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## Hvitra-manna-land and Lamoni

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**Abstract:** This article relates names from sagas and American geography to Book of Mormon names such as “Laman” and “Lamoni,” which the author suggests refers to “white.” This is seen as a Book of Mormon evidence.

# Hvitra-manna-land and Lamoni

By J. M. Sjodahl

A rather interesting letter, referring to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, was received some time ago, at the Latter-day Saint mission headquarters in Chicago, and forwarded to Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, of the Council of the Twelve, and Church Historian, Salt Lake City. The writer is Mr. A. O. Ueland, a lawyer of Halstead, Minn.

The gentleman explains that he has read the Book of Mormon and found the historical part of it of interest, as it relates to a "white race settling in America in prehistoric days." He frankly admits that "it appears improbable that Joseph Smith could have just made up the whole story." The writer also states that he used to be quite a student of Norse sagas and legends and especially that relating to the early voyages of Norsemen to our shores.

He refers particularly to the story of Are Marson, who, towards the close of the 10th century of our era, is said to have set sail from Iceland. About twenty years afterwards, as the saga has it, one Gudleif Gudlougson, having drifted out of his course from Iceland to Ireland, came to a semi-tropical coast, where he and his crew were captured by the natives.

"Then came an old man, with long white beard, who seemed to be a kind of chief. He questioned them in the Norse language, and when he learned who they were, inquired about parties both in Norway and Iceland. After aiding them to get their ship repaired, he disclosed that he was Are Marson, sent greetings to his relatives in Iceland, and cautioned against further attempts to explore the land, because, he said, he would soon be dead, and it would be difficult to say how the natives would treat strangers after he was gone. The crew got back safely, touching Ireland on the return, thence to Norway and, finally, Iceland. He brought the greetings to Are Marson's relatives, one of whom, a child of Are's cousin, was Thordhild, the mother of Leif Erickson, thus establishing the conclusion that Leif had heard about a land in the west before starting on his voyage of discovery.

The country where Are Marson was found, the Norwegians called "Hvitra-manna-land." There is also another legend from approximately the same period, of a Norse viking, Bjorn Breidvikakappa, who drifted west from Ireland and came to Hvitra-manna-land, so that name became established in the sagas. After having related these legends, Mr. Ueland says:

"Now, it struck me that there might be some connection between those ancient records of your Church, and the sagas. This idea is original with

me, and may look preposterous, but none of the scholars of Norway, who have treated upon those legends, seem to know anything about your traditions. If they had known the same, would they not have attempted to connect the two? It would seem from your records that those white races kept records down from the fifth century. \* \* \* I am not enough of a scholar to analyze just what the word 'Hvitra-manna-land' means. Literally, it would seem to be, 'White men's land.' Now, did that description only refer to a lighter blue hue than for instance, the negroes, whom they called "Bluemen," or the Skrellings, believed to have been Esquimaux?"

The letter from which this quotation is taken seems to me to be an evidence that the Spirit of the Lord is at work, even outside the boundaries of the Church, to establish the authenticity of the Book of Mormon by such evidence as the intellectual, educated portion of the world can readily grasp.

Mr. Ueland's account of pre-Columbian visits of Icelanders to the North American continent is an able summary of sagas preserved in ancient documents, such as those published more than three quarters of a century ago, by the learned Danish scholar, Charles Christian Rafn, in *Antiquitates Americanae*. I may be permitted to add what the scholarly von Tschudi (*Peruvian Antiquities*, p. 5), speaking of Scandinavians in pre-historic America, says:

"This, however, is certain, that the monuments, inscriptions, arms, utensils, tools, and remains of the dead, recently found in the states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and elsewhere, attest an entrance of strangers into the country, much more considerable than any of those which the manuscripts we have mentioned bring to our knowledge."

Mr. Ueland refers to the tradition concerning *Hvitramannaland* and, naturally, supposes that there may be some connection between that tradition and the historical part of the Book of Mormon.

Scholars have suggested that *Hvitramannaland*, or, as the word means, "White Men's Land," may have been so called by the Indians on account of white-clad Catholic priests, or missionaries, who had founded colonies there. This is, of course, conjecture. Is there no explanation more plausible?

Is it not possible that the word "Hvitramannaland" is the Icelandic translation of an Indian name of a country, which the Icelanders, as soon as its meaning became known to them, rendered into their own tongue? We do the same thing when we, for instance, call a certain territory in Germany the "Black Forest," instead of *Schwarzwald*. But is such an Indian word known to exist, or to have existed?

Dr. Brinton (*Myths of the New World*, p. 207) says, "The Algonquins, with one voice, called those of their tribes living nearest the rising sun 'Abnakis,' our ancestors at the east, at the dawn; literally, our *white* ancestors." I have underlined the

word "white." This proves that the great and numerous stock of Indians known as Algonquins have preserved a tradition concerning a land of a "white" ancestry.—*Hvitra-manna-land*.

If we inquire further into the meaning of the word *Abnaki*, we find in the Lenape dialect the word *Lumon-aki*, which Rafinesque (*The American Nations*, Vol. 1, p. 129) translates "white country"—the very identical word which the Icelanders, in their relations and records, may have translated "Hvitramannaland," just as Rafinesque does.

*Abn-aki* and *Lumon-aki* are, of course, variants of the same word, *abn* being an easily understood abbreviation of *Lumon*, and both meaning "white," while *aki* is the Algonquin, or at least Lenape, for "country."

But where did the pre-Columbian Indians get the word *Lumon* (or *Laman*) for "white"? The Book of Mormon alone answers that question. That volume, as is well known, tells us that one of their ancestors was named *Laman*, which means "white"; for *laman* is the same as the Hebrew, *Laban*, and that is the meaning of that word. But Indian tradition, by pointing to a "white" ancestry, or a "white" country, also proves, if I read the story correctly, that American natives, or some of them, are "Lamanites;" that is, descendants of an ancestor whose name was "White," or, which is the same, "Laman." And the Icelanders, in transmitting to us their own valuable records, are witnesses to the fact that the Indians with whom they came in contact had such traditions centuries before Columbus appeared in this hemisphere.

In the Book of Mormon (Alma 21:22) we read of the "land which was under the reign of King Lamoni." It seems to me that if we consider the meaning of names, and the information conveyed either in historic or legendary form, it is difficult to efface the impression from one's mind that the *Lumonaki* of the Lenapes and the *Hvitramannaland* of the Icelanders, considered merely as words, are derived from the Land of *Lamoni*, or from *Laman*.

In Yucatan we find the word in the form of *Labna* as the name of a city near Uxmal. *Laman* is, according to Reclus, the name of a tribe of the Ulva stock of Indians, possibly the same as the *Ramas*. The river Mico, also called Bluefields, was called *Lama* by the Indians (Cyrus Thomas, *Indian Languages of Mexico and Central America*, Bur., of Am. Ethn. Bull. 44, p. 79). In South America, we have in the vicinity of Truxillo, the *Lamanos*, or *Lamistas*, (Brinton, *American Race*, p. 216) and the *Lamas* on the river *Maranon* (Ibid. p. 285). So that the Book-of-Mormon name *Laman* has been perpetuated among the Indians and is found to this day in various forms all over America.

Mr. Ueland says he does not "believe in the truth of the story about those golden plates."

May I ask then, what about the testimony of the three witnesses? They solemnly affirm that they *saw* the angel, *heard* the voice from heaven, and *handled* and examined the plates. They were men of good character, of sound mind, more than average intelligence—men whose testimony was as good as that of any American citizen. Martin Harris was a well-do-do farmer. Oliver Cowdery was a school teacher and, later, a lawyer. David Whitmer was, if not in a worldly sense, a successful business man, a highly respected American *citizen*. How would their testimony be received by an impartial jury?

I asked that question in a priesthood meeting, recently, and Mr. James H. Moyle, one of our prominent lawyers, who was present, and who, in his younger days, had heard Martin Harris speak, and had interviewed David Whitmer at Richmond, Mo., said in substance that in a case involving property rights, for instance, the decision of which would depend on the credibility of the testimony of the three witnesses as given in the Book of Mormon, the court would be bound by the rules of evidence to find in favor of the side represented by them. I believe this to be absolutely true.

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## Bits of Philosophy

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Be a child in heart but not a boob in action.

The more you get after people the farther you get away from them.

It is a poor bargain to trade a spirit-thrilled life for a fun-fizzled life.

There is only one step from heaven to hell, but a million from hell to heaven.

The depth of our regret for the imperfect in our lives is the measure of our progress.

It is better to giggle at the silliest thing in the world, than to be sad about your own sadness.

Simple faith, plain humility, genuine sincerity, moral courage, and gentle charity constitute a great soul.

*Nephi Jensen*