

SECTION 5: IDENTIFYING THE NEPHITES (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

Editor's Note: This is a summary of the full paper, available online at http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/. This paper was last updated 23 November 2008.

This document is a partial analysis of the scholarly merits of the evidence and research used by Rodney Meldrum¹ in his firesides and DVD presentation, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography*.² Neither FAIR nor this document take any position on the geographic location of Book of Mormon events.³ It is important, however, that Meldrum's theories be analyzed according to the same standards by which other Book of Mormon geography theories are evaluated. To avoid confusion, this paper refers to Meldrum's geographic model as the Limited North American Model, or LNAM.⁴ This document is just one in a series of such analytical documents.

In this document we examine Meldrum's research and conclusions in several sections of his DVD presentation, all relative to his correlations between the Hopewell culture and the Nephites. This examination addresses, specifically, Part 6 of the DVD presentation (titled "Tents, Temples, and Teepees: Cultural Evidence from the Book of Mormon"), Part 10 (titled "Nephite Defenses: Hopewell Defense Systems"), Part 12 (titled "The Mound Builders: Hopewell Mound Building"), Part 13 (titled "Nephite Culture: Hopewell Culture"), and Part 14 (titled "Nephite Implements: North Native American Cultural Ruins, Hopewell Artifacts").

As demonstrated in other sections of the FAIR reviews, the LNAM's analysis of DNA and geographic information are wanting. The problems evidenced in those reviews preclude

¹ This paper follows the scholarly custom of referring to an individual, at first reference, by full name and then subsequently referring to the individual by last name only. We fully recognize Rodney as a brother in the gospel, but in discussing secular issues (such as scholarly research and geographic models) it was felt that continually prefacing his name or the name of any other referenced scholar or individual with "Brother" or "Sister," while accurate, would distract from the readability of the paper.

² Rodney Meldrum, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography: New scientific support for the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon; Correlation and Verification through DNA, Prophetic, Scriptural, Historical, Climatological, Archaeological, Social, and Cultural Evidence* (Rodney Meldrum, 2008). The DVD is in sections; citations in this paper reference the DVD's section number and title, followed by an approximate time stamp from the DVD.

³ FAIR recognizes that faithful individuals and scholars can honestly disagree on where Book of Mormon events took place; there is no revealed or officially accepted geography. FAIR provides an online reference to over 60 different geographic models at http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_geography (click on Book of Mormon Geographical Models).

⁴ Meldrum's model places Book of Mormon peoples in an area roughly covering the Atlantic seaboard to the Rocky Mountains. This name was chosen as descriptive of the general model. We recognize that Meldrum may pick a different name at some point and would invite him to do so.

the Hopewell from being the Nephites of the Book of Mormon. Still, Meldrum's evidence directly related to the Hopewell must be addressed.⁵

It is no secret that Meldrum sees many parallels between the Hopewell and the Nephites.⁶ Most of the parallels are either meaningless or misleading. The parallels, offered as evidence, generally suffer from one of two flaws:

1. An isolated demonstration that a feature from the Book of Mormon was present in the Hopewell culture without examining the presence of the same feature in other ancient cultures.
2. A misstatement or misunderstanding of Book of Mormon textual requirements, so what is presented as evidence for a Hopewell correlation with the Nephites is actually not valid evidence.

This paper examines both of these flaws as it relates to the evidence presented in the DVD.

EVIDENCES THAT AREN'T UNIQUE (BUT ARE PRESENTED AS SUCH)

The first major flaw evidenced in the DVD presentation is offering supposed parallels between the Hopewell culture and Nephite culture. The problem is, this evidence would only be convincing if the parallel is unique. For instance, if one shows that culture A and culture B both shared a common trait, the demonstration only has persuasive evidentiary value if it can be shown that the same trait isn't found in cultures C, D, and E. The less unique the trait, the less value it has in establishing a geography for the Book of Mormon.

The following sections examine evidences presented in the DVD that suffer from this particular flaw.

BREASTPLATES AND HEADPLATES

The Book of Mormon mentions in several places that Nephite warriors used breastplates and headplates as part of their battle implements.⁷ The DVD presentation notes that the Hopewell had "breastplates [and] headplates"⁸ and uses this parallel as evidence that the Hopewell and the Nephites were the same cultures. The DVD does not point out, however, that it is unclear whether such items were always used in Hopewell warfare. Metal items

⁵ A full addressing is available in the full version of this review, available at http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/.

⁶ See Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 6, "Tents, Temples, and Teepees," 0:00-0:40, for a good example of how Meldrum starts with his belief concerning the Hopewell and then finds many parallels to fit that belief. This is an example of allowing one's theories to drive one's observations.

⁷ See, for example, Mosiah 8:10; Alma 43:19, 46:13, 44:9, 49:6; Helaman 1:14; or Ether 15:15.

⁸ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 14, "Nephite Implements," 0:34-2:20.

associated with the Hopewell were often dedicated to ritual burial use, not to use in actual warfare.⁹

Further, there were other ancient cultures that used headplates and breastplates. In other words, the Hopewell were not unique in this usage (if they, in actuality, used them in warfare). It is well known, for instance, that Central American cultures used both headplates and breastplates in their warfare—at least by the Spanish conquest.

DEFENSIVE WORKS

The Book of Mormon mentions the use of defensive structures including earthen embankments, for at least part of the Nephite period.¹⁰ The DVD presentation notes that the presence of defensive structures such as earthen ditches with a stockade on top in Hopewell structures. Such parallels ultimately provide little support for the LNAM because the structures are not unique to the Hopewell.

A Central American model, dismissed by the DVD, also cites extensive earthen fortifications with stockades on top. For example, the city of Becan in the Yucatan is well known. It is encircled by a moat sixteen meters wide and covers a distance of two kilometers.¹¹

Nor are such structures unique to the Americas. For example, in Wales in 1000 B.C. similar forts were “constructed in strong, naturally defensible positions...consisting of banks and ditches often revetted and topped with stone walls...”¹²

Does this mean that the Welsh were Nephites? Or the Maya? Or the Hopewell? Since the use of these type of fortifications were not unique to any one group, they do not provide clear evidence for any one group to lay claim to the title “Nephites.”

CITIES

The DVD presents evidence without providing sufficient information for the audience to appropriately assess that evidence. For instance, the DVD states that a city referenced in Alma 50 is “in Ohio about 90 miles off of the shore of Lake Erie.”¹³ Viewers are not told what North American city is referenced, whether the city has been dated, and if the dating match the date of the referenced Book of Mormon city.

⁹ Olaf H. Prufer, “Prehistoric Hopewell Meteorite Collecting: Context and Implications,” *The Ohio Journal of Science* 61/6 (November 1961): 348 notes that “the majority of all Hopewell copper axes shows no signs of use; there are several very large and exceedingly heavy implements of this kind which obviously could not have served functional purposes; copper headdresses and breast plates, no doubt, were used ceremonially.”

¹⁰ See, for example, Alma 49:8. This is the first instance of this type of fortification being mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

¹¹ You can see an online reconstruction of this structure at <http://www.mayaruins.com/becan.html> (last accessed November 11, 2008). See also David L. Webster, *Defensive Earthworks at Becan, Campeche, Mexico: Implications for Mayan Warfare* (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University, Publication 41, 1976), 3.

¹² Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, online at <http://www.rcahmw.gov.uk/HI/ENG/Heritage+of+Wales/Themes/Living/> (last accessed November 11, 2008).

¹³ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 10, “Nephite Defenses,” 5:10-5:40.

The DVD's presentation of conclusions based on archaeological findings also contains some questionable statements. For instance, the presentation claims that "all these cities were defensive in nature" and that the people "weren't aggressive."¹⁴ All city walls are "defensive" in nature, but a walled city can serve as a fortress from which armed groups may go out to attack or raid others. One cannot reliably conclude from the archaeological record whether the inhabitants of a city were aggressive or not.

LOTS OF DEAD PEOPLE AND AGRICULTURE

The DVD argues that the presence of many dead bodies in a Hopewell mound matches the Book of Mormon, as does the fact that the mound builders were farmers.¹⁵ While there is a parallel, it isn't exactly supportive of the LNAM. Every socially complex hierarchical society has experienced high death rates from war and other causes. It is not surprising that many dead would be found in a burial mound, but since the Book of Mormon never mentions burying the dead in mounds, it is not clear that this bolsters the LNAM.

Likewise, while the Hopewell were farmers, they were not alone in that occupation. Many ancient societies were agrarian—any advanced culture requires agriculture to provide a food surplus, allow for specialization, permit settlement in one place, etc. If the Hopewell were *not* agrarian, that would count against the LNAM, but the presence of Hopewell farming does not uniquely support the LNAM as the correct geography.

NEAR WATER

The DVD presentation notes that the Hopewell established settlements near water, just as we find in the Book of Mormon.¹⁶ This is a case of stating the obvious—people need water in order to survive. All cultures (not just the Hopewell or the Nephites) require water, and settlement along waterways is typical for pre-modern cultures. Such a setting is not unique to the Hopewell and Book of Mormon peoples, so such a parallel is weak evidence for establish a geographical setting for the Book of Mormon.

MISSTATEMENTS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The second major flaw evidence in the DVD presentation is offering an evidence that is based upon a misunderstanding of what the Book of Mormon text says or a misstatement of the text. The following sections examine evidences presented in the DVD that suffer from this particular flaw.

GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS METALS

The DVD presentation asserts that the Hopewell match the Nephites in terms of access to precious metals:

¹⁴ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 10, "Nephite Defenses," 4:40-4:55.

¹⁵ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 16, "Nephite Implements," 6:54-7:30.

¹⁶ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 13, "Nephite Culture," 0:18-0:55.

Now, the copper is very interesting, because there's only a few places on the Earth where native copper exists.

Over here in Salt Lake City, where Kennecott Copper is, the largest pit mine in the world. That has no native copper. All that copper has to be smelted out. When I say native copper, I mean it's just copper that's on the ground. It just so happens that one of the biggest repositories of geologic native copper is right there in the Keweenaw Peninsula in Michigan...¹⁷

The claim that native copper is found “only a few places on the Earth” is false. Most locations with modern copper mines requiring excavation also had some native copper on the surface available for archaeo-metallurgy.¹⁸ Also, the assertion that native copper is necessary also does not match the description of how the Book of Mormon peoples found their precious metals—they had to “dig it out of the earth” (Ether 10:23).

Continuing along the “native” (or easy access) line of reasoning, Meldrum also indicates that it is likely that Nephites found gold in “placer deposits.”¹⁹ Such deposits are a collection of minerals in a trap site, such as a river eddy. However, this ignores the fundamental point—the text of the Book of Mormon indicates that the people mined their metals by extensive digging (inconsistent with using tracer deposits), refined them, and became “exceedingly wealthy” (see Helaman 3:9, 11).

THE MICHIGAN RELICS AS EVIDENCE

It is interesting that the DVD presentation mentions some artifacts that were “declared as fakes or hoaxes” which were taken out of the presentation to avoid controversy. Then, interestingly enough, the presentation still presents information about the artifacts as if they should be considered anyway.²⁰

This is a clever step—it allows Meldrum to have the best of both worlds. He can make a show of scientific objectivity by not overtly including it in his presentation, while still getting the benefit of having mentioned it and implied that it, too, is evidence. He can then call doubters into question by implying that those who have questioned this evidence are not “objective” or “qualified” or “scientific.” And, he gets all these benefits without having to present a shred of evidence.

Meldrum's description of the artifacts leaves no doubt he is referencing what are known as the “Michigan Relics.”²¹ It has been long known that the relics are frauds. Many non-LDS

¹⁷ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 16, “Nephite Implements,” 2:30-3:15.

¹⁸ Christopher N. Watkins, an LDS graduate student, is currently coauthoring a paper on prehistoric native copper use in the American southwest, and provided us with this information by personal communication.

¹⁹ DNA Truthseeker [Rod Meldrum], “The River Sidon and the Great Lakes Theory,” *Mormon Apologetics and Discussion Board* (13 May 2008), online at <http://www.mormonapologetics.org/index.php?showtopic=35553&view=findpost&p=1208426371> (last accessed June 2, 2008).

²⁰ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 16, “Nephite Implements,” 7:56-9:15.

²¹ A photo of the forged “Michigan Tablet” of Christ's crucifixion is available in Wayne May, “Christ in North America?” *Ancient American* 4/26, online at <http://ancientamerican.com/article26p1.htm>. Perhaps not coincidentally, May is a tour director with Meldrum offering “The Ultimate LDS Tour” to the Hopewell area (see <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/index.php>, last accessed June 5, 2008).

authors who have published peer-reviewed articles about the relics.²² Another scientist who rejected them was James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and an eminent Ph.D. geologist. Talmage studied the artifacts soon after their appearance, declared them forgeries, and said so in a paper he co-authored for a non-LDS, peer-reviewed journal.²³ Talmage recorded that the stepdaughter of the man who discovered the relics told him that her step-father “made, buried, and dug up many of the articles.”²⁴ A case for a relic being forged simply doesn’t get much more air-tight than this.

TEPEES AND TENTS

Meldrum titles one section “tepees and tents,” though he never mentions tepees again. He does, however, mention tents, which the audience is supposed to associate with tepees. There is a problem with this, however. Tipis were used primarily by the Plains Indians, while the LNAM’s Nephites (the Hopewell) used permanent structures for housing.

The problem of equating tipis with the “tents” referred to in the Book of Mormon also involves the timing of the Plains Indian cultures. The ability to follow migrating herds and take their tents with them was heavily dependent upon horses, probably introduced into the area only after the 1600s.²⁵ As a result, this tipi-culture had its greatest extent from 1750 to 1890, long after the close of the Book of Mormon.²⁶

Even discounting the problems of a lack of correspondence between time and place, does the Book of Mormon text agree that Lamanites were nomadic? On the contrary, when the sons of Mosiah travel to Lamanite country on their mission (prior to the time of Christ) the Lamanites were clearly living in cities. (This is in contrast to the DVD’s claim that “they didn’t do much in the way of city building.”²⁷) From the descriptions of their kings and kings over kings, they were not only cities, but large ones with a complex social organization. The Book of Mormon text disagrees with the claim that the Lamanites were nomadic throughout most of Nephite history.²⁸

²² Francis W. Kelsey, “Some Archaeological Forgeries from Michigan,” *American Anthropologist* 10/8 (May 1908): 48–59; Francis W. Kelsey, “A Persistent Forgery,” *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 33/1 (1911): 26–31; Stephen D. Peet, “A ‘Stamp’ Table and Coin Found in a Michigan Mount,” *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 15 (September 1894): 313.

²³ Frederick Starr, J.O. Kinnaman, and James E. Talmage, “The Michigan Archaeological Question Settled,” *The American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 33, no. 3 (1911): 160–164.

²⁴ James E. Talmage, journal, June 1921; cited in Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Mormonism’s Encounter with the Michigan Relics,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 40/ 3 (2001): 187.

²⁵ “The Plains tribes adopted a horse culture beginning in the 17th century when escaped Spanish horses were obtained.” (“Plains Indians,” wikipedia.org, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plains_Indians, last accessed June 3, 2008); “Few Indians lived on the Great Plains before white men brought the horse in the 1600s.” (“Plains Indians,” <http://www.mce.k12tn.net/indians/reports4/plains.htm>, last accessed June 3, 2008). See also the review relative to buffalo evidence at http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/ for other examples of how Plains Indian history is inaccurately presented in the DVD.

²⁶ “Plains Indians,” wikipedia.org, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plains_Indians (last accessed June 3, 2008).

²⁷ Meldrum, *DNA Evidence*, section 6, “Tents, Temples, and Teepees,” 3:30-3:40.

²⁸ There is some evidence for Lamanite nomadic hunting and gathering early in Nephite history (e.g., Enos 1:20), but this is not the dominant Lamanite lifestyle through most of the Book of Mormon. See the review of buffalo evidence at http://www.fairlds.org/DNA_Evidence_for_Book_of_Mormon_Geography/ for further details.

TEMPLES

Meldrum claims that Hopewell temples are more like Solomon's temple than the Mayan temples sometimes associated with Mesoamerican artwork and the Book of Mormon. While he recognizes that the Mayan structures post-date the Nephite period, he insists that making this comparison is "fair game" since some LDS authors have not been clear about the distinction.

The DVD makes much of the ceremonial executions and blood rites of Mayan temples, and then concludes that this doesn't match the true temples of the Book of Mormon. This is true, but one must ask—so what? Mayan temples are not Nephite temples; the chronology is wrong for them to be equated. But, neither are the Hopewell mounds evidence of Nephite temples. The DVD repeatedly uses images of Monk's Mound (near present-day Collinsville, Illinois) to illustrate its claims about "Nephite temples." This mound cannot have been a Nephite temple, since its construction began around 900–950 A.D. and was not completed until 1100 A.D.²⁹

CONCLUSION

If the geography and genetics data had supported the LNAM, some of the supposed Book of Mormon parallels with the Hopewell would have been small additions to the model that helped enhance it. Lacking the firm foundation that the DVD supposedly presents, the author sees mounting evidence where there isn't any. The LNAM also ignores contrary evidence that doesn't fit the model.

Again, this paper is a summary of information presented in the full paper, *Section 5: Identifying the Nephites*. If you are interested in a longer exposition on the matters covered here, please see the full paper. The full paper also provides additional points at which the theories in *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography* should be rejected.

²⁹ "Monk's Mound," wikipedia.org, online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monk%27s_Mound (last accessed 5 September 2008).