

Robert K. Ritner

The most important event of the year for **Robert K. Ritner** was the December appearance of his volume *The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: A Complete Edition*, published by the Smith-Pettit Foundation in Salt Lake City (for cover photo, see the figure). For a fuller discussion of the book, see the *2010-2011 Annual Report*, pp. 152-53. The volume represents the culmination of work by Oriental Institute Egyptologists on the Egyptian papyri once owned by the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith and used by him to “translate” the scriptural Book of Abraham now included in Smith’s *Pearl of Great Price*. Every generation of Chicago Egyptologists has examined these documents, including James H. Breasted, John A. Wilson, Richard A. Parker, and Klaus Baer. As a former student of Baer, Ritner was first contacted to analyze one of the surviving papyri in 2002, and he produced editions of this text in 2002 and (for a more scholarly audience) in 2003. No scholar, however, had attempted to edit and translate all of the

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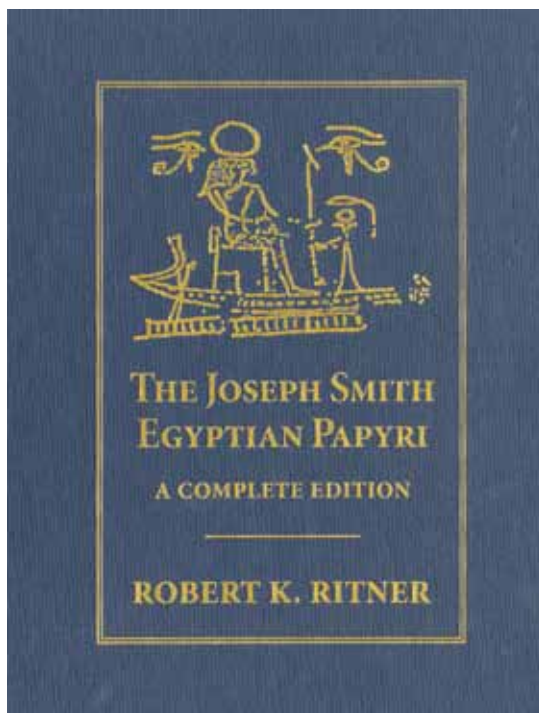
Smith Egyptian materials, which have only partially survived in fragmentary, and often mismounted, papyrus sheets that in some cases resemble decoupage rather than coherent, ancient documents. Other texts and sections have been lost but may be reconstructed through woodcuts and hand copies produced by Smith's designated "scribes" in the 1840s for his attempted translation.

Egyptologists have shown consistently that Smith's interpretations, done before Champollion's decipherment was generally known in America, are invalid. Smith's translations are invented, and his explanations of scenes confuse males and females, and even human and animal heads. The documents newly studied by Ritner further reveal an incomplete translation by Smith that narrates an apocryphal tale of a princess Katumin and a pharaoh Onitas (pp. 209–13). In reality, the papyrus depicts the *male* Amenhotep and is a copy of Book of the Dead chapter 46. It is particularly gratifying that by May Ritner's volume had been all but sold out, so that preparations for a second edition began after only five months on the market.

Other publications include "Ptolemy IX (Soter II) at Thebes," published in the papers of the Oriental Institute colloquium *Perspectives on Ptolemaic Thebes: Occasional Proceedings of the Theban Workshop*, edited by Peter F. Dorman and Betsy M. Bryan, pp. 97–114 (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 65; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2011).

Ritner was quite active in lectures during the year. With Nanno Marinatos, he co-hosted the colloquium Thera, Knossos, Egypt (Hellenic Museum and The Oriental Institute), delivering a joint paper with Nadine Moeller on "The Ahmose 'Tempest Stela,' Thera and Comparative Chronology" (October 22). For the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, he gave two lectures in connection with the exhibit Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs, "God-Kings in Ancient Egypt" and "God-Kings, Dictators, and Revolutions: Real vs. Imaginary 'Pharaohs,'" (December 29–30). In Philadelphia on January 6, he acted as respondent for a panel on "Graeco-Roman Religion in Light of the Demotic Sources" at the annual meeting of the American Philological Association. For the Oriental Institute Travel Program tour of the Milwaukee exhibit Cleopatra: The Search for the Last Queen of Egypt, he presented "The House of Ptolemy: Cleopatra in Context" (January 21). On April 29, he returned to Houston to repeat his talk on "Real vs. Imaginary 'Pharaohs'" for the University of Chicago Harper Lecture series.

On May 18–20, Ritner was in Geneva, Switzerland, at the invitation of the Université de Genève, where he served as a member of the dissertation jury for the doctoral study by Pierre Meyrat on "Les papyrus magiques du Ramesseum: Recherches sur une bibliothèque privée de



Cover photo of Ritner's book, published in December 2011

la fin du Moyen Empire.” In addition to these activities, Ritner taught five courses on Middle Egyptian, Egyptian history, Ptolemaic hieroglyphs, and introductions to Demotic and Coptic.
