



Type: Magazine Article

The Book of Mormon Originally Written in Hieroglyphics - II

Author(s): Thomas W. Brookbank

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (April 1911), pp. 500–505

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Abstract: Offers some evidence from worldwide sources to corroborate Mormon's statement in the Book of Mormon that the text was written in reformed Egyptian characters.

The Book of Mormon Originally Written in Hieroglyphics.

BY THOMAS W. BROOKBANK.

II.

Returning to the leading line of thought, all the circumstances of the case as we have reviewed them, show that when Nephi began to record the history of his people, his knowledge of the necessary symbolical forms was limited. New forms, whether of the reformed or of the unreformed order, had to be devised as the writing progressed, and new subjects came to hand for treatment. Under these conditions, a beginner in the extremely difficult work of engraving hieroglyphics on metal, should leave some traces here and there of his lack of skill and general efficiency. Signs of this character easily discernible in the Book of Mormon text will soon be noticed. But before occupying our attention with them, it is advisable to illustrate what is meant by hieroglyphical writing, in order that younger readers may be better prepared to appreciate the merits of the case.

Blair, in his *Rhetoric*, University Edition, Lecture VII, says:

According to the properties which they (the Egyptians) ascribed to or the qualities with which they supposed natural objects to be endowed, they pitched upon them to be the emblems, or hieroglyphics, of moral objects; and employed them in their writing for that end. Thus ingratitude was denominated by a viper; imprudence by a fly; wisdom by an ant; victory by a hawk; a dutiful child by a stork; a man universally shunned by an eel, which they supposed to be found in company with no other fish. Sometimes they joined together two or more of these hieroglyphical characters; as a serpent with a hawk's head to denote nature, with God presiding over it.

These examples are Egyptian, and are not given as illustrative of the "reformed" Egyptian system used by the Nephites. They give us, however, an idea of the unusual difficulties which must be met and overcome when one is writing according to a system based on the Egyptian. The number of different characters required by such a method was certainly quite large; and the labor and patience necessary in order to picture them properly and neatly when engraved on metal plates, can scarcely be appreciated by people who use a simple alphabetic system. Mistakes could not be corrected easily, and we may be sure that new forms would not be multiplied needlessly by beginners. Few ordinary mortals could remember the particular outlines of more than a comparatively small number of them, and hence constant reference to the key for the proper character to be used, would have to be made—a labor involving much loss of time and tests of patience.

Coming now to the evidence found in the text of Nephi's writings, (I Nephi and II Nephi) that these books were not written in the native language of their author, we notice how he clings persistently to some symbol, or word combination, with which he became familiar soon after he began to write his records. The first example which shall be submitted is the phrase, "the things which." This is used once in I Nephi 1: 6, and again in verse 7; three times in 1: 16, and twice in 2: 1; and often in the next few chapters. Now, the compound relative "what" could be substituted generally in these examples; but not until we come to I Nephi 15: 17 do we find that the compounded form has been devised and used. "Exceeding" and "exceedingly" supply other examples. "Exceeding" occurs in Nephi's first book in 2: 16; 3: 8, 14, 25; 4: 9; 5: 1; 7: 16; 8: 12, 23, 27; etc. "Exceedingly" in 1: 6; 4: 28; 5: 9; 8: 4, 36; etc. Now, without any material modification of the sense of either of these words, in most of these examples, or, perhaps, in all of them, and in others which can readily be found in the two books already mentioned, could be substituted by "very" alone or in phrase combination, but this word used as an adverbial modifier we fail to find until near the close of Nephi's second book. "Very," adjectively used, occurs in I Nephi 14: 1; 15: 14, 17; 19: 7; and adverbially in II Nephi 27: 28—there forming part of a quotation from Isaiah 29: 17.

The omission of this word from the first portion of the text of the Book of Mormon is certainly rather significant, in view of the fact that modern English authors use "very" as an adverb quite frequently in their productions; and the advisability or advantage of rejecting its use could hardly suggest itself to Joseph Smith or Sidney Rigdon as the authors of an alleged imposture. These last remarks apply also to the word "quite," which does not occur in the first half of the Book of Mormon, unless it is found in the quotation from Isaiah. "Quite" is a term in daily use among English speaking people, and what plausible reason can be assigned for its general, perhaps total, exclusion from an alleged literary production by American authors? It would often serve quite well instead of "exceeding." There is to be added to these words of common occurrence in English literature, the term "just" in combinations such as "just now," "just come," etc., which the first Nephi does not use at all, and it may not occur in the Book of Mormon anywhere. "Guess"* is a word that Joseph Smith, a native of Vermont, might be expected to use frequently; but it does not occur in the first half of the book in view, and it is a pretty question whether it is found in any of the inspired word of God to this Church; for he never makes a guess, as mortals so often do. The list of common, but excluded words, is closed for the present with "namely." We fail to find it in the Nephite records, as an original term.

The elimination so largely of these common English words from the Book of Mormon vocabulary, is fairly conclusive evidence that no modern author wrote that book originally, and it is remarkable to what an extent Joseph Smith, as the inspired modern translator of ancient records, was restrained from using them. He certainly must have been familiar with them all.

The claim that the words just referred to do not occur in the Book of Mormon as stated, must be accepted as being simply the result of conscientious labor to ascertain the truth in the matter. If any mistake has been made, I am not aware of it.

Proceeding once more with citations from Nephi's writings,

* Helaman 16:16 is the only place in the Book of Mormon, so far as is known, where the word occurs, and there in the past tense.—ED.

it is observed that the expression, "And it came to pass," is of monotonous occurrence in the first chapters of his first book; but turning to II Nephi, chapter 1, we find that it has been almost wholly discarded—occurring in that section only once; and other chapters can readily be found wherein the change is very manifest. "Being overcome with the Spirit," is a portion of the text in I Nephi 1: 7. It is repeated in verse 8. "Depart into the wilderness," is a reading in I Nephi 2: 2; and "Departed into the wilderness" occurs twice in verse 4. "Down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah" is found in I Nephi 5: 12, and again in the following verse. "After the manner of," and "It must needs be," are other familiar examples. These illustrations will be closed with a few additional references, as follows—all from the first book of Nephi:

	FIRST USE.	SECOND USE.
Learning	Nephi 1: 1	Nephi 1: 2
Language.....	" 1: 2	" 1: 2
Knowledge.....	" 1: 1	" 1: 3
My days.	" 1: 1	" 1: 1
Record	" 1: 1	" 1: 2
Dwelt.....	" 1: 4	" 1: 6
Saw and heard.....	" 1: 6	" 1: 6
The Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy.....	" 3: 2	" 3: 4
Went forth.....	" 1: 5	" 1: 11
Carried away.....	" 1: 8	" 1: 13
Marvelous	" 1: 14	" 1: 14
He hath written many things.....	" 1: 16	" 1: 16
Concerning	" 1: 18	" 1: 18
Testified... ..	" 1: 19	" 1: 19
Make a full account.....	" 1: 16	" 1: 16

In some cases we find a word or a phrase was used three, or perhaps four or more times within the compass of a few verses, as, for instance, "partake" in 8: 11, 12, 15, 16, 17.

This characteristic of repeating, within a brief space, terms once used, is observable in most parts of the Book of Mormon, but is particularly noticeable in the first sections of that work. Now, upon what hypothesis can we most reasonably account for these peculiarities?

The frequent repetition of the same words and phrases, and a general sameness in forms for expressing thought, are common verities among uneducated people. But while this is true respecting those in general who are unschooled, it is equally true that those who are learning a *foreign* language, find themselves in identical straits as to the use of terms at the beginning of their studies. From this latter point of view, it is as evident as the light of day, that the repetition of words, phrases, etc., and no great variation in style in the Book of Mormon, is precisely what we should expect to find in the production of any person who was writing in difficult symbols with which he was not perfectly familiar. Attention has already been called to the probable extent of Nephi's knowledge of hieroglyphical forms, and his lack of practice in writing them, and under such circumstances it was only natural that he should, after having, for example, engraved the hieroglyphic for knowledge, copy it, (since it was in sight) a second or a third time, if it would at all serve his purpose. He could copy the form before him with much less labor than he could devise a new one, or search out a substitute from the key.

His increasing proficiency as he progressed with his work, is discernible from the contrast that exists between the first and the latter portions of it. An illustration in point has heretofore been cited.

Other writers of other sections of the Book of Mormon would, for similar reasons, copy, to a greater or less extent, the hieroglyphics which had just been engraved by them on the plates. It is not claimed that this line of argument is sufficient to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon was written originally in symbolic characters; but who can reasonably deny that repetitions would naturally occur in writing a record of the size and character of that contained in the work just named, by the use of multiplied and doubtless many complex forms with which the author or authors could not so perfectly familiarize themselves, as it is possible to do with an alphabetical system, containing only a few simple forms. The characteristics under consideration stand, therefore, as a consistency of great value to sustain Joseph Smith's statement that the original records of the Book of Mormon were written in hieroglyphics. If they did not occur in it, long ago some of his enemies would doubtless have wanted to know how Nephi, a young

man who apparently had few opportunities for studying a foreign system of hieroglyphical writing, could, nevertheless, write fluently by such a method from the very beginning of his work.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SNOWFLAKE, ARIZ.

The Man Who Follows the Plow.

I'm not so much at singin' as you high, kaffutin' chaps,
My voice it may be husky, and a little rough, perhaps;
But I have been a plowin' with a lazy team, you see,
And it keeps me pretty busy with my "Get-up, whoa-haw, gee!"
But, if you'll pay attention, I have a word to say,
About the great mistakes you make, and do it every day,
In dealing out your praises, and I want to tell you now,
Too often you forget the man who walks behind the plow.

REFRAIN:

You may talk about your learned men, with their wit and wisdom rare,
Your painters and your poets, they get praises everywhere;
It's well enough to make a show, but will you tell me how
This world could ever do without the man who follows the plow?

'Tis well enough to go to school, to learn to read and write:
It's easier still to dress up fine, and sport around all night.
Your music, paintin' and poetry may all be hard to beat,
But tell me, what you're going to do for something good to eat?
You say my boots are muddy, and my clothing it is coarse;
That I'd make a good companion for the oxen or the horse.
My face is red, my hands are hard, of course, I will allow,
But do not be so quick to spurn the man who follows the plow.

I like your great inventions, I'm glad you're getting smart;
I like to hear your music, for it kinder stirs my heart;
But it will never stir the stomach of any hungry man;
So let me call your attention to the sort of a thing that can.
Now, boys, don't be so anxious to leave the good old farm;
Your father's strength is failing, soon he'll need your youthful arm.
If you're honest in your purpose, at your feet the world will bow,
For the greatest of the great men, Abraham Lincoln, was a man
who steered the plow.—SELECTED BY HAROLD C. KIMBALL.