

THE WORLD

OF THE JAREDITES

PART V

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CONCERNING DESERET

My dear Professor F.

BY ALL odds the most interesting and attractive passenger in Jared's company is *deseret*, the honeybee. We cannot pass this creature by without a glance at its name and possible significance, for our text betrays an interest in *deseret* that goes far beyond respect for the mere feat of transporting insects, remarkable though that is. The word *deseret*, we are told (Ether 2:3), "by interpretation is a honeybee," the word plainly coming from the Jaredite language, since Ether (or Moroni) must interpret it. Now it is a remarkable coincidence that the word *deseret* enjoyed a position of great ritual prominence among the founders of the classical Egyptian civilization, who associated it very closely with the symbol of the bee. These people, the authors of the so-called Second Civilization, seem to have entered Egypt from the northeast as part of the same general migration that sent the makers of the classical Babylonian civilization into Mesopotamia.⁷⁵ Thus we have the founders of the two great parent civilizations of antiquity entering their new homelands at approximately the same time and from a common center—apparently the same center from which the Jaredites also took their departure, but more of this later. What concerns us here is that the Egyptian pioneers carried with them a fully developed cult and symbolism from their Asiatic home.⁷⁶ Chief among their cult objects would seem to be the bee, for the land they first settled in Egypt was forever after known as "the land of the bee," and designated in hieroglyphic by the picture of a bee, while every king of Egypt "in his capacity of 'King of Upper and

Lower Egypt'" bore the title, "he who belongs to the sedge (the sign of Upper Egypt) and the bee (the sign of Lower Egypt)."⁷⁷

From the first, students of hieroglyphic were puzzled as to what sound value should be given to the bee-picture.⁷⁸ By the New Kingdom, according to Sethe, the Egyptians themselves had forgotten the original word,⁷⁹ and Grapow designates the bee-title of honor as "unreadable."⁸⁰ Is it not strange that such a common and such a very important word should have been forgotten? What happened? Something not at all unusual in the history of cult and ritual, namely the deliberate avoidance or prohibition of the sacred word. We know that the bee sign was not always written down, but in its place the picture of the red crown of Lower Egypt was often "substituted for superstitious reasons."⁸¹ The substitution was a natural one, for the bee like the red crown was identical with the majesty of Lower Egypt. If we do not know the original name of the bee, we do know the designation of the red crown—the name it bore among other things when substituted for the bee. The name was *dsrt* (the vowels are not known, but we can be sure they were all short),⁸¹ for the founders of Egyptian civilization called their land *dsrt*, and the crown they served *dsrt*. Now when the crown appears in place of the bee, it is sometimes called *bit* "bee,"⁸² yet the bee, though the exact equivalent of the crown, is never by the same principle called *dsrt*. This certainly suggests deliberate avoidance: If the Egyptians were reluctant to draw the picture of the bee "for superstitious reasons," they would certainly hesitate to pronounce its true name. The word *dsrt* happens to mean *red* in Egyptian and could safely be used in

that connection but never applied to the bee. A familiar parallel immediately leaps to mind: To this day no one knows how the Hebrew word for God, YHW, is to be pronounced, because no good Jew would dare to pronounce it even if he knew, but instead when he sees the written word always substitutes another word, *Adonai*, in its place to avoid uttering the awful sound of the Name. Yet the combination of sounds *YHW* is a very common verb form in Hebrew and as such used all the time. There are other examples of such substitution in Hebrew, and there must have been many in hieroglyphic which, as Kees points out, is really a kind of double talk.

That the Egyptians deliberately avoided calling the bee *deseret* while applying the name to things symbolized by it and even substituted for it is further indicated by another remarkable fact. The bee symbol spread in other directions from its original home, enjoying a prominent place in the mysteries of the Hittites, the Finnish *Kalevala*, and surviving in some nations in certain Easter rites. In all of these the bee is the agent through which the dead king or hero is resurrected from the dead, and it is in this connection that the bee also figures in the Egyptian rites.⁸³ Now the original "deseret" people, the founders of the so-called Second Civilization, claimed that their king, and he alone, possessed the secret of resurrection. That, in fact, was the cornerstone of their religion; it was nothing less than "the king's secret," the power over death by which he held his authority.⁸⁴ If the bee had any part in the profoundly secret royal resurrection rites of the Old Empire—and how else can we account for its presence in the later and more popular versions of the

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of the Northwest American Indians, one must reckon to a greater extent than most of us were hitherto prepared to admit, with the possibility of diffusion from Eastern Europe and the Middle East."⁸⁰ A few years ago this would have been high treason to American archaeologists. Now it brings the new world into the old world picture. In the case of the Nephites we can pinpoint the original old world cultures represented. In the case of the Jaredites we can almost do the same, for they came from the same region, to the north of Mesopotamia, that served in ancient times as a veritable martialing area for world invasions. That is where their culture belongs, and that is where it fits.

It is still too early to attempt a detailed picture of life in the days of the dispersion. "The archaeology of nomad central Asia is still in its infancy," writes G. N. Roerich. "A new branch of historical science is coming into being, the object of which will be to formulate laws that will build up the nomad state and to study the remains of a great forgotten past."⁸¹ But the general picture begins to take form. Let me quickly sketch for you the rough outline.

The basic fact is space—vast expanses of grassland, woods, and mountains, where hunters and herdsmen have ranged since time immemorial, trespassing on each other's territory, raiding each other's settlements, stealing each other's cattle, and grimly pursuing or escaping each other by turns. In good times the tribes multiply, and there is crowding; in bad times they are forced to invade each other's lands in search of grass. The result is chronic chaos, a condition which has been a standing challenge to the genius and ambition of men with a talent for leadership. Periodically the Great Man appears in Asia to unite his own tribe in fanatical devotion to himself, subdue neighboring tribes one after another, and by crushing all resistance at last bring "peace and order" to the world. The endless expanse of the steppes and the lack of any natural boundaries call for statesmanship in the grand manner, the concept and techniques of empire being of Asiatic origin. For a time one mind nearly

succeeds in ruling the world, but a quick reckoning comes when the Great Man dies: In a wild scramble for the throne among his ambitious relatives the universal empire promptly collapses: Space, the force that produced the super-state, now destroys it by allowing disgruntled or scheming heirs and pretenders to go off by themselves to distant regions and found new states with the hope in time of absorbing all the others and restoring world dominion. The chaos of the steppes is not the primitive disorder of savage tribes accidentally colliding from time to time; it is rather, and always has been, a shrewd game of chess, played by men of boundless arrogance and formidable intellect with mighty armies at their disposal.⁸¹

Now to turn to the Jaredites, their whole history is the tale of a fierce and unrelenting struggle for power. The Book of Ether is a typical ancient chronicle—military and political history with casual references to the wealth and splendor of kings. You will note that the whole structure of Jaredite history hangs on a succession of strong men, most of them rather terrible figures. Few annals of equal terseness and brevity are freighted with an equal burden of wickedness. The pages of Ether are dark with intrigue and violence, strictly of the Asiatic brand. When a rival for the kingdom is bested, he goes off by himself in the wilderness and bides his time while gathering an "army of outcasts." This is done by "drawing off" men to himself through lavish bestowal of gifts and bribes. The forces thus won are retained by the taking of terrible oaths. When the aspirant to the throne finally becomes strong enough to dispose of his rival by assassination, revolution, or a pitched battle, the former bandit and outlaw in turn mounts the throne to cope with a new batch of rebels and pretenders. This you will instantly recognize as the biography of the typical Asiatic conqueror. It is a strange, savage picture of nightmare politics that the Book of Ether paints, but it is historically a profoundly true picture. Take a few examples.

In the oldest records of the race we find the supreme god, founder of the state and cult, "Winning his way to the throne by battle, often by vio-

lence against family predecessors, which generally involves horrific and obscene incidents."⁸² So much for the antiquity of the system. There is now ample reason for believing that the oldest empires known to us were by no means the first, and that the familiar process goes back to prehistoric times: "Empires must have been formed and destroyed then as they were to be later on."⁸³ Such empires "were not the result of gradual expansion or development but rapidly became enormous empires under the leadership of a single great man," McGovern observes, "and under the reign of his successors slowly but surely declined," though in many cases they "disintegrate immediately after the death of their founders."⁸⁴

(To be continued)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

⁸⁰Omitted from text.

⁸¹We are following Moret in this, *Hist. de l'Orient*.

⁸²Moret, *op. cit.* I, 173.

⁸³A. H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (Oxford, 1927), pp. 72-73.

⁸⁴See the speculations of W. Pleyte, "La Guepe," *Ztschr. für ägyptische Sprache* IV (1866), p. 14f; Kurt Sethe, "Ueber einen vermeintlichen Lautwerth des Zeichens der Biene," *Ibid.* XXX (1892), 113-9; Karl Piehl, "La Lecture du Signe (Abeille)," *Ibid.* XXXVI (1898), p. 85.

⁸⁵Sethe, *Aeg. Ztscher.* XXX, 117.

⁸⁶H. Grapow, *Aegypt. Handwörterbuch*, 223.

⁸⁷Gardiner, *op. cit.*, p. 491. The final "t" is the feminine ending, the root being *dsr*.

⁸⁸A. Erman & H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägypt. Sprache*, I, 435.

⁸⁹T. H. Gaster, *Thespis*, pp. 364-367. In his notes on the Telepinu Myth, Gaster points to ties that connect the rites all over the ancient world.

⁹⁰Moret, *op. cit.* I, 75-180, 189, 207-222, 230ff, especially 257 f.

⁹¹In Egypt "the kings of the North were incarnated in the totem of Bouto: a Bee (bit)"; Moret, *op. cit.* I, 178.

⁹²Erman & Grapow, *op. cit.* I, 434.

⁹³K. Sethe, in *Aeg. Ztscher.* XXX (1892), 118: *Als Determinativ steht es aber, was zu beachten ist, stets allen anderen voran. . .*

⁹⁴Moret, *op. cit.* I, 12.

⁹⁵H. Frankfort, *Cylinder Seals* (London, Macmillan, 1939), p. 311.

⁹⁶*Trails to Inmost Asia*, p. 123.

⁹⁷For a general treatment of this theme, see Ellsworth Huntington, *Mainsprings of Civilization* (N. Y., John Wiley, 1945), pp. 187-207.

⁹⁸C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* (The Schweich Lectures 1945; London, 1948), p. 1.

⁹⁹Vernadsky, *Ancient Russia*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁰McGovern, *Early Empires*, p. 116 f.