



Type: Book Chapter

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## Book of Abraham Concerns & Questions

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Source: *A CES Letter Reply: Faithful Answers For Those Who Doubt*

Published: Sandy, UT; n.p., 2018

## **BOOK OF ABRAHAM**

### *Concerns & Questions*

*“None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.*

– LDS CHURCH’S *TRANSLATION AND HISTORICITY OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM* ESSAY

*Of course, the fragments do not have to be as old as Abraham for the book of Abraham and its illustrations to be authentic. Ancient records are often transmitted as copies or as copies of copies... Evidence suggests that elements of the book of Abraham fit comfortably in the ancient world and supports the claim that the book of Abraham is an authentic record.*

– SAME ESSAY

## SHORT ANSWER:

Once again, you are simply passing along arguments that you, yourself, do not understand. Most of them have been borrowed, unexamined, from a musical theatre pianist with no Egyptological training, and many of them are factually incorrect.

## LONG ANSWER:

I'll let you ask your long questions first.

1. Originally, Joseph claimed that this record was written by Abraham “by his own hand, upon papyrus” – a claim still prominent in the heading of the Book of Abraham. This claim could not be evaluated for decades as many thought the papyri were lost in a fire.

Why not? As the official essay you selectively quote from says, “The phrase can be understood to mean that Abraham is the author and not the literal copyist.” The claim is that Abraham originally wrote this by his own hand, not that he wrote every copy by his own hand. When I first read *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling, I did not assume that the good Ms. Rowling had personally typed my copy herself.

The original papyrus Joseph translated has since been found...

No, most of it hasn't. Nearly all of the papyri Joseph had in his possession was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, but a handful of scraps survived the flames and surfaced in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City nearly a century later. When the Church was given these fragments in 1967, they immediately published pictures of them in *The Improvement Era*, along with an article stating that the relatively small amount of extant text was clearly not the source material for the Book of Abraham.

Everything else you write on this subject is tainted by the assumption that this meager amount of surviving material is, in fact, the entirety of “the original papyrus Joseph translated” for the Book of Abraham. It is not, and the Church has never once claimed that it is.



Cover story from *The Improvement Era*, January 1968

... and, as stated in the Church's July 2014 *Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham* essay, "scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts...[that] date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived."

This was first "admitted," of course, in a cover story of a 1968 *Improvement Era*, the Church's official magazine at the time, published shortly after the scraps were discovered. A pretty lousy cover-up, yes?

We know this is the papyrus that Joseph used for translation because the hieroglyphics match in chronological order to the hieroglyphics in Joseph's *Kirtland Egyptian Papers*, which contains his *Grammar & Alphabet of the Egyptian Language* (GAEL).

You keep referring to this as "the papyrus." These were scraps of papyri, likely no more than 10% of the whole of what Joseph Smith had in his possession. And we know it was part of Joseph's collection because it contains a segment of Facsimile 1, which is remarkably unique among Egyptian couch scenes. The Church has never tried to argue that these papyri were not owned by Joseph Smith.

Additionally, the papyrus were pasted onto paper which have drawings of a temple and maps of the Kirtland, Ohio area on the back and they were accompanied by an affidavit by Emma Smith verifying they had been in the possession of Joseph Smith.

It's a good thing, then, that the Church has never disputed that these papyri scraps were part of the collection owned by Joseph Smith. And by the same token, no credible critic has tried to argue that this comprised the totality of the Book of Abraham source materials, as you seem to be doing.

2 . Egyptologists have also since translated the source material for the Book of Abraham...

No, they haven't. Nobody, in or out of the Church, has ever tried to argue that the text on these fragments are the source material for the Book of Abraham. It is foolish to discuss the Book of Abraham when you have gotten that basic premise so completely wrong. Yet, dutifully, I have no choice but to rush in where angels fear to tread.

Let's frame the issue in terms that are helpful to the discussion. The underlying problem is this: why don't the scraps we have match the text of the Book of Abraham? You see only one possible answer, which is that the Book of Abraham is a fraud. But as I see it, there are three other possible answers.

### **1. Surprise! The text matches!**



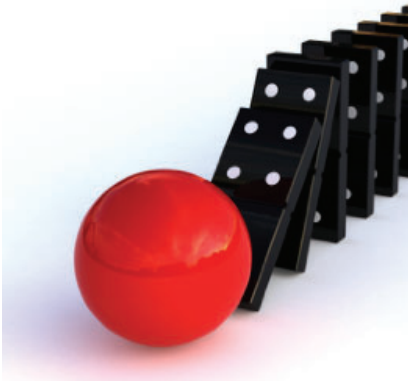
*Actually, the text matches after all! Sorry for the confusion. Egyptologists are unanimously wrong, and the Book of the Dead as it appears in all other papyri is, in fact, the Book of Abraham.*

## **2. The text was burned**

*The material we have represents a small fragment – roughly 10% by most estimates – of all the papyri Joseph Smith had in his possession, and it does not match the description of the “long scroll” that included red as well as black ink that Joseph suggested was the source of the Book of Abraham. So the funerary texts were intermingled with the Book of Abraham, and the true source text used for the translation is lost to us.*



## **3. The text is a catalyst**



*The entirety of what Joseph had was, indeed, nothing more than common Egyptian funerary texts, yet these texts started the ball rolling for a series of revelations that constitute the Book of Abraham, much in the same way the Book of Moses was received by revelation as Joseph read Genesis in the Old Testament.*

So which of these positions is right? I don't think it's that cut and dried. My personal position has more in common with possibility #2 than any of the other two, but there are elements from #3, and even

#1, that cannot be entirely dismissed.

There is a fourth alternative, too, one that probably represents the majority opinion of members of the Church. That opinion is as follows:

## **4. It's scripture, so who cares?.**

I do not share the second part of that opinion, but I emphatically share the first part. The Book of Abraham is arguably the most profound book of scripture we have in our possession, and the doctrines found therein define the relationship between God and his children in a way radically at odds with orthodox Christian thought and in a way that is wholly, uniquely Mormon. The importance of the idea that each of us, at our core, is co-eternal with God, cannot be overstated. The concept of pre-existence, the eternal nature of matter and the rejection of Ex Nihilo creation – all of that comes from the Book of Abraham, and, while hints of it can be found in the other standard works, nothing approaching the clarity and beauty of these magnificent truths can be found anywhere else.

The doctrine of Creatio Ex Nihilo, or Creation Out of Nothing, is central to much of the Christian world. As I understand it, the idea is that there was nothing in the universe, or even no universe itself. There was only God. And at one point, God decided He wanted there to be

Something instead of Nothing. And so, out of Nothing, he made Something, and voila! Here we are!

This idea is also the source of much mischief.



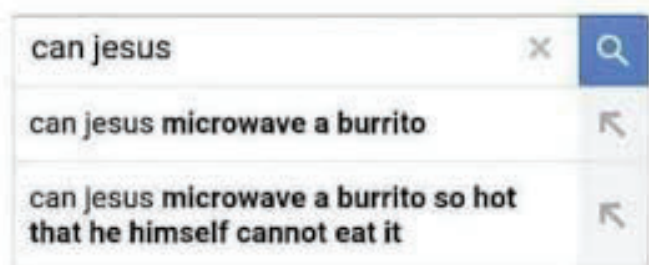
Michelangelo's Ex Nihilo God

Those who propose it think that any other explanation diminishes God's omnipotence. In contrast, the Book of Abraham insists that to create is to "organize" that which already exists. It rests on the premise that elements are eternal, and that intelligence is

eternal, too. In some form or another, each of us is a unique, eternal Intelligence, co-existent with God, and God has designed the universe and organized matter and intelligence to create a circumstance by which we can become more like Him. Ex Nihilists insist that the Mormon God, therefore, is not omnipotent, because he can't create matter or intelligence out of nothing.

It's because of this tension that there are some very pointless arguments to be had as to what the definition of omnipotence is. The most famous is the question, "Can God create a rock so large that He can't move it?" Or, in the words of Homer Simpson, "Can Jesus microwave a burrito so hot that he, himself, could not eat it?"

Because of the Book of Abraham, we can define omnipotence, as the capability to do everything that can be done. Ex Nihilists reject this. They say there is nothing that cannot be done, because God can do everything. OK, fine. Then you have to answer questions that don't make God look like a very pleasant guy.



For example: You, Mr. Ex Nihilist, you believe God can do anything? Then why didn't he create a universe free of evil, pain, and suffering? Why did he make us capable of sin? Why did he create a circumstance where a great deal of his supreme creations are doomed to spend an eternity in a lake of fire? What's the point?

The famous literary figure Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's *Candide* concludes that since this is the only world we've got, and God is perfect, then this is, by definition, the best of all possible worlds, so stop complaining. The problem, of course, is that this places certain limits on God, too. If this is the best he could do, and even us flawed humans can see there are significant problems, then he isn't as omnipotent as Ex Nihilists think he is, is he?

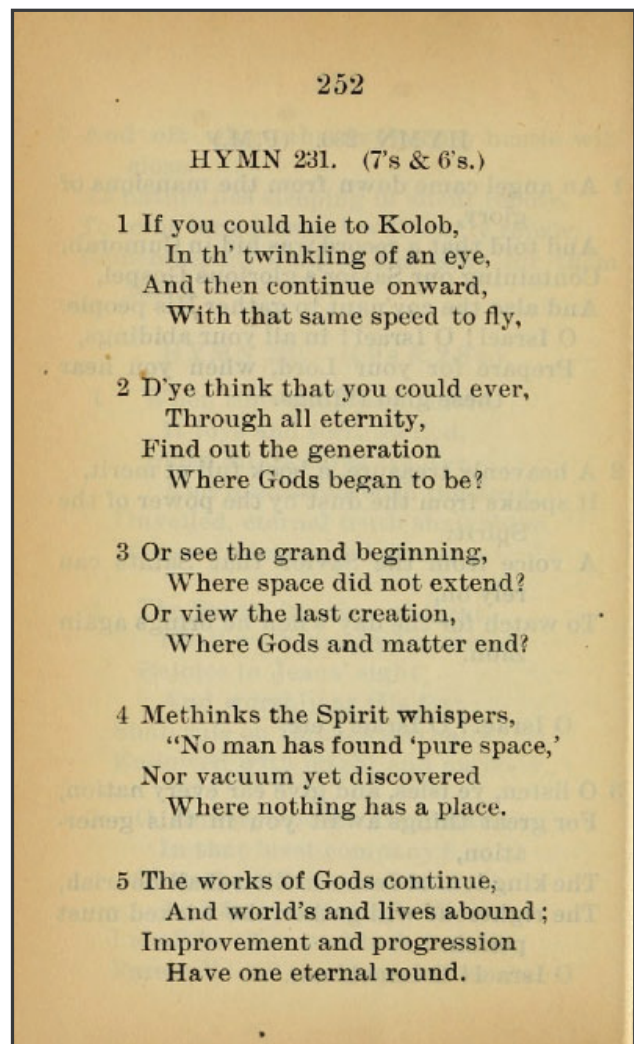
Mormons don't have all the answers about suffering and evil, but, thanks in large part to the Book of Abraham, they do have a context for it that the rest of the world doesn't have. What's happening in this life was colored by what happened in the eternity before it, and it will be mitigated by what happens in the eternity after.

Many people use this truth to make rash assumptions about this life's inequities. Clearly, if I'm stronger, happier, richer, or better looking than you, then I must have been a better guy before I got here, no? Well, no. We don't know that. Maybe you were too big a wimp to be able to handle the rough life of someone else. We haven't been given the information, but just knowing that there is more to the story helps us understand why some things don't seem to gibe with what we ought to expect.

The point is that Ex Nihilo creation makes good squarely responsible for all the rotgut in the universe, and it's no use saying otherwise. My understanding of a merciful and omnipotent deity doesn't allow for that kind of nonsense. And that understanding is firmly rooted in the precepts found in the Book of Abraham.

All that is context for why it is so difficult to simply write off the Book of Abraham because of the evidence you cite against it, which is both weak and circumstantial. There is too much substance in the book itself to simply write it off at the first sign of trouble.

(I also love the Book of Abraham because "If You Could Hie to Kolob" is my favorite hymn. It's the only hymn that ends in a minor key.)



Hands down, my favorite hymn

Back to your objections, which I will let you state without interruption this time:

2 . Egyptologists have also since translated the source material for the Book of Abraham and have found it to be nothing more than a common pagan Egyptian funerary text for a deceased man named “Hor” around first century C.E. In other words, it was a common Breathing Permit that the Egyptians buried with their dead. It has nothing to do with Abraham or anything Joseph claimed in his translation for the Book of Abraham.

Yeah, not so fast.

First of all, the Joseph Smith Papyri contain excerpts from both the Book of Breathing and the Book of the Dead, which, while both are associated with Egyptian burials, are not, in fact, the same texts. This suggests that these fragments were not a single “common Breathing Permit” but, rather, part of a collection that could well include the Book of Abraham, too.

More importantly, it is incorrect to say that the Book of the Dead has “absolutely nothing to do with Abraham.” The discovery of the Testament of Abraham in 1892 and the Apocalypse of Abraham in 1898 show remarkable parallels with the Book of Abraham, but also tie Abraham to Egyptian afterlife traditions. Hugh Nibley’s seminal work *Abraham in Egypt* shows the extent to which Abrahamic traditions are tied to the Book of the Dead. Quoting from Nibley, once again in red:

The evidence that has led the experts in the past ten years to recognize the closest ties between the old Abraham apocrypha and the Egyptian Book of the Dead, especially with references to the pictures in the latter, effectively eliminates the one argument against serious reading of the Book of Abraham.

The whole thing is [available online for free](#) and is well worth reading and is chock full of specifics connections between the two documents and makes it impossible to blithely assert that Abraham and the Book of the Dead have “absolutely nothing to do with” each other.

3. The Church admits this in its essay :

No, they don’t. You quote selectively from the essay when a snippet out of context suits your purposes, but you ignore the parts that are inconvenient to your predetermined argument. For example, here is what you claim is the Church’s admission that these fragments have nothing to do with Abraham:

*“None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mentioned Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham, though there is not unanimity, even among non-Mormon scholars, about the proper interpretation of the vignettes on these fragments. Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments date to between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E., long after Abraham lived.*



And here is a section later in the same essay that Abraham has extensive Egyptian connections:

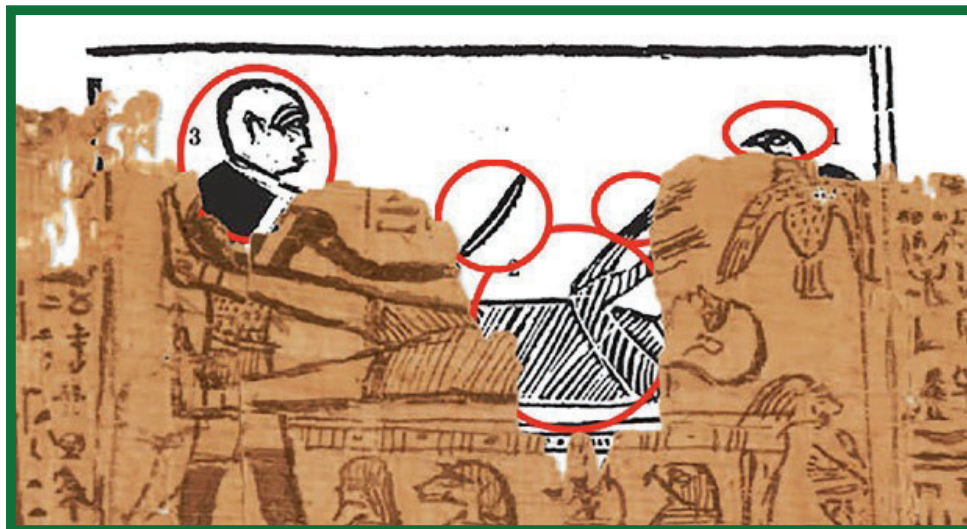
The book of Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham that circulated in the ancient world around the time the papyri were likely created. In the book of Abraham, God teaches Abraham about the sun, the moon, and the stars. “I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt,” the Lord says, “that ye may declare all these words.” Ancient texts repeatedly refer to Abraham instructing the Egyptians in knowledge of the heavens. For example, Eupolemus, who lived under Egyptian rule in the second century B.C.E., wrote that Abraham taught astronomy and other sciences to the Egyptian priests. A third-century papyrus from an Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 1 in the book of Abraham. A later Egyptian text, discovered in the 20th century, tells how the Pharaoh tried to sacrifice Abraham, only to be foiled when Abraham was delivered by an angel. Later, according to this text, Abraham taught members of the Pharaoh’s court through astronomy. All these details are found in the book of Abraham.

It is therefore incorrect to say that the Church “admits” these fragments “have nothing to do with Abraham,” particularly since Facsimile 1, which is linked to Abraham by these other ancient texts, is included in the fragments. And as Nibley noted, the other Egyptian traditions mentioned in this essay make a correlation between the two texts far more plausible.

You repeatedly cite this essay as if it’s a smoking gun proving your accusations, when, taken as a whole, it’s devastating to your argument. This strongly suggests that beyond the proof texts you cite, you haven’t actually bothered to read it.

### FACSIMILE 1

The graphic below shows the rediscovered papyri placed on top of Facsimile 1. The red circles denote the filled-in sections of facsimile 1 that respected modern Egyptologists say is nonsense.



No, the red circles denote the filled-in sections of facsimile 1 that Kevin Mathie says is nonsense. He's not an Egyptologist at all, respected or otherwise. We'll get to that shortly.

In contrast with the canonized version of Facsimile 1, the following image is what Facsimile 1 is really supposed to look like, based on Egyptology and the same scene discovered elsewhere in Egypt:



Where is this scene discovered elsewhere in Egypt? (Spoiler: It isn't.) If it were, why not provide a picture of the real thing instead of this modern creation, which is merely an uneducated guess created by a non-Egyptologist?

I think the answer is that the vast majority of couch scenes look something like this:



And this:



And this:



And while I know this wasn't your intent, I would be remiss if I didn't personally thank you for resolving one of my main concerns about Book of Abraham with your flawed objection here.

I was first introduced to the idea you mention here by an architect who had done a great deal of work for the Church and was on his way out of full fellowship because of his concerns

about the Book of Abraham. He told me that Facsimile 1, as found in the Joseph Smith Papyri, had been altered from what it was “really supposed to look like,” as you say, and that every time this scene appeared in other settings, the guy with the knife had a jackal’s head, and so of course this was just Joseph Smith messing around. I took the architect’s word on this, and I found it troubling. From those conversations, I assumed that the scene in Facsimile 1 must be so common as that it could be found in papyri from the same period.

But what’s you’ve shown me here is that there is *no other scene in any existing papyri that matches Facsimile 1.*

The picture that shows what Facsimile 1 is “supposed to look like” is wildly misleading. You didn’t pull it from off of papyri; someone drew in the missing pieces thousands of years later in order to match your assumptions. If there really were a scene that matched Facsimile 1, you wouldn’t have to rely on someone to whip one up. If it’s “supposed to look like” this, then ***why can’t you show me a scene from actual papyri that actually looks like this?***

In the common funerary scenes, what’s striking is how little they look like Facsimile 1, either the original or your modern “corrected version.” Yes, there’s a guy lying on a couch, but that guy looks like King Tut’s sarcophagus in most of them, and, really, nothing at all like the guy in Facsimile 1. Where’s the crocodile? Where’s the bird? Why is this the only one with a live body instead of a coffin?

As you pat yourself on the back for assuming that you know what this is “supposed to look like,” you skip over a number of very significant differences which make Facsimile 1 unique.

Hugh Nibley again:

The instant reaction of most professing Egyptologists to the sight of Facsimile No. 1 is to announce that it is the most-routine and commonplace object imaginable, that countless drawings identical with this one are to be found on tomb and coffin walls and papyri. Some of the better scholars were given pause, however, and right from the beginning T. Deveria insisted that the Mormons must have made drastic alterations in the sketches, because they were decidedly not as they should be. The main effort of the learned since the discovery of the original in a damaged condition in 1967 has been to reconstruct the missing parts in a way to show that they were really nothing out of the ordinary, while quietly ignoring the really impressive uniqueness of the parts that are not missing.

For instance, an eminent Egyptologist maintained that the fingers of the reclining man’s upper hand are really the feathers of a bird. In time, however, he yielded enough to declare that even if they were fingers it would make no difference to the interpretation. Wouldn’t it? If this turns out to be the only instance known of the man on the couch lifting two hands, that would indeed make a great deal of difference. But forget about the fingers and the feathers; in what other “embalming scene” does a priest with or without an Anubis headdress, lean over a corpse that is waving both an arm and a leg? That gesture, as a number of special studies have pointed out, indicates a stirring to life and a rising from the couch, not the utter quiescence of a corpse about to be laid away. And what about the big crocodial under the couch? Or the lotus stand? You will not find them in any of the other Lion-couch vignettes.

One other place you can find it, however, is on the back wall of the apartment I lived in as a missionary in Glasgow. Our landlord was not a member of the Church, but he was fascinated by it, and he thought Facsimile 1 would make a great mural. Behold:



Full color, even!

And here he is with all the elders in our district posing in front of his masterpiece:



I digress. Carry on.

The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile 1 and what it actually says, according to Egyptologists and modern Egyptology:

No, it really isn't. It's you faithfully reproducing, in a new format, this hoary graphic from MormonInfographics.com that was in your last version of the CES Letter.

The Book of Abraham		
A common funerary document		
Joseph Smith's Interpretation	Translated Correctly? Facsimile #1, Book of Abraham	Modern Egyptological Interpretation
The Angel of the Lord.		1 The spirit or "ba" of Hôr (The deceased fellow)
Abraham fastened upon an altar		2 The deceased: His name was "Hôr"
The idolatrous priest of Elkenah		3 (see original image, this figure was originally portrayed with the head of a Jackal)
The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh.		4 A common funereal bier or "lion couch"
The idolatrous god of Elkenah.		5
The idolatrous god of Libnah.		6 Canopic jars containing the deceased's internal organs.
The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah.		7
The idolatrous god of Korash.		8
The idolatrous god of Pharaoh.		9 This is the god "Horus"
Abraham in Egypt		10 A libation table bearing wines, oils, etc. Common in Egypt.
Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians.		11 A palace façade, called a "serekh"
Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be hig, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word, Shaumahyeen.		12 This is just the water that the crocodile swims in.

Joseph Smith's Interpretation available @ [lds.org/scriptures/pgp/abr/fac-1](https://lds.org/scriptures/pgp/abr/fac-1)  
 Modern Egyptological Interpretation compiled @ [bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA\\_6.html](https://bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA_6.html)  
 LDS apologist explanation @ [en.fairmormon.org/Book\\_of\\_Abraham/Joseph\\_Smith\\_Papyri/Facsimiles/Facsimile\\_1](https://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Abraham/Joseph_Smith_Papyri/Facsimiles/Facsimile_1)

**MormonInfographics.com**

I can only guess as to the reasons behind the official absence of MormonInfographics this time around. (Is this another "tone problem?") In the case of your First Vision section, it removed one of the most egregiously embarrassing errors in your last step, as it provided a graphic that ignored the vital 1842 Wentworth Letter account and added in the 15-word reference to the 1835 account as if it were its own thing. Back then, I had more patience with you than I do now, but even then I still labeled that graphic as "irredeemably stupid." Which it was. (And is.)

Perhaps you think removing these amateurish, tacky graphics gives you more credibility, except while you have removed the attribution, you have not removed the argument. In this case, you simply steal all this information, word for word, and put it into a new table, without telling your readers where it came from.

Like so:



	JOSEPH SMITH'S INTERPRETATION	MODERN EGYPTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION
1.	<i>The Angel of the Lord</i>	<i>The spirit or "ba" of Hôr (The deceased fellow)</i>
2.	<i>Abraham fastened upon an altar</i>	<i>The deceased: His name was "Hôr"</i>
3.	<i>The idolatrous priest of Elkenah</i>	<i>Anubis. (see original image, this figure was originally portrayed with the head of a Jackal)</i>
4.	<i>The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh</i>	<i>A common funeral bier or "lion couch"</i>
5.	<i>The idolatrous god of Elknah</i>	<i>Canopic jars containing the deceased's internal organs. They represent the four sons of the god Horus, who are: #5: Qebehsencuf #6: Duamutef #7: Hapy #8: Imsety</i>
6.	<i>The idolatrous god of Libnah</i>	
7.	<i>The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah</i>	
8.	<i>The idolatrous god of Korash</i>	
9.	<i>The idolatrous god of Pharaoh</i>	<i>This is the god "Horus"</i>
10.	<i>Abraham in Egypt</i>	<i>A libation table bearing wines, oils, etc. Common in Egypt</i>
11.	<i>Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by Egyptians</i>	<i>A palace facade, called a "verekh"</i>
12.	<i>Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be hig, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word Shaumahveen</i>	<i>This is just the water that the crocodile swims in</i>

Sources:  
 Joseph Smith's Translations: Facsimile 1 in Book of Abraham <sup>8</sup>  
 Modern Egyptological Translations <sup>9</sup>  
 FairMormon Facsimile 1 Apologetics <sup>10</sup> (notice FairMormon attempts to distract away from line by line translations and instead goes off in irrelevant tangents about sacrifice and other nonsense.)

There's a word for citing sources without giving proper attribution: **plagiarism**.

Perhaps you've heard of it.

I'm not an Egyptologist, and neither are you. So from whence cometh your authoritative "Modern Egyptological Interpretation" that makes its way into the graphic that provides the foundation of your argument?

The answer can be found in the link in the bottom left-hand corner of the original graphic. There we find this link – [http://bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA\\_6.html](http://bookofabraham.com/boamathie/BOA_6.html).

Except that website is pulled down, so in your updated CES Letter, you provide [this link](#) to the web archive where it's preserved in digital amber. What's telling is that the link description represents the only removal of information from the old graphic in the new one. The first graphic mentioned "boamathie" to give readers a clue as to who it is that's providing the "Modern Egyptological Translations."

Yet you don't credit "boamathie" at all. You just tell your readers this is the "Modern Egyptological Translation" but don't bother to tell us where it's coming from.

One might think you don't want people to know who your source is. (And I can understand why.)

Turns out that link leads to a piece on the subject by someone named Kevin Mathie.

Who is Kevin Mathie? Is he an Egyptological authority upon whom we can readily rely?

I visited his website the first time around, and I did it again this time. Unlike you, as of September 2018, he hasn't updated anything. Here's what I found:



*Kevin Mathie is a professional composer, music director, and pianist who has more than 25 years' experience working in the music industry. He specializes in orchestral and hybrid orchestral music (i.e., orchestral music combined with electronic instruments such as synths and guitar).*

*His compositions have been featured on the television network SHOWTIME®, and have also been used in film, television, radio, and live theater.*

*During his career, he has also led more than 100+ musical productions, and received numerous awards for his work, including:*

- ***Best Behind-the-Scenes Musical Theater MVPs (i.e., Most Valuable Player, 2013) – Salt Lake City Weekly's 2013 Arty Award***
- ***Best Musical Score (2014) – Las Vegas 48-Hour Film Project, for the film *Enthusiasm****
- ***Best Musical Score (2009) – Salt Lake City 48-Hour Film Project, for the film, *S.H.A.T.****

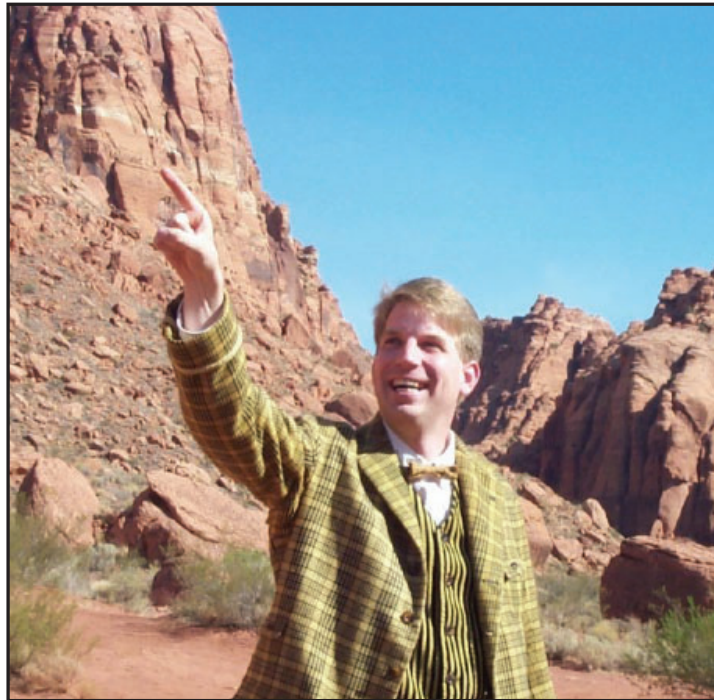


*Kevin is currently the music director and arranger for Salt Lake Acting Company's popular annual production of Saturday's Voyeur, and also regularly composes for and performs at several other theaters. He is a member of both ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild of America.*

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Unlike your previous impeccable scholarly source Brad Kirkland, however, Kevin Mathie has apparently spent no time involved in productions that feature killer tomatoes.

So what on earth makes Kevin Mathie's opinion on this subject any more valuable than my own? After all, I have a prestigious Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theatre from the University of Southern California. I have been active in the theatre for over four decades. I have at least as much musical theatre experience as Mr. Mathie does. I've even played Harold Hill in *The Music Man* – twice! By your standards, that makes me at least as authoritative an Egyptologist as Mathie, yes?



**Jim Bennett as The Music Man, Tuacahn, Summer of 2000**  
*"Well, you got trouble, my friend. Right here with Egyptology."*

So, having burnished my Egyptological credentials, let me tell demonstrate why even a cursory review of the so-called "Modern Egyptological Interpretation" reveals it to be useless.

The problem is that you're conflating art with text, as if both impart information in the same manner and with the same restraints. They don't. The reason they say that "a picture is worth a thousand words" is that it takes at least a thousand words to textually describe an image, and even then, words are inadequate to the task.

For instance, take Kevin Mathie's splash page, pictured above. Without actually providing the image, I can tell you that it features a large fellow with a beard seated at a grand piano on top of a mountain, with a host of other mountains in the background. He is surrounded by flying musical instruments, including a violin with wings, as well as sheet music that appears to be blown around by the high mountain air.

Now is that an accurate description? I think so. Is it a comprehensive description? By no means. There are a lot of elements left out – the musical score that seems to be following one of the violins, for example. And my description of the sheet music, while technically accurate, is obviously not how Mathie intended it to be interpreted. The music looks like it's just blowing everywhere, but I get the sense that this is a visual representation of how music is supposed to sound. Like the historically inaccurate church art we reviewed earlier, he's

using iconography to emotionally convey a number of different ideas and feelings, and each element in the picture is fraught with symbolism that is subject to multiple interpretations.

Now suppose I were to ask you to “translate” Mathie’s picture into ancient Egyptian. Does the flying violin represent the beauty of music, or its ability to transcend space and time, or Mathie’s personal talent, or music’s innate spirituality? I think a case can be made for all those things. Does each image within the larger image have a single, static interpretation the way words do? Of course not.

So back to non-Egyptologist/Saturday’s Voyeur songwriter Kevin’s Mathie’s official “Modern Egyptological Interpretation.”

Take a look at Item #12 in Facsimile 1:



Joseph Smith’s explanation of Item #12 is lengthy and involved, but Mathie assures us that “This is just the water that the crocodile swims in.”

Um, okay. Why is there a crocodile in the first place? Why did the artist put water with a crocodile under a picture of a human sacrifice? This would be like looking at the winged violin in the Mathie splash page and interpreting the wings as “just the wings the violin uses to fly.” Well, yes. But why is the violin flying? Violins don’t generally fly – shouldn’t we assume some deeper symbolism there?

It’s also true that crocodiles swimming in bodies of water can’t usually be found underneath people lying on couches. Insisting that there is one, and only one, interpretation of any of these images is something a real, non-musical theatre Egyptologist would likely reject.

We have a similar problem with items 5-8, shown here:



Joseph provides detailed explanations for the jars under the couch, but Mathie insists these are only “Canopic jars containing the deceased’s internal organs.”

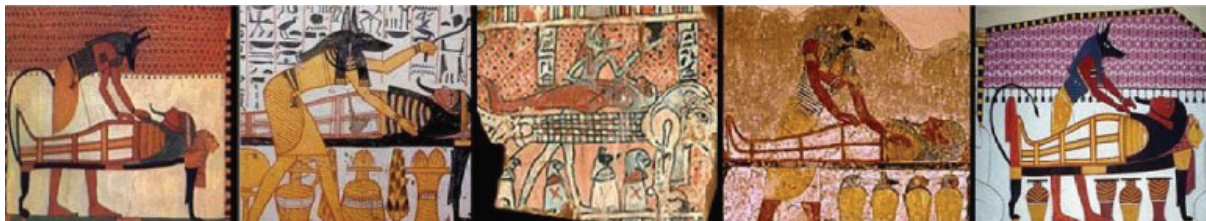
That’s simply wrong on its face, because the guy on the couch clearly isn’t deceased. He’s raising his leg and waving his arm, which, as Nibley points out, indicates that this dude ain’t dead yet.

So the lazy Mathie-plagiarized-by-Runnells interpretation is predicated on the false premise that this is a corpse like all the other corpses in other pictures, while Facsimile 1 is unmistakably showing us a live body.

Also, why do these canopic jars have animal heads? What’s the significance of one being an eagle and one being a jackal, etc.? Are we to presume that there’s no way they could represent false gods, the way Joseph says they do? (Isn’t Anubis a false god? Doesn’t he have a jackal’s head?) Are we simply to assume this is just like the crocodile water, which is only crocodile water? Is there no other way to interpret a flying violin with wings as anything other than an actual flying violin?

This is what happens when you argue from authority, especially when the authority you’re invoking for an Egyptological discussion comes from the Salt Lake City Weekly’s 2013 Arty Award.

The following images show similar funerary scenes which have been discovered elsewhere in Egypt. Notice that the jackal-headed Egyptian god of death and afterlife Anubis is consistent in every funerary scene.



Yes! Also notice that the sarcophagus is consistent in every funerary scene, too - but not at all consistent with Facsimile 1. The extant version of this scene found in the Joseph Smith Papyrus repudiates your contention that this is just a commonplace image, as all of the comparisons you provide confirm Facsimile #1’s uniqueness.

## FACSIMILE 2

The following is a side-by-side comparison of what Joseph Smith translated in Facsimile 2 versus what it actually says according to Egyptologists and modern Egyptology:

No, the following is another Runnells plagiarism from MormonInfographics.com based on the musings of a non-Egyptologist who won the 2009 Best Musical Score award for the film *S.H.A.T.*, a man whose name has been conveniently removed from your recent version.

Perhaps it would be best if I put them side by side to allow your readers to see the theft.

**Old Version with Tone Problems**  
*Kevin Mathie gets a mention at the bottom*

**New, Plagiarized Version**  
*No mention of Kevin Mathie*

## The Book of Abraham

**Hypocephalus; a funerary amulet**

Joseph Smith's Interpretation	Translated Correctly? Facsimile #2, Book of Abraham	Modern Egyptological Interpretation
1. Koltb, The residence of God		1. The god Khnum.
2. Stands next to Koltb		2. "Anun-Ru", god with two faces representing rang & setting sun.
3. God sitting on his throne, clothed with power and authority		3. "Horus-Ru" riding in his boat
4. Rauekyang, also the number 1000. The measuring of time of Olblish		4. Represents Sokat, not a number
5. Enish go on dash; a governing planet		5. Cow of Hathor, behind which stands a uazet-headed goddess holding a sacred tree.
6. Represents this earth in it's four quarters		6. The four (4) sons of Horus, they can represent the four cardinal points of earth.
7. God sitting on his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood		7. The god "Min", an ithyphallic god, that is, a sexually aroused male deity.
8. Contains writings that can only be revealed in the temple		8. "grant that the soul of Osiris Sheehook may live."
9. Ought not to be revealed at the present time.		9. "the netherworld (below the earth) and its great waters."
10. Will be given in the own due time of the Lord		10. "O might god, lord of heaven and earth"
11. No Annotation Given		11. "O god of the sleeping ones from the times of creation" (Read in order 11, 10, 9, 8)
		12. "see" and "saw"
		13. "which made be"
		14. "breathings"
		15. "his book"
		16. "and may this soul and its possessor never be discovered in the netherworld"
		17. "may this tomb never be discovered"
		18. "I am Osiris in the house of Baneben in Heliopolis, so exalted and glorious. I am] copulating with without equal. I am] that mighty god in the house of Baneben of Heliopolis... that might god..."
		19. "You shall be as that god, the Buestian"
		20. Writing: "The name of this mighty god"
		21. Figures 22,23. Baboons are adoring souls of that man
		22. "The name of this mighty god"
		23. Baboons are adoring the souls of that man

**MormonInfographics.com**

	JOSEPH SMITH'S INTERPRETATION	MODERN EGYPTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION
1.	Koltb, The residence of God	The god Khnum
2.	Stands next to Koltb, called by the Egyptians (RUBAL)	"Anun-Ru", god with two faces representing rising & setting sun
3.	God sitting on his throne, clothed with power and authority	"Horus-Ru" riding in his boat
4.	Reuekyang, also the number 1000. The measuring of time of (RUBAL)	Represents Sokat, not a number
5.	Enish go on dash; a governing planet	Cow of Hathor behind which stand a uazet-headed goddess holding a sacred tree
6.	Represents this earth in its four quarters	The four sons of Horus, they can represent the four cardinal points of earth
7.	God sitting on his throne, revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the priesthood	The god "Min", an ithyphallic god that is, a sexually aroused male deity
8.	Contains writings that can only be revealed in the temple	"grant that the soul of Osiris Sheehook may live"
9.	Ought not to be revealed at the present time	"the netherworld (below the earth) and its great waters"
10.	Will be given in the own due time of the Lord	"O might god, lord of heaven and earth"
11.	No Annotation Given	"O god of the sleeping ones from the times of creation" (Read in order 11, 10, 9, 8)
12.		"see" and "saw"
13.		"which made be"
14.		"breathings"
15.		"his book"
16.		"and may this soul and its possessor never be discovered in the netherworld"
17.		"may this tomb never be discovered"
18.		"I am Osiris in the house of Baneben in Heliopolis, so exalted and glorious. I am] copulating with without equal. I am] that mighty god in the house of Baneben of Heliopolis... that might god..."
19.		"You shall be as that God, the Buestian"
20.		Writing: "The name of this mighty god"
21.		Figures 22,23. Baboons are adoring souls of that man
22.		"The name of this mighty god"
23.		Baboons are adoring the souls of that man

Source: Joseph Smith's Translations: Facsimile The Book of Abraham<sup>10</sup> Modern Egyptological Translations<sup>11</sup> Facsimile Facsimile 2: Apologetics<sup>12</sup> (Joseph was here given 1 out of 21 translations correct?)

Kevin Mathie strikes again. All the problems I referenced with regard to our musical non-Egyptologist's interpretation of Facsimile #1 apply here, too, as does the error of equating art with text as having a single, conclusive, and exclusive interpretation. There is no reason readers should feel an obligation to accept Mr. Mathie's interpretation above yours, mine, or anyone else's, including Joseph Smith's.

The other key difference between the MormonInfographics version and the one you stole from them is you concede that "Joseph may have gotten 1 out of 21 translations correct." Presumably, you're referring to Figure #6, where the music director and arranger for Salt Lake Acting Company's popular annual production of Saturday's Voyeur agrees with Joseph Smith that these represent the four quarters of the Earth.

I certainly think that's more impressive than you do, as the likelihood of wild guesses about ancient figures getting anywhere close to the target is miniscule. Yet here we have a bullseye which you can blithely dismiss because of your confidence in the Egyptological wisdom of a man who's authority comes from being a member of both ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild of America.

You're in way over your head, Jeremy. Not even someone who has led more than 100+ musical productions and received numerous awards for his work can bail you out.

One of the most disturbing facts I discovered in my research of Facsimile 2 is figure #7. Joseph Smith said that this is “God sitting on his throne...” It’s actually Min, the pagan Egyptian god of fertility or sex. Min is sitting on a throne with an erect penis (which can be seen in the figure). In other words, Joseph interpreted that this figure with an erect penis is Heavenly Father sitting on His throne.

How is this “disturbing?” Sorry to crack a smile, but I don’t think this is a “disturbing fact;” I think it’s a delightful one. An aversion to acknowledging the existence of genitalia is more puritanical than doctrinal, and Mormons who believe in an anthropomorphic deity ought not be surprised to learn that such a god would be anatomically correct. Egyptian mores were clearly different from the Victorian ones that still linger in LDS Church culture, and I see this as nothing more than an (admittedly crude by today’s standards) acknowledgement that God has a body. (Although there’s also some debate over whether or not that’s a penis or an arm. Actually, I’m not sure which part is supposed to be the arm/penis. As far as pornography goes, this is pretty tame stuff.)

Regardless, Egyptologists and Joseph Smith both acknowledge here we have an anthropomorphic god on a throne. Joseph Smith says it’s God the Father; flying violinist Kevin Mathie cribs from Egyptologists and announces that it’s Min. Understanding that art can have multiple interpretations, it could easily be both. In any case, it’s pretty uncanny that both would see it as a god on a throne, because to my untrained eye, it looks like a goose running with a wooden crate on its back.

I think the great deal of the problems you have with the Book of Abraham originate from a false dichotomy – either everything Joseph Smith had to say about the facsimiles and the extant papyrus text can be objectively verified by modern academics, or the Book of Abraham is a complete fraud. But reality doesn’t fit into either of those categories very well. If Joseph is a complete fraud, why does he rightly recognize a god on a throne in an image that looks like a goose with a wooden crate?



**A Possible Reference to a Pornographic Egyptian God**  
*If only he had a crate on his back...*

Why does he identify images that represent “the four corners of the earth” that Egyptologists agree is correct? How is it that his Abraham is consistent with apocryphal Abrahamic writings that weren’t published until after Joseph’s death? Yet, on the flip side, why would he make so

many other interpretations of the material that no Egyptologist recognizes?

Personally, my answer is one rooted in a broader context – the idea of myths and symbols being appropriated and modified by different cultures for different purposes, especially over vast periods of time. Prior to World War II, the gammadion cross appeared on American military airplanes, and it was also a common symbol of peace and industry in Japan and among Native Americans. But since Hitler got ahold of it and made it the icon of the Third Reich, the gammadion cross, aka the swastika, now has an entirely different meaning and association that has swallowed up all non-fascistic interpretations forever.

If one assumes that Abraham wrote “on papyrus, by his own hand” the material Joseph used to translate the book that bears his name, one also has to assume that the handwriting took place at least two thousand years before the copyist who put on the Joseph Smith Papyri got ahold of it. Two thousand years is a very, very long time. What kind of additional or extraneous meanings would cultures have attached to those symbols in the interim, symbols which were ancient even in the time of the Pharaohs? It would be the most natural thing in the world for a culture to appropriate the inherent power of an ancient symbol to graft an icon of a false god onto the icon of a true one.

If Abraham wrote his account “by his own hand” several millennia ago, and that account were to be passed down among Egyptian scribes for thousands of years, it would be unavoidable that scribes would borrow themes and symbols from the original story as they fashioned their own myths and legends. What seems likely to me is that whatever text and artwork was on the papyrus contained some kind of mixture of both truth and embellishment, and Joseph, via revelation, was able to extract the divine gold buried under the man-made dross. That would also mean that both Joseph and the Egyptologists are correct at the same time – the figure with the phallus represented Min, but thousands of years earlier, it represented God the Father, yet that interpretation was later modified and lost until Joseph the Seer was able to find it again.

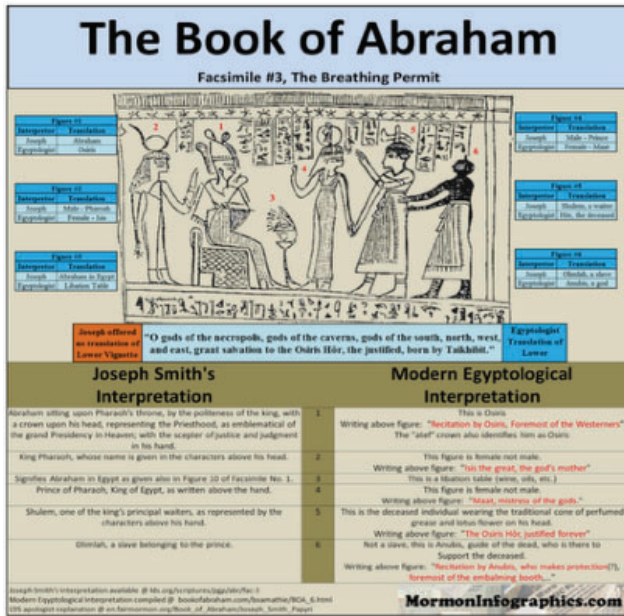
That explanation, which does not tidily fit into the box of one of the three possible explanations I previously offered for the Book of Abraham, is the one that best matches the existing evidence. It’s why the Book of Abraham contains correct information and interpretations that Joseph couldn’t possibly have guessed by accident, but it also contains material that doesn’t jibe with a Saturday’s Voyeur’s “Modern Egyptological Interpretation.” I know the ambiguity troubles you, but honest academics are forced to acknowledge and accept that kind of uncertainty. No responsible scholar would ever claim that modern scholarship allows us to perfectly and definitively understand the ancient world.



**A young Jackie Bouvier in Native American garb**  
*It didn't mean then what it means now*

That doesn't seem to have stopped you and/or Kevin Mathie, though. Moving on to Facsimile 3, which you've once again plagiarized from MormonInfographics, as shown below:

**Another Old Version with Tone Problems**  
Kevin Mathie gets his due



Haven't we beaten this dead horse long enough? All the Kevin Mathie stuff I said about Facsimiles 1 and 2 applies here, too.

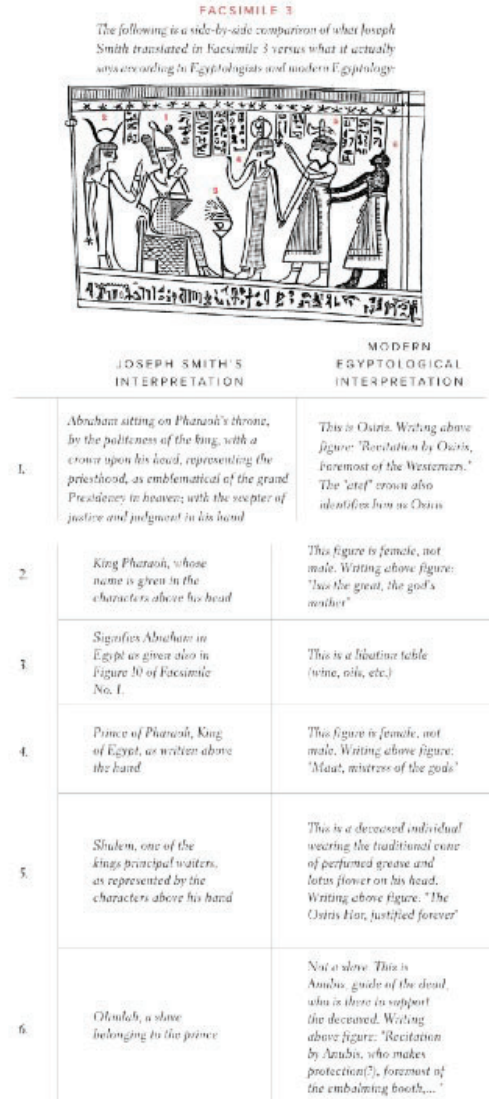
I'll add this comment about Facsimile 3 from a Mormon Egyptologist John Gee, who has degrees from Berkeley and a doctorate in Egyptology from Yale.

Here's what Dr. Gee had to say:

"Facsimile 3 has always been the most neglected of the three facsimiles in the Book of Abraham. Unfortunately, most of what has been said about this facsimile is seriously wanting at best and highly erroneous at worst. This lamentable state of affairs exists because the basic Egyptological work on Facsimile 3 has not been done, and much of the evidence lies neglected and unpublished in museums. Furthermore, what an ancient Egyptian understood by a vignette and what a modern Egyptologist understands by the same vignette are by no means the same thing. Until we understand what the Egyptians understood by this scene, we have no hope of telling whether what Joseph Smith said about them matches what the Egyptians thought about them."

Why should I presume John Gee is wrong and Kevin Mathie is right?

**Another New, Plagiarized Version**  
Still no mention of Kevin Mathie



Sources:  
Joseph Smith's Translations: Facsimile 3 in Book of Abraham \*  
Modern Egyptological Interpretations \*  
Facsimile 3: Apologists \* ("There are LDS experts who believe the Book of Abraham is a genuine artifact, and that it testifies of Joseph Smith's status as a prophet. Non-LDS experts obviously do not agree with that.")

3. Egyptologists state that Joseph Smith's translation of the papyri and facsimiles are gibberish and have absolutely nothing to do with what the papyri and facsimiles actually are and what they actually say. Nothing in each and every facsimile is correct to what Joseph Smith claimed they said.

By "they," you really mean Kevin Mathie. That's it. One guy who is a musician, not a scholar, who comprises the entirety of your whole crack Egyptological research squad - a single, utterly unqualified source to uphold your entire case against the Book of Abraham. There is no reason why anyone should take a single thing Kevin Mathie has to say on this subject with any degree of seriousness, and there is every reason to ignore it. You have not made an argument; you've essentially passed along gossip.

Non-Mormon Egyptologists essentially ignore the facsimiles, and you provide no links to anyone with any credentials or authority who understands them or can offer an informed opinion on them. Once again, you have passed on an accusation you don't understand yourself which is much, much weaker than you pretend it is. This is pathetic scholarship that collapses under the slightest examination.

### FACSIMILE 1

1. The names are wrong.

Says Kevin Mathie.

2. The Abraham scene is wrong.

According to Kevin Mathie, who created a fake drawing that contradicts the authentic drawings you compare to Facsimile 1, which all have sarcophagi, not Facsimile 1's live body.

3. He names gods that are not part of the Egyptian belief system; of any known mythology or belief system.

At least, that's what Kevin Mathie says. A host of highly trained scholars say otherwise, but since they're faithful Latter-day Saints, you rely on a musician who agrees with you.

### FACSIMILE 2

1. Joseph translated 11 figures on this facsimile.

What on earth do you mean he "translated" 11 figures?  
How do you "translate" art? Can you translate the Mona Lisa into Spanish?

None of the names are correct and none of the gods exist in Egyptian religion or any recorded mythology.

Single source: Kevin Mathie

2. Joseph misidentifies every god in this facsimile.

"I know this, because I can play the piano."

- Kevin Mathie



**Mona Lisa**  
*The Spanish Translation*



### FACSIMILE 3

#### 1. Joseph misidentifies the Egyptian god Osiris 19 as Abraham.

Like how you misidentify Kevin Mathie as an Egyptological expert?

My theory, which is just as valid as Kevin Mathie's because, you know, show biz and stuff, is that this figure was originally Abraham, and that he was later misidentified by Egyptians as one of their own gods much in the same way *View of the Hebrews* mistakes Quetzalcoatl for Moses. (See? Misappropriation of symbols. It happens even with non-Mormons, too!)

#### 2. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Isis 20 as the Pharaoh.

Ibid. (Plus Kevin Mathie.)

#### 3. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Maat 21 as the Prince of the Pharaoh.

More Ibid, and more Mathie.

#### 4. Misidentifies the Egyptian god Anubis 11 as a slave.

Wait a minute. That guy's Anubis? Isn't Anubis the one with the jackal's head in all your non-Facsimile 1-resembling couch scenes? Why does this Anubis look nothing like the other Anubises? He looks like an ancient Ed Grimley with that weird spurt of hair sticking out of his head. Fact is, this interpretation, like all of the interpretations you offer, are far from definitive, Kevin Mathie notwithstanding.

#### 5. Misidentifies the dead Hor as a waiter.

I identify him as Kevin Mathie.  
And I'm probably just as right.

#### 6. Joseph misidentifies – twice – a female as a male.

You've misidentified Kevin Mathie as an Egyptological expert twenty times more than that, so you might want to consider cutting Joseph some slack.



**PICTURED: ANUBIS**  
Or maybe Kevin Mathie

You're presuming definitive interpretations of these figures where none exist. (See the quote from John Gee, above.) If they did, you'd have a more credible source for them than Kevin Mathie.

#### 4. The Book of Abraham teaches an incorrect Newtonian view of the universe .

Not only is this false, but the link you've provided above to prove your point doesn't say this at all. And this is the same link you used in your last version of the CES Letter, which means you've had at least two years to read your own source, and you still haven't bothered to do so. Why should your readers take you seriously when you don't even read your own sources, let alone understand them?

Keith Norman, the single source for this assertion, holds no special academic or ecclesiastical authority that requires us to view this as nothing more than one man's opinion. Your A-Team of LDS scholars consists of a lawyer who did some fundraising for a archeological group (Thomas Ferguson), the guy in charge of the animated Killer Tomatoes series (Boyd Kirkland), the musical director for the Salt Lake Acting Company (Kevin Mathie), and now this Keith Norman guy, whose entire contribution to LDS scholarship seems to consist of a couple of articles written for Dialogue and Sunstone almost thirty years ago. The idea that his opinion represents a definitive deconstruction or even an accurate representation of LDS cosmology is more than a little silly.



**SIR ISAAC NEWTON**

*A man who, unlike Jeremy Runnells, actually read his sources*

In the piece, Norman himself is quite self-effacing and readily concedes that his academic credentials and skills are not up to the task of providing anything more than his personal speculation on this subject. "Astronomy has always held a fascination for me, but my mathematical abilities are awaiting the Millennium for development," he says. (Norman's degree is in early Christian studies, not any hard sciences.) Later, he admits he only has "a superficial knowledge of what has been going on in theoretical physics in this [the 20th] century. I can presume to offer no more than that, as I am still struggling with books on the subject written for the layman."

What's telling is that the focus of the article is on how Latter-day Saint theology is Newtonian, but he never cites the Book of Abraham as the source for his theory, and he certainly offers no evidence that the Book of Abraham teaches a Newtonian view of the universe. He cites the B of A only once. Here's the reference in its entirety:

The astronomical assertions in the Pearl of Great Price may indicate that God rules within our own galaxy, the Milky Way: "Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest" (Abr. 3:9; cf. facsimile 2, esp. fig. 5). Does each God have his and her own galaxy or cluster of galaxies?

A good question, and one that in no way undermines the cosmology of the Book of Abraham. Your proof-texting of Norman's article is inexcusably lazy. I recommend you go to whatever Redditor sold you this bill of goods and ask for your money back.

These Newtonian astronomical concepts, mechanics, and models of the universe have since been succeeded and substantially modified by 20th century Einsteinian physics.

All concepts you, personally, know nothing about and are in no position to discuss.

What we find in Abraham 3 and the official scriptures of the LDS Church regarding science reflects a Newtonian world concept. Just as the Catholic Church's Ptolemaic cosmology was displaced by the new Copernican and Newtonian world model, however, the nineteenth-century, canonized, Newtonian world view has since been displaced by Einstein's twentieth-century science.

We don't find any such thing; your source doesn't say this, and you're asserting something you don't understand and can't possibly defend. This is question-begging gone mad.

Keith E. Norman, an LDS scholar ...

He's no more an LDS scholar than you or I are.

... has written that for the LDS Church:

*"It is no longer possible to pretend there is no conflict."*

Conflict between what? Because he's not talking about the Book of Abraham and a Newtonian concert of the universe. You are ripping Keith Norman out of context and misusing his words.

Norman is taking an overarching view of Latter-day Saint cosmology here, and he admits in the article that no such Latter-day Saint cosmological framework has "ever [been] systematized," which means that any conflicts he observes are only with his own personal theories of what that cosmology is. And right after he writes the sentence you quote above re: the conflict between cosmology and doctrine, he writes this sentence:

"Given the dynamic nature of Mormon theology, and the mechanism of progressive revelation in accordance with our capacity to receive, such a reconciliation [between cosmology and doctrine] is by no means far-fetched."

Last time, I gave you the benefit of the doubt and presumed that it was ignorance, not malice, that led you to mislead your readers on this point. But since it's been roughly five years since you first published the CES Letter, the fact that you still haven't read through your own sources suggests a malicious level of ignorance on your part.

Norman continues:

“Scientific cosmology began its leap forward just when Mormon doctrine was becoming stabilized. The revolution in twentieth-century physics precipitated by Einstein dethroned Newtonian physics as the ultimate explanation of the way the universe works. Relativity theory and quantum mechanics, combined with advances in astronomy, have established a vastly different picture of how the universe began, how it is structured and operates, and the nature of matter and energy. This new scientific cosmology poses a serious challenge to the Mormon version of the universe.”

And do you know what that serious challenge is, according to Mr. Norman? (That would require reading your own article, so I’m confident your answer is no.) It’s the idea that Ex Nihilo creation - matter coming into existence from nothing - is more scientifically defensible than the idea that matter is eternal. That is utter and complete nonsense that requires tortured semantic distinctions with which Einstein would never have agreed.

Since you have clearly not read the article, allow me to summarize Norman’s thesis here - one which, again, does not rely on the Book of Abraham at all.

Scientists are incapable of measuring time and space prior to the Big Bang, so some essentially describe the pre-Big Bang universe as “nothing.”

What scientists mean when they say “nothing,” however, is that there is nothing that can be defined within the current confines of space and time. We have no way of measuring or observing the pre-Big Bang universe, so there’s no point in trying to describe something we do not have the resources to understand.

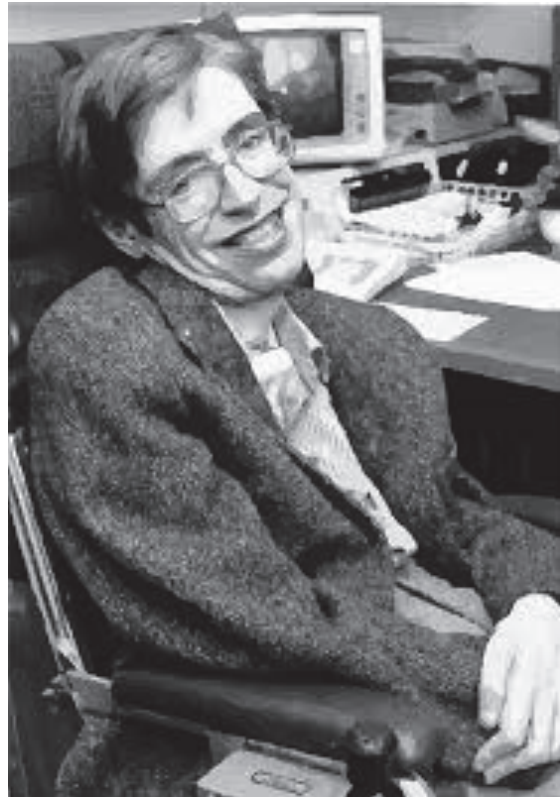
This is how Stephen Hawking put it:

Since events before the Big Bang have no observational consequences, one may as well cut them out of the theory, and say that time began at the Big Bang. Events before the Big Bang, are simply not defined, because there's no way one could measure what happened at them.

That is not to say they were “nothing.” Quite the opposite, according to Dr. Hawking:

At this time, the Big Bang, all the matter in the universe, would have been on top of itself. The density would have been infinite.

Norman, with a “pre-Hawking” understanding of the universe, seizes on semantic wordplay to



**DR. STEPHEN HAWKING**  
*He, too, read his own sources*

say that the Ex Nihilo creationists are scientifically accurate, because matter came into existence with no antecedent. Yet he also undermines his own argument later in the piece when he speculates that “our universe may have begun as an enormous black hole in a different universe.” That’s not the same thing as “nothing,” and Ex Nihilo is nonsense under both Newtonian and Einsteinian models. What is “nothing” is the bearing Keith Norman’s highly speculative article has on your uninformed argument.

Grant Palmer, a Mormon historian and CES teacher for 34 years, wrote ...

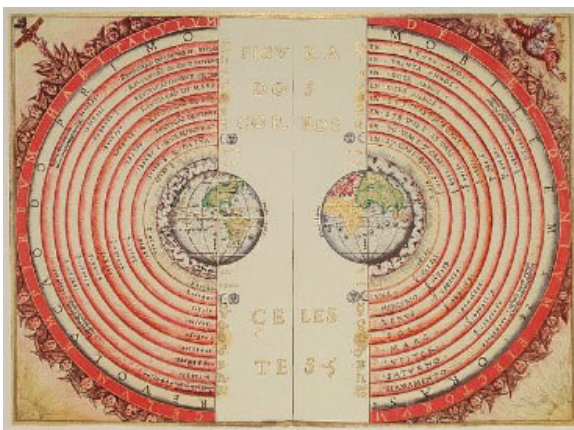
This is misleading. It suggests that Palmer was working professionally both as a historian and a CES teacher for that same 34-year period of time, which he wasn’t. He had a Master’s Degree in American history, not a doctorate, and he published no academically peer-reviewed papers on Mormon history during his lifetime, unless you count the master’s thesis on the Godbeites that he wrote as a student. Palmer is beloved by dissidents because they agree with him, but his academic credentials would not qualify him as a professional historian, and his scholarship, while perhaps not as shoddy as your own, still leaves a great deal to be desired.

So what did Mr. Palmer have to add to this discussion?

“Many of the astronomical and cosmological ideas found in both Joseph Smith’s environment and in the Book of Abraham have become out of vogue, and some of these Newtonian concepts are scientific relics. The evidence suggests that the Book of Abraham reflects concepts of Joseph Smith’s time and place rather than those of an ancient world.

– *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p.25

This, again, is question-begging. This is not evidence; it’s an assertion of evidence that you don’t bother to provide. Citing specific examples of any supposed “scientific relics” from the book would be helpful.



**Figure of the heavenly bodies — An illustration of the Ptolemaic geocentric system, 1568**  
*Way before Joseph Smith*

It’s also a bizarre criticism because one would expect “scientific relics” that were typical of Abraham’s time, not Joseph Smith’s. And - surprise! - that’s exactly what we find as the Book of Abraham presents a largely geocentric worldview. Geocentrism, or the idea that the earth is the center of the universe, was certainly a scientific relic by the time Joseph Smith came on the scene, but it’s entirely appropriate for Abraham, and it’s actually evidence for the Book of Abraham’s ancient origins.

5. 86% of Book of Abraham chapters 2, 4, and 5 are King James Version Genesis chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12. Sixty-six out of seventy-seven verses are quotations or close paraphrases of King James Version wording. (See *An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins*, p.19)

If the Book of Abraham is an ancient text written thousands of years ago “by his own hand upon papyrus,” then what are 17th century King James Version text doing in there? What does this say about the book being anciently written by Abraham?

This is just a reprise of the same issue you raised in your issues with Book of Mormon translation, and, once again, you demonstrate a fundamental ignorance of the relationship between an original text and its translated version.

A modern translator’s word choices say nothing about the antiquity of a given text, and, absent copyright issues, there is nothing sinister about translators relying on existing translations of similar material to guide them in their translation.

When the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he quoted from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, which was the most modern version then available. What does this say about the Old Testament as an ancient document? Nothing whatsoever.



**6.** Why are there anachronisms in the Book of Abraham? For example, the terms Chaldeans, Egyptus, and Pharaoh are all anachronistic.

These look more like legitimate translation choices than actual anachronisms.

Re: Chaldeans: Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees, and so it’s not surprising that he also refers to his land as “Chaldea” and its inhabitants as “Chaldeans.” It’s clear from the text that the use of the term “Chaldeans” has reference to people from Ur, not people from the nation of Chaldea that came along much later. How else should Abraham have described the people from Ur of the Chaldees? Chaldeesians? Ur-ites?

Re: Egyptus: Prepublication versions of the B of A manuscript refer to Egyptus as “Zeptah,” which is similar to the chronologically appropriate and non-anachronistic “S3t-Pth,” which can be rendered in a Latinized version as “Egyptus.” This independent etymology actually strengthens the case for the Book of Abraham’s ancient origins.

Re: Pharoah: The fact that Egyptians didn’t use the word Pharoah to describe their kings until later than Abraham would have written his book doesn’t – and shouldn’t – preclude a translator from using the commonly understood word in a modern translation.

Additionally, Abraham refers to the facsimiles in 1:12 and 1:14 . However, as noted and conceded above in the Church’s essay, these facsimiles did not even exist in Abraham’s time as they are standard first century C.E. pagan Egyptian funerary documents.

This was neither noted nor conceded in the Church’s essay. What was noted and conceded was that the text, not the Facsimiles, did not match the Book of Abraham text, and that one need not assume that the text next to Facsimile 1 demonstrated that the two were connected. In fact that’s part of your next quote, like so:

“Some have assumed that the hieroglyphs adjacent to and surrounding facsimile 1 must be a source for the text of the book of Abraham.”  
– Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham essay, [lds.org](http://lds.org)

And the next sentence from the essay, which you exclude from your quote even though it answers your question:

“But this claim rests on the assumption that a vignette and its adjacent text must be associated in meaning. In fact, it was not uncommon for ancient Egyptian vignettes to be placed some distance from their associated commentary.”

You don’t get to cite the beginning of the paragraph and ignore the end of it. The assertion in the essay is directly contrary to your claim.

### WHY WOULD ANYONE ASSUME THAT?

“And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; and that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record.”  
– Abraham 1:12

You’re also assuming this is the original version of Abraham’s record, when, in fact, it’s a copy of a copy of a copy two thousand years or so from the original record. Your assumptions are incorrect.

7. Facsimile 2, Figure #5 states the sun receives its “light from the revolutions of Kolob.” We now know that the process of nuclear fusion is what makes the stars and suns shine. With the discovery of quantum mechanics, scientists learned that the sun’s source of energy is internal, and not external. The sun shines because of thermonuclear fusion. The sun does not shine because it gets its light from any other star or any other external source.

This one inspired me to set up a class action lawsuit against Stevie Wonder for his song “You Are the Sunshine of my Life” because, contrary to his scientifically inaccurate lyrics, the sunshine of his life actually shines because of thermonuclear fusion.

The comment on Figure #5 reads as follows:

Is called in Egyptian Enish-go-on-dosh;  
this is one of the governing planets also,  
and is said by the Egyptians to be the Sun,  
and to borrow its light from Kolob  
through the medium of Kae-e-vanrash,  
which is the grand Key, or, in other words,  
the governing power, which governs  
fifteen other fixed planets or stars, as also  
Floese or the Moon, the Earth and the  
Sun in their annual revolutions. This  
planet receives its power through the  
medium of Kli-flos-is-es, or Hah-ko-kau-  
beam, the stars represented by numbers 22  
and 23, receiving light from the  
revolutions of Kolob.



*Stevie Wonder singing about  
the medium of Kae-e-vanrash*

The phrase “is said by the Egyptians” ought to be a clue that this is a description of an Egyptian metaphor, not a literal scientific treatise. In other words, when we say “the sun rises in the East,” those words convey a valuable metaphorical meaning, even though they’re not at all scientifically accurate. The sun, of course, is well beyond the boundaries of the four cardinal directions, and it is the earth’s relative movement, not the sun’s, that accounts for this scientifically indefensible concept of “sunrise.”

On the other hand, I don’t see any reason why thermonuclear fusion couldn’t be a key component of “the medium of Kae-e-vanrash.”

8. There is a book published in 1829 by Thomas Dick entitled *The Philosophy of a Future State* .

1829. A very good year, indeed. It’s the year the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph was already pretty far down the road with Mormon theology by this point, so this book couldn’t have been included in all the stuff he supposedly plagiarized to write the Book of Mormon. Maybe this made for a bit of light reading after he was poring through *View of the Hebrews*, *The Late War between the United States and Great Britain*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, oodles of Captain Kidd stories, and dozens of obscure local and African maps.

But, okay, here we go. One more accusation of plagiarism. Excuse me for not being staggered, floored, or astounded. You can only cry wolf so many times.

Joseph Smith owned a copy of the book and Oliver Cowdery quoted some lengthy excerpts from the book in the December 1836 *Messenger and Advocate*.



Indeed! And Oliver participated in the Book of Abraham translation process. Why would a plagiarist call attention to his source? A source which, just by reading the excerpt to which you link which you clearly haven't read yourself, clearly bears no textual resemblance to the Book of Abraham at all?

Klaus Hansen, an LDS scholar, stated:

Klaus Hansen? Am I supposed to know who he is? Should I add him to the team of killer tomatoes and Saturday's Voyeur? And why is it that the only LDS "scholars" you respect are those who agree with you, while those who disagree are just "unofficial apologists?" But OK. What did the good Mr. Hansen state?

*"The progressive aspect of Joseph's theology, as well as its cosmology, while in a general way compatible with antebellum thought, bears some remarkable resemblances to Thomas Dick's 'Philosophy of a Future State'."*

That may be why Oliver chose to quote from him. I quote from C.S. Lewis on my blog all the time, because I'm thrilled to find a non-Mormon writer advancing what seems, to me, to be some very remarkable resemblances to Mormon ideas. To my knowledge, no one has accused me of plagiarism as a result, nor should it surprise us when people from different backgrounds arrive at similar philosophical conclusions.

Because that's what we're talking about here – ideas that Thomas Dick had that bear some similarity to ideas in the Book of Abraham. Clearly none of Dick's text can be found in the B of A, so insinuations of plagiarism are pretty silly.

Hansen continues:

*"Some very striking parallels to Smith's theology suggest that the similarities between the two may be more than coincidental. Dick's lengthy book, an ambitious treatise on astronomy and metaphysics, proposed the idea that matter is eternal and indestructible..."*

Correct.

*and rejected the notion of a creation ex nihilo.*

Incorrect.

"None but that Eternal Mind which counts the number of the stars, **which called them from nothing into existence**, and arranged them in the respective stations they occupy, and whose eyes run to and fro through the unlimited extent of creation, can form a clear and comprehensive conception of the number, the order, and the economy of this vast portion of the system of nature." [Emphasis added]

– Thomas Dick, Philosophy of a Future State, pp. 206-207.

Calling things from "nothing into existence" is the very definition of Ex Nihilo creation, which Dick clearly accepts and the Book of Abraham explicitly rejects. Mr. Dick has a bunch

of other ideas that fly in the face of Mormon theology. His God is “a spiritual uncompounded substance, having no visible form, nor sensible quantities, ‘inhabiting eternity,’ and filling immensity with his presence, his essential glory cannot form an object for the direct contemplation of any finite intelligence.” (p.202) This deity also “existed alone, independent of every other being” for “[i]nnumerable ages before the universe was created.” (p. 56)

That’s about as un-Latter-day Saint – and un-Book of Abraham – as a God can possibly be.

*Much of the book dealt with the infinity of the universe, made up of innumerable stars spread out over immeasurable distances. Dick speculated that many of these stars were peopled by ‘various orders of intelligences’ and that these intelligences were ‘progressive beings’ in various stages of evolution toward perfection.*

Those, apparently, are the parts of the book that Oliver liked, which is why he quoted from them in the Messenger and Advocate. Like you, he apparently prefers to quote scholars when they agree with him.

*In the Book of Abraham, part of which consists of a treatise on astronomy and cosmology, eternal beings of various orders and stages of development likewise populate numerous stars. They, too, are called ‘intelligences.’*

Same name, but with entirely different functions. Dick’s divine intelligence is completely and forever removed from every other intelligence, all of which is far too limited and weak to ever understand the Eternal Mind. Abraham 3, where God steps into the midst of intelligences and proclaims “These I shall make my rulers” is antithetical to Dick’s conception of deity.

*Dick speculated that ‘the systems of the universe revolve around a common centre...the throne of God.’ In the Book of Abraham, one star named Kolob ‘was nearest unto the throne of God.’*

“Therefore are they before the **throne of God**, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” – Revelation 7:15

“And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the **throne of God**, and by him that sitteth thereon.” – Matthew 23:22

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the **throne of God**.” – Hebrews 12:2

Emphasis added in all above biblical passages. There are plenty more. The “throne of God” even makes several appearances in the Book of Mormon, which was completed before Joseph got his hands on Philosophy of a Future State. Incredible as it may seem, this is proof that Joseph could have thought of using this three-word phrase without Thomas Dick’s help.

*Other stars, in ever diminishing order, were placed in increasing distances from this center.”*

– *Mormonism and the American Experience*, p.79-80, 110

I'd very much like to read the rest of this passage from Klaus Hansen, as the few articles I can find of his suggest that he's a faithful Latter-day Saint. I don't have a copy of his book, and, apparently, neither does anyone else - it has no reviews on Amazon. The text is unavailable online. It would be interesting to see if these observations are tempered by a broader context that you neglect to cite, as I suspect they probably are.

9. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland was directly asked about the papyri not matching the Book of Abraham in a March 2012 BBC interview:

**Sweeney:** Mr. Smith got this papyri and he translated them and subsequently as the Egyptologists cracked the code something completely different...

**Holland:** (Interrupts) All I'm saying...all I'm saying is that what got translated got translated into the word of God. The vehicle for that, I do not understand and don't claim to know and know no Egyptian.

Is "I don't know and I don't understand but it's the word of God" really the best answer that a "prophet, seer, and revelator" can come up with to such a profound problem that is driving many members out of the Church?

Is paraphrasing Elder Holland to torture his words into sounding more ignorant than they actually were really the best way to make your argument?

Elder Holland didn't say "I don't know and I don't understand but it's the word of God." What he said was that he didn't understand "the vehicle for that," meaning the means of translation, and that he didn't know Egyptian. If you actually watched the documentary, which I did at the time, you'd recognize that Sweeney was about as obnoxious to Elder Holland as he could have possibly been. Elder Holland's patience and grace under hostile fire was impressive by any objective standard.



*"Mitt Romney was a bishop here."  
- John Sweeney, BBC*

This may be a tangent, but that documentary merits additional comment. Throughout the piece John Sweeney gets all the simple details wrong. For example, he constantly refers to chapels as temples; yet when he stands outside the Boston Temple, he claims Mitt Romney was "a bishop here." Well, no. As any Latter-day Saint knows, regular meetinghouses and temples serve very

different purposes. If someone's going to warn the world about Mitt's scary cult, which was the purpose of the piece, maybe they should get the little things right if they want us to trust them on the big things.

It's clear who Sweeney trusts, though – dissidents. He spends about twenty minutes interviewing modern polygamists who have zero connection to the church to which Mitt Romney belongs, and then another twenty or so interviewing unstable people who've left the church, one of whom claims to have been “followed,” although whether or not it was the church that was following him, he can't be sure. Sweeney makes one offhand comment that the vast majority of the people who knew Mitt as a bishop really liked and respected him, but that comment comes before a lengthy interview with the one woman who didn't. That's the approach. If you hate the Mormons, then you're honest and credible. If you like them, then you're hiding something. (Sound familiar, Jeremy? It should.)

At one point in Sweeney's piece, some wackadoodle, random hairy dude claims that Mormon spies are trained by the CIA to learn how to snoop on church members' private lives. Sweeney then cuts to a spooky shot of the Church Office Building and scarily intones that he has contacted a CIA agent “who refuses to reveal his name.” This CIA wannabe Deep Throat confirms... that the CIA does, in fact, employ Mormons. That's it. That's the smoking gun evidence of some secret Mormon spy network. No word if Lutherans who work for the CIA are also being trained to spy on parishioners.

After giving full hearing to reports by the angriest people imaginable about all the horrors of Mormonism, he then ambushes Elder Holland and asks him to deny these horrors, which he does, after which Sweeney presents some variation of “Oh, sure, Elder Holland. You may claim that you don't follow people and shun people and cut them out of their families, but I've found thirty people” – Sweeney's own, admitted number – “who beg to differ.” That's the tone of this piece – thirty loopy, ex-Mormon cranks vs. the entire faithful membership of the LDS Church, the whole of which gets about a fifth of the total screen time.

But you're right – as he was being badgered by a hostile interviewer who was unwilling to give him time to respond, Elder Holland did not provide a comprehensive understanding of the Book of Abraham in the few seconds he was allotted before the next question. Or perhaps he did go on at length, and Sweeney left it on the cutting room floor. Making Elder Holland look good was not on John Sweeney's agenda.

*The following are respected Egyptian scholars/Egyptologists statements regarding Joseph Smith and the Book of Abraham:*

*“...these three facsimiles of Egyptian documents in the Pearl of Great Price depict the most common objects in the Mortuary religion of Egypt. Joseph Smith's interpretations of them as part of a unique revelation through Abraham, therefore, very clearly demonstrates that he was totally unacquainted with the significance of these documents and absolutely ignorant of the simplest facts of Egyptian writing and civilization.”*

– Dr. James H. Breasted, University of Chicago, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*, p.26-27

*“It may be safely said that there is not one single word that is true in these explanations.”*

– Dr. W.M. Flinders Petrie, London University, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*, p.24

*“It is difficult to deal seriously with Joseph Smith’s impudent fraud... Smith has turned the goddess [Isis in Facsimile #3] into a king and Osiris into Abraham.”*

– Dr. A. H. Sayce, Oxford professor of Egyptology, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator*, p.23

Man. You left all the big guns for the end, didn’t you? If you had all these respected Egyptian scholars in your back pocket, why did you keep trotting out the guy who wrote Saturday’s Voyeur to make your case?

I’d like to see what else Dr. James H. Breasted has to say on the subject. Is he still teaching at the University of Chicago? No, he isn’t, probably because he’s been dead for over eighty years. Same with A.H. Sayce. Flinders Petrie is the kid of the group – he died in 1942. All these statements were made over a hundred years ago in the service of an anti-Mormon tract published by Franklin Spalding, an Episcopal bishop. All of them would have believed Egyptological ideas that modern scholars would now reject, based on the most current research available. Certainly all of them precede the flood of Book of Abraham scholarship that has taken place since the Joseph Smith Papyri were discovered in 1967, papyri that none of them saw.

Hugh Nibley, who I quote in fire red again, absolutely destroys these guys.



At that time it was claimed that the pronouncements of five of the greatest scholars of all time had “completely demolished” all grounds for belief in the divine inspiration or historic authenticity of the Book of Abraham and, through it, the Book of Mormon. It turned out, however, that Bishop Franklin S. Spalding, in gathering and manipulating the necessary evidence for his determined and devious campaign, had (1) disqualified the Mormons from all participation in the discussion on the grounds that they were not professional Egyptologists; (2) sent special warnings and instructions to his experts that made it impossible for any of them to decide for Joseph Smith; (3) concealed all correspondence that did not support the verdict he desired; (4) given the learned jury to

understand that the original Egyptian manuscripts were available, which they were not; (5) said that Mormons claimed them to be the unique autobiographic writings and sketching of Abraham, which they did not; (6) announced to the world that Joseph Smith was being tested on linguistic grounds alone, specifically as a translator, though none of his experts ventured to translate a single word of the documents submitted; and (7) rested his case on the “complete agreement” of the scholars, who agreed on nothing save that the Book of Abraham was a hoax.

The experts (1) did not agree among themselves at all when they spoke without collusion; (2) with the exception of James H. Breasted, they wrote only brief and contemptuous notes, though it was claimed that they had given the documents “careful consideration”; (3) they admitted that they were hasty and ill-tempered, since they at no time considered anything of Joseph Smith’s worth any serious attention at all; (4) they translated nothing and produced none of the “identical” documents, which, according to them, were available in countless numbers and proved Joseph Smith’s interpretations a fraud. They should have done much better than they did since they had everything their own way, being free to choose for interpretation and comment whatever was easiest and most obvious, and to pass by in complete silence the many formidable problems presented by the three facsimiles. Those Mormons who ventured a few polite and diffident questions about the consistency of the criticisms or the completeness of the evidence instantly called down upon their heads the Jovian bolts of the New York Times, accusing them of “reviling scholars and scholarship.” A safer setup for the critics of Joseph Smith could not be imagined. And yet it was they and not the Mormons who insisted on calling off the whole show just when it was getting interesting. It was not a very edifying performance.

– From “A New Look at the History of the Pearl of Great Price” published in The Improvement Era, May, 1970.

Yeah, maybe the flying violin dude was your best bet after all. At least, he was the first time you published your letter.

In addition to the above, world renowned and respected University of Chicago professor of Egyptology, Dr. Robert Ritner, provided a detailed response and rebuttal to the LDS Church’s *Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham* essay that is sobering and devastating. Dr. Ritner’s rebuttal to the Church’s essay can be read [here](#).

Congratulations on finding a rare non-Latter-day Saint Egyptologist who has bothered to look at the Book of Abraham with any degree of academic qualification. If you were actually writing a credible piece of scholarship, you would have scrubbed Kevin Mathie out of your letter completely and revised it based on Dr. Ritner’s work. The fact that you didn’t do that suggests, again, you haven’t read Dr. Ritner’s work. Or that you don’t care about the strength of your arguments as long they drive people out of the Church. (Probably both.)

Dr. Ritner is an exception to the rule that the Book of Abraham is all but ignored by non-Mormon Egyptologists, because, frankly, they don’t care enough about the issue to pay any attention to it, which is why you’re left with Kevin Mathie.

There is no denying, however, that Ritner's assessment is devastating to anyone who believes that the text of the Breathing Permit of Hor corresponds to the text of the Book of Abraham according to modern Egyptological understanding. Now I don't know anyone who believes that, necessarily - certainly the Church doesn't, and they never have - but if there's somebody out there who is operating under that misperception, they ought to read Ritner and get their facts straight.

I have neither the knowledge or the credentials to repudiate Ritner in any respect, although he overplays his hand when he insists that not only is the Breathing Permit of Hor not the text of the Book of Abraham, but that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, along with secret documents that only that Tanners had, prove that the entirety of the Book of Abraham comes from this relative handful of scraps.

Kerry Muhlestein explains:

If Joseph had originally written an Egyptian character in the margin and then either puzzled out or had the translation revealed to him, there would have been no need to continue to write down the original characters when making third or fourth copies of the scriptural text. [36] We can document that Joseph Smith was not in Kirtland when many of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were created. [37] Both the fact that the hieratic text was apparently overwritten onto the English Book of Abraham verses and evidence of specific scribal practices suggest that the hieratic was a late addition. [38] This indicates that they were written after the text had been completed, not copied beforehand and then translated.

Unfortunately, Ritner refuses to concede that anything Latter-day Saint academics have written about the Book of Abraham is worthy of his time, despite the extensive and serious work they have done that is not easily dismissed. Here's Hugh Nibley, for instance, writing a rebuttal to Ritner's pat dismissal of Joseph Smith's descriptions of the facsimiles, likely written before Ritner was born.

...it is important to emphasize what many Egyptologists are insisting on today as never before, namely, the folly of giving just one interpretation and one only to any Egyptian representation. This is the pit into which Joseph Smith's critics have always fallen: "This cannot possibly represent 'A' because it represents 'B'!" "The value of an Egyptian presentation," Eberhard Otto reminds us, "depended on seeing the greatest possible number of meanings in the briefest possible formulation."<sup>3</sup> Heretofore, critics of the Joseph Smith explanations have insisted on the least possible number of meanings, namely one, to every item, and as a result have not only disagreed widely among themselves, but also exposed their efforts to drastic future revision. The Egyptians "considered it a particular nicety that symbols should possess multiple significance," wrote Henri Frankfort, "that one single interpretation should not be the only possible one."

It's also interesting that Ritner labels his piece as a response to the Church's essay, as he essentially only responds to the subjects that he feels he can easily discredit - he only goes

after the low-hanging fruit, as it were. The following quotes from the Church's essay are completely ignored by Robert Ritner:

*The book speaks of "the plain of Olishem," a name not mentioned in the Bible. An ancient inscription, not discovered and translated until the 20th century, mentions a town called "Ulisum," located in northwestern Syria.*

Ritner's response: Silence.

*Further, Abraham 3:22–23 is written in a poetic structure more characteristic of Near Eastern languages than early American writing style.*

No response from Ritner.

*Facsimile 1 and Abraham 1:17 mention the idolatrous god Elkenah. This deity is not mentioned in the Bible, yet modern scholars have identified it as being among the gods worshipped by ancient Mesopotamians.*

Ritner doesn't address this at all.

*In the book of Abraham, God teaches Abraham about the sun, the moon, and the stars. "I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egypt," the Lord says, "that ye may declare all these words." Ancient texts repeatedly refer to Abraham instructing the Egyptians in knowledge of the heavens. For example, Eupolemus, who lived under Egyptian rule in the second century B.C.E., wrote that Abraham taught astronomy and other sciences to the Egyptian priests.*

Ritner doesn't mention this.

*A later Egyptian text, discovered in the 20th century, tells how the Pharaoh tried to sacrifice Abraham, only to be foiled when Abraham was delivered by an angel. Later, according to this text, Abraham taught members of the Pharaoh's court through astronomy. All these details are found in the book of Abraham.*

Shouldn't this be included in a comprehensive response? But Ritner doesn't bother.

*Other details in the book of Abraham are found in ancient traditions located across the Near East. These include Terah, Abraham's father, being an idolator; a famine striking Abraham's homeland; Abraham's familiarity with Egyptian idols; and Abraham's being younger than 75 years old when he left Haran, as the biblical account states. Some of these extrabiblical elements were available in apocryphal books or biblical commentaries in Joseph Smith's lifetime, but others were confined to nonbiblical traditions inaccessible or unknown to 19th-century Americans.*

They're accessible to Ritner, but you wouldn't know that from his response, which fails to address them.



Look, again, I'm not qualified to argue Egyptological details, and Ritner is. But it ought to be disturbing, Jeremy, that, like you, he only engages arguments that he thinks he can win. You may not realize that's not how it works, but as a genuine scholar, Ritner knows better, which makes his decision to only engage part of the essay a telling admission of more uncertainty on his part than he's willing to publicly concede.

The following video offers a thorough, complete, and unbiased overview of the Book of Abraham issues as well as the apologetic responses to them:

[CESLETTER.ORG/PAPYRI](http://CESLETTER.ORG/PAPYRI)

Nonsense. There is no such thing as an unbiased overview of the Book of Abraham. You claim lack of bias only when people's biases agree with your own. In any case, that video came out before the Church's essay was published, so it's outdated and largely useless.

An online contributor created an [easy-to-understand document](#) very clearly outlining the Book of Abraham issues.

It's easy to understand because it's simplistic and wrong, relying on the same faulty assumptions found in the main body of your letter. Why do you refuse to identify your "online contributor?" Could it be because they have no more qualifications than you do to draw educated conclusions about the Book of Abraham?

Of all the issues, the Book of Abraham is the issue that has both fascinated and disturbed me the most. It is the issue that I've spent the most time researching because it offers a real insight into Joseph's modus operandi as well as Joseph's claim of being a translator. It is the smoking gun that has completely obliterated my testimony of Joseph Smith and his claims.

It is always a tragedy when someone loses their faith, but I consider it especially tragic when someone's testimony is obliterated because of misunderstandings, bad information, and logically fallacious assumptions like the kind you present here. The gun is smoking because you have unwittingly shot yourself in the foot. And now you've made it your life's mission to shoot as many other people's feet as you possibly can. Perhaps it's time to find something less destructive to do with your time.



***Don't point your smoking gun at my foot.  
(PICTURED: My foot)***