

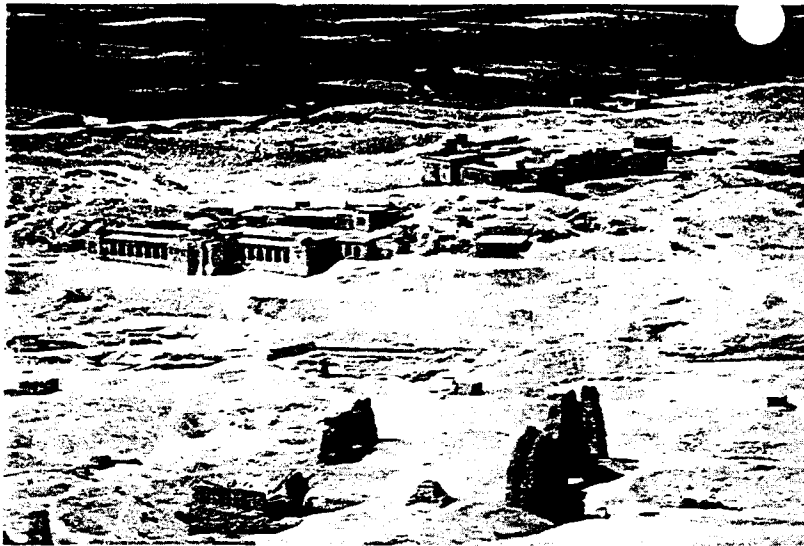
The Book of Abraham: Extracts from the Larger Text Also Called the Book of Abraham

The book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price is an extract from a larger document also known as the book of Abraham. The record of Abraham was found buried with some Egyptian mummies exhumed from the west bank of the Nile across from the ancient city of Thebes about 1820. This record was "beautifully written on papyrus, with black, and a small part red, ink or paint, in perfect preservation." (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:348.)

How Could Abraham's Writings Be in Egypt?

It is generally understood that Abraham was born and raised in the land of the Chaldeans in Mesopotamia. When he fell into disfavor with his family and the political leaders, and was consequently sentenced to death, the Lord rescued him and directed him to go to the land of Canaan, which was given to him and his posterity as a land of their inheritance. (See Abraham 1:1, 5-7, 12-16, 18-19.)

A famine that became "very grievous" caused Abraham to leave the land of Canaan and move to the richly endowed land of Egypt until the famine abated. (Abraham 2:21.) Abraham lived in Egypt where he mingled with royalty, instructed Pharaoh's court on the subject of astronomy,



The West Bank of the Nile near Thebes is where the papyri and the mummies were found

and no doubt taught the truths of the everlasting gospel whenever the occasion arose. When he left Egypt to return to his land of promise, he was "very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." (Genesis 13:2.)

The posterity of Abraham lived in Canaan from that time on. On several occasions, however, famines caused them to flee to Egypt with the magnificent Nile River and its fertile delta. Abraham's grandson Jacob and his family went to Egypt to seek for food during a famine. Joseph, Jacob's son, was governor of the land, second only to Pharaoh, when Jacob's family arrived.

So there are many possibilities that could account for the writings of Abraham being in Egypt. First, Abraham may have kept records and left them in Egypt when he returned to Canaan. Second, the posterity of Abraham, perhaps Jacob himself, preserved his sacred writings and carried them to Egypt when they relocated there. Third, later Israelites who treasured the writings of their illustrious and honored ancestor could easily have taken his writings, or copies of them, to Egypt.

Events Leading to the Discovery of the Abraham Papyri

Europeans had paid little attention to their Egyptian neighbors to the south for several hundred years, until the Napoleonic Wars. Veterans of battles in Egypt took back to Europe stories and sketches that created a great sensation among all classes. After Napoleon and his forces were defeated at Waterloo in 1815, many restless Europeans looking for

adventures moved to Egypt to engage in the profitable business of stripping Egypt of her precious historical monuments. The land of Egypt was robbed of much of its magnificent splendor during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century.

Mehemet Ali, viceroy of Egypt, ruled with an iron hand. He was anxious to increase Egypt's technology, which was far behind that of European nations. So, in exchange for industrial assistance, Mehemet Ali allowed the European visitors to rob graves and plunder the relics of Egypt's illustrious past.

Antonio Lebolo

One of the prominent men working in the digs in Upper Egypt was Antonio Lebolo. Lebolo, who was born in 1781 in the Piedmont of present day Italy, close to the French and Swiss borders, served as a gendarme under Napoleon. After Napoleon's defeat, Lebolo and many of his comrades-in-arms were forced to leave their homes or face certain imprisonment. By 1817, the exiled soldier was residing in Egypt, employed by Bernardino Drovetti, the former French consul general, to supervise the work of several hundred laborers in his excavations in Upper Egypt. Lebolo became well known and was highly regarded by many important people. One of them, Count Carlo Vidua, wrote of a visit to Thebes and said of Lebolo:

"But, among so many marvelous things, that are possible to be admired at Thebes, the most curious one of all is the valley where the kings' sepulchers lay. It is rather a lonely valley, arid, horrible, in which some holes like caverns are seen. Entering these caverns, long galleries, halls, chambers, and cabinets are found, in short, they are underground palaces, all covered with painted bas-relieves; and it is very marvelous. It is wonderful the preservation of the colors, the amount of works, the scrupulous attention used to make them. Lately, a new one was discovered which surpasses all the others in beauty, in the perfection of the work, and in execution [Tomb of Seti I]. I visited it two times. The second time I spent the whole day there, examining everything; it was already late evening, and I couldn't move myself away from there.

"I dined inside there in a beautiful hall, much more elegant than our ballrooms. Also, I believe that, considering all, this sepulcher of the king of Thebes is a much more sumptuous dwelling than the dwellings of our living European kings. Who, do you think, gave me the honor of those sepulchers, and who reigns in Thebes in exchange of the dead king? A Piedmontese. Mr. Lebolo from Canavese, formerly a police officer in the service of France. He came to Egypt and was employed by Mr. Drovetti in the excavations, which he does continuously in Thebes. Our

Piedmonteses really have a ready spirit, and are capable of succeeding in everything; from police officer to antiques is a big jump. Well, Mr. Lebolo works successfully in his new career; he found beautiful pieces for the Drovetti museum; and since he was allowed by him to do some excavations of his own, he gathered for himself a small collection, which will bring him a moderate fortune. In those ten days that I lived in Thebes, Mr. Lebolo accompanied me, took me everywhere, had me come to dinner at his house, which is among monuments and half embedded in tombs, all filled with mummies, papyruses, and little statues. An Egyptian bas-relief was the top of the door; we made fire with pieces of mummies' coffins." (Balbo, *Letters of Count Carlo Vidua*, 2:177.)

Lebolo and his crews excavated various sites near Thebes, Karnak, and the west bank in Upper Egypt. In one of these sites, they discovered a catacomb containing several hundred mummies. They removed eleven mummies of the first order of burial, the only ones of the entire collection that were well enough preserved to be transported. (See Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:348-49.) The exact site of the tomb from which the eleven mummies were exhumed is unknown because Lebolo worked on several sites over the period from 1817 to 1821, and no record to identify the site has been found.

Lebolo left Egypt and returned to Castellamonte about 1826 where he died at his home on 19 February 1830 at the age of forty-nine. (Legal papers in the possession of H. Donl Peterson.) On 30 July 1831, Lebolo's twenty-one-year-old son, Pietro, was authorized by the family to go to Trieste to see why a shipping company owner, Albano Oblasser, had not paid the Lebolo family for the eleven mummies that he had been commissioned to sell.

On 5 October 1833 Pietro Lebolo went before a notary in Torino to give Francesco Bertola, who was then living in Philadelphia, "the authority to claim the eleven mummies and other antique objects located in various boxes belonging to the deceased Antonio Lebolo who sent them to Albano Oblasser of Trieste. Albano Oblasser sent them to New York to the custom house of Mr. Led and Quellerspie of Meetland and Kennedy." According to this notarized statement, the eleven mummies had been sent to New York City to the house of Mr. Led and Mr. Quellerspie "to be sold to anybody that would have paid the sum that they (Mr. Led and Quellerspie) would have thought appropriate and then sent quittance in any possible way." Mr. Bertola was given authority to sell the mummies, "and he will take care of all of the problems that might come up in order to obtain a quick liquidation of such objects." (The original documents are located in the State Archives in Turin, Italy. Photocopies and translations are in the possession of H. Donl Peterson.)

M. ael H. Chandler

The *History of the Church* contains an intriguing story that raises several questions that have yet to be answered. "On his [Lebolo's] way from Alexandria to Paris, he put in at Trieste, and, after ten days' illness, expired. This was in the year 1832. Previous to his decease, he made a will of the whole, to Mr. Michael H. Chandler, (then in Philadelphia, Pa.,) his nephew, whom he supposed to be in Ireland. Accordingly, the whole were sent to Dublin, and Mr. Chandler's friends ordered them to New York, where they were received at the Custom House, in the winter or spring of 1833." (Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:349.)

There is evidence that Lebolo was in Alexandria and Trieste in the early 1820s. In Alexandria, Lebolo was engaged in selling Egyptian artifacts. In Trieste, where he visited several times between 1822 and 1824, he was listed as a merchant. No known documents substantiate Lebolo's illness in Trieste.

The year of Lebolo's death is recorded in Trieste as taking place in that city in 1832. Neither of those assertions is accurate. In fact, Lebolo died in his hometown of Castellamonte during the night of 18-19 February 1830. This fact is documented in church records of Castellamonte and is corroborated by several notarial documents relative to the Lebolo family that are maintained in the State Archives in Turin, Italy.

The archives in Trieste contain several oversized books in which are recorded the wills of those who filed them there. No will bearing Lebolo's name has been found in Trieste; however, Lebolo did prepare his last will and testament on 17 November 1829 in Castellamonte. (A copy of the will is in the possession of H. Donl Peterson.) Neither does Lebolo's genealogy mention a Michael H. Chandler, an Irishman, in any of the records. No documents have been found that in any way tie Lebolo and Chandler as relatives.

Research in Dublin has failed to document that any mummies moved through the Port of Dublin or were advertised in the maritime news sections of the newspapers of the day. The documents located in the State Archives of Turin mention only the shipment of the mummies from Trieste to New York City to be sold on the market to the highest bidder.

This segment of the story is still baffling. The route the mummies took to get to New York and the reasons for Michael Chandler's involvement with their handling have not yet been clearly established.

Despite the minor discrepancies between recent research findings and Oliver Cowdery's report in the *History of the Church* (see 2:348-51), the main facts in Oliver's account are borne out by recent research:

The mummies were found near Thebes. They were discovered by Antonio Lebolo, a celebrated French traveler. Lebolo was employed by

Drovetti, who was granted permission to excavate by Mehemet Ali. Lebolo did superintend several hundred men in the digs. Lebolo did own eleven mummies. Lebolo did have business connections in Trieste. The mummies were freighted to New York City. They did arrive in the winter or early spring of 1833. Seven mummies were sold to gentlemen in the east before Chandler took the remaining four to Kirtland.

In fact, the only discrepancies are that the early dates in Oliver Cowdery's account are not accurate and Lebolo did not die in Trieste. Documentation is lacking to establish or discredit the assertion of a blood relationship between Chandler and Lebolo and the route of the mummies to the United States. And it should be kept in mind that the information contained in the *History of the Church* was probably given to Oliver Cowdery by Michael Chandler, whose documentation relative to the origin of the mummies, if any, was probably written by the Lebolos or Mr. Oblasser in a foreign language.

The Mummies in America

Chandler, a resident of Philadelphia, had possession of the eleven mummies in the later part of March 1833. How he knew of their arrival in New York City is not known. Because no notice of the mummies' arrival appears to have been published in New York City newspapers, it seems Chandler must have had inside information about their arrival, location, and availability. Perhaps he had some connection with the customs house owners, fellow Irishmen McCloud, Gillespie, Maitland, and Kennedy. In any case, the following advertisement appeared in the *U.S. Gazette*, a Philadelphia newspaper, on 3 April 1833:

"The largest collection of Egyptian mummies ever exhibited in this city, is now seen at the Masonic Hall . . .

"They were found in the vicinity of Thebes, by the celebrated traveler Antonio Lebolo and Chevalier Drovetti, General Consul of France in Egypt.

"Some writings on papyrus found with the mummies, can also be seen, and will afford, no doubt, much satisfaction to amateurs of antiquities.

"Admittance 25 cents. children half price."

Michael Chandler sold seven of the eleven mummies during the next few months. By 9 September 1833 he had sold five of them. When he exhibited the mummies in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the newspaper announcement read: "Six mummies now exhibiting in the Masonic Hall, Harrisburg." By 27 March 1835, he had sold two more of them. On that date a Painesville, Ohio, *Telegraph* article mentioned "the four mummies, now exhibiting in this place." These are the four mummies, along

the sacred writings, that were purchased by the Saints in Kirtland in July 1835.

Joseph Smith Acquired the Papyrus and the Four Remaining Mummies

"On the 3rd of July, Michael H. Chandler came to Kirtland to exhibit some Egyptian mummies. There were four human figures, together with some two or more rolls of papyrus covered with hieroglyphic figures and devices. As Mr. Chandler had been told I could translate them, he brought me some of the characters, and I gave him the interpretation, and like a gentleman, he gave me the following certificate:

"Kirtland, July 6, 1835.

"This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, showed to the most learned; and, from the information that I could ever learn, or meet with, I find that of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., to correspond in the most minute matters.

"Michael H. Chandler,

"Traveling with, and proprietor of, Egyptian mummies."

(Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:235.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith felt impressed to purchase the papyri. Orson Pratt recorded that Joseph did not want to purchase the mummies, but Chandler would not sell the documents independent of them.

The Papyrus Is Translated

Joseph Smith was anxious to begin translating the newly acquired papyrus to discover why he had been impressed to purchase them at the high price of \$2,400. With W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery acting as scribes, Joseph commenced translating the ancient scrolls and recorded, "Much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc." (*History of the Church*, 2:236.)

The Prophet spoke with great respect of the Egyptian documents. His journal entry for 1 October 1835 reads, "This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding." (*History of the Church*, 2:286.)

On 14 November 1835 Warren Parrish was selected as the scribe to assist the Prophet in translating the Egyptian records. In a revelation given to Joseph Smith for Warren Parrish, the Lord stated, "Behold, it shall come to pass in his day, that he shall see great things show forth

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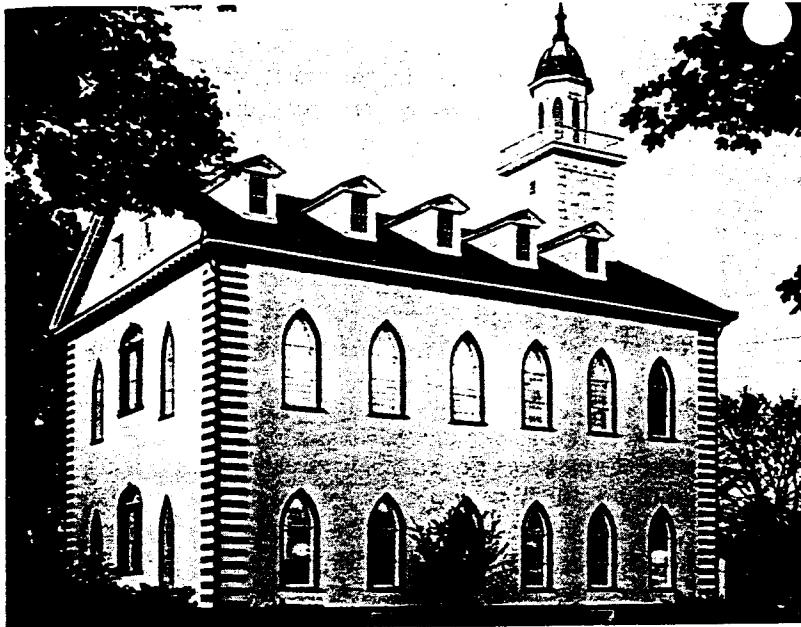
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The four mummies were kept in the Kirtland Temple (far left, upper room), where Joseph Smith began translating the ancient Egyptian papyri

themselves unto my people; he shall see much of my ancient records, and shall know of hidden things, and shall be endowed with a knowledge of hidden languages; and if he desire and shall seek it at my hands, he shall be privileged with writing much of my word, as a scribe unto me for the benefit of my people." (Smith, *History of the Church*, 2:311.)

William E. M'Lellin, Brigham Young, and Jared Carter visited Joseph Smith on 16 December 1835, and Joseph reported, "I exhibited and explained the Egyptian records to them, and explained many things concerning the dealing of God with the ancients, and the formation of the planetary system." (*History of the Church*, 2:334.)

On 6 May 1838 the Prophet recorded: "I also gave some instructions in the mysteries of the kingdom of God; such as the history of the planets, Abraham's writings upon the planetary systems, etc." (*History of the Church*, 3:27.)

On 18 June 1840 Joseph wrote to the high council that "the time has now come, when he [Joseph] should devote himself exclusively to those things which relate to the spiritualities of the Church, and commence the work of translating the Egyptian records, the Bible, and wait upon the Lord for such revelations as may be suited to the conditions and circumstances of the Church." (*History of the Church*, 4:137.)

(The following announcement was made by the Quorum of the Twelve on 21 February 1842: "Let all the different branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in all the world, call meetings in their respective places and tithe themselves and send up to this place to the Trustee in Trust, so that his hands may be loosed, and the Temple go on, and other works be done, such as the new translation of the Bible, and the record of Father Abraham published to the world." (Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:517.)

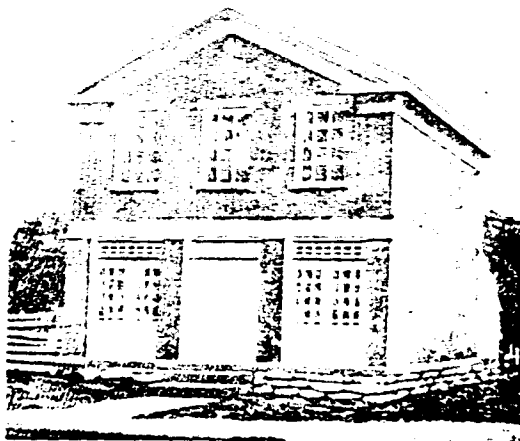
The Book of Abraham Is Published

Joseph Smith was the editor of the Church newspaper, *Times and Seasons*, when the first two installments of the book of Abraham were printed. The following notice appeared on 1 March 1842 when the first installment was printed:

"This paper commences my editorial career. I alone stand responsible for it, and shall do all papers having my signature hence forward.
"Joseph Smith"

(*Times and Seasons*, 3 [1 Mar. 1842]: 710.)

What we currently have as the book of Abraham was printed in three installments. Abraham 1:1-2:18 was published in the 1 March 1842 edition of the *Times and Seasons*. Abraham 2:19-5:21 was published in the 16 March 1842 edition, and Facsimile 3 was published in the 16 May 1842 edition. Elder John Taylor, who succeeded Joseph Smith as the editor of the *Times and Seasons*, published the following notice in the 1 February 1843 paper (p. 95):



The papyri were stored and later translated in the red brick store in Nauvoo

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"We would respectfully announce to those of our subscribers (and there are a good many of them) who commenced their subscriptions for the Times and Seasons at the time when brother Joseph took the editorial department, that the term for which they subscribed for is nearly at a close: most of those commenced at the seventh and eighth numbers; at the time when the translations from the Book of Abraham commenced. This is the sixth number, which only leaves four weeks until the time that they subscribed for, will be fulfilled.

"We have given this timely notice that our friends may prepare themselves. We would further state that we had the promise of Br. Joseph, to furnish us with further extracts from the Book of Abraham. These with other articles that we expect from his pen, the continuation of his history, and the resources that we have of obtaining interesting matter; together with our humble endeavors, we trust will make the paper sufficiently interesting."

The book of Abraham was a lengthy record. When the ancient writings first came to the Church, Oliver Cowdery wrote:

"When the translation of these valuable documents will be completed, I am unable to say; neither can I give you a probable idea how large volumes they will make; but judging from their size, and the comprehensiveness of the language, one might reasonably expect to see a sufficient to develop much upon the mighty acts of the ancient men of God, and of his dealing with the children of men when they saw him face to face. Be there little or much, it must be an inestimable acquisition to our present scriptures, fulfilling, in a small degree, the word of the prophet: For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (In *Messenger and Advocate*, 2 [Dec. 1835]: 236.)

Unfortunately the Prophet Joseph Smith was unable to publish to the world additional passages from the writings of Abraham. The last months of his life were filled with heavy duties that did not allow him time to return to this great work.

The Contributions of the Book of Abraham

Even though we do not have the entire book of Abraham, nor the book of Joseph, what we do have is very significant. The book of Abraham contributes to the scriptures more information about—

1. The ten generations between Noah and Abraham, which are only briefly mentioned in the Bible.
2. The importance of the patriarchal order of the holy priesthood in Abraham's day.
3. The clash between the idolatrous world and the Lord's faithful.
4. The Abrahamic covenant.

5. The planetary system, as understood by the ancients. The planetary system and the organization of the spirits are paralleled in Abraham 3.

6. The premortal life. Perhaps the best statement in the standard works on this subject is recorded in Abraham 3.

7. Why Abraham had Sarai declare to the Egyptians that she was his sister.

8. Sacred truths pertaining to the temple ordinances.

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