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## Book of Abraham Polemics: Dan Vogel's Broad Critique of the Defense of the Book of Abraham

Author(s): Jeff Lindsay

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# BOOK OF ABRAHAM POLEMICS: DAN VOGEL'S BROAD CRITIQUE OF THE DEFENSE OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

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Jeff Lindsay

Review of Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021). 250 pp. \$18.95 (softback).

**Abstract:** *Dan Vogel's latest book claims to offer clear-cut evidence showing what, when, and how Joseph Smith fraudulently translated the Book of Abraham. While he claims to use an objective approach, he instead weaves a polemical agenda that ignores some of the most important scholarship in favor of the Book of Abraham. He ignores crucial evidence and relies on assumptions and hypotheses as if they were established facts. The arguments of apologists, which he claims to be reviewing and critiquing, are often overlooked or, when treated, attacked without letting readers know the substance of the apologetic argument. He neglects key arguments and important documents that don't fit his theory. The work is a valuable tool to explore Book of Abraham polemics, but it is not even-handed scholarship by any means. Vogel's latest contribution does not overturn the evidence against his paradigm nor overthrow the growing body of insights into the antiquity of the Book of Abraham.*

The Book of Abraham is viewed by some critics of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the weak underbelly of the faith, an easy target to attack to undermine the beliefs of members and the interest of investigators. Dan Vogel, a long-time critic of the Book of Abraham, who has influenced many people with his theories and arguments — including some members of the Church — has published a new book aimed at exploding the defenses that Latter-day Saint scholars have offered for the Book of Abraham. Drawing upon arguments honed

over many years, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique*<sup>1</sup> seeks to set the record straight by examining the arguments made by apologists and showing us what the evidence actually reveals.

After reading his claim to be just pursuing history “based entirely on a dispassionate, balanced analysis of the relevant historical documents” (xvii), I expected what would at least seem to be an even-handed consideration of key evidence on both sides of the debate, including discussion of important apologetic works and arguments. In spite of knowing what the conclusions would be, the journey could be valuable for students of the Book of Abraham to understand the weaknesses in evidences and arguments. Vogel’s book can indeed be valuable for that purpose, but only for a small fraction of the issues surrounding the Book of Abraham. What is neglected, unfortunately, contradicts the claim of dispassionate scholarship. The book is primarily valuable for understanding the most refined and creative arguments available, as far as I know, for the critics’ paradigm of how and what Joseph translated to give us the Book of Abraham. In providing a seemingly compelling and certainly creative story for the origin of the Book of Abraham based upon some of the mysterious Kirtland Egyptian Papers, Vogel excels, although the arguments still fail.

In addition to thoroughly discussing his paradigm for the translation, Vogel also tackles a variety of other issues. He explores several aspects of the Book of Abraham story: he provides a timeline for some of the key moments and documents involved and critiques aspects of the Book of Abraham text, the explanations of the facsimiles, and a few of the evidences apologists offer for the book. He also provides alternate nineteenth-century sources that could help account for the book. It is comprehensive in terms of providing the negative angles that can be taken, but it falls awkwardly short in responding to some important issues that defenders of the Book of Abraham have been pointing out for years.

Another reason for paying attention to Vogel’s book is that the background it provides can help Latter-day Saint scholars and students of the Book of Abraham to not only better understand focal points of the debate on the Book of Abraham and the methods critics use to undermine it, but to also better recognize when others even within the Church treat questionable claims from critics as fact. For example, understanding Vogel’s polemical arguments and methodology can help

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1. Dan Vogel, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2021).

readers discern the nature of the unfortunate and now openly admitted influence of Vogel on an important volume from the Joseph Smith Papers Project (*Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*,<sup>2</sup> hereafter JSPRT4). The volume is remarkably valuable, but readers need to understand the subtle but pervasive bias in the many choices and statements made therein. After publication, Brian Hauglid, one of the volume editors of JSPRT4, praised Vogel's approach to the Book of Abraham, noting that it had influenced his work as an editor. Vogel discusses this and praises Hauglid for that in his book (xvi, also citing Hauglid's public acceptance of critical approaches to the Book of Abraham, on Facebook, in footnote 20). That influence can be seen in many ways that have been pointed out elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, scholars relying on the scholarship in JSPRT4 may not recognize the bias from the influence of Vogel and other critics that may lead readers to accept many errant, unstated assumptions or unjustified conclusions, or to miss many valuable insights that arguably should have been provided. Vogel's arguments, though, will enable readers to see why, for example, the biased framing of details around the Book of Abraham manuscripts and the sloppiness in assigned dates for some of the documents are important and why those flaws improperly play into the hands of critics. (Such flaws would likely only be noticed by those familiar with the details of the attacks levied against the Book of Abraham and should not be used to impugn the work or motives of the Joseph Smith Papers team: in spite of the subtle and easily missed errors in one still remarkable volume, JSPRT4, the vast body of work from the

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2. *The Joseph Smith Papers, Revelations and Translations*, vol. 4: *Book of Abraham and Related Manuscripts*, eds. Robin Scott Jensen and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018).

3. Jeff Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019): 13–104, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/a-precious-resource-with-some-gaps/>; John Gee, "Prolegomena to a Study of the Egyptian Alphabet Documents in the Joseph Smith Papers," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 77–98, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/prolegomena-to-a-study-of-the-egyptian-alphabet-documents-in-the-joseph-smith-papers/>; John Gee, "Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 42 (2021): 127–70, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/fantasy-and-reality-in-the-translation-of-the-book-of-abraham/>; John Gee, "The Joseph Smith Papers Project Stumbles," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Faith and Scholarship* 33 (2019), 175–86, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-joseph-smith-papers-project-stumbles/>.

Joseph Smith Papers team generally complies with the highest standards of scholarship.)

### **Taking the Shine Off *Shinehah*: An Insight Into Vogel’s Approach**

It would be unfair to expect every argument in favor of the Book of Abraham to be considered, or to expect every scholar who has published something in favor of the book to be discussed by Vogel. But it’s fair to expect commonly cited issues to be addressed and major, foundational works to be cited and discussed. However, my expectations in this area were met with disappointment. Here we consider the noteworthy issue of *Shinehah* as a telling illustration of Vogel’s approach.

After reading Vogel and beginning this review, I turned to what may be the one of the most important and far-ranging foundational works of Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Abraham, *One Eternal Round*, the *magnum opus* of Dr. Hugh Nibley that was completed after his death the help of Dr. Michael D. Rhodes.<sup>4</sup> While reading pages 333 to 334, I was reminded that the word *Shinehah*, said to be “the sun” in Abraham 3:13, actually can mean the sun in ancient Egyptian. It is one of the numerous clues in the Book of Abraham that something is going on other than mere fabrication by Joseph Smith. The plausibility of *Shinehah* as the sun in ancient Egypt is now one of multiple evidences of ancient origins that apologists sometimes mention in discussing the Book of Abraham.<sup>5</sup> It is not absolute proof of anything, but is a meaningful issue and one that demands attention.

What is especially interesting is that *Shinehah* was not widely used to mean the sun in ancient Egypt. Use of that term for the sun is only attested during a relatively brief span of about six centuries that overlaps with the likely time that Abraham lived, as John Gee has noted.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this was a lucky guess, but one that should at least raise an eyebrow.

As I read Nibley’s observations, I recalled reading about *Shinehah* several times in Vogel’s book, but I could not recall how Vogel attempted to refute the main point that Joseph’s identification of *Shinehah* as the

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4. Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2010).

5. See, for example, “Shinehah, The Sun: Book of Abraham Insight #16,” *Pearl of Great Price Central*, Oct. 23, 2019, <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/shinehah-the-sun/>, and *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Shinehah,” last modified May 13, 2018, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/SHINEHAH>.

6. Gee, “Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham.”

sun was plausible in ancient Egypt. As I went back to Vogel, I saw he had much to say about *Shinehah*, mentioning it 28 times. He is obviously aware of the importance of this topic.

Beginning on page 158, Vogel claims that *Shinehah* did not originate with the translation of the Book of Abraham but was a code name used in the 1835 printing of the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>7</sup> He argues that *Shinehah* came first as a code name and then was added to the Book of Abraham in 1842 when Joseph allegedly did the translation of Abraham 3. There is reasonable evidence that Abraham 3 was likely translated, at least as a first draft, in 1835,<sup>8</sup> but the translation of the Book of Abraham had at least begun before the Doctrine and Covenants was printed in August 1835. But whether the word *Shinehah* first appeared as a random code word in the Doctrine and Covenants that would be the same as a word in Abraham 3:13, or first arose during work on the Book of Abraham and then was adopted as a memorable code word standing for “Kirtland,” the meat of the apologists’ argument about *Shinehah* is that *Joseph Smith correctly identified a real Egyptian word as the sun* in Abraham 3:13. So how does Vogel deal with that argument?

Vogel goes on for several pages (158–63), arguing that Abraham 3 was not translated until 1842 and that its use of *Shinehah* may derive from an 1838 revelation that mentions the “the plains of Olaha Shinehah” (D&C 117:8). He also argues that Hebrew words in Abraham 3 like *Kokaubeam* (meaning stars) point to an 1842 date of translation, discounting the argument that Joseph’s brief 1842 translation work could have included working in Hebrew terms to the existing text — even though the many

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7. A scrap of paper containing “Shinehah” was added as a code word to the 1833 revelation that is now D&C 96 by pinning the scrap to the original manuscript of the revelation, apparently in preparation for the August 17, 1835, printing. This most likely occurred in 1835 and could have occurred after translation of the Book of Abraham had begun, though it is possible that it occurred before Joseph received the papyri. The most logical scenario, in my opinion, is that the word was obtained through Joseph’s work related to the Book of Abraham and was then borrowed as a memorable code word to represent “Kirtland” in preparing for the 1835 printing of Section 96. See Jeff Lindsay, “Trying to Take the Shine off Shinehah: Vogel’s Response to a Commonly Cited Evidence for Book of Abraham Authenticity,” *Mormanity* (blog), April 10, 2021, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2021/04/trying-to-take-shine-off-shinehah.html>. Also see Christopher C. Smith, “The Inspired Fictionalization of the 1835 United Firm Revelations,” *Claremont Journal of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 2011): 15–31, <https://www.academia.edu/2357317>, who prefers a May to June 1835 date for addition of the “Shinehah” scrap, while recognizing that it is still possible for that addition to have occurred after July 1835.

8. Gee, “Prolegomena,” 78–79, 96–97.



added foreign code names in the 1835 printing of the Doctrine and Covenants already set a precedent for updating an earlier revelation with added names.

But through all this talk of *Shinehah* and where it first occurred and when, it was only in preparing this review, prompted by seeing Nibley's discussion of this issue as one of numerous equally fascinating issues in his tome, that I noticed something astonishing: there is no discussion by Vogel of *why* Abraham 3's use of *Shinehah* is considered evidence for the Book of Abraham or why it matters to Latter-day Saint defenders. It's as if Vogel is just inoculating readers against a commonly cited evidence without creating any awareness of what the evidence is. One could explain that without giving very much ground by proposing that *Shinehah* in Abraham 3:13 is just one lucky guess. But Vogel, clearly aware of the argument, doesn't reveal why some see it as relevant evidence. This is not the dispassionate scholarship promised at the beginning of the book.

There are many other similar nuggets in Nibley's *One Eternal Round*, along with fascinating vistas about ancient Egyptian perspectives that help us see the ancient setting of the broad themes of the Book of Abraham. Unfortunately, readers of *Book of Abraham Apologetics* will not even learn of the existence of Nibley's *magnum opus*, for it is never discussed or cited. Nibley is brought into the conversation several times to criticize him for a few statements, but so much of the meat he offered for Book of Abraham students is simply left off the table. For *Shinehah* and a variety of other issues, I believe there should at least have been a recognition as to what the argument is with a footnote to the relevant documents, one of which most certainly should be *One Eternal Round*.

### **Where Vogel Shines: His Overarching Theory for the Translation of the Book of Abraham**

The strength of Vogel's book is in explaining in detail his paradigm for what and how Joseph "translated" in producing the Book of Abraham. According to Vogel, who sometimes seems to channel Fawn Brodie in reading Joseph's mind, Joseph felt he had a valuable tool when he acquired the papyri, for since they could not yet be translated by scholars in the U.S., he could offer his own bogus translation to further impress his followers with his powers. He decided to take a different approach than anything he had done before by first producing a tool for translation, and then "translating" from it. The tool began as the "Egyptian Alphabet" and then became converted to the more complete volume known as the "Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language" (GAEL).

Characters from that volume were associated with long explanations having various “degrees” from one through five in which the fifth degree often corresponded with a more fleshed out “definition.” As a work of unschooled mortals with no knowledge of Egyptian, it seems completely misguided and is not an accurate translation of the characters that are Egyptian. Vogel insists that Joseph first created the GAEL, and then used some of it to build a story line and “translate” the Book of Abraham, while apologists see strong evidence that it is dependent on the Book of Abraham translation as well as the Doctrine and Covenants or other sources, and is not the source of the translation or story line of the Book of Abraham.

In Vogel’s paradigm, Joseph selected a scroll belonging to an ancient priest named Hor that was merely an ordinary funerary text with some interesting drawings, including our current Facsimile 1. Joseph misinterpreted an ordinary funeral scene as Abraham on the altar, and then picked some text near (but not immediately next to) that figure on a portion of the scroll that is now known as Joseph Smith Papyrus XI (JSP XI), believing it to contain the Book of Abraham. After working on the GAEL long enough to have some ideas for a story line, Joseph had two scribes write characters from JSP XI into the left margin of some blank pages and then dictated the “translation” that went with those characters, typically giving lengthy blocks of text, as many as 200+ English words for one character or short string of characters in the margin.

This translation began with just 3 characters for Abraham 1:1–3 dictated to W.W. Phelps on Book of Abraham Manuscript C, with a title beginning with “Translation.” Then he later dictated more text, beginning with Abraham 1:4, to two other scribes at the same time, with Frederick G. Williams writing Book of Abraham Manuscript A, and Warren Parrish writing Book of Abraham Manuscript B. These two manuscripts, which I call the “twin manuscripts,” have some similar errors and corrections that seem to reflect scribes taking simultaneous dictation from a speaker who stumbles and changes his mind and makes corrections in midstream. Williams takes dictation of verses up until our Abraham 2:5. For some reason, Parrish stopped after Abraham 2:2.

Vogel explains that the twin manuscripts from Williams and Parrish provide clear evidence that shows Joseph’s translation process at work as he tells scribes what character to write and then dictates the translation. It is live “revelation” and reveals that what Joseph was doing was completely wrong and a total fraud, for the characters on JSP XI have nothing to do with Abraham.

Here the Latter-day Saint apologist might offer a typical response by saying that this process of placing English text next to characters need not mean that Book of Abraham manuscripts reflect live creation of new scripture but may reflect copying from an existing manuscript. Vogel believes the evidence of similar errors and corrections proves that dictation was underway, and what else could that mean but Joseph Smith dictating new scripture on the fly? Vogel has a seemingly plausible timeline, apparent evidence of translation occurring, and “smoking gun” evidence that seems to give us a direct window into how and what Joseph translated.

As for the possibility of contrary evidence, Vogel tells us that there is none. Regarding Nibley’s theory expressed in 1975<sup>9</sup> that the scribes were matching up existing revelation with Egyptian characters to try to show their own skills with Egyptian, Vogel says, “There is no evidence that such an event ever took place” and states that the evidence shows just the opposite (8). Later he reminds us that “[t]here is no evidence to support the existence of a now-lost original text from which the Parrish and Williams documents were copied” (15–16). He repeats this claim twice more later (19–20, 24). For Vogel, we need to understand that “there is no evidence” means “OK, there may be something that looks like evidence, but I’ve got arguments against it.” It’s a subtlety in his methodology that may confuse some readers at first.

Several reasonable objections to this overarching paradigm remain unanswered in Vogel’s treatment. Fortunately, one important objection is not only mentioned, but answered in a truly clever way that I consider a highlight of the book.

### **A Clever Explanation for the Most Direct Evidence of Scribes Using an Existing Translation in Making the Book of Abraham Manuscripts**

One of the most important of the “no evidence” evidences against Vogel’s paradigm is the presence of dittography (a mistaken repetition of text) in Williams’s Book of Abraham Manuscript A in which he copies Abraham 2:3–5 twice. The dittograph occurs on the last surviving page of Williams’s Book of Abraham Manuscript A, which can be examined in detail on the Joseph Smith Papers website<sup>10</sup> (but note that

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9. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 2.

10. Frederick G. Williams, “Book of Abraham Manuscript A,” p. 4, *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/>

the transcript there misses some details that are caught in the finalized version published in the printed volume<sup>11</sup>). Surely Joseph Smith did not lose track in his on-the-fly story line and forgetfully jump back and once again make up three large verses matching the previous dictation word for word. Dittography is a very common scribal error when scribes are copying existing text from a written document and accidentally jump back to a previous spot in the document. This can easily occur if the place a scribe is looking for in the document has an identical or similar word that also occurs in an earlier spot on the page, as it does in this case. Abraham 2:2 and 2:5 both end with “Haran” in our text, or with “Haron” in Williams’ equivalent of vs. 2, so after writing “Haran” in the final sentence of vs. 5, he could have looked back to the document being copied to find his next starting point after “Haran” and, seeing a line end with “Haron” at the end of our vs. 2, thought he had found his target and picked up his copying with the following verse, Abraham 2:3, which he had already copied. This huge mistake, along with many other less dramatic clues, seems to require copying from an existing manuscript. Vogel does not overlook this evidence and provides an impressive solution in favor of his model.

The large dittograph in Manuscript A is visual evidence that Williams was copying from an existing manuscript. If so, how can we accept the theory that he was taking live dictation of newly created scripture from Joseph Smith? Here Vogel truly shines with a creative and almost elegant model that he has devised to overturn the impact of the dittograph of Abraham 2:3–5, handily turning evidence for an earlier manuscript of at least part of the Book of Abraham into “no evidence” at all.

Vogel suggests that when Williams and Warren Parrish allegedly took simultaneous dictation from Joseph to create the similar “twin manuscripts” (Book of Abraham Manuscript A and Manuscript B, respectively), Williams for an unknown reason wrote an extra paragraph of dictation that Parrish did not write (our current Abraham 2:3–5). Parrish later copied that extra text from Manuscript A into Manuscript C, along with the text Parrish had from his own Manuscript B. Manuscript C had been started by W.W. Phelps and originally just had Abraham 1:1–3. It would become what Vogel sees as the “translation book” creating the key record for the early Book of Abraham translation. Then, maybe a week later in late November 1835, Parrish took more dictation of newly translated text from Joseph Smith for Abraham 2:6–18.

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book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-a-abraham-14-26/4.

11. JSPRT4.

For some reason, Williams later wanted to add some of the new material to his own manuscript, according to Vogel. Since his manuscript originally ended with the word “Haran” at the end of Abraham 2:5 in “Therefore he continued in Haran,” he searched for “Haran” in Parrish’s document (a word that occurs multiple times) and found the wrong place, Abraham 2:2, ending with “the daughter of Haran.” Williams thus began copying for a second time our current Abraham 2:3 and continued copying a full paragraph of material he had already written, not noticing the duplication.

This is a clever explanation. It is important enough that I will quote directly from Vogel (28–31):

There is a reconstruction of the events that best explains how the dittograph occurred, and once understood, it becomes clear that this repetition in no way threatens the oral dictation theory.

When Parrish and Williams recorded from Smith’s dictation, probably on 19 and 20 November 1835, Williams wrote one more paragraph than Parrish. Parrish drew the last hieratic character, but left the remainder of the page blank.

Next, Parrish copied the English text onto seven pages of the translation book following the half page Phelps had previously scribed, making some slight changes. After skipping a line, Parrish then copied the paragraph that had been dictated in his absence from the Williams document. At this point, Parrish again began writing from Smith’s dictation directly into the book, which, as previously discussed, is evident from the in-line corrections made in his new English text. This possibly occurred on 24 and/or 25 November 1835, which are the last two entries in Smith’s Kirtland journal in which translation is mentioned.

Later, Williams wanted to copy the new text from the translation book into his manuscript to make it complete. The paragraph that Williams last wrote ended with the word “Haran” on a line by itself. As he turned the pages of the translation book looking for a paragraph that ended with that word, Williams would first have come to the top of page 7 and would have accidentally begun copying the paragraph that he had already recorded from Smith’s dictation. He was

apparently unaware that the next paragraph also ended on the following page with “Haran”.

What may have added to Williams’s confusion was the blank line before the paragraph and the possibility that either Parrish’s or Williams’s document or both did not have the characters in the margin next to the paragraph. As previously mentioned, Parrish had evidently copied the characters into the margin before copying the English text but, having miscalculated the number of lines, found it necessary to scrape off two groups of characters on page 7, precisely where the dittograph occurs.

Because he was no longer a scribe recording from oral dictation and was merely recording a second copy of a text that had already been entered into the translation book, Williams saw no need to copy the characters or to maintain the margins and paragraphing.

We may not know exactly how Williams introduced a paragraph-long dittograph into his document, but the scenario I have proposed explains more of the evidence and facts than Gee’s assertion that the entire document is a copy based on a repeated paragraph at the end. Gee’s explanation cannot explain the presence of clear evidence of simultaneous recording from dictation that appears in the document prior to the dittograph. Nor can it explain the change in Williams’s method of recording that occurs at the point of the dittograph.

The resolution is brilliant. Yes, of course there is a dittograph, and of course it was created by copying from the wrong place in an existing manuscript. But the existing manuscript was one based on his own Manuscript A that was copied by Parrish into Manuscript C that had added translation from Joseph. Williams wanted a copy of the new material, but accidentally started copying a long passage that he had just copied a few days earlier.

This explanation seems reasonable and has apparently convinced some people, but I’m afraid that those who were convinced failed to ask some of the basic questions that need to be raised about Vogel’s scenario.

First, note that the “change in Williams’s method of recording” refers to the visible drift in his left margin that occurs partway into the repeated material. Williams no longer holds the left margin open for characters and doesn’t add the characters he had previously written. Vogel says,

“Because Williams changed his method of recording at the point where the repeated paragraph appears, it would be a mistake to conclude the entire document is a visual copy based on the unusual dittograph at the end” (28). I agree that a dittograph on page 4 does not necessarily mean that copying from an existing manuscript occurred on pages 1–3, but it certainly means copying occurred on page 4. But Vogel is suggesting that the change in the margin should be taken as evidence in favor of his theory of later copying from what Parrish copied from Williams into Manuscript C instead of an existing manuscript being used in the original session when the first instance of Abraham 2:3–5 was written. Is that reasonable?

There are a variety of reasons why one’s margin might drift or characters might not be copied. Perhaps something has changed, but what? The dittograph and margin drift happens with the verses that Parrish did not copy in his manuscript, which ends at Abraham 2:2. If both scribes were copying at the same time, could the departure of Parrish have resulted in a change? I have previously offered the proposal that simultaneous dictation could have been occurring, but not of new scripture by Joseph Smith — but by someone else reading from an existing manuscript.

Spelling clues also call for an existing manuscript, one that Parrish seems to have been able to see when he was writing names. Parrish is not a great speller, giving us “preist,” “sacrafice,” “fassion” (fashion), “patraarch,” “government,” “pople” (people), “Idolitry,” “deliniate,” “runing,” and “smiten,” something that can happen when copying an existing manuscript as the mind recalls a string of multiple familiar words just read, and then writes the recalled words using one’s own spelling, not paying attention to the details of how they were spelled on the document. But in spite of his weakness in spelling, Parrish spells names with remarkable consistency, even when there are silent consonants or otherwise difficult spellings. All three occurrences of “Mahmachrah” are spelled that way, though the first occurrence is not capitalized. All 3 occurrences of “Zibnah” are the same. Of the eleven occurrences of “Pharaoh,” a difficult word that many people get wrong, he has it correct eight times. Once he drops the final “h,” once he inverts the “ao,” and once he has an extra vowel in “Pharoaoh.”<sup>12</sup>

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12. Jeff Lindsay, “The Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts: Do They Reflect Live Translation Produced by Joseph Smith, or Were They Copied From an Existing Document?,” *Mormanity* (blog), July 4, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/07/the-twin-book-of-abraham-manuscripts-do.html>. Thanks

While spelling errors of proper nouns in Manuscript B suggest that Parrish could see a manuscript that was being copied, Kyler Rasmussen has made further observations. The nature of the misspellings of other words in Parrish's Manuscript B and in Manuscript C, when we know he was copying from existing manuscripts, are consistent, indicating both manuscripts are based on visual copying rather than live dictation.<sup>13</sup>

Based on spelling clues, I have argued that Parrish could see the spelling of difficult names while Williams could not for much of his document, and that perhaps Parrish was reading aloud before writing lines down to help Williams in also making a copy.<sup>14</sup> Or another person could have been reading to both, but perhaps with the manuscript close to Parrish for easy copying of difficult names. Parrish may have been giving guidance on the placement of characters, and with his departure, Williams didn't know where to place them or didn't care. Alternatively, he may have just grown weary and impatient after four pages of scribal work. A drifting margin and failure to copy characters does not require a different setting on a different day. That's the real issue: did this happen in the complex way Vogel proposes involving different days, with Williams copying from Parrish's copy of his own prior work, or did Williams just copy from the same source that he used the first time he wrote Abraham 2:3–5?

Vogel fails to consider two important questions: (1) is there textual evidence that Williams is copying from Parrish's entry in Manuscript C, which has some differences compared to what Williams wrote the first time for Abraham 2:3–5; and (2) does the handwriting and ink flow on the manuscript point to a later second session for the dittograph, or does it appear that the dittograph was done at the same time as the preceding text? Both of these questions lead to answers that stand strongly against Vogel's model, creative as it is.

I suggest there are three tests we can consider for Vogel's proposal, apart from any problems in the chronology:

Does the duplicate text, perhaps written several days later, show use of a different ink, different pen, different ink flow, different spacing or

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to Ryan Dahle in the comments for pointing out the significance of the silent consonants.

13. See Jeff Lindsay, "More on the Book of Abraham Manuscripts: What Spelling Errors Teach Us," *Mormanity* (blog), Jan. 23, 2021, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2021/01/more-on-book-of-abraham-manuscripts.html>.

14. Lindsay, "A Precious Resource with Some Gaps."



slant of the text, or does it look as if it were written in the same session as the immediately prior text?

Does the first occurrence of Abraham 2:3–5 show clear signs of oral dictation and essentially no signs of visual copying?

Does the second occurrence of Abraham 2:3–5 show signs of copying from Parrish’s document rather than copying from what may have been (in the model of some Latter-day Saint apologists) the document that was the source of the first occurrence (and the entire manuscript)?

Vogel failed to ask these questions. It’s not enough to offer a clever but convoluted argument that in theory could account for some details when other important details clash with the proposal. Let’s consider the three factors. Note that I am using the transcript from JSPRT4, which is considered the final version with some differences relative to the preliminary transcript on the Joseph Smith Papers website. Both have errors, but the transcript in the book is more detailed and catches some things that weren’t noticed when the website version was done. Most of the corrections I mention for this passage are not shown on the website, only in the book.

**1. Different appearance?** As Williams begins the dittograph, the ink flow, the appearance of the ink, the spacing and slant of his text all continue exactly as before, as far as I can see. I find it difficult to believe that this is in a new session several days later, now in the new mode of copying from a manuscript when all was oral dictation before. A change does crop up when Williams abandons the left margin he had been following, but that only occurs after he has copied for a few lines. Regardless of why he allows the margin to drift, his style and ink are indistinguishable from the text above. In 1835, without the benefit of mass-produced consistent ball point pens, the appearance of the ink could easily vary from one session to the next, and, of course, details of handwriting could vary. Looking at the writing of various individuals in the photographs of documents in the Joseph Smith Papers helps us see just how much the appearance of a scribe’s writing can vary. For Manuscript A, it strongly appears that the dittograph occurred in the same session as the first instance.

**2. Signs of visual copying in the first occurrence?** Yes, there are indications of making a visual copy in the first occurrence of the duplicated text, just as there are throughout the rest of the preceding text. For this specific passage, these apparent copying errors include (1) writing “the” instead of “thee,” an easy copying mistake to make (dropping one or more letters from a word occurs in both Williams and

Parrish, with two more examples of this in the 2nd occurrence when we know that Williams is copying visually — there he drops two letters in “kindred” and more in writing “bro” for “brother’s”); (2) writing an “r” to begin the word “land” before changing it to an “l” (this is indicated in the printed book, not the website); (3) initially writing “dem” and changing it to “deno” followed by “minated” to create the word “denominated” (also not indicated on the website’s transcript); and (4) initially writing an “s” and then changing it to a “d” for the word “dwelt,” which can make sense as a copying error (cursive “s” with an elongated upper peak can look like a “d”) but not as a likely error in oral dictation (also not indicated on the website’s transcript).

Further, this passage has much more punctuation than is typical of scribes, including Williams specifically, when taking dictation of revelation from Joseph Smith. In this short passage, we have by my count (relying on the printed transcript) six commas, one period, two colons, and three semicolons. It’s more heavily punctuated than some other parts of Williams’s manuscript. Both the errors and the punctuation mark this passage as one more typical of a visually copied text than a scribe taking oral dictation from Joseph Smith, though the punctuation is not always consistent with how it was done the first time.

**3. Is the dittograph copied from Parrish’s Manuscript C?**<sup>15</sup> I find this issue especially interesting. Parrish’s version of Abraham 2:3–5, presumably copied from Williams, has some notable differences relative to the first occurrence written by Williams. For example, both instances of “therefore” in Parrish follow a comma, not the colons that Williams has, and both are in lowercase, while in Williams both are capitalized. So what happens when Williams allegedly copies the text from Parrish to unknowingly create his dittograph? The result is closer to his first occurrence. Both occurrences of “therefore” are still capitalized: one follows a colon and the other a line break where a colon may have been overlooked. Williams’s initial colon after “idoltry” and before “Therefore” may have been inserted, according to the transcript in the book, and is missing in the dittograph, but there is a line break there followed by the capitalized “Therefore.” Parrish, on the other hand, has “unto his Idoltry, therefore ... ,” which differs twice in capitalization and once in punctuation.

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15. “Book of Abraham Manuscript, circa July–circa November 1835–C [Abraham 1:1–2:18],” in JSPRT4, 230–31, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-abraham-manuscript-circa-july-circa-november-1835-c-abraham-11-218/7>.

Also significant is the difference between Williams and Parrish in writing the phrase we now have as “thy father’s house” in Abraham 2:3. In Manuscript C, Parrish writes “house” in copying from Williams, and it’s clear, with an unmistakable “s.” Williams, on the other hand, has “home” each time he writes that verse. The editors of the Joseph Smith Papers volume on the Book of Abraham transcribe both instances as “home,” but add footnotes to both suggesting that the word might be “house.”<sup>16</sup> It is unclear at first glance. However, detailed examination of Williams’s handwriting shows that the word in both cases is “home” with very little justification to read it as “house.”<sup>17</sup> Whatever motivated Williams to write “home” the first time again motivated him to write “home” in the dittograph. He most likely is not copying from Parrish as he makes the dittograph, but rather continues using the same existing manuscript he used the first time.

If Williams were copying from Manuscript C for the dittograph, why did he fail to copy the character in the margin where the dittograph began? Later, why did he fail to follow Parrish’s paragraph break that is followed by “But I Abram” and also fail to use the character in the margin that Parrish has there? At the place where Parrish has stopped writing, Williams creates a dittograph and stops using characters — perhaps they were working together in some way and things changed when Parrish quit and perhaps left (that was a consideration in my prior proposal that Parrish may have been reading aloud to help Williams in making his copy for a while). It may be possible that the original manuscript he was copying from lacked characters, and that instructions for character placement had been provided by Phelps to Parrish who oversaw character placement while he was present with Williams (if the two scribes were present and possibly collaborating as they began making their copies), so Parrish’s departure could have left Williams unsure of what to do regarding characters. There are many possibilities here, including the scenario proposed by John Gee in which Williams wrote his copy first, and then Parrish copied it, in some cases preserving the manuscript errors and corrections as if initially seeking to make an accurate copy of the original document, warts and all. Gee’s analysis also includes

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16. JSPRT4, 201n106–107, 240.

17. Lindsay, “The Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts,” with the analysis of “house” vs. “home” in the July 21, 2019, update.

consideration of all the errors and corrections in the twin manuscripts, which he concludes strongly weigh against Vogel's scenario.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, it simply does not look like Williams has been copying from Parrish, but he rather appears to be using the same source (a source that may have lacked characters), though his punctuation is inconsistent. For example, a colon in his initial "many flocks in Haran:" becomes a comma in the dittograph, with "many flock in Haran," and "many" being inserted above the line. Williams may be getting tired at this point, as he is making a large number of errors, such as dropping the word "after," writing "bro" for "brothers," writing "sarah" instead of "Sarai," skipping "many" and having to insert it, dropping the "s" in "flocks," and, when he gets to some of the allegedly new material on Parrish's document with a very clear "but I Abram and Lot," dropping the very visible "I" of Manuscript C to render "but Abram and Lot." Fatigue and growing errors make sense if this were all a continuation of a lengthy session, reaching the end of page 4, versus starting fresh to write down a short passage of new material from Manuscript C. Page 4 of his manuscript, though, is probably not the end of that session since it ends in the middle of a sentence. Surely there was a page 5 and perhaps more, but no more has survived. Many relevant documents in the translation may have been lost or destroyed, not just a significant portion of the original scrolls but also the text that Williams and Parrish were using to make their copies.

Why were they making copies in the first place? Perhaps to continue helping Phelps by adding new speculative material to his Grammar and Alphabet, which I see as the apparent purpose indicated by the headers on both of the twin manuscripts that refer to the "sign of the fifth degree of the second part." That's not the kind of header we would expect from Joseph creating scripture, but it fits in perfectly with the unfinished content of the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language. It is direct evidence that Williams and Parrish saw their manuscripts not as new live revelation of the translation of the Book of Abraham, but as an effort to use the existing translation to further translate "an alphabet *to* the Book of Abraham" (the phrase used in Joseph's journal entry of July 1835<sup>19</sup>) meaning they were seeking to link existing English

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18. Gee, "Fantasy and Reality in the Translation of the Book of Abraham," 131–40.

19. The journal entry can be seen at "History, 1838–1856, volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838]," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-1->

text to characters to be used for the unfinished section of the second part of the GAEL dealing with the “fifth degree” of those characters. Vogel, unfortunately, makes no mention of the apparent meaning of that heading or why it may be significant to apologists.<sup>20</sup>

Vogel’s hypothetical scenario is interesting but seems to fail basic criteria that we might expect if it were true. Persistent evidence points to the use of an original manuscript during the creation of Book of Abraham Manuscript A prior to the obvious copying that occurred in the dittograph. The source for Williams’s scribal work doesn’t appear to have changed when the dittograph occurs. The details of the dittograph do not point to Parrish’s work in Manuscript C as the source used by Williams. And the appearance of page 4 of Williams’s manuscript suggests a continuous session, perhaps with an increasingly weary Williams, rather than a fresh session several days later.

The dittograph and the rest of the twin Book of Abraham manuscripts do not fit with Vogel’s complex model, offering too much evidence for the use of an existing manuscript and a dittograph that occurred in a continuation of the same session as the original occurrence of Abraham 2:3–5. The dittograph still stands as compelling evidence against Vogel’s paradigm. But there may be even bigger hurdles for Vogel’s theory.

### **A Moot Theory? Overlooked Hurdles**

Arguments over the textual details of the twin manuscripts, which Vogel dates to November 1835, are irrelevant when one considers the more serious barriers to Vogel’s theory. In fact, in light of these hurdles,

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september-1834-2-november-1838/51. For discussion, see Jeff Lindsay, “An Alphabet TO the Book of Abraham: What Did Joseph Mean?,” *Mormanity* (blog), Nov. 3, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/11/an-alphabet-to-book-of-abraham-what-did.html>.

20. See Jeff Lindsay, “The Meaning of the Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts,” *Meridian Magazine*, Aug. 26, 2019, <https://latterdaysaintmag.com/the-meaning-of-the-twin-book-of-abraham-manuscripts/> and Jeff Lindsay, “More on the Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers: Recent Explorations Based on Comments at *Interpreter*,” *Mormanity* (blog), Dec. 15, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/12/more-on-meaning-of-kirtland-egyptian.html>. Vogel was aware of this argument in 2019 when he argued against it based on the uncertainty of the source and meaning of the character at the left of the phrase “sign of the fifth degree of the second part” in the twin manuscripts. See Dan Vogel, July 22, 2019, comment on Lindsay, “The Twin Book of Abraham Manuscripts,” <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/07/the-twin-book-of-abraham-manuscripts-do.html?showComment=1563847325291#c8067389757591071068>.

Vogel's creative discussion of the twin manuscripts and the dittograph may be simply moot.

First is the textual evidence from what supposedly represents the beginning of Joseph's dictation of revealed text, the verses of Abraham 1:1–3 penned by W.W. Phelps in Book of Abraham Manuscript C. Like the twin manuscripts, it provides compelling textual evidence that it does not represent live dictation but was derived from an existing manuscript.

Consider the general nature of the text, which has the appearance of a finished manuscript with careful punctuation, unlike the typical results of scribal work when Joseph is dictating scripture. The editors of one volume of the Joseph Smith Papers series, *Documents: Volume 5, January 1835–October 1838*, made this observation when they noted why Book of Abraham manuscripts A and B were likely copied from an existing manuscript: "Textual evidence suggests that these Book of Abraham texts were based on an earlier manuscript that no longer exists."<sup>21</sup> The supporting footnote explains:

Documents dictated directly by JS typically had few paragraph breaks, punctuation marks, or contemporaneous alterations to the text. All the extant copies, including the featured text, have regular paragraphing and punctuation included at the time of transcription as well as several cancellations and insertions.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to an abundance of seemingly careful punctuation (17 commas, 10 semicolons, 1 colon, and 1 period, by my count using the transcript<sup>23</sup>), there are also corrections made that are consistent with copying from an existing manuscript, unlike Joseph's revelatory diction. The first is writing "desiring one" and then wiping off "one" and then writing "to be one who possessed great Knowledge." After writing the phrase "a greater follower of righteousness," Phelps apparently had skipped the phrase "a possessor of greater Knowledge." Perhaps this happened because he had just written something very similar and, believing he was looking at a phrase he had already written, continued

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21. Brent M. Rogers, et al., eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents: Volume 5, January 1835–October 1838* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2017), 74–75.

22. *Ibid.*, 74–75n323.

23. JSPRT4, 219.

with the following phrase, “a father of many nations,” only later noticing what he had skipped. The missing phrase is then inserted above the line.

The next correction appears to be changing a comma to a semicolon after “prince of peace,” the kind of correction that is atypical of scribes recording Joseph’s dictation and much more consistent with copying an existing manuscript. Later Phelps writes “through fathers” and later inserts the missing “the” between those words, a mistake consistent with visual copying, though scribes taking dictation can get behind and miss words as well.

Of particular importance in Phelps’s writing are the footnotes he inserts that link two characters to very small blocks of English text. The first footnote occurs before the phrase “In the land of the Chaldeans,” and the second footnote before “Abraham.” It looks almost as if a footnote may have originally been intended before the next word “Saw” after “Abraham” and may be related to the scratching out of something in the margin replaced by the number 2. Then another character occurs halfway down in Phelps’s writing without a footnote or a paragraph break. It’s as if Phelps began with associations to specific words or phrases, then wrote the next character of interest without knowing how to associate it to anything specific, and then stopped. The twin manuscripts continue where Phelps left off but begin with headers that link the copies to the GAEL. They associate new characters not found in the GAEL with blocks of more text from the Book of Abraham, while also showing the same textual features that point to use of an existing manuscript in addition to some common errors and corrections that could be consistent with oral dictation from someone reading a manuscript, but less likely as live creation in the mind of Joseph Smith of new scripture.

Before we can entertain a theory about Manuscripts A and B representing live dictation of new scripture, we need to first address the evidence from the earlier work of Phelps on Manuscript C that points to the use of an existing translation. Phelps appears to begin by searching for connections between a couple of characters in the GAEL and an existing text with detailed punctuation. The specific connections stop after two characters, and his work stops after three verses and three characters. Williams and Parrish are obviously continuing whatever Phelps had begun, labeling their documents as being related to the fifth degree of the second part in the GAEL. It would seem most logical to infer that they are seeking to assist Phelps with creation of the GAEL, treating new characters that have not been considered yet, but their effort gets nowhere, and the new characters considered are never entered

into the GAEL. The abundant textual evidence contrary to Vogel's paradigm is not considered, which is unfortunate for a book purporting to explore the positions taken by Latter-day Saint defenders of the Book of Abraham.

In addition to the textual evidence, further barriers to Vogel's theory come from highly relevant historical documents that are ignored or poorly considered. Vogel's model has Joseph first exerting great efforts to create the GAEL as a tool to assist in his translation, translating in a method entirely different than occurred for the Book of Mormon, the translation of the Bible that gave us the Book of Moses by revelation, and the translation of a lost record given in D&C 7. In Vogel's model, Joseph begins translation in November 1835, producing the verses from Abraham 1:1 to 2:18, and then moving on to the rest of the text in 1842. Unfortunately, this does not square with the historical record, both in terms of how Joseph translated but especially when he translated.

Here Vogel overlooks the import of repeated statements of direct and indirect witnesses who unanimously describe Joseph translating by revelation, not by an apparent academic method relying on the GAEL. Warren Parrish said, "I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks [sic] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven."<sup>24</sup> Vogel quotes this in his book but misses its significance. This was said after Parrish had become an enemy of the Church and easily could have mocked the bizarre scenario of Joseph trying to use the GAEL as a dictionary he had made up to translate the Book of Abraham, with one character evincing as many as 200 words. But there is never a mention of Joseph using the method Vogel presents as "obvious." No witness speaks of Joseph translating by use of a strange "academic" method with the GAEL. It was simply by revelation.

It did not take months of impossibly creating a translation tool to translate. Rather, translation began almost immediately. Vogel acknowledges that Oliver Cowdery said Joseph translated a few characters right away and this impressed Michael Chandler, the entrepreneur who brought the papyri to Joseph, but Vogel asserts that "whatever Smith said to convince Chandler [of his power to translate], it

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24. Warren Parris, letter to the editor, *Painesville Republican* 2, no. 14–15 (Feb. 15, 1838), [https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Parrish\\_\(1838\):\\_%22I\\_have\\_set\\_by\\_his\\_side\\_and\\_penned\\_down\\_the\\_translation\\_of\\_the\\_Egyptian\\_Heiroglyphicks\\_as\\_he\\_claimed\\_to\\_receive\\_it\\_by\\_direct\\_inspiration\\_of\\_Heaven%22](https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Parrish_(1838):_%22I_have_set_by_his_side_and_penned_down_the_translation_of_the_Egyptian_Heiroglyphicks_as_he_claimed_to_receive_it_by_direct_inspiration_of_Heaven%22).



had nothing to do with Hebrew Bible patriarch Abraham” (ix). Rather, he speculates that perhaps Smith spoke about magic amulets and zodiac symbols or astronomy when he saw Facsimile 2, which may have jived with something Chandler had heard earlier from scholars.

One important relevant document that Vogel does not cite comes from the recollections of John Riggs:

Arriving in Kirtland with his Egyptian artifacts, Chandler stayed at the Riggs hotel and requested an audience with Joseph Smith. According to a later recollection of John Riggs, he “was present when the Prophet first saw the papyrus from which is translated the Book of Abraham.” In examining the papyrus, the Mormon prophet was struck by what he perceived as a similarity between some of the Egyptian characters and characters of “Reformed Egyptian” that he had previously copied from the gold plates. Smith was given permission to take the papyrus home; and “the morning following Joseph came with the leaves he had translated.”<sup>25</sup>

Translation of something had begun, and there was more than just a word or two — there were multiple pages. The historical record shows that Joseph could translate rapidly and did not need to first create translation tools. The record shows that he almost immediately began translation, not just commentary on the alleged zodiac-like nature of Facsimile 2 (Vogel’s suggestion that its astronomical associations are something obvious that Joseph could see is based on hindsight). He did not need to and would not wait until November 1835 to translate Abraham 1 nor wait until 1842 to translate Abraham 3 and beyond. We know this for many reasons, such as the use of *Shinehah* of Abraham 3:13 in 1835, as well as other factors, such as these provided by Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen<sup>26</sup>:

- Oliver’s use of language from the first few verses of Abraham 1 in a patriarchal blessing he recorded in September 1835,

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25. Terryl Givens and Brian Hauglid, *The Pearl of Greatest Price: Mormonism’s Most Controversial Scripture* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), 120, citing *Tullidge’s Quarterly Magazine* 3, no. 3 (July 1984): 283.

26. Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen, “‘The Work of Translating’: The Book of Abraham’s Translation Chronology,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, eds. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2016), 139–62, <https://rsc-legacy.byu.edu/pt-pt/archived/let-us-reason-together/work-translating-book-abraham-s-translation-chronology>.

which must have been drawing upon a July translation, since no translation occurred in August or September.

- Joseph Smith’s reference in a letter to the Church in 1839 to “the Sun Moon or Stars, all the times of their revolutions, all the appointed days, months and years, and all the days of their days, months and years, and all their glories, laws, and set times shall be revealed,” echoing the discussion in Abraham 3 of the “times and seasons in the revolutions” of Kolob in verse 4 and the various “set times” of verses 6, 7, and 10.
- Joseph’s 1838 sermon in which he “instructed the Church, in the mistories of the Kingdom of God; giving them a history of the Plannets &c. and of Abrahams writings upon the Plannettary system &c.” Muhlestein observes that “the specific phrase ‘writings upon the Plannettary system’ strongly suggests that the Prophet was preaching about Abraham 3; nothing else in his revelations match that description.”

Against the latter two points, Vogel argues that the GAEL must be what Joseph meant when he mentioned the astronomical items (164). He has a reasonable argument. The GAEL does describe celestial bodies, including Kolob (a late addition by Warren Parrish). It mentions revolutions and governing powers and has many concepts and names that sometimes seem closely related to Facsimile 2. It speaks of some bodies rotating more slowly than others, as in Abraham 3, but does not use the distinctive term “set time.”<sup>27</sup> The question is whether these astronomical matters were derived from existing translation or were used for translation later in 1842. The GAEL, in my opinion, does not provide anything that looks like the kind of coherent narrative implied by “Abraham’s writings” on the planetary system. Joseph wasn’t speaking about entries in a dictionary or alphabet, but about the translation of Abraham’s text. Abraham 3 coupled with Facsimile 2, seems to provide a reasonable foundation for the astronomical material that could have been used to create the fragmented statements in the GAEL, complete

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27. The GAEL transcript and photographs of the text can be examined and searched online at “Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language, circa July–circa November 1835,” *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/grammar-and-alphabet-of-the-egyptian-language-circa-july-circa-november-1835/7>. To search or rapidly explore the text, click on the button “View Entire Transcript” that is visible after scrolling to the bottom of the text window on the right of the screen.

with “bulls-eyes” such as associating Figure 1 with “the first creation,” Figure 4 (the bird in a ship) with the expanse of the heavens, Hathor the cow associated with the sun, etc., for which the GAEL could not serve as a source. It’s easy to see how the Book of Abraham material could have sparked some of the related entries scattered in the GAEL and very difficult to explain how that material could have been brought together to create the coherent narrative in the Book of Abraham.

### **Missing Evidence That Could Fill a Book or Two**

While Vogel does mention some of the arguments in favor of the Book of Abraham, especially older works where some statements may have missed the mark, what has been overlooked is far more than a few nuggets like *Shinehah. Book of Abraham Apologetics* suffers not just from the failure to treat some relevant evidence, but also from a basic failure to recognize the hurdles that Vogel’s paradigm faces, including missing questions that need to be asked and issues that need to be addressed if the work is meant to be scholarly.

To be clear, though, there’s much to appreciate in the work Vogel has done to compile his arguments in a comprehensive form. It would be better, though, if Vogel didn’t claim it was an objective, dispassionate work of historical scholarship and instead simply said that he was just presenting the best arguments he could find against the Book of Abraham.

### **A Missing Hurdle from a Missing Portion of Facsimile 2**

One of the surprising missing issues involves Joseph Smith’s comments about some of the Egyptian characters on the right side of Facsimile 2, characters that come from the very papyrus fragment that Vogel claims has been absolutely proven to be the source of the Book of Abraham “translation.” Tim Barker carefully examined this issue in an important presentation at the 2020 FairMormon Conference in “Translating the Book of Abraham: The Answer Under Our Heads.”<sup>28</sup> The key point here is that a large gap on the damaged Facsimile 2 was filled in with Egyptian

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28. Tim Barker, “Translating the Book of Abraham: The Answer Under Our Heads” (presentation, FairMormon 2020 Conference, Provo, Utah, Aug. 2020), <https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/2020-fairmormon-conference/the-answer-under-our-heads>. Also see Jeff Lindsay, “A Gift From an Early ‘Anti-Mormon’ Attack on the Book of Abraham: Clear Evidence About the Source of Joseph’s Translation,” *Mormanity* (blog), Jan. 10, 2021, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2021/01/a-gift-from-early-anti-mormon-attack-on.html>.

characters in preparation for publication, and those characters were taken from JSP XI, the papyrus fragment that was the source of most of the characters used in the margins of the three Book of Abraham manuscripts, said to be telltale evidence that Joseph Smith was using those characters as the source for his bogus “translation.” About half of the characters from the Book of Abraham manuscript margins were used in filling in the gaps on Facsimile 2. Reuben Hedlock did this under the guidance of Joseph Smith, as Barker shows.

The inserted characters are in three lines on the central right panel, labeled as Figures 13, 14, and 15 in our printing of Facsimile 2, and the inserted characters in the rim, labeled as Figure 18, are all treated the same in Joseph’s comments. The explanations for those characters “will be given in the own due time of the Lord.” That declaration is followed by this statement that refers to all the comments made regarding Facsimile 2: “The above translation is given as far as we have any right to give at the present time.”

Whatever the scribes of those puzzling Book of Abraham manuscripts with characters in the margins thought they were doing with Egyptian characters added to portions of Joseph’s revealed text, the explanations on Facsimile 2 strongly suggest that Joseph had not used characters from JSP XI as the source for the book of Abraham translation. “Joseph clearly indicates that he did not translate JSP XI,” Barker explains.

This is one of the first and most important hurdles to clear for Vogel’s thesis. Will he jump over it, knock it over, or step around it? We won’t know in this book, because he runs his race on a track where that hurdle is nowhere in sight.

As happens in many heated debates on controversial issues, a single piece of evidence rarely creates a slam dunk argument and can often be attacked in various ways. Here one can wonder if Joseph really authorized the choice of characters (the record does indicate supervision by Joseph in this) and even if so, whether it’s possible that Joseph didn’t recognize which papyrus fragment he had translated (that seems unlikely) or didn’t recognize the characters he supposedly had scrutinized for months back in 1835 (if the characters were presented to him without telling him which papyrus Reuben Hedlock selected as a source, I suppose that could be a problem). So of course arguments can be raised against this piece of evidence. But this is still vital evidence to consider if one wishes the book to be viewed as comprehensive and dispassionate, and if one wishes to address the most important arguments from Latter-day Saint defenders of the Book of Abraham.

In objecting to missing elements, I am not saying that Vogel deliberately left them out to mislead readers. He may simply be so close to his own point of view that objections to his arguments are found unworthy of attention. But that perspective is one of blindness and undermines the claims he makes.

### More Missing Issues

Strangely, Vogel seems to simply ignore much of what Latter-day Saint apologists have identified as among the most relevant documents and most important arguments for understanding the meaning of the papers related to the Book of Abraham. Besides those related to Joseph's comments on characters from JSP XI, the name *Shinehah*, and other issues previously discussed, other omissions include:

- The Egyptian Counting Document, one of the earliest documents in the Kirtland Egyptian papers that were relied on in the GAEL. This document gives us important clues about what was and was not being “translated” as well as clues related to the purpose of the project. Although the importance of this document was raised in at least one of the sources Vogel cites,<sup>29</sup> he's silent on this issue. It shows W.W. Phelps exploring purely non-Egyptian characters as “Egyptian,” possibly for his interest in exploring the “pure language” of the ancients. Some of these non-Egyptian characters are imported into the Egyptian Alphabets and GAEL. Clearly something other than or in addition to translating real papyri is at play. Why not let us know about this important document and the way it fits pro-Book of Abraham paradigms?
- Muhlestein's discovery that the owner of the Joseph Smith Papyri, an Egyptian priest named Hor, would be from the time and place (Thebes, ca. 200 B.C.) where Egyptian priests had ready access to and a fascination with Jewish lore.<sup>30</sup> The idea that a priest from Thebes in Hor's era had an Egyptian document adapted to convey information featuring Abraham's

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29. Lindsay, “A Precious Resource with Some Gaps.”

30. Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 217–43, <https://rsc.byu.edu/no-weapon-shall-prosper/egyptian-papyri-book-abraham>.

life is remarkably consistent with Egyptian history. Call it just another lucky coincidence, but it's certainly a basic factoid of interest in Book of Abraham apologetics not to be found in Vogel's book.

- The manuscripts from Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G. Williams, both showing two pairs of Egyptian-like characters presumably from the Book of Mormon project beneath a pair of English phrases: "(The Book of Mormon)" and "(the interpreters of languages)." <sup>31</sup> Assuming that the English corresponds to a translation, the characters are compact but not ridiculously so, still having a logical relationship in which each pair of characters represents only two significant words, apart from "the" and "of."
- The abundant use of "translated" material in the GAEL that is taken from documents not closely related to the Book of Abraham, including many already existing revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants that are obviously alluded to or cited in portions of the GAEL. While several LDS writers have mentioned this, the greatest buzz came about 10 years ago in a presentation by William Schryver,<sup>32</sup> in the course of arguing that the GAEL may have been intended to be a reverse cipher for encoding revelations to hide information from enemies of the Church. The theory has some gaps, as do all theories trying to explain what the GAEL was intended to do, but Schryver's theory should also have been cited as one of the

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31. "Appendix 2, Document 2a. Characters Copied by Oliver Cowdery, circa 1835–1836," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-document-2a-characters-copied-by-oliver-cowdery-circa-1835-1836/1>, and "Appendix 2, Document 2b. Writings and Characters Copied by Frederick G. Williams, circa Early to Mid-1830s," *Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-2-document-2b-writings-and-characters-copied-by-frederick-g-williams-circa-early-to-mid-1830s/1>. The significance of these documents is discussed in Jeff Lindsay, "Joseph Smith and Champollion: Could He Have Known of the Phonetic Nature of Egyptian Before He Began Translating the Book of Abraham?," *Mormanity* (blog), April 27, 2019, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2019/04/joseph-smith-and-champollion-could-he.html>.

32. William Schryver, "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," (presentation, 2010 FAIR Conference, Sandy, UT, Aug. 2010), <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/fair-conferences/2010-fair-conference/2010-the-meaning-of-the-kirtland-egyptian-papers-part-i>.

several possibilities Latter-day Saints have raised regarding the strange GAEL. But whether Schryver's theory is mentioned or not, Vogel should at a minimum have engaged with the data Schryver and others have presented about the influence of material from unexpected sources on the GAEL.

- The evidence from several documents showing that Joseph had provided at least some of the astronomical material related to the Book of Abraham during 1835.

Vogel does tackle some important arguments and evidences. One of these is the evidence from the Egyptian Alphabets, where Joseph's manuscript shows signs that he's not the ringleader behind the basic approach of having columns for characters, sounds, and translations. Joseph simply ignored the columns for sounds and wrote over them. Further, the insertions at the beginning show us right away that he was not leading the effort, but probably copying or drawing upon another document. The documentary evidence points to Phelps as the mastermind behind the projects. Vogel mentions part of this evidence but dismisses it too hastily (89–92).

Vogel does have a chapter (Chapter 8) that explores some of the evidences that Book of Abraham defenders have used to suggest the book has ancient origins. Here he shows relatively more engagement with Latter-day Saint apologists, though almost exclusively John Gee and Kerry Muhlestein. For example, he argues that some of the evidences for antiquity in the Book of Abraham could have been known to Joseph Smith since they could be found in various books in Joseph's day. It's a fair argument. He also delves into the proposal that Abraham was using an ancient geocentric astronomical model, not one from Joseph's environment, which we consider later.

Much more interesting than the details of any physical model Abraham or a redactor had in mind is the purpose of treating astronomy in the first place, and here we come to what I consider to be the most important evidentiary finding in Gee's analysis of the issue.<sup>33</sup> Gee notes the Egyptian wordplay inherent in Abraham's discussion in Abraham 3, where the word for "stars" can also mean "spirits," and Abraham's teaching that the planetary bodies have an order with a grand body, Kolob, being above them all. He points out that Abraham is paving the way to teach Pharaoh from the principles of astronomy that the same

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33. John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 115–20.

order applies to spirits, and the Lord is above them all — meaning that Pharaoh is not the grandest, but God is. It’s a teaching that Abraham could not blurt out directly without inviting capital punishment, but he could teach it indirectly; in describing astronomy and then making the connection to the nature of souls as well, Pharaoh could be taught an important truth about God somewhat obliquely. What once seemed like a disjointed, illogical development in Abraham 3 — suddenly jumping from astronomy to the nature of premortal souls — in light of a linguistic insight that could only come from an Egyptologist, we can now see that Abraham 3 is surprisingly reasonable in a way that Joseph could not have knowingly fabricated. On this issue, however, Vogel is silent. There’s no awareness of this important aspect of Gee’s argument on astronomy in the Book of Abraham.

While Vogel takes on some of the evidence used to support the Book of Abraham, his scope is surprisingly narrow and far too much is overlooked. The Pearl of Great Price Central website<sup>34</sup> has been offering a series of posts and videos on evidence pertaining to the Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses. These don’t seem to have come into Vogel’s crosshairs. While Vogel is focused on what Gee and Muhlestein have to say, that focus is quite selective. One can get a feel for how little of the work of Latter-day Saint apologists has been considered by comparing Vogel’s book to an August 2020 review of recent developments related to the Book of Abraham by Kerry Muhlestein. In “Scholarly Support for the Book of Abraham,”<sup>35</sup> Muhlestein summarizes some of the works that provide support for historicity of the text as well information on how to approach the facsimiles and the translation process. Important findings published by Kevin Barney, Quinten Barney, and Stephen Smoot listed in that paper are not mentioned by Vogel. Kevin Barney, for example, provides evidence that the pagan god Elkenah mentioned in the Book of Abraham corresponds well with the god El of the Canaanites.<sup>36</sup> Quinten Barney’s analysis of the ancient crocodile god of Egypt shows that it aligns perfectly with Joseph Smith’s comment on the crocodile in

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34. Pearl of Great Price Central (website), <https://www.pearlofgreatpricecentral.org/>.

35. Kerry Muhlestein, “Scholarly Support for the Book of Abraham,” Interpreter Foundation Blog, Aug. 25, 2020, <https://interpreterfoundation.org/blog-scholarly-support-for-the-book-of-abraham/>.

36. Kevin Barney, “On Elkenah as Canaanite El,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 22–35, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol19/iss1/5/>.



Facsimile 1 as the idolatrous god of Pharaoh.<sup>37</sup> This is one of the more commonly cited evidences in favor of the Book of Abraham, but there is no mention by Vogel. One of the articles by Stephen Smoot should have been cited in Vogel's treatment of one of the evidences he does tackle: the claim that the ancient place Olishem mentioned in the Book of Abraham has now been confirmed by archaeology to actually have existed in the right time and place, as Gee argues, at a northern Ur location (while some scholars prefer a southern location).<sup>38</sup> Vogel critiques Gee by citing an old criticism of Gee's proposal that was based on the reasons used to favor a more southern Ur, but those arguments are carefully considered and rebutted by Smoot.<sup>39</sup>

Muhlestein's partial list of important sources relevant to the defense of the Book of Abraham should have been considered by Vogel, but only a small portion seems to be given any attention. Also neglected are all 36 cited articles from Pearl of Great Price Central and a reference from John Gee and Stephen Ricks that is described as "the most comprehensive methodological approach to evaluating the historicity of the Book of Abraham,"<sup>40</sup> which also points to key issues such as Sobek, the crocodile god.

As for the crocodile god in Facsimile 1, Vogel does note that Joseph associated the crocodile with Pharaoh (it would be more accurate to say that Joseph called the crocodile "the idolatrous god of Pharaoh"). However, once again Vogel *does not explain why this is viewed as an important piece of evidence* among Book of Abraham defenders. As with his evasive treatment of the *Shinehah* evidence, he does not cite any references here that could help the reader understand why some of us consider Joseph's statement about the crocodile to be evidence for

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37. Quinten Barney, "Sobek: The Idolatrous God of Pharaoh Amenemhet III," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 22–27, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol22/iss2/3/>.

38. John Gee, "Has Olishem Been Discovered?" *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 2 (2013): 104–107, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol22/iss2/10/>.

39. Stephen O. Smoot, "In the Land of the Chaldeans': The Search for Abraham's Homeland Revisited," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 7–37, <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/land-chaldeans-search-abrahams-homeland-revisited>.

40. John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 63–98, <https://rsc.byu.edu/historicity-latter-day-saint-scriptures/historical-plausibility-historicity-book-abraham-case-study>.

the Book of Abraham, but he cautiously tries to neutralize that uncited evidence for those who may encounter it by suggesting that Joseph may have obtained the idea for the crocodile-Pharaoh association from Adam Clarke’s biblical commentary (232). Recently there have been claims that Joseph relied heavily on Adam Clarke in preparing his Inspired Translation of the Bible, though careful analysis has shown those claims to be without merit, with no evidence of Clarke influencing Joseph in that project.<sup>41</sup> Vogel’s proposal seems to have slightly more merit. He notes that in discussing Exodus 1:11, Clarke indicates that the title Pharaoh “signifies *crocodile*, ... a *sacred animal* among the Egyptians” (232, emphasis original). Even if Joseph had carefully studied Clarke’s massive multi-volume work, is a statement about the meaning of the name of Pharaoh enough to guide Joseph to the bullseye of identifying a crocodile not as a symbol of Pharaoh, but as “the idolatrous god of Pharaoh”? The phrasing is a perfectly accurate description of the role of Sobek, the crocodile god directly associated with Pharaoh. Again, Vogel tries to diminish an argument without admitting that there is potentially impressive evidence at hand. It is just a random borrowing from Adam Clarke, he says, just as *Shinehah* was nothing more than borrowing a random code name from the Doctrine and Covenants.

Particularly unfortunate is overlooking one of Gee’s most impressive finds published in his “Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham.”<sup>42</sup> Gee presents evidence for the authenticity and plausibility of the Book of Abraham’s names given for each of the four gods under the lion couch in Facsimile 1 and named in Abraham 1:6. Many more evidences could be cited, such as Joseph properly identifying Figure 6 in Facsimile 2 as related to “the four quarters of the earth,” properly recognizing the significance of many more aspects of Facsimile 2, and much more, including some fascinating finds compiled by Robert F. Smith that merit more attention.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Kent P. Jackson, “Some Notes on Joseph Smith and Adam Clarke,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 40 (2020): 15–60, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/some-notes-on-joseph-smith-and-adam-clarke/>.

42. John Gee, “Four Idolatrous Gods in the Book of Abraham,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 133–52, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/four-idolatrous-gods-in-the-book-of-abraham/>.

43. Robert F. Smith, “A Brief Assessment of the LDS Book Of Abraham,” (unpublished document, rev. ed. Feb. 28, 2020), <https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21ALpQPjo6wnZARpQ&cid=4682EB322DD9603E&id=4682EB322DD9603E%211797&parId=4682EB322DD9603E%21769&o=OneUp>.

## No Geocentrism in Abraham's Day?

One of the few evidences for the Book of Abraham's ancient plausibility that Vogel tackles is the proposal that information about astronomy in Abraham 3 is given in geocentric terms in order to help Abraham converse on astronomy with Pharaoh's court. After stating that a knowledge of Egyptology is not necessary to address the issues regarding the Book of Abraham, he critiques Latter-day Saint Egyptologists several times for their statements about ancient Egypt. While I believe amateurs should be able to challenge scholars and that good can come from anyone's reasonable critique or analysis of past scholarship, we amateurs should also recognize that those with formal training in their field may know what they are doing, so our critiques need to be backed with good evidence or logic and still may be wrong. Vogel's critique of the views of John Gee and others regarding the astronomical content in the Book of Abraham strikes me as highly flawed.

Several Latter-day Saint scholars have noted that the astronomical model in the Book of Abraham may relate to ancient geocentric cosmologies. In 1991, Kevin Christensen, drawing upon Nibley's observations on the facsimiles, linked the cosmology in Abraham 3 to the motion of the stars perceived from the earth and the long-term drift of stars and constellations.<sup>44</sup> Later, John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson proposed that the astronomical model that Abraham would use to teach Pharaoh some important spiritual truths makes the most sense when viewed as a type of geocentric model, one that Pharaoh could accept.<sup>45</sup> The Lord seems to have given Abraham more advanced knowledge as well, as J. Ward Moody proposes in his evaluation of the mix of astronomical information present in the Book of Abraham,<sup>46</sup> but

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44. Kevin Christensen, "New Wine and New Bottles: Scriptural Scholarship as Sacrament," *Dialogue* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 124, [https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue\\_V24N03\\_123.pdf](https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V24N03_123.pdf).

45. John Gee, William J. Hamblin, and Daniel C. Peterson, "And I Saw the Stars': The Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, eds. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 1–16, <https://archive.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/and-i-saw-stars-book-abraham-and-ancient-geocentric-astronomy>. Also see John Gee, "Abrahamic Astronomy," in *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*, 115–20, <https://rsc.byu.edu/content/1784>.

46. J. Ward Moody, "Times of Reckoning and Set Times in Abraham 3," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020): 1–14, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/times-of-reckoning-and-set-times-in-abraham-3/#sdfootnote20sym>. Moody proposes that "times of reckoning" refers to

much of the discussion seems couched in terms of what one observes from the earth and with principles that could relate well to the geocentric views of the Egyptians and fulfill the purpose stated by the Lord in Abraham 3:5 for this information: “Abraham, I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt, that ye may declare all these words.”

In “Abrahamic Astronomy,” Gee makes the basic case for a geocentric model that Abraham could have used in talking with the Egyptians:

The astronomy in the Book of Abraham uses as its point of reference “the earth upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:3, 5–7). It mentions various heavenly bodies, such as “the stars” (Abraham 3:2), among which is Kolob (Abraham 3:3–4). These provide a fixed backdrop for the heavens. Among the stars are various bodies that move in relation to the fixed backdrop, each of which is called a “planet” (Abraham 3:5, 8) or a “light” (Abraham 3:5–7), though since the sun and moon and certain stars are each also called a “planet,” we should not think of them as necessarily being what we call planets. Each of these planets is associated with “its times and seasons in the revolutions thereof” (Abraham 3:4). These lights revolve around something, and that is the fixed reference point, “the earth upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:3, 5–7). The Book of Abraham thus presents a geocentric astronomy, like almost all ancient astronomies, including ancient Egyptian astronomy.

Each heavenly body, with its revolution, is associated with something called a “set time” (Abraham 3:6, 10) or “the reckoning of its time” (Abraham 3:5), which seems to be its revolution around the earth and for the earth, its rotation. The greater amount of time is associated with a higher orbit and thus being “above or greater than that upon which thou standest in point of reckoning, for it moveth in order more slow; this is in order because it standeth above the earth upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:5). The higher orbits are larger and take more time to traverse; thus, the longer the time of revolution, the higher the light is above the earth.

The ancient Egyptians associated the idea of encircling something (whether in the sky or on earth) with controlling

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apparent motion relative to the earth, while “set times” refers to the actual motion in space.

or governing it, and the same terms are used for both. Thus, the Book of Abraham notes that “there shall be the reckoning of the time of one planet above another, until thou come nigh unto Kolob, ... which Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to *govern* all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest” (Abraham 3:9, emphasis added). The Egyptians had a similar notion, in which the sun (*Re*) was not only a god but the head of all the gods and ruled over everything that he encircled. Abraham’s astronomy sets the sun, “that which is to rule the day” (Abraham 3:5), as greater than the moon but less than Kolob, which governs the sun (Abraham 3:9). Thus, in the astronomy of the Book of Abraham, Kolob, which is the nearest star to God (Abraham 3:16; see also 3, 9), revolves around and thus encircles or controls the sun, which is the head of the Egyptian pantheon.

The conversation between Abraham and the Lord shifts from a discussion of heavenly bodies to spiritual beings. This reflects a play on words that Egyptians often use between a star (*ach*) and a spirit (*ich*). The shift is done by means of a comparison: “Now, if there be two things, one above the other, and the moon be above the earth, then it may be that a planet or a star may exist above it; ... as, also, if there be two spirits, and one shall be more intelligent than the other” (Abraham 3:17–18). In an Egyptian context, the play on words would strengthen the parallel.<sup>47</sup>

With an interesting Egyptian wordplay, the purpose of the astronomical material being given to Abraham becomes apparent. By teaching Pharaoh about the order seen in astronomy, with one star near God governing all others because it is in order most high with the longest time of reckoning, so can the same principle be implied when it comes to souls, with God being higher than all. Using this roundabout astronomical approach to lay a metaphorical foundation, Abraham can help Pharaoh see that there is a God higher even than the Sun, higher than the Egyptian pantheon, and higher than Pharaoh. Speaking such things directly could be seen as an attack on Pharaoh and Egyptian religion, a capital offense, but the astronomical analogy could help Pharaoh learn the principle without getting Abraham killed.

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47. Gee, “Abrahamic Astronomy,” 115–17.

Vogel is not impressed. He begins a rather meandering discussion of astronomical issues with this:

However, the model they use to interpret Abraham Chapter 3 *requires the earth to be spherical with the sun, moon, and planets revolving in concentric circles around it, a model that, in fact, dates many centuries after Abraham.* Indeed, all (but one) of the authors' examples range from the third century BCE (Greek philosophers) to fourteenth-century-CE Italy (Dante). (133–34, emphasis added)

This is an unfortunate misreading of Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson.<sup>48</sup> Their argument absolutely does not require the advanced Ptolemaic version of geocentrism and, in fact, is compatible with flat earth models from ancient Egypt. Vogel's footnote at this point adds another argument or two:

The exception [the alleged “one” example relied on by Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson not dating to many centuries after Abraham] is the Egyptian belief that the earth, personified by the god Geb, and sky, personified by the goddess Nut, are separated by Shu, god of air. While Gee et al. state that this concept of the cosmos “goes back at least as far as the Middle Kingdom (and thus to the approximate time of Abraham),” they do not explain that in the Egyptian cosmos the earth is flat and instead emphasize an Egyptian text which says the “Sun-disk encircles, that which Geb and Nut enclose” (Gee et al., “And I Saw the Stars,” 7). Thus they imply that Egyptians believed the sun revolved around the earth. In their description of the first of the four types of geocentricity, they state that the “sun, moon, stars, planets, etc. — surrounded and encompassed the earth in a single undifferentiated heaven” (ibid., 5). In the footnote they reference the “view of the heavens from the tomb of Seti I,” which clearly shows the earth as flat with the heavens over it. The ancient Egyptians believed the sun (Ra) traveled on a barge at night to emerge in the east the next morning, and not that the sun revolved around the earth. (134n42)

Vogel seems to assume that a flat earth model is contrary to a geocentric view, perhaps because he assumes that “geocentric” must

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48. Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson, “And I Saw the Stars.”

refer to the latest, well-known versions of geocentrism with heavenly bodies acting as if connected to revolving spheres moving around a spherical earth. But more primitive flat earth models can accurately be described as geocentric. If it is the sun literally moving across the sky rather than the earth rotating on its axis, and if the motion of the stars each night is due to their motion relative to the earth, we clearly have a geocentric model, regardless of how the sun gets back to its starting point each morning.

Vogel chastises Gee, Hamblin, and Peterson for only considering one piece of evidence from ancient Egypt. Here he has not carefully read the article he criticizes. Speaking of the ancient Egyptian views on astronomy, the authors state that “*numerous references* make it clear that their worldview was fundamentally geocentric”<sup>49</sup> (emphasis added). Their footnote here cites James P. Allen’s *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*,<sup>50</sup> a work that considers the astronomical implications of 16 Egyptian sources. It has significant evidentiary value in support of the point made in “I Saw the Stars.” (I discuss some of the details of that work and some later publications on Egyptian astronomy elsewhere.<sup>51</sup>)

While Vogel protests the citing of only one reference on ancient Egypt supporting geocentrism, the most appropriate rejoinder is not that the reference cited treats multiple ancient texts, but rather, the basic features of the ancient Egyptian model are so widely attested and well known that only one reference is appropriate. Indeed, it is almost common knowledge that the ancient Egyptians believed the sun moved across the sky each day and was reborn in the east the next morning. While language describing the sun moving over the earth is abundant, one can also find many references to the sun “encircling” the earth, though this need not mean a perfectly circular Ptolemaic orbit. For example, an item of jewelry dating to 1887–1878 B.C., likely near the time of Abraham, has this inscription: “The god of the rising sun grants life and dominion over

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49. Ibid., 7.

50. James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (New Haven, CT: Yale Egyptological Seminar, 1988), 3–7, <https://archive.org/details/GenesisInEgyptThePhilosophyOfAncientEgyptianCreationAccountsJamesP.AllenYaleEgyptologicalSeminar1988/page/n3/mode/2up>.

51. Jeff Lindsay, “Geocentric Astronomy in the Book of Abraham? Dan Vogel’s Refutation of LDS Scholars,” *Mormanity* (blog), March 31, 2021, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2021/03/geocentric-astronomy-in-book-of-abraham.html>.

all that the sun encircles for one million one hundred thousand years [i.e., eternity] to King Khakheperre [Senwosret II].”<sup>52</sup>

One of the most familiar aspects of ancient Egypt, the use of a cartouche to encircle the names of royalty, is a symbol related to the sun encircling the earth. From the *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, we read:

The cartouche derives from the Egyptian *shen*-ring, a hieroglyphic sign depicting a coil of rope tied at one end, meaning “ring, circle,” the root Sn (*shen*) expressing the idea of encircling. Symbolically, the cartouche represents the encircling of the created world by the sun disc — that is, the containment of “all that the sun encircles.”<sup>53</sup>

Having the sun and the stars move around the earth, encircling it, is even more specific than the geocentric argument Gee et al. require for their point regarding geocentric elements in Abraham 3 and its suitability for presentation to the Egyptian court (simply having the sun move across the sky should be enough). Incidentally, in the above passage about the cartouche, we are again reminded of part of the Egyptian etymology of *Shinehah*, involving the “the root Sn (*shen*) expressing the idea of encircling,” exactly as Nibley explains. In fact, Nibley notes that the Egyptian term *Shinehah* refers to the sun, but it can also mean “one eternal round,” the name of his important but neglected book.<sup>54</sup> Paying attention to Nibley’s work would have helped Vogel recognize just how well grounded if not well rounded the geocentric argument is.

Vogel goes on to propose that Joseph Smith in his revelations was just borrowing from the modern cosmology expressed by authors such as Thomas Dick, an argument that is no more reasonable now than when Fawn Brodie proposed it decades ago and that has been treated by Latter-day Saint defenders.<sup>55</sup>

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52. “Pectoral and Necklace of Sithathoryunet with the Name of Senwosret II, ca. 1887–1878 B.C.,” Metropolitan Museum of Art (website), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544232>.

53. Cathie Spieser, “Cartouche,” in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, eds. Elizabeth Froid and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2010), 1, <https://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewFile.do?contentFileId=2401055>.

54. Nibley, *One Eternal Round*, 333–34.

55. Jeff Lindsay, “Joseph Smith’s Universe vs. Some Wonders of Chinese Science Fiction,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 29 (2018): 105–52, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smiths-universe-vs-some-wonders-of-chinese-science-fiction/>.



I have responded elsewhere in more detail to Vogel’s arguments against the geocentric features in the Book of Abraham proposed by Gee et al.<sup>56</sup> I note that in light of the reverence the Egyptians gave to certain stars, especially the “immortal” (never setting) circumpolar stars near the pole star in the sacred northern part of the sky — stars that rotated much more slowly than other stars and never set — statements in Abraham 3 relating slower moving stars to the deity and governance of the cosmos actually fit in beautifully with ancient Egyptian mythology. That framework, couched in part with geocentric terminology, would have been a brilliant way for Abraham to engage with the Egyptians in terms they could understand, teaching about astronomy as a steppingstone to teaching spiritual principles, aided with the Egyptian wordplay between “soul” and “star” that John Gee has discussed.

Stars associated with souls and gods, with governance and glory, with set times and revolutions, with hierarchy and order, all were part of ancient Egyptian concepts and nicely fit the Book of Abraham. The ancient astronomy of the Book of Abraham, coupled with some extra information the Lord showed Abraham, cannot be dismissed as Joseph merely drawing upon his environment.

There’s more to understand and discover here, but it will most likely come from scholars with expertise in Egyptology and the ancient world, not by the approach Vogel feels is sufficient for managing all that comes from Latter-day Saint treatments of the Book of Abraham.

### **Just Another Ordinary Funerary Text?**

For decades, critics of the Book of Abraham have been asserting that the Joseph Smith Papyri and the facsimiles show that what Joseph had was nothing more than a perfectly ordinary funerary text. Vogel does the same (xv–xvi, 183–85). And because we know these are ordinary funerary texts, we can naturally know what was on the missing portions — obviously just more traditional, ordinary Egyptian funerary materials, which, of course, rules out any hope for a “missing scroll” theory. And because the facsimiles are perfectly ordinary documents, we can be sure they aren’t part of anything unusual (even if there are unusual elements). It all smacks of a circular argument. Latter-day Saint scholars from Nibley on have explained that there are unique elements consistent with the idea that well-known Egyptian vignettes could have been adapted to

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56. Lindsay, “Geocentric Astronomy in the Book of Abraham?”

tell a unique story. Failure to address that possibility and the uniqueness of the facsimiles is another void in Vogel's treatment of his topic.

For example, regarding Facsimile 1, Muhlestein offers these considerations:

Some have suggested that it is a typical embalming scene. Yet it is at least as different from embalming scenes as it is similar. The only similarities are that a person is on a lion couch with another person standing nearby. Others would suggest that the closest parallels of this scene are in the temple of Denderah and that the figure on the couch ought to be associated with Osiris. Recently John Gee has closely examined these Denderah depictions. He has noted that only one of these has a winged figure in it, somewhat similar to Facsimile 1. This scene is accompanied by a text which says that Bastet, an Egyptian goddess not even pictured in the scene, "is your protection every day; she commands her messengers to slaughter your enemies." Thus we find a perfect textual sibling for the closest iconographic match to Facsimile 1 in that both are about someone who was in danger and received protection. There are other similar texts accompanying similar scenes in Denderah. Other lion couch scenes at the temple include scenes of Anubis and the Sons of Horus defending someone from his adversaries, or list Shesmu, a god associated with human sacrifice, as part of the scene. Accompanying texts describe the person on the altar being killed, his confederates being stabbed, and "his flesh being ashes, the evil conspirator destined for the lion couch/slaughterhouse, in order that he will no longer exist." I remain unconvinced that the scenes at Denderah are real parallels to Facsimile 1, though they may be. Yet if critics insist on associating the two, they must also be willing to associate them with the sacrificial elements of the Denderah scenes — which only corroborate Joseph's interpretation of this facsimile.

However, it should be noted that Facsimile 1 is unique in many ways. In this scene the figure is neither in mummified form, nor naked, as is the case in most of the supposed parallels. The figure on the couch has two hands raised, in a position that almost certainly denotes a struggle. And while one cannot tell this from the printed facsimile, on the original papyrus it is clear that the priest is standing between the altar and the legs

of the person on that altar. In other words, the person on the altar is only part way on, because the priest is occupying the space between both of the victim's legs and the altar. I can imagine no reason for this unless the person on the altar was trying to get off. If the priest were helping him get on the altar, he would not be between his legs. Clearly this depiction is unique, and denotes some kind of movement that is not found in any parallel.<sup>57</sup>

I would also add the simple observation that the stance of Abraham on the altar, with one leg forward and two arms up, beautifully represents the Egyptian hieroglyph meaning to pray or supplicate, perfectly consistent with the Book of Abraham text that describes Abraham praying to God while on the altar. This is not an ordinary embalming scene.<sup>58</sup>

### **More Unanswered Questions to Consider**

Vogel leaves unanswered important questions that have long been raised by defenders of Joseph Smith, such as why should we think the GAEL was used by Joseph to any degree to produce the Book of Abraham or to translate Egyptian:

1. when so much of it is not Egyptian,
2. when all but three of the Egyptian characters allegedly translated from JSP XI are generally not even present therein,
3. when the English "translations" in the GAEL show a slight relationship with (arguably a dependency from) a few verses in the Book of Abraham but come nowhere close to being useful for translating the text,
4. when the characters allegedly used to create the translation are explicitly said by Joseph on Facsimile 2 to not have been translated,

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57. Kerry Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 217–43, <https://rsc.byu.edu/no-weapon-shall-prosper/egyptian-papyri-book-abraham>.

58. See Jeff Lindsay, "A Leg Up on the Critics: Facsimile 1 of the Book of Abraham," *Mormanity* (blog), Jan. 11, 2007, <https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2007/01/leg-up-on-critics-facsimile-1-of-book.html>.

5. when the GAEL shows no involvement of Joseph Smith, being entirely in the handwriting of W.W. Phelps apart from a few lines from Warren Parrish,
6. when Joseph's other efforts at translation show no relationship at all with the model Vogel thinks Joseph used,
7. when Joseph showed that he could translate some of the papyrus by revelation essentially as soon as he received the scrolls and could see that there was information related to Abraham (so why would painstaking efforts to create an alphabet first and then a grammar be needed to continue with a revealed translation?), and
8. when significant material in the GAEL is drawn from other existing materials such as the Doctrine and Covenants?

The complex nature of the GAEL may defy any simple theory for whatever Phelps was doing, whether it was reverse translation, coming up with clues to the "pure language," or something related to Schryver's reverse cipher theory (not mentioned at all by Vogel). But the important issue is that drawing upon material from the Doctrine and Covenants raises valid questions about translation of Egyptian being the goal, especially in light of the non-Egyptian material in the characters.

Many questions also remain on other basic topics that should also be raised in such a book:

1. Does the historical record about where Joseph and the scribes were on various dates fit the paradigms offered?
2. In any of the revelatory/translation scenarios Joseph had, did he do anything that corresponds with Vogel's model, i.e., first creating an alphabet with a small group of characters, then developing a grammar, and then working out the translation of characters that generally were not in the alphabet or the grammar?
3. Is there any reason anybody would pursue a translation the way Joseph allegedly did? Isn't the idea of creating an alphabet before anything is known of a language and then using that to create a grammar and then a translation so ridiculous that his peers would be anything but impressed and, at least for those who left the Church, would surely call foul? Can this really be explained as a scheme to impress peers and brainstorm to come up with a story line?

4. Does Vogel's model comport with the most basic statement in Joseph's journal about his work with the alphabet, namely, that it was an alphabet "to" the Book of Abraham, as if it were a guide or index related to existing translated material from the Book of Abraham, not an impossible translation key "for" translating the Book of Abraham? This quote is virtually a foundation for Vogel's approach, yet he fails to consider arguments about why Joseph said "to" rather than "for."<sup>59</sup>
5. Given that there actually was a sizeable collection of materials that were sold after Joseph's death and apparently were destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire, how can we be sure that nothing related to the Book of Abraham could have been in that collection? We are supposed to accept that it would necessarily just be more perfectly commonplace Egyptian funerary documents, but can we really be confident that materials we don't have were entirely ordinary, especially when the facsimiles are not? Of course, defense of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham need not rely on a missing scroll. The key is that the translation, from whatever source, was given through revelation.

The omission of so many aspects of the defense of the Book of Abraham leaves Vogel's hypothesis running only on the hurdle-free parts of the track. This work does provide a valuable service by pointing to genuine gaps in some of the responses of defenders and by highlighting areas for more scholarship, but it would be unfair to believe that Vogel's polemical objective has been achieved and the irrationality of the Book of Abraham exposed. Maybe that will be done in a sequel, but for now, I believe that Joseph's abilities to reveal ancient text by the power of God did not evaporate when he acquired the papyrus scrolls.

However the revelation was done, I think the most reasonable approach is to see the GAEL and related documents to be the intellectual derivatives of some early Saints seeking to understand more on their own based on clues from a revealed text. Whatever project was underway, it was aborted quickly, leaving us virtually no explanation about what the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were all about. The confusion of mortals puzzling things out on their own should not trump the power of revelation and the ancient text we have been given.

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59. Lindsay, "An Alphabet TO the Book of Abraham."

## Conclusion

From beginning to end, Vogel's approach is informed by a firm belief that Joseph is a fraud who used the GAEL to create a story line for his "translation" of the Book of Abraham. That belief, unfortunately, drives him, perhaps subconsciously, to overlook so much that can't be made to fit his theory. He offers a clever hypothesis that becomes a rigid paradigm to explain a few details on the Book of Abraham manuscripts, but this paradigm collapses when tested for validity.

Vogel frequently treats his hypotheses as settled facts and relies on them repeatedly, not letting the reader know how many assumptions are being made. For example, he describes how *Joseph* did such and such in the GAEL, always making Joseph Smith the author and architect, stating that as if it were an unassailable fact. He begins with his conclusions taken for granted and moves from there to create the image of overwhelming evidence and victory against shady apologists.

Vogel begins by intoning how he will rely on the purest historical methodology to yield "clear-headed understanding" with a "balanced, dispassionate analysis" of the "relevant historical documents" (xvii), just moments after he has demonstrated mystical mind-reading skills as he tells us what Joseph Smith was thinking when he first saw the papyri: "Smith saw an opportunity to translate an ancient text that would confirm some of his recent doctrinal developments as well as be available for public inspection" (vii). This statement, like most of Vogel's insertions of opinion, is given as if simply a dispassionate academic observation. Again, Vogel seems too close to his own paradigms to distinguish dispassionate analysis from his enduring passion for polemics, or to distinguish careful scholarship from personal opinion. "Relevant documents" may mean "documents that I can use to support my views." The book's promise to survey the apologetic arguments for the Book of Abraham swiftly devolves to nitpicking a few works where he feels he has good attacks, ignoring many critical evidences and much vital scholarship that would raise uncomfortable questions about his views.

In saying this, I am not saying that the evidence pointed to by defenders of the Book of Abraham adequately answers all difficult questions, for there is simply so much we don't know given the paucity of information regarding the translation and the many related documents, including the original scrolls. Many key documents are simply missing, as are explanations from the scribes for what we do have.

Vogel also does point out some valid flaws in old arguments and raises some reasonable points. But he does not apply the dispassionate

methodology he claims to follow and does not play fairly in his review of the apologetics of the Book of Abraham. Too much is ignored or handled with troubling levels of bias, with the disappointing and misleading treatment of *Shinehah* being a relevant example. The apologists he engages in battle are hardly represented except as shadows who offer a few quotes that can be nitpicked, sometimes with good reason. But the meat of their work, the most salient arguments and publications, are generally not to be found. In the end, Vogel stands victorious on a strangely quiet and empty battlefield.

Overall, *Book of Abraham Apologetics: A Review and Critique* is an intriguing book, but it doesn't live up to its claims or even its title. There is plenty of critique, but a severe shortage of review.

**Jeffrey Dean Lindsay** recently returned to the United States after almost nine years in Shanghai, China. Jeff has been providing online materials defending the Church for more than twenty years, primarily at [JeffLindsay.com](http://JeffLindsay.com). His Mormonity blog (<https://mormanity.blogspot.com>) has been in operation since 2004. He is currently vice president for The Interpreter Foundation and co-editor of *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*. Jeff has a PhD in chemical engineering from BYU and is a US patent agent. He is currently senior advisor for ipCapital Group, assisting clients in creating intellectual property and innovation. From 2011 to 2019 he was the head of Intellectual Property for Asia Pulp and Paper in Shanghai, China, one of the world's largest forest product companies. Formerly, he was associate professor at the Institute of Paper Science and Technology (now the Renewable Bioproducts Institute) at Georgia Tech, then went into R&D at Kimberly-Clark Corporation, eventually becoming corporate patent strategist and senior research fellow. Jeff served a mission in the German-speaking Switzerland Zurich Mission. He and his wife Kendra are the parents of four boys and have eleven grandchildren.