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A Tragedy of Errors

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Abstract Review of . . . *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (1992), by Charles M. Larson.

Charles M. Larson, . . . *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri.* Grand Rapids: Institute for Religious Research, 1992. 240 pp., illustrated. \$11.95.

A Tragedy of Errors

Reviewed by John Gee

“It’s all over. It’s all over. It’s all over.”

C. M. Larson, 1990

Recently many members of the Church opened their mail boxes to find an unsolicited anti-Mormon book inside.¹ The cover letter claimed that in this “fascinating new book” the author has put “the mass of scholarly writing on the Book of Abraham into manageable form,” providing “an up to the minute account” complete with “the first ever published color photographs of the Joseph Smith papyri collection.” None of these claims is true.

Though the book is principally an attack on the book of Abraham, it seeks to discredit the Book of Mormon indirectly (p. 5-6). This justifies its review here.

A Deliberate Deception

Contrary to the publisher’s claims, the book is not new. It is a second edition with only minor changes from Charles M. Larson, . . . *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus: The Testimony of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment—or a Latter-day Disaster?* (Orem, UT: privately published by author, 1985). The biggest difference between the two editions is that the rhetoric has been toned down slightly in the second edition. Photographs have also been added, though there is neither attribution on the photographs nor any indication of permission to publish them. But the publishers, the Institute for Religious Research,² are mistaken in thinking that they are publishing the

¹ Some 30,000-35,000 copies of the book have been printed and distributed across the United States.

² The Institute for Religious Research is closely affiliated with the Gospel Truths Ministries, sharing the same phone and at least some of the same personnel. Gospel Truths Ministries is run by Roger P. Hansen, Luke P. Wilson, and Joel Groat, and is listed in Eric Pement and Keith

first color photographs of the Joseph Smith papyri.³ They are nearly a quarter century too late for that, for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints published a complete set of color photographs of the Joseph Smith papyri in the February 1968 *Improvement Era*.

This book is a rehash of Jerald and Sandra Tanner's arguments from the late 1960s, which are an elaboration of the arguments of Franklin S. Spalding in 1912, which are essentially a highly polemicized form of T. B. H. Stenhouse's arguments of 1873, whose main argument along this line was borrowed from Jules Remy's arguments in 1861, which were translated from the French edition, whose main argument was taken from the short commentary of Theodule Deveria in 1856.

The argument built up in these works runs as follows: (1) Joseph Smith claimed to have translated the Book of Mormon from Reformed Egyptian. (2) The book of Abraham was written in the same language as the Book of Mormon. (3) The Kirtland Egyptian Papers demonstrate that Joseph Smith thought the book of Abraham was on Joseph Smith Papyri I, XI, and X. (4) Joseph Smith Papyri I, XI, and X have been identified by Egyptologists as a Book of Breathings. (5) The Book of Breathings is not the book of Abraham. (6) Therefore Joseph Smith could not translate Egyptian. (7) Therefore Joseph Smith was not a prophet. (8) Therefore Latter-day Saints should leave the Church and adopt "Biblical Christianity" (i.e., Protestant

Edward Tolbert, *The 1991 Directory of Cult Research Organizations* (Trenton, MI: American Religious Center, 1991), 29. The Institute for Religious Research is not connected with any church, university, theological seminary, or Bible institute; it is a private organization dedicated to disseminating fundamentalist Christian teachings. While Luke P. Wilson is supposed to head the Institute for Religious Research, Roger P. Hansen signs the checks.

³ Larson mentions the original publication of the papyri (see pp. 41, 229-30). Larson also follows Fawn Brodie (Fawn M. Brodie, letter to Dale Morgan, 12 December 1967, Dale Morgan Papers, Box 28, Folder 19, Reel 10, Frame 327, resurrected in Newell G. Bringhurst, "Fawn M. Brodie as a Critic of Mormonism's Policy toward Blacks—A Historiographical Reassessment," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 11 [1991]: 39-40), in accusing the Church of suppressing the papyri (pp. 200-201, 229-30). However, the Church obtained the papyri on 27 November 1967 and published them two months later in the *Improvement Era*.

Fundamentalism; pp. 189-90). As will be demonstrated below, premises 2-3 are not true, and conclusions 6-8 are also not true.

Larson's way of "putting the mass of scholarly writing on the book of Abraham into manageable form" is to ignore almost all of the scholarly writing on the book of Abraham in the last twenty years (more on this later). The publisher's claim that the volume is "up to the minute" evidently derives from the citation of two articles from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, although Larson misses new and important evidence that came out about the same time.

To list all of the little mistakes and misquotations would be tedious; therefore we will concentrate on some of the more egregious errors. The reader cannot assume, however, that any particular passage from Larson is correct simply because we fail to label it mistaken.

The book initially feigns sympathy with Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints, apparently in order to lure the reader into its ultimately anti-Mormon conclusions. This may be why the acknowledgments thanking such notable anti-Mormons as H. Michael Marquardt, the late Reverend Wesley P. Walters,⁴ and the Tanners are found in the back of the book (p. 237), instead of being placed at the front as is normal for books and as they were in the first edition. The chapter written with anti-Mormon writer Floyd McElveen is also tucked in the back (pp. 188-95),⁵ followed by a response card asking if the reader "made a decision for Jesus Christ as a result of reading this book" (p. 197). Such disingenuousness also seems to explain why the neutral-sounding Institute for Religious Research published the book, rather than the closely associated Gospel Truths Ministries—a name that would alert the average Mormon. Two-thirds of the way through the book (on p. 165), we are introduced to a standard list of old anti-Mormon chestnuts (e.g., the Adam-God theory, Joseph Smith and the occult, etc.) and advised in the accompanying footnote to seek guidance in the works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner.⁶

⁴ Walters wrote the "Forward [*sic*]" (pp. 5-6), but his title of Reverend has been here omitted.

⁵ McElveen has previously published anti-Mormon materials through Gospel Truths Ministries. In 1986 the organization dumped copies en masse on doorsteps around Utah County.

⁶ For hints on the general reliability of the Tanners, see L. Ara Norwood, Matthew Roper, and John A. Tvedtnes, reviews of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, in

Larson as Historian

Larson sets up his case by claiming that Joseph Smith had to invent the book of Abraham (1) because of the apostasy in Kirtland (pp. 11-12); and (2) because "in Kirtland . . . the growth of the Church became stagnant" (p. 12). But the Kirtland apostasy took place in 1837-38, two years after Joseph Smith began work on the book of Abraham. Moreover, rather than stagnating, "the LDS population in Kirtland multiplied from about 100 in 1832 to over 1,500 in 1836."⁷ In Kirtland alone, the Church was nearly doubling annually at this time. This is stagnation? Larson provides no documentation for any of his claims here; his approach is pure, unsubstantiated speculation.

Larson claims that Joseph needed scriptural justification for his new doctrines. But here he overlooks the Mormon belief in living prophets. Joseph Smith was engaged in publishing his own revelations in 1835 and continued to receive and publish them throughout his life. He would hardly need to stick his neck out to invent something ancient when he could invent something modern. Thus, in Larson's examination of the historical circumstances, he has no motive for Joseph to invent the book of Abraham. And he fails to supply historical evidence to back his claims up.

Larson's discussion of Hugh Nibley's qualifications to deal with the papyri is similarly inaccurate. He scarcely mentions Nibley before he essays to attack Nibley's credentials: "Dr. Nibley was *not* an Egyptologist, as he himself was the first to admit." So Larson says that Nibley, who "must have realized his expertise with other ancient languages would be of little help in working with the papyri," rushed off in 1966-67 after the papyri were discovered by Atiya to "[begin] to study Egyptian in Chicago with Dr. John A. Wilson" (p. 54). "Dr. Nibley subsequently studied under Klaus Baer, as well" (p. 230 n. 2). "This 'head start' in the ancient tongue . . . was nevertheless quite inadequate, and he found himself unqualified to deal with the

Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 3 (1991): 158-230, and Matthew Roper, review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* in this volume of the *Review*, pp. 169-215.

⁷ Milton V. Backman, Jr., and Ronald K. Esplin, "History of the Church: c. 1831-1844, Ohio, Missouri, and Nauvoo Periods," in Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:609.

papyri on his own" (p. 54). Here, Larson seeks to discredit his opposition by a diversionary tactic. But to do so, he must invent the facts. In reality, Dr. Nibley's first study of Egyptian was in 1927;⁸ he used it in his Ph.D. dissertation and in articles published in 1945,⁹ 1948,¹⁰ 1949,¹¹ 1956,¹² to mention but a few examples. In 1959, while on sabbatical leave at the University of California at Berkeley, Nibley became Klaus Baer's first student in Egyptian and learned Coptic at the same time. It was during the summer of 1964 that Nibley studied under both Baer and Wilson at the University of Chicago. When the papyri appeared, it had been forty years since Nibley's first introduction to Egyptian. If there was anything Nibley was relatively new at in 1968, it was Coptic, but he had even published in scholarly journals on texts in that language as well.¹³ While Nibley may not have felt as prepared as he would like to have been, that hardly made him "unqualified" (p. 54). Indeed, what Nibley considered "frankly skirmish[ing] and spar[ring] for time,"¹⁴ Klaus Baer considered to be "a delight and [something that] should be compulsory reading for budding

⁸ From an oral interview by the reviewer with Nibley. The material here has been subsequently checked by Nibley.

⁹ See Hugh Nibley, "Sparsiones," *Classical Journal* 40 (1945): 515-43; cf. n. 104; reprinted in *The Ancient State*, vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), 148-94.

¹⁰ Hugh Nibley, "The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East," *Improvement Era* 51 (1948); essentially reprinted as "Men of the East," in *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites*, vol. 5 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 25-42.

¹¹ Hugh Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," *Western Political Quarterly* 2/3 (1949): 328-44; reprinted in *The Ancient State*, 1-32.

¹² Hugh Nibley, "Egypt Revisited," *Improvement Era* 59 (March-June 1956): 150-52, 185-87, 244-45, 252-54, 256, 258, 260, 308-10, 334, 336, 338-40, 390-91, 460-61; reprinted in *Lehi in the Desert*, 308-49.

¹³ Hugh Nibley, "Evangelium Quadragesima Dierum," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (1966): 1-24; reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), 10-44.

¹⁴ The phrase comes from Hugh Nibley, "An Intellectual Autobiography," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1978), xxvi. Larson seems unaware of the source of the quotation (pp. 115, 212, 233 n. 1). This is apparently referring to Nibley's *Improvement Era* and *BYU Studies* articles of the late sixties.

Egyptologists.”¹⁵ Larson appears completely ignorant of the fact that non-Latter-day Saint Egyptologists have quoted Nibley in respected Egyptological journals.¹⁶ And while Larson accuses those who would consider Nibley’s scholarship valid of being mere “novices” (p. 85), at least one leading non-Mormon Egyptologist has described Nibley’s work as “a serious scientific attempt to make full use of Egyptological literature” even if it “shows clear traces of Mormon viewpoints.”¹⁷

Larson’s historical failings continue to exhibit themselves in his other biographical sketches. His treatment of J. E. Homans (pp. 29-30), for instance, is inaccurate in the extreme. And, as usual, he provides no documentation for any of his statements about Homans. There is, for example, no evidence that Homans was hired by the Church. Indeed, there is evidence against Larson’s claim on this matter. When he asserts that Church leaders “sought the services of a hired, professional ‘expert’ ” to defend the book of Abraham (p. 29), Larson’s only cited source directly contradicts him. At the time Homans’s articles first appeared, they were accompanied by the following statement:

The author of the article herewith published is a non-resident of Utah, and is not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The article as received by the News was accompanied by the statement that the author had written it upon his own initiative, without request or suggestion from any member of the Church, and solely because of his interest in the subject, to which his attention had been

¹⁵ “They might be an effective inoculation against the pompous ass syndrome.” Klaus Baer, letter to Hugh Nibley, 10 August 1968, in the Archives of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

¹⁶ E.g., Robert K. Ritner, “Hermes Pentamegistos,” *Göttinger Miszellen* 49 (1981): 73-75.

¹⁷ L. M. J. Zondhoven, *Annual Egyptological Bibliography 1977* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1981), 181. By contrast, at least one Egyptologist considered the works of the anti-Mormons Nelson, Heward, and Tanner to be “amateur” and “polemical” with “several gross errors.” See Dieter Mueller, in *Annual Egyptological Bibliography 1968* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 131-32 (D. J. Nelson), 169-70 (the Tanners); cf. 84 (Heward and Tanner).

drawn by the publication of the pamphlet by Episcopal Bishop F. S. Spalding.¹⁸

Larson's historical method is as follows: Invent evidence, read minds, attribute motives, misquote sources, argue from circumstantial evidence—or better yet—argue from no evidence. His treatment of the anti-Mormon bogus Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson, as well of Robert L. and Rosemary Brown's exposé of Nelson, is highly misleading (pp. 54-59, 148-54, 199-226). Larson also has a poor grasp of the Book of Mormon. He garbles the story of its coming forth (pp. 9-10) and misattributes quotations (Moroni is called Mormon on p. 90).

Larson as Egyptologist

If Larson stumbles as a historian, he falls flat on his face as an Egyptologist.¹⁹ He betrays no knowledge of any foreign language, yet offers to guide us through Egyptian, "a unique area of study that is extremely difficult to master" (p. 54).²⁰ Although he adopts a fairly straightforward approach to the documents on pages 97-99, he cannot even pull the correct

¹⁸ *Deseret Evening News*, 18 January 1913, section 3, p. 6; later cited by B. H. Roberts in *CHC* 2:139. Although Larson cites this on p. 28, it is not at all clear that Larson had even read it. But one worries more if he *did*. Thanks to Matthew Roper for providing this source as well as several others.

¹⁹ "Mr. Larson is not qualified to speak on things Egyptian. He illustrates this when he states that, before translating a hieratic text, the characters 'must first be converted to hieroglyphics' (p. 89). That's like saying that before translating a hand-written English letter into French one must first type it! Egyptian hieratic is a writing system and need not be converted to something else before translation" (personal communication from John A. Tvedtnes).

²⁰ Larson's statement about vowels on p. 232 n. 3 is not true. See, for example, Elmar Edel, *Neue Deutungen keilschriftlicher Umschreibungen ägyptischer Wörter und Personennamen* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980); for contrary evidence to the statement about hieratic on p. 232 n. 2, see Georg Möller, *Hieratische Lesestücke*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1910), 1:1, 4, 7-16; T. G. H. James, *The Hekanakte Papers and Other Early Middle Kingdom Documents* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1962), plates 1-9, 14, 19-21, 24-30; Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927), 1: plates II-III, V-VI.

hieratic signs from the papyrus (though, admittedly, this might be the publisher's fault).²¹

He makes fun of the book of Abraham, which he thinks was produced in a manner that he is at great pains to demonstrate is manifestly impossible. Yet, left on his own to translate Egyptian, he gives us gibberish (pp. 97-99). He does not even identify the contents of the various Egyptian texts correctly (pp. 62, 120, 138). Not only is Larson apparently unable to read the original texts to which he refers, but he has misunderstood the translations he himself cites. Contrary to his assertion that the Book of Breathings contains "prayers to pagan Egyptian gods" (pp. 120, 138), the Joseph Smith Book of Breathings is addressed to no Egyptian gods; rather, it is addressed to a human individual and reminds him of promises made to him and things he has experienced.

Larson labels facsimile 3 "the single most common form of Egyptian funerary scene known—the deceased being led into the presence of the Court of Osiris, god of the underworld." For him the scene is just the standard "chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*" (p. 108). This is an important point for critics of the book of Abraham. The facsimiles must be dismissed as just run-of-the-mill pagan nonsense. The University of Chicago's Klaus Baer, however, disagreed: "Facs[imile] No. 3 is not a judgment scene and exact parallels may be hard to find." Much the same might be said of the other facsimiles. Calling them "typical funerary texts" does not explain anything, and is not really true.²²

²¹ E.g., the fourth set of signs on p. 99, far from being the *m-ht* signs of column 1, line 3, are the *w* and *p* signs from *irw p3*, column 1, line 6.

²² Baer, letter to Nibley, 13 September 1968, p. 2. Other pertinent statements: "Facs. No. 1 and 3 are by no means the usual things" (ibid.). "The 1912 Egyptologists certainly went too far in claiming that Fascimiles 1-3 in PGP were ordinary scenes of which dozens of examples could be found" (ibid., 1). See Hugh W. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 3-9. Larson never deals with the issues Nibley raises here. Nor is Nibley the first to raise them. Edith Varga says that the hypocephali are "une coutume funéraire exclusive" (uniquely a funerary custom) and tend to run in priestly families; see Edith Varga, "Les travaux préliminaires de la monographie sur les hupocéphales," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 12 (1961): 241-44, quoted from p. 247.

Larson never deals with what occurs on the Egyptian papyri we have: What do they say? What did they mean to the Egyptians? His only attempt at indicating what any of the papyri mean is an explanation of Joseph Smith Papyrus I (p. 102). But the explanation not only matches no Egyptian text;²³ it makes no sense. How can grandchildren be present at their father's conception? Can Larson produce any Egyptian text where the Egyptians make this mistake?

But whereas Larson's philological errors are hidden, his errors in restorations of ancient texts are quite manifest. Not only is his restoration of Joseph Smith Papyrus I obscene, it is impossible (pp. 64-65, 102). Larson provides what he claims to be a "professional reconstruction" (pp. 62-65), contrasting it with Joseph Smith's reconstruction of missing portions of the papyri, of which he is extremely critical. To restore a lacuna without the aid of revelation, however, careful comparison to parallel texts must be done in order to show that the restorations are even possible. Can Larson produce another papyrus (as opposed to a temple wall) where the figure on the lion couch is ithyphallic? Can he show any authentic Egyptian drawing where anyone wearing breeches is ithyphallic?²⁴ While Larson has noted that there are some characters above the figures, he has misunderstood the implications. The characters are in vertical columns marked by vertical lines to either side of the text, a practice reserved for cases where there is more than one column of text. Given at least two columns of text, there is no room for

²³ On the problems with Larson's naive line of interpretation, see Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1948), 126-27; Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 152-53; David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 44; Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1952), 568.

²⁴ Larson's reconstruction otherwise follows that of Edward Ashment, but it is significant that Ashment did not make this mistake. See Edward H. Ashment, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Reappraisal," *Sunstone* 4 (1979): 39. Larson's view of Ashment is ambivalent at best. He cannot seem to make up his mind whether Ashment is "a respected LDS Egyptologist" (p. 128), a fellow apostate (pp. 147-78), or one of a number of "LDS apologists" (p. 164). When Ashment agrees with Larson, Larson speaks well of him; when Ashment does not, Larson does not.

the bird hovering over the figure. A hand is the only reasonable restoration. Besides, the artist has already demonstrated how he draws the end of a bird's wing, and it is not in separate strokes.²⁵ Thus the restoration Larson mocks (pp. 155-56) is possible, whereas his own is not.

This raises an interesting point. Larson claims his restoration to be "professional." Was it done by a professional Egyptologist? If so, by whom? Was it done by a professional artist? If so, the artist apparently had no familiarity with the canons of Egyptian art, and the reconstruction is too crude to have been done by a good artist. Does "professional" perhaps refer to a professional anti-Mormon?²⁶

One final point: Nearly every attempt at reconstruction of Joseph Smith Papyrus I strenuously tries to avoid the knife in the standing figure's hand. This, the critics say, is a figment of Joseph Smith's imagination, with no basis in the original papyrus scene. Nevertheless, an eyewitness account suggests that it was, in fact, present on the original. One visitor to Nauvoo during the lifetime of Joseph Smith describes being shown "a number of glazed slides, like picture frames, containing sheets of papyrus, with Egyptian inscriptions and hieroglyphs. . . . Pointing to the figure of a man lying on a table, he [the Mormon guide] said, 'That is the picture of Abraham on the point of being sacrificed. That man standing by him with a drawn knife is an idolatrous priest of the Egyptians.'"²⁷ If the drawn knife was crudely sketched in, and

²⁵ Michael Lyon, who worked on the staff at the Ramses II exhibit in Denver, points out that the bottom stroke of the upper group is a definite thumb stroke.

²⁶ Larson's reconstruction looks very similar to a tentative reconstruction made by Robert F. Smith; see Robert F. Smith, letter to Brent Metcalfe, 3 November 1983, in the F.A.R.M.S. archives. There is, however, no indication that Larson had access to Smith's work. If he did somehow manage to obtain a copy of Smith's work, by whatever means, he has altered it.

²⁷ Henry Caswall, "The Mormons," *The Visitor or Monthly Instructor for 1842* (1842): 406. Though Caswall freely embellished his accounts later (see Hugh Nibley, "The Greek Psalter Mystery or Mr. Caswall Meets in the Press," in *Tinkling Symbols and Sounding Brass*, 11:304-406); this one is contemporary, and from his description of Joseph Smith Papyrus IIIA-B we know that he had seen the papyri and not just the book of Abraham facsimiles. It does not matter, by the way, whether the priest is shown with an Anubis mask or not; he is still a priest; Christine

easily distinguishable from the papyrus proper, this observer fails to mention it. Yet he was a hostile witness, eager to emphasize anything that looked fishy.

Like many anti-Mormons, Larson continues to cite the 1912 Egyptologists as authoritative on the book of Abraham (pp. 27-29, implied in p. 151) because they said what the anti-Mormons want to hear (cf. Helaman 13:27-28). Yet the present scholarly opinion is that "in 1914 [and thus, presumably, in 1912 as well], Egyptology was essentially an amateur subject."²⁸

Theme and Variations

If Larson insists that "Nibley was *not* an Egyptologist" (p. 54), we must insist that Larson merits the title of Egyptologist even less. But Larson's strength is supposed to be his "patience and skill" to "bring into manageable form this mass of material." And so, besides presenting the anti-Mormon theory, Larson lists many varieties of responses which various Latter-day Saint scholars have given to the anti-Mormon argument over the years. He classifies these responses under various categories, each of which he sees as conflicting with all the others. But while some of the theories conflict, not all of them do. Larson also marshals a number of arguments against these responses: Yet some of these arguments are not refutations at all, but mere rhetoric. Let us look at a few points in some of Larson's purported rebuttals. (I retain Larson's labels for the responses, however flippant or inadequate they may be.)

First, in what Larson calls the "Any Egyptian Connection" Theory, he screams for three italicized paragraphs that there cannot, indeed must not, be any Egyptian connection with the scriptures. He states, "Throughout the Old Testament it is abundantly clear that God took great pains to dissuade the children of Israel from any contact with the false gods and idolatrous practices of their pagan neighbors" (p. 119, deemphasis mine). Perhaps, however, we should consider the actual relationship between Egypt and Israel in the Old Testament: "In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and

Seeber, "Maske," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1977-89), 3:1196-99.

²⁸ Anthony Leahy, "Editorial Foreword," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76 (1990): vii.

with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isaiah 19:24-25). Hosea says "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1). Matthew interprets this scripture messianically as referring to Jesus (Matthew 2:12-15). When Larson repudiates any contact between the Israelites and their neighbors, he negates the whole point of the book of Jonah. Scholars have also pointed to the similarities between Job and the Egyptian tale of the Eloquent Peasant.²⁹ "It can hardly be doubted that the author of Proverbs was acquainted with the Egyptian [*Instruction of Amenemope*] and borrowed from it."³⁰ In the Old Testament, furthermore, God often designates various pagans as his servants (Isaiah 10:5-6; 44:28-45:1; Habakkuk 1:5-10).

Larson continues, "The New Testament likewise teaches the same principle that God does not use pagan or ungodly vessels to bear his truth" (p. 119, also deemphasized). It is rather interesting that he should choose Paul as an example of this alleged principle (pp. 119-20), for Paul quotes the pagan poet Aratus (*Phaenomena* 5) approvingly when teaching the gospel (Acts 17:28). Larson's "principle" would have been news to many of the Church Fathers, as well, who routinely referred to the divine truths supposedly embodied in Hellenistic philosophy. But, more impressive still, the Lord Jesus himself quotes a pagan poet to Paul in one of his visions (Acts 26:14 citing Euripides, *Bacchae* 794-95). Larson's argument that "God does not use pagan or ungodly vessels to bear his truth" is simply not true.

Furthermore, when Larson claims that "the Joseph Smith Papyri have been identified with absolute certainty as prayers to pagan Egyptian gods" (p. 120, deemphasis mine), he is manifestly in error. Where, we may ask, in all of Papyrus

²⁹ See Kenneth A. Kitchen, "The Basic Literary Forms and Formulations of Ancient Instructional Writings in Egypt and Western Asia," in Erik Hornung and Othmar Keel, *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag, 1979), 239.

³⁰ "Ever since Adolf Erman pointed this out there has been a consensus among scholars on a literary relationship." Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973-80), 2:147; Kitchen, "The Basic Literary Forms and Formulations of Ancient Instructional Writings in Egypt and Western Asia," 241, 244, 246, 248, 250.

Joseph Smith XI-X³¹ is there any prayer to any Egyptian God? In the text in question, Hor is the name of an individual Egyptian man. His father's name is Rmny-qꜣy, and his mother's name is Tꜣy-ḥbyṯ; the name is clearly identified as personal rather than divine.³²

Larson never deals with the contents of the Joseph Smith Papyri. He does not seem to know what is in them, nor does he particularly seem to care. Rather, he condemns the contents outright without ever properly examining them. If Larson thinks Nibley is wrong in stating that conventional translations of the Book of Breathing are not translations but nonsense (p. 139), he could do us the courtesy of explaining to the reader what the Book of Breathing means, as Nibley attempted to do in his book *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*. Nibley spent 280 pages on an effort to explain what it meant in its Egyptian context, but Larson avoids the whole issue by labelling it a "Nobody Really Understands Egyptian Anyway" Theory, dodging or misrepresenting the issue by insisting that somebody somewhere understands this stuff, and then dropping it (pp. 138-40).

All we have from Larson in his attempted rebuttals is that somebody somewhere does understand the Egyptian material, but that no one (or at least no Bible-believer) should try. If he is going to answer Nibley's complaint that the Egyptian material has *not* been properly understood,³³ he must demonstrate rather than assert that he understands what the Book of Breathing is. How can he demonstrate this without ever dealing with the evidence? It is all well and good for him to list a string of definitions for various Egyptian characters (pp. 97-99)—though even here he has not always gotten either the translation or the characters correct—but when he is through we have a text that reads: "this pool great Khonsu born of Taykhebyṯ justified

³¹ The text of Papyrus X follows that of Papyrus XI.

³² We bring this up to forestall the ridiculous answer that there are any prayers to Horus in the papyrus; Hor (Hellenized as Horus) was used as a personal name in Egypt much the same way that Jesus is used as a personal name in Latin American countries today.

³³ Larson fails to grasp the fact that, when Nibley argues that the Egyptian material has not been understood properly or even taken seriously (pp. 138-40), he is not arguing that it cannot be understood if taken seriously.

likewise after grasp.”³⁴ What on earth does that mean? Larson never tells us.

The Papyri That Aren't There

Larson has nothing but contempt for what he calls the “Missing Black and Red Scroll” Theory (pp. 129-34), for “it is considered valid by novices” (p. 85). He insists that we now possess the papyri from which the book of Abraham comes, and that Latter-day Saint scholars who have argued that another, missing, papyrus was the source are indulging in mere wishful thinking. After all, “whenever qualified people have studied the papyri, including such undisputed experts as Baer, Wilson, and Parker, they have always reached the same conclusions that [Dee Jay] Nelson did” (p. 151, deemphasis mine). Yet Larson is unaware that the most recent non-LDS Egyptologist to write on the subject, to my knowledge, said that “the Pap. Joseph Smith XI and X containing the Book of Breathings were wrongly identified by others with Joseph Smith’s book of Abraham.”³⁵

Larson is adamant that “there were *two*, and *only two*, ‘rolls of papyrus’ ” (pp. 133, 85) and accuses Nibley of concocting a story about there being more than one lengthy scroll in Nauvoo (pp. 129-30).³⁶ This is important to him because he wants to be able to demonstrate that we have the papyrus from which Joseph Smith claimed to have derived the book of

³⁴ I have given Larson the benefit of the doubt by selecting the more correct of the readings he has provided and correcting the personal name.

³⁵ Zondhoven, *Annual Egyptological Bibliography 1977*, 180-81.

³⁶ In 1906, while visiting Nauvoo, President Joseph F. Smith related to Preston Nibley his experience as a child of seeing his Uncle Joseph in the front rooms of the Mansion House working on the Egyptian manuscripts. According to President Smith, one of the rolls of papyri “when unrolled on the floor extended through two rooms of the Mansion House. Hugh Nibley, “Phase I,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3/2 (Summer 1968): 101. This would have been sometime between 1843 when the Mansion House was completed and the prophet’s death in June 1844, one or two years after other parts of the papyri had been cut up and placed under glass. Cf. also Hugh Nibley, “New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” *Improvement Era* 71 (March 1968): 17-18, and Hugh Nibley, “Judging and Prejudging the Book of Abraham,” Nibley archive, 1979, 6-7; reprinted as an appendix in Robert L. and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, vol. 1, ed. Barbara Ellsworth, rev. ed. (Mesa, AZ: Brownsworth, 1982), 236-45.

Abraham, and then point out triumphantly that the book of Abraham cannot, in fact, be derived from that papyrus. Nonetheless, the evidence appears to be on Nibley's side rather than Larson's. In 1842, the fragments we now have in the Joseph Smith Papyri were mounted in "a number of glazed slides, like picture frames, containing sheets of papyrus, with Egyptian inscriptions and hieroglyphics."³⁷ The next year, in 1843, a nonmember named Charlotte Haven visited Lucy Mack Smith and wrote a letter to her own mother about it:

Then she [Mother Smith] turned to a long table, set her candlestick down, and opened a long roll of manuscript, saying it was "the writing of Abraham and Isaac, written in Hebrew and Sanscrit," and she read several minutes from it as if it were English. It sounded very much like passages from the Old Testament—and it might have been for anything we knew—but she said she read it through the inspiration of her son Joseph, in whom she seemed to have perfect confidence. Then in the same way she interpreted to us hieroglyphics from another roll. One was Mother Eve being tempted by the serpent, who—the serpent, I mean—was standing on the tip of his tail, which with his two legs formed a tripod, and had his head in Eve's ear.³⁸

If Nibley's source seems suspect for being late, oral, and from a Mormon, this other source (which Nibley did not cite) nevertheless says the same thing—but is contemporary, written, and from a non-Mormon. Notice that the vignette described matches none of those in the Joseph Smith papyri we have from the Metropolitan Museum.³⁹ And there seem indeed to have been two long rolls even after the present fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri were mounted. If there were only two

³⁷ Caswall, "The Mormons," 406.

³⁸ Charlotte Haven to her mother, 19 February 1843, in "A girl's letters from Nauvoo," *The Overland Monthly*, second series, 16 (December 1890): 623-24.

³⁹ There is a slight resemblance to a scene in Papyrus Joseph Smith V, but the walking serpent there is not "standing on the tip of his tail," his tail does not form a "tripod" with his two legs, and his head is at nobody's ear.

rolls it is important to note that Joseph Smith Papyri I-XI were *not* on them.

Larson tries to dismiss the notion that the document from which the book of Abraham was translated was "beautifully written upon papyrus, with black, and a small part red, ink or paint, in perfect preservation" (pp. 129-32).⁴⁰ But there is another eyewitness account from the Nauvoo period that supports this statement:

"Oh, here is the Pearl of Great Price," said Brother Horne, picking up that book. "I've seen these records with my own eyes," referring to the Book of Abraham, "and handled them with these hands. Mother Lucy . . . showed them to me. . . . The records which I saw were some kind of parchment or papyrus, and it contained writing in red and black. Mother Lucy told me that one was the writings of Abraham and the other the writings of Joseph, who was sold in Egypt."⁴¹

And there is still more evidence that Joseph Smith had additional papyri. Egyptian papyrus documents almost universally pertain to only one individual.⁴² So from an Egyptological perspective how many papyri do we know that Joseph Smith had? We know that there was a Book of Breathings belonging to Hor, son of Remnyqay and Taykhebit,⁴³ a Book of the Dead belonging to Tasheritmin,⁴⁴ a Book of the Dead belonging to Neferirnub,⁴⁵ a hypocephalus

⁴⁰ DHC 2:348.

⁴¹ Robert Horne, "Reminiscences of the Church in Nauvoo," *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* 60 (1893): 585.

⁴² Exceptions may be found in Alan H. Gardiner, *Late-Egyptian Miscellanies* (Bruxelles: Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth, 1937). It must be noted, however, that these are a completely different type of document than those attested in the present collection of the Joseph Smith Papyri.

⁴³ Joseph Smith Papyrus I, X, and XI.

⁴⁴ Joseph Smith Papyrus II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, and IX. Tasheritmin is also the name of the mother of Iufankh, who owned the beautiful late Book of the Dead published in R. Lepsius, *Das Todtenbuch der Ägypter nach dem hieroglyphischen Papyrus in Turin* (Leipzig: Wigand, 1842). From circumstantial coincidences it is tempting to wonder if the two were identical.

⁴⁵ Joseph Smith Papyrus IIIA-B.

belonging to Sheshonq,⁴⁶ and a document belonging to Amenhotep, the son of Hor.⁴⁷ Here we have documents from at least five different individuals. If we have all the papyri Joseph Smith had, where, we might ask Mr. Larson, are Facsimiles 2 and 3, the roll belonging to Amenhotep, or all the strange vignettes which those who saw the papyri in Nauvoo describe? If there are documents we do not have, by what clairvoyance do Larson and his fellow critics proclaim what was or was not on them?

The Kirtland Egyptian Papers

Larson also tries to refute what he calls the "Scribes Did It" Theory. This is the theory that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers represent the purely speculative efforts of Joseph Smith's scribes, and not of the Prophet himself, to learn Egyptian from the translated book of Abraham. (Of sixteen manuscripts in the collection, only two have the handwriting of Joseph Smith.) Thus, the papers would have no bearing on Joseph Smith's knowledge of Egyptian, nor on the method he used to translate the book of Abraham. Larson's attack on this theory is very peculiar because he never deals with the major piece of scholarship done on this topic.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Facsimile 2; see p. 125 in Michael Rhodes review herein.

⁴⁷ Kirtland Egyptian Papers, Egyptian Manuscript #6, page marked number 1.

⁴⁸ Hugh Nibley, "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," *Brigham Young University Studies* 11/4 (Summer 1971): 350-99. This is indicative of Larson's scholarship in general. He also fails to cite the published versions of the "Mnemonic Device" Theory. Richley H. Crapo and John A. Tvedtnes, "A Study of the Hor Sensen Papyrus," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 109 (25 October 1968): 1-6; Richley H. Crapo and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hor Sensen Papyrus as a Mnemonic Device: A Further Study," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 114 (2 June 1969): 6-13, and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Use of Mnemonic Devices in Oral Traditions, as Exemplified by the Book of Abraham and the Hor Sensen Papyrus," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 120 (April 1970): 2-10; Benjamin Urrutia, "The Joseph Smith Papyrus," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4/2 (Summer 1969): 129-34.

Personal communication from John Tvedtnes: "Mr. Larson, like other critics of the book of Abraham, has cursorily dismissed the work Richley Crapo and I did with the Sensen papyrus. He dwells on some minor points and ignores the overall work. The one point in which he felt our case was strongest is far from the strongest point in the original article,

For Larson, the Kirtland Egyptian Papers are "the Critical Link" (p. 41). Indeed his entire case rests on them. A careful comparison of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers reproduced on pp. 45-48 with Larson's portrayal of the evidence on pp. 97-99 shows, nevertheless, that Larson has not been accurate in his presentation of the evidence. Though Larson follows the order of the glyphs in the first column of Joseph Smith Papyrus I, he does not do the same with the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, nor

most of which he keeps from his audience. (He also didn't note the two follow-up articles on the same subject.) Larson fails to note that we demonstrated that there was a consistency in the way Joseph Smith separated out Egyptian words from a text in which there are no spaces marking the division between words, and that the meaning of each Egyptian word is consistently reflected in the English text of the book of Abraham to which it was juxtaposed in the book of Abraham manuscripts. Certainly this is evidence that Joseph Smith knew the meaning of those words! Larson presents as an example of the weakness of our case the use of the word 'this' in Abraham 1:11. He shows a single occurrence for this word in the verse. The truth is that the word appears three times in that verse, while its plural equivalent appears once. As Crapo and I wrote, it is not the importance of the word in the verse that matters, but whether it is reflected at all. The fact that the Egyptian words are reflected in the corresponding English text each and every time is statistically significant. . . .

"Larson also failed to note that Crapo and I suggested other possibilities for the tie between the Abraham story and the Sensen text, including the suggestion that a later descendant of Abraham had worded the story of his ancestor to fit the Sensen text. If this be true, then it doesn't matter when the Sensen text was composed.

"Larson's citation of Klaus Baer from Jay Todd's book is irrelevant. A reading of Baer's letter clearly shows that he was talking apples, while Crapo and I were talking oranges. He was thinking about translation, while we were suggesting the use of the Sensen text as a mnemonic device. Baer didn't understand the concept and I complained about his unfair treatment. He later had one of his students personally deliver an apology for his harsh words, though he continued to disagree with the theory we had proposed. Baer's complaint about the lack of a systematic mnemonic theory makes no real sense in the light of our study, for we suggested that the Sensen text was used as the basis for the wording of the Abraham story. This means that the Egyptian text placed its own restrictions on the wording of the Abrahamic text, so there could be no system. I demonstrated this in my April 1970 article, 'The Use of Mnemonic Devices in Oral Traditions, as Exemplified by the Book of Abraham and the Hor Sensen Papyrus.' Larson made no reference to the article."

does the text in the column "Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham Translation" match.

Here again, we have a major flaw in Larson's theory, for the anti-Mormon argument assumes that we have all the material Joseph Smith had. We know that Joseph Smith planned to publish more of the book of Abraham than he did, but what was in the unpublished portion? To an extent it is mere speculation to fill in the lacuna, but we do know something of the plan of the work. Abraham writes that "a knowledge of the beginning of the creation, and also of the planets, and of the stars, as they were made known unto the fathers, have I kept even unto this day, and I shall endeavor to write some of these things upon this record" (Abraham 1:31). The beginning of the information on the creation is supplied in the present book of Abraham (Abraham 3:21-5:21). So when Joseph Smith records that when he was working on the Egyptian records, "The system of astronomy was unfolded,"⁴⁹ he means something specific.⁵⁰ On 16 December 1835, Joseph had recorded in his journal, "Elder McLellen Elder B. Young and Elder J[ared] Carter called and paid me a visit, with which I was much gratified. I exhibited and explain[e]d the Egyptian Records to them, and explained many things to them concerning the dealings of God with the ancients and the formation of the planetary System."⁵¹ This information goes far beyond the material in the present book of Abraham. And even if Abraham 4:14-18 is taken to be the discussed passage, where in the Kirtland Egyptian Papers does this passage occur? In 1838, Anson Call reported that "Joseph . . . said to us, 'Sit down and we will read to you from the translations of the book of Abraham.' Oliver Cowdery then read until he was tired when Thomas Marsh read making altogether about two hours."⁵² A conservative estimate would

⁴⁹ Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 60 (hereafter cited as *PWJS*).

⁵⁰ Incidentally, Joseph Smith always used the word "unfold" to refer to revelation, not "research" as Larson claims (p. 125); it would have helped had Larson quoted the source correctly or used a better source such as *PWJS*, 60, or Dean C. Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 1:102. Neither of the original manuscripts mentions "research."

⁵¹ *PWJS*, 105.

⁵² Anson Call, *Manuscript Journal*, Summer 1838, 9, cited in Duane D. Call, "Anson Call," master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1956, 33.

suggest that the book of Abraham material translated at that point was about four times the length of what we have now. Where did it all go? Certainly not into the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, which cannot have been the principal manuscript of the book of Abraham. The only indication of the provenance of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers is that Wilford Wood found them.⁵³ Whence did he obtain them?

There is no statement on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers as to who is responsible for their production or what their purpose was. But it is certainly reasonable to assume that Warren Parrish, Joseph Smith's scribe for a time, played a leading role. After all, on 14 November 1835, Parrish had been blessed to "see much of my ancient records, and [he] shall know of hid[d]en things, and shall be endowed with a knowledge of hid[d]en languages, and if he [Parrish] desires and shall seek it at my hand, he shall be privileged with writing much of my word."⁵⁴ "There was a prevalent spirit all through the early history of this Church, which prompted the Elders to suppose that they knew more than the Prophet. Elders would tell you that the prophet was going wrong, men who thought they knew all about this work thirty or forty years some of them before the Lord revealed it, tried 'to steady the ark.' The Church was constantly afflicted with such a class of men."⁵⁵ Warren Parrish was specifically mentioned as one of them.⁵⁶ After Parrish left the Church, he wrote a nasty letter to the editor of the *Painesville Republican*. The letter may be divided into two parts: First, Parrish establishes himself as an intimate acquaintance of Joseph Smith (which he was); then he tells everything dastardly he can about Brother Joseph, inventing all kinds of scandalous statements when he cannot think of anything substantive. It is in the former part of the letter that Parrish said, "I have set by his side and penned down the translation of the Egyptian Heiroglyphicks [*sic*] as he claimed to receive it by direct inspiration of Heaven."⁵⁷ If Joseph Smith had been using the Alphabet and Grammar to translate the book of Abraham it seems odd that Parrish did not mention it. Here Parrish has the chance to tell the world how ludicrous Joseph Smith is when

53 Nibley, "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," 350-51.

54 *PWJS*, 83.

55 George A. Smith, 15 November 1864, in *JD* 11:7.

56 *JD* 11:11.

57 Warren Parrish, letter to the editor of the *Painesville Republican*, dated 5 February 1838, in *Painesville Republican* 2, 15 February 1838, 3.

claiming to translate pages of text from only a few characters (Parrish had studied Hebrew), but there is no mention of a process which would have been utterly silly had it been as the critics have charged. And yet Parrish must invent an alleged teaching that men are not accountable for their actions in order to make the Prophet look the part of a foolish scoundrel. Parrish's accusations are unfounded; if he had some solid ground he surely would have made use of it. Instead, his statement only suggests that what the critics of the book of Abraham have always charged is not the case.

Larson displays the first four pages of Kirtland Egyptian Papers, book of Abraham manuscript 1, "showing Book of Abraham material translated from Egyptian characters drawn on the left side of the page" (pp. 45-48). On the first page of the manuscript (p. 45) we see that the top half of the page is in the uneven handwriting of W. W. Phelps. The second half of this page as well as the other pages displayed are in the smooth, straight, even handwriting of Warren Parrish. In fact, a straight-edge held at the bottom of any line of letters in Parrish's writing shows that they line up almost perfectly. The careful student will notice that the hieratic characters do not line up the way the English text does; the deviation gets worse the further one goes down the manuscript. Therefore, it seems apparent that the hieratic characters were not written at the same time as the English text. But the English text is smooth and evenly spaced; there is no cramming or additions (as there are in Phelps's handwriting). If the hieratic were added first, the text would have to adjust to fit the available space. Therefore the English was written first and the hieratic added later. Who added the hieratic and when was it added? There is no indication who placed the text there, much less that Joseph Smith is responsible for the hieratic characters. These are just a few of the many problems confronting the student of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, yet Larson and his fellow critics simply gloss over all the problems with their simplistic theories.⁵⁸ What exactly the

⁵⁸ The exotic words and phrases used by Joseph Smith are another problem that Larson simply sidesteps (pp. 126-27). Michael Rhodes was the first to point out that *Jah-oh-eh* "O the earth" is good Egyptian *ī ʕt* (personal communication; the Coptic vocalizations of *eiahe* and *ohe* show that Joseph Smith has hit an impressive target). Likewise, *Sue-e-eh-nī* (cited p. 126) might be *s nīm* "Who is the man?" Anyone who surveys the history of Egyptology soon discovers the vast differences in the various transliteration systems that have been used. No one has considered what

Kirtland Egyptian Papers are, no one at present has enough information to determine.⁵⁹

Avoiding the Issue

One of the major problems, not only with Larson's book, but with all the anti-Mormon efforts to discredit the book of Abraham, was most succinctly encapsulated by the eminent Egyptologist Klaus Baer: "Whether the resulting book of

sort of transliteration system the early brethren might have been using (if the attempt was even a serious one). Joseph Smith used a Sephardic transliteration system for Hebrew instead of the now more common Ashkenazi system, which often disguises the word to us today, yielding, for instance, "gnolaum" instead of the more familiar 'ôlâm. Given the transliteration system, one can then see that Joseph Smith's sentence quoted on p. 126 is good Aramaic (known in Joseph's day as Chaldean)—or would be, had Larson spelled "shemayana" correctly.

⁵⁹ The statement which Larson terms "disingenuous" (pp. 137-38) still holds as a careful statement of the state of the research: "It was principally divine inspiration rather than [Joseph Smith's] knowledge of languages that produced the English text of the book of Abraham. His precise methodology remains unknown." H. Donl Peterson, "Translation and Publication of the Book of Abraham," in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:134.

Personal communication from John Tvedtnes: "Larson, like so many others (including Latter-day Saints), has misunderstood the nature of Joseph Smith's 'Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar.' It is not a revelation, but a working paper. Much of what it says is guesswork. But there are some real Egyptian words and names in it, and their meaning is accurately reflected by Joseph Smith. (This is an amazing feat, considering the infancy of Egyptian decipherment at the time the book of Abraham was produced.) But what concerns me most is that Larson has evidently not read my 1970 article, 'The Critics of the Book of Abraham,' [Papers delivered at the Book of Abraham Symposium at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion, 3 April 1970, pp. 70-76] in which I showed that the terms *degree* and *part* in the Alphabet and Grammar were *not* intended as grammatical terms. Rather, they denote the location of the symbols on the papyri. The 'first part,' for example, is what we call Facsimile 1. The 'first degree' of that 'part' is the first column of script, while 'the second degree' is the second column, and so forth. The 'second part' is what Nibley termed the 'Small Senses Papyrus.' It is pasted on paper marked with one-inch vertical rulings. The 'first degree of the second part' denotes the first of these columns, counting from the right. Much of the Alphabet and Grammar is merely a means of giving 'map coordinates' for locating the symbols on the papyri."

Abraham is or is not inspired scripture can . . . only be told by examining the *PGP*.”⁶⁰ This the anti-Mormons have consistently refused to do. As Hugh Nibley put it, “To this day the critics insist on confining their efforts strictly to an exposé of Joseph Smith’s method, while avoiding any discussion of the results with almost hysterical touchiness.”⁶¹ In doing so they ignore a growing mass of scholarly writings dealing with the subject.⁶² Some of the most significant things to have come out of looking at the book of Abraham in its ancient context include:

1. The book of Abraham has close affinities to a large number of apocryphal and Egyptian writings to which Joseph Smith could have had no access.⁶³

2. Abraham claims that his story starts out near a place called “Olishem” (Abraham 1:10), and that place name is indeed attested in newly discovered inscriptions from approximately Abraham’s time.⁶⁴

60 Klaus Baer, letter to Hugh Nibley, 10 August 1968, p. 1.

61 Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, 53.

62 Personal communication from John Tvedtnes: “Larson’s book is clearly one-sided. He fails to address the fact that many things found in the book of Abraham were unknown in Joseph Smith’s day but are common knowledge today. Nibley has dealt with many of these issues, and there are other studies that need to see the light of day. Books like Larson’s will never serve such a purpose.”

63 See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981). Several of these writings are conveniently listed in E. Douglas Clark, “Abraham,” in Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:7-9, and Stephen E. Thompson, “Contents of the Book of Abraham,” in *ibid.*, 1:135. Thompson, incidentally, has a Ph.D. in Egyptology and is a visiting instructor in Egyptology at Brown University.

64 John M. Lundquist, “Was Abraham at Ebla? A Cultural Background of the Book of Abraham,” in Robert L. Millet and Kent P. Jackson, eds., *Studies in Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985), 225-37. The citation of *Ú-li-si-im^{ki}* looks rather removed in *Narâm-Sin b* 5.2.13 (= UET I 275.2.13), but this is only because Lundquist, following Hans Hirsch (“Die Inschriften der Könige von Agade,” *Archiv für Orientforschung* 20 [1963]: 74), has transliterated the signs without taking into regard the fact that for the place and time the *si* sign should be read *šé* (Wolfram von Soden, *Das akkadische Syllabar* [Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1948], 43; the *im* sign can also be read *em*; *ibid.*, 73), leaving the reading as *Ú-li-šé-em*. The area is also particularly prone to the Canaanite shift, which would render the name as “Olishem.” To Lundquist’s citation of E. Kautsch and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 48-49, add Sabatino Moscati et al., *An*

3. There is no evidence to place Ur of the Chaldees in southern Mesopotamia, but there is good reason to locate Ur in the north, near the site of Olishem.⁶⁵

4. Most of Joseph Smith's interpretations of the facsimiles have been shown to be in the right general ballpark although "there has been little or no work done on [these types of texts by Egyptologists] since the end of the last century."⁶⁶

5. The astronomy detailed in the book of Abraham does not match the heliocentric astronomy of Joseph Smith's or our own time, but can only be a geocentric astronomy like that characteristic of the ancient Mediterranean world.⁶⁷

6. David Cameron discovered an Egyptian lion couch scene much like Facsimile 1 explicitly mentioning the name Abraham.⁶⁸ This last reference casts in a new light Larson's claim that "none of the book of Abraham facsimiles (or the

Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980), 48-49.

⁶⁵ Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Where Was Ur of the Chaldees?" in H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 119-36.

⁶⁶ Michael D. Rhodes, "A Translation and Commentary of the Joseph Smith Hypocephalus," *Brigham Young University Studies* 17/2 (Winter 1977): 259-74; the quotation is from 274. A more recent work on Facsimile 2 is Hugh Nibley "One Eternal Round: The Significance of the Egyptian Hypocephalus" (taped series of twelve lectures, 27 June-27 September 1990, available from F.A.R.M.S.). For an interpretation of only certain figures, see John Gee, "Notes on the Sons of Horus," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1991. Indicative of the general neglect of the documents is the article on hypocephali in the standard Egyptological lexicon, only four sentences long, one of which is: "Eine K[opftafel] findet sich kurioserweise auch unter den 3 hl. Büchern der Mormonen" (among the three holy books of the Mormons belongs, curiously enough, a hypocephalus); Dieter Kessler, "Kopftafel," *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, 7 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973-90), 3:693.

⁶⁷ William Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and John Gee, "'And I Saw the Stars . . .': The Book of Abraham and Geocentric Astronomy," presented at the Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, August 1991.

⁶⁸ For the discovery, see John Gee, "References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts," *Insights: An Ancient Window* (September 1991): 1, 3. More recently, see John Gee, "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign* 22 (July 1992): 60-62.

papyrus drawings from which they were adapted) make mention of Abraham" (p. 110). "Up to the minute" research, indeed!

Until the critics are willing to take the book of Abraham—text as well as pictures—and the recent scholarship seriously, they only dodge the issues. Larson's book is another attempt at evasion. The book of Abraham is deceptively small, for dealing with it adequately is far more complicated than almost anyone has guessed. We agree with Larson on one point: "Exposing error is the right thing to do, as only good can be the ultimate result of people learning the truth" (p. 171, deemphasis mine). Larson's book is so full of errors that it deserves to be exposed for what it is.

Addendum

John L. Sorenson

A recently published book by Charles M. Larson, . . . *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*, contains references to Thomas Stuart Ferguson (p. 180) which demand that I correct the record.

In the first place, the writer makes a number of errors which show, at least, lack of rigor in preparation of this book:

1. Ferguson established the New World Archaeological Foundation as a private organization, not "at Brigham Young University." After problems arose in administering its work, under funding from the Latter-day Saint Church, the Church insisted that the Foundation be brought under the administrative and financial cognizance of Brigham Young University if support was to continue, whereupon Ferguson's role became advisory and limited.

2. The Society for Early Historic Archaeology was independent, not "BYU's." Ferguson briefly had a nominal connection with the SEHA but in fact opposed most of what the SEHA undertook.

3. Milton R. Hunter, coauthor with Ferguson of the book *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*, was not an apostle but one of the First Council of Seventy.

4. Ferguson himself never "received substantial grants from the LDS Church." The Foundation he originated did, but the money was to fund professional archaeologists, about half of them non-Mormons, and was never for his individual use.

The early history of the Foundation has been sketched by J. Alden Mason, non-LDS professor emeritus of anthropology

at the University of Pennsylvania, in his Foreword to "Research in Chiapas, Mexico." Dr. Mason referred to the Latter-day Saint Church's funding of the work this way: "The world is much indebted to this Church for its outstanding contribution to the advancement of archeological [*sic*] research and the increase of scientific knowledge," and "The stated purpose of this Foundation is *not* to seek corroboration of the Book of Mormon account, but to help to resolve the problem of whether civilization in Middle America developed autochthonously or as a result of diffused or migrated influence from some area of the Old World, and to shed light on the culture and way of life of the ancients during the formative period."⁶⁹

Larson implies that Ferguson was one of the "scholars and intellectuals in the Church" and that "his study" was conducted along the lines of reliable scholarship in the "field of archaeology." Those of us with personal experience with Ferguson and his thinking knew differently. He held an undergraduate law degree but never studied archaeology or related disciplines at a professional level, although he was self-educated in some of the literature of American archaeology. He held a naive view of "proof," perhaps related to his law practice where one either "proved" his case or lost the decision; compare the approach he used in his simplistic lawyerly book *One Fold and One Shepherd*.⁷⁰ His associates with scientific training and thus more sophistication in the pitfalls involving intellectual matters could never draw him away from his narrow view of "research." (For example, in April 1953, when he and I did the first archaeological reconnaissance of central Chiapas, which defined the Foundation's work for the next twenty years, his concern was to ask if local people had found any figurines of "horses," rather than to document the scores of sites we discovered and put on record for the first time.) His role in "Mormon scholarship" was largely that of enthusiast and publicist, for which we can be grateful, but he was neither scholar nor analyst.

Ferguson was never an expert on archaeology and the Book of Mormon (let alone on the book of Abraham, about

⁶⁹ J. Alden Mason, foreword to "Research in Chiapas, Mexico," *Papers of the NAAF*, No. 1 (1959), iii, the first of a distinguished series of professional monographs now running through No. 65.

⁷⁰ Thomas S. Ferguson, *One Fold and One Shepherd*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Olympos, 1962), 230ff.

which his knowledge was superficial). He was not one whose careful "study" led him to see greater light, light that would free him from Latter-day Saint dogma, as Larson represents. Instead he was just a layman, initially enthusiastic and hopeful but eventually trapped by his unjustified expectations, flawed logic, limited information, perhaps offended pride, and lack of faith in the tedious research that real scholarship requires. The negative arguments he used against the Latter-day Saint scriptures in his last years display all these weaknesses.

Larson, like others who now wave Ferguson's example before us as a case of emancipation from benighted Mormon thinking, never faces the question of which Tom Ferguson was the real one. Ought we to respect the hard-driving younger man whose faith-filled efforts led to a valuable major research program, or should we admire the double-acting cynic of later years, embittered because he never hit the jackpot on, as he seems to have considered it, the slot-machine of archaeological research? I personally prefer to recall my bright-eyed, believing friend, not the aging figure Larson recommends as somehow wiser.