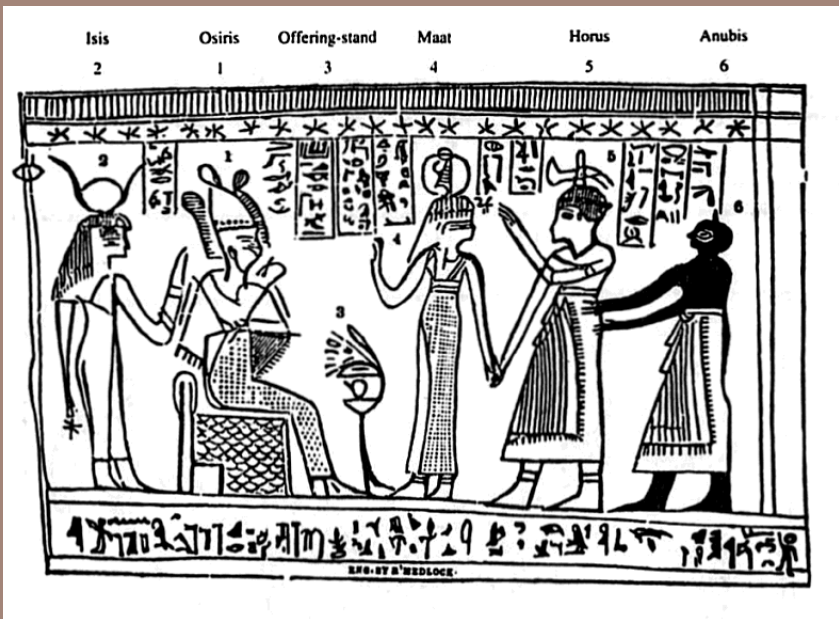


The Book of Abraham Revisited



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H. Michael Marquardt

In the year 1835 at Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith, Jr., leader of the Church of the Latter-day Saints, dictated what he claimed was a translation of an ancient Egyptian papyrus containing the writings of Abraham. Through the years, whenever the Book of Abraham was printed there were included with the printed text three drawings, each designated as a “facsimile” from this alleged Book of Abraham. In recent years the truth of such claims was shattered when some of the actual Egyptian papyri which Joseph Smith had in his possession were rediscovered and given to the LDS Church. What does one do when what was represented to be Abraham’s writings turns out to be totally unsupported by what is written in the Egyptian characters?¹

The early LDS Church leaders repeatedly claimed that the Egyptian text contained the actual writing of Abraham. When William W. Phelps, as a scribe for Joseph Smith, was writing in the latter part of 1835, he recorded that the record was a “Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the Catacombs of Egypt.”² These words formed a preface in the Phelps manuscript to the opening portion of Joseph Smith’s Book of Abraham (1:1 to 2:18) and clearly assert that the text that followed was Abraham’s own writing.³

1. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, while in their earlier years they used the Book of Abraham (though never canonized by their conference), today consider this book as a non-scriptural, speculative writing of Joseph Smith. See W. Wallace Smith, *Saints' Herald* 117 (March 1970): 5; Richard P. Howard, “The Book of Abraham, in the Light of History and Egyptology,” *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action*, Pilot Issue (April 1970): 33-47, and his articles entitled “Joseph Smith, the Book of Abraham, and the Reorganized Church of the 1970s,” *Saints' Herald* 117 (October to December 1970), and republished in *A Decade of the Best* (Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 1972), pp. 186-211.

2. *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papers*, compiled by H. Michael Marquardt (Printing Service, 1822 Highland Drive, N.W., Cullman, Ala. 35055), p. 148; from Translation Manuscript No. 1 of the Book of Abraham, p. 1.

3. Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co. 1969), pp. 228, 324. (Hereafter cited as *Saga*.)

When the church headquarters was moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, the LDS Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was given the responsibility of managing the church publication called the *Times and Seasons*. Wilford Woodruff, who was the business manager at the time, recorded in his diary that:

Joseph the Seer has presented us some of the Book of Abraham which was written by his own hand but hid from the knowledge of man for the last four thousand years but has now come to light through the mercy of God.⁴

Accordingly, the Quorum of the Twelve issued an announcement in their periodical that the church wanted tithes sent to Nauvoo for publications, including “the record of Father Abraham.”⁵ When Joseph Smith himself took over as editor of the *Times and Seasons* he dictated an article recorded by his scribe, Willard Richards. which stated in part:

A considerable quantity of the matter in the last paper was in type before the establishment came into my hands. . . . In the present no. will be found the commencement of the Records discovered in Egypt some time since as penned by the hand of Father Abraham which I shall continue to translate & publish as fast as possible till the whole is completed. . . .⁶

Only a small portion of this article was published, along with a notice to subscribers of the paper that Joseph Smith now became responsible for the publication’s contents as the editor of the *Times and Seasons*.⁷ For Wilford Woodruff and the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo, there was no question that the long awaited papyri writings which Joseph Smith had and was working on would soon be published and made available to members of the church and to all the world through their *Times and Seasons* press.

Willard Richards made a copy of the Book of Abraham text bearing the following heading:

A Translation of Some ancient Records that have fallen into our hands from the Catacombs of Egypt, purporting to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, called the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand upon papyrus. THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.⁸

This descriptive heading was then published in the *Times and Seasons*

4. Diary of Wilford Woodruff. entry of February 19, 1842. LDS Church Archives; also in *Saga*, p. 221.

5. *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 715.

6. “Joseph Smith to the Times and Seasons,” Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Archives.

7. *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 710.

8. Book of Abraham Manuscript No. 4. p. 1. LDS Archives: see photo in *Brigham Young University Studies* 11 (Summer 1971): 389.

along with the opening portion of the text that was represented to be a book actually written by Abraham himself.⁹ In three separate issues of the church paper individual reproductions or “facsimiles” from this “Book of Abraham” record were printed from woodcut illustrations made by Reuben Hedlock. Mormon scholar Edward H. Ashment has demonstrated that these original woodcut drawings of Facsimile No. 1 (the lion-couch scene) and Facsimile No. 2 (the round hypocephalus) were not copied correctly in all details and include some incorrect restorations in damaged areas of the original papyrus.¹⁰

In the month of May, 1844, Josiah Quincy and Charles Adams visited Nauvoo and viewed the Egyptian mummies and talked to Joseph Smith about the records. Charles Adams recorded in his diary:

He [Joseph Smith] then took us down into his mother’s chamber and showed us four Egyptian mummies stripped and then undertook to explain the contents of a chart or manuscript which he said had been taken from the bosom of one of them. The cool impudence of this imposture amused me very much. “This,” said he, “was written by the hand of Abraham and means so and so. If anyone denies it, let him prove the contrary. *I say it.*” Of course, we were too polite to prove the negative, against a man fortified by revelation.¹¹

From Adams and others who viewed the mummies and asked about the age of the manuscripts obtained with them it is clear that Joseph Smith and the early Mormons represented the Book of Abraham to have been penned by the very hand of Abraham himself. After Smith’s death in June, 1844, Franklin D. Richards published a pamphlet in July, 1851, entitled, *The Pearl of Great Price*. In this publication was printed the little Book of Abraham, together with the three facsimile illustrations.

About five years after the three facsimiles were published in the *Pearl of*

9. *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 1, 1842): 704, Joseph Smith as editor. Concerning the words “purporting to be.” Dr. Hugh Nibley, in *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. 1981). pp. 3-4, claims that these words were deleted in 1851. However, it was actually the Book of Abraham published in 1878 that omitted the words. This was the second edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*, published before canonization by the LDS Church in 1880.

10. Edward H. Ashment, “The Facsimilies of the Book of Abraham: A Reappraisal.” *Sunstone* 4 (December 1979): 33-48. The *Times and Seasons* 1842 woodcut “facsimiles,” though not correct or clear in all details, were better than those later published in editions of the *Pearl of Great Price*, by the LDS Church. It was not until 1976 that there appeared in printings of the *Pearl of Great Price* either Facsimile No. 3 or all three *Times and Seasons* reproductions of these woodcuts. With the new 1981 edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* the facsimilies have been replaced by those produced when Joseph Smith was editor of the Nauvoo paper.

11. Diary of Charles Adams, entry of May 15, 1844, in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* LXVIII (1952): 285.

Great Price a young Egyptologist by the name of M. Theodule Deveria, who was working at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France, was asked to examine these facsimiles and comment on as much of the poorly copied Egyptian characters as could be deciphered. In commenting about Facsimile No. 3, Figure 5, he wrote:

The deceased led by Ma into the presence of Osiris. His name is Horus, as may be seen in the prayer which is at the bottom of the picture, and which is addressed to the divinities of the four cardinal points.¹²

Deveria was the first Egyptologist to note that what Mormons had published as a “Facsimile from the Book of Abraham” was really a funeral illustration for a corpse named Horus.

Later, when the mummies and papyri which Joseph Smith had owned were sold to the St. Louis Museum and put on display. Professor Gustavus Seyffarth, who had devoted considerable study to Egyptian, was also able to read the name of the person for whom Facsimile No. 3 was made. The following mentions his visit and observations:

... according to Prof. Seyffarth, the papyrus roll is not a record, but an invocation to the Deity Osirus, in which occurs the name of the person, (Horus,) and a picture of the attendant spirits, introducing the dead to the Judge, Osirus.¹³

In 1873 T. B. H. Stenhouse published his book, *The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons*, which republished Deveria’s study of the Book of Abraham facsimilies. His book was republished four times by the year 1905.¹⁴ This helped to circulate more widely the information that the Book of Abraham material really was funerary in nature and that Facsimile No. 3 was made for an Egyptian named Horus.

The second edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* was issued in 1878, after Orson Pratt, Sr., had edited the work. It was here that the words “purporting to be” were removed from the heading of the Book of Abraham. George

12. First published in French in *Voyage au Pays des Mormons*, par Jules Remy, 2 vols. (E. Dentu, Paris, 1860), and in English translation in *A Journey to Great Salt Lake City*, by Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley (London: W. Jeffs, 1861). 2:539-46. Published in parallel columns were Joseph Smith’s explanation of each facsimile with that of Theodule Deveria’s interpretation. This quote is from page 546.

13. Catalogue of the St. Louis Museum, 1859, p. 45: cited in *Saga*, p. 298. Prof. Seyffarth saw the actual papyri on display.

14. T. B. H. Stenhouse. *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), pp. 513-19. Republished in the years 1874 (London), 1878 (London), 1900 (New York), and 1904 (Salt Lake City).

Reynolds during the following year wrote and published a defense of the Book of Abraham as a divine and ancient record.¹⁵ He apparently felt that he had answered some of the criticism dealing with the Book of Abraham, and on October 10, 1880, the *Pearl of Great Price* was voted upon and canonized, along with Smith's revelations. The vote was by General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—"The motion was seconded and sustained by unanimous vote of the whole conference."¹⁶ This made the *Pearl of Great Price* the fourth standard work of the LDS Church and accordingly was to be regarded as scripture by the church. Later, in a new edition, it was again voted upon on October 6, 1902. The LDS Church by these actions locked themselves into having to defend the Book of Abraham as an actual production of Abraham instead of an Egyptian funerary text.

In 1912 the Rev. Franklin S. Spalding published his own independent study of the Book of Abraham, which included letters from eight Egyptologists and Semitists who had responded to his inquiry concerning the interpretations of the three facsimilies published with the Book of Abraham text.¹⁷ All eight scholars independently reported that the facsimilies were funerary illustrations that had no relationship with Abraham.

In the next two years rebuttal articles appeared dealing with the scholars' findings published by the Rev. F. S. Spalding, attempting to establish an Abrahamic origin for the Egyptian material. Except for a few articles or books mentioning this controversy, nothing of importance occurred until the

15. *The Book of Abraham. Its Authenticity Established as a Divine and Ancient Record* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News and Publishing Establishment, 1879), 49 pp. This booklet, before it was published in final form, had previously appeared in the *Deseret Evening News* in serial form from December 1878 to March 1879. While the words "purporting to be" were deleted in the 1878 edition of the *Pearl of Great Price*, it has continued to be published in the "History of Joseph Smith," written for the March 1, 1842, date at Nauvoo in 1845. See "Manuscript History of the Church," Book C-1, p. 1277; *The Deseret News* 5 (August 8, 1855): 1; *Millennial Star* 19 (February 14, 1857): 101, and *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1908), 4:524.

16. *Millennial Star* 42 (November 15, 1880): 724. In 1886 Deveria's examination of Facsimile Nos. 1 and 3 were published in W. Wyl [Wilhelm Ritter von Wymetal], *Mormon Portraits . . .* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Co., 1886): 221-23.

17. Rt. Rev. F. S. Spalding, *Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Arrow Press, 1912). The brief comments by the eight Egyptologists and Semitists on Facsimile Nos. 1, 2, and 3 are contained in their letters, which are published in this booklet. While the Rev. Spalding was aware of Stenhouse's *The Rocky Mountain Saints* and *A Journey to Great Salt Lake City*, both of which included Theodore Deveria's examination, Spalding decided to make his own study by writing letters to various scholars. One of the scholars, Samuel A. B. Mercer, summarized the controversy in 1913 in his article, "Joseph Smith As an Interpreter and Translator of Egyptian," in *The Utah Survey* 1 (September 1913): 4-36.

1960s. On November 27, 1967, some “newly discovered papyri” (which had been in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City) were turned over to the LDS Church. With these papyri was the original papyrus fragment from which the published Facsimile No. 1 had been copied.¹⁸

Translations of the Egyptian characters connected with the three Book of Abraham facsimiles have now been made by both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars and published for all to read. Not since Prof. Seyffarth and Deveria’s time has the Book of Abraham material been examined so closely.

Original of Facsimile No. 1

Dr. Klaus Baer was the first person to publish a translation of the writing flanking the original of Facsimile No. 1. The following translation starts from the outer right-hand column and identifies it as an illustration intended to accompany the “Breathing Permit” written for a deceased named Hor(us), son of Tikhebyt:

Lines 1-3 give the titles, name, and parentage of the man for whose benefit the *Breathing Permit* was written:

. . . the prophet of Amonrasonter, prophet [?] of Min Bull-of-his-Mother, prophet [?] of Khons the Governor . . . Hor, justified, son of the holder of the same titles, master of secrets, and purifier of the gods Osorwer, justified [?] . . . Tikhebyt, justified. May your ba live among them, and may you be buried in the West. . . .

Too little is left of line 4 to permit even a guess at what is said. Insofar as I can make it out, line 5 reads:

May you give him a good, splendid burial on the West of Thebes just like. . . .¹⁹

Dr. Baer also gave a helpful explanation of the figures on the drawing made from the papyrus. The numbers in parentheses are those on Facsimile No. 1, published by Joseph Smith, added by Dr. Baer to facilitate comparison with Smith’s comments upon various parts of the drawing:

The vignette shows the resurrection of Osiris (who is also the deceased owner of the papyrus) and the conception of Horus. Osiris (2) is represented as a man on a lion-couch (4) attended by Anubis (3), the jackal-headed god who embalmed the dead and thereby assured their

18. For a short, detailed study of the controversy surrounding the Book of Abraham from the days of Joseph Smith to the first part of the 1970s, see Wesley P. Walters, “Joseph Smith Among the Egyptians: An Examination of the Source of Joseph Smith’s Book of Abraham,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16 (Winter 1973): 25-45.

19. *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Autumn 1968): 116-17.

resurrection and existence in the hereafter. Below the couch are the canopic jars for the embalmed internal organs. The lids are the four sons of Horus, from left to right Imset (8), Hapt (7), Qebah-senuwef (6) [5], and Duwa-mutef (5) [6], who protect the liver, lungs, intestines, and stomach, respectively. At the head of the couch is a small offering stand (10) with a jug and some flowers on it and two larger vases on the ground beside it. The ba of Osiris (1) is hovering above the head.²⁰

Facsimile No. 2

Michael Dennis Rhodes, a Mormon scholar skilled in Egyptian, has translated the hieroglyphic writing of Facsimile No. 2, a copy of an Egyptian hypocephalus, so-called because it was usually placed under (hypo-) the mummy's head (cephalus).

Edge [Figure 18]: I am D jabty in the House of the Benben in Heliopolis, so exalted and glorious. [I am] a copulating bull without equal. [I am] that Mighty God in the House of the Benben in Heliopolis . . . that Mighty God. . . .

Left Middle [Figures 11, 10, 9 and 8]: O God of the Sleeping Ones from the time of the Creation. O Mighty God, Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Netherworld and his Great Waters, grant that the soul of the Osiris Sheshonk, may live.

Bottom [Figures 17 and 16]: May this tomb never be desecrated, and may this soul and its possessor never be desecrated in the Netherworld.

Upper Left [Figures 21, 20 and 19]: You shall be as that God, the Busirian.

To the Left of the Standing Two-headed God [Figure 2]: The name of this Mighty God.²¹

This translation makes it clear that the material does not relate to Abraham (or even to Horus as Facsimiles no. 1 and no. 3 do), but to a deceased named Sheshonk.

Facsimile No. 3

Dr. Baer has also given an explanation of the figures on Facsimile No. 3, together with a reading of some of the hieroglyphs as far as he can recognize them from the woodcut copy.

"Facsimile No. 3" shows a man (5), his hand raised in adoration and a

20. Ibid., p. 118. The square bracketed numbers indicate that a number of Egyptologists identify Qebah-senuwef with Figure 5 and Duwa-mutef with 6.

21. *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 (Spring 1977): 265, with footnotes to the text. The bracketed "Figures" refer to the numbers placed on Joseph Smith's reproduction of the hypocephalus to facilitate his reference to various parts of the drawing.

cone of perfumed grease and a lotus flower on his head (ancient Egyptian festival attire), being introduced by Maat (4), the goddess of justice, and Anubis (6), the guide of the dead, into the presence of Osiris (1), enthroned as king of the Netherworld. Behind Osiris stands Isis (2), and in front of him is an offering-stand (3) with a jug and some flowers on it. Over the whole scene is a canopy with stars painted on it to represent the sky. . . . The texts, poorly copied as they are, carry us one step further. As far as it can be made out, the lines of hieroglyphs below the scene read:

O gods of . . . , gods of the Caverns, gods of the south, north, west, and east, grant well-being to Osiris Hor, justified, . . .

The characters above and to the left of the man [Figure 5] are probably to be read: "Osiris Hor, justified forever." Even though Hor is a relatively common name in Greco-Roman Egypt, this does suggest that "Facsimile No. 3" reproduces a part of the same manuscript that "Facsimile No. 1" does. Hor's copy of the *Breathing Permit* would then have two vignettes, one at the beginning and another ("Facsimile No. 3") at the end, an arrangement that is found in other copies of the same text. . . . a comparison with the photograph shows that "Facsimile No. 1" was originally printed actual size, so the fact that "Facsimile Nos. 1 and 3" are about the same height may well be significant. It is what would be expected if they were from the same scroll.²²

The same name Hor or *Horus* which Prof. Seyffarth read in the 1850s and that Deveria read from the printed Facsimile No. 3 is now confirmed as being on that facsimile as well as appearing in one of the columns of hieroglyphics of the original to Facsimile No. 1.

A portion of the original papyrus text which accompanied the illustrations used for Facsimile Nos. 1 and 3 was among the papyri recovered from the museum's archives.²³ It contains the Egyptian characters that were copied down the left hand margin of the Book of Abraham Translation Manuscripts. It has also been translated by several scholars including Dr. Hugh Nibley, who has published a word-for-word translation of what all authorities agree are actually instructions for wrapping the mummy.

inside (of) the lake great (of) Chonsu born of Taykhebyt justified likewise after clasp – ed (two) arms his upon breast his being as wrap – ed like a book (or roll . . .); the Book of Breathings . . . being written according-to-what is . . . in (the sacred) writing (Books) on both inside and outside in linen (of) the king One places (or is placed) arm left

22. *Dialogue 3* (Autumn 1968): 126-27.

23. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1981). 36 pp.

his vicinity of heart his, having-been-done this for his wrapping on (the) side outer If makes one for him book this, then breathes he like souls (of the) gods for time and eternity²⁴

Dr. Baer's translation of the same text smooths out the stiffness of the Egyptian style into more flowing English, as follows:

Osiris shall be conveyed into the Great Pool of Khons—and likewise Osiris Hôr, *justified*, born to Tikhebyt, justified—after his arms have been *placed* on his heart and the Breathing Permit (which [Isis] made and has writing on its inside and outside) has been wrapped in royal linen and placed under his left arm near his heart; the rest of his mummy-bandages should be wrapped over it. The man for whom this book has been copied will breathe forever and ever as the bas of the gods do.²⁵

From the above translations and explanations of the Egyptian writings and drawings scholars have determined that rather than giving a narrative story about Abraham, the texts indicate that they are funeral in nature. It is time for the LDS Church to realize that identification of the Egyptian materials as the Book of Abraham and the canonization of it as scripture is an historical error made in years past. It is time also to accept the documents for what they really are—strictly Egyptian funeral texts, rather than authentic Abrahamic records recorded by the father of the faithful.

24. *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975); 19-23.

25. *Dialogue* 3 (Autumn 1968).



Vignette from a Roman era funeral papyrus acquired by Joseph Smith, Jr., in 1835. It is an illustration that accompanied a “Breathing Permit” which was to enable the corpse to live and breathe again in the next life. The hieroglyphic character encircled indicates that the deceased was named Hor or Horus. Other hieroglyphics indicate that his father was a priest named Osorwer and his mother was Tikhebyt.

TIMES AND SEASONS.

"Truth will prevail."

Vol. III No. 9.]

CITY OF NAUVOO, ILL. MARCH, 1, 1842.

[Whole No. 45.]

A FAC-SIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.

NO. 1.



In his periodical, *Times and Seasons*, Joseph Smith falsely identified the same illustration as a FACSIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM, showing that he mistakenly thought this pagan "Breathing Permit" was actually the work of the patriarch Abraham some two thousand years earlier.



This is a copy of Facsimile No. 3 as printed in the *Times and Seasons*, issue of May 16, 1842, and represented to be from the “Book of Abraham.” Figure No. 5 (second from the right) is the deceased person, identified as Horus in the characters above his hand and in the prayer at the bottom of the picture. Both Theodule Deveria and Gustavus Seyffarth read the name Horus in the 1850s. In fact, Prof. Seyffarth saw and read the original papyrus from which Facsimile No. 3 was copied. The reading of the deceased’s name as Hor, or Horus, has recently been reconfirmed by Dr. Klaus Baer, Egyptologist at the Oriental Institute, Chicago, Illinois.

Book Reviews

Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*.
Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981

Reviewed by H. Michael Marquardt

In his new book, *Abraham in Egypt*, Dr. Hugh Nibley states that “To date, not a critic has laid a finger on the Book of Abraham” (p. 1). If this were true, there would be little need for Dr. Nibley to have produced this book. The truth is that what was represented as a “translation” of an ancient Egyptian papyrus made by the Mormon founder, Joseph Smith, Jr., and entitled the Book of Abraham has been completely discredited in the eyes of scholars by the rediscovery of some portions of that papyrus in 1967 in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Dr. Nibley tries to put as much distance as possible between those papyrus fragments and Joseph Smith’s Book of Abraham, because the papyrus fragments have demonstrated beyond doubt that Joseph Smith did not have the slightest idea of what the Egyptian characters on the papyrus really said. Therefore, in a previous work, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, Dr. Nibley without success tried to prove that the papyrus fragments recovered in 1967 were not the portion from which Joseph Smith made his Book of Abraham translation. In this book he goes further and suggests that Smith may not have had an Egyptian text before him at all, but received the entire work by revelation. He remarks that Joseph “had already demonstrated at great length his power to translate ancient

records *with or without possession of the original text*” (emphasis added, p. 4). He therefore wants the reader to put aside all the evidence that establishes the fact that Joseph Smith could not understand a word of Egyptian, although professing divine aid to do so, and to concentrate only on the contents of the little 15-page work itself. Dr. Nibley tries to show that the contents fit in with various patterns and ideas of the ancient Egyptians themselves as well as with Jewish apocryphal works. Therefore he would like to shift the issue to one where “it is the Book of Abraham that is on trial, not Joseph Smith as an Egyptologist” (p. 3).

To separate the Book of Abraham from an Egyptian text in Joseph Smith’s possession, Dr. Nibley must eliminate all reference to such Egyptian records actually being in Joseph’s hands. This he is able to do by completely misreading the statements made about the Book of Abraham by Joseph himself. In 1842, when Joseph Smith, as editor of the *Times and Seasons* first published in that church paper his Book of Abraham, he prefaced the publication with a statement that it was a translation of “Records that have fallen into our hands.” This preface in full proclaimed:

A TRANSLATION of
some ancient Records *that have
fallen into our hands*, from the
Catacombs of Egypt, purporting

to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, called the BOOK OF ABRAHAM, written by his own hand, upon papyrus (emphasis added).

Dr. Nibley, who carelessly or otherwise failed to check the *Times and Seasons* wording, erroneously charged the editor of the 1851 *Millennial Star* with inserting the words “that have fallen into our hands” when he reprinted the Book of Abraham for their British readers. Thus Dr. Nibley accuses the editor (who was Franklin D. Richards) with creating the idea that Joseph had actual Egyptian records of the Book of Abraham in his possession and therefore “implying that the actual possession of the records is what made translation possible” (p. 4). Unfortunately, for Dr. Nibley’s case, it was Joseph himself who made the claim of having actual documents from which he was translating his Book of Abraham. Furthermore, when the *Millennial Star* press in 1851 reprinted Joseph’s work in their little pamphlet, the *Pearl of Great Price*, they reprinted the preface exactly as it had appeared in the *Times and Seasons*, published by the Prophet himself. Dr. Nibley’s whole premise is therefore undercut by a simple check of the factual data itself.

However, Dr. Nibley is not finished with his bungling of the data. He further charges the editor of the *Millennial Star* with removing the words “purporting to be” when reprinting the *Times and Seasons* preface in 1851. Dr. Nibley belabors this point:

But note the significant omissions and insertions. “. . . purporting to be” is omitted, and in its place an imperious dash that brooks no nonsense—it *is* the writing of Abraham (p. 4).

The truth is, the 1851 printing did not leave out “purporting to be” or any other word or phrase from the original *Times and Seasons* printing. It was an 1878 printing of the *Pearl of Great Price* that deleted the words “purporting to be,” and it was that version that was canonized by the LDS Church as scripture. The “imperious dash” was added in later printings of the Book of Abraham and is still retained in the current official 1981 printing.

As if that were not enough distortion of the data, Dr. Nibley accuses the (1851) editor with misreading the prefatory material so as to make the words “Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus” mean that Joseph had acquired the actual handwritten copy made by Abraham himself. Dr. Nibley maintains that the wording actually was “part of the original Egyptian title: ‘. . . called the Book of Abraham, *written by his own hand, upon papyrus*’—that was Abraham’s own heading” (p. 4). “This is important,” Dr. Nibley adds, “since much misunderstanding has arisen from the assumption that the Joseph Smith Papyri were the original draft of Abraham’s book, his very own handiwork.” First, however, Dr. Nibley’s editor turns out to be Joseph Smith, since the 1851 edition simply reprinted Joseph’s own heading. And secondly, if this were a misunderstanding, the 1851 editor cannot be blamed for such an error, for visitors to Nauvoo were shown Abraham’s own signature on the papyrus by the prophet Joseph Smith himself.

On page 51 Nibley argues that “The Book of Abraham must have come from somewhere,” inferring that the book may reflect authentic Abrahamic material. He is correct that it derives from some source, but there is no indication in his book that the textual material for at least half of the Book of

Abraham came directly from the King James Version of the Old Testament book of Genesis. There are revisions, but the King James style of the Genesis story dealing with Abraham before he went into Egypt and the Genesis account of the creation of the world are clearly reflected in the book.

The Book of Abraham was represented by Joseph Smith himself as having come from a papyrus in his possession, and the printed facsimilies were taken from the Egyptian originals, and have been published along with Joseph's own English text for everyone to examine. A large portion of Nibley's book deals with one of these facsimilies (No. 3), which Nibley suggests "could be truly represented in ritual texts which are at the same time historical" (p. 60). While quoting H. Frankfort, "that one single interpretation should not be the only possible one" (p. 117), the interpretation of Facsimile No. 3 which Dr. Nibley asks the reader to accept strains one's gullibility to the limit. Nibley maintains that it is a royal audience that is depicted on Facsimile No. 3, since all Egyptian scenes are "audiences," with variations in each period of Egyptian history. Dr. Nibley admits that the person on the throne (Figure 1) is "obviously" the Egyptian god Osiris (p. 123), and even concludes that "King Pharaoh" and the "Prince of Pharaoh" (Joseph's identification of Figs. 2 and 4) are wearing the *female* clothing of the goddesses Isis (with the headdress of Hathor) and Maat. Unfortunately, for Dr. Nibley, the identifying title "Mother of the Gods" for Isis, as well as the names of Osiris and Maat, *appear in hieroglyphic characters on the scene itself* in Facsimile No. 3. Nibley did not see fit to translate these accompanying inscriptions! Yet Dr. Nibley earlier stressed the importance of utilizing

the written text itself for identifying Egyptian representations. He writes:

Take Figure 1 in Facsimile No. 3, for example: obviously Osiris in royal attire, but a recent study of that familiar personage admonishes us that "one must never forget" that "there is such a variety of representations of Osiris with the crook, flail, and *was*-scepter . . . that no certain identification is possible," *unless the picture is accompanied by a written text* (p. 122, emphasis added).

It is on this ground that Nibley's latest book can be most seriously faulted in that he *studiously avoids following the meaning assigned by the inscriptions themselves*. This being so, the reader should question why such significant omissions were made by Dr. Nibley. He must realize that there is a problem here, for there seems no other adequate reason for avoiding the inscriptional material. He identifies Figure No. 5 (whom Joseph named Shulem) as the "owner of the stele," which Nibley imagines became the transmitter of the story about Abraham, "Facsimile No. 3 may well be a copy on papyrus of the funeral stele of one Shulem . . . Shulem is the useful transmitter and timely witness who confirms for us the story of Abraham at court" (p. 147). The written text, however, identifies this person (Figure 5) as the deceased by the name of Horus. This is the reason why Figure 5 is the center of attention as suggested in the drawing and accompanying hieroglyphics. According to the specific designations on the papyrus illustration itself, therefore, the deceased Horus is being led before the Egyptian god Osiris. Dr. Nibley's rambling speculations fall before the text itself.

In his conclusion Dr. Nibley suggests that it is the critics that need to read the Book of Abraham (p. 246). He gives a summary of Facsimile No. 3 as he wishes it to be understood, with his suggestion that we do the works of Abraham. These he lists as:

... learning first the law of obedience, carrying out specific instructions regarding the building of altars, the bringing of sacrifices, the paying of tithes, the carrying out of explicit ordinances (circumcision), the bestowal of blessings, the keeping of family records, the making of

covenants, prayer and intercession for all mankind, works on behalf of the dead, marrying for eternal posterity—in short, the works of Abraham center around the Temple (pp. 249-50).

Does Dr. Nibley seriously expect the LDS people to build altars and offer sacrifices today?

Abraham in Egypt is a book that has a flood of learned-sounding material but under close analysis does not deal with the real problems raised by this little book of Mormon scripture, the Book of Abraham.

They Lie in Wait to Deceive, by Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown.
Mesa, Ariz.: Brownsworth Publishing Co., 1981.

Reviewed by Wesley Walters

They Lie in Wait to Deceive is a single-issue work concentrating on discrediting the writings of author and lecturer Dee Jay Nelson. Such an attack has no lasting value, merely perpetrating the Browns' opposition to Mr. Nelson in prose and caustic cartoons. The book hardly merits a review, but pastors will doubtless find the work appealed to by Mormon missionaries as a vindication of their prophet Joseph Smith, Jr.'s production of the Book of Abraham. For this reason a review seems to be warranted.

Joseph Smith in 1835 acquired some Egyptian papyri and proceeded to identify them as the writings of Abraham and Joseph. For years the location of these papyri was largely unknown, but in 1967 they surfaced publicly when the Metropolitan Museum in New York City turned them over to the Mormon Church. Dee Jay Nelson, a Mormon scholar who knew sufficient Egyptian to translate the material, was one of

the first members of the LDS Church to publicize the fact that Joseph's "translation" of these documents bore no relationship to what the Egyptian texts really said. They were actually funeral texts from the Roman period, and their contents, when translated, clearly evidenced the fraudulent nature of Joseph Smith's claim to translate ancient records by divine aid. The Nelsons subsequently left the church, and, at the urging of friends, Mr. Nelson began lecturing on the material. To combat the effectiveness of his work, the Browns have produced this book.

The opening portion of the book seems well researched and documented. It appears conclusive (if the Browns' transcriptions of taped talks by Mr. Nelson are accurate) that, for whatever reason, Mr. Nelson did lay claim to undergraduate and advanced degrees which had no academic status. The Browns' conclusions from this data,

however, are too far-reaching. They feel this discredits all his work on the Joseph Smith Egyptian materials and demonstrates that he does not know Egyptian sufficiently well to deal with those papyri. This, of course, is a matter separate from the question of Mr. Nelson's statements about his academic achievements. The Browns should have been able to recognize this distinction, for Joseph Smith clearly lied about not having received a revelation on polygamy, and yet the Browns apparently do not feel this discredits all that Joseph Smith said and did. In fact, to back his false statement that there was no revelation endorsing plural marriage, Joseph even ordered the paper and press of the *Nauvoo Expositor*, which had publicized the polygamous revelation, to be destroyed. Now, of course, practically every Mormon acknowledges that the paper printed only the truth. Yet Joseph's dissimulation in this matter is not regarded by most Mormons as sufficiently serious to force them to reject everything that Joseph Smith, Jr., said or taught.

As the Browns develop their case, the quality of their evidence deteriorates. Their mounting anger and hostility against Mr. Nelson leads them to draw false inferences and to reach erroneous conclusions. For example, Mr. Nelson claimed that after the papyri were located, Dr. Hugh Nibley was sent off to the Oriental Institute in Chicago "to learn a little Egyptian." This is countered by a phone conversation the Browns had with Dr. Nibley in which he said he was there "from 1964 through 1966" (p. 131), while the papyri were not "discovered" until 1967. The Browns, however, overlooked the fact that Dr. Klaus Baer of the Oriental Institute mentioned in a 1968 letter that Dr. Nibley had shown him enlarged photos of all the material in the summer of 1966 "and that he had had

this material for at least a year prior to that." Therefore Mr. Nelson's conclusion may well be correct that, knowing of the papyri (and even having photos of them), Dr. Nibley rushed off to improve his knowledge of Egyptian in order to be equipped to deal with the material when it would finally be made public.

Again, when Mr. Nelson identified the Egyptian gods whose heads are reproduced on the lids of the funerary jars, known as canopic jars, the Browns comment: "Nelson identified the canopic jars correctly only once" (p. 163). The Browns base this conclusion on Dr. Klaus Baer's identification of the jackal-headed god as "Qebehsenuef" and the falcon-headed god as "Duamutef." Mr. Nelson identified them that way in his "Eye of Ra" booklet, a publication on which Dr. Baer had given him some assistance "with some general comments and annotations and corrections . . ." (Dr. Baer's letter reproduced on p. 37). However, in Mr. Nelson's earlier publication he had reversed the identification, as he also did in his Bakersfield address. Hence the Browns conclude that he only got it correct once. However, most Egyptologists identify Duamutef as the jackal and Qebehsenuef as the falcon god, as Mr. Nelson has usually done. (Cf. E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, pp. 278-79; David O. Connor, David Silverman, et al., *The Egyptian Mummy*, University of Pennsylvania Museum, 1980, pp. 33, 37.) In fact, the Egyptians themselves often identify the jackal as Duamutef, while at other times reversing this and identifying it as Qebehsenuef. Dr. Baer in a personal letter (September 27, 1981) cites numerous examples of various identifications by the Egyptians. (For a popular source verifying the identification of the jackal as Duamutef and the Falcon as Qebehsenuef, the

usual identification given by Nelson, see the Papyrus of Ani in Evelyn Rossiter, *The Book of the Dead*, p. 35). Among the examples of confusion by the Egyptians on the question of identification, Dr. Baer cites three variations that occur in the tomb of Nefretari and concludes “even a queen of Egypt couldn’t get consistent, careful decisions in such matters.” It hardly seems legitimate, when the Egyptians themselves could not get the identifications consistent, to fault Mr. Nelson with identifying the jars “correctly only once.” There is Egyptian textual material to support nearly all of his varying identifications.

Further, the Browns erroneously argue that Nelson’s translation of the Joseph Smith papyri material was dependent upon the translations of Egyptologists Baer and Parker, which were published in the fall of 1968 (pp. 110-11). They ignore the fact that Mr. Nelson had his work in print in April of 1968, months before their translations appeared or before he ever contacted Dr. Baer concerning some details about his “Eye of Ra” material. In fact, Dr. Baer in his article even credited Mr. Nelson’s publication with sharpening his observations about the material at one point (*Dialogue*, Autumn, 1968: 118, n. 34a).

Feeling that they had disposed of Mr. Nelson’s work which had discredited the Book of Abraham, the Browns turned to Dr. Hugh Nibley’s efforts to salvage Joseph Smith’s Egyptian material. Dr. Nibley set forth his defense of Joseph’s Book of Abraham in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*. In this publication Dr. Nibley seeks to show that one of the existing papyri (“The Breathing Permit of Hor”) was not the work identified by Joseph Smith as the writing of Abraham.

Dr. Nibley hangs his conclusion on a statement in the *History of the Church*,

asserting that “the Prophet himself supplied us with the most conclusive evidence” (p. 167). The statement of “the Prophet” that Dr. Nibley refers to is a comment that the record of Abraham and Joseph was beautifully written with red and black letters in “perfect preservation.” Since the “Breathing Permit of Hor” is not exactly “beautifully written,” seems not well preserved, and has no red letters, Dr. Nibley concludes that it cannot be the papyrus Joseph identified as the Book of Abraham. However, the statement about the letters and the state of preservation of the record was not written by Joseph Smith. It was taken from a letter written by Oliver Cowdery which had been published in the *Messenger and Advocate* (vol. 2, p. 234) and was doctored to make it appear as if Joseph the Prophet had written it when it was placed in his history. Joseph’s original diary does not contain any such statement. Furthermore, Cowdery had derived the descriptive statement from an affidavit that was turned over to the church when the papyri were purchased from Mr. Chandler, and in that setting the statement was a comment about the state of the papyri in general, and not a description of any particular papyrus. One of the two scrolls obtained from Mr. Chandler, which contains spells from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, did indeed have red lettering at various places, and so the general description was not incorrect. However, Dr. Nibley should have been aware of the falseness of attributing the comment to “the Prophet himself,” since the editor of the *History*, B. H. Roberts, had printed all this information in a footnote at the end of that entry in the *History*. The Browns unthinkingly follow Dr. Nibley and thus rest their case on evidence that will not support their conclusions.

Furthermore, the Browns have ignored the objective evidence that clearly connects the “Breathing Permit

of Hor” with the Book of Abraham. The illustration (or vignette) from the “Breathing Permit” was reproduced by Joseph Smith as Facsimile No. 1 and was expressly labeled “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham.” In addition, the hieroglyphics written in columns beside the original vignette clearly designate it as a funerary papyrus for a deceased named “Hor . . . son of . . . Osorwer” and his mother “Tikhebyt” (cf. Dr. Klaus Baer’s translation in *Dialogue*, Autumn, 1968: 116-17). This is the same individual mentioned in the opening lines of the first column of the text of the “Breathing Permit” itself, namely “Hor . . . born to Tikhebyt” (ibid., p. 119; cf. pp. 111, 117, n. 24). Therefore, as Dr. Baer has conclusively established in his article, the illustration (vignette) unquestionably belongs with the “Breathing Permit” and not with some lost text preceding it, as Dr. Nibley tries to maintain.

Moreover, when the columns of hieroglyphics which are beside the vignette were copied onto a working paper bearing Joseph Smith’s own handwriting, the copied material even included the first two Egyptian characters from the opening line of the “Breathing Permit” text itself. The working paper identified one of these characters as meaning “Ahbroom,” with the added comment, “Signifies the father of the faithful.” The two characters together, however, form part of the Egyptian verb “they shall,” according to Dr. Baer. This not only demonstrates that Joseph Smith, Jr., did not have the slightest idea what the Egyptian characters meant; it also shows that he connected the “Breathing Permit of Hor” with Abraham, the father of the faithful.

If this were not sufficient proof, more is found on the manuscript pages of Joseph’s alleged “translation”

itself. In his *History* Joseph reported that “with W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery as scribes, I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics” (II:236). Of three extant manuscripts of Joseph’s Book of Abraham “translation,” one is in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps. All contain down the left hand column the hieratic characters copied from the opening lines of the “Breathing Permit.” Beside these characters is the supposed “translation” of them. Those Egyptian characters in reality give instructions to the embalmers and contain none of the content that Joseph’s “translation” associates with those characters. Dr. Nibley sought to avoid the force of this by suggesting that Joseph’s scribes were merely guessing, trying to line up Joseph’s translation with the Egyptian characters to see if they could discover how to translate Egyptian. However, even if Joseph’s scribes are thought to be experimenting in this manner, it still demonstrates that these scribes knew Joseph had identified the “Breathing Permit” as the writings of Abraham, otherwise all three of the manuscripts would not have associated Joseph’s “translation” with the same identical characters from the “Breathing Permit of Hor.”

Moreover, when Joseph published his reproduction of Facsimile No. 2, he filled in the broken areas of the text with lines of Egyptian characters taken from the text of the “Breathing Permit of Hor.” He then labeled the entire reproduction as “A Facsimile from the Book of Abraham.” These and other evidence collected in H. Michael Marquardt’s *The Book of Abraham, Papyrus Found* (rev. 1981 ed.) make it eminently clear that the Book of Abraham papyrus was considered by Joseph Smith, Jr., to be none other than the “Breathing Permit of

Hor.” The Browns have been unwilling to face this undeniable connection—a connection that does not need the work of Dee Jay Nelson to establish it. This connection is authoritatively established with equal clarity from the writings and analysis of an authority to whom the Browns themselves appeal, the noted Egyptologist Dr. Klaus Baer.

The Browns’ book, therefore, has proved helpful in researching the academic status of Mr. Nelson. They have not, however, relieved the Mormon Church of the embarrassment of following a prophet who mistakenly believed and taught that a Roman era funerary papyrus was the writing of the biblical patriarch, Abraham.
