

Sample

The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers

includes

Joseph Smith's Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar



Compiled by
H. Michael Marquardt

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Egyptian Papers

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H. Michael Marquardt
1981

Typescript of Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar
by Jerald and Sandra Tanner

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Foreword by Sandra Tanner

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Table of Contents

	Page No.
Foreword by Sandra Tanner	v
Introduction	vi
About the Compiler	x
Acknowledgments	xi
Plate — The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found	xii
A. Joseph Smith Responsible for the Egyptian Papers — Historical Background	1
1. Egyptian MS. No. 1, ca. 1835, Manuscript entitled: “Grammar & Aphabet [<i>sic</i>] of the Egyptian Language”	5
2. Egyptian MS. No. 2, Manuscript entitled: “Egyptian Counting”	75
B. Introduction to Egyptian MSS. Nos. 3, 4 and 5	81
1. Egyptian MS. No. 3	83
2. Egyptian MS. No. 4	93
3. Egyptian MS. No. 5	105
C. Introduction to MSS. Nos. 6 and 7	113
1. Egyptian MS. No. 6	115
2. Egyptian MS. No. 7	121
D. MSS. Nos. 8, 9 and 10	
1. Egyptian MS. No. 8	125
2. Egyptian MS. No. 9	127
3. Egyptian MS. No. 10	129
E. Other manuscripts	131
1. A sheet of paper with English and Hebrew (?)	132
2. Some Arabic writing	133
3. Drawing of the damaged original of Facsimile No. 2 of the Book of Abraham	134
Plate 1 — The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found	135
Plate 2 — The Source of the Book of Abraham Margin Characters	135
F. Joseph Smith Responsible for the Translation Manuscripts	137
1. The Book of Abraham Translated from Which Papyrus?	138
2. The Book of Abraham Does not Represent What is Written on the Hor Sensen Papyrus	139
3. Translation of Joseph Smith Papyrus XI, col. 1	140
G. The Use of the Bible in the Production and Composition of the Book of Abraham	143
H. Translation MS. No. 1	153
I. Translation MS. No. 2	175
J. Translation MS. No. 3	185
K. Book of Abraham manuscripts not included in this compilation	199
L. Records were Egyptian Documents	200
M. Conclusion	201

Foreword

By Sandra Tanner

In 1835 Joseph Smith, Jr., announced what he thought was the most important discovery in the history of biblical studies. It all began on July 3rd when Michael Chandler brought his traveling exhibit of Egyptian mummies and papyri to the small Mormon community of Kirtland, Ohio. After examining the artifacts, Joseph Smith announced to his followers that the papyri contained the long lost writings of Old Testament prophets Abraham and Joseph.

... I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc., — a more full account of which will appear in its place, as I proceed to examine or unfold them. Truly we can say, the Lord is beginning to reveal the abundance of peace and truth (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Vol. 2, Deseret Book, 1976, page 236).

Josiah Quincy, who visited with Joseph Smith in 1844, described his experience of being shown the papyri by Smith:

Some parchments inscribed with hieroglyphics were then offered us. They were preserved under glass and handled with great respect. “That is the handwriting of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful,” said the prophet. “This is the autograph of Moses, and these lines were written by his brother Aaron. Here we have the earliest account of the Creation, from which Moses composed the First Book of Genesis” (“Figures of the Past,” as quoted in *Among the Mormons*, edited by William Mulder and Russell Mortensen, New York, 1958, pages 136-137).

By the time of Smith’s death he had translated only a portion of the papyrus attributed to Abraham.

The Alphabet and Grammar

In preparation for his translation, Joseph Smith began working on an Egyptian grammar. He used various hieroglyphs from the papyri and proposed an English explanation. In the month of July, 1835, Joseph Smith recorded the following in the *History of the Church*:

The remainder of this month, I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2, page 238).

Under the date of October 1, 1835, Joseph Smith recorded this statement:

This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding, the particulars of which will appear hereafter (*History of the Church*, Vol. 2, page 286).

The Book of Abraham was published in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842 and is now found as a part of the *Pearl of Great Price*. Although Joseph Smith did not publish his “Egyptian alphabet,” he quoted from it on different occasions. On November 13, 1843, he wrote a letter in which he stated:

Were I an Egyptian, I would exclaim Jah-oh-eh, Enish-go-on-dosh, Flo-ees-Flos-is-is; (O the earth! the power of attraction, and the moon passing between her and the sun) (*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 4, page 373).

This statement should be compared with Smith's "Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language," pages 29 and 30 [pages 63 and 65 of this book]:

Jah-oh-eh The earth under the government of an other or the second of the fixed stars, which is called Enish-go-on-dosh or in other words the power of attraction it has with the earth.

Flo-ees: The moon — signifying its revolutions, also going between, thereby forming an eclipse

Flos-isis: The sun in its affinity with Earth and moon — signifying their revolutions showing the power, the one has with the other

The translation of Facsimile No. 2 in the Book of Abraham contains some of the same words Joseph Smith used in his "Egyptian Grammar." The words Kolob, Jah-oh-eh, Oliblish, Enish-go-ondosh, Kae-e-vanrash, Floeese, and Kli-flos-is-es are all found in the Smith Egyptian papers.

In a recent article, Christopher C. Smith presents evidence of Smith's direct involvement in the production of the grammar and also discusses the odd arrangement of the five parts, with the Fifth degree at the start of the grammar, working back to the First Degree. He states:

The manuscripts employ a grammatical system in which a character may appear in any of five degrees, such that with each increase of degree the character takes on a deeper or slightly different meaning ("The Dependence of Abraham 1:1-3 on the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar," by Christopher C. Smith, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, Vol. 29, 2009, p. 41).

Christopher C. Smith concludes his article with this statement:

The textual evidence strongly suggests that Joseph Smith was the primary author of the Alphabet and Grammar documents and that he used them as a translation key for portions of the Book of Abraham. The implication is that he conceived of the Alphabet and Grammar documents as products of revelation (Ibid., p. 53).

After Joseph Smith's death the "Egyptian Alphabet" was brought to Utah. James R. Clark, of the Brigham Young University, stated:

His "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" survived his death and the Mormon exodus to the West. An entry in the L. D. S. Church Historian's Office Journal under the date of October 17, 1855, states that the "Egyptian Alphabet" was among the early records of the L. D. S. Church when they were moved on that day into the fireproof vault of the new Historian's Office in Salt Lake City (James R. Clark, *Progress in Archaeology*, Brigham Young University, 1963, page 27).

Little was known about the "Egyptian Alphabet" until the year 1935. Clark stated:

Your author was from 1932 to 1936 a student of Dr. Sperry's at Brigham Young University and was in "on the ground floor" of this research with Dr. Sperry. This included our "discovery," with the assistance of A. William Lund, assistant Church Historian, in February, 1935 of Joseph Smith's translation of Abraham's Alphabet and Grammar to accompany his (Abraham's) record which we discussed in Chapter 8 (James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, 1962, page 156).

James R. Clark gave the following information regarding the "Egyptian Alphabet":

After having had a photographic copy of this document for a number of years, the present investigator secured permission from the L. D. S. Church Historian to describe the document in brief and to publish photographs of the outside covers and label and of page one and to quote from other pages.

The "Egyptian Alphabet" is a ruled journal approximately 8x12 inches and approximately one inch and a half thick. Not all, in fact a small proportion of the pages, is filled with copies of "ancient" characters with their equivalent vocalization in English and a translation of their meaning. The "grammar" or "alphabet" has been arranged in five sections which Joseph Smith called "degrees." Blank pages appear between the material copied or written in the book for each of these degrees, giving some indication that a more complete work was in contemplation.

This “Grammar” and/or “Alphabet” to the papyrus records compiled by Joseph Smith and appearing partly in his handwriting but largely in the handwriting of his secretary or secretaries (or so we have been informed) might be said to be exhibit “A” among the evidence on which we will rest our working hypothesis . . . (Clark, *Progress in Archaeology*, Brigham Young University, page 27).

The photographs Clark wrote about are found in his book, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, pages 101 and 103.

On December 10, 1960, Sidney B. Sperry, of the Brigham Young University, was asked if the “Egyptian Alphabet” could be published:

Question: Why not publish the Egyptian grammar?

Answer: Well, I do not know whether the Church authorities would let us do it now or not. I think it would be a little premature, perhaps, to do it now, until we can really do a good job of it (Dr. Sidney B. Sperry, *Pearl of Great Price Conference*, Brigham Young University, December 10, 1960, page 9 of 1964 edition).

In 1965 a man loaned us a microfilm of Smith’s grammar. While the prints from this film are not as clear as one would like, they are the only ones currently available. The transcription was made by placing the microfilm in an enlarger, which enabled us to read many of the words which are not readable in the reproduction.

In the first part of the “Egyptian Alphabet” the pages are numbered from 1 to 34. After this, alphabetical letters are used instead of numbers. On pages “G” and “H” Joseph Smith gives what he claims to be the Egyptian system of counting.

On the second line of page “J” the Book of Abraham manuscript starts. This should be compared with the *Pearl of Great Price*, Book of Abraham 1:4. The manuscript continues to chapter 2, verse 6. After page “M” the pages have the wrong letters at the top. They are lettered in this order: S, R, Q, P, N and O. In comparing the text with the *Pearl of Great Price* we find that page “S” starts again with the Book of Abraham 1:4. The text continues to Abraham 2:2. The Book of Abraham manuscript ends on page “O:”

After page “X” a smaller book follows which is very important. Joseph Smith’s signature appears on page one. The pages which follow contain Egyptian writing which was apparently copied from the original papyrus rolls.

One of the pages contains a drawing of a serpent on legs and James R. Clark makes the following statement concerning this drawing:

There is a reproduction of that serpent with legs in the Egyptian Grammar as Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery copied it from the papyrus of Abraham or of Joseph (Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price*, page 114).

Oliver Cowdery, one of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, stated that the drawing of the serpent on legs was taken from “Joseph’s record”:

The language in which this record is written is very comprehensive, and many of the hieroglyphics exceedingly striking. The evidence is apparent upon the face, that they were written by persons acquainted with the history of the creation, the fall of man, and more or less of the correct ideas of notions of the Deity. The representation of the god-head-three, yet in one, is curiously drawn to give simply, though impressively, the writers views of that exalted personage. **The serpent, represented as walking, or formed in a manner to be able to walk**, standing in front of, and near a female figure, is to me, one of the greatest representations I have ever seen upon paper, or a writing substance; and must go so far towards convincing the rational mind of the correctness and divine authority of the holy scriptures, . . . The inner end of the same roll, (Joseph’s record,) presents a representation of the judgment: At one view you behold the Savior seated upon his throne, crowned, and holding the sceptres [scepters] of righteousness and power, before whom also, are assembled the twelve tribes of Israel, the nations, languages and tongues of the earth, the kingdoms of the world over which satan is represented as reigning. Michael the



Joseph Smith Papyrus V

End of sample pages.
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