



Type: Magazine Article

There Were Jaredites, Part V: "Our Own People"

Author(s): Hugh W. Nibley

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 59, No. 11 (November 1956)

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

Page(s): 818–819, 857–858

Abstract: This wide-ranging series discusses the “epic milieu” of the second millennium B.C. and places the Jaredites in their historical context alongside the Babylonians, Egyptians, early Greeks and others. It makes a comparison between the Book of Ether and ancient writings of Babylon, Egypt, Sumer, and others. The description of the Jaredite boats seem to resemble the boat of Ut-Napitshtim who was the Sumerian counter-part of Noah. Old Jewish and even older Indian sources record the use of shining stones that protect the owner beneath the water. These have been traced back to Babylonian tales of the deluge. Since the Jaredite record reports that their boats were patterned after Noah’s ark, ancient myths that surely have their foundation in real events help to provide greater understanding of the book of Ether. The book of Ether meets all the criteria of epic traditions of heroic societies. The remains of heroic societies are difficult to identify. The fifth part discusses heroic myths and epics in Europe.

There Were Jaredites

by Dr. Hugh Nibley

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

"OUR OWN PEOPLE"

OF ALL THE EPIC CULTURES the three friends considered in their long book-filled discussions, the most involved and interesting were those having to do with our own ancestors. True, their records do not go back to the third and fourth millennia B.C.; yet they are closely related in race and language to people whose records do go back that far; for example, the Hittites and Hurrians seem to be most closely related to the Celts, whose truly epic civilization and heroic literature Chadwick has examined at length.

That scholar, however, is interested in giving us only the evidence found in the Celtic writings; a thousand years earlier classical writers describe the same Celtic heroic culture in far more clear and objective terms. One needs only recall the once familiar pictures from Caesar's *Gallic Wars*: Here we find great nations on the move, princely messengers of great houses constantly coming and going with propositions and challenges; betrayals, plots, coalitions, and conjurations are the order of the day; vast masses of humanity with all their furniture and arms piled on lumbering wagons pour through the passes of the mountains and inundate the plains.

For the classical writers the Celts are the people who are constantly moving about in their painted wagons. In prehistoric times the Latin language borrowed from the Celts a vocabulary "drawn chiefly from the following semantic categories: riding, driving, warfare, clothing, and social hierarchy: common Roman words for serf, and our own word ambassador (Ger. *Amt*: official office) are taken from the Celts."¹ It was strictly a heroic vocabulary. The greatest of all Celtic heroes, King Arthur, built up his body of knightly followers by gifts and grants, and "was so prodigal of his bounties that he began to run short of things to distribute among the huge multitude of knights that came to him."²

At least a century before Arthur, a classical writer recounts an ancient tale of how one hero rode among all the tribes of Gaul scattering gifts with such lavish hand that people followed his wagon everywhere and elected him king of all the tribes.³ Since generosity had to unite with prowess in war and noble blood to make kings, it is not surprising that the Celtic mythological cycles are full of horrible deeds of bloodshed and intrigues among the great houses. The most interesting thing about these cycles is the way each great house or nation is completely exterminated—with the exception of one survivor—by the next great house or nation, and so on. One of these lone survivors wandered through the world for fifty years, living on memories, "as in a fever dream."⁴ These wars of extermination were carried out with ritual formality.

Thus when the Tuatha De Danaan refused to halve all Ireland with the Fir Bolg, their hero formally challenged the strongest of the Fir Bolg to meet him in single combat, while the two armies met at Mag Tured and agreed to spend one hundred days preparing for battle. For the battle "it was agreed that there should be no general engagement but that an equal number of warriors should go out and fight each day!"⁵ Among all the Celts we meet the story of the two brothers who fight a duel in which the winner becomes sole ruler of the land. The king-hero of the Celts is a "curious mixture of cruelty and paternity."⁶

A good king would "do what the men of Byrgwin held best, giving of food and drink to everyone who came . . ." while a bad king "makes a progress round Ireland, demanding the wives and treasures of his hosts," who are honor bound to receive him since, like Arthur's knights, they have all taken mighty oaths to the king.⁷ We have the picture from Joinville of St. Louis as king, going about from place to place in royal progress and sitting under the oak, at which time anyone could approach

him as he righted wrongs and chastened the wicked.⁸ As in other heroic societies, the queen was independent and had her own palace, which exactly paralleled the king's in all its appointments and arrangements.⁹

In numerous legends that tell how successive waves of invaders come to the islands, the invaders are always described as coming from the Great Plain to the East, the Land of the Living, and laying oppressive tribute on the inhabitants of the lands—the descendants of earlier invaders, demanding a tribute of everything including children, to be paid on the night of Samhain feast: two-thirds of all their produce had to be carried yearly to Mag Cetne, the great shrine at the exact center of the earth."¹⁰ The king "gave privilege of refuge, i.e., sanctuary, to the roads . . . leading to the cities and temples," and especially to the royal person, as in Persia.¹¹ In legend the royal establishment is described as a great and fabulous tower that has contact with the other world.¹² The great Merlin describes the taking over of the land in terms that might have been taken right out of the Pyramid Texts, when he tells how under "the favor of the Thunderer . . . the seats of the blessed shall be renewed throughout the lands, and shepherds shall be set in places befitting."¹³

It all seems to be right out of the Egyptian or Babylonian epics, and indeed scholars have long since and often pointed out the extremely close resemblances between the Celtic epic literature, especially the Grail saga, and the Babylonian and Egyptian legends and rituals.¹⁴

WHO AS A CHILD has not stood between two mirrors and seen his image repeated with perfect accuracy but diminishing brightness into green and mysterious depths where "nothing is but what is not"? The eerie and disturbing quality of such an experience is the nearest thing to what one feels in reading the Germanic epics and the Norse sagas. Most

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sagas of the North must be interpreted on a number of different time levels at once. The minstrels of what the Germans call the "High" Middle Ages, themselves living in the completely heroic world of courts and camps, sang the deeds of Richard and Taillefer in romantic times gone by. But Taillefer had led the charge at Hastings as he "with a loud voice animated his countrymen with songs in praise of Charlemagne and Roland."¹⁵ Charlemagne and Roland in turn, like the heroes of the saga time that followed them, had listened to the hero tales not of their own age but of a totally different age of migration 500 years earlier.

But the Germanic heroic tradition does not even begin with Attila and Ermanrich, for there is evidence of a still older Frankish heroic tradition, and a Gothic one before that, while the oldest of the Scandinavian sagas emphatically refers everything back to Troy!¹⁶ Every time our northern ancestors have found themselves living under heroic conditions of migration and world upheaval, they have revived an authentic heroic literature, but always they have taken as their subject not the deeds of their own age but some preceding migration-time. But the heroic songs of those earlier times went back to still other migrations, and so on. Hence the bedizening impression of duplication and repetition and the sense of being lost in a maze of time or a hall of mirrors.

Let us go back to the earliest of the old Norse texts, the prose Edda, and take a look at Othinn, the great prototype of the first kings.¹⁷ He comes with the storm, especially in a terrible wind, and whatever his spear or rod is pointed at is instantly dedicated to destruction; he is the arch-*Einherja*—the great destroyer; he is the *Sig-fadhir*, ever-victorious, who having subdued the land builds his castle, Sigtun, the victory fort, where he can sit in a high tower on his high seat, the *Hlithskialf*, and through a special window survey all that goes on in the earth. At the slightest sign of disaffection his arrows dart forth to overcome the most distant opposition in an instant. His rule was won by force and is maintained by force, as Loki once reminded the gods when in their cups at a great feast he chal-

lenged the lot as usurpers and invaders.¹⁸

Othinn is in legend the Wild Huntsman, who leads the terrible host through the sky. The peasantry dread him as a warrior and a wanderer in the earth;¹⁹ sometimes he comes traveling in disguise to spy out the land, coming in a great raincoat and floppy hat with a staff and a patch over his eye—for he has literally given his right eye for knowledge and power. As the god of runes he brings writing with him, and magic, and hidden knowledge, and autocratic rule.

"There is something eery and treacherous" about him, we are told, that suggests "the autocratic daring adventurer." The people do not love him: he is their father and their ruler, but just the same they dread him—"they are afraid of his intellectual superiority and aristocratic daring." No popular oath or prayer of the many that have survived is ever dedicated to him: The common people dread and avoid him.²⁰

When Othinn enters the land as an invader, he finds Thor, Frey, and Njord already in occupation: They invaded earlier, and have now settled down to become homebodies and popular gods. But a closer examination has shown that originally they too all did exactly as Othinn is doing. Tyr, for example, goes back to an Indo-European expansion time at least a thousand years before Othinn's day. "As Zio he is identical with Zeus as director of wars. . . ." His sign, like Othinn's, was the spear, and "if Getic, Scythian and Gothic traditions meet anywhere, "it is in the worship of his spear, which led the prehistoric migrants as the staff of Moses once led Israel."²¹

The fascinating and frightening figure of Othinn, that reminds us so strongly of the prehistoric kings of Egypt and Babylonia of whom we have said so much, is no invention of scaldic fancy, however. There actually were such men, and one of them was Attila the Hun, the hero of half the Germanic epics and the villain of the other half. For the Franks, Attila is the treacherous tyrant, "pure 'Asiatic,'" while "for the Bavarians and Ostrogoths he is the model of the benevolent protector."²²

The earliest German epics go back

to a time when Attila "collected the children of princes from the lands of all the lords and kept them as hostages at his court, from which they were always trying to escape."²³ This romantic theme was more than poets' fancy: the Roman ambassador Priscus who visited the court of Attila had a good deal to say about these hostages.

As to the sordid and bloody affairs between the princely houses, Schneider says, "There is nothing fictitious about this wickedness; it makes the thoroughly convincing impression of having been actually experienced . . . the Asiatic tyranny is real." And another authority writes: "We believe that the actual experiences of the Heroic Age often enough found expression in the tragic view of life (*Weltbild*). Much noble blood was shed, brave nations vanished without a trace after performing mighty deeds, the foundations of great empires collapsed, the noble had to perish and the base to triumph."

Even the fabulous story of Siegfried and Brunhilda, we are told, "could come right out of a typical Merovingian chronicle, in which the deadly hatreds among the royal ladies, the slaying of each other's vassals, treacherous ambushes on the hunts, and so forth, are so richly attested."²⁴ It is not history, indeed, but it is "a snapshot of the real contemporary world of the Franks."²⁴ And way back in Tacitus we still find it: the inherited feuds between the great houses, the riotous banquets, the fighting, gambling, and bloody vows.

Since the writer has read sagas at least once a week for thirty years, he is sorely tempted to exploit the vastness of this neglected field. But since with the progress of education the comic book has superseded all other books, we must be content to present the epic world of but one representative saga. It is the *Thithriks-saga af Bern*, a truly gigantic piece and "a great storehouse of Germanic legend, though in a new style imitated from French romance, but recording old tradition. . . ."²⁵ The great hero of this saga is not Theodoric the Goth, as we might expect, but Attila. And it is the real historical Attila. In the *Thithriks-saga*, Europe is described as an appendage of Asia—and that

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President Don Carlos Brown, Jr., sustained as president of the San Fernando Stake, with Elders James E. Craddock and Robert L. Baird as counselors. The stake now consists of Sherman Oaks, Van Nuys, Van Nuys Second, Van Nuys Third, Pacoima, San Fernando, San Fernando Second wards, and Newhall Branch. The stake membership is now 4,884.

Elders Spencer W. Kimball and LeGrand Richards of the Council of the Twelve effected these changes.

President Marion D. Hanks of the First Council of the Seventy dedicated the remodeled and enlarged chapel of the Coltman Ward, North Idaho Falls (Idaho) Stake.

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is exactly how Jordanes, a Goth who witnessed the events of the time, described it.²⁶

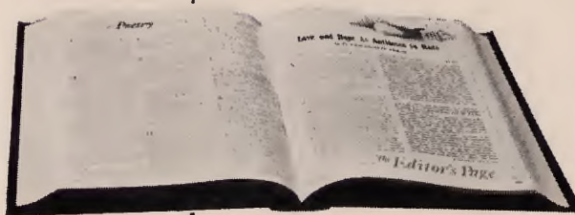
Attila sets up his *stath*, or administration center, in Susam (Soest) and there receives a constant stream of embassies from the whole earth, while he sends his messengers abroad to proclaim and execute his will. (Ch. 47, 48.) Priscus, who actually visited the court of Attila on the Steppes, describes it as a wood-and-tent city, dominated by the huge palisade and buildings of the central palace—all of wood.²⁷ Likewise our saga (Ch. 252) tells us that the great castles of the time were all of wood. In the royal economy the amount of stuff that changes hands in the form of gifts is enormous: it is acquired on great raids—primarily cattle raids. (Ch. 51.) Attila is the soul of generosity, but he has his motives: "To win a man over to him he would give him clothing, weapons, and a horse." (Ch. 145.) "He took cattle and wealth away from his enemies and gave it to his friends" (Ch. 181) is a formula that might have been taken right out of the Avesta.

In return his friends were bound to him by terrible oaths. (Ch. 241.) Before a knight could "ride," that is, go forth alone on an adventure, he had to receive royal permission after first explaining exactly where he was going and what he was going to do; and on return his first duty was to go immediately to the royal castle and report. (Ch. 149.) Gifts were proportionate to the value of services rendered, and could even include the

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classic bestowal of the hand of the king's daughter with half the kingdom as dowry. (Ch. 159.)

(To be continued)

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³This was Luernius, in Athenaeus, *Deipnosoph.*, IV, 34, 15; 37 (152).

⁴H. D. Jubainville, *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology* (Dublin, 1903), pp. 19-21, 72f, 76-93, 146-155; Henry Morris, "The Partholon Legend," *Jnl. Royal Soc. of Antiquaries*, LXVII (June 1937), 57-72.

⁵Jubainville, *op. cit.*, pp. 91f. Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, IX, 11.

⁶Chadwick, *Growth of Lit.*, pp. 66ff.

⁷Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, III, 7.

⁸Joinville, *Chronicle of St. Louis* (Everyman Edition), pp. 148-9.

⁹Geoffrey, Bk. ix.

¹⁰John Rhys, *Celtic Heathendom* (Hibbert Lectures, 1886), pp. 608, 584, 412;

Jubainville, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 57, 60ff, 98; J. Zwicker (Ed.), *Fontes Historiae Religionis Celticae* (Berlin 1934), ii, 143-4.

¹¹Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, III, 5 (ed. Griscom, pp. 281ff for the Welsh version); Rhys, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹²It is also identical with a tumulus and subterranean palace—the world of the dead to which the ancient Celts were so attached. See Jubainville, *op. cit.*, pp. 146ff.

¹³Geoffrey, *op. cit.*, VI, 3-4 for this and a great deal more to the same effect.

¹⁴Rhys, *op. cit.*, pp. 155ff, 160ff, 562; Mary Williams, "An Early Welsh Ritual Poem," *Speculum*, XIII (1938), 38ff; A. H. Krappe, "Who Was the Green Knight?" *ibid.*, XIII, 213ff; R. Heinzel, "Ueber die französischen Gralromane," in *Wiener Akad. Denkschr.* 40 (1892); and especially Von Schroeder, "Die Wurzeln vom hlg. Gral," *ibid.*, 166 (1910f), Pt. i.

¹⁵Thos. Percy, *Essay on Ancient Minstrels in England*, iii.

¹⁶This whole theme is treated at length by Hermann Schneider in two works which clearly illustrate the complete change of thought that has taken place on the subject of the epic milieu between the two dates of publication. They are H. Schneider, *Germanische Heldensage* (Berlin & Leipzig, 1928), pp. 1-42, and *Heldendichtung, Geistlichendichtung Ritterdichtung* (Vol. I of J. Petersen & H. Schneider, *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, Heidelberg: Winter 1943), pp. 1-37.

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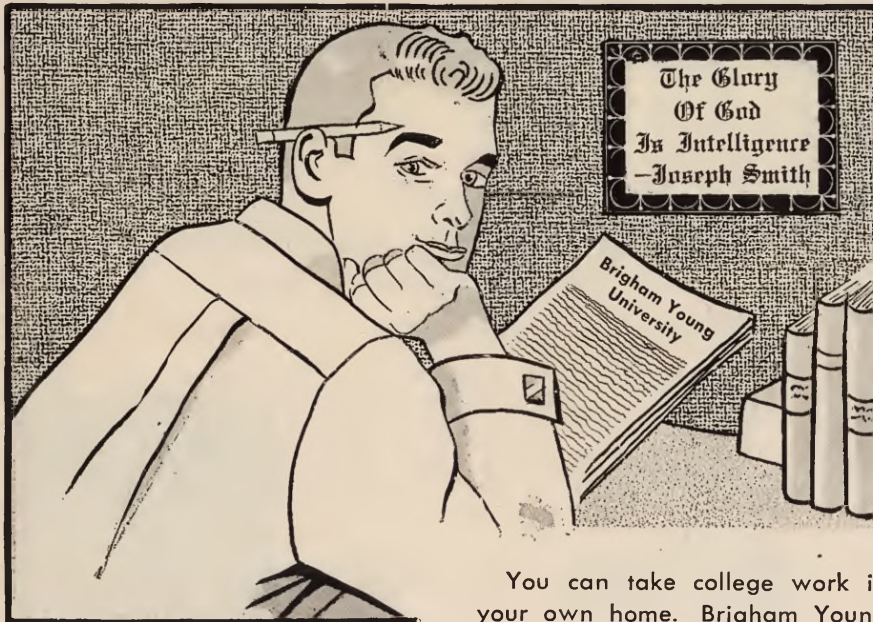
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²⁶We have discussed this in *Western Political Quarterly*, IV (June 1951), 247-9.

²⁷Priscus Rhetor, *Legatio ad gentes*, in Migne, *Patrol. Graec.* CXIII, 724, 732f, 737.

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Coyotes - A Tale of the Hills

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After this, I was positive that I could see the demons darting hither and thither all around us. I thought so again when father's horse gave a quick plunge forward, from an attack in the rear, as we afterwards learned. Luckily, Father had a good hold on the reins. Those moments seemed years! Would the fog never leave and give us an opportunity to fight for our lives? Why should we be made helpless and then attacked?

Our horses were becoming unmanageable now, and we felt that if the

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