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Sacred Metallic */sic/* Plates

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Abstract: This series refers to the discovery of “sacred stones,” upon which are inscribed Hebrew characters, one of which reads “may the Lord have mercy upon me a Nephite.” Scholars wonder where these people who spoke Hebrew came from, and the Book of Mormon provides the answers. Pratt claims that the Nephites landed in Chile near the city of Valparaiso. Later, Hagoth and others sailed to North America (Alma 63:4-12 and Helaman 3:3-16). The Nephites knew Hebrew and Egyptian and wrote in reformed Egyptian. The third part discusses Hebrew inscriptions on the Newark Stones and their translation, and Nephite coinage.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody."—ISAIAH.

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SACRED METALIC PLATES.

BY O. PRATT.

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The second "Sacred Stone," whose description was given in the 48th No. of the STAR, contained inscriptions in two apparently different alphabets,—namely, four or five characters on the side of a figure of an animal which could not be deciphered, and several Hebrew characters on the head of one of the human figures, and also the Hebrew letter *Shin* on another head. It is to be hoped that, at some future time, exact copies of all these characters will be printed, for the inspection of the learned. It is not impossible that the undeciphered portion may yet be read. The Book of Mormon informs us that the Nephites wrote in two different languages, and used two different sets of alphabetic characters, namely, Hebrew and Egyptian, both of which were, in process of time, altered and reformed, from what they were, when they left Jerusalem. May not the undeciphered letters upon the stone be the Egyptian? Or are they Hebrew in a state so defaced, that they cannot be distinctly read? In either case, it completely upsets the

hypothesis that the aborigines of that continent had no alphabet, and were unacquainted with the art of writing.

The inscriptions upon the wedge-shaped stone, are certainly very remarkable, embodying, in a few words, some of the most sublime sentiments, contained in divine revelation. It would have been difficult for the most civilized believers in revealed religion, to have framed short sentences more beautiful and expressive than the following:—

"KING OF THE EARTH."

"LAW OF THE LORD."

"WORD OF THE LORD."

"HOLY OF HOLIES."

Could any people, but enlightened Hebrews, have written these holy sentiments, in the sacred Hebrew character?

The stone, containing the abstract of the Ten Commandments, and a figure, dressed in priestly garments, with a flowing robe over the shoulder, and over whose head is the Hebrew name for Moses, is, indeed, peculiarly

interesting. It is evident that the ancient possessor of this stone, did not consider himself violating any of these commandments, by carving out the figure of the man who received them from Sinai. It was doubtless a mere token of remembrance, to bring more forcibly to the mind, in an engraved hieroglyphic form, the great law-giver and Prophet of Israel. It is also very evident that the Hebrew writer did not intend to quote from their voluminous sacred Records, every word and phrase of the Ten Commandments, but merely to give an extract, omitting now and then a sentence or a phrase, but incorporating all the most prominent and essential portions. Precisely the same course has been pursued, in making Scriptural quotations, by the learned in all ages.

Let us next examine some of the translator's remarks, concerning what he terms the imperfections of the spelling, &c. He says a *daleth* has been improperly used for a *vav*. But is not the translator himself mistaken? The old Phœnician *vav* (or "primitive Hebrew") very much resembles the present Hebrew *daleth*; hence, the former might very easily be mistaken for the latter. Again he says, In two other words the *yod* is omitted, namely, in *Mitsraim*, and in *Elohim*. But as the former is in the dual form, and is literally translated *Egypt*s instead of *Egypt*, there is no doubt but the ancient American Israelites, purposely left out the *yod*, so as to pronounce the same *Mitsram*, and thus render it in the singular form. *Elohim* is also a plural noun, and signifies *gods*, but by omitting the *yod*, and transposing the letters *he* and *mem*, they pronounced the word *Elomeh*, which is no doubt in the singular form, and was certainly, in this one instance, the Hebrew word for *God* in the country of the mounds. And thus the commandment would be rendered, "Thou shalt have no other" *god* "before me." In the inspired translation of this commandment, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, (page 172,) we have precisely the same rendering, the original being translated *god* instead of *gods*. Therefore, instead of the omissions of *yod*, and the transposition of

mem and *he*, indicating a carelessness or a want of learning, as supposed by the translator, it shows a refinement or improvement in their language, far beyond what has been manifested in the mutilated copies which have, on the Eastern World, descended to our times. Hebrews of the East have been obliged to translate *Elohim* both in the singular and plural; while it seems that the ancient Hebrews of the New World, had a special form indicating the singular; and what is still more remarkable, this form coincides with the same sentence, translated from the Gold Plates, some thirty years before the Stone was disinterred.

The translator says, "No Rabbi would ever write *Kelachteha* instead of *Melachteha*." But has not the learned Hebrew critic again blundered, and mistaken *mem* for *kaph*? One of the three forms of the letter *mem* in the old Phœnician, which is generally believed to be the ancient Hebrew, is very much like one of the three forms for the letter *kaph*; and hence, one might easily be mistaken for the other. *Kaph* and *mem* is not so very unlike on the old Hebrew coins, but that they might easily be mistaken, one for the other, unless great care were taken in the exact construction of the two letters.

It is also stated, that "The words 'his ox' are partly written at the end of one line, and then they are written in full at the beginning of the next line on the opposite side of the stone." But this is not an imperfection: indeed, it is the precise method adopted by the Hebrews of the East. (See Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, pp. 1798 and 1799.

"One of the greatest mysteries here," says the reporter to the Occident, "is the peculiar alphabet. The letters are very different from the letters of all the other stones, and this convinces Dr. Lilienthal and others, that this stone is much the most ancient." In this we entirely disagree with the learned Dr. The characters upon the first three stones resemble more nearly the Hebrew characters of the East, than those on the fourth stone; hence, there is the greatest probability that the inscriptions upon the former three were made before the alphabet had be-

come materially altered by succeeding generations in the New World: but the great alterations of the form of the letters on the last stone, would prove that it had passed through many reformations, after arriving in America, and consequently, was more modern than the others. The Book of Mormon informs us, that the first colony of Hebrews settled in the region, where now are found the mounds, about five and one-half centuries after they left Jerusalem; and that they remained there, about four and one-half centuries before their destruction. It is highly probable, that the writing upon the first three stones was made in the early period of their settlement; while the Ten Commandments were engraved at a much later period, after the Hebrew characters became very much altered, as they are said to have been, by Moroni, who wrote at the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era. (See Book of Mormon, p. 515.) We have already quoted a passage from the Book of Mormon, to show that about one-half century before Christ, copies of the sacred Scriptures were sent into all parts of the land among the people. Consequently the Hebrews who constructed the mounds, were not so ignorant, as the learned writer for the Occident has endeavored to prove.

To show the great alterations, made in the Hebrew characters, the translator says, "I have examined several *alephs* in different languages, and found no *aleph* like the one here." And from the description which he gives of its shape, it must resemble the two adjoining sides of a square, in the same position as the *daleth*, with a diagonal drawn from the right angle. Why did not the translator look for the equivalent of *aleph* or *a*, in the letter *he*? If he had done so, he would have found that the Aramaic *he* very much resembles his description of the newly discovered Hebrew *aleph*. Now the Aramaic was spoken by the Samaritans, to whom was left "the Hebrew writing;" and the Samaritan *he*, although a consonant, is often used as *aleph* or short *ä* (See Ballhorn's comp. p. 15); the Aramaic and the early Hebrew letters upon the coins are very nearly the same;

and undoubtedly the Aramaic *he* was used by the American Hebrews, instead of *aleph*. The American Hebrew *men* resembles the Samaritan *yod*. The American Hebrew *lamedh* is like the Roman L, with its horizontal line reversed, which is like the old Kufic *l*, and also like one of the eight forms of the Etrurian *l*, which was, without doubt, in a great measure, derived from the Hebrew. The newly discovered Hebrew *ayin*, is like the *ayin* upon the Hebrew coins, with the addition of a circle drawn around it. Again, the author of the article in the Occident says, "Fourteen of these letters differ very widely from the present square character, sometimes called Assyrian, and sometimes Chaldee;" and he also has proved that they differ, in some measure, from the old Hebrew on the coins. And perceiving all this he says, "This suggests the most interesting question, Whether this stone exhibits the original Hebrew alphabet in which the holy Books were written, before the Babylonish captivity?" The Book of Mormon answers this question, that it is, indeed, the old Hebrew before the captivity, remodeled by successive generations in America. The writing upon the first three stones is probably a nearer approach to the primitive Hebrew of that early age. These discoveries likewise settle the long disputed question in regard to the time of the commencement of the square form of the Hebrew characters. Some have contended, in opposition to the Jewish Talmud, that this form was originated not far from the commencement of the Christian era; while others, with apparently much evidence, have assigned a much more ancient date, and believe that Ezra wrote the Scriptures in the Assyrian square form. Now these late discoveries of the first three Sacred Stones show a distant approximation to the square form, and seem to sustain the assertion in the Talmud, concerning the great antiquity of that form.

It is also asserted that on the stones, "there is no distinction between initial and final letters." It is believed by most of learned Hebraists, that the five final letters, used in modern Hebrew, were unknown before the capti-

vity. This circumstance proves the great antiquity of the Hebrew colonists in America.

The formation of vowel points is an invention, introduced since the commencement of the Christian era; but as the Hebrew of the mounds knows nothing of the invention, it is evident that its antiquity preceded this comparatively modern innovation.

Several copper rings were found on the shell of the coffin, and on the inside, "several human bones, 'a locket of very fine black hair, about six or eight inches long,' and ten other copper rings." What are these copper rings? They no doubt were the uncoined money of these ancient Hebrews. It is generally supposed that coined money was unknown before the captivity; but the Egyptians, Jews, and Phœnicians, used copper, silver, and gold money, uncoined, from the days of Abraham down. Its value was determined by weight, instead of being determined as a coinage. The shape of these uncoined pieces was in the form of rings. (See Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. ii, p. 406.) We can thus perceive, why the money of the mounds had the form of rings. It was the form which they were well acquainted with, when they left Jerusalem. The Hebrews, in the northern part of South America, five hundred and nineteen years after they left Jerusalem, had in circulation a metallic currency, which, from the description given of the values of different pieces, was evidently a coinage; but the shape of the coins is not described: some of them may have been in the form of rings; others, may have been in other shapes. As the names are given in the original Nephite language, it will be interesting, in this place, to give the following quotation concerning them:—

"These are the names of the different pieces of their gold, and of their silver, according to their value. And

the names are given by the Nephites: for they did not reckon after the manner of the Jews who were at Jerusalem; neither did they measure after the manner of the Jews, but they altered their reckoning and their measure, according to the minds and the circumstances of the people, in every generation, until the reign of the Judges; they having been established by king Mosiah. Now the reckoning is thus: a senine of gold, a seon of gold, a shum of gold, and a limnah of gold. A senum of silver, an amnor of silver, an ezrom of silver, and an onti of silver. A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold: and either for a measure of barley, and also for a measure of every kind of grain. Now the amount of a seon of gold, was twice the value of a senine; and a shum of gold was twice the value of a seon; and a limnah of gold was the value of them all; and an amnor of silver was as great as two senums; and an ezrom of silver was as great as four senums; and an onti was as great as them all. Now this is the value of the lesser numbers of their reckoning: a shiblon is half of a senum: therefore, a shiblon for half a measure of barley; and a shiblum is half of a shiblon; and a leah is the half of a shiblum. Now this is their number, according to their reckoning. Now an antion of gold is equal to three shublons." (Book of Mormon, p. 239.)

The coins of greater value were of gold or silver; those of less value may have been copper. May not the copper rings of the mound have belonged to this latter class? A very singular fact is developed in the above extract, namely, that the Nephites seem to have had one permanent price for their grain; in other words, the Nephite grain market was not a fluctuating, speculative element, as it is in modern times; but, like their currency, it had one uniform standard value, and some stability about it.

(To be Continued.)

Irregularity and want of method are only supportable in men of great learning or genius, who are often too full to be exact, and therefore choose to throw down their pearls in heaps before the reader, rather than be at the pains of stringing them.