

Book of Abraham, Facsimile 2, Figs. 22, 23 Egyptian Correlations - The Apes Are Stars

Research by Kerry A. Shirts

Joseph Smith gave us a facsimile in the BofA, # 2, the hypocephalus with various interpretations of some of the figures. Joseph Smith never interpreted or translated the rim of the hypocephalus, hence the critics reasoning that Smith was deceiving us by putting some of the writing of the papyri he had in his possession in the rim of the incomplete hypocephalus just isn't relevant. No Mormon scholars among us have ever said differently. Why the restoration of the looks of the thing has to be deceptive is beyond me. What is wrong with the idea that perhaps Hedlock wanted the hypocephalus to look more complete? Now had Smith translated the rim and said what it translated out to be, and if it then was shown that his translation was wrong and based on part of the upside down text, now that would be deceptive. But Joseph Smith, again, I repeat, never translated the rim of the thing. How is this deception?

But there is one figure, among many, which I have been looking into a bit and find Joseph Smith was quite astonishing with his interpretation of, which is the two apes in the center panel, labelled as numbers 22, and 23. Here Joseph Smith's explanations of the apes are "stars." How on earth a monkey, baboon, ape, can be said to represent stars is incredible. Is there any writings or indications that Smith could have gotten this weird explanation from somewhere contemporaneously? Yet this idea fits very snugly and comfortably in the Egyptian state of affairs, to be sure.

Hans Bonnet in his "Reallexicon der Agyptischen Religionsgeschichte" notes some interesting things about these apes, from the Egyptian side of things. The apes can represent Thoth, the god of writing (Sie ist dem Thot sonderlich zu eigen wenn er in der Rolle eines Schutzgottes der Schreiber und des Schreibwesens erscheint, p. 7).

Bonnet explains something else interesting in light of what Joseph Smith said about the central panel, or Fig. 1 in the hypocephalus. Bonnet tells us that Horapollo explains that the apes, during the equinox (wahrend der Aquinoktien), urinates hourly, as a sort of measure of time (allstundlich zu urinieren, p. 7). Joseph Smith explains that the central panel in which the apes reside is directly involved with celestial time, and the measure of time (Fac. 2, fig. 1). This is very Egyptian to be sure.

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Bonnet also explains that the apes have a strong relationship with the heavenly bodies (grossen Gestirnen), specifically, the Sun, as they raise their front paws to the rising sun in worship (die das Gestirn mit erhobenen Vorderpfoten betend begrüssen - p. 7)

And what's more, Bonnet notes that along with the sun, the stars the apes are also associated with or through Thoth as the moon also (Note: the apes in Smith's hypocephalus have the moondiscs - "mondscheibe" - on their heads). "Tatsächlich ist der Affes erst durch Thot zum Mondtier gewroden. Auf diese Eigenschaft deutet die Mond- scheibe, die er vielfach als Kopfputz tragt." p. 8).

So we have the sun, moon, and stars, as also the measurement of time, exactly as with the heavenly bodies and measurement of time in Joseph Smith's explanations.

Alan Gardiner notes that Thoth is the god of writing and mathematics as well. ("Egyptin Grammar", p. 113). Note that in Smith's explanation we have the idea of "The measurement according to celestial time, which celestial time signifies one day to a cubit." Note the application of mathematics and inter-reaction with time. Lewis Spence in his book "Egypt" says: "He [Thoth] is called the 'great god' and 'lord of heaven' [note that Bonnet says of him that he is the old Babboon-god, the "Hez-ur, the "Great White" - "Dagegen horen wir von einem alten Paviensgott der Hez-ur, der grosse Weisse, gennant wird." p. 7], and that in his role as a lunar god, Thoth was considered "the measurer", (Spence, p. 107). He is the "Great White" of Bonnet's description because the full moon is very large and very white in the sky (Spence, p. 107).

Thoth as "Tehuti" is the scribe of the gods (E.A.W. Budge, "Hieroglyphic Vocabulary to the Book of the Dead", p. 447, Cf. Karl-Theodor Zauzich - "Hieroglyphen Ohne Geheimnis", tr. Ann Macy Roth, p. 94). Thoth was the creator of hieroglyphs according to some accounts, who is also shown in scenes of 'Weighing of the heart' making a written record of the judgment of the deceased, as in the temple of Ramesses II at Abydos, where we read "For recitation by Thoth, Lord of Khmunu (Hermopolis), the scribe..." (Hilary Wilson, "Understanding Hieroglyphs," 1995, p. 96f, Cf. Margaret Bunson, "The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt," p. 264).

In Egypt, it is Thoth (Hermes to the Greeks, Mercury to the Romans) who is the Master of the City of Eight. Thoth gives man access to the mysteries of the manifested world, which is

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symbolized by eight. (Anthony West, "Serpent in the Sky", p. 51). While in the Joseph Smith hypocephalus there are only two babboons, in other hypocephali there are sometimes 2, sometimes, 4, sometimes 6, and sometimes 8. Eight babboons can also be seen on the Metternicht Stelae. Adolf Erman notes that the town of eight was named after the eight elementary beings of the world, whose chief god was Thoth, the god of wisdom (Erman, "Aegypten", tr. Helen Tirard, "Life In Ancient Egypt", p. 24).

That Joseph Smith was depicting an ancient Egyptian hypocephalus correctly with many of the figures is incredible, considering that Egyptian was not yet known in the 1830's when Joseph Smith received the Egyptian antiquities from the antiquities dealer. How on earth would anyone guess haphazardly that apes could represent stars, and other heavenly bodies, and dealt with astronomy, measurement of time, etc.? I believe it shows the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith.