

## **Chapter 18**

### **A cultured Pearl: The fall of the Book of Abraham**

**Dee Jay Nelson**

The authors refer to Dee Jay Nelson as an “expert” on the topic of Egyptology (p. 199). However, Dee Jay Nelson has long been revealed to have been a fraud, who got his PhD from an unaccredited college. Indeed, the Tanners, who are often quoted in the book, discredited Nelson many years ago now.<sup>1</sup>

### **Do we have the source of the Book of Abraham**

The authors labour under the assumption that the twelve fragments the Church has in its possession, eleven of which the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York handed over to the Church in 1967, compose the source material for the translation of the Book of Abraham. Notwithstanding, this is a rather errant conclusion, notwithstanding its popularity in anti-Mormon literature.<sup>2</sup> For instance, when Joseph Smith brought the papyri, the outer ends of the papyrus scrolls were already damaged. To prevent further damage, the outside portions of some of the papyri were separated from their rolls, mounted on paper, and placed in glass frames. The remainder of the rolls were kept intact. In Nauvoo, Joseph Smith turned over the mummies and the papyri to his recently-widowed mother, Lucy Mack Smith, to free himself from the obligation of exhibiting the papyri and to provide her with a source of income, charging visitors a quarter of a dollar for a view of the scrolls. Therefore, the scrolls used to produce the Book of Abraham is not the Book of the Dead.<sup>3</sup>

The so-called “Egyptian alphabet and grammar,” or, to be more correct, the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, are often seen as the “crucial link” between the Book of the Dead and the source material for the Book of Abraham. Notwithstanding, at least one of the documents, perhaps more, are copies of another document. Furthermore, they all have different starting and ending points in respect to the hieratic characters on the margins of the papers, and, additionally, the only full text has absolutely no Egyptian characters! This

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<sup>1</sup> Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism - Shadow or reality?* 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 309-11

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Charles M. Larson, *By his own hand upon papyrus: a new look at the Joseph Smith papyri* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Institute for Religious Research, 1992)

<sup>3</sup> John Gee, *A guide to the Joseph Smith papyri* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 7-9. For more, see John Gee, “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*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 175-218. For a history of the papyri and mummies that the Church purchased from Michael Chandler, see H. Donl Peterson, *The story of the Book of Abraham: mummies, manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1995).

would suggest that they were not dictation manuscripts, but a failed attempt to reverse engineer the Egyptian language.

In a diary entry for November 15, 1843, Joseph Smith wrote of his desire to prepare an Egyptian grammar.<sup>4</sup> This reveals that Joseph Smith played a minimal role in the production of the Papers. After all, if, as critics contend, the Kirtland Egyptian Papers were his attempt at an Egyptian grammar, why the diary entry?

## **Facsimile 1**

The authors write (p. 199) that facsimile 1 is “a picture of an Egyptian named Hor being prepared for burial.” However, the figure in facsimile 1 is clearly not dead, but in a position that resembles, when tilted 90 degrees, the Egyptian hieroglyph of one praying. Furthermore, there is one ancient lion couch scene in antiquity that mentions the biblical Patriarch, Abraham, by name, something the 1912 critics (whose arguments the authors repeat in some part) claimed were an impossibility.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Book of Abraham and the Priesthood Restriction**

The only scriptural basis for the Mormon doctrine on Negroes and the priesthood prior to 1978 is found in the Book of Abraham 1:21-27 (P. 200)

This interpretation is based on the popular eisegesis that Latter-day Saints engaged in to justify a restriction on the priesthood prior to 1978. The Book of Abraham, however, makes no such claim consistent with the restriction on priesthood. Rather, it describes the rivalry between Abraham, who had records from ancestors to prove that he was the rightful heir to the priesthood, while the pharaohs (not all the Egyptian people) claimed it was through Ham (see especially Abraham 1:2-4, 18, 26-31). From these passages, it is clear that the dispute was over the patriarchal order of priesthood, which is inherited from father to son, not over the Melchizedek Priesthood, and certainly not priesthood in general.

The patriarchal order, as we are informed in D&C 107:40-41 ff, was passed from father to eldest son except in cases where the eldest son was unworthy. Abraham claimed to have records to prove that the right of this priesthood was his, not Pharaoh's.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Scott H. Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record: the diaries and journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1989), 427

<sup>5</sup> *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Broadway, New York: Doubleday, 1983) 2:717

<sup>6</sup> For more, see Alma Allred, “The tradition of their fathers: myth versus reality in LDS scriptural writings,” in *Black and Mormon*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Chicago, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 34-49