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THE EXPLANATION-DEFYING BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Kerry Muhlestein

THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM HAS BEEN A SOURCE OF CONTROVERSY SINCE some Egyptologists called its authenticity into question in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though an initial firestorm brewed after Egyptologists labeled Joseph Smith's interpretation of the facsimiles fraudulent, the furor soon settled. However, criticism about the interpretation's authenticity began again soon after portions of the Joseph Smith papyri were obtained by the Church in the late 1960s. When it was discovered that the text surrounding Facsimile 1 did not match the text in the Book of Abraham, detractors argued that the translation by Egyptologists substantiated their claims that Joseph Smith was a fraud. However, this discovery actually substantiated nothing about how, when, or from what source the Book of Abraham originated. These details continue to unfold as we learn more about Abraham from the existing papyri, the research in the field of Egyptology, and other sources independent of the Bible. While we do not yet fully understand its origins, we are sure that the Book of Abraham provides light and knowledge regarding such matters as the life of Abraham, the premortal existence, and the purpose of our earthly existence.



The Book of Abraham is an amazing book of scripture that continues to defy attempts to explain how or when it came about. As we try to better understand and appreciate it, I have found a useful analogy. At one point physicists were certain all matter could be classified as either a wave or a particle; nothing could be both. The difficulty was that as more and more investigations were conducted, scientists found that some evidence pointed toward light behaving as a particle while other evidence demonstrated that

it behaved as a wave. This puzzled scientists. As Albert Einstein stated, “It seems as though we must use sometimes the one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do.”¹ It was only when light was paradoxically accepted as both a particle and a wave that physicists made further progress in understanding it. Similarly, there are many things about the Book of Abraham that do not fit tidily into the little boxes we have created regarding scripture and how it is revealed and recorded. It is a unique type of revelation just as light is a unique type of matter. The Book of Abraham is not typical scripture, so we should not be surprised that it was revealed by unprecedented means. Accepting the Book of Abraham as unique scripture enables readers to embrace its beauty, meaning, and validity.

HISTORY OF THE PAPYRI

Describing the unusual—even miraculous—nature of the Book of Abraham begins with its discovery. The papyri that sparked its translation were only found because of an exponential increase in excavations in Egypt after the Napoleonic invasion of 1798. As Egypt became more open to western countries and cultures, it experienced several years of large-scale exploration and exploitation, wherein thousands of objects were exported to other countries. During this short time period, some papyri found in Thebes were among the first Egyptian antiquities to arrive in the United States, working their way to Kirtland, Ohio, of all places. That such antiquities would show up in a small town and would be presented to an unlearned, upstart religious leader in July of 1835, facilitating the revelation of key doctrines concerning covenants, premortality, the purpose of life, and creation, is astonishing.

Upon receiving the papyri, Joseph Smith immediately began translating, proclaiming the papyri contained the writings of Joseph of Egypt and of Abraham. The Prophet spent time translating in July, focusing his attention on the writings of Abraham. He stopped in August and September in order to take care of Church business and then began translation again in October. In both July and October, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and W. W. Phelps also tried to create an Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar. In November the Prophet spent a few weeks intensively working on the translation. As December began, the opportunity to begin a formal study of Hebrew arose, and all efforts to translate Egyptian or create a guide to Egyptian grammar were abandoned as they undertook Hebrew.

During the following years, Joseph often expressed a desire to do more translation of the papyri, but he was not able to do so seriously until 1842 when he became the editor of the Church’s newspaper *Times and Seasons*. In early March of 1842 he used that newspaper to publish Facsimile 1 and

Abraham 1:1–2:18. He spent a few days in March translating the papyri and then, later in that month, published Facsimile 2 and the rest of the Book of Abraham that we now have. In May he published Facsimile 3. He said that he would publish more of the Book of Abraham but did not do so before he was killed.

After Joseph Smith was martyred, his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, inherited the papyri. She supported herself by charging people to see them and the mummies Joseph had acquired at the time he purchased the papyri. When Lucy died, Emma Smith inherited the antiquities and quickly sold them. The new owner, Abel Combs, sold most of the papyri and mummies to the St. Louis Museum, which sold them to a museum in Chicago that burned in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. The mummies and papyri in the museum were destroyed by the fire.

While it was not known at the time, Abel Combs had not sold all of his papyri to the St. Louis Museum. He had given a small collection of mounted fragments to his housekeeper. This housekeeper's descendants later sold them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In 1967, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints acquired the papyri from the museum. The resurfacing of these papyrus fragments reignited interest in the Book of Abraham and its translation.

WHICH PYPYRI WERE TRANSLATED?

Because it was almost universally assumed that all of the papyri Joseph Smith had once owned had been destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire, many were surprised when the papyri resurfaced in 1967. The fragment that drew the most interest was the one that contained the vignette or drawing that was the original source of Facsimile 1.² Part of the reason this fragment drew so much attention was because of the possibilities it presented. It seemed that perhaps we could now test Joseph Smith's revelatory abilities. Many members of the Church *assumed* that the text on the papyri that surrounded the original of Facsimile 1 was the source of the Book of Abraham. It seemed this might give them the chance to demonstrate Joseph Smith's translating abilities. Anti-Mormons also *assumed* that the text adjacent to that drawing was the source of the Book of Abraham and were excited about the opportunity to disprove Joseph Smith's prophetic abilities.³ Sadly, neither of these groups took the time to carefully examine their assumptions. Thus, when the text was translated and was found to be a fairly common Egyptian funerary document called the Book of Breathing, many felt they could now demonstrate that Joseph Smith was not an inspired prophet. This, probably more than anything, has caused confusion regarding the Book of Abraham. Much of this confusion comes because so many don't even realize they have made an assumption about the source of the Book of Abraham. For them, it is

simply a given that Joseph Smith translated the text adjacent to Facsimile 1 as the Book of Abraham.

So how could we test this assumption? The first step would be to examine the text itself to see if it contains any clues about its relationship with its associated pictures. The second would be to examine similar papyri from the same time period to see if the texts and their vignettes were typically adjacent to each other. The third way to test this assumption would be to examine the accounts of eyewitnesses who saw the papyri and knew from what material Joseph Smith said he was translating. Of course, modern speculations about the role of the extant papyri in the translation of the Book of Abraham would be less important than evidence from eyewitnesses.⁴

A test of these assumptions provides some useful insight. A study of the text reveals that Abraham 1:12 and 14 refer to the drawing known as Facsimile 1. Yet they refer to the drawing as being “at the beginning” of the text, which strongly suggests that it was not right next to the text. Thus, test one—examining the text itself—indicates that the drawing is probably not adjacent to the text.⁵ Examining similar papyri from the same period reveals a similar pattern. Frequently, the drawing associated with a text is not adjacent to the text. Consequently, the second test indicates that the assumption may or may not be true but makes it clear that we are not safe in assuming that the text adjacent to Facsimile 1 is by default the source of the Book of Abraham.

When reading accounts of eyewitnesses who saw the papyri and heard from Joseph Smith or his close companions about them, we learn that most of these people say nothing at all about the source of the Book of Abraham. When they do, they refer to a distinct portion of the papyri, identified as the long roll, which was burned in the Great Chicago Fire, as that source.⁶ Therefore, the long roll, not portions now in our possession, was identified as the source of the Book of Abraham by Joseph’s contemporaries. To argue otherwise would be to argue against the historical record. Although the relationship between what was written on the physical papyri known as the long roll and what was recorded as the Book of Abraham is not clear, we can say that the text adjacent to Facsimile 1, which we now have in our possession, was not the source.

WHAT WAS JOSEPH SMITH’S TRANSLATION PROCESS?

Questions about *what* Joseph Smith was translating naturally lead to asking *how* he translated. For most people, the idea of translating is fairly straightforward. Conventionally, translators read a document in one language they understand and render it into another language they understand. The difficulty in assessing the Book of Abraham is that while Joseph Smith says he “translated” the Book of Abraham, he hardly ever used that word in the

conventional way. Therefore, it will be helpful to first look at the other ways Joseph Smith used the word *translate*.

Joseph Smith's first translation project was the Book of Mormon. It was written in a language he clearly did not claim to know. Instead, he said he was given the ability to translate by the gift and power of God. We don't know a lot about the Book of Mormon translation process. We know that the Prophet used the seer stones we call the Urim and Thummim, as well as another seer stone he found in his youth. While the exact details are unknown, it seems he often was not looking at the gold plates at all when translating. Therefore, Joseph Smith translated a document written in a language he didn't know into a language he did know (English) without looking at the physical text that recorded the unknown language.

Joseph's next translation project took place while he was in the midst of finishing the Book of Mormon translation. As he and Oliver Cowdery asked a question, the Prophet was shown in vision a parchment written on by John.⁷ Again, it was written in a language Joseph Smith did not understand. This time he never physically saw the words he translated—he only saw a document in vision. In fact, it is not clear whether or not he even saw the words written on the parchment. It is possible that he did and at the same time was given the translation of those words. However, it is also possible that he may have seen that the parchment existed and then had the translation of it come to him after the vision.

The Prophet's third translation had very little to do with what most people call *translating*. He studied an English version of the Bible and provided us with another English version of the text that contained a *translation* of things that enhanced the text. Although he called it the "New Translation of the Bible," we call it the Joseph Smith Translation. In this case, the text came to him as pure revelation and was not dependent at all on the physical text he had in front of him. This process began about two months after Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon.

The next translation project was the Book of Abraham, which the Prophet began in 1835, several years after he had started working on his "New Translation of the Bible." This process began after he acquired some Egyptian papyri, as outlined earlier. While some later confidants of the Prophet spoke of his using the Urim and Thummim while translating,⁸ the exact nature of this process is unknown. There is no doubt that the translation was spurred on by the physical possession of the papyri, although he certainly did not know the original language of the text. It is also clear that Joseph Smith and many of the Saints spoke of the writings of Abraham being on the papyri, intimating that the process may have been similar to the translation of the gold plates.

At the same time, some clues suggest there was something of a revelatory process akin to that which the Prophet utilized in the translation of the Bible.

For example, in Joseph Smith's journal it is recorded, "This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with [Bros.] O[liver] Cowdery and W[illiam] W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded."⁹ Perhaps this refers to the Prophet's coming to understand the meaning of Facsimile 2 or translating Abraham 3. Either way, the language suggests a revelatory experience in which the papyrus served only as some kind of catalyst for the revelation of the English text. Joseph's mother reported that he could translate portions of the papyrus that had been broken off, comparing his ability to translate to Daniel's ability to interpret a dream he was not told about.¹⁰

Based on the Prophet's translation history and the evidence we have, there seems to be at least four possible scenarios for the translation process:

1. By the power of God, Joseph Smith translated a text that was written on the long scroll of papyri by Abraham.
2. As Joseph opened his mind to God because of his curiosity about the text on the papyri, he received revelation about an ancient text not on the papyri but written by Abraham.
3. Joseph received revelation from God "about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham,"¹¹ unrelated to any specific ancient document, in a revelatory process.
4. A combination of the above choices also seems quite possible, meaning that Joseph translated something on the papyri and received revelation regarding other teachings as well.

GRAMMAR OF THE EGYPTIAN ALPHABET AND LANGUAGE

There is a group of documents that makes understanding the translation process all the more complicated. Joseph Smith and his scribes left behind some sheets of paper they called a Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language, which contain various Egyptian characters alongside explanations of those characters. A few connected documents bear different titles but contain similar information. They also created a few copies of the text of the Book of Abraham that have some Egyptian characters in the margin. The latter characters seem to come from the fragments of papyrus that contain Facsimile 1. Some have postulated that Joseph Smith used the Egyptian Alphabet to translate the characters on the Book of Abraham manuscripts and that this was both the source of the Book of Abraham and the method of its translation.

If this explanation were true, it would certainly simplify the questions we have been trying to answer. Unfortunately, this theory does not fit the evidence we have. As we look at the Egyptian Alphabet, it is clear that Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and W. W. Phelps were products of their time when it came to their knowledge of Egyptian. In the early nineteenth century,

the Egyptian language was in the process of being deciphered by scholars such as the Frenchman Jean-François Champollion and others, but many people thought that Egyptian was a cryptic language, with each character conveying varied meanings based on the amount of knowledge possessed by the reader. It was only after Egyptologists gained the ability to translate Egyptian using conventional methods that this notion about the language was dispelled. The Prophet and his colleagues were just hoping to figure out something that worked. Nevertheless, they failed, producing a document that makes little sense. This is not surprising considering none of the authors claimed to know or understand Egyptian and the translation of Egyptian characters had stumped scholars for centuries.

Yet some have supposed that the Egyptian Alphabet was the tool used to create the translation. In order to assess whether this could be the case or not, I conducted research to test the assumption. First, I located all of the phrases in the Egyptian Alphabet that also appear in the Book of Abraham. I then compared the Egyptian characters next to those phrases to the Egyptian characters adjacent to the matching lines in the early Book of Abraham manuscripts. Of the twenty-one times I found text in the Egyptian Alphabet that matched text in the Book of Abraham, I found only one time that the corresponding Egyptian characters matched, four times when part of the characters matched, and sixteen times in which there was no match whatsoever. Clearly the Egyptian alphabet was not used to translate the papyri, nor is there any demonstrable relationship between the characters on the papyri and the text of the Book of Abraham. This is not surprising since the characters come from fragments of papyri that eyewitnesses noted were not the source of the Book of Abraham.

HOW DO JOSEPH SMITH'S INTERPRETATIONS COMPARE TO MODERN DISCOVERIES?

Many people ask how Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles compare to the interpretation an ancient Egyptian would have given that same drawing. This is a question worth asking but not simple to answer. Part of the reason this question is difficult to answer is because it is not necessarily the right question to ask. For example, as we compare Facsimile 1, or any of the facsimiles, with similar Egyptian vignettes, we are probably studying the wrong audience. Maybe we shouldn't be looking at what Egyptians thought the facsimiles meant at all but rather at how Joseph Smith would have viewed them as part of the spiritual interpretation needed in modern times. Or perhaps the Prophet was telling us how a group of ancient Jews would have interpreted the drawings.¹² Another possibility is that he was telling us how a small group of Egyptian priests who were collecting biblical stories would have interpreted the drawings. At this time in history, we know there was mutual adopting of religious figures between the Egyptian and Israelite

cultures. The adopted figures would be given new meaning by the fostering religion,¹³ which makes it difficult to know what we should compare Joseph Smith's interpretations of the facsimiles to. Sometime vignettes were used later in ways never intended in the original usage.

Typically when people have asked what the Egyptians would say these drawings meant, and how this compares with what Joseph Smith said they meant, they actually end up comparing it to what modern Egyptologists say they mean. This is, of course, understandable because we do not have access to any ancient Egyptians, and we assume modern Egyptologists are reliable replacements. But we know that Egyptologists, including myself, are often wrong regarding what ancient Egyptians would have said on a subject. In fact, one study demonstrated that in the few instances where we have found Egyptian labels about various figures in hypocephali (like Facsimile 2), they hardly ever match up with what Egyptologists said they meant.¹⁴ It can therefore be problematic to look to modern Egyptologists for what ancient Egyptians would have said various drawings represented. Thus any conclusions reached by making such comparisons must be tentative and should not be the basis for any conclusions regarding the larger issues.

Still, what happens when we do compare the facsimiles with Egyptological interpretations? For example, it is tempting to say that Facsimile 1 is a common funerary scene because it has some elements in common with a funerary scene. It is, however, different in many of its elements. It is also clearly not a scene commonly associated with the Book of Breathings, though many have claimed it is. There are actually no other instances of this scene being adjacent to the Book of Breathings, though some continually insist that there are, regardless of lack of evidence to support the claim.¹⁵

There are elements that make Joseph Smith's interpretation of Facsimile 1 plausible. The story of Abraham's actions and his near sacrifice by a priest associated with Egypt have long caused pause among people who did not believe that the Egyptians practiced human sacrifice. However, we have since learned that they absolutely did.¹⁶ Furthermore, the situations that prompted such action align perfectly well with the story presented in the Book of Abraham and Facsimile 1 because Abraham was trying to disrupt the worship of Egyptian gods, and disruption of official cultic worship was punishable by sacrifice.¹⁷ We also know that in the international religious amalgamation some Egyptian priests were engaged in, they did sometimes associate a somewhat similar scene with Abraham.¹⁸

There are a number of elements in Facsimile 1 that do match well with what Joseph Smith said the drawing represented.¹⁹ Do all of Joseph Smith's interpretations of Facsimile 1 match up with either a standard Egyptological interpretation or with one that has been demonstrated through more specialized research? No. Neither do all the elements of the vignette match with what Egyptologists would say about the representations. Clearly we

have progress yet to make in arriving at both a better Latter-day Saint interpretation and an Egyptological understanding of this drawing.

This is also true of Facsimile 2. Again, many elements of Joseph Smith's interpretations do not align well with an Egyptological point of view;²⁰ however, a surprising amount are supported by good Egyptological research.²¹ Additionally, using the kind of drawing represented in Facsimile 2, a hypcephalus, in such a way is strikingly similar to the use of the zodiac in synagogues in Roman Palestine, such as at Sepphoris or Bet Alpha. In these cases, ancient Jews took a Greek representation of the cosmos (Facsimile 2 is an Egyptian representation of the cosmos) and used it in a uniquely Jewish fashion with a uniquely Jewish interpretation, just as it appears is happening with Facsimile 2. Moreover, some ancient Egyptians associated Abraham with this kind of drawing.²² Again, while none of these things prove that Joseph Smith was correct, they do demonstrate plausibility.

Facsimile 3 is similar. It has received the least amount of scholarly study and attention,²³ so it has the smallest amount of disagreement or agreement attached to it. There are some elements I do not understand from either an Egyptological or a Latter-day Saint point of view. Yet we do know that this very type of drawing was associated with Abraham by some ancient Egyptians.²⁴

EGYPTIAN AND JEWISH RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATIONS IN THE FACSIMILES AND THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

This discussion leads to one striking observation. While the international culture in Egypt at the time the papyri were created was such that we should expect *many* Egyptian religious representations to be correlated to Jewish religious elements, we should not expect that *every* Egyptian religious representation would be. Yet each of the three Egyptian representations, or facsimiles, Joseph Smith said were associated with Abraham actually *was* associated with him by ancient Egyptians. While this does not prove the Prophet to be a prophet, it does defy other proposed explanations. Critics who are quick to point out understandable inconsistencies with his explanations of the facsimiles do not even try to deal with these significant instances of consistency. This is true of studies about the Book of Abraham as a whole as well. While plausible explanations have been proposed that account for the inconsistencies, besides acknowledging the power of God, no plausible explanations have been posed for the many striking consistencies in the Book of Abraham with nonbiblical traditions regarding Abraham.²⁵

A few such traditions that were not known in Joseph Smith's day but which agree with the Book of Abraham are that those who were disrupting the worship of idols in Abraham's society were killed; Abraham prayed for deliverance when he was about to be killed because of his disruption of idol worship; the priest or leader who was trying to kill him was killed

instead; Abraham was heir to the priesthood because of his fathers; Abraham possessed a Urim and Thummim; Abraham possessed records of his fathers; there was a famine in Abraham's homeland; and Haran died in the famine.²⁶ The fact that Joseph Smith did not know of these details, and other similarities from ancient sources, yet they agree so well with ancient sources, is striking.

When we look candidly at the known facts, we are left with a number of elements about the facsimiles and text of the Book of Abraham that are puzzling, a number that are quite plausible, and a number that are compelling. In other words, we are again unable to explain the process using the theories or methods of men. We are forced to admit that, just as we had to adjust our thinking about matter because light behaves as both a particle and a wave, we will have to look for something that goes beyond our current understanding about how scripture is revealed if we are to account for everything we know about the Book of Abraham.

MORE STUDY IS NEEDED

While there are many more fascinating questions surrounding the Book of Abraham and dozens of similarities with known ancient history and literature that we could highlight, space does not permit detailing these things more fully here. What should be clear by now is that the Book of Abraham and the story that surrounds it are amazing. The serendipitous arrival of the papyri in Kirtland in 1835 is hard to accept as mere coincidence. In addition, no theories discussed can account for everything we know about its translation, its source, its similarities to ancient and medieval sources, and, most especially, the power and profoundness of its message.

While people from different backgrounds may disagree regarding some of my assessments, I believe we all can agree that the origin of the Book of Abraham currently defies explanation. It would be unfortunate to make assumptions regarding the things we don't know and then condemn Joseph Smith or the Book of Abraham based upon those assumptions. On the other hand, how interesting it is to explore the mystery of the translation of the Book of Abraham, which continues to reveal answers as it simultaneously elicits further questions. Regardless of how it was received, the Book of Abraham reveals sublime information about the premortal existence, the Creation, the importance of our mortal experience, and many more great and wonderful truths—which is the best evidence of its truthfulness.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham." <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham>.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kerry Muhlestein received his BS from BYU in psychology with a Hebrew minor. As an undergraduate he spent time at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in the intensive Hebrew program. He received an MA in ancient Near Eastern studies from BYU and his PhD from UCLA in Egyptology. He taught courses in Hebrew and religion part-time at BYU and the UVSC extension center as well as in history at Cal Poly Pomona and UCLA. He also taught early-morning seminary classes and classes at the Westwood (UCLA) Institute of Religion. His first full-time appointment was a joint position in religion and history at BYU–Hawaii. He is the director of the BYU Egypt Excavation Project. He was selected by the *Princeton Review* in 2012 as one of the best 300 professors in the nation (the top .02 percent of those considered). He and his wife, Julianne, are the parents of six children, and together they lived in Jerusalem while Kerry taught there. He has served as the chair of a national committee for the American Research Center in Egypt and serves on their Research Supporting Member Council. He has also served on a committee for the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities and currently serves on their board of trustees and as a vice president of the organization. He is also involved with the International Association of Egyptologists.

NOTES

1. David Harrison, "Complementarity and Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics," UPSCALE, <http://www.upscale.utoronto.ca/GeneralInterest/Harrison/Complementarity/CompCopen.html>.
2. For more information, the reader can listen to a series of lectures by the author, available on CD. Kerry Muhlestein, *Understanding the Book of Abraham, a Guided Tour*, 3 CDs (Salt Lake City: Covenant Communications, 2013).

3. See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Case Against Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1968), 2:159; 3:330. An example of Latter-day Saint ideas is found in Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Improvement Era*, January 1968–May 1970; reprinted in Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2009).
4. On the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, see Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010); Brian M. Hauglid, "Thoughts on the Book of Abraham," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 242–53.
5. Kerry Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham," *Religious Educator* 11, no. 1 (2010): 90–106; Kerry Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View," in *No Weapon Shall Prosper*, 217–41.
6. For some examples, see Charlotte Haven, letter to her mother, February 19, 1843, cited in "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," *Overland Monthly*, December 1890, 624; Jerusha W. Blanchard, "Reminiscences of the Granddaughter of Hyrum Smith," *Relief Society Magazine*, September 1922, 9; "M," *Friends' Weekly Intelligencer* 3, no. 27, October 7, 1846, 211. For a summary on this point, see Kerry Muhlestein, "Papyri and Presumptions: A Careful Examination of the Assumptions and Eyewitness Accounts Associated with the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Mormon History*, forthcoming.
7. See D&C 7.
8. At this point, they referred to the Prophet's seer stone as a Urim and Thummim.
9. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 67.
10. William S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts, Respecting the Rise Progress and Pretensions of the Mormons* (N.p.: 1837), 4–5.
11. "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://www.lds.org/topics/translation-and-historicity-of-the-book-of-abraham>.
12. Kevin L. Barney, "The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2006), 107–30.
13. Kerry Muhlestein, "The Religious and Cultural Background of Joseph Smith Papyrus I," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22, no. 1 (2013): 20–33.
14. John Gee, "Towards an Interpretation of Hypocephali," in *Le lotus qui sort du terre: Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga*, Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts Supplément–2001 (Budapest: Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, 2001), 325–34; Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham," 98.
15. Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham," 99–100.
16. See Kerry Muhlestein, *Violence in the Service of Order: the Religious Framework for Sanctioned Killing in Ancient Egypt*, British Archaeological Reports International Series 2299 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2011); and Kerry Muhlestein, "Royal Executions: Evidence Bearing on the Subject of Sanctioned Killing in the Middle Kingdom," in *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 15, no. 2 (2008). See also "Death by Water: The Role of Water in Ancient Egypt's Treatment of Enemies and Juridical Process," in *L'Acqua Nell'antico Egitto: Vita, Rigenerazione, Incantesimo, Medicamento*, ed. Alessia Amenta, Michela Luiselli, and

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17. Kerry Muhlestein and John Gee, “Egyptian Middle Kingdom Contexts for Human Sacrifice,” in *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 2, no. 2 (2011): 70–77; Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 216–43.

18. See John Gee, “Research and Perspectives: Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts,” *Ensign*, July 1992, 60–62; and John Gee, “References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts,” *Insights: An Ancient Window* (September 1991): 1, 3.

19. See Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham,” 90–106; and Muhlestein, “A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View,” 217–41.

20. On the Egyptological point of view, see John Gee, “Towards an Interpretation of Hypocephali,” 325–34.

21. Michael D. Rhodes, “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Twenty Years Later” (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994). See also John Gee, “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *FARMS Review* 20, no. 1 (2008): 136.

22. See Rhodes, “The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus.”

23. John Gee, “Facsimile 3 and the Book of the Dead 125,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, 95–106.

24. John Gee, “A New Look at the *ankh p' by* Formula,” in *Proceedings of IXe Congroes International des Études Démotiques*, Paris, 31 août–3 septembre 2005, ed. Ghislaine Widmer and Didier Devauchelle (Cairo: Institut Français Archéologie Orientale, 2009), 133–44.

25. John A. Tvedtnes, Brian M. Hauglid, and John Gee, comps. and eds., *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), xxii.

26. Information compiled by Bethany Jensen using Tvedtnes, Hauglid, and Gee, *Traditions about the Early Life of Abraham*.

The recent web posting on the Book of Abraham by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (hereafter the LDS church) represents new reflection on a document whose authenticity as verifiable history is now officially acknowledged to be in serious dispute.¹ Thus the position paper concludes with a concession by noting (unnamed) modern scholarly opposition to the Book of Abraham, followed by a defense against any such scholarly debate: "The veracity and value of the book of Abraham cannot be settled by scholarly debate concerning the book's translation and historicity." The Problems The published text of the Book of Abraham is accompanied by three woodcut "Facsimiles" with explanations authored by Joseph Smith himself. Go to Book. Show Author Bio. The Explanation-Defying Book of Abraham. Kerry Muhlestein. Kerry Muhlestein received his BS from BYU in psychology with a Hebrew minor. The Book of Abraham is unique in the scriptural canon of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, because it is the only book in that canon that has pictures. Since 1842 when it was first published, the Book of Abraham has been accompanied by three facsimiles of Egyptian characters and figures that illustrate the text. Joseph Smith provided explanations for many of the figures in these illustrations. Since then, many have been naturally curious about how Joseph Smith's original explanations hold up in light of advances made in the field of Egyptology. In Joseph Smith's day, Egyptology