New Light on Joseph Smith's Egyptian Papyri

Additional Fragment Disclosed

Because of the unprecedented interest generated throughout the Church by the recovery of 11 pieces of papyrus that were once the property of the Prophet Joseph Smith, The Improvement Era is reproducing here in color all of the known papyri now in the possession of the Church. There are 12 pieces in all; 11 of these are included in the recent find (see January Era) and one has been in the Church Historian's Office over the years. The 12 pieces of papyrus have now been numbered and labeled by Dr. Hugh Nibley, who has been assigned by the Church to direct the investigation and research being done on the material. (See the second in his series of articles, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," page 14.)

Fragment 1 is the section of the papyrus manuscript from which the Prophet Joseph Smith obtained Facsimile No. 1, which is reproduced in the Book of Abraham.

Fragments 2, 3A and 3B are unclassified, illustrated fragments.

Fragments 4-9—these include the one from the Church Historian's Office—are from the Book of the Dead.

Such books, which were written to assist in the safe passage of the dead persons into the spirit world, were commonly buried with Egyptian mummies. The writings on the recently recovered fragments show that all of these Book of the Dead papyri belonged to the lady Taimin Mutnincheshonsu. Thus, we probably now know the name of the female mummy that was in Joseph Smith's possession and on whose person it was reported the papyrus was originally found.

Fragments 10 and 11 are unclassified, unillustrated hieratic texts. (Hieratic text is a cursive, shorthand version of hieroglyphics.)

Fragment 4 is called the "Framed Trinity Papyrus" because this particular fragment had an old frame on it when it was found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It is thought that the fragment may have been framed and displayed during the Prophet Joseph Smith's time. It is labeled "Trinity" because such figures as those shown in the upper left-hand illustration are interpreted by Egyptologists as representing the Trinity.

D.L.G.
Background of the Church Historian’s Fragment

By Jay M. Todd
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As to the background of the Church Historian’s fragment, this is most
puzzling. Two members of the historian’s office, A. William Lund and
Earl E. Olson, assistant Church historians, do not recall any information
surrounding the fragment—only that it has been there throughout their
service. Brother Lund has been assistant Church historian since 1911, and
has worked since September 1908 in the historian’s office. They believe
that the fragment has been a part of the manuscript of the Egyptian Alphabet
and Grammar, perhaps this entry helps to date and place the papyrus
fragment in its long journey from Nauvoo to Utah.

(2) However, the most interesting—and most puzzling—entry is found
under date of Saturday, July 11, 1846. (As early as 1938, Dr. Sidney B. Sperry
of Brigham Young University, the “father” of much of our modern Pearl
of Great Price research, mentioned in part this intriguing entry in Ancient
Records Testify in Papyrus and Stone, an MIA course of study.) “At seven a.m.
President Brigham Young and the brethren with he went into council in
Powaheek’s tent, which was on the east side of the creek.

“Powaheek asked, where they would winter and where they would cross the
Missouri. It was reported that somebody had stolen from the ‘Mormons.’
Powaheek said if he found anything, he would return it . . . .”

“Powaheek spoke of Joseph Smith, the prophet, who had been murdered
and with whom he had been acquainted; said, the prophet was a great
and good man.”

“ar the Presidency passed out of the
tent, Banquequa, a Pottawatomie [sic] Chief, called us aside, and pre-
sented a paper counseling the Indians not to sell their lands, given them by
Hon. Dunham, and two sheets of hieroglyphics, from the Book of Abra-
ham. President B. Young started at

... ten minutes after eight, rode till
twenty-two minutes after ten, when
they stopped at the west branch of
the Nodaway, with Ezra Chase; they
resumed their journey at half past
eleven and arrived at Pottawatomie
Indian village forty-five minutes after
one p.m.

“A Pottawatomie captain presented
two sheets of the Book of Abraham;
also a letter from their ‘Father’ Joseph
Smith, dated 1843, and a map of their
land by W. W. Phelps . . . .”

The location of these meetings was
in western Iowa, where the Saints were
establishing themselves at Council
Bluffs, Mount Pisgah, and other camps
in preparation for the winter of 1846,
previous to the general exodus to the
Rocky Mountains a year later. The
West Nodaway River generally ranges
45-55 miles east and southeast of
present-day Omaha, Nebraska. From
Church history, it appears that Brig-
ham Young was moving westward to-
ward Council Bluffs at the time.

This startling entry presents many
questions: 1) Were two different
presentations being made of the Book
of Abraham material, or is the second
reference supposed to be an amplifica-
tion of the first reference?

2) Are there two presentations, one
involving actual papyrus fragments,
the other involving a presentation of
printed sheets from the Book of Abra-
ham printed in the Times and Seasons,
the other fragment? Numerous questions come to mind.

But the story is not yet finished. To add strength to the possibility that the Potawatami Indians actually could have obtained some manuscripts, perhaps even as a gift from the Prophet Joseph Smith, the following entries from the *Documentary History of the Church* are presented:

1) Under date of Saturday, June 24, 1843: Several of the Potawatamie [sic] Indians called to see the Nauvoo House and Temple. They wanted to talk, but their interpreter could not speak much. According to Dr. T. Edgar Lyon, well-known Church historian, associated with Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., Nauvoo was a prominent spot for Indians and was called by them *Quaquanees*. Indian burial grounds abounded in the area. The Potawatamie Indians were there, being ever pressed westward by settlers since their expulsion from the area around Lake Michigan in 1833. A famous American Indian war, the Black Hawk War, was also waged in this vicinity. At any event, when these Indians arrived, the Prophet Joseph was not in town. He had been forcibly taken the day before by two sheriffs from Missouri, who arrested him under false arrest to Dixon, Lee County, Illinois, some 140 miles northeast of Nauvoo. He was released several days later under a writ of habeas corpus.

2) Under date of Sunday, July 2, 1843: "I had an interview with several Potawatamie [sic] chiefs, who came to see me during my absence." Following this statement, the Prophet had included "Interview with Potawatamie Chiefs. (From Willard Woodruff's Journal.)" which contains the following: "The Indian chiefs remained at Nauvoo until the Prophet returned and had his trial. During their stay they had a talk with Hyrum Smith in the basement of the Nauvoo House... They were not free to talk, and did not wish to communicate their feelings until they could see the great Prophet. At length, on the 2nd..."
day of July, 1843, President Joseph Smith and several of the Twelve met those chiefs in the court-room, with about twenty of the elders. The following is a synopsis of the conversation which took place as given by the Interpreter:

The Indian orator arose and asked the Prophet if the men who were present were all his friends. Answer—yes.

He then said—"We as a people have long been distressed and oppressed. We have been driven from our lands many times. . . . We have talked with the Great Spirit, and the Great Spirit has talked with us. We have asked the Great Spirit to save us and let us live, and the Great Spirit has told us that he had raised up a great Prophet, chief and friend, who would do us great good and tell us what to do; and the Great Spirit has told us that you are the man (pointing to the Prophet Joseph). We have now come a great way to see you, and hear your words, and to have you to tell us what to do. Our horses have become poor travelling, and we are hungry. We will now wait and hear your word."

The Spirit of God rested upon the Lamanites, especially the orator. Joseph was much affected and shed tears. He arose and said unto them:—"I have heard your words. They are true. The Great Spirit has told you the truth. I am your friend and brother, and I wish to do you good. . . ."

"The Great Spirit has given me a book, and told me that you will soon be blessed again. The Great Spirit will soon begin to talk with you and your children. This is the book which your fathers made. I wrote upon it [showing them the Book of Mormon]. This tells you what you will have to do. I now want you to begin to pray to the Great Spirit. I want you to make peace with one another, and do not kill any more Indians; it is not good. Do not kill white men; it is not good; but ask the Great Spirit for what you want, and it will not be long before the Great Spirit will bless you, and you will cultivate the earth and build good houses like white men. We will give you something to eat and to take home with you."

"When the prophet's words were interpreted to the chiefs, they all said it was good. . . ."

"At the close of the interview, Joseph had an ox killed for them, and they were furnished with some more horses. . . ." (Italics added.)
In addition to this brief information, which certainly portrays a picture of emotion and deep respect between the Potawatami Indians and the Prophet Joseph Smith, the date of the event is most important. It is July 1843, more than a year after the Book of Abraham had first been printed in Times and Seasons in 1842. By now the Prophet knew which pieces of papyrus were important, in terms of religious scripture, and which were not.

During the Indians’ stay, and in a gesture of lasting friendship, the Prophet may have given them either pages from Times and Seasons, which featured Book of Abraham facsimiles, or perhaps some actual papyrus fragments, or both. Thus, in addition to food and horses, the Prophet may have wished to give the Indians a personal token, something of value or of antiquity to demonstrate his affection and bond with them. At any event, it seems apparent that whatever it was that the Indians gave to Brigham Young in 1846 was that which they had obtained during their 1843 Nauvoo visit with the Prophet Joseph Smith. It is certainly a most intriguing puzzle.
With our readers, the staff of The Improvement Era will be looking forward with eager anticipation to additional developments in this fascinating story, and to the unfolding of the meaning of the hieroglyphics and illustrations on these valuable manuscripts as they are given by Dr. Nihely in his articles.