

and nature of Joseph Smith's work on this publication. Indeed, one real possibility in that case would be that the Book of Abraham is not a translation at all, in the sense of transferring ideas from the Egyptian to the English language.

In the light of the findings of the 1912 Egyptologists, and depending upon whether their present-day successors will substantiate their conclusions, one may be confronted with the evidence that the Book of Abraham was rather the product of a highly intuitive mind, stimulated at least in part by an earlier work of revising the creation accounts of the Authorized Version of the Bible, 1830-1833. Textual comparisons between Joseph Smith's "New Translation of the Bible" (or, "Inspired Version," as published by the Reorganized Church) and the Book of Abraham (Genesis 1 and 2: Abraham 4 and 5) show a remarkable degree of parallelism of subject materials, language style and content. The major difference is the monotheism of the former and the polytheism of the latter. It should be recalled also that in 1842 when Joseph Smith published the Book of Abraham his work of biblical revision had not yet been published.

There will be a natural tendency for some who are dogmatically committed to the Book of Abraham and/or to an image of Joseph Smith as an infallible living oracle to minimize or even to rule out completely the possibility of any relationship existing between the recently discovered papyri and the Book of Abraham as published. However, the unmistakable connection between these recently discovered papyri and the facsimiles published by Joseph Smith in 1842 leaves little room for such maneuvering, and leads the open-minded observer away from such an alternative.

It appears that in time the mystery of the Book of Abraham will be unveiled. Meanwhile, it is significant for the Reorganized Church that undue haste and overzealous faith did not move it in the nineteenth century to canonize this work of Joseph Smith, Jr., primarily on the basis that it was accomplished by Joseph Smith, Jr.

THE SOURCE OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IDENTIFIED

Grant S. Heward and Jerald Tanner

The following evidence that one specific fragment, the "sensen" text, was used by Joseph Smith in obtaining the Book of Abraham was submitted by Grant Heward (who has studied Egyptian on his own and reports that he was recently excommunicated for his views on Joseph Smith's ability to translate Egyptian) and Jerald Tanner (who heads Modern Microfilm, Co., a professedly anti-Mormon publishing house). Their work is followed by translation of the sensen text by Professor Richard Parker and finally by a discussion of the present state and best future direction of studies of Joseph Smith's work with Egyptian by professor Hugh Nibley (scholarly defender of the Mormon faith whose continuing argument for the divine origin of the Book of Abraham based on external evidences in the Abrahamic tradition is appearing serially in the IMPROVEMENT ERA).

It now appears that the papyrus fragments recently recovered by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints include the text used by Joseph Smith in his efforts to translate the Book of Abraham. The fragment in question (see illustration No. 1) was identified in the February, 1968, *Improvement Era* (bottom of p. 40-I) as "XI. Small 'Sensen' text (unillustrated)." It would

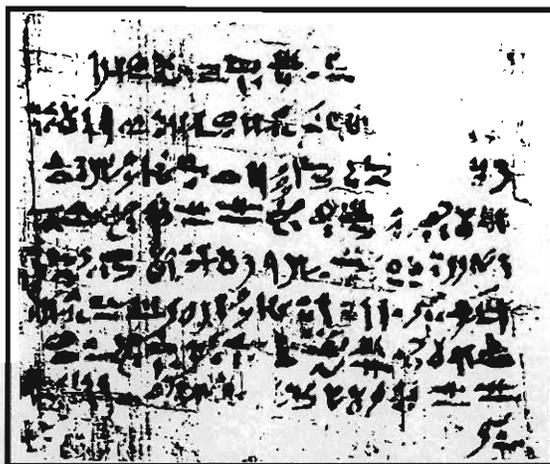


ILLUSTRATION NO. 1

A photograph of the right side of the papyrus fragment identified in the *IMPROVEMENT ERA*, Feb. 1968, as "XI. Small 'Sensen' text (unillustrated)." Joseph Smith used this as the basis for the *Book of Abraham*.

seem that Joseph Smith studied this fragment and concluded that it was written by Abraham. Then Joseph, or his scribes, copied down a character or two at a time and to the right of each character rendered a translation of its meaning. These translations comprise the original manuscript version of the *Book of Abraham*. (See illustrations Nos. 2 and 3.)

Dr. James R. Clark of Brigham Young University provides this description of the manuscripts:

As a matter of fact there are in existence today in the Church Historian's office what seem to be two separate manuscripts of Joseph Smith's translations from the papyrus rolls, presumably in the hand writing of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery; neither manuscript contains the complete text of the *Book of Abraham* as we have it now. One manuscript is the *Alphabet and Grammar*. . . . Within this *Alphabet and Grammar* there is a copy of the characters, together with their translation of *Abraham 1:4-28* only. The second and separate of the two manuscripts contains none of the *Alphabet and Grammar* but is a manuscript of the text of the *Book of Abraham* as published in the first installment of the *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842.¹

All of the characters in the first two rows on the papyrus fragment shown in illustration No. 1 can be found attached to the portion of the *Book of Abraham*

¹James R. Clark, *The Story of the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City, 1962), pp. 172-173.

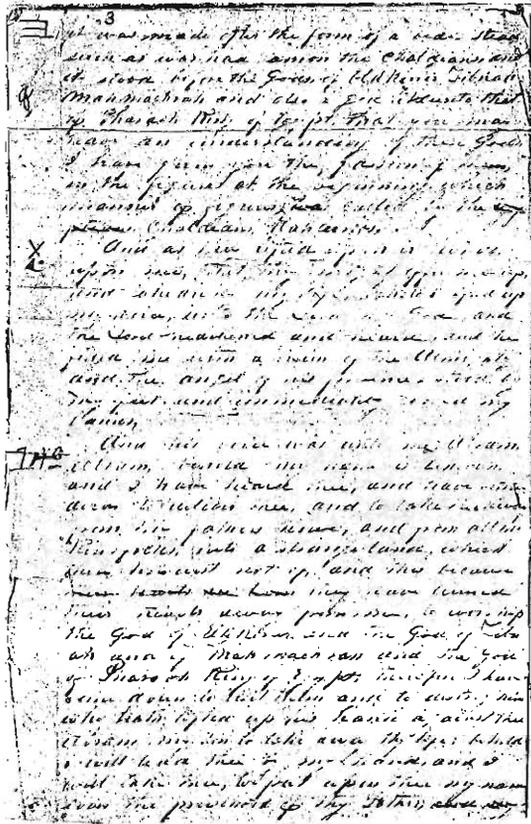


ILLUSTRATION NO. 2

A photograph of page q of the "Book of Abraham" manuscript. This portion is found in the Pearl of Great Price, Abraham 1:13-18.

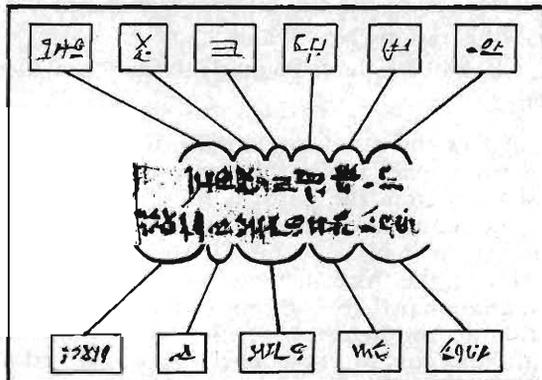


ILLUSTRATION NO. 3

A comparison of the characters that were photographed from one of the handwritten manuscripts of Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar" (in rectangles around border) with the characters as they appear on the first two lines of the papyrus shown in Illustration No. 1 (material in center of illustration).

in Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar." Illustration No. 3 provides a comparison of characters from one of the handwritten manuscripts with the characters as they appear on the original papyrus.

A photograph of the first page of the second manuscript of the Book of Abraham is found on page 179 of James R. Clark's *Story of the Pearl of Great Price*. Dr. Clark writes,

I have in my possession a photostatic copy of the manuscript of the Prophet Joseph Smith's translation of Abraham 1:1 to 2:18. This manuscript was bought by Wilford Wood in 1945 from Charles Bidamon, son of the man who married Emma after the death of the Prophet. The original of this manuscript is in the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City. The characters from which our present Book of Abraham was translated are down the left-hand column and Joseph Smith's translation opposite, so we know approximately how much material was translated from each character.²

This manuscript begins with the statement, "Translation of the Book of Abraham written by his own hand upon papyrus and found in the catacomb[s] of Egypt." This manuscript is more extensive than that in the "Alphabet and Grammar." Illustration No. 4 compares characters from this manuscript with those in the third line of the papyrus fragment.

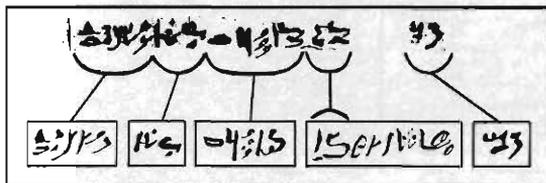


ILLUSTRATION NO. 4

The third line of the papyrus fragment (above) compared with the characters traced from the longer Book of Abraham manuscript (below), located in the LDS Church Historian's Office.

Joseph Smith apparently translated many English words from each Egyptian character. The characters from fewer than four lines of the papyrus make up forty-nine verses of the Book of Abraham, containing more than two thousand words. If Joseph Smith continued to translate the same number of English words from each Egyptian character, this one small fragment would complete the entire text of the Book of Abraham. In other words, the small piece of papyrus pictured in illustration No. 1 appears to be the whole Book of Abraham!

This evidence raises several problems. One is that the Egyptian characters cannot conceivably have enough information channels (component parts) to convey the amount of material translated from them. Another is that the papyrus fragment in question dates from long after Abraham's time, much

²James R. Clark in *Pearl of Great Price Conference, December 10, 1960* (Brigham Young University, Extension Publications, 1964 Edition), pp. 60-61.

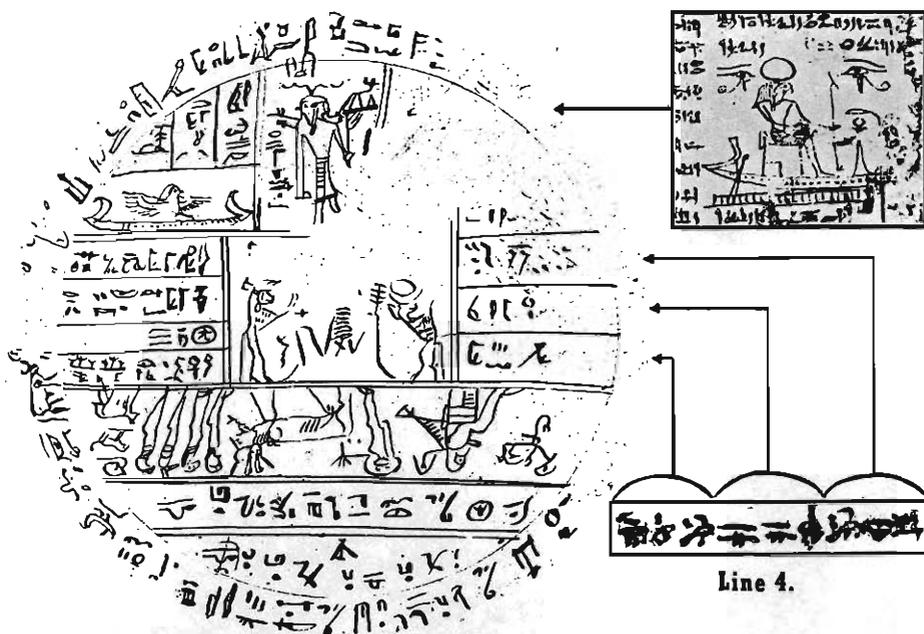


ILLUSTRATION NO. 5A

A drawing of Facsimile No. 2 as it appears in Joseph Smith's "Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar." The missing areas would seem to indicate that portions of the original of Facsimile No. 2 were either unreadable or had fallen away. When Facsimile No. 2 was first printed the blank areas were filled in from portions of the other documents. Notice that line 4 of Illustration No. 1 was added in up-side-down.

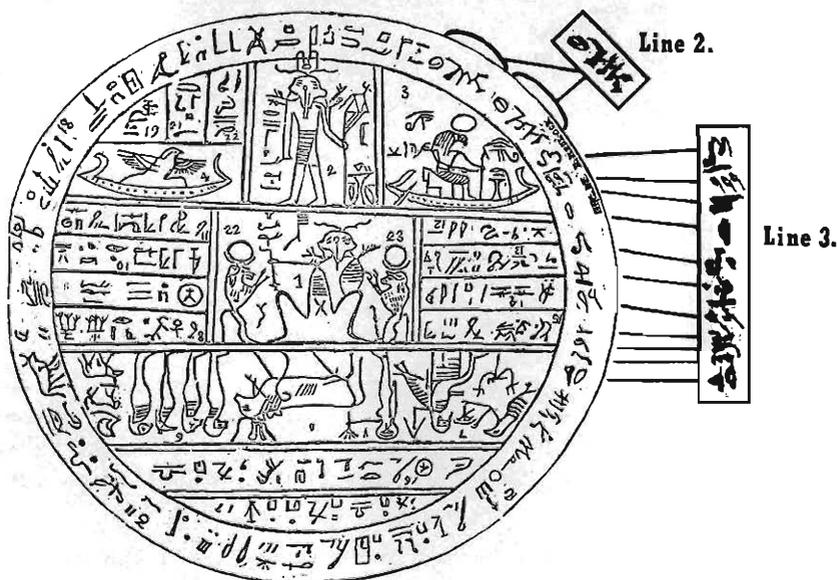


ILLUSTRATION NO. 5B

Facsimile No. 2 as it was first printed in the TIMES AND SEASONS, Vol. 3, March 13, 1842. Notice that the characters along the right hand edge have been filled in up-side-down from the same papyrus Joseph Smith used for the text of the Book of Abraham. See Illustration No. 1, lines 2 and 3.