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## Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham

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# FOUR IDOLATROUS GODS IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

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John Gee

**Abstract:** *Although unknown as deities in Joseph Smith's day, the names of four associated idolatrous gods (Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, and Korash) mentioned in the Book of Abraham are attested anciently. Two of them are known to have connections with the practices attributed to them in the Book of Abraham. The odds of Joseph Smith guessing the names correctly is astronomical.*

Among the specifics given in the Book of Abraham are the names of five deities worshipped in Ur of the Chaldees identified as “the god of Elkenah, and the god of Libnah, and the god of Mahmackrah, and the god of Korash, and the god of Pharaoh, king of Egypt” (Abraham 1:6). The Book of Abraham also informs us a little about the organization of the cult of “these dumb idols” by noting that “the priest of Elkenah was also the priest of Pharaoh” (Abraham 1:7). Up to this point we have had very little knowledge about these particular deities outside of the text of the Book of Abraham itself.<sup>1</sup> In this article I examine what can be known about the first four deities mentioned.

## Methodological Notes

Obviously the preferred situation would be that one could find these proper names attested both in the correct time and place.<sup>2</sup> This desideratum is easier said than done. There are relatively few extant

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1. For exceptions, see Kevin L. Barney, “On Elkenah as Canaanite El,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 19, no. 1 (2010): 22–35.

2. John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, “Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2001), 66–69.

sources from Abraham's approximate time and place. Ancient sources from Abraham's day were written for the needs and purposes of the people in Abraham's day; they were not written to answer our questions. Information pertaining to our concerns comes only, if it come at all, as incidental mentions in the text. The likelihood of their appearing increases with the number of texts available. Since the amount of relevant information is small, so are the chances of that information answering the questions we may have. We may want, for example, to know how many people lived in Abraham's Ur, but texts from Abraham's day usually do not deal directly with population sizes of towns.

### Time

Based on the Book of Abraham, Abraham seems to have lived in a time when Egyptians were in the northern Levant. The only time when that appears to be the case is between the reigns of the Pharaohs Sesostris II (1871–1864 BC) or Sesostris III (1863–1825 BC) on one end and Amenemhet III (1843–1798 BC) on the other end.<sup>3</sup> This is a period of at most seventy years, and it coincides with the Middle Bronze II period archaeologically. Because this time period is rather narrow and we actually have no written records from the northern Levant at that time, we must widen our scope chronologically by assuming *cultural continuity*.

Cultural continuity relies on the widespread human inertia not to change what works. Many practices, institutions, and beliefs can persist for hundreds, sometimes even thousands, of years without significant change. The longer time between two attestations of a cultural practice, the greater the chance of its having changed between them.

### Place

Abraham's hometown of Ur seems to be located in the area of modern southern Turkey or northern Syria.<sup>4</sup> The homeland (*môladâ*) in which

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3. Gee and Ricks, "Historical Plausibility," 69; Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee, "An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011): 74, 77 n. 25; John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2017), 101. I am following the dates of Rolf Krauss, "Lunar Dates," in *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, ed. Erik Hornung, Rolf Krauss, and David A. Warburton (Leiden, DEU: Brill, 2006), 427; and Thomas Schneider, "The Relative Chronology of the Middle Kingdom and the Hyksos Period (Dyns. 12–17)," in *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, 174.

4. Gee, *Book of Abraham*, 98–101.

the Ur of the Chaldees that Abraham fled (Genesis 12:1) is the same homeland (*môladâ*) in Aram-Naharin (Genesis 24:10) to which he sent his servant to find his son a wife (Genesis 24:4, 7). Aram-Naharin is located in modern-day northern Syria or southern Turkey rather than Mesopotamia. The names in the Abraham narrative are also linked to that area.<sup>5</sup>

Although it has been suggested that the site of Oylum Hüyük in the Kilis plain has been connected with the Olishem mentioned in the Book of Abraham,<sup>6</sup> this identification has been contested from both directions: on the one hand Oylum Hüyük has been proposed to be Ḥaššuwa instead;<sup>7</sup> and on the other hand Gaziantep (alternately Oylum) has been proposed to be Olishem with Tilbeşar as Ḥaššuwa.<sup>8</sup> Neither proposed identification of Oylum Hüyük, as Ullišum or Ḥaššuwa, is certain. Locating Ur somewhere in the Kilis or Sajur plain is a reasonable proposal that can be provisionally accepted until more information either confirms or falsifies it. It is located about 165 kilometers (100 miles) west of Harran, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) west of Carchemish, and about the same distance north of Aleppo. The Kilis plain contains thirty-eight known or suspected Middle Bronze II sites.<sup>9</sup> Of the known ones, seventeen are small (1–3 hectares), ten are medium sized (4–6) hectares, two are large (7–10 hectares), and one, at 17 hectares, is massive: Oylum Hüyük.<sup>10</sup> Using the typical estimate of one hundred people per acre (2.47 hectares),<sup>11</sup> the small sites would have a population of about a hundred

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5. Douglas Frayne, “In Abraham’s Footsteps,” in *The World of the Aramaeans I*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 216–36.

6. Atilla Engin, “Oylum Höyük İçin Bir Lokalizasyon Önerisi: Ullisum / Ullis / İllis,” in *Armizzi: Engin Özgen’e Armağan*, (Ankara: Asitan Kitap, 2014), 129–45. For an evaluation of the claims, see John Gee, “Has Olishem Been Discovered?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 104–7.

7. Ahmet Ünal, “A Hittite treaty tablet from Oylum Höyük in southeastern Turkey and the location of Ḥaššu(wa),” *Anatolian Studies* 65 (2015): 19–34.

8. Alfonso Archi, “Egypt or Iran in the Ebla Texts ?” *Orientalia* 85, fasc. 1 (2016): 26–27.

9. Atilla Engin and Barbara Helwing, “The EBA-MBA Transition in the Kilis Plain,” in *Looking North: The Socioeconomic Dynamics of Northern Mesopotamian and Anatolian Regions during the Late Third and Early Second Millennium BC*, ed. Nicola Laneri, Peter Pfälzner, and Stefano Valentini (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 99.

10. Engin and Helwing, “EBA-MBA Transition,” 98–100.

11. William G. Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans,

people, the medium-sized sites would have about two hundred people, and the large sites three or four hundred people; Oylum Hüyük would have had about seven hundred inhabitants.

In the ancient Near East, deities could be either local, regional, or super-regional. Local deities are particular to a specific location. When deities are shared with other locations in an area, then they are regional deities. Those that transcend a particular region can be termed super-regional deities. If the deities mentioned in the Book of Abraham are strictly local deities, then they will be found only if the precise location of Abraham is discovered. Since the precise location is not known, the only chance to find the deities is if they are regional or super-regional deities.

### Understanding the Labels

At the general time and place, the phrase “god of X” can mean a variety of things. The following are known usages from the time.

*Person:* In one Mari letter, Išḫi-Adad refers to the “DINGIR ša a-bi-ia” “the god of my father,”<sup>12</sup> showing that the name mentioned after the god can refer to the owner or possessor of the deity. Other letters mention “DINGIR ša be-lí-ia”<sup>13</sup> or “DINGIR-lum ša be-lí-ia”<sup>14</sup> “the god of my lord.” The Book of Abraham’s “god of Pharaoh” (Abraham 1:6) seems to fit this pattern.

*Place:* Mari letters refer to the “DINGIR.MEŠ ša a-li-šu” “the gods of his city,”<sup>15</sup> which shows that it is possible for a specific place to be mentioned. Likewise, Idrimi refers to the “DINGIR.MEŠ ša URU

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2012), 72.

12. ARM 5 20 16, in Georges Dossin, *Correspondance de Iasmaḥ-Addu* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1952), 36.

13. ARM 26/1 190 7', in Dominique Charpin and J.-M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), 1:372.

14. ARM 26/2 315 58, 26/2 289 27, in Dominique Charpin, Francis Joannés, Sylvie Lackenbacher, and Bertrand Lafont, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988), 2:78, 217. Cf. DINGIR.MEŠ ša be-lí-ia; ARM 26/2 401 6, in Charpin, Joannés, Lackenbacher, and Lafont, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1:243; ARM 26/2 542 15, in Charpin, Joannés, Lackenbacher, and Lafont, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1:2, 535; DINGIR.MEŠ ša be-lí; ARM 26/2 436 16, in Charpin, Joannés, Lackenbacher, and Lafont, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1:341.

15. ARM 26/1 156 22, in Charpin and Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1:323; ARM 26/2 401 5, in Charpin, Joannés, Lackenbacher, and Lafont, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1:243.

*A-la-la-aḥ*<sup>ki</sup>” “the gods of the city of Alalah,”<sup>16</sup> as well as the “*i-lam ma-at Ḫu-ri-ib-te*<sup>ki</sup>” “the god of the country of Ḫuribte.”<sup>17</sup> This can be extended to use the name of a god applied to a specific place, like “<sup>d</sup>*Da-gan ša Ū-ra-aḥ*<sup>ki</sup>” “Dagan of Urah.”<sup>18</sup>

It is not unusual for each location to have its own set of deities worshipped there. This can be shown in a Hittite cult inventory which lists the locations and the deities worshipped there, only portions of which we list here:<sup>19</sup>

Town	Deities
Šananauya	Ištar/Šawuška
Ušḫaniya	Storm God ( <sup>d</sup> 10) Sun Deity ( <sup>d</sup> UTU-uš)
Kipitta	Sun Deity ( <sup>d</sup> UTU-AŠ)
Uḫḫiuwa	War god ( <sup>d</sup> ZA-BA <sub>4</sub> -BA <sub>4</sub> )
Kapitatamna	[Storm] God ( <sup>d</sup> [10])
Liššina	Storm God ( <sup>d</sup> 10)
Uwalma	Gods (DINGIR.MEŠ)
Tenizidaša	Pirwa
Piddaniyaša	Pirwa
[Ma]lidaškuriya	Nanaya
Kalašmitta	Stag God ( <sup>d</sup> KAL) Ala
Tamettaya	Storm god of the gate-house ( <sup>d</sup> 10 KI.LAM) <sup>20</sup> Anzili
Durmitta	Gods (DINGIR.MEŠ)

16. Inscription of Idrimi, line 88, Edward L. Greenstein and David Marcus, “The Akkadian Inscription of Idrimi,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 1976): 66–67.

17. Inscription of Idrimi, line 14, in Greenstein and Marcus, “The Akkadian Inscription of Idrimi,” 64.

18. ARM 21 333 70’.

19. KBo 12.53+, in Michele Cammarosano, *Hittite Local Cults* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 276–85.

20. For the interpretation of this Sumerogram, see Itamar Singer, *The Hittite KI.LAM Festival* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 1:46, 115.



Some towns have more than one chief deity, and some deities are worshipped in more than one place, but the list gives an idea of the geographic variation in worship.

*Attribute:* The autobiography of Idrimi twice uses the expression “DINGIR.MEŠ ša AN ù KI” “the gods of heaven and earth.”<sup>21</sup> This expresses more an attribute than a specific place. This can also be seen in the Mesopotamian god lists where successive lines of one give “AN šá LÚ,” “AN šá SAL,” “AN šá LUGAL,” and “AN šá par-ši” “the god of men, the god of women, the god of the king, the god of the official.”<sup>22</sup>

*Name:* In cuneiform the names of deities are usually prefixed with the Sumerian sign DINGIR (conventionally abbreviated <sup>d</sup>, although in the original cuneiform writing there is no distinction between writing a phonetic sign, a logogram, or a determinative).<sup>23</sup> Determining when the sign should be read as a determinative and when it should be read as a logogram is not always a trivial or easy matter.<sup>24</sup> While this sign is not always read, it is, for example, possible to read the construction <sup>d</sup>Da-gan as “the god Dagan” or “the god of Dagan,” even though this is not the usual way to understand this construction.

The English word *god*, however, might not translate as the equivalent of DINGIR. In Joseph Smith’s day, the word *god* could specifically refer to “a false god; a heathen deity; an idol,”<sup>25</sup> which is clearly the way it is used in Abraham 1:6. In cuneiform writing systems of Abraham’s day, when the idol was referred to, the term sign ALAM was used rather than DINGIR. Thus the eighth year of Zimrilim was called “MU Zi-im-ri-li-im ALAM <sup>d</sup>Ḫa-at-ta ú-še-lu-ú” “the year Zimrilim erected the god of Ḫatta.”<sup>26</sup>

21. Inscription of Idrimi, lines 95 and 98, in Greenstein and Marcus, “The Akkadian Inscription of Idrimi,” 66, 68.

22. Anu ša amēli 1–4, in Richard L. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God-Lists*, AN: <sup>d</sup>An-nu-um and AN: Anu šá Amēli (New Haven, CT: Yale Babylonian Collection, 1998), 228. The same sign is read both AN and DINGIR; Rykle Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon* (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 2004), 248–50.

23. John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 111–12; Richard Caplice and Daniel Snell, *Introduction to Akkadian* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2002), 5–7.

24. See Robert M. Whiting, “The Reading of the Name DINGIR-šu-ì-lí-a,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 2 (1977): 171–77; Charpin and Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* 1:415–16.

25. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), s.v. god.

26. E.g., ARM 25 26.

## Transliteration

The Book of Abraham uses the Hebrew transliteration system that Joseph Smith learned from Josiah Seixas.<sup>27</sup> It was the standard transliteration system used in English-speaking countries in the nineteenth century. It differs from the transliteration systems used today and had a number of disadvantages. One of these is that it creates ambiguities, because combinations of letters can stand for different phonemes in the original languages. Such ambiguities are common in transliteration systems both anciently and in modern times. The following table shows the differences between the transliteration system of Seixas and the system used today:

Hebrew Letter	Current Transliteration	Seixas Transliteration
א	ʾ	
ב	b	b
ג	g	g
ד	d	d
ה	h	h
ו	w	v
ז	z	z
ח	ḥ	kh
ט	ṭ	t
י	y	y
כ	k	k
ל	l	l
מ	m	m
נ	n	n
ס	s	s
ע	ʿ	gn
פ	p	p, f
צ	ṣ	ts
ק	q	k

27. It may be found in J. Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Andover, MA: Gould and Newman, 1834), 5.

Hebrew Letter	Current Transliteration	Seixas Transliteration
ר	r	r
ש	š	sh
ש		s
ת	t	t

As the table shows, the Seixas system is ambiguous in a number of cases where different letters have the same transliteration. This needs to be kept in mind when dealing with the transcriptions of foreign terms in the Book of Abraham. In this article I distinguish between Book of Abraham and contemporary attestations by preserving the spelling from the respective sources.

### Context

While identifying a facet about the text and showing that it occurred in the time of Abraham argues for the historical authenticity of the text, one should not stop there. It is important not just to identify names in extra-canonical sources but to use those sources to learn something more about the deity. More information can not just argue for historical authenticity but can elucidate facets of the text that might not be otherwise apparent.

### Elkenah

A variety of identifications for Elkenah have been proposed,<sup>28</sup> but the most likely is some form of Hebrew El-qoneh (*’l qnh*), “the god who creates.”

The Karatepe inscription is a bilingual inscription in Hieroglyphic Luwian and Phoenician. In the inscription the Luwian Ea is equated with the Phoenician *’lqn ’rš*, “the god who created the earth.”<sup>29</sup> The Hittite form of this name is Elkunirša.<sup>30</sup> The Hittites preserved a myth, supposedly

28. See Barney, “Elkenah as Canaanite El,” 26–29; Gee and Ricks, “Historical Plausibility,” 75.

29. KARATEPE 1 §LXXIII, in John D. Hawkins, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscriptions: Volume I: Inscriptions from the Iron Age* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 1.1:58.

30. B. H. L. van Gessel, *Onomasticon of the Hittite Pantheon* (Leiden, DEU: Brill, 1998), 1:63.

Canaanite,<sup>31</sup> about this god. According to that myth, Elkunirša lived at the headwaters of the Euphrates river.<sup>32</sup> The myth, as such, is lamentably fragmentary, but has been summarized as follows:

“Ašertu, the wife of Elkunirša, attempts to seduce Baʿal. The Storm-god reveals everything to her husband and insults her on his inspiration. Thirsting revenge, Ašertu regains the favor of her husband, who then lets her do whatever she like with Baʿal. The goddess Anat now comes on the scene. Having overheard the conversation between Elkunirša and Ašertu, she warns Baʿal. Here the text breaks off. Elkunirša is the Hittitized form of the Semitic phrase ‘El Creator of the Earth.’”<sup>33</sup>

The myth contains intriguing passages, such as one character (Ašertu) saying to another, (Baʿal) “Come sleep with me”; and when the offer was refused, responding, “Else I will press you down with my [word] and [stab] you with my [. . .]”<sup>34</sup> The restoration of “stab” comes from a parallel passage in the story. This passage echoes the passage in the Book of Abraham in which “this priest [of Elkenah (see Abraham 1:7)] had offered upon this altar three virgins at one time, who were the daughters of Onitah, one of the royal descent directly from the loins of Ham. These virgins were offered up because of their virtue; because they would not bow down to worship gods of wood or of stone, they were killed upon this altar, and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians” (Abraham 1:11). Most Anatolian myths are closely connected to rituals.<sup>35</sup> The tablet from Böghazköy offers the mythic justification, while the Book of Abraham focuses on the ritual. The Book of Abraham specifies that the ritual, unlike the myth’s stabbing, was “done after the manner of the Egyptians,” and so it must have differed from the simple stabbing of the myth.

This deity is thus attested over a wide area, from Böghazköy to the headwaters of the Euphrates and down past Cilicia into Canaan. He is

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31. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., trans., *Hittite Myths* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 69–70.

32. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 69.

33. Maciej Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor* (Warsaw, Poland: Academic Publications Dialog, 1995), 128.

34. Translation in Hoffner, *Hittite Myths*, 69. For the text, see Heinrich Otten, “Ein kanaanäischer Mythos aus Boğazköy,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 1 (1953): 126.

35. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 106.

also attested over a wider temporal range. His myth is also associated with a choice between immorality or death.

### Libnah

Two god lists from Ugarit attest a specific set of deities called the “gods of Labana” (Akkadian: DINGIR.MEŠ la-ab-a-na; Ugaritic: il lb[-]n).<sup>36</sup> This has been taken as meaning “the gods of Lebanon,”<sup>37</sup> but others have been less certain about the translation.<sup>38</sup> There are two canonical god lists from Ugarit, a short one and a long one,<sup>39</sup> and the gods of Labana appear on the long one, suggesting that they are not main deities worshiped at Ugarit.

The alternate spelling that appears in some manuscripts of the Book of Abraham but was corrected in the printed edition, Zibnah,<sup>40</sup> is attested in the Hittite pantheon as Zappana.<sup>41</sup> In Hittite usage of the cuneiform writing system, some “signs whose initial consonant is a stop can have either a voiced or voiceless interpretation,” while those that end in a stop “do not indicate whether the final stop is voiced or voiceless”; so “when transcribing syllabically written Hittite words, Hittitologists normally transliterate the obstruent according to the value of the cuneiform sign most favored by the tradition of Hittitologists.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, the transcriptions are traditional, and what is transcribed as a voiced consonant may actually be voiceless and vice versa. Thus the Hittite deity could as easily be Zabbana.

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36. RS 92.2004, line 35, and RS 24.643, line 43 (=KTU 1.148.43), in Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 18–19; Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquin Sanmartin, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani und anderen Orten*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Münster, Germany: Ugarit Verlag, 2013), 153.

37. Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Leiden, Germany: Brill, 2015), 487.

38. Pardee, *Ritual and Cult*, 19.

39. G. del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 68–69.

40. Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010), 26 n. 30.

41. van Gessel, *Hittite Pantheon*, 1:575.

42. Harry A. Hoffner Jr. and H. Craig Melchert, *A Grammar of the Hittite Language* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 1:16.

## Mahmackrah

There are two possible ways to take this name: as the name of a deity or as a place name. The two possibilities will be discussed in that order, by considering it first as the name of a deity.

Previous attempts to equate Mahmackrah with the Mesopotamian deity <sup>d</sup>*Ma-mi-ḥi-rat*<sup>43</sup> foundered because in the first place the name had been misread and was actually Mami-šarrat (<sup>d</sup>*Ma-mi-šar-rat*) and thus not a close match phonetically; and in the second place because it was not the name of a deity but of a canal.<sup>44</sup> Some relation to Hebrew *mimkar* “merchandise” has also been suggested.<sup>45</sup>

The name of a deity that is at least somewhat close to that of Mahmackrah was found at Beth-Shan in 1927.<sup>46</sup> It was found in Level IX of the tell, and is associated with a scarab of Thutmose III,<sup>47</sup> which would date it to the Eighteenth Dynasty of the Egyptian New Kingdom, which, in fact, is the standard date assigned to it by archaeologists.<sup>48</sup> The deity is speculated to have been imported into the land of Israel from northern Mesopotamia during Amorite incursions at the end of the Early Bronze Age and thus part of the landscape during the time of Abraham.<sup>49</sup>

The god of Beth-Shean is written *Mkr* (or *M<sup>c</sup>k3r3*).<sup>50</sup> This may be a variation of *m<sup>c</sup>q3rw* (alternately *m<sup>c</sup>qwrwiw*), which is a type of vessel. The word is thought to be related to Ugaritic *mqrt*, which is “a container or pot,”<sup>51</sup> or to Akkadian *maqārtu*, which is some sort of vessel.<sup>52</sup> The

43. John M. Lundquist, “Was Abraham at Ebla? A Cultural Background of the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1 and 2),” in *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 2: The Pearl of Great Price*, eds. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985), 232.

44. Gee and Ricks, “Historical Plausibility,” 91–92 n. 108.

45. *Ibid.*, 75.

46. Henry O. Thompson, *Mekal: The God of Beth-Shan* (Leiden, DEU: E. J. Brill, 1970), 22–23.

47. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

48. Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000–586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 1:242; Amihai Mazar, “Beth-Shean,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1:306.

49. Thompson, *Mekal*, 172–73.

50. Alexis Mallon, “Une nouvelle stèle égyptienne de Beisan (scythopolis),” *Syria* 9, no. 2 (1928): 127; Thompson, *Mekal*, 180, plate V; Christian Leitz, *Lexikon der Ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2002) 3:458.

51. del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín, *Dictionary of Ugaritic*, 561.

52. CAD M1:240, s.v. *maqārtu*.

prefixed element might be the demon <sup>d</sup>MÁ attested at Ugarit,<sup>53</sup> or perhaps a Hurrian prefix.<sup>54</sup> The use of the Egyptian *q* to write a Semitic *k* and the reverse (*k* for *q*) are rare, but attested.<sup>55</sup> The point, however, is moot, since both would have been rendered as a *k* or *ck* in Joseph Smith's transliteration system.<sup>56</sup> Modern scholars have often assumed that the *r3* that ends the name in the Egyptian script is trying to transcribe a Semitic *l*, which it can do, but it more often transcribes a Semitic *r*.<sup>57</sup>

The other possibility is that Mahmackrah is a place name. A location with a name close to Mahmackrah is known from Abraham's time in the general area of Haran. The Assyrian king, Šamši-Adad, writes to Išmaḥ-Adad that there is a revolt in Zalmaqum, a larger area of which the territory of Haran is a part, and that he is going with his army to suppress the revolt. On the way, an addition to his army has met him at Mammigira.<sup>58</sup> So this was a place in between Šubat-Enlil (modern Tell Leilan, Syria) and Haran (modern Şanlıurfa, Turkey).<sup>59</sup> A contemporary itinerary shows that it was seven days' travel from Šubat-Enlil to

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53. RS 25.420+440C+445+447+456+459C II 23, in Walter Farber, *Lamaštu: An Edition of the Canonical Series of Lamaštu Incantations and Rituals and Related Texts from the Second and First Millennia B.C.* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 92. The canonical series of Lamaštu is broken at this point, so we are unable to determine at this time the Akkadian equivalent. The deity is male and the female of the pair is <sup>d</sup>Ama-za-ka-nu-ta. The writing of MÁ normally means "boat" (Akkadian *eleppu*); Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*, 205–6. Exactly what it means in this particular passage is unclear.

54. In which case, it could mean "this." N. Nozadze, *Vocabulary of the Hurrian Language* (Tbilisi, Georgia: Society of Assyriologists, Bibliologists and Caucasiologists, 2007), 236–37. For a slightly different view (as "he") see Ilse Wegner, *Hurritisch: Eine Einführung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2007), 180; Dennis R. M. Campbell, *Mood and Modality in Hurrian* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 295; Johannes Friedrich and Annelies Kammenhuber, *Hethitisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1952), 4:317. The lexeme is missing from Emmanuel Laroche, *Glossaire de la Langue Hourrite* (Paris: Éditions Klincksieck, 1976–77).

55. James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 436.

56. Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar*, 5.

57. Hoch, *Semitic Words*, 435.

58. ARM 1 10, in Georges Dossin, *Correspondance de Šamši-Addu et de ses fils* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1950), 38–42.

59. The two places are about 240 km apart in an almost direct east-west line from each other.

Mammigira and another three days to Haran.<sup>60</sup> The cuneiform writing of the place, Ma-am-ma-gi-ra<sup>ki</sup>, could also be read Ma-am-ma-qí-ra<sup>ki</sup>, which would end up as Mammackirah in Joseph Smith's transliteration system. In a presumably later letter of Šamši-Adad, he asks Ismaḥ-Adad to install himself at Mammigira.<sup>61</sup> Another letter from Šamši-Adad says that Suda, which is a part of Zalmaqum, is in the area of Mammigira.<sup>62</sup> The letters concern military affairs, so no deities that might be worshipped at Mammigira are mentioned.

### Korash

Of the various deities, perhaps the one we have the most information on is Korash, known among the Hittites as Kurša,<sup>63</sup> which is conventionally translated as “hunting bag.”<sup>64</sup> It was typically “made of appropriately prepared sheepskins and sometimes even decorated,”<sup>65</sup> but “leather, wood, and reed” are all attested materials for a Kurša.<sup>66</sup> The bag “functions as the symbol of a deity and is therefore treated as a god.”<sup>67</sup> It seems to have been “worshipped as an impersonal deity.”<sup>68</sup> The Hittites used “implements associated with a particular god as the actual cult representation of that god.”<sup>69</sup> Some of the tablets mentioning Kurša are in Middle Hittite script,<sup>70</sup> which seems to be a couple hundred years after

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60. YBC 4499 24–33, in William W. Hallo, “The Road to Emar,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 18, no. 3 (1964): 60, 63–64.

61. ARM 1 53, in Dossin, *Correspondance de Šamši-Addu*, 108–10.

62. ARM 1 97, in Dossin, *Correspondance de Šamši-Addu*, 168–70.

63. For the writing of both [o] and [u] with cuneiform signs read with *u*, see Wegner, *Hurritisch*, 43–44. The form of the name *Kurša* is the absolute form of the word, which occurs only three times, usually with case endings; van Gessel, *Hittite Pantheon*, 1:267–71. The Hittite case system may be causing syncope on the root; see Hoffner and Melchert, *Grammar of the Hittite Language*, 32–33.

64. Gregory McMahon, *The Hittite State Cult of the Tutelary Deities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 143, 250–54; Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 76.

65. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 76.

66. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 165, 251; Maciej Popko, *Kultobjekte in der hethitischen Religion (nach keilschriftlichen Quellen)* (Warszawa, Poland: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1978), 109.

67. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 252.

68. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 76, 111; Popko, *Kultobjekte in der hethitischen Religion*, 108.

69. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 143.

70. *Ibid.*, 143–44.



Abraham,<sup>71</sup> but it is known also from Old Hittite sources.<sup>72</sup> For example, there is an Old Hittite mythic fragment in which “the bee is the goddess’s messenger bringing the lost *kurša*.”<sup>73</sup> The term also appears in New Kingdom Egypt.<sup>74</sup>

*Kurša* could be a form of *Ziḫariya*,<sup>75</sup> “the chief god of the lands occupied by the *Kaška* people,”<sup>76</sup> but it could also represent a male deity written with the LAMMA sign,<sup>77</sup> which had readings of either *annari* or *innara*.<sup>78</sup> He was a tutelary deity,<sup>79</sup> which means that he was one of a number of “guardian spirits over personal well-being, nature, the home, a sacred locus, a particular activity, etc.” that served some sort of protective function.<sup>80</sup> Though *Ziḫariya* had “an extremely close connection” with *Kurša*, they were not always identical.<sup>81</sup>

*Ziḫariya* is a well-attested Hittite deity,<sup>82</sup> but he seems originally to have been a Hattic deity from *Ḫatenzuwa*.<sup>83</sup> “*Ziḫariya* has his own temple and a festival, and is sufficiently important to the king’s safety that he is taken on campaign.”<sup>84</sup> He was evoked as a divine witness in a number of treaties: between *Suppiluliuma I* and *Huqqana of Hayasa*,<sup>85</sup> between

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71. Billie Jean Collins, *The Hittites and Their World* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 38, 42–46.

72. Popko, *Kultobjekte in der hethitischen Religion*, 109.

73. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 82.

74. Thomas Schneider, “Fremdwörter in der ägyptischen Militärsprache des Neuen Reiches und ein Bravourstück des Elitesoldaten (Papyrus Anastasi I 23, 27),” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* 35 (2008): 192; Hoch, *Semitic Words*, 332–33.

75. *KUB* 55.43, lines 1 and 5, in McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 144–45, cf. lines 20–21 on pages 146–47.

76. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 87, 89–90.

77. *Ibid.*, 90.

78. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 89; Christel Rüster and Erich Neu, *Hethitisches Zeichenlexikon: Inventar und Interpretation der Keilschriftzeichen aus den Boğazköy-Texten* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1989), 187.

79. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 89.

80. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 2–3.

81. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

82. van Gessel, *Hittite Pantheon*, 1:593–97.

83. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 19–20.

84. *Ibid.*, 22.

85. Gary Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 24; Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 1:442–43.

Suppiluliuma I and Shattiwaza of Mittanni,<sup>86</sup> between Suppiluliuma I and Tette of Nuhashshi,<sup>87</sup> between Mursili II and Tuppi-Teshup of Amurru,<sup>88</sup> between Mursili II and Niqmepa of Ugarit,<sup>89</sup> between Mursili II and Manapa-Tarhunta of the Seha River land,<sup>90</sup> between Tudkhalia IV of Hatti and Ulmi-Teshup of Tarhuntassa,<sup>91</sup> and between Tudhaliya IV and Kurunta of Tarhuntassa.<sup>92</sup> One treaty was even set up on a bronze tablet in his temple.<sup>93</sup> The purpose of the divine witnesses was to carry out the blessings for obedience or curses for disobedience to the treaty. He received offerings individually and along with other deities.<sup>94</sup> For example, if Huqqana violated his agreement with Suppiluliuma, then “these oath deities will not leave you alone, nor on your account will they leave alone that man to whom you go over. They shall destroy him. And the oath gods shall not neglect<sup>95</sup> this matter in regard to both of you, and they shall not make it permissible for both of you. They shall destroy both of you together and thereby fulfill the wishes of My Majesty.”<sup>96</sup> “If you, Prince Shattiwaza, and you Hurrians do not observe the words of this treaty, the gods, lords of the oath, shall destroy you [and] you

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86. KBo 1.1 v.44, in H. H. Figulla, E. Forrer and E. F. Weidner, *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi* (Leipzig, Germany: J. C. Hinrichs, 1923), 7; Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 43, 47; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:376–77.

87. KBo 1.4 IV.11, in Figulla, Forrer and Weidner, *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi*, 1:20; Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 53; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:414–15.

88. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 58; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:478–79,

89. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 63; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:490–91.

90. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 81; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:534–35.

91. KBo IV.10 54, in Figulla, Forrer and Weidner, *Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi*, 4:57; Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 106; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:638–39.

92. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 116; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:624–25.

93. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 117.

94. McMahan, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 21–22.

95. Kitchen and Lawrence translate as “forgive.” The Hittite verb is tar-na-an-zi, which basically means “to let go”; Friedrich, *Hethitisches Wörterbuch*, 21516.

96. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 25; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:444–45.

Hurrians, together with your land, your wives, and your possessions.”<sup>97</sup> Total destruction was the usual curse.<sup>98</sup> He was also invoked in other oaths.<sup>99</sup> Though known as a tutelary deity<sup>100</sup> and the best attested of the tutelary deities,<sup>101</sup> and thus in charge of protection, he could also be involved in destruction. Zithariya was also involved in both the Great Substitution Ritual and the Ritual at an Enemy Border.<sup>102</sup> In the latter ritual, Zithariya received an offering of an extra sheep.<sup>103</sup>

As an object, the kurša “was taken along on military expeditions and upon returning was ceremoniously brought back into his temple in the capital.”<sup>104</sup> Given that it was made of perishable materials and was prone to decay when handled, the Kurša had to be renewed and rededicated occasionally. We have a ritual for the renewing of the Kurša.<sup>105</sup> It involved eating bread, drinking some liquid, singers, and something called “dog-men.”<sup>106</sup> The term for dog-men is a literal rendering of the Sumerian signs LÚ.MEŠ UR.GI<sub>7</sub><sup>107</sup>; it can mean “hunter” in some contexts, but was also used in cultic contexts,<sup>108</sup> such as the festival of the crocus (AN.TAḪ.ŠUM),<sup>109</sup> which took place in the spring.<sup>110</sup> The dog-men drove sheep into the temple for offerings connected with oracles,<sup>111</sup> and they were involved in sacrificing a goat.<sup>112</sup> They are also involved in the construction of the

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97. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 43; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:378–79, 384–85.

98. Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:416–17, 480–81, 490–91; 626–27; 638–41.

99. Jared L. Miller, *Royal Hittite Instructions and Related Administrative Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 146–47, 310–11.

100. Collins, *Hittites and their World*, 173.

101. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 19.

102. *Ibid.*, 21.

103. *Ibid.*, 21.

104. Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor*, 87.

105. KUB 55.43, in Helmut Freydank, *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, Heft LV* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 29, 31–33, 35; translation in McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 144–57.

106. KUB 55.43 ii 1–12, in Freydank, *Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi, Heft LV*, 31; translation in McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 146–49; cf. 183–86.

107. For UR.GI, as *kalbu* “dog,” see Miguel Civil, *MSL XIV* (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1979), 101; Borger, *Mesopotamisches Zeichenlexikon*, 432.

108. McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 268–69.

109. *Ibid.*, 262.

110. Collins, *Hittites and their World*, 162–63.

111. KUB 22.27 iv 17, in McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 269.

112. KBo 13.179:11’–12’ in McMahon, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 269; transliteration and translation on pp. 165–66.

Kurša containers.<sup>113</sup> They are noted for their ceremonial dress.<sup>114</sup> The role of these dog men in the ceremony is described by the Hittite verb *wappiya-*, which is the same verb that is used to describe a dog making noise, but also a particular aspect of Hittite ritual activity.<sup>115</sup> (In one festival Zithariya also has “cult functionaries who bark” like Kurša.)<sup>116</sup>

Kurša could also be a witness on treaties and enforce the curses for disobedience.<sup>117</sup> In these cases he is listed alongside Zithariya and thus is not syncretized or conflated with him.

One of the things that make the Hittite evidence interesting is the presence of the dog-men, which seems to be reflected in the standard Egyptological insistence that figure 3 in Facsimile 1, identified as “the idolatrous priest of Elkenah,” should have a jackal’s or dog’s head.

### Conclusions

Tentative identifications can be provided for all four of the deities mentioned in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. Three (Elkenah, Libnah, and Korash) are close phonetically. Three (Elkenah, Libnah, and Korash) are close geographically to the site of Abraham’s sacrifice; the other (Mamackrah) is attested a bit farther away (although if it is a place name then it is closer). Two (Elkenah and Korash) are superregional deities whose geographical attestation covers Abraham’s homeland. As there are few sources from the region in Abraham’s day (Middle Bronze Age), all of them are attested in the Late Bronze Age with indications that at least one of them (Korash) goes back to the Middle Bronze Age. For two (Elkenah and Korash), we can currently discuss more than their names. The ability to do so shows the importance of going past the simple identification of a name where possible.

For those deities for whom we have more information than just their name, one (Elkenah) seems to be involved in a ritual in which individuals were asked to engage in sexual immorality or face death, which parallels Abraham 1:11. One (Korash) is involved in cursing those seen as disobedient to the king, who were destroyed, which parallels Abraham 1:5–13.

This might seem like a meagre amount of information, but it represents a significant step forward in research on the Book of Abraham.

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113. McMahan, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 186.

114. Singer, *The Hittite KILAM Festival*, 1:130.

115. McMahan, *Hittite Tutelary Deities*, 262–63.

116. *Ibid.*, 21.

117. Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 414–15; 534–35; 624–25.

Twenty years ago almost none of this was known. It was certainly not known when Joseph Smith published the Book of Abraham.

What are the odds of Joseph Smith guessing right? A number of factors complicate the calculation, so only a simplified calculation will be done. Joseph Smith provided four names, two of two syllables and two of three syllables. Using the twenty-two unique consonants provided by the Seixas transliteration system, a CVC syllabic structure (since one of the Seixas consonants is a null value), and five vowels, there are 2420 possible syllable combinations; but because the vowels were not always written and frequently changed in dialects, we drop them, for a total of 484 syllable combinations. Since there are ten syllables in the names Joseph Smith provided, this is a total of  $7.05 \times 10^{26}$  different possible combinations. The Mesopotamian god list AN: <sup>d</sup>A-nu-um lists 2130 non-unique deities.<sup>118</sup> Multiplying the number by five to account for deities not included in the Mesopotamian list, and taking the ratio of the two numbers, gives us a very rough estimate of the chance of randomly putting together syllables into four correct ancient deities' names of one in  $6.62 \times 10^{22}$ . By comparison, the odds of winning the Powerball lottery by buying a single ticket are merely one in 292 million ( $2.92 \times 10^6$ ).<sup>119</sup> The odds of winning the Powerball lottery two weeks in a row are one in  $8.52 \times 10^{16}$ . The odds of winning three weeks in a row are one in  $2.49 \times 10^{25}$ . Though only a crude calculation of the odds, it gives some idea how difficult it would be for Joseph Smith to simply guess correctly.

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118. Litke, *A Reconstruction of the Assyro-Babylonian God-Lists*, AN: <sup>d</sup>An-nu-um and AN: Anu šá Amēli, 372 from Tablet I, 423 from Tablet II, 285 from Tablet III, 296 from Tablet IV, 314 from Tablet V, 314 from Tablet VI, and 126 from Tablet VII. These are not unique names (many are duplicates) and explanatory lines are also included.

119. "One in 292 Million," *Wall Street Journal*, updated August 18, 2017, <http://graphics.wsj.com/lottery-odds/>.

Perspectives, Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt, Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, Journal of Egyptian History, Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities, *Lingua Aegyptia*, Review of Books on the Book of Mormon, *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur*, and *Interpreter*. Among others, his scholarship has been published by American University of Cairo Press, Archaeopress, Association Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, E. J. Brill, Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, Czech Institute of Egyptology, Desert Book, de Gruyter, Harrassowitz, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Macmillan, Oxford University Press, Peeters, Praeger, Religious Studies Center, and the Society of Biblical Literature. He has published three books, edited eight books, and edited an international multilingual peer-reviewed professional journal. He served twice as a section chair for the Society of Biblical Literature.

