

Facsimile 3: Judgment Scene or Presentation Scene?

Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham has been identified in the past as “a constantly recurring scene in Egyptian literature, best known from the 125th chapter of the *Book of the Dead*. It represents the judgment of the dead before the throne of Osiris.”¹ Based on comparable iconography from other Egyptian funerary texts, this understanding of Facsimile 3 has been prevalent among Egyptologists.² “The formal judgment of the dead contained in BD spell 125 . . . involves the deceased supplicant making a ‘negative confession’ asserting his or her faultless behavior on earth in the presence of forty-two gods assembled in the Hall of the Two Truths, while the heart is weighted against the feather of Maat.”³ This judgment scene very frequently is depicted as transpiring before the presence of the god Osiris, who is often shown sitting on a throne accompanied by his sisters/wives Isis and Nephthys.

1. Michael D. Rhodes, “Facsimiles from the Book of Abraham,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:136.

2. See, for instance, F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow Press, [1912]), 24, 26; and Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition, P. JS 1–4 and the Hypocephalus of Sheshonq* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2011), 138. Klaus Baer opined in 1968 that Facsimile 3 was “a scene [that] comes from a mortuary papyrus and is similar to, but not identical with scenes showing the judgment of the deceased before Osiris” in Book of the Dead Spell 125. Klaus Baer, “The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1968): 126.

3. Peter F. Dorman, “The Origins and Early Development of the Book of the Dead,” in *Book of the Dead: Becoming God in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Foy Scalf (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2017), 39.

Although this interpretation of Facsimile 3 has become commonplace, objections might nevertheless be raised.⁴ “The problems with the theory that Facsimile 3 is the vignette from Book of the Dead 125 can be most readily shown” by the fact that many of the essential elements needed for a judgment scene are missing in Facsimile 3.⁵ One copy of the Book of the Dead from the first century AD—broadly contemporaneous to the Joseph Smith Papyri⁶—describes what appears to have been considered the “normative” version of a judgment scene for that time period:

The forty-two gods [in front of] the deceased above the hall of the truths; a figure of Hathor, [lady] of the underworld carrying a *was*-scepter, protecting the man, while the two arms of the scale are straight and Thoth is on its left, to the right of its [. . .] while Horus speaks, and Anubis grasps it on the side on which are the two truths (Maats) while he is opposite on the other side of the scale. Thoth reads the writings since a scroll is in his hand [. . . Ammut] in whose hand is a knife and before whom are a sword and a scepter, Anubis holding his hand. A lotus with two supports on which are the four sons of Horus. A chapel in which Osiris sits on his throne there being an offering table with a lotus before him. Isis is behind him praising, and Nephthys is behind him praising.⁷

When this description is compared with Facsimile 3, several problems of comparison with Book of the Dead 125 appear.

Facsimile 3 lacks the forty-two gods. It is missing Hathor holding the *was*-scepter. There is no balance-scale. Thoth is missing from the left side of the nonexistent scale. Horus is missing. The figure generally

4. John Gee, “Facsimile 3 and Book of the Dead 125,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid, Studies in the Book of Abraham 3 (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2005), 95–105.

5. Gee, “Facsimile 3 and Book of the Dead 125,” 99.

6. See “What Egyptian Papyri Did Joseph Smith Possess?,” 13–28 herein, and “The Ancient Owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 201–5 herein.

7. Gee, “Facsimile 3 and Book of the Dead 125,” 100, citing P. Bibliothèque Nationale 149 1/16–24, in Franz Lexa, *Das demotische Totenbuch der Pariser Nationalbibliothek (Papyrus des Pamonthes)* (Leipzig, Ger.: Hinrichs, 1910), 6–8, plate 1; compare Martin Andreas Stadler, *Der Totenpapyrus des Pa-Month (P. Bibli. nat. 149)*, Studien zum Alt-ägyptischen Totenbuch 6 (Wiesbaden, Ger.: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003), 29–30, 182; Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 446–47; and John Gee, “A New Look at the *ḥḥ p3* by Formula,” in *Actes du IXe congrès international des études démotiques, Paris, 31 août–3 septembre 2005*, ed. Ghislaine Widmer and Didier Devauchelle (Paris: Institut Français D’Archéologie Orientale, 2009), 139–40. Note that Gee, Lexa, Smith, and Stadler all differ in some parts of their respective readings of the Demotic text.

identified with Anubis is not grasping the side of the scale, but the waist of the man. Since Thoth is not depicted, he cannot be shown reading anything. Ammut is absent, along with the knife, sword, and scepter. The lotus is missing the four sons of Horus atop it. Though Osiris is shown sitting, he is not depicted seated within any chapel. Almost all of the elements which the Egyptians thought were important for the scene are conspicuous by their absence from Facsimile 3. Significantly, these elements are present in a vignette accompanying Book of the Dead, chapter 125, found among the Joseph Smith Papyri, as well as other copies of vignettes of Book of the Dead, chapter 125. These elements are present in all the judgment scenes that the critics would compare with the Facsimile 3. The elements of the judgment scene as listed in the Demotic Book of the Dead are consistent with those of earlier judgment scenes. Their absence from Facsimile 3 indicates that Facsimile 3 is not a judgment scene and is not directly associated with Book of the Dead 125.⁸

While it is true that not all ancient Egyptian judgment scenes in the centuries-long tradition of the Book of the Dead are universally consistent in what they visually depict, when enough elements are missing it might be reasonably asked whether the illustration in question is in fact a judgment scene at all. Furthermore, the fact that Facsimile 3 was part of the Book of Breathings and not the Book of the Dead also raises the question of whether comparing it to chapter 125 from the Book of the Dead is the right approach in the first place. It is partly for these reasons that Quinten Barney has recently performed a study of Facsimile 3 in which he compared it with similar throne scenes depicting the god Osiris from the other extant copies of the Book of Breathings.⁹ Barney categorized four types of throne scenes (invocation, weighing of the heart, presentation, and hybrid) from the Book of Breathings and compared them with Facsimile 3.¹⁰ After careful comparison, Barney concluded that while “Facsimile No. 3 does have much in common with those various throne scenes found in these texts, including those scenes from the Book of Breathings, . . . several challenges present themselves as we begin to try classifying the Facsimile into one of the four categories of throne scenes presented above.”¹¹

8. Gee, “Facsimile 3 and Book of the Dead 125,” 100–101.

9. Quinten Zehn Barney, “The Neglected Facsimile: An Examination and Comparative Study of Facsimile No. 3 of *The Book of Abraham*” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2019).

10. Barney, “Neglected Facsimile,” 70–88.

11. Barney, “Neglected Facsimile,” 81.

In fact, when compared with other throne scenes from the Book of Breathings, Facsimile 3 contains several anomalous artistic elements that are not standard in other illustrations, and its placement on the papyrus scroll obtained by Joseph Smith (not at the commencement of the text but at least two columns in) is likewise not standard for this type of text. So, while “the type of scene with which Facsimile No. 3 compares best is that of the Presentation scene, which features the deceased being introduced into the presence of Osiris by one or more other Egyptian deities. . . . There are several challenges with placing Facsimile No. 3 into this category.”¹²

If Facsimile 3 is indeed closer to a presentation scene than a judgment scene, then it might have a plausible connection with astronomy. “Parallel scenes on Egyptian temples are explicitly labeled as initiations. Known initiation rituals from Greco-Roman Egypt include instruction in astronomy as part of the initiation.”¹³ This converges with Joseph Smith’s interpretation that this scene depicts Abraham “reasoning upon the principles of Astronomy, in the king’s court.” Until further work can shed more light on this fascinating but complex matter, we will have to be content for now that “although Facsimile No. 3 was attached to the *Hor Book of Breathings*, it is anything but a common funerary scene from that collection of texts.”¹⁴

Further Reading

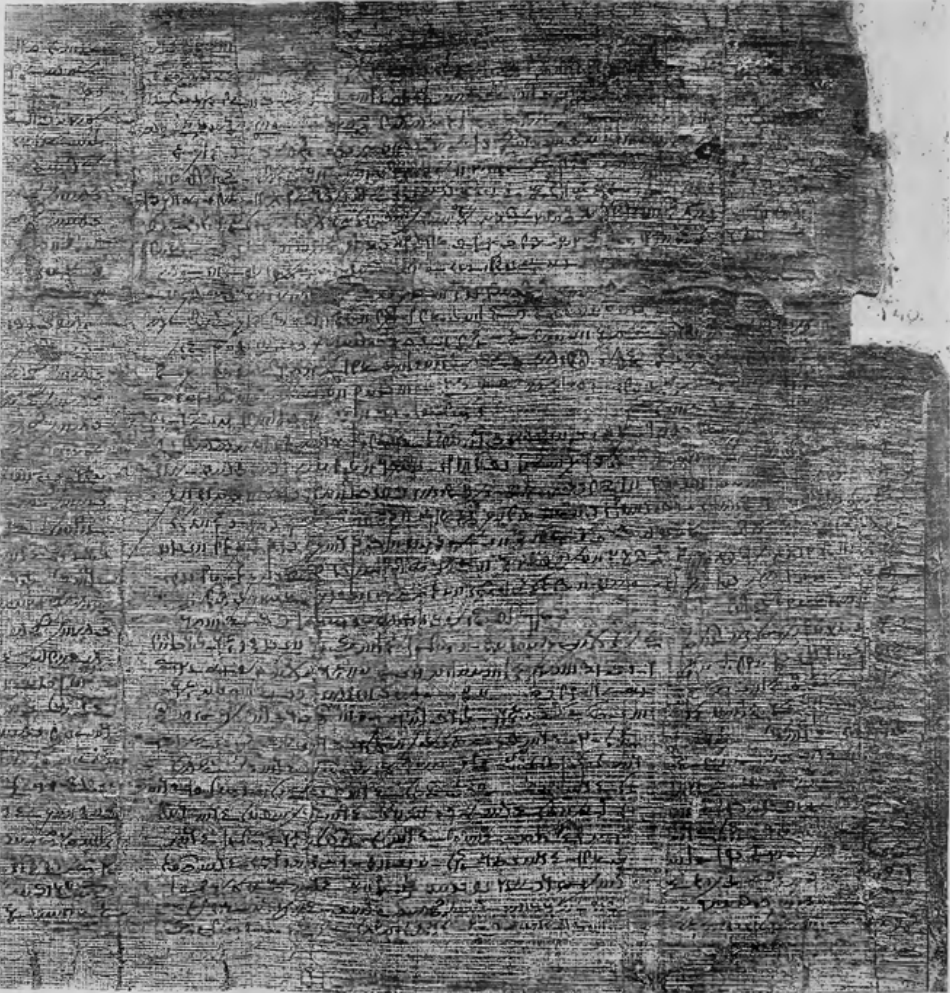
Barney, Quinten. “The Neglected Facsimile: An Examination and Comparative Study of Facsimile No. 3 of *The Book of Abraham*.” Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2019.

Gee, John. “Facsimile 3 and Book of the Dead 125.” In *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, compiled and edited by John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid, 95–105. Studies in the Book of Abraham 3. Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2005.

12. Barney, “Neglected Facsimile,” 81.

13. John Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2017), 153.

14. Barney, “Neglected Facsimile,” 88. See also Hugh Nibley, “All the Court’s a Stage: Facsimile 3, a Royal Mummying,” in *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary P. Gillum, The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 14 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies at Brigham Young University, 2000), 382–465.



Papyrus des Pamonthes (Dem. Totb.)
Kolumne 1

Vorlag: J. C. Heisch, Leipzig.

Lichtdruckanstalt Eb. Drechsler, Strassburg 95.

FIGURE 43. Column I of the Demotic Book of the Dead of Pamonthes (Bibliothèque Nationale 149), AD 63, containing a written description of the judgment scene from Book of the Dead 125. From Lexa (1910), plate I.

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Papyrus des Pamoethes (Dem. Totb.)
Kolumne 1

FIGURE 44. Drawn rendering of column I of the Demotic Book of the Dead of Pamoethes (Bibliothèque Nationale 149), AD 63. From Lexa (1910), plate Ia.