issue of translation. No indication is ever given, no slightest hint is dropped at any time, that the Egyptian characters in the margins were appealed to in case of disagreement or during any discussion; no reference is found anywhere to the way in which those symbols might have been put to use in arriving at meaning; there is no evidence that anything in the A&G was put to use in these translations—indeed, the Egyptian symbols appearing in the A&G are *not* those found in the margins of the Pearl of Great Price copies. The claim that these documents show us exactly how the Book of Abraham was translated is the purest nonsense. Incidentally, the retouches in the text continued long after Kirtland. In our own time the important title of the 1851 edition was changed: “Translated from the Papyrus, by Joseph Smith” has been added, and the significant qualification “Records . . . *purporting to be* the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt,” has been dropped.

Mysterious Markings

A variety of markings⁹⁷—letters, numbers, dashes, and dots—serve in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers to coordinate the work and avoid confusion as a number of people were

97. [In this section Nibley refers to “a series of capital letters” in blue ink that accompany many of the manuscripts. At this writing he does not know who it is and surmises it may be someone during Joseph’s time trying to identify and classify the mss. It is now quite certain that the

dealing with the same material. As we have seen, the pages of the various series are numbered, and the pages of Book of Abraham Ms. #4 are coordinated by number with those of a missing manuscript.⁹⁸ A series of capital letters, each with two strokes under it, runs through all the papers, placed there by a single hand, identifying each separate sheet, to avoid confusion. Not all the pages are so marked, and no effort is made to follow a rigorous order; thus six pages of Book of Abraham Ms. #3 bear the letters O through S, in proper order, but in reverse, while elsewhere the letters appear in the same order as the pages. The letters do not have any necessary relation to page numbers, the pages lettered A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, being matched by the numbers 6, ?, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, and blank, respectively in the A&G. Two loose two-page spreads, though marked with the usual underlined capital letters (this time T, U, and V), bear on each of their two pages capital Os and Ws respectively—not underlined. In Book of Abraham Mss. #2 and #3, sometimes the capitals with strokes under them appear in the left-hand margins right along with the Egyptian symbols, which the unwary might easily confuse with them. This should admonish us that the position of a symbol next to a text does not necessarily prove that the text is a translation of the sign. It was entirely in keeping with the need to obscure the exotic nature of their work for the brethren to employ not only letters and numerals to mark off various phases of their undertaking, but to draw also on the wonderful Egyptian symbols that had so astonishingly come into their hands. To this day but few mid-Westerners have ever seen a real Egyptian papyrus, and for the genuine article to turn up in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835, is against all the rules of probability. Our copyists can take the hieratic symbols or leave them alone, and the same applies to the other symbols. Each type was added by

individual most likely responsible for adding the capital letters is Andrew Jenson—eds.]

98. [See note 97 above—eds.]

a single person, concerned not with interpretation but with bringing the work of a number of hands together in some sort of correlation.

What Is Behind All This?⁹⁹

It would seem that Joseph Smith is working with the brethren, but they are doing a lot of things on their own. What strikes one first of all is the overpowering predominance of one hand and mind in the work—those of Phelps. In his handwriting is the bound A&G (Egyptian Ms. #1), a copy of the “Egyptian Alphabet ” (Egyptian Ms. #3), the first half-page of the important Book of Abraham Ms. #1, and the “Katumin” document (Egyptian Ms. #7) which claims to be the actual translation of an accompanying text. Each of these writings is the most ambitious and revealing of its type. And was Phelps simply the faithful scribe? Far from it! Almost as soon as he met Joseph Smith he was made “printer unto the Church,” a title which, as Clark points out, meant far more than “that simply of a pressman.”¹⁰⁰ Before joining the Church Phelps had already been the editor of three newspapers (founder of two), employing his craft to broadcast the power of a universal mind. His biographer gives him the epithet of “versatile”—“printer, hymn writer, poet-journalist, newspaper editor, judge, orator, scribe, lawyer, educator, . . . pioneer, explorer, writer of books and pamphlets, topographical engineer, superintendent of schools, surveyor general, weather man, chaplain of the lower house of representatives, and speaker of the house

99. [In this section Nibley is operating under the assumption that the Abraham and Egyptian papers were produced in 1837 (or later) when some of the brethren were apostatizing from the Church and others were questioning Joseph Smith’s credibility as a prophet or as an educated man. We now know that the individuals who scribed these papers (especially the Abraham papers) did so as early as fall 1835. In fact, it is quite possible that most of these papers were created before 1837—eds.]

100. Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 24.

in the legislature.”¹⁰¹ Though only thirty years old when he first met the Prophet, he had already been a candidate for the lieutenant-governorship of New York. Upon embracing the gospel he determined, as he puts it, “to quit the folly of my ways, and the fancy and fame of this world.”¹⁰²

But to renounce the vanity of the world is more easily said than done, and before half a year had passed Phelps had to be roundly rebuked by the Lord: “And also let my servant William W. Phelps stand in the office to which I have appointed him. . . . And also he hath need to repent, for I, the Lord, am not well pleased with him, for he seeketh to excel, and he is not sufficiently meek before me” (D&C 58:40–41). Phelps was not a man to subordinate himself, and in 1832 the Prophet warns him in a letter to take care lest “they that think they stand should fall.”¹⁰³ On 14 January 1833, Joseph declared that Phelps represented “the very spirit which is wasting the strength of Zion like a pestilence.”¹⁰⁴ Phelps was a wonderful man, but his weakness was vanity. At the time the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were being produced, the Prophet had to rebuke him again; but things had gone so far that Phelps soon turned against Joseph Smith and went about publicly stirring up trouble, and finally, in November 1838, signed a terrible and damning affidavit against the Prophet.¹⁰⁵ Within two years, however, he confessed that his charges had been lies and begged to be taken back into the Church again. That took strength of character, and Joseph forgave him freely, as

101. Bowen, “Versatile W. W. Phelps,” 2. [See Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and William Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34/1 (2008): 26–62—eds.]

102. *Ibid.*, 24.

103. *History of the Church*, 1:299, letter of Joseph Smith to W. W. Phelps, 27 November 1832.

104. *Ibid.*, 1:317.

105. The document is given at length in Bowen, “Versatile W. W. Phelps,” 91–93.

he always forgave his enemies; he knew only too well Phelps's one great fault—"he taketh honor unto himself."¹⁰⁶

Joseph Smith had a high regard for Phelps's ability. In an encouraging and kindly note to the latter's wife he had written that "few can compete with [his merits, experience, and accomplishments] in this generation."¹⁰⁷ In his literary activities as editor of the *Evening and Morning Star* he was given a free hand: "If the world receive his writings—behold here is wisdom—let him obtain whatsoever he can obtain in righteousness, for the good of the saints" (D&C 57:12). They were *his* writings, not Joseph's; even when the journal displeased the Prophet, who wrote to Phelps, "If you do not render it more interesting than at present, it will fall," he was left to his own resources.¹⁰⁸ Claiming "a good education which included the Greek and Latin classics," Phelps was quite aware that he was the best educated of the brethren. It was he who gave their grandiloquent titles to the Church leaders—Lion of the Lord, Wild Ram of the Mountains, Archer of Paradise, etc.¹⁰⁹ It was he who on 9 August 1831 saw "the destroyer riding upon the face of the waters."¹¹⁰ But his desire to be heard extended to matters of revelation as well as to scholarship. He also aspired to making inspired translations of the scriptures. Among the Kirtland Egyptian Papers is a small clothbound

106. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 1:506–7 n. 21. He gives the exchange of letters between Phelps and Joseph Smith on the occasion. The quotation is from a blessing given to Phelps by the Prophet on 22 September 1835; see Bowen, "Versatile W. W. Phelps," 98.

107. Joseph Smith Jr. to Sally Phelps, 20 July 1835, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 360.

108. Joseph Smith Jr. to W. W. Phelps, 11 January 1833, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 293.

109. Bowen, "Versatile W. W. Phelps," 1.

110. *Ibid.*, 33.

book inscribed “W. W. Phelps, Diary Vc. 1835,”¹¹¹ containing original renderings of the Bible, of which the Church Historian writes: “These passages of Scriptures from the Bible do not appear to have any connection with the Inspired Revision by the Prophet Joseph Smith. This is no doubt the result of research and study done by Wm. W. Phelps.” And why not? Joseph Smith encouraged others to obtain all the gifts that God has bestowed on man. Thus in 1835 the promise was given to Warren Parrish through the mouth of Joseph Smith: “He shall see much of my ancient records and shall know of hidden things, and shall be endowed with a knowledge of hidden languages, and if he desires, and shall seek it at my hand, he shall be privileged with writing much of my word.”¹¹² Plainly the right to undertake inspired translation was not limited to Joseph Smith but was extended to others, in particular the very scribes who produced the Kirtland Egyptian Papers.

There was jealousy, too. The situation is elucidated in a revelation of November 1831: “O ye elders of my church, . . . Your eyes have been upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and his language you have known, and his imperfections you have known; you have sought in your hearts knowledge that you might express beyond his language” (D&C 67:1, 5). The smart men around the Prophet were convinced that they could do a better job than he could in turning out inspired writings. And there were no restraints placed upon them as long as they went about it honestly. “It is your privilege” — they even receive the *promise* to share the same gifts as Joseph, but only to that degree to which “you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves, . . . for ye are not sufficiently humble” (D&C 67:10).

111. [W. W. Phelps’s diary is no longer kept with the Abraham/Egyptian materials—eds.]

112. Joseph Smith Jr., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1, *Autobiographical and Historical Writings*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 136.

There it is, plain as a pikestaff: the brethren were impatient with Joseph Smith's lack of education and desired to improve on his performance. They had every right to do so, and were invited to try, but warned that they would not succeed as long as they were motivated by jealousy. So there is no reason why Cowdery, Phelps, and the others should not have tried their own hands at deciphering Egyptian. Upon receiving the above revelation, "William E. M'Lellin, as the wisest man, in his own estimation, having more learning than sense, endeavored to write a commandment like unto one of the least of the Lord's, but failed."¹¹³ Are not the Kirtland Egyptian Papers written by men who shared M'Lellin's ambitions? Upon first viewing the papyri, Phelps had written to his wife: "These records of old times, when we translate them and print them in a book, will make a good witness for the Book of Mormon."¹¹⁴ The editorial "we" here definitely includes himself—the Kirtland Egyptian Papers bear witness that no one tried harder to translate than he did, and there is a note of impatience if not petulance in the letter he wrote the lady six weeks later: "Nothing has been doing in translating of the Egyptian record for a long time, and probably will not for some time to come."¹¹⁵

In coming into the Church, Phelps had moved into what had previously been Oliver Cowdery's intellectual domain of editing and writing, and a distinct rivalry between the two can be detected in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Even before the Church was organized, Cowdery had sought and been promised the gift of knowing things "concerning the engravings of old records . . . that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred" (D&C 8:1, 11). As always, certain conditions went with the promise, however: "According to your faith shall it be done unto you," and "you shall

113. *History of the Church*, 1:225–26.

114. See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 340.

115. Bowen, "Versatile W. W. Phelps," 68 (letter of 11 September 1835).

ask . . . with an honest heart” (D&C 8:11, 1). That is why “in attempting to exercise this gift of translation, . . . Oliver Cowdery failed; and . . . the Lord explained the cause of his failure to translate”:¹¹⁶ “Behold, you have not understood; . . . you took no thought save it was to ask me” (D&C 9:7). Lack of perfect faith and honesty in Cowdery showed itself in the following year, when he had the presumption to write Joseph Smith a letter “‘Commanding’ him to alter one of the revelations which had been received.”¹¹⁷ Soon after that he was told that he had a right to speak by revelation whenever the Comforter led him, but that he was not to compete with the head of the Church in speaking with authority and that his writing was to be “not . . . by way of commandment, but by wisdom” (D&C 28:5). He had as good a right to use his wits as other men, but, like Phelps in his writing and translating, was prone to be carried away by vanity and fall on his face. Each man became increasingly jealous of the Prophet through the year 1837, and both finally had to be cut off from the Church, Cowdery at the autumn conference of 1837¹¹⁸ and Phelps in the following summer.¹¹⁹

Though he experienced a marvelous manifestation at the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in March 1833, Frederick G. Williams “soon after . . . yielded to improper influences” and accordingly, on 7 November 1837, was “rejected as a counselor in the First Presidency.” He was not excommunicated until 17 March 1839, however, and was taken back into the Church a year after.¹²⁰ During the period of writing the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, therefore, he was definitely turned

116. *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:132–33.

117. *Ibid.*, 1:217.

118. *Ibid.*, 1:431–34.

119. *History of the Church*, 3:46.

120. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Jenson, 1901), 1:52.

against Joseph Smith.¹²¹ As early as 1836 Warren Parrish was found embezzling \$25,000 of the Safety Society Funds and began operations against President Smith, going about organizing the “Reformers” who went so far as to seize the temple and declare Joseph Smith a fallen prophet. Parrish had been found “guilty of sexual sin in Kirtland,” but “made confession to the church, and on promising reformation retained his standing.” He was not cut off from the Church until early 1838, when he became one of Joseph Smith’s bitterest enemies; he never returned to the Church.¹²² Thus the man who worked most closely with Phelps in turning out the Kirtland Egyptian Papers was one of those most strongly animated at the time by feelings of ambition, jealousy, and guilt.

Willard Richards, who did not even join the Church before 1837, was the one and only writer of Kirtland Egyptian Papers to remain true; and when the others left he took charge of what papers were available. Though he was “keeper of the records” and was in charge of all official documents, it is significant that the papers designated as “Egyptian Grammar” were not kept with the others in the iron-bound box which Elder Richards risked his life to save during a flash flood while crossing the plains, but were stored away by themselves in the trunk of his wife Jennetta.¹²³ This alone puts them in a special category apart from the official documents of the Church; they were laid

121. [This cannot be the case since Frederick G. Williams was involved with the Abraham papers in fall 1835. Williams served as scribe for Joseph Smith’s journal 3–7 October 1835; see *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals, Vol. 1* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 67–71—eds.]

122. *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:404–6; see *History of the Church*, 2:528.

123. According to the official “Schedule of Church Records. Nauvoo 1846,” drawn up by Thomas Bullock for Willard Richards at the time of the exodus from Nauvoo. The story of the iron-bound box is dramatically recounted by Claire Noall, *Intimate Disciple: A Portrait of Willard Richards* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1957), 489–91. [Mss. #2 and #3 were also in Jennetta’s trunk—eds.]

aside and never in any sense proclaimed official. He didn't have all the papers, however; all along the Prophet had been more interested in dictating his own history to these same men than having them work on the Book of Abraham, and when they left him they took their work with them: "Twice Joseph had attempted to have his history recorded and published," yet "in each case an apostate scribe had refused to surrender a partly prepared manuscript."¹²⁴ The important Book of Abraham Ms. #1 by Phelps was never among the papers that passed from Willard Richards to his nephew Franklin D. Richards, but was acquired by the Church in 1937 through the late Wilford Wood. The scribe apparently considered that he had a right to the thing as his own work.

Another Tentative Summary

The men who cooperated, more or less, to produce the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were impatient of Joseph Smith's scholarly limitations and were at the same time invited by him to surpass them. In dealing with these men, the Prophet showed superhuman forbearance, freely forgiving them all their terrible offenses against him and inviting them back into the Church even when they did not ask it. In their literary work he gave them a free hand, sharing his idea with them and letting them make what use they pleased of his words. They were the "aspiring men," the "great big Elders . . . who caused him much trouble"; "after he taught them in private councils, they would then go forth into the world and proclaim the things he had taught them, as their own revelations."¹²⁵ But still he put up with them, encouraging them to work along with him and improve his English.

Now when these men turned against Joseph Smith, at the very time that they were working on the Egyptian

124. Noall, *Intimate Disciple*, 306–7.

125. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 225.

Papers, they all started making public statements and signing affidavits in which they did their best to invent the most damning and withering charges they could to make the Prophet an object of ridicule and contempt as well as loathing in men's eyes. Phelps, Cowdery, and Williams all admitted later that the charges were fabrications; but why at that time did not one of them, including the bitter Parrish, so much as even hint at the fiasco of the Egyptian translations?¹²⁶ Because there was no fiasco: the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were as much their baby as Smith's, and no matter who was responsible for them they contained nothing reprehensible, since no claims either of divine inspiration or of scholarly accuracy were made for them. The freedom of expression displayed by the various copyists shows plainly enough that the work was considered experimental.

Here we see the brethren, with the encouragement of the Prophet, casting about for suggestions and ideas, a course that was often recommended to them by the voice of revelation. Before God gives us the answer he expects us to be diligent seekers, even as Abraham was (Abraham 2:12): "We never inquire at the hand of God for special revelation," said Joseph Smith, "only in case of there being no previous revelation to suit the case. . . . It is a great thing to inquire at the hands of God, . . . and we feel fearful to approach Him . . . especially about things the knowledge of which men ought to obtain in all sincerity, before God, for themselves, in humility by the prayer of faith."¹²⁷ The brother of Jared, at the Lord's suggestion, attempted to produce a flameless light for his ships. He worked like a demon, exercising all his faith, ingenuity, and strength, and the result was a fiasco!

126. [Even with Nibley arguing (albeit incorrectly) that these papers were produced during a time when Phelps, Williams, Cowdery, and Parrish were against Joseph, the question of why they did not expose Joseph's so-called fraudulent work with the Book of Abraham is still valid—eds.]

127. *History of the Church*, 1:339.

In words of total self-abasement he announced his humiliating failure and confessed his helplessness, begging the Lord to take over where he had failed. And at that point—but not a moment before—God did take over (Ether 2:22–3:6). Even the mighty brother of Jared had to learn by that mortifying but highly effective process of trial and error, which is the essence of our time of probation here on earth.

We should not let the element of the fantastic in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers prejudice us too much against them. The history of Egyptology is largely a story of the fantastic. Aside from the nature of the material, every Egyptologist must indulge in some pretty wild guessing from time to time if he hopes for any fruitful breakthroughs—the greater the scholar the more bold and original the guessing. The bad guesses, of course, don't get published; usually they are quietly and mercifully forgotten and never held against their perpetrators. We are not much interested in the thousands of times that Edison was wrong, but in the hundreds of times he was right. In the case of Joseph Smith the attitude of the critics has always been the reverse of this. But no man knew better than he that it is by our mistakes that we are admonished, humbled, and enlightened.

The Kirtland Egyptian Papers, we submit, represent that mandatory preliminary period of investigation and exploration during which men are required to “study it out in [their] mind” (D&C 9:8), making every effort to “obtain for themselves” whatever can be so obtained, thereby discovering and acknowledging their own limitations before asking for direct revelation from on high. There were at least three separate experiments or approaches, none of which, as far as we can see at present, contributed anything to the Book of Abraham. Specifically, (1) the Book of Abraham was *not* derived from the alphabet writings, which only got as far as beta—the second letter; (2) it was *not* derived from or by means of the grammar, which never got beyond the first page and a half; (3) it was *not* translated from the first two

lines of the Joseph Smith Papyrus XI—the Book of Breathings, for reasons indicated above. These three projects were separate undertakings, each dealing with different materials from the others and in a different way. The three exercises can be regarded as experiments which were dropped before any of them got very far—laid aside and wisely kept out of circulation, for such things could easily be misinterpreted by malicious minds.

Many ask from what particular Egyptian manuscript the Book of Abraham was translated. The answer is that we do not know. The eleven fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri in our possession are only a portion of the original collection. But when in 1842 the Prophet at Nauvoo describes himself as “translating from the Records of Abraham,” we can be sure that it was *not* the Book of Breathings to which he was referring, that having been dropped for good way back in 1837.

All proper investigation moves from the known to the unknown, and whatever was definitely known the brethren of Kirtland were willing to embrace—they made valiant efforts to come to grips with Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and German; but in their day nothing was known about Egyptian. What were they to do? They had nothing to go on but intuition, and they gave it a try. They had an excellent excuse for not getting involved in the mysteries of an unknown language, but still they tried their hand at a number of approaches, because you never know and because they had been invited by revelation to do so. God knew perfectly well that the brother of Jared would fall on his face; that was part of the plan. But we today are in a different situation; we have enormous advantages which the men of Kirtland did not have, and the firm and relentless thrusting in our faces of the newly rediscovered Joseph Smith Papyrus is a reminder that we now are under the same obligation they were under to exhaust all the available resources. Those resources are indeed formidable and should test the skill and dedication

of LDS scholars to the limit. So far, though they have hardly been touched, they promise wonderful things.

The Kirtland Egyptian Papers were a milestone, now left far behind. The follies of 1912 were another, in which Joseph Smith's critics showed *their* limitations to the world. There will be other milestones, but the lesson of each will be the same—namely, that the more diligently we seek, the better right we have to ask.

What emerges most clearly from a closer look at the Kirtland Egyptian Papers is the fact that there is nothing official or final about them—they are fluid, exploratory, confidential, and hence free of any possibility or intention of fraud or deception. Strangely enough, though they seem to express a free play of fancy, they are not all pure nonsense. For example, Joseph Smith's discussion of the alphabet, strangely reminiscent of Rabbi Akiba's alphabet, reads like a very up-to-date analysis of the basic ideas of Egyptian religion and kingship; and there are so many happy guesses about the meanings of symbols that one begins to wonder whether they can all be purely accidental or fanciful. After all, the Book of Abraham itself is far from nonsense. All these things, however, must be the subject of other and more careful studies.

12

Conclusion: Taking Stock

“Look here upon this picture and on this”

The long discussion of the follies of 1912 that was thoroughly discussed in the series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” has turned out to be no idle sparring for time or waste of paper.¹ Who would have thought that the pattern of 1968 could follow that of 1912 as closely as it did? Let us briefly summarize the situation as we found it to be in 1912.

At that time it was claimed that the pronouncements of five of the greatest scholars of all time had “completely demolished” all grounds for belief in the divine inspiration or historic authenticity of the Book of Abraham and, through it, the Book of Mormon. It turned out, however, that Bishop Franklin S. Spalding, in gathering and manipulating the necessary evidence for his determined and devious campaign, had (1) disqualified the Mormons from all participation in the discussion on the grounds that they were not professional Egyptologists; (2) sent special warnings and instructions to his experts that made it impossible for

“Conclusion: Taking Stock” originally appeared in the series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” in IE 73 (May 1970): 83–89, 91–94.

1. See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed., CWHN 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000), 86–162; and in this volume, CWHN 18:40–94.

any of them to decide for Joseph Smith; (3) concealed all correspondence that did not support the verdict he desired; (4) given the learned jury to understand that the original Egyptian manuscripts were available, which they were not; (5) said that Mormons claimed them to be the unique autographic writing and sketching of Abraham, which they did not; (6) announced to the world that Joseph Smith was being tested on linguistic grounds alone, specifically as a translator, though none of his experts ventured to translate a word of the documents submitted; and (7) rested his case on the “complete agreement” of the scholars, who agreed on nothing save that the Book of Abraham was a hoax.

The experts (1) did not agree among themselves at all when they spoke without collusion; (2) with the exception of James H. Breasted, they wrote only brief and contemptuous notes, though it was claimed that they had given the documents “careful consideration”; (3) they admitted that they were hasty and ill-tempered, since they at no time considered anything of Joseph Smith’s worth any serious attention at all; (4) they translated nothing and produced none of the “identical” documents, which, according to them, were available in countless numbers and proved Joseph Smith’s interpretations a fraud. They should have done much better than they did since they had everything their own way, being free to choose for interpretation and comment whatever was easiest and most obvious, and to pass by in complete silence the many formidable problems presented by the three facsimiles. Those Mormons who ventured a few polite and diffident questions about the consistency of the criticisms or the completeness of the evidence instantly called down upon their heads the Jovian bolts of the *New York Times*, accusing them of “reviling scholars and scholarship.”² A safer setup for the critics of Joseph Smith could not be imagined. And yet it was they and not the Mormons who

2. “Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1912, 3.

insisted on calling off the whole show just when it was getting interesting. It was not a very edifying performance.

The project of 1968 may have been carried out with more sophistication than that of 1912, but in the last analysis the demonstration rested more than ever before on an all-out appeal to authority. If anything, the public today is more prone than ever to accede to the pressure of official persuasion and more easily overawed by the mystique of sciences that have become specialized to the point of total incomprehensibility. This can be seen in the declaration of half a dozen intellectuals that after a lifetime of belief they have finally and suddenly become convinced by the authority of one Egyptologist that Joseph Smith was a fraud. The remarkable thing is that these people would be outraged at the suggestion that they accept any demonstration whatever against the Prophet by experts in their *own* fields without thoroughly examining the evidence for themselves. Yet it is with an audible sigh of relief that they commit their brains and their immortal souls into the hands of a young man recently out of graduate school, the lone practitioner of a discipline of which they know nothing.³ Rustics and adolescents might be excused for being bowled over by the sheer majesty of unassailable authority, but those thinking people must have been desperately determined to get something against Joseph Smith. These people, while unable to accept the unanimous opinion of five of the greatest scholars of the past, rested the most important decision of their lives on the purely intuitive deduction of a single scholar whose credentials they made no effort to examine.

Since the basic charges against Joseph Smith emerging from the study of the newly found papyri have not been discussed in the pages of the *Improvement Era*, it may be well

3. [Nibley is referring to Klaus Baer, who was at the time in his thirties. Nibley's first contact with Baer was as Baer's first student in 1959, when Baer had just completed his doctorate. Nibley, nearly twenty years his senior, was already a full professor and almost twice Baer's age—eds.]

to review them briefly here. Two documents of the Joseph Smith Papyri were identified and translated in 1967–68, the one comprising sections from the Book of the Dead, the other being the much rarer but still not unknown *sensen* papyrus or Book of Breathings. Neither of these texts contained the same reading matter as the Book of Abraham, but who said they should? A single scholar announced that the text of the Book of Abraham was *supposed* to be a translation of the *sensen* papyrus, and, since it was not, “Abraham” was a hoax. It is on this claim alone that announcements have gone forth to the press that the fraudulence of the Pearl of Great Price has at last been established.

What supports the idea that the Book of Abraham was thought by Joseph Smith to be a translation of the Breathing Certificate? Two things: first, that the Breathing text was originally adjoined to Facsimile 1 on the same strip of papyrus, and second, that the symbols from the Breathing text are interpreted bit by bit in a writing known as the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar or Kirtland Egyptian Papers,⁴ in which the interpretation turns out to be the same as the text of the English Book of Abraham. It looks like an open-and-shut case, but only if one is determined to look no further. The demonstration was simply a matter of matching up the edges of two pieces of papyrus and of matching up certain symbols (whether one could read them or not made no difference whatever) with passages from the English Book of Abraham. That the latter cannot possibly be a translation of the symbols has been brilliantly apparent to everyone who has ever bothered to compare them—and they are already compared for our convenience in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. No slightest knowledge of Egyptian is necessary to convince anybody that when a symbol as brief as CAT is “translated” by an involved paragraph of over one hundred words, we are not dealing with a “translation” in any

4. [In later writings, Nibley referred to this as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers—eds.]

accepted sense of the word. If it isn't a translation, what is it? Looking closer we soon discover that the text of the Book of Abraham in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers has simply been copied down without alteration or hesitation, making it perfectly clear that that translation was completed *before* it was ever set down beside the characters from the *sensen* papyrus and that what we have before us in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers does *not* represent an attempt at translation. We notice further that nothing in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers is in the handwriting of Joseph Smith and that strangely enough a number of different handwritings are involved—showing that something was going on which we do not understand today. We also learn that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were never given out as an official or inspired document, never meant for publication, never placed before the Church for approval, never discussed for the record, never explained to the world as the facsimiles were. Did Joseph Smith *really* translate the Book of Abraham from those symbols? Of course not! Well then, what is wrong? What is wrong, according to one expert, is that he *thought* he was translating them. And how does the expert know that? Before going in for mind reading, it might be well to make a closer examination of the whole problem. Whenever scholars have a suspected ancient document to test, as Friedrich Blass says, the *first* thing to do is to examine the *content* of the document and see if it fits into the ancient setting to which it is ascribed.⁵ This is exactly what our experts have *not* done. The question that constantly comes to mind as one considers their determined assaults on the Pearl of Great Price is, *Why don't they ever pour their water on the fire?*

The Mormons are deeply concerned only with what they accept as scripture. Non-Mormons, raised in the tradition of the infallible Bible, are unable to conceive of a man's

5. See Friedrich W. Blass, "Hermeneutik und Kritik," *Einleitende und Hilfsdisziplinen*, vol. 1 of *Handbuch der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Nördlingen: Beck, 1886).

being a prophet and at the same a time a fallible mortal; they persist in thinking as they did in 1912 that the discovery of any slightest flaw in Joseph Smith's character or his work must necessarily bring the whole structure of Mormonism down in ruins. It isn't that way at all: all men are "subject to vanity," said Joseph Smith, and all must be allowed a generous margin of error to be themselves.⁶ But there *are* points on which no such freedom is allowed; there are writings that the Mormons accept as inspired scriptures, and these include the explanations to the facsimiles in the Book of Abraham. Why have not the Egyptologists concentrated on them? Naturally in 1968 priority went to the newly found papyri, which had never been translated and about which many people were understandably curious and impatient. But when it soon became apparent that those documents did not contain any of the text of the Book of Abraham as we have it, it was time for the Egyptologists, having done their work and done it well, either to bow out of the scene or to go on to the more important and essential problems of the facsimiles. All but one wisely chose the former course, recognizing that it was not their business as Egyptologists to pass judgment on matters of divine inspiration or revelation. The one exception⁷ did not hesitate to convert his doctoral gown into the starry robe of the clairvoyant and announce that Joseph Smith *thought* the papyri on hand contained the text of the Book of Abraham, which makes him both deceived and a deceiver. On this highly intuitive conclusion rests the whole case against Joseph Smith.

Still, 1968 saw definite progress over 1912. For one thing, more is known now about the original documents, which display a measure of originality and oddity that the scholars of 1912 categorically refused to recognize and for which the Mormons cannot be held wholly responsible. It is now

6. "Sunday Morning, May 16th, 1841," *Times and Seasons* 2 (1 June 1841): 429.

7. [Baer—eds.]

generally conceded, as was not the case in 1912, that Egyptian documents can sometimes bear a number of different interpretations at once, all being valid, and that one and the same document can be at one and the same time both highly stylized and highly personalized, conventional and yet unique, to suit a particular purpose or occasion. It is also generally believed now, as it was not in 1912, that there really was an Abraham. On such points the authorities of 1912 were convinced that the final word had been spoken. But they were wrong—the door is still wide open.

The Open Door

The decision of the scholars to avoid the facsimiles and their explanation was dictated by caution and experience. By choosing their own fires to fight, they remain masters of the situation. Any attack on the facsimiles, on the other hand, promptly turns into a stunning demonstration of the limitations of Egyptology. The fact is, as we shall soon see, that nothing is known about documents of this type, to say nothing of these particular documents, each of which is unique in a number of essential points. Still worse are the disturbing number of instances in which Joseph Smith's supposedly wild guesses happen to have anticipated the best knowledge of the Egyptologists. This is strikingly brought home in the case of Facsimile 2.

In the mid-1880s Professor Samuel Birch of Oxford gathered together every example he could locate of those round "hypocephali" of which Facsimile 2 is a good example. His project called for the collaboration of all interested Egyptologists throughout the world in an attempt to come to some agreement as to what these peculiar objects represented.⁸ The Joseph Smith hypocephalus was not among those studied, and the work went forward happily uninhibited by any

8. See Samuel Birch, articles in *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, 1883–85.

reference whatever to it or to the Prophet. So it came about that when certain eminent Egyptologists twenty-eight years later found themselves confronted by Joseph Smith's interpretation of Facsimile 2 and were asked to give an opinion of it, they had their work already done for them. All any of them had to do was to point to the impressive study of 1884 and its well-publicized results, which were well known to all of them, and say, "Here, my friends, you have the answer. This is what a hypocephalus is really about!" How did it happen, then, that *none* of the experts of 1912 so much as mentioned Dr. Birch's model study and its enlightening results? Can it possibly be because the findings of 1884 were in surprising agreement on every main point with Joseph Smith's interpretation of *his* hypocephalus? We have yet to discuss Facsimile 2, and here we are getting ahead of the story; but also we may have here an explanation of why the experts do not choose to pour their water on the fire. It only burns more brightly when they do.

The last Egyptologist to leave the scene in 1968 banged the door resolutely behind him. But the catch did not hold; it was very weak. The conclusion that Joseph Smith was wrong because he thought that the *sensen* papyrus actually contained the full text of the Book of Abraham rests on exceedingly indirect and dubious evidence. What the Breathing Certificate contains is one question, and it has been partially answered. What its contents have to do with the Book of Abraham is a very different question, which cannot be answered by a knowledge of Egyptian alone. The Book of Breathings has been studied for many years and by many scholars. To this day, the conclusions reached by Philippe de Horrack, Heinrich Brugsch, Emmanuel de Rougé, François Chabas, and others about a century ago still hold: (1) though the *sensen* book is easy to translate, nobody can even begin to understand it; (2) it presents truly astonishing affinities to certain passages and teachings of both the Old and New Testaments; (3) its ideas and expressions cannot

be confined to any one period of Egyptian history; (4) it remains a complete enigma.

It is imperative, even if it is somewhat embarrassing, to keep in mind that the scholars of 1968 are quite as human as those of 1912. They still cannot speak of Joseph Smith but what their voices shake with emotion, and they still change the subject with awkward haste whenever he is mentioned. More important, they are still constitutionally incapable of conceiving even for a moment and by the wildest stretch of the imagination that he might be right. The history of education makes it clear at every step that *all* scholarship has a religious orientation—the atheism of Eduard Meyer was just as charged with religious emotion as were the oddly varied but powerfully conditioned opinions of Samuel Mercer, A. H. Sayce, or Friedrich Freiherr von Bissing. It is sheer nonsense to pretend that one's scholarly opinions rest on an intellectual plane aloof from any religious influences. A sincere attempt to maintain such an impossible posture would require at the very least that one leave all questions of revelation and inspiration strictly out of the discussion of Joseph Smith's writings, which calls for a degree of detachment that none of the critics, in 1912 or 1968, was ever able to achieve.

The Big Picture and the Little Picture

It is important to specialize. It is sound professional policy to deal with something that nobody else understands. But there are natural limits to specialization: inevitably one reaches the point at which the study of a single star cannot be pursued further until one has found out about a lot of other stars. The little picture starts expanding into a big picture, and we soon discover that without the big picture the little one cannot be understood at all. In the study of the ancient world the big picture, long ignored by scholars, has been coming into its own in recent years. For generations students worked with meticulous care on their little specialized pictures in the confident hope that in the end

each little piece would fit together with others to give a larger and clearer picture of the world and all that's in it. The idea worked: the separate studies did show a tendency to fit together and fall into patterns. Instead of gratifying the scholars, however, this alarmed most of them, fearful of the dissolution of sacred departmental bounds. Within the limits of his specialty the expert is lord and master; small wonder if he treasures and defends those limits.

As we see it, the main issue all along between the Latter-day Saints and the learned has been that of "the big picture" versus "the little picture." The best chance of catching Joseph Smith or anybody else off base is to detect him in some slip visible only to the eagle eye of the specialist with a microscope. That is perfectly legitimate, of course, provided the specialist lets the rest of us look through his microscope and provided he himself knows just what he is seeing. On both scores the Egyptologists have been deficient. The rest of us don't know how to operate the microscope—we will have to take their word for what they see; and as to their understanding and interpretation of it, well, who are we to judge what we can't even see? Professor Breasted was able to dismiss the whole Book of Abraham with devastating finality by simply observing that the Egyptians were polytheists and the Jews monotheists;⁹ within a limited framework this is so, and no picture was large enough to hold both systems in 1912—but today it is a different story, and the sweeping declaration of Breasted gives a completely distorted image which, ironically enough, the Book of Abraham corrects. Again, the idea of Abraham sitting on Pharaoh's throne (Facsimile 3) caused the experts to roar with laughter in 1912—since when does Pharaoh, of all people, allow others to sit on his very own throne? "Ever since prehistoric times" is the answer now. Up until this very writing the present author had never thought

9. James H. Breasted, in Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow, 1912; reprint, Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1965), 25.

to connect the Book of Abraham with a lengthy study published by him in the *Classical Journal* twenty-five years ago, in which he cited a dozen instances in which nonroyal individuals were permitted to sit on kingly thrones during the observance of certain rites common to many ancient civilizations, including that of Egypt.¹⁰ Today the principal emphasis in studies of Egyptian and Canaanitish religion is on those very rites, with special attention to the honored (and usually doomed) guest on the king's throne. Here is a "big picture" of which no one dreamed in 1912.

How much Egyptology depends on the big picture, and how reluctant most Egyptologists are to recognize it, is strikingly illustrated in Professor Adriaan de Buck's work on Egyptian dramatic texts.¹¹ Of one such text he wrote, "a large part of this interesting text is utterly unintelligible. The first complete lines indeed tell a clear, coherent story, but after a few lines the drift of the narrative is completely lost."¹² The meaningless text is quite intact, however—what is wrong? De Buck explains: "This text . . . belongs to a literary *genre* of which only very few examples are known to us, viz., the so-called dramatic texts."¹³ With no master plan to follow, the great de Buck can produce only such a translation as he describes as in "large part . . . little more than incoherent words and disjointed phrases."¹⁴ Professor de Buck was able to spot this strange and puzzling text only because it fitted into a larger category of papyri first recognized by the learned and imaginative Kurt Sethe. It was also de Buck who while editing the Coffin Texts recognized spell 312 as substantially

10. See Hugh Nibley, "Sparsiones," *Classical Journal* 40/9 (1945): 515–43; reprinted in *The Ancient State*, CWHN 10 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 148–94.

11. Adriaan de Buck, "The Dramatic Text," in Henri Frankfort, *The Cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos*, 2 vols. (London: Egyptian Exploration Society, 1933), 1:82–86 and 2: plates LXXXIV and LXXXV.

12. *Ibid.*, 1:82.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

the same writing as chapter 78 of the Book of the Dead, both being derived from an older lost dramatic text of considerable importance. The foremost American authorities on the Book of the Dead have passed over chapter 78 time and again without seeing anything more in it than E. A. Wallis Budge saw more than sixty years ago, and as far as they were concerned the melodrama of the Hawk to the Rescue might have gone undiscovered for centuries. For Egyptologists in general, as specialists' specialists, have always been suspicious of anything resembling a big picture, preferring the safe method of Professor Battiscombe Gunn, who insisted on treating every Egyptian text as a complete, self-contained, independent, isolated entity.

Of course there is something to be said for tending strictly to the day's assignment; one can overdo the big picture, as amateurs and cranks are liable to do. But the fact remains that the great Egyptologists have all been those who were willing to venture farther than other men and risk the censure of their colleagues in a quest for wider vistas and associations. The safe conservative majority still prefer to explain the whole magnificent complex of Egyptian civilization as a fortuitous and haphazard accumulation of junk, and Egyptian religion as an amalgamation of cult objects thrown together from countless local shrines where their original primitive significance had been forgotten long before the fusion. Even though the Egyptians were able to impose on the structure a wonderful consistency and uniformity of style while at the same time achieving a technical skill that fills us with awe, still, most Egyptologists insist on seeing in the whole stunning performance only a majestic facade with nothing behind it. Because of this attitude, according to Claas J. Bleeker in his study of Egyptian festivals, Egyptologists "have not succeeded in presenting a satisfactory description of ancient religion. Evidently, they have not asked themselves what their approach to this religion ought to be. They have obviously studied this ancient

religion from the viewpoint of a modern European"¹⁵—or worse still, of the modern American scientist with the evolutionary chip on his shoulder.

Blindness to larger contexts is a constitutional defect of human thinking imposed by the painful necessity of being able to concentrate on only one thing at a time. We forget as we virtuously concentrate on that one thing that hundreds of other things are going on at the same time and on every side of us, things that are just as important as the object of our study and that are all interconnected in ways that we cannot even guess. Sad to say, our picture of the world to the degree to which it has that neatness, precision, and finality so coveted by scholarship is a false one. I once studied with a famous professor¹⁶ who declared that he deliberately avoided the study of any literature east of Greece, lest the new vision destroy the architectonic perfection of his own celebrated construction of the Greek mind. His picture of that mind was immensely impressive but, I strongly suspect, completely misleading.

It is against the wider background of religious traditions and ceremonies common to most of the ancient Near East that the facsimiles in the Book of Abraham begin to make real sense and that Joseph Smith's explanation of them scores one bull's-eye after another. Interestingly enough, it was the jury of 1912 that insisted on forcing the big picture on the attention of the world. For there was just one thing on which they all agreed regarding the facsimiles, one thing alone on which none of them hesitated for a moment to speak with absolute certainty and finality: Whatever the facsimiles might be, or whatever they might mean, according to this verdict, they could not possibly have anything whatever to do with Abraham. By bringing Abraham into the picture so forcefully, they pushed out the walls to take in

15. Claas J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religious Renewal* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 1.

16. [Werner Jaeger—eds.]

more territory than their specialties warranted. It was safe enough for them to do that then, for they all considered the biblical Abraham to be a mere myth and some of them had written books and articles to prove it. But now that Abraham has become a real person, we are obliged to test the facsimiles in the light of the extensive archaeological and literary materials that are today bringing to life the man and the world in which he lived.

This takes us beyond the range of the Egyptologists and breaks their monopoly. They take comfort in the proposition that if Joseph Smith can be debunked in any *one* area, it makes no difference what evidence might seem to support his position in another. That argument is valid, however, only if the disclosures in the one area have been complete and exhaustive, which has been anything but the case. Here the experience of 1912 should teach us a lesson. Never were men more confident that enough was known by them on one point at least to prove Joseph Smith hopelessly and irredeemably wrong; satisfied with that, they considered the problem solved. Yet it was precisely on that one point, the possibility of ties between Abraham and the facsimiles, that their position was weakest, since, as it turned out later, they knew virtually nothing at all either about Abraham *or* the facsimiles. The same tendency to settle for premature conclusions was apparent in 1968. So when the experts offer a possible or plausible explanation of some figure in the facsimiles, for example, a crocodile or a bird, they invariably put forward their explanation as the *one* possible answer, excluding all others. Egyptologists of all people should be the first to acknowledge that one possible explanation of a bird, while perfectly acceptable, by no means excludes from the Egyptian mind other equally valid explanations of the same object.

To avoid looking seriously into the countless possible explanations of this or that figure, the Egyptologist today can shrug his shoulders and declare with some impatience

that, of course, anybody who is determined to do so can make out a case for Joseph Smith or anything else. Whether this is true or not (and we seriously doubt it), the man who makes such a statement has painted himself into a corner; for as long as one can make out a case, no matter how flimsy, *for* Joseph Smith, the case *against* him cannot be considered closed. The writer's own purpose in snooping around in the stacks has been simply to throw out suggestions and hint at possibilities. Not for a moment does he insist that any of his own explanations, for example, of the figures in Facsimile 1, is correct. It is enough that an explanation is conceivable, enough to show that many possibilities remain to be considered, to keep the door open. Until far more work has been done, the idea of discrediting Joseph Smith on the strength of one completely demonstrated point must yield to the opposite reasoning: Whenever any evidence *favours* the Book of Abraham, conflicting evidence may be discounted until further investigation, since the chances of such agreement are much rarer than the almost unlimited possibilities of disagreement.

We frankly prefer the big picture to the single-shot solution, having found it to be far more foolproof than any little picture. Composed as it is of thousands of little images, the big one can easily dispense with large numbers of them without suffering substantially. It is a huge overall sort of thing, supported by great masses of evidence, but nonetheless presenting a clear and distinct image. No one can be sure of a little picture, on the other hand; at any moment some new discovery from some unexpected direction may wipe it out. Let us take a brief distant view of the big picture of Abraham that is just beginning to emerge from the fog. Here is a long-forgotten body of apocryphal stories about the patriarch, the oldest and most important being of recent publication—and neither this author nor any of his colleagues had ever heard of them before 1968! We read of desperate people seeking security in a world of drought and

famine by rushing to the supplication of idols. We read of their great ceremonial assemblies at huge ritual complexes, of the royal victims offered, of princesses compelled to compromise their virtue or suffer death. We read of kings insecure on their thrones and determined to establish and retain a royal line, seeing their worst enemy and opponent in Abraham. We read of constant tension between matriarchal and patriarchal traditions; of a king who coveted priestly authority above all things and tried to buy it from Abraham; of hungry migrants driven from place to place and crisis to crisis; of rites and ordinances all directed to combating an all-pervading drought and assuring the fertility of the land and prestige of the king. We read of Egypt in Canaan and Canaan in Egypt—culturally, politically, and especially religiously. We read of a peculiar altar built for the sacrificing of Abraham, of how he prayed for deliverance and at the last moment was rescued by an angel, who accomplished his mission by smiting the assembly with a disastrous earthquake. We read of the strange humiliation and conversion of the king and of Abraham's yet stranger refusal to let him share in his priestly functions. We read of kings and princes doing obeisance to Abraham, clad in royal insignia at the behest of the king, who shortly before had tried to put him to death. We also read of Isaac and Sarah going through much the same experience as did Abraham, placed upon the altar or the lion couch, praying in a single voice with Abraham for deliverance, saved at the last moment by an angel.¹⁷

The choruses of voices from the East is surprisingly joined by another from the West, a mass of classical lore all going back to Minoan and Mycenaean times. It depicts the same distracted world as that of the Abraham legends, the same desperate, famine-ridden people seeking to stem the all-pervading drought and make the waters flow by the same great public ceremonies; it tells us of that strange

17. See Hugh Nibley, "The Sacrifice of Isaac" and "The Sacrifice of Sarah," in *Abraham in Egypt*, CWHN 14:319–81.

breed of kings who tried to put their noble guests to a ritual death on cunningly devised altars in order to save their own lives and restore fertility to their afflicted lands; it tells us how the scheme failed when a noble, suffering, godlike, traveling stranger turned the tables and was miraculously delivered from the altar at the last moment, while the officiating priest of the king himself paid the sacrificial price. Fittingly, these old stories all point to Egypt as the scene and Busiris and Heracles as the actors in the primal version of this strange drama, Heracles being the standard substitute for any suffering hero whose real name was forgotten. Vital to the understanding of such traditions is the now recognized interplay of ritual and history in the ancient world, where great ritual events were major historic milestones and typical historical events were duly ritualized. This means that there can be no objection to the picture of Abraham on the altar as an authentic stereotype; and indeed, the Book of Abraham beats us to the punch when it explains that Abraham was by no means the only noble victim to suffer ritual death on that peculiar lion-shaped altar. The legends that recall the same situation, therefore, offer powerful confirmation of the event.

Each of the vignettes that have just flashed by us—a very incomplete list indeed—has a double link, one with the historical and archaeological record indicating that there was something behind it, and the other with the Book of Abraham. What more do you want? Joseph Smith was certainly on the track of something. The newer studies of Abraham are much concerned with his Asiatic background and with the mysterious kings of Genesis 14. Most mysterious of all is his archrival, the enigmatic Nimrod whom the legends identify with Pharaoh or the father of a pharaoh and with an Asiatic upstart king who seized the throne of Egypt. There were a number of such kings, and the name of Nimrod is closely tied with certain Asiatic or Libyan dynasties that ruled in Egypt, the most illustrious of the line being that Shishaq (or

Sheshonq) I, who reintroduced human sacrifice in Egypt and had particularly close family and other ties with Israel. He was the son and the father of a Nimrod, and both names occur frequently. The only time the name of Abraham has ever turned up in Egyptian inscriptions was when Breasted and others spotted it on the reliefs of Sheshonq I at Karnak, which describe his campaign in Palestine.¹⁸ The identity of the name has been questioned, of course, but never disproved. In the light of such things one can only ask whether it is pure accident that the name of Shishaq occurs on Facsimile 1; if there was ever an Egyptian family in which one would expect the name of Abraham to be remembered, it would surely be that of the Sheshonqids. The presence of writing attributed to Abraham in the hands of the Sheshonq family is in itself by no means an unlikely situation, but of course absolutely nothing has been proven as yet. That is just the point: wherever we look the big picture stretches out, a huge, dim patchwork sprawl of history and legend awaiting the explorer of future generations. Far beyond our scope or grasp, it is enough at the present moment to show that it is *there*.

There are those who deplore the study of such things as “esoteric” and “exotic.” By very definition the unknown is always exotic and the little-known is always esoteric; the terms are relative—to the departmental philosopher even Latin may be esoteric and Greek positively exotic. Now the office and calling of scholarship and science is to investigate the unknown, and people who engage in such work are not ashamed of admitting that it intrigues them—it is exciting and even romantic stuff; the motion is always away from the commonplace and familiar to the strange and wonderful. The established academician with his tried-and-tested platitudes and truisms is welcomed to his world of preaching

18. James H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906–7), 4:353 (§ 715).

and posturing, but the greatest appeal of the gospel in every age has been that it is frankly wonderful—one glorious surprise after another.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price is the way they knocked the walls out of the narrow religious edifice of Western man of the early nineteenth century. Without them Mormonism might well be charged, as it has been, with being nothing but a segment of a narrow isolated subsection of Protestant Christianity. With them, it breaks into the big picture in the grand manner, for while one of these books takes us as far away in time and place as it is possible to get in human history, showing God's dealings as it were with men of another world, the other by choosing an Egyptian provenance cuts for us the largest possible slice of the religious experience of the race.

O, ye of little knowledge!

The trouble with the little picture is that one can never be sure of it. It is outlined by the areas that surround it, and if one ignores them, the lapidary perfection of the small picture is little more than a glorified doodling. "The case at issue," writes the most helpful of the critics of 1968, is "what *are* the facsimiles?" And indeed, until we know exactly what the facsimiles are, it makes no difference what we may think Joseph Smith *thought* they were. The question can be answered at various levels, and any number of *partial* answers are possible. That is typical of Egyptian questions, as Professor Bleeker shows at length in his new book on the festivals. Here are some points he makes:

1. An understanding of Egyptian religion can best be achieved through the study of the festivals, since these supply us with the abundance of documents we need.¹⁹

19. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 141.

2. These documents, however, are only pictures for which no written explanations are available, aside from very brief labels, for “the Egyptian . . . felt no need to explain them.”²⁰

3. Accordingly, in spite of our monumental compilations of pictures and texts, “extremely few facts are known about the festivals of even the well-known gods.”²¹ The Egyptologist must be reconciled to the fact that “there will always be gaps in his knowledge and that his insight will often prove inadequate. For the data with which he is working are scanty, uninformative, and sometimes extremely difficult to explain.”²²

4. Hence the usual practice has been for the Egyptologist simply to describe what he sees and let it go at that: “There has yet to be written a critical analysis of the fragmentary data and a satisfactory interpretation of these ceremonies [including that baffling business on the lion couch, incidentally!]. . . . As a rule, the authors . . . are content with a factual description bereft of any thorough-going explanation.”²³ Most Egyptologists, in fact, pride themselves on sticking to purely descriptive observations and avoiding the pitfalls of speculation.

5. But that gets them nowhere: “It is meaningless to collect data,” says Bleeker, without asking “what did the Egyptians believe?”²⁴ There is no escaping it: “One must learn to think as an Egyptian in order to understand his religion.”²⁵ “One must learn to think Egyptian.”²⁶ But this leaves us all in a dilemma: how does one go about learning to think Egyptian, and how does one know when one has succeeded? Living teachers we have none; we can only

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 33.

22. Ibid., 1.

23. Ibid., 94.

24. Ibid., 141.

25. Ibid., 142.

26. Ibid., 1.

learn to think Egyptian by a thorough understanding of the Egyptian books, which of course cannot be understood until we *first* know how to think Egyptian. Alexander M. Stephen spent long years among the Hopis and in the end admitted that he had never been able to so much as peep under the blanket of Hopi religious thought.²⁷ Even if an Egyptologist were to fly through time and live among the ancient Egyptians, we would still have no guarantee of his capacity to “think Egyptian.” It is impertinent to claim mastery of a mode of thought when no control exists to confirm or refute our claims.

Now there are great bodies of Egyptian religious texts, like the Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, and there are also huge albums of pictures, like the Medinet Habu reliefs or the vignettes from the Book of the Dead, and there can be no doubt that some of these texts go together. But since they are not *found* together, we can only guess which goes with which. We cannot prove, for example, that the texts we cited to illustrate the lion-couch scene really belong to it; but neither can anyone prove the opposite in the present state of our knowledge.

So the Egyptologists in confining themselves to purely descriptive activities are doing the safe thing. But no science is content with mere description, and the more descriptive sciences have hit upon a way of making up for their deficiencies. It is showmanship—what would any learned profession be without it? The scholars of 1912 played a shrewd game when they conducted the public as it were into the awesome recesses of the Egyptian Museum and there, pointing with mute eloquence to a lot of things that looked something like the facsimiles, let the world draw its own conclusions, that these things in some mysterious way proved Joseph Smith a fraud. The main purpose of the expedition was to silence criticism: you must admit that the Egyptian Collection for

27. See *Hopi Journal of Alexander M. Stephen*, ed. Elsie C. Parsons (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

sheer mass and charge is intimidating to a layman, an overpowering demonstration of the boundless accomplishments of science. The visitor is embarrassed by the riches that surround him and made crushingly aware of his own ignorance. And when a tall, dignified man bustles through the halls with a paper in his hand, the visitor can only whisper with religious awe to whoever is with him, "There goes the Curator, the Man Who Knows!" And right here we have the crux of the matter, which is that the curator does *not* know. Let us refer again to the festival reliefs, the most numerous and impressive objects ever to come under the surveillance of a curator. Nothing is more familiar to the Egyptologist than these wonderful scenes of offering and presentation repeated over and over again hundreds of times. Yet Professor Bleeker assures us that no real explanation of them, ancient or modern, is available, that all we shall ever know about them is what we can guess by looking at the mute pictures themselves—a lock without a key.²⁸

It would appear that the experts of 1912 did not know enough to suspect the limitations that crowded them on every side. Knowing nothing, they thought they knew everything, and in a way they did. For how can a man be charged with ignorance who knows all that is known, and hence all that there is to be known, on a subject? The rock upon which scholarship builds its house is that maxim dear to the heart of A. E. Housman: "Among the blind the one-eyed man is king!"²⁹ The Egyptologist is in the enviable position of being able to say with stately simplicity, when confronted by a word or sentence *he* cannot read, "*It cannot be read,*" and retire from the scene with enhanced rather than damaged prestige.

28. See Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 16–18, 104, 144.

29. A. E. Housman, *Introductory Lecture Delivered before the Faculties of Arts and Laws and of Science in University College London October 3, 1892* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 23.

As we pass through the hallowed halls of the museum, avidly reading the labels on everything, we begin to feel a vague sense of annoyance with the little tags and snippets of information that are being handed out to us. These prim little inscriptions rarely do more than describe what we can see for ourselves. As our feet become hotter and our enthusiasm cooler, we wonder if Bleeker was not right when he said that it is meaningless merely to collect data and describe things. Even the evolutionary rule doesn't explain very much in Egypt: "It is doubtful," wrote Bleeker, "whether there is any point in enquiring into the development of ancient Egyptian thought, as Breasted in particular has done,"³⁰ the trouble with that being that one simply reconstructs the past according to one's preordained pattern. The tags and labels in the museum, like those hypnotic—nay, stupefying—captions to the pictures in nature and travel magazines, impart an air of intimate knowledge (few suspect how often they are totally inaccurate!) and seem designed to indicate with a few modest words the boundless treasures that repose under the lid. But don't be fooled: the reason they tell us so little is simply that they have no more to tell. "The great voids and flaws in the tenuous fabric of our knowledge," writes Paul Weiss, are "now covered by illusive verbal wrappings, which insinuate knowledge where there is none."³¹

From the museum we turn to the *sensen* papyrus. What are we told about it? Again the familiar tags and snippets: The lady's name refers to the Theban moon-god, son of Amon and Nut; Amon-Re, king of the gods, is the chief deity of the great temple of Karnak at Thebes; Min Bull-of-His-Mother is a common epithet of the fertility god Min;³² Khons the Governor is an epithet of Khons; "justified" is the usual epithet

30. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 8.

31. Paul A. Weiss, "Living Nature and the Knowledge Gap," *Saturday Review*, 29 November 1969, 21.

32. [Nibley is following Baer's misreading of this epithet; the proper reading is Min who massacres his enemies—eds.]

placed after the name of a deceased person; the title Osiris is given to the deceased in all mortuary texts after about 2200 B.C.; Re is the sun-god. Osiris joins him in his daily circuit around the earth; Nut is the sky-goddess, sister and wife of Geb; natron was used by the Egyptians instead of soap. . . . And so on and so on. It is all in the handbook, as routine and predictable as a knee jerk, the approved school solution that leaves us none the wiser, “factual description bereft of any thorough-going explanation,” as Bleeker puts it.³³ If we are not given anything of solid and arresting value, it is because there is nothing of that kind to give. If there is any reality behind the facsimiles, Egyptology has yet to discover it.

The last page of the latest and one of the best of Egyptian grammars warns the student that Egyptian cultic texts are full of errors, due to the process of transmission, but what is worse, that even where the translation is assured, “the content remains for us a sealed book [*énigmatique*].”³⁴ At the same time, the latest studies of the best-known and best-documented Egyptian rites—the Opening of the Mouth, the *heb-sed*, and the royal sacrifices—all insist with great emphasis that, contrary to what has always been assumed, virtually nothing is known about any of these rites or in all probability ever will be known.³⁵ Since the matter of our three facsimiles is undeniably related to these rites, since the categories to which these scenes belong (lion-couch, hypcephalus, and presentation) have never been carefully studied, and since the specific place of each of the three scenes within its category has never been examined, it is nothing short of chicanery for anyone to pretend that he knows what

33. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 94.

34. Adriaan de Buck, *Grammaire élémentaire du moyen égyptien* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 144.

35. See Eberhard Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1960); Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*; and Philippe Derchain, *Rites égyptiens: Le sacrifice de l'oryx* (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique reine Élisabeth, 1962).

the facsimiles are about. It is perfectly legitimate to speculate and guess about these things, but not to pontificate about them—not for anyone.

At all times the whole discussion of the facsimiles in the Book of Abraham and the papyri that go with them has hinged on one point and one alone: Who really knows? We will readily grant that Professor X can read Egyptian as well as anybody else can, but is that enough? Is it even relevant? Every eminent Egyptologist has commented with dismay on the circumstance that one can read a text readily and even glibly without having the vaguest idea of what it is about. The only chance of progress in such a state is, as de Buck points out, to seek the widest possible associations—a procedure of which most Egyptologists are deeply suspicious.

Unexplained Territory

It is only the last step that counts, as the French say, and so far nobody has taken it. The hopes for a quick decision with the finding of the Joseph Smith Papyri were blasted when it became apparent on the one hand that those documents do not contain the Book of Abraham, and on the other that the connection between the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and the Book of Abraham is anything but clear. The work has hardly begun, but people still seek the safe and easy solution of authority and ask with impatience, “Can’t you spare us all that speculation and surmising and comparing and illustrating and simply give us the results?” The anti-Mormons have been only too glad to do just that, but we must never let them make us forget that proof is a process, not an answer, and that there is no such thing as total knowledge. A thing is proven when the individual is convinced, but no one can ever share just the thoughts and experiences that add up to proof in the mind of another. This writer cannot go very far along the road with the Egyptologists, to be sure, but he cannot escape the responsibility of going on his own *just as far as he possibly can*. The same obligation rests on every other person who would

pass judgment on Joseph Smith. For centuries astronomers described the craters of the moon and the rings of Saturn, but their explanations of those phenomena were no better than the thoughtful guesses of anybody else. Today all that the experts can do with the facsimiles is to describe them—what they really say remains anybody's guess. Egyptologists would do well to heed the maxim of the most famous of Egyptian sages, the immortal Ptah-hotep: "Be not arrogant because of thy knowledge, and have no confidence in that thou art a learned man. Take counsel with the ignorant as with the wise, for the limits of art cannot be reached, and no artist fully possesseth his skill."³⁶

Many Latter-day Saints have not been too happy with the Joseph Smith Papyri, which instead of giving them all the answers only set them to work on a lot of problems with which none of this generation is prepared to deal. But it was the Mormons who started this game, and it is their responsibility to keep it going. They can never again leave the field without forfeiting the game. The opposition have been only too glad to call a halt at any time; they were in an unseemly hurry to blow the whistle in 1912, and that should have tipped the Mormons off. But the Mormons did not realize the strength of their own position and relapsed into silence, not from any fear of controversy (they do not have to issue daily bulletins from the housetops, as their enemies have done), but out of preference for smoother and easier roads of knowledge.

In 1833 the School of the Prophets at Kirtland adopted a basic curriculum of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and for a time some of the brethren, following the example of the Prophet, seriously came to grips with those languages. The program was violently interrupted, but it was enough to serve notice that the Mormons intended to study the hard way and to take advantage of all the resources that are available for the

36. Adolf Erman, *The Ancient Egyptians: A Sourcebook of Their Writings*, trans. Aylward M. Blackman (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 56.

study of the scriptures. God had told Oliver Cowdery in no uncertain terms that revelation follows study and may never be claimed as a substitute for it (D&C 9:7–8). The bringing forth of the papyrus fragments in 1967 was a reminder to the Saints that they are still expected to do their homework and may claim no special revelation or convenient handout solutions as long as they ignore the vast treasure-house of materials that God has placed within their reach.

So far we have only taken a preliminary view of a few problems raised by Facsimile 1, and hardly even mentioned Facsimiles 2 and 3, which in their way are even more challenging and enlightening. We have dealt entirely in possibilities, never in certitudes, possibilities being all we need to keep the door open. “The method of critical discussion,” says Karl Popper, “does not establish anything. Its verdict is always and invariably ‘not proven.’”³⁷ As long as a single aspect of any problem raised by the Book of Abraham remains unexamined, as long as there is the remotest possibility that any slight detail of any significance may have been overlooked, as long as a single possible relevant text remains unread, we must hold our final word in abeyance.

A few years ago a librarian in Salt Lake City revived the dormant issue of the facsimiles in the Book of Abraham by proclaiming with great force in a series of lectures that the one fatal mistake that Joseph Smith made in all his career of deception was to publish a commentary on Egyptian documents that would someday be an open book to science.³⁸ The librarian had it backwards. It would be hard to find any document that Joseph Smith or anyone else could have selected, whose nature and purpose is more effectively locked up from the scrutiny of the learned. To the eye of the

37. Karl Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality*, trans. Mark A. Notturmo (New York: Routledge, 1996), 104.

38. [We have not been able to identify the highly respected university librarian in Salt Lake City, also known as Mr. F, whom Nibley mentions—eds.]

candid unbeliever the Prophet may be considered particularly lucky in having hit upon these singularly enigmatic objects as the subject of his discourses and to have been thrice lucky in coming up with a history of Abraham that fits so nicely with the old Abraham legends and traditions about which he knew nothing. Whether it was luck or not, we cannot in all fairness deny him the advantage of our own very real ignorance by continuing to conceal it. It is on the absurd assumption of a whole and solid knowledge of the facsimiles and on that alone that the case against Joseph Smith rests at the moment.

Question Time

Ever since the services of professional Egyptologists were enlisted to contribute to the downfall of the Prophet, beginning in 1845, one stock question has been addressed to the Mormons with tireless persistence: "The scholars have spoken; why don't you do the honest thing and accept the verdict of the experts?" The answer should be clear by now: "Why don't *you* do the honest thing and find out how much the experts really know?" Both questions are perfectly legitimate. During the past hundred years the general public has known next to nothing about the moon, and yet when an intelligent and dedicated man who has spent his life gazing at the moon offers to tell us just how our satellite originated, the ignorant public hesitates to accept his opinion as binding or final. Why? How can we ignoramuses in all honesty question the learned specialist for a moment?

Well, for one thing, if we are honest we must admit that our knowledge is far too limited to permit us to judge of the man's competence—and that is exactly what he is asking us to do when he solicits our assent. Then too, we feel that our expert is going too far: we are willing enough to accept his purely descriptive statements about the size, specific gravity, motion, etc., of the moon, but when he presumes to tell us things bordering on ultimate origins, common sense

admonishes caution. Science, as we are often told today in the scientific journals, only describes things—it does not explain them; an observation is not in itself an explanation. And so while we applaud the skill of the scholar who translates an Egyptian text, we draw the line when that same scholar almost overnight becomes an expert on Mormonism and the mind of Joseph Smith and hands down his ultimate decisions on last things purely by virtue of his command of a very limited, dubious, and tentative stock of rules of Egyptian grammar.

Also, while we must admit that an astronomer's ideas about lunar origins and an Egyptologist's idea about the facsimiles may be learned and plausible enough, the fact remains that the vital information necessary to prove their theories one way or another is simply not available—a limitation attested by the inability of the best astronomers and Egyptologists to agree on such matters. Alan H. Gardiner recommended that Egyptologists set up their theories and their translations as targets to shoot at and then do their best to falsify them. That is the one fruitful scientific method, but where the Book of Abraham is concerned, the Egyptologists, though confronted by the most baffling examples of what their most speculative of sciences has to deal with, have chosen to declare their opinions sacrosanct and beyond question or discussion, even though the documents at hand go far beyond the domain of their competence in every direction. They have done a nice preliminary tidying-up job in one corner of the field—the sort of thing they are good at—and for that they have our sincere thanks. But they have not touched upon the main problems, except for a few purely personal and emotional outbursts; and as for really getting into the substance of the Book of Abraham, it would be as unfair to expect them to do that as it would be to credit them with having done it.

Who, then, is to decide these weighty matters? That is just the point: Is it necessary to decide here and now? The

Mormons have always hesitated and asked for time, waiting (though rarely seeking) for further light and knowledge. Significantly, it has always been the Egyptologists, usually the very soul of caution, who have insisted on a once-for-all, here-and-now, before-we-leave-the-room decision and have been desperately determined not to prolong the discussion. That is still their policy, and it forces us to return upon their own heads the routine question with which the world would confound and demolish us: You scholars have spoken; why don't you do the honest thing and admit that you don't know a blessed thing about the facsimiles, that you haven't made even a superficial study of them either to examine the categories to which they belong or the peculiarities of the individual documents? Why not admit that the relationship between the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and the Book of Abraham is an enigma, full of odd contradictions and unexplained anomalies? Why not admit that you are not privy to the mind of Joseph Smith? That the test of the Book of Abraham lies in what it says, not in the manner in which it may have been composed, and that a thorough test of its contents would require a scope of research that no scholar today has any intention of undertaking, a scope of knowledge that few if any scholars today possess? Why not recognize that there is a vast amount of literary material that presents remarkable parallels to the matter in the Book of Abraham and that no scholar has made the slightest effort to look into the problems that these correspondences raise? Why not admit that the figure of Abraham is shrouded in mystery and that the search for the real Abraham has just begun? Why not admit, in Gardiner's words, that "what is proudly advertised as Egyptian history is merely a collection of rags and tatters,"³⁹ and, if one admits so much, that it is far too early in the game to convert those few rags and tatters into robes of academic omniscience?

39. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 53.

Until now, no one has done much more than play around with the bedizening treasury of the Pearl of Great Price. “They” *would* not, we *could* not make of the Book of Abraham an object of serious study. The time has come to change all that. The book that concerns us was purposely called “The Pearl of Great Price,” that term being both in scripture and apocrypha the designation of a treasure that is both hidden and inexhaustible. Being hidden, it must be searched out and dug up—brought out of the depths by the strenuous and determined efforts of whoever would possess it. Being inexhaustibly vast, it can never cease to be a source of new wonders to the inquiring mind. In the past this treasure has been treated more or less like a convenient bit of pocket money, a ready fund of occasional texts to be dipped into for self-serving commentaries. That is not the purpose of the scriptures, which is to tell us what we do not know and often do not want to know. The Pearl of Great Price is unique among scriptures in that its message is available only to that extent to which God’s children choose to make it so, but at the same time it is capable of conveying knowledge of undreamed of scope and significance.

Appendix: “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price”

With the publication of this volume, the complete series “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” that appeared in the *Improvement Era* (1968–70) has now been published. The bold-face portions appear in *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed., CWHN 14; the remaining portions appear in this volume, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*, CWHN 18.

“Part 1, Challenge and Response.” *IE* 71/1 (January 1968): 18–24. **(only pages 20–22, “Appeal to Authority,” appeared in *Abraham in Egypt*)**

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“Part 1, Challenge and Response (continued).” *IE* 71/3 (March 1968): 16–18, 20–22.

“Part 1, Challenge and Response (continued).” *IE* 71/4 (April 1968): 64–69 (includes a long note entitled “We Should Explain,” 65–66).

“Part 2, May We See Your Credentials?” *IE* 71/5 (May 1968): 54–57.

“Part 2, May We See Your Credentials? (continued).” *IE* 71/6 (June 1968): 18–22.

“Part 3, Empaneling the Panel.” *IE* 71/7 (July 1968): 48–55.

“Part 4, Second String.” *IE* 71/8 (August 1968): 53–64.

“Part 5, Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document.” *IE* 71/9
(September 1968): 66–80.

“Part 5, Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document (continued).”
IE 71/10 (October 1968): 73–81.

“Part 6, Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document (continued).”
IE 71/11 (November 1968): 36–38, 40, 42, 44.

“Part 6, Facsimile No. 1: A Unique Document (continued).”
IE 71/12 (December 1968): 28–33.

“Part 7, The Unknown Abraham.” *IE* 72/1 (January 1969):
26–33.

“Part 7, The Unknown Abraham (continued).” *IE* 72/2
(February 1969): 64–67.

“Part 8[7], The Unknown Abraham (continued).” *IE* 72/3
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“Part 8, Facsimile No. 1, By the Figures.” *IE* 72/7 (July 1969):
101–11.

“Part 8, Facsimile No. 1, By the Figures (continued).” *IE*
72/8 (August 1969): 75–87.

“Part 8, Facsimile No. 1, By the Figures (continued).” *IE*
72/9 (September 1969): 85–95.

- "Part 8, Facsimile No. 1, By the Figures (continued)." *IE* 72/10 (October 1969): 85–88.
- "Part 9, Setting the Stage—The World of Abraham." *IE* 72/10 (October 1969): 89–95.**
- "Part 9, Setting the Stage—The World of Abraham (continued)." *IE* 72/11 (November 1969): 36–44.**
- "Part 9, Setting the Stage: The World of Abraham (continued)." *IE* 73/1 (January 1970): 56–65.
- "Part 10, The Sacrifice of Isaac." *IE* 73/3 (March 1970): 84–94.**
- "Part 11, The Sacrifice of Sarah." *IE* 73/4 (April 1970): 79–95.**
- "Conclusion: Taking Stock." *IE* 73/5 (May 1970): 82–89, 91–94.

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