The explanation given for Facsimile 3 identifies figure 2 as “King Pharaoh, whose name is given in the characters above his head.” One potential way to identify this figure by Egyptological methods would be to read “the characters [hieroglyphs] above his head.” Unfortunately, the original illustration or vignette from the papyrus is not extant, and so we are forced to decipher the glyphs as they are reproduced in Facsimile 3 by their engraver Reuben Hedlock. While Hedlock appears to have done a fairly commendable job accurately reproducing the facsimiles (at least based on a comparison of Facsimile 1 with the extant original papyrus), he also made some noticeable mistakes. So the first issue at hand in resolving the question of the identity of this figure would be to determine how legible these glyphs actually are.

In fact, a number of Egyptologists who have examined Facsimile 3 have lamented that the hieroglyphs reproduced by Hedlock were partially or entirely illegible, “leaving them to rely upon comparable scenes from other texts to provide their interpretations of the figures.”

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1. For instance, Hedlock positioned figure 3 in Facsimile 1 behind figures 2 and 4, whereas in the original illustration figure 3 is positioned between figures 2 and 4.

2. Thus, William Flinders Petrie, “The inscriptions are far too badly copied to be able to read them,” and John Peters, “The hieroglyphics which should describe the scenes, however, are merely illegible scratches, the imitator not having the skill or intelligence to copy such a script.” F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator* (Salt Lake City: Arrow Press, [1912]), 24, 28. Compare the comments in 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): 127 nn. 109–10.

two Egyptologists who have tried in print to read the hieroglyphs above figure 2 render them as follows:\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\textit{As.t wr.t mw.t ntr}</td>
<td>\textit{'Is.t wr.t mw.t ntr}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Isis the great, the god’s mother.”</td>
<td>“The great Isis, mother of the god.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ritner does not provide a hieroglyphic transcription for his reading, while Rhodes does. A careful comparison of the glyphs as reproduced by Hedlock and Rhodes, however, reveals some difficulties.\(^5\) The most noticeable difference is in the top three glyphs, which form the name Isis. These glyphs were either poorly preserved by Hedlock or poorly drawn by the original ancient Egyptian scribe (it is impossible to tell without the original papyrus fragment), making them effectively illegible. What Egyptologists such as Rhodes (and, it would appear, Ritner) have done is reconstruct and read these glyphs how they think they \textit{ought} to be read (as the name of Isis), as opposed to how they \textit{actually} stand in the preserved facsimile.\(^6\) So while this figure could with good reason be identified as Isis

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\(^6\) As one Egyptologist has recognized, this can be “a dangerous procedure when one is trying to use the names to prove something.” Baer, “Breathing Permit of Hôr,” 127 n. 110.
based on similar iconographic elements found in comparable scenes, the identity of this figure cannot be securely reached based solely on reading the poorly preserved hieroglyphs. The identification of this figure as Isis is therefore worth exploring, but there are reasons for this identification to be accepted cautiously.

At first glance, this appears problematic for Joseph Smith’s interpretation of this figure, since, as seen above, scholars identify this figure as the goddess Isis (or sometimes the goddess Hathor, who was often syncretized with Isis), not the Egyptian Pharaoh. If we assume that this identification is correct, a closer look at the attributes and epithets ascribed to the goddess Isis during the time Facsimile 3 was drawn reveals that this identification actually has some justification.

As the mother of the god Horus, who was the godly manifestation of Pharaoh, Isis had long been recognized as the royal mother and the king’s wife by the ancient Egyptians. “She was most commonly shown as a woman wearing the throne symbol that helps to write her name. As the ‘throne goddess,’ she was the mother of each Egyptian king.” By virtue of her royal associations and because of her extensive worship throughout the Mediterranean world, by the time of the Joseph Smith Papyri, Isis had come to be identified as the Pharaohess of Egypt. In one text from this time period, for example, she is called “the Pharaohess of the whole land” (pr-ṣt nt ts r-ḥr-f). Of her additional dozens of epithets and titles, she was also designated, among other things, “ruler of the two lands in the house of joy” (ḥkṣt t3wy m ḫwt ṣwt-ib), “ruler of gods and goddesses” (ḥkṣt nṯrw nṯrwt), “the Pharaoh(ess) of everything” (pr-ṣt nt tm nb).

7. See the discussion in Barney, “Neglected Facsimile,” 63–88.
11. The Egyptian word translated here is feminine.
15. Leitz, Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen, 3:40; 88:30.
“the queen who seizes office by her decree” (nswt īti iṣwt m sḥrw-s),
“excellent ruler” (ḥkst mnḥt),
“excellent queen” (nswt mnḥt),
“excellent ruler on the throne of her father” (ḥkst mnḥt ḫr nst ʾt-s),
“ruler of Egypt” (ḥkst nt bṣkt), and “queen of all Egypt” (nswt nt nswt r ṣw-s).

Epithets such as these were routinely given to the reigning monarch, whether male or female, and inasmuch as Isis’s name in Egyptian literally means “throne” or “seat,” her shared identity with the office of the pharaoh is not at all surprising. “As the presumed embodiment of the ‘seat of the throne;’ [Isis] is in a special way bound to kingship and thus to the political aspect of [the king’s] divine nature; her role as mother of Horus and sister-wife of Osiris binds her even more closely into the Egyptian kingship, in which the living King Horus [the Pharaoh] embodies.” Accordingly, “with the idea of the Great Lady [Isis] actually” personifying the throne, and thereby the Egyptian kingship, “the incongruity of [Joseph Smith’s identification of] figure 2 [in Facsimile 3] as ‘King Pharaoh’ begins to dissolve.”

Further Reading

