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A Translation and Commentary of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus

Michael Dennis Rhodes

My purpose in writing this paper has *not* been to “try to prove” that the Prophet Joseph’s interpretation of the hypocephalus is correct; that proof can come only from God, and each individual must find it for himself. Rather, it has been my aim to present a translation and commentary of the hypocephalus known as Facsimile 2 of the Pearl of Great Price, drawing upon our current knowledge of Egyptian language, culture, and religion. Surprisingly (at least to some), in a number of instances Joseph Smith’s interpretation accords with modern Egyptology’s. In other cases, however, there is definite disagreement. I have not tried to disguise or pass over these differences; I have sought merely to present them as I see them. What significance can be attached to them, each must decide for himself.

When dealing with things Egyptian, one must constantly be on guard against making absolute statements. Our knowledge of Egyptian civilization is woefully small. As Alan Gardiner has stated, “It must never be forgotten that we are dealing with a civilization thousands of years old and one of which only tiny remnants have survived. What is proudly advertised as Egyptian history is merely a collection of rags and tatters.”¹ At best we can make “educated” guesses which are in constant need of revision and which often, when viewed in the light of subsequent knowledge, seem most ludicrous. This paper then is not meant to be a definitive and final word on the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus, but rather, in Gardiner’s words, “A target for others to tilt at.”

Hypocephalus is the name given to a small disk-shaped object made of papyrus, stuccoed linen, bronze, wood, or clay, which the Egyptians placed under the head of their deceased (hence the name *hypocephalus*, literally, “under the head”). The purpose of the

Michael Dennis Rhodes is a graduate student in Egyptology at Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany.

¹Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 53.

hypocephalus was to envelope the head and body in flames or radiance, thus making the deceased divine.² The hypocephalus itself symbolized the eye of Re or Horus,³ i.e., the sun, and the scenes portrayed on it relate to the resurrection or life after death, which idea is more particularly symbolized by the course of the sun. The upper portion of the hypocephalus represented the day sky, and the lower portion (the part with the cow) the night sky.

Hypocephali first appeared during the Saite Dynasty (663-525 B.C.) and their use continued down at least to the Christian era.⁴ It is in the Saite recension of the Book of the Dead, chapter 162, that directions for the construction and use of the hypocephalus are given. The section to which this chapter belongs (162-165) is found only in the late Saite version and contains many strange words and concepts. Eduard Naville considers these chapters to be of foreign origin, or at least influenced by sources outside Egypt.⁵ E. A. Wallis Budge suggests that the influence is in part Nubian.⁶

Since the meaning of the hypocephalus is intimately connected with chapter 162 of the Book of the Dead, I will now give a translation of the whole of that chapter as it is found in Richard Lepsius' *Todtenbuch*.⁷

Chapter 162

Title: A spell for causing flame to occur under the head of a glorified being.

1. To be recited: Greetings to you, mighty Par⁸ of the lofty Double plumes, possessor of the White crown [of Upper Egypt], equipped with the flail. You are Lord of the Phallus.⁹ You rise consistently,

²See Richard Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Aegypter* (Leipzig: C. Wigrand, 1842), chapter 162, line 10. Translation on pp. 260-61 of this article.

³Samuel Birch, "Hypocephalus in the Possession of Sir Henry B. Meux, Bart.," *Proceedings for the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, November 1883, p. 3. (Hereafter cited as *PSBA*.) See also Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1952), pp. 314 and 630.

⁴See Samuel Birch, "Hypocephalus in the Collection of Walter Myers, Esq. F. S. A.," *PSBA*, 2 June 1885, p. 214, where Birch discusses a hypocephalus which dates to about the Christian era.

⁵Eduard Naville, "Einleitung," *Das Aegyptische Todtenbuch der XVIII. bis. XX. Dynastie*, 3 vols. (Berlin: A. Asher, 1886), p. 184.

⁶E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1969), 2:19.

⁷Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch*.

⁸Par, *P3r*(°), i.e., Re, the sun god. Cf. Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Woerterbuch der Aegyptischen Sprache*, 5 vols. (Berlin: Belegstellen, 1971), 2:401,8. (Hereafter cited as *Wb*.)

⁹Symbolic of the regenerative powers.

2. shining forth and never ceasing to rise. You are a master of forms, who has numerous appearances. You hide yourself from your children¹⁰ in [or with] the Udjat-eye.¹¹ You are the strong roarer in the midst of the Assembly¹² of the Gods. You are a
3. powerful runner, swift of stride.¹³ You are a strong god who comes to the one that summons him, [and who comes] to the one that laments [his] misery
4. caused by need [or pestilence]. Come then to my call, [for] I am Ihet.¹⁴ Your name¹⁵ is in my mouth, [and] I will say it: he of *Hghghr*¹⁶ is your
5. name, >*Iri-ikrs-ing-rbt*¹⁷ is your name, *Srp.t-miw-sriw*¹⁸ is your name, *Hrst*¹⁹ is your name. I have praised your name. I am Ihet. Hear my voice this
6. day. You placed a flame under Re's head, and behold, he is in the divine Netherworld in Heliopolis.²⁰ You caused him to become like those upon the earth.²¹ He is your soul, do not forget him. Come to the
7. Osiris, Efonakh, justified, [and] cause a flame to occur under his head. Truly he is the soul of the Great Body²² which rests in Heliopolis. *3hw-hpr-sr*²³ is his name, *Br-kt-tw*²⁴ is his name. Come indeed and
8. cause him to become like one of your followers, [for] this one, he belongs to you.
To be recited over a figure of Ihet which is made of fine gold and placed around the neck of the
9. glorified being and also put in writing upon new papyrus [and] placed under his head. [If this is

¹⁰"The one who hides himself from his children," an epithet of Ammon-Re at Khasut (Chois) in the Delta. The meaning is not known.

¹¹*wd3.t*- the uninjured eye of Horus (from *wd3*- "to be hale, uninjured"). Also of Re and generally of any god or goddess. Also, an amulet in the form of an eye. Cf. *Wb*, 1:401,12.

¹²*psd.t*, literally, "the nine," but perhaps better understood as a plural of a plural, i.e., all gods. (This idea was suggested to me by Professor Hans Goedicke.)

¹³Just what these epithets mean is not at all clear.

¹⁴*Ih.t*- the heavenly cow *Mh-wr.t*, a form of Hathor. Cf. *Wb*, 1:120,6.

¹⁵Every god and goddess possessed a hidden or secret name. If anyone could find out this name, he would have power over the god or goddess. Cf. Budge, *Gods*, 1:301, and Bonnet, *Reallexicon*, p. 501ff.

¹⁶*Hghghr*- The word is meaningless in Egyptian.

¹⁷Also meaningless.

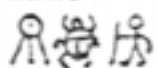
¹⁸Also meaningless. This name is found behind the four Sons of Horus on the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus.

¹⁹Also meaningless. All of these names may be just gibberish, or some other language, perhaps Nubian. See Budge, *Gods*, 2:21.

²⁰Not the earthly Heliopolis, but rather the Heavenly Heliopolis in the same sense as the "Heavenly Jerusalem."

²¹I.e., made alive again.

²²I.e., Osiris.

²³  [?] I have no suggestions for this.

²⁴Another incomprehensible name.

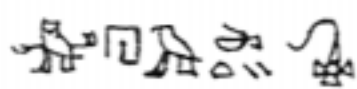
done,] there will be a multitude of flames all around him as [it is] with those upon the earth. The Eye of Ihet [i.e., the hypocephalus] is a very great protection for her son, Re, when he sets.

10. His throne shall be encircled by a zealous [?]²⁵ army. He shall be made divine²⁶ in the Necropolis [and] he shall not be turned back from any door of
11. the Netherworld successfully. Then shall you say [after] you have placed this goddess around the neck of the glorified being, "O most hidden one who is in heaven, watch over the body of your son, [and] preserve him in the Necropolis.
12. This is a great and secret book. Do not allow anyone's eyes to see it, [for] that would be an abomination. He who knows it [i.e., the book] and keeps it secret, he will continue to exist.
13. The name of this book is: Mistress of the Secret Temple. The End.

Hypocephali are found in several museums in Europe,²⁷ but except for the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus, none seem to have found their way to America. The largest single collection of hypocephali is in the British Museum, and three pieces of that collection are very closely related to the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus both in layout and text.²⁸ Comparing these with Facsimile 2 from the Pearl of Great Price has made it possible to reconstruct the original text of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus with only a few questionable readings.

Since the story of the finding of the hypocephalus and the other scrolls and how they eventually came into the possession of Joseph Smith is given elsewhere,²⁹ I will touch on it only briefly. Around the year 1818, Antonio Lebolo was employed by Bernadino Drovetti, French Consul-General in Egypt at the time, to find

²⁵ found in the *Wb*.



mhd.ty [?] This word is not

²⁶*ntr.w* Old perfective. That the word is not a noun is made clear from the determinative. Cf. *Wb*, 2:364,15.

²⁷British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, Berlin Museum, Magyar Nemzeti Museum in Budapest, Cairo Museum in Egypt.

²⁸The three are 37909, 8445c, 8445f. Berlin No. 7792, although badly mutilated, also shows similarities.

²⁹See Keith Terry and Walter Whipple, *From the Dust of Decades* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), pp. 11-23. See also, James R. Clark, *Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955), and Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 2:348-50.

antiquities in Thebes. While digging in the area of Gurneh, he discovered a large shaft at the bottom of which he found some 400 mummies. He removed eleven of them, but died before he was able to remove any of the others. Of these eleven, seven were retained by Drovetti, but the remaining four were willed to Le-bolo's nephew, Michael Chandler, and were shipped to him in America. When Chandler received the mummies, he unwrapped them and found several papyri with them among which was the hypocephalus we are now considering. In 1835 Chandler sold the mummies and the papyri to the Church, and Joseph Smith then began to translate and publish them in the *Millennial Star*. Thus it would seem from the meager evidence we have, that the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus came from a tomb located in the Gurneh area of Thebes. From the text of the hypocephalus itself, it seems that the owner's name was Sheshonk.³⁰

When perusing Facsimile 2, one is immediately struck by the contrast between most of the hieroglyphic signs, which are readily recognizable, and the signs of the right third of the figure on the outer edge as well as the outer portions of the sections numbered 12-15. On closer examination, these prove to be hieratic and inverted (that is, upside down to the rest of the text). And, most surprising of all, these hieratic characters are recognizable as a fairly faithfully rendered copy of lines 2, 3, and 4 of the Church papyrus XI, which contains a portion of the Sensen papyrus or *Book of Breathings*. Especially clear is the actual word, *snsn*, in section 14, and part of the name of the possessor of the papyrus, (*t3y-)*hby.t, repeated twice. Why this was done I am not sure. I can only postulate that these portions of the hypocephalus were damaged (a common enough occurrence because of the extremely fragile condition of these documents), and someone (the printer, one of the Prophet's associates, or Joseph Smith himself) copied these characters off the Sensen papyrus so that the facsimile would look complete. In support of this view is an ink drawing of Facsimile 2 in the Church Historian's Office which shows blanks in these sections.

Following is a reconstructed hieroglyphic transcription of the text of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus. As is the normal practice, it will read from left to right rather than from right to left as is found in the original text.

³⁰See translation on page 265 of this article.

JOSEPH SMITH HYPOCEPHALUS

Edge: I am Djabty³¹ in the House of the Benben in Heliopolis,³² so exalted and glorious.³³ [I am] a copulating bull without equal.³⁴ [I am] that ³⁵ Mighty God³⁶ in the House of the Benben in Heliopolis . . . that Mighty God . . .

Left Middle: O God of the Sleeping Ones³⁷ from the time of the Creation.³⁸ O Mighty God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Netherworld and his Great Waters,³⁹ grant that the soul of the Osiris⁴⁰ Sheshonk,⁴¹ may live.

Bottom: May this tomb never be desecrated,⁴² and may this soul and its possessor never be desecrated in the Netherworld.

Upper Left: You shall be as that God, the Busirian.⁴³

To the Left of the Standing Two-headed God: The name⁴⁴ of this Mighty God.

BRITISH MUSEUM HYPOCEPHALUS

Edge: O Djabty in the House of the Benben in Heliopolis, so high. A copulating bull . . . [may you cause fire to occur under] his head.

³¹*D3b.ty-* (*Wb*, 4:562,7) an epithet of Osiris, perhaps meaning the "provider." It can also be "box" like Hebrew *tēbah* "ark" of Noah which is thought to be a borrowing from Egyptian. Cf. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 1061.

³²*Hw.t-bnbn* - the name of the sun sanctuary in Heliopolis. Cf. *Wb*, 1:459,10. See also Ricardo Caminos, "The Chronicle of Prince Osorkon," *Analecta Orientalia* 37 (Rome: Pontifica Institutum Biblicum, 1958), p. 127.

³³These two adjectives may refer either to the House of Benben or to Djabty; the latter seems the more likely.

³⁴From earliest times the Egyptians thought of the bull as being especially strong and fertile, and both gods and kings were associated with the bull (Budge, *Gods*, 1:24-27).

³⁵Reading, *ntr pwy* °3. Other hypocephali have *ntr* °3 here.

³⁶*Ntr* °3- "Mighty God," a term used to refer to Osiris and to the dead person thought of as Osiris (*Wb*, 2:361,2&7).

³⁷*Sḏr.w*, i.e., the Dead. Cf. *Wb*, 4:392,9).

³⁸*Sḏp-tpy*, literally, "first time," i.e., the Creation. Cf. *Wb*, 3:438,1. *M* with the sense "from." Cf. *Wb*, 2:1,10.

³⁹*M.w* °3, the primeval ocean from which the sun rose on the day of creation, and which surrounds the earth. Cf. Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961).

⁴⁰On the identification of the dead with Osiris, see Frankfort, *Religion*, p. 103ff. Osiris was, among other things, the god of the resurrection. Cf. Budge, *Gods*, 2:141.

⁴¹*Šng*, the name of several kings of Dyn. XXII. It is Lybian in origin.

⁴²Emending to *nn thi.tw ḥ3.t in*. Similar passages, but even more garbled are found in the British Museum hypocephali 8445c, 3445f, and 37909.

⁴³*Dd.wy*, a nisbe of *Dd.w*, Busiris, a cult center of Osiris in the Delta, and thus used as an epithet of Osiris. Cf. *Wb*, 5:630,7.

⁴⁴On the importance of a god's name, see footnote 15.

As for this Mighty God, may he cause the soul of the Osiris, Bukheben, justified to live.

Right Middle: O Mighty God, who lives, breathes and journeys on the water, and whose word Re enters to hear.

Left Middle: O August God, O Mighty God, who lives in Heaven. [You are] one who is jealous of his power, a Living One to whom is given life, duration and dominion forever.

BRITISH MUSEUM HYPOCEPHALUS 37909

Edge: O Djabty in the House of the Benben, so high and glorious. O copulating bull, Mighty God in . . . whose majesty is distinguished. May you grant that the soul of the Osiris, Takhered-Khons, justified, live, who is the daughter of Tanu-en-Baste, most justified.

Top Half by Standing Figure: I am known⁴⁵ and I know.⁴⁶

Top Half, Left Upper Section: You are⁴⁷ the eight rams, you have lived.

Bottom Half: Tomb of the Water-room [?]⁴⁸ . *mrh.t*-chamber.⁴⁹

BRITISH MUSEUM HYPOCEPHALUS 8445c

Edge: O shrine⁵⁰ in the House of the Benben, so high and glorious. O copulating bull, Mighty God, Living One who is over the Gods in . . . [several words are broken off here] . . . to the Osiris, Har, justified. May you⁵¹ cause flame to occur under his head, [for] he is one of your followers.⁵²

Bottom: Trespassed tomb of the chapel of water [?].⁵³

Top: You are the eight rams of your gods [?].⁵⁴

⁴⁵*Rb.y* a passive *sdm.f.* Cf. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), paragraphs 419-24.

⁴⁶*Rb.kwy* Old perfective. Cf. Gardiner, *Grammar*, 3rd ed., paragraphs 309-18.

⁴⁷Read *iw.k* rather than *iw.n.k*.

⁴⁸*H3.t n m.w.* Just what this might be, I don't know.

⁴⁹*Mrh.t* with house determinative. Not found in the *Wb*.

⁵⁰*Db3.t* "shrine." Cf. *Wb*, 5:561,8. This lacks the seated god determinative found in the other hypocephali. See footnote 31.

⁵¹Read *-k* instead of *-f*.

⁵²This is almost verbatim from chapter 162 of the Book of the Dead. See translation on pages 260-61 of this article.

⁵³I have no idea what this refers to.

⁵⁴Seems garbled.

FACSIMILE 2 BY THE NUMBERS

The interpretation of illustrations is probably the most difficult part of understanding Egyptian texts. These illustrations were *not* included merely for decoration; they were always used to supplement and clarify the text. Their symbolic meaning, however, is often for us quite obscure and even baffling. A given symbol can have many different meanings, and trying to decide which one the author of the text was trying to convey is at times nearly impossible. For example, the *Udjat*-eye can represent healing, but also completion, light, totality, protection, glory, and even riches.⁵⁵ Add to this the fact that in many instances we have no idea what some symbols mean, and one can appreciate the magnitude of the problem now before us. Samuel Birch, after struggling to explain the meaning of several of the illustrations found on the hypocephali he was studying, finally admitted, "The esoteric meaning of these scenes is unknown."⁵⁶ Following is an interpretation of the illustrations on the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus:

1. A seated deity with two (or in most hypocephali, four)⁵⁷ ram's heads. He holds in his hand the symbols of life (*ḥ*), dominion (*w3s*) and stability (*dd*). On either side of the god are two cynocephalic apes (nos. 22 and 23) with horned moondisks on their heads, in an attitude of adoration.⁵⁸ There are also two serpents, one on either side of the seated deity.⁵⁹

This seated god represents the creator god, Khnum.⁶⁰ When thus depicted with four heads, Khnum united within himself the attributes of the gods Re (the sun), Shu (light), Geb (the earth), and Osiris (the afterworld), and he was considered to be the type of the primeval creative force, *Sf.t-h3.t*.⁶¹ This four-headed version

⁵⁵Gertrud Thausing and Traudl Kerzt-Kratschmann, *Das Grosse Aegyptische Totenbuch*, Schriften des Osterreichischen Kulturinstituts Kairo, Archaeologisch-Historische Abteilung, Band I, 1969.

⁵⁶Samuel Birch, "Hypocephalus in the British Museum No. 8445," *PSBA*, 6 May 1884, p. 185.

⁵⁷See, e.g., British Museum hypocephali 37909, 8445f, 8445c, etc. For another hypocephalus with only two heads represented see *PSBA*, 1897, plate II. Also, in another hypocephali, the god is wearing one or more *Atif* crowns.

⁵⁸The number of apes varies from two to as many as eight.

⁵⁹These snakes often have circles drawn around them. For example, see British Museum hypocephalus 8445f.

⁶⁰So William Flinders Petrie, *Abydos I*, 1902, Twenty-second Memoir of the Egyptian Exploration Fund (London: Published by order of the Committee, 1902); P. J. de Horrow, "Les Hypocéphales," in *Études Archéologiques, Linguistiques et Historiques dédiées à Mr. le Dr. C. Leemans*, ed. W. Pleyte (Leiden: n.p., 1885).

P. J. de Horrow, "Hypocephalus in the Musée du Louvre," *PSBA*, 4 March 1884, p. 128. Wiedeman, however, in Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, p. 389, considers it to be a representation of the pantheistic Amon-Re.

⁶¹Budge, *Gods*, 2:51; *Wb*, 4:456, 13; Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, pp. 137-38.

of Khnum was worshiped at Mendes, Egyptian *B3-nb-Dd.t*, "The Ram [or Ba] of the Lord of Djedet," and he was called the ram with four faces on one neck.⁶²

The basic ideas apparently represented by the central figures on the hypocephalus focus on the Creator-God, his powers in life, dominion, and stability. In much the same vein, Joseph Smith's comments on these characters speak of "the first creation," God's "residence," "government," and "measurement of time." The ideas in the two cases strike parallels if we admit life and residence as closely related concepts, dominion and government as functional equivalents, and measurements of time as presupposing some form of stability.

The cynocephalic apes can represent Thoth and the moon,⁶³ but due to their curious habit of watching the rising of the sun, the apes were also thought to be spirits of the dawn who were worshiping the sun at its rising.⁶⁴ For this reason, they are often found in connection with the sun. Also, besides these solar and lunar associations, apes are found in connection with stars and constellations.⁶⁵ Exactly what they represent here is not clear, but Joseph Smith's explanation that the two apes represent stars is not unreasonable. A scene quite similar to this is found on the obverse of the famous Metternich Stela, where eight apes are seen worshiping a seated god with four rams' heads. The god himself is encircled in a sun disk. To the left stands the Ibis-headed god, Thoth, with whom, as before mentioned, the apes are often found associated.⁶⁶

The meaning of the two snakes is harder to arrive at. Snakes were an object of both fear and reverence for the Egyptians. On the one hand, they were considered to be "earth demons" because of their close association with the ground, and they were avoided as much as possible. But along with this belief, was the idea that snakes possessed a protective power, and for this reason they were used as amulets for the protection of houses, temples, and tombs.⁶⁷ It is probably in this latter sense that they are used here.

2. A two-headed deity wearing the double-plumed crown of Amen, with Ram's horns mounted on it. On his shoulders are jackal

⁶²Budge, *Gods*, 2:64-65.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 364-65; Frankfort, *Religion*, illustration 3; de Hozack, "Les Hypocéphales," p. 60.

⁶⁴Budge, *Gods*, 2:365.

⁶⁵Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, p. 7.

⁶⁶For an illustration see Budge, *Gods*, 2:271. See Naville, *Aegyptische Totenbuch*, 1:tfl.XXI (chapter 16A) where the vignettes show apes worshiping Re-Harakhty or a sun disk.

⁶⁷Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, p. 682.



A Fac-Simile from the Book of Abraham, No. 2.

heads, and he is holding the jackal standard of Wepwawet. To his right is an altar with offerings on and around it. In most hypocephali, he is holding the *ankh*, or symbol of life, in his right hand. Also to his right is a line of hieroglyphics reading: "The name of this Mighty God."

P. J. de Horrock considers this to be Amen-Re; the two heads illustrating the hidden and mysterious power of Amen combined with the visible and luminous power of Re.⁶⁸ William Petrie agrees that it is Amen-Re, but sees the two heads as representing the rising and setting sun.⁶⁹ That the deity is a form of Amen is clear from the fact that he is wearing the double plume crown mentioned in chapter 162 of the Book of the Dead, but why he has jackals' heads on his shoulders and is holding a jackal standard is not so evident. The jackal is generally used as a symbol of Anubis and Wepwawet, both funerary gods, Anubis being specifically the god assigned to guide the dead through the afterworld to the throne of Osiris. Perhaps due to the funerary character of the hypocephalus, it was thought that Amen should also carry emblems indicative of his power over that realm as well.

Again, we can compare here the significance ascribed to these characters by Joseph Smith. Where the hypocephalus depicts the two-headed deity holding the symbol of life or power over death, Joseph mentions "holding the key of power." Where an altar is shown, Joseph identifies the principle of "sacrifice upon an altar" as revealed by God to Abraham. A hidden power seems to be associated with the name of the two-headed God, who probably serves as a guide for the dead to bring them into the presence of God. This might concur with Joseph's explanation that this figure "stands next to Kolob," as a guide surely must do if he is going to be able to lead the dead to God.

3. Hawk-headed Re with the sun disk on his head, seated on the solar bark. On either side of him is an *Udjat*-eye. In his hand he holds the *w3s*-sceptre, symbol of dominion,⁷⁰ and in front of him is an altar with a lotus blossom on it.

Re seated in his bark represents the sun in its daily journey across the sky and symbolizes resurrection and rebirth, since the sun was thought to die and be reborn each day. The lotus on the altar

⁶⁸de Horrock, "Louvre Hypocephalus," *PSBA*, 1884, p. 128.

⁶⁹Petrie, *Abydos I*, p. 50.

⁷⁰*w3s*- "dominion." Cf. Gardiner, *Grammar*, 3rd ed., p. 559; Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Printed for the Griffith Institute at the University Press, 1962), p. 54.

in front of him is also symbolic of rebirth and the rising sun.⁷¹ The *Udjat*-eye was symbolic of light and protection (among other things),⁷² and is thus not out of place in this context.

Here again certain similarities may be detected in Joseph Smith's explanations. Where we may identify a royally seated god holding the sceptre of dominion, Joseph describes a god sitting on his throne clothed with power and authority. The sun disk on the god's head and the *Udjat*-eye, symbolic of light and protection, somewhat track in meaning Joseph's mention of "a crown of eternal light . . . also the grand key-words of the holy priesthood." No explicit mention of resurrection imagery is made by Joseph Smith here or elsewhere in his explanations, but his entire discussion assumes an immortal perspective.

4. A mummiform hawk with outspread wings, seated upon a boat. Represents either Horus-Soped or Sokar, both hawk gods, which are symbolized by a mummiform hawk.⁷³ De Horrack suggests that it symbolizes the resurrection of the body or soul,⁷⁴ but this does not seem to be very convincing to me. One outstanding feature of this figure is its outspread wings, which are not normally found in representations of these two gods. Some connection with Horus, the personification of the sky, seems clear.⁷⁵ The association with Sokar, the ancient god of Memphis, is even more interesting. In the festival of Sokar, which was celebrated in many parts of Egypt, a procession was held in which the high priest would place the Sokar-boat on a sledge and pull it around the sanctuary. This procession was symbolic of the revolution of the sun and other celestial bodies.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, no texts have come down to us explaining this symbolism in more detail.

Joseph Smith sees here symbolism for the expanse or firmament of the heavens, which concept, as stated above, the Egyptians often represented by a hawk god (especially Horus). Also, Joseph's explanation that this figure represents the revolutions of Kolob, and Oliblish agrees favorably with what we know of the symbolism of the Sokar-boat in the festival of Sokar at Memphis.

⁷¹Budge, *Gods*, 2:18.

⁷²Thausing, *Grosse Totenbuch*, p. 73.

⁷³Budge, *Gods*, 1:498 and 505.

⁷⁴de Horrack, "Louvre Hypocephalus," *PSBA*, 1884, p. 128; de Horrack, "Les Hypocephalus," p. 60.

⁷⁵Budge, *Gods*, 1:146. The name Horus probably means "He who is on high." Cf. J. Gwyn Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1960), p. 37.

⁷⁶Budge, *Gods*, 1:505.

5. A cow wearing a sun disk and double plumes with a *menit*-necklace (symbol of Hathor, Ihet, etc.).⁷⁷ This is the cow Ihet, mentioned in chapter 162 of the Book of the Dead, which should be drawn on a piece of new papyrus.⁷⁸ This picture of a cow is common to almost all hypocephali. Ihet is a form of Hathor, the personification of the power of nature.⁷⁹ She is also connected with Mehweret (Greek Methyr), another cow goddess who symbolized the sky.⁸⁰ The name Mehweret (*mḥ-wr.t*) means, "Great fullness," i.e., the primeval waters from which Re first arose. Especially instructive is a section of chapter 17 from the Book of the Dead:⁸¹

I have seen this Re who was born yesterday from the buttocks of Mehweret.⁸² [If] he prospers, I prosper. [If] I prosper, he prospers.

What is this? This is the Primeval Waters of heaven. [Another reading]: It is the image of the eye (*ir.t*) of Re [in] the morning at his daily birth.

Now as for Mehweret, she is the *Udjat*⁸³ of Re.

Standing behind the cow is an unidentifiable goddess whose head is an *Udjat*-eye, and who is holding a lotus blossom, again the symbol of rebirth.⁸⁴

In relation to these characters, Joseph speaks of a governing planet receiving light through a medium of governing power. No particular nexus, however, between the symbolism of the powers of nature or the primeval waters and that governing readily commends itself.

6. These four standing mummiform figures are the four Sons of Horus, *Imst* (or *Msti*, with a man's head), *H3py* (with an ape's head), *Dw3-mw.t.f* (with a jackal's head), and *Kbh-snw.f* (with a hawk's head). They were the gods of the four quarters of the earth, and later came to be regarded as presiding over the four cardinal points.⁸⁵ They also were guardians of the viscera of the

⁷⁷Ibid., 1:430; Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, p. 459.

⁷⁸Lepsius, *Todtenbuch*, chapter 162, lines 8-9.

⁷⁹Budge, *Gods*, 1:431.

⁸⁰Budge, *Gods*, 1:422-23. For pictures, see plate facing p. 422 titled, "Mehweret—the eye of Re."

⁸¹Naville, *Aegyptische Todtenbuch*, chapter 17, lines 34-36.

⁸²Re—that is, the sun—was thought of as being born anew each day after having died the night before.

⁸³Here *wḏ3.t* means not only "eye," but "protection" and "amulet." The hypocephalus itself was called *wḏ3.t*.

⁸⁴de Horrack, "Louvre Hypocephalus," *PSBA*, 1884, p. 127. See also footnote 71.

⁸⁵Budge, *Gods*, 2:145; E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Papyrus of Ani), (New York: Dover, 1967), p. CI; Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, p. 315.

dead, and their images were carved on the four canopic jars into which the internal organs were placed.

Joseph Smith simply states, "Represents this earth in its four quarters."

Behind the four standing figures there is a lotus blossom, a lion, and a sheep. This is the hieroglyphic name of one of the strange gods of chapter 162 of the Book of the Dead⁸⁶ which is tentatively rendered *Sr.t-miw-sriw*. Just what god is meant is not known.

7. A seated ithyphallic god with a hawk's tail, holding aloft the divine flail. Several gods of similar appearance are found on the Metternich Stela mentioned above.⁸⁷ Before him is what appears to be a bird of some sort, presenting him with an *Udjat*-eye. In most other hypocephali it is a snake or an ape that is presenting the eye, but often this snake seems to have a hawk's head. This snake is thought to be Nehebka, a snake god and one of the assessors in the 125th chapter of the Book of the Dead.⁸⁸ Nehebka was considered to be a provider of nourishment, and as such was often shown presenting a pair of jars or the *Udjat*-eye, the symbol of all good gifts.⁸⁹ As for the bird found in Facsimile 2, this could symbolize the Ba (which is often represented as a bird by the Egyptians) presenting the *Udjat*-eye to the seated god.

The seated god is clearly a form of Min, the god of the regenerative, procreative forces of nature, perhaps combined with Horus as the hawk's tail would seem to indicate.⁹⁰

Joseph Smith mentions here the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove and God "revealing through the heavens the grand key-words of the priesthood." The procreative forces, receiving unusual accentuation throughout the representation, may stand for many divine generative powers, not least of which might be conjoined with the blessings of the priesthood in one's posterity eternally.

Taken as a whole, the figures and illustrations of the hypocephalus all seem to point toward the Egyptians' hope in a resurrection and life after death. Although this message seems to be conveyed by a strange assortment of gods, animals, and mixtures of both, it

⁸⁶Lepsius, *Todtenbuch*, chapter 162, line 5. See translation on pages 260-61 of this article and also footnote 18.

⁸⁷See footnote 66.

⁸⁸So Petrie, *Abydos I*, p. 50; Samuel Birch, "Henry B. Meux Hypocephalus, . . ." *PSBA*, 1883, p. 38; Birch, "Hypocephalus in the British Museum No. 8445a," 5 February 1884, p. 107; Bonnet *Reallexikon*, p. 389; de Horrack, "Les Hypocéphales," p. 59.

⁸⁹Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, p. 511.

⁹⁰So Petrie, *Abydos I*, p. 50.

is well to remember that to the Egyptians these were all aspects of the One God who manifested himself in many forms.⁹¹

CONCLUSION

Although we can, with the help of other similar texts, reconstruct the text and figures of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus with a fair degree of accuracy, we are still far from completely understanding the message which the Egyptians meant to convey by it. The text of the hypocephalus itself seems to be an address to Osiris, the god of the Dead, on behalf of the deceased, Sheshonk. As is the case with most Egyptian texts (especially religious texts), it is full of references to matters either obscure or unknown to us, although undoubtedly clear to the Egyptians. Needless to say, much work is still to be done before we can fully understand the import of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus, and hypocephali in general. Unfortunately, there has been little or no work done on them since the end of the last century. I hope, however, that I have been able to contribute to our knowledge of this interesting group of texts.

⁹¹Thausing, *Grosse Totenbuch*, pp. 16 and 72; Budge, *Gods*, 1:131-46; Bonnet, *Reallexikon*, pp. 223-25.