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Scriptures with Pictures: Methodology, Unexamined Assumptions, and the Study of the Book of Abraham

Mark J. Johnson

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SCRIPTURES WITH PICTURES: METHODOLOGY, UNEXAMINED ASSUMPTIONS, AND THE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Mark J. Johnson

Abstract: Research on the origins and nature of the Book of Abraham and the accompanying facsimiles has long been hampered by faulty methodology. And while the last few years have seen a significant reexamination of the assumptions that represent the underpinning of our understandings of the Book of Abraham, some unexamined assumptions persist. This study addresses seven aspects of the Book of Abraham, which include a discussion of the sources, the process, the results, the content, the witnesses, and the historical background. For each of these aspects, this study identifies lingering assumptions and shows how a proper methodology can validate or eliminate these assumptions from the scholarly discourse.

The Book of Abraham is an ancient work revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. A version of this book had fallen into the hands of the early Latter-day Saints and was among the texts discovered in the cache of ancient scrolls purchased from a traveling collection owned by Michael Chandler.¹ The scroll that held the Book of Abraham also featured a unique vignette that illustrated a scene from the life of Abraham. This picture became Facsimile 1 of the published Book of Abraham.

This study explores seven facets related to the production of the Book of Abraham. For each of these facets, a more careful and nuanced look at assumptions regarding the Book of Abraham is examined, and methodological parameters are recommended as a foundation for further

1. Instead of repeating this story here, the reader is referred to Kerry Muhlestein, "Assessing the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Introduction to the Historiography of their Acquisitions, Translations, and Interpretations," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 22 (2016), 21-27.

studies. I hope to demonstrate that by discarding incorrect assumptions and relying on a proper methodological framework for our studies, a correct picture for the Book of Abraham will emerge.

Once unexamined assumptions are allowed to fall away, I wish to reveal a simple background for the scrolls and an ancient Book of Abraham. This study surmises that an ancient copy of the Book of Abraham was preserved by a Theban priest who paired it with a more standard funerary document. To ornament the Book of Abraham, he drew a unique vignette at the start of the scroll which featured the attempted sacrifice and delivery of Abraham. This vignette featured items that were familiar to Horos, such as a lion-couch functioning as the altar, and canopic jars below awaiting organs of the offering.

The Problem

A continual difficulty for students of the Book of Abraham is a perceived disconnect between Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimiles and that of the translation and interpretation of the vignettes by Egyptologists. This disconnect is further widened by the rediscovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri in 1967.² Critics of Joseph Smith quickly pointed out that while the papyri fragments seemingly contained the source for Facsimile 1, the surrounding text doesn't contain the Book of Abraham but is a document called an *Egyptian Book of Breathings Made by Isis*.³ Latter-day Saint scholars and students have taken it upon themselves to discover a device to explain these discrepancies, and many creative approaches have been conceived in this regard.⁴

2. A convenient summary is found in John Gee, "A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Book of Abraham" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 7.

3. Note that this name is now outdated and likely incorrect. It has recently been called a "Letter of Recommendation Made by Isis." See John Gee, "Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008), 135.

4. These approaches have ranged from the text of the Book of Abraham as received solely by revelation, the papyrus acting as a catalyst of some type, to the text of the Book of Breathings as a mnemonic device to assist in the memorization of the text of Abraham, to actually having the Book of Abraham written in Hebrew characters that were hidden inside the hieratic words of the Book of Breathings. See respectively Karl Sandberg, "Knowing Brother Joseph Again: The Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith as Translator," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 22/4 (1989), 17-37; John A. Tvedtnes, "Internal Evidence for an Abrahamic Oral Tradition," *Book of Abraham Symposium*, ed. John A. Tvedtnes (Salt Lake City: Institute of Religion, 1971), 44-48; and Joe Sampson, *Written by the Finger of God: A Testimony of Joseph Smith's Translations* (Sandy, UT: Wellspring, 1993).

The difficulty of dealing with this disconnect is not assuaged by lingering assumptions and faulty methodology that have surrounded many studies of the Book of Abraham. Great care needs to be taken so as not to contribute more problems with faulty methodology.⁵

The ability to study the Book of Abraham is limited on two fronts. The first obstacle is a large number of primary documents that are missing. It has been noted that “between the current fragments and some very bad copies of characters from the papyri, we know Joseph Smith had papyri or portions of papyri from at least five individuals.”⁶ All that remain of these papyri are eleven fragments that were cut from the scrolls and mounted under glass to preserve them. Among the lost papyri, the original papyri versions of facsimiles numbers two and three are missing. Also absent is an original manuscript for the English translation that was revealed to Joseph Smith. There are copies of this original manuscript, but even these are currently incomplete and contain only part of what became the published version of the Book of Abraham.

A second difficulty lies in the fact that witness statements to the papyri and the mummies are not on equal ground. Only recently have these statements been scrutinized to validate if the statements are reliable or whether they should be considered as hearsay. Most uses of these statements also fail to consider the motivation of the witnesses by taking all statements at face value. Some descriptions were clearly attempts to mock the work of Joseph Smith, while other attempts to describe the papyri and the translation were well-meaning and faith-promoting.⁷ An additional problem lies in a misunderstanding of the Egyptian documents by the early Latter-day Saints, which was fueled by a fascination with the facsimiles. The environment was ripe for speculation and embellishment regarding the papyri and the mummies, which led to incorrect and contradictory statements. The early Saints applied bad methodology by deciding what these scrolls constitute and

5. Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of View,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 226.

6. Gee, “Some Puzzles from the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 118.

7. John Gee, “Eyewitness, Hearsay and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Andrew Hedges, Donald W. Parry, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 192–95. See also Brian M. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010), 213–23.

providing their analyses of the vignettes based on this incorrect identity. Curiously, many modern students of the Book of Abraham continue to apply this faulty method.

Following the lead of other Latter-day Saint scholars,⁸ I wish to stress the importance of a proper methodology for research of the papyri and the Book of Abraham. The use of proper methodological steps can expose incorrect assumptions about the book and eliminate them from the scholarly narrative. Many studies of the Book of Abraham and the accompanying facsimiles not only severely limit their potential by not taking into account the proper methodological parameters but also risk fatal errors in their conclusions by not starting on solid ground. Latter-day Saint Egyptologist John Gee, who has been leading the charge for a correct methodological approach to the study of the Book of Abraham, has noted that “[unexamined] assumptions always color, and in most cases overwhelmingly guide, the work done. Yet these assumptions are rarely made explicit.”⁹

Because details of the origins of the Book of Abraham are unknown due to lost documents and cultural misunderstandings both on the part of the early Saints and on the part of later writers, some of our conclusions must be built on guesswork. However, if we can formulate a solid methodology, we can make better and more reasonable assumptions that will allow us to piece the puzzle together.

Methodology

In this paper, I suggest the following methodological parameters as essential to a study of the Book of Abraham and its accompanying documents, e.g., the papyri fragments and the Kirtland Egyptian papers. This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor is it free from further refinement, but I feel it helpful to gather these ideas together in one place. Some of these methods have been explored by other scholars, while I will suggest others based on my own observations. These parameters attempt to deal with a wide gamut of aspects regarding the Book of Abraham: the sources, the process, the results, the content, the witnesses, and the historical background. This methodology is designed to include the other scriptural records brought forth by Joseph Smith as a benchmark for analysis. These parameters comprise:

8. Gee, “Eyewitness,” 175–217. See also Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 217–43.

9. John Gee, “A Method for Studying the Facsimiles” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007), 351.

1. The Scrolls: Attention and priority need to be paid to all the scrolls and documents in the Prophet's collection. The idea that the Book of Abraham was written on one of the now lost scrolls has been called the "Missing Scroll Theory." If it's possible that the Book of Abraham physically existed on a part of the scrolls now lost to us, this translation theory ought to be the preferred theory, as it nullifies other theories of translation, as will be established below.
2. The Facsimiles: The illustrations that became the facsimiles need to be studied and understood individually before they are considered as a set. If the vignettes constitute different documents from different sources, we should be cautious about interpreting them by the same set of rules.
3. Method of Translation: By the time Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham, he already had experience in producing new scriptures. Any study of the mode of translation of the Book of Abraham ought to give precedence to methods already familiar to the Prophet.
4. The Manuscripts: A fuller understanding should be sought for the translation documents of the Book of Abraham. The translated text exists only partially; much of the documentation of the translation remains unaccounted for. Studies of the Book of Abraham need to factor in the existence of possible lost manuscripts.
5. The Timeline: The time it took the Prophet to translate the record is unknown, and attempts to reconstruct a production timeline have yielded mixed results. Just as with the method of translation, the rate of translation should be considered against the Prophet's other scriptural projects. Consideration ought to be given to what the Prophet was doing when he used the term *translation*.
6. The Witnesses: While there are many descriptions of the Book of Abraham and the papyri, these observations were made before the discipline of Egyptology reached any kind of maturity. The witness statements need to be filtered through the mindset of the people of Kirtland and Nauvoo. This can be done by observing the patterns of understanding the Saints had toward the ancient artifacts they encountered.
7. The Ancient Past: There may be a significant difficulty in understanding the ancient Egyptian mind. Indeed, the

explanations of the facsimiles may not need to be viewed in a strict Egyptological fashion but may be profitably studied through a Semitic lens. Yet even this may prove difficult. Indeed, there may not be only one source of influence on the explanations.

First method: Gathering the Scrolls

First, serious attention needs to be paid to the so-called “Missing Scroll theory,” which holds that the text of the Book of Abraham was written on one of the scrolls in the Prophet’s possession that has now been lost. *If there is a reasonable possibility that the Book of Abraham existed on one of the scrolls, then this theory should take priority over all other translation theories.*

This theory of the source of the Abrahamic text ought to be the preferred theory because it nullifies other theories.¹⁰ The theory that the Book of Abraham was extracted from the Book of Breathings as a result of the Prophet’s work on the Alphabet and Grammar documents accounts for only the Egyptian text on the surviving papyri fragments and doesn’t account for the possibility of lost fragments or material. This can also be said for the “pneumonic device theory,” which was also based only on the extant Book of Breathings fragments, although it would extract the text of the Book of Abraham in a different manner. Last, if the Abrahamic text was written on part of the scrolls now lost, it would also override the “pure revelation” theory, which has Joseph Smith getting the text without its being present on the scrolls.

I have mentioned that there were found at least four scrolls and a hypocephalus with the mummies that were purchased in Kirtland. Three of these scrolls contained Egyptian Books of the Dead. The fourth scroll contained a document called a Book of Breathings, Made by Isis.¹¹ The owner of this scroll was an Egyptian priest from Thebes named Horos.¹² The Missing Scroll theory centers in this scroll.

To affirm the likelihood of the Missing Scroll theory, certain criteria ought to be met. It needs to be shown that there was room on the scroll

10. A convenient summary of these theories can be found in John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2000), 19–23.

11. Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 10–11. See also Gee, “Eyewitness,” 188–91.

12. He has also been called Hor or Horus by other scholars, depending on their translation preferences. This study will refer to him as Horos.

of Horos for the text of the Book of Abraham. Second, it should be demonstrated, if possible, that the scroll of Horos featured a second text. These two caveats are of course related, but the fulfillment of one doesn't automatically confirm the other. Last, it should be demonstrated that the inclusion of a story of Abraham on an Egyptian priestly scroll is not anachronistic with regard to the time and place the scroll's fashioning.

The Scroll of Horos: This scroll was created by an Egyptian priest who lived in the Ptolemaic Period.¹³ He would have come from a priestly family and would have been quite literate.¹⁴

The scroll of Horos features the vignette of a man lying on an altar or lion-couch while another character stands over him. This vignette became the first facsimile of the Book of Abraham. This vignette was only one part of this scroll. Latter-day Saint Egyptologist Michael D. Rhodes describes the physical characteristics of this papyrus scroll:

The text of the Book of Breathings is written on the recto of the papyrus (the side with the papyrus strips running horizontally). ... Column 1 contains nine lines of text, and columns 2, 3, and 4 each contain thirteen lines. The height of the papyrus is approximately 11 cm. The width of the initial vignette is 19 cm, and the approximate widths of the surviving columns are (1) 8.5 cm, (2) 20 cm, (3) 28 cm, and (4) 21 cm. Assuming an approximate width of 20 cm for each of the two missing columns and another 20 for the second vignette, the length for the entire book of Breathings would have been about 156 cm. By way of comparison, the Denon Book of Breathings papyrus is 187 cm long and has an average height of 20.5 cm. During the Ptolemaic period, the average size of a papyrus roll was about 320 cm long and 32 cm high. Thus the Hor Book of Breathings would have taken up about half the length of one of these rolls, and it is about one-third the standard height.¹⁵

13. While Horos of Thebes would have had the literacy to create these documents, I am uncertain that priests of this type could create their own Book of Breathings (or Books of the Dead or hypocephali. for that matter) while they were alive or whether this task needed to be done post-mortem. For the remainder of this paper, I will assume that Horos was the author of this scroll.

14. Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri," 217-43.

15. Michael Dennis Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo: FARMS, 2002), 4.

Rhodes notes that a likely size of the scroll belonging to Horos is 320 cm (or about 10 feet) long if it were a standard size scroll of its place and time of production. This would leave 164 cm available for an additional text. However, this scroll was possibly longer. Some of the early witnesses of the papyri describe one of the scrolls as being a “long roll,”¹⁶ as long as one room in the Nauvoo house. The difficulty with this statement is that it is based on a third-hand source and may not be verifiable. If the roll was unrolled in Nauvoo, then this was likely after the papyri had been cut apart and some of the pieces mounted behind glass. Despite the fact that the length is uncertain, the important thing to note is that a long roll was among the collection and that its length was a noticeable feature among the witnesses.¹⁷ An attempt to determine the length of the scroll of Horos has been attempted by use of a mathematical model, but this has proven problematic.¹⁸

Other considerations should be brought into an examination of the length of the scroll. What is a comparable length for other long scrolls from this period? Gee has noted that a long scroll — “The scroll — ROM 978x43.1, a Ptolemaic period Book of the Dead — has since been unrolled; its length (including the fragmented portions) is about seven meters (roughly twenty-three feet).”¹⁹ Also notable is that the so-called Great Isaiah scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls is about 24 feet long and has 53 columns of text.

The length of the scroll shouldn’t be determined by what we think it *ought* to hold. This would be bad methodology. If it were somehow possible to determine an approximate length, we could then postulate how much content it would hold. The fact that a standard-sized papyrus roll of this period is 320 cm can’t serve as strong evidence that the scroll of Horos was actually that long. However, the possibility of a longer scroll invites room for exploration. If the mathematical models cannot provide a maximum length, perhaps they can point to a *minimum* length. If the numbers demonstrate any size larger than the estimated 156 cm for the Horos Book of Breathings, then there was room on the scroll for more material.

Multiple texts: If this scroll had room on it for a second text, is there a precedent that scrolls of this type have multiple texts? Not surprisingly,

16. Gee, “Some Puzzles,” 119–23.

17. Ibid., 123.

18. Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 217–43.

19. John Gee, “Formulas and Faith,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, 21/1 (2012): 62.

the existence of multiple texts on a single scroll has been well established.²⁰ The Horos Book of Breathings need not be the only text on the scroll.

An unexpected witness to the scroll of Horos is provided by a trained scholar who saw the remainder of the scroll in the St. Louis Museum. Gustavus Seyffarth left a description of the scroll, which was used by the museum's catalogue. His notes on the scroll have been preserved and examined by John Gee.

Gee describes Seyffarth's involvement with this scroll:

Gustavus Seyffarth saw this papyrus in the Wood Museum and describes it indicating not only that Facsimile 3 was still part of this roll but also that the roll contained another text. Seyffarth did not see the Book of Breathings contained in Papyrus Joseph Smith XI + X because these fragments were not part of the fragments that went to the Wood Museum. ... Seyffarth's description allows the reconstruction of the opening lines of the new text of the scroll of Hor, which were "Beginning of the Book of ..." Unfortunately, Seyffarth's description does not allow us to determine exactly which book was included.²¹

Seyffarth provides a firsthand witness that the papyri contained a second text that was featured on the scroll of Horos.

Abraham in Egypt: The last item to be addressed is the prospect of a biblical character being predominantly mentioned on an Egyptian scroll. This can't serve as evidence, but it can open the door to the possibility of the Book of Abraham's being on this roll.

Latter-day Saint Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein brings together information to demonstrate that not only were biblical characters known to the priests at Thebes, but they were also known during the time frame of the production of the Horos Book of Breathings. He notes that "our current evidence indicates that a group of priests from Thebes possessed, read, understood, and employed biblical and extrabiblical texts, most especially texts about Abraham and Moses."²²

A story about a biblical character being included on scrolls from the Ptolemaic period isn't out of place at all. But why would Horos include

20. Gee, "Eyewitness," 192.

21. Ibid., 10-11.

22. Kerry Muhlestein, "The Religious and Cultural Background of Joseph Smith Papyrus I," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, 22/1 (2013): 30.

information about Abraham on his own scroll? Again, Muhlestein provides a logical answer:

Interestingly, we know that Hor was involved with rituals that had to do with calling on preternatural aid to ward off potential evil forces. These rituals often involved either real or figurative human sacrifice. Now that we know that priests from Hor's era and geographic location would have used biblical figures to augment their religious rituals and spells, we better understand why he would have been interested in the story depicted on Facsimile 1, that of a biblical figure who was saved from sacrifice by divine intervention.²³

Delivery from death would have been an appealing theme to this priest of Thebes. This is a reasonable explanation, although there may be additional explanations.²⁴

Walking through our steps, we find the Horos Book of Breathings is remarkably similar to the Book of Breathings found on Louvre 3284, an indication they likely belong to the same category of documents. Based on the size of the Book of Breathings fragments in Joseph Smith's possession as well as considerations for the size of the scroll, we find that if this particular scroll was the standard length for the time and location it was produced, the Book of Breathings belonging to Horos would have taken up only half the scroll. If the Horos Book of Breathings was 156 cm long, there would have remained at least 164 cm for an additional text. This scroll began with a vignette showing a man lying on a lion couch, followed by a Book of Breathings Made by Isis. At the end of this document (or after the start of the next) was a vignette of Horos being introduced into the presence of Osiris, surrounded by Anubis and Ma'at. This was followed by a second text, which very well could be the Book of Abraham. Observations by Gustavus Seyffarth indicate that the scroll had a second text on it beginning near the vignette that became Facsimile 3.

The collective evidence demonstrates that the scroll of Horos contained a second text beyond the Book of Breathings. That the text

23. Muhlestein, "The Religious and Cultural Background," 30.

24. Stephen O. Smoot and Quinten Barney, "The Book of the Dead as a Temple Text and the Implications for the Book of Abraham," *The Temple Ancient and Restored Temple on Mount Zion Series* 3, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books; Orem, UT: The Interpreter Foundation, 2016), 175-201.

could have been the Book of Abraham is a likely possibility but ultimately still remains a matter of faith.

Second Method: Taking the Vignettes out of the Frames

A significant methodological error is that the facsimiles are studied as a complete set and that all three are subject to the same history and consequently the same guidelines of understanding. *The illustrations from which Joseph Smith derived the Book of Abraham facsimiles need to be examined independently of each other. If we focus only on what we think are commonalities among the illustrations, we will miss what we can learn from their differences. Caution must be taken when applying analysis to the facsimiles: methods that apply to one of the vignettes may not be appropriate for the others.*

When the papyrus was cut up and portions were mounted under glass, the vignettes were removed from their original context. Illustrations from the Books of the Dead were viewed and interpreted alongside illustrations from the Book of Breathings. We should be careful not to view the facsimiles the same way. If we can extricate the three illustrations from each other, we can properly see how they originated and then how they relate to the Book of Abraham.

John Gee provides an example of this line of thinking in a discussion of the Kirtland Egyptian papers:

Before we proceed with an examination of this group of documents, it is worth remembering that each of the documents has its own reason for existence and its own subsequent history. Just because the documents are lumped together now does not mean that they were lumped together then or that they should be lumped together. Different criteria applied to the documents create a surprisingly different grouping of documents.²⁵

This same technique will be beneficial to the facsimiles. Because the facsimiles are now published together and have been arranged to roughly follow the Book of Abraham narrative, it is tempting to view them as a matching set, i.e., seeing all three of them belonging to an ancient Book of Abraham. However, a more careful examination will

25. John Gee, "Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt," *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World* eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 438.

show differences among these documents. These differences include their ancient authorship, ownership, function, and size. An examination of the text of the Book of Abraham is also warranted, as has it a direct correlation to the facsimiles.

The first indicator that the facsimiles should be studied independently is the recognition that Facsimile 2 is a different type of document than the other two vignettes. It belongs to a class of documents known as hypocephali. The owner of this document was a man named Sheshonq.²⁶ This type of document was created by the scribe drawing the scene, and the text of this blessing to the dead on a disk was placed under the head of the deceased. A more thorough explanation has been stated this way:

Facsimile 2 belongs to a class of Egyptian religious documents call hypocephali (Greek: ipokefalos, *hypokephalos*), “under the head,” a translation of the Egyptian *hry-tp* with the same meaning). A hypocephalus is a small, disk-shaped object, made of papyrus, stuccoed linen, bronze, gold, wood, or clay which the Egyptians placed under the head of their dead. They believed it would magically cause the head and body to be enveloped in flames or radiance, making the deceased divine. The hypocephalus symbolized the Eye of Re or Horus, that is, the sun. The scenes portrayed on it relate the Egyptian concept of resurrection and life after death. To the Egyptians, the daily rising and setting of the sun was a vivid symbol of the resurrection. The hypocephalus itself represented all the sun encircles, the whole world. The upper portion represented the world of men and the day sky, and the lower portion (the part with the cow) represented the netherworld and the night sky.²⁷

More than one hundred hypocephali have been found and catalogued by scholars. Each of these documents is uniquely made for the individual owners, although they broadly follow a similar structural pattern.²⁸

The hypocephalus of Sheshonq is an authentic representative of an existing class of funerary documents. As such, it wouldn’t have been

26. The name has also been translated as *Sheshonchis* or *Sesonchis*.

27. Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 294. After describing the upper and lower portions, it is unfortunate that following this description, the book publishes Facsimile 2 upside-down.

28. Luca Miatello, “The Hypocephalus of Takerheb in Firenze and the Scheme of the Solar Cycle,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur*, Bd. 37 (2008), 277–87.

inscribed on the same papyrus scroll as the other vignettes, as some have depicted. Consider that (1) the owner of the hypocephalus is a different person than Horos, (2) the size of the hypocephalus (19 cm x 20 cm) is larger than the scroll of Horos is tall (11 cm),²⁹ (3) the early witnesses note that separate items with astronomical notations were found apart from the rolls, (4) if the so-called Church Historian's copy of Facsimile 2 is an accurate representation of the original hypocephalus and its lacuna, it should be noted that damage to this document is a different shape and pattern than the damage to the scroll of Horos, which occurred after it was rolled and placed with the mummies.³⁰

Once recognized that the hypocephalus of Sheshonq wasn't on the scrolls but was a separate item altogether, it can be seen that it was conscripted by the Prophet Joseph Smith to represent narrative and doctrinal elements from the Book of Abraham. This is the most straightforward explanation for its connection to the Book of Abraham.

If the hypocephalus that became Facsimile 2 was originally created for the man Sheshonq and was later adopted to match elements of the Book of Abraham, what should be made of the other two facsimiles?

There were at least two vignettes on the scroll belonging to Horos. One vignette appears to be a fairly standard illustration of a typical scene and as such has given the most difficulty to students of the Book of Abraham. The other vignette is a unique illustration that defies parallels to other scenes but is comfortably matched to the Book of Abraham story.

A look at Facsimile 3 is in order. If this vignette is removed from the Book of Abraham and the other facsimiles and examined under its own terms, it will be seen that it was drawn to accompany the Book of Breathings made by Isis. Rhodes notes that "this vignette clearly portrays the deceased Hor being introduced to Osiris after having been declared innocent ... in the Hall of the Two Truths; he is worthy to enter into the presence of Osiris."³¹ Another Pearl of Great Price commentary expounds on the contents of the vignette:

The illustration from which Facsimile 3 was copied came at the end of the Book of Breathings belonging to Hor. His

29. Gee, "Eyewitness," 189. The facsimiles were printed from carved blocks based on tracings that Reuben Hedlock made of the originals. The original prints of Facsimile 2 and the printing block for the same measured about 19 cm by 20 cm.

30. For a picture of this document, see Hugh W. Nibley and Michael D. Rhodes, *One Eternal Round* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2010), 635.

31. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings*, 23.

name appears three times in the hieroglyphic writing in this illustration. In its present form, this vignette represents the deceased man, Hor (Figure 5), being introduced into the presence of Osiris (Figure 1), god of the dead, seated on a throne with his sister/wife Isis (Figure 2), standing behind him. In front of Hor is the goddess of truth, Ma'at (Figure 4), and behind him is the jackal-headed God Anubis (Figure 6). Hor has just passed through the hall of judgment, and having been found worthy, is introduced by Ma'at into the presence of Osiris, there to live with him and the other gods throughout eternity and to become a god himself.³²

The vignette that became Facsimile 3 is an appropriate scene for the Horos Book of Breathings. The names of the characters are spelled in hieroglyphic columns above them. Like the hypocephalus of Sheshonq, this vignette belongs to an existing class of vignettes and is fully functional in that role. Rhodes notes that this type of vignette is common among the known Book of Breathings.³³

A difference between this vignette and the vignettes that accompany other Books of Breathings is the location of the vignette of Horos in relation to the text. However, scholars have noted, the location of the vignette didn't always matter to the Egyptian scribes when they created their scrolls.³⁴ If this applies to the scroll of Horos, the vignette is best understood as a typical illustration that supplements a Book of Breathings.

This "presentation scene" is at home with the Book of Breathings made by Isis and appears to have been reinterpreted to match the Book of Abraham narrative, similar to the hypocephalus. Difficulties are found only once this illustration is paired to the Book of Abraham and assigned new explanations.

The outlier of the vignettes is Facsimile 1. There has been great effort on the part of scholars, students, and critics to match this vignette to other types of Egyptian vignettes.³⁵ There also has been a near equal effort to demonstrate the uniqueness of this scene. It might be difficult to have it both ways. Further complicating any prospective analysis is that any text columns in this scene have, for the most part, been broken off and are now lost. If the creator of this vignette wished to portray

32. Draper, Brown and Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price*, 296.

33. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings*, 17.

34. Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri," 224-25.

35. Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri," 232-34.

Abraham (or Horos or Osiris, for that matter), we cannot ascertain that fact from the vignette alone.

Many LDS scholars have noted that the vignette of a man on a lion couch is unique in that it doesn't appear in conjunction with any other Books of Breathings. Muhlestein notes,

There is no known case of any vignette remotely like Facsimile 1 that is associated with the type of text that is adjacent to it. No other copies of the Book of Breathings contain anything similar. Based on ancient parallels to the Book of Breathings, the most likely conclusion is that the picture next to the text was not associated with the text.³⁶

This vignette is different from other funerary³⁷ scenes. Instead of a mummification scene, this one features a live participant on the lion couch. Muhlestein notes that “some scholars have suggested that Facsimile 1 is a typical embalming scene rather than a depiction of Abraham on an altar. Yet this vignette is as different from other embalming scenes as it is similar to them. The only similarities are that a person lies on a lion couch with another person standing nearby.”³⁸ Others interpret this vignette as a resurrection scene, but the details on the vignette make parallels difficult as well.³⁹

There has been much effort to match this vignette with other types of scenes. That the vignette needs to conform to a standard scene is an unexamined assumption and should be challenged.

The difficulty most scholars have with understanding the facsimiles is trying to figure out if the vignettes are funerary scenes or if they are not. This is because they are and they aren't. Once Facsimile 1 is allowed to be apart from the other scenes, it isn't requisite that scholars force it into something it is not, namely a standard funerary document.

36. Ibid., 225.

37. In this paper, I use the term *funerary* somewhat loosely, as these documents are more than just accessories for burial. See Smoot and Barney, “The Book of the Dead as a Temple Text,” 175-76.

38. Kerry Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 99.

39. Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), 91. Ritner proposes that Osiris is on the altar displaying his potency, as in other reanimation scenes. However, this suggestion by Ritner isn't possible; the current vignette doesn't have room for such an addition. See John Gee, “A Tragedy of Errors” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* vol. 4 (1992), 101-02.

Next, a look at the text of the Book of Abraham and its relationship to the facsimiles is justified. Verses 12, 13, and 14 of chapter one link the first facsimile with the story of Abraham's impending sacrifice. These verses make especial mention of the form of the altar and the types of the Egyptian gods. These items were important enough to the author or redactor of the text to interrupt the narration of the story.

The general assumption of some readers of the Book of Abraham was that Abraham himself wrote these particular descriptions and therefore by extension was responsible for the vignette showing the sacrifice. These verses are responsible for modern readers' deciding that Abraham was creating primitive drawings to accompany his story. Based on these assumptions, it is not difficult to see Abraham as the creator of the illustration if not the actual papyrus itself. Indeed, many early Latter-day Saints believed this, and many critics of Joseph Smith still assign this belief to the Church and its members, regardless of whether it is correct or not.⁴⁰

However, if these descriptions in question are a textual gloss by a later author and not Abraham, the need to have Abraham compose the illustrations fades away. Kevin L. Barney notes that "deleting these back references not only would do no harm to the flow and sense of the text, it would actually improve them."⁴¹

If the descriptions of the altar and the gods are a gloss from a later author/editor, it will be seen that the story flows smoothly and dramatically with the additions removed. Following Barney's suggestion, the deletion of the back references gives the narrative a seamless flow:

And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; ... 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 the vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands. (Abraham 1:12, 15)

The flow of the narrative gives good reason to believe the descriptions in the text of the Book of Abraham were a later addition specifically

40. Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 27.

41. Kevin L. Barney, "The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources," in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant, Studies in the Book of Abraham* 3, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005), 123-24.

created to link the lion couch vignette to the text of the Book of Abraham. There is no way to know definitively if the gloss is the product of Horos or the editorial work of Joseph Smith himself.

Last, it is notable that if there were (at least) two texts on the scroll of Horos, we should at least be open to the idea of at least one of the vignettes drawn for the Book of Breathings and another for the Book of Abraham. The notion of having two independent texts on the scroll allows for the two vignettes to be viewed independently of each other as well. Indeed, the burden of proof needs to be on those who wish to have the vignette of Horos being presented to Osiris and the vignette of Abraham on the altar being attached to the same text — either both to the Book of Breathings or both to the Book of Abraham.

The solution with the greatest simplicity is to have the vignette of Abraham on the lion-couch created as a frontispiece for the Book of Abraham and the vignette of Horos being introduced to Osiris acting in its function with the Book of Breathings, just as similar vignettes are created for other Books of Breathings. The vignette that became Facsimile 3 as well as the hypocephalus of Sheshonq, are connected to the Book of Abraham because the Prophet Joseph assigned new meanings to them from the texts and themes of the Book of Abraham and not because they were associated with Abraham's writings anciently. If the facsimiles are parceled from the Book of Abraham, it is apparent that two of them were adopted by the Prophet to illustrate the Book of Abraham narrative by being assigned new meanings that were not originally immanent.

Third Method: Processes of Translation

By the time Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham, he already had experience producing new scriptures. Based on the method of translation of the Book of Mormon, a similar means of translation for the Book of Abraham should be a preferred approach until further evidence comes to light.

One of the most debated aspects of the Book of Abraham is the method of translation. As mentioned earlier, this aspect of the Book of Abraham is difficult to understand due to a lack of primary supporting manuscripts as well as unspecific journal entries. Critics of the Prophet Joseph Smith frequently examine the method of translation in hopes of disproving the Book of Abraham and by extension also discredit the Book of Mormon.

Opinions about the translation method range from the translation being obtained through the Urim and Thummim⁴² or seer stones, to the translation being directly revealed to Joseph Smith through revelation, to his having acquired the translation by decoding the hieratic characters from the Book of Breathing.

John Gee notes that “there is no evidence that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim in translating the Book of Abraham. Indeed, the Urim and Thummim were probably surrendered to Moroni years previously.”⁴³ The difficulty here is that there is very little direct evidence for any method of translation, let alone for the use of the Urim and Thummim. One of the very few firsthand witnesses was Warren Parrish, who stated that “I have set ~~down~~ by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks [sic] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven.”⁴⁴ This statement supports the idea that the Book of Abraham was received through revelation, but it doesn’t specify anything beyond that. The prophet himself was also careful to state that the translation was given to him, as opposed to his working the translation on his own.⁴⁵

It is to be noted, however, that close associates of the prophet seem to collectively favor the use of the Urim and Thummim or the seer stones. Wilford Woodruff⁴⁶ and Parley P. Pratt, who were close friends to the Prophet, tell that the Urim and Thummim were used in the translation process.⁴⁷

Although the use of sources will be considered later in this paper, it ought to be mentioned that firsthand witnesses should take priority

42. The name *Urim and Thummim* is used here to represent the Nephite Interpreters sealed up with the Book of Mormon plates. The interpreters were never referred to as the U&T in the Book of Mormon text, although the early brethren of the Church adopted that name for both the interpreters and for Joseph Smith’s seer stones.

43. Gee, “A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 11.

44. Warren Parrish, Letter to the editor, *Painesville Republican*, 15 February 1838, as cited in Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 217.

45. Nibley provides a good discussion of this issue. See Hugh Nibley, “Translated Correctly?” in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 55.

46. Michael H. MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith’s Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 228.

47. H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 161–63.

over second- and third-hand sources. However, there needs to be consideration of multiple statements that have convergence. And while this convergence doesn't guarantee an accurate recollection, it should cause a more thoughtful look at the collective evidence.

It might seem problematic that the Urim and Thummim were described as being used for the translation; the Prophet had likely surrendered them some years earlier. He did, however, still have some of his seer stones. Eric Eliason has noted that the early Saints didn't differentiate between the seer stones and the Urim and Thummim: "It seems that early Mormons began to use the terms *seer stone* and *Urim and Thummim* interchangeably, with the latter convention winning the day."⁴⁸ Matthew J. Grey takes this into consideration when he notes that "when the Egyptian papyri appeared, Joseph again turned to his seer stones and divine inspiration for assistance in translating the ancient documents."⁴⁹ Mackay and Frederick note that Joseph Smith had given away his brown seer stone in 1830 but that he would have used his white seer stone when the Book of Abraham was translated in 1835.⁵⁰

If Joseph Smith used a seer stone to produce the Book of Abraham, it would have been a comparable process to his translating the Book of Mormon. During the Book of Mormon translation, he had the plates nearby but did not examine them physically to get the translation; rather he saw the translation via his seer stone (or the interpreters) that he placed in a hat to shield out the light.⁵¹ The prophet's mother reported that while translating the Book of Abraham, he would look into his hat and read not only the translation on the scrolls but also read portions of the papyri that were broken off and were missing.⁵²

This should be the preferred theory of the revelation of the text to the Prophet because it most closely resembles the translation of the Book

48. Eric A. Eliason, "Seer Stones, Salamanders, and Early Mormon 'Folk Magic' in the Light of Folklore Studies and Bible Scholarship," *BYU Studies* 55:1 (2015), 78.

49. Matthew J. Grey "The Word of the Lord in the Original," *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 260.

50. Michael Hubbard Mackay and Nicholas J. Frederick, *Joseph Smith's Seer Stones*, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 126–129.

51. A thorough description of this process is explored in MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 123–30.

52. *Friends Weekly Intelligencer*, 3 October 1846, 211, as cited in Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 223.

of Mormon. Joseph Smith likely would have recognized the hieratic text of the scrolls as a “reformed” Egyptian and returned to a familiar method. Also notable is that this method is different from his Inspired Translation of the Bible or other revelations. If the Book of Abraham were present on one of the scrolls,⁵³ this would be similar to the Prophet’s physically possessing the plates of brass. The Inspired Version, on the other hand, was received in part through the direct revelation of large narrative portions as well as combing through the King James Version to find verses that needed emendation.

Evidence is lacking for all theories concerning the translation, and the witness statements aren’t firsthand, but the use of the seer stones would answer many questions, as I will show later.

Fourth Method: Understanding the Manuscripts

A proper methodology for studying the documents relating to the Book of Abraham includes not only correctly understanding the documents we do have but also accounting for probable documents now lost. This would include manuscript pages that contain the full translation of the Book of Abraham; portions of the published translation are now without any documentation.

Researchers of the Book of Abraham need to come to an understanding of the manuscripts that relate to the translation. This is another instance in which research on the Book of Abraham is hampered by a lack of documentation. Instead of an original manuscript of the Prophet’s dictated translation, we have a small collection containing partial copies of the translation and explanations of the facsimiles. Included in this collection are seemingly related papers with sundry logographic characters and definitions. While some documents containing parts of the prepublished translation exist, it would be a mistake to think those were the only ones produced and therefore rest a research model on those pages alone.

This section of methodology will first examine the so-called Kirtland Egyptian Papers. Following this, I will explore the possibility of an original manuscript.

53. However, Joseph also saw through the Urim and Thummim an ancient parchment belonging to John the Beloved. This document was apparently not in possession of the Prophet, but he was able to see and obtain a translation all the same. See a brief discussion in MacKay and Dirkmaat, *From Darkness unto Light*, 123.

The Kirtland Egyptian Papers: The Kirtland Egyptian Papers are brought into the discussion of the translation because they are claimed by many to be the source of the Book of Abraham translation. These documents fall roughly into two categories: one group contains manuscript copies of the translation of the Book of Abraham (these have been referred to as the *Kirtland Egyptian Papers-Abraham*, or *KEPA*), while the other group appears to be an attempt to decode ancient languages (called *the Kirtland Egyptian Papers-Egyptian*, or *KEPE*).⁵⁴ The documents labeled Ab1, Ab2, Ab3, and Ab4 are the overlap of these two categories because they contain elements of both.⁵⁵ This overlap, as well as the overall lack of other documents, has caused confusion about the translation process.

These four documents are viewed by some as being the source of the Book of Abraham translation because they feature Egyptian characters placed in a margin next to a copy of the translation. These characters appear to be extracted from the beginning of the Horos Book of Breathings. This has resulted in some critics of the Prophet as well as some members of the Church claiming these KEPA documents are the source (or working papers) of the translation. This forced connection of the hieratic characters with the text of the Book of Abraham is seen as tying the two together when such a connection is never made explicit in the documents themselves.⁵⁶ In turn, this has led to the assumption that there is a valid connection between the characters on the left of the margin and the translation on the right and that the Book of Abraham was believed to come from the Egyptian characters at the beginning of the Book of Breathings. Once this assumed connection is made, it is presented as evidence of Joseph Smith's gift of translation (or lack thereof).⁵⁷

54. Like the papyrus fragments in possession of the Church, study of these so called "Egyptian papers" is also beleaguered by multiple labels, such as the "Valuable Discovery." See Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, 76-77.

55. Brian M. Hauglid, "The Book of Abraham and the Egyptian Project," *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World* eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 477-79.

56. While some claim these characters represent a "before and after" method of translation, perhaps the Egyptian characters were placed there as ornamentation for the text.

57. This is a new version of an old argument. Before the rediscovery of these pages, some scholars made the same observations regarding the Egyptian writing

One of the difficulties of this assessment is that it is based on a communitive view of the papers. Taken as a whole, they seem to support the notion that they are a reflection of the translation. But this view appears possible only because the papers are “lumped together.”⁵⁸ If each set of documents is examined under its own terms, the notion of these pages being the working papers for the translation becomes more difficult to maintain.

It needs to be noted that because the KEPA copies exist, that doesn’t give them superiority in the process of the production of the Book of Abraham. Robert J. Matthews notes, regarding the Prophet’s revelations, that “the existence of multiple copies is not an unusual circumstance, for multiple copies were made of nearly all of the revelations that the Prophet Joseph received, in order that the information could be made available to the members of the Church as rapidly as possible.”⁵⁹

There are a number of methodological difficulties with viewing the KEPA collection as the source of the translation of the Book of Abraham. I have noted earlier that the study of the Book of Abraham is inhibited by a lack of adequate documentation. The KEPA theory of translation is appealing to many not because the theory works, rather because it fills the void in the documentation. Assigning the KEPA papers to the method of translation also provides a purpose for the otherwise mysterious collection.

Hauglid observed that “perhaps, an alphabet was drawn from the already extant Book of Abraham. This ... possibility begs the question as to why one would attempt to create an Egyptian alphabet from a preexistent English text.”⁶⁰ The answer would appear to be that the alphabet was not for the purpose of the translation but to supplement the ongoing original language project, which will be discussed below. Failure to consider the KEPA and KEPE papers in light of this ongoing project is to ignore historical context.

Automatically adopting the KEPA papers to be the source of the Book of Abraham is bad methodology; it doesn’t consider the possibility of other translation documents that might now be lost. Further, it ignores

on the facsimiles and the explanations provided by the Prophet. See Barney, “The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation,” 109–14.

58. Gee, “Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt,” 438.

59. Robert J. Matthews “A Plainer Translation”; *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 61.

60. Hauglid, “The Book of Abraham and the Egyptian Project,” 484.

how grammars are produced⁶¹ and ignores the relation to the evidently related project of decoding the lost language of Adam, which is a better fit for the KEPE papers.

Some have proposed that the papers of the so called Alphabet and Grammar were co-opted into functioning as a guide to the translation or to have use for the ancient languages project. I would argue that these papers (Ab1, Ab2, Ab3, and Ab4) were specifically created for the ancient languages project under the prompting of W. W. Phelps, who made Ab1.⁶² These four early copies of the Book of Abraham translation were made with a deliberate left margin on the folio pages. No other copies of the Prophet's revelations have this type of margin. This open space seems deliberately created to hold characters extracted from the scroll of Horos.

Because of so many unknowns regarding the KEPA papers, research may be best suited to determine what the collection is *not*. The process of elimination could narrow the possible purposes of these papers.

The Original Manuscript: It has been noted that one of the difficulties of assigning the Kirtland Egyptian papers as the source of the Book of Abraham is that it ignores the possibility of an earlier original manuscript. These KEPA pages in possession of the Church seem to be a by-product of a larger work. Brian Hauglid posits that Joseph Smith produced a master translation manuscript (which Hauglid labels Ab0) which is now missing.⁶³ He notes that “while closely examining the Abraham manuscripts, one fact quickly became clear: all of the surviving manuscripts containing text of the Book of Abraham represent copies of earlier documents.”⁶⁴ He elaborates:

We have a fairly good idea of how Joseph Smith worked when it came to receiving revelation and dictating it to a scribe. From the surviving originally dictated manuscripts of the Book of Mormon, we know that there was no paragraphing, sentence structure, or punctuation because the text in the dictated manuscripts appears as one long sentence. Joseph Smith appears to have dictated the Book of Mormon text in a generally continuous fashion, rarely stopping. The text in the Abraham manuscripts, on the other hand, exhibits paragraphing, sentence structure, and punctuation that

61. Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 21-23.

62. Hauglid, *A Textual History*, 149.

63. *Ibid.*, 7, 21.

64. Hauglid, “Thoughts on the Book of Abraham,” 250.

would be characteristic of text that had evolved beyond the dictation phase.⁶⁵

These original manuscript pages would have been gathered and tied together with string to create a portfolio that could be read like a book. This technique was also used for the original manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. These pages contain the original version of the revelation, which then went on to be standardized with paragraphing and punctuation while the Prophet made revisions and clarifications he thought necessary to prepare the text for publication.

This original manuscript appears to be the subject of this journal entry by Anson Call in 1838. He writes that translation manuscripts of the Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible were kept together and that the translation of the Book of Abraham took about two hours to read.⁶⁶ That this manuscript is not from the KEPA collection should be obvious. This manuscript is much longer than our current published version, perhaps four times as long.⁶⁷

This account also makes clear that the Prophet kept the original manuscript for the Book of Abraham with the manuscripts for the JST. Matthews traces the path of the JST manuscripts from this point in 1838 through the possession of his secretary, James Mulholland, and after that through Mulholland's sister-in-law, Ann Scott, who held on to the documents for a few months before turning them over to Emma Smith.⁶⁸ Matthews notes that Joseph Smith had the manuscripts with him during the Nauvoo period (1839–1844).⁶⁹

It was during this Nauvoo period that the Prophet would have begun to prepare the translation for publication. Documents AB5, 5a, 6, and 7 were likely produced as a printer's manuscript in the same way as the Book of Mormon had a later printer's manuscript, was based on the original manuscript. Because these documents don't contain the full five chapters of the current Book of Abraham, it seems logical to conclude that even this set from the KEPA collection is missing pages.

An original manuscript for the Book of Abraham, while not currently extant, is likely based on the attributes of the other documents

65. Hauglid, "Thoughts on the Book of Abraham," 251.

66. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," 98.

67. Gee, "Eyewitness," 200–01.

68. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation," 99.

69. Ibid., 100. Note that while Matthew's primary concern was the trail of the JST manuscripts, he does note other papers that were kept together as well. The Book of Abraham manuscript seems to be in this collection.

as well as being a natural by-product of a logical translation process. Just as distant planets are discovered by their gravitational influences on known objects, so too does an original manuscript explain the states of the other Egyptian documents.

While Hauglid demonstrates that a large manuscript could have been possible, he also notes a lack of evidence regarding the same.⁷⁰ Caution needs to be taken here so as not to marshal a lack of evidence as evidence.⁷¹ It is true that there is no direct mention of a master translation manuscript, although it may be that Joseph Smith and contemporaries never mentioned it as being called such. References may exist albeit in an unclear or nonspecific description. Because these witnesses refer to the translation, it may be uncertain to which document they are referring.

And while there may not be a contemporary mention of an original manuscript, Church leadership in the late 1800s believed such manuscripts existed. H. Donl Peterson writes of a “mission to the states” to locate the original translation documents.⁷² Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith were dispatched back east to enquire about the relationship of these documents to RLDS Church leadership as well as to research a rumor that these documents were still intact and possibly in the newly rebuilt Wood Museum. They unfortunately returned empty-handed.

I mentioned earlier that collections Ab5 and Ab7 were likely created as a printer’s manuscript for the publication in the *Times & Seasons* periodical. Ab5 consists of thirteen folios with the text of Abraham 1:1-2:18. Each of these pages is labeled in the upper left corner with a page number from one to fourteen. Folio 4 is currently missing. Ab7 is a single sheet containing Abraham 3:18b-22a. The folio sheet is labeled 7 on the front and 8 on the back. If this was from a collection of pages for the second published extract, then it is the only page remaining. The pages of Ab5 and Ab7 average about 160 words per sheet. Based on the total word count of the published Book of Abraham, the first published installment had fourteen manuscript pages, and the second installment could have had approximately twenty pages or ten double-sided pages.

70. Hauglid, *A Textual History*, 5.

71. For a look at this methodological problem, see Hugh W. Nibley, “How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book,” *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 499–502.

72. Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham*, 217–29. Peterson does not make it clear whether he is referring to the papyri fragments or to a written manuscript.

Fifth Method: A Translation Timeline

Another difficulty posed by the lack of documentation of the translation is the mystery of how long the translation actually took. *Just as viewing the method of the translation of other scriptural projects should be factored in to a study of the Book of Abraham, so too should the production timeline be viewed in light of other projects.* Two aspects of the translation time can perhaps benefit from comparison to other projects. First, the pace of translation of the papyri should be compared against the earlier rate of translation of the Book of Mormon. Second, Joseph Smith was concurrently preparing his Inspired Version of the Bible for publication while he was working on the Abraham manuscripts. Examining the work on the JST will prove helpful to understand the Prophet's work on the Book of Abraham.

There are two theories regarding how long it took Joseph Smith to translate the papyri. One posits that the translation was largely completed by 1835. Another theory suggests the early translation happened in 1835, and the rest was completed in 1842 in anticipation of the publication of the selections of the translation in *Times & Seasons*. Both theories are based on the word *translate* in the Prophet's journals. Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen have noted that the current evidence is mixed on when the prophet completed his translation. They write that "at this point, there is no theory that accounts for all of the evidence."⁷³

It should be noted that much of the evidence for the later translation date can be explained in a context that fits the earlier dates as well. Most of this evidence consists of the Prophet's journal entries and will be addressed shortly.

The Rate of Translation: One of the avenues briefly explored by Muhlestein and Hansen discusses the rate of the translation.⁷⁴ Looking at only the translation up to Abraham 2:18, they note that if Joseph Smith had translated this particular section of text, "that would mean that he translated 49 verses, or 2,149 words, averaging almost 6 verses or 253 words a day" during his eight and a half days of translating near the end of 1835.

They use this figure to demonstrate the unlikelihood that a minimum portion of the text was translated in 1835 while the rest of the translation

73. Kerry Muhlestein and Megan Hansen, "The Work of Translating: The Book of Abraham's Translation Chronology" in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life's Work of Robert L. Millet* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 157.

74. Muhlestein and Hansen, "The Work of Translating," 142-43.

was completed in 1842. They note that the rest of the translation of the published version, had it been translated in 1842, would have been completed at a rate nine times faster than the earlier efforts, with an average result of 2226 words per day. The divide between these two rates moves them on to other methods for establishing a timeline, such as the teachings from the Abrahamic record which were recorded between the 1835 and 1842 when the translation was published.

The difficulty with this experiment (which was why the analysis was performed) is that it deals with uncertain journal entries and is based on only a handful of manuscripts. The discovery of manuscripts could change the picture drastically. That said, it may be useful to look at the translation of the Book of Mormon as a comparison of the Prophet's *modus operandi*.

John W. Welch notes that the Book of Mormon translation proceeded along at a “blistering” eight pages per day average.⁷⁵ The eight pages referred to is in reference to the first printed edition of the Book of Mormon. Welch also cites Terryl Givens, who gives an average of over 3,500 words per day produced by the Prophet.⁷⁶ A random sample⁷⁷ from a reprint of the 1830 Book of Mormon reveals approximately 3,770 words for an eight page-selection, which is in the ballpark of Givens' estimate.

The published version of the Book of Abraham contains approximately 5,770 words within its five chapters. Building on the notion that Joseph Smith returned to his use of the seer stones for the translation method, our current version of the Book of Abraham could have been completed in *under two days*. Even if Warren Parrish wrote at half the speed of Oliver Cowdery, who was chief scribe for the Book of Mormon, the published version still could have taken four days.

Two points should be made in regard to this proposition. First, there is still too much we don't know about the translation process for any estimation of time to be attached to the translation. The fact that the Prophet spent the latter half of July 1835 translating as well as a number of days in October and November of the same year doesn't definitively demonstrate that he completed his work by that point. However, if

75. John W. Welch, “Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820-1844* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2005), 102.

76. Welch cites Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*, (Cambridge, MA: Oxford University Press, 2003), 37.

77. Mosiah 17:1-20:22a

the Prophet was returning to a familiar technique of translating and dictating the text, then the Prophet would have been able to translate a large portion of the text of Abraham, if not all of it, in this short time, given his spiritual gifts and abilities.

Second, if Joseph Smith was able to dictate an average of eight pages per day by this method, the number of translation days would allow for a larger manuscript to be produced. The manuscript described by Anson Call could comfortably have been made during these time constraints. The potential for a rapid translation demonstrates that a larger manuscript with additional content could have been produced, but this by no means can prove that it existed.

Hauglid also considers the translation rate in regard to an original manuscript when he notes that if the Prophet “worked at translating the papyri during a good portion of the month of July and the seven additional recorded translation days in late 1835 at a somewhat slower pace than the Book of Mormon, he still could have produced a 50–60 manuscript pages of Abraham text by the end of 1835.”⁷⁸

A comparison of the translation of the Book of Mormon with the Book of Abraham doesn’t prove the Abrahamic record was translated in its entirety in 1835, but it does show that such a feat has a methodological precedence.

The word *Translation*: An additional difficulty occurs in reconstructing a translation time line, in that there is some question on Joseph’s usage of the word *translation*. Muhlestein and Hansen astutely note that when the Prophet mentioned “translating,” he could have been actually revising the text.⁷⁹ While the term seems to be ambiguous, a look at the JST translation process may be helpful, for it was undergoing a similar development.

It was noted above that the manuscripts of the Book of Abraham and the JST were kept together leading into the Nauvoo period and that Joseph continued to work on them extensively for their publication. During this time, Joseph Smith requested that an office might be provided for him so he could continue the work of translation. The account of this meeting proposes

that the church having erected an office where he can attend to the affairs of the Church without distraction, he thinks and verily believes that the time has now come, when he should

78. Hauglid, *A Textual History*, 5.

79. Muhlestein and Hansen, “The Work of Translating,” 149.

devote himself exclusively to those things which relate to the Spiritualities [sic] of the Church and commence the work of translating the Egyptian Records — the Bible — and wait upon the Lord for such Revelations as may be suited to the Condition and circumstances of the Church.⁸⁰

Robert J. Matthews has observed that “although the translation [of the JST had] ... been sealed up and ‘finished’ in 1833, the above memorial indicates that the Prophet intended to do more with the Bible, in addition to translating the Egyptian records.”⁸¹ In this instance, it seems that Joseph used the word *translate* to refer to further work on the documents, even though he considered the translation finished. If these smaller emendations to the text of the JST was labeled as *translating*, such a process for the text of the Book of Abraham may also indicate a completed status at an earlier time.

Indeed, caution should be exercised when referring to the journal entries that mention the translation. Matthews notes that the Prophet also used the word *translation* “to convey the meaning generally assigned to the term *transmitted*.”⁸² The Eighth Article of Faith is used as an example of this usage. The word *translation* needn’t always refer to the decipherment of languages or the revelation of ancient content.

Though the translation timeline for the Book of Abraham remains unknown for now, many of the methods of examination seem to favor an 1835 time frame.

Sixth Method: Deposition of Witnesses

Inevitably, any study of the Book of Abraham or the papyri will deal with witness statements, which all need to be examined according to a number of factors. The witness statements need to be examined on their own merit, but they shouldn’t always be taken at face value. They shouldn’t be treated as if they were puzzle pieces which were handed out randomly by Joseph Smith and which, if they all could be collected and assembled, reveal a clear picture of the Book of Abraham. Instead, many of these pieces are duplicates of each other. Many pieces have been altered over time due to faulty memory or reshaped to embarrass the Prophet. And of course many pieces have been lost.

80. “History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842],” p. 1063, The Joseph Smith Papers, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/235>

81. Matthews, “A Plainer Translation,” 42.

82. Ibid., 7.

Research on the scrolls, vignettes and mummies in possession of the Saints needs to be done within the larger picture of how those of Joseph Smith's era understood ancient artifacts. When patterns of belief and behavior toward other antiquities are encountered, this mindset needs to be applied to the Egyptian collection as well. Researchers should also be mindful of whether the witness statements can be considered accurate if they are from second- or third-hand sources.

The witnesses of the scrolls lived in a pre-scientific culture that understood antiquities in a different manner than what is understood today. Egyptian was just beginning to be understood in faraway places, which often left these early witnesses to use their best judgment to interpret the ancient scrolls. This interpretation was built on the revelatory groundwork given to the Prophet Joseph Smith, but many of their best guesses about the papyri have now proven incorrect.⁸³

Nineteenth-Century Understandings: First, research needs to focus not only on what the witnesses saw, but how they saw it. It is necessary to understand the attitudes and understanding of the Bible in postcolonial America, for this will shape how the Saints viewed the Book of Abraham. The Bible was not only their religious guide, but it also provided proof-texts for theological reasoning, a baseline for science and astronomy, and a reliable handbook for world history. Philip Barlow notes that “Joseph Smith grew up in a Bible-drenched society, and he showed it. Like those around him, his religious conceptions and his everyday

83. This understanding of the Bible by these early Latter-day Saints needs to be coupled with their perceptions of Hebrew in early America. Among the Bible-believing Christians, Hebrew became something of a gold standard for scriptural understanding. Scholars and clergy clamored to learn the Hebrew script to aid in their exegesis of the Old Testament. The Hebrew language was also thought to be a closer to the original or pure language of Eden. If the Latter-day Saints thought that the scrolls in the Egyptian collection contained Hebrew characters, it was to testify of the antiquity of the scrolls. Gray notes that “references to Hebrew on the papyri appear to have been the impressions of the documents’ ancient and sacred nature, rather than accurate paleographic descriptions.” If witness statements record that Hebrew was featured in the scrolls, these statements need to be analyzed according to this criterion. See Matthew J. Grey “The Word of the Lord in the Original” *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 260.

speech were biblically informed. He shared his era's assumptions about the literality, historicity, and inspiration of the Bible."⁸⁴

These early Latter-day Saints viewed themselves as direct heirs to the Kingdom of God that existed in ancient times. In addition to seeing themselves reflected in antiquity, they viewed the rest of the world around them as remnants of the biblical epoch. Mark Alan Wright sets the stage for understanding the early Saints' notions of antiquity:

The Saints were very comfortably situated within the cultural context of their day. The discipline of North American archeology was still in its infancy, an era we now refer to the "Speculative period," which began in 1492 and lasted until 1840. According to North American archeologist Larry Zimmerman, "Epistemologically ... [during the Speculative period, people] were mostly prescientific. What they knew was based on theological models of explanation. Essentially, if something wasn't in the Bible, it had no real explanation." The expectation, then, was that the Bible would explain the sometimes strange things that were being unearthed by antiquarians — and, conversely, that the artifacts would validate the biblical narrative. In this regard, Joseph Smith and his followers were very much products of their time.⁸⁵

Wright's important study demonstrates how this model of explanation functioned when the Saints encountered ancient relics. He shows how the discoveries of Native American remains came to be interpreted as ancient Lamanite warriors. The "discovery" of the Kinderhook plates also had ties to the biblical era in the minds of some of the Saints, even though the antiquity of the plates has now proven to be a hoax. Wright further details that when

artifacts were brought to his attention, Joseph would virtually always attempt to sacralize them by placing them within the context of scriptural peoples or places — generally, the very scriptures he claimed to bring to light. The artifacts and

84. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 2nd Edition (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

85. Larry Zimmerman, "Archeology," in *A Companion to the American Indian*, ed. Thomas Biolsi (Malden, MA: Blakwell, 2008), 527, as cited in Mark Alan Wright, "Joseph Smith and Native American Artifacts," *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 121–122.

the scriptures had a symbiotic relationship in his mind; the scriptures provided the history of the objects and the objects provided the history of the scriptures.⁸⁶

The Saints had the mindset that they were being blessed with ancient artifacts and that these artifacts in turn went on to support the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon was frequently used to show support for the legitimacy of the Bible, so much so that it became a literal and physical fulfillment of Ezekiel 37, with its mention of the Stick of Joseph. The Nephite interpreters included with the brass plates were soon called the Urim and Thummim, based on the sacred objects of the Old Testament.

Building on this paradigm, the idea that the Egyptian collection had biblical ties is not unreasonable, given the expectations of the early members of the Church. In addition to the papyri being tied to the biblical accounts, it became only natural for the mummies also to be connected to the biblical record. Muhlestein notes that “accounts make it clear that there was some kind of belief during the Nauvoo era that the mummies were royalty; and perhaps were connected with the Exodus.”⁸⁷ Further,

If Joseph Smith knew that he had the writings of Abraham and Joseph and if he knew or suspected that these writings did not take up all the papyri, it is logical that he would assume that there were writings from other great biblical figures present as well. Correspondingly, such biblical awareness creates the natural assumption that legged snakes were a depiction of the Garden of Eden story, for it was not until after the eating of the fruit that the serpent was told to go about on its belly.⁸⁸

Muhlestein is on the right track. This “biblical awareness” leads Joseph Smith and the early Saints to assume the whole collection of Egyptian artifacts belonged to a biblical treasure trove. With the Book of Abraham physically present on the scroll of Horos, the other items in the collection would have naturally belonged to other biblical figures.

86. Wright, “Joseph Smith and Native American Artifacts,” 134.

87. Kerry Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith’s Biblical View of Egypt,” *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World* eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 464.

88. Kerry Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts: A Model for Evaluating the Prophet Nature of the Prophet’s Ideas about the Ancient World,” *BYU Studies*, 55:3 (2016), 76-77.

Witnesses report seeing the within the scrolls the writing of Joseph of Egypt, the patriarch Jacob, Moses, and others.⁸⁹

Muhlestein shows how the vignettes on the Tshemmin scroll could be seen as representations of biblical stories, particularly when one of its vignettes features a serpent with legs. With this new reinterpretation, other vignettes on the scroll were assigned to other biblical events. A representation of the Trinitarian Godhead was seen, as was the pillar of Enoch. In addition to the Tshemmin vignettes, Muhlestein reports that some of the early witnesses were likely referring to the judgment scene of the Neferninub scroll as being representative of Jacob's ladder.⁹⁰

Based on this pattern of interpretation, the scroll of Neferninub could be seen as a scroll of Jacob by some of the witnesses, the mummies could be seen as Egyptian royalty, and the hypocephalus of Sheshonq as a Celestial Globe that showed the System of Astronomy. The large quantity of material on the scrolls would prompt Oliver Cowdery to exclaim that "volumes" would be needed to hold the translations.⁹¹

Perhaps unfortunately, this paradigm also shows the writings of Joseph of Egypt were likely part of the biblical inventions. Oliver Cowdery spoke most explicitly of the Book of Joseph, describing it as containing pictures that are a match to the vignettes of the Tshemmin roll.⁹² A simpler solution is that he was attempting to make sense of this scroll by assigning biblical connections to the vignettes when in reality it contained no such writings of any of the patriarchs.

The idea of the Book of Joseph was fueled in part by the legitimate presence of the writings of Abraham and the then current "scientific" approach of linking mysterious artifacts to the Bible. The idea of a Book of Joseph continues to be perpetuated in our day by a certain "list-mania" that can exist among students of lost scripture.⁹³

89. Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 213-23.

90. Muhlestein, "Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts," 49.

91. Oliver Cowdery, "Egyptian Mummies," *Latter Day Saints Messenger and Advocate* 2/3 (December 1835): 236. See also William West's statement that the translation would be larger than the Bible. See William S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Rise Progress and Pretensions of the Mormons* (n.o., 1837), 5, as cited in Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 217.

92. Cowdery, "Egyptian Mummies," 236.

93. Examples of such lists can be found in Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mormons, Manuscripts and Mummies*, 262-63; 269-71. See also Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed., (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 453-55. Among these lists it is common to see full books assigned to people mentioned very briefly in scriptural passages. For example, McConkie implies

Witnesses and Hearsay: The witness statements themselves can be difficult to study based on how researchers group them together. Should they be categorized by their status of being eyewitnesses as opposed to being a secondhand account? How much credence should be given to convergences? Should the accounts of content based on the vignettes be understood differently than the witnesses of the content of the translation? These are questions that invite further exploration.

An introductory query into the topic of witness statements and hearsay has been written by John Gee,⁹⁴ who carefully guides the reader through examples of witnesses seeing the same things but reporting the events differently.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was the best witness for the translation of the Book of Abraham. Gee notes that “published statements of the Prophet take precedence over secondhand garbled remembrances, no matter how well intentioned.”⁹⁵

Unfortunately, Joseph Smith had little to say about the translation process. However, he needs to be regarded as an expert witness to the contents of the unpublished portions of the Book of Abraham. If the Prophet completed more of the translation than what was eventually published (and the evidence reviewed shows that this is likely the case), he would be the best source for information on the contents of the papyri. As an example of this, consider the following statement, which was part of a sermon delivered by the Prophet in Nauvoo:

[The] Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham’s record, are called: God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Witness or Testator.⁹⁶

that statements in the Book of Mormon from prophets such as Zenock, Neum, and Ezais were extracted from their respected books. However, these prophets of the Brass Plates may have had their words recorded only in a now unknown historical narrative, such as with Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha.

94. Gee, “Eyewitness,” 175–217.

95. Ibid., 195.

96. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” pp. 10–11, *Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives, as cited in Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 220.

Of course, the current version of Abraham's record doesn't mention these names of God, nor does it reflect an everlasting covenant made among these three personages. This statement now indicates lost material that was never published. Equally important, it gives us a glimpse at what the missing content contained.

An additional comment by the prophet is worth examination. The Prophet Joseph Smith, speaking at a conference of the Church on 27 August 1843, turned his remarks to the subject of the eternal nature and power of the Melchizedek Priesthood. During this sermon, the Prophet quoted or paraphrased an episode between Abraham and Melchizedek regarding the Priesthood. The account reads:

Abram, says to Melchisedec, I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the Priesthood, and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchisedeck [sic] ordained Abram and sent him away. Abram rejoiced saying now I have a Priesthood.⁹⁷

These details from the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek are not attested to in the book of Genesis, the prophet's Inspired Translation of the Bible, or the Book of Mormon. The themes of Abraham's receiving the priesthood are unique to the Book of Abraham.⁹⁸ Such a statement would be a fulfillment of the desires of Abraham that he recorded in the first part of his record. It is also consistent with a statement likely provided by Lucy Mack Smith that the Book of Abraham contains "more particular accounts than our Bible gives us, of Noah, the Ark and the flood — of Abraham and Melchizedek — of Joseph and Pharaoh — and of various other distinguished characters."⁹⁹ It is also worth noting that Joseph Smith here used the name *Abram*, rather than the longer *Abraham*. This is consistent with the earliest copies of the Book of Abraham manuscripts, which used this form as well.

Second- and third-hand accounts need to be considered carefully, as they are steps removed from eyewitness accounts. For instance, the prophet's friends and family left descriptions of the contents of the papyri, as did many visitors to Nauvoo who saw the mummies and papyri. These descriptions included items that were both on the papyri

97. History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843 – 30 April 1844], p. 1708, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/80>. This sermon was recorded by Willard Richards.

98. Hauglid, "Thoughts on the Book of Abraham," 247.

99. *Friends Weekly Intelligencer*, 3 October 1846, 211, as cited in Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 223.

(such as vignettes now lost) as well as descriptions of unpublished sections of the Book of Abraham. There is a built-in difficulty in this task: all the descriptions of the contents of the Book of Abraham are not on equal ground. Extra care needs to be taken not to equate an eyewitness account of the scrolls with second- or third-hand accounts, which amount to hearsay.¹⁰⁰

A unique case about the witness statements is that there is sometimes a convergence of ideas. These need to be dealt with carefully. They might carry more weight than a single account, and they need also to be studied based on their source. If multiple witness statements are based on one incorrect witness, then caution needs to be the rule. And while only looking at firsthand accounts would be a nice ideal, Muhlestein notes that to ignore statements on the ground that they are firsthand remembrances would be lazy scholarship.¹⁰¹

An additional admonition: it needs to be remembered that many of the Prophet Joseph Smith's journal entries were added after the fact by his scribes. Indeed, many of these journal entries were included years after they actually happened. Before relying too heavily on these accounts, these ought to be checked against the Prophet's original papers to verify that they actually say what they report to say.

Seventh Method: Approaching Antiquity

It was noted at the beginning of this study that one of the problems of Book of Abraham research is that it is riddled with unspoken yet faulty assumptions. One of the main unspoken assumptions that dominates the field regards the antiquity of the scrolls and the facsimiles. Many studies want to place the papyri and the vignettes in Abraham's hands without thinking about whether he would have created them. *The age of the papyri and the vignettes shouldn't at the outset be retrofitted to Abraham's day. Related to this idea is the notion that Abraham drew the vignettes himself to illustrate his record. This does not honestly treat the papyri for what they are. Studies connecting Abraham and the vignettes need to be done with caution.*

A methodological difficulty is often attempted by studies that begin with the end result of the facsimiles and their explanations and then try to trace their history back in time to their origin, to levels of ancient Egyptian understanding and/or to Abraham's own time so we can get the story to match up with our expected conclusions.

100. Gee, "Eyewitness," 175–217.

101. Muhlestein, "Joseph Smith's Biblical View," 451.

A second unspoken assumption is the notion that the Book of Abraham, the facsimiles, and the papyri correspond with ancient Egyptian language, religion and culture. However, exactly how the correspondence is supposed to work has never been clear. Recently, scholars have been questioning why an Egyptian background for the Book of Abraham is necessary.¹⁰² Studies of the Book of Abraham that seek an Egyptian connection need to demonstrate why such connections are required.

Antiquity of the scrolls: The first assumption that needs to be addressed is the notion that Abraham was the literal author of the scrolls and fragments now in possession of the Church. This has been called *Autographic Assumption*¹⁰³ and was a much more prominent idea among early members of the Church, but it still lingers in the minds of some critics of the Church as well as with a small number of Latter-day Saints.

These assumptions had their origin early on and are perpetuated by a misunderstanding of early eyewitness statements like that of Josiah Quincy, who reported that the papyrus contained the “handwriting of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful”¹⁰⁴ as well as the Book of Abraham’s heading, which states that the book was written by Abraham’s “own hand, upon papyrus,” which some extend to mean the scroll fragments now in possession of the Church, and that the accompanying vignettes were literally created by Abraham.¹⁰⁵

Muhlestein notes some of the problems with this assumption:

Critics say that if this papyrus was written in the second century BC it could not possibly have been written by Abraham himself. In regard to this assumption, I ask, who said this particular papyrus was written by Abraham himself? The heading does not indicate that Abraham had written that particular copy but rather that he was the author of the original. What these critics have done is confuse the difference between a text and a manuscript. ... A text, regardless of how many copies of it exist in the world, is written by one author. However, each copy of that text is a manuscript.¹⁰⁶

102. Muhlestein, “Assessing the Joseph Smith Papyri,” 41; Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 98-99.

103. Barney, “The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources,” 111.

104. Gee, “Eyewitness,” 194-95.

105. Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 97.

106. Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 230.

The notion of Autographic Assumptions has been thoroughly dismantled by Kevin L. Barney,¹⁰⁷ whose important study details the process by which these assumptions were called out by critics of the Church, and members of the Church had to reassess their views. As Egyptology grew as a discipline, the idea that the scrolls and the facsimiles were the product of Abraham's day became more and more unlikely.

Curiously, the notion of Autographic Assumptions still exists for many students of the Book of Abraham regarding the facsimiles. Scholars are willing to grant that the scrolls in Joseph Smith's possession were from the Ptolemaic era, but some still wish to see the facsimiles as holdovers from Abraham's original work. Perhaps this could be called *Autographic Illustrations*. Note that much of this analysis is designed to deal with the explanations of the facsimiles rather than the facsimiles themselves.

A version of this idea is manifest in a commentary on the Pearl of Great Price that was compiled by Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes. The authors put forth the hypothesis that the explanations of the facsimiles provided by Joseph Smith were interpretations of original drawings made by Abraham. The illustrations that accompany the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price are the result of these original drawings being transmitted over time, especially modified to suit the purposes of Horos, the owner of the papyrus.¹⁰⁸ If the explanations don't match the Egyptian originals, it is because the Egyptian vignettes have been modified beyond their original purpose.

This theory has the advantage of being able to bridge this disconnect between the explanations and the vignettes. It provides a buffer between the vignettes and the explanations to allow the explanations room for vindication by favorable comparison to antiquity. As such, Joseph Smith can be shown to have provided us with much more than "good guessing."¹⁰⁹

This theory has the disadvantage of being entirely unprovable. The authors advance their assumptions first and then develop a theory that fits. Because they believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, his explanations would have been doctrinally and historically correct. Because the vignettes don't entirely agree with the explanations, and because the explanations aren't likely to have been changed or

107. Barney, "The Facsimiles," 107-30.

108. Draper, Brown and Rhodes, *The Pearl of Great Price*, 243.

109. *Ibid.*, 283.

misunderstood, this disconnect must lie on the part of the facsimiles themselves. To solve this, the authors invent Abrahamic originals, which then must have matched the explanations in their original form. Draper and the other authors need that there be original illustrations by Abraham himself if Joseph Smith's explanations are to make sense.

The difficulty with this, of course, is that it invents documents to fill in a gap based on their assumptions. They also make the error of lumping all the facsimiles into one category, in this case as belonging to the original Abrahamic writings.

Turning to Facsimile 1, the authors suggest that

in its present form, the illustration represents the deceased owner of the papyrus, Hor, lying on a lion-couch and being resurrected. Above his head is a human-headed bird representing his soul (Egyptian *ba*). The standing figure is Anubis, god of mummification and guide of the dead, who leads the resurrected person to the hall of judgment and, if the person passes the judgment, into the presence of Osiris, the god of resurrection.¹¹⁰

While this vignette could represent Horos, Anubis, and the *ba* of Horos, the document itself doesn't actually say who is featured. The only real connection of this vignette to the Horos Book of Breathings is based on proximity. This interpretation of the vignette containing Horos and Anubis may be possible, but it isn't the only one.

This interpretation of the vignette depends on there having been an Abrahamic original which was modified into a standard funerary illustration. Unique features of this vignette are explained because of this document's dual nature as being a hybrid of an original picture and a newly modified document. The authors note that parts of this vignette do not match standard funerary illustrations and explain them as remnant parts of an original Abrahamic scene. They give a similar treatment to Facsimile 3, where in this scene "pharaoh has become a female goddess, as has his son. The king's waiter, Shulem, is now Hor, the owner of the papyrus,"¹¹¹ etc.

The difficulty with this position is that if Abraham originally drew these illustrations, only to have them modified to more Egyptian-style documents, they have changed to the point where they don't represent the Book of Abraham. It has been mentioned above that the hypocephalus

110. Draper, Brown and Rhodes, 287.

111. Ibid., 296.

of Sheshonq and the presentation scene are fully functional examples of their genre. Re-drawing supposed originals as stock Egyptian scenes means they are no longer the originals nor are they even faithful copies, just images that are vaguely similar. Were someone to replace his or her television remote control with a scientific calculator, it will be unable to turn on the television, even though the two items may look analogous.

The output of this theory changes Abraham's teaching in Pharaoh's court into an accurate presentation scene introducing Horos to Osiris, yet the scene of Abraham on the altar appears not to match standard embalming scenes very well, although the authors in this particular commentary label it as such. The consequences of applying the same rules to all three documents results in an analysis that must include exceptions because Facsimile 1 doesn't conform in the way the other documents do. They note that Horos's being in the classic gesture of prayer and the presence of the crocodile-god below the altar are different from standard embalming scenes and therefore, according to the authors, must be remnants of the Abrahamic originals.¹¹²

There is an even larger difficulty here as well. The hypocephalus was not owned by Horos and was created by a different scribe. Even if the two vignettes from the scroll of Horos were based upon Abrahamic originals, it doesn't explain how an additional Abrahamic vignette became transformed into a hypocephali and preserved by another individual away from the scroll of Horos. Even if this scenario were true for Horos, it wouldn't guarantee that Sheshonq would follow the same procedure. Indeed, Sheshonq and Horos may have lived at different times and been entombed in entirely different catacombs, only to have these disparate documents excavated and collected together centuries later.

There is one last problem with this specific theory, that the vignettes of the scroll of Horos were based on Abrahamic originals. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes invoked a version of the missing papyrus theory by stating that a copy of the Book of Abraham on the scroll of Horos was "most likely."¹¹³ These authors claim the pictures attached to the Book of Breathings were originally drawn by Abraham and modified by the scribe who created the scrolls for Horos. If these illustrations were created by Abraham for his record, why were they removed from the version of the Book of Abraham that was on the scrolls and heavily modified and repurposed for Horos's Book of Breathings? Especially if the Book of Abraham were still included in the collection of scrolls? Why couldn't

112. Draper, Brown and Rhodes, 287.

113. *Ibid.*, 242.

the author preserve the original style of the Abrahamic drawings for the Book of Abraham and then craft new illustrations for his Book of Breathings? Further, if the original drawings of Abraham were heavily repurposed for the Book of Breathings, why doesn't Facsimile 1 have anything to do with the sequence or content of the Book of Breathings?

Balk like an Egyptian: It has been the standard procedure to judge the translation and interpretation of the scroll and the vignettes by comparing them with those of professional Egyptologists. I noted earlier that the differences between Joseph Smith's versions and that of the Egyptologists has caused no small disconnect. However, Latter-day Saint scholars have come to question the methodology of this approach. The matter of using the Egyptological standards of interpretation seems to be rarely cut and dried. This of course does not mean that legitimate parallels to the explanations cannot be found in the Egyptian historical record, but this is not as simple as it appears on the surface. William Hamblin demonstrates the complexity of the task by noting:

In other words, by the Late Period at the latest, the Egyptians had developed religious methods of reinterpreting their own ancient iconographic symbols and images (which were by that time already 2000 years old). *Different movements and sects within Egypt produced differing interpretations of the same images.* This phenomenon broadly parallels similar and roughly contemporaneous developments of different movements of textual exegesis and interpretation among both Egyptians, Alexandrian Greeks, and Jews within Egypt itself.¹¹⁴

Kevin Barney makes the correct observation that while the Book of Abraham as we know it was written on papyrus, Abraham himself sojourned in Egypt only for a short time. He further notes the likelihood that Abraham penned his writings in an ancient language such as Akkadian or another Semitic language.¹¹⁵ Abraham was not an Egyptian and needn't have spoken the language. He may have taught Pharaoh the principles of astronomy through an interpreter. John Gee also notes the idea that an Egyptian interpretation of the facsimiles is an assumption that ought to be questioned. He asks, "Why do Joseph Smith's interpretations need to match ancient Egyptian interpretations at all? I do not intend

114. William J. Hamblin, "Iconotropy and the JS Abraham Facsimilies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 2013. Emphasis in original..

115. Barney, "The Facsimiles," 113.

to address the issue here but merely to raise it. Critics should note that unless they can answer this question satisfactorily, they have no case.”¹¹⁶

By the same token, those who wish to provide faith-promoting scholarship should also demonstrate why Joseph’s explanations of the facsimiles need to match ancient Egyptian thought.

One such theory, posited by Kevin Barney, sees the shortcomings of a strictly Egyptian analysis and proposes a different ancient model for the explanations of the facsimiles. His Semitic Adaption theory shows us a potentially useful way of viewing the facsimiles through a “Semitic prism” rather than through the sometimes problematic Egyptological lens. His analysis is creative and insightful in viewing the facsimiles in this new light. This Semitic view is a result of his correctly choosing to abandon any Autographic Assumptions, as mentioned above. He also demonstrates examples in which Egyptian and Jewish texts influenced each other. He explains,

I suggest that as part of the redaction of the text, J-red (our hypothetical Egyptian-Jewish redactor) adopted or adapted vignettes from a Book of Breathings and a hypocephalus as illustrations for the Book of Abraham. In co-opting the papyri to a new purpose, this person reinterpreted them in accordance with Semitic religious sensibilities and the requirements of the Abraham story. Therefore, the Egyptian material in the facsimiles has been refracted through a Semitic prism. It is only by viewing the facsimiles through a Semitic lens that we can clearly see how the explanations relate to the figures.¹¹⁷

This theory gives rise to the correct idea that the illustrations could benefit from a Semitic explanation, but to do this he has to invent a Jewish-Egyptian redactor, which seems methodologically difficult. Another problem present in this theory is the unspoken notion that an ancient Jew would need to be responsible for the Semitic content. This could be a likelihood for the presence of Semitic content, but it may not be the only source.

Unfortunately, there seems to be one fatal error in this particular version of Semitic influence. It may well be that the explanations to the facsimiles have a Semitic slant, but let us note that this specific information isn’t built into the vignettes. The burden of the Semitic

116. Gee, “A Method for Studying the Facsimiles,” 352.

117. Barney, “The Facsimiles,” 115.

Adaption theory is to demonstrate that J-red had specific interpretations in mind that aren't explicit in the vignettes as we now have them. If he had specific meaning in mind, where did this information originate if it didn't come from the vignettes themselves? The parsimonious answer is that the explanations originated from Joseph Smith himself, through revelation, through his own studies of the Egyptian scrolls, or through a combination of both.

Barney is willing to entertain the idea that the vignettes were not part of the original Book of Abraham but instead were standard illustrations of the time, then adapted or adopted to the Book of Abraham by a Jewish-Egyptian scribe. One of the difficult positions Barney suggests is that the hypothetical J-red had selected both the vignettes from the scroll of Horos and the hypocephalus of Sheshonq to supplement the Abraham story.¹¹⁸ Here he makes the mistake of subjecting all three facsimiles to the same rules of interpretation when they needn't be lumped together at all. As mentioned above, the hypocephalus of Sheshonq and the vignette of Horos introduced into the presence of Osiris are, for all intents and purposes, standard examples of their respective classes of documents. The only sign of adapting or adopting of the facsimiles comes from the explanations and not from facsimiles themselves.

Comparative studies: Another area where bad methodology can thrive is in comparative studies. These can be methodologically problematic if the underlying assumptions behind such studies are incorrect. One of the biggest problems of comparative studies is the often unaddressed idea that correlation between similar concepts or ideas is the same as causation, which may not be the case. Scholars have noted that hypocephali (such as the one owned by Sheshonq) can be shown to have thematic connections to Abraham. However, we would be mistaken to believe that because such connections exist, it indicates that Abraham drew our particular hypocephali or that the hypocephali were deliberately created to represent Abraham's teachings.

One such example is the fact that Abraham has been connected with the Wedjat Eye or the Eye of Ra, which is also one of the names of the hypocephalus. Rhodes notes an Egyptian text that mentions "Abraham, the pupil of the eye of the Wedjat."¹¹⁹ This specific connection of Abraham to the hypocephalus includes Abraham as part of the ancient milieu,

118. This is also intoned by Michael Lyon, *Appreciating Hypocephali as Works of Art and Faith [Transcript]*, (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1.

119. Michael Dennis Rhodes, "The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus ... 17 Years Later" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994), 6. See also Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri," 101.

but it may be difficult to claim more than that. Any further attempt to connect these items risks a syllogistic fallacy: if (A) the hypocephalus is a Wedjat eye, and (B) Abraham is the Wedjat eye, then (C) Abraham is the hypocephalus. While the mention that Abraham has been called the eye of the Wedjat in one text seems to be an intriguing parallel, it is notable that similar titles have been given to the Egyptian deity Hathor¹²⁰ as well as the land of Egypt itself.¹²¹ The nature of the parallel changes if more data are considered.

Great effort needs to go into studies to avoid forms of “parallelomania.”¹²² Samuel Sandmel warns that when parallel material is believed to have been found between two texts, the parallels need to stand in context rather than being viewed only in isolation. Such parallels taken out of context may miss important underlying factors, such as mistranslations or cultural difference. Scholars need to be wary of producing quantity rather than quality when making such connections.

Origins of the Facsimile Explanations: A difficulty is encountered in the perception that the explanations of the facsimiles are of ancient origin and therefore need to be accounted for by linking them to antiquity.

The explanations suffer from the same endemic problem as the rest of the Book of Abraham: an overwhelming lack of documentation. There is only one existing copy of these explanations among the Church’s Egyptian papers, the explanations for Facsimile 3 being missing entirely. In addition to this singular copy, these pages appear to have been created very near the publication of the facsimiles in the *Times & Seasons* and may have been the printer’s manuscripts for the publication. If the ideas for the explanations existed earlier to this, the documentation of these ideas is lacking.¹²³ Gee notes:

The earliest manuscripts of any of the Explanations are the Book of Abraham manuscripts 5A and 6, both in the handwriting of Willard Richards. There is nothing in the

120. Nibley, *One Eternal Round*, 318. See also Hugh W. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005), 517.

121. *Ibid.*, 204.

122. Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 81/1 (March, 1962), 1–13.

123. The journal by Appleby has some of this information from the explanations, but there is some question as to whether he had this information earlier or supplemented his account with information from the published explanations after the fact. See Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 201.

documents that indicates authorship. While I am not saying that assuming that Joseph Smith wrote the Explanations is a bad assumption, it does need to be pointed out that it is an assumption and not provable.¹²⁴

This question of the authorship of the explanations also extends to Abraham or a later scribe somewhere along the lines of transmission. The explanations provided for facsimiles 2 and 3 are not inherent within the vignettes themselves. Claiming Abrahamic authorship for these explanations is impossible to prove. Like the Autographic Assumptions mentioned earlier, it is illogical to start with the results of the explanatory notes being ancient and then seek a path to prove such a path to antiquity existed.

Far too often, scholars and critics deal with the explanations of the symbols as either right or wrong. This however denies the fluid nature of symbolism. As William Hamblin has noted, the symbolism of Egyptian imagery went through an evolution over the years. Symbols can have a wide multivalence depending on time or culture. Studies of the facsimiles would do better to deal with the subject of symbolism as valid” or “invalid” instead of “right” or “wrong.” If imagery has multiple possible meanings, the act of labeling one particular interpretation right or wrong leaves out additional and even contradictory layers of meaning that may be considered appropriate as well. Thinking of the symbolism as valid or invalid may take a little more work, but it will yield a more honest result.

Accuracy of the facsimiles: Another error that has been made regarding the facsimiles is the notion that they have been incorrectly reproduced in the Pearl of Great Price and need a proper restoration. Larsen commits this error when he begins applying what he believes are correct features to Facsimile 1. He has already decided that Joseph Smith’s representation is incorrect, so he creates a new version based on other funerary texts. By assuming the vignette of Abraham on the altar should have been a standard funerary illustration, he makes changes he feels appropriate. This method is putting the cart before the horse. His approach might seem applicable if the vignette were a standard funerary text, but if it is a unique illustration unrelated to the Book of Breathings, his restorations are incongruous.

The correct way to approach possible restorations is first to see if the existing markings on the papyri would support the restoration rather

124. Gee, “Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt,” 437–38.

than deciding what needs to be in the picture and making the new figures fit.¹²⁵ Larson's restorations of the additional bird in lieu of a hand and the resurrected holding his phallus may be similar to other funerary documents, but these emendations don't fit what is already on the extant papyri.¹²⁶

Observations

With these methodological parameters in place, a new look at the translation, the papyri and the vignettes seems warranted. To be clear, I am basing these observations on the notion that the Book of Abraham existed in some state among the literature of the Theban archives, which Horos, feeling that something about this record was worth recording, copied it alongside his Book of Breathings on the scroll. I hope these observations will be a springboard for replacing the bad methodology still present in all too many studies about the Book of Abraham.

The Facsimiles: There have been many opinions regarding the nature of the facsimiles. Gee summarizes some of the options as that

1. The facsimiles belong to Egyptian funerary texts and have nothing whatsoever to do with Abraham.
2. The facsimiles originated with Abraham and were drawn by him on the papyrus. This requires that the manuscripts date to the time of Abraham.
3. The facsimiles originated with Abraham and were copied along with the manuscript.
4. The facsimiles are illustrations only loosely dependent on the text. They were illuminations of the day the papyri were produced, using stock motives of the art of the time and the place where the papyri were produced. The facsimiles are thus comparable to mediaeval manuscript illuminations in

125. For example, see Bell's "restoration" of JSP I as a more careful attempt than the heavy-handed work of Larson. Bell sees the second hand of the man on the couch for what it is instead of a second bird. See Lanny Bell, "The Ancient Egyptian 'Books of Breathing,' the Mormon 'Book of Abraham,' and the Development of Egyptology in America," in *Egypt and Beyond: Essays Presented to Leonard H. Lesko upon his Retirement from the Wilbour Chair of Egyptology at Brown University*, (Charlestown, MA: Brown University, 2008), 30.

126. Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992). See also Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition*, 91.

biblical manuscripts.¹²⁷

The correct nature of the facsimiles is likely a combination of categories 1 and 4. The difficulty of these categories is that they judge the facsimiles based on their final location in the published Book of Abraham and apply the same rules of interpretation to all three vignettes, which muddies the picture. Allowing each vignette to be studied as a separate document gives a much cleaner picture.

The Book of Abraham was published in installments, with three illustrations accompanying the text. The original monograph written by Abraham himself was produced well over a thousand years before Horos of Thebes made a copy of this text on his own papyrus scroll. While it is certainly possible that Abraham included illustrations to go with his story, there is no scholarly way to know this. Modern assumptions use an implied but unexamined *a priori* argument that since the Book of Abraham was published with pictures, Abraham must have been responsible for those pictures as well as the text. This reasoning is held in place with Abraham 1:12-14 as a lynchpin.

However, even if the text of this statement was supplied by Abraham, it still applies only to the scene of Abraham on the lion couch. The other facsimiles aren't mentioned in our current published Book of Abraham. Whereas the text of Abraham 3:15 states that the visions of the cosmos are being shown to Abraham so he can teach them in Egypt, our current text doesn't mention any connected illustrations.

The facsimiles were created because Joseph and the early Saints viewed the Egyptian collection as being biblical-era artifacts. The hypocephalus was known as a Celestial Globe from an early date. As such, it is likely that it held the same weight of importance to the members as the scrolls themselves. It should be seen as being published as part of the whole biblical collection instead of being a physical part of the scroll of Horos and, hence, separate from the Book of Abraham.

There have been numerous and massive studies on the relationship between Abraham, the ancient religion of the Egyptians, and the facsimiles. While it can't be proven that the hypocephalus of Sheshonq and the presentation scene of Horos and Osiris have direct ancient ties to Abraham, many of the ideas assigned to these vignettes by the Prophet Joseph Smith have proven to be at home in an ancient milieu.

127. Gee, "A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri," 15-16. Gee notes that he favors the last view that the facsimiles are similar to illuminated manuscripts.

It is difficult to tell if Joseph Smith thought the other vignettes were legitimate scenes from the Book of Abraham or whether he simply accepted a good idea by having a vignette match the story and chose other pictures that would be a good fit for the Abraham extracts. Joseph could have recognized a good idea and run with it.

Since this study sees Joseph Smith as having co-opted the vignette of Horos and Osiris as well as hypocephalus of Sheshonq, it seems possible the prophet could have gone on to adapt additional vignettes for further installments of the Book of Abraham in the *Times & Seasons*.

Facsimile 1: This vignette was specifically created to supplement the text of the Book of Abraham in the same manner that other vignettes are used on other scrolls. Specifically, assuming that Horos is responsible for the textual gloss that became Abraham 1:12,¹²⁸ the purpose of this vignette is to show the type of altar and the gods of the Egyptians. Why this is important to the author isn't clear, but it seems to fulfill his purposes. That said, the rest of the details of his illustration don't necessarily matter. Since the surviving papyrus is missing the head of the idolatrous priest, his knife, and the head of the angel of the Lord, there has been no small stir about if they were reproduced correctly by Joseph Smith and Reuben Hedlock. Ultimately, it doesn't really matter if the angel has a bird head or a human head or if the priest has a human head or a jackal head. The purpose of the picture isn't about those things. Efforts might be better served by determining why it was important to the author to show the form of the altar rather than to decide if the original drawing featured a hand or a bird's wing.

Horos isn't specially modifying an embalming scene or a resurrection scene as has been suggested by others, he is creating a new scene that uses the same techniques and styles he undoubtedly used elsewhere. This vignette was created on Horos's own volition. Before this, the Book of Abraham, like the rest of ancient biblical scrolls, had no illustrations. For Horos's version, he added a vignette following a similar tendency to illustrate contemporary Books of Breathings and Books of the Dead.

The idea of providing a vignette for the story would have made sense to the Egyptian scribe of this scroll but also might have been a novelty for a scroll containing writings of a biblical figure. To the best of my knowledge, scrolls of Jewish origin do not contain illustrations. Indeed, the prohibition of certain images in Jewish art has a long and complicated history. The Babylonian Talmud Tractate Abodah Zarah

128. This idea would also be true if Joseph Smith were the originator of this gloss.

42a, 43a, and 43b¹²⁹ present complicated guidelines regarding the use of the imagery of idolatrous gods as well as other images, such as human faces, the sun, moon and stars, and dragons,¹³⁰ all of which are featured in the vignettes. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* further mentions that the Rabbis forbade the fashioning of the four figures of Ezekiel,¹³¹ which appear in both Facsimile 1 and 2 as the Egyptian Sons of Horus.

If we wish to maintain an Abrahamic origin of the facsimiles or at least an ancient Jewish origin, we need to acknowledge the possibility that the inclusion of gods and dragons might be offensive to ancient Jewish readers, and the idea that the vignettes existed in conjunction with the Book of Abraham in a different form before they were matched to the Horos Book of Breathings made by Isis may prove problematic, based on old traditions of Jewish aniconism. I do not claim any expertise on this matter, but it seems that further research on this topic is definitely warranted.

Facsimile 2: As the Prophet was preparing the extracts from the Book of Abraham for publication, he “likened” other drawings to reflect the contents of the Book of Abraham. The hypocephalus of Sheshonq was given an Abrahamic explanation that featured many principles of astronomy that didn’t make it into our current Book of Abraham.

The Prophet had been preparing to introduce the temple endowment to the Saints during the previous months. He could have seen familiar themes in the Hypocephali (such as blessings of strength and vitality, priesthood and power, and resurrection and eternal life) and described the contents of the hypocephalus to conform to the basis of the endowment, by use of the principles of astronomy as described in the Book of Abraham as the source of the language (Kolob, etc.).

A common interpretation of Facsimile 2 approaches the hypocephalus as an example of sacred astronomy, it being specifically an

129. “Babylonian Talmud: Tractate ‘Abodah Zarah, Folio 42a,” accessed August 20, 2016, http://halakhah.com/zarah/zarah_42.html; “Babylonian Talmud: Tractate ‘Abodah Zarah, Folio 43a,” accessed August 20, 2016, http://halakhah.com/zarah/zarah_43.html.

130. This entry of the Talmud defines a dragon as an animal with scales between its legs, which would match the crocodile god Sobek. The dragon as portrayed in the KJV can be translated as a jackal. Both are portrayed on Facsimile #1.

131. Joseph Jacobs, Kaufmann Kohler, and Judah David Eisenstein, “Art, Attitude of Judaism Toward,” accessed August 20, 2016, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1823-art-attitude-of-judaism-toward#anchor1>.

example of the divine center.¹³² The hypocephalus has been portrayed as a map or microcosm of the cosmos, following a similar motif as temple symbolism. A paradigm of sacred astronomy was all-important in the religions of the ancient world. This archetypal framework has been noted in numerous comparative studies. Facsimile 2 has elements of this motif, with Kolob at the center, then stars, and then the earth portrayed as one moves away from the middle. The brethren of the church in Kirtland were certainly correct when they referred to the hypocephalus as a Celestial Globe.¹³³

However, if this type of comparative analysis can be done with the hypocephalus of Sheshonq, then it can be done with other hypocephali as well. Quite a number of hypocephali have been found that match the hypocephalus of Sheshonq in purpose and pattern. Because of these similarities, one could substitute, for example, the hypocephalus of Lady Wst-wrt¹³⁴ or the hypocephalus of Lady Ta-khred-Khonsu¹³⁵ for Facsimile 2 without any need to change to the facsimile's explanations.

It may seem appropriate to connect the hypocephalus of Sheshonq to the Book of Abraham through the lens of astronomy, but nothing is unique to this hypocephalus that can't be found in other examples. Indeed, those who wish to make such connections need to demonstrate that the hypocephalus of Sheshonq and the Book of Abraham contain the same *type* of astronomy. If different systems are on display in the respective works, the astronomy connection is moderate at best.

Facsimile 3: In its original form on the scroll, it had nothing to do with the biblical patriarch Abraham but was to serve as a vignette to accompany the Horos Book of Breathings.

This drawing was interpreted by Joseph Smith to document one of the scenes in the Book of Abraham. It seems uncertain if the Prophet knew he was giving the vignette a reinterpretation or whether he thought the scene was actually representative of the story from the Book of Abraham.

132. Michael Lyon, "Appreciating Hypocephali as Works of Art and Faith," 12-17. See also Nibley, *One Eternal Round*, 260, 285. Note that Tamás Mekis interprets the hypocephalus as demonstrating the transition from day to night and west to east, the equatorial line being the boundary of the halves. See Tamás Mekis, "Hypocephali: Thesis of the Dissertation" (Master's Thesis, University Eötvös Loránd, 2013).

133. William Appleby is one of the men who record this title. See Hauglid, *A Textual History*, 219.

134. Nibley, *One Eternal Round*, 636; Lyon, "Appreciating Hypocephali," figure 7.

135. Lyon, "Appreciating Hypocephali," figure 13.

Taken at face value, Joseph Smith's explanations pose some difficulty. The biggest difficulty is that the names of each of the scenes' participants are written above their heads in the columns of text. Joseph was correct in noticing that the names of the characters were above their heads, but he provided different names to these characters. Also noticeable is the difference in the gender of the characters between the vignette and Joseph's explanation.¹³⁶

The significance of the explanation of Facsimile 3 is that it shows details of a story from the missing portion of the translation. The importance the explanation is not that Pharaoh is a woman in this scene or that Abraham is substituting for Pharaoh but that the story in the Book of Abraham originally contained the characters of Pharaoh, the prince, and so on.

The missing story in the Book of Abraham no doubt tells of Abraham sitting on Pharaoh's throne teaching the principles of astronomy. Abraham teaches that stars and planets exist one above another and intelligences also exist one above another. Perhaps most significant to Joseph's interpretation is the classes of people found in the scene. It ranges from Pharaoh to one of his princes and on down the ranks to a chief waiter (court official) named Shulem and last to a slave belonging to the prince, named Olimlah. Nibley notes, "The five figures in our Facsimile 3 represent a different social stratum, from divinity to slave, though (and this is important) all belong to the same universe of discourse."¹³⁷ If Abraham taught Pharaoh that wise men existed one above another and that intelligences existed one above another, then the members of the scene would also have provided a handy illustration of this system because Pharaoh was greater than the prince, who was greater than Shulem, etc.

Joseph Smith appears to mention the words of Abraham that he taught in Pharaoh's court when he said:

I want to reason a little on this subject; I learned it by translating the papyrus which is now in my house. I learned a testimony concerning Abraham, and he reasoned concerning the God of Heaven; in order to do that said he, — "suppose we have two facts, that supposes another fact may exist; two men on the earth, one wiser than the other, would logically shew that another who is wiser than the wisest may exist.

136. Muhlestein, "Egyptian Papyri," 101.

137. Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 452.

Intelligencies [sic] exist one above another, so that there is no end to them.” If Abraham reasoned thus — if Jesus Christ was the son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ had a Father, you may suppose that he had a Father also.¹³⁸

Note that while this teaching from the writings of Abraham is reminiscent of Abraham 3:18–19, this is from a different occasion because it is Abraham who is doing the teaching. The most likely setting for this event is that it is from the missing portion of the Book of Abraham that is described in the explanations of Facsimile 3.

It has been observed that this vignette has received the least amount of attention, perhaps because of the problems mentioned above. If we understand that this vignette was adopted by Joseph Smith to represent a new context, the problems largely disappear.

The Scroll of Horos: Horos, son of Osoroeris and Taykhebit, created a scroll in the second century BC. This scroll was roughly 11 cm in height and 320 cm in length, the standard length for scrolls of the Ptolemaic era, although it’s possible that this scroll could have been longer.

On the outer portion of the scroll was a document called the Book of Breathings, made by Isis belonging to Horos. The scroll of Horos contained at least two illustrations, one of an attempt to sacrifice a man on an altar and the other of Horos presented before the throne of Osiris in the company of other gods. The interior portion of the scroll contained the Book of Abraham. The text of the Book of Abraham was amended by Horos to make mention of the illustration of the attempted sacrifice at the beginning of the scroll. This drawing was placed at the beginning of the scroll to illustrate the gods and the altar mentioned in the Book of Abraham narrative.

I propose that Horos was creating on this roll a standard Book of Breathings made by Isis. Many Books of Breathings feature a “presentation scene” at the beginning of the book and conclude with a vignette of an incense offering being offered by the deceased. Horos left room for these two illustrations and was planning to add them after he completed the text. In the process of producing this scroll, he decided a second book should be added to the interior of this scroll and selected the Book of Abraham. As such, he followed his priestly tradition and

138. “History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844],” p. 103, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/109>

created a new vignette, painting it in where the “presentation scene” was slated to go.

It could also be that Horos incorrectly placed the two vignettes in each other’s spot. This could have happened if Horos had left room on the scrolls for the vignettes while writing the texts with the intent of adding the illustrations later. If the vignette of Horos being introduced into the presence of Osiris was at the beginning of the scroll, it would be a closer match to the other Books of Breathings mentioned above. This would also put the vignette of Abraham on the lion couch near the commencement of the Book of Abraham.

Muhlestein notes that “priests in Thebes had both biblical texts and nonbiblical stories about biblical figures in their possession by at least 200 BC and that one of the characters they read the most about was Abraham.”¹³⁹ It shouldn’t be a surprise to find a book associated with Abraham being preserved by a priest of Thebes. As more evidence comes to light, the idea of the Book of Abraham contained on the scroll of Horos becomes a match to the culture whence it came.

The Missing Manuscript: The Kirtland Egyptian Papers are a standard ledger size of 12½ by 7¾ inches (32 by 20 cm). These sheets would be a good candidate for the paper holding the lost translation. In its current form, the Book of Abraham has approximately 5,500 words. If Anson Call’s account is correct, the full translation could contain up to 22,000 words and well over 120 manuscript pages if these pages were similar to the pages of Ab5 and Ab7.

If this original manuscript took two hours to read, as Anson Call suggested in his journal, we need to account for the reading time relative to the condition of the portfolio. If it generally lacked capitalization and punctuation, it may have taken a bit longer to read and therefore may not be as long as has been suggested. Gee suggests that our current version of Abraham takes approximately 30 minutes to read,¹⁴⁰ but this seems to be based on a formatted text. If the readers of these pages had to work their way through this unpolished version, this may indicate a somewhat smaller length of text.

If a master translation existed, what became of this collection of documents? The original manuscript hasn’t been found in the current collections of the LDS Church or the archives of the Community of Christ.

139. Muhlestein, “Egyptian Papyri,” 223.

140. Gee, “Eyewitness,” 201.

One possibility has been noted by Matthews in his research on the JST:

In October 1881 the general offices of the RLDS Church were moved from Plano to Lamoni, Iowa. On January 5, 1907, the offices at Lamoni were destroyed by fire, and many valuable historical documents were lost. The report of the fire in the *Saints' Herald* indicated that the loss was estimated at \$40,000 but that the greatest loss was not financial. "The Church library, containing many rare and valuable books was destroyed," and "nothing was saved from the office of the Church Historian."¹⁴¹

The Seer Stone: If the Prophet wasn't actually translating off the papyrus physically but instead seeing it by the means of the seer stone, perhaps he might not have known that the text surrounding the vignette of Abraham on the altar wasn't actually the Book of Abraham or that he was translating from a different part of the scroll. This would be an easy assumption to make. Perhaps because of this, these beginning Egyptian characters from the Book of Breathings papyri are used as part of the Kirtland Egyptian papers. Hauglid has noted, "It appears that Joseph Smith (and his associates) made a literal connection between the Egyptian papyri and the Book of Abraham by translating specific characters on the papyri to produce both the Egyptian and Abraham manuscripts."¹⁴²

The Prophet's mother describes her understanding of the translation process. Although she doesn't mention the seer stones, the process she describes was used to translate the Book of Mormon by use of one of the Prophet's seer stones.

[Lucy Smith] said, that when Joseph was reading the papyrus, he closed his eyes, and held a hat over his face, and that the revelation came to him; and that where the papyrus was torn, he could read the parts that were destroyed equally as well as those that were there; and that scribes sat by him writing, as he expounded.¹⁴³

Lucy's mention of Joseph reading the torn parts of the papyrus might be extrapolation on her part, especially if she, like so many other

141. Robert J. Matthews "A Plainer Translation," 102.

142. Hauglid, "The Book of Abraham and the Egyptian Project," 486.

143. *Friends Weekly Intelligencer*, 3 October 1846, 211, as cited in Hauglid, *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham*, 223.

early members of the Church, believed the Book of Abraham was the only thing on the scroll.

If the revelatory process through the seer stone showed the prophet the translation of the hieratic Book of Abraham without his translating directly off the papyri, the location of the text of Abraham might not have been obvious. Believing the characters at the beginning of the scroll were the start of the Book of Abraham is an easy and forgivable assumption.

The Book of Joseph: In addition to the Book of Abraham, many of the saints believed the rest of the scrolls contained other accounts of the patriarchs. If one scroll had the writings of Abraham, it would be only natural for the other scrolls to be a record of Joseph, the other patriarch who had ties to Egypt. The writings of Joseph of Egypt were, from an early date, believed to be contained in the scrolls.¹⁴⁴ Once the Saints decided the other roll was the Book of Joseph, they began the task of assigning biblical meanings to the vignettes. Eve tempted by the serpent was seen in the vignettes as was Enoch's Pillar.

The early saints can hardly be blamed for their overzealous interpretation. The Lord was revealing truths at an incredible rate through revelation and through ancient writings. With the Book of Mormon and its accompanying artifacts, it is easy to see that the cache found with the writings of Abraham would also belong to a sort of treasure trove of the biblical patriarchs.

This mindset is clear in the statement of Parley P. Pratt:

The record is now in course of translation by means of the Urim and Thummim, and proves to be a record written partly by the father of the faithful, Abraham, and finished by Joseph when in Egypt. 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.¹⁴⁵

Pratt strives to present a plausible solution for how the records could have been preserved in the catacombs of Egypt. However, once the discipline of Egyptology started to gain steam, his theory has shown to be impossible regarding these particular scrolls.

Pratt also presents the interesting idea that there may not have been a separate Book of Joseph but rather that Joseph finished the record of his great-grandfather. If there is any truth to the existence of the writings

144. Muhlestein, "Joseph Smith's Biblical View of Egypt," 452.

145. Parley P. Pratt, "Editorial Remarks," *Millennial Star* 3/3 (July 1842): 47.

of Joseph being present in the collection of the scrolls, this scenario seems most likely. However, this idea may have been borrowed from the Book of Mormon narrative, with Moroni finishing the story of his father Mormon. Pratt's testimony stands in contrast to the statements of other witnesses, for example Oliver Cowdery and Albert Brown, who stated that the writings of Joseph were on a separate scroll.

One recent study has attempted to collect all the pertinent information on the lost writings of Joseph of Egypt.¹⁴⁶ To the author's credit, he makes his assumptions transparent within the paper. However, whenever the evidence is ambiguous, he chooses to interpret the evidence in favor of his thesis. The witness statements cited are given the maximum benefit of the doubt based on each of the witness's proximity to Joseph Smith. Nor does the author acknowledge the possibility that Joseph Smith was mistaken about the contents of the rest of the scrolls.

As an additional limitation it needs to be remembered that many of the Prophet Joseph Smith's journal entries were added after the fact by his scribes. Indeed, many of these journal entries were included years later, after they actually happened. It needs to be acknowledged that the secretaries employed by the Prophet had the opportunity to interject their own views. For example, the first journal entry mentioning the writings of Joseph was given the dates of 6-8 July 1835, but it wasn't originally written by Joseph Smith; rather it was likely inserted into the church history manuscripts by W. W. Phelps in 1843.

This author, as well as H. Donl Peterson before him, takes note of a lengthy description of Joseph of Egypt's scroll by Oliver Cowdery. They both note that Cowdery describes "the Godhead, the creation, the fall of Adam and Eve, Satan in the Garden of Eden, and other temple related themes."¹⁴⁷ Of course, other scholars have noted that these biblical themes appear to be based on the vignettes of the Tshemmin scroll. The author acknowledges these parallels in the footnotes but puts forward the familiar idea that the location of the vignettes need not appear next to the text they supplement. The author cites Malcom Mosher: "[In] documents from the 21st Dynasty on, misalignment of the text and vignette of a spell can occur, with the text preceding the vignette, or

146. Quinten Barney, "The Joseph Smith Papyri and the Writings of Joseph of Egypt" *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2016), 95-109.

147. Barney, "The Joseph Smith Papyri and the Writings of Joseph of Egypt," 103-04. See also Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham*, 130.

vice versa.”¹⁴⁸ This implies that the writing of Joseph could have been elsewhere on the Tshemmin scroll, in the same manner as the Book of Abraham coexists on the Horos scroll with the Book of Breathings. This is a creative theory, one worthy of further research.

However, I find two difficulties with this theory. First, while some vignettes may not be aligned with their respective texts, this doesn’t appear to be the case with the Tshemmin Book of the Dead; the vignettes appear next to their respective chapters. The vignette of the deceased sitting before three seated deities (which is described by Cowdery as the Godhead) is next to a chapter titled “A chapter for sitting among the great gods.”¹⁴⁹ Cowdery’s description of the Eve and the serpent vignette is next to a chapter that allows the deceased to walk the earth.¹⁵⁰ The Pillar of Enoch that Cowdery describes is a hieroglyphic sign for Heliopolis. The chapter next to this vignette describes the deceased entering Heliopolis.¹⁵¹ Muhlestein notes that these descriptions as understood by Egyptologists are different from those given by Cowdery and other witnesses.¹⁵² This is, of course, to be expected. The significance of these witness statements is not that they are different from those of Egyptologists but rather that these witnesses believed they were seeing scrolls and pictures associated with biblical accounts.

Second, while Horos could have been inclined to include the Book of Abraham on the interior of his scroll, we have no indication that Tshemmin had the same proclivities. And while it is possible that writings of Joseph could exist on the interior of the Tshemmin scroll, there could have been another Book of Breathings, another text entirely, or no text at all.

Following the mindset of the early Latter-day Saints, it seems likely that the Book of Joseph was invented because of the large number of scrolls in the collection. Since the collection had a perceived connection to Biblical world, it only became natural that the Book of the Dead of Tshemmin was seen as the Book of Joseph and that the curious vignettes it contained were representative of Biblical scenes, even if all of these scenes were not understood.

148. Barney, “The Joseph Smith Papyri and the Writings of Joseph of Egypt,” 103, footnote 19.

149. Michael Dennis Rhodes, *Books of the Dead Belonging to Tshemmin and Neferirnub: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2010), 54.

150. Michael Dennis Rhodes, *Books of the Dead*, 43.

151. Michael Dennis Rhodes, *Books of the Dead*, 44.

152. Muhlestein, “Joseph Smith and Egyptian Artifacts,” 53–60.

Conclusion

Following a careful methodology instead of merely relying on assumptions for a study of the Book of Abraham yields clear and perhaps unexpected results. By letting the papyri and the vignettes speak for themselves, we find a unique story of an Egyptian priest who preserved a lost story of Abraham by literally taking it to his grave. We may never know Horos's motivation for including the Book of Abraham alongside his Book of Breathings, but he provided it with a new vignette to ornament the story.

The Egyptian collection of writings and mummies was seen by the early Latter-day Saints to be from the biblical world. The legitimate presence of the writings of Abraham in the papyri inspired others to view the rest of the collection as containing the writings of other biblical patriarchs and prophets. The hypocephalus of Sheshonq and a vignette from the Book of Breathings were also regarded as being from ancient prophets.

By seeing the other facsimiles as being co-opted into the Book of Abraham by the Prophet Joseph Smith, we are free to jettison what were previously problematic interpretations. More important, we can now focus on what the Prophet had in mind with his explanations, rather than spend our efforts trying to reinforce flimsy and peripheral Egyptian connections.

The methodology also points to a large and rapid translation. John Gee's observations are largely borne out by the parameters discussed in this paper. He concludes his own study as follows:

The Joseph Smith Papyri were considerably larger than the critics claim. Most of the Joseph Smith Papyri probably were destroyed in the Chicago Fire. The Book of Abraham seems to have been translated from part of the missing papyri. The Book of Abraham was translated faster than the critics claim and was originally much larger than the published version. The Kirtland Egyptian Papers are an after-the-fact by-product of the translation process.¹⁵³

Granted, not everyone will be happy with the results, but I believe that observing a better methodology and discarding unexamined assumptions will allow us to see a clear, yet surprisingly simple story for the text and the illustrations.

153. Gee, "A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri," 16.

Mark J. Johnson *is pursuing a BS in Marketing Management with Western Governor's University. His interests include scripture study, family history, woodworking, and 1950s-era rock and roll. He has papers published in the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and the Review of Books on the Book of Mormon. He lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, with his wife and two children.*

