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Abstract: This article refers to the record-keeping habits of the inhabitants of the Americas as discovered by European observers. An English translation of several records is given, and a kinship shown between traditions among the American pre-European peoples and the milieu from which the Book of Mormon emerged.

ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE

BY J. M. SJODAHL

On September 22, this year, it will be ninety-nine years since the plates containing the text of the Book of Mormon were delivered to the Prophet Joseph Smith by the angel Moroni. The date is one of the memorable ones in human history.

At the time when the plates, with the urim and thummim and the breastplate, were entrusted to the temporary custody of Joseph, he was well prepared for the mission to which he had been called. From the first appearance of Moroni, September 21, 1823, till the delivery of the record, September 22, 1827, the angel had instructed him, from time to time, regarding the contents of the book and the doctrines of the gospel. The mind of the youth had been opened to revelations, and he was prepared, as the prophets of old, to give to the world "the word of the Lord," as the divine Spirit unfolded it to him, whether concerning the past, the present, or the future.

The Book of Mormon has during all these years stood the severest and most bitter criticism, and at the same time been an unshakable foundation of faith in God and his Son, our Savior. How is that to be accounted for? There is only one answer to that question: It owes its existence, both in the original and the translation, to that divine inspiration and influence.

The Book of Mormon is the only now known inspired record of the ancient Americans, and as such it has a value and an importance beyond calculation. But it is not the only early American record ever made. In Mexico and Central America, particularly, literature was flourishing. Writings, generally called hieroglyphics, adorn monuments and temples at Chiapas, Palenque, Copan, Chichen-Itza and Quirigua, to mention only a few places. A kind of hieratic writing, known to the initiated only, was, according to Nadaillac, made by the priests, specimens of which have come down to us in the Dresden manuscript, the Troano manuscript, and a few others.

Bishop Landa thought he had discovered an alphabet of thirty-three signs, or letters, but these seem to have proved of no value to students of the monuments and the manuscripts. The hieroglyphs, as far as read, refer to astronomical dates and calculations.

According to a tradition recorded by Bancroft, during the reign of a Toltec king, Ixtlilcuechalmac, toward the end of the seventh century a meeting of the wise men was held under the direction of one Hueman. At this congress all Toltec records were brought together, and after careful study a volume was compiled which they called the *Teomoxtli*, or "The Book of God." This book is said to have contained a history of the world from the deluge, or even from the creation, together with the rites, laws and social customs of the people.

It ended with prophecies concerning the future. Hueman, we are told, died shortly after the completion of this work, at the age of 300 years. Probably this book was destroyed among other valuable manuscripts which the fanatic Don Juan de Zumarraga consigned to the flames.

These books were made of cotton cloth, or of skins specially prepared, or of a composition of silk and gum, but more generally from the leaves of the aloe plant, called by the natives the *maguey*, from which a kind of paper was made, resembling the Egyptian papyrus. Sometimes they were made up in rolls, as Hebrew parchments, but sometimes folded like a folding screen, with a tablet of wood at each end, and when a manuscript was thus folded and closed, it resembled somewhat a modern bound volume. At the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, there were large quantities of such records in the country. There were numerous scribes, whose skill in drawing hieroglyphs astonished the new-comers.

Picture writing was more generally practiced. It is found in South America, in Central America, and North America. Some drawings are, no doubt, only the inspirations of primitive artists, but others are true writings, intended to convey information, or to record events, as a matter of tradition or history.

Such writings are sometimes symbolical. That is, one picture may stand for a complex idea, one that we express by a sentence, or even several sentences. In such a case the meaning of the picture is unknown except as it is accompanied by the sentence it represents. The Lenapes had such writings, which have been preserved. The figures were engraved or painted on bark or slabs of wood, as the Norse runes. One of these came into the possession of Professor Rafinesque, who published a translation of it in 1836, in Philadelphia. Later it became the property of Dr. Brinton who, in 1885, published a facsimile of the symbols, together with the explanatory Indian text, and a translation of his own. This priceless North American record contains the traditions of the Lenapes and related tribes. It begins with the creation. It mentions the flood, and then the crossing of their forefathers over some large water on the ice, and continues with a history of the wanderings and wars of the people. It records the coming of the Europeans from the east, and closes about the year 1820, with the statement that Kithtilkund and Lapanibi, chiefs of two tribes, had agreed to return to the region beyond the *Masispek* (Mississippi). "Shall we be free and happy there?" the chronicler asks. "We want," he adds, "rest, and peace, and wisdom."

These records, Rafinesque observes, seem to be but abridgments of more copious annals, or the bases of their traditions. "The Niniwas or Chippewas, the Ottowas, the Sakis and Shawanis, all Lenape tribes, have such painted tales and annals, called *Neobagun* by the former."

The Delawares, too, had records. Loskiel says: "The Delawares keep genealogies, with the character of each man, if wise, rich, renowned, or a mighty warrior. They use hieroglyphs on wood, trees

and stones, to give caution, information, communicate events, achievements, keep records. Sometimes the hero has at his feet men, heads, or weapons. They have also paintings on skins of deeds, hunts, feats, etc."

A few extracts from the Lenape records or songs may prove interesting.

I. *The Creation.*

At first there was nothing but seawater on the top of the land.

There was much water, and much fog over the land, and there was also the God-creator.

And this God-creator was the first Being, an eternal Being and invisible, although everywhere.

It was he who caused much water, much land, much cloud, much heaven.

It was he who caused the sun, the moon, the stars.

And all these he caused to move well.

By his action it blew hard, it cleared up, and the deep water ran off.

It looks bright, and islands stood there.

It was then, when again the God-creator made the makers, or spirits.

And also the first beings, and also the angels, and also the souls, all them he made.

And afterwards he made the man-being, ancestor of the men.

He gave him the first mother, mother of the first beings.

And fishes he gave him, turtles he gave him, beasts he gave him, birds he gave him.

II. *Snake Worship*

But there was a bad spirit who caused the bad beings, black snakes, and monsters or large reptiles.

And caused also flies, and caused also gnats.

All the beings were then friends and stood there.

Thou being *Kiwis*, good God *Wunard*, and the good makers, or spirits, were such.

With the jins *Nijini*, the first men, and the first mother, their wives, which were Fairies.

The first food of the jins and Fairies was a fat fruit.

All were willingly pleased, all were easy-thinking, and all were well-happified.

But after awhile a snake priest brings on earth secretly the snake worship of the god of the snakes.

And there came wickedness, crime and unhappiness.

And bad weather was coming, distemper was coming, with death was coming.

All this happened very long ago, at the first land beyond the great ocean.

III. *The Flood*

There was long ago a powerful Snake, when the men had become bad beings.

This strong Snake had become the foe of the jins, and they became troubled, hating each other.

Both were fighting, both were spoiling, both were never peaceful.

And they were fighting, least man with dead-keeper.

And the strong Snake readily resolved to destroy or fight the beings and the men.

The dark Snake he brought, the monster he brought, snake rushing-water he brought.

Much water is rushing, much go to hills, much penetrate, much destroying.

Meantime at *Tula*, at that island, *Nanabush* became the ancestor of beings and men.

Being born creeping, he is ready to move and dwell at *Tula*.

The beings and men, all go forth from the flood, creeping in shallow water, or swimming afloat, asking which is the way to the turtle back.

But there were many monsters in the way, and some men were devoured by them.

But the daughter of a spirit helped them in a boat, saying, Come, come; they were coming and were helped.

Nanabush, Nanabush became the grandfather of all, the grandfather of the beings, the grandfather of the men, and the grandfather of the turtles.

The men were there, they turtle there, they were turtling all together.

He was frightened, he the turtle, he was praying, he the turtle, let it be to make well.

Water running off, it is drying, in the plains and the mountains, at the path of the cave, elsewhere went the powerful action.

IV. *The Crossing of the Water*

After the flood, the manly men (*Lenapes*) with the manly turtle beings dwelt close together at the cave house and dwellings of *Talli*.

It freezes was there, it snows was there, it is cold was there.

To possess mild coldness and much game, they go to the northerly plain; to hunt cattle they go.

To be strong and to be rich, the comers divided into tillers and hunters.

The most strong, the most good, the most holy, the hunters they are.

And the hunters spread themselves, becoming *Northerlings*, *Easterlings*, *Southerlings*, *Westerlings*.

Thus the *White country* (*Lumonaki*), north of the *Turtle country*, became the hunting country of the turtling true men.

Meantime, all the *Snakes* were afraid in their huts, and the *Snake priest* said to all, let us go.

Easterly they go forth at *Snakeland*, and they went away earnestly grieving.

Thus escaping by going so far, and by trembling the burnt land is torn and is broken from the *Snake* fortified land.

Being free, having no trouble, the *Northerlings* all go out, separating at the *Land of Snow*.

The fish resort to the shores of the gaping sea, where tarried the fathers of *White Eagle* and *White Wolf*.

While our fathers were always boating and navigating, they saw in the east that the *Snakeland* was bright and wealthy.

The *Head-beaver* and the *Big-bird* were saying to all, let us go to the *Snake island*.

By going with us, we shall annihilate all the *Snaking* people.

Having all agreed, the *Northerlings* and *Easterlings* went over the water of the frozen sea, to possess that land.

It was wonderful when they all went over the smooth deep water of the frozen sea, at the gap of the *Snake sea* in the great ocean.

They were ten thousand in the dark, who all go forth in a single night in the dark, to the *Snake island* of the eastern land in the dark, by walking all the people.

They were the manly north, the manly east, the manly south; with manly *Eagle*, manly *Beaver*, manly *Wolf*; with manly hunter; manly priest, manly rich; with manly wife, manly daughter, manly dog.

All coming there, they tarry at *Firland*. But the *Western* men, doubtful of the passage, preferred to remain at the old *Turtle land*.

NOTES

The translation of these Indian annals, was completed in 1833, three years after the Book of Mormon had been published. It took the translator thirteen years, from the time he obtained the manuscript, to accomplish the task. He had to learn the language first.

The story of the creation in this record is remarkably like the account in Genesis. In both, the land is covered with water and vapor. The divine Creator, in Genesis, caused his Spirit to move upon the waters; in the Indian record he causes a wind to blow, and then the land appears.

In both accounts the Creator is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in them, including spirits, the first beings, souls and the progenitors of the human race. In both, man is given dominion over the fishes in the sea, the animals of the field, the birds in the air, and all creeping things.

The accounts are so strikingly similar as to force us to conclude that they have come from the same source, and for that reason these annals are a remarkable confirmation of Genesis.

To one familiar with the language of the record the similarity between this narrative and that of Genesis would be more striking. The ancestor of men, for instance, is *Jinwis*, which word, Professor Rafinesque says, is identic wth the Hebrew *ish* man the "w" beng the masculine article "h."

In the story of the Snake worship we are told that peace and harmony prevailed in all nature, until a "Snake-priest" secretly introduced the Snake worship of the god of the Snakes. That caused a total change.

These Snakes evidently were, or were supposed to be, "the black Snakes," a class of people which, the record says, were originated by a "bad spirit." The reference is not to the transgression of Adam, but rather to the fall of Cain, of whom we read in the Pearl of Great Price (p. 12 and 13, new edition) that he entered into secret compacts with Satan, to murder and get gain, and that Lamech succeeded him. As Satan is the "dragon" "the old Serpent," so Cain may well be referred to as the Snake priest who introduced Snake worship and its abominable secrets.

Beyond the great ocean. If the story was originally told to the children and descendants of Noah in the Old World, then, "beyond the great ocean" would, of course, mean on the American continents.

The story of the deluge is very much similar to the account in Genesis. A "powerful Snake" predominates on earth—that is, some follower of Cain and Lamech—and, as a consequence, there is strife and war everywhere. Then the "black Snake," Satan, undertakes to destroy the human race and all living creatures by a deluge. The waters rush and accomplish destruction. But Nanabush, the Noah of

Genesis, who was "born creeping"—that is to say humble—was willing to dwell in *Tula*, and there he was saved, and became the second ancestor of the race.

Tula. The word *Tula* is the name of the place from which the Toltecs and other nations in Mexico, according to their traditions, came. But in the Lenape, Professor Rafinesque says, it means "turtle" or "tortoise." It is the same as the Hebrew *Tor*, meaning strong. The *Tula* in the narrative is, therefore, the ark—the "tebah" of Genesis.

The story of the crossing of the water deserves close study. According to the records, "Men" and "Turtles" dwell together near the cave house. They are, undoubtedly, two different tribes. The "Men" may be supposed to refer to some particularly prominent group, and the "Turtles" may have been so called from some special connection with the ark.

The Cave House. Many Indians have traditions of a cave, or several caves, from which their ancestors emerged. May refer to ships in which they came across the deep.

It was cold in that place, and, consequently, the people decided to go to a plain to the north, where the climate was more congenial and the game more plentiful.

On this plain they divided into "tillers and hunters."

The hunters spread out over a wide area and became Northerlings, Easterlings, Southerlings, and Westerlings. And thus the White country (*Lumonaki*), north of the Turtle country, became the hunting ground of the valiant Turtles.

But in this new country there was another race, referred to in the record as "Snakes." These were trembling in their huts because of the invasion, wherefore their priest induced them to evacuate the country. They obeyed regretfully, and emigrated in an easterly direction. At the same time, some catastrophe in Nature devastated the old country by fire, and separated it in some way from the new Snakeland. The Northerlings were now free to roam, and they reached out as far as the Land of Snow.

We are now told of a place by the "gaping sea," where fish (perhaps shell fish) is abundant, and where the progenitors of White Eagle and White Wolf once had lived. Here, while the men were boating and sailing, they discovered Snakeland in the east, and found it to be a bright and wealthy country. Two great chiefs then persuade the people to invade Snakeland and exterminate the Snakes. The Northerlings and Easterlings crossed the water on smooth ice, to the number of 10,000, in one dark night. Having arrived in Snake-land, they settled in a country called Firland.

It is supposed that this refers to the crossing of the Behring strait by Indian ancestors. But that notion must be given up as too fanciful. Ten thousand people could not be marched across 50 miles of frozen sea in one dark night. The Arctic ice is by no means

smooth and even. When the drifting cakes freeze together, they form ridges and obstacles of such a formidable nature that Arctic explorers have sometimes not been able to progress more than half a mile a day, and one authority has said that Commander Peary could not possibly have traveled 57 miles a day, though he had the advantage of broad daylight. Besides, the rocky, barren shores of the American side of the strait would hardly have attracted settlers from a country with plenty of game and an abundance of fish. If the tradition has an historical basis, as it, no doubt, has, that must be sought in some other crossing. Some river or narrow strait might be crossed in boats in one night, as Washington crossed the Delaware. Charles X, of Sweden, it is true, with his army, crossed the Little Belt on the ice, between the mainland and the island of Fyen, in 1658, but that strait is only a mile across at its narrowest point, and yet that is regarded as quite a feat in the grim history of war.

But if this was not a passage over Behring strait, where could it have happened? Possibly it was not a march on the ice at all. The translators may have misunderstood the symbolic pictures, especially if they have been at all influenced by pre-conceived theories, as sometimes will happen. But that is a question that must be left to scholars to clear up. If the ice feature is eliminated, there are many places that might fit the narrative.

The records follow the wanderings and divisions and conflicts of the people. At the Fish River (Nemasipi), which "separated the land," they settled for some time. Professor Rafinesque remarks that, according to Hekewelder, this river is the Mississippi, but the professor thinks it is the Illinois river. But here, he says, began the wars with the *Talegas*, the northern *Toltecas* or *Atlantes*, circa 48 generations before 1600, or near the beginning of our era, which continued for four generations, or over 130 years, till about 150 after Christ. The allies, *Talamatans*, which are the Hurons and Iroquois, then united. They are since called *Delamantans* and *Lamantans*.

Laman. In these names, as in the geographical name *Lumonaki* (the White Country), the name of Laman seems to be perpetuated.

Sidon. That name means Fishing River. It is the name of a famous river in the Book of Mormon. The name Mississippi has the same meaning. The famous river in the Book of Mormon and the famous North American river have, if the meaning is considered, identically the same name.

Two lessons are brought home to us, when we compare the Book of Mormon and other ancient American records.

One is the absolute originality of the Book of Mormon. It is an independent document, with not the slightest trace of plagiarism.

The material on which it is written is neither cotton, nor silk, nor the maguey leaves, nor even stone slabs, but metal plates, the very best material for the purpose of the compilers of the book.

The script used is neither the hieroglyphs of the Mayas, nor the picture writing of other aborigines, but a simplification of "reformed Egyptian," which I suppose to be the "Old Israelitic," with which Lehi must have been familiar, and which actually was a "reformed Egyptian" alphabet, adapted to the needs of practical business men, like the Phoenicians.

The subject and scope of the Book are equally original. It is not, and it does not profess to be, a universal history of the American race, its origin, its development, its degeneration and wanderings and vicissitudes. It is neither a Maya record, nor an Aztec, nor an Inca, nor an Algonkin, but a Nephite record. It is one of the several original American records, with its own field. It tells us in broad outlines something of the history of the Jaredites, or rather a small portion of them; of the colonists of Lehi, with its two main divisions, and of the Mulekites. But it does not give us to understand that these are the only people that ever inhabited or ever settled on the American continents.

Another lesson is the agreement in the main features of the Book of Mormon history and other records. American ancient history is the history of retrogression from a very high cultural level to a lower one, due to disintegration and strife, with notable efforts here and there to regain the lost heights. This fact is written all over the American continents. And the agreement of the Book of Mormon with these facts is one of the strong evidences of the truth of the sacred volume, and this evidence is strengthened by every new discovery in the wonderful domain of American archaeology.

Now, Why Stop?

Now, why stop and let sorrow take control?
 For God is just, his works are manifold;
 Or why condemn? For in this life we are
 More weak than seems the smallest heavenly star.
 Or why feel blue and say the world's gone wrong,
 Because we hear no more its pleasant song?
 Or, say ye not that life is only vain,
 For joy is sure to follow after pain.
 And, after all, the things we really prize,
 Are love and hope for that tranquil paradise.
 Our sorrow at the loss of our dear friend,
 Only makes us sense more joyfully the end.
 We live by faith, and it is freely given,
 And by that power we know God lives in heaven.
 So, with this hope impressed upon each mind,
 Let's turn not back nor even look behind;
 But let our faith forever active be;
 To lead to life in all eternity.

Auburn, Wyoming.

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