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Book of Mormon Characters

Author(s): J. M. Sjodahl

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Abstract: This article discusses the Anthon transcript and declares that the letter written by Anthon concerning the figures on the paper presented by Martin Harris provides an opinion that is without value. Anthon's brief examination and his finding do not correlate with the characters as preserved.

BOOK OF MORMON CHARACTERS

BY J. M. SJODAHL

The readers of the *Era* are familiar with the characters of the Book of Mormon, as they have been preserved in Church literature.

During the time between December, 1827, and the following February, the Prophet Joseph, then living on his farm near Harmony, Penn., copied some of the letters, or glyphs, on the plates, and translated a few of them by the aid of the sacred instrument provided for that purpose. In February, 1828, his friend, Martin Harris, came to Harmony, to visit Joseph, and the latter handed him two of the specimens. Martin Harris then proceeded to New York and submitted them to the inspection of Prof. Charles Anthon, of the Columbia College.* This incident of Church history is well known.

It will also be remembered that Prof. Anthon, in letters written years afterwards to men searching for material for anti-"Mormon" literature, acknowledged the visit of Martin Harris and the existence of certain "characters," but declared them to be a hoax, and a clumsy one at that. Thus, in 1841 he is said to have written a letter to an Episcopalian minister in New Rochelle, near New York, in which he informed the reverend gentleman, for publication, that he, Anthon, after a *brief* examination of the paper presented felt convinced that it was a fraud. That the "examination" must have been exceedingly brief is evident from the fact that he went on to say that "the characters were arranged in columns like the Chinese mode of writing," and that "Greek, Hebrew, and all sorts of letters, more or less distorted, either through unskilfulness or from actual design, were intermingled," whereupon the whole ended in a rude representation of the Mexican zodiac.

This has been widely circulated as Prof. Anthon's opinion, based upon a "brief"—as the learned linguist admits—examination of the characters brought to him by Martin Harris. It is hard to imagine how even a brief examination could impress anybody but an ignoramus with the idea that those lines now known as the *Characters* were Greek, Hebrew, etc., letters arranged in columns, as in Chinese manuscripts, and ending with a drawing of the Mexican zodiac. It is much easier to believe that the Professor, when writing for the delectation of anti-"Mormon" credulity, drew upon his own imagination. At all events a *brief* examination of such a document is no examination at all, and Prof. Anthon's opinion is, from a scientific point of view, valueless.

*At the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, there is a photographic reproduction of a print, which purports to be a facsimile of one of the drawings made by the Prophet and submitted to Prof. Anthon by Martin Harris. See also the illustration in the *Improvement Era* for April, this year.


Dr. Augustus Le Plongeon came to an entirely different conclusion regarding the Book of Mormon characters.

I am fully aware that Le Plongeon is not accepted as an authority, and that some of the theories and opinions he has advanced go much farther than the facts adduced warrant; but I do not know that his ability has ever been doubted, or that the value of his discoveries has been questioned. And for that reason he certainly is entitled to a hearing on a question of fact relating to the ancient inhabitants of America.

In a letter to Elder D. M. McAllister, of Salt Lake City, dated 18 Sidney Place, Brooklyn, July 1, 1892, Dr. Le Plongeon made this statement:

"I have carefully examined the characters on the plates from which the Mormon book was translated. Although several resemble some on the ancient monuments and in the Maya codices, still the characters of the writings are in no way similar to that of the Maya inscriptions, or those on the tablets of Palenque. It seems to me they bear more similitude to the Old Phoenician. Still, I am free to confess that the following are found in the Maya writings:

~ is n; U, or C, or N, is ma (Egyptian or Maya), meaning "the land," "the country"; □ (h) is ah, meaning "the male," "the powerful." D, or ∩, is t, symbol of Maya tem, altar, and the Egyptian T. ~ This is the most significant. It is found in the Maya books, ☽, where it has the meaning of "the lands of the west," that is, North and South America and the lost (Land of Mu) Atlantis, indicated by the dot in the midst of the ocean, contained within the shores of the western continent, from New Foundland to Cape St. Roque in Brazil.

In a note Dr. Plongeon adds that the character:  is a composite, which in Maya glyphs would mean Ah-tem, "he of the altar," either God or the priest.

Dr. Plongeon and his gifted wife spent ten years, or more, among the Mayas in Yucatan. They learned the language and studied the people by living among them. They were very successful in their research work.

Dr. Plungeon was a friend of the late President John Taylor. In one of his letters to Elder D. M. McAllister he says:

"Mr. John Taylor, the late president of the 'Mormon' Church, was a friend of mine since 1852. We became acquainted in Europe, and since then, from time to time, we have corresponded. His last letter to me is dated a few months before his demise."

Who Would A-Conquering Go

"When I a-conquering go," I vowed,
 "I shall not heed the jeering crowd,
 With purpose bold, and eyes ahead,
 With shoulders firm, and kingly tread,
 No voice can call me back, I know,
 The day that I a-conquering go."

"Wills such as mine no man can turn,
 When once the fires of conquest burn
 Within my breast, as forth I stand
 Unflinchingly to take command.
 No restless thoughts my heart shall know
 The day that I a-conquering go."

"But, for today, I love red wine,
 And warm lips madly meeting mine;
 I love the game, the laugh, the song,
 To feast and play the whole night long,—
 Such follies to the Past I'll throw
 Tomorrow, when I conquering go."

In youth I sang thus boastfully:
 "My passions cannot master me,
 Though my todays are full of bliss,—
 The sparkling wine and rapturous kiss
 Belong to youth, and he must know
 Them all, who would a-conquering go."

Now, all too late, I comprehend
 The wisdom of my childhood friend,—
 A gray old man who said to me:
 "Ah, youth, could I but make you see
 That he who would true valor show,
 Must all his days a-conquering go."