Franklin Spalding Strikes Again: A Response to Internet Criticism of Kerry Muhlestein’s Book of Abraham Videos

*Administrator’s note: The following is the result of a combined effort by as many as a dozen FAIR volunteers, all of whom made substantive contributions, and so is posted here under the group authorship “FAIR Staff.” Also, some of the individuals discussed below are either anonymous or pseudonymous; because we do not even know their genders in some cases, all references to them will use masculine pronouns (“he,” “his,” “him) for the sake of brevity.*

Critics on a particularly hostile Internet message board have been celebrating over e-mail responses to some YouTube videos of LDS Egyptologist Kerry Muhlestein. In the videos Dr. Muhlestein commented on some matters related to the Book of Abraham. The e-mails are from Egyptologists at UCLA (where Muhlestein earned his PhD). These scholars were solicited for their views by being sent the following e-mail from a critic on the message board:

Dr. Muhlenstein [sic] has recently been in a series of videos where he discusses his recent research on these papyrus fragments. His conclusions about the veracity of [Joseph] Smith’s translation of these papyri, their related facsimiles, and the explicit connection between the ancient biblical figure Abraham, and the ancient Egyptian book of the Dead, are contrary to what I thought the scholarly consensus was.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Unfortunately, the e-mailer set up a straw man from the beginning: The videos are said to be “on these papyrus fragments,” meaning the Joseph Smith Papyri. He then goes on to speak about “[Muhlestein’s] conclusions about the veracity of Smith’s translations of these papyri.” Actually, Muhlestein says the papyri are *not* the source of the Book of Abraham (see note 13). Much of what Muhlestein talks about in the videos—such as various traditions about Abraham, the so-called Kirtland Egyptian Papers, and so forth—are not really related to the Joseph Smith Papyri at all, or even Egyptology proper. Two videos *do* focus on the facsimiles, of which only Facsimile 1 could be said to be related to the papyri that we have in our possession.

The e-mailer then asks if the Egyptologists“could help [him] understand how non-LDS Egyptologists view the Joseph Smith papyri, his translation of the accompanying facsimiles, and how valid the claims that Muhlenstein [sic] has been making in his recent videos are.”

The three responses from the solicited Egyptologists are reproduced below.

1. “I suggest that you consult Prof. Robert Ritner’s new edition of the so-called Joseph Smith Papyri. His views are in line with mine. Robert. K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri. A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City 2011). I am indeed too busy to look at the videos.”

2. “The translation and interpretation of the Joseph Smith documents are a religious, rather than a scholarly endeavor and as such I respect them.”

3. “I watched the three videos, and I don’t agree with any of it. The ancient Egyptians had no concept of Abraham, so I don’t know where he gets these comparisons… And No, most Egyptologists do not agree, despite what Kerry says. I know Kerry, but I do not have much respect for his work. Now I have even less. The fact that he is digging in Egypt is even more worrisome… This PhD was awarded before I arrived at UCLA, although I know that Kerry finished his text based dissertation after only two years of Egyptian language training, which is rather laughable.

“Have you read Robert Ritner’s work about this in Journal of Near Eastern Studies? It’s the best out there… Kerry is just spinning out the same Mormon rhetoric. What is different is: Mormons are funding PhDs in Egyptology and Biblical Studies and then funding positions at BYU and elsewhere and passing these people off as experts, when they are only ideologically driven researchers, not experts interested in actual evidence.

“Thanks for sending. It’s important to know who these people are… I will send it on to Robert Ritner of U Chicago, if that is okay with you...”

After quoting or paraphrasing the responses, the poster who sent the e-mail concludes his post : “So there you have it. All 3 of the professors of Egyptology at the University where Kerry got his degree disagree with his claims. Peer review is a b\*\*\*\*, isn’t it Kerry.”

**Peer-Review**

It is puzzling that anyone, by any stretch of the imagination, would consider the e-mail comments on a YouTube video by several Egyptologists as constituting “peer review.”

First, peer review is, ideally, *double blind*, meaning neither the reviewer nor the submitter knows the identity of each other during the review process. This is to help ensure that bias is not introduced in the review process. The need for such measures is evident in the strong bias against Dr. Muhlestein displayed by the third respondent (discussed further below). These e-mails are anything but double blind, as Dr. Muhlestein’s identity is revealed in the initial e-mail.

Second, peer review is meant to act as the process of providing substantive feedback on or criticism of a work that evaluates the arguments of the author in a rigorous manner, ideally by someone who is familiar with the issues being discussed. The responses given by the three Egyptologists do not engage in critically evaluating Dr. Muhlestein’s claims (more on this below).

Thirdly, peer review is to be conducted on material seeking to be published in professional journals or other publications of a high academic quality. A few YouTube videos hardly qualify as professional academic work.

We get a tantalizing glimpse into what one of the posters thinks qualifies as “peer review”, which, from reading the comments of other posters, seems to be representative of the thoughts of many posters on this message board. “Who better to do this [“peer review” of Dr. Muhlestein’s work] than qualified folks from the University where he got his degree?”

**The Joseph Smith Papyri**

Most Egyptologists are not well informed about the Joseph Smith Papyri themselves. In 2006, John Gee, speaking to a group of Egyptologists at a conference hosted by the American Research Center in Egypt, pointed to a number issues about the papyri that Egyptologists have gotten wrong, and warned that choosing to comment on the Joseph Smith Papyri meant stepping into an ideological war where their words would inevitably be used by one side or another.[[2]](#endnote-2)

What’s more, the material Dr. Muhlestein is talking about in these videos is not strictly Egyptological; to engage it, one must be knowledgeable about the Mormon side of things as well. Two of the Egyptologists commenting on the matter wisely chose to stay out of it, but one not only decided to engage, but seems to have gladly taken an ideological side against not just Dr. Muhlestein, but Mormons in general.

**Do All Three Responses Agree?**

This leads to the question, did, in fact, all three Egyptologists denounce Dr. Muhlesteins claims?

The first Egyptologist didn’t even actually look at Dr. Muhlestein’s videos, but instead recommended Robert Ritner’swork, saying he agreed with Ritner’s conclusions.[[3]](#endnote-3) So how do we get a denunciation of Muhlestein’s claims from someone who didn’t even look at the claims? Well, Ritner denounces the Book of Abraham, and Muhlstein believes in the Book of Abraham. Based simply on this, our first Egyptologist disagrees with Muhlstein. But is agreeing with someone who disagrees with someone else (whose position you have not personally examined) the same thing as disagreeing with that someone else?[[4]](#endnote-4) Not really, and no one should be shocked that someone who is apparently only paying attention to one side of this debate happens to agree with the side to which he is paying attention.

The second Egyptologist, based on the information made publicly available, didn’t actually comment one way or another. First, he wisely said this is a religious matter. After being pressed, because “Muhlestein was claiming that that the science of Egyptology” supported some of his claims, he responded that he, the poster sending the e-mail, was right, and that he would “discuss it with [Muhlestein].” Nothing in the information available suggests disagreement. It’s possible that this Egyptologists might have realized that he wasn’t familiar with all the issues, but also knew Muhlestein was a good Egyptologist, so he thought it would be wise to ask him about the research he is referring to rather than simply denouncing it.

This leads to the third Egyptologist, Dr. Kara Cooney, professor of Egyptian Art and Architecture at UCLA. (We use her name because apparently she gave permission for it to be used publicly in connection with her response.) Substantial portions of the email were quoted on this message board, and her disdain for Muhlestein (and Mormon scholars in general) is readily apparent. Let’s take a closer look at what she says about Muhlestein and his work:

**Egyptians Had No Concept of Abraham**

Dr. Cooney announces, “I watched the three videos, and I don’t agree with any of it. The ancient Egyptians had no concept of Abraham, so I don’t know where he gets these comparisons…” (ellipsis in original).[[5]](#endnote-5)

In this statement we see more of an open confession that she is ignorant of the research on which Muhlestein’s claims are based. Perhaps if she had read Muhlestein’s presentation at the international Egyptological conference in Moscow held in the fall of 2009, she would know where he gets his comparisons.[[6]](#endnote-6) In this paper, Muhlestein cited numerous examples of the use of various Biblical figures—including Abraham—in Egyptian texts. Muhlestein concluded: “Our current evidence indicates that a group of priests from Thebes possessed, read, understood, and employed Biblical and extra-Bibical texts, most especially texts about Abraham and Moses.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

Dr. John Gee has also recently published a paper that transcribes, translates, and discusses an Egyptian text about Abraham.[[8]](#endnote-8)

It is entirely possibly that Dr. Cooney has read Dr. Muhlestein’s work, but in her reply she makes no indication of such, or of any attempt at critical engagement of his arguments.[[9]](#endnote-9)

**No Respect for His Work, No Respect at All!**

Of course, just because Muhlestein and some other Mormons have presented and published on this very issue in a respected venue doesn’t matter: Dr. Cooney writes, “I know Kerry, but I do not have much respect for his work. Now I have even less.” Starting from a position of such strong dislike, it becomes easy to dismiss his work without any real engagement.

It’s isn’t a surprise that she confesses to having no idea where his claims are coming from, and doesn’t even seem to even be familiar with his work. Since she does not like him very much, she probably does not keep track of what his research has actually uncovered, and what he has actually published. She does not give us any *reason* why his work is problematic, just that she personally doesn’t respect it much. Apparently, however, there are Egyptologists who *do* respect and appreciate Muhlestein’s work, otherwise he wouldn’t be presenting at academic conferences and publishing in peer-reviewed journals. So her off-hand (and evidently uninformed) opinion of “his work” ultimately doesn’t mean much.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**A Worrisome, Laughable PhD**

Dr. Cooney goes on to say that “the fact that he [Muhlestein] is digging in Egypt is even more worrisome… This PhD was awarded before I arrived at UCLA, although I know that Kerry finished his text based dissertation after only two years of Egyptian language training, which is rather laughable” (ellipses in original).

Dr. Cooney’s ideological bent is starting to show here: She is alarmed that Dr. Muhlestein is doing research in Egypt, though the only reason for such alarm appears to be the fact that she disagrees with and dislikes him. She then distances herself from his PhD work at UCLA and tries to discredit it. For Muhlestein to write a PhD dissertation after only two years of training in Egyptian seems “rather laughable” to Dr. Cooney.

This raises some questions: Were all the people on Dr. Muhlestein’s dissertation committee just in on the joke? Does the fact that he was granted his degree not speak to UCLA’s credibility? And why perpetuate this dangerous ruse just for fun? Are Mormons really soamusing to non-Mormons that respected academic institutions would risk awarding them advanced degrees just to poke fun at them?

We might ask what Dr. Muhlestein was doing during those “two years of Egyptian language training” that Dr. Cooney holds in such contempt. Fortunately, Dr. Muhlestein has clarified his education at UCLA for us.

I had the two years of Egyptian language classes offered at UCLA, during those two years *and two more* I was consistently in graduate seminars where we translated various texts and worked on both the language and the meaning of those texts. These seminars consisted of things like Old Egyptian Texts, Middle Egyptian, Late Egyptian, the language of the Book of the Dead and other afterlife books, etc. Language training comes from more than just grammar classes. Moreover, I am happy to let my published work based on the Egyptian language stand as a witness of my work.[[11]](#endnote-11)

So Dr. Muhlestein spent four years studying Egyptian language and texts. Anyone who doubts his proficiency in Egyptian need only consult his published works on the subject (see note 10) to judge for themselves whether his training was “laughable.”

Until Dr. Cooney can provide evidence to the contrary, it is safe to assume that Muhlestein went through the same vetting every other PhD candidate goes through, and demonstrated the necessary level of competence and mastery required by UCLA and those who were on his dissertation committee. Under such circumstances, most people would find it *impressive* that he finished his dissertation in so little time. It’s not laughable, it’s remarkable.

**Read Ritner; He’s Got It Figured Out!**

Dr. Cooney then recommends Ritner, but not Ritner’s most recent published work. Instead she recommends his article in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*: “Have you read Robert Ritner’s work about this in the Journal of Near Eastern Studies? It’s the best out there…” (ellipses in original).

We assume she is referring to Ritner’s 2003 translation of the Book of Breathings found among the Joseph Smith Papyri.[[12]](#endnote-12)If that is the case, then she is really only stepping around the issue, since Muhlestein’s comments are not about the translation of the Book of Breathings at all.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Not only that, but she is wrong to say that Ritner’s is the best translation; that honor would fall on the critical edition done by Michael D. Rhodes.[[14]](#endnote-14) While both are generally the same, in a side-by-side comparison, Rhodes’ translation proves to be more accurate in a number of places.[[15]](#endnote-15)

**It’s Important to Know Who These People Are**

Dr. Cooney’s concluding two sentences is where her ideological bias takes full bloom. “Kerry is just spinning out the same Mormon rhetoric. What is different is: Mormons are funding PhDs in Egyptology and Biblical Studies and then funding positions at BYU and elsewhere and passing these people off as experts, when they are only ideologically driven researchers, not experts interested in actual evidence.”

It may very well be that someone has negatively influenced her opinion of Mormons. Given her eager recommendation of Ritner, and that at the end she says she will “send [the videos] on to Robert Ritner of U Chicago,” we’re going to guess that his writings critical of the Book of Abraham may have played an influential role in the formulation of her negative opinions. After all, Ritner himself has made frequent swipes at Mormons in his publications.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Notwithstanding, we find her blanket accusation about *all* Mormons with PhDs, and especially those working at BYU, breathtaking in its prejudice. It is simple bigotry, which would never be tolerated if directed toward researchers at other respected universities with an ecclesiastical ownership (like Notre Dame, Pepperdine University, or Valparaiso University). We also find it highly ironic: In her ideologically-driven statement, she accuses Muhlestein and every other Mormon scholar of being an “ideologically driven researcher” who is not “interested in actual evidence.” Remember, this in an e-mail where she admits to being ignorant of the evidence on which Muhlestein’s claims are based, yet goes on to discredit his conclusions anyway; that is not what an “expert interested in actual evidence” does. The second respondent best exemplifies the behavior of a professional expert; Dr. Cooney’s response reflects that of an ideological researcher not interested in actual evidence.

In one final line, Dr. Cooney makes the remark, “Thanks for sending. It’s important to know who these people are.” Yes, it *is* important to know who has ideological biases (Dr. Cooney included). But the hypocrisy of publishing this comment on a message board whose regular participants cry foul anytime a Mormon tries to raise awareness about “who these people [commenting on Mormonism] are” is manifest and plainly evident.

**The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same.**

There is a saying in French that is concisely elegant: *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose*— “the more things change, the more they stay the same”. The veracity of this proverb has been repeatedly vindicated, especially when it comes to observing the tactics used by critics of Mormonism.

Consider the example of Reverend Franklin Spalding, who, in 1912, sent copies of the Book of Abraham facsimiles to a panel of learned Egyptologists to ascertain the accuracy of Joseph Smith’s interpretations of them. The responses Spalding received were published as Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator.[[17]](#endnote-17) They were universally negative. The scholars corresponding with Spalding condemned Joseph Smith’s interpretations of the facsimiles as mistranslations, and cast doubt on Joseph Smith’s ability as a translator.

Mormon apologists were quick to respond to Spalding’s jury: Appearing in the Church’s magazine Improvement Era, Latter-day Saint luminaries such as B.H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, J.M. Sjodahl, and others made a hasty response to Spalding’s critical scholars. Lacking any skill in Egyptology—and thus unable to comment on the Egyptological criticisms passed on the facsimiles themselves—these defenders instead focused on the problematic nature of how Spalding solicited the views of his panelists, and argued that, probably intentionally, he prejudiced the scholars to give negative assessments of Joseph Smith’s work.

It wasn’t until the late 1960s, when portions of the Joseph Smith Papyri resurfaced, that Hugh Nibley—who *did* have training in Egyptology—would take up the pen to critically analyze what Spalding’s experts had said some fifty years earlier. In addition to reaffirming the polemical, biased, and otherwise overly zealous (and thus unprofessional) reactions that Spalding probably calculated to receive from his panelists, Nibley also took to task the hasty judgments the scholars made in their Egyptological evaluation of the facsimiles. In effect, Nibley was the first to meet these Egyptologists on their own ground, arguing that their analyses left much to be desired.[[18]](#endnote-18)

It is still fashionable today to include the now-century old testimonies of Spalding’s Egyptologists in attacks on the Book of Abraham. And, as we’ve just seen, it is also fashionable among critics today to mimic the methods Spalding used to try and discredit the Book of Abraham.

Unfortunately, these methods are purely *arguments from authority*. The Egyptologists enlisted against the Book of Abraham in 1912 and in 2013 certainly aren’t lightweights; but fallacies are still fallacies. *Argumentum ad verecundiam* has been and will forever be fallacious. An erroneous opinion remains erroneous even if multiple highly trained scholars hold the opinion.

**Conclusion**

Contrary to the claims of some anonymous Internet commentators, Muhlestein’s claims have not been thoroughly refuted by three Egyptologists.

The first and greatest irony of it all that must be observed is that these three email responses do not constitute a “peer review,” while Muhlestein’s claims are based on the research done by him and others that *has* undergone a vetted peer review process.

Only one of the respondents actually renounced Muhlestein’s claims, and in doing so she offered no arguments or engagement of his claims, admitted ignorance of the evidence, and made a polemical personal attack on Muhlestein and other Mormons. Meanwhile, those who express disdain and outrage for Mormon apologists because they, allegedly, never engage the arguments and only engage in *ad hominem* attacks, themselves ignore evidence, and attack those who disagree with them. We can safely assume that if an LDS scholar had said about a critic of Mormonism what Dr. Cooney has said about a defender of Mormonism, these ideologues would be carrying forth about how mean and nasty Mormon apologists are, and would be insisting that it is nothing but pure *ad hominem*.

And so we see that the methods of Rev. Spalding are once more being bandied about, having been resuscitated after a century of dormancy. It is unbecoming of Dr. Cooney to so flagrantly steep herself in polemical mudslinging against a fellow Egyptologist. Careful and informed criticism of Dr. Muhlestein’s work is one thing. This is something else entirely.

We would have hoped that by now contemporary non-LDS Egyptologists working on the Joseph Smith Papyri would have progressed beyond carelessly flinging “several off-hand and hostile opinions” that amount to little more than “a lot of indignant snorts.”[[19]](#endnote-19) This was, apparently, expecting too much. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.*

1. E-mail posted on the website MormonThink.com, attributed to poster “flackerman” on Mormon Discussions.com. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John Gee, “New Light on the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *FARMS Review* 19/2 (2007): 245–59, based on a paper given at the 58th annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt, in Toledo, Ohio, April 20, 2006. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See Robert K. Ritner, *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 2012). Interestingly, Ritner’s “complete edition” is not even carried, so far as we can tell, by the Chicago University Press, the very school where he is a professor. We tried finding it by searching the title on the university website: <http://press.uchicago.edu/press/search.html?clause=THE+JOSEPH+SMITH+EGYPTIAN+PAPYRI%3A+A+COMPLETE+EDITION> (accessed February 27, 2013). Note the first two results of this query are publications by Michael D. Rhodes and Brian M. Hauglid from the Neal A. Maxwell Institute’s Studies in the Book of Abraham, which are carried by the Chicago University Press: <http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/series/BYU-SBA.html> (accessed February 27, 2013). Why is this prestigious press carrying the work of these alleged “hack apologists,” but not work of their resident Book of Abraham expert? [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This reminds us of the silly debates people have over sports teams. “Even though my team has not played your team, we know that my team is better because my team beat team X, which beat your team.” Every sports fan has probably made this argument at least once in their life. Every sports fan also knows that such an argument holds virtually no weight at all. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The videos in question are from <http://mormonchallenges.org/category/bookofabraham/> (accessed February 27, 2013). There are actually five videos featuring Muhlestein, so we’re not sure which three were sent to Dr. Cooney. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See Kerry Muhlestein, “Abraham, Isaac, and Osiris-Michael: The Use of Biblical Figures in Egyptian Religion, A Survey,” in *Achievements and Problems of Modern Egyptology: Proceedings of the International Conference Held in Moscow on September 29–October 2, 2009*, ed. Galina A. Belova (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, Center for Egyptological Studies, 2011), 246–59. (We presume that this publication meets a satisfactory requirement of peer review to those on the hostile message board.) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Muhlestein, “Abraham, Isaac, and Osiris-Michael,” 259. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. See John Gee, “An Egyptian View of Abraham,” in *Bountiful Harvest: Essays in Honor of S. Kent Brown*, ed. Andrew C. Skinner, D. Morgan Davis, and Carl Griffin (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2011), 137–56. Incidentally, this volume it also carried by the Chicago University Press: <http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/B/bo13468577.html> (accessed February 27, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. There are further connections between Egypt and Abraham that Dr. Cooney seems to be unaware of. This includes the so-called “Greek Magical Papyri”, the allusions to the Book of the Dead in the Testament of Abraham, an apparent allusion to a hypocephalus in the Apocalypse of Abraham, and the use of the Demotic Story of Setna in the story of the rich man and Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke, with Abraham as a Jewish substitute for Osiris. All of these are discussed in Kevin L. Barney, “The Facsimiles and Semitic Adaptation of Existing Sources,” in *Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant*, ed. John Gee and Brian M. Hauglid (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2005), 107–30. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Incidentally, a sampling of Dr. Muhlestein’s other Egyptological work includes: “Binding with Heraldic Plants,” in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists*, 2 vols., ed. Jean-Claude Goyon and Christine Cardin (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Department Oosterse Studies, 2007), 1335–41; “Empty Threats? How Egyptians’ Self-Ontology Affect the Way We Read Many Texts,” *JSSEA* 34 (2007): 115–30; “Execration Ritual,” in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles, Cali.: UCLA, 2008), online at <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz000s3mqr> (Accessed February 27, 2013); “Royal Executions: Evidence Bearing on the Subject of Sanctioned Killing in the Middle Kingdom,” in *The Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 51/2 (2008): 181–208; “Teaching Egyptian History: Some Discipline-Specific Pedagogical Notes,” in *The Journal of Egyptian History*, 2/1–2 (2009): 173–231. This list does not include Dr. Muhlestein’s Mormon- related works, which are likewise numerous. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Kerry Muhlestein to the authors, e-mail correspondence, March 1, 2013, emphasis added. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See Robert K. Ritner, “The ‘Beathing Permit of Hôr’ among the Joseph Smith Papyri,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62/3 (2003): 161–80. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. In one of the videos, Muhlestein specifically explains that the Book of Abraham is *not* a translation of the extent Joseph Smith Papyri. See the video, “Papyri Found and It Doesn’t Relate? Book of Abraham Challenge 1,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuxTDeElxlo&feature=player_embedded> (accessed February 27, 2013). At the end of this video, Muhlestein specifically says, “Anyone who tells you that Joseph Smith is translating from the text around Facsimile 1 on the small fragment that we have is just flying in the face of the historical accounts that tell us the source is the long scroll.” Since there are five videoes and Dr. Cooney says she only watched three, we’re willing to give her the benefit of the doubt and assume this is one of the two she did not watch, possibly because the person sending her the email only sent her three and did not include this one. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. See Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. See Kerry Muhlestein, “The Book of breathings in Its Place,” *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 483–86. Of course, to those who are already disposed to the same ideology as Dr. Cooney, the very fact that this comparison was made by Muhlestein is enough to dismiss it out of hand. Yet those who are genuinely interested in getting at the best-quality scholarship should take a look at the errors in Ritner’s translation that Muhlestein points out. We note that there are some places where Muhlestein suggests Ritner is more accurate than Rhodes, but that more often it is the other way around. Muhlestein reasonably concludes that for those interested in studying the Joseph Smith Papyri, both translations should be consulted. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. See Larry E. Morris, “The Book of Abraham: Ask the Right Questions and Keep on Looking,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 359–63. This is especially ironic given Ritner’s repeated lamentations that Nibley made unfair swipes against the 1912 Egyptologists. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Franklin S. Spalding, Joseph Smith, Jr., As a Translator (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Arrow Press, 1912). Rev. Spalding is not to be confused with Solomon Spaulding, whose work is sometimes presented by critics of the Book of Mormon as a source of Joseph Smith’s plagiarism. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. See Hugh Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000), esp. 127–62; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham*, ed. John Gee (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2009), *passim*. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. So characterized John A. Wilson the behavior of Spalding’s 1912 experts. See John A. Wilson, *Thousands of Years: An Archaeologist’s Search for Ancient Egypt* (New York, N. Y.: Scribner’s Sons, 1972)*,* 176. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)