
JOSEPH SMITH'S BIBLICAL VIEW OF EGYPT

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For some time before the birth of Joseph Smith, an interest in Egypt had been growing among Western cultures.¹ This was heightened and hastened by Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, which took place just seven years before the birth of the Mormon prophet.² The reports and descriptions of Egypt and her wonders brought about renewed European contact with the land of the Nile and did much to curry curiosity and fascination with Egypt's culture and wonders.³ A slew of travelers published their adventures in and impressions of Egypt before and after Joseph Smith acquired his antiquities, adding fuel to the flame of interest in Egypt.⁴ It was during Joseph Smith's youth that Egyptian artifacts first started to flow into the United States, igniting greater attention to the ancient land.⁵ As fascinating as Nile history and culture was, much of Egypt's appeal to the Western mind, both before and immediately after the

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burst of academic inquiry that accompanied Napoleon's invasion, was attached to the role Egypt played in the Bible.⁶ This was at least partially because the study of Egypt was not yet on a sure academic footing.⁷ For a variety of reasons, a great deal of the attention given to things Egyptian centered on Biblical associations.⁸

It seems worthwhile, then, to examine what connections Joseph Smith made between the Bible and the Egyptian antiquities he came to possess. The most immediate and important connection is Joseph's quick association of the papyri with Abraham,⁹ thus providing Joseph Smith's followers with new writings from that foundational Biblical character. This association of the papyri with Abraham is also accompanied by many associations Joseph Smith presumably made between the three facsimiles of Egyptian vignettes that were published along with explanations that tied them in with Abraham.¹⁰ He also believed that the papyri contained some of the writings of Joseph of Egypt,¹¹ but never published anything about this, nor do we find record that he translated any of it. Because these topics have received a great deal of attention elsewhere,¹² here we will focus solely on connections made between Joseph's papyri and the Bible that were never published by Joseph Smith.

Because we have no writings from Joseph Smith himself making such connections, we must rely on hearsay sources to learn of purported biblical connections the Mormon prophet may have made between the Bible and the papyri.¹³ This creates a difficulty in drawing conclusions from the evidence we will examine. Some would argue that we should not give credence to anything not written by Joseph Smith himself. If such a standard were applied to history in general we would find much of what we know about history forcibly ripped from us. It would certainly strip us of most of the things we know about Joseph Smith. We have nearly 100 accounts of people speaking with Joseph Smith about the papyri or mummies and dozens of the Prophet's own journal entries that describe

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him teaching others about those same subjects. To suppose that in his few written accounts about the antiquities he said everything he had ever conveyed in these many oral communications with friends and visitors is naïve at best. Turning a blind eye to these sources because of the difficulty of dealing with them would represent lazy scholarship that is unwilling to engage with issues. Clearly there is something of significance to be gained from those who spoke with the Prophet or heard him teach. We would be foolish to ignore such valuable sources.

At the same time, we must also be careful because secondhand and thirdhand sources will inevitably introduce inaccuracies, as they convey both the person's misunderstandings and misremembrances.

The Mormon prophet and his claims to inspired translation were not a topic that produced neutral feelings. Certainly many would intentionally distort their conversations, either for the sake of making Joseph Smith look more foolish or more credible, depending upon the religious convictions of the speaker. Additionally, imaginations and preconceived ideas about antiquities could easily make a listener hear more romantic things than were actually said. Each source must be carefully evaluated. Even the most careful of evaluations will often leave us uncertain as to the reliability of a source. In this study, greatest credence will be given to ideas that were repeated more than once and over an extended period of time. This does not mean that such repeated ideas are surely accurate, but it does lend a great deal more probability to its accuracy.

The Brown Account

Our very earliest accounts, from John Whitmer,¹⁴ W. W. Phelps,¹⁵ the manuscript history,¹⁶ and Benjamin Johnson,¹⁷ all mention only writings of Abraham and Joseph. The earliest account of a biblical connection besides the Book of Abraham or the writings of Joseph comes from a young convert. Albert Brown visited Kirtland in October of 1835, just months after the acquisition of the papyri and mummies. In a letter to his parents, he recounts the purchase and states that the records contained “som of the history of Josef while in egypt and also of Jacob and many prophesies Delivered by them.”¹⁸ Because all other accounts we have from this time period speak only of the record of Abraham and Joseph, it seems most likely that young Albert had misremembered which of the great patriarchs’ records were included among the papyri, writing “Jacob” instead of “Abraham.” We know of times when visitors were told the writings were of “Abraham and Joseph, Jacob’s son.”¹⁹ Just hearing the name “Jacob” in connection with the papyri could easily lead to confusion about whose writings were thereon.

We also do not know the source of Albert's information, making it even more difficult to assess the accuracy of his report. What is clear is that there was a general feeling that the Biblical records were being added to because of these papyri. It is possible that Brown heard from Joseph Smith that the writings of Jacob were on the papyri, but because this idea is not corroborated by others during this time period, and because we do not know the source of Brown's information, it is somewhat doubtful.

The Cowdery Account

Our next critical account is not a recitation of what Joseph Smith said the papyri contained, but rather what was written by Oliver Cowdery after he worked for a few months with the papyri in conjunction with Joseph Smith. Oliver Cowdery did not claim he was sharing Joseph Smith's interpretation and in fact may have been the originator of the views he expressed. However, it is clear that Joseph Smith was at least nominally involved in the history Cowdery was trying to create because Joseph Smith at least somewhat oversaw the historical efforts Cowdery was asked to undertake,²⁰ and because Cowdery wrote that Joseph Smith was assisting him with those writings.²¹ While it is likely that at this time Cowdery did not hold to interpretations he had not shared with the Prophet or that the Prophet disagreed with, the most we can say is that these were views Cowdery held after having conferred closely with Joseph as they examined the papyri together.²²

Cowdery provided an extensive description of the papyri in the LDS newspaper *The Messenger and Advocate*, some of which concerned seeing biblical connections in the vignettes on the papyri:²³

The evidence is apparent upon the face, that they were written by persons acquainted with the history of the creation, the fall of man, and more or less of the correct ideas of notions of the Deity. The representation of the god head—three, yet in one, is curiously drawn to give simply, though

impressively, the writer's views of that exalted personage. The serpent, represented as walking, or formed in a manner to be able to walk, standing in front of, and near a female figure, is to me, one of the greatest representations I have ever seen upon paper, or a writing substance; and must go so far towards convincing the rational mind of the correctness and divine authority of the holy scriptures, and especially that part which has ever been assailed by the infidel community, as being a fiction, as to carry away, with one mighty sweep, the whole atheistical fabric, without leaving a vestige sufficient for a foundation stone. Enoch's Pillar, as mentioned by Josephus, is upon the same roll. . . . The inner end of the same roll, (Joseph's record,) presents a representation of the judgment: At one view you behold the Savior seated upon his throne, crowned, and holding the scepters of righteousness and power, before whom also, are assembled the twelve tribes of Israel, the nations, languages and tongues of the earth, the kingdoms of the world over which satan is represented as reigning. Michael the archangel, holding the key of the bottomless pit, and at the same time the devil as being chained and shut up in the bottomless pit.²⁴

Oliver Cowdery, and likely Joseph Smith, clearly felt that much of the papyri was connected with the Bible. In particular, many drawings, or vignettes, were explicitly said to be about important biblical events.²⁵ This fits well with what becomes a common trend in describing the papyri.

The Leavitt Account

Another example of hearing about Biblical connections comes from Sarah Leavitt, who saw the papyri in either late 1835 or early 1836, very soon after Joseph had acquired them. Sarah and her husband, Jeremiah, had traveled to Kirtland to be baptized. Leavitt recalls that after hearing the prophet preach in the temple, "We went into the upper rooms, saw the Egyptian mummies, the writing that was said to be written in Abraham's day, Jacob's ladder being pictured on it, and

lots more wonders that I cannot write her[e], and that were explained to us.”²⁶

Dating this event is somewhat difficult. Leavitt writes that it took place in September 1835. However, she also reports that she saw the mummies in the upper rooms of the temple, which were not finished at that time. The mummies were indeed moved to those rooms soon after they were finished, but this was in February or March of 1836. Thus Leavitt remembers incorrectly either the date or the place.

While it is clear that someone spoke to Leavitt of a connection between the papyri and the Bible, it is not clear who told Leavitt that Jacob's ladder was depicted in the Egyptian vignettes. Because it followed directly after a sermon by Joseph Smith in the same building, it is possible that he also showed them the papyri and mummies, as he was wont to do; but we cannot tell. At this period Joseph Smith Sr. also sometimes showed visitors the mummies and papyri. Thus, Leavitt is at best a secondhand source of Joseph Smith Jr.'s ideas, though she may be recalling the teachings of someone else altogether.

An account of a gentleman and two ladies being shown a papyrus hanging on the wall of the temple and being told Jacob's ladder was depicted thereon by Joseph Smith Sr. seems to be from the same time period. James H. Kennedy, who was decidedly antagonistic towards the Mormons, recalled a story he heard from one of those visitors, which makes Kennedy's a fourth-hand account of the Mormon prophet's teachings (if Joseph Smith Sr. was not speaking of his own interpretations), and a thirdhand account of Joseph Smith Sr.'s statements.²⁷ While this creates a difficulty in evaluating this account, it is similar to Leavitt's remembrance. Additionally, as will be seen in the next account we will discuss, later witnesses of the papyri cast some light on this issue.

The Caswall Account

Henry Caswall visited Nauvoo in 1842, and provides a thirdhand account of Joseph Smith's ideas about biblical connections with the papyri he owned. Caswall was hoping to meet the Prophet and see the antiquities. Joseph Smith was not in town when Caswall called on him, but Caswall was able to prevail upon a storekeeper to let him in to see the sheets of papyri:

One of the Mormons said, "Mr. Smith informs us that this picture is an emblem of redemption. Do you see those four little figures? That is the old Devil desiring to devour the four quarters of the earth. Look at this person keeping back the big dog. That is Jesus Christ keeping the devil from devouring the four quarters of the earth. Look down this way. This figure near the side is Jacob, and those are his two wives. Now do you see those steps?" "What," I replied, "do you mean those stripes across the dress of one of Jacob's wives?" "Yes," he said, "that is Jacob's ladder." "That is indeed curious," I remarked; "Jacobs ladder standing on the ground, and only reaching up to his wife's waist."²⁸

Because this is an account of what Caswall recalls of an unknown person²⁹ reporting what Joseph Smith said about the papyri, we must use caution in ascribing any of this to Joseph Smith.³⁰ However, Caswall also heard a description of the meaning of what must have been the original source of Facsimile One. What he recounts of that description matches perfectly with what had been published about that facsimile only one month earlier.³¹ Such precision and reliability suggests that we can place a certain amount of trust in Caswall's other account of Joseph's interpretation. Additionally, the fact that both Leavitt and Caswall, as well as possibly Kennedy's source, were told that Jacob's ladder was depicted on the papyri, despite several intervening years, indicates at the very least that for some time it was prevalently held that Joseph Smith thought Jacob's ladder was depicted on the papyri he owned. If there is any accuracy to what



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Caswall heard, then clearly Joseph Smith associated the Bible with a myriad of elements from the Egyptian drawings.

The Appleby Account

Further ideas about the meaning of these Egyptian vignettes were conveyed by William I. Appleby, who visited Joseph Smith and was shown the papyri in 1841. While Appleby finished his autobiography seven years after this visit, he seems to be quoting from his own journal at this point, suggesting that he wrote the account of his visit much closer in time to the actual event than 1848. He appears to have heard the interpretations he recounts from Joseph Smith himself. Thus he is a fairly reliable secondhand source, inasmuch as he received his information about Joseph Smith's views from Joseph

Smith, probably recorded those views soon thereafter in his journal, and later utilized that journal in creating his autobiography. Because we cannot be certain of his reliance on his journal, and because human mistakes are made when recalling an event even soon afterwards, we must still exercise caution.

Besides writing about the vignettes that were the sources for the published facsimiles, Appleby says, “There are also representations of men, beasts, Birds, Idols, and Oxen attached to a kind of a Plough, and a female guiding it. Also the serpent when he beguiled Eve. He appears with two legs, erect in the form and appearance of man. But his head in the form, and representing the Serpent, with his forked tongue extended.”³²

Some of Appleby’s writings about the vignettes convey only description without any interpretation or Biblical association, such as listing that there were birds, oxen, and ploughs. He was quite accurate in describing scenes on the papyri. However, the account also supplies us with an interpretation that is not part of the facsimiles and that does connect with the Bible. Appleby informs us that there was a legged serpent with his tongue sticking out, but also provides the interpretation that this was a depiction of the serpent beguiling Eve. This rings a confirming note with Cowdery’s writings.

The Haven Account

The interpretation of the serpent beguiling Eve is strengthened by Charlotte Haven’s writings. She visited Nauvoo as a youth in 1843 and gave detailed accounts of her visit in letters. Haven was shown the papyri by Joseph Smith’s mother, Lucy Mack Smith. Mother Smith had been given charge of the antiquities and made a living by showing them to visitors and regaling them with explanations and stories about both the papyri and mummies. Thus Haven’s account is thirdhand.

Young Charlotte writes of the Egyptian vignettes she saw, one of which was interpreted as “Mother Eve being tempted by the serpent, who—the serpent, I mean—was standing on the tip of his tail, which with his two legs formed a tripod, and had his head in Eve’s ear.”³³ Again we see the association of the legged snake with the story of the Fall.

Furthermore, Haven remembered that Mother Smith said the papyri contained “the writing of Abraham and Isaac.”³⁴ This is the only recollection of Isaac being mentioned, making it likely that Haven got confused between Joseph and his grandfather Isaac.

The Quincy Account

Just before Joseph Smith’s death, Josiah Quincy and Charles Francis Adams visited the Mormon prophet. Quincy’s later memoirs about Joseph Smith present a mixed impression. He admires some things about Joseph, and simultaneously disdains others.³⁵ While Quincy wrote a great deal about his visit to Nauvoo, only one part of it is pertinent to the current inquiry. He writes that Joseph Smith showed him the papyri and told him, “This is the autograph of Moses, and these lines were written by his brother Aaron. Here we have the earliest account of the Creation, from which Moses composed the First Book of Genesis.”³⁶

Quincy wrote this many years later, though he says that he referred to his journal while doing so. The historicity of his account is further complicated when we compare it to Adams’s account, because the two often have differences.³⁷ Sadly, Adams did not write of this particular subject, though he did write of their visit with Joseph Smith. Adams was a prodigious and scrupulous journal keeper, and the minor disagreements between the two casts some doubt on the Quincy account.

We have no record of Joseph Smith translating anything from Moses after acquiring the papyri. Neither do we have any other

accounts where someone else makes the claim that Joseph believed the writings of Moses were on the papyri, which suggests that either Quincy did not remember the conversation well or that Joseph Smith never translated the portion about which he was speaking nor did he speak of it often to others. Because of a complete lack of corroborating statements regarding the writings of Moses, and because Quincy seems to be recalling Joseph's explanation nearly fifty years later, it is far more likely that his statement about the writings of Moses is the result of his misremembering the conversation. Thus of all the accounts we have examined, Quincy's is the least substantiated. If it is accurate, then Joseph Smith felt that the papyri contained more Biblical stories than just those about Abraham and Joseph.

Sharp Account

An odd detail that is connected with Biblical characters is related by a man who interviewed Lucy Mack Smith a year after Joseph Smith's death. After the interview, Thomas Sharp wrote, "Her story with regard to the mummies, (learned from Joe,) is about as follows: It seems that, for the express purpose of corroborating the 'brass plates' which were one day to be dug up and translated as 'the Book of Mormon,' the angel of the Lord, three thousand years ago, appeared to Joseph in Egypt and delivered to him a wooden case, containing a roll of *papyrus*, which was to be buried by him with the family of one of the patriarchs."³⁸ It is difficult to know how much of this account comes from the writer, how much originated with Lucy, and how much may have come from her son. As will be seen below, Lucy seems to have a tendency to embellish stories about the antiquities, so it is likely that the story originated with her. In any case, clearly associations between the Bible and the papyri were rife among the Latter-day Saints.

What Was Believed to Be on the Papyri?

While there are a great many more writings that speak of the papyri and its biblical connections, those related above are the accounts

that clearly go beyond the writings Joseph Smith associated with Abraham and Joseph of Egypt. These accounts contain three outliers: Albert Brown's is the only account that claims the papyri held the writings of Jacob; Haven remembered Isaac's writings being thereon; and Quincy's is the only account that claims the ancient documents contained writings of Moses and Aaron. Most likely these attributions represent misremembering on the part of the writers.

The other six accounts represent a different kind of witness. Leavitt's is either a secondhand or thirdhand account relating a belief that Jacob's ladder was pictured on the papyri. Kennedy's is a fourthhand account regarding the same belief, and Caswall's is a thirdhand account that agrees with the other two on this matter. These accounts, which span from 1836 until 1842, and are from people who liked Joseph Smith as well as from those who ridiculed him, represent a varying spectrum of reliability. Yet their agreement on this subject over such a long period of time and from such divergent points of view suggests that there may be validity to the notion that Joseph Smith thought Jacob's ladder was depicted on the papyri. At the very least, several people believed he did.

A similar case is presented by the Cowdery, Appleby, and Haven writings. Cowdery, who may represent a secondhand source of Joseph Smith's ideas, believed that the snake from the Garden of Eden was depicted on the papyrus. Appleby's secondhand account agrees with this, as does Haven's thirdhand account. Again, these witnesses represent a range of opinions about Joseph Smith's prophetic ability. They also span almost the entire time Joseph Smith owned the papyri, ranging from 1835, when he first acquired them, until 1843, one year before his death. Taken together, these disparate witnesses present a good possibility that Joseph Smith felt the papyri contained a drawing of the snake from the Garden of Eden.

Examining all of the accounts of those who saw the papyri during Joseph Smith's lifetime or shortly thereafter, we can see a

definite pattern regarding which Biblical figures were associated with the papyri. The writings of Abraham were mentioned forty-six different times. Writings from Joseph of Egypt are spoken of twelve times, while Jacob, Isaac, Moses, and Aaron are each mentioned once. Jacob's ladder is mentioned three times, Eve and the serpent is mentioned three times, and a depiction of Enoch's tower is mentioned once.

It is tempting to think that Abraham is mentioned most often because many of those who wrote about seeing the papyri were making later recollections after the Book of Abraham had been published, which would naturally focus their attention more on Abraham. While this could theoretically be true, we see the same ratio of mentions of Abraham as opposed to other figures before the publication of the Book of Abraham as afterwards, and among those who were not Mormons as opposed to those who were. Abraham is clearly the focus of the papyri by those who saw them. Joseph of Egypt is also strongly associated with them. There is a reasonable, but not strong, connection with Jacob's ladder and the Garden of Eden. All other associations are negligible.

Given the data available to us, we cannot safely determine whether or not Joseph Smith felt there were more writings from biblical characters on his papyri besides Abraham and Joseph. What we can safely conclude is that a number of people believed the Mormon prophet thought many of the drawings on the papyri were about the events and characters of the Bible, especially the Garden of Eden story and Jacob's ladder.

Other Antiquities

However, the papyri were not the only Egyptian artifacts Joseph Smith possessed and seemingly associated with the Bible. The purchase of the papyri included four mummies as well. The earliest account displays a hesitancy to try to identify the mummies. When

the papyri were first acquired, rumors about their identities spread. In particular the desiccated figures were rumored to be Abraham and Abimelech.³⁹ Oliver Cowdery printed a response, emphasizing that Abraham was buried in Hebron and thus the mummy could not be Abraham's. He further denied that they knew the identities of the mummies.⁴⁰ Despite some visitors claiming that the mummies were those of Joseph of Egypt and other biblical characters just a few months later,⁴¹ in the 1838 draft history of the Church, Joseph Smith again denied knowing the identity of the mummies.⁴²

Yet we find accounts from several years later that claim Joseph Smith knew something of who the mummies were. S. M. Bartlett recalls a conversation he had with Joseph about the mummies. Bartlett was the editor of the *Quincy Whig* for fourteen years. Bartlett frequently wrote about the Mormons, and was initially quite sympathetic to their cause and frequently expressed respect for them as a people. These sentiments would later become more negative, but his visit with Joseph Smith and subsequent reporting of it took place while he was still quite positive in his attitudes towards Joseph Smith and his followers. In his paper, he recalled Joseph Smith showing him the mummies, saying, "'The embalmed body that stands near the center of the case,' said he [Joseph Smith], 'is one of the Pharaohs, who sat on the throne of Egypt, and the female figure by it was probably one of the daughters.' 'It may have been the Princess Thermutis,' I replied, 'the same that rescued Moses from the waters of Nile.' 'It is not improbable,' answered the Prophet, 'but time has not yet allowed fully to examine and decide that point'" (quotation marks added).⁴³ Here we see attributed to the Mormon prophet the notion that the mummies were royalty, but a hesitation to go beyond that. Bartlett himself was far more likely to make attributions regarding their identity than Joseph Smith was at this time. In this account the Mormon prophet does not seem to know the exact identity of any of the mummies, and is not even sure if the mummies were related to

each other. It is also clear that a tendency to identify Egyptian antiquities with the Bible was not unique to Latter-day Saints.

Appleby's remembrance of a visit from roughly that same time period is similar. He recalls:

A Genealogy of the Mummies, and Epitaphs on Their deaths &c &c, are all distinctly represented on the Papyrus, which is called the "Book of Abraham." The Male mummy was one of the Ancient Pharaohs of Egypt, and a Priest, as he is embalmed with his tongue extended, representing a speaker. The females were his wife and two daughters, as part of the writing has been translated, and informs us who they were, also whose writings it is, and when those mummies were embalmed, which is nearly four thousand years ago.⁴⁴

Appleby's account again has Joseph Smith making a connection between one of the mummies and Egyptian royalty. This time the relationship between the mummies seems to be known, with translation of the writing on the mummies being the source of that knowledge.

These secondhand accounts make it clear that there was some belief during the Nauvoo era that the mummies were royalty, and perhaps were connected with the Exodus. This same evidence suggests that at the very least Joseph held the view that the mummies were Egyptian royalty. This idea is strengthened by a host of third-hand accounts. Such hearsay accounts mean little in and of themselves, but when they accord with the writings of two men who heard from Joseph Smith himself about the identities, and who recorded those conversations soon thereafter, they lend a supporting air to the authenticity of these recollections. At the very least they inform us that it was widely believed that Joseph Smith thought the mummies were royal.

Most of those who write about the mummies learned about them from Joseph Smith's mother as she showed them to a number of people. Mother Smith was apparently quite a storyteller in regard

to the antiquities, which is not surprising in light of the fact that her livelihood stemmed from showing them to visitors. Thus we must be careful with accounts that relay information gained from her. It must be kept in mind that these accounts relate the Mormon prophet's view in thirdhand, and that one of the human filters had an interest in making the antiquities as interesting as possible and in making Joseph Smith look as wondrous as possible. Yet the fact that the accounts are prevalent and that they at least partially agree with the few secondhand sources we have suggests there is some validity to them.

As far as I am aware, the earliest mention of the mummies as royalty comes from Henry Asbury, who visited the house that Mother and Father Smith were renting in Quincy, Illinois, after they had fled Missouri but before Nauvoo had become habitable. In this house, the aged Smiths showed many people the antiquities. Asbury recalls, "The old lady charged ten cents admittance and acted as exhibitor, explaining who and what each object really was. I am now unable to accurately give even the substance of these explanations by the old lady, but in substance they amounted to an assertion that one or more of the mummies was one of the Pharaohs or kings of Egypt."⁴⁵

Three years later, LaFayette Knight visited the Smiths in Nauvoo in 1843, writing of that visit, "I went into his [Joseph Smith's] house and had a comfortable chat with him, and then examined the four mummies one of which his Mother told me was King Onitus, on whose breast was found the writing of Abr[a]hamit being as they say, the astronomy taught by him. With a long wand, she pointed out to us the supposed Pharaoh of the Exodus himself, his wife, and his daughters. Then followed a detailed account of the life of each. Upon my asking her how she had obtained all this information, she replied in a severely virtuous tone, in a manner calculated to repress all further doubt and questioning, 'My son Joseph recently received a revelation from the Lord regarding these people and their times. He told it all to me.'⁴⁶

Even after the Prophet's martyrdom visitors were told of the mummies by Mother Smith. For example, one woman writes, "Her curiosities consisted of two mummy kings and their queens, who lived long before Pharaoh; also the foot of Pharaoh's daughter, and a number of sheets of hieroglyphics, which she commenced to explain."⁴⁷ Several other accounts, spanning a number of years, contain nearly identical identifications.⁴⁸ Thus it appears that over time the perception that Joseph Smith identified the mummies with royalty, and often with the Exodus, became stronger and more widespread. We must keep in mind that we have no first- or even secondhand sources of Joseph Smith saying the mummies were figures from the Exodus, which limits our ability to attribute that idea to him.

While we cannot be certain about Joseph Smith's views regarding the identity of the mummies, and even less so with how those views he may have held might have developed, the evidence suggests at least one possible scenario, tentative as it must be. Clearly there was no claim to know the identity of the mummies in the early history of Joseph Smith's ownership of them. The first known identification of the mummies was made by Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith, who were depending upon the sensational nature of the antiquities for their income. Modern followers of Joseph Smith have no reason to believe that their founding prophet would have been corrected by God if he were influenced by such claims. *Perhaps* the assertions seemingly made by his parents caused him to start thinking more seriously about the identity of the mummies, which could explain why he soon thereafter spoke of one of them as a king. Finding others receptive to that idea, and even willing to go beyond that, could have created a climate in which further speculation could germinate and lead to more claims about the mummies. Or perhaps Joseph Jr.'s willingness to entertain something about the identity of the mummies further fueled the imagination and feeling of permission felt by his parents, who in turn spread their ideas about the mummies to a

great number of people. Whether any of these scenarios are correct or not, at the very least many people learned from the senior Smiths that the mummies were royal and connected with the Exodus.

Conclusions

Space constraints demand that another venue serve as the place for discussing how the notion that the papyri and mummies were associated with the Bible should be evaluated in terms of Joseph Smith's prophetic exercise. Here we take only a first step. We can easily conclude that Joseph Smith acquired and displayed mummies and papyri during an era of intense interest in Egypt and its connection with the Bible. While it is not as easy to tell how Joseph Smith himself thought the antiquities he owned were associated with Biblical stories besides stating that the writings of Abraham and Joseph were on the papyri, it is very clear that many who knew Joseph Smith believed he saw such connections. The notion that the papyri contained depictions of the Garden of Eden and of Jacob's ladder spanned a number of years and was held by a variety of unconnected people. The perception that he thought the mummies represented the royalty of Egypt, possibly from the Exodus story, was not conveyed for as many years, but was spread by more people. The multiple accounts spanning so many years create a strong probability that Joseph Smith saw more connections between his antiquities and the Bible than just those of Abraham and Joseph. This is in keeping with what we would expect from the larger cultural milieu as well as from Joseph Smith's own repeated pattern of experiencing a variety of connections with and manifestations of the ancient world of the Bible.

Notes

1. One of the earliest works reflecting this new interest was John Greaves, *Pyramidographia: or a Description of the Pyramids in Aegypt* (London: George Badger, 1646). Other succeeding important works that stirred interest were Frederick Norden, *Voyage D'Egypt et de Nubie* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish

- Academy of Sciences and Letters, 1755); and Richard Pococke, *A Description of the East and Some Other Countries, Vol. 1: Observations on Egypt* (London, W. Boyer, 1743). See also Kerry Muhlestein, “European Views of Egyptian Magic and Mystery: A Cultural Context for the Magic Flute,” *BYU Studies* 43, no. 3 (2004): 137–48.
2. The primary written source of that excitement was the famous thirty-seven volumes of *Description de l’Égypte*. See Andrew Bednarski, *Holding Egypt: Tracing the Reception of the Description de l’Égypte in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Golden House, 2005).
 3. See Kerry Muhlestein, “Prelude to the Pearl: Sweeping Events Leading to the Discovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” in *Prelude to the Restoration: From Apostasy to the Restored Church* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 130–41.
 4. For some examples from this time period, see Captain Henry Light, *Travels in Egypt, Nubia, Holy Land* (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1818); Frederick Henniker, *Notes, during a Visit to Egypt, Nibia, the Oasis, Mount Sinai and Jerusalem* (London: John Murray, 1823); Dr. R. R. Madden, *Travels in Turkey, Egypt, Nubia and Palestine* (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Co., 1829); John Carne, *Letters from the East* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826); Lord Lindsay, *Letters from Egypt, Edom, and the Holy Land (Including the Notes of William Ramsay)* (London: Henry Colburn, 1838); *Letters from the Old World by a Lady of New York, Vols. I and II* by 1840 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1840); Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life, Past and Present* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1848). See also Deborah Manley and Sahar Abdel-Hakim, eds., *Traveling Through Egypt. From 450 B.C. to the Twentieth Century* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2004).
 5. See Muhlestein “Prelude to the Pearl,” 138; on mummies as artifacts in America, see S. J. Wolfe and Robert Singerman, *Mummies in Nineteenth Century America* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 7. Wolfe and Singerman believe that mummies first began to come to America in about 1923.
 6. See Athanasius Kircher, *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta* (Rome: Herman Elliot, 1646). Kircher, a Jesuit priest, felt that Hermes Trismegistus was an Egyptian

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- prophet. See Erik Hornung, trans. David Lorton, *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 101–3. Here Kircher was following the work of earlier writers such as the antique work *Asclepius*, which notes that Trismegistus prophesied of Christ. See Charles Burnett, “Images of Ancient Egypt in the Latin Middle Ages,” in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Changing Visions through the Ages*, ed. Peter Ucko and Timothy Champion (London: UCL Press, 2003), 82. Another ancient work, by an anonymous author, states that Hermes Trismegistus composed a work on the Trinity. See Burnett, “Images of Ancient Egypt,” 91.
7. See John Gee’s chapter in this volume.
 8. See *Die Sendung Moses* by Friederich Schiller, 1790. Examples of the effect of Egyptian culture mixed with biblical ideas are seen in the Rosicrucian Brotherhood and the Free Masons; see Muhlestein, “European Views of Egyptian Magic and Mystery,” 143–45.
 9. Joseph Smith History B-1, 596, digital copy at josephsmithpapers.org.
 10. “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham, No. 1,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842, 703; “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham, No. 2,” *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1842, insert; and “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham, No. 3,” *Times and Seasons*, May 16, 1842, 783. While we do not know if Joseph Smith is the original author of these interpretations, we know he participated in preparing the published interpretations and gave editorial approval to them. For example, on March 1, 1842, his journal records being at the printing office “correcting the first plate or cut of the records of father Abraham, prepared by Reuben Hedlock for the *Times and Seasons*” (spelling corrected). The next day he wrote that he served for the first time as the editor of the *Times and Seasons*, reading through the proofs “in which is the commencement of the Book of Abraham.” On March 4 he worked again with Reuben Hedlock preparing the cut for the second facsimile. On March 9 he examined the copy of the *Times and Seasons* in which that facsimile would be published. See Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, vol. 2 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard

- Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011), 39–42; hereafter *JSP*, J1.
11. Joseph Smith History B-1, 596, digital copy at josephsmithpapers.org.
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22. As evidenced by the October 1 journal entry, “This afternoon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr O[liver] Cowdery and W[illiam] W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded,” in *JSP*, J1:67.
23. For information about Oliver as editor, see John W. Welch, “Oliver Cowdery as Editor, Defender, and Justice of the Peace in Kirtland,” in *Days Never to Be Forgotten: Oliver Cowdery*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2009), 255–60.
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29. Likely Ebenezer Robinson, David Yearsley, or Hiram Kimball, according to Roger D. Launius and F. Mark McKiernan, *Joseph Smith, Jr.'s Red Brick Store*

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30. Caswall is specific about being told that Joseph Smith had said the vignette represented redemption. Even still we are left to rely on Caswall’s memory of someone else’s memory of what Joseph said. While the rest of the statement is not as directly attributed to Joseph Smith, the way it reads it is most likely that it, too, was reported as Joseph’s ideas.
 31. See “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham, No. 1,” *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842, 703.
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