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The Egyptian Bible and the Cosmic Order

In 1966, the University of Utah Coptologist Aziz Atiya (1898–1988) learned that the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art owned several funerary papyri from Ptolemaic Egypt, artifacts whose appropriate disposition had vexed the museum for decades.[1] The distinctively American provenance for these documents drew curators to show them to Atiya. The fragments in question came from a collection that Joseph Smith Jr. had purchased in Kirtland, Ohio in 1835.

The afterlife journey of those papyri was in some respects as elaborate as the voyage such documents anticipated for the spirits of the deceased. Interred in Thebes around 200 BCE, the papyri were appropriated around 1820 by the Italian adventurer Antonio Lebolo, then ended up in the collection of Michael Chandler, an itinerant showman largely lost to history. Chandler made it from Philadelphia to Cleveland, thence to the nearby folk expert in hieroglyphs, Joseph Smith, then residing in the Latter-day Saint town of Kirtland. The prophet, in collaboration with trusted colleagues, used the papyri to draft a collection of philological documents and publish a new book of scripture, carrying the papyri and their sacred products from Kirtland to Missouri to the new Latter-day Saint capital at Nauvoo, Illinois.

Joseph's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, displayed the artifacts in a makeshift frontier museum in the early 1840s (some evidence suggests that the Smiths hoped to integrate the museum into the Nauvoo temple[2]). After Smith died, his family retained the papyri. His widow Emma Hale Smith and her second husband sold them to a collector, Abel Combs, who sold most of them to another collector, who in turn housed them in the St. Louis Museum, from which they were sold to Wood's Museum in Chicago. Most of the papyri were likely destroyed in the Chicago fire of 1871, but Combs's housekeeper inherited a few. Those latter papyri ultimately made their way to the Metropolitan Museum, by way of her grandson.[3]

Such are the peregrinations of the Joseph Smith papyri. What early Latter-day Saints did with these ancient documents is also a fascinating story with many unexpected turns. Smith's encounter with the papyri resulted in a collection of

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[1] Gee, "Puzzles," 115–16.
[2] McBride, *Nauvoo Temple*, 3.
[3] Todd, *Book of Abraham*, and Peterson, *Book of Abraham*.

manuscripts, some of which were published in 1842 as the Book of Abraham. The published texts of the Book of Abraham—sparsely commented by Joseph Smith himself—entered the scriptural canon forty years later. (The associated grammatical texts were less complete, harder to categorize, misplaced for decades, and never canonized.) The published manuscripts positioned themselves as a biblical lost book retelling the Genesis story in the name of Abraham. This Egyptian Bible returned again to the Hebrew Bible's primeval history; revealed, confirmed, or expanded several distinctive Latter-day Saint doctrines; and—most controversially—demonstrated to Smith's followers his mastery of hieroglyphs.

The Book of Abraham did all that and more for believers for over a century-and-a-half. It did nothing of the sort for critics. As Egyptology shifted toward a modern professional discipline, it became increasingly clear that the product of Smith's encounter with the hieroglyphs looked nothing like an academic translation. No professional non-Mormon Egyptologist would ever endorse the English text of Smith's Egyptian project as containing straightforward linguistic translations.[4]

Though the disconnect between the modern interpretation of the papyri and Smith's English-language documents had been noted since at least the 1860s,[5] the recovery from the Metropolitan Museum of papyrus fragments among the remnants of the Joseph Smith collection—a *Breathing Permit* and *Book of Going Out by Day*, both ritual texts to guide the newly deceased in the afterlife—resulted in a flash of controversy.[6] Following Joseph Smith's lead, Latter-day Saints had traditionally understood the papyri as coded references to their scriptures and cosmology, a view fundamentally at odds with academic Egyptian interpretations. The leading Church classicist of the day, Hugh Nibley, imaginatively identified the funerary papyri as an early Egyptian version of the Nauvoo temple liturgy, while critics framed the recovered papyri as proof of Smith's deceit.[7] Some Latter-day Saints separated from their church in the aftermath of the publicity about the papyri; the topic still figures in many popular works by and for disaffiliating Church members.[8]

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[4] By "Egyptian project," I mean all of Smith's work relating to hieroglyphs and the papyri. See Brown, "Chain of Belonging," 12.

[5] The French Egyptologist Theodule Deveria analyzed the facsimiles in Remy and Brenchley, *Great-Salt-Lake City*, 2: 540–46. F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith*, collected scholarly responses to the facsimiles.

[6] See, e.g., Wilson, "Summary Report"; Stephen Thompson, "Egyptology"; and Ritner, "Breathing Permit."

[7] Contrast, for example, Nibley, *Joseph Smith Papyri*, with Larson, *Joseph Smith Papyri*, and the counterpolemic in Gee, "Tragedy of Errors."

[8] The "Book of Abraham problem" figures, for example, in the pastiche of anti-Mormon tropes published as http://cesletter.com/Letter-to-a-CES-Director.pdf (accessed August 16, 2016), with one Latter-day Saint response at http://debunking-cesletter.com (accessed February 2, 2018). As an emblem of the tension, a counterculture press published an antagonistic rendering of the text of the Smith papyri by an Egyptologist (Robert Ritner) who had been the academic advisor of a Latter-day

The Egyptian papyri, their antebellum American context, Smith's translations, and the debates about their nature and significance have generated many decades of controversy within and around the early Church. These stories—and the cultural contexts and implications that the polemics on both sides have consistently missed—are the work of this chapter. For ease of exposition, I briefly review the historical context, consider the relevant documents on their own terms, and then tie Smith's Egyptian project back to questions of his complex dance with modernity. With a special eye to its relevance to the nature of time, self, and scripture, I argue that Smith was revealing an Egyptian Bible saturated by the metaphysics of hieroglyphs.[9] This special Bible played an important role in the elaboration of Smith's replacement for the Chain of Being, what I call the Chain of Belonging. In this treatment, I am especially interested in understanding what the texts were for, what they did, and what they had to say about themselves.

We begin with context.

Egypt in America

Two core sets of traditions mediated Smith's encounter with Egypt, one mainstream and the other esoteric (admitting that the two are closer than many observers have been comfortable acknowledging). In the nineteenth century, most thinkers were drawn to the antiquity of Egypt and its pictographic language. Egypt contained origins and archetypes as well as the promise of mysteries lost to the Bible when the Hebrews fled their captivity for the promised land. The pictograms held the key to recovering those secrets.

The after story of ancient Egypt is reasonably well known. Although its long period of political domination ended long since (while the timing is debated, the Egyptian empire was clearly waning by the seventh to sixth centuries BCE), Egypt continued to wield substantial cultural power.[10] Egyptian civilization was already visibly ancient in classical antiquity.[11] In the early nineteenth century, Egypt returned to prominence in the aftermath of Napoleon's invasion and looting of artifacts (1798–1801), including Egypt's mummified dead.[12] This new

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Saint (John Gee) who has argued that Smith's translation was in fact Egyptologically accurate (albeit of missing papyri). The edition bristles with swipes at Smith and Gee. See Ritner, *Joseph Smith Papyri*, versus Gee, *Introduction*.

[9] I charted early thoughts on several of these themes in "(Smith) in Egypt."
[10] See, e.g., Russell, *Ancient Egypt*; Trafton, *Egypt Land*; Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics*, 72; Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit*, 38, 125; and Day, *Mummymania*.
[11] Take the exemplary account in Plato's *Timaeus* 22b–e explaining how the Nile protected Egypt from cyclical loss of history with each ecological devastation. Cooper, *Plato*, 1230.
[12] Day, *Mummymania*, 3, and sources therein cited. Trafton, *Egypt Land* explores the complex paradoxes of America's situation of itself within ancient history.

physical availability of Egypt triggered resurgent interest. Egyptiana figured in political rhetoric, sermons, museums, and traveling displays as well as American cemeteries.[13] People even saw themselves as consuming mummies in the form of medicinal teas.[14] Outside the mainstream, Egypt was a foundation for hermeticism, a mostly Christian esoteric wisdom tradition that was important to Renaissance neoclassicism and early modern philosophy.[15] Egypt loomed large as history, power, and mystery.

In defense of such conventional beliefs, Egypt likely was one of the earliest human cultures to develop a complex society. Its religion is perhaps the oldest known in any substantial detail, and it was probably important to the development of monotheism.[16] Supported by the fertility of the Nile within an arid wilderness, the early Egyptians achieved substantial, durable feats of engineering. And, in contrast to other ancient civilizations, enough of Egypt remained through late antiquity (the period before Europe's "Middle Ages") to impart a sense of continuous presence. This presence came largely through biblical rhetoric and esoteric traditions that persisted well into modernity.

For Smith, Egypt was the promise of primeval culture, power, and wisdom. For an ardent primordialist like him, perhaps no relics could be more important than objects from Egypt. Such physical articles could serve as portals to the ancient world. In Smith's hands they opened an Egyptian window onto the primordial Bible, the texts his translation work had always been trying to restore.

Without Napoleon, Smith would never have laid eyes on either mummy or papyrus. In the networks of early Atlantic culture, the European expropriation of Egyptian artifacts meant that within a few decades of the French invasion a small collection of Ptolemaic-era mummies from Thebes had made their way into Smith's translation room. When Michael Chandler came to Kirtland with his road-weary "posthumous travelers," he found fertile ground. Smith rallied donors and purchased the collection for a hefty sum.[17]

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[13] Buck, *Theological Dictionary*, 194; Davies, *Culture of Salvation*, 101–102; Farrell, *American Way of Death*, 170.

[14] The material from which the teas were brewed was often called "mummia"; drinking it dated at least to medieval Europe. On Egyptomania, see Day, *Mummymania*, and MacDonald and Rice, *Ancient Egypt*.

[15] On Hermetism, see, e.g., Ebeling, *Hermeticism*, and Brooke, *Refiner's Fire*. Russell, *Ancient Egypt*, 194–95 provides a contemporary situation of Hermes in theories of ancient Egypt. Rollin, *Ancient History*, an eighteenth-century reference Smith donated to the Nauvoo Library, also mentions Hermes in these terms (1844 edition, 65, 79, 119). On Hermes and early modern philosophy, see Gillespie, *Theological Origins*, 82–83, 175.

[16] Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian*.

[17] See Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 26–27. The rough equivalent in 2018 dollars may have been around $60,000: http://www.in2013dollars.com/1835-dollars-in-2018?amount=2400, accessed March 6, 2018.

Immediate Contexts and Continuities

The mummies arrived in Kirtland at an important moment for Smith. He was working to establish his church's infrastructure and was a couple of years into creating the Kirtland Temple rites (see chapter 7). On the translation front, work had fallen quiet. He wanted to continue translating and urged his followers to support him. The once visionary New Translation of 1830 had largely morphed into a competition with Campbell and had mostly wrapped up by summer 1833 (although, as we've seen, he continued his novel Bible rereadings). The Book of Mormon was established and circulating. Of the gold plates only a few transcripts of hieroglyphs (the "Caractors" documents) remained.[18] Smith's targumizing project had stalled, at least in terms of major scriptures. In addition, by 1835 he had spent at least six years episodically on the trail of prelapsarian pictograms (see chapter 1). As of 1835, he still had nothing that could prove his hieroglyphic mastery publicly and incontrovertibly.

That situation changed in summer 1835, with the arrival of Chandler's mummies and their papyri. In Chandler's papyri Smith at last owned what all agreed were Egyptian hieroglyphs. The glyphic game was on.

Smith's key collaborator in this endeavor was W. W. Phelps, his trusted advisor in linguistics and scholarly arcana for years. While Phelps had arrived too late to help with the Book of Mormon, he was with Smith for most of the key innovations in the quest for pure language. Ghostwriting in the 1840s for Smith, Phelps summarized their encounter with the corpses in public correspondence with a New York newspaperman, claiming that "although dead, the papyrus which has lived in their bosoms, unharmed, speaks for them in language like the sound of an earthquake. *Ecce veritas*! *Ecce cadaveros*! Behold the truth! Behold the mummies!"[19] This seismic call issued from the long-stilled throats of the Theban mummies and promised to reveal the deep mysteries lurking behind the sectarian King James Bible. Smith had hoped that another assistant, Warren Parrish, could play an important role, even promising Parrish that as part of the work on the Egyptian Bible he would "know of hid[d]en things" and "be endowed with a knowledge of hid[d]en languages."[20] His lieutenant and confidant Frederick G. Williams was also transiently involved. Oliver Cowdery hoped to stay central to this new project, even embellishing his 1833 patriarchal

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[18] MacKay et al., "'Caractors' Document." See also *JSPD1*, 361–64. The document had been made into placards by 1844 as a celebration of Smith's abilities as a translator of hieroglyphs: Kimball, "Anthon Transcript."
[19] *T&S* 4:24 (November 1, 1843): 374.
[20] *JSPD5*, 52–53.

blessing in 1835 to prophesy that he would still "be an instrument in the hands of his God, with his brother Joseph, of translating and bringing forth to the house of Israel."[21] In the event, Parrish and Cowdery proved durably unfaithful, while Phelps (other than a hiatus associated with a falling out during the Missouri War) persevered.

Importantly, many of the Saints saw the Egyptian papyri as linguistically and metaphysically connected to their Book of Mormon.[22] The Book of Mormon script was Reformed Egyptian, and it emphasized the sacred continuities between Smith and the biblical patriarch Joseph of Egypt, a connection Smith himself emphasized by occasionally assuming Joseph's Egyptian title—*Zaphnathpaaneah*—as a pseudonym.[23] Cowdery also emphasized the continuity between the missing Reformed Egyptian of the Book of Mormon and the apparently Unreformed script of the papyri. He maintained that some Book of Mormon "characters" were "like those of the writings" on the papyri. Phelps confirmed this interpretation in an 1835 letter to his wife, arguing that the papyri would "make a good witness for the Book of Mormon."[24] Smith reportedly showed the Caractors document to Chandler during the negotiations over the papyri.[25] Similarly, when Lucy Mack Smith described her son's encounter with the Book of Mormon plates, she said that he "transcribe[d] the Egyptian alphabet" from them.[26]

What I call Smith's Egyptian Bible—a suite of interrelated documents—follows and expands on the work initiated in the Book of Mormon and the New Translation: the recovery of the primordial Bible.[27] Complementary to the visions of Moses and Enoch, within his Egyptian Bible, Smith brought the primeval history of Genesis to its sequel: the rise and career of Abraham. To understand the import of Smith's Egyptian Bible requires knowledge of the texts themselves, to which we now turn.

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[21] *JSPD5*, 512. An 1829 revelation promised Cowdery that "other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate" (D&C 9:2).

[22] *JSPR4*, xiv–xv, correctly calls out continuities among these scriptural projects.

[23] 2 Nephi 3:14–20, with expansion of the theme in *EMS* 1:6 (November 1832): 41. The pseudonym is used in *Nauvoo Neighbor* 1:9 (June 28, 1843).

[24] *M&A*, 2:3 (December 1835): 235; Phelps's letter of July 19–20, 1835, was reprinted in Van Orden, "Kirtland Letters," 556.

[25] *JSPJ1*, 67, 105.

[26] *JSPD1*, 355.

[27] The suggestion by the twentieth-century Latter-day Saint thinker Sidney Sperry that Abraham 3 is an Ur-text for Genesis 12 exemplifies this sense of continuity between the New Translation and the Egyptian Bible. *Deseret News*, April 6, 1935, 1.

Overview of the Texts

The Saints' encounter with mummies and papyri resulted in several manuscripts, none of which appears to be in final form.[28] Smith's Egyptian Bible contains four collections of documents: (1) the Ptolemaic-era papyri; (2) the hieroglyphic grammar documents; (3) the Book of Abraham, existing in manuscript and published forms; and (4) the facsimile interpretations (metaphysical interpretations of vignettes within the papyri). The fact that the texts are not complete introduces some caution into interpretation. Still, the available documents integrate well into Smith's overall scriptural project. Emblematically, Cowdery announced that the papyri represented "an inestimable acquisition to our present scriptures."[29] He was more correct than he knew.

The funerary papyri, largely written in hieratic script (a cursive form of hieroglyphs), were illustrated with a variety of vignettes—special type scenes relevant to the ritual function of the texts, sometimes but not always illuminating the associated text. They are fairly typical religious texts of the Ptolemaic era and are generally concerned with the afterlife status of the decedent to whom they were attached.[30] Both Latter-day Saints and their critics have seen these documents' status as paramount: some practicing Church members maintain that the Book of Abraham is a scholarly, linguistic translation (albeit of no longer extant papyri), while their critics counter that the papyri bear no linguistic connection to the Book of Abraham. Unfortunately, most such discussions of the documents generate more heat than light. What matters for our discussion here is the fact—undisputed by all—that these papyri contain ritual stories for and about the dead in a script that was for millennia associated with sacred pictography.

The Grammar Documents

By and large, the hieroglyphic grammar documents cluster around a projected interpretive lexicon of Egyptian hieroglyphics.[31] These grammar documents,

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[28] Smith's request for funding to support his ongoing Egyptian translations even after the serialization of the first sections of Abraham supports the view that the current Book of Abraham is an unfinished work. See *The Wasp* 1:37 (January 14, 1843): 3.

[29] M&A, 2:3 (December 1835): 236.

[30] These papyri have been analyzed at length. A full translation is presented in Ritner, *Complete Edition*. On the Latter-day Saint side, see Rhodes, *Books of the Dead*, and Rhodes, *Book of Breathings*.

[31] I use the term "grammar" following their precedent to reflect what they considered themselves to be doing. By way of potentially relevant precedent for the name and structure of *GAEL*, Moses Stuart's 1832 *Grammar of the Hebrew Language* (a text the Kirtland Saints purchased to help with the Egyptian and Hebrew projects) includes an important chart on page 2, labeled "Ancient Hebrew Alphabet," which is structurally similar to *GAEL*.

patterned on scholarly reference works, sought to wrestle sacred glyphs into the realm of common sense and the science of grammar while expressing a belief in Egyptian writing as the linguistic expression of metaphysical correspondence. In this way, the hieroglyphic grammar documents represented the same basic impulse as Smith's New Translation of the Bible. Even as they contain inchoate and sometimes inconsistent notions, the grammar documents remain informative. The philological exercises provide an important window into Smith's religious and social vision and the broader context of hieroglyphic culture in which they operated. Without the grammar documents, the themes and aspirations of the canonized Book of Abraham can be only partly understood.

The bulk of the work on the hieroglyphic grammars seems to have stretched from the summer of 1835 to early 1836. After Joshua Seixas arrived in Kirtland in January 1836, the documentary evidence suggests that Smith and his collaborators turned to Hebrew language and grammar to solve the mysteries of the papyri, likely sensing that they had taken Egyptian grammar as far as they could. The Latter-day Saint Bible scholar Matthew Grey thus appears correct in his suggestion that the Kirtland Hebrew School was part of the Egyptian project.[32] By April 1836 (shortly after the temple dedication and pivotal solemn assembly, as described in chapter 7), Phelps had left Kirtland, and all work on the hieroglyphic grammar documents ceased.[33] Despite Smith's desire to return to this work, there's no clear evidence for any further labors on the hieroglyphic grammars, even in 1842, when Smith and Phelps briefly returned to the Egyptian materials to ornament several political documents.[34] Some portions of the Book of Abraham, especially the beginning of its opening chapter, may rely on the grammar documents, but overall the hieroglyphic grammars do not dominate the published scripture. Instead, the grammars flesh out the conceptual context.

Incomplete, unpublished, and impressionistically organized, the Egyptian grammar documents were once called the "Kirtland Egyptian Papers," although that initial name hasn't held up. The collection includes two notebooks, three loose-leaf documents, a hand-drawn copy of a hypocephalus, *Egyptian Alphabet* documents, an "Egyptian Counting" manuscript, and a ledger book called the *Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language* (hereafter *GAEL*; Figure 6.1).[35]

The names for the documents suggest what several early Latter-day Saints hoped they would represent—their mastery of ancient languages and the science

[32] Grey, "Word of the Lord," extended in "Egyptian Papyri." The fact that Smith sought the Hebrew Lexicon to interpret the Kinderhook plates in 1843 confirms this notion: *JSPJ3,* 13.

[33] On the date of Phelps's departure, see Van Orden, "Kirtland Letters," 548.

[34] Brown, "Ghostwriter," 44–45, 59–61. In 1838, gossip in Jackson County had it that Smith was still planning to work on the hieroglyphic grammar: Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed*, 25.

[35] I follow *JSPR4* in this taxonomy. The title page of *GAEL* includes a pedestrian spelling error that I do not reproduce here.
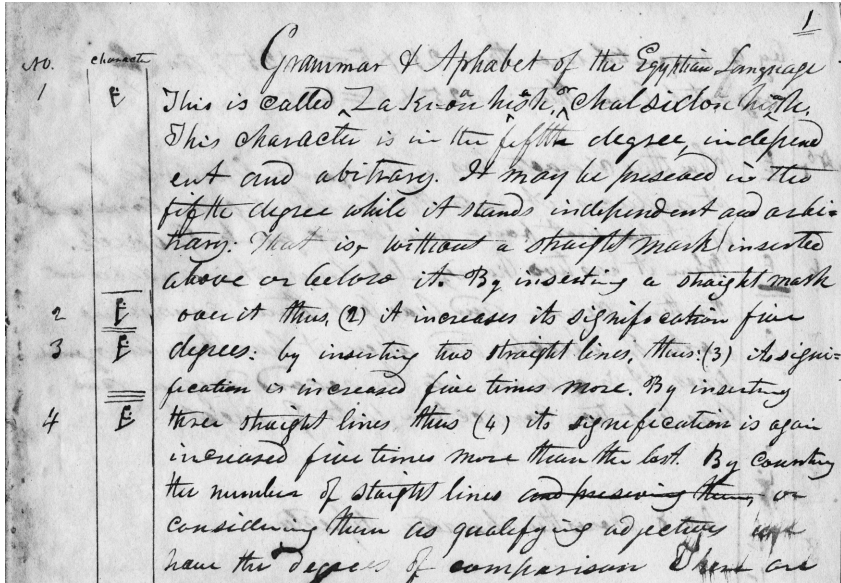
Figure 6.1 Title page of the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language. Image courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

of grammar. While multiple scribes had a hand in various documents (including occasional holographs of Smith), the handwriting of Phelps dominates the *GAEL*. Phelps played a prominent intellectual role in the hieroglyphic grammars,[36] even if the earliest documents appear to derive from Smith's dictation.[37] In parallel, Cowdery and Williams made an abortive attempt to create grammatical documents for the Reformed Egyptian of the Book of Mormon as part of the 1835 work on the papyri. Their translation of snippets of the book of Jacob into glossolalic Hebrew-like syllables parallels the form and content of the Egyptian grammar documents.[38]

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[36] Brown, "Ghostwriter," explores these topics at some length, inspecting the long–term relationship between Smith and Phelps, in which Smith relied on Phelps's reported mastery of foreign languages and secular learning.

[37] This is suggested by the various phonetic rendering of given glyphic names in the loose leaf "Egyptian Alphabet" texts. See *JSPR4*, 53–110.

[38] *JSPD1*, 361–64, with some discussion in Grey, "Word of the Lord," 254. The texts are Jacob 5:13, 7:27. The Williams version contains more glyphs that do not appear to match any of the extant Book of Mormon Caractors documents or the Egyptian grammar documents. Some but not all of Williams's glyphs look vaguely Ethiopic (as was printed in small snippets as part of the 1821 Laurence translation of the Book of Enoch), but there is no clean connection between the two.

The grammar documents strained toward an ultimate grammar book, an aspiration that the historian Ken Cmiel has associated with humanistic learning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[39] If we can judge by the extant documents, Smith's grammar would fit somewhere between primers for school use and the ancient mystical lexicon of Horapollo, with perhaps a hint of those most notorious grammars of Atlantic culture, the *grimoires* (spell books).[40]

The major grammar document is the *GAEL*, which is an early sketch of the projected reference work.[41] While *GAEL* remains an unfinished draft, it's the most mature of the grammar documents, containing thirty-four pages of reasonably coherent written content within a large ledger. It is clearly drawn from the *Egyptian Alphabet* documents. *GAEL* reads like a glossary of ancient runes. Each entry includes a hieratic character (or portion thereof, or other glyphic material), its pronunciation in an English transliteration, and impressionistic sentences explaining the underlying meaning. The entries are arranged in two "parts" (about fourteen pages in length), each of which is divided into five "degrees" (two to three pages in length). The first part seems, more or less, to deal with humans, whereas the second part is more concerned with angels and stars.[42] What the authors mean linguistically by "degrees"—a formal term of art within the grammar documents—isn't entirely clear, but it has to do with multiplication, reproduction, and ramification for a given glyph. The idea sounds somewhat like conjugations in Latin or Greek or the varied meanings of Hebrew roots.[43] For example, a given hieratic character might be transliterated as *Zool*. In the first degree of the first part, *Zool* means "From any fixed period of time back to the beginning."[44] The scope and content of the definition increase with each passing degree. By the time *GAEL* reaches the fifth degree of the second part for *Zool*, the definition is seventy-four words long and connects Abraham, Noah, and the genealogical priesthood to the scope of time stretching from the present to the primordium.[45]

The grammar documents are a hieroglyphic puzzling through the esoteric traditions of signs. I think of these transliterations of glyphs' names as "graphic glossolalia," a written version of the sacred singing in unknown syllables that is the more familiar version of the glossolalia we encountered in chapter 1.

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[39] Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 32, 37, 48.

[40] On Horapollo, see Young, "Egypt," and Cory, *Horapollo*, with modern commentary in Iversen, *Myth of Egypt*, 47. On grimoires, see Davies, *Grimoires*, and Dillinger, *Treasure Hunting*, 92–93.

[41] Hauglid, "Egyptian," 492–95.

[42] The parts may also correspond to the layout of glyphs on the papyri. See Tvedtnes, "Critics," 73–74.

[43] If the *GAEL* did draw on knowledge of Semitic radicals, that might suggest an 1836 date for the *GAEL* for which there is otherwise little good evidence. I doubt that in fact Phelps and Smith were drawing on that specific grammatical concept.

[44] *JSPR4*, 158–59.

[45] *JSPR4*, 128–29.

Glossolalia is fundamentally concerned with spiritual contact with concepts (or agencies) beyond human language. The syllables uttered by the person engaging in glossolalia—whatever the specific resonances may be—are beyond human language. The sacred syllables are a point of contact between the world of human language and the world beyond. An observer must then render those unknown syllables into a familiar human language, a process called interpretation. Such are the well-established mechanics of glossolalia. Rarely if ever are the glossolalic syllables themselves written, unless perhaps by outside observers in an anthropological vein.[46] Most often glossolalic syllables are sung, in rapid succession, leaving no graphic trace of that ecstatic encounter with primal language.

In the case of the hieroglyphic grammar documents, something similar is happening. Sacred glyphs deeply connected to a world beyond mere human language are rendered into syllables that do not belong to any known human language. Those glossolalic syllables are then rendered into human language, in this case English. Instead of a glossolalic singer and a separate interpreter in a sustained oral performance, though, in the case of the grammar documents, the process occurs deliberately on paper, in the format of a lexicon. To put it too simply, Phelps and Smith wrestled the raw spiritual act of glossolalia into the earthly science of grammar. This is what I mean by graphic glossolalia: the inscription of syllables beyond human language with an accompanying interpretation into English.[47]

Polemical arguments have wrangled over the details of the interrelationships of the documents of the Egyptian project.[48] The grammar documents are obviously kindred with Smith's decoding of the vignettes into his facsimiles. They integrate thoroughly into the work to discover the primordial language of Eden. Smith and Phelps may have employed the grammar documents in the creation of some portions of the Book of Abraham, but they are clearly not the sole or even primary textual source of the published scripture.[49] We can't solve minute

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[46] See, e.g., Lamson, *Shakers*, 78–79.

[47] There may be a subtle, nongenetic, association between Smith's merger of visionary experience and text here and Ellen Harmon's (founder of Seventh-Day Adventism) mergers of vision and text. See Perry, *Bible Culture*, 40–41. Alphabetic mysticism (especially but not exclusively in Gnostic writings) is similar. See, e.g., *Pistis Sophia* 4, 142; *Gospel of the Egyptians* 44 and 46; and *Zostrianos* 127, with discussion in Johnson, *Religious Experience*. See also Ebeling, *Hermes Trismegistus*, 17, and Davies, *Popular Magic*, 110, 147, 153. The Hellenic Egyptian spells brim with alphabetic mysticism: Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*. Finally, the Oxford mystic John Hutchinson (1674–1737) may be another nongenetic antecedent, in his work on glyphic, unpointed Hebrew: Hindmarsh, *Early Evangelicalism*, 118–19; *Buck, Theological Dictionary*, 228–29.

[48] See, e.g., Larson, "Joseph Smith Papyri," 88–99; Ritner, Joseph Smith Papyri, 29–44; Smith, "Dependence," versus Nibley, "Kirtland Egyptian Papers"; and Gee, *Introduction to Book of Abraham*, 32–39. I thank Brian Hauglid for help with these sources.

[49] Large amounts of published material are absent from the grammar documents. Even at the barest grammatical level, at least five words are in the published Book of Abraham but absent from the grammar documents: *shagreel, olishem, kahleenos, shulem,* and *olimlah.*

questions of textual interrelationships on the basis of current historical evidence. Here, I'm interested in what the entire collection of documents communicated about the nature of early Restoration thought and its triangulation within modern intellectual and spiritual currents.

The Book of Abraham

The Book of Abraham exists in several partial manuscript copies and a version published sequentially in the church newspaper in spring 1842. The manuscript versions, primarily in the hand of Warren Parrish and Willard Richards,[50] are generally similar, with some subtle and occasionally important differences. The best evidence suggests that Smith dictated the text, with textual revisions to the Richards manuscript near the time of printing.[51] Abraham 1:1–2:18 appears to be largely contemporaneous with the grammar documents.[52] Given their obvious dependence on the Seixas grammar and relevance to the temple liturgy, Abraham 4–5 were probably dictated in early 1842. Abraham 3 is of less certain dating, perhaps a collation of material dictated from approximately 1838 to 1842, with final dictation likely in 1842.[53]

To the question of dating Abraham 3, Smith sought funding to publish the Book of Abraham in 1837.[54] He was using content from the Book of Abraham in the summer of 1838, suggesting that it was on his mind then, although there's no clear evidence of translating per se in 1838.[55] He publicly discussed key content for Abraham 3 in the spring and summer of 1839.[56] A letter from Elizabeth Haven Barlow to her sister in October 1839 suggests Smith may have been working on Abraham 3 at that time.[57] He returned to the themes in a May 1840

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[50]   For more thoughts on Phelps's role, see Brown, "Ghostwriter," 37–38.

[51]   After Warren Parrish was excommunicated, he told the Painesville *Republican* that he "penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as [Smith] claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven." *JSPD5*, 74.

[52]   All the known Kirtland-era manuscripts cease at 2:18, and that is the text for the initial installment of the Book of Abraham publication in *T&S* 3:9 (March 1, 1842): 704–706.

[53]   Based on Smith's report that he was busy performing new translation work in 1842, I think it most likely that he was dictating Abraham 4–5 (and possibly Abraham 3 in its published form) at that point. His announcement that he had solved Egyptian astronomy in October 1835 could represent his translation of the hypocephalus (Facsimile 2). On Abraham 4–5, see Grey, "Use of Hebrew."

[54]   *JSPD5*, 77.

[55]   Thus Smith's May 6, 1838, discourse: "He also instructed the Church, in the mistories of the Kingdom of God; giving them a history of the Plannets &c. and of Abrahams writings upon the Plannettary System &c." See also his July 1838 preaching: "Is there not room enough upon the mountains of Adamondi awman, or upon the plains of Olea Shinihah, or the land where Adam dwelt." See *JSPD6*, 134, 193.

[56]   *JSPD6*, 369–70, 543. See also *JSPD3*, 85.

[57]   Haven reported that Smith preached a sermon on "the kingdom before the foundation of the world." He "said he would feed the church with meat, Explained some passage of Scripture which is not translated right and which have even been a stumbling block to the world. He also related some

letter to missionaries headed to Israel.[58] A January 1841 sermon similarly alluded to Abraham 3,[59] while he sought resources to "attend to the business of translating" in August 1841.[60] Smith discussed content from Abraham 3 at Wilford Woodruff's 35th birthday party on 1 March 1842.[61] Smith's March 1842 journal mentions new translation work right after the publication of the first installment of the Book of Abraham; the extant manuscript drafts from which printing occurred date to 1842 and include apparently last-minute adjustments to the language at the time they went to press.[62] Currently available evidence can't distinguish (1) Smith dictating in a new form material he'd been working with for three or four years from (2) Smith revising previously dictated material in 1842. In other words, the second half of Abraham probably belongs somewhere between 1838 and 1842, with important activity focused in the first half of March 1842.

Even so, the published Book of Abraham is obviously unfinished. Smith admitted as much—he anticipated and perhaps dictated additional material from Abraham as well as a projected Book of Joseph of Egypt.[63] I suspect that the temple liturgy and its emphasis on mystically powerful language and the sacred primordium (chapter 7) provided the impetus for publication in 1842: the timing and content—including explicit callouts to the temple in the facsimile interpretations—strongly suggest such a relationship.

The published Book of Abraham reads like a collection of related texts by the same author(s), albeit in an artificial order. In the discussion that follows, I hew to the chronology of the text, beginning in the time before the world was and ending with Abraham's life and times. The Book of Abraham is presented in four distinct parts (arranged here in narrative-chronological order, to match the flow of Smith's primordial Bible): (1) a cosmological prequel to Genesis 1 (Abraham 3) that introduces the Chain of Belonging, (2) a targum of Genesis 1–2 that incorporates themes and material from other places (Abraham 4–5), (3) a hieroglyphic introduction to Abraham's life (Abraham 1:1–4), and (4) a targum of Genesis 12–20 (Abraham 1:5–2:25).

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very interesting facts which he has lately translated from the records which came with the Mummies." Elizabeth Haven Barlow, Quincy, IL, to Elizabeth H. Bullard, Holliston, MA, September 21, 1839, Barlow Family Collection, MS 941, bx. 1, fd. 1, CHL.

[58] Smith and colleagues told Orson Hyde and John Page that they were on a mission that "is worthy of those inteligences who surround the throne of Jehovah to be ingaged in." *JSPD7*, 281–82.

[59] "At the first organization in heaven we were all present and saw the Savior chosen and appointed." *JSPD7*, 495.

[60] *JSPD8*, 228.

[61] *JSPJ2*, 39.

[62] *JSPJ2*, 42: Smith "Commenced Translating from the Book of Abraham."

[63] In February 1843, Smith advertised that there was more of the Book of Abraham to come: *JSPD5*, 77.

According to its narrative chronology, the Book of Abraham begins before the world was, before even the spirit of God began to brood over the waters of chaos in Genesis 1. In retrospect the early visions of Moses and Enoch were incomplete. Abraham was to tell more of the cosmic prequel that had begun to sketch out. Abraham 3 contains an explosion of cosmological narratives tied to the implements of translation, the *Urim* and *Thummim* (perhaps exploiting *Urim* as the plural of the hometown, *Ur*, from which Abraham was fleeing). As part of this cosmogony, chapter 3 outlines the divine secrets of astronomy, in what appears to be an expansive meditation on Job 38:1–7. In the Hebrew Bible account, God asks Job, rhetorically, whether Job was present at the founding of the world, "when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." This Jobian text was a favorite biblical anchor for the belief in stars as angels and a placement of human intelligence at the beginning of the cosmos.[64] This mysterious allusion in Job may also have anchored the stories that happened before Genesis 1. The connection between the Bible's primeval history, cosmology, and astronomy was secure for many other Christians. Adam Clarke's Bible commentary included tables of celestial bodies in his treatment of Genesis.[65]

In Abraham 3's prequel to Genesis, Abraham experiences a panoramic vision. Instead of picturing humans, though, as many other prophets had,[66] Abraham sees human-like stars. He discovers Smith's Chain of Belonging as a principle of cosmic order and hierarchy. He also refines the account of the process by which Jesus became Savior during cosmic prehistory—a council of angels and humans was called, a plan was presented, Jesus and Satan proposed approaches to implementation that differed primarily in the priority of human agency (as we saw in chapter 3), and God chose (apparently as an exegesis of Isaiah 6:8) Jesus as the leader for the implementation of what Latter-day Saints called the "plan of salvation" (Abraham 3:22–28). With this new information, the creation saga of Genesis 1–3 makes more sense. The 1842 components of the Book of Abraham—especially the prequel and creation saga—returned to the primeval history in support of the temple liturgy. After the prequel, the Abraham text transitions into its targum of the first chapters of Genesis.

Abraham 4–5 (a unitary block) picks up from chapter 3, rereading Genesis 1 in a distinctively Latter-day Saint way. There Abraham emphasizes that the creators of the earth were a divine team who "organized" the earth. Among other modifications, this retelling of Genesis 1 makes explicit that God is the plural *Elohim*, the Gods—a change from the still singular "God" of the visions of Moses and Enoch in 1830. The text also clarifies the odd King James syntax of "morning

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[64] See, e.g., Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 3:168, and Givens, *Souls Had Wings*, 16.
[65] Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 1: 28–29.
[66] Brown, "Read the Round."

and evening," and the use of "time" in place of "day" to refer to epochs of creation. This connection to "set times"—one mechanism by which Smith's celestial bodies affected human beings—binds Abraham 3 more clearly to Smith's rereading of Genesis 1 and the grammar documents.[67] As Matthew Grey has pointed out, much of the lexical work of Abraham 4–5 depends on the Hebrew training materials from 1836.[68] We shouldn't, though, be too distracted by the use of the Seixas material. Abraham 4 and 5 are not merely the result of an autodidact ornamenting Genesis with gems from the Seixas grammar. There's a theological as well as linguistic infrastructure for the theology presented, and Smith reengages prior revelations (e.g., D&C 88:17–25) in this work.[69] Smith's targums in Abraham 4–5 are grappling with notions of the sacred hierarchy in the Chain of Belonging, the astronomical hierarchy of time, and the role of humans in the creation.

That Smith includes targums of the primeval history in his Book of Abraham underscores the early belief in the identity of sacred, ancient languages and Smith's constant rereading of the Bible. Contemporary observers noted this fact: Charlotte Haven, on hearing Lucy Mack Smith read from Abraham in Nauvoo, thought "it sounded very much like passages from the Old Testament."[70] An Illinois newspaper made a similar point in 1852.[71] But the merger of Hebrew scripture with Egyptian papyri speaks to the unity of pictographic language and the need to tell and retell those first stories. In an excavation of the primal language of humanity, the pure language of scripture necessarily plays a central role.[72]

Abraham 4–5 targumizes the dual creation narratives of Genesis 1–3. The initial creation account (understood as a spiritual creation) is completed within the first three verses, and then the Abraham text runs through the implementation of that creation. The astral creation accounts (Genesis 1:3–5, 14–18)

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[67] Abraham 3 explicates the language of Genesis 1:14–16, explaining both what is involved in regulating "seasons" and "days" and "years" and what it means for a particular light to "rule the day," thereby recurring to a prior engagement of that text in the Olive Leaf—D&C 88:42–45.

[68] Grey, "Use of Hebrew," which follows Walton, "Seixas," and Muhlestein and Hansen, "Work of Translating."

[69] Abraham 4–5 substitutes obedience for the traditional declaration that the creation is good. The passage in the Olive Leaf indicates that "abid[ing] the law" is what allows an object to fill the "measure of its creation," culminating in the declaration that the earth itself (the object of creation) abides a law to fill its creation. The Seixas grammar doesn't indicate a substitution of obedience for the declaration of goodness.

[70] Haven, "Letters from Nauvoo," 624.

[71] Hauglid, *Textual History*, 223.

[72] Abraham 4–5 may have also been sensitive to the troubled status of italicized words in the King James Bible. While this analysis is merely suggestive, of the 37 italicized words in the targumized sections of the Bible, 26 (70%) were modified in the corresponding sections of the Book of Abraham. I thank Brady Winslow for performing this analysis of Genesis 1:1–31; 2:1–10, 15–25; 11:28–29; 12:1–13. When more than one sequential word was in italics, e.g., "it is," we treated them as a single italicized word.

recur in Abraham (4:3–5, 13–18). The verb "organize" occurs four times in three verses, intentionally recalling the organization of human spirits in Abraham 3:22 and Smith's interpretation of the Hebrew word *bara*, which we encountered in chapter 5.

The Abraham narrative seeks to resolve several potential problems with the received Genesis text, beginning with the problem of the Fall. Specifically, instead of the "day" of the Genesis account, Abraham explains that Adam would die in the "time" as measured according to the star Kolob (see what follows) that he ate the forbidden fruit, rather than on the same earth day (Abraham 5:13). This aside self-consciously resolves an apparent inconsistency in the Bible text: Adam lived for many centuries after eating the fruit.

The narrative flow is then interrupted to solve another textual problem in the Genesis account—herbs were originally said to grow before the arrival of rain to nourish and humans to cultivate them. The Abraham version of the story explains that the mist (4:6) took care of the need for precipitation before humans were created (4:7) and placed into a garden where they could then grow herbs.[73] And in yet another act important to orienting sacred hierarchies, the Book of Abraham reorders the naming sequence and the creation of Eve, assuring that Eve gets her name ("Woman") before the animals get theirs (4:17–21). The Abraham targums thus continue the work performed by the Book of Mormon and the New Translation, recovering primordial clarity from the remnants in the Protestant Bible.

After the creation, the Book of Abraham transitions chronologically into a targum of Genesis 12 that introduces the character of Abraham. This is in fact where the published Book of Abraham begins. The first portion of Chapter 1 is a concatenation of images and clauses in three verses, from an original manuscript in Phelps's hand. This brief section could represent a kind of warmup exercise for the ultimate scripture, much as the grammar documents may have been. It is stylistically different from what follows, and much of the content—although not the order—can be mapped to entries within the *GAEL*.[74] This introduction may, in other words, bridge some of the space between the grammar documents and the published work, a segue from the grammatical explorations steeped in hieroglyphic culture to the intense targumizing at the core of the Book of Abraham. It is also possible, however, that the *GAEL* entries were back-formed from the dictated introductory text.[75]

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[73]   Judging by Noah Webster's 1828 *Dictionary*, "herb" in antebellum America was similar to its late twentieth-century meaning.

[74]   This is the argument of Smith, "Dependence," which is more evocative than persuasive, although some textual aspects may corroborate his claim: *JSPD5*, 77.

[75]   This is the argument of McLellan, "Abraham 1:1–3."

The stylized preface adverts to Smith's priesthood based in parenthood, a genealogical chain of power, the nature of authority, and esoteric knowledge. Those themes persist through the Book of Abraham. Essentially, then, those first four verses encapsulate much of what is to come. The extant manuscripts transition into Abraham 1:5–2:18, likely dictated in the fall of 1835 as a targum of Genesis 12. (While the available manuscripts stop at 2:18, the flow of the published text continues through the end of chapter 2.) After a transitional verse (1:4), the narrative echoes the call of Lehi (1:5; cf. 1 Nephi 1, esp. 18–20, echoing Luke 4:24 and John 4:44) at the beginning of the Book of Mormon, when he found himself rejected by his countrymen for speaking the truth with prophetic authority. Abraham 1:8–12 shows Abraham's countrymen to be committed to the worship of false gods, including even human sacrifice.[76] The narrative about human sacrifice is tethered to a vignette (Facsimile 1) by the abrupt phrase "I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record" (1:12). This vignette typifies all pictograms, as the text then announces that *Kahleenos* is the "Chaldean" word for "hieroglyphics" (1:14).[77] After this aside to demonstrate the textual basis of the human sacrifice narrative, Jehovah rescues Abraham—a textual anticipation of the subsequent rescue of Isaac from Abraham later in life in Genesis 22. This deeply intertextual aside, which confirms the text's authenticity and clearly situates Abraham within the prophets of scripture, then gives way to the main narrative—the lineal priesthood of cosmic power.

The published Book of Abraham thus fuses a variety of themes and ideas within an overall structure of a targum. While it's not directly based on the grammar documents (with small possible exceptions), these documents are part of the same quest. The primordial Bible and its pure language are allowed to glimmer forth through the drab confines of the English Protestant Bible. They were joined by another form of hieroglyphs come to life, esoteric interpretations of several of the images that adorned the hieratic texts.

The Facsimiles

Smith included stylized vignette interpretations with the published Book of Abraham as "Fac-similes." Employing an interpretive approach familiar from the grammar documents, the facsimiles circulated as siblings to the anticipated Egyptian Grammar and complements to the published scripture. These

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[76] While Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1:7:1, suggests that Abraham had to flee the Chaldeans because of their worship of chthonic deities, and Cowdery was apparently reading Josephus during this period, the Book of Abraham doesn't seem to follow Josephus.

[77] The canonical *Rahleenos* is probably an error—the Kirtland manuscripts use *Kahleenos*. See *JSPR4*, 197, 209, 223, 291.

"figures at the beginning" of the Book of Abraham were the very definition of hieroglyphs, pictures telling ancient stories.[78] The Latter-day Saints publicly delighted in the facsimiles, even as they battled with skeptical critics.[79]

Facsimile 1 ties itself to the textual material relating to human sacrifice, based on what most Egyptologists consider a depiction of resurrection from a platform called a lion couch, in Abraham 1.[80] Facsimile 1 also incorporates material relevant to the Nauvoo temple liturgy.

Facsimile 2 is a hypocephalus, a circular text intended to be placed under the decedent's head. The facsimile 2 interpretation relies heavily on words in the *GAEL* and is closely connected to the material in Abraham 3 and the Masonic terminology of the temple liturgy (including explicit reference to "grand Keywords").[81] In a coy preterition that points to temple mysteries, many of the symbols are left shrouded in mystery, teasing the reader with new material yet to be revealed. Between the manuscript and the published versions, the phrase "cannot now be revealed" transitions to "cannot be revealed" to outsiders, suggesting that the depicted secrets had in fact been revealed in the temple liturgy.

Facsimile 3 is another, less convoluted extension of the Abraham 3 astronomical material, which confirms that Abraham taught his intensely sacerdotal and genealogical astronomy at pharaoh's court.[82] Facsimile 3 is based on a vignette that modern Egyptologists term an Osiris throne scene, from the *Book of Breathings*, in which the god Osiris receives offerings and perhaps the decedent.[83]

The facsimiles thus appear to be important connections between the grammar documents and the main scripture, and the Egyptian Bible and the temple liturgy. They exemplify the interpretive approach Smith and his collaborators took to the encounter with hieroglyphs. They also fit well into the category of graphic glossolalia, filling a similar role in the lives of believers.

So much for the texts themselves. The themes they explore are what now draw our attention. The content focuses closely on Smith's transformation of the

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[78] Abraham 1:14. The facsimiles are published in *T&S* 3:9 (March 1, 1842): 703; 3:10 (March 15, 1842): 722a; 3:14 (May 16, 1842): 783–84. Some words are found in both the vignettes and the grammar documents but with varying meaning (e.g., Oliblish, Enish-go-on-dosh, Kae-e-vanrash, Jah-oheh, Flo-eese).

[79] See *T&S* 3:14 (May 16, 1842): 790, and a reprint from the New York *Herald* in *T&S* 3:13 (May 2, 1842): 773–74. See also *The Wasp* 1:2 (April 23, 1842): 3, in which William Smith (Joseph's erratic brother) responded to allegations that the facsimiles unmasked Latter-day Saint intentions to perform human sacrifice. Kidder, *Mormonism*, 335, parodied the facsimile as "Illustration of Mormonism, No. 1."

[80] On this resurrection scene, see Baer, "Breathing Permit," 118.

[81] See discussion in Ehat, "Mormon Succession," 43–4.

[82] As a lens onto the early interpretive plurality, *M&A*, 2:3 (December 1835): 236, argues that the vignette is a scene of the last judgment rather than a reference to Abraham teaching in Pharaoh's court.

[83] On the motif of Osiris on his throne, see Coenen, "Document of Breathing," 40–41.

traditional Chain of Being into his genealogical Chain of Belonging as a conceptual infrastructure for a communalistic heaven.

Themes of the Egyptian Bible

Smith's Egyptian project explores, in complementary ways, themes at the center of early Latter-day Saint thought. The documents ground these ideas in the Abrahamic hinge point between the primeval history and the rest of the Bible. These thematic explorations help to clarify the contexts and themes of the early Restoration. I see three main motifs at play in Smith's Egyptian Bible. First, the documents present sacred pictography as constituting metaphysically correspondent language, which united ancient languages in one. Second, the Egyptian project provides imagery of female power, which is part of its notion of priesthood grounded in parenthood. Third and relatedly, these documents elaborate at length Smith's Chain of Belonging, which extends the interconnections among human microcosm and stellar macrocosm and leads back to the earth's primordium in Eden.

In this Egyptian Bible, we get a glimpse of Smith's project: to interconnect humanity across time and space through an expansive metaphysics. As he does so, he resists the sharp boundary markers increasingly imposed by proponents of modernity.

The Metaphysics of Pictography

The Egyptian Bible project extended work on the recovery of the pure language, including the modification of Smith's Sample of Pure Language in May 1835, discussed in chapter 1. In that "specimen" of pure language, Phelps used Hebrew-sounding transcriptions for some characters, much as the subsequent grammar documents did. Importantly, although Phelps seems to have included Masonic ciphers (which relied on a 1:1 correlation between code letter and real letter) in his specimen, he interpreted the ciphers as pictograms rather than letter equivalents.[84]

The bulk of the attention to the power of pictograms comes in the grammar documents and the facsimiles, although the canonized Book of Abraham

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[84] W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835, HBLL. Will Schryver identified the Masonic cipher, although he has not yet published his observations. The transliterations sound like the Hebrew letters *zayin* and *ayin*, although the associated characters are not similar to the Hebrew letters. For sample Masonic ciphers, see Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 143, 248, 251.

also reflects these concerns, foregrounding its discovery of the pure name for pictograms. These texts provide a crucial connection to the hieroglyphic quest that predated them. The documents treat glyphs as pictograms charged with metaphysical power. These pictograms connected to both literal referents and expanded semantic targets in a cascading reference.

Many if not most of the grammar interpretations are pictographic. A dot, like the pupil of an eye, is *Iota*, "the eye or to see or sight," a visual leitmotif in the documents. One "compound" of *Iota* appears to be an eye with a horizontal eye-lash.[85] The pictograms could also be geographical, such as a curved line like a horizon interpreted as "the whole earth" or "the whole of anything." When the curve is inverted, it takes on an antipodal meaning—"under the sun; under heaven; downward . . . going down into the grave; going down into misery = even Hell").[86]

Smith, Phelps, and Cowdery practiced a combinative pictography: several important glyphs are composites. A character associated with Abraham's origins is "shown dissected" by treating its individual strokes as distinct characters.[87] Similarly, a stick figure (*Ho hah oop*) represents Jesus, an "intercessor." This figure's left leg is the glyph for delegation (*Jah-ni-hah*), anticipating the Abraham 3 account of a savior, Jesus, chosen as God's legate to earth in the premortal drama.[88] The glyph for *Kiahbroam* combines the character for *Zub Zool oan* ("first man or father of fathers") with an eye (*ki*) and a figure that seems to trace the horizon.[89] The composite glyph means "a father of many nations," a novel deconstruction of the patriarch's name. Implicit within this gloss is the image of Abraham seeing his posterity and thereby comprehending the earth.[90] These pictograms held the story of Abraham's covenant: his offspring would extend to the visible horizon and beyond.

The glyph interpretations often merged physical and metaphorical meanings. The glyph *Zi* (an upside-down "T") means both "upright" and "modest and chaste being taught most perfectly."[91] The same glyph is later transcribed as *Zub*, now described as vertical ascent: "leading up or to: the time for going up to the altar to worship; going up before the Lord[;] being caught up."[92]

The grammar documents, among other aspects of the Egyptian project, confirm the early Latter-day Saint belief that sacred languages could be united. In

[85]   *JSPR4*, 56–57, 118–19. *JSPR4*, 355, displays all variants of *Iota*.
[86]   *JSPR4*, 124–25.
[87]   *JSPR4*, 120–21.
[88]   *JSPR4*, 180–81. *Jah-ni-hah* represented "one who was the second person in authority." Cf. Abraham 3:24.
[89]   More than one glyph and name was associated with vision or the eye.
[90]   *JSPR4*, 120–21, 124–25.
[91]   *JSPR4*, 122–23, 131–32.
[92]   *JSPR4*, 126–27.

a statement later attributed to Smith, Cowdery claimed that "many characters or letters [on the papyri are] exactly like the present, (though probably not quite so square,) form of the Hebrew without points."[93] In other words, Hebrew and Egyptian scripts were kindred. The Book of Mormon (1 Nephi 1:2) set the stage for such a merger, as the Nephites wrote a language "which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians." In his own engagement of the Book of Mormon characters, Cowdery labeled the ancient language under-lying them as "Hebrew."[94] These sentiments partook of Egyptological traditions. Thus, the French writer Pierre Lacour reported in a widely circulated 1821 essay that the language of ancient Egypt was Hebrew, including the script.[95] It's un-likely that Smith and Phelps read Lacour's *Essai sur les hieroglyphes*, but they participated in ancient and widely disseminated traditions about the unity of sa-cred languages. We ought not to be surprised that the early Saints soon turned to their Hebrew teacher to help them solve their Egyptian problem. If he could only teach them Hebrew, they seem to have believed, they would be one crucial step closer to mastering Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Many of the transcriptions in the grammar documents sound Hebrew; Hebrew letter names are invoked for certain glyphs, including *aleph, beth*, and *gimel*.[96] The interpretations of those names at least once play off the tradi-tional pictographic accounts of the origin of those Hebrew letters (e.g., *beth* as house). The name for Egypt (*Ah meh strah*) seems to be a modification of the name of Ham's son Mizraim, perhaps via Josephus, with the divine particle (*ah*) prepended.[97] In essence, *ah-meh-strah* may be equivalent to *ah-miz-ra*, with the -*im* at the end of *Mizraim* dropped because it appeared to be a grammatical plural.

The focus on the deep unity of sacred languages likely also explains why Smith included obviously Hebrew or Hebrew-derived words as Egyptian terms in the Book of Abraham and the facsimile interpretations. Among the Hebrew words (often using the Seixas transcription scheme) are Raukeeyang (i.e., *raqia*, "firma-ment"; facsimiles 1 and 2), Elkenah (1 Samuel 1:1), ha-kokobeam (*ha-kokabim*,

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[93] *M&A*, 2:3 (December 1835): 234. Cowdery appears to have based this assessment on Moses Stuart, *Grammar of Hebrew*, 12, which told the story of Hebrew script, including the "present *square* form of the Hebrew letters." Cowdery had purchased the Stuart grammar during a trip to New York to purchase reference works for translation in October–November 1835.

[94] *JSPD1*, 361–64.

[95] Iversen, *Myth of Egypt*, 131.

[96] *Aleph* (*JSPR4*, 176–77) is the top half of the Hebrew letter and means "in the beginning with God, the son, or first born"; *Ba eth* (*JSPR4*, 168–69) is somewhat stylized but recognizable as *beth*, while the glyph named *Beth* (*JSPR4*, 160–61) is a hatched single line meaning "residence." *Gah mel* (*JSPR4*, 180–81) appears to be a *gimel* laid on its side and refers to a "promising situation." These might suggest that the Stuart grammar was used in constructing parts of the grammar documents. This use of Hebrew letters does not, however, require the arrival of Seixas, as Cowdery had brought Hebrew reference works back to Kirtland by November 1835.

[97] JSPR4, 126–27. Smith, "Dependence," 46, suggests that Josephus's rendering (*Antiquities* 1:6:2) as *Mestre* affected the phrasing in *GAEL*.

"the stars"; facsimile 2), and shammau/shaumahyeem (*shamaim*, "expanse," facimile 1). In the case of the firmament and the heavens, Smith openly equated *raqia* and *shamaim*, seeing the facsimile as an opportunity to perform an exegesis of the Hebrew of Genesis 1. He clearly knew that he was engaging Hebrew in this targum; he just saw the Hebrew Bible as deeply connected to Egyptian.[98]

The unity of ancient sacred languages encompassed all the languages of sacred writ. New Testament Greek terms and phrases also appear in the grammar documents. *Alpha* and *Omega* combine (perhaps under the influence of Smith's Edenic word for God, *Ahman*) as *Ahmeos*, a symbol similar to the capital Greek *alpha* that means "God without beginning or end."[99] *Hades* appears in several permutations involving *Hahdees*, a glyph like the lowercase Greek *lambda* referring to the "kingdom of wickedness." Even Arabic numerals joined the fray, in a document in Phelps's hand matching essentially all the numbers from one to nine to Egyptian characters.[100]

Phelps and Smith recognized Hebrew and Greek letters and words: the intermixing of ancient languages in the Egyptian project was unlikely to be accidental. The merger reflected instead their belief in the unity of scriptural languages at their pictographic beginnings. In the language beyond languages in which God spoke the world into existence, the sacred languages could have a shared origin. What is often seen as a novice mistake in the Egyptian project is evidence of Smith's and Phelps's deep belief that sacred languages retained at least some fragments of the deep unity in the original language.[101]

In 1843, Phelps and Smith proposed an etymology of the word "Mormon" that confirmed their ongoing belief in the continuity of ancient languages. The etymology positions *mon* as the Egyptian equivalent of the Hebrew word *tob* or the Greek term *kalos*. By combining *mon* with the English word "more," the polyglot portmanteau *Mormon* therefore meant "more good."[102] In their autodidactic way, Phelps and Smith were continuing to position Egyptian hieroglyphs as a solution to Babel's plurality.

Sacred pictography and the intermixing of scriptural languages once again point to the pervasive influence of metaphysical correspondence in early Latter-day Saint scripture. Pictograms were morsels of language that bound objects and concepts in space. The sacred overlap of Hebrew, Egyptian, and Greek represented times (and textual spaces) when languages were deeply,

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[98] In this respect, Smith mirrored the promiscuous intermixing of languages in some antique magic papyri. Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*. Many of these syncretic spells include names of deities or other incantations in an array of non-Egyptian languages.

[99] On *Ahmeos*, see *JSPR4*, 180–81, and *JSPR4*, 56–57. For context, see Webster, *American Dictionary*, s.v. "A"; and D&C 95:17.

[100] Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 55–56.

[101] Walton, "Professor Seixas."

[102] Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 56.

even constitutively, interconnected. A formal grammatical construct within the grammar documents had a similar role to play in expressing the power of metaphysical correspondence. A horizontal line interpreted as a visual marker to specify the degrees was itself intimately tied to reproduction and genealogy.[103] Those connections mediated by the notion of degree are intimately tied to lineage and reproduction, a model of priesthood that had an easy and sustained connection to the power of women.

The Priestess and the Multiplication of Power

In addition to sacred pictography, another important theme in the grammar documents is the divinity of women. Given the centrality of Eve to the Garden of Eden story and the intimate ties—mediated through Abraham and Sarah—between priesthood and reproduction, we should not be surprised to see images of female power in the Egyptian Bible. In fact, the Egyptian materials, especially the grammar documents, abound with accounts of women's sacred authority.

The gender association may have benefited from the depiction of several female figures in the papyri themselves. For Cowdery, the most noteworthy was a picture of Eve speaking with a legged snake, thus confirming the Genesis account of Eve's temptation. "The serpent, represented as walking, or formed in a manner to be able to walk, standing in front of, and near a female figure, is to me, one of the greatest representations I have ever seen."[104] In that drawing, Cowdery saw an external evidence for the Bible. Smith, happy enough with such evidence, had other things in mind for the figure of Eve. Eve permeated the grammar documents both directly and through her female offspring. Notably, Eve was the one God instructed to multiply and replenish the earth (Genesis 1:28) in the Bible account. That sense of multiplication, kindred to the notion of semantic ramification, played an important role in Smith's Egyptian targum and its engagement of the priestess.

Especially as it connected with the recreation of the world in the aftermath of the flood—when Noah and his wives received the same commandment as Eve, to multiply and replenish the earth (Genesis 9:1)—Smith's Egyptian project contains accounts of female priestly power spread across multiple figures and scenes. This female sacerdotal power, tied to reproduction, is in many respects a prequel to the full flowering of Smith's parental system of priesthood in the

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103 Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 59–61.
104 M&A, 2:3 (December 1835): 236, describing a vignette on Joseph Smith Papyrus 4. William Appleby confirmed that interpretation in a reminiscent account in his Autobiography and Journal, 1848–1856, 72–73, CHL.

Nauvoo temple (chapter 7), in which women were formally ordained as queens and priestesses.[105]

The priestess theme in Smith's Egyptian Bible encompasses two main aspects. The first concerns the discovery of Egypt by a woman who is the eponym for the Egyptian nation. The story of the special women who were both named Egyptus (in fact, a mother-daughter pair) is present in Smith's Egyptian project as a suggestive hint rather than a sustained narrative. In Josephus and other sources, Egyptus was understood to be the male eponym for Egypt. The identification of a woman with Egyptus appears to be novel with Smith and Phelps.[106] In the published Book of Abraham, the relevant material reads, "The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus, which, in the Chaldean, signifies Egypt, which signifies, that which is forbidden; when this woman discovered the land it was under water" (Abraham 1:23–24).[107] This brief account appears to be filling in the otherwise obscure action of Genesis 8:16, in which Noah's sons and daughters-in-law must explore the newly dry earth as the flood waters recede.[108] In the earliest manuscripts, *Zeptah* is Ham's wife, her name drawn from the glyphs for *Zip* and *Tah*. Her daughter with Ham was named Egyptus. The name Egyptus likely spread from daughter to mother as an inadvertent merger of the two names within the manuscripts.[109]

The association between the enigmatic woman and the discovery of Egypt is present in the grammar documents as well, and it appears to derive from an image on Fragment of Book of the Dead for Semminis, in which a woman is rowing a boat as she perhaps looks into the distance under the shade of her right hand (Figure 6.2).[110]

Presumably, she espies a land just discovered under the water on which she floats. Importantly for this argument, just beneath her vessel is the character that is identified in *GAEL* as *Iota taues Zip Zi*, decoded as "The land of Egypt which was first discovered by a woman."[111] This composite glyph combines *Zip Zi* (woman), *Iota* (sight), and *taues* (being under water). Beneath that character is the horizontal line that the grammar documents define as the ramifying "degree" (Figure 6.3).

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[105]   On queens and priestesses, see, e.g., England, "Nauvoo Journal," 164, and Lewis, *Proceedings of the Mormons*, 8.

[106]   Josephus, *Works*, 584.

[107]   The name of Ham's wife is not attested in the Bible. The Apocryphal Book of Jubilees identifies it as Neelatamauk; other sources propose other names. None that I can locate proposes Egyptus.

[108]   Egypt was thought to have been founded "soon after the deluge." *M&A* 3:6 (March 1837): 471.

[109]   Metcalfe, "Wife of Ham."

[110]   She appears to me to be holding the upper section of her oar; I'm following what I suspect was the interpretation of Phelps and Smith. For the full papyrus, see *JSPR4*, 16–17.
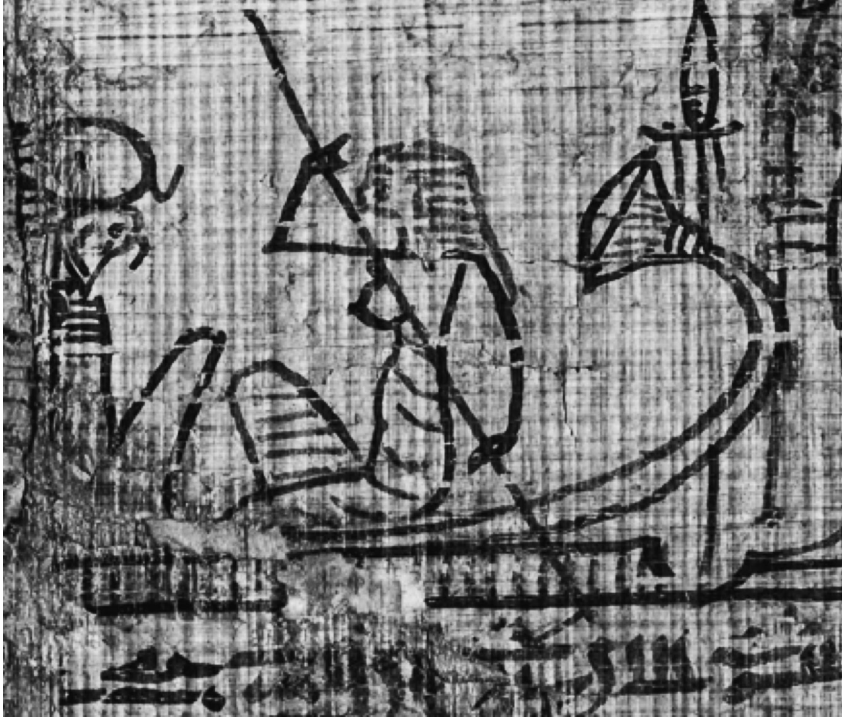
[111]   *JSPR4*, 124–25.

Figure 6.2 Image from Fragment of Book of the Dead for Semminis—C, a possible textual anchor for the Egyptus tradition in Smith's Egyptian Bible. Image courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Figure 6.3 Magnified image of the character for woman/degree in the bottom left of the image in Figure 6.2. Image courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Even beyond the highly suggestive characters adjacent to the vignette of the woman apparently discovering something from her boat, the grammar documents generally support this line of interpretation. A woman is the eponym for Egypt, and the discovery of Egypt is connected to water. Beyond the image of a woman rowing, the connection to Ham (it is his wife and daughter, after all, who are named Egyptus) is fundamentally a connection to Ham's father Noah and the repopulation of the world after the flood in Genesis 8–9. (Ham is associated with Egypt in the Bible and parabiblical traditions, generally through his son Mizraim.[112])

Phelps and Smith seem to have seen the female figure in the boat, known that Ham was associated with Egypt, and understood that the female figure—surely a daughter-in-law to Noah from Genesis 8:16—was associated with the discovery of Egypt as the floodwaters receded. To understand the metaphysical basis for this claim requires the papyrus and its vignette, Smith's commitment to sacred pictography, and biblical traditions about Ham and the flood in the context of the Noachide recapitulation of the world's first peopling. This confluence of inputs speaks to the sense in which Smith's project was precisely a targum and the papyri were the infrastructure for the pictographic connections that made the targum possible.

If the first point about female authority in the Egyptian project is Smith's novel assertion that Egypt was discovered by a woman, the second is his connection between women, priesthood power, and the generations of time. The specific female figure—the eponymous matriarchal founder of Egypt—joined others in wielding female power in the expression of matriarchal authority over later generations. The small and generative glyph *Zip* does work throughout the grammar documents. Not only does it figure in the name *Zeptah* that morphed into *Egyptus*, it is also a term consistently associated with women. *Zip Zi* in the fourth degree of the first part is "all women" and is explicitly tied to multiplication and numerals.

Throughout the grammar documents, humans and their relationships are inter-convertible with language, generally through this equivalence of biological and grammatical multiplication.[113] The hieratic glyph that is transliterated *Zip Zi* appears to be the underscore mark, the horizontal line that marks the ramification of semantic degrees, as we discussed earlier. This dual use of a single glyph as a grammatical construct and as a name for women implicitly argues that female power is tied to the ramifications and interconnections of hieroglyphic language. *Zip Zi* as the name for a glyph shows up in several other locations,

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[112] Psalms 78:51, 105:23–27, 106:22. On Mizraim, see Creighton, *Sacred and Profane History*, 1:127–28. See also discussion in Fleming, *Scripture Gazetteer*, 1:441.

[113] *JSPR4*, 134–35.

generally representing a variant of women or in one definition "a tittle or dignity conferred upon women." Other semantically similar glyphs are taken to indicate the "crown of a princess or queen." Repeatedly, then, glyphs for women represented royal power and authority. Commonly in early Restoration thought, such invocations of royal power were tied to priesthood.[114] The Egyptian project and its predecessors thus saw titles, dignities, and royalty as synonymous with priesthood.

Beyond but related to *Egyptus* and *Zip Zi*, we encounter another royal-priestly female figure in the story of the pharaonic princess whom Smith seems to have identified among the mummies.[115] We can trace this figure, *Katumin*, through the grammatical degrees of the *GAEL*. A series of glyphs follows her, an archetypal princess, through a process of maturation from a young virgin to an established mother. In other words, the grammatical degrees track her ascent along a reproductive hierarchy that parallels the extension of priestly power.[116] The grammatical degrees of reference run alongside the expansion of a genealogical priesthood power through marriage and reproduction in Katumin's life.

Early in the grammar documents, a compressed ellipse is the character associated with Katumin. The association between that character and women may derive from Fragment of Book of the Dead for Semminis, in which a female figure appears to be pouring water onto a tree. The water droplets look like the character interpreted as Katumin, recalling especially the tie to the receding flood waters associated with Egyptian women in the *Egyptus* narrative (Figure 6.4).

Furthermore, Katumin is defined as "a lineage with whom a record of the fathers was intrusted by tradition of Ham, and according to the tradition of their elders, by whom also the tradition of the art of embalming was kept."[117] This seems to be a reference to the fact that the mummies held the papyri in their arms, but it also connected back to the persistent themes of genealogy, priesthood, and scripture. Remember that genealogical records are, among other things, concerned with the transmission of priestly authority in Smith's exegesis of Ezra 2 (see chapter 1). Elsewhere, Katumin is tied to "the name of the royal

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[114] The suggestion of a royal priesthood underlying the equivalence of kings and priests seems to be an exegesis of Revelation 1:6 and 5:10, which Smith understood to be using the term "kings and priests" as a synonymous couplet rather than a list of separate statuses. Smith used that imagery in his 1832 Vision (D&C 76:56–58), journal entries in 1843 (*JSPJ3*, 66, 86), and sermons in 1844 (Historian's Office, General Church Minutes, April 7 and April 8, 1844, CR 100 318, bx. 1, fd. 19, CHL). See also *JSPAR,* 95–96, 278, and Willard Richards, Nauvoo, IL, to Brigham Young, New York City, NY, July 18–19, 1843, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, bx. 41, fd. 28, CHL. I thank Brady Winslow for these sources.

[115] On the possibility that Katumin was one of the mummies Smith purchased, see Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 61n150.

[116] This maturation progresses in parallel in the definitions of *Ho oop hah*. See discussion in Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 60–61.

[117] *JSPR4*, 120–23, 156–57.

Figure 6.4 Image from Fragment of Book of the Dead for Semminis—C, suggesting a comparison between water droplets and the glyph (inset at the bottom drawn from GAEL) associated with Princess Katumin in Smith's Egyptian Bible. Image courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

family in the female line."[118] One other stray hint suggests that Katumin may have been associated with Solomon's Temple, when Cowdery used the Bishop Ussher chronology to indicate that the Egyptian princess was born in *Anno Mundi* 2992, the year of Solomon's Temple.[119]

To recap, a princess named Katumin, bearing specially charged records, represents a lineage and exemplifies the idea of grammatical and reproductive degrees as fulfillment of the biblical mandates to multiply. Consistent with Smith's other teachings (and as was true for men also), this priestly power of

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[118] *JSPR4*, 56–57.

[119] *JSPR4*, 31, Cowdery's "Valuable Discovery" document. The "2962" in the text is an error, as Cowdery indicates that she lived twenty-eight years and died in Anno Mundi (AM) 3020. Her birth year was thus AM 2992. According to the standard Ussher chronology, that is the year of Solomon's temple and the conclusion of the Abrahamic period. Ussher reported that the world was created in 4004 BCE.

women appears to be tied to parenthood, procreation, and the cycle of genera-
tions. In other words, women are central priestly participants in the realization
of the Abrahamic blessing in the world.[120] There's even a hint that *Katumin* may
be a reference to a type (i.e., an archetypal princess) in her "descent from her
by whom Egypt was discovered while it was under water."[121] In other words,
Katumin came from Egyptus. They partook of the same royal line. By extension,
so will the women who follow.

Within the canonized Book of Abraham, the main reflexes of princess
Katumin's story are a brief reference to priestly virgins sacrificed by pagan
priests (Abraham 1:11) and the ongoing emphasis on genealogy and reproduc-
tion. While the Book of Abraham doesn't make this point explicit, this merger
of reproduction and priesthood power suggests that the instructions to Eve and
Adam to "multiply and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28), mirrored in the par-
allel instructions to Noah and his family (Genesis 8), were in fact priesthood
callings.

According to the Egyptian project, men exist with power parallel to that of
women. One glyph for a powerful patriarch describes the "extension of power by
marriage or by ordination,"[122] suggesting the ongoing interconnection of marital
and priestly power. This reference again ties the priesthood that Smith associ-
ated with both Egypt and his temple to parenthood, a physical and metaphysical
force in which both men and women participated. The Book of Abraham's treat-
ment of this genealogical priesthood hovered between engaging the problems
with Egyptus's offspring (because of Ham's curse, which separated him from
Abraham's covenanted blessings) and the power that inheres in the genealogical
priesthood.[123]

The twin concepts of genealogy and priesthood seem to represent, in these
hieroglyphic stories about Abraham, two sides of the same coin. In the published
scripture, God tells Abraham that he and his seed are, by definition, "Priesthood"
(Abraham 2:11). In fact, this brief sequence of verses (2:9–11) reinterprets
Genesis 17:6–8 in a way that exemplifies the conceptual work that Smith's targums
did. In place of the relatively simple announcement of Abraham's covenant in
Genesis, Smith's Abraham offered an expansive reframing in terms of a priest-
hood that could interconnect all of humanity.[124] As opposed to the terse promise
of plentiful offspring in Genesis, the Book of Abraham reveals that Abraham's

120 Hovorka, "Sarah and Hagar" suggests that women are involved in the Abrahamic covenants
in the Bible. Hovorka probably did not go far enough in her appreciation of the power attributed to
women in Smith's Egyptian project. Stapley, *Power of Godliness*, does emphasize the role of women in
that early notion of priesthood.
121 *JSPR4*, 140–41.
122 *JSPR4*, 132–33; Brown, "(Smith) in Egypt," 57–63.
123 See, e.g., Abraham 1: 2–4, 18, 24; 2:10–11.
124 I thank Kathleen Flake for bringing this juxtaposition to my awareness.

progeny "shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations." The ministry is the evangelism of strangers into Abraham's family—"as many as receive this gospel shall be called after thy name and shall be accounted thy seed." The Book of Abraham hammered home the deep and necessary dependence of priesthood (the power that converted believers and organized them in the church) on parenthood (biological multiplication), specifically that of Abraham and Sarah. Priesthood was thus explicitly the power by which Abraham's and Sarah's sacred parenthood could unfold across the globe. This notion of Abrahamic priesthood had deep roots in Smith's revelations, and through the Egyptian project the necessary incorporation of women into that priesthood became somewhat clearer.

The promise of priestly power for women was exciting for many participants, even as it unfolded in the context of assumptions about the nature of gender that have not weathered the interceding decades well. Smith and Phelps were endorsing neither late modern gender equality nor Victorian sexual norms. The priestess theology of the Egyptian Bible engaged the intersection of heavenly and earthly powers as they concerned genealogy and reproduction.[125]

In Smith's Abrahamic system (especially as manifest in the Egyptian Bible and the accompanying temple liturgy), women were sources of power, although their power could only be wielded in company with men. This was true throughout the early Restoration—women had striking power, which they could not wield in isolation. The hierarchy of men over women—a connection between the classical Chain of Being and Smith's genealogical revision as the Chain of Belonging—is apparent in the grammar documents. Another interpretation of the glyph *Zip Zi* (third degree) reads "under or beneeath, second in right or in authority or Government, a fruitful place or fruitful vine."[126] This was the combination consistently present in Smith's thought—women had vast cosmic powers that they wielded with men who stood higher in an ontic hierarchy.[127]

Smith's Egyptian Bible highlights aspects of a female priesthood—centered in the fulfillment of the Genesis command to multiply and replenish the earth—that came to fruition over the course of the Egyptian project as it became the Nauvoo temple liturgy. While in the temple that female priesthood became formally codified and implemented, the textual tributaries appear in Smith's Egyptian Bible. Women's connection to life, mediated through the first mother Eve, makes the human family possible. Smith's Egyptian Bible, with its focus on parenthood-based priesthood, brings women directly into the royal line.

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[125] This is a major argument of Stapley, *Power of Godliness*, who charts the persistence of this "cosmological" model through approximately 1890.

[126] *JSPR4*, 140–41

[127] Kathleen Flake (e.g., "Priestly Logic") has written insightfully on these themes.

Women thus stand at the center of the Chain of Belonging, another major theme within the Egyptian project.

The Chain of Belonging, Human and Astral

Smith tied his notions of interlaced priesthood and parenthood to a radical rein-terpretation of the ancient scientific construct of the Chain of Being, which was an ontological hierarchy encompassing the entire universe in which all classes of beings differ from each other in their essence. This foundation of a lineal priesthood was central to Smith's strategy to advance a genealogical Chain of Belonging in which humans, angels, and Gods were genetically interconnected. The new hierarchy was genealogical rather than ontological.

Smith's approach to humans' mutual embeddedness placed him in the cross-currents of several of the ideological shifts later associated with secularity, as we saw in chapter 3. When it came to questions of extrahuman biology, he seemed comfortable with the Chain of Being, as manifested by a reference to the "scale of nature" and a straightforward endorsement in an 1832 revelation (D&C 77:3). For example, he saw in the beasts of Revelation representatives of the various "classes of beings in their destined order or sphere of creation." But when it came to rigid ontological or aristocratic hierarchies, he largely rejected the Chain of Being.[128] Instead of the gradations in ontology from the classic Chain of Being, Smith argued that human beings were interconnected in a vast family tree. The hierarchy was parental, genealogical; the power that interconnected humanity was called priesthood. Smith's genealogical Chain made it all the way to (and perhaps through) God. The God of the Bible was in his view not the wholly tran-scendent creator of the Chain of Being, but the oldest progenitor of the genealog-ical Chain of Belonging.

Smith's revelations in 1832 and 1833 paved the way for this revised under-standing, with the introduction of hierarchies in heaven in the Vision and the Olive Leaf. The Vision saw a reference to "many mansions" (John 14:2) as indi-cating a hierarchy of afterlife kingdoms, while the Olive Leaf tied this to the possibility of human perfection. Those prior revelations are a template for the astronomical observations in Abraham. Smith's April 1836 vision indicated the connection between an Elias/Elijah figure and Abraham: "Elias appeared and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying, that in them and their seed all generations after them should be blessed."[129] This notion that

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[128] For contemporary discussions of the Chain of Being, see *M&A* 1:8 (May 1835): 113; *M&A* 1:7 (April 1835): 108;, and William Phelps, Letter to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835, HBLL.

[129] *JSPD5*, 228.

one's seed would be blessed as Latter-day Saints participated in the Abrahamic promise was ubiquitous. Believers incorporated these images further into their writings and revelations. Lorenzo Barnes received a blessing telling him that "all the powers of the priesthood we seal upon thy head & upon thy sead forever."[130] Priesthood and offspring were consistently interrelated.

The Book of Abraham makes clear that God had spoken with Abraham "face to face," the same as he had with Moses (Abraham 3:11), and provides a panoramic vision. This new vision starts with God revealing the sacred names of celestial bodies, apparently to complement Abraham's knowledge of their set times. (These special names may be the astral equivalents of the new names of the temple; see chapter 7.)

Immediately the Book of Abraham relates the conversation in which God tells Abraham that he will have unlimited progeny (an anticipation of the earthly Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 15 and 17) by assuring that the reader knows that the vision occurred at night, when the stars would be visible (Abraham 3:14, cf. Genesis 22:17). The text then reiterates the principle of hierarchy and places God at the head of the Chain of Belonging (3:18–19).

Shortly thereafter begins a famous account (3:22–28) of the preexistent "intelligences" among whom Christ predominates. The Book of Abraham sketches out (3:27) the backstory of the cosmic theomachy and an account of God's leadership of a team of demiurges (a term I borrow from Plato's *Timaeus* for the "craftsman" who made the cosmos from an ideal divine template) who craft an earth for humans to inhabit and be tested, while deploying an obscure reference to the "first estate" lost by certain angels in Jude 6.[131] Abraham 3 thus pulls together disparate biblical materials to extend the primeval history into a time before time. It thereby establishes the original infrastructure of the Chain of Belonging, which simultaneously integrates celestial bodies into the family of angels, gods, and humans.

One particularly expansive glyph interpretation in the grammar documents points out what Smith was doing with his Chain of Belonging. The glyph for the celestial kingdom recapitulated the Vision (D&C 76) and anticipated the celestial marriage revelation (D&C 132). This glyph combines four simpler glyphs: *Lish* (God), *Zi* (woman or queen), *ho e oop* (prince), and *Iota* (sight/eye). This composite glyph is glossed as "one glory above all other glories, as the [sun] excels the moon in light, this glory excels being filled with the same glory equally." In other words, the glyph reiterated the astral hierarchy of glories described in the

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[130] *JSPD5*, 135.
[131] The theomachy is also described in Moses 4 and Revelation 12. The reference to the council of demiurges also contains a vague but intriguing evocation of the Gnostic contest and perhaps an echo of Job's famous trial, which begins in Job 1:7–12.

1832 Vision in a way that emphasized the familial unity of the highest echelon of the celestial Chain. When the Egyptian pictogram placed a man and a woman together in the presence of God, Smith subsumed the traditional Chain of Being into the human family, whose "many parts" were thereby "united."[132] This was his Chain of Belonging. Several other glyphs similarly describe the "degrees and parts" of the many afterlife kingdoms described in the 1832 Vision.[133] These interpretations and the revelations they draw on together get at the possibilities of harmonies among human beings in heaven and on earth.

Smith emphasized the association between the funerary papyri and "the system of astronomy" that "was unfolded" through them, with a special focus on "the formation of the planetary System."[134] Though it is tempting to situate the astrophysical speculations of Smith's Egyptian Bible within established astronomies—Ptolemaic, Copernican, or otherwise—early Latter-day Saint ideas about stars aren't fundamentally concerned with the concepts of formal astronomy.[135] They cared much more about the overlapping hierarchies of humans, stars, and gods.[136] They were, in other words, fleshing out their Chain of Belonging in its human and astral aspects.

These stars wove themselves into human souls and societies, existing in hierarchies that paralleled and sustained human genealogy. These hierarchies touched human lives in part through the control of time by celestial bodies. Within the grammar documents, Smith, Phelps, and Cowdery wove together an exegesis of the Hebrew astrogony (cf. Genesis 1:14–18, with its emphasis on stars as ruling and determining), a literal reading of 2 Peter 3:8 ("one day is with the Lord as a thousand years"), and the commonplace view, confirmed by Buck's *Theological Dictionary*, that time is a "mode of duration marked by certain periods, chiefly by the motion and revolution of the sun."[137] Smith, Phelps, and Cowdery suggested that celestial bodies determined their *gravitas* on the basis of the time signaled by the length of their orbit.

People had long known from astronomy that days were defined by movement through space. The transition on earth from light to dark and back again happened because the earth spun on its axis as it hurtled through space, and the years, marked by the transitions of seasons, occurred because the earth made its way around the sun. That was all clear enough. A few months before the papyri

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[132] *JSPR4*, 160–61

[133] *JSPR4*, 160–61, 180–81.

[134] *JSPJ1*, 67, 124.

[135] Bushman, *Rough Stone*, 454–55; Vogel and Metcalfe, "Scriptural Cosmology"; Gee, "Geocentric Astronomy."

[136] Thus William Warburton reports that in ancient hieroglyphs a star "denoted or expressed the idea of the DEITY." *Divine Legation*, 2:295.

[137] Buck, *Theological Dictionary*, 573. Webster's 1828 dictionary contained a similar description of "relative time."

arrived, Oliver Cowdery had conscientiously referred to "a few days, measured by this present sun."[138] In an editorial shortly after the publication of the Book of Abraham, Smith and his colleagues argued that human "spirits are governed by the same priesthood that Abraham, Melchizedec, and the apostles were" and that "they are organized according to that priesthood which is everlasting." Tying human genealogies to cosmic hierarchy, as the Book of Abraham does consistently, the editorial indicated that these human spirits "all move in their respective spheres, and are governed by the law of God."[139]

The hieroglyphs provided an instrument for clarification of the nature of astral time. To solidify their biblical foundation, Smith and Phelps employed cubits as an astronomical metric.[140] In heaven "the measurement according to Celestial time" was held to "signif[y] one day to a cubit, which day is equal to a thousand years according to the measurement of this earth."[141] These cubits (one quarter of "the leng[th] from the end of the longest finger to the end of the other when the arms are extended," or approximately twenty-one inches) measured the arc length of an orbit, thus the amount of time required to revolve around a center place.[142] Smith and Phelps apparently employed the notion that a span called a cubit subtended one degree of the sun's orbit around the earth.[143] (Neither Phelps nor Smith was so obtuse as to believe that a star's orbit was less than two feet.) Their method therefore described a celestial orbit from the perspective of an individual on a subservient planet, watching the dominant celestial body. The measure of that movement was both bodily (defined in terms of an individual's limbs) and sacred (it was a measurement in the Hebrew Bible). These sacred cubits also connected back to the first human body. In the phrase of one popular lecturer, such measurements were "coeval with [the] hand of our first father Adam!"[144] In this early Latter-day Saint view, cubits emphasized the close association between humans and the cosmos in sacred astronomy. Just as orbits measured human lives, so did human bodies measure orbits. These concepts are not precisely the zodiacal body of folk religion, though they draw on the same conceptual framework of metaphysical correspondence.[145] The published Book of

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[138] *M&A* 1:7 (April 1835): 108.

[139] *T&S* 3:11 (April 1, 1842): 745.

[140] These cubits also appear in Facsimile 2.

[141] *JSPR4*, 166–67. Cubits are generally defined as 21 to 27 inches and reflect the length of a forearm from elbow to fingertip. Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 2:261, described various definitions of "cubit" in his exegesis of 1 Samuel 17:4. Buck, *Theological Dictionary*, 31 defined a cubit as 21.8 inches, within the range Phelps and Smith proposed.

[142] *JSPR4*, 178–79.

[143] Such is the persuasive argument of the emeritus astronomer Johnson "One Day." See also, e.g., Seymer, *Ancient Egypt*, 1:252, and Narrien, *Astronomy*, 77. While Seymer's and Narrien's books are admittedly British publications, British books commonly circulated in the United States, and they suggest the presence of traditions relevant to the use of a cubit of arc length to describe an orbit.

[144] *T&S* 5:5 (March 1, 1844): 462.

[145] On the zodiacal body, see Butler, *Sea of Faith*, 80.

Abraham confirms the material from the grammar documents in its description of a gradation of "set times" for stars leading "unto the throne of God" (Abraham 3:10, 4:15–6).

Smith and Phelps may have drawn some inspiration for their human-like astronomy from a story about Smith's biblical namesake. In an 1832 editorial, Phelps invoked a famous dream of the Hebrew Bible in which "the sun and moon, and the eleven stars made obeisance to" Joseph of Egypt (Genesis 37:1–9) as evidence of Joseph Smith's authority and holy lineage.[146] The power of the biblical Joseph over his brothers, the tribes of Israel, served as a potent image for Smith and Phelps, with astral valences.

Within the Egyptian Bible, Smith proposed a hierarchy of celestial bodies based on light (rather than just astral time), recalling his 1832 revelation "on priesthood" (D&C 84) and the True Light revelation of 1833 (D&C 93), while slightly modifying the temporal framing of the Olive Leaf (D&C 88). A distinctive targum of Genesis 1:14–18 appears to be the biblical basis for the hierarchy of light among celestial bodies. It didn't require much of a stretch. Light was the medium by which stars reached human awareness, the power that separated stars from the inky blackness of the night sky. Within the grammar documents, the glyph *Flos isis* (possibly a compound of the Greek *phos*—light—and the Egyptian goddess *Isis*) signifies (fifth degree) "the highest degree of life, because its component parts are light. . . . the light of the grand governi[n]g of 15 fixed stars centre there."[147] Starlight confirmed the hierarchies that ordered and linked space and time; bodies with more central orbits possessed greater light. In the second degree, *Flos isis* is "the King of day or the central moving planet, from which the other governing moving planets receive their light . . . slow in its motion."[148] A derivative glyph, *Kli flosis* (fifth degree), "signifies Kolob in its motion, which is swifter than the rest of the twelve fixed stars; going before, being first in motion."[149] This motion connected Kolob back to the questions of how time binds human beings and their experience.

Egypt was often associated in nineteenth-century America with sacred astronomy, and astronomy with sacred history.[150] The Bible joined traditional

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[146] *EMS* 1:6 (November 1832): 41.

[147] *JSPR4*, 164–65. Isis figured prominently in some American metaphysical traditions, including as a representation of the twelve stars. Heavlin, *Mysteries of Isis*, 15, 234.

[148] *JSPR4*, 178–79, 182–83.

[149] *JSPR4*, 164–65. "Kli" seems to be an abbreviated *Kolob* prepended to a contracted *flos isis*.

[150] Bellamy, *All Religions*, 27, explained that Egyptians "have long had the honor of the mention of the constellations." See also Commentary on Genesis 41:8 and Daniel 2:10, in Clarke, *Holy Bible*, 1:231 and 4:568, and Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I.7.1–2, see also *M&A* 2:3 (December 1835): 236. Cowdery had framed Smith's discovery of his golden plates within traditions from Josephus two months earlier: *M&A* 2:1 (October 1835): 196. See also the series "The Wonders of Ancient Egypt," *Nauvoo Neighbor* 1:31 (November 29, 1843); 1:32 (December 6, 1843); 1:33 (December 9, 1843); 1:34 (December 20, 1843).

scholarship and folk wisdom with narratives about magicians and divines who saw truth in the skies, prophets who could make the sun stop moving, or a God who marked the birth of his Messiah-son by positioning a star over the baby's crib.[151] Connections between stars and God are very old. The Leonid meteor shower of November 1833 impressed many, including the Saints, and celestial marvels played a central role in the wonder lore that defined for many the imminence of Christ's return.[152] Stars have always mattered, and not just to astrologers.

The connection between celestial and human bodies is exemplified in the story of the star Kolob. This Kolob narrative incorporates a sustained exegesis of Job and Genesis, a religious astronomy, and (probably) a gentle modification of the Hebrew word for star (*kokab*).[153] Within the grammar documents, *Kolob* grounded the celestial Chain of Belonging. In the Book of Abraham, it is the governing star nearest to God: "These are the governing ones; and the name of the great one is Kolob, because it is near unto me, for I am the Lord thy God: I have set this one to govern" (3:3). That special Kolob was the star by which God told time (3:4), which solved a logical problem in the text, as discussed earlier.

The grammar documents dramatically expand the modest discussions of the special star in the Book of Abraham. *Kolob* represents "the first creation . . . nearer to the Celestial, or the residence of God."[154] This star was the "first in government, the last pertaining to the measurement of time."[155] Kolob was the pinnacle of the celestial bodies known as *hah kokaubeam*.[156] It was (second degree) the "eldest of all the Stars, the greatest body of the heavenly bodies."[157] Kolob signified the "first beginning to the bodies of this creation . . . having been appointed for the last time the last or the eldest."[158] The fact that this Kolob is both first and last according to time seems an obvious echo of the Alpha and Omega designation by which Christ is known in the New Testament.

In the grammar documents, each star has its own *kairos*, or "set time," and Abraham receives the right to know each of these stars and set times. To know a celestial body's *kairos* is to discern its name and its power.[159] The binding of times was parallel to the genealogical priesthood of the human hierarchies. As the

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[151] Matthew 2 and Joshua 10.

[152] On the meteor shower, see Van Wagenen, "Singular Phenomena." On wonder lore in America, see, e.g., Marsden, *Edwards*, 69, 121.

[153] Zucker, "Student of Hebrew," 51, proposes this minor deformation of *kokab*, but misses the emphasis on proximity to God in Abraham 3:3, 9.

[154] *JSPR4*, 166–67.

[155] *JSPR4*, 166–67, 178–79.

[156] This transliteration of the Hebrew *ha'kokabim* (the stars) follows Seixas's Sephardic system.

[157] *JSPR4*, 166–67, 178–79.

[158] *JSPR4*, 170–71.

[159] Abraham 3:6–7, 10. I'm aware that I'm using *kairos* in an idiosyncratic way. My analogy here relies on the notion that being bound by the set time of a planet instates a propitious relationship.

eldest hierarch, Kolob received a priesthood scope over other celestial bodies—
GAEL defines it in its third degree as "the highest degree of power in govern-
ment, pertaining to heavenly bodies."[160]

This Kolob, which was the brightest star with the most central orbit, is the
most familiar of the celestial bodies described in the Egyptian project. The in-
terdependence of starlight and habitation may be a targum of Job 38:19–20, in
which God speaks from a whirlwind to Job, with a probing question: "Where is
the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, /
That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know
the paths to the house thereof?" God was asking Job whether he was present at
the primordial creation when light was separated from darkness. But in those
spare words, it appears that Smith and Phelps saw hints of the interrelationships
among stars, lights, and the passage of time. Consistent with Smith's practice,
these interpretations and extensions were translations that saw the vast truths
lurking in muddled sections of the King James Bible.

The special star Kolob rapidly made its way into Latter-day Saint ritual,
discourse, hymnody, and cosmology. It figured especially prominently in
aspirations to move through space bodily, as we saw in chapter 3. Through this
especially bright star with a divinely central orbit, Smith showed his followers the
way to heaven.

The Egyptian Bible used sprawling targums of the primeval history to situate
believers within the Chain of Belonging. Given the centrality of integration into
that Chain within the Nauvoo temple liturgy, it's little wonder that the Egyptian
Bible is so intensely tied to the temple liturgy. Before treating the temple spe-
cifically in the next chapter, it's worth considering what the Egyptian project
might say about the triangulation of Smith and his disciples within the currents
of modern culture.

Secularity and the Egyptian Bible

Though Jean-François Champollion had definitively identified the pho-
netic nature of Egyptian hieroglyphs by about 1822, the phonetic interpre-
tation was discordant with prior traditions. Relatively few listeners were
immediately interested in abandoning the understanding of hieroglyphs as
pictographic codes.

Champollion is a useful inflection point in the disenchantment of Egyptian
language and culture. The mysterious hieroglyphs turned out to be a syllabary

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[160] *JSPR4*, 174–75.

(a writing system that encodes syllables rather than letters) based on the rebus (visual puns, as when a picture of an *eye* is used to represent the first-person pronoun *I*), rather than pictograms per se. Hieratic script proved to be a simplified cursive variant of hieroglyphs.[161] According to Champollion and his heirs, Egyptians didn't have any special mysteries hidden in the language itself, however many spells and incantations might have been preserved in magic papyri and funerary texts.[162] Scholars could understand all they needed to know by treating Egyptian like any other human language. Once the Egyptian language had been stripped of its metaphysical power, it became more difficult to maintain that, for example, Thoth/Hermes was the god of language or to imagine that glyphs provided access to a world beyond the merely physical. Within a few generations, Egyptology resembled an established, secularized mode of understanding one early culture among many in the antique Mediterranean.

Yet many nonspecialists, particularly those most resistant to Enlightenment-style traditions of reproduction and verification, continued to see Egypt as a major source of wisdom and mystery. Popular writers continue to the present day to wonder about the technological marvels of the Egyptian funerary monuments. Many still see hieroglyphs as infused with great meaning.[163] These individuals have resisted the elite and academic disenchantment. So where do the Saints belong within these modern Egyptian currents? Theirs is a complex collage of old and new.

To rehearse my basic point in the interest of clarity, when Smith encountered mummies and their funeral papyri in 1835, he employed hieroglyphs as mystical correspondences—abundant linguistic objects of real divine presence—to expose primordial truths from the Hebrew Bible's history. This pictographic project in an Egyptian key revealed aspects of Smith's divine anthropology, primarily as a targum of the Genesis creation accounts. He integrated those principles with his repurposed Chain of Belonging while fixing logical problems in the King James text along the way.

Even as they sought deep metaphysical reality, Smith and his colleagues were still enmeshed in the modern world. The papyri were standard religious texts from Ptolemaic-era Thebes; they were written in standard hieratic script. Smith and his lieutenants were prone at times to understand them in plain terms, as when Brigham Young and Willard Richards wrote from England asking whether Smith wanted them to transcribe glyphs from the British Museum to send to him for review.[164] But the Egyptian documents were something else too, and

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[161] Powell, *Writing*, esp. 85–127.

[162] On Egyptian magic, see, e.g., Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt*, and Meyer, *Ancient Christian Magic*.

[163] On the broader history of Egyptology, see Thompson, *Wonderful Things*, vols. 1–3.

[164] *JSPD7*, 394.

that is what Smith and his associates also saw. The papyri contained hieroglyphic portals into the pure language of the primeval Bible and the words, authority, and person of Abraham. They called forth an experience probably best considered graphic glossolalia.

Form and content merged in this project, which exemplified the metaphysical aspirations of hieroglyphs. Smith worked to make the cosmic presence actual in the world through his engagement of hieroglyphs. As he did so, he reiterated the key positions he had taken in opposition to rising sensibilities about the nature of time and human selves.

Conclusion

Smith communed with ancient Egypt through the papyri, mummies, and glyphs. Smith's Egyptian Bible was also concerned with the nature of time itself, as measured by the celestial bodies. This time was deeply personalized and heterogeneous. Time was measured not in seconds or days but in parent-child relationships. It was not counted with watches or calendars but by human-like stars. The use of astronomy for the calculation of time spans two modes of thinking about scientific observation and measurement. The notion that certain times could be dominated by certain planets was classic zodiacal astrology. At the same time, it reflected an astronomical consensus. When Smith weighed in, he did so in a way that biblicized astrology. Time was wrapped up in the special star Kolob, which corresponded to Jesus.

Smith also had something important to say about the nature of human selves in his Egyptian Bible. Selves could not exist independently, and they were not well buffered. Parents could affect children and vice versa. Celestial bodies mirrored and influenced human bodies and society. Selves were suspended in a relational medium he called priesthood. This priesthood extended through both women and men to bind the generations of time together.

Once again, Smith and his followers drew on trappings of modern culture to make peace with the exigencies of their environment, but their project was a fundamentally enchanted one. Caught between the two worlds, such as they were, the early Saints wanted to wield all that was good in both. Whether they were blissfully unaware or defiantly resistant—I suspect the latter—they lived in a world that didn't fit into the channels of modernity and its discontents.

Smith's work to transform the Chain of Being is exemplary here. While Locke and others eliminated the Chain of Being by abandoning hierarchy and, later, materializing people, Smith saw the Chain of Being as the promise of a vastly humanized system of harmony. This harmony, his Chain of Belonging, integrated

divinized human beings into the fabric of the cosmos. That was his goal. One key instrument in that work was a special kind of scripture that was both human and textual and was intimately concerned with mediating and obliterating spatial and temporal distance. This mode of scripture culminated in the sacred rituals of the Nauvoo temple.