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Behold an Angel of the Lord Came and Stood Before Me: A Cultural Examination of Joseph Smith's 1823 Visions of Moroni

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“Behold an Angel of the Lord Came and Stood Before Me”:

A Cultural Examination of Joseph Smith’s

1823 Visions of Moroni

Adam P. Hock

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

“Behold An Angel of the Lord Came and Stood Before Me”:
A Cultural Examination of Joseph Smith’s
1823 Visions of Moroni

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Literary historian Terryl L. Givens referenced the visions of Moroni as “exhibit A” of Mormonism for nineteenth century believers. The 1823 visions constituted one of the core tenets of the religion as an underlying premise of *The Book of Mormon*. The significance of the visions, however, has not translated into many studies on the 1823 visions. This thesis seeks to fill portions of this gap by evaluating the visions within post-Revolutionary evangelical and treasure seeking culture.

I contend that the visions drew upon various elements of the culture, but ultimately diverged from the culture. The introduction recounts the vision from the perspectives of Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, and Lucy Mack Smith. Chapter one provides a historiographical review of the literature and some methodological considerations. Chapter two describes the evangelical and treasure seeking cultures. The examination emphasizes the cultural belief in visions and dreams that contained angels, guides, guardians, or other preternatural beings. Chapter three examines the significance of the dates of the 1823 visions, September 21-22. Three traditions associated significance with the date, witchcraft, astrology, and Christianity. I show that either the date did not match with the holiday of these traditions or that Smith probably did not know of its significance. Many people called the vision a dream, which led Oliver Cowdery to refute that claim. Chapter four analyzes whether the visions constituted dreams or visions, before proceeding to evaluate the imagery of dreams and visions. Smith’s visions lacked much of the imagery of other contemporary visionaries. Chapter five evaluates Moroni’s message to Smith. I contend that Smith considered the plates a treasure and they fit the cultural pattern of treasure. Moroni, though, directed Smith’s attention from the money seeking elements toward religious purposes.

Many elements within the vision follow the cultural beliefs concerning visions and dreams, which make the visions appear as a cultural product. Careful evaluation of the details of the visions, shows however, the 1823 visions diverged from many cultural tenets.

Keywords: Joseph Smith, Moroni, Moroni Visions, Evangelical Dreams, Treasure Seeking, 1823 Visions, History of Joseph Smith

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INTRODUCTION

“AN ANGEL APPEARED BEFORE ME”: JOSEPH SMITH’S 1823 VISIONS OF MORONI¹

The prospect of a better life, one free from the turmoil of the past years, motivated the Joseph and Lucy Mack Smith family to move to Palmyra, New York. Crop failure was the proverbial last straw that broke the camel’s back, and Palmyra offered a transformation from destitution to economic prosperity. The hard work of the entire family began to pay dividends as they built and moved from the small log home in the Palmyra township into a larger frame home which they had constructed on their Manchester farm.² Construction depended upon the work of Alvin, the oldest son in the family, while financing came from a diverted land payment. Alvin’s death in November of 1823 hindered completion of the home, but did not halt construction. They completed the house, but were behind in house payments, leaving one option: Hyrum and Joseph, Jr., the second and third oldest sons, needed to find work from others to financially support the family.³

In 1825, Josiah Stowell hired Joseph, Jr., as Lucy said “on account of his having heard that he possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye” then later hired Father Smith.⁴ The job intended to help the family “but it was never very profitable to him [Joseph, Jr], as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it.”⁵ Stowell eventually ended the expedition, but continued to employ Joseph to labor on their family farm. Employment facilitated the development of important relationships for Joseph, including the Joseph Knight,

¹ Karen Lynn Davidson et al., eds., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 116.

² Donald L. Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee,” in *Joseph Smith: the Prophet, the Man*, ed by. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate, vol. 17, Religious Studies Center Monograph Series (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 213.

³ Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 32–33, 45–46.

⁴ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool; London: Published for Orson Pratt by S.W. Richards; sold at the Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1853), 92–93.

⁵ Joseph Smith, *Elders’ Journal* (Far West, Missouri, July 1838), 43.

Sr. family, as he translated the Book of Mormon and organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The exact date of Joseph's meeting the Knight family remains unclear. Knight bought wheat from the Smith family in 1825, but his interaction may have only been with Joseph, Sr.⁶ In the fall of 1826, Knight hired Joseph, Jr. to work on his farm indicating the last possible introduction, though some have speculated that Knight met Joseph, Jr. as early as the spring of 1826.⁷ His work with Josiah Stowell showed the Knight Family Joseph's hardworking, amiable character – qualities that motivated them to hire him. Aside from lodging, food and payment, working for the Knight family developed a friendship and safe environment for Joseph.⁸

After a period of time, Joseph recounted to the Knight family his personal visionary experiences. In a reminiscent account, Joseph Knight, Jr. recalled Joseph telling the family: “I think it was in November he made known to my Father and I, that he had seen a vision, that a personage had appeared to him and told him <where> there was a gold book of ancient date buried, and if he would follow the directions of the Angel he could get it, we were told it in secret.”⁹ The vision mentioned was Joseph's initial vision in 1823 of an angel named Moroni.¹⁰

Knight's recollection of events depicted one way early Mormons gave Joseph's visions of Moroni prominence in early Mormon teachings. Joseph did not frequently mention his first theophany where he saw God and Jesus Christ, instead deferring to his later angel visions. These

⁶ William G. Hartley, *Stand by My Servant Joseph: The Story of the Joseph Knight Family and the Restoration* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 2002), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9. Hartley argues Knight signed an indenture document, “a bond backed by a mortgage,” potentially intending to assist Joseph during his 1826 trial in Bainbridge. If this is accurate, Knight definitely knew Joseph in the spring of 1826, because the document was signed April 14, 1826. The document never identified who received the indenture, or the amount to be paid, leaving the argument speculative.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5–11.

⁹ Joseph Knight, Jr., “Joseph Knight, Jr. Autobiography,” Manuscript, 1862, 1, Salt Lake City, Utah, Church History Library.

¹⁰ The event referenced must have been the 1823 experience, because of the date and details. Joseph's telling of the vision came in 1825, which eliminates the 1826 and 1827 experiences from consideration. The 1823 interview seems probable over the 1824 because Knight states the angel showed him the plates, and Joseph never references the 1824 visitation.

visions were the story of Mormonism. “The story of Joseph's first vision may have taken years to make the transition from personal conversion to publicly proclaimed portent of the new gospel dispensation. But from the very first, Moroni's visit to the boy prophet was exhibit A in the case for Mormonism,” stated literary scholar Terryl L. Givens.¹¹

The significance nineteenth-century Mormons placed upon the visions of Moroni justifies extensive scholarly work on the vision. Surprisingly, this has not been the case. Milton V. Backman wrote a book analyzing Joseph’s first theophany within its historical context, but a similar work has not been completed regarding Joseph’s 1823 visions of Moroni.¹² Most biographers have grouped all of the Moroni visions together as aspects of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, without discussing the 1823 visions as a singularly important event. Those who have analyzed the 1823 vision have only evaluated portions of the interview, usually through a treasure seeking or Christian paradigm. A complete evaluation of the details of the vision within a cultural context has yet to be explored.

This thesis will seek to analyze the vision within the complete religious culture. No such study exists that situates the vision within the religious culture of post-Revolutionary America. Without such a study, questions about the vision continue to exist. This thesis will seek to determine resemblances and differences between Joseph Smith’s 1823 visions and other

¹¹ Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon : the American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84. Other examples of this include William E. McClellin and Orson Pratt mentioning only the Moroni visitations in their missionary journals (William E. McLellin, *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831-1836*, ed by. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah; Urbana: BYU Studies, Brigham Young University ; University of Illinois Press, 1994); Orson Pratt, *The Orson Pratt Journals*, ed by. Elden Jay Watson (Salt Lake City: E.J. Watson, 1975).

¹² Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: The First Vision in its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); For more information on the historical context of Smith’s first theophany, see Samuel Alonzo Dodge and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Exploring the First Vision* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2012), and Steven C. Harper, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: A Guide to the Historical Accounts* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2012).

contemporary dreams, visions, and treasure seeking endeavors, and to argue for its distinctiveness.

The 1823 Visions

Varying accounts of the visions exist. Joseph directed different scribes to record five different versions of the visions, while Oliver Cowdery wrote another account under Smith's direction. Cowdery's account was the first published account of the vision in letters between Cowdery and W.W. Phelps, spanning 1834-1836. Smith's third account, in 1838, became his first published account of the visions, but was not circulated until 1842 in the *Times and Seasons* in Nauvoo. Other contemporaries of Smith recorded other accounts of the vision, including Martin Harris, Willard Chase, Orsamus Turner, and Henry Harris.¹³ Some scholars argue Smith's accounts of the visions evolved to contain less treasure seeking motifs and more religious motifs.¹⁴ The following introductory overview of the visions follows the accounts of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery and Lucy Mack Smith. The details of the various versions of the narrative will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

During the evening of September 21, 1823, the Joseph Smith, Sr. family discussed various religions and their interpretations of the scriptures.¹⁵ At age fourteen, Joseph had experienced his first vision where he had been forgiven of his sins and was told not to join any church.¹⁶ Now just three months shy of his eighteenth birthday, Joseph felt motivated to

¹³ Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 65–67, 75–77; Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 49–51.

¹⁴ Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, (New York: Knopf, 1979), 405; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 45; Mark D. Thomas, "Form Criticism of Joseph Smith's 1823 Vision of the Angel Moroni," *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (2002): 146–154.

¹⁵ Lucy Mack Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," Manuscript (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1845), 335, Church History Library.

¹⁶ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:208–215. Oliver Cowdery's account of the vision is believed to be under the direction of Joseph. It was also published with slight changes in the Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate.

approach God concerning his standing before Deity. The intervening years had lacked visions and momentous divine communications, which left Joseph uncomfortable about his spiritual situation. His own choices further complicated the situation. As he said, “I frequently <fell> into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the corruption of human nature which...led [him] into divers temptations to the gratification of many appetites offensive in the sight of God.”¹⁷

The family retired to bed, and the still of night permeated the house, yet sleep evaded Joseph’s eyes. Instead, he meditated “upon [his] past life and experience, [he] was well aware [that he] had not kept the commandments.”¹⁸ The heavy burden of sin weighed upon Joseph’s soul, causing him to approach God in prayer. Oliver Cowdery believed the prayer continued sometime between “eleven and twelve.”¹⁹ In the earliest of Joseph’s accounts of the vision he mentions repentance as his motivation for prayer, demonstrating Joseph’s preeminent concern that September evening.²⁰ Other purposes included confirmation of his standing before God and “to know for himself of the certainty and reality of pure and holy religion.”²¹ He expected the answer to come through another divine manifestation.²²

Suddenly, a brilliant light burst into the small upstairs room of the Smith’s one-and-a-half story log home.²³ Gradually increasing until it filled the room, the brighter than noonday rays

¹⁷ Ibid., 1:220.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1:116.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:57. Lucy Mack Smith gives a different chronology of the evening. She says that the family discussed the subject of religion late into the evening (Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” 335–336.). Moroni appeared to Joseph after a short time of praying. In this explanation of the vision, Cowdery’s account was used for two reasons. First, Lucy writes over twenty years after the experience, while Oliver writes about ten years after the vision. Second, Joseph could have given Oliver more details about the vision during the writing process, since he was alive. Joseph had died previous to Lucy’s account making the account more a subject of Lucy’s mind.

²⁰ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:13, 116, 220–221.

²¹ Ibid., 1:56.

²² Ibid., 1:220–221.

²³ The various accounts of the Second Vision appear to give conflicting reports about the appearance of the light. The 1832, 1842, and 1844 accounts, as well as Oliver Cowdery’s fourth letter to W.W. Phelps, all use the verb

caused Joseph to believe “the house was filled with consuming fire.”²⁴ The extreme brightness sent a shock through the young man’s body, followed by fear entering his heart.²⁵ Hovering above the ground, in the center of the light, appeared a being, whose presence replaced Joseph’s fear with calm and serenity.²⁶

He measured about the common size of a man,²⁷ and wore a loose robe.²⁸ The perfectly white, seamless garment fit just above his ankles and wrists, opening in a way which allowed Joseph to see into the messenger’s bosom, further exposing his feet, hands, neck and head.²⁹ “Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning.”³⁰

The voice of the being pierced the quiet night air when he called the young man by name and identified himself as Moroni, an angel sent from the presence of God, who had inhabited the American continent anciently.³¹ Joseph had prayed to God to gain a forgiveness of sins, which the angel informed him God had granted.³² He told Joseph that God had a work for him to perform, “that the scriptures might be fulfilled, which say – ‘God has chosen the foolish things of

“burst” to describe the light appearing in the bedroom. The 1839 account makes the appearance of light seem gradual. This interpretation attempts to amalgamate the views.

²⁴ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:508.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 1:58.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 1:220.

²⁹ Ibid., 1:222–223.

³⁰ Ibid., 1:222.

³¹ Ibid., 1:14, 112.; Most accounts do not mention Moroni by name. They only refer to him as a messenger or angel. The 1839 account names the messenger “Nephi,” with a later revision in an unknown hand to Moroni. Oliver Cowdery’s account, also, claims that the messenger who appeared to Joseph Smith was Moroni. The circa 1832 account also alludes to Moroni as a writer of the plates. Brigham Young noted that Nephi could have also appeared in the vision. Moroni was the main messenger, not Nephi. (Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1 [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1989], 277; Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:223). Later revelations later identified Moroni as the person who revealed the plates to Moroni. Revelations published in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants referred to the messenger who appeared to Smith as Moroni. One revelation was published in the *Latter-day Saints’ Evening and Morning Star* in August of 1830, while the second revelation was published in the 1844 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (Robin Scott Jensen, Richard E. Turley, Jr., and Riley M. Lorimer, eds., *Revelations and Translations: Vol. 2: Published Revelations*, The Joseph Smith Papers [Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2009], 277, 687).

³² Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:58.

the world to confound the things which are mighty.”³³ The assignment would result in people calling Joseph both good and evil for the work which he was asked to perform.³⁴

Joseph’s first task was to retrieve gold plates that had been deposited in a hill in “the Town of Manchester Ontario County N.Y.”³⁵ The plates were the writings of the ancient inhabitants of the American continent, and contained a history of people including “their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people.”³⁶ “He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants.”³⁷ Accompanying the plates was ancient instrument in form like spectacles. Possession of this instrument “constituted seers in ancient or former times,” and it was preserved to assist in translating the record from its ancient writing.³⁸ The entirety of the plates would be translated except for a sealed portion, which contained the same revelation given to the apostle John on the isle of Patmos. The sealed section would come forth when the people were deemed worthy.³⁹

Moroni proceeded to prophesy and teach about other topics including events preceding the Second Coming of Christ, as well as Christ’s millennial ministry. The prophecies were mainly recitations of Old Testament prophecies, at times with slight variations of the scriptures. The verses quoted or referenced included Malachi 3 and 4; Acts 3:22-23; Isaiah 11, Joel 2:28-32, Isaiah 29:11, 13-14.⁴⁰

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 1:222–223.

³⁵ Ibid., 1:14, 232–233.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:495, 509.

³⁷ Ibid., 1:222.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 1:59.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:222–225.; For a complete list, see Kent P. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” in *The Pearl of Great Price*, ed by. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, vol. 2, Studies in Scriptures (Salt Lake City: Randall Books, 1985), 348–360.

The messenger ended the vision by telling Joseph not to show the contents from the hill to anybody, unless instructed by God. Disobedience to this counsel would result in his destruction. Finally, Moroni gave a detailed recitation of where the plates were hidden, which included a vision of the location of the plates opened to Joseph's view, so he could locate the place and retrieve the plates.⁴¹ At the end of the vision, the light began to gather around the angel, and a heavenly conduit opened through which the angel ascended.⁴² As the dark night filled the room, Joseph continued to reflect and ponder on the events which had just transpired.

To his surprise, a light appeared in the room a second time interrupting his meditation. At the light's apex, the angel appeared by Joseph's bedside and recited the same message from the previous visit with one additional segment about the "great judgements which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence, and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation."⁴³ After completing his message, Moroni ascended to heaven as he had done previously.

After these two visitations from the angel, sleep fled from Joseph's eyes, replaced with musings about the message from the angel.⁴⁴ To his astonishment, the angel appeared a third time and rehearsed the message again. The third encounter added a caution: the plates were to be used only for the purposes which God had designed, not for economic gain or prosperity. Satan would tempt him with these enticements, but Joseph needed to focus on the purposes of God or he would not obtain the plates.⁴⁵ After completing his message, the angel left Joseph again.

Almost immediately following the third visit, the crow of the rooster sounded in Joseph's ears,

⁴¹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:60, 227.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1:226–227.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1:226.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:226–227.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:230–231.

meaning the “interviews must have occupied the whole of that night.”⁴⁶ A sleepless Joseph arose from bed and went to work on the family farm for the day.

Strength, though, evaded him. At one point, Joseph stopped working either from fatigue or contemplation about the message. “We must not slacken our hands or we will not be able to complete our task,” chided his brother, Alvin.⁴⁷ Joseph continued to work, but a short time later stopped again. The second stoppage drew Joseph Smith, Sr.’s concern. As he looked at the young man, he noticed Joseph’s pale countenance and assumed illness. Deemed unable to work, the young Joseph returned home to rest.⁴⁸ During the walk home, his strength entirely failed him and he collapsed to the ground.

Unconsciousness enveloped him. Moroni appeared again to the young man and called him by name and rehearsed the same message from the previous night - making this appearance the fourth time Joseph heard the message.⁴⁹ ““Why did you not tell your father that which I commanded you to tell him?’ Joseph replied, ‘I was afraid my father would not believe me.’ The angel rejoined, ‘He will believe every word you say to him.’”⁵⁰ Joseph promised to tell his father about the visions the previous evening.

Joseph returned to the area his father had been working and found that he had returned home because he did not feel well. Joseph asked Alvin to find Joseph, Sr. and send him back to the field because the younger Joseph had “something of great importance to communicate to him.”⁵¹ When Joseph, Sr. found his son, Joseph related the events of the previous evening. His

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:230.

⁴⁷ Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations*, 82.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 81; Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:230.

⁴⁹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:230–231.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations*, 82. Lucy claims that Moroni asked Joseph about telling his father first, but Joseph’s 1839 account reverses the order. In order to perceive Joseph’s thoughts better I follow his order of the events.

⁵¹ Ibid.

father wept and declared the message to be of God.⁵² He “charged him not to fail in attending strictly to the instruction which he had received from this heavenly messenger.”⁵³ Joseph departed to find the hill.

Three miles southeast of the Joseph Smith, Sr. farm, and four miles south of Palmyra lies a hill about 100 feet high.⁵⁴ In a description of the hill, Oliver Cowdery wrote, “The north end rises quite sudden until it assumes a level with the more southernly extremity, and I think I may say an elevation higher than at the south a short distance, say half or three fourths of a mile. As you pass toward Canandaigua [to the south] it lessens gradually until the surface assumes its common level.”⁵⁵ The hill later became known as Cumorah, based upon the conclusion of The Book of Mormon. Joseph instantly recognized the place where the plates lay buried from vision he saw while conversing with by the angel.⁵⁶

Walking the three miles from his home to the hill emotionally taxed Joseph as Moroni’s prophecy came true. Satan tempted Joseph to use the plates to alleviate some of the financial burdens upon his family. The idea enticed Joseph. Conversely, the directions from the messenger weighed on Joseph’s mind that the record was to be used for divine purposes. The young man vacillated between good and evil as he strode toward the knoll.⁵⁷ Finally, the temptation became too great for the young man as he “saught the Plates to obtain riches.”⁵⁸

⁵² Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:117.

⁵³ Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations*, 82.

⁵⁴ Rex C. Reeve, Jr. and Richard C. Cowan, “The Hill Called Cumorah,” in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*, ed by. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Provo, Utah: BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine, 1992), 72; For a more descriptive explanation, see Cameron J. Packer, “A Study of the Hill Cumorah: A Significant Latter-day Saint Landmark in Western New York” (Thesis, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2002), 7–11.

⁵⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:76.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:232–233.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:82.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:14.

Near the top of the west side of the Hill Cumorah laid a stone which “was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edges all round was covered with earth.”⁵⁹ Joseph located the stone and found something to leverage the rock from the earth, revealing a box in the ground. “The box...was formed by laying stones together in some kind of cement, in the bottom of the box were laid two stones crossways of the box.”⁶⁰ Peering down into the box, Joseph saw all the contents identified by Moroni and recognized the opportunity for wealth presented with the treasure. With aspirations of monetary gain haunting him, Joseph reached into the box to obtain the plates and other artifacts.⁶¹

As his hands reached into the box, a shock went throughout his entire body. Surprised by the action, he attempted to retrieve the plates a second time. A similar result occurred. He determined stronger physical exertion would enable him to possess the record. Joseph reached a third time into the box with “increased exertion” which resulted in another shock. For a moment he wondered whether seeing the plates was “a dreem of Vision but when I considred I knew that it was not.”⁶² Finally, in exasperation he pled, “why can I not obtain the book?”⁶³

“Because you have not kept the commandments of the Lord,” answered a calm voice behind him. He turned to find the angel from the previous night before him again. “In an instant, all the former instructions, the great intelligence concerning Israel and the last days, were brought to his mind: he thought of the time when his heart was fervently engaged in prayer to the Lord, when his spirit was contrite, and when his holy messenger, from the skies unfold[ed] the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:232.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:82.

⁶² Ibid., 1:14.

⁶³ Ibid., 1:83.

wonderful things connected with the record.”⁶⁴ Joseph recognized his own failings of disobeying the instructions of the angel and seeking the plates for riches.

Immediately, Joseph prayed to God for forgiveness of his sins. The gloom Joseph felt eventually began to melt away, the Spirit of the Lord filled him, and another vision opened to his view. The glory of God surrounded him, and he understood the mercy and grace of divinity. “Look!” rang the angel’s voice breaking the blissful state.⁶⁵ Joseph turned to discover Satan and his minions in the torment and anguish-filled depths of hell. “All this is shown, the good and the evill, the holy and impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one” explained the angel.⁶⁶

The angel reiterated the instruction that the plates were to be used only for the purposes of God – not wealth or gain. The record held value only to the inhabitants of the world because of the content, not their material value. Moroni reminded Joseph that the record contained the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and because of their sacred nature only one who was pure in heart and focused on the work of God could obtain the plates. Since Joseph had not kept the commandments of God, he could not obtain the record at that time.⁶⁷

Moroni warned Joseph that individuals would oppose the work and ridicule him. Even amidst these persecutions and trials, Joseph would be commended by others for the work about to be accomplished. Moroni charged Joseph to strive to keep the commandments and follow the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that the angel in Nephi’s Book of Mormon vision of the tree of life issued the same charge throughout the vision as he directed Nephi to various scenes. (Joseph Smith, trans by., *The Book of Mormon*, 1st ed. [Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830], 24).

⁶⁶ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83; The Messenger and Advocate account corrects the spelling of “evill” to its proper form “evil”. See Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 198.

⁶⁷ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:84.

ways of the Lord, and then he would obtain the record.⁶⁸ He prophesied that “When they are interpreted the Lord will give the holy priesthood to some, and they shall begin to proclaim this gospel and baptize by water, and after they shall have power to give the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. Then will persecution rage more and more...when this takes place, and all things are prepared, the ten tribes of Israel will be revealed in the north country.”⁶⁹ The young man would need to return the following year at the same time for further instruction. After meeting Moroni each year at the hill, Joseph finally received the plates four years later in 1827.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1:84–85.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:85.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORIOGRAPHY, PURPOSE, AND METHODOLOGY

Joseph Smith's 1823 visions have become a polarizing topic within the study of Mormon history. Scholars have used the vision either to prove or to disprove Joseph's prophetic claims. Over forty biographies of Joseph Smith have been published. Most, if not all, mention the visions of Moroni and their influence upon Smith. The works cited in the historiography represent some of the more significant works.

Historiography

The first writer to examine Mormonism and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in depth was a contemporary of Joseph Smith's, E.D. Howe.¹ His work, *Mormonism Unveiled*, portrayed Joseph as an imposter who deceived many people to follow him. The book seeks to warn those desiring to join the faith. "Our object, therefore, in the present undertaking, will not be so much to break the spell which has already seized and taken possession of great numbers of people in our enlightened country, as to raise a warning voice, to those who are yet liable, through a want of correct knowledge of the imposition, to be enclosed within its fetters."²

His evaluation inaccurately depicts details of the vision including the first vision of Moroni occurring two years prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, and the angel asking for both his wife and first born son to attend later interviews.³ The book, though, adds valuable insights to Joseph's treasure seeking and use of magical instruments. Howe viewed the Second Vision as a result of Joseph's treasure seeking, claiming the vision morphed from a

¹ Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time: With Sketches of the Characters of Its Propagators ...* (Printed and Pub. by the Author, 1834).

² *Ibid.*, ix.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

money-seeking expedition to a religious event.⁴ The work also adds valuable accounts of the Second Vision from others, including Willard Chase, who included many treasure seeking motifs, including the angel initially appearing as a toad, and the plates moving when Joseph set them down.⁵

George Q. Cannon produced a more sympathetic view of Joseph, which addressed a believing Mormon audience.⁶ Even though Cannon acknowledged Joseph's human elements, he still placed Smith on a pedestal. He wanted to view Joseph "as he towered in the full radiance of his labors; see him the reconciler of divergent sects and doctrines, the oracle of the Almighty to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples."⁷ This sympathetic view displays itself throughout his recounting of the vision. He views Joseph's sins that led to prayer as transgressions due to inexperience and associations rather than grievous sins against God.⁸ He also exaggerates Moroni's stature, claiming he was larger than a normal size man, while Oliver Cowdery specifically states he was the size of normal man.⁹ Even with the inconsistencies, the biography has become a timeless testimony of Joseph Smith for believing Latter-day Saints.

The first academic study of the life of Joseph Smith came from I. Woodbridge Riley, who evaluates the vision "by applying the principles of modern psychology of religion, as derived from cold-blooded statistics."¹⁰ Riley deemed Joseph's conversion normal, "but the accompanying visions put him in the rarer third of youth who have dreams and hallucinations."¹¹ Riley diagnosed Joseph with inherited emotional instability from Lucy, which was exacerbated

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 241–244.

⁶ George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet*. (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888).

⁷ Ibid., xxv.

⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰ I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: a Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1902), 58–59.

¹¹ Ibid., 60.

with Joseph's apparent alcohol usage.¹² After dismissing claims that Joseph invented the visions, he presents his final analysis, stating: "There is no call for so harsh a judgment: the visionary seizures were not consequent on dementia, nor were they feigned. There is a truer and, at the same time, more charitable explanation,- it is, in a word, that Joseph Smith, junior, was an epileptic."¹³

One of Riley's underlying questions was the veracity of the vision, which B.H. Roberts continued to examine. His sympathetic approach becomes evident from the opening paragraph of his comprehensive history of the LDS Church: "The length of time between his visions strongly argues for the reality of the first one."¹⁴ Roberts' account follows Joseph's recounting of the experience fairly closely. His ability to discuss controversial aspects separated Roberts from previous sympathetic authors. He addressed Joseph's treasure seeking while working for Josiah Stool [Stowell], but limited Joseph's participation to one month.¹⁵ In a note, Roberts briefly analyzed the possibility of the vision as a subjective creation of Joseph Smith, but did not flesh out the topic much.¹⁶

John Henry Evans provided another openly sympathetic perspective in an effort "to give such a picture of the Prophet as one of his contemporaries would see, who was interested, but had no axe to grind."¹⁷ The book is organized thematically, with the Second Vision discussion included around Joseph's prophetic and seeric roles. 1823 continued a sequence of visionary experiences for Joseph that included the 1820 theophany, with later visions of John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John and Moses, Elias, and Elijah. Visions were the means of Joseph learning

¹² Ibid., 64, 66.

¹³ Ibid., 69–70.

¹⁴ B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1930), 69.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:82.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:83–84.

¹⁷ John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith, an American Prophet*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), viii.

and developing as a prophet and seer. Evans' view of Mormonism relies upon the Moroni visions and coming forth of the Book of Mormon: "Without the Prophet's second vision, or rather series of visions - those in which Moroni figures - there would be no *Book of Mormon*, and in consequence a large slice of Mormon theology would be eliminated."¹⁸

In his dissertation, Larry C. Porter analyzed "the historical origins associated with the rise and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the initial years of the restoration, in New York and Pennsylvania between 1816 and 1831."¹⁹ This study answered questions concerning the background and context of individuals and the collective Church during the Church's formative years.²⁰ His account of the vision provided three helpful additions to the field: first, a detailed explanation of the chronology of events from Moroni's appearance to Joseph retrieving the plates at the Hill Cumorah; second, significant quotations from Joseph's 1838 account; and finally descriptions of the Hill Cumorah from David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery.²¹

Fawn Brodie's work *No Man Knows My History* began a significant pivot in discussions of the vision away from doctrinal influences towards Joseph's magical practices. Brodie's Joseph wanted to do more with his life than farm, which led him to his best opportunity for gaining wealth - treasure hunting, a popular magic activity.²² Initially Joseph did not tell friends and acquaintances of the religious significance of the plates, choosing instead to let others believe they were treasure. As time progressed, the gold plates and interviews with Moroni transformed

¹⁸ Ibid., 333.

¹⁹ Larry C. Porter, "A Study of the Origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816-1831" (Dissertation, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1971), reprint, (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History and BYU Studies, 2000), 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 1.

²¹ Ibid., 23-25.

²² Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, (New York: Knopf, 1979), 18-20.

from a treasure expedition into a religious vision.²³ “Perhaps in the beginning Joseph never intended his stories of golden plates to be taken seriously, but once the masquerade had begun, there was no point at which he could call a halt,” wrote Brodie.²⁴

The magic argument dated back to E.D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled*, which included statements of Willard Chase and other contemporaries of Joseph who claimed that he practiced treasure hunting prior to receiving the plates from Moroni.²⁵ Brodie’s work, though, was the first to include testimonies from Joseph’s 1826 trial. Also, documents that are now standard reading about the Moroni visions, such as Chase’s statements of Moroni appearing as a toad, and Peter Ingersoll’s statement questioning whether Joseph had the plates, were first reproduced in Brodie’s work.²⁶

Donna Hill used the research of her brother, Marvin Hill, and his research assistant Richard Bennett to create another sympathetic biography of Joseph. She had a twofold view of Joseph as a “builder, despite great adversity, of a highly successful community” and “an inspired spiritual leader who had ordinary human failings.”²⁷ Her view of the vision fits within the second paradigm by acknowledging Joseph’s failings prior to the vision, specifically citing drinking and fighting, but minimizing any significant transgression.²⁸ Hill contributed by accepting that Joseph used a seer stone and sought for treasure. “Perhaps little would have been made of Joseph’s money-digging if he had used a stone in searching for treasure as well as in transcribing the word of God,” wrote Hill.²⁹

²³ Ibid., 37–39.

²⁴ Ibid., 41.

²⁵ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*.

²⁶ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 37–38.

²⁷ Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977), ix.

²⁸ Ibid., 56.

²⁹ Ibid., 67.

Magical interpretations of the vision exploded with D. Michael Quinn's book, entitled *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*.³⁰ Working under the premise that Joseph Smith and early Mormons practiced magic, Quinn stated four theses of the work: "believing in and practicing...magic have never been nonrational, uneducated, or irreligious. Second,...magic rituals rarely substitute for religion. Third, there is a difference between labeling and separating...Fourth, the first generation of Mormons included people with a magic world view that predated Mormonism."³¹ The book expanded the discussion of magic past treasure hunting and seer stones to include lamens, rituals, astrology and other forms of magic. Quinn looked at the 1823 vision as a product of astrology, witchcraft, and magical ritual. The book gave new depth to details mentioned by Brodie, such as repeating dreams, and treasure guardians morphing into animals,³² while introducing the significance of astrology to the vision with his discussion of the autumnal equinox and the full moon on the night of the vision.³³ In many instances, his emphases reflected the tenets of magical and folk religion practices in New York and New England.

Smith's visions of Moroni received new psychological examination from Robert D. Anderson, who offered a psychoanalytic interpretation. This form of study argues "God, supernatural forces, and spiritual experiences exist but are of no interest to the psychobiographer" therefore leaving the researcher to look only at the motivations of the

³⁰ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1987), ix-x; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

³¹ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, xxi-xxii.

³² Quinn's work was released around the time of the discovery of the forged "Salamander letter" by Mark Hofmann. The letter, allegedly written by Martin Harris, stated that Joseph Smith saw a salamander that revealed the plates to him (Richard E. Turley, Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann case* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992], 79-111).

³³ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 143.

subject.³⁴ This led Anderson to query, “if we strip away Joseph Smith’s claims of supernatural guidance, how might his behavior be evaluated?”³⁵ The answer showed Joseph as a “narcissistic personality” that “used the Book of Mormon to express those tendencies.”³⁶ The vision was a product of magical influences. Joseph’s mind created Moroni, then his family reinforced the idea of the messenger, which led Joseph to believe the vision.³⁷ This differed from Riley because of methodology, coupled with Anderson’s attempt to analyze the motivations of Joseph, instead of providing epilepsy as an explanation for the event.

One work that has received less attention but contains a significant section on the vision is Grant Palmer’s work *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*. Palmer argued that Joseph Smith acquired the idea of the Book of Mormon from “The Golden Pot” (“Der Goldne Topf”), a story written by E.T.A. Hoffman.³⁸ The story chronicles a student, Anselmus, who is hired to copy ancient writings for Archivarius Lindhorst, a magician. Palmer connects aspects of the story with the Second Vision, including Joseph receiving a shock, the visitation of angels, the date of the vision, and the message.³⁹ Palmer suggested Joseph had learned of the story from Luman Walters, who, according to Quinn, had taught Joseph many of his magical rituals.⁴⁰ “In the recounting of these experiences, [Joseph] appears to have borrowed many elements of the storyline, terms, and concepts that were familiar to his audience. Over time, the story was

³⁴ Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), xviii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 70–73.

³⁸ Leonard J. Kent and Elizabeth C. Knight, eds., *Selected writings of E.T.A. Hoffman: Volume One, The Tales*, vol. 1 (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 60–136.

³⁹ Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 147–170.

⁴⁰ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 39, 117–121.

altered; one could say that it was gentrified and Christianized much as Joseph himself was,” concluded Palmer.⁴¹

Like Palmer, Ronald V. Huggins relies upon Quinn’s work to provide a magical explanation for the vision. His focus, though, changed from Joseph to Moroni. Huggins believed Joseph’s telling of the vision evolved from treasure seeking adventure to a religious experience.⁴² During the transition, Moroni changed from a treasure guardian to an angel. Using comments from Willard Chase to support his thesis, he concludes that “The angel Moroni began his career as a type of murdered treasure-guardian ghost particularly (though not exclusively) associated with the story of Captain Kidd’s treasure.”⁴³

Evaluation of Joseph’s construction of the vision narrative continued with Mark D. Thomas’ use of New Testament form criticism. Thomas claimed the 1839 account of the vision was the most complete account, but certain aspects of that account could not have occurred until after 1834. The differences led him “to distinguish the original historic core of the visionary narrative and experience from later anachronistic redactions.”⁴⁴ He concludes that Joseph most likely had a visionary experience or, at least, Joseph believed he had a vision.⁴⁵ The core narrative of the vision taught that “Joseph Smith saw what he described as a spirit or angel three times in a dream or vision.”⁴⁶ The angel told or showed Joseph the ancient record and the location of the record, and the importance of the message of the record, which was understood as part of God’s mission to save the world. “The angel or spirit may have cited scripture, but the

⁴¹ Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, 174.

⁴² Ronald V. Huggins, “From Captain Kidd’s Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni : Changing Dramatis Personae in Early Mormonism,” *Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (2003): 19; For a review of Huggins work, see Larry E. Morris, “I Should Have an Eye Single to the Glory of God’: Joseph Smith’s Account of the Angel and the Plates,” *FARMS Review* 17, no. 1 (2005): 11–81.

⁴³ Huggins, “From Captain Kidd’s Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni,” 41.

⁴⁴ Mark D. Thomas, “Form Criticism of Joseph Smith’s 1823 Vision of the Angel Moroni,” *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (2002): 146.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

wording of the citations cannot be recovered.”⁴⁷ Thomas dismisses that portion of the 1839 vision since the aspects of Elijah bringing the Priesthood could not have occurred until 1834.⁴⁸

After Thomas’ brief departure, Dan Vogel’s work returned to the treasure seeking narrative. Vogel’s Joseph “believed that he was called of God, yet occasionally engaged in fraudulent activities in order to preach God’s word as effectively as possible.”⁴⁹ Therefore, Joseph used treasure seeking elements to deceive individuals concerning the 1823 vision. The only religious aspects of the vision were the Urim and Thummim, the prophecy of Malachi 4 with other quotations of scriptures, and Moroni being called an angel, which Joseph added later.⁵⁰ Stripping away those elements of the narrative only leaves a treasure hunting story. Details of the vision – such as the significance of the date, repeating dreams, a toad appearing, and the plates disappearing – support a treasure hunting interpretation. In Vogel’s reconstruction, Joseph lied to his parents on September 22 about the events, and continued to lie and deceive about the subsequent activities. As time grew between witnessing the experience and writing about it, Joseph made the vision appear increasingly religious. The spirit requested his brother Alvin’s presence for the 1824 visit to the hill, yet Alvin died two months after the 1823 visit further proving deception since the angel would have known Alvin would die and therefore would not have requested his presence.⁵¹

Richard Bushman’s recent biography of Joseph Smith analyzed “a side of Joseph Smith not adequately examined in other biographies: his religious thought.”⁵² Bushman’s Joseph is a

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁹ Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), viii.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁵¹ Ibid., 48–49.

⁵² Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xxi. In 1984, Bushman wrote about Joseph Smith and Mormonism prior to 1830 (see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Many of the ideas relating to the Second Vision are the same in both books.

religious outsider, which allowed Joseph to seek for truth through a variety of means including visions, treasure hunting, and Bible reading. 1823 was a watershed year for Joseph. “If Joseph initially understood the First Vision as his conversion, similar to thousands of other evangelical conversions, this vision wrenched Joseph out of any ordinary track.”⁵³ Instead of using his seeric gifts to seek treasure, Moroni showed Joseph his potential as a prophet. He began to learn the path God had laid out for him, which required an end to his treasure hunting pursuits. Joseph, though, could not pull away from the practice during the years following the first meeting with the angel. “By 1826, even Joseph Smith, Sr. had come around to a more biblical conception of Joseph's mission. The plates were seen less and less as a treasure and more and more as a religious history, preparing Joseph to conceive of himself as a translator and prophet.”⁵⁴ Finally in 1827, when he received the plates, Joseph was able to pull away from the practice.

Mark Ashurst-McGee brought the discussion back to Moroni's role in the vision.⁵⁵ Similar to Huggins, Ashurst-McGee evaluated the development of Joseph's characterization of Moroni, arguing two plausible theses explain the angel: either Moroni morphed from treasure-guardian to angel or Joseph consistently depicted him as an angel. He synthesizes those views to ask “Was Moroni initially more meaningful to Joseph Smith as an angel or as a treasure guardian?”⁵⁶ The article argues “for the historical validity of the traditional understanding of Moroni as an angel” by valuing first-hand accounts over second-hand or third-hand accounts, early account over later accounts, and through a folklore analysis.⁵⁷ He concludes that “The real story that emerges from these documents is not that Joseph Smith transformed a treasure

⁵³ Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 44.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

⁵⁵ Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” *FARMS Review of Books* 18, no. 1 (2006): 34–100. Ashurst-McGee originally published the article in 2001 (“Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 39–75. The second article includes two additional postscripts which respond to Ronald Huggins and Dan Vogel.

⁵⁶ Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

guardian into an angel but rather that Moroni has been transformed from an angel into a treasure guardian by a set of early critics and those historians who have relied on them.”⁵⁸

Samuel L. Brown has recently presented a significantly different view of treasure hunting and the vision by evaluating Joseph’s and early Mormonism’s interest in death.⁵⁹ Previous authors had argued that money acted as Joseph’s only motivation for treasure seeking, but Brown contends money contributed to Joseph’s participation but his interest in death also contributed.⁶⁰ “The Mormon prophet’s quest for buried treasure emphasized the dead and their secret artifacts, as did the religion-building that soon followed.”⁶¹ Treasure digging was a form of grave robbery that Joseph participated in to acquire relics from the dead and understand their use. Speaking of the 1823 vision, Brown wrote “Smith focused considerable attention on the conflict between the two currents in treasure seeking, one the venal and sacrilegious quest for easy money, the other the reverent pursuit of the artifacts of the dead.”⁶² Joseph’s thought that he should obtain the plates for money depicted the first current, while the appearance of Moroni represented the dead who were angry with Joseph for treating the plates lightly. “The book itself emphasized this mandate: this treasure was not to be spent,” wrote Brown.⁶³ Those who obtained the book had to show reverence through prayer and fasting.

Other works have provided further insights to the details of the vision. Richard Bennett argues that the thrice-repeated dream represented the culture, using the repeating dreams in Charles Dicken’s *A Christmas Carol* to support the claim.⁶⁴ H. Donl Peterson gives a helpful

⁵⁸ Ibid., 76–77.

⁵⁹ Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth : Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4–5.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 71.

⁶¹ Ibid., 70.

⁶² Ibid., 76.

⁶³ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁴ Richard E. Bennett, *School of the Prophet : Joseph Smith Learns the First Principles, 1820-1830* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2010), 40.

explanation of the time of the vision. He claims that they happened between midnight and 6 A.M., with the fourth appearance happening around 8 A.M.⁶⁵ Kent P. Jackson also gave a useful explanation of the message of the vision, including a list of the scriptures quoted by Moroni.⁶⁶

Purpose

The major literature has avoided certain aspects of the vision and inaccurately portrayed others. This leaves room for new work and discussion that this thesis seeks to fulfill. Few authors have offered an evaluation within a broad context that comprehends both institutional and folk traditions. This is essential to understanding the origins of Mormonism, because these two influences are the roots of many aspects of the religion.⁶⁷ Most authors evaluate the vision only within the context of treasure seeking culture, omitting discussion of sources of inspiration such as Christian visions and dreams. Richard Bushman argues that Christian conversion dreams and visions have similarities with Joseph's 1820 vision, but claims that the 1823 visions lack parallels. This thesis will reevaluate this claim.⁶⁸

This thesis will provide new perspectives on the significance of the date of the vision (Chapter 3), and thrice-repeated dreams (Chapter 4). Quinn and Palmer both emphasize the importance of September 21. Brodie, Quinn, and Bennett discuss relevancy of thrice-repeated dreams. The thesis will also discuss comments from Oliver Cowdery about the experience being a dream or a vision (Chapter 4), and the angel's message to Joseph (Chapter 5). Each of these aspects will be discussed and compared against folk and institutional cultural beliefs with similar religious experiences.

⁶⁵ H. Donl Peterson, *Moroni: Ancient Prophet, Modern Messenger* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2000), 104.

⁶⁶ Kent P. Jackson, "The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith," in *The Pearl of Great Price*, ed by. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, vol. 2, *Studies in Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: Randall Books, 1985), 348–360.

⁶⁷ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 242–247.

⁶⁸ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed by. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 209; See also Richard Lyman Bushman, "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1998 1997): 183–204.

Like Richard Bushman in *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, I contend that the vision was a distinctly singular and independent creation that drew upon the surrounding culture and environment.⁶⁹ While many aspects appear as products of the culture, Joseph's vision appears similar only on the surface; an evaluation of details reveals significant differences between Joseph's vision and other religious experiences. Whether Smith's Moroni stories were the result of actual encounters with a messenger, hallucinations, or pure fabrications, they conveyed something more than the visionary culture that surrounded him.

Methodology

I intend to create an objective view of post-Revolutionary America and of Joseph Smith. While a completely unfiltered view of the time is impossible, some methodological axioms can significantly bring more academic balance.

The preeminent methodological question is whether Joseph actually had the vision. The historiography of the subject includes divergent opinions on the matter. However, this thesis will approach the topic as though Joseph experienced a religious vision or dream, since he apparently believed it actually occurred that evening. Even Fawn Brodie, who asserted that Joseph Smith invented the experience, held that he came to believe his story.⁷⁰ Further, placing purportedly, supposedly or other similar words would become cumbersome stylistically. Questioning the veracity of Joseph's vision would not reflect how he viewed the vision.

While many additional scholars accept that Joseph believed he had a vision, this is a significant methodological decision. As the literature has expressed, many times when dealing with supernatural or religious experiences the natural instinct of a scholar is disbelief. The

⁶⁹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 7-8.

⁷⁰ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, vii-ix.

scholar then works from that position to examine other aspects associated with the experience.⁷¹ Taking this view to the extreme can be hazardous to understanding the culture and thoughts associated with the supernatural experience. As sociologist of religion Rodney Stark noted, “methodological agnosticism represents good science, but methodological atheism and theism are unscientific.”⁷² The prevailing idea surrounding supernatural activity is “Why do people who should know better insist on claiming such experiences and making such interpretations of them?”⁷³ Many academics have constructed a world that dismisses the possibility of supernatural activity because of the impossibility of scientific proof.

Stark answered by theorizing that revelations could occur not only with deceptive frauds and mentally ill individuals, but also with normal people who talk to God and maintain rational thought afterwards.⁷⁴ Revelations in this category occur more frequently when the culture supports or encourages supernatural experiences and the revelator interacts with another person who receives or received similar communications. Stark uses the 1823 vision as an example of such revelations.⁷⁵

This approach is not without precedent. Richard Bushman approached Joseph in the same manner. “To blur the distinction – to insist that Smith devised every revelation himself – obscures the very quality that made the Prophet powerful.”⁷⁶ Mark Thomas concurred that Joseph believed that he had a visionary experience.⁷⁷ Therefore, it seems disingenuous to simply dismiss Joseph’s vision, and other contemporary visions, as deceptions or mere fantasy.

⁷¹ David J. Hufford, "Traditions of Disbelief," *New York Folklore* 8, no. 3-4 (Winter 1982): 47.

⁷² Rodney Stark, "A Theory of Revelations," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (1999): 288.

⁷³ David J. Hufford, "Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology Versus Folk Belief," *New York Folklore* 11, no. 1-4 (1985): 179.

⁷⁴ Stark: 305.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith, Rough Stone Rolling, a Cultural Biography of Mormonism's Founder* (New York: Knopf, 2005), xxi.

⁷⁷ Thomas, "Form Criticism of Joseph Smith's 1823 Vision of the Angel Moroni," 156.

One of the great debates among scholars regards the relationship of magic and religion, and usage of the terms. Stephen Ricks and Daniel Peterson suggest simply avoiding the term in academic discussion due to its pejorative nature.⁷⁸ The term “magic” carries many preconceived notions, usually associated with production magic. Magic, as a term, cannot be avoided since early Americans used it as part of the culture. Books which taught magical rituals used the term, as did pastors.⁷⁹ Similar to the previous issues discussed, avoiding usage with terms such as folk religion or common religion, obscures nineteenth century culture for the reader.

Separating religion and magic is nearly impossible; the two are inseparably connected within the culture. William Barrett, the author of a nineteenth-century book on magical rituals, stated “the true magician is the truest Christian and nearest disciple of our blessed Lord, who set the example we ought to follow.”⁸⁰ Agrippa’s *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* viewed magic as the combination of natural mathematical philosophy with religion.⁸¹ While magicians fully viewed themselves as Christian, pastors condemned their acts as not from God.⁸² Those outside of magic struggled to differentiate magic and Christianity, while practitioners saw harmony. Both sought supernatural experiences through their rituals. A Christian prayed for a heavenly vision, while a magician would use a ritual circle or rod. What made a prayer overtly Christian, but not magic? In Mormon terms, what was the difference between a seer stone and the Urim and Thummim? The maxim of one man’s magic is another man’s religion appears true.⁸³

⁷⁸ Stephen D. and Daniel C. Peterson Ricks, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *To Be Learned Is Good If...*, ed. Robert L. Millett (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1987).

⁷⁹ One example of contemporaries using the term comes from Francis Barrett, *The Magus, Or Celestial Intelligencer; Being a Complete System of Occult Philosophy* (London: Lackington, Allen and Co., 1801), xiii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁸¹ Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed by. Donald Tyson (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1993), 689.

⁸² Frederick Henry Quitman, *A Treatise on Magic, or, on the Intercourse between Spirits and Men with Annotations* (Albany: Balance Press, 1810), 5.

⁸³ David J. Whittaker, “Magic, Folk Religion, and the Origins of Mormonism: Some Bibliographic Suggestions on Some New Questions,” *Unpublished Article* (August 1985).

The dilemma continues in modern research. Jon Butler defined religion as things “associated with supernaturalism, with supernatural beliefs, and with the conviction that supernatural beings and power can and do affect life as humans know it.”⁸⁴ Mark Ashurst-McGee, though, points out that “magic is usually more manipulative and coercive as opposed to religion being more supplicative and submissive.”⁸⁵ Nineteenth-century definitions of magic tended to agree with Butler’s analysis. Frederick Henry Quitman, while condemning the practice, defined magic as “producing supernatural activities, effects, by the agency of spirits.”⁸⁶ Noah Webster pointed to supernatural influences in his dictionary entry entitled magic.⁸⁷

Both Christianity and magic seek the supernatural. Only outcome separates the means. Christianity encourages individuals to join an institution, while magic lacks formal organization.⁸⁸ Dreams commonly depict this separation. Two individuals could experience a dream; one would be deemed Christian and the other deemed magic. If the person claimed the dream converted and brought the person closer to Christ, pastors seemed more inclined to accept the means. Conversely, if the dream produced treasure seeking opportunities, condemnation ensued. Since both fields allow for supernatural experiences, how the religious experience is used must differentiate the two concepts. Instruments assisted in magical work. Treasure seekers used rods and seer stones to create experiences or confirm their experiences. Evangelical visionaries never used instruments outside of the institutionally accepted individual prayer. It seems that, for this discussion, the best definition for religion and magic is simply supernatural activity with the outcome separating the two concepts.

⁸⁴ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 3.

⁸⁵ Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet” (Master’s Thesis, Utah State University, 2000), 41.

⁸⁶ Quitman, 1.

⁸⁷ Noah Webster, “An American Dictionary of the English Language” (New York: S. Converse, 1828).

⁸⁸ Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: a History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4.

In this study, religion is defined as any supernatural activity. David Hufford identified supernatural as “god(s), angels, souls, so forth.”⁸⁹ I have accepted that definition. This definition allows flexibility to use the term according to ideas and thoughts associated with contemporary practices. Since many experiences will be evaluated throughout the project, supernatural will need to cover many different concepts. It also allows for both institutional and folk experiences to be included, which was representative of the culture.

⁸⁹ Hufford, "Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology Versus Folk Belief," 177.

CHAPTER TWO

“YES, WE ARE A VISIONARY HOUSE”: THE JOSEPH SMITH, SR. FAMILY’S PLACE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY RELIGIOUS CULTURE

Post-Revolutionary America increasingly accepted and, at times, encouraged visions and dreams in post-Revolutionary America. Preachers, at one time, sought to minimize the legitimacy of dreams, but the rise of democracy and an egalitarian society moved fringe religious practices from marginal positions toward wider acceptance among evangelicals.¹ These practices included “uncontrolled bodily movements (fits, bodily exercises, falling as dead, catalepsy, convulsions); spontaneous vocalizations (crying out, shouting speaking in tongues); unusual sensory experiences (trances, visions, voices, clairvoyance, out-of-body experiences; and alterations of consciousness and/or memory (dreams, somnium, somnambulism, mesmeric trance, mediumistic trance, hypnotism, possession, alternating personality),” known as religious enthusiasm as well as treasure seeking.² The Smith family found themselves as participants in some facets of this culture, creating the ideal circumstances for Joseph Smith, Jr.’s 1823 vision to occur.

¹ Defining evangelism is complex because of its fluid nature throughout the early stages of colonial America and the new republic (Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening : the Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007], xiv). Most visionaries did not identify a religious preference, so in this chapter evangelical includes most Protestant religions. Methodist visionaries included Lorenzo Dow (*History of Cosmopolite: Or, The Four Volumes of Lorenzo’s Journal* [Joseph Rakestraw, 1816]), and Benjamin Abbott (*The Experience, and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott* [New York: Published by Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813]), The term also includes revivalists such as Charles Finney (*Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney* [New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1876]). Some visionaries associated with multiple Protestant groups, such as Norris Stearns (*The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command* [Greenfield, Mass.: Denio & Phelps, 1815]) whose father was a Baptist, but he felt inclined to join Methodism. Generally, the term excluded Catholics. Shaker visions were not included in this study.

² Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions : Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.

Colonial Religion

During the Great Awakening in New England, preacher-led revivals assisted individuals in becoming converted to Jesus Christ and his gospel, but brought the unintended consequences of religious enthusiasm.³ In Northampton, Massachusetts, Jonathan Edwards tried to foster a better attitude about religion among teens, but after sermons at the funerals of two young people, conversions became rampant as well as spectacular manifestations of the Holy Ghost, including visions. The revivals produced staggering results, three hundred converts over six months which nearly doubled the size of the congregation, but also bred a significant amount of enthusiasm, which drew the ire of critics.⁴

These critics were labeled formalists or antirevivalists, while those sympathetic to these experiences were categorized radicals or enthusiasts. In formalists' eyes, enthusiasm was delusional and fostered unrealistic communication with Deity through naturalistic occurrences of imagination.⁵ One of the strongest opponents of enthusiasm, Charles Chauncy, explained enthusiasm as a product of an overactive imagination, meaning enthusiasts believed they had communicated with God when they had actually imagined the event, caused by "a bad temperament of the blood and spirits; 'tis properly a disease, a sort of madness:." ⁶ Further, these experiences disrupted the order of the church, violated the commandments of God, offended the

³ Jon Butler ("Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 [September 1982]: 305–325) argues that the term Great Awakening is a nineteenth-century historical creation; I have followed Thomas Kidd's approach (*The Great Awakening*, xviii), which accepts the term but does not limit the events to the 1740s. Usage of the term also assists in clarification of a limited discussion within the chapter.

⁴ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 16–20; See also George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards : A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 150–169.

⁵ Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 3, 17–20.

⁶ Charles Chauncy, *Enthusiasm Described and Caution'd Against*. (Boston: J. Draper, 1742), iv, 3.

Spirit and needed to be prevented.⁷ Some blamed preachers for creating the problem through rhetorical strategies, personal desires for enthusiasm, or boisterous movements.⁸

Among the culprits of these actions was Jonathan Edwards, who actually denounced enthusiasm depending on the circumstance. The issue was complex for Edwards. Practitioners in his Northampton congregation experienced spiritual transformations accompanied with religious enthusiasm, yet other clergy decried these experiences as foolishness and heresy.⁹ In order to balance the competing ideals, Edwards argued that the presence of enthusiasm did not eliminate the role of the Holy Spirit; instead, visions and bodily movements were an indirect result of feeling the Holy Spirit, and crying out was appropriate when individuals began to understand their own wickedness and depravity before God. "Although Edwards exhibited a relative patience for radicals, he fundamentally preferred an orderly, hierarchal, and socially conservative awakening," explained historian Thomas Kidd.¹⁰ If the experience glorified God, then Edwards accepted the emotional display, but if it only encouraged personal aggrandizement than he rejected the experience.¹¹

Edwards and Chauncy's positions highlight a complex and multifaceted view of the effectiveness of revivals and enthusiasm. The debate clarified little, but demonstrated tension between antirevivalists and moderates. The issue became more complex with the continued effectiveness of revivals when enthusiasm occurred. According to Kidd, "The antirevivalists tried to highlight the role of enthusiasm in order to denounce the revivals generally, while the moderate evangelicals denied that manifestations of revivalism continued to appear, and in the later stages of the revivals of the 1740s, it seemed that only the radicals had much success in

⁷ Ibid., 13–14.

⁸ Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 24, 31.

⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 158, 161.

¹⁰ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 159. See also Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions*, 34.

¹¹ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 20–21.

continuing to promote awakenings.”¹² The victims in the debate were the parishioners who experienced dramatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit, but were marginalized or rejected by cleric authority. In the end, cleric attempts to dissuade practitioners and moderates from enthusiasm failed; enthusiasm had found a place within religion as a means of converting individuals.

The American Revolution

As the debate over enthusiasm demonstrated, tensions often existed between clergy and practitioners, with the former attempting to limit the latter’s role within evangelicalism. The American Revolution, though, changed the landscape of evangelicalism as the democratic undercurrents displayed during the eighteenth-century gave way to increased and unrestrained egalitarianism. According to Gordon Wood,

The older hierarchical and homogeneous society of the 18th century - a patronage world of personal influence and vertical connections whose only meaningful horizontal cleavage was that between gentlemen and common people- this old society, weaker in American and never as finely calibrated as in England, now finally fell apart, beset by forces released and accelerated by the Revolution, to be replaced over the subsequent decades with new social relationships and new ideas and attitudes, including a radical blurring of the distinction between gentlemen and the rest of society.¹³

The Revolution led to a loss of control of the rising generation as youth displayed independence by regarding the influence, direction and support of peers over their parents.¹⁴ Democracy and the Constitution fostered the spirit of independence, subsequently giving people new opportunities including increased education through literacy, and political participation by common people. As individuals eagerly joined the political and intellectual discussion, idea

¹² Ibid., 173.

¹³ Gordon S. Wood, “The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution,” in *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1974), 73.

¹⁴ Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution : The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2000), 3, 19.

origination moved from a product of elites to creations of common people who possessed little formal education.¹⁵

The Great Awakening demonstrated fundamental egalitarian tendencies among evangelicals as parishioners adjusted thinking on enthusiasm through their own experiences, therefore the Revolution was not as dramatic of a transformation within evangelism as other aspects of society, but it still adjusted the social order.¹⁶ Enthusiasm challenged the hierarchal structure by claiming common individuals had a right to direction from God, expanding the right past the clerical elite.¹⁷ “America's nonrestrictive environment permitted an unexpected and often explosive conjunction of evangelical fervor and popular sovereignty,” stated historian Nathan Hatch.¹⁸ Individuals experimented with ways to participate in religion and changed the role of leadership to accommodate the increasingly egalitarian culture.¹⁹

The changes demonstrated themselves within clerical ranks as people wanted a more homogeneous society where leaders and clergy, who represented an elite class, no longer spoke for the diverse community.²⁰ The number of clergy swelled after the Revolution, filled with common people, especially youth, who felt the need to preach the gospel after their conversion, but lacked formal preparation and education.²¹ “There may be, perhaps, 1500 besides, who are nominally ministers of the Gospel. But they are generally illiterate men, often not possessed of a good English education, and in some instances unable to read or write....With few exceptions, they are utterly unacquainted with Theology, and like other men are devoted through the week to secular employment and preach on the Sabbath, with such preparation as such an education and

¹⁵ Wood, “The Democratization of Mind in the American Revolution,” 73, 80.

¹⁶ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 289.

¹⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 45; Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 286–287.

¹⁸ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4; Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution*, 117.

avocations will allow,” stated Yale President Lyman Beecher in his call for more educated clergy.²² Despite Beecher’s disdain for common preachers, many felt common folk were better equipped to communicate with Deity, through individual Bible study, and personal revelation manifested in dreams, visions and other enthusiastic methods.²³ Structural looseness and congregation participation in camp meetings promoted the egalitarian cause, while diminishing the influence of the clerical elite.²⁴ The religious views of the early Republic became the views of the people, meaning the enthusiastic experiences that had been viewed with disdain were now accepted as a part of Christianity.

Evangelical Visions and Dreams

Itinerants of the early Republic not only accepted enthusiastic experiences, but also encouraged them as an essential part of Christianity. Instead of scrutinizing and comparing experiences against church doctrine, preachers, itinerants, and participants accepted experiences at face value as communications from God - not products of delusion.²⁵ Among the most prominent forms of revelation and enthusiasm were personal dreams.²⁶ “Scores of preachers’ journals, from Methodists and Baptists, from north and south, from white and black, indicated a ready acceptance to consider dreams and visions as inspired by God, normal manifestations of divine guidance and instruction,” wrote Nathan Hatch.²⁷ Confidence in dreams naturally grew

²² Lyman Beecher, *An Address of the Charitable Society for the Education of Indigent Pious Young Men, for the Ministry of the Gospel* (New Haven, Connecticut: Education Society of Connecticut, 1814), 5–6.

²³ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46, 50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: the Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 182.

²⁷ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 10.

from a belief that the Bible and prayer conveyed revelation, thus dreams became equitable with those revelatory mediums as a part of daily religiosity.²⁸

The eagerness of individuals seeking dreams was exemplified by Jonathan Plummer who received dreams conveying messages from God, but the dreams lack any visual material common in other experiences. The “dreams” were short, pithy statements impressed on his mind during sleep.²⁹ His willingness to categorize his revelations as dreams represented a culture that encouraged divine communication through this means. The regularity of dreams is further exhibited in the amount of pamphlets, newspaper articles, and autobiographies that mention dreams or visions as part of an individual’s spiritual conversion.

Various forms of dreams occurred to enlighten individuals, some of the dreams communicated only simple messages of direction for the dreamer. Individuals believed that the dreams foretold future events, as one couplet illustrated:

“Saturday’s night’s dream, Sunday morning told,
Was sure to come to pass before a week old.”³⁰

Itinerant Lorenzo Dow recorded many of these dreams. In one instance, he mentioned viewing a dream that instructed him to preach in another town. The following day, Dow departed.³¹

Benjamin Abbott dreamt he needed to visit “Mr. T-,” and obeyed.³² These mundane revelations were usually recorded without much, but affirmed the revelatory capability of dreams

Dreamers and visionaries rarely focused attention upon worldly categorizations, such as gender, location, or social class. The experiences occurred rather equally among men and

²⁸ Ann Kirschner, “‘God Visited My Slumber’: The Intersection of Dreams, Religion, and Society in America, 1770-1830” (Ph.D., Delaware: University of Delaware, 2004), 5–6, 26; Alan Taylor, “The Free Seekers: Religious Culture in Upstate New York, 1790-1835,” *Journal of Mormon History* 27, no. 1 (2001): 51.

²⁹ Jonathan Plummer, *A Vastly Remarkable Conversion*, 1818.

³⁰ Warren Robert Cochrane, *History of the Town of Antrim, New Hampshire: From Its Earliest Settlement to June 27, 1877, with a Brief Genealogical Record of All the Antrim Families* (Mirror Steam Printing Press, 1880), 316.

³¹ Dow, *History of Cosmopolite*, 106.

³² Abbott, *The Experience, and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott*, 322.

women, while actually empowering women, though they rarely became preachers.³³ Visionaries rarely specified locations of where the vision occurred, while printed pamphlets could be produced in multiple locations over the years, which demonstrated widespread nature of the visionary culture.³⁴ When coupled with the open discourse among preachers during the revival years, the location became even less significant.³⁵ Even social status was often ignored by visionaries, choosing instead to make the primal focus matters of religious importance, most notably the state of either the visionaries' or another's soul.³⁶

For many the goal of dreams was to become converted and strengthen their faith and devotion.³⁷ The general conversion experience usually contained five stages, which were identified by historian Virginia Lieson Brereton: "(1) life before the conversion process began, when narrators more or less ignored the question of salvation; (2) a period when narrators became acutely aware of their sinfulness and of the possibility they would be damned forever; (3) the surrender to God's will in conversion proper, during which converts felt the oppressive sense of sinfulness lifted and gained confidence or at least hope that they were saved; (4) a description of the narrator's changed behavior and attitudes, resulting from conversion; and (5)

³³ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed by Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 202; Susan Juster, "To Slay the Beast: Visionary Women in the Early Republic," in *A Mighty Baptism: Race, Gender, and the Creation of American Protestantism*, ed by Susan Juster and Lisa MacFarlane (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 20; Kirschner, "God Visited My Slumber," 158; For the religious experience of women in upstate New York, see Rachel Cope, "In Some Places a Few Drops and Other Places a Plentiful shower: The Religious Impact of Revivalism on Early Nineteenth-Century New York Women" (Ph.D., Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University, 2009).

³⁴ *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision* (Philadelphia: John Cruikshank, 1789); Chloe Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself* (New York: John C. Totton, 1810); Nicodemus Havens, *Wonderful Vision of Nicodemus Havens* (Boston: Coverly, Jr, 1812); Richard Lee, *The Melancholly End of Ungrateful Children* (Rutland, Vermont: Richard Lee, 1795); Hezekiah Goodwin, *A Vision* (New Haven: Josiah Meigs, 1788).

³⁵ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, xvi.

³⁶ Bushman, *Believing History*, 202.

³⁷ For examples of conversion narratives, see Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself*; George De Benneville, *A True and Remarkable Account of Dr. George De Benneville* (Norristown: David Sower, 1800).

an account of periods of discouragement and low spiritual energy followed by renewals of dedication.”³⁸ Visionaries did not identify each stage, but they occurred in most conversion narratives, each containing important aspects in relation to dreams. The second stage, experiencing the depth of sin, occurred prior to the dream or vision. As one newspaper recorded, “The dreamer must feel that sin is a substantial ill, in which himself is fatally implicated, not a mere abstraction to be discoursed of; he must learn that the righteous God deals with mankind on terms perfectly adapted to the intellectual and moral conformation of human nature, of which He is the author; and he must know that salvation is deliverance, in which man is an agent, not less than a recipient.”³⁹ Once the depth of sin weighed upon the individual, the dream occurred as part of the third and fourth stages of conversion, many times with the dreamer meeting Jesus. Most dreams concluded with the charge to share the experience with others, which promoted the acceptance of dreams among evangelicals, since conversion was the most important event in evangelicalism.⁴⁰

Chloe Willey followed this pattern as she recorded her dream of Christ. The first stage contained childhood memories filled with concerns of little importance relating to eternal salvation.⁴¹ A sermon from a local preacher on being Christian and the happiness of that lifestyle inspired her to read the Bible. Reading taught her that she “was a sinner, and must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus;” but she did not know how.⁴² Uneasiness about receiving a forgiveness of sins continued while attending Dartmouth College, even as a number of associates

³⁸ Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation Stories of Women’s Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 6.

³⁹ “Extract from the Natural History of Enthusiasm,” *New York Evangelist* 1, no. 1 (March 6, 1830): 3.

⁴⁰ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 55.

⁴¹ Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself*, 3. She opened her narrative with a near-death experience, which could be construed as salvation centered, but she did not understand the experience that way. She recorded that the doctor told her she was either going to be really good or really bad as individual. The experience appeared to have no lasting influence.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 5.

joined churches.⁴³ Another sermon, this time by a visiting Baptist minister, helped her sincerely recognize that she had not obtained a forgiveness for her sins, but remained in a sinful state. The revelation devastated her. “All the pleasure which I had formerly taken with my companions had now fled and even the sight of my former vanities was truly painful,” she wrote.⁴⁴ She concluded the second stage by expressing horror over her previous lifestyle, and anguish for every sin mentioned in the Bible. During this nadir, she dreamt:

One night, as I retired to pray, I had a most shining view of the justice and holiness of God –of the purity of his nature and character, and of my own criminality. I conceived, that God would be just and glorious, should he lay justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet. I expected soon to be numbered with the congregation of the dead, and the miserable in hell. In this situation, all that I could say was, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” While I was on my knees before God, my Savior spake peace to me in these words: “Behold I have found a ransom. I gave my life to redeem such repenting, returning sinners.” At this there was a strange alteration in my mind: my burden left me: and the view I had of what Christ suffered for sinners, filled me with wonder and surprise. Now greatly did I admire his love, adore his mercy, and long to join the redeemed of the Lord in praising his name.⁴⁵

The vision took her through the third and fourth stages of conversion narratives after realizing the justice of God because her own “criminality” and then submitting to God’s will as a sinner and accepting Christ as her savior. After the vision, she distanced herself from her friends because of their worldly ways, joined the Baptists, and received other visions, which demonstrated the final stage with times of higher and lower devotion.⁴⁶

Willey’s vision of hell closely resembled another common form of dreams – the spiritual journey.⁴⁷ In these dreams, the visionary journeyed through a place, usually heaven or hell, with

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6–7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 7–11.

⁴⁷ Bushman, *Believing History*, 204; Examples of spiritual journeys include Thomas Chamberlain, *America’s Timely Remembrancer; or, the Minister preaching his own Funeral Sermon* (Fredericktown: M. Bartgis, 1794); Mehetable Churchill, *A Remarkable Instance of the Interposition of the Spirit of Grace, to Save from Death a Guilty Sinner* (Smith Warriner, 1783); *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously*

the assistance of a guide. In visions of heaven and hell, the dreamer journeyed through hell feeling the despair and hopelessness of such a dreadful habitation, before the guide moved the person to the sanctity of God's presence, where the person would want to stay, but be forbidden by the guide. Some expeditions took individuals only to heaven, such as one anonymous visionary who journeyed through a mountainous village, meeting individuals and discussing their reasons for inhabiting the area until the visionary viewed a heavenly city where "The mansions were beautiful, adorned with many fine gardens of beautiful flowers."⁴⁸ Others only were carried to the depths of hell, as one visionary saw devils preventing the work of God before seeing interactions between Lucifer and Belzebug.⁴⁹ Participation in Biblical scenes occurred regularly as the dreamer could become a character as in the crowd as Elijah preached or see Daniel in the lion's den.⁵⁰ Many of these dreams converted the recipient to Jesus, but at times the guide simply encouraged the individual to share the message of the vision, formally preach the gospel, or live a more Christian lifestyle.⁵¹

At times, the spiritual journey led an individual through apocalyptic scenes of destruction that stemmed from the condemned ignoring the commandments of God, thus necessitating God's vengeance.⁵² Guides gave dreamers the responsibility to share the vision with the world to encourage repentance and prevent the upcoming destruction.⁵³ In Nicodemus Havens' vision, a

Manifested in a Vision (Philadelphia: John Crukshank, 1789); Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself*, 11–12.

⁴⁸ Anonimus's *Travels. throu Europe and America and Some Visions of Many Heavenly Mansions in the House of God* (Ephrata, 1793), 8.

⁴⁹ Abner Kneeland, *The Olive Branch and Christian Inquirer: Devoted to Science, Religion and Morality*, vol. 1 (A. Kneeland, 1828), 109.

⁵⁰ John Nelson, *An Extract from the Journal of Mr. John Nelson. To Which is Added, A Brief Memoir of His Life and Death* (Liverpool: Nuttall, Fisher, & Dixon, 1807), 137.

⁵¹ Abbott, *The Experience, and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott*, 37–38; John Mills, *Vision of John Mills, in Bedford County, at Virginia, in the Year 1785, 1785; A Warning to Disobedient Youth Being a Relation Concerning a Certain Henry Webb, who was Three Days and Nights in a Trance*. (Carlisle: James Kiteley, 1788).

⁵² Bushman, *Believing History*, 204; Other apocalyptic narratives include Isaac Child, *The Vision of Isaac Child* (Philadelphia: H. Bickley, 1814).

⁵³ Bushman, *Believing History*, 203.

Christian duty persuaded him to share his vision of the end of the world with others. While enjoying the social atmosphere at his father's home, a violent crash followed by trembling of the earth caused the family to be concerned about the end of the world. The shocks continued until Havens was taken "with surprizing velocity" to New York City, where street after street had been leveled by the destruction. Similar scenes ensued at the islands of Jamaica, St. Domingo, Trinidad and St. Bartholomew, as well as London, and Paris.⁵⁴ Only six people survived the destruction at London, because of their piety and willingness to sell *Solemn Warning* by Nimrod Hughes, implying that the righteous were saved from the destruction.⁵⁵ The vision concluded with an increase devotion to God as the survivors erected nineteen thousand chapels in three weeks.⁵⁶ Havens' vision demonstrated many of the themes of Biblical destruction upon nations due to unrighteousness, which occurred regularly throughout apocalyptic narratives. The message of warning intended to motivate people to live more piously, especially the dreamer, as was demonstrated with the building of thousands of chapels.

Each of these visionaries believed that a guide, angel or other being would appear and direct them through the experience. Aaron Warner knew the path during his spiritual journey, but was surprised when a guide did not appear to show him the way.⁵⁷ The guides differed in appearance and style. Some knew the visionary, like Hezekiah Goodwin who knew Mr. Yeamans prior to his death.⁵⁸ Others appeared in resplendent clothing, like the two men in bright clothing in the pamphlet entitled *The Glory of the Heavenly City*.⁵⁹ The reality that angels,

⁵⁴ Havens, *Wonderful Vision of Nicodemus Havens*, 4–8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ Aaron Warner, *A Remarkable Dream, or Vision, Which was Experienced on the Night of the 20th of May, 1799* (Hartford, Connecticut: John Babcock, 1801), 9.

⁵⁸ Goodwin, *A Vision*, 3; See also Lee, *The Melancholly End of Ungrateful Children*, 7.

⁵⁹ *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision*, 5; See also Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command*, 12, and Samuel Ignalls, *A Dream, or Vision*, 1809.

guides, or messengers appeared to people and spoke to them underlined each visionary narrative. Many evangelicals would likely have accepted Joseph Smith's claim that an angel or messenger appeared to him during a vision or dream, because of the cultural tenets.

Even as occurrences, publications, and acceptability of dreams increased during the post-Revolutionary era, some clergy and Christians found the enthusiastic measures unrealistic or unnecessary. Many reports of revivals made deliberate efforts to note the lack of enthusiasm during the camp meeting. One letter to the editor of the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* characterized many individuals' encouragement of conversion, but opposition to enthusiasm:

In the summer of 1810, a certain neighborhood in the town was visited by the Spirit, and about 10 were awakened, and, as we hope added to the Lord. From that time, till June, of the past year, one and another were brought under serious impressions, and expressed a hope that they had passed from death unto life. During the last winter, Christians seemed to be more engaged in religion, and more concerned than usual for the prosperity of the church, and for the salvation of sinners. Prayer meetings were appointed, and attended with solemnity and engagedness. And it appears not, although nothing special was then visible, that the Spirit was secretly operating upon the minds of some...No irregularities of animal passion...no bodily agitation...no ravings of enthusiasm have as yet appeared. It has proceeded with stillness, but not with rapidity.⁶⁰

While the opposition was not as strong as during the Great Awakening, many reports possessed a subtle undertone that conversion should occur independent of enthusiasm, reflecting earlier premonitions about these experiences.

Treasure Seeking

Egalitarian acceptance of non-traditional communication from Deity extended past dreams to other folk beliefs and practices, such as treasure seeking and astrology. Participants drew upon a rich history of folk religion practices dating back to colonial America as well as

⁶⁰ "To the Editor of the Connecticut Magazine," *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine; and Religious Intelligencer* 6, no. 4 (April 1813): 155.

England.⁶¹ The democratic spirit of the new Republic allowed for the continuance of these traditions, but changed their acceptance by curtailing regulations that had kept the practice in the periphery.⁶²

The new Constitution of the United States facilitated one of the first major changes through the First Amendment's freedom for religion and the separation of church and state clauses. The document created a new standard by abstaining from using the title of Christianity or even the name of Deity, instead choosing the nebulous term religion. The change opened a Pandora's Box of possibilities for religious practice as religion no longer had definitive limits or parameters. Religion moved away from the narrow Judeo-Christian model towards an open market of religious ideas associated with things of the spirit as well as of the church. As groups and individuals attempted to revert back to colonial practices of church-oriented religion, Congress rejected the proposals, and held firm with a broad definition of religion.⁶³

Many probably viewed the change as merely cosmetic since individuals thought folk religion practices, such as treasure seeking, were a form of Christianity, which originated with the belief that guardians, such as demons, spirits, or ghosts, haunted the areas surrounding buried treasure.⁶⁴ Not every guardian, however, meant to forever keep his horde from any treasure seeker. "According to folk belief, the soul of a deceased person had to wander until a certain task he had failed to fulfill during his lifetime was complete or some guilt had been expiated," wrote

⁶¹ For an explanation of European treasure seeking and magical practices, see Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: a History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); For an explanation of colonial American folk religion, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989); Herbert Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

⁶² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 36.

⁶³ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 265–266.

⁶⁴ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 61.

historian Johannes Dillinger.⁶⁵ As treasure seekers located the loot, guardians were released from their captivity because it was believed that the new treasure owners would use a portion of the treasure for a positive purpose.⁶⁶ Releasing the soul assisted the wandering soul, leaving the visible world to enter the eternities, thus fulfilling the Christian responsibility to save souls.⁶⁷

The release of the guardian showed how these religious overtones were not just “window dressing,” but deeply Christian rituals for the participants.⁶⁸ Ritual adherence allowed the treasure seeker to physically participate in religion.⁶⁹ If treasure seeking was only a form of Satanic worship, or economic gain, then individuals would not have been concerned with redeeming souls. They would have recoiled at the thought of assisting the work of God; instead many condoned or encouraged the release of souls from their earth-bound state to a heavenly sphere.⁷⁰ Some did not view themselves as greed obsessed individuals, but primarily as treasure seekers who could physically experience assisting in the redemption of souls.⁷¹

For others treasure hunting served a dual purpose of saving souls and reaping economic prosperity.⁷² Not surprisingly many poor men and women, who usually lacked a complete understanding of the new capitalistic economy, were attracted to the activity with hopes of discovering an illusive treasure that would facilitate an improved, financially stable, lifestyle.⁷³ “They were beginning to feel capitalism's imperatives but still thought that sudden wealth could only be had from outside the natural economy. Consequently, they eagerly sought riches but

⁶⁵ Ibid., 73; See also Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” *FARMS Review of Books* 18, no. 1 (2006): 43–47 for additional insights into the different types of treasure guardians.

⁶⁶ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 74.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 78.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Alan Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy : Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830.,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1986): 22.

⁷⁰ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 79.

⁷¹ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 22.

⁷² Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 78; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 8.

⁷³ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 19.

clung to the notion that spiritual beings could assist or retard that acquisition,” noted historian Alan Taylor.⁷⁴ Wealthy people participated, as well, by financing expeditions, but their support was not necessary, leaving a predominant lower economic class to discover the loot.⁷⁵ The irony of this goal was the lack of success in obtaining the treasure; rarely did a person actually discover the treasure on these nighttime excursions.⁷⁶

Treasure hunts usually occurred at night with a varying amount of individuals fulfilling specific roles.⁷⁷ The search began when an individual heard about a treasure through legend or other means, and then persuaded others to participate in the expedition. Individuals were selected by the organizing person, at times through the medium used to locate the treasure, and promised a portion of the treasure.⁷⁸ The assistant dug for the treasure, while the organizing individual served as a seer or rodsman.

Dreams were one of the involuntary methods for locating treasure. Similar to evangelical dreams, these happened at night while the person slept. Eva Marshall dreamt of a tall, thin man with a scar on his face who directed her to a “buried treasure under mottled pebbles, marked by three spears of grass, on the windswept rise in her yard.” The man instructed her to obtain the fortune at midnight. Abiding the instructions, she sent her son and a friend to the spot she saw in her dream, but they got scared by a lightning storm and did not obtain the treasure.⁷⁹ These experiences regularly occurred but were not the most common means of identifying treasure, as most individuals consciously attempted to acquire treasure after hearing a legend or rumor.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁶ I have found only two examples of a successful treasure excursion: Dorothy Dengler, “Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 3, no. August (1946): 176; John Harriott, *Struggles Through Life, Exemplified in the Various Travels and Adventures ... of Lieut. John Harriott*, 1807, 216–218.

⁷⁷ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 8.

⁷⁸ Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses: Delivered Before the Citizens of that Town, February 7 and 21, and March 30, 1867* (Tuttle & Co., printers, 1867), 47–48.

⁷⁹ Richard M. Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 177.

Tales of pirates burying treasure or town rumors often piqued the interest of seekers and led to attempts of discovering the treasure hunt. In the town of Antrim, New Hampshire, discussions of the tales of Captain Kidd created excitement of buried treasure, while the town of Whitingham, Vermont was riddled with treasure hunting that stemmed in part from Captain Kidd's voyages.⁸⁰ Stories of Captain Kidd extended outside of New England into New York, as historian Whitney Cross noted legends of buried treasure were widespread in that region.⁸¹ As Richard Dorson explained, these tales rarely produced results: "In the hope of just such a find or strike, searchers for buried wealth have followed leads, tips, and dreams that produce little more than a never-ceasing crop of underground rumors, and some unshakable place legends."⁸² In many instances, tales of buried treasure led seekers to use divinatory media, such as rods or seer stones, to confirm the legitimacy of the tale.

Rods were the most frequently used tool to discover or confirm treasures. A rod was a Y-shaped twig or other piece of wood, often cut from a hazel tree. According to historian Ron Walker, rods were also used for various intents including "healing, answering religious questions, determining a suspect's criminality, or discovering lost articles, salt licks, underground water channels, and subterranean minerals."⁸³ Many rodsman followed a regimented procedure to receive revelation from the rod beginning with holding the instrument in his hands with the palms facing up, then walking across the terrain until the rod pointed downwards.⁸⁴ At times individuals who had skills in using the rod were brought into town to

⁸⁰ Cochrane, *History of the Town of Antrim, New Hampshire*, 318; Franklin C. Jillson and Mary Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont: a History of the Town* (Private press of the author, 1894), 113.

⁸¹ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 80.

⁸² Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 174.

⁸³ Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 440–441.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 441.

assist in their expedition, like in the case of Arad Sherman.⁸⁵ Other purposes of rods included locating water, determining interest of the treasure seeking participants or whether a person would live or die.⁸⁶ The rod was evidently the most popular means of locating and confirming treasure⁸⁷.

Another frequently used tool required an individual to place a stone, known as a “peep” or “seer” stone, inside a hat, peer into the hat while blocking any light, to see the treasure and its location.⁸⁸ Ronald W. Walker found in his research that “there were green, yellow, white, and ‘speckled’ stones, opaque and polished stones, and round and oblong stones. Their only common quality was their ‘unusual’ or ‘peculiar’ nature.”⁸⁹ In particular, seers valued stones that were different with respect to their size, shape, smoothness, luster, translucency, color, shade, encasing, history, and consecration.⁹⁰ Many used crystals because they were clear which provided the best opportunity for seers to view things, and drew upon a symbolic meaning of purity and acting as an intermediary between the visible and the invisible.⁹¹ Conversely, dark stones occasionally represented evil.⁹² Stones were important because they opened visions of treasure locations and treasure guardians to the seers.⁹³ Using these devices was less common than using rods, and some seers had to meet certain requirements while demonstrating a talent to use them. According to one source, a seer “ought to be a pure virgin, a youth who had not known

⁸⁵ William Adams, *Gazetteer of Washington County, Vt., 1783-1889* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Journal Company, 1889), 280.

⁸⁶ Caleb Butler, *History of the Town of Groton: Including Pepperell and Shirley, from the First Grant of Groton Plantation in 1655* (Boston: Press of T.R. Marvin, 1848), 256n; Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses*, 47, 50.

⁸⁷ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 26–27.

⁸⁸ Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 442.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Mark Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith, Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet” (M.A., Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 2000), 156–182.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 173.

⁹³ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 10; Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood,” 132.

woman, or at least a person of irreproachable life and purity of manners.”⁹⁴ Even though the glossary only mentioned males as seers, females also acted as seers as Sally Chase demonstrated in New York.⁹⁵

Once the location of the treasure was identified, the crew assisting the rodsman or seer dug for the treasure. The hunt itself was often a well-planned event, as dates and times held significance to treasure seekers. Most occurred during the night, between midnight and dawn, and were especially prominent on special days such as holidays and equinoxes.⁹⁶ The position of the treasure could change according to the weather. A full moon brought the treasure closer to the surface, while similar effects occurred during the summer months as the heat of the sun made the treasure rise.⁹⁷ The depth of the treasure varied, but were mostly deep in the ground, which required the crew to dig massive holes that were visible to individuals from a distance.⁹⁸ In one instance, the group dug for several days trying to locate the treasure, while a separate example described a group that dug seventy feet into the ground with no success.⁹⁹ Finally, the crew would hit something hard indicating the discovery of a treasure chest.

Many failed expeditions began after a participant verbally exclaimed something, usually after initially discovering the treasure, which caused the treasure to move to another location, and

⁹⁴ Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary; with a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions* (London : E. Jeffery, 1811), 111.

⁹⁵ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 41–43.

⁹⁶ Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 443; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 10.

⁹⁷ John Wesley Hanson, *History of Gardiner, Pittston and West Gardiner: With a Sketch of the Kennebec Indians, & New Plymouth Purchase, Comprising Historical Matter from 1602 to 1852; with Genealogical Sketches of Many Families* (W. Palmer, 1852), 169; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 10.

⁹⁸ DeWitt Clinton and William W. Campbell, *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton* (Baker and Scribner, 1849), 47.

⁹⁹ Dengler, “Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester,” 175; Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses*, 50.

left the people without their loot.¹⁰⁰ During a hunt led by a man named Winchell, one of the diggers yelled “Get off my toes!,” which ended the spell that kept the treasure stationary, while another man in Rochester announced he had the treasure, only to hear a terrible noise and watch the treasure vanish into the earth.¹⁰¹ Exclamations demonstrated a lack of self-control for the diggers because they broke one of the basic rules of treasure seeking, ritual silence, which instructed seekers to not speak any words during the expedition.¹⁰² Johannes Dillinger equates the silence to that of monks and other church-goers participation in a religious service, since both the religious ceremony and treasure search worked to save souls.¹⁰³ Other explanations argue that the silence represented the treasure seekers unity and solidarity, while another theory explains the code functioned to provide an easy explanation for failure as a muttered word or short laugh could curse the dig.¹⁰⁴ At times, treasure guardians would scare groups so they would speak and break the spell protecting an enchanted treasure from moving away or protecting the treasure from being moved away by the guardian.¹⁰⁵

Various types of treasure guardians including ghosts, fairies, and demons, either protected the loot or assisted individuals in locating and acquiring the treasure. The treasure guardians mentioned earlier were usually ghosts who were either the spirit of the person who

¹⁰⁰ Dengler, “Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester,” 175; Emelyn Elizabeth Gardner, *Folklore from the Schoharie Hills, New York* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 14–15; Josiah Fletcher Goodhue and Middlebury Historical Society (Middlebury Vt.), *History of the Town of Shoreham, Vermont: From the Date of its Charter, October 8th, 1761, to the Present Time* (A.H. Copeland, 1861), 145; D. Mason & Company, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York* (D. Mason, 1895), 411.

¹⁰¹ Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses*, 78; Dengler, “Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester,” 175.

¹⁰² Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 108–109.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York: with Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Everts & Ensign, 1878), 265; D. Mason & Company, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 412; William Philip Boyd, *History of the Town of Conesus, Livingston Co., N. Y.: From its First Settlement in 1793, to 1887, with a Brief Genealogical Record of the Conesus Families* (Conesus, N.Y.: Boyd’s Job Printing Establishment, 1887), 135.

buried the treasure, or had been killed by the treasure owner to protect the bounty.¹⁰⁶ Fairies were spirits from the premodern world that assisted people by teaching them skills, such as treasure seeking.¹⁰⁷ Some believed demons or devils dwelt below the earth in contrast to God who lived in the heavens above. Therefore the devil and his dominions controlled the treasure deep in the ground which led to frequent disruptions of digs.¹⁰⁸

Preventing seekers from acquiring the treasure was the most important task for many treasure guardians. Many transformed into hideous monsters or animals, loud noises, and storms attempting to frighten the seekers.¹⁰⁹ One dramatic moment captured the full essence of treasure guardians:

But when even the most devout, pious and godly Christians, with the Bible, Prayer-book, and Pilgrim's Progress lying near them, to keep off infernal spirits, had dug down to within an inch or two of the treasures, a daemon, in shape of some huge monster, with hideous yawning mouth and enourmous white teeth; or of some ugly night bird, with eyes as big as saucers, would appear, as if on purpose to mock them, and hinder them from adding wealth to their wisdom; and upon the slightest word or whisper from one of the party, the chest almost within their grasp, would move off with a rumbling noise, to some distant and less attainable spot.”¹¹⁰

Appearances like this intended to confront and scare the crew, without inflicting physical harm.

The seeker had to stay focused in order to acquire the treasure.¹¹¹

Searchers employed a variety of methods to keep the treasure guardian from hindering their search. One method was to draw two magical circles around the treasure. The outer circle prevented evil influences from reaching the diggers, while the inner circle prevented the treasure from moving.¹¹² Others used the Bible to prevent the treasure from moving. One story recounted

¹⁰⁶ Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” 44.

¹⁰⁷ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Ashurst-McGee, “Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian,” 44.

¹⁰⁹ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 65; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 10.

¹¹⁰ Butler, *History of the Town of Groton*, 256n.

¹¹¹ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 65.

¹¹² Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 445.

a group finding a treasure and lifting it from the ground until it became stuck, at which time they placed a Bible on the chest while they looked for further assistance, upon returning the Bible and the treasure had disappeared.¹¹³ Diggers also used ritual swords, magical instruments, hymns and incantations to protect themselves from these guardians.¹¹⁴

Similar to evangelical experiences, treasure seekers believed that an actual being appeared to protect the treasure. A man named “Shippy” searched for treasure that was revealed in a dream. Two men from his town dressed as ghosts to scare him during his dig. The scared man ran shrieked and ran back to the town to tell others of his encounter with a ghost. Over the ensuing days, Shippy told everybody of his experience until the men told him of the prank.¹¹⁵ The amazing part of the story is not the failed treasure attempt or the men tricking the seeker; instead it is Shippy’s unquestionable believe that a guardian appeared. The seeker did not think he was tricked, until the men told him. In another instance, the son of a minister claimed that a group of angels revealed treasure to him, and then brought him before a trial of ancient prophets.¹¹⁶ At times, the seekers actually interacted with the guardians, as was the case with a seeker in Saratoga County, New York who stepped on the tail of the devil.¹¹⁷ Writers subtly mocked the belief in preternatural appearances, but the scope of appearances depicts a firm confidence in these appearances.¹¹⁸

Treasure seeking episodes were not isolated instances, but occurred in various places by many people. In Maine, “Treasure-seeking mania” spread throughout the towns of Gardiner and

¹¹³ Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses*, 51.

¹¹⁴ Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood,” 63–64.

¹¹⁵ Boyd, *History of the town of Conesus, Livingston Co., N. Y.*, 135.

¹¹⁶ D. Mason & Company, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York*, 412.

¹¹⁷ Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York*, 265.

¹¹⁸ Stafford Canning Cleveland and Jemima Wilkinson, *History and Directory of Yates County: Containing a Sketch of its Original Settlement by the Public Universal Friends, the Lessee Company and Others, with an Account of Individual Pioneers and Their Families; also, of Other Leading Citizens, Including Church, School, and Civil History, and a Narrative of the Universal Friend* (Penn Yan, New York: S.C. Cleveland, 1873), 716; Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 174; Cochrane, *History of the Town of Antrim, New Hampshire*, 317.

Pittston and continued as individuals returned every summer to find buried treasure.¹¹⁹ Rome, New York also possessed the spirit of treasure seeking, while a hill in Little Falls, New York contained so many holes from treasure digging that De Witt Clinton noticed them from a distance.¹²⁰ Forty-six different treasure hunting experiences occurred in Whitingham, Vermont over a few months.¹²¹ Many people continued the practice, even amidst failure, due to a hopes of financial prosperity as well as increased spirituality.

The Smith Family

With such a widespread practice of treasure hunting, it is not surprising that Joseph Smith, Jr. and other members of the Joseph Smith, Sr. family reflected the culture of the day by participating in magic rituals and receiving visions. Hyrum, one of the Smith's sons, once told traveler, and future Mormon convert, Solomon Chamberlin, "Yes, we are a visionary house."¹²²

Joseph Smith, Sr. led the way for the family, with multiple visions that Lucy Mack Smith recorded. His second vision began with Father Smith journeying through a barren wilderness when a thought crossed his mind, which caused him to stop and consider his actions before proceeding. "This is the desolate world; but travel on," spoke the guide who accompanied him in a dream. Reluctantly Father Smith walked on the "broad and barren" path before him, knowing that broad paths usually led to death and hell, while narrow paths brought life and salvation. To his surprise, a second, narrow path appeared after a short distance. A few steps on the new pathway opened a view of a "beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west" with a rope along the bank leading into a valley with a tree. "It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch

¹¹⁹ Hanson, *History of Gardiner, Pittston and West Gardiner*, 168–169.

¹²⁰ Christian Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage Through the States of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, and Through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, and New-Orleans; Performed in the Years 1807 and 1808; Including a Tour of Nearly Six Thousand Miles ...* (New York: Printed by Isaac Riley, 1810), 16; Clinton and Campbell, *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton*, 47.

¹²¹ Jillson and Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont*, 115–118.

¹²² Larry C. Porter, "Solomon Chamberlin's Missing Pamphlet: Dreams, Visions, and Angelic Ministrants," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 2 (n.d.): 114.

that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut bur, and as white as snow, or if possible whiter.”¹²³ The burs split open exposing the brilliantly white fruit, which Father Smith reached down and plucked from the ground to eat. The indescribably delicious fruit satiated his palate while generating an altruistic yearning for his family and others to partake. Inexpressible joy enveloped the Smith family as they ate under the shower of ridicule and mocking that originated from finely dressed individuals in a “spacious building” across the river. Ignoring the scorn, Father Smith asked his guide for the meaning of the tree. It represented the love of God, the angel said, before informing him of one more task— bring the rest of the family to consume the fruit. A surprised Father Smith surveyed the area only to realize that two children were not eating of the fruit. He brought them to the tree and returned his attention to the guide and the mysterious building. He wanted the meaning of the spacious building. “It is Babylon, it is Babylon, and it must fall,” replied the guide. Smith awoke filled with joy.¹²⁴ These dreams and visions generally belonged to the spiritual journey category as Father Smith walked through, or to, various locations including deserts, gardens, and meetinghouses with a guide beside him. Smith’s dreams differed from most journeys because he never experienced heaven or hell, but did reach a judgment bar in which he was forced to call on the grace of Christ to deliver him.¹²⁵ The last dream did not take Father Smith on a journey; instead the guide told him he lacked one thing for salvation, but he awoke before the guide could write the direction.¹²⁶

¹²³ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool; London: Published for Orson Pratt by S.W. Richards; sold at the Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1853), 58.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 57–58, 70–72.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

Visions extended beyond Smith's theophanies to dreams received by Lucy Mack Smith and Smith, Sr. Lucy's biography of Smith and their family conspicuously accentuates the importance of visions in the home by incorporating several dreams and visions from herself, and Joseph Smith, Sr. Lucy's dream most closely resembled a spiritual journey. She saw two trees in a meadow. One tree responded to bright lights falling upon it with movements from the wind that resembled the nearby river, while the second tree lacked the light and refused to move. Lucy believed the light-filled tree represented Joseph Smith, Sr. and the stiff tree his brother Jesse, because her husband would accept the gospel and be influenced by it, similar to how the wind and light moved the tree, while Jesse would not.¹²⁷ Lucy's dream continued in a heritage of enthusiasm. Shortly after becoming married, her sister Lovisa became ill for two years, stumping the doctors about the ailment. Finally, she began to recover, only to have a "violent re-attack" hinder her progress, and forced to lay in bed for three days and two nights. Suddenly awakened, she declared that she had been healed by Jesus Christ.¹²⁸ Later, Solomon Mack, Lucy's father, experienced bright flashes of light and a voice calling his name during the night, which led to his conversion.¹²⁹ The recounting of the dreams accentuated her visionary emphasis as she glorifies enthusiastic experiences in her writings while others minimize their significance.¹³⁰

The familiarity of dreams and visions obviously influenced Smith as he believed that divine manifestations occurred. If his belief did not begin prior to 1820, then his first theophany, a visionary conversion experience, created a belief in supernatural visions, which was further

¹²⁷ Ibid., 54–56.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 23–25; See also Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage: Influences of Grandfathers Solomon Mack and Asael Smith*, 2nd Edition, Revised. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2003), 75–113.

¹²⁹ John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 84–85.

¹³⁰ This happens in her account of Lovisa's miraculous healing. Solomon Mack also recounts the instance but with less detail. See Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage: Influences of Grandfathers Solomon Mack and Asael Smith*, 75–76.

emphasized with his determination to receive another heavenly manifestation in 1823.¹³¹ Subtly, Smith showed a proclivity towards dreams and visions, by almost aligning with Methodists, who encouraged enthusiasm more than other religions, prior to his first theophany.¹³²

Smith probably began treasure hunting because of his father's practice. Neighbors and acquaintances of Joseph Smith, Sr. spoke of the older Smith using a rod for a variety of purposes from locating water to treasure hunting. His participation extended into 1823 and beyond as one person recorded that Father Smith acknowledged using the rod for treasure hunting after Smith received the plates.¹³³ Father Smith reportedly began the practice around the turn of the century, which left ample opportunity to teach and instruct Smith about the nuances of the craft.¹³⁴

Smith also reflected the culture with his use of rods and stones while treasure seeking. Neighbor Isaac Butts remembered "Young Jo had a forked witch-hazel rod with which he claimed he could locate buried money or hidden things. Later he had a peep stone which he put his hat and looked into it. I have seen both."¹³⁵ Contemporaries of Smith recalled him searching for treasure with his father as early as 1819-1820, in these early instances probably with the use of a rod.¹³⁶ Smith may have obtained his first seer stone as early as 1819.¹³⁷ He would later

¹³¹ Karen Lynn Davidson et al., eds., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 214–215.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 1:208–209; John H. Wigger, "Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820," *Journal of the Early Republic* 14, no. 2 (July 1, 1994): 170; Christopher C. Jones, "'We Latter-day Saints are Methodists': the Influence of Methodism on early Mormon religiosity" (Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2009), 47.

¹³³ Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood," 74; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 32–33.

¹³⁴ Ashurst-McGee, "A Pathway to Prophethood," 76–77.

¹³⁵ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 33.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Some debate exists over Smith's first seer stone. Michael Quinn argues that it was a whitish and opaque stone (*ibid.*, 43). Mark Ashurst-McGee contends that Smith's first stone was a dark brown stone ("A Pathway to Prophethood," 230–247).

acquire other stones which were used for a variety of means from treasure hunting to receiving revelations.¹³⁸

Conclusion

Religion during the early Republic incorporated many aspects that were frowned upon during previous years including dreams, visions and treasure seeking. Dreams and visions followed four different patterns: simple inspirations, conversion narratives, spiritual journeys and judgment narratives. The dream during this time became an extension of the Bible as another source of revelation, and essential part of Christianity. Treasure seeking served a dual focus as an experiential form of Christianity and income-generating practice. Legends and dreams sparked people's interest in treasure seeking, but tools, such as rods and seer-stones, assisted in actually locating the buried treasure.

The culture of increasing democracy, visions, dreams, and treasure hunting that surrounded Smith at the time of 1823 vision had a significant influence upon the young man. As historian John Brooke noted about Mormonism generally, but could be applied to Smith specifically: "Certainly, Mormonism was fundamentally shaped by the environment in which it emerged, and the particular circumstances of time and place must be kept clearly in view."¹³⁹ The Smith family's participation in each of these activities demonstrates the culture's influence upon them and Smith. They were not immune from the cultural tides, which helped facilitate the perfect environment for Smith to interact with Moroni as well as introduce a new religion.

Gordon S. Wood wrote:

“During the early decades of the nineteenth century the time was ideally suited for the establishment of the new faith. The democratic revolution was at its height, all traditional authorities were in disarray, and visions and prophesying still had a powerful appeal for large numbers of people. A generation or so later it

¹³⁸ Ashurst-McGee, “A Pathway to Prophethood,” 198.

¹³⁹ Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 59.

might have been necessary for Smith and his followers to get some university professors to authenticate the characters on the gold plates.”¹⁴⁰

Similar to Smith’s reception of the plates in 1827, beliefs in visions and treasures coupled with the movement toward more egalitarianism provided a unique culture for acceptance regarding the events of September 21, 1823.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon S. Wood, “Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,” *New York History* 61 (October 1980): 381.

CHAPTER THREE

“WHEN ON THE EVENING OF THE... TWENTY FIRST OF SEPTEMBER...”: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DATE OF THE VISIONS

Joseph Smith rarely recorded the dates of significant events during the 1820s, including his first vision of Deity and the restoration of priesthood by apostles Peter, James and John. Smith eventually recorded the season and year of his first theophany in 1838, but never narrowed the time to a specific date.¹ The purported visions of Moroni differed in that Smith recorded the date of the vision, September 21-22, 1823, in all but one recital of the experience.² Remembering the date followed the pattern of many Christian visionaries, who recalled the date of their vision and included that element within their narratives.³ In contrast, treasure seeking examples rarely, if ever, recorded the date of the experience. Smith’s remembering the date only continued a pattern that other evangelical visionaries established.

Some current scholarship has investigated the date and determined Smith associated the date with magical rituals held on the autumnal equinox. D. Michael Quinn argued that the date held significance with Smith and other groups, especially within the occult. He pointed to three different occult sources that identified significance with the date. First, he found a few occult

¹ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 141.

² Karen Lynn Davidson et al., eds., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 14, 82, 221, 494, 508.

³ Ebenezer Adams, *A True and Wonderful Relation of the Appearance of Three Angels, (Clothed in White Raiment) to a Young Man in Medford, near Boston, in New-England, on the 4th of February 1761, at Night* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1791); Sarah Alley, *An Account of a Trance or Vision of Sarah Alley, of Beekman Town, Dutchess County, State of New-York*, 1798; Adams, *A True and Wonderful Relation of the Appearance of Three Angels, (Clothed in White Raiment) to a Young Man in Medford, near Boston, in New-England, on the 4th of February 1761, at Night*; Thomas Chamberlain, *America’s Timely Remembrancer; or, the Minister preaching his own Funeral Sermon* (Fredericktown: M. Bartgis, 1794), 3; Rebecca Ashburn, *Three Remarkable Dreams in Succession*, 1802, 1–3; Jane Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish* (Philadelphia, 1793), 5; Nathan Culver, *A Very Remarkable Account of the Vision of Nathan Culver*, Fifth. (Boston: E. Russell, 1795), 2; *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision* (Philadelphia: John Crukshank, 1789), 5; Hezekiah Goodwin, *A Vision* (New Haven: Josiah Meigs, 1788), 3.

books showing that individuals used September 22 to encounter spirits or preternatural beings. Second, he used astrological ideas and symbolic interpretations to argue that the Smith family parchment indicated that the date facilitated a “pure youth to contact a good spirit.”⁴ Third, astrological information, contained in almanacs, pointed to the visions beginning just before midnight on the autumnal equinox.⁵ Grant Palmer later expanded the importance of the date by claiming the equinox demonstrated that Smith relied upon E.T.A. Hoffman’s story “Der Goldne Topf” as a source for his account.⁶ Hoffman’s narrative begins after Ascension Day making the equinox mentioned the autumnal equinox. The cat that accompanied the women into the woods and the numerous animals in Veronika’s home, one of Hoffman’s characters, contained witchcraft motifs, which creates the possibility that the equinox referred to the witchcraft sabbath held on the autumnal equinox. High astrology also viewed significance with the autumnal equinox, since the day and the night were equal.⁷ Palmer’s comparison to “Der Goldne Topf” opens Smith to the susceptibility of engaging in a witchcraft sabbath and employing astrology’s belief in the autumnal equinox. This chapter examines three traditions, witchcraft, astrology and Christian holy days, while seeking to determine what cultural significance the date may have held on Joseph Smith’s environment.

Witchcraft

Seventeenth-century America contained many accounts of individuals accusing others of practicing witchcraft. Accused witches in Salem, Massachusetts received the most notoriety for

⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 142.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 142–143.

⁶ Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 163, 165–166.

⁷ April C. Athman, “Magic, Myth, and Ritual in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Der Goldne Topf*,” in *Fantastic Odysseys: Selected Essays from the Twenty-second International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed by. Mary Pharr (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 92.

their activities, but witchcraft spread throughout all of the colonies, including New York.⁸ Rebecca Greensmith claimed she participated in witch meetings “at a place not far from her house” in colonial Connecticut.⁹ Instances of witchcraft include Goodwife Glover of Boston, who admitted “tormenting her enemies by stroking rag dolls that she made to represent them.” Henry Grey believed that his cow was bewitched, so he beat the cow to punish the witch. A neighbor, who he suspected, collapsed in agony.¹⁰ Witchcraft belief taught that these witches originated in Europe before sneaking aboard ships headed toward the colonies.¹¹

The supposed witches brought many traditions, including “her pact with the Devil, her nocturnal flights and the Sabbat.”¹² The Sabbat, or Sabbath, originated during the late Middle Ages as a means to separate primitive witchcraft from a new, emerging belief. Witchcraft moved away from harming others, and towards worshipping the devil, who then gave the witch power to harm her enemies.¹³ The Sabbat brought witches together for a nocturnal meeting to offer homage to the devil through rituals such as worshipping the devil as the witches’ master and copulation with the devil.¹⁴

The Sabbaths likely never existed in Europe. Witchcraft trials never mentioned the existence of the Sabbath before 1612, “and the subsequent references to such gatherings are sporadic and inconclusive.”¹⁵ Further, testimonies originated from individuals tortured by witch hunters. Confessions relieved the distress tortured individuals felt, rather than declaring authentic

⁸ Richard M. Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 37. See also Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 228–229.

⁹ Richard Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 162–163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ Dorson, *American Folklore*, 35.

¹² P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400-1800* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2001), 92.

¹³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 438.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 446.

occurrences.¹⁶ Historian Keith Thomas stated, “The truth is that acceptable evidence for the literal reality of ritual devil-worship, whether in England or on the Continent, is extremely scanty.”¹⁷ Questioning extended into America. Some seventeenth-century America colonists dismissed the sabbaths as a European creation of demonic images that lacked biblical foundations.¹⁸ After the Salem witch trials and their fallout, witchcraft accusations, fear of witches, and even belief in witches declined dramatically. Any practice of witchcraft sabbaths seemingly disappeared in the eighteenth century.¹⁹

Witchcraft continued in a reduced manner during the early nineteenth century. Many people believed in witches and took precautions against.²⁰ E.D. Howe, a contemporary of Smith’s, stated that Father Smith and Lucy Mack possessed “a firm belief in ghosts and witches.”²¹ If true, this would have exposed Smith to witchcraft belief and folklore. Brantley York remembered witches in his North Carolina neighborhood in the 1810s, but his definition of witches differed from the seventeenth-century belief.²²

The people of this neighborhood believed in Witchcraft [sic], Ghost-seeing [sic], haunted houses and fortune-telling. They attributed wonderful, if not supernatural powers, to the creatures of their imaginations – witches. They believed that a witch could transform herself into any animal she chose, whether beast or bird. They also attributed to a witch the power to creep through a key-hole, by the magic of a certain bridle called the witch’s bridle – she could change any person on whom she could place it, into a horse; and then what is still more remarkable,

¹⁶ Rosemary Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts on File, 1989), 288; Kurt Seligmann, *The History of Magic and the Occult* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), 171; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 516.

¹⁷ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 516.

¹⁸ Godbeer, *The Devil’s Dominion*, 159.

¹⁹ Herbert Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment : Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 106.

²⁰ Warren Robert Cochrane, *History of the Town of Antrim, New Hampshire: From Its Earliest Settlement to June 27, 1877, with a Brief Genealogical Record of All the Antrim Families* (Mirror Steam Printing Press, 1880), 315.

²¹ Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time: With Sketches of the Characters of Its Propagators ...* (Printed and Pub. by the Author, 1834), 12. The Book of Mormon mentions that witchcraft and sorceries were “wrought upon the face of the land” but associated the practice with the devil Joseph Smith, trans by., *The Book of Mormon*, 1st ed. (Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830), 520, see also 244.

²² Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 229.

both could come out through a key-hole, and being mounted, she could ride this remarkable horse wherever she chose, nor would such an animal assume its identity till the bridle was removed.²³

Brantley's explanation of witchcraft omitted any discussion of devil worship, signifying a change in nineteenth-century witchcraft beliefs. Witchcraft belief can be documented in North Carolina and New Hampshire, but not New York, which creates doubt concerning the cultural practice of witchcraft while the Smith family lived in Palmyra. At the very least, the Smith family's witchcraft understanding differed from witchcraft participation during the seventeenth century practice.

The Sabbath's lack of existence coupled with the evolving nature of witchcraft casts significant doubts regarding Smith's participating in a witchcraft Sabbath the night of September 21, 1823. The only reported instance of a sabbath occurring on the autumnal equinox would be Hoffman's claim. If the event existed in the nineteenth century, did Smith participate in the ritual worship, or at least propitiation, of Satan? Abner Cole claimed that Smith "propagated the vulgar, yet popular belief that these treasures were held in charge by some evil spirit, which was supposed to be either the DEVIL himself, or some one of his most trusty favorites," which adds credibility to the notion that Smith propitiated the devil as a treasure guardian.²⁴ The action, however, seems uncharacteristic according to Smith's and other sympathetic sources' portrayal of his visions. Smith approached God in prayer, desiring repentance from his sins, which clearly exemplified Christian motifs, and sought an understanding concerning "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" according to Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt.²⁵ Moroni informed Smith about

²³ Brantley York, *The Autobiography of Brantley York* (Durham, North Carolina: The Seeman Printery, 1910), 8.

²⁴ Abner Cole, "Gold Bible, No. 3," *The Reflector (Palmyra)*, February 1, 1831, 92 Emphasis in original.

²⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:13, 57, 116, 220, 524; Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1989), 409.

the impending Second Coming of the Messiah.²⁶ Moroni warned Smith that Satan would try to persuade him to use the plates for economic gain, and then counseled him to avoid the temptation.²⁷ The next day at the Hill Cumorah, Moroni showed Smith the mercy and condescension of God to increase Smith's faith in Christ.²⁸ The messenger showed Smith Satan's influence and condemning Satan thus dispelling any possibility of Satanic worship. Oliver Cowdery relayed Moroni saying, "All this is shown the good and the evill, the holy and the impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by the wicked one Behold, whatever entices and leads to good and to do good, is of God, and whatever does not is of that wicked one: It is he that fills the hearts of men with evil, to walk in darkness and blaspheme God; and you may learn from henceforth, that his ways are to destruction, but the way of holiness is peace and rest."²⁹ These themes could be a product of Smith changing the message of the vision to exemplify more Christian motifs.³⁰ While this conclusion deserves examination, it does not dismiss the improbability of Smith worshipping Satan. In Abner Cole's statement, he claimed Satan guarded the treasure, but Smith did not worship the devil. Even if the devil was present at the meeting, Smith did not worship him which was a requirement for the witches' sabbath.

One of the books Smith could access, Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, mentioned the sabbath, but later called assemblies where they worshipped the devil and other activities "absurd lies."³¹ D. Michael Quinn argued that the Smith family's lamens originated

²⁶ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:494.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:230.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:83; Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (October 1835): 198.

²⁹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83; Cowdery, "Letter VIII," 198.

³⁰ Mark D. Thomas, "Form Criticism of Joseph Smith's 1823 Vision of the Angel Moroni," *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (2002).

³¹ Reginald Scot and Brinsley Nicholson, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London: Elliot Stock, 1886), xxxiv, 37.

from Scot's book, which potentially exposed Smith to Sabbaths and witches meetings.³² Scot's work lacked an explanation of dating or activities performed at the meeting, negating the possibility that Smith learned about the activity from that source.

Another form of the sabbath began in the early twentieth century. The autumnal equinox was one of the eight sabbaths practiced within modern witchcraft each year.³³ Early modern sabbaths varied from meeting weekly to once or twice a year, which means the modern sabbath provides the best connection between September 21 and the holiday because of the equinox.³⁴ The exact origin of the modern witchcraft sabbath is unknown. Rosemary Guiley wrote, "A system of greater and lesser sabbats were long in existence when Gerald A. Gardner joined a coven of hereditary Witches in England in 1939."³⁵ The twentieth-century date diminishes the probability that the modern sabbath dated back to the early nineteenth-century, the time of Smith's visions, further negating Smith's potential participation in a witchcraft sabbath.

Occult Books

Occult books provided another potential source from which Smith may have learned about the supernatural significance of the autumnal equinox and September 22. D. Michael Quinn noted that Robert C. Smith's *Complete System of Occult Philosophy* included an anecdote regarding a group of men attempting to receive a preternatural visitation on September 22.³⁶ Two of the most prominent magical books, *The Magus* and Agrippa's books of occult philosophy, stated that the autumnal equinox held significance within astrology, but did not mention the date

³² Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 110.

³³ Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, 288–289; Leslie Shepard, ed., *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, vol. 2 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1978), 794; Larry A. Nichols et al., *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006).

³⁴ Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, 287.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

³⁶ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 141–142 Quinn argues that one specific example shows the significance of the date. Quinn's example does not add relevance to the date, but merely states the event occurred that day. It does not provide sufficient evidence that the individuals held September 22 in high regard.

or attribute any specific significance.³⁷ *The Complete Fortune Teller* lacked any references to the date.³⁸ Ebenezer Sibly's second volume of *A New and Complete Illustration of the Celestial Science...* contained one reference to the autumnal equinox, but gave the date as September 23. "When the Sun is in the first of them, viz. in the spring, March 20th, it is called the vernal equinox; and when in autumn, September 23d, it is called the autumnal equinox; at both which times, it is equal day and night all over the world."³⁹ This dating differed from the Smith's September 21-22 dating. Most occult books lacked reference to the date, or used a different date for the autumnal equinox, thus eliminating Smith used these sources. Quinn's used these books as witnesses of a broader cultural knowledge. The paucity of information shows that this cultural knowledge did not extend to September 21-22.

Astrology

Astrology provided another explanation for Smith praying on September 21. The autumnal equinox held two significant meanings within astrology: the lengths of the day and night were equal and the earth enters Libra during the night of the event.⁴⁰ D. Michael Quinn has argued that the date contained astrological significance for Smith, because "the equinox was a time when the earth could be expected to experience the introduction of 'broad cultural movements and religious ideas.'"⁴¹ This argument is not exclusionary to the autumnal equinox.

³⁷ Ibid., 100–101; Francis Barrett, *The Magus, Or Celestial Intelligencer; Being a Complete System of Occult Philosophy* (London: Lackington, Allen and Co., 1801); Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed by. Donald Tyson (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1993).

³⁸ *The Complete Fortune Teller, or, An Infallible Guide to the Hidden Decrees of Fate Being a New and Regular System for Foretelling Future Events by Astrology, Physiognomy, Palmistry, Moles, Cards, and Dreams.* (Brookfield, Mass., 1816).

³⁹ Ebenezer Sibly, *A New and Complete Illustration of the Celestial Science of Astrology; Or, The Art of Foretelling Future Events and Contingencies* (London: Printed for, and sold by, the Proprietor, 1822), 966.

⁴⁰ Jean Louis Brau, Helen Weaver, and Allan Edmands, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Astrology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 107; Nicholas De Vore, *Encyclopedia of Astrology* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 179, 366–368; James R Lewis, *The Astrology Book : the Encyclopedia of Heavenly Influences* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 2003), 223.

⁴¹ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 144; see also Brau, Weaver, and Edmands, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Astrology*, 194–195.

The same reasoning applies equally to the vernal equinox, or any significant astrological date.

The autumnal equinox held less unique significance, therefore, than Quinn had argued.

The date of the vision creates additional problems. Astrological manuals state that on September 22 the earth leaves the zodiac sign of Virgo, and enters Libra on September 23 making the equinox on the night between September 22 and 23.⁴² The vision of Moroni occurred on the night of September 21-22, not September 22-23. The date, therefore, contains no astrological significance because the vision did not occur on the autumnal equinox.

Almanacs of upstate New York demonstrated a contemporary understanding of the autumnal equinox as either September 22 or 23. Most individuals learned about common astrology from almanacs, making them the best source to evaluate astrological practices.⁴³ Most almanacs printed in New York between 1810 and 1820 contained a reference to the autumnal equinox, usually with an illustration of the earth entering Libra.⁴⁴ A vast majority of almanacs

⁴² De Vore, *Encyclopedia of Astrology*, 179.

⁴³ Leventhal, *In the Shadow of the Enlightenment*, 22–23.

⁴⁴ For a selection of 1810 almanacs, see Andrew Beers, “The Farmers’ Calendar, or Utica Almanack, For the Year of our Lord, 1810 ...”, 1809, Andrew Beers, *Phinneys’ Calendar, or, Western Almanac, for the Year of our Lord, 1810 ...* (Otsego, New York: H. & E. Phinney, Jun., 1809), Andrew Beers, *Webster’s Calendar, or, The Albany Almanack, for the Year of Our Lord 1810 ...* (Albany, New York: Websters and Skinner, 1809), and *Poor Richard Revived, or, The Albany Almanack, for ... 1810 ...* (Albany, New York: S. Allen, Jun., 1809); For a selection of 1811 almanacs, see Andrew Beers, *The New-York & Vermont Farmer’s Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1811 ...* (Lansingburgh, New York: Tracy & Bliss, 1810), Andrew Beers, *Phinneys’ Calendar, or, Western Almanac, for the Year of Our Lord, 1811 ...* (Otsego, New York: H. and E. Phinney, Jun., 1810), *Smith & Forman’s New-York Sheet Almanac for the Year 1811* (New York: Smith & Forman, 1810), Andrew Beers, *Webster’s Calendar, or, The Albany Almanack, for the Year of Our Lord 1811 ...* (Albany, New York: Websters and Skinner, 1810). For 1812, see Andrew Beers, “The Farmers’ Calendar, or Utica Almanack, for the Year of Our Lord, 1812 ...”, 1811, John Nathan Hutchins, *Hutchins Improved : Being an Almanack and Ephemeris of the Motions of the Sun and Moon, the True Places and Aspects of the Planets, the Rising and Setting of the Sun, and the Rising, Setting and Southing of the Moon, for the Year of our lord 1812 ...* (New-York: Alexander Ming, (Successor to Hugh Gaine), 1812), Andrew Beers, *Stoddard’s Diary, or, Columbia Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1812 ...* (Hudson, New York: Ashbel Stoddard, 1811), *Wood’s Almanac, for the Year of our Lord, 1812 ...* (New York: Samuel Wood, 1811), Andrew Beers, *The New-York & Vermont Farmer’s Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1812 ...* (Lansingburgh, New York: Tracy & Bliss, 1811); For 1813, see Andrew Beers, *The Farmer’s Calendar; or, Saratoga Almanack for the Year of our Lord, 1813. ...* (Ballston-Spa, New York: S.R. Brown, 1812), Andrew Beers, *Beers’ Calendar, or, Southwick’s Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1813 ...* (Albany, New York: H.C. Southwick, 1812), Andrew Beers, *The Farmer’s Calendar, or, The New York, Vermont & Connecticut Almanac, for the Year of our Lord 1813 ...* (Bennington, Vermont: William Haswell, 1812), *ibid.*, John Nathan Hutchins, *Hutchins’ Revived Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1813 ...* (New York: Smith & Forman, 1812). For 1814, see Andrew Beers, *The Farmer’s Calendar, or, The New York, Vermont & Connecticut Almanac, for the Year of our Lord 1814 ...* (Bennington,

that mentioned the equinox claimed the event occurred on September 23.⁴⁵ A small fraction associated September 22 with the astrological event.⁴⁶ None of the almanacs evaluated placed the equinox on September 21. At times, authors of the almanacs disagreed upon the day the event occurred in a given year, clouding the possibility that Smith knew the specific date for 1823. At times, the same author gave two different dates for the autumnal equinox. For example, *The*

Vermont: Printed by William Haswell, 1813), Andrew Beers, *Stoddard's Diary, or, Columbia Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1814 ...* (Hudson, New York: Ashbel Stoddard, 1813), John Nathan Hutchins, *Hutchins Improved, Being an Almanack and Ephemeris ... for the Year of our Lord 1814 ...* (New-York: Alexander Ming, 1813), Abraham Shoemaker, *Ming's United States Register, and New-York Pocket Almanac, for the Year 1814 ...* (New York: Alex. Ming, 1813), *Smith & Forman's New-York and New-Jersey Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1814 ...* (New York: Smith & Forman, 1813). For 1815, see Andrew Beers, *The Farmers' Diary, or, Western Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1815 ...* (Canandaigua, New York: Bemis & Beach, 1814), Andrew Beers, *The Farmer's Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1815 ...* (Kingston, New York: S.S. Freer, 1814), Andrew Beers, *Beers' Almanac, for the Year of our Lord 1815 ...* (Poughkeepsie, New York: P. & S. Potter., 1814), Joshua Sharp, *Wood's Almanac, for the Year 1815 ...* (New York: S. Wood, 1814), *Smith & Forman's New-York Pocket Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1815 ...* (New York: Smith & Forman, 1814). For 1816, see *Sword's Pocket Almanack, and Christian's Calendar for the Year of our Lord 1816,...* (New York: T. & J. Swords, 1815), Andrew Beers, *The Farmers' Calendar, or The New-York, Vermont & Connecticut Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1816 ...* (Bennington, Vermont: Darius Clark., 1815), Andrew Beers, *Phinneys' Calendar, or, Western Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1816 ...* (Cooperstown, New York: H. & E. Phinney, 1815), Andrew Beers, *Webster's Calendar, or, The Albany Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1816 ...* (Albany, New York: Websters and Skinner, 1815), John Nathan Hutchins, *Hutchins' Revived Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1816 ...* (New York: Smith & Forman, 1815). For 1817, see Andrew Beers, *Beers' Calendar, or, Southwick's Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1817 ...* (Albany, New York: H.C. Southwick, 1816), Andrew Beers, *The Columbian Calendar, or, New-York and Vermont Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1817* (Troy, New York: Francis Adancourt, 1816), Andrew Beers, *Stoddard's Diary, or, Columbia Almanack, for the Year ... 1817 ...* (Hudson, New York: Ashbel Stoddard, 1816), Joshua Sharp, *Wood's Almanac for the Year 1817 ...* (New-York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1816), *The New York Farmer's Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1817 ...* (New York: Charles N. Baldwin, 1816). For 1818, see Andrew Beers, *Beers' Calendar, or, Hosford's Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1818 ...* (Albany, New York: E. & E. Hosford, 1817); Andrew Beers, *The Farmers' Calendar, or, Utica Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1818 ...* (Utica, New York: William Williams, 1817); Andrew Beers, *Stoddard's Diary, or, Columbia Almanack, for the Year ... 1818 ...* (Hudson, New York: Ashbel Stoddard, 1817), John Nathan Hutchins, *Hutchins Improved, Being an Almanac and Ephemeris ... For the Year of our Lord 1818 ...* (New York: George Long, 1818), David Young, *The New York Farmer's Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1818 ...* (New York: Charles N. Baldwin, 1817). For 1819, see Andrew Beers, *Farmer's Diary, or, Catskill Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1819 ...* (Catskill, New York: M. Croswell & Son, 1818), Andrew Beers, *Farmer's Diary, or, Newburgh Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1819 ...* (Newburgh, New York: Benj. F. Lewis & Co., 1818), Andrew Beers, *The Farmer's Calendar, or, Genesee Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1819 ...* (Rochester, New York: E. Peck & Co., 1818). For 1820, see Andrew Beers, *The Farmer's Diary, or, Beers' Ontario Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1820 ...* (Canandaigua, New York: J.D. Bemis & Co., 1819), Andrew Beers, *Webster's Calendar, or, The Albany Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1820 ...* (Albany, New York: Websters and Skinner, 1819), Joshua Sharp, *Wood's Almanac for the year 1820 ...* (New-York: Samuel S. Wood & Co., 1819).

⁴⁵ For a selection of these, see *The Christian Almanack, for the Year of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Rochester, New York: E. Peck & Co., 1823); Beers, *Webster's Calendar, or, The Albany Almanack, for the Year of Our Lord 1810 ...*; Sharp, *Wood's Almanac, for the Year 1815 ...*; Beers, *Stoddard's Diary, or, Columbia Almanack, for the Year ... 1818 ...*

⁴⁶ Beers, *Stoddard's Diary, or, Columbia Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1812 ...*; Hutchins, *Hutchins' Revived Almanac for the Year of our Lord 1816 ...*

Farmer's Diary of 1814 stated the sun entering Libra on September 24 and the night and day being equal on September 23. While *Beers Calendar; or Southwick's Almanack of 1814* placed the earth entering Libra on September 23, with the day and night being equal on September 24. Andrew Beers wrote both almanacs. A definitive conclusion cannot be made that Smith knew the correct date of autumnal equinox, but early American almanacs suggest that he would have leaned toward September 23 as the date of equinox.

Sixty almanacs between 1810-1820 contained a specific reference to the equality of the day and night. Fifty-seven of those almanacs place the date as September 23, with the other three claiming equality between the day and night on September 24. There is no account of the Moroni visits that indicate Smith viewed the day and night of the encounter as equal.

1823 almanacs published in New York depicted the autumnal equinox occurring on September 23. All five almanacs examined displayed the symbol for the earth followed with “enter” then ending with the sign for Libra.⁴⁷ Three of these almanacs explained that the day and the evening were equal with the simple phrase “even.”⁴⁸ If Smith consulted an almanac, he would have likely anticipated that the autumnal equinox occurred on September 23.

Printers in upstate New York produced various forms of almanacs. The Smith family most likely used the *Western Almanac*, the *Farmer's Almanac*, or *Beer's Ontario Almanac*.⁴⁹

Both the *Western Almanac* and *The Farmer's Almanac* depicted the earth entering libra on

⁴⁷ *The Christian Almanack, for the Year of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; Western Agricultural Almanack, For the Year of our Lord 1823* (Rochester, New York: E. Peck & Co., 1823); Loud & Wilmarth, *The Farmer's Diary, or, Ontario Almanack* (Canandaigua, New York: J.D. Bemis & Co., 1823); Andrew Beers, *Webster's Calendar: or the Albany Almanack, for the Year of our Lord, 1823* (1823, n.d.); Joshua Sharp, *Astronomical Calendar, or, Farmers' Almanac, for 1823: Being the Third after Leap Year* (Ithaca, N.Y.: A.P. Searing & Co., 1823).

⁴⁸ Loud & Wilmarth, *The Farmer's Diary, or, Ontario Almanack; The Christian Almanack, for the Year of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; Western Agricultural Almanack, For the Year of our Lord 1823*.

⁴⁹ David J. Whittaker, “Almanacs in the New England Heritage of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 29, no. 4 (Fall 1989): 94.

September 23, 1823, and claimed that the day and night were “even.”⁵⁰ Earlier almanac editions showed September 23 as the day of the equinox. Sixteen of twenty almanacs sampled from previous years claimed that the equinox occurred on September 23 that year, which means that the almanacs the Smiths most likely consulted placed the equinox on September 23. His prayer and vision the evening of September 21-22 lacked astrological implications associated with the autumnal equinox.

Christianity

The calendar was a fundamental part of the almanac. The almanac calendars showed astrologically significant days, such as the equinox, and other special or holy days. The almanacs also showed that St. Matthew’s holy day occurred on September 21. Christian holy days divided into three categories: memorials, feasts, and solemnities. Memorials rank as the least significant days of the Christian calendar. These events celebrate Christian Saints. The celebrations are either obligatory or optional depending on the prominence of the saint commemorated on that day. Feasts ranked second on the hierarchy, and they commemorated “mysteries in our Lord’s life, events in the life of the Blessed Virgin, as well as certain more important saints, such as Apostles and Evangelists.” The final category, solemnities, belonged to events in the life of significant people such as Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, and others. Holy days in this category consisted of Christmas, Easter, Holy Trinity, or similar events.⁵¹ St. Matthew’s day falls within the second category of importance. The Church of England printed St. Matthew’s day in red-letters within the Common Book of Prayer to emphasize its importance above other holy days

⁵⁰ *Western Agricultural Almanack, For the Year of our Lord 1823*; Loud & Wilmarth, *The Farmer’s Diary, or, Ontario Almanack*.

⁵¹ Joseph N. Tylenda, *Saints and Feasts of the Liturgical Year* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), ix.

commemorating Saints.⁵² The holy day remembered the individual or event associated with that day. John Tulley first recorded St. Matthew's holy day in 1687.⁵³ The inclusion of holy days later developed into a consistent enclosure in the almanac.

Almanac readers learned that the Christian holy day for St. Matthew occurred on September 21. More almanacs between 1810 and 1820 referenced St. Matthew's day than the autumnal equinox, giving Smith a higher probability of learning the day. Four of the 1823 almanacs examined designated St. Matthew's day on September 21.⁵⁴ The almanacs consistently published the holy day as September 21, which would have enhanced the probability of Smith knowing the date. Even the almanacs the Smiths would have most likely used contained a reference to St. Matthew's day.⁵⁵ The prevalence and consistency of the date made it plausible that Smith knew of the holy day, even if he did not know its significance. Almanacs at the time were rather reticent on the topic. Only almanacs that were explicitly labeled as Christian during this time contained any information regarding Matthew or the day. For example, *Swords's Pocket Almanac and Christian Calendar* contained a small biography of St. Matthew.

St. Matthew was called the last of the Apostles, and was, by profession, a Publican, or in our language, a Custom-house-officer, under the master Publicanus, who farmed the revenues from the Roman state. St. Matthew was employed to collect the duties laid on the fishing-trade, in the lake of Tiberias; and sitting at the receipt of custom, where he might have a clear view of ships and their lading, our Savior passing by, saw him in the execution of his office. And, notwithstanding the miracles which Jesus wrought in the country about Capernaum might probably make some impressions on him. yet so visible was the wonderful efficacy of the Holy Spirit of God in his conversion, that our Savior

⁵² Bonnie J Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 583–584.

⁵³ Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York: B. Franklin, 1977), 59.

⁵⁴ *Western Agricultural Almanack, For the Year of our Lord 1823*; Beers, *Webster's Calendar: or the Albany Almanack, for the Year of our Lord, 1823*; *The Christian Almanack, for the Year of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*; Loud & Wilmarth, *The Farmer's Diary, or, Ontario Almanack*.

⁵⁵ *Western Agricultural Almanack, For the Year of our Lord 1823*; Loud & Wilmarth, *The Farmer's Diary, or, Ontario Almanack*.

said nothing more than, *follow me*. And he arose and followed him accordingly, without the least hesitation.⁵⁶

Most almanacs, however, provided limited explanations about rituals or ways to participate in the feast. For example, *Farmer's Almanac for... 1795* contained information concerning holy days and ways to celebrate, but omitted St. Matthew's day from the list, further demonstrating the limited explanation of the holy day.⁵⁷ The likelihood of the Smiths possessing one of these almanacs appears remote, since these specialized almanacs only existed in small quantities in the early republic.

Smith's interests likely prevented him from celebrating the saint. The holy day commemorates the life of the apostle and evangelist Matthew, author of the first gospel.⁵⁸ He worked as a publican (tax collector), prior to his calling as an apostle, making him the "patron saint of accountants, tax-collectors, custom officers,...and is often portrayed with a bag of coins or a money-box."⁵⁹ Smith would not have recognized Matthew as a patron saint, because he lacked affiliation with these activities. Smith may have easily identified more with St. Christopher because of the connection between St. Christopher and treasure seeking.⁶⁰ Even Smith's religious explorations hindered learning the significance of the day. In his 1838 history, Smith claimed to feel an affinity toward Methodism.⁶¹ Methodists supported the liturgical calendar, but only wanted to emphasize the most significant dates, such as Christmas and

⁵⁶ *Sword's Pocket Almanack, and Christian's Calendar for the Year of our Lord 1816*,..., 45.

⁵⁷ "The Farmer's Useful and Entertaining Companion; or, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont Almanack, for the Year of our Lord 1795 ...," 1794, <http://opac.newsbank.com/select/evans/26962> (accessed March 5, 2013).

⁵⁸ Blackburn and Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year*, 381–382.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁶⁰ Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: a History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 85.

⁶¹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:210.

Easter.⁶² Thus neither Smith's Methodist associations nor his treasure seeking interests inclined him toward celebrating St. Matthew on September 21.

Smith potentially attempted to reverence St. Matthew during the evening hours of the visit. Matthew received the New Testament title of Apostle and later evangelist for his writing of the gospel of Matthew.⁶³ Moroni told Smith that God had called him to a special work and that he would bring forth additional scripture.⁶⁴ The calling to perform God's work paralleled Matthew's call as an apostle, as did creating additional scripture similar to the gospel that Matthew wrote. However, by Smith's account, he did not know Moroni would promise these things. Smith only intended to receive forgiveness of sins, not to reverence or emulate St. Matthew with the calling and scripture.⁶⁵ The timing of Moroni's appearance provides further complications, because Moroni appeared around eleven or midnight the night of September 21-22.⁶⁶ If Moroni appeared at midnight or shortly after then the events occurred not on St. Matthew's holy day but on St. Maurice's day – an even less significant day in Smith's religious environment.⁶⁷ The events of the visitation deviate enough to dismiss Smith's vision as a means to reverence or emulate St. Matthew.

Conclusion

Smith uncharacteristically remembered and cited the date of the vision of Moroni, and consistently recorded the same date. In three of Smith's five accounts of the vision, he attributed the visions to September 21, while the 1832 account stated September 22.⁶⁸ Oliver Cowdery

⁶² William Nash Wade, "A History of Public Worship in the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, from 1784 to 1905" (PhD Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1981) 214.

⁶³ David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶⁴ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:222.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:57.

⁶⁷ Blackburn and Holford-Stevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year*, 382–383.

⁶⁸ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14, 218–219, 221, 494, 508.

dated the vision on September 21 in his fourth and seventh letters to W.W. Phelps.⁶⁹ Many scholars believe that Smith consistently remembered the date because it contained special meaning. Remembering the date of his vision followed some of the cultural patterns. Many Christian dreamers remembered the date of their experience, while most treasure seekers never recorded the date of their expeditions. The dates of Christian visions varied, and avoided significance beyond the experience. Smith's memory of the date followed the cultural norm for Christian visions.

Smith never mentioned folk religion connections, but similarities exist between the witchcraft sabbath, autumnal equinox in astrology and Christian holy days. A small minority practiced witchcraft during the early Republic, but no evidence exists that they actually practiced the dreaded sabbaths of Protestant legend. Even if they did occur, it strains credulity to that in Smith's visions he worshipped Satan, which was essential to witchcraft sabbaths.

A connection between the astrological autumnal equinox and the vision lacks clarity because the equinox occurred on September 23, the day following Smith's visitation with Moroni. Smith probably lacked sufficient information about St. Matthew's day because of the dearth of information in almanacs to reasonably assume this occurred. The events occurring on September 21-22 lack clarity regarding the performance of the rituals or Smith's knowledge of the events to adequately claim cultural parallels.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:59, 73.

CHAPTER FOUR

“HE SHEWED UNTO ME A HEAVENLY VISION”: IMAGERY WITHIN THE VISIONS

Matthew Carey’s early American Bibles epitomized the increasing use of illustrations to convey religious messages.¹ Carey printed clustered illustrations together on paper heavier than its text-filled counterpart to help readers quickly identify the images and skip from picture to picture, which drew the attention of the reader away from the printed message toward the visual message, and invited the reader to experience the story or the location depicted.² Biblical illustrations created a heightened visual sensitivity that naturally extended into graphic evangelical dreams and visions. Dreams, though, expanded past imagery by allowing the dreamer to participate.³ “Moreover,” as historian Ann Kirschner wrote, “what a print could not accomplish, but a dream could, was to move the viewer from active spectator to participant... Words, at least temporarily, could not replicate the potency of the visual image. Dreams carried devotional and visual impact equal to, if not surpassing, printed pictures.”⁴ This heightened sensitivity encourages an examination of the imagery of the 1823 visions. This chapter will consider the classification of the Smith’s purported visions of Moroni as a vision and the imagery of the vision beginning with a re-evaluation of the much discussed topics of whether the experience constituted a dream or vision, and whether the thrice-repeated vision followed cultural patterns. The chapter will then move to less discussed aspects of the vision,

¹ Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 47.

² *Ibid.*, 59, 66.

³ Ann Kirschner, “‘God Visited My Slumber’: The Intersection of Dreams, Religion, and Society in America, 1770--1830” (Ph.D., Delaware: University of Delaware, 2004), 130.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

namely the imagery of the dream by evaluating what people saw in their dreams and visions, and how Smith's experience compared to those experiences.

Dream or Vision

Early Mormons struggled to classify the Second Vision, repeatedly calling the experience a dream and a vision. In *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*, Orson Pratt called the experience a vision.⁵ Conversely, a Rochester newspaper article paraphrased Martin Harris stating that Smith “had been visited by the spirit of Almighty in a dream,”⁶ while The Ohio Star reported that Smith had been “visited in a dream.”⁷ One modern scholar pointed to Smith's own initial recitation of the vision as evidence of a dream.⁸ In his 1832 journal account of the experience, Smith wrote, “I called again upon the Lord and he shewed me a heavenly vision,” but at the hill Cumorah on September 22, 1823 he wondered whether the experience “had been a dreem of Vision.”⁹ Yet, in his 1835 recitation he said, “I had another vision of angels, and in a draft of his 1838 account he recorded “Meditating upon this wonderful vision.”¹⁰ Smith vacillated about the title, which could have confused others, or entitled individuals to use the terms interchangeably.

Oliver Cowdery sought to clarify the issue by emphatically declaring the encounter was a vision, even though the experience occurred at night. “But the one of which I have been speaking is what would have been called an open vision. And though, it was in the night, yet it was not a

⁵ Karen Lynn Davidson et al., eds., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 525.

⁶ “Golden Bible,” *The Gem: A Semi-Monthly Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* (Rochester, New York, September 5, 1829), 70; Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 272–273.

⁷ “The Golden Bible,” *The Ohio Star* (Ravenna, Ohio, December 9, 1830), 2.

⁸ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 138–141.

⁹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:13–14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:116, 227.

dream,” said Cowdery.¹¹ Visions and dreams differed, regardless of the time of occurrence, Cowdery clarified. The presence of a messenger and the wakefulness of the participant made the experience a vision. Since Moroni had actually been in the room with Smith with a light surrounding him that illuminated the room and then disappeared, the experience could only be classified as a vision. “He was awake, and in solem prayer, as you will bear in mind, when the angel made his appearance,” wrote Cowdery, implying Smith knew whether the angel actually appeared or whether it was a product of his imagination.¹² Others classifying the experience as a dream opened the experience to questions of delusion, while the label ‘vision’ added credibility.¹³

Cowdery still knew that God spoke through dreams, even if people were deceived.¹⁴ Prior to contending for a visionary classification, Cowdery listed Biblical examples of God communicating with individuals through dreams.¹⁵ Each instance contained a warning to individuals from God, which may have revealed Cowdery’s belief that dreams only conveyed warnings. Smith’s experience may have classified as a vision for Cowdery because of the message.

Cowdery’s stance defied contemporary visionaries who used the titles, ‘dream’ and ‘vision,’ interchangeably. Authors of published dream and vision narratives commonly equated visions and dreams.¹⁶ One author, identified only as N.W. of the County of Worchester, stated “Sometime in March 1798, I saw a dream (or rather a vision)...”¹⁷ Samuel Ingalls entitled his

¹¹ Ibid., 1:74.

¹² Ibid., 1:73–74.

¹³ Ibid., 1:74. In the two paragraphs on this subject, Cowdery used “deceived,” or a form of the word, three times, which accentuated his primary concern.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1:74.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:73.

¹⁶ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 78.

¹⁷ NW of the County of Worchester, *Remarkable Dreams, &c. or Thoughts from the Visions of the Night*, 1800, 7.

story, *A Dream or Vision*.¹⁸ In a pamphlet, one Dr. Watts equated the two concepts together in his title.¹⁹ Further, the Bible made no such distinction between the terms. The author of Job recorded “Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through vision:” (Job 7:14, KJV), “He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night.” (Job 20:8), then later wrote “In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;” (Job 33:15). Prior to interpreting the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel said “Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed are these;” (Daniel 2:28). Usage of the term reflected equality among the types of experiences; visions were not necessarily better than dreams. Early Mormon references may only have exemplified this biblical speak in early American culture.²⁰

Though counter to the contemporary culture, vision as a title might have actually best reflected Smith’s own thinking on the epiphany. Smith’s circa 1832 account recounted Smith wondering whether the appearance of September 21 was a dream, but Smith dismissed the thought, acknowledging the event as a vision: “then being exceedingly frightened I supposed it had been a dream of Vision but when I considered I knew that it was not.”²¹ Smith never labelled or referenced his experience as dream after that moment. As noted earlier, Smith called the interview a vision in 1835 and in 1838 but did not use the term in either 1842 or 1844. Smith only fleetingly viewed the experience as a dream, which would dismiss Cowdery’s deception concern.

¹⁸ Samuel Ignalls, *A Dream, or Vision*, 1809.

¹⁹ Dr. Watts, *A Wonderful Dream, with a Surprising and Visionary Account of the Triumph Over Satan, the Subtle Adversary of Souls* (Taunton: J. Danforth, 1812).

²⁰ It is interesting to note that The Book of Mormon equates vision with dream. Lehi, a Book of Mormon prophet states, “Behold, I have dreamed a dream; or, in other words, I have seen a vision” (Joseph Smith, trans by., *The Book of Mormon*, 1st ed. [Palmyra, New York: E.B. Grandin, 1830], 18).

²¹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14.

Repeating Dreams

Among the evidences Cowdery employed to validate the vision was Moroni's repeating appearance throughout the evening and into the morning: "Far from this; for the vision was renewed twice before morning, unfolding farther and still farther the mysteries of godliness and those things to come."²² Others emphasized the repeating nature of the vision, especially the thrice-repeated "dream" during the nocturnal visitations. The Ohio Star article specified that "the spirit of the Almighty" came to the young man three times that night.²³ Martin Harris stated that Smith went to obtain the plates after a spirit visited him three times.²⁴ Even Smith accentuated the role of thrice-repeated dreams during each of his recitals of the vision, specifically in 1844 when he wrote, "The angel appeared to me three times the same night and unfolded the same things."²⁵ In the 1832 account, Smith strained to emphasize the thrice repeated dream. After citing the messenger appeared three times, Smith adds "and once on the next day," instead of stating four times.²⁶ Smith could have stated five visits, since the angel appeared an additional time during the daytime of September 22, but instead chose three during the night and once the next day. Early Mormon focus on thrice repeated dreams reflected a cultural teaching.

Treasure seeking culture and grimoirs believed in repeating dreams. Agrippa's book on occult philosophy stated, "For there are four kinds of true dreams...the fourth, which is repeated to the same dreamer, according to that which *Smith* saith to Pharaoh, but that thou hast seen the dream belonging to the same thing the second time, it is a sign of confirmation."²⁷ Francis Barrett confirmed Agrippa's thoughts: "But there are four kinds of true dreams...the fourth, that

²² Ibid., 1:74.

²³ "The Golden Bible," 2.

²⁴ "Golden Bible," 70; Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:272–273.

²⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:509.

²⁶ Ibid., 1:14.

²⁷ Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, ed by. Donald Tyson (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1993), 634. Emphasis in original.

which is repeated to the same dreamer in the nocturnal visions.”²⁸ While Washington Irving told a treasure seeking story that claimed the seekers always received a vision thrice-repeated before discovering the loot.²⁹ Repeating dreams were among the involuntary means of discovering treasure. Modern scholars have noted the emphasis of repeated dreams within the early Republic, especially within treasure-seeking culture. Alan Taylor argued “Dreams, especially if thrice repeated, guided seekers to suspected treasure,” while Michael Quinn also connected thrice-repeated dreams with treasure seeking.³⁰ Ronald Walker observed the frequency of dreams being repeated thrice, but focused on the significance of the number three rather than thrice-repeated dreams.³¹

From these arguments, thrice-repeated visions regularly occurred within treasure seeking and visionary culture, but scholars have exaggerated the role of repeated-dreams. In an evaluation of twenty-nine treasure seeking accounts that originated with dreams, only four accounts began with an individual dreaming multiple times in one evening.³² Most treasure seeking expeditions originated from other sources, further diminishing the prominence of thrice-repeated dreams. Of eighty-four treasure digging narratives, thrice-repeated dreams accounted for less than five percent, making them a rare and insignificant portion of the methods used to find treasure. Most of the scholarly attention ensued because of the repeating nature of the 1823

²⁸ Francis Barrett, *The Magus, Or Celestial Intelligencer; Being a Complete System of Occult Philosophy* (London: Lackington, Allen and Co., 1801), 2:72.

²⁹ Washington Irving, *Tales of a Traveller* (New-York: Printed by C.S. Van Winkle, 1825), 253.

³⁰ Alan Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy : Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830.,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1986): 10; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged*, 139.

³¹ Ronald W. Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” *BYU Studies* 24, no. 4 (Fall 1984): 440.

³² Franklin C. Jillson and Mary Jillson, *Green Leaves from Whitingham, Vermont: a History of the Town* (Private press of the author, 1894), 115–119; Emelyn Elizabeth Gardner, *Folklore from the Schoharie Hills, New York* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 13–15, 179, 185; George W. Walker, “The Lost Treasure of Oneidas,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1947): 252–254; Josiah Fletcher Goodhue and Middlebury Historical Society (Middlebury Vt.), *History of the Town of Shoreham, Vermont: From the Date of its Charter, October 8th, 1761, to the Present Time* (A.H. Copeland, 1861), 144–145; Sarah Josepha Buell Hale, *Traits of American life* (E.L. Carey & A. Hart, 1835), 104–110; Henry Royce Bass, *The History of Braintree, Vermont: Including a Memorial of Families that Have Resided in Town* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle & Company, State Printers, 1883), 46.

vision, even though repetitive dreams transpired only in a small portion of treasure seeking narratives.³³

The magical text books further argued that repeating dreams meant the experience was true, but the belief did not resonate among individuals of the early Republic. After his Christian apocalyptic vision repeated three times, Nicodemus Havens' wrote, "If any truth can be placed in *old sayings*, the Vision of Nicodemus Havens, of the city of New York, Cordwainer, MUST BE TRUE."³⁴ His unsure confidence reflected a distinction between what books taught, and what people believed about thrice-repeated dreams. Ashbel Tucker dreamed three times one evening of a meeting by a river with a man who had undeservedly received money from another man, which he kept for a period of time before burying the unexpected treasure. After the third dream, Tucker sprang from his bed, and located the man by the river just as his dream had prophesied. Tucker did not approach the man, though, because he was "Startled that so much [of] his dream should prove true."³⁵ Deacon Bascom expressed similar trepidation about the veracity of his thrice-repeated dream. He finally acted after receiving a fourth dream, six months later.³⁶ If people accepted thrice-repeated dreams as unequivocally true, as Agrippa's *Occult Guide* and *The Magus* stated, one might expect that Tucker would have not been surprised by the experience, and would have approached the man, or that Deacon Bascom would have acted on the initial dream. Even Smith momentarily questioned his thrice-repeated experience when he could not obtain the plates at the Hill Cumorah.³⁷ While thrice-repeated dreams occasionally occurred, recipients did not view them as indubitable.

³³ See Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy," 10.

³⁴ Nicodemus Havens, *Wonderful Vision of Nicodemus Havens* (Boston: Coverly, Jr, 1812), 11, emphasis in original.

³⁵ Bass, *The History of Braintree, Vermont*, 46.

³⁶ Hale, *Traits of American life*, 104–105.

³⁷ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14.

Christian dreams contained accounts of repeating dreams with a comparable frequency to treasure seeking, further validating the rarity of their occurrence. John Valton told John Wesley that he had received a dream of God pardoning his sins that occurred twice in one night.³⁸ As noted, Nicodemus Havens's apocalyptic vision recurred three times.³⁹ In a widely circulated account, Rebecca Ashburn received three nocturnal dreams in successive nights. The first evening, she dreamt that a minister came and encouraged her to leave her spiritual darkness and come to the light of Christ under his tutelage. After singing three hymns, he left. The following evening, she viewed herself dying on her bed when the same minister came to her again to locate her pain. She pointed to her heart, which prompted him to comfort and again encourage her to believe in Christ. He repeated the sayings three times, before praying and departing. The third dream began with Rebecca surrounded by a group of people, when the minister appeared and beckoned her to the light again, which she obliged. He escorted her to another room, conversed with her for a moment about another world, and then left because he had fulfilled his role.⁴⁰ Similar to treasure hunting dreams, Christian dreams contained repeating dreams, but they were only a fraction of dream accounts. The majority of Christian accounts contained only one experience.

In some instances, three dreams in one night should be characterized as multiple, not repeating dreams, since the same experience did repeat in the evening. In one treasure hunting example, the person dreamed three times in the same night, which does not guarantee the same dream occurred each time, nor does it fit the occult concept of repeated dreams. Some individuals classified those occurrences as a repeating dream, even though the contents, except

³⁸ John Wesley, *The Experience of Several Eminent Methodist Preachers: With an Account of Their Call to and Success in the Ministry. In a Series of Letters Written by Themselves, to the Rev. John Wesley* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1837), 293.

³⁹ Havens, *Wonderful Vision of Nicodemus Havens*.

⁴⁰ Rebecca Ashburn, *Three Remarkable Dreams in Succession*, 1802, 1–4.

the directive, were not articulated.⁴¹ Rebecca Ashburn's case exemplifies this distinction as she had three distinct dreams on different nights that contained the same message, as did Benjamin Abbott, who had three different experiences during his conversion narrative, but none repeated.⁴² Even though the goals of the dreams were the same, the events within the dream differed, so the experiences qualified as multiple, but not repeated, dreams.

Smith's experience qualified as a repeating dream since Moroni repeated the same message each visit with minor variations, but claiming it reflected the cultural beliefs about dreams is an overstatement. Magical overtones exist since the vision repeats three times during the night, but it lacked significant cultural influences, since most dreams only occurred once and most individuals lacked faith in repeating dreams. Surprisingly, though, Cowdery used the repeating visions as evidence. After rhetorically asking if Smith was deceived, he said: "Far from this; for the vision was renewed twice before morning, unfolding farther and still farther the mysteries of godliness and those things to come."⁴³ The vision harmonized with a slim minority of visionary experiences, therefore not truly reflecting the dominant cultural attitudes of dreams.

Imagery

Christian visions, especially spiritual journeys, depicted visual experiences that portrayed an individual traveling to and viewing a variety of locations and people, including traveling through heaven and hell, meeting various individuals, or travelling to different places.⁴⁴ Dreamers believed that visual images held a more powerful effect than text.⁴⁵ "Evangelicals were not only tolerant and accepting of this sort of precise visual detail, they embraced it as the literal

⁴¹ Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 440.

⁴² Ashburn, *Three Remarkable Dreams in Succession*; Benjamin Abbott, *The Experience, and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott* (New York: Published by Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 18–22.

⁴³ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:74.

⁴⁴ Kirschner, "God Visited My Slumber," 136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

enactment of evangelism’s core practice: unmediated access to the Bible,” noted historian Ann Kirschner.⁴⁶ Visionaries wrote detailed accounts of what they saw and experienced through spiritual journeys or apocalyptic visions, which were often recreations of Biblical stories or teachings, such as John Nelson’s dream of watching Jeremiah preach in Jerusalem or viewing Daniel in the lion’s den.⁴⁷ Visionaries transformed into participatory actors, instead of passive recipients. Aaron Warner climbed a staircase that led to heaven; Joseph Smith, Sr. walked on a wide road, before seeing the straight and narrow path; an unidentified visionary travelled through the “Heavenly City,” and Caleb Poole used the sword of the Spirit to kill two bulls.⁴⁸ In the most dramatic participatory moment, Charles Finney touched Jesus as he wiped Christ’s feet with his tears.⁴⁹ The graphic visions invited the visionary to transform the words and teachings of the Bible into reality, as the visionary become a character in the Biblical narrative or lessons.⁵⁰

Moroni’s nocturnal visitation conspicuously lacks significant amounts of imagery. During the nocturnal instruction, Smith never travelled to another place, viewed Jesus, friends, or prophets, except for Moroni – levitating in his own bedroom – nor did he see future life events. The angel apparently stood, instructed and recited scriptures to Smith for almost the entirety of the vision. While Moroni quoted and referred to many Biblical passages, he did not situate Smith in any Biblical scene, either real or imagined. Smith’s vision generally lacked all of these components; he contently listened to Moroni’s direction without so much as asking a question or

⁴⁶ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁷ John Nelson, *Extract from the Journal of John Nelson: Being an Account of God’s Dealing With Him from His Youth to the Forty-Second Year of His Age* (E.Stevenson & F.A.Owen, 1856), 24, 137.

⁴⁸ Aaron Warner, *A Remarkable Dream, or Vision, Which was Experienced on the Night of the 20th of May, 1799* (Hartford, Connecticut: John Babcock, 1801), 9; Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool; London: Published for Orson Pratt by S.W. Richards; sold at the Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1853), 58; *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision* (Philadelphia: John Crukshank, 1789), 5–7; Caleb Pool, *News from Heaven, by Vision, Communicated Miraculously to, and Explained by Caleb Pool, of Gloucester* (By the Author, 1805), 3.

⁴⁹ Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1876), 20.

⁵⁰ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 131.

making a comment. Instead of participating in the experience, Smith observed as an active spectator.

Limited imagery existed during portions of the vision beginning with Moroni's entrance. In many Christian dreams, an angelic being guided the visionary through the spiritual or apocalyptic journey, who usually remained unidentified, but occasionally was a Biblical figure, friend or relative.⁵¹ Guides appeared with such regularity that the absence of a guide surprised Aaron Warner as he waited for direction during his experience.⁵² Moroni acted in this capacity within Smith's vision. The guide's entrance into the dream usually contained little grandeur. The dreamer simply stated that somebody appeared to lead them through the experience.⁵³ Other experiences depicted dramatic moments such as a door bursting open before the guide entered, or carriages carrying the guides to the dreamer.⁵⁴

For this study, the most intriguing appearances described light suddenly bursting into the view of the visionary with a messenger or guide in the middle of this light, because of the similarity to Moroni's appearance. These accounts depicted the light emanating from the angel, but filling the entire room with a brightness that exceeded the sun at midday. In one account, Nathan Culver described the angel's entrance similar to Moroni's entrance: "The same instant I saw a man in the room with a bright shining light around him, which appeared brighter than the sun, shining, in his full strength."⁵⁵ During one of Jane Cish's visions, the brightness of the white-clad angel enlightened the entire room.⁵⁶ Smith's 1838 account provided a similar description of Moroni's appearance: "While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I

⁵¹ Ibid., 57.

⁵² Warner, *A Remarkable Dream, or Vision, Which was Experienced on the Night of the 20th of May, 1799*, 9.

⁵³ Hezekiah Goodwin, *A Vision* (New Haven: Josiah Meigs, 1788), 3; *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision*, 5; John Mills, *Vision of John Mills, in Bedford County, at Virginia, in the Year 1785*, 1785.

⁵⁴ Goodwin, *A Vision*, 3; Ignalls, *A Dream, or Vision*.

⁵⁵ Nathan Culver, *A Very Remarkable Account of the Vision of Nathan Culver*, Fifth. (Boston: E. Russell, 1795), 4.

⁵⁶ Jane Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish* (Philadelphia, 1793), 6.

discovered a light appearing in the room which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday and <when> immediately a personage <appeared> at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor...Not only was his robe exceedingly white but his whole person was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning. The room was exceedingly light, but not so very bright as immediately around his person.”⁵⁷ Moroni’s appearance harmonized with many elements of Christian dreams, such as brightness that exceeded the midday sun, and the light filling the entire room, but variances existed concerning the source of the light. Contemporaries depicted light emanating from the angelic being, while Smith claimed light appeared prior to the angel’s entrance, thus referencing a light source independent of Moroni.⁵⁸ Cowdery clarified that two lights existed while Moroni appeared, one flooding the room while another originated around the angel.⁵⁹ One light emanated from Moroni, similar to other visions, but a second, independent source of light was not recorded by other visionaries.

The presence of two lights resolves Smith’s competing explanations that a light suddenly appeared and gradually disseminated throughout the room.⁶⁰ The initial burst of light sprang from the initial light that filled the room, but the gradual light emanated from Moroni. The 1842 account of the vision subtly articulates the presence of both lights “on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness burst into the room, indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire;... In a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory yet greater than that with which I was

⁵⁷ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:220.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:494.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:57–58.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:220, 508.

already surrounded.”⁶¹ The multiple lights distinguished Smith from other experiences since others with similar experiences only described one light that originated from the angel, instead of the angel adding to an already present light.

At the end of the vision, “a conduit open[ed] right up into heaven, and he [Moroni] ascended up till he entirely disappeared,” which left the room dark.⁶² Smith’s reference omitted discussion of the second light, only the light surrounding Moroni. The departing light distinguished Smith from other visions, whose visions ended simply. Nathan Culver simply said “I saw no more” to end his vision.⁶³ Jane Cish remembered light surrounding the room toward the end of the vision, but never mentioned the light disappearing.⁶⁴ The angel in Eliza Thomas’ vision departed out of the door without the spectacular disappearance.⁶⁵ Moroni’s exit diverged from the culture with a spectacular exit, while most visionary experiences briefly mentioned the guide’s exit, if at all.

Visions of heaven and hell were a common and important element of spiritual journey narratives. Titles of published pamphlets, such as *A Vision of Heaven and Hell* or *A Wonderful Dream, with a surprising and visionary account of the triumph over Satan, the subtle adversary of Souls*, demonstrated the significance visionaries placed on their visions of heaven and hell.⁶⁶ Visionaries wrote vivid depictions of beings brought down into the depths of hell, which reflected the images contained in illustrated Bibles.⁶⁷ Jane Cish’s narrative described much of the imagery common in these visions:

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:494.

⁶² Ibid., 1:226.

⁶³ Culver, *A Very Remarkable Account of the Vision of Nathan Culver*, 12.

⁶⁴ Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish*, 15.

⁶⁵ Eliza Thomas, *A Vision; Tending to Edify, Astonish, and Instruct; Experienced by Miss Eliza Thomas* (Stonington, Conn.: Samuel Trumbull, 1800), 6.

⁶⁶ Ann Phillips, *A Vision of Heaven and Hell* (Barnard, VT, 1812); Watts, *A Wonderful Dream, with a Surprising and Visionary Account of the Triumph Over Satan, the Subtle Adversary of Souls*.

⁶⁷ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 131.

Now, said the angel, I have one sight more to shew thee, then I will dismiss thee; and then there appeared unto me a wide, dreary, dark, gulph [sic], which seemed as if it were filled with smoke, fire, and brimstone, and other kinds of noisome vapours, through this I looked, and saw millions of unhappy wretches, tormented in the most horrid manner: Every faculty, sense and power was tormented. They eternally pine with hunger and thirst; they see nothing but darkness, smoke, fire and brimstone; and through the doleful cries of woe and despair; they smell nothing but the suffocating stink of brimstone and noxious vapours; they taste nothing but the bitter pains of eternal death; and above all they feel nothing but the most excruciating torments inflicted by the avenging wrath of an angry God, which I saw as a stream poured upon them; they groaned, sighed, and gnashed their teeth, and gnawed themselves with pain; they blasphemed and cursed the God of Heaven, and each other, and were in all respects unutterably miserable.⁶⁸

The devil appeared in various forms throughout the visions including the shape of a human, a “fierce” bull, and an “old dragon.”⁶⁹ The denizens of hell wreaked havoc upon the visiting visionary. Sarah Alley, for example, saw Satan “furiously” lung at her, coming within “a rod or too” but was stopped by a chain. John Mills saw in vision Satan taking judged souls “in a fearful manner, and dragging them down to a torment that kept continually raining, foaming, and stinking with brimstone.”⁷⁰ The experiences poignantly reminded each dreamer that they could permanently dwell with Satan and his minions, thus actualizing one of their greatest fears.

Similar to other visions, Smith saw and experienced the mercy and condescension of Christ, and saw Satan and his minions.⁷¹ Smith felt the power of Satan around him, similar to Mehetable Churchill and a man in Josiah Priest’s book.⁷² His vision of Christ brought relief and

⁶⁸ Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish*, 13.

⁶⁹ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 151; Culver, *A Very Remarkable Account of the Vision of Nathan Culver*, 12; Pool, *News from Heaven, by Vision, Communicated Miraculously to, and Explained by Caleb Pool, of Gloucester*, 3; Phillips, *A Vision of Heaven and Hell*, 2.

⁷⁰ Sarah Alley, *An Account of a Trance or Vision of Sarah Alley, of Beekman Town, Dutchess County, State of New-York*, 1798, 6; Mills, *Vision of John Mills, in Bedford County, at Virginia, in the Year 1785*.

⁷¹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83.

⁷² *Ibid.*; Mehetable Churchill, *A Remarkable Instance of the Interposition of the Spirit of Grace, to Save from Death a Guilty Sinner* (Joseph Warriner, 1783), 14–15; Josiah Priest, *The Wonders of Nature and Providence, Displayed: Compiled from Authentic Sources, Both Ancient and Modern, Giving an Account of Various and Strange Phenomena Existing in Nature, of Travels, Adventures, Singular Providences, &c* (Albany, New York: J. Priest, 1826), 563–565.

peace, which was another characteristic of evangelical experiences.⁷³ Smith's accounts though barely mentioned his experience at the hill Cumorah of visiting the depths of hell and the heights of heaven. Only the Oliver Cowdery account acknowledged that aspect of the interview, and he briefly discussed it, compared to the pages of explanation other visionaries gave the topic. For Smith, this aspect of the vision was secondary to other components, such as Moroni's message and retrieving the plates. The vision also did not confirm forgiveness, as that had happened the previous evening when Moroni first appeared. Instead, the vision attempted to motivate Smith toward good by seeing the depths of heaven and hell. "All this is shown, the good and the evil, the holy and the impure, the glory of God and the power of darkness, that you may know hereafter the two powers and never be influenced or overcome by that wicked one," Moroni said.⁷⁴ This auxiliary experience acts as a prime example of how Smith's vision did not fit within the cultural pattern of visions. Both experienced heaven and hell, but while contemporaries felt the visions assisted in conversion and forgiveness, Smith gave it minimal attention.

Smith's reluctance to elaborate upon this vision could stem from a lack of detail viewed, when compared to others. Smith did not experience the depths of hell with as much fervor as his contemporaries; instead he felt sorrow for not focusing entirely upon the works of God. Cowdery only wrote that Smith "beheld the prince of darkness, surrounded by his innumerable train of associates."⁷⁵ Satan did not grab Smith or attempt to keep him in hell; he only viewed their presence. Without a similar experience, Smith might have felt uncomfortable focusing upon those aspects of his experience.

⁷³ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83; Phillips, *A Vision of Heaven and Hell*, 3; Chloe Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself* (New York: John C. Totton, 1810), 3.

⁷⁴ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Visions of heaven periodically occurred prior to or after visiting hell, and many times involved seeing Jesus, occasionally accompanied by a heavenly host. Descriptions of heaven used imagery similar to descriptions of hell. Visionaries regularly viewed heaven as a city, most often a heavenly Jerusalem, with “Walls...as chrystal, and the City of pure Gold,” that had “no need for the Sun or the Moon to shine on it, for the Glory of God doth enlighten it.”⁷⁶ A warm and amiable Jesus, clad in white, bright clothing, dwelt there and often spoke and comforted the individual.⁷⁷ Benjamin Abbott saw “by faith,” as he wrote, “the Lord Jesus Christ standing by me, with his arms extended wide, saying to me, ‘*I died for you*’” and then handed him a sweet drink.⁷⁸ Sarah Alley recognized Christ from those surrounding him because he appeared “more personal and far more glorious.” He informed her that she could not stay in heaven, but had to “return to the world and warn the people therefore to repent and do better” – and he encouraged her to stay on the straight and narrow path.⁷⁹ An anonymous writer saw God surrounded by concourses of angels and a light that blinded her view of Christ, when she finally saw him he looked down “pleasantly” upon her and her guide giving her needed strength.⁸⁰ The experiences made the visionaries participants as they walked the streets of heaven or spoke with Jesus.

Smith, though, lacked a participatory role within his vision of heaven and hell. Only Cowdery mentioned the vision in passing with little description of what Smith experienced. “At that instant he looked to the Lord in prayer, and as he prayed darkness began to disperse from his mind and his soul lit up as it was [in] the evening before, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit; and again did the Lord manifest his condescension and mercy; the heavens opened and the glory

⁷⁶ Thomas Chamberlain, *America’s Timely Remembrancer; or, the Minister preaching his own Funeral Sermon* (Fredericktown: M. Bartgis, 1794), 4–5. *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision* also describes heaven as a city.

⁷⁷ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 136.

⁷⁸ Abbott, *The Experience, and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott*, 20–21 Emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ Alley, *An Account of a Trance or Vision of Sarah Alley, of Beekman Town, Dutchess County, State of New-York*, 8–9.

⁸⁰ *The Glory of the Heavenly City, and Blessedness of Departed Saints, Graciously Manifested in a Vision*, 8.

of the Lord shone round about and rested on him,” wrote Cowdery.⁸¹ The account lacked the imagery and intimate portraits of other Christian accounts, which usually contained vividly described heaven with a warm and relatable Jesus. Smith vision only mentioned Christ; he did not meet Jesus. Smith participated as spectator again, not an active contributor.

The vision of heaven and hell included seeing the condescension of God, which occasionally occurred among Christian visionaries, but lacked a uniform explanation. Jane Cish saw the life of Christ, including his birth, baptism, entering the ministry and performing miracles, before giving an elaborate and detailed description of his death.⁸² Cish’s vision harmonized with vision of the Book of Mormon Prophet Nephi, who saw similar events of the life of Christ in what he called the “condescension” of Christ.⁸³ She never entitled this vision the condescension of Christ, though, only Norris Stearns used the term in reference to seeing Christ submit to the will of the God. He did not see the life of Christ.⁸⁴ The examples provide no definitive evidence about the cultural meaning of condescension in dreams. This ambiguity makes it impossible to determine whether that aspect of the vision followed the cultural patterns of dreams.

Some of the inconsistencies between visions stem from the recitations. The foci of other visions differed from Smith’s accounts because Smith did not elaborate on those details. Instead of giving detailed descriptions of Christ, Smith concentrated his attention on the description of Moroni and his appearance, not on the heavenly vision. Smith excludes that vision in all but one account unlike contemporaries who devoted significant portions of their accounts to visions of

⁸¹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83.

⁸² Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish*, 6–7.

⁸³ Smith, *The Book of Mormon*, 24–26.

⁸⁴ Norris Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command* (Greenfield, Mass.: Denio & Phelps, 1815), 12.

heaven and communing with Jesus. The young man's reticence in discussing the details of the vision diverged drastically from contemporary Christian visionary writings.

The directness actually presented a style similar to treasure hunting narratives. Most accounts lacked the vivid details contained in Christian dreams, including the specific location of the treasure. Instead the accounts stated a treasure existed then individuals went to search for it, using rods and stones to determine the proper digging place. A minority of accounts contained vivid locations of where the treasure was located. Deacon Bascom went directly to the place he saw in vision. Even though he did not obtain the treasure he was confident that the mine was located in the spot revealed to him.⁸⁵ Another man, "elder Belknap" saw a vision where an American Indian guided him to treasure spot. The next day the man went to the location without any assistance.⁸⁶ During the evening visitation Moroni showed Smith a second vision, or a vision within a vision, of the hill Cumorah and the location of the plates. Smith saw the dream so vividly that he knew "so clearly and distinctly...the place again when I visited it."⁸⁷ Smith's dream followed the treasure seeking narrative because Moroni did not show him the plates, only the location, similar to Bascom and "elder Belknap."⁸⁸ The vision differed from Belknap because Smith's lacked participation. Belknap walked through the area to the treasure location with his guide, while Moron only showed Smith the location of the plates without personal accompaniment.⁸⁹ It differed from both visions because it was a second vision or vision within a vision. In the end, the vivid imagery closely resembled a limited number of treasure seeking narratives.

⁸⁵ Hale, *Traits of American life*, 107.

⁸⁶ Walker, "The Lost Treasure of Oneidas," 252–253.

⁸⁷ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:226.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:222, 226.

⁸⁹ Walker, "The Lost Treasure of Oneidas," 252–253; Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:226.

Conclusion

This chapter began by discussing whether Joseph Smith's experience qualified as a dream or a vision. Visionaries used the terms interchangeably, but Oliver Cowdery felt that characterizing the experience as a dream opened Smith to criticisms of mere dreaming. Cowdery's defense potentially reflected Smith's own thinking on the matter, because he only referred to the vision as a dream in one account and dismissed that notion almost immediately after it took place. The repetitive nature of the vision has received significant attention from scholars, but the focus has created overemphasis as repeated dreams constituted only a minor portion of treasure seeking narratives. While the phenomenon was part of magic and treasure seeking beliefs, most treasure seekers did not receive, nor emphasize, thrice-repeated dreams. Thrice-repeated dreams could be characterized as a magical experience, but not a cultural one because of the lack of prominence among nineteenth century treasure seekers.

The imagery employed during the vision separated Smith's experience from contemporary dreams and visions. Smith lacked the imagery and participation others frequently used. While other visionaries actively participated, Smith passively observed. His lack of detail, though, followed the pattern of treasure hunting narrative, especially in regards to Moroni showing him the location of the plates. In this regard, the imagery of 1823 visions closely resembles treasure hunting narratives, where the emphasis is on the existence of the treasure, not the imagery of the revelation. Similarly, Smith's vision focused on the plates as the preeminent message of the vision.

CHAPTER FIVE

“AS SPOKEN BY THE ANGEL”: MORONI’S MESSAGE TO JOSEPH SMITH

More than what Smith saw, Moroni’s words to the young man developed into the enduring message of the interview. Early missionaries shared the narrative while preaching, and the product of the visions (the Book of Mormon) has become a central tenet of Mormonism.¹ Did Moroni’s message parallel the message of other evangelical dreams or treasure seeking narratives? This chapter seeks to answer whether the message of the visions carried common themes of evangelical dreams or whether treasure seeking motifs dominated or if the visions followed neither.

Evangelical

A careful survey of the contemporary literature shows that most evangelical dreams contained verbal communication between the dreamer and the guide, similar to Moroni’s delivery to Smith. Norris Stearns’ narrative differed when God and Christ did not speak to him because “Spirit communicateth to Spirit without words.”² Most writers described a conversation that ensued between the guide and the visionary. In one anonymous writer’s vision, the guide said “Arise and come along with me, I will shew thee what thou has been desirous to know this long time.” The visionary saw various places and people before asking “What may become of these people, they all intend to go to heaven and are informed, that their works shall follow them, and in heaven cannot be such an uncouth *Chaos*” to which the guide responded, “I will shew thee, and thou shalt marvel more at it, than at all things which thou has seen hitherto, but we

¹ John W. Welch, “The Acts of the Apostles William E. McLellan,” in *The William E. McLellan Journals: 1831-1856*, ed by. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah; Urbana and Chicago, Illinois: BYU Studies, Brigham Young University ; University of Illinois Press, 1994), 19.

² Norris Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command* (Greenfield, Mass.: Denio & Phelps, 1815), 13.

have to cross a great river first.”³ The conversation continued in this manner throughout most of the expedition. In Smith’s vision, Moroni communicated verbally with the young man, similar to most evangelical dreams, as Oliver Cowdery depicted when he said “I gave, in my last, a few words, on the subject of a few items, as spoken by the angel at the time the knowledge of the record of the Nephites was communicated to our brother.”⁴ The visit lacked the conversational style of other evangelical dreams. Moroni dictated scriptures, doctrine, and prophecies, while Smith quietly absorbed the message. Smith’s vision resembled other visions because the angel spoke, but differed when the angel only lectured.

Moroni called the young man by name to begin his message, which differed from many accounts. In the 1832 account he stated, “he called me by name” and in 1838 he used the same phrase again.⁵ The guide in Timothy Walker’s vision called him by name, but this proved the exception rather than the rule.⁶ Many guides only motioned or told the dreamer to follow upon their appearance. In Jane Cish’s dream, the angel beckoned Cish to follow without speaking a word, while in another experience the guide simply said “Follow me” to begin.⁷ Nathan Culver’s guide acknowledged Culver’s vain thoughts as an introduction.⁸ John Mills’ vision had begun when the guide asked him if he understood what he was seeing.⁹ Many guides featured a deceased family member or friend, which possibly explains the lack of introductions, due to the familiarity between the visionary and guide. Moroni used the name as a means to assuage Smith’s fear and to become acquainted, since he identified himself and stated his purpose after

³ *Anonimus’s Travels. throu Europe and America and Some Visions of Many Heavenly Mansions in the House of God* (Ephrata, 1793), 4.

⁴ Karen Lynn Davidson et al., eds., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:14, 222.

⁶ Timothy P. Walker, *The Flaming Sword or a Sign from Heaven Being a Remarkable Phenomenom* (Exeter: J. Richardson, 1814), 6.

⁷ Jane Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish* (Philadelphia, 1793), 4, 6.

⁸ Nathan Culver, *A Very Remarkable Account of the Vision of Nathan Culver*, Fifth. (Boston: E. Russell, 1795), 7.

⁹ John Mills, *Vision of John Mills, in Bedford County, at Virginia, in the Year 1785*, 1785.

calling Smith by name. As Smith later wrote: “When I first looked upon him I was afraid, but the fear soon left me. He called me by name and said unto me that he was a messenger send from the presence of God to me and that his name was Nephi [Moroni],” wrote Smith.¹⁰ Opening with the visionary’s name rarely occurred, even when characters did not know each other, therefore distinguishing Smith’s experience from contemporary visions.

Most visionaries in conversion narratives experienced the pains of their sins before receiving forgiveness from Christ or an angel. Mehetable Churchill lived a sinful life until her vision convinced her of her sinful ways, and motivated her to plead for forgiveness from God. “Sinner thy prayer is heard – the Lord permits thee to return to earth” said an angel to her before instructing her to live a more virtuous life.¹¹ Lorenzo Dow felt despair over his sinful state, which caused him to pray until he fell asleep. A vision appeared to him of the devil, but as he awoke from the dream he experienced forgiveness of sins.¹² Norris Stearns felt agony over his sins until “there came a sweet flow of the love of God to [his] soul, which gradually increased. At the same time, there appeared a small gleam of light in the room, above the brightness of the sun, then at his median, which grew brighter and brighter: As this light increased, [his] sins began to separate, and the Mountain removed towards the east.”¹³ Charles Finney felt the agony of sin that led him to make “such confessions as I could with my choked utterance.”¹⁴ Smith’s sins motivated him to pray to God and he experienced the desired forgiveness, similar to Dow,

¹⁰ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:222; Joseph’s 1838 account makes it appear that the fear dissipated prior to Moroni speaking his name. Oliver Cowdery’s account omits Moroni calling Joseph by name, but combining the two accounts shows that the fear left near the time Moroni spoke Joseph’s name. According to Cowdery, the fear stayed until Moroni introduced himself as an angel from God. According to the 1838 account, Moroni spoke Joseph’s name prior to announcing his purpose, therefore Joseph felt fear until the moment Moroni said “Joseph” and announced his purpose. (ibid., 1:58).

¹¹ Mehetable Churchill, *A Remarkable Instance of the Interposition of the Spirit of Grace, to Save from Death a Guilty Sinner* (Joseph Warriner, 1783), 14–15.

¹² Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite: Or, The Four Volumes of Lorenzo’s Journal* (Joseph Rakestraw, 1816), 17–18.

¹³ Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command*, 11–12.

¹⁴ Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1876), 20.

Stearns, and Finney.¹⁵ Smith's experience diverged because forgiveness was not the end of the experience, instead Moroni continued to share other messages about the gathering of Israel and the Second Advent of Christ.¹⁶ Other visionaries regarded forgiveness as the final goal of the vision, since they rarely wrote about topics outside of their conversion. Stearns' account provided interesting parallels, because Stearns' forgiveness came when the angel appeared, similar to Smith's experience.¹⁷ Moroni, as Smith recounted, "said the Lord had forgiven me my sins."¹⁸ Forgiveness arose from the angel's words, not the presence of the angel, which differed from the Stearns account. Similar to other accounts, Smith wanted God to forgive him of his sins, which an angel did, but unlike other visions, Moroni conveyed additional information about the plates and other doctrinal topics.

Biblical passages frequently appeared in dreams, either through the guide's quotation or passages entering the mind of the visionary. Quotation of scriptures evolved naturally from the close relationship between the Bible and dreamers.¹⁹ No account, however, matched the quantity of scriptures that Moroni quoted to Smith, and the scriptures rarely overlapped. One of the angels that appeared to Ebenezer Adams quoted Colossians 3:4, "*When Christ who is our Life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in Glory;*"²⁰ Benjamin Abbott had the scriptures opened to him during his vision of Christ, which he used to interpret aspects of his dream.²¹ Chloe Willey felt David and Job's words best reflected her feelings after seeing Christ: "I

¹⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14, 57–58, 116, 220–221.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:494, 508.

¹⁷ Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command*, 12.

¹⁸ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14.

¹⁹ Ann Kirschner, "'God Visited My Slumber': The Intersection of Dreams, Religion, and Society in America, 1770-1830" (Ph.D., Delaware: University of Delaware, 2004), 138.

²⁰ Ebenezer Adams, *A True and Wonderful Relation of the Appearance of Three Angels, (Clothed in White Raiment) to a Young Man in Medford, near Boston, in New-England, on the 4th of February 1761, at Night* (Boston: Green and Russell, 1791) Emphasis in Original.

²¹ Benjamin Abbott, *The Experience, and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott* (New York: Published by Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 20–21.

thought I could with David say, ‘Let every thing [sic] that hath breath, praise the Lord.’ Yea, I would say with Job, ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.’”²² For the most part, Moroni quoted scriptures that did not appear in other messages, but occasional exceptions occurred.

Joel 2:28 overlapped most frequently between Smith’s account and other evangelical visions. The words of Joel 2:28 prefaced Ebenezer Adams account of seeing three angels in one night, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all Flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old Men shall dream Dreams, and your young Men shall see Visions.”²³ Nathan Culver’s guide quoted a similar passage, but misattributed the scripture to Joel 11:28, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all Flesh, and your Sons and your Daughters shall prophesy; your old Men shall dream Dreams; your young Men shall see Visions.”²⁴ Each visionary prominently placed the scripture in the publication or narration to imply that their vision fulfilled this Biblical prophecy. Moroni quoted Joel 2:28 to Joseph Smith on the night of September 21, but viewed the passage as an unfulfilled prophecy. Smith’s vision did not fulfill the prophecy; instead the prophecy was about to be fulfilled after Smith received the initial vision.

Moroni continued his quotations of scriptures, including themes concerning “the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the gospel, in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be

²² Chloe Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself* (New York: John C. Totton, 1810), 7.

²³ Adams, *A True and Wonderful Relation of the Appearance of Three Angels, (Clothed in White Raiment) to a Young Man in Medford, near Boston, in New-England, on the 4th of February 1761, at Night*.

²⁴ Culver, *A Very Remarkable Account of the Vision of Nathan Culver*.

prepared for the millennial reign.”²⁵ The covenant between God and ancient Israel did not occur in evangelical narratives, but the motifs of preaching the gospel to others and destruction prior to the Second Advent of Christ did occur.²⁶

Christ’s Second Coming occurred as part of the apocalyptic narratives, primarily focusing upon the destruction that occurred prior to Christ’s appearance. Moroni cited some scriptures that created a motif of cleansing prior to Christ’s appearance, including Malachi 3, Isaiah 11, and Acts 3:22-23.²⁷ All the scriptures referenced or quoted in Smith’s 1838 account referred to apocalyptic destruction in some manner, except Joel 2. Moroni expanded the theme during his second nocturnal visit when “he informed me [Smith] of great judgements which were coming upon the earth, with great desolations by famine, sword, and pestilence, and that these grievous judgments would come on the earth in this generation.”²⁸ This motif existed among Christian judgment narratives. A guide told Ebenezer Adams that the destructions he saw was God frowning on the world, therefore people needed to repent.²⁹ Nicodemus Havens saw the destruction of various areas, including New York and Paris, which motivated people to become increasingly pious.³⁰ In both cases, the vision intended to warn people prior to God’s destruction with vivid descriptions. Smith lacked the details of the destruction, since the Bible passages gave no new additional insight into the destruction.³¹ The passages taught that the wicked would perish prior to Christ’s appearance, while the righteous would be persevered, which was also

²⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:494–495.

²⁶ Nicodemus Havens, *Wonderful Vision of Nicodemus Havens* (Boston: Coverly, Jr, 1812); Isaac Child, *The Vision of Isaac Child* (Philadelphia: H. Bickley, 1814); Walker, *The Flaming Sword or a Sign from Heaven Being a Remarkable Phenomenon*, 10–11; Ann Phillips, *A Vision of Heaven and Hell* (Barnard, VT, 1812), 3.

²⁷ Kent P. Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” in *The Pearl of Great Price*, ed by. Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, vol. 2, *Studies in Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: Randall Books, 1985), 362.

²⁸ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:226.

²⁹ Adams, *A True and Wonderful Relation of the Appearance of Three Angels, (Clothed in White Raiment) to a Young Man in Medford, near Boston, in New-England, on the 4th of February 1761, at Night*.

³⁰ Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command*, 10.

³¹ For a list of Second Coming specific scriptures, see Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” 361–362.

conveyed in evangelical dreams.³² Some of the quotations gave more hope than other evangelical dreams, such as Joel 2:32 which prophesied of Christ delivering his people.

Dreams motivated or told others to enter the ministry or preach the gospel to others. The day following his experience, Charles Finney told a client, “Deacon B-, I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours.’ He looked at me with astonishment, and said, ‘What do you mean?’ I told him, in a few words, that I had enlisted in the cause of Christ;”³³ A dream encouraged Lorenzo Dow to continue his labors in preaching the gospel.³⁴ Moroni informed Smith that he would be an instrument in the hands of the Lord, but it did not seem to entail the same type of ministering as Finney and Dow.³⁵ God wanted Smith to translate the plates with the instruments provided. The chronology of events recorded in the 1838 account affirms Smith’s primary purpose:

That God had a work for me to do and that my <name> should be had for good and evil among all nations kindreds and tongues. or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people. He said there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from when they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it as delivered by the Saviour to the ancient inhabitants. Also that there were two stones in silver bows and these (~~put~~ <stones fastened> into a breastplate) ~~which~~ was what constituted what is called the Urim & Thummim deposited with the plates, and <the possession and use of these stones> ~~that~~ was what constituted seers in ancient or former times and that God <had> prepared them for the purpose of translating the book.³⁶

Moroni instructed Smith that God had chosen him, then explained the need for the record to be translated. The progression accentuated the translation as Smith’s preeminent responsibility.

Scholar Kent P. Jackson interpreted Moroni’s quotation of Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 11:1, 10-12 as further evidence of Smith’s call, but Smith never explained Moroni’s interpretation of those

³² Ibid., 356.

³³ Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney*, 24.

³⁴ Dow, *History of Cosmopolite*, 41.

³⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:495.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:222.

passages, so it is difficult to say with certainty that they affirm his call.³⁷ Many dreamers wanted to preach as a result of their experience. Smith lacked the inclination; instead he accepted the responsibility Moroni gave him.

Some visionaries felt impressed to share their experience with others to bring them to repentance or assist in their conversion. Christ charged Sarah Alley to get on the straight and narrow path before she could enter heaven, and was encouraged by a friend to share the gospel message with his associates.³⁸ Isaac Child viewed the fight between good and evil and subsequent destruction of the area, so he could “make them known unto the people of this land” through a book of his experience.³⁹ John Mills saw people judged by God and sent to hell, so he could share this image with others.⁴⁰ “The public are here presented with a book written by an illiterate youth, who has been highly favored of God, and shown many things, which he is now commanded to write,” wrote Norris Stearns.⁴¹ Moroni directed Smith to retrieve the record and share the translated work, but said nothing about sharing the message with others. Smith’s charge to write a book differed from Child’s and Stearn’s charge because they wrote of their personal experience, while Smith’s book focused on the ancient American people. Smith appeared hesitant to publish the vision. Oliver Cowdery, not Smith, wrote the first published account of the vision in 1835, nearly twelve years after the vision.⁴² After the first published account, he published more renditions of his vision than contemporary evangelical visionaries published of

³⁷ Jackson, “The Appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith,” 361.

³⁸ Sarah Alley, *An Account of a Trance or Vision of Sarah Alley, of Beekman Town, Dutchess County, State of New-York*, 1798, 9.

³⁹ Child, *The Vision of Isaac Child*, 9–10.

⁴⁰ Mills, *Vision of John Mills, in Bedford County, at Virginia, in the Year 1785*.

⁴¹ Stearns, *The Religious Experience of Norris Stearns, Written by Divine Command*, 3; Richard Bushman (*Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed by Reid Larkin Neilson and Jed Woodworth [New York: Columbia University Press, 2004], 205) points out a similarity between the opening paragraphs of Stearns’ account and Smith’s vision.

⁴² Oliver Cowdery, “Letter IV,” *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 1 (February 1835): 77–80. Cowdery wrote the account under the direction of Joseph.

their experiences. Eventually his publishing equaled, if not surpassed, the publications of other evangelicals.⁴³

Message lengths varied from dream to dream. Some experiences contained only a few spoken words from Christ or the guide to the visionary, while others contained long speeches that elaborated upon the themes. Hezekiah Goodwin's conversation with his guide, Mr. Yeamans, lasted the entire twelve page pamphlet, while Christ spoke only a few words to Chloe Willey.⁴⁴ The length of Moroni's message harmonized with the longer messages.

Parameters existed within evangelical dreams to determine veracity and creditability. Dreamers rarely challenged hierarchy, doctrine, theology, or scriptural teachings because these resistances exceeded the limits of dreams. Smith's experience defied hierarchy, theology, and scriptural teachings.⁴⁵ Oliver Cowdery's account described Smith working outside the religious structure:

And that the scriptures might be fulfilled, which say – “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty: and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are that no flesh should glory in his presence.[”] Therefore, says the Lord, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; the

⁴³ Rebecca Ashburn published two versions of her visionary experiences (*Three Remarkable Dreams in Succession*, 1802; Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818: Collected from Numerous Publications and Letters From Persons of Piety and Correct Information* [Albany, New York: G. J. Loomis, 1819]), but the publications featured the same account. Most only published one account. See, Cish, *The Vision and Wonderful Experiences of Jane Cish, A Brief Account of the Vision and Death of the Late Lord Lyttleton* (Stanford, New York: Daniel Lawrence, 1804), Thomas Chamberlain, *America's Timely Remembrancer; or, the Minister preaching his own Funeral Sermon* (Fredericktown: M. Bartgis, 1794); Joseph published accounts in 1834-1835 through Oliver Cowdery, (“Letter IV”, Oliver Cowdery, “Letter V,” *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 [March 1835]: 95–96, Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VI,” *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 [April 1835]: 108–112, Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VII,” *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1 [July 1835]: 155–159, Oliver Cowdery, “Letter VIII,” *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 [October 1835]: 195–202). Four articles were published in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842 (Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons* 3 [March 1, 1842]: 707, Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 3 [April 1, 1842]: 748–749, Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 3 [April 15, 1842]: 753–754, Joseph Smith, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Times and Seasons* 3 [May 2, 1842]: 771–772).

⁴⁴ Hezekiah Goodwin, *A Vision* (New Haven: Josiah Meigs, 1788); Willey, *A Short Account of the Life and Remarkable View of Mrs. Chloe Willey, of Goshen, N.H., Written by Herself*, 7.

⁴⁵ Kirschner, “God Visited My Slumber,” 12–13.

wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid;... “This cannot be brought about untill first certain preparatory things are accomplished, for so has the Lord purposed in his own mind. He has chosen you as an instrument in his hand to bring to light which shall perform his act, his strange act, and bring to pass a marvelous work and a wonder... Therefore, marvel not if your name is made a derision, and had as a by-word among such, if you are the instrument in bringing it, by the gifts of God, to the knowledge of the people.”⁴⁶

Smith intended to reform the hierarchal structure, or as Moroni said “confound the things which are mighty.” Moroni wanted Smith to radically reform Christianity, not just convert a few people or preach to various groups. The plates supplied a new book of scripture that contained the fullness of the gospel and challenged both the theological and scriptural teachings of evangelicalism. In essence, the entirety of the message challenged the accepted framework of evangelical Christianity.

Treasure Seeking

Moroni’s message highlighted retrieving the plates from the Hill Cumorah. Smith demonstrated this emphasis by incorporating that aspect of the vision into each account of the vision. Smith underscored other details at different times, but only retrieving the plates was noted in each account. The topic appeared twice in the 1838 account, once near the beginning of the vision when Moroni informed Smith about the reality of the plates, and the other when Moroni revealed the location of the plates.⁴⁷

The attention given to retrieving the plates draws comparisons to treasure seeking. Johannes Dillinger succinctly stated, “There is no denying the fact that this [the coming forth of the Book of Mormon] is a treasure narrative. The topic of the story is obviously a supernatural find of an old object of very high material value that was hidden in the ground and that nobody

⁴⁶ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:58–59.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:222, 224.

could claim ownership of.”⁴⁸ Dillinger contends that three factors fit the treasure seeking model: the plates were buried in the ground, Moroni appeared as a supernatural being, and nobody claimed ownership of the plates. Dan Vogel argued that the message proved treasure hunting motifs, if references to an angel, Urim and Thummim, and Malachi 4:5 were removed.⁴⁹ Michael Quinn provided more analysis on the situation, which suggests that Dillinger’s assessment oversimplifies a potential treasure seeking narrative. Quinn pointed to the nocturnal visitations, thrice-repeated dreams, supernatural visitor, date and timing of the vision as factors that showed magic and treasure seeking overtones.⁵⁰ Other treasure seeking narratives suggest that more qualities existed in treasure seeking narratives than the treasure being buried, a supernatural appearance, and ownership of the plates. The possibility exists that Smith’s experience followed folk religion motifs.⁵¹

Defining treasure establishes the foundation for determining whether the vision constitutes a treasure narrative. Webster’s 1828 dictionary defined treasure as “something very much valued.”⁵² Dillinger explained that a treasure could be something tangible as well as illusive.⁵³ In early America, treasure usually constituted a stereotypical treasure with a chest that

⁴⁸ Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: a History* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 179.

⁴⁹ Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 44.

⁵⁰ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View: Revised and Enlarged* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 136–177.

⁵¹ Grant Palmer argues that Smith received the narrative from E.T.A. Hoffman’s story “Der Goldne Topf” (*An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002]). Palmer’s argument fails to sufficiently prove that Smith had knowledge of the story and used it prior to sharing his narrative. Palmer contends that a Palmyra newspaper article contained a review of the story, which created the possibility for Smith to become familiar with the story. The connection does not prove that Smith read the story or even knew about the story. It only proves that a review was available for Smith to view. Palmer also contends that Smith’s mentor Luman Walters could have introduced the story to him. Once again, Palmer does not adequately show that Walters knew and read the story, and that he shared it with Smith. Even if a connection between Smith and the story could be made, it appears unlikely that Smith modified the story for his benefit. Palmer’s connections are not readily apparent to the reader. Smith’s narrative follows other treasure seeking experiences more than other Hoffman’s work, which suggests Smith would have gained the story from those sources.

⁵² Noah Webster, “An American Dictionary of the English Language” (New York: S. Converse, 1828), 2:797.

⁵³ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 2.

was hidden usually by Capitan Kidd or some instances concealed by Indian relics. The plates firmly fit within this conception of a treasure as Indian relics buried in the ground. Smith contemplated the monetary incentives of acquiring the plates twice: first, while walking to the hill Cumorah and then after seeing the plates.⁵⁴ His thoughts demonstrated the plates possessed economic value comparable to treasures. Oliver Cowdery recorded:

You will have wondered, perhaps, that the mind of our brother should be occupied with the thoughts of the goods of this world, at the time of arriving at Cumorah, on the morning of the 22nd of September, 1823, after having been rapt in the visions of heaven during the night, and also seeing and hearing in open day; but the mind of man is easily turned, if it is not held by the power of God through the prayer of faith, and you will remember that I have said that two invisible powers were operating upon his mind during his walk from his residence to Cumorah, and that the one urging the certainty of wealth and ease in this life, has so powerfully wrought upon him, that the great objects so carefully and impressively <named by the angel had entirely> gone from his recollection that only a fixed determination to obtain now urged him forward....No sooner did he behold this sacred treasure than his hopes were renewed, and he supposed his success certain; and without first attempting to take it from its long place of deposit, he thought, perhaps, there might be something more, equally as valuable, and to take only the plates, might give others an opportunity of obtaining the remainder, which he could secure, would still add to his store of wealth.”⁵⁵

Smith viewed the plates through the lens of monetary gain. Earlier Oliver Cowdery dispelled any question when he called the plates a “sacred treasure.”⁵⁶ Brigham Young later referred to the record as a treasure.⁵⁷ Early Mormons viewed the plates as a treasure because of their economic or spiritual value.

Oliver Cowdery confirmed Smith’s thinking when he wrote, “he had heard of the power, of enchantment, and a thousand like stories, which held hidden treasures of the earth, and supposed that physical exertion and personal strength was only necessary to enable him to yet

⁵⁴ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14, 82–83.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:82.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 2 (Liverpool; London: F.D. Richards, 1855), 181.

obtain the object of his wish.”⁵⁸ Smith’s supposition is not surprising. He and his family practiced treasure seeking before and after his first encounters with Moroni, leading to a natural tendency to consider the plates a treasure because of the description. “Young Smith had not only heard his father and mother relate the marvelous tales of buried wealth, but had accompanied his father in the midnight delvings, and incantations of the spirits that guarded it” wrote Orsamus Turner.⁵⁹ The plates originated from American Indian heritage, and were buried in the ground; both qualities commonly described treasures. Smith’s familial and cultural surroundings fostered his belief that the plates could be a treasure.

Many treasure expeditions occurred on hills, which would have accentuated the treasure seeking motif. DeWitt Clinton noticed numerous holes dug in the sides of mountains, which he attributed to treasure seeking.⁶⁰ Similarly, Zim Allen found gold in the side of a hill, while a group searched Train (Pine) Hill in Wells, Vermont looking for a treasure.⁶¹ Many people searched for treasure on hills, especially the place called Cumorah. “Legends of hidden treasure, had long designated Mormon Hill [Hill Cumorah] as the depository,” wrote Orsamus Turner.⁶² According to John A. Clark’s third-hand account, Joseph Smith, Sr. led a group to Cumorah for treasure after Smith failed to obtain the plates.⁶³ The plates contained more treasure searching motifs because of their location within a hill, specifically the hill Cumorah.

⁵⁸ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:83 Cowdery refers to the plates as a treasure only when Joseph considered the plates a treasure. Cowdery never used the term again.

⁵⁹ Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000), 50.

⁶⁰ DeWitt Clinton and William W. Campbell, *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton* (Baker and Scribner, 1849), 47.

⁶¹ Dorothy Dengler, “Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 3, no. August (1946): 178; Hiland Paul and Robert Parks, *History of Wells, Vermont, for the First Century After Its Settlement* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle & Company, Job Printers, 1869), 81–82.

⁶² Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:50.

⁶³ Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 265.

Most individuals searched for treasure with aspirations of economic prosperity.⁶⁴ A guide in Deacon Bascom's dream asked him if he wanted to be rich, and then revealed the location of the treasure.⁶⁵ Moroni specifically forbade Smith from using the plates for monetary gain, but charged Smith to use them for the purposes of God.⁶⁶ Moroni included a history lesson of the inhabitants of the American continent to aid in this shift. "I was informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people was made known unto me;" stated Smith in his 1842 account.⁶⁷ Smith regularly shared details about the civilization with his family, which demonstrated that the history of the people deeply impressed him. "During our evening conversations, Smith would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship," wrote Lucy Mack Smith.⁶⁸ The history separated Smith's encounter from other treasure hunting narratives because they only discussed the location of the treasure. A rumor of a Spanish treasure excited a group in Washington County, Vermont to search for and locate the treasure, yet no details about the treasure, or origins of the people were mentioned.⁶⁹ Even Mr. Bassett did not ask his escort, an American Indian, about the history of the people or treasure during their walk

⁶⁴ Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy : Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830.," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (1986): 19.

⁶⁵ Sarah Smitha Buell Hale, *Traits of American life* (E.L. Carey & A. Hart, 1835), 104.

⁶⁶ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:230.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:495.

⁶⁸ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool; London: Published for Orson Pratt by S.W. Richards; sold at the Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1853), 85.

⁶⁹ William Adams, *Gazetteer of Washington County, Vt., 1783-1889* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Journal Company, 1889), 280.

to the treasure.⁷⁰ Treasure seekers primarily worried about money, while Moroni tried to get Smith to alter his perspective from the treasure to scriptural themes and history. Moroni even cautioned Smith against seeing the plates for their monetary value.⁷¹ The instructions provided Smith a comprehensive view of the civilizations, not just their remnants and artifacts. Instead, he “had been tempted of advisory and sought the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that [he] should have an eye single to the Glory of God.”⁷² Smith’s inability to comprehend the entire message prevented him from obtaining the plates until 1827. Moroni’s message to the young man forbade him from viewing the plates for financial gain. Treasure seekers primarily viewed the loot for its economic reward. Moroni’s insistence upon focusing on God significantly differentiated Smith’s visions from the treasure seeking motifs.

Some have contended that Smith altered Moroni’s message to avoid these treasure seeking motifs. Dan Vogel points to Moroni’s use of Malachi 4:5 to introduce priesthood, and subsequently more religion, as one example.⁷³ Smith did not reference Malachi 4:5 in his 1832, 1842, and 1844 accounts, which makes Vogel’s argument unusual because it was not a central part of Smith’s narrative.⁷⁴ The reference appeared in the middle accounts of the vision, which demonstrates that Smith did not transform his narrative to become increasingly Christian. Oliver Cowdery’s account omits Malachi 4:5, which disproves Vogel’s claim. Cowdery argued that the vision came from God, and contained significant amounts of the scriptures quoted by Moroni.⁷⁵ Cowdery seemed most likely to use Malachi 4:5 to prove a Christian origin, yet did not use the scripture. Vogel ignores other Christian themes explained by Moroni including the covenants

⁷⁰ Jay Gould, *History of Delaware County: And Border Wars of New York, Containing a Sketch of the Late Anti-rent Difficulties in Delaware with Other Historical and Miscellaneous Matter Never Before Published* (Keeny & Gould, 1856), 296.

⁷¹ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:230.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1:14.

⁷³ Vogel, *Joseph Smith*, 44.

⁷⁴ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14–15, 494–495, 508–509.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:64–71, 74.

made to Israel, and destruction preceding Christ's Second Advent. Cowdery's account introduced these themes in the first published account of Smith's vision, which debunks the claim that Smith altered his narrative to avoid treasure seeking similarities.⁷⁶ Traditional Christian elements existed in the first publication of the narrative, not just treasure seeking motifs.

Johannes Dillinger contends that the first missionaries in Europe struggled to teach Moroni's visits because of the European treasure seeking culture, therefore they taught the story different than Smith.⁷⁷ Dillinger's argument appears flimsy because of the widespread practice of folk religion in America, which missionaries and Smith would have encountered when telling the story in America. If missionaries experienced challenges with the narrative, it would have been displayed in America as well as Europe. The argument relies upon Orson Hyde's pamphlet, *Ein Ruf Aus Der Wüste*, in which he recounts the visions of Moroni in German. Hyde's pamphlet suffered from poor translation from English to German, rather than an inharmonious message between Smith and Hyde's message. "I do not claim that this work is perfect in its mechanism; I do not understand the German language perfectly, however, the principles which are emphasized in it are true and good," wrote Hyde.⁷⁸ Hyde translated the text so poorly in some places that he wrote the exact opposite of his intent. Marvin H. Folsom, a professor of German, quoted the German passage with a translation before explaining how Hyde mistranslated the concept:

"Sie [die Platten) [sic] wurden heir niedergelegt als Mittel zur Anhäufung irdischen Gewinnes, oder zur Verherrlichung dieser Welt [22:13]
 "They were [not] deposited here as a means of accumulating world gain or of glorifying this world."

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:64–71.

⁷⁷ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America*, 178–179.; Dillinger does not mention Orson Pratt's missionary pamphlet of Joseph's visions which preceded Orson Hyde's account (Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:517–548). Pratt does not convey the same treasure seeking message that Hyde does, which suggests that missionaries did not struggle with the message in Europe. The act was isolated to Hyde's account, not a widespread problem among missionaries.

⁷⁸ Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1989), 403–404.

“We know from various other accounts that this is the exact opposite of what is intended. It seems clear that the nicht was omitted and proofreading did not correct it. The presence of oder reinforces this interpretation.”⁷⁹

Words, such as “Urkunden,” could be translated as documents, or parchments, as Dillinger does, or plates and records as Folsom does.⁸⁰ Other statements support Smith’s narrative. “He [Smith] was also told that the ‘American Indians’ were remnants of the House of Israel and that they were an enlightened people when they left Jerusalem to emigrate to America, possessing a knowledge of the true God and enjoying his blessing and special favor....He was told that these records contained many sacred revelations pertaining to the fullness of the gospel and which stood as prophecies on a grand scale concerning the events of the last days....” wrote Hyde.⁸¹ Similar to Moroni, Hyde focused on the record as a history of the people and doctrinal treatise, rather than Smith’s potential monetary advancements. Hyde included other details, such as the heritage of the American Indians, which followed Smith’s narrative, but Hyde simply lacked the understanding of both languages to accurately convey his thoughts. Smith still initially viewed the expedition as a treasure seeking moment, but Hyde’s account does not provide adequate support to the claim.

Most treasure seeking expeditions used multiple people to dig. Rainsford Rogers gathered groups of people to search for a treasure before disappearing.⁸² A man named Winchell gathered a group of men to search for the treasure together.⁸³ Like many other aspects, Smith’s experience diverged because he searched for the record alone, even though Father Smith was an experienced

⁷⁹ Marvin H. Folsom, “The Language of Orson Hyde’s Ein Ruf aus der Wüste,” in *Proceeds of the Deseret Language and Linguistic Society* (presented at the Fifteen Annual Symposium, Provo, Utah, 1989), 12. All brackets and punctuation were in the original with the exemption of [sic].

⁸⁰ Jesse, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:412–413.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1:411, 413.

⁸² Charles Henry Bell, *History of the Town of Exeter, New Hampshire* (Exeter, New Hampshire: Press of J. E. Farwell & Company, Boston, 1888), 412–413.

⁸³ Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses: Delivered Before the Citizens of that Town, February 7 and 21, and March 30, 1867* (Tuttle & Co., printers, 1867), 47–49.

treasure hunter who knew about the vision. Moroni told him to bring others to later visits, but only Smith looked for the plates in 1823.⁸⁴

Smith identified the specified location and reached into the hole to retrieve the plates once he reached the hill Cumorah. A shock reverberated throughout his body. Two additional attempts produced the same results. Finally the young man exclaimed, “why can I not obtain them?”⁸⁵ Treasure seekers commonly exclaimed verbally when discovering the treasure or while digging. John M’Ginnis exclaimed “There, I’ve found it!” after locating the treasure.⁸⁶ Mr. Boyce announced “I’ve found it!” after striking the treasure.⁸⁷ Somebody yelled out “Get off my toes” during a dig under the direction of a man named Winchell.⁸⁸ In each instance, the exclamations violated the ritual silence of treasure seeking, therefore forcing the treasure to permanently move.⁸⁹ Smith cried out, but the plates did not move or vanish. Willard Chase testified that Smith retrieved the plates from the hill, set them down, looked back into the box, before discovering that the plates had vanished. Smith looked into the hole again, and found the plates safe situated in the box.⁹⁰ Chase’s account diverges from the cultural pattern of treasures vanishing because Smith had not exclaimed, yet. He exclaimed after this incident.⁹¹ Even if the treasure vanished from Smith’s grasp in 1823, it occurred temporarily since he was able to retrieve the record in 1827. Other treasure seekers never found the treasure again after somebody spoke.⁹² Martin Harris spoke of an instance when Joseph Smith, Sr. persuaded Smith, Jr. to show

⁸⁴ Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (1976): 2.

⁸⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:14, 83.

⁸⁶ Josiah Fletcher Goodhue and Middlebury Historical Society (Middlebury Vt.), *History of the Town of Shoreham, Vermont: From the Date of its Charter, October 8th, 1761, to the Present Time* (A.H. Copeland, 1861), 145.

⁸⁷ Adams, *Gazetteer of Washington County, Vt., 1783-1889*, 280.

⁸⁸ Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont, in Three Discourses*, 48.

⁸⁹ D. Mason & Company, *Landmarks of Wayne County, New York* (D. Mason, 1895), 411.

⁹⁰ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:67.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Adams, *Gazetteer of Washington County, Vt., 1783-1889*, 280; Dengler, “Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester,” 175–176.

him the plates while still in the hill. The record moved to another location when they located the plates. Smith looked into his seer stone, and directed them to another spot, only to see the treasure move again. The events repeated several times throughout the night excursion. The expedition occurred after the 1823 excursion, since Harris stated Smith had married Emma Hale which happened in 1827.⁹³ Many treasure seekers exclaimed when they encountered the treasure, but the treasure disappeared from their view. Smith's experience led to an exclamation, but the treasure did not move permanently.

Treasure seeking expeditions rarely resulted in actually finding a treasure. Robert Walter Cochrane, a writer of the history of the town of Antrim, New Hampshire, stated "Time and labor and money freely spent. Root bog and rocky soil were dug over in vain. In this way the delusion soon wore itself out, and those who had been duped were glad to hear not more about it."⁹⁴ A young Thurlow Weed searched for the treasure of Capitan Kidd but found nothing.⁹⁵ A Vermont legend recounted the son of Isaac Bisco searching for a treasure his father had buried, but yielding nothing.⁹⁶ Smith saw the plates and the other items, but did not acquire the treasure. "I made an attempt to take them [the plates] out but was forbidden," wrote Smith in 1838.⁹⁷ Oliver Cowdery's account elaborated the point, "He had come, to be sure, and found the word of the angel fully fulfilled concerning the reality of the record but he had failed to remember the great end for which they had been kept, and in consequence could not have power to take them into his

⁹³ Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:264–265.

⁹⁴ Warren Robert Cochrane, *History of the Town of Antrim, New Hampshire: From Its Earliest Settlement to June 27, 1877, with a Brief Genealogical Record of All the Antrim Families* (Mirror Steam Printing Press, 1880), 317.

⁹⁵ Thurlow Weed, *Life of Thurlow Weed Including his Autobiography and a Memoir ...* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1883), 7.

⁹⁶ Abby Maria Hemenway and Carrie Elizabeth Hemenway Page, *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer: Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille and Orange counties. Including also the natural history of Chittenden County and index to volume 1* (A.M. Hemenway, 1871), 129.

⁹⁷ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:232.

possession and bear them away.”⁹⁸ Moroni forbade the young man from acquiring the record because he had viewed the plates as treasure. Smith’s view followed the culture, but he disobeyed the commandments of the angel and God. Not retrieving the plates followed the treasure hunting pattern of not obtaining the treasure. Smith’s vision differed because he still had the chance to retrieve the plates at a later date. When the treasure disappeared during most treasure seeking expeditions, it was gone forever. Smith could still see the plates, and extract them from the ground at another time, which distinguished his experience from other narratives.

Conclusion

Moroni’s message to Smith vaguely followed contemporary evangelical dreams. Guides quoted scriptures to the visionary in many instances, but the scriptures were not consistent. Scriptures that frequently appeared in both visions, such as Joel 2:28-32, were interpreted differently. Few themes overlapped, such as the destruction preceding the Second Coming, but Smith’s vision lacked the experience of others. Moroni quoted him only scriptures that prophesied about the coming of Christ. Some aspects appeared in both narratives, such as repentance, but Smith’s vision extended beyond their experience. Visionaries gained forgiveness as the goal of the vision, while Moroni continued to teach Smith about other doctrines after granting a forgiveness of sins. Each of these examples provides the illusion of similarity, but differed from key points of evangelical dreams.

Treasure hunting fit the cultural milieu better. Smith initially viewed the plates as a treasure seeking expedition because they belonged to American Indians, were buried in the ground, and were located at a popular treasure seeking place. Smith and many Mormons continued to call the plates a treasure even after the 1823 visions. Moroni prevented Smith from obtaining the plates because he was not focused on the purposes of God, which diverges from the

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1:83.

culture. Other treasure seeking narratives viewed the loot as an economic opportunity, while Moroni wanted Smith to see the prize only for its spiritual value and use it God's objectives. The treasure not moving after Smith's exclamation further negated the parallels. Treasure vanished after exclamations, but not with the 1823 visions. Smith exclaimed after the treasure moved, but he still could see and later retrieve the record. No treasure seeking narrative depicted a similar occurrence. The message to obtain the plates seemed liked a treasure seeking expedition, even to Smith, but fulfilled a different purpose. The message of the vision varied in key components, making it a distinctively unique experience among Christianity and folk religion.

CONCLUSION

Visions and dreams of nineteenth-century New York featured angels and guides who escorted individuals through the visionary experience with words of encouragement or direction. Joseph Smith's 1823 visions mimicked the same pattern when Moroni, an angel from ancient America, appeared beside his bed to inform the young man about God's role for him. The appearance of angels may have appeared somewhat normal to Smith because guides frequently appeared to evangelicals, who sought visions. Treasure guardians gave directions to retrieve treasure in nearby locations, similar to the record at the hill Cumorah, which also would have been familiar to Smith.¹ Treasure seekers believed that guardians protected buried loot, similar to Moroni protecting the plates. The culture recognized that angels or guardians appeared to individuals, which may have facilitated Smith's acceptance of the vision. With these similarities, were Smith's 1823 visions a mere representation of the culture?

The date provided a potential similarity between folk religion and the visions. The date of the visions occurred near the autumnal equinox which drew upon witchcraft and astrology beliefs. Some supposed witchcraft sabbaths occurred on the autumnal equinox, but that tradition never existed in colonial America and early Republic. The date of the vision did not match the astrological autumnal equinox because that event occurred on the following night. Almanacs in the early Republic frequently placed the autumnal equinox of the night of September 22-23. The 1823 visions avoided the significance of the days because the witchcraft practice did not exist, and the visitations occurred on September 21-22, instead of September 22-23. Smith's vision appeared to follow the dating of the folk religion, but missed by one day.

¹ Evangelical refers to many Protestants who had visionary experiences. For a discussion on the term evangelical see p. 31n1.

Almanacs likely informed Smith that St. Matthew's holy day occurred on September 22. The date of the vision closely resembled the Christian holy day since Moroni appeared on that day, but diverges because Joseph likely did not know of the significance of the holy day. Almanacs cited the day but contained little information about the significance of the date. Specialized almanacs, such as Christian almanacs, occasionally mentioned St. Matthew, but the brief citations lacked adequate explanations. The paucity of information diminishes the possibility that Joseph prayed to receive a vision in homage to St. Matthew. The date of the vision was particular to the vision, independent of any activity occurring on that date.

Many Mormons vacillated between calling the experience a dream or a vision. Similar to evangelical narratives, the terms appeared interchangeable. Oliver Cowdery vehemently denied the possibility that the experience classified as a dream. Smith received a vision, not a dream. Smith only momentarily wondered if the experience constituted a dream, before dismissing the thought and calling it a vision from that time forward. Only accepting the vision classification displayed another way Mormons distinguished the visions from other religious experiences, since evangelicals used the terms interchangeably.

Evangelical dreams experienced intense visual events. The visionary saw heaven and hell, the world destroyed, or other graphic images. The visions extended beyond imagery to participation as the dreamer walked through the destroyed world or spoke with Christ. Visionaries did not passively watch the experience; they actively engaged. Smith's vision contained detailed images of the location of the plates at the hill Cumorah and Moroni appeared in grandiose fashion. Smith, though, never participated in the vision. Moroni showed Smith the location of the plates, but Smith did not walk the grounds of the hill during the vision or heft the plates. Generally, Moroni preached and recited scriptures to Smith, while the young man

passively absorbed the discourse from the messenger. Even Smith's vision of heaven and hell at the hill Cumorah lacked elements such as the devil and his minions attacking the visionary or speaking to Christ. Smith's passive receptivity made the vision different from evangelicals. The entrance of Moroni and the vision of the plates make the experience appear similar to other evangelical visions, but that was not the case. The 1823 visions lacked the fundamental components of graphic imagery and visionary participation. The imagery appeared, but differed in the details of the experience.

Moroni appeared to Smith three times the night of September 21-22 and twice during the day of September 22. The repeating vision, especially thrice-repeated visions, existed in treasure seeking culture. Many scholars point to thrice-repeated visions as evidence that the experience contained treasure seeking motifs. Evangelicals also believed in thrice-repeated dreams as evidence of the veracity of the dream. Thrice-repeated dreams occurred in treasure seeking narrative and evangelical dreams, but with less frequency than has been implied. Repeated dreams happened in a fraction of treasure seeking experiences. Smith's vision contained a thrice-repeated dream. The infrequency of these experiences mitigates the efficacy of the claim that the visions reflected the culture. The repeated appearance only represented a portion of the culture.

The message of the vision closely paralleled many aspects of treasure seeking culture. Treasure seekers looked for treasures that were buried in the ground, at times on the sides of hills. The treasure originated from an assortment of sources, including American Indian relics. The discovery yielded a newfound wealth to the treasure seeker. The plates fit the description of treasure seeking, almost perfectly. The record was buried in the ground along the side of the hill Cumorah – a location known for treasure seeking. The plates originated from ancient inhabitants of America, providing another parallel with the culture. Smith saw the monetary value of the

plates while walking to the hill, similar to a treasure seeker. Moroni stopped Smith's retrieval of the plates, because of the young man's desire to use the plates for monetary benefit. The plates should be used for a spiritual purpose, not economic gain. Treasure seekers sought the loot primarily for economic advancement. Moroni's refusal distinguished the vision from other treasure seeking narratives in a significant way. Treasure seeking culture allowed for a dual purpose of spiritual and economic prosperity. Smith could only use the plates for the purposes of God. He could not possess an economic objective.

Evangelical visions continued to show the 1823 visions' divergence from the culture. Guides in the evangelical dreams quoted scriptures to vision, just as Moroni quoted scriptures to Smith. Joel 2:28-32 overlapped in both evangelical experiences and the 1823 visions. Certain themes appeared in both narratives, such as destruction prior to the Second Advent of Christ. Both evangelical visionaries and Smith sought forgiveness of sins prior to the opening of their visions. Smith's vision extended beyond receiving forgiveness for his sins. Most evangelical visionaries accepted forgiveness as the decisive message of the guide. Moroni expanded the purpose of the vision beyond that premise. Smith would perform God's work. Cowdery quoted Moroni saying "He [God] has therefore chosen you [Smith] as an instrument in his hand to bring to light that which shall perform his act, his strange act, and bring to pass a marvelous work and a wonder."² Evangelical visionaries felt that their vision fulfilled the prophecy in Joel 2, but Moroni told Smith that the prophecy would be fulfilled in the future. Smith was not the fulfillment of that prophecy, but the part of a work that would fulfill the prophecy of Joel 2. The themes of the message confirmed a broader purpose. Moroni commissioned Smith to assist in the gathering of Israel and prepare a people for the Second Advent of Christ; instead of just viewing

² Karen Lynn Davidson et al., eds., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, vol. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 59.

the destruction prior to Christ's coming.³ Evangelicals felt the call to preach their vision, if a call even came during the vision. Moroni commissioned Smith to a work that surpassed the influence of evangelical visions.

Evangelical dreams did not challenge church leadership, authority, or beliefs.⁴ Evangelicals wrote their experiences as a means of bringing people closer to Christ or preparing people for the eminent destruction. Smith not only wrote his vision, but also brought forth another book of scripture – another Bible. None of the evangelical visionaries even approached the magnitude of that message to add scripture. Evangelical experiences confirmed the faith of the visionary. Smith's vision confirmed his own faith, and challenged the structure. Evangelicals never equated the messages within the visions as equal to scripture. Smith's book did. It single-handedly distinguished Smith from other evangelical visions. Smith did not end with the book, though. His call to “confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things are despised” led him to begin a new church.⁵ Some few visionaries began their own religion, but most did not. Organizing another church directly challenged church leadership and authority. Evangelical visionaries submitted to the leadership; Joseph challenged it.

These distinctions extend to treasure seeking narratives as well. Treasure seekers practiced folk religion, but did not preach or organize churches. In the instances when a treasure was found, the seeker used the loot for financial gain. Seekers never stated their objective as bringing others to Christ or assisting in the work of God. Moroni forced that view upon Smith. The young man had to use the treasure only for the purposes of God, which meant bringing forth new scripture and preparing people for Christ's coming.

³ Ibid., 1:494–495.

⁴ Ann Kirschner, “‘God Visited My Slumber’: The Intersection of Dreams, Religion, and Society in America, 1770–1830” (Ph.D., Delaware: University of Delaware, 2004), 13–14.

⁵ Davidson et al., *Histories, Vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844*, 1:58.

Parallels did not exist amongst each tradition. Treasure seeking narratives did not contain elements of evangelical dreams, while evangelical dreams did not parallel treasure seeking narratives. The two ideas were distinct from each other, and did not converge. Yet, the 1823 visions contained parallels with both cultures. The visions amalgamated institutional and folk religion into one singular experience. No other vision merged evangelical dreams and treasure seeking motifs, especially in such a seamless way. The visions became distinctive in their unprecedented blending of cultural milieus. The 1823 visions were “exhibit A” of Mormonism, because they diverged from the culture in some characteristics while amalgamating other features in a singular and distinctive manner.⁶

⁶ Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon : the American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84.

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