

a cause of concern and disaffection among the Latter-day Saints. Prophetic paradigms more accommodating of Smith's humanity have been taking shape in the Church of Jesus Christ for some time now. Richard Bushman's landmark biography of Joseph Smith broke new ground in 2005 as an unstinting portrait of a flawed leader written by a faithful believer.<sup>316</sup> With similar frankness, the church now acknowledges on its website that prophetic misunderstanding and prophetic inspiration may coexist in the same person even at the same moment. Smith certainly believed that he was successfully rendering the actual Egyptian symbols into their English counterparts. In the case of the facsimiles he was apparently wrong, and in the case of the Book of Abraham narrative he may have been as well. Yet the church website—in a striking return to the position first articulated in the church's 1912 responses to the Egyptologists—proposes the possibility that “even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri . . . they catalyzed a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a revelation about the life of Abraham.”<sup>317</sup>

Invoking such a “catalyst” theory of revelation may empower the believer with a more accommodating model of Smith's seership, even as it strikes the skeptic as evasive. The value of such a possibility, however, is that it brackets the questions of historicity and accuracy altogether and enables a new range of questions to emerge. Instead of evaluating Smith's work by looking back through the lens of contemporary Egyptology, we may learn the workings of Smith's prophetic imagination and his own unique cultural moment by entering more fully into his nineteenth-century context. By doing so, we move the question of seership and translation out of the domain of linguistic proficiency altogether.

### **From Mummies to Scripture: Rethinking Translation**

It is commonly known, that in Egypt there were Hieroglyphics inscribed on the columns and walls of temples and buildings; it is acknowledged however at this day, that no one can determine their signification. Those Hieroglyphs were no other than Correspondences expressive of things Spiritual by things Natural. The Egyptians, more than any people in Asia, cultivated the Science of Correspondences; but in process of time they lost the Science in idolatry—forgetting the Substance in the Symbol. The science became extinct. . . . Should