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# U. A. S. NEWSLETTER

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Assistant Editor: Ray T. Matheny

Published approximately every six weeks by THE UNIVERSITY ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The purpose of the Newsletter is to disseminate knowledge of recent archaeological discoveries bearing on the Latter-day Saint scriptures; also of the archaeological activities and viewpoints of the Society and its members. Subscription by membership in the Society: three dollars per year; or Life Membership, fifty dollars. (Membership also includes subscription to other publications of the Society and of the BYU Department of Archaeology.)

71.0 RECENT DISCOVERIES RELATIVE TO THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM, by James R. Clark. The following article is a summary of a talk delivered at the society's Twelfth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. The Symposium was held April 2, 1960, on the BYU campus, see Newsletters 65.0 and 66.0. Dr. Clark is Associate Professor of Religion at BYU. has done considerable research in the fields of LDS Church history and the Pearl-of-Great Price. and is a general officer of the UAS.

71.01 Description of Evidence. From the title assigned for this paper you might have expected that I would announce that the papyrus rolls from which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham are once more available to the world for examination. I can make no startling announcement of this kind. I only wish that I might for it would be not only "news" but it would be gratifying to have at last a firm foundation on which to base a study of the translation of these records. What I have to offer in place of any startling announcement of this kind is a preliminary working hypothesis outlining the nature of the script contained on the papyrus rolls possessed by Joseph Smith and from which he translated the Book of Abraham.

Critics of the Book of Abraham have generally considered the script of the original records to have been Egyptian because of the presence in the published facsimiles of Egyptian hieroglyphs. In general critics have claimed that Joseph Smith's translations do not accord with correct translations of these "Egyptian" characters. An examination of a manuscript of his translation of characters which gave the world the text of Abraham 1:1-2:18 raises serious doubts that the script of the Abrahamic record was "Egyptian" even though some Egyptian glyphs were used.

The nature of the evidence used for the study is as follows:

I. A Grammar and/or Alphabet to the papyrus records compiled by Joseph Smith.

Evidence for the existence and compilation of this "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" is found in the following statements of Joseph Smith in his journal:

- a. "The remainder of this month, (July, 1835) I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients." (DHC 2:238)
- b. "October 1 (1835) This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding, the particulars of which will appear hereafter." (DHC 2:286)

It is important to note in passing that Joseph Smith in both quotations identifies the grammar and the record as being connected with a people whom he designates as "the ancients". A study of Joseph Smith's use of this term in other portions of his journal seems to clearly indicate that he meant by "the ancients" the patriarchal line running from Abraham to Methuselah and perhaps on back to Adam, rather than the Egyptians. It is to be noted that in the first statement quoted above he definitely states that the grammar with which he was dealing was that of "The Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients." This point is made here in passing. It will have later significance in our working hypothesis.

A statement from the personal diary of Wilford Woodruff, close associate of Joseph Smith seems to give additional support to the above interpretation of what Joseph Smith intended to convey as to the nature of the language on the papyrus rolls which he had copied into the "Egyptian Alphabet". Writing on February 19, 1842, from a personal acquaintance with the papyrus rolls, Wilford Woodruff asserts that:

"The Lord is blessing Joseph with power to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of God; to translate through the Urim and Thummim ancient

records and hieroglyphics old as Abraham or Adam . . . "(Personal journal in LDS Church Historian's Library)

Parley P. Pratt, another associate of Joseph Smith during the period under consideration (1835-1842) asserts of the record from which Joseph Smith produced the Book of Abraham:

"The record is now in course of translation by means of the Urim and Thummim, and proves to be a record written partly by the father of the faithful, Abraham, and finished by Joseph when in Egypt." (Millennial Star 3:46, July, 1842)

In 1843 Joseph Smith's journal contains this entry:

"Suggested the idea of preparing a grammar of the Egyptian language." (DHC 6:79)

This last entry is somewhat confusing. We are not sure just what he meant by the word "prepare". Did he anticipate publishing? We do not know. He had begun "arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language" as early as July, 1835. He had "labored on the Egyptian alphabet" with Oliver Cowdrey and W. W. Phelps in October, 1835. He had published the Book of Abraham in March, 1842. He now spoke of "preparing a grammar of the Egyptian language". What did he mean by this last statement in November, 1843? He never said, so far as records have survived or are available. He was killed the following June.

His "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" survived his death and the Mormon exodus to the West. An entry in the LDS Church Historian's Office Journal under the date of October 17, 1855 states that the "Egyptian Alphabet" was among the early records of the LDS Church when they were moved on that day into the fireproof vault of the new Historian's Office in Salt Lake City.

Nothing more appears in LDS literature so far as we are aware concerning Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet" until 1938 when Dr. Sidney B. Sperry slyly hinted of its existence in an MIA course of study after having personally examined it in the Historian's Office along with the present investigator.

After having had a photographic copy of this document for a number of years, the present investigator secured permission from the present LDS Church historian to describe the document in brief and to publish photographs of the outside covers and label and of page one and to quote from other pages.

The "Egyptian Alphabet" is a ruled journal approximately 8x12 inches and approximately one inch and a half thick. Not all, in fact a small proportion of the pages are filled with copies of "ancient" characters with their equivalent vocalization in English and a translation of their meaning. The "grammar" or "alphabet" has been arranged in five sections which

Joseph Smith called "degrees". Blank pages appear between the material copied or written in the book for each of these degrees giving some indication that a more complete work was in contemplation.

This "Grammar" and/or "Alphabet" to the papyrus records compiled by Joseph Smith and appearing partly in his handwriting but largely in the handwriting of his secretary or secretaries (or so we have been informed) might be said to be exhibit "A" among the evidence on which we will rest our working hypothesis as to the nature of the language contained on the papyrus rolls possessed by Joseph Smith, 1835-1844, from which he is said to have produced the Book of Abraham.

II. A handwritten manuscript of the text of Abraham 1:1-2:18 with accompanying symbols from which it seemingly was translated.

There is no direct statement in the journal of Joseph Smith referring to this manuscript, but it might be reasonably supposed that in order to print the Book of Abraham in the Times and Seasons, the Mormon Church periodical in Nauvoo of which he was the editor, he would have prepared a manuscript for the typesetter. Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal for February 19, 1842, that he had that day assisted in setting the type for the first installment of the Book of Abraham. Obviously the Book of Abraham published in the Times and Seasons (March 1, 1842 issue) was therefore set from a manuscript rather than from Joseph Smith's memory.

This manuscript, a photostatic copy of which is in the possession of the investigator, was purchased in 1945 by Wilford Wood of Woods Cross, Utah from Charles Bidamon, son of the man who married Emma Smith following the death of Joseph Smith. The original manuscript is in the library of the LDS Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City.

III. A handwritten manuscript of the text of Abraham 1:4-28 with accompanying symbols from which it seemingly was translated.

This manuscript accompanies the "Grammar and Alphabet" in the LDS Church Historian's Office and presumably was brought West before 1855. The form of the symbols and the translated material on these two manuscripts would seem to suggest that they are two separate copies or portions of two separate copies of manuscripts prepared by Joseph Smith and his scribes for the publication of the Book of Abraham in 1842.

IV. The printed facsimiles (three in number) accompanying the Book of Abraham as printed in the Times and Seasons in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842.

The 1842 printing of these facsimiles is vital to any attempt at an accurate study of the nature of the language and symbols appearing on the original papyrus rolls.

Joseph Smith attests in his journal that he personally supervised and checked the plates or cuts from which these facsimiles were printed, that he corrected errors in them that had been made by Reuben Hedlock and that on March 9, 1842 he had exhibited "the Book of Abraham in the original to Brother Reuben Hedlock, so that he might take the size of the several plates or cuts, and prepare blocks for the Times and Seasons; and also gave instruction concerning the arrangement of the writing on the large cut (Facsimile No. 2), illustrating the principles of astronomy. . . ." (DHC 4: 543)

It is necessary to raise a caution against using any printing of these Facsimiles except that prepared by Joseph Smith. Later plates made of these cuts or Facsimilies show some marked changes in the form and completeness of the symbols. Failure to use these original printings has been a serious weakness of all subsequent criticisms of Joseph Smith as a translator. To the investigator's knowledge there has never been an appraisal of Joseph Smith's ability as a translator which has been based on these original printings done under his personal supervision by any scholar or linguist and subsequent printings that have been used in such criticism can be demonstrated to be defective printings.

V. The literary evidence contained in the text of the Book of Abraham

In addition to the copies of symbols and translations contained in the first four sources discussed above, we have certain references in the text of the Book of Abraham which have a distinct bearing on the nature of the language contained on the papyrus rolls possessed by Joseph Smith. Certain claims and references are made by the writer of the Book of Abraham which seem to indicate that he was conscious of a paleographic problem that would be presented by his record to later readers. There is evidence that he took some pains to attempt to bridge this linguistic gap.

71.02 Examination of the Evidence.

One of the fundamental steps in modern archaeological research that has to do with the authentication of written records is the examination of the literary evidence itself.

Abraham, judging by the literary evidence in the Book of Abraham, seems to have been anxious that his intended audience or readers should understand the culture or cultures with which he was at that time associated. Because of this consciousness on his part, it seems feasible from the literary record to at least make a preliminary determination of the audience for which his record was intended.

The evidence of both direct statement and explanatory remarks which he seemed impelled to include in

his record makes it quite apparent that his intended audience were his own descendants whom he evidently thought would be unfamiliar with both the Egyptian and the Mesopotamian cultures of his day.

He specifically says that he was writing "for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me." (Abraham 1:31)

Writing for such an audience he seems impelled to make explanations of both Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultural features. His audience was evidently not Egyptian, else why would he write:

- a. "Now at this time it was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Chaldea. . . men, women, and children." (Abraham 1:8), or "Now this king of Egypt was a descendant from the loins of Ham, and was a partaker of the blood of the Canaanites by birth." (Abraham 1:21).

Certainly it is highly improbable that statements of this kind would have been written for an Egyptian audience whom we could expect to have been already familiar with this type of information.

- b. His audience was evidently not Chaldean (whatever such a term signified at that time). This is evidenced by the following explanations that Abraham seemed impelled to make: "It was made after the form of a bedstead, such as was had among the Chaldeans. . ." (Abraham 1:13).

It seems hardly logical that if Abraham's record was directed to an audience in Ur that he would have offered this bit of cultural elucidation. Nor would he have offered the following:

"Which manner of figures is called by the Chaldeans, Rahleenos, which signifies hieroglyphics." (Abraham 1:14).

"The daughter of Egyptus (the manuscripts have it Zeptah) which in the Chaldean signifies Egypt, which signifies that which is forbidden." (Abraham 1:23).

It seems to this investigator that even more striking evidence of this thesis of the non-Egyptian, non-Chaldean audience is found when a comparison is made between the symbols which produced the text of the Book of Abraham and the symbols contained in the three illustrations or facsimilies that accompany the text.

By reference to the accompanying reproduction of symbols and text of Abraham 1:11-13 from the Bidamon manuscript (see item 2 in description of evidence) compared with the reproduction of Facsimile No. 1 from the Times and Seasons (item 4 in description of evidence)

it becomes apparent that Abraham wrote his text in a different set of symbols than those he used for his illustrations.

**TIMES AND SEASONS.**

"Truth will prevail."  
 Vol. III. No. 9.] CITY OF NAUVOO, ILL. MARCH, 1. 1842. P. 10 No. 45.

A FACSIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.  
 NO. 1.



EXPLANATION OF THE ABOVE CUT.  
 FIG. 1.—The Angel of the Lord.  
 2. Abraham, fastened upon an Altar.  
 3. The Idolatrous Priest of Elkenah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice.  
 4. The Altar for sacrifice, by the Idolatrous Priests, standing before the Gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmocharah, Koraah, and Pharaoh.

**Facsimile No. 1**

It is evident that his intended reader would have conveyed to him the concept of the altar and the sacrifices there performed by reading the three symbols in the accompanying illustration. These symbols, judging from their translation, were a highly specialized type of ideograph where a few strokes of the pen or brush conveyed an entire concept. Although the symbols may represent stylized altars they seem to be abstract symbols. Seemingly Abraham was concerned that the reading of such symbols though conveying the concept of altars and the sacrifice of the three virgins and the attempted sacrifice of himself, to the reader, for his descendants familiar with such abstract symbols would still fail to give to an audience unfamiliar with either Egyptian or Chaldean cultural objects a concrete notion or understanding of the form or shape of such altars. Since he was evidently anxious that his readers be familiar with such artifacts he wrote:

"And that you may have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record. It was made after the form of a bedstead." (Abraham 1:12-13)

As will be seen by a comparison of Facsimile No. 1 above and photographs of Egyptian manuscripts of various periods, it is not hard to identify the source of Abraham's concrete illustration of the altar. The usual scholarly interpretation of this "bedstead" is that it is

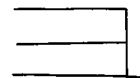
a couch or a bier connected with the dead and mummification. Could it not also have represented an altar for human sacrifice at the time of Abraham? Our one illustration pictures a priest wearing the jackal's mask of the god Anubis officiating at such a "bedstead," couch or bier.

Here, then, it seems to this investigator, we have a somewhat classic illustration of the contrast between two different sets of symbols used to convey essentially the same ideas or concepts. We have on the one hand the highly condensed and abstract symbols in which Abraham wrote his text "for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me" and we have the very concrete symbols representing actual Egyptian or Chaldean artifacts which he used to illustrate his text for the benefit of a posterity who would be unfamiliar with such artifacts.

The above illustration seems to be clearly supported by the literary evidence in the text under consideration, the explanation seems to this investigator to account for a majority of the evidence and hence it is suggested as a working hypothesis that the script of the text of the Book of Abraham was non-Egyptian, that it was written in non-Egyptian symbols which though abstract would be understandable to Abraham's immediate descendants to whom he would pass the "records of the fathers, even the patriarchs" (Abraham 1:31). The cultural references, however, would be lost on a later audience unfamiliar with Egyptian or Chaldean artifacts, hence Abraham provided for their cultural education by illustrating his text with pictures of well-known artifacts of these cultures.



Abstract or Ideographic Symbol for Altar.  
 Record of Abraham, 2000 B.C.



Two symbols from Joseph Smith's Egyptian Grammar also used in connection with the altar and Abraham 1:11-13.

Joseph Smith's "Explanations" of the cuts made in 1842 would then stand as simply--explanations made by Abraham of his usage of the cultural artifacts and symbols represented in these illustrations and not translations of these symbols as scholars have insisted that they should be. His translation of the Book of Abraham text, by contrast, would have been made from the symbols of the language of "the ancients" or the patriarchal language or script, or the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients, represented by the symbols

in the illustration.

71.1 SOME VIEWS ON THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM, by Ross T. Christensen. The following abstract has been written from notes for a lecture entitled "Discoveries in the Archaeology of the Pearl of Great Price," given on the BYU campus, June 7, 1960, at the 37th Annual Leadership Week. The lecture was repeated on June 30 at the Second Annual BYU Leadership Week in Salt Lake City under the title, "Pearl of Great Price: Some Archaeological Claims." Dr. Christensen is chairman of the BYU Department of Archaeology.

71.10 The Story of the Abraham Scroll. The Book of Abraham, now an integral part of the Pearl of Great Price, was first published in 1842 at Nauvoo, Illinois, in the Times and Seasons. Its historical content and the circumstances of its discovery are such as to require the application of archaeology for checking and clarification at many points.

Important sources of information on the events that culminated in the publication of the Book of Abraham are two statements by the Prophet Joseph Smith recorded in the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Vol. II, pp. 235-236 and 348-351. Here, he tells how certain scrolls were discovered in Egypt and how they came into his hands, as the details were related to him.

In 1828, according to Joseph Smith, Antonio Lebolo (or Sebolo) discovered several hundred mummies in a "catacomb" near Thebes. Only eleven of these, however, which were of the first order of embalming, were in a condition to be removed. En route to Paris with his collection, Lebolo died at the port of Trieste. His mummies were sent on and in 1833 reached his nephew, Michael Chandler, in New York City. It was at this time that two scrolls and two or three sheets of papyrus were discovered in the wrappings. In 1835 Chandler took his collection, which then included four mummies, to Kirtland, Ohio, where Joseph Smith, upon examining the scrolls, declared that one of them had been written by Abraham, the ancient Hebrew patriarch, and the other by his great-grandson, Joseph.

From that time until Joseph Smith's death in 1844, the mummies and scrolls seem to have remained in his possession. After the martyrdom they passed to the Prophet's mother, who exhibited them in a small museum for a time. At least part of these antiquities appear to have passed successively thereafter to a museum in St. Louis and another in Chicago, where they presumably perished in the great fire of 1871. Some students suspect however, that some of the papyri may still be in existence.

There were thus three important discoveries in

connection with the Book of Abraham; (1) the original discovery of the mummies near Thebes in 1828 (or 1818; see below); (2) the discovery in New York in 1833 that the mummies were accompanied by writings; and (3) the discovery in Kirtland in 1835 that the scrolls had been written by Abraham and Joseph, respectively.

71.11 Some Archaeological Claims. The story of this extraordinary collection presents a number of claims which should be examined by the archaeologist. Among them are the following:

(1) As to funerary architecture. It is stated that Lebolo's find was made in a "catacomb" near Thebes. A catacomb is an underground gallery or chamber hollowed out of the solid rock for the purpose of burying the dead.

Beginning with the Old Kingdom, c. 2800 BC, Egyptian monarchs were buried in impressive pyramid-tombs. The last such pyramid seems to have been built, however, by Ahmose I, who died c. 1545 BC (I. E. S. Edwards, The Pyramids of Egypt, p. 196). Thereafter, apparently in an effort to thwart the relentless tomb-robbers, the pharaohs took to the practice of building merely a mortuary temple at Thebes in the "City of the Dead" but hollowing out the actual burial chamber in the "Valley of the Kings" lying to the west. These underground catacombs or pit-tombs were cut out of the solid rock and their locations kept secret. A well-known example, excavated in the 1920's, is that of the boy-king, Tut-Ankh-Amen, who died c. 1344 BC.

Joseph Smith states, on the basis of the information given to him, that Lebolo's discovery was made in 1828. However, there is good reason to believe that the French explorer had already died in 1823 and that his great discovery had actually been made in 1818 at a site called Gurneh (Qurneh), on the west bank of the Nile river north of Thebes.

(2) As to mummification. The Prophet states that Lebolo found in the pit-tomb two or three hundred mummies embalmed after the second and third orders lying on the floor of the catacomb and about 100 embalmed after the first order placed in niches. Herodotus tells of the three orders of embalming as practiced in Egypt in the fifth century B. C. The "first order" was the most expensive and gave the best protection to the corpse. (See The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 40-48, on the source of the asphalt used in the process.)

The Bible, incidentally, indicates embalming in the cases of the patriarch Jacob and his son Joseph (Genesis 50:2, 26).

Of particular interest in this connection is the practice of mass reburial that developed in late times

in ancient Egypt. Beginning around 900 BC, pious priests would gather up mummies that had been dragged from their tombs and robbed of their jewelry, re-burying them in large numbers in common underground pit-tombs. Giovanni Belzoni describes in vivid language his own discoveries of such mass burials in the years preceding 1820 (James Baikie, The Life of the Ancient East, pp. 89-90). Emile Brugsch in 1881 and Loret in 1898 made similar discoveries, including the remains of many well-known pharaohs (*ibid.*, pp. 130-134). Lebolo's discovery at Gurneh was undoubtedly of such a mass reburial.

(3) As to papyrus funerary scrolls. Papyrus was a kind of paper manufactured from a plant which was native to the banks of the Nile. It was the favorite writing material of the Mediterranean region from very ancient times until the early centuries of the Christian era. Sheets of it were glued together, thus forming long rolls or scrolls. Frequently, scrolls were included in the wrappings of mummies, as a rule inscribed with variant copies of a tedious funerary text called the Book of the Dead, but occasionally containing historical or other material, instead. Belzoni observed that these scrolls were found above the knees, on the legs, within the eviscerated chest, or under the arms (*ibid.*, p. 90).

(4) As to the identity of the mummies. Joseph Smith at first declined to identify who the mummies were, only denying that they were those of Abraham, Joseph, and Abimelech, as some had accused him of claiming. However, in 1844 he is reported to have stated that one of them was the remains of Pharaoh Necho (Josiah Quincy, Figures of the Past, p. 383).

If the prophet was correctly reported in this statement, then one of the mummies was that of a king of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. It may have been Necho I, but was more likely Necho II (609-595 BC). The latter monarch was noteworthy for his unsuccessful attempt to restore the lost power Egypt had possessed during the Empire Period. Also, it may be noted that he was responsible for the death of the Judaeen king Josiah in 609 BC (2 Chronicles 35:20-24) and that he was a contemporary of Lehi of the Book of Mormon, who left Jerusalem about 600 BC.

Joseph Smith is also reported to have thought that another of the mummies was probably that of Necho's daughter, while Parley P. Pratt indicates that one of the scrolls was found on what was apparently this same female.

71.12 An Attempt to Date the Scroll. To assign a date to the scroll of Abraham is a ramified problem. For one thing, the patriarch himself is believed to have lived in the twentieth century BC. However, its companion scroll (or a portion of the

Abraham scroll evidence suggests that the two scrolls were originally joined together) was written by Joseph, who lived three generations later. Also, according to Quincy (*ibid.*, p. 385), Joseph Smith stated that Moses and Aaron had added to the record. The latter pair are generally dated to the thirteenth century BC.

But although Abraham may have written as early as the twentieth century BC, the pit-tomb or "catacomb" in which Lebolo found his mummies undoubtedly was not carved out until the sixteenth century BC or later, since this type of funerary architecture was not in use until that time. Since, however, it was a mass reburial among which the four mummies in question were found, their final interment there evidently dates to sometime following about 900 BC, which is when pious priests began to practice this custom.

Yet, if two of the four mummies were those of Pharaoh Necho II and his daughter and if the scroll was found on the latter, then its final placement in the tomb must have been during or following the sixth century BC, for Necho died in the year 594.

Now Warren R. Dawson, in the entry for Antonio Lebolo in his Who Was Who in Egyptology, p. 88, reports the discovery made in 1818, which evidently included the four mummies under consideration. According to this source, Lebolo, found a number of Ptolemaic mummies in the pit-tomb of Gurneh. Since the house of Ptolemy reigned in Egypt between the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BC and the death of Cleopatra in 30 BC, this would mean that at least some of the "several hundred mummies" mentioned by Joseph Smith were inserted during the last three centuries before Christ. But it is not clear whether any of the four in question were of Ptolemaic date and type. Also, the vicinity of Thebes seems an unlikely, though not impossible, locale for a Ptolemaic-period burial.

Thus, although the original composition of the Book of Abraham may date to the twentieth century BC, the final desposition of the mummies in connection with which his scroll was found apparently dates to some 1400 years later (sixth century BC) and possibly as much as 1900 years later (first century BC).

Evidently what happened was that the scroll was passed from Abraham through a line of persons who respected its sanctity, including his descendants, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron, who added their own writing to it. Later possessors of the scroll, such as Pharaoh Necho, need not have been able to read its script nor understand its contents, but only desired to own it and be buried with it for the supposed magical power of so ancient an object.