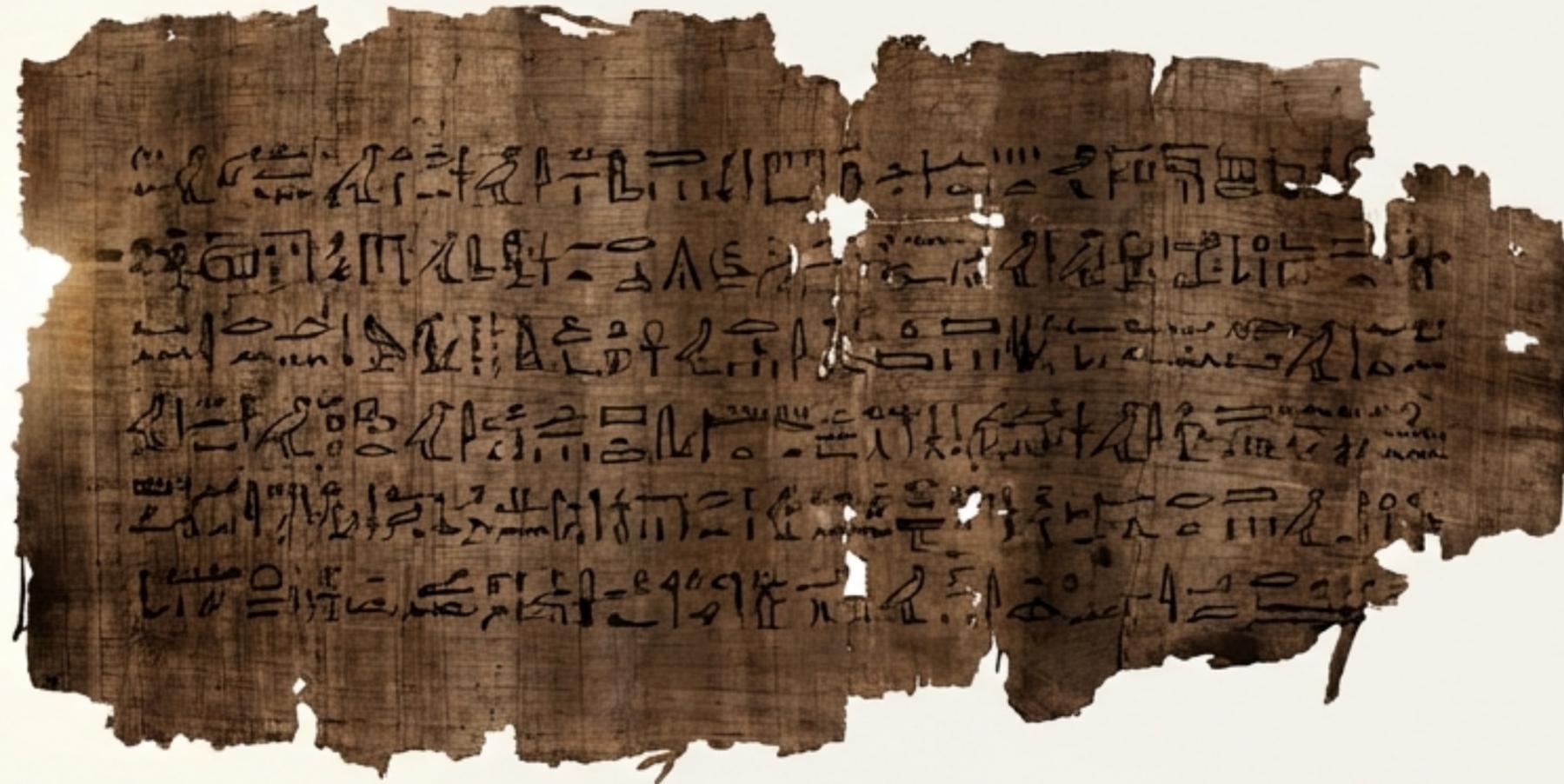


The Book of Abraham: A Testable Claim

An Investigative Analysis of Joseph Smith's Translation of Egyptian Papyri



The Ultimate Test of a Prophet's Gift

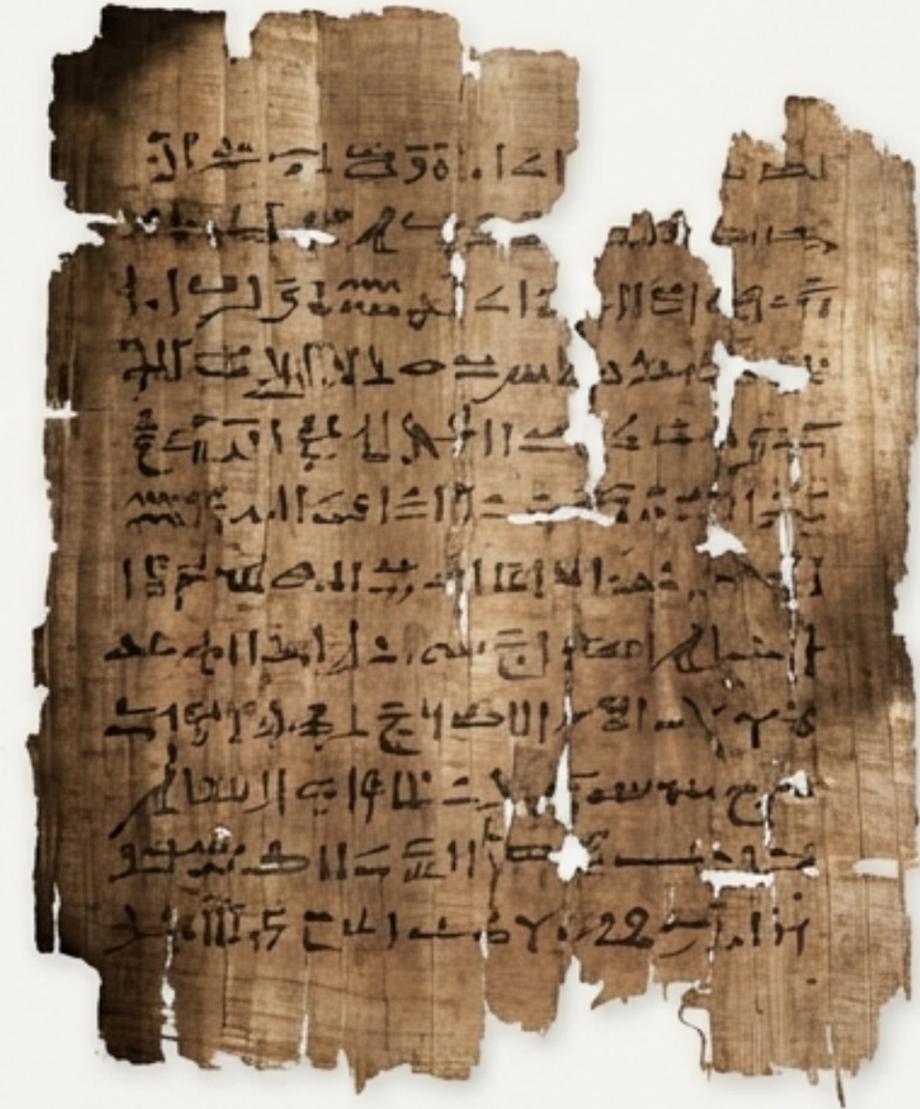
- Joseph Smith's authority was built on his self-proclaimed title as a "Prophet, Seer, Revelator, and Translator."
- The Book of Mormon plates were taken away, leaving no source text to verify.
- The Book of Abraham is different. As one analysis states, it is "the most important way that we can really discern whether or not Joseph Smith had the ability to translate ancient languages."
- For the first time, we have the alleged source document, the translation, and the scientific tools to evaluate the claim.

"If there were one single issue... that would allow you to really fairly and scientifically determine whether Joseph Smith had the powers he claimed he had, it is the book of Abraham."

THE CLAIM

A translation of some ancient records... purporting to be the writings of Abraham while he was in Egypt, called Book of Abraham, **written by his own hand upon papyrus.**

THE ARTIFACT



This presentation will investigate if the text on the right produces the story described on the left.

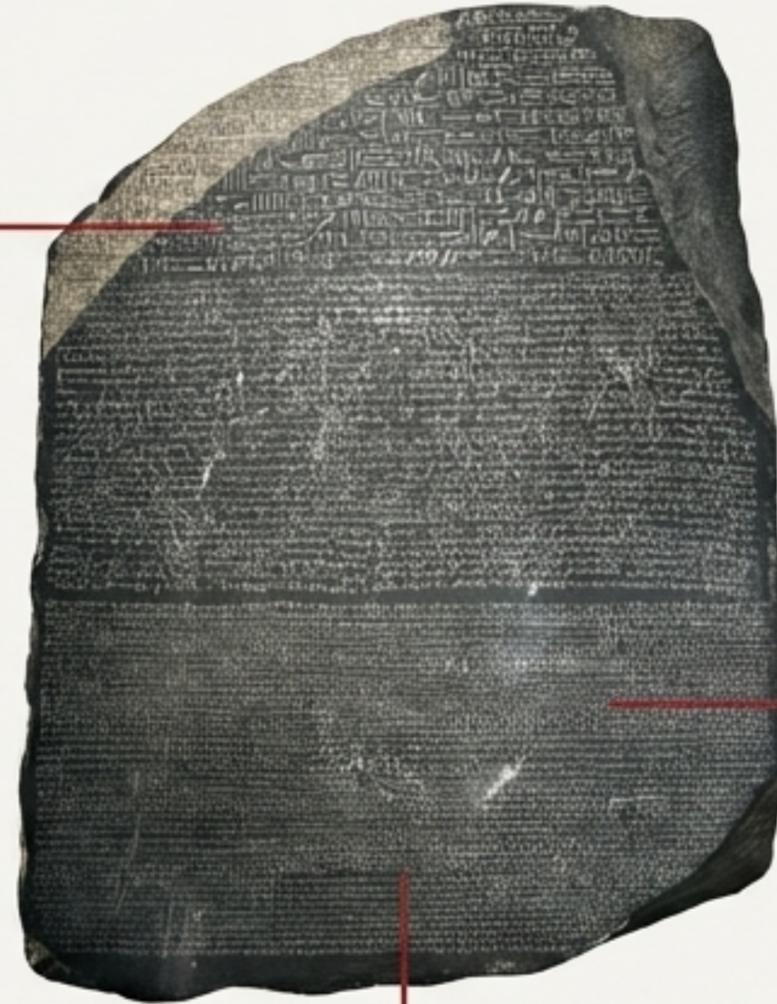
The Opportunity: A Prophet Meets an Artifact

1835, Kirtland, Ohio

- An entrepreneur, Michael Chandler, arrives with four mummies and several papyrus scrolls.
- This occurs during a peak of global fascination with Egyptian artifacts, known as “Egyptomania,” sparked by Napoleon's 1798 campaign.
- Joseph Smith inspects the scrolls and declares, “much to our joy we found that one of the roles contained the writings of Abraham.”
- **The church purchases the artifacts for \$2,400 (approximately \$68,000 in today's money),** a massive sum for the financially-strapped community.



The Key to the Case: Unlocking Hieroglyphs



Discovered in 1799 and largely deciphered by the 1820s, the Rosetta Stone contained the same text in three scripts: Hieroglyphic, Demotic, and Ancient Greek.

Because scholars could read Greek, they could finally “crack the code” of ancient Egyptian.

This transformed the study of Egyptian artifacts from speculative guesswork into a scientific discipline.

While this knowledge was developing, Joseph Smith was in a “neck of the woods” where he could feel confident that no one could fact-check his translation.

Exhibit A: An Impossible Timeline

Abraham's Lifetime
(Estimated):
~1800 BCE.

Date of Papyrus
3rd Century BCE –
1st Century CE.

Abraham's
Lifetime
~1800 BCE.

Date of Papyrus
Fragments:
3rd Century BCE –
1st Century CE.

Over 1,500 years.

The Verdict from the Source

The LDS Church's own Gospel Topics Essay on the Book of Abraham concedes: "These fragments **date** to between the third century BCE and the first century CE, **long after Abraham lived.**"

***Exhibit B*:** The Source vs. The Story

The Church's Own Admission

“None of the characters on the Papyrus fragments mention Abraham’s name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham.”

“Mormon and non-Mormon Egyptologists agree that the characters on the fragments do not match the translation given in the book of Abraham.”

Analysis

The church itself acknowledges that the source text and the resulting scripture are unrelated. Scholars identify the fragments as common funerary texts, designed to be buried with the dead for passage into the afterlife—exactly what one would expect to find with mummies.

Exhibit C: Deconstructing Facsimile 1



Joseph Smith's Translation	Egyptological Consensus
3. "The idolatrous priest of Elkenah."	3. Anubis, the jackal-headed god of embalming, preparing a body.
2. "Abraham fastened upon an altar."	2. The deceased person, Hor, lying on a funerary bier.
1. "The Angel of the Lord."	1. The <i>ba</i> , or spirit of Hor, depicted as a bird.

Conclusion: Smith interpreted a standard Egyptian **burial scene** as an **attempted human sacrifice**.

Forgery in the Gaps: The Altered Evidence

Original Papyrus Fragment (with lacunae)



Published Facsimile 1 (with additions)



Key Forgeries

- The original figure of the “priest” is headless. Joseph Smith drew in a human head. Egyptologists know it should be the head of a jackal (Anubis).
- He drew a knife in the priest's hand where none existed, to support his sacrifice narrative.

“He describes these as **“added forgeries*”** including the human head and knife of the supposed idolatrous priest.” – Dr. Robert Ritner

Exhibit D: Deconstructing Facsimile 2 (The Hypocephalus)



Joseph Smith's Translation	Egyptological Consensus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Kolob, signifying the first creation..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The four-headed ram god, Khnum.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7. "God sitting upon his throne..." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7. The ithyphallic (erect) fertility god, Min.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. "...is to be had in the Holy Temple of God." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. "Grant that the soul of Osiris Shoshenq may live."



Critical Error

This artifact, a hypocephalus, was a funerary item from a *different mummy*. Smith combined unrelated documents into a single narrative, demonstrating he did not understand what he was working with.

Exhibit E: The Smoking Gun of Facsimile 3

The Indisputable Error: Direct Character Translation



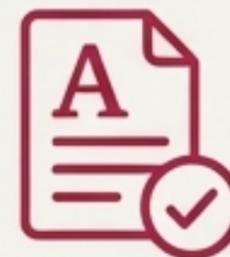
Smith's Translation (Fig. 4): "The characters above the hand mean 'Prince of Pharaoh, King of Egypt.' He identifies the figure as male."

Actual Translation: "The characters read 'Ma'at, Mistress of the Gods.' The figure is the goddess of justice, a female."



Smith's Translation (Fig. 5): "Identifies the standing black figure as 'Shulem, one of the king's principal waiters.'"

Actual Figure: "This is the god Anubis. Smith's identification of a black-skinned deity as a servant aligns with 19th-century racial biases that informed the priesthood ban."



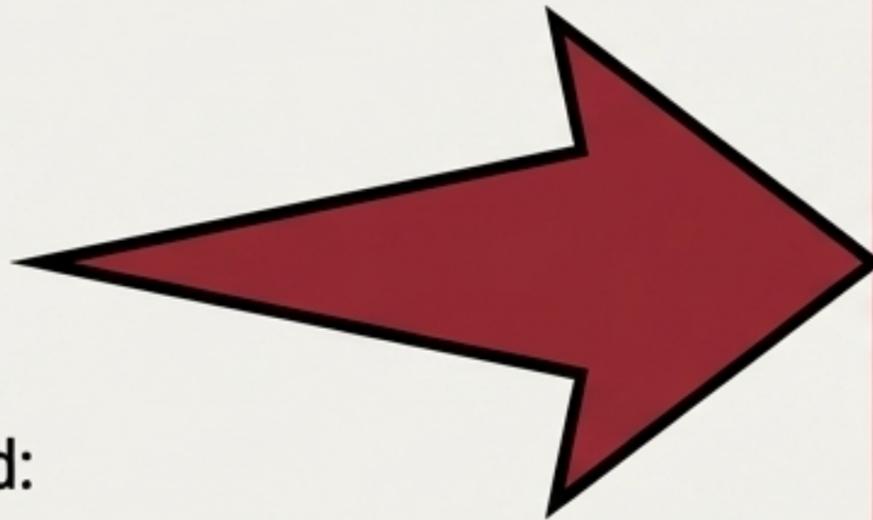
Critical Error

This direct character translation error is irrefutable proof that Smith could not read Egyptian and was fabricating the explanations for the facsimiles.

A Flawed Method: From One Word to Four Verses



Egyptian Word:
"Lake"



12. And it came to pass that the priests laid violence upon me, that they might slay me also, as they did those virgins upon this altar; and that you might have a knowledge of this altar, I will refer you to the representation at the commencement of this record.
13. It was made after the form of a bedstead, such as was had among the Chaldeans, and it stood before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and also a god like unto that of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.
14. That you might have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning, which manner of figures is called by the Chaldeans Rahleenos, which signifies hieroglyphics.
15. And as they lifted up their hands upon me, that they might offer me up and take away my life, behold, I lifted up my voice unto the Lord my God, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and he filled me with the vision of the Almighty, and the angel of his presence stood by me, and immediately unloosed my bands;



Case Study

Egyptologists identified two specific symbols from the papyrus that, together, mean "lake." The first is the phonetic spelling, the second is a determinative symbol for water. In the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith's translation spun these two characters—the—the single word "lake"—into four complete verses of scripture. This demonstrates that his "translation" was not a linguistic process but an act of expansive invention.

The Investigative Verdict

The Claim: The Book of Abraham is a literal translation of an ancient papyrus, written by Abraham's own hand.

Finding 1: Dating

The papyrus was created over 1,500 years after Abraham would have lived. **Claim Falsified.**

Finding 2: Source Text

The papyrus is a common Egyptian funerary text. Its contents have no connection to Abraham or the events in the scripture. **Claim Falsified.**

Finding 3: Facsimiles

Smith's interpretations of figures, translation of characters, and restoration of missing sections are all incorrect according to modern Egyptology. **Claim Falsified.**

Conclusion: The evidence does not support the claim. Joseph Smith was not able to translate Egyptian.

Verify the Evidence

This investigation distills complex scholarship into a clear narrative. We encourage further personal study using the foundational sources.

Key Resources

Academic Analysis: *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* by Dr. Robert Ritner, former endowed chair of Egyptology at the University of Chicago.

Historical Research: The works of historian Dan Vogel on Joseph Smith and early Mormon origins.

In-Depth Discussion: The *Mormon Stories* Podcast series on the Book of Abraham.

The Official Position: The LDS Church's "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham" Gospel Topics Essay.