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Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham, Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016) "Translation and Historicity of the Book of Abraham," Gospel Topics Essays (2016
patriarch Abraham, recounts how Abraham sought the blessings of the priesthood, rejected the idolatry of his father, covenanted with Jehovah, married Sarai, moved to Canaan and Egypt, and received knowledge about the Creation. The book of Abraham largely follows the biblical narrative but adds important information regarding Abraham's life
and teachings. The book of Abraham was first published in 1842 and was canonized as part of the Pearl of Great Price in 1880. The book originated with Egyptian papyri, but no eyewitness account of the translation survives, making it impossible to reconstruct the process
Only small fragments of the long papyrus scrolls once in Joseph Smith's possession exist today. The relationship between those fragments and the text we have today is largely a matter of conjecture. We do know some things about the translation process. The word translation typically assumes an expert knowledge of multiple languages. Joseph Smith
claimed no expertise in any language. He readily acknowledged that he was one of the "weak things of the world," called to speak words sent "from heaven." Speaking of the translation of the Book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon, the Lord said, "You cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me." The same principle can be applied to the book of Mormon with the lord said.
Abraham. The Lord did not require Joseph Smith to have knowledge about the life and teachings of Abraham is consistent with historical knowledge about the ancient world.3 Some of this knowledge, which is discussed later in this essay
had not yet been discovered or was not well known in 1842. But even this evidence of ancient origins, substantial though it may be, cannot prove the truthfulness of the Book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham any more than archaeological evidence can prove the truthfulness of the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abraham and the son of God. The book of Abrah
scripture ultimately rests on faith in the saving truths found within the book itself as witnessed by the Holy Ghost. Thousands of years ago, the prophet Nephi learned that one purpose of the Book of Mormon was to "establish the truth" of the Bible.4 In a similar way, the book of Abraham supports, expands, and clarifies the biblical account of
 Abraham's life. In the biblical account, God covenants with Abraham to "make of thee a great nation." The book of Abraham provides context for that covenant by showing that Abraham was a seeker of "great knowledge" and a "follower of righteousness" who chose the right path in spite of great hardship. He rejected the wickedness of his father's
household and spurned the idols of the surrounding culture, despite the threat of death. 6 In the Bible, God's covenant with Abraham appears to begin during Abraham, the covenant began before the foundation of the earth and was passed down through Adam, Noah, and other prophets. 7 Abraham thus takes
his place in a long line of prophets and patriarchs whose mission is to preserve and extend God's covenant on earth. The heart of this covenant is the priesthood, through which "the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal" are conveyed.8 The book of Abraham clarifies several teachings that are obscure in the Bible. Life did not begin at birth, as is
commonly believed. Prior to coming to earth, individuals existed as spirits. In a vision, Abraham saw that one of the spirits was "like unto God." 9 This divine being, Jesus Christ, led other spirits in organizing the earth out of "materials" or preexisting matter, not ex nihilo or out of nothing, as many Christians later came to believe. 10 Abraham further
learned that mortal life was crucial to the plan of happiness God would provide for His children: "We will prove them herewith," God stated, "to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them," adding a promise to add glory forever upon the faithful.11 Nowhere in the Bible is the purpose and potential of earth life
stated so clearly as in the book of Abraham. The powerful truths found in the book of Abraham emerged from a set of unique historical events. In the summer of 1835, an entrepreneur named Michael Chandler found a ready audience.
Due partly to the exploits of the French emperor Napoleon, the antiquities unearthed in the catacombs of Egypt had created a fascination across the Western world.13 Chandler capitalized on this interest by touring with ancient Egyptian artifacts and charging visitors a fee to see them. These artifacts had been uncovered by Antonio Lebolo, a former
cavalryman in the Italian army. Lebolo, who oversaw some of the excavations for the consul general of France, pulled 11 mummies from a tomb not far from the ancient city of Thebes. Lebolo shipped the artifacts to Italy, and after his death, they ended up in New York. At some point the mummies and scrolls came into Chandler's possession.14 By the
time the collection arrived in Kirtland, all but four mummies and several papyrus scrolls had already been sold. A group of Latter-day Saints in Kirtland purchased the remaining artifacts for the Church. After Joseph Smith examined to papyri and commenced "the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics," his history recounts, "much to
our joy [we] found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham."15 Joseph Smith worked on the translation of the second chapter and fall of 1835, by which time he completed at least the first chapter and part of the second chapter.16 His journal next speaks of translating the papyri in the spring of 1842, after the
Saints had relocated to Nauvoo, Illinois. All five chapters of the book of Abraham, along with three illustrations (now known as facsimiles 1, 2, and 3), were published in the Times and Seasons, the Church's newspaper in Nauvoo, between March and May 1842.17 The book of Abraham was the last of Joseph Smith's translation efforts. In these inspired
translations, Joseph Smith did not claim to know the ancient languages of the records he was translating. Much like the Book of Mormon, Joseph's translation of the book of Mormon of the book of Morm
pattern of revealing His truths "after the manner of their [His servants'] language, that they might come to understanding."18 Joseph's translations took a variety of forms. Some of his translations were not based on any known physical records
Joseph's translation of portions of the Bible, for example, included restoration of original text, harmonization of contradictions within the Bible itself, and inspired commentary. 19 Some evidence suggests that Joseph studied the characters on the Egyptian papyri and attempted to learn the Egyptian language. His history reports that, in July 1835, he
was "continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arrangeing a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients." 20 This "grammar," as it was called, consisted of columns of hieroglyphic characters followed by English translations recorded in a large notebook by Joseph's scribe, William W. Phelps.
Another manuscript, written by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, has Egyptian characters followed by explanations. 21 The relationship of these documents to the book of Abraham is not fully understood. Neither the rules nor the translations in the grammar book correspond to those recognized by Egyptologists today. Whatever the role of the
grammar book, it appears that Joseph Smith began translating portions of the book of Abraham almost immediately after the purchase of the papyri.22 Phelps appearently viewed Joseph Smith as uniquely capable of understanding the Egyptian characters: "As no one could translate these writings," he told his wife, "they were presented to President
 Smith. He soon knew what they were."23 After the Latter-day Saints left Nauvoo, the Egyptian artifacts remained behind. Joseph Smith's family sold the papyri and the mummies in 1856. The papyri were divided up and sold to various parties; historians believe that most were destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Ten papyrus fragments once
in Joseph Smith's possession ended up in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. 24 In 1967, the museum transferred these fragments to the Church, which subsequently published them in the Church's magazine, the Improvement Era. 25 The discovery of the papyrus fragments renewed debate about Joseph Smith's translation. The
fragments included one vignette, or illustration, that appears in the book of Abraham as facsimile 1. Long before the fragments were published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church, some Egyptologists had said that Joseph Smith had published by the Church had been said that the Church had been said 
the facsimiles as freestanding drawings, cut off from the hieroglyphs or hieratic characters that originally surrounded the vignettes. The discovery of the fragments meant that readers could now see the hieroglyphs and characters immediately surrounding the vignette that became facsimile 1.26 None of the characters on the papyrus fragments
mentioned Abraham's name or any of the events recorded in the book of Abraham. Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint the proper interpretation of
the vignettes on these fragments. 27 Scholars have identified the papyrus fragments as parts of standard funerary texts that were deposited with mummified bodies. These fragments do not have to be as old as Abraham for the book
of Abraham and its illustrations to be authentic. Ancient records are often transmitted as copies or as copies of Abraham could have been edited or redacted by later writings of earlier peoples. 28 Moreover, documents initially composed for
one context can be repackaged for another context or purpose.29 Illustrations once connected with Abraham could have either drifted or been dislodged from their original context and reinterpreted hundreds of years later in terms of burial practices in a later period of Egyptian history. The opposite could also be true: illustrations with no clear
connection to Abraham anciently could, by revelation, shed light on the life and teachings of this prophetic figure. Some have assumed that the hieroglyphs adjacent to and surrounding facsimile 1 must be a source for the text of the book of Abraham. But this claim rests on the assumption that a vignette and its adjacent text must be associated in
meaning. In fact, it was not uncommon for ancient Egyptian vignettes to be placed some distance from the Lord nor Joseph Smith explained the process of translation of the book of Abraham, but some insight can be gained from the Lord's instructions to Joseph regarding translation. In April 1829, Joseph
received a revelation for Oliver Cowdery that taught that both intellectual work and revelation were essential to translating sacred records. It was necessary to "study it out in your mind" and then seek spiritual confirmation. Records indicate that Joseph and others studied the papyri and that close observers also believed that the translation came by
revelation. As John Whitmer observed, "Joseph the Seer saw these Record[s] and by the revelation of Jesus Christ could translate these records."31 It is likely futile to assess Joseph's ability to translate papyri when we now have only a fraction of the papyri he had in his possession. Eyewitnesses spoke of "a long roll" or multiple "rolls" of papyrus.32
Since only fragments survive, it is likely that much of the papyri accessible to Joseph when he translated the book of Abraham is not among these fragments. The loss of a significant portion of the papyri means the relationship of the papyri to the papyri to the papyri to the papyri accessible to Joseph when he translated the book of Abraham is not among these fragments.
the papyri may have led to a revelation about key events and teachings in the life of Abraham, much as he had earlier received a revelation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words translation about the life of Moses while studying the Bible. This view assumes a broader definition of the words translation.
papyri as a conventional translation would be. Rather, the physical artifacts provided an occasion for meditation, reflection, and revelation about the life of Abraham, even if that revelation did not directly correlate to the characters on the papyri.34 A careful study of the book of
Abraham provides a better measure of the book's merits than any hypothesis that treats the text as a conventional translation. Evidence suggests that elements of the book of Abraham fit comfortably in the ancient world and supports the claim that the book of Abraham is an authentic record. The book of Abraham speaks disapprovingly of human
sacrifice offered on an altar in Chaldea. Some victims were placed on the altar as sacrifices because they rejected the idols worshipped by their leaders. 35 Recent scholarship has found instances of such punishment dating to Abraham's time. People who challenged the standing religious order, either in Egypt or in the regions over which it had
influence (such as Canaan), could and did suffer execution for their offenses. 36 The conflict over the religion of Pharaoh, as described in Abraham 1:11-12, is an example of punishment now known to have been meted out during the Abraham 1:10-12.
ancient world. The book speaks of "the plain of Olishem," a name not mentioned in the Bible. An ancient inscription, not discovered and translated until the 20th century, mentions a town called "Ulisum," located in northwestern Syria.37 Further, Abraham 3:22-23 is written in a poetic structure more characteristic of Near Eastern languages than
early American writing style.38 Joseph Smith's explanations of the facsimile 1 and Abraham contain additional earmarks of the ancient world. Facsimile 1 and Abraham 1:17 mention the idolatrous god Elkenah. This deity is not mentioned in the Bible, yet modern scholars have identified it as being among the gods worshipped by ancient
Mesopotamians.39 Joseph Smith represented the four figures in figure 6 of facsimile 2 as "this earth in its four quarters." A similar interpretation has been argued by scholars who study identical figures in other ancient Egyptian texts.40 Facsimile 1 contains a crocodile deity swimming in what Joseph Smith represented the four figures in other ancient Egyptian texts.40 Facsimile 2 as "this earth in its four quarters." A similar interpretation has been argued by scholars who study identical figures in other ancient Egyptian texts.40 Facsimile 1 contains a crocodile deity swimming in what Joseph Smith represented the four figures in other ancient Egyptian texts.40 Facsimile 2 as "this earth in its four quarters." A similar interpretation has been argued by scholars who study identical figures in other ancient Egyptian texts.40 Facsimile 2 as "this earth in its four quarters."
interpretation makes sense in light of scholarship that identifies Egyptian conceptions of heaven with "a heavenly ocean." 41 The book of Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details found in nonbiblical stories about Abraham is consistent with various details about the consistency of the c
Abraham about the sun, the moon, and the stars. "I show these things unto thee before ye go into Egyptians in knowledge of the heavens. For example, Eupolemus, who lived under Egyptian rule in the second century B.C.E.
wrote that Abraham taught astronomy and other sciences to the Egyptian priests.43 A third-century papyrus from an Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 1 in the book of Abraham.44 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 1 in the book of Abraham.44 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 1 in the book of Abraham.44 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham.44 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham.44 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham.44 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham.45 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 2 in the book of Abraham.46 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham.46 A later Egyptian temple library connects Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with an illustration similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with a similar to facsimile 3 in the book of Abraham with a similar to facsimile 3 
when Abraham was delivered by an angel. Later, according to this text, Abraham are found in the book of Abraham are found in the book of Abraham. Other details are found in the book of Abraham are found in the book of Abraham.
a famine striking Abraham's homeland; Abraham's homeland; Abraham's familiarity with Egyptian idols; and Abraham's being younger than 75 years old when he left Haran, as the biblical commentaries in Joseph Smith's lifetime, but others were confined to nonbiblical
traditions inaccessible or unknown to 19th-century Americans. 46 The veracity and value of the book of Abraham cannot be settled by scholarly debate concerning the book's status as scripture lies in the eternal truths it teaches and the powerful spirit it conveys. The book of Abraham imparts profound truths
 about the nature of God, His relationship to us as His children, and the purpose of this mortal life. The truth of the book of Abraham is ultimately found through careful study of its teachings, sincere prayer, and the confirmation of the Spirit. The Church acknowledges the contribution of scholars to the historical content presented in this article; their
work is used with permission. Doctrine and Covenants 1:17, 19, 24. Doctrine and Covenants 9:9. See, for example, Daniel C. Peterson, "News from Antiquity," Ensign, July 1992. 1 Nephi 13:40. See also Mormon 7:8-9. Genesis 12:2. Abraham 1:1-2, 5-
12. Abraham 1:2-3, 19. Abraham 2:11. See also Doctrine and Covenants 84:19-21. Abraham 3:24; 4:1, 12, 14-16. Abraham 3:25-26. Joseph Smith History, 1838-1856, vol. B-1, 596, available at josephsmithpapers.org. See S. J. Wolfe with Robert Singerman, Mummies in Nineteenth Century America: Ancient Egyptians as Artifacts
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Smith History, 1838-1856, vol. B-1, 596, available at josephsmithpapers.org. Brian M. Hauglid, A Textual History of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2010), 6, 84, 110. Joseph Smith, Journal, March 8-9, 1842, available at josephsmithpapers.org; "A Fac-Simile from the Book of Abraham" and "A
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1:24. Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985), 253. In Joseph Smith's day, the word translate could mean "to explain the meaning of words to a
person who does not understand them," or "to explain or unfold the meaning of predictions, vision, dreams or enigmas; to expound and lay open what is concealed from the understanding." (Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language [New York: S. Converse, 1828], s.v. "Translate," "Interpret.") Joseph Smith History, 1838-1856,
vol. B-1, 597, available at josephsmithpapers.org. Transcriptions and digital images of these manuscripts, known collectively as the "Kirtland Egyptian Material," josephsmithpapers.org. Transcriptions and digital images of these manuscripts, known collectively as the "Kirtland Egyptian Material," josephsmithpapers.org. Transcriptions and digital images of these manuscripts, known collectively as the "Kirtland Egyptian Papers," can be found at "Book of Abraham and Egyptian Material," josephsmithpapers.org. W. W. Phelps to Sally
Phelps, July 19-20, 1835, in Bruce A. Van Orden, "Writing to Zion: The William W. Phelps Kirtland Letters (1835-1836)," BYU Studies 33, no. 3 (1993): 555, available at byustudies.byu.edu. John Gee, A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), 2. The fragments are known to have been
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the same time as the Metropolitan discovery, making 11 fragments in all. Michael D. Rhodes, "Why Doesn't the Translation of the Egyptian Papyri and the Book of Abraham: A Faithful, Egyptological Point of
View," and Brian M. Hauglid, "Thoughts on the Book of Abraham," both in No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2011), 217-58. On the lack of unanimity among Egyptologists, see, for example, John Gee, "A
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through the books of Jasher and Josephus. Joseph Smith was aware of these books, but it is unknown whether he utilized them.
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