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*Did Lehi and his family bring to the Americas traces of Persian culture because of Zoroaster's influence on Jewish thought?*

# SINCE CUMORAH

NEW VOICES FROM THE DUST

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*The appearance in the Dead Sea Scrolls of a story similar to that of Moroni and the "treading upon the garments" incident of the Book of Mormon is another mark of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, according to the author. But it also shows the influence of Persian culture—and Zoroaster—upon Lehi and his Jewish contemporaries.*

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● From the long Isaiah discussion we are learning what the even longer Homeric controversy has taught us, that once we have questioned the unity of any literary composition, we cannot guarantee the integrity of any of the parts it breaks up into. Also, we are learning that the resemblances and differences between texts do not necessarily prove common or different authorship; Prof. Gordon has demonstrated at length that a change of pace, mood, subject matter, or even dialect in an ancient writing does not necessarily denote a change of authorship. Neither, on the other hand, does a "striking resemblance" between passages

prove common origin.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, it is precisely the Deutero-Isaiah that is written in language "that often means many things at once, that shimmers and floats over space and time"; so any attempts to identify historically what it speaks of must "remain strictly confined to subjective criteria."<sup>21</sup>

Hopes for an objective approach to the subject today are sought in the Iranian affinities of Isaiah. Since the Persians did not take over until the end of the Babylonian captivity, it is assumed that traces of Persian influence in Isaiah require a dating of some sections to a period long after the lifetime of the prophet. But here again we run into a very complicated situation. D. Winston has very recently published a lengthy survey of "The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran" and found that component to be a very real quantity indeed. Years ago we called attention to Iranian elements in the Book of Mormon, and if we are still at a loss to explain them, the experts are no less baffled by the same influences in the Bible; at present "investigators

are as divided as ever as to the extent of Iranian influence on Jewish literature."<sup>22</sup>

The main difficulty is in deciding what is and what is not distinctively Iranian. Teachings found both in the early Persian writings and in the Jewish scriptures and apocrypha include the idea of a council in heaven at the creation, a division of opinion and rebellion, a plan of probation for man on the earth, a world period of 7,000 years, the division of history into twelve periods, the resurrection of the body, etc. In these things "Zoroastrianism allies itself with Judaic religious as against the Indian and Gnostic view," while such doctrines as "the dualism of the Dead Sea Scrolls belong to the Iranian rather than the Greek or Gnostic variety." Plainly there is a genuine affinity here.<sup>23</sup>

But at the same time the Jews share these same ideas with other neighbors both nearer than the Persians and able to produce written sources far older than anything the Iranians can offer.<sup>24</sup> In fact, as Wesphal Hellbusch now points



out, Iran is more often a clearing-house for older teachings than a place of origin, so what passes for "Iranian" doctrine may well be "a fusion of Persian and Babylonian teachings."<sup>25</sup> Thus if Isaiah 44-45 "shows very close resemblances to the so-called Cyrus Cylinder . . . it has been suggested that both are dependent on the style of the Babylonian Court Inscriptions."<sup>26</sup> If the same two chapters of Isaiah suggest ancient Iranian teachings about the creation, the same teachings may be found at a much earlier time and much closer to Israel in the Memphite theology of Egypt—and Isaiah's use of Egyptian imagery and ideas has long been recognized.<sup>27</sup>

The case for Iranian priority in the Bible must await some means of dating of Iranian traditions, which at the moment present "insuperable chronological difficulties."<sup>28</sup> Since, as we have already noted, the appearance of the name of Cyrus in the Book of Isaiah does not even serve to date the verse in which it occurs, the more subjective appeals to a Persian atmosphere, such as the much-debated

issue of whether chapters 40-48 were written before the Edict of Cyrus and 49-55 after or whether they were written at the same time, can hardly be expected to settle anything.<sup>29</sup>

Further doubts as to just how Iranian the Iranian elements in Jewish literature really are are suggested by the fact that some Persian teachings are matched by Jewish ones that are definitely older and "actually indigenous to Jewish literature."<sup>30</sup> We must not forget, as J. B. Bauer reminds us, that much of the material in the old Apocryphal writings is "much older than the books themselves."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it is as likely that the Persians with their well-known hospitality to the ideas and religions of other people borrowed from the Jews as the other way around. Thus, the imagery of the light versus darkness which constantly recurs in the early Jewish writings, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, does *not* appear in the old Persian writings, but turns up later in heretical Iranian teachings, plainly borrowed from somewhere else.<sup>32</sup>

Now, the Book of Mormon itself contains one story that is far more Persian than anything in Isaiah: The legend of Kawe, who became the founder of the Persian monarchy and priesthood when he put his garment on a pole and went throughout the land rousing the people to fight for liberty and overthrow the traitor and false claimant to the throne, is the story of Moroni and Amalikhiah even in detail—and it is far older than Lehi or Isaiah.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, in this particular episode of the Book of Mormon, Moroni is consciously and deliberately following old ritual patterns. In one chapter, Alma 46, we have several ancient traditions and

practices *not* mentioned in the Bible but carried out or discussed by Moroni in full consciousness of their archaic background. Most of these can now be readily understood in the light of the so-called Battle Scroll (IQM) of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Since we have discussed most of them elsewhere, we mention them only briefly here:

1. Moroni rends his coat and writes a high-sounding slogan on a piece of it, which he then fastens on the end of a pole as a banner. Such slogans and banners now meet us in IQM, Sections 5-7.

2. Before the battle "when he had poured out his soul to God," Moroni "named all the land which was south of the land Desolation, . . . and all the land, both on the north and on the south—a chosen land. . . ." (Al. 46:17.) Whether we punctuate this to mean that he named the enemy land desolation and the rest "chosen" or that he named the "chosen land" and let the rest keep its ill-omened title, the point is that we have here the practice, now attested by the Battle Scroll, of formally blessing the hosts of Israel and cursing the land of their enemy before the battle.<sup>34</sup>

3. In the next verse Moroni refers to his people as "despised," and he often designates them as the poor. This again is in keeping with the Old World practice as set forth in the IQM.<sup>35</sup>

4. The people, arming themselves, come running to the standard, "rending their garments in token, or as a covenant." Note the emphasis on the symbolism of what is going on; the making of this covenant involves treading on their garments, calling down upon themselves an imprecation should they ever break their covenant: ". . . may [he] cast us at the feet

of our enemies, even as we have cast our garments at thy feet to be trodden under foot, if we shall fall into transgression." (Al. 46:22.)

In a very recent study J. Z. Smith considers under the title of "Treading upon the Garments" an ancient ritual practice attested in the newly discovered early Christian Coptic texts in which a person upon becoming a member of the Church would take off his garment and trample on it "in token" of having cast away an old way of life and also of the trampling of sin underfoot, and especially "with reference to the curses placed on the inciter."<sup>36</sup> Heretofore the custom has been traced to Hellenistic sources, but it now appears from the newly found documents that it is an original and very old Jewish rite "probably to be traced back to Jewish exegesis of Gen. 3:21 . . ."<sup>37</sup> It has all the marks of being archaic and shows that peculiar blend of ritual and real-life behavior which at first made the understanding of the Battle Scroll so difficult and which puts such a distinctive stamp upon some of the historical events in the Book of Mormon.<sup>38</sup>

5. Moroni calls to the people's attention a well-known tradition that they had read of in their books about the two parts of the garments of Joseph and how Jacob reacted to them. (Al. 46:23-27.) A remarkable thing about this story, which his hearers are expected to know by heart, is that though traces of it, or rather the merest hints, turn up in the Apocrypha, the only intelligible version of it available to us is in the account that the great Persian scholar Tha'labi picked up among the Jews living in Iran in the Middle Ages.<sup>39</sup> Of course we don't know how long those Jews or their ancestors had been living in Persia—their being there may have been just a coincidence. But we do have here a clear indication that the writers of the Book

of Mormon had access to records now lost, and there is no reason why the story of Kawe should not be among them.

But why would Moroni follow a pagan model? This is just the question that is bothering students of the Scriptures and the Scrolls. How are we to account for "an Iranian penetration into Qumran," among the strictest of all sectarian Jews, dedicated to living the Law in its purity? How does it happen that early Jewish apocrypha are "saturated with Iranian material"?<sup>40</sup>

The frequent association and identification of Old Testament patriarchs and prophets with Zoroaster in Jewish and, following them, Christian sources, though very difficult to date, shows at least that the Jews had no antipathy for the Persian prophet (who was possibly a contemporary of Lehi).<sup>41</sup> Though, as Winston observes, "the Jewish identification of Zoroaster in itself is no guide whatever in our attempt to ascertain the extent of Iranian-Jewish interpretation,"<sup>42</sup> it does suggest that in the time of Lehi there were sympathetic contacts between the two peoples. If the original image of Zoroaster had been an unfavorable one, it would have remained such traditionally; ergo, the first Jewish impression of Zoroaster was a favorable one. And that could not have been the case had that image come to the Jews as that of an alien prophet of an alien people. The most pleasing Iranian images to the Jews belong to a period of Zoroaster, long before the days of

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forgave sins. In the instance of the palsied man, the forgiveness of sin seems to have been preparatory to the healing of the body. The episode is plainer in the Inspired Version (Matt. 9:2-7):

"And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed; and Jesus, knowing their

Cyrus; they go back to the time of Lehi and hence leave their stamp in the Book of Mormon. Such at any rate is our amateurish surmise.

(To be continued)

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>36</sup>C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook* (Rome: Pontifical Institute, 1947), pp. 6-7.

<sup>37</sup>Eissfeldt, *op. cit.*, p. 453. H. Frey sees in Isaiah 40-55 "a vision, resembling in form the Revelation of St. John," moving "beyond all bounds of space and time"; see the discussion of G. Fohrer, "Zehn Jahre Literatur Zur Alt-testamentlichen Prophetie (1951-1960)," in *Theologische Rundschau*, N.F. 28 (1962/3), pp. 239 ff.

<sup>38</sup>D. Winston, "The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran: A Review of the Evidence," *History of Religions*, 5 (1966), p. 186. For our own observations, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1957), pp. 175-7.

<sup>39</sup>Winston, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-7, 200, 205, 212.

<sup>40</sup>For references, see note 19 above.

<sup>41</sup>S. Westphal-Hellbusch, in *Sumer*, 12 (1956), p. 66. The quotation is from Winston, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

<sup>42</sup>Winston, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>43</sup>Hugh Nibley, in *BYU Studies*, 7, pp. 3-6. Whereas Assyriologists (e.g. Widengren) today derive certain royal epithets in Isaiah from Mesopotamian ritual sources, Egyptologists (such as Morenz) derive the same titles from Egyptian cult; both are older than the Persian. G. Fohrer, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup>Winston, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>45</sup>Eissfeldt, *op. cit.*, p. 447. E. Jenni, "Die Rolle des Kyros bei Deuterosejaja," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 10 (1954), pp. 241-256, points out that Cyrus is a stock figure representing the herald of salvation in ancient literature. Such stock figures were readily substituted for each other; thus the Messianic prophets listed in 3 Ne. 10:15-17 are typical stock figures, representing the same idea regardless of the time in which they lived. A later scribe would not hesitate to put the name of Cyrus in the place of some earlier deliverer who was less familiar to him and his hearers. The name of Cyrus does not appear in the Book of Mormon.

<sup>46</sup>Winston, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>47</sup>J. B. Bauer, in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 20 (1964), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup>Winston, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>49</sup>*An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, pp. 175-7.

<sup>50</sup>Y. Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light . . .* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 15, 215, 223-5; and IQM, secs. 17-19.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 311f, 323.

<sup>52</sup>J. Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," in *History of Religions*, 5 (1966), pp. 224-233. Quotation is from p. 229.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 230-233. It has special reference to the skin garment of Adam.

<sup>54</sup>See our discussion "Old World Ritual in the New World," ch. 23 of *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 186-9, for a translation and discussion.

<sup>56</sup>Winston, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 213-5. On Zoroaster as Lehi's contemporary, see *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, pp. 42f.

<sup>58</sup>Winston, p. 216.

faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee; go thy way and sin no more.

"And, behold, certain of the Scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

"And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore is it that ye think evil in your hearts?

"For is it not easier to say, Thy