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Voices from the Dust

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Abstract: This article claims that Chihuahua, Mexico was once inhabited by a brilliant civilization. A visit to the ruins shows remarkable skills in masonry, textiles, and pottery, as well as a preoccupation with warfare and ingenious designs for protection. The inhabitants of this civilization may have been the Gadianton robbers.



This huge olla is 8 feet high and 8 feet in diameter.

Voices from the Dust

By THEODORE MARTINEAU

FOR many years historians and scholars have wrestled in vain with the problems relating to the origin and early history of the Indian tribes inhabiting this land when first explored by Europeans. And this, too, despite the fact that for more than a century such a history has been within easy reach.

A really broad-minded and honest seeker for Truth will be willing to accept such evidence as may come into his possession, regardless of its origin or from whom it might be received, and it is for such that this article is written.

We have abundant evidence that the country lying to the southward for thousands of miles was once densely populated, and particularly is this true of the state of Chihuahua in northern Mexico.

So dense was the population of the Sierra Madres of that region that every foot of available land must have been intensively cultivated, a fact attested by the numerous terraces of stone built across every ravine or other place where a few feet of soil might be saved from being carried away by erosion. Where irrigation was necessary canals were built with as perfect a gradient as would be possible by our best engineers and the roads and trails which they laid out through the rugged mountains showed a skill which bespeaks a high order of intelligence.

Who were these people and whence did they come?

According to the Nephite record the Gadianton Robbers made these mountain fastnesses their strongholds about the beginning of the Christian Era, (3 Nephi 1-27, also 2-17), and vast numbers of them lived there at times until the wild game upon which they subsisted became scarce.

They raided the flocks and herds of their enemies, and at times, it seems reasonable to suppose, they doubtless tilled the soil of their upland valleys.

THAT this people lived in a state of almost constant warfare admits of but little doubt for every cave dwelling was built with the purpose in view of furnishing security for its inhabitants, and every commanding hill or peak was fortified to serve either as a stronghold or as a point of observation. One stone fort near the Largo Valley is almost one thousand feet in length by about one-third of that in width, with at least three parallel walls inclosing the inner works. The spring from which they obtained their water is some distance down the hill and in order to procure this necessity with safety they built zigzag passages down the hill in such a manner that the water carrier was quite safe from the spears and arrows of an enemy.

In almost every one of the hundreds of cave dwellings visited by the writer during his more than

forty years of residence in Arizona and Chihuahua, adequate protection for the inmates has been the prime object of the builders. Port holes are so arranged as to command the approach, which in many instances is but a leaning pole with notches cut for footholds, or else it is a narrow pathway hewn out of the solid cliff walls.

The doors are, as a rule, about two feet wide at the top, and a little wider at the bottom which is some eighteen inches above the floor, with a notch about a foot deep and about half that wide extending downward so that in entering, the foot may be passed through first thus making it unnecessary to bend the body double in order to enter the room. See photo No. 1.

Seldom are the doors more than thirty inches in height so that a person of ordinary size must stoop to enter, thus putting him at a disadvantage where the cave man is defending his home with a club or his battle ax of stone. The few windows found in the outer walls are seldom more than fourteen inches square and usually have heavy oak bars set into the masonry about three inches apart.

WHERE the buildings are more than one story in height, the builders laid peeled pine poles across the top of the walls, usually about six or seven feet from the floor and on top of these poles

were laid from two to four inches of stiff clay or cement for a floor of the upper room.

These poles, about four inches in diameter, were cut with a stone ax and when brought from a distance, a notch was cut a few inches from the end to protect the rope from wear while they were being dragged to their destination. The marks of stone axes upon the poles are very plain for in the dry dust of the caves, wood and other objects are almost immune to decay.

While digging among the ashes and refuse from the dwellings we found many pieces of fabric woven from wool or some other kind of a fine fiber but to our great regret these specimens were lost on the way home.

Several varieties of corn and of beans were found, also the seeds and stems of squash, parts of potatoes, pieces of cooked mescal such as the natives now use in the making of liquor, and the bones of fish, deer and turkeys. We also found shoes of twisted fibers of the aloe, a few sea shells and many broken specimens of beautifully decorated pottery.

This pottery is far superior in its coloring and texture to any we have seen from our own state. According to a statement made to me by the late Prof. Paul Henning who was for a number of years connected with the National Museum in Mexico, the coloring and figures found upon some of the ollas in my possession were symbolic of the religious beliefs and ceremonies of a people who had undoubtedly been familiar at some time with at least some of the teachings of the Christian faith. The cross, the square, the compass, a dove with human feet, and many other marks, he said, indicated contact with a people having a highly developed religion.

From observations made in the Penasco Colorado cave dwellings, it seems quite evident that these houses were occupied by two different peoples and at rather widely separated periods of time. The older inhabitants were much farther advanced in civilization than were those who came later if we may accept the evidence of their greater skill in the design and dec-

oration of their pottery, and in the making of cloth and other articles.

The cement and other materials used in their buildings were of far better quality, and their workmanship as builders leaves no doubt as to their greater knowledge and skill as compared to those who came later and repaired some, and rebuilt other dwellings. Another discovery which seems to bear out this idea was made when we noticed that the floor of a room which we had cleared was considerably higher above the ground than was usually the case. After breaking through the floor the charred remains of roof or ceiling poles were found



Scene from interior of the Penasco, Colorado Cave.

mingled with the cement which had once covered the poles. Underneath this layer another very hard and well polished floor was encountered. Here were many broken pieces of kitchenware of a surprisingly beautiful color and texture, and quite distinct in coloring and quality from the pieces found on the upper floor, or out in the yard.

How do these findings agree with what we know of the history of those peoples inhabiting Mexico prior to the Conquest?

Historians are fairly well agreed that many of the peoples then living in the valley of Mexico had

After dwelling in the southland for forty years, Theodore Martineau presents some data in the following article which will be of interest to those interested in the pre-Indian peoples of America.

come from the North during the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.

When they came and how long they were on the way is very much involved in mystery to the average student of history, but when viewed in the light of our Nephite chronicles, the difficulty disappears.

THE last great battles which resulted in the utter destruction of the white race upon this continent occurred between the years 385 and 400 A. D. and the final entry in the record by Moroni was about the year 421 A. D. from

which date the survivors—Lamanites and Indians, disappear from view for several centuries. These people whom we shall now call by their better known name of Indians had become a degenerate, flesh eating race who soon separated into various family units which later became tribes

and in some instances, nations. As game became more scarce they scattered far and wide.

Some of these tribes, notably the Zunis and Pueblos of New Mexico, and the Moquis and Hopis of Arizona settled down to agricultural pursuits and built permanent homes, while others, no doubt, with the chilling blasts of Winter holding them in their icy grasp, were impelled to follow the Summer southward. Slow and painful must have been their journey, burdened as they were by their goods, their children and their aged and infirm.

The strength of their manhood and their womanhood had fallen in the wars and they had neither vehicles nor beasts of burden. Hence they could travel but slowly, and were no doubt compelled to halt during the cold season in order to protect themselves from freezing.

Thus years, perhaps centuries, elapsed before they again reached the lands where their fathers had established their strongholds. Here they rebuilt or repaired the damage wrought by time's relentless hands, and then passed on leaving a few brief chapters of their history behind in the Penasco Colorado and in many other cave dwellings.