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A Precious Resource with Some Gaps

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Jeffrey Dean Lindsay

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A PRECIOUS RESOURCE WITH SOME GAPS

Jeffrey Dean Lindsay

Review of *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, eds. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018), 381 pages.

Abstract: *The publication of high-resolution documents and carefully prepared transcripts related to the origins of the Book of Abraham in The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts is a remarkable achievement that can help students of Church history and of the Book of Abraham explore many aspects of that volume of scripture for themselves. The book, especially when coupled with the resources and advanced interface of the Joseph Smith Papers website, will provide lasting value for scholars, students, and anyone wishing to better understand the Book of Abraham and its complex origins. However, there are some gaps in the book that must be understood, including a mix of minor errors, questionable assumptions, and a few major problems that can unnecessarily lead readers to question the ancient roots and the divine inspiration behind the Book of Abraham. A future addendum could help resolve many such issues and would be a welcome addition. However, there may be a fundamental flaw in the commentary that tends to align with the way critics of the Church approach the Book of Abraham as a product of Joseph's environment rather than a text rooted in revelation and antiquity. Sadly, in spite of hundreds of footnotes with extensive references to the research and perspectives of some scholars, this volume tends to exclude a great deal of relevant research provided by some noteworthy scholars. For example, it fails to mention even once the past scholarship of Hugh Nibley on these documents and generally neglects the work of other scholars that can point to the strengths of the Book of Abraham and give tools for coping with the thorny issues. The openness about the conundrums of the*

Book of Abraham should be encouraged, but it should be balanced with at least an awareness that there are noteworthy positives that readers can weigh against the question marks, and that there are frameworks that can help faithful readers understand how a divinely revealed text can be produced by the same man who wanted to begin learning Egyptian and Hebrew after he had already provided divine translation. Such a balance is needed in a book from the Church dealing with such sensitive issues, where misunderstanding has led some people out of the Church. Sadly, in spite of its many achievements in opening the doors to the documents associated with the Book of Abraham, this book lacks the balance that is needed.

Debates on the meaning and origins of the Book of Abraham often resort to appeals to authority, with debaters frequently relying on the credentials of various sources to attack or defend the Book of Abraham. Some so-called scholars at times have been shown to have spurious or entirely fraudulent credentials, and others have used solid credentials to mask superficial scholarship and polemical agendas. With the publication of Volume 4 of *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations*¹ (hereafter JSPRT4), a great many of the most vital documents related to Book of Abraham origins are now available for detailed inspection by anybody.

Now, for example, if an alleged expert declares that a particular document shows that Joseph Smith was translating single characters into large blocks of detailed text on the fly as he dictated to a pair of scribes, one can scrutinize the document and find numerous textual clues that expose the unjustified nature of such a claim (revealing, for example, new evidence about what was happening during dictation and evidence that an already existing document was simply being copied).² The claims of scholars can be examined and weighed using primary sources and raw data, and new discoveries and surprises can be found. Even some of the implicit assumptions of the editors of this

1. *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, eds. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018). Note also a different Volume 4 in the primary series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*. The *Revelations and Translations* series deals specifically with documents related to the production of scripture by Joseph Smith.

2. Jeff Lindsay, "The Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts: Do They Reflect Live Translation Produced by Joseph Smith, or Were They Copied from an Existing Document?," *Mormanity* (blog), July 4, 2019; <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/07/the-twin-book-of-abraham-manuscripts-do.html>.

volume can be examined and weighed by those who want to learn and see for themselves. The combination of a beautiful, high-quality print volume and an electronically searchable website with a very useful and clever interface makes the gargantuan project behind JSPRT4 a genuine multimedia treasure for our day.

The physical volume itself (a large “Facsimile Edition” with color photographs) is a treasure thanks to its high-quality materials and excellent workmanship. As someone who has spent much of his life in the paper industry, I recognize and appreciate the high-quality paper and print in this book. Numerous large color photographs of key documents grace the text, joined by helpful, almost-always accurate transcriptions. The documents are preceded with useful notes on the historical background and details about the sources.

The book begins with a 17-page introduction, “Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts,” that discusses the history and origins of the Book of Abraham. A section entitled “Editorial Method” then discusses the intelligently selected annotation system and approach to transcription. The “Note on Photographic Facsimiles” is fascinating. Each image is taken with advanced photographic techniques and equipment, and typically results in about 229 megabytes of information per photo before being converted to print or online media. The multispectral imaging technique used also allowed some very faint text to be made visible, enabling recovery of text that otherwise would have been lost. A great deal of technical work and attention to detail has gone into the preparation and publication of the many documents in this volume, and the large crew who made it possible are to be heartily congratulated.

The bulk of the volume is the section, “Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts.” This begins with a section that presents the surviving Egyptian papyri from Joseph’s collection. Because of the darkness of the papyrus itself and the limitations of print, those wishing to examine details of the characters will probably be best served by using the high resolution images on the JSPP website (JosephSmithPapers.org).

After the papyri come sections with documents containing copied characters or combinations of characters and English text from 1835, including the components of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Later manuscripts follow from the preparation of the printed Book of Abraham, including the facsimiles.

The table of contents ably conveys the magnitude of the work:

Contents

Detailed Contents	viii
Timeline of Joseph Smith’s Life	x
Map: Joseph Smith’s Residences	xi
Volume 4 Introduction: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts	xiii
Editorial Method	xxxix
Note on Photographic Facsimiles	xxxvi

Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts

Egyptian Papyri	3
Notebooks of Copied Egyptian Characters	25
Copies of Egyptian Characters	43
Egyptian Alphabet Documents	53
Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language	111
Book of Abraham Manuscripts, ca. July–circa. November 1835	191
Book of Abraham Manuscripts, ca. February–circa. 15 March 1842	243
Facsimile Printing Plates and Published Book of Abraham	295

Reference Material

Book of Abraham Chronology for the Years 1835 and 1842	338
Works Cited	341
Comparison of Characters	350
Acknowledgements	381

One of the most valuable sections is the “Comparison of Characters” (pp. 350–80), which lists every “Egyptian” character from the various manuscripts and shows its form for each manuscript in which it is found. It also shows whether each character is found on the papyri (or specifically, on the Fragment of Breathing Permit for Horus–A). Unfortunately, the intriguing characters from the Egyptian Counting Document are not included.³ Perhaps the fact that none of the characters on that document

3. “Egyptian Counting, circa. Early July–early November 1835,” JSPRT4, 95-99. Also see “Egyptian Counting, circa Early July–circa 26 November 1835,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/egyptian-counting-circa-early-july-circa-26-november-1835/1>.

are Egyptian at all and none of them clearly occur on any of the papyri played a role. But many other characters on other documents also aren't real Egyptian. The decision not to include the Egyptian Counting document puzzles me, however, especially since I believe it is important for students of the Book of Abraham to understand that many of the "Egyptian" characters included are not Egyptian, and the Egyptian Counting document is one of the most direct ways for students of the Book of Abraham to recognize that something other than translating actual Egyptian was going on. As will be discussed below, at least one of the unusual characters on that document may provide an important link to the Hebrew education that Joseph and his brethren undertook, apparently at least in part to help them better prepare intellectually for unraveling the Egyptian language.

In the introduction to the "Comparison of Characters," the editors state that the decision not to include the characters of the Egyptian Counting document was because they chose to include only characters that were numbered (p. 331), but the numbering of characters refers not to numbers already present in the documents but to the numbering applied by the editors of JSPRT4. That may beg the question as to why the Egyptian Counting document was not given the same attention and numbering of characters as other components of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. No additional editorial work would have been needed, since those characters are already inherently numbered. Fortunately, the document itself was included, and readers can explore those characters on their own.

In any case, the "Comparison of Characters" section is a highly useful addition that clearly required a great deal of work, and it is one of many examples of innovative and well-designed tools provided to assist students of the Book of Abraham.

A Reflection of a Bold Era of Openness in the Church

The contents of JSPRT4, like the entire Joseph Smith Papers Project, reflect an era in which the Church shows a remarkable willingness to open doors and vaults to let the world explore and understand our history. The Joseph Smith Papers Project (hereafter JSPP) marks a daring and brilliantly executed leap forward in scholarship and information sharing.

That the Church would support and publish such a venture is remarkable, particularly when the documents being published and the interpretative commentary therein may seem to weaken orthodox views on what the Book of Abraham is and how it was produced. It is to the credit of the Church that it would hand over these documents to scholars

and allow all the warts and puzzles to be published, including commentary that frankly points out some of the problems in the Book of Abraham.

On the other hand, it may be a boldness that has gone too far — or rather, doesn't go far enough — in raising many problems without even hinting at information and perspectives that can help faithful Latter-day Saints deal with the problems. Given that one of the editors, Brian Hauglid, has “come out” after publication of this volume claiming that he rejects apologetics defending the Book of Abraham and suggesting that this published volume aligns with the views of some noted critics of Joseph Smith, there are serious reasons to be concerned about the editorial approach and some of the gaps and problems in this text.

Why Raise Concerns? A Note on the Failings of Objectivity

Expressing my concerns about such a valuable book is not meant to demean the tremendous collective effort of so many who have sought to bring the best scholarship possible to the inspired and extensive Joseph Smith Papers project. Unfortunately, all human works have flaws, and sometimes they can be serious. It is personally painful to point out some of the issues in such a work, but in light of the potential harm that might occur if the problems are not acknowledged, I believe the problems in this specific and influential volume cannot be given a pass based on the noble aspirations behind the work.

We can expect that the editors and others who prepared this volume have generally sought to be objective in their scholarship, striving to avoid any bias or personal agenda. But objectivity in any endeavor may be, to use a title from Peter Novick, a “noble dream.”⁴ In his introduction to *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, Novick recognizes that historians and other scholars cannot completely free themselves from personal views that influence their work, whether they realize it or not. Trying to be truly neutral and objective is “like nailing jelly to a wall.”⁵ Those who think this or any other volume simply “lets the facts speak for themselves” without any trace of bias or agenda are unprepared for the realities of scholarship. Ideally, the effect of the inevitable personal biases will not detract significantly from the value of a work. But to pretend bias is not there is an illusion. To overlook its existence and its role may leave the student and the scholar vulnerable to

4. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1988), <https://www.amazon.com/That-Noble-Dream-Objectivity-Historical/dp/0521357454/>.

5. *Ibid.*, Introduction.

many errors and misunderstandings. In this case, the effect of the bias, however unintentional, may be harmful in several ways.

While all involved surely sought to be fair and objective in their work, there remain some obvious indications that this noble intent may not have been realized. While we must not make too much of any individual's potentially hasty or careless comments made on social media, it is now well known that Brian Hauglid made a surprising comment on Facebook which indicates that he rejects the defense of the Book of Abraham made by fellow BYU professors, apologists, and even himself in times past and that he now has aligned his thinking with noted critics of the Book of Abraham. What this means for Hauglid's editorial work is an issue that should not be simply ignored.

Responding to a November 9, 2018, post by long-time Book of Abraham critic Dan Vogel, Hauglid made the following public statement, which, as of 12 May 2019, is still visible in Facebook and apparently has not been followed up with a retraction or apology:

For the record, I no longer hold the views that have been quoted from my 2010 book in these videos. I have moved on from my days as an “outrageous” apologist. In fact, I'm no longer interested or involved in apologetics in any way. I wholeheartedly agree with Dan's excellent assessment of the Abraham/Egyptian documents in these videos [videos which are critical of the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith]. I now reject a missing Abraham manuscript. I agree that two of the Abraham manuscripts were simultaneously dictated [Vogel's point is that they were simultaneously dictated by Joseph Smith as he was “translating” characters in the margins, thus giving us a window into the translation process as it occurred]. *I agree that the Egyptian papers were used to produce the BoA.* I agree that only Abraham 1:1-2:18 were produced in 1835 and that Abraham 2:19-5:21 were produced in Nauvoo. And on and on. *I no longer agree with Gee or Muhlestein. I find their apologetic “scholarship” on the BoA abhorrent. One can find that I've changed my mind in my recent and forthcoming publications. The most recent JSP Revelations and Translation vol. 4, The Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts (now on the shelves) is much more open to Dan's thinking on the origin of*

the Book of Abraham. My friend Brent Metcalfe can attest to my transformative journey.⁶

Sadly, it seems that Hauglid has denounced his peers for having views similar to those he publicly shared in the past.⁷ I hope that whatever problems or tensions are behind this puzzling statement may be resolved, and I hope that Hauglid's journey might take a new direction and bring him closer to where he once was. Unfortunately, it raises fair questions about Hauglid's approach, especially when he hints that his "transformative journey" has influenced his editorial work in JSPRT4, which is "much more open to Dan's thinking on the origin of the Book of Abraham."

Ideally, publication of documents by a careful scholar is not necessarily *open* or *closed* to any particular agenda. What can be open or closed, however, are the actions and choices of the editors: what to include and exclude from the discussion; what guidance to provide to the reader in introductory commentary, explanatory and interpretive statements; references cited; remarks in footnotes; and points of view that are accepted, acknowledged, or never mentioned, etc. The fingerprints of editorial work abound in this volume and go far beyond mere presentation of primary documents. Now that at least one of the editors has revealed that he advocates a position not just sharply but harshly at odds with those of faithful scholars at BYU, we must ask the painful question: has this harsh perspective influenced the content of JSPRT4?

Again, we must not make too much of Hauglid's statement, for he is only one of the two editors for this volume, and only one of a large team of scholars who assisted in this work and reviewed it prior to publication. But a work from a committee of scholars is not necessarily less free of bias and unwarranted assumptions than any one of its individuals. Particular paradigms spread and become established, especially among peers with similar education or whose collaboration comes because of their common viewpoints and approaches, and can lead to illusions of collective objectivity and certainty when a host of biased assumptions may impede the effort. As Laurence Veysey wrote, citing the problem of pro-Mormon bias,

6. Brian Hauglid, November 9, 2018, comment on Dan Vogel, "Truth of the Book of Abraham (Part 6) — Joseph Smith As a Student of Hebrew," Facebook, November 9, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/dan.vogel.35/posts/1398006876998582>, emphasis added.

7. Brian Hauglid, "Investigating the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," FAIRMormon Conference, Aug. 3-4, 2006; <https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2006-Brian-Hauglid.pdf>. See also John Gee, Brian Hauglid, and John Tvedtnes, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship: 2001).

A sociologist writing the history of sociology remains, from the historian's point of view, an amateur, no different in principle from an untrained Mormon writing the history of Mormonism. Particularistic intellectual commitments inhibit balanced clarity of vision regarding a certain time and place in the academic world as in any other.⁸

As argued below, whether intentional or not, the particular intellectual commitments and personal views of the editors may have strongly affected significant aspects of this volume and thus have given us a tool that, while monumental in the presentation of valuable documents, is seriously flawed in some aspects of its scholarship. In saying so, of course, I am far from objective and bring my own pro-Church and pro-pologetic biases to this review (and yes, I recognize the irony in citing Veysey), though I genuinely seek to be fair in my approach.

Apparent Gaps and Weaknesses

Turning to the gaps and weaknesses in JSPRT4, let us look at the following issues:

1. Lack of Acknowledgement of Past Scholarship
2. Lack of Balance in Interpretive Remarks
3. Overlooking the Role of Hebrew Study on the Book of Abraham Project
4. Errors in the Assumed Dates of Key Documents
5. Granting Improper Credibility to a Key Claim of Book of Abraham Critics Regarding the Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts A and B
6. Improperly Downplaying Common Knowledge about Champollion and the Nature of the Egyptian Language
7. Minor but Sometimes Important Details
8. Missing "First Aid" and Ignoring the Positives

1. Lack of Acknowledgement of Past Scholarship, or Where's Nibley?

In a recent conversation with an active member who is also a student of Egyptology, I learned that he had great respect for Nibley's magnum

8. Laurence Veysey, "Reappraising the Chicago School of Sociology," *Reviews in American History* 6, no. 1 (March 1978): 115, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2701486>.

opus on the Book of Abraham, *One Eternal Round*.⁹ He felt it had a great deal of value most members and perhaps most scholars have failed to consider. When my copy of JSPRT4 finally reached me in Shanghai, China, I was anxious to see how this valuable volume would treat past scholarship on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and the Book of Abraham. I was especially interested to see how it would respond to the intricate analysis presented in *One Eternal Round* and other voluminous works of Nibley, the first scholar to dig into the Joseph Smith papyri and perhaps the most important scholarly work to have addressed numerous issues around the Kirtland Egyptian Papers (KEP), the papyri, the Facsimiles, and the text of the Book of Abraham. To my amazement, as I read JSPRT4, it seemed that every time there was an issue where I would expect a helpful reference to findings from Hugh Nibley or other scholars such as John Gee, Kerry Muhlestein, or others, there was simply silence.

Turning to the list of works cited (pp. 340–49), I was even more surprised to see that Nibley was completely missing. This volume has hundreds of footnotes: 205 in the section on the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language (GAEL), 215 in the section for the Egyptian Alphabet documents, 128 in the Introduction, 209 in the section on the Facsimile printing plates and published Book of Abraham, etc. Some critics are cited, and critic Brent Lee Metcalfe is credited in the Acknowledgments (p. 381), but there seems to be a ban on Nibley. What’s going on? This points to what may be a fundamental problem in the interpretive framework that is implicitly if not explicitly presented in JSPRT4. Much more than just Nibley may have been overlooked.

In response to my complaint, one reviewer familiar with the JSP Project argued that the failure to cite Nibley is merely a reflection of the editorial policy for the JSP Project and that there was no intent to overlook Nibley. That statement was surely made in good faith, but examination of the commentary and its many footnotes suggests this may be an example of the hidden bias and the “particular intellectual commitments that can inhibit balanced clarity of vision” among academics, as Veysey observed.

JSPRT4 turns to many sources to establish the nature of the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and their relationship to the Book of Abraham. On such matters, many scholars would, in my opinion, recognize Hugh Nibley’s extensive work on many aspects of the Book of Abraham as a vital foundation that must be acknowledged, whether one agrees or disagrees with any of his viewpoints.

9. Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010).

After the Joseph Smith Papyri were discovered in 1967, Hugh Nibley began a lengthy series of articles in the 1968 and 1969 *Improvement Era* periodical that explored the content and meaning of the papyri and their relationship to the Book of Abraham.¹⁰ It was an important foundation related to the materials of the new JSPRT4.

In 1971, Nibley's *BYU Studies* article "What Is the Book of Breathings?"¹¹ provided detailed scholarly insight into some of the most basic issues students of the Joseph Smith Papyri will have: What are these papyrus fragments about? What did they mean in ancient Egypt? Such questions surely cannot be off limits for JSPRT4, which turns to a harshly critical work of Robert K. Ritner¹² many times when discussing the fragments and the Egyptian characters.¹³

Many of these citations to Ritner could well have included a citation to relevant portions of Nibley's *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (2nd edition, 2005) for its detailed analysis and translation of the papyri, complete with comparison to a more complete Egyptian manuscript that does much to enhance understanding of the papyri.¹⁴ Yet Nibley is cited zero times compared to at least 49 citations of Ritner. As one minor example, when Ritner is cited on page 20 in footnote 64 regarding the concept of a balance depicted on a papyrus fragment, the Fragment

10. Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price, Part 1," *Improvement Era* 71, no. 1 (January 1968): 17-25, <https://archive.org/details/improvementera7101unse/page/n19>. See also Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price, Part 1 (continued)," *Improvement Era* 71, no. 2 (February 1968): 14-18, 20-21, <https://archive.org/details/improvementera7102unse/page/n15>; continuing in monthly installments over nearly two years, culminating in Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price, Part 9 (continued): Setting the Stage — The World of Abraham," *Improvement Era* 72, no. 11 (November 1969): 116-25, <https://archive.org/details/improvementera7211unse/page/n117>.

11. Hugh Nibley, "What Is the Book of Breathings," *BYU Studies* 11, no. 2 (1971): 1-25, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/what-book-breathings>.

12. Robert K Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition, P. JS 1-4 and the Hypocephalus of Sheshonq* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2011).

13. In the Introduction, Ritner is cited three times among the 128 footnotes. On pp. 22-23, 24 of 65 footnotes cite Ritner. On pp. 40-41, 12 of the 40 footnotes for "Notebooks of Copied Egyptian Characters" include citations to Ritner. On p. 52, nine of the 20 footnotes related to the "Copies of Egyptian Characters" include citations to Ritner. Citations to outside works are much less frequent in the later portions of the book, where he is cited twice on p. 292 and once on p. 332.

14. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed., eds. John Gee and Michael D. Rhodes (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).

of the Book of the Dead for Nefer-ir-Nebu (JS Papyrus III), Nibley's detailed discussion of that fragment and its depiction of a balance could have been cited with good effect and with little risk of charges of veiled apologetics.¹⁵ But Nibley's foundational work and extensive scholarship gets zero recognition. This is a great mystery and an obvious defect in the book. How did this lack of balance happen?

On p. xxv of the Introduction, the editors offer their opinion (albeit a plausible one shared to some degree by Nibley) that the Kirtland Egyptian papers represent a failed effort to “unravel the mysteries of the Egyptian language” and also observe, citing Ritner again, that the material in the KEP has no value in translating Egyptian. A few sentences later they tell us “there is some evidence” (with a footnote to a critic of the Book of Abraham, discussed below) that the Book of Abraham drew upon language in the GAEL, as if its purpose were to assist in Joseph's translation (making it a failed translation, of course) rather than drawing upon the existing translation for some other purpose. If one is to cite a critic's opinion on the purpose and use of the GAEL, why not, in the spirit of scholarship and fairness, at least also point to the evidence and opinions provided by Nibley on this very issue? Further, if Ritner is cited to create the impression that the translation is utterly without merit, why not, in the spirit of scholarship and fairness, observe that Nibley and others at least claim to have found “some evidence” that Joseph got many things right? There is simply not the balance that scholarship and fairness demand. If outside views are to be cited to provide context, why must they lean only one way? Why is Nibley excluded from the conversation? This is a sign of something seriously amiss. Is it unthinkable that one editor's avowed hostility toward apologetics might surreptitiously lead him to overlook Nibley, perhaps the “father of apologetics” for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, without consciously intending to do so and that others with similar mindsets might fail to notice the flaw? Intentional or not, it is a flaw.

2. A Lack of Balance in Interpretative Remarks, or Apologetics vs. Polemics: Both Outside the Purpose of the Joseph Smith Papers?

JSPRT4 contains a variety of subjective, interpretative statements about the Book of Abraham and its debatable relationship to the KEP, such as the previously mentioned hint that at least part of the Book of

15. Ibid., 401-7.

Abraham was produced from the GAEL. There are other interpretative and questionable statements of this kind, such as statements discussed below on the role of Egyptomania or the significance of a pair of Book of Abraham manuscripts. Another example occurs on p. 192 in the description of three Book of Abraham manuscripts that contain text up to Abraham 2:18, where it is suggested that the remainder of the text was dictated by Joseph in 1842 (as if at least part of that additional text had not already been translated in 1835, and as if the KEP came before the cosmological material in the Book of Abraham). On the same page, it is also stated that the text of Abraham 1:1-3 in Book of Abraham Manuscript C “contains the most similarities to the definitions in the Grammar and Alphabet volumes and was therefore also likely connected to JS’s study of the Egyptian language.” This wording in context suggests Abraham 1:1-3 was produced from the GAEL, consistent with the previously mentioned assertion on p. xxv that there is “some evidence” the GAEL was used to produce at least part of the Book of Abraham. While there is clearly a relationship between the GAEL and the Book of Abraham, why not open the door to the possibility proposed by other scholars that the GAEL was derived in part from the existing translated text? Why not suggest that the close relationship between Abraham 1:1-3 and the KEP might suggest that the work in the Egyptian Alphabet and the GAEL began with or emphasized the earliest translated text? One particular viewpoint seems to be enforced, whether the editors recognize it or not. Those who are close to the debate between critics and defenders of the Book of Abraham may recognize the pattern of bias in such interpretative remarks, regardless of how unintentional that bias was.

This review began with explorations of some Book of Abraham issues on my blog motivated by an email from someone I once helped with Book of Abraham issues but who now was ready to abandon his faith again because he felt a Maxwell Institute presentation in early January 2019 by JSPRT4 editors Brian Hauglid and Robin Jensen completely undermined any hope for Joseph Smith to be a real prophet.¹⁶ The presentation, given to a large audience at Brigham Young University in January 2019, seemed only to highlight problems with the Book of Abraham and left out the many positives, which struck me as odd and unbalanced.¹⁷ I hopefully

16. Brian Hauglid and Robin Jensen, “A Window into Joseph Smith’s Translation” (Neal A. Maxwell Institute seminar, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Jan. 11, 2019), <https://mi.byu.edu/news-events/01-11-jensen-hauglid/>.

17. Jeff Lindsay, “Friendly Fire from BYU: Opening Old Book of Abraham Wounds Without the First Aid,” *Mormanity* (blog), March 14, 2019, <https://>

wondered if time constraints or other outside constraints might have resulted in the presumably unintentional “friendly fire” from the presentation, but in ongoing study to better understand the issues and the way they are handled in the JSP Project, I fear that personal bias, intentional or not, was strongly at play. Reading Hauglid’s Facebook comment added to that concern.

In a later post, I wondered aloud why JSPRT4 failed to include a highly relevant “pure language” document from W. W. Phelps¹⁸ (one that showed he was using six characters in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers *before* the scrolls were ever seen).¹⁹ In response, editor Robin Jensen kindly explained that the project was of a limited, specific scope and could not include the huge number of potentially related papers. Now I better understand that the JSP Project is about promoting scholarship by providing the papers that belonged to or were associated with Joseph Smith and his work, and that JSPRT4 is intended to provide papers directly associated with Joseph and those around him in the context of the work leading to the Book of Abraham. I can appreciate that the editors may have felt the document did not meet their criteria and left it out in good faith. However, since it is primary information on the “pure language” issue that interested Joseph and Phelps, was written by an associate of Joseph who played a critical role in the Book of Abraham work, and sheds great light on the nature and source of some of the characters that Phelps would include in the JSP-relevant KEP documents he would write, then perhaps it may meet the criteria for inclusion or at least should have been given more attention in helping readers understand what this document may say about the KEP and its purpose. I admit my interest in the excluded document was driven in part by its value to Book of Abraham apologetics, and that is understandably not the purpose of the JSP Project.

The JSP Project is clearly not about apologetics but rather about sharing primary documents for future scholarly work. *But if the goal is*

mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/03/friendly-fire-from-byu-opening-old-book.html.

18. W. W. Phelps, letter to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835, Church History Library, as cited by Brian M. Hauglid, “The Book of Abraham and the Egyptian Project: ‘A Knowledge of Hidden Languages,’” in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2015), 474-511, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/approaching-antiquity-joseph-smith-and-ancient-world/book-abraham-and-egyptian-project>. A color image of the letter is available at <https://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/Phelps%20Letter.jpg>.

19. Jeff Lindsay, “The Pure Language Project,” *Mormanity* (blog), April 18, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/04/the-pure-language-project.html>.

not apologetics, neither can it be polemics. If the goal is not to promote faith, neither should it unnecessarily undermine it. Subjective bias that supports positions that can undermine faith and weaken respect for the scriptures must be avoided. Cited scholarship and perspectives on the complex interpretative issues around the KEP must not actively exclude and ignore relevant scholarship that refutes or undermines key positions of critics of the Church. Acknowledging such past scholarship, when it is at least as relevant as other works being cited, should be a matter of course in a work like this and could at least remind readers that there is more than one way of understanding the issues involved with the complex and puzzling documents presented. How can actual scholarship possibly be at play when the most significant body of scholarly works on the very papers being considered — the works of Hugh Nibley — is not even mentioned? It's one thing to disagree with Nibley, but to pretend he does not exist may point to something other than openness and objective scholarship.

One reader familiar with the scope of the JSP Project has suggested that I misunderstand the purpose of the JSP, and that is true, or at least was true when I wrote my initial complaint about neglect of the 1835 Phelps “pure language” letter. *But again, JSPRT4 does much more than simply present and transcribe documents.* There is extensive commentary and over a thousand footnotes with each sentence of commentary and each choice of what to cite and what to ignore having the potential to reflect personal views of the editors. As stated on the dust cover and on the JSPP website,

The introductory material situates Smith's efforts in the broader context of the nineteenth-century fascination with Egyptian history and culture, of his own effort to reveal truths from the ancient past, and of his other translation efforts. The annotation in this volume explores the relationships between and among the various manuscripts.²⁰

That statement may already reflect the tendency to see the revealed Book of Abraham as a product of Joseph Smith's culture and environment (the KEP, on the other hand, can readily be understood as a human effort and product of the nineteenth century, but the key issue is whether it followed the translation or was the tool that produced the translation or shows the translation in progress, as some critics argue). In any case, the existence of extensive commentary and footnotes that identify (or

20. JSPRT4, inside back dust jacket, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/revelations-and-translations-volume-4-book-of-abraham>.

ignore!) relationships and create a “context” for the translation effort opens very large doors for editorial bias to influence the result.

If the introductory material is to create “the broader context” for Joseph’s work, why the choice to focus solely on the “nineteenth-century fascination with Egyptian history and culture”? Why not also consider the context of ancient extra-biblical traditions and manuscripts dealing with Abraham and how they relate to the Book of Abraham? Why not consider ancient Egypt’s temporary and geographically limited fascination with Hebrew culture and especially with two figures in Hebrew lore, Moses and Abraham? That phenomenon was focused around 200 BC in the region of Thebes, where Egyptian priests were using biblical texts and had interest in Abraham.²¹ If there were an Egyptian Book of Abraham, that would be the place to look for such a document. Is it merely coincidence that the Joseph Smith papyri belonged to an Egyptian priest from that time and place? Why is such information not part of at least a passing reference in reviewing the “broader context” to understand the origins of the Book of Abraham, including its possible connections to antiquity discussed in prior scholarship? Is it because there is already an assumption built into this volume that the Book of Abraham’s origins are to be found only in the nineteenth century? The scholarship on this and other relevant matters should, in my opinion, at least be alluded to in a footnote, lest the polemical position against the Book of Abraham be the only door allowed to swing open in this book. Choosing where to look to provide “broader context” and how to

21. Kerry Muhlestein, “The Religious and Cultural Background of Joseph Smith Papyrus I,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 1 (2013): 20-33, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1510&context=jbms> and Muhlestein, “Abraham, Isaac, and Osiris-Michael: The Use of Biblical Figures in Egyptian Religion, a Survey,” in *Achievements and Problems of Modern Egyptology*, ed. Galina A. Belova (2011), 246-59, https://www.academia.edu/526154/_Abraham_Isaac_and_Osiris-Michael_The_Use_of_Biblical_Figures_in_Egyptian_Religion_in_the_proceedings_of_Achievements_and_Problems_of_Modern_Egyptology,_Galina_A._Belova_ed._Moscow-Russian_Academy_of_Sciences_2012_246-259. See also Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 61; John Gee, “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *FARMS Review* 20, no. 1 (2008): 113-37, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/pdf-control.php/publications/review/20/1/S00009-5176a4d94ae9e10Gee.pdf>; and Gee, “The Ancient Owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri” (FARMS Transcript Gee-99a, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Provo, Utah, 1999), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/PreliminaryReports/Set%203/Transcritps/Gee,%20The%20Ancient%20Owners%20of%20the%20Joseph%20Smith%20Papyri,%201999.pdf>.

guide readers in understanding documents is inevitably an interpretive act subject to biases and debatable assumptions. To think the choice is purely objective scholarship is an illusion.

How the documents are presented and which perspectives are acknowledged and which are ignored is a critical issue that cannot be addressed with pretended obliviousness to the debates based on the documents in question.

The personal perspectives of the editors — or at least of Brian Hauglid — regarding the Book of Abraham seem to show up immediately in the opening words of the volume. The decision about what to say and what not to say regarding the Book of Abraham and the debate over its authenticity or antiquity is evident in the introduction to volume 4, “Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts,” which seems to lay a foundation for Hauglid’s more open recent narrative about the Book of Abraham shortly after publication of JSPRT4.

One reviewer of this paper suggested that I am making too much of Hauglid’s influence and also pointed out that Hauglid did not write the introduction. That’s a fair observation, but the issue is not who is responsible for apparent bias but rather its very existence. But certainly Hauglid, as one of the two editors for this volume, cannot have been without influence on the tone and approach taken. That others involved may share similar assumptions or views on some of the implicit or explicit issues involved should not be surprising.

The tone of the Introduction is that Joseph Smith and early Saints may have thought they were translating Egyptian but really weren’t (pp. xii–xiv). We are told that the Egyptian Alphabet documents show “attempts to decipher the Egyptian writing system” (p. xiv) — which cannot be completely accurate, since many of the characters therein aren’t even Egyptian but include some characters that Phelps was already discussing with respect to the “pure language” before the scrolls ever came to Kirtland.²²

Any claims regarding the use and purpose of the KEP relative to translation of the Book of Abraham must be tempered with caution rather than accepting the narrative that “this is how the ‘translation’ was done.” Reasons for such caution include

- the minute fraction of characters in the Egyptian Alphabet documents and GAEL that are used in the Book of Abraham manuscripts;

22. Phelps’s letter to his wife, Sally, May 26, 1835. Also see Lindsay, “The Pure Language Project,” April 18, 2019.

- the small fraction of characters in the Book of Abraham manuscripts that are defined in the Egyptian Alphabet documents and the GAEL;
- the number of characters in the Book of Abraham manuscripts that are not on the scrolls; and
- the small amount of content in the Book of Abraham that has any relationship to the “translations” in the Egyptian Alphabet documents and GAEL.

Such tempering seems absent in JSPRT4. Since helping readers understand the broader context and the relationships between related documents is part of the stated purpose for the commentary provided, it is also disappointing that relationships between the GAEL and other *prior* documents of Joseph Smith are generally overlooked. For example, William Schryver has pointed out that the explanations given for some of the “Egyptian” characters (many of which are not Egyptian) relate not only to the translated Book of Abraham (which arguably came first) but also to revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. Schryver points to Doctrine and Covenants 76 and 88:24 as sources for several KEP explanations.²³ Doctrine and Covenants 77:1 and several other portions of the Doctrine and Covenants may also have influenced the KEP.²⁴ This information need not be presented to drive anyone’s apologetic agenda but should be of interest to scholars seeking to understand the KEP and its sources and purpose.

From an apologetic perspective, of course, it is interesting that the KEP contains a great deal of “Egyptian” not from the scrolls and explanations/definitions that are not part of the Book of Abraham but apparently from other preexisting texts. In fact, for the GAEL and the Egyptian Alphabet documents, one can examine the characters, their definitions, and the existence of any apparently related glyphs on the key existing scroll (Fragment of Breathing Permit for Horus-A), and see that, of the 62 characters assigned a meaning, only four (2.32, 2.41, 2.42, and

23. Schryver, “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” FAIRMormon Conference, Provo, Utah, 2010; presentation available in two parts on YouTube: https://youtu.be/PWMg82BM_w0 (Part 1) and <https://youtu.be/T2cQb3Ng3M8> (Part 2). Material on links in the KEP to Doctrine and Covenants 76 and 88:24 occur in Part 2 around 2:00 and 3:00, respectively. For screenshots showing these connections, see Jeff Lindsay, “Friendly Fire,” March 14, 2019.

24. Jeff Lindsay, “More Connections Between the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and Prior Documents,” *Mormanity* (blog), May 31, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/05/another-connection-between-kirtland.html>.

3.11) have a clear connection to a character on the papyrus, with three more characters (2.36, 2.40, and 3.15) possibly, but with less certainty, being found on the papyrus. *At best, then, it appears that only 7 of the 62 characters given meanings in the GAEL and the Egyptian Alphabet documents come from actual Egyptian.* This raises serious questions about the purpose and use of these documents and calls into question claims that Joseph was using them to create the Book of Abraham as a translation from an existing papyrus fragment. Such factual observations should have been given emphasis in the commentary, but seem to have been overlooked in JSPRT4. Fortunately, determined readers can discover this for themselves using the published documents and the helpful “Comparison of Characters” section.

We are also told that Joseph Smith’s “journal references working on some of them [the Egyptian Alphabet documents and the GAEL] on a few occasions” (p. xv) when this statement involves an *assumption* that references made in October and November 1835 to the “Egyptian alphabet” and “the Alphabet of the ancient records,” respectively, necessarily refer to the same Egyptian Alphabet documents we have today — documents that may date to well after Joseph’s journal entries were made. It is clear that Joseph was working on or interested in some kind of “alphabet” to better understand Egyptian, but we don’t know that the surviving documents we have today were part of whatever Joseph meant in those statements. Caution is needed in making such statements. Caution is also needed in recognizing that Joseph’s intellectual attempts to understand Egyptian may tell us nothing about the revelations that yielded the text or its relationship to the surviving papyri.

The introduction speaks of an Egyptomania gripping the US in Joseph’s day (but not enough, apparently, to let news of the Rosetta Stone or Champollion ever hit the streets of Kirtland or Nauvoo) and reminds us of the views of Athanasius Kircher, whose seventeenth-century treatise was quickly made irrelevant by the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 and by the advances of Young and Champollion shortly thereafter. Kircher emphasized the mysterious symbolic nature of hieroglyphs, which, according to some of our critics, led Joseph Smith to think that one character could require paragraphs of text to translate. We are then given a remarkable statement from the editors:

Even after Champollion’s groundbreaking discoveries, though, some continued to assert competing theories about Egyptian hieroglyphs, whether they rejected Champollion’s findings or were ignorant of them. Indeed, in *America in the*

1830s and 1840s, Champollion's findings were available to only a small group of scholars who either read them in French or gleaned them from a limited number of English translations or summaries.

There is no evidence that Joseph Smith or his associates had read contemporary works of French or English Egyptological scholarship, but nevertheless seemed to approach the papyri with many assumptions espoused by scholars who wrote before Champollion. The documents created by Smith and his associates, for example, suggest that they assumed that the Egyptian language contained a series of complex systems and symbols, each of which had multiple meanings. (JSPRT4, p. xvii)

This surprising statement will be addressed later in the section for Issue 6, “Egyptomania without Champollion?” For now, note that while the use of multiple “degrees” in the GAEL is confusing and strange, and while Joseph may have supported the work being pursued therein, any theory about Joseph’s thinking that one character could be unfolded into large amounts of text needs to be calibrated with what he actually indicated about reformed Egyptian in the Book of Mormon and what he said about characters on the Facsimiles. Significant evidence, discussed below, counters the above editorial statement. Again, there is a lack of balance and a failure to provide alternative frameworks for understanding what the puzzling issues in the Book of Abraham papers really mean or might not mean.

The inside cover of the book also makes related statements that leave the door open for the Book of Abraham as derived from human decipherment work, and implies that Joseph saw Egyptian artifacts as his contemporaries did (though apparently without knowledge of Champollion):

Like many of his contemporaries, Joseph Smith viewed Egyptian artifacts with deep interest, wondering what knowledge they might contain about the ancient world, biblical narratives, and divine truths. Soon after purchasing the mummies and papyri, Smith and his associates set about attempting to decipher the Egyptian language by proposing linguistic rules and dissecting individual characters. Around the same time, Smith also dictated to his clerks a first-person account of the biblical prophet Abraham, which Smith said was a translation of the writing on the papyri in his possession.²⁵

25. JSPRT4, inside front dust jacket.

This remark helps set the stage for Joseph's work as a product of his environment but apparently an environment still ignorant of Champollion. It suggests that creating grammatical rules (*ex nihilo*, apparently) came first, followed shortly thereafter by creation of the translation possibly based on the GAEL, rather than leaving open the door for the likely scenario that the GAEL was derived from the existing translation (vastly more logical and in line with how Champollion did his work, using a known translation to decipher something about the language). It also implies that the bizarre dissection of individual Egyptian characters done by W. W. Phelps in parts of the GAEL was directed by Joseph, when that is simply an assumption. There are several bits of slanted mischief in those three short sentences.

Sadly, the editorial comments in the JSPRT4 seem to zealously avoid any hint that there may be antiquity or authenticity anywhere in Joseph's translated text or in the comments on the Facsimiles, when the neglected works of Nibley and the still heavily neglected views of Kerry Muhlestein (only two works of dozens are cited), John Gee, and others could at least have been pointed to in some academically appropriate way without being overtly apologetic.

Fortunately, the important Introduction of JSPRT4 does not fail to cite Gee and Muhlestein, treating them with better respect than it does Nibley. Gee's valuable *Introduction to the Book of Abraham* is cited on p. xviii regarding a tiny detail in the chain of events involved in the bringing of Egyptian artifacts to America. On p. xiv, three of his works are cited on the issue of how long the scrolls were, but only after citing and accepting the views of others who claim they were much shorter than Gee's calculation (that's not to say Gee's calculation was correct but rather illustrates the general neglect of many weightier matters Gee addresses). That appears to be the extent of references in the Introduction to Gee's work, and elsewhere the occasional references appear to be about minute details rather than to his overarching views and major contributions to the debate over the Book of Abraham. As for Muhlestein, he is cited in the introduction on p. xxv to the effect that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers have been found by scholars "to be of no actual value in understanding Egyptian." That is certainly true, but Muhlestein, like Gee and Nibley, has much more to say about the manuscripts, their context, and their relationship to the Book of Abraham, not to mention the value of Joseph Smith's work and how faithful readers can cope with some of the puzzles. In this and many other issues, there seems to be a lack of balance.

In response to my concerns, one reviewer implied that the citing of Nibley or raising the ancient context of the Book of Abraham would jeopardize the scholarly credibility of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Perhaps so, but surely there is a way to find balance without losing face. If the views and theories of critics can be cited or given support with interpretative comments, why cannot the opposing views and theories of faithful scholars at least be hinted at in order to avoid bias in this work? Must we be this ashamed of scholarship within The Church of Jesus Christ and the strengths of the Book of Abraham?

Faithful Latter-day Saints, having confronted the warts of the Book of Abraham and related documents for decades, have found ways to understand and cope with the issues without losing faith in the divine nature of the Restoration. Faithful Latter-day Saints and sound scholars have also seen great treasures in the Book of Abraham that point to the ancient roots of the Book of Abraham and the sacred value of the text, however it was revealed and crafted. A publication like JSPRT4 that digs into the warts should also, in my opinion, not be afraid to hint at some of the beauty and not be ashamed to recognize the existence of scholarly perspectives like those of Hugh Nibley, if only to add balance when works of critics are cited and theories of critics are given weight. Such balance is not crude apologetics — it is scholarship.

3. Overlooking the Role of Hebrew Study

Several potential gaps and errors in this volume might have been averted if the role of Hebrew study among Joseph and his brethren had been more carefully considered. Below we'll consider several lines of evidence that point to the influence of Hebrew study on several portions of the KEP.

Unfortunately, throughout JSPRT4 is an assumption that the work on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers ceased when Hebrew study began at the end of 1835 and more earnestly in early 1836, resulting in a failure to explore an important possibility. It is true that Joseph's translation work ceased as he focused on the study of Hebrew, but it is a mistake to see the Hebrew study as unrelated to the Book of Abraham project. Indeed, it may well be that Joseph believed that understanding Hebrew would be a major step toward better intellectual understanding of the mysterious Egyptian he had somehow already translated by the power of God.

While Joseph's direct translation work may have been on hold or largely completed when Hebrew study began,²⁶ work on the Kirtland

26. Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen, "The Work of Translating?: The Book of Abraham's Translation Chronology," in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in*

Egyptian Papers may have continued or come into full swing. Indeed, a casual examination of those papers reveals significant influence from at least a very basic study of Hebrew, such as an abundance of terms related to the first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. However, by seriously considering the impact of Hebrew and considering the materials that may have influenced Joseph and his scribes, one can readily find evidence of a more extensive impact of Hebrew study on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, even to the point of being able to pinpoint specific content in some Hebrew books as potential sources of both characters and concepts in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. By assuming that Hebrew study marked the end of work with those papers, important relationships may have been overlooked that otherwise would have been noticed and, as discussed in Issue 4 below, dates proposed in JSPRT4 for the Kirtland Egyptian Papers may be far too early and may need to be revised to later dates more in line with the dates previously proposed by John Gee (e.g., Oct. 29, 1835 to April 1836 for documents in the handwriting of Warren Parrish),²⁷ though some of Gee's other proposed dates may still be too early.

Matthew Grey mentions some of the specific Hebrew books we know Oliver Cowdery brought to Kirtland in November 1835.²⁸

The historical records do not indicate which books he purchased, but the artifact holdings in the LDS Church History Library, Community of Christ, and Brigham Young University archives show that he brought back copies of an 1833 edition of the *Biblia Hebraica*,²⁹ the 1835 edition of

Honor of the Life's Work of Robert L. Millet, eds. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2016), 139-62; https://rsc.byu.edu/es/archived/let-us-reason-together/work-translating-book-abraham-s-translation-chronology#_ednref40. The authors argue that by the end of 1835 Abraham 4-5 had already been translated. Hebrew words may have been added to the text later as a gloss to incorporate words learned during Joseph's later study of Hebrew. These arguments are not addressed in JSPRT4.

27. John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2017), 27.

28. Matthew Grey, "The Word of the Lord in the Original," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 249-302; <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/approaching-antiquity-joseph-smith-and-ancient-world/word-lord-original-joseph-smith-s>.

29. Augustus Hahn, ed., *Biblia Hebraica*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Caroli Tauchnitz, 1833), as cited by Grey, "The Word of the Lord in the Original." Also see the 1831 edition at *Google Books*, <https://books.google.com/books?id=B88UAAAAYAAJ&pg=PP3>.

Moses Stuart's *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language*,³⁰ and the 1832 edition of Josiah Gibbs's *A Manual Hebrew and English Lexicon*,³¹ all some of the highest quality resources available at that time.³²

Another Hebrew book theoretically available to Oliver Cowdery when he went east to bring Hebrew books back to Kirtland could be Hyman Hurwitz's *The Elements of the Hebrew Language*, first printed in 1832, with a second edition in 1835,³³ and also Hurwitz's *The Etymology and Syntax in Continuation of the Elements of the Hebrew Language* from 1831.³⁴ Hurwitz is not listed in Matthew Grey's list, but there is no reason to believe the list from Grey is complete. Though printed in London, there would be adequate time for it to have reached the United States by late 1835 when Oliver was in the market for Hebrew books.

Multiple clues point to prior or concurrent Hebrew study as the KEP was prepared. Perhaps the most striking single clue may be the use of an unusual symbol from Moses Stuart's *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language*. Consider the beginning of Stuart's book on p. 10, shown in Figure 1, where the Hebrew alphabet is presented with some other forms of Hebrew letters or other alphabets.

30. Moses Stuart, *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language*, 5th ed. (Andover, MA: Gould and Newman, 1835), <https://archive.org/details/32882013436202-agrammarofthehe/page/n1>, also available at *Google Books*, <https://books.google.com/hk/books?id=zMsvAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA10>. See also the 1831 fourth edition at <https://books.google.com/books?id=jtwUAAAAYAAJ>, downloadable at <https://archive.org/details/grammarofhebrewl04stua/page/n5>.

31. Josiah W. Gibbs, *A Manual Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah Howe, 1832); <https://archive.org/details/manualhebrewengl00gibbuoft/page/n3>. Also see the 1824 edition at *Google Books*, <https://books.google.com/hk/books?id=He8tAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1>.

32. Grey, "The Word of the Lord in the Original."

33. Hyman Hurwitz, *The Elements of the Hebrew Language*, 2nd ed. (London: John Taylor, 1832); <https://books.google.com/books?id=7NsUAAAAYAAJ>. Download the file at https://books.google.com/books/download/The_Elements_of_the_Hebrew_Language.pdf?id=7NsUAAAAYAAJ&output=pdf&sig=ACfU3U30u7iR-GNDF5wyOenVX89fKm1sDg.

34. Hyman Hurwitz, *The Etymology and Syntax, in Continuation of, The Elements of the Hebrew Language*, (London: John Taylor, 1831); <https://books.google.com/hk/books?id=5-52-T2CY9UC>. Download the file at https://books.google.com/books/download/The_Etymology_and_Syntax_in_Continuation.pdf?id=5-52-T2CY9UC&output=pdf&sig=ACfU3U2Dc39FY8eb35yjkfZxKO5Bj7U4_w. See also the 1835 2nd edition at <https://archive.org/stream/grammarofhebrewl00hurwrich#page/n113/mode/2up>.

No. II.				No. III.				
LATER HEBR. ALPHABET.				ORIENTAL ALPHABETS.				
Forms.	Rep. by	Sounded as	Names.	Arabic alphabet.	Syriac alphabet.	Hebrew coin-letter.	Samar. alphab.	Heb.
א	א	'	Nālēph	ا	ܐ	א	𐤀	א
ב	bh	v	Bēth	ב	ܒ	ב	𐤁	ב
ג	b	b					𐤂	ג
ד	gh	g	Gīmēl	ג	ܓ	ג	𐤃	ד
ה	g	g					𐤄	ה
ו	dh	{th in that	Dālēth	ד	ܕ	ד	𐤅	ו
ז	d	d					𐤆	ז
ח	h	h	Hē	ה	ܚ	ה	𐤇	ח
ט	v	v	Vāv	ו	ܘ	ו	𐤈	ט
י	z	z	Zāyīn	ז	ܙ	ז	𐤉	י
כ	hh	hh	Hhēth	ח	ܚ	ח	𐤊	כ
ל	t	t	Tēt	ט	ܛ	ט	𐤋	ל
מ	y	y	Yōdh	י	ܝ	י	𐤌	מ
נ	kh	kh, h	Kāph	כ	ܟ	כ	𐤍	נ
ס	k	k					𐤎	ס
ע	l	l	Lāmēdh	ל	ܠ	ל	𐤏	ע
פ	m	m	Mēm	מ	ܡ	מ	𐤐	פ
צ	n	n	Nūn	נ	ܢ	נ	𐤑	צ
ק	s	s	Sāmēkh	ס	ܣ	ס	𐤒	ק
ר	“	“	Ṛāyīn	ע	ܘ	ע	𐤓	ר
ש	ph	ph, f	Pē	פ	ܦ	פ	𐤔	ש
ת	p	p					𐤕	ת
י	ts	ts	Tsādhē	צ	ܥ	צ	𐤖	י
ך	q	q	Qōph	ק	ܩ	ק	𐤗	ך
ר	r	r	Rēsh	ר	ܪ	ר	𐤘	ר
ש	sh	sh	Shīn	ש	ܫ	ש	𐤙	ש
ס	s	s	Sīn	ס	ܫ	ס	𐤚	ס
ת	th	th	Tāv	ת	ܬ	ת	𐤛	ת
ת	t	t					𐤜	ת

Figure 1.

Under the column “Hebrew coin-letter,” we see old forms of several Hebrew letters used on coins, including a form of *aleph* similar to an upside down *A* or sideways *A* and a form of the second letter, *beth*, which looks like a circle with a horizontally flipped capital *L* descending from the right side of the circle.³⁵ This unusual character is not found, as far as I know, in the other Hebrew materials available to the Saints in Kirtland, nor is it found on the scrolls. It is Hebrew, not Egyptian, yet it is present in Kirtland Egyptian Papers, in a key document apparently one of the first, the Egyptian Counting document.³⁶

Figure 2 shows close-ups of key portions of the Egyptian Counting document and Stuart’s Hebrew “coin letters” showing the first two rows of entries.

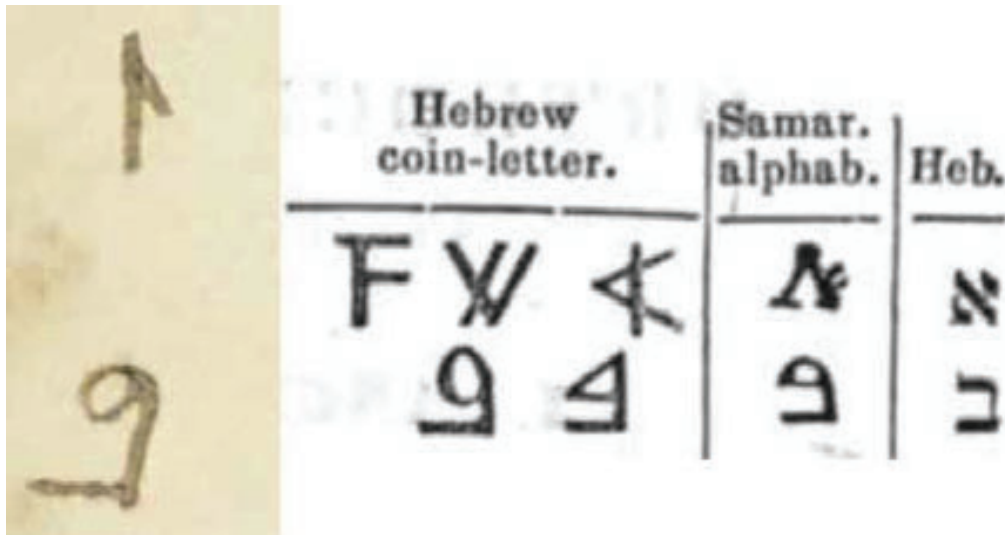


Figure 2.

The Egyptian Counting document uses a character for the number 2 that is nearly identical to the Hebrew “coin-letter” character given by Stuart for *beth*, the second letter of the alphabet, which is also used for the number 2. Of course, it is possible for coincidences in the form of a character to occur, but having a match in form and meaning (with *beth* as the number 2 in Hebrew and in the Egyptian Counting document) is highly unlikely. However, other sources besides Stuart could have

35. For more on Hebrew coin letters, see L. Kadman, “The Hebrew Coin Script: A Study in the Epigraphy of Ancient Jewish Coins,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 4, no. 3/4 (1954): 150-69; <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27924575>.

36. “Egyptian Counting, circa Early July–early November 1835,” JSPRT4, 95-99. Also see “Egyptian Counting, circa Early July–circa 26 November 1835,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/egyptian-counting-circa-early-july-circa-26-november-1835/1>.

provided W. W. Phelps with knowledge of the same ancient Hebraic form for *beth*. My search of other Hebrew language materials for an English speaker before 1835 has not yet revealed another source, though a 1784 book on the history of writing does list a nearly identical character for *beth*, along with Greek and other alphabets that might have been of interest to Phelps, had he encountered the book. In Thomas Astle's *The Origin and Progress of Writing: As Well Hieroglyphic as Elementary*, Figure 3 shows a portion of a table that includes several archaic forms of *beth*, including the form seen in the Egyptian Counting document.³⁷

Tabl. I. p. 64.

ALPHABETA ANTIQUA

II

Punicum Phoenician: Oscan: Arcadian: Galli. antiq: Phoenicum Hebr: antiq: sive Samaritanum.

A	λ	Α Α Π	Α	Α Α	Α	Α Α Α	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	Α
B	β	Β Β Β	Β	β	B		⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	B
Gh	ϑ		GH. K	GG	C	CC C	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	Gh
D	δ		C. >	Δ D	D	δ δ	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	D
E	ε	Ε Ε Ε	Ε	EE	E	Ε Ε Ε	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	E
V	ϑ ϑ ϑ	ϑ ϑ	F 8	VV	F	φ φ φ	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	V
Z	ζ	ζ					⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	Z
H	η	η η	η η	H	Gh	η η η	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	H
Th	θ	θ			Th	θ θ	⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈ ⋈	Th

Figure 3.

While I have found no evidence that Phelps saw or used this book, contrary to the clear evidence that he had access to Moses Stuart's book and began studying Hebrew shortly after that book became available, Astle's book was in the Library of Congress by 1840³⁸ and at Harvard by 1830,³⁹ and probably was in other locations in the US, although it does

37. Thomas Astle, *The Origin and Progress of Writing: As Well Hieroglyphic as Elementary* (London: T. Payne & Son, B. White, P. Elmsly, G. Nichol, and Leigh and Sotheby, 1784), Table 1, p. 64, <https://books.google.com/books?id=mI3nAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA64> (scroll down on page to see the table).

38. *Catalog of the Library of Congress in the Capitol of the United States of America*, Dec. 1839 (Washington DC: Langtree and Sullivan, 1840), <https://books.google.com/books?id=vowbAQAIAAJ&pg=PA200>.

39. *A Catalogue of the Library of Harvard University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1830), 112, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Oy0IAAAQAAJ&pg=PA112>.

not show up in nineteenth-century catalogs of several other major or relevant libraries that I have searched (e.g., the Princeton Library from Phelps's home state and libraries in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania), which suggests it may not have been a widely available book.⁴⁰

While Stuart's book would seem to be the most plausible source for Phelps's use of an archaic form of a Hebrew letter in the Egyptian Counting document, that could still be mere coincidence or could have arisen from other sources. However, there are further reasons to recognize the influence of early Hebrew study on the KEP and to recognize the need to reconsider some issues on the dating of some KEP documents.

On the dating of documents, the editors of JSPRT4 correctly discerned that the mysterious Egyptian Counting document "must have been created before the Grammar and Alphabet volume, ... because Phelps used material from the Egyptian Counting document in some of the definitions in that volume" (p. 95). But it's not just Phelps in one volume relying on the Egyptian Counting document, it's also all three Egyptian Alphabets in the KEP as well. For example, the GAEL has several versions of the term *nitahveh* to mean "twenty-five," based on *ni* = 2, *tah* = 10, and *veh* = 5 from the Egyptian Counting document. The same word occurs in Egyptian Alphabets A and C (see character

40. It is not listed in the 1821 catalog of the great Allegheny College Library, one of the nation's largest libraries of that day: see *Library of Allegheny College, Catalogue* (Meadville, PA: Allegheny College, 1823), <https://books.google.com/books?id=K5xAAAAAYAAJ>. It is not present in Wallace De Witt, *Catalogue of the Pennsylvania State Library* (Harrisburg, PA: A. Boyd Hamilton, 1859), <https://books.google.com/books?id=wjQIAAAAQAAJ>, nor in *A Catalogue of the Medical Library Belonging to the Pennsylvania Hospital* (Philadelphia: Bartram, 1806), <https://books.google.com/books?id=YmwpAAAAYAA>, nor in the Princeton Library in Phelps' home state of New Jersey; see *Subject-catalogue of the Library of the College of New Jersey, at Princeton* (New York: Charles M. Green, 1884), <https://books.google.com/books?id=u2H1ZHdCMPsC&printsec=frontcover>. Turning to Ohio, it is not present in William Holden, *Catalog of the Ohio State Library* (Columbus, OH: Nevins and Myers, 1875), <https://books.google.com/books?id=RslCAAAAYAAJ>. It is not found in the Manchester (New York) Library: see Robert Paul, "Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library," *BYU Studies* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 333-56, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/joseph-smith-and-manchester-new-york-library>. Nor is it in *Catalogue of the Rochester City Library, April 1839*, provided by the Rochester Athenaeum and Young Men's Association (Rochester, NY: Shephard, Strong, and Dawson, 1839), http://www.libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Catalogue_of_the_Roch_City_Library_1839.pdf. However, it was listed in the Cincinnati Public Library by 1884: see *Finding-List of Books in the Public Library of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati, OH: J.R. Mills, 1882-1884), 673, <https://books.google.com/books?id=OG4xAQAAMAAJ&pg=PA673>.

3.15 on p. 371 in the convenient “Comparison of Characters” section). Also consider character 2.41, associated with the name *Vehkliflosis*. The root *Kliflosis* (character 2.40, p. 365) is associated with the star Kolob, and since *veh* means “five” in the Egyptian Counting document, it is no surprise that the GAEL identifies Vehkliflosis as the fifth planet or fixed star (p. 344). Vehkliflosis occurs in all three Egyptian Alphabet documents, but without translation. The term *ni* occurs in several contexts with echoes of the number 2, such as *Ja ni hah* in the GAEL (part 2 degree 3, character 2.36), where it means “one who will be second in authority” (p. 364). Versions of that name occur in all three Egyptian Alphabets. The concept of a second person associated with *ni* might be found in various spellings of the word *Sue Eh ni* meaning “what other person is that or who” (character 1.16, pp. 355–56). Other phrases with *veh* (five) are associated with character 2.29 in all three Egyptian Alphabets and in the GAEL.

In the Egyptian Counting document, the symbol for the number 1, pronounced “eh,” is a vertical line with a short diagonal line descending from the right side of the topmost point, like a horizontally flipped number 1. Invert it, and you have the symbol that begins all three Egyptian Alphabet documents, character 1.1, pronounced “ah” and referring to the “first being.” This symbol as written in the Egyptian Alphabet documents and in its many minor variants is apparently not found on the scrolls, as is true of all the other symbols in the Egyptian Counting document (which raises a question not noticeably addressed in the comments in JSPRT4: How can we assume that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were intended for translating actual Egyptian into English when so many of the characters thereon are not even Egyptian?).

In struggling to understand Egyptian, it is natural that the Saints might be interested in looking to Hebrew for more knowledge. Joseph Smith in 1830 had declared that the reformed Egyptian of the Book of Mormon was a “running language” like Hebrew, running from right to left,⁴¹ and copies of characters from the gold plates suggest to many observers some kind of rough similarity to the type of characters the Saints would see on the papyri. For now, the critical issue is that Hebrew study — self-study only, at first — was made possible when Oliver Cowdery returned to Kirtland with a collection of Hebrew materials on November 20, 1835. Later, in early 1836 after self-study faced

41. Joseph Smith, “History, circa June–October 1839 [Draft 1],” p. 9, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-june-october-1839-draft-1/9>.

serious roadblocks, Joseph would bring Hebrew scholar Joshua Seixas to Kirtland to conduct Hebrew classes for the enthusiastic Saints. For details on the history of Joseph's quest to learn Hebrew and its impact on the Saints and the later completed versions of the Book of Abraham, see works by Michael T. Walton⁴² and Matthew Grey.⁴³

Glancing at the various "Egyptian" words in Kirtland Egyptian Papers, one can get the sense that Hebrew might have played some role. For example, the KEP contains an abundance of words related to some Hebrew letters, especially *aleph* and *beth* (here I will use the transliteration of Stuart). Further, the frequent use of dots within or near characters, especially non-Egyptian characters (characters apparently not found on the existing papyri), may suggest Hebrew vowel pointing and other diacritics in the Masoretic text, which can include a dot inside a letter, one or more dots below a letter, and a dot above a letter.⁴⁴ Horizontal lines above a few characters in the KEP may also be similar to the *rafe*, a small bar written above a consonant (showing that a *dagesh lene* dot had been omitted deliberately, not by scribal error).⁴⁵

Perhaps out of awareness of such factors, John Gee criticized the Joseph Smith Papers Project for failing to consider the evidence for Hebrew influence on the KEP. But his argument was based on the use of *h* following long final vowels, which he felt had come from Seixas.⁴⁶ Gee is correct: a shift in spelling seems to occur from some apparently early work with the characters, where we see, for example, the name *Katumin* in some documents, which seems to evolve into spellings with an *h* (as in *Kah tou mun* and other similar spellings) in the apparently later Egyptian Alphabets and the GAEL. However, examination of the Hebrew manuals written by Joshua Seixas — one from 1830⁴⁷ and one

42. Michael T. Walton, "Professor Seixas, the Hebrew Bible, and the Book of Abraham," *Sunstone*, Issue 26 (1981); <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/pdf/026-41-43.pdf>.

43. Grey, "The Word of the Lord in the Original."

44. "The Masoretes and the Punctuation of Biblical Hebrew," British and Foreign Bible Society, May 2, 2002; http://lc.bfbs.org.uk/e107_files/downloads/masoretes.pdf.

45. *Ibid.*

46. John Gee, "Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2015), 427-48; <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/approaching-antiquity-joseph-smith-and-ancient-world/joseph-smith-and-ancient-egypt>.

47. James [sic] Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar* (Philadelphia: L. Johnson and Co., 1830), <https://archive.org/details/manualhebrewgram03seix>.

from 1834⁴⁸ — does not show evidence of a transliteration system that would readily account for the abundant use of *h* after vowels in the KEP (though it is true that the Hebrew letter *he* related to our *h* does occur at the end of many words after a vowel, and Seixas does use, for example, *zah'in* as the transliteration of the seventh letter, given by Stuart as *zayin*). This raises the question: Could some of the other sources studied by the Saints provide detectable influence in the KEP?

Of the books listed by Matthew Grey that Oliver is known to have brought to Kirtland (though there may be others, such as Hurwitz's book), Gibb's book (based on the German work of Wilhelm Gesenius) generally lacks transliteration, as does *Biblia Hebraica*. But Moses Stuart's *A Grammar of the Hebrew Language* and Hurwitz's *The Elements of the Hebrew Language* could have played a role in influencing the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. In contrast to Seixas's *auleph* for the transliteration of the first Hebrew letter, both Stuart and Hurwitz use *aleph* and *beth*, similar to the KEP, while other transliterations for the first two letters may be found in various sources. Stuart has a number of words heavy in *h*, such as *bah-hel* and *ruhh-hhats*, and Hurwitz offers many examples with *h* following a vowel, such as *l'ba-bah* and *ya-ra-ah*, both meaning "moon," and *ham-mah* for the "sun."⁴⁹ Both Stuart and Hurwitz provide transliterations that sometimes are broken up with hyphens between syllables, an especially prominent feature of Hurwitz, similar to the hyphens or dashes between many syllables in the "Egyptian" words of the KEP.

There may be other connections to some of the Hebrew coin-letters presented by Moses Stuart, though these are more speculative and less striking than the above-mentioned use of the unusual Hebrew coin-letter for *beth*, and may simply be due to chance.⁵⁰ For example, in

48. J. Seixas, *A Manual Hebrew Grammar for the Use of Beginners* (Andover, MA: Gould and Newman, 1834), <https://books.google.com.hk/books?id=wkRAAQAAIAAJ&pg=PA1>. Download the file at https://books.google.com.hk/books/download/A_Manual_Hebrew_Grammar_for_the_Use_of_B.pdf?id=wkRAAQAAIAAJ&output=pdf&sig=ACfU3U3bUsLwMaA0foX-aXfOB8Poiv2PSQ.

49. Hurwitz, *Etymology and Syntax*, 10.

50. One of the strange things that struck me in looking at Stuart, perhaps just a coincidence, is that Stuart's listing of *O* as the Hebrew coin character symbol is on the same line as the *k* sound (see the upper right portion of the second image from Stuart's page 10 above), which could lead one (as it did me initially) to think that *O* was associated with a the *k* sound, though it's really associated with *ayin*, shown at the right of that column. A similar *O* symbol is also the sign associated with the name *Katumin* in Phelps's "Notebook of Copied Characters, circa Early July

the Book of Abraham manuscripts with characters in the margins, there are several concocted characters apparently not found on any papyrus. Some of these may have a relationship to characters among Moses Stuart's Hebrew coin-letters. JSPRT4's character no. 2 from the Book of Abraham manuscripts, which appears to be a sideways *F* with a dot to the right, strongly resembles the capital *F* form of a Hebrew coin letter for *aleph* in Stuart.

Another capital *F* also appears on the left of composite character no. 2 from the Book of Abraham manuscripts, with the version in Book of Abraham Manuscript A shown in Figure 4. Here we see the *aleph*-related *F* and a dot on the left joined by a straight line to a *Y* on the right; but the *Y* portion also resembles Stuart's Hebrew coin-letter form for *daleth*, though here the descending line on the right is at a slant, like that of the *F* on the left, rather than being vertical, as in Stuart's depiction. In between these two end portions is an *O* with two internal lines and a dagesh-like dot, perhaps emulating a capital Greek theta, or perhaps a modified *O* from Stuart's Hebrew coin-letter for *ayin*. A total of four dots (like Hebrew points) adorn this character. Is this a composite character inspired by one or more of Stuart's Hebrew coin-letters with Hebrew-like diacritical marks?

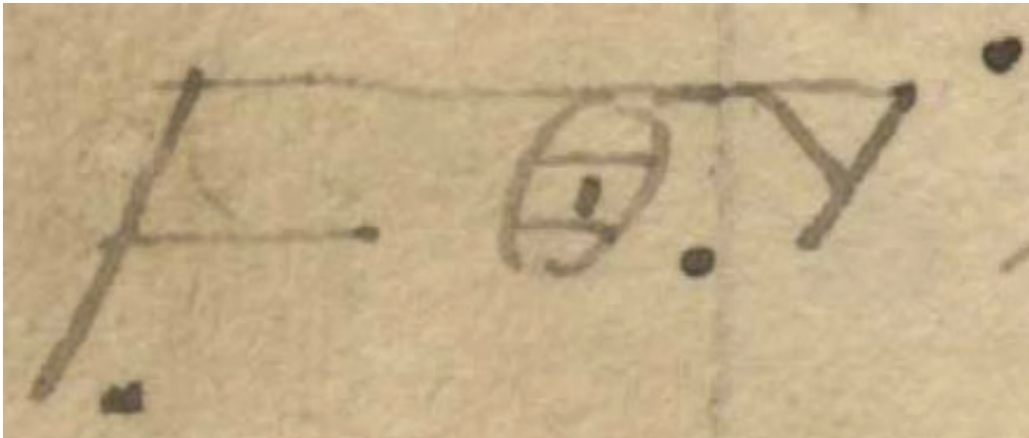


Figure 4.

Further general content from Stuart and similar Hebrew texts may have influenced the Egyptian Alphabets and the GAEL. The Egyptian Alphabets all have sections with *aleph* (the first letter of Hebrew) near

1835," JSPRT4, pp. 34-35, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/notebook-of-copied-characters-circa-early-july-1835/5>, which lists some Egyptian and a "translation." Someone trying to study Stuart carefully would quickly realize that the *O* is not linked to a *k* sound after all, but there may be a remote possibility of sloppy work leading to that association.

the beginning of the section, followed by words that seem to combine *aleph* and *beth* (the second letter of Hebrew) and then *beth* and forms of *beth* thereafter. For example, the following table lists words from pages 1 and 2 of Egyptian Alphabet C (JSPRT4, pp. 86–87; text taken from JSPP website), some of which may be related to some of the first few Hebrew letters shown by Stuart on p. 10, namely, *aleph*, *beth*, *gimel*, *daleth*, *he*, and later *yodh* (like Greek *iota*), and possibly *ayin*. The components believed to be tied to Hebrew letters are in bold:

Ah me os	God without beginning or end
Aleph	In the beginning with God the Son or first born
Albeth	Angels or disembodied spirits or Saints.
Alkabeth	Angels in an unalterable state, men after they are raised <from the dead>
Alchebeth	Ministers of God, high priests, kings
Alchibeth	Ministers of God, and less than high priests —
Alkobeth	Ministers not ordained of God, sinful
Alkubeth	Ministers who are less sinful for want of power
Ba=eth	The name of all mankind — man or men
Ba=eth=ka	Adam or the first man, or first king
Ba-eth kee	The next from Adam, one ordained under him.
Ba-eth ki	The third ordained under Adam
Ba-eth ko	The fourth from Adam
Baeth ku	The fifth high priest from Adam
Beth	Man's ⁵¹ first residence, a fruitful garden, a great valley

51. Here the JSPP website has the puzzling *Man<:>s*, which I believe is a misreading of the handwriting for *Man's*, where a heavy termination of the letter *s* is confused for an overlapping dot inserted with the upper dot (actually an original

Beth ka	Another place of residence, 5 times as great and more spacious, & larger than the firsts
Beth ke	The third place of residence, 5 times as great as the last and still greater
Beth ki	The fourth place, 5 times that of the last.
Beth=ko	The fifth place, 5 times greater than the last
Beth ku	The sixth place 5 times
ku= Ain , tri=eth	The whole earth, pure, with all-glory grains[?]
Ebeth <=>ku<=> ain tri=eth	All the heavenly bodies = Eternity
Ebeth=ka	The heaven of heavens, <wh[e]re god resides Ce[lestial]. K[ingdom].> the greatest place of hap
Kah tu ain tri eth	
Kah tu ain	
Dah tu Hahdess Hahdees	
Hah dees	
De=eh	
Zip zi Iota Veh	
Lish=zi=ho e=oop Iota	
Gahmel	
Ho=hah=oop	
Io= ho-hah=oop	
Io ho hah oop Zip Zi	
Jah- ho e oop	
Jah= ho- <ni hah>	

apostrophe) to form a meaningless colon. See “Egyptian Alphabet, circa Early July circa November 1835–C,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/egyptian-alphabet-circa-early-july-circa-november-1835-c/3>.

Jah-oh=eh	
Moh nit tish <Flo=ees>	
Flos=isis	
Kli-flos isis	
Veh kli flos-isis	
Kolob	

In this list, we have echoes of letters of the Hebrew alphabet, such as *aleph* (unlike *auleph* from Seixas), *beth*, *gimel* (“Gahmel”), *daleth* (“Dah”/”dees”/”de=eh”), *he* (“Ho=hah,” “Ho e,” “oh=eh”), *yodh* (“iota”), and possibly *ayin* (“ain”).

Interestingly, while Moses Stuart and Hyman Hurwitz have *beth* as the transliteration for the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Seixas uses *baith* (and *auleph* for *aleph*). Both *beth* and *ba-eth/ba=eth* are present in this list. Perhaps those working on the KEP began with influence from the transliteration of Stuart and possibly Hurwitz during the Saints’ self-directed Hebrew study in early 1836 before Seixas came as an instructor, and then learned of and applied Seixas’ *baith* in the form of *ba-eth*. For the letters alone, though, the KJV could have served as a source, since Psalm 119 names sections with letters of the Hebrew alphabet with a transliteration system compatible with the KEP (*aleph*, *beth*, etc., and *ain*). Gibbs’ book (Gesenius), by the way, gives *aleph* for the first letter, *beth* for the second letter⁵² and spells the third letter *gimel*.⁵³ For the third letter, Seixas uses a double *m* in *gimmel* unlike the single *m* in the related KEP word. Stuart like Gibbs has *gimel*, while Hurwitz introduces it as “Gimel, or rather Gamal,”⁵⁴ with the second spelling more suggestive of the KEP’s “Gahmel.” Gibbs writes *ain*⁵⁵ (a form seen in the KEP), as does the KJV for Psalm 119, instead of Stuart’s *ayin*.

Also of significance may be the meaning assigned to *beth* and some of its variants based on the word *residence*. In Hebrew, *beth* means “house,” a point naturally made by Stuart and Hurwitz, like Seixas.

The relationships evident in the list above occur in all the Egyptian Alphabet documents and also in the GAEL. For example, on page 33 of the GAEL, the transcription from JSPRT4 (pp. 180–81) reads:

52. Gibbs, *A Manual Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 69.

53. *Ibid.*, 107.

54. Hurwitz, *Etymology and Syntax*, 10.

55. Gibbs, *A Manual Hebrew and English Lexicon*, vi.

Ahme=os=	God without beginning or end
Alkibeth	minister of God under or the less
Baethkee	The first next from Adam, one one ordained under him, a patriarch or the right of the first born
Bethka	another place of residence, made so by extension so by appointment
Bethka	Another & larger place of residence, made so by appointment. By extension of power; more pleasing, more beautiful: a place of more complete happiness, peace and rest for man
Bethku=ain-tri=eth	The whole earth, or the largest place, the greatest enjoyment an earth the garden of the earth
Dah tu Hah dees	Hell another Kingdom; the least kingdom, or kingdom without glory; the whole kingdom and domin[ion] of darkness, with all its degrees and parts. governed by the Doagrass, him who is an enemy to G<o>od
Gahmel ⁵⁶	a fair prospect of anything: Landscape; a place or country: the face of the country; beautiful situated; a country under a promontory=a promising situation for man
Jah=ho ni hah	One delegated with redeeming power; a swift messenger; one that goes before another; one having redeeming power, a second person in authority
Jah=ohch	The earth, including its affinity with the other planets, with their governing powers; which are fifteen: the earth; the sun, and ...

56. JSPT4 and the JSP website provide *Gahmel* in the transcription for page 33 of the Grammar and Alphabet document, but a closer look suggests that this is a minor error in the transcription. I think it should be *Gahmol*. Comparing other examples of *el* and *ol* on the same page using the high-resolution images on the JSP website suggests to me that *Gahmol* is the better fit. In either case, the word written is clearly similar to and possibly cognate with Stuart's *Gimel* and especially with Hurwitz's *Gamal*.

The first word seems to draw upon the term *Ahman*, which Joseph Smith had previously given⁵⁷ and which W. W. Phelps used in his “pure language” letter of early 1835⁵⁸ with six strange characters, written before Joseph ever saw the scrolls, and all are found in the Egyptian Counting document and elsewhere in the KEP.⁵⁹ (The inclusion of such non-Egyptian characters in the “Egyptian” of the KEP is a critical issue discussed by Schryver but not adequately addressed in JSPRT4.⁶⁰) *Ahme=os=* as God (similar to *Ahman*, discussed above) could fit the concept of *aleph*, “the first.” *Aleph* also may be hinted at in the *Alkibeth* name, which seems to link man to God, or *beth* to *aleph*. Then we have a series of *beth*-related names, some of which imply a “secondary” nature (like *beth* itself as the second letter), such as “The first next from Adam, one one [sic] ordained under him” or “another place of residence, made so by extension.” “Another place of residence” seems to combine the concept of second/secondary with *house*, both related to Hebrew *beth*.

Next come two names arguably related to *daleth* and *gimel*: *Dah tu Hah dees* (*dah* for *daleth*) and notably *Gahmel*, seemingly a giveaway for Hebrew influence. Then we have two names that may draw upon *he*.

Thus on one page, we see links to *aleph*, *beth*, *gimel*, *daleth*, and *he* in almost the same order as the Hebrew. This page, in the handwriting

57. *Ahman* first appears in a revelation given March 1, 1832, now in Doctrine and Covenants 78:15-16; see “Adam-ondi-Ahman,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/topic/adam-ondi-ahman/>. The similar term *Awwmen* a reference to the Savior, appears in another 1832 document, “Sample of Pure Language, between circa 4 and circa 20 March 1832,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/sample-of-pure-language-between-circa-4-and-circa-20-march-1832/1>.

58. Phelps, letter to Sally Phelps, May 26, 1835.

59. Lindsay, “The Pure Language Project.” An image of the letter is not included in the JSPP, unfortunately, but can be seen at <https://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/Phelps%20Letter.jpg>.

60. Another important source of earlier work on the possible meaning of the KEP is William Schryver, “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers” (FAIRMormon Conference, Provo, Utah, 2010), https://youtu.be/PWMg82BM_w0 (Part 1) and <https://youtu.be/T2cQb3Ng3M8> (Part 2). Schryver points to the many non-Egyptian characters in the KEP and also links some of the definitions in the KEP to the Doctrine and Covenants, both issues which show that translating the Book of Abraham from Egyptian scrolls probably was not the intent of the work. Rather, he sees some of the documents as an effort to create a reverse cipher for converting English into code. Whether the reverse cipher theory has merit or not, the observations about the nature of the “Egyptian” and relationships between various documents merit further scholarly attention. Schryver, however, is not cited in JSPRT4, though he previously worked with Hauglid in studying the KEP.

of W. W. Phelps, may be drawing upon his study of Hebrew using one or more Hebrew books that came to Kirtland in late November 1835. Joseph and his brethren began studying Hebrew on their own at this point, and the translation of the scrolls was quickly dropped. Soon realizing they needed help, in early 1836 they hired Joshua Seixas to teach them. There may be traces of Seixas in some of the transliterations (especially “ba-eth” and related spellings), but perhaps the details of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers may have already been influenced by the Hebrew of Moses Stuart and others, possibly including Hyman Hurwitz, before they learned from Seixas.

While Phelps never uses Seixas’s *auleph* in the KEP nor his *dauleth* (or other “Egyptian” words beginning with *dau*), he does use these forms later in a short science-fiction story that he published in 1845, “Paracletes,” as discussed by Samuel Brown.⁶¹ A number of characters are given names based on *Mil* plus a Hebrew letter, including *Milauleph*, *Milbeth*, *Milgimal*, *Mildauleth*, *Milhah*, *Milvah* and *Milzah*, the latter apparently being derived from *he*, *vav*, and *zayin*.

Having noted the relationship between the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the number 2 in the Egyptian Counting document via an unusual character provided by Moses Stuart, we might wonder if other characters he provides are also tied to characters in the KEP. No other clear correspondence exists with the Egyptian Counting document. However, there might be a connection between *aleph*-related words in the KEP with one of Stuart’s Hebrew coin-letters for *aleph* that is essentially our letter *V* with a line through it, like an inverted letter *A*. That coin-letter has something in common with the first character listed by Phelps on page 1 of the GAEL (p. 116 of JSPRT4), character 5.27, shown in Figure 5.

61. Samuel Brown, “William Phelps’s Paracletes, An Early Witness To Joseph Smith’s Divine Anthropology,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 62-82, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1402664.

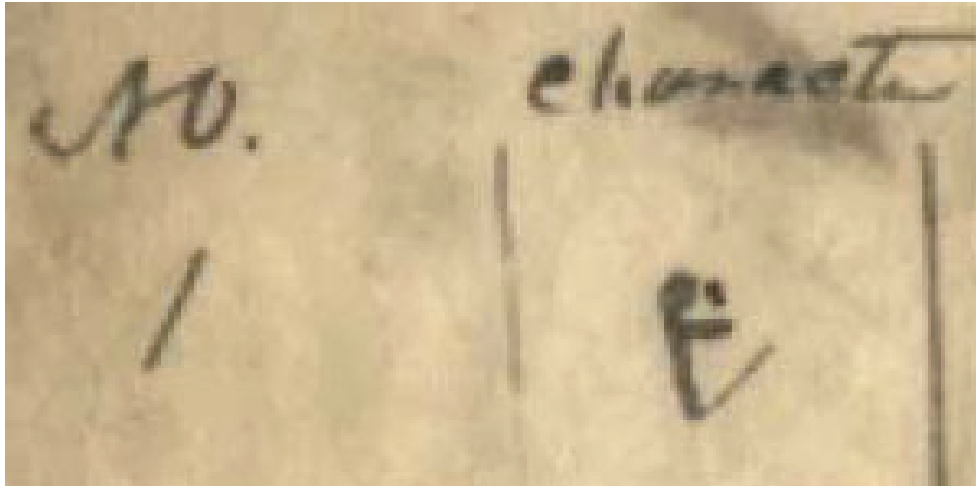


Figure 5.

This character is not really defined there, but on page three of the GAEL (p. 120 of JSPRT4), character 1.1, a character similar to character 5.27 minus the horizontal stroke and dot, similar to an inverted Egyptian Counting document character for the number 1, is said to be

Ah lish The first Being — supreme intelligence; supreme power; supreme glory= supreme Justice; supreme mercy without beginning of life or end of life comprehending all things, seeing all things: the invisible and eter[n]al⁶² godhead.
(p. 121)

Ah lish could be inspired by *aleph* and has a meaning to match. Whether it has any relationship to a Hebrew coin-letter or not, the Egyptian Counting document's number for 1 could be related to a GAEL character whose sound and assigned meaning relate to *aleph*. Most of the other Egyptian Counting numbers seem to be variations of our Arabic numerals, as can also be said of the Egyptian Counting 1. The symbol for 2 is a standout in having a symbol closely related to a Hebrew coin-letter version of the corresponding Hebrew numeral, the letter *beth*, which also occurs near the beginning of the GAEL, where on page 2 we learn that *beth* is a place of happiness, which also fits nicely with the Hebrew meaning of the letter *beth*, "house."

After *beth*, we then have a mysterious character on page 2 of the GAEL (p. 118 of JSPRT4), character 5.28, which is generally said to be *Ah brah-oam*

62. In the high resolution image of the JSPP website, there's enough of a squiggle after the *r* in *eternal* that I think the author, W. W. Phelps, for this part of the document, should be credited with *eternal* rather than a typo that requires an editorial addition of [n], but that's a minor issue.

but reported here as *Ah brah-aam*.⁶³ That character looks much like the Arabic alphabet letter corresponding to Hebrew *daleth*, as shown in the image above of p. 10 of Stuart (see Figure 6). Could this derive from Stuart?

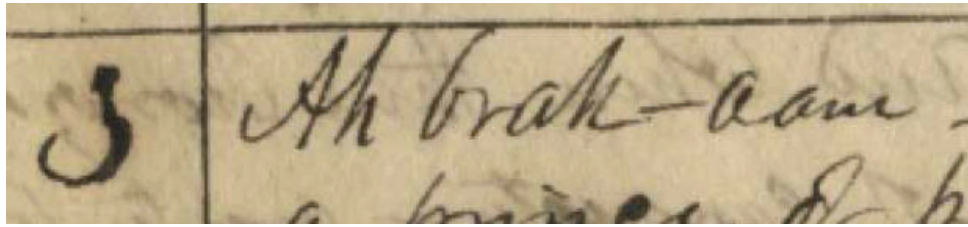


Figure 6.

Further, the mysterious *iota*, character 1.14 in JSPRT4, presented as just a round dot in the KEP, may be related to the almost dot-like Syriac alphabet version of the Hebrew letter *yodh* presented by Stuart above, which can function as a *y* sound or as the vowel *i*, though a relationship with Hebrew pointing for the vowel *i* (discussed below) seems more likely.

Turning to possible relationships between the KEP and Hebrew diacritics, Stuart and Hurwitz, like Seixas, naturally explain the use of various marks, though Hurwitz may have an edge over Stuart and Seixas in possibly serving as a source for some of the KEP's content related to JSPRT4's character 1.14, *iota*.

Could the *iota* of the KEP, seemingly based on the Greek letter *iota* corresponding to the letter *I* be related to *yodh* of the Hebrew alphabet? Some clues suggest a connection to the Hebrew letter, and a Hebrew textbook might have served as inspiration for the KEP.

The pointing to add the *i* vowel sound is a dot under a letter, shown in Figure 7 from Hurwitz's tables for long and short vowels, respectively.⁶⁴

HIRIK	יְ or יִ	under as יְ, יִ, בִּי	ī in <i>machine</i>
SHORT HIRIK	.	under as יְ, בִּי	i in <i>pin</i>

Figure 7.

63. On several occasions, cursive *o* appears to be confused for *a* in the transcriptions. The two letters often look very similar, but in this case the leading character in the apparent *aam* has a final stroke making a hint of the loop that is typical for *o* in Phelps' writing, suggesting that it the word may be the expected *Ah brah-aam* after all.

64. Hurwitz, *Etymology and Syntax*, 15.

Interestingly, one of the more common “Egyptian” characters that may not be Egyptian at all is designated as character 3.15 in JSPRT4 and is depicted as a horizontal line centered over a single dot, exactly like Hurwitz’s depiction for *hirik* above, though he was showing placement of the *hirik* relative to a long vowel, not suggesting that the line above a dot was a unique character, though it may have served as inspiration for part of the KEP. This character, said to be *iota nitahveh ah que*, occurs in all three Egyptian Alphabet documents and occurs six times in the GAEL (see summary at p. 371). It is said to mean “I saw twenty-five persons.” Occurrences of the allegedly “Egyptian” character are in the form of a dot that is placed under a horizontal line, exactly like the depiction for the *hirik* (see Figure 8).

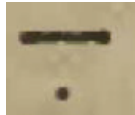


Figure 8.

The dot, *iota*, character 1.14, is said to mean “eye” or “to see.” Is it a coincidence that *eye = iota = i*? Perhaps so.

The case for the influence of Hebrew on the KEP should be strong, based on the presence of multiple words that are related to letters of the Hebrew alphabet, along with assigned meanings that often correlate with two of the associated numerals (first/primary for *aleph* and secondary for *beth*) and, in the case of *beth*, its meaning of “house.” One could argue that this could come from general familiarity with Bible study materials rather than Hebrew study per se. Perhaps more than casual familiarity with Hebrew letters may be needed to account for other parallels involving Hebrew diacritics and particularly the vowel *i* and *iota*. But the case for the influence of a specific Hebrew book brought to Kirtland on November 20, 1835, is enhanced by noting that the “Egyptian” number for 2 in the Egyptian Counting document appears to be taken from Moses Stuart and is not likely to be due to random chance, since it’s an unusual character, used without any significant modification like inversion, and the associated Hebrew name of *beth* is used in “Egyptian” words in the KEP with a reasonably related assigned meaning in the KEP pertaining to “secondary” concepts appropriate for the number 2. I don’t think chance alone can plausibly explain these parallels.

Further investigation should also consider the possible influence of other Hebrew materials and explore the possibility that Hurwitz’s materials were on hand to influence the KEP. In addition to Hurwitz’s

KEP-compatible transliteration system, heavy use of hyphens to separate symbols, and many transliterated words with *h* following a vowel akin to the KEP,⁶⁵ Hurwitz also emphasizes the Hebrew word for *moon* and gives multiple cognates.⁶⁶ This word is clearly related to the name *Libnah* in the 1842 Book of Abraham, though the earlier extant manuscripts have *Zibnah*. It is unknown if the change was made around 1842 or much earlier, or whether *Zibnah* was the originally intended or dictated word (the similarity in nineteenth-century cursive between capital *Z* and *L* would seem to facilitate a scribal error that could result in an initial *Libnah* becoming *Zibnah* in many Book of Abraham documents). The relationship between *Libnah* and the color “white” may be a fitting link to Duamutef, the son of Horus named *Libnah* by Joseph Smith.⁶⁷

Hurwitz’s *Etymology and Syntax* may also help solve one of the many puzzling statements of W. W. Phelps in the GAEL, the discussion of the “parts of speech” at the beginning of the document which shares some strange theories about how characters need to connect to the different parts of speech. But in discussing parts of speech, Phelps does not mention nouns. The word *pronoun* occurs once in the GAEL, but *noun* does not, while verbs are discussed a couple of times and mentioned as one of the “parts of speech.” Here are two excerpts from the GAEL

65. See, for example, Hyman Hurwitz, *Etymology and Syntax*, 7, which lists *a-loh*, *o-leh*, *o-lah*, *a-lah*, *a-leh*, *al*, *el-yon*, *ma-aleh*, *ma-alah*, *na-alah*, *eli*, and *th'-a-lah*.

66. On pages 10-11 of *Etymology and Syntax*, Hurwitz gives examples of etymology involving words related to *l'ba-nah*, meaning “the moon,” or literally “the white one.” Related words shown include *lib'neh*, *l'bo-nah*, *l'banon* (the name of the land Lebanon), *l'ba-nah*, and *hel-b'nah*. This example illustrates the tendency of Hurwitz to separate syllables with hyphens, as is common in the KEP. It also points to the apparent Hebrew origins of the word *Libnah* in the Book of Abraham, one of the Egyptian gods mentioned by Abraham. However, the name used throughout the KEP is *Zibnah*, not *Libnah*.

The earliest record of *Libnah* in a Book of Abraham manuscript is a copy of the Book of Abraham text in Willard Richards’s handwriting in 1842, possibly a document used to prepare the published version of the Book of Abraham. In that manuscript, *Zibnah* was written originally and then the *Z* is overwritten with an *L*. The cursive *Z* in *Zibnah* in the KEP and in Richards’s handwriting as well looks much like a *Z* with an extra arc in the beginning of the letter. This could result in a copying error, writing *Z* when *L* was intended. Was there an original nonextant document with dictated *Libnah* that was copied as *Zibnah* into a document used for the KEP, or, probably more likely, did Joseph make the correction initially in 1842?

67. Rick Moser, “Facsimile 1 Figure 6 – Eastern Sunrise,” *Conflict of Justice* (blog), Feb. 27, 2019, <http://www.conflictjustice.com/facsimile-1-figure-6-eastern-sunrise/>.

transcript at the Joseph Smith Papers Project website,⁶⁸ nearly the same as the transcript in JSPRT4.⁶⁹

By counting the numbers of st[r]aight lines *and preseving them*, or considering them as qualifying adjectives we have the degrees of comparison There are five connecting *parts of speech* in the above character, called Za-ki an hish. These five connecting *parts of speech*, for *verbs, participles — prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs*. In ~~translation~~ translating this chara[c]ter, this subject must be continued until there are as many of these connecting *parts of speech* used as there are connections or connecting parts found in the character. (p. 1 of GAEL)

For instance, the first connection should be called Jugos, which signifies *verb* or action: and the second connection should be called Ka=Jugos, which is a variation, according to the signification of the second degree: Kah Jugos should <be> preserved in the second degree. It signifies an action passed: The third connection is called Kah pr=ga=os, which signifies an action to be received or <to> come to pass. The fourth connection is called Ka=os-Ju which signifies connection and the fifth is called Ka-os=Juga=os and is used to qualify according to the signification of the fifth degree. whether for *prepositions, verbs, adve[r]bs* &c. (p. 15 of GAEL)

When I first read Phelps's comments in the painful-to-read GAEL, I was puzzled about his *apparent omission of nouns as a part of speech*, when they clearly are present in the GAEL. A possible explanation might come from Phelps's study of Hebrew. Perhaps Phelps was influenced by the discussion of the relationship of nouns and verbs in some of the Hebrew books he may have encountered when the Saints began delving into Hebrew, particularly Hurwitz's *The Etymology and Syntax*.

68. Transcript of the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/grammar-and-alphabet-of-the-egyptian-language-circa-july-circa-november-1835/181#full-transcript> and JSPRT4, 117-83.

69. For the transcript of page 1 of the GAEL, see JSPRT4, 117. For page 15 of the GAEL, see JSPRT4, 145. Differences relative to the JSPP website are in details regarding the emendations made to the text, where the printed volume generally gives more precise technical information.

Hurwitz makes an argument over several pages (pp. 8–14) that nouns tend to come from verbs and that verbs should take priority:

[I]t follows that these two species of words [verbs and nouns] must have formed the very rudiments of language. But, as if both could not have been invented at the same time, it has been made a question which of the two has a right to claim the priority. Most of the Oriental Grammarians have decided in favor of the Verb.⁷⁰

[T]he class of words which grammarians denominate *nouns* must originally have been *verbal* (somewhat like the words called participles), expressive of some property of circumstance by which the named object was characterized. And indeed, such is still the character of the far greater portion of Hebrew nouns, even of those which designate natural objects [here a list of examples is given including *ra-ki-a*, the firmament, and *l'banah*, the moon, like *Libnah* in the Book of Abraham].⁷¹

This being the case, we can easily comprehend how the same word would frequently be used both as a noun and as a verb. ...⁷²

In all these examples it is evident that there is no distinction whatever between the noun and the verb; but even in those where a distinction exists, it is so slight, as clearly to show the common origin of the words. ...⁷³

*Both theory and fact lead me, therefore, to conclude that the Hebrew nouns were originally verbalia; and that verbs ought to be considered as the elements of speech, not on account of their priority of invention, but because they generally contain the primary signification of words.*⁷⁴

Hurwitz also uses the phrase *parts of speech* eight times in his text, with *part of speech* occurring four times. This may seem like a common phrase, but a search in Google Books for “parts of speech” between 1700 and 1835 yields only 14 hits. The singular *part of speech* over that time period yielded 12 hits. These are miniscule numbers. *Parts of speech* may not be a very common phrase at all, yet Phelps uses it nine times in the

70. Hurwitz, *Etymology and Syntax*, 8.

71. *Ibid.*, 10.

72. *Ibid.*, 12.

73. *Ibid.*, 13.

74. *Ibid.*, 14, emphasis added.

GAEL (six times on the first page), and Hurwitz uses it almost as much in his book. Hurwitz's first use is in pointing out that verbs will be the starting place for treating the different parts of speech:

In treating of the different *parts of speech*, Orientalists generally begin with the verb.⁷⁵

The early Hebrew Grammarians reckoned only three *parts of speech* : 1) the name, in which they included nouns and adjectives : 2) the verb : 3) the particle in which they included the other classes.⁷⁶ [*emphasis added, Hebrew omitted*]

Could Phelps's emphasis on verbs and omission of nouns as "parts of speech" derive from study of Hurwitz?

Another characteristic of the GAEL is the frequent use of the term *signification* to describe various aspects of the words being examined. There are 25 occurrences of this term in the relatively brief text. Hurwitz also uses that word dozens of times. Surprisingly, the word *signification* does not occur frequently before 1835. On Google Books there are only 19 hits between 1700 and 1835. Perhaps this could be considered as another possible link between Hurwitz and Phelps. Not too much can be made of using a known but not highly common word, but in combination with the even less common *parts of speech* and the unusual teaching of the priority of verbs over nouns, there may be a basis for believing that Hurwitz's book either directly or indirectly shaped Phelps during the early 1836 period of intense Hebrew study among the Latter-day Saints.

The possible relationships between Phelps's writings in the GAEL and a book on Hebrew by Hyman Hurwitz could be one more indication that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers cannot be understood without recognizing the impact of Hebrew study on their content.

Summarizing, we see hints of Hebrew-study influence on the KEP not only from (1) the many terms in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers related to Hebrew letters including *aleph*, *beth*, *daleth*, *gimel*, *he*, and possibly *ayin*; (2) awareness of the meaning and numerical value of *beth* and the numerical value of *aleph*; (3) apparent awareness of diacritical marks, such as the lone dot to represent the vowel sound *i* ("iota"), and dots placed in various positions relative to characters similar to Hebrew pointing, though this issue may be due to coincidence; (4) use of at least one and possibly several Hebrew coin-letters from Moses Stuart, including the surprisingly appropriate use of the unusual coin-letter form of *beth* for the number 2 in

75. Ibid., vii.

76. Ibid., 6.

the Egyptian Counting document; and now (5) incorporation of Hurwitz’s teachings on the lack of distinction of verbs and nouns, with priority given to verbs, expressed in language referring to the “parts of speech” in a text that makes heavy use of the word *signification*.

Could Phelps have studied Hebrew on his own before he participated with the Saints in studying Hebrew in 1836? When Hebrew study began in Kirtland, Phelps was not able to participate initially due to interference from many other duties. On January 5, 1836, he wrote, “I want to study Hebrew, and I have not as yet been able to begin.”⁷⁷ He would excel when he later began studying, but his statement seems to suggest that he did not already have serious Hebrew study in his background.

It seems to me that the role of Hebrew study on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers needs more attention and research. It is true that Joseph ceased translating the Book of Abraham (or had already finished most of the translation) a few days after Oliver returned to Kirtland on November 20, 1835. However, work on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers may have continued or been stimulated by the Hebrew discoveries being made, leading to several ways in which Hebrew study would influence the KEP.

Unfortunately, in JSPRT4, it seems to be assumed that the work with the KEP was pretty much completed by the time serious Hebrew study started. There seems to be essentially no recognition of the impact of Hebrew study on the project or on the documents. This may have resulted in a missed opportunity to more accurately date the undated documents and to more fully understand the influences that shaped the study and speculations of early Latter-day Saints, however fallacious those purely human intellectual efforts were.

4. Errors in the Assumed Dates of Key Documents

Warren Parrish was hired as a scribe on October 29, 1835, as JSPRT4 recognizes, yet documents he wrote as a scribe are given the improperly early date range of June 1835 to November 1835. For example, both Book of Abraham Manuscript B (in the handwriting of Parrish alone) and Book of Abraham Manuscript C (in the handwriting of Phelps for vv. 1–3, thereafter Parrish) are given a date of July–circa November 1835

77. W. W. Phelps, Jan. 5, 1836, as cited by Bruce Orden, *We’ll Sing and We’ll Shout* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018), 165. However, it is possible that Phelps had been exposed to some aspects of Hebrew earlier. Years earlier he had mentioned some Hebrew words in other publications and had a general interest in languages. See Grey, “The Word of the Lord in the Original.”

(p. 217). Content from Parrish should clearly be labeled with a date no earlier than October 1835 (though it's possible Manuscript C was begun by Phelps much earlier). Here John Gee's assessment is more reasonable: he lists both documents as from October 29, 1835 to April 1836,⁷⁸ a range that leaves open the possibility of Hebrew study influence. However, some of Gee's proposed dates for other documents may still be too early.

In response to the above statement, one reviewer kindly pointed out that Parrish was working as a volunteer scribe for Joseph Smith before October 29, 1835, noting that Parrish was acting as a clerk, for example, for the Kirtland High Council and served as a scribe for Joseph in writing letters.

Parrish's work can be explored using the JSPP website's biography,⁷⁹ which includes a list of associated documents that either mention Parrish or are in his handwriting. One document showing his role in the High Council is "Minutes, 17 August 1835," where Parrish is listed as one of three clerks.⁸⁰ In the source note provided, footnote 18 informs us that "Parrish had been preaching in Tennessee and had just reached Kirtland a few days before."⁸¹ Parrish's summer mission would have kept him from being involved in the early work with the Book of Abraham. He clearly was involved with the High Council as a clerk by mid-August, but does that translate into personal scribal work for Joseph?

Looking for support for Parrish's volunteer work of writing letters for Joseph earlier in 1835, the only relevant document I could find on the JSPP website is a document in Parrish's handwriting labeled "Revelation, [Kirtland Township, Geauga Co., Ohio], 27 Oct. 1835."⁸² This was just two days before Joseph wrote of hiring Parrish as a scribe and may not adequately allay my concern about ascribing unnecessarily early dates to the KEP documents that Parrish prepared.

While it is possible that Parrish was involved with the Book of Abraham project in August, September, or early October, his handwriting on the extant documents of the KEP is likely to date to after his being hired

78. Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 27.

79. "Parrish, Warren Farr," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/warren-farr-parrish>.

80. "Minutes, 17 August 1835," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-17-august-1835/1#full-transcript>.

81. ("From the Letters of the Elders Abroad," *LDS Messenger and Advocate*, Aug. 1835, 1:167-68.)

82. Revelation (Kirtland Township, Geauga Co., OH), 27 Oct. 1835, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-27-october-1835/1#source-note>.

as a scribe, and possibly beginning mid-November, 1835, according to Bruce Orden in his biography of W. W. Phelps, *We'll Sing and We'll Shout*:

One solution to Joseph's pressing administration needs was to hire a new scribe in addition to Cowdery and Phelps. On Thursday, October 29, Joseph's record stated that the Prophet hired Warren Parrish for fifteen dollars per month. ...

Parrish became acquainted about this time with the Egyptian papyri in order to take over as the main scribe on that project. Phelps was assigned in early November to work almost full-time at the printing office to produce the reprint of *The Evening and the Morning Star*, complete the hymnbook, help John Whitmer get caught up on the backlogged *Messenger and Advocate*, ensure the *Northern Times* was up to date, and assist in distributing the Doctrine and Covenants.

Parrish became Smith's assistant in further work on the Book of Abraham and related Egyptian projects. The handwriting on the Book of Abraham manuscript, the Egyptian alphabet and grammar documents, and Joseph Smith's diary changes from that of Phelps or Cowdery to that of Parrish. This took place in mid-November 1835.⁸³

Further, based on the above discussion of the influence of Hebrew study on the KEP, it seems that the Saints' study of Hebrew after November 20, 1835, may have influenced the Egyptian Counting manuscript, the Egyptian Alphabet documents, and the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language. This would seem to require a date well after the July 1835 to November 1835 dates given by the editors of JSPRT4 for these documents. The latest listed possibility of November 26, 1835, on the JSPP website for the Egyptian Counting document⁸⁴ theoretically could work if the Hebrew study materials brought on November 20 were digested immediately and then applied to create the Egyptian Counting document, but much more time is needed for the other documents to evolve and draw upon the Egyptian Counting document. If the apparent influences of Hebrew study in the KEP discussed in Issue 3 above are real, by the time the existing Egyptian Alphabet documents and the

83. Orden, *We'll Sing and We'll Shout*, 192.

84. "Egyptian Counting, circa Early July–circa 26 November 1835," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/egyptian-counting-circa-early-july-circa-26-november-1835/1#facts>.

GAEL were prepared or even started, Hebrew study had already begun, and the translation of the Book of Abraham had already stopped.

The GAEL and the earlier Egyptian Alphabet documents from the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are said by critics to show Joseph Smith's translation process. It is frequently assumed, especially by our critics, that these documents preceded the translation of the Book of Abraham or show it in progress. However, the documents in question generally lack dates, and the vague statements from those who produced them do not identify when these specific documents were produced, nor do they explain *why* they were produced. Caution is needed in assigning dates. Unfortunately, the editors of JSPRT4 have assumed these documents were produced in the same time frame as the Kirtland-era translation of the Book of Abraham, which occurred from July to November 1835. This generous date range would enable the Kirtland Egyptian Papers to serve as sources for the production of the Book of Abraham, a theory favored either intentionally or unintentionally in the treatment of these documents in JSPRT4, consistent with the personal views at least one of the editors but not consistent with the unreferenced analysis of other scholars.

If these documents arose after November 1835, then that would strengthen the argument of apologists that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are derived from the revealed translation and not the other way around. The dates matter, at least to some people and for some issues. Unfortunately, textual clues indicate the assumed dates presented in JSPRT4 are in serious error (see Issue 3, above, on the implications of Hebrew study on the dates of documents).

5. Granting Improper Credibility to a Key Claim of Book of Abraham Critics Regarding the Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts A and B

A popular and seemingly potent claim of some critics is that we can see evidence of Joseph "translating" on the fly from the characters in the margins of the Book of Abraham Manuscript A and Manuscript B, which show evidence of two scribes simultaneously copying down text that someone was reading. (Manuscript C is in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps for the first 20 lines giving Abraham 1:1-3, and then it switches to that of Warren Parrish, and shows signs of coming after the first two documents, A and B.)

Manuscript A and Manuscript B both begin with the very same mistakes and corrections, as if the speaker were catching the errors and correcting them on the fly. As we look on the first page of both

manuscripts, there is clearly an oral process going on, especially when we see different spellings for unusual names. So this is said to give us a window into Joseph's *translation* showing what is happening as he dictates, showing us how he used a few characters to create large blocks of text. We see the original Book of Abraham text being created from mystic Egyptian — and it's just embarrassing.

These documents are then used in making some of the most widely disseminated arguments against the Book of Abraham, and it is crucial that the editorial comments be made with caution and care, and with an awareness of the potential impact these documents can have when used to undermine testimonies of the Restoration.

Yes, there certainly appears to be an oral process occurring with simultaneous copying, at least at the beginning of Manuscripts A and B. But was it really Joseph dictating? How do we know? This is simply an assumption made by our critics. And was this dictation of text being revealed/fabricated on the fly, or was it dictation from an existing manuscript to help two scribes make a copy? The editors of JSPRT4 express their interpretations of these documents as follows (part of which was mentioned in Issue 2, above):

Discrepancies in the spelling of several words in the two manuscripts suggest that the manuscripts were not visually compared against one another or against a single, earlier version. Given the similarities between the texts of the two manuscripts and the revision process for both, *JS may have dictated some or most of the text to both scribes at the same time. In that case, these two manuscripts would likely be the earliest dictated copies of the Book of Abraham.* Some scribal errors in the later portion of the manuscript made by Williams, however, indicate that he copied some of his text from another manuscript. *JS may have read aloud to Williams and Parrish from an earlier, nonextant text, making corrections as he went; he followed a similar process in his work in the Bible revision project.*

The third version, inscribed by Phelps and Parrish, silently incorporates most of the changes made in the earlier Williams and Parrish versions. The most complete of any of the extant versions created in Kirtland, the manuscript inscribed by Phelps and Parrish was originally copied into a bound volume, which suggests that it was viewed as *a more permanent text, rather than a work in progress.* This manuscript also contains

prefatory material that does not appear in the other two Kirtland-era manuscripts. *This prefatory material contains the most similarities to the definitions in the Grammar and Alphabet volume and was therefore also likely connected to JS's study of the Egyptian language.* Many themes appear both in the Book of Abraham manuscript inscribed by Phelps and Parrish in the Grammar and Alphabet volume, and three characters that are analyzed in the fifth degree of the first part of the Grammar and Alphabet volume are found in the margin of this manuscript.

JS may have planned to translate more of the Book of Abraham when he moved to Missouri, but the conflict that ensued there, as well as JS's arrest and incarceration in 1838–39, prevented additional work. *JS dictated later portions of the Book of Abraham in Nauvoo in 1842.* (JSPRT4, p. 192)

Do these manuscripts represent translation work in progress and give us a window into how Joseph created the Book of Abraham? Could these really be the earliest dictated manuscripts of the Book of Abraham? Do they derive from definitions in the GAEL and reflect Joseph's misguided personal study of Egyptian? Those are all key talking points for critics of the Book of Abraham, part of the basic fabric for the case against Joseph as a prophet. But a more careful examination of these documents reveals the questionable scholarship behind such arguments.

A careful look at the twin texts A and B shows that what was being dictated was an already existing text, not one being created. Fortunately, the editors of another volume in the JSP series, *Documents: Volume 5, January 1835–October 1838*, recognize this: “Textual evidence suggests that these Book of Abraham texts were based on an earlier manuscript that no longer exists.”⁸⁵ The supporting footnote explains:

Documents dictated directly by JS typically had few paragraph breaks, punctuation marks, or contemporaneous alterations to the text. All the extant copies, including the featured text, have regular paragraphing and punctuation included at the time of transcription as well as several cancellations and insertions.⁸⁶

85. Brent M. Rogers, et al., eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents: Volume 5, January 1835–October 1838* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2017), 74–75.

86. Rogers et al., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents: Volume 5, 74-75n323*.

This point should have been made in JSPRT4, not out of a shameless desire to support apologetics, but to point out something distinctive and obvious about the manuscripts that, incidentally, weakens a common argument from Book of Abraham critics. The apologetic argument need not be explicitly raised, but the evidence pointing to the existence of an earlier manuscript is relevant and important and should not be brushed aside in favor of anyone's personal theory that these documents show a "window" into the live translation process of Joseph Smith.

Further, the evidence suggests the most likely source of dictation was *not* Joseph Smith but one of the two scribes who was initially reading aloud for the benefit of the other. The most plausible scenario to account for these documents is that Warren Parrish was dictating for the benefit of his fellow scribe Frederick Williams as they both made copies of an existing text, but when Parrish left at one point, Williams began copying visually from the existing manuscript and then made a classic blunder typical of visual copying, not taking oral dictation.

Why would Parrish stop writing while Williams continued? If these manuscripts were being prepared after self-directed or tutored Hebrew study had commenced in December of 1835 or January of 1836, then one possibility for Parrish running out of breath in the scribal work for Book of Abraham Manuscript B could be his respiratory illness, which began in December 1835 and continued to afflict him in January 1836, so much so that he wrote the following to Joseph as he temporarily backed down from his writing work: "I have a violent cough and writing has a particular tendency to injure my lungs. I therefore with reluctance send your journal to you until my health improves."⁸⁷ Parrish would return to his scribal duties on February 8, 1836.⁸⁸ The reason for leaving early is only of secondary interest, however. More important is what we learn from the manuscripts.

Parrish, working on Manuscript B, stopped early after writing "who was the daughter of Haran" from Abraham 2:2. However, Williams kept on writing in Manuscript A. *It was at this point where something changed*, as is visible in the image and transcription in JSPRT4 (pp. 200–01) and on the website.⁸⁹ Initially I thought it was Williams who may have been

87. Warren Parrish letter to Joseph Smith, as cited in Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1971): 448, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol11/iss4/8>.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Book of Abraham Manuscript A, p. 4, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-a-abraham-14-26/4>.

reading, but examination of the spelling of names shows that Parrish was probably looking at the manuscript and was able to spell unusual names consistently, while Williams shows great variability, making the kind of mistakes natural in taking dictation. Thus it seems that dictation was occurring and continued as long as both scribes were writing, but when Parrish stopped after Abraham 2:2, it seems he left or otherwise ceased dictating because after this change, Williams's manuscript shows a classic copying blunder that does not fit a scenario of taking dictation from Joseph Smith: he accidentally jumped back in the text he was looking at and began copying a large block of text a second time, repeating the three verses of Abraham 2:3–5 essentially word for word (an error known as *dittography*).⁹⁰ The change also includes writing all the way to the left margin of the page instead of respecting the column that held occasional Egyptian characters.

The common mistakes and corrections in the beginning of the documents are hard to explain if Joseph were dictating and already had a sentence in his head, but make sense if a scribe is reading aloud from an existing manuscript a few words at a time as both scribes then write what has been spoken. Consider the opening lines, here taken from the transcript of Manuscript A on the JSPP website:

I sought for <mine> ~~the~~ appointment ~~whereunto~~ unto the
priesthood according to the appointment of God unto the
fathers concerning the seed...⁹¹

How does “mine appointment” get turned into “the appointment”? Note that the final sentence in question has both “mine appointment” and “the appointment” right after it. When copying by hand from an existing text or reading aloud from an existing text, skipping ahead (or looking back) to a similar phrase and momentarily confusing the two is an easy and common mistake to make. Switching a nearby “the appointment” for the immediate “mine appointment” would be completely understandable if one were working from an existing text. It's also possible that if the reader were not used to putting *mine* in front of a noun, one could also subconsciously make it more natural by reading *the* for *mine*. The fact that *mine* ends with *ne*, which can look like *he* in *the* might have contributed to the error. But in any case, looking at an

90. Lindsay, “The Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts.”

91. “Book of Abraham Manuscript A,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-a-abraham-14-26/1>.

existing text and copying or reading could readily result in this error, whereas if one had decided to speak of “my appointment” (if Joseph were making up scripture on the fly) but in old fashioned language, it’s unlikely that one would slip and just say *the* instead, when the context of the sentence demands a possessive. This is an error that most likely is due to working with an existing text.

Next, how could “appointment unto” become “appointment whereunto” if one is dictating one’s own words and ideas? This mistake, however, could again be very natural if someone were reading out loud from an existing text in hand. The conversion of *unto* into *whereunto* makes sense as a scribal or reading error given that *whereunto* was just used in a similar context earlier in Abraham 1:2, assuming that it was present on the hypothesized preexisting, more complete manuscript. In that verse, *whereunto* is also in the context of receiving the Priesthood:

And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right *whereunto* I should be ordained to administer the same.

If the person reading the text to our two scribes had the complete text of Abraham 1 in hand, helping them to make copies for their own use or study, perhaps, then if that person had previously read verse 2 or were familiar with it, then memory (or visual memory) of that previous *whereunto* regarding Priesthood rights could easily cause one to stumble and say *whereunto* instead of *unto*. The same could happen for someone making a copy by hand, but since two manuscripts from two scribes have the same error, it would seem they are either taking notes from dictation or deliberately preserving scribal errors from a previous text, which would seem unlikely.

Evidence that it is Parrish who is reading and not Joseph Smith comes from analysis of the spelling errors made. If one of the scribes were the speaker and had the text before him, he would have had the benefit of seeing how unusual names were spelled, and thus would be less likely to introduce misspellings that needed correction when it came to proper names. So let’s look at the typos in proper names in these two manuscripts and see how they compare. Below are the proper names in each manuscript, excluding the common or relatively easy names Egypt and Egyptian, Ham, Adam, and Noah. They are shown in order and grouped by name in order of occurrence and showing corrections. First we consider the transcript of Manuscript A by Frederick G. Williams:

- *Elk=Kener, Elk=Kener, Elk=Keenah, Elk-keenah, Elk Keenah, Elk-Keenah, Elkkeenah*
- *Zibnah, Zibnah, Zibnah*
- *Mah-mackrah, Mah-Mach-rah, Mah-Mach-rah*
- *Pharoah, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaohs*
- *Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldea, chaldees, chaldees, chaldees*
- *Chaldeans, Chaldeans, Chaldea* [“in the Chaldea signifies Egypt” — Chaldean is meant]
- *Shag=reel, Shag-reel*
- *Potipher<s> hill, Potiphers hill*
- *Olishem*
- *Θnitus Onitah*
- *Kah-lee-nos* [note that the canonized text has Rahleenos]
- *Abram, Abram; Abraham <Abram>, Abram, Abram, Abram*
- *Ur, Ur, Ur, Ur, Ur*
- *Cananitess, cannites*
- *Zep-tah*
- *Egyptes*
- *Haran, Haron, Haran, Haran, Haran, Haran, Haran*
- *Terah*
- *Sarai, Sarai, sarah*
- *Nahor*
- *Milcah*
- *canaan, canaan*
- *Lot*

Manuscript B by Warren Parrish has these proper names with corrections shown:

- *Elkkener, Elkken[er]* [here the edge of the paper is damaged obscuring the final *r*, but it appears he wrote the full word, *Elkkener*], *Elkkener, Elkkener, Elkkener, Elkkener*
- *Zibnah, Zibnah, Zibnah*
- *mahmachrah, Mahmachrah, Mahmachrah*
- *Pharoah, Pharao[h], Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharoah, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh, Pharaoh*
- *Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldea, Chaldeas*
- *Chaldeans, Chaldeans, Chaldea* [“in the Chaldea signifies

Egypt” — Chaldean is meant, same error here as in Manuscript A],

- *Shagreel, Shagreel*
- *Potiphers hill, Potiphers hill*
- *Olishem*
- *Onitah*
- *Kahleenos* [The canonized text has *Rahleenos*. Since a cursive capital *R* often looks much like a *K*, it would be easy to read *Rahleenos* on an existing text as *Kahleenos*. Williams also wrote *Kahleenos*. Perhaps the original text had *Kahleenos*, or it may have had *Rahleenos*, which Parrish or someone else misread.]
- *Abram, Abram, Abram*
- *ur, Ur, Ur*
- *canaanites, Canaanites*
- *Zeptah*
- *Egyptes*
- *Haran, Haran*
- *Terah*
- *Sarai*
- *Nahor*
- *Milcah*

Parrish is not a great speller, giving us *preist*, *sacrafice*, *fassion* (fashion), *patraarch*, *govermnent*, *pople* (people), *Idolitry*, *deliniate*, *runing*, and *smiten* in Manuscript B, but he spells names consistently, with the exception of capitalization and typos for *Pharaoh*. Williams, on the other hand, has significant variation in his spelling of unusual words, suggesting that for the most part, he was writing down what he heard, while Parrish might have been looking at what he was writing or was able to see it when needed if someone else were dictating, so his unusual words are spelled accurately and consistently.

Based on the data, it seems unlikely that Williams was reading the text, but much more likely that Parrish was, or that he could at least see the text when needed to see how unusual names were spelled. And it seems highly unlikely that a third party was reading to both Parrish and Williams.

In sum, textual analysis reveals that it is very unlikely that this text represents Joseph dictating text to his scribes but much more likely that it represents Parrish dictating to Williams as both made copies, until Parrish stopped and Williams then began visually copying the preexisting manuscript (no longer extant) and created a huge dittography

at that very point. Much points to the existence of a prior manuscript, initially read aloud by Parrish, then visually copied by Williams. Other errors in these documents are also consistent with this scenario.

Rather than leaving readers with the impression that these two documents may have been the original source of Book of Abraham material, it is important to explain why they reflect copying from an existing manuscript, both during the dictated portion and the final visually copied portion. At a minimum, JSPRT4 should have noted the implications about the format and punctuation of the documents that were properly observed in another volume of the Joseph Smith Papers. It is important to recognize that Joseph was not creating or revising his translation on the fly here, that these manuscripts cannot represent the earliest texts created by Joseph Smith for the Book of Abraham, and that they do not give us a window into how Joseph created and dictated his translated text. That gap is part of a prevalent pattern of overlooking perspectives and references to other scholarship that could lessen the impact of arguments against the authenticity of the Book of Abraham.

Unfortunately, editor Brian Hauglid in a public lecture at BYU recently argued that these manuscripts give us a *window* into Joseph’s translation process,⁹² and this viewpoint might have influenced the commentary if not the choice of what to exclude from the commentary (as in a complete neglect of Nibley).

Note also the closing sentence in the excerpt above of editorial comments on the documents in question here: “JS dictated later portions of the Book of Abraham in Nauvoo in 1842” (JSPRT4, p. 192). The footnote for that statement directs readers to p. 245, where we learn that the editors believe that dictation from Joseph Smith was at play in the 1842 Book of Abraham manuscript from Willard Richards because “significant misspellings and rushed letter formation in the entire manuscript suggest that someone — presumably JS — read from the Kirtland-era manuscripts, making occasional changes, while Richards inscribed the text” (p. 245). Many difficult names are actually spelled correctly without revision, and the impression of *rushed* letter formation may be a weak tool for discriminating dictation from visual copying, though I think dictation is plausible in this case. Whether the handwriting and spelling necessitates dictation may be debatable, but there is no evidence that any dictation related to that 1842 document was *from Joseph Smith*. It’s an assumption.

92. Hauglid and Jensen, “A Window into Joseph Smith’s Translation,” 2019. For a discussion of the impact of this presentation and its gaps, see Lindsay, “Friendly Fire from BYU.”

It is possible that most of the Book of Abraham we now have was already completed in 1835, and some scholars argue for that position.⁹³ One clue to consider comes from George W. Robinson's record of a discourse by Joseph Smith on May 6, 1838, in which Joseph "instructed the Church, in the mistories [mysteries] of the Kingdom of God; giving them a history of the Plannets &c. and of Abrahams writings upon the Plannettary System &c."⁹⁴ If Joseph were teaching others about Abraham's cosmological writings, it would seem likely that he had already translated Abraham 3 and provided comments related to Facsimile 2. That would be consistent with the October 1, 1835, journal entry for Joseph Smith:

This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brothers O[liver] Cowdery and W[illiam] W. Phelps, and during the research the principles of Astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients, unfolded to our understanding; the particulars of which will appear hereafter.⁹⁵

Statements in JSPRT4 like "JS dictated later portions of the Book of Abraham in Nauvoo in 1842" may create the impression that dictation means creation of the new text, when the possible dictation of that document may have been, as it was in the case of Manuscripts A and B discussed above, dictation of an existing text in order to make a copy rather than create new material, although it may have involved revisions of the existing text as well. *Translation* may include refining and editing in its broad usage among the early Saints, so caution is needed in interpreting occasional references to translation in journals or other sources.

Commentary that overlooks the possibility of a preexisting document also occurs with the later Manuscript C. In the introduction to Manuscript C, we read:

It is unclear if Phelps copied from an earlier version of the Book of Abraham or if the portion of this manuscript that is in Phelps' handwriting is *the first iteration of that text*. The prefatory material inscribed by Phelps is closely related to the

93. Muhlestein and Hansen, "The Work of Translating."

94. "Discourse, 6 May 1838," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-6-may-1838/1#source-note>.

95. Joseph Smith History, Oct. 1, 1835, in "History, 1838-1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834-2 November 1838]," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/76>.

English explanations of characters found in the Grammar and Alphabet volume. (JSPRT4, p. 217)

Here the editors suggest that Abraham 1:1-3, in the handwriting of Phelps, may be the “first iteration of the text.” They imply it was freshly translated by using bits and pieces pulled from the GAEL. In fact, the corrections in Abraham 1:1-3 are consistent with visual copying of a manuscript and do not fit a scenario of live translation being dictated by Joseph Smith. Here is the transcript of Abraham 1:1-3 in W. W. Phelps’s handwriting from Manuscript C:

Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the CataCombs of Egypts

In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw, that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence, and seeing there was greater happiness and peace and rest, for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same: Having been a follower of righteousness; desiring ~~one~~ <to be> one who possessed great Knowledge; a greater follower of righteousness; <a possessor of greater Knowledge;> a father of many nations; a prince of peace; one who keeps the commandments of God; a rightful heir; a high priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers, from the beginning of time; even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time; even the right of the first born, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through <the> fathers, unto me.⁹⁶

The first error occurs when “desiring to be one” was written as “desiring one.” This is not likely to reflect an error in dictation but is more readily understood as a scribal error caused by skipping a couple of words. The correction was made by scraping off the ink of “one” and writing “to be” over that spot, a process that strikes me as more leisurely than simply striking out the error and continuing to better keep up with dictation.

The next correction is the insertion between existing lines of the phrase “a possessor of greater Knowledge.” Since a related phrase had just been written, “one who possessed great Knowledge,” it would be easy for a scribe making a visual copy to assume that the overlooked phrase was

96. “Book of Abraham Manuscript C,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-c-abraham-11-218/1>.

one that had just been written, and to look to the following new phrase to continue copying, only later noticing that a common scribal error (skipping text) had been made. This could also occur during dictation if the speaker changed his mind and decided to add one more phrase, but a scribal copying error is the more natural possibility here.

Both of the corrections made in this portion of the manuscript point to a scribe copying visually from an existing text. There is absolutely no basis for inferring that this might be “the first iteration” of the text.

The editors here also infer that this text may have been derived from the GAEL. The possibility that the phrases in the GAEL have been influenced by an existing translation does not receive attention in JSPRT4, as far as I can tell. But they are right that there are connections to the GAEL. For example, we find the following definitions of some characters in the GAEL:

Ah-broam. one who possesses great knowledge (p. 13 of the GAEL)

Ahbroam: a follower of righteousness a possessor of greater knowledge (p. 9 of the GAEL)

Since both possession of “great knowledge” and possession of “greater knowledge” exist in the GAEL, it would seem that the concept of both great and greater knowledge was already established (either on an original Book of Abraham document that the GAEL borrows or in the GAEL, if one believes that the GAEL was crafted first), making it less likely that the insertion of “a possessor of greater Knowledge” in Manuscript C was due to a new idea occurring to Joseph Smith during dictation and more likely to be momentary confusion by a scribe copying from an existing manuscript. The “first iteration” suggestion is irresponsible.

The inference in the Introduction to Manuscript C that it may be derived from the GAEL is made more explicit in the Introduction to the volume, where we read that “some evidence” exists for the derivation of the Book of Abraham from the GAEL, rather than the other way around:

Some evidence indicates that material from the Grammar and Alphabet volume was incorporated into at least one portion of the Book of Abraham text in Kirtland. (JSPRT4, xxv)

A footnote for this statement references an article by Chris Smith⁹⁷ which argues that Abraham 1:1–3 seems too choppy and looks like it has

97. Christopher C. Smith, “The Dependence of Abraham 1:1-3 on the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*

been crudely assembled from various phrases in the GAEL, which he assumes must pre-date the translation:

The best evidence for considering the GAEL a *modus operandi* for translation of part of the Book of Abraham is that this method of composition left its mark on the text itself. In Abraham 1:1–3 we find the prophet’s most explicit and thoroughgoing attempt to derive the Book of Abraham translation from the GAEL. Very few connecting parts of speech are supplied between the lexemes (units of vocabulary) here; almost every phrase has a correspondent in the Grammar. Material is drawn from all five degrees. This undoubtedly accounts for the choppiness and redundancy of these three verses, which stylistically are very different from the remainder of the Book of Abraham. Verse 3, for example, reads as though it has been cobbled together from a series of dictionary entries. Note the abundance of appositives introduced by the words *even* and *or*:

It was conferred upon me from the fathers; it came down from the fathers, from the beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time, even the right of the firstborn, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through the fathers unto me. (Abraham 1:3)

The stylistic difference from the rest of the book is a sure sign that these three verses are dependent on the GAEL, rather than the other way around.⁹⁸

Seeing a decisive difference in style in 3 verses that discriminate them from the rest of the text seems like a highly subjective way to evaluate the origins of a text. Introducing phrases with *even* and *or* in seemingly choppy passages is actually not unique to Abraham 1:3. After five more uses of *even* just in Abraham 1, we soon encounter Abraham 2:11 and then Abraham 3:5, both of which employ *even* and *or*.

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right

29 (2009): 38-54, https://www.academia.edu/2357346/The_Dependence_of_Abraham_1_1-3_on_the_Egyptian_Alphabet_and_Grammar.

98. Ibid., 47.

shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, *or* the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, *even* with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, *even* of life eternal. (Abraham 2:11)

And the Lord said unto me: The planet which is the lesser light, lesser than that which is to rule the day, *even* the night, is above *or* greater than that upon which thou standest in point of reckoning, for it moveth in order more slow; this is in order because it standeth above the earth upon which thou standest, therefore the reckoning of its time is not so many as to its number of days, and of months, and of years. (Abraham 3:5)

Taking context *and* style into account, note that Abraham 1:3's allegedly unique stylistic problems involve discussion of origins and beginnings: "the *beginning of time, yea, even from the beginning, or before* the foundation of the earth, ... *even the right of the firstborn, or the first man.*" In context, the style of that language seems akin to what we find much later in Abraham 4:4–5, where *or* is again used:

4 And they (the Gods) comprehended the light, for it was bright; and they divided the light, *or* caused it to be divided, from the darkness.

5 And the Gods called the light Day, and the darkness they called Night. And it came to pass that from the evening until morning they called night; and from the morning until the evening they called day; and this was *the first, or the beginning*, of that which they called day and night.

Here we have references to *beginning* and *first* combined with *or*, just as in Abraham 1:3. Is there any substance to Chris Smith's subjective impressions? His claim, cited with approval in JSPRT4, that his perceived difference in style "is a sure sign that these three verses are dependent on the GAEL, rather than the other way around" simply reflects the opinion of an author who has overlooked the possibility that the GAEL was derived from an already existing translation. It is surprising that the article would be cited as if it were legitimate evidence for derivation of the Book of Abraham from the GAEL.

An interesting pattern in Abraham 1:1–2 suggests more than copying and pasting random phrases from the GAEL. Verse 1 begins with Abraham "at the residence of my fathers" but then seeks something more: "another place of residence." This theme of "seeking more" is

developed in verse 2 as Abraham seeks “greater happiness and peace and rest,” seeks “the blessings of the fathers,” and though already a follower of righteousness, desires “to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge.” And then he comes back to the concept that begins his text, the fathers, as he seeks to be “even a father of many nations, a prince of peace,” and thus he “became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.” Verse 3 then develops that theme more fully, and may have some structure to it:

- A. from the fathers / from the fathers, [fathers]
- B. from the beginning of time / from the beginning [beginnings]
- C. before the foundation of the earth / to the present time [earth & time]
- B. right of the firstborn / first man, who is Adam [firsts]
- A. first father / through the fathers [fathers]

Chiasmus may not have been intended (Robert F. Smith proposes larger chiastic structures for portions of the Book of Abraham, one of numerous evidences of antiquity he discusses for the Book of Abraham⁹⁹), but the “redundancy” that Chris Smith sees as a telltale sign of fabrication from clumsy cobbling of phrases from the GAEL may reflect more purposeful authorship in the original text, even if the translation could be reworked to better meet the stylistic expectations of modern readers and critics.

Chris Smith makes a valuable point, however, in observing a connection between Abraham 1 and a blessing Oliver gave in the summer or fall of 1835, apparently penned in September 1835.¹⁰⁰ A more complete excerpt from the JSP website follows:

But before baptism, our souls were drawn out in mighty prayer to know how we might obtain the blessings of baptism and of the Holy Spirit, according to the order of God, and we diligently *saught for the right of the fathers*, and the authority of the holy priesthood, and the power to *admin[ister] in the same: for we desired to be followers of righteousness and the possessors of greater knowledge*, even the knowledge of the mysteries of

99. Robert F. Smith, “A Brief Assessment of the Book of Abraham,” Version 10, March 21, 2019, <https://www.scribd.com/document/118810727/A-Brief-Assessment-of-the-LDS-Book-of-Abraham>.

100. Smith, “The Dependence of Abraham 1:1-3 on the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” 52. Smith cites Patriarchal Blessing book, 1:8-9, *Early Mormon Documents*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 451-54.

the kingdom of God. Therefore, we repaired to the woods, even as our father Joseph said we should, that is to the bush, and called upon the name of the Lord, and he answered us out of the heavens, and while we were in the heavenly vision the angel came down and bestowed upon us this priesthood; and then, as I have said, we repaired to the water and were baptized. After this we received the high and holy priesthood,¹⁰¹

Oliver is using language from Abraham 1:2, where Abraham “sought for the *blessings of the fathers*, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to *administer the same*, ... *desiring* also to be ... a greater *follower of righteousness*, and *to possess a greater knowledge*, and ... I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.” Christopher Smith recognizes that Cowdery is drawing upon the Book of Abraham, not scattered phrases from the GAEL, and thus properly concludes that Abraham 1:1–3 must have been completed before September 1835. However, he improperly concludes that the GAEL therefore must have been completed before September 1835, maintaining the assumption that the GAEL must have come first.¹⁰² It’s much more reasonable to recognize that it came later and was drawing upon the translation for whatever its purpose was. Since JSPRT4 cites Christopher Smith’s paper, it would have been helpful to recognize that its value is not in providing evidence of derivation from the GAEL, but in raising the bar for theories of the Book of Abraham’s being derived from the GAEL, since such theories no longer have the luxury of allowing the GAEL to be completed in late November or early 1836. The concepts from Abraham 1:1–3 are at the core of what is in the GAEL, not just a tiny portion that could have been added as an addendum.

6. Improperly Downplaying Common Knowledge about Champollion and the Nature of the Egyptian Language: Egyptomania without Champollion?

The editors of JSPRT4 seem to minimize the state of public knowledge about the Rosetta Stone and the work of Young and Champollion in understanding the basics of the Egyptian language, thus raising the

101. Oliver Cowdery, “Patriarchal Blessings,” 1:8-9, cited in “Priesthood Restoration,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/priesthood-restoration>. The JSP site states that this was “probably recorded summer/fall 1835,” while Christopher Smith states it was Sept. 1835.

102. Smith, “The Dependence of Abraham 1:1-3 on the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,” 53.

possibility that Joseph Smith really may have thought he could translate hundreds of words of text from a single Egyptian character, as we have in a standard critical narrative about how Joseph allegedly translated the Book of Abraham. In this, they are not alone. Brian Hauglid's coauthor for the forthcoming *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Beleaguered Scripture*,¹⁰³ Terryl Givens, one of the scholars on the Joseph Smith Papers' National Advisory Board, has expressed similar views, perhaps influenced by the prominent work of Hauglid and Jensen. In a 2017 lecture, Givens expressed his views on Egyptomania and its influence on Joseph Smith and the Book of Abraham.¹⁰⁴ Below is my transcription of a segment from the video as Givens explains how he thinks Joseph thought about Egyptian hieroglyphs:

We've had a few references today to Nineteenth Century Egyptomania. The point that I want to make is that the kind of Egyptomania that I think might have been most relevant to Joseph Smith's religious fashioning predates the Napoleonic engagement with Egypt. It goes back to the Early Modern period. And I'm going to just summarize this very quickly for you by saying this, that the notion of hieroglyphs in particular in the Enlightenment and Romantic circles carried echoes of priestly powers of expression and discernment. But the term was also taken to imply an almost mystical concision and economy of expression unknown to modern languages. Many language theorists working in the Nineteenth Century to try to trace language to its Adamic form were convinced that the further back you go, the more compressed and concise language becomes. By the time you get to the hieroglyph, ... you have *the linguistic equivalent of a kind of neutron bomb*, so that the notion being that here is *a priestly emblem that has magically and mystically oracularly condensed within itself worlds of meaning which only a priestly power can unlock* and allow to blossom into fullness. *When I think of Joseph Smith laboring over the Egyptian Papyri and the whole Abrahamic cosmology*

103. See the announcement for Terryl Givens and Brian Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism's Beleaguered Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming in August 2019), <https://www.terrylgivens.com/projects-1>.

104. Terryl Givens, "Joseph Smith and Translation: Notes Toward a Theoretical Framework" (The Mormon Translation Conference, Logan Utah, 16 March 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYkEPHH2xB8>.

*that emerges out of this, it seems to me that we get a perfect understanding of how the hieroglyph was understood.*¹⁰⁵

While eloquently expressed, this statement may not accurately represent the views likely to be held by Americans in Joseph's day. Indeed, this may be the result of projecting the views of Hauglid and others onto the data to see the desired confirmation of those views.

Hauglid's co-editor of JSPRT4, Robin Jensen, has expressed a viewpoint similar to Givens's:

While it does not appear that Joseph Smith or his associates drew directly upon earlier scholarship regarding ancient Egypt, they shared with such scholars assumptions about the Egyptian language. For instance, they believed the language was mysterious, symbolic, and closely linked to Hebrew and other languages that reflected a more refined and "pure" language.¹⁰⁶

The view that hieroglyphs were mysterious characters packed with hidden meaning dates back to Athanasius Kircher in the seventeenth century but quickly declined with knowledge of the Rosetta Stone. In light of Champollion's work, by 1831 the *North American Review* was describing Kircher's views in this manner: "how utterly baseless, how laboriously absurd was his entire scheme of interpretation."¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, Givens and Jensen (along with Hauglid, apparently) place Joseph into the mindset prior to the Napoleonic engagement with Egypt when the Rosetta Stone was discovered and the world quickly realized that Egyptian was actually a running language with some kind of reasonable relationship to alphabetic systems. Givens implies that Joseph and his brethren were somehow swept up in Egyptomania without being aware of the hottest news in the world of Egyptomania, namely, that the Rosetta Stone had been found. The story of the Rosetta Stone was widely discussed news dating back to 1799, which would later

105. Ibid., 14:15 to 15:50, emphasis added.

106. Robin Scott Jensen, "The Joseph Smith Papers and the Book of Abraham," *BYU Religious Education Review* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2017), 16, https://rsc.byu.edu/sites/default/files/review/Review_10.1_webv2%20%28low%29.pdf. See also Brian Hauglid, "The Book of Abraham and Translating the Sacred," *BYU Religious Education Review* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2017), 12; <https://rsc.byu.edu/review/2017-winter-review-magazine-101/book-abraham-two-parts>.

107. Review of J.-G.-Honoré Greppo, *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion, Jun.: and on the Advantages Which It Offers to Sacred Criticism*, transl. Isaac William Stuart (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1830); *North American Review* 32 (1831):100, <https://archive.org/details/jstor-25102877/page/n5>.

be coupled with the 1822 news that Champollion had begun to decipher Egyptian. These were key drivers for Egyptomania in the nineteenth century, and cannot be so readily excised from Joseph's world. Givens' view arguably would divorce Joseph from his environment in 1835 and from the very Egyptomania that supposedly inspired him.

Of course, the technical details of Champollion's work were not widely known. In fact, those details may not have lived up to the hype. Champollion's discoveries were somewhat piecemeal, and still did not allow him to fully read and understand the Rosetta Stone. It would not be until 1858, over two decades after Champollion's death, that a full translation of the Rosetta Stone would be published in Philadelphia, an effort that required significant work and further advances.¹⁰⁸

Even if the Joseph Smith of 1835 were still in "uneducated farm boy mode" and had been unaware of the Rosetta Stone and Champollion before purchasing the mummies and scrolls from Chandler, Chandler and the many other educated people who would come to Kirtland to see the artifacts and meet Joseph likely would have broken the well-known news to him.

Givens's view, romantic as it may be, also requires divorcing Joseph from the Book of Mormon. Joseph's views on Egyptian arguably should not depart wildly from the views expressed by Mormon in the manuscript Joseph translated. Mormon in Mormon 9:32 tells us that

we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, *according to our manner of speech.*

The reformed Egyptian of the Book of Mormon *reflected speech*. It must have been phonetic, or at least the reformed script Mormon referred to, like the reformed Egyptian script of demotic.

Mormon's statement is not the only vital clue on the nature of Egyptian. King Benjamin in Mosiah 1:4 explains that Lehi taught the language of the Egyptians to his children so they could read the brass plates, and so they could teach that to their children in turn. The implication, of course, is that Egyptian is a language you can teach to

108. R. B. Parkinson, Whitfield Diffie, Mary Fischer, and R. S. Simpson, *Cracking Codes: The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 41-42, <https://books.google.com.hk/books?id=QD9g1mMaAAsC&printsec=frontcover>.

your children, one that does not require mystic oracular gifts to draw out mountains of hidden text from a molehill of ink.

Apart from indications in the Book of Mormon about the nature of the Egyptian on the brass plates and the reformed Egyptian used by Mormon, Joseph Smith also expressed his viewpoint directly. Regarding the title page of the Book of Mormon, which came from the last plate (not the last character!) in the Nephite record, Joseph said:

I would mention here also in order to correct a misunderstanding, which has gone abroad concerning the title page of the Book of Mormon, that it is not a composition of mine or of any other man's who has lived or does live in this generation, but that it is a literal translation taken from the last leaf of the plates, on the left hand side of the collection of plates, the language running same as all Hebrew writing in general.¹⁰⁹

It was a *running language*, with a chunk of language on the last plate corresponding to the chunk of English on our title page, not an utterly mystical language, one where each squiggle could be paragraphs of English. With his experience in reformed Egyptian behind him, does it stand to reason that once he saw the Egyptian scrolls in 1835, he would suddenly reverse course and see it as pure mysticism completely unlike Hebrew, no longer phonetic nor a “running language”?

Further evidence against such a view comes from Joseph's comments on the meaning of the Facsimiles. The four hieroglyphs for the four sons of Horus in Facsimile 2 (labeled as element 6) become a remarkably concise “the four quarters of the earth,” a statement that is actually quite accurate. Other statements he makes regarding the facsimiles and the characters tend to be equally brief. No sign of magical compactness with neutron bombs of meaning waiting to be detonated by the Prophet. That idea died swiftly, though not universally, as news of the translation of the Rosetta Stone spread. It was old news when Joseph saw the scrolls. While it is possible that Joseph and the people of Kirtland had remained in the dark about the Rosetta Stone and Champollion, it seems unlikely. But certainly there was still nothing practical available from Champollion's work in that day to guide them, even if they had had access to French publications. For that, revelation would be needed, and it seems they then would do their best on their own to follow suit and create their own “Alphabet.”

109. Joseph Smith, “History, circa June–October 1839 [Draft 1],” 9.

Unfortunately, Givens's view on how Joseph saw the Egyptian language may have been shaped by an unwarranted opinion from the editors of JSPRT4, where we read the questionable view that Champollion's work really wasn't well known until decades later and that it did not really change the way typical people thought about Egyptian. Here's the statement from the opening pages:

Even after Champollion's groundbreaking discoveries, though, some continued to assert competing theories about Egyptian hieroglyphs, whether they rejected Champollion's findings or were ignorant of them. Indeed, in America in the 1830s and 1840s, Champollion's findings were available to only a small group of scholars who either read them in French or gleaned them from a limited number of English translations or summaries. (JSPRT4, p. xviii)

That's an astonishing assertion. Americans in the 1830s had not heard of Champollion's work? Only a tiny group of scholars were in on the news? Should we also assume that news of the Rosetta Stone and its related implications had also gone unnoticed in the US?

Even before Champollion made his discoveries and turned his surname into a household term, the discovery of the Rosetta Stone may have begun influencing common knowledge in the United States about Egyptian as an alphabetic language. Witness the history book published in the United States in 1814 by the American clergyman Samuel Whelpley, *A Compend of History from the Earliest Times*:

It is upwards of 3600 years since Memnon, the Egyptian, invented the letters of the alphabet; about three centuries after which they were introduced by Cadmus into Greece. To perpetuate the memory of events, and to convey ideas to persons absent, invention first suggested the use of figures, or images of things intended. When these were found inadequate, symbols, emblematic of more complex ideas, were adopted. But the defect of these, in expressing combinations and abstract ideas, must have soon appeared: and was probably followed by the discovery, that a certain combination of arbitrary marks might be adapted to the expression of all articulate sounds. This was doubtless the noblest of all inventions, as it has proved a most wonderful means of improving the human mind. It not only answered the highest expectations of its inventor, but doubtless far exceeded all conjecture; as it proved to be the

father of all the liberal arts and sciences, and has continued the widening source of knowledge, happiness, and admiration to every age.

The most ancient of authentic historians with whom we are acquainted is Moses. He was born in Egypt 1571 years before Christ, at a time, as we have already remarked, when Egypt was the most enlightened of all nations. He, being the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, was of course educated in all their learning. . . .

*When Moses wrote, alphabetic writing had been known in Egypt several centuries, and if, we consider the rapid improvements which that very ingenious people made in art and science, we shall see cause to believe that, in Moses' time, they had made very considerable progress.*¹¹⁰

Is it possible that Joseph and the Saints were familiar with Whelpley? Absolutely, for "Whepleys Compend" (sic) is on the 1844 donation list for the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute.¹¹¹

But what of Champollion, whose discoveries began to be known in 1822? Had word reached the United States in Joseph's day? If so, one clue might be found in books and newspapers that mention Champollion. Do they need to take several sentences to explain to all the nonscholars and non-French speakers just who he is and what the Rosetta Stone was in order to bring readers up to speed, or do they act as if everyone knows the man and what he did? Below is an 1828 newspaper story from the *Delaware Journal*:

Curious Ancient Manuscripts. — M. Champollion, jun., who is about to embark at Marseilles for Egypt, having inspected a valuable collection of ancient manuscripts in the possession of M. Sallier, an inhabitant of Aix, has discovered two rolls of papyrus relating "The History and wars of the Reign of Sesotris the Great." These manuscripts are dated the ninth year of that Monarch's reign. Sesotris-Rhames or the Great, according to the calculations of the German chronologists, lived in the time

110. Samuel Whelpley, *A Compend of History from the Earliest Times* (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1814), 25-26, <https://archive.org/details/CompendOfHistory1814/page/n27>.

111. Christopher C. Jones, "The Complete Record of the Nauvoo Library and Literary Institute," *Mormon Historical Studies* 10/1 (Spring 2009): 180-204, <http://mormonhistoricsites.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/The-Complete-Record-of-the-Nauvoo-Library-and-Literary-Institute.pdf>. Whelpley's volume is shown at 192.

of Moses, and was the son, as is supposed, of the Pharaoh, who perished in the Red Sea, while pursuing the Israelites.

This remarkable document, which, after a lapse of more than three thousand years, M. Champollion has discovered, as by a miracle, may contain details the interest of which will be readily imagined, on some of the grandest incidents of Sacred History. On the 2d inst. The Academical Society of Aix received the report of M. Sallier relative to this discovery. A third roll has also been found, treating either on astronomy or astrology, but more probably on both these sciences combined. It has not yet been opened; but it is hoped that it will throw some additional light upon the conceptions of the heavenly system entertained by the Egyptians and Chaldeans, the first people who devoted themselves to that study. — *Paris Paper*.¹¹²

There are echoes of the Book of Abraham here, with mysterious ancient scrolls possibly involving issues from sacred history and a recognition that one scroll might pertain to astronomy/astrology. The contents of those scrolls was the news — not the fact that Monsieur Champollion, whose first name needed not to be given, could read Egyptian. That was assumed to be common knowledge for common readers.

Given that newspapers in the nineteenth century become much less likely to have been preserved and digitized the older they are, it can be difficult to find the original announcements that described who Champollion was and what he had done. Mentions of him that I have found in the 1820s and 1830s already treat him as common knowledge and don't give his full name. Thus on April 10, 1823, for example, when the *National Gazette* in Philadelphia printed news about Champollion, he was already simply M. Champollion.¹¹³ The article does mention the progress that is being made in reading Egyptian based on his “alphabet of the Phonetic hieroglyphics” and “guided by this hieroglyphic alphabet” — reports on Champollion frequently speak of his alphabet, a usage that may well be the inspiration for the Egyptian Alphabet documents and the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language. But the primary news being reported in this 1823 story is that Professor T. Lacour in France had just published a paper on hieroglyphics claiming that

112. *Delaware Journal*, October 10, 1828, p. 2, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025530/1828-10-10/ed-1/seq-2/>.

113. “Scientific and Literary Travels,” *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), April 10, 1823, p. 2, https://www.newspapers.com/clip/20023486/champollions_decipherment_of_rosetta/.

understanding Hebrew may be the key to better understanding Egyptian, for he was convinced that the Egyptian language at the time of Moses was similar to Hebrew. (Such concepts may well have been what motivated Joseph Smith to delve into Hebrew to advance his own intellectual pursuit of Egyptian.)

Likewise in the New York newspaper *The Morning Herald* we read in September 1837 of a rabbi's travels to Egypt:

It happened, too, that about the time that our Rabbi [Joseph Wolff] went to the East, the singular monumental histories of ancient Egypt began to be revealed to the world by Champollion, Young, Rossellini, and other *savans* of Europe. From these revelations, the public enthusiasm of the west was roused to its highest pitch. The opening of the tombs of Thebes, Luxor, Memphis, Medinet Abu, astonished all the learned, and startled all the religious.¹¹⁴

Joseph Wolf traveled to Egypt in 1821 and returned to England in 1826.¹¹⁵ This was the time when the news of the decipherment work of Champollion and Young “astonished all the learned, and startled all the religious,” not just a few scholars who could read French. Or Italian and Latin, for that matter, for Ippolito Rossellini, also apparently a household name in the 1830s, the friend of Champollion and founder of Egyptology in Italy, published his works in Italian and Latin.¹¹⁶ As with Champollion, while the technical details may have required knowledge of a foreign language, the news did not.

Maybe folks in Delaware and the East Coast were up to speed on this, but what about the more remote hinterland of Ohio? Could those more rural folks, perhaps swept up in their own agrarian brand of Egyptomania, have heard anything of the Rosetta Stone and its translator? The following story from an Ohio newspaper in 1837 reminds us of the history of the Rosetta Stone, but assumes that readers understand its multilingual nature. Champollion and Dr. Young are mentioned as if readers will know these famous men with no need to give their first names or the details of what they did regarding their

114. *The Morning Herald*, September 7, 1837, p. 2, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030312/1837-09-07/ed-1/seq-2/>.

115. Wikipedia, s.v. “Joseph Wolff,” last edited May 5, 2019, 08:22, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Wolff.

116. Wikipedia, s.v. “Ippolito Rosellini,” last edited April 24, 2019 18:18, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ippolito_Rosellini.

discoveries “concerning the hieroglyphic language of Egypt.” The source is the *Maumee Express* of Maumee City, Ohio, November 18, 1837:

Antique. — The Currators [sic] of the Albany Institute [Albany, New York] acknowledge the donation of a copy in plaster of the *Rosetta Stone*, now in the British Museum, from Henry James Esq. ...

The interest of this piece of antiquity is increased by the fact that all the discoveries of Dr. Young and Champollion concerning the hieroglyphic language of Egypt, originated in a study of the inscription on it.¹¹⁷

It is taken for granted that readers know of Champollion and also of his predecessor in studies of the Rosetta Stone, Dr. Thomas Young.¹¹⁸

Another source to consider is the 1830 publication in the US of the book *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion, Jun.: and on the Advantages Which It Offers to Sacred Criticism* by J.-G.-Honoré Greppo, translated from French.¹¹⁹ The eminent American scholar Moses Stuart offered his views in the Preface:

The great problem of Hieroglyphics is at last solved; and the veil has been lifted up which hid from past ages the mysteries that lay concealed under them. We now know that they were usually employed as mere *alphabetic letters*; that when thus read, they give us regular composition in the Coptic or old Egyptian language; and that, as the Coptic is understood by a considerable number of scholars in Europe, we are in a fair way of knowing all which the Egyptian *phonetic* or *alphabetic* Hieroglyphics on the monuments, were designed to teach.

We know also that Hieroglyphics were often employed as *symbols*, i.e., as the *signs of ideas*; and these symbols are to a great extent already known, and progress in the knowledge of them is gradual and constant.

117. *Maumee Express*, November 18, 1837, p. 2, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85026142/1837-11-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.

118. See Wikipedia, s.v. “Thomas Young (scientist),” last edited May 26, 2019, 05:28, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Young_\(scientist\)#Egyptian_hieroglyph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Young_(scientist)#Egyptian_hieroglyph).

119. J.-G.-Honoré Greppo, *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion, Jun.: and on the Advantages Which It Offers to Sacred Criticism*, trans.. Isaac William Stuart (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1830), <https://archive.org/details/essayonhierogly00stuagoog/page/n8>.

It is also ascertained, that there are Hieroglyphics, or rather, groups of them, which have a mystical meaning; such as they have generally been supposed to convey.¹²⁰

Stuart leaves open the possibility that some characters or groups of characters can have a deeper mystical meaning but tells us they were usually simply used as phonetic alphabetic symbols, consistent with the implications we find from the reformed Egyptian of the Book of Mormon.

Val Sederholm has expounded on some of the issues above, describing what news of Champollion would mean for ordinary people during the Kirtland era. He adds further evidence and concludes that the literature of that era “shows both keen interest and an easy familiarity [with Champollion] — not to know about these breakthroughs in 1837 would be like not knowing about the railroad or the steam engine. ... Ohioans in 1837 didn’t need a Jean-Francois attached to their Champollion.”¹²¹

If Joseph had retreated from his earlier statements about reformed Egyptian (and relevant statements in the Book of Mormon) and in 1835 began to view Egyptian as a mysterious oracular language where each character could yield vast treasures of information, why seek to develop an *alphabet* of the language? Isn’t the very idea of an Egyptian alphabet contrary to the notions of Kircher? Champollion’s work was widely reported to be yielding an “alphabet of Egyptian,” but if Joseph were ignorant of Champollion rather than informed by his achievement, why would he have imagined an *alphabet* could be possible or have any value? The very word seems to imply a belief that the Egyptian language is at least largely phonetic, and seems to reflect awareness of the Rosetta Stone and Champollion. The 1828 Webster dictionary gives this definition for “alphabet”: “The letters of a language arranged in the customary order; the series of letters which form the elements of speech.”¹²² Kircher’s pre-Rosetta notions don’t leave much room for pursuing such. If the notions espoused in JSPRT4 are correct, why would the Saints even hope to create an “alphabet” (complete with sounds!) for such a language?

120. Moses Stuart, “Preface,” in Greppo, *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion, Jun.*, iii–iv.

121. Val Sederholm, “What did Joseph Smith say about the nature of Egyptian hieroglyphs?” *I Began to Reflect* (blog), May 17, 2017, <https://valsederholm.blogspot.com/2017/05/what-did-ohioans-in-joseph-smiths-day.html>.

122. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828, <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/alphabet>.

7. Minor But Sometimes Important Details

There may be other gaps on some of the minor details in the book. One issue, for example, is the method used to identify handwriting. I may be missing something, but I have not noticed any description of who made the determinations and what process was used. This may be especially important in identifying Joseph Smith's handwriting in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. A small fragment is attributed to Joseph Smith in the Egyptian Alphabet document A for the first page and a half. But do we really know that was Joseph writing? I ask out of curiosity, not as an expert on nineteenth-century handwriting, though I have heard that handwriting from that era can be easily confused, since many people learned to write in similar styles. Just glancing at the part attributed to Joseph in Egyptian Alphabet document A and comparing it to his handwriting in other documents from around 1835 (e.g., his Letter to Sally Waterman Phelps from July 20, 1835,¹²³ and his journal¹²⁴), one can notice some differences in spite of basic similarities, such as a dramatic difference in the capital Z (simple in the Egyptian Alphabet, more complex and ornate in other documents), an apparent difference in capital I, and differences in details on several other letters. I expect there was a thorough investigation and probably review from handwriting experts, but that detail has escaped me if it is in the book.

Other details may be minor and not of much concern to most readers. However, for those searching for particular details, one challenge is that some of the transcriptions on the website and, to a lesser degree, in the book, may be in error. For example, in searching for names related to *Katumin*, I could not find one example (an instance of *Kah tou mun* in the GAEL) that I had just seen because the transcription on the website had *Kah ton mun*,¹²⁵ while the book has the more accurate *Kah tou mun* (JSPRT4, pp. 122-23). The *n* and *u* in handwriting can look much the same, but *Kah tou mun* seems to be the correct choice.

123. Joseph Smith, "Letter to Sally Waterman Phelps, 20 July 1835," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-sally-waterman-phelps-20-july-1835/1>.

124. Joseph Smith, "Journal Entry, September 22, 1835," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/2>. Use the "scribe" icons in the transcript to identify handwriting. Joseph Smith's starts with the "September 23" entry.

125. GAEL, p. 4 with transcript, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/grammar-and-alphabet-of-the-egyptian-language-circa-july-circa-november-1835/10>.

I also encountered several cases where an *o* in handwriting appeared to be misread as *a*, giving, for example, *Iata* when *Iota* seems to be meant. The two letters can often be very close, but there are usually clues if one compares other instances of those letters on the same page, such as a tendency for the tail stroke of *a* to descend further than in *o* or a tendency for *a* to be more open at the top than *o*. One example is the *Iata* listed at JSPRT4, p. 119, for the image on p. 118, the second page of the GAEL. An example of *e* and *o* probably being confused is the listing of “Gahmel” at JSPRT4, p. 181 (image from GAEL at p. 180), which I believe should be *Gahmol*. But in general, JSPRT4 seems to be meticulous and accurate in transcriptions, while the outstanding website has not yet incorporated what may be relatively recent corrections in the book. But the website also remains an extremely useful and valuable resource.

8. Missing “First Aid” and Ignoring the Positives

My final problem area to discuss is the general failure to include *first aid* for some of the thorny issues as well as a tendency to ignore the many positives that could be at least hinted at for those interested in the strengths of the Book of Abraham and not just the obvious warts.

Looking through JSPRT4 and its helpful “Comparison of Characters” section (pp. 350–80), students of the Book of Abraham who have heard that Joseph Smith used the GAEL to create his “translation” might be startled to see how very few of the many characters considered in the GAEL are actually used on Book of Abraham manuscripts, and especially startled to see how few of the 28 characters on the Book of Abraham manuscripts are actually found in the GAEL or the Egyptian Alphabet documents. Of those 28 characters, I see only three (labeled characters 3.11a, 5.27, and 5.28) that are in the GAEL or the Egyptian Alphabet documents, one of which is part of the 18 characters said to be found on the scroll called the “Fragment of Breathing Permit for Horus-A,” with eight characters apparently not found on the scrolls or in the GAEL or Egyptian Alphabet documents. If the GAEL shows us how Joseph did the translation, it seems to apply to only about ten percent of the characters in the margins of the Book of Abraham manuscripts. The numbers raise serious doubts to common theories about how the translation was done. It would have been helpful for the editors of JSPRT4 to make several such rudimentary observations to help faithful readers understand the gaps in some of the arguments used against the Book of Abraham. Such factual observations can be made in an academically appropriate way without “tainting” the volume with ugly apologetics

or otherwise losing face before the academic world. However, such information might have weakened the apparent favored theory of the JSPRT4 editors that the Book of Abraham was at least partially derived from the GAEL and not the other way around, and would also have undermined the controversial thesis put forward in JSPRT4 that the twin Book of Abraham manuscripts with Egyptian characters in the margins represent Joseph Smith's "translation" of those characters, being dictated live by Joseph to his scribes, presumably drawing upon prior work with the Egyptian Alphabets and the GAEL.

The commentary, however, need not be and, in my opinion, should not be blind to the debates that swirl around the Book of Abraham manuscripts. This narrative of the critics claiming that the KEP shows how the Book of Abraham was "translated" fails in several ways, and the editorial comments on these documents could have and should have prepared readers to understand that there are plausible reasons to reject the critical narrative. On the other hand, yes, it is possible to be a faithful member of the Church and accept that narrative, which holds the Book of Abraham to be inspired or inspiring fiction, a mostly or purely human work that occasionally manages to convey interesting doctrine and uplifting sentiments through a fictional (if not fraudulent) medium. But for those who see the Book of Abraham as a prophetic work with some kind of roots in antiquity, we expect that a Church publication with these valuable documents should not leave the reader defenseless against the well-crafted and increasingly disseminated claims of critics. We should expect the publication to at least hint at reasonable frameworks for coping with the challenges to faith that are underway based on arguments related to these documents. Such first aid is not to be found in this volume.

Similar statements can be made for many other issues in JSPRT4, where other scholars have provided materials to help readers come to terms with challenges in the Book of Abraham manuscripts and appreciate the strengths therein — but such aid is generally lacking in this volume. The complete absence of High Nibley, one of the most prolific and most cited scholars to have dealt with Book of Abraham issues, is genuinely startling. Even if one sharply disagrees with Nibley and finds his work "abhorrent," to neglect his pioneering work and his extensive research culminating in *One Eternal Round* seems simply improper and unscholarly. The neglect of the evidence in support of the Book of Abraham or the frameworks for coping with Book of Abraham issues from faithful Egyptologists Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee is also

disconcerting, although nine works of Gee’s many dozens at least make it into the list of works cited, as do two of Muhlestein’s many dozens.

Scholarship involving the claims of any faith and canonized scriptures from that faith cannot be done in a vacuum of pretended indifference to the implications of the study. When it comes to the scriptures, theories and interpretations of data that may undermine or disturb the faith of readers should be discussed with an intent to also let readers know that others have already dealt with the issues and found reasonable frameworks for dealing with the problems that appear.¹²⁶ This is a vital role of apologetics: not to ignore problems and stumbling blocks, but to give others reasons to maintain hope and faith, and to provide roadmaps for coping with difficult terrain such that stumbling blocks do not necessarily become impasses to faith.

As a final observation, there is an unfortunate misunderstanding among many Latter-day Saints that apologetics is the opposite of scholarship. To defend, in some people’s minds, is to lose credibility and to promote blind faith rather than scholarship. But in my opinion, good scholarship is often behind the best work that helps us better understand and respect the Church’s scriptures. Today there are many intelligent resources that readers can turn to for appreciating the strengths of the Book of Abraham.¹²⁷ Students of the Book of Abraham ought to know, for example, that the time and place of the origin of the Joseph Smith Papyri, namely Thebes around 200 B.C., correspond with the very time and place where there was a fascination with Abraham and Moses among Egyptian priests, making it the time and place where one would expect to find an

126. Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 217-43, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/no-weapon-shall-prosper/egyptian-papyri-and-book-abraham-faithful-egyptological-point-view>.

127. Some general resources might include (1) Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*; (2) Nibley, *One Eternal Round*; (3) “What evidence does the Book of Abraham demonstrate to support its own antiquity?,” FAIRMormon, https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Question:_What_evidence_does_the_Book_of_Abraham_demonstrate_to_support_its_own_antiquity%3F; (4) Michael D. Rhodes, “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus: Twenty Years Later,” 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120204014818/http://home.comcast.net/~michael.rhodes/JosephSmithHypocephalus.pdf>; (5) Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View”; and (6) Robert F. Smith, “A Brief Assessment of the Book of Abraham.”

actual Book of Abraham text in Egypt, if one existed.¹²⁸ They should be aware of the general plausibility of many aspects of the Book of Abraham in light of what we can determine about the ancient setting treated in the text.¹²⁹

They should understand the evidence for the potential authenticity of several names in the Book of Abraham.¹³⁰ They should know that the Book of Abraham's cosmology and the theme of the divine council fit remarkably well in the world of the ancient Near East.¹³¹ They may wish to learn that there is support for *Shinehah* as a term that means "the sun,"¹³² or that modern archaeological evidence provides tentative support for the ancient place name *Olishem* in the right time and place to correspond to the Book of Abraham,¹³³ or that there might be support in ancient Egyptian for some of the strange titles given to various celestial objects in the Book of Abraham.¹³⁴ They should know that the once ridiculed idea of Egyptian priests offering human sacrifice has been shown to have significant

128. Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 49-65; Muhlestein, "The Religious and Cultural Background of Joseph Smith Papyrus I"; and Muhlestein, "Abraham, Isaac, and Osiris-Michael."

129. 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, Brigham Young University, 2001), 63-98, <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/3-historical-plausibility-historicity-book>.

130. John Tvedtnes, "Ancient Names and Words in the Book of Abraham and Related Kirtland Egyptian Papers" (2005 FAIR Conference, August 5, 2005), <https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2005-John-Tvedtnes.pdf>. (See the links on the final page to watch the presentation on YouTube.)

131. Stephen Smoot, "Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no.2 (2013), <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=2891&index=3>.

132. *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. "Shinehah," last modified May 12, 2018, 23:59, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/SHINEHAH>.

133. Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 98, 101. Also see the press release "Prophet Abraham's lost city found in Turkey's Kilis," *The Hurriyet Daily News*, August 16, 2013, <http://www.hurriyettailynews.com/prophet-abrahams-lost-city-found-in-turkeys-kilis-52591>. On this matter, Gee has noted the potential value but urges patience as more work is needed. See John Gee, "Has Olishem Been Discovered?," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 104-7, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/pdf-control.php/publications/jbms/22/2/9Gee_Olishem%20Discovered.pdf.

134. Val Sederholm, "An Egyptologist Looks at Enish-go-on-dosh in LDS Book of Abraham, Facsimile 2, Figure 5," *I Began to Reflect* (blog), Jan. 13, 2014, <https://valsederholm.blogspot.com/2014/01/an-egyptologist-looks-at-enish-go-on.html>.

support, in part from Kerry Muhlestein's PhD dissertation and related publications.¹³⁵ Sound scholarship can also lead students to awareness of extensive ancient traditions consistent with numerous extrabiblical details of the Book of Abraham,¹³⁶ such as the attempt to slay Abraham for his opposition to idol worship, the sin of his father in pursuing idolatry, and many other details. They may wish to learn that at least some of the comments about the Facsimiles have strong plausibility, such as the crocodile being the god of Pharaoh,¹³⁷ the four sons of Horus (Fig. 6 in Facs. 2) representing the "four quarters of the earth," the association of Hathor (the cow in Facs. 2) with the sun,¹³⁸ the association of bird wings with the expanse of heaven, the association of the solar barque with the number 1000,¹³⁹ the relationship of Facs. 1 to the hieroglyph for prayer,¹⁴⁰ etc. While the lofty standard of academic credibility and the dream

135. Kerry Muhlestein, *Violence in the Service of Order: The Religious Framework for Sanctioned Killing in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011), https://www.academia.edu/10132431/Violence_in_the_Service_of_Order_the_Religious_Framework_for_Sanctioned_Killing_in_Ancient_Egypt_British_Archaeological_Reports_International_Series_2299_Oxford_Archaeopress_2011_. See also his "Sacred Violence: When Ancient Egyptian Punishment was Dressed in Ritual Trappings," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 78, no. 4 (2015): 229-35, https://www.academia.edu/23378038/_Sacred_Violence_When_Ancient_Egyptian_Punishment_was_Dressed_in_Ritual_Trappings_Near_Eastern_Archaeology_78_4_2015_229-235; and "Royal Executions: Evidence Bearing on the Subject of Sanctioned Killing in the Middle Kingdom," *The Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 51/2 (2008): 181-208, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1890&context=facpub>.

136. John Gee, Brian Hauglid, and John Tvedtnes, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship: 2001).

137. Quinten Barney, "Sobek: The Idolatrous God of Pharaoh Amenemhet III," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 22-27, https://web.archive.org/web/20171115002357/https://publications.mi.byu.edu/pdf-control.php/publications/jbms/22/2/2Barney_Sobek.pdf. Also see "The Crocodile God of Pharaoh in Mesopotamia," *FARMS Update No. 108*, in *Insights* 16, no. 5 (Oct. 1996): 2, <https://publications.mi.byu.edu/pdf-control.php/publications/insights/16/5/16-5%20October%201996.pdf>.

138. Jeff Lindsay, "Questions About the Book of Abraham, Part 2: Evidences for Plausibility," *LDS FAQ*, last updated February 5, 2018, https://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_Abraham2.shtml.

139. *Ibid.*

140. E. A. Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary* (London: John Murray, 1920), xcvi, <https://archive.org/details/egyptianhierogly01budguoft/page/xcvi>. See also Jeff Lindsay, "A Leg Up on the Critics: Facsimile 1 of the Book of Abraham," *Mormanity* (blog), Jan. 11, 2007, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2007/01/leg-up-on-critics-facsimile-1-of-book.html>.

of objectivity may make it difficult or improper to raise or even hint at such issues in JSPRT4, that volume seems to do too much to underscore the positions of our critics. There is a lack of balance that I hope can be corrected at some point in the future.

Postscript: A Window into the Editors' Stance and More Friendly Fire

As this paper was nearing publication, the Maxwell Institute revamped their website after roughly a week of downtime, introducing dramatic changes and some painful losses.¹⁴¹ The new website gave pride of place to a new podcast featuring the editors of JSPRT4 as they discussed the Book of Abraham and what they had learned through their editorial work.¹⁴² The interview was conducted by Blair Hodges of the Maxwell Institute. Unfortunately, the comments of both editors underscore some of the concerns raised to this point in this paper.

The risk of editorial blindness to many crucial issues relative to the Book of Abraham and the possible bias against or neglect of evidence supporting the Book of Abraham as a revealed work rooted in antiquity (the disreputable stance of “abhorrent” apologists, per Hauglid’s above-mentioned denunciatory Facebook comment) was first made clear to me when I heard of a damaged testimony from a Church member who listened to Hauglid and Jensen’s January 2019 seminar at BYU.¹⁴³ As noted above, in that presentation problems with the Book of Abraham and Joseph’s translation were raised with no hint of “first aid.” After writing several blog posts with criticism of that presentation and of Hauglid and Jensen’s personal opinions that appear to have influenced comments, citations, and omissions in JSPRT4 — concerns that I am confident were made known to the editors — I was disappointed to find similar comments in the new podcast. The podcast presumably did not have the tight time constraints of the BYU seminar, which I initially hoped might have been the reason for the lack of discussion of the strengths of the Book of Abraham. It was not an official scholarly document that could

141. Jeff Lindsay, “Lost Treasures at the Maxwell Institute?,” *Mormanity* (blog), June 27, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/06/lost-treasures-from-maxwell-institute.html>.

142. “MIPodcast #92 — Joseph Smith’s Egyptian papers, with Robin Jensen & Brian Hauglid,” Brian Hauglid and Robin Jensen, interviewed by Blair Hodges, Neal A. Maxwell Institute, June 27, 2019, <https://mi.byu.edu/mip-hauglid-jensen/>.

143. Hauglid and Jensen, “A Window into Joseph Smith’s Translation,” 2019. See also Lindsay, “Friendly Fire from BYU.”

possibly require strict rules against discussing faith-promoting material. It was simply an informal opportunity to discuss and share views from the editors and what they have learned from their study.

Several problems are apparent in this podcast. One is that an overly simplistic view of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers is promulgated when Hauglid says:

In other words, they'll take characters from the papyri, they'll put them in the left column, and I think they tried to do a pronunciation guide with how to say this particular glyph or whatever.

Later he adds:

Those documents [the Book of Abraham manuscripts with added characters] are unique because they have in the left margins characters taken from the fragment that was once attached to the vignette that we get Facsimile One from.

An important point that needs to be underscored is that many of the glyphs in the KEP and on some Book of Abraham manuscripts are not Egyptian at all and do not come from the papyri. As noted earlier, at best only 7 of the 62 characters given translations in the KEP are found on the key papyrus fragment. Some of the KEP characters come from a letter W. W. Phelps wrote about the “pure language” before the scrolls ever reached Kirtland, and some appear to come from other sources such as Greek, including archaic Greek, Masonic ciphers, etc. Only about ten percent of the characters on the Book of Abraham manuscripts both have definitions in the GAEL and are found on the papyrus, raising serious questions about the theory that the GAEL was an attempt to translate the papyri and was somehow used to translate the Book of Abraham. Some of the characters in the Book of Abraham manuscripts are not found on the papyri at all. To overlook the puzzling diversity of origins of the characters in the KEP is severe oversimplification that irons out some vital clues about what is or is not going on in the work with so-called “Egyptian” characters.

Another questionable viewpoint expressed in the podcast is that the Book of Abraham was an evolving product reflecting Joseph’s culture and theology, which began in 1835 for only Abraham 1 through 2:18, and then, years later in Nauvoo as Joseph’s thinking evolved, he added the remaining material. The editors are quite confident of this:

JENSEN: One thing that I find interesting, if you look at the Joseph Smith Papers volume, this volume we’ve been talking about, the majority of the documents were created in Kirtland in 1835. But if you look at just the Book of Abraham

itself, **the majority of the Book of Abraham was actually produced, translated in Nauvoo.** I think that's something that not many have realized, where this **really was divided into two parts.** Joseph Smith first began work in Kirtland and then he stopped, the temple was being built, he moved to Missouri, there were all sorts of problems in Missouri with non-Mormon neighbors, and then it took a long time to get things settled in Nauvoo trying to get that going.

HODGES: Why did that break matter? Why should anyone care that it had this break?

JENSEN: So I find it fascinating because Joseph Smith as religious leader — **you can trace his developing, understanding of theology, of the things that he's teaching to Latter-day Saints.** So to know that the first portion of the Book of Abraham is in Kirtland, historians can better, then, understand how the theology as found in the first portion of the Book of Abraham was read by Kirtland Saints and the theology that was, to that point, revealed to those Saints.

But then you look at the later portion of the Book of Abraham and, placing that in a Kirtland theological setting, doesn't make as much sense. But when you look to the Nauvoo theological setting, Joseph Smith has revealed all sorts of new information that it fits better. There's a better context to that in Nauvoo than in Kirtland.

HAUGLID: And Joseph Smith also incorporates Hebrew terms that he learned after his Joshua Seixas tutoring at the Hebrew school in Kirtland that come out after his tutoring experience in Nauvoo, where he put some of those in Abraham 3 and there's other things that you find with some Hebrew connections that he would have learned.

So I think we've kind of got it where we can see what's going on in the Kirtland area there pretty well. The Abraham chapter one to chapter two, verse eighteen seems to fit just fine right in that time period. Then, as Robin said, when you get up to Nauvoo that also fits that context really well in terms of his theology, in terms of how they're looking at the language, how they're incorporating some of the Hebrew. It fits into that Nauvoo period. Plus, you also have some plain

language coming out of Joseph Smith's journal saying "we're translating on March eighth and March ninth for the tenth number of the *Times and Seasons*." So that fits as well. So you've got some historical backing there.

This split scenario is countered by scholarship from one of the peers decried by Hauglid. In an important work that is not acknowledged in JSPRT4, in the podcast, nor in the January seminar, Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen have provided compelling reasons for accepting that much more than Abraham 1 and 2 had been translated by 1835.¹⁴⁴ If the editors had been more open to the possibility that the Book of Abraham translation preceded the creation of the relevant portions of the existing Egyptian Alphabet documents and the GAEL, then it would seem much more logical that those documents are drawing upon bits and pieces of the translation, including terms related to the supposedly later cosmological material and to the creation account, rather than providing a tool that could have been used in the translation of the papyri. Again, given that roughly 90% of the "Egyptian" characters translated in the GAEL and the Egyptian Alphabet documents are not even found on the papyrus fragment supposedly being translated, theories of Joseph using the GAEL to translate the papyrus seem untenable.

Further, the use of Hebrew learned from Joshua Seixas in 1836 does not date the translation that employs those term to the Nauvoo era, nor does it even require that it occurred after 1836. Relevant Hebrew terms could have been added as late editorial glosses in preparing and revising the original 1835 material for publication. It was in 1835 when Joseph, while translating, indicated that the system of astronomy had been unfolded to him.¹⁴⁵ That would be consistent with Facsimile 2 and Abraham 3 having been already revealed by that time.

Among the numerous evidences raised by Muhlestein and Hansen for the translation being largely done in 1835, one of them is the vastly different pace of translation required if Joseph had translated Abraham 2:19 through Abraham 5 in the day-and-a-half allocated to translation in 1842. Compared to the days of known translation in 1835, he would have to have translated over 2,200 words a day in 1842 compared to an average of about 250 words a day in 1835, a pace nine times greater. Rather than generating new verses in 1842, a more reasonable hypothesis is that Joseph was editing the existing translation to incorporate Hebrew

144. Muhlestein and Hansen, "The Work of Translating."

145. Joseph Smith History, Oct. 1, 1835.

and lessons learned from Hebrew study and to make other changes to prepare the manuscript for publication.

The prior scholarship of Muhlestein and Hansen, along with many others, should have been carefully addressed in some way for JSPRT4, and especially for the podcast.

The editors seem to see Joseph's later use of material related to the last three chapters of the Book of Abraham and Facsimile 2 as evidence that his theology (and cosmology) came first, then the "translation" with related material. Here the editors should have considered the possibility that Joseph had been learning from what he translated and applied it in later discourses. To see his evolution in thinking as the cause for the additional material in Abraham 3–5 rather than being partly a response to what he learned from Abraham 3–5 reflects an overly humanistic, secular view of Joseph Smith's work in creating scripture. It may be that the editors and other scholars associated with this project are comfortable with that approach, but it does not represent the only reasonable approach. Further, it does not represent sound scholarship if approaches from other scholars are not fairly considered, and it does not fairly represent the position of the Church and faithful members (including many scholars) who see the ancient and the divine in Joseph's translations of the Book of Abraham, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Moses.

Let us now turn to a critical issue. The editors reveal in the podcast that they are keenly aware that people have left the Church over arguments about Joseph's allegedly failed translation of the Book of Abraham from the Joseph Smith Papyri. At that point, it would have been reasonable to offer some consolation and encouragement based on the strengths of the Book of Abraham and the many evidences for its antiquity and divine translation. Instead, both editors take a stance that seems consistent with Hauglid's "coming out" on Facebook:

HODGES: You're just trying to make the documents themselves accessible so that people can then do work based on the documents.

HAUGLID: Right. It's a resource for people. And so I agree. There's plenty to talk about in terms of the content of the Book of Abraham.

JENSEN: I think increasingly you're seeing less angst over the content of the Book of Abraham than you are with the context of the Book of Abraham. There've been people who may have

left the church or felt frustrated with the historical narrative. It's not so much about the content itself. It's not about the actual narrative of the Book of Abraham. It's about the way in which it was produced, and I find that interesting, not surprising at all that Joseph Smith as prophet, seer, and revelator, there's a lot hanging on the Book of Abraham and what it means for Joseph Smith's revelatory process, his translation. It's been such an important symbol for Joseph Smith's calling.

And when people look to the Book of Abraham and when people say, "I left the church because of the Book of Abraham," that's shorthand that I think almost everyone understands is, "It's not the content. It's "Joseph Smith produced this text from papyri. The papyri does not actually contain the Book of Abraham, therefore Joseph Smith is a fraud." That is, frankly, a reasonable, logical conclusion to someone whose testimony is based upon this simplistic view of Joseph Smith's translation. If we have simplistic views of how Joseph Smith produced his scripture, then it's not going to take much to topple that simplistic understanding. So I think that producing a better understanding — kind of this nuanced understanding of production of scripture by Joseph Smith — is not only good scholarship, but I think it's good for Latter-day Saints throughout the world.

HAUGLID: Let me just add that — maybe in defense of those who do leave — they were raised in the church. They were given the narrative they were given, that they were supposed to believe. There was no nuancing that was going on, really, with any of that as we're trying to do now with what happened with the Book of Abraham. So yes, it's a big decision that these people sometimes make, and perhaps there is a simplistic aspect to that, their testimonies, but I'm of the opinion that it's not all their fault.

Those believing Joseph's translation to be divinely inspired are told that leaving the Church may be a "reasonable, logical conclusion" based on that expectation, but the expectation is said to be overly simplistic. The fault for people leaving the Church over the Book of Abraham is laid, in part, at the doorstep of the Church for teaching that Joseph actually translated the Book of Abraham through the gift and power of God.

Jensen oversimplifies by claiming that the Church has given believers a particular “narrative” for the translation of the Book of Abraham.

Further, in the above statement we see the “translation” is not valid as those with “simplistic” testimonies had unwisely expected. Hauglid and Jensen seem to see the “translation” as Joseph’s (failed) human toying with the Egyptian on the Joseph Smith Papyri — there is no mention of other possibilities that many other scholars have discussed at length, no mention of the clear evidences that something other than fraud and guesswork is behind the text, but an apparent acknowledgement that the critics have been right all along about the Book of Abraham, echoing Hauglid’s earlier, online agreement with Dan Vogel.

Unlike JSPRT4, Nibley is mentioned in the podcast, but only to dismiss his arguments regarding the possibility of translation from a missing scroll and his views on the KEP coming after the translation. The basis for the editors’ belief that they have largely “overturned” Nibley’s views is that they can see bits and pieces of the Book of Abraham in the KEP, as if the Book of Abraham later worked out those concepts more fully. But that’s a subjective view. Why aren’t the bits and pieces of the Book of Abraham concepts found in the KEP pointing to derivation from the Book of Abraham? They argue that since Joseph’s history speaks of work on the Egyptian alphabet, whatever that was (we don’t know that it was the same as the extant manuscripts — an assumption is involved in the editors’ argument), around the same time as the translation, that it was a concurrent process and that the alphabet was therefore used somehow in the translation. That process, however, could easily involve periods of revelatory translation followed by personal attempts to understand Egyptian and crack the code. There is no new evidence presented here that overturns the reasons offered by Nibley and others for the KEP to be a derivative work based on translated material.

Both editors call for a more mature, nuanced approach, which seems to mean that as Joseph evolved over time, he injected his theological views into the framework of a fictional Book of Abraham from a failed but perhaps sincerely attempted “translation” of papyri that he could not understand. So, to understand the Book of Abraham, we don’t need to look to antiquity, to ancient literature about Abraham, or to what Egyptian priests may have known and written about Abraham, but we should only turn to the nineteenth century and consider how Joseph perceived the papyri in his nineteenth century setting, the only context that determined the fruits of his work:

JENSEN: Yep. Intellectually you want to divide them. You want to say “well the papyri, that’s one thing. The nineteenth century setting, that’s another thing. They’re not together.” In some senses that is true. But in another way, we have to understand how Joseph Smith and others viewed the papyri, viewed them in their nineteenth-century context, without trying to take on our own understanding. There’s been a lot of work in Egyptology since Joseph Smith’s day, obviously.

HODGES: I would say the vast majority of usable work has been.

JENSEN: So it’s very tempting to say “well, Joseph Smith didn’t know what he was talking about. Oliver Cowdery, Phelps, others, they were naive in thinking they could even make sense of this,” but for Joseph and his contemporaries this was a real effort. This was a real attempt to understand these papyri for what they were, what they could offer them, and what they could teach about the universality of human nature.

HAUGLID: Yes. That’s kind of where I was going to go. You have really a first response to all this Egyptomania stuff going on with all these papyri fragments and such coming in. We’re seeing Joseph Smith as one of those first responders in a sense to this material coming into their possession, and what they’re making of it is sometimes, for us we might say it’s off, it’s not Egyptology at all, and that’s okay, but just the fact that how they responded to it tells us things. It helps us understand where they’re coming from and this Egyptian material triggers that for us. So we get kind of a close-up view in a sense.

JENSEN: I also often tell people that Joseph Smith and other’s work in understanding, trying to decipher these papyri, tells us more about their own worldview than it does about the ancient world.

So in light of the apparent problems the editors choose to emphasize, it’s “tempting to say Joseph was a fraud,” but he was really trying, rather sincerely, in “a real effort.”

This “nuanced” approach advocated by Hauglid and Jensen not only makes the translation of the Book of Abraham a pious fraud, but raises obvious questions about Joseph’s translation of the reformed Egyptian that yielded the Book of Mormon. We don’t even get the reassurance

that since there are compelling reasons to accept the Book of Mormon as a legitimate translation of an ancient document through the gift and power of God, then perhaps our approach to the challenges of the Book of Abraham should be given enough “nuancing” to recognize that there may be answers to the challenges it seems to face based on the “simplistic” assumptions used by critics.

Ironically, the dangerously “simplistic” approach that can cause so much harm is not that of believing Joseph could give revealed translations of ancient documents through the gift and power of God, but the overly simplistic approach taken by the critics: “the only papyri Joseph attempted to translate are the surviving fragments,” “no missing scrolls can account for anything,” “these twin documents from two scribes mean Joseph was dictating the translation live from these few Egyptian characters,” “the GAEL is the source of the translation,” etc. Hauglid and Jensen lend credibility to those perspectives in their podcast, their Maxwell Institute seminar, and in their editorial work for JSPRT4. They have excluded significant and well-considered alternative possibilities, even going so far as to excise any mention of some of the most important scholarship and scholars related to the field of their work. This is not balanced scholarship, but, even if purely unintentional, a highly biased perspective that unnecessarily undermines the position of the Church, the original mission of the Maxwell Institute, and the faith of many members of the Church.

The issue of the twin Book of Abraham manuscripts by Frederick Williams and Warren Parrish is particularly egregious in the podcast. The idea that Joseph Smith is dictating the Book of Abraham translation live to his scribes, based on “Egyptian” characters from the papyri in the margins (some of which are not Egyptian) is an old hypothesis from critics, but is raised in response to Hodges’ question: “Did the Joseph Smith Papers research team uncover anything new that was previously unknown about these documents while putting this book together?” The contribution of the editors on this issue was realizing that the scribes were writing on paper from a common source, but the textual evidence of simultaneous work is already clear. The issue, though, is what was occurring in this process. Was it really dictation from Joseph Smith giving original translation?

JENSEN: So what we have is pretty compelling evidence that they’re there at the same time using the same piece of paper, **creating this text, the Book of Abraham**, that gives us a new appreciation to the dictation process. Usually when

we hear about **Joseph Smith dictating**, it's him dictating to one singular scribe. So it's interesting to imagine to try to reconstruct what that would look like with Joseph Smith dictating to multiple clerks.

HAUGLID: It's interesting that we're now talking about this when years and years ago Ed Ashment proposed the same thing. It created a firestorm of rejection amongst our LDS scholars, but **now here we are talking about this and agreeing with Ed Ashment.**

HODGES: About having multiple clerks in particular at the same time?

HAUGLID: Receiving dictation, yeah.

HODGES: Why was that so controversial?

JENSEN: I have no idea.

HAUGLID: Probably because it was Ed Ashment that proposed it. [laughter]

Simultaneous writing, yes, but what is the evidence that they were “creating” the Book of Abraham in that moment? That is the argument of the critics — one that is based on assumptions, not evidence. In fact, as noted above, analysis of the text suggests that the most plausible scenario for the twin documents is that Warren Parrish was reading from an existing manuscript until he ceased and probably left, at which time the other scribe began copying directly by himself and then committed a major scribal error typical of copying visually, an unlikely error in oral dictation. In other words, it is highly unlikely that Joseph was dictating.

Arguments based on the twin manuscripts are at the heart of modern attacks on the Book of Abraham. This is a pivotal issue that Dan Vogel uses to undermine acceptance of the Book of Abraham as a revealed text, one that has weakened the “simplistic” testimonies of many unprepared to see past the gaps in the argument.

Why is this controversial? The JSPRT4 editors unfortunately have no idea, but many students of the Book of Abraham may recognize the controversy. If the assumptions of our editors about these documents are valid, it suggests that Joseph Smith was giving live translation for a handful of characters, translation apparently derived from the characters rather than characters being added by the scribes to an already existing translation (for reasons that aren't clear).

This scenario is controversial because it suggests that we do, in fact, have the very characters that Joseph was translating (no mention, again, is made of the fact that several of these characters are not even Egyptian), that the Joseph Smith Papyri were the source of Joseph's translation work, that he foolishly thought that one character could give over 100 words of translation, and that what the Church considers to be a revealed translation is idiotic and inept, with nothing of any value. The inability of the editors to understand why that position is controversial and potentially harmful is deeply puzzling. But it's consistent with the tone of their previous webinar, rich in presenting warts without first aid. For those who feel that Joseph translated the Book of Abraham with divine power from an ancient document of some kind, such unbalanced and overly simplistic negative information can be harmful.

It is time to recognize that in spite of the meticulous scholarship regarding the photography and transcription of the documents in this volume, significant and harmful bias has crept into JSPRT4 and in the recent publications (a seminar and the follow-up podcast) of the Maxwell Institute. Significant harm has been done to the testimonies of some, not because the Church has irresponsibly taught them that Joseph Smith translated with the gift and power of God, nor because the believers were too simplistic in believing what they had been taught. It is true that the issues are complex, that warts exist, and that nuance is needed, but not the nuance that says, "The critics were right; the Church was wrong. But Joseph had some inspiring ideas in his fiction shaped by his nineteenth-century environment." We need to strengthen our awareness of the other side of the story, of the positives around the Book of Abraham and the abundant evidences of antiquity, to help those who struggle to have the balanced information needed to have a truly more nuanced testimony. "Friendly fire" that zealously overlooks the existence of "first aid" is not the solution.

Conclusion

JSPRT4 is an extremely valuable resource for scholarship, especially when coupled with the outstanding and innovative website of the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Unfortunately, the commentary in many ways reflects the personal biases of the editors, which results in not only missed opportunities but also may have done some mischief that advances the cause of critics of Joseph Smith. There is much more to the story and significantly different approaches in dealing with these documents that should have been considered in the name of fairness and

open scholarship that recognizes the related work of others. Of particular concern may be errors in the dating of the documents, due in part to failure to consider the possibility of the Hebrew study on the generation of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. It is hoped that some of these defects may be remedied with a future addendum.

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