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# JOSEPH SMITH'S AWARENESS OF GREEK AND LATIN

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**A**lthough Joseph Smith's awareness of classical languages is not nearly as well known as are his forays in Egyptian and Hebrew, his interests in Greek and Latin were not insignificant. As far as Latin is concerned, his awareness was mostly limited to technical legal terms and popular political phrases that he undoubtedly encountered on his numerous occasions in court and in public discourse. Regarding Greek, even if his skills were not at the level of being able to pick up a Greek Bible and sight-read it with ease, a modest case can be made that Joseph had genuine interests in, gave actual support to, and achieved certain abilities in learning with Greek, particularly the Greek of the New Testament. And even though he and others in his day were not drawn toward many of the rationalistic or individualistic stands of Hellenism, Joseph Smith made use of several insights and benefitted from certain intuitions

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that he acquired regarding the essentials of working with ancient Greek texts. While there are certainly reasons why his Greek—rudimentary though it may have been—has been almost completely overlooked in the past, it is important not to overlook or discount this part of his deep interest in antiquity, especially with the ways in which antiquity functioned as a tool in Joseph Smith’s repertoire of revelation and restoration.<sup>1</sup>

### **Classical Languages in Joseph Smith’s Day: Living or Dead?**

In order to place the discussion of this subject into its cultural context, it is informative to survey the interesting time of transition in which Joseph Smith lived. A generation before his birth in 1805, the golden age of classical learning in America had peaked from about 1760 to 1790.<sup>2</sup> During that late colonial period, classical education had proved useful as a means of creating social cohesion among the elite; and during the early years of the Republic, shared commitments to classical ideals continued to unite leading members from all of the separate states with a common set of values.<sup>3</sup> While many other subjects were added to college curricula during this formative period, the study of the Greek and Latin classics remained mandatory for higher education at that time.<sup>4</sup>

Among the founding generation of American history, attitudes toward classical education varied widely. John Adams, for example, wrote that Americans ought to obtain “a comprehensive knowledge of history and of mankind” if they were to be able to resist oppression. On many occasions and in different ways, the founders of the American Republic “ransacked the Roman and Greek classics for usable lessons from the past, . . . extracting therefrom analogies, parallels, and precedents as guidelines for public policy and partisan politics, as well as exemplars of civic and private virtue.”<sup>5</sup> In the classics, they found “histories of ancient sages” and “the great examples

of Greece and Rome” as well as “the law of nature” and “the spirit of the British constitution.”<sup>6</sup> James Madison,<sup>7</sup> James Monroe,<sup>8</sup> and John Quincy Adams<sup>9</sup> were among those who strongly favored classical training, and for the most part the Founders generally looked to the classics for guidance from “the lamp of experience” regarding public policy and civic virtue.<sup>10</sup> John Marshall, the first chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, had very little formal education, but his father had brought a Latin and Greek instructor all the way from Scotland to Virginia to ensure that his son would be able to read Horace and Livy before he attended the College of William and Mary for a ten-week legal course.<sup>11</sup>

Yet other members of the founding generation, including Benjamin Franklin,<sup>12</sup> saw less value in the study of the classics. Thomas Paine favored abolishing the study of dead Latin and Greek.<sup>13</sup> Epitomizing this divide was the erudite Thomas Jefferson, who personally enjoyed reading the classics and mined them for political purposes but still wanted to have languages other than Latin and Greek taught in schools.<sup>14</sup>

Following the Revolutionary era, however, the domination of the classics in the curriculum diminished as Greek and Latin texts were increasingly seen to be inconsistent with democratic principles and with the proper education of citizens in the new republic.<sup>15</sup> By the early nineteenth century, opponents of the classics had become very outspoken in popular education and some social circles. Summarizing what he refers to as this “marked deterioration of classical studies in America” during America’s fledgling decades, historian Meyer Reinhold notes that the nineteenth century began with “a flood of expressions of alarmed concern about the neglect, decay, status, and vulnerability of classical studies in America.”<sup>16</sup> By that time, even lawyers and doctors were no longer typically required to study Latin, and the teaching of Greek essentially survived only in the few institutions most dedicated to

preparing students for the ministry, where a high proficiency in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew was required. In the late 1820s—by the time Joseph Smith was a young man—“classical learning ceased to be a ‘dynamic force in American public life.’ It had ceased to be useful knowledge for the larger society, and no longer offered guidelines for the nation.”<sup>17</sup> West of the Appalachians, religious publications such as Campbellite newspapers even boasted that their frontier ministers, who did not know Greek or Latin, were every bit as competent as the university-educated ministers arriving from the East.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in the era in which Joseph Smith was most active, a knowledge of Greek and Latin would not necessarily have made a positive impression on all people.

The value of knowing Greek and Latin remained the highest in the ministry. Terryl Givens mentions the two-day examination in 1827 of a candidate to become a Presbyterian minister, testing him on Greek and Latin as well as rhetoric, logic, philosophy, geography, and astronomy, and concluding with a Latin exegesis of the Latin expression *an sit Christus vere Deus* and a critical exercise on Hebrews 6:4–8.<sup>19</sup> Joseph disparaged the Greek classical authors as having no salvific value,<sup>20</sup> but he did not reject the importance of Greek for the study of the New Testament. Indeed, in this way he reflected the divided sentiments of his day: siding with those who railed against the impractical classics, while seeing value in the use of Greek and ancient languages in studying the Bible.

Few people associated with Joseph Smith knew much of either Greek or Latin. Hyrum Smith spent some time at Dartmouth, where Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and other languages were taught, but he did not take any of those classes. There appears to be no evidence that Sidney Rigdon knew Greek or Latin, even though he was, for a while, a Campbellite minister. Lorenzo Snow went to Oberlin to study Latin, but he put that dream aside and left to serve a Mormon mission. According to Tom Alexander’s biography,

Wilford Woodruff finished common school in four years, studying classical languages and other subjects; after joining Joseph's followers, he and others studied a little more Latin in the Kirtland School after his return from Tennessee in 1836.<sup>21</sup> Still, very few people close to Joseph knew much more than a smattering of Latin and probably even less Greek.

### Joseph Smith's Awareness of Latin Expressions

Joseph rarely used Latin outside of political or legal contexts. With the exception of a few quotations of famous lines from Virgil, the Latin expressions that he used or encountered in those situations were not ancient Latin but were phrases current in the ordinary legal or political rhetoric of his day. Indeed, Joseph had plenty of opportunities to encounter Latin in his life. Etymologies for English words were regularly given in the copy of Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, which Joseph Smith acquired in 1835. From the very young age of thirteen, he encountered legal Latin from his involvement in over two hundred court cases, where he naturally encountered hundreds of terms such as *alias venditioni exponas*, *capias ad satisfaciendum*, *qui tam*, and *venire facias juratores*.<sup>22</sup> With an adept legal mind, Joseph once boasted, "I am a lawyer, I am a big lawyer," and while serving as a mayor and judge in Nauvoo, he spent time studying the law.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph's known uses of Latin fall into three phases. First, in the 1830s, he used Latin phrases in writing ordinary journal entries or minutes of meetings. These included *sine die* ("without day," or without scheduling the next appointment, 1833), *pro tempore* ("for the time being" or temporarily, 1838), and *ipse dixit* ("it speaks for itself," or is self-evident), *sine qua* [or *quo*] *non* ("without which not," or that which is essential), *ex parte* (proceeding without an affected party being present), and *ex officio* (functioning under the official powers of an office).

Second, on March 1, 1842, in his letter to John Wentworth, Joseph used *summum bonum* (“fullest purpose” or “highest good”). On September 6, 1842, in his letter about baptism for the dead which would become Doctrine and Covenants 128, he used *in propria persona* (speaking of those who could not be baptized for themselves in their own proper person; see D&C 128:8) and again *summum bonum* (D&C 128:15).

Third, perhaps influenced by W. W. Phelps but probably also by others around him, Joseph took up the occasional use of Latin phrases in political tracts and correspondence in 1843 and 1844, mostly for emphatic or dramatic effect. In 1843, he used *O gladius!* *O Crumena!* (O sword! O moneybag!), *viator* (traveler), *Ecce veritas!* *Ecce cadaveros!* (Behold the truth! Behold the corpses!), *Veni mori et reviviscere!* (Come death, and be revived again!), *solvo* (I explain, or I answer), *Vox reprobri, vox Diaboli!* (The voice of a reprobate! The voice of the Devil!). In 1844, these appear: *ad infinitum* (and so on, forever), *secundum artem* (according to or following accepted practice), *Amor vincit omnia et nos cedamus amori* (Love conquers all; let us all yield to love, quoting Vergil, *Eclogue* 10:69), *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one), *Vox Matti! Vox Diaboli!* (The voice of a mad man! The voice of the Devil!), *Unitas, libertas, caritas—esto perpetua!* (Unity, generosity, charity—may it be forever). Several Latin phrases are found in his presidential political pamphlet, *Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States*, as is the Greek expression *hysteron proteron* (“putting the last first”), a negative contemporary literary expression that was used to describe one’s saying of things in an order that reverses the natural order, or, in other words, getting the cart before the horse.

Joseph may have been influenced in his use of Latin phrases by others, such as the Missouri governor Daniel Dunklin or John C. Bennett, both of whom used Latin to achieve strong political or rhetorical effects in correspondence with Joseph. In 1836, Dunklin used

*Vox populi, vox Die* (the voice of the people is the voice of God). In 1840, Bennett used the popular phrases *sicut patribus, sit Deus nobis* (just as God was with our fathers, so may he be with us); *in necessariis unitas, in non necessariis libertas, in omnibus caritas* (unity in the essential, liberality in the non-essentials, and charity in all); and *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* (good in manner, better in fact); and in 1841, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* (concerning the dead, speak nothing but good) and *ab initio* (at the outset). Regarding Bennett's use of *sicut patribus, sit Deus nobis* as the motto of the city of Nauvoo, he took this Latin from the motto of the city of Boston, where it was adopted in 1823 and appeared on the city's seal.<sup>24</sup> Bennett would use it several times in Nauvoo.<sup>25</sup>

Politically, spewing out a deluge of Latin phrases was considered good sport and good form. An account describes how Harvard's president bestowed an honorary degree upon Andrew Jackson, using flawless Latin. Jackson is said to have responded with an equally flawless incantation of a nonsensical stream of Latin phrases—“*ex post facto, e pluribus unum, sic semper tyrannis, quid pro quo,*” etc.—to the mortification of some and to the delight of many.<sup>26</sup> Jackson's strategy would be imitated by many people before social assemblies, and this may well explain and contextualize the uses of similar rhetorical outbursts of flourishes in Latin that punctuated Joseph Smith's political rhetoric as well.

Thus, aside from a couple Latin phrases that appear in the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph's known uses of Latin were always in legal or political contexts, never biblical or scriptural. He quoted Virgil once (perhaps supplied by W. W. Phelps). He mentioned Latin in connection with biblical studies, as seen below, but he correctly recognized that the primary texts of the New Testament were written in Greek, and thus he did not seem to see great value in probing the meaning of the Latin words of the Vulgate Bible.

## Did Joseph Promote the Study of Latin and Greek?

Evidence indicates that Joseph actively encouraged the study of Latin and Greek. In the winter of 1836–37, H. M. Hawes was hired by Joseph Smith and brought to Kirtland, Ohio, to teach Greek and Latin at the Kirtland High School in the attic of the Kirtland Temple. Joseph took the study of all subjects seriously in the broad and ambitious curriculum adopted by the Kirtland school, which covered everything from history, languages, politics, and governments, to astronomy, geology, and arithmetic. For these classes, he gave desirable rooms adjacent to the First Presidency’s office, with ample space, heat, and good light. According to one record, Joseph studied Greek or Latin under Joshua Seixas and became proficient in language.<sup>27</sup>

Apparently Joseph approved of the study of Greek and Latin in Nauvoo, although such was not a matter under his direct supervision. An overstated self-promotional piece regarding the University of Nauvoo in June 1842 touted that this University would “before long, be equal if not superior to any college in the country” and that in Nauvoo “all the sciences are taught” and also “Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, etc.”<sup>28</sup> A year and a half later, J. Hatch began advertising in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* that he offered instruction in Latin and Greek in his “Select School,” but it is unknown how many students (if any) actually enrolled with him or elsewhere in the city.<sup>29</sup>

## Joseph Smith’s Awareness of Greek

As one of the original languages of the Bible, ancient Greek seems to have captured a much larger portion of Joseph Smith’s interest than Latin. During the 1830s, numerous biblical commentaries utilized Greek in their analysis of both the Old and New Testament texts, and at least by the Kirtland years—if not sooner—Joseph had certainly been exposed to commentaries which appealed to the Bible’s original languages. In January 1834 Joseph acquired a copy of Thomas



Hartwell Horne's very extensive and erudite *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*.<sup>30</sup> While the edition owned by Joseph shows no signs of annotations or use, simply leafing through the text would have exposed Joseph to a variety of Greek uncial and miniscule scripts, as well as to tables comparing the Hebrew and Greek versions of Old Testament biblical passages.

Almost two years later, on November 20, 1835, Oliver Cowdery brought back from New York for Joseph a copy of Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, along with a classical Greek lexicon. While it is unknown which lexicon this might have been, the Greek Lexicon of Schrevelius had been translated from Latin and published in Boston in 1826, and it was the kind of Greek dictionary probably available on the market in 1835. Joseph would use his lexicon to check the meanings of particular words, which one can profitably do even without being proficient in parsing complex Greek grammatical forms and understanding the full context of biblical texts. So equipped, Joseph and others in his day were able to find support for interpretations of scripture they favored or had adopted.

It appears that Joseph started using his Greek lexicon almost immediately. A rare journal entry dated December 23, 1835, records that Joseph spent the morning studying Greek at his home in Kirtland, before showing visitors the Egyptian papyri and experiencing an unpleasant visit with relatives of Oliver Cowdery who were "blinded with superstition & ignorance [*sic*]." <sup>31</sup> Also, an admittedly very late recollection says that in the fall of 1838, as he was waiting for a steamboat in Richmond, Missouri, Joseph spent a good part of thirteen days studying Greek and Latin.<sup>32</sup> But it was not until the Nauvoo period that records show Joseph's understanding of the meanings of Greek words.

Before he began using Greek more extensively in his sermons, however, Joseph Smith—now settled in Nauvoo—had an encounter on April 19, 1842, with a certain Henry Caswall [spelled variously as

Caswall or Caswell], an educated and devoted Anglican who, later that year, published an account claiming to have exposed Joseph Smith as a fraud. Because this incident often comes up in discussions about Joseph's linguistic abilities, it is worth looking at briefly here. Caswall's account—various versions of which he published in London under four separate titles between 1842 and 1851<sup>33</sup>—quickly became a favorite piece of ammunition among Joseph's growing numbers of enemies. The editor of the *Warsaw Message*, after summarizing Caswall's claims, concluded with, "Such is the manner in which his [Joseph Smith's] knavery is sometimes exposed! Yet, strange that people continue to believe him!"<sup>34</sup> The facts, however, do not bear out such boasts.

Essentially, Caswall claimed that he showed to Joseph Smith "an ancient Greek manuscript of the Psalter written upon parchment, and probably about six hundred years old," which he claimed had been in his family for generations. Pretending to be completely sincere, Caswall asked Joseph to identify what the text was. According to Caswall's account, he suggested to Joseph that the text might be Greek, to which Caswall claimed that Joseph Smith replied, "It ain't Greek at all. . . . It is a dictionary of Egyptian Hieroglyphics." Purportedly, Joseph went on: "Them figures is Egyptian hieroglyphics; and them which follows, is the interpretation of the hieroglyphics, written in the reformed Egyptian . . . like the letters that was engraved on the golden plates."

Assuming that Caswall actually had such a psalter and that his description of its Greek script was accurate, this would mean that he had an early thirteenth-century Greek text, and thus the Greek script, likely Byzantine, would have looked almost nothing like the standard typeset Greek which was typically used in the nineteenth century. Indeed, there are ample reasons to believe that Joseph, or virtually any other American at the time, would not have recognized a medieval Greek text of the Psalms. And if Caswall's alleged

parchment were written in a short two-column form, this might also explain why, at first glance, it might have looked to Joseph something like a dictionary of short listings—assuming that is what he said—since each row or column would likely begin with a larger and more stylized hand-drawn letter that would look nothing like the printed standard Greek script which Joseph would have been accustomed to. In fact, the entire Greek text, if truly written in a thirteenth-century Byzantine script, would likely be indecipherable to anyone not trained to read medieval Greek scripts. Many good classicists cannot readily read every Greek script any more than all English speakers can read thirteenth-century Old English manuscripts.<sup>35</sup> Many Greek scripts look very unusual and, on first glance to an untrained eye, not completely unlike Egyptian Hieratic script (perhaps something related to what Joseph meant by “reformed Egyptian”), which Joseph knew something about from his work with the Egyptian papyri he had acquired.

As the story ends, Caswall declined to sell his psalter to Joseph, and after he had been shown Joseph’s Egyptian papyri, Joseph “disappeared,” as Caswall said. But if Joseph left in a rush, it was likely to get some work done, as he then spent the rest of that day and the next examining land developments in the north parts of Nauvoo. His journal on April 19, 1842, states that he “Rode out in the city. & examined some land near the north limits.”<sup>36</sup> Although Caswall would soon claim that Joseph had been revealed as a fraud, Joseph seems to have been utterly unimpressed by Caswall’s visit. His journal that day does not mention Caswall or his psalter.

Richard Bushman, in *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*,<sup>37</sup> wisely makes no mention of this brief, and probably insignificant, few minutes that Joseph had with Caswall, who was just another visitor to Nauvoo. But as Craig Foster has shown,<sup>38</sup> it appears that the encounter did in fact occur: Caswall’s visit was acknowledged and rebutted in a statement in the *Times and Seasons* published eighteen months

later.<sup>39</sup> So while it appears that Caswall did actually meet Joseph, any significance of what happened in their very short encounter may never be known.

Be that as it may, the Caswall encounter probably offers little useful information about Joseph's abilities or inabilities with Greek. Whether Caswall's trap was fair or not, or whether it was actually sprung or not, the whole episode was not as damaging as Caswall would go on trumpeting. Because the encounter has been thought to prove that Joseph knew nothing about Greek, one may well ask: Was this a real test of Joseph's ability to recognize standard Greek fonts? Do the discrepancies between Caswall's four published versions of this incident make his story inconclusive?<sup>40</sup> What happened to this six-hundred-year-old Greek family heirloom that Caswall purportedly showed to Joseph Smith? And assuming that it actually existed, what did its script actually look like?

Interestingly, perhaps the one thing that the Caswall episode may have done was to send Joseph back even more vigorously to his Greek lexicon and commentaries to be sure that he was not running any risk of ever being challenged, or even remotely embarrassed, in such a way again. Beginning in September 1842 and continuing for the rest of his life, Joseph regularly commented on the meaning of individual Greek words, especially in his Sunday sermons. During the next two years, one can find at least a dozen direct or indirect uses of Greek by Joseph Smith.

He found that Greek meanings supported many ideas that he had taught. On September 1, 1842, an unsigned editorial in *Times and Seasons* explained the meaning of the Greek word *baptizō* as meaning "to immerse or overwhelm," in contrast to the word *rantizō*, "to scatter on by particles" or "to sprinkle." Similarly, in the 1826 Greek Lexicon, basic non-liturgical meanings of the word *baptizō* include "immerse, submerge, plunge, sink." Joseph found this point consistent with his insistence that baptism should be by full immersion, a

practice that had been strongly introduced into LDS thought in May 1829 through the translation of the Book of Mormon and by the resurgent baptisms of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery.<sup>41</sup>

Classical definitions also facilitated for him new understandings of ancient scripture. On September 6, 1842, in his letter regarding baptism for the dead, which eventually became Doctrine and Covenants 128, Joseph not only used the Latin *propria persona* (128:14) and *summum bonum* (128:11), as mentioned above, but he also offered “a different view of the translation” of Matthew 16:19, rendering it, “whatsoever you record on earth shall be recorded in heaven, and whatsoever you do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven.” It is unknown whether Joseph meant this translation in a literal sense or not, but it is interesting that the Latin (*ligo*) and the Greek (*deō*), which both mean to “tie” or “bind,” can also mean to bind by law and duty, to obligate, or to bind as in creating a binding contract, or treaty. While there is no evidence that Joseph got this point from the Greek or Latin, his understanding that the recording of ordinances was necessary to make them binding was at least consistent with this sense of the word *bind* in Greek, Latin, or English.

On May 15, 1843, Joseph, in the *Times and Seasons*, rejected the idea that the word *Mormon* was “derived from the Greek word *mormo*.”<sup>42</sup> This problem, raised in *Mormonism Unveiled* in 1834,<sup>43</sup> originated with a dictionary entry that defined the Greek word *Mormōn* as the name of a monster from Greek mythology similar to a hobgoblin or a bug-bear. Instead, Joseph explained that “Mormon” is derived from “mor” (i.e., *more* in English) and “mon” (i.e., *good* in Egyptian), and, before identifying “mon” as the Egyptian word for “good,” the editorial gives the words for “good” in various languages: Saxon (*good*); Danish (*god*); Gothic (*goda*); German (*gut*); Dutch (*goed*)—these five etymologies coming right out of Noah Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*. In addition, the letter goes on to list the words for “good” in ancient

languages, including Latin (*bonus*); Greek (*kalos*), Hebrew (*tob*), and Egyptian (*mon*).

On December 6, 1843, in a letter to James Arlington Bennet, Joseph gave a gratuitous etymological explanation of “mathematical,” which he said comes from the Greek word *mathesis*.<sup>44</sup> This explanation also was derived from Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, which reads “Mathesis, Gr. [Greek], meaning the doctrine of mathematics.”

### Joseph’s Use of Greek in Sermons and Discussions

In the last twelve months of his life, Joseph delivered several sermons in which he focused on New Testament texts, referring to Greek wordings that he had checked. On June 11, 1843, a Sunday morning, he insisted that the correct translation of *hell* is “a world of spirits,” and not just a place of final damnation but a spirit world where the spirits of the deceased dwell. “Go to my house I will take my lexicon,” he said, and there (in his lexicon) one finds that *hades* means “a world of departed spirits” where disembodied “spirits, the righteous & the wicked all go.”<sup>45</sup> And, he added, the modern definitions given to the word *paradise* “don’t answer to the original word [or meaning] used by Jesus.”<sup>46</sup> Joseph would return to this point on several subsequent occasions.

On August 27, 1843, preaching on Sunday at the temple grove, Joseph discoursed on Hebrews 7. He made the point that Melchizedek was not the king of Salem (a place), but the king of peace and righteousness (a quality). He argued that no understanding of this word, whether expressed in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, or French, would see this as a reference to a place, but rather as part of a title such as prince or king of peace.<sup>47</sup>

On January 29, 1844, Joseph Smith discussed the meaning of the Greek word *Hades* in Luke 23, this time with a Millerite lecturer.<sup>48</sup>

## JOSEPH SMITH'S AWARENESS OF GREEK AND LATIN

As before, he translated it as “the spirit world,” not as “hell,” and pointed to his Greek lexicon in support.

On April 7, 1844, a Sunday afternoon, Joseph expounded at length on certain words in the Bible.<sup>49</sup> Here he pointed out “an error” in the King James Version of the Bible, for in other translations of the Bible, *James* is rendered as *Jakobus* or *Jacob*, as it in fact reads in the Greek and Latin texts of the New Testament: “Greek says Jacob German says Jacob thank God I have got this book and I thank him more for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>50</sup> He finds in this a key that helps us “to find out God—what kind of a being we have got to worship,”<sup>51</sup> but it is not clear how this should be understood. The record simply concludes with Joseph saying, “I have preached Latin Hebrew Greek German & I have fulfilled all, I am not so big a fool as many have taken me for,”<sup>52</sup> and emphatically asserting that this understanding “corresponds the nearest to the revns [revelations] that I have given the last 16 years.”<sup>53</sup>

An article appeared in the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on April 10, 1844, reporting an interview with Joseph on April 8 in which he stated that he sought to find and know the Bible in its purity, and that this knowledge was the rock on which he built his hopes. Joseph then “made references to the causes of the present sectoring tenets and deviation from the very word of God. He unfolded . . . the oldest book in existence of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew [his polyglot Bible]. . . . He there selected the verses where words were omitted in translation, and additions made to carry out the speculations that exist in the churches of the Sectarians.” This newspaper article concluded, “I am satisfied that Nauvoo is a place of knowledge and that wisdom will be justified of her children.”<sup>54</sup>

On May 12, 1844, a Friday morning, speaking again from the Temple Stand, Joseph said in a sermon that from the German translation of the New Testament and other versions of the Bible, “I get testimony to bear me out in the revelations that I have preached for

the last 14 years—the old German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew translations all say it is true, they cannot be impeached, and therefore I am in good company.”<sup>55</sup>

On May 15, 1844, Josiah Quincy visited Nauvoo and met Joseph Smith at Joseph’s home, the Mansion House. In his famous entry in *Figures of the Past: From the Leaves of Old Journals*, Quincy reported an exchange between Joseph and a Methodist minister over the salvation of one of the robbers crucified alongside Jesus and the necessity of baptism. “How do you know he wasn’t baptized before he became a thief?” Joseph asked, adding, “In the original Greek, as this gentleman [turning to Quincy] will inform you, the word that has been translated paradise means simply a place of departed spirits. . . . And there, doubtless, he received the baptism necessary for his admission to the heavenly kingdom.”<sup>56</sup> The Greek here is *paradeisōi*, and Joseph’s point is that “in paradise,” rightly, is not the same as “in heaven” (which would be *ouranōi*) where God is, or the kingdom “of heaven” (*tōn ouranōn*), but rather is a place like the Garden of Eden (part of this earthly sphere), although at the same time a spiritual or immortal realm in which a spirit may dwell or into which a mortal person may be caught up. This is the third known time Joseph made this very point. Josiah Quincy then went on to record that Joseph “referred to his miraculous gift of understanding all languages, and took down a Bible in various tongues [his polyglot Bible], for the purpose of exhibiting his accomplishments in this particular.” While Quincy politely recorded that “our position as guests prevented our testing his powers by a rigid examination,” he observed that Joseph used more Hebrew than Greek and that more of his visitors would have been able to catch him “tripping” if he had discussed the more familiar Greek.<sup>57</sup> It would be an interesting curiosity to know which polyglot Bible Joseph owned. One example of such multilanguage, parallel-columned printings is Elias Hutter’s remarkable polyglot Bible published in Nürnberg, Germany, in 1599, which gave parallel



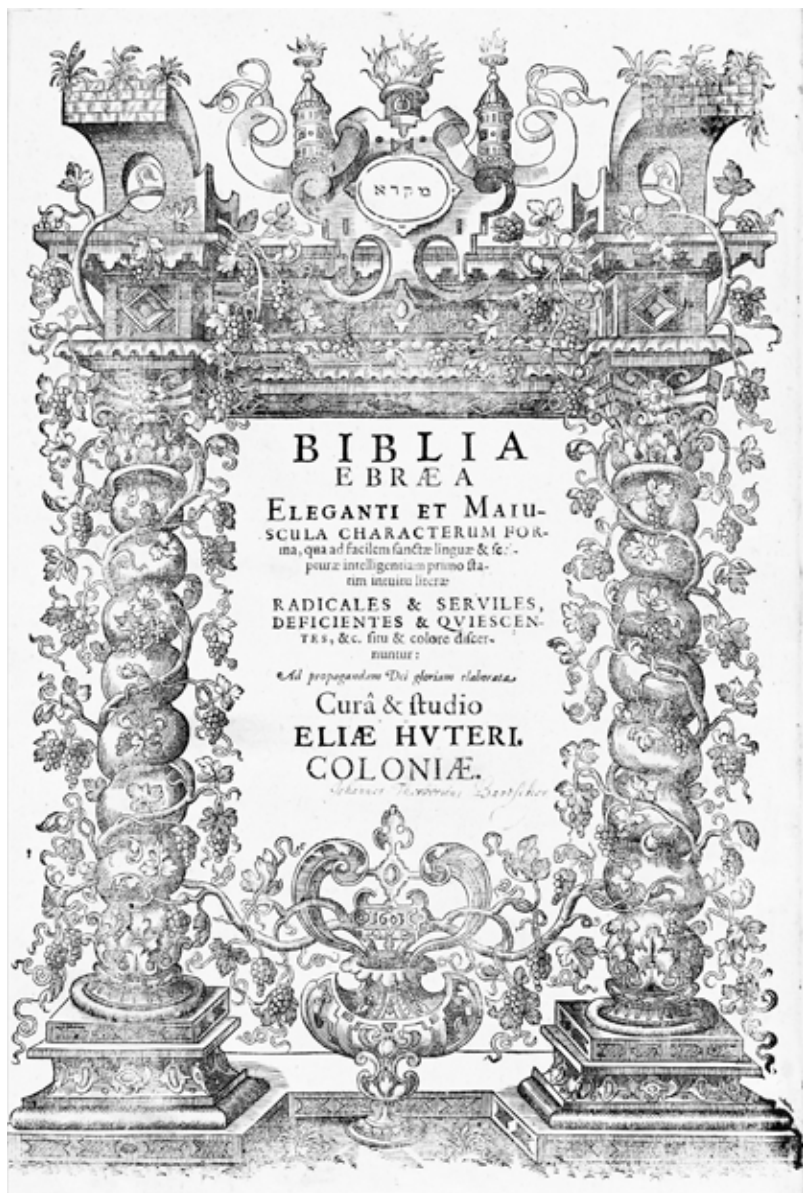
texts of the New Testament in Syriac, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, Italian, Polish, English, and Danish.<sup>58</sup>

The next day, on June 16, 1844, eleven days before he was murdered, Joseph delivered yet another Sunday sermon, his last great sermon in the grove east of the Nauvoo Temple. On this occasion, he commented on John 17:21, saying, "I want to read the text to you myself—I am agreed with the Fa[the]r & the Fa[the]r is agreed with me & we are agreed as one—the Greek shews that i[t] sho[ul]d be agreed."<sup>59</sup> Here Joseph is reading the idea of being "one" as idiomatic for being in agreement, rather than being in some identical metaphysical, theological, or ontological state. The Greek *hen* ("one") can mean to be united and hence agreed.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

From the evidence concerning Joseph Smith's use and understanding of Greek and Latin, several points stand out as they invite further exploration and discussion. First, Joseph and many others in Nauvoo were quite capable of making use of and understanding Greek and Latin phrases. And to explain the appearance of Greek and Latin in Joseph's writing, one need not assume that he used a ghostwriter. As seen here, Joseph's primary uses of and concerns about the translation of the Greek New Testament were most often articulated during his Sunday sermons, situating these comments as expressions of his most authentic personal and spiritual voice.

Second, Joseph had a polyglot Bible. He showed it to Josiah Quincy in Nauvoo on May 15, 1844. Three days before that visit, Joseph had commented that he had a polyglot Bible which contained the New Testament in German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew translations. The fact that Joseph mentioned this book on Friday morning before Quincy's Sunday visit shows that he was making use of it for other reasons and did not pull this reference work out just to impress Quincy.



The 1603 version of Elias Hutter's Polyglot Bible. Courtesy of Skokloster Castle, Sweden.

Third, in his notes about his visit, Quincy said that Joseph referred to “his miraculous gift of understanding all languages.” Joseph took down his polyglot Bible as evidence that he valued and was interested in the study of biblical languages, even if time did not allow Quincy to cross-examine Joseph to see how much he knew of these languages. It would seem unlikely that Joseph would show the book to demonstrate that he was able to keep up with the sectarian ministers, but rather to show that his spiritual gifts had put him not only ahead of them but also on a completely different track. It is not hard to agree that Joseph was gifted in many ways, and that some people are more gifted in language acquisition than others. But more than that, Joseph Smith, especially through his experiences in translating the Book of Mormon and working with the translation of the Bible for many years, seems to have developed insights into the sensing of semantic meanings of key words, the deeper nature of the conveyances of languages, and the need to discern the ancient speakers’ original intent in order to interpret correctly, especially when interpreting the scriptures.

Fourth, it is important to note that Joseph Smith explained his own methodology when he said, while holding his polyglot Bible, that from this sort of study “I get testimony to bare [bear] me out in the revelations I have preached for the last 14 years.”<sup>61</sup> He did not see himself as using these texts to find or discover the ancient meaning of biblical passages, but rather he began his study with things in mind that he had come to know through the process of revelation—for example, his knowledge of the existence of a spirit world as a holding place for departed spirits awaiting the Resurrection. Then he went to his lexicon and found support in the Greek for the difference between the ultimate state of heaven and the temporary state of the spirit world with its paradise and spirit prison. One may call this work “proof texting,” “apologetics,” or “cherry picking,” but for Joseph Smith this was a completely valid use of points he learned by

studying the Bible through the lens of biblical languages. Joseph saw this sort of evidence as “circumstantial evidence,” which can combine with faith, because both are products of collecting experiential data attractive to the mind through choices arising from values and beliefs.<sup>62</sup> Joseph did not so much think that ancient languages could reveal important secrets; rather, he thought that ancient languages could confirm his previous revelations of true doctrines.

Along this same line, one crux of the Protestant Reformation was the question of how 2 Timothy 3:16 should be translated. Should it read, “All scripture is inspired and is profitable”? Or should it read, “All scripture that is inspired is profitable”? The Greek manuscripts read the first way, but some Latin texts omit the *and* and thus justify the second meaning. Interestingly, in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, Joseph moved the *and* to the beginning of this verse, thus yielding a verse that agrees with the first of these translation options, and also with the Greek manuscripts in which the word *and* existed. His translation also comports with the fact that Greek word orders can be changed in such a way; but then he also read this text in the second way by placing priority on the importance of the inspiration of the Holy Ghost rather than on institutional imprimatur mandating that once something is declared to be scripture it is to be understood, by definition, to be inspired. Thus the Joseph Smith Translation reads, “*and* all scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine.” Illustrating again the sequence of putting revelation first, this translation of 2 Timothy 3:16 was written around March 1832, whereas Joseph had already, in November 1831, received a text by revelation, namely Doctrine and Covenants 68:4, which had defined scripture in this second way: “And whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.”

Throughout Joseph's life, revelation came first. For him, all else, including insights from the Greek, Hebrew, or Latin, were merely enlightening appendages or footnotes.

## Notes

A special thanks to Lincoln Blumell for his conceptual initiative and to Joseph Trevor Antley for his excellent research assistance.

1. See Terryl L. Givens, "Joseph Smith: Prophecy, Process, and Plenitude," and John W. Welch, "Joseph Smith and the Past," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2006), 55–68, 105–17.
2. See Meyer Reinhold, *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 174.
3. See Jurgen Herbst, "The Yale Report of 1828," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 215–16. Traditionally, a classical education had been the prerogative of middle-class males, and it remained so until several decades into the nineteenth century. See Kim Tolley, "Science for Ladies, Classics for Gentlemen: A Comparative Analysis of Scientific Subjects in the Curricula of Boys' and Girls' Secondary Schools in the United States, 1794–1850," *History of Education Quarterly*, 36, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 132.
4. Herbst, "Yale Report," 216–21. On the teaching of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in the colonial years, see George Emery Littlefield, *Early Schools and School-Books of New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 231–78.
5. Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 174.
6. John Adams, "Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law" (1765), in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, ed. Charles F. Adams (Boston: 1850–56), 3:463. See generally Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 136.
7. Ralph Louis Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1971), 41.
8. Daniel Preston, "James Monroe, 1758–1783: Student and Soldier of the American Revolution," in *A Companion to James Madison and James Monroe*, ed. Stuart Leibiger (John Wiley and Sons: 2012), 345.

9. Harlow G. Unger, *John Quincy Adams: A Life* (Philadelphia: De Capo Press, 2012), 58–66.
10. Unger, *John Quincy Adams*, 58–66. Likewise Adam Smith, whose moral and economic treatises were highly influential in America as well as in his British homelands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, was heavily grounded in the classics; see Gloria Vivenza, *Adam Smith and the Classics: The Classical Heritage of Adam Smith's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
11. Leonard Baker, *John Marshall: A Life in Law* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 13, 63, 66. In Kirtland, Joseph Smith would also follow this pattern of importing language tutors, as discussed below.
12. Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 120.
13. Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 125–26.
14. Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 124.
15. Herbst, “Yale Report,” 216.
16. Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 191–92. See also Thomas Smith Grimke, *Reflections on the Character and Objects of All Sacred Literature and on the Relative Excellence and Value of Religious and Secular Education, and of Sacred and Classical Literature* (New Haven: Howe, 1831), 113–15, on the “deficiency of Classics in usefulness.”
17. Reinhold, *Classica Americana*, 194. Compare in English experience, Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830–1960* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).
18. In this connection, see Finis’s four arguments against the classics, discussed in Lee T. Percy, *The Grammar of Our Civility: Classical Education in America* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 85–116.
19. Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67.
20. See, for example, *New York Herald*, January 10, 1844, 1; cited in Joseph Smith Jr., *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:77 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).

## JOSEPH SMITH'S AWARENESS OF GREEK AND LATIN

21. Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1993), 13, 47.
22. Such terms regularly appear in documents the forthcoming Joseph Smith Legal Papers series.
23. Joseph Smith, journal, 1842–1843, 217–20, Church History Library, in forthcoming Joseph Smith Papers; *History of the Church*, 5:289.
24. John Hayward, *The Massachusetts Directory* (Boston: John Hayward, 1835), 174; reprinted in John Hayward, *The New England Gazetteer* (Boston: John Hayward, 1839).
25. Bennett is known to have used the phrase in his inaugural address as Nauvoo's first mayor, published in *Times and Seasons*, February 15, 1841, 316; in a letter to Joseph Smith dated August 15, 1840, preserved in Joseph Smith Letterbook 2, 171–72, Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library, and in Joseph Smith Papers, "Letter from John C. Bennett, 15 August 1840" (ID #566) at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/letter-from-john-c-bennett-15-august-1840>; and also in a pseudonymous letter (under the moniker "Joab, General in Israel"), "Burglary! Treason! Arson!!! Murder!!!!" *Times and Seasons*, September 1840, 65–67.
26. Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 258.
27. M. F. Cowley, "Sketch of the Life of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Latter-day Saints Southern Star* 2, no. 8 (January 20, 1900): 58.
28. John C. Bennett, head of the fledgling University of Nauvoo, letter dated May 8, 1842. See "Highly Important from the Mormon Empire," *New York Herald*, June 17, 1842.
29. J. Hatch's advertisement appeared often in the newspaper beginning November 15, 1843. *Nauvoo Neighbor*, on DVD accompanying *The Best of the Nauvoo Neighbor*, ed. Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2013).
30. Discussed in John W. Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *FARMS Review* 15, no. 1 (2003): 47–80. The date (January 1834) of this acquisition by Joseph Smith,

- apparently from J. D. Hughes, is written on the front endsheet of this book, in the Archive of the Community of Christ, Independence, Missouri.
31. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 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, 2008), 135, 137.
  32. Statement made by John W. Hess that was printed in “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor*, May 15, 1892, 302.
  33. One of these is Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo in 1842* (London: J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842). See page 35 for this account.
  34. “The Mormon Prophet and the Greek Psalter,” *Warsaw Message*, November 15, 1843.
  35. Papyrologists must receive special training in order to decipher the scripts used in the ancient world, which lacked punctuation, diacritical marks, and spacing between words and made use of frequent abbreviations.
  36. Joseph Smith, journal, April 19, 1842, in *JSP*, J2:51.
  37. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005).
  38. See Craig L. Foster, “Henry Caswall: Anti-Mormon Extraordinaire,” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 152.
  39. “Reward of Merit,” *Times and Seasons*, October 15, 1843, 364: “It will be recollected by some, that a Mr. Caswell [*sic*], professing to be an Episcopal minister, came to this city some twelve or eighteen months ago. He had with him an old manuscript, professing to be ignorant of its contents, and came to Joseph Smith, as he said, for the purpose of having it translated. Mr. Smith had a little conversation with him, and treated him with civility, but as the gentleman seemed very much afraid of his document, he declined having any thing to do with it. . . . After telling all the tales that he had heard, [he] went to making others in regular Episcopal order out of whole cloth, and published his misshapen batch to the world, as a ‘History of Mormonism.’”
  40. Hugh W. Nibley dramatizes the differences between the 1842, 1843, 1851, and 1865 renditions in “The Greek Psalter Mystery, or Mr. Caswall Meets the



## JOSEPH SMITH'S AWARENESS OF GREEK AND LATIN

- Press,” in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, vol. 11 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 304–406.
41. See Mosiah 18:14; 3 Nephi 11:26; D&C 13:1; Articles of Faith 1:4.
  42. “Correspondence,” *Times and Seasons*, May 15, 1843, 194.
  43. See E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, OH: Telegraph Press, 1834), 21.
  44. See Joseph Smith to James Arlington Bennet, “History of Joseph Smith,” *Millennial Star*, May 26, 1860, 326–27.
  45. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 211, 213.
  46. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 211.
  47. See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 244–47. See also Hebrews 7:2; Alma 13:18.
  48. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:189.
  49. See Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 340–62.
  50. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 341, 351.
  51. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 359.
  52. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 354; see also 341, 345, 358.
  53. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 351, which would refer to revelations he had received since 1828, when he began translating the Book of Mormon.
  54. *Nauvoo Neighbor*, April 10, 1844.
  55. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 366. This statement was made in the context of Joseph’s speaking about his reading of Matthew 24: his right to the “keys of the Priesthood,” as foretold by the coming of the angel in Revelation 14:7. His work on the translation of Matthew 24 was in the late summer of 1831; the restoration of priesthood keys was in 1829–30; and comings of the angel Moroni were from 1823 to 1829.
  56. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 391–92.
  57. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 376–400.
  58. Elias Hutter, ed., *Biblia Sacra, Ebraice, Chaldaice, Graece, Latine, Germanice, Italice/Sclavonice/Saxonice* (Nuremberg, Germany: 1599).

JOHN W. WELCH

59. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 380, reported by Thomas Bullock; see also George Laub's journal in *Words of Joseph Smith*, 382; the McIntire Minute Book clearly identifies this as coming from John 17:20–23; *Words of Joseph Smith*, 383.
60. While it is probable that Joseph Smith based this argument largely on theological grounds and not on a philological distinction, there is some support for his assertion. *Eis, mia, hen* (“one”) can also mean “unity” when used in a mathematical or philosophical sense. See Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (New York: Harper, 1846), 406. Some modern translations have also interpreted *eis* to mean “agreement.” See also Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Including Hebrew–Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1998).
61. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 365.
62. Welch, “Joseph Smith and the Past,” 109. On Joseph's reliance on circumstantial evidence, see John W. Welch, “The Power of Evidence in the Nurturing of Faith,” in *Nurturing Faith through the Book of Mormon: The Twenty-Fourth Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 149–86, reprinted most recently as “The Role of Evidence in Religious Discussion,” in Robert L. Millet, ed., *No Weapon Shall Prosper* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2011), 259–94; see text accompanying notes 53–56.