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## Old America - Casas Grandes

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**Abstract:** Series of articles dealing with archaeological, anthropological, geographical, societal, religious, and historical aspects of ancient America and their connections to the Book of Mormon, which is the key to understanding “old American” studies.

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## Old America.

BY G. M. O.

### CASAS GRANDES.

THE ruins in northern Mexico, New Mexico and Arizona consist chiefly of structures similar in plan and arrangement to those still used by the Pueblos; but they are far superior as monuments of architecture, science and skill. We have every evidence that in ancient times this part of the country was thickly settled, and a numerous population, evidently followers of agricultural pursuits and the builders of cities, occupied the country as far northward at least as the Utah lakes. The larger portion of their buildings doubtless was built of perishable materials, which have left no trace; many of them, however, were built of stone, though wood and adobe seems to have been more generally used. Some of the ruined stone buildings were inhabited when the Spaniards first conquered the country. The remains everywhere present the same characteristics, representing a people always building the same way with very little variation in the forms of their structures, and their condition in life substantially the same. But the ruins are not all the same age, many of them being so ancient that the traditions of present races do not reach them.

In New Mexico, between the head waters of the San Jose and Zuni rivers, west of the Rio Grande, on a bluff rising some two hundred feet from the plain, are the ruins called "El Moro." On one side of the bluff, which is vertical, and composed of yellowish white sandstone, are "Spanish inscriptions and Indian hieroglyphics." Lieutenant Simpson (1849) describes the ruins as being the remains of an extensive Pueblo building, built of rock, "with considerable skill, the walls in some places being still perfect to the height of six or eight feet, the stones uniform in size, fourteen inches long and six inches wide, are placed in horizontal layers, each successive layer breaking joints with that below it. Remains of cedar beams, painted pottery, obsidian arrow-heads and other relics were found. Four or five years after Lieutenant Simpson passed through this part of the country Lieutenant Whipple went westward, following mainly along the thirty-fifth parallel. After Whipple left El Moro he entered the valley of Ojo Pescado; here, close by a spring were two old Pueblo buildings in ruins, and not far away a deserted town of a later date. The two ancient structures were circular in form and equal in size, being about eight hundred feet in circumference. They were built of stone, but have so crumbled as to be but little more than heaps of rubbish. Pottery similar to that found at El Moro, painted in bright colors, and some of a beautiful polish was found. In the same neighborhood, on the summit of a cliff twenty-three feet high, was another old ruin strongly walled around. In the centre was a mound on which were traces of a building. Whipple encamped at Zuni, a great Pueblo building, inhabited at the time by two thousand people. Not more than a league away are the crumbling walls of an old Zona, which shows nothing but ruins. Its wall is from two to twelve feet high, and it covers several acres of ground. This old town became a ruin in ancient times; after remaining long in a ruined condition it was again rebuilt, and again deserted after a considerable period of occupation. It is still easy to distinguish between the two periods. "The standing walls rest upon the ruins of a great antique wall," says Whipple. The

premature masonry is about six feet thick, that of the later period is only from a foot to a foot and a half thick.

At a place west of Zuni ancient relics were found. Here formerly stood an extensive town, probably constructed of adobes. Near the Colorado Chiquito is an extensive ruin on the summit of an isolated hill of sandstone. On the ridge overlooking Pueblo Creek are traces of an old settlement. Ruins are abundant in the Rio Verde Valley down to the junction of that river with the Rio Salinas. Whipple says: "Large fields in the valley of the Rio Gila and many spots among the Pinal Lena Mountains are marked with the foundations of adobe houses. In Canyon Chelly, near San Francisco Mountain, there are ruins of more permanent structures of stone, which in their day must have excelled the famed pueblos of New Mexico."

In the valley of the Chaco, north of Zuni, are the ruins of what many suppose to have been the famous "Seven Cities of Cevola." The first Spanish traveler into these regions was Mark di Niga, a Franciscan monk, in the year A. D. 1539. How far northward his exploratory and missionary journey extended we are unable to tell. He reported on his return to New Galicia that there were towns and cities in this country built of stone, the houses several stories high and flat roofed. One town or city, called Cevola or Cibola, seemed to him larger than the City of Mexico, when viewed from a distance, for he did not venture to approach it closely. He also speaks of seven towns or cities in one kingdom, in which the Indians informed him there was gold in abundance. Friar Mark also says that he saw one of the natives of Cibola, who was a *white man*, of a good complexion and capacity (Hackloryt, III. 370). Spanish cupidity being excited by the friar's relation of the greatness and vast wealth of Cevola, Coronado, the governor of New Galicia, set out with an army to conquer and rob its cities. But these buccaneers were disappointed in not finding gold, silver and precious stones. The report of this conquest and the governor's disappointment is still in existence. Lieutenant Simpson examined the ruins of these supposed seven cities, and describes them as being all built pueblo fashion and of stone, and adds: "It discovers in the masonry a combination of science and art which can only be referred to a higher stage of civilization and refinement than is discovered in the work of Mexicans or Pueblos of the present day." Espejo made an incursion in these countries with a military force in the year 1583. He describes the natives "as a people much given to labor, and continually occupied" (Hackloryt III. 389).

In regard to the white man that Friar Mark saw, some Indians on the coast told Alarcon that there were white men up the country (doubtless meaning in the direction of Cevola), but that they knew nothing else (Hack. III., 429). Ruins of Casas Grandes (great houses) in the Mexican state of Chihuahua are minutely described by Bartlett (Explorations in New Mexico, Vol. II). The general character of these buildings is the same as the Pimo and Moquis villages on the Gila and Colorado. One of the buildings measured by Mr. Bartlett was eight hundred feet long, and from east to west about two hundred and fifty feet. Garcia Conde also mentions a class of ruins along the margin of the Casas Grandes and Janos rivers for a length of twenty leagues and a breadth of ten. Jars, pitchers, in fact pottery of all kinds painted in designs with white, blue and scarlet colors, corn-grinders and stone axes have been found. These beautiful specimens of pottery are much superior to that made by the Mexicans of the present day. Bartlett says, "The whole valley and plain for miles

around these ruins is strewed with fragments of pottery. On the summit of the highest mountain southwest of the ruins about ten miles distant is an ancient stone fortress from which the whole country, for a vast extent can be viewed." Many other ruins have been examined in this part of the old Mexican territory, and more will be brought to light, for the whole region has not been carefully examined, and new discoveries are constantly reported. So late as the year 1874 the U. S. surveying party reported the discovery of an extensive ruined city in Baker's canyon, about fifty miles south of the Utah line. An ancient mound was levelled by the railroad builders on the site of the depot in this city, and the mounds seven miles west of the Jordan are familiar to most of our citizens. For a long time it was the supposition that this was the original country of the Aztecs, from their name Aztec or "men of lakes;" but a more accurate knowledge of the localities has led to the abandonment of this opinion, and it is now considered more probable that the ancient civilization had reached the countries along the North American shores of the Pacific from the valley of Mexico or Central America. There is some faint light thrown upon the civilization of our western territories, slight but not devoid of significance. Among several of the Indian tribes of the United States there exists traditions of their having, during their passage eastward, come into hostile collision with and finally defeated people living in fortified towns. The Delaware Indians, for instance, say that many centuries ago the great Lenni-Lenapi inhabited a territory far to the west and that when they began moving eastward they came upon a numerous and civilized people, whom they call Alligewi, occupying the country on the eastern banks of the Mississippi, and living in fortified towns. The Iroquois, who likewise reached the river about the same time, united with the Lenni-Lenapi, and the two roving tribes made such fierce and repeated assaults upon the Alligewi that to avoid extermination the latter abandoned their cities and territories and fled down the banks of the river. The traditions of the Iroquois bear out this of the Delawares.

(To be Continued.)

## UNDER THE SNOW.

From "All the Year Round."

(Continued.)

ON the 11th of January, my first thought on waking was to make an end of my painful task; when I had lighted the lamp I felt my courage oozing away. I was obliged to have recourse to a new remedy with which I ought to have been able to dispense. Instead of breakfasting as usual on boiled milk and potatoes, I took a little bread and wine. This regimen restored a certain degree of firmness which I cannot ascribe to my own personal character, but of which I took advantage without delay. I had well considered the means of execution, and everything had been prepared the day before.

Oh, my dear grandfather, when you taught me, in front of your house, to transport a heavy body by the employment of rollers, we little thought that I should apply your lessons on so sad an occasion as this. The remembrance of what you then told me was completely refreshed in my memory. I could hear the sound of your voice, in imagination; and when the funereal burden nodded its head, as if in sign of approbation, I was so overcome that I turned my eyes away, like a person who dreads to look over the brink of a precipice.

The way was smoothed: the body was soon beside the grave. The most easy way would have been to let it fall in; but I could not make up my mind to treat it with so little reverence. Every difficulty being vanquished at last, what then remained to be done gave me but little uneasiness. I could freely give way to my grief. Seated on the mound which I had raised with my own hands, I wept abundantly by the side of that open grave. I could not resolve to throw in the first shovelfuls of earth without performing some sort of funeral service. I knelt, and searched my memory for passages of Scripture suitable to the occasion. I took the Bible, being sufficiently acquainted with it to find fitting portions, and such as my grandfather would have pointed out. While reading aloud, it appeared to me as if I had quitted my solitude. The holy volume responded to my emotion. At last I stopped, through exhaustion; I collected my thoughts, and no longer deferred what remained to be done. In a short space of time, the grave was filled. I spent the rest of the day in carving with the point of my knife the following inscription on a small tablet of maple-wood:

Here rests the body of Louis Lopraz, who died in the night of the 7th-8th of January, in the arms of his grandson Louis Lopraz, who buried him with his own hands.

I nailed the tablet to a stake, which I planted on the mound over the grave; after which I closed the door and returned to the kitchen, where Blanchette is my only company. Nevertheless, although I feel more at ease now the body is no longer lying on the bed, I find that some remains of weakness still linger in my mind. I combat them by paying frequent visits to the grave, and always without a light. I have resolved to say my prayers there night and morning.

JANUARY 15.—Yes; my position is greatly changed; I become more and more aware of it every day. I had a friend and a companion, and yet I dared to complain! God is punishing me for my former discontent. I am left alone—all alone! This thought pursues me the whole day long.

JANUARY 16.—I cannot shake off my weakness. I left my bed in a state of languor and discouragement, which continues. I write merely for writing's sake. If I told the whole truth, this journal would now be filled with a melancholy picture of despair. I have hardly the energy to guide my pen. My first distress when we were made prisoners here, my fright when the wolves threatened to devour us, and the sad scenes of my grandfather's death and burial, were as nothing compared with the prostration of strength into which I have fallen. I had no conception of this kind of suffering.

JANUARY 24.—Providence, to drag me out of the weariness of ennui, has sent a new source of disquietude. The goat yields a smaller quantity of milk. I thought I observed it several days ago; at present, I cannot doubt the fact.

JANUARY 25.—My grandfather certainly foresaw the possibility of my being detained here all by myself, and gave me several hints how I should act under such circumstances. One day he said, "What should we do if Blanchette were to go dry? It would be absolutely necessary to pluck up our resolution to kill her, and live on her flesh as long as we could." He followed this up with explanations how we should have to manage, to preserve her flesh. Am I to be reduced to this cruel extremity?

JANUARY 26.—If matters do not grow worse, I may set my mind at ease. Blanchette still gives enough milk for my sustenance. I have several cheeses in store. I have examined the remainder of my stock, and have spent the day in calculating how long it would last, if I had nothing else. It would not carry me through a fortnight.