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*Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* is published by the Dialogue Foundation. Editorial Office and Subscription Department, P. O. Box 2350, Stanford, California 94305. Publication Office, 2180 E. 9th South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108. All communications should be sent to the Editorial Offices. *Dialogue* has no official connection with any department of Stanford University or of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Second class postage paid at Salt Lake City, Utah. Printed by The Quality Press, Salt Lake City. Contents copyright © 1968 by the Dialogue Foundation.

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*Dialogue* is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter issues. Subscription rate in the United States is \$7 per year; \$5 for students and missionaries, add \$1 for foreign subscriptions. Single copies, \$2, back issues, \$2.50. Subscription and change of address requests should be sent to the Subscription Department, P. O. Box 2350, Stanford, California 94305. *Dialogue* welcomes articles, essays, stories, notes and comments, and art work. Manuscripts should be sent in duplicate to the Manuscript Editor, accompanied by return postage.

THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI:  
A PRELIMINARY REPORT

Richard A. Parker

*Richard A. Parker is the Wilbour Professor of Egyptology and Chairman of the Department of Egyptology at Brown University. His primary interest is in the later stages of Egyptian language and history. He remarks that the BOOK OF BREATHINGS is a late (Ptolemaic and Roman periods) and greatly reduced version of the BOOK OF THE DEAD. No comprehensive study of it has yet been undertaken and no manuscript has yet been published adequately. He would provisionally date the two BOOK OF BREATHINGS fragments in the Church's possession to the last century before or the first century of the Christian era; his translation of one of these fragments, the important "sensen" text, begins on page 98.*

Photo (1). This is a well-known scene from the Osiris mysteries, with Anubis, the jackal-headed god, on the left ministering to the dead Osiris on the bier. The pencilled(?) restoration is incorrect. Anubis should be jackal-headed. The left arm of Osiris is in reality lying at his side under him. The apparent upper hand is part of the wing of a second bird which is hovering over the erect phallus of Osiris (now broken away). The second bird is Isis

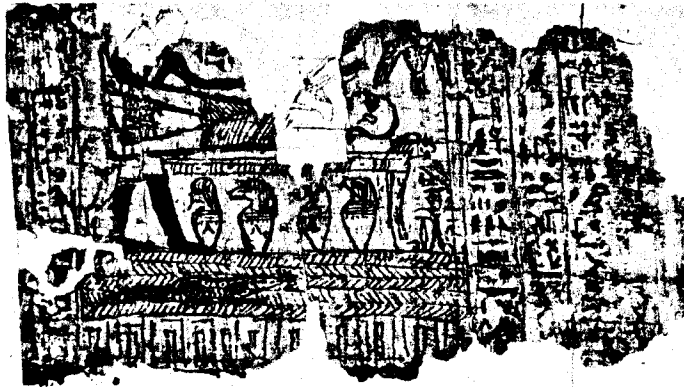


PHOTO 1

and she is magically impregnated by the dead Osiris and then later gives birth to Horus who avenges his father and takes over his inheritance. The complete bird represents Nephthys, sister to Osiris and Isis. Beneath the bier are the four canopic jars with heads representative of the four sons of Horus, human-headed Imseti, baboon-headed Hapy, jackal-headed Duamutef and falcon-headed Kebehsenuf. The hieroglyphs refer to burial, etc., but I have found no exact parallel in the time at my disposal and the poor photography precludes easy reading of the whole. I see no obvious personal name.

(2 to 9). These are all fragments of the Book of the Dead belonging to the woman Ta-sherit-Min, daughter of Neskhons. Some of the fragments actually join and could be so mounted when the papyrus is prepared properly. The order of the photographs is as follows:

(7). Right fragment has the vignettes and parts of Spells 53 and 54 of the Book of the Dead. The left fragment has parts of the vignettes and Spells 63 and 65. The titles are 53, Spell for not eating dung or drinking urine in the god's domain; 54, Spell for giving breath to a man in the god's domain; 63, Spell for drinking water and not becoming parched by fire; 65, Spell for going forth by day and overcoming one's enemies.

(9). Right column, an unidentified spell. Left column, upper vignette for Spells 67 and 70, lower for Spell 72. 67, Spell for going out; 70, Another spell; 72, Spell for going forth by day and opening the underworld of the west.

(2). Either fits under (9), or joins at the side since the top continues Spell 72. Then follow Spells 74, 75, 76 and 77 with vignettes. 74, Spell for opening the feet and ascending from the earth; 75, Spell for going to Heliopolis and taking a seat there; 76, Spell for assuming any form one wishes; 77, Spell for assuming the form of a falcon of gold.

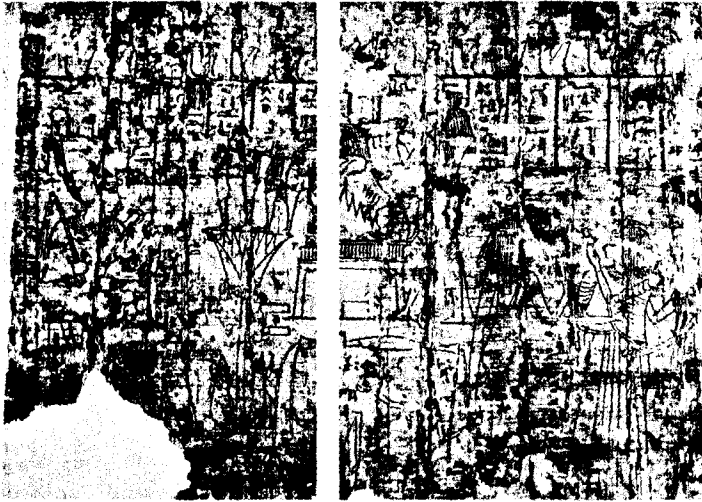
(4). This joins directly to (2) and I would judge was once cut off rather than broken away. The base line under the legged serpent in the top vignette points to the fourth line above the base of the swallow. The papyrus in (4) needs arrangement at the top. There is the end of an unidentified spell and then Spells 86, 87, 88 and 89 with vignettes, the middle of which is for 87 and 88. 86, Spell for assuming the form of a swallow; 87, Spell for assuming the form of a son of earth (a snake); 88, Spell for assuming the form of a crocodile; 89, Spell for causing that a man's soul attach itself to his corpse in the god's domain.

(3). This joins directly to (4). The baseline under the middle vignette of (2) points to the line immediately above the lower vignette on the right in (3). The upper part of (3) is badly arranged. Some fragments are upside down, and the middle needs to be straightened as well. On the right the top vignette is for either Spell 91 or 92. The middle is for Spell 100 and the lower for 101. 91, Spell for not letting a man's soul be confined in the god's domain; 100, Spell for making content the soul of a blessed one and causing that he ascend to the bark of Re and his retinue; 101, Spell for protecting the bark of Re. On the left at top Spell 103 and then vignettes for Spells 104, 105 and 106. 103, Spell for opening beside Hathor; 104, Spell for sitting among the great gods; 105, Spell for making a man's spirit content in the god's domain; 106, Spell for giving offerings in Memphis.

(8). This is part of the vignette of Spell 110, portraying the deceased in the other world.

(5 and 6). These join directly and together compose the well-known Spell 125 judgment scene. Osiris is on the left. The four sons of Horus stand

on the lotus before him. Behind him is the Devourer who eats the condemned hearts. Below is the scales on which the heart of the deceased is weighed against the feather of truth. Behind the Devourer is Thoth who records the verdict, and on the right Ma'at, goddess of truth, leads in the deceased. Above is a row of assessors.



PHOTOS 5 AND 6

The titles I have quoted above are without strict regard to the preserved writing.

The papyri need to be carefully cleaned and straightened and then re-photographed with care to illuminate the under side somewhat to eliminate all shadows in cracks and breaks, which can frequently look just like writing.

#### A TENTATIVE APPROACH TO THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

*Richard P. Howard, Church Historian  
Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*

During the 1830's John Whitmer wrote, in connection with the ancient Egyptian records purchased by the church in July 1835 from Michael H. Chandler,

... Joseph the Seer saw these records and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records which gave an account of our forefathers. Much of which was written by Joseph of Egypt who was sold by his brethren. Which when all translated will be a pleasing history and of great value to the Saints.<sup>1</sup>

Oliver Cowdery described the papyri as "the Egyptian records, or rather the writings of Abraham and Joseph. . . ." He further observed:

The evidence is apparent upon the face, that they were written by persons acquainted with the history of the creation, the fall of man, and more or less of the correct ideas of notions of the Deity. The representations of the god-head — three, yet in one, is curiously drawn to give simply, though impressively, the writers views of that exalted personage. . . . The inner end of the same roll, (Joseph's record,) presents a representation of the judgment: At one view you behold the Savior seated upon his throne, crowned, and holding the sceptres of righteousness and power, before whom also, are assembled the twelve tribes of Israel, the nations, languages and tongues of the earth, the kingdoms of the world over which satan is represented as reigning. . . . Be there little or much it must be an inestimable acquisition to our present scriptures, fulfilling, in a small degree the word of the prophet: For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Smith, Jr., concurred in Cowdery's estimate of the great spiritual value of these ancient documents, and of their direct relationship to both Abraham and Joseph.

I . . . commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc., — a more full account of which will appear in their place, as I proceed to examine or unfold them. Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly seven years later, in 1842, Joseph Smith, Jr., published the result of his "translation" activity in these papyri, but in his introduction to the text he more conservatively cited the material as "*purporting to be* the writings of Abraham" (italics mine).<sup>4</sup>

In July 1862 the Reorganized Church published the Book of Abraham in its monthly periodical with no editorial comment and without the introduction given it in 1842 by Joseph Smith.<sup>5</sup> Twenty-one months later that same issue of the *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* was reprinted, along with other

<sup>1</sup>John Whitmer, "The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment." MS, p. 76. In The Archives, Department of History, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>2</sup>Oliver Cowdery, Kirtland, Ohio, to William Frye, Gilead, Illinois, letter dated December 22, 1835, published in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. II, No. 3, December, 1835, pp. 234-237.

<sup>3</sup>"History of Joseph Smith," *Millennial Star*, Vol. XV, No. 19, May 7, 1853, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup>*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, Nos. 9, 10 and 14, March 1, March 15 and May 16, 1842, pp. 703-706; 719-722; 783-784.

<sup>5</sup>*The True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, Vol. 3, No. 1, July, 1862, pp. 1-10.

back issues, and the publishers ran a small notice concerning the availability of the Book of Abraham by this means:

The Book of Abraham was published in the *Herald*, in No. 1 of Vol. 3. That number has been republished, and is now for sale. Price 10 cents.<sup>6</sup>

Thirty-two years later two officials of the Reorganized Church published the following observation on the Book of Abraham:

The church has never to our knowledge taken any action on this work, either to indorse or condemn; so it cannot be said to be a church publication; nor can the church be held to answer for the correctness of its teaching. Joseph Smith, as the translator, is committed of course to the correctness of the translation, but not necessarily to the indorsement of its historical or doctrinal contents.<sup>7</sup>

This conservative position stemmed from a knowledge of the doctrinal content and implications of same in the Book of Abraham, and has generally represented the sentiment of the church leaders and membership since that time.

However, several developments since 1896 indicate the need for a more definite, if tentative, statement on the part of the Reorganized Church. These developments seem to require forthright clarity in the direction of questioning the 1835-1842 linguistic skill of Joseph Smith, Jr., as a translator of ancient Egyptian symbols. This is true especially in the light of the fact that the contributions of the great pioneer Jean François Champollion (1790-1832), relating to the deciphering of the inscriptions on the Rosetta Stone and to ancient Egyptian philology generally, were not known in the western hemisphere sufficiently by 1842 so as to have helped Joseph Smith, or any other American, develop proficiency in this field. And while Joseph Smith's history mentions his 1836 classwork in Hebrew, he makes no mention of formal instruction in Egyptian, and alludes in this connection only to his preparation of an Egyptian alphabet and grammar. The basis for this work is not specified.

The first development was the publication of a pamphlet by the Episcopal Bishop of Utah in 1912,<sup>8</sup> based on the work of eight prominent Egyptologists, scattered from Chicago to Munich. Spalding had sent them copies of the three well-known facsimiles published along with the Book of Abraham by Joseph Smith in *Times and Seasons* in 1842. Spalding had requested each to interpret the symbols and comment upon the accuracy of the interpretations of them offered by Joseph Smith. The Egyptologists complied with Spalding's request and submitted their interpretations and appraisals. While they did not agree in every minute detail with each other they were nonetheless unanimously at sharp variance with each of the twenty-five interpre-

<sup>6</sup>*The True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, Vol. 5, No. 7, April 1, 1864, p. 112.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Smith III, and Herman C. Smith. *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1896. Vol. II, p. 569.

<sup>8</sup>F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith as a Translator*, Salt Lake City, Utah: Arrow Press, 1912. 31 pp.

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tations of the facsimiles published by Joseph Smith, Jr. Therefore, since 1912 serious students of this subject have had to consider the probability that Joseph Smith had erred at many significant points in his interpretations of the drawings on the papyri, from part of which the text of the Book of Abraham itself was apparently derived. The implication of this is that if Joseph Smith erred in assessing the meanings of the papyri drawings, there is a strong likelihood that his interpretations of the ancient Egyptian language symbols on the papyri were inaccurate also.

A second development underscores this possibility: the publication in 1966 of a reproduction of a document known as Joseph Smith's "Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language." Until recently this document was available to only a few scholars at the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. However, Jerald Tanner of Salt Lake City managed to obtain a microfilm of this document and published enlarged prints from this film.<sup>9</sup> This reproduction, *if of an authentic original*, demonstrates significant connections between some words in it and identical words used by Joseph Smith in his interpretations accompanying the three facsimiles as published in 1842. It follows that if modern Egyptologists have or might yet clearly establish the inaccuracy of Joseph's interpretations of the three facsimiles, and if further research confirms the link already observed between Joseph's facsimile interpretations and his "Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language," then the reliability of the Book of Abraham as a translation of ancient records could no longer safely be maintained.

The third development has implications largely for the future. This is the widespread dissemination of splendid reproductions of the recently discovered eleven Egyptian papyri. At least two of these clearly relate to the Book of Abraham facsimiles first published by Joseph Smith. This relationship is all the more firmly established by the presence, among the papyri, of a certificate of sale of the papyri to Mr. A. Combs by L. C. Bidamon, Emma Smith Bidamon and Joseph Smith III, dated May 26, 1856.<sup>10</sup> This certificate, both in content and in signatures, appears to be authentic. The significance of the distribution of these documents is that now, more information than ever is available for Egyptologists' translation and further comparison with Joseph Smith's facsimiles and his "Egyptian Grammar and Alphabet." Should this occur, and should their translations of these ancient papyri be published, evidence of great consequence would then bear upon a fuller assessment of the relative merits of the Book of Abraham as representative of either his (Abraham's) writings or of writings about him.

If the present-day Egyptologists' work on these ancient papyri tends to confirm the conclusions of their 1912 predecessors, proponents of the Book of Abraham will be drawn to a revision of their present estimate of the meaning

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<sup>9</sup>Modern Microfilm Company, *Joseph Smith's Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar*. Salt Lake City, 1966.

<sup>10</sup>The full text of this certificate was published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 2, No. 4, Winter, 1967, p. 52n.



and nature of Joseph Smith's work on this publication. Indeed, one real possibility in that case would be that the Book of Abraham is not a translation at all, in the sense of transferring ideas from the Egyptian to the English language.

In the light of the findings of the 1912 Egyptologists, and depending upon whether their present-day successors will substantiate their conclusions, one may be confronted with the evidence that the Book of Abraham was rather the product of a highly intuitive mind, stimulated at least in part by an earlier work of revising the creation accounts of the Authorized Version of the Bible, 1830-1835. Textual comparisons between Joseph Smith's "New Translation of the Bible" (or, "Inspired Version," as published by the Reorganized Church) and the Book of Abraham (Genesis 1 and 2: Abraham 4 and 5) show a remarkable degree of parallelism of subject materials, language style and content. The major difference is the monotheism of the former and the polytheism of the latter. It should be recalled also that in 1842 when Joseph Smith published the Book of Abraham his work of biblical revision had not yet been published.

There will be a natural tendency for some who are dogmatically committed to the Book of Abraham and/or to an image of Joseph Smith as an infallible living oracle to minimize or even to rule out completely the possibility of any relationship existing between the recently discovered papyri and the Book of Abraham as published. However, the unmistakable connection between these recently discovered papyri and the facsimiles published by Joseph Smith in 1842 leaves little room for such maneuvering, and leads the open-minded observer away from such an alternative.

It appears that in time the mystery of the Book of Abraham will be unveiled. Meanwhile, it is significant for the Reorganized Church that undue haste and overzealous faith did not move it in the nineteenth century to canonize this work of Joseph Smith, Jr., primarily on the basis that it was accomplished by Joseph Smith, Jr.

### THE SOURCE OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IDENTIFIED

Grant S. Heward and Jerald Tanner

*The following evidence that one specific fragment, the "sensen" text, was used by Joseph Smith in obtaining the Book of Abraham was submitted by Grant Heward (who has studied Egyptian on his own and reports that he was recently excommunicated for his views on Joseph Smith's ability to translate Egyptian) and Jerald Tanner (who heads Modern Microfilm, Co., a professedly anti-Mormon publishing house). Their work is followed by translation of the sensen text by Professor Richard Parker and finally by a discussion of the present state and best future direction of studies of Joseph Smith's work with Egyptian by professor Hugh Nibley (scholarly defender of the Mormon faith whose continuing argument for the divine origin of the Book of Abraham based on external evidences in the Abrahamic tradition is appearing serially in the IMPROVEMENT ERA).*

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It now appears that the papyrus fragments recently recovered by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints include the text used by Joseph Smith in his efforts to translate the Book of Abraham. The fragment in question (see illustration No. 1) was identified in the February, 1968, *Improvement Era* (bottom of p. 40-1) as "XI. Small 'Sensen' text (unillustrated)." It would

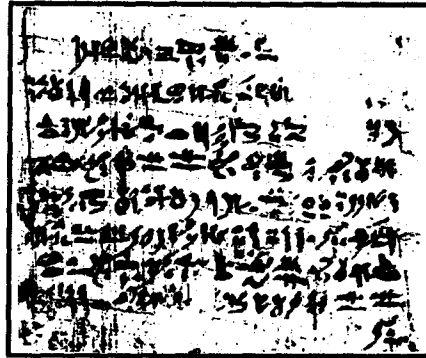


ILLUSTRATION NO. 1  
A photograph of the right side of the papyrus fragment identified in the *IMPROVEMENT ERA*, Feb. 1968, as "XI. Small 'Sensen' text (unillustrated)." Joseph Smith used this as the basis for the *Book of Abraham*.

seem that Joseph Smith studied this fragment and concluded that it was written by Abraham. Then Joseph, or his scribes, copied down a character or two at a time and to the right of each character rendered a translation of its meaning. These translations comprise the original manuscript version of the *Book of Abraham*. (See illustrations Nos. 2 and 3.)

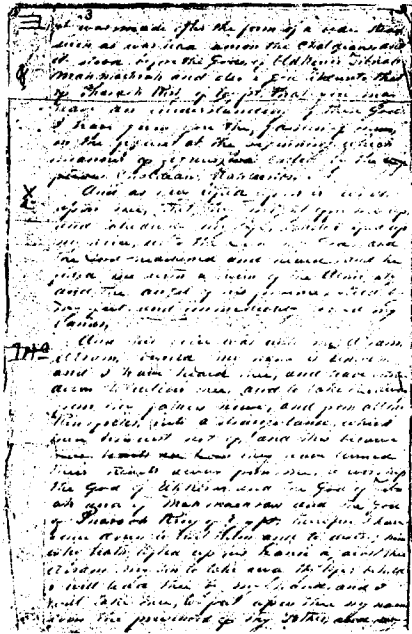
Dr. James R. Clark of Brigham Young University provides this description of the manuscripts:

As a matter of fact there are in existence today in the Church Historian's office what seem to be two separate manuscripts of Joseph Smith's translations from the papyrus rolls, presumably in the hand writing of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery; neither manuscript contains the complete text of the *Book of Abraham* as we have it now. One manuscript is the *Alphabet and Grammar*. . . . Within this *Alphabet and Grammar* there is a copy of the characters, together with their translation of *Abraham 1:4-28* only. The second and separate of the two manuscripts contains none of the *Alphabet and Grammar* but is a manuscript of the text of the *Book of Abraham* as published in the first installment of the *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842.<sup>1</sup>

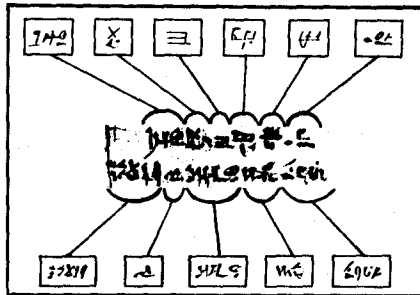
All of the characters in the first two rows on the papyrus fragment shown in illustration No. 1 can be found attached to the portion of the *Book of Abraham*

<sup>1</sup>James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, 1962), pp. 172-173.

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**ILLUSTRATION NO. 2**  
 A photograph of page q of the "Book of Abraham" manuscript. This portion is found in the Pearl of Great Price, Abraham 1:13-18.



**ILLUSTRATION NO. 3**  
 A comparison of the characters that were photographed from one of the handwritten manuscripts of Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" (in rectangles around border) with the characters as they appear on the first two lines of the papyrus shown in Illustration No. 1 (material in center of illustration).

in Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar." Illustration No. 3 provides a comparison of characters from one of the handwritten manuscripts with the characters as they appear on the original papyrus.

A photograph of the first page of the second manuscript of the Book of Abraham is found on page 179 of James R. Clark's *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*. Dr. Clark writes,

I have in my possession a photostatic copy of the manuscript of the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation of Abraham 1:1 to 2:18. This manuscript was bought by Wilford Wood in 1945 from Charles Bidamon, son of the man who married Emma after the death of the Prophet. The original of this manuscript is in the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City. The characters from which our present Book of Abraham was translated are down the left-hand column and Joseph Smith's translation opposite, so we know approximately how much material was translated from each character.<sup>2</sup>

This manuscript begins with the statement, "Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the catacomb[s] of Egypt." This manuscript is more extensive than that in the "Alphabet and Grammar." Illustration No. 4 compares characters from this manuscript with those in the third line of the papyrus fragment.

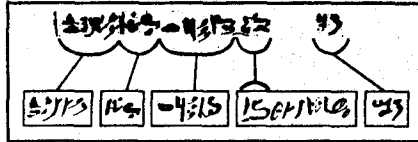


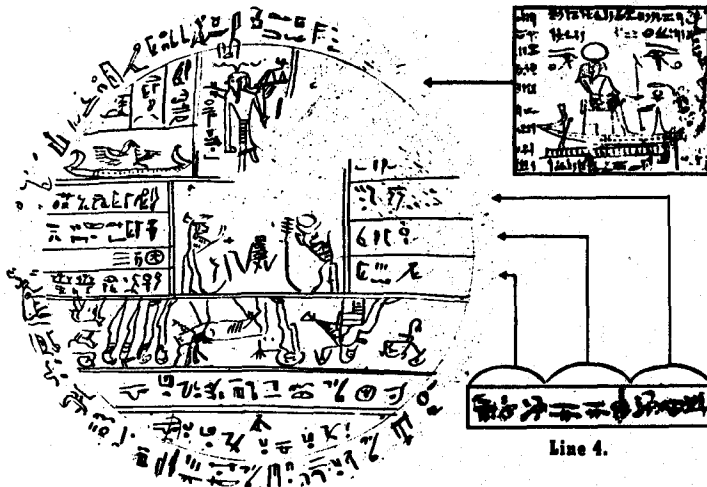
ILLUSTRATION NO. 4  
The third line of the papyrus fragment (above) compared with the characters traced from the longer Book of Abraham manuscript (below), located in the LDS Church Historian's Office.

Joseph Smith apparently translated many English words from each Egyptian character. The characters from fewer than four lines of the papyrus make up forty-nine verses of the Book of Abraham, containing more than two thousand words. If Joseph Smith continued to translate the same number of English words from each Egyptian character, this one small fragment would complete the entire text of the Book of Abraham. In other words, the small piece of papyrus pictured in illustration No. 1 appears to be the whole Book of Abraham!

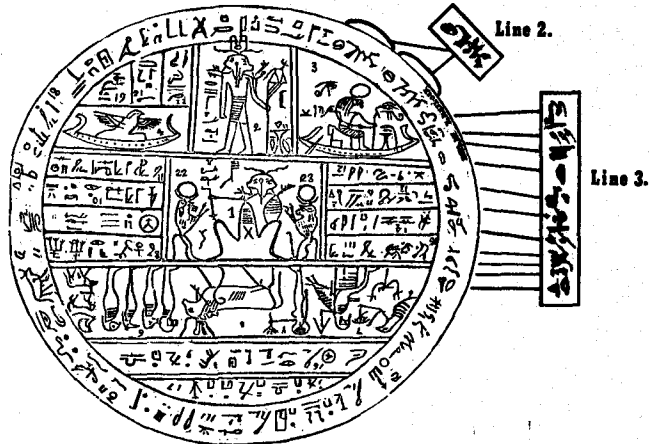
This evidence raises several problems. One is that the Egyptian characters cannot conceivably have enough information channels (component parts) to convey the amount of material translated from them. Another is that the papyrus fragment in question dates from long after Abraham's time, much

<sup>2</sup>James R. Clark in *Pearl of Great Price Conference, December 10, 1960* (Brigham Young University, Extension Publications, 1964 Edition), pp. 60-61.





**ILLUSTRATION NO. 5A**  
 A drawing of Facsimile No. 2 as it appears in Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar." The missing areas would seem to indicate that portions of the original of Facsimile No. 2 were either unreadable or had fallen away. When Facsimile No. 2 was first printed the blank areas were filled in from portions of the other documents. Notice that line 4 of Illustration No. 1 was added in up-side-down.



**ILLUSTRATION NO. 5B**  
 Facsimile No. 2 as it was first printed in the TIMES AND SEASONS, Vol. 3, March 13, 1842. Notice that the characters along the right hand edge have been filled in up-side-down from the same papyrus Joseph Smith used for the text of the Book of Abraham. See Illustration No. 1, lines 2 and 3.

Facsimile No. 2 seems to have been reconstructed in a peculiar way. First, areas that are blank in the "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" have been filled in with characters from other documents. Second, lines of hieratic and hieroglyphic writing are joined together in a strange way — introducing foreign and unrelated thoughts. Third, to add to the confusion, the hieratic writing is inserted upside-down in relation to the hieroglyphic text on the same lines.

THE BOOK OF BREATHINGS  
(FRAGMENT 1, THE "SENSEN" TEXT, WITH  
RESTORATIONS FROM LOUVRE PAPYRUS 3284)

translated by Richard A. Parker

COLUMN I

1. [ . . . . . ] this great pool of Khonsu
2. [Osiris Hor, justified], born of Taykhebyt, a man likewise.
3. After (his) two arms are [fast]ened to his breast, one wraps the Book of Breathings, which is
4. with writing both inside and outside of it, with royal linen, it being placed (at) his left arm
5. near his heart, this having been done at his
6. wrapping and outside it. If this book be recited for him, then
7. he will breath like the soul[s of the gods] for ever and
8. ever.

COLUMN II

1. The beginning [of the Book of Breathings made by Isis for her brother Osiris, to make his soul live, to make his body live, to make young his members]
2. again, [so that he may attain the] horizon with his father Re' (the sun), [so that his soul may appear in glory in the sky in the disk of Yah (the moon), so that his body may shine as Sah (Orion) on the body of Nut (the sky), and to]
3. cause [the like of th]is to happen to the Osiris Hor, justified, [born of Taykhebyt . . . . . Hide (it), hide (it)!]
4. Don't [allow] any man to read it. [It] is profitable [for a man in the necropolis. He truly lives anew millions of times. Words to be recited]:

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5. Hail, [Osiris H]or, justified, born of Tay[khebyt . . . . . / You are pure; your heart is pure, your front is purified; your back is]
6. cleansed; your middle is in *bd*-natron [and *hsmn*-natron. There is no bad member of yours. Purified is the Osiris Hor, justified, born of Taykhebyt, engendered by]
7. Remenykay, justified, with the *Ydyt*-water [of the Field of Offerings, north of the Field of Locusts. Have purified you Edjo and]
8. Nekhbet at the fourth hour of the night and the fourth hour [of the day. Come thou, Osiris Hor, justified, born of Taykhebyt, that you may enter the Broad Hall of the]
9. Two Goddesses of Righteousness, you being purified from [all] baseness [and all wrongdoing. Stone of Righteousness is your name. Hail, Osiris Hor, justified, born of Taykhebyt! You enter]
10. [the Otherworld] very pure. Have purified you [the Two Goddesses of Righteousness in the great Broad Hall. A cleansing has been made for you in the Broad Hall of Geb and your members have been purified in]
11. [the Broad Hall of Shu. You] see Re' when he sets [as Atum in the evening. Amon is with you, giving you well-being and Ptah]
12. [fashions your limbs]. You enter into the horizon with Re' [ . . . . .

(At most one line is lost between the end of this fragment and the top of the right-hand column of the second fragment.)

### PHASE ONE

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The investigation of the Book of Abraham has still far to go before we can start drawing significant conclusions. Even the first preliminary stage of the operation is by no means completed, for we still have to determine exactly what the relationship was supposed to be between the official text and the Egyptian papyri in the possession of Joseph Smith, and how Smith treated the papyri. The problem of Joseph Smith as an inspired prophet never enters into the discussion at all, since that lies entirely beyond the province of scholarship: the experts must judge him as a translator or not at all. But translator of what? While he freely circulated reproductions of the three Facsimiles with his interpretation of them, inviting comment from one and all, he never specified from what particular papyri he was translating the text proper or by what process.

Unlike the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price is a work in progress, a selection made after the Prophet's death of writings that do not make up a single connected or completed work. There are two known manuscripts



of the Book of Abraham and there may be yet other undiscovered. One of them, a study of visible symbols, is not the sort of thing that anyone would dictate to another, everything being addressed to the eye; but is it in the handwriting of Joseph Smith? It is certainly not his spelling. There is a lot we would like to know about these strange texts. There are signs of experimenting here, and the writer feels free to make alterations as he goes. We must not forget that Joseph Smith was not only permitted but commanded to cast about in his own mind for the answers to things before asking for revelation (DC 9:7-8), just as the Nephites were commanded to "ponder upon the things" they wished to understand and so to "prepare your minds" for revelation (3 Ne. 17:3), and as the Brother of Jared, when he asked the Lord how he should light his ships was told to solve the problem for himself as best he might *before* appealing for supernatural aid (Ether 3-4). If we do not have an official Urtext of the Pearl of Great Price we do have some manuscripts which indicate independent thinking and speculation.

Under this heading we would certainly place the *Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar*, which is no more fantastic than the Egyptological gymnastics of such a great thinker as Leibniz — there seems to be something about Egyptian which brings out the latent crack-pot in many of us. The *Alphabet and Grammar* consists of two quite different documents. One is the list of signs, each accompanied by a short phonetic rendering and a brief interpretation; here there is nothing extraordinary about the *length* of each "translation," whatever one might think of its content. But it is a wholly different story when we come to the second document, where one brief symbol may be followed not by a corresponding transliteration and translation but by a whole page or more of history or commentary. Either we have here a totally different language from that in the sign-lists, which show a quite rational sense of proportion between Egyptian symbols and English sentences, or else this is a "translation" in an entirely different sense.

If the few symbols here given, which are taken from the brief Sen-Sen fragment, are the Egyptian source of the Book of Abraham, why were they never given out as such to the public? Because it was Smith's secret source of information? It could not have been that unless he was actually translating it. At best the symbols on the left would seem to indicate section-headings. To see in them the whole book of Abraham is to fly in the face of reason and attribute our insanity to Joseph Smith. Any thought of a *literal* translation is of course out of the question, but to identify the symbols in the Sen-Sen papyrus with the text of the entire book of Abraham we must assume that the sly Joseph Smith and his competent co-workers remained blissfully unaware of a discrepancy so gross that a cretin could not miss it. In the absence of any explanation by its writer, the very arrangement of the texts, while indicating a definite connection, whatever it might be, between the symbols and the English text, strikes one forcefully at first glance as a clear indication that the person who wrote it could not possibly have intended the one text to pass as a translation of the other, especially since he has already demonstrated a sane sense of proportion in the preceding sign-lists.

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Those who insist that "the Egyptian characters cannot conceivably have enough information . . . to convey the amount of material translated from them," are the very parties who do conceive of just that, and insist that Joseph Smith actually did derive all that stuff from them. They can't have it both ways. If nobody could possibly get the Book of Abraham out of the Sen-Sen papyrus, then we can be quite sure that nobody did — nobody including Joseph Smith. But in that case what is the charge against him — that he *pretended* to be translating the Sen-Sen papyrus? Then why did he keep it a secret? Since the Sen-Sen business makes very little sense to anybody, while the Book of Abraham makes very good sense, one might suppose that Smith could have produced the latter without any reference to the former — that he could have written the Book of Abraham more easily, in fact, without having to bother himself with those meaningless squiggles. But if the Sen-Sen symbols are expendable, why does he use them at all? His only purpose would have been to impress others, but he keeps the whole operation strictly to himself and never circulates the Sen-Sen papyrus as he did the Facsimiles. And why on earth would he fasten on this particularly ugly little piece and completely bypass the whole collection of handsome illustrated documents at his disposal? Did he really think he was translating? If so he was acting in good faith. But *was* he really translating? If so, it was by a process which quite escapes the understanding of the specialists and lies in the realm of the imponderable.

No one has begun to look into the Sen-Sen problem seriously. In the sign-lists, for example, there are many corrections and alterations in the English translation and the handwriting is interrupted and hesitant. But in the text that accompanies the Sen-Sen signs there are no deletions, additions or corrections, the spelling is perfect, and the handwriting is flowing and unflinching. The English text then is plainly not being composed for the first time in this manuscript, which is being copied from an already complete English text. Is somebody trying to match up the already available text with the Sen-Sen symbols? Whatever is happening, the finished and almost flawless manuscript is not being derived from the symbols placed to the left of it. The connection between the two remains a mystery.

Today nobody claims that Joseph Smith got his information through ordinary scholarly channels. In that case one wonders how any amount of checking along ordinary scholarly channels is going to get us very far. But that does not excuse us from going as far as we can. Many questions are still to be answered concerning the whole bulk of the Egyptian manuscripts possessed by Joseph Smith. Were important parts missing in 1830? Was the jumbling and cutting done "before it was brought to Kirtland?" Who pasted the things together? Who cut them up? We are told that the papyri were in beautiful condition when Joseph Smith got them, and that one of them when unrolled on the floor extended through two rooms of the Mansion House. Those we have today are mounted on paper showing maps of the Kirtland area, but that suggests that the mounting took place only after the Kirtland period, when all thought of returning to Kirtland was given up and the precious maps had

become waste paper. Such questions are interesting and relevant, but for the study of the Book of Abraham their interest is only secondary since none of the Book of the Dead papyri were consulted in the composing of that book, any more than the Arabic Mss were.

When I first saw photos of the papyri I made myself disagreeable by throwing a great deal of cold water around. For publicity they were great, and as far as I can see their main value is still in calling the attention of Latter-day Saints to the existence of scriptures which they have studiously ignored through the years. But after all, what do the papyri tell us? That Joseph Smith had them, that he studied them, and that the smallest and most insignificant-looking of them is connected in some mysterious way to the Pearl of Great Price. There is really very little new here to shed light on the Book of Abraham. We must look elsewhere for further light and knowledge. For after all, the Book of Abraham does have something to say, and that should be the point of departure in any serious investigation of its authenticity. Here we have an instructive parallel with the Book of Mormon.

There is nothing in the circumstances surrounding the production of the Book of Mormon to give one the least confidence in the authenticity of the book. But what a book! Without the book anyone would be justified in labelling the whole story of its coming forth as utterly fantastic and impossible. But having the book changes everything. Critics have claimed to find all sorts of things wrong with it, but we can allow for such things since 1) our own ignorance is a very real quantity, and 2) the Book of Mormon itself makes due allowance for "the mistakes of men" in its production. The real problem is not to account for the times the Book of Mormon is or seems to be mistaken, but for the times it is right. Within the past year, for example, we have discovered and published a brief and all too inadequate resumé of a military section of the Book of Mormon which displays an absolutely staggering knowledge of strategy and tactics. Well, this sort of thing has to be accounted for, and it is only by going from the known to the unknown that we can eventually test those things which in our present ignorance seem utterly absurd but make perfectly good sense once we know what is going on.

So it is also with the Pearl of Great Price. We are completely in the dark as to how it was produced, but we are anything but helpless with the wealth of detailed material it offers us to test it by. The strange history, the strange rites, the strange doctrines all meet us again and again in ancient sources far removed from Egypt but all connected with the name of Abraham. The great mass of Abraham legends preserved in Jewish, Moslem, Christian, and even Classical sources are known to few Egyptologists, but as we read through them we find Egypt coming into the picture again and again in new and strange relationships. True, the soil of Egypt has given us absolutely nothing on the subject of Abraham in Egypt, but for that matter S. Herrmann is now maintaining that there is not the slightest scrap of evidence that Israel itself was ever in Egypt. No Egyptian evidence, perhaps, but then Egyptian sources are not the only sources, and it is folly to come out with a verdict about the Book of Abraham until we have studied fully and carefully the great and

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And all these things have nothing to do with the subject matter of the Pearl of Great Price? What else, then?

And here, right in the Sen-Sen papyrus we come upon one of these odd and disconnected details we just talked about. For we find here a quite typical identification of some person "born of Tayhebt" with Osiris, Horus, and a Stone of Righteousness, whatever that is — "Stone of Righteousness is your name." Now in the Mormon scriptures we have the same sort of puzzling identities: Abraham, according to the Book of Abraham (3:1) possessed the mysterious Urim and Thummin (I ask myself if these can represent *Wr* and *Tm* of Heliopolis, where there were two important stones — but let it pass, things are confusing enough as it is); by these stones the Lord spoke to Abraham (why is the ideogram for the Great Seer of On written with two stones?) and showed him the starry heavens (vv. 2, 4 — don't tell me we have here the field-lens and ocular of a telescope). In Alma 37:23 Urim and Thummin is called "a stone" the function of which is to distinguish the righteous from the wicked ("Stone of Righteousness"? — oops, sorry!), and the person who possesses it goes by the code-name of Gazelem; so that in the D.C. 78:9, Gazelem is said to be Enoch, though here identified with Joseph Smith. In some of our old "Abraham" literature Enoch, usually as Idrisi, is identified with both Abraham and Osiris. It is so easy to make and establish such identifications, one might think, that they can have no great significance. But that is just what remains to be seen — let's not get ahead of the game, or overlook any possibility that there might be something there after all — "If it looks like an elephant," Professor Popper used to say, "call it an elephant!"

Or take another case, equally odd. In Spell 31 of the Book of the Dead in that same MS (R) in which Professor Wilson detects the closest resemblances to the Joseph Smith Book of the Dead papyrus, occurs the statement, "I am truly Osiris, to whom his Father Geb and his Mother Nut were sealed . . ." To this Professor Allen appends a footnote, advising the reader to "Cf. Mormon rite of sealing children to parents." Why do that if there can be no possible connection between them? It so happens that there are extensive passages in the *Coffin Texts* (from Spell 131 on) in which the sealing of one's family to one in the next world is treated in exactly the same sense and the same terms as those familiar to Mormons but utterly foreign to outsiders. A coincidence, to be sure, but there are altogether too many such coincidences. No non-Mormon can be criticized for being ignorant of Mormonism — after all, there is no end to what people have been willing to believe. But if all this to-do is to pass as a critique of Joseph Smith and Mormonism, it is well that the critics know what they are criticizing. And that is just where the whole business breaks down. If the verdict of the learned has failed hitherto to have any telling effect on the prestige of Joseph Smith save on those giddy Mormons who wish to be thought intellectual, it is because the experts have passed judgment on a thing they do not understand; in the most literal sense of the word *they do not know what they are talking about*, because they do not know what Joseph Smith actually taught.

So far everything that has appeared in print about the newly found papyri

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has been written either by hysterical opponents of everything Mormon or by people innocent of any bias in favor of Joseph Smith, (our own efforts have until now been confined to the affair of 1912, which many people are still persuaded settled the hash of the Book of Abraham for all time). Which means that we have now heard the worst. And it is surprisingly feeble: We have learned that Joseph Smith experimented — but we already knew that; we have learned that the papyri are of relatively late date — but the Mormons have always known that; we have seen some of the papyri that were in Smith's possession, but there is no evidence that we have seen them all, and it is apparent that only one small piece among them has any direct bearing on the Book of Abraham — and what the connection is remains a complete mystery. The Egyptologists — and we can be everlastingly grateful that they are among the ablest and most honorable scholars who ever lived — have supplied some interesting footnotes to the text, but these offer poor enough pickings for anyone seeking occasion against the Prophet.

So now it is time to hear the other side of the story, for after all it is just possible that there are things that might be said in favor of the Book of Abraham. So far no one has asked how Smith came to produce a history of Abraham which can be matched at every point from a wealth of ancient sources — Jewish and Christian apocrypha, Talmud, Mishna, even Gnostic, Hasidic and Cabbalistic writings, Moslem commentators, sectaries of the desert such as Mandaean and Qumran people, even the church Fathers and Classical writers. Even a casual reading of the Book of Abraham shows that the story refers not so much to unique historic events as to ritual forms and traditions — all these must be checked. So far we have heard what is wrong or at least suspect about the Book of Abraham, but as yet nobody has cared to report on the other side of the picture. It is for that we are saving our footnotes.