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The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham

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Joseph Smith Papyrus IV (in current condition). This fragment, from a papyrus originally belonging to a woman named Semminis, contains text and vignettes from Book of the Dead chapters 91, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, and 106. In the nineteenth century, fragments from other papyri were glued in to patch holes.



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The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham

The facsimiles of the Book of Abraham and their interpretation have sparked considerable discussion. We may divide these into discussions over the copying and interpretation of the facsimiles.

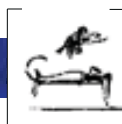
There is some evidence to indicate that the papyri containing the facsimiles of the Book of Abraham were already damaged when Joseph Smith obtained them. The original of Facsimile 1 is now in bad condition with many missing areas, and much debate has focused on guessing how much of the damage occurred after Joseph Smith owned the papyrus. A sketch of Facsimile 2 made in 1842, probably by Willard Richards, shows areas of that facsimile that were damaged. Facsimile 3 was apparently destroyed in the Chicago Fire but seems to have been largely intact when Joseph Smith had it.





The original facsimiles were engraved to size by Reuben Hedlock in 1842. Comparison of the remaining portions of Joseph Smith Papyrus I with the original publication of Facsimile 1 shows that Hedlock produced a careful, faithful—though not entirely photographically accurate—copy of the papyrus. Later versions of the facsimiles were not as carefully copied as Hedlock’s. The most inaccurate versions of the facsimiles were originally published in the 1907 edition of the Pearl of Great Price and perpetuated until the 1981 edition, which returned to Hedlock’s engraving (see chart on page 7). Unfortunately, many Egyptological publications, contrary to their normal epigraphic standards, continue to use the 1907 edition of the facsimiles instead of the 1842 or 1981 edition.

It has been constant practice to compare and contrast Joseph Smith’s explanations of the facsimiles with those of modern Egyptologists. Joseph Smith’s “explanations” (found on the adjoining pages in the Pearl of Great Price) are short statements that serve as a key to identify the figures. The use of the facsimiles as illustrations of the Book of Abraham is dependent on the text of the Book of Abraham. Only the subject illustrated by Facsimile 1 corresponds with the text of the Book of Abraham; the other facsimiles correspond to portions of the Book of Abraham that were not published. Egyptological interpretations of the facsimiles begin with the assumption that the facsimiles are standard illustrations for funerary texts. These interpretations are often hampered by the lack of good recent Egyptological studies of the class of illustrations to which the various facsimiles belong. Comparisons between Joseph Smith’s explanations and those of the ancient Egyptians are generally hampered by insufficient attention to the prob-





A Brief Outline of the Contents of the Book of Abraham

The following is an overview of the contents of the Book of Abraham. Although Joseph Smith did not publish the entire Book of Abraham, some of the contents may be inferred from the facsimiles and other statements in the Book of Abraham; these inferences are placed in square brackets.

1. Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees (see Abraham 1:1–2:4)
 - a. Sacrifice of Abraham (see Abraham 1:5–20)
 - b. Egyptian History of Abraham’s day (see Abraham 1:20–28)
2. Abraham’s Travels in Syria and Canaan (see Abraham 2:4–?)
 - a. Abrahamic Covenant (see Abraham 2:6–13)
 - b. Abraham’s Travels in Canaan (see Abraham 2:14–21)
 - c. Sacrifice of Sarah (see Abraham 2:21–25)
 - d. Abraham’s Vision (see Abraham 3:1–5:21)
 - i. Astronomy Lesson (see Abraham 3:1–19)
 - ii. Premortal existence (see Abraham 3:20–28)
 - iii. Creation (see Abraham 4:1–5:21)
 - iv. [Fall] (inferred from Abraham 1:31)
 - e. [Nature of the Cosmos] (inferred from Abraham 1:31; Facsimile 2)
3. [Travels in Egypt] (implied in Abraham 2:21–22, Facsimile 3)
 - a. [Abraham in Pharaoh’s court] (Facsimile 3)

lems involved in such comparisons: (1) We only know what Joseph Smith called the figures in the facsimiles, but we do not have corresponding portions of the Book of Abraham that would tell the story portrayed in two of the facsimiles. (2) Some individuals have paid insufficient attention to the evidence of what the Egyptians thought the facsimiles meant. In compar-



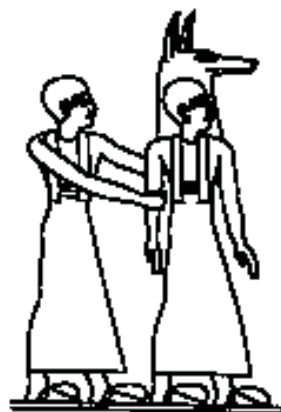


ing Joseph Smith’s understanding of the facsimiles with ancient Egyptian understanding of the facsimiles, we are comparing two unknowns. While some (but not all) studies by Latter-day Saints have been overeager to find similarities between Joseph Smith’s explanations of various figures and those of Egyptologists, studies by critics have generally been unwilling to grant that Joseph Smith could have gotten anything correct, even by coincidence. Additionally, most studies of the facsimiles (whether looking at Joseph Smith’s or ancient Egyptian interpretations) have suffered from merely identifying the parts without exploring how those parts interact to form a whole.

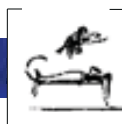
While it would be impossible to briefly summarize the debate on the facsimiles, the principal issues relating to each of the facsimiles have been as follows:

Facsimile 1: Every figure in this facsimile has been discussed

somewhere. Because the papyrus in its present state is not as complete as Facsimile 1, however, contro-



Right: Ptolemaic period drawing from the temple of Dendara depicting priests as both being bald and wearing jackal masks. Left: Example of such a mask (with eyeholes) now in the collection of the Römer und Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim, Germany.





Facsimile 1 of the Book of Abraham.

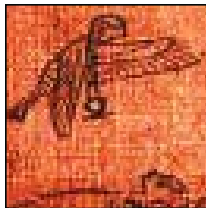
versy here has focused on whether the heads of figures 1 and 3 have been restored correctly, whether there was a knife in the hand of figure 3, and whether figure 2 had two hands or one. Some have argued that figure 1 should have a human head and figure 3 should have a jackal's head. A variety of restorations have been suggested for figure 2, usually replacing one of the hands with a bird (even though Egyptians at that time period did not draw birds' wings that way; see chart on page 38) and replacing the knife with some other object, varying from the innocuous to the obscene. The discussion about figure 3 has centered on whether the head should be that of a jackal or a bald



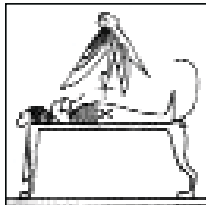


Wing or Hand?

Wings



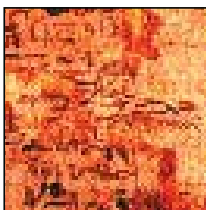
JSP VI. Typical wing feathers are outlined.



Book of the Dead 89 from P. Turin. No feathers are indicated.



Book of the Dead 157 from P. Turin. Another typical wing.



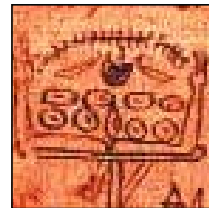
JSP IV. Feathers go down, not out.



JSP I

Because Joseph Smith Papyrus I currently has a hole where the arms should be, some have suggested that the upper ink traces are those of a wing rather than a hand. A hand, however, is the only possibility—first because wings were not drawn that way at the time the papyrus was made, and second because of the clear thumb stroke at the bottom of both hands, which is not characteristic of a wing. So similar are the two hands that they can easily be superimposed one on top of the other. Neither hand resembles the adjacent wing.

Hands



JSP IV. Note how the thumbs are outlined.



JSP I. Note that the wing is not drawn the same way as the hands.

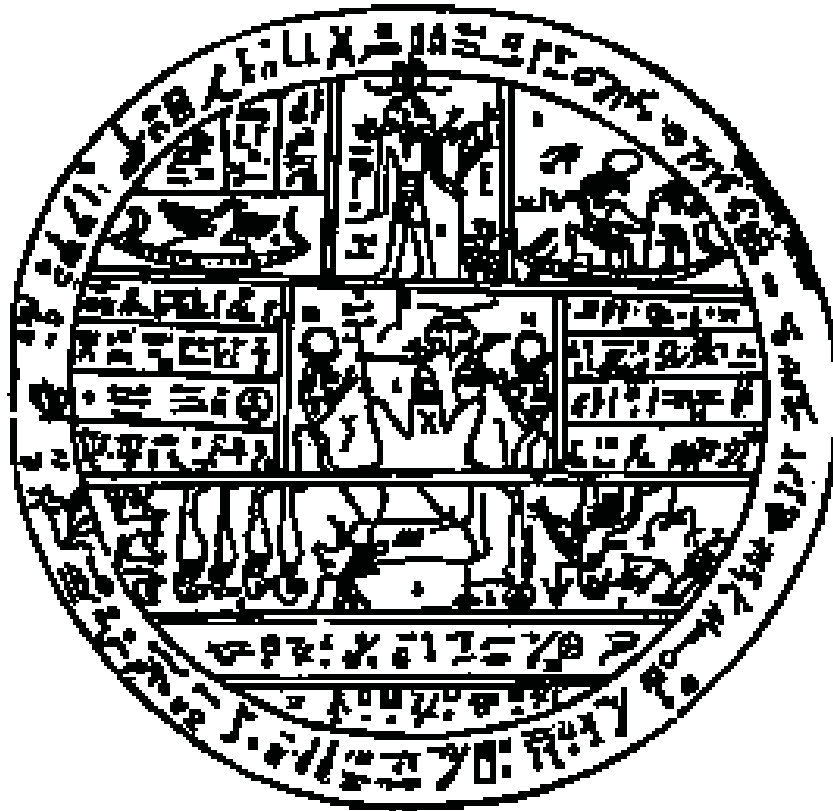


Strokes used in making JSP I.



The two hands superimposed on each other.





Facsimile 2 of the Book of Abraham.

man. Whether the head is a jackal or a bald man in no way affects the interpretation of the figure, however, since in either case the figure would be a priest.¹³ The presence of a knife in the hand of figure 3, while unusual, is attested by certain observers when the papyri were still intact and by one observer before Facsimile 1 was made.¹⁴ Issues concerning the accuracy of both the artwork and the copying are routinely clouded by shifting the responsibility of the artwork from the engraver, Reuben Hedlock, to Joseph Smith, without adducing any evidence to identify a particular individual with the responsibility for the restorations.

Facsimile 2: This facsimile has attracted much attention because of its round shape and complicated Greek name, hypo-





Figure 7 from Cairo CG 9446, the only known ancient Egyptian identification of figure 7 on a hypocephalus: “the great god.”

as though it were out of place, but they fail to acknowledge that the figure finds parallels in several hypocephali. Certain sectarians have also focused on the identification of figure 7 (God sitting upon his throne), although their normal identification of that figure finds no support in any known hypocephali: the only known ancient Egyptian identification of figure 7 is “the great god.”¹⁶ Although it is generally acknowledged that there is a connection between hypocephali and Book of the Dead chapter 162, the specific relationships remain inadequately explored.

Facsimile 3: Facsimile 3 has received the least attention. The principal complaint raised by the critics has been regarding the female attire worn by figures 2 and 4, who are identified as male royalty. It has been documented, however, that on certain occasions, for certain ritual purposes, some Egyptian men dressed up as women.¹⁷

cephalus. Nearly every figure in this facsimile has been discussed in various places, with arguments for and against the explanations provided. Joseph Smith’s identification of figure 6 as the four quarters of the earth finds substantiation in Egyptological literature.¹⁵ Some have focused attention on how figure 3 (God sitting upon his throne) is drawn





Facsimile 3 of the Book of Abraham.

