

Fifty years ago on November 27, 1967 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City turned over to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormon Church) some ancient Egyptian papyri that founding prophet Joseph Smith had in his possession. Smith, church president at the time, believed one of the rolls of papyri contained the writings of the patriarch Abraham, father of three religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

In 1842, as editor of a church periodical, Joseph Smith published the opening portion of what he considered the “Book of Abraham.” After his death portions of the collection of papyri were obtained by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1968 Egyptologists who had an interest in examining the papyri translated the same papyrus that was used by Smith in his publication.

Since that time additional Egyptologists, historians, religious scholars, and the LDS Church have come to the conclusion that none of the papyri obtained in 1967 contain the name of Abraham, or the story found in the “Book of Abraham.” This fact has put new emphasis and interpretation on the claim of Joseph Smith. The idea that Smith was able to receive impulses that the Egyptian papyri were Abraham’s record has been called into question.

The damaged roll used in preparing the “Book of Abraham” story has been dated to the second century before the Christian era. It contains the funeral instructions of its deceased owner named Hôr (also Horos or Horus), an Egyptian priest. Many regard Joseph Smith’s “Book of Abraham” as his theological speculation, question his prophetic calling, or that the English text is a revelation to Smith with little or no regard to any of the Egyptian papyri obtained in 1967.

There are three illustrations published with the “Book of Abraham” in the LDS scripture *The Pearl of Great Price*. Original papyrus of Facsimile No. 1 (written for a deceased Egyptian priest named Hôr. A papyrus fragment containing Wrapping Instructions was attached to the illustration.) Printed Facsimile No. 3 (based upon a lost illustration for Hôr). A separate printed Facsimile No. 2 for a different deceased person (includes filled in spaces; part taken from the Wrapping Instructions).

The Egyptian funerary writings do not contain the name Abraham. They do not include the story of Abraham being fastened on an altar, presenting instructions on astronomy, or recording the creation of the earth by multiple gods. In 2014 the LDS Church published the conclusion that “None of the characters on the papyrus fragments mention Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham.”