



JOSEPH SMITH AND
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
EGYPTOLOGY

JOSEPH SMITH AND ANCIENT EGYPT

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On July 19–20, 1835, W. W. Phelps wrote his wife about the recent news in Kirtland, Ohio: “On the last of June, four Egyptian mummies were brought here. With them were two papyrus rolls, besides some other ancient Egyptian writings. As no one could translate these writings, they were presented to President Smith. He soon knew what they were and said that the rolls of papyrus contained a sacred record kept by Joseph in Pharaoh’s court in Egypt and the teachings of Father Abraham.”¹

This is the earliest record of Joseph Smith’s encounter with Egyptian artifacts. According to conventional wisdom, by the time Joseph Smith ran across Egyptian papyri in 1835, Jean-François Champollion had already deciphered Egyptian hieroglyphs a dozen years previously. Joseph Smith should have known better but clearly did not. In this case, some who follow the conventional wisdom do

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not think that Joseph Smith knew anything about the ancient world, but they think that he should have. Whoever would place Joseph Smith in the Egyptology of his day has two hurdles to overcome. The first is knowing what Egyptology was actually like in Joseph Smith's day. The second is figuring out what we can know of Joseph Smith's involvement in Egyptology. Only after dealing with these two issues can we accurately assess Joseph Smith's understanding of Egyptian.

The Decipherment of Hieroglyphs

We tend to forget what Egyptology was actually like in Joseph Smith's day. The following was a viewpoint from a bit closer to that time: "The theories of Spohn, Klaproth, Goulianos, Riccardi, Jannelli, and others, are forgotten," said the Reverend Peter Le Page Renouf in 1859, "or at least have ceased to occupy the attention of those who seriously intend to make themselves acquainted with the language, the literature, or the history of ancient Egypt."² One of those mentioned, J. Klaproth, stated in 1827, "Monsieur Champollion does not like anyone to speak about Egypt without his permission, and above all, he does not like anyone to mention those who were engaged in it before him: it is an unpardonable offense."³ This is an indication of the disagreements among the various scholars vying for the title of the decipherer of hieroglyphs. It is an indication that Champollion had not yet carried the day. Egyptology was not yet the settled field it is now or even was by the end of the nineteenth century.

The Rosetta Stone was discovered in July 1799 and is now an icon. It is the most visited object in the British Museum. Companies name themselves after it. It would probably shock most of the visitors on pilgrimage to visit that object that most Egyptologists have never read it. Don't you start your study of hieroglyphs with the Rosetta Stone? No, we do not. We Egyptologists have some good reasons for neglecting it, which I cannot go into here. We also have a precedent for it. While it is true that Jean François Champollion did use the

Rosetta Stone to decipher hieroglyphs, as his critics never failed to point out, to the end of his days he could never read it. He used it but did not read it.

Our tale actually begins soon after the discovery of the Rosetta Stone. The Rosetta Stone is a legal decree written by Ptolemy V Epiphanes in three scripts: Egyptian hieroglyphs on the top, Demotic in the middle, and Greek on the bottom. The top is missing but the lower two inscriptions are mostly intact. So prospective decipherers could compare the two lower inscriptions but were not really certain where in the other texts the hieroglyphic one began. That created something of a problem.

Baron Antoine Isaac Silvestre de Sacy, a professor of Arabic—one of Champollion’s professors, in fact—and the founder of the *Journal Asiatique*,⁴ started the decipherment of any phase of the Egyptian language by identifying names of the three principle persons in the Demotic portion of the Rosetta Stone in 1802.⁵ That same year, Johan David Åkerblad, “then at Paris, but afterwards the Swedish resident at Rome, had begun to decipher the middle division of the inscription” on the Rosetta Stone⁶ by taking the alphabet established by de Sacy, applying it rigorously to certain words in the Rosetta Stone, and showed that they were related to Coptic.⁷ Both de Sacy and Åkerblad thought that Demotic was a purely “alphabetical system, composed of twenty five letters only.”⁸ Unfortunately, they were wrong about that, and so were stuck there.

Thomas Young was one of those polymaths destined to give the typical professor an inferiority complex. Any one of Young’s scientific accomplishments would secure his historical fame—he was the first to recognize astigmatism in the human eye, the first to establish a consistent theory of colors, the first to demonstrate the wave behavior of light, the developer of the theory of capillary action, and the developer of his own method of tuning instruments—but in 1814 Young also turned his fertile intellect to the decipherment

of Egyptian. Young recognized that the key element necessary to understand Demotic was to identify word groups and to match the Demotic word groups with the Greek words, thus deciphering the Demotic portion of the Rosetta Stone.⁹ In 1823, Young published the decipherment of five Demotic and bilingual (Greek and Demotic) papyri, most of which could stand still today with minor modifications.¹⁰

In 1828, Johann Gottfried Ludwig Kosegarten published a short grammar of Demotic in Latin based on the Rosetta Stone and a few bilingual Greek and Demotic papyri.¹¹ Kosegarten's grammar discussed the alphabet,¹² names,¹³ date formulae,¹⁴ numbers,¹⁵ the Greek portions of bilingual papyri,¹⁶ and interlinear interpretations of the Demotic portions.¹⁷ Most of Kosegarten's work, which Heinrich Brugsch considered to be "interesting and extremely important,"¹⁸ could stand today. Heinrich Brugsch demonstrated his mastery of Demotic by publishing his grammar of Demotic in 1855.¹⁹

The received wisdom is that Jean-François Champollion published his decipherment of the Rosetta Stone hieroglyphs in French in 1822.²⁰ This is somewhat misleading. What Champollion established in 1822 was a correspondence between the letters of the Greek alphabet and several hieroglyphs found in Greco-Roman period cartouches, and that these letters corresponded with the first sound of the Coptic words for the pictures composing the hieroglyphs.²¹ This was an important first step, but only a first step.

In 1824, Champollion extended his decipherment in a two volume work called the *Précis*.²² In it, he extended his alphabet to recover Greek and Roman names.²³ Arguing that the same values are held in all words, not just names, he matched the hieroglyphs with parallel signs in hieratic.²⁴ Using expressions of filiation, grammatical particles, and personal pronouns, Champollion first proved the long suspected but never demonstrated relationship of hieroglyphs with Coptic.²⁵ Champollion then tackled the problem of divine

names, illustrating that application of the alphabet yielded the names of Egyptian deities known from Classical sources, through which he was able to determine that certain hieroglyphs could represent entire concepts.²⁶ Champollion next applied his alphabet to show that it could recover native Egyptian names known from Coptic.²⁷ Setting common formulae found on obelisks in parallel, Champollion argued that royal epithets could be derived therefrom (though he was not usually correct in interpreting those epithets).²⁸ The various pharaohs of the many dynasties of Egyptian history had been listed by the bilingual Egyptian priest and royal advisor Manetho; though the work was lost, several classical historians like Josephus, Eusebius, and Africanus had copied the list, thus preserving the names of scores of Egyptian pharaohs. By applying his alphabet to earlier native Egyptian pharaohs, Champollion was able to show how many of these corresponded to the names of pharaohs given in Manetho.²⁹ In Champollion's recapitulation of his results on the nature of hieroglyphic writing, he compared it favorably with the testimony left by classical authors.³⁰ He concluded with a chapter criticizing his precursors and summarizing the results of his investigations.³¹ Champollion's 1824 *Précis* was the true decipherment. A second edition containing many corrections was issued in 1828.³²

After Champollion died in 1832³³—three years after Young's death³⁴—Champollion's brother, Jacques-Joseph Champollion-Figeac, edited and published Champollion's grammar and dictionary posthumously over the period of 1836 to 1844³⁵ and, by his bungled editing, prevented the decipherment from being acknowledged for years.³⁶ Richard Lepsius examined Champollion's work thoroughly in 1837 and pronounced it sound³⁷—doubtlessly because it was too early for the editorial gaffes of Champollion-Figeac to have tarnished the work unduly.

A hieroglyphic dictionary (into English), the work of Samuel Sharpe, appeared in 1837.³⁸ Sharpe reviewed the decipherment,³⁹ and

based his vocabulary on the Rosetta Stone, and a few stele in the British Museum.⁴⁰ Sharpe's work serves as an amazing illustration of how badly wrong someone can be in matching up a translation with the original text. Sharpe divides the words in the wrong places and associates the words of the translation with the wrong glyphs. Sharpe was not stupid, but he was often wrong. Sharpe also has lengthy explanatory notes about his translations in the dictionary yielding lengthy definitions that sometimes go on for pages.

Gustav Seyffarth, a superb copyist of Egyptian documents, studied Semitic languages under F. A. W. Spohn. "Seyffarth's life is perhaps the most tragic example in all Egyptology of a brilliant mind, perhaps genius, led astray by fantastic notions; . . . had he used his very great intellectual powers alongside Champollion, Lepsius, Brugsch, and Ebers whom he fought for sixty years, his contributions to Egyptology might have been immense."⁴¹ He had a keen eye for detail, and could reproduce a hieratic text as well as any ancient Egyptian scribe. Furthermore, he was skilled in transcribing hieratic into hieroglyphs. These skills served him well. From 1826 to 1828, he wandered through Europe collecting inscriptions,⁴² the fourteen volumes of which serve as the basis for his understanding of Egyptian.⁴³ In 1855, he published another grammar of Egyptian, arranging the signs by object represented.⁴⁴ Seyffarth's grammar, which was based on Coptic, is not bad,⁴⁵ but his interpretation of signs is atrocious. Seyffarth respected Young's work but denied Champollion's any validity,⁴⁶ perhaps because he misunderstood Champollion's argument.⁴⁷ In 1860 Seyffarth could pronounce that those who failed at translation did so "probably because they were acquainted only with the system of Champollion, according to which nobody, as yet, has succeeded in translating one line of hieroglyphic, or Hieratic text, down to this day, as is known."⁴⁸ Although much of Seyffarth's work is simply wrong, in Seyffarth's defense, it must be said that he interpreted many things correctly; the problem

is discerning which is which, a task that is far easier with 150 years of hindsight.

Seyffarth vociferously and ferociously attacked anyone who disagreed with him. When Reverend Peter Le Page Renouf pointed out that his system made no sense, he said, “I must acknowledge that the said article is written so ingeniously, skilfully, and winningly, that scarcely one reader, except the author and myself, would suspect its deceptiveness, and that, had I not a conscience, I should wish to be able to write such articles. . . . On the other hand, I can not conceal that his treatise is so full of contradictions, misrepresentations, insinuations, and calumnies, on every page, that a small volume would not suffice to refute them all.”⁴⁹ “I will not return Dr. Seyffarth’s compliment,” replied Le Page Renouf. “I am convinced that he is utterly incapable of anything like wilful misrepresentation or deliberate calumny. . . . But it is not to any moral perversity that we must attribute the incredible misrepresentations of fact so common in Dr Seyffarth’s [*sic*] attacks upon all Egyptologists since the time of Champollion, but to a peculiar inaccuracy of mind, in consequence of which he misses the exact meaning of the author, and hits upon something essentially different, though more or less resembling it in sound or sense. Even when he quotes the very words of an author, we cannot be sure that we have the author’s meaning,” since Seyffarth would misquote or misattribute quotations.⁵⁰

Seyffarth’s complaint that Champollion could not provide a translation for the Rosetta Stone, or anything else, was accurate. Just after Seyffarth left Europe, however, Olivier Charles Camille Emmanuel de Rougé had been the first to translate a running Egyptian text, laying out the correct ground rules for reading and translating hieroglyphic texts.⁵¹

In 1851, Heinrich Brugsch published his examination of two hieratic Documents of Breathings Made by Isis,⁵² the first extensive examination and translation of a hieratic text.

Egyptology in America

Most of the events pertaining to the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs took place in Europe and are not reflected in America. The barrier of the Atlantic insulated America somewhat from the progress in the decipherment. What was available in America is more pertinent to what Joseph Smith might have known.

News of Champollion's discovery was published in Boston in 1830, by Moses Stuart and his son Isaac.⁵³ The Stuarts translated a French evaluation by J. G. H. Greppo, who spent most of his book discussing how this might prove advantageous for biblical studies, and provided a brief alphabet of twelve hieroglyphs with their correct hieratic and Demotic equivalents.⁵⁴ Twelve years later, the Stuart's translation was republished in New York, but without the plates, so that in effect, no key for decipherment was given.⁵⁵ Neither one of these books ever made it to the Manchester New York Public Library, which contained nothing on the subject of ancient Egypt whatsoever.⁵⁶ They were also published after the Book of Mormon.

The first popularization of Champollion's discovery to reach America was George Gliddon's *Ancient Egypt*, which was published in 1843, and sold twenty-four thousand copies.⁵⁷ Gliddon went on an extensive lecture circuit promoting Champollion's decipherment.

No Egyptologists arrived in America until Gustav Seyffarth arrived in 1854,⁵⁸ and he was definitely out of the emerging mainstream. In fact, it was because he was out of the emerging mainstream and "found it increasingly hard to get his numerous and extraordinary works published or to found a proper school" that he emigrated from Germany to the United States.⁵⁹ Thus, in John Wilson's opinion, in 1864 "there was no American to match the scholars of France, Germany, and Great Britain" in Egyptology.⁶⁰ Scholars there were, but professors there were not. The first professorship of Egyptology in German was Heinrich Brugsch, who acquired the chair in Göttingen in 1868.⁶¹ By comparison, the first professorship of Egyptology in

England was at University College, London, which was awarded to Wm. M. Flinders Petrie in 1894.⁶²

The first American to be professionally trained in Egyptology was Charles Edwin Wilbour, who studied under Maspero beginning in 1880.⁶³ Wilbour, however, was in exile for his involvement with the infamous Tweed Gang, and never returned to America.⁶⁴ Thus Wilbour's training came too late, and never made it across the Atlantic.

The first American to get a Ph.D. in Egyptology was James Henry Breasted. Breasted received his undergraduate degree from the Chicago College of Pharmacy in 1886, a master's degree from Yale University in 1891, and a PhD under Adolf Erman in Berlin in 1894.⁶⁵ In 1895, he began teaching Egyptology at the University of Chicago.⁶⁶ Breasted noted that in 1912, "American Universities have never until recently given such studies any attention, and there is still only one professorship of the science in the United States,"⁶⁷ his own, established at the University of Chicago in 1905.⁶⁸ Breasted founded the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in 1919.⁶⁹

What Was Known about Egyptology in Joseph Smith's Day?

So what was the Egyptology available for examining the Joseph Smith Papyri in Joseph Smith's day? If the papyrus had been written in Demotic and available in Europe, there would have been hope for an accurate analysis. As for hieroglyphs, Champollion had published the basics of the system, but it required a knowledge of Coptic derived from other sources, and was not universally accepted in his day. Champollion-Figeac's grammar was nearly impossible to work with. De Rouge's work was as yet unpublished. Hieratic was recognized, but no extensive work had been done on it. The Book of the Dead was not recognized, and any work done would have been essentially from scratch. The Book of Breathings had been published in

facsimile form, but had not been translated and so any work on the subject would have been from scratch. Although news of the results of Champollion's work had reached America, it was available only in poorly reported, badly published, filtered versions of his early work. When Joseph Smith worked with the papyri, it was essentially on his own, without any benefit of bilingual inscriptions or Egyptological work of any kind.

James H. Breasted, the father of American Egyptology, was in a unique position to recognize the state of Egyptology previous to his day, and wrote in 1912 that in Joseph Smith's day "it would have been impossible for any American scholar to know enough about Egyptian inscriptions to read them."⁷⁰ "It will be seen, then," Breasted concludes, "that if Joseph Smith could read ancient Egyptian writing, his ability to do so had no connection with the decipherment of hieroglyphics by European scholars."⁷¹

Joseph Smith and Egyptian

The other half of the equation is how to figure out what Joseph Smith knew of Egyptian. While we could and probably should consider the contributions of others of the early Brethren—Oliver Cowdery was, after all, the first in modern times to correctly identify the vignette of Book of the Dead 125 as a judgment of the dead,⁷² preceding Max Uhlemann by almost twenty years⁷³ and Richard Lepsius by almost a decade⁷⁴—our focus here is on Joseph Smith. How is one to know what Joseph Smith knew of Egyptian?

Determining what Joseph Smith thought about anything poses certain problems for historians. The sources are varied and range from autographs to dictations to divine revelations to ghost written pieces to third-hand rumors to late reminiscences. Historians can take, and have taken, a range of approaches, from the minimalist—taking for Joseph Smith's opinion only what can be shown to come from his own hand or mind, as exemplified by Dean Jessee's

Personal Writings of Joseph Smith—to the maximalist—taking anything that has ever been attributed to him, no matter how tenuously or how late, as accurately reflecting Joseph Smith’s thought. This issue is fundamental to any approach to Joseph Smith, including one that looks at what Joseph Smith knew of the ancient world. Much of what has been attributed to Joseph Smith’s knowledge of ancient Egypt comes from sources of questionable historical value. This paper takes a strict minimalist approach. Doing so is the safest way to determine what ideas are actually Joseph Smith’s even though it will eliminate sources that probably, but not demonstrably, reflect his thought.

It is important to remember that although various people acted as scribe to Joseph Smith, they were independent people and had their own independent thoughts. Not everything written by one of Joseph Smith’s scribes came from the mind of Joseph Smith, even during the time period when they served as Joseph Smith’s scribes. To use an absurd example, at times during the summer and fall of 1835, W. W. Phelps served as Joseph Smith’s scribe. Automatically assigning any document written by Phelps at that time to the mind of Joseph Smith would have us arguing that Joseph Smith dictated many of the letters that Phelps wrote to his wife Sally.⁷⁵ The proposition should rightly strike the reader as absurd, but the same absurd argument underlies attempts to assign some documents to Joseph Smith as representative of his thought on Egyptian.

Facsimiles

Everyone assumes that Joseph Smith wrote the Explanations to the Facsimiles from the Book of Abraham. We cannot, however, prove that he did. The earliest manuscripts of any of the Explanations are Book of Abraham manuscripts 5A and 6, both in the handwriting of Willard Richards.⁷⁶ There is nothing in the documents that indicates authorship. While I am not saying that assuming that Joseph

Smith wrote the Explanations is a bad assumption, it does need to be pointed out that it is an assumption and is not provable. If someone wanted to argue that Willard Richards wrote the Explanations, we could not prove it false. So one cannot, with certainty, use the Explanations of the Facsimiles as a source for Joseph Smith's knowledge of Egyptian or lack thereof.

The So-Called Kirtland Egyptian Papers

It has been popular to use a group of documents, often called the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, to reconstruct Joseph Smith's knowledge of Egyptian. There are three problems with this approach: provenance, format, and journal entries. Before we proceed with an examination of this group of documents, it is worth remembering that each of the documents has its own reason for existence, and its own subsequent history. Just because the documents are lumped together now does not mean that they were lumped together then or that they should be lumped together. Different criteria applied to the documents create a surprisingly different grouping of documents.

Provenance. One of those groupings comes if we look at the provenance of the documents. All of them are now in the Church Historian's Office, but not all of them took the same path to get there. The different routes show that they come from different nineteenth-century archives. Those archives, in turn, tell us something important about the documents.

The vast majority of the manuscripts were brought to Utah by Willard Richards and W. W. Phelps. But one of the documents was given to the Church by Wilford Wood. He in turn obtained it from Charles Bidamon, who, in turn, got it from his father, who was Lewis Bidamon, Emma Smith's second husband. So we know this document belonged to Joseph Smith. The others did not. To whom did the other documents belong? They arrived at the Church Historian's Office through Willard Richards and W. W. Phelps. Four of the

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documents are in the handwriting of Willard Richards and can be safely said to belong to him. Most of the rest of the documents are in Phelps's handwriting and seem to have belonged to him. Thus we have three archives that have been combined into a heterogeneous dossier. We can assemble these archives as follows:

Archive	Manuscript number	Comments
Joseph Smith	1294 folder 1	Abraham 1:1-2:8 in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish
Willard Richards	1294 folder 4	Abraham 1:1-2:18, 3:18-26 in the handwriting of Willard Richards
	1294 folder 5	Explanations of the Facsimiles in the handwriting of Willard Richards
W. W. Phelps	1294 folder 2	Abraham 1:4-2:6 in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams
	1294 folder 3	Abraham 1:4-2:2 in handwriting of Warren Parrish
	1295 folder 1	The large book in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps and Warren Parrish
	1295 folder 2	Called "Egyptian counting" in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps
	1295 folder 3	Called "Egyptian alphabet" in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps
	1295 folder 4	Called "Egyptian alphabet" in the handwriting of Joseph Smith

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	1295 folder 5	Title missing in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery
	1295 folder 6	Called “Valuable discovery” in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery
	1295 folder 7	In the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery and Frederick G. Williams
	1295 folder 8	Egyptian characters, hand unknown
	1295 folder 9	Egyptian characters, hand unknown

Format. As William Schryver has pointed out, the format of many of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers follows that format established by W. W. Phelps in work he did on the pure language in May 1835 before anyone in the Church had heard of the papyri. All of them are from his collection of manuscripts. Kirtland Egyptian Papers show the influence of his thinking and were begun in his handwriting. They show what W. W. Phelps thought. They include the famous “Grammar and alphabet [*sic*]” book, which has been incorrectly included as the work of Joseph Smith on the Joseph Smith Papers website.

Contrary to the date provided on the Joseph Smith Papers website, the book cannot date to 1835. How do we know that? The system of transliteration that Phelps used in the book follows the transliteration system taught by Josiah Seixas beginning in January of 1836. Words with long final vowels end in an “h.” The transliteration system used before that does not have the “h” and this can be seen in the transcriptions of the same words made in October 1835. Since the book has the later system, it must date after the later system was taught and thus must date after its introduction in January

1836. Joseph Smith's journal entries indicate that within a week of receiving Hebrew books, Joseph dropped working on Egyptian in favor of Hebrew.⁷⁷

We have no record of Joseph Smith working on Egyptian materials from November 1835 until the beginning of 1842. Although Joseph Smith's journals have numerous gaps starting in the spring of 1836, from October 1835 to April 1836, we have good records of what he was doing, and he was working on projects other than studying Egyptian after November 1835. This means that he was not working on the so-called Grammar and Alphabet, with its 1836 transliteration system. That work, instead, should be attributed to the man in whose handwriting it is and whose format it follows: W. W. Phelps.

Journal entries. Joseph Smith's journal also seems to indicate that the documents in Phelps's archive belonged to Phelps. After Joseph Smith heard W. W. Phelps read a letter that Joseph Smith had him write for him that quotes from the documents, afterwards Joseph Smith "called again and enquired for the Egyptian grammar."⁷⁸ Yet two days later he "suggested the idea of preparing a grammar of the Egyptian language"⁷⁹ apparently because he did not agree with Phelps's treatment.

Thus the provenance, the format, and Joseph Smith's treatment in his journals indicate that the majority of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers belonged to Phelps. So they cannot be used to reconstruct Joseph Smith's knowledge of Egyptian, only that of W. W. Phelps.

Sources for Joseph Smith's Knowledge of Egyptian

Although the minimalist approach taken here will not make everyone happy, particularly those who would like to assume that Joseph Smith is responsible for certain items, it is a conservative, safe approach. It takes only what can be proven to be Joseph Smith's. The only certain source of Joseph Smith's knowledge about Egyptian

is the text of the Book of Abraham excluding the facsimiles. This too, however, needs a caveat. The Book of Abraham as published, stops before Abraham actually arrives in Egypt. There is little that the Book of Abraham directly says about ancient Egypt. The mode of human sacrifice does compare well with human sacrifice as practiced by the Egyptians at the time of Abraham.⁸⁰ Other indications of antiquity can also be found in the Book of Abraham, though they do not relate directly to Egypt.⁸¹

The manuscripts of the Book of Abraham produce one interesting feature, an Egyptianism, which might indicate some knowledge of Egyptian on Joseph Smith's part. The earliest manuscript (2) containing Abraham 1:17 reads "and this because ~~their hearts are turned~~ they have turned their hearts away from me."⁸² The phrase "their hearts are turned" was crossed out and "they have turned their hearts" was written immediately afterwards. In Egyptian of the time period of the Joseph Smith Papyri the passive is expressed by the use of a third person plural.⁸³ So the two phrases would be identical in Egyptian. The translator has to decide which way to render the passage. While this is true of Egyptian of the time period of the papyri, it is not true of Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, or Aramaic, or even classical Egyptian; English makes a distinction between the two even if late twentieth century and twenty-first century English sometimes uses a third person plural for an indefinite subject.

Conclusions

Since Joseph Smith and the Brethren at Kirtland worked independently of the Egyptological tradition in Europe, it comes as no surprise that (1) the work produced does not use the same, or even similar terminology, (2) the transliteration system employed bears no particular relationship to the various transliteration systems of Egyptology, either of the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first

centuries, (3) Joseph Smith is not accepted as belonging to, or being part of, the Egyptological tradition of the last century and a half. These conclusions require no special insight.

However, the net result of this investigation is that we have few resources to determine what, if anything, Joseph Smith understood of Egyptian. Egyptian was not really understood in Joseph Smith's day. Not a single inscription in either hieratic or hieroglyphs had been completely translated before his death, and none were published until seven years afterwards. Joseph Smith was not in the tradition of Champollion to which Egyptology today belongs. Any knowledge he may have had did not come from that source, and indeed, everyone is in agreement about that.

Certain sources for Joseph Smith's knowledge of ancient Egypt are few. Many sources that individuals would like to attribute to Joseph Smith either are not demonstrably his or are demonstrably not his. Nevertheless, one of those sources provides an Egyptianism which argues for some effective knowledge of ancient Egyptian on Joseph Smith's part.

Notes

1. W. W. Phelps to Sally Phelps, July 1835, in Bruce A. Van Orden, "Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835–1836)," *BYU Studies* 33, no. 3 (1993): 9n4.
2. Peter Le Page Renouf, *The Life-Work of Sir Peter Le Page Renouf*, 4 vols. (Paris: Leroux, 1902–21), 1:2. This essay was originally printed in *Atlantis* 2, no 3 (1859): 74–97.
3. J. Klaproth, *Seconde lettre sur les hiéroglyphes, adressée à M. de S****** (Paris: J.-S. Merlin, 1827), 5–6.
4. Warren R. Dawson and Eric P. Uphill, *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, 2nd ed. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1972), 270–71.
5. Henri Brugsch, *Grammaire Démotique* (Berlin: Dümmler, 1855), 6.

6. Thomas Young, *An Account of Some Recent Discoveries in Hieroglyphical Literature, and Egyptian Antiquities: Including the Author's Original Alphabet, as extended by Mr. Champollion, with a Translation of Five Unpublished Greek and Egyptian Manuscripts* (London: Murray, 1823), 8–9.
7. Brugsch, *Grammaire Démotique*, 6; Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 12.
8. Young, *An Account of Some Recent Discoveries in Hieroglyphical Literature*, 9; Brugsch, *Grammaire Démotique*, 6; Dawson and Uphill, *Who Was Who in Egyptology*, 4, 271.
9. Young, *An Account of Some Recent Discoveries in Hieroglyphical Literature*, 11–12.
10. Young, *An Account of Some Recent Discoveries in Hieroglyphical Literature*.
11. Joannes Godofredvs Lvdoicvs Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra commentario prima* (Weimar, Germany: Landes-Industrie-Comtoir, 1828); Brugsch, *Grammaire Démotique*, 6–7.
12. Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra*, 5–17, tab. A.
13. Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra*, 26–43, tab. B–C.
14. Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra*, 23, 44–51, tab. D–F.
15. Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra*, 52–60, tab. G–I.
16. Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra*, 61–71.
17. Kosegarten, *De prisca aegyptiorvm litteratvra*, tab. I–XIV.
18. Brugsch, *Grammaire Démotique*, 6–7.
19. Henri Brugsch, *Grammaire démotique contenant les principes généraux de la langue et de l'écriture populaires des anciens égyptiens* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler, 1855); Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 16.
20. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 14–15. This story is garbled slightly in Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 9–10.
21. Jean-François Champollion, le jeune, *Lettre à M. Dacier, secrétaire perpétuel de l'Academie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres, relative a l'alphabet des hiéroglyphes phonétiques employés par les égyptiens pour inscrire sur leurs*

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