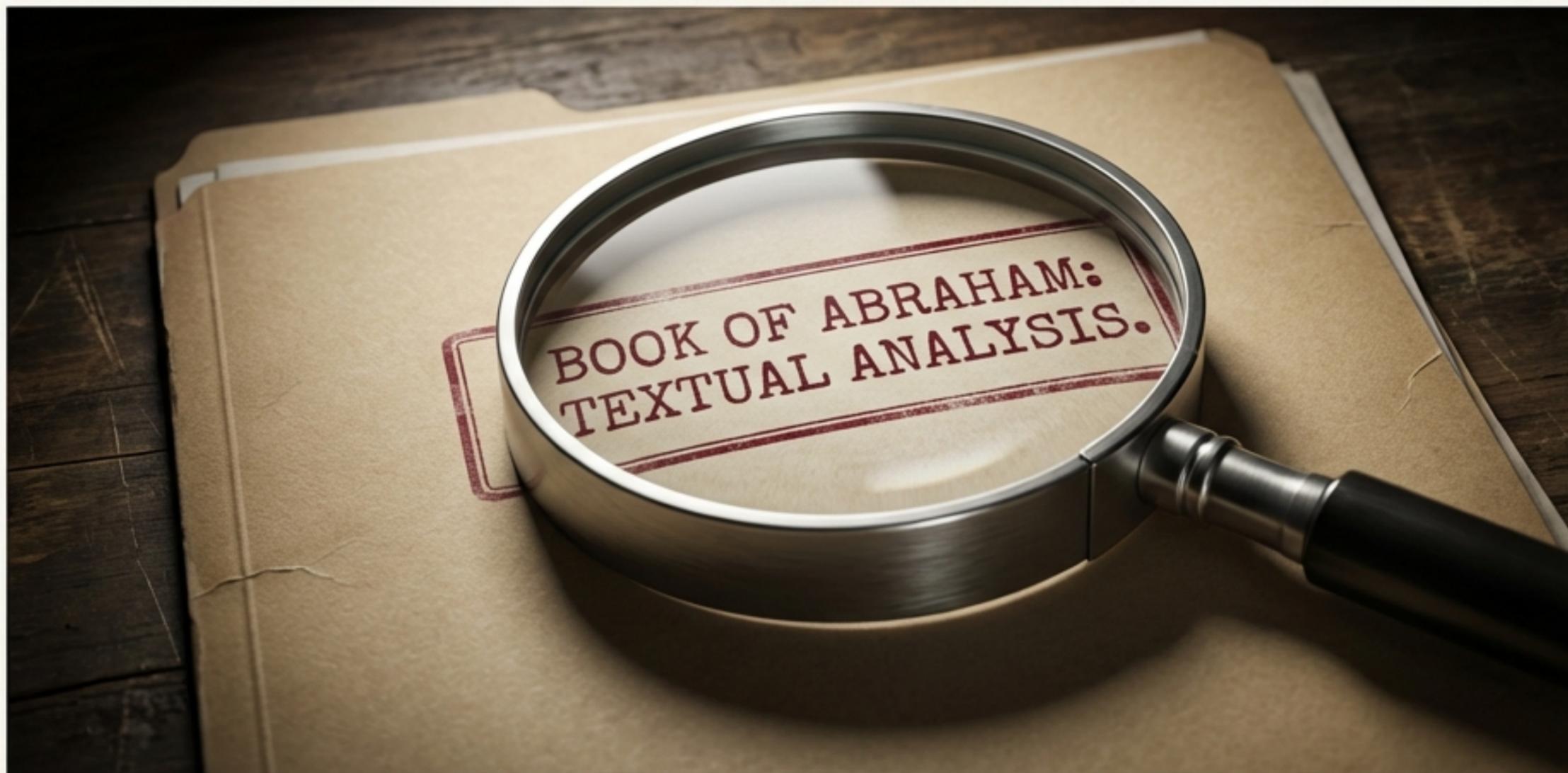


Case File: The Book of Abraham

A Forensic Analysis of the Textual Evidence



The Book of Abraham claims to be a translation of a record “written by [Abraham’s] own hand upon papyrus.” This investigation sets aside the debate over the papyri and the translation method to focus on a single question: What do the textual “fingerprints” within the book itself reveal about its origins and authorship?

Exhibit A: The Anachronism in Verse One

The investigation begins with the book's opening line:
"In the land of the **Chaldeans**... I, Abraham..." (Abraham 1:1).
This term is a critical temporal marker.



Corroborating Evidence

Even FAIR Mormon concedes this is a problem: "...its text mentioning of the Chaldeans, as with Genesis, is according to our presently available evidence probably anachronistic... this remains a problem for the Book of Abraham's historicity."

Exhibit A, continued: The “Potiphar” Problem

The text references “Potiphar’s Hill” (Abraham 1:10). The name “Potiphar” is distinctly Egyptian and serves as another precise linguistic timestamp.



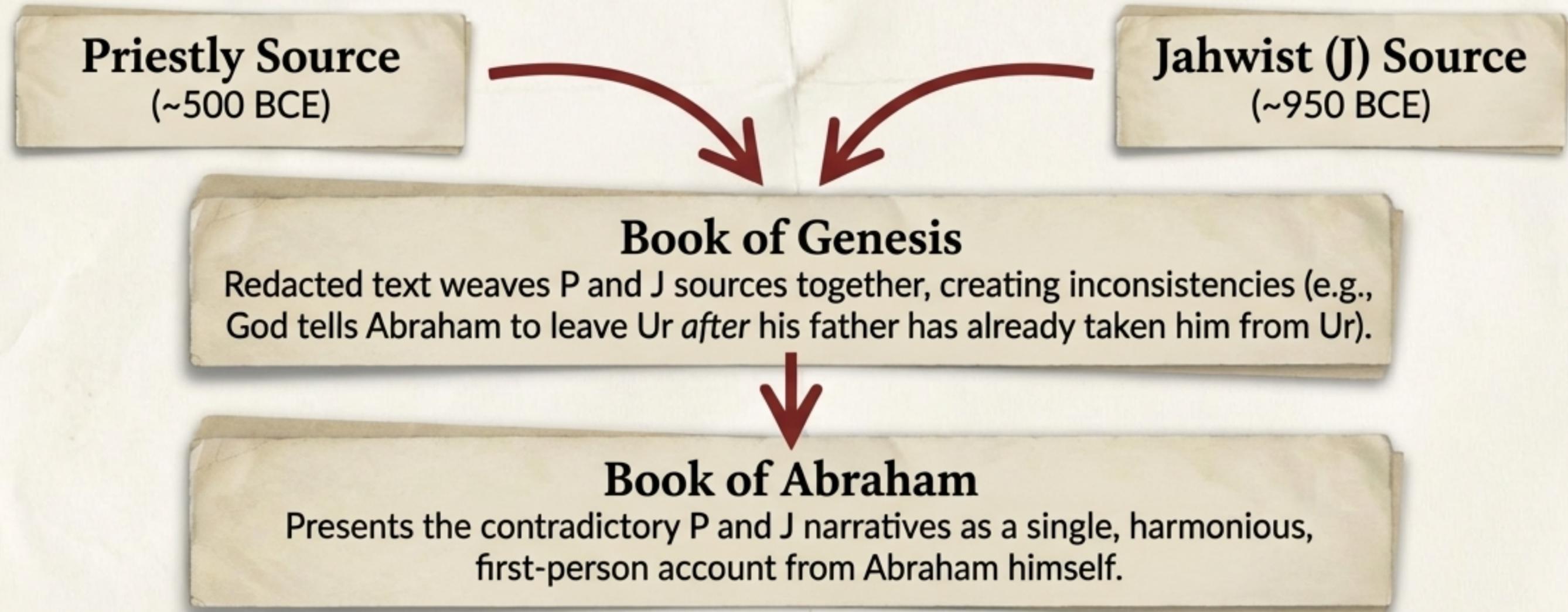
Dr. Robert Ritner,
Egyptologist

“The name Potiphar... has a grammatical construction that wasn’t possible and wasn’t used as a personal name until around 700 BC... it had to have been composed no earlier than 700 BC because it has anachronisms in there that couldn’t have existed [before then].” ”

Like “Chaldeans,” this name places the text’s **composition more than 1,000 years after** Abraham would have lived.

Exhibit B: Tracing the Text's Source Code

Biblical scholars have demonstrated that the Book of Genesis was compiled from multiple, sometimes contradictory, source documents written centuries after Abraham. The **Book of Abraham** incorporates these same contradictory sources into a single, first-person narrative—an impossibility for an author writing in Abraham's time.



An Impossible Harmony: The Evidence in Parallel

Dr. David Bökovoy explains:

Notice how those are two different historical documents that **contradict** one another that have been brought together in the **book of Abraham** as if it is **one** single harmonious narrative put into the words of **Abraham**... How could this come from Abraham when we know that these are two separate historical sources written many centuries after he would have supposedly lived?

Genesis 11 - Priestly Source

...and Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Terah... taking Abram from Ur daughter in law... and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan...

Genesis 12 - J Source

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's God commanding Abraham to leave... his father's house unto a land that I will shew thee...

Abraham 2

...for my father... continued to dwell in the land of Ur... and the Lord had said unto me, Abraham, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house...

Exhibit C: 19th-Century Textual Contaminants

The Patriarchal Blessing of 1834

Language from a patriarchal blessing given by Joseph Smith Sr. and recorded by Oliver Cowdery in 1834 appears directly in the second verse of the Book of Abraham, written in 1835. The linguistic overlap is too precise to be coincidental.

1834 Blessing

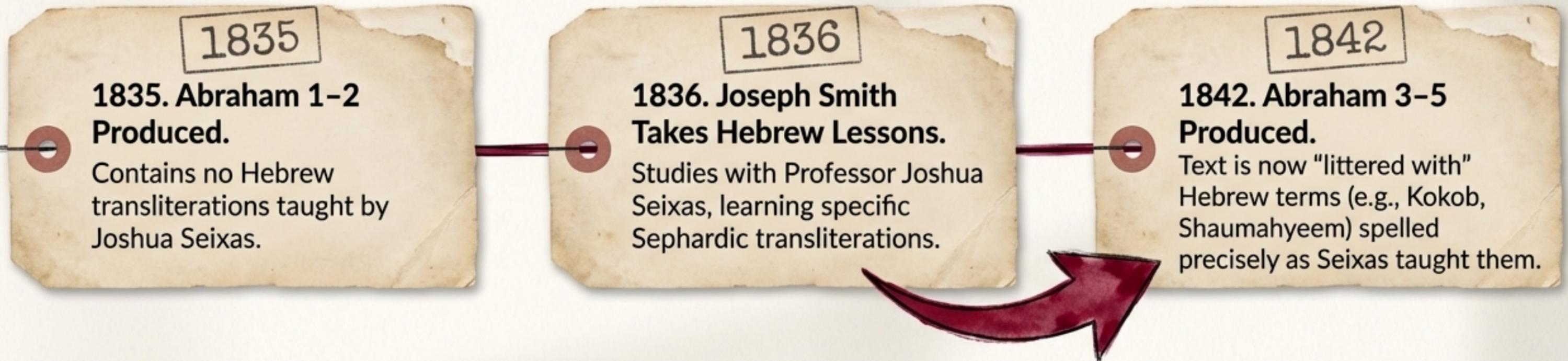
*...diligently sought for the
right of the fathers...
desire to be followers of
righteousness and possessors
of greater knowledge...*

Abraham 1:2

...sought for the blessings of
the fathers, and the right...
a follower of righteousness,
Desiring also to be one who
possessed **great knowledge...**

The Joshua Seixas Connection: Dating the Author's Education

The creation of the Book of Abraham text occurred in two phases. The linguistic content of each phase directly reflects what Joseph Smith was studying at the time.



Quote from BYU Professor Dr. Matthew Gray:

"...when Joseph used these Hebrew words, he spelled them in ways that he was taught by his Hebrew instructor back in Kirtland with that distinct... Sephardic spelling."

An Evolving Godhead, An Evolving Scripture

Joseph Smith's Hebrew lessons in 1836 introduced him to the concept of "Elohim" as a plural noun ("Gods"). This new understanding is directly reflected in the Book of Abraham, but *only* in the portions created after his lessons.

The doctrine of a **plurality of Gods**, central to late Nauvoo Mormonism, appears for the first time in the 1842 sections (Chapters 4-5) of the Book of Abraham. The **1835 sections** reflect Joseph's earlier, more traditional view of the Godhead. The "ancient" text evolved in lockstep with its 19th-century author's theology.

**1836 Hebrew Lessons:
"Elohim" = Gods**

Monotheistic language.

Part 1 (1835)

*Joseph Smith language.
Elohim has been known in the
inager of the author and
controler. Elohim has made
the usanger, but not in the
new understanding.*

*of the quoes, and counioned
with eleroc-molitor, and the
oun and being dlat.sayner
in Ahm. oaths thom elowed.*

Part 2 (1842)

*Plurality of Gods ("The Gods
said, Let there be light...")
saithas saniole. of occlior.
("The Gods said, Let there be
light ...") but if eéiis are
gullmormone ouov the laris of.
The Nuvosihu is aaved him.
"The Gods said, it brum say that
the cita of Allah's thomwhere
in The llurality under the Gods
Plurality of Elohead.
Stimma, and the hope of Gods*

Plurality of Gods
("The Gods said,
Let there be
light...")

Cosmology from a 19th-Century Bookshelf

The astronomical concepts in Abraham Chapter 3 were not ancient mysteries. They mirror inaccurate theories popular in Joseph Smith's day, particularly from books known to be in his possession.

Thomas Dick, *Philosophy of a Future State*, 1830

- "Universe made of indestructible, reorganized matter."
- "Eternal, progressing beings called "intelligences."
- "All stars revolving around a central point, the "throne of God."
- "Time being relative to the distance from this central point."

Book of Abraham, Chapter 3

- "...ye shall see the space thereof... there are many kingdoms... for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom..." (Abr 3:24)
- "...these two spirits... one being more intelligent than the other... I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than them all." (Abr 3:19)
- "...and he said unto me: This is Kolob... nearest unto the throne of God..." (Abr 3:3-4)
- "...one revolution was a day unto the Lord, after his manner of reckoning, it being one thousand years according to the time appointed unto that whereon thou standest." (Abr 3:4)

Joseph Smith owned a copy of Dick's book. The similarities are striking.

Evaluating the Counter-Narrative: The Apologetic ‘Hits’

Apologists point to several supposed “hits” or evidences within the text that they claim prove an ancient origin. The three most common are:

1. The practice of human sacrifice.
2. The place name “Olishem.”
3. The deity “Elkenah.”



Do these claims constitute a valid alibi for an ancient text, or do they collapse under scrutiny?

Debunking the Alibi: Human Sacrifice vs. Execution

The Claim

“The book of Abraham speaks disapprovingly of human sacrifice... Recent scholarship has found instances of such punishment dating to Abraham’s time.”
- *LDS.org Gospel Topics Essay*

The Reality

Dr. Robert Ritner clarifies that the sources cited refer to **political execution** or **capital punishment** for crimes, not religious human sacrifice.

“

Dr. Robert Ritner, Egyptologist

If you commit a crime there will be **capital punishment**. That is not **sacrifice**... All of that is **smoke and mirrors and confusion of terms**... They find one small aspect which if you squint your eyes... That if you squint your eyes... **it sort of looks like this, but then it doesn't fit the entire picture.**

Debunking the Alibi: "Olishem" and "Elkenah"

Olishem

Connects "Olishem" to an ancient town "Ulisum."

Flaws

- Wrong Location:** Ulisum is in NW Syria; the Book of Abraham's geography is in a southern location.
- Wrong Sound:** The Akkadian "Ulisum" has no "sh" sound. The transliteration is impossible.
- Apologist John Gee himself calls the link "promising but not proven."

Elkenah

"Elkenah" is identified as an ancient Mesopotamian deity.

Flaws

- No Record:** "Elkenah" is not a recognized deity in antiquity. The name only appears in the Book of Abraham.
- Weak Link:** The connection is a tenuous assumption based on the generic Canaanite god "El."

The Investigator's Fallacy: A Flawed Method

The apologetic "alibi" is not built on objective analysis of evidence. It is the result of starting with a conclusion and forcing the data to fit. This is the opposite of the historical or scientific method.

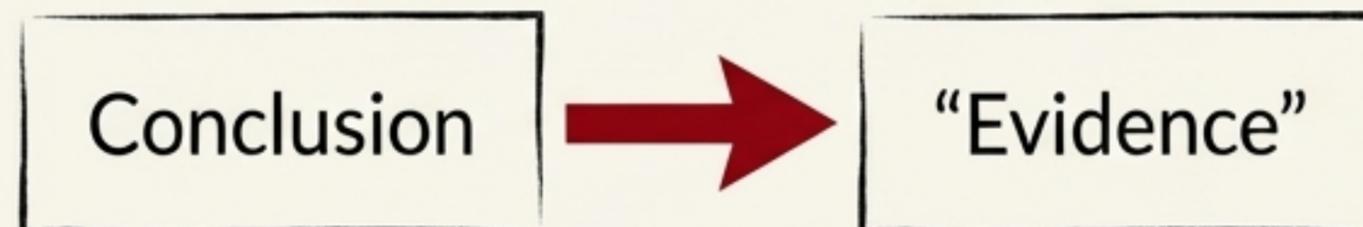
Kerry Muhlestein, PhD, BYU Egyptologist

"I start out with an assumption that the book of Abraham...is true. Therefore any evidence I find I will try and fit into that paradigm."

Historical Method



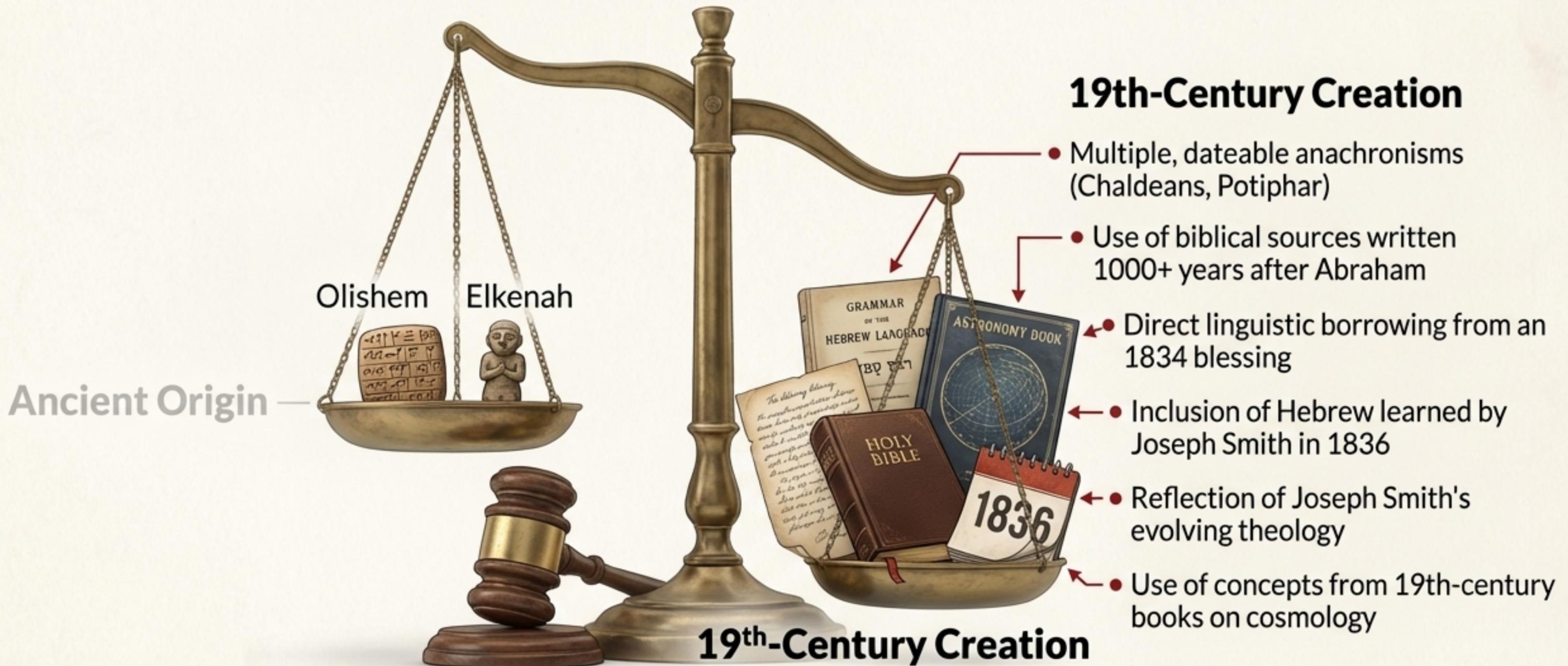
Apologetic Method



The Verdict: The Overwhelming Weight of Evidence



When examined forensically, the Book of Abraham's text does not contain the fingerprints of an ancient patriarch. Instead, it is covered in the unmistakable fingerprints of a 19th-century author.



A Case of 19th-Century Pseudepigrapha

The scholarly term for a work that attributes modern authorship to a revered ancient figure is “pseudepigrapha.” This practice was used to lend authority to new ideas. Respected Mormon historian Richard Bushman reached this same conclusion about the Book of Abraham.

“From a modern scholarly perspective, Moses, along with a later translation of the book of Abraham, looks less like a translation of the Bible than a major variant on... **pseudepigrapha** ... writings that had a Biblical ring... but for reasons both theological and political **did not make it into the canon.**”

— Richard Bushman, PhD