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<AT>Altering Translated Scriptures: The Case of *Familiar Spirit* (as a Key Phrase of the Restoration and as an Inapt Product of Jacobean Demonology)

<AA>*Wilfried Decoo*

<TXT>In 1980 church leaders issued a policy on translation of Latter-day scriptures to other languages: translators should follow the words, phrases, and sentence structures, as well as the idiomatic expressions and literary style of the original authors as literally as possible, even if some expressions are awkward or ambiguous.[1] The policy came in the wake of the church's endeavor to produce its own edition of the King James Bible, soon followed by the edition of the

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<FNTXT>[1] "First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Policy Relative to Translation of the Standard Works," April 17, 1980, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I thank Tod Harris from the Church Translation Department for confirming these points of the policy, which is an internal document. The policy is discussed in Marcellus S. Snow, "The Challenge of Theological Translation: New German Versions of the Standard Works," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17, no. 2 (1984): 133–49; and in Marvin H. Folsom, "Some Stylistic Features of the German Translation of the Standard Works," *Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium* 16, no. 1 (1990): 91–104.

four Standard Works as one book.[2] Cross-references, a Bible dictionary, and a topical index aimed at creating doctrinal cohesion and coordinated scripture study. To guarantee the same for other languages, close literalness in translation seemed the obvious path. In 1980 an example had just been set by the complete retranslation of the Book of Mormon in German. It was the work of Immo Luschin, then president of the Swiss Temple, who strongly defended the principle of close literalness.[3] Moreover, the discovery of ancient style figures in the Book of Mormon was seen as proof of its authenticity, hence, the conviction that the same features had to be maximally preserved in translations. In 1984 it was decided to revise the extant editions of the three Mormon Standard Works in all European languages, so they would be in line with the 1980 policy. To execute this massive project, still ongoing, the Church Translation Department provides personnel, training, travel, and tools. An English lexicon was developed to define all words used in the scriptures and a translation guide for each verse, clarifying what should be taken into account in translation.

Against this background, this article studies the noun phrase "*a familiar spirit*" in the sentence "their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit" in 2 Nephi 26:16, an echo from Isaiah 29:4 as worded in the King James Bible (KJV). The sentence is a key element in Restoration rhetoric, interpreted as predicting the emergence of the Book of Mormon. However, for its meaning in English and for its translation to other languages, *familiar spirit* presents an interesting linguo-historical case, both by its Hebrew source in Isaiah and its unique Jacobean formulation in English.

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[2] For the history behind the production, see Robert J. Matthews, "The New Publications of the Standard Works—1979, 1981," *Brigham Young University Studies* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1982): 387–424.

[3] See citations in Snow, "Challenge of Theological Translation."

The first section of this article situates the phrase in its context and summarizes how it has been regarded within Mormon circles over the years, from a literal to a necromantic understanding. The second section illustrates the translation challenge to other languages: I list the original translations in the eight European languages in which the Book of Mormon was published in the nineteenth century, each followed by its changes in revised editions during the twentieth century, up to the latest change to necromancy required by the Translation Department. In the third section I discuss how the Masoretic and the Septuagint texts do not sustain a necromantic interpretation of *familiar spirit* in Isaiah 29:4—a viewpoint that also non-KJV translations confirm. The fourth section explicates that *familiar spirit* is a distinctive and inapt KJV idiom, a product of its era, with antecedents in Roman and medieval *familiares*, folk beliefs, and Aquinas's theology. Jacobean demonology fossilized the phrase in the KJV, in contrast to all other Bible translations. In the fifth section I follow the development in America: brought to the New World with the KJV, by the 1800s, *familiar spirit* had overall lost its Jacobean specificity. Joseph Smith, his revision of the Bible, and the Book of Mormon gave the phrase a new and fitting meaning in the context of the Restoration. Moreover, Nephi's text invites us to identify the voice of a specific male person. I also remark that a necromantic interpretation sustains the magical worldview of the origins of Mormonism. In the last section I express a few thoughts and concerns regarding the (re)translation of Mormon scriptures.

This article does not claim any original discovery. It attempts to systematize disparate elements for a hopefully clearer view on an already much-discussed topic, but now in a historical and multilingual perspective.

<T1HD>*Familiar Spirit*: From a Literal to a Necromantic Understanding

<TXT>In the Book of Mormon, 2 Nephi includes much of Isaiah. First, Nephi lets his brother Jacob quote five chapters, "which Isaiah spake concerning all the house of Israel."[4] Second, Nephi cites fourteen Isaiah chapters with prophecies relating to Israel.[5] In the succeeding six chapters, Nephi gives his "own prophecy," insisting on its "plainness" in contrast to the sometimes "hard to understand" words of Isaiah (2 Ne. 25:1–8). Here Nephi uses and alters phrases from Isaiah to insert them into a vast future panorama from his time up to the final judgment. In Nephi's and Jacob's own words, the process is one of "likening" what Isaiah wrote to their own history and the future of mankind.[6]

A central element in Nephi's prophecy concerns the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the last days. In Isaiah 29:4, in the KJV translation, the prophet addresses Jerusalem and predicts its total destruction, to such an extent that its voice will speak "out of the ground": "Thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech shall whisper out of the dust." Nephi applies the metaphor to the future destruction of his own people—"my seed and the seed of my brethren"—

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[4] 2 Nephi, chapters 6 to 10, referencing parts of Isaiah chapters 49 to 52. For a study of the textual variants between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, see Royal Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 369–91.

[5] 2 Nephi, chapters 12 to 24, referencing Isaiah chapters 2 to 14.

[6] The terms *like* and *likening* appear in 2 Nephi 6:5; 11:2, 8. For an analysis of this dynamic transition from Isaiah's prophecy to Nephi's, see Robert A. Cloward, "Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 191–247. For Nephi's understanding and elucidation of Isaiah, see Donald W. Parry, "Nephi's Keys to Understanding Isaiah (2 Nephi 25:1–8)," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, 48–65.

and the resurgence of their history from the ground. He changes Isaiah's address to the third person plural: "Their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit" (2 Ne 26:16).[7]

From the earliest days, church leaders interpreted this key phrase as referring to the Book of Mormon, a book found in the earth and recognized as *familiar* to believers. From Orson Pratt to Russell M. Nelson, their message has been one of literal understanding in late modern English: the voice of the book emanates a *familiar spirit* that people recognize.[8] Faith-strengthening commentators confirm that view: "Nephi is evidently saying here that the doctrinal

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[7] Note one more variant: both the KJV and the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) have "as **<UL>**of**<NM>** one that hath a familiar spirit" (KJV) to "as one that hath a familiar spirit" (2 Nephi). Skousen considers this variant a paraphrastic case, see Skousen, "Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations," 370.

[8] Selection, in chronological order: Orson Pratt, "Was Joseph Smith Sent of God?," *Millennial Star* 10, no. 18 (September 15, 1848): 273; Orson Spencer, *Letters Exhibiting the Most Prominent Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Liverpool: Budge, 1879), 80–81; LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and A Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 59–60; S. Dilworth Young, *One Hundred Forty-Fourth Annual Conference Report* (April 1974), 88; Bruce R. McConkie, *One Hundred Fiftieth Annual General Conference Report* (April 1980), 97; Gordon B. Hinckley, *Faith, The Essence of True Religion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 10; Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 432–33; and Russell M. Nelson, "The Exodus Repeated," *Ensign*, July 1999, 10. Orson Pratt also identifies the voice from the earth in the ruins of ancient civilizations found in America: Orson Pratt, January 7, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 2:285–86.

teachings of the Book of Mormon would seem familiar to people who had already read and accepted the Bible."[9]

The KJV, however, contains other occurrences of "familiar spirits," part of disparaged occult practices.[10] "Consulters of familiar spirits" are thus associated with charmers, wizards, and necromancers and should be put to death (Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:11). A strong association of *familiar spirit* with necromancy comes from the story of the "witch" of Endor who "has a familiar spirit" and is able to bring up Samuel from the dead (1 Sam. 29). Necromancy is understood here as actively invoking or summoning the spirit of a dead person. A similar connection is found in Isaiah 8:19, reflected in 2 Nephi 18:19, where the prophet admonishes not to seek the words of the dead from those "that have familiar spirits." It is understandable that the similar occurrence of a *familiar spirit* in Isaiah 29:4, related to a voice coming out of the ground, has led some analysts to tie it to necromancy.[11] Sometimes it includes some disparaging of the "simplistic" literal understanding of familiarity.

<T1HD>A Diachronic Look at Eight Translations
<TXT>Between 1851 and 1890, the Book of Mormon was published in eight west European languages, three in the Romance group (French, Italian, and Spanish), four in the Germanic

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[9] Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 146. See also Ludlow, *Unlocking Isaiah in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 207.

[10] The terms *occult*, *esoteric*, *mystic*, *magic*, and others are often interchangeable or overlapping in the literature. Distinctions that scholars make between them are not universally recognized. Neither is the boundary with "acceptable" religious practices clear-cut. I skip this discussion here.

[11] References to authors who discuss these identifications and nuances come later in the article.

group (Danish, Dutch, German, and Swedish), and one in the Celtic group (Welsh). When working on the Isaiah chapters in 2 Nephi, translators could look in their particular Bible and copy the phrases where the equivalence seemed evident. If not evident, they could translate Nephi's phrases literally. Indeed, for the structure "as one that hath a familiar spirit," some translated it (quasi) literally, while others reproduced the words from Isaiah 29:4 in their Bible. As far as I could assess, none of these nineteenth-century non-English Bibles contains the equal KJV phrase "familiar spirit," which is indeed a distinctive KJV idiom. The comparison of the eight translations reveals:

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- For the first editions, four out of eight—Dutch, Italian, Spanish, and Swedish—opted for the literal translation of *familiar spirit*.

- The other half—Danish, French, German, and Welsh—chose to copy the expression from a Bible version, which led to variants between them. For example, French opted for "un esprit de python."[12]

- In the revised editions after 1960, Danish, French, and German abandoned their Bible equivalent and also shifted to the literal translation. This homogenous change presumably happened upon instruction from the church to affirm the notion of familiarity. Welsh was never revised.[13]

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[12] The Bible used was probably the Bible Martin of 1744 or a later edition, which uses "esprit de python" in Isaiah 29:4. See further in the article for the use of *python* in the Vulgate and related translations.

[13] The Welsh edition has not been revised. In 2000, the church published a facsimile edition and offers the text online, still in the chapters division of 1830. See Ronald D. Dennis, "Llyfr Mormon: The Translation of the Book of Mormon into Welsh," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 11, no. 1 (2002): 45–49, 110.

- However, more recently as part of the major revision of the scriptures, all editions dropped the literal translation in favor of a structure related to necromancy—evoking spirits from the dead.

<TXT>Table 1 gives for each language the date of the Book of Mormon edition—the first pertaining to the first edition, next the one(s) with a revision, and finally the latest edition. The English equivalent (=) renders the phrase as closely as possible. The antecedent of the phrase is in each case *their voice*, referring to the destroyed Nephites and Lamanites.

<INSERT TABLE 1 NEAR HERE>

The change to a necromantic context in all latest editions is due to an instruction in the church's translation guide pertaining to 2 Nephi 26:16: "Familiar spirit refers to a spirit of a dead person invoked by a medium to advise or prophesy (compare 2 Nephi 18:19). One that hath a familiar spirit therefore is the person who invokes such a spirit."[14] The same explanation is provided to all church members in the *Book of Mormon Student Manual*.[15] Requiring an explicit

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[14] The translation guide is not publicly available. I thank Tod Harris from the Church Translation Department for providing the relevant information for this case. To justify its definition, the guide refers to 2 Nephi 18:19, which mirrors Isaiah 8:19 in the KJV. That verse admonishes not to consult spirits of the dead. But this referral to 2 Nephi 18:19 is not warranted because 2 Nephi 26:16 deals with a different context. Also, Isaiah 8:19 and 29:4 differ, both in the Hebrew and Greek texts. See further in this article.

[15] "The original meaning of 'familiar spirit' is a noun, meaning a spirit who prompts an individual or the spirit of a dead person. While this meaning may sound odd to us today, in the past it commonly conveyed the sense that departed ones can have influence beyond the grave into this life." *Book of Mormon Student Manual* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2009), chap. 12, 2 Nephi 25–

necromantic paraphrase in translation is surprising as it departs from the 1980 policy to keep the translation literal. Moreover, is it justified?

<T1HD>About the Key Word *'ôb* in Isaiah 29:4: Necromancy or Not?

<TXT>*Familiar spirit* in the KJV is the result of a translation choice that does not match the original Hebrew. This section considers the original Hebrew in Isaiah 29:4, the transfer to Greek and Latin, and how non-KJV Bible translations have chosen to render the structure differently. The overarching question being, is the reference to necromancy or not?

<T2HD>From Hebrew to Greek to Latin

<TXT>The historical context of Isaiah's poetic prophecy is generally accepted as Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE, as described in 2 Kings 18 and 19. In the first four verses of Isaiah 29, Yahweh addresses Jerusalem as Ariel and predicts its destruction to the ground. The prophecy is also viewed as applicable to the later destruction of Jerusalem around 587 BCE. Verse 4 portrays the dramatic outcome of the ruined city as a voice coming out of the ground, comparing it to the voice of some entity, rendered by the Hebrew *'ôb*.[16] This key word has been

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27, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-student-manual/chapter-12-2-nephi-25-27.

[16] Hebrew אוב (rendered as *'ō·wḇ*, *aub*, or *'ôb*). Parry noted no textual variants for Isaiah 29:4. See Donald W. Parry, *Exploring the Isaiah Scrolls and Their Textual Variants* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 204. For Hebrew lexicons, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898) lists the meaning *necromancer* pending context, but *ghost* for Isaiah 29:4. ==The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew== puts *ghost* as prime meaning, but "perhaps sometimes *medium*, *necromancer*, i.e., one who consults a ghost." **{AU: can you please provide author and publication information for the version you used?**

the object of numerous studies. Otero calls the meaning of *'ôb* a "mystifying puzzle" and illustrates it in his overview of *'ôb* and related terms in various traditions.[17] Blenkinsopp notes that "speculation about the etymology of *'ôb* has not advanced the discussion significantly."[18] Hays and LeMon recognize *'ôb* as "a philological mystery for scholars of classical Hebrew and Israelite religion. It does not seem to mean the same thing in all instances, and its etymology is unclear and contested."[19]

In nearly all biblical occurrences of *'ôb*, the word is part of the condemnations of various occult practices.[20] Many studies focus on Saul's encounter with the "witch" at Endor—who has

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David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 1:148. / And is the lexicon info I added correct?} For Brown-Driver-Briggs, the place, date, and page info is: (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1907), 15.

[17] Andrés Piquer Otero, "Who Names the Namers? The Interpretation of Necromantic Terms in Jewish Translations of the Bible," in *Textual Criticism and Dead Sea Scrolls Studies in Honour of Julio Trebolle Barrera*, ed. Andrés Piquer Otero and Pablo A. Torijano Morales (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 241–76.

[18] Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence," *Vetus Testamentum* 45, no. 1 (January 1995): 1–16. Blenkinsopp warns that English equivalents are generally no more than approximations.

[19] Christopher B. Hays and Joel M. LeMon, "The Dead and Their Images: An Egyptian Etymology for Hebrew *'ôb*," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 1, no. 4 (December 2009): 1–4. A vast literature describes these spirit phenomena in the Bible, with numerous interpretations and controversies. For a recent overview, see Reed Carlson, *Unfamiliar Selves in the Hebrew Bible: Possession and Other Spirit Phenomena* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022).

[20] See Isabel Cranz, "The Rhetoric of Prohibitions: Divination and Magic in Deuteronomy and Leviticus," *Semitica* 60 (2018): 139–58. For a detailed list of Hebrew occult terminology—with its Greek, Latin, and KJV equivalents—see Steven L. Jeffers, "The Cultural Power of Words: Occult Terminology in the Hebrew, Greek, Latin and English Bibles" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1989). See also

or commands an *‘ôb*. Here *‘ôb* is mostly understood as *a spirit* that helps her with her necromantic craft.[21] Some authors point to similar Assyrian, Hittite, Ugaritic, and Assyrian words that mean *pit*— a ritual hole to give infernal beings or spirits of the deceased access to the upper world, in which case the Endor witch is the possessor of such a pit.[22] The phrase in Isaiah 29:4 could then be read as "a voice as from a pit." The three common interpretations of *‘ôb* in its necromantic context are: (1) the spirit of a dead person that can be consulted through necromancy; (2) a cultic object used in necromancy, which could be a pit; and (3) a necromantic diviner, often translated as *medium*.[23] In short, when the context refers to some form of communication with the dead, *‘ôb* is always associated with another term—"a hendiadys of sort."[24]

Isaiah 29:4, however, is one of the rare cases where *‘ôb* is not associated with such terms. The verse laments the future destruction of Jerusalem, to such an extent that its voice will speak

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Jonathan Lee Seidel, "Studies in Ancient Jewish Magic" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996).

[21] For the Endor pericope, Bar reviews the polysemy of necromantic terms associated with *‘ôb*: the spirit or the image of the dead, or the necromancer as person. See Shaul Bar, "Saul and the Witch of Endor," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 120n7. A vast corpus of studies is devoted to the episode of Saul visiting the witch at Endor. For its terminology, see Erasmus Gaß, "Saul in En-Dor (1 Sam 28): Ein literarkritischer Versuch," *Die Welt des Orients* 42, no. 2 (2012): 153–85. However, the multiple interpretations of the woman's personality, the related terms, and necromantic functions do not seem relevant for the understanding of *‘ôb* in Isaiah 29:4, as explained further.

[22] Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew ‘Ôḇ," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 4 (December 1967): 401. Hoffner refers to the scholars who preceded him on this path.

[23] Hays and LeMon, "The Dead and Their Images," 1–2.

[24] Bar, "Saul and the Witch of Endor," 118.

out of the ground "*as* an *'ôb*." The whole KJV structure "as one that hath a familiar spirit" is the rendition of the single Hebrew noun *'ôb* agglutinated to the conjunction of comparison *ke*.[25] There is no indication that necromancy is eliciting the voice. There is no individual "possessor of an *'ôb*" such as the witch at Endor. A valuable argument comes from the Septuagint (LXX) as the closest benchmark for the original texts. In cases where *'ôb* is associated with necromancy, LXX renders the word by *eggastrimuthos*, "one that speaks from the stomach." Some scholars render it by *ventriloquist*—from a belief that the spirit of the dead houses in the medium's body.[26] For Isaiah 29:4, however, LXX does not use *eggastrimuthos*, but paraphrases to "and your voice will be as those speaking from out of the earth,"[27] where the more neutral *phonountes* (those speaking) avoids the terms associated with necromancy.[28] In contrast, Isaiah 8:19, reflected in 2 Nephi 18:19, uses *eggastrimuthos*. It makes the equivalence with Isaiah 29:4 and 2 Nephi 26:16, as posited by the translation guide, questionable (see earlier at footnote 14). It should be clear that *'ôb* as such is not inevitably linked to necromancy. Also noteworthy is that

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[25] Hebrew: כאוב (rendered as *kə·'ō·wḇ*).

[26] For a critical discussion of that choice, see Sofía Torallas Tovar and Anastasia Maravela-Solbakk, "Between Necromancers and Ventriloquists: The ἐγγαστρίμυθοι in the Septuaginta," *Sefarad* 61, no. 2 (2001): 419–38.

[27] Greek: "καὶ ἔσται ὡς οἱ φωνοῦντες ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἡ φωνή σου." See *Septuaginta, Volumen II*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstat, 1965), 602. The Greek sentence is identical in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[28] Otero discussed the widespread equation between *'ôb* and *eggastrimuthon* in more detail in their necromantic contexts, but recognized that the case of Isaiah 29:4 is problematic in that respect. See Otero, "Who Names the Namers?," 258–61.

cultural changes were transforming necromantic divination into mere soothsaying by means of a medium.[29]

The LXX authors were still close in time to the understanding of the Hebrew text. In contrast, the Vulgate, dating from the fourth century CE, is shaped by conceptual shifts stemming from Greek-Roman culture and by terms proper to the Greek New Testament. One term that came to render the concept of oracles—understood as prophetic or divinatory speaking—is the *pneuma pythona*, the spirit of python. For centuries, the Delphic Pythia had been standing as representative of women rendering oracles, with as mythological background the dragon-serpent Python. The *pneuma pythona*, or *python* as such, evolved to a generic name for having a spirit of divination. The term is suitably used in the New Testament Greek when Paul and Silas, walking in Philippi, are stalked by a young woman possessed with the *pneuma pythona* (Acts 16:16–18). In 1 Samuel 28 in the Vulgate, the witch of Endor, the woman having an *'ôb*, became a *mulier habens pythonem*—"a woman having a/the python." The voice in Isaiah 29:4 became *erit quasi pythonis de terra vox tua*—"like a/the python from the ground will be your voice." Overall, the generalized use of *python* for oracles and similar manifestations came to overshadow the necromantic perspective—the speaking spirit did not need to come from the dead.[30]

<T2HD>Mormon Commentators on Necromancy (or Not)

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[29] Tovar and Maravela-Solbakk, "Between Necromancers and Ventriloquists," 423.

[30] Otero noted: "It seems that Jerome combined two ways of rendering אוב, one applied to the practitioner, *magus*, another one to the involved spirit, *python*. Both of them seem to imply a distance from necromancy-specific ideas and a growing inclusion of generic divination terms." Otero, "Who Names the Namers?," 271.

<TXT>A number of Mormon exegetes and Hebraists, reading Isaiah 29 with Nephi in mind, do not accept the association with necromancy. Tvedtnes notes that "the Hebrew is best read as 'thy voice shall be as a ghost out of the ground'; it has nothing to do with spirit mediums."[31] Hoskisson treats the KJV translation of *'ôb* as *familiar spirit* in Isaiah 29:4 as nonnecromantic, supplementing it with a latter-day interpretation: speaking out of the ground as of one that hath a *familiar spirit* means "that destroyed Judah will speak from the dead, that is, from the records they left behind, the Old Testament, and without the aid of a medium. This has nothing to do with necromancy and divination."[32] Samuel Brown notes that "for the Latter-day Saints, spirits crying from the dust were prophets, lost ancestors, rather than ghoulish specters. Necromancy was a corruption of the miracle of seeric scripture in the Mormon view."[33]

Other authors, however, building on the necromantic sphere of *familiar spirit* in other biblical passages, tie the passage to necromancy, but in varied ways. Amanda Brown sees Isaiah 29:4 as "a compelling passage concerning necromancy" because the words *ghost*, *dust*, and *out of the ground* "are indicative of necromancy."[34] Webb sees in Nephi's movement "out of the

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[31] John A. Tvedtnes, "Book of Mormon Answers: 'Fulness of the gospel' and 'familiar spirit,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1997): 11.

[32] Paul Hoskisson, "Update: The 'Familiar Spirit' in 2 Nephi 26:16," *Insights* 28, no. 6 (2008), 7.

[33] Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 124.

[34] Amanda Colleen Brown, "Out of the Dust: An Examination of Necromancy as a Literary Construct in the Book of Mormon," *Studia Antiqua* 14, no. 2 (2016), 27–37. With reference to Amanda Brown, Book of Mormon Central (BMC) gives this commentary: "Isaiah's use of 'familiar spirit' clearly evokes the concept of necromancy or communicating with the dead . . . Yet the appropriateness and purpose of this communication, as well as how literal or figurative it may be, is less than clear in the text."

ground" a vision of resurrection mixed with necromancy: "They will rise up out of the ground, with the words emerging from the dust in a voice that will appear or be like that of a mystical séance—the necromancer who speaks with the dead."[35] Barney mentions the various meanings of *'ôb*, recognizes the KJV *familiar spirit* as "an unfortunate translation," and for Nephi's use of the phrase concludes that "the words of the Book will speak low out of the dust as a ghost called up from the netherworld," implying some necromancy.[36] Spencer correctly identifies the Jacobean *familiar spirit* as "an animal body," but adds "through which the spirits of the dead are made to speak in necromantic practices."[37] Harrell, with reference to Isaiah 29:4, states that *familiar spirit* "was an archaic way of referring to a necromancer or medium who communicates with the dead," and concludes for 2 Nephi 26:16 that "the Book of Mormon depicts Joseph Smith as being like one having a familiar spirit because, in a figurative sense, the deceased

BMC's further discussion tries to elucidate this alleged presence of necromancy. Discarding necromancy from the onset would be easier. See https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/knowhy/how-are-the-words-of-the-book-of-mormon-like-one-that-hath-a-familiar-spirit.

[35] Jenny Webb, "Slumbering Voices: Death and Textuality in Second Nephi," in *Reading Nephi Reading Isaiah: Reading 2 Nephi 26–27*, ed. Joseph M. Spencer and Jenny Webb (Salem, UT: Salt Press, 2011), 63–78.

[36] Kevin Barney, "As One that Hath a Familiar Spirit," October 18, 2007, https://bycommonconsent.com/2007/10/18/as-one-that-hath-a-familiar-spirit/.

[37] Joseph M. Spencer, *The Vision of All: Twenty-Five Lectures on Isaiah in Nephi's Record* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016), 259. The animal identification is discussed further, as well as the nonuse of these for necromancy.

ancient inhabitants of America would speak through him."[38] Bowen identifies "as of one that hath a familiar spirit," "as one channeling an ancestral spirit from the spirit world."[39]

Non-KJV Bible Translations

The various terms related to spirits and mediums in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, with their inherent ambiguities and dependence on context, have posed numerous challenges to translators in modern languages. For the English versions preceding the KJV, Wycliffe's Bible was written in Middle English towards the end of the fourteenth century. While based on the Vulgate, it does not use the python idiom, perhaps because the idiom had lost its significance in the vernacular. The witch of Endor became "a woman having a fiend speaking in the womb," the young woman at Philippi "had a spirit of divination," and the voice in Isaiah 29:4 was "as the voice of a dead man raised up by conjuring"—which in this case brings necromancy to the foreground as Wycliffe's interpretation of the Vulgate Latin *quasi pythonis de terra vox tua*. Next Erasmus, Tyndale, and others revolutionized Bible translations by turning to other sources than the Vulgate. Their work nourished the Reformation. New translations also reflected the culture of the times. Both the Coverdale Bible of 1535 (based on Tyndale's groundwork) and the Bishops' Bible of 1568 rendered the phrase in Isaiah 29:4 as "like the voice of a witch," which reflects the

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[38] Charles R. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 50–51.

[39] Matthew L. Bowen, "'And the Meek Also Shall Increase': The Verb Yāsap in Isaiah 29 and Nephi's Prophetic Allusions to the Name Joseph in 2 Nephi 25–30," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 30 (2018), 9.

Endor pericope and is indicative of the growing attention to witches in sixteenth-century England. The Geneva Bible of 1560 chose for "like him that has a spirit of divination."[40]

All modern English Bible translations, with their renewed attention to the Hebrew sources, saw no reason for a divinatory or necromantic interpretation in Isaiah 29:4 and reduced the comparison to *ghost* or *spirit*: "like the voice of a ghost" (New Revised Standard Version); "ghostlike from the earth" (New International Version); "like a ghost's from the earth" (Common English Bible); "like that of a spirit from the ground" (New American Standard Bible); and "that of a ghost from the earth" (New American Bible Revised Edition). In other European languages, a sampling of Bible translations in Danish, Dutch, French, German, and Spanish from the 1400s up to now revealed a similar disparity in the oldest versions, while the more recent versions move toward "the voice of a spirit" or "a ghostly voice."

<T1HD>The KJV's *Familiar Spirit*: A Witch's Demonic Pet
<TXT>Since the KJV use of *familiar spirit* is so distinctive, the following takes a closer look at the historical context in which it came to be introduced in the KJV in 1611 and at the antecedents of the phrase. Indeed, the preparation of the KJV between 1604 and 1611 happened at a time imbued with demonology, witchcraft, and familiar spirits. King James himself wrote a *Daemonologie*, first published in 1597 and reprinted in 1603 when he ascended the throne of

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[40] On the other hand, in the Endor pericope in Samuel 28, the Geneva Bible identifies the woman as "a woman that hath a familiar spirite,"**{AU: typo or sic? sic}** with Saul asking "counsel of a familiar spirit." It illustrates how the phrase was already popular in 1560 and convenient to render the established understanding of the python-woman in the LXX and Vulgate translations. See also footnote 102.

England. His views contributed not only to the persecution (and later exoneration) of witches, but also to the choice of new terms in the KJV.

<T2HD>The Historical Context

<TXT>In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, concerns over witchcraft came and went in waves in European cities and regions. Witches could be men or women, but women became a preferred target. In continental Europe, witchcraft cases—often tied to accusations of heresy—were handled by local or regional church or civil authorities. In England, however, witchcraft became a matter of national criminal justice, with a "relatively advanced conception of due process of law."[41] Royal acts to condemn witchcraft were passed in 1542 and 1563, with punishments ranging from imprisonment to death. In 1604, one year after King James's accession to the English throne and the very year he commissioned a new Bible translation, a new and harsher act was passed.[42] The first listed crime was to "consult, covenant with, entertain, imploy, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit." Through a pact with Satan, a witch could perform *maleficium*, an enchanted action to harm other people. Accusing someone of witchcraft allowed angry neighbors or rivals to impute whatever misfortune to whomever they considered responsible. The 1604 act would last till 1735.

What made English cases so peculiar was the prime position given to the witch's *familiar spirit*, shortened to his or her *familiar*. Walker calls familiars "a famously distinct feature of

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[41] Elliott P. Currie, "Crimes without Criminals: Witchcraft and Its Control in Renaissance Europe," *Law and Society Review* 3, no. 1 (August 1968): 11.

[42] For the texts of the various acts, see https://statutes.org.uk/site/witchcraft-acts/.

English witch beliefs,"[43] Mendez "one of the most idiosyncratic concepts of English witchcraft folklore,"[44] and Leddy "a phenomenon unique to early modern English witchcraft."[45] These familiars are "minor demons who, at Satan's command, become the servants of a human wizard or witch. It is one of the distinctive features of English witchcraft that these spirits were very often thought to take the form of small animals, such as would be found around farms and homes; some witches claimed to have received them directly from the devil, others from a relative or friend."[46] Other definitions of the English witch's *familiar* concur. In Early Modern English,[47] a *familiar* as noun is defined as "a spirit, often taking the form of an animal, which obeys and assists a witch or other person."[48] Damsma identifies it as "a domesticated demon which usually comes in the guise of an animal and assists the witch."[49] Millar states that in

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[43] Garthine Walker, "The Strangeness of the Familiar: Witchcraft and the Law in Early Modern England," in *The Extraordinary and the Everyday in Early Modern England*, ed. Angela McShane and Garthine Walker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 111.

[44] Agustin Mendez, "The Problem of Demonic Corporeality in Early Modern England: Thomas Aquinas, Demonology, and Witchcraft Folkloric Ideas (c. 1587–1648)," *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 18, no. 1 (2021), 153.

[45] Gabriela Garcia Leddy, "'One May Be an Imp as Well as Another': The Familiar Spirit in Early Modern English Witchcraft Pamphlets" (PhD diss., University of York, 2016), 2.

[46] Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud, "Familiars," in *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118.

[47] As a language stage, Early Modern English covers the period from the end of the fifteenth century to the second half of the seventeenth century.

[48] *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), s.v. "familiar," A3a, attested in 1583 in a sermon on Deuteronomy: "A Sorcerer, or a charmer, or [he] that asketh Counsell at spirites that are called familiars."

[49] Alinda Damsma, "Another Royal Encounter for the Woman of Endor," *Hebrew Studies* 62 (2021): 163.

English witchcraft narratives, "the Devil most commonly appeared as a small domestic animal known as a familiar spirit."[50] Sometimes adopting a human form, most familiars appeared as a common animal living with the witch—cats, dogs, pigeons, flies, toads, and more.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE>

True, a witch's companion is also attested in other parts of Europe, but in England the detailed descriptions of the bizarre physical and emotional bonds between a witch and a variety of familiars stand out.[51] Almond synopsizes: "Where European witches were demonic lovers, English witches were demonic mothers"; continental witches copulated with Satan, while English witches fed their familiars with their blood and milk.[52] What made familiars so important in English witch trials was the evidence they provided to prosecutors. How a *maleficium* had caused harm to someone was difficult to prove. But since the *familiar* had been seen in bizarre relations with the witch and usually had left one or more specific marks on the witch's body, the so-called teats, such proofs could be convincing in court.

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[50] Charlotte-Rose Millar, "Over-Familiar Spirits: The Bonds between English Witches and Their Devils," in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, ed. Laura Kounine and Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 173.

[51] For a description of the multiple relations between witches and demonic pets, including their increasing monstrosity over time, see Francesca Matteoni, "Familiar Spirits: Blood, Soul and the Animal Form in Early Modern England," in *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication*, ed. Éva Pócs (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 79–89.

[52] Philip C. Almond, *The Devil: A New Biography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 138. Almond adds: "Or perhaps rather, in the English context the sexual, the maternal and the demonic were complexly interwoven."

<T2HD>Tracing the Antecedents of the KJV's *Familiar Spirit*

<TXT>For etymology, *familiar* comes from the Latin *familiaris*—partly via the French *familier*—in the Roman tradition to define *familia* as a broad social entity, including slaves.[53] In Middle English, the noun *a familiar*, attested since the 1200s, refers to "a member of a household, such as a retainer or servant."[54] Since the 1400s, *a familiar* is also applied to "a close friend or associate; a person whom one knows well."[55] Used as adjective, *familiar*—next to its still active meanings of *close*, *intimate*, or *accustomed*—then also indicated "belonging to, or relating to one's household or family."[56] As explained further, the word was also used in a religious context, contiguous with the tradition of the *lares familiares*, the Roman household gods, which were still discussed in medieval and Renaissance treatises.[57]

For the specific meaning of the *familiar* as a devil morphed into a corporeal apparition and related to a witch, researchers point to various antecedents, with controversies over which had the greatest impact: classic beliefs in accompanying spirits, patristic and scholastic

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[53] *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford Scholarly Editions Online), s.v. "familia."

[54] *Middle English Dictionary* (University of Michigan Library), s.v. "familier, familiar."

[55] OED, s.v "familiar," A2a.

[56] OED, s.v. "familiar," BI2a.

[57] See Rex Delno Barnes III, "Haunting Matters: Demonic Infestation in Northern Europe, 1400–1600" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2019), 2, 121–33. For more on *lares familiares*, see Harriet I. Flower, *The Dancing Lares and the Serpent in the Garden: Religion at the Roman Street Corner* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

demonology, folk beliefs, or popular pamphlets on witches. We enter a world where a profusion of broad and narrow terms overlap, too many to disentangle and define here.[58]

The Beliefs in Accompanying Spirits

The belief that humans are surrounded by invisible forces or beings is found in all ancient cultures. More specific is the belief that each human has an accompanying spirit. From the classical era comes Socrates's personal *daimon*, the assistant spirit or *genius*. Plato portrayed it as a still voice that inspired Socrates and forewarned him of dangers. Since then, the nature of Socrates's daimon has been vastly discussed—from being common wisdom, or internal rationalism, to the workings of the Holy Ghost.[59] Philo Judaeus (c. 20 BCE–c. 50 CE) explored the divine *pneuma* that moved biblical figures to their prophecies and interpretation of dreams. Philo came to see it as an angelic being, individually assigned.[60]

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[58] For overviews of terms, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Deborah Willis, "Magic and Witchcraft," in *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney and Thomas Warren Hoppe (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), 170–81.

[59] Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, *On the Daimonion of Socrates: Plutarch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); John Partridge, "Socrates, Rationality, and the Daimonion," *Ancient Philosophy* 28, no. 2 (2008): 285–309.

[60] John R. Levison, "The Prophetic Spirit as an Angel According to Philo," *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 2 (April 1995): 189–207.

Related is the belief since antiquity that each individual is accompanied by two spirits, a good and an evil one.[61] This concept of two dueling spiritual forces became part of Judeo-Christian traditions.[62] Early Christian and medieval monastic writings describe the struggle of individuals, wedged between their *spiritus bonus* and *spiritus malus*, sometimes represented as an angel and a demon hovering around them.[63] In post-classical Latin, a guardian angel was called an *angelus familiaris*, which transferred into English as *familiar angel*, attested since the middle of the fifteenth century, together with its counterpart *familiar devil*, defined as "a demon who associates with or is under the power of a person."[64] Such beliefs and terms facilitated the step to *the familiar* as the evil companion of a witch.

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[61] For authors who interpreted the phenomenon of the dual spirits before it reached the Renaissance, see D. T. Starnes, "The Figure Genius in the Renaissance," *Studies in the Renaissance* 11 (1964): 234–44.

[62] Rein Ferwerda, "Two Souls. Origen's and Augustine's Attitude toward the Two Souls Doctrine. Its Place in Greek and Christian Philosophy," *Vigiliae Christianae* 37, no. 4 (December 1983): 360–78; C. G. Stroumsa and Paula Fredriksen, "The Two Souls and the Divided Will," in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 198–217.

[63] David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jean-Patrice Boudet, Philippe Faure, and Christian Renoux, eds., *De Socrate à Tintin: Anges gardiens et démons familiers de l'Antiquité à nos jours* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019).

[64] OED, s.v "familiar," C2. *Familiar angel* is attested c1425, *familiar devil* in 1464.

<T3HD>Patristic and Scholastic Demonology: How Demons Can Turn into Animals

<TXT>The biblical mentions of angels and demons nourished a voluminous Judeo-Christian literature as to their nature and activities. Overall, the devil and his demons were defined as fallen angels: they chose their condition. In patristic writings, the classical Greek and Roman *daemones*, originally seen as positive spiritual entities, became literally "demonized" as Satanic counterfeits of pagan cultures. Augustine's thorough discussion of demons greatly affected the later debates.[65] Various philosophical and religious traditions, also conveyed by Arab treatises, carried the discussion on angels and demons into the late Middle Ages.

Fundamental was the contribution of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). In contrast to Augustine, who saw angels and demons as corporeal beings composed of "airy" material, Aquinas defined them as totally immaterial. But since biblical passages affirm that angels and devils appeared to humans and conversed with them, Aquinas conceived the ontology of the immaterial being who can simulate whatever body from condensed air.[66] Thus the devil can appear visibly "in some kind of species."[67] The serpent in Eden is the prime example. The devil

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[65] Benjamin W. McCraw, "Augustine and Aquinas on the Demonic," in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, ed. Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp (London: Routledge, 2017), 23–38; Gregory D. Wiebe, "Demons in the Theology of Augustine" (PhD diss., McMaster University, 2015); N. Zarotiadis, "Religious Conflict with the Demons According to St Augustine," *Theology & Culture* 3 (September 2021): 27–34.

[66] *Summa Theologiae* I, Quaestio 51, Articulus 2, h. http://summa-theologiae.org/.

[67] *De malo*, Quaestio 3, Articulus 4. **{AU : do you have a URL for this citation ?}**
https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/qdm02.html

and his minions can fabricate and discard bodies—*in aliqua specie*—as needed.[68] Aquinas thus gave a natural and theological foundation to assertions that the devil could transform into a human or an animal, and appear and vanish at will. According to Mendez, Aquinas's "theorizations about angels and demons are considered as one of the intellectual foundations of Early Modern European witch-hunts."[69] Aquinas's influence was vast, through the Dominican order to which he belonged and through the emerging medieval universities where demonology was part of the sciences taught.[70] The Bible supported the demonic connection with animals, beginning with the serpent in Eden. Demons beg Jesus, about to cast them out of two men, to send them instead into a herd of pigs. The devil is ubiquitous in the beasts in John's Revelation.[71] Medieval and Renaissance iconography, a main source of information for the public at large, produced a wide range of diabolical creatures with animal traits.

Although protestant reformers fiercely opposed Catholic "irrational" essentials such as transubstantiation, elaborate rituals, and miracles associated with saints, overall, they kept

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[68] This phenomenon is therefore not the same as taking possession of an existing body. See Seamus O'Neill, "Augustine and Aquinas on Demonic Possession: Theoria and Praxis," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 90 (2016): 133–47.

[69] Mendez, "The Problem of Demonic Corporeality in Early Modern England," 143.

[70] Jan Machielsen, ed., *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 2020). See also the parts on Aquinas in Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Angels and Demons: A Catholic Introduction* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

[71] Pieter G. R. De Villiers, "Prime Evil and Its Many Faces in the Book of Revelation," *Neotestamentica* 34, no. 1 (2000): 57–85.

demonology in their belief system. Cambers demonstrates the "coherence and pervasiveness of Protestant forms of magic," in particular in matters of demonic possession and exorcism.[72]

<T3HD>Folk Beliefs

<TXT>Some authors favor the viewpoint that "the familiar spirit stemmed from popular English beliefs rather than the beliefs of prominent theologians."[73] Beliefs about the relations between humans and animals date back to time immemorial. More specific for our topic is the Christian tradition of associating an individual with an animal. Next to Jesus's lamb or dove, Mark's lion, Luke's ox, and John's eagle, saints are depicted with their familiar animal, stemming from a specific event in their lives, such as Saint Jerome's lion or Saint Werburgha's goose. The famed thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea* mentions more than four hundred cases of saints associated with animals.[74] In the sphere of evil and demons, a parallel representation brought animals to the

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[72] Andrew Cambers, "Demonic Possession, Literacy and 'Superstition' in Early Modern England," *Past & Present* 202, no. 1 (February 2009): 35. See also Amy G. Tan, "Resisting the Devil: The Case of Edward Dynham (1626) and Options for English Protestant Dispossession," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 19, no. 2 (2017): 135–53. Note that demonic possession was viewed as the result of *maleficium* by a witch. Overall, the "possessed" person was considered innocent. See Levack, "Possession," 1614–15. **{AU: please provide a complete citation here as you have not sourced this title before.} Brian P. Levack, "Possession, Witchcraft, and the Law in Jacobean England,"** *Washington and Lee Law Review* **52, no. 5 (1995): 1613-1642.**

[73] Jason Lee, "The Role of the Familiar Spirit in the Glanville-Webster Witchcraft Debate," *Rice Historical Review* 6 (Spring 2021): 48–73.

[74] Lucille Guilbert, "L'animal dans la Iégende dorée," in *Legenda Aurea, sept siècles de diffusion*, ed. Brenda Dunn-Lardeau (Montreal: Bellarmin, 1986), 77–94. See also Ante Skrobonja et al., "Domestic Animals as Symbols and Attributes in Christian Iconography: Some Examples from Croatian Sacral Art," *Veterinarni Medicina-Praha* 46, no. 4 (2001): 101–7.

side of archetypal wrongdoers, what Sax calls the "demonization" of the friendly, "grateful animals."[75] For its surfacing in popular accounts, authors point to the severe persecution of independent Christian sects in the High Middle Ages. Persecutors' fantasies delivered stories of secret nocturnal conventions with a bestial Satan, orgies, and the burning of children born from those unions.[76] In 1233, a papal bull issued by Pope Gregory IX describes how at such heretical meetings "Satan would appear as a black cat, or as a frog or toad, or as a furry man."[77] By the fourteenth century, the idea had become popular "of a witch's familiar, a spirit that lives with him, follows him, and gives him advice and magical aid."[78] And "in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, heretics ceded to witches as the dominant interest of ecclesiastics."[79] The familiar was now well connected to the witch, man or woman.

Some authors point to a less evil origin in popular beliefs. Among others, Wilby draws attention to the widespread practitioners of magic or "cunning folk" who act as healers, divine

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[75] Boria Sax, "The Magic of Animals: English Witch Trials in the Perspective of Folklore," *Anthrozoös* 22, no. 4 (2009): 317–32.

[76] Heinrich Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages*, *1000–1200* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 34–37; Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe*, *950–1250* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley and Sons, 2008), 11–25; Jeffrey Richards, "Heretics," in *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 42–73.

[77] Norman Cohn, "The Myth of Satan and His Human Servants," in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. Mary Douglas (repr., New York: Routledge, 2004), 9.

[78] Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 187.

[79] Christine Caldwell Ames, *Righteous Persecution: Inquisition, Dominicans, and Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 10.

the future, find lost objects, stir to fall in love, and more, with supernatural help. Wilby connects

that help to Shamanistic traditions that conjure up spirits and to the world of fairies and

hobgoblins—household helper spirits, solitary creatures then also part of popular beliefs. At the

service of "cunning folk," such creatures could also act maliciously to harm people, hence,

another source for the emergence of the witch's familiar.[80] The more elite magicians—

alchemists and astrologers—were "frequently alleged to operate with the assistance of a demonic

spirit."[81] Though their activities were overall tolerated, often even seen as beneficial, if a harmful

action was suspected, it made their attendant animal a Satanic familiar.[82]

<T3HD>Popular Pamphlets

<TXT>Beliefs in accompanying spirits, patristic and scholastic demonology, and folk beliefs no

doubt helped to fashion the familiar, but these factors also played out elsewhere in Europe.

Therefore, to explain the sudden popularity and precise meaning of the witch's familiar since the

middle of the sixteenth century in England, some authors consider the pamphlets on witchcraft as

the main cause. Millar cites various analysts who are of this opinion.[83] Pamphlets, cheap and

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[80] Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2005); Emma Wilby, "The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland," *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (October 2000): 283–305.

[81] James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 71.

[82] For a comparison of English *familiar spirits* as animals with related incidences around the globe, see the chapter "Witches and Animals," in Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 262–78, 340–44.

[83] Millar, "Over-Familiar Spirits," 173–89.

only a few pages long, belonged to the street literature, "a subset of the literature of 'strange news,' stories of monstrous, prodigious or disastrous occurrences."[84] Immensely popular as a news source, they were the sensationalist entertainment of the time and "stories of demonic animals would sell."[85] Of the many preserved English witchcraft pamphlets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nearly all tell of the witches' relation with the devil in animal form. Leddy's analysis of the 297 familiars described in English witchcraft pamphlets from 1566 to 1693 shows the complex interplay of both demonological and folkloric beliefs, anxieties about the boundaries between man and beast, and ideas about gender roles and the function of religion.[86]

What about necromancy? There was a general consensus that spirits coming into the proximity of people or entering bodies were devils, not spirits of deceased people. In Catholicism the latter had their own realms, in heaven, in hell, or in purgatory. As Cooper-Frost notes, demons who pretended to be the souls of the dead were considered machinations of the devil. For Protestant theologians, "any ghostly spirits that walked the earth were just that, spirits, and were to be understood as evil spirits and messengers of the Devil, not as the souls of departed

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[84] Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 145.

[85] Millar, "Over-Familiar Spirits," 174.

[86] Leddy, "'One May Be an Imp as Well as Another.'"

humans."[87] No *familiar spirit* in Millar's detailed studies or in Leddy's vast inventory refers to the spirit of a dead person.[88]

<T2HD>King James, Witchcraft, and KJV Language

<TXT>Towards the end of the sixteenth century, a handful of authors engaged in more thorough evaluations of witchcraft: was it real or should it be debunked as superstition? The latter was the opinion of Reginald Scot who published his *Discovery of Witchcraft* in 1584.[89] In 1597, King James (then still James VI of Scotland) published his *Daemonologie*, as an explicit refutation of Reginald Scot's work.[90] James, a prolific writer, had been personally involved in witch trials in Scotland.[91] In 1603, when he ascended to the throne of England, his book was reprinted. The next year he commissioned a new translation of the Bible.

<INSERT FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE>

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[87] Julianne Siudowski Cooper-Forst, "To Rend and Teare the Bodies of Men: Theology and the Body in Demonic Possession; France, England, and Puritan America, 1550–1700" (PhD diss., University of New Hampshire, 1992). The reference to Aquinas: *Summa Theologica*, Part. 1, Qn. 117, Art. 4.

[88] In literature, however, and particularly in theatre, the rising of spirits from the dead was a common theme. See John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Barbara H. Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984).

[89] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584; replica, North Chelmsford, MA: Courier, 1989).

[90] *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogue* (Edinburgh: Robert Walde-graue, 1597; Project Gutenberg E-book 25929, 2008), 128. For quotes in this article, spelling has been modernized.

[91] See Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, ed., *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000).

Daemonologie provides insight in an abundant terminology of the period, with numerous references to the Bible and to Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. The extent of King James's opinions on the KJV translators is difficult to determine, but some aspects are striking. The Hebrew words for practitioners of the occult, who are repeatedly condemned in the Torah, have challenged translators since the LXX. For example, the Vulgate rendered the Hebrew *yidde'onî* by four different words: *divinis*, *incator*, *hariolis*, and *magos*.[92] Pre-KJV Bible translations named occult practitioners *charmers*, *clepers of devils*, *conjurors*, *diviners*, *enchanters*, *hearkeners to devils*, *soothsayers*, *sorcerers*, *tellers of fortunes*, and *witches*.[93] The reason for this diversity is that translators chose terms that "specify those people in their social system who they felt resorted to similar occult means and against whom they could now use the translated Bible as a religious weapon to strike them down."[94] However, these pre-KJV translations never used *magician* or *wizard*. Up to 1550, these two terms applied to "wise men"—pious guardians of covert knowledge, practitioners of beneficial "white witchcraft," or "cozeners who trick simple folk into believing they do natural magic."[95] They were tolerated, if not appreciated. But in 1597, King James's *Daemonologie* put the magicians squarely in the group that "consults with the Devil, plainly prohibited," and thus deserves the death penalty. One of their attributes is "their familiar spirit."[96] Though *Daemonologie* does not mention *wizard*, a similar semantic overhaul struck the

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[92] Based on their roots and contextual use, these could be rendered in English by *diviner*, *enchanter*, *fortune teller*, and *magician*, but a precise equivalency, given different eras, is not possible.

[93] Listed in Jeffers, "The Cultural Power of Words," 254–61.

[94] David H. Darst and Steven L. Jeffers, "Wizards and Magicians in the King James Old Testament," *Seventeenth Century* 6, no. 1 (1991): 2.

[95] Ibid., 6.

[96] *Daemonologie*, 2 [xiii], 24 [029].

term. The connotation of "wise man" for *wizard* shifted to "skilled in occult arts" and next to "a man who practices witchcraft."[97] The KJV translators made *wizards* and *magicians* their prime occult practitioners—two words that none of the preceding Bible translations had used.[98] Darst and Jeffers demonstrate "that the major reason was sociopolitical, with the goal of anathematising these two popular folkloric kinds of occult tradesmen from English culture as the earlier Bibles had tried to anathematise all the other occult figures."[99]

To the targeted group are added those "with a familiar spirit." The KJV translators consistently chose *wizard* for the Hebrew *yidde'onî*.[100] Since *yidde'onî* is always paired with *'ôb*, the KJV adds *familiar spirit* in each instance. Wizards and those who deal "with familiar spirits" are always named in one breath.[101] The KJV is the first Bible to introduce the denunciation of "them that have familiar spirits" or "consulters with familiar spirits" in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, thus legally sentencing them together with magicians and wizards.[102] We may

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[97] OED, s.v. *wizard*, A1 and A2a. Note that over time, a positive connotation came to prevail again, "a man who 'does wonders' in his profession" (A2b).

[98] Checked through the search functions in Early Modern English Bibles at https://studybible.info/. Darst and Jeffers ("Wizards and Magicians," 3) noted: "Of all the occult practitioners mentioned in the Bible, the ones that appear most often in the King James version are wizard (eleven times), magician (twelve), soothsayer (five), sorcerer (three), and witch (seven)." Other professions the KJV mentions are *astrologers*, *charmers*, *diviners*, and *enchanters*.

[99] Darst and Jeffers, "Wizards and Magicians," 4.

[100] The various interpretations of the meaning of *yidde'onî* would lead us too far here. Extensive Hebraic and exegetical studies discuss the term.

[101] See Jeffers, "The Cultural Power of Words," 17–20, for the complete list in the KJV.

[102] The first Bible to refer to occult practitioners with "a familiar spirit" is the Geneva Bible (1560), not in the legal denunciations in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, nor in Isaiah, but only in three

assume that seventeenth-century readers of the KJV in England, conditioned by decades of stories, pamphlets, illustrations, and witch trials, visualized such *familiars* or *familiar spirits* as demonic pets.

Time would erode that meaning. Critical studies of the KJV revealed the inaptness of *familiar spirit* as translation. As early as 1816, prominent biblical scholar John Hewlett notes that the KJV's *familiar spirit* has no corresponding word in the Hebrew, Greek, or Latin text. He concludes that only "the absurd doctrine of witchcraft" of the period and King James's "undue influence" made the KJV translators introduce the term *familiar spirit*. For its use in Isaiah 29:4—"a voice as one that hath a familiar spirit"—Hewlett is categorical: "The unnecessary and improper introduction of a 'familiar spirit' into this passage throws a shade of darkness over it, and renders the meaning unintelligible."[103]

<T1HD>In the Context of the Restoration

<TXT>This section looks at the development in America. I only touch briefly on how the meaning of *familiar spirit* evolved in the two hundred years since the arrival of Protestant

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specific events: Saul's visit to the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:7–8; 1 Chr. 10:13), King Manasseh's idolatry (2 Kgs 21:6; 2 Chr. 33:6), and Josiah's repression (2 Kgs 23:24). The Bishops' Bible of 1568 has the same occurrences. It illustrates that by 1560 the concept of *familiar spirit* was tied to the occult, but it is not certain if it already invoked the narrower connotation of the demonic domestic animal. The earlier Coverdale Bible (1535) does not use *familiar spirit*, nor does the Catholic Douay-Rheims Bible (Old Testament published in 1609 and 1610), showing that the Catholics did not identify with the Reformation's terminology.

[103] John Hewlett, *Commentaries and Annotations on the Holy Scriptures* (London: Longman, 1816), 498.

immigrants. The main topic here is how Joseph Smith, his revision of the Bible, and the Book of Mormon gave *familiar spirit* a new meaning in the context of the Restoration. Also, a closer look at Nephi's text, related to "familiar spirit," which states that "for the Lord will give unto him power," deserves attention as a refutation of necromancy. Finally, I observe that a necromantic interpretation tends to sustain the magical worldview of the origins of Mormonism.

<T2HD>The Evolving Meaning of *Familiar Spirit* in America

<TXT>English Protestant immigrants brought the KJV and their Jacobean understanding of familiar spirits to America.[104] The early colonists persisted in considering witchcraft a crime. In practice, cases were relatively few and judges often acquitted the accused for lack of solid proof. Two periods formed the exception: 1662–63, and the "Salem hysteria" in 1692–93.[105] In England meanwhile, the Enlightenment led to the 1735 Witchcraft act that forbade lawsuits for alleged witchcraft. In the American colonies, legislation struggled with such an overhaul. As people continued to impute their misfortunes to neighbors and rivals, accusations of witchcraft kept

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[104] For the introduction of the KJV in America, see Brian C. Wilson, "KJV in the USA: The Impact of the King James Bible in America," in *The Critique of Religion and Religion's Critique*, ed. Dustin J. Byrd (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 261–78.

[105] The literature on these developments is vast and beyond the scope of this article. I consulted John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997); Herbert Allan Leventhal, "In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1973); Timothy J. McMillan, "Black Magic: Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England," *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 1 (September 1994): 99–117.

occurring. For magistrates, simply rejecting such as superstition and exonerating the accused would go against scripture. It resulted in ambivalent trials as people could level one of two charges against alleged occult practitioners: either accuse them of actual witchcraft or of deception by pretense. In the 1820s, young Joseph Smith found himself part of such an imbroglio, both by his involvement in questionable treasure seeking and by his claims of spiritual manifestations.[106]

By the 1800s, the specific Early Modern English meaning of *familiar spirit* had waned. Davies, who documented America's "witchcraft after Salem," acknowledges familiars as part of a distinctively English witchcraft tradition, but it "was not a major theme in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American witchcraft belief, though it cropped up from time to time in disputes."[107] In books of the period, the phrase *familiar spirit* became mainly confined to citations and commentaries on the Bible and on former occult practices.[108] A *familiar spirit* could now be understood as an internal spirit of divination or an invisible Socratic companion.[109]

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[106] Manuel W. Padro, "Cunning and Disorderly: Early Nineteenth-Century Witch Trials of Joseph Smith," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 35–70.

[107] Owen Davies, *America Bewitched: The Story of Witchcraft after Salem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90.

[108] My assessment is based on the hundreds of book results from Google Ngrams for *familiar spirit* in American texts for each of the decades between 1820 and 1900. Overall, the frequency declines. I recognize that further research could refine the results, but the overall trend is evident.

[109] Published in New York in 1827, one Methodist-Episcopal book described how Paul and Simon, stalked by the young woman at Philippi, acted by "their dispossessing this woman of her familiar spirit." Adam Clark, *A Collection of Discourses on Various Subjects* (New York: Bangs and Emory, 1827), 39. In Jonathan Scott's long poem *The Sorceress*, published in New York in 1817, the *familiar spirit* is an invisible, friendly spirit. **{AU: can you**

True, magic and cunning-folk traditions endured, also in early Mormonism, but a *familiar spirit* in the Jacobean tradition of a witch's demonic pet is not identified as part of them.[110]

Witchcraft trials continued well into the nineteenth century, but the focus turned to pretense and fraud in new phenomena, such as spiritualism, mesmerism, and hypnotism. Noteworthy is that in the 1850s and 60s a few church leaders applied the biblical condemnations of "those that have familiar spirits" to such phenomena.[111]

<T2HD>Joseph Smith and the Meaning of *Familiar Spirits*

<TXT>Even as connotations evolved in the vernacular, people still read the KJV with the same 1611 phraseology that condemned "consulters of familiar spirits." As Joseph Smith encountered *familiar spirits* in the KJV, his revision of the Bible—known as the Joseph Smith Translation (JST)—is therefore revealing. He did not change any of the condemnations related to *familiar spirits* in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. However, in the Endor pericope in 1 Samuel 28, where the

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please source this poem in a book.} Jonathan M. Scott, *The Sorceress: Or, Salem Delivered. A Poem, in Four Cantos* (New York: C. Baldwin, 1817)

[110] John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1998); Jonathan A. Stapley, *The Power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 105–24. The closest association with a familiar spirit as an animal comes from the distorted representation of Moroni as a black toad transforming into a spirit. See Manuel Padro, "Cunning Distortions: Folk Christianity and Witchcraft Allegations in Early Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 49, no. 1 (2023): 1–42.

[111] Parley P. Pratt, April 6, 1853, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:43; Brigham Young, May 31, 1863, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:194.

'*ôb* of the witch, translated as *familiar spirit*, is a central component, he altered the text significantly. At the onset of her encounter with Saul, the woman says that her life is endangered by being approached as one that has a *familiar spirit*—"wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" Joseph Smith lengthened the sentence with a denial, "wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die *also who hath not a familiar spirit*?" She thus seems to deflect the reprehensible trait,[112] while still being able to act transcendentally. If so, Joseph Smith makes her a legitimate spokesperson endowed with divine power. Indeed, in nineteenth-century Mormonism, during its creative exploration of theology and eschatology, the witch at Endor came to be seen as a righteous prophetess, even as the (plural) wife of Samuel.[113]

The next JST changes accentuate the verbal revelation of the woman, rather than the necromantic. The italics denote Joseph Smith's additions: "Then said the woman, *The word of* whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up *the word* of Samuel. And when the woman saw *the words of* Samuel, she cried with a loud voice . . . And the woman said unto Saul, I saw *the words of* Samuel ascending out of the earth." Though the text also suggests a visual encounter between Saul and Samuel, Joseph Smith's addition of *words* "ascending out of the earth" is reminiscent of the voice speaking "out of the ground" in Isaiah 29:4 and 2 Nephi 26:16,

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[112] The interpretation could go two ways, pending a comma pause before or after *also*. In "to die also, (me) who hath no familiar spirit," the woman seems to deny having such a spirit. In "to die, also who has no familiar spirit," as a rhetorical exclamation, it may imply that everyone has or can have a *familiar spirit*. In both cases, a punishment is therefore not warranted. The second possibility is perhaps reinforced by the next verse, identical in the KJV and the JST, when Saul tells the woman: "There shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing."

[113] See Christopher James Blythe, "The Prophetess of Endor: Reception of 1 Samuel 28 in Nineteenth-Century Mormon History," *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 4, no. 1 (2017): 43–70.

as well as of Book of Mormon figures who announce their words will once speak "from the dust" (2 Ne. 33:13; Morm. 8:23). Moreover, the woman "saw the words," which implies that the revelatory "speaking" was in writing, such as Joseph Smith reading his revelations with the help of a seer stone.

<T2HD>Interpretations of Identity in Isaiah 29:4 and 2 Nephi 26:16

<TXT>Joseph Smith did not change Isaiah 29:4 in the JST, leaving "a voice as one that hath a familiar spirit" intact, though he changed the rest of the chapter substantially.[114] However, Nephi's use of the phrase in 2 Nephi 26:16 continues with a significant addition: "Their voice shall be as one that hath a familiar spirit; *for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them.*" A short syntactic analysis is called for here. At the end of the addition, in *concerning them*, the plural pronoun refers to those whom Nephi had identified in the previous verse "as my seed and the seed of my brethren"—their descendants. But they are viewed as one entity, as expressed in *their voice*, moreover reinforced by the comparison *as one*. In *the Lord God will give unto him power*, the pronoun *him* can have as antecedent *their voice*, *one*, or *familiar spirit*. In the comparison, *voice* is the head word, but the masculine *him* points more to *one* or *spirit*. *One* is the antecedent of the relative clause *that hath a familiar spirit*, implying two entities: the one and his *familiar spirit*. But both remain an outsider as only used for comparison: ultimately, it is the voice that *may whisper*. Telling is the expressed action: the causal subordinate *for the Lord will give unto him power*, followed by the purposive subordinate *that he may whisper*, implies that the recipient is worthy to receive divine power. In that sense

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[114] See for this revision, Cloward, "Isaiah 29 and the Book of Mormon," 227–30. Also, Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1982), 268–77.

any demonic or necromantic attributes would be misapplied. The *him* is a precious ally to bring valuable knowledge to the surface. As Wright phrased it: "Thus a passage, which in its original context had a completely negative connotation—in terms of suffering and the ghostly metaphors used—becomes a prophecy of blessing and revelation."[115]

In "for the Lord will give unto him power," the pronoun *him* as a male person has seen various interpretations, each tied to a person involved in speaking "from the dust." A plausible case can be made that *him* refers to Joseph Smith.[116] He was most instrumental in producing and publishing the Book of Mormon. The book itself sustains that interpretation. Only a few chapters after Nephi's reference to the *familiar spirit*, in a blessing given to his youngest son, Joseph, Lehi refers to a former prophecy by Joseph, son of Jacob (2 Ne. 3:1–16). This Joseph of old predicted the coming of a "choice seer" who would have the same name, as well as his father— understood as referring to Joseph Smith as the chapter heading states. The prophecy includes the Lord saying: "And unto him will I give power to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins. . . . And it shall be as if the fruit of thy loins had cried unto them from the dust" (2 Ne. 3: 11, 19). Nephi's addition to Isaiah's *familiar spirit*—"for the Lord God will give unto him power, that he may whisper concerning them"—appeared only a few pages earlier. The closeness and the similar words allow the interpretation that the antecedent of *him* is Joseph Smith.

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[115] David P. Wright, "Joseph Smith's Interpretation of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 4 (1998): 199.

[116] Hoskisson uses this interpretation as an example of exegetical reading: "They also shall speak 'out of the ground . . . as one that hath a familiar spirit; for the Lord God will give unto him [Joseph Smith] power, that he [the translator of the Nephite records] may whisper concerning [the destroyed Nephites], even as it were out of the ground' where they are buried, and where the plates had been buried." Hoskisson, "Update," 7. See also Harrell's interpretation of Joseph Smith as the *familiar spirit* in a figurative sense. Harrell, *"This Is My Doctrine,"* 50–51.

Each of the three major writer figures in the Book of Mormon, presented as engravers of the plates upon which they recorded their history, can also be identified as *him* to whom God gave power "that he may whisper concerning them." Nephi concludes his farewell with: "I speak unto you as the voice of one crying from the dust" (2 Ne. 33:13). Moroni identifies himself "as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust" (Moro. 10:27). Mormon, on the title page, mentioned his record to be "sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord. . . . To come forth by the gift and power of God." McConkie and Millet suggest that *him* "appears to be a reference to Mormon, the great prophet-editor of the Book of Mormon." They base this choice on an interpretation of 2 Nephi 3:17–18 where Lehi makes a distinction between "a Moses" and his "spokesman," referring to Moses and Aaron, followed by a similar distinction between the main writer of the Nephite records and a spokesman. McConkie and Millet consider Mormon the main writer and Joseph Smith the spokesman.[117]

<T2HD>Literal Versus Interpretative Translation and the Magic World View

<TXT>The preceding has shown that the translation guideline to understand *familiar spirit* in 2 Nephi 26:16 as the "spirit of a dead person invoked by a medium" is not justified. But there is more. Insisting on a necromantic orientation would sustain the view of a magical background of the church's origin—a controversial topic since the 1980s. Arguments have been expressed about the possible function of Moroni as a treasure guardian emerging from the dead.[118] With

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[117] Joseph F. McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon, Volume 1, First and Second Nephi* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 210–11, 306–7.

[118] For sources and discussion, see Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni as Angel and as Treasure Guardian," *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 35–100. See also Padro, "Cunning Distortions," 27–30.

reference to Nephi's use of *familiar spirit*, Quinn links the passage to Moroni's appearance to Joseph Smith "as a spirit three times, as expected within the magic world view." Quinn concludes from it that "the Book of Mormon proclaimed itself as the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy concerning divinely appointed necromancy or psychomancy. This was divination through communication with spirits of the dead."[119] In that view, Moroni is not an angelic resurrected being anymore, but a specter. Quinn even claims that "centuries before 1830 the phrase 'familiar spirit' referred only to necromancy." This claim is not supported by the facts, on the contrary, as explained earlier. But a church guideline identifying *familiar spirit* in 2 Nephi 26:16 as "the spirit of a dead person," and rendered that way in all non-English translations, plays into the cards of the magic world view.

To summarize, in 1611 the Jacobean *familiar spirit*, as rendered in the KJV, had everything to do with witchcraft and demonic pets. KJV occurrences of those "with a familiar spirit" are in the company of wizards, magicians, and necromancers. However, in Isaiah 29:4, the Hebrew and LXX texts refer only to a voice whispering out of the ground, representing a destroyed Jerusalem, without any reference to necromancy. In the Book of Mormon, the same metaphor is used by prophets who predict their voices will once again cry from the dust— through their records. They call for their history to be heard, not to be evoked as specters. Paradoxically, the contemporary, literal meaning of *familiar spirit* suits this understanding well: their voices resonate with biblical familiarity. Nephi's use of Isaiah's phrase, as rendered in the KJV, can thus be seen as a deliberate choice, and as understood by Joseph Smith. In this case, literal understanding and literal translation to other languages, as the 1980 church policy required, is validated as the safest course.

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[119] Quinn, *Early Mormonism*, 376–77.

<T1HD>Some Final Thoughts and Concerns

<TXT>The translation of *familiar spirit* is but one of dozens if not hundreds of similar challenges for translation—words like *Gentiles*, *atonement*, *repentance*, *charity*, *salvation*, etc. Those responsible for scriptures translation have a daunting task. Within that broader view, I submit a few concerns.

How was the requested "revision" of the existing translated scriptures defined in 1984? As a limited review of significant differences with the source text, or as a thorough overhaul, or even as independent new translations? Or were translation employees given much leeway to decide for themselves? Instead of preserving the correct, existing text as much as possible, translators tend to make their own mark substantially, if only to create or justify employment. They easily impose their individual or regional preferences. Changes in the extant text often have little to do with improved literalness, but with debatable synonyms or alternate structures, heightening the chance of errors that will only become apparent in later years. Many if not most translator employees in the church are nonprofessionals and the small committees that assess their work are local church leaders, unfamiliar with scriptural linguistics and unable to devote time to thorough review. The justification for this precarious work format comes from reliance on "translating with the Spirit"—a principle hammered on in all church guidelines related to translation and presented as a guarantee for perfection. The problem with this approach is that each translation, from the very first edition, is praised as having been written under inspiration. After every translation or revision is completed, stories are told of divine guidance.[120] In truth,

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[120] For examples, see Po Nien (Felipe) Chou and Petra Chou, "To Every Nation, Kindred, Tongue, and People," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis

these exhaustive revisions and retranslations leave us with many unresolved hurdles as to the balance between literalness and readability, and the differentiation between form and meaning, often complicated by the church's choice of the local Bible version.

Another point of concern is the apparent lack of interlingual coordination. It suffices to compare the most recent translations of "as of one that hath a familiar spirit" in the various European languages (see the list above). In spite of resulting from the same translation guideline, the differences, even between closely related languages, are startling. Over the past twenty years I have observed how the stumbling Dutch revisions of the Book of Mormon could have greatly profited from the earlier German discussions and conclusions. The Romance languages have a very high amount of corresponding points, in particular in religious vocabulary. But the translations and revisions end up with different solutions.

A new version of the scriptures is suddenly furnished to church members. The effect is vastly underestimated. Members bond emotionally with the time-honored text of their scriptures. Children grow up with the ring of the sacred phrases. Scriptures received as a gift at baptism are meant for life. Converts usually cherish their first Book of Mormon, perhaps with a picture and a message from their first missionary and with their first annotations as sacred memories. Key verses have been learned by heart. The sudden confrontation with a thoroughly revised or retranslated text is bound to upset many readers. When the new "more literal" German retranslation was published in 1980, controversies raged for years, finally leading the church to have the retranslation redone. The Dutch retranslation underwent a similar fate twice, in 1994 and in 2004, with the latest thoroughly "modernized" edition (2017) as to the use of pronouns

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L. Largey et al. (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 227–64.

again disheartening scores of members.[121] Such massive rewriting is inconceivable in the English text, where even the change of a single word becomes a well-documented issue with extensive justification.[122] It would be unthinkable to change the English Book of Mormon 2 Ne 26:16 into: "Their speech shall be low out of the dust, and their voice shall be as one that hath a spirit of a dead person invoked by a medium."

Finally, even if a new edition is now closer to the English original, the question remains if it brought the readers closer to the essence of the message in a time when modern Bible translations are doing exactly that to reach more people, in particular the less literate and the younger generations, and often with a more correct text.[123] To complicate things even more, many church members prefer to continue to use their own copy for lessons and talks, thus unwittingly exposing unnecessary, erroneous, or at least debatable changes in the recent more literal versions. Though these controversies rage or rumble internally and are silenced in the name of obedience, they are a vivid part of contemporary, international Mormon history.

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[121] For a history of the Dutch translations of the Book of Mormon, see Walter van Beek and Wilfried Decoo, "Translating the Crown Jewel: The Book of Mormon in Dutch between Conservatism and Modernism," in *Trajecta: Religion, Culture and Society in the Low Countries* (forthcoming).

[122] Hence, the church discourages rewriting the Book of Mormon into familiar or modern English. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1993/04/news-of-the-church/modern-language-editions-of-the-book-of-mormon-discouraged.

[123] Daniel O. McClellan, "'As Far as It Is Translated Correctly': Bible Translation and the Church," *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 20, no. 2 (2019): 53–83.