



Type: Book Chapter

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## Historical Overview

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**Joseph Smith Papyrus I** (in current condition). The vignette is the original of Facsimile 1 of the Book of Abraham. The hieroglyphs on the right give the name, titles, and genealogy of Hor, the original owner of the manuscript.



# 1

## *Historical Overview*

### **Early History of the Papyri**

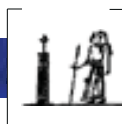
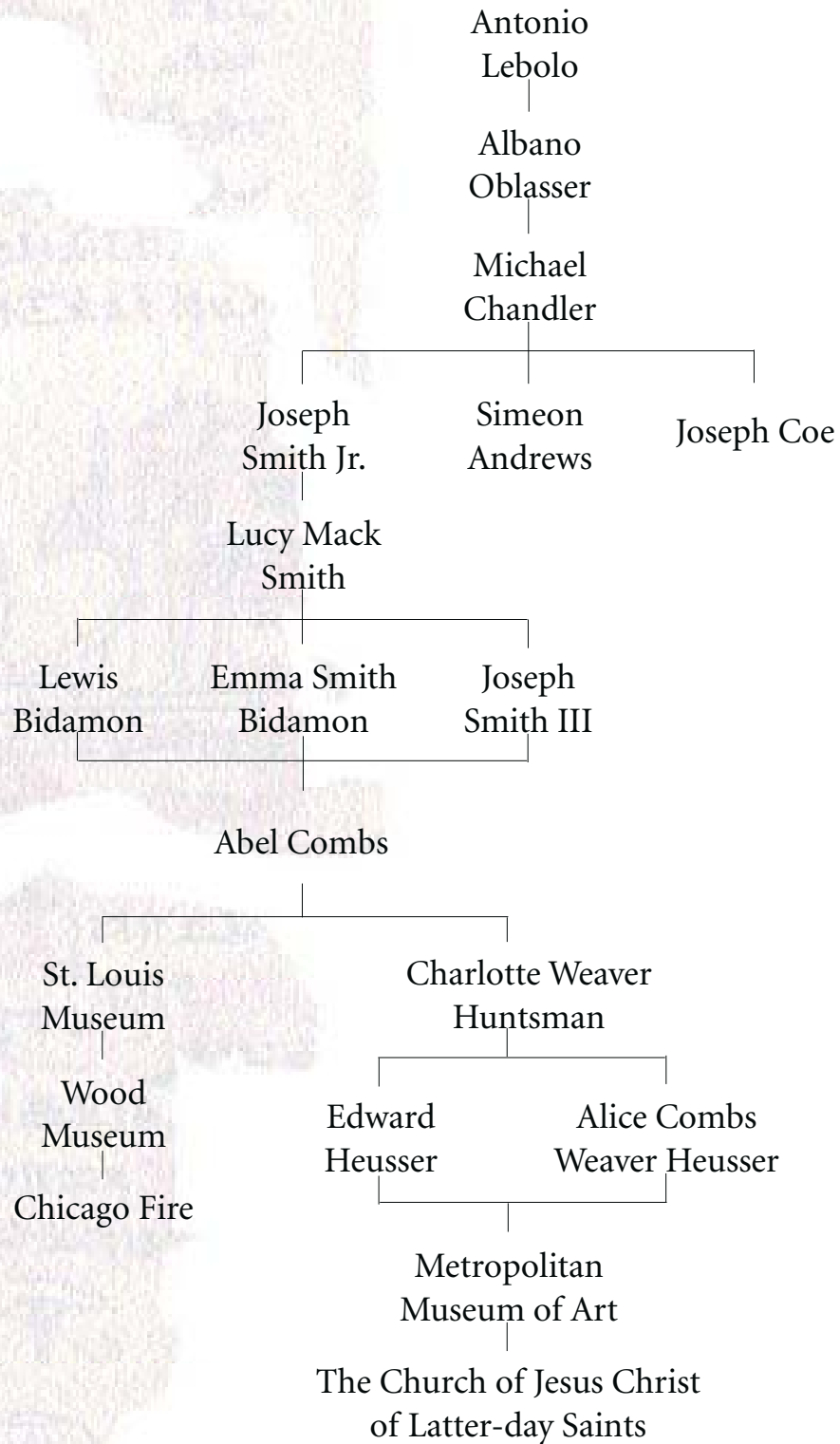
In the early part of the nineteenth century, Antonio Lebolo, an antiquities dealer working under the consul general of Egypt, plundered several tombs in Thebes in southern Egypt. Some of the antiquities he sold; others he kept. Among those he kept were eleven mummies that he brought home to Italy.

After Lebolo's death, his family sent the mummies through the shipping company of Albano Oblasser to sell in America to the highest bidder. The highest bidder was Michael Chandler, who, having failed to find valuables inside the mummies other than some papyri, took them around as part of a traveling curiosity show. After two years on the road, Chandler's mummy show reached Kirtland, Ohio, then





## Owners of the Papyri

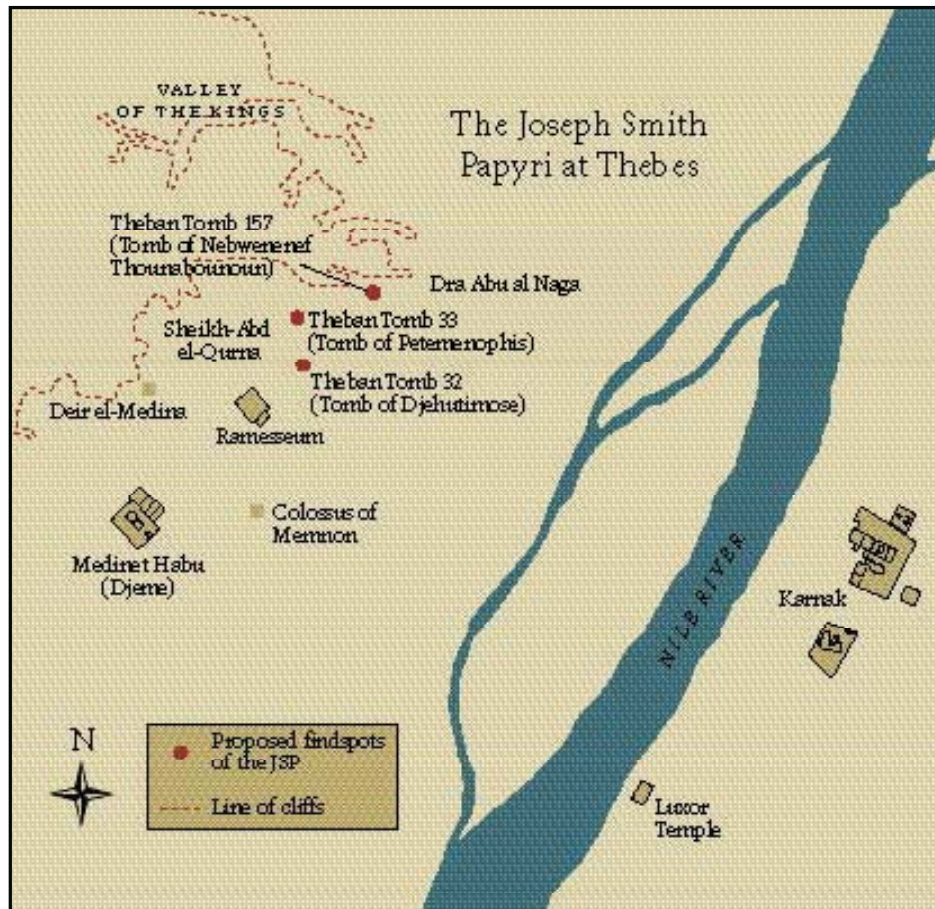




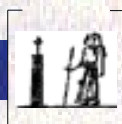


the headquarters of the fledgling Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Smith, prophet of the church, examined the several papyrus rolls and, after commencing “the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics,” said that “one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc.”<sup>2</sup> In early July of 1835, Joseph Coe, Simeon Andrews, Joseph Smith, and others paid Chandler \$2400 for four mummies and at least five papyrus documents, including two or more rolls<sup>3</sup> (see charts on pages 10–13).



Several locations where Antonio Lebolo could have found the Joseph Smith Papyri are indicated.





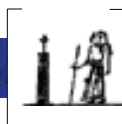
## History of the Translation of the Book of Abraham

Joseph Smith began translating the papyri in early July 1835. The current text of the Book of Abraham was translated by the end of the month. He left off translation in August 1835 to visit the Saints in Michigan.<sup>4</sup> Revelation pertaining to the Book of Abraham was not received again until 1 October 1835.<sup>5</sup> Translation continued through 25 November 1835, but Joseph then set aside the papyri to study Hebrew, finish the Kirtland temple and dedicate it, and, later, deal with troubles in Missouri. While Joseph slightly revised the translation preparatory to its publication in 1842, there is no other evidence that he worked on the translation of the existing Book of Abraham after 1835 (see chart on opposite page).

We have no firsthand evidence that Joseph Smith used the Urim and Thummim or a seer stone in translating the Book of Abraham. Nor did Joseph apparently use any grammars or dictionaries in preparing his translations. Joseph Smith himself never discussed how he translated the Book of Abraham. Nevertheless, Warren Parrish, one of the scribes involved in the translation during late 1835, stated, “I have set [*sic*] by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Hieroglyphicks [*sic*] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration of Heaven.”<sup>6</sup>

## History of the Publication of the Book of Abraham

In early 1842 Joseph Smith, Willard Richards, and Reuben Hedlock prepared the text for publication in the *Times and Seasons*. Only three installments were published, which included about one quarter of what Joseph Smith translated. Unfortunately the location of the original manuscripts of his





## Timeline for the Translation and Publication of the Book of Abraham

First Translation Period	<b>3 July 1835</b>	Michael Chandler arrives in Kirtland with the mummies.
	<b>6 July 1835</b>	Michael Chandler issues certificate to Joseph Smith about his translation abilities. Some of the Saints in Kirtland purchase mummies.
	<b>July 1835</b>	Joseph Smith translates the Book of Abraham.
Second Translation Period	<b>1 Oct. 1835</b>	With Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, Joseph Smith receives revelation about the system of astronomy (Facsimile 2).
	<b>7 Oct. 1835</b>	Joseph Smith recommences translating the Book of Abraham.
	<b>29 Oct. 1835</b>	Warren Parrish hired as scribe.
	<b>19 Nov. 1835</b>	Translation
	<b>24 Nov. 1835</b>	Translation
	<b>25 Nov. 1835</b>	Translation
	<b>26 Nov. 1835</b>	Translation
Publication Period	<b>19–26 Feb. 1842</b>	Type is set for the first installment of the Book of Abraham.
	<b>23 Feb. 1842</b>	Joseph Smith commissions Reuben Hedlock to make cuts to accompany the Book of Abraham in the <i>Times and Seasons</i> .
	<b>1 Mar. 1842</b>	First installment of the Book of Abraham is published in the <i>Times and Seasons</i> (vol. 3, no. 9, containing Abraham 1:1–2:18 and Facsimile 1).
	<b>4 Mar. 1842</b>	Joseph Smith shows Reuben Hedlock the papyri so he can make the cut for Facsimile 2, illustrating the principles of astronomy.
	<b>8 Mar. 1842</b>	Joseph Smith revises translation of the Book of Abraham.
	<b>9 Mar. 1842</b>	Joseph Smith continues revisions.
	<b>15 Mar. 1842</b>	Second installment of the Book of Abraham is published in the <i>Times and Seasons</i> (vol. 3, no. 10, containing Abraham 2:19–5:21 and Facsimile 2).
	<b>16 Mar. 1842</b>	Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham is published in





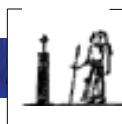
translation is presently unknown and thus about three quarters of Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Abraham is lost. The three facsimiles made to accompany the translation of the Book of Abraham were cut to actual size by Reuben Hedlock.

In 1851 Franklin D. Richards, then the newest apostle of the church and the new president of the European Mission headquartered in England, found that the church members in England—the location with the largest concentration of Latter-day Saints in the world at the time—had almost no church literature. Elder Richards included the Book of Abraham in “a choice selection from the revelations, translations, and narrations of Joseph Smith,” published as *The Pearl of Great Price*.<sup>7</sup> It was “not adapted, nor designed, as a pioneer of the faith among unbelievers”; instead it was designed for the Saints to “increase their ability to maintain and to defend the holy faith by becoming possessors of it.”<sup>8</sup> The facsimiles of the Book of Abraham were recut with this edition and succeeding editions, becoming increasingly more inaccurate with subsequent editions.

In 1878 the Pearl of Great Price was published in Utah. Two years later it was canonized by a vote of the general conference. The longest-used edition was published in 1907; it had the most inaccurate copies of the facsimiles and continued to be used until the 1981 English edition restored Hedlock's original facsimiles. The 1981 edition has been the standard edition ever since (see chart on opposite page).

### Later History of the Papyri

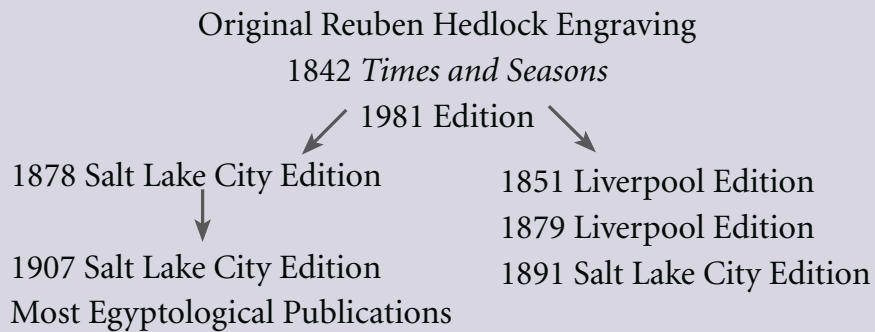
When Joseph Smith bought the papyri, the outer ends of the papyrus scrolls were already damaged. To prevent further







## Publication History of the Hypocephalus



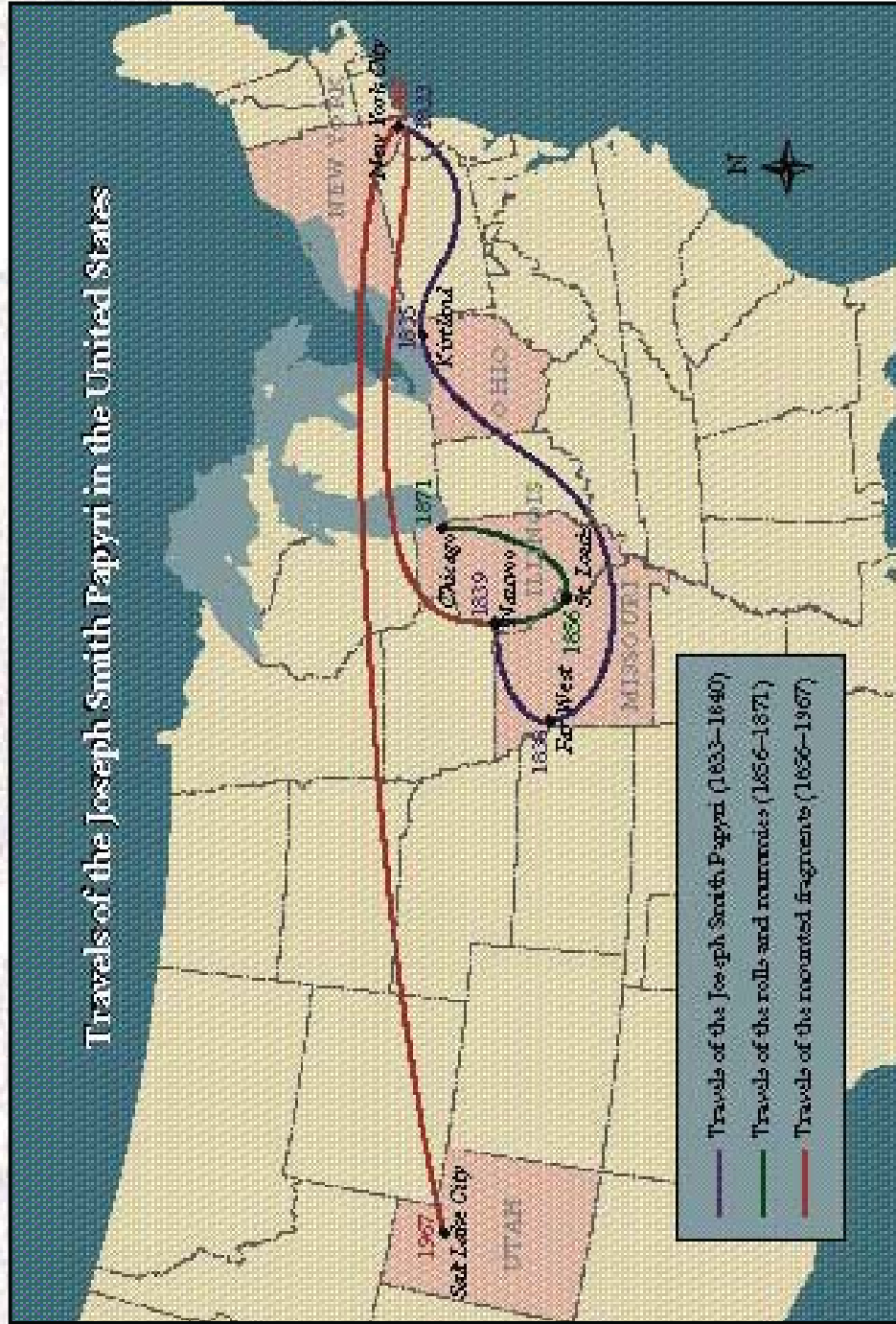
**PURPLE:** only in 1842 edition; **BLUE:** not in 1851 edition;  
**RED:** not in 1878 or 1907 edition; **GREEN:** not in 1907 edition.

While the original facsimiles of the Book of Abraham were made directly from the papyri, later copies were not and have progressively deteriorated, as illustrated here by Facsimile 2. Lines and figures that are missing from each edition are marked in color. Figures missing from the 1878 edition are also not on the 1907 edition. The illustration does not show distortions in the proportions in various editions.



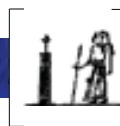


## Travels of the Joseph Smith Papyri in the United States



This map illustrates the travels of the Joseph Smith Papyri to various locations. After 1856 the collection was split into two groups. Routes shown are not exact. Only key dates are indicated.

damage, the outside portions of some of the papyri were separated from their rolls, mounted on paper, and placed in glass frames. The remainder of the rolls were kept intact.





In Nauvoo Joseph Smith turned over the mummies and papyri to his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, to free himself from the obligation of exhibiting the papyri and to provide his widowed mother with means to support herself. She kept the mummies and papyri for the rest of her life, exhibiting them to interested visitors for twenty-five cents a person. On 26 May 1856, less than two weeks after Mother Smith died, Emma Smith (Joseph's widow), her second husband, Lewis C. Bidamon, and her son, Joseph Smith III, sold the mummies and the papyri to Abel Combs.<sup>9</sup>

Abel Combs split up the papyri. Some he sold to the St. Louis Museum, including at least two of the rolls and at least two of the mummies; some of the mounted fragments he kept. The St. Louis Museum sold the rolls and mummies to the Wood Museum in Chicago. The Wood Museum burned down in the Chicago Fire of 1871, and presumably the papyri and mummies were destroyed with it. The mounted fragments passed from Abel Combs to the hands of Edward and Alice Heusser. In 1918 Alice Heusser offered the papyri to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. At the time, the museum was not interested. In 1947 Ludlow Bull, the associate curator of the Department of Egyptian Art, purchased the papyri for the Metropolitan Museum from Edward Heusser. On 27 November 1967 the Metropolitan Museum presented the fragments of the papyri to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The church published the papyri two months later in the *Improvement Era*;<sup>10</sup> the current numbering system of the papyri derives from this publication. To the disappointment of many, while these remaining fragments contained the original drawing for Facsimile 1, they were not the portion of the papyri that contained the text of the Book of Abraham (see charts on pages 10–13).





## An Overview of the Papyri

Document	Known Contents	Estimated Original Dimensions
Papyrus of Hor	Owner's name, titles, genealogy; Facsimile 1 from the Book of Abraham; the Book of Breathings Made by Isis (only 4 of an original 6 columns remain); Facsimile 3; and another text of which only the opening words ("Beginning of the Book of . . .") have been preserved.	13 cm x 320 cm (13 cm x 68 cm is still extant)
Papyrus of Semminis	Book of the Dead chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 53, 54, 57, 63, 65, 67, 70, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89, 91, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 110, 125, and other unidentified texts.	32 cm x 320 or 640 cm (now 32 cm x 117 cm)
Papyrus of Noufianoub	Vignette for the Book of the Dead 125 and other unidentified texts.	32 cm x 320 cm (now 32 cm x 33 cm)
Papyrus of Amenophis	Book of the Dead 45 and other unidentified texts.	32 cm x 320 cm
Hypocephalus of Sheshonq	Facsimile 2 (hypocephalus).	19 cm x 20 cm

\*<sup>m</sup> = male; <sup>f</sup> = female







## That Joseph Smith Owned<sup>11</sup>

Preserved Fragments	Disposition of Fragments	Ancient Owner
JSP I, XI, and X	Outer fragments from the roll remain. The inner portion of the roll, including Facsimile 3, was destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871.	Hor ( <i>hr</i> ) <sup>m*</sup> , son of Osoroeris ( <i>wsir-wr</i> ) <sup>m</sup> and Chibois ( <i>t3y-ly-bi3.t</i> ) <sup>f</sup>  a
JSP VII, VIII, V, VI, IV, and II. The fragments in JSP IX are scattered throughout.	Some fragments from the roll remain. The inner portion of the roll was probably destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871.	Semminis ( <i>t3-šr.t-mn</i> ) <sup>f</sup> , daughter of Eshkons ( <i>ns-hnsw</i> ) <sup>f</sup>
JSP IIIa–b	Unknown; perhaps destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871.	Noufianoub ( <i>nfr-ir.t-nwb</i> ) <sup>f</sup>
None	Unknown; perhaps destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871.	Amenophis ( <i>imn-ḥtp</i> ) <sup>m</sup> , son of Tanoub ( <i>t3-nwb</i> ) <sup>f</sup>
Facsimile 2	Unknown; perhaps destroyed in the Chicago Fire of 1871.	Sesonchis ( <i>ššnq</i> ) <sup>m</sup>

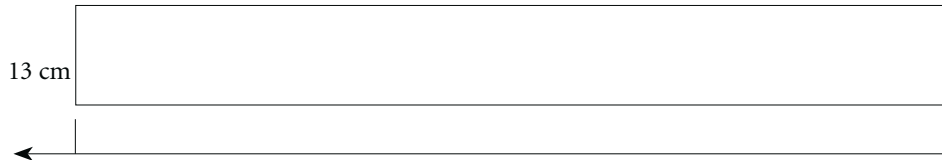




## Original Extent of the Joseph Smith Papyri\*

### Scroll of Hor

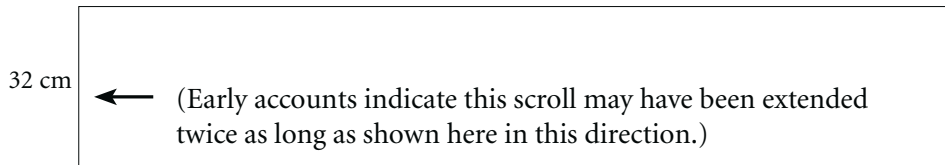
320 cm (about 10 feet)



To the Wood Museum in Chicago (1864) and destroyed in the Chicago Fire (1871)

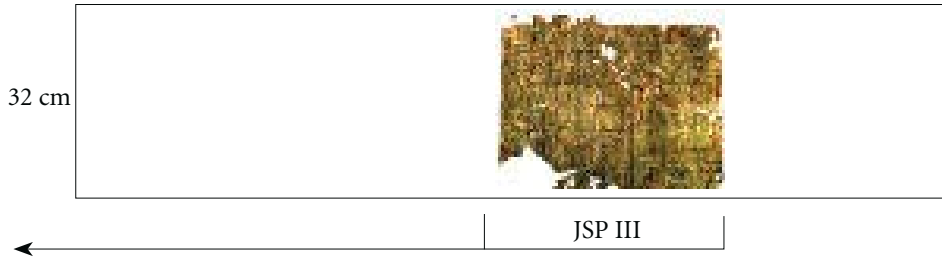
### Scroll of Semminis

320 cm



### Scroll of Noufianoub

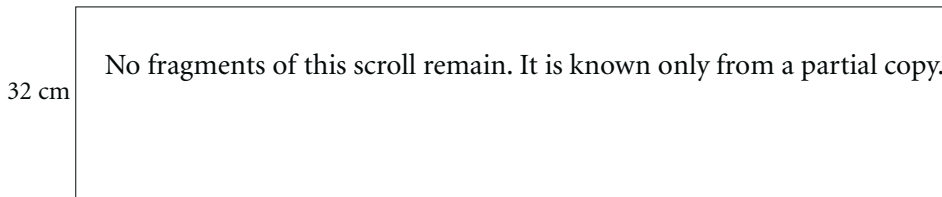
320 cm



To the Metropolitan Museum of Art (1947) and then the LDS Church (1967)

### Scroll of Amenophis

320 cm



### Hypocephalus of Sheshonq (original now missing)

