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**Abstract** Review of “The ‘Breathing Permit of Hôr’ Thirty-four Years Later” (2000); and “‘The Breathing Permit of Hôr’ among the Joseph Smith Papyri” (2003), by Robert K. Ritner.

# THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM: ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND KEEP ON LOOKING

Larry E. Morris

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Robert K. Ritner, associate professor of Egyptology at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, points out in the introduction that “each generation of Chicago Egyptologists has dealt with the Mormon papyri” (p. 98). Professor Ritner mentions James H. Breasted, John A. Wilson, and Klaus Baer specifically.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, concludes Ritner, “it has now fallen to me to reassess Baer’s translation [of the “Breathing Permit of Hor”] in light of Egyptological advances of the past thirty-four years” (p. 98).

This objective is worthy, and Ritner no doubt has the credentials to discuss these Egyptological issues. Ritner’s translation and commentary

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My thanks to Kevin L. Barney and to FARMS resident scholar Matthew Roper for their help on this article.

1. Breasted (1865–1935) was the first American to receive a PhD in Egyptology. He founded the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, long considered the leading center of Egyptian studies in the United States. Wilson and Baer were two of Breasted’s foremost successors; Hugh Nibley studied under both of them during his sabbatical at the University of Chicago in 1966–67.

Review of Robert K. Ritner. “The ‘Breathing Permit of Hôr’ Thirty-four Years Later.” *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 97–119.

Review of Robert K. Ritner. “The Breathing Permit of Hôr’ among the Joseph Smith Papyri.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62/3 (2003): 161–77.

were first printed in *Dialogue* in 2000 and reprinted (with a revised introduction) in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (JNES) in 2003. Students of the Joseph Smith Papyri will want to take a close look at Ritner's translation, as well as his extensive notes.

### The Book of Breathings

Ritner is dealing with three papyrus fragments—Joseph Smith Papyrus (JSP) I, JSP X, and JSP XI. JSP I includes a vignette, or illustration, that is clearly the basis for Facsimile 1 in the Book of Abraham as well as some accompanying columns of text. JSP X and XI are both hieratic text fragments.<sup>2</sup> JSP I, X, and XI were among the Egyptian artifacts obtained by Joseph Smith in 1835.<sup>3</sup> In 1968 Klaus Baer offered a translation of these fragments,<sup>4</sup> which, as Ritner points out, “has served as the basis for all further studies of the text” (*Dialogue*, p. 98). In 1975 Hugh Nibley offered his translation in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*.<sup>5</sup>

These three fragments, found on a mummy discovered in a Theban tomb, were owned by an Egyptian priest by the name of Hor. They are part of a larger text sometimes called the “book of breathings.” Baer suggests, however, that “breathing permit” is actually a better translation. In addition, these fragments are sometimes known as the “sensen” text, from the Egyptian *snsn*, or breathing. Hence, these names all refer to the same text.

In *Dialogue*, Ritner notes “the absence of any formal edition of the Joseph Smith Book of Breathing combining full translation and trans-

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2. Hieratic is a cursive form of hieroglyphics. See John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), for photos and explanations of the Joseph Smith Papyri. These fragments are often referred to as JSP I, XI, and X because they were originally arranged in that order on the scroll. (The original numbers were assigned by the *Improvement Era* in 1968 before the exact relationship of the various fragments had been analyzed.)

3. See Gee, *Guide*, 1–13, for a historical overview.

4. Klaus Baer, “The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham,” *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 109–34.

5. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); a new edition is being prepared.

literation” (p. 98), apparently unaware that such a formal edition was indeed in progress at the time. Shortly after Ritner’s work appeared in 2002 (the issue was actually distributed two years after its publication date), Michael D. Rhodes published *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary*, which included a transliteration, a translation, extensive commentary, and both black-and-white and color photographs.<sup>6</sup> Neither of these works can be faulted for not mentioning the other (the Rhodes manuscript went to the publisher well before Ritner’s translation appeared), but Ritner can certainly be faulted for not mentioning Rhodes’s work the second time around. Although Ritner claimed that “no full edition of this papyrus document has yet appeared” (*JNES*, p. 163), the Rhodes volume *had been in print for a year*—and had been discussed at a scholarly conference three months before that.<sup>7</sup> Ritner’s failure to mention *The Hor Book of Breathings* is an indication that he has not been keeping up with the current research.

Nevertheless, the timing provides a pleasant serendipity for students of the Joseph Smith Papyri because Ritner and Rhodes translated the same text independently of each other. This offers an excellent basis for comparison and analysis. Note, for example, the differences in how Ritner and Rhodes translate the hieroglyphic text accompanying the initial vignette (in JSP I):

Ritner	Rhodes
(1/1) [“Osiris, the god’s father], prophet of Amon-Re, King of the Gods, prophet of Min who slaughters his enemies, prophet of Khonsu, the [one who exercises]	(1) [The Osiris, God’s father] priest of Amon-Re, king of the gods, priest of Min, who massacres his enemies, priest of Khonsu, who is powerful in

6. Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

7. Michael Rhodes presented his research at the annual American Research Center in Egypt conference, held in Baltimore in April 2002. *The Hor Book of Breathings* was published in July 2002 and the *JNES* article in July 2003.

<p>authority in Thebes, (1/2) [ . . . ]  . . . Hor, the justified, son of the  similarly titled overseer of se-  crets and purifier of the god, Os-  orwer, the justified, born by the  [housewife and sistrum-player  of] (1/3) [Amon]-Re, Taikhibit,  the justified!</p> <p>May your ba-spirit live  among them, and may you be  buried on the west [of Thebes].”</p> <p>(I/4) [“O Anubis(?), . . .]jus-  tification(?). (I/5) [May you give  to him] a good and splendid  burial on the west of Thebes as  on the mountains of Ma[nu](?).”  (<i>Dialogue</i>, p. 104)</p>	<p>Thebes. (2) . . . Hor, justified, the  son of one of like titles, master  of the secrets, god’s priest, Usir-  wer, justified, born of [the house  wife, the musician (3) of Amon-  Re,] Taykhebyt.</p> <p>May your soul live in their  midst. May you be buried at the  head of the West. . . .</p> <p>(4) . . . (5) [ . . . ] May you  give to him beautiful and useful  things on the west [of Thebes]  like the mountains of Manu.<sup>8</sup></p>
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Of course, Egyptologists will have to take up the matter of comparing and critiquing these translations. (As far as I know, such a comparison has not yet been made.)

Ritner annotates his translation quite extensively, explaining, for example, why he prefers “slaughters his enemies” (1/1) to “massacres his enemies” or such alternatives as “smites his enemies” or “brings an end to his enemies” (*JNES*, p. 168 n. 44). Ritner also includes notes on the work of previous scholars, such as Baer, Marc Coenen, and Jan Quaegebeur, noting that “changes from Baer’s understanding of the document are few” (*JNES*, p. 164). Since Rhodes offers a similar analysis and frequently refers to the same scholarly body of work, readers thus have excellent resources for examining details of virtually every aspect of the translation.

Ritner and Rhodes are therefore required reading for anyone interested in the Joseph Smith Papyri. A comparison of Ritner’s transla-

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8. Rhodes, *Hor Book of Breathings*, 21–23.

tion to that of Rhodes, however, makes one thing quickly apparent: Ritner frequently attacks those who disagree with him, while Rhodes maintains a scholarly tone throughout. Therein lies one of the chief weaknesses of Ritner's work.

### "Scurrilous Remarks"

In *JNES* Ritner reports that personal attacks followed publication of his translation in *Dialogue*. This is regrettable and reflects poorly on those who responded in such a manner. As Ritner describes: "The earlier version of this article produced internet discussions devoted not to the translation, but to scurrilous remarks concerning my own religious and personal habits. Let the scholar be warned" (p. 162 n. 7).

Ritner apparently believes that those who engage in these kinds of discussions ought to follow basic standards of good scholarship. I agree. Ritner does not say precisely what those standards are, but I suggest the following:

- Avoiding sarcastic language or ad hominem arguments
- Making explicit and fair assumptions
- Following sound methodology
- Documenting arguable facts
- Eschewing ax-grinding

No one adhering to such canons would have resorted to scurrilous remarks about Ritner. Furthermore, given Ritner's understandable discomfort with such responses, I would have thought he would be the last person to level criticism at those who disagree with him. But that is not true at all.

In *JNES*, for example, Ritner begins his discussion by attacking the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: "The anglicized Latin term 'Egyptus' is said to be Chaldean for 'that which is forbidden' in reference to the cursed race of Ham who are denied the 'right of Priesthood' ([Abraham] 1:23–27), a statement that served as the basis for Mormon racial discrimination until a 'revelation' during the modern era of civil rights legislation reversed the policy (but not the 'scripture') in 1978" (p. 161). Ritner's choice of terms (*racial discrimination*) and his use of quotation marks ("revelation," "scripture") immediately

reveal his cynicism toward the Church of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, consider historian Robert V. Remini's treatment of the same topic: "The Book of Abraham . . . related how Abraham insisted on his right of appointment as High Priest, claiming that the Pharaoh of Egypt, a good and decent man, was a descendant of Ham and therefore could not hold the priesthood. That statement later justified Church policy of denying the priesthood to African-Americans, since they supposedly descended from Ham, a policy that continued until 1978, when it was terminated."<sup>10</sup> Ritner offers politically charged language, Remini neutral language; Ritner makes value judgments, Remini maintains scholarly disinterest. The difference is instructive because neither of these scholars is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Not surprisingly, Ritner also ridicules Joseph Smith. Note his choice of terms: "Such '*reasoning*' included references to the *outlandish* 'Jah-oh-eh,'" "all of this *nonsense* is illustrated," "Smith's *hopeless* translation," and "such interpretations are *uninspired fantasies*" (*JNES*, pp. 161, 162, 176 n. 128, emphasis added). Then, despite using such partisan language, Ritner suggests that he is providing an "*impartial* reassessment of Baer's translation" (*JNES*, p. 164, emphasis added). Is Ritner impartial?

Again, Remini's treatment stands in stark contrast: "Other important teachings of Joseph resulted from his purchase in July 1835 of four Egyptian mummies and some papyri for \$2,400 from a traveling 'entrepreneur' by the name of Michael H. Chandler. He then translated the papyri, which contained, he said, writings of the patriarch Abraham. This Book of Abraham became part of *The Pearl of Great Price*, along with the Book of Moses and other writings."<sup>11</sup>

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9. To help his readers understand this issue, Ritner could have referenced such articles as Lester E. Bush Jr., "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," *Dialogue* 8/1 (1973): 11-72. Bush points out that the text of the Book of Abraham was not originally used to support the church's priesthood policy. But Ritner offers no such help.

10. Robert V. Remini, *Joseph Smith* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 107. Remini won the National Book Award for his three-volume biography of Andrew Jackson. Concerning Ritner's mocking of church "revelation" and "scripture," one has to wonder if the editors of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* would have allowed anti-Semitic remarks at the beginning of a paper dealing with Jewish history.

11. Remini, *Joseph Smith*, 105.



There is also reason to believe that Ritner's anti-Mormon sentiments affect his translation. As noted above, Ritner offers the following translation for a text fragment identified as column 4 in JSP I: ["O Anubis(?), . . .]. He explains that "a divine name (Anubis?) must be lost here, since the following address shifts from Hor to a deity on his behalf." This is hardly incidental, however, because, as Ritner points out, "This passage rebuts Gee" (*JNES*, p. 169 n. 51). Since Ritner is relying on his own reconstruction of the text to rebut John Gee, the question is, How did Baer translate this fragment? Baer offered no translation at all. "Too little is left of line 4 to permit even a guess at what it said," he wrote.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Rhodes offers no translation, simply an ellipsis indicating missing text. Ritner, however, suggests a new interpretation that just happens to give him an advantage in his dispute with Gee—and he fails to inform the reader of Baer's comment on the matter.<sup>13</sup>

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12. Baer, "Breathing Permit of Hôr," 117.

13. I object to Ritner taking up a personal dispute with John Gee. In *JNES*, for example, Ritner includes the following aside: "With regard to the articles by my former student John Gee, I am constrained to note that unlike the interaction between Baer and Nibley, and the practice of all my other Egyptology students, Gee never chose to share drafts of his publications with me to elicit scholarly criticism, so that I have encountered these only recently. It must be understood that in these apologetic writings, Gee's opinions do not necessarily reflect my own, nor the standards of Egyptological proof that I required at Yale or Chicago" (p. 167). Such a statement is objectionable for several reasons. First of all, claims made in a scholarly paper should be verifiable by the reader—either through the text itself or through the documentation cited in the notes. But there is no way for the reader to verify what happened between Ritner and Gee—that is a private matter between the two of them. And Gee has had no opportunity to speak for himself. Second, the sophisticated readership of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* knows perfectly well that one professor does not speak for others or for another institution. Ritner has no business bringing up something that is obviously a personal matter between him and Gee. This is yet another departure from scholarship. Ritner then compounds his mistake by not keeping up with Gee's work. For example, he seems to be unaware of two of Gee's key articles on the Book of Abraham: John Gee, "Eyewitness, Heresay, 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, UT: FARMS, 2000), 175–217; and John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 63–98.

Ritner next attacks Gee and Hugh Nibley, making a point of describing them as “Mormon traditionalists,” in contrast with “Egyptological scholars”—a category that includes Ritner himself (*JNES*, p. 163). But rather than simply stating his disagreements with Nibley and Gee and allowing readers to judge for themselves, Ritner poisons the well through his use of sarcastic and contemptuous language.

In describing Hugh Nibley, for example, Ritner seems unwilling to use the kind of language employed by other authors who are also not Latter-day Saints. Richard and Joan Ostling (who direct a fair amount of criticism toward the Church of Jesus Christ) describe Nibley as “a BYU scholar in ancient Near Eastern studies but not an Egyptologist.”<sup>14</sup> Ritner, by contrast, calls Nibley the “lionized patriarch” of FARMS (*JNES*, p. 163 n. 9), an obvious allusion to Facsimile 1, where the patriarch Abraham is said to be fastened upon a lion-couch altar. Again, Ritner mentions the “work of Nibley and his acolytes” (*Dialogue*, p. 98 n. 4). My Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (eleventh edition) defines the word *acolyte* as “one who assists a member of the clergy in a liturgical service by performing minor duties.” Nibley is thus a priest of polemics, and his fellow scholars are altar boys. Some may think Ritner’s remark is clever, but the question is whether Ritner’s approach is helpful to readers seeking a fair look at the Joseph Smith Papyri. Quite the contrary, Ritner’s approach time and again smacks of nonscholarly ax-grinding.

Nibley’s and Gee’s ideas are characterized not as opinions or disagreements but as “quibbling” or even “nihilistic quibbling” (*Dialogue*, p. 102 n. 30, p. 115 n. 125). Not content with this kind of editorializing, Ritner uses exclamation marks to express his disgust: “Nibley’s error was further confused in J. Gee . . . where it is said to be Hor’s father’s (!) name” (*Dialogue*, pp. 106–7 n. 59).

The irony of all of this is that Ritner criticizes Nibley for his (supposedly) ad hominem attacks on such Egyptologists as Breasted, W. M. Flinders Petrie, and Samuel A. B. Mercer, objecting to Nibley’s

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14. Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 281.

characterizations of these scholars and arguing that they should be judged on their arguments. Why, then, does Ritner himself sarcastically characterize his opponents rather than offer an assessment of their arguments?

Nor is Ritner following in the tradition of Wilson or Baer when he goes out of his way to attack Joseph Smith, the Church of Jesus Christ, and BYU scholars. In his discussion of JSP II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, and IX (all of which are fragments from the Book of the Dead—Egyptian religious documents typically buried with the dead), Wilson limits his comments to the papyri themselves, never making snide remarks about the position of the Church of Jesus Christ. His good will is apparent in his concluding sentence: "The Church may well be proud to have such a text."<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Baer's tone is nonhostile. He certainly agrees with Ritner that the Breathing Permit of Hor has nothing to do with Abraham, but he does not use terms such as "outlandish," "nonsense," "hopeless," or "uninspired" to describe Joseph Smith's interpretation. After giving his preliminary translation, Baer comments: "This is as far as an Egyptologist can go in studying the document that Joseph Smith considered to be a 'roll' which 'contained the writings of Abraham.' The Egyptologist interprets it differently, relying on a considerable body of parallel data, research, and knowledge that has accumulated over the past 146 years since Champollion first deciphered Egyptian—none of which had really become known in America in the 1830's. At this point, the Latter-day Saint historian and theologian must take over."<sup>16</sup>

By making personal attacks, Ritner produces a paper that is less scholarly than those of Wilson or Baer.

### "The Basis for 'The Book of Abraham'"

In the very first sentence of his *Dialogue* article, Ritner steps out of his area of expertise to make a controversial claim that really has

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15. John A. Wilson, "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 85.

16. Baer, "Breathing Permit of Hôr," 133.

nothing to do with his stated purpose of reexamining the Breathing Permit of Hor. He announces, as if it were an established fact, that the eleven papyrus fragments once owned by Joseph Smith—and given by the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Church of Jesus Christ in 1967—were “employed as the basis for ‘The Book of Abraham’” (p. 97). Of course, whether Joseph Smith employed these fragments as the “basis” of the Book of Abraham is not established at all—this is the issue that has sparked such a long and heated debate over the origin of the Book of Abraham. Further, this is not an Egyptological question, for the debate does not center on a translation of the fragments. Rather, this is a historical question: what papyrus—if any—was Joseph Smith viewing when he dictated the Book of Abraham and what did he mean by *translation*?

Much of the debate over the origin of the Book of Abraham revolves around a collection of documents known as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Most of these documents apparently date to the 1835–37 time period and are written in four different hands: W. W. Phelps, Oliver Cowdery, Warren Parish, and Joseph Smith. Rather than being a coherent set of manuscripts, the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are a hodgepodge of notes and odds and ends relating to the papyri obtained from Michael Chandler and to the Book of Abraham. As Hugh Nibley notes, the papers include “two impressive documents, one a bound manuscript commonly and falsely designated as ‘Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar,’ and the other what appears to be a translation of the first chapter of the Book of Abraham from a number of accompanying hieratic symbols.”<sup>17</sup>

Since various hieratic characters from the Book of Breathing (also called the Breathing Permit of Hor) are prominently featured in these two documents from the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, some have concluded that Joseph Smith falsely assumed the Book of Breathing to contain the writings of Abraham. H. Michael Marquardt, for example, puts it this way: “I conclude that the overwhelming evidence

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17. Hugh Nibley, “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 350.

shows that Joseph Smith used the Book of Breathings (Joseph Smith Papyrus XI, col. 1) and considered it the writing of Abraham. The fact is that the papyrus which he used as the source of the Book of Abraham manuscript characters has nothing to do with Abraham. . . . That Joseph Smith did not ever translate Egyptian correctly can be seen throughout his Egyptian papers.” Among those agreeing with Marquardt are Edward Ashment and Ritner.<sup>18</sup>

All of this, of course, is closely linked to Joseph Smith’s claim to be a prophet of God. Joseph hardly looks like a prophet if his supposed inspired translation is shown to be nothing but nonsense and bears no relationship to the ancient text in question.

So it is not surprising that Latter-day Saint scholars see things differently. “What emerges most clearly from a closer look at the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” writes Nibley, “is the fact that there is nothing official or final about them—they are fluid, exploratory, confidential, and hence free of any possibility or intention of fraud.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, John Gee concludes that the relationship of the hieratic symbols to an excerpt of the Book of Abraham is not at all clear for a number of reasons, including the following: at least some hieratic characters were written in different ink, they do not line up with the English text, and they run over the margins (all of which suggests the hieratic characters may have been added as an afterthought).<sup>20</sup>

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18. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found*, 2nd ed. (n.p. [available from Utah Lighthouse Ministry], 1981), 20, 35. The critics’ case regarding the relationship between the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and the Book of Abraham is also stated in Edward H. Ashment, “Reducing Dissonance: The Book of Abraham as a Case Study,” in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 221–35; Charles M. Larson, . . . *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992); and Jerald and Sandra Tanner, “Solving the Mystery of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *Salt Lake City Messenger* 82 (September 1992): 1–12. While one could reasonably interpret certain sections of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers as being Joseph Smith’s “worksheet” for translating the Book of Abraham, one could just as reasonably interpret them as being *someone’s* attempt to link the Book of Abraham with the Book of Breathings *after* the Book of Abraham had been revealed.

19. Nibley, “Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” 399.

20. Gee, *Guide*, 22, caption.

Given the controversy over the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, we would expect Ritner to “document arguable facts” and inform his readers of this strong difference of opinion, even if only in a note. Instead, Ritner gives the impression that the whole matter is cut and dried. When Ritner mentions the Kirtland Egyptian Papers in a note, he simply references an article by Ashment as evidence of Joseph Smith’s authorship of the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar (*JNES*, p. 169 n. 48).<sup>21</sup> That’s the end of it. The very least that Ritner should have done was tell readers of the dispute and suggest they check Nibley’s landmark article “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers” to understand the opposing viewpoint, but he doesn’t even do that. This is not impartial scholarship.

### “A Pastiche of Genesis”

In the introduction to his *JNES* article, Ritner devotes one paragraph to the content of the Book of Abraham, claiming it is “often a pastiche of Genesis” (p. 161, presumably meaning that it imitates or synthesizes Genesis). Next he summarizes part of the Book of Abraham and the three facsimiles, characterizing all this as “nonsense” (p. 161). He then moves to a discussion of the papyri.

Ritner has once again departed from the tradition of Wilson and Baer, for neither of them ridicules the content of the Book of Abraham. Instead, they stay focused on Egyptological issues. Considering the controversy over the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and the complex historical questions involved, I believe Wilson and Baer were wise not to get sidetracked—and it’s interesting that Rhodes follows suit (by not discussing the Book of Abraham in *The Hor Book of Breathings*). But once Egyptologists bring up the content of the Book of Abraham, good scholarship requires that they fairly report varying scholarly opinions concerning the book’s authenticity. Then it seems reasonable for them to take their own stand and defend it. Ritner, however, doesn’t do this, electing instead to dismiss the Book of Abraham with a wave of the hand.

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21. Edward H. Ashment, “Joseph Smith’s Identification of ‘Abraham’ in Papyrus JS I, the ‘Breathing Permit of Hôr,” *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 121–26.

But such a dismissal does not get to the heart of the matter. In the first place, saying that the Book of Abraham is an imitation or synthesis of Genesis is at the very least a vast oversimplification. Genesis is written in third person, Abraham in first person. At least half the verses in Abraham have no corresponding verse in Genesis. In addition, the prose style of Abraham is sometimes different from the Bible. The Genesis account contains nothing like the following verse, either in style or content: "And, finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same; having been myself a follower of righteousness, desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers" (Abraham 1:2).

Furthermore, Ritner does not inform his readers that certain elements of the Book of Abraham also appear in ancient or medieval texts. Take, for example, Facsimile 3, which depicts, as Ritner puts it, "enthroned Abraham lecturing the male Pharaoh (actually enthroned Osiris with the female Isis)" (*JNES*, p. 162). In what Ritner describes as nonsense, Joseph Smith claimed that Abraham is "sitting upon Pharaoh's throne . . . reasoning upon the principles of Astronomy" (Facsimile 3, explanation).

Clearly, Joseph Smith's interpretation did not come from Genesis (where there is no discussion of Abraham doing such a thing). From Ritner's point of view, therefore, this must qualify as one of Joseph's "uninspired fantasies." But going a layer deeper reveals interesting complexities. A number of ancient texts, for example, state that Abraham taught astronomy to the Egyptians. Citing the Jewish writer Artapanus (who lived prior to the first century BC), a fourth-century bishop of Caesarea, Eusebius, states: "They were called Hebrews after Abraham. [Artapanus] says that the latter *came to Egypt* with all his household to the Egyptian king Pharethothes, and *taught him astrology*, that he

remained there twenty years and then departed again for the regions of Syria.”<sup>22</sup>

As for Abraham sitting on a king’s throne—another detail not mentioned in Genesis—note this example from *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (Stories of the Prophets), an Islamic text compiled in AD 1310: “The chamberlain brought Abraham to the king. The king looked at Abraham; he was good looking and handsome. The king honoured Abraham and seated him at his side.”<sup>23</sup>

Ritner may counter that such parallels do not establish the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. That is true, but certainly they deserve *some* mention. At the very least, these parallels show that “all of this nonsense” is not really an appropriate description of Joseph Smith’s interpretation. Fairness demands that Ritner, in his dismissal of the content of the Book of Abraham, at least mention similarities between it and other texts about Abraham and point readers to other sources of information. Once again, however, Ritner is found lacking.<sup>24</sup>

### “Parallelomania”

I find it particularly ironic that the same issue of *Dialogue* that carried Ritner’s article (as well as an article by Ashment quoted by

22. John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 7. In the ancient world there was no difference between astronomy and astrology. *Traditions* is yet another important FARMS work that Ritner fails to mention.

23. *Ibid.*, 449.

24. Critics of the Book of Abraham have examined the Kirtland Egyptian Papers in great detail, concluding, like Jerald and Sandra Tanner, that “all of the evidence adds up to the inescapable conclusion that although Joseph Smith claimed to translate the Book of Abraham from the papyrus he had in his possession, the words that he dictated came from his own imagination.” Tanner and Tanner, “Solving the Mystery,” 4. At the same time, these critics have conspicuously avoided discussing the *content* of the Book of Abraham. In a review of Nibley’s *Abraham in Egypt*, for example, H. Michael Marquardt makes no mention of parallels between the Book of Abraham and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the *Testament of Abraham*, even though Nibley discusses them at length. (The review was printed by Utah Lighthouse Ministry in 1983.) One exception is the late Wesley P. Walters. In his article “Joseph Smith among the Egyptians,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16/1 (1973): 25–45, Walters responds to a number of parallels mentioned by Nibley. Walters seems to have read Nibley and other Latter-day Saint scholars much more carefully than Ritner has.



Ritner in *JNES*) also included an article by Bradley J. Cook entitled "The *Book of Abraham* and the Islamic *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Tales of the Prophets) Extant Literature."<sup>25</sup> As noted above, the *Qiṣaṣ* includes an account of Abraham being seated next to a king. Cook points out a number of other parallels between the Book of Abraham and the *Qiṣaṣ*, including the following: the idolatry of Abraham's fathers, Abraham's special knowledge, the celestial mysteries revealed to Abraham, the rejection of Abraham's message by the people of Ur of Chaldea, Abraham's relationship with his father, human sacrifice in Abraham's day, and Abraham's deliverance by angels.

Cook points out, for example, the Book of Abraham's claim that Abraham's father was a worshipper of idols and "turned again unto his idolatry" (Abraham 2:5). A number of *Qiṣaṣ* sources agree, stating "that Terah not only worshiped idols, but had turned idolatry into a lucrative trade." As Cook notes, such details are not found in Genesis, and "Joseph Smith could not have known about these parallel Islamic texts, at least so far as can be determined by scholarly means."<sup>26</sup>

The appearance of Cook's article in the same journal as Ritner's translation gave Ritner a good opportunity to be aware of the parallels issue and mention it in his 2003 *JNES* article, perhaps commenting on the possible meaning of such parallels. But this Ritner does not do, once again cutting his readers off from interesting and relevant debates regarding the Book of Abraham.

Of course, this is not to say that Ritner had to treat the subject exhaustively. References to Cook's article and to Ashment's opposing view would have been sufficient. Ashment states his case this way: "Because the evidence about the translation process of the Book of Abraham leads to a negative conclusion about Joseph Smith's ability to translate ancient languages—which consequently produces dissonance—a major strategy of apologists is to shift the focus of the LDS community to the new belief that the Book of Abraham is authentically

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25. Bradley J. Cook, "The *Book of Abraham* and the Islamic *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Tales of the Prophets) Extant Literature," *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 127–46.

26. *Ibid.*, 134, 142.

ancient because several parallels to it have been affirmed from other sources.”<sup>27</sup>

Ashment criticizes what he calls the “parallel school” of Book of Abraham apologetics because “it is an anathema to it to rely on a method that ‘insists that the essential requirement for interpretation of a text is to read it in context: not merely in literary context, but in the wider, deeper social and cultural context in which both author and audience lived, and in which the language they employed took on the connotations to which the interpreter must seek to be sensitive.’”<sup>28</sup>

This last point of Ashment’s, about reading texts in their full context (actually a quotation from Howard C. Kee), is well taken. Douglas F. Salmon has expanded on this issue as follows: “It is imperative that readers are informed as to what the existence of parallels is supposed to prove. The details of the hypothesis that is supported by the existence of parallels must be spelled out, for the reader of this type of literature is usually left struggling to read between the lines in an attempt to piece together the real argument. Documents that are used should be discussed as to their relevance in the supply of the parallel. The date, location, language, author, culture, and *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of the various texts must be considered, and obviously problematic details must be addressed.”<sup>29</sup>

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27. Ashment, “Reducing Dissonance,” 222–23.

28. Ibid., 230. Ashment’s internal quotation is from Howard C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World: A Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 3.

29. Douglas F. Salmon, “Parallelomania and the Study of Latter-day Scripture: Confirmation, Coincidence, or the Collective Unconscious?” *Dialogue* 33/2 (2000): 154–55. See William J. Hamblin’s review of Salmon’s article in “Joseph or Jung? A Response to Douglas Salmon,” *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 87–104. Believers in the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham have every reason to move cautiously when citing parallels in support of their belief because the use of parallels is a two-edged sword. Critics of the Book of Mormon, for example, have long cited parallels between that book of scripture and Ethan Smith’s *View of the Hebrews* (published before the Book of Mormon) as evidence that Joseph Smith borrowed freely from Ethan Smith. Similarly, Thomas E. Donofrio has recently attempted to prove that Joseph Smith drew on such sources as David Ramsay’s *Life of George Washington* and Mercy Otis Warren’s *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* in producing the Book of Mormon. Donofrio cites phrases common to both the Book of Mormon and either Ramsey

Latter-day Saint scholars John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks share this concern, noting that "an incautious search for parallel material can often degenerate into a wild grab for anything, no matter how remote."<sup>30</sup> They go on to make a distinction between historical plausibility and historical possibility and suggest several categories relevant to the study of parallels. I believe other Latter-day Saint scholars would do well to keep these kinds of issues in mind when they discuss ancient parallels to the Book of Mormon or the Book of Abraham. Still, Ashment does not ask the obvious question: If focusing on parallels can be a way of dodging the issue of the translation of the Book of Abraham, isn't it also possible that focusing on the translation can be a way of dodging the issue of parallels? Wouldn't it be better to focus on both? But like virtually all critics of the Book of Abraham, Ashment seems unwilling to deal with this question: Does the Book of Abraham offer internal evidence that it is indeed an ancient text?

Instead, Ashment concludes that the "parallel school" has no value whatsoever: "It is therefore suggested that such means of dealing with the dissonance concerning the Book of Abraham be abandoned." In reaching this conclusion, however, Ashment makes what I see as a very curious statement: "The attempt to demonstrate the historicity of the Book of Abraham by means of searching far and wide for parallels is suspect because of its complete disregard for the cultural, temporal, and spatial matrices of the material it uses."<sup>31</sup>

The question is, why is it even possible to search "far and wide" and find parallels to the Book of Abraham? Facsimile 3 is a good example. If Joseph Smith is totally without a clue in translating Egyptian (which, in the view of Ritner and Ashment, might be putting it mildly) and has no idea what Facsimile 3 really means (enthroned Osiris with the female Isis), how in the world does he make a wild guess (Abraham expounding

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or Warren, such as "the cause of liberty," "in the cause of their country," "surrendered themselves prisoners of war," and "supply of provisions," concluding that "the tally of similarities begin[s] to defy random chance." Donofrio's material is at the following Web site: [www.post-mormons.com/tories.htm](http://www.post-mormons.com/tories.htm) (accessed 6 April 2004).

30. Gee and Ricks, "Historical Plausibility," 67.

31. Ashment, "Reducing Dissonance," 231.

on astronomy while sitting on Pharaoh's throne) that makes perfect sense in the context of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts?

It looks to me like Ashment's point about "far and wide" works against him here. If Joseph is simply making things up, why should we expect to find *any* parallels confirming his version? What does it mean if Abraham teaching astronomy to the Egyptians is found in such diverse sources as Eupolemus (a Jew or Samaritan in Palestine in the mid-second century BC) and Ioannes Zonaras (a twelfth-century Byzantine historian) and if Abraham sitting on a throne is found in such sources as the *Midrash Rabbah* (a rabbinic commentary composed around the fifth century AD)?<sup>32</sup> Do such disparate parallels damage the theory that the Book of Abraham contains ancient elements? It seems to me that the more parallels one finds, the more one is inclined to take a more careful look at the content of the Book of Abraham. After all, the Latter-day Saint scholars are not making assertions about source and derivation (that one document derived from another), which are perhaps the most controversial and problematic claims made by those guilty of "parallelomania." Rather, they are simply offering parallels claimed to confirm ancient elements in the Book of Abraham.

This discussion of parallels is crucial because both Ritner and Ashment seem intent on making two points: first, Joseph Smith failed in his attempt to translate Egyptian, and second, the Book of Abraham is not an ancient text. Further, they take the first point as a given (which it is not) and apparently believe it automatically proves the second point. Ritner, of course, offers no evidence that he even knows about the extrabiblical traditions related to the Book of Abraham, but he makes his conclusions clear when he calls Joseph's interpretations "nonsense" and "uninspired fantasies." And although Ashment brings up the subject of parallels, he accuses Hugh Nibley of "parallelomania" and concludes that apologists are "unnecessarily archaizing" the Book of Abraham.<sup>33</sup>

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32. Tvedtnes, Hauglid, and Gee, *Traditions*, 8–9, 97, 261.

33. Ashment, "Reducing Dissonance," 230, 231.

"By analogy," continues Ashment, "because the movies *The Sword in the Stone* and *Camelot* contain the name of King Arthur, the 'parallelomania' approach would accept them as valid evidence in establishing the historicity of the book *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*."<sup>34</sup> But this is a false analogy. The screenwriters of the movies had access to *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table*, so similarities prove nothing. An accurate analogy would have an author (call him Ishmael) claiming to restore a medieval text about Arthur (call it the Book of Arthur). Ishmael's book parallels *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* in certain scenes but also creates new ones. Later, these newly created scenes are found to parallel medieval texts about Arthur unavailable to Ishmael. Wouldn't the natural response be to examine the whole issue more carefully and start asking questions rather than insisting that the Book of Arthur cannot be authentic because Ishmael failed in his attempt to translate Old English?

How can we possibly begin to determine whether the Book of Abraham is an authentic ancient text without closely examining the text itself? Do Ritner and Ashment mean to suggest that once the Book of Breathings is shown to be an Egyptian funerary document with no connection to Abraham that the issue of whether the Book of Abraham is ancient or modern is settled and that no further research is necessary?

The so-called apologists have compiled an impressive collection of texts from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources that apparently parallel extrabiblical elements of the Book of Abraham. These elements range from Terah returning to idol worship, to an angel rescuing Abraham from death, to Abraham seeing premortal spirits.<sup>35</sup> Ashment makes a good point when he says that such documents have to be read in their full context to see if they are actually parallel. As Samuel Sandmel says, "Detailed study is the criterion, and the detailed study ought to respect the context and not be limited to juxtaposing mere excerpts. Two passages may sound the same in splendid isolation from their

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34. Ibid., 230–31.

35. See index A to Tvedtnes, Hauglid, and Gee, *Traditions*.

context, but when seen in context reflect difference rather than similarity.”<sup>36</sup> But Ashment’s claim that a sound methodology is needed is hardly evidence that the whole enterprise ought to be abandoned. The only reasonable thing to do is to examine these claims and see if actual parallels exist. If so, we can then look at possible explanations for these parallels—such as literary borrowing by Joseph Smith, coincidence, a Jungian collective unconscious, or genuine prophetic insight.<sup>37</sup>

Ritner’s failure to even mention the subject of parallels is a major flaw in his work.

### Egyptian Origins

Seeing any discussion of parallels as a smoke screen, Ashment concludes “there is no factual basis to the rationalizations which have been devised to explain away the dissonance caused to the Book of Abraham by the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers and by the Joseph Smith Papyri.”<sup>38</sup> The heart of this dissonance, or lack of agreement, is the fact that according to such Egyptologists as Wilson, Baer, and Ritner, the Joseph Smith Papyri have absolutely nothing to do with the prophet Abraham.

Ritner and Ashment see this as the final nail—indeed the only nail needed—in the coffin. As Ritner puts it, Joseph Smith’s interpretations “are defended only with the forfeiture of scholarly judgment and credibility” (*JNES*, p. 176 n. 128).

The Kirtland Egyptian Papers and translations of the Joseph Smith Papyri are quite problematic for believers in Joseph Smith’s story. The discovery of the papyri seemed like the perfect chance to put Joseph’s claim of divine powers to the test. So when respected professors of Egyptology find no confirmation of Joseph’s interpretation, disillusionment or dissonance certainly results. These difficulties as-

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36. Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” in *Two Living Traditions: Essays on Religion and the Bible* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 293. This essay was originally published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* 31 (1962): 1–13.

37. Salmon, “Parallelomania,” and Cook, “*Book of Abraham*,” suggest these possible explanations.

38. Ashment, “Reducing Dissonance,” 231.

sociated with the Book of Abraham have been the catalyst for some Saints losing their faith.

But the leading scholar on the Book of Abraham, Hugh Nibley, had what I believe to be a profound insight when he said: "The two rules to follow here are 1) to ask the right questions, and 2) to keep looking." He then goes on to identify what he sees as "the one question which the Book of Abraham confronts us with before all others[.] Simply this: Is it a true history?"<sup>39</sup>

I agree that this is the best question to ask. Nibley asks another question that brings the whole discussion right back to where Ritner and Ashment want to keep it—Egypt: "Is there anything to the proposition (suggested long after J. S. published it) that Abraham wrote an autobiography in Egypt or under very strong Egyptian influence? Are the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* attempts (cir. the 1C A.D.) to reproduce the autobiography? Was it originally illustrated by vignettes from the Egyptian Book of the Dead? Believe it or not, all these questions are being answered in the affirmative today by serious students."<sup>40</sup>

An autobiography of Abraham illustrated by vignettes from the Book of the Dead? Here is a possible parallel that Ashment cannot reasonably chalk up to "parallelomania." Quite the opposite, it bears directly on the Book of Abraham because Joseph claimed to restore a first-person account from Abraham and because several fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri are from the Book of the Dead. Surely this is something any serious student of the Book of Abraham ought to investigate.

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39. Hugh Nibley, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," *Sunstone*, December 1979, 51. Nibley was responding to Edward H. Ashment's article "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Reappraisal" in the same issue of *Sunstone*, 33–48. "It is significant to realize that the prophet's connection with the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers does not necessarily mean that the latter constituted the material from which he produced the Book of Abraham," writes Ashment ("Facsimiles," 44), who, I believe, effectively undercuts some of his later arguments (after he had apparently changed his mind on some things).

40. Nibley, "Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham," 51, emphasis added. In the original, Nibley's parenthetical phrase "suggested long after J. S. published it" is mistakenly set off in brackets.

Take one of Nibley's examples, the *Testament of Abraham*. A text of Jewish (possibly Essene) origin likely composed around the first century AD, the testament survives in two Greek critical revisions or recensions, A and B (thought to derive from a common source, although neither is dependent on the other). The testament basically tells the story of the angel Michael being sent by God to prepare Abraham for his death and accompany his soul to heaven. Not ready to die, Abraham arranges a bargain with Michael that allows them to see the entire world. Biblical scholar James R. Mueller comments that "an Egyptian provenience for the Testament has been widely accepted."<sup>41</sup>

In one scene of the testament, Abraham and Michael see Abel, the son of Adam, sitting on a throne "to judge all the creation and to examine righteous and sinners." Next to Abel sit "two angels, the one on the right and the one on the left, these are those who record the sins and the righteous deeds." The two angels are identified as Dokiel and Puruel.<sup>42</sup>

In a dissertation on the *Testament of Abraham*, the French scholar Francis Schmidt compares the testament with two psychostasy (judgment) scenes in Egyptian papyri: *The Book of the Dead of Pamonthes* (AD 63) and *The Tale of Satni-Khamois* (AD 50–100). "Osiris is seated on a throne of fine gold. Flanking him are the 24 'assessors.' Before him is a table laden with lotus flowers. In the middle of the room is a balance in which good and evil deeds are weighed. Anubis watches the oscillation of the needle, and Thot records the result of the weighing (in Pamonthes, he reads a book). The monster of Amente waits to devour the wicked."<sup>43</sup>

Schmidt believes there are definite parallels between Osiris and Abel and between Anubis and Dokiel. In fact, he "finds counterparts to

41. James R. Mueller, "Testament of Abraham," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:44.

42. Michael E. Stone, trans., *The Testament of Abraham: The Greek Recensions* (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 33–35. The quoted excerpt is from Recension A.

43. As reported in 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, MT: Scholars Press, 1972), 32.



most of the elements in [the *Testament of Abraham*] in a single Egyptian source. In both of the documents that he cites, he finds the judge on a throne of gold; a table before him; the weighing of the souls/deeds by a counterpart of Dokieli; the divine scribe; and possibly a counterpart to the punishing angels."<sup>44</sup> Schmidt is thus theorizing that a scene in a Jewish story about Abraham actually had its origins in an Egyptian vignette that portrayed Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, and Anubis, the Egyptian jackal-headed god and patron of embalming.

All of this sounds familiar. Turning back to Ritner, we note that he described Facsimile 1 of the Joseph Smith Papyri as "a scene of Anubis tending Osiris on the funerary bier" (*JNES*, p. 161). The Joseph Smith Papyri date to the same era as the papyri mentioned by Schmidt (with the JSP possibly dating to the first half of the second century BC or approximately three hundred years prior to Schmidt's judgment scenes). Lastly, an Egyptologist could legitimately say of either Schmidt's psychostasy scene or Joseph Smith's Facsimile 1 that "it has nothing to do with Abraham."

The *Testament of Abraham* was not available in English until almost fifty years after Joseph Smith's death. Does this prove the Book of Abraham authentic? No, but this whole area is ripe for research and reporting by scholars such as Ritner and Ashment. They could, for example, respond to the question, Is it possible that the Joseph Smith Facsimiles 1 and 3 were used to illustrate a Ptolemaic/Roman era account of Abraham?<sup>45</sup> To the best of my knowledge, however, neither of them has anything at all to say on the *Testament of Abraham*.

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44. Ibid., 33–34. Nickelsburg notes that Schmidt's case "is not without its problems" and points out areas in which the Jewish and Egyptian stories are not parallel (ibid., 34).

45. Such a suggestion, of course, necessitates dealing with the critics' claim that Joseph Smith believed the papyri to be a document actually written by Abraham (problematic because virtually everyone agrees that the JSP date to within one or two hundred years before or after Christ). As Gee points out in his article, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence," 194–95, Charles Francis Adams quoted Joseph Smith differently than Josiah Quincy did, and Quincy (a chief source of the critics' claim that Joseph believed the papyri to be four thousand years old) garbled Joseph Smith's words in his reporting. Furthermore, it would make perfect sense for a Ptolemaic/Roman copy of Abraham's writings to include the phrase "written by the hand of Abraham."

### “A Jewish Substitute for the Pagan God Osiris”

In 1964 the biblical scholar K. Grobel pointed out another intriguing parallel between the Old Testament prophet Abraham and the Egyptian Book of the Dead.<sup>46</sup> Grobel’s main text is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus 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 wouldst 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.

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46. K. Grobel, “. . . Whose Name Was Neves,” *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963–64): 373–82.

Grobel notes a number of "perplexities" associated with this parable (for example, "The gospels nowhere else imply that *at death* 'the angels' carry the person away somewhere") and suggests that "some of our perplexities may go back to an alien religion, an alien language, and an alien culture" (as opposed to a Jewish or Christian tradition). Furthermore, adds Grobel, "Gressman proposed a lost Egyptian original whose closest descendant is the Demotic tale of Satme."<sup>47</sup>

In this Demotic version, which was recorded on papyrus around AD 50–100, a young man named Si-Osiris leads his father through the seven halls of Amnte, the abode of the dead. "In the fifth they see a man in torment, the pivot of the door being fixed in his right eye-socket, because of which he prays and grievously laments. In the seventh they see Osiris enthroned, the great god, Ruler of Amnte, and near him a man clad in fine linen and evidently of very high rank. Si-Osiris identifies the latter to his father as the miserably buried pauper of Memphis and the tormented one as the sumptuously buried rich man. . . . The boy also explicitly adds that Osiris had ordered the rich burial-linen of the magnate to be given to the former pauper to wear in Amnte."<sup>48</sup>

Discussing parallels between the Lukan account and the Demotic papyrus, Grobel notes that the "classified compartments strongly suggest the classified halls or courtyards in Satme's Amnte and *Book of the Dead* 147. How about the water? The Demotic story does not mention it, but the association of Osiris with water is constant. . . . *The Book of the Dead* . . . lets Osiris say, 'I am the man who covereth thy head and who poureth cold water upon thy palm.'" Grobel then reaches a conclusion that has to bring a double take for any student of the Book of Abraham: "'Abraham' must be a Jewish substitute for the pagan god Osiris."<sup>49</sup>

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47. Ibid., 374–75, emphasis in original. Demotic is "an Egyptian script that developed out of hieratic that was used for business documents in the Nile Delta region. The earliest dated example comes from 657 B.C. and the latest comes from A.D. 457, over a century after Christianity became the official religion of Egypt." Gee, *Guide*, 63.

48. Grobel, "' . . . Whose Name Was Neves,'" 376–78.

49. Ibid., 380.

It is difficult to imagine a more striking comparison than to equate Osiris with Abraham. What was Joseph Smith's interpretation of the person lying on the lion couch in Facsimile 1? "Abraham fastened upon an altar" (Facsimile 1, explanation). What was Ritner's interpretation? "Osiris on the funerary bier" (*JNES*, p. 161). Again, according to Joseph Smith, what was the meaning of the figure on the throne in Facsimile 3? "Abraham sitting upon Pharaoh's throne, by the politeness of the king, with a crown upon his head, representing the Priesthood, as emblematical of the grand Presidency in Heaven; with the scepter of justice and judgment in his hand" (Facsimile 3, explanation). What was Ritner's interpretation? "Enthroned Osiris" (*JNES*, p. 162).<sup>50</sup>

Here we have a scholar who is not a Latter-day Saint, completely independent of "Nibley and his acolytes," concluding that Abraham was a substitute for Osiris. Then we have Joseph Smith, who, according to Ritner, could not possibly have known anything about the original meaning of the papyri, somehow managing to equate Abraham with Osiris not once but twice—as well as creating a nonbiblical story about the great patriarch that in detail after startling detail is consistent with ancient traditions. There is *something* happening here, and whatever all of this ultimately means, it certainly reveals for the present that Ritner's treatment is superficial, neglecting areas that deserve in-depth scholarly research and discussion. I believe he would make a valuable contribution by continuing to look at the Book of Abraham and asking new questions, not in a partisan frame of mind similar to Jerald and Sandra Tanner but in an openness of spirit similar to the great scholars of the past. William James comes to mind.

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50. For an excellent discussion of how a Jewish redactor may have used the facsimiles, see Kevin L. Barney, "The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Egyptian Sources," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, forthcoming).