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The Ancient Owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri

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Transcript
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This presentation is a summary of research that will appear in a book tentatively entitled *The Historical Backgrounds of the Book of Abraham*. Full documentation will appear in that volume.

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The Ancient Owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri

John Gee

Although many people have dealt with the modern owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri, almost nothing has been published about the ancient owners, those for whom the papyri were written. Of course, since we have only approximately thirteen percent (13%) of the papyri that Joseph Smith had, we are not able to say as much about them as we could if all the papyri were preserved. Since no portions of the papyri of Sheshonq or Amenhotep remain, we will not discuss them at this time other than to note that the owners were likely part of the priestly class. Likewise, Neferirtnoub is only known from two papyrus fragments that together comprise one vignette, so we will not discuss her at this time. If the beginning of the Tsemminis scroll were intact, we could say more about her, but it is not. So we will focus on Hor, son of Osoroeris, the owner of Papyrus Joseph Smith I+XI+X. Even with Hor, we can only scratch the surface of what we might be able to discuss.

Date of the Joseph Smith Papyri

The obvious first question is when did Hor live? The answer to this question requires a candid discussion of how the papyri were dated and what dating criteria are acceptable in this particular case. The Joseph Smith Papyri have been dated to the Roman period, specifically to the latter half of the first century A.D. Since “many publishers of late texts hardly argue the dates they propose for their papyri,” we need to inquire into the nature of the dating of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Up until recently, the most extensive argument for dating the papyri to the Roman period comes from Hugh Nibley. Nibley asked the right questions about the papyri and answered them as well as they could be answered in that day; if we answer them differently now, it is because we have more information now than he did twenty-five years ago. Nibley used two criteria to date the Joseph Smith Papyri: paleography and archaeological context, but there are also other possibilities.

Radiocarbon Dating

One of these is radiocarbon dating. Although it is popular in some circles to date by radiocarbon dating, such a method is impractical in the case of the Joseph Smith

Papyri. Although radiocarbon dating has improved since 1967 so that the entire papyrus would not be destroyed in the process of determining the date, the margin of error is still too high. Objects dated to 300 B.C. have a 300-year margin of error, meaning that an object dating to 300 B.C. may be dated anywhere between 600 B.C. and A.D. 1. This also assumes that the Joseph Smith Papyri have not been contaminated, which they have been; the glue and backing paper applied during the nineteenth century introduced organic material to the papyri, which will throw off any radiocarbon date. There are more accurate means of dating.

Paleographic Dating

The curator of the Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Henry Fischer, when the papyri were given to the church, may have been the first to suggest that the Joseph Smith Papyri could be dated by means of paleography. Paleographic dating is done by comparing handwriting of documents. Handwriting styles change over time, and these changes make it possible to assign a date to otherwise undated documents on the basis of similarities in handwriting and format with documents of known date. In order for paleographic dating to be effective, there must be a more or less complete series of documents of known date whose handwriting can be compared and contrasted. Documents that actually come from time periods in which there are no known dated examples will not be dated accurately.

There are other limits to the effectiveness of paleographic dating. Scribes generally do not change their handwriting styles; thus an individual scribe will use the same style for the extent of his career. How long might that career be? A series of Demotic tax scribes show tenures ranging from five (5) to thirty-nine (39) years with the average being nineteen (19) years. Because a scribe could be in office for forty years using the same handwriting throughout, paleographic dates cannot be specified more precisely than to the nearest half century. Any paleographic date that pretends to be more precise than this without further refining argument is suspect.

Paleography is most effective with business and legal documents. Literary texts pose problems for paleographic dates because literary handwriting styles are different from those used in business and legal documents. In literary documents the scribe makes a greater effort to produce a calligraphic copy, as opposed to the hastily written

business and legal correspondence. Criteria for dating business hands cannot be used for dating literary hands. What complicates the problem further is that literary texts are generally not dated, so establishing a series of dated examples of literary hands becomes very difficult.

All of this is directly relevant to the problem of dating the Joseph Smith Papyri, most of which are written in hieratic. Hieratic ceased to be used as a business hand about 600 B.C.; thereafter it is only used as a literary hand for texts in the classical language—a sort of King James Egyptian. Dated hieratic documents after 600 B.C. are few and far between, leaving gaping holes in the series starting in the Ptolemaic period (332 to 52 B.C.). Möller's paleography, currently the best work available, is weak after 1000 B.C. because Möller did not have many dated hieratic manuscripts upon which to base a hieratic paleography. "Unfortunately, Greco-Roman hieratic hands are hard to date, chiefly because of their regularity, although, indeed, competent scholars exhibit extreme caution in attempting to date hieratic hands from the whole of the first millennium B.C., not just those of Greco-Roman date." Thus the date of the Joseph Smith Papyri cannot be safely dated on the basis of paleography. Yet this is the principle basis upon which the date of the Joseph Smith Papyri has been established!

To show how paleography has been used to date the Joseph Smith Papyri, we will follow the arguments proposed by Hugh Nibley, which are the most detailed of the arguments put forth thus far. Unlike other Egyptologists who dated the Joseph Smith Papyri to the first century, Nibley provided specific examples of hieratic signs from Möller's paleography that he thought were diagnostic, but in the light of recent scholarship all of these arguments have collapsed.

One aspect of the paleographic dating that can be helpful, but has only recently been utilized, is the writing instrument used. In Greco-Roman times two writing instruments were used: the masticated rush and the split-reed pen. The split-reed pen or *kalamos* is made from a reed, sharpened to a point and split; it makes a fine line of even thickness. The rush brush is made with a thinner stem than the reed pen; the rush is cut obliquely with a sharp knife and chewed so that it becomes a stiff brush that makes both thick (from top left to bottom right) and thin lines (from bottom left to top right). The Joseph Smith Papyri were written with a brush, not a reed pen. The reed pen was introduced into Egypt for Greek documents after the Greek conquest of Egypt, but

many native scribes used brushes for Greek documents until about 230 B.C., after which time “the use of the brush for writing Greek texts was quickly abandoned.” Eventually, Egyptian scribes begin using the reed pen even for Demotic and hieratic, so by Roman times the reed pen has completely replaced the brush. Demotic documents from the second century B.C. used a brush and those from the first century B.C. were written with a reed. Although one cannot tell from Möller’s paleography charts, inspection of photographs of the original documents he used to compile his work shows that all the Roman period manuscripts are written with a reed pen and not a brush. Thus a Roman date for the Joseph Smith Papyri is highly unlikely.

Archaeological Context: The Soter Find

Hugh Nibley also proposed a dating argument from the archaeological context of the papyri. He suggested that the Joseph Smith Papyri came from the Soter find, which was excavated by the same man who excavated the Joseph Smith Papyri, Antonio Lebolo. From Soter's coffin we learn that Soter, son of Cornelius Pollius, was *archon* of Thebes. Soter's tenure as *archon* of Thebes can be dated from Papyrus Bremner 41, a tax document from which we learn that Soter was the *archon* of Thebes in the eleventh year of Trajan (A.D. 107). His burial would, of course, date later than that. In order to establish a link between the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Soter find, it is necessary to show that there was some connection, familial or otherwise, between Hor and Soter. Although the items from the Soter find all have interlocking genealogies, none of the genealogies of the owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri intersect with the Soter find. The artwork in the Soter find also differs significantly from that found in the Joseph Smith Papyri. Here again, however, Dr. Nibley asked the right question: “Were there two such finds” by Lebolo? The answer, based on what we now know, is yes; the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Soter find are two separate finds.

Prosopographical Dating

In 1982 Jan Quaegebaer expressed doubts about the dating of hieratic papyri, particularly Books of Breathings, to the Roman period on the basis of paleography: “The dating of the late funerary papyri needs a more detailed discussion. A prosopographical study of the Theban priests in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods based on all available sources could shed new light on this problem.” Indeed, the prosopographical approach,

which is based on identifying specific individuals, has been very fruitful.

Joseph Smith Papyrus I lists the following information about the owner of the papyrus (translating the columns from right to left):

1 [. . .] Prophet of [Amun]-Re king of the Gods, prophet of Min, . . . prophet of Khonsu the first [. . .]

2 [. . .] Hor, justified, son of the similarly titled, stolites, and priest, Osoroueres, justified, [born of]

3 [. . .] Taykhebit.

There is a considerable amount of information in this particular text. It provides the name of the owner of the papyrus, his titles, his parents' names, and some of his father's titles.

Before his death, Quaegebeur submitted three manuscripts redating the Books of Breathings including the Joseph Smith Papyri. These two articles and one monograph detail the prosopographical argument for the dating of the papyri. Quaegebeur noticed that the owners of several Books of Breathings normally dated to the first century A.D. by paleography had the same titles and familial relations as individuals living centuries earlier. Quaegebeur gathered together the genealogical information from many sources. One important source of information was a graffito at Medinet Habu. He found that the genealogical information contained in seven documents allowed the reconstruction of a family tree. Dated documents provide two dates when individuals in the family were alive. Quaegebeur associated Hor, the owner of Joseph Smith Papyri I+XI+X, with this family and dated the papyri to the first half of the second century B.C. Furthermore, Hor might be the same individual as a mummy stored in a place called the Thounabounoun in 124 B.C., which we call Theban Tomb 155.

Qualifications for the Priesthood

From Hor's titles, we know that he was a priest at Thebes. There was really only one way to become a priest in Ptolemaic times. One had to be born into it. One inherited the right of the priesthood from one's fathers. Although priesthood in Egypt during the New Kingdom was not necessarily hereditary, because of governmental policies of the Libyan rulers of the Third Intermediate Period, by Ptolemaic times it was hereditary. But three things needed to occur before one became a priest. First, one needed to

survive until his coming-of-age at fourteen. This was not a trivial matter as mortality rates for children were high. One-third of all females born would not live through their first year, over half would not reach the age of ten, and only a third would reach the ripe old age of thirty. Slightly under one-third of all males born would die in the first year, about half would attain their coming-of-age at fourteen, and less than one-third would reach the age of forty. Thus the death ages on grave stones and the toe tags attached to mummies tend to be rather low. The mortality rate is also attested from some common names. For example, one common name was Apynchis, which means "he will live." If one survived to adulthood, one had to remain ritually pure and free from blemish to become a priest. This included remaining chaste, being honest, paying full offerings, being free from debt, not being a slave, and not having any physical deformities. There was also a sizeable fee to become a priest. Lastly, one had to be approved in one's priesthood by not only the priestly council but also by the royal representative, for state and religion were not yet separate. In earlier times, appointment to the priesthood was finally decided by oracle, rather than by the king's representative.

When one became a priest, one was circumcised and initiated into the temple. At the entrance, one swore an oath to abide by the conduct expected of priests. This oath included specific vows of moral conduct; honesty with one's fellowmen, the gods, and the departed spirits; and the faithful performance of one's priesthood duties.

Income

Priesthood in Egypt was a paid office. Priests had two principle types of income: from serving as priests in temples and serving as choachytes in tombs.

Income from serving in temples was obtained by holding endowed priesthoods much like holding an endowed professorship at a university today. Temples, by previous royal grants, controlled vast amounts of land. Tracts from this land were rented to farmers for a percentage of the produce of the land. The revenues from certain tracts were earmarked to endow particular priesthoods. Priests tried to accrue several priesthoods because that increased their income. Temples tended to parcel the priesthoods to the same people because the pool of priests was limited by hereditary lines and further by training, talent, and purity requirements. The priesthoods thus

tended to cluster into the hands of a small group of individuals who came from the same family.

Income from serving as a choachyte in tombs came from a different source. The families of deceased individuals paid for rituals to be performed for the mummies of those individuals. When the family stopped paying for the services of the priest, that was the end of the service and the income. In Ptolemaic times—as opposed to the Middle Kingdom during Abraham’s day—it was unusual for a propertied endowment to be set up for perpetual maintenance of a private cult.

Some priests supplemented their income through investments in real estate. These investments provided more income through the rental of property.

Activity

The activity of the priests can be divided into two parts: their activity as priests in the temple and their activity as choachytes in the tombs. The activity of the priests in the temples included both daily and periodic rituals. One of the daily rituals was the care of the cult statue. Offerings were prepared before dawn, and all the offerings were purified with soap, water, and incense. The priests too were purified with soap, water, and incense. All the offerings were brought to the offering table. Then the priest entered the holy of holies, the seal was broken, and the bolt drawn back on the door of the shrine. The statue was taken out, presented with the offerings, and then washed, anointed, clothed, and returned to its shrine. Finally, the door was closed, bolted, and resealed, and the priest swept his footprints away as he left.

Another of the daily rituals was the execration ritual. A wax figure of a serpent was spat upon, trampled under the left foot, pierced, bound, chopped in pieces, and cast into the fire.

Periodic rituals included a large number of festivals and consultation of oracles.

Over the four-thousand-year history of the Egyptian religion, it incorporated elements from other religions with which it came in contact, giving it an ever more complicated theology to be mastered by the priests.

Literacy

As shown by the Joseph Smith Papyri, Hor was a remarkably literate fellow. His papyrus is written both in hieratic, with occasional Demoticisms, and Ptolemaic temple

glyphs. He could probably also read Greek. Thus he would probably have been able to read and write all of the languages on the roughly contemporary Rosetta stone: Ptolemaic temple glyphs, Demotic, and Greek. Not all who spoke Greek could also read it, and less than one percent (1%) of those who spoke the Egyptian language of the day, Demotic, could read it. Hor's basic bilingual literacy puts him in an elite class. Being able to read classical Egyptian and the complex Ptolemaic temple glyphs puts Hor among the most learned and well-read individuals in the country. By comparison, few Egyptologists today can read most of the scripts that Hor could, and possibly no one alive today could read them as well as he could.

The Book of Breathings

The Papyrus of Hor contained at least two texts. One of these is the first Book of Breathings and the title of the other we do not know. If the prosopographical dating is correct, then Papyrus Joseph Smith XI+X is the earliest copy of the Book of Breathings extant. The scroll also contained two vignettes, which we know as Facsimiles 1 and 3 of the Book of Abraham. Critics of the Book of Abraham have normally assumed that the facsimiles belong to the Book of Breathings. The Book of Breathings, however, has a standard vignette and it is not similar to either of the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the vignettes may have belonged to the other text on the Papyrus of Hor. Could it have been the Book of Abraham? To answer that we will need to know what the Egyptians might have known about Abraham and this will require some historical background.

Egypt Knowledge of Abraham

Before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., at least some of the Jews living in Judah tried to escape the Babylonian captivity or the authorities of Jerusalem by fleeing to Egypt. From the Lachish letters and the book of Jeremiah, we know of the unfortunate end of at least one of these, Uriah, who failed to reach sanctuary in Egypt. After the fall of Jerusalem, some groups of the Jews remaining in Judah went to Egypt, where foreign mercenaries were in demand.

After conquering the Babylonians, the Persians, having also conquered Egypt, employed Jewish mercenaries at outposts in Egypt. They were careful to keep Jewish mercenaries away from neighboring Jewish states where they might have a conflict of

interest, and so stationed them in Elephantine on the southern border and Khasstemehi on the western border. We know a good deal about the community at Elephantine from the Aramaic papyri they left there. From these papyri we know that the Jews built a temple at Elephantine. This temple, situated on the grounds of the temple of the native Egyptian, ram-headed god Khnum, outraged the local Egyptians when they discovered that the Jews sacrificed the ram, the symbol of the local god, at Passover. The Egyptians rioted and tore down the Jewish temple at Elephantine, and no identifiable archaeological trace of it has remained.

At least some of the members of the Jewish community in Elephantine and also from Khasstemahi moved to Memphis where there was also a similar community. The community spread, but as it did so, it often assimilated to the surrounding Egyptian culture. Thus, issues of the Jewishness of the individuals is in question because they adopted many of the ways of their Egyptian neighbors, particularly in religion, to the point where they no longer seem Jewish in the modern sense of the word. This is well-illustrated by an Aramaic inscription formerly in the Berlin Museum though destroyed in World War II: the Jew Adaiah gave his daughter an Aramaic name, Ahatabu, married her to an Egyptian, Hor, and his grandson, Abisala, assimilated to the Aramaean-Egyptian society, worshiping Osiris and having himself buried in Egyptian fashion, although he still kept the Aramaic language.

The assimilation went both ways, however; thus we have an Egyptian scribe in Elephantine, learning the language of the Persian empire, collecting stories about foreign lands, and writing copies of Jewish Psalms.

Egypt was conquered by Alexander in 332 B.C. Alexander was crowned as pharaoh, adopted as the son of Amon, and thereafter depicted himself with the horns of his father. After the death of Alexander, Ptolemy, the son of Lagos, took over Egypt first as satrap and later as pharaoh. Ptolemy's Egyptian empire was one of the largest ever—including the Cyrenaica to the west, Cyprus, most of the eastern coastline of Asia minor, most of the Levantine littoral, Jerusalem, Galilee, and even parts of mainland Greece. Ptolemy I invited more Jews to settle in Egypt proper, and over a hundred thousand did according to one account.

While Ptolemy was king of Egypt, the area controlled by Egypt included Abdera on the Greek mainland, the homeland of Hecataeus. During the time that Ptolemy I

controlled Abdera, Hecataeus made a trip to Egypt going as far south as Thebes and learned about Egypt firsthand. Hecataeus also had firsthand contact with native Egyptian priests, and “used . . . Egyptian sources to revise . . . Herodotus’ account of Egyptian history.” Hecataeus wrote five books, none of which is completely extant: (1) On the Poetry of Homer and Hesiod, (2) On the Hyperboreans, (3) The History of Egypt, (4) Concerning the Jews, and (5) About Abraham and the Egyptians. He had a positive opinion of Moses and the Jews. He also knew of noncanonical traditions about Abraham, about which he wrote a book that is thought to have been “a major source behind Josephus’ account of Abraham.” Unfortunately, since this work has not survived we are unable to determine the extent of the contact between Hecataeus of Abdera and the priests of Thebes and whether Hecataeus was a source of knowledge for the Egyptian priests at Thebes or vice versa.

Ptolemy I was succeeded by his son, Ptolemy II, called Philadelphus (sister-loving) because he married his sister, Arsinoe II. The sordid tale of the Ptolemies gets even worse in succeeding generations, making our lurid soap operas and talk shows pale by comparison, but we cannot go into it here. Ptolemy II instituted cultic reforms under the guidance of Manetho of Sebennytus, whom most of us know from his Egyptian history. (Manetho was the one who divided Egyptian history into the dynasties we know today.) Ptolemy II also was interested enough in the Jews to have the Jewish scriptures translated from Hebrew into his native language, Greek. Thus the Septuagint was produced in Egypt. Whatever source Hecataeus may have used for his work on Abraham and the Egyptians, it was *not* the Septuagint.

The large amount of territory controlled by the Ptolemaic empire aroused the envy of the Seleucid empire based in Syria and Mesopotamia. The Seleucids fought the Ptolemies over nearly everything, but particularly Coele-Syria, the area of modern Israel and Lebanon. The first five Ptolemaic rulers (all named Ptolemy) fought five major Syrian wars, and the homeland of the Jews changed hands many times. This was a contributing factor in the removal of many Jews to Egypt. Many settled in Alexandria but others scattered throughout the country where they were generally a small minority. Along with the external conflicts, the Ptolemies suffered from internal revolts led by native Egyptians.

At the end of the third century B.C., Ptolemy IV Philopator (which means “father-

loving," as his father was about the only member of his family that he did not have murdered) died with only half of Egypt under his control. Ptolemy IV left the throne to his five-year-old son Ptolemy V Epiphanes, and everyone was plotting to carve up Ptolemy's possessions among themselves: the native Egyptians led by Haronnophris and Chaonnophris in southern Egypt, Philip V king of Greece, the Seleucid monarch Antiochus III, Ptolemy V's own generals, and the Romans. In spite of this, Ptolemy V defeated the rebels. This is discussed in a royal decree Ptolemy V issued, we today know this as the Rosetta stone. In his twenty-third regnal year, Ptolemy V could proclaim his rule throughout all of Egypt and Coele-Syria; unfortunately in that same year, 180 B.C., he died.

This is the approximate time period of Hor, the owner of Papyri Joseph Smith I+IX+X. It is also the approximate time of Artapanus. Artapanus was "familiar with the native life of Egypt and the purely priestly traditions." Artapanus was also familiar with traditions about Abraham, and preserves some of them including the tradition that Abraham "came to Egypt with all his household to the Egyptian king Parethothes, and taught him astrology."

Ptolemy V left behind two sons and a daughter, Ptolemy VI Philometor, Ptolemy the brother (later Ptolemy VIII Physicon), and Cleopatra II. The next fifty years when these three ruled Egypt are very convoluted, and we will skip the details other than to note that Cleopatra II was a great patron and favorite of the Jews. In 175 B.C., however, Antiochus IV Epiphanes became the new king in Seleucia. Antiochus IV Epiphanes had a great impact on several countries, but we will only look at a few of the consequences of his rule. Antiochus invaded Jerusalem and desecrated the temple. Honi, or Onias—nicknamed the circle drawer, former high priest in Jerusalem but expelled by Antiochus—founded the Jewish temple in Egypt at Leontopolis with the permission of Ptolemy VI. This temple lasted until the time of Vespasian. Honi's temple was to replace the many Jewish temples scattered throughout Egypt. Renewed interest in Abraham is shown by a receipt for bricks found on the site of the temple of Leontopolis containing the name of an individual, Abram, named after the biblical patriarch. Antiochus's persecutions of the Jews prompted the Maccabean revolt that is commemorated in Hannukah.

During the Antiochian conquest of Judah, Eupolemus, who lived in Palestine,

wrote a work about Abraham that seems to be related to the Egyptian works about Abraham.

We do not know about any works about Abraham produced in Egypt during the first century B.C. So we will skip over the lurid spectacle of the Ptolemies, including the famous Cleopatra VII, Julius Caesar, Mark Anthony, and Octavian who conquered Egypt and made it a Roman province. The next Egyptian work about Abraham was produced in the reign of Tiberius by Philo Judaeus, an Alexandrian Jew. Philo knew traditions about Abraham knowing the science of the heavens, but he was more interested in applying the then trendy technique of allegory to the Jewish scriptures to show that the Bible taught the then trendy philosophy Middle Platonism.

The *Testament of Abraham* is thought to have been a product of Egypt. Unfortunately, "There are no references to historical events, [and] the doctrines of the book are not datable to any narrow historical period." Still, the opinions about the origins of this work are at least worth noting. N. Turner "regarded it as having been written in Egypt before the Septuagint was translated or in wide use, and when at least some Jews still spoke Hebrew." This would date it to early in the Ptolemaic period, before the end of the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphos. He thought that the work was translated into Greek in the first half of the second century B.C., which would make the translation contemporary with the Joseph Smith Papyri. E. P. Sanders argues that because of the massive destruction of Jews in A.D. 117, the *Testament of Abraham* must have been written in the first century A.D. at latest; he furthermore argues that it must have been written in Egypt.

A third-century-A.D. archive pertaining to the Theban temple has both a copy of the biblical Psalms in Greek and hymns dedicated to the Egyptian goddess Nephthys, which shows an easy adoption of Jewish religion by Egyptians. Unfortunately, by this time the Romans developed a distinctive dislike of Judaism, Christianity, and the native Egyptian religion. All three were officially banned. Nevertheless, the contemporary pagan Zosimus of Panopolis is also familiar with both Egyptian priestly traditions and Jewish ones and conflates the two.

Finally we come to the Anastasi priestly archive. This archive—written in Demotic, hieratic, and Greek, and containing mythological, ritual, and alchemical texts—was assembled during the Roman period by a priest at Thebes. At the time the

archive was assembled, Roman authorities had made the practice of the Egyptian religion illegal. Therefore the owner of the archive did not leave his name on it. The manuscripts in this archive have been dated paleographically from the second century A.D. to the fourth century A.D. These dates, however, must be taken with a grain of salt. Demotic was prohibited for legal documents during the reign of Tiberius and thus dated documents in Demotic became scarce. Greek literary manuscripts are not written in the same hand as Greek documentary hands and furthermore are generally not dated until around the tenth century A.D., so Greek literary hands are often tenuously dated at best. I consequently do not feel comfortable dating these documents to anything more precise than the Roman period. The most popular name of any found in the archive is the divine name Iahō, or Jehovah, god of the Hebrews. This archive has many references to the Old Testament; for instance, one text asks the god to "reveal thyself to me here today in the way of revealing thyself to Moses which you did on the mountain upon which you created the darkness and the light." Two noncanonical books of Moses and the Prayer of Jacob are found in this archive. Abraham is associated with astronomy in this archive as he was at least since Hecataeus and specifically with the phrase "fixed planets," which also occurs in the Book of Abraham. Abraham is connected with a lion couch by an Egyptian scribe who left the instructions "[write these w]ords with this picture upon a new papyrus." Abraham is connected with incineration in this text and other texts. Abraham is called "the pupil of the wedjat eye," which associates him with hypocephali. As one hypocephalus states: "I am he who came from the wedjat-eye; I am its pupil." Interestingly, Jewish hekalot traditions as well as the *Sepher Razim*, all of which were found in the Cairo Geniza, are known to have been influenced by similar Egyptian texts.

We have works about Abraham produced and copied in Egypt before and after the time of the Joseph Smith Papyri. Hor, as one of the best-educated individuals in the country, was in an excellent position to have learned about Abraham. We have Egyptian traditions about Abraham dating to the reigns of Ptolemy I, Ptolemy II, Ptolemy V, Ptolemy VI, Tiberius, and the third century A.D. Thus, it should come as no surprise that a Theban priest during the Ptolemaic period should possess a Book of Abraham.

Importance of the Book of Abraham

From time to time, various individuals ask me why I spend time studying and defending the Book of Abraham. The major purpose of the Book of Abraham is not to teach us about Egyptian history or Egyptian religion, though we might learn something about them and they might help us to understand the Book of Abraham and its background. It is not to recover more historical information, though it certainly does that. It is not to defend the life and trial of father Abraham, although it does this too. It is not to defend the prophetic role of Joseph Smith, although it does that as well. Rather, it is to defend the premortal role of Jesus as Savior, chosen before the foundation of the world. It is to defend our best source about our own premortal life, and it is to defend the importance of the plan of salvation—for none of us can return to live with God again unless we do all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us.

Egyptian Traditions about Abraham

Ruler	Date	Author
Ptolemy I	305–282 B.C.	Hecataeus of Abdera
Ptolemy II	285–246 B.C.	Septuagint
Ptolemy V	204–180 B.C.	Artapanus P. Joseph Smith I+XI+X
Ptolemy VI	180–145 B.C.	Eupolemus
(Disputed)	285 B.C.–A.D. 117	<i>Testament of Abraham</i>
Tiberius	A.D. 14–37	Philo
Roman Period	Third Century A.D.	Zosimus of Panopolis Anastasi Archive