

Marginal Characters in the Book of Abraham Manuscripts.

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I am grateful to be with you today and grateful for the chance to explain what we know about the characters in the Book of Abraham manuscripts. Three of the Books of Abraham manuscripts have characters in the margins. For example folder 12:94 manuscript 1 contains characters at approximately the beginning of every paragraph. Back in 1968 Jerald Tanner and Grant Heward identified these characters as belonging to Joseph Smith Papyrus XI and hypothesized that the text in the manuscripts of the translation of the characters in the margin. Under their hypothesis they supposed that Joseph Smith thought that the characters were the source of the Book of Abraham and that he simply pulled them from the manuscript as they would be read off as indicated.

So you can see how John's drawn a line here showing the order in which it's been insinuated the characters were drawn. They thought that Joseph Smith thought that the text on Joseph Smith Papyrus XI, which is a Letter of Fellowship made by Isis was the same as the Book of Abraham. There is a lacuna or hole, the damaged portion you see in Joseph Smith Papyrus XI. But fortunately there are other copies of the letter of fellowship made by Isis like this one in the British museum. These copies allow us to know what should be in the lacuna in order to fill it appropriately.

Let's see how this comparison works in practice. We start with the first character on the papyrus. This is a rather standard reed leaf. Unfortunately the papyrus degraded a bit since 1835 and only the top part of the character is now visible. But a copy from 1835 shows us that the lower part was still intact in Joseph Smith's day. This is followed by the curly "W". Since the papyrus is missing this common letter, I have taken another one from elsewhere in the papyrus to show you how the scribe writes this letter. This is an indication of this letter too, was part of the papyrus in Joseph Smith's day. The third character or rather a group of two characters is not preserved on the papyrus, nor is it found elsewhere on the papyrus. So I show it from the hand copy of the parallel text found in the Louvre. This was the third person plural pronoun and the verb 'sta' 'to induct'.

The next phrase that we expect to be found on the papyrus is fortunately found elsewhere on the papyrus in Column II. The 19th century copy almost looks as though its copied backwards but it's still identifiable. The rest of the phrase "Osiris of Horus" follows, showing a clear parallel for the copy in the 19th century manuscript. The next character is not identifiable in the papyrus or the parallel text and is the only one that is unidentifiable. Picking up on the left side of the lacuna, we see a fragmentary character which as it's clear from the 1835 copy was slightly better preserved in 1835. This is the word, now we just have to guess the pronunciation, 'kna' or 'interior'. This is followed by the demonstrative pronoun 'this'. The next word on the papyrus and in the manuscripts is the noun 'lake, pool or garden.' This is followed by the water determinative which looks to the modern eye like the backwards capital "E." This is followed by the adjective 'great.'

We then come to the largest group so far in the manuscript, the name of the Egyptian God Chons. The complicated form of the characters is well preserved in the 19th century copy. This is followed by a sign which is a pair of arms and represents the word 'arms' or 'hands', the next group of signs looks like a rather poor copy of the prepositional phrase 'in it'. The copyists in the 19 century sometimes did not really understand what they were copying and it is sometimes something of a stretch for those of us who can read the ancient scripture and recognize what it was they were copying. It is no coincidence that the characters were not originally recognized by Egyptologist.

The next group of signs looks like the following cluster although the determinative is difficult to recognize. The following signs in the manuscripts are the terms for "heart." This is followed by the verb 'born of.' The next group of signs in the papyrus and the manuscript is the feminine form of the word 'the' written out fully. This is followed by the term 'she of high character.'

The next sign is a female determinative. The next group of signs is two phrases "justified" or "vindicated" or "deceased" and the word "likewise." This is followed by the word "after" and the copy shows that more of the characters were preserved in the 19th century. The name of the mother of the individual comes next. Then come the words "two arms to." This is followed by the very clear writing of an alternate spelling of the word "heart." Next we have a group of characters that finish out the end of a line that seems to be ungrammatical in the original. Finally we have the end of the word "burial."

So Heward and Tanner were right that the characters in the margin of the manuscripts come from Joseph Smith Papyrus XI. Unfortunately there was something about this subject they did not tell, something important that they may not have realized themselves. Lets see how their theory actually works in practice. We start with the character in the corner then move into the lacuna, then comes the unidentifiable character, right there and then we move across the line. You see that they're being taken in sequence. This is about as far as anyone feels the need to go.

What is happening seems pretty clear but it isn't. The next character is clear and pulled from two lines down. The one after that comes from two lines further. Then we drop yet another two lines, then back up a line. Finally we skip three lines up. Then it goes in sequence across the line. We then move down on to the next line but in the very next group of characters, we jump back to the previous line. Then we go back down to the next line, skipping over the characters on the left of the lacuna. Then we move to the left, finishing out the line. The project ends with the characters at the beginning of the next line. The characters in the margin start off with individual glyphs but the groups get larger and larger as the project goes on until it is given up.

If the characters in the left hand margin were thought to be translated by the words on the right, they should've been taken in order but they were not. The theory, as propounded, does not pass the sobriety test; they cannot follow a straight line. Egyptologists are so funny, aren't they? Thus there remains a significant gap between the fantasy theorized and the reality of where the characters actually came from. Significantly, in two places the same characters are placed in the margins. The characters were clearly taken from the same place but there is no overlap in the subject of the text on the right hand side. The idea that the characters were considered to be the

source of the English text simply fails. If that is what has been tried in 1835 and it is by no means certain that it was, then it was clear even then that it did not work but the hypothesis rests on an assumption. That assumption is that someone before 1968 thought that the text on the right was supposed to be a translation of the characters on the left.

That assumption has been shown time and time again to be baseless. It is demonstrably wrong on many levels and it is high time that it was not only questioned but rejected. Without that assumption however, the hypothesis proposed by Heward and Tanner and accepted by many others does not hold and it too should be rejected.