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Recent Scientific Investigations: They Substantiate the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: Inspired by a study of archaeological remains in Panama that lead one archaeologist from New York to call it “the Pompeii of ancient America,” Melville believes Panama finds corroboration with the Book of Mormon in such issues as location and size, commerce, industries, cloth, tools, and elephants.

RECENT SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATIONS

They Substantiate The Book of Mormon

BY ALTON C. MELVILLE

"The Pompeii of Ancient America," is the title given to the report of A. Hyatt Verrill of the results of the first six months' investigation conducted by him in the interest of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, of New York. This expedition of the past year is the first ever conducted in Panama. The reason for the delay in such investigations is the extremely heavy tropical undergrowth. This, along with the tropical weather, have worked havoc with the architectural remains of the American continent, destroying where natural conditions in Greece and Egypt tend to preserve the splendors of the past, according to the investigators.

Nevertheless, remarkable discoveries have been made very recently by scientists. The account given by Mr. Verrill in *World's Work* will be found to be strikingly similar to that given by Moroni and others in the Book of Mormon; the principal difference seems to be only in the author's point of view, the facts are entirely consistent, in both instances. (*World's Work*, January, 1927.)

LOCATION AND SIZE

"And they built a great city by the narrow neck of land, by the place where the sea divides the land. * * * And the whole face of the land northward was covered with inhabitants." (Ether 10:20).

The locality of Mr. Verrill's investigation is the same, the Panama region. The term "great" in its fullest meaning is very appropriate in describing in size what has already been found, both in area and number of inhabitants. A single temple is being cleared of the heavy tropical growth and excavated at this time by this explorer. It covers, alone, an area of more than one hundred acres; about a tenth of the job is completed. In his report Mr. Verrill says: "My statement that the area supported a vast and teeming population is based on several obvious facts. *First*, the immense number of burials, ceremonial monuments, village sites, and mounds. *Second*, the incredible number of potsherds, stone artifacts, and other manufactured articles scattered over an immense area. *Third*, the enormous size and great number of stone stelai, monuments, etc., which could have been moved and erected only by thousands of hands."

COMMERCE

"And they were exceedingly industrious, and they did buy and sell and traffic one with another, that they might get gain." (Ether 10:22.)

Speaking of former inhabitants of Yucatan, Gregory Mason, who

with Prof. Heber J. Spinden of the Peabody Museum of Harvard headed a recent expedition into that vicinity, says, "The bold canals dug by the Mayas for their ships of commerce are filled with heavy reeds and crocodiles. * * * The Mayas were a nation of traders and farmers whose social fabric rested upon a wide-spread and deep feeling for religion."

INDUSTRIES

"Wherefore, he [Shule] came to the hill Ephraim, and he did molten out of the hill, and made swords out of steel for those whom he had drawn away with him; and after he had armed them with swords he returned to the city Nehor, and gave battle unto his brother Corihor, by which means he obtained the kingdom and restored it unto his father Kib." (Ether 7:9.)

"And they did work in all manner of ore, and they did make gold, and silver, and iron, and brass, and all manner of metals; and they did dig it out of the earth; wherefore, they did cast up mighty heaps of earth to get ore, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of copper. And they did work all manner of fine work." (Ether 10:23.)

Quoting Mr. Verrill on this subject: "If, in a country like Egypt, where even flowers are perfectly preserved in burials thousands of years old, only one iron implement has been discovered, what chances of finding iron tools would we have in a tropical land, where burials were in the earth?"

"Indeed, less than two years ago, I was scoffed at for suggesting that an entirely new and unknown culture of great antiquity had existed in Panama, but we now have undeniable proofs of the fact. Moreover, at a depth of five and one-half feet below the surface, at the temple site, among broken pottery and embedded in charcoal, I found a steel or hardened iron implement. The greater portion is almost completely destroyed by corrosion, but the chisel-shaped end is in good condition. It is so hard that it is scarcely touched by a file and will scratch glass, and with such an implement it would be a simple matter to cut and carve the hardest stone."

"Oddly enough, no gold or copper objects have been found, although the race was evidently familiar with gold and were experts at working the metal, for a nose-ring of bloodstone beautifully cut and polished is capped at the extremities with wonderfully wrought and fitted gold tips."

CLOTH

"And they did have silks, and fine-twined linen; and they did work all manner of cloth, that they might clothe themselves from their nakedness." (Ether 10:24.)

Although pictures and drawings suggest that these people wore no garments, says Mr. Verrill, yet "the presence of clay spindle weights proves that they used cotton, if not as cloth at least as thread or twine."

TOOLS

“And they did make all manner of tools to till the earth” * * *
(Ether 10:25.)

The same explorer has this to say regarding tools: “I am thoroughly convinced that these people, as well as many other pre-historic races, possessed iron or steel tools, and I do not know of a single argument or fact to disprove this. * * * But how can they explain the evidence of tool marks on much of the stone work? Not the irregular indentations which might have been, and very likely were, made by pecking with a stone hammer, but clearly cut, delicate lines and chisel marks. However, we shall leave this for the archaeological experts to decide. * * * ”

ELEPHANTS—DOMESTICATED

“And there were elephants and cureloms and cumoms * * * which were especially ‘useful unto man’.” (Ether 9:19.)

Although the evidence may be said to be conclusive, that the elephant or mastodon found in the LaBrea tar pits and other places existed at a much earlier time than civilization, yet we have the following bit of convincing evidence in substantiation of the Book of Mormon that the elephant has existed since then, and probably was domesticated. Mr. Verrill says, “But perhaps the most interesting and remarkable find of all was a large sculptured stone figure thoroughly elephantine in form and detail. * * * Not only is the body elephantine, but the large leaf-like ears could belong to no other known creature, while the hind knees bend *forward*, a character peculiar to the elephant. * * * It is difficult to believe that any man unfamiliar with the elephant could have conventionalized a tapir or ant bear to the extent of adding broad fan-shaped ears and legs bending forward, while, as a final touch, the creature is represented carrying a load or burden upon its back!”

THE TIME ELEMENT

The Book of Mormon gives us the earliest time of this civilization as being about 2,000 B. C., or nearly four thousand years ago.

Although Mr. Verrill, in estimating the time, speaks only in very approximate terms, note how he virtually agrees with the sacred record: “At this rate it would require four hundred years to deposit a foot of soil, and an accumulation of ten feet would mean some four thousand years have passed since the first monuments and idols were erected.”

* * * *

And yet someone has said that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon from his own knowledge. If he did, would it not prove that he was indeed a Prophet and Seer, to possess the knowledge of conditions, the customs of peoples, their occupations and industries.

the varieties of animals and the particular time they existed—and this, years before science or any human agency knew?

If, as the fact is, he did not write the book originally, it is true that, as Gregory Mason says, “where a few centuries ago thousands of human beings fashioned a high civilization” they “abandoned their cities to the devouring jungles of the tropics * * * from causes still wrapt in mystery.” Isn't it more reasonable to believe that this record has been brought forth from the earth, as have these other things, only by Divine direction for the spiritual enlightenment of man? The scientific phase is, of course, only incidental.

Bearing on the Book of Mormon

Students of the Book of Mormon are always on the lookout for any item in history or science bearing upon that record, and so the following is submitted:

An account of the tradition among the Chinese, of their first settlement in China, seems to hint at that remarkable migration of the Jaredites from the Tower of Babel to the “great sea which divides the lands,” where some of them (doubtless only a part of them) took to the barges which were lighted in so remarkable a manner. Dr. Fisher, of Yale, gives this account:—

“The nucleus of the Chinese nation is thought to have been a band of immigrants, who are supposed by some to have started from the region southeast of the Caspian Sea, and to have crossed the headwaters of the Oxus. They followed the course of the Hoang Ho, or Yellow, river, having entered the country of their adoption from the northwest, and they planted themselves in the present province of Shan-se.”

Further to identify these people to the Book of Mormon reader, Dr. Fisher adds, “Although nomads, they had some knowledge of astronomy.” Of the occurrences while the migration halted at that point, history, of course, says nothing, but the annual pilgrimage of hundreds of thousands of Chinese to the top of their sacred mount just at the point of the peninsula of Shantung, testifies to the Book of Mormon student very eloquently of the wonderful manifestations received there by the brother of Jared.—*L. A. Wilson, Manti, Utah.*

