

Papyri and Writings of Abraham

Prior to 1823 a cache of mummies came into the possession of Antonio Lebolo. They were found in catacombs near Thebes in Egypt. Lebolo died at Castellamonte, Piedmont (now Italy) in February 1830. Later eleven mummies associated with Lebolo were transported to America. This appears to be the largest shipment to America up to that time. Only a few exhibits of mummies had been reported in major cities. A man named Michael H. Chandler said he secured the mummies and started exhibiting them in Philadelphia. To date there has been no independent confirmation that Chandler bought them. In April 1833 the mummies and papyri were put on display charging 25 cents for adults and 12½ cents for children to view them. During April through the first part of June they were shown at the Masonic Hall and the Philadelphia Arcade in Philadelphia. One advertisement read:

The largest collection of EGYPTIAN MUMMIES ever exhibited in this city, is now to be seen at the Masonic Hall, in the [sic; on] Ches[t]nut Street above Seventh. They were found in the vicinity of Thebes, by the celebrated traveler Antonio Lebolo and Chevalier Drovetti, General Council of France in Egypt. Some writings on Papyrus [Papyrus] with the Mummies, can also be seen, and will afford, no doubt, much satisfaction to Amateurs of Antiquities.¹

It was reported that one of the mummies was stripped of its wrappings while in New York.² Two mummies were sold to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. In December 1833 Dr. Samuel George Morton dissected the mummies before academy members and others. This is confirmation that the mummies and papyri were exhibited in Philadelphia that year. A certificate was made by a group of medical doctors:

Having examined with considerable attention and deep interest, a number of Mummies from the catacombs, near Thebes, in Egypt, and now exhibited in the Arcade, we beg leave to recommend them to the observation of the curious inquirer on subjects of a period so long elapsed; probably not less than three thousand years ago. The features of some of these Mummies are in perfect expression.—The papyrus, covered with black or red ink, or paint, in excellent preservation, are very interesting. The undersigned, unsolicited by any person connected by interest with this exhibition, have voluntarily set their names hereunto, for the simple purpose of calling the attention of the public to an interesting collection, not sufficiently known in this city.

¹ *U.S. Gazette*, April 3, 1833, Philadelphia, as cited in H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 89.

² *Ibid.*, 92.

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I concur in the above sentiments, concerning the collection of Mummies in the Philadelphia Arcade, and consider them highly deserving the attention of the curious.

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By March 1835 seven mummies had been sold before Chandler exhibited them in Cleveland, Ohio. A description of the mummies appeared in the Painesville *Telegraph*. There were three female mummies and one male mummy. Rolls of writings were with three of them. Of particular interest is the male mummy:

No. 3.—Height 4 ft. 4½.—Male, very old, say 80; arms crossing on the breast, each hand on its opposite shoulder; had a roll of writing as No. 1 & 2; superior head, it will compare in the region of the sentiments with any in our land; passions mild.⁴

It should be pointed out that there were no scholars in America at the time who could give a good translation from the Egyptian writing. Books such as the one by J. G. H. Greppo, *Essay on the Hieroglyphic System of M. Champollion, Jun.* (Boston, 1830) contained some rudimentary ideas on the topic. Jean Francois Champollion, a young French scholar, helped decipher the Rosetta Stone. But he died in 1832 leaving his important works to be published posthumously in Paris. His books *Grammaire égyptienne* (1836) and *Dictionnaire égyptienne* (1841) together with studies of other scholars led to the decipherment of the ancient Egyptian language.

Another Cleveland newspaper said the four mummies were three males and one female but this does not appear to be correct. The article described the writing found in "the arms of the old man" being in length about "10 or 12 inches, and 3 or 4 in width." Continuing it said, "The characters are the Egyptian hieroglyphics; but of what it discourses none can tell."⁵

About June 30 Michael Chandler arrived with his exhibit of mummies at Kirtland, Ohio, church headquarters. Joseph Smith Jr., prophet-president of the Church of the Latter Day Saints was shown the mummies and papyri. Chandler had a placard which told of his showcase of four mummies. This handout said the mummies "may have lived in the days of Jacob, Moses, or

³ "Egyptian Antiquities," in *Times and Seasons* 3 (May 2, 1842):774, Nauvoo, Illinois. See also *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (December 1835):235, Kirtland, Ohio.

⁴ "Mummies," *Telegraph* 13 (March 27, 1835), Painesville, Ohio. See Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 134, and Peterson, *Story of the Book of Abraham*, 117.

⁵ "A Rare Exhibition," *Cleveland Whig*, March 25, 1835, Cleveland, Ohio, as cited in Peterson, *Story of the Book of Abraham*, 112.

David" and that figures and hieroglyphic characters upon papyrus "will be exhibited with the Mummies."⁶

Joseph Smith had more interest in the papyri than in the four Egyptian mummies. Smith took the records and went to his translating room in his home. It was reported by William W. Phelps, a clerk and scribe for Joseph, that Smith considered one record to be of Joseph of Egypt and another roll as that of his great-grandfather Abraham who lived for a time in Egypt. It was revealed that these papyri were related to the biblical Joseph and Abraham. Smith showed considerable interest in obtaining these ancient writings in order to work out a translation. Chandler said that previously "he obtained in a small degree, the translation of a few characters." Joseph Smith showed to Chandler some characters said to have been copied from the Book of Mormon plates. The following certificate was presented to Smith before any purchase was made:

Kirtland, July 6th, 1835.

This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, jr. in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters, in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, shown to the most learned: And, from the information that I could learn, or meet with, I find that of Mr. Joseph Smith, jr. to correspond in the most minute matters.

(Signed)

Michael H. Chandler.

Travelling with, and proprietor of Egyptian Mummies.⁷

Joseph Smith was very much interested in purchasing the records but they had to be sold with the four Egyptian mummies. The cost was to be \$2,400, a substantial amount especially considering the expenditures for building the Kirtland Temple. According to Joseph Coe, arrangements were made to make the purchase before Chandler left Kirtland. Coe explained in 1844:

Previous t[o] closing the contra[c]t with Chandler I made ar[r]angements with S[imeon]. Andrews for to take one third part and your self & Co. one third leaving one third to be borne by myself. . . . Chandler was only an agent acting for some men in Philadelphia, the mummies when delivered to him for exhibition wer[e] valued at some 2 or 300 dollars, but they sued him and was allowed the sum which he sold them to me for viz. \$2400.⁸

As mentioned, when the papyri were shown to Joseph Smith he studied them for a short time and remarked that these records were those of the biblical Joseph in Egypt and of the patriarch Abraham. As told by Oliver Cowdery, the better preserved papyrus was represented to be that of Joseph of the Old Testament. The more damaged papyrus was represented to be that of Abraham, father of the Hebrew nation.

⁶ "Egyptian Antiquities," *Times and Seasons* 3 (May 2, 1842):774.

⁷ Oliver Cowdery to William Frye, December 22, 1835, Oliver Cowdery Letterbook, 72, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Published in *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (December 1835):235.

⁸ Coe to Joseph Smith, January 1, 1844, Joseph Smith Collection, CHL.

Joseph Smith embarked on preparing an alphabet to help him translate and present an explanation of the Abraham papyrus to the church. Smith wrote and dictated his ideas to his scribes. William W. Phelps, one of the scribes, recorded the final version in the Egyptian Alphabet to Abraham's record. Eventually this included writing on thirty-four pages in a bound ledger book. William Phelps wrote, in a letter to his wife Sally, about the records and mummies purchased from Chandler:

Last evening we received your first letter after an absence of twelve weeks and twelve hours. . . . Brother Joseph remarked that it was as easy to shed tears while reading that letter as it was when reading the History of Joseph in Egypt. ...

The last of June four Egyptian mummies were brought here; there were two papyrus rolls, besides some other ancient Egyptian writings with them. As no one could translate these writings, they were presented to President Smith. He soon knew what they were and said they, the "rolls of papyrus," contained the sacred record kept of Joseph in Pharaoh's Court in Egypt, and the teachings of Father Abraham. God has so ordered it that these mummies and writings have been brought in the Church, and the sacred writing I had just locked up in Brother Joseph's house when your letter came, so I had two consolations of good things in one day. These records of old times, when we translate and print them in a book, will make a good witness for the Book of Mormon. There is nothing secret or hidden that shall not be revealed, and they come to the Saints.⁹

Shortly after purchasing the Egyptian artifacts, Joseph Smith commenced working with Oliver Cowdery and William W. Phelps on what was described as an Egyptian "alphabet to the Book of Abraham."¹⁰ Three preliminary manuscripts contain characters copied by Smith, Phelps, and Cowdery. Some Egyptian characters were copied from the original vignette (illustration) of what became Facsimile No. 1 from the Book of Abraham. Written were Joseph Smith's explanations concerning Adam, the founding of Egypt, and astronomy. As they developed these ideas, they were arranged in a manuscript book labeled "Egyptian Alphabet." Though never completely finished, Joseph Smith worked on the Egyptian Alphabet with Phelps. Afterward Warren Parrish was scribe for a small amount of material. While this is not a real Egyptian alphabet, it is a helpful insight into the way Joseph Smith was working with the papyrus preparatory to his work on the Book of Abraham text.¹¹

The English text of the majority of the Egyptian Alphabet manuscript book contains the writings of Joseph Smith dictated to his scribe and clerk William W. Phelps. On page 1 there is a mention "In translating this character" showing that Joseph Smith was rendering his interpretation to this work. There is not perfect harmony in the short work of thirty-four handwritten pages.

⁹ William W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, July 19-20, 1835, as cited in Leah Y. Phelps, "Letters of Faith from Kirtland," *Improvement Era* 45 (August 1942):529. See also Bruce A. Van Orden, ed., "Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835-1836)," *Brigham Young University Studies* 33:3 (1993):554-56.

¹⁰ *History of the Church* 2:238, written in Manuscript History, Book B-1:597 in 1843, CHL.

¹¹ See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*. Original in CHL.

The book contains five divisions called "degrees." The following are some examples of how Joseph Smith was able to study the handwritten symbols. They were copied on the left side of the page. Next appears in English the reported sound of the word, followed by Smith's English explanation to the right. In the examples that follow, page numbers of the original "Egyptian Alphabet" are given in parentheses.

One interpretation from the third degree is the sound "Zub zool" meaning "pointing to the end of a fixed period. A road which leads to some particular place for instance: from Chaldea I travelled to dwell in the land of Canaan." (14) Another character that would have different meanings in each of the five degrees was the sound "Ho-oo hah":

1st Degree: "Crown of a princess, or unmarried queen" (21)

2nd Degree: "Corwn [Crown] of a married Queen" (17)

3rd Degree: "Crown of a widowed queen" (13)

4th Degree: "Queen who has been married the second time" (9)

5th Degree: "Queen Kah tou mun, a distinction of Royal female lineage or descent, from her whom Egypt was discovered while it was under water, who was the daughter of Ham—lineage with whom a record of the fathers was entrusted by the tradition of Ham and according to the tradition of their elders: by whom also the tradition of the art of embalming was kept" (3-4).

The story as Joseph Smith explained it told about Abram (Abraham). Abraham's father was an idolater. A priest bound Abram, attempting to have him as a human sacrifice. He was rescued by an angel. The king (pharaoh) of Egypt descended from Ham and had Canaanite blood by birth. All the Egyptians came from this lineage. A story of the discovery of Egypt by Zeptah (or Egyptus) is told also about the government of Egypt. The rights of the priesthood are explained as coming from Noah.

In either October or November 1835, Joseph Smith dictated to William W. Phelps such ideas about Father Abraham in the opening sentences of the Book of Abraham:

Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the Catacombs of Egypt

In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my fathers, I, Abraham, saw, that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence, and seeing there was greater happiness and peace and rest, for me, I sought for [the] blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same: Having been a follower of righteousness; desiring to be one who possessed great Knowledge; a greater follower of righteousness; <a possessor of greater knowledge;> a father of many nations; a prince of peace; one who keeps the commandments of God; a rightful heir; a high priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers, from the beginning of time; even from the beginning, or before the foundation of the earth, down to the present time; even the right of the first born, or the first man, who is Adam, or first father, through <the> fathers, unto me.¹²

There are three Translation Manuscripts of the Book of Abraham that represent Joseph Smith's dictation. The scribes for Joseph Smith were William W. Phelps, Frederick G. Williams,

¹² Translation Manuscript, No. 1, 1, CHL. See Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*, 147-48.

and Warren Parrish. Parrish recopied the text from his manuscript and took further dictation from Joseph Smith. The writings were represented by Smith as Abraham's. The characters on the papyrus which are on the first column immediately to the left of the original Facsimile No. 1 were used (except for the missing characters in the first three lines) in the three Translation Manuscripts. It appears that this section of the papyrus was considered the commencement of the Book of Abraham.

Line 2 has a lacuna (gap or break) in the papyrus fragment. Here restored characters were placed on the manuscript pages that are unnatural to the text. Joseph Smith represented these incorrectly restored signs as concerning the discovery of the land of Egypt and also the claim that from Ham, son of Noah, "sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land" (Abr. 1:24). It states that Pharaoh was of that lineage and therefore could not have the right to the patriarchal priesthood (Abr. 1:27).¹³ The text concerns itself with Abraham having written this record (Abr. 1:1, 12, 14, 31), including the illustration (Facsimile No. 1) written at the beginning or commencement of the record.

Joseph Smith did not understand Egyptian, so he could not actually translate from that language. The symbols inspired him with ideas. He represented the text produced as an inspired revelatory interpretation (translation). The saints knew Joseph Smith had no knowledge of Egyptian and that the contents of the papyrus would have to be revealed by God.

As indicated earlier, Smith employed scribes to help him write important records. These included the Book of Mormon, his revelations, his revision of the Bible, many of his letters, and his journal entries. While Joseph Smith's personal handwriting appears in texts produced by him, the majority of his writings were dictated to his appointed scribes. Because a document is not in Smith's hand does not mean that it was not produced by him. Several manuscripts termed as an "Egyptian Alphabet" likewise contain information that was dictated by Joseph Smith. One of these preliminary manuscripts contains his handwriting.

Joseph Smith Sr. was the first church patriarch and he was ordained to give blessings to members. The emphasis on priesthood authority was an important topic in the Latter-day Saint church in 1835. It was natural to want to trace the office of patriarch back to biblical times. Joseph Smith taught that the order of the patriarchal priesthood "was confirmed to be handed down from father to son, and rightly belongs to the literal descendants of the chosen seed, to whom the promises were made."¹⁴ A listing, including the line of this authority from Adam to Noah was reportedly "written in the book of Enoch."¹⁵

In the month of June 1835, Joseph Smith dictated a letter to his scribe William W. Phelps, wherein he stated: "We are now commencing to prepare and print the New Translation."¹⁶ Smith already revised his dictated manuscript of Genesis in his Bible revision changing some of the ages of the patriarchs prior to Noah. That the subject of patriarchs was important to him is evident from his history where it mentions that on June 21 he "preached in

¹³ This would be considered in Joseph Smith's day as the office of church patriarch. It was a hereditary office going from father to son. See LDS D&C 107:40; RLDS D&C 104:18.

¹⁴ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 269; LDS D&C 107:40; RLDS D&C 104:18.

¹⁵ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 270; LDS D&C 107:39-57; RLDS D&C 104:17-29.

¹⁶ Smith to "Dear brethren in the Lord," June 15, 1835, CHL. See Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 363.

Kirtland on the evangelical order."¹⁷ This was prior to Michael Chandler coming to Kirtland with the four Egyptian mummies and rolls of papyrus.

The Manuscript History, known also as the History of Joseph Smith, was compiled in 1843 for the year 1835. It records the following two entries for the month of July 1835:

I, with W.W. Phelps and O. Cowdery, as scribes, commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics¹⁸

The remainder of this month, 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.¹⁹

Joseph Smith did not work every day with these Egyptian records. In fact, because of the small number of pages, we can determine that only a short time period was involved. The preliminary alphabet manuscripts, as mentioned previously, are in the handwriting of Joseph Smith, William W. Phelps, and Oliver Cowdery. These three documents of four manuscript pages each contain characters written on the left side of the page with a few words defining their meaning. These manuscripts were prepared in 1835 prior to and in connection with the bound volume of the "Egyptian Alphabet." The volume contains handwriting on 34 pages with 184 blank pages.

The Egyptian Alphabet contained two sections. In the first section, the symbols copied are interpreted in connection with ancient Egypt. The second section continued that topic and then goes into a type of astronomy which was reported to have been known to the Egyptians. Joseph Smith believed that the Christian gospel had been presented to the ancient Egyptians by the Old Testament patriarch Abraham. William Phelps wrote to his wife Sally on September 11, 1835:

Nothing has been doing in translation of the Egyptian Record for a long time, and probably will not for some time to come.²⁰

Joseph Smith's journal for 1835 was commenced on September 22. The first entry was recorded by Oliver Cowdery and entries for the next two days were written by Smith. Cowdery started again recording in the journal the entries from September 25 through October 2. For nine days no work with the Egyptian records was done. Oliver Cowdery recorded the following entry in Joseph's journal:

October 1, 1835. This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr. [brothers] O. Cowdery and W.W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded.²¹

¹⁷ Manuscript History, Book B-1:595; CHL; *History of the Church* 2:234.

¹⁸ Manuscript History, Book B-1:596; *History of the Church* 2:236.

¹⁹ Manuscript History, Book B-1:597; *History of the Church* 2:238.

²⁰ W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, September 11, 1835, William Wines Phelps Papers, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University. See Van Orden, "Writing to Zion," *Brigham Young University Studies* 33 (1993):563.

Six days later on October 7 Frederick G. Williams recorded at the end of that entry, "this afternoon recommenced translating the ancient records."²² This was Smith's first opportunity to work on the alphabet or other related pages since the afternoon of October 1.

It was not until October 29 that an additional scribe, Warren Parrish, was appointed to assist Joseph Smith as his personal scribe. Parrish was also involved while Joseph Smith dictated the text to his Book of Abraham. Oliver Cowdery had departed Kirtland for the East and returned back on November 20, being gone about two weeks. There is no record that Smith did any work on the alphabet from October 8 to 31. A revelation was given on November 14 which mentioned the calling of Warren Parrish as a scribe for Joseph Smith stating in part:

behold it shall come to pass in his day that he shall see much of my ancient records, and shall know of hid[d]en things, and shall be endowed with a knowledge of hid[d]en languages, and if he desires and shall seek it at my hand, he shall be privileged with writing much of my word, as a scribe unto me for the benefit of my people, therefore this shall be his calling until I shall order it otherwise, in my wisdom and it shall be said of him in a time to come, behold Warren the Lord[']s Scribe, for the Lord[']s Seer whom he hath appointed in Israel.²³

The revelation states that Parrish should see "my ancient records." This revelation documents the call of Parrish in connection with the Egyptian records. Warren Parrish's handwriting appears on the last pages of the second part of the five degrees of the Egyptian Alphabet.

As an additional scribe to Joseph Smith, Parrish had the privilege to record entries in Smith's diary. Warren wrote entries for part of October, for the complete month of November 1835, and for December 1-18, except for part of a letter copied in the journal by Frederick G. Williams for the entry of November 16. Joseph Smith attended the School of the Prophets from November 2 to 13. A revelation was given on November 8 stating that William Phelps and John Whitmer were "under condemnation before the Lord," which lasted for a short time.²⁴ On November 17 Joseph "ex[h]ibited <the Alphabet> of the ancient records to Mr. Holmes and some others."²⁵ Smith's journal records the work on the translation of the text of the Book of Abraham in November during a four day period.

November 19: "I returned home and spent the day in translating the Egyptian records"

November 20: "we spent the day in translating, and made rapid progress"

November 24: "in the after-noon we translated some of the Egyptian records"

November 25: "spent the day in Translating"²⁶

²¹ Joseph Smith Journal, 3; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:45.

²² *Ibid.*, 2:50.

²³ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 276; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:79.

²⁴ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 275; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 2:68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:85.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:87-88, 90.

From the above journal entries and from the manuscripts of the Book of Abraham text it appears that Joseph Smith on these days dictated the final text for what is now known as Abraham 1:1 to 2:18. The first half of page 1 of the dictated manuscripts is in the handwriting of William W. Phelps. This was the opening portion of the Book of Abraham. About this time Smith completed his astronomy section of the alphabet as dictated to Parrish. On November 19-20 Smith apparently dictated the text to both Warren Parrish and Frederick G. Williams at the same sitting.

Warren Parrish then copied the text of the Book of Abraham from the manuscript he had previously written onto the manuscript page where Phelps started the beginning of the Book of Abraham text. It was probably on November 24 or 25 that the remaining few pages were dictated by Smith to Parrish. The translation manuscripts of the Book of Abraham were produced by dictation from Joseph Smith in November 1835 as recorded in his journal.

On November 26 Parrish recorded, "we spent the day in transcribing Egyptian characters from the papyrus."²⁷ This entry mentions only copying characters. Smith and Parrish were both afflicted with a cold and no work was done in connection with the dictation of the Egyptian records for November 27. The diary entry of November 28 reads, "I am considerably [considerably] recovered from my cold, & I think I shall be able in a few days to translate again, with the blessings of God."²⁸ Smith was not able to return to his work on the Book of Abraham until six years later in 1842 though he spoke to the saints concerning the work. The record of his activities in connection with his Egyptian Alphabet and the Book of Abraham had already been written by his scribes as is evident from the documents which were produced.

The Book of Abraham text contains ideas that were developed from the material in the bound Egyptian Alphabet manuscript book. This close relationship is clear since the characters are the same (including those not on the Egyptian papyrus) and many of the English explanations used are from the developed text of the fifth degree.

The first chapter of the Book of Abraham contains ideas which are already developed from the previous existing text in the dictated Egyptian Alphabet. For example, the name Abraham came from a character with the sound "Ah broam" or "Ah brah-oam" which is interpreted starting with the first degree:

1st Degree: "The Father of the faithful. The first right—The elder" (20)

2nd Degree: "a follower of righteousness" (16)

3rd Degree: "one who possesses great knowle[d]ge" (13)

4th Degree: "a follower of righteousness a possessor of greater knowledge" (9)

5th Degree: "a father of many nations a prince of peace, one who keeps the commandments of God. A patriarch a rightful heir, a high priest" (2)²⁹

The Book of Abraham contains these words:

having been myself a follower of righteousness desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, and to be a greater follower of righteousness, and to possess a greater knowledge, and to be a father of many nations, a prince of

²⁷ Ibid., 2:90.

²⁸ Ibid., 2:91; not included in *History of the Church* 2:321.

²⁹ See also in the fifth degree for "Kiah abran oam," Egyptian Alphabet, 3.

peace, and desiring to receive instructions, and to keep the commandments of God, I became a rightful heir, a High Priest, holding the right belonging to the fathers.³⁰

There was a gap in the papyrus and a character was placed on the page even though the papyrus was broken at this spot. Here Joseph Smith, besides adding a new character, continues his dictation from the explanation worked out in the Egyptian Alphabet. This character has the sound "Iota toues-Zip Zi." Here Smith dictated how Egypt was discovered:

1st Degree: "The land of Egypt" (21)

2nd Degree: "The land which was discovered under water by a woman" (18)

3rd Degree: "The woman sought to settle her sons in that land. She being the daughter of Ham" (14)

4th Degree: "The land of Egypt discovered by a woman who afterwards settl[ed] her sons in it." (10)

5th Degree: "The land of Egypt which was first discovered by a woman whter [while?] under water, and afterwards settled by her sons she being a daughter of Ham" (5)

The Book of Abraham text reads:

The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the daughter of Ham . . . When this woman discovered the land it was under water, who afterward settled her sons in it; and thus from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land.³¹

For a character with the sound "Zub Zool eh" the meaning in the fifth degree was explained:

In the days of the first patr[i]archs In the reign of Adam; in the days of the first patriarchs; in the days of Noah; in the blessings of Noah; in the blessings of the children of Noah; in the first blessings of men; in the first blessings of the church. (6)

Like the other examples, the Book of Abraham explains:

in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his [Ham's] father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood.³²

³⁰ LDS Abraham 1:2; wording is different than Translation MS No. 1, 1.

³¹ LDS Abraham 1:23-24. For using the reported curse by Noah for supporting slavery, see Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³² LDS Abraham 1:26.

While this passage may not seem clear, the theme was developed in the Egyptian Alphabet as meaning that Shem obtained the priestly blessings (the patriarchal priesthood) from under the hand of his father Noah. Joseph Smith interpreted the character with the sound "Ho-e-oo" in the fifth degree as follows:

A prince of the royal blood, a true descendant from Ham, the son of Noah, and inheritor of the Kingly blessings from under the hand of Noah, but not according to the priestly blessing, because of the transgressions of Ham, which blessings fell upon Shem from under the hand of Noah. (4)³³

The Egyptian Alphabet was a step in the process by which Joseph Smith interpreted and explained the characters for the Book of Abraham. As shown above, some of the text was first interpreted in the Alphabet. Abraham 1:26 is more understandable when it is compared to what Smith dictated to William Phelps about the blessing of Ham in the bound alphabet book.

While dictating the Book of Abraham (what is now chapter 2) Joseph Smith used the KJV Genesis as a guide and text for part of his story. The actual wording in the story suggests the use of Genesis in composing this work. This would indicate that the wording dictated was basically a copying effort of a pre-established text. At times Smith revised the KJV text to make it an autobiographical account by Abraham. The wording as printed in the KJV was used as part of the text Abraham supposedly wrote by his own hand. It is clear that Joseph Smith had the Bible open to the book of Genesis as he dictated this section of the Book of Abraham.

The contents of part of Translation Manuscripts Nos. 1, 2, and 3 (written in 1835) have as a source two verses of Genesis chapter 11. Also Manuscripts Nos. 1 and 2 used chapter 12 from KJV Genesis for the new Abraham story. These Translation Manuscripts are part of the writings of Joseph Smith, written by his scribes William W. Phelps, Frederick G. Williams, and Warren Parrish. Compare the Book of Abraham text to that recorded in Genesis:

<u>Joseph Smith's story of Abraham</u>	<u>Genesis, Old Testament</u>
Abraham 2:1-2	Genesis 11:28-29
Abraham 2:3	Genesis 12:1
Abraham 2:9	Genesis 12:2
Abraham 2:11	Genesis 12:3
Abraham 2:14-15, 18	Genesis 12:4-6

The text for Abraham 2:9, 11, 14-15, 18 is found only in Translation Manuscript No. 1 (pages 8-10) written from Joseph Smith's dictation by Warren Parrish. The actual Egyptian

³³ The 1830 manuscript for the revised Genesis 9:26 (KJV) reads, "And he [Noah] said blessed be the Lord God of Shem and Canaan shall be his servant and a vail of darkness shall cover him that he shall be known among all men" (Old Testament Manuscript 1, 25, CCLA). See also *Messenger and Advocate* 2 (April 1836):290; in *The Essential Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 87.

characters used to represent the text of the Book of Abraham when translated into English by Egyptologists does not correspond to the Abraham/Genesis text or subject matter.³⁴

From close examination, it is correct that Egyptian documents were once in the hands of Joseph Smith. Smith possessed no knowledge of the Egyptian language at any period of time while he was studying and producing his Egyptian papers. Joseph Smith was human; however, considering his claim to correctly translate Egyptian into English, it offers no more than a pretended translation from the Egyptian.

These primary historical documents are important because they show that the scribes were taking dictation from Joseph Smith. The Egyptian papers, including the Egyptian Alphabet, contain the record of Joseph Smith's efforts to work with ancient documents. One of the manuscripts of the "Egyptian alphabet" contains Joseph Smith's handwriting, together with the handwriting of his scribe Oliver Cowdery. These 1835 documents help us understand how Smith dictated the text of the Book of Mormon six years earlier. The Egyptian Alphabet and related papers are preserved manuscript texts that show how Joseph Smith produced the ideas prior to and in connection with the Book of Abraham. These records have serious implications for the dictation process of the text of the Book of Mormon.

In his work on the Book of Mormon, before Joseph Smith commenced to dictate, he reportedly transcribed an Egyptian alphabet from the record of the Book of Mormon. Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Smith's mother, described the importance of her son copying characters of an alphabet to show to the learned. The characters were reportedly in the Egyptian language and were to be shown to those who professed knowledge in languages other than English. Lucy wrote in her history (dictated in 1845), the following concerning the year 1827:

It soon became necessary to take some measures to accomplish the translation of the record into English but he [Joseph Smith] was instructed to take off a fac simile of the ~~alphabet Egyptian~~ characters <composing the alphabet which were called reformed egyptian> Alphabetically and send them to all the learned men that he could find and ask them for the translation of the same.³⁵

Lucy continued her narrative concerning the Egyptian alphabet:

Joseph started [in] Dec[ember]. for Penn[sylvania] it was agreed that Martin Har[r]is should follow him as soon as he <Joseph> should have sufficient time to transcribe the Egyptian alphabet which Mr. Harris was to take to the east and through the country in every direction to all who professed linguists to give them an oportunity [opportunity] of showing their talents.³⁶

³⁴ See studies by Robert K. Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33 (Winter 2000):97-119; Ritner, "'The Breathing Permit of Hôr' among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62 (July 2003):161-80; and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, 2002). See chapter 21 for additional information when the Book of Abraham was published in 1842.

³⁵ Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 393.

³⁶ Lucy Mack Smith, Manuscript Draft. See Anderson, *Lucy's Book*, 402.

That the characters were to be from an alphabet was clear when Lucy Smith addressed the church conference in October 1845. Lucy said that she had been called "upon by Joseph to go & tell Martin Harris & family that he [Joseph] had got the Plates & he wanted him [Martin] to take an a[l]phabet of the Characters & carry them to the learned men to decypher."³⁷

Joseph Smith's father understood that the last recorded plate of the Book of Mormon contained the alphabet as he explained to Fayette Lapham about 1830: "The remaining pages [of the gold plates] were closely written over in characters of some unknown tongue, the last containing the alphabet of this unknown language."³⁸

One of the learned persons whom Martin Harris visited in 1828 was Professor Charles Anthon of New York City. Harris took with him the characters which Joseph Smith had transcribed as a sample of what was contained on the record. In two of his three letters recalling this incident Professor Anthon wrote about the sheet of paper which contained the characters of Smith's alphabet. The first extract is from Anthon's 1834 letter and the second one was written in 1841:

This paper was in fact a singular scrawl. It consisted of all kinds of crooked characters disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets.³⁹

The import of what I wrote was, as far as I can now recollect, simply this, that the marks in the paper appeared to be merely an imitation of various alphabetic characters, and had in my opinion no meaning at all connected with them.⁴⁰

These references indicate that the first thing Joseph Smith did was to prepare an alphabet of the Book of Mormon. Professor Anthon commented that the characters appeared to be various alphabetical characters.

Joseph Smith's work on his Book of Abraham Egyptian alphabet, seven years later, shows that he could not understand or interpret documents written anciently. Examinations done by Egyptologists show that Smith had not the slightest idea what the Egyptian characters meant relating to names, places, and subject matter. These manuscript pages clearly show that Joseph Smith pretended to translate Egyptian records. The claim that they had been written by the biblical Abraham is without a solid foundation.

The manuscript pages show that Smith used the Bible as he did when he dictated the Book of Mormon text. In April 1829 Joseph Smith received a revelation for his scribe Oliver Cowdery. Cowdery evidently tried to dictate some words but could not. Smith explained in the revelation:

³⁷ Norton Jacob, Journal, October 8, 1845, CHL. See Ronald O. Barney, *The Mormon Vanguard Brigade of 1847: Norton Jacob's Record* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005), 53.

³⁸ "The Mormons," *Historical Magazine* 7 (May 1870):307. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 1:462-63.

³⁹ Charles Anthon to Eber D. Howe, February 17, 1834, published in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 271; in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:380.

⁴⁰ Anthon to Rev. T. W. Coit, April 3, 1841, *The Church Record* 1 (1841):231; in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* 4:384-85.

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.⁴¹

If the above is a correct description of how Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon text, then it is an insight into the process of Joseph Smith's revelations, restoration of biblical texts, the Egyptian Alphabet, and the Book of Abraham. Whatever came into the mind of Smith and that he dictated was considered to be inspired. John Whitmer, who had been another scribe when Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon and later some of his revision of the Bible, wrote in his history:

Joseph the Seer saw these Record[s] and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records, which gave an account of our forefathers, ~~even abraham~~ Much of which was written by Joseph of Egypt who was sold by his brethren Which when all translated will be a pleasing history and of great value to the saints.⁴²

In 1829 when Joseph Smith dictated portions of the text of the Book of Mormon, he read from the common Bible of the day, the King James Version. This became part of the process by which he composed the Book of Mormon. Passages in the Book of Mormon, when compared with the KJV, show that the Bible was used when it was being dictated to and recorded by a scribe.

Only part of the original 1829 manuscript of the Book of Mormon pages of the dictated text is extant. We do not have the gold plates to determine the accuracy of Joseph Smith's dictation from the Egyptian. But we do have the Egyptian papyri, Joseph Smith's Egyptian Alphabet, and the Book of Abraham Translation Manuscripts. These later manuscripts together with Joseph Smith's journal and knowing when his scribes worked with him all place the dictation process in the last half of 1835. With this historical background, we have enough information to examine Joseph Smith's competence with the ancient Egyptian language.

None of Joseph Smith's scribes or witnesses to the plates of the Book of Mormon saw Joseph Smith consult the gold plates when he dictated the text. Just as no one said they saw Joseph Smith use the Bible when he dictated the Book of Mormon, no one said they saw him use the Bible as he dictated part of the text of the Book of Abraham. Warren Parrish described the time when he was taking dictation from Joseph:

I have set [sic] by his [Joseph Smith's] side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven.⁴³

⁴¹ Marquardt, *Joseph Smith Revelations*, 37; LDS D&C 9:8-9; RLDS D&C 9:3.

⁴² Westergren, *From Historian to Dissident*, 167.

⁴³ Parrish to the Editor, February 5, 1838, *Painesville Republican* 2 (February 15, 1838).

This clearly indicates that Parrish sat by Smith's side, and took dictation from him as Smith interpreted the Egyptian writing by direct inspiration. This is the same way that Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon text in 1829. It appears that the same method was used for both the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham. By making a transcript of an alphabet to the Egyptian language for these records it is clear that both books were to be in a form of ancient Egyptian. The manuscripts of the Book of Abraham and related papers serve as a good model to know how well Joseph Smith understood and interpreted ancient Egyptian characters.

The clear implication of a study of the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers is that Joseph Smith had no knowledge of the ancient Egyptian language. Smith did not know how to translate ancient documents. If as John Whitmer and Warren Parrish suggests, Joseph Smith received a revelation regarding the contents of the Egyptian records, then the revelation gave the wrong meaning. It does not matter how Joseph Smith arrived at his interpretation of Egyptian characters, his reading of the characters is at variance with the ancient text and is incorrect. The real value of the Egyptian Alphabet and the Translation Manuscripts of the Book of Abraham is that they show us that Joseph Smith cannot get the interpretation of the Egyptian right through either linguistic study or inspiration.

This raises the question of how reliable his work on the Book of Mormon would be. The Book of Mormon is represented to have been written by the hand of a man named Mormon in a form of Egyptian. Without a working knowledge of the Egyptian language, Joseph Smith would have others believe that he could make a correct interpretation of an ancient text. Whatever would come from his mouth as he dictated the Book of Mormon, Egyptian Alphabet, and Book of Abraham was considered inspired.

All indications are that since Smith did not really translate from an ancient language in his work on the Book of Abraham, he could not be trusted in his earlier dictation, when he reportedly had a record written in the same basic language. The material he produced indicates that he had a vivid and creative imagination as the dictated text to his religious documents shows. David P. Wright, associate professor of Bible and Ancient Near East at Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, wrote concerning Joseph Smith's works including the Book of Abraham:

This work is basically a reworking of the English biblical text (some Hebrew learning is exhibited as well, but not much). Consequently, in all his work [the Book of Mormon, the Joseph Smith Revision of the Bible, and the Book of Abraham] there is a consistency in approach and method: he is not working in any of them with ancient languages (except for the bit of Hebrew in Abraham) and in all of them there is attention (to a greater or lesser degree) to revising or responding to the KJV. (This common character of all the works shows, by the way, that Smith, and not some other nineteenth-century personage, is the author of the Book of Mormon.)⁴⁴

Returning from a church mission on November 25, 1836, Wilford Woodruff went to the House of the Lord (Kirtland Temple) and viewed the records and mummies. He wrote in his

⁴⁴ David P. Wright, "In Plain Terms that We May Understand': Joseph Smith's Transformation of Hebrews in Alma 12-13," in Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 1993), 211.

journal: "We [Abram O. Smoot and Woodruff] then visited the upper rooms & there viewed four Egyptian Mum[m]ies & also the Book of Abram [Abraham] Written by his own hand & not ownly hieroglyphicks but also many figures that this precious treasure Contains are Calculated to make a lasting impression upon the mind which is not to be erased."⁴⁵ Smoot recorded in his personal journal for the same day: "we had the privilege of beholding the great wonders of Egypt, the mummies that were taken from the Calicomes [Catacombs] in Egypt; these were the greatest wonders I ever saw. I had also a view of the records that came with them, the Book of Abraham which was written by his own hand in Hyrogliphics [sic]."⁴⁶

William S. West of Braceville, Ohio, came to Kirtland to see what he could learn firsthand about the Mormons. After paying twenty-five cents to see the temple, Egyptian mummies, and papyrus records, his curiosity was so much excited that he went again the next day to examine them once more. The following is his account:

They say that the mummies were Egyptian, but the records are those of Abraham and Joseph These records were torn by being taken from the roll of embalming salve which contained them, and some parts entirely lost, but Smith is to translate the whole by divine inspiration, and that which is lost, like Nebuchadnezzar's dream, can be interpreted as well as that which is preserved; and a larger volume than the Bible will be required to contain them. Is it possible that a record written by Abraham, and another by Joseph, containing the most important revelation that God ever gave to man, should be entirely lost by the tenacious Israelites, and preserved by the unbelieving Egyptians, and by them embalmed and deposited in the catacombs with an Egyptian priest[?] . . . I venture to say no, it is not possible. It is more likely that the records are those of the Egyptians.⁴⁷

The portion of the Book of Abraham interpreted in 1835 was published in March 1842 at Nauvoo, Illinois.⁴⁸ Joseph Smith dictated additional information concerning Abraham and included three illustrations from the Book of Abraham with its publication. Chapter 21 will contain a discussion of the facsimiles and text.

⁴⁵ Wilford Woodruff, Journal, November 25, 1836, CHL; Kenney, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal* 1:107.

⁴⁶ Abram O. Smoot, Journal, November 25, 1836, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

⁴⁷ Wm. S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Rise, Progress and Pretensions of the Mormons* (1837), 5-6.

⁴⁸ *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842):704-706, Joseph Smith editor.