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There Were Jaredites - Our Own People - Continued

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There Were Jaredites

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OUR OWN PEOPLE

CONTINUED

IN THE THITHRIKS-SAGA, Attila's admirers admit quite frankly that it was his intention to conquer the world (Ch. 145); he cultivated the myth that no one could resist him (Ch. 225), and to paralyze all opposition practised a policy of deliberate *Schrecklichkeit*, as did his rivals. (Ch. 51.) When he decided on an expedition, he would summon all his followers and address them from a wooden tower, exactly as the Roman emperors and the Hittite kings used to do. The Book of Mormon students will think instantly of certain Jaredite and Nephite parallels.

The conquest was not fitful but planned and systematic, closely following the procedure attributed to Othinn in the prose Edda: in every newly occupied land a *stath* or administration center was set up, a castle built, and a trusted relative of the king, usually a son, left in charge. The saga makes it very clear that these heroes made no distinction at all between hunting and warfare; and when they were not doing the one or the other, they could be found refreshing themselves at their endless *veitzla*, the reciprocal banquets they would give for each other in their castles. (Ch. 56.) All the nobles of Europe and Asia were invited to Ermanrich's great *veitzla*, where he gave out gilt and purple robes, gold, rings, and treasures, exactly as an eyewitness tells us the Emperor Justinian did when he entertained the Hunnish chiefs while striving his best to adopt their customs.²⁸

Of kings in general the saga tells us that they must be rich in cattle, good riders, and generous givers of wealth. (Ch. 45.) For this last a king must needs be acquisitive and shrewd (*afli oc hug*). (Ch. 182.) The great chiefs themselves were skilful traders and businessmen—to that gift in no small degree they owed their power. The *torg* or market was under their special protection (Chs. 80,

263-4), the horse fair being especially important (Ch. 83); and in the saga we see the caravans of merchants moving between Europe and Asia exactly as they had done in the earliest heroic ages. (Ch. 125.) The proper business of a king is to raid other kings' lands, take as many *borgir* (castles, strong places) as possible (Ch. 46, 141), and return with lots and lots of cattle. (Ch. 8.) Brides were bought with cattle, as in Homer, and to refuse an offer of marriage was a fatal insult: "If you do not give Attila your daughter to wife," says his messenger to a great king, "he will do damage to your domains." (Ch. 50.)

When Osantrix became convinced that Attila was out to conquer the world, "he gathered together against him all the people of his realm, and no people could stand against them to whatsoever land they came." (Ch. 147.) As the two kings squared off for a war of extermination in the best Jaredite fashion, their affairs were regulated with great formality: the proper challenging letters were duly exchanged and the summoning of the two armies was carried out with ritual decorum. (Ch. 282.) When such armies met, each king would set up his *landtiold* or royal pavilion opposite the other and challenge his rival to a duel. (Chs. 52, 195ff.)

These single combats between kings were common, and formal rules of chivalry were observed, such as "no striking under the shield." The heroes would fight all day long until evening, then retire to their tents for the night, and renew the contest next morning. (Chs. 133, 200, 201, 204, 275.) On one occasion the kings were so worked up that they went on fighting even after dark, and kept it up until both fainted from loss of blood. (Ch. 200.) The defeated king in such a combat was either beheaded by the victor or fell on his face before him, swearing awful oaths of submission. (Ch. 54.) A regular tribute of cattle was demanded by the victor. (Ch. 248.)

As in other heroic cultures, it is very important for a noble "that all men may hear his name." (Ch. 137.) It must be spoken of in the great

houses and be known at all the places where he stopped for the night, receiving hospitality from his own class, family, and order, with a proper formal exchange of credentials and identification. (Chs. 106, 110.) The knight traveled with his coat of arms and badge of nobility on full display, so that it might be recognized by friend and foe at a distance. (Chs. 108, 173ff.)

They wore Asiatic dress, the trousers and armor invented by the riders of the steppes. (Ch. 97.) The castles in the saga are most interesting: they are great wooden structures (Ch. 252) used primarily as *gisting* places—overnight stations and military strong points. (Chs. 244, 63f, 104.) The castle was a necessity in a world of robber bands, individual outlaws, and adventurers (Chs. 104, 118); yet they as much as anything were responsible for the existence of such classes of people, for their primary purpose was to serve as headquarters for the exploitation of both farmers and merchants. (Ch. 118.)

In the Thithriks-saga the great houses like the kings themselves, are always attempting to draw off each other's supporters. (Ch. 125.) The burning of each other's castles, as in Froissart, amounts almost to a formality. (Ch. 89.) To put a rival out of the running and yet spare his life by the expedient of mutilation was common (Ch. 86), as was the custom of rival lords keeping each other "in strong irons" (Ch. 152) after having obtained control of the rival's person by some such neat device as a breach of hospitality. (Ch. 62.)

Occasionally some adventurer, having been dispossessed or too poor to own a castle, would seek out some wild region, some forest tract, where he would gather his followers for a series of raids to build up his power. (Ch. 53.) In battle and when gathering or rallying his forces the chief himself would carry his banner. (Ch. 271.) Every retainer swore not to return from the battle until the king did: The king must be by the rules of the game the last to die. (Ch. 283-4.) And by the same rules his proper

²⁸Procopius, *Anecdotes*, VIII, 5, 9, 13f.

opponent had to be a rival king whom, as we have seen, he would challenge to single combat.

The Thithriks-saga was first published in 1853. No English translation has appeared, and so far as we know, it has never been translated into any other language.

The Book of Ether as an Epic

"So now we come back to the Jaredites!" cried Blank one evening a year after the three friends had begun their discussions.

"It has been a most interesting trip," F. conceded, "but I wonder if it was really necessary to go so far. Twenty-two epics is quite a workout."

"I think it was necessary," Professor Schwulst said thoughtfully. "When we are dealing with non-mathematical subjects, it is hard to know at what point we can say a thing has been proved. The only way we can be sure is by *overproving* it."

"And there is more to it than that," Blank added. "Who, for example, authorized Chadwick or anyone else to decide just what things are to be taken as the true hallmarks of epic poetry? How do we know that his list is anything but his own idea? Only by reading the epics ourselves. Each one is an organic whole, and not to be broken down arbitrarily into *Leitmotivs*. Far more important than any statistical checking of recurrent themes is the impression each epic makes as a whole. And that impression can only be learned if you read each masterpiece from beginning to end."

"So it looks as if your most powerful tool for proving the book of Ether is one that nobody can use!" F. observed with a smile.

"Well almost nobody," Blank conceded. "But since we three have gone so far, may I suggest as our last undertaking that we read the book of Ether once more—not as an epic, for it has been divested of its epic form, but as a rich depository of epic materials?"

"What do you mean," said F., "divested of its epic form?"

"Our editor, Moroni, admits the damage," Blank replied. "He says that the men of his day were conspicuously lacking in the peculiar literary gifts of those who wrote the original book of Ether: 'Behold, thou

hast not made us mighty in writing like unto the brother of Jared,' he says, 'for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them.' (Ether 12:24.) This applies not only to the case of two men, however, but also to the gifts of the two civilizations as a whole: '. . . Lord thou hast made us mighty in word by faith, but thou hast not made us mighty in writing; for thou hast made *all this people* that they could speak much . . . and thou hast made us that we could write but little . . . wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words; . . .'" (*Ibid.*, 12:23-25.)

As Matthew Arnold has shown in his wonderful essay on the translation of Homer (the greatest work of literary criticism in the English language, according to Housman), the most remarkable thing about a true epic is the way in which it surpasses all other literature in power and directness, a peculiar force and impact that renders a real epic impossible to imitate or translate. Only a real epic milieu can produce it. All other writing is pale, devious, laborious, and ineffective by comparison. Moroni in editing Ether is keenly aware of his inability to do justice to the writing before him. It just can't be done, he says, and he is right. He plainly tells us that the original Ether is a type of composition unfamiliar to the Nephites, "who like ourselves obviously had no true epic literature."

"Why do you say 'true' epic?" F. asked.

"Because there have been so many false ones," Schwulst volunteered. "Let us remember that clever writers in every age have tried their best to produce epic poetry. Since everybody always thought such poetry was simply the product of literary genius, no one could see any good reason why a literary genius of sufficient determination could not produce an epic. So Virgil, Dante, Camoens, Longfellow, Apollonius Rhodius, Tegner, Tennyson, and Milton, to name only a few, burned barrels of midnight oil in the production of what they fondly thought was true epic poetry. And you know the answer: No matter how great the poet or how noble his verse, the artificiality of his work is

instantly apparent. There is something completely lacking in every case, but until our own generation nobody knew what it was. It is simply that real epics tell the truth. We can thank Milman Parry for showing us that 'a genuine epic can only be the product of a genuine epic milieu.'"

"In other words," Blank concluded, "epic literature cannot be faked."

"Perhaps with what is known today about the epic milieu a better job might be done. It shouldn't be too hard now, for the great 'literary' epics are not merely off the track in their epic details and off-pitch in the epic idiom; they are, every one of them, incredibly misinformed, crude, and clumsy—childishly so. They are often great poetry, but as faithful pictures of the worlds they mean to depict they are commonly misinformed. The best scholar of the would-be epic writers was Sir Walter Scott; yet who does not know today that his works are monuments of inaccuracy? The reason for this fatal defect in all their works is that none of these great men was aware of the fundamental difference between a real epic and every other type of writing. A real epic describes a real world, while they insisted on describing imaginary ones."

"Yet," said F., "the author of the Book of Mormon seems to have been aware of that difference—he must have been, to make Moroni say the things he did."

"And since Moroni has taken the liberty to change the language and form of the Jaredite record," Schwulst added, "I am afraid our source can no longer be read as an epic."

"It must have been tremendous," said Blank with a sigh, "'unto the overpowering of man' to read it. And all we have now is Moroni's brief summary, made from a translation and interlarded with his own notes and comments. That means that all that is left to us is the gist of the epic material. . . ."

"Still that should be enough for a thorough testing," said Professor Schwulst. "There are forty pages of it, and some of them are amazingly compact. So let us now go back again to Chadwick's list, and this time see how it fits the book of Ether." (*To be continued*)