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Joseph Smith Jr. as a Translator:
The Book of Abraham as a Case Study

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Stephen O. Smoot

Abstract: *This paper examines Joseph Smith's approach to translation, using the Book of Abraham as a case study to explore the interplay between divine revelation and human participation in scriptural production. While the Book of Abraham incorporates both ancient and modern elements, its unique synthesis resists simple categorization as either an unblemished Abrahamic autograph or a purely nineteenth-century pseudepigraphon. Drawing on historical evidence and textual analysis, this paper aims to illuminate Joseph Smith's role as both translator and revelator, offering insights into how Latter-day Saints might understand the complex process of producing sacred texts.*

[**Editor's Note:** *An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the annual Joseph Smith Papers Conference in Salt Lake City on 26 October 2018*.]

> Geschrieben steht: "im Anfang war das Wort!"
> Hier stock' ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?
> Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,
> Ich muss es anders übersetzen,
> Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.
> —Goethe, *Faust I*, 1224–1228[1]

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1. "It is written: 'In the beginning was the *Word*.' / How soon I'm stopped! Who'll help me to go on? / I cannot concede that *words* have such high worth / and must, if properly inspired, / translate the term some other way." Johann

On 6 April 1830, the day the Church of Christ (later renamed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) was officially founded, Joseph Smith received a revelation affirming his divinely appointed roles. The revelation declared him to be "a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ" (Doctrine and Covenants 21:1).[2] During his ministry, Joseph Smith undertook several significant projects as an inspired translator. These projects represent a conceptual range of translation that Joseph himself never clearly defined, leaving it up to us to tease out the nuances based on the evidence we have available. These projects included the Book of Mormon, which he testified was translated "by the gift, and power of God";[3] a lost record of John the Beloved Disciple (Doctrine and Covenants 7);[4] a "new translation"[5] of the Bible, now known as the Joseph Smith Translation;[6] a "record of John" — presumably

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Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I & II*, ed., trans. Stuart Atkins (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 33.

2. Compare Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations: Manuscript Revelation Books, facsimile ed.* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009), 27.

3. "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 707. See Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011); Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU]; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015); Gerrit J. Dirkmaat and Michael Hubbard MacKay, *Let's Talk about the Translation of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2023).

4. "Account of John, April 1829–C [D&C 7]," in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay et al. (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 47–48. See Jeffrey G. Cannon, "Oliver Cowdery's Gift," in *Revelations in Context: The Stories Behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016), 15–19; 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: Joseph Smith's Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019), 231–61.

5. "Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 25 June 1833, in *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, ed. Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, et al. (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2014), 154; and "Letter to Church Leaders in Jackson County, Missouri, 2 July 1833," 167.

6. See Robert J. Matthews, *"A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of*

again the Beloved Disciple — embedded within a 6 May 1833 revelation (Doctrine and Covenants 93:6–18);[7] and the Book of Abraham, described as "a translation of some ancient records . . . from the catacombs of Egypt, purporting to be the writings of Abraham."[8] Beyond these inspired scriptural translations, the Prophet demonstrated a fascination with recovering the primordial "pure language" of Eden.[9] To this end, he pursued the study of both ancient and modern languages, particularly Hebrew, as a means of enhancing his revelatory insights.[10]

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the Bible—A History and Commentary (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975); Kent P. Jackson, *Understanding Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 2022; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2022).

7. See Nicholas J. Frederick, "Translation, Revelation, and the Hermeneutics of Theological Innovation: Joseph Smith and the Record of John," in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 304–27.

8. "The Book of Abraham," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (March 1, 1842): 704, spelling standardized. See John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017); Stephen O. Smoot, John Gee, Kerry Muhlestein, John S. Thompson, *A Guide to the Book of Abraham, BYU Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (2022).

9. David Golding, "'Eternal Wisdom Engraven upon Heavens': Joseph Smith's Pure Language Project," in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 331–62; 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, "The Quest for Pure Language," in *Joseph Smith's Translation: The Words and Worlds of Early Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 19–49; Stephen O. Smoot and Brian C. Passantino, eds., *Joseph Smith's Uncanonized Revelations*, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2024), 47–51.

10. Louis C. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 41–55; 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*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 249–302, rsc.byu.edu /book/approaching-antiquity-joseph-smith-ancient-world; Matthew J. 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,* 390–451; John W. Welch, "Joseph Smith's Awareness of Greek and Latin," in *Approaching Antiquity*, 303–28. In addition to these languages, Joseph also briefly studied German with the assistance of Alexander Neibaur, a German Jewish convert, and Orson Hyde, who had spent part of his 1840– 1842 mission to Palestine in Germany. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., (*The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 191n17, 254–56, 263–64, 267, 276, 279, 297; Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith,

Joseph's linguistic pursuits informed both his sermons and writings, including his important King Follett Sermon of 7 April 1844, where he offered an expansive reinterpretation of the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1.[11]

Joseph Smith also occasionally engaged in what might be described as "secular" translations, wherein he offered interpretations of texts outside the scope of his prophetic calling. One notable example occurred in 1843 when he was presented with a set of small brass plates allegedly unearthed near Kinderhook, Illinois. These plates were later revealed to be forgeries, both by the admission of one of the hoaxers and through modern scientific testing. Despite this, Joseph reportedly "translated a portion" of the plates,[12] likely focusing on a single character on just one of the plates. Based on available evidence, this translation appears to have been attempted through non-revelatory means rather than by inspiration.[13] A similar instance is found in the account of Henry Caswall, an Episcopalian cleric who visited Nauvoo in 1842. Caswall brought with him a medieval Greek manuscript — a copy of the Psalms — and showed it to Joseph. According to Caswall's hostile account, Joseph embarrassed himself in front of an audience of Saints when he misidentified the manuscript's contents as a "dictionary of Egyptian Hieroglyphics."[14] Precisely what transpired

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and Brent M. Rogers, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 3: May 1843–June 1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015), 205–7, 222, 271.

11. Alex D. Smith, et al, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 14: 1 January–15 May 1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2023), 316, 320–21, 330–31, 338; "Conference Minutes," *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 15 (15 August 1844): 614; see Kevin L. Barney, "Joseph Smith's Emendation of Hebrew Genesis 1:1," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 103–35; Kevin L. Barney, "Examining Six Key Concepts in Joseph Smith's Understanding of Genesis 1:1," *BYU Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000): 107–24, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol39/iss3/7/.

12. "William Clayton, Journal, May 1, 1843," in *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 100.

13. Brian M. Hauglid, "Did Joseph Smith Translate the Kinderhook Plates?" in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 93–103; 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.

14. Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo* (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 34–37; Henry Caswall, *The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century; or, the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Mormons* (London: J. F. G. & J. Rivington, 1843), 223–24.

during this encounter has been the subject of considerable debate. While it is of course possible that Joseph mistook the contents of Caswall's manuscript, the learned reverend's narrative is fraught with inconsistencies, bias, and obvious exaggerations meant to make Joseph look foolish, thus rendering his motives and the reliability of his account suspect.[15]

Joseph Smith's engagement with ancient texts and artifacts, and the role these sources played in shaping his work as a prophet, has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry.[16] This paper focuses on a single scriptural project that highlights the complexities of Joseph's approach to translation: the Book of Abraham.[17] As I will argue, the Book of Abraham resists simplistic categorization, revealing dynamics that transcend conventional definitions of translation. Specifically, the production of the Book of Abraham incorporates both ancient and modern elements, complicating efforts to classify it as either an unblemished Abrahamic autograph or a purely nineteenth-century pseudepigraphon. A critical examination of the text and the historical context of its production demonstrates that Joseph Smith's conception of translation was, in many respects, expansive and idiosyncratic by contemporary standards. At the same time, it is essential to challenge reductive interpretations that dismiss the Book of Abraham as merely a product of Joseph's frenzied religious imagination.

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15. See Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass, The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), 304–406; Craig L. Foster, "Henry Caswall: Anti-Mormon Extraordinaire," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995): 145–59, esp. 150–54; John W. Welch, "Joseph Smith's Awareness of Greek and Latin," *Approaching Antiquity*, 311–14; "Joseph Smith and the Greek Psalter," *Mormonr* (website), mormonr.org/qnas/NMzhsd/joseph_smith_and_the_greek_psalter.

16. See the studies in Blumell, Grey, and Hedges, eds., *Approaching Antiquity*; MacKay, Ashurst-McGee, and Hauglid, eds., *Producing Ancient Scripture*; and additionally, Stephen O. Smoot "Apologetics and Antiquity: Book of Mormon Reception, 1830–1844," *Journal of Mormon History* 48, no. 4 (Fall 2022): 1–31.

17. The title of this paper intentionally draws inspiration from Franklin S. Spalding's *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: The Arrow Press, 1912), a seminal anti-Mormon publication that challenged "Joseph Smith's competency as a translator of ancient languages" (13) by critically examining his explanations of the Book of Abraham facsimiles.

The Translation of the Book of Abraham:
A Brief Historical Review

Before delving into my analysis of the Book of Abraham, a brief overview of the translation of the book will provide necessary context for the analysis that follows. Given the extensive coverage of this history elsewhere, this summary will remain concise.[18] On 3 July 1835, shortly after the initial academic advances in deciphering the Egyptian language emerged in Europe,[19] an antiquities dealer and showman named Michael Chandler presented Joseph Smith with a collection of Egyptian papyri and mummies.[20] Upon examining the materials, Joseph declared that one of the papyrus rolls contained "the writings of Abraham; another the writings of Joseph of Egypt."[21] Following this announcement, Joseph acquired the collection for $2,400 and promptly began efforts to translate the papyri.[22] During the summer and fall of 1835, Joseph worked alongside his scribes W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, Warren Parrish, and Frederick G. Williams to decipher the texts.[23] In conjunction with the translation of the papyri,

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18. See Stephen O. Smoot, "'From the Catecombs of Egypt': Latter-day Saint Engagement with Ancient Egypt and the Contest of Religious Identity," *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 4 (Fall 2020): 3–23, for a recent summary of this history.

19. See generally Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology: 1: From Antiquity to 1881* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2015); Kerry M. Muhlestein, "Prelude to the Pearl: Sweeping Events Leading To The Discovery of the Book of Abraham," in *Prelude to the Restoration: From Apostasy to the Restored Church* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 149–61; John Gee, "Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt," in *Approaching Antiquity*, 427–48; *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4: Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, ed. Robin C. Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018), xvi–xxii. Jeff Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019): 76–87, offers some important notes on potential contemporary influence of early Egyptological discoveries on Joseph Smith, interpreterfoundation.org/a-precious-resource-with-some-gaps/.

20. "History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838]," p. 595–96, *Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november-1838/49.

21. "History, 1838–1856, volume B-1," p. 596.

22. "Letter from Joseph Coe, 1 January1844," p. [1], *Joseph Smith Papers*, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-from-joseph-coe-1-january-1844/1. This comes out to approximately $86,000 in 2025, according to online inflation calculators.

23. For a treatment on the translation of the Book of Abraham with

members of this circle also undertook a project to create an "alphabet and grammar" of the Egyptian language — an endeavor that appears to have been conceptually related to their efforts to recover the "pure language."[24] The extent of Joseph Smith's involvement in this effort to systematize and study the Egyptian language remains disputed, as does its precise relationship to the production of the Book of Abraham.[25]

The exact methods employed by the Prophet in the process of translating the Book of Abraham also remain unclear. Some historical evidence indicates Joseph Smith and those close to him, including those who assisted in the translation and publication of the Book of Abraham, believed the text was produced "by the revelation of Jesus Christ,"[26] with some accounts mentioning the use of a seer stone in the process.[27] Not much more can be conclusively stated, as no consensus has yet been reached regarding the relationship between the translated text and the Egyptian papyri, the connection between the translated text and the "alphabet and grammar" manuscripts (the Egyptian language project), or the relationships among the extant Book of Abraham manuscripts themselves.[28] There is ongoing debate about whether the entire extant Book of Abraham was translated during the summer and fall of 1835, or if only a portion (up to Abraham 2:18) was completed in that period, with the remainder (up to Abraham 5:21) being produced in the spring of 1842, shortly before its publication.[29] (As we will explore below, the presence of Hebrew terminology

accompanying primary sources, see "Book of Abraham Translation," *Mormonr* (website), mormonr.org/qnas/Rqa6Tb/book_of_abraham_translation.

24. See the recent studies in Michael Hubbard MacKay, "The Secular Binary of Joseph Smith's Translations*," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 54, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 1–39; Michael MacKay and Daniel Belnap, "The Pure Language Project," *Journal of Mormon History* 49, no. 4 (2023): 1–44.

25. For an overview of the various perspectives on this issue, see Smoot et al., "The 'Kirtland Egyptian Papers' and the Book of Abraham," in *Guide to the Book of Abraham*, 45–49.

26. "John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847," in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831–1847,* ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2012), 86.

27. See Stephen O. Smoot, "Did Joseph Smith Use a Seer Stone in the Translation of the Book of Abraham?" *Religious Educator* 23, no. 2 (2022): 65–107, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol23/iss2/7/.

28. See generally Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham*, 13–55.

29. The following two sources favor the first theory: Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen, "'The Work of Translating': The Book of Abraham's Translation

in the third chapter of the Book of Abraham is an important piece of evidence in this debate.) However exactly it was produced, the resulting text was published serially between 1 March and 16 May 1842, under the title "The writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus."[30]

The recovery of fragments of the Egyptian papyri once owned by Joseph Smith in 1967 has sparked significant debate regarding the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. These surviving papyri fragments do not contain the English text of the Book of Abraham but are instead identifiable as copies of Egyptian funerary texts, including the Book of Breathings and the Book of the Dead.[31] While The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to affirm the inspiration and scriptural authority of the Book of Abraham, it acknowledges that the relationship between the translated text and the papyri remains complex and not fully understood.[32] Consequently, any attempt to

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Chronology," in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life's Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 139–62; and John Gee, "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. journal.interpreterfoundation.org/fantasy-and-reality-in-the-translation-of-the-book-of-abraham/. The following sources favor the second theory: Matthew J. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 390–451, and Brian 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," both in *Producing Ancient Scripture*, 363–89.

30. "A Translation," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842), 704.

31. 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; John A. Wilson, "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations: A Summary Report," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 67–85; Richard A. Parker, "The Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 86–88; Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/85/; Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); Michael D. Rhodes, *Books of the Dead Belonging to Tshemmin and Neferirnub: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010); Robert K. Ritner, ed., *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition, P.JS 1–4 and the Hypocephalus of Shesonq* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2011).

32. See "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham.

understand the production of the Book of Abraham must approach this subject with care and nuance. To this end, I will highlight four data points derived from my close study of the text of the Book of Abraham to explore what they reveal about Joseph Smith as a prophet engaged in the act of inspired translation. These data points include: (1) the figure of Zeptah/Egyptus, which provides insight into Joseph Smith's interaction with the onomasticon of the Book of Abraham text he rendered; (2) the use of Hebrew vocabulary in the Book of Abraham, likely reflecting Joseph's efforts to incorporate linguistic knowledge he obtained from his studies into his scriptural productions; (3) the presence of explanatory glosses within the text of the Book of Abraham, which shed light on the interplay between revelation and interpretive clarification in the translation process; and (4) the Book of Abraham's creation account, a narrative that offers a window into how Joseph's study of Hebrew coupled with his revelation on Abrahamic cosmology contributed to Latter-day Saint doctrine. Together, these data points provide just such a nuanced perspective on the nature of the translation of the Book of Abraham that the Church calls for today.

Data point 1: Zeptah/Egyptus

The Book of Abraham's first chapter recounts a primeval history of Egypt's founding:[33] "The land of Egypt [was] first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus" (Abraham 1:23). This woman "discovered the land [when] it was under water, who afterward settled her sons in it; and thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land." The "first government of Egypt" was established by "Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham" (vv. 24–25). In its current canonical edition (2013), the Book of Abraham presents the genealogy of Egypt's founding family as depicted in Figure 1 — Ham is the husband of Egyptus[1] and the father of Egyptus[2], the mother of Pharaoh. This genealogy reflects the names of the characters as originally published in the *Times and Seasons* on 1 March 1842.[34] Significantly, two of the names in the Book of Abraham appear differently in the 1835 Kirtland manuscripts. In all three Kirtland-era manuscripts, Ham's wife (Egyptus[1]) is identified as

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33. See Smoot et al., "Zeptah and Egyptes," in *Guide to the Book of Abraham*, 101–6, for additional discussion of what I offer in this section.
34. "Book of Abraham," *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842), 705.

either "Zep-tah" or "Zeptah."[35] Additionally, the name of their daughter is consistently rendered as Egypt*es* rather than Egypt*us*.[36]
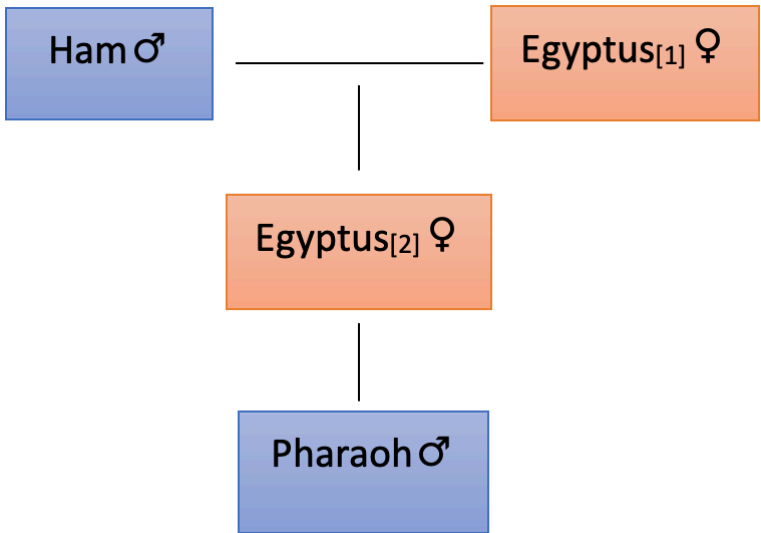

Figure 1. The genealogy of Ham and Egyptus as presented in the canonical text of the Book of Abraham, based on the 1842 *Times and Seasons* publication under Joseph Smith's editorship.

In the earliest iteration of the narrative, the family tree of Egypt's discoverers appears as depicted in Figure 2 — Ham is the husband of Zeptah and the father of Eyptes, the mother of Pharaoh. Both Zeptah and Egyptes were emended to their current readings in Willard Richards's 1842 manuscript copy of the Book of Abraham, evidently in preparation for publication in the *Times and Seasons*.[37] The change from Egypt*es* to Egypt*us* may suggest that the name was spelled aloud to Richards as he recorded it,[38] but it is also possible that it simply reflects Joseph Smith's or another Nauvoo clerk's imprecise pronunciation of the English schwa plus the consonant [s] (/əs/)

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35. Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 199, 211, 227.

36. Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 199, 211, 227.

37. Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 261, 263.

38. Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 292n78.

contained in the ending syllable of the name. This latter explanation is consistent with evidence from the dictated Book of Mormon manuscript.[39]
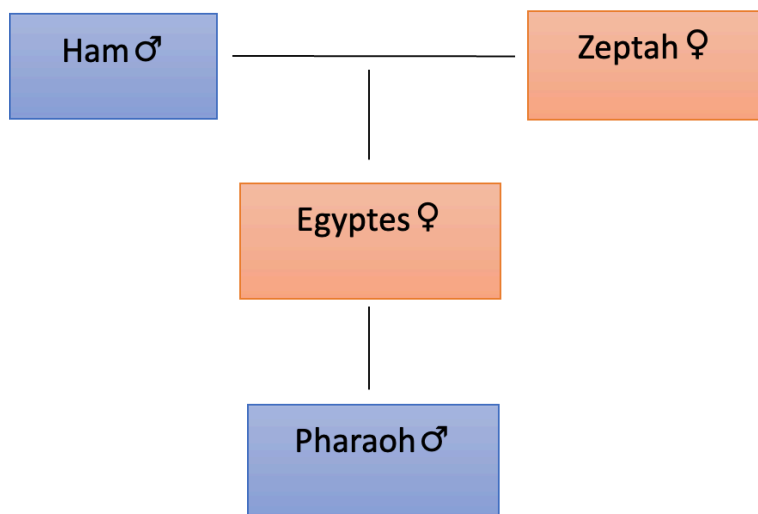

Figure 2. The genealogy of Ham and Egyptus according to the 1835 Kirtland-era Book of Abraham manuscripts.

Whatever the case for Egyptes/Egyptus, which might be explained easily enough as simply the result of imprecise pronunciation, the change from Zeptah to Egyptus[1] is more difficult to account for. Writing in 1955, James R. Clark proposed that the alteration was intended to make the name more familiar to contemporary readers, observing that Joseph Smith was "translating the papyrus into English for readers who were already commonly familiar with this nomenclature."[40] If this is correct (and it appears to be a plausible enough explanation), then the revisions may have aimed to create a stronger connection between the characters in the text and the land of Egypt, reinforcing the thematic significance of this land already familiar from the Bible.

39. Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Six: Spelling in the Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2020), 461–63.

40. James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), 127. For a diverging view, see Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Curious Textual History of 'Egyptus' the Wife of Ham," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 34, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 1–11, who argues that the name changed as the result of scribal revisions—a combination of phonetic reinterpretation and visual adjustments—reinforced by Joseph Smith's imaginative effort to ground the story in a pseudo-historical framework.

Whatever the motivation, as with his revisions to post-1830 editions of the Book of Mormon,[41] including the alteration of names,[42] these adjustments to the Book of Abraham appear to indicate that Joseph's conception of revelatory translation encompassed processes of revision and redaction.[43]

That being said, the name Zeptah appears to be an authentically ancient name that grounds the Book of Abraham in the ancient world. Contrary to one author's assertion that it is merely "an imaginative Chaldean name,"[44] *Zeptah* is a plausible rendering of the Egyptian name *Siptah*, which means "son of [the god] Ptah." While the name underwent changes between the manuscript and printed versions of the Book of Abraham, suggesting that Joseph Smith felt at liberty to revise the names of figures in his revealed translations, this name also anchors the translation to an ancient source.

Data point 2: Hebrew vocabulary

The second data point worth examining is the presence of distinctly Hebrew words in the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith's explanations of the accompanying facsimiles. (See table 1.) This Hebrew terminology first appears in Abraham 3:13, during the account of Abraham's cosmic vision.[45] In transliterating these words, Joseph Smith adhered closely to the Sephardic pronunciation system outlined in Joshua

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41. Royal Skousen, "Changes in The Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 161–76, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/changes-in-the-book-of-mormon/.

42. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 3, Mosiah 17–Alma 20* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2006), 1418–21; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 3, Enos through Mosiah* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 374–76.

43. Entries in Joseph Smith's journal on 8 and 9 March 1842 speak of him "translating & revising" the Book of Abraham as he prepared it for publication, consistent with the conclusion we have reached here. See Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 42. On the potential significance of this, see the comments in Muhlestein and Hansen, "The Work of Translating," 149–50.

44. Metcalfe, "Curious Textual History," 9.

45. There are no extant manuscripts for Abraham 2:19–3:17 and Abraham 3:27–5:21. The earliest known text for these passages is found in the *Times and Seasons* publications of 1 March and 15 March 1842.

Seixas's *Manual Hebrew Grammar* (1834), a text he and others studied in Kirtland beginning in January 1836.[46]

Table 1. Hebrew words in the Book of Abraham.

Book of Abraham Transliteration	*Manual Hebrew Grammar* (1834) Transliteration	Society of Biblical Literature Transliteration	Hebrew
Raukeeyang (Facsimile 1, Fig. 12; Fac. 2, Fig. 4)	*raukeeyagn*	*rāqîʿa*	רָקִיעַ
Shaumau (Fac. 1, Fig. 12)	**shaumau*	**šāmāh*[47]	*שָׁמָה
Shaumahyeem (Fac. 1, Fig. 12)	*shaumayeem*	*šāmayîm*	שָׁמַיִם
Kokob (Abraham 3:13)	*kokaub*	*Kôkāb*	כּוֹכָב
Kokaubeam (Abraham 3:13, 16)	*kokaubeem*	*kôkābîm*	כּוֹכָבִים
Hah-ko-kau-beam (Fac. 2, Fig. 5)	*hakokaubeem*	*ha-kôkābîm*	הַכּוֹכָבִים
Gnolaum (Abraham 3:18)	*gnolaum*	*ʿôlām*	עוֹלָם

This feature of the text raises several important questions, foremost among them being how to account for their presence. Are the transliterated Hebrew words in the text from Joseph Smith's modern redactional handling of the text based on the transliteration system he learned from Seixas in 1836 or are they original to an ancient Book of Abraham text that Joseph simply rendered using this transliteration system? The available evidence, in my judgement, favors the first explanation, but some nuances must be considered. To start, the presence of Hebrew terminology in a pristine Abrahamic text dating to the early second millennium BCE (circa 2000 BCE) is implausible.[48] Current evidence places the origins of Hebrew no earlier than the

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46. Joshua Seixas, *Manual Hebrew Grammar,* 2nd ed. (Andover, MD: Gould and Newman, 1834), 6–7; Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 419–28.

47. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 425–27, highlights lexical sources available to Joseph Smith during his Hebrew studies that reconstruct *shaumau* as an archaic and obsolete root. Compare, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 1029; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II 51-100: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* Anchor Bible 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 135–36.

48. On the dating and historical setting of Abraham, see John Gee, "The Wanderings of Abraham," in *From Creation to Sinai: The Old Testament through the Lens of the Restoration*, ed. Daniel L. Belnap and Aaron P. Schade (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 251–78.

late second or early first millennium BCE (circa 1000 BCE).[49] It is true that "a precursor to Hebrew was already spoken by the inhabitants of Canaan in the second millennium B.C.E." by the time of the Israelites' entrance into the land,[50] and recent discoveries are beginning to catalog samples of written Amorite[51]—an "important early ancestor of Hebrew"[52] that may have been Abraham's language.[53] However, these precursors are not the Hebrew proper found in the Book of Abraham. Just as Anglo-Saxon, the language of *Beowulf*, or Middle English, the language of Chaucer, are distinct from modern English, these early Northwest Semitic languages, including Amorite, are distinct from the Hebrew that emerged later. Thus, based on the currently available evidence, the presence of Hebrew in an untouched Abrahamic *Urtext* is difficult to maintain.

That being said, it is noteworthy that only three Hebrew words appear in the actual translated text of the Book of Abraham: *Kokob* (Abraham 3:13), its plural form *Kokaubeam* (Abraham 3:13, 16), and *Gnolaum* (Abraham 3:18). In contrast, the remaining four Hebrew terms are found in Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles, which, unlike the Book of Abraham text, do not claim to be of ancient origin. (Why Joseph Smith chose Hebrew in his explanations to the

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49. In "Archaic Biblical Hebrew," in *A Handbook of Biblical Hebrew, Volume 1: Periods, Corpora, and Reading Traditions*, ed. W. Randall Garr and Steven E. Fassberg (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 20, Augustinus Gianto identifies the following texts as some of our earliest in the Hebrew Bible: Exodus 15:1–18; Numbers 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 16–19; Deuteronomy 32:1–43; Judges 5:1–30; 1 Samuel 2:1–10; 2 Samuel 22:2–51; and Psalm 18. These he dates to the turn of the first millennium BCE. Looking beyond the biblical corpus, Peter Bekins, *Inscriptions from the World of the Bible: A Reader and Introduction to Old Northwest Semitic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2020), 91, notes that "the Gezer Calendar (tenth century BCE) is typically counted among [Old] Hebrew texts, but it does not have any distinctly Hebrew features. The earliest [non-biblical] texts that can be specifically identified as Hebrew come from the ninth century BCE."

50. William M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins Through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 30.

51. For instance, Andrew George and Manfred Krebernik, "Two Remarkable Vocabularies: Amorite-Akkadian Bilinguals!" *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 116, no. 1 (2022): 113–66.

52. Schniedewind, *Social History of Hebrew*, 30.

53. If not Amorite, then perhaps some other Proto-Northwest Semitic dialect; or, alternatively, Hurrian or Old Babylonian. See Michael P. Streck, "Old Babylonian," in *History of the Akkadian Language*, ed. Juan-Pablo Vita, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1002.

facsimiles is unknown.[54]) The terms in the Book of Abraham text — *Kokob/Kokaubeam* and *Gnolaum* — are attested in cognate Semitic languages that predate Hebrew: *Kokob/Kokaubeam* ("star[s]") is attested as Old Akkadian *kakkabu/kabkabu* and Ugaritic *kbkb*,[55] while *Gnolaum* ("everlasting," "ancient") is attested in Ugaritic as ʿ*lm*.[56] This linguistic attestation leaves open the possibility that these terms reflect Joseph Smith's rendering of an underlying ancient text. What's more, scribal redactions were common in the transmission of ancient texts, where copyists adapted older works to the linguistic context of their time. The Hebrew words in the Book of Abraham could, hypothetically, be the result of just such an adaption, and would therefore reflect the language of ancient scribes (rather than Abraham himself). If a copy of Abraham's writings was preserved among the Joseph Smith Papyri, which date well over 1,500 years after Abraham's day, it would have undergone scribal transmission over centuries, passing through various cultural and linguistic filters, including Egyptian and Hebrew-speaking environments.[57] By the time such a text reached Joseph Smith, it may have already incorporated elements foreign to Abraham's original composition, reflecting the influence of the later scribes that preserved it.[58]

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54. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 428, suggests some reasons "might have included a desire to provide biblical verisimilitude for his Abrahamic record, display his erudition, or help his fellow students of Hebrew make connections between their studies and the papyri."

55. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, vol. 8 ed. A. Leo Oppenheim (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1971), 21, 45–49; Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1943), 417; George and Krebernik, "Two Remarkable Vocabularies," 115, 120.

56. Gregorio del Olmo Lette and Joaquín Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, 3rd. rev. ed., trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1:155; Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, 456–57. The etymology for the Hebrew ʿ*ôlām* is uncertain. The word is possibly related to the Akkadian *ullū* ("distant past"), as discussed in Ernst Jenni, "Das Wort ʿ*ôlām* im Alten Testament," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64, no. 1 (1952): 201–2, who determines the similarity between the two are "unlikely to be coincidental" and so an etymological relationship is "somewhat plausible," but also cautions that a direct etymology cannot be established. See additionally *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, ed. Martha T. Roth, vol. 20 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2010), 73–74.

57. See Stephen O. Smoot and Kerry Muhlestein, "Prophets, Pagans, and Papyri: The Jews of Greco-Roman Egypt and the Transmission of the Book of Abraham," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2022): 105–34.

58. The possibility that the Book of Abraham represents Joseph Smith's

However, the usage of these Hebrew terms as explanatory glosses within the narrative ("Kokob, which is star"; "Kokaubeam, which signifies stars, or all the great lights, which were in the firmament of heaven"; "for they are gnolaum, or eternal"), seems to suggest they were employed by Joseph as the modern translator to convey theological and cosmological concepts. (See the next point for more on glosses in the Book of Abraham.) These concepts, while rooted in the Abrahamic narrative, were presented in a manner unfamiliar to readers but resonant with what Joseph regarded as sacred and authoritative language. Joseph's use of transliterated Hebrew words in the Book of Abraham may therefore represent his attempt to imbue the text of Abraham with additional theological depth and scriptural resonance — anchoring his work to the biblical tradition and enhancing the sacred character of his revelation. Furthermore, even if these words originated with Abraham or an ancient hypothetical copyist, their presentation in the English Book of Abraham still undeniably reflects Joseph's Hebrew studies. As Muhlestein and Hansen acknowledge, "On the surface, [the presence of Hebrew in the text] suggests Joseph translated these phrases after he began his study of Hebrew and that

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translation of a later copy of an earlier Abrahamic autograph has been considered by Latter-day Saint scholars for some time. For instance, see Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 4–9; Michael D. Rhodes, "Teaching the Book of Abraham Facsimiles," *Religious Educator* 4, no. 2 (2003): 117–18; Kevin L. Barney, "The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 125–28; Hugh Nibley and Michael Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 20–22; Kerry Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 229–31; Stephen O. Smoot and Quinten Barney, "The Book of the Dead as a Temple Text and the Implications for the Book of Abraham," in *The Temple: Ancient and Restored*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry, (Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation; Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2016), 193–96; Smoot and Muhlestein, "Prophets, Pagans, and Papyri," 105–34. This possibility has also been acknowledged by the Church: "Of course, the fragments do not have to be as old as Abraham for the book of Abraham and its illustrations to be authentic. Ancient records are often transmitted as copies or as copies of copies. The record of Abraham could have been edited or redacted by later writers much as the Book of Mormon prophet-historians Mormon and Moroni revised the writings of earlier peoples." "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays, churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham?lang=eng.

his transliterations were influenced by his grammar book."[59] Whether this indeed means Joseph translated the third chapter of Abraham after learning Hebrew in 1836, as maintained by Grey and Hauglid, or later revised an earlier translation to incorporate his linguistic studies, as Muhlestein and Hansen posit, is largely immaterial to my own argument. What is clear is that Joseph's exposure to Hebrew influenced the *final form* of the text published in 1842 — either by shaping the original translation or through subsequent editorial refinements. This demonstrates that his evolving knowledge and study of language were integral to the final production of the Book of Abraham and that the text Joseph gave to his readers reflects an interaction between revelation and intellectual effort. Both explanations — the possibility of a post-Hebrew-study translation or a later revision — are consistent with the evidence seen here and either supports my contention that Joseph's work on the Book of Abraham was shaped by his scholarly and revelatory experiences alike.[60]

Data point 3: Explanatory glosses

The Hebrew terminology in Abraham 3:13 and 3:18 is not the only instance in the text where explanatory glosses are provided for the reader. The first chapter of the Book of Abraham also contains several such glosses (emphasis added):

- "And it came to pass that the priest made an offering unto the god of Pharaoh, and also unto the god of Shagreel, even after the manner of the Egyptians. *Now the god of Shagreel was the sun.*" (1:9)
- "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.*" (1:12)
- "That you may have an understanding of these gods, *I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at*

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59. Muhlestein and Hansen, "'The Work of Translating,'" 150.

60. Gee, "Fantasy and Reality," 167, correctly notes that "retranslating and revising is not uncommon in translations," and hypothesizes that Joseph spent 9 March 1842, "revising the Hebrew transliterations [in the Book of Abraham]" that were revealed to him in 1835 "to the then standard Hebrew transliteration system that [he] had learned from Sexias."

> *the beginning*, which manner of figures is called by the Chaldeans *Rahleenos, which signifies hieroglyphics.*" (1:14)

- "and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the court of Pharaoh; *which Pharaoh signifies king by royal blood.*" (1:20)
- "The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus, *which in the Chaldean signifies Egypt, which signifies that which is forbidden.*" (1:23)

In the description of the Abrahamic covenant provided at Abraham 2:6–11, interpretative glosses are likewise employed to clarify the blessings promised to Abraham:

> And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee *(that is, in thy Priesthood)* and in thy seed *(that is, thy Priesthood),* for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee *(that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body)* shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal. (v. 11)

Finally, interpretative glosses are used in the Book of Abraham's creation account to explain certain aspects of the Gods' creative acts:

- "And the Gods formed man from the dust of the ground, and took his spirit *(that is, the man's spirit)*, and put it into him; and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (5:7)
- "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the time that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die. *Now I, Abraham, saw that it was after the Lord's time, which was after the time of Kolob; for as yet the Gods had not appointed unto Adam his reckoning.*" (5:13)

A cursory reading of the Book of Abraham might suggest that all explanatory glosses originate with Abraham himself. This certainly appears to be the case with the gloss in Abraham 5:13, which explains that Adam and Eve operated on what might be called "Kolob Standard Time" while in the Garden of Eden. However, a closer examination of the manuscript evidence indicates that some glosses appear to be nineteenth-century additions. For example, "The references to the

facsimiles within the text of the Book of Abraham seem to have been nineteenth-century editorial insertions."[61] This is apparent with the glosses at Abraham 1:12, 14, which appear to be interlinear additions in Frederick G. William's Kirtland-era manuscript.[62] As explained by Gee:

> The earliest manuscript we have shows that the phrase "I will refer you to the representation that is at the commencement of this record" from Abraham 1:12 was squished in two lines of smaller handwriting in the space at the end of the paragraph between Abraham 1:12 and 1:13. Similarly, Abraham 1:14 was added in a smaller hand squeezed into the margin at the top of the page, above the header, ignoring the ruled left margin. The Book of Abraham actually reads smoothly without these additions. Thus, these statements in the text seem to be nineteenth-century additions approved by, if not made by, Joseph Smith.[63]

The gloss "which signifies hieroglyphics" at the end of Abraham 1:14 first appears in the 1 March 1842, publication of the text in the *Times and Seasons*. It is absent from the Kirtland-era manuscripts and Willard Richards's early 1842 copy, suggesting that it originated with Joseph Smith or one of the clerks in the printing office.[64] This observation raises the possibility that other glosses in the Book of Abraham may also have originated with Joseph Smith or his scribes.[65] However, prudence dictates evaluating each gloss individually, as

61. Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 143.

62. Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 195, 197, 239nn57, 64.

63. Gee, *Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 143–44; compare Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 193, who write, "Two relatively large insertions in this version illustrate a connection between the Book of Abraham text and a vignette on the papyri. The insertions refer readers to a representation of the attempted sacrifice of Abraham upon an altar, which points readers to the vignette, or illustration, from the Book of Breathing for Horos. These insertions by Williams may have been first added to [his manuscript] and then silently incorporated in later versions." See further Stephen O. Smoot, "Framing the Book of Abraham: Presumptions and Paradigms," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 282–86, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/framing-the-book-of-abraham-presumptions-and-paradigms/.

64. Jensen and Hauglid, *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations, Volume 4*, 197, 209, 223, 257, 309, 334n85.

65. Smoot et al., "How did Joseph Smith Translate the Book of Abraham?" in *Guide to the Book of Abraham*, 40–41.

the evidence varies. For instance, the gloss at Abraham 5:13 appears original, while the gloss at the end of Abraham 1:14 is almost certainly a modern interpolation. This phenomenon is not without precedent in Joseph Smith's other revealed texts. For example, the 1840 third edition of the Book of Mormon introduced the gloss "or out of the waters of baptism" at 1 Nephi 20:1 under the Prophet's editorial supervision.[66] That explanatory glosses were added to the Book of Abraham likely at Joseph's editorial direction is therefore consistent with his broader translation practices, demonstrating that his concept of "translation" encompassed textual emendations that did not necessarily reflect a direct rendering of the underlying source.

Data point 4: Creation account

The influence of Joseph Smith's Hebrew studies on the Book of Abraham appears to extend beyond the handful of Hebrew words found in Abraham 3. His engagement with Hebrew in Kirtland in the winter of 1836 also appears evident in Abraham 4–5, which recounts a creation narrative that diverges in notable ways from the Genesis creation account. As Muhlestein and Hansen observe:

> Phrases like "organized and formed" (Abraham 4:1) instead of "created," "expanse," instead of "firmament," "heavens" (Abraham 4:1) instead of "heaven," and "empty and desolate" (Abraham 4:2) as opposed to "without form and void" are all phrases Joseph likely picked up from his Hebrew study and some of which he referenced elsewhere. Even an apparent use of the Hebrew *hiphil* verb form is present in Abraham 4:4. Various words and phrases which were clearly influenced by Joseph Smith's Hebrew studies are used throughout the entire narrative of chapters 4 and 5. The same is true of representing creation being brought about by "gods" instead of "God," something that Joseph Smith argued could be demonstrated in the Hebrew name for God. These elements are so thoroughly interwoven in the text of Abraham 4 and 5 that it is difficult to imagine them as glosses. Rather, they seem to represent integral features of the text.[67]

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66. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 1, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 427–28.

67. Muhlestein and Hansen, "Work of Translating," 150, internal citations removed.

Matthew Grey has similarly argued that "the published text of the Book of Abraham shows that Joseph Smith incorporated into the translation process his knowledge of Biblical Hebrew — which he concurrently acquired through textbooks and formal study with a Hebrew instructor."[68] Grey, like Muhlestein and Hansen, identifies elements in the creation account in Abraham 4–5 as evidence of how Joseph's study of Hebrew shaped the translation process.[69] For example, it has been a common — and reasonable — assumption that Joseph Smith's rendering of the Hebrew ʾĕlōhîm as the plural "Gods" rather than the singular "God" throughout Abraham 4–5 reflects his training with Joshua Seixas.[70] There is some basis for this assumption.[71] However, it would be mistaken to claim that Joseph simply adopted Seixas's views and presented them as his own. "It is almost certainly during his study of Hebrew at the end of 1835 and the beginning of 1836 that Joseph first saw any linguistic evidence in Hebrew that supported the notion of a plurality of gods," write Muhlestein and Hansen. "Yet the way he would have encountered this does not seem like it would have propelled him towards that interpretation."[72] One reason for this is that Seixas's grammar used to instruct the Kirtland school explicitly disavowed the interpretation of ʾĕlōhîm that Joseph eventually embraced.[73] In fact, a passing comment made by him in an 1844 sermon suggests that Joseph and Seixas held opposing views on the implications of ʾĕlōhîm as a plural noun.[74] There is little in Seixas's religious background or academic work to suggest that he would have encouraged Joseph Smith to embrace the radical doctrine of a plurality of gods.[75] As one biographer observes, "We must conclude that

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68. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 390.

69. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri" 431–45.

70. Zucker, "Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew," 52–53; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 171.

71. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 437–44.

72. Muhlestein and Hansen, "'Work of Translating,'" 151.

73. Muhlestein and Hansen, "'Work of Translating,'" 151; Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 439; Michael T. Walton, "Professor Seixas, the Hebrew Bible, and the Book of Abraham," *Sunstone* 6, no. 2 (March–April 1981), 43n12.

74. Brent D. Dowdle et al., eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 15: 16 May–28 June 1844* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2023), 270.

75. Shalom Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue: Hebrew & the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 176–89, esp. 185–89.

Seixas's influence on the Mormons was primarily philological."[76] While Joseph's study under Seixas may have served as a catalyst for his revelatory development of the doctrines of a plurality of gods and deification, "in his post-1836 translations, [he] did not slavishly adhere to the teachings of Joshua Seixas, but felt free to adapt his academic learning to his prophetic thinking in innovative ways." Indeed, although Joseph "deferred to his various textbooks on several points" in formulating his views, "there were other instances in which his own examination of the [Egyptian] 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."[77]

Juxtaposing the Book of Abraham with the creation account in the Book of Moses (Moses 2–3), a text revealed to Joseph Smith between June and October 1830 as part of his inspired revision of the Bible, offers additional perspective in understanding how progressive revelation and intellectual study contributed to the production of the Prophet's scriptural translations. Since both texts were produced by the same human agent — Joseph Smith — they function as complementary sources for analyzing the Prophet's revelatory offerings. In a sense, the Book of Moses provides something akin to a control group for understanding the Book of Abraham, as it captures Joseph's initial foray into restoring ancient scripture, allowing us to trace thematic and doctrinal continuities and divergences between the two works. This approach illuminates how Joseph's translations were not static productions, but instead the result of dynamic processes influenced by external factors — such as, in the case of the Book of Abraham, his exposure to the Egyptian papyri and his Hebrew studies in Kirtland — complemented with revelatory insight.

The creation accounts in Moses 2–3 and Abraham 4–5 share many similarities but also include significant differences. We will highlight just a few examples here. Both describe the creation in sequential stages, emphasizing divine power and intention in forming the earth, the heavens, and humanity. However, the texts diverge in their portrayal of the divine beings involved, the method of creation, and the broader narrative context. In Moses 2–3, the Creator is identified as "Almighty God," "God," or "Lord God," emphasizing a singular, personal deity commanding creation into existence by verbal fiat. This account

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76. Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue*, 193.
77. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri," 442.

closely parallels the Genesis narrative (specifically the King James Version Joseph was revising), repeatedly using the phrase "And I, God, said . . ." to describe the sequential acts of Creation (Moses 2:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29) — although the shift from a third-person to a first-person narrative voice is a notable departure from the biblical text. Like Genesis, the Moses account speaks of God "creating" the cosmos (Moses 2: 1, 21), describes the earth as "without form, and void" (Moses 2:2), and references a "firmament" dividing the waters (Moses 2:6). Time is structured into "days," with each phase marked by "the evening and the morning" (Moses 2:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), again reflecting the KJV Genesis framework. All of this is presented in the context of God speaking directly to Moses, revealing the mystery of creation to the prophet (Moses 1:40; 2:1).

In contrast to Moses, Abraham 4–5 is presented in a third-person voice as a revelation to Abraham in the context of his vision of the premortal world and divine council (Abraham 3:22). It introduces the concept of the "Gods" as collaborative agents in the creation process. The consistent plural language — such as "the Gods organized," "the Gods said," "the Gods ordered," and "the Gods took counsel" — reflects a clear council-like deliberation, emphasizing a cooperative nature of divine governance not explicit in Moses (Abraham 4:1, 3, 7, 10, 12, 26). Notably, the term "created" is absent, with the Gods instead "organizing" or "preparing" the elements (Abraham 4:1, 11–12, 14–16, 25–27). Time is measured by the Gods in "times" rather than "days," suggesting a broader, chronologically indefinite framework for the stages of creation (Abraham 4:8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Other differences include descriptions of the earth and its condition. In Abraham, the earth is described as "empty and desolate," with the Spirit of the Gods "brooding" upon the waters, (v. 2) in contrast to Moses' depiction of the earth as "without form, and void," with the Spirit of God "moving" upon the waters. Additionally, the "firmament" of Moses and Genesis is replaced with an "expanse" in Abraham, (v. 6) reflecting an additional linguistic and conceptual shift.

While it is feasible that some of these differences could be attributed to the distinct eponymous ancient figures these texts claim as their ultimate sources — Moses for the Book of Moses and Abraham for the Book of Abraham — many of the variations in the latter are likely influenced, at least in part, by Joseph Smith's study of Hebrew. His engagement with the Hebrew language and text of Genesis during his studies in Kirtland provided him with new linguistic tools and

conceptual frameworks that shaped his understanding of the creation narrative. This exposure, in turn, likely informed his translation choices in the Book of Abraham. By comparing these two texts, it becomes evident that Joseph Smith's evolving understanding of ancient languages played a significant role in shaping the content and presentation of his translations.

At the same time, the overarching cosmological vision contained in the Book of Abraham aligns closely with elements found in ancient Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian traditions. For instance, the Book of Abraham's depiction of a divine council, with multiple gods deliberating and organizing the cosmos, resonates with ancient Near Eastern depictions of an assembly of deities such as those found in Canaanite and Mesopotamian texts. The idea made explicit in the Book of Abraham of organizing creation from chaotic matter, rather than creation *ex nihilo*, is also a hallmark of ancient cosmologies. Additionally, the geocentric model described in Abraham 3, which focuses on a hierarchy of celestial bodies in relation to the earth, reflects pre-modern astronomical paradigms characteristic of the ancient world.[78] These ancient convergences make it difficult to dismiss the Book of Abraham as mere nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha, as it exhibits patterns and themes consistent with the world Abraham would have known.[79] However, words and concepts drawn from Joseph Smith's study of Hebrew, such as those influenced by Seixas's *Manual Hebrew Grammar*, reflect a nineteenth-century linguistic context rather than the original language of Abraham's era. This anachronism does not indicate that the Book of Abraham is a modern forgery, but simply that it cannot easily be classified as a direct, pristine Abrahamic autograph or untouched relic of the patriarchal age. Rather, it reflects a blending of ancient and modern elements, shaped both by Joseph Smith's revelatory process and by his engagement with contemporary linguistic tools.

Upon close examination, the Book of Abraham's parallel biblical material in Abraham 4–5 appears to both preserve Abrahamic material and draw from the King James Bible, albeit refracted through Joseph Smith's experience studying Hebrew under Joshua Seixas.

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78. See Smoot et al., *Guide to the Book of Abraham*, 135–74.

79. Contra David Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2014), 169–89, who unconvincingly downplays the significance of this material for the historicity of the Book of Abraham.

The language and structure of the creation account bear clear traces of the KJV's influence, suggesting that Joseph drew upon its familiar phrasing while adapting and expanding it.[80] This phenomenon is not without precedent; the Book of Mormon likewise extensively incorporates KJV biblical quotations and allusions, blending them with original material to create a distinct scriptural voice and narrative.[81] This pattern of incorporating and adapting KJV language has been acknowledged by Royal Skousen, a prominent proponent of the Prophet's "tight control" over the Book of Mormon's rendering.[82] Skousen's study of King James text in the Book of Mormon has compelled him to go so far as to characterize the Book of Mormon as "a creative translation that involves considerable intervention by the translator."[83] If this is true for the Book of Mormon, it is reasonable to expect a similar dynamic in the case of the Book of Abraham.

Conclusion: Bridging Antiquity and Modernity in the Book of Abraham

These four data points underscore the complex nature of Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Abraham. They indicate the Prophet's active engagement with the text, not merely as a passive recipient of revelation but as a translator and editor consciously working to convey the inspired truths of Abraham's record in a manner accessible and meaningful to a modern audience. As one scholar memorably put it, Joseph "did not think of himself as God's stenographer. Rather, he

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80. Anthony A. Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 30–49, 62–63. Compare Walton, "Professor Seixas, the Hebrew Bible, and the Book of Abraham," 43n8. Grey, "Approaching Egyptian Papyri ," 444–45, offers evidence that Joseph "and his associates believed that the papyri contained the urtext of Genesis," and therefore, in a process of what Grey calls "reverse engineering," Joseph "may have felt that rather than laboring over the papyri to translate that original source, it was more convenient to start with the surviving derivative source (Genesis 1–2) and work backward to recover the original account."

81. 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: FARMS, 2019).

82. Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 61–93.

83. Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018): 107.

was an interpreting reader, and God the confirming authority."[84] At the same time, the Book of Abraham contains undeniable ancient features that defy categorization as purely speculative or the product of prophetic imagination.[85] Paradoxically, Joseph's translation of the Book of Abraham thus appears to function as both a rendering of an ancient text and a modern expansion or "midrash"—using the term in its popular, albeit not strictly accurate, sense.[86] In this regard, B. H. Roberts's "manual theory" or Blake Ostler's "expansion theory" for the Book of Mormon may offer a useful framework for understanding the nature of the Book of Abraham.[87] Similarly, Michael R. Ash's perspective— that revelation often involves a collaborative process between God and his prophets, where human culture, language, and understanding shape the final inspired product—offers valuable insight. The view articulated by these authors portrays scripture as dynamic and multifaceted, blending divine inspiration with human interpretation.[88] Much of what they propose seems relevant for understanding the Book of Abraham and can account for the data we have seen above.

However, this paradigm also has its explanatory limitations, as all translations—especially those of ancient texts—inevitably involve some degree of expansion and interpretation to make the rendering comprehensible to readers. Translation is never a purely mechanical process, even under the most ideal circumstances. If we take seriously

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84. Kathleen Flake, "Translating Time: The Nature and Function of Joseph Smith's Narrative Canon," *The Journal of Religion* 87, no. 4 (October 2007): 507.

85. As attempted by Karl C. Sanberg, "Knowing Brother Joseph Again: The Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith as Translator," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22, no. 4 (1989): 17–38, and Bokovoy, *Authoring the Old Testament*, 169–73.

86. See the cautionary comments in Avram R. Shannon, "Mormons and Midrash: On the Composition of Expansive Interpretation in *Genesis Rabbah* and the Book of Moses," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2015): 15–34.

87. B. H. Roberts, "Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era* 9, no. 6 (April 1905): 425–36; "Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Improvement Era* 9, no. 7 (May 1906): 544–53; "Book of Mormon Translation," *Improvement Era* 9, no. 9 (July 1906): 706–13; Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 66–123.

88. Michael R. Ash, *Rethinking Revelation and the Human Element in Scripture: The Prophet's Role as Creative Co-Author* (Redding, CA: FAIR, 2021). Ash includes a discussion of the Book of Abraham (pp. 679–728) as an example of how scripture often reflects a blend of divine elements filtered through human agency, much as I have explored here.

the possibility that the Book of Abraham reproduces an ancient text in some form, which I believe we should, such expansion becomes not just possible but inevitable — even when the translation is conveyed through revelation. This is because the process necessarily involved a human agent, Joseph Smith, who worked through the constraints of a human brain, expressed himself in a human language, and operated with the cultural and linguistic tools available to him at the time. In this light, the very act of translation — whether by inspiration or by scholarly engagement — is an interpretive endeavor, shaped by the translator's understanding, experience, and context. The more pertinent question for the Book of Abraham, then, may not be whether it represents a modern prophetic expansion of an ancient source, but rather to what degree or extent such expansion occurred. The lack of direct access to the original source text that Joseph Smith claimed to translate, however, limits our ability to definitively resolve this matter. All we currently possess is Joseph's English translation. Without an Abrahamic original, we are left to rely on contextual evidence, textual analysis of the English translation, and reasoned inferences. This necessarily situates the discussion in the realm of conjecture. Until additional ancient manuscript evidence emerges, our understanding of the precise kind of translation Joseph Smith produced must remain provisional. "We [can] set up assumptions, based upon our best knowledge, but can go no further."[89]

An additional, potentially helpful framework for understanding the Book of Abraham has been articulated by Brant Gardner in his analysis of the Book of Mormon. In a recent monograph, Gardner explores the "compositional layers that are explicit and implicit in the text of the Book of Mormon."[90] He identifies two such layers that are relevant here: the nineteenth-century text and the Nephite Book of Mormon. The first layer consists of what Gardner terms "translation artifacts" in the modern English text produced by Joseph Smith, such as King James Bible quotations and anachronistic language.[91] Gardner concludes that "the resulting translation" produced by the Prophet "transmits the Nephite meaning, but it was filtered through Joseph's culture,

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89. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 110.

90. Brant Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper: Textual and Narrative Structures of the Book of Mormon* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2023), x.

91. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper*, 17–60.

vocabulary, and experiences."[92] The second layer, the Nephite Book of Mormon, represents the record composed in antiquity by Mormon, Moroni, and other Nephite recordkeepers — a complex text that interweaves written and oral sources.[93] Mormon and Moroni served as the ultimate ancient editors who shaped this record into the cohesive narrative we now have.

A similar compositional schema might be applied to the Book of Abraham, consisting of two layers: the nineteenth-century text and the Abrahamic text. At the top layer, as with the Book of Mormon, we find "translation artifacts" present in the English text of the Book of Abraham. These artifacts reflect Joseph Smith's cultural and linguistic environment, including his vocabulary, familiarity of the King James Bible, and influences such as his study of Hebrew. These features are not necessarily part of the ancient text itself but are the result of the inspired process through which Joseph rendered the record into a form comprehensible and meaningful to a nineteenth-century audience. Beneath this is the Abrahamic text, composed by Abraham himself and, presumably, transmitted through the centuries. This layer represents the core content of Abraham's writings — his autobiographical narrative and cosmological vision. A copy of this record was preserved among the Egyptian papyri obtained by Joseph Smith. This layer reflects the ancient compositional work of Abraham and later scribes who may have contributed to its transmission and preservation. This compositional framework underscores the complexity of the Book of Abraham and suggests, as I have maintained, that the text we have before us today reflects a synthesis of ancient and modern elements, shaped by Abraham's writings, the process of transmission over millennia, and Joseph Smith's inspired translation. Understanding these layers enriches our appreciation for the Book of Abraham as both an ancient document and a product of modern revelation.

To be very clear, and to dispel any possibly misunderstanding, I believe the Book of Abraham is an ancient text that preserves elements of Abraham's life and teachings. I reject the view that the Book of Abraham is merely nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha, as this explanation is both incompatible with the available data and is incongruent with my belief in Joseph Smith's prophethood. Like the Book of Mormon, I believe the Book of Abraham has been shaped by centuries of ancient transmission as well as Joseph Smith's modern revelatory

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92. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper*, 67.
93. Gardner, *Engraven Upon Plates, Printed Upon Paper*, 71–163.

translation process. However, these redactional layers neither disprove its ancient origin nor diminish its spiritual value. Any attempt to interpret what I have laid out here as some kind of admission of the Book of Abraham's purely modern origin or its lack of historicity misrepresents my position. Instead, I am simply making the point that Joseph's participation in rendering the text into English reflects a collaboration between human effort and divine guidance.

I hope that what I have outlined above will feel consistent with what many Latter-day Saints already understand. The idea that God works through the imperfect mediums of language and culture does not diminish the divine nature of revelation and is reflected in scripture itself. Nephi taught how "the Lord God giveth light unto the understanding" of men, "for he speaketh unto men according to their language, unto their understanding" (2 Nephi 31:3). Similarly, the Doctrine and Covenants affirms that revelation is given through prophets "after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (Doctrine and Covenants 1:24). Joseph Smith himself acknowledged the challenges and imperfections inherent in conveying divine revelation through human language. He lamented on one occasion how his "crooked, broken, scattered, and imperfect language" could sometimes entrap him in a "little narrow prison" and a "total darkness of paper, pen, and ink."[94] This candid admission hardly disqualifies Joseph as a prophet; it simply acknowledges a fact of the human condition.

Brigham Young similarly recognized that revelation is inevitably shaped by the human instruments through which it is conveyed. As he stated in an 1855 speech, "The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle, so far as they go; but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low, grovelling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections. He has to speak to us in a manner to meet the extent of our capacities."[95] Brigham went even further on another occasion, teaching how the delivery of scripture is inherently tied to the human context of its reception. "When God speaks to the people," he said in an 1862 discourse, "he does it in a manner to suit their circumstances and capacities. . . . Should the Lord

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94. "Letter to William W. Phelps, November 27, 1832," in *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey et al. (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2013), 320, spelling standardized.

95. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 2:314.

Almighty send an angel to rewrite the Bible, it would in many places be very different from what it now is. And I will even venture to say that if the Book of Mormon were now to be re-written, in many instances it would materially differ from the present translation."[96] Brigham was not denying the existence of revelation with comments such as these. Instead, he was acknowledging the reality that when God speaks to humanity, including his prophets, he condescends to meet them where they are and adapts revelation in ways that are comprehensible and meaningful within the limitations of human experience.

Based on the preceding discussion, we conclude that the case of the Book of Abraham exemplifies how Joseph Smith's revelatory synthesis of ancient and modern sources produced a text that transcends simplistic categorizations. Called a "translation" by the Prophet, a term I accept in how I conceptualize the text, the Book of Abraham represents a rich, vibrant, and audacious work—one that seamlessly weaves together ancient truths and modern elements to create something far greater than the sum of its parts. This book offers profound doctrinal and cosmological insights that not only resonate with believers such as myself but also challenge and inspire all who honestly engage with its complexities.[97] While some critics, operating under unexamined and overly reductive naturalistic assumptions,[98] might dismiss the Book of Abraham as nothing more than the product of Joseph Smith's environmental borrowing or fanciful imaginings, such a perspective underestimates the depth and originality of the text.[99] The Book of Abraham defies such easy dismissal precisely

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96. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:311.

97. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 51–65, argues compellingly that the focus should be less on Joseph Smith's process or method in translating the Book of Abraham and more on the end result. As Nibley observes, "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" (63).

98. For instance, Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021).

99. This applies equally to claims that Joseph Smith plagiarized Thomas Dick (Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 171–72) and to assertions that the Book of Abraham is merely a reworked pastiche of Genesis (H. Michael Marquardt, "Joseph Smith's Egyptian Papers: A History," in *Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, 32–44; and Robert K. Ritner, "'The Breathing Permit of Hôr' Among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62, no. 3 [2003]: 161).

because of its paradoxical nature. It presents itself as both a record deeply rooted in antiquity, with authentic ancient elements beyond Joseph Smith's ability to magically conjure on the American frontier in the 1830s, and a product of modern prophetic expansion, shaped by Joseph's unique cultural and theological context. Taking the Book of Abraham seriously on its own terms requires granting Joseph Smith the intellectual and spiritual credibility to engage with him as a prophet. While this may be a bridge too far for some, doing so reveals a work that rewards careful study and reflection.[100] The tension between the ancient and modern elements present in the Book of Abraham is not a weakness but a strength — offering a multifaceted lens through which readers can explore questions of faith, revelation, and the nature of scripture. It is precisely this interplay of ancient authenticity and modern creativity that makes the Book of Abraham such a compelling and enduring source of inquiry and inspiration.

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100. As seen, for instance, in Brown, *Joseph Smith's Translation*, 193–232.

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