

A Letter Regarding the Acquisition of the Book of Abraham

Christopher C. Lund

Among the “Miscellaneous Manuscripts” in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress is an 1835 letter from Albert Brown¹ to which he expresses his feelings about the Church in Kirtland and also provides interesting corroborative details concerning the history of the acquisition of the Egyptian mummies and papyrus records. His report that the price of \$2400 was paid to Michael Chandler² for the mummies and the records is a nearly contemporary account—written just four months after the purchase—and it agrees exactly with the figure that appears twenty-one years later in L. C. Bidamon’s³ certificate of provenance, submitted with the mummies to A. Combs⁴ in 1856.⁵

A transcription of the letter follows:⁶

Mr. James Brown

Nov. 1, 1835

Dear Parents I improve this opportu[nity] of communicating a few lines to you to inform you where I am an to let you know of the prospect which lise before me. I left Missouri the twelfth of September in company with Peter Whitmer and arived in kirtland Ohio the 17 of october. We had a prosperous journey and found our relatives all in good health and the church in great prosperity, his numbers increasing and the blessings of heaven pound out upon them and many coming from all parts of the united states to kirtland and to missoury to obey the commanments of the Lord and to escape the calamity and judgements pronounced against this generation or those that obey not the fullness of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the work of the Lord rolls on and the power of Godliness trying to be made manifest and the great things of the kingdom revealed.

I will relate one incident that happened not long since in our favour by some men that had our Egyptian Mummis which th[e]y were carr[y]in through the world to exhibit and also an ancient record that was foud in their coffins, this record containing som of the history of Josef while in egypt and also of Jacob and many prophesies Delivered by them. These records were bought by the Church and also the Mummis and are now in Kirtland. They bought the Mummis for the sake of the record and paid 2400 hundred dollars for them. Many of the learned have been to kirtland to examine the characters but none of them have been able to tell but very little about them and yet Joseph without any of the wisdom of this world can read them and know what they are.

Thus we see that the wisdom of the world is in comparison with the wisdom of God. I should be highly gratified to see you and converse with you, but I do not no that I ever shall for I expect to be engaged here through the

winter and, in the spring, I suppose I shall return to the Land of Zion. I expect also that Mr Ives and his family will go up also and many hundreds in the course of next summer. I should be glad to visit you onse more before I lieve Ohio but I don[t] know that it will be possible. [. . . ?] I wish you all well and wherein you have seen any thing wrong in me I ask your forgiveness and desire that you will forgive me and I entreat you onse more to repent all of you and obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and prepare to meet the Lord when he shall arise to shake terribly the Earth for the hour is fair [far] distant when this with many other judgements will take place. I write not these things by any knowledge of my own for the Lord hath declared them with his own voice out of the heavens and it must be fulfilled and wo unto us if we air [are] found among the wicked for the Lord has give unto us understanding sufficient to know the truth from error and the holy bible teaches us plainly that these things are true and faithful. It teaches us that he will gather his people from all nations and plan them in their own Land and this work has comenced and will be accomplished and those who reject the things reject the council of god and must be destroyed with the wicked from the face of the earth. I write these things unto you becuse I love you and feel for you and desire your prosperity and your Eternall welfare and may the Lord have mercy on us and yet gather us to the Land of Zion the consecrated ground.

Albert Brown

By request I write a few lines for Brother Ives. He says to you he wishes you well and sends his respects to you and would be pleased to see you.

Sister Ives says that she wishes to write to you but her situation of mind at present will not permit her. She has endeavored to write but her mind is not sufficient composed to think of communicating to you. She sends her respects and would be very much pleased to see you before she goes to the west. We wish you to write as you receive this.

Direct Letter to Kirtland
Geouyo [Geauga] Co.

November 1, 1835

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1. Albert Brown (1807–1891), carpenter by trade, had been a member if Zion's Camp and would later become a member of the Nauvoo Legion and a patriarch. He came to Utah in 1863. (See Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed rev., 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1932–1951], 2:183; and Franc Esshom, *Pioneer and Prominent Men of Utah* [Salt Lake City: Western Epics, Inc., 1966], p.772.)

2. Michael Chandler inherited the mummies and papyri from his uncle Antonio Lebolo, who had discovered the treasures while excavating near Thebes, in 1831 (*Times and Seasons* 3 [2 May 1842]: 774). Chandler was touring the country with the Egyptian display at the time he sold them to the Church.

3. Lewis C. Bidamon married Emma Hale Smith, widow of Joseph Smith, on 23 December 1847 (see Hancock Country Marriage Record Book, Carthage Courthouse,

Carthage, Illinois, Book A1, 1829–1849, p. 105, entry 1242) and thus came into possession of the mummies and papyri.

4. A Combs purchased “four Egyptian mummies and the records of them” from Major L.C. Bidamon and Emma Smith Bidamon. Upon Combs’s death, he willed them to his housekeeper. (Record of sale cited in Jay M. Todd, *Saga of the Book of Abraham* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969], pp. 290, 296, 348.)

5. Keith Terry and Walter Whipple, *From the Dust of Decades: A Saga of the Papyri and Mummies* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), p. 26 and fn. 27.

6. Spelling inconsistencies have been retained except where syllables or letters are supplied in brackets to facilitate comprehension.