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## Editors' Introduction

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Latter-day Saint interest in Abraham was heightened in 1835, when members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints purchased several Egyptian mummies and, with them, ancient documents from which the Book of Abraham resulted. In March 1842 the church's newspaper, *Times and Seasons*, published the book in two installments. In 1851, while in Liverpool, England, Franklin D. Richards published a small collection of Joseph Smith's writings, including the translation of the Book of Abraham, which he entitled the Pearl of Great Price. The book was republished, with additional materials, in Salt Lake City in 1878. Two years later, at the October general conference of the church, it was officially canonized. Since that time, the Book of Abraham has been included among the standard works, or scriptures, of the Latter-day Saints.

Interest in the Book of Abraham increased when in 1968 some of the original papyri held by Joseph Smith were discovered and turned over to the Church of Jesus Christ. Much of the work on the papyri has been done by the incomparable Hugh Nibley, who has shown us that the Book of Abraham, which goes beyond the Abraham story in Genesis, finds support in various ancient traditions regarding the patriarch.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, many of the ancient texts have been unavailable to the general membership of the Church of Jesus Christ. This present book assembles various Abraham accounts for the first time, including English translations of Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Latin, Persian, Coptic, and Egyptian texts.

Of these texts, only the *Book of Jasher* was known to early members of the church. The first English translation appeared in 1840, after Joseph Smith had already produced the

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1. In particular, see Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975); *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000). At this writing, Nibley is working on another volume dealing with the Book of Abraham, *One Eternal Round*.

text we have of the Book of Abraham but before its publication (in 1842).<sup>2</sup> After the Book of Abraham was published, it was noted in the *Times and Seasons* that “if we believe in present revelation, as published in the *Times and Seasons* last spring, Abraham, the prophet of the Lord, was laid upon the iron bedstead<sup>3</sup> for slaughter; and the book of Jasher, which has not been disproved as a bad author, says he was cast into the fire of the Chaldees.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Book of Abraham, the Parallel Genesis Account, and Nonbiblical Tradition

Interest in nonbiblical Abraham traditions likely began almost as soon as the Book of Abraham appeared in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842. In its published form the Book of Abraham can be readily compared with the Genesis account of the early life of Abraham. From this comparison one can see many significant variances between the two accounts, as the following comparison shows (differences are in bold).

### Comparison of the Abraham Accounts of Genesis and the Book of Abraham

#### Genesis 11:28–29, 12:1, 11:31

28. And **Haran died** before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.

29. And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram’s wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor’s wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.

12:1. Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

#### Abraham 2:1–7

1. Now the Lord God **caused the famine to wax sore in the land of Ur, inso-much that Haran, my brother, died;** but Terah, my father, yet lived in the land of Ur, of the Chaldees.

2. And it came to pass that I, Abraham, took Sarai to wife, and Nahor, my brother, took Milcah to wife, who was the daughter of Haran.

3. Now the Lord had said unto me: Abraham, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee.

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2. “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.” John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 4. Cf. chart on p. 5.

3. Abraham 1:13 mentions a bedstead but does not suggest that it was made of iron. The author of the article was evidently influenced by the “iron bedstead” of Og, king of Bashan, mentioned in Deuteronomy 3:11.

4. *Times and Seasons* 3 (Sept. 1842): 902.



11:31. And **Terah took Abram** his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; **and they went** forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

4. Therefore **I left** the land of Ur, of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and **I took** Lot, my brother's son, and his wife, and Sarai my wife; **and also my father followed after me**, unto the land which we denominated Haran.

5. And the famine abated; and my father tarried in Haran and dwelt there, as there were many flocks in Haran; and my father turned again unto his idolatry, therefore he continued in Haran.

6. But I, Abraham, and Lot, my brother's son, prayed unto the Lord, and the Lord appeared unto me, and said unto me: Arise, and take Lot with thee; for I have purposed to take thee away out of Haran, and to make of thee a minister to bear my name in a strange land which I will give unto thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession, when they hearken to my voice.

7. For I am the Lord thy God; I dwell in heaven; the earth is my footstool; I stretch my hand over the sea, and it obeys my voice; I cause the wind and the fire to be my chariot; I say to the mountains—Depart hence—and behold, they are taken away by a whirlwind, in an instant, suddenly.

#### Genesis 12:2–5

2. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

#### Abraham 2:8–17

8. My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my hand shall be over thee.

9. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee **above measure**, and make thy name great **among all nations**, and thou shalt be a blessing **unto thy seed after thee, that in their hands**

**they shall bear this ministry and Priesthood unto all nations;**

10. And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father;

11. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee; and in thee **(that is, in thy Priesthood) and in thy seed (that is, thy Priesthood), for I give unto thee a promise that this right shall continue in thee, and in thy seed after thee (that is to say, the literal seed, or the seed of the body) shall all the families of the earth be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal.**

12. Now, after the Lord had withdrawn from speaking to me, and withdrawn his face from me, I said in my heart: Thy servant has sought thee earnestly; now I have found thee;

13. Thou didst send thine angel to deliver me from the gods of Elkenah, and I will do well to hearken unto thy voice, therefore let thy servant rise up and depart in peace.

14. So I, Abraham, departed as the Lord had said unto me, and Lot with me; and I, Abraham, was **sixty and two years old** when I departed out of Haran.

15. And I took Sarai, whom I took to wife when I was in Ur, in Chaldea, and Lot, my brother's son, and all our substance that we had gathered, and the **souls that**

3. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee **shall all families of the earth be blessed** (cf. Doctrine and Covenants 132:29–33).

4. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was **seventy and five years old** when he departed out of Haran.

5. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the **souls that they had gotten** in Haran; and

they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

#### **Genesis 12:6–20**

6. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7. And the **Lord appeared unto Abram**, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.

8. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there **he builded an altar** unto the Lord, and **called upon the name of the Lord**.

**we had won** in Haran, and came forth in the way to the land of Canaan, and dwelt in tents as we came on our way;

16. Therefore, eternity was our covering and our rock and our salvation, as we journeyed from Haran by the way of Jershon, to come to the land of Canaan.

17. Now I, Abraham, built an altar in the land of Jershon, and made an offering unto the Lord, and prayed that the famine might be turned away from my father's house, that they might not perish.

#### **Abraham 2:18–25**

18. And then we passed from Jershon through the land unto the place of Sechem; it was situated in the plains of Moreh, and we had already come into the borders of the land of the Canaanites, and **I offered sacrifice there in the plains of Moreh, and called on the Lord devoutly, because we had already come into the land of this idolatrous nation**.

19. And the **Lord appeared unto me in answer to my prayers**, and said unto me: Unto thy seed will I give this land.

20. And I, Abraham, arose from the place of the altar which I had built unto the Lord, and removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched my tent there, Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east; and there **I built another altar** unto the Lord, and **called again upon the name of the Lord**.



9. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

10. And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

11. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that **he said unto Sarai his wife**, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon:

12. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

13. **Say, I pray thee**, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

14. And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair.

15. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

16. And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.

21. And I, Abraham, journeyed, going on still towards the south; and there was a continuation of a famine in the land; and I, Abraham, concluded to go down into Egypt, to sojourn there, for the famine became very grievous.

22. And it came to pass when I was come near to enter into Egypt, **the Lord said unto me**: Behold, Sarai, thy wife, is a very fair woman to look upon;

23. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see her, they will say—She is his wife; and they will kill you, but they will save her alive; therefore see that ye do on this wise:

24. **Let her say** unto the Egyptians, she is thy sister, and thy soul shall live.

25. And it came to pass that **I, Abraham, told Sarai, my wife, all that the Lord had said unto me**—Therefore say unto them, I pray thee, thou art my sister, that it may be well with me for thy sake, and my soul shall live because of thee.

17. And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram's wife.

18. And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife?

19. Why saidst thou, She is my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take her, and go thy way.

20. And Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

As can be seen above, only Abraham 2 can be directly compared with Genesis 11 and 12. A number of elements or themes in Abraham 2 are not found in the biblical account. The following list provides twelve of these elements and themes from the Book of Abraham verses noted in the comparison:

1. A famine struck Abraham's homeland (Abraham 2:1, 5).
2. Haran died in the famine (Abraham 2:1).
3. Terah, after repenting, returned to his idols (Abraham 2:5).
4. Believers are the seed of Abraham and are blessed through him (Abraham 2:10–11).
5. Abraham held the priesthood (Abraham 2:9, 11).
6. Abraham sought God earnestly (Abraham 2:12).
7. An angel came to rescue Abraham (Abraham 2:13).
8. Abraham was familiar with Egyptian idols (Abraham 2:13; 3:20).
9. Abraham was sixty-two years old when he left Haran, not seventy-five as Genesis says (Abraham 2:14).
10. Abraham made converts in Haran (Abraham 2:15).
11. Abraham prayed that God would end the famine in Chaldea (Abraham 2:17).
12. The Lord instructed Abraham to say that Sarah was his sister (Abraham 2:22–25).

Taken as a whole, the Abraham traditions contained in this book show that all of the elements in this list are attested in nonbiblical traditions to one degree or another. Some elements attested only in Abraham 2 but not in Genesis 11 and 12 appear regularly in nonbiblical texts. For instance, the themes of Terah's idolatry, an angel rescuing Abraham, and Abraham making converts in Haran are so well attested by a large cross section of traditions that it appears odd the biblical account does not include them. Abraham 1 and 3 are not attested at all in the Bible, yet they also contain elements that are well evidenced in nonbiblical traditions. Abraham 1 contains the sacrifice of Abraham, Abraham as a



record keeper, and the destruction of the idols, and Abraham 3 contains an account of Abraham's knowledge and use of astronomy.

As mentioned, since the publication of the Book of Abraham in 1842, Latter-day Saints, particularly General Authorities, have not only been aware of the Book of Abraham's distinctiveness when compared with the biblical account, but have also provided commentary on various occasions.

### Early LDS Treatment of Nonbiblical Abraham Traditions

At the October 1892 general conference of the church, Franklin D. Richards, the original compiler of the Pearl of Great Price, alluded to the *Book of Jasher* and similar accounts when he noted the existence of stories about Abraham not known from the Bible:

It was so with father Abraham. The Bible tells us but very little about him. Other histories inform us that so severe was his persecution, while yet an infant, that his mother had to take him and hide away in a cave of the earth; and his parents were so anxious concerning him that they carried food and sustained him and his mother for a long time. The sorcerers and the astrologers were stirred up to anxiety and curiosity, because there had another star appeared in the heavens at the birth of that boy Abraham. They thought it meant something, that it was significant, and it was whispered to the king, who tried to get the boy out of the way. Abraham's father, Terah, brought forth a child, by the king's command, from one of his other women, that was born just about the same time, and the king caused it to be destroyed. After awhile [*sic*] the mother of Abraham, thinking the anger of the king was appeased, ventured out with the boy.

Another history tells us that he was placed to dwell awhile with Shem, the good old patriarch, and lived several years with him, hid up and secluded, studying the things of God. He loved righteousness, and, hungering for more righteousness, got away from the idolatry of his relations, and even of his father's house, and was for some time studying the things of God in the houses of those early patriarchs that had just come through the flood. When he ventured to come out again, and it was found out that he was that same Abraham, the wrath of the king was aroused with double fury, and this time he was seized upon and put into a fiery furnace. The Bible does not tell us of this, but other histories do. The Mohammedan's bible [*sic*] tells him of it. It is in the Koran. Abraham was so dealt with by this persecution that he wondered where he could find a place on the earth, wherein he could dwell in safety. The Lord told him to get him up out of that country, and He would show him a place, a little way off, that he should have for his own some time.<sup>5</sup>

Other early Latter-day Saint leaders also recounted nonbiblical stories about Abraham.<sup>6</sup> John Taylor, evidently drawing on the *Book of Jasher*, mentioned such stories on several occasions:

5. Brian H. Stuy, ed., *Collected Discourses* (Sandy, Utah: BHS Publishing, 1989), 3:140–41.

6. Brigham Young declared that "Abraham was faithful to the true God, he overthrew the idols of his father and obtained the Priesthood after the order of Melchisedek" (*Journal of Discourses*, 11:118). Abraham 1:20 notes that "the Lord broke down the altar of Elkenah, and of the gods of the land, and



About this time a singular kind of personage appeared on the stage of action, named Abraham. He had been taught by his father to worship idols; but the Lord had manifested himself to him on certain occasions and instructed him in the true religion. . . . There is something humorous in a history that we have in relation to this personage. The priests of those days offered sacrifices to their gods, and, like the priests of these days, they were generally opposed to new revelation from God. Abraham's father had instructed him in the doctrines of these idols, and had sought to induce him to have faith in them and in their power, authority, and dominion, telling him what great personages they were. But Abraham, inspired by the Lord, went on a certain occasion into the temple of these gods and smote them right and left, upsetting and breaking them in pieces. His father came in and asked what he had been doing, what great sin this was that he had committed, why he was so sacrilegious in his feelings and so wicked as to seek to destroy these gods? Said he, "Father, I did not do anything to them, they quarreled among themselves and went to work fighting and knocked one another down, broke one another's heads and knocked off one another's arms and legs." "Oh," said his father, "my son do not tell me anything of that kind, for they are made of wood and they could not move or stir from their place nor knock one another down; it has been some other agency that has done it." "Why, father," said he, "would you worship a being that could not stir or move, that had hands and could not handle, that had legs and could not walk, a mouth that could not speak, and a head and it was of no use? Would you worship a being like that?" But nevertheless our history informs us that the priests were angry and stirred up his father against him. But the Lord inspired Abraham to leave there.<sup>7</sup>

On another occasion, in a talk given in Provo, Utah, John Taylor again addressed the subject of Abraham:

It reminds me of a story told of Abraham. It is said Abraham's father was an idolater, and that he had a number of gods in his house. This grieved Abraham, whilst his father wanted his son to believe and worship as he himself did; but Abraham knew better than to do such a thing. Abraham at last thought he would teach his father a lesson by making a clean sweep of his gods. So he got a club, or some other weapon, and knocked off the heads of some, the arms and legs of others, and made a general wreck among the idols, but left the biggest untouched. When Abraham's father learned what had happened, he of course was greatly exercised; he inquired of Abraham who had done it. Abraham told him that the gods had had a quarrel among themselves, "and," said he, "here is the fellow, (pointing to the big one he had spared) that did it." Said the father: "My son, why do you tell me such a thing. My gods cannot fight; they have legs, but they cannot walk; they have arms, but they cannot use them; they have eyes and ears, but they cannot see nor hear." "Why, father," said Abraham, "is it possible that you worship a god that cannot hear or see, walk or use himself at all?"<sup>8</sup>

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utterly destroyed them," but it does not attribute this act of destruction to Abraham, as do some of the extracanonical sources.

7. *Journal of Discourses*, 14:358–59.

8. *Journal of Discourses*, 22:307.



In the appendix to his book *Mediation and Atonement*, John Taylor referred to “the days of Pharaoh and Nimrod” and spoke of the introduction of idolatry, noting that

[For] the nations who scattered at Babel, the easiest thing for them to do was to worship their dead ancestors and the heavenly orbs. In due course naturally followed the framing of idols, which at first only represented the being or thing worshiped, but which were afterwards regarded as gods themselves, and as such revered. The idea of God’s anger at men’s sins, associated with the law of sacrifice, led mankind to believe that the more precious and beloved was the offering to him who offered it, the more acceptable would it be to heaven. As a result, men soon began to offer up their sons and their daughters to appease the wrath of their gods.<sup>9</sup>

He then quoted Abraham 1:8–11.

In an 1865 discourse, Wilford Woodruff tied the story of the Book of Abraham to the noncanonical accounts of Abraham’s destruction of his father’s idols:

Look at the days of Abraham, whose faith was so great that he was called the father of the faithful. He was an heir to the royal priesthood, another noble spirit, the friend of God. He came upon this earth, not in a way of light, but through idolatrous parents. His father was an idolator. I do not know who his grandfather was; but his father had false gods that he worshipped and sacrificed to. God inspired Abraham, and his eyes were opened so that he saw and understood something of the dealings of the Lord with the children of men. He understood that there was a God in heaven, a living and true God, and that no man should worship any other God but Him. These were the feelings of Abraham, and he taught his father’s house, and all around him, as far as he had the privilege. The consequence was, his father and the idolatrous priests of that day sought to take his life. In the book of Abraham, translated in our day and generation, we are informed that Abraham was bound, and those priests sought to take his life, but the Lord delivered him from them. One reason why they did so was, that he had gone into those places which his father considered sacred, and among the wooden gods which were there, and, being filled with anger that his father should bow down and worship gods of wood and stone, he broke them. When his father saw that his son Abraham had broken his gods he was very angry with him. But Abraham, trying to reason with his father, said that probably the gods had got to fighting among themselves and had killed one another. He tried to bring him to reason, but his father did not believe they had life enough to kill one another. If he had possessed the spirit which his son had, he would have said there is no power with these gods; but he did not, and Abraham had to flee from his father’s house, confiding in the Lord, who gave many promises to him and concerning his posterity.<sup>10</sup>

In January 1898 a San Francisco newspaper carried an account of “A Remarkable New Version of the Apocalypse of Abraham,” by Professor G. Nathanael Bonwetsch of the University of Goettingen, Germany, with a partial translation of the text from its original Old Slavonic manuscript. When the matter came to the attention of E. H. Anderson, a member of the Church of Jesus Christ, he suggested that the church’s *Improvement Era*

9. John Taylor, appendix to *The Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1882), 198.

10. *Journal of Discourses*, 11:244.



seek Professor Bonwetsch's permission to publish the text. Bonwetsch had translated the text into German and was planning, along with his colleague R. Seeberg, to publish it in a book then in preparation, but he agreed to allow Anderson to publish an English translation from the German in advance of the book. Consequently, the first Western publication of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which is included in this current collection, appeared in the *Improvement Era* during 1898,<sup>11</sup> followed by a brief comparison of the text of the *Apocalypse* with that of the Book of Abraham.<sup>12</sup>

### Beginnings of Idolatry

A number of the extracanonical Abraham stories explain that idolatry began rather innocently when men erected images of dead ancestors and that it was Satan who inspired people to worship these images. A similar story was told by Brigham Young:

What is commonly termed idolatry has arisen from a few sincere men, full of faith and having a little knowledge, urging upon a backsliding people to preserve some customs—to cling to some fashions or figures, to put them in mind of that God with whom their fathers were acquainted, without designing or wishing the people to worship an idol—to worship stocks, stones, beasts, and birds. Idols have been introduced, which are now worshipped, and have been for centuries and thousands of years; but they were not introduced at once. They were introduced to preserve among the people the idea of the true God.<sup>13</sup>

Abraham 1:5 indicates that Abraham's father, Terah, was an idolator—a fact not noted in the Abraham story told in Genesis, though Joshua 24:2 alludes to it briefly: "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods."

### Selections from the Abraham Traditions

This volume does not include all the Abraham stories from the sources cited nor all the available stories about Abraham. Rather, it includes only those portions of the stories that relate to events in Abraham's early life through those events covered by the Book of Abraham. Thus we have stories beginning with Abraham's birth (or, rather, his conception) through his visit to Egypt, leaving out events that correspond to Abraham's later life, as recorded in Genesis 14–25, and omitting parallels to the creation materials in Abraham 4–5 (also known from Genesis 1–2).

At the same time, other tales about Abraham that do not parallel the chronological account of his life as found in Abraham 1–3 and Genesis 12–13 are included when they

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11. E. H. Anderson and R. T. Haag, trans., "The Book of the Revelation of Abraham," *Improvement Era* 1 (Aug.–Sept. 1898): 705–14, 793–806.

12. Joseph F. Smith and B. H. Roberts, "Comments on the Book of the Revelation of Abraham," *Improvement Era* 1 (Oct. 1898): 896–901.

13. *Journal of Discourses*, 6:194.



shed light on the account in the Book of Abraham. This includes accounts of Abraham's involvement with astronomy and later reflections on events that took place in Ur and Egypt, as well as stories about the idols of Egypt, ties between Ur of the Chaldees and Egypt, the idolatry of Abraham's fathers, and the discovery and founding of Egypt.

It should also be noted that the Muslim and Christian texts cited herein are highly dependent on Jewish sources, though they sometimes give information not found in any extant Jewish texts. The Muslim sources show a degree of interdependence, including some reliance on the Qur'an. Some early Christian books, such as the *Conflict of Adam and Eve*, the *Book of the Cave of Treasures*, the *Book of the Rolls*, and, to a lesser extent, the *Book of the Bee*, clearly have a common source but have passed through different hands.

### Transmission of Abraham Traditions

Abraham traditions pervade the entire Mediterranean basin and the Near East.<sup>14</sup> They were transmitted and preserved across cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries over a period of more than two millennia. In addition to Jews, Christians, Muslims, and related groups (Samaritans, Falasha, and Mandaeans), the stories have also been recorded by early pagan writers.

Many of the Abraham stories began as oral traditions that were passed on from one generation to another. Jews and Muslims alike preserved the transmission lines along with the stories themselves, thus establishing their antiquity.

The later Jewish texts frequently cite early rabbis as sources for the information about Abraham and often give the names of other rabbis who passed the stories on to future generations. A typical entry would read, "Rabbi Z said on the authority of Rabbi Y, who had it from Rabbi X." This sort of authentication of early rabbinic declarations began as early as the second century A.D., when the Mishnah was compiled, and continued well into the Middle Ages. Most recitations of earlier authority were used to establish doctrinal issues, so there was always a dialectic purpose behind the lines of transmission.

While the Jewish traditions seem to be relatively unified, Eastern Christian writers seemed to preserve a much wider variety of Abraham stories. This stems in part from the fact that some of these writers were citing both Jewish and pagan traditions about Abraham. Another factor is the broader geographical expanse of Christianity, which covered most of Europe, portions of Africa from Egypt to Tunisia and as far south as Ethiopia, and much of the Middle East. With the widening gap between eastern (mostly Greek-speaking) and western (Latin) Christianity came greater diversity in the Abraham stories. Many of the traditions known in the East to Jews and Orthodox Christians were lost to the West. The Latin Fathers relied almost entirely on Jerome, who had but little to say about nonbiblical Abraham traditions.

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14. We know that Jewish and Muslim stories about Abraham have been preserved in Chinese, but we have been unable to locate specific examples or determine if they preserve the traditions of the sort encompassed in this volume.



Another significant factor in the more complete preservation of the Abraham traditions in the East is that the Jewish and Christian presence in the areas Muslims conquered made the stories available to the conquerors. While Jews and Muslims often cited a line of transmission authority for the traditions, Christians typically did not.

### **Jewish and Christian Influences on Islam**

Jewish and Christian presence in Arabia reaches back to a very early period. According to Arabian tradition, the Jewish presence in the Hijaz (western Arabia) may have begun when Jews fled Roman persecution in A.D. 70 and 135. After these events, Judaism probably began to flourish in Arabia. However, the beginnings of Jewish settlements in Arabia are too lost in misty tradition to allow exact dating. Whatever their origins in that land, by the fifth century the Jews had firmly “established themselves by their industry and enterprising spirit.”<sup>15</sup> By the time of Muḥammad’s birth (A.D. 570), Judaism in Arabia had become a thriving presence, with Jews in all areas of Arabian society. These Jews could be found as merchants, bedouin, farmers, poets, and warriors, and all spoke Arabic as well as Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> There was also a strong Jewish presence in Abyssinia (Ethiopia), a Christian ally of Rome, during the pre-Islamic period just prior to Muḥammad’s birth. From Abyssinia, Christian expeditions were launched against a ruler of the Yemen (who had embraced Judaism) in order to halt his persecutions of the Christians. Some of these anti-Jewish expeditions reached as far north as the Jewish settlements along the trade route near Medina.<sup>17</sup> In the north, in the eastern part of the Fertile Crescent (Iraq), Judaism had flourished at least since the time of the Babylonian captivity (587 B.C.). This region is noted for the important Jewish Gaonic schools that had produced the Babylonian Talmud in the sixth century A.D.

Christianity had also, since the time of Constantine, gained a firm foothold in the Arabian Peninsula. In bedouin Arabia, for instance, Christianity was a more widespread presence than either Zoroastrianism (the religion of Persia) or Judaism. Christians moved about with relative ease during the Byzantine period, and some worked as missionaries in the outlying towns of Arabia. Although Christian influence on the Arab tribes in Arabia was not deeply rooted, some amount of Christian biblical knowledge certainly spread throughout Arabia. Furthermore, the diffusion of biblical materials into Arabia also came from Christians in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Abyssinia, who exercised their influence by

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15. “Yathrib, an oasis on the caravan route running from north to south, rich in underground water supplies, springs and fountains, provided the Jews with a land where they could apply their farming experience.” Barakat Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews: A Re-examination* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1979), 25–26.

16. Gordon D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 49.

17. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1:156.



way of Yemen.<sup>18</sup> The Jewish and Christian presence in Arabia during these early periods made it likely that many biblical ideas penetrated into the world of Arabian paganism, whether or not any part of the Bible had been translated into Arabic at that time. Hence, knowledge of the Old and New Testaments was probably transmitted orally through the Jewish settlement in Medina and through Christian missionary efforts within the regions of the Byzantine and Sassanid (Persian) Empires, which had penetrated large areas of the Arabian Peninsula.

Stories related to biblical prophets such as Abraham circulated among the Arabs orally prior to the time of Muḥammad in the seventh century and during the early periods of Islam. Evidence indicates that material of this nature was already in circulation at the time of Muḥammad. However, a significant increase of this non-Islamic material seems to have taken place in the two generations following his death.<sup>19</sup> It is not known for certain how much written material of this nature was available during the lifetime of the prophet. But whether or not the material was available to him, it seems clear that he was familiar with some biblical material, having learned it from storytellers. One of several anecdotes from Ibn al-Jawzī illustrates that the Prophet Muḥammad was not only aware of these storytellers but seemed to approve of them:

The Messenger of God went out to a *qāṣṣ* [storyteller] who was narrating tales whereupon [the *qāṣṣ*] stopped. The Messenger of God said: "Continue narrating, for my sitting [in the meeting of a storyteller] from dawn until sunrise is more desirable to me than the releasing of four slaves; and [my sitting in such a meeting] from the afternoon until the sun sets is more pleasing to me than the freeing of four slaves."<sup>20</sup>

These storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) appeared on the scene at a very early period and may have been connected to the professional poets of pre-Islamic Arabia. They seem to have emerged somewhat "spontaneously and informally and were readily accepted by the community."<sup>21</sup> Up to the end of the Umayyad period (A.D. 750), some storytellers were attached to courts or camps, and they frequently visited fairs. Given the oral culture of pre-Islamic Arabia, storytellers played a significant role in society; for example, they popularized the "emotion-laden theme" of the day of judgment and the receiving of rewards or punishments here or in the hereafter.<sup>22</sup>

Following the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, Muslim contact with Judaism and Christianity increased. Jewish communities in the areas of Syria, North Africa, Palestine, and Egypt were able to join their coreligionists in Iran and Iraq. Muslims in some of these areas received biblical material directly from Jews, who read out of the

18. Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment* (1926; reprint, London: Cass, 1968), 17.

19. Newby, *A History of the Jews*, 66.

20. Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa-ʿl-mudhakkirīn*, trans. Merlin L. Swartz (Beirut: n.p., 1986), 101.

21. Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 2:15.

22. *Ibid.*



Torah. For example, during the first century after Muḥammad, evidence indicates that the Jews would read the Torah in Hebrew and interpret it to the people of Islam in Arabic.<sup>23</sup> Even ʿUmar (d. 644), the second caliph, may have been affected by Judaism because he knew of the biblical and extrabiblical sacred literature of the Jews.<sup>24</sup>

### Muslim Transmitters

Among the Muslims we find an elaborate science of transmission developing in the two or three centuries after Muḥammad. The following section will identify the major Muslim transmitters and the careful attention Muslims give to authenticating transmission. We will see how significant the role of the Muslims was in accurately transmitting ancient extrabiblical traditions to the medieval and modern periods.

When Islam came on the scene in the early seventh century A.D., some of the early converts to Islam had originally been Jewish or Christian. Several of these new converts, such as Warāqa ibn Nawful, were contemporaries of Muḥammad and are credited with orally transmitting Jewish and Christian lore into Islam. Many of these oral stories were written down during the first and second Islamic centuries (seventh and eighth centuries A.D.).

These stories and legends were then collected and arranged into prototypical works that authors such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī would later use as antecedent materials in producing their histories, which were embellished with legends and lore. Individuals credited with the task of collecting and arranging the earlier material include Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. ca. 652), a learned Jewish convert from Yemen; Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 730), a Yemenite of Persian descent; and ʿAbdullāh b. Salām (d. 663), a Jew from Medina. According to W. W. M. Thackston Jr., “the vast majority of legendary traditions on the pre-Islamic nations preserved in the learned literature of Islam goes back to these men.”<sup>25</sup>

Haim Schwarzbaum, a noted folklorist, has identified both Wahb ibn Munabbih and Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, in particular, as two of many traditionists who “served as ‘personality-pegs’ on which many Jewish and Christian legends were hung throughout the centuries of

23. See Buhkāri 6:25, and al-Suyūti, in M. J. Kister, “Ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā ḥaraja,” *Israel Oriental Studies II* (1972): 238.

24. “For ʿUmar, it seems, was more familiar with local Jewish ritual and literature than has been hitherto recognized.” Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri*, 2:7.

25. W. W. M. Thackston Jr., trans., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisaʾi* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), xiii. Ibn al-Jawzī includes Wahb b. Munabbih and Kaʿb al-Aḥbār in his list of the first narrators or storytellers (see Ibn al-Jawzī, 145, 161). Nabia Abbott designates ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās as the third individual in company with Wahb and Kaʿb, concluding that “one need only read through al-Kisāʾī’s *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* to realize the large extent of legendary and fictional materials attributed to these three men.” Nabia Abbott, “Wahb b. Munabbih: A Review Article,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36/2 (1977): 112.



Islamic history."<sup>26</sup> Many other respected Muslims orally transmitted biblical materials. Individuals such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 687), Muḥāhid (d. 722), al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. ca. 720–25), al-Suddī (d. 745), Qatāda (d. 746), and Muḥammad ibn Ishāq (d. 768) are just a few transmitters one would become familiar with when reading Muslim tradition. Mūsā b. Hārūn, ʿAmr b. Ḥammād, Abū Hurayrah, and Abū Mālik, although not dated, are said to be contemporary with Muḥammad and also preface many Muslim biblical transmissions.

### Reliability of the Muslim Transmitters

Although much of the Muslim legendary material was transmitted orally and written down by about the end of the eighth century, a science developed to ascertain the trustworthiness of the recorded traditions and their transmitters. A “science of men” (*ʿilm al-rijāl*), as it was called, emerged about the same time that legendary materials contained in *ḥadīth* (i.e., sayings and acts of Muḥammad), Qurʾanic commentaries, and histories were written down. It developed as a safeguard against forgeries.

As most of the traditions handed down orally were accompanied by a chain of transmitters (*isnād*), learned Muslims developed a detailed way of investigating each transmitter. For instance, an *isnād* attached to a legend could look something like this: “Mūsā b. Hārūn heard it on the authority of ʿAmr b. Ḥammād—Asbāt—al-Suddī [d. 745]—Abū Ṣāliḥ [fl. 661–80]—and Abū Mālik—Ibn ʿAbbās [d. 687] and Murrah al-Hamdānī—Ibn Masʿūd and some of the companions of the Prophet: The first king who ruled over all the earth, east and west, was Nimrod.”<sup>27</sup>

Muslim scholars would carefully analyze this *isnād* to determine several things before accepting the report as credible. First, they would examine the trustworthiness (*thiqa*) of each of these individuals, whether they were good upstanding Muslims in faith and practice in the community. They then looked at issues of geography and chronology. If, for instance, al-Suddī was said to have heard this tradition from Abū Ṣāliḥ, but al-Suddī was never reported to have been in proximity to Abū Ṣāliḥ, then Muslim scholars doubted the tradition’s authenticity. Or if Abū Mālik was said to have heard the report from Ibn ʿAbbās, but Ibn ʿAbbās had already been dead for fifty years at the birth of Abū Mālik or was born a century after him, the tradition would be called into serious question.

In the following chart we can see that al-Ṭabarī mentions each of the transmitters by name before relating that Nimrod was the first of four kings. About a century later al-Thaʿlabī identifies the same transmitters as al-Ṭabarī and relates the same tradition. However, over two centuries later, the general tradition that Nimrod was the first king was firmly embedded in Muslim tradition. Baiḍāwī does not even mention the individual transmitters. This indicates how later Muslims relied upon the earlier science of transmission.

26. Haim Schwarzbaum, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk-Literature* (Walldorf-Hessen: Verlage für Orientkunde, 1982), 57.

27. This is an actual *isnād* and tradition found in *Prophets and Patriarchs*, vol. 2 of *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. William M. Brinner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 2:50.



Consistency of a Muslim Tradition in Cited vs. Noncited Transmission (10–13th Centuries)		
Al-Ṭabarī (d. 923)	Al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1036)	Al-Baiḍāwī (d. 1286)
Mūsā b. Hārūn ʿAmr b. Ḥammād Asbāt Al-Suddī Abū Ṣāliḥ Abū Mālik Ibn ʿAbbās Ibn Masʿūd/Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad	<i>Ḥadīth</i> reporters (i.e., the individuals in al-Ṭabarī’s list)	General transmitters No specific names
Nimrod, the first king. Four world kings (i.e., Nimrod, Solomon, Alexander, Nebuchadnezzar).	Nimrod first king to place the crown on his head. Same four kings mentioned.	Nimrod first to place crown on his head. No mention of four kings.

Concerning the Abrahamic narrative, two main Muslim traditions—particularly dealing with the events surrounding Abraham and Nimrod—emerge. One tradition comes from Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq (d. 768), and the other from al-Suddī (d. 745).<sup>28</sup> Although some details differ between the two, in general they complement each other by filling in gaps of information. Interestingly, one finds both traditions used extensively throughout the corpus of Muslim materials. Whether from historical books, Qurʾanic commentaries, or the tradition of the “stories of the prophets” (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), a general unanimity on the major events that took place in the life of Abraham exists. This unity demonstrates not only that the early Muslims were careful in maintaining the integrity of their traditions by analyzing transmission but also that what is transmitted is in all likelihood rooted in antiquity.

For the most part biblical transmission appears to occur very early in Arabia, both prior to and after the rise of Islam. These materials were carefully checked and written down within a relatively short time after Muḥammad’s death in A.D. 632. The following chart shows the remarkable consistency of sources used by three different Muslims: al-Ṭabarī (d. 923), who wrote his famous *History*; al-Thaʿlabī (d. 1036), who wrote a *Stories of the Prophets*; and al-Baiḍāwī (d. 1286), who wrote a popular commentary on the Qurʾan. Our case study will use excerpts from the Abraham story found in each of the above three authors. Of course, this comparison is only a sample of what one would find in comparing many Muslim traditions.

28. For a careful analysis of the two traditions, see Heinrich Schutzinger, *Ursprung und Entwicklung der arabischen Abraham-Nimrod Legende* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1961), 20–42.

Consistency in Muslim Tradition and Transmission (10–13th Centuries)			
Tradition	Al-Ṭabarī's Sources	Al-Thaʿlabī's Sources	Al-Baiḍāwī's Sources
Astrologers prophesy against Nimrod.	Ibn Ishāq	Al-Suddī	Al-Suddī
Nimrod imprisons all pregnant women.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	Al-Suddī
Nimrod massacres male children under age two.	Ibn Ishāq	Al-Suddī	Al-Suddī
Abraham's mother hides/gives birth in a cave.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq
Abraham receives food by sucking his thumb.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq
Abraham grows at a miraculous rate.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq
Abraham sees sun, moon, and stars and receives his call.	Ibn Ishāq	unnamed	Ibn Ishāq
Abraham mocks idols, feigns sickness, smashes idols.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq Al-Suddī Qatāda	unnamed
People gather wood to burn Abraham.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	unnamed
Abraham is cast into the fire.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq
Abraham, in the fire, converses with Gabriel for several days.	Ibn Ishāq	Ibn Ishāq	unnamed
Abraham is imprisoned in a house.	Ibn Ishāq	unnamed	unnamed
Fire is so hot, birds flying overhead are burned.	Al-Suddī	prob. al-Suddī	prob. al-Suddī
Abraham marries Sarah.	Al-Suddī	unnamed	unnamed
Abraham/Pharaoh—wife-sister motif.	Al-Suddī	unnamed	unnamed
Pharaoh is afflicted with paralysis when he tries to touch Sarah.	Al-Suddī	unnamed	unnamed



The Abraham narrative illustrated in these charts depends in large part on the accounts of Ibn Ishāq and al-Suddī. Although these men lived in the generation after transmitters such as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and Wahb b. Munabbih, the biblical materials Kaʿb and Wahb transmitted were most likely passed on to others such as Ibn Ishāq and al-Suddī. Just because one does not see specific reference to the earlier transmitters in the Abraham narrative does not necessarily argue against its authenticity or antiquity. In fact, there is ample evidence of antiquity when one looks into the Jewish and Christian roots of traditions related to Abraham. For instance, regarding the star, it is recorded that Nimrod saw in a dream a star that outshone the sun and the moon. This is most likely a reinterpreted version of a Jewish story concerning the astrologers of Nimrod who, “when they left the house, they lifted up their eyes toward heaven to look at the stars,” and “one great star came from the east and ran athwart the heavens and swallowed up the four stars at the four corners.”<sup>29</sup> Christians, of course, also accept the appearance of a star at the birth of Christ.<sup>30</sup> Other Muslim commentators have also related that before the birth of Abraham, Nimrod saw a star in a dream.<sup>31</sup> This may indicate that the star motif was a widespread part of the belief structures of both the Jews and the Christians before and after the rise of Islam.

Like the Muslim account of Abraham in the cave, Jewish tradition also places Abraham in a cave at birth. In one tradition God opens two windows in the cave; through one, he puts forth oil and through the other, fine flour.<sup>32</sup> In another tradition, Abraham, “lying alone in the cave without food, began to weep; but God sent the archangel Gabriel to give him milk, which flowed from the little finger of his right hand—and so the child was suckled.”<sup>33</sup> The cave motif and miracle feedings can also be found in the Christian tradition in which angels bring sustenance to saints in need.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the Muslim tradition of Abraham growing up at a miraculous rate is found in Jewish haggadic literature as well.<sup>35</sup> The idolatry and Nimrod motifs are well attested in both Jewish literature<sup>36</sup> and Muslim tradition.

29. Louis Ginzburg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1937), 1:207.

30. See Matthew 1.

31. According to al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 2:53, “A star arose over Nimrod so bright that it blotted out the light of the sun and the moon.”

32. Schutzing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 143.

33. Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 136.

34. Note the *Book of James*, or *Protoevangelium*, 8:1: “And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as a dove that is nurtured: and she received food from the hand of an angel.” *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. M. R. James (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 42. Perhaps the *Book of James* provided some of the material about the childhood of Mary in Qurʾan 3:37. See also Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews*, 5:212 n. 29. Christian tradition has also placed the birth of Jesus in a cave. See *Book of James* 18:1; 19:2, in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 46. See also Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 323–25.

35. For the Jewish traditions see Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:190–91; Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Myths*, 136–37. Ginzburg also argues that Christian traditions have this motif. See *Legends of the Jews*, 5:210 n. 15.

36. For the idolatry and Nimrod motifs, see David Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes* (Paris: Geuthner, 1933), 36–38; Schutzing, *Ursprung und Entwicklung*, 145–50, 152–54; Ginzburg, *Legends of*



These few examples emphasize the antiquity of the traditions found in the Muslim Abraham narratives and also confirm the care taken by the Muslims to preserve this material.

## Conclusions

The nonbiblical traditions about Abraham underscore the pervasive influence this great patriarch has had on ancient and modern peoples. Because the Book of Abraham parallels so many nonbiblical stories, it is clearly part of the same tradition.

One might dismiss a single element found in a nonbiblical tradition that parallels the Book of Abraham as mere coincidence. However, when a large number of such elements come together from diverse times and places, they overwhelmingly support the Book of Abraham as an ancient text. There are far too many references to Terah as an idolator, Abraham as a sacrificial victim, Abraham as an astronomer, and Abraham as a missionary to lightly dismiss their antiquity. In addition, many other distinctive elements found in these traditions, though not repeated as frequently, add to the overall strength of the unique elements found in the Book of Abraham.

Over the past several years, as we have analyzed the early Abraham traditions, we have been impressed that most of the distinctive nonbiblical elements of the Book of Abraham can be supported to one degree or another by these traditions. The majority of these nonbiblical traditions were not available to the Prophet Joseph Smith during his lifetime. Therefore, we have outlined in the introductory paragraph when each work was published or translated in a Western language. While we think these traditions provide substantial evidence that the Book of Abraham is an ancient text, we realize that others may not find the evidence convincing. The persistence and stability of the traditions over more than a thousand years suggest that they may date from much earlier than their first written appearance.

To the believer the worth of the Book of Abraham lies not in how well it agrees with ancient texts but in its spiritual value, which can be ascertained only by reading it prayerfully. We hope that this volume will not only encourage the reader to turn frequently to that sacred volume of scripture but also to consider more carefully the sources and transmission of tradition.

## Organization of This Book

The extracts included in this book follow, as nearly as possible, a chronological arrangement within the different traditions. The first section deals with the earliest traditions about Abraham and includes selections from both early Jewish and pagan sources. This is followed by sections on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, then a section in which other traditions (e.g., Samaritan, Falasha, and Mandaean) are grouped. A series of appendixes includes materials related to the study of Abraham.

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*the Jews*, 1:197–203, 5:212 n. 33, 5:215 n. 40; Graves and Patai, *Hebrew Myths*, 140–42; *Book of Jasher* 11–12; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 1–3, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1:689–90.



To illustrate the ties between the Book of Abraham and the various traditions cited in this volume, we have included footnotes to the relevant selections. Also included are several indexes. The thematic index groups various distinctive themes that are found in the Book of Abraham but are missing from the Genesis account and lists the various non-canonical texts that relate to each theme. Some of these ties are stronger than others, and we leave it to the reader to judge the relative merits of each reference in the footnotes and the index. The other two indexes are by subject and citation.

## Editorial Comments

This book contains perhaps the broadest cross section of ancient and medieval texts that FARMS has ever produced in one volume. Linguistically, the extracts come not only from languages such as Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic, but also from lesser-known ones such as Demotic, Old Coptic, Old Turkish, Persian, and Gē'ēz. Geographically and temporally, these collected stories about Abraham stretch across the entire ancient and medieval world: three different continents and thousands of years of human history. The breadth of this project has created some unique needs in the production of the book.

### Previously Published Material

Most of the selections in this volume are based on existing translations that are readily available to the readers. Of the translations prepared especially for this volume, most are based on original texts. However, in some instances our translations are based on versions of accounts found in languages other than the original. This is partly because we could not always locate the original version and partly because of the constraints of time. We intend this book to be a resource primarily for general readers—most of whom will be members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

We followed *Chicago Manual of Style* 2.174 and 2.175 as a guideline in determining how to treat the previously published material:

Usually only certain alterations are permissible, without explanation, in editing material previously published. Notes may be renumbered consecutively throughout a selection or a chapter in a selection. Cross-references to parts of the original work not reprinted should be deleted. Obvious typographical errors, inadvertent grammatical slips, and unintentional inconsistencies in modern works may be corrected. Single quotation marks may be changed to double, . . . following American practice, and periods and commas may be put inside quotation marks. . . . Words set in full capitals in the text may be marked for small capitals. Other typographical oddities should not be reproduced unless they contribute to the sense of the original. An old title page, for example, should not be set in type imitating the original typeface. . . .

Unless the editor or compiler explains—in the preface or elsewhere—what kinds of changes have been made in the original text, all other matters of style should be retained: British or archaic spelling; excessive punctuation or lack of punctuation; capitalization in

the text and notes; and style of footnotes (in some instances this may need slight modification for clarity). Any internal deletion in a selection should be indicated by ellipsis points.<sup>37</sup>

In keeping with these guidelines, we have reproduced the extracts as they are found in the original publication, including small capitals and italics. However, at times the original documents contained diacritics on just a few names or, in other texts, the names were all in small capitals. In those instances we eliminated the diacritics and the capitals to make the text more readable. These and any other omissions or changes are noted in the introductory paragraph at the beginning of each extract.

The translators of these extracts have all used various ways to indicate their insertions or corrections to the text. Unless an explanation was necessary for the sense of the text, we have not explained their sigla (here, various kinds of brackets or other symbols used to indicate emendations or clarifications of texts) or use of other typographical markers such as italics (many of the older translations do not contain explanations of their sigla).

At times, however, we have added our own bracketed material for clarification, something that could cause confusion if the previously published material also uses brackets. To avoid confusion, we have footnoted all of our brackets that are run into the text of a previously published translations. At times we have added bracketed explanations above or below paragraphs to summarize omitted text or contextualize the text following. We have not footnoted those brackets.

We have followed the same principle, but reversed, with ellipsis points. Whenever the ellipsis points are part of the previously published material, we have used a footnote to indicate that fact. Our own ellipses points we have added without comment, to indicate omissions in the text.

We have also often used our own paragraphing for each extract and, in some cases, have turned verse into prose.

### **New Translations**

The individual translators have used a variety of styles and have not necessarily been consistent in their usage between texts. Nevertheless, we have tried to create a general consistency with all the translations we made. We established a few guidelines in our use of sigla: we indicate lacunae in the text using brackets with ellipsis points or phrases indicating lacunae. We also use brackets to indicate our clarifications and, if necessary, parentheses to indicate parenthetical material by the author. Any use of other sigla is footnoted where it occurs.

In the Jewish and Western Christian material, we have kept transliteration to a minimum, using English spellings for the names. Where nonstandard spellings have been used (e.g., in many of the Eastern Christian and Arabic authors), standard spellings are found

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37. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 99.



in the notes. Diacritics have been largely minimized except for in the Arabic material, where we chose to follow the transliteration style of one of our longest extracts, William Brinner's translation of one part of al-Ṭabarī's history, *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Note that in some instances the same name will receive different diacritics; for example, the name Abraham may be rendered Ibrāhīm or Ibrahīm. In all these cases the diacritics reflect the original Arabic spelling of the name. Also, for most of our translations, we have omitted the ubiquitous epithets (may peace be upon him, etc.) that appear in Muslim writings, and we have used dashes between names to indicate the phrase "on the authority of."

### **Introductory Paragraphs and Footnotes**

Introductory paragraphs are limited to information that pertains to the author's background, the sources of the text, its general availability, and essential comments about the excerpt. Further information may be found in the usual biographical dictionaries and specialized encyclopedias, which we used in compiling the information.

While most of our readers will likely be members of the Church of Jesus Christ who are interested in learning more about Abraham, we hope this collection will prove to be of value to others who have an interest in and want to learn more about this venerable patriarch. To this end, in the footnotes we have spelled out the names of those books of scripture familiar primarily to members of the church. For instance, references to Abraham and to the facsimiles are found in the Book of Abraham (in the Pearl of Great Price). At times reference is made to the Doctrine and Covenants, another scripture that includes revelations received by the Prophet Joseph Smith and others and is presently available in the 1981 edition. All references to the Bible are to the King James Version (KJV).

Because of the nature of this book, consistency was almost impossible to achieve. One extract will use British spellings, and another, American. Some have paragraphs numbered by folio, some simply by numbers, and, with the shorter ones, by nothing at all. Different extracts have different levels of headings and subheadings. We have tried to be as consistent as possible with our own translations, but as noted above, each section has slightly different rules. Overall, we have striven to keep the footnotes consistent, and the introductory paragraphs of each piece follow the same general pattern. We hope that our editing has made the various texts informative, easy to follow, and enjoyable to read.

### **Editorial Responsibility**

Supervisory editorial responsibility for the various excerpts has generally rested with the general editor who first identified the excerpt as being relevant. Where the editor provided the translation, the supervisory editor will be obvious. In general John A. Tvedtnes is responsible for the Jewish material and the Christian and Earliest material not translated by John Gee. Brian M. Hauglid is responsible for the Muslim material, and Hauglid and Tvedtnes share responsibility for the introduction.