

# New Light on Joseph Smith's Egyptian Papyri

## Additional Fragment Disclosed

Because of the unprecedented interest generated throughout the Church by the recovery of 11 pieces of papyrus that were once the property of the Prophet Joseph Smith, *The Improvement Era* is reproducing here in color all of the known papyri now in the possession of the Church. There are 12 pieces in all; 11 of these are included in the recent find (see January *Era*) and one has been in the Church Historian's Office over the years. The 12 pieces of papyrus have now been numbered and labeled by Dr. Hugh Nibley, who has been assigned by the Church to direct the investigation and research being done on the material. (See the second in his series of articles, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," page 14.)

Fragment 1 is the section of the papyrus manuscript from which the Prophet Joseph Smith obtained Facsimile No. 1, which is reproduced in the Book of Abraham.

Fragments 2, 3A and 3B are unclassified, illustrated fragments.

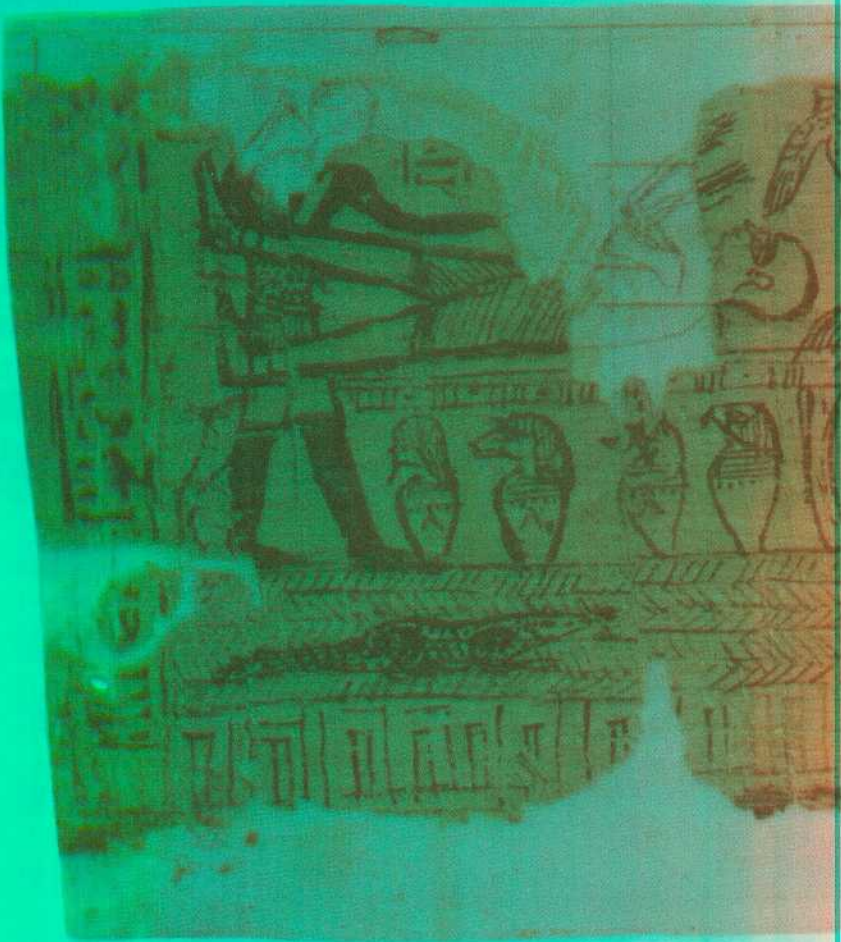
Fragments 4-9—these include the one from the Church Historian's Office—are from the Book of the Dead.

Such books, which were written to assist in the safe passage of the dead persons into the spirit world, were commonly buried with Egyptian mummies. The writings on the recently recovered fragments show that all of these Book of the Dead papyri belonged to the lady Taimin Mutninesikhonsu. Thus, we probably now know the name of the female mummy that was in Joseph Smith's possession and on whose person it was reported the papyrus was originally found.

Fragments 10 and 11 are unclassified, unillustrated hieratic texts. (Hieratic text is a cursive, shorthand version of hieroglyphics.)

Fragment 4 is called the "Framed Trinity Papyrus" because this particular fragment had an old frame on it when it was found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It is thought that the fragment may have been framed and displayed during the Prophet Joseph Smith's time. It is labeled "Trinity" because such figures as those shown in the upper left-hand illustration are interpreted by Egyptologists as representing the Trinity.

D.L.G.



1. Facsimile No. 1



# Background of the Church Historian's Fragment

By Jay M. Todd  
Editorial Associate

● As to the background of the Church Historian's fragment, this is most puzzling. Two members of the historian's office, A. William Lund and Earl E. Olson, assistant Church historians, do not recall any information surrounding the fragment—only that it has been there throughout their service. Brother Lund has been assistant Church historian since 1911, and has worked since September 1908 in the historian's office. They believe that the fragment has been a part of the manuscript of the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar prepared by Joseph Smith preparatory to the translation of the Book of Abraham and that it apparently has always been in the Church's hands. A perusal of the files of the Church Historian's Office discloses these two items:

(1) Wednesday, October 17, 1855. ". . . The following books and papers were taken from this office today and deposited in the fire proof vault of the new Historian's Office, namely on the 2nd shelf from the bottom: History Books, A., B.1, B.2 . . . Egyptian Alphabet; . . . three plates of the Book of Abraham; red box with papers, blanks, journal, stereotype [sic] plates." Thus, if the Church Historian's fragment has always been with the Egyptian Alpha-

bet and Grammar, perhaps this entry helps to date and place the papyrus fragment in its long journey from Nauvoo to Utah.

(2) However, the most interesting—and most puzzling—entry is found under date of Saturday, July 11, 1846. (As early as 1938, Dr. Sidney B. Sperry of Brigham Young University, the "father" of much of our modern Pearl of Great Price research, mentioned in part this intriguing entry in *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone*, an MIA course of study.) "At seven a.m. President Brigham Young and the brethren with him went into council in Powsheeks' tent, which was on the east side of the creek.

"Powsheek asked, where they would winter and where they would cross the Missouri. It was reported that somebody had stolen from the 'Mormons.' Powsheek said if he found anything, he would return it. . . .

"Powsheek spoke of Joseph Smith, the prophet, who had been murdered and with whom he had been acquainted; said, the prophet was a great and good man.

"As the Presidency passed out of the tent, Banquejappa, a Pottawatomie [sic] Chief, called us aside, and presented a paper counseling the Indians not to sell their lands, given them by Jon. Dunham, and two sheets of hieroglyphics, from the Book of Abraham. President B. Young started at

ten minutes after eight, rode till twenty-two minutes after ten, when they stopped at the west branch of the Nodaway, with Ezra Chase; they resumed their journey at half past eleven and arrived at Pottawatomie Indian village forty five minutes after one p.m.

"A Pottawatomie captain presented two sheets of the Book of Abraham; also a letter from their 'Father' Joseph Smith, dated 1843, and a map of their land by W. W. Phelps. . . ."

The location of these meetings was in western Iowa, where the Saints were establishing themselves at Council Bluffs, Mount Pisgah, and other camps in preparation for the winter of 1846, previous to the general exodus to the Rocky Mountains a year later. The West Nodaway River generally ranges 45-55 miles east and southeast of present-day Omaha, Nebraska. From Church history, it appears that Brigham Young was moving westward toward Council Bluffs at the time.

This startling entry presents many questions: 1) Were two different presentations being made of the Book of Abraham material, or is the second reference supposed to be an amplification of the first reference?

2) Are there two presentations, one involving actual papyrus fragments, the other involving a presentation of printed sheets from the Book of Abraham printed in the *Times and Seasons*,

II. Plowing scene ↓



← III A. Court of  
Osiris (on throne)

which the second Indian captain had acquired somehow and presented as a gesture of friendship to Brigham Young?

3) Do both presentations involve newspaper clippings?

4) Since Baquejappa was acquainted with the Prophet, did the Prophet, in a gesture of affection to the Indian chief, give him some pieces of papyrus that from his study the Prophet knew were not important to the Book of Abraham? (As noted above, Dr. Hugh Nibley asserts that the Church Historian's fragment is from the Book of the Dead.)

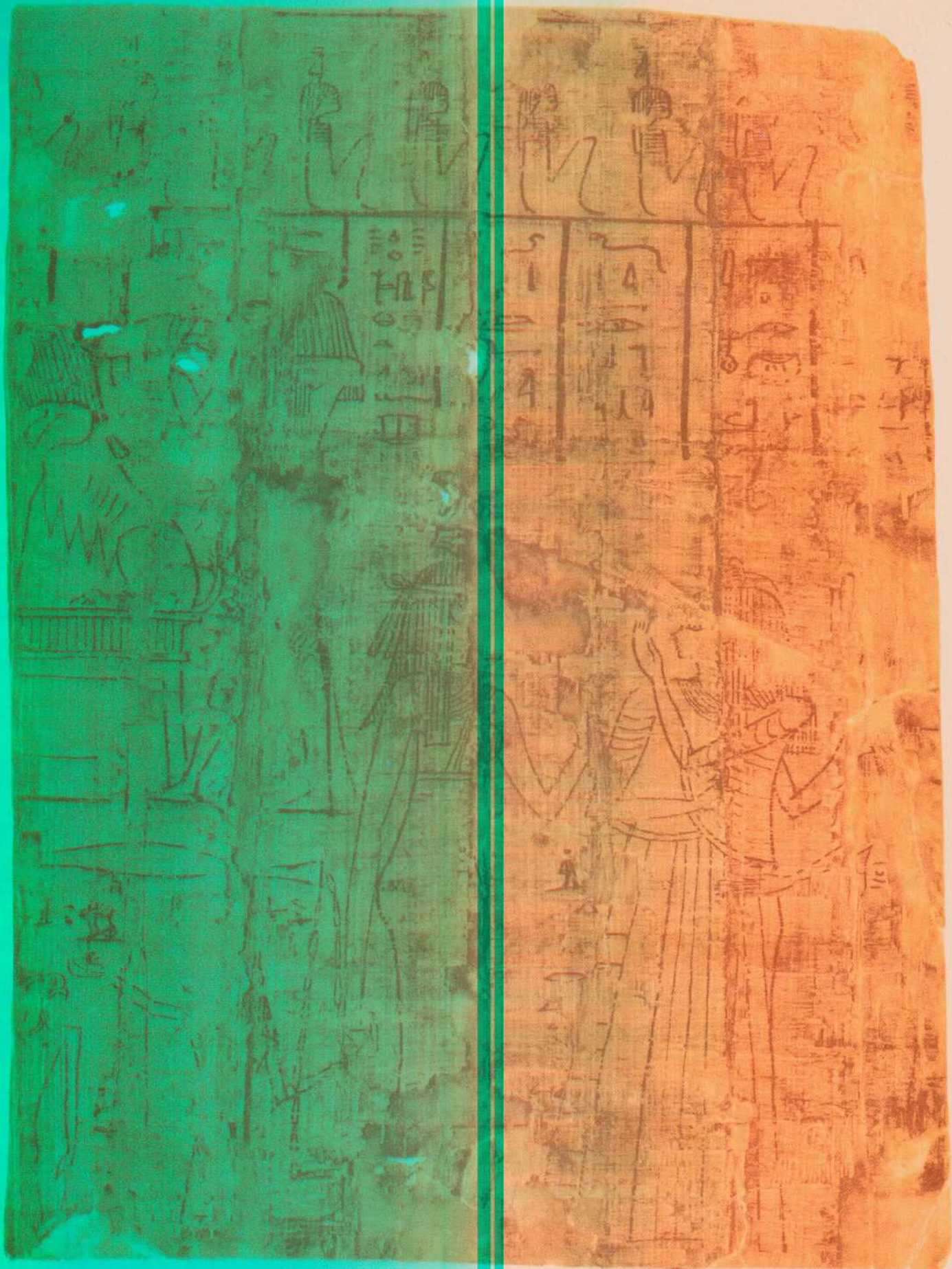
5) If these were actual papyri fragments being returned, were they part of that which was "reported that somebody had stolen from the 'Mormons'?"

6) Did some Indians, while visiting with Joseph Smith, steal some papers and papyrus from him, his office, or Church buildings? Why did the Baquejappa call the men "aside"—a feeling of guilt?

Since the Indians had a letter from the Prophet, and apparently were acquainted with him, the setting is such that it is certainly possible that the Indians could have acquired through some means some actual papyrus fragments.

7) But perhaps the biggest unanswered question is: If the presentation actually did involve two papyrus fragments, is the newly named Church Historian's fragment one of those fragments? And if so, where is

→ III B. Court of Osiris  
(Thoth recording)



Handwritten text in an ancient script, likely Egyptian hieroglyphs, covering the left side of the papyrus scroll. The text is arranged in horizontal lines and is partially obscured by a vertical red line.



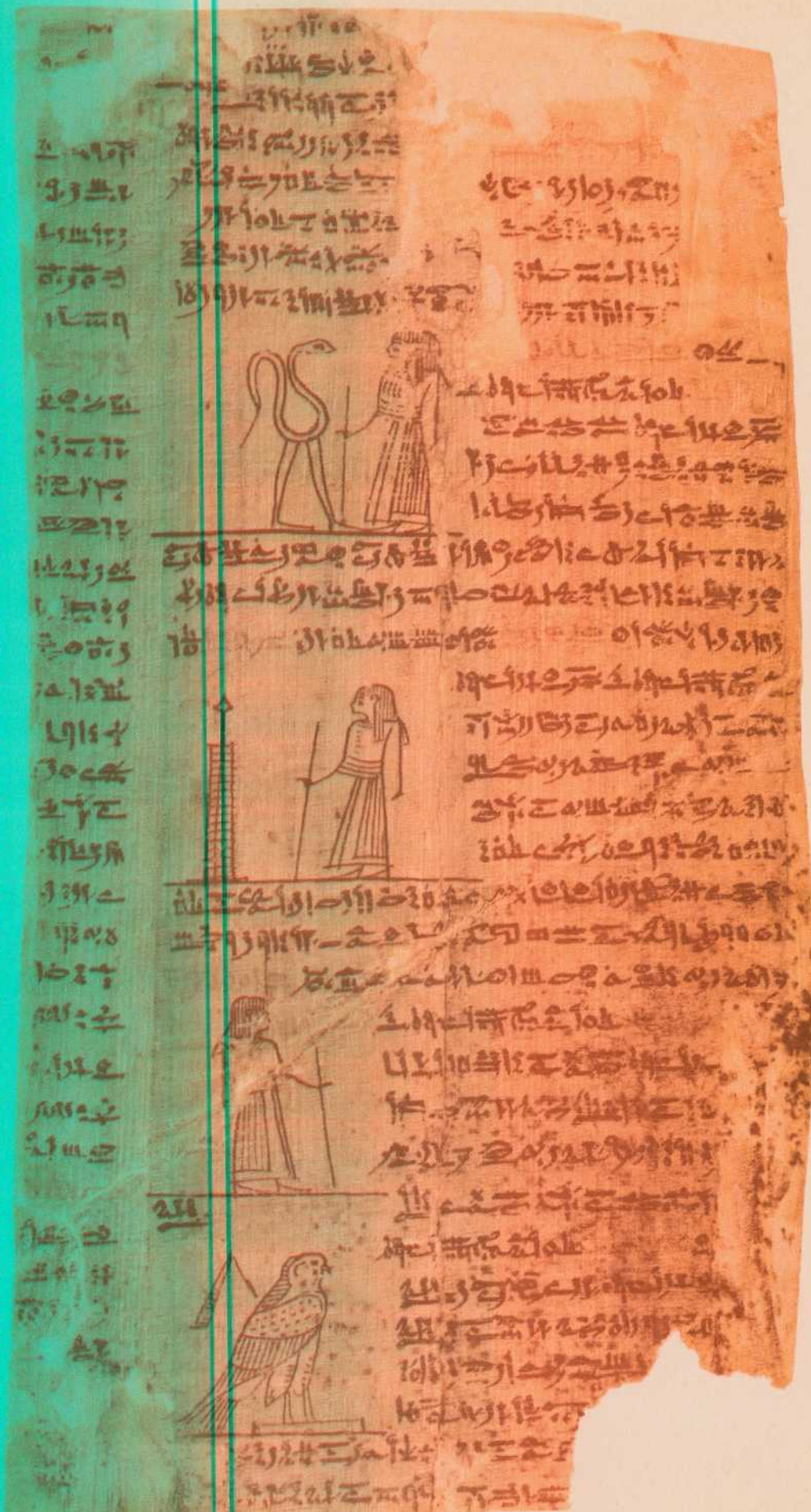
Handwritten text in an ancient script, likely Egyptian hieroglyphs, covering the right side of the papyrus scroll. The text is arranged in horizontal lines and is partially obscured by a vertical red line.



the other fragment? Numerous questions come to mind.

But the story is not yet finished. To add strength to the possibility that the Pottawatami Indians actually could have obtained some manuscripts, perhaps even as a gift from the Prophet Joseph Smith, the following entries from the *Documentary History of the Church* are presented: 1) Under date of Saturday, June 24, 1843: "Several of the Pottawatomie [sic] Indians called to see the Nauvoo House and Temple. They wanted to talk, but their interpreter could not speak much." According to Dr. T. Edgar Lyon, well-known Church historian associated with Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., Nauvoo was a prominent spot for Indians and was called by them *Quashquema*. Indian burial grounds abounded in the area. The Pottawatami Indians were there, being ever pressed westward by settlers since their expulsion from the area around Lake Michigan in 1833. A famous American Indian war, the Black Hawk War, was also waged in this vicinity. At any event, when these Indians arrived, the Prophet Joseph was not in town. He had been forcefully taken the day before by two sheriffs from Missouri, who transported him under false arrest to Dixon, Lee County, Illinois, some 140 miles northeast of Nauvoo. He was released several days later under a writ of habeas corpus.

2) Under date of Sunday, July 2, 1843: "I had an interview with several Pottawatamie [sic] chiefs, who came to see me during my absence." Following this statement, the Prophet had included "Interview with Pottawatamie Chiefs. (From Willford Woodruff's Journal.)" which contains the following: "The Indian chiefs remained at Nauvoo until the Prophet returned and had his trial. During their stay they had a talk with Hyrum Smith in the basement of the Nauvoo House. . . . They were not free to talk, and did not wish to communicate their feelings until they could see the great Prophet. At length, on the 2nd



← VI. The swallow →

→ VII. Man with staff  
(entering into glory)

day of July, 1843, President Joseph Smith and several of the Twelve met those chiefs in the court-room, with about twenty of the elders. The following is a synopsis of the conversation which took place as given by the interpreter: The Indian orator arose and asked the Prophet if the men who were present were all his friends. Answer—yes.

“He then said—‘We as a people have long been distressed and oppressed. We have been driven from our lands many times. . . . We have talked with the Great Spirit, and the Great Spirit has talked with us. We have asked the Great Spirit to save us and let us live; and the Great Spirit has told us that he had raised up a great Prophet, chief and friend, who would do us great good and tell us what to do; and the Great Spirit has told us that you are the man (pointing to the Prophet Joseph). We have now come a great way to see you, and hear your words, and to have you to tell us what to do. Our horses have become poor traveling, and we are hungry. We will now wait and hear your word.’ The Spirit of God rested upon the Lamanites, especially the orator. Joseph was much affected and shed tears. He arose and said unto them: ‘I

have heard your words. They are true. The Great Spirit has told you the truth. I am your friend and brother, and I wish to do you good. . . .

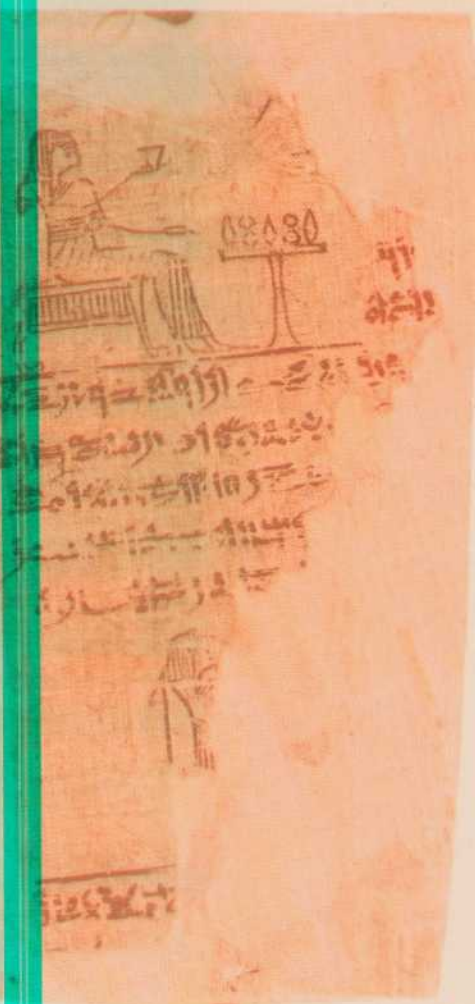
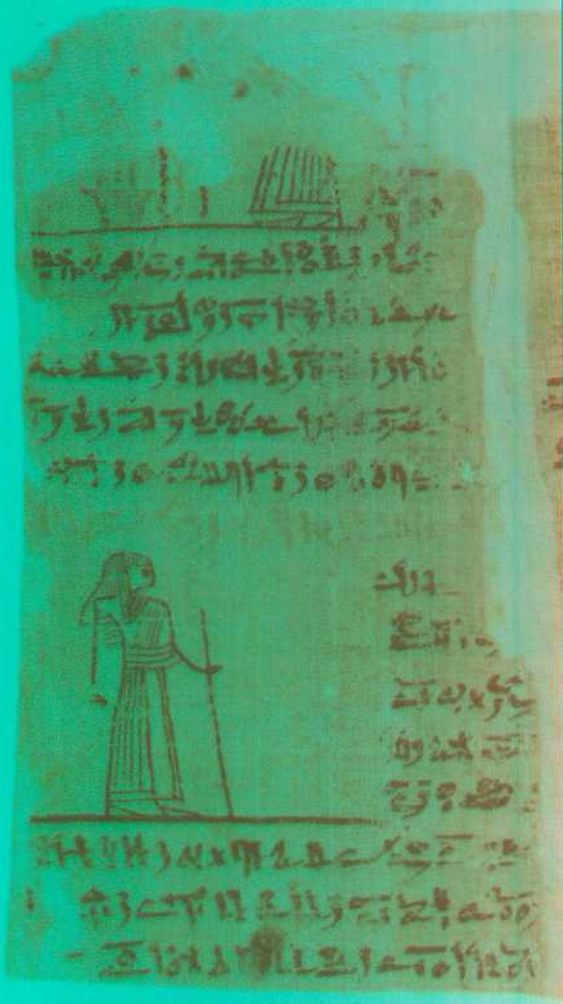
“The Great Spirit has given me a book, and told me that you will soon be blessed again. The Great Spirit will soon begin to talk with you and your children. This is the book which your fathers made. I wrote upon it [showing them the Book of Mormon]. This tells you what you will have to do. I now want you to begin to pray to the Great Spirit. I want you to make peace with one another, and do not kill any more Indians; it is not good. Do not kill white men; it is not good; but ask the Great Spirit for what you want, and it will not be long before the Great Spirit will bless you, and you will cultivate the earth and build good houses like white men. *We will give you something to eat and to take home with you.*”

“When the prophet’s words were interpreted to the chiefs, they all said it was good. . . .

“At the close of the interview, Joseph had an ox killed for them, and they were furnished with some more horses. . . .” (Italics added.)

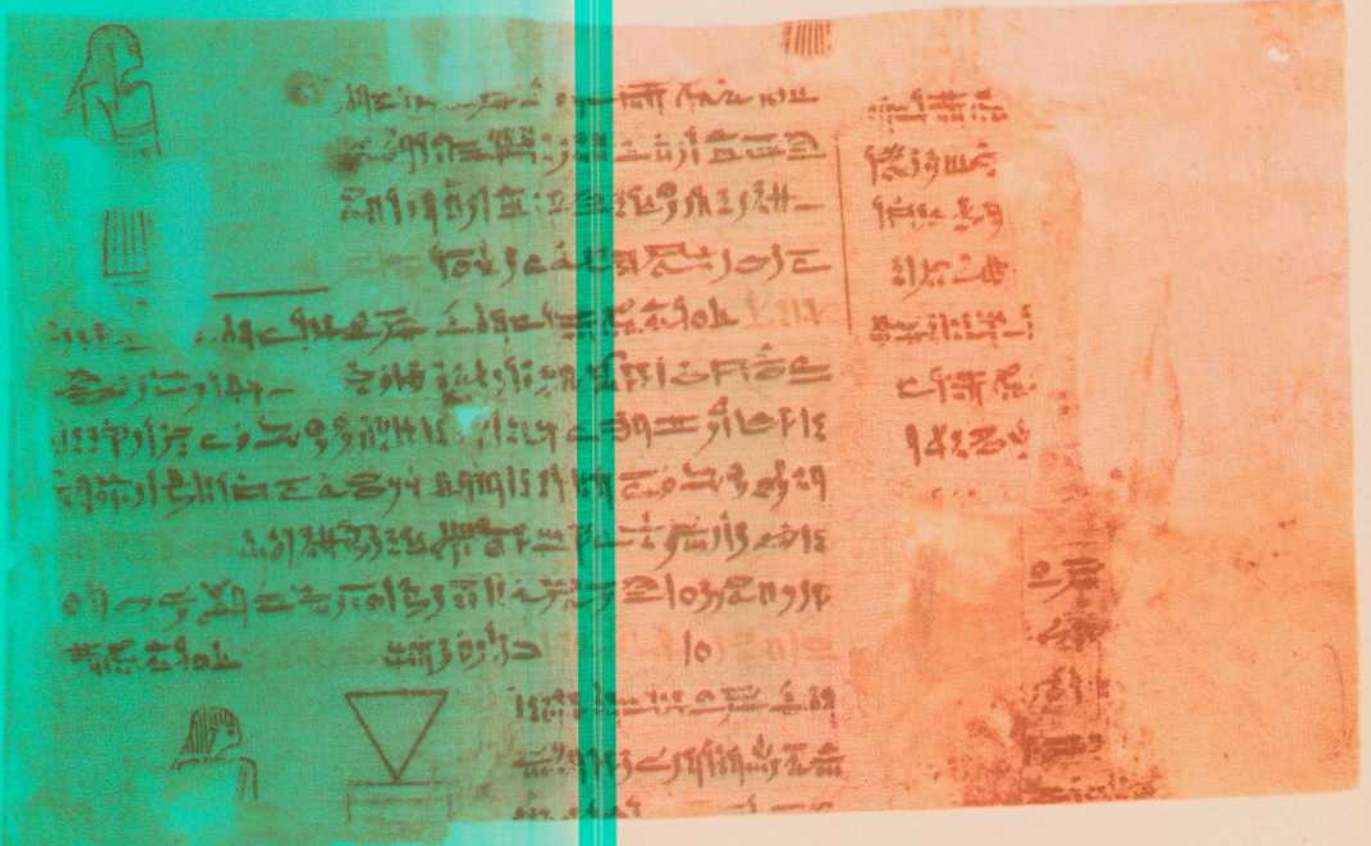
→ VIII.  
Inverted triangle





In addition to this brief information, which certainly portrays a picture of emotion and deep respect between the Potawatami Indians and the Prophet Joseph Smith, the date of the event is most important. It is July 1843, more than a year after the Book of Abraham had first been printed in *Times and Seasons* in 1842. By now the Prophet knew which pieces of papyrus were important, in terms of religious scripture, and which were not.

During the Indians' stay, and in a gesture of lasting friendship, the Prophet may have given them either pages from *Times and Seasons*, which featured Book of Abraham facsimiles, or perhaps some actual papyrus fragments, or both. Thus, in addition to food and horses, the Prophet may have wished to give the Indians a personal token, something of value or of antiquity to demonstrate his affection and bond with them. At any event, it seems apparent that whatever it was that the Indians gave to Brigham Young in 1846 was that which they had obtained during their 1843 Nauvoo visit with the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is certainly a most intriguing puzzle. →



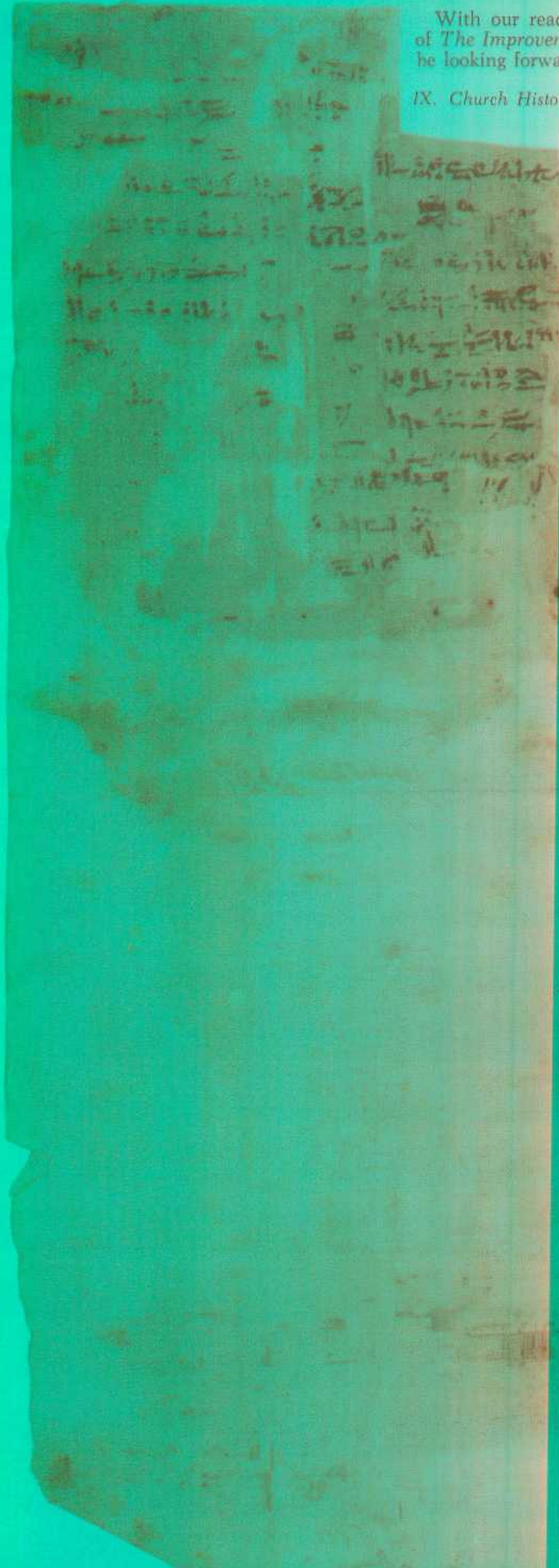


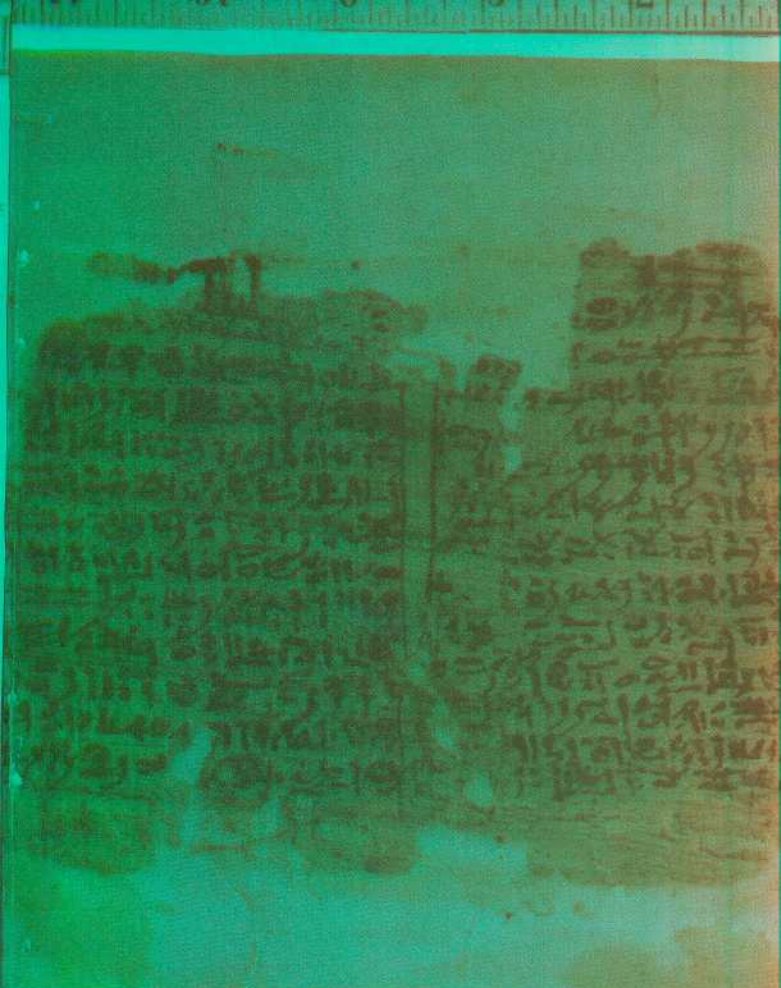
With our readers, the staff of *The Improvement Era* will be looking forward with eager

IX. *Church Historian's fragment*

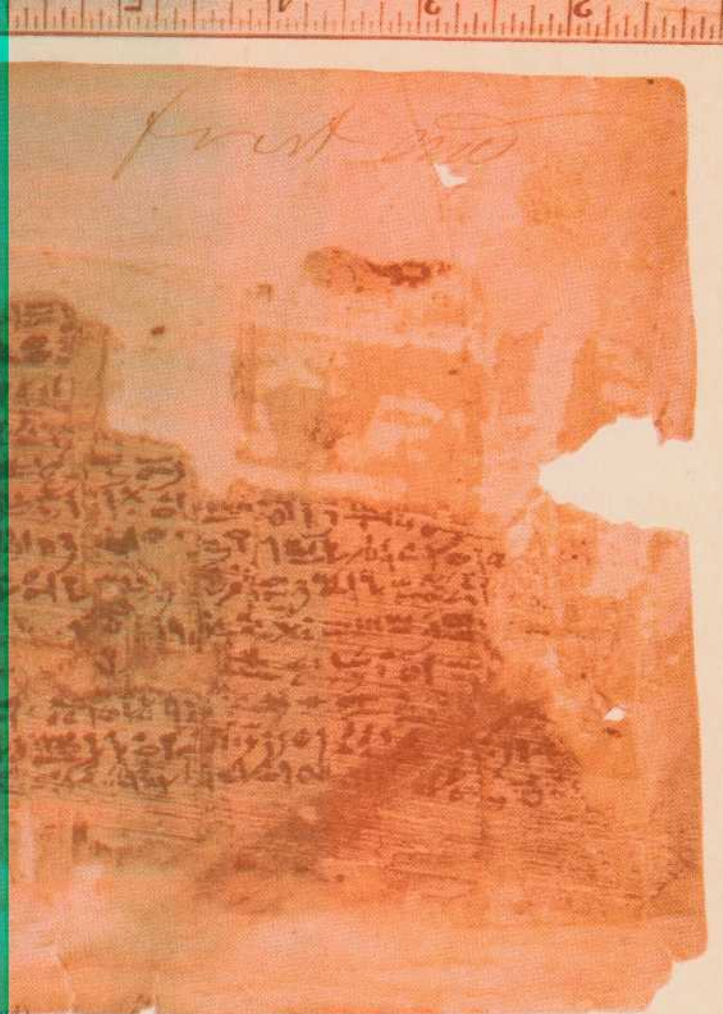


anticipation to additional developments in this fascinating story, and to the unfolding of the meaning of the hieroglyphics and illustrations on these valuable manuscripts as they are given by Dr. Nibley in his articles. ○





X. Hieratic text, the "Sensen" papyrus, labeled "first one" (unillustrated)



XI. Small "Sensen" text (unillustrated)

