



JOSEPH SMITH JR., FIRST PROPHET AND PRESIDENT OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, WORKED ON THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM IN 1835 AND 1842. COURTESY OF THE CHURCH HISTORY MUSEUM.

those who will not attribute anything to Joseph Smith unless it can be proven that he said it or did it. While such a minimalist approach certainly excludes many real deeds and sayings of Joseph Smith, it is the safer scholarly approach and avoids unnecessary speculation. Here we will examine what Joseph Smith did with the papyri, moving from the more certain to the more speculative.

HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

Joseph Smith began translating the papyri in early July 1835, with Oliver Cowdery and William W. Phelps serving as his scribes. The current published text of the Book of Abraham, and probably more, seems to have been translated by the end of July 1835; the Book of Abraham appears to have been longer than the current text. In August 1835, Joseph Smith left Kirtland to visit the Saints in Michigan, and no translation was done during the trip. Revelation pertaining to the Book of Abraham was not known to have been received again until 1 October 1835. Trans-

lation continued intermittently through 25 November 1835, but Joseph then set aside the papyri to study Hebrew, finish and dedicate the Kirtland Temple, and, later, deal with troubles in Missouri. Joseph revised the translation preparatory to its publication in 1842, but other than that, no evidence has survived that he worked on the translation of the existing Book of Abraham after 1835. Unfortunately, Joseph was extremely busy and consequently somewhat haphazard in his record keeping, so we cannot be certain.

We do not know if the translation of the Book of Abraham was ever completed, but we do know the publication was not. The second installment in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842 ends with the words “to be continued,” but it never was. None of the extant manuscripts of the Book of Abraham even cover as much as the printed text.

Despite much speculation, the process Joseph Smith used to translate the Book of Abraham is unknown; we have no record of Joseph Smith himself discussing what methods he used. We have no



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