

## **News reporter interviewing a scholar who has dedicated a great deal of study to the content and origins of the books in the Pearl of Great Price.**

Reporter:

Why did Joseph Smith say he had translated the writings of Abraham even though the manuscripts do not date from Abraham's time?

Scholar:

The Prophet Joseph Smith never claimed the papyri were indeed the writings of Abraham. He said the book of Abraham was "a translation of some ancient Records that have fallen into our hands, from the Catacombs of Egypt, purporting to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt" (Times and Seasons, Mar. 1, 1842, 704).

"In 1966 eleven fragments of papyri once possessed by the Prophet Joseph Smith were discovered in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. They were given to the Church and have been analyzed by scholars who date them between about 100 B.C. and A.D. 100. A common objection to the authenticity of the book of Abraham is that the manuscripts are not old enough to have been written by Abraham, who lived almost two thousand years before Christ. Joseph Smith never claimed that the papyri were autographic (written by Abraham himself), nor that they dated from the time of Abraham. It is common to refer to an author's works as 'his' writings, whether he penned them himself, dictated them to others, or others copied his writings later" (The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual, 28).

Reporter:

What did Joseph Smith do with his translation?

Scholar:

"The book of Abraham was originally published a few excerpts at a time in Times and Seasons, a Church publication, beginning in March 1842 at Nauvoo, Illinois (see [the introduction] at the beginning of the Pearl of Great Price). The Prophet Joseph Smith indicated that he would publish more of the book of Abraham later, but he was martyred before he was able to do so. Concerning the potential length of the completed translation, Oliver Cowdery once said that 'volumes' would be necessary to contain it (see Messenger and Advocate, Dec. 1835, 236).

"In addition to hieroglyphic writings, the manuscript also contained Egyptian drawings. On 23 February 1842, the Prophet Joseph Smith asked Reuben Hedlock, a professional wood engraver and member of the Church, to prepare woodcuts of three of those drawings so they could be printed. Hedlock finished the engravings in one week, and Joseph Smith published the copies (facsimiles) along with the book of Abraham. Joseph Smith's explanations of the drawings accompany the facsimiles" (The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual, 28–29).

Reporter:

What happened to the mummies and the papyri?

Scholar:

“After the death of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the four mummies and the papyri became the property of Joseph’s widowed mother, Lucy Mack Smith” (The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual, 29). After Lucy Mack Smith died, the collection was sold to a man named Abel Combs. The collection may have been sold by Joseph Smith’s wife Emma, or it may have been sold by his brother William. Mr. Combs sold some of the collection to a museum in St. Louis, Missouri. He retained other portions and later gave some of them away. (See The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual, 29; H. Donl Peterson, *The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism* [1995], 204–9, 257.)

“Several theories have been offered regarding what happened ... to the mummies and the papyri. It appears that at least two of the mummies were burned in the great Chicago fire of 1871 (see B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. [1909–11], 2:380–382).

“In the early spring of 1966, Dr. Aziz S. Atiya, a University of Utah professor, [brought to the attention of the Church several fragments of the Joseph Smith papyri that were located] at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. These fragments were presented to the Church by the director of the museum on 27 November 1967. The current whereabouts of the other mummies and the other portions of the papyri are unknown [see H. Donl Peterson, “Some Joseph Smith Papyri Rediscovered (1967),” in *Studies in Scripture, Volume Two: The Pearl of Great Price*, ed. Robert L. Millett and Kent P. Jackson (1985), 183–85]” (The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual, 29).