

Institute 6-9-20 *200th Anniversary of the Restoration: Mummies, Manuscripts, and the Book of Abraham*
Studying Restoration Church History

I hope this class offers historical details to motivate future study. However Hugh Nibley cautioned: “The two greatest nuisances in the church are (a) those who think they know enough to disprove the claims of Joseph Smith, and (b) those who think they know enough to prove them” (Hugh Nibley, *Eloquent Witness*, 2008).

Questions:

1. Why do the Joseph Smith Papyri from the Metropolitan Art Museum not match the text of Abraham?
2. Did Joseph Smith translate the Book of Abraham from papyri that he had (but we don't), or from direct revelation from God? The current available evidence can support either one, but more for the first.

Sources:

Encyclopedia of Mormonism, 1059; BYU Studies vol 31, Donl Peterson; *History of the Church* 2:235-291; Pearl of Great Price Central.com; John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri*, FARMS, 2000; also, Gee, *An Introduction to the Book of Abraham*. For more see writings on the subject by Hugh Nibley, Mike Rhodes, etc.

Timeline

- ~**1817-1822**, an Italian soldier under Napoleon, now turned Egyptian excavator, Joannes Petrus Antonius Lebolo, began digging in pit 32 or 33 near Thebes in Egypt and found many artifacts including a group of 11 mummies. Shortly after his death, Lebolo's son sold 11 mummies through the shipping company, Albano Oblasser, to sell in America to the highest bidder.
- **Spring 1833**—Eleven mummies and Egyptian artifact arrived in the USA and sold at an auction. As the highest bidder, Michael Chandler borrowed \$6,000 to buy them. He opened the mummies hoping for treasures, and found “rolled up with some kind of linen, saturated with the same bitumen . . . two or three other small pieces of papyrus, with astronomical calculations . . .” (John Gee). Chandler then spent two years on a traveling mummy-show selling off the mummies and scrolls.
- **July 3, 1835**—Chandler and his mummy-show arrived in Kirtland, supposedly to meet with the Prophet Joseph. Chandler inquired “if he had a power by which he could translate the ancient Egyptian. Mr. Smith replied that he had” (P. Pratt, *Millennial Star*, July 1842). Chandler claimed to be an “Irish nephew” of the Italian excavator, that are for sale. Chandler presented the last of his four mummies and some hieroglyphics, which others supposedly had interpreted. Joseph Smith left and returned with a written English translation corresponding to the interpretation Chandler had already received. The Prophet displayed interest in the papyri, but not the mummies. Unfortunately, Chandler would not break up his exhibit.
- **July 6, 1835**—Chandler issues certificate to Joseph Smith about his translation. Church members (Joseph Coe, Simeon Andrews, and others), purchased the mummies and papyri for \$2,400, as a gift to Joseph. The mummies included: “four human figures [1 woman, 3 men] . . . with two or more rolls of papyrus” (*History of the Church*, 2:235). Oliver Cowdery remembered that it was “two rolls . . . [with] two or three other small pieces,” the text written “with black, and a small part, red ink or paint” (*Messenger and Advocate*, 12-31-1835)
- **July 6, 1835**—Joseph translated some “hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another, writings of Joseph of Egypt.”
- **July 17-31, 1835**—Joseph began “continually . . . translating an alphabet . . . and arranging a grammar” of Egyptian (*HC*, 2:236-38). The Book of Abraham was finished at the end of the month (we only have ¼ of it).
- **August-Sept**—Joseph visited saints in Michigan and returned to Kirtland
- **Oct 1, 1835**—With W.W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery, Joseph received a revelation about the “principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham . . . unfolded” (*HC*, 2:286). Probably referring to Facsimile 2.
- **Oct 7, 1835**—“This afternoon I re-commenced translating the ancient records” or Book of Abraham (2:289)
- **October 24, 1835**—“Mr. Goodrich and wife called to see the ancient [Egyptian] records, and also Dr. Frederick G. Williams to see the mummies” (*HC*, 2:291).
- **October 29, 1835**—Joseph hired scribe, William Parrish, who recorded, “I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks [*sic*] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven” (Quoted from John Gee-99, FARMS).
- **Nov-Dec, 1835**, nearly every day Joseph records that people came by to see the mummies or the records. Neither Joseph nor his peers left any record of him using the Urim and Thummim (didn't Moroni have it?).

- **November 19, 24, 25, 26, 1835** Joseph recorded "translating the Egyptian records." On the 20th, he "made rapid progress" (HC, 2: 318, 320). The Church Archives contain texts from the translation of the Book of Abraham 1:1-2:18.
- **December 23, 1835**—The Prophet Joseph tried to stop exaggerations by clarifying details in the local newspaper: "It has been said that the purchasers of these antiquities pretend they have the bodies of Abraham, Abimelech, (the king of the Philistines,) Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, &c., &c., for the purpose of attracting the attention of the multitude, and gulling the unwary; which is utterly false. Who these ancient inhabitants of Egypt were, I do not at present say . . .
 "The records were obtained from one of the catacombs in Egypt, near the place where once stood the renowned city of Thebes, by the celebrated French traveler, Antonio S[L]ebolo, in the year 1831. . . He entered the catacomb June 7, 1831, and obtained eleven mummies. There were several hundred mummies in the same catacomb; about one hundred embalmed after the first order, and placed in niches, and two or three hundred after the second and third orders, and laid upon the floor or bottom of the grand cavity. The two last orders of embalmed were so decayed, that they could not be removed, and only eleven of the first, found in the niches. On his way from Alexandria to Paris, he put in at Trieste, and, after ten days' illness, expired.
 "This was in the year 1832. Previous to his decease, he made a will of the whole, to Mr. Michael H. Chandler, (then in Philadelphia, Pa.,) his nephew, whom he supposed to be in Ireland. Accordingly, the whole were sent to Dublin, and Mr. Chandler's friends ordered them to New York, where they were received at the Custom House, in the winter or spring of 1833" (HC, 2:348-50; note, the *History of the Church* mistyped the name *Lebolo* as *Sebolo*) [Joseph recorded what he was told, but Chandler's story was laced with falsehoods].
- **Nov 2, 1837**—Joseph appointed two men to raise money for the publication of the book of Abraham. However, it was delayed four years by the National and Kirtland bank failures (1837), Missouri riots (1837-1838), Joseph's imprisonment (1838-1839), the saints becoming refugees in Quincy (1839) and moving to onto Nauvoo (1839), Joseph's trip to Washington DC (1839), and starting to build the Nauvoo Temple (1840).
- **Feb 23 1842**—Joseph Smith commissioned Reuben Hedlock to make a cut of the actual size of facsimiles.
- **March 1, 15, and 16, 1842**—Published first three sections of *The Book of Abraham* in the Nauvoo newspaper, "Times and Seasons." *These three instalments are only 1/4 of what Joseph translated, but we do not have the whole translation. Only Facsimile #1 has it's accompanying text, facsimile #2 and #3 were to accompany the later text, which Joseph translated, but we don't have, nor is the text available now* (Gee, *A Guide to JSP*, 4).
- **1842-1856**—Joseph gave the four mummies to his widowed mother, Lucy as a means of income. She showed them to interested tourists for 25 cents. The fragments were glued onto something sturdy, and then showed them under glass (which destroyed the ability to do carbon dating on them)
- **May 26, 1856**—Twelve days after Lucy's death the manuscripts (and the four mummies?), were sold by Emma Smith and her husband Lewis Bidamon and Joseph III—to Able Combs. He kept 13% of the papyrus manuscript (including the damaged fragments originally glued and framed under glass). Combs sold the rest to the St. Louis Museum (who sold them to the Wood Museum, which later moved to Chicago and burned in the fire of 1871).
- **1871**—The papyri were reportedly burned in the great Chicago fire.
- **1947**—The MET purchased only surviving 13% of the papyri. These remnants had passed down from Abel Combs to his house keeper, to her daughter, Alice and her husband, Edward Heusser. After multiple attempts, the widower Heusser finally sold it to the NYC Metropolitan Museum of Art when a curator who valued Egyptology saw the offer.
- **November 19, 1967**—The MET needed money and offered eleven fragments to the Church saying that they were once among the scrolls of Joseph Smith's papyri. An anonymous donor gifted the papyri to the church. However, these fragments do not include our texts. The MET text is an Egyptian damaged text that had been glued and not the scroll translated as the Book of Abraham. The press did not report the story correctly, but nothing was clarified because of the Arab-Israel war at the time. Hugh Nibley responded to the flood of anti-Mormon attacks.
- **1968**—The church published the translations of the few papyri from the MET in the *Improvement Era*.

More on the Excavator (*Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1059)

The excavator, Antony Lebolo, was licensed by the French government during Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, to deal in artifacts in Thebes, just across the Nile from Luxor. His name was carved into the wall of Pit Tomb 32,

but Pit Tomb 33 fits the description found in Joseph's History of the papyrus scrolls and the eleven mummies. Sadly, the brick-lined tombs were destroyed by the excavators. Records from Lebolo's excavation describe: Entering these caverns, long galleries, halls, chambers, and cabinets are found, in short, they are underground palaces, all covered with painted bas-reliefs; and it is very marvelous. It is wonderful, the preservation of the colors, the amount of the works, the scrupulous attention used to make them. Lately, a new one was discovered which surpasses all the others in beauty, in the perfection of the work, and in execution. I visited it two times. The second time I spent the whole day there, examining everything; it was already late evening, and I couldn't move myself away from there. I dined inside there in a beautiful hall, much more elegant than our ballrooms. Also, I believe that, considering all, this sepulcher of the king of Thebes is a much more sumptuous dwelling than the dwellings of our living European kings." ("Antonio Lebolo: Excavator of the Book of Abraham" by H. Donl Peterson, *BYU Studies*, vol. 31 (1991), Number 2 - Spring 1991, p.14)

In the winter or early spring of 1833, eleven mummies and ancient papyri (including some writings of Abraham and Joseph) arrived in the United States secured in Egyptian sarcophagi. We don't know all the details yet, but it appears that Chandler lived in Philadelphia, and ended up with four of the mummies. He unwrapped the female and found the scrolls. He was told, no one could translate Egyptian in Pennsylvania, but a certain "Joe Smith" in Kirtland claimed to translate ancient records. Chandler contacted several linguists at reputable eastern academic institutions for possible interpretation of the papyrus.

What Papyri Did Joseph Smith Have?

In addition to the four mummies, the prophet Joseph received 4 or 5 papyri. Some of the edges or other parts of two of the four scrolls were damaged. Those damaged pieces were put under glass and framed by 1837. Other rolls were complete. All of Joseph's papyri were described at the time as:

1. A number of glazed slides, like picture frames, containing sheets of papyrus with Egyptian inscriptions and hieroglyphics." (The church bought these fragments from the MET—which include "the book of the dead," and "the book of breathings." They are identified by their prior owners, four ancient Ptolemies in Egypt).
2. "long roll of manuscript" (that the Book of Abraham was translated from)
3. "another roll"
4. "two or three other small pieces of papyrus with astronomical calculations, epitaphs, etc."

We do not have the scroll that Joseph Smith used to translate the book of Abraham (we assume it burned in the Chicago fire of 1871). But we do have information to compare what the text says with the world of Abraham.

Rosetta Stone

Our question should be, "Did any American know Egyptian in 1833?"

"In 1822 the young French genius Jean Francois Champollion, with the aid of the trilingual Rosetta Stone, had first deciphered the ancient hieroglyphic writings in France, but his dictionary of Egyptian hieroglyphics would not be published in Europe until 1841. Hence, the American academicians whom Chandler consulted in 1833-35 were unable to read the papyrus records. At best, they could only speculate on the meaning of some of the symbols when they could reach consensus on them." (Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism*, p.2).

Archeological History Validation of the Book of Abraham

Historically, within the text of the Book of Abraham, we have more evidence on its antiquity than we have for the "documentary hypothesis" of the Old Testament. One of the best recent discoveries in Abrahamic literature was discovered over a century after Joseph's translation and it begins with the same four parallel phrases. John Gee has published several other archeological cases that add to the historical plausibility of the Book of Abraham.

Mummies and Fragments: Dating The Papyri

The paper has been glued, so carbon dating doesn't work. The handwriting dates to the Greco period. But the text appears much older and was probably retranslated by different scribes over the centuries onto a later manuscript. We also have an old and newer copy of 2 different alphabets in JS's "Kirtland Egyptian Papers" that brought confusion. The fragments from the same collection that the MET sold to the church date from ca. 200-1800 BC or the Middle Bronze Age (but no carbon dating works because the fragments were glued in the 19th C).

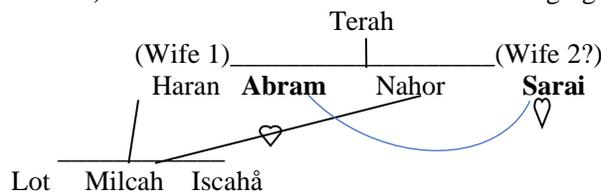
National Awareness

When Joseph first published the first section of Abraham in the *Times and Seasons* in March 1842, it was noticed by much of the nation. Three weeks later, one of the foremost newspapers in the country picked up the story. James Gordon Bennett, who founded the *New York Herald*, published on Sunday, April 3, 1842:

“We give in this day’s paper a very curious chapter from the Book of Abraham which we find published in the last number of a weekly journal called the *Times and Seasons*, conducted by Jo. Smith, the great Mormon Prophet, in the city of Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois. . . This Joe Smith is, undoubtedly, one of the greatest characters of the age. He indicates as much talent, originality, and moral courage as Mahomet, Odin, or any of the other great spirits that have hitherto produced the revolutions of the past ages. . . . Some such singular prophet as Joe Smith is required to preserve the principle of faith, and to plant some new germs of civilization that may come to maturity in a thousand years. While modern philosophy, which believes in nothing but what you can touch. . . . We certainly want some such prophet to start up, take a big hold of the public mind—and stop the torrent of materialism that is hurrying the world into infidelity, immorality, licentiousness, and crime.”

A Few Points of What the Text Adds about Abraham

1. Famines were a regular natural phenomenon as well as God’s way of punishing the wicked when needed (there are 130 verses in LDS scripture that mention “famine”). It sounds like Abram’s brother died because of the famine (Ab 2:1).
2. Marriages were made with closer relations than we practice now. Abram marries his half-sister and his brother marries his niece (Gen 20:12). I found advice in the Mishnah encouraging marriages within the family.



3. The Lord directs Abram to leave his “kindred.” This has already happened and continues to happen over and over. Abraham records either hearing the seeing the Lord in vision ten times! But he is not told where he is going, but only that he will be shown (Ab 2:3, 6). His move is physical with emotional and spiritual growth.

I feel this is how we are often prompted—it involves walking by faith.

Abram’s Visions Of Jehovah—including the Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood

VOICE OF GOD VISION OF GOD

1:16

1:15

2:3

2:6-11 “to make of thee a minister to bear My Name;”

2:22

3:11

3:4, 5, 6

3:15

4. Terah repented—in part (Ab 1:30, 2:5) but once life gets easier again, he returns to his sins. Terah’s wickedness separates him from his children this time (and may have been the cause of their second journey).
5. Abram becomes the father of the chosen people through
6. the priesthood (2:10). The three major religions of that region today, claim this link to Abraham as their father (Jewish, Islamic, and Christian). The major difference in our belief is the tie to the priesthood as is evident in comparing the two accounts of this vision:

Gen 12:2-3

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father;

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed

Abr 2:9-11

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee *above measure*, and make thy name great *among all nations*, and thou shalt be a blessing *unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;*

11. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee (*that is, in thy Priesthood*) and in thy seed (*that is, thy Priesthood*), for

I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal