God Sitting upon His Throne (Facsimile 2, Figure 7)

Figure 7 in Facsimile 2 is identified as follows: "Represents God sitting upon his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood; as, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham, in the form of a dove." Appearing in several other ancient Egyptian hypocephali,[1] the sitting personage in figure 7 has been described by one Egyptologist as "a polymorphic god sitting on his throne" with "his back [in] bird-form, while one of his arms is raised like that of [the gods] Min or [Amun] and hold[ing] forth a flagellum." Standing next to him is a "falcon- or snake-headed snake" believed to perhaps be the minor deity Nehebkau, who "offers the wedjat-eye."[2]

Another Egyptologist has similarly described this figure as "a seated ithyphallic god with a hawk's tail, holding aloft a flail. This is a form of Min . . . perhaps combined with Horus, as the hawk's tail would seem to indicate. Before the god is what appears to be a bird presenting him with a Wedjat-eye."[3] In some hypocephali, the ancient Egyptians themselves simply identified this figure as, variously, "the great god" (*nṯr ʿ3*), the "Lord of Life" (*nb ʿnḫ*), or the "Lord of All" (*nb r ḏr*).[4] This first epithet is significant for Joseph Smith's interpretation, since in one ancient

1. Tamás Mekis, *The Hypocephalus: An Ancient Egyptian Funerary Amulet* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), 49–52.

2. Mekis, *Hypocephalus,* 51–52.

3. Michael D. Rhodes, "The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Twenty Years Later," 11, unpublished manuscript, [1997], accessed December 20, 2022, https://www.magicgatebg.com/Books/Joseph%20Smith%20Hypocephalus.pdf.

4. John Gee, "Towards an Interpretation of Hypocephali," in *"Le Lotus Qui Sort de Terre": Mélanges Offerts À Edith Varga,* ed. Hedvig Győry (Budapest: Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, 2001), 334; Mekis, *Hypocephalus,* 51 n. 317.

Egyptian text the divine figure Iaho Sabaoth (Lord of Hosts) is also afforded the epithet "the Great God" (*p3 nṯr ʿ3*).[5]

Since some Egyptologists have suggested this figure is the god Min or Amun, who was often syncretized with Min,[6] it would be worth exploring what we know about this deity, even if this identification wasn't explicitly made by the ancient Egyptians themselves. One of Egypt's oldest gods, Min was worshipped as early as the Pre-Dynastic Period (pre-3000 BC). Although he assumed multiple attributes over millennia,[7] Min is perhaps best known as "the god of the regenerative, procreative forces of nature"[8]—that is, as a sort of fertility god who was often depicted as the premier manifestation of "male sexual potency."[9] He is frequently shown raising his arm to the square while holding a flail (symbols or gestures associated with kingship), displaying power and the ability to protect from enemies.[10]

Min is also very often, though not always,[11] depicted in hypocephali with an erect phallus (ithyphallic), which Egyptologists have interpreted as either a symbol of, on the one hand, sexual potency, fertility, (pro) creation, and rejuvenation, or, on the other hand, aggression, power, and authority.[12] One Egyptologist has also interpreted depictions of Min with his raised arm and erect phallus as a sign of him being "a protector

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5. John Gee, "The Structure of Lamp Divination," in *Acts of the Seventh International Conference of Demotic Studies, Copenhagen, 23–27 August 1999,* ed. Kim Ryholt (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, University of Copenhagen, 2002), 211–12.

6. Christian Leitz, ed., *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 3:290–91.

7. Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen,* 3:288–91.

8. Rhodes, "Twenty Years Later," 11.

9. Eugene Romanosky, "Min," in *The Ancient Gods Speak: A Guide to Egyptian Religion,* ed. Donald B. Redford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 218.

10. Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen,* 3:288; Jorge Ogdon, "Some Notes on the Iconography of the God Min," *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 7 (1985/6): 29–41; Romanosky, "Min," 219; Toby Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London: Routledge, 1999), 161; Manfred Lurker, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 52; Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 196; compare Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2003), 115; and Richard H. Wilkinson, "Ancient Near Eastern Raised-Arm Figures and the Iconography of the Egyptian God Min," *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 11 (1991–2): 109–18.

11. Mekis, *Hypocephalus,* 50.

12. Ogdon, "Some Notes on the Iconography of the God Min," 29–41; Joachim Quack, "The So-Called Pantheos: On Polymorphic Deities in Late Egyptian Religion," in

of the temple" whose role was "to repulse negative influences from the 'profane surroundings'" of the sacred space of the temple.[13]

That Min would assume the roles of divine procreator who gives life and divine king who upholds the cosmos is understandable from the viewpoint of ancient Egyptian religion.[14] As Ian Shaw explains,

> Although Egyptian art shied away from depicting the sexual act, it had no such qualms about the depiction of the erect phallus. . . . The three oldest colossal religious statues in Egyptian history, found by [William Flinders] Petrie in the earliest strata of the temple of Min at Koptos . . . were essentially large ithyphallic representations, probably of Min. . . . This celebration of the phallus appears to be directly related to the Egyptians' concerns with the creation (and sustaining) of the universe, in which the king was thought to play a significant role—which was no doubt one of the reasons why the Egyptian state would have been concerned to ensure that the ithyphallic figures continued to be important elements of many cults.[15]

Christina Riggs similarly comments that "near-naked goddesses, gods with erections, and cults for virile animals, like bulls, make sense in [ancient Egyptian] religious imagery because they captured the miracle of life creating new life."[16] For this reason Min was "regarded as the creator god *par excellence*" in ancient Egypt, as fertility and (male) sexuality was "subsumed under the general notion of creativity."[17]

Figure 7 in Facsimile 2 was either originally drawn or copied somewhat crudely (without access to the original hypocephalus it is impossible to tell), and so it is not entirely clear if the seated figure is ithyphallic

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Aegyptus et Pannonia III: Acta Symposii anno 2004, ed. Hedvig Győry (Budapest: Comité de l'Égypte Ancienne de l'Association Amicale Hongroise-Égyptienne, 2006), 176.

13. Ogdon, "Some Notes on the Iconography of Min," 35.

14. Min was often syncretized with both Horus and Amun, two gods closely associated with kingship, and himself bore the epithet "Min the King." Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen,* 3:290–91.

15. Ian Shaw, *Ancient Egypt: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 133.

16. Christina Riggs, *Ancient Egyptian Art and Architecture: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 89.

17. K. Van der Toorn, ed., "Min," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible,* ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, 2nd ed. (Leiden, Neth.: Brill, 1999), 557, emphasis in original. This can be further seen in the Pyramid Texts, which explicitly link male sexual virility with the creation of the cosmos (in this case the birth of Shu and Tefnut from the primordial creator god Atum). Pyramid Text (PT) 475 in James Allen, trans., *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts,* ed. Peter Der Manuelian (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 164.

or if he has one arm at his side with the other arm clearly raised in the air. Although Egyptologists have tended to interpret figure 7 in Facsimile 2 as ithyphallic—and that *seems* to be how it is depicted—it should be kept in mind, as noted above, that Min is not always depicted as such in hypocephali, so he need not *necessarily* be viewed as ithyphallic in Facsimile 2.

But what about the figure assumed to be Nehebkau offering Min the *wedjat*-eye?[18] Depicted most commonly as a snake or snake-headed man[19]—but sometimes as a falcon (as in Facsimile 2)[20]—in chapter 125 of the Book of the Dead, Nehebkau is named as one of the judges of the dead.[21] In chapter 149 of the Book of the Dead, he is associated with Min and other deities as one who ensures that the dead will be rejuvenated and resurrected with a perfected body.[22] In the Pyramid Texts, he feeds the deceased king and acts as a divine messenger.[23] As such, he "was considered to be a provider of life and nourishment."[24] Together "Nehebkau and Min were symbolic of life-force and procreative forces of nature."[25]

In ancient Egyptian, the word *wḏꜣ* carries the meaning of "hale, uninjured," and also "well-being."[26] It can describe the health or wholeness of the physical body, the soul, or moral character.[27] At the time of the creation of the Joseph Smith hypocephalus, the word meant "whole or complete" and "perfect," and featured in ritual contexts where an individual's heart was proclaimed to be *wḏꜣ* when the words of the ritual were "spoken exactly" (meaning the ritual was properly executed).[28]

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18. Alan W. Shorter, "The God Nehebkau," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21, no. 1 (1935): 41–48; Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses,* 224–25.

19. Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses,* 224; Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen,* 4:274.

20. Mekis, *Hypocephalus,* 52 n. 319; Leitz, *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen,* 4:274.

21. Raymond O. Faulkner, trans., *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (London: British Museum Press, 2010), 32; Karl Richard Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter nach dem hieroglyphischen Papyrus in Turin mit einem Vorworte zum ersten Male Herausgegeben* (Leipzig, Ger.: G. Wigand, 1842), plate XLVII.

22. Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead,* 137; Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter,* plate LXXI.

23. PT 187 and PT 365 in Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts,* 78, 230.

24. Rhodes, "Twenty Years Later," 12.

25. Luca Miatello, "The Hypocephalus of Takerheb in Firenze and the Scheme of the Solar Cycle," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 37 (2008): 285.

26. Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1991), 74–75; compare Rainer Hannig, *Großes Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Chr.)* (Mainz, Ger.: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1997), 231–32.

27. Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Wörterbuch der aegyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), 1:399–400.

28. Penelope Wilson, *A Ptolemaic Lexicon* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 283.

The *wedjat*-eye Nehebkau presents to Min (or vice-versa in some hypocephali) was thus envisioned by the ancient Egyptians as the "whole" or "sound" eye of the god Horus and had an apotropaic function in ancient Egyptian religion.[29] In Ptolemaic temple inscriptions, the word is used for the purpose of "saving and protecting . . . the body, or being saved in the temple,"[30] and in one Demotic creation text the phrase *dỉ wḏꜣ* denotes "something the creator god does to the gods while eternally rejuvenating them, a usage reflected in prayers for mortal individuals." Accordingly, it appears in the temple graffiti of petitioners requesting divine blessings.[31] The *wedjat*-eye was, in short, "the symbol of all good gifts"[32] and divine blessings, and thus a symbol for "the miracle of [the] restoration" and renewal of the body.[33] Among Coptic Christians, the word *wḏꜣ* (ⲟⲩⲁϩⲓ) meant "salvation, saved" in the soteriological sense in addition to the mundane sense of "healthy, whole."[34] This fuller understanding helps make sense of Joseph Smith's interpretation of this figure and situates such in an ancient Egyptian context.[35]

Further Reading

Nibley, Hugh, and Michael D. Rhodes. *One Eternal Round*, 304–22. The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 19. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010.

Rhodes, Michael D., "The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Twenty Years Later." Unpublished manuscript, [1997]. https://www.magicgatebg.com/Books/Joseph%20Smith%20Hypocephalus.pdf.

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29. Geraldine Pinch, *Handbook of Egyptian Mythology* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 131–32.

30. John Gee, "Some Neglected Aspects of Egypt's Conversion to Christianity," in *Coptic Culture: Past, Present and Future,* ed. Mariam Ayad (Stevenage, U.K.: Coptic Orthodox Church Centre; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), 51–52.

31. Gee, "Some Neglected Aspects of Egypt's Conversion," 52.

32. Rhodes, "Twenty Years Later," 11.

33. Hugh Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round,* The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 19 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010), 314.

34. Wolfhart Westendorf, *Koptisches Handwörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1977), 287; Richard Smith, *A Concise Coptic-English Lexicon,* 2nd ed. (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1999), 39; Gee, "Some Neglected Aspects of Egypt's Conversion to Christianity," 49–54, esp. 51–52.

35. See also Nibley and Rhodes, *One Eternal Round,* 304–22.