

## **Did Joseph Smith Claim His Abraham Papyrus Was an Autograph?**

By Luke P. Wilson

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“The Lost Book of Abraham” (LBOA) is a documentary film that examines the history of the Book of Abraham controversy and includes interviews with Mormon, Christian and secular scholars. It was produced by the Institute for Religious Research (IRR), a non-denominational Christian foundation.

LBOA is sharply criticized in an article by Professor Michael D. Rhodes of Brigham Young University and its adjunct, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (formerly, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies – FARMS). Rhodes’ critique, “A Response to the Video, ‘The Lost Book of Abraham,’” is available online at <http://home.comcast.net/~michael.rhodes/TheLostBookofAbraham.pdf>.

The present article is a reply to one of Rhodes’ major arguments, that Joseph Smith did not claim the ancient Egyptian scroll from which he derived the Book of Abraham was an autograph. *Rhodes and other defenders of the Book of Abraham contend that the scroll Joseph Smith translated (parts of which have survived – Papyri Joseph Smith I-XI-X) could have been a much later copy of the manuscript originally penned by Abraham, which would account for the fact that it dates to only the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. [p. 1].*

While LBOA speaks of Joseph Smith claiming to translate a record authored by Abraham “nearly 4,000 years” ago, time constraints did not allow examination of the question of whether the scroll itself (in contrast to the story on the scroll) was an Abraham autograph. However, there is in fact compelling evidence to show that Joseph purported that the scroll he identified as a lost record of Abraham, and from which he claimed to translate the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price, was an Abraham autograph (early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.). For the sake of brevity, the summary here is limited to testimony of Joseph Smith himself, and four of his Mormon contemporaries, Wilford Woodruff, Parley P. Pratt, W. W. Phelps, and William I. Appleby.

Statements in the diary of Wilford Woodruff (a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, and later, the fourth President of the LDS Church) are a good place to begin. He relates the following in his diary for February 19, 1842:

The Lord is Blessing Joseph with Power to reveal mysteries of the kingdom of God; to translate through the urim and Thummim Ancient **records & Hyeroglyphics as old as Abraham** or Adam .... Joseph the Seer has presented us some of the Book of Abraham which was **written by his own hand but hid from the knowledge of man for the last four thousand years ...**<sup>1</sup>

Notice that it was Woodruff's understanding that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham from Egyptian characters on one of his papyrus scrolls, and that this scroll was an Abraham autograph that had been out of circulation from the time of its composition until Joseph acquired it.

While Woodruff does not tell us how he came to this understanding, his diary relates two episodes that provide important clues. In an 1836 entry, he describes viewing Joseph Smith's Egyptian papyri, then housed in an upper room of the Kirtland temple. His guide on this occasion was none other than Warren Parrish, one of Joseph Smith's three scribes for the Book of Abraham:

Elder [Abraham] Smoot & myself visited each apartment [of the Kirtland temple] accompanied by Elder [Warren] Parrish .... we then visited the upper rooms & there viewed four Egyptian Mummies & also the Book of Abram Written by his own hand & not only the 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Staker, ed., *Waiting for World's End: The Diaries of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), pp. 50-51. Emphasis added, but spelling and capitalization from the original.

<sup>2</sup> Staker, p. 8, spelling and punctuation from the original. Woodruff mentions earlier in this diary entry that he set out for Kirtland, Ohio on November 25, 1836 from an undisclosed but apparently nearby location, as Staker indicates he arrived in Kirtland on this same date (p. xxiv).

We cannot be certain, but it is quite possible that Woodruff was actually in the company of Joseph Smith on this occasion of viewing the Egyptian papyri in the Kirtland temple; Woodruff certainly met him on this same day, for the description in his diary includes this statement: "... I spent one of the happiest days of my life at this time in visiting Kirtland & the House of the Lord & the President & Elders of the Church. I was truly edified to again strike hands with President Joseph Smith Jr. ..." (p. 8).

Were Woodruff's views on the Book of Abraham informed by Warren Parrish? Woodruff does not say, but this is certainly a reasonable inference. It was on or about November 25, 1836 when he viewed the papyri with Parrish – the date Woodruff arrived back in Kirtland, after a nearly two year absence.<sup>3</sup> Parrish had commenced working as Joseph Smith's scribe for the Book of Abraham and other matters 13 months earlier, in October 1835. Some of the "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" and Book of Abraham manuscripts that date from this period are in Parrish's handwriting.<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with statements Parrish made in a letter to the editor published in a February 1838 Ohio newspaper. He described his close working relationship with Joseph Smith, and his intimate knowledge of Joseph's claims concerning the Abraham papyrus and his putative translation of it:

I have been Smith's private Secretary, called to fill this high and responsible station by revelation[,] which I wrote myself as it drop[p]ed from the lips of the Prophet .... I have kept his Journal, and like Baruch the ancient scribe, have had the honor of writing the History of one of the Prophets .... *I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven.*<sup>5</sup>

Looking at these circumstances, it is difficult to imagine that Parrish would *not* have commented to Woodruff on what he, Parrish, knew about Joseph Smith's views on the Book of Abraham and the putative Abraham papyrus.

Returning to Woodruff's February 19, 1842 diary entry, he also tells of being appointed by the Quorum of the Twelve (of which he was himself a member) to serve in a managing role at the *Times and Seasons* printing office.<sup>6</sup> There

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<sup>3</sup> See Staker's chronology, p. xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> "Thursday, [October] 29 [1835]. – Brother Warren Parrish commenced writing for me, at fifteen dollars per month." B. H. Roberts, ed., *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News, 1948), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., revised, vol. 2, p. 293. Edward H. Ashment puts the *terminus ad quem* for Parrish's scribal service at July 1837, in which month he was accused of embezzling money from the Kirtland Safety Society – "Reducing Dissonance: The Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1990), p. 224.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to the editor in the *Painesville [Ohio] Republican* of February 15, 1838. Italics added, but spelling and capitalization in the original. The part of the second statement that mentions penning Joseph Smith's translation of Egyptian hieroglyphics is also included in a letter to the editor in *Zion's Watchman*, March 24, 1838.

<sup>6</sup> *History of the Church* (vol. 4, p. 513) for February 3, 1842 includes the statement that "Elder [Wilford] Woodruff took the superintendence of the printing office, and Elder [John] Taylor the editorial department of the *Times and Seasons* ..." The printing office shared the same building with the *Times and Seasons*.

Woodruff was personally involved in preparing the first installment of the Book of Abraham for publication:

After consulting upon the subject the quorum appointed Elders J. Taylor & W Woodruff of the Twelve to Edit the Times & Seasons & take charge of the whole establishment under the direction of Joseph the Seer. Accordingly, I left my station at the Nauvoo provision store & commenced this day labor for the church in the printing establishment.

I have had the privilege this day of assisting in setting the *TIPE* for printing the first peace of the *BOOK OF ABRAHAM* that is to be presented to the inhabitants of the *EARTH* in the *LAST DAYS*.<sup>7</sup>

In his journal Joseph Smith mentions visiting the *Times and Seasons* printing office to oversee preparation of the Book of Abraham for publication. Thus, Woodruff's work would almost surely have brought him into personal contact with Joseph in the specific context of the Book of Abraham project. The first installment of the Book of Abraham that Woodruff helped prepare was published in the *Times and Seasons* of March 1, 1842, just 10 days after his February 19 diary entry cited above.

To summarize the circumstances and substance of Woodruff's testimony:

- He personally viewed the Joseph Smith papyri.
- His guide on the occasion was Warren Parrish, who, as one of Joseph Smith's three scribes for the Book of Abraham, would have had a firsthand knowledge of the prophet's views regarding the Book of Abraham.
- He was a competent and trusted associate of Joseph Smith, and was personally involved in preparing the Book of Abraham for publication.
- It was Woodruff's understanding that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham from the Egyptian characters on one of his papyrus scrolls, and that this scroll was an Abraham autograph.
- His diary entries were contemporary with the experiences being reported, so that the information would have been fresh in his memory when he recorded it.

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<sup>7</sup> Staker, p. 51. Italics added, but spelling, capitalization, and punctuation from the original.

Given these factors, the testimony of Wilford Woodruff should be viewed as important evidence for understanding Joseph Smith's own testimony, to which we now turn.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to a quip by Mormon scholar-apologist John Gee, we do not need to resort to "mind reading"<sup>9</sup> to know what the Mormon prophet himself believed about the papyrus scroll from which he derived the Book of Abraham. A November 13, 1843 letter of Joseph to non-Mormon James Arlington Bennett reveals important details of what the Mormon prophet believed about his putative Abraham papyrus.<sup>10</sup> The letter is somewhat rambling and loquacious in nature, but includes this relevant statement:

... the art of embalming human bodies and preserving them in the catacombs of Egypt, whereby men, women, and children, as mummies, after a lapse of *near 3,500 years* come forth among the living, and although dead, the papyrus *which has lived in their bosoms, unharmed*, speaks for them, in language like the sound of an earthquake ...<sup>11</sup>

While Joseph does not indicate explicitly in this letter that he is referring to his Abraham scroll, this is implicit in, and may be deduced from, three details in the statement.<sup>12</sup>

First, Joseph assigned a *specific age* – "near[ly] 3500 years" old – to the papyrus he had in mind, which does not fit a reference to ancient papyri *in general*.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In his extensive article on 19th century testimony about the Joseph Smith papyri, John Gee unaccountably ignores these Wilford Woodruff diary entries - see John [Laurence] Gee, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidences of the Joseph Smith Papyri," in Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, et al, *The Disciples as Witness*, (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), pp. 175-217.

<sup>9</sup> Gee, "Eyewitness ...", p. 192.

<sup>10</sup> *Voice of Truth*, p. 11; also found in *Times and Season*, November 1, 1843, p. 373. Note that the date of the letter is 6 months after publication of the final installment of the Book of Abraham. Charles M. Larson discusses some aspects of this letter in his book, *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Institute for Religious Research, 1992), pp. 126-27.

<sup>11</sup> The text of the letter is published in the *History of the Church*, 6:73-78.

<sup>12</sup> Contra the view of Ben McGuire of the independent, pro-Mormon Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), who passes off Joseph Smith's papyrus reference in the letter to Bennett: "I read into Joseph's remarks the idea that he was referring to buried papyri in general, and not specifically to those in his possession." See his article, "Responding to Errors in an Anti-Mormon Film," [www.fairlds.org](http://www.fairlds.org).

<sup>13</sup> It must be acknowledged that there is some ambiguity in Joseph's use of the singular, "papyrus" (in contrast to the plural, "papyri"). Did he mean a particular papyrus scroll, or the paper-like material from which scrolls were made? The former is a more natural way to

Second, Joseph used a very unusual phrase to describe the papyrus to which he was referring: “the papyrus which has *lived unharmed in their bosoms.*” This very strange detail matches precisely what scholars now know about how the ancient Egyptians used the particular type of burial document from which Joseph Smith derived Facsimiles 1 and 3. It is called a Book of Breathings, and it was placed on the breast of the corpse and enfolded in the mummy wrappings – the directions are actually prescribed in the text of the document.<sup>14</sup> *Joseph Smith could only have known of this ancient, culture-specific detail through his experience of finding the Hor Book of Breathings scroll when he unwrapped one of the mummies he acquired in 1835.*<sup>15</sup>

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read the statement, but is somewhat awkward in light of the reference to the papyrus residing in the “bosoms” (plural) of multiple mummies. The resolution of this ambiguity may lie in testimony of Parley P. Pratt, William I. Appleby, William W. Phelps, and others, which suggests that Joseph Smith believed the Book of Abraham had been begun by Abraham, but completed by his great grandson Joseph, apparently on a second scroll.

<sup>14</sup> Here is Rhodes’ translation of these directions from Papyrus Joseph Smith I: “The Document of Breathing which <Isis> made shall (also) be buried, which is written on both the inside and outside of it, (*wrapped*) in royal linen, being placed <under> his left arm near his heart ...” Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Studies and Mormon Research-Brigham Young University, 2002) p. 27. Italics added. See also, Robert K. Ritner, “The Book of Breathings of Hôr’ Among the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 62 no. 3 (2003), pp. 166-67.

<sup>15</sup> There are many references to this detail from contemporary eyewitnesses of Joseph’s papyri, including his widow. When, 12 years after her late husband’s death, Emma Smith Bidamon sold his Egyptian antiquities, she alluded to the peculiar details of the discovery of the Abraham scroll: “they [papyri] were highly prized by Mr. Smith on account of the importance attached to the *record which were [sic] accidentally [sic] found enclosed in the breast of one of the mummies.*” The certificate of sale dated May 26 [18]56 and signed by L[ewis]. C. Bidamon, Emma [Smith] Bidamon, and Joseph Smith [III]. This certificate was in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the time that it transferred the Joseph Smith Papyri to the LDS Church in November 1967. Transcript and photograph of the original document in the files of the Institute for Religious Research. Italics added, but spelling and punctuation from the original. See Appendix C for the complete text of the certificate of sale.

Gee says that it was Emma Smith’s second husband, Lewis C. Bidamon, who sold the Joseph Smith Egyptian antiquities to Abel Combs (“Eyewitness ...”, p. 177). While it is true that Lewis Bidamon was a co-signer of the certificate of sale, only Emma was in a position to certify its factual claims and it was clearly she who brought ownership of the papyri into her marriage to Bidamon. Does Dr. Gee have reason to believe Emma objected to the sale of the Joseph Smith Papyri? Or perhaps he is arguing a technicality – that under the laws of that day, at the time of marriage, a woman’s property came under the legal control of the husband? In any case, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Gee is “spinning” the story to draw attention away from the evidence that Joseph Smith’s widow, at this point in her life, no longer put much stock in her late husband’s story that one of the papyri was a treasured lost scripture, since she was willing to sell the materials to someone outside the faith. I do note that in another of his publications (*A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000, p. 9), Gee accurately reports that it was Emma (Smith) Bidamon, Lewis C. Bidamon, and Emma’s son Joseph Smith (III) who sold the papyri.

Third, just two paragraphs earlier in this same letter, Joseph quoted a series of putatively Egyptian words which equate almost exactly with the "Explanation" printed under Facsimile 2 (Figs. 1,5) in the Book of Abraham: "Jah-oh-eh, Enish-go-on-dosh, Flo-ees-Flos-is-is." This same series of words also appears in the "Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language."<sup>16</sup> *This correspondence is far too unusual, exact and detailed to be incidental. It points to the Book of Abraham as the context for Joseph Smith's comment about a nearly 3,500-year-old papyrus. From these internal evidences it is virtually certain that he was referring to his putative Abraham scroll.*

At this point further consideration should be given to Joseph Smith's description of the papyrus as having "*lived unharmed* in their bosoms." Since the context establishes that Joseph was referring to his Abraham scroll, *it follows from his description of it as having lain "unharmed" within the folds of the mummy wrappings for nearly 3,500 years, that he believed it to be an autograph, or at least to date to the proximate time of Abraham (early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.). Thus, Joseph Smith's testimony rules out the argument of Rhodes-Gee-Nibley to account for the late date of the Hor Book of Breathings – that it was a copy made many centuries later.*

It has been noted that Joseph Smith gave a specific age for the papyrus he mentioned in his letter to James Arlington Bennett – "nearly 3500 years" old. How did Joseph arrive at this particular figure and what is its significance? A published statement of Parley P. Pratt (a member at the time of the Quorum of the Twelve, and thus, one of Joseph Smith's trusted associates),<sup>17</sup> provides a reasonable explanation for the derivation and significance of this detail. Writing in the July 1842 *Millennial Star*, Pratt gave this description of the time and circumstances under which the Abraham papyrus was originally produced:

The record ... proves to be a record written partly by the father of the faithful, Abraham, and *finished by Joseph in Egypt. After his death*, it is supposed they were preserved in the family of the Pharaohs and afterwards hid up with the embalmed body of the female with whom they were found.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> "Alphabet and Grammar of the Egyptian Language," pp. 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Salt Lake City, 1873, 11<sup>th</sup> printing, Deseret Book Co., 1975), p. 119. While Pratt was away from Kirtland on a mission in July 1835 when Joseph Smith acquired the Egyptian papyri from Michael Chandler, he returned to Kirtland in October 1835 and was there until April 1836, when he left on a mission to Canada (p. 131).

<sup>18</sup> *Millennial Star*, July, 1842, p. 47. Pratt later describes the Book of Abraham as, "...burst[ing] upon the world *after a silence of three or four thousand years*, during which it has slumbered *in the bosom of the dead*, and been sealed up in the sacred archives of Egypt's mouldering ruins ..." – *Millennial Star*, August, 1842, p. 70, italics added. It is

Pratt's description of the Book of Abraham as having been finished by Abraham's great grandson Joseph, receives support and more explicit connection to Joseph Smith by two of the prophet's contemporaries in the Mormon community, W[illiam]. W[ines]. Phelps, and William I. Appleby.

In a letter of July 19-20, 1835, just three weeks after Joseph Smith acquired the Egyptian papyri, Phelps wrote to his wife that there were, "two papyrus rolls beside some other ancient Egyptian writings with them." He attributed to Joseph Smith this description of the contents of the papyri that is consistent with that of Pratt:

... he [Joseph Smith] soon knew what they were and said they, the rolls of papyrus, contained *the sacred record of Joseph in Pharaoh's court in Egypt, and the teachings of Father Abraham.*<sup>19</sup>

Phelps was living in the home of Joseph and Emma Smith when he wrote this letter,<sup>20</sup> and about two weeks earlier had commenced service (along with Oliver Cowdery) as Joseph's scribe for the translation of the Egyptian papyri.<sup>21</sup> Thus, he was in a unique position to have the firsthand knowledge of Joseph's views implied in the above statement.

In the letter to his wife, Phelps also mentioned that the Egyptian papyri were in the house as he wrote ("... the sacred writing I had just locked up in

notable that Pratt's figure of "three or four thousand years" corresponds closely with Joseph Smith's reference to papyri dating back "nearly 3,500 years."

Pratt's reference to the Abraham scroll being "preserved in the family of the Pharaohs" may reflect the views of Joseph Smith. Emma Smith Bidamon's certificate of sale for her late husband's Egyptian antiquities includes a similar idea: "these Mummies [sic] were found to be be the family of Pharo [sic] King of Egypt."

The statement about the book being "hid with the embalmed body of the female with whom they were found," conflicts with the testimony of William Appleby presented later in this paper; he says the Abraham scroll was embalmed with the male mummy. However, Appleby gives clear descriptions of both the Hor Book of Breathing scroll and the Ta-Shirt-min (PJS II-IV-VI-V-VII-VIII-IX, see composite photo in Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus*, p. 34, reverse side of color foldout panel); it seems likely that he is conflating the Book of Abraham and Book of Joseph scrolls.

<sup>19</sup> The text of Phelps's letter is reproduced in H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1995), p. 4. See Appendix A for the full text of the letter.

<sup>20</sup> W. D. Bowden, "The Versatile W. W. Phelps," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958, p. 62, as cited by Edward H. Ashment, "Reducing Dissonance: The Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books 1990), p. 232, n. 17.

<sup>21</sup> The *History of the Church* includes this entry for July 5, 1835, "... with W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery as scribes, I commenced translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc. ..."

Joseph's house when your letter came."), and he expressed this view of their significance: "when we translate and print them in a book, [they] will make a good witness for the Book of Mormon." It seems very unlikely that Phelps was describing his own grand plans for the Egyptian papyri. Rather, the statement almost certainly reflects ideas Joseph Smith had articulated to Phelps, his house guest and scribe for the Book of Abraham. (See Appendix A for full text of Phelps's letter.)

William Appleby visited Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois on May 5, 1841 (10 months before serialized publication of the Book of Abraham commenced in *Times and Seasons*). His journal includes a detailed description of Joseph's Egyptian papyri, from which it is possible to conclude that Appleby saw the originals from which all three Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham were copied. In the following passage from Appleby's journal, I have highlighted in *italic his own observations* that can be correlated to the surviving papyri; I have highlighted in **bold details that reflect Joseph Smith's interpretations** of Facsimiles 1, 2 and 3, which he evidently related to Appleby:

To day I paid Br Joseph a visit .... Saw the *Rolls* of Papyrus and the writings thereon, **taken from off the bosom of the Male Mummy**, having some of the **writings of ancient Abraham and of Joseph** that was sold into Egypt. The writings are **chiefly in the Egyptian language, with the exception of a little Hebrew**. I believe they give a description of some of the scenes in Ancient Egypt, of their worship, their Idol gods, etc. The writings are beautiful and plain, composed of *red, and black inks*. There is a perceptible difference, between the writings. *Joseph, appears to have been the best scribe*. There are also *representations of men, beasts, Birds, Idols and oxen attached to a kind of plough, a female guiding it. Also the serpent when he beguiled Eve. He appears with two legs, erect in form and appearance of man. But his head in the form, and representing the Serpent, with his forked tongue extended*. There are likewise **representations of an Altar erected, with a man bound and laid thereon, and a Priest with a knife in his hand, standing at the foot, with a dove over the person bound on the Altar with several Idol gods standing around it. A Celestial globe with the planet Kolob of first creation of the supreme Being – a planet of light, - which planet – makes a revolution once in a thousand years, -** Also the Lord revealing the Grand key words of the Holy Priesthood, to Adam in the garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and to all whom the Priesthood was revealed.

**Abraham also in the Court of Pharaoh sitting upon the King's throne reasoning upon Astronomy, with a crown on his head, representing the Priesthood as emblematical of the grand Presidency in Heaven, with the scepter of Justice and Judgment in his hand. And King Pharaoh, standing behind him, together with a Prince – a principal waiter, and a black slave of the King.** A genealogy of the Mummies, and the Epitaphs and their deaths, etc., etc., are also distinctly represented on **the Papyrus which is called the "Book of Abraham."**

*The Male mummy was one of the Ancient Pharaohs of Egypt, a Priest, as he is embalmed with his tongue extended, representing a speaker: The females were his wife and two daughters, as a part of the writing has been translated, and informs us, who they were, also whose writing it is, and when those mummies were embalmed, which is nearly four thousand years ago.*<sup>22</sup>

Of immediate relevance to the question of whether Joseph believed his putative Abraham scroll was an autograph are Appleby's comments that it "was taken from off the bosom of the Male<sup>23</sup> Mummy" and that the mummies were embalmed "nearly four thousand years ago." These details are consistent with the papyrus reference in Joseph Smith's 1843 letter to James Arlington Bennett, as well as to the testimony of Woodruff and Pratt that has already been considered.

Appleby does not explicitly attribute the details of his account to Joseph. However, four aspects of Appleby's account indicate he was articulating things he learned from the prophet: (1) his comments issue from a personal visit with Joseph, (2) he personally viewed the Egyptian papyri and gave a detailed description of them, (3) he recounted Joseph's interpretations of all three vignettes on which the Facsimiles were based, nearly a year before

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<sup>22</sup> William I. Appleby Journal, ms. 1401 1, pp. 71-72, LDS Church Archives, courtesy of H. Michael Marquardt, see Appendix B for a lengthier citation. John Gee cites portions of the Appleby account, but leaves off important details that are detrimental to his view that Joseph Smith did not purport that his Abraham scroll was an autograph – see "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence," pp. 183-184.

<sup>23</sup> This detail conflicts with Pratt's testimony, cited earlier, which speaks of the Abraham scroll as being embalmed with a female mummy. This conflict may be explained as a confusion or a conflation of two scrolls – the Book of Abraham (Hor Book of Breathing scroll = PJS I-XI-X + Facsimile 3 original, embalmed with the single male mummy) and the Book of Joseph (Book of the Dead of Ta-Shert-min = PJS II-IV-VI-V-VII-VIII-IX [see composite photo in Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus*, p. 34, reverse side of color foldout panel]) – understood by some of Joseph contemporaries as the completion and/or extension of the Book of Abraham.

they had been rendered as Facsimiles, and (4) he recorded a significant portion of Joseph's translation [Abraham 1: 15-31] nearly a year before its publication. It seems most natural to conclude that the text of Appleby's journal above in **bold** reflects views articulated to him by Joseph Smith.

The statements of Pratt, Phelps and Appleby have in common the close association of the ancient record of Abraham with the patriarch's great grandson Joseph, who is variously presented as having completed a work begun by Abraham, or having authored a related work.

Now, as an exploratory exercise, we will set the death of the patriarch Joseph as the *terminus a quo* for the Abraham papyrus. The basis for this is Pratt's statement that the Book of Abraham was completed by the patriarch Joseph, and sometime after his death embalmed with a mummy. At this stage of the argument we are assuming that Pratt's understanding accurately reflects that of Joseph Smith (we will examine the validity of this assumption in due course).

Next, we need to ask what date Joseph Smith would have assigned to the death of the patriarch Joseph? The dating system in the Mormon Prophet's personal Bible and in two Bible reference works in his library, gives the date 1635 B.C. for death of the patriarch Joseph,<sup>24</sup> so it is reasonable to conclude that this was the understanding of Joseph Smith. If we then measure back from 1843, the year of Joseph Smith's letter to James Arlington Bennett, to 1635 B.C., we arrive at the figure of 3,478 years as the age of the Abraham papyrus scroll in the understanding of the Mormon Prophet. *This seems too remarkably close a correspondence to the figure of "nearly 3,500 years" that Joseph Smith assigned to "the papyrus which has lived unharmed in their bosoms," to be incidental.*

Taken together with the testimony of Wilford Woodruff, Parley Pratt, and William Appleby, the details of the papyrus reference in Joseph Smith's letter to James Arlington Bennett show that the Mormon prophet purported that his Abraham scroll was an autograph that was completed by Abraham's great grandson Joseph in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C., that sometime after

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph Smith's personal Bible is in the archives of the Community of Christ: *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments: Together with the Apocrypha: Translated out of the original tongues, and with the former translations diligently compared and revised. With Canne's Marginal Notes and References.* Cooperstown, (NY) Stereotyped, Printed and Published by H. & E. Phinney ... 1828; Thomas Hartwell Horne gives the same date for the death of the patriarch Joseph in *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, 4<sup>th</sup> corrected edition, vol. 1, p. 44 (Genesis 50). Joseph Smith's 3 volume set is in the archives of the Community of Christ.

his death it was embalmed with a mummy,<sup>25</sup> and that it was thus out of circulation until it was acquired by the Mormon prophet in 1835.

## **Conclusion**

It must be acknowledged that the nature of the evidence presented in this paper is circumstantial and inferential on a number of points. However, many will probably find the cumulative weight of the evidence compelling.

Michael Rhodes, John Gee, and Hugh Nibley have argued that the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. date of the Hor scroll is not a problem, because Joseph Smith did not claim the document from which he derived the Book of Abraham was an autograph. The weight of evidence from the testimony of Joseph Smith and his contemporaries is clearly against this line of argument.

**APPENDIX A**

## LETTER OF WILLIAM W. PHELPS

Kirtland, Ohio  
July 19 and 20, 1835

Beloved Sally:

Last evening we received your first letter after an absence of twelve weeks and twelve hours. Our tears of joy were the witness of its welcome reception. By these things we learn the value of each other's society and company, and friendship, and virtue. Taking the letter altogether, with all its candor and information and remembered names, it is, by all who have read it, called a very good one. 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.

Source: H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Deseret Book Company, 1995), p. 4. Reproduced by Peterson from Leah Y. Phelps, "Letters of Faith from Kirtland," *Improvement Era* 45 (August 1942), p. 529.

## APPENDIX B

WILLIAM I. APPLEBY JOURNAL ENTRY OF MAY 5, 1841

To day I paid Br Joseph a visit. received instruction concerning "Baptism for the Dead." Read the revelation as given by the Lord last January concerning the same, and Recorded in the "Book of the Law of the Lord." Viewed four Mummies, one male and three females, brought from Ancient Thebes, in Egypt, - saw the Roll[s]\* of Papyrus, and the writings thereon, taken from off the bosom of the Male Mummy, being some of the writings of ancient Ab[r]aham and of Joseph, that was sold into Egypt. The writings are chiefly in the Egyptian language, with the exception of a little Hebrew. I believe. They give a description of some of the scenes in Ancient Egypt, of their Worship, their Idol Gods &c. The writings are beautiful and pla[i]n, composed of red, and black ink. There is a perceptible [perceptible] difference, between the writings. Joseph appears to have been the best scribe. There are also representations of men, beasts, Birds, Idols, and Oxen attached to a Kind of a Plough, and a female guiding it, Also the serpent when he beguiles Eve. He appears with two legs, erect in the form and appearance of man. But his head in the form, and representing the Serpent, with his forked tongue extended. There are likewise, representations of an Alter erected, with a man bound and laid theren, and a Priest, with a Knife in his hand, standing at the feet, with a dove over the person bound on the Altar, with several Idol Gods, standing. around it. A Celestial Globe, with the planet "Kolob or first creation of the Supreme Being – a planet of light, which planet – makes a revolution once in a thousand years, - Also the Lord revealing the Grand Key words of the Holy Priesthood. to Adam in the Garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedeck, Ab[r]aham, and to all whom the Priesthood was revealed. – Ab[r]aham also, in the Court of Pharaoh sitting upon the King's Throne reasoning upon Astronomy, with a crown upon his head. representing the Priesthood as emblematical of the grand Presidency in Heaven, with the Scepter of Justice and Judgment in his hand. And King Pharaoh. standing behind him, together with a Prince – a principal waiter, and a black slave of the King. A Genealogy of the Mummies, and Epitaphs on their deaths &c &c, are also distinctly. represented on the Papyrus. Which is called the "Book of Abraham"

The Male mummy was one of the Ancient Pharaoh's of Egypt, and a Priest, as he is embalmed with his tongue extended, representing a speaker: The females were his wife and two daughters, as a part of the writing has been translated, and informs us, who they were, also whose

writings it is, and when those mummies were embalmed, which is nearly four thousand years ago. There is also a vivid description given on the Papyrus, of the creation, far more accurately and minutely, than the account given in the Bible, Likewise were the Idolatrous Priest. Elkenah" attempted to offer up Ab[r]aham as a sacrifice, to their Idol Gods, in Egypt, (as represented by the Altar &c. before refer[r]ed to). But was delivered by the interposition of Almighty power, representing the Dove, over the Altar, when Ab[r]aham lies Bound which broke the cords by which he was bound, tore down the Altar, an extract, from the Papyrus – concerning the above, and also the first Settlement of the Land of Egypt.

From the Book of Abraham, Translated by Joseph Smith, The Prophet, Seer, and Revelator of the Church of "Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints"

[Abraham 1:15-31]. "And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up, and take away my life, behold I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God: and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with a vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands, and his voice was unto me, Abram! Abram! behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy Fathers house, and from all thy Kin-folks into a strange land, which thou knowest not of, and this because they have turned their hearts away from me, to worship the God of Elkenah, and the God of Libnah, and the God of Mahmackrah, and the God of Korash, and the God of Pharaoh King of Egypt; therefore I have come down to visit them, and to destroy him, who hath lifted up his hand against thee Abram, my son, to take away thy life, Behold I will lead thee by my hand, and I will take thee, to put upon thee my name, even the Priesthood of thy Father, and my power shall be over thee, as it was with Noah, so shall it be with thee, that through thy ministry, my name shall be known in the Earth forever, for I am thy God."

6. "Behold, Potiphar's Hill was in the land of Ur, of Chaldea; and the Lord broke down the Altar of Elkenah and of the Gods of the land, and utterly destroyed them, and smote the Priest that he died; and there was great mourning in Chaldea, and also in the Court of Pharaoh, Which Pharaoh signifies King by royal blood. 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. From this descent. sprang all the Egyptians, and thus the blood of the Canaanites was preserved in the land."

7. "The land of Egypt being first discovered by a woman, who was the

daughter of Ham, and the daughter of Egyptus, which, in the Chaldea, signifies Egypt, which signifies, that which is forbidden. When this woman discovered the land it was under water, who afterwards settled her sons in it: And thus, from Ham, sprang that race which preserved the curse in the land. Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the Eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was Patriarchal. Pharaoh being a righteous man, established his kingdom and Judged his people wisely and Justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first Patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, - and also Noah his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood"

"8 Now Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaoh's would fain claim it from – Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry; but I shall endeavor hereafter to delineate the chronology, running back from myself to the beginning of the creation, for the Records have come into my hands, which I hold unto this present time"

"9. Now, after the Priest Elkenah was smitten, that he died, there came a [of] fulfilment of those things which were said unto me, concerning the land of Chaldea, that there should be a famine in the land. Accordingly a famine prevailed throughout all the land of Chaldea, and my father was sorely tormented because of the famine, and he repented of the evil which he had determined against me to take away my life. But the Records of the fathers, even the patriarchs, concerning the right of Priesthood the Lord my God preserved in mine own hands, therefore a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers, have I Kept even unto this day, and I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record for the benefit of my posterity that shall come after me." &c.

Thus the Reader will discover, some of the Knowledge, contained in the writings on the Papyrus. It also further states that the Egyptians, offered up Virgins, (sometimes of the royal blood) as sacrifice, to their Idol Gods

These mummies were taken from the Catacombs of Egypt, in the year 1831. by A celebrated, French traveller, names Antonio De Lobolo. and shipped to France, from there to New York, N. A. Where they were exhibited, together with the Papyrus, for some time, also in the city of Philadelphia, exciting the curiosity of the learned, for although the

writing on he papyrus is called Egyptian &c, yet it is in such characters and of such ancient date, that none of the learned professors, in those cities could decipher or translate it, until the mummies, together with the Papyrus ere taken to Kirtland Ohio, where Joseph Smith resided. As the Proprietor of then [them] had bee informed that he had translated a Record, already. said to be the "reformed Egyptian: Accordingly the writings were shown to Joseph, he saw their contents, the intelligence they contained, and to obtain the Papyrus, was obliged to purchase the mummies also, which some individuals of the Church did, for the sum of twenty four hundred dollars. From Kirtland they were removed to Nauvoo, where I had the pleasure of seeing them &c.

Source: William I. Appleby Journal, 5 May 1841, ms. 1401 1, pp. 71-72, LDS Church Archives. Spelling, capitalization, punctuation in the original. Transcript made by and kindly provided to me by H. Michael Marquardt.

\*Marquardt's transcript has "roll," while that of John Gee (see note 21) has "rolls."

## APPENDIX C

## DEPENDENCE OF THE ST. LOUIS &amp; CHICAGO MUSEUM CATALOG DESCRIPTIONS OF THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI ON THE CERTIFICATE OF SALE FOR JOSEPH SMITH'S EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES

Certificate of Sale for Joseph Smith's Egyptian Antiquities	St. Louis & Chicago Museum Catalog Description of Joseph Smith Egyptian Antiquities
<p>"This certifies that we have sold to Mr. A. Combs four Egyptian Mummies with the records of them. <b>This [sic] mummies were obtained from the catacombs of Egypt sixty feet below the surface of the Earth. by the antiquarian society of Paris &amp; forwarded to New York &amp; purchased by the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith</b> at the price of twenty four hundred dollars in the year eighteen hundred thirty five [sic] they were highly prized by Mr. Smith on account of the importance which attached to the <b>record</b> which were [sic] accidentally [sic] <b>found enclosed in the breast of one of the Mummies.</b> from translations by Mr. Smith of the <b>Records.</b> [sic] these Mummies were found <b>to be the family of Pharo</b> King of Egypt. [sic] <b>they were kept</b> exclusively by Mr. Smith until his death &amp; since <b>by the Mother of Mr. Smith</b> notwithstanding we have had repeated offers to purchase which have invariably been refused <b>until [her] death</b> which occurred on the fourteenth day of this month[.]"</p>	<p><b>"These mummies were obtained in the catacombs of Egypt, sixty feet below the surface of the earth, for the Antiquarian Society of Paris, forwarded to New York, and there purchased, in the year 1835, by Joe Smith, the Mormon Prophet, on account of the writings found in the chest of one of them,</b> and which he pretended to translate, as stating them to belong to <b>the family of the Pharaohs'</b> – but, according to Prof. Seyffarth, the papyrus roll is not a <b>record</b>, but an invocation to the Deity Osirus, in which occurs the name of the person, (Horus,) and a picture of the attendant spirits, introducing the dead to the Judge, Osirus [sic]. The body of one is that of a female, about forty – the other, that of a boy, about fourteen. <b>They were kept by the Prophet's mother until her death,</b> when the heirs sold them, and shortly after, were purchased for the Museum."</p> <p><i>[More than a third of the words in this paragraph (64 of 155 words) come from/are in common with the Certificate of Sale document.]</i></p>