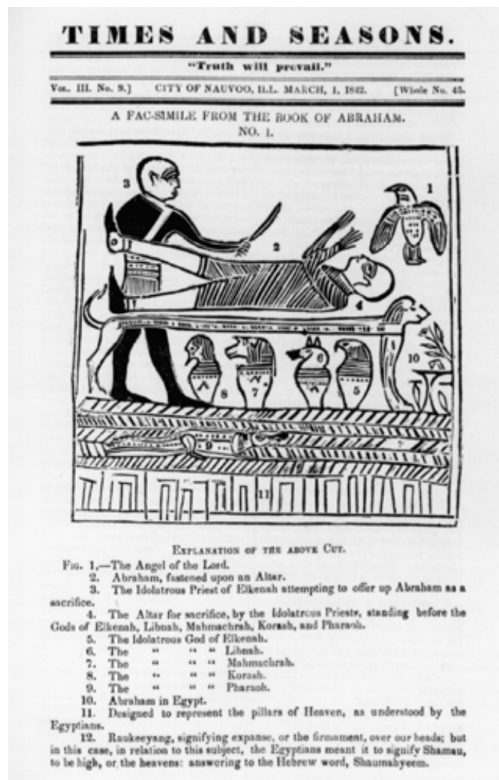


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Joseph Smith published facsimiles from the book of Abraham in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1842. The facsimiles were taken from the collection of Egyptian antiquities that were transported from Ohio to Missouri—and eventually to Illinois.

A book of Abraham facsimile from the *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842

Courtesy of R.Q. and Susan Shupe

From Kirtland, Ohio, to Far West, Missouri: Following the Trail of the Mormon Mummies

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when this was published.

The story detailing the discovery of the Egyptian mummies in Upper Egypt, together with the papyri scrolls, their subsequent purchase by the Latter-day Saints in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1835, and Joseph Smith's translation of the papyrus scroll containing the writings of Abraham, is a

fascinating and important narrative. However, the focus of this paper will be to outline briefly the history of the four Egyptian mummies during the Kirtland and Missouri periods of the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Kirtland Period

During the decades of 1820 and 1830, a number of Egyptian mummies were shipped to the United States for commercial display. Michael Chandler, an Irish immigrant, purportedly acquired eleven mummies from his Italian relative, Antonio Lebolo. By 1833, Chandler was moving from one city to the next, displaying his mummies in commercial exhibits. Newspaper ads indicate that his venues included Philadelphia in April 1833, Baltimore in July/August 1833, and Harrisburg in September 1833. Eventually, Mr. Chandler settled in Stow, Ohio—not far from the Mormon settlement of Kirtland. Here he resumed his traveling exhibit, making stops in Cleveland and vicinity during the spring of 1835. As of that date, his collection had dwindled from eleven to only four mummies, and he openly offered to sell them along with the ancient papyri.¹

During Chandler's travels, he was informed of Joseph Smith's translation work with the Book of Mormon. When Chandler arrived in Kirtland, he specifically invited Joseph to come and view the collection. After examining the artifacts, Joseph asked if he could purchase only the papyri, but Chandler denied that request. The price for the mummies and papyri was a considerable sum of \$2,400.² Nevertheless, a group of members and nonmembers emerged and purchased the Egyptian antiquities. With papyri in hand, Joseph Smith recorded: "Soon after . . . the Saints at Kirtland purchased the mummies and papyrus, . . . and with W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdrey as scribes, I commenced the translation of some of the characters or

hieroglyphics, and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt.”³

Although Joseph Smith may have initially kept the mummies at his residence in Kirtland, by mid-October of 1835, they had been moved to the home of Frederick G. Williams. The movement of the mummies to the Williams’s home is substantiated by several statements made by the Prophet:

Saturday, October 24: Mr Goodrich and wife called to see the ancient [Egyptian] records, and also Dr. Frederick G. Williams to see the mummies.⁴

Thursday, October 29: Returned to our writing room, went to Dr. Williams’ after my large journal; made some observations to my scribe concerning the plan of the city, which is to be built up hereafter on this ground consecrated for a Stake of Zion.

While at the doctor’s, Bishop Edward Partridge came in in company with President Phelps. I was much rejoiced to see him. We examined the mummies, returned home, and my scribe commenced writing in my journal.⁵

Tuesday, November 17: Exhibited the alphabet of the ancient records, to Mr. Holmes, and some others. Went with him to Frederick G. Williams’, to see the mummies.⁶

Apparently, the mummies may have been kept at the residence of Frederick G. Williams from October 1835 to mid-February 1836—at which time they were delivered to Joseph Coe, a member of the first high council of the Church in Kirtland (see D&C 102:3). Regarding this event, Joseph Smith stated:

Elder Coe called to make some arrangements about the Egyptian mummies and records. He proposes to hire a room at John Johnson’s Inn, and exhibit them there from day to day, at certain hours, that some benefit may be derived from them. I complied with his request, and only observed that they must be managed with prudence and care, especially the manuscripts.⁷

Joseph Coe had earlier contributed \$800 of the \$2,400 needed to purchase the mummies and papyri from Michael Chandler in July 1835.⁸ It was probably Coe’s intention to exhibit the

antiquities at Johnson's Inn so he could recover some of the \$800 he had loaned for the purchase of the mummies and papyri. The fact that the mummies were to be exhibited at an inn, a rest stop for travelers and strangers, clearly prompted the Prophet to counsel Coe to manage the mummies and papyri with "prudence and care."⁹ Little, if any, information is known about Coe's venture to exhibit the mummies at John Johnson's Inn. How long the mummies remained in Joseph Coe's possession remains a mystery. What is known, however, is that both the mummies and the papyri were moved to the upper floor of the Kirtland Temple sometime prior to or following its dedication on 26 March 1836. This fact is affirmed by a statement in the *History of the Church* on 2 November 1837 as well as in a journal entry by Wilford Woodruff, who viewed both the mummies and obbed during a visit to the temple:

Thursday, November 2, 1837: The Church in Kirtland voted to sanction the appointment of Brother Phineas Richards and Reuben Hedlock, by the Presidency, to transact business for the Church in procuring means to translate and print the records taken from the Catacombs of Egypt, then in the Temple.¹⁰

Elder Smoot and myself visited each obbed of the House accompanied by Elder Parrish & I must confess the scenery is indisscribable. When I entered the obbed of the house & Passed into the lower room their was great solemnity if not awe immediately overwhelmed me. I felt indeed as if my footsteps were in the Temple of the Lord. After walking into the Pulpets erected for the Priesthoods & viewing the curtains all bespeaking that grandure, solemnity & order that nothing short of wisdom from God could invent. We then visited the upper rooms & there viewed four Egyptian Mumies & also the Book of Abram written by his own hand & not ownly the hieroglyphicks but also many figures that this precious treasure contains are calculated to make a lasting impression upon the mind which is not to be erased.¹¹

It also appears that as early as December 1835, Joseph Smith had planned to use a room in the temple as both a repository for the mummies/obbed and a place for translation. In his journal on Thursday, 31 December, Joseph observed: "In the after noon I attended at the Chapel

to give directions concerning the upper rooms, and more especially the west room which I intend obbedd, for a translating room, which will be prepared this week.”¹²

The Kirtland Temple would have been an ideal location to translate the ancient texts as well as store the mummies and papyri together. However, neither the temple nor Kirtland itself would remain places of tranquility and peace. By the summer of 1837, just three or four months following the dedication of the Kirtland Temple, the seeds of apostasy were sown among a significant number of Church members. The temple itself was scene to several heated debates between those faithful to Joseph and those who opposed him. Eliza R. Snow described one such event:

Soon after the usual opening services, one of the brethren on the west stand arose, and just after he commenced to speak, one on the east interrupted him. Father Smith, presiding, called for order—he told the apostate brother that he should have all the time he wanted, but he must wait his turn—as the brother on the west took the floor and commenced first to speak, he must not be interrupted. A fearful scene ensued—the apostate speaker becoming so clamorous that Father Smith called for the police to take that man out of the house, when Parrish, John Boynton, and others, drew their pistols and bowie-knives, and rushed down from the stand into the congregation; John Boynton saying he would blow out the brains of the first man who dared to lay hands on him. Many in the congregation, especially women and children, were terribly frightened—some tried to escape from the confusion by jumping out of the windows. Amid screams and shrieks, the policemen, in ejecting the belligerents, knocked down a stove-pipe, which fell helter-skelter among the people; but, although bowie-knives and pistols were wrested from their owners, and thrown hither and thither to prevent disastrous results, no one was hurt, and after a short, but terrible scene to be enacted in a temple of God, order was restored, and the services of the day proceeded as usual.¹³

As a result of the apostates’ hatred and opposition to Joseph and other key leaders of the Church, Joseph was forced to leave Kirtland on the night of 12 January 1838. Following his departure, the apostates sought to seize control of properties belonging to the Prophet or the Church. Regarding these events, Lucy Mack Smith said:

Their first movement was to sue Joseph for debt, and, with this pretense, seize upon every piece of property belonging to any of the family. Joseph then had in his possession four Egyptian mummies, with some ancient records that accompanied them. These the mob swore they would take, and then burn every one of them. Accordingly, they obtained an execution upon them for an unjust debt of fifty dollars; but, by various stratagems, we succeeded in keeping them out of their hands.¹⁴ [p.99]

One of the strategies referred to by Lucy Smith involved hiding the mummies and obbed in the homes of Latter-day Saints still living in the Kirtland area. One such home was that of William Huntington. Oliver B. Huntington, a son of William, recorded the following:

This same Fall of 1837 the Kirtland Bank broke and with it Kirtland broke and the Devil broke out among the members of the Church. Many of the leading Elders obbed and turned against the Prophet seeking to take his life, but God warned him to rise up by night and depart for Missouri which he did and as fast as possible all the faithful followed, and those who could not go but were forced to stay another winter were hunted, obbed, robed and obbed by apostates and among that number I was one although at the same time my house was a hiding place for old father Joseph Smith his sons Carlos and Samuel and many others. In my house the mummies and Egyptian Records were hid to keep them from sworn destruction by apostates.¹⁵

It appears that while the mummies were in the Huntington home, they were stored for a time under the bed of Zina Diantha, a daughter of William Huntington. The following is descriptive of Zina's bedtime routine with the four mummies stored under her bed:

Candle in hand, Zina opened the door of her dark bedroom. In the dim light, she could see the four black shapes protruding from under the big, hand-carved wooden bed. They were sarcophagi, each containing the mummified body of an ancient Egyptian—enough to frighten the sleep out of any teenage youngster.

But Zina was not to be frightened by a few mummies, Egyptian or otherwise. She set her candlestick down on the chest of drawers, matter-of-factly dressed for bed and went to sleep wondering if the permanent sleepers beneath her had been nobles or kings or just ordinary folk like herself.¹⁶

With the collapse of the Mormon community at Kirtland, those who remained loyal to this nascent faith either left town or went into hiding. This hurried departure necessitated leaving

the mummies and papyri secretly hidden at William Huntington's home in New Portage, Ohio, which was about twenty miles south of Kirtland. In the absence of the Prophet Joseph, it appears that his parents were entrusted with the care of the Egyptian artifacts.

During this same time, a pair of brothers, Edwin and Samuel Woolley, became interested in Mormonism. Edwin had heard the missionaries preach and felt compelled to meet the Mormon Prophet. Edwin arrived too late at Kirtland, but he did manage to locate Joseph Smith Sr. at the Huntington home.

Edwin convinced Father Smith, according to Edwin's brother Samuel, "to bring the mummies and the Record of Abraham" with him to his home in Rochester, Ohio.¹⁷ A wagon was hired to transport the artifacts, and Father Smith commenced a lengthy stay with the Woolleys that winter of 1837–38. His absence prompted his wife Lucy Mack to send son William to locate him.¹⁸ After rejoining the family, they began their slow journey to Missouri, arriving at Far West during July 1838.

The Missouri Period

What became of the mummies and the ancient writings during the Missouri period becomes somewhat obscured. One pioneer writer omits the entire Missouri episode, claiming that the mummies went directly from the Kirtland area to Nauvoo.¹⁹ However, a handful of others document that the mummies passed through Missouri during 1838.

Samuel Woolley is perhaps the most forthright Missouri source. He records in his diary that he transported the mummies and papyri from Kirtland (or Rochester, Ohio) to Far West.²⁰ His statement seems plausible, even though no other accounts confirm his claim. Two additional facts do raise significant questions about Woolley's statement. First, the Woolley brothers did not officially join the Church until 1840 in Nauvoo. With the recognized financial value of these

artifacts, would they have been entrusted to newcomers with no formal Church commitments? And second, the pattern of guardianship during this period points consistently to Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith as being overseers of the mummies. Joseph's parents are the last to have the artifacts during the Kirtland era, and they are the first to be mentioned with them as the Nauvoo period commences. Why then would they have not retained them during the Missouri period?

On the other hand, perhaps the Woolley claim can be reconciled with these loyalty and guardianship issues. What if Father Smith journeyed to Missouri in tandem with the Woolley brothers? None of the extant pioneer journals make reference to such a joint effort, but it does have some circumstantial support. For instance, Edwin Woolley did have the means to hire a wagon and transport the mummies from New Portage to Rochester just after the trouble began—why not then from Rochester to Far West? Also, either Joseph Sr. was quite comfortable with the Woolleys or he liked their cooking because Lucy Mack had to summon him to return home during the winter of 1838. Both of these facts point toward a mutual trust and relationship between the Smiths and the Woolleys, even though the journals remain silent on any joint venture.

The first account of the mummies in Missouri comes from an anti-Mormon writer, a William Swartzell. He wrote on 24 May 1838 from Richmond's landing, "This is the place where the Mormons land their goods for transportation across the country. I saw there Joseph Smith's box of mummys." Two months later, he observed that they were gathering logs for a house where Joseph would translate the "hieroglyphics of the Egyptian mummies."²¹ Even though he was bent on criticizing Mormonism, he does record the first sighting of the box of mummies.

The only other mention of the Egyptian artifacts in Missouri comes from Anson Call, who visited Far West sometime during the summer of 1838. He recalls seeing the papyri in John Corrill's store and then, with the help of Vincent Knight, carrying them in boxes to Joseph's office. There they found Joseph with a number of the brethren. Joseph was delighted to receive the records; and then, as a group, they read from the book of Abraham for the space of two hours.²² This account is especially significant because of a sympathetic record keeper who actually saw the papyri.

When these previous two references are excluded, no other mention is made of the artifacts in Missouri. On one occasion, the Prophet did preach using the book of Abraham to explain some of "the mysteries of the kingdom of God; such as the history of the planets, Abraham's writings upon the planetary systems, etc."²³ This entry verifies that notwithstanding their whereabouts, the writings of Abraham were not forgotten even during the brief Missouri period.

The notorious "Order of Extermination" on 27 October 1838 sounded the exodus for the Saints once again. Shortly thereafter, Joseph Jr. relocated his family to the border town of Quincy, Illinois. He remained behind in Missouri and was imprisoned in the Liberty Jail during the winter of 1838–39. The mummies and papyri were once again entrusted to Joseph Sr. and Lucy, as attested by Henry Ashbury, a non-Mormon writer in the Quincy area. He described the scene rather derogatorily:

The winter passed in quietness and the Mormons were on their good behavior. Old Daddy Smith and his aged wife, Joe Smith's father and mother, rented the house or part of it, situated on the northeast corner of Sixth and Hampshire Streets, and set up a sort of museum of curiosities, consisting mainly of several mummies from Egypt. The old lady charged ten cents admittance and acted as exhibitor, explaining who and what each object really was. I am now unable to accurately give the substance of these explanations by the old lady, but in substance they amounted to an assertion that one or more of the mummies was

one of the Pharaohs or kings of Egypt, and there belonged to him some hieroglyphics or writings upon papyrus, which she said in some way proved the truth of Mormonism or something tending in that direction. The show did not seem to pay and did not run long here.²⁴

Note the reference to both the mummies and the hieroglyphics/ papyrus. If the artifacts had been previously separated for security purposes, at least they had been reunited by the time of the Quincy/ Nauvoo period.

Conclusion

This analysis reviews, as far as current sources permit, the route of the Egyptian artifacts from Kirtland to Missouri and then to Nauvoo. Of primary interest to this study has been the Missouri period. Even though the source material is scant, evidence exists that the senior Smith family was overseeing the artifacts. The family appears to have accepted support from the Woolley brothers in the Kirtland/Far West transition. It also stands to reason that the mummies and the papyri were separated at times during the short-lived Missouri sojourn. What was anticipated as a time to resume the Abrahamic translations became instead a brief stopover with relentless opposition. Even though the Egyptian artifacts made their way to Missouri, it was a discrete journey with a short stay. It would be in Nauvoo where the sun would shine again upon the mummies and their papyri.

Notes

¹ *Cleveland Daily Advertiser*, 26 March 1835, cited in H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 6.

² Jay M. Todd, "Egyptian Papyri Rediscovered," *Improvement Era*, January 1968, 16.

³ Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols., 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), 2:236. Hereafter cited as HC.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:291.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:293.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:316.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:396.

⁸ H. Donl Peterson, "The Mormon Mummies and Papryi in Ohio," *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History*, ed. Milton V. Backman Jr. (Provo, Utah: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1990), 128.

⁹ *HC*, 2:396.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:520–21.

¹¹ Dean C. Jessee, "The Kirtland Diary of Wilford Woodruff," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 4 (summer 1972): 371 (terminal punctuation inserted; original spelling and capitalization retained).

¹² Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:124 (terminal punctuation inserted; original spelling and capitalization retained).

¹³ Eliza R. Snow, "Biography of Lorenzo Snow," as quoted in B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1930), 1:406.

¹⁴ Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, Lucy Mack Smith (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 247.

¹⁵ Oliver B. Huntington, *History of Oliver Boardman Huntington*, typescript, LDS Archives, 13.

¹⁶ “Prominent Mormon Women,” *Deseret News and Salt Lake Telegram*, Church Section, 30 November 1963, 16.

¹⁷ Samuel A. Woolley Autobiography, Church Archives, as cited in H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 139–40.

¹⁸ Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother*, 217–18.

¹⁹ William I. Appleby Autobiography, Church Archives, as cited in Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham*, 140.

²⁰ James R. Clark, “Joseph Smith and the Lebolo Egyptian Papyri,” *BYU Studies* 8, no. 2 (winter 1968): 200.

²¹ William Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed: Being a Journal of a Residence in Missouri* (Perkin, Ohio: William Swartzell, 1840), 9, 25.

²² Duane O. Call, “Anson Call and His Contributions toward Latter-day Saint Colonization” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1956), 32–33.

²³ HC, 3:27.

²⁴ Henry Asbury, “Reminiscences of Quincy, Illinois, 1882,” in Jay Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968), 208.