



Book of Abraham Controversies

Faithful Answer to Challenging Questions

By Cameron Ford

Let's first understand the origin of Joseph Smith Papyri



- Napolean starts the age of Egyptian grave robbing
- Antonio Lebolo found several mummies and Papyri in Thebes Egypt and took them to Italy
- Lebolo dies in 1830 and his collection gets shipped to New York
- Michael Chandler somehow get possession of them and tours with them, eventually selling off what he could of the collection

Mummies and Papyri end up in Kirtland



- Chandler takes collection to Cleveland and hears of Joseph Smith's ability to translate ancient documents
- Joseph examines Papyri (described as two long scrolls and 11 fragments) and declares the two long scrolls were about Abraham and Joseph of Egypt
- Joseph wants to buy the papyri, but Chandler won't sell them separate from the mummies
- So, the Church buys the Papyri and Mummies
- In 1835-36 Joseph produces most, if not all of, the Book of Abraham (BoFA) by the gift and power of God (some witnesses state by use of the Seer Stone)
- In the Nauvoo period (1842), the Church publishes the translation in a series of newspaper editions along with the facsimiles. In Utah, the Church canonizes the BoFA and Facsimiles in 1880 as part of the Pearl of Great Price

Path of Papyri after Joseph's Death

- After Joseph's death, his mother Lucy Smith becomes the caretaker of the mummies and Papyri and charges people to see them to generate income in her old age
- After Lucy's death, Emma's family sells the collection to Abel Combs, who sells most of the collection (minus the fragments) which ends up in the Chicago museum and are eventually destroyed by a Chicago fire
- Fragments end up in the New York Metropolitan museum
- In 1967 someone at the Met recognizes that one of the Papyri fragments matches Facsimile #1 in the LDS Book of Abraham and contacts a professor at the University of Utah
- The Church buys the collection in 1967 and publishes images in the New Era
- Before the fragments showed up again, Egyptologists in 1912 examined the facsimiles at the request of the bishop of the Episcopal Church of Utah in order to expose Joseph Smith as a fraud.
- When the fragments show up in 1967, it starts another flurry of anti-LDS activity in relation to the Book of Abraham

The Church has two Theories on the source of the Book of Abraham

Theory 1:

- ▶ The original text of the Book of Abraham was on one of the long scrolls
 - ▶ This is claimed by many contemporary witness from the time of the translation
 - ▶ This is my preferred theory, since there is no reason to believe it wasn't on one of the long scrolls (as argued in this slide deck)

Theory 2:

- ▶ The papyrus did not actually contain the text of the Book of Abraham, but Joseph believed it did, and it acted as a catalyst for him to receive a revelation of the text of the Book of Abraham
 - ▶ Similar to how he received the text for the Book of Moses by revelation without having an actual ancient physical text in his possession

Facsimile Number 1

Joseph's Interpretations



Fig. 1. The Angel of the Lord.

Fig. 2. Abraham fastened upon an altar.

Fig. 3. The idolatrous priest of Elkenah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice.

Fig. 4. The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh.

Fig. 5. The idolatrous god of Elkenah.

Fig. 6. The idolatrous god of Libnah.

Fig. 7. The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah.

Fig. 8. The idolatrous god of Korash.

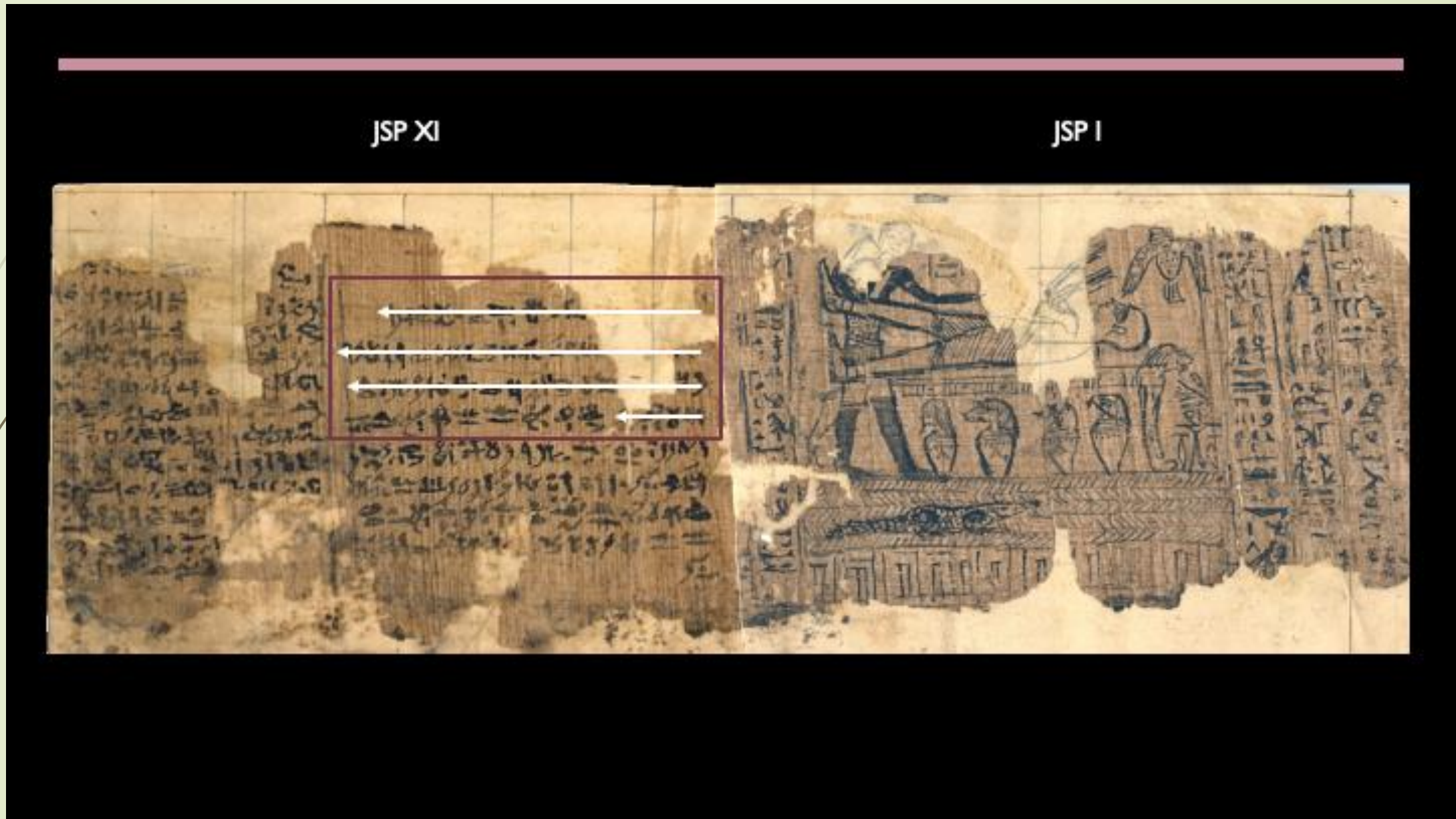
Fig. 9. The idolatrous god of Pharaoh.

Fig. 10. Abraham in Egypt.

Fig. 11. Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians.

Fig. 12. Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shaumau, to be high, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word, Shaumahyeem.

Discovered fragments of the altar scene has hieroglyphs adjacent

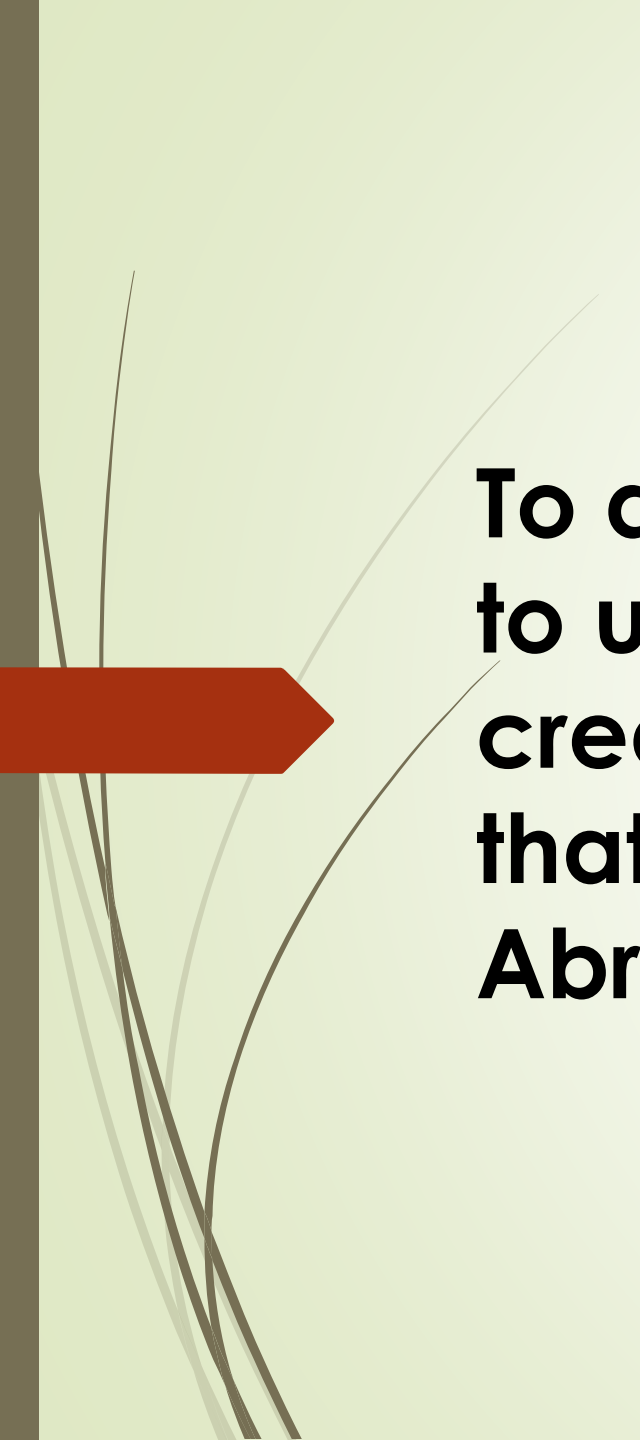


Controversy #1

- Egyptologists interpret facsimile #1 as a standard Egyptian lion couch embalming scene similar to many others found
- The figure above the man on the lion couch is not an Egyptian Priest, but should have had a jackal head depicting the God Anubis
- The image has nothing to do with Abraham
- Check Mate
 - Since the Lion Couch scene has nothing to do with Abraham, Joseph Smith is a fraud
 - Time to abandon the church

Controversy #2

- Hieroglyphs adjacent to the Facsimile #1 image have been translated by Egyptologists and have nothing to do with Abraham
 - They are the Egyptian Book of Breathings owned by a man named Hor
- Critics claim the Kirtland Egyptian Papers owned by the church show some of the Hieroglyphs from the Book of Breathings next to text from the Book of Abraham
 - The claim is that this shows that Joseph was supposedly translating from the text next to the Facsimile #1 image
- Check Mate
 - Since that text has been shown to NOT be the Book of Abraham text, Joseph Smith is a fraud and fabricated the text for the Book of Abraham
 - Time to abandon the church



To answer these criticisms, we first need to understand the reconstruction done to create facsimile #2 (the Hypocephalus) that we currently have in the Book of Abraham

This drawing from Joseph Smith period shows the Hypocephalus was damaged

Willard Richards' (?) Drawing of Sheshonq Hypocephalus



Book of Abraham Facsimile No. 2



Book of Breathings Hieroglyphs adjacent to the Lion Couch Papyri were used to fill in the damaged sections



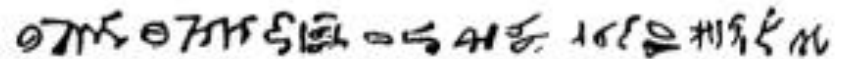
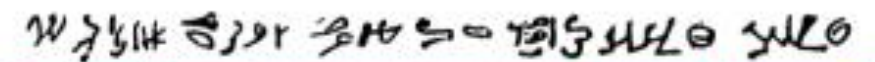
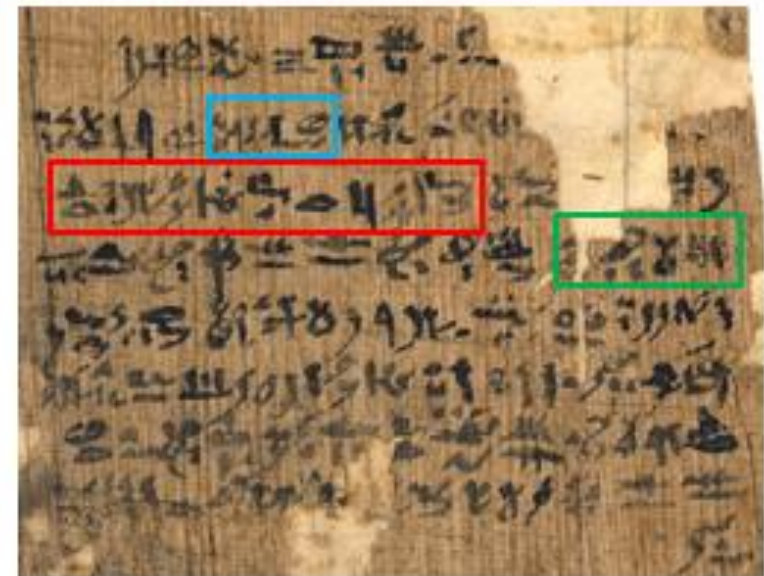
Figure 18: 

Figure 18 turned right side up:

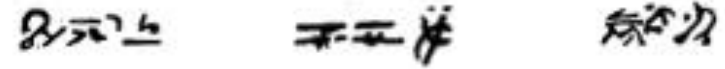




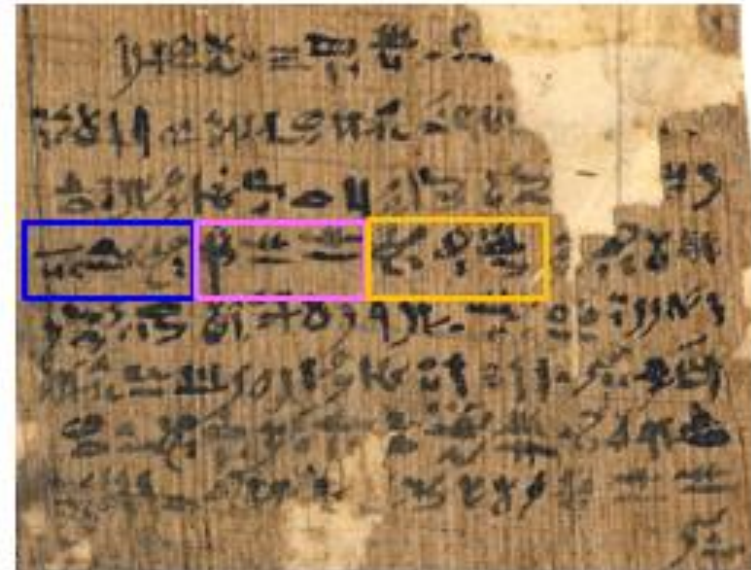
Book of Breathings Hieroglyphs adjacent to the Lion Couch Papyri were used to fill in the damaged sections



Figures 13-15:



Figures 13-15 turned right side up:



Joseph gives no translation for every section containing replacement hieroglyphs



Joseph Smith:

“[explanations to Figures 13, 14, 15, 18] will be given in the own due time of the Lord.


“The above translation is given as far as we have any right to give at the present time.”

Time Vindicates the Prophets

- This implies Joseph Smith did not believe the Book of Abraham translation came from the hieroglyphs near the lion couch scene
- Scholars have postulated that the lion couch fragments were originally part of one of the longer scrolls. It is not unusual for a collection of different writings to be part of a single scroll. In this case it would be the lion couch scene, the book of breathings, and the Book of Abraham all on the same scroll
- Scholars state that about 50% of Egyptian Papyrus have text next to images that have nothing to do with the images
- The Kirtland Egyptian Papers (KEP) have English text unrelated to the Book of Abraham next to other Book of Breathing characters.
- The KEP had a few papers in the hand writing of Joseph Smith, Warren Parrish and others, but most of them were in the hand writing of W. W. Phelps
- It is hard to know what they were trying to accomplish with the KEP, but the best guess is that they were trying to create an Egyptian to English grammar using part of the revealed text of the Book of Abraham as a guide
- Most 1st hand accounts from Joseph Smith's time consistently claim the Book of Abraham was translated from one of the long scrolls presumably lost in the Chicago fire

Time Vindicates the Prophets


- The Joseph Smith Papyri date from roughly 300BC to 100BC
- During that period many Jews lived in Egypt
- Scholars have shown that Jews from that period were using Egyptian images and interpreting them as their own biblical stories
- Scholars have also shown that Egyptian Priests were also interpreting their own iconography in terms of Israelite stories
 - This is called syncretization (fusion or blending of different beliefs, practices, or cultures)
 - Egyptian's polytheistic religion hedged its bets and tried to honor ALL Gods, just in case



“In order to more fully understand the vignettes of the Joseph Smith Papyri that were made into the Facsimiles in the published Book of Abraham, let us look more carefully at the zeitgeist [ideals and beliefs from a period of time] from which the papyri came. The zeitgeist was created in a day of internationalization in Egypt. They [the facsimiles] were created in a day when the Egyptians were living among a great number of Greeks and Jews. Each of these cultures borrowed from each other.

The Greeks created gods and cultic practices heavily influenced by the Egyptians. The Egyptians borrowed from both the Jews and the Greeks in their religious and cultic practices and representations, and many Jews were similarly influenced by the Greeks and Egyptians.

Thus we must conclude that the Jews who created or worshipped in these synagogues were using representations from the cultures around them but using and understanding them in their own unique way. Isn't it possible that this was also done with all three Facsimiles? Couldn't these all represent a Jewish way of understanding Egyptian style drawings?” -Dr. Kerry Muhlestein: Interpreting the Abraham Facsimiles



“On the other hand, we also know that at least some Egyptians were using Jewish stories and ideas in their religious practices and writings. They used their typical religious rituals but inserted Jewish, Greek, Mesopotamian, and other religious elements into these rituals, texts and spells, thus slightly altering and adapting their ritual and textual representations.

I believe it is absolutely certain that there are some typical Egyptian religious representations that at least some Egyptian priests assigned a non-traditional meaning to as they incorporated foreign religious elements into all parts of their religious practice. Given this, how can someone forcibly argue that something like Facsimile One cannot represent something other than the traditional Egyptological interpretation? Such a supposition is untenable, and would never be made unless an agenda was driving it.” -Dr. Kerry Muhlestein: Interpreting the Abraham Facsimiles



Time Vindicates the Prophets

- Scholars have found a similar lion couch scene from roughly this time period in Thebes that has partial text in Greek that says: “Abraham, who upon...”
- Joseph Smith correctly interprets the Crocodile as the god of Pharoah
 - Early critics liked to point out that the Egyptians had no Crocodile god of Pharoah
 - Later scholarship long after Joseph gave this interpretation found that there was indeed a Crocodile god associated with Pharoah



**A fascinating side note is to learn
what the Book of Breathings
attached to the lion couch scene
actually describes**

What is the Book of Breathings?

- It derives from the much earlier Egyptian Book of the Dead
- In the Book "The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: an Egyptian Endowment", Hugh Nibley translates the Book of Breathings owned by Hor next to the lion couch scene
- He describes it as a depiction of an Egyptian Endowment that has a LOT of amazing parallels to the LDS Temple Endowment
- No claim is made that Joseph knew this, but it is a strange coincidence that an Egyptian endowment just happens to show up on the papyrus in Joseph's possession

Facsimile Number 2



Facsimile Number 2

Joseph's Interpretations



1: Kolob, signifying the first creation, nearest to the celestial, or residency of God

2: Oliblish, stands next to Kolob

3: God sitting upon his throne

4: Expanse, or firmament. Also, a numerical figure (1000)

5: The Sun

6: Represent earth in its four quarters

7: God revealing through the heavens the grand Key-words of the Priesthood, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost (dove)

8-21: not described/revealed

22&23: Stars receiving their light Kolob and pass it on to the Sun and other celestial objects

Controversy #3

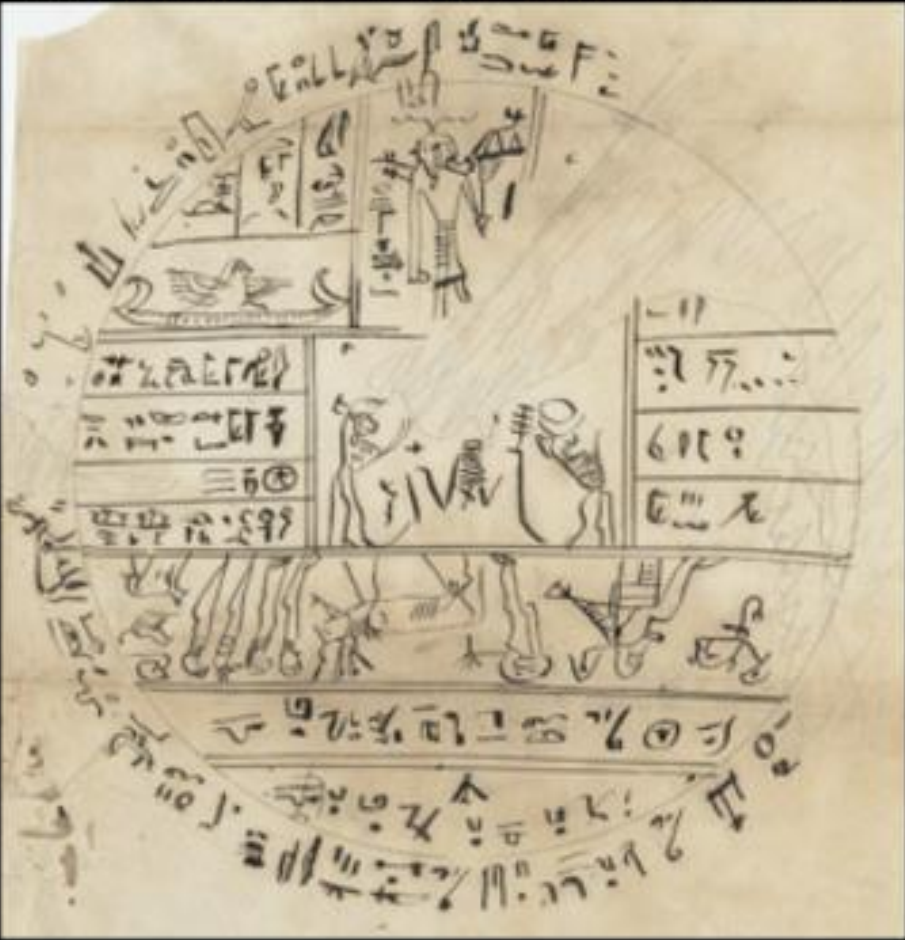
- Facsimile #2 is a Hypocephalus owned by a man name Sheshonq.
- Hypocephali were placed under then head of mummies and were believe to have the power to allow the mummy to resurrect and have eternal life.
- Egyptologist say it has nothing to do with Abraham, but depict life, death, and resurrection scenes with various Egyptian gods (Horus, Ammon, Hathor, Min, and the Sons of Horus).
 - The upside-down portion depicts the underworld, or world of the dead.
- Check Mate
 - Since the Hypocephalus has been shown to NOT be associated with Abraham, Joseph Smith is a fraud
 - Time to abandon the church

Understanding Egyptian Religion

- **The Egyptians did not actually believe their gods were animals, or really had animal heads**
- **They understood their gods figuratively with the different animal heads signifying different attributes**
- **The Egyptians understood all of their gods to be associated with celestial objects (sun, moon, stars)**
 - **This was not understood until after the time of Joseph Smith, since no one could read Egyptian at that time. The Rosetta stone that allowed us to finally read Egyptian hieroglyphs was discovered in 1799 and was just being figured out during the era of Joseph Smith and was not yet published and circulated**

Drawing from Joseph Smith period shows the Hypocepheli was damaged and reconstructed as best they could

Willard Richards' (?) Drawing of Sheshonq Hypocephalus



Book of Abraham Facsimile No. 2



A different Hypocephalus with similar scenes helps us better understand what the original of facsimile 1 really should have looked like



Approximately 158 different Egyptian hypocephali have been found, all with similar features

Hypocephalus Figures as most Egyptians would have understood them

Crowned representation of Horus or Amun-Re with human double head, holding a staff with a jackal sitting on top

The female sky goddess Nut, "the one with a 1000 souls"

The Hypocephalus represents cycle of death and resurrection. The right side up portion represents the world of the living. The upside-down portion represent the world of the dead.

The four sons of Horus, with hawk, jackal, baboon and human heads, associated with the four quarters of the earth

Cow Goddess Hathor, a female version of the sun god




Four headed squatting Ram God Amun with knees going out in two directions. He wears a crown and has scepters on his knees. He is associated with a god/star at the center of creation

Baboon gods surrounding Amun, associated with stars

Snake with penis presenting the Wedjat Eye to the throned god Min. Min also has a penis and is holding up a flail behind him. Min was associated with fertility (thus the penis)

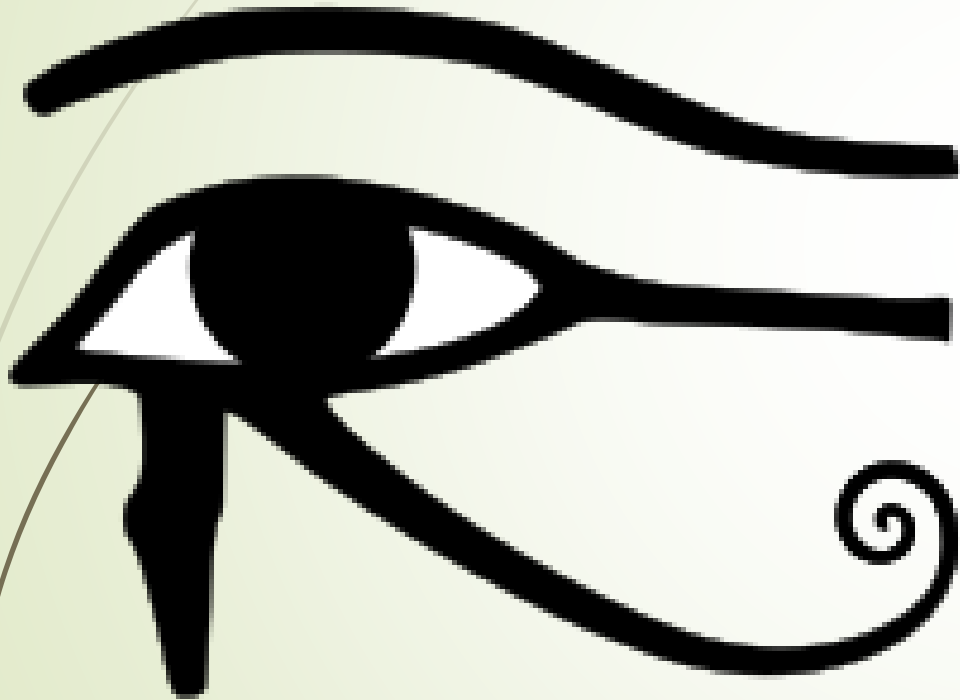
Facsimile 1 incorrectly copied figure 2 double head into figure 1 and offset it from the squatting body





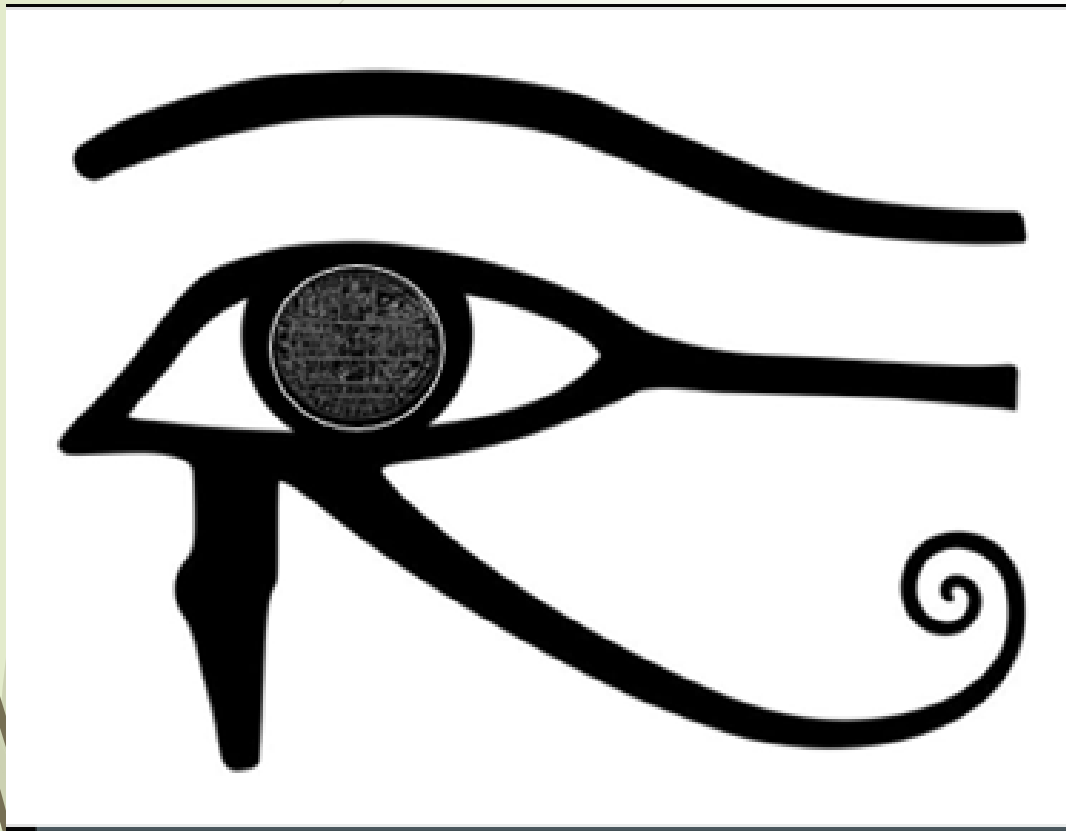
**To understand how the
hypocephalus actually relates to
Abraham, we need to learn about
the Egyptian Wedjat Eye**

The Egyptian Wedjat Eye (Eye of Horus or Ra)



The "wedjat eye," also known as the Eye of Horus or Udjat eye, is a powerful ancient Egyptian symbol representing healing, protection, and regeneration.

Egyptians interpreted the Hypocephalus to be the Pupil of the Wedjat Eye



Scholars have found text from the period of the Joseph Smith Papryi saying: “Abraham the pupil of the eye of the Wedjat”

Comparing Joseph Smith's Hypocephalus Interpretations

- **“It should be noted that there is not the slightest indication in the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus that this or any other figure might have anything to do with the starry heavens” -Hugh Nibley: One Eternal Round page 294**
- **Egyptians associated all of the deities depicted in the hypocephalus with celestial objects:**
 - **Figure 1: Amun, the king of the Gods at the center of all creation. “...the crowned figure in the center of the cosmic circle representing the first of all the creative power, also the governing power, by whom time and space are measured and structured as revealed in the stars” -Hugh Nibley: One Eternal Round page 260**
 - **Figures 22 & 23, the Apes: “They are identified as stars. As early as the Pyramid Texts, they are designated as “the Beloved Sons” of Sothis/Sirius, the brightest star in the sky” -Hugh Nibley: One Eternal Round page 242**

Comparing Joseph Smith's Hypocephalus Interpretations

- ▶ **Figure 4, “the sun-ship on the wings of the sky... the sheltering wings of the sky-god... Professional Egyptologists have protested to the author that there is nothing known to them to justify attributing the number 1000 to figure 4. Yet here, if ever, the Joseph Smith explanation is right on target. The woman Nut, the sky-goddess of the outspread wings, has a peculiar epithet.. “a Thousand Are Her Souls”, or “The one with a Thousand Souls” -Hugh Nibley: One Eternal Round pages 279,282**
- ▶ **Figure 5, the Cow: The Heavenly Mother. Egyptians interpreted the Cow as a representation of the Heavens. “But Joseph Smith also tells us that figure 5 is the Sun. No Problem.... As early as the Old Kingdom, the cow appears “as the female equivalent of Re” -Hugh Nibley: One Eternal Round page 293**
- ▶ **Figure 6: The Canopic figures, or Sons of Horus. The Egyptians did indeed understand these to represent the four quarters of the earth.**

Facsimile Number 3



Facsimile Number 3

Abraham reasoning upon the principles of Astronomy



Joseph's Interpretations

1: Abraham sitting upon Pharaoh's throne

2: King Pharaoh, whose name is given in the characters above his hand

3: Signifies Abraham in Egypt

4: Prince of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, as written above the hand

5: Shulem, one of the king's principal waiters, as represented by the characters above his hand

6: Olimlah, a slave belonging to the prince

Controversy #4

- Facsimile #3 is a standard Egyptian judgement scene that depicts Osiris on the throne with the Goddess Hathor behind him, and the Goddess Maat in front of him presenting a man for judgement.
- Egyptologists have translated the Hieroglyphs above the figures and they correspond to a standard Egyptian judgement scene.
- Joseph Smith claims the man on the throne is Abraham, and his claims for the other figures do not match the hieroglyphs
- Check Mate
 - Since the scene has been shown to NOT have anything to do with Abraham and the hieroglyphs don't match what Joseph claimed, Joseph Smith is a fraud
 - Time to abandon the church

Judgement scene Associations to Abraham

- Scholars have found several ancient judgement scene images similar to Facsimile 3 where the person sitting on the throne is labeled “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”
- An ancient text found in the 1900’s called the “Testament of Abraham” depicts a judgement scene that is unquestionably from the 125 chapter of the Egyptian “Book of the Dead”
- Hugh Nibley points out that even a 4-year-old can tell that figure 4 is a female. So why did Joseph claim it was the male prince of Pharaoh? Egyptologist critics have been oddly silent on this obvious mess up
 - This is because the Goddess Hathor and Maat were strongly associated with Egyptian kingship and Pharaoh and his son would have no problem associating themselves with these deities
 - According to Nibley, ancient Egyptians often re-enacted this judgement scene with various people playing the different parts
 - Nibley postulates that this image could be a memorial of one such re-enactment including the famous visitor Abraham playing the role of Osiris

Not all Egyptian Papyri were associated with Abraham

- LDS Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein did a small study that assumed 25% of Egyptian papyri had associations with Abraham by ancient Egyptians and Jews
 - He states that 25% is actually much too high
- Assuming this very high 25%, his study demonstrates that the odds are astronomical that all three of the Egyptian Papyri that ended up in Kirtland and were described by Joseph Smith to have connections to Abraham, would be later shown by scholars to actually have connections to Abraham

What the Book of Abraham gets Amazingly Right

- Ancient texts have shown up that depicts an attempted sacrifice of Abraham as depicted in the BofA
- For a long time, scholars did not believe that Egyptians were involved in human sacrifice
- It has now been shown that they did, and it was primarily for sacrilege against their Gods
- Egyptian mythology does depict Egypt being discovered and founded by a woman and her son as described in the BofA
- Ancient texts have turned up describing Abraham as teaching astronomy to the Egyptians, exactly as stated in the BofA

What the Book of Abraham gets Amazingly Right

- The astronomy depicted in the BofA has earth at the center, exactly as believed in the time of Abraham
- BofA mentions the Plains of Olishem (BofA 1:10) near Abrahams native Ur.
 - Ancient documents have been discovered with the name “Plains of Ulishem” (a linguistic bullseye) in the modern Turkey/Syria area
 - Semitic languages (Egyptian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic) only write down the consonants, so Olishem and Ulishem are virtually identical words
 - The Turkey/Syria area is a strong candidate for the ancient land of Ur described in the Bible
- BofA 3:13 “This is Shinehah, which is the Sun”
 - Recent research has discovered an Egyptian word “Shinehah” that was used to described the path of the sun

An Approach to the Book of Abraham

by Hugh Nibley, page 40

“...long experience has shown that the Latter-day Saints only become aware of the nature and genius of their modern scriptures when relentless and obstreperous criticism from the outside forces them to take a closer look at what they have, with the usual result of putting those scriptures in a much stronger position than they were before.”

Sources

- ▶ Interpreting the Abraham Facsimiles, by Kerry Muhlestein
<https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1-14825/>
- ▶ Translating the Book of Abraham, The Answer Under Our Heads, 2020 FAIR Conference Presentation by Tim Barker,
<https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/conference/2020-fairmormon-conference/the-answer-under-our-heads>
- ▶ Abraham in Egypt, Collected works of Hugh Nibley
- ▶ An Approach to the Book of Abraham, Collected works of Hugh Nibley
- ▶ The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: an Egyptian Endowment , Collected works of Hugh Nibley
- ▶ One Eternal Round, Collected works of Hugh Nibley
- ▶ Church History Matters Podcast, by Scott Woodward and Casey Griffiths, episodes 31 thru 34, <https://churchhistorymatters.podbean.com/>