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Ancient Pictographs of Southern Utah

Author(s): Harold L. Snow

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Abstract: In this article, corresponding words in ancient near Eastern languages and those of American Indians is seen as evidence of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon because Latter-day Saints believe the book is a sacred history of ancient inhabitants of America who came from Jerusalem.

ANCIENT PICTOGRAPHS OF SOUTHERN UTAH

BY HAROLD L. SNOW

While on a recent trip to parts of southern Utah, including San Juan and Wayne counties, Professor Andrew A. Kerr, of the archaeology department of the University of Utah, made a special study of pictographs. These were found carved on the rock cliffs of those regions. They may have been made probably more than a thousand years ago by the early ancestors of our modern Indians.

Pictographs are not the same things as the hieroglyphics of ancient times. Instead of being a written language, the pictographs seem to be a form of thought-writing which seeks to convey ideas by means of picture-signs. They may be just marks which suggest the object or idea in mind. The main purpose of this art, it seems, was to express a thought, register a fact, or convey a message.

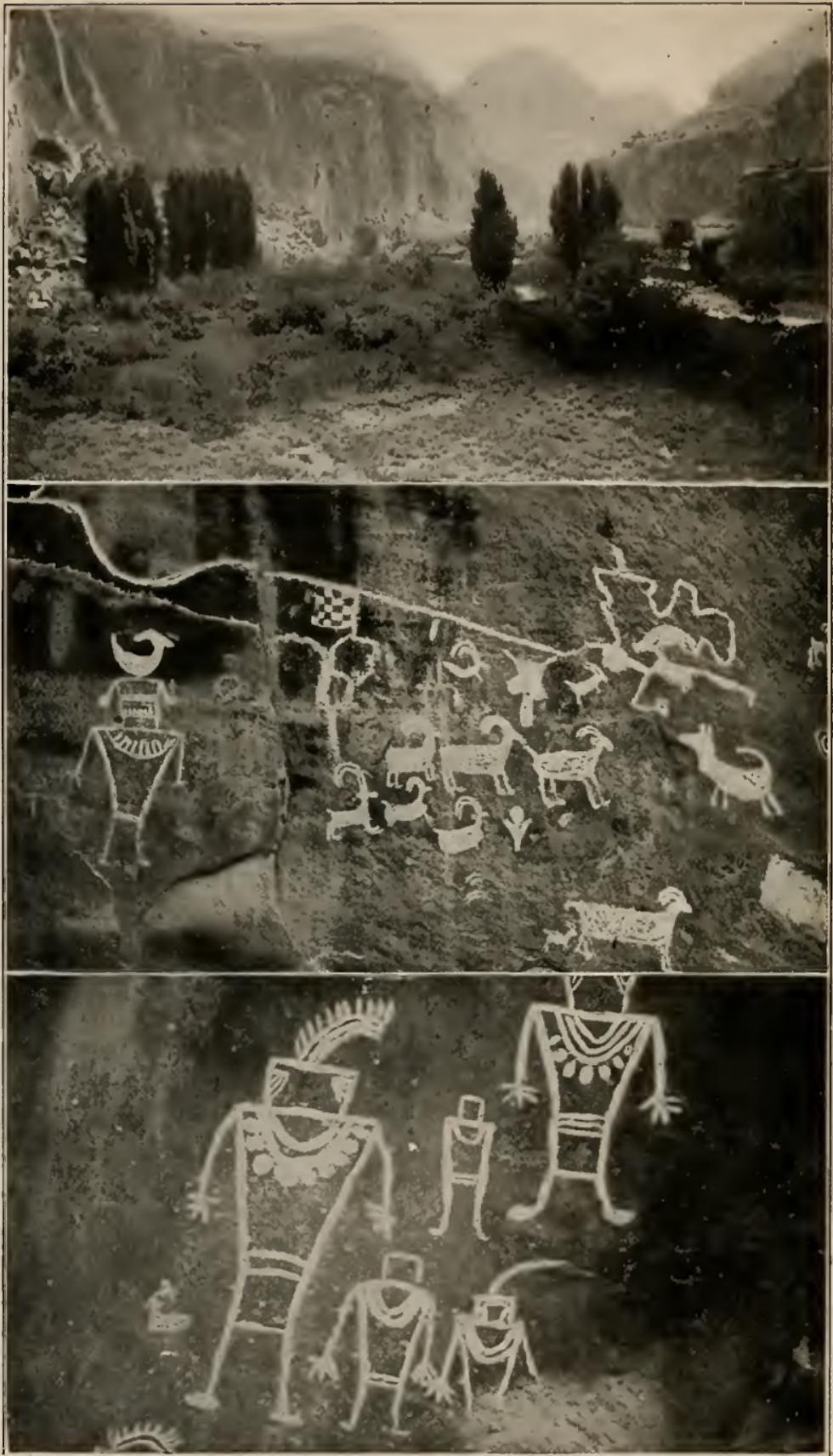
Pictographs were made in many parts of North America by the ancient inhabitants of the country. These are found in the form of pictures of different kinds of objects, having been made in most instances by the use of sharp-pointed stones or arrow heads. Most of the pictographs which are found in southern Utah, represent the sun, elk, snakes, mountain sheep, goats and human beings. At times there are found straight and also queerly curved lines near a picture of some animal. These are interpreted by some to be maps of the country or indications of the presence of water holes.

One of the stone tools which it is believed was used to cut pictographs into the flat rocks of the canyon walls in San Juan county is now found among the archaeological relics in the University of Utah museum.

Explaining the significance of pictographs, Henry W. Henshaw, who spent much time studying the American Indian, writes:

"Pictographs, on the one hand, are more or less closely connected with sign language by which they may have been preceded in point of time. Some, indeed, see in pictography a later stage of gesture speech, but the evidences assumed to be indicative of such genetic connection fall far short of proof, and it is believed that pictography may have had a more or less independent origin and career. Pictographs, on the other hand, are closely connected with every varying form of script and print, past and present, the latter in fact derived directly or indirectly from them. Although the earliest use of picture-signs is shrouded in the mists of antiquity, and although they have been employed by all uncivilized peoples, it is chiefly to the Indian of North and South America we must look for a comprehensive knowledge of their use and purpose, since among them alone were both pictographs and sign language found in full and significant employ. Pictographs have been made upon a great variety of objects, a favorite being the human body. Among other natural substances, recourse of the pictographer has been had to stone, bone, skins, feathers, quills, gourds, shells, earth, sand, copper, and wood, while textile and fabrics figure prominently in the list.

"The tools by which, and the materials of which, pictographs have been made, are almost as various as the objects upon which they have been found. For carving upon hard substances, including cutting, pecking, scratch-



Photos by A. A. Kerr.

Top: The Dome, Fruita, Utah. Many of the pictographs are found on the rocks of the cliff in the background at the left. Center and bottom: pictographs.

ing and rubbing, a piece of hard, pointed stone, frequently perhaps an arrow-point, was an effective tool. For incising bark and similar substances a pointed bone was employed. A piece of charcoal, or more often a bit of red ocher served for drawing. Dyes of various shades of brown, red and yellow, which were extracted from plants, were available for painting. The Zuni and Navajo employed corn meal for ceremonial marking of their bodies, and for their famous dry paintings they used sand, ashes, and powdered mineral and vegetable substances of various hues."

The ancient savage artists used to emphasize prominent and unmistakable features of an object or animal which they wished to show in their pictographs. For instance, in the pictographs which are shown in Professor Kerr's photos, the necklace and head-dress of specific design are large and plainly shown, while the arms and hands and fingers of the figures representing human beings are shown by straight lines. This emphasis of important features, authorities declare, finally led to the elimination of everything but essentials in the making of pictographs.

It is not believed, by most authorities on the subject, that the Indian pictographs record events of great importance. The report of the American Bureau of Ethnology refers to this idea as follows:

"It would seem that the oft-expressed belief that a mine of information respecting the customs, origin, and migrations of ancient peoples is locked up in these generally indecipherable symbols must be abandoned. It is interesting to note that similar and sometimes identical pictographic symbols appear in widely remote parts of the world. Pictographs of Central and South America show remarkable resemblances to some from New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Bearing in mind the racial identity, similar culture status, and in a general way the similar environment of their makers, such resemblances and even identities in pictographic representations are in no wise surprising. Even were it possible to establish for these similar and widely separated symbols a common significance, which is not the case, such facts are best interpreted as coincident, and as closely analogous to the occurrence of identical words in unrelated languages. Upon this head Col. Mallery pertinently remarks that attempts to prove relationship identity of symbols is of less importance than general similarity of design and workmanship. His further statement, conservative though it be, that by the latter criteria it is possible, to a limited extent, to infer migrations and priscan habitat, is less convincing. It is thought that criteria like these should be employed with great caution, and that in such studies their chief value must ever be as aids in connection with other and corroborative evidence."

The Latter-day Saints, however, can see more to the corresponding words in the ancient languages and those of the Indians than can other people of the world because of the "other and corroborative evidence" which we have in the Book of Mormon, and in modern-day revelation. So we cannot let it suffice to call such corresponding words, customs, habits and traditions of the Indians and those of the old ancients of Asia "just coincidents" in every case.

Attempts to interpret the rock-writings of the ancients on the American continent have so far proved unsuccessful; but who can tell what keys may yet be found?

Chicago, Ill.