

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Joseph Smith Among the Egyptians: An Examination of the Source of Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham

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1

Was the Mormon Prophet, Joseph Smith, Jr., the first American Egyptologist? He could well be credited with this distinction if his claim to be able to read Egyptian by direct divine aid is true. In 1835, while Champollion in France was just making the first breakthrough in understanding the method of Egyptian writing, Joseph Smith's *History* records the following about his own Egyptian studies:

The remainder of this month, I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients.¹

No wonder the Mormon writer William Berrett proudly announced about his Prophet, "His most notable achievement was the development of a Grammar for the Egyptian hieroglyphic form of writing," and he added that it was "the first Egyptian grammar in America."²

The question of whether Joseph Smith could really understand Egyptian has more than just academic or even historical interest. Smith's claim to be the restorer of the world's only true religion ultimately rests on whether he could translate unknown languages by divine power. He first put forth his claim to such supernatural ability when he maintained that he had translated his Book of Mormon from golden plates written in "Reformed Egyptian," a language which he alone, by divine aid, could read. Although witnesses claim to have seen the gold plates, no one at that time—not even the witnesses—was able to check Smith's translating ability. Upon completion of the work the plates were said to have been returned to God, leading one of Smith's contemporaries to ask, granting there were such plates, "how are we to know that the Book of Mormon

¹ Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church*, II, p. 238 (hereafter cited as DHC). How this quotation reads in the original manuscript housed in the Utah LDS Historian's Office this writer has not been informed, although over the past year repeated inquiries were made, even by certified mail.

² William E. Berrett, *The Restored Church* (1956), pp. 133 f.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

is a correct translation?"³ The only point, therefore, at which one might check as to whether Joseph Smith did have a gift for translating is in regard to the Egyptian documents he began to translate in 1835.

In the latter part of June that year a man named Michael Chandler brought to Kirtland, Ohio four mummies and some papyrus writings found with them.⁴ When the Mormons purchased these a few weeks later, the Mormon Prophet with his divine gift began work on them and much to their delight announced "that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt."⁵ The remainder of the month was taken up with "translating an alphabet" to this "Book of Abraham," as he named it, and "arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients." The young Prophet was not at all bashful about his Egyptian ability when he displayed his Egyptian treasures to Josiah Quincy a few years later. "These are hieroglyphics," he proudly announced, "nobody can read them but myself. I can read all writing and all hieroglyphics."⁶ At the time, any claims he might make about his abilities would be quite

³ William Harris, *Mormonism Portrayed* (1841), p. 6. Joseph Smith's *History* published the following year answers this by stating that the Lord declared the translation "correct" (DHC I, p. 55). However, the only objective evidence offered, a slip of paper allegedly containing some of the Reformed Egyptian "Caractors" from the plates, is declared by Egyptologists as definitely not Egyptian (*Saints Herald*, CIII, November 12, 1956, p. 1098). The one serious attempt to find similarities with Egyptian characters (A. Crowley, *Improvement Era*, February 1942, pp. 76 ff) had to hunt among scripts separated from each other by a thousand years and in some instances much later than the period from which the alleged "Reformed Egyptian" is supposed to date. In addition, Mr. Crowley sought correlations with the Sinai proto-Semitic script (*Era* March 1942, pp. 150ff; September 1944, pp. 542ff) rendering the entire attempt a linguist impossibility, a sort of alphabetic smorgasbord. The "Caractors" can more easily be derived from variations on the English alphabet and numerals (John D. Nutting, *Mormonism Today and Its Remedy*, 1927, p. 11). Some have also noted similarities with magical alphabets used in talismans and almanacs and even with ciphers and symbols used by some secret societies. Dr. Wm. F. Albright, once cited by Mormons as an authority on "Reformed Egyptian," maintains that "there was no such language" (signed statement December 1, 1949). On the document itself see Francis Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (1960), I, pp. 172ff and Dr. Stanley Kimball, *BYU Studies* X (Spring 1970), pp. 325 ff.

⁴ According to a letter of W. W. Phelps dated July 19 and 20, 1835 (*Era* XLV, August 1942, p. 529). For the recoverable background of these antiquities see James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (1955), pp. 62-93, and the updating in Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (1969), pp. 13-169 (hereafter as Todd).

⁵ DHC II, p. 236. On pp. 350 f Smith promised his would be "a correct translation."

⁶ Henry Halkett, "Henry's notes upon Joe Smith the Prophet" (notes on Mr. Quincy's visit to Mormon Joseph Smith c. 1845, William L. Clements Library), p. 5. Full text published in Todd, p. 257. That Smith thought of himself as some sort of master of languages is evident in Mr. Quincy's own notes (*Figures of the Past*, 1883, p. 385; Todd, p. 255) which state, "The prophet referred to his miraculous gift of understanding all languages, and took down a Bible in various tongues for the purpose of exhibiting his accomplishments in this particular." In the face of such statements one wonders how Dr. Hugh Nibley of Brigham Young University can calmly proclaim, "Joseph Smith made no secret of his falibility [sic] and claimed to know no language but English" (*BYU Studies*, VIII, Winter 1968, p. 174). For other instances of

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

safe since the whole method of translating Egyptian was still a matter of dispute among scholars and remained so for a number of years thereafter.⁷

Although the papyri were later found to date from Roman times,⁸ Joseph Smith claimed they were in the very handwriting of Abraham himself. In 1840, for example, he showed a visitor to Nauvoo the papyri and stated, "My time has been hitherto too much taken up to translate the whole of them but I will show you how I interpret certain parts. There," said he, pointing to a particular character, 'that is the signature of the patriarch Abraham'."⁹ To Josiah Quincy he stated, "That is the handwriting of Abraham ... This is the autograph of Moses, and these lines were written by his brother Aaron."¹⁰ Mr. Charles Adams, who accompanied Quincy on the trip, reported in his diary the same type of statement by the Mormon leader. "'This,' said he, 'was written by the hand of Abraham and means so and so. If anyone denies it, let him prove the contrary. I say it.'"¹¹ In an interview with Joseph Smith, Henry Caswall recorded that, "Mr. Smith had discovered that these sheets contained the writings of Abraham written with his own hand while in Egypt."¹² Even the Apostle Wilford Woodruff understood Joseph to teach that the papyrus was four thousand years old and written by Abraham himself. In his diary he recorded:

The Lord is blessing Joseph with power to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; to translate through the Urim and Thummim ancient records and hieroglyphics as old as Abraham or Adam... Joseph the Seer has presented us

Smith's display of his linguistic prowess see Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (1945), p. 292 and note; and Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism* (hereafter as Case) III (1971), p. 60.

⁷ As late as 1856 Dr. Gustav Seyffarth was still contending that Champollion's system was wrong and quoted one German scholar who stated in 1845 (a year after Smith's death) that "We declare, as decidedly, that there is not a man alive, who could read and explain any whole section of the Book of the Dead, much less a historical papyrus." (*Seyffarth's Lectures*, 1856, pp. 54 f). Prof. Seyffarth saw the papyri while on display in the St. Louis Museum (Clark, *op cit.*, p. 159) but in his papers preserved at Concordia Theological Seminary the writer could find no copy of these texts. Cf. *BYU Studies* X (Autumn 1969), p. 63 f; Todd, pp. 296-298.

⁸ See below notes 32 and 37.

⁹ *Quincy Whig* III (October 17, 1840), p. 1. Full text in Sidney B. Sperry, *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone* (1938-39 M.I.A. Course), pp. 51 f; Todd, pp. 210 f.

¹⁰ Josiah Quincy, *op. cit.*, p. 386; Todd, p. 256.

¹¹ Diary of Charles Adams, May 15, 1844 in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* LXVIII (1952), p. 285.

¹² Henry Caswell, *The City of the Mormons* (1842), p. 22; also Todd, p. 237. Dr. Nibley, without proof, flatly contradicts this and the preceding testimony, stating, "Joseph Smith never claimed that they were autographic manuscripts or that they dated from the time of Abraham." (*Era*, February 1968, p. 20). Earlier Mormon writers would differ with Dr. Nibley, however: see *Millennial Star*, III (July 1842), p. 47 in Sperry, *op cit.*, p. 54, or Todd, p. 241; and *Csae* II (1968), pp. 162 f.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

some of the Book of Abraham which was written by his own hand but hid from the knowledge of man for the last four thousand years ...¹³

Consequently, when the translation of this record of Abraham was begun, the opening page of an early manuscript draft was headed, "Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the catacombs of Egypt."¹⁴

The work was looked upon by the early Mormons as an important verification of the Book of Mormon, especially since it was reported that Joseph was translating it by the same instrument he had used to translate the Book of Mormon, namely, the Urim and Thummim.¹⁵ Shortly after the papyri were purchased by the church, W. W. Phelps wrote his wife that President Smith

soon knew what they were and said they, the "rolls of papyrus," contained the sacred record kept by Joseph in Pharaoh's court in Egypt, and the teachings of Father Abraham ... These records of old times, when we translate and print them in a book, will make a good witness for the Book of Mormon.¹⁶

Furthermore, the *Warsaw Signal* relates an interview with Joseph Smith's mother, who pointed out that the angel of the Lord had given the ancient patriarch Joseph the papyrus while he was in Egypt and after burying it with the Queen, God had it brought to light apparently for the express purpose of corroborating her son's work on the Book of Mormon.¹⁷ When the Mormon Elder, Freeman Nickerson, debated Tyler Parsons in Boston in 1841, Nickerson mentioned "that the hand-writing of a letter from old father

¹³ Diary February 19, 1842 in Sperry, *op. cit.*, p. 57, or Todd, pp. 220f, and cf. a similar statement, Todd, p. 196.

¹⁴ This MS, acquired by Wilford Wood in 1937 (*Era*, September 1937, pp. 543, 565, 573; also Todd, pp. 327-331), is now designated as B. of A. Ms. #1 (*BYU Studies* XI, Summer 1971, pp. 351, 383 ff). The title carried over in the *Pearl of Great Price* reads in part "... The writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand upon papyrus." Dr. Nibley regards the terminology as the Egyptian method of indicating authorship and not an autographic original, but he can cite no exact parallel (*BYU Studies*, IX, Autumn 1968, pp. 72-78). Cf. the reply of the Mormon Elder Dee Jay Nelson in his *Joseph Smith's "Eye of Ra"* (1968), pp. 24 f.

¹⁵ See citations in *Case II*, p. 182.

¹⁶ Letter of W. W. Phelps, July 19 and 20, 1835 (*Era* XLV, August 1942, p. 529; Todd, pp. 172f).

¹⁷ The *Warsaw Signal* II (September 10, 1845), p. 2. Extract in Sperry, *op. cit.*, p. 55 and Todd, p. 266. At times Joseph's mother added her own embellishments as she apparently did when Miss Charlotte Haven reported that she "turned to a long table, set her candle-stick down, and opened a long roll of manuscript, saying it was 'the writing of Abraham and Isaac, written in Hebrew and Sanscrit' and she read several minutes from it as if it were English... she said she read it through the inspiration of her son Joseph." ("A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," February 19, 1843, *Overland Monthly* XVI, December 1890, p. 624; Todd, pp. 243-246). There seems no reason, however, to question Mother Smith's views as to the papyri's importance. Cf. a similar statement made by her in Quincy, Illinois, Todd, p. 208.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Abraham, the patriarch, was found, and if that is true, said the Elder, and I have no doubt it is, it would silence all that had been said, or could be said, about the falsity, and perjury of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon."¹⁸ By corroborating Joseph's ability to translate unknown languages, the work was thought to completely vindicate his claims about the Book of Mormon. Correspondingly, if his divine aid fails him in giving him an understanding of Egyptian, then his claim to translate "Reformed Egyptian" is seriously threatened.

5

In 1842 Joseph Smith published his Book of Abraham translation in his church's paper, *Times and Seasons*,¹⁹ and along with this text he included three woodcut illustrations from the Egyptian materials, labeling them Facsimile No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3. About fifteen years later a French Egyptologist named Theodule Deveria examined the woodcut illustrations, and although they were poorly copied, he easily recognized that they contained burial scenes involving the pagan god Osiris, and he was able to read the name of the deceased on Facsimile No. 3 as being a man named Horus or Hor.²⁰ Facsimile No. 1 is an embalming scene showing the deceased lying on a lion-couch; but Joseph had explained this to be Abraham about to be slain on an Egyptian altar.²¹ Facsimile No. 3

¹⁸ Tyler Parsons, *Mormon Fanaticism Exposed* (1841), p. 62. More recently Nephi Jensen (*Manual for the Adult Members of the Aaronic Priesthood*, 1942, p. 122) observed that Smith's power to translate Egyptian "is a vital one since it involves not only the authenticity of the Book of Abraham but also the divinity of the Book of Mormon."

¹⁹ *Times and Seasons* III (March I and 15, May 16, 1842), pp. 703-706, 719-722, 783 f.

²⁰ Jules Remy, *A Journey to the Great Salt Lake* (1861) II, pp. 540-546. A recent study by the Mormon scholar Dee Jay Nelson reaches the same conclusion concerning Fac. No. 3. See his reconstruction and detailed analysis in *A Translation and Study of Facsimile No. 3 in the Book of Abraham* (1969), pp. 21-28. On Deveria see pp. 28-30 and note p. 13 where the conflict between Egyptologists' and Smith's interpretation is diagrammed, as well as pp. 26 f where it is shown that none of the hieroglyphic names Smith identified is correct. Cf. Case III, pp. 47-52.

²¹ Dr. Nibley defends Joseph's explanation (*Era*, September, October, December 1968, May-October 1969) by regarding the scene as a royal coronation initiation rite in which a foreigner is put to death in place of the king himself. If a sacrifice is depicted, it certainly is a foreigner of some race other than Abraham's, for the face is clearly non-Semitic (Cf. e.g., Egyptian portrayals of Semites in *Illustrated World of the Bible Library*, I, pp. 26, 38, 94, and Dr. Nibley's apparent recognition of this in *Era*, September 1968, p. 78). Except for a lotus flower, an art-form occasionally associated with foreigners but of varied usage long before Abraham's time, Dr. Nibley can find nothing in the scene to suggest it relates to Abraham. Typical is Dr. Nibley's defense of Joseph's identification of the hawk as "The Angel of the Lord." The hawk, Dr. Nibley states, was occasionally the messenger of the gods and "the Greeks called such a messenger an 'angelos' from which our own word angel is derived." (*Era*, July 1969, p. 110). By the same process one could show that one of the Apostles and not "The Angel of the Lord" is intended since the alternate Greek word for messenger is "apostolos."

Dr. Nibley accounts for the non-Egyptian, Semitic-sounding names assigned by Smith to the Egyptian gods by asserting that "we are dealing here with a Canaanite version" (*Era*, August 1969, p. 83), yet, according to Dr. Nibley, to clarify his story Abraham illustrates his work with figures so highly technical

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

shows the deceased being led before Osiris, god of the dead, and behind the enthroned Osiris stands his wife Isis. Joseph identified the figure on the throne as Abraham, and the figures behind and in front of him as Pharaoh and his son respectively, failing to recognize that these figures are wearing women's dresses and headdresses.²² To defend such unfortunate misidentifications by their Prophet, the Mormon writer George Reynolds suggested that the papyrus "had at least two (but more probably three) meanings, the one understood by the masses—the other comprehended only by the initiated, the priesthood and others; which latter conveyed the true though hidden intent of the writer."²³ Apparently guarded by this defense, the Mormons felt safe in 1880 in canonizing the Book of Abraham as part of their Scriptures as sacred as the Book of Mormon and Smith's revelations.²⁴

The Mormons' problems with this translating effort of their Prophet were far from over, however, for in 1912 the LDS Church received a great blow in the publication of Episcopal Bishop Franklin S. Spalding's *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*. Having submitted Smith's three woodcut illustrations to some of the world's leading Egyptian scholars, Spalding received independently from each the same verdict—that the entire interpretation of Smith was false and that he evidently did not know a thing about Egyptian.²⁵ The

that "they cannot be understood unless they are viewed through trained Egyptian eyes." (*Era*, December 1968, p. 32).

²² Dr. Nibley asserts that Pharaoh and his son are dressed in feminine attire because "coronation scenes always include two women (goddesses) to effect the transmission of authority" (*BYU Studies* X, Summer 1970, p. 438, Thomas W. Mackay's summary of Dr. Nibley's words from the *Era*, May 1956, p. 334), or alternatively because they thus "acknowledged the great feminine ancestor from whom they obtained the right to ride Egypt" (Editor's summary of Dr. Nibley's words in "Some Egyptian Parallels to Facsimile No. 3," *Book of Abraham Symposium*, 1970, p. 69). Philologist Nelson points out, however, that "except in extremely rare cases this solar disk and horns headdress is shown being worn only by goddesses and never by a mortal, not even PharaohI have never seen an ancient picture of Pharaoh wearing the solar disk and horns." (*A Translation and Study of Facsimile No. 3*, pp. 12, 14; cf. p. 5). The same scene portrayed on other funerary documents confirms that the figures represent the goddesses Isis and Maat and not Pharaoh and his son. See illus. in *Case III*, p. 52. For a diagrammed contrast of Egyptologists' and Smith's explanations of the three facsimiles see: A. Chris Eccel, "The Role of the Mormon Apologist in the Reduction of Cognitive Dissonance," inserts #4–6; cf. pp. 6 f. With some effort Nephi Jensen (*op. cit.*) finds ten of Smith's identifications correct. These, however, were common knowledge prior to 1835 (James D. Bales, *Joseph Smith, Jr. as a Translator of Egyptian*, 1955, pp. 2-10) and Jensen overlooks the many incorrect identifications (*Id.*, pp. 10-12).

²³ George Reynolds, *The Book of Abraham* (1879), pp. 44f. The "double meaning" explanation was later adopted by Dr. Clark (*op. cit.*, p. 139; cf. also his "Prophets and Problems of the Book of Abraham," 1958, p. 75); and more recently resorted to by Dr. Nibley (reported in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Is the Book of Abraham True?*, 1968, p. 9). Cf. *Case II*, p. 16 f.

²⁴ Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 204 f.

²⁵ Spalding's booklet, along with Dr. S. A. B. Mercer's September 1913 *Utah Survey* summation, is available in the Tanners' photomechanical reprint, *Why Egyptologists Reject the Book of Abraham* (1964). For

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Mormon church partially side-stepped the issue through the efforts of a professional writer named J. C. Homans. Writing under the pseudonym of Robert C. Webb, to which he attached a self-awarded Ph.D., Homans put forth a display of Egyptian that seemed quite overwhelming to the average reader and created the erroneous impression that the alias "R. C. Webb, Ph.D." was an authority in that field.²⁶ It was argued that Spalding's scholars did not always agree in their interpretations and that they did not give Smith's work the attention it deserved.²⁷ The Mormons maintained that the Facsimiles by themselves were not a sufficient basis for judging their leader's translating abilities. One would need the original Egyptian text from which Smith had made his translation,²⁸ but this was generally believed to have been destroyed in a fire in a Chicago museum in 1871. So discussion came largely to a standstill until 1966.

In April of that year Jerald and Sandra Tanner published a photo-mechanical reproduction of the "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" which Joseph had begun to put together in 1835. Although a few Mormon scholars had known of the existence of this material since about 1935, it was not generally available to most Mormon or to non-Mormon scholars.²⁹ This EAG material, or Kirtland Egyptian Papers (KEP) as they have

Dr. Mercer's more recent (1953) verdict against Joseph Smith, along with similar conclusions by currently renowned Egyptologists Drs. Wilson, Parker and Edwards, see the Tanners' *The Salt Lake City Messenger* (April, July 1966), and cf. further their booklet, *The Mormon Papyri Question* (1968), pp. 1-8, and Case II, pp. 124-128. Dr. Albert Lythgoe's supporting evidence in 'Museum Walls Proclaim Fraud of Mormon Prophet' (*The New York Times*, December 29, 1912) was reprinted by the Tanners but only privately circulated.

²⁶ See Case II, p. 128-131 on Homans, whose initials are variously given as "J. C." (Dr. Sperry in *Pearl of Great Price Conference*, 1964, p. 6) and as "J. E." (Brodio, *op. cit.*, p. 175). "At one time when 'Dr. Webb' was escorted around BYU seeking help to write one of his later books defending Smith as a translator, a few men had learned that 'Webb' was only a hired hack writer and they withheld assistance," according to one of those few still living. (Letter, February 27, 1972).

²⁷ Although Dr. Nibley asserted that the 1912 scholars "never did get around to testing Joseph as a translator" (*Era*, March 1968, p. 22), their challenge has bothered the LDS Church. In 1936 the Mormon press published "Dr. Webb's" most extensive rebuttal (*Joseph Smith as a Translator*); in 1955 Dr. Clark devoted considerable space to a reply (*op. cit.*, pp. 52-62, 117-119, 120-141); and in 1968 Dr. Nibley began a near filibuster against the Spalding scholars (*Era*, January-August, 1968, and *Passim*, September 1968-May 1970). For the 1912-1913 defense see the chronological listing in Sperry, *Ancient Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone*, pp. 77 f.

²⁸ E.g., Mormon writer Henry Evans stated, "Before they would be warranted in saying that the entire Book of Abraham was not properly translated, they would have to examine the original papyrus, or a copy of it, from which the Book of Abraham was translated Now, as a matter of fact the hieroglyphics submitted to the scholars constituted less than one-seventh of the Book of Abraham and that only an accompaniment of the text." (*Era* XVI, February 1913, p. 343; cf. *Case II*, p. 164).

²⁹ Dr. Sperry and Dr. Clark had seen and studied the EAG material in 1935, but they had not been "cleared" to release this information (*Book of Abraham Symposium*, 1970, pp. 21 f). Therefore, the best Dr. Sperry could do in 1938 was to describe how it "seems...quite probable" the material was arranged (*op.*

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

more recently been designated, consists of some separate work-sheets and a bound volume containing material of the same type as on the work-sheets.³⁰ The EAG attempts to interpret Egyptian by breaking down the characters into the number of component strokes it takes to write them, and each type of stroke is given a strange name and an arbitrary English meaning. The number of connecting points in a character was thought somehow to intensify the meaning, and the EAG material is thus repeated through each of five “degrees” of intensity. When the scholarly world through the Tanners’ publication got their first good look at this bizarre method of translating Egyptian,³¹ some Mormons became unsettled to the point of losing their faith in Smith’s ability to translate Egyptian. Yet a more shattering blow to their faith was still to come the following year.

8

On November 27, 1967 the news media carried an unexpected announcement that a portion of the papyri which Joseph Smith had acquired in 1835 was still in existence and had been turned over to the Mormon church by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City where they had been since 1947.³² Now at last the official material was available for judging the Mormon leader’s translating ability. What was heralded with great rejoicing by the Mormon community, has since turned into a nightmare for their scholars and has been responsible for some learned Mormons coming to reject the Book of Abraham and even renounce all the claims of their Prophet.

cit., p. 69). In 1955 Dr. Clark gave the first sampling from the EAG Mss. (*op. cit.*, pp. 100-110, 132, 136, 163), but as late as 1960 Dr. Sperry still felt “it would be a little premature” to publish all the material (*Pearl of Great Price Conference*, 1964, p. 9). Even after the Tanners made the material available in 1966, it was still felt that “more work... needs to be done on the collation of the documents before we do anything about publication.” (*Book of Abraham Symposium*, p. 23). Cf. Todd, pp. 281 f, 286, 311 ff.

³⁰ The Tanners published the material under the title *Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar*, but Dr. Nibley prefers the designation of “Kirtland Egyptian Papers” (*BYU Studies* XI, Summer 1971, p. 350). Dr. Nibley’s otherwise helpful article, which includes an enumeration and description of the various documents, is unfortunately marred by careless statements, faulty observations, factual errors, misquotations and fallacious reasoning; e.g. after giving the dating of most of the KEP as *two* years after Smith acquired the papyri (p. 351), he subsequently refers to them as “turned out *years* later” (p. 353, italics mine); the title heading the “Grammar & Alphabet” [sic], being slightly crowded at the end of the line, gets distortedly described as “awkwardly and unevenly crammed in at the top of the first page, as an after thought” (p. 359f). Cf. also below notes 41 and 44.

³¹ For Egyptologists’ opinions see the Tanners’ *The Mormon Papyri Question*, pp. 20-27.

³² *Deseret News*, November 27, 1967, A, p. 1. For further details see *Dialogue* II (Winter 1967), pp. 51-64; *Era* LXXI (January 1968), pp. 12-16; *Book of Abraham Symposium*, pp. 36-43; Todd, pp. 333-351; and photos of papyri *Id.*, pp. 366-380; *Era* LXXI (February 1968), pp. 40 ff; *BYU Studies* VIH (Winter 1968) [pp. 179 ff.]. A few professionals are said to have known about the papyri since 1902 (Todd, p. 347 f), and the Museum since 1918 (Todd, pp. 346, 348).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Museum's collection consisted of eleven fragments of three different papyri.³³ The first of the two major ones is most likely that which Joseph Smith had identified in 1835 as the writings of the patriarch Joseph.³⁴ The second, and more important, is the papyrus he had identified as the "Book of Abraham" and from which he had copied Facsimile No. I (the lion-couch scene). This scroll undoubtedly also contained the drawing Smith had

³³ Dr. Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hor. A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," *Dialogue* III (Autumn 1968), p. 111—a major article by an expert whose *conclusions*, though challenged by Dr. Nibley (*BYU Studies* XI, Winter 1971, pp. 153ff), still remain firmly established. Dr. Baer sees the three to be:

(1) Book of the Dead for the deceased Tshenmin (others transcribe as Ta Shert Min=Ta-Shere-Min), represented in P. JS (=Papyrus Joseph Smith) II, IV-IX.

(2) Book of the Dead judgment scene for "the (female) musician Amen-Re Neferirhub"—P. JS III. Cf. D. J. Nelson's comments (*The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2, Appendix 1*).

(3) "Breathing Permit" (others designate as "Book of Breathings" and "Sensen") for "Hor, son of the priest Osorwer and the lady Tikhebyt"—P. JS I, X, XI. All of these papyri are regarded by Egyptologists as being at least a thousand years later than the time of Abraham, clearly later than 500 B.C. (Wilson, *Dialogue* III, Summer 1968, p. 70. Cf. the Tanners' *The Mormon Papyri Question*, pp. 13-16).

Smith's collection originally included portions of at least two more papyri:

(4) The "hypocephalus" (Smith's Fac. No. 2) for a corpse named Shehonk (Wilson, *Dialogue* III, Summer 1968, p. 68), or the biblical spelling Shishak (Petrie in Spalding, *op. cit.*, p. 23). For a detailed study see Dee Jay Nelson, *Joseph Smith's "Eye of Ra" (1968)*. While Smith makes this part of the Abrahamic material, the use of the hypocephalus was a late practice "toward the end of ancient Egyptian history" (Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 68), certainly not earlier than the 7th century B.C. (Nelson, "Eye of Ra," p. 19). As printed by Smith (*Times & Seasons* III, fol. p. 721; and subsequently in the PGP) the hypocephalus was falsely restored using material from the Hor papyrus (P. JS XI). Cf. Nelson, *Id.* pp. 22-25; Tanner & Heward, *Dialogue* III (Summer 1968), pp. 96-98; *Case* III, p. 9-30, and Dr. Nibley's attempted defense in *BYU Studies* IX (Autumn 1968), pp. 86-96.

(5) Book of the Dead for Amen Hotep (Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 68), as reflected in Egyptian texts poorly copied into the KEP Egyptian Mss. No. 6 and No. 7 (sometimes referred to as Joseph Smith's "Valuable Discovery Notebook"). Cf. Nelson's detailed examination in *The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, pp. 3-6, 8-11, 40 and Appendix 1.

³⁴ Oliver Cowdery's description of the "Book of Joseph" as containing a "serpent, represented as walking... standing in front of and near a female figure" (*Messenger & Advocate* II, December 1835, p. 236) appears to match the drawing on the Tshenmin papyrus (cf. further: *Case* III, pp. 63-66; Tanner, *The Mormon Papyri Question*, pp. 16-18; Todd, pp. 191-194). The Tshenmin papyrus has received preliminary treatment by Dr. Parker (*Dialogue* III, Summer 1968, pp. 87 f), by Dr. Wilson with helpful annotations (*Id.*, pp. 71-85), and by Dee Jay Nelson (*The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, pp. 22-35).

Since the KEP material has the walking serpent sketched in under the text mentioning Amen Hotep, that papyrus could be regarded as the "Book of Joseph," but comments by those who saw the papyri do not indicate there were two such drawings, and the sketch is sufficiently close to the Tshenmin vignette (Cf. Nelson, *Id.*, p. 26) to conclude that the Tshenmin papyrus is the one Smith identified as the "Book of Joseph." It is thought that Joseph Smith attempted a translation of the "Book of Joseph," but to date little information about it has been forth-coming.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

reproduced as Facsimile No. 3,³⁵ but only the vignette for Facsimile No. 1 was in the Metropolitan collection.³⁶ Belonging to this same papyrus were two fragments containing four columns of text, which Dr. Klaus Baer of the University of Chicago showed joined directly to the opening vignette,³⁷ and with the vignette constituted the entire opening section of the scroll. Far from having anything to do with Abraham, the scroll was found to be a piece of Egyptian funeral literature dating from about the time of Christ.³⁸ The latest form of the Egyptian Book of the Dead literature, this “Book of Breathings” or “Sensen Papyrus” depends upon charms to get the deceased successfully through the realm of the dead so he may live and breathe again, and is thoroughly pagan in nature.³⁹



³⁵ As indicated above, Fac. No. 3 is for the deceased Hor or Horus, and the same name appears in the columns of hieroglyphics on the papyrus accompanying the vignette from which Smith copied his Fac. No. 1. The hieroglyphics from columns number 1, 2, 3 and 5 (numbering from right to left) were copied into the KEP, recurring in Egyptian Mss. No. 3, No. 4 and No. 5. Since the copying in the KEP was done from left to right, the columns on the right hand side of the vignette (cols. 1, 2, 3) appear in reverse order (3, 2, 1) in the KEP material, and this is there followed immediately by column 5 from the left hand side of the vignette. Cf. further Dr. Baer, *op. cit.*, pp. 116f, 126–129; Case III, pp. 32–36; Dee Jay Nelson, *The Joseph Smith Papyri*, pp. 24 f, 43–45. Nelson tentatively read the name as “Ter,” but later corrected it to “Hor,” following Dr. Parker, along with Drs. Wilson and Baer (*The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, p. 2 fn.).

³⁶ In the damaged vignette the figure at the foot of the lion-couch lacks a head. Smith’s woodcut restores to this figure a human head instead of the usual Jackal head of the god Anubis. Cf. on this Dr. Parker (*Dialogue III*, Summer 1968, p. 86), Dr. Wilson’s comments (Tanner, *The Mormon Papyri Question*, p. 13, cf. pp. 9–12) and Dee Jay Nelson (*The Joseph Smith Papyri*, pp. 41–45). See Dr. Nibley’s defense of Smith’s drawing (*BYU Studies IX*, Autumn 1968, pp. 81–86, 98f; *Era*, September and October, 1968) and the Tanners’ reply (Case III, pp. 31–46, 72f).

³⁷ Baer, *op. cit.*, pp. 111–113, 133 f. This is further confirmed from Smith’s translation of the Book of Abraham which refers the reader back to “the representation at the commencement of this record” (Ab. 1.12).

³⁸ *Id.*, p. 111. Even Dr. Nibley concedes that the papyri belong to a late period (*Era LXXII*, August 1969, p. 75; *BYU Studies XI*, Winter 1971, pp. 158f).

³⁹ A BYU publication notes: “The Book of the Dead is a collection of ancient Egyptian funerary texts consisting of spells and incantations understood to assist the soul of the departed during his perilous journey through the after life. It would thus presumably be pagan in spirit and have nothing to do with any scriptures written by Abraham.” (*Newsletter and Proceedings of the Society for Early Historic Archeology*, March 1, 1968, p. 9).

Dr. Nibley seeks to soften this pagan element by reconstructing the Egyptian religion so that it is virtually parallel to the Mormon faith (*BYU Studies XI*, Winter 1971, pp. 170f, 175, 178–182, 185f), in the process misreading some of his sources: e.g., to establish that the Egyptian funeral texts were originally an initiation ceremony for the living, somewhat akin to the Mormon Temple Ceremonies, he appeals to S. G. F. Brandon, who does not make the leap from funerary literature to initiation ceremonies that Dr. Nibley

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

When the LDS Church in February 1968 published sepia reproductions of all the fragments they had acquired, Mr. Grant Heward, a Salt Lake City letter-carrier, drew public attention to a significant feature about one of these fragments. Mr. Heward had taught himself Egyptian and had been working for some time with the EAG materials.⁴⁰ In with the EAG materials were two nearly identical manuscripts of Smith's translation of the opening portion of his Book of Abraham (subsequently number B. of A. Mss. No. 2 and No. 3), which contained crudely copied Egyptian characters in a column to the left of the translation. Mr. Heward pointed out that these were copied directly from the first two lines of the opening column of text on the Book of Breathings papyrus, which the *Era* had published as "XI Small 'Sensen' text (unillustrated)".⁴¹ He further observed that another Book of Abraham manuscript (now designated as Ms. No. 1),⁴² which carried Smith's translation still farther along, continued the Egyptian Sensen text in the left column down into the fourth line of the papyrus. This was indeed a sobering discovery, for this meant that scholars now had not only the papyrus that Smith had identified as the Book of Abraham, but even the very portion of the text he had used as a basis for his translation. It immediately became apparent that Smith did not understand a word of the text he was supposedly translating.

implies he does. He further cites C. J. Bleeker's work, but fails to quote on the same page the statement that "there never was a secret doctrine in Ancient Egypt; there were no closed societies of priests and initiates possessing esoteric knowledge," which obviously would damage Dr. Nibley's case.

⁴⁰ On Mr. Heward's intellectual conflicts and ultimate excommunication see: *Case II*, p. 177 f, 167; Tanner, *The Mormon Papyri Question*, p. 27, and *Is the Book of Abraham True?*, pp. 10 f. For his skill as a self-taught student of Egyptian of.: *Id.*, pp. 18-23; and Nelson, *Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, pp. 30-32.

⁴¹ This was drawn to Mr. Heward's attention by an acquaintance who wished to remain anonymous (Grant Heward, "Historical Statements," p. 1), and announced in the Tanners' *Salt Lake City Messenger*, March 1968. Cf. also their *Is the Book of Abraham True?*, pp. 3-6. For a handy comparison of the Sensen text with the characters copied on to the manuscripts, see *Case II*, p. 152.

⁴² The designations are those recently set up by the LDS Historian's Office (*BYU Studies* XI, Summer 1971, p. 351). In employing these references Dr. Nibley at one point says that Mss. No. 2 and No. 3 were on the microfilm of the KEP materials taken from the Historian's Office, but that No. 1 and No. 4 were not (p. 354), which is correct; at a later point he mistakenly reverses this (p. 370). He is also in error in regard to Ms. No. 1 in stating, "It has never been published" (p. 382), for it had appeared in full in *Case II*, pp. 147-151 in 1968. He considers Ms. No 1 to be "the parent and original of the series to which Mss. No. 2 and No. 3...belong" (p. 382). However, except for the first half page in the handwriting of Phelps (p. 384), the rest of Ms. No. 1 in the hand-writing of Warren Parrish cannot possibly precede Mss. No. 2 and No. 3. The latter Mss., from the type of corrections they contain, give clear evidence of being produced simultaneously from oral dictation and contain readings that do not appear in Ms. No. 1. Further, Ms. No. 1 shows evidence of being copied from and a slight expansion of Ms. No. 3. Mss. No. 2 and No. 3 contain Smith's translation of Ab. 1.4-2.6 and 2.2 respectively, while Ms. No. 1 covers Ab. 1.1-2.18 (as much as appeared in the first installment in *Times & Seasons*, March 1, 1842).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Joseph's translation is derived from the introductory portion which gives the name of the corpse and of his mother, as well as directions for burying the Sensen text with the mummy. As translated by Dr. Klaus Baer, these burial instructions read:

*Osiris shall be conveyed into the Great Pool of Khons—and likewise Osiris Hor, justified, born to Tikhebyt, justified—after his arms have been placed on his heart and the Breathing permit (which [Isis] made and has writing on its inside and outside) has been wrapped in royal linen and placed under his left arm near his heart; the rest of the mummy-bandages should be wrapped over it. The man for whom this book has been copied will breathe forever and ever as the bas of the gods do.*⁴³

12

From this brief section Joseph derived over four pages of translation which begins:

In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my father, I Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence...

and this continues for a chapter and a half, containing over 2,000 English words, all from three and a half lines of Egyptian text that makes no mention of Abraham.⁴⁴

If this is not sufficient evidence that the Prophet had no idea about what the Egyptian text said, it is further confirmed by the fact that he broke up Egyptian words in odd places and derived dozens and dozens of words of translation from a single Egyptian word and even from a portion of a word.⁴⁵ At one point he used the final character in the Egyptian

⁴³ Baer, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-120. Independent translations have also been made by: Dr. Parker (Dialogue III, Summer 1968, pp. 98 f), and by Dee Jay Nelson (*The Joseph Smith Papyri*, pp. 36-41; and with annotations, *The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, pp. 17-21). For a transcription of the text into hieroglyphic characters see *Id.*, p. 16, and for a comparison with Louvre Papyrus 3284 which is "virtually identical" (Nibley), see pp. 12-13 and *BYU Studies XI*, Winter 1971, p. 156. Cf. further *Case II*, p. 157 f and Tanner, *Is the Book of Abraham True?*, pp. 17-20. A handy comparison of the translations of Drs. Baer, Parker and Nelson can be found in *Case II*, p. 159.

⁴⁴ Dr. Baer provides a comparison of the translation from the Egyptian text with Smith's translation from B. of A. Ms. No. 3 (*op. cit.*, pp. 130-132).

⁴⁵ The Tanners state, "We find that in one instance one set makes 71 words in English, another makes 121, another set makes 177, and still another makes 234 words." (*Is the Book of Abraham True?*, p. 10; of. pp. 11-15). See also *Case II*, pp. 165-171 and Nelson, *The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, pp. 14-17. For the normal ratio of Egyptian to English, see Nelson's rendering of Ab. 1.4 into Egyptian (*Id.*, p. 39).

Dr. Nibley uses this disproportion to argue that the text is not intended to be viewed as a translation of the characters to the left (*BYU Studies XI*, Summer 1971, p. 374) and cites KEP Eg. Ms. No. 7 where there appears to be a more normal proportion of professed English translation to its Egyptian text on the following page. However, the parallel document, Eg. Ms. No. 6 (p. 3), shows that this same disproportional method was used, with many English words of that translation being derived from just a

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

word meaning “lake” or “pool,” which served only as a determinative word-ending showing that the word had something to do with water. It resembles a capital “E” facing backwards and could not have taken more than three (and certainly not more than six) strokes to write. From this three-stroke character the Mormon leader got 76 words of translation (Ab. 1.13-14),⁴⁶ which included seven personal names of at least two syllables each (Elkenah, Mahmackrah, Rahleenos, etc.), a dozen nouns (e.g. bedstead, figures, hieroglyphics), and an assortment of pronouns, verbs, conjunctions, prepositions and definite articles.

Even the church’s chief defender of the Book of Abraham, Dr. Hugh Nibley, had to concede that Joseph Smith’s translation could not be derived from the Sensen text. He wrote that “it soon became apparent that those documents did not contain any of the text of the Book of Abraham as we have it,” and that “no slightest knowledge of Egyptian is necessary to convince anybody that when a symbol as brief as CAT is ‘translated’ by an involved paragraph of over one hundred words, we are not dealing with a ‘translation’ in any accepted sense of the word.”⁴⁷

Two Mormon scholars, Mr. John Tvedtnes and Mr. Richley Crapo, have summarized the dilemma the Mormons face in dealing with this material.⁴⁸ There are, as they see it, only two avenues open to them. The first possibility is to discount the large ratio of English words to Egyptian symbols and to maintain that Joseph really did use the Sensen text to obtain his translation. However, as they rightly observe, this “implies proving that the Book of Abraham text does indeed come from the Sen-Sen Text.” This possibility “appears to have been ruled out by the scholarly translations of the Sen-Sen Text” which make it very clear that so far as the normal reading of the Egyptian text is concerned the Book of Abraham is just not on the Sensen papyrus. The second avenue is to come up with some other explanation as to why the Egyptian characters stand next to the Book of Abraham translation in the manuscripts, to “find some other reason why Joseph Smith put them in juxtaposition.” This too does not seem to be very helpful “in the absence of a reasonable substitute explanation for the juxtaposition” other than that Joseph Smith felt he was deriving his translation on the right from those Egyptian characters at the left.

few Egyptian characters. See Nelson, *The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, pp. 4, 9-11 where this was pointed out at least three years prior to Dr. Nibley’s article.

Mr. Bichley Carpo examined the possibility that there might be something significant in the way Smith divided up the Egyptian text, but discovered that students unfamiliar with Egyptian tended to divide the words at the same points (*Book of Abraham Symposium*, pp. 25-34). This is probably because the spacing between characters seems to measure the greatest at these points.

⁴⁶ From the three remaining characters another 59 words were derived.

⁴⁷ *Era*, May 1970, p. 83.

⁴⁸ *Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A.*, October 25, 1968, pp. 1, 3, 4.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Dr. Hugh Nibley adopts the latter approach, and as Tvedtnes and Crapo had anticipated, Dr. Nibley has great difficulty in coming up with a reasonable explanation for the juxtaposition. He suggests that the Egyptian characters “are meant as guides or markers of some sort,” to mark “the point at which a scribe takes up his pen,” or “to help the copyists in coordinating their work.” This would mean that the characters were added a few at a time as the English text was being written, perhaps, as he at a later place suggests, “to mark off various phases of their understanding.”⁴⁹ However, in the midst of setting forth these suggestions, he inconsistently changes his mind and states that “the English of the Book of Abraham was here copied down *before* the Egyptian *signs* were added” and he tries to show that the Egyptian was squeezed in later, for “all the marginal Egyptian writing is supplied by a single hand,” “a single person concerned... with bringing the work of a number of hands together in some sort of correlation” had placed the Egyptian in the margin.⁵⁰ In spite of Dr. Nibley’s efforts, however, Book of Abraham Ms. No. 1 makes it quite clear that the intended relationship was that of text to translation, for the columns there are headed “Character” and “Translation,” following the format of “Character” and “Explanation” used in the EAG materials.⁵¹

To make his case, Dr. Nibley not only has to separate the Egyptian text from Smith’s English text of the Book of Abraham, he also needs to separate Smith from any connection with the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar. Although he has to admit that the Prophet played around with some of the EAG material, since a four-page manuscript employing the method used in the EAG exists in what Mormon scholars identify as Joseph’s own handwriting,⁵² yet he wants Joseph’s manuscript to be quite different from the manuscripts in the handwriting of his scribes, Joseph’s work being “perfectly sane and rational.”⁵³ Any relationship that exists, therefore, between the EAG and the text of the Book of Abraham (and there are several) must be attempts by Smith’s associates to make use of their Prophet’s translation in trying to understand and learn Egyptian themselves. After a few experimental attempts, Dr. Nibley sees them as scrapping the project as unsuccessful, and such material he felt would not be worth even five minutes of his time.⁵⁴ Having written off the whole EAG as worthless, Dr. Nibley suddenly feels that the

⁴⁹ *BYU Studies* XI (Summer 1971), pp. 376, 385, 390.

⁵⁰ *Id.*, pp. 380 (italics Dr. Nibley’s), 391. Earlier he had suggested they were “section-headings” (Dialogue III, Summer 1968, p. 100).

⁵¹ See further, Eccel, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 f.

⁵² *BYU Studies* XI, p. 364 51.

⁵³ *Id.*, p. 367.

⁵⁴ *Id.*, p. 379, 384 f; “This writer, however, has never spent so much as five minutes with the Egyptian Grammar, and does not intend to unless he is forced to it. ...Joseph Smith never pretended to understand Egyptian.” (*BYU Studies*, Winter 1968, p. 176). As his later (1971 *BYU Studies*) article shows, Dr. Nibley finally did spend considerably more than five minutes with the KEP material.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

EAG material is indispensable to the Mormon scholar who would seriously study the Book of Abraham. It is something “at the very least he must be thoroughly familiar with.”⁵⁵ Consequently it merits further investigation since it “reads like a very up-to-date analysis of the basic ideas of Egyptian religion and kingship.”⁵⁶ Furthermore, while Dr. Nibley firmly maintains that Joseph’s Book of Abraham is not derived from the Book of Breathings, in a separate article he announced that the Book of Breathings really appears to preserve the Mormon and therefore true understanding about exaltation, Godhood, the after life, and the priesthood once known to Abraham and the patriarchs and transmitted to Coptic Christianity, but lost to the world until restored by Joseph Smith.⁵⁷ So one is left with the interesting conclusion that Smith did and did not use the Book of Breathings; that the EAG is and is not of any value; and that the Egyptian in the margin of the Book of Abraham manuscripts was and was not added later.

Dr. Nibley shows a similar state of confusion in dealing with the Facsimiles which Joseph Smith published with his Book of Abraham translation. In March of 1968 scholars were informed that they can not make use of the Facsimiles to judge Joseph’s translating abilities for the Facsimiles are “not an integral part of the Book of Abraham.”⁵⁸ Even though the translation itself refers the reader more than once to the Facsimiles (Ab. 1.12, 14), Dr. Nibley dismisses this by saying that “the remark may well be the insertion of a later scribe.”⁵⁹ This leaves the reader wondering how a scribe could insert a remark into the Egyptian manuscripts of the Book of Abraham when Dr. Nibley has already concluded that the papyri “did not contain any of the text of the Book of Abraham as we have it.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ *Era*, August 1968, pp. 55 f.

⁵⁶ *BYU Studies* XI, Summer 1971, p. 399.

⁵⁷ *BYU Studies* XI, Winter 1971, pp. 153-187. Dr. Nibley suggests that the Egyptian religion transmitted its ideas not only to Jewish communities, but also to Coptic and Gnostic Christianity (pp. 159f), apparently making them normative Christianity and rendering all other forms of early Christianity, including the New Testament itself, an aberration from the truth. The recently discovered Nag Hammadi Gnostic material, however, is regarded by scholars in that field as influenced by Iranian rather than Egyptian thought. Dr. Nibley’s theory, furthermore, ignores the fact that the earliest New Testament manuscripts have been found in Egypt and are of the conventional text that stands behind the present English versions of the Bible, and are wholly lacking in any elements of the Egyptian religion. If Coptic Christianity reflects any portions of the Egyptian religion, it must be regarded as resulting from a later syncretistic tendency on the part of the Coptic Church, and not due to some imagined transmission of ‘truth’ that was later lost to Christianity and the Bible.

⁵⁸ *Era* LXXI, March 1968, p. 18.

⁵⁹ *BYU Studies* IX, Autumn 1968, p. 78.

⁶⁰ *Era*, May 1970, p. 83. Lacking a text, Dr. Nibley tries to establish the genuineness of the Book of Abraham from similarities with Muslim as well as “ancient Jewish writers of whom Joseph Smith knew nothing” (*Era*, March 1970, p. 91). The few similarities that seem plausible were a matter of public

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

However, Dr. Nibley soon announces that “we are going to discuss *only* the facsimiles and the interpretation thereof,” regarding Smith’s interpretation as divinely inspired.⁶¹ Unfortunately for Dr. Nibley, the “inspired interpretation” under Facsimile No. I stands in direct contradiction with Joseph’s inspired text of the Book of Abraham itself. The explanation under the facsimile declares that the scene represents “Abraham in Egypt” (Fig. 10) as the “priest of Elkchat” (Fig. 3) attempts to sacrifice him on an Egyptian altar. The inspired text of the Book of Abraham explains that the same scene represents Abraham as the priest of Elkenall attempts to sacrifice him on a “Chaldean” altar “in the land of Chaldea,” before he ever started on his long journey to Egypt hundreds of miles away (Ab. 1.7f, 10–13, 20; 2.4, 14, 21).⁶² With Dr. Nibley, however, confusion is twice

information in the popular commentaries of Smith’s day: e.g., the rabbinic interpretation of Genesis 12.5 reflected in Ab. 2.15 (that Abraham proselyted souls in Haran) had been noted by Matthew Henry (e.g. 1811 edition), by Symon Patrick (1809 edition), by Adam Clarke (1810) and Thomas Scott (1828). In like manner, the Jewish tradition about the idolatry in Chaldea and the attempt to kill Abraham for his opposition to it are set forth in Henry & Clarke on Genesis 10.9 f; 11.31; Isaiah 29.22; Daniel 3.6, 26; by Henry and Patrick on Joshua 24.2f; and by Henry on Isaiah 41.8; 51.1 f. Smith’s associate, Sidney Rigdon, reportedly had a fine library (Charlotte Haven, *Overland Monthly*, December 1890, p. 625).

An additional source of such information was the contacts Joseph Smith and Lorenzo Snow made with Jewish teachers of the day—Dr. Daniel Peixotto and Prof. Joshua Seixas (Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” *Dialogue* III, Summer 1968, pp. 43 ff; note pp. 50 ff on Hebrew in the Book of Abraham). Contrary to the impression that Dr. Nibley creates that such oriental legends were inaccessible even to scholars (*Era*, January 1969, p. 27), they have been readily available through the collections of Herbelot 1697, 1777 editions, Eisenmenger 1711, Fabricius 1722, and Otho 1759, as well as directly from the Talmud (e.g. Sanh. 93a; Pes. 118a) and the Koran (e.g. Sura XXI 65 ff).

The lone point of similarity with the *Genesis Apocryphon* (*Deseret News*, Church Section, November 23, 1968), in making God responsible for Abraham’s misrepresentation about Sarah, is probably mere coincidence since the similarity is implied by interpretation rather than expressed (cf. Ab. 2.21-25 and *Genesis Apocryphon* XIX 14–21). The *Genesis Apocryphon* is regarded by experts as a Midrashic elaboration of the biblical story, dependent upon it and lacking the authenticity of the biblical material.

An equally good, if not better, case can be made for deriving the contents of the Book of Abraham from materials available to Joseph Smith (see this illustrated in *Case III*, pp. 79-86). His reworking of the Genesis creation material in Ab. 4.1-31; 5.1-21, changing “God” to “they (the Gods)”, is clearly a reworking of the Genesis account for in one passage Joseph forgot to make the change to the plural (cf. Ab. 4.16 with the previously uncorrected form. in *Times & Seasons* III, p. 721; and see also the Tanners’ *The Salt Lake City Messenger*, October 1969, p. 4). The book still has some glaring philological errors (see George Arbaugh, *Revelation in Mormonism*, pp. 107-114, except fn. p. 110 where “Chaldea” is understood as Akkadian while Smith probably meant Aramaic). Even a Mormon astronomer stands perplexed before its bizarre statements on astronomy (see R. Grant Athay, “Astronomy in the Book of Abraham,” *Book of Abraham Symposium*, especially pp. 64-67).

⁶¹ *Era*, November 1968, p. 37. The drawings themselves are “not necessarily inspired,” but the “explanations...are presented for our acceptance as inspired scriptures,” “an inspired interpretation” (*Id.*, pp. 36f). Cf. *BYU Studies* IX, Autumn 1968, pp. 73 f.

⁶² Apparently after writing the “Chaldean” interpretation in 1835, Smith laid it aside, and when later at Nauvoo he added his inspired explanations under Fac. No. I (they first appear on the back of B. of A. Ms.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

confused, for after citing Egyptian sources to show the scene depicts Abraham in Egypt, and appealing to Jewish legends that speak of Abraham in Chaldea,⁶³ he introduces still another location, telling us that the drama is “unfolding not in Egypt but in Canaan,” “on Asian soil under Egyptian hegemony.”⁶⁴ In addition, Dr. Nibley informs us that no scholar in the world is considered competent to judge the Prophet’s “inspired interpretation” of the facsimiles unless he can claim to know everything there is to know about them. “Why don’t you do the honest thing,” he prods the scholars in his closing argument, “and admit that you don’t know a blessed thing about the facsimiles, that you haven’t made even a superficial study of them.”⁶⁵ Even if the scholars did know some blessed things about the facsimiles and had made an intensive study of them, Dr. Nibley is unwilling to listen to them, for he demands that they first answer “an appalling preliminary question: Do you know all there is to know about these three documents?...He who knows not all things is ignorant of all things.”⁶⁶ If the scholarly world were to follow Dr. Nibley’s dictum, no scholar would ever come to any conclusion about any subject, since no reputable scholar would ever claim to know all there is about a subject, even if that subject were one in which he was considered an expert.

If Dr. Nibley seems at the very least confused in his attempt to separate Smith from the Sensen text with which he was working, Tvedtnes and Crapo seem correspondingly absurd in their attempts to defend Joseph’s Egyptian ability. Pursuing the idea that “the Book of Abraham text does indeed come from the Sen-Sen Text,” they suggest one of two possibilities. They first propose that the Egyptian text was used “as a memory device, by Abraham (and perhaps by his descendants), each symbol or group of symbols bringing to mind a set number of memorized phrases relating to Abraham’s account of his life.” This would mean that to remember this Hebrew story, a Hebrew had to use an Egyptian text which had no logical connection with the story. The whole process would be like memorizing the book of Jonah by tying it to a portion of the French National Anthem with which it has nothing in common. This would hinder rather than aid memory.

Mr. Tvedtnes complicates the picture even more by suggesting that “the descendant of Abraham” who composed the “oral tradition” not only tied it to the Sensen text, but

No. 4 from the Nauvoo period, *BYU Studies* XI, Summer 1971, p. 387) he forgot to consult his earlier interpretation and contradictorily identified the scene as “Abraham in Egypt.”

⁶³ (Egyptian) *Era*, September 1969, p. 93; (Chaldean) *Era*, October 1969, pp. 90-93; of. also his comments on the “Chaldean” altar in *Era*, July 1969, p. 101.

⁶⁴ (Canaan) *Era*, February 1969, p. 65. Cf. March 1969, p. 84; May 1969, p. 88 and his notation that ‘Just south of Sodom was the great plain (Olishem?)’, November 1969, p. 118; (Asian) *Era*, March 1969, p. 76, 82; April 1969, p. 71.

⁶⁵ *Era* LXXIII, May 1970, p. 93.

⁶⁶ *Era* LXXI, November 1968, pp. 38, 40. For further consideration of Dr. Nibley’s tactics and conflicting positions see: Eecel, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-13, 18-21.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

created a second memory aid by building his story around certain variations of Hebrew words, the poor Hebrews thus having two memory systems to keep track of. Tvedtnes feels this to be the case because he has been able to translate Smith's story into Hebrew and work it out this way.⁶⁷ It is indeed a strange type of scholarship that proves its case by inventing the evidence it appeals to.

A variation of the mnemonic idea was proposed by Benjamin Urrutia,⁶⁸ who suggested that an unknown person (designated "x") coded the writing of Abraham into an Egyptian funeral document to preserve it from destruction by a Pharaoh hostile to the Hebrews. Moses decoded it by means of the Urim and Thummim to use in his Genesis account, and Smith used the same instrument to produce his "translation."

One difficulty with these suggestions is that they run counter to the claims put forth by Smith as to his ability to understand and translate Egyptian. As Tvedtnes and Crapo had noted, "since the oral tradition itself would have long since disappeared with the death of Abraham or the last of his descendants acquainted with the story, the Book of Abraham would have had to be *revealed* to Joseph Smith, perhaps in connection with the use of the Egyptian symbols." An even greater difficulty is that they all view the Abraham story as being coded to the Sensen text at an early date. In reality, since *some* three hundred words of Smith's translation are tied to the name of the corpse and his mother in *this* Sensen text from the time of Christ, any coding had to be with that specific papyrus and not with the Book of Breathings in general. This would mean that if someone coded the story to that particular Sensen papyrus as a memory device, he was wasting his time since the text was immediately buried with the corpse.

A second proposal made by Tvedtnes and Crapo is to view the hieratic words as "core-concepts in the corresponding English story of Abraham." This idea would mean that most of the Book of Abraham was not written by Abraham at all, "much of the English text may have been supplied by Joseph Smith as inspired commentary on the hieratic words." With much effort, they believe they can find "certain cases in which [the meaning of] the hieratic words *are* found in the corresponding English text." Thus they feel they can establish that Joseph Smith understood the Egyptian text. But since such correspondences only consist of a word or two that matches the Egyptian meaning to the left, "the Book of Abraham seems NOT to be a direct translation of the Egyptian text appearing on the Sen-Sen papyrus."

⁶⁷ John Tvedtnes, "Internal Evidences for an Abrahamic Oral Tradition," *Book of Abraham Symposium*, pp. 44 f.

⁶⁸ *Dialogue IV*, Summer 1969, pp. 130 f.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The feeble nature of the correlations they are able to make shows how hardput Smith's defenders are. For example: (1) The Egyptian word "in" or "inside" was used as the basis for Ab. 1.7b-10. Although Smith got 122 words from this one Egyptian word, "in" happens to be one of these 122 words and so becomes evidence that the Prophet really understood Egyptian. Of course, "in" occurs 16 times in the first chapter of Smith's translation, even where the Egyptian word "in" does not stand opposite it, but that fact seems irrelevant to those gentlemen. (2) Ab. 1.11—59 words in all—is translated from the word meaning "the" or "this," and in those 59 words the word "this" occurs six times ("Now *this* priest..." and 5 times more in the passage). However, this overlooks the fact that "the" or "this" is used at least 130 times in the first chapter alone, and in every other instance the Egyptian sign does not occur. (3) The determinative sign for woman is used to derive a six-word translation reading, "who were the daughters of Ham." Because daughters is obviously feminine, it is concluded that there must be a thought relationship between the "core-concept" and Smith's translation. Dr. Klaus Baer, commenting on this hypothesis, has rightly objected that "similarities to Egyptian, *are related to the whole by no visible principle*—often they are a very secondary part of the text."⁶⁹ With this kind of correlation it would be possible to prove that any piece of writing were derived from any ancient text.

The really fatal blow to all these fanciful schemes for saving their Prophet's reputation as a translator is that Joseph actually employed the outlandish method for interpreting Egyptian worked out in the EAG to obtain portions of his Book of Abraham text.⁷⁰ For example, the EAG says that a straight horizontal line is pronounced "Zip Zi" and means "a woman married or unmarried, or daughter; signifies all or any woman." A curved line like a smiling mouth signifies "beneath" and is pronounced "tou es," while a dot is "iota" and means either "the eye, or I see." When the three are joined together it is pronounced "Iota tou es Zip Zi" and comes to mean "the land of Egypt which was first discovered by a woman while under water, and afterwards settled by her sons, she being a daughter of Ham."⁷¹ Consequently when this sign combination is found in the margin of the Book of Abraham manuscripts, the following translation occurs:

The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham; and the daughter of Zeptah which in the Chaldea signifies Egypt, which

⁶⁹ See fuller text quoted in Todd, p. 386 f for further weakness in the theory.

⁷⁰ Dr. Nibley sees the connection between Smith's translation and phrases occurring in the EAG to be one of deriving the EAG material from Smith's translation rather than the translation as an expansion of the EAG material (*BYU Studies* XI, Summer 1971, p. 369). However, the insertion of sets of characters from the EAG into the margin of the B. of A. Mss. at points where the Sensen text lacks Egyptian characters due to holes in the papyrus argues against Dr. Nibley's view.

⁷¹ EAG, pp. 21, 5; cf. pp. 10, 14, 18.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

signifies that which is forbidden. When this woman discovered the land it was under water, who after settled her sons in it, and thus from Ham sprang that race which preserved, the curse in the land.⁷²

With the Prophet utilizing such an erroneous method of Egyptian translating, it is quite pointless to try to show that he actually understood the Egyptian text and derived the correct meaning from it.

If anything could be more destructive of Smith's claim to understand "the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients," it is found in the fact that Joseph even translated the holes in the papyrus. William West, who saw the papyri a year or two after Smith acquired them, said that they "were torn by being taking from the roll of embalming salve... and some parts entirely lost." Then he adds, "but Smith is to translate the whole by divine inspiration and that which is lost... can be interpreted as well as that which is preserved."⁷³ This is exactly what Joseph has done, for his manuscript of the Book of Abraham has characters in the margin even where there are holes in the papyrus fragment in lines, 1, 2 and 3. That these parts were missing when the Prophet made his translation is seen from at least three considerations. First, as we noted, Dr. Baer has succeeded in piecing together the fragments so that we have the entire opening portion which can now be viewed as a whole.⁷⁴ One glance at this paste-up quickly reveals that a V-like piece is missing at equal intervals in this opening portion. When the rolled papyrus was pulled loose it tore a V-shaped section out of several layers of the rolled papyrus. The middle one of these V-shaped tears cuts into lines 1, 2 and 3 of the portion of text that is copied on to the Book of Abraham manuscripts, and it is flanked by tears of equal depth on either side. Secondly, when we try to fit the characters that have been supplied in the margin of the Book of Abraham manuscripts into the space left by the breaks in the text of the papyrus, we find we have more material than could possibly be squeezed into those areas.⁷⁵ Finally, the scrawls that appear in the margin at the points where the papyrus had a portion of the text missing do not resemble any known hieratic character or match the style of the rest of the characters copied in the margin of the manuscript. We know from other Breathing permits, which have texts nearly identical with this one which Joseph used, just what words and characters should appear in these spaces, and there is no resemblance whatever between what should appear and the reconstructions offered

⁷² B. of A. Ms. No. 1, p. 5. In the PGP printing (Ab. 1.23) the name "Zeptah" has been changed to read "Egyptus."

⁷³ William West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Rise, Progress and Pretensions of the Mormons* (1837), p. 5. Dr. Baer (*Dialogue III*, Autumn 1968, p. 130 if) points out the places where the tears occurred and the text has been "Incorrectly restored" by Smith.

⁷⁴ For Dr. Baer's paste-up see *Dialogue III*, Autumn 1968, p. 113; Cf. *Case III*, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Illustration in *Case 11*, p. 172-174; Cf. Nelson, *The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, p. 14f.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

on the Book of Abraham manuscripts. In some instances enough of the broken off word remains on the papyrus to establish that the reading did matell the readings found in other copies of the Book of Breathings that are in a better state of preservation.⁷⁶

What is most interesting in all these instances is that the holes where Smith supplied both the text and the translation are the key passages the Mormon church has used to establish their discriminatory policies towards the Negroes.⁷⁷ It must be most disconcerting to defenders of the Mormon faith to discover that the main ground for their theological position on the Negro being denied the priesthood rests upon no firmer foundation than Joseph Smith's translation of the holes in his papyrus.

It is no wonder that some Mormons have come recently to reject Joseph's claim to a knowledge of Egyptian, and even his claim to have been a Prophet of God. Although the office of President of the Mormon Church is supposed to carry with it the gift to translate,⁷⁸ the rediscovered papyri were not delivered to the head of the church, but to the scholars at Brigham Young University. Perhaps this was because not even the present Prophet, Seer and Revelator of the LDS Church could defend Smith as a translator when all there is to work with in some instances is the holes in the papyrus. But not even the best scholarship can save a sinking ship,⁷⁹ and Mormons of integrity such as Dee Jay Nelson, whose competence in Egyptian is granted by all, have sorrowfully admitted that the Book of Abraham was not at all a divine production, but purely the work of Joseph

⁷⁶ See Dr. Baer's comments, *Dialogue* III, Autumn 1968, pp. 129 f.

⁷⁷ *Case II*, pp. 171f; cf. also Reorganized LDS Church Historian Richard P. Howard's "The 'Book of Abraham' in the Light of History and Egyptology," *Courage* I, April 1970, pp. 41 f; or his revision in *Saints' Herald* CXVII, October, November, December 1970, or in *A Decade of the Best* (1972), pp. 186-221. His candid discussion of the Reorganizations attitude toward the Book of Abraham is a refreshing contrast to the Utah Church's devious defenses. See also Mr. Howard's earlier "Tentative Approach" in *Dialogue* III, Summer 1968, pp. 88 ff.

⁷⁸ *Case II*, p. 139.

⁷⁹ Note should be taken of some of Smith's other linguistic failures. He attempted to derive the word "Mormon" from the contraction of the English word "more" and an alleged Egyptian word "mon," which led one anti-Mormon writer to dub it a "mule-word." Cf. "Webb's" feeble defense in *Joseph Smith as a Translator*, pp. 64-71. There is no Egyptian word "mon" that means "good" as Smith had claimed in *Times & Seasons* IV, p. 194, according to Dr. Wm. F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University (Tanners' *The Salt Lake City Messenger*, April 1965, p. 2).

Joseph also failed in his attempt to identify some mental plates from Kinderhook, Ill. The plates were manufactured by a couple of local inhabitants and buried in an Indian mound being excavated in the area. The characters on them were copied from a Chinese tea chest, but Smith identified them as containing information about one of the descendants of Ham. Their fraudulency has been placed beyond question by a Mormon scholar. See Tanners *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (1969), pp. 25-31; Appendix, pp. 78-80.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Smith's imagination.⁸⁰ One life-long defender of Joseph Smith made his own independent investigation of Joseph's ability as a translator of Egyptian records, utilizing recognized Egyptologists without telling them a word about the issues that were at stake. Their verdict agreed with the findings of Mr. Nelson and Dr. Baer. Consequently, he came to reject the Book of Abraham and the claims put forth by Joseph Smith as a translator of ancient languages. His words are the only fitting conclusion an honest man can form when the facts are all considered:

Joseph Smith announced, in print (*History of the Church*, Vol. II, p. 236) that "one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt ... "Since four scholars, who have established that they can read Egyptian, say that the manuscripts deal with neither Abraham nor Joseph—and since the four reputable men tell us exactly what the manuscripts do say I must conclude that Joseph Smith had not the remotest skill in things Egyptian.

With the failure of his claim to understand by divine aid "the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients" falls not only his right to be called America's first Egyptologist, but also his claim to be the restorer of God's true Church on earth.^{81 82}

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⁸⁰ For Nelson's rejection of the Book of Abraham see: *The Joseph Smith Papyri, Part 2*, p. 9; *A Translation and Study of Facsimile No. 3*, p. 5; and an extract from his letter in *Case II*, p. 160.

⁸¹ My deepest appreciation is expressed to a young LDS scholar of Mormon history, Mr. Michael Marquardt, who in addition to the help he provided Mr. Todd in writing *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (p. viii), has graciously assisted this writer as well. For his pains-taking checking of every reference and many helpful suggestions, a sincere "Thank you." His expertise in the field has led him to the conclusion that it is from "Joseph Smith's inability to translate Egyptian in any form that the Latter-day Saints must reject the Book of Abraham and seriously question the Book of Mormon" (Letter, February 1, 1972).

⁸² Walters, W. P. (1973). "Joseph Smith Among the Egyptians: An Examination of the Source of Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 16(1), 23–45.