



Type: Report

---

## A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri and Book of Abraham

Author(s): John Gee

Published: Provo, UT; FARMS, 1999

---

**Abstract:** John Gee recounts the history of the Joseph Smith papyri, their discovery, travels, and eventual translation. Particular attention is devoted to the reconstruction of the papyri and their relationship to the Book of Abraham. The origin and contents of the Book of Abraham and the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are also discussed.



FARMS

FOUNDATION FOR ANCIENT RESEARCH AND MORMON STUDIES

John Gee

# A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri and Book of Abraham

## Summary:

John Gee recounts the history of the Joseph Smith papyri, their discovery, travels, and eventual translation. Particular attention is devoted to the reconstruction of the papyri and their relationship to the Book of Abraham. The origin and contents of the Book of Abraham and the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are also discussed.

Transcript  
Pearl of Great Price

FARMS  
Brigham Young University  
P.O. Box 7113  
University Station  
Provo, UT 84602  
1-800-327-6715  
(801) 373-5111  
[www.farmsresearch.com](http://www.farmsresearch.com)

\$3.00  
GEE-99



1 23456 78910 4

Transcript of a lecture presented on 3 March 1999 as part of the FARMS Book of Abraham Lecture Series.

John Gee received a B.A. in Near Eastern Studies from Brigham Young University, an M.A. in Near Eastern Studies from the University of California at Berkeley, and a Ph.D. in Egyptology from Yale University. He has worked as a Research Assistant in the Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an Assistant Instructor at Yale University, and is currently (1999) an Assistant Research Professor of Egyptology at Brigham Young University.

© 1999 by John Gee

**Fair Use Copying Notice:** These pages may be reproduced and used, without alteration, addition, or deletion, for any nonpecuniary or nonpublishing purpose without permission.

# A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri and Book of Abraham

John Gee

This presentation is a summary of research that will appear in an article entitled "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri," in *The Scholar as Witness: Essays in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, currently in press, and a book tentatively entitled, *The Historical Backgrounds of the Book of Abraham*. Full documentation will appear in those publications.

## The Story of the Papyri

In July of 1798 Napoleon invaded Egypt. As a result of the invasion, Napoleon gained nothing; Egypt, however, gained a new government under Muhammad Ali, and Europe gained Egyptomania, for, in the long run, the most important thing that Napoleon brought in his invasion was not his infantry, but his army of academics (see figure 1).

Napoleon took along 150 scientists and artists, including the mathematicians Gaspar Monge and Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier, and the chemist Claude-Louis Berthollet. In August of 1798 Messrs. Monge, Fourier, and Berthollet founded the Egyptian Institute. Though Monge and Berthollet fled Egypt with Napoleon in 1799, Fourier was not a close personal friend of Napoleon and did not return to France until 1801. The following year, he employed as his secretary Jacques-Joseph Champollion, the elder brother of the more famous Jean-François Champollion. Before his return to France, Fourier supervised the archaeological researches of the Egyptian Institute. The French expedition of Egypt was a remarkable thing since it "was most liberally provided, by the government of the day, with a select body of antiquaries, and architects, and surveyors, and naturalists, and draughtsmen, whose business it was to investigate all that was interesting to science or to literature in that singular country." In 1809, as a result of their expedition, the French published their "splendid collection," the *Description de l'Égypte* (Description of Egypt), eight volumes of text, five volumes of pictures of Egyptian antiquities, two volumes on modern Egypt, and three on its natural history. These eighteen volumes, which often required a special cabinet to house, provided the first extensive view of Egyptian antiquities to Europeans (including temples, sarcophagi, and papyri), and fueled European interest in Egypt. Monge had

developed descriptive geometry for military purposes, but it has also proven an indispensable tool in archaeology and was used in the French archaeological work in Egypt, thus setting a new standard for archaeological work at the time. Their most notable find the French discovered built into the fortress of the port of el-Rashid, in July 1799; it was a large basalt slab containing a decree by Ptolemy V Epiphanes discussing his political and religious reforms after suppressing a revolt. Captured by the British and "now safely and quietly deposited in the British Museum," this stele, now called the Rosetta stone after the Italian form of the name of the place where it was found, remains one of the least read though most famous of all Egyptian texts, for it enabled Thomas Young to begin decipherment of Demotic, and later enabled Jean-François Champollion to start the same process with Egyptian hieroglyphs.

One of the soldiers accompanying Napoleon on his expedition to Egypt was an Italian from the Piedmont area by the name of Bernadino Drovetti. Drovetti served under Napoleon's brother-in-law Joachim Murat. After saving Murat's life at the expense of his hand, Drovetti was appointed the French consul general to Egypt, in which capacity he served from 1803 to 1814.

After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, another Italian from the Piedmont, Antonio Lebolo, having sided with the losers, had to fend for himself. Stigmatized in his home country, he abandoned his wife and child and left for Egypt, where he found a friend in Drovetti. Drovetti employed Lebolo as his agent, sending him on errands to scout for antiquities to loot. At this time, Egyptian archaeology was indistinguishable from tomb robbery. (After all, the major difference between an archaeologist and a tomb robber is that an archaeologist publishes what he finds.) Fueled by the interest generated by the publication of the *Description de l'Égypte*, Europeans were anxious to acquire Egyptian antiquities for themselves, and men like Lebolo, Drovetti, Giovanni d'Anastasi, and Giovanni-Batiste Belzoni were willing to supply them. "The purpose of my researches," stated Belzoni, "was to rob the Egyptians." It would be difficult to state the case more succinctly.

All sorts of ruses were used to obtain antiquities. To acquire for Drovetti an obelisk to which Belzoni had previously obtained the rights, Lebolo "pretended he could read the hieroglyphics on the obelisk, and said it was written, that the obelisk belonged to Mr. Drovetti's ancestors; consequently he had a right to it." This coupled with a little baksheesh secured him possession for a time. A large portion of the

material in the Egyptian collections of European museums was acquired at this time and through similar means. Lebolo had not the advantage of being a well-connected diplomat, like Anastasi, nor of having won fame and glory for physical prowess like Belzoni, and thus is less well-known. The rivalries and dirty dealing typical of the art-collecting world of days past were in full swing, and collecting antiquities was dangerous business. Belzoni and Lebolo were rivals, and Lebolo had the misfortune of having failed in his attempt to assassinate Belzoni, who lived long enough to write about it in his memoirs, thus preserving for us a bit of the skulduggery of both unsavory scoundrels. "The whole of ancient Thebes is the private property of the English and French consuls"; stated a contemporary traveler who dealt with Lebolo, "these buildings that have hitherto withstood the attacks of *Barbarians*, will not resist the speculation of civilized cupidity, virtuosi, and antiquaries." Belzoni claimed that the sight of mummies before he became accustomed to it, "impressed me with horror"; be that as it may, Belzoni's description of smashing through hundreds of mummies impresses the modern Egyptologist with exactly the same emotion.

Among the loot acquired from various tombs, Lebolo kept a small personal collection that he took with him when he retired from the tomb robbery business. In 1822, he returned to his native Italy with a black mistress and a collection of mummies. Upon his untimely death in 1830, he passed his collection of Egyptian antiquities to his son, Pietro, who, to earn money, sold them on consignment to Albano Oblasser to sell in America to whomever would purchase them for whatever price they might fetch minus freight (see fig. 2).

When the mummies arrived in New York, they were purchased by one Michael Chandler, who had borrowed a good deal of money to do so. Chandler had hopes of getting rich, and upon opening the coffins to see what the mummies contained, found something. "When Mr. Chandler discovered that there was something with the mummies, he supposed or hoped it might be some diamonds or valuable metal, and was no little chagrined when he saw his disappointment." For, "on opening the coffins, he discovered that in connection with two of the bodies, was something rolled up with the same kind of linen, saturated with the same bitumen, which, when examined, proved to be two rolls of papyrus. . . . Two or three other small pieces of papyrus, with astronomical calculations, epitaphs, &c., were found with others of the mummies." Chandler resolved to earn a living displaying the mummies and the papyri as part of an

Egyptian freak show, much like P. T. Barnum did a few years later. At least Chandler had authentic goods, to which he got the certificates of the learned wherever he traveled, collecting them like a snake-oil salesman garners endorsements. What captivated the public interest more than the mummies was the papyri. Chandler eventually tired of life on the road and, needing to repay the money he had borrowed to purchase the mummies, decided to sell the collection. After passing through Cleveland, his circuit took him through Kirtland, Ohio. Finding a willing buyer, Chandler sold the mummies in July 1835 for \$2400 and settled down to farming.

The new buyers were a consortium of three, Joseph Coe, Simeon Andrews, and Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith was to translate the papyri and thus was given control of the antiquities. Translation began in July 1835 and ended in November, with most of the translation of the Book of Abraham being finished by the beginning of October. Most of what Joseph records doing with the papyri is showing them to interested parties, of which there were generally a couple per month. The remainder of the year Joseph Smith spent learning Hebrew. In 1836, the completion and dedication of the Kirtland Temple occupied Joseph's time. By 1838, conditions in Kirtland had become intolerable, and Joseph was forced to flee to Missouri, as did many, though not all, of the other Saints.

The mummies and the papyri followed Joseph to Missouri in the summer of 1838, courtesy of Vinson Knight. By the end of the summer, Joseph was imprisoned, and Missouri's governor, Lilburn W. Boggs, ordered that "the Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State, if necessary, for the public good." The papyri and mummies were transported to Illinois with the rest of the Saints under the direction of Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. When Joseph was allowed to escape, he joined the Saints in Illinois in the spring of 1839, and there was work to be done. The swamps needed to be drained, and a city built. In the winter months of early 1842, over six years after his last known work on the papyri, Joseph finally had time to work on the papyri again. Three installments of the Book of Abraham were published in the *Times and Seasons* early that year, all containing facsimiles, although only the first two installments contained text. The facsimiles accompanying the publication of the Book of Abraham were made to size by Reuben Hedlock, the former elder's quorum president in Kirtland. Further installments of the work were promised but never published. Joseph's attentions had turned to other crucial projects, such as establishing the Relief Society and introducing the fullness of

the temple endowments. By the end of the year, Joseph was in hiding. Though he still showed the papyri to visitors, as he had in Kirtland, he turned most of those responsibilities over to his widowed mother, who was aged and needed some means of support. In 1844, Joseph was felled by an assassin's bullet.

In 1851, Franklin D. Richards, the newest apostle and the new president of the European Mission headquartered in England, found that the Saints in England, who at the time were the largest group of Saints in the world, had almost no church literature including the Book of Mormon. Elder Richards decided to publish "a choice selection from the revelations, translations, and narrations of Joseph Smith." He entitled it *The Pearl of Great Price*, and included the Book of Abraham among the choice selections. *The Pearl of Great Price*, said Elder Richards, was "not adapted, nor designed, as a pioneer of the faith among unbelievers," instead it was designed for the Saints to "increase their ability to maintain and to defend the holy faith by becoming possessors of it." The facsimiles of the Book of Abraham were recut with this edition and succeeding editions, becoming increasingly more inaccurate with subsequent editions (see fig. 3).

In 1878, *The Pearl of Great Price* was published in Utah. Two years later it was canonized by a vote of the general conference. Until 1981, the standard edition was the 1901 edition, which had the most inaccurate copies of the facsimiles. The 1981 English edition restored the original facsimiles by Reuben Hedlock and has been the standard edition ever since.

We return now to the papyri. After her sons' death, Lucy Mack Smith lived with Joseph's wife, Emma, until she passed away in May of 1856. Mother Smith exhibited the mummies and the papyri until her death and charged the going rate, twenty-five cents. Meanwhile, Emma had remarried; her new husband was Lewis C. Bidamon (see fig. 4).

No sooner had mother Smith died than her family got rid of the mummies. Lewis Bidamon, Emma Smith, and her son Joseph Smith III sold the four mummies and papyri to Abel Combs, another traveling salesman less than two weeks later. Combs did not keep the papyri together. Some he sold to the St. Louis Museum, others he kept. Those sold to the St. Louis Museum were subsequently sold to the Wood Museum. The Wood Museum later moved to Chicago and was destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. For a long time it was thought that all the papyri were destroyed, but it was not so. Combs kept some of them himself. These passed to his housekeeper when he died.



The housekeeper gave them to her daughter Alice Heusser, who approached Albert M. Lythgoe of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the papyri in 1918. The Metropolitan Museum of Art decided that it did not want them.

Thirty years later, the Metropolitan had a change of heart due, in large measure, to the efforts of Ludlow S. Bull. Bull, who obtained an undergraduate education at Yale, a law degree from Harvard, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, started Egyptology at Yale. Bull had a long history with the Metropolitan. He was appointed as assistant curator in the Department of Egyptian Art in 1922, the same year he received his Ph.D., and was made associate curator six years later. Bull maintained an interest in the papyri and tried in 1946 to ascertain what had happened to them. By the time Bull returned to acquire the papyri for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Alice Heusser had died, so Bull negotiated with her widower, Edward Heusser. The Metropolitan acquired the papyri in 1947 and promptly published the fact in its official museum acquisitions list, thereby guaranteeing that no one would ever see it. And no one did.

In 1967 New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art was under the dynamic direction of Thomas Hoving. Hoving wanted the biggest and the best of everything. To get the funds for the biggest and best of everything, he needed to get rid of the less desirable of the museum's pieces and instructed the various departments to rid themselves of the least historical pieces. This included the Egyptian galleries, which had a problem: What should they do with the Mormon papyri? Who would want them? Certainly no Egyptologists wanted them. Maybe the Mormons would want them back. Maybe they wouldn't. How were they to know?

Opportunity presented itself in the form of Aziz S. Atiya, a Coptic scholar on the faculty of the University of Utah. On a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to research Coptic objects in its collections, Atiya was approached by Henry Fischer, the curator of the Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan, with a delicate matter. Did he think that the Mormons might be interested in the papyri? Would he approach the Mormons and find out? He would. Unfortunately, Atiya did not know many Mormons, and none at the church's headquarters. He was directed to N. Eldon Tanner, a member of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Negotiations began in earnest in 1966, but it took a year to get the matter approved through the museum's de-acquisition process. The transfer was then arranged for on 27 November 1967. An anonymous donor gave a gift to the museum and in exchange the

museum gave the church the papyri. The change of ownership made the newspapers, who immediately and characteristically got the story wrong. The Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was more concerned about the acquisition of the Temple of Dendur, and the impact that the 1967 Arab-Israeli war would have on pursuit of their studies of antiquity, than about correcting the misconceptions of the press.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was pleased to have the papyri and published them with unheard-of speed. Two months later, they appeared in the February 1968 *Improvement Era*, and the present numbering of the papyri goes back to this initial publication. Of course, the anti-Mormons had already begun their attack by this time. In response, Malcolm Jeppson, the editor of the fledgling journal, *Dialogue*, requested that Richard Parker, John Wilson, and Klaus Baer publish preliminary translations of the extant papyri in the summer of 1968, which they did. Jeppson also included articles by Hugh Nibley from the pro-Mormon viewpoint and Jerald Tanner and Grant Heward from the anti-Mormon viewpoint. With this publication the anti-Mormon argument fossilized into an almost canonical mantra, endlessly repeated and rarely scrutinized. New developments have generally come from the Mormon end of things. For example, the first full-scale publication of any of the individual papyri with text, translation, and commentary was in 1975 by Hugh Nibley, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The first translation of Facsimile 2 was done by another member of the church, Michael Rhodes. The anti-Mormons have specifically avoided further research on a subject that they are both ill-equipped to handle and which might overturn their argument.

### **Reconstructing the Papyri**

Since the anti-Mormon attack on the Book of Abraham rests on their misunderstanding of the papyri, let us look at the papyri in more detail.

What the Metropolitan Museum of Art was given and in turn gave to the church were ten fragments of papyri that had once comprised three separate manuscripts. These three manuscripts had originally belonged to individuals named Hor (JSP I, X–XI), Tsemminis (JSP II, IV–IX), and Neferirtnoub (JSP IIIa–b). The anti-Mormons argue as if these ten fragments were all that ever existed. From nineteenth-century records, however, we know that Joseph Smith originally possessed at least five papyri (see fig. 5).

When Joseph Smith purchased the papyri, they were not in the best condition. A transcription of portions of one of the papyri done probably in November 1835 shows squiggle marks used to indicate the edge of the papyrus showing that portions had already come loose. In December 1835, Oliver Cowdery describes the papyri as "two rolls of papyrus" along with "two or three other small pieces of papyrus." The papyri were beginning to break into little pieces as is demonstrated by the tiny fragments patched in the wrong places in the papyri when they were finally mounted on paper dating from the Kirtland period. In 1837, William S. West described the papyri as "a quantity of records, written on papyrus, in Egyptian hieroglyphics. . . . These records were torn by being taken from the roll of embalming salve which contained them, and some parts entirely lost." In December 1837 Luman Shirtliff looked at the parchment or Papyrus as called in the Egyptian language. This Parchment appeared to be made of fine linen cloth starched or sized with some kind of gum then ironed very smooth and written on in characters, figures, hieroglyphics, and conveying the Egyptian language. These sheets were about as large as the face of this book [30 x 37.5 cm] when open. They were rolled up, put in a gum case and laid on the breast of one of the leading men of the Egyptians, when the Mummy or body was found this record was on his breast. By the end of 1837, parts of the papyri were already separated into sheets. A visitor from Montrose, Iowa, in April 1840 described the papyri as being in "several frames, covered with glass, under which were numerous fragments of Egyptian papyrus, on which, as usual, a great variety of hieroglyphical characters had been imprinted." In May 1841, William I. Appleby recorded in his journal that he "saw the Rolls of Papyrus and the writings thereon, taken off the bosom of the male mummy." Visiting Nauvoo in April 1842, Reverend Henry Caswall states that he saw "a number of glazed slides, like picture frames, containing sheets of papyrus, with Egyptian inscriptions, and hieroglyphics." When Charlotte Haven saw the papyri in February 1843 she describes seeing "a long roll of manuscript" and seeing "hieroglyphics from another roll." When Josiah Quincy saw the papyri in 1844 he describes them as "some parchments inscribed with hieroglyphics . . . preserved under glass and handled with great respect." While at least some of the papyri were in the St. Louis Museum in 1856, Gustavus Seyffarth, who was teaching at Concordia College, saw at least one "papyrus roll."

What is one to make of these descriptions? Clearly rolls were in existence as late as 1856, yet as early as 1837 sheets are also known. The answer would seem to be that when Joseph Smith purchased the papyri in 1835 they were already deteriorating. The

outer portions of the rolls, being most exposed to handling, were suffering. To stabilize these portions of the papyri, they were separated into sheets, mounted on paper by 1837, and placed under glass frames by 1840. This, however, still left at least two rolls, at least one of which was "a long roll of manuscript." These long rolls have not survived. The roll that Seyffarth describes as being in the St. Louis Museum was later moved to Chicago where the same description is used of a papyrus in the Wood Museum, which was destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871. This roll seems to have contained Facsimile 3. Thus, the only portions of the papyrus that have survived to the present day are those mounted under glass, and at least two long rolls were destroyed in the Chicago Fire.

### **The Extent of the Joseph Smith Papyri**

From the eyewitness historical descriptions of the papyri and the remaining physical evidence, we can construct the following Egyptological description of the papyri (see fig. 6).

Let's begin with the roll we have the most of: The Book of the Dead of Tsemminis, daughter of Eskhons, was a long roll (estimated to be originally 320 x 32 cm) whose damaged outside leaves were preserved under glass, the fragments which remain are Papyrus Joseph Smith VII, VIII, V, VI, IV, and II (arranged in that order from right to left), along with Papyrus Joseph Smith IX from the LDS Church archives, whose miscellaneous fragments belong throughout the roll. Twenty-seven chapters from the Book of the Dead are contained in these fragments. Fragments from the first quarter of the roll are missing. The fragments were separated from the roll and mounted on glass probably in 1836. The roll seems to have contained a copy of Book of the Dead, chapter 125 (the famous judgment of the dead) as well as a vignette of a tree, a man, and a woman with a snake standing on its legs with its head in the woman's ear; this is consistent with both the extant chapters and the eyewitness descriptions. The roll and possibly some of the fragments seem to have been destroyed in the Chicago Fire. This roll probably dated to the last half of the third century or first half of the second century B.C. This is likely the papyrus that was described in 1835 as the one from which "some linguists however say they can decipher 1336, in what they term an epitaph; ink black and red; many female figures." The term "epitaph" used in this report probably refers to the portions that were written in red ink, which we now call "rubrics." The cipher 1336 would probably be an attempt to make out the hieratic of *dd mdw in* "words said

by," which on this papyrus is written with red ink.

The Book of the Dead of Neferirtnoub, of which two fragments remain as Papyrus Joseph Smith IIIa–b, was, from early accounts, "a roll as No. 1 [the Tsemminis roll], filled with hieroglyphics, rudely executed" and found on a female mummy. Since only the two fragments remain, the rest seems to have been destroyed in the Chicago Fire.

The hypocephalus of Sheshonq is preserved only as Facsimile 2 in the Book of Abraham. This document had a particular name, "the Large cut. illustrating the principles of Astronomy." Although it is impossible to tell from most modern publications of Facsimile 2, Reuben Hedlock made the original *Times and Seasons* facsimiles to size; thus, Facsimile 2 was a separate broadside significantly larger than the other two facsimiles. (Joseph Smith's and Reuben Hedlock's careful epigraphic concerns are under-appreciated, particularly when compared with other epigraphic and Egyptological publications of their day.)

Some of the Book of the Dead of Amenhotep, son of Tanoub, is preserved only in a terrible copy in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers Egyptian manuscript no. 6. The different name is what distinguishes it as a separate document. The Ptolemaic hieratic has been copied by one of the brethren in Kirtland who had no idea what he was copying and did not recognize the same sign when he saw it again. This has made the document very difficult to read. Nevertheless I have reexamined this text recently and deciphered part of it. One column contains a chapter from the Book of the Dead hitherto unattested in the Joseph Smith Papyri. The other columns have so far resisted identification with any known Egyptian text.

The papyrus of Hor, son of Osoroeris and Taykhebit, was a substantial roll (probably 300 x 11 cm). The outer leaves, separated and mounted probably in Kirtland in 1836, remain as Papyrus Joseph Smith I, XI, and X (in that order, from right to left). Gustavus Seyffarth saw this papyrus in the Wood Museum and describes it indicating not only that Facsimile 3 was still part of this roll but also that the roll contained another text. Seyffarth did not see the Book of Breathings contained in Papyrus Joseph Smith XI + X because these fragments were not part of the fragments that went to the Wood Museum. Seyffarth was well trained in the ancient Near Eastern languages known in his day and was an extremely good copyist of hieroglyphic and hieratic documents. Unlike the brethren in Kirtland, Seyffarth's copies of Egyptian texts look like they were

done by a native scribe. Unfortunately, Seyffarth was a rival of Champollion who disagreed vehemently with Champollion's decipherment of Egyptian; his own views were, shall we say, idiosyncratic in the extreme. Fortunately, Seyffarth's description allows the reconstruction of the opening lines of the new text on the scroll of Hor, which were "Beginning of the Book of. . . ." Unfortunately, Seyffarth's description does not allow us to determine exactly which book was included. We should further note that most translations and commentaries of the Papyrus Joseph Smith XI-X are in fact translations and commentaries of Papyrus Louvre 3284. Though the outer pieces ended up as Papyrus Joseph Smith I, XI, and X, the remainder of the roll almost certainly was in the Wood Museum in Chicago and thus destroyed in the Chicago Fire.

I conservatively estimate that the remaining papyrus fragments amount to at most thirteen percent (13%) of what Joseph Smith once had.

### **History of the Translation**

We are now in a better position to examine the translation process Joseph Smith used. Joseph Smith acquired the papyri in July of 1835. He proceeded to translate the papyri throughout the rest of July 1835, during which time the present text of the Book of Abraham was translated. He left off translation in August 1835 to visit the Saints in Michigan. Translation did not commence again until 1 October 1835. The last record of translation is in November 1835. After that time, Joseph Smith studied Hebrew, finished the Kirtland Temple, and dedicated it. While Joseph Smith revised the translation preparatory to its publication in 1842, there is no other evidence that he worked on the translation after 1835 (see fig. 7).

There is no evidence that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim in translating the Book of Abraham. Indeed the Urim and Thummim were probably surrendered to Moroni years previously. Warren Parrish, one of the scribes involved in the translation during late 1835, stated, "I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks [*sic*] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration of Heaven."

What was the pace of the translation of the Book of Abraham? To understand this we first need to examine the structure of the book (see fig. 8). The Book of Abraham gives an outline of its prospective contents:

A knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they

were made known unto the fathers, have I kept even unto this day, and I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record, for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me. (Abraham 1:31)

Combining this statement with the present contents of the Book of Abraham and the contents of the facsimiles, we derive an outline of the Book of Abraham.

We have only one journal entry from Joseph Smith that indicates where he was in the translation process of the Book of Abraham. On 1 October 1835, Joseph Smith said that he “this after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr. O. Cowdery and W. W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded.” Later that year, Joseph Smith discussed “the system of astronomy as taught by Abraham, which is contained upon these manuscripts” with Brigham Young and Jared Carter. When the Book of Abraham was being published and Reuben Hedlock was carving the plates for Facsimile 2, it was called “the Large cut. illustrating the principles of Astronomy.” So when Joseph states that the system of astronomy was unfolded, this indicates that Joseph was already to the point in the Book of Abraham that discusses Facsimile 2, a point further along in the translation of the Book of Abraham than was ever published. This is confirmed by the report of Anson Call, who said that in 1838 the Book of Abraham took about two hours to read out loud, which would seem to mean that it was approximately four times the length of the published version.

Joseph Smith’s journal entry has implications for how the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are viewed (see fig. 9). The Kirtland Egyptian Papers are a heterogeneous collection of documents written by the brethren in Kirtland that many think are somehow related to the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Book of Abraham. Critics of the Book of Abraham claim Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham using the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. The journal entry for 1 October 1835 is the only place where any of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are mentioned. The mention of the “Egyptian Alphabet” has wrongly been interpreted to mean the so-called Alphabet and Grammar, which is among the Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Three of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, however, are labeled “Egyptian Alphabet” whereas the so-called Alphabet and Grammar is labeled “Grammar and alphabet [*sic*] of the Egyptian language.” The journal entry mentions the presence of Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, whose handwriting is found on the “Egyptian Alphabet” documents, whereas the so-called Alphabet and

Grammar is in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish, the latter of whom was not employed as a scribe until almost a month later. Examination of the three manuscripts shows that they are not copies of each other and that each scribe worked independently. Furthermore, the manuscripts are not directly related to the part of the Book of Abraham translated, nor to any other part of the Book of Abraham. We can therefore say that Joseph Smith did not use the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, including the so-called Alphabet and Grammar, to translate the Book of Abraham.

### **Approaches to the Book of Abraham and the Papyri**

The Book of Abraham has been approached in many different ways and with many different theories. These may be classified in a number of ways: by the relationship of the Book of Abraham to the papyri, by the date of the Book of Abraham, by the date of the papyri, by the transmission of the text, and by the nature of the facsimiles. Earlier attempts at classification have failed to recognize the variety of issues involved as well as the breadth of the theories. These various classifications are not completely independent from each other; some go together while others are incompatible (see fig. 10).

### **Relation of the Book of Abraham to the Papyri**

How the Book of Abraham relates to the papyri has been approached in several ways. These may be categorized as the Kirtland Egyptian Papers theory, the missing papyrus theory, the cryptogram theory, and the pure revelation theory.

Some people (both Mormon and non-Mormon) believe that the so-called "Alphabet and Grammar" is key to the relationship between the papyri and the Book of Abraham. Because some of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers have Egyptian characters written in the margins of a copy of the Book of Abraham, proponents of this theory hypothesize that the Book of Abraham is a translation of those characters. These characters have been demonstrated to have been added after the English text; thus it was not a matter of writing the character and then writing the translation, but of someone later adding Egyptian characters in the margin at the beginning of paragraphs of text. Proponents of this theory also fail to recognize that, in deciphering languages (like Egyptian), grammars are compiled from translated texts and are not built by establishing the grammar first and then translating the text. Thus proponents of this theory fail to explain how anyone could produce a text through the means they posit was used.



Some scholars, myself included, have noted that since the preserved papyri account for, at best, about thirteen percent (13%) of the papyri that Joseph Smith possessed, the reason the Book of Abraham does not match the translation of the preserved papyri is that the Book of Abraham was translated from a portion of the papyri that is now missing. The Kirtland Egyptian Papers that have been connected with the papyri are thus an attempt to match up the translation of the Book of Abraham with the wrong characters (which would be easy enough if the Book of Abraham were the second text on the papyrus of Hor).

A few individuals have noticed a connection between the meaning of the Egyptian characters in the margins of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers and the text in the Book of Abraham manuscript. They have hypothesized either that the wording in the Book of Abraham was influenced by the Egyptian characters or that the Egyptian characters served as a sort of mnemonic device for recalling the Book of Abraham.

Others have thought that the Book of Abraham was not connected in any way with the papyri but was received by pure inspiration. Mormons and non-Mormons who hold this theory differ as to the source of that inspiration.

#### **Date of the Book of Abraham**

The date that the text of the Book of Abraham was written, whether Abrahamic, Hellenistic, or modern, has been the major division between Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint approaches to the Book of Abraham. The text is usually dated (to modern or ancient times) by assumption rather than by any attempt to demonstrate the milieu out of which it came.

Most non-Mormons think that the Book of Abraham is a modern fabrication by Joseph Smith.

A small minority of Latter-day Saints think that the Book of Abraham was written in Hellenistic Egypt and that it is an ancient pseudepigraphon translated by Joseph Smith.

Most Latter-day Saints, myself included, take the text as written by the patriarch Abraham.

#### **Date of the Papyri**

The date of the Joseph Smith Papyri has also provided difference of opinions, whether they date to Abraham's day, the Ptolemaic period, or the Roman period.

Some have assumed that the papyri date to Abraham's day. This notion is

supported by hearsay sources (notably Josiah Quincy), who incorrectly reported what they misunderstood Joseph Smith to have said, and a failure to understand the difference between the date of a text and the date of a manuscript. (For example, Paul's letter to the Galatians was written in the first century, but most of the manuscripts date to much later.) Dating the papyri to Abraham's day is mostly put forward as a strawman by anti-Mormons who claim that it is what Mormons believe.

For many years the standard date put forward was that the Joseph Smith Papyri were written during the Roman period, in the first century A.D. (or more precisely, the second half of the first century A.D.). This was argued on the basis of the hieratic handwriting on the papyri, sometimes additionally shored up by connecting the papyri with the Soter find, a late first-century, early second-century A.D. cache also excavated by Antonio Lebolo.

Some, including the late Jan Quaegebeur and myself, date the Joseph Smith Papyri to the Ptolemaic period, more specifically, to the first half of the second-century B.C. This dating is based on prosopography and certain epigraphic considerations, which will be detailed later in this lecture series.

### **Transmission of the Text**

Those who believe that the text dates back to Abraham can also be categorized by differences in theories of textual transmission. Those who do not think that the text dates back to Abraham hold that there is no transmission of the text.

Some believe that the manuscript (and not just the text) dates back to Abraham's day and was written by Abraham while he was in Egypt. Critics often attribute this belief to Latter-day Saints.

Others believe that Abraham wrote the text while he was in Egypt and that it was transmitted by Egyptians and that the papyri are a later manuscript.

A third theory of transmission, which the late Donl Peterson and I arrived at independently, postulates that the Book of Abraham was written by Abraham and passed down through his descendants, some of whom took a copy to Egypt where it was copied (after being translated) onto a later manuscript.

### **Nature of the Facsimiles**

The nature and origin of the facsimiles also provides a divergence of opinion. The non-Mormon theory is that the facsimiles belong to Egyptian funerary texts and have nothing whatsoever to do with Abraham. Another theory is that the facsimiles

originated with Abraham and were drawn by him on the papyrus. This requires that the manuscripts date to the time of Abraham. A third theory is that the facsimiles originated with Abraham and were copied along with the manuscript. A fourth theory is that the facsimiles are illustrations only loosely dependent on the text. They were illuminations of the day the papyri were produced, using stock motifs of the art of the time and place the papyri were produced. The facsimiles thus are comparable to mediaeval manuscript illuminations in biblical manuscripts. I favor this theory.

One unusual thing with these various theories is that evangelical anti-Mormons normally base their attack on the Book of Abraham by reference to arguments and conclusions drawn from atheists who have atheist presuppositions, which permeate their arguments and conclusions. Ironically, if they applied the same sort of presuppositions to their own religion, they would find their own beliefs under a concerted attack.

### **Conclusions**

So what have we learned? The Joseph Smith Papyri were considerably larger than the critics claim. Most of the Joseph Smith Papyri probably were destroyed in the Chicago Fire. The Book of Abraham seems to have been translated from part of the missing papyri. The Book of Abraham was translated faster than the critics claim and was originally much larger than the published version. The Kirtland Egyptian Papers are an after-the-fact by-product of the translation process. Thus the historical record does not support the theories of the critics.

## The French Expedition to Egypt

- 1798 July Napoleon invades Egypt
- 1798 August Egyptian Institute founded
- 1799 July Rosetta stone discovered
- 1799 Napoleon flees Egypt for France
- 1801 Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier returns to France
- 1802 Jacques-Joseph Champollion becomes Fourier's secretary
- 1803 Bernadino Drovetti appointed French consul general to Egypt
- 1809 *Description de l'Égypte* published
- 1814 Drovetti's term as consul general ends



## Joseph Smith Papyri Time Line Part 1

1822	Antonio Lebolo returns to Italy
1830	Lebolo dies
1833	Chandler buys the mummies
1835 July	Chandler sells the mummies to Joseph Coe, Simeon Andrews, and Joseph Smith
1838	Joseph Smith flees to Missouri
1838 summer	Mummies arrive in Missouri
1839	Joseph Smith escapes from Liberty Jail
1842 February	Book of Abraham published
1844	Joseph Smith assassinated



## Publication of the Book of Abraham Time Line

1835	Chandler sells the mummies to Joseph Coe, Simeon Andrews, and Joseph Smith
1842	Book of Abraham published
1851	Pearl of Great Price published
1878	Pearl of Great Price published in Utah
1880	Pearl of Great Price canonized
1901	1901 Pearl of Great Price becomes standard edition for 80 years
1981	New edition of Pearl of Great Price restores original facsimiles





## Joseph Smith Papyri Time Line Part 2

- 1856 May Mother Smith dies, mummies sold to Abel Combs
- 1856 Abel Combs sells papyrus rolls to St. Louis Museum
- 1871 Rolls destroyed in the Chicago Fire
- 1918 Alice Heusser tries to sell Joseph Smith Papyri to Metropolitan Museum of Art
- 1947 Metropolitan Museum of Art acquires Joseph Smith Papyri
- 1967 Metropolitan Museum of Art gives Joseph Smith Papyri to LDS Church
- 1968 Anti-Mormon argument against the Book of Abraham fossilizes
- 1975 First full publication of PJS XI-X.
- 1977 First translation of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus



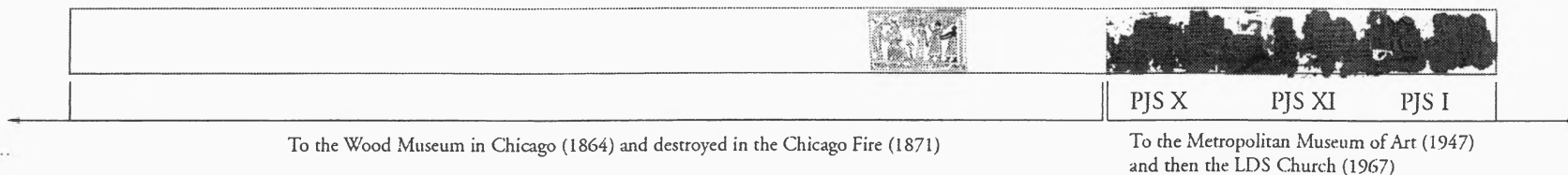
## Condition of the Papyri

1835 November	Papyri broken on edges
1835 December	Papyri in rolls and several pieces
1837	Records had been torn
1837 December	Papyri in separate sheets
1840 April	Papyri mounted in frames
1841 May	Rolls of papyrus in existence
1842 April	Papyri mounted in "glazed" picture frames
1843 February	Two rolls of papyri in existence
1844	"Parchments" preserved under glass
1856	Two papyrus rolls

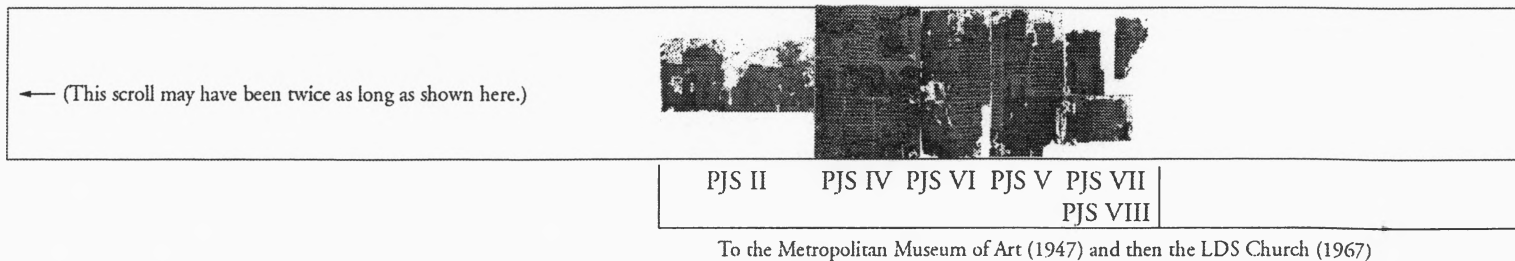


# THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI: THEN AND NOW

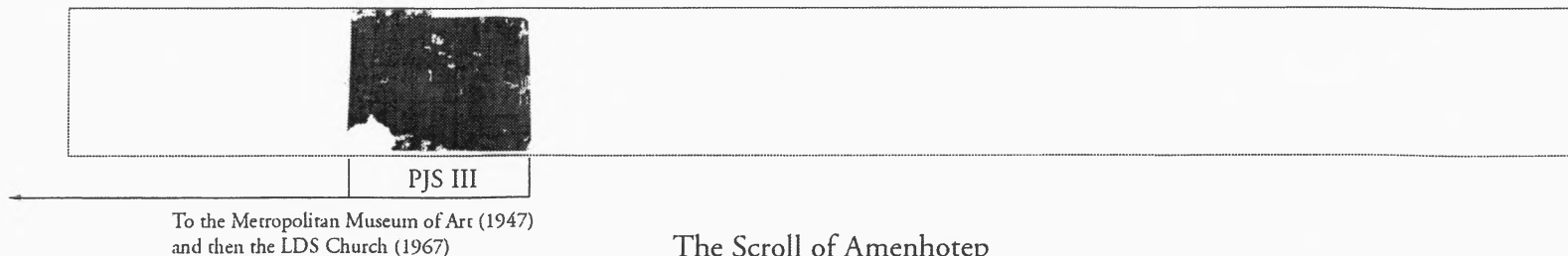
## The Scroll of Hor



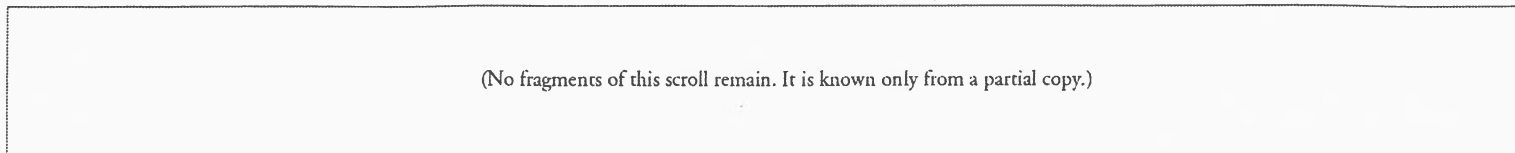
## The Scroll of Tsemmin



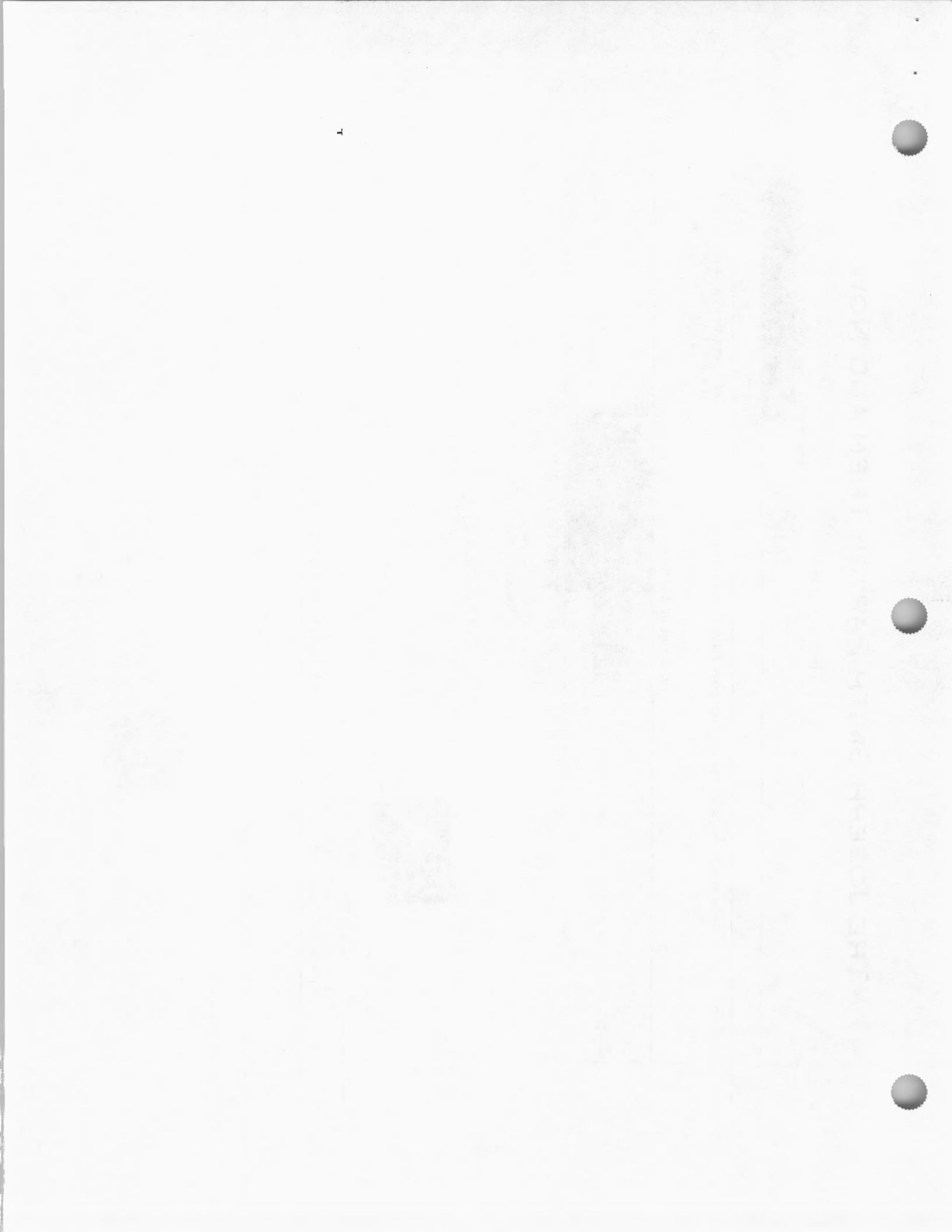
## The Scroll of Noufianoub



## The Scroll of Amenhotep



The Hypocephalus of Sheshonq  
(now missing)



## Translation of the Book of Abraham Time Line

1835 July	Chandler sells the mummies to Joseph Coe, Simeon Andrews, and Joseph Smith
1835 July	Joseph Smith begins to translate the Book of Abraham
1835 August	Joseph Smith visits the Saints in Michigan
1835 September	Joseph Smith returns to Kirtland
1835 October	Joseph Smith starts translating the Book of Abraham again
1835 November	Joseph Smith ends translation of the Book of Abraham, begins studying Hebrew
1836 April	Kirtland Temple dedicated
1838	Joseph Smith flees to Missouri
1838 summer	Mummies arrive in Missouri
1839	Joseph Smith escapes from Liberty Jail
1842 February	Book of Abraham published
1842 March	Relief Society organized
1844	Joseph Smith assassinated





## Outline of the Contents of the Book of Abraham

Outline	Citation in Book of Abraham	Prospective Contents (from Abraham 1:31)	Facsimiles
1. Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees	Abraham 1:1-2:4	A knowledge of	
a. Sacrifice of Abraham	Abraham 1:5-20		Facsimile 1
b. Egyptian History of Abraham's day	Abraham 1:20-28		
2. Travels in Syria and Canaan	Abraham 2:4-?		
a. Abrahamic Covenant	Abraham 2:6-13		
b. Abraham's Travels in Canaan	Abraham 2:14-21		
c. Sacrifice of Sarah	Abraham 2:21-25		
d. Abraham's Vision	Abraham 3:1-5:21		
i. Astronomy Lesson	Abraham 3:1-19		
ii. Preexistence	Abraham 3:20-28	the beginning of creation,	
iii. Creation	Abraham 4:1-5:21		
iv. [Fall]			
e. [Nature of the Cosmos]		and also of the planets, of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers	Facsimile 2
3. [Travels in Egypt]			
a. [Abraham in Pharaoh's court]			Facsimile 3



## The Kirtland Egyptian Papers

#	Date	Size	Handwriting	Title & Contents
KEPE 1	1836(?)	1 vol. 31x20 cm.	W.W. Phelps & Warren Parrish	"Grammar & alphabet [sic] of the Egyptian language"
KEPE 2	1836(?)	2 leaves 33x20 cm.	W.W. Phelps	"Egyptian counting"
KEPE 3	1 October 1835(?)	4 leaves 32x20 cm.	W.W. Phelps	"Egyptian alphabet"
KEPE 4	1 October 1835(?)	9 leaves 32x20 cm.	Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith	"Egyptian alphabet"
KEPE 5	1 October 1835(?)	4 leaves various sizes	Oliver Cowdery	[title lost, "Egyptian alphabet" (?)]
KEPE 6	26 November 1835(?)	1 vol. 20x13 cm.	Oliver Cowdery	"Valuable discovery of hidden [sic] records"
KEPE 7	1837(?)	1 vol. 20x16cm	Oliver Cowdery	"F.G.W." and "William"
KEPE 8	26 November 1835(?)	1 leaf 32x40 cm.	?	[no title]
KEPE 9	26 November 1835(?)	1 leaf 39x19 cm.	?	[no title]
KEPE 10	?	1 leaf 33x20 cm.	-	[no title] = JSP IX
KEPA 1	1836(?)	10 leaves 32x20 cm.	W.W. Phelps & Warren Parrish	[no title] BoA 1:1-2:18
KEPA 2	1836(?)	4 leaves 33x19 cm.	W.W. Phelps	[no title] BoA 1:4-2:6
KEPA 3	1836(?)	6 leaves 32x19 cm.	Warren Parrish	[no title] BoA 1:4-2:2
KEPA 4	February 1842(?)	18 leaves 29x20 cm.	Willard Richards	[no title] BoA 1:1-3:26
KEPA 5	March 1842(?)	4 leaves various sizes	Willard Richards	[no title] Facsimile 2
KEPA 6	1842	broadside 32x19 cm.		[back has a letter to Clyde Williams & Co., signed by Joseph Smith and W. W. Phelps]



## Approaches to the Book of Abraham

Relation of Book of Abraham to Papyri	Date of Book of Abraham	Date of the Papyri	Transmission of Text	Nature of Facsimiles
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kirtland Egyptian Papers Theory</li> <li>2. Missing Papyrus Theory</li> <li>3. Cryptogram Theory</li> <li>4. Pure Revelation Theory</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abrahamic</li> <li>2. Hellenistic</li> <li>3. Modern</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Abraham's Day</li> <li>2. Ptolemaic Period</li> <li>3. Roman Period</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Manuscript Dates to Abraham</li> <li>2. Abraham Wrote Text in Egypt and Stayed there</li> <li>3. Abraham's Descendents Brought Text to Egypt</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Egyptian funerary Texts</li> <li>2. Illustrations of the Day</li> <li>3. Copied from Abraham's Drawings</li> <li>4. Drawn by Abraham</li> </ol>

