
Reconsidering Lucy Mack Smith's Folk Magic Confession

Samuel M. Brown

In her justly famous family memoir, Lucy Mack Smith, mother of Mormon founder Joseph Smith Jr., invested considerable energy in establishing and maintaining the honor of Mormonism's first family. Her *Biographical Sketches of the Prophet Joseph Smith and His Progenitors for Many Generations* tells in great depth the story of early Mormonism's most famous family in a sustained apologia for the Smiths and the visionary church founded by Joseph Jr.¹ Dictated in 1845 to Martha Knowlton Coray in Nauvoo, Lucy's memoir in part supported the family's claims vis-à-vis Smith's apostolic successor Brigham Young while dealing with the reality of revelations about Smith's controversies in life (especially, but not exclusively, polygamy) and the aftermath of his death.²

In the original manuscript, though not in the published versions, Lucy Mack attempted to defend the family's honor in a statement that has been much discussed but rarely understood (Figure 1). In this brief essay, I provide a close reading of that specific passage and its contextual location. In my history writing I have emphasized the importance of a multi-causal approach to history, an attempt to characterize the "cloud of meanings" that envelops religious believers, their movements, their acts, and their texts. My approach draws much from anthropologist Clifford Geertz's "thick description," but is more self-consciously religious in approach.³ In this close reading I suggest that Lucy was attempting, with some dissembling, to deny that her family had dishonored itself by involvement in esoteric folk practices. Lucy's action

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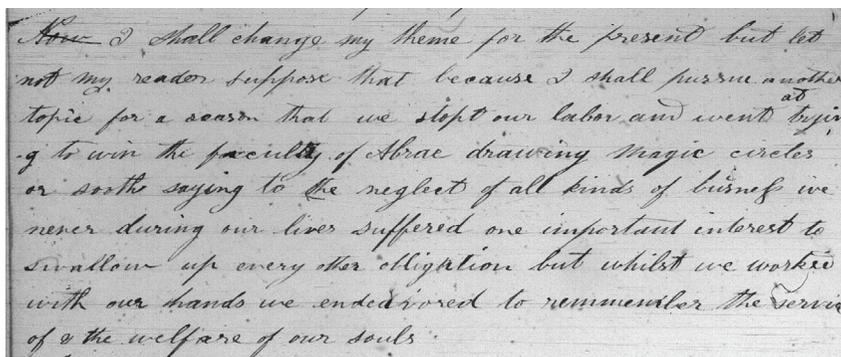


Figure 1. Excerpt from Lucy Mack Smith’s manuscript in handwriting of Martha Knowlton Coray. Image courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

provides important insight into the meanings surrounding “magic” in early America, the nature of textual religious memory, and the rhetorical contexts for truth claims.

As she turned in her family memoir from describing the family’s work to subdue the frontier and achieve economic independence to her son’s visionary experiences, Lucy Mack Smith, a status-conscious former Presbyterian, paused to distinguish Joseph Jr.’s visions from the ill-reputed world of folk magic:

Let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac drawing magic circles or sooth saying to the neglect of all kind of business[.] we never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation but whilst we worked with our hands we endeavored to remmember the service of & the welfare of our souls.⁴

This odd transition saw significant use in D. Michael Quinn’s well-known survey of possible intersections between early Mormonism and what Quinn called the “magic worldview” (many scholars would probably now call magic “folk esotericism,” “folk rites,” or “folk religion”).⁵ Historiographically, Lucy Mack Smith’s aside came to be seen as proof positive of the centrality of “magic” to the Smiths’ worldview. This putative confession filled an important lacuna in the historical record. The problem historians faced in the mid-to-latter twentieth century was that emblems of folk practices—seerstones, lamens, charms, and talismans—existed, but the Smiths had not left direct, univocal evidence of their feelings about either those specific implements or folk esotericism per se. The stakes were high at that historiographical

moment: confessions of credulity about “magic” threatened the integrity of a “hagiographic” view of Joseph Smith. The argument over Smith’s credibility was much older than a brief review of the literature in the 1980s might suggest, since magic versus prophetic models of Smith had been applied and contested since the 1830s. But by the middle twentieth century, “magical” ways of thinking seemed more remote than they had in antebellum America, and the documentary record of Mormonism’s early beginnings was often disputed. Smith’s earliest followers understood his background and cultural context; many were ardent anti-Protestants and/or participants in esoteric folk culture. But twentieth-century members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Smith’s most successful heirs, had to look at the founder from across a cultural chasm. Even without textual misinterpretation, there remains the historical problem of the “salutary vertigo” modern Latter-day Saints may feel as they peer into their culturally remote but reasonably well documented history.⁶

Harsh criticism occasioned a revision of Quinn’s work on Mormon “magic,” but the misreading of Lucy’s comment persisted through the revised edition.⁷ Lucy’s purported confession remained important enough to the debate that apologist William J. Hamblin offered a public reinterpretation of the phrase, pushing for a reading of the passage as a straightforward disavowal of magic,⁸ a view that has persisted in the current era of internet apologetics.⁹

Both sides in the often strenuous debate over the Smith family’s relationship to folk esotericism have been satisfied with superficial readings of Lucy’s statement. Careful attention to text and context suggests that this statement is a dissembling disavowal of the Smiths’ acquaintance with folk esotericism that refuses to admit their involvement with folk rites. In this paragraph, Lucy followed the Protestant master narrative of church dominance to segregate folk rites from respectable, ecclesial religion. Historians Eamon Duffy and Keith Thomas have demonstrated for early modern England, and Jon Butler for early America, that official religion and folk rites can be quite difficult to separate in practice, even as master narratives maintain that they are separable.¹⁰

Context matters a great deal, and in Lucy’s buildup to her dismissal of allegations of folk magic, she paused to describe at length an encounter fraught with class and respectability. Explaining a formal tea with prominent local women who embarrassed her by exclaiming that she needed to abandon her “log house” for a “new house,” Lucy retorted by maintaining that at least one of the women had children who could not free themselves from the “Grog Shop & gambling house.” On the contrary, Lucy announced, she had raised children who lived an “upright and honorable course of conduct.”¹¹

After briefly emphasizing again her family's considerable industry, and before turning to her son's visions and two more of her husband's visions—themselves fairly typical evangelical narratives that would have demonstrated seriousness as a Christian¹²—Lucy sparred with the family's critics in her brief aside about three “magical” practices. Though she was attempting to deny her family's involvement in such activities, Lucy's list of three sample practices provides useful insights into the nature of folk esotericism and its intersections with established religion.

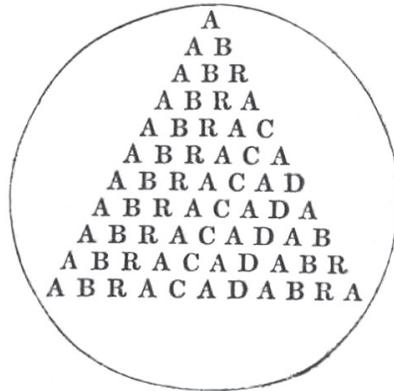
That hers was an attempted denial is clear from both close attention to the text and to the third of the practices she listed. The third activity to which Lucy alludes makes quite clear that she was disclaiming involvement in folk rites. “Soothsaying,” a pejorative term for predicting the future or certain forms of supernatural sight, is not a word that a Protestant (or sectarian ex-Protestant) would use to describe her own or her family's activities. In a Bible-drenched culture like that of early America, soothsaying recalled capital crimes within the Hebrew Bible. Soothsayers included the much-maligned Balaam (Josh. 13:22), so obtuse that he was outclassed (and reprimanded) by his famously garrulous ass; the Philistines (Isa. 2:6), whose mighty giant the mythically powerful first king of united Israel slew with a sling; the courtiers of the Babylonian king whom Daniel put to shame (Dan. 2:27; 4:7; 5:7; 11); or the corrupted state of Israel whom Micah (Micah 5:12) denounced. In the sole explicit New Testament reference, soothsaying was a lucrative sequela of demonic possession (Acts 16:16). Joseph Jr.'s scripture employed biblical citations to confirm the rejection of soothsaying (2 Ne. 12:6 and 3 Ne. 21:16). Simply put, soothsaying is not a category that exists other than as a denunciatory epithet. Even people who might accept “magic” as a self-reference would not accept “soothsaying.” Had Lucy Smith been endorsing such behaviors, she would almost certainly have described them as “prophecy” or “seerhood.” There is in Lucy's disavowal of soothsaying an almost palpable frustration and embarrassment. She seems unable to shake the opprobrium of critics. She knew well the family's early poverty and heterodoxy, remembered that their Presbyterian minister had eulogized Alvin in 1823 as unbaptized, and hence likely damned, that her brother-in-law called Joseph Jr. a “necromanc[er] of infidelity,” that an Anglican academic mocked Joseph Jr.'s storied translating abilities, that to many critics the Book of Mormon was the fraudulent capstone of a treasure-hunting career.¹³ Lucy's embarrassed frustration expressed itself in her clumsy lines of defense. As the introduction to her proud characterization of her son's visions and revelations, she both denied common and stigmatized folk rites and protected the family's respectability by claiming that even the visions of Joseph Sr. and Joseph Jr. did not keep them from working to support themselves financially.¹⁴

Magic circles, the second of the practices that Lucy mentioned, are ubiquitous and ancient, drawing on the close associations between geometry and divinity in the Antique Mediterranean and persisting in important variants across many traditions. Circles were drawn on parchments or in the ground to make possible the retrieval of buried treasure, the conquest of a demon, or the recovery from an illness or curse.¹⁵ Such circles served to divide the world, separating the practitioner from danger or enclosing a sought-after power or material within the special space that contained the practitioner. Magic circles are well described in ancient Egyptian ritual magic¹⁶ as well as in the Hellenized Egyptian practices depicted in the famous Greek magical papyri.¹⁷ Closest to Smith temporally and geographically were applications of magic circles to effect the recovery of buried treasure or related techniques within Atlantic culture.¹⁸ A treasure seeker might sketch such a circle in the dirt to protect a dig from dark spirits guarding the treasure.

Geometrical forms figured prominently in ancient philosophical systems, particularly those deriving from Plato or Pythagoras and their disciples. Geometrical symbols—easy to inscribe, easy to understand, easy to see as constituents of worlds seen and unseen—bore considerable conceptual and metaphysical weight in western traditions. They often held within themselves the power of a symbol rightly expressed, which mirrored the awesome power of language in many historical human traditions. On a broad historical scope, magic circles have been part of human culture for millennia. What exactly magic circles meant in the hands of treasure seekers in the early American Republic is not entirely clear. Were they merely the paraphernalia of a desperate hope for material success, or were they part of rigorous attempts to control treasure-guarding spirits? The answer is probably somewhere in the middle, with faint echoes of older necromantic traditions and a strongly technological aspect to them. It seems likely that at some point Joseph Jr. and Joseph Sr. used magic circles as part of their treasure hunting activities; on that specific point, though, Lucy's ostensible confession obfuscates rather than clarifies.

Lucy's first denounced practice, winning the "faculty of Abrac," also drew on long-established traditions. Ostensibly deriving from attempts to gain control over the ancient deity Abraxas (also spelled Abrasax), this triangle within a circle combined interests in numerology (the name was held to represent the cosmically significant number 365), alphabetic mysticism, theurgy (control of deities, often through knowledge of their names), and a version of magic squares (Figure 2). All of these traditions have been of active interest from at least the time of Christ, as manifest in ancient Greek and Coptic magic papyri and amulets.¹⁹ These traditions over the centuries grew from and informed the great mysteries of language, its ability to communicate meaning in arbitrary symbols, to conceal or reveal secrets. The capacity to rearrange

Figure 2. An Abrac triangle taken from George Oliver, *The Antiquities of Freemasonry* (1823).



letters in various permutations contributed to the perceived power of language (e.g., the Jewish mystical traditions called Kabbalah) and was important to the function of the faculty of Abrac. By the early nineteenth century, access to these remnants of Antique “magic” and theurgy seem to have come primarily via Freemasonry, which self-consciously attempted to replicate ancient mystery religions and esoteric wisdom traditions.²⁰ The faculty of Abrac is mentioned favorably as a skill of Masons in the famous forgery called the Leland manuscript, and various Masons either endorsed or disclaimed the faculty.²¹ The faculty of Abrac seems to have been primarily a textual and practical echo of older alphabetic mysticism traditions.²² Those alphabetic traditions constituted vibrant elements of Masonic liturgy and belief²³; the mystical triangle itself (recalling that the faculty of Abrac was a triangle of letters) could be seen as a mystical version of the capital Greek letter delta or the geometrical model of the divine Trinity.²⁴ Anti-Masons, including early Mormon convert William W. Phelps, claimed that Masons used the faculty for a variety of purposes.²⁵ To the extent it is possible to judge at this late remove, these early modern echoes of alphabetic mysticism and theurgy probably functioned largely as charms of protection, health, or good fortune. In this regard they were not so different in proximate goal from older magical traditions, though the early modern applications of the faculty of Abrac generally took place in a different cultural environment. Quinn’s invocation of Abrac as a “link” between “magic and divinity” fails to appreciate the distance between Antique esoteric traditions and their antebellum echoes. Though the Abrac triangle may have ultimately derived from theurgical encounters with Abraxas/Abrasax in Antiquity, in early American folk religion, the faculty probably mostly operated as a practical charm vaguely associated with Masonry. I am not aware of any credible evidence that early American participants in folk religion

actually expected to command the deity Abraxas theurgically as a result of their use of such a charm.

Abrac triangles and magic circles share several features and assumptions, most notably the power of language, the prospect of human influence on suprahuman beings, and the power of certain kinds of maps. The Smiths believed strongly in versions of those underlying principles, but their precise relationship to specific objects or practices is not easily described in a persuasive way. Folk esotericism was certainly part of the cloud of meanings from which the Smiths drew, but the specific elements they considered when they engaged in such activities are far from clear, as are the relationships between folk rites and Smith's formally religious career.

When Lucy claimed that the Smiths "never allowed one interest" to dominate their lives, she was addressing questions of class respectability and nodding toward controversies over paid clergy in her social context. It was important to Lucy to be clear that her visionary husband and son did not rely on priestcraft for their support. In her phrases one hears echoes of the early Saints' intense antipathy for paid clergy. The Book of Mormon called it priestcraft (Alma 1:5-6, 12, cf. 2 Ne. 26:29) and decried it in strong terms, as did LDS newspapers and modern scriptures. In this regard, Lucy and the other Saints added their voices to a chorus of populist Protestants who decried the power and economic success of professional clergy, the "priests" and "prelates" of orthodox Reformed Christianity, who didn't have to work with their hands for a living.²⁶

Quinn's and other related readings of this passage also require a misapprehension of the role of particular rites in the religious experience of participants. The Abrac triangles and magic circles were not designed to save souls, they were intended to achieve proximate temporal ends, to provide safety from harm, and to find buried treasure. In the phrase of one British contemporary of the Smiths, the Abrac triangles were "supposed to convey perpetual health and happiness, and protection from temporal dangers."²⁷ While the Smiths almost certainly believed to some extent in the efficacy of such rites, these charms and talismans were not treasured for their effect on one's soul. A reference by a pious former Presbyterian to the "service" and "welfare" of "souls," even one who actively participated in folk esotericism, would not be a reference to charm drawings, papers, or talismans. Such papers were used as aids in everyday work or for healing. They were not primarily designed to effect spiritual regeneration. Even practitioners did not confuse them with either ecclesiastical rituals or the pious regeneration that subserved the welfare of souls in antebellum America. Though scholars of religion might cringe in the telling, it strikes me that while their divisions were not as dramatic as ours, antebellum Americans still distinguished between the Christianity

of their churches, which they tended to associate with rites of salvation and power for the afterlife; and the power in nature, in words, or in parchments, which they tended to associate with temporal concerns, primarily economic prosperity and physical health. Critics called those latter beliefs “superstition” or “magic,” and this framing affected the ways participants talked about their belief or involvement in such folk rites. Many believers largely understood the two worlds to be compatible, a belief that galled their clergy most of the time, but the two worlds brought somewhat different instruments to bear on reasonably distinct problems.²⁸ In Lucy’s contrast between her son’s visions and folk rites, the persistent reality of magic as a foil for religion is clear in the language of participants.

What shall we as modern readers do with the disavowal’s main evidential utility—the Smiths found folk rites embarrassing? Was this dissembling like that surrounding polygamy, keeping a Mormon mystery safe from the gaze of snooping Protestants? In sharp distinction to polygamy there is no compelling evidence of a later centrality of such rites to the major body of the Church.²⁹ Were the Smiths embarrassed by the folk rites as signs of their poor social location? Or were folk rites central to the tension internal to Common Sense philosophy and theology, the fact that most commoners believed things wildly incompatible with evolving scientific and orthodox religious considerations? I suspect that some combination of these played a role in Lucy’s denial of involvement in folk rites.

Ultimately the Smiths’ critics, or at least the worldview on which they relied (what we call in complex and misleading shorthand “Enlightenment” or “modern”), prevailed. This should come as no surprise. Lucy and her editors admitted as much with this disclaimer and its exclusion from the published family memoir. Whatever else motivated them, they acknowledged the power of Enlightenment narratives even as they tried to co-opt them.

Despite the cultural separation between the Smiths and the twenty-first century, there are some possible analogues to the folk rites from which Lucy distanced herself. Ouija boards (those commercialized fossils of nineteenth-century séance spiritualism), magic 8-balls, preserved rabbit feet, lucky numbers and lotteries, and even nutraceutical supplements are all rough analogues of the older technologies that embarrassed Lucy. These contemporary relics are largely separated from their theoretical moorings for us moderns, but for Smith it was those moorings—fragments of cosmic truth preserved over many generations—that were more relevant than any specific instance of them. Again and again throughout his career, Lucy’s favored son argued that the cultures of his peers were merely remnants of an earlier, glorious truth. Language did have power, maps of the cosmos did matter, the believer could make meaningful contact with the supernatural.

This reconsideration of a controversial and somewhat opaque text suggests that magic may still be useful as an academic category, but its primary utility is in getting at the question of how groups understand their status vis-à-vis the larger society. That Lucy denied her family's involvement in deprecated folk religion does not mean the Smiths were not involved in activities that their critics called "magic." But it does suggest that they saw folk rites as distinct from honorable religion and were publicly embarrassed by these rites.

Lucy's disavowal of folk rites also provides some insight into the experience of outsider religion in Protestant America.³⁰ Lucy showed awareness of, and to a certain extent membership in, two different cultures, a predicament Smith's heirs continue to find themselves in: trying to explain their beliefs and traditions in terms their host culture can understand while attempting to retain their distinctiveness.

Language continues to wield power. Though the Abrac triangle is not a reliable indicator of alphabetic mysticism among the Latter-day Saints, such instruments are a reminder of important cultural overlaps between late Antiquity and the early modern Atlantic world. Though the marked significance of angelic or supernatural names has receded in our culture, a transition already underway when Lucy wrote her memoir, names still have power, and the term *magic* is just such a name. The familiar refrain "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me" seems more an aspiration than an attestation, an act of dissembling in the hopes of limiting the social and personal power of names and words.

By juxtaposing deprecated folk rites and her family's spiritual visions, was Lucy implicitly suggesting that early Mormonism incorporated the true essence of these traditions? While it seems unlikely that in this particular passage she was self-consciously making the argument, such a proposition would have come naturally to her. Lucy's son Joseph taught that he had found the essence of the Bible, traditions about American ethnic origins, Freemasonry, and hieroglyphs. In the 1840s Joseph Jr. seems to have suggested that he had transformed the essence of formal esotericism. Lucy may have been subtly and perhaps unconsciously following her son's lead—the Smith family would reveal the important truths of which folk esotericism was merely a collection of broken fragments.

Whether accepting certain elements of normative religiosity within an outsider religion was good for the early Mormon movement is difficult to know, but that is the direction that most of Smith's heirs have followed. In some respects Lucy's disavowal is a "missing link" in a transition from a world of cosmic possibility to a world of restrained and respectable religion, a part of the broader transitions from sect to church, from premodern to modern,

from magical to mundane. Of course, these are not truly sequential states, and historians in another century may view our particular historical moment with due skepticism, desecrating lotteries, faith healings, revelation of the sealed Book of Mormon, and visions of Joseph Smith or Brigham Young throughout the twentieth century as evidence that soothsaying, with its complex claim to distance and power, was alive and well. If that is the case, I hope this brief essay will be less misunderstood than Lucy's commentary 150 years from now.

Notes

1. Lavina Fielding Anderson, ed., *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), is the standard critical edition of the text.

2. The relationship between Lucy Mack Smith and Brigham Young in this period is fluid and complex. Ultimately, Lucy sided strongly with Smith's widow, Emma Hale. See John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 115, 142, 335-336.

3. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30. I described my approach in a presentation to the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology, Utah Valley University, May 2011.

4. Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 323.

5. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 68-70. On newer terminologies, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2008), 3-14; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, ed., *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 716-18; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 64-65; Danny Ethus Burton and David A. Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 36-42; Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 1-4.

6. On "salutary vertigo," see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), xvii.

7. Quinn, *Magic World View* (1st ed.), ix, 127-33, 128 n5; and Quinn, *Magic World View* (2nd ed.), xi-xii, 152, 330 n14, 465 n124, 467 n137, 469 n157.

8. William J. Hamblin, "That Old Black Magic," review of D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. and enlarged ed., *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2 (2000): 225-394.

9. See http://www.fairwiki.org/Joseph_Smith/Occultism_and_magic/Lucy_Mack_Smith_on_%22faculty_of_Abrac%22_and_%22magic_circles%22, accessed October 9, 2011.

10. Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c. 1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

11. Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 322.

12. Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 324.

13. Samuel Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 69–70; and Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and William W. Phelps,” in Stephen C. Taysom, ed., *Dimensions of Faith: A Mormon Studies Reader* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 2011), 268–71.

14. To be clear, in Lucy's framing it is the visions of Joseph Smith Sr. and Joseph Smith Jr. that are the antecedent for “the welfare of our souls,” not the rites from which she was trying to distance her family.

15. On applications in English history, see Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Continuum, 2003), 94, 129, 144–45. On applications in Europe, see Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 90–91, 110–11, 127.

16. Donald B. Redford, ed., *The Ancient Gods Speak: a Guide to Egyptian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), s.v., Magic.

17. The papyri texts are most accessible in Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells: Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

18. Quinn, *Magic World View* (2nd ed.), 26, 46, 70; Burton and Grandy, *Magic, Mystery, and Science*, 50–52, Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35, 38, 147–50; Alan Taylor, “The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 6–34.

19. Patristic heresiology maintained that the Basilidians worshiped such a God, though the patristic witness is uncertain. The etymology of the name is uncertain and disputed. Smith's favored theological dictionary mentioned the Basilidian deity but not the possible connection with the faculty of Abrac. See Charles Buck, *Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia: Edwin T. Scott, 1823), 45–46. John Fellows, *An Exposition of the Mysteries, or Religious Dogmas and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians, Pythagoreans, and Druids* (New York: Gould, Banks and Co., 1835), 226, 231, makes the association explicit.

20. Fellows, *Exposition of the Mysteries*, among several others, attempts to tie Masonry to ancient mystery religions.

21. The Leland manuscript is reprinted in Samuel Cole, *The Freemason's Library and General Ahiman Rezon* (Baltimore: Benjamin Edes, 1817), 8–11. It was not generally understood to be a forgery until decades later. For other examples of the complex relationship between Masonry and the faculty of Abrac, see, John Bee, *Slang. A Dictionary* (London: T. Hughes, 1823), 1.

22. On Antique traditions of alphabet mysticism, see the masterful Patricia Cox Miller, “In Praise of Nonsense,” in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 481–505.

23. This line of analysis has been rather underdeveloped in academic writing on Masonry, though fascination with language and words and letters is integral to most if not all Masonic traditions.

24. Bernard, *Light on Masonry*, 261–62.

25. See Quinn, *Magic World View* (2nd ed.), 68–69; John E. Thomson, “The Philalethes Society,” viewed at http://masonicmoroni.com/Philalethes/facultie_of_abrac.htm; and William W. Phelps, *Ontario Phoenix*, August 25, 1830. See also James Hardie, *The New Free-Mason's Monitor* (New York: n.p., 1818), 203; and Henry Dana Ward, *Free Masonry, Its Pretensions Exposed in Faithful Extracts of its Standard Authors* (New York:

n.p., 1828), 104–05.

26. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 17–46.

27. George Oliver, *The Antiquities of Freemasonry; Comprising Illustrations of the Five Grand Periods of Masonry from the Creation of the World to the Dedication of King Solomon's Temple* (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1823), 123.

28. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 215–27, Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 67–97, 228–34. Quinn does acknowledge these points broadly. See Quinn, *Magic World View* (2nd ed.), xiii, xiv, 321.

29. There is evidence of the persistence of seer stones, treasure seeking, and astrology in the Nauvoo and Utah periods, but they were not central to Mormon self-identity in the way polygamy was. See “Notice,” *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 2 (December 1, 1842): 32, on people following James C. Brewster and Brewster’s counter-accusations against Joseph Smith Sr. in *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Diggers: Why do the Mormons Rage, and the People Imagine a Vain Thing?* (Springfield, IL: n.p., 1843), copy located in the Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. For a discussion of Brewster see Dan Vogel, “James Colin Brewster: The Boy Prophet Who Challenged Mormon Authority,” in Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 120–34. Jonathan A. Stapley is currently working on a project that tracks the dissemination of folk practices in nineteenth century Utah.

30. R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), describes the general situation of outsiders in American religion.