

source was Edward Heusser, who sold the pieces to the museum in 1947. Edward was the husband of Alice Heusser, a daughter of a housekeeper of a Mr. A. Combs, who in 1856 bought the papyrus from Emma Smith Bidamon. The letter signed by Emma, which Dr. Atiya discovered with the eleven papyrus pieces, noted the sale of the papyrus to Mr. Combs.

Eleven pieces of the original collection are now safely in the hands of the Church. Some nineteen others may still be in existence. It is possible that some or all of the remaining pieces will eventually be located and acquired by the Church.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. FISCHER

*DIALOGUE: On Monday, November 27, 1967, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City presented a number of documents to President N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency, who accepted them on behalf of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. What were these documents? Could you describe them for us?*

*FISCHER: There are eleven documents. In addition, there is a letter of presentation from the family of Joseph Smith. The documents in question are fragments of funerary papyri; that is, fragments of long scrolls containing texts intended for the benefit of the deceased and placed in the dead man's tomb. I would say that the dimensions of these fragments vary from the size of a large envelope or large post card to three times that size. Furthermore, one of these fragments actually can be identified as the original document from which Joseph Smith copied the drawing which is called "Facsimile No. 1," found in the Pearl of Great Price. Since the illustration is incomplete, this assumption can be verified very exactly. That is to say, the part that's missing in the original scroll fragment, and that had been sketched in by hand, corresponds to Joseph Smith's reproduction in the Pearl of Great Price.*

*DIALOGUE: Then you feel that, in the case of Facsimile No. 1, the part of the scroll fragment that is missing now was also missing at the time Joseph Smith had this document in his possession?*

*FISCHER: I think that it is in just about the same state as when he owned it.*

*DIALOGUE: Is there any evidence for the supposition that all these fragments came from the same original scroll?*

*FISCHER: They certainly belong to more than one scroll and probably as many as four. Although there are several fragments from the same scroll.*

*DIALOGUE: Would you comment on the size of the scrolls?*

*FISCHER: You mean the size of the original scrolls? Well, I am not sure. They could have been quite long. How long? Perhaps fifteen feet; scrolls like these are even longer in some cases. They vary in length and as you can see, these are small fragments of rather long documents.*

*DIALOGUE: Do you think Joseph Smith cut up parts of the original scrolls into these pieces?*

*FISCHER: No, I doubt if he cut the documents. I think that they came to him in this fashion. I doubt very much if he cut them up.*

*DIALOGUE: Would you elaborate on the evidence that these manuscripts were those actually possessed by Joseph Smith?*

FISCHER: There is first of all the letter from the family of Joseph Smith. We have given the Church this letter. It states that the mummies and record had been owned by Joseph Smith. The letter is signed by three people, Joseph Smith's son, Joseph Smith, Emma Smith Bidamon, and her husband L. C. Bidamon. We have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the letter. It rings true. Furthermore, these papyri were mounted on pieces of a map which relates to the area and the time when Joseph Smith lived in Illinois. And there is the point, too, that one of these documents does correspond exactly to one of the illustrations in the Pearl of Great Price, and it is absolutely certain that this is the same papyrus. As I've said, the part that's missing corresponds to the restorations made by Joseph Smith. And that really clinches it. Facsimile No. 1 is also a very good copy, a very accurate copy, as far as the section preserved is concerned.

DIALOGUE: *I have been told that there was some writing on the margins of some of the papyri, or at least on the material that the papyri were mounted on. Was this writing done by Joseph Smith?*

FISCHER: There is some writing on the maps but this may not be in his own hand; perhaps he simply took a map done in pen and ink and used that for mounting. I think that's what you have in mind. There's some other writing, but we don't know just what it pertains to; there's perhaps a genealogical table or something of that sort. These writings don't have any immediate relation to the papyri, however, they were just on pieces of paper that were reused for the mounting. They might be of interest in indicating the time and the place of Joseph Smith's study of the papyri. Quite possibly they are of some historical interest in terms of Joseph Smith's life.

DIALOGUE: *How did these manuscripts actually come into the possession of the Metropolitan Museum?*

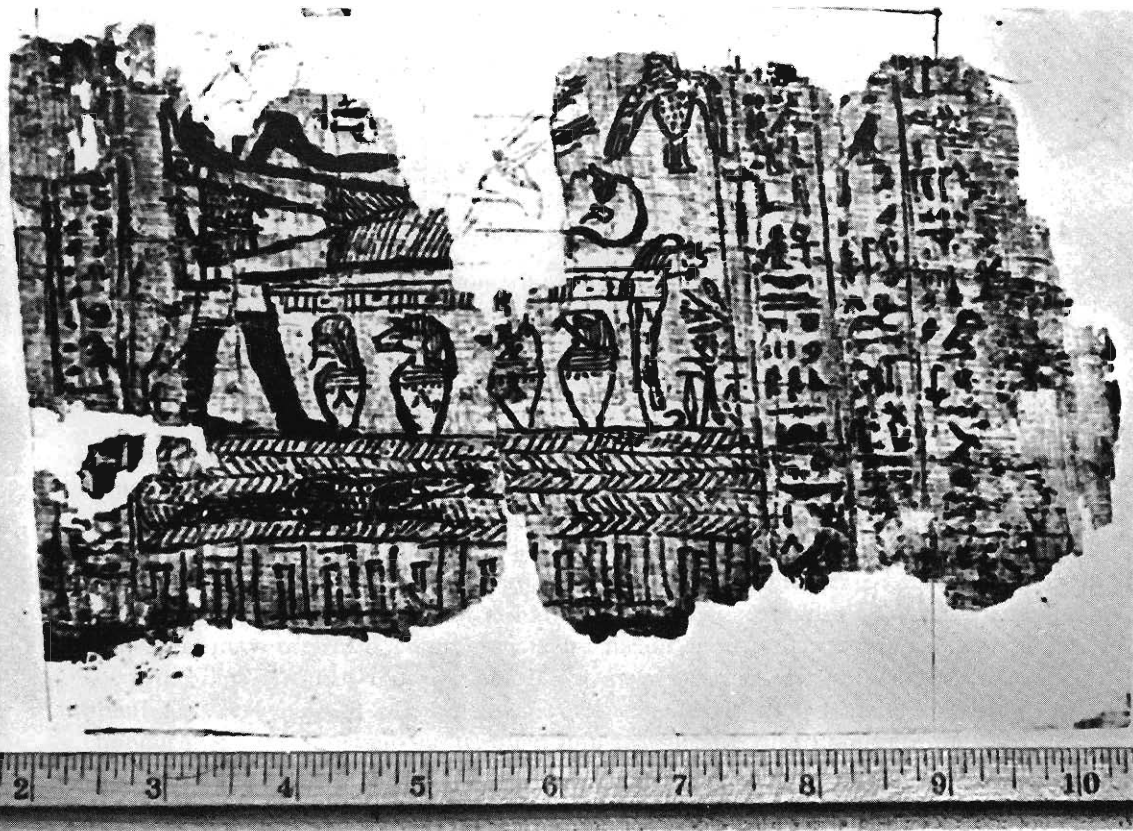
FISCHER: Our first knowledge of them goes back to 1918 when our first curator, Dr. A. M. Lythgoe, was shown these fragments by a Mrs. Alice Heusser, a woman who lived in Brooklyn. I think that must be the way you pronounce her name (he spells it out). Her mother had been housekeeper to a person named Combs, and Combs had bought them from the family of Joseph Smith. It is that sale which is mentioned in the letter I referred to. On the death of Mr. A. Combs, they were left to Mrs. Heusser's mother. One of our staff members, Dr. Ludlow Bull, had maintained an interest in these records; in about 1946 he tried to find out where they were and they were offered to us by the widower of Mrs. Heusser, Mr. Edward Heusser. We acquired them then in 1947. Of course, we knew because we had the letter too, what the relevance was to the Mormon Church.

DIALOGUE: *You were aware at that time, in fact, even in 1918, that it was relevant to the Church; however, you did not at that time contact anyone who was associated with the Mormon Church?*

FISCHER: Frankly, we didn't know what the Mormon Church's wishes were. It wasn't until we discussed the matter with Professor Atiya, who teaches in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah, that we had a possibility of finding out how they

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On the facing page we have reproduced (1) the original papyrus from which Joseph Smith took "Facsimile No. 1," (2) the first published copy, printed from a woodcut by Reuben Hedlock in the *Times and Seasons*, Vol. III, No. 9 (March 1, 1842), and (3) the somewhat different version used in contemporary copies of the Pearl of Great Price (dating from 1876). [ed.]



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**TIMES AND SEASONS.**

"Truth will prevail."

Vol. III. No. 9.] CITY OF NAUVOO, ILL. MARCH, 1, 1842. [Whole No. 45.

A FACSIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.  
NO. 1.



EXPLANATION OF THE ABOVE CUT.

- Fig. 1).—The Angel of the Lord.
- 2. Abraham, fastened upon an Altar.
- 3. The Idolatrous Priest of Elkenah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice.
- 4. The Altar for sacrifice, by the idolatrous Priests, standing before the Gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh.
- 5. The Idolatrous God of Elkenah.
- 6. The " " " Libnah.
- 7. The " " " Mahmackrah.
- 8. The " " " Korash.
- 9. The " " " Pharaoh.
- 10. Abraham in Egypt.
- 11. Designed to represent the pillars of Heaven, as understood by the Egyptians.
- 12. Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament, over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shamau, to be high, or the heavens; answering to the Hebrew word, Shaumahyeem.

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A FACSIMILE FROM THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

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- Fig. 1. The Angel of the Lord. 2. Abraham fastened upon an altar. 3. The idolatrous priest of Elkenah attempting to offer up Abraham as a sacrifice. 4. The altar for sacrifice by the idolatrous priests, standing before the gods of Elkenah, Libnah, Mahmackrah, Korash, and Pharaoh. 5. The idolatrous god of Elkenah. 6. The idolatrous god of Libnah. 7. The idolatrous god of Mahmackrah. 8. The idolatrous god of Korash. 9. The idolatrous god of Pharaoh. 10. Abraham in Egypt. 11. Designed to represent the pillars of heaven, as understood by the Egyptians. 12. Raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament over our heads; but in this case, in relation to this subject, the Egyptians meant it to signify Shamau, to be high, or the heavens, answering to the Hebrew word, Shaumahyeem.

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felt about it. Then it became possible to transfer the documents from us to them.

DIALOGUE: *At what time did Dr. Atiya become aware of the existence of the scrolls?*

FISCHER: I would say about a year ago. We know him well; he is a gentleman we have been associated with through the American Research Center in Egypt and so on. He had come to our department and was looking for illustrations for one of his books. This matter came up in the course of giving him this help. We knew, since he worked in Salt Lake City and was acquainted with leaders of the Mormon Church, that he might very tactfully find out how they felt about it. So we simply informed him about this in confidence, and I think he handled the matter very nicely.

DIALOGUE: *There was a period of approximately one year between the time Dr. Atiya became aware of the scrolls and the Church acquired them. We would be interested in learning what sort of research Dr. Atiya and others did to verify that these scrolls were authentic, and that indeed they were the ones that were associated with Joseph Smith. Was Dr. Atiya involved in research of this nature during that year?*

FISCHER: I don't know. I imagine that he simply passed on photographs to the Church leaders, and then they could see for themselves. I think the two points, the letter and the illustration in the papyrus that was reproduced by Joseph Smith in the Pearl of Great Price just clinched the matter beyond all doubt. I think they were immediately convinced on the basis of the photographs.

DIALOGUE: *The DESERET NEWS press release described some of the documents as in their words "conventional hieroglyphic and hieratic Egyptian funerary texts;" Would you elaborate on this?*

FISCHER: I think that probably the Church will try to establish exactly what these texts are. We know for a certainty, however, that they are parts of several copies of the Book of the Dead. The texts probably vary in date, but most of them are pretty late in terms of ancient Egyptian history. The spells in these texts would insure the welfare of the dead man in the next world. They provide a means of getting there, give him certain powers in the next world, and so on.

DIALOGUE: *So these particular scrolls, referred to in the DESERET NEWS, are very similar to other scrolls that may be in the Museum's possession.*

FISCHER: Yes, that's right. There are many, many copies of these texts. Of course, a very beautiful example would be of great interest to us, and we do normally have some fine examples on display. Let's say that these fragments are reduplications in that sense. Such reduplications are of interest to specialists in funerary text but are not useful to us in terms of our exhibition.

DIALOGUE: *Are manuscripts of this sort characteristic of a particular time period in Egyptian history?*

FISCHER: They go back to a custom that we first know of from the Old Kingdom, the earliest of the three greatest periods of Egyptian history, the time of the

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The manuscript reproduced on the facing page apparently includes the drawings Oliver Cowdery referred to in a letter to William Frye concerning the papyri which appeared in *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (December 1835), p. 236. Joseph Smith had reported that "one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt"; in discussing this record of Joseph, Cowdery said, "The serpent, represented as walking, or formed in a manner to be able to walk, standing in front of, and near a female figure, is to me, one of the greatest representations I have ever seen upon paper. . . . Enoch's pillar, as mentioned by Josephus, is upon the same roll."

Vertical column of cuneiform script on the left side of the tablet, containing approximately 25 lines of text.

Horizontal line of cuneiform script above the first illustration.



Horizontal line of cuneiform script below the first illustration.



Horizontal line of cuneiform script below the second illustration.



Horizontal line of cuneiform script below the third illustration.



Horizontal line of cuneiform script at the bottom of the tablet.

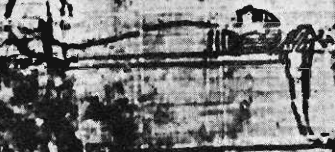
Main body of cuneiform script on the right side of the tablet, organized into several columns and separated by horizontal lines.



The manuscript reproduced here contains a drawing (lower right hand corner) very similar to Figure 3 of Facsimile No. 2 of the Book of Abraham. Other papyri contain figures similar to Figure 6 of Facsimile No. 2 and to Figure 2 of Facsimile No. 3.



Handwritten text in an ancient script, likely Egyptian hieroglyphs, arranged in several horizontal lines. The text is partially obscured by dark, irregular markings on the left side of the page.



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pyramids. In the burial chambers of the pyramids of the late fifth and sixth dynasty, and the eighth dynasty, too, you have texts insuring the king's access to the next world, and his welfare there. The practice of using texts for this purpose was later taken up by private individuals, as well as the king. They were carved on the inside of coffins during the Middle Kingdom, the next period, from about 2,000 B.C. onwards. Then about 500 years later a different practice developed as the Egyptians changed the form of their coffins to the anthropoid forms (shaped to look like a man) that most museum-goers are familiar with. Instead of carving or painting the texts on the inside of the coffin, they put the texts on rolls of papyrus and then rolled the rolls up and put them with the dead man.

DIALOGUE: *Were the scrolls that are in the possession of the Church found in that form?*

FISCHER: Well, we don't know exactly the circumstances, but we would assume that from other cases.

DIALOGUE: *So you would place the origin of the scrolls sometime after 1500 B.C.?*

FISCHER: A good deal after, I believe. I wouldn't want to say exactly what the date was. I think the dates vary somewhat, but some of the texts probably come down to the very end of ancient Egyptian history not too long before the time of Christ; others may be earlier. I must concede that I am not an expert on that question. I haven't dated them that precisely myself.

DIALOGUE: *Is it possible to date papyri using the carbon-14 method?*

FISCHER: I don't think so. In the first place, to make the test, you have to consume a considerable amount of the papyrus. In this case, you would have to use so much of it that you would have nothing left. And then when you make that sort of test, you often arrive at results that are fuzzier than could be established by other means, such as by paleography and so on.

DIALOGUE: *Are there other possible methods for dating papyrus?*

FISCHER: Paleography is one means; the style of writing might be analyzed. Someone who is expert on such fragments would know at a glance that it belongs to a definite period, and that sort of judgment would be your best indication. These fragments could be compared with others that have well established dates, and there are many papyri that could be used for this type of research. I am sure that we could arrive at a pretty accurate date if such a comparison were made. It would be a good possibility for the Mormon Church to pursue.

DIALOGUE: *Could you give us more details about the burial traditions of the period associated with these texts?*

FISCHER: Originally, the king alone had the right to obtain access to an existence beyond this one. Eventually his right was transferred to other persons. The Egyptians generally provided for their existence in the next world in a variety of ways. They didn't depend solely on any one of them. They tried to build a tomb that would last. They would mummify the body to try to guarantee its permanence. They would try to insure that offerings be perpetuated. In earlier times, they would put reliefs into the tomb, depicting life as they knew it. They hoped, and expected too, that in this way they would continue their existence. They used many different methods but they were all directed to the same result. Throughout Egyptian history the emphasis is increasingly on the religious aspect of this sort of insurance. There was more and more reliance on the magical spell, on the religious text; some of



these texts pertain to spiritual matters while others are more material and concrete; they vary tremendously in character.

DIALOGUE: *Is there any possibility that these burial customs were flexible enough that an Egyptian might bury with the dead certain writings that had family significance? In some parts of our country today, for instance, people bury the text of the gospel of St. Matthew or the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians, because they were particularly close to them in life. Is there any counterpart to that in this period of history?*

FISCHER: No, I don't think so, because these texts from the Book of the Dead were put together specifically for the purpose of burial; therefore, the Egyptians already had exactly what they needed. They would not have thought of another means.

DIALOGUE: *Could you characterize the type of language or method of writing used on these papyri?*

FISCHER: It is the Egyptian language, a language related to both the Hamitic and Semitic families of languages. In a religious text there is usually a tendency toward archaic phraseology and orthography. In such cases, the writers go back to early texts and try to preserve the early phases of the language. The writing is in some cases a kind of book-writing, done with pen and ink in a style that approximates hieroglyphs; in other cases it is more cursive, and the forms are more abstract. That sort of writing we call hieratic. You find both kinds in these fragments.

DIALOGUE: *You mentioned that these texts would be copied from one generation to the next. Would the copyist keep the same type of figures or characters from generation to generation? In other words, would a text be written the same way three hundred years after it had first appeared?*

FISCHER: Well, there are some variations, of course, but there is also great continuity, as you suggest; that is to say, you would find similar vignettes from one scroll to the next, continuing over a great number of years.

DIALOGUE: *There was then a great stability in the form of the writing, over many centuries?*

FISCHER: Very much so.

DIALOGUE: *So this particular type of scroll might have been placed in the tombs of other mummies at different periods of time?*

FISCHER: Yes, but the scroll would generally mention the specific individual; in some cases a scroll might be written with blanks left in it for the name to be filled in when the scroll was purchased. In other cases a papyrus was inscribed expressly for an individual. You can say theoretically that a given scroll would be applicable to any person; but generally it was attached to an individual through the use of his name. That would be rather important to the person who possessed the particular scroll.

DIALOGUE: *You may not want to respond to this, but is it unusual for a scroll of this nature to be buried with an Egyptian, since this scroll pertains to someone whom the Mormon Church purports to be Abraham who is associated with the area of Palestine?*

FISCHER: I think that's a question for the Mormon Church to answer.

DIALOGUE: *Is it common to have had many copies made of the parts of the Book of the Dead?*

FISCHER: The Book of the Dead itself is a compilation of texts. Now, the compilation might vary from one papyrus to another, but you could expect certain chapters to be regularly included.

DIALOGUE: *You mentioned that the translation of such works as these would not be difficult.*

*Does this suggest that, unlike other ancient languages, the Egyptian language did not evolve in any marked sense?*

FISCHER: There certainly was change, but, as I said, when it comes to religious texts there is a tendency to use the classical language, as the Roman Catholic Church has used Latin for many years. The same tendency is found in many religions. In Islam, the Arabic of the time of Mohammed is used for prayer.

DIALOGUE: *I'd like to ask one clarification question. Was it in 1918 that the Museum acquired the papyri?*

FISCHER: We didn't acquire them until 1947. As I said before, the curator of our department was shown these documents in 1918. Many years afterwards, another member of our department, Dr. Bull, asked the family whether they still had them. Finally, he found out that the husband of Alice Heusser was still alive, and the husband sold them to us. But that wasn't until 1947. Then, a year ago, we made contact with Professor Atiya. It took us a little time before I was able to correspond with him. Subsequently, we put this matter before the director and our trustees. As you know, we had a change of directorship. I think that as museums do things, we acted with reasonable speed.

DIALOGUE: *Is this a standard practice to give such documents to interested private institutions such as the Church?*

FISCHER: I am glad you asked that question, since, technically, we have not given the documents to the Church. As far as the Church is concerned, it is a gift, of course, but it was made possible by an anonymous donation which covered the cost to the Museum. We have not set a precedent for giving away an object; we cannot be in that position.

DIALOGUE: *Would you say that the Church does not have complete ownership? Is there a way by which these documents could be called back?*

FISCHER: No, absolutely not. They are a gift from the Museum, but the gift was made possible because of an anonymous donation from a friend of ours.

DIALOGUE: *Does the Metropolitan Museum have a photographic record of all of these documents, including the letter?*

FISCHER: Yes, we do.

DIALOGUE: *Does the Metropolitan Museum plan to publish information on these scrolls?*

FISCHER: No, we are going to leave that to the Mormon Church. I am sure they are going to publish these texts in such a way that they can be studied eventually. I don't think they ought to be pressed. This is their prerogative. We have given them that prerogative along with the documents.