



Type: Journal Article

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## Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms

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Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,  
Volume 47 (2021), pp. 263-338

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

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# INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT  
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 47 · 2021 · Pages 263 - 338

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)  
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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## FRAMING THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM: PRESUMPTIONS AND PARADIGMS

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Stephen O. Smoot

Review of Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021). 250 pp. \$18.95 (softback).

**Abstract:** *The Book of Abraham continues to undergo scrutiny in both academic and polemical publications. The latest offering of substance in the latter category, Dan Vogel's Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique, criticizes the work of those who argue for the antiquity and inspiration of the Book of Abraham and makes a sustained argument that the book is, instead, modern pseudepigrapha written by a pious fraud (Joseph Smith) in the nineteenth century. Book of Abraham Apologetics lays out a particular naturalistic approach to this text that works best only when certain metaphysical and methodological assumptions are taken for granted. This approach, however, as well as most of his arguments against the Book of Abraham's historicity, are severely undermined both by Vogel's inability to properly assess the evidence and his metaphysical or ideological commitments. This review critiques Vogel's critique of Book of Abraham apologetics and offers an alternative to his questionable framing of the text and its interpretation.*

At first glance, the Book of Abraham would hardly appear to warrant much, if any, apprehension; after all, the book occupies a meager fourteen pages (five chapters) in the current edition of the Pearl of Great Price as canonized by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But looks, as the saying goes, can be deceiving, and popular prejudice notwithstanding, the Book of Abraham has proven both resilient and, in some ways, elusive.<sup>1</sup> Hugh Nibley wisely warned us a generation ago that the road ahead for anybody wishing to assess the origin and nature of the Book of Abraham by academic means is daunting. "Consider for

a moment the scope and complexity of the materials with which the student *must* cope if he would undertake a serious study of the Book of Abraham's authenticity," wrote Nibley in 1968.

At the very least he must be thoroughly familiar with (1) the texts of the "Joseph Smith Papyri" identified as belonging to the Book of the Dead, (2) the content and nature of the mysterious "Sen-sen" fragment, (3) the so-called "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" attributed to Joseph Smith, (4) statements by and about Joseph Smith concerning the nature of the Book of Abraham and its origin, (5) the original document of Facsimile 1 with its accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions, (6) the text of the Book of Abraham itself in its various editions, (7) the three Facsimiles as reproduced in various editions of the Pearl of Great Price, (8) Joseph Smith's explanation of the Facsimiles, (9) the large and growing literature of ancient traditions and legends about Abraham in Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, Greek, Slavonic, etc., (10) the studies and opinions of modern scholars on all aspects of the Book of Abraham.<sup>2</sup>

Nibley was not being alarmist with this assessment. After all, the canonical text of the Book of Abraham purports to be Joseph Smith's inspired translation of a historical narrative attributed to the eponymous biblical patriarch and preserved on an ancient Egyptian papyrus. This means, at a minimum, that anyone wishing to pass judgment on the authenticity of the text is going to need some kind of training in, or at least exposure to, the following disciplines: (1) Syro-Levantine, Anatolian, and/or Mesopotamian archaeology of the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 2200–1600 BC), in order to suitably consider the historical plausibility of the events depicted in the text;<sup>3</sup> (2) the Hebrew Bible, in order to conduct a proper comparative analysis of the biblical material (specifically Genesis 1:1–2:20; 11:27–12:13) that overlaps with the text;<sup>4</sup> (3) Egyptology, including its subdiscipline papyrology and specialization in the funerary literature of the Ptolemaic Period, in order to assess the nature and content of the Joseph Smith Papyri and the three facsimiles that accompany the text, as well as to evaluate the historical and cultural setting of the papyri;<sup>5</sup> (4) Greco-Roman Judaism, particularly Egyptian Judaism, in order to evaluate the significance of the many extra-biblical texts relating to Abraham composed during this period;<sup>6</sup> (5) nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint history and theology, especially the theology of "translation" and the production of scripture in the religious

worldview of Joseph Smith, in order to accurately understand how the Prophet produced the Book of Abraham and what he and contemporaries thought about the text;<sup>7</sup> (6) textual criticism, to accurately understand the authorship and transmission of the manuscripts related to Joseph Smith's Abraham project.<sup>8</sup>

As a consequence of this truly staggering state of affairs, an extensive bibliography on practically all facets of the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri has emerged, especially after the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> One would, of course, be excused from wanting to wade too deep into what can too easily turn into mystifying exercises in the worst kind of scholastic hair-splitting. Be that as it may, this is the intimidating reality awaiting anyone who wishes to summit the mountain of Book of Abraham scholarship (and, for that matter, polemics). Those who wish to compartmentalize and limit their approach to the text by focusing on just one specific aspect, or who otherwise wish to approach the text from just one discipline or background, are welcome to do so, but they should be aware that their analysis, if unable to adequately account for each of these interlocking subcategories, is going to have limited explanatory power. In other words, "If you decide you want to enter the debate, you ought to do some real homework. There is a large bibliography, and there are dozens of theories to master, not to mention a large body of evidence." To make matters worse, the Book of Abraham and "the [Joseph Smith Papyri] are part of a sectarian debate" that shows no signs of abating. Passions then, as now, continue to run high, and "for nearly one hundred years it has been standard operating procedure to dig for dirt on the background of anyone who enters the debate, and if one sides with the Mormons, the opponents have no qualms about bearing false witness." In brief, "one simply cannot win playing this game," so "if you do address the issue in print, you need to know that the two sides in the dispute will never leave you alone. It is a life sentence with no possibility of parole."<sup>10</sup>

### **The Book of Abraham and its Critics**

After Hugh Nibley, whose voluminous writing has laid much of the bedrock for those who accept the historicity of the Book of Abraham and approach it as an ancient text,<sup>11</sup> undoubtedly the most prominent Latter-day Saint scholar who has contributed to Book of Abraham scholarship is the Yale-trained Egyptologist John Gee, currently the William Gay Research Professor in the department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at Brigham Young University. Gee has been writing on the

Book of Abraham since the early 1990s,<sup>12</sup> and his most recent book-length treatment appeared in 2017.<sup>13</sup> Besides Gee is the UCLA-trained Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein, a professor of Ancient Scripture at BYU who, besides providing meaningful academic contributions to the conversation, has also been instrumental in popularizing Book of Abraham scholarship and apologetics for a general Latter-day Saint audience.<sup>14</sup> These three scholars have, unquestionably, been the most influential in shaping the overall contours of the mainstream Latter-day Saint apologetic reaction to challenges made to the inspired authenticity (including the historicity) of the Book of Abraham.<sup>15</sup>

As of right now, the most determined and outspoken critics of the Book of Abraham and its orthodox apologists worthy of any serious consideration are Brian M. Hauglid, a retired BYU colleague of Gee and Muhlestein who now finds their work “abhorrent,”<sup>16</sup> and Dan Vogel, an independent author and Joseph Smith biographer who has returned to the polemical contest surrounding the Book of Abraham after a several-decades hiatus.<sup>17</sup> It is Vogel’s most recent offering, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique*,<sup>18</sup> that is the focus of this review.

I should note that until very recently I would have placed Robert K. Ritner, Rowe Professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, among those in “the other corner.” However, sadly, Ritner “died July 25 [2021] after a years-long battle with kidney disease and leukemia.”<sup>19</sup> Even if he is no longer standing in the critics’ corner, Ritner’s critical works continue to be cited among those who, like Hauglid and Vogel, reject the historicity of the Book of Abraham.<sup>20</sup>

Even before jumping into the actual text of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, something immediately stood out to me when I first picked up the volume. Three endorsements accompany Vogel’s critique of apologetic efforts on behalf of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. That itself is not remarkable. What is remarkable are the identities of two of the endorsers. The first endorsement comes from Susan Staker, an independent scholar of Latter-day Saint history<sup>21</sup> who believes “this book should be welcomed more broadly for engaging a range of scholarly discussions about Joseph Smith’s Egyptian project.” Hers is followed by two additional endorsements by one former and one current research associate with BYU’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship: John Christopher Thomas and Brian Hauglid, who both also speak highly of the book.<sup>22</sup> Thomas praises Vogel for his “painstaking research” that in his opinion produces “a compelling narrative of the emergence,

history, and development of the Book of Abraham that is sure to become standard reading and part of the academic discourse.” Hauglid applauds Vogel for his “erudite, methodical, and thorough treatment of the subject.” The book (a “must-read”), he continues, “bring[s] into high relief the difficulties of walking the razor’s edge of faith and transparency.” One might be forgiven for getting the impression that this is a polite way of saying the book is (or at least should be) effective at getting believers to question their faith in the authenticity of the text, especially since Vogel welcomes Hauglid as a compatriot and a useful foil against Gee and Muhlestein.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the significance of two Maxwell Institute scholars endorsing what effectively amounts to an attack on Joseph Smith’s prophetic credibility is perhaps best left alone for another time. If nothing else, Thomas’ and Hauglid’s endorsements signal that the culture wars (academic and otherwise) surrounding the Book of Abraham are evolving in some unexpected ways and leaves one suspicious of what this may portend for the ideological trajectory of a Church-funded enterprise such as the Maxwell Institute.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever Vogel may lack in formal academic training<sup>25</sup> he makes up for with a fairly impressive publication record (if only in terms of quantity) and a sort of rugged, autodidactic historiographical moxie. Thanks to his YouTube channel and recent appearance on a popular anti-Mormon podcast, he also enjoys celebrity status among disaffected and ex-members of the Church.<sup>26</sup> Vogel is an ex-Latter-day Saint atheist who in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* (249–50), like on previous occasions, voices his view that Joseph Smith was a sincere but deluded religious charlatan (a so-called “pious fraud,” to use the fashionable euphemism), and that his scriptural texts are the products of his imaginative (and semiconsciously fraudulent) engagement with his nineteenth-century environment instead of divine revelation (which in Vogel’s worldview doesn’t exist). Indeed, Vogel has made his *Weltanschauung* as it relates to Joseph Smith’s truth claims abundantly clear:

To my mind, the most obvious solution ... is to suggest that Smith was a well-intentioned “pious deceiver” or, perhaps otherwise worded, a “sincere fraud,” someone who prevaricated for “good” reasons. Admittedly, the terms are not entirely satisfying. Nevertheless, ‘pious’ connotes genuine religious conviction, while I apply “fraud” or “deceiver” only to describe *some* of Smith’s activities. I believe that Smith believed he was called of God, yet occasionally engaged



in fraudulent activities in order to preach God's word as effectively as possible. ...

No biographer is completely free of bias. As is no doubt apparent, my inclination is to interpret any claim of the paranormal — precognition, clairvoyance, telekinesis, telepathy — as delusion or fraud. I do not claim that the supernatural does not exist, for it is impossible to prove a negative. I maintain only that the evidence upon which such claims rest is unconvincing to me.

...

I believe that during his early career as a treasure seer, he was a charlatan but came to believe that he was, in fact, called of God and thereafter occasionally used deceit to bolster his religious message.<sup>27</sup>

In brief, Vogel rejects Joseph Smith's supernatural claims because "there is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural."<sup>28</sup> This actually makes his new book a fine example of exactly what we would expect from a metaphysically atheistic and naturalistic approach to a book of scripture that purports to be the inspired translation of the writings of an equally inspired ancient prophet; that is to say, *Book of Abraham Apologetics* approaches its subject with a paradigm that from the outset does not even allow for the possibility that the Book of Abraham is actually anything like what it claims to be. Vogel is certainly not alone in this. As Nibley observed long ago to great effect, it has been almost routine for the Book of Abraham's most ardent skeptics to begin with the assumption that Joseph Smith was incapable of translating an ancient text through revelation because either revelation isn't real or has ceased.<sup>29</sup> Such a paradigm, unsurprisingly, has the tendency to prejudice the conclusions of the reader, who is asked to at least consider that the text just might be what it claims it to be. I thus applaud Vogel for his forthrightness and candor when he frankly admits at the outset that he "see[s] the Book of Abraham as a product of the nineteenth century," even if he then quite unbelievably tries to assure readers that his "conclusions are based entirely on a dispassionate, balanced analysis of the relevant historical documents" (xvii). I likewise commend Vogel for at least making token gestures of attempting to refute the evidence for the historicity of the Book of Abraham that challenge his beliefs about the nature of the text, even if it is painfully obvious throughout *Book of Abraham Apologetics* that he has little to none of the specialization

mentioned above that is essential to critically engage the issues and thereby offer a substantive verdict.

### On “Objectivity”

Since he presents himself to his readers as a scholar who, unlike his apologist foes, offers a cool, even-tempered, no-nonsense analysis of the documentary record (xvi–xvii), it behooves us to ask whether Vogel’s assumed naturalistic paradigm might in any way compromise his feigned objectivity; whether, indeed, our would-be dragoman leading us through this mess is up to the task of navigating the intricacies of the subject. Before we answer this, let us first turn to the sage observations of Kerry Muhlestein, who with admirable frankness has voiced an important point self-evidently obvious to all but the most mulishly ideological. At the 2014 annual FairMormon conference and again at the same’s 2020 conference, Muhlestein raised the (clearly true) point that all those who approach the Book of Abraham bring with them both general assumptions about how they think the world works and assumptions specific to Joseph Smith’s claims to inspired seership.<sup>30</sup> Muhlestein reminds us “how important the beginning premise or the beginning assumption is that people make” when they approach books that purport to be inspired scripture, and how “often we don’t realize this.” He continues,

I think this is a little bit akin to our assumptions about the validity of revelation as a source of knowledge. There are many people in the world [including Vogel] who are certain that [revelation] is not a valid source of knowledge. And beginning with that assumption then anything having to do with the restoration and Joseph Smith as a prophet has to be discarded. They have to ignore any evidence that would support [the notion that Joseph Smith was a prophet,] and I’ve seen this happen. I’ve seen people who are critical of Joseph Smith when something comes up that kind of supports something he had translated through inspiration.<sup>31</sup>

Because these persons do not allow for the possibility that Joseph Smith could have translated an ancient document by revelation, they must “explain things away because it doesn’t fit in with their beginning assumption.” Muhlestein, on the other hand, not only allows for the possibility but positively believes that Joseph Smith received revelation to translate ancient texts, and so he “start[s] out with an

assumption that the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon and anything else that we get from the restored gospel is true,” and therefore attempts to harmonize evidence “into that paradigm.” He doesn’t, however, feel the need “to defend that paradigm; [he] feel[s] that [he] want[s] to understand the evidence that [he] find[s] within that paradigm because to [him it is] a given that it’s true.” Muhlestein freely acknowledges that “there are others [like Vogel] who will assume that it’s not true, and on these points, we’ll just have to agree to disagree, but we will understand one another better when we understand how our beginning assumptions color the way we filter all of the evidence that we find.”<sup>32</sup>

Whether he likes it or not, Vogel is doing in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* precisely what Muhlestein described in this 2014 address — he is approaching the Book of Abraham with certain metaphysical assumptions that influence not only how he interprets the data, but that prejudices the conclusions he draws therefrom. To be sure, this does not mean that Vogel is automatically wrong when he concludes that the Book of Abraham and its claimed translator are nineteenth century frauds (“pious” or otherwise). It does mean, however, that Vogel cannot realistically expect us to believe that he is coming at this issue as a dispassionate, “objective” scholar who has no predetermined interest in whether Joseph Smith’s claims are true or false. Metaphysically speaking, Vogel has just as much riding on the authenticity or inauthenticity of the Book of Abraham as orthodox Latter-day Saints do. By the evidence of his own admission, as seen above, it is dishonest in the extreme for Vogel to pretend otherwise.

### Vogel’s Argument

Vogel’s main argument offered in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is effectively articulated in his opening chapter (1–32). Here he makes the following case for the composition of the English text of the Book of Abraham:

After dictating three verses of the Book of Abraham to [William W.] Phelps, probably in early July 1835, Smith began immediately to work on his Alphabets and bound Grammar of the Egyptian language. Then, the following November, he dictated forty-eight verses of Abraham to [Frederick G.] Williams and [Warren] Parrish. ... Recognizing that the Parrish and Williams documents are the original records of Smith’s dictation of Abraham and that they date to

November 1835 means the theory that the Alphabets and bound Grammar were created after the translation must be abandoned. Instead, these documents — the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers — relating to the Egyptian language should be seen as Smith’s preliminary efforts to understand his newly acquired papyri and to convince followers that his translation was derived from the papyri. (31–32)

The problem this presents for those who believe the Book of Abraham is a translation of an ancient text is simple: first, the papyri fragments allegedly believed by Joseph Smith to be the source of the translation of the Book of Abraham were recovered in the 1960s, and the Egyptian text thereon, when translated, bears no resemblance to the English text of the Book of Abraham; and second, the Egyptian-language documents (discussed below) fail to convey an accurate understanding of the Egyptian language. We can determine the first point, according to Vogel, thanks to the hieratic characters in the margins of the Kirtland-era Book of Abraham manuscripts, and the second because Joseph Smith was, Vogel alleges, the primary author of the Egyptian-language documents. In short, in Vogel’s formulation Joseph Smith fails on both counts as a translator of Egyptian: he misidentified what was on the papyri he acquired, and he misunderstood how the Egyptian language actually works.

This is why Vogel does not feel it is necessary to turn to any other discipline to assess the authenticity of the Book of Abraham than his preferred area (category six in my articulation above). “I believe that what is required in any treatment of the Book of Abraham is not fluency in hieroglyphics [sic] or a belief in Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling, but a firm, clear-headed understanding of the methods of history and of the relevant nineteenth-century historical sources. Anything else is counterproductive” (xvii). It seems, however, that Vogel doesn’t actually believe this, because a sizable portion of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is dedicated to neutralizing arguments for the historicity of the Book of Abraham from those who affirm it is a translation of an ancient text (215–42). If Vogel’s theory for the composition of the Book of Abraham and the text’s relationship to both the surviving papyri fragments and the Egyptian-language documents is as decisive as he claims, we cannot help but wonder why he must go to such lengths to disarm the evidence for historicity. In any case, since Vogel insists that knowledge of ancient languages is not needed to render confident judgment on the Book of Abraham, throughout this review I will oblige him by not bothering to

provide transliterations or translations of the ancient languages I utilize unless otherwise necessary.

The second component of Vogel's argument against the Book of Abraham is to defuse the evidence for the text's historicity by providing modern sources from which Joseph Smith could have derived the contents, themes, and ideas in the text. In addition to the usual suspects, such as Adam Clarke and Thomas Dick, Vogel points to other nineteenth century sources, no matter how obscure, to contend that "the so-called unique elements in the Book of Abraham ... were all known to Joseph Smith's contemporaries." Vogel wisely cautions that he is "not arguing that Smith knowingly plagiarized these sources," but simply that "Smith arrived at a similar narrative but through a different process." The net result is that "Smith's contemporaries had access to the same Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions about Abraham and that these traditions were widely known in Smith's day," and that this refutes "claims of antiquity" (217).

With the basic thrust of Vogel's main contention in mind, let us proceed to examine some of the key arguments put forth in *Book of Abraham Apologetics*. This review does not pretend to be an exhaustive response to all of Vogel's arguments, but hopefully I will be able to show how in some important ways Vogel's arguments are either questionable, insufficient, or simply erroneous. I, myself, do not profess to have mastery over all aspects of the Book of Abraham. Those readers interested in diving deeper into the issues discussed in this review are encouraged to consult the bibliography collected on the Pearl of Great Price Central website.<sup>33</sup> Most of the material from Nibley, Gee, and Muhlestein that Vogel argues against in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* are also online (and catalogued in the Pearl of Great Price Central bibliography), and readers are likewise encouraged to engage these works on their own as they assess their own position on the Book of Abraham.

### **The "Kirtland Egyptian Papers" and the Book of Abraham**

The centerpiece of Vogel's contention that the Book of Abraham is a modern pseudepigraphon is the motley collection of manuscripts commonly classified as the "Kirtland Egyptian Papers,"<sup>34</sup> the "Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers,"<sup>35</sup> or more recently the "Egyptian-language documents."<sup>36</sup> This corpus can broadly be grouped into the following categories:

- (1) several manuscripts on which associates of Joseph Smith copied Egyptian characters; (2) three manuscripts containing

attempts to decipher the Egyptian writing system, called the Egyptian Alphabet documents; (3) a document associated with the Egyptian Alphabet documents, called the Egyptian Counting document, that contains a system of counting; and (4) a manufactured book of ruled paper into which early Latter-day Saint scribes William W. Phelps and Warren Parrish inscribed a “Grammar and A[l]phabet” of the Egyptian language. The Egyptian-language documents are textually interdependent. The Egyptian Alphabet documents contain non-Roman characters — many of which were copied from the papyri — with accompanying transliterations and definitions. Characters, transliterations, and definitions from the Egyptian Alphabet documents were later copied into the Grammar and Alphabet volume.<sup>37</sup>

Controversy has swirled around these documents for over five decades, since “the extent of Joseph Smith’s involvement in the creation of these manuscripts is unknown.”<sup>38</sup> More than just that, actually,

Almost every aspect of these documents is disputed: their authorship, their date, their purpose, their relationship with the Book of Abraham, their relationship with the Joseph Smith Papyri, their relationship with each other, what the documents are or were intended to be, and even whether the documents form a discrete or coherent group.<sup>39</sup>

From the looks of it, the Egyptian-language documents are little more than a confounding historical oddity that only a small cadre of archivists and historians would find meaningful; hardly the sort of thing to get worked up over. Why is it, then, that anti-Mormons have long salivated over these manuscripts? Because despite how well-intended they may have been, “these attempts are considered by modern Egyptologists — both Latter-day Saints and others — to be of no actual value in understanding Egyptian.”<sup>40</sup> The “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language” (GAEL) document, called the “bound grammar” throughout *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, has particularly proven to be a lightning rod, since it is commonly believed that the linguistic hocus-pocus of the GAEL is all that is needed to safely demonstrate Joseph Smith’s inability to understand Egyptian.

To properly indict Joseph Smith, Vogel attributes the *entirety* of the Kirtland-era Egyptian-language corpus to the Prophet (xi). He specifically goes to great pains to attribute authorship of the “Grammar

and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language” (GAEL) to Joseph Smith (96–115), since the “imaginative” (96) way the Egyptian language is understood in this text is indeed damning for the Book of Abraham if the latter was derived from the former. Of course, Vogel has no other prosecutorial option if he wants his charges to stick. If enough reasonable doubt can be cast on the claim that Joseph Smith was the primary author of the GAEL, then one of Vogel’s most important arguments in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* unravels. For Vogel’s naturalistic claims about the Book of Abraham to work, he *needs* Joseph to be the principal instigator behind the Egyptian-language documents.

So what evidence, exactly, does Vogel have to attribute authorship of the GAEL to Joseph Smith? The first is this entry from Joseph Smith’s history: “The remainder of this month [July 1835], I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients.”<sup>41</sup> Although dated July 1835 and written in the first person, this entry, in fact, is a retrospective account that was composed by scribe Willard Richards no earlier than mid-September 1843. Vogel is aware of this, and so postulates that “he probably composed the July 1835 account with the help of Smith and/or Phelps, the latter of who also worked on Smith’s history” (34). He indeed *may* have consulted Joseph for this entry, or he may have only consulted Phelps, who is the other (stronger, in my judgment) candidate for the authorship of the GAEL and who by late 1843 had assumed the mantle of ghostwriter for the Prophet.<sup>42</sup> So while this entry from Joseph Smith’s history is evidence of contemporary attribution of the GAEL to Joseph, it is only secondary evidence for such, as it could just as well be Phelps’ own projection of his summer 1835 efforts onto Joseph. “It is important to remember that although various people acted as scribe to Joseph Smith, they were independent people and had their own independent thoughts. Not everything written by one of Joseph Smith’s scribes came from the mind of Joseph Smith, even during the time period when they served as Joseph Smith’s scribes.”<sup>43</sup>

Vogel next offers Joseph Smith’s October 1, 1835, journal entry as evidence that “phase two” of work on the GAEL resumed under the Prophet after a brief lapse (121–25). The entry reads: “October 1, 1835. This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr O[liver] Cowdery and W[illiam] W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded.”<sup>44</sup> Vogel immediately jumps to the conclusion that this must be referring to the astronomical content of the GAEL, “which in the last seven chapters ... [describes] a hierarchy of stars and planets” (121).

A much more parsimonious explanation for the October 1, 1835 journal entry, however, is that on this day Joseph was working (“laboring”) on the “Egyptian alphabet” documents, not the GAEL.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the GAEL, this group of Egyptian-language documents (labeled A, B, and C in *JSPRT4*) actually does contain not only the handwriting of Phelps, but also that of Cowdery and the Prophet. “The three versions are clearly related. They may all be derived from an earlier version, or, more likely, they may have been created simultaneously, with [Joseph], Cowdery, and Phelps consulting with one another or referring to each other’s manuscripts.”<sup>46</sup> Joseph, Cowdery, and Phelps working together on the “Egyptian alphabet” texts one breezy October afternoon is a far more likely scenario than the convoluted one Vogel offers.<sup>47</sup>

None of this is to deny that Joseph Smith had any involvement whatsoever with the composition of the Kirtland-era Egyptian-language documents. His handwriting appears in at least one of the “Egyptian alphabet” manuscripts, and his history *could* be used to show his involvement in the production of the GAEL in some undeterminable capacity. It is, rather, to stress two things. First, the evidence for Joseph Smith’s involvement in the composition of the GAEL, specifically, is tenuous; and second, Vogel has ramrodded the facts into a specific predetermined conclusion about the composition of the Book of Abraham and its relationship with the Kirtland-era Egyptian-language documents. In fact, the situation is far more uncertain than Vogel lets on.

It is unclear when in 1835 Joseph Smith began creating the existing Book of Abraham manuscripts or what relationship the Book of Abraham manuscripts have to the Egyptian-language documents. While some of the documents are clearly textually dependent upon others, there is also evidence of overlapping creation, false starts, and building upon previous work. The sequence of the creation of the Kirtland-era Book of Abraham manuscript and the various manuscripts of the Egyptian-language project is unknown. Considerable overlap of themes exists between the Book of Abraham and the Egyptian-language documents. Both have information concerning Abraham, Egypt, the Creation, Adam and Eve, Eden, astronomy, and Kolob and other stars, among other topics. 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. But



most of the Book of Abraham is not textually dependent on any of the extant Egyptian-language documents. The inverse is also true: most of the content in the Egyptian-language documents is independent of the Book of Abraham.<sup>48</sup>

Because of this, Vogel's overall discussion of the significance of the Egyptian-language documents in *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, including his exposition on how the content of the GAEL and other related documents must have informed the worldview of Joseph Smith, is of limited value.<sup>49</sup>

### **The “Lost Papyrus” Theory and the “Catalyst” Theory**

The 2014 Gospel Topics essay “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham” forthrightly notes how the surviving fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri do not render the English text of the Book of Abraham when translated. “None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham,” the essay acknowledges.

Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.<sup>50</sup>

Understandably, this incongruence is simply too good for critics of Joseph Smith to pass up. As Nibley so memorably expressed it back in 1975, “Some people were endlessly dinning into the ears of the public that what was written on that small and battered strip [of papyrus] proved beyond a doubt that Joseph Smith was a fraud, because he thought that it contained the Book of Abraham, whereas it contains nothing of the sort.”<sup>51</sup> How, then, does the Church account for this discrepancy? The essay offers two options:

It is likely futile to assess Joseph’s ability to translate papyri when we now have only a fraction of the papyri he had in his possession. Eyewitnesses spoke of “a long roll” or multiple “rolls” of papyrus. Since only fragments survive, it is likely that much of the papyri accessible to Joseph when he translated

the book of Abraham is not among these fragments. The loss of a significant portion of the papyri means the relationship of the papyri to the published text cannot be settled conclusively by reference to the papyri. Alternatively, Joseph's study of the papyri may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words *translator* and *translation*. According to this view, Joseph's translation was not a literal rendering of the papyri as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and revelation. They catalyzed a process whereby God gave to Joseph Smith a revelation about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri.<sup>52</sup>

These two explanations have come to be commonly called the "missing papyrus" theory and the "catalyst" theory, respectively. The first theory finds perhaps its most outspoken advocate in John Gee,<sup>53</sup> whereas the second enjoys support among influential Latter-day Saint thinkers such as Terryl Givens.<sup>54</sup> Both theories have their strengths and weaknesses, and both are, in my judgment, viable, but "for none of the theories is the evidence as neat or as compelling as one might wish,"<sup>55</sup> and so it is wise at this point not to become too particularly dogmatic.

In order to erase any vestiges of hope for those who wish to affirm the historicity and inspiration of the Book of Abraham, Vogel critiques both the missing papyrus theory and the catalyst theory in the penultimate chapter of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* (179–214). "There is no reasonable or compelling evidence to support the theory that the Book of Abraham's English text came from a long roll of papyrus" that is now missing, Vogel announces. "Furthermore, appeals to a catalyst theory of the Book of Abraham, including attempts to redefine the term translate, fail to account satisfactorily for the text's own references to Facsimile 1 and to Smith's own use of the term 'translate' in its conventional meaning" (213–14). The Mormons are without a prayer. The only honest option, our authority urges, is to admit that the Book of Abraham is a nineteenth-century pseudepigraphon. But is the situation really as dire for the faithful as Vogel makes it out to be?

## Red Ink

Vogel begins his refutation of the missing papyrus theory by attacking its weakest argument that informed advocates for the theory no longer use (179–80). In the first edition of *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* Nibley referenced the following entry in the *History of the Church* as evidence that the Book of Breathing fragments recovered in 1967 were not the source of the Book of Abraham: “The record of Abraham and Joseph, found with the mummies, is beautifully written on papyrus, with black, and a small part red, ink or paint, in perfect preservation.”<sup>56</sup> This description, supposedly from Joseph Smith as it appears in *History of the Church*, was to Nibley evidence that the Prophet did not consider P. Joseph Smith X–XI the source of the Book of Abraham.<sup>57</sup> As Vogel correctly points out (180), however, this source actually comes from Oliver Cowdery, not Joseph Smith, and was describing the papyri generally, not strictly the supposed source of the Book of Abraham.<sup>58</sup> Vogel did not need to cite the critical author H. Michael Marquardt to inform us of this, since in the second edition of *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, Gee himself made this clear. “It is now known that the person who identified the papyri as having red ink was Oliver Cowdery rather than Joseph Smith, and he may have been referring to a different papyrus than the one Nibley thought he was.”<sup>59</sup> Still, if Vogel’s intention here was to score an easy point against Nibley, then he succeeded admirably.

## Eyewitness Testimony

Of great importance for the missing papyrus theory are the testimonies left by eyewitnesses who viewed the papyri in the nineteenth century. Vogel recognizes this as much as Gee and Muhlestein do, and so he devotes a considerable portion of this chapter attempting to negate or downplay the eyewitness testimony, which appears to indicate rather strongly both that a sizeable portion of papyrus is missing and that the source believed to be the Book of Abraham was contained on that missing portion (181–82, 192–204). Since this matter essentially boils down to a matter of interpretation, it strikes me as rather unnecessary, even pedantic, in this review to assess each of Vogel’s claims individually. Readers are welcome to gauge the competing interpretations of the historical sources offered by Muhlestein and Vogel for themselves.<sup>60</sup> But I do feel it necessary to make one observation on Vogel’s overall methodological habits when it comes to interpreting the relevant sources.

Vogel displays an unmistakable kind of presentistic hubris in his efforts to downplay the significance of the eyewitness testimony

for the missing papyrus theory.<sup>61</sup> A major problem Vogel has with Muhlestein's reading of the historical accounts is that "none of the eyewitnesses possessed the knowledge necessary to verify a long-scroll theory. Most witnesses simply expressed an assumption based on Smith's identification" of the papyri (182). What Vogel seems to forget here that he is not the eyewitness in all of this, and it doesn't require any sort of esoteric knowledge or specialized academic training for nineteenth-century frontier rustics to tell the difference between a "long roll of manuscript" (see below) and fragments of papyrus mounted under glass. Neither does it require an "assumption" for an eyewitness to report what Joseph Smith or others related about the contents of this or that portion of the papyri.<sup>62</sup> To be fair, Vogel does make the valid point that some of the eyewitnesses do identify the mounted fragments and not the long roll as being the source of the Book of Abraham, or at least they report Joseph Smith as indicating such (e.g. 193). But this merely complicates the missing papyrus theory; it does not outright refute it as Vogel insists.<sup>63</sup>

The way Vogel handles the testimony of Charlotte Haven is instructive on this point. Her account of viewing the papyri has been scrutinized by both advocates and opponents of the missing papyrus theory because of its potential ramifications for identifying the source of the Book of Abraham. Below is the relevant portion of Haven's testimony in full:

From there we called on Joseph's mother, passing the site of the Nauvoo House, a spacious hotel, the first floor only laid. It is like the Temple in being erected on the tithe system, and when finished will surpass in splendor any hotel in the State. Here Joseph and his heirs for generations are to have apartments free of expense, and they think the crowned heads of Europe will rusticate beneath its roof. Madame Smith's residence is a log house very near her son's. She opened the door and received us cordially. She is a motherly kind of woman of about sixty years. She receives a little pittance by exhibiting The Mummies to strangers. When we asked to see them, she lit a candle and conducted us up a short, narrow [sic] stairway to a low, dark room under the roof. On one side were standing half a dozen mummies, to whom she introduced us, King Onitus and his royal household, — one she did not know. Then she took up what seemed to be a club wrapped in a dark cloth, and said "This is the leg of Pharaoh's daughter, the one that saved Moses." Repressing a smile,

I looked from the mummies to the old lady, but could detect nothing but earnestness and sincerity on her countenance. Then she turned to a long table, set her candle-stick down, and opened a long roll of manuscript, saying it was “the writing of Abraham and Isaac, written in Hebrew and Sanscrit,” and she read several minutes from it as if it were English. It sounded very much like passages from the Old Testament — and it might have been for anything we knew — but she said she read it through the inspiration of her son Joseph, in whom she seemed to have perfect confidence. Then in the same way she interpreted to us hieroglyphics from another roll. One was Mother Eve being tempted by the serpent, who — the serpent, I mean — was standing on the tip of his tail, with which his two legs formed a tripod, and had his head in Eve’s ear. I said, “But serpents don’t have legs.” “They did before the fall,” she asserted with perfect confidence. The Judge slipped a coin in her hand which she received smilingly, with a pleasant, “Come again,” as we bade her goodby.<sup>64</sup>

Vogel’s objections to Muhlestein’s and Gee’s interpretation of this account are equal parts special pleading and ideologically motivated. Haven reports that Lucy Smith explicitly identified the “long roll of manuscript” as “the writings of Abraham and Isaac,” to which Vogel merely shrugs off by saying she “only” identified it as such and not explicitly as “the source of the published Book of Abraham” (199). But what else could the Prophet’s mother have possibly meant other than the source of the Book of Abraham with her comment that the “long roll” contained the “writings of Abraham”? Vogel’s objection here is simply a desperate attempt to make Haven’s testimony mean something other than what it plainly means.

Like Christopher Smith before him,<sup>65</sup> Vogel also objects that Haven could merely have been describing the “two-foot scroll containing the end section of Hôr’s Book of Breathings” (199). The matter basically boils down to whether it is plausible that a casual observer would consider two feet of papyrus a “long roll.” It is of course possible, but it’s not a foregone conclusion, that this is an example of “a witness describing the fragments as if they were complete scrolls” (200–201) as Vogel pretends.<sup>66</sup> Even Smith, who is skeptical of the missing papyrus theory and argues against it, concedes that “since [two feet] for the interior portion of the Hor scroll is hardly long by Egyptological standards, Haven’s report seems to imply the presence of another text on the scroll

following the Document of Breathing.”<sup>67</sup> Just so. That Vogel obstinately refuses to acknowledge as even possible what is obvious from the Haven account obliges me to conclude that he is motivated not by careful historical consideration but rather by a desire to neuter the arguments of his apologist interlocutors.<sup>68</sup>

### **The Length of the Hor Scroll**

Besides the testimony of eyewitnesses who viewed the papyri, is there any other way to determine the amount of material originally possessed by Joseph Smith? In 2007 Gee attempted to answer the question of how long the Joseph Smith Papyri originally were with a mathematical formula used by Egyptologists to calculate the length of papyri scrolls.<sup>69</sup> Gee’s initial calculations yielded an estimated 1250.5 cm or 41 feet of missing papyrus from the scroll of Hor.<sup>70</sup>

Gee’s initial findings were met with criticism by Andrew Cook and Christopher Smith not long after his 2007 publication.<sup>71</sup> They argued that “no more than 56 cm of papyrus can be missing from the scroll’s interior,” a number that, obviously, is both far less than Gee’s estimate and precludes the possibility of a hypothetical missing Book of Abraham text to appear on the Hor scroll.<sup>72</sup> What resulted was a back and forth between Gee and Cook<sup>73</sup> that resulted in Gee revising his math and coming up with a new estimate: “about 314 centimeters, which is about ten feet three and a half inches give or take a foot.”<sup>74</sup>

Vogel, predictably, sides with Cook and Smith on the question of mathematically determining the amount of missing papyrus from the Hor scroll (185–86). “This means,” he writes, “that there was an intact roll of about four inches wide and about two feet long that Gee’s and Muhlestein’s eyewitnesses saw and identified with the Book of Abraham” (186). I freely confess that I do not have the mathematical acumen to independently determine who is right or wrong on this matter. From the fact that he provides no actual compelling reason to prefer Cook and Smith’s results over Gee’s, neither, it appears, does Vogel.

What I can say, however, is that last year Eshbal Ratzon and Nachum Dershowitz published a study which found that “though theoretically reasonable, many practical problems interfere with” any attempt to determine the length of ancient scrolls mathematically, with the unfortunate result that “highly significant errors are quite frequent” and “past uses of this approach should be reevaluated.”<sup>75</sup> When it comes to Cook and Smith’s methodology, which Vogel assures us is superior to Gee’s (186n19), these two authorities conclude that “the results [derived

from their method] are no better than eyeballing.”<sup>76</sup> This does not prove Cook and Smith are wrong and Gee is therefore correct, but it does put something of a damper on our confidence in their results, especially since Ratzon and Dershowitz have no vested interest that I can detect in how much missing papyrus there might be from the Hor scroll. It would appear, then, that caution and further study seem prudent when it comes to attempting to determine the length of the Joseph Smith Papyri with heretofore standard mathematical formulae.<sup>77</sup>

### Facsimile 1

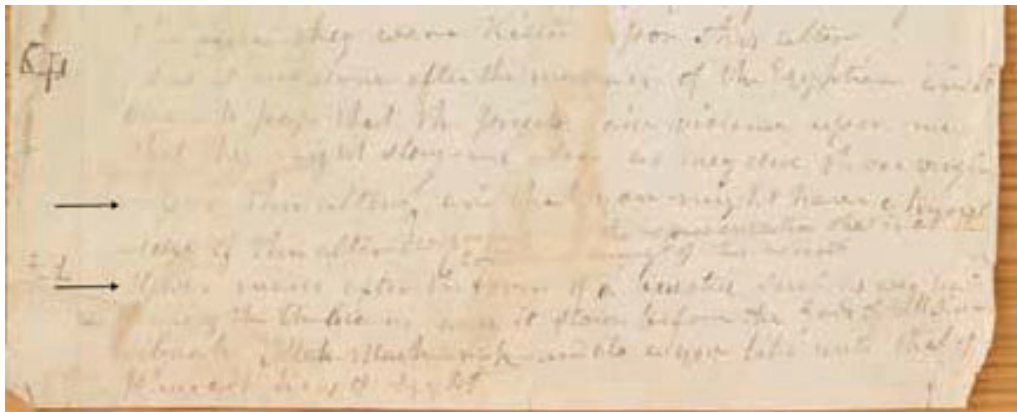
Critics of the missing papyrus theory are quick to point out that the text of the Book of Abraham actually mentions Facsimile 1:

And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; and that you may have a knowledge of this altar, *I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record.* ... That you may have an understanding of these gods, *I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning*, which manner of figures is called by the Chaldeans Rahleenos, which signifies hieroglyphics. (Abraham 1:12, 14, emphasis added)

Vogel contends that “these statements regarding Facsimile 1 create a serious problem for the long-scroll theory. Indeed, it is difficult to explain how the Book of Abraham can refer to the opening vignettes of the Book of Breathing as ‘the commencement of this record’” (188). In fact, although this claim has been popular with anti-Mormons since the 1960s,<sup>78</sup> it actually isn’t very hard to account for these verses with the missing papyrus theory. Muhlestein has offered a perfectly plausible explanation, which Vogel ignores.<sup>79</sup>

But more importantly, Vogel finds himself at odds with every other text critic who has look at the Book of Abraham manuscripts, and who agree that the damning lines from vv. 12, 14 are interlinear insertions in the Williams manuscript, and not original.<sup>80</sup> Rather than being interlinear insertions, Vogel claims that “there is a general upward slant to all of Williams’ lines [on the first page of the manuscript], especially at the end of paragraphs,” and therefore v. 12 “was inserted into the space created by the upward angle of the previous line” (189). A careful look at the first page of the Williams manuscript, however, tends to refute Vogel’s claims. (See Figure 1.) Only the third and fourth paragraphs on that

page might to an appreciable degree be described as slanting upwards, but certainly not “all of Williams’s lines” as Vogel claims. Crucially, the lines immediately before and after v. 12 do not appear to slant. The text “I will refer you to the representation that is at the ... ” does slant upwards, but even if we grant that this was because of Williams’s scribal habit, and not because the line is an insertion, it does not explain why “... (commencement of this record” is directly underneath and does not begin at the left margin of the next line.



**Figure 1.** Lines 36 and 38 on the first page of Frederick G. Williams’s copy of Abraham 1:2–13. These lines show no tendency towards slanting upwards, contrary to Vogel’s claim. Detail of image from [www.josephsmithpapers.org](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org).

Vogel’s claim that “cutting out the entire reference to the sacrificial altar does not work, because doing so would create too much space between paragraphs, which was not Williams’s practice” (189–90) is also refuted by a look at the preceding paragraph breaks, which do in fact tend to leave considerable space between the end of the line and end of the page. (See Figure 2.) The first and third paragraph breaks, for example, occur before halfway down the line; the second and sixth paragraph breaks end about halfway down the line; and the fourth paragraph ends at about 3/4s down the line. If we suppose a fifth paragraph ending at “know|ledge of this alter” on lines 36–37, it would, in fact, align very nicely with the first, second, third, and sixth paragraph endings. What’s more, the breaks at paragraphs one and arguably two occur mid-sentence in Williams’s text, posing no problem for the fact that the likely break at the fifth paragraph, as postulated above, also occurs mid-sentence.



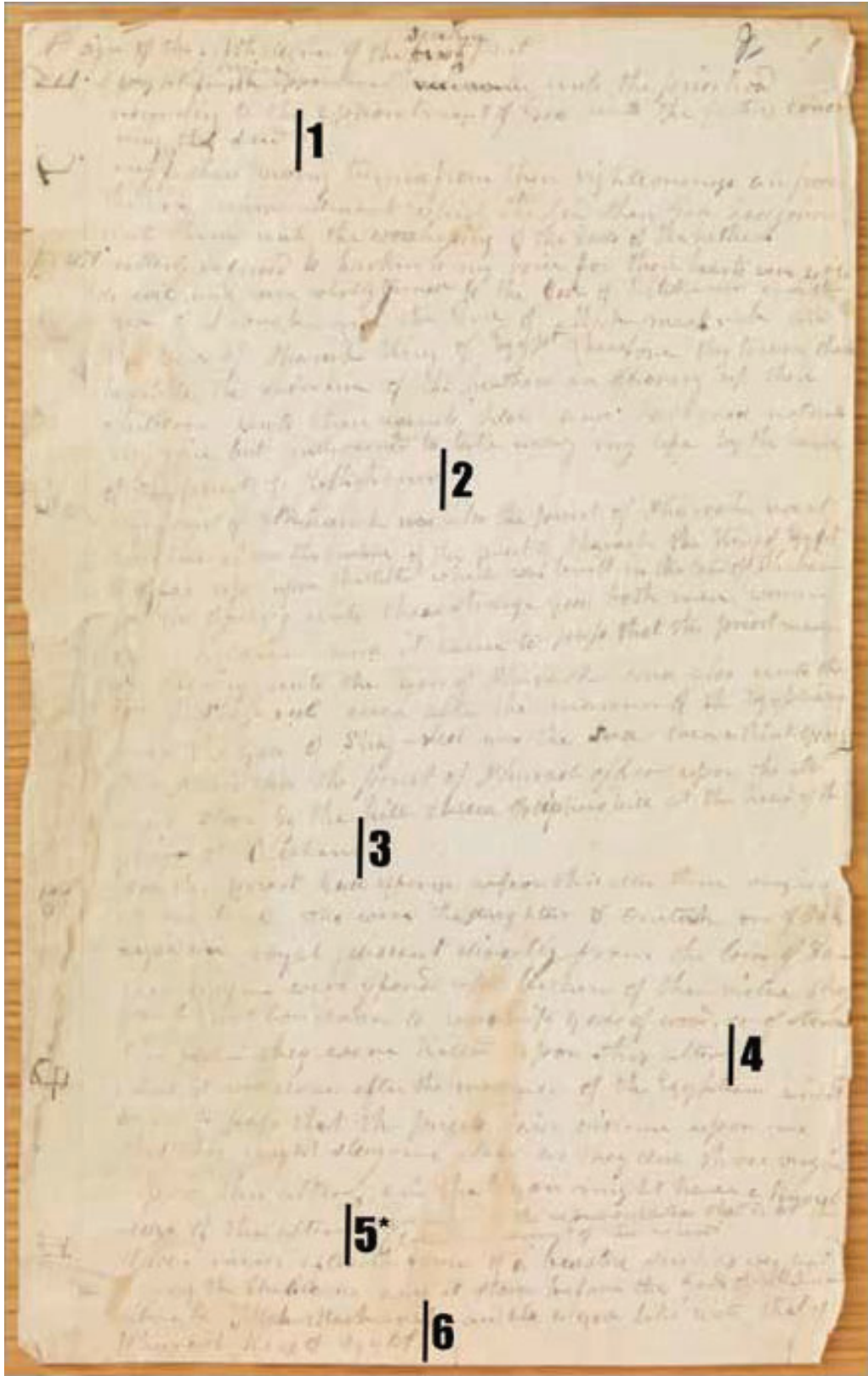


Figure 2. The paragraph breaks on the first page of Frederick G. Williams' copy of Abraham 1:2-13. Image via [www.josephsmithpapers.org](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org).

Vogel has a better argument for why verse 14 may not be an interlinear insertion. He observes that “this page, like the previous one, is unruled; so there is no top margin that would have been left blank” (190–91). He also notes that “page 4 [of the Williams manuscript] also begins without observing the right margin” (191). What Vogel does not mention, however, is that page four of Williams’ manuscript also *ends* without observing the left margin, as shown in Figure 3, effectively making the entire page margin-less. (The first two lines and the last seven lines basically run from the left to right edges of the page.) The same is not true for page two, where the first four lines of v. 14 begin left of the margin that runs uniformly until the end of the page. Williams began and ended page four by following the same margins except for the middle of the page where he indented right to make room for marginal characters.



**Figure 3.** Lines 1–10 of page 2 of Frederick G. Williams’ copy of Abraham 1:14–22. The clear indentation after line 4 is apparent, as is the cramped spacing of the first line at the top of the page. Detail of image via [www.josephsmithpapers.org](http://www.josephsmithpapers.org).

One could argue that the difference in indentation on pages two and four is because of the placement of the marginal characters. A cursory glance at the manuscript would seem to bear this out. Even so, if one were to follow Vogel’s argument, one would be hard-pressed to explain the cramped spacing of the first line on page two, which does not seem to appear at the top of the other three pages of Williams’ manuscript. This along with the fact that v. 12 almost certainly is not original satisfies me that “the content and spacing of this paragraph [at the top of page two], along with similar revisions to the line at the bottom of the previous page, suggest that this paragraph was inserted.”<sup>81</sup> Gee is absolutely correct that “the Book of Abraham actually reads smoothly without these additions.”<sup>82</sup> As revised to omit the lines in question, the text of Abraham 1:12–15 from Williams’ manuscript would read:

... and that you might have a knowledge of this alter[,] It was made after, the form of a bedsted such as was had among the Chaldeans and it stood before the Gods of Elk-keenah Zibnah Mah-Mach-rah — and als[o] a God like unto that of pharaoh King of Egypt[.] And as they lifted up their hands upon me that they might offer me up ...<sup>83</sup>

Whatever the ultimate implications this may have for the missing papyrus theory, the relationship between the text and Facsimile 1, or what was assumed by Joseph or his clerks to be the source of the Book of Abraham remains to be fully explored. For now, it is enough to say that Vogel's appeal to Abraham 1:12, 14 in his attempt to refute the missing papyrus theory is not decisive.<sup>84</sup>

### Joseph Smith — “Translator” Extraordinaire

If the missing papyrus theory does not suit Vogel, what about the so-called catalyst theory, or the theory that Joseph Smith's engagement with the Egyptian papyri “catalyzed” a revelatory experience by which he revealed the Book of Abraham text? As mentioned previously, the two most recent advocates for this theory are Terryl Givens and Samuel Brown. As ingenious as they might be, Vogel is not impressed with the attempt to broaden the semantic range of “translation” in Joseph Smith's theological lexicon. He is specifically critical of Givens, whose recent articulation of the catalyst theory Vogel strenuously critiques (204–13). “Did Smith truly believe — mistakenly — that his inspired dictation of the Abraham text came from the papyrus?” he asks. “The text itself references Facsimile 1 twice, which suggests that Smith believed he was translating, *in the conventional sense*, and not receiving revelation” (211, emphasis added). Vogel doubles down on this claim by appealing to the Egyptian language documents, all of which Vogel attributes as being the mental products of the Prophet (211). For Vogel, the Kirtland-era Egyptian papers “tell us Smith's definition of translation was conventional and straightforward” (211). One page later, Vogel insists that Joseph Smith's translation projects must have been conventional because of the “eye-witness testimony that describe Smith reading the translation from the [seer] stone” (212). Vogel concludes by mentioning the Prophet's translation or revision of the Bible as yet further evidence that “there is no indication that he used ‘translation’ in any sense different from the conventional sense” (213).

There is so much question begging packed into these few short pages of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* that it is truly difficult to know

where to begin to start unpacking all of it. In a spectacular display of clairvoyance, Vogel confidently proclaims exactly what Joseph Smith must have been thinking and intending with his use of the word “translation” to describe his textual compositions. Unfortunately for him, though, Vogel’s pronouncements on the supposed “conventional” banality of the Prophet’s use of “translation” could not come at a more awkward moment, since the inquisitive reader is now greatly benefitted by last year’s *Producing Ancient Scripture*, which demonstrates beyond controversy just how multifaceted and at times unreservedly idiosyncratic the Prophet’s use of “translation” truly was.

Let’s begin with the Book of Abraham, which Vogel is adamant is Joseph Smith’s bungled “conventional” rendering of the papyri fragments now housed safely in Church archives in Salt Lake City. Even if we grant Vogel’s highly dubious dogma that the Kirtland-era Egyptian language documents are exclusively the fruit of the Prophet’s wild linguistic forays, we must ask how exactly Joseph and his clerks imagined he could understand Egyptian in the first place. By consulting the work of the European savants, perhaps? Out of the question, as both the Prophet’s defenders and critics agree.<sup>85</sup> “It would have been impossible for any American scholar to know enough about Egyptian inscriptions to read them before the publication of Champollion’s grammar,” insisted the skeptical James Henry Breasted in 1912. “American Universities have never until recently given such studies any attention. . . . It will be seen, then, that if Joseph Smith could read ancient Egyptian writing, his ability to do so had no connection with the decipherment of hieroglyphics by European scholars.”<sup>86</sup> Then how? We need not resort to any Vogelian augury to answer this question, as the documentary record provides more than enough clues to bolster our confidence. “Joseph the Seer saw these Record[s] and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records,” recorded John Whitmer in his important history, “[w]hich when all translated will be a pleasing history and of great value to the saints.”<sup>87</sup> Warren Parrish, an intimate in the Prophet’s labor on the Egyptian papyri, recounted after his disaffection how he “penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as [Joseph] claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven.”<sup>88</sup> And what of the seer stone? The *Cleveland Whig* reported in the summer of 1835 on being “credibly informed” by a source close to him (apparently Frederick G. Williams) that “Joe has . . . examin[ed] the papyrus through his spectacles.”<sup>89</sup> The Prophet’s mother rehearsed something similar to visitors shortly after her son’s death. “She said,” reports our informant, “that when Joseph was

reading the papyrus, he closed his eyes, and held a hat over his face, and that the revelation came to him; and that where the papyrus was torn, he could read the parts that were destroyed equally as well as those that were there; and that scribes sat by him writing, as he expounded.”<sup>90</sup>

This agrees with William West, who in 1837 described “a quantity of records, written on papyrus, in Egyptian hieroglyphics” in the possession of Joseph Smith.

These records were torn by being taken from the roll of embalming salve which contained them, and some parts entirely lost; but Smith is to translate the whole by divine inspiration, and that which is lost, like Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, can be interpreted as well as that which is preserved; and a larger volume than the Bible will be required to contain them.<sup>91</sup>

Frederic G. Mathers’ late account converges well the contemporary reports with his remark that “Joe Smith translated the characters on the roll, being favored with a ‘special revelation’ whenever any of the characters were missing by reason of mutilation of the roll.”<sup>92</sup> (*That* is supposed to be the “conventional” or “straightforward” way of dealing with lacunae in a manuscript when attempting to translate an ancient text?) But where these accounts are hearsay, we have the testimony of no less than one of the men who “assist[ed] in setting the TIPE for printing the first peace of the BOOK OF ABRAHAM” and who was “much edified” with the Prophet’s ability “to translate through the Urim & Thummim Ancient records & Hyeroglyphics as old as Abraham or Adam.”<sup>93</sup> Another one of Joseph’s Nauvoo clerks, Howard Coray, reminiscenced to his daughter of having “heard him prophesy many things that have already come to pass,” and, what’s more, distinctly remembered having also “seen him translate by the Seer’s stone.”<sup>94</sup> Translate what? Surely neither the Book of Mormon nor the Bible, which were completed long before Coray began clerking for the Prophet (or before he had even joined the Church, for that matter) in the spring of 1840.<sup>95</sup> The Kinderhook Plates, perhaps? Also impossible, as Coray was finishing a mission in the eastern United States at the time of the incident (early May 1843),<sup>96</sup> and, furthermore, we can confidently say that Joseph attempted a secular, not a revelatory, translation of those notorious fakes.<sup>97</sup> This leaves only a portion of the Book of Abraham or, perhaps, some other heretofore unknown Nauvoo-era revelation that the Prophet received through his seer stone. But Coray recalled both hearing Joseph prophesy *and* seeing

him translate with the seer stone, strongly suggesting that he meant the Book of Abraham with this description.

From friendly and hostile sources, then, we see a picture of Joseph Smith not scrabbling through lexica and grammars to give us the English text of the Book of Abraham, which any “conventional” translation would demand, but instead of him tapping into the same prophetic reserve with which he produced the Book of Mormon. “The decipherment of the Egyptian language was newly under way when [Joseph] Smith began to study the papyri, and there is no evidence that he was acquainted with the progress that had been made,” write Jensen and Hauglid.

He was certainly unequipped to translate the scrolls as a scholar would. The translation of the Book of Abraham is perhaps best understood by examining the way in which Smith produced other scriptural works, namely the Book of Mormon, the Bible revision, and his revelations.<sup>98</sup>

Speaking of which, Vogel does not dispute the “eye-witness testimony that describe Smith reading the translation [of the Book of Mormon] from the [seer] stone” (212). What, pray, is “conventional” and “straightforward” with translating an ancient text on golden plates by looking into a magic rock? So frightfully disruptive and absurd is this notion of “translation” within the strict confines of secular academe that even the most generous Gentile authorities who write on Joseph Smith today find themselves blushing when asked to account for the affair.

Then there is the troublesome fact for Vogel that Joseph Smith described his Bible revision project undertaken between 1830–1833 as both a “translation”<sup>99</sup> and a “revelation,”<sup>100</sup> and that this translation/revelation was done by revising and expanding the English text of the King James Bible, *not* through a fresh rendering of Hebrew or Greek (as is widely known). And yet we are to believe that this is a “conventional translation?” So anomalous is the Prophet’s Bible revision that its very existence has spawned a veritable academic cottage industry of specialists who since at least the mid-twentieth century have exhausted themselves trying to understand the precise nature of the Prophet’s revisions to the biblical text and the relationship the final product has with his revelatory method.<sup>101</sup> But our author cannot be bothered by this. “Rather than redefining ‘translation’ to address problems, the problems should tell us that Smith was not translating as he claimed” (213). In other words, Vogel is upset that Joseph Smith did not use words the way he does, and therefore finds fault both with the Prophet and his followers

who try to make sense of the texts he produced. Rather than be caught in the uncomfortable position of taking Joseph Smith seriously on his own terms, Vogel is content to dismiss the matter as being unworthy of any intellectual curiosity or honest effort to understand.

To be sure, we should be wary of the more outlandish post-modernist approaches to understanding Joseph Smith's conception of translation which attempt to totally decouple the Prophet's texts from "an underlying ancient source" (208).<sup>102</sup> In that regard, I am actually in agreement with Vogel that one real danger of the catalyst theory (whether for the Book of Abraham or any other of Joseph Smith's scriptural productions) is that one is liable to redefine the meaning of translation "as broadly as possible, even to the point that the word loses any significant meaning" (205). The point that Vogel fundamentally misses is that one can formulate a definition of "translation" and "translator" that is meaningful in describing Joseph Smith and his scriptural works *only* by first putting in the minimal amount of effort to understand Joseph on his own terms. This Vogel obstinately refuses to do, because he clearly thinks he knows better than Joseph Smith what Joseph Smith meant by calling his textual outpouring "translations."<sup>103</sup> We might be tempted to give Vogel some credit here, were it not for his conspicuous habit of riding roughshod over the historical record and imputing into his subject his own assumptions about how a translation *must* be in order to be worthy of the name. So instead we turn to Nibley, who wisely observes how

the Prophet has saved us the trouble of faulting his method by announcing in no uncertain terms that it is a method unique to himself depending entirely on divine revelation. That places the whole thing beyond the reach of direct examination and criticism but leaves wide open the really effective means of testing any method, which is by the results it produces.<sup>104</sup>

### **Book of Abraham Parallels: Ancient or Modern?**

As previously mentioned, a sizable portion of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is devoted to refuting the arguments put forth by apologists and other Latter-day Saint scholars for the Book of Abraham's historicity (215–42). Vogel sets out to "deal with defensive attempts to support the Book of Abraham's antiquity that draw parallels between unique/non-biblical aspects of Abraham's narrative and genuinely ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources." Vogel concludes that "these parallels are *invariably* weak, misrepresented, or irrelevant, and arguments for

ancient historicity overestimate the significance of the evidence and underestimate what Smith’s contemporaries knew about non-biblical legends involving Abraham” (215, emphasis added). A powerful claim, to be sure. Defenders of the Book of Abraham’s historicity have *nothing* to offer in defense of the text that wasn’t already known to Joseph Smith’s contemporaries, according to Vogel, and they misrepresent the evidence. We might have more confidence in Vogel’s verdict if he himself did not routinely demonstrate his inability to provide even a modicum of original argumentation or critical assessment of the evidence. Instead, what he offers in this portion of his book is largely a parade of hand-waving, appealing to authority, and a totally inadequate engagement with both the primary evidence and the secondary literature. A few examples should suffice our purposes here.

### **Abrahamic Traditions**

As previously mentioned, a substantial portion of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* is dedicated to negating the impressive amount of parallels the Book of Abraham shares with extra-biblical sources. In the eighth chapter (“Nineteenth-Century Sources,” 215–26), Vogel discusses “possible nineteenth-century sources for the English text of the Book of Abraham,” specifically potential sources for the first two chapters of the text (215). Vogel is keen to refute “defensive attempts to support the Book of Abraham’s antiquity that draw parallels between unique/non-biblical aspects of Abraham’s narrative and genuinely ancient Egyptian, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources.” In Vogel’s opinion, the sources amassed in publications such as *Traditions About the Early Life of Abraham* are “invariably weak, misrepresented, or irrelevant” (215).<sup>105</sup> Instead, Vogel “contend[s] that the so-called unique elements in the Book of Abraham — that Abraham’s father, Terah, was an idolater; that Abraham was a victim of an attempted sacrifice; that Abraham was an astronomer; that Abraham made converts in Haran — were all known to Joseph Smith’s contemporaries,” and are therefore unimpressive evidence for the text’s antiquity (216).

For all the grief he gives “apologists” for their supposed leaps in reconstructing the chronology of the translation of the Book of Abraham, Vogel has no problem filling the gaps with his own preferred speculation so long as it benefits his predetermined naturalistic conclusions. Vogel wonders, for instance, if “Smith *may* have consulted Bible commentaries such as Methodist Adam Clarke’s well-known volumes and other theological works” in the summer of 1835 to conjure



material (“brainstorm,” to use Vogel’s word) for his “pseudepigraphic text” (217–19, emphasis added).<sup>106</sup> Here we encounter a rather curious — if not also comical and totally absurd — portrait of a Joseph Smith who was clever enough to rattle off hundreds of pages of original material for the composition of the Book of Mormon in a matter of weeks,<sup>107</sup> but needed months to mine material in order to compose a measly forty-five verses for the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1:4–2:18). Vogel similarly cites an 1841 discourse delivered by Joseph Smith as further evidence that “Smith had time to think about his pseudepigraphic text” (218)<sup>108</sup> without ever considering the possibility that this material is evidence for precisely the opposite of what Vogel supposes, namely, that the Prophet had translated material well beyond the extant text.<sup>109</sup> The reason for this failure of imagination on Vogel’s part, of course, is because he *needs* Joseph Smith to be both a thieving magpie lifting content from Clarke and Dick and Josephus and a quack pseudepigraphist scrambling for time as he strings along his unsuspecting followers.

But it was not only contemporary sources that inspired the Prophet’s fanciful text, according to Vogel. “To Smith, this partly intact vignette [in P. Joseph Smith I] looked like human sacrifice, and no doubt the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham came to mind” (226). How exactly Vogel has divined all of this he does not disclose; suffice it to say that for him the point is that “none of the non-canonical sources [compiled by Latter-day Saint scholars] has Abraham stabbed or slashed with a knife before being thrown into the fire. He is simply thrown into the fire alive and a miraculous power preserves him until he emerges” (227). True enough, but in his attempt to turn the Book of Abraham into derivative nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha, Vogel misses something important: if none of the sources “well known to Smith’s contemporaries” (227) portray Abraham as being slaughtered with a knife, then where on earth did the Prophet come up with the idea? Vogel may be confident in his ability to read Joseph Smith’s mind, but I am not. Vogel must supply us with better evidence than basically a hunch if we are going to follow his line of thinking. What’s more, we must insist that Vogel do something more to account for the crucial point raised by Muhlestein:

What I found in the few cases of Egyptian sacrifice (human or not) about which we have details is that typically the sacrificial victim was struck with a blade and then burned. In hindsight that makes perfect sense. It is much easier to burn someone or something that is already dead. Nearly all animal sacrifices are done this way. This is likely what was intended

for Abraham as well, to first be struck with a knife while on an altar (as pictured on the facsimile) and then to be burned. Thus the Egyptian sources helped make sense of the various elements of the Abraham story.<sup>110</sup>

Vogel actually cites part of this source (227) but does nothing to refute Muhlestein's point that what is depicted in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham actually accords better with ancient Egyptian material from Abraham's day (see below) than with the later Judeo-Islamic traditions about the patriarch that were circulating in Joseph Smith's day.

Consider also how Vogel handles the Book of Abraham's portrayal of the patriarch as an astronomer. He correctly points out that Josephus, a source available to Joseph Smith, includes brief mention of Abraham's penchant for arithmetic and astronomy, and that Latter-day Saints, unsurprisingly, cited Josephus on occasion (121).<sup>111</sup> From this Vogel concludes that "it is no surprise that Smith would include a discussion of astronomy in his account of Abraham in Egypt" (121). Perhaps not, but what is surprising if we assume Josephus was a major source of Joseph Smith's thinking is that the latter would depart from the former in some important ways.

The Book of Abraham implies that Abram reasoned with the Egyptians about astronomy, and while there is certainly a very distinct parallel here between Josephus and Joseph Smith, there are also some key differences in the way they present Abram teaching astronomy. First off, the Book of Abraham relates that the principles of astronomy were given to Abram in a nighttime revelation before he entered Egypt. However, Josephus reports that Abram had already acquired such knowledge while still in Chaldea. Josephus also states that he derived such knowledge through celestial observation, as opposed to revelation, since by nature Abram was naturally very intelligent and somewhat of a prodigy. Second, Josephus frames Abram's presentation of astronomical insights within the context of mathematics whereas the Book of Abraham never reports that Abram taught mathematics but instead that he taught the Egyptians astronomy to teach the realities of deity. Finally, in Josephus's account, Pharaoh is never mentioned, and the context presupposes that Abraham taught generally the Egyptians arithmetic and astronomy, whereas the Book of Abraham implies that Abraham taught Pharaoh specifically astronomy. In this respect, the Book of Abraham

account is actually closer to an account given by Artapanus, an ancient Jewish author who lived in Egypt sometime before the first century BCE, since he specifically reported that Abram taught Pharaoh astronomy. These observations are not to minimize the fact that there is significant extrabiblical parallel between Josephus and Joseph Smith, but to suggest some caution before automatically assuming that Josephus has to be the direct source for this parallel since there are also some important differences. Also, it must be remembered that in Jewish sources of the Second Temple period and Rabbinic period, Abram was widely regarded as an astronomer of sorts, so it is not inconceivable that such information could have been obtained via a source other than Josephus.<sup>112</sup>

The most notable aspect of the Book of Abraham's depiction that departs from Josephus and the other usual sources we might suspect if we were to follow Vogel is the explicit mention of the patriarch possessing and using the Urim and Thummim (Abraham 3:1, 4), which finds deeply intriguing parallel with rabbinic sources unavailable to Joseph Smith (and, apparently, unknown to Vogel).<sup>113</sup> While Vogel does helpfully remind us about the pitfalls of parallelomania, his own reading of the Book of Abraham as nothing more than Joseph Smith's imaginary literary concoction with some run-of-the-mill nineteenth-century sources thrown into the mix leaves much to be desired.

### **“Human Sacrifice” in the Book of Abraham**

The opening chapter of the Book of Abraham narrates the patriarch's near-sacrifice at the hands of an idolatrous priest, which Facsimile 1 of the Book of Abraham visually depicts. According to the text, Abraham's kinsfolk at Ur practiced the “custom” of “offer[ing] up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea . . . men, women, and children” to “strange gods” (Abraham 1:8). This “custom” is called in the text “the sacrifice of the heathen” (v. 7) and an “offering” (vv. 7–9), but never a “human sacrifice.” It was directed by “the priest of Elkenah,” a northwest Levantine deity attested in Abraham's day<sup>114</sup> who was also a “priest of Pharaoh” (v. 7), meaning evidently a god closely associated with Pharaoh or the office of kingship (v. 9).<sup>115</sup> This practice is said to have been conducted “after the manner of the Egyptians” (vv. 9, 11) at an altar near a hill that bore an Egyptian name (v. 10). The text of the Book of Abraham, therefore, depicts what we today might call “human sacrifice” (a loaded term that requires lots of unpacking) being practiced

at Ur of the Chaldees (wherever that was) in a ritualized setting that to some unspecified degree mimicked an Egyptian custom.

Is there any evidence for what is depicted in the Book of Abraham? Specifically, is there evidence that the ancient Egyptians practiced “human sacrifice” that might have been mimicked by non-Egyptian peoples (such as Abraham’s presumed northwest Semitic or Mesopotamian kinspeople)? Vogel answers in the negative (231–32). Citing Ritner and Woods, who also dismiss the Book of Abraham, Vogel insists that “defenders of the Book of Abraham not only persist but overstate their case” for the practice of “human sacrifice” among the ancient Egyptians (232). A closer look at this issue, however, reveals serious problems with Vogel’s claim.

Let us first take a look at whether Vogel has fairly represented the argument made by those who affirm the Book of Abraham’s historicity. The only pieces of apologetic literature Vogel cites on this point are Muhlestein’s 2003 dissertation on the subject of “sanctioned killing” in ancient Egypt and his 2011 article giving a general overview of Book of Abraham issues.<sup>116</sup> Either because he is ignorant of it or because he could not be bothered to include it, Vogel fails to meaningfully engage Muhlestein’s extensive Egyptological work on the subject of “sanctioned killing” in ancient Egypt.<sup>117</sup> He also overlooks Muhlestein’s important 2011 study cowritten with Gee that explains the relevance of this body of work for the Book of Abraham.<sup>118</sup> In fact, while Muhlestein was (only somewhat) tentative in the 2011 article cited by Vogel,<sup>119</sup> he would later go on to make a much more forceful argument in subsequent publications. In 2015, for instance, writing in the journal *Near Eastern Archaeology* (published by the prestigious American Schools of Oriental Research), Muhlestein summarized his work on “sanctioned killing” in ancient Egypt by making the emphatic case that “institutionally sanctioned ritual violence [in ancient Egypt] centered around two main ideas: interference with cult, and rebellion.”<sup>120</sup> Interference with the cult and rebellion against the established political (and thereby religious) order is precisely what landed Abraham on the altar according to the first chapter of the Book of Abraham, which Vogel perhaps would have appreciated had he better command of the relevant literature.<sup>121</sup>

Central to the question of whether the ancient Egyptians practiced “human sacrifice” is the archaeological deposit discovered at the Middle Kingdom fortress of Mirgissa. Muhlestein and Gee cite this finding as their key witness, observing,

Just outside the Middle Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa, which had been part of the Egyptian empire in Nubia, a deposit was found containing various ritual objects such as melted wax figurines, a flint knife, and the decapitated body of a foreigner slain during rites designed to ward off enemies. Almost universally, this discovery has been accepted as a case of human sacrifice.<sup>122</sup>

Does this concur with the Egyptological consensus? Writing in 2001, Stephan J. Seidlmayer summarized,

The most important find relating to execration rituals of the Middle Kingdom comes from outside the Egyptian fortress at Mirgissa in Lower Nubia. ... There, a large pit was excavated that contained the remains of more than 175 pottery vessels inscribed with long execration texts; they had been broken intentionally during the ritual. This cache also contained an extensive series of other magical objects, including models of birds, ships, and parts of the human body. The remains of four inscribed limestone figures of captives were also found there that had possibly served as models for the texts on the pots. Careful analysis of the archaeological context revealed the phases of the ritual, during which even a human sacrifice occurred.<sup>123</sup>

Seidlmayer is not alone in this assessment. Thus John Coleman Darnell and Coleen Manassa:

The interplay of ritual activity and more mundane military activity in the Egyptian world led on at least one occasion to what might be considered human sacrifice — the so-called Mirgissa Deposit. An intact assemblage from the Middle Kingdom fortress of Mirgissa contained the body of an executed man buried in a shallow pit along with a number of broken red clay vessels and several limestone and clay figurines of prisoners and associated images. The deposit appears to reveal the conjunction of three events: (1) a ritual called “breaking the red vessels,” well attested in representations of Egyptian funerary practice; (2) an execration ritual in which certain individuals, both Egyptian and foreign, are ritually damned; (3) finally, the actual execution of a human. ... At Mirgissa, ritual and reality appeared to have coincided, and a human victim — decapitated and buried upside down

— received the treatment meted out to ritual images. One cannot say whether the individual executed was simply chosen at random, the human sacrifice being the primary object of the ritual, or whether, as appears more likely, the deposit represents the religious significance of a ritualized execution that would have taken place on the basis of some military or legal precedent. Most likely the victim was a Nubian criminal or rebel leader whose execution took on greater cosmic meaning by the application of the execration ritual to his execution.<sup>124</sup>

And Perla Fuscaldò:

In the Middle Kingdom fortress at Mirgissa, figurines and jars were found in situ inside two pits. On three stone statuettes representing prisoners buried in sandy soil, and on a large amount of broken pottery placed in a pit, “execration texts” were written. In another pit a human skull was found. At Mirgissa not only human figurines and broken pottery but also human remains were buried, which means that an actual human sacrifice could have been made during this execration ritual.<sup>125</sup>

And Emily Teeter:

Two other large deposits of execration figurines were found at the Middle Kingdom fort at Mirgissa in Nubia. One consisted of inscribed potsherds and 350 figurines. The other was made up of about 200 fragments of broken red vases bearing inscriptions, ostraca, 346 mud figurines, and three limestone prisoner figurines of bound enemies (and the head of another). The malicious intent of the deposit was made clear by the presence of a human sacrifice and by four crucibles supplied to burn and destroy the four prisoner figurines. These vessels are known from religious texts as the “furnace of the coppersmiths” that consumed enemies. This group ... show[s] the extent to which magic was legitimate and accepted, for these deposits were intended to kill enemies of the state.<sup>126</sup>

And, most recently, Andrew T. Wilburn:

One of the best preserved and archaeologically complete deposits of execration figurines and texts is associated with

the military fortress at Mirgissa, constructed in the XII dynasty, perhaps during the reign of Sesostris II (1845–1837 BCE), which served as a bulwark against the Nubian peoples to the south of Egypt. The deposit, which consisted of three separate pits, included 197 inscribed red ceramic vessels, 437 uninscribed red vessels, 346 mud figurines, 3 figurines in limestone, the head of a fourth figurine, and the remains of a human ritual killing. The bulk of the deposit was placed within a large pit hollowed out in the sand, well away from patterns of movement on the site. The ceramic vessels were shattered prior to being placed in the pit, and approximately one-third of the vessels had been inscribed with the names of enemies of the Egyptian state. The fragments of inscribed and uninscribed pots were regularly interspersed with seven layers of mud figurines, with each layer including a specific corpus of items: a headless and bound torso, a severed head or foot, a blinded eye, six or seven models of reed boats, a domesticated animal, a reptile, twelve geese in flight and a number of unidentified objects. The human figures or body-parts clearly represent the Nubians, whom the rite intended to kill or otherwise destroy; the rite also intended the destruction of their herds (the domesticated animals) and means of transport (the boats). The reptile and the geese likely stood for the traditional divine enemies of Egypt, residents of the desert. A second deposit was placed eleven meters away from the first, and included the statuettes of three bound prisoners and the head of a fourth. A third deposit consisted of the head of a Nubian victim, killed as part of the ritual, and buried in the ground on top of a pottery vessel. Around the skull, the excavators discovered traces of red beeswax, presumably the remains of wax figurines that were melted in the performance of the rite. The decapitated body of the Nubian was found a short distance away, offering clear evidence that this individual was executed as part of the process.<sup>127</sup>

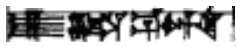
Vogel's appeal to Ritner in his attempt to refute Muhlestein's work on this matter is rather awkward considering that Ritner himself described the Mirgissa deposit as "indisputable evidence for the practice of human sacrifice in classical ancient Egypt." As he explained,

Interred about four meters from the central deposit, a skull rested upside down on one half of a broken pottery cup, its

mandible missing and its upper jaw flush with the surface. About the skull were found small traces of beeswax dyed with red ochre, presumably the remains of melted figurines. Although the cup which had probably once held the skull seemed naturally broken, perhaps as a result of burial, an intentionally shattered piece of inscribed red pottery 15 cm to the southeast clearly affiliated the find with the ritual of the central deposit. Lying a further 5 cm from this broken pottery was a flint blade, the traditional ceremonial knife for ritual slaughter. That the skull derived from a ritual sacrifice cannot be denied, as it was the initial discovery of a nearby decapitated and disarticulated skeleton which had led to the find of the execration assemblage. ... At Mirgissa, the interdependence of rite and execution is expressed concretely — by the corpse of the human sacrifice.<sup>128</sup>

My point here is not to make an argument from consensus, which is fallacious, but rather to stress that Vogel's nihilistic and unformed quibbling over whether we call the phenomenon "human sacrifice" or "sanctioned killing" or "ritual violence" or something else obfuscates the fact that Muhlestein's work is both firmly within the Egyptological mainstream and amply demonstrates the overall plausibility of the behavior depicted in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. We can, in fact, answer in the affirmative that there is evidence that the ancient Egyptians of Abraham's day sometimes ritually executed human victims in what not a few Egyptologists sometimes call "human sacrifice." The supreme irony in all of this, of course, is that the text of the Book of Abraham does not even call the practice described in its pages "human sacrifice." Nor does it require actual Egyptians in Abraham's homeland committing the deed. It merely requires general knowledge of this Egyptian custom among Abraham's kinsfolk. Vogel has come nowhere close to adequately accounting for the evidence pertaining to this matter.<sup>129</sup>

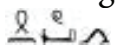

### **Olishem**

As early as the mid-1980s,<sup>130</sup> Latter-day Saint scholars have pointed to a plausible candidate for the toponym Olishem mentioned at Abraham 1:10. Inscriptional evidence from Mesopotamia dating to the reign of the Akkadian king Naram-Sin (circa 2254–2218 BC) speaks of a certain , standardized as either Ulisum or Ulishum, but also Ulissum, Ullis(s)um, Ul(l)is(s)um, and Ul(l)is.<sup>131</sup> The location of



this Ulisum/Ulishum most likely lies somewhere west of the Euphrates in southeastern Turkey, but it is difficult to be more specific with the available evidence. Vogel, desperate to neutralize this very promising evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Abraham, is quick to dismiss this correlation. “[M]aking this argument requires moving Ur from Chaldea in the south to an unlikely location in northern Mesopotamia near Haran,” Vogel informs us (235). What exactly makes it “unlikely” he never bothers to explain. I myself have looked carefully at the question of the location of Abraham’s Ur, and while the case for a northern location is not ironclad, it is also not out of question and finds support among non-Latter-day Saint scholars.<sup>132</sup> Because Vogel is completely unequipped to critically engage this issue, he passes the buck by once again offhandedly citing Christopher Wood’s negative assessment of the proposed identification of Olishem with Ulisum.<sup>133</sup> Vogel appears to be unaware of the fact that more recently at least one non-Latter-day Saint archaeologist working at one of the proposed sites of ancient Ulisum (the Kilis plain located north of Aleppo across the Turkish border) has suggested a promising though tentative identification with Olishem and its connected plain.<sup>134</sup> While a positive identification of the Book of Abraham’s Olishem with Ulisum is still currently beyond definitive proof, it is nevertheless a viable and promising candidate, despite Vogel’s feeble objections.<sup>135</sup>


### Shinehah

The third chapter of the Book of Abraham furnishes the names Shinehah and Olea as meaning “the sun” and “the moon,” respectively (Abraham 3:13). Whatever language these two words are supposed to derive from, however, is left unspecified. In 1936, J. E. Homans (writing under the pseudonym R. C. Webb) felt that “neither of them resembles a word of Egyptian origin,” and argued that Shinehah derived from “such a verb-root as **shanah**, meaning ‘to shine,’ ‘to brighten,’ although as spelled here, it is unfamiliar.”<sup>136</sup> Homans’ argument to link Shinehah with a Semitic root, however, is not persuasive.<sup>137</sup> In 2010, Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes proposed a reconstructed Egyptian etymology for Shinehah as deriving from the elements  and . While this appears plausible, it remains unattested and is a conjectural reconstruction. Matthew Grey has most recently suggested that Shinehah, like Olea, instead derives “from Smith’s previous work on the ‘pure language of Adam,’” and therefore should not be seen as deriving from any extant ancient tongue.<sup>139</sup> Vogel, as would be expected, weighs

in on the matter by dismissing Shinehah as an “invented” name that belongs with the other codenames created for the 1835 first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (161). He additionally disputes the arguments made by Gee and others that Shinehah in Abraham 3:13 indicates the translation of the Book of Abraham extended beyond the extant Kirtland-era manuscripts, which end at Abraham 2:18 (158–63).

Vogel’s protestations notwithstanding, I am not convinced that we can definitively resolve the issues pertaining to the presence of Shinehah in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants and Abraham 3:13 and what the implications of such are for the chronology of the translation of the latter. What I do wish to emphasize here is the point previously made by Gee:

Some [like Vogel] might hypothesize that the term *Shinehah* was borrowed into the Book of Abraham from its use in the Doctrine and Covenants. This hypothesis assumes that the Book of Abraham is a modern fictional work written by Joseph Smith. The assumption, though unstated, is essential for the argument to be comprehensible. The problem with the assumption is that this term in the Book of Abraham is a known Egyptian term.<sup>140</sup>

Gee is referring to the attested Egyptian word from the time of Abraham for the sun’s ecliptic: . This word<sup>141</sup> and its cosmological significance for the ancient Egyptians is both a phonetic and a broadly conceptual match with what is found in Abraham 3<sup>142</sup> and, accordingly, “if one accepts that the Book of Abraham is ancient, then the simplest explanation is that the Doctrine and Covenants borrows from the Book of Abraham.” If, on the other hand, one follows Vogel and “argues that the Book of Abraham borrows from the Doctrine and Covenants, then one assumes the Book of Abraham is modern, but one must still explain how it contains an authentic Egyptian term whose existence was unknown to Western scholarship until 1882.”<sup>143</sup> Because he does not know Egyptian and by his own admission does not care to bother with the Egyptian sources in assessing the authenticity of the Book of Abraham, Vogel’s treatment neglects to account for any of this significant evidence.

### Miscellaneous Issues

There are a multitude of miscellaneous issues relative to the Book of Abraham that Vogel raises in *Book of Abraham Apologetics* which should

not be dismissed or avoided. The following sections examine just three of these issues.

### **Race, the Priesthood Ban, and the Book of Abraham**

The issue of race in the Book of Abraham and the nature of the priesthood “curse” described at Abraham 1:23–27 is one that will likely continue to provoke strong feelings, especially among readers living in the United States who are still grappling with the deeply regrettable legacy of anti-black racism in America. The sad reality is that historically, and in some lingering cases even today, Latter-day Saints have used the Book of Abraham to justify racist policies and attitudes, chief among them the pre-1978 prohibition on men of African descent from holding priesthood offices and the restriction on both men and women of African descent from participating in temple ordinances. Although contemporary leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have officially rejected attempts to use scriptural justification for these past racist policies and teachings,<sup>144</sup> this does not change the unfortunate ways in which Latter-day Saints have used scripture in what can charitably be called deeply flawed and misapplied readings.<sup>145</sup>

As would be expected, Vogel sees the Book of Abraham as the product of Joseph Smith’s nineteenth century racist ideas about the origins of people of African descent (95–117). As Vogel correctly notes, a number of Joseph Smith’s contemporaries, like generations of Christians before the nineteenth century, read certain passages in the book of Genesis (such as the enigmatic story of Noah cursing of his son Ham in Genesis 9 and details about the descendants of Ham in the so-called Table of Nations in Genesis 10:6–20) to justify the enslavement of people of African descent.<sup>146</sup> For Vogel, Joseph Smith’s scriptural productions are merely the outgrowth of these racist theories.

“As early as 1831,” Vogel writes, “Smith’s revelations explained that the mark God had put upon Cain for murdering his brother, Abel, was black skin” (108). To support this, Vogel cites Moses 7:8, 22, which speaks of how in vision the prophet Enoch saw that

the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people. ... [And he] beheld the residue of the people which were the sons of Adam; and they were a mixture of all the seed of Adam save it was the seed

of Cain, for the seed of Cain were black, and had not place among them.<sup>147</sup>

He likewise draws attention to Joseph Smith's revision or translation of Genesis 9 (KJV 9:25–26), which reads, “And he said cursed be Canaan a Servent of servants shall he be unto his breatheren and he said blessed be the Lord God of Shem and Canaan shall be his servent and a vail of darkness shall cover him that he shall be known among all men.”<sup>148</sup> As Vogel goes on to argue, the Book of Abraham merely amplified Joseph Smith's racist predilections enshrined in his prophetic engagement with the biblical text. “In the intervening years between working on his Bible revision and dictating the text of the Book of Abraham, Smith modified his ideas about the origin of the Black race” (109).

The most glaring problem with Vogel's argument, of course, is that these passages say positively nothing about Cain's descendants having black *skin*. If, as Vogel believes, Joseph Smith was conjuring the contents of his “new translation”<sup>149</sup> of the Bible from his own mind, there was nothing to stop him from explicitly making black *skin* the mark of Cain's descendants. But the text never actually does this. Instead, it uses the much more abstract “blackness” and “darkness” to describe the people. Vogel infers that Moses 7:8 “seemed to allude to Africa” (109) but provides no justification for this reading beyond his own supposition. What's more, the opening chapter of the Book of Moses subverts Vogel's reading, and supports the notion that the “blackness” of the children of Cain and Canaan, and later the “veil of darkness” over Canaan, was not skin pigmentation, but a withdrawal of the glory of God from among the people. Moses 1:15 describes how Moses could detect Satan's deception because the latter's “glory” was “darkness” unto him compared to God's own incomparable glory. In OT1 this passage reads that Satan's glory was “blackness” unto Moses, thus providing a clear thematic link with Enoch's prophecy later in Moses 7.<sup>150</sup> This, of course, is in strict keeping with ancient Jewish idiom, which uses “darkness” to describe evildoers, demons and their realm, and those who are in a spiritually benighted state.<sup>151</sup> Ironically, Vogel is imposing on the text of both the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham the same racist (mis)reading that Latter-day Saints after Joseph Smith's death imposed on these texts.

The glaring problem for Vogel and others who wish to portray Joseph Smith as imbibing in commonplace nineteenth century American racism with his scriptural productions<sup>152</sup> is that there is “no contemporary evidence” that the Prophet ever appealed to either the Book of Moses or the Book of Abraham in his racial thinking.<sup>153</sup> Indeed, “There is no

evidence that during his lifetime [Joseph] Smith or any of his followers cited the book of Abraham to deny black Mormon men the priesthood.”<sup>154</sup> Vogel admits that “how [the Book of Abraham’s teachings] applied to Smith’s church [sic], and the priesthood Smith established, was never explicitly stated during Smith’s lifetime” (110), which is a bashful way of conceding that he has no actual evidence for this reading that he merely assumes must have originated with the Prophet. “While not addressing slavery directly,” Vogel writes, “[the Book of] Abraham supports the white supremacist ideology of slave owners” (116). This bizarre claim is made all the stranger by the fact left unaddressed (but certainly known) by Vogel that Joseph Smith not only approved of the ordination of at least two black men to the priesthood (Elijah Able and Q. Walker Lewis), but also that he ran on an anti-slavery platform during his 1844 presidential bid.<sup>155</sup>

Vogel correctly observes that in April 1836, in what was probably a move to distance the Latter-day Saints from the more radical antebellum abolitionist movement and to ameliorate the tense situation with the pro-slavery Missourians, Joseph Smith published an anti-abolitionist editorial in the *Messenger and Advocate*.<sup>156</sup> What Vogel seems not to appreciate, however, is that with this editorial Joseph had a perfect opportunity to use his supposedly racist scripture to bolster his case. But he didn’t. Instead, he quoted the KJV rendering of Genesis 9:25–26, not the Book of Abraham and not even his own translation of this same passage (the one Vogel thinks is clear proof of the Prophet’s racist thinking). Vogel never stops to ask why. I can only assume that this is because Vogel has already come to the conclusion that as nineteenth century texts, the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham must necessarily reflect their racist nineteenth century environments. As with his utterly farfetched attempt to use the issue of race in the Book of Abraham to attribute the authorship of the Grammar and Alphabet to Joseph Smith (96–115), his attempt to depict the Book of Abraham as projecting a “white supremacist ideology” is entirely unconvincing (116). Suffice it to say that more responsible, informed treatments of this topic should be sought elsewhere.<sup>157</sup>

### **Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew**

Hebrew terminology appears in both the text of the Book of Abraham and in some of Joseph Smith’s explanations to the text’s accompanying facsimiles (Abraham 3:13, 16, 18; Facsimile 1, Fig. 12; Facsimile 2, Figs. 4–5). Additionally, the Creation account preserved in Abraham 4–5 in

some ways appears to reflect a knowledge of Hebrew (for instance, the rendering of “expanse” at Abraham 4:6 as opposed to the “firmament” of Genesis 1:6 for the word רָקִיעַ). Since there is no evidence that Joseph Smith knew Hebrew in any meaningful sense before late-January 1836, this raises questions about both the nature and chronology of the translation of the Book of Abraham.

As would be expected, scholars are divided on the ramifications of the presence of this Hebrew terminology in the Book of Abraham.<sup>158</sup> A significant part of the debate revolves around whether the presence of Hebrew words in the third chapter of the Book of Abraham indicates this portion of the text was translated after January 1836. On one side of the argument is Matthew Grey, who has recently affirmed that the presence of Hebrew terminology in the Book of Abraham is indicative that the text of Abraham 3–5 was composed after 1836.<sup>159</sup> On the other side is Kerry Muhlestein, who, along with his co-author Megan Hansen, argues that the Hebrew phrases in the Book of Abraham are evidence of Joseph Smith’s editorial preparation and revision, but not the composition, of the text post-1836.<sup>160</sup> Although he himself does not know Hebrew, Vogel weighs in on this subject (145–77) and argues that “the last three chapters of Abraham bear the marks of Smith’s Hebrew lessons with Seixas in early 1836,” which, he insists, “creates a problem for defenders who require that the entirety of the Book of Abraham translation must precede” both the composition of the GAEL and Joseph Smith’s Hebrew lessons (147).

None of Vogel’s counterarguments to Muhlestein and Hansen’s thesis appear especially fatal in my judgment, as they largely rest either on assumptions about certain behavior expected of Joseph Smith<sup>161</sup> or on readings of historical sources that are particularly suited to Vogel’s need to downplay or otherwise refute his interlocutors’ own conclusions.<sup>162</sup> In any case, a much more robust, comprehensive, and informed treatment on Joseph Smith’s study of Hebrew can be found in Grey, who has both the advantage of not sharing Vogel’s ideological handicaps and an actual working knowledge of the languages involved in this subject. For now, I am interested in reiterating what Vogel never bothers to explain in his treatment: how Joseph Smith was able to capture authentic ancient concepts with only an elementary understanding of Hebrew and while under the tutelage of a teacher who openly balked at the ideas advanced in the Book of Abraham and the Prophet’s sermons.<sup>163</sup>

As Vogel correctly observes, Joseph Smith learned that the Hebrew noun אֱלֹהִים is, technically, a plural form from his Hebrew studies (155,

167–69).<sup>164</sup> What Vogel does not adequately account for is how this rudimentary understanding not only supposedly gave Joseph Smith the wherewithal to concoct an elaborate cosmology for the Book of Abraham, but how this cosmology could anticipate the findings of secular scholarship by several decades. As I myself and others have shown, the Book of Abraham’s depiction of the divine council and a plurality of gods is firmly at home in the ancient world.<sup>165</sup> Vogel never addresses any of this, and in his regrettable habit of missing the forest for the trees, instead contents himself with arguing over minutiae with “apologists” on the chronology of the production of the English text. But regardless of *when* the text was produced, that it captures authentic ancient concepts cannot be denied, and is wholly remarkable. The ways Joseph Smith deploys his knowledge of Hebrew in the Book of Abraham and in other teachings cannot simply be a matter of the Prophet heedlessly repackaging a few things he picked up from Joshua Seixas.<sup>166</sup> Instead,

While [Joseph] Smith clearly deferred to his various textbooks on several points — sometimes preferring one resource over another — there were other instances in which his own examination of the papyri, developing theology, and revelations merged with his creative use of less conventional Hebrew definitions or technicalities, thus allowing him to tease out unique theological concepts and produce a distinctively expansive translation.<sup>167</sup>

### **The Cosmology of the Book of Abraham**


The cosmology described in the third chapter of the Book of Abraham has proven to be an irresistible fascination for writers since at least the nineteenth century.<sup>168</sup> Following his earlier work from the 1990s, Vogel offers his own views on the cosmology of the Book of Abraham in the fifth chapter of his book (“The Cosmos,” 119–44). The two main arguments that Vogel drives home in his treatment on the cosmology of Abraham 3 are that the cosmology is not ancient, and that it borrows from contemporary nineteenth century astronomical and theological speculation. “[The Book of Abraham’s] cosmology was not what one would expect from an ancient author,” Vogel insists. Instead, “the mix of contemporary astronomy and theological concerns” of the nineteenth century “resulted in a cosmology [in the text] that is as foreign to twenty-first-century readers of Smith’s texts as ancient Hebrew cosmology was to Smith and his contemporaries” (119).

What interests me with Vogel's approach to the cosmology of the Book of Abraham is not his wholly speculative arguments for its dependence on the Egyptian grammar documents (121–33),<sup>169</sup> nor his rehashing of the tired claim that Joseph Smith was dependent on the writings of Thomas Dick (129, 132, 138–39, 144),<sup>170</sup> nor his ignoring the fact that learned contemporaries dismissed it as absurd and contrived (which is strange indeed if the system is wholly derivative of nineteenth-century thinking).<sup>171</sup> Instead, I am interested in his attempt to refute the reading of the cosmology of Abraham 3 that sees the system as geocentric. Specifically, Vogel takes issue with the arguments made in the groundbreaking 2005 study conducted by John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, (133–40).<sup>172</sup> Vogel is eager to refute this model for understanding Abraham 3 because it fundamentally undercuts his belief that the Book of Abraham is a modern pseudepigraphon influenced by Dick and other nineteenth century theologian-cosmologists. In his haste to refute Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson, however, Vogel ends up committing the same infractions he lays at the feet of his opponents.<sup>173</sup> He also fails to account for other models for Abraham 3, such as Muhlestein's, that also plausibly situate the text in the ancient world.<sup>174</sup> Crucially, Vogel fails to explain how his model accounts for the fact that Abraham 3 has “the earth upon which [Abraham] standest” (vv. 3, 5, 7) as the patriarch's point of reference for “reckoning” the movement of the celestial bodies being viewed above him.<sup>175</sup> The plainest reading of these two verses at the very least strongly point to the likelihood that the text is describing a geocentric cosmos from Abraham's (the narrator's) vantage.

Of special interest in this discussion is what to do with one Middle Kingdom text that seems especially germane to the cosmology of Abraham 3. The significance that the couplet shown in Figure 4 holds for royal ideology and the idea of cosmic dominion is fairly clear<sup>176</sup> both from the excerpted passage below and from other examples,<sup>177</sup> and both Gee and Muhlestein have perceptively noted the significance it holds for Abraham 3.<sup>178</sup> Much less clear is what it might tell us about how the ancient Egyptians envisioned their cosmos and what bearing that may have on the argument that Abraham 3 reflects a geocentric cosmos.



**Figure 4.** A significant couplet from a Middle Kingdom text.<sup>179</sup>

While Leonard Lesko disavows the idea that the “very common phrase”<sup>180</sup>  and its equivalents reflects a geocentric cosmos,<sup>181</sup>



more recently Joanne Conman has problematized Lesko's reading by pointing out that he neglects to consider the precise manner in which the Egyptians tracked the movement of celestial bodies, including the sun.<sup>182</sup> In any case, it is clear that what the sun encircles in the Egyptian cosmic view includes the earth — “the world ruled by the pharaoh”<sup>183</sup> — and Vogel does not do justice to the issue with his dismissive footnote (134n42).

### **Conclusion: Taking Stock**

“None of the leading theories of Book of Abraham historicity exhibits an accurate understanding of the Joseph Smith Egyptian papers” (243). So writes Vogel at the curtain call of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*. For a study that boasts to be nothing less than a soberminded “work of history” (xvii), it is truly telling that Vogel spends most of his conclusion recapitulating his grievances with “apologetic theories” (243), gets in one final dig at “the last stand of one school of Abraham apologetics” (248), and injects a bit of theology for good measure (249–50). In any case, Vogel again entreats us to abandon the apologetics of yesteryear and embrace Joseph Smith as a saintly liar who “believed himself authorized by God to use misdirection/deception ... to promote greater faith in his ‘inspired pseudepigrapha’” (249).<sup>184</sup> The Book of Abraham, in Vogel's final ruling, is a modern forgery that Joseph Smith used “to lend ancient support to several of [his] doctrinal innovations not clearly discussed in the Bible” (250).

Although in this review I have been highly critical of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*, I want to conclude by reiterating that I actually do appreciate that Vogel has offered a fairly systematic attempt to account for the origin and contents of the Book of Abraham from a metaphysically naturalistic or atheistic perspective that, however woefully inadequate, takes the text seriously enough to undertake such a project. I commend Vogel for giving his Latter-day Saint “apologist” foes enough courtesy to at least spare us the sort of patronizing, glib dismissiveness that has marred the work of past skeptics. I mean this sincerely when I say that if one is looking for a secular accounting for the Book of Abraham that begins with the conclusion that Joseph Smith could not and therefore did not translate ancient records by the power of God, you have a fairly decent example in the form of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*.

This, however, is about all I can say positively for the book. It is apparent throughout *Book of Abraham Apologetics* that while Vogel is certainly better informed than most critics, his work nevertheless suffers

from what is at times a painfully obvious lack the prerequisite ability needed to tackle most of the issues he contends with. To put it bluntly in the reappropriated words of Richard Lloyd Anderson, Vogel is in no position

to say whether the Book of [Abraham] is more like the nineteenth century than the ancient world that it chronicles. A student of the nineteenth century [like Vogel] may indeed find parallels in this period and the Book of [Abraham], but without a knowledge of the world of antiquity, he simply is not equipped to make a judgment whether the Book of [Abraham] resembles more Joseph Smith's environment or the ancient culture it claims to represent.<sup>185</sup>

Lest I am misunderstood, let me be clear what I am and am not claiming. Vogel, as I have shown in this review, is incapable of adequately dealing with the ancient evidence for the Book of Abraham, and therefore most of his objections to the work of his apologist interlocutors is spurious. This is simply because he is deficient in the specialized training needed to do such. Consequently, he can only consider a nineteenth century origin for the book both because his ideological position requires it and because his inability to handle the ancient sources means that he is incapable of critically assessing the evidence for the ancient origin of the book. It is, furthermore, very obviously the reason why he is adamant that the only discipline needed to assess the authenticity of the Book of Abraham just so happens to be the one discipline in which he has any expertise. This does not automatically make Vogel's arguments wrong, but it does make them deeply suspect. I am not saying that Vogel is simply wrong because he doesn't have the necessary training, but rather that Vogel's arguments are deficient because he doesn't actually carefully consider all the evidence, and uncritically relies on others to make his predetermined case against the historicity of the Book of Abraham for him. If I may reapply Vogel's own words, "[His] claims are not supported by the documentation, but, instead, result from [his] need to make the facts fit their theories" (16).

One final question to consider before we conclude is to ask how we should frame the Book of Abraham, or which presumptions should we let prevail as we approach the text. The first option is to presume, like Vogel, that because there is no good reason to believe in the supernatural, the Book of Abraham must therefore be something other than what Joseph Smith said it was, and the evidence examined in that light. The second — and, in my judgment, superior — option is to “exercise

a particle of faith” (Alma 32:27) that the Book of Abraham is actually what it and its translator claim it to be, and to not reflexively dismiss the evidence for its authenticity just because it may not always be as direct as we would wish, or just because doing so might force us to ask difficult metaphysical questions about the existence of revelation and the reality of Joseph Smith’s seer gift. This approach, which Hugh Nibley articulated well for the Book of Mormon in the 1950s,<sup>186</sup> is admittedly not without its shortcomings, and asks much in the way of intellectual and metaphysical commitment of those who would entertain it, but is far better at making sense of the relevant facts pertaining to the coming forth of the Book of Abraham, to say nothing of the text itself.

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### Endnotes

- 1 Kerry Muhlestein, “The Explanation-Defying Book of Abraham,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura Harris Hales (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 79–91.
- 2 Hugh Nibley, “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” *Improvement Era* (August 1968): 55–56, emphasis in original; cf. Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 154–55.
- 3 Establishing the overall “plausibility” of the historicity of the text of the Book of Abraham is pretty much the most we can hope to achieve with the tools of scholarship, for the reasons cogently laid out in 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.
- 4 One study that has approached the Book of Abraham from this angle can be found in David E. Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old*

*Testament: Genesis-Deuteronomy* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books), 161–89.

- 5 The Joseph Smith Papyri have been extensively studied and enjoy multiple translations and editions. See Klaus Baer, “The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1968): 109–34; Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976); rep., Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol 16 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005); Michael D. Rhodes, “A Translation and Commentary of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 259–74; rep. and rev., Rhodes, “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus ... Twenty Years Later,” (FARMS Preliminary Report, 1997); John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); *Books of the Dead Belonging to Tshemmin and Neferirnub: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2010); Robert K. Ritner, ed., *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011). For a study on the cultural background of the papyri, see Kerry M. 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.
- 6 See, generally, Nissim Wernick, “A Critical Analysis of the Book of Abraham in the Light of Extra-Canonical Jewish Writings” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1968); Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., passim; Jared W. Ludlow, “Abraham’s Vision of the Heavens,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 57–73; Stephen O. Smoot and Kerry M. Muhlestein, “Prophets, Pagans, and Papyri: The Jews of Greco-Roman Egypt and the Transmission of the Book of Abraham,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* (2021): forthcoming.
- 7 For two recent representative works on this point, see Samuel M. Brown, *Joseph Smith’s Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press,

2020); Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid, eds., *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2020).

- 8 Text-critical work on the Book of Abraham manuscripts can be found in Brian M. Hauglid, ed., *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010); Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2018), hereafter *JSPRT4*. However, Hauglid and Jensen's text-critical work has been critiqued by John Gee ("The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 33 [2019]: 175–86; "Taking Stock," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 [2020]: 113–18; "Prolegomena to a Study of the Egyptian Alphabet Documents in the Joseph Smith Papers," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 [2021]: 77–98; "Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 [2021]: 127–70) and Jeffrey Lindsay ("A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 33 [2019]: 13–104; "A Welcome Response, but Flaws Remain," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 34 [2020]: 105–12), both of whom offer a dramatically different reconstruction of some key elements of the composition and transmission of the text than enunciated by Hauglid and Jensen.
- 9 See "Bibliography," Pearl of Great Price Central, <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/bibliography-adv/>.
- 10 John Gee, "New Light on the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review* 19, no. 2 (2007): 257–58.
- 11 In addition to *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri and Abraham in Egypt*, cited above, see also Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 18 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009); Hugh W. Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round*, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 19 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010).

- 12 Some of Gee's early work includes "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign* (July 1992): 60–62; "A Tragedy of Errors," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4, no. 1 (1992): 93–119.
- 13 John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017). My review of Gee's monograph appeared in Stephen O. Smoot, "Pressing Forward with the Book of Abraham," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 28 (2018): 299–308.
- 14 For examples of Muhlestein's academic work on the Book of Abraham, see Kerry Muhlestein, "Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts: A Model for Evaluating the Prophetic Nature of the Prophet's Ideas about the Ancient World," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2016): 35–82; "Papyri and Presumptions: A Careful Examination of the Eyewitness Accounts Associated with the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 4 (October 2016): 31–50; "Joseph Smith's Biblical View of Egypt," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 449–73. For samples of his apologetic and popularizing work, see "The Book of Abraham, Revelation, and You," *Ensign* (December 2018): 54–57; "The Explanation-Defying Book of Abraham," 79–91; "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 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 217–43.
- 15 But see also the thoughtful discussion of other ways to approach the Book of Abraham in Robin Scott Jensen, Kerry Muhlestein, and Scott C. Esplin, "Discussing Difficult Topics: The Book of Abraham," *Religious Educator* 21, no. 3 (2020): 117–37.
- 16 In a 2018 social media post, Hauglid stated "for the record" that he no longer held to his previous theories about the textual composition of the Book of Abraham and found the "apologetic 'scholarship' [of Gee and Muhlestein] on the [Book of Abraham] abhorrent." See Wikipedia, s.v. "Brian Hauglid," last edited on June 9, 2021, 16:38, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian\\_M.\\_Hauglid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_M._Hauglid) (with links to a third-party site that has preserved screenshots of Hauglid's comment). Hauglid's latest thinking on the composition of the English text of the Book of Abraham can be found in Brian M. Hauglid, "Translating an Alphabet to the Book

of Abraham': Joseph Smith's Study of the Egyptian Language and His Translation of the Book of Abraham," in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 363–89.

- 17 In 1990 Vogel and co-author Brent Lee Metcalfe made the argument in print that the cosmology of the Book of Abraham reflects modern post-Newtonian astrophysics, and is therefore of modern, not ancient, date. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Joseph Smith's Scriptural Cosmology," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 187–219. Vogel is perhaps best known for his 2004 biography *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004) and his useful five-part compilation of documents related to the early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (*Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003]).
- 18 Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021). Citations of this volume will appear in parenthesis throughout the body and footnotes of this review.
- 19 Sara Patterson, "Robert K. Ritner Jr., eminent Egyptologist and beloved teacher, 1953–2021," *UChicago News* (July 28, 2021), <https://news.uchicago.edu/story/robert-k-ritner-jr-eminent-egyptologist-and-beloved-teacher-1953-2021>.
- 20 Ritner began voicing his displeasure with Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri in print beginning some twenty years ago (see Robert K. Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 [Winter 2000]: 97–119; "The Breathing Permit of Hôr" Among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62, no. 3 [2003]: 161–80), culminating in 2011 with his edition of the Joseph Smith Papyri (*The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition*) cited earlier.
- 21 Samples of Staker's work includes Susan Staker, ed., *Waiting for World's End: The Diaries of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993); John Sillito and Susan Staker, eds., *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002); Susan Staker, "God(s) as Character(s) in Joseph's Bible Stories: March 1830 to September 1830," *The John Whitmer*

*Historical Association Journal* 35, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015): 137–49; “A Book of Joseph: Bible Backstories for a Seer,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 145–59. Staker has published at least one piece that touches on the Book of Abraham in Susan Staker, “‘The Lord Said, Thy Wife Is A Very Fair Woman to Look Upon’: The Book of Abraham, Secrets, and Lying for the Lord,” in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 289–318.

- 22 Thomas is named as an institute scholar and a “short-term research grant recipient” in the institute’s 2020 annual report (see “2020 Annual Report,” [report, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship], 3, 73, [https://byumiuploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/01/2020-MI-Annual-Report-web\\_small.pdf](https://byumiuploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/01/2020-MI-Annual-Report-web_small.pdf)), while Hauglid was identified as an institute scholar and visiting fellow in the institute’s 2019 annual report (see “2019 Annual Report,” [report, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship], 3, 12, 80, <https://byumiuploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/01/2019-Maxwell-Institute-Annual-Report-web.pdf>).
- 23 In his introduction (xvi) and again in his conclusion (248), Vogel cites Hauglid’s 2018 announcement on social media that he “wholeheartedly” agrees with Vogel on the production of the Book of Abraham and had broken rank with his former colleagues.
- 24 At the very least, it calls into question the propriety of keeping Elder Neal A. Maxwell’s name affixed to the institute, since Elder Maxwell was, famously, a fierce advocate for exactly the kind of apologetics that some at the MI now appear to agree, with Vogel, is duplicitous (or, more specifically, “abhorrent”).
- 25 The extent of Vogel’s academic training is a BA in history from California State University at Long Beach.
- 26 See “1051–1053: Dan Vogel – Preeminent Joseph Smith Historian,” *Mormon Stories Podcast*, January 21, 2019, <https://www.mormonstories.org/podcast/dan-vogel/>.
- 27 Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, viii, xii, xiv–xv.
- 28 *Ibid.*, xvi.
- 29 Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 127–62.



- 30 Kerry Muhlestein, “The Book of Abraham and Unnoticed Assumptions” (2014 FairMormon Conference, August 7 and 8, 2014, Utah Valley Convention Center, Provo, UT), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2014/book-abraham-unnoticed-assumptions>; Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papers and the Translation of the Book of Abraham: What Careful Applications of the Evidence Can and Cannot Tell Us,” (2020 FairMormon Conference, August 2020), <https://youtu.be/EvbUAF8zQ5Q>, esp. 2:38–5:10.
- 31 Muhlestein, “The Book of Abraham and Unnoticed Assumptions.”
- 32 Ibid., transcript punctuation slightly altered.
- 33 Bibliography,” Pearl of Great Price Central, <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/bibliography-adv/>.
- 34 The term coined by Hugh Nibley, “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” *BYU Studies* 11, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 350–99; rep. in Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*, 502–68.
- 35 The term preferred by H. Michael Marquardt, “Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papers: A History,” in *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, 11–56.
- 36 The term used by the Joseph Smith Papers Project, as found in Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, xiii.
- 37 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, xiv–xv, citations removed.
- 38 Ibid., xv.
- 39 Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 33.
- 40 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, xxv.
- 41 “History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838],” p. 597, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/51>.
- 42 Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 26–62.
- 43 Gee, “Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt,” in *Approaching Antiquity*, 437.

- 44 “Journal, 1835–1836,” p. 3, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/4>.
- 45 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, 53–93.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 47 See further Gee, “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham,” 161–62; “Prolegomena to a Study of the Egyptian Alphabet Documents in the Joseph Smith Papers,” 78–83.
- 48 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, xxv, citations removed.
- 49 If one wishes to explore this line of investigation, I recommend, as an alternative to Vogel, Samuel Morris Brown, “Joseph (Smith) in Egypt: Babel, Hieroglyphs, and the Pure Language of Eden,” *Church History* 78, no. 1 (2009): 26–65; Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is On Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 115–41; Samuel Morris Brown, *Joseph Smith’s Translation*, 193–232.
- 50 “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham,” Gospel Topics, July 2014, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham>.
- 51 Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, xi.
- 52 “Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham,” emphasis in original.
- 53 Gee has made his most sustained case for the missing papyrus theory in John Gee, “Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, eds. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 175–217; but see also John Gee, “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 115–23; John Gee, “Formulas and Faith,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21, no. 1 (2012): 60–65; John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 83–86.
- 54 Givens, *The Pearl of Greatest Price*, 180–202, views the Book of Abraham as the revelatory outpouring of Joseph Smith’s prophetic insight upon his encounter with the Egyptian papyri but not a translation of an ancient Abrahamic text. Another version of the catalyst theory that compares the production of the Book

of Abraham with the charismatic practice of glossolalia (that is, speaking in tongues) has recently been articulated by Brown, *Joseph Smith's Translation*, 193–232.

- 55 Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 86.
- 56 B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948), 2:348.
- 57 Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2.
- 58 Oliver Cowdery, “Egyptian Mummies — Ancient Records,” *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 3 (December 1835): 234.
- 59 John Gee, “Introduction to the Second Edition,” in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., xxi. Gee goes on to bring this up again (2n5) in the note accompanying Nibley's text.
- 60 See especially Muhlestein, “Papyri and Presumptions,” 31–50.
- 61 A much more careful critique, and one that I recommend over Vogel's, even though I disagree with many of its conclusions, is Christopher C. Smith, “‘That Which is Lost’: Assessing the State of Preservation of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 31, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 78–81.
- 62 Incidentally, Vogel fails to meaningfully engage any of the points raised in Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts,” 35–82.
- 63 Gee, “Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 192–95, for instance, has offered justifiable reasons to be cautious with the sources Vogel uses to say that Joseph Smith identified Abraham's handwriting as being on P. Joseph Smith XI.
- 64 Charlotte Haven, “A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo,” *Overland Monthly* 16, no. 96 (December 1890): 623–24.
- 65 Smith, “‘That Which is Lost’,” 78–81.
- 66 Vogel (199) is also dismissive of Haven's testimony because of the “exaggerated, if not fanciful” comments by Mother Smith that she could read the papyri by her faith in the inspiration of her son. But Haven is clear that what Lucy read aloud “sounded very much like passages from the Old Testament — and it might have been for anything we knew.” It could be that Lucy was reading

from published portions of the Book of Abraham text, and not making up “fanciful” material in the moment. (After all, the Book of Abraham not only sounds like the Old Testament, but even reproduces material from the book of Genesis.) Vogel might have a point here if Haven were the only source Muhlestein and Gee rely on for the missing papyrus theory. But since she is not, the most we can afford Vogel is that he is right to say that we must not overstate the evidence (a point that is hardly controversial and provides no special insight).

- 67 Smith, “‘That Which is Lost,’” 78. To be clear, Smith immediately follows with his own reasoning for why he ultimately rejects this view:

One must keep in mind, however, that Haven was completely ignorant of Egyptological standards. She had no reference against which to judge what constituted a ‘long roll.’ Indeed, her use of the term ‘manuscript’ to describe the papyrus may indicate that she evaluated the scroll’s length relative to typical nineteenth-century paper manuscripts rather than to typical Ptolemaic papyrus scrolls.

I do not find this argument especially convincing, but that is beside the point; lest I am accused of duplicity, I feel it needful to make Smith’s own position clear.

- 68 In this regard Vogel is utterly incorrigible, as he exhibits the same methodological behavior in how he handles the testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon (e.g. Dan Vogel, “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, eds. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002], 79–121).
- 69 Gee, “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 120–23.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 71 Andrew W. Cook and Christopher C. Smith, “The Original Length of the Scroll of Hôr,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 1–42.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 36.

- 73 Gee, “Formulas and Faith,” 60–65; “Andrew Cook, “Formulas and Facts: A Response to John Gee,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 45, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 1–10; John Gee, “Book of Abraham, I Presume” (August 2–3, 2012, South Towne Exposition Center, Sandy, UT), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/august-2012/book-of-abraham-i-presume>.
- 74 Gee, “Book of Abraham, I Presume.”
- 75 Eshbal Ratzon and Nachum Dershowitz, “The Length of a Scroll: Quantitative Evaluation of Material Reconstructions,” *PLOS One* 15, no. 10 (2020): 1.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 22–23, warn from their results that

[w]hile the length reconstruction method works well in theory, its margin of error — when trying to estimate the length of a real scroll — is simply too large to be trusted. In the rare cases where four or five consecutive damage points are preserved, however, its reliability might be reasonable. It should be stressed that we examined here some of the very best preserved scrolls, for which approximate reconstructions are not required, since they are already comparatively intact, and their length can be measured. In practice, the method is applied to much more poorly preserved scrolls, ones that have decomposed into many scattered fragments. These fragments underwent additional processes of deterioration, disintegration, and warping. In these cases, the distance between points is sometimes reconstructed rather than measured. Therefore, in the actual cases where the method is used, the margin of error should be expected to be much larger.

If Vogel is going to insist that we accept Cook and Smith’s results over Gee’s, it seems reasonable to insist that he give some mathematical reason that accounts for the analysis of Ratzon and Dershowitz.

- 78 Grant S. Heward and Jerald Tanner, “The Source of the Book of Abraham Identified,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (1968): 89–97.
- 79 Muhlestein, “Assessing the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 29–32; Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 225–26.

- 80 Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 143; “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham,” 132–33; Brent M. Rogers et al., eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 5: October 1835–January 1838* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 78; Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, 195–96nn57, 64; Royal Skousen, “Curriculum Vitae,” (2 January 2018), 39, <https://humanities.byu.edu/wp-content/uploads/Royal-Skousen-VITA.18-7.pdf>.
- 81 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, 239n64.
- 82 Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 144.
- 83 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, 195–96.
- 84 In fact, as Gee, “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham,” 133, notes, the result is something of a mess for Vogel.
- 85 See Gee, “Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt,” 427–48.
- 86 James H. Breasted to Franklin Spencer Spalding, in F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: The Arrow Press, 1912), 25.
- 87 “John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847,” p. 76, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/john-whitmer-history-1831-circa-1847/80>.
- 88 Warren Parrish, letter to the editor of the *Painesville Republican*, February 5, 1838, in “Mormonism,” *Painesville Republican* 2, no. 14–15 (February 15, 1838).
- 89 “Another Humbug,” *Cleveland Whig* 1, no. 49 (August 5, 1835): 1. See the discussion in Michael Hubbard MacKay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith’s Seer Stones* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 127–28, who suggest the source was William W. Phelps, a scribe in the Egyptian project.
- 90 M., *Friends’s Weekly Intelligencer* 3, no. 27 (3 October 1846): 211.
- 91 William S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting The Mormons* (n.p., 1837), 5.
- 92 Frederic G. Mather, “The Early Days of Mormonism,” *Lippincott’s Magazine* 2, no. 6 (August 1880): 211. One wonders if Mather’s sarcastic “special revelation” is a reference to the seer stone.

- 93 Wilford Woodruff, Journal, February 19, 1842, <https://www.wilfordwoodruffpapers.org/documents/a9d1a2cb-18fe-445d-a5e4-350caaf63442/page/46a50900-b577-4e5c-9fd9-6b2347845fc1>; and in Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1983), 2:155. Compare Parley P. Pratt, "Editorials," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 3 (July 1, 1842): 47.
- 94 Howard Coray to Martha Jane Lewis, 2 August 1889, p. 4, Church History Library, MS 3047. My thanks to Walker Wright for alerting me to this source.
- 95 Coray joined the Church in late-March 1840 and began clerking for Joseph Smith less than a month thereafter. See Howard Coray, Journal, pp. 6–7, Church History Library, MS 8142 = Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Mss 1422, Box 1, Folder 1.
- 96 Coray, Journal, p. 15.
- 97 See the definitive analysis in Don Bradley and Mark Ashurst-McGee, "President Joseph Has Translated a Portion? Joseph Smith and the Mistranslation of the Kinderhook Plates," in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 452–523.
- 98 Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, xxii.
- 99 Gerrit J. Dirkmaat et al., eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2014), 154, 167.
- 100 Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 83, 86, 92. See also the significant facts surrounding whether the parchment of John was considered a "translation" or "revelation" to Joseph and the early Saints as discussed in David W. Grua and William V. Smith, "The Tarrying of the Beloved Disciple: The Textual Formation of the Account of John," in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 231–61.
- 101 See Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985); Robert L. Millet and Monte S. Nyman, eds., *The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University,

Religious Studies Center, 1985); Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Royal Skousen, “The Earliest Textual Sources for Joseph Smith’s ‘New Translation’ of the King James Bible,” *FARMS Review* 17, no. 2 (2005): 451–70; Kerry Muhlestein, “One Continuous Flow: Revelations Surrounding the ‘New Translation,’” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, eds. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2008), 40–65; Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible,” in *Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer*, eds. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010), 51–76; “The King James Bible and the Joseph Smith Translation,” in *The King James Bible and the Restoration*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 197–214; Thomas A. Wayment, “Intertextuality and the Purpose of Joseph Smith’s New Translation of the Bible,” in *Foundational Texts of Mormonism: Examining Major Early Sources*, eds. Mark Ashurst-McGee, Robin Scott Jensen, and Sharalyn D. Howcroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 74–100; Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon. Part Five: The King James Quotations in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2019), 132–40; Thomas A. Wayment and Haley Wilson-Lemmon, “A Recovered Resource: The Use of Adam Clarke’s Bible Commentary in Joseph Smith’s Bible Translation,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 262–84; Thomas A. Wayment, “Joseph Smith, Adam Clarke, and the Making of a Bible Revision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 3 (July 2020): 1–22; Kent P. Jackson, “Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60.

- 102 I hasten to add that I do not believe Givens is guilty of any such offense, as Vogel apparent does; on the contrary, whatever my disagreements with him, I find Givens consistently thought-provoking, informed, and insightful, and recommend him as an admirable exponent of the catalyst theory for the production of the Book of Abraham. For a thoughtful engagement with Givens’ articulation of the catalyst theory, see John S. Thompson, “‘We May Not Understand Our Words’: The Book of Abraham



and the Concept of Translation in The Pearl of Greatest Price,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 41 (2020): 1–48.

- 103 We cannot help but wonder just how far we might advance in understanding the Targumim of ancient Judaism were we to allow Vogel to dictate the rules of the game. Compare, for instance, Willem F. Smelik, “Translation and Commentary in One: The Interplay of Pluses and Substitutions in the Targum of the Prophets,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 29 (1998): 245–60; Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); Paul V. M. Felsher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2011); Michael L. Klein, *Michael Klein on the Targums: Collected Essays 1972–2002*, eds. Avigdor Shinan and Rimón Kasher (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2011); Edward M. Cook, “The Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the Targums,” in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 92–117.
- 104 Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 63; See further Robert J. Matthews, “Joseph Smith — Translator,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, eds. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 77–87; Richard Lyman Bushman, “Joseph Smith as Translator,” in *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, eds. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 233–47. Note also the important observation made by Benjamin D. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 117, on the nature of revelation as “translation” for the biblical prophets.
- 105 John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions About the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).
- 106 Vogel makes a rather astonishing admission here that might otherwise go unnoticed if the reader is not paying close attention. Vogel states,
- In July 1835, Smith started to dictate the English text of the Book of Abraham from a copy of the Egyptian funerary manual Book of Breathings once owned by an

Egyptian [sic] priest named Hôr but soon interrupted his dictation to compile an Alphabet and then a Grammar and Alphabet of Egyptian, in which he gave ‘translations’ of random hieratic-looking characters. (217)

If we follow Vogel’s logic here, Joseph Smith was able to produce fanciful content for his pseudepigraphic Book of Abraham on the fly in July 1835 after his initial encounter with the papyri, but for some inexplicable reason decided to suddenly stop to first produce a convoluted alphabet and grammar system to translate the text he was already capable of simply making up in the first place. Vogel, it would seem, wants to have it both ways—he both wants Joseph Smith to be dependent on the Grammar and Alphabet but also able to materialize content out of thin air without the aid of the Grammar and Alphabet.

- 107 John W. Welch, “Timing the Translation of the Book of Mormon: ‘Days [and Hours] Never to Be Forgotten,’” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (2018): 11–50.
- 108 “Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organizations of the earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth, these personages according to Abraham’s record, are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer, and God the third, the witness or Testator.” See “Discourse, circa May 1841, as Reported by William Clayton,” p. 10, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-circa-may-1841-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1>; Vogel cites the version of this discourse in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comp., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The contemporary accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 87–88n5.
- 109 Compare Jensen and Hauglid, *JSPRT4*, 244, “Despite [Joseph Smith’s] reference to ‘Abraham’s record,’ no known Kirtland-era manuscript contained these teachings, perhaps indicating that [he] had an understanding of the later portion of the Book of Abraham before he committed it to paper.”
- 110 Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 221.
- 111 *Antiquities* (1.7.1–1.8.2). See Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Abraham as Chaldean Scientist and Father of the Jews: Josephus, *Ant.* 1.154–168,

and the Greco-Roman Discourse About Astronomy/Astrology,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 35, no. 2 (2004): 119–58.

- 112 Lincoln H. Blumell, “Palmyra and Jerusalem, ISR: Joseph Smith’s Scriptural Texts and the Writings of Flavius Josephus,” in *Approaching Antiquity*, 372, citations removed.
- 113 For instance, the ספר זהר (1.78a) says of Abraham:

ורזא דמלה לך לך דהא קודשא בריך הוא יהיב ליה לאברהם  
רוחא דחכמתא והוה ידע ומצרף סטרי דיישובי עלמא ואסתכל  
בהו ואתקל בתיקלא וידע חילין די ממנן על סטרי יישובא

Of special interest for our purposes is the function of the תיקלא in the patriarch’s possession, with which, this source says:

והוה תקיל וצריף אנון דשלטין בסטרי דישובא מדברי ככביא ומזליהון

So far, the best theory for the identification of Abraham’s תיקלא remains that of Moshe Cordovero (אור יקר זהר [Jerusalem, ISR: Achuzat Israel, 1967], 4:127–29). See also the discussion in Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 332, citing *B. Bava Batra* 16b; *Zohar* 1:11a-11b, *Idra Rabbah*. While I am hesitant to definitively say this is a parallel with Abraham 3:1, 4, it is nevertheless a very enticing one.

- 114 W. Röllig, “El-Creator-Of-The-Earth,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. Karel van der Toorn (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1999), 280–81; Ben H. L. Gessel, *Onomasticon of the Hittite Pantheon* (Leiden, NDL: E. J. Brill, 1998), 1:63; Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 82–83; Maciej Popko, *Religions of Asia Minor* (Warsaw: Academic Publications Dialog, 1995), 128; Patrick D. Miller, Jr. “El, The Creator of Earth,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 239 (1980): 43–46; cf. John Gee, “Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 133–52; Kevin Barney, “On Elkenah as Canaanite El,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 22–35.
- 115 The identity of this god has been persuasively identified by 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; cf. John Gee, “The

- Crocodile God of Pharaoh in Mesopotamia,” *Insights*, October 1996, 2. Note also the important comment in Anna-Latifa Mourad, *Rise of the Hyksos: Egypt and the Levant from the Middle Kingdom to the Early Second Intermediate Period* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015), 173.
- 116 Kerry Muhlestein, “Violence in the Service of Order: The Religious Framework for Sanctioned Killing in Ancient Egypt” (PhD diss., The University of California, Los Angeles, 2003); Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 220–21.
- 117 Kerry Muhlestein, “Execration Ritual,” in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (2008), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3f6268zf>; *Violence in the Service of Order: The Religious Framework for Sanctioned Killing in Ancient Egypt*, BAR International Series 2299 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011); “Those Who Speak Rebellion: Refining Our Understanding of the Words Used to Describe ‘Rebellion,’” in *Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Egyptologists: University of the Aegean, Rhodes, 22–29 May 2008*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 241, eds. P. Kousoulis and N. Lazaridis (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 1473–83; *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, s.v. “Violence” (2015), <https://escholarship.org/content/qt9661n6rn/qt9661n6rn.pdf?t=qlp9a8>; “Sacred Violence: When Ancient Egyptian Punishment was Dressed in Ritual Trappings,” *Near Eastern Archeology* 78, no. 4 (December 2015): 244–51.
- 118 Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee, “An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 2 (2011): 70–77.
- 119 Vogel quotes Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 221, thus: “While the Egyptians *may* have had some kind of regular program of human sacrifice (slight bits of evidence suggest this but there is no conclusive evidence), at the same time they certainly did believe there were certain circumstances in which the only appropriate response was to ritually slay someone.” Vogel omits what immediately follows: “The most likely scenario for this occurred when an individual disrupted the religious or political order. The Book of Abraham indicates that Abraham had been preaching against idolatry (a concept that lay at the heart of almost every aspect of Egyptian belief and culture) and that this led to the local priest trying to sacrifice him (see Abraham 1:5–7). A large corpus of noncanonical tradition about Abraham agrees

with that picture.” Muhlestein, citing his own work, then goes on to affirm, “I discovered that thoroughly and correctly performing Egyptological research is a key to understanding the Book of Abraham. When we pull facts from carefully researched materials, they match perfectly with the information we receive from Joseph Smith. The picture the Book of Abraham paints dovetails neatly into the larger mural of Egyptian history and practice.”

120 Muhlestein, “Sacred Violence,” 244.

121 As Muhlestein and Gee, “An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham,” 75, explain,

Because of the temporal and categorical proximity of Middle Kingdom examples of human sacrifice, we can now come closer to an understanding of Egyptian ritual slaying and the story presented in the first chapter of the Book of Abraham. It is clear that during the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians engaged in such practices when they deemed it necessary, and that desecrations or perceived threats were some of the situations that seemed to justify the ritual slaughter of humans. This picture matches well with that depicted in the Book of Abraham. Our understanding of the picture painted by each context can now be informed by the other, allowing us to more fully understand each individual story and the larger context in which these people lived their lives and practiced their religious beliefs.

122 Muhlestein and Gee, “An Egyptian Context for the Sacrifice of Abraham,” 73.

123 Stephan J. Seidlmayer, “Execration Texts,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1:488.

124 John Coleman Darnell and Colleen Manassa, *Tutankhamun’s Armies: Battle and Conquest During Ancient Egypt’s Late Eighteenth Dynasty* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 133.

125 Perla Fuscaldo, “Tell al-Dab’a: Two Execration Pits and a Foundation Deposit,” in *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of the Eighth Congress of Egyptologists, Cairo, 2000, Volume 1: Archaeology*, ed. Zahi Hawass (Cairo: The




American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 187. Note that Fuscaldo goes on to link the Mirgissa findings with those at Avaris:

The two execration pits at Tell al-Dab'a are similar to those found at Mirgissa. The execration pit, Locus 1055, with the three human skulls is similar to the Mirgissa pit containing a human skull. The execration pit, Locus 1016, with the two human skeletons and the broken pottery, could be similar to those with three limestone figurines embedded in sand, and to the pit with the inscribed broken pottery. The special feature of the execration pit, Locus 1016 at Tell al-Dab'a, is that the figurines with the name of the defeated enemies were substituted with the sacrifices of two defeated enemies. . . . If this happened, we do not know why the Egyptians sacrificed enemies in Avaris instead of using substitute figurines as usual. This ritual of the destruction of pottery and the actual execution of prisoners, as happened with the rebels, could have been an execration ritual performed as part of the ceremonies for the celebration of the conquest of the city and for the construction of new buildings.

- 126 Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 178
- 127 Andrew T. Wilburn, "Figurines, Images, and Representations Used in Ritual Practices," in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 189*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2019), 467–68.
- 128 Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization* 54 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1993), 163, 171. Ritner's entire discussion of "human sacrifice" in its Egyptian magical context (Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 162–71) is worth consideration, and has significant implications for what is depicted in the Book of Abraham and Facsimile 1. See also Jacco Dieleman, "Egypt," in *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, 103–12, for a useful discussion and overview of the execration ritual.
- 129 Vogel could have spared himself a lot of unnecessary trouble had he bothered to consult Muhlestein's discussion on the semantics of "human sacrifice" as opposed to "sanctioned violence" and the like in *Violence in the Service of Order*, 5–8, as well as in Herman te

- Velde, “Human Sacrifice in Ancient Egypt,” in *The Strange World of Human Sacrifice*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Leuven, NDL: Peeters, 2007), 127–34.
- 130 John M. Lundquist, “Was Abraham at Ebla? A Cultural Background of the Book of Abraham (Abraham 1 and 2),” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Two: The Pearl of Great Price*, eds. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Randall Book Co., 1985), 225–37.
- 131 C. J. Gadd and Leon Legrain, eds., *Ur Excavations, Texts I: Royal Inscriptions* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1928), 75; Hans Hirsch, “Die Inschriften der Könige von Agade,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 20 (1963): 74; Benjamin R. Foster, “The Siege of Armanum,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 14 (1982): 29; Michael C. Astour, “Overland Trade Routes in Ancient Western Asia,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 3:1407; Nashat Alkhafaji and Gianni Marchesi, “Naram-Sin’s War against Armanum and Ebla in a Newly-Discovered Inscription from Tulul al-Baqarat,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 79, no. 1 (2020): 14.
- 132 Stephen O. Smoot, “In the Land of the Chaldeans’: The Search for Abraham’s Homeland Revisited,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 7–37.
- 133 Christopher Woods, “The Practice of Egyptian Religion at ‘Ur of the Chaldees’?” in *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri, 73*. I have responded to Wood’s objections in Smoot, “In the Land of the Chaldeans’,” 32–34.
- 134 Atilla Engin, “Oylum Höyük İçin Bir Lokalizasyon önerisi: Ulisum/Ullis/İllis,” in *Armizzi: Engin Özgen’e Armağan*, ed. Atilla Engin, Barbara Helwing, and Bora Uysal (Ankara: Asitan Kitap, 2014), 136.
- 135 See John Gee, “Has Olishem Been Discovered?” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 104–107.
- 136 R. C. Webb, *Joseph Smith as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1936), 104, bolding in original.
- 137 For one thing, Homans never bothers to specify which Semitic root “shanah” meaning “to shine” or “to brighten” is supposed to

derive from. It is not recognizable as a root in Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, or Akkadian as meaning “to shine.”

- 138 Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 333–35.
- 139 Matthew Grey, “Approaching Egyptian Papyri through Biblical Language: Joseph Smith’s Use of Hebrew in His Translation of the Book of Abraham,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 429.
- 140 Gee, “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham,” 157.
- 141 Also attested as, variously:  (CT 61 I, 259),  (CT 214 III, 174),  (CT 393 V, 67).
- 142 Rami van der Molen, *A Hieroglyphic Dictionary of Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2000), 599; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18–21; *Ancient Egyptian Phonology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 11–30; Rolf Krauss, *Astronomische Konzepte und Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Pyramidentexten* (Wiesbaden, DEU: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 14–66; John Gee, “Hypocephali as Astronomical Documents,” in *Aegyptus et Pannonia V: Acta Symposii anno 2008*, ed. Hedvig Györy and Ádám Szabó (Budapest: The Ancient Egyptian Committee of the Hungarian-Egyptian Friendship Society, 2016), 60.
- 143 Gee, “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham,” 158.
- 144 “Race and the Priesthood,” Gospel Topics Essay, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/race-and-the-priesthood>:

Today, the Church disavows the theories advanced in the past that black skin is a sign of divine disfavor or curse, or that it reflects unrighteous actions in a premortal life; that mixed-race marriages are a sin; or that blacks or people of any other race or ethnicity are inferior in any way to anyone else. Church leaders today unequivocally condemn all racism, past and present, in any form.



- 145 For a good overview of the origin and history of priesthood and temple ban and the lives of black Latter-day Saints, see W. Paul Reeve, “Race, the Priesthood, and Temples,” in *A Reason for Faith: Navigating LDS Doctrine and Church History*, ed. Laura H. Hales (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 159–78. For fuller treatments, consult W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014); Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
- 146 Stephen R. Haynes: *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); David M. Whitford, *The Curse of Ham in the Early Modern Era: The Bible and the Justifications for Slavery* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009); David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017).
- 147 See also “Old Testament Revision 1,” p. 15, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/17>.
- 148 “Old Testament Revision 1,” p. 25, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/28>.
- 149 “Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 25 June 1833,” p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-church-leaders-in-jackson-county-missouri-25-june-1833/2>; “Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 2 July 1833,” p. 52, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-church-leaders-in-jackson-county-missouri-2-july-1833/2>.
- 150 “Old Testament Revision 1,” p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/3>.

- 151 See for instance Targum Jonathan Isaiah 52:14, which reads:

כמא דסברו ליה בית ישראל יומין סגיאין  
דהוה חשוך ביני עממיא חזוהון וזוהון מבני אנשא

or Targum Jonathan 1 Samuel 2:9, which reads:

גוית עבדוהי צדיקיא יטר מגיהנם ורשיעיא בגיהנם בחשוכא ידדוןן

or the magical texts from the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic bowls, which refer to demons as *דאית בבביל שדי והישיכי דאית בבביל* and *דחשוכא רברבי* (Shaul Shaked, James Nathan Ford, and Siam Bhayro, eds., *Aramaic Bowl Spells: Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Bowls, Volume One* [Leiden, NDL: Brill, 2013], 153n4, 298; J. B. Segal, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 2000), no. 023A; Christa Müller-Kessler, “Die Zauberschälensammlung des British Museum,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 48/49 [2001/2002]: 121–22); cf. Marcus Jastrow, comp., *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1903), 509; Michael Sokoloff, comp., *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of The Talmudic and Geonic Periods* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), 236, 487. One of course also thinks of the *בני חושך* in the cosmology of the Qumran community, such as those mentioned in 1Q33 who are identified (I,1–2) with the *בליעל* *היל* and assisted by Gentile nations who wage war against the *אור בני* (righteous Qumranites) at the end of days (cf. Jean Duhaime, “Light and Darkness,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Lawrence H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], 1:495–96).

- 152 Including Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), 172–73, and Ryan Stuart Bingham, “Curses and Marks: Racial Dispensations and Dispensations of Race in Joseph Smith’s Bible Revision and the Book of Abraham,” *Journal of Mormon History* 41, no. 3 (July 2015): 22–57.
- 153 Matthew L. Harris and Newell G. Bringhurst, eds., *The Mormon Church and Blacks: A Documentary History* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 12–13.
- 154 Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 116. Compare Reeve, “Race, the Priesthood, and Temples,” 160, who notes, “Even though Joseph Smith produced the Book of Abraham, he never

used it to justify a priesthood restriction.” The same can be said for the white enslavement of persons of African descent.

- 155 “License for Elijah Able, 31 March 1836,” p. 61, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/license-for-elijah-able-31-march-1836/1>; Joseph Smith, *General Smith’s Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States* (Nauvoo, Il.: John Taylor, Printer, 1844), 8. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 289; Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 9; Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 107; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 127.
- 156 “Letter to Oliver Cowdery, circa 9 April 1836,” p. [289], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-oliver-cowdery-circa-9-april-1836/1>, published in *Messenger and Advocate* 2, no. 7 (April 1836): 289–91; Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 289; Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness*, 212; Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color*, 123–25; Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People*, 96–97. Vogel (116), likewise notices this.
- 157 For instance, Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 466–607; Alma Allred, “The Traditions of Their Fathers: Myth versus Reality in LDS Scriptural Writings,” in *Black and Mormon*, eds. Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 34–49; Reeve, “Race, the Priesthood, and Temples,” 159–78.
- 158 The pioneering study on this topic is Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 41–55. More currently, see Matthew J. Grey, “‘The Word of the Lord in the Original’: Joseph Smith’s Study of Hebrew in Kirtland,” 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), 249–302; “Approaching Egyptian Papyri through Biblical Language: Joseph Smith’s Use of Hebrew in His Translation of the Book of Abraham,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 390–451; Muhlestein and Hansen, “‘The Work of Translating,’” 149–53.
- 159 Grey, “Approaching Egyptian Papyri through Biblical Language,” 407–45.
- 160 Muhlestein and Hansen, “‘The Work of Translating,’” 149–53.

- 161 E.g., “If Smith possessed more of the Book of Abraham translation beyond chapter 5, it seems inconceivable that he would not have included it when he published Facsimile 3 in the May 1842 issue of the *Times and Seasons*” (176).
- 162 E.g., Vogel’s discussion (163–64, 172–76) of Wilford Woodruff’s and Anson Call’s testimonies.
- 163 “Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock,” p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/2>; Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 379. “I once asked a learned Jew once — if the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in heam in the plural — why not render the first plural — he replied it would ruin the Bible — he acknowledged I was right.”
- 164 Vogel does nothing to reinforce his contention that there is “no indication that Smith was a polytheist [in 1835], although he held an unorthodox interpretation of the Trinity” (167). Leaving aside that Vogel never bothers to explain what he means by either “polytheist” or “unorthodox interpretation of the Trinity,” the Prophet’s 1831 translation of Genesis, now canonized as Moses 2–4, which overtly speaks of God the Father and his Only Begotten (two gods) as being involved in the Creation, and texts such as D&C 76:18–24, 58 refute this assertion.
- 165 Stephen O. Smoot, “Council, Chaos, and Creation in the Book of Abraham,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 28–39; David E. Bokovoy, “Ye Really Are Gods’: A Response to Michael Heiser concerning the LDS Use of Psalm 82 and the Gospel of John,” *FARMS Review* 19, no. 1 (2007): 272–79; Kevin Barney, “Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith’s Understanding of Genesis 1:1,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 107–24; Terryl Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215–16; Givens, *The Pearl of Greatest Price*, 125–28; Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 115–20, 129–42.
- 166 Something recognized even by non-Latter-day Saint scholars, including Shalom Goldman, “Joshua/James Seixas (1802–1874): Jewish Apostasy and Christian Hebraism in Early,” *Jewish History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 76, 82; *God’s Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North

- Carolina Press, 2004), 194; Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” 52.
- 167 Grey, “Approaching Egyptian Papyri through Biblical Language,” 442.
- 168 George Reynolds, “The Book of Abraham—Its Genuineness Established,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 41, no. 8 (February 24, 1879): 113–15; “The Book of Abraham—Its Genuineness Established,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star* 41, no. 9 (March 3, 1879): 129–32.
- 169 Not only are Vogel’s arguments for the Book of Abraham’s dependency on the Egyptian language documents debatable, they are also a red herring. As far as interpreting the cosmology in the published *text* of the Book of Abraham goes, it is the text itself that demands our attention and consideration. It is therefore perfectly irrelevant to our evaluation of the cosmology of Abraham 3 that the GAEL describes lunar eclipses in the system of astronomy (138), for instance. Gee’s dismissal of the GAEL in his analysis of the cosmology of Abraham 3 does not render his treatment “incomplete” (137); rather, Vogel’s constant recourse to the GAEL throughout this chapter to shore up his counter-arguments is nothing but a distraction.
- 170 Edward T. Jones, “The Theology of Thomas Dick and its Possible Relationship to That of Joseph Smith” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969) and Erich Robert Paul, *Science, Religion, and Mormon Cosmology* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 88–92, are just two authors who come to mind who have reviewed the claim that the Prophet was dependent on Dick and find it lacking, or, at least as typically presented by environmentalist critics like Vogel, lacking the needed nuance.
- 171 “Mormonism; or, New Mohammedanism in England and America,” *Dublin University Magazine* 21, no. 123 (March 1843): 296–97. (My thanks to Matthew Roper for alerting me to this source.) The objections raised against the Book of Abraham in this source are revealing, both because it shows how the Book of Abraham has found vindication only after Joseph Smith’s lifetime (e.g. Smoot, “In the Land of the Chaldeans,” 32–34; Gee, “Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham,” 133–52), and also in how it highlights Vogel’s deficiencies in his one area of competence: nineteenth-century sources.

- 172 John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, “‘And I Saw the Stars’: The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, 1–16.
- 173 For example, Vogel repeatedly brings up the point that the Book of Abraham fails to explicitly describe the earth as a flat disc, which would have been the cosmological view during Abraham’s time (119, 134n42). This, for Vogel, is apparently indication that the text reflects the astronomy of Joseph Smith’s day. But the text of the Book of Abraham is actually silent on the shape of the earth, and Vogel’s attempt to somehow use this silence to his advantage is, of course, fallacious.
- 174 Kerry Muhlestein, “Encircling Astronomy and the Egyptians: An Approach to Abraham 3,” *Religious Educator* 10, no. 1 (2009): 33–50. Muhlestein’s model, incidentally, ably answers Vogel’s objection (136) that the geocentric model is too “hypothetical” in its conceptual linkage of stars with spirits (cf. Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 116–17).
- 175 The closest Vogel comes to addressing this crucial point is with his comment that “Abraham 3:5 . . . *implies* the earth moves when it places the earth in the planetary hierarchy below the slower-moving moon” (143–44, emphasis added).
- 176 So rightly recognized by John L. Foster, *Thought Couplets in the Tale of Sinuhe*, Münchener Ägyptologische Untersuchungen 3 (Frankfurt, DEU: Peter Lang, 1993), 55–56; James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian Literature: Eight Literary Works of the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 125.
- 177 E.g. *Urk.* IV 82, 13; 102, 11; 283, 16; 341, 11; explained succinctly by Donald B. Redford, “The Sun-disc in Akhenaten’s Program: Its Worship and Antecedents, I,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 13 (1976): 49–50; W. V. Davies, “Egyptian Hieroglyphs,” in *Reading the Past: Ancient Writing from Cuneiform to the Alphabet*, ed. J. T. Hooker (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press; London: The British Museum Press, 1990), 116.
- 178 Muhlestein, “Encircling Astronomy and the Egyptians,” 33–34, 37–43; Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 116–17. See also the perceptive connection made in Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 57–67, which converges

nicely with what is conceptually depicted at Abraham 3:3, 5–6, 9. My thanks to John Gee for reminding me of this source. (Gee, incidentally, also reminds me how this is just one of many examples — another being his work on human sacrifice — from Ritner’s usually overall excellent non-polemical Egyptological work that has led him and other Latter-day Saint scholars to consider Ritner one of the foremost non-Mormon Egyptologists to have done the most to establish the historical authenticity of the Book of Abraham.)

- 179 Aylward M. Blackman, *Middle Egyptian Stories*, Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca II (Brussels: Fondation Égyptologique, 1932), 33.
- 180 Alan H. Gardiner, *Notes on the Story of Sinuhe* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1916), 81; cf. *Egyptian Grammar*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 74.
- 181 Leonard Lesko, “Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology,” in *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 117–18.
- 182 Joanne Conman, “It’s About Time: Ancient Egyptian Cosmology,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 31 (2003): 33–71, esp. 34–35. In fact, Conman’s entire treatment on time reckoning in Egyptian cosmology may prove to be fertile ground for further exploration of the issue at hand, but it is not expedient to do so now.
- 183 Philippe Germond, *The Symbolic World of Egyptian Amulets* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2005), 46.
- 184 Perhaps this is the “razor’s edge of faith and transparency” Hauglid had in mind in his endorsement of *Book of Abraham Apologetics*.
- 185 Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Foreword,” in Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), xii; cf. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Foreword to the 1967 Edition,” in Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 7* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), viii.
- 186 Hugh Nibley, “New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study,” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 8* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 54–126; based on a series that ran in the *Improvement Era* between 1953–1954.