New Light on the Joseph Smith Papyri

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Forty years ago the eleven remaining fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri were given back to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I have studied these remnants for more than twenty years and would like to discuss a few related historical issues that are unknown to many people, including Egyptologists.

Full Disclosure

Anyone approaching the Joseph Smith Papyri should be prepared to wade through much nonsense in the form of commentaries and analyses. A bibliography produced in 1992 was thirty-five pages of single-spaced eight-point font,[1] and the amount of material has steadily increased. This material comes from (1) Mormons who produce both nonsense as well as some solid historical studies and some decidedly uneven work, (2) anti-Mormons who produce nonsense, and unfortunately far too often (3) Egyptologists. The nonsense from Egyptologists is not the mistakes made in Mormon history and belief, which is outside our range of interest, but rather the numerous Egyptological and historical errors we make in our treatment of the

This is a slightly modified version of a paper given at the fifty-eighth annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, in Toledo, Ohio, on 20 April 2006. The paper was originally written for Egyptologists and has been modified for a more general audience.

1. Adam D. Lamoreaux, "Pearl of Great Price Bibliography" (FARMS paper, 1992).

Joseph Smith Papyri. Professor Robert Ritner has commented on the low standards of some of the material on the Joseph Smith Papyri, particularly the "apologetic" material,[2] and I am inclined to agree with his comments. But we should remember that the principal definition of *apologetic* is "defense of a point of view"[3] and thus includes Professor Ritner's work on the subject as well. All work on the Joseph Smith Papyri is unavoidably apologetic for some point of view.

In over two decades of dealing with constant inquiries about the papyri, I have learned that the only disinterested parties are those who truly have no interest in the matter. Disinterested parties do not ask questions or write articles and books. Everyone who writes about the papyri has an agenda and a bias even if unwilling to admit it. I do not think it is a good idea to attempt to hide one's stance in areas of scholarly inquiry, because understanding the assumptions, presuppositions, and preunderstandings that lie behind one's presentation of matters is crucial to understanding the arguments.

My stance on the matter is scarcely a secret. In the interest of full disclosure, I note that I am employed by Brigham Young University, which is owned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of which I am a believing and active member; I am a member of the board of directors of the Aziz S. Atiya Fund for Coptic Studies; and I am a previous employee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I have a personal interest in not besmirching the reputation of these institutions. I also note that Joseph Smith was my wife's great-great-great-grandfather's brother and my own great-great-great-great-grandfather's third cousin. That having been said, I note that in my capacity as a professor at BYU I do not, indeed cannot, officially speak for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormon—and I use the term because of its familiarity to Egyptologists even though it is not

2. Robert K. Ritner, "'The Breathing Permit of Hôr' among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62/3 (2003): 167.

3. Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "apologetic"; see also John Gee, "*La Trahison des Clercs*: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 51–120; Daniel C. Peterson, Editor's Introduction, "The Witchcraft Paradigm: On Claims to 'Second Sight' by People Who Say It Doesn't Exist," *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): xi–xviii.

preferred by the Church of Jesus Christ—and anti-Mormon interpretations are not my focus here. I wish to address only a few of the many historical issues.

What We Think We Know

The popular story of the papyri is as follows: Joseph Smith acquired the papyri from a nephew of Antonio Lebolo for six thousand dollars; Smith produced the Book of Abraham from the Book of Breathings; the papyri were lost for many years but were discovered by Dr. Aziz S. Atiya in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and so when the museum's administrators found out, they gave the papyri to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Egyptologists then pointed out that the documents were not the Book of Abraham but merely a Book of Breathings Made by Isis. This is the story we think we know; however, none of this is true. The details are all wrong.

The Rediscovery

To illustrate the situation, let us take what is generally thought to be the most secure of the elements of the story, Dr. Atiya's discovery of the papyri in the Metropolitan Museum. The original sources for this story are newspaper accounts garbled from the original press release.[4] The crucial paragraph read: "The Museum has had the collection since 1947, but their existence was not known to the Church until recently, when a renowned Distinguished Professor of the University of Utah saw the original of the facsimile while researching Coptic and Arabic papyri in a special room at the Museum."[5] The newspapers took this further and made Atiya the discoverer of the document who notified the Metropolitan Museum of Art of what they had. But that is not what happened. The published museum acquisition list for 1947 records that the museum had acquired "papyrus fragments of hieratic Books of the Dead, once the property of the Mormon leader Joseph

4. See Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 1.

5. Reprinted in Todd, *Saga of the Book of Abraham*, 4.

Smith."[6] This shows two things: first, that the museum knew exactly what they had, and second, that no one had read the museum acquisition list.

What really happened is outlined in correspondence between Atiya and Henry Fischer, then curator of the Egyptian department at the Met. After reading the story in the newspaper, Fischer wrote to Atiya as follows: "Although I was already aware that your version of the 'discovery' of these documents had caused considerable confusion, it was startling to read that you had informed me of their existence. While I have taken pains to avoid any outright contradictions of what you said, I do not see why either I or the other members of my department—past and present—should be put in the position of being ignorant about facts we could not fail to have known."[7] As Fischer explained in a 1968 interview about the matter: "We knew, since he worked in Salt Lake City and was acquainted with leaders of the Mormon Church, that he might very tactfully find out how they felt about it. So we simply informed him about this in confidence, and I think he handled the matter very nicely."[8] Even Klaus Baer, an Egyptologist working at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, knew in 1968 that "the Metropolitan Museum was fully aware of what the papyri were when they first saw them in 1918, and they knew what they were doing when they acquired them. I saw photographs of them for the first time in 1963, I believe, and was asked at the time, on my honor not to tell anyone where they were and to keep the whole thing confidential."[9]

So why did the museum not contact the church earlier? Fischer explains: "There is only one satisfactory answer to those who wonder why we did not tell the L.D.S. Church about the papyri at an earlier

6. "Review of the Year 1947," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 7/1 (1948): 17.

7. Henry G. Fischer to Aziz S. Atiya, 2 January 1968, Aziz Atiya Collection, Accn 480, Bx 40, fd 1, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

8. Norman Tolk, Lynn Travers, George D. Smith Jr., and F. Charles Graves, "An Interview with Dr. Fischer," *Dialogue* 2/4 (1967): 58.

9. Klaus Baer, letter to Jerald Tanner, 13 August 1968, quoted in Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 316.

date: not that we did not know of the significance of the documents, but that we did not know what the reaction of the Church would be. And it was solely—albeit indispensably—in respect to the latter point that [Atiya] provided me with information."[10] As he said in an interview at the time: "Frankly, we didn't know what the Mormon Church's wishes were. It wasn't until we discussed the matter with Professor Atiya . . . that we had a possibility of finding out how they felt about it."[11]

Furthermore, what Met administrators thought they gave the church was "papyrus fragments of hieratic Books of the Dead."[12] "There are many, many copies of these texts," Fischer said. "Of course, a very beautiful example would be of great interest to us, and we do normally have some fine examples on display. Let's say that these fragments are reduplications in that sense. Such reduplications are of interest to specialists in funerary texts but are not useful to us in terms of our exhibition."[13] Somehow we have an idea that it was the Egyptologists who noticed that there was a copy of the Book of Breathings Made by Isis in the collection. But as Baer pointed out, "Let's face it; it was [Hugh] Nibley and not the Egyptologists who noticed that the sensen fragments were not from the Book of the Dead."[14]

The Discovery

If the story of the rediscovery of the papyri is incorrect, the story of the discovery of the papyri also needs several corrections. First, thanks to the diligent research of Donl Peterson and Brian Smith, we know that almost all of Michael Chandler's story about the mummies

10. Fischer to Atiya, 2 January 1968, Aziz Atiya Collection.

11. Tolk et al., "Interview with Dr. Fischer," 56–58. "It is pretty clear to me," Baer wrote in 1968, that the museum "didn't want anyone to find out about the papyri before the Mormon Church did, at least not publicly, and that [the museum] took their own sweet time about it. . . . The situation evidently was handled in the manner that would least embarrass anybody, and the general attitude seems to have been to wait until an auspicious moment." Klaus Baer to Jerald Tanner, 13 August 1968, as quoted in Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 316.

12. "Review of the Year 1947," 17.

13. Tolk et al. "Interview with Dr. Fischer," 58.

14. Klaus Baer to Jerald Tanner, 8 August 1968, as quoted in Petersen, *Hugh Nibley*, 318.

and the papyri is a fabrication or is based on misunderstandings.[15] Chandler does not appear to have been any relation of Antonio Lebolo, and he certainly was not his nephew. John Larson, the archivist of the Oriental Institute, cites the price of the papyri as six thousand dollars.[16] This is based on the secondhand account of Josiah Quincy[17] but is refuted by the statements of the purchasers[18] and by the legal documents filed in a lawsuit against Chandler over the papyri.[19] The price was only twenty-four hundred dollars. So Quincy was wrong on the price of the papyrus; in addition, here he is a secondhand source. Also, when one compares Quincy's account of things Joseph Smith said with that of Quincy's cousin, Charles Francis Adams, one finds that the latter account is closer to what Joseph Smith published on the same subject.[20] Quincy thus becomes an unreliable witness—one writing forty years after the fact.

This brings us to the matter of methodology. As John Baines has written, the typical Egyptologist "tends not to be very open to issues of theory and methodology, and at the level of interpretation he will often work without an awareness of the presuppositions he applies."[21] On the other hand, Mormon studies, particularly since the 1980s and the exposure of the forgeries introduced by Mark Hofmann, have pro-

15. H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995).

16. John A. Larson, "Joseph Smith and Egyptology: An Early Episode in the History of American Speculation about Ancient Egypt, 1835–1844," in *For His Ka: Essays Offered in Memory of Klaus Baer*, ed. David P. Silverman (Chicago: Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, 1994), 164 n. 9, 172.

17. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 386.

18. Joseph Coe to Joseph Smith, 1 January 1844, as cited in Peterson, *Story of the Book of Abraham*, 7–8.

19. Peterson, *Story of the Book of Abraham*, 169–74.

20. See John Gee, "Telling the Story of the Joseph Smith Papyri," review of *The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Study of the Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri*, by James R. Harris; *For His Ka: Essays Offered in Memory of Klaus Baer*, edited by David P. Silverman; *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism*, by H. Donl Peterson, *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 53.

21. John Baines, "Introduction," *Royal Anthropological Institute News*, no. 15 (August 1976): 2.

duced an extensive literature on the subject.[22] It is clear that recent Egyptological treatments of the Joseph Smith Papyri[23] could have benefited from attention to this literature. Be that as it may, it is worth examining some methodological issues.

Mormonism has always been controversial. From its very origins, there have been accounts pro and con, and in the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, historians may say to themselves:

22. While not an exhaustive list, the following are some of the more important discussions: Howard C. Searle, "Authorship of the History of Joseph Smith: A Review Essay," *BYU Studies* 21/1 (1981): 101–22; Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 151–71; John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "An Introduction to the Relevance of and a Methodology for a Study of the Proper Names of the Book of Mormon," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:126–35; Gary F. Novak, "Naturalistic Assumptions and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 23–40; Dean C. Jessee, "Priceless Words and Fallible Memories: Joseph Smith as Seen in the Effort to Preserve His Discourses," *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 19–40; David B. Honey and Daniel C. Peterson, "Advocacy and Inquiry in the Writing of Latter-day Saint History," *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 139–79; William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 161–97; Gary F. Novak, review of *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, by George D. Smith, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5/1 (1993): 231–49; Louis Midgley, "The Radical Reformation of the Reorganization of the Restoration: Recent Changes in the RLDS Understanding of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 132–63; David Bohn, "The Larger Issue," *Sunstone*, February 1994, 45–63; William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 434–523; Daniel C. Peterson, "Text and Context," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 524–62; William J. Hamblin, "The Latest Straw Man," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 82–92; Massimo Introvigne, "The Book of Mormon Wars: A Non-Mormon Perspective," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 1–25; George L. Mitton and Rhett S. James, "A Response to D. Michael Quinn's Homosexual Distortion of Latter-day Saint History," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 141–263; Richard Lloyd Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 67–104; William J. Hamblin, "That Old Black Magic," *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 225–393.

23. Such as John A. Larson, "Joseph Smith and Egyptology: An Early Episode in the History of American Speculation about Ancient Egypt, 1835–1844," in *For His Ka*, ed. Silverman, 159–78; Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); and Robert K. Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 97–119.

What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? The most helpful method of sorting through the various accounts and claims about historical events is to use those sources that are eyewitnesses to an event, whether they are Mormon or not, and exclude those that are not eyewitnesses. For history, hearsay sources are irrelevant. Contemporary sources are to be preferred to later reminiscences like Josiah Quincy's.

There are twenty-six eyewitness sources that describe the Joseph Smith Papyri. These accounts provide diachronic descriptions of the Joseph Smith Papyri during the period when the Mormons first owned them—that is, from 1835 to 1856. John Larson uses only a third of these in his article for the Baer memorial volume and includes a number of sources that are not eyewitnesses.[24] Those that he uses, unfortunately, are often missing key elements. For example, his sampling of Joseph Smith journal entries dealing with the papyri omits five entries from 1835 alone.[25] Larson might have included more eyewitness accounts had he actually read some of the sources he cites in his bibliography.[26]

Larson claims that "there seems to be no published record of the westward movement of the mummies and papyri with the Mormons from Kirtland, Ohio, to Missouri, and then back across the Mississippi River to Nauvoo, Illinois. One can only imagine how much damage the fragile antiquities may have suffered as they bounced over hundreds of miles of rough roads in carts or wagons."[27] Had he read the accounts, he would not have needed to "only imagine." The first comes from Anson Call's journal from the summer of 1838, published in 1985:

> While at Far West I happened in John Corls [Corrill's] or the Church store and my attention was called by Vincent Knights who was opening some boxes of goods. Says he, "Joseph will

24. Larson, "Joseph Smith and Egyptology."

25. See John Gee, "Telling the Story of the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 54 n. 30.

26. Notably Todd, *Saga of the Book of Abraham*, cited in Larson, "Joseph Smith and Egyptology," 177.

27. Larson, "Joseph Smith and Egyptology," 169–70.

> be much pleased with these. He has been very uneasy about the translation of the Bible and the Egyptian Records. Here they are." Placing them on the table, he said to me, "If you will take one of these, I will the other and we will carry them over to Joseph's office."[28]

The trip into Missouri was calm compared to the trip out. On 27 October 1838, Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs declared "open war" on the Mormons and issued an order calling out the militia, declaring: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies and *must be exterminated* or driven from the state."[29] Three days later, a contemporary source reported that the militia "had killed nearly all the 'Mormons' gathered at" the settlement of Haun's Mill and "4000 some say 6000 Malitia [*sic*] had camped that night, one half mile south of Far West with orders from the governor of the state to exterminate the Mormons."[30] Ann Scott Davis records that at the request of her brother-in-law, James Mulholland, Joseph Smith's secretary at the time, she took charge of the papyri and other important papers, "as he thought they would be more secure with me, because I was a woman, and the mob would not be likely to search my person. Immediately on taking possession of the papers, I made two cotton bags of sufficient size to contain them, sewing a band around the top ends of sufficient length to button around my waist; and I carried those papers on my person in the day-time, when the mob was round, and slept with them under my pillow at night. I cannot remember now the exact length of time I had those papers in my possession; but I gave them to sister Emma Smith, the prophet's wife, on the evening of her departure for Commerce" in February of 1839.[31]

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28. Anson Call, manuscript journal, summer of 1838, p. 9, as cited in Robert J. Matthews, *"A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1985), 98; Mark L. McConkie, *Remembering Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 259–60.

29. The extermination order is quoted in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1948), 3:175.

30. Warren Foote, as quoted in Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 32–33.

31. F. M. Cooper, "Spiritual Reminiscences.—No. 2.: In the Life of Sister Ann Davis, of Lyons, Wisconsin," *Autumn Leaves* 4 (January 1891): 18.

One does not need to imagine how much damage the fragile antiquities suffered. In a forthcoming publication, Michael Rhodes shows that an 1835 copy of a fragment now part of Papyrus Joseph Smith IX contains thirty-four lines of text as compared to the current fragment, which contains only about twelve. The length of text preserved in each line is also reduced to about one-third its original size.

Eyewitnesses from the Nauvoo period (1839–1844) describe "a quantity of records, written on papyrus, in Egyptian hieroglyphics,"[32] including (1) some papyri "preserved under glass,"[33] described as "a number of glazed slides, like picture frames, containing sheets of papyrus, with Egyptian inscriptions and hieroglyphics";[34] (2) "a long roll of manuscript"[35] that contained the Book of Abraham;[36] (3) "another roll";[37] (4) and "two or three other small pieces of papyrus with astronomical calculations, epitaphs, &c."[38] Only the mounted fragments ended up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and thence were given back to the Church of Jesus Christ. When eyewitnesses described the vignettes as being of the mounted fragments, they can be matched with the fragments from the Metropolitan Museum of Art; but when the vignettes described are on the rolls, the descriptions do not match any of the fragments from the Met. Gustavus Seyffarth's 1856 catalog of the Wood Museum indicates that some of the papyri were there. Those papyri went to Chicago and were burned in the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. Whatever we might imagine their contents to be is only conjecture. Both Mormon and non-Mormon eyewitnesses from the

32. William S. West, *A Few Interesting Facts Respecting the Rise, Progress, and Pretensions of the Mormons* (Warren, OH, 1837), 5, cited in Todd, *Saga of the Book of Abraham*, 196–97.

33. Quincy, *Figures of the Past*, 386.

34. Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842* (London: Rivington, 1843), 22–23.

35. Charlotte Haven to her mother, 19 February 1843, printed in "A Girl's Letters from Nauvoo," *Overland Monthly* 16/96 (December 1890): 624, as cited in Todd, *Saga of the Book of Abraham*, 245.

36. Jerusha W. Blanchard, "Reminiscences of the Granddaughter of Hyrum Smith," *Relief Society Magazine* 9/1 (1922): 9; and Haven to her mother, 19 February 1843.

37. Haven to her mother, 19 February 1843.

38. Oliver Cowdery to William Frye, 22 December 1835, printed in the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (December 1835): 234.

nineteenth century agree that it was a "roll of papyrus from which our prophet translated the Book of Abraham,"[39] meaning the "long roll of manuscript" and not one of the mounted fragments that eventually ended up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[40]

As for the translation, no one knows how it was done, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no position on how the Book of Abraham was translated or from what papyrus. Since there is no official position, members of the church divide into four opinions about the translation of the Book of Abraham. The smallest group, comprising about 0.5 percent of members—according to my informal, admittedly unscientific surveys—thinks that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham from the existing fragments that were in the Met. The next largest group thinks that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham from papyrus fragments that are no longer in existence. About one-third think that there is or was no connection between the Book of Abraham and any papyrus fragments. The largest group, more than half of members, do not care where the Book of Abraham came from. As Egyptologists, however, we routinely assert that the Mormon position is the one that is actually the least popular of all positions. The only eyewitness to the translation process to describe it was Joseph Smith's scribe, Warren Parrish, who claimed, after he left the church, "I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration from Heaven."[41]

Editions

Since the rediscovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri in 1967, there have been twelve purportedly Egyptological editions of the Joseph

39. Blanchard, "Reminiscences," 9; and Haven to her mother, 19 February 1843.

40. For the distribution of the manuscript fragments, 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 et al. (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 188–91; and John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 10–13.

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

Smith Papyri X and XI,[42] a number that surely far exceeds the papyri's Egyptological importance. One would think that, with so many editions, the work would be getting better, but so far the ninth edition—that of Michael Rhodes, distributed by the University of Chicago Press—has been the best. The tenth and eleventh, both by Professor Robert Ritner, are a step backward in understanding the papyri since it has been shown that on average one out of every four lines in his editions does not match what is actually on the papyri.[43] It becomes clear that in places many of the readings in these editions are taken from a different papyrus altogether and that the textual variants of the Joseph Smith Papyri were unnoticed. One line of text was invented. Whatever value those editions may have for polemical purposes,[44] they are of little use in understanding the papyri since, to borrow a phrase from de Buck, a really sound study of the papyri must be continually going back from the edition to the originals,[45] which means that, as editions, they are largely useless. Even on polemical grounds the author of these

42. (1) Grant S. Heward, *The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found!* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, n.d. [1968]); (2) Dee Jay Nelson, *The Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1968); (3) Richard A. Parker, "The Book of Breathings (Fragment 1, the 'sensen' Text, with Restorations from Louvre Papyrus 3284," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 98–99; (4) Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 109–34; (5) Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1975); (6) Michael H. Marquardt, *The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1975); (7) Michael H. Marquardt, *The Book of Abraham Papyrus Found*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1981); (8) Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992); (9) Rhodes, *Hor Book of Breathings*; (10) Ritner, "'Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later"; (11) Robert K. Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hôr' among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62/3 (2003); (12) Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005).

43. As demonstrated by Kerry Muhlestein, "The Book of Breathings in Its Place," *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 483–86.

44. See Larry E. Morris, "The Book of Abraham: Ask the Right Questions and Keep On Looking," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 355–80. For Ritner's propensity to get into academic arguments, see Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 19–20, esp. nn. 58–59.

45. Adriaan de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 1:xv.

editions, to quote Professor Ritner, "fails to account for the remarkable persistence of the 'pathetic or ludicrous' activities which he finds so devoid of truth or value."[46]

Advice

For those who would like to work with the Joseph Smith Papyri in the future, a few words of advice:

1. All approaches will be biased. Objectivity is a myth.[47] The papyri are part of a sectarian debate. I will not describe the various groups involved, their positions, their tactics, or their funding, but anyone who gets involved should first learn who the players are. It is worth knowing, for example, that while *Dialogue* was a Mormon journal in the 1960s when Baer published in it, over the years it has changed so that many members of the church no longer consider it to be Mormon in any meaningful sort of way. It is also worth knowing that for nearly one hundred years it has been standard operating procedure to dig for dirt on the background of anyone who enters the debate, and if one sides with the Mormons, the opponents have no qualms about bearing false witness, as Douglas Cowan has shown.[48] One simply cannot win playing this game. Baer and Fischer understood quite well that it was not a good idea for outsiders to get involved in a religious dispute. Fischer politely bowed out, and Baer tried to be gracious to everyone. Baer's graciousness, however, cost him a good deal of time, which brings me to my next point.

2. If you do address the issue in print, you need to know that the two sides in the dispute will never leave you alone. It is a life sentence with no possibility of parole. The Reverend S. A. B. Mercer was still responding to inquiries almost fifty years later in his retirement. Before you rush into print, you might want to ask yourself: "Do I want

46. Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 10.

47. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

48. Douglas E. Cowan, *Bearing False Witness? An Introduction to the Christian Countercult* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003).

to spend the rest of my one moment in annihilation's waste by dealing with this?"

3. If you decide you want to enter the debate, you ought to do some real homework. There is a large bibliography, and there are dozens of theories to master, not to mention a large body of evidence. Many mistakes would not have been made had Egyptologists only known the literature better. You have to pay attention to what Latter-day Saints say about the papyri. It is they who have traced the history of the papyri, dug up what information is known about Antonio Lebolo, identified Joseph Smith Papyri X–XI as a Book of Breathings, and done much basic work on hypocephali, and they are the people who have access to the original documents. They know their own history much better than others do, and they know what they believe better than outsiders. You might be surprised to find yourself on the same side. Hugh Nibley has often been maligned for taking the ludicrous position that others think he ought to have taken rather than the position he actually took. The argument he made in his edition of the papyri is as follows: "*The Book of Breathings is not the Book of Abraham!*"[49] and it is a "howling absurdity [to insist] that the book [of Abraham] was produced in a manner in which . . . no book could possibly be produced, ever!"[50] Instead the Book of Breathings has something "to offer in its own right"[51] and deserves to be studied against an Egyptian background. The first two points have been widely accepted by mainstream Latter-day Saints.

4. If you want to do anything with the originals, you need to apply to the archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at least a full year in advance. You will need approvals from half a dozen committees that meet only once a month and for whom your request will be far down the list of agenda items. Requests to do anything before that time will garner an automatic denial.

5. Whatever goodwill Professor Baer had established among the Mormons by his tact has more than been destroyed by the recent coop-

49. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2nd ed., 2 (emphasis in original).
50. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2nd ed., 5.
51. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 2nd ed., xxv.

eration of certain Egyptologists with anti-Mormons. Whatever short-term tactical gains for anti-Mormonism these Egyptologists may have made, the net result is a long-term loss for a serious Egyptological examination of the material. Those who wish to work with the originals will have to find ways to distance themselves from those efforts and the individuals involved in them, and from those who violate the church's copyrights on the material. It is worth following Professor Ritner's warning that those "for whom ridicule . . . [is] an occupation" and who are "not disposed to be particularly charitable" are "not relevant to the present discussion."[52]

Conclusions

Most of what we as Egyptologists think we know about the Joseph Smith Papyri is demonstrably wrong, whether on the details of their history or on Mormon attitudes about them. The assumptions we make, the presuppositions we have, and the myths that we have invented dominate discussions of the papyri and the Mormons. It seems therefore fitting to conclude with a slight alteration of one of Professor Ritner's astute observations: "In the past, our theories have dictated our facts as often as our facts have dictated our theories. Theoretical bias has been unrecognized and its pervasive influence ignored. So long as we are willing to allow our preconceptions to structure our questions and answers, to rewrite the historians, or disbelieve the papyrus evidence, how will we ever find examples of positive . . . interaction between Egyptian and [Mormon]? It will not matter whether we use [Mormon] or [Egyptian] evidence, or any evidence at all; we shall see only our long-ingrained stereotypes."[53]

52. Robert K. Ritner, "Implicit Models of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap, and Prejudice," in *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, ed. Janet H. Johnson (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 290.

53. Ritner, "Implicit Models of Cross-Cultural Interaction," 290.