



Type: Magazine Article

A Study in American Hebraic Names I

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (December 1916)

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

Page(s): 166–170

Abstract: This article cites many words and names found in the Americas that coincide and correspond with Hebrew names and words.

A Study in American Hebraic Names

By T. W. Brookbank

Mr. H. H. Bancroft, in his great work entitled *The Native Races of the Pacific States*, refers to numerous ideas and customs observed among the Indians in various places on this continent, and which are set forth by some learned investigators as identical with, or, at least, very similar to, others that have existed among different peoples of the Old World, and especially among the Jews, to whom the origin of many of these things has more or less directly been attributed. Commenting on these matters, Mr. Bancroft says, "At the same time, I think it just as probable that the analogies referred to are mere coincidences, such as might be found among any civilized or semi-civilized people of the earth." This opinion is expressed while he has the autochthonic theory of the origin of the native American under discussion, and he concludes his remarks respecting it as follows:

"Hence it is, many not unreasonably assume that the Americans are autochthones until there is some good ground given for believing them to be of exotic origin. * * * No one at the present day can tell the origin of the Americans; they may have come from any one or from all the hypothetical sources enumerated in the foregoing pages, and here the question may rest until we have more light upon the subject."

Mr. Bancroft does not, in express terms, state that he believes the autochthonic hypothesis is most probably correct; yet it apparently is more acceptable to him than any of the others that he reviewed—the "Mormon" theory (or claim) among them.

With commendable fairness, however, he refers to many of the arguments which have been advanced by various authors who maintain that the Indians are of Jewish descent, observing that "Melgar gives a list of Chiapanec calendar names, and finds fourteen agree with suitable Hebrew words" (Vol. V, pp. 95, 96).

It appears to the present writer that numerous similar or identical ideas and analogous customs, together with not a few Hebrew words gleaned from various sources, ought to supply an argument quite strong enough to connect satisfactorily our native races with the Jews of the Old World; but all these evidences are brushed aside as mere coincidences, or as coming, it might be, from a few Hebrews who, in ancient times, from unknown causes and by unknown means, made their way to Amer-

ica and intermarried with the primitive people—a little leaven, in this instance, evidently having gone a long way.

So far as I am aware, Mr. Melgar has conducted his investigation in a field not largely occupied, and as it is one where fruits which, perhaps for quite good reasons, may not be very abundant, are, nevertheless, valuable, it is purposed in these remarks to add some additional testimony in line with what that gentleman has developed.

The claim that evidences of this character, philological, are valuable, is sustained by what Muller says in his *Science of Language* (Vol. 1, pp. 326-7), which in effect is that, aside from historical records, language is by far the best of the secondary authorities to prove racial kinship. This fact, he concludes, "is conceded by all."

To begin remarks bearing more directly on the matter in hand, we find one objection to the Jewish hypothesis is that "The strong trait in Hebrew compound words of inserting the syllable *el* or a single letter (*l*) in the names of children, derived from either the primary or secondary names of the Deity, does not prevail in any Indian tribes known to me" (Schoolcraft's *Archæology*, Vol. III, p. 61).

It is the insertion of this syllable *el* or *l* only, in some instances, which causes the name compounded with it to express some relationship to God, as, for example *Bethel*, that is "house or place of God," *beth* meaning "house" or "place," and *el* is the first part of *Eloah* and *Elohim*, which were Hebrew names for God and Gods respectively. Two other common names were also used by those ancient people for God—*El* and *Eloh*. But as the Hebrews of old wrote only the consonants of words, they would leave out the e's in Bethel and write that word with the letters only that stood for *B'th* and *l*.*

Now, it may occur to some that in view of what Mr. Schoolcraft says relative to the lack of compound words or names in *el*, among various Indian tribes, and of what Mr. Muller observes concerning the value of language as a means for tracing racial kinship, we are at the outset confronted with an objection to the theory of the Jewish origin of the Indians which is fortified in the best possible manner, barring historical records.

But little real importance, however, attaches to this proposition; for while Mr. Schoolcraft found no such names among a comparatively few Indian tribes of a wild character, where he

*Should any adult reader favor the writer with a perusal of these remarks, he will please understand that as the leading purpose in view is to afford assistance in their studies to those of youthful age, explanations will sometimes occur which would be omitted were this paper penned solely for those who are familiar with Scriptural studies and, historically, with Jewish customs.

apparently conducted his investigation, no one is therefore justified in claiming that such names are not of occurrence among any tribes whatever, nor is it by any means probable that Mr. Schoolcraft examined all the names in use by the tribes involved; and even granting that he did examine every one of them, who shall say that names compounded with *el* did not occur among Indians of those same tribes in preceding generations? Not every name used by our own forefathers is in service among us now. Water under certain conditions becomes as hard as a rock, but the claim of a multitude of people who live in the torrid zone, and who never saw water in that form, that such a thing is unbelievable, can in no way detract from the real value of the testimony of a single school-boy or school-girl who has seen water in the form of ice; and it is just as apparent that the evidence supplied by Mr. McIgar, and others who have found names among the Indians which are Hebraic, is of far greater importance in the case before us than the statement of one investigator, or of dozens of them, for that matter, that they have found no Indian names compounded with *el* or *l*.

But we must keep in view the real essence of the statement made by Mr. Schoolcraft, which is that since the ancient Hebrews *frequently* made such compounds, almost any, if not every tribe of Indians, were they of Jewish descent, should also show to some extent the use of such compound names; but since they do not occur generally among them, the native Americans can not have an Hebraic origin. This implied, and in some cases expressed assumption, is also of no great value when one takes into consideration the general conditions of barbarism or savagery under which Indian life, for the greater part, has been passed for generations. To illustrate the situation, we find English-speaking people are now all familiar with the name Jehovah; but let us suppose that these same people should become scattered in numerous tribes over a new continent, and in this dispersed condition let them have no alphabetic language whatever, nor even hieroglyphics or picture writing, except what some members of the tribes could devise, and who would not consider the argument as wholly unreliable if, after some centuries had elapsed, some one should attempt to show that the latest generations of these scattered and untutored Englishmen, having no alphabetically written records, could not be of English descent because a few investigators, or a regiment of them, had failed to find names among them compounded with *jah* or *yeh*, to say nothing of their having a significance that should attract the attention of learned and painstaking investigators as very similar to that now attributed to Jehovah by English people? Reference in these last remarks is made to the findings and the opinion of the great investigator, Lord Kingsborough.

In this connection the fact is recalled that an American often has, even now, not a little difficulty in understanding the English as it is used in some parts of the British Isles; and in England itself the residents of several different localities do not lack much of needing an interpreter to bring the respective people to an understanding of one another's speech. This all occurs, too, while books in English are published by the thousands, and dictionaries are easily at the service of everybody. What a disagreement among us in the use of language would ensue—what a babel of confusion would result in a thousand years, or even in a few centuries, were all our present means for keeping us in uniformity, such as it is, obliterated, is hazardous to conjecture; but doubtless it would be very great.

An investigation, then, of the character in mind, conducted solely among some of the wild Indian tribes, while not by any means out of place, will likely, for good reasons, yield no very great results analogically Hebraic, so far as names are concerned. Still, there are some examples, and not a few by any means, to which attention will be called before these remarks are closed. It is apparently of far greater importance that an inquiry into these matters be conducted with reference to that period of time when Jews came, or are supposed or alleged to have come, to this country many centuries ago, and then among a people who kept historical records written with the aid of alphabetic symbols, such for example as those used by people who lived anciently in portions of Mexico. It was in a field of this character where Mr. Melgar developed such favorable results in a single specialty.

It appears also that Mr. Schoolcraft and others with him have overlooked the fact that besides the syllable *el* or the *l* only, there are other names for God or for a member of the Deity which, either in full or in an abbreviated substitute form, were often used by the Jews in compounding names; and, consequently, they are of as much value to prove an analogical Hebraic usage as if in every one of them the *el* or *l* should occur. Among the names to be submitted presently, not all are of the latter class, but as those of another class, compounded also with a substitute for a Divine appellation, seem to the writer to be of no insignificant value as evidence of the Jewish origin of the Indians, some quotations and references that afford an authoritative basis for the claim that they are doubtless Hebraic as compounded, will be submitted.

The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Art. "Jehovah," says:

"The attempt to connect the name *Yahweh* with that of the Indo-European deity (*Jehovah—Jove*), or to derive it from Egyptian or Chinese may be passed over. But one theory which has had considerable currency requires notice, namely, that *Yahweh* or *Yahu* or *Yaho* is the name of a god

worshiped throughout the whole, or a great part, of the area occupied by the Western Semites."

And in a note on the same page it further says:

"The form *Yahu* or *Yaho* occurs not only in composition, but by itself. This is doubtless the original *Ia o* (this name in Greek letters (*Iao*) frequently found in Greek authors and in original texts as the name of the God of the Jews."

From the *Jewish Encyclopædia*, Art. "Names of God," we learn that this same name for Jehovah (*Yahweh*) is contracted to *Jah* or *Yah* and also *Jeho* or *Yeho*, and goes to *Jo* and *Yo* in combination in the first part of compound names, and *Yah* in the second part of such names.

The *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia of Religious Knowledge*, Art., "Yahweh," informs us that the Hebrew names *Yehonathan* or *Yonathan* (Jonathan) and *Hizki Yahu* or *Hizkiyah* (Hezekiah) are fairly representative of names compounded with the Divine name, and that *Yahweh* appears in the writing of the early Fathers and Gentile authors also as *Iao*, *Yaho*, *Yahou* and *Yaoue*.

According to Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, *Amaziah* means "whom Jehovah strengthens," *Amariah*, "whom Jehovah promised," *Amasiah*, "whom God bears;" and *Jah*, it states, is a shorter form of *Jehovah* used in forming such compounds as *Eli-jah*, *Isa-jah*, *Jerem-jah*, etc. (the last, Jeremiah). It also appears in *Ahi-jah* (Ahiah), meaning the "Friend of Jehovah;" *Berechiah*, that is, "blessed of Jehovah, and so on; all such compounds involving God, or Jehovah, in some kind of relationship.

(To be continued)

Revelation

What a marvelous invention, the wireless!
 Man's thoughts speed through the air swift as light.
 Only stations that accord get the message,—
 The discordant are left in the night.

But more marvelous is God's revelation!
 Master words speed through space swift as thought.
 Only hearts that are attuned, get the message,—
 And those souls out of tune are untaught.

Guy C. Coleman.

Tabiona, Utah