

As Things Stand at the Moment

HUGH NIBLEY*

The most widely syndicated article on the "Joseph Smith Papyri" to appear to date is a typical performance of Mr. Wallace Turner which first appeared in the *New York Times* of July 15, 1968. It is one of those high-flown insinuating reports breathing an aloof superiority, studiously evasive of anything specific. First we are told that there has been "bitter wrangling among the intellectuals of the Mormon world." If an intellectual is anybody willing to argue, what is meant by the "Mormon world"? If the Church is meant, why not say Church? "The attack," Mr. Turner continues, "has come from within the Mormon community." Again, why "community" instead of "Church"? Because, to be sure, there has been no attack and no wrangling whatever within the Church. Later on Mr. Turner mentions "two heretics notorious to the church establishment" (a term dear to the heart of Mr. Turner), unaware that there are no heretics in a church where every member is supposed to have his own personal, nontransferrable testimony, and that to be a heretic in any church one must be a member: the two in question are not members of the Mormon Church and were not members at the time they are supposed to have attacked from "within the community." A favorite means of lending authority to attacks on the Mormon Church has ever been the announcement that the attacker was himself once a good and active Mormon. But since the only qualification for such a title is one's demonstrated capacity to remain true and faithful to the end, no backslider can claim it. Mr. Turner's problem is to tell the world that the question of the papyri has split the Mormons, without actually saying so—an assignment for which he is peculiarly well-fitted.

*Dr. Nibley, professor of religion and history at Brigham Young University, is a frequent contributor to *BYU Studies*.

"There is no question," writes the reporter, "that Smith worked from these papyri; the question is whether his writings based on them were actual translations or pure fabrications." We know that he worked *with* the papyri, but what can working *from* them possibly mean? Or what can be meant by "his writings *based* on them"? Were they actual translations? Then why not say so? How could a very meaningful text be both derived from and based on something that makes no sense at all? A vivid flashback to 1912 is the skillfully garbled statement that Joseph Smith in the Pearl of Great Price presents "hand-drawn copies of three groups of hieroglyphs together with his translation of them." There were not three groups of hieroglyphs and no translations of hieroglyphs. Later we are told that the Prophet "also had work papers, in which it seemed that sections of the Book of Abraham were attributed to specific symbols." Again the escape word is "seemed." "Also" work papers? What were the other papers? If the "work papers" were Smith's, why are none of them in his handwriting? Again, we learn that the eleven newly-found documents were "involved in the production of the Book of Abraham." Just how is one to understand "involved"? Some of the eleven documents have no visible relationship whatever to the Book of Abraham, and what the connection of the others is remains to be determined. Joseph Smith, according to the two "heretics" as quoted by Mr. Turner, "apparently translated many English words from each Egyptian character. . . ." But there is no place for an equivocal "apparently" in the vaunted rigor of their demonstration; "apparently" leaves the door open to the many objections that arise and the swarm of questions that must be answered before the pair can announce for the final time their longed-for "Fall of the Book of Abraham."

One "threat to the Mormons of these findings," according to Mr. Turner, who obligingly does the Mormons' thinking for them, is that they "could turn sociological by undermining the scriptural basis for the Mormons' discrimination against Negroes." The scriptural basis of Mormon belief rests wholly on inspired English translations of the scriptures—not a single original version of any holy book is known to exist anywhere in the world today, and scholars have never been able to agree on what the ancient texts they do possess are trying to convey. In such a state of things nothing can take the place of an in-

spired translation as far as the LDS members are concerned, and no study of Egyptian or any other ancient texts could ever "undermine the scriptural basis" for any Mormon belief.

Whatever translation comes by the gift and power of God is certainly no translation in the ordinary sense, and Joseph Smith never put forth the translation of the Book of Abraham as an exercise in conventional scholarship. But when Mr. Turner concludes his article with our statement that "Today nobody claims that Joseph Smith got his information through ordinary channels," he uses it as a punch line to make it sound like a declaration that the Mormons have abandoned a previously held belief, than which nothing could be farther from the mark. In every case in which he has produced a translation, Joseph Smith has made it clear that his inspiration is by no means bound to any ancient text, but is free to take wings at any time. To insist, as the critics do, that "translation" may be understood only in the sense in which they choose to understand it, while the Prophet clearly demonstrates that he intends it to be taken in a very different sense, is to make up the rules of the game one is playing as well as being the umpire. To stick to the same specifications would brand either Pope's or Chapman's or Rouse's *Iliad*, or all three of them, fraudulent, so wide is their range.

BOOK OF ABRAHAM MAKES GOOD SENSE

We agree with Mr. Turner that there is a significant parallel between the case of the Book of Abraham and that of the Book of Mormon. Since the beginning the world has been asked to dismiss both books as impostures not because of what is in them, but because of the strange way in which each was supposed to have been produced. It is as if someone pretending to be a cook but without credentials or experience were to turn out a banquet worthy of the *cordon bleu* only to be condemned unanimously by the cooking profession because he had not cooked according to their rules. Whether the "Sensen" Papyrus or the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar (hereafter cited as EAG) makes sense or not, the Book of Abraham makes very good sense, and like the Book of Mormon can thoroughly be tested in the light of a wealth of ancient documents. We have more than enough viable material to put the Prophet to the test where he specifically claims revelation,

without having to rummage in dubious papers which were never meant to be included among inspired writings.

Year in and year out one must repeat the old refrain that the arguments of the world against the inspired scriptures of the Latter-day Saints collapse because they rest on a completely false idea of the Mormon conception of revelation. Can a book with a misspelled word in it possibly be the product of divine revelation? If not, says the Mormon, there never was a divinely inspired book. Can a man who makes mistakes and learns by trial and error like other people possibly be a prophet? If not, we reply, then no man ever was a prophet. Can one who doubts and speculates and meditates about a thing later receive revelation about it? He is more apt to receive revelation, we say, than one who does not. We know that Joseph Smith studied reports about the ancient civilizations of central America and speculated about them with lively interest—but *that was after the Book of Mormon appeared*. There is every indication that the free-wheeling conjectures of the EAG were made after the Book of Abraham was completed, so that even the irrelevant argument of the book's dubious documentary background remains unfounded.

Two basic questions that confront us in evaluating the Pearl of Great Price are (1) Did the Egyptians really have something? and (2) Did Joseph Smith really have something on the Egyptians? Until recently both propositions have been relegated to the limbo of superstitious nonsense by all respectable scholars. But of recent years proposition No. 1 has come in for some serious rethinking by quite sober Egyptologists and other scientists, who tell us that the Egyptians may really have had something after all. And what they had turns out to be something that suspiciously resembles what Joseph Smith said they had. Which puts us in the way of answering our second question, which is not whether Smith was inspired or not, but whether his writings may be checked against those of the real world of Abraham. The real work has not even begun.

From the beginning there has been considerable misunderstanding about the exact nature of the Joseph Smith papyri. If the Mormons really believed them to be the very handwriting of the Patriarch Abraham, they would have made a good deal of that in their preaching and missionary work, they

would have made frantic efforts to keep them in their possession, they would have guarded them like the golden plates, and they most certainly would have done everything to get them back from Emma and William Smith. But the saints never played up the idea of having autographic writings of Abraham, preferring to understand the term "writings of Abraham" in the broad and familiar sense in which the term is applied to other scriptures, like the writings of Moses, John, or Ether, none of which pretend to be autographic.¹ In 1912 their spokesmen were quite outspoken: "There is no evidence that Abraham himself wrote in his own hand any part of the papyri found with the mummies, certainly not the hypocephali."² They looked at the Church historian's statement that "As the work proceeded he [Joseph Smith] became convinced that one of the rolls of papyrus contained a copy of a book written by Abraham,"³ and made capital of the idea that Abraham was the very scribe who wrote the papyri, for that made their debunking assignment very easy, in view of the late provenance of the documents.⁴

But the Mormons have never displayed any particular reverence or awe for the facsimiles. Whereas the editing of the standard works has ever been an object of meticulous care, even a cursory examination of successive reproductions of the plates of the Book of Abraham shows the work to be amazingly slapdash and slipshod, as if a mere approximation of the general idea were quite enough to satisfy the Brethren.⁵ Though the explanations that accompany the facsimiles have the authority of inspiration, we are explicitly told that the ancient drawings themselves were nothing but purely human attempts to

¹Hugh Nibley, "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 71 (February, 1968), pp. 20-21.

²Osborn J. P. Widtsoe, "The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 16 (April, 1913), p. 600.

³J. M. Sjodahl, "A Final Word," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 16 (September, 1913), p. 1102. "Some of the Latter-day Saints seem to have believed that the papyri in question represented the actual autographic work of Abraham and Joseph—that the hand of Abraham had pressed the very papyrus handled by Joseph Smith. Such a conclusion, however, does not seem to be involved in the text of Smith's account, and need not be considered authoritative." See Robert C. Webb, "A Critical Examination of the Facsimiles in the Book of Abraham," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 16 (March, 1913), p. 440.

⁴Pointed out by Widtsoe, *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 16, p. 599, and Robert C. Webb, "Truth Seeking: Its Symptoms and After Effects," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 16 (September, 1913), p. 1090.

⁵See our comments in "A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 71 (April, 1968), p. 65.

illustrate what Abraham was talking about: “. . . and that you may have an understanding of these things, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures in the beginning. . . .” No claim of inspiration is made for the drawings, which used the peculiar conventions and symbols of one particular culture: “. . . as understood by the Egyptians . . . but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify,” etc. Even the cosmic splendors of Facsimile No. 2 purport to be nothing but the conventional treatment of certain themes in the traditional symbolic idiom of a people denied the priesthood. There is nothing particularly holy about them.

BY THE HAND OF ABRAHAM

When the Book of Abraham was first published, being personally edited by Joseph Smith, it was designated by him as “A translation of some ancient Records, from the Catacombs of Egypt, *purporting* to be the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt, *called* the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand, upon papyrus.”⁶ Note that Smith himself designates the writings only as “some ancient Records,” then he tells us what they are purported to be, and finally gives us the *title* of the document. Here “written by his own hand” is not Joseph Smith’s verdict but part of the original title of the document translated. Such long explanatory titles are characteristic of Egyptian writings.⁷

Two important and peculiar aspects of ancient authorship must be considered when we are told that a writing is by the hand of Abraham or anybody else. One is that according to Egyptian and Hebrew thinking any copy of a book originally written by Abraham would be regarded and designated as the very work of his hand forever after, no matter how many reproductions had been made and handed down through the years. The other is that no matter who did the writing originally, if it was Abraham who commissioned or directed the work, he would take the credit for the actual writing of the document, whether he penned it or not.

⁶*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3 (March 25, 1842), p. 704.

⁷Thus a work we happen to be studying at the moment has the title: “Translation of the Secrets of the Ritual for repelling the Raging One, made in the Temple of Osiris of Abydos, to keep Seth away from Osiris. This book will protect against the enemies of Osiris for seven days, and is beneficial to whoever recites it,” in S. Schott, *Urkunden Mythologischen Inhalts* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 61.

As to the first point, when a holy book (usually a leather roll) grew old and worn out from handling, it was not destroyed but *renewed*. Important writings were immortal—for the Egyptians they were “the divine words,” for the Jews the very letters were holy and indestructible, being the word of God. The wearing out of a particular copy of scripture therefore in no way brought the life of the book to a close—it could not perish. In Egypt it was simply renewed (*ma.w, sma.w*) “fairer than before,” and so continued its life to the next renewal. Thus we are told at the beginning of what some have claimed to be the oldest writing in the world, “His Majesty wrote this book down anew. . . . His Majesty discovered it as a work of the Ancestors, but eaten by worms So His Majesty wrote it down from the beginning, so that it is more beautiful than it was before.”⁸ It is not a case of the old book’s being replaced by a new one, but of the original book itself continuing its existence in a rejuvenated state. No people were more hypnotized by the idea of a renewal of lives than the Egyptians—not a succession of lives or a line of descent, but the actual revival and rejuvenation of a single life.

Even the copyist who puts his name in a colophon does so not so much as publicity for himself as to vouch for the faithful transmission of the original book; his being “trustworthy(*iqr*) of fingers,” i.e., a reliable copyist, is the reader’s assurance that he has the original text before him. An Egyptian document, J. Spiegel observes, is like the print of an etching, which is not only a work of art in its own right but “can lay claim equally well to being the original . . . regardless of whether the individual copies turn out well or ill.” Because he thinks in terms of types, according to Spiegel, for the Egyptian “*there is no essential difference between an original and a copy*. For as they understand it, all pictures are but reproductions of an ideal original.”⁹ Being itself but a copy of “an ideal original,” the first writing of a document enjoys no special superiority over later copies.⁹ Thus an Egyptian who handed us a writing or drawing of Abraham’s would be nonplussed if we asked him whether Abraham really made it. Who else?

⁸K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altaegypt. Mysteryenspielen* (Leipzig, 1928), p. 20.

⁹J. Spiegel, in *Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Instituts Fur Ägyptische Altertumskunde in Kairo*, Vol. 9 (1940), p. 160.

This concept was equally at home in Israel. An interesting passage from the Book of Jubilees recounts that Joseph while living in Egypt used to read to his sons "the words which his father Jacob used to read from among the words of Abraham." (39.6) Here is a clear statement that "the words of Abraham" were handed down in written form from generation to generation, and were the subject of serious study in Joseph's Egyptian family circle. The same source informs us that when Joseph died and was buried in Canaan, "he gave all his books and the books of the fathers to Levi his son that he might preserve and *renew* them for his children until this day." (45:15) Here "the books of the fathers" including "the words of Abraham" have been preserved for later generations by a process of renewal.

In this there is no thought of the making of a new book by a new hand. It was a strict rule in Israel that no one, not even the most learned rabbi, should ever write down so much as a single letter of the Bible from memory: always the text must be copied letter by letter from another text that had been copied in the same way, thereby eliminating the danger of any man's adding, subtracting, or changing so much as a single jot in the text. It was not a rewriting but a process as mechanical as photography, an exact visual reproduction, so that no matter how many times the book had been passed from hand to hand, it was always the one original text that was before one. To make the illusion complete, the old worn-out copy was never kept around—the renewed book *was* the original; the old one was not reused, cut up, burned or even buried, for a writing containing the ineffable name of God could not be destroyed. It simply disappeared without trace; with the completion of the process of rejuvenation, the old corruptible shell ceased to exist. It was quietly and unobtrusively walled up in a sacred building, in a *geniza* whose very existence was ignored by the congregation.¹⁰ Thus the holy book continued its life, ageless and unchangeable, through the centuries, with never a thought of its being anything but the sacred original.

But "written by his own hand"? This brings us to the other interesting concept. Let us recall that that supposedly oldest of Egyptians writings, the so-called Shabako Stone, begins with

¹⁰*Juedisches Lexikon* (Berlin, 1928), Vol. 2, p. 1014; *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, pp. 612f.

the announcement that "His Majesty wrote this book down anew. . . ." This, Professor Sethe obligingly explains, is "normal Egyptian usage to express the idea that the King ordered a copy to be made."¹¹ Yet it clearly states that the king himself wrote it. Thus when the son of King Snefru says of his own inscription at Medum, "It was he who made his gods in [such] a writing [that] it cannot be effaced," the statement is so straightforward that even such a student as W. S. Smith takes it to mean that the prince himself actually did the writing. And what could be more natural than for a professional scribe to make an inscription: "It was her husband, the Scribe of the Royal Scroll, Nebwy, who made this inscription"? Or when a noble announces that he made his father's tomb, why should we not take him at his word? It depends on how the word is to be understood. Professor Wilson in all these cases holds that the person who claims to have done the work does so "in the sense that he commissioned and paid for it."¹² The noble who has writing or carving done is always given full credit for its actual execution; such claims of zealous craftsmanship "have loftily ignored the artists," writes Wilson. "It was the noble who 'made' or 'decorated' his tomb," though one noble of the old kingdom breaks down enough to show us how these claims were understood: "I made this for my old father . . . I had the sculptor Itju make (it)."¹³ Dr. Wilson cites a number of cases in which men claim to have "made" their father's tombs, one of them specifically stating that he did so "while his arm was still strong"—with his own hand!¹⁴

Credit for actually writing the inscription of the famous Metternich Stele is claimed by "the prophetess of Nebwen, Nest-Amun, daughter of the Prophet of Nebwen and Scribe of the Inundation, 'Ankh-Psametik,'" who states that she "*renewed (sma.w) this book* [there it is again!] after she had found it removed from the house of Osiris-Mnevis, so that her name might be preserved. . . ."¹⁵ The inscription then shifts to the masculine gender as if the scribe were really a man, leading to considerable dispute among the experts as to just who

¹¹Sethe, *Dramatische Texte*, p. 20.

¹²Discussed by J. S. Wilson in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 6 (1947), pp. 239f.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹⁵C. E. Sander-Hansen, *Die Texte der Metternichstele* (Copenhagen, 1956), p. 48 (Spruch viii).

gets the credit. Certain it is that the lady boasts of having given an ancient book a new lease on life, even though her hand may never have touched a pen.¹⁶

Nest-Amun hoped to preserve her name by attaching it to a book, and in a very recent study M. A. Korostovstev notes that "for an Egyptian to attach his name to a written work was an infallible means of passing it down through the centuries."¹⁷ That may be one reason why Abraham chose the peculiar Egyptian medium he did for the transmission of his record—or at least why it has reached us only in this form. Indeed Theodor Böhl observed recently that the one chance the original Patriarchal literature would ever have of surviving would be to have it written down on Egyptian papyrus.¹⁸ Scribes liked to have their names preserved, too, and the practice of adding copyists' names in colophons, Korostovstev points out, could easily lead in later times to attributing the wrong authorship to a work. But whoever is credited with the authorship of a book remains its unique author, alone responsible for its existence in whatever form.

So when we read "The Book of Abraham, written by his own hand upon papyrus," we are to understand, as the Mormons always have, that this book no matter how often "renewed" is still the writing of Abraham and no one else; for he commissioned it or "according to the accepted Egyptian expression" wrote it himself—with his own hand. And when Abraham tells us, "That you may have an understanding of these gods, I have given you the fashion of them in the figures at the beginning," we do not need to imagine the patriarch himself personally drawing the very sketches we have before us. In fact, the remark may well be the insertion of a later scribe. To the Egyptian or Hebrew mind the sketches could be twenty-seventh hand and still be the authentic originals, as long as Abraham originally ordered them and put his name to them. Still less are we to see in these helpful little diagrams anything pretending to be a supernatural or sacrosanct performance.

The publication of the original Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri if it has done nothing else has put an end to one of the

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁷M. A. Korostovtsev, in *Revue d'Égyptologie*, Vol. 19 (1967), p. 191.

¹⁸Th. Böhl, in *Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux Jaarbericht*, Vol. 17 (1963), pp. 134f.

most ridiculous games ever played. In this game the experts were wildly cheered as they scored point after point against Joseph Smith (they being both the judges and the score keepers), with the strict understanding that under no circumstances could the Prophet be permitted ever to score a point against them. Indeed our non-Mormon friends still feel morally and intellectually obligated never to admit even for the sake of argument that Joseph Smith could possibly be right in the sense in which he claimed to be right. It is an unsailable axiom of the learned that no matter how long the game goes on or how many matches are played, Smith's score must always be zero. While the Mormons have freely if not enthusiastically acknowledged the fallibility of the Prophet and actually conceded points to the opposition, there has never been any thought of the challengers' ever conceding a point to them. It was not just an absurdly one-sided game; it was no game at all, though the players went on solemnly pretending to be testing and exploring a proposition that they would not even consider.

Tennis, Anyone?

But now original Egyptian documents invite us to a more serious game. The scholars no longer dodge the issues or flaunt their credentials. Our first article to take serious issue with the experts on tangible grounds (*The Improvement Era*, September, 1968) met with immediate and gratifying response. The letters have not been complimentary, but they have been better than that—constructive. Those who promptly batted our balls back across the net have not been carping or picayune in their objections, but eminently reasonable and well informed. After the giants of 1912 passed away, the field was left to zealous amateurs whose antics have been dictated by hysterical partisanship and an uncontrollable desire to shine (with what a splash some of them now announce that they have actually got their names into the *New York Times*!); such human weakness is pardonable if they only wouldn't carry it so far—throwing confetti, leaping over the net, and forming a victory parade every time their team scores a point, or with equal fervor blowing the whistle, calling a fault, halting play and declaring the game forfeit every time they think their opponents have muffed a play. After that it is a relief

to be dealing with sensible people. Let us see how the game goes now.

It began with Joseph Smith serving the ball: Here are things, he said referring to the papyri, which go back to Abraham.

The opposition returned the ball: Nothing of the sort! These are perfectly ordinary funerary motifs for which thousands of identical examples could be supplied.

We return it to them: You are overlooking a number of oddities in the papyri which definitely are not ordinary.

And they return it to us: There are all sorts of irregularities in Egyptian drawings; funerary papyri are full of such peculiarities.

And we: That fact does not impugn the oddities in these particular documents, but rather substantiates them. These are not exactly like any other documents, though that was precisely your contention.

And they: No. That was the contention of the scholars of 1912; you are fighting a straw man. Students today do not take such extreme views.

We: True enough, but the public and the Mormons do not know that. The men of 1912 are straw men only if we have revived them. But we have not done that; that is the work of busy propagandists in our midst who still have most people believing that the men of 1912 spoke the final word. We cannot be beating a dead horse if the horse is far from dead.

They: But you say the experts deliberately overlooked important oddities like the clothing and hand position of the figure on the couch. Professor Parker mentioned the hands, so you are wrong.

We: He mentioned them only to deny that they exist. He will not even consider the hands as such, and that is the only mention they ever get. As to the clothing, the question is not who drew it but the mere fact that it is there. We find it strange that none of the experts ever mentioned that undeniable and striking fact.

They: You have your silences too. You mention only three hypotheses to account for the irregularities in the papyri. You have not considered all the possibilities.

We: We did not say that only three hypotheses were possible, but only that three and no more were put forth by the experts. We have always shared Popper's opinion that "there is always an infinity of logically possible solutions to every problem." If you have another theory, it's your serve.

They: So it is. Here goes: "One thing we learn from the original papyri that no one would have guessed before 1967 is that the Pearl of Great Price woodcuts *include restorations*." The irregularities in the facsimiles about which you make such a fuss are largely the result of Mormon attempts to restore the damaged papyri.

We: We grant your first proposition, but the second remains to be demonstrated.

They: Who else would restore them but the Mormons? There is evidence for that in the pencilled sketching that is still to be seen on the backing of the No. 1 papyrus. We believe that was done by the Mormons and not by later owners.

We: Why would the Mormons make a reconstruction that differs drastically from the official Mormon version?

They: We can explain that. Since "the Mormon connections of the papyrus were always known to its successive owners," *any* later attempt to restore it would have followed the Pearl of Great Price. But this pencilled doodling does not follow it; therefore it is not later but earlier, representing "a first attempt at restoration, rejected as unsatisfactory."

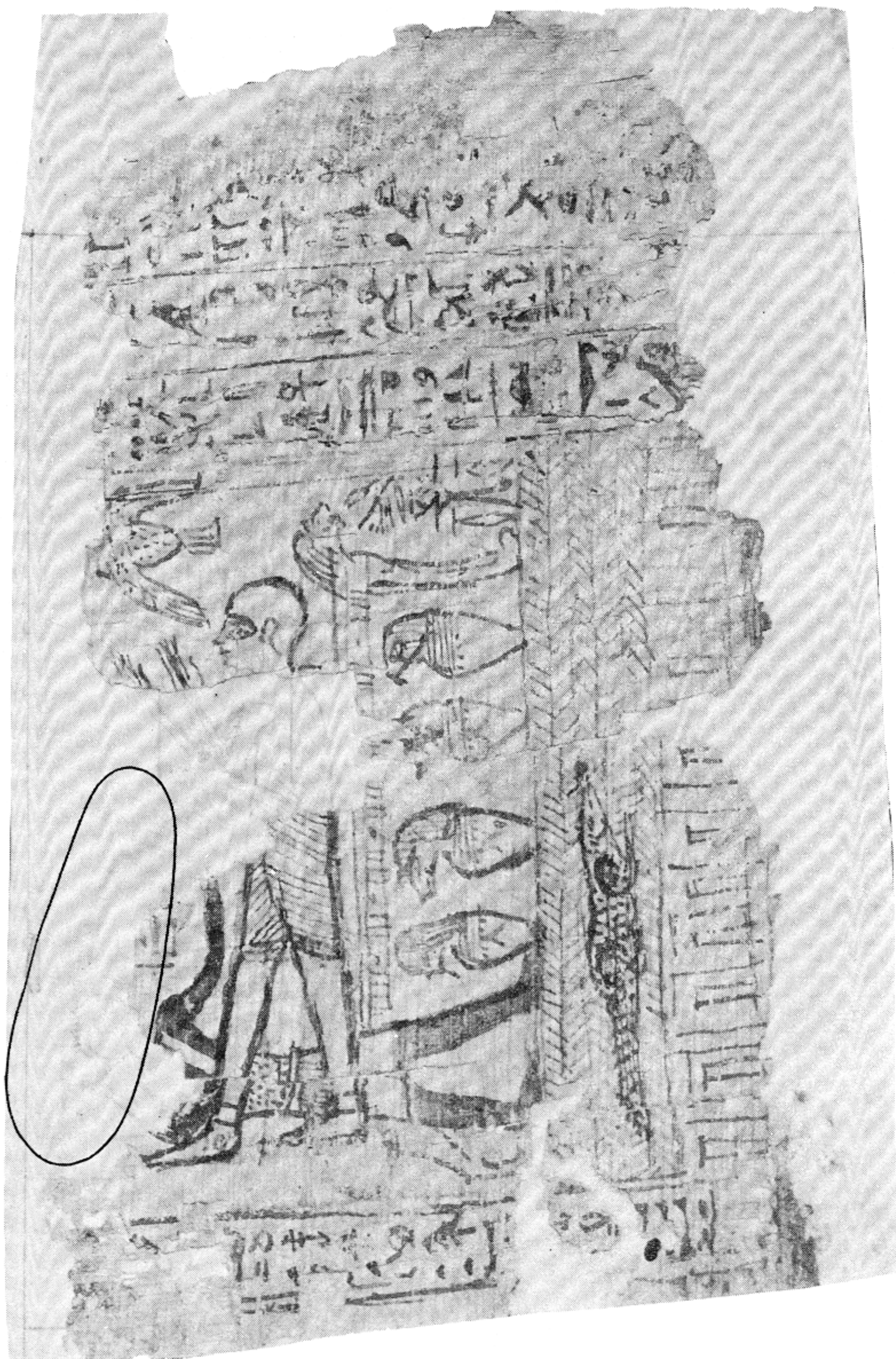
We: I am afraid you knocked that one clear out of the court. Your suggestion that any non-Mormon owner would have followed the Pearl of Great Price just like any Mormon is indeed refreshing: since when have non-Mormons felt bound by Mormon opinion or obligated to make a reconstruction that would vindicate the Mormon scripture? You say the drawing was "rejected as unsatisfactory" right at the beginning—which means that it was allowed to stand untouched from ten to twenty years, a constant reminder of the ineptness of the Brethren and a constant refutation of their later official reconstruction, when it would have been the easiest thing in the world—and perfectly legal—to retouch or erase it: it wasn't even drawn on the papyrus and made no pretense to being ancient. And the Mormons were not only crazy enough to let this highly unacceptable performance stand as it was, but their

friends and enemies were blind enough never to notice it, either to explain it or to make fun of it.

As is well known (from the labors of Robert Eisler and others), the first and most urgent thing to be done whenever the official version of a document, sacred or otherwise, is decided on is to destroy all other versions. Yet you want us to believe that the Mormons saw no advantage to removing, replacing, or even retouching this incriminating document. Or if you insist that the Mormons had such perfect integrity as to leave this foolish and unfortunate drawing untouched by pencil or eraser, and resisted every temptation to draw a single line more on that empty backing for twenty years, then the wholesale restorations that you suggest for the rest of the papyri are entirely out of the question. That the space on the modern paper backing, which had no claim to sanctity, was never used for any more speculative sketching after that first awkward and highly unsatisfactory attempt is a strong indication that its inviting surface was not available until later. The pattern of the exposed patches of glue on the backing still remains to be explained: the mere presence of those ugly patches, where the mounting was otherwise so very neatly done, casts serious doubt on your theory that the surviving parts of the Facsimile No. 1 papyrus are all that the Mormons ever saw of it. We simply cannot believe that in years of busy speculation and study in which they were concerned with everything else, the saints never so much as breathed on that first unfortunate, discredited, embarrassing, profane, and highly unwelcome bit of sketching. It is both interesting and reassuring to find such a naive suggestion coming from so distinguished a source.

They: Speaking of naive suggestions, when you used that portrait of Lucy Mack Smith to guarantee the integrity of Facsimile No. 1 "before it was damaged," why didn't you call attention to the numbers indicating some of the figures in the pictures? The numbers weren't part of the original papyrus, you know.

We: We completely overlooked the numbers until after the article went to press. Only then did we get our first good look at the picture. So you win a point. We now assume that the artists consulted the Hedlock reproduction. But in examining the portrait closely we discovered something of importance that is not discernible in *The Improvement Era* reproduction,



Facsimile No. 1 from the papyrus fragments given the Church by the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. The glue line (circled) does not show up on the photography as plainly as on the original.

something that is *not* in the Hedlock drawing. The artist has drawn a jagged line right across the top of the facsimile, cutting off the top both of the priest's head and of the bird's head but leaving the rest, including the knife in the priest's hand, untouched. The area above the jagged line is of a slightly



An enlarged reproduction of the replica of Facsimile No. 1 in the background of the painting of Lucy Mack Smith, taken from the photograph of that painting in the Church Historian's Office.

lighter shade than that below, and in the original may be of a different color. It seems to mark the limit of the papyrus, i.e., of the damage to the thing, at some time *after* the Mormons had acquired it. It is nearly all there. In other things also the painter of Mrs. Smith's portrait departs from the Hedlock engraving.

They: What about the wrinkling? It seems to us that some of the wrinkles supposedly in the papyrus extend right out beyond and include the picture frame.

We: The paint could have run where the artists made extra-heavy vertical markings (providing he used water colors), or else the wrinkles could belong to the big portrait itself, of

which we have only a photograph. But the picture frame is clearly a frame, closely resembling the one in which other papyri are still mounted, and most of the wrinkling is definitely confined within its borders as if it really belonged to the papyri.

They: If the papyrus was intact almost to the top, how does it happen that the short inscription above the priest's arm was never produced in any of the engravings? It would have been, had it been there, "since Joseph Smith had no objection to having hieroglyphics reproduced."

We: He also had no objection to supplying missing parts of inscriptions; why has he not done so here, especially since the inscription was a very short one, and it is still perfectly obvious that there was an inscription there? You see it works both ways, but you miss the main point, which is that *all* hieroglyphs have been deliberately omitted from this particular plate. There is clear evidence that the whole inscription on the right was folded under when the thing was mounted. In view of the avoidance of all the hieroglyphs, the omission of the shortest one of all can hardly be viewed as proof that it was not there. And speaking of arguments of silence, while you claim that the pencilled sketching on the backing shows that the parts supplied were missing from the beginning, you never bother to explain why the bird's head was not drawn in at the same time, though you say that was also missing.

WHAT KIND OF HEAD?

They: There was no missing head. The head is still there; there is still "clearly a human head in the original (the beard, hair-line, nose still show, and the official center location of the head over the wing is also evidence)."

We: "*Clearly* a human head?" But of the thousands of people who have looked at it, it took a shrewd and determined observer to detect that. The most characteristic feature of the *ba*-birds we remember to have seen is the large soulful eye. But here is no eye, no brow, no nose (if that is a nose, anything is!), no mouth, no chin, no neck, no ear. With the hair-line intact the face should be virtually complete, but after looking up a lot of human-headed birds for comparison this still continues to tax the imagination. The other heads are quite different.

They: If Hedlock was copying an Egyptian bird's head he would hardly have done such a poor job of it.

We: Rather say if he was inventing one, being an expert draftsman, he would have done a far better job. But if bad drawing is an argument against an Egyptian bird's head, what does it do to your much worse drawn human head?

They: The artist knew that the viewer would expect a human head; he did not have to lean over backwards to indicate one—the merest dubbing would do the trick. Deveria expected a human head and was disturbed at not finding one. So are we.

We: Deveria expected a human head, but the good Professor Parker did not: *He* saw not your clearly drawn human head, and he had excellent reason for seeing a bird's head instead. Take the large sampling of lion-couch scenes in Budge's *Osiris*, for example: what do you find there? Men lying on lion couches and flying birds all over the place, but not a single human-headed bird. You must admit that statistics are overwhelmingly in favor of giving the bird a bird's head.

They: Oh, but there are some lion-couch scenes with human-headed birds flying overhead.

We: Yes, and in every such case the bird is holding either life-symbols or breath-feathers in each outstretched claw. This bird does not even have claws: in other lion-couch scenes (e.g., Denderah) the flying bird is shown without claws, but the human-headed bird—never—which makes this one of the rarest objects in all of Egyptian funerary art. Admittedly it is a bad bird's head and an even worse human head. So where does that leave us? I would say with a fifth hypothesis, one that we have been plugging all along: it is the poor Egyptian artist who is in trouble—out of his depth with this strange assignment.

They: Let's turn to Facsimile No. 2, where we have much clearer evidence of restoration. In the Church Historian's Office among the papers of the EAG is a rather well-done pen-and-ink sketch of the facsimile made by some Mormon at an early date. This, we believe, is the way the hypocephalus looked when it came into Joseph Smith's hands; and in it there are certain parts missing and we are shown exactly what they are. Now these parts are *not* missing in the official engraving of the hypocephalus, Facsimile No. 2, which can

only mean that they have been later supplied. You will notice that a large part of the inscription around the rim is missing, and this has been filled in with hieratic characters from other papyri definitely known to have been in the possession of Joseph Smith. So there you have it.

We: Since the restored portions of the rim with their crude repetitions (hardly an attempt to be subtle) are not a subject of inspired commentary, we don't think that is too important.

They: But two of the most important figures *are* the subject of "inspired commentary," namely Figures 1 and 3. They are both entirely missing in the EAG drawing and have both been supplied from other figures contained in papyri in Joseph Smith's possession. Look at the head of Figure 1: it is "absolutely identical" with that of Figure 2!

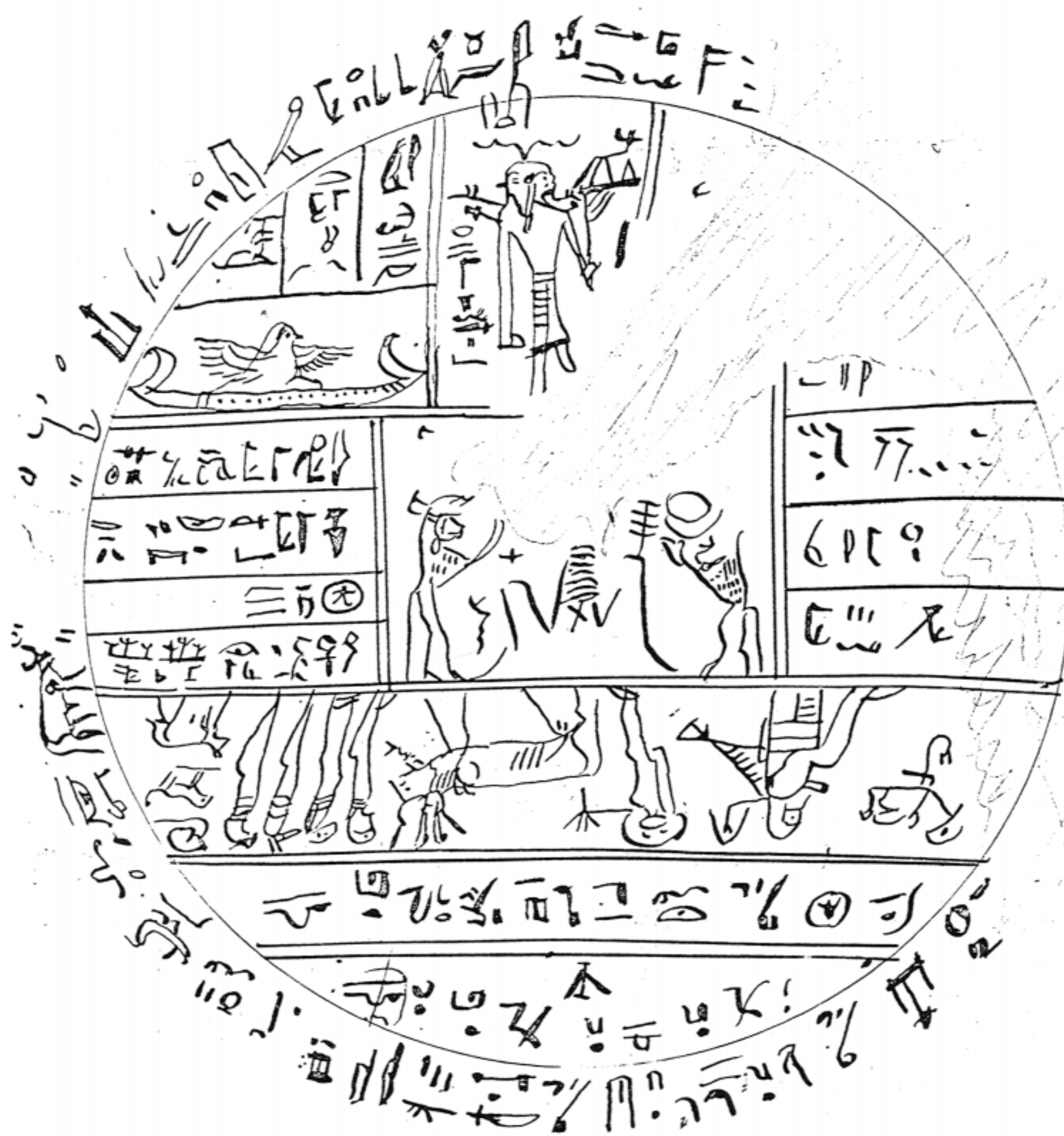
We: Absolutely? It seems to us that in the first Hedlock engraving the two (or should we say four?) heads have a number of points in which they differ—the eyes, the vertical line, the beards.

They: These are very minor differences you must admit. But note how far out of line the two heads of Figure 1 are—that is a clear indication that they have been dubbed in.

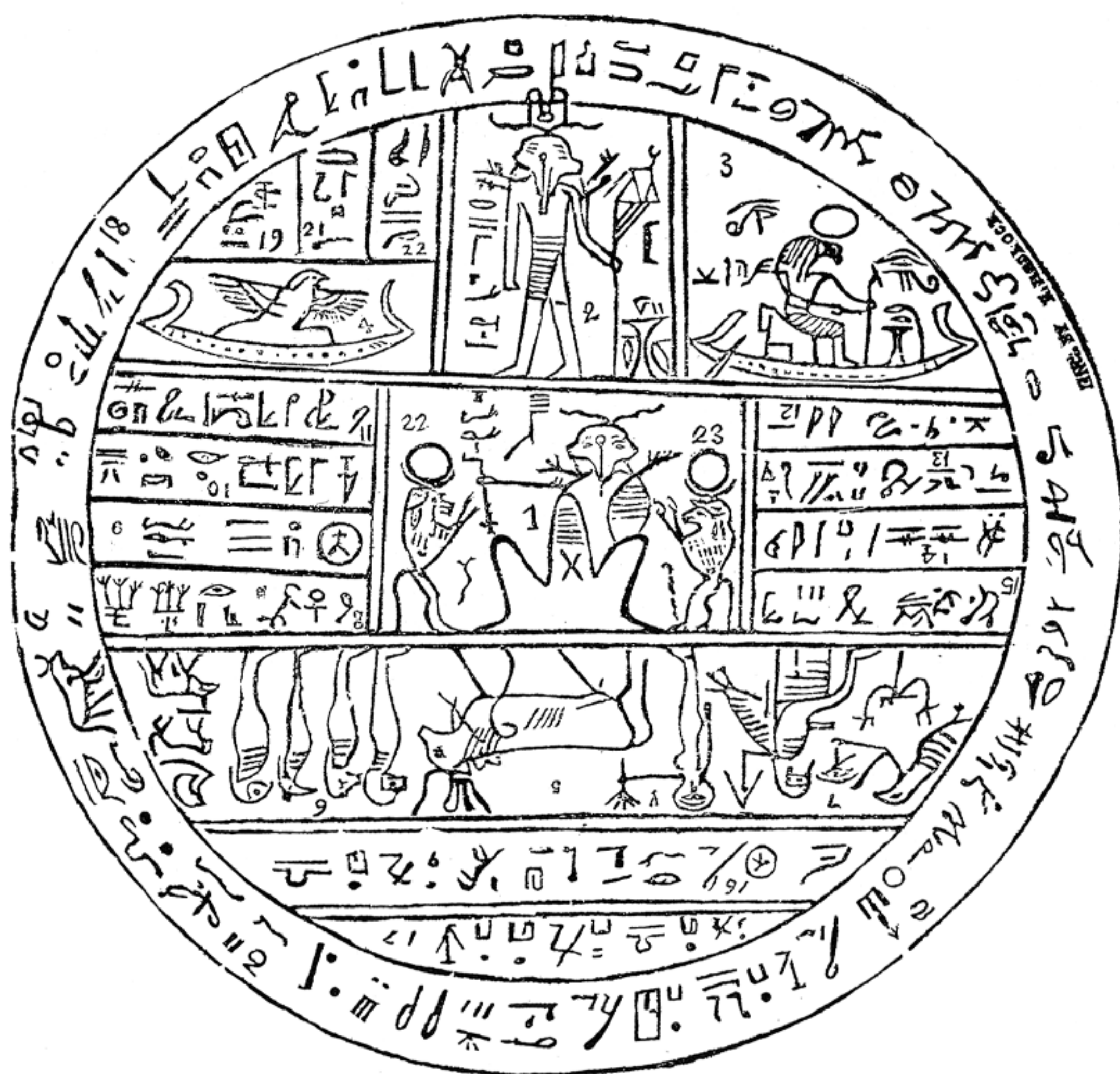
We: But consider that these two figures were drawn at the same time by the same hand, side by side on the same piece of paper. Why should the artist indicate all those minor differences if they did not exist?

They: To make it appear that the heads were different, of course—that he was not just copying.

We: But in that case he would have gone much further and made them really different. The Egyptians themselves, you know, were anything but averse to repetition in their funerary designs. As to the heads of Figure 2 being out of line, is it not more likely that that indicates not that they were being faked but that some of the papyrus had become loose and been awkwardly replaced? If, as you maintain, it was simply a matter of copying borrowed heads onto the neatly symmetrical trunk of Figure 1, which still sits dead center in the panel, nothing could be easier than to put it on *straight*. But Hedlock did not do that; he was struggling with something that definitely was out of line. The phenomenon occurs a number of times in Facsimile No. 2.



A partially completed copy of Facsimile No. 2 found among the papers with the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar in the Church Historian's Office.



The Hedlock woodcut of Facsimile No. 2 reproduced from *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, (March 25, 1842).

They: But look at Figure 3. This is no case of shifting pieces of papyrus. The whole thing is completely missing in the EAG drawing, and is replaced by borrowing the boat shown in the framed papyrus from the Book of the Dead.

We: Granted. But the same boat with the same figure in it appears just in that spot, and *only* in that spot, in a number of other hypocephali. Remember, some fifty-odd other round hypocephali enable us to judge pretty well how good a job of reconstructing the Mormons did. In some cases it was altogether too good, that is, Facsimile No. 2 comes nearer to the other "normal" hypocephali than the battered EAG version does, and this indicated to us at least that the thing was in a better condition when Hedlock made his engraving than when the EAG copy was made, so that the latter cannot be used as a measure of the extent of reconstruction in the former.

They: But in the corresponding boat in the other hypocephali there are other occupants of the boat that are missing in Figure 3.

We: The occupants of the boat vary, and all of them are missing in one drawing or another, with one exception: the *khpr-r* beetle which is interchangeable on the hypocephali with the solar disk on the head of the enthroned figure. Since no two of the Figure 3 boats are exactly alike we can be satisfied that Hedlock has got all the essentials.

They: But Miss Elisabeth Thompson says the boats should always be prow to prow.

We: Not these boats. Look at the British Museum Hypocephalus No. 8445 where the stern of the boat and the figure in it fit right up against the panel, exactly as in our Figure 3.

They: But there are two boats there, one above the other.

We: In many hypocephali there is only one—which shows that we must always allow for differences.

They: But your Figure 3 is most obviously identical with the boat shown in the Joseph Smith framed papyrus.

We: Of course, it is the same boat! But was it necessarily taken from there? Note that there are certain hieroglyphs behind the seated figure in the boat which do *not* appear in our framed papyrus, but *do* appear on some of the other hypocephali, e.g., the Florence and Meux hypocephali.

They: But since the other hypocephali of which you make so much all have a central figure with four ram's heads, is it



A Henry Meux hypocephalus from Thebes, reproduced from *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, Vol. 14 (December 4, 1883).

not far more likely that it was such a figure and not a repeat of Figure 2 that was out of line?

We: More likely, yes. But if there is anything a study of hypocephali should teach us, it is to look out for exceptions *and* repetitions—we find them everywhere. Thus the ram's-horn headdress of Figure 1 is unusual—the four-headed ram usually wears a magnificent and complex crown, but in some instances (e.g., British Museum No. 8446) he wears only the plain ram's horns. That could be an authentic crown. On the other hand there was plenty of room above the body of Figure 1 to have included the headdress of Figure 2 if Hedlock was borrowing the whole head. Yet he avoided that crown, which would have been incorrect (i.e., not justified by any example known to us), in favor of a correct one. Incidentally, there is *not* room above the body of Figure 1 for the very high and ornate crown worn by the four-headed ram.

They: But there is no other instance in which a two-headed figure sits in the center of the circle.

We: None that we know of. But there are hypocephali in which the central figure is missing entirely, others in which it has only a single instead of a double body, in which it holds only one scepter instead of two, and/or holds only simple *was* scepters instead of the usual threefold *ankh-was-djed* scepter, or in which it holds no scepter at all.

They: Speaking of scepters, the EAG drawing definitely has the edge over the Hedlock.

We: In quality, but not in quantity. Hedlock had more to look at, though he muffed it. In the EAG drawing the remains of one of the scepters is clearly shown as the four horizontal lines of the *Djed*-symbol on a staff. These lines so closely resembled the horizontal strokes on the body of Figure 1 immediately adjacent to them, that Hedlock ended up making them look like another body—perhaps. On the other side, however, the *was*-scepter is clearly visible, which is lacking (all but the bottom stroke) in the EAG copy. This awkward attempt to give meaning to the triple scepter (than which no figure could look more meaningless to a layman) could be fairly called an attempt at restoration—not an invention but a fixing up of something that was there. The feet of Figure 2, on the other hand, facing as they do in the wrong direction, we agree to call a restoration. Still, Hedlock drew the jackel-staff cor-

rectly, completing it right down to the ground; while the EAG shows a shorter but equally practical and plausible staff. It is Hedlock who gets it right. Note how neatly and correctly (according to all the other hypocephali) Hedlock joins the four panels right in the middle of what is only a great blank space for the EAG artist.

They: Any clever draftsman could have figured that out.

We: Not necessarily. The EAG artist was at sea: he continued the right-hand boundary of the central panel up well beyond the point of juncture and drew the right-hand border of panel two at an impossible angle. As he saw it, the base-line that runs beneath the two ships and Figure 2 does not run straight across. That is, with those parts missing he was not at all sure how the original looked, but Hedlock draws everything in with deft confidence, exactly as it should be according to the evidence of all the other hypocephali. Again, the EAG artist did not see and recognize the headdress of Figure 2, which is correctly represented by Hedlock. The EAG drawing shows only one serpent beside Figure 1, while Hedlock and all the other hypocephali show two, one on either side. In the middle of the body of Figure 2 the EAG artist has drawn a rather noncommittal tau-cross, while Mr. Hedlock has put a bold and uncompromising crisscross, which, according to the other document, is as it should be. Hedlock shows hieroglyphs to the left of the head of Figure 1, which are entirely missing from the EAG drawing but vindicated by other hypocephali, e.g., the Leyden Hypocephalus. In the EAG picture what looks like a *htp* hieroglyph is just touching the shoulder of Figure 2. This is not matched by any like protrusion from the other shoulder. The Hedlock engraving, on the other hand, shows odd wing-like protrusions, two of them on either shoulder. According to your theory these can only be later additions; yet just such queer double "wings" appear on the shoulder of the corresponding figure in a British Museum Hypocephalus, No. 8445a. Then again, the EAG artist can't make heads or tails of whatever it is facing the seated Figure 7. The other hypocephali tell us that it is a serpent presenting the *wdjat* eye, and Mr. Hedlock clearly shows such a presentation.

They: We grant you that, but the figure in your facsimile looks more like a bird than a snake.

We: Sure enough, and in some hypocephali (e.g., from the Louvre, Florence, British Museum No. 8445a) the creature has a bird's head just like this one. If this is a mere reconstruction, how does it happen that the Mormon engraver hit upon the right figure—which was also the most unlikely figure imaginable? Either he was indeed inspired or he had more of the hypocephalus before his eyes than the other artist did. Here is another case, even clearer: Mr. Hedlock shows the sun-moon crowns of the two baboons intact and resting squarely atop the animals' heads which, according to many other hypocephali, is exactly where they belong. But the EAG artist does not know what to do with them: the one on the right is so completely destroyed that he cannot even make it out, while he places the one on the left in the baboon's upraised hands instead of on his head.

This dislocation of the sun-moon symbol as well as the disruption of the crown of Figure 2 in the EAG copy is an important point, for it shows that pieces of the papyrus were loose and shifting around. It may account for some aspects of our Figure 1.

They: But can you deny that both figures have essentially the same head?

We: Why shouldn't they have since according to the Prophet's explanation they perform practically identical functions? May we call your attention to a transposition of heads and bodies between these two figures in *other* hypocephali? In the Nash Hypocephalus the head of our Figure 2, with its double human face and double feather-crown, is placed on the body of our Figure 1, the double seated figure holding the two scepters. In a hypocephalus from the Myers collection two *identical* standing figures seem to be taking the place of our Figures 1 and 2. In a Berlin hypocephalus (No. 7792), Figure 1 has a single body, like Figure 2, instead of his usual double body. In some cases Figure 1 appears without Figure 2; in others the reverse is true. If the figures are thus transposable, and if Figure 2 can borrow the body of Figure 1, why can't Figure 1 borrow the head of Figure 2 in our version? Such identity would be in keeping both with Egyptian practice and with Smith's interpretations.

So the game goes on. These are only some of the issues arising from one short, mangled (only half of it was published)

installment representing a first tentative approach to the subject. The ball goes back and forth—sometimes “they” make a point, and sometimes “we” do, but the final score is far in the future. The first thing everybody asked when the discovery of the papyri was announced was either “Does this prove the Book of Abraham?” or “Doesn’t this show that Joseph Smith was wrong?” Does a falling apple prove Newton’s laws? Only to people with an awful lot of training and preparation, and no longer to many of them. The scholar is not alive today who can tell us all there is to be known about the facsimiles, and until we know that the game must still go on. As things stand at the moment, but only at the moment, we may venture a few observations:

(1) There are many questions raised by the finding of the Joseph Smith Egyptian papyri—not just one question. The Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar cannot be used as a close check on the Book of Abraham until a great deal more is known about both documents. We do not yet know just what the EAG is or in what light Joseph Smith regarded it.

(2) The dating of these particular papyri is of no conclusive significance as far as possible relationship to Abraham is concerned.

(3) The facsimiles were originally intended as visual aids for an unspecified audience. Nothing supernatural, inspired, or sacrosanct is claimed for them. The Latter-day Saints made no special efforts to retain them in their possession, and after they were lost were careless and indifferent in the manner of their reproduction.

(4) The Hedlock engraving when compared with an early sketch showing parts of Facsimile No. 2 to be missing shows definite signs of attempted restoration.

(5) The restoration was not as extensive as the other sketch would indicate, and no clear instances of such have been demonstrated on Facsimile No. 1.

(6) The restorations on Facsimile No. 2 are limited to the filling in of gaps, not the alteration of existing symbols. They were not made with an eye to supporting Smith’s interpretations, e.g., two heads do not express the idea of a universal God better than four heads; a clothed sacrificial victim is no more

convincing than an unclothed one; a priest with a mask is no more authentic than one without a mask, etc.

(7) The only restorations that might affect the interpretations, Figures 1 and 3, are paradoxical, in that the one is astonishingly fitting, not only to the interpretation given but in the light of comparison with other hypocephali, while the other is so far out of line that it is hard to see in it the faking of a skillful artist.

(8) In many details Hedlock shows a better knowledge of the hypocephalus than the artist who is supposed to furnish the evidence for the state of the thing when Hedlock made his copy. Hence the latter is not a reliable control.

As the game progresses our ideas about the Pearl of Great Price are bound to change, even as our ideas about the Book of Mormon have changed through the years as new evidence has steadily been brought to light. Throughout the Doctrine and Covenants the saints are constantly reminded of two things: (1) of what they have received, and (2) of what they are expected to seek after. The seeking part is the proper sphere of schools and universities, and in the matter of the facsimiles to the Book of Abraham in particular we have all been invited to seek. It is time we were getting down to business.

ADDENDUM (SHOWING THAT THE GAME NEVER ENDS)

Since the above sport sheet went to press Professor Klaus Baer's invaluable study, the first thorough and complete examination and translation of a Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyrus so far undertaken, has appeared in the pages of *Dialogue* (III, Autumn 1968, pp. 109-134). The many questions this work raises, far from bringing the game to a close, have merely stepped up the tempo as it becomes possible, thanks to Dr. Baer's efforts, for contestants on both sides of the net to become more familiar with the real nature of the game. So here is a bit of overtime:

They: Joseph Smith thought that this papyrus (the *Sn-sn*) contained the Book of Abraham.

We: Reading Joseph Smith's mind has always been the last and usually the first resort in refuting his claims. By what divination do you know what he thought?

They: By no divination. Here are the characters from the papyrus on the left hand and set over against them on the right are lengthy passages from the Book of Abraham. What more do you want?

We: A lot of information, such as, who juxtaposed the texts in this amusing way?

They: Who else but Smith? He owned the papyrus and wrote the "translation."

We: But the exercise is in the hands of a number of different people, and none of it seems to be in Smith's hand. The English text appears here in its final unaltered state. Do you mean to say that this actually represents Smith's first attempt at "translating" it? Here there are no signs of speculation and head scratching, as in the other sign list.

They: This doesn't have to be the first attempt of all. It could be later copy.

We: A later copy of what? If all that was wanted was to produce a copy, why doesn't one person copy the thing through? Instead of that there are a few lines of translation in one hand, and then a few in another, and so on. Surely each copyist would not become exhausted at the end of half-a-dozen lines of English or less.

They: They would if the few lines meant a slow and exhaustive effort by the one who was dictating.

We: Such an effort would necessarily show in the state of the text. But this is a completely finished text without changes or corrections. Therefore it does not represent the first appearance of the translation, but the use of the completed text in some sort of special exercise. This matching-up business does *not* represent the process by which the text was produced.

They: But would Smith's followers have the kind of imagination that would match up the Egyptian and English texts in such a fantastic way?

We: Not imagination—lack of imagination! The matching is quite impossible.

They: But you have been saying all along that these writings may represent Smith's own private speculations.

We: And we still do! For all we know they *may* represent anything. That is just the point: we simply do not know, and until we do our work is not done. Your reading of Joseph Smith's mind settles nothing.

They: But how about the facsimiles? The many irregularities they contain certainly indicate Mormon manipulation, since an Egyptian copyist would have done things differently.

We: Would he? The original papyrus shows that some of worst mistakes are not Mormon but Egyptian. You accept the "small offering stand" as Egyptian, though it is found in no parallel instances; you say frankly "I know of no representations of Osiris on a couch with both hands in front of his face"; you attribute a human head to a legless bird, a thing so far as we have been able to discover without parallel in the funerary art. These undoubtedly Egyptian touches are not conventional by any means, yet you continue to abuse the principle by attributing every oddity to Mormon "restorations" until proved otherwise.

They: Do we go so far?

We: Well, you do go so far as to assume without question that the priest in Facsimile No. 1 should have a jackal's mask. And you are quite right—he *should* have, and the human head is an error. But whose error?

They: Whose could it be but Smith's?

We: Smith didn't need an unmasked priest—a mask would have been just as impressive perhaps. But let us call your attention to at least three Ptolemaic lion-couch scenes closely paralleling this one in which the artist has deliberately drawn the embalming priest without a jackal-mask.

They: Deliberately?

We: Yes. In one case the mask has been carefully erased, and in the other two it was carefully not drawn in; in all three scenes all the other figures are entirely complete and intact—only the jackal's mask of the priest is missing.¹⁹ We do not at present know why the Egyptians preferred here to dispense with the mask, but it is at least conceivable that the artist of Facsimile No. 1 had his reasons too. It will not do to attribute to the Mormons everything that puzzles us.

They (by letter): You admit that the sketch of Facsimile No. 1 in the Lucy Mack Smith portrait has the Hedlock numbers on it; yet you think it significant that it may indicate the actual state of preservation of the papyrus at the time the portrait was made. How do you reconcile the two propositions?

¹⁹*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 17 (1931), Plates lvi, lvii.

We: Well, naturally the artist would not keep his model sitting and suffering while he sketched in the little picture on the wall; with plenty of Hedlock reproductions going around he could easily fill in that part at his leisure—so he did. But at the same time he made an undeniable effort to indicate that the framed thing on the wall really was the original. Better photographs accent the wrinkling and the frame, and it still remains unthinkable that the old lady should have displayed a mere printed copy—the only “original” Hedlock would be a wood-block! So the jagged line along the top may be significant. Incidentally, you people brush aside valuable contemporary testimony as of no significance when it does not suit your purposes. The contemporary record both by its assertions and its silences is quite unsuspecting of the sort of manipulating you see everywhere.

They: After all, “the case at issue is: what *are* the facsimiles?”

We: Agreed. And after reading your latest and best account (the article which called forth this addendum), we still do not know the answer. Your notes are immensely valuable and must supply the standard handbook for which all of us were hoping. But they tell us what the Egyptologists think, and not what the Egyptians thought. What do *you* say Facsimile No. 1 is, for example?

They: It “shows the resurrection of Osiris (who is also the deceased owner of the papyrus) and the conception of Horus.”

We: There you have it. Former Egyptologists said that it could not possibly represent Abraham because it was supposed to be Osiris, but now you tell us that it can be both Osiris and a human being at once; again, they said it could not be a sacrificial scene because it was an embalming or resurrection scene, but now you tell us that it can be *both* a resurrection scene and a conception. This all shows what we mean when we repeatedly affirm that we cannot answer the question, “What are the facsimiles?” until we know *everything there is to know* about them.

They: Yes, but we know a great deal about them that does not fit in with Joseph Smith’s ideas.

We: If you will excuse us for saying so, the only point you have made so far against Joseph Smith has been by a

bit of sleight-of-hand—not intentional, we are sure, but quite effective. The secret of successful conjuring tricks, as everybody knows, is to occupy the attention of the audience with an absorbing display of colorful skill while manipulating the essential properties of the trick unobtrusively on the side. Thus while lost in admiration, as we have often been, of your mastery of a formidably difficult idiom, we run the risk of overlooking the casual manner in which the real trick is pulled off—that having nothing whatever to do with the translation of Egyptian. You open your article by observing in passing that “Joseph Smith thought that his papyrus contained the Book of Abraham,” and you end it with an even more casual subordinate clause about “the document that Joseph Smith considered to be a ‘roll’ which ‘contained the writings of Abraham.’ ” But how do you know what Joseph Smith “thought” and what he “considered”? This of course is the crux of the whole matter, but you do not discuss it—you merely state it as your opening and closing shots. You quote his very words as if he meant them to apply to the Breathing document; but how do you know he did?

By way of answer you have gone to all the trouble of placing the “Sen-sen” symbols and the Book of Abraham side by side, and thereby presented us with the most effective possible refutation of your settled belief that Smith thought he was translating this particular document. Neither he nor anyone else could have thought it. You say that other people in his day tried to interpret Egyptian that way, but you are wrong; this translation of two or three short strokes and a dot with a 200 or 500-word history is not just exaggerated Kircherism—Horapollo, Kircher, Leibniz, *et al.*, based their interpretations, however fantastic, on rational and allegorical principles; but no conceivable amount of rationalizing can match up the two columns here: this goes completely out of bounds. Long before anyone suspected the real meaning of the hieratic symbols in the EAG, students were pointing out to each other that the column on the right could by no effort of the imagination be viewed as a *translation* of the column on the left. You can see it, and I can see it, and Mr. Heward can see it, and any ten-year-old child can see it. But Joseph Smith, who was clever enough to make up the story of the Book of Abraham in the first place, was too dense to see that the

story—*his* story—was not *really* a translation of a page of senseless squiggles! Yet unless he believed that there is no case against him. We still suspect that there is a relationship between the two documents, but we don't know what it is.

On October 12, 1968, two graduate students in Near Eastern studies at the University of Utah, R. Crapo and J. A. Tvednes, presented an interesting hypothesis to explain the relationship between the Breathing Certificate and the Book of Abraham. We have it only second hand and await their publication, but it seems that the idea is that if one takes the actual meaning of the hieratic signs in the order in which they occur, they can be roughly matched up with certain general themes of the Book of Abraham which occur *in the same order*. This indicates to Crapo and Tvednes that what we have here is a mnemonic device to aid in an oral recitation. This would make the "Sen-sen" papyrus a sort of prompter's sheet. True, the document tells a connected and consistent story, but then it would have to do that in order to serve as an effective aid to memory by itself being easily memorized.

Far-fetched as it may seem, there are many ancient examples of this sort of thing, the best-known of which is the alphabet itself. By merely reciting the oldest alphabet one intoned a little sermonette on man's earthly calling, "a mnemonic device which helped the rapid spread of the West Semitic system of writing."²⁰ The classic example of a work which condenses the meaning of whole chapters into a single letter is the *Sefer Yetzirah*, "the oldest and most respected book of Jewish Mysteries," whose authorship is persistently attributed to Abraham. We are now being advised that "if we are to understand the Jewish authors correctly, we must examine their work carefully to see whether they contain a *gematria*," that is, condensed and hidden code-writing, which turns up in the most surprising places.²¹

The condensing of matter on prompting sheets is a very old practice. Sethe suggested that the Memphite dramatic text was really an abbreviated directive, in which, though the text seems quite complete, the full content of the speeches and the action is merely hinted at.²² Heinrich Schäfer noted that

²⁰H. Tur-Sinai, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 41 (1951), p. 288f., 296.

²¹Rosh-Pinnah, in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 57 (1967), p. 214.

²²K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1928), p. 18.

the famous Stele C14 in the Louvre “consists of sentences which read like the headings of chapters,” though they also make a connected text.²³ We could, and in time probably will, furnish many examples of this sort of thing. In a preliminary statement in *Dialogue* it was suggested that the hieratic symbols placed over against the long sections of the Book of Abraham might be viewed not as texts but as topic headings. We still don’t know what the connection is, but one thing is certain—that the relationship between the two texts was never meant to be that of a direct translation. If it were we can be sure that Joseph Smith would have published the Egyptian text along with the facsimiles and the translation.

²³H. Schäfer, in *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, Vol. 52 (1914), p. 17.