

Mummies shown by Joseph Smith

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Interview at Nauvoo, Illinois, 1840

"A Glance at the Mormons," *Boston Courier* 14 (July 16, 1840), "From the Alexandria Gazette," emphasis omitted. No copy of the *Gazette* is extant. The article was republished in *The North American and Daily Advertiser* 2 (July 22, 1840):1, Philadelphia; *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal*, July 25, 1840; *Supplement to the Courant* 6 (August 29, 1840):139-40, Hartford, Connecticut; and the *Quincy Whig* 3 (October 17, 1840):1, Quincy, Illinois.

In late April 1840 an anonymous writer sent his report to the *Gazette* of Alexander, Virginia about his visit with Joseph Smith in the river town of Nauvoo, Illinois.

After he had shown us the fine grounds around his dwelling, he conducted us, at our request, to an upper room, where he drew aside the curtains of a case, and showed us several Egyptian mummies, which we were told that the church had purchased, at his suggestion, some time before, for a large sum of money. The embalmed body that stands near the centre of the case, said he, is one of the Pharaohs, who sat upon the throne of Egypt; and the female figure by its side, was probably one of his daughters. It may have been the princess Thermutis, I replied, the same that rescued Moses from the waters of the Nile.

It is not improbable, answered the prophet; but my time has not yet allowed me fully to examine and decide that point. Do you understand the Hebrew language, said he, raising his hand to the top of the case, and taking down a small Hebrew Grammar of Rabbi Seixas. That language has not altogether escaped my attention, was the reply.

He then walked to a secretary, on the opposite side of the room, and drew out several frames covered with glass, under which were numerous fragments of Egyptian papyrus, on which, as usual, a great variety of hieroglyphical characters had been imprinted. These ancient records, said he, throw great light upon the subject of Christianity.

They have been unrolled and preserved with great labor and care. My time has hitherto been too much taken up to translate the whole of them, but I will show you how I interpret certain parts. There, said he, pointing to a particular character, that is the signature of the patriarch Abraham.

It is indeed a most interesting autograph, I replied, and doubtless the only one extant. What an ornament it would be to have these ancient manuscripts handsomely set, in appropriate frames, and hung up around the walls of the temple which you are about to erect in this place.

Yes, replied the prophet, and the translation hung up with them.¹

Interviews at Nauvoo, Illinois

Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo, in 1842* (London: Printed for J. G. F. & J. Rivington, 1842), 34-37, emphasis omitted. There were various reprints of Caswall's account.

Another visitor who spent three days at Nauvoo was Henry Caswall, an ordained clergyman in the Episcopal Church. He brought with him an old Greek Psalter of the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, written on parchment, with a purpose to test Joseph Smith and see what he could find out during about him. The three days that Henry Caswall visited were April 17-19, 1842. Caswall saw the Egyptian papyri and later Lucy Mack Smith showed him the four Egyptian mummies including one she said was a king of Egypt. Caswall's published accounts expanded after the first printing. For this reason the 1842 edition is used which preserve his observations on Nauvoo and his meeting with Smith on April 19, 1842.

Having exhibited the book to the prophet, I requested him in return to show me his papyrus; and to give me his own explanation, which I had hitherto received only at second hand. He proceeded with me to his office, accompanied by the multitude. He produced the glass frames which I had seen on the previous day; but he did not appear very forward to explain the figures. I pointed to a particular hieroglyphic, and requested him to expound its meaning. No answer being returned, I looked up, and behold! the prophet had disappeared.

“The Mormon Population of Montrose and Nauvoo,” *Daily Evening Transcript* (Boston, Massachusetts), 15 (January 20, 1844). The newspaper gives as its source: “[From a private journal of a tour last summer.]” The following is an extract from the newspaper article.

We were rowed across the river to Nauvoo, and on la[n]ding , inquired the way to Joe’s house as he keeps tavern. We found that we were questioning the Prophet himself, who was somewhat shy in conversation, until we told him that we were strangers, who, having heard much of his celebrity, could not pass without paying our respects. He invited us in, but in reply to our interrogations, said, that he “had something else to do besides answering the questions of strangers.”

In regard to his religion, *he believed it*, and didn’t care whether any one else did or not, and if we desired to know what his faith was, we could ascertain by buying the book of Mormon, which I did for 10s. He showed us four mummies from which he had unfold[d]ed the cerements, and said that one was king *so and so*, and another his sister, &c, &c. He also showed us some *hieroglyphics*, which he said formed the record and signature of Joseph when in captivity!

¹ As early as April 1840 Joseph Smith was planning on building a temple at Nauvoo.

Visit to Nauvoo, Illinois

What follows is from the Charles Francis Adams Journal located in Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. In 1952 a journal extract was published in Henry Adams, "Charles Francis Adams Visits the Mormons in 1844," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 68.

It was Dr. William Gano Goforth of Belleville, Illinois who persuaded Josiah Quincy IV and his distant cousin Charles Francis Adams to visit Nauvoo. Willard Richards recorded, "Wednesday May 15th 1844. [Joseph Smith] At home. Much rain this A M. A son of John Quincy Adams [Charles Francis Adams,] Mr [Josiah] Quincy. & Dr Goforth visited at the Mansion" and that evening Joseph Smith "rode to the upper Landing with Mr Adams. Quincy. & H[iram]. Kimball."²

The following is from the journal of Charles Adams:

Upon our return from the meal we were introduced into another chamber which had been prepared in the interval, and here we sat down and held a long conference with the prophet upon himself, his doctrines and his projects. He then took us down into his mother's chamber and showed us four Egyptian mummies stripped and then undertook to explain the contents of a chart or manuscript which he said had been taken from the bosom of one of them. The cool impudence of this imposture amused me very much. "This," said he, "was written by the hand of Abraham and means so and so. If anyone denies it, let him prove the contrary. I say it." Of course, we were too polite to prove the negative, against a man fortified by revelation. His mother looked on with attention and aided in the explanation whenever the prophet hesitated, from which I inferred that she was usually the exponent of the writings to strangers. At the close, he notified us that for this instruction, his mother was in the habit of receiving a quarter of a dollar a piece from them, which sum we paid forthwith.

Letter of Josiah Quincy

Josiah Quincy to "My dear darling wife" [Mary Jane Miller Quincy], May 16, 1844, as cited in Jed Woodworth, "Josiah Quincy's 1844 Visit with Joseph Smith," *Brigham Young University Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000):84-87. Original in Quincy-Howe Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

We passed the whole day in his society, & had one of the most extraordinary conversations I ever participated in, he preached for us, prophesied for us, interpreted hieroglyphics for us, exhibited his mummies and took us to his temple which he is now erecting on a most majestic site of hewn stone.

² Joseph Smith Journal, entry of May 15, 1844, LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Notes of Henry Halkett

An individual by the name of Henry Halkett wrote some notes of Quincy's visit to Nauvoo about 1845. No further information known about Halkett at this time. The original is titled "Henry's notes upon Joe Smith the Prophet," located in Misc. Collection 1841-1844, Box 36, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Concerning the notes we have what was published in 1953: "Storm, Colton. A visit to Joseph Smith, 1844: a Boston Quincy goes to Nauvoo. 'On at least one occasion, Quincy told the story of his visit t Nauvoo in considerable detail. The listener, Henry Halkett, promptly recorded what he remembered of Quincy's account. That manuscript is now in the Clements Library. It varies enough from Quincy's record to seem worth printing. Halkett might be suspected of embroidering the tale, but several passages are so close to Quincy's printed version that we can believe Halkett was an accurate reporter."³

The following is from Henry Halkett notes on Josiah Quincy's visit to Nauvoo in May 1844. Words that are crossed out in the original are omitted.

On Mr Quincy's return to Joe's house (which was the Hotel or Public House), he said they would perhaps like to see his curiosities, on their assenting, he took them down to his cellar, where there were several common pine presses, he opened these & to their astonishment they saw several black corpses. "That one" said Joe "is the body of Pharoah Necho" Joe it seem had imported four mummies & having taken off the wrappers, had stuck them upright in these presses. He then opened the little boxes which are always found about a mummy & took our some papyrus. "This" said he "is the handwriting of Abraham, that one is Moses" and so on. "These are hieroglyphics, nobody can read them but "myself, I can read all writing & all hieroglyphics." Mr Quincy pointed to one of them which had a representation of a man, a woman &, a tree & a [-] non descript animal. "That" said Joe "is the creation of the World, there is Adam "Eve the Tree of Knowledge & the Serpent." Mr Quincy asked him how it could be a serpent as it had legs. Joe answered "Oh you know that serpents originally had legs like chickens, "but afterwards God said "'Upon the belly shalt thou crawl' and "so he lost his legs" Mr Quincy speaks of Joe having an extraordinary acquaintance with the Bible & that he was very ready in reply, & clever in supporting his notions by quotations & reasoning.- After the exhibition was closed Joe said "Persons who "see my curiosities usually give my mother a quarter of "a dollar."

³ *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* 60 (Dec. 5, 1953):71-72. Reference provided by James E. Crooks.

THE MORMONS—A SKETCH OF THEIR
HISTORY.

BY HON[.] JOSIAH QUINCY, JR.

...

I once visited Nauvoo, in my passage up the Mississippi—it was early in the morning that I landed.⁴ On proceeding to the tavern, I saw standing in the front door, a man about six feet in height, and of good proportions. He wore duck pants and a pepper and salt coat[.] His beard was long⁵ and his hair not combed, and his personal appearance was that of a common working man[.]—This was Joseph Smith, the landlord, the lawgiver, commander-in-chief of the Nauvoo Legion, the Supreme Judge of the Mormons, a Priest after the order of Melchisedek, the only living prophet of the most high God[.] He was in no way disconcerted by our approach at that unceremonious hour of the day[.] He greeted us cordially, gave us his benediction, invited us in, passed a few words with us in a social, easy and dignified manner, and then left us to ourselves. After breakfast he again made his appearance, shaved, and in a suit of black[.]

...

He professed to understand all languages[.] In proof of his claim he took from a book case volumes in divers oriental tongues, which he read with fluency and explained with the utmost assurance and gravity. And inasmuch as we were all unacquainted with the languages ourselves, we could not dispute the prophet's claim. But he had sagacity enough not to introduce the Latin, Greek, Hebrew and German tongue, or any other language which we did understand.

Before leaving he took us into an interior apartment of his dwellings, and opened a closet, he showed us three mummies, which he said he had procured from Egypt, at an expense of \$6000[.]⁶—One of them he said was Adam, one was Eve, and the third, which was a sort of duck-legged object, he said was the serpent[.]⁷ "Why," said I, "hat cannot be a serpent, for that was a snake." "O, no!" said the prophet, "not before the fall; the serpent walked upon legs like a chicken before the fall[.] But after he tempted our first mother to eat the forbidden fruit, then God cursed the serpent "above every breast of the field, and said, upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life[.]" For this

⁴ Quincy in his May 16, 1844 letter to his wife Mary Jane wrote that he landed "at midnight." *Brigham Young University Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000):84.

⁵ Smith's had "a beard of some three days growth." *Ibid.*

⁶ The cost was \$2,400. In Quincy's 1881 account he also mentioned the figure of six thousand dollars.

⁷ This would be referring to images on a papyrus and not to the mummies.

exhibition he blandly told us that spectators usually paid his mother a quarter of a dollar[.]

He also showed us three pieces of hieroglyphic writing upon parchment, of a very antique appearance. The first, he said, was the hand-writing of Abraham, the father of the faithful; and he pointed out to me a scrawl at the bottom, which he said was the autograph of Abraham. The next, he said, was one of the letters of Moses, and the other was the chirography of Pharoah [Pharaoh] Neco [Necho].

He said they were called Egyptian hieroglyphics by vulgar minds, because those [sic] was no ordinary mortal who could read them[.] He told me that he was the only man in the world capable of reading them[.]

Josiah Quincy's recollection based in part on his Journal

About thirty-five years later Josiah Quincy expanded on his ten pages of journal he kept of his visit. Quincy's account was first printed as "Leaves from Old Journals," *Independent* 33 (December 29, 1881):4-5 and "Leaves from My Journal," *ibid.*, 34 (January 19, 1882):2-4. The *Independent* was a New York magazine. Reprinted in Josiah Quincy, posthumously published in *Figures of the Past, From the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 376-400.

The Independent 33 (December 29, 1881):4-5.

LEAVES FROM OLD JOURNALS.

—————
JOSEPH SMITH AT NAUVOO.

I.

—————
BY THE HON. JOSIAH QUINCY.
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"And now come with me," said the prophet, "and I will show you the curiosities." So saying, he led the way to a lower room, where sat a venerable and respectable-looking lady. "This is my mother, gentlemen. The curiosities we shall see belong to her. They were purchased with her own money, at a cost of six thousand dollars,"⁸ and then, with deep feeling, were added the words "and that woman was turned out upon the prairie in the dead of night by a mob." There were some pine presses fixed against the wall of the room. These receptacles Smith opened, and disclosed four human bodies, shrunken and black with age. "These are mummies," said the exhibitor. "I want you to look at that little runt of a fellow over there. He was a great man in his day. Why, that was Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt!" Some parchments inscribed with hieroglyphics were then offered us. They were preserved under glass and handled with great respect.

⁸ The correct amount is two thousand four hundred dollars. As far as known Lucy was not involved in the purchase.

"That is the handwriting of Abraham, the Father of the Faithful," said the prophet. "This is the autograph of Moses, and these lines were written by his brother Aaron. Here we have the earliest account of the Creation, from which Moses composed the First Book of Genesis."⁹ The parchment last referred to showed a rude drawing of a man and woman, and a serpent walking upon a pair of legs. I ventured to doubt the propriety of providing the reptile in question with this unusual means of locomotion. "Why, that's as plain as a pikestaff," was the rejoinder. "Before the Fall snakes always went about on legs, just like chickens. They were deprived of them, in punishment for their agency in the ruin of man." We were further assured that the prophet was the only mortal who could translate these mysterious writings, and that his power was given by direct inspiration.

⁹ It is not known if any of the papyri was claimed to be in the hand of Moses or Aaron. One source mentions that it contained some "history of Josef [Joseph] while in egypt and also of Jacob and many of their prophesies Delivered by them." Albert Brown to "Dear Parents," November 1, 1835 reproduced in Christopher C. Lund, "A Letter Regarding the Acquisition of the Book of Abraham," *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 (Spring 1980):403.