



CHAPTER 2

Joseph Smith and the Papyri

MOST OF THE INTEREST IN THE JOSEPH SMITH POPYRI comes from what people think Joseph Smith may or may not have done with or said about them. Finding out what Joseph Smith actually said or thought about the papyri is a complicated matter. The historical record has flashes of incomplete information but usually does not provide us with the information we would like to know. Individuals who deal with the history must usually bring in assumptions about what occurred, many of which may be false and most of which cannot be proven.

One of the assumptions people often make concerns what material is attributed to Joseph Smith. On one end of the spectrum are those who will attribute as much as possible to Joseph Smith, even if we know that he did not say or do it. For example, many attribute the artwork of the facsimiles, which is long known to have been done by Reuben Hedlock, to Joseph Smith. At the other end are



JOSEPH SMITH JR., FIRST PROPHET AND PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, WORKED ON THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IN 1835 AND 1842. COURTESY OF THE CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM.

lated by the end of July 1835; the Book of Abraham appears to have been longer than the current text. In August 1835, Joseph Smith left Kirtland to visit the Saints in Michigan, and no translation was done during the trip. Revelation pertaining to the Book of Abraham was not known to have been received again until 1 October 1835. Trans-

those who will not attribute anything to Joseph Smith unless it can be proven that he said it or did it. While such a minimalist approach certainly excludes many real deeds and sayings of Joseph Smith, it is the safer scholarly approach and avoids unnecessary speculation. Here we will examine what Joseph Smith did with the papyri, moving from the more certain to the more speculative.

HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Joseph Smith began translating the papyri in early July 1835, with Oliver Cowdery and William W. Phelps serving as his scribes. The current published text of the Book of Abraham, and probably more, seems to have been trans-

lation continued intermittently through 25 November 1835, but Joseph then set aside the papyri to study Hebrew, finish and dedicate the Kirtland Temple, and, later, deal with troubles in Missouri. Joseph revised the translation preparatory to its publication in 1842, but other than that, no evidence has survived that he worked on the translation of the existing Book of Abraham after 1835. Unfortunately, Joseph was extremely busy and consequently somewhat haphazard in his record keeping, so we cannot be certain.

We do not know if the translation of the Book of Abraham was ever completed, but we do know the publication was not. The second installment in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842 ends with the words “to be continued,” but it never was. None of the extant manuscripts of the Book of Abraham even cover as much as the printed text.

Despite much speculation, the process Joseph Smith used to translate the Book of Abraham is unknown; we have no record of Joseph Smith himself discussing what methods he used. We have no



AN ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE GOLDEN PLATES, BREAST-PLATE, AND URIM AND THUMMIM, BASED ON DESCRIPTIONS BY JOSEPH SMITH AND OTHERS. CREATED BY DAVID A. BAIRD, COURTESY OF HISTORICAL ARTS AND CASTINGS. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

TRANSLATION TIMELINE

Late June 1835	Michael Chandler arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, with a number of mummies and the papyri.	3–7 October 1835	Frederick G. Williams served as Joseph Smith’s scribe, and MS 1294 folder 2 (containing Abraham 1:4–2:6 in his handwriting) was probably produced at this time. The manuscript contains a long dittography, which indicates that it is a copy of an existing manuscript.
Early July 1835	Joseph Smith purchased the mummies and papyri from Michael Chandler.	7 October 1835	Joseph Smith recorded in his journal, “This afternoon recommenced translating the ancient records.” ⁴
July 1835	Joseph Smith, assisted by Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, began to translate the Book of Abraham.	29 October 1835	Warren Parrish was hired as scribe.
August 1835	Joseph Smith visited Church members in Michigan. While he was gone, W. W. Phelps published the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, using the term “Shinehah,” taken from Abraham 3:13, as a code word for Kirtland, Ohio, in sections 86 and 98 (sections 82 and 104 in the current edition). This indicates that the Book of Abraham had at least reached Abraham 3:13 before Joseph Smith left for Michigan.	19 November 1835	Joseph Smith recorded in his journal, “I returned home and spend the day in translating the Egyptian records: on this has been a warm & pleasant day.” ⁵
September 1835	Oliver Cowdery, in copying previously given patriarchal blessings into a book, quoted from Abraham 1:2. This verse was dropped from most of the 1835 manuscripts, but the quotation shows both that it had been translated by September and that we are missing the original manuscript.	20 November 1835	Joseph Smith recorded in his journal, “In morning at home: the weather is warm but rainy, we spent the day in translating, and made rapid progress. “At Evening, President Cowdery returned from New York, bringing with him a quantity of Hebrew books for the benefit of the school, he presented me with a Hebrew bible, lexicon & Grammar, also a Greek Lexicon and Websters English Lexicon.” ⁶ The reception of a Hebrew grammar and dictionary would take over Joseph’s interests.
11 September 1835	W. W. Phelps wrote to his wife, “Nothing has been doing in the translation of the Egyptian Record for a long time, and probably will not for some time to come.” ¹	24 November 1835	Joseph Smith recorded in his journal, “In the afternoon, we translated some of the Egyptian, records.” ⁷
1 October 1835	Joseph Smith recorded in his journal: “This after noon labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with brsr. O. Cowdery and W. W. Phelps: The system of astronomy was unfolded.” ² Three documents are labeled “Egyptian alphabet” and are in the handwritings of (respectively) Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery, and W. W. Phelps. ³ These documents contain quotations and allusions to (in order) Abraham 1:3, 11, 24, 25; 5:7, 8. The system of astronomy refers to Facsimile 2.	25 November 1835	Joseph Smith recorded in his journal, “Spent the day in Translating.” ⁸ This is the last record of Joseph Smith translating Egyptian; his attention then turned to Hebrew.

1. W. W. Phelps, letter to Sally Phelps, 11 July 1835, in Bruce Van Orden, “Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835–1836),” *BYU Studies* 33, no. 3 (1993): 563.

2. Joseph Smith, Journal, 1835–1836, in *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 67; Dean C. Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 60; Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 2:45; Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 86–87.

3. MS 1295, folders 4, 5, 6, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

4. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:71; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 62; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:50; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 90.

5. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:107; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 90; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:87; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 119.

6. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:107; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 91; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:87; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 119.

7. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:109; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 92; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:88; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 120.

8. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:110; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 92; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:90; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 121.

- 26 November 1835 Joseph Smith recorded in his journal, “At home, we spent the day in transcribing Egyptian characters from the papyrus.—I am severely afflicted with a cold.”⁹ MS 1294 folders 6, 7, 8, and 9 all fit this description, but which (if any of them) were written on this day is unknown.
- 16 December 1835 Joseph Smith recorded in his journal: “Returned home[.] Elder McLellen Elder B. Young and Elder J. Carter called and paid me a visit, with which I was much gratified. I exhibited and explained the Egyptian Records to them, and explained many things to them concerning the dealings of God with the ancients and the formation of the planetary System, they seemed much pleased with the interview.”¹⁰ An account of the “the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers” is promised in the Book of Abraham as part of the record (Abraham 1:31), but although the Book of Abraham discusses the creation in Abraham 4–5, it does not elaborate on the formation of the planets in the current text, although it alludes to it in Abraham 4:15–16. This indicates that Joseph had gone further in translation than the current text by the time that he stopped translating toward the end of November 1835.
- 1837 The fragments of papyri are mounted on backing paper and put into frames.
- 19–26 February 1842 Type was set for the first installment of the Book of Abraham.
- 23 February 1842 Willard Richards recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal, “Gave R. Hadlock [Hedlock] instructions concerning the cut for the altar & Gods in the Records of Abraham. As designed for the Times and Seasons.”¹¹
- 1 March 1842 Willard Richards recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal: “During the fore-noon at his office. & printing office correcting the first plate or cut. of the Records of father Abraham, prepared by Reuben Hadlock for the Times & Seasons.”¹² Examination of the metal plates that Hedlock used shows that Joseph Smith changed only the position of some of the numbers. The first installment of the Book of Abraham that was published in the *Times and Seasons* (vol. 3, no. 9, containing Abraham 1:1–2:18 and Facsimile 1) is dated to 1 March but apparently did not actually come out on this day.
- 2 March 1842 Willard Richards recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal: “Read the Proof of the ‘Times and Seasons’ as Editor for the First time, No. 9-Vol 3d in which is the commencement of the Book of Abraham.”¹³
- 4 March 1842 Willard Richards recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal: “Exhibiting the Book of Abraham, in the original, To Bro Reuben Hadlock. so that he might take the size of the several plates or cuts. & prepare the blocks for the Times & Seasons. & also gave instructions concerning the arrangement of the writing on the Large cut. illustrating the principles of Astronomy.”¹⁴ The “large cut” was Facsimile 2, which was printed in a special foldout printed to size, and the image was larger than the page of the *Times and Seasons*.
- 8 March 1842 Willard Richards recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal: “Commenced Translating from the Book of Abraham, for the 10 No of the Times and Seasons—and was engaged at his office day & evening.”¹⁵
- 9 March 1842 Willard Richards recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal: “Examining copy for the Times & Seasons presented by [John] Taylor & [John C.] Bennet. And a variety of other business in the President office in the morning. In the afternoon continued the Translation of the Book of Abraham.”¹⁶
- 15 March 1842 The second installment of the Book of Abraham appeared in the *Times and Seasons* (vol. 3, no. 10, containing Abraham 2:19–5:21 and Facsimile 2).
- 16 May 1842 Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham was published in the *Times and Seasons* (vol. 3, no. 11).

9. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:110–11; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 92–93; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:87; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 121.

10. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:123–24; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 105; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:106; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 134.

11. Joseph Smith, Illinois Journal, 1841–1842, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 2:36; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:360.

12. Joseph Smith, Illinois Journal, 1841–1842, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 2:39; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:363–64.

13. Joseph Smith, Illinois Journal, 1841–1842, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 2:39; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:364.

14. Joseph Smith, Illinois Journal, 1841–1842, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 2:40; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:366.

15. Joseph Smith, Illinois Journal, 1841–1842, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 2:42; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:367.

16. Joseph Smith, Illinois Journal 1842–1843, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 2:42; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:367.

firsthand evidence that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim or a seer stone in translating the Book of Abraham. Some thirdhand accounts claim he did, but those accounts do not come from anyone who actually observed the translation. Nor did Joseph Smith apparently use any grammars or dictionaries in preparing his translations. Nevertheless, we do have an account from Warren Parrish, one of the scribes involved in the translation during late 1835. He wrote, “I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration of Heaven.”¹ This is the only recorded statement of anyone directly involved in the translation about how it was done.

JOSEPH SMITH’S TRANSLATION METHODS

Over the course of Joseph Smith’s life, the way that he translated texts changed. Looking at what we know of the translation of the Book of Abraham in the context of Joseph Smith’s translations of ancient texts shows that it fits well into his development as a translator.

When Joseph Smith began translating the Book of Mormon in 1827, he usually left the plates in a box or wrapped in a cloth, placed the interpreters or his seer stone (both of which seem to have been called Urim and Thummim) in a hat, and read the translation he saw in the stone to a scribe. He received many of his early revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants the same way. When the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon were stolen, an angel took back the interpreters, and Joseph instead used his seer stone. By the time that Joseph finished translating the Book of Mormon in 1829, he no longer needed to use the Urim and Thummim to receive revelation.

1. Warren Parrish, letter to the editor, *Painesville Republican*, 15 February 1838, 3.

When he provided a translation of a papyrus for the seventh section of the Doctrine and Covenants, he did not have physical possession of the papyrus he was translating.

When he did his translation of the Bible from 1830 to 1833, he used neither the Urim and Thummim nor any manuscripts in the original languages to do so. At the beginning of this translation, Joseph Smith would dictate long passages to his scribe without the use of the Urim and Thummim. When Sidney Rigdon began serving as a scribe, however, he apparently persuaded Joseph to change his practice and mark only passages in the Bible that needed changes and record those.

His translation of the Book of Abraham, apparently without Urim and Thummim, dictionary, or grammar, and “by direct inspiration of Heaven,” fits comfortably into the historical pattern of his translations.

The first time Joseph Smith appears to have used any kind of grammar or dictionary was when he began to learn Hebrew, starting in late 1835 but mostly in 1836, after the current portion of the Book of Abraham seems to have been translated. When studying Hebrew, Joseph Smith appears to have done translation in the normal way by studying the grammar and the dictionary and producing a translation with those aids under the tutelage of a Hebrew teacher, Josiah Sexias.

Though Joseph Smith did occasionally write for himself, he preferred to dictate to associates who served as scribes. These other individuals, however, also thought for themselves and wrote their own works. Most of the scribes who assisted in the translation of the Book of Abraham (Oliver Cowdery, W. W. Phelps, and Warren Parrish) had been promised in blessings that they could translate ancient texts. Consequently, though Joseph used scribes, not everything written by someone who served as his scribe is necessarily by Joseph Smith.

The documents Joseph Smith dictated in 1835–36 were from one to seventeen pages in length. The manuscripts of the Book of Abraham dating to that time vary in length, between one and ten pages of text, all of which fit within the range of what Joseph Smith was known to dictate in a single day at that time. Even under the assumption that we have all the manuscripts and assuming that the differences between them account for different translation sessions, we can account for only three hypothetical translation sessions (presumably Abraham 1:1–3, 1:4–2:6, 2:7–18), and we have six recorded in his journal. This is another indication that the manuscripts are incomplete.

So, given Joseph Smith’s development as a translator and the historical time period when the translation of the Book of Abraham occurred, we would expect that Joseph Smith would translate simply by receiving inspiration—without the Urim and Thummim—and dictating the translation to a scribe, covering between one and seventeen pages at a time. Use of a grammar and a dictionary seems to have been foreign to his methods until after he studied Hebrew in 1836. What little we know of the translation of the Book of Abraham seems to fit this pattern.

HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

In early 1842, Joseph Smith, Willard Richards, and Reuben Hedlock prepared the text for publication in the *Times and Seasons*. Each installment of the Book of Abraham was accompanied by an illustration called a facsimile from the Book of Abraham. The three facsimiles made to accompany the translation of the Book of Abraham were cut to actual size by Reuben Hedlock. Only three installments were published, which together included what has been estimated

BLESSINGS

Oliver Cowdery was blessed in April 1829: “Oliver Cowdery, verily, verily, I say unto you, that assuredly as the Lord liveth, who is your God and your Redeemer, even so surely shall you receive a knowledge of whatsoever things you shall ask in faith, with an honest heart, believing that you shall receive a knowledge concerning the engravings of old records, which are ancient, which contain those parts of my scripture of which has been spoken by the manifestation of my Spirit. . . . Ask that you may know the mysteries of God, and that you may translate and receive knowledge from all those ancient records which have been hid up, that are sacred; and according to your faith shall it be done unto you.”¹

On 22 September 1835, Joseph Smith blessed W. W. Phelps, “Behold, he shall have understanding in all sciences and languages, and with his brother <Oliver> shall write and arrange many books of the good of the church, that the youth may grow up in wisdom.”²

On 14 November 1835, Warren Parrish was promised the following in a blessing: “Behold it shall come to pass in his day that he shall <see> great things shew forth themselves unto my people, he shall see much of my ancient records, and shall know of hidden things, and shall be endowed with a knowledge of hidden languages.”³

1. Doctrine and Covenants 8:1, 11.

2. Blessing for William W. Phelps, 22 September 1835, available at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/blessing-for-william-w-phelps-22-september-1835>.

3. Joseph Smith, Journal 1835–1836, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 1:99–100; Jessee, *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 83; Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:79; Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 112.

to be about one-quarter to one-third of what Joseph Smith translated. The last installment published in the *Times and Seasons* ends with the statement “to be continued.” Unfortunately, the location of the original manuscript of his translation is currently unknown, and thus, according to the estimate, about two-thirds to three-quarters of Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Abraham is lost.

In the absence of textual or historical evidence, speculation about what the fuller Book of Abraham might have contained is interesting and sometimes well-reasoned. Speculation is a dangerous basis upon which to build theories and should not be mistaken for fact. In the book of Genesis, the story of Abraham covers from Genesis 11:27 to Genesis 25:10; yet the Book of Abraham ends at about the equivalent of Genesis 12:13. Presumably, much more of Abraham’s life might have been covered if it had been published. We can only speculate about where it might have ended. Though there are some lines of argument that would have had it end after the events in Genesis 22, we do not know if that would have actually been the case.

In 1851, Franklin D. Richards—then the newest Apostle of the Church and the new president of the European Mission, headquartered in England—found that the Church members in England, the location with the largest number of Latter-day Saints in the world at the time, had almost no Church literature. Elder Richards included the Book of Abraham in “a choice selection from the revelations, translations, and narrations of Joseph Smith,” published as the Pearl of Great Price.² It was “not adapted, nor designed, as a pioneer of the faith among unbelievers”; instead, it was designed for the Saints “to increase their ability to maintain and defend the holy faith by becoming possessors of it.”³ The facsimiles of the Book of Abraham were

2. *The Pearl of Great Price* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851), title page.

3. Franklin D. Richards, “Preface,” in *The Pearl of Great Price* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851), v.



THE ORIGINAL PRINTING PLATES OF THE FACSIMILES FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM, PRODUCED IN 1842 BY REUBEN HEDLOCK AND CORRESPONDING TO THE SIZE OF THE ORIGINAL PAPYRUS DOCUMENTS. WHILE FACSIMILES 1 AND 3 DERIVE FROM VIGNETTES FROM THE SAME SHORT PAPYRUS AND ARE THUS THE SAME HEIGHT, FACSIMILE 2 COMES FROM A TALLER PAPYRUS DOCUMENT. WELDEN C. ANDERSEN, © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

recut with this edition and succeeding editions, becoming increasingly more inaccurate with subsequent editions.

In 1878, the Pearl of Great Price was published in Utah. Two years later it was canonized by a vote of the general conference of the Church. The 1907 edition had the most inaccurate copies of the facsimiles, and they continued to be used until the 1981 English edition restored Hedlock’s original facsimiles. The 1981 edition has



THE APOSTLE FRANKLIN D. RICHARDS PUBLISHED THE FIRST EDITION OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE IN ENGLAND IN 1851 WHILE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN MISSION OF THE CHURCH. PHOTOGRAPH BY CHAPMAN, SMITH & CO. COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY.

been the standard edition ever since. The 2013 edition has only minor changes.

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

There are seven known manuscripts of the Book of Abraham; none of them are the original, and none of them are complete. Most of the extant manuscripts come from the first and second chapters and thus do not cover the entire portion of the Book of Abraham that had been translated at the time that they were produced. More than half of the published Book of Abraham is not attested in any surviving manuscript.

Although Oliver Cowdery and William W. Phelps were the scribes for the initial portion of the translation of the Book of Abraham in July 1835 and early October 1835, none of the manuscripts are in the handwriting of Cowdery, and only three verses on one manuscript are in the handwriting of Phelps.

The earliest surviving manuscript of the Book of Abraham, probably written in early October 1835 in the handwriting of Frederick G.

SURVIVING KIRTLAND-PERIOD MANUSCRIPTS OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

CHURCH HISTORY ARCHIVAL NUMBER	BOOK OF ABRAHAM MANUSCRIPT NUMBER	CONTENTS	PAGES	DATE	SCRIBE
MS 1294 fd. 1	Ab1	Abraham 1:1–3	1	Between July 1835 and 29 October 1835	W. W. Phelps
MS 1294 fd. 2	Ab2	Abraham 1:4–2:6	4	Between 3 and 29 October 1835	Frederick G. Williams
MS 1294 fd. 3	Ab3	Abraham 1:4–2:2	6	Between 29 October 1835 and 1 April 1836	Warren Parrish
MS 1294 fd. 1	Ab4	Abraham 1:4–2:18	10	Between 29 October 1835 and 1 April 1836	Warren Parrish

ALL OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM MANUSCRIPTS DATING TO THE KIRTLAND PERIOD ARE SHORT, AND NO MANUSCRIPT EXCEEDS THE LENGTH OF A TYPICAL DICTATION SESSION FROM THE TIME PERIOD. TAKEN TOGETHER, THEY DO NOT ACCOUNT FOR ALL THE TRANSLATION SESSIONS KNOWN FROM JOSEPH SMITH'S JOURNALS.

Williams, contains a long dittography (a repetition of part of the manuscript), which is characteristic of copied manuscripts—not dictated ones. (Joseph Smith's scribes at the time made dittography errors in

both copied and dictated texts, but the longest dittography in a text from 1835 to 1836 known to be dictated is three words. Longer dittography errors otherwise occur only in copied texts.)

In the Kirtland period, there are more translation sessions recorded in Joseph Smith's journal than can be accounted for in the surviving manuscripts.

References to the content from later sections of the Book of Abraham (e.g., Shinehah from Abraham 3:13) show up after the translation commenced but come from sections later in the translation than the manuscripts surviving from Kirtland.

Joseph Smith mentions in his journal that he revised the translation of the Book of Abraham in 1842 just before publication, but none of the manuscripts seem to contain these revisions. There are places where the published text differs from the manuscripts, but no manuscript shows additions, deletions, or corrections that bring the text on the manuscript in line with what was eventually published.

Nineteenth-century eyewitnesses say that Lucy Mack Smith "had pasted the deciphered sheets on the leaves of a book which she showed us" in 1846.⁴ Only one of the known manuscripts is part of a

4. M., *Friends' Weekly Intelligencer* 3, no. 27 (7 October 1846): 211.

RIGHT: A MANUSCRIPT FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM (CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY, MS 1294, FOLDER 1) IDENTIFIED AS BOTH ABI AND AB4. THE DARKER HANDWRITING AT THE TOP IS THAT OF W. W. PHELPS (ABI), WHILE THE LIGHTER HANDWRITING AT THE BOTTOM IS THAT OF WARREN PARRISH (AB4). THIS IS THE ONLY MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IN THE HANDWRITING OF EITHER W. W. PHELPS OR OLIVER COWDERY. THE PORTION IN PHELPS'S HAND MIGHT BE THE EARLIEST SURVIVING EXTRACT FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

Translation of the book of Abraham written
by his own hand upon papyrus and found
in the catacombs of Egypt

In the land of the Chaldeans, at the residence of my
father, I, Abraham, saw, that it was needful
for me to obtain another place of residence, and see-
ing there was greater happiness and peace and rest
for me, I sought for the blessings of the fathers, and
the right wherewith I should be ordained to admin-
ister the same: Having been a follower of righteousness,
desiring to be one who possessed great
virtues; a greater follower of righteous-
ness; a possessor of greater knowledge;
a father of many nations; a prince
of peace; one who keeps the commandments of
God; a right heir; a high priest, holding
the right belonging to the fathers, from the be-
ginning of time; even from the beginning, or
before the foundation of the earth, down to
the present time; even the right of the first
born, or the first man, who is Adam,
or first father, through the fathers, unto me.
I sought for mine appointment unto the
priesthood according to the appointment
of God, unto the fathers, concerning the
seed.

my father having turned from their
righteousness, and from the holy com-
mandments, which the Lord their
God had given unto them, unto the
worshipping of the gods of the heath-
ens.

utterly refused to hearken to my voice
for their hearts were set to do evil, and
were wholly turned to the god of Akkenu
and the god of Sennar and the god of

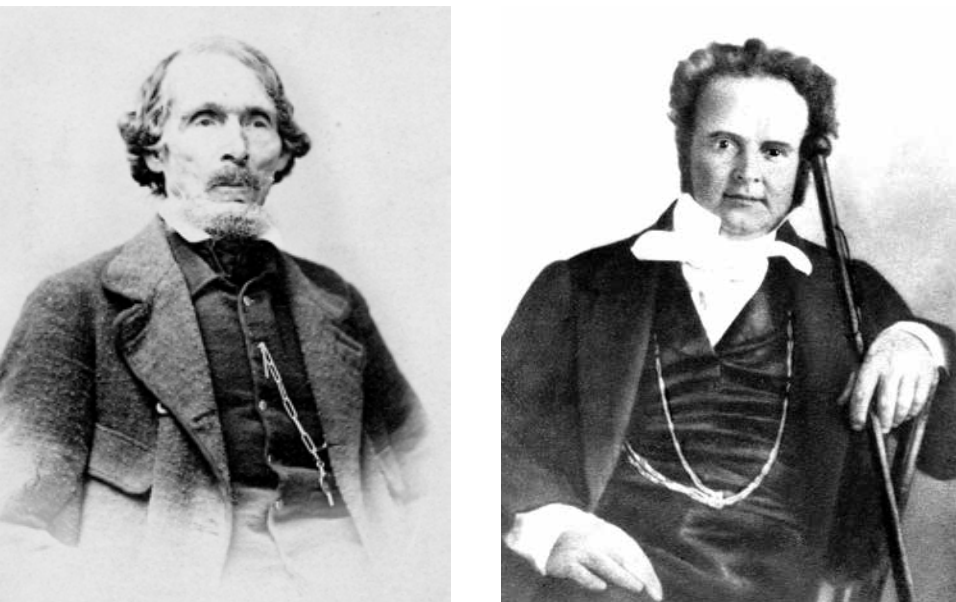
F sign of the fifth degree of the ~~high~~ ^{secret} priest
 I. I say let forth the appointed ~~representative~~ ^{representative} unto the priesthood
 according to the appointment of God unto the fathers concern-
 ing the dead
 My fathers having turned from their righteousness and per-
 verted themselves unto the worship of the gods of the heathen
 utterly refused to hearken to my voice for their hearts were set to
 do evil and were wholly turned to the God of Belshazzar and the
 God of Sargon, and the God of Nib-mach-rish and
 the God of Pharaoh King of Egypt therefore they turned their
 hearts to the sacrifices of the heathen in offering up their
 children unto them again idols and heathen nations
 my voice but endeavored to take away my life by the hand
 of the priest of Belshazzar
 The priest of Belshazzar was also the priest of Pharaoh, now it
 was the custom of the priest of Pharaoh the King of Egypt
 to offer up upon the altar which was built in the land of Belshazzar
 for the offering unto these strange gods both men women
 and children and it came to pass that the priest made
 an offering unto the God of Pharaoh and also unto the
 God of Sargon even after the manner of the Egyptians
 for the God of Sargon was the Sun even a thank offering
 of a child unto the priest of Pharaoh offer upon the altar
 which stood by the hill Cheen Bolephur hill at the head of the
 plain of Belshazzar
 Now the priest had offered upon this altar three virgins
 at one time who were the daughters of Onitash one of the
 royal descent directly from the loins of Man-
 their virgins were offered up because of their virtue they
 would not be able to work up gods of wood, or of stone
 therefore they were killed upon this altar
 and it was done after the manner of the Egyptians and it
 came to pass that the priests did violence upon me
 that they might slay me also as they did those virgins
 upon this altar and that you might have a true
 image of this altar ^{the representation that is at the}
 which was made after the form of a beasted such as was
 among the heathen and it stood before the God of Belshazzar
 which Nib-mach-rish and also was like unto that of
 Pharaoh King of Egypt

book—the William Appleby Journal—and it was not in the possession of Lucy Smith.

These manuscripts tell us something about the translation process, but they are not extensive enough to tell us much, and they do not tell us as much as they might if they were the originals. The manuscripts point to some revision during the translation process. Unlike the Book of Mormon, the manuscripts show some recasting of language in the translation. One of these changes may tell us something about the original language of the Book of Abraham. The earliest manuscript containing Abraham 1:17 reads, “and this because their hearts are turned they have turned their hearts away from me.” The phrase “their hearts are turned” was crossed out and, “they have turned their hearts” was written immediately afterwards. The two phrases would be identical in the Egyptian of the papyri, so this may be an indication that Joseph Smith was translating from Egyptian.

Most of the extant Book of Abraham manuscripts seem to have been personal copies of portions of the Book of Abraham made for their owners. This can be seen in examining who had each particular manuscript. The main manuscript seems to have been part of a book that was kept by Lucy Mack Smith until her death in 1856. One of the manuscripts was in the possession of Joseph Smith’s family, and it consists of a few loose, unbound pages. William Appleby recorded some of the Book of Abraham in his journal. The rest of the manuscripts were brought to Utah by Willard Richards and W. W. Phelps, who were Church historians but also had their own personal materials. Willard Richards seems to have made a copy to take to the printer and kept some of those pages.

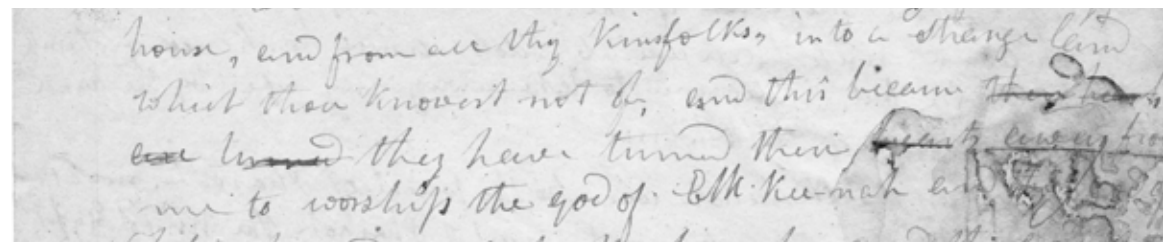
A MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM (CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY, MS 1294, FOLDER 2) IDENTIFIED AS AB2. THIS IS THE EARLIEST SURVIVING MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM. TOWARDS THE END OF THE MANUSCRIPT IS A LONG DITTOGRAPHY, WHICH REPEATS PART OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM, INDICATING THAT THIS MANUSCRIPT IS A COPY OF AN EVEN EARLIER MANUSCRIPT, WHICH UNFORTUNATELY HAS NOT SURVIVED.



WILLIAM W. PHELPS SERVED AS SCRIBE FOR THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IN 1835 AND WAS A PROLIFIC AUTHOR IN HIS OWN RIGHT. THE APOSTLE WILLARD RICHARDS SERVED AS SCRIBE FOR THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IN 1842 AND LATER SERVED AS CHURCH HISTORIAN. COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY.

OTHER POTENTIALLY ASSOCIATED MANUSCRIPTS

Along with the Book of Abraham manuscripts that Richards and Phelps brought to Utah are other manuscripts. These manuscripts have been known under a number of names, such as “the Kirtland Egyptian Papers” or “the Grammar and Alphabet of the Egyptian Language.” The name designations are modern ones and typically reflect assumptions of the individuals using the particular desig-



THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPT OF ABRAHAM 1:17, SHOWING THE CORRECTION OF THE TEXT. BOTH THE CROSSED-OUT PHRASE AND THE ONE THAT REPLACED IT WOULD READ THE SAME IN EGYPTIAN, WHICH INDICATES THAT THIS IS A PLACE IN THE TEXT WHERE THE TRANSLATOR CORRECTED HIS TRANSLATION. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

nations. No designation has gained wide acceptance. Almost every aspect of these documents is disputed: their authorship, their date, their purpose, their relationship with the Book of Abraham, their relationship with the Joseph Smith Papyri, their relationship with each other, what the documents are or were intended to be, and even whether the documents form a discrete or coherent group. With so many questionable or problematic facets of the documents in dispute, theories about the Book of Abraham built on this material run the risk of following a potentially incorrect assumption to its logically flawed conclusion. The only things about the manuscripts that are not disputed are their provenance, and (with one exception) the handwriting of the document. Yet, while the handwriting of the document is not disputed, whether the individual writing the document was serving as author or scribe is.

While these documents are kept together, often classed together, and, additionally, often classed with Book of Abraham manuscripts, that classification is artificial. To understand this, one must know

BOOK OF ABRAHAM MANUSCRIPTS AND OTHER MANUSCRIPTS STORED

WITH THEM IN CHURCH ARCHIVES

CHURCH HISTORY ARCHIVAL No.	BOOK OF ABRAHAM MANUSCRIPT No.	CONTENTS	SCRIBE	DATE
MS 1294 fd. 1	Ab1	Abraham 1:1–3	W. W. Phelps	Between July 1835 and 29 October 1835
MS 1294 fd. 1	Ab4	Abraham 1:4–2:18	Warren Parrish	Between 29 October 1835 and 1 April 1836
MS 1401 fd. 1	WA	Abraham 1:15–31	William Appleby	5 May 1841
MS 1294 fd. 4	Ab5	Abraham 1:1–2:18	Willard Richards	1842
MS 1294 fd. 4	Ab5a	Facsimile 1 explanation	Willard Richards	1842
MS 1294 fd. 5	Ab6	Facsimile 2 explanation	Willard Richards	1842
MS 1294 fd. 5	Ab7	Abraham 3:18b–26a	Willard Richards	1842
MS 1294 fd. 2	Ab2	Abraham 1:4–2:6	Frederick G. Williams	Between 3 and 29 October 1835
MS 1294 fd. 3	Ab3	Abraham 1:4–2:2	Warren Parrish	Between 29 October 1835 and 1 April 1836
MS 1295 fd. 3		Egyptian alphabet	W. W. Phelps	1 October 1835
MS 1295 fd. 4		Egyptian alphabet	Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery	1 October 1835
MS 1295 fd. 5		[Egyptian alphabet]	Oliver Cowdery	1 October 1835
MS 1295 fd. 6		Transcription of portion of Imouthes papyrus	Oliver Cowdery	After July 1835
MS 1295 fd. 7		Transcription of portion of Imouthes papyrus	Oliver Cowdery	After July 1835
MS 1295 fd. 8		Transcription of Semminis papyrus	W. W. Phelps(?)	After July 1835
MS 1295 fd. 9		Transcription of Semminis papyrus	W. W. Phelps(?)	After July 1835
MS 1295 fd. 2		Egyptian counting	W. W. Phelps	Between July 1835 and January 1836
MS 1295 fd. 1		Grammar and alphabet [sic] of the Egyptian language	W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish	Between January and April 1836

DATING CRITERIA	ARCHIVE	PROVENANCE
	Joseph Smith	Joseph Smith to Emma Smith to Lewis Bidamon to Wilford Wood to LDS Church Archives
Parrish's service as scribe	Joseph Smith	
Dated journal entry	William Appleby	William Appleby
	Willard Richards	Brought west by Willard Richards and W. W. Phelps
	Willard Richards	
	Willard Richards	
	Willard Richards	
Williams's service as scribe	W. W. Phelps	
Parrish's service as scribe	W. W. Phelps	
Journal entry matching scribe and title, pre-Seixas transliteration system, characters read from left to right, the word "part" is used for what is now called a "line" or "column"	W. W. Phelps	
Journal entry matching scribe and title, pre-Seixas transliteration system, characters read from left to right, the word "part" is used for what is now called a "line" or "column"	W. W. Phelps	
Journal entry matching scribe and title, pre-Seixas transliteration system, characters read from left to right, the word "part" is used for what is now called a "line" or "column"	W. W. Phelps	
	W. W. Phelps	
	W. W. Phelps	
	W. W. Phelps	
Pre-Seixas transliteration system	W. W. Phelps	
Post-Seixas transliteration system	W. W. Phelps	

the difference between a dossier and an archive. A dossier is a group of documents gathered by historians in modern times because they are seen as related in some way. An archive is a group of documents that was originally assembled by an individual for his or her own purposes. Both dossiers and archives are valuable in research and address different issues and problems. This group of manuscripts now kept together in Church archives is a dossier and not an archive. Since the provenance of the documents is not disputed, it can be used to separate the dossier of documents into discrete archives.

We know that one of the Book of Abraham manuscripts came from Joseph Smith because it passed from him, to his wife, to her second husband's family, who sold it to Wilford Wood, who gave it to the Church. The other documents of this dossier came from Willard Richards and W. W. Phelps. The documents form at least two separate archives, one of which belonged to Joseph Smith. Of the other documents, the ones in Willard Richards's hand form a separate group on their own. They all share the same handwriting and deal with different materials and subjects than the other documents; they seem to have been the printer's manuscript for the publication of the Book of Abraham. On that basis, they can be considered a distinct archive in the larger dossier.

The rest of the collection (which includes more than just Book of Abraham manuscripts) is known to have been in Phelps's possession, and most of the documents are in his handwriting. Joseph Smith's journal also seems to indicate that the documents belonged to Phelps. On 9 November 1843, Joseph Smith received a letter from James Arlington Bennet and, not having the time to draft a response, "gave instruction to have it answered" by W. W. Phelps in his name.⁵ Phelps spent three or four days working on the draft and showed off

5. Joseph Smith, Journal, December 1842–June 1844, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 3:127.

his own language prowess, in the course of which he quoted some of his own speculation on the Egyptian documents from the manuscripts in his possession. On the morning of 13 November 1843, "Phelps read [the] letter to Jas A Bennet. & [Joseph Smith] made some correcti[on]s."⁶ Apparently, the Egyptian quotation bothered Joseph Smith because that afternoon he "called again & enqui[re]d for. the Egypti[a]n grammar,"⁷ apparently to check what Phelps had quoted. Two days later Joseph Smith "suggested the idea of preparing a grammar of the Egyptian Language;"⁸ it sounds like he may not have agreed with Phelps's treatment. Phelps's treatment is based on his attempt to reconstruct the Adamic language in early 1835.

Whatever the extent of Joseph Smith's involvement with Phelps's attempt to compile an Egyptian grammar, the order of events is interesting. Phelps's documents date later than the early Book of Abraham manuscripts. The grammar seems to have been produced from the Book of Abraham and not the other way round. Most people who learn another language learn it by studying a grammar book and using a dictionary. Those who decipher a dead language, however, do not learn the language that way. A decipherer comes up with a translation first, recording insights along the way. Later, scholars gather the insights into the language that the decipherers came up with and systematize them into a grammar book from which others will learn the language. This was the pattern followed in the decipherment of languages such as Egyptian, Akkadian, Sumerian, Hittite, Elamite, Linear B, Luwian, and Mayan. W. W. Phelps and his associates seem to

6. Joseph Smith, Journal, December 1842–June 1844, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 3:128.

7. Joseph Smith, Journal, December 1842–June 1844, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 3:128.

8. Joseph Smith, Journal, December 1842–June 1844, in *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals*, 3:130.

Grammar & Alphabet of the Egyptian Language

This is called Zabri on high, or Chaldicton high. This character is in the fifth degree, independent and arbitrary. It may be increased in the fifth degree while it stands independent and arbitrary. That is, without a straight mark inserted above or below it. By inserting a straight mark above it thus (1) it increases its signification five degrees: by inserting two straight lines, thus: (2) its signification is increased five times more. By inserting three straight lines thus (3) its signification is again increased five times more than the last. By counting the number of straight lines and preserving them, or considering them as qualifying adjectives we have the degrees of comparison. These are five connecting parts of speech in the above character, called Zabri on high. These five connecting parts of speech, for verbs, participles, prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs. In translating this character, the subject must be continued until there are as many of these connecting parts of speech used as there are connections or connecting parts found in the character. But whenever the character is found with one horizontal line, as at (2) the subject must be continued until ^{five times} the number of connecting parts of speech are used; or, the full sense of the writer is not conveyed. When two horizontal lines occur, the number of connecting parts of speech are continued five times further - or five degrees. And when three horizontal lines are found, the number of connections are to be increased five times further. The character above has 5 parts of speech: increase by one straight line thus 5 x 5 is 25

1
2
3
4

have envisioned the same process with the Book of Abraham: Joseph Smith's translation coming first and any grammar coming later.

Although we have incomplete information on exactly how the Book of Abraham was translated, the resulting contents of that translation are more important than the process itself.

FURTHER READING

Gee, John. "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*, 175-217. Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000. This article discusses what can be learned about the Joseph Smith Papyri from nineteenth-century eyewitness accounts of the papyri. It also discusses some of the evidence of what Joseph Smith thought he was doing with the papyri.

LEFT: W. W. PHELPS'S SPECULATIONS ON EGYPTIAN GRAMMAR (CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY, MS 1295 FOLDER 1) IN HIS HANDWRITING. WHILE SOME OF THE MANUSCRIPTS USE THE TERMS "DEGREE" AND "PART" AS MODERN "FRAGMENT" AND "COLUMN" TO INDICATE WHERE IN THE PAPYRI THE SIGN IN QUESTION COMES FROM, PHELPS MISUNDERSTOOD THEM TO BE SOME SORT OF GRAMMATICAL TERM. WHILE OLIVER COWDERY AND W. W. PHELPS WORKED ON VERSIONS OF THIS DOCUMENT, KEEPING DIFFERENT SECTIONS IN DIFFERENT COLUMNS WITH LABELS, JOSEPH SMITH COPIED THEIR WORK, IGNORING THE COLUMN DIVISIONS AND CATEGORIES AND DROPPING OUT TEXT. THIS INDICATES THAT JOSEPH SMITH CARED LESS ABOUT THE DOCUMENT THAN COWDERY OR PHELPS AND THAT IT PROBABLY WAS NOT HIS IDEA. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

10

11

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- ✓ Ah the first being who exercises Supreme power
- ✓ pha the first man or one who has kingly power or
- ✓ pha a more universal reign having greater dominion or power
- ✓ royal family royal blood or pharaoh or supreme power king
- ✓ crown of a prince or queen or stands for queen
- ✓ Virgin unmarried or the principle of virtue
- ✓ Kakh ton man the name of a royal family in female line
- ✓ Zic oop hah An unmarried woman and a virgin princess
- ✓ ho ee oop young unmarried man a prince
- ✓ Zip Zi woman married or unmarried a daughter
- ✓ hah oop hah crown of a prince or king
- ✓ one who or due the Earth
- ✓ tone take or H. toke ton - es beneath or underwa
- Iota the eye or to see or sight sometimes me myself
- ✓ Iota ton. as Zip Zi the land of Egypt first seen ^{water} under
- ✓ Sue Ch ni what other person is that or who
- ✓ hore oop pha bak pha a government power or kingdom
- ✓ Zub Zool one the beginning first before pointing to
- ✓ Zub Zool Ch in the beginning of the & other creation
- Zool Ch signifies to be in any as light in the
- ✓ Zub the first creation of any thing first in the
- ✓ H Zub zool from the first to any stated period ^{each of the creation} of time
- ✓ Zool from any or some first period of time to the beginning

The second part first degree

- A Ahnawos God without beginning or end
- ✓ Aleph in the beginning with God the ^{first born} Son or
- ✓ Albeth Angels or disembodied spirits & saints
- ✓ Alcaheth Angels in an unalterable immortal ^{state}
- ✓ Achibeth ministers of God high priests kings
- ✓ Aldhibeth ministers of God under or the lips
- ✓ Alchobeth ministers not ordained of God simple
- ✓ Alehibeth ministers who are lips sinful ^{in the} of
- ✓ Baeth the name of all mankind man or man
- ✓ Baeth ka Adam or the first man or first king
- ✓ Baeth ke the next from Adam one ordained ^{under}
- ✓ Baeth ki the third patriarch
- ✓ Baeth ko the fourth from Adam
- ✓ Baeth ka

———. "Joseph Smith and Ancient Egypt." In *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, edited by Lincoln H. Blumell and Matthew J. Grey, 427–48. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015. This article discusses what Joseph Smith might have known about ancient Egypt and what evidence can be used to learn about Joseph Smith's knowledge of ancient Egypt. The essay takes a minimalist point of view, using only what can be demonstrated to come from Joseph Smith to reflect his knowledge, rather than a maximalist point of view, which takes anything attributed to Joseph Smith—no matter how tenuously—as reflecting his knowledge.

Hauglid, Brian M. *A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions*. Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011. This book contains photographs and simplified transcriptions of the various manuscripts of the Book of Abraham. The transcriptions are simplified in that not every example of rewriting or retouching is noted. The text is a printing of the 1842 edition of the text with places where the manuscripts or later editions vary from the 1842 text noted in footnotes.

MacKay, Michael Hubbard, and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat. *From Darkness unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon*. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2015. The best synthesis so far about Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon. While the Book of Abraham is different in many respects, this book is helpful for understanding Joseph Smith's trajectory in translation and how he learned to approach translating an ancient text.

LEFT: A PAGE FROM THE 1835 EGYPTIAN ALPHABET (MS 1295, FOLDER 4) IN THE HANDWRITING OF JOSEPH SMITH AND OLIVER COWDERY. CHARACTERS FROM THE POPYRUS WERE COPIED INTO A NOTEBOOK AND WERE THEN TRANSLATED USING A COMPLEX SYSTEM IN WHICH EACH CHARACTER WAS GIVEN MULTIPLE HIERARCHICAL MEANINGS. © INTELLECTUAL RESERVE, INC.

Muhlestein, Kerry, 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*, edited by J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top, 139–62. Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016. An even-handed examination of various points of evidence for the chronology of the translation of the Book of Abraham. Muhlestein essentially confirms the standard chronology followed here.