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## The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources

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## THE FACSIMILES AND SEMITIC ADAPTATION OF EXISTING SOURCES

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Latter-day Saint descriptions of the historical background to the Joseph Smith Papyri sometimes set the stage with an account of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798.<sup>1</sup> Napoleon brought with him a small army of scientists and artists, whose published reports of the wonders of Egypt<sup>2</sup> soon fueled a wave of Egyptomania among Europeans. This intense interest in all things Egyptian spurred a demand for Egyptian antiquities, which men like Antonio Lebolo, the excavator of the Joseph Smith Papyri, were all too willing to meet. Thus, Napoleon's scholars and the European reaction to their work established the conditions that would eventually lead to the purchase of a collection of Egyptian antiquities by a group of Latter-day Saints, including Joseph Smith, in Kirtland in 1835. Joseph would go on to translate certain papyri from this collection as the Book of Abraham.

Much like the wide-eyed Europeans of the early nineteenth century, Latter-day Saints (and their critics) have been fascinated by the Egyptian aspects of the Book of Abraham since its first publication in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842. This is a perfectly understandable fascination and one that I myself share. In the twentieth century, the Book of Abraham weathered two critical attacks on its authenticity, both of which were grounded in the Egyptian material related to the book. First, in 1912 Franklin S. Spalding, the Episcopal bishop of Utah, sent copies of the facsimiles from the Book of Abraham to a number of prominent Egyptologists of the day, together with Joseph's proffered explanations. The Egyptologists concluded that

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1. See, for instance, H. Donl Peterson, "Antonio Lebolo: Excavator of the Book of Abraham," *BYU Studies* 31/3 (1991): 9–11; H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 36–42; and John Gee, "A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri and Book of Abraham" (FARMS paper, 1999), 1–3.
  2. In the many volumes of E. F. Jomard, *Description de l'Egypte*, published between 1809 and 1813.

the Prophet's explanations were not correct.<sup>3</sup> Second, in 1967 a small portion of the original collection of Joseph Smith Papyri was recovered from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, including the original from which Facsimile 1 was taken. Critics argued that Joseph "thought" he was translating the Book of Abraham from a papyrus that was part of this restored collection, called the Sensen Papyrus (now identified as Joseph Smith Papyrus [JSP] I, XI, and X). When modern Egyptologists translated this papyrus, it was found to contain not something like the English text of the Book of Abraham but rather an Egyptian "Book of Breathings."<sup>4</sup> Following each of these events, many critics were certain that the downfall of the Book of Abraham (and, they hoped, the church with it) was imminent. It is no doubt with a sense of frustration that they have witnessed belief in the Book of Abraham and the divine mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proceed apace during the more than thirty years since the recovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri from the Metropolitan Museum.

In this paper, we shall briefly review the Spalding pamphlet and the contemporary LDS response to it. We shall see that the early LDS respondents clearly rejected some of the facile assumptions that some seem to have held about the papyri, most particularly the assumption that the papyri possessed by Joseph represented the actual holographic original penned by Abraham himself (as opposed to being a later copy of Abraham's text). Notwithstanding the early rejection of these assumptions by the LDS respondents, such assumptions have continued to exert a sometimes misleading influence on LDS perceptions of the papyri.

When we, together with the 1912 respondents, properly reject the autographic assumptions about the papyri, we find other possibilities concerning the origins and history of the Book of Abraham. For instance, that book may have had its origin as a Semitic text that experienced the normal transmission processes of copying, translation, and redaction from the time of Abraham in the Middle Bronze Age until the Greco-Roman era when the Egyptian papyrus copies were made.

Specifically, we will suggest that the facsimiles may not have been drawn by Abraham's hand but may have been Egyptian religious vignettes that were adopted or adapted by an Egyptian-Jewish redactor as illustrations of the Book of Abraham. We will illustrate general processes of Jewish adaptation of Egyptian sources and then describe in detail three specific examples from the Greco-Roman period (the same period when the Joseph Smith Papyri were produced) that each relates in some way to Abraham. We will suggest that such Jewish adaptation of Egyptian sources was common during this time period and would explain the adaptation of the facsimiles to illustrate the Book of Abraham, which may have come under this redactor's care as part of the ancient transmission of the text.

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3. See Franklin S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow, 1912).

4. The inauguration of this stage of criticism was marked by a series of articles in *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968), including John A. Wilson, "A Summary Report," 67–85; Richard A. Parker, "The Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," 86–88, and "The Book of Breathings (Fragment 1, the 'Sensen' Text, with Restorations from Louvre Papyrus 3284)," 98–99; Richard P. Howard, "A Tentative Approach to the Book of Abraham Identified," 92–98; and Hugh Nibley, "Phase One," 99–105; followed by Klaus Baer, "Breathing Permit of Hor," 3/3 (1968): 109–34. Issues related to the Sensen Papyrus are in general beyond the scope of this essay. For a bibliography until 1992, see Adam D. Lamoreaux, "Pearl of Great Price Bibliography" (FARMS paper, 1992).

Having articulated this Semitic adaptation theory, we will examine Stephen Thompson's critique of Joseph's interpretations of the facsimiles, showing how this theory resolves the issues raised by Thompson. We shall then conclude by describing the general explanatory power of the Semitic adaptation theory.

### The Spalding Pamphlet

Of the two great flurries of activity regarding the Book of Abraham, the more challenging was that of 1912, if only because the Saints lacked a Hugh Nibley to take their part in the discussion. Spalding's pamphlet attracted the Saints' attention for several reasons. The first (and most obvious) reason was the academic prestige of Spalding's panel of experts. Second was the disarming tone of the piece. The Latter-day Saints were accustomed to bitter polemical battles, but Spalding wrote in a friendly manner. He dedicated the pamphlet to his many LDS friends, describing them as "honest searchers after the truth."<sup>5</sup> He also used a little flattery. His opening sentence sets the stage: "If the Book of Mormon is true, it is, next to the Bible, the most important book in the world."<sup>6</sup> Note that Spalding does not use a contrary-to-fact condition; he does not say "if the Book of Mormon *were* true, it *would be*" important. Rather, he gives the appearance of being open minded, of genuinely allowing for the possibility that the book may be true. If in fact it is true, he says, it is of great value to New Testament and other religious scholars, archaeologists, and scientists, including botanists, zoologists, and geologists. He then states that "it is inexcusable that the book has never had the serious examination which its importance demands."<sup>7</sup> With all of these statements, his LDS readers would have been nodding their heads in solemn concurrence.

In several more chapters, he describes how the ultimate test of the correctness of the Book of Mormon translation is not possible, because the plates from which it was taken are not extant. We do, however, have the Book of Abraham with its facsimiles. So here is a way to test Joseph's skill as a translator and indirectly to test the value of the Book of Mormon as a translation. With this setup, in his final chapter he reproduces, without significant comment, letters from eight orientalists, including some of the most prominent Egyptologists of the day, all concluding that Joseph's interpretations of the facsimiles are wrong.

The first Latter-day Saint to respond to Spalding was B. H. Roberts. Roberts was a personal friend of Spalding's, and his initial take was that Spalding had been completely fair in his production, praising Spalding's courtesy and even generosity in prosecuting his case.<sup>8</sup> But as others began to look at the pamphlet more closely,<sup>9</sup> it did not take long to discover that Spalding's fairness was

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5. Spalding, *Translator*, 2.

6. *Ibid.*, 3.

7. *Ibid.*, 4.

8. B. H. Roberts, "A Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions," *Improvement Era*, February 1913, 310; this is an expanded version of "Remarks on 'Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator': A Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 December 1912, 33.

9. Many of the responses appeared in the *Deseret Evening News* and are therefore accessible only with great difficulty in barely legible microfilm copies; fortunately, the more significant pieces were reprinted, sometimes in expanded form, in the *Improvement Era*. Note in particular the following: John Henry Evans, "Bishop

superficial only, a veneer of sheep's clothing covering a wolfish anti-Mormon attack. Particularly vexing was the fact that Spalding never did release the correspondence he had used to solicit the experts' opinions, and the letters of the scholars showed indications of having been prejudiced against Joseph's interpretations by coaching in the solicitation letters (as opposed to a completely blind solicitation).<sup>10</sup> Spalding's failure to trust his position implicitly, which apparently induced him to poison the waters with his scholarly correspondents, was a serious mistake that undercut his credibility with his Mormon audience.

Spalding made other mistakes as well. For instance, in my view, as a forensic matter, it was a strategic error to press an inferential case against the Book of Mormon rather than focusing his effort directly on the Book of Abraham itself. A review of the literature of the controversy discloses additional strategic errors, such as the following: (1) he failed to address the hypocritical double standard of attacking Mormon scripture on the backs of agnostic scholars while simultaneously defending the Bible from the very similar attacks of the higher critics;<sup>11</sup> (2) he apparently was unable to convince his panel of the importance of the inquiry, resulting in the superficial, almost flippant correspondence he received from the experts (who simply made heavily authoritarian

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Spalding's Jumps in the Logical Process," *Improvement Era*, February 1913, 343–46; James Edward Homans [Robert C. Webb, pseudo.], "A Critical Examination of the Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham," *Improvement Era*, March 1913, 435–54, "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator," *Improvement Era*, May 1913, 691–702, "Truth Seeking: Its Symptoms and After Effects," *Improvement Era*, September 1913, 1071–99, and "Have Joseph Smith's Interpretations Been Discredited?" *Improvement Era*, February 1914, 313–51; N. L. Nelson, "An Open Letter to Bishop Spalding," *Improvement Era*, May 1913, 603–10; Frederick J. Pack, "An Open Question to Dr. Spalding," *Improvement Era*, May 1913, 702–4, "The Spalding Argument," *Improvement Era*, February 1913, 333–41, "Dr. Pack to Dr. Peters," *Improvement Era*, June 1913, 777–78, and "An Offshoot of the Spalding Argument," *Improvement Era*, June 1913, 778–79; Isaac Russell, "A Further Discussion of Bishop F. S. Spalding's Pamphlet," *Improvement Era*, September 1913, 1092–99; Janne M. Sjodahl, "The Book of Abraham," *Improvement Era*, February 1913, 326–33, "The Word 'Kolob,'" *Improvement Era*, April 1913, 620–22, and "A Final Word," *Improvement Era*, September 1913, 1100–105; Sterling B. Talmage, "A Letter and a Protest against Misrepresentation," *Improvement Era*, June 1913, 770–76; Junius F. Wells, "Scholars Disagree," *Improvement Era*, February 1913, 341–43; John A. Widtsoe, "Comments on the Spalding Pamphlet," *Improvement Era*, March 1913, 454–60, and "Widtsoe's Reply to Bishop F. S. Spalding," *Improvement Era*, April 1913, 616–19 [responding to Franklin S. Spalding, "Rev. Spalding's Answer to Dr. Widtsoe," *Improvement Era*, April 1913, 610–16]; Osborne J. P. Widtsoe, "The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding," *Improvement Era*, April 1913, 593–603; Levi Edgar Young, "The Book of the Dead," *Improvement Era*, February 1913, 346–48; and Judge Richard W. Young, "Scientists Not Always Correct," *Improvement Era*, March 1913, 460–64. For a summary of this matter, read Samuel A. B. Mercer, "Joseph Smith as an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian," *Utah Survey* 1/1 (1913): 4–36 (reprinted by Modern Microfilm Co. and available from Jerald and Sandra Tanner) from the critics' side, and from the side of the Saints, Hugh W. Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, which ran as a serial from January 1968 through May 1970. (In an ironic note, Mercer's private Egyptological library now sits on the shelves of the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU, primarily in the Ancient Studies Room. I well remember seeing his name written into the front covers of these volumes. On this acquisition, see Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, May 1968, 55.)

10. See in particular Osborne Widtsoe, "Unfair Fairness," and Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, February 1968, 14–21.
11. See in particular the discussions of this issue in Roberts, "Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions"; Sjodahl, "Book of Abraham"; and Pack, "Spalding Argument."

statements with little or no analysis or recitation of evidence);<sup>12</sup> (3) he failed to address the apparent contradictions among the scholars in their statements;<sup>13</sup> and (4) in general, his study lacked even the most fundamental scientific rigor.<sup>14</sup>

The third reason Spalding's pamphlet effectively garnered attention was that it was based on a web of assumptions that seem to have been commonly accepted by Mormons at the time. These assumptions included the following:

1. The papyrus from which the Book of Abraham was taken was an original autograph of Abraham and was penned by the great patriarch himself (that is, Abraham's own hand had touched the very papyrus that came into Joseph's possession, as opposed to the papyrus being a later copy of a text written by Abraham).
2. The papyri from which the facsimiles were taken were part and parcel with the Book of Abraham and similarly were autographic documents (that is, they were drawn by Abraham's own hand).
3. Since all these papyri had been written by Abraham himself, it necessarily follows that Abraham originally composed them in the Egyptian language.
4. Accordingly, there was no textual transmission of these documents in antiquity.
5. Therefore, as purely Egyptian documents, the facsimiles could properly be tested without any reference at all to the Book of Abraham (to which they purport to relate).

For convenience of reference, I will refer to these concepts as the *autographic assumptions*. The autographic assumptions, if accepted, gave Spalding an advantage in a couple of important respects. First, by insisting that the papyri underlying the Book of Abraham and the facsimiles were autographic documents, he established a very early baseline for claims of historical anachronisms. Since Abraham is generally believed to have lived around the twentieth century B.C., give or take a few centuries, if documents of the type represented by the facsimiles could be shown to date only to a substantially later period, the facsimiles could not in fact have derived from Abraham. Second, if the papyri were penned by Abraham himself in Egyptian, then the Egyptian content of the facsimiles must have been fully intended by Abraham, and the facsimiles could be judged as ordinary Egyptian documents, just like any other Egyptian papyrus. Therefore, it would be proper for the Egyptologists to evaluate the authenticity of Joseph's proffered explanations without taking into account the English Book of Abraham (the papyrus source of which no longer being extant).

While the autographic assumptions seem to have been commonly accepted among the Saints of the day, that was only because they had been unexamined. In fact, if Spalding made strategic errors in his pamphlet, the Saints who responded to him also made missteps. Their first and biggest error was not being prepared, even though they knew (or should have known)

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12. A theme of several of the responses but best addressed by Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, April 1968, 64–69. Several sections of the series have been reprinted in Hugh W. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000).

13. This observation was made and commented upon by many of the respondents, starting with Roberts, "A Plea in Bar of Final Conclusions."

14. The particular complaint of John A. Widtsoe, "Comments on the Spalding Pamphlet" and "Dr. Widtsoe's Reply to Rev. F. S. Spalding."

from studies or comments circulated earlier that the interpretation of the facsimiles would become an issue.<sup>15</sup> In his review of the incident, Hugh Nibley quite rightly chastised the Latter-day Saint academics of the day for being caught flat-footed.<sup>16</sup> Having no one on their side knowledgeable in the young science of Egyptology was a tremendous disadvantage.

While Spalding's pamphlet caused no little stir over the short term, in the long run it was beneficial to the Saints, because it caused them to reexamine their assumptions (including, in particular, the autographic assumptions) about the facsimiles. This reexamination began almost immediately, as certain respondents challenged the premises on which Spalding's case was built. So, on the supposed autographic nature of the papyri, Homans (Webb) wrote:

Some of the Latter-day Saints seem to have believed that the papyri in question represented the actual autographic work of Abraham and Joseph—that the hand of Abraham had pressed the very papyrus handled by Joseph Smith. Such a conclusion, however, does not seem to be involved in the text of Smith's account, and need not be considered authoritative.<sup>17</sup>

Osborne Widtsoe objected to the assumptions that the facsimiles (1) had precisely the same provenance as the Book of Abraham and (2) were themselves autographic documents:

Instead of the three facsimiles forming the original text of the Book of Abraham, they really constitute no part thereof. They were merely found with the mummies. Instead of the facsimilies, being written in Abraham's own hand, and thus recording a unique revelation to Abraham, it is undoubtedly true that they are facsimilies of "a series of documents which were the common property of a whole nation of people." It does not affect the importance of the facsimilies, therefore, if they belong to a period centuries later than that of Abraham.<sup>18</sup>

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15. For Theodule Deveria's early studies of the facsimiles, see his "Specimen de l'Interpretation des Ecritures de l'ancien Egypte" and "Fragments de Mss. Funeraires Egyptiens consideres par les Mormons comme les memoires autographes d'Abraham," in *Theodule Deveria: Memoires et Fragments*, ed. Gaston Maspero (Paris: Leroux, 1896), 165–202. Deveria's work first appeared in Jules Remy, *Voyage au Pays des Mormons*, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860), which was translated into English in Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, *A Journey to Great-Salt-Lake City*, 2 vols. (London: W. Jeffs, 1861), and republished by T. B. H. Stenhouse, *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), 513–19. The 1903 correspondence of Henry Woodward and E. A. Wallis Budge is reproduced in Wells, "Scholars Disagree."
  16. This famous taking to the woodshed of one generation by a later is to be found in Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," (January 1968): 23–24, under the subheading "The Mormons Default."
  17. Homans [Webb], "A Critical Examination of the Facsimiles," 440. The statement in the manuscript that the record was written "by his own hand upon papyrus," and the apparent historical allusion to Abraham's "signature" being on the papyrus, seem to point to an early belief in the papyri being autographic documents. These statements appear to have been misunderstood; see Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" (February 1968): 18–21, under the subheading "Some Basic Misconceptions"; John Gee, "Telling the Story of the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 53–54; and Russell C. McGregor with Kerry A. Shirts, "Letters to an Anti-Mormon," Review of James R. White, *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 203–5. In my view, even if Joseph or other early brethren did understand the papyri to have been Abrahamic holographs, that was simply a mistaken assumption. Similarly, many early members of the church wrongly assumed that the Book of Mormon lands constituted the whole of the Americas, but the text itself must control, and in this instance trumps these kinds of assumptions. For a lucid discussion of this issue, see John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1990), 5–35.
  18. Osborne Widtsoe, "Unfair Fairness," 599–600.

On the question of the original language of the Book of Abraham, as John A. Widtsoe pithily asked, “Who says or has said that Abraham wrote the Book of Abraham in Egyptian?”<sup>19</sup> Since the papyri themselves were written in Egyptian, that is certainly one of the languages we must consider, but if the papyri are not autographic documents, then the great passage of time from the age of Abraham to the date of the papyri hardly makes an Egyptian composition of the book a foregone conclusion. Widtsoe sensed that the answer to this question would probably lie in a careful reading of the Book of Abraham itself, which the experts generally ignored.<sup>20</sup>

When a previously unknown book from antiquity is discovered, scholars do not simply assume that the book was originally composed in the language in which the book happens to be extant. They do not, for instance, assume that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was composed in Old Slavonic just because that is the language in which the text happens to be preserved. Rather, they examine the book carefully for clues as to its language of composition. Sjordahl made the very sensible and perfectly obvious observation that Abraham was a Semite whose native language would have been Semitic.<sup>21</sup> Much of the material in the Book of Abraham has nothing to do with Egypt. Further, I believe that a careful study of the Book of Abraham itself would likely highlight the book’s profoundly Semitic character. In my view, the autographic assumptions are incorrect.<sup>22</sup> It seems much more likely to me that, if Abraham composed the original text from which the Book of Abraham derives, then

1. Abraham may have composed the text in a Semitic language. Whether this would have been an East Semitic language, presumably some form of Akkadian (the Semitic lingua franca of its day), or a West Semitic language, presumably some sort of early Canaanite dialect (analogous to Ugaritic), is difficult to say. It certainly would not have been composed in Hebrew, which did not really come into existence as such until about 1200 B.C. Abraham may have written his text in cuneiform in a medium suitable to that type of writing, such as clay tablets.
2. Between the time of Abraham’s composition of the text and the early second century B.C. (or first century A.D.) papyrus copies that later would come into Joseph Smith’s possession, there was a transmission of the text. This may have included versional

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19. John A. Widtsoe, “Dr. Widtsoe’s Reply,” 618.

20. Ibid.

21. See, for instance, Sjordahl, “The Word ‘Kolob,’” 621.

22. The date of the Book of Breathing to which Facsimiles 1 and 3 were appended is disputed. Nibley, on paleographical grounds (following Klaus Baer), dated the papyri to the Roman period (about the first century A.D.). Gee, on prosopographical grounds (following Jan Quaegebeur and Marc Coenen), dates the papyri to the early Ptolemaic period (that is, early second century B.C.). See John Gee, “The Ancient Owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri” (FARMS lecture, 1999) and *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 15–16. Robert K. Ritner, “The ‘Breathing Permit of Hor’ Thirty-four Years Later,” *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 99, acknowledges that the earlier dating is possible, but makes it clear that he prefers the Roman dating. Whichever dating is correct, it should be clear that we are dealing with a late copy of Abraham’s text, more than 1,500 years removed from Abraham, and not an Abrahamic holograph. Given these basic facts, the refusal of some Latter-day Saints to acknowledge that the Book of Abraham underwent a textual transmission in antiquity is difficult to fathom.



translation into Egyptian and, possibly, other languages (such as Hebrew), scribal copying, and, possibly, redaction of the text.<sup>23</sup>

3. The facsimiles may not have originated with Abraham; rather, they may have become associated with the Book of Abraham as part of the redaction and transmission of the text. This last point will require some further explanation.

To a great extent I believe that Mormon scholars have correctly rejected the false premises of the autographic assumptions on which Spalding's attack was based. But in one very important respect, both critics and too many defenders myopically have continued to look at the facsimiles in much the same way that Spalding and his Egyptologists did. The standard to which Spalding wanted to hold Joseph's interpretations of the facsimiles was whether they accorded with what the facsimiles meant to modern Egyptologists. Mormon scholars have refined this standard somewhat, by asking also what the facsimiles would have meant to an ancient Egyptian.<sup>24</sup> Now, what the facsimiles mean to modern Egyptologists and what they would have meant to ancient Egyptians are both important, necessary questions to ask, and studies along these lines must continue. Nevertheless, it seems to me that they should represent the ultimate question only if we accept Spalding's premise that Abraham drew the facsimiles and was in every respect their creator and author. But what if Abraham did not draw the facsimiles? What if they already existed and were either adopted or adapted by an Egyptian-Jewish redactor as illustrations of the attempt on Abraham's life and Abraham's teaching astronomy to the Egyptians? (For convenience, I shall refer to this hypothetical Jewish redactor as "J-red.") In this case, the facsimiles would have both an Egyptian context (reflecting the religious purpose for which they were originally created by the Egyptians) and a Semitic context (reflecting the religious purpose for which they were adopted<sup>25</sup> or adapted by J-red).<sup>26</sup> Thus, the ultimate question would not be "What do the facsimiles mean to modern Egyptologists?" nor "What would the facsimiles have meant to an ancient Egyptian?" but rather "What would the facsimiles have meant to J-red?"

We have a tendency when looking at the facsimiles to think of Abraham as well schooled and articulate in Egyptian religion, as if he were some sort of an Egyptian priest. But this is only an as-

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23. Compare the important comments of John Gee in his "Abracadabra, Isaac, and Jacob," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 72–74.
  24. In theory, the two standards should be identical, but in practice the knowledge of modern Egyptologists is not perfect, so this does represent a meaningful difference. See John Gee, "Towards an Interpretation of Hypocephali," in *"Le lotus qui sort de terre:" Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga*, ed. Hedvig Györy (Budapest: Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, 2001), 325, 330–34.
  25. If the facsimiles were "adopted" for use as illustrations of the Book of Abraham, then they would be run-of-the-mill Egyptian documents. Any lion couch scene would have done for Facsimile 1, any hypocephalus would have done for Facsimile 2, and any throne scene would have done for Facsimile 3. If they were "adapted" as illustrations of the Book of Abraham, then the artist would have made subtle changes in the typical vignette to represent better the Abrahamic scene being portrayed. I view this as a matter for those with Egyptological training to sort out, and I take no position in this paper as to which is the more likely scenario.
  26. Because papyri of the sort represented by the facsimiles (based on present knowledge) substantially postdate Abraham, it seems more likely to me that a redactor first used the papyri as illustrations of the book. Therefore, I will generally refer to J-red in this paper. Conceptually, however, this type of adaptation could have been undertaken by Abraham himself.

sumption. Although according to the biblical canon Abraham visited Egypt, we do not even know whether he learned the Egyptian language, much less became knowledgeable in the Egyptian mysteries. The attempt to sacrifice Abraham did not take place in Egypt, and Abraham received his revelation of the heavens outside of Egypt. When Abraham finally did go to Egypt due to famine, he taught the Egyptians astronomy. But note that Abraham was the one doing the teaching, not vice versa. For all we know, he may have communicated with the Egyptians in his own language through interpreters.

Defenders of the Book of Abraham have long sought to understand Joseph's explanations of the facsimiles in terms of conventional Egyptian religious interpretations. Again, for reasons that will become clear below, I believe that this activity is appropriate and necessary, as far as it goes. But what if we were to take this activity to its logical conclusion: suppose we were to succeed in showing that Joseph's explanations in every way matched those of the Egyptians themselves? That might (or might not) satisfy the critics, but then what would be their religious value to us? Do we worship Atum-Re? Should we revive the Egyptian cultus? It seems to me that these documents have religious value to us only if they are reinterpreted in accordance with Semitic sensibilities as applying to events in the life of Abraham.

I suggest that as part of the redaction of the text, J-red (our hypothetical Egyptian-Jewish redactor) adopted or adapted vignettes from a Book of Breathings and a hypocephalus as illustrations for the Book of Abraham. In co-opting the papyri to a new purpose, this person reinterpreted them in accordance with Semitic religious sensibilities and the requirements of the Abraham story. Therefore, the Egyptian material in the facsimiles has been refracted through a Semitic prism. It is only by viewing the facsimiles through a Semitic lens that we can clearly see how the explanations relate to the figures.

## The Instructions of Amenemope

In very general terms, Jewish cultural and religious adaptation of Egyptian materials may be illustrated by the parallels between the Instructions of Amenemope and portions of the book of Proverbs. The Instructions of Amenemope is a collection of wise sayings written in Egypt during the New Kingdom (1550–1069 B.C.) and first published by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1923.<sup>27</sup> The papyrus was found inside a statue of Osiris from a tomb in Thebes. Another fragmentary copy was discovered and published in the 1960s,<sup>28</sup> and additional copies are known from writing boards in the Turin Museum, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and the Louvre.<sup>29</sup>

Budge mentioned a couple of parallels between Amenemope and Proverbs, but it was a later article published by Adolf Erman in 1924 that really drew the attention of scholars to such parallels.<sup>30</sup> A

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27. E. A. Wallis Budge, *Facsimiles of Egyptian Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*, 2nd series (London: British Museum, 1923), plates 1–14.

28. B. J. Peterson, "A New Fragment of *The Wisdom of Amenemope*," *JEA* 52 (1966): 120–28.

29. W. K. Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 241–65. For a basic bibliography of works dealing with the relationship between Amenemope and Proverbs, see John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1997), 207–8 n. 9. The above summary of Amenemope texts is adapted from *ibid.*, 207–10.

30. Adolf Erman, "Eine ägyptische Quelle der 'Sprüche Salomos,'" *SPAW Philosophisch-historischen Klasse* 15 (1924): 86–93.

tremendous amount of scholarly ink has been spilled since that time attempting to articulate the relationship between the two texts. Most scholars see Proverbs as dependent on either Amenemope or a common source; a small minority argues that the dependence goes the other way; and some scholars argue that there is no connection and that the similarities are to be explained by polygenesis.<sup>31</sup> I would agree with the majority of scholars that Proverbs depends, whether directly or indirectly, on Amenemope (or a common source). These parallels are well accepted. The standard scholar's edition of the Hebrew Bible, in the Latin notation system of its critical apparatus, makes a number of references comparing the Hebrew to the *doctrina Amenemope*.<sup>32</sup> A synopsis of the relationship between the two texts follows this article.<sup>33</sup>

### Osiris-Abel

Now to an illustration of a Semitic adaptation of an Egyptian source that is of more specific relevance to the Book of Abraham. A number of Latter-day Saint scholars have commented on the parallels between the Book of Abraham on the one hand and both the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* on the other. It is not my intention to revisit those parallels; rather, I will focus here on one particular scene from the *Testament of Abraham* and later on one particular aspect of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

First, a brief introduction to the *Testament* is in order. The *Testament of Abraham* was probably composed in Greek<sup>34</sup> and most likely dates to first century (A.D.)<sup>35</sup> Egypt.<sup>36</sup> The text exists in two main recensions, the longer called Recension A and the shorter Recension B.<sup>37</sup> Both recensions exist in a handful of Greek manuscripts and a Romanian version; Recension B also exists in Slavonic, Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions. The *Testament of Abraham* tells the story of how when Abraham had lived the full measure of his mortal existence, God sent the archangel Michael—his “commander in chief”<sup>38</sup>—to

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31. See the survey of Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament*, 207–16.

32. Rudolf Kittel, Wilhelm Rudolf, and others, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990), 1304–5, at apparatus notes 22:18a, 22:20b, 23:7a, 23:7c, and 23:10a.

33. Adapted from James L. Crenshaw, “Proverbs, Book of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:516.

34. Scholars are somewhat split over whether the *Testament* had a Hebrew original or was composed in Greek, with earlier scholars favoring the former view and later scholars the latter. See the discussion in E. P. Sanders, “The Testament of Abraham,” in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1:873–74.

35. The date of this work is uncertain, with arguments ranging from as early as the early third century B.C. to the early second century A.D. First century A.D. seems to be the most commonly accepted date. See *ibid.*, 874–75.

36. The vast majority of scholars accept an Egyptian provenance, although some earlier scholars argued for an origin in Palestine. See *ibid.*, 875–76.

37. Jared W. Ludlow's doctoral dissertation is on this subject, entitled “A Narrative Critical Study of the Two Greek Recensions of ‘The Testament of Abraham,’” at the University of California, Berkeley and Graduate Theological Union. See *Insights* (July 2000): 8. This dissertation has now been published as Jared W. Ludlow, *Abraham Meets Death: Narrative Humor in the Testament of Abraham* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

38. ἀρχιστρατηγός *archistrategos*, an Egyptian-Jewish title. See Sanders, “Testament of Abraham, Recension A,” 882 n. 1c.

inform Abraham so that he might arrange his affairs prior to his death. Abraham refuses to follow Michael, however, and desires a tour of the whole inhabited world before he dies. Michael and Abraham survey the world in a divine chariot, and whenever Abraham sees someone sinning he asks for the sinner to be struck down. God then puts an end to the tour, since his own practice is to be patient with sinners in order to give them an opportunity to repent. Abraham is then shown the judgment, which is the scene we will examine in some detail below. Abraham repents of his harshness, and the sinners who had been struck down at his request are restored to life. Abraham, however, still refuses to follow Michael. So God sends Death, who, by a deception, gets Abraham's soul to accompany him, whence he returns<sup>39</sup> to the presence of God.

For our purposes, the critical part of the story is the judgment scene. As recounted in Recension A, Abraham sees two fiery-looking angels driving myriad souls to judgment. The judgment hall is situated between a narrow gate for the use of the righteous and a broad gate for the wicked. In the judgment hall there is a terrifying throne, and seated on the throne is a wondrous man, with an appearance like unto a son of God. In front of this figure is a crystal-like table, covered with gold and fine linen. Resting on the table is a book. On either side of the table are angels holding papyrus and ink. In front of the table is a light-bearing angel holding a balance, and on his left is a fiery angel holding a trumpet full of fire. The man on the throne judges the souls. The two angels with papyrus record; the one on the right records the deceased's righteous deeds, and the one on the left records sins. The angel with the balance weighs the souls, and the fiery angel tries them with fire. Michael informs Abraham that this scene represents judgment and recompense.

Abraham asks Michael specifically who all of these figures are and is informed that the judge seated upon the throne is Abel, who judges men until the Parousia (second coming). At the Parousia, everyone is to be judged by the twelve tribes of Israel, and, finally, God himself shall judge all men, so that the judgment may be established by three witnesses. Michael tells Abraham that the angels on the right and left record righteous deeds and sins. The sunlike (ηλιμορφο *heliomorphos*) angel holding the balance is the archangel Dokiel,<sup>40</sup> the righteous balance-bearer, who weighs the righteous deeds and sins. The fiery angel who tests the works of men with fire is the archangel Purouel.<sup>41</sup> Everything is tested both by fire and by balance.

In the shorter Recension B, which lacks most of this detail, there is only one recorder, who is identified as Enoch.

This scene is significant because it is widely recognized<sup>42</sup> as having been influenced by an Egyptian psychostasy ("soul weighing") papyrus, which is related to chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead. It may even be that the author was gazing on such a psychostasy papyrus as he penned this account. But while there is a clear relationship between the Egyptian psychostasy scene and the judgment scene of the *Testament of Abraham*, the scene has been transformed to accord with

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39. Michael's plea to Abraham is that he "once again [ετι απαξ *eti hapax*] go to the Lord." Ibid., 891.

40. The name is elsewhere unattested. Box proposed a Hebrew original *doqiel*, which would refer to exactness (in weighing). Schmidt proposed that the original name was Tsedeqiel, "justice of God." See *ibid.*, 890 n. 13e.

41. As "fire" in Greek is πυρ *pur*, this is apparently a graecized form of Uriel. See *ibid.*

42. See the citations at *ibid.*, 889 n. 12f, and George W. E. Nickelsburg Jr., "Eschatology in the Testament of Abraham: A Study of the Judgment Scene in the Two Recensions," in *Studies on the Testament of Abraham*, ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg Jr. (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 23–64.

Semitic needs and sensibilities. Osiris has become Abel; the Egyptian gods have become angels. Our author looks at the Egyptian illustration, yet sees a situation peopled with Semitic characters. I suggest that this scene establishes a paradigm for understanding the facsimiles to the Book of Abraham: “As is the vignette for chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead to the *Testament of Abraham*, so are the facsimiles to the Book of Abraham.”

This paradigm can, I believe, best be appreciated by means of an allegory. Imagine that, instead of the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith translated and published a book called the *Testament of Abraham*, which roughly corresponds to the *Testament of Abraham* as we know it. Further, imagine that, although the *Testament* is authentic and genuinely ancient, no papyrus copy of it has yet been discovered, so the Latter-day Saints accept it on faith while their critics dismiss it as a fantasy. Suppose that together with the text of the *Testament*, Joseph published a facsimile of an Egyptian psychostasy papyrus as an illustration of the judgment scene. For convenience we will refer to this as “Facsimile P” (for psychostasy). (This facsimile looks something like the psychostasy papyrus from the Joseph Smith collection, Joseph Smith Papyri III.) Now, suppose that, together with Facsimile P, Joseph published certain explanations of numbered figures in the facsimile. Without trying to reproduce the full text of what his explanations might have been, below is the substance of them:

1. Represents righteous Abel, the son of Adam, whom wicked Cain slew, and who sits on a throne of judgment. Abel judges the entire creation, examining both the righteous and sinners. [Referring to the seated Osiris figure on the throne.]
2. The balance of judgment, in which the souls of the dead are weighed against God’s righteousness. [Referring to the scales.]
3. Represents Dokiël, the righteous balance-bearer, who weighs dead men’s souls. [Referring to the Anubis figure on one side of the scales.]
4. Represents Purouel, who tries men’s deeds by fire. [Referring to the Horus figure on the other side of the scales.]
5. Enoch, the scribe of righteousness, recording both the good deeds and the sins of the dead in the Book of Life. [Referring to the Thoth figure.]
6. An angel of the Lord. [Referring to the Maat figure.]
7. The soul being presented for judgment. [Referring to the figure representing the deceased.]

After the publication of this *Testament*, some seventy years elapse, and Franklin Spalding submits Facsimile P to a group of Egyptologists, together with the proffered explanations. The Egyptologists promptly declare the interpretations to be “bosh.”<sup>43</sup> The Egyptologists refuse even to allow Joseph any lucky guesses, as might be suggested by the explanations that are closest to their Egyptian counterparts, figures 2 and 7. These Egyptologists aver that figure 1 represents Osiris, not the biblical Abel. In figure 3, the name Dokiël is clearly not Egyptian, this being a reference to the Egyptian god Anubis. In figure 4, not only is Purouel not an Egyptian name, it appears to be an inept amalgam of Hebrew and Greek, showing that only an ignorant knave like this Joseph Smith

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43. This is the word E. A. Wallis Budge summarily used to dismiss Joseph Smith’s interpretations of the facsimiles. See Wells, “Scholars Disagree,” 341–43.

fellow could have coined it. The figure actually represents the Egyptian god Horus. Figure 5 does not represent the biblical Enoch but rather the Egyptian god Thoth, and figure 6 is not “the angel of the Lord,” but the Egyptian goddess Maat.

The Saints of this hypothetical situation, stunned by these disclosures, scramble for answers. A big debate ensues, the results of which are inconclusive. Over time, defenders of the church claim that the explanations are “generally” consistent with Egyptological understanding, while critics discount any “lucky guesses” and characterize Joseph’s explanations as completely incorrect and made up.

And so the matter sits. Now, from our perspective outside of this hypothetical, we can see that people are looking at Facsimile P as if they were in Plato’s cave, forced to view mere shadows on a wall. From where we sit, however, we can see clearly that Joseph’s explanations are completely correct. The Egyptologists are also correct enough, but only as to the meaning of Facsimile P *in its Egyptian context*. But Facsimile P has another, a *Semitic context*, as an illustration of the *Testament of Abraham*. That context cannot be appreciated by studying Facsimile P in isolation (which leads to the tendency to think of it in purely Egyptian terms); rather, the facsimile must be considered together with the text it purports to illustrate, the *Testament of Abraham*. When viewed in that light, the plausibility of Joseph’s explanations is made manifest. If, by some chance, an actual manuscript of the *Testament* were to be discovered in this hypothetical situation, the mystery would be completely solved, and the people would be able to see clearly (as do we) just how Joseph’s explanations relate to the facsimile.

From this allegory we can see why it is important to continue to study the Egyptian background of the facsimiles. We have no way of knowing to what extent J-red based his use of the facsimiles on their Egyptian meaning; it is only by careful study of the Egyptian context of the facsimiles that we can determine how much Egyptian content is to be found in the explanations. The reason scholars are able to recognize the Egyptian influence in the *Testament of Abraham* psychostasy scene is that enough Egyptian elements are present for the connection to be drawn. But we can also see why studying only the Egyptian context of the facsimiles will never yield a complete explanation of the significance of Joseph’s interpretations. We need to be able to look at them the way J-red did, as Semitized illustrations of the Book of Abraham. When we see them from this perspective, our vision gains clarity, and the facsimiles and Joseph’s interpretations come into focus.

## **Osiris-Abraham**

Another example of Egyptian material being refracted through a Semitic lens is provided by the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which is recounted in Luke 16:19–31:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger

in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

In his important study of this passage, Hugo Gressmann<sup>44</sup> suggested that Luke's account was based on a popular Jewish version, perhaps written in Hebrew, of an Egyptian story. Neither the Egyptian original nor the Jewish version of that original has survived; nevertheless, their existence can be inferred from other documents that do exist. The popular Jewish version can be deduced from seven late rabbinic splinters; these texts almost certainly do *not* derive directly from the Gospel of Luke. The Egyptian original is hypothesized based on the Demotic story of Setna, described below.<sup>45</sup> To analogize the relationship among these texts in genealogical terms, the Egyptian original is like a grandfather, and the popular Jewish version a father, to the account in Luke. The story of Setna is a kind of uncle to the Lucan account, and the seven rabbinic splinters are nieces and nephews of sorts.

The Demotic story of Setna is known from a single papyrus manuscript in the British Museum (Pap. DCIV).<sup>46</sup> It was written on the back of two Greek business documents, one of which was dated in the seventh year of Claudius (A.D. 46–47). We can therefore suggest that the Demotic story was written sometime during the next half century, or roughly A.D. 50–100. According to the story, the magicians of Egypt were challenged by an Ethiopian sorcerer, but no Egyptian was able to best the challenger. So an Egyptian in Amnte, the abode of the dead, prayed in the presence of Osiris, the ruler of Amnte, to return to the land of the living. Osiris commanded that he should, and so the man, though dead for centuries, was reincarnated as the miraculous offspring of a childless couple and given the name Si-Osiris (“Son of Osiris”). Eventually, when the boy turned twelve, he dealt with the foreign sorcerer and then vanished from Earth.

The part of the story that is relevant to Luke 16 takes place while the boy is growing up. One day the boy and his father see two funerals: first, that of a rich man, shrouded in fine linen, loudly lamented and abundantly honored; then, that of a poor man, wrapped in a straw mat,

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44. Hugo Gressmann, *Vom reichen Mann und armen Lazarus: Eine literargeschichtliche Studie* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1918); K. Grobel, “. . . Whose Name Was Neves,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963–1964): 373–82. LDS scholars have begun to cite Grobel, as in H. Donl Peterson, “Book of Abraham: Origin of the Book of Abraham,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:134. We should note that the first LDS scholar to recognize the significance of Gressmann's and Grobel's work to the Book of Abraham was Blake T. Ostler, “Abraham: An Egyptian Connection” (FARMS paper, 1981). For the original text see Francis Llewellyn Griffith, *Stories of the High Priests of Memphis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 142–207, and plates.

45. See Grobel's chart, which is also reproduced in Ostler, “An Egyptian Connection,” 18.

46. My description of the text closely follows that of Grobel, “Neves.”

unaccompanied and unmourned. The father says that he would rather have the lot of the rich man than that of the pauper. Little Si-Osiris, however, impertinently contradicts his father's wish with an opposite one: "May it be done to you in Amnte as it is done in Amnte to this pauper and not as it is done to this rich man in Amnte!" In order to justify himself, the boy takes his earthly father on a tour of Amnte.

Si-Osiris leads his father through the seven classified halls of Amnte. The dead are assigned to one of the halls depending on the merits and demerits of their mortal lives. In the fifth hall they see a man in torment, the pivot of the door being fixed in his right eye socket, because of which he grievously laments. In the seventh they see Osiris enthroned, the ruler of Amnte, and near him a man clothed in fine linen and evidently of very high rank. Si-Osiris identifies the finely clad man as the miserably buried pauper and the tormented one as the sumptuously buried rich man. The reason for this disparate treatment is that, at the judgment, the good deeds of the pauper outweighed the bad, but with the rich man the opposite was true. Now the father is able to understand the filial wish of Si-Osiris.

Once again we are able to see how the Egyptian story has been transformed in Semitic dress. The angels of the Lucan account appear to be an instrumentality substituted for Horus (or the falcon of Horus).<sup>47</sup> The "bosom of Abraham" represents Amnte, the Egyptian abode of the dead. And, most remarkably, Abraham is a Jewish substitute for the pagan god Osiris—just as is the case in Facsimiles 1 and 3. These relationships are summarized in a chart following the article.

### The Hypocephalus in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*

A kind of companion text to the *Testament of Abraham* is the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Like the *Testament*, the *Apocalypse* dates to the first or second century A.D. It tells the story of how Abraham in his youth perceived that idols were simply creations of men and not really gods. After leaving his father's house, Abraham is commanded to offer a sacrifice so that God will reveal great things to him. God sends his angel Iaoel<sup>48</sup> to take Abraham on a tour of heaven, during which he sees seven visions. The text is only extant in a number of medieval Old Slavonic manuscripts, but scholars have deduced from the presence of Hebrew names, words, and phrases, as well as other Hebraisms (such as the use of the positive for the comparative), that the text was most likely originally composed in Hebrew, in which event the probable provenance of the text was Palestine.<sup>49</sup>

Michael Rhodes describes what appear to be possible allusions to a hypocephalus in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.<sup>50</sup> During his vision Abraham is shown "the fulness of the whole world and its circle," which appears to be a description of a hypocephalus. This vision includes the plan of the universe, "what is in the heavens, on the earth, in the sea, and in the abyss," which are very close to the words used in the left middle portion of the Joseph Smith hypocephalus. The *Apocalypse*

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47. Grobel, "Neves," 378.

48. A compound of Yah, a short form of Yahweh, and El.

49. See R. Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:682–83.

50. Michael D. Rhodes, "The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Seventeen Years Later" (FARMS paper, 1994), 6. This paper is an updated version of Rhodes, "A Translation and Commentary of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus," *BYU Studies* 17 (spring 1977): 259–74.



also includes a description of four fiery living creatures, each with four faces: that of a lion, a man, an ox, and an eagle. This is almost certainly a Semitic transformation of the Sons of Horus (via Ezekiel 1–2), which are represented as figure 6 of Facsimile 2.<sup>51</sup> These relationships are also summarized in a chart following the article.

### Spalding Redivivus

Having articulated this view of the relationship of the facsimiles to the Book of Abraham, we are now in a position to compare and contrast the views set forth by Stephen Thompson in his article entitled “Egyptology and the Book of Abraham.”<sup>52</sup> Thompson’s article is, in essence, a more up-to-date and sophisticated version of the Egyptologists’ reports included in Spalding’s pamphlet. I believe that it was necessary for someone to try to set forth in a clear way what contemporary Egyptology makes of the facsimiles. Thompson’s article serves this function, thus ultimately advancing the cause of truth.

Thompson quotes Michael Rhodes as stating that “the Prophet’s explanations of each of the facsimiles accord with present understanding of Egyptian religious practice.”<sup>53</sup> Thompson’s burden is to prove this statement untrue. Actually, I would agree with Thompson that, without qualification, the statement as it stands is overbroad. Unfortunately, Thompson lacks any sense of balance, and his own treatment of the facsimiles is excessively narrow. For instance, Thompson disallows Joseph’s explanation of the four sons of Horus in Facsimile 2, figure 6, as representing the “earth in its four quarters” on the grounds that the sons of Horus never bear that meaning in a funerary context.<sup>54</sup> I frankly find this to be an astonishingly restrictive reading.<sup>55</sup> I have difficulty seeing how Thompson can refuse to give Joseph even partial credit for this explanation. In any event, I would deny that the Joseph Smith hypocephalus (as reinterpreted by J-red) even has a funerary context, so ultimately for me Thompson’s reading is moot.

Thompson gives the Egyptian context for Facsimile 1, figures 12 and 11. Figure 12, which Joseph took as “designed to represent the pillars of heaven,” is in fact a palace facade called a *serekh*.<sup>56</sup> Figure 11, which Joseph took as “raukeeyang, signifying expanse or firmament over our heads, but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be high, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word Shaumahyeem,” are simply waters in which the crocodile (figure 9), representing the god Horus, swims. The waters appear to be above the palace facade, but this is simply an illusion resulting from the perspective used in Egyptian art. Everything above the facade is to be understood as occurring *behind* it.

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51. On the variability of form and cultural adaptation of the sons of Horus, see John Gee, “Notes on the Sons of Horus” (FARMS paper, 1991).
  52. Stephen E. Thompson, “Egyptology and the Book of Abraham,” *Dialogue* 28/1 (1995): 143–60.
  53. Michael D. Rhodes, “Facsimiles from the Book of Abraham,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:136–37, as quoted by Thompson, 143 n. 1.
  54. Thompson, “Egyptology and the Book of Abraham,” 152.
  55. If it is really true that the sons of Horus do not represent the cardinal directions, then I believe Thompson is under obligation to engage the Egyptological literature more fully to demonstrate the point, as in both Egyptological and popular literature it is a commonplace.
  56. Thompson, 145.

While this is a useful summary of the Egyptian context of these figures, it does not address what I view as the ultimate question: “Do Joseph’s explanations make sense as reflecting J-red’s understanding of the scene?” I believe the answer to this question is a very strong yes. In Hebrew cosmology, the *rāqîa*˚ (אֲרָקִיָּא) or “firmament” was believed to be a solid dome, supported by pillars.<sup>57</sup> The *rāqîa*˚ in turn was closely associated with the celestial ocean, which it supported.<sup>58</sup> In the lower half of Facsimile 1, we have the *rāqîa*˚ (1) connected with the waters, as with the celestial ocean, (2) appearing to be supported by pillars, and (3) being solid and therefore capable of serving itself as a support, in this case for the lion couch. The bottom half of Facsimile 1 would have looked to J-red very much like a microcosm of the universe (in much the same way that the divine throne chariot of Ezekiel 1–2, which associates the four four-faced fiery living creatures with the *rāqîa*˚ above their heads on which God sits enthroned, is a microcosm of the universe). The Egyptian artist’s perspective is not necessarily a limitation on J-red. The stacking effect of waters apparently both being supported and acting as a support would have suggested to J-red the Hebrew conception of the *rāqîa*˚.

Joseph also took Facsimile 2, figure 4 (the mummiform hawk with outspread wings in a boat) as a representation of the *rāqîa*˚, the figure answering “to the Hebrew word *Raukeeyang*, signifying expanse, or the firmament of the heavens, also a numerical figure, in Egyptian signifying one thousand.” The Book of Abraham uses two alternative English words to translate *rāqîa*˚: *firmament*, which highlights its solidity, and *expanse*. English *expanse* derives from Latin *expandere*, “to spread out”; this translation highlights the verbal root from which *rāqîa*˚ derives, *rāqîa*˚ which means “to spread out (from beating),” and from there simply “to spread out.” I would suggest that to J-red, the outspread wings of the mummiform hawk made for a very natural representation of the *rq*˚.<sup>59</sup>

In the middle section of his article, Thompson argues against any possibility that the Book of Abraham is a holographic document. Given that Abraham lived in the Middle Bronze Age and that the Joseph Smith Papyri date to Ptolemaic (or Roman) times, Thompson is certainly correct on this point. He quotes Paul Hoskisson, who in an otherwise excellent article writes that “the content of the Book of Abraham did not pass through numerous revisions, the hands of countless scribes.”<sup>60</sup> This statement appears to be based on an assumption that the source for the Book of Abraham was an autographic original. Contra Hoskisson, as I have expressed above, I believe it likely that the Book of Abraham did undergo a textual transmission in antiquity. As a concrete example, I would

57. On the perceived solidity of the firmament, see Paul H. Seely, “The Firmament and the Water Above,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 227–40.

58. For drawings of this basic cosmological understanding, see Keith Norman, “Adam’s Navel,” *Dialogue* 21/2 (1988): 86, and Anthony Hutchinson, “A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered,” *Dialogue* 21/4 (1988): 22.

59. This would appear to be a case where Joseph gives both the Semitic context (*rāqîa*) and the Egyptian context (the number 1,000) of the figure. A number of LDS scholars (such as Rhodes, “Seventeen Years Later,” 10) have noted the connection between the number 1,000 and the ship of the dead. Thompson demurs on this point, arguing that *h3* in this context should rather be taken as a reference to lotus blossoms. The question appears to me to be very much open, but even if Thompson is correct, he does not seem to appreciate the irony of castigating Joseph Smith for making a mistake very similar to that made by modern Egyptologists.

60. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?” in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 130.

read the back references to Facsimile 1 at Abraham 1:12b and 14 as glosses that would have been added to the text only at the time it was first appended to a scroll containing a Book of Breathings, if in fact that is what happened.<sup>61</sup> Thompson is unwilling to allow this possibility, because in his view the pronoun “I” in verse 12 (“I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of the record”) must have been written by Abraham.<sup>62</sup> This insistence on Thompson’s part is naive at best; certainly anyone familiar with critical scholarship regarding biblical redaction would not doubt the willingness of a scribe to make such a clarification in words as if from the perspective of an ancient prophet. Deleting these back references not only would do no harm to the flow and sense of the text, it would actually improve them.

Thompson draws three conclusions, which correspond to the three parts of his article. First, he concludes that Joseph Smith’s interpretations of the facsimiles are not in agreement with the meanings these figures had in their original, funerary context. I can agree with that statement to a certain extent, although I cannot entirely agree with what I view as Thompson’s unduly restrictive handling of the evidence. Second, he concludes that anachronisms in the text of the book make it impossible that it was translated from a text penned by Abraham himself (i.e., without an ancient transmission); based on the dating of the papyri, I would concur that the source text was not a holographic original. Third, Thompson concludes that what we know about the relationship between Egypt and Asia renders the account of the attempted sacrifice of Abraham extremely implausible. Although this third conclusion is beyond the scope of this article, I disagree with it. I see the cult described in the story as being Syro-Palestinian, not Egyptian.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusions

We have reviewed the history of criticism of the facsimiles, beginning with the Spalding pamphlet, and concurred with the early reviewers of the pamphlet in rejecting the autographic assumptions. We showed how the facsimiles can have both an Egyptian context and

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61. John Gee argues, based on Gustavus Seyffarth’s description of the roll containing the original of Facsimile 3 as it existed in 1856 while it was at the St. Louis Museum, that there may have been another text on the roll following the Book of Breathings (“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*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges [Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000], 189). If this argument is correct, and if this additional text was the Book of Abraham, my theory would explain *why* J-red appended that book to a Book of Breathings (because he meant to adopt the vignettes to the Book of Breathings as illustrations for the Book of Abraham). On this reading, the back references to “the commencement of this record” and to “the beginning” were added to point the reader to the beginning of the *scroll*, not the *book*. This would also explain why some of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers show attempts to match characters from the Book of Breathings to the finished English text of the Book of Abraham; those involved in the exercise would have wrongly assumed that the Book of Abraham was the *first* text on the papyrus scroll, whereas in reality it would have been the *second*.

62. Thompson, “Egyptology and the Book of Abraham,” 154.

63. I plan to address this point in a future article.

a Semitic context and how Joseph's explanations for the most part could relate to the Semitic context of the figures as illustrations of the Book of Abraham.<sup>64</sup>

In briefly reviewing Stephen Thompson's update to Spalding's pamphlet, we agreed that Joseph's interpretations do not fully reflect the original, funerary context of the facsimiles, and we further agreed that the papyrus copy that came into Joseph's possession was not an Abrahamic holograph. (We disagreed, however, with Thompson's reading of the cult in Abraham 1 as necessarily having been predominantly Egyptian in nature.)

In considering the significance of the theory articulated in this paper, for convenience of reference we shall refer to it as the "Semitic Adaptation" theory. What are the disadvantages of positing the Semitic Adaptation theory? Very few that I can see. This theory entails the rejection of the autographic assumptions, which some Saints might wish to cling to as a more traditional understanding, but it seems to me that the early date of Abraham in the Middle Bronze Age coupled with the late date of the papyri in Ptolemaic (or later) times requires a rejection of the autographic assumptions in any event. The only way to salvage those assumptions would either be to assert that Nibley, Gee, and the non-LDS Egyptologists who have examined the question are all wrong in their dating of the papyri or to assert that the source for the Book of Abraham was not on the roll containing Facsimiles 1 and 3 (since that roll has been dated) and indeed was almost 4,000 years old, notwithstanding that the other papyrus materials in the cache were only about 2,200 years old. I would reject any such attempt to salvage the autographic assumptions.

Inasmuch as clinging to the autographic assumptions, in my judgment, is not a serious option, the only other potential cause for concern I can see is that the Semitic Adaptation theory posits an ancient transmission of the text, including redaction. I can understand the desire of some to posit a text that came to Joseph directly from Abraham's hand without any intermediaries, unsullied by scribal hands. But unless we can place either the papyri in the Middle Bronze Age or Abraham in the Ptolemaic era, neither of which is going to happen, it seems to me that we are constrained to acknowledge that at least one copy of the original Abrahamic text was made. And once we acknowledge that the text was copied and that there is about a 1,700-year time gap between Abraham's original and that late copy, it seems to me that we are then constrained to consider the very real possibility of a transmission of the text in antiquity.

A comparison with the Book of Mormon might be instructive here. The gold plates were untouched by human hands from the time Moroni deposited them in a stone box in the fifth century

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64. These conclusions relate to the various LDS theories about the Book of Abraham described in John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 20, as follows:

1. On the relation of the Book of Abraham to the papyri: Although I am open to a "pure revelation" theory, my argument here pursues a "missing papyrus" view.
2. On the date of the Book of Abraham: I see the book as having an Abrahamic core but with later interpolations resulting from the transmission of the text.
3. On the date of the Joseph Smith Papyri: I would follow Gee and accept the date of the papyri as the Ptolemaic period (based on prosopography). (Prior to Gee I accepted Nibley's Roman dating, which was based mainly on the hieratic writing style.)
4. On the transmission of the text: In my view, Abraham's descendants (or others) brought the text into Egypt; it was not an Egyptian composition.

A.D. until Joseph's retrieval of the cache in 1827. Prior to that time, however, the records of the Book of Mormon peoples underwent an express redaction process at the hands of Mormon and Moroni. Similarly, the papyrus source for the Book of Abraham sat untouched from the time it was deposited in the tomb during the Greco-Roman age until Lebolo retrieved it. Before that time, though, it circulated among people and was subject to normal transmission processes. My hypothetical redactor, J-red, was in essentially the same position with respect to the Book of Abraham as Mormon was with respect to the Book of Mormon. The difference is that we know of Mormon and his influence on the text, whereas the existence of J-red is hypothetical and his identity unknown. In this respect the Book of Abraham is more like the Bible, which certainly has undergone redaction processes (even if one rejects the large redactional theories, such as the Documentary Hypothesis, the multiple authorship of Isaiah, or the existence of Q) by nameless redactors. But the fact that the Bible experienced such processes does not interfere with our ability to accept it as scripture. In the case of the Book of Abraham, that it was translated and put forward by a modern prophet should be sufficient to ease any qualms one might have about the effects of an unknown redactor on the text.

The disadvantages to the Semitic Adaptation theory in my view are negligible, yet the explanatory power of that theory is substantial. Note in particular the following:

1. Based on present knowledge, the facsimiles appear to be vignettes that should date to a period of Egyptian history substantially (i.e., more than a millennium) removed from the time of Abraham. There is, therefore, an inherent dating anachronism involved in ascribing the facsimiles to Abraham. The traditional argument would appear to entail that Abraham created these vignettes, and, more than a millennium later, the Egyptians began to adapt Abraham's creation to their own religious purposes. The Semitic Adaptation theory, by allowing separate provenances for the text of the Book of Abraham and its facsimiles, and by allowing the facsimiles to have their origin for Egyptian religious purposes, resolves this issue by permitting the adaptation to flow in the other direction.
2. The extent to which Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles accord with present Egyptological knowledge is debated. Generally, non-LDS Egyptologists who have examined the question have maintained either that the explanations are completely wrong or that they are mostly wrong, with perhaps a few lucky guesses. Understandably, LDS scholars have pressed hard in the other direction, articulating ways in which the explanations can be seen as consistent with Egyptological understanding. As a faithful Latter-day Saint, I am in general sympathetic to the observations along these lines made by LDS scholars. Nevertheless, even putting such efforts in their best light, there remain substantial disconnects between the proffered explanations and those of the Egyptologists. The Semitic Adaptation theory fully explains why such disconnects exist. Under this theory, the Egyptologists are no longer the final arbiters of the correctness of the explanations of the facsimiles.
3. A substantial part of the debate over the facsimiles has revolved around whether the facsimiles were incorrectly restored. While I expect that these debates will continue, ultimately the Semitic Adaptation theory moots the question. That is, for example, even

if the priest standing to the left on Facsimile 1 were wearing the jackal mask of Anubis and did not hold a knife in his hand, it still would have been quite natural for J-red to perceive the scene as showing the attempted sacrifice of Abraham. Therefore, under this theory the details of the reconstruction of the facsimiles become largely immaterial vis-à-vis the explanations of the figures.

4. I believe the Semitic Adaptation theory has the potential to put the “missing papyrus” theory on a sounder footing. John Gee has suggested that there may have been another text on the roll containing the Book of Breathing. The Semitic Adaptation theory explains *why* the text of the Book of Abraham may have been appended to a Book of Breathing: because J-red intended to adapt the vignettes of the Book of Breathing as illustrations for his text, the Book of Abraham. This placement of the text would also explain why the back-references to Facsimile 1 as being at “the commencement of this record” and at “the beginning” (which were meant to refer to the beginning of the scroll, not the beginning of the book) may have been misunderstood and led those involved in the production of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, in their attempt to reverse engineer the Egyptian language, to begin with the Book of Breathing itself at the beginning of the scroll.
5. The Semitic Adaptation theory, by allowing for an ancient transmission of the text, takes the Book of Abraham seriously as an ancient book. That a 4,000-year-old papyrus was commingled among a cache of 2,200-year-old papyri would be a most difficult proposition to accept. Some acknowledge that the papyrus source of the Book of Abraham is a copy, thus at least nominally rejecting the autographic assumptions, yet continue to be influenced by those assumptions. They therefore seem to want to see the Abrahamic original as drawn with brush and ink on papyrus in Hieratic Egyptian, together with the facsimiles, which papyri then sat untouched for over 1,500 years until they were finally copied—once—and the copy was deposited in a tomb in Thebes. This is not a realistic picture of the history of the text. In my view, allowing for a transmission of the text (including copying, translation, and redaction) is a more realistic means of getting a text from the Semitic, nonnative Egyptian Abraham in the Middle Bronze Age to an Egyptian papyrus in the Ptolemaic era.
6. Thompson posits a number of anachronisms to Abraham’s day in the Book of Abraham. As things stand, we would appear to have three choices when faced with a purported anachronism in the text: (a) deny that the anachronism exists and assert that, although it has not yet been attested in an extant source, the posited characteristic does indeed date back to the Middle Bronze Age; (b) acknowledge the anachronism, but assign it to Joseph Smith as a translator’s anachronism, which does not in and of itself compromise the Book of Abraham as a translation of an ancient source; or (c) acknowledge the anachronism and assign it to Joseph Smith as the modern author of the text. The Semitic Adaptation theory, by suggesting that the text underwent an ancient transmission, allows a fourth option: that we acknowledge the anachronism but assign it to an ancient redactor.

7. We have pointed to general processes of Semitic adaptation of Egyptian texts and iconography. We have also identified three specific examples that date to Greco-Roman times (the same general time period during which the Joseph Smith Papyri were produced), all of which relate in some way to Abraham. Under traditional theories this evidence is of limited relevance, since it dates almost two millennia after the time of Abraham. Under the Semitic Adaptation theory, however, this evidence now comes from the right time period to say something meaningful about the ancient production of the Book of Abraham and its facsimiles. Under that theory, this evidence is transformed from late (and therefore relatively weak) evidence to becoming a powerful illustration of how Jews during this time period adapted Egyptian sources to their own purposes. The adaptation of an Egyptian psychostasy vignette from chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead in the judgment scene of the *Testament of Abraham*, the adaptation of the Egyptian original underlying the Demotic Story of Setna in a Jewish popular version (replacing Osiris with Abraham), and the adaptation of a hypocephalus in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* provide a stunning glimpse of how J-red, living and working in the same era, may have adapted vignettes from a Book of Breathings and a hypocephalus as illustrations of the Book of Abraham, which had come under his care as a part of the ancient transmission of the text. In my view, the Semitic Adaptation theory turns the facsimiles and their interpretations from a perceived weakness of the Book of Abraham into a real strength.

**Synopsis of Relationship between Amenemope and Proverbs**

<b>Amenemope</b>	<b>Proverbs</b>	<b>Subject</b>
1. 3/9–11, 16	22:17–18	Appeal to hear
2. 1/7	22:19	Purpose of instruction
3. 27/7–8	22:20	Thirty sayings
4. 1/5–6	22:21	Learning a worthy response
5. 4/4–5	22:22	Do not rob a wretch
6. 11/13–14	22:24	Avoid friendship with violent people
7. 13/8–9	22:25	Lest a trap ruin you
8. 7/12–13	22:28	Do not remove landmarks
9. 27/16–17	22:29	Skillful scribes will be courtiers
10. 23/13–18	23:1–3	Eat cautiously before an official
11. 9/14–10:5	23:4–5	Wealth flies away like an eagle/geese
12. 14/5–10	23:6–7	Do not eat a stingy person's food
13. 14/17–18	23:8	Vomiting results
14. 22/11–12	23:9	Do not speak before just anyone
15. 7/12–15	23:10–11	Do not remove landmarks of widows
16. 11/6–7	24:11	Rescue the condemned

**Semitic Transformations from the Vignette to Chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead to the Judgment (Psychostasy) Scene of the *Testament of Abraham***

<b>Egyptian Context</b>	<b>Semitic Context</b>
1. Osiris	Abel
2. Anubis	Dokiel
3. Horus	Purouel
4. Thoth	Enoch or an angel
5. Maat	An angel



**Semitic Transformations from Hypothetical Egyptian Original Underlying the Demotic Story of Setna to the Deducible Jewish Popular Version (from which the Lucan Account of the Rich Man and Lazarus Descends)**

<b>Egyptian Context</b>	<b>Semitic Context</b>
1. Osiris	Abraham
2. Amnte	Bosom of Abraham
3. Horus (or falcon of Horus)	Angels

**Semitic Transformations from a Hypocephalus to the Apocalypse of Abraham**

<b>Egyptian Context</b>	<b>Semitic Context</b>
1. A circular disk representing the upper world and the netherworld	Abraham is shown “the fulness of the whole world and its circle”
2. “O Mighty God, Lord of heaven and earth, of the hereafter, and of his great waters” [from Facsimile 2, left middle]	Abraham is shown “what is in the heavens, on the earth, in the sea, and in the abyss”
3. Four Sons of Horus A. Hapy [baboon] B. Imsety [man] C. Duamutef [jackal] D. Qebehsenuf [falcon]	Four fiery living creatures, each with four faces (via Ezekiel 1–2) Lion [or ox] Man Ox [or lion] Eagle