

Tracking the Queen of Sheba

By KATELYN CROW & LISA HIGHTOWER

Yemen and Ethiopia may share more than the migration route of early man; they both claim to be the homeland of the legendary Queen of Sheba, renowned as beautiful, intelligent, adventurous, and a gracious queen.

Connie Mulligan, associate professor in the department of anthropology at the University of Florida, said that many Ethiopians believe the Queen of Sheba came from Ethiopia.

Ethiopian mythology explains that the Queen of Sheba heard about the renowned wisdom of King Solomon and visited him in Israel ~1000 B.C. The Queen returned to Ethiopia carrying his child, a boy named Menelik who later became the first king of the Ethiopian dynasty, Mulligan said.

Yemen citizens claim that the Queen of Sheba was actually from Yemen. This confusion may not be surprising considering how close the two countries were in ancient times.

“We think of them as two completely different countries and continents, but in fact there’s evidence that the Queen ruled over an area that included both Ethiopia and Yemen and both may have been a part of the mythical “God’s country” of Punt,” Mulligan said.

Mulligan’s research into genetic markers may offer some insight into the Queen dilemma. Her research reviews changes in DNA sequence, called ‘polymorphisms’, that are unique to different regional groups of people.

“We have some data that show a particularly high frequency polymorphism in Ethiopian Jewish people relative to Ethiopian non-Jewish people and relative to the rest of the world,” Mulligan said.

That trend is what she would expect to find if the Queen of Sheba returned from visiting King Solomon with a Jewish heir that started a Jewish community, Mulligan said. This provides support for Ethiopia’s claim to be the homeland of the Queen of Sheba.



KATELYN CROW

Following Ancient Footprints

One University of Florida scientist is using genetic footprints to track the migration of ancient humans.

Connie Mulligan, associate professor in the department of anthropology, is studying DNA samples taken from populations in southern Arabia to understand the movement of early man.

“We’re interested in reconstructing the first migration of anatomically modern humans out of Africa,” Mulligan said. Mulligan is looking into a migration route from the Horn of Africa starting in Ethiopia and moving towards the southern tip of Arabia in Yemen.

Mulligan is studying genetic markers called polymorphisms in DNA sequences or slight variations in the genetic pattern that are distinct to people living in certain regions. These specialized population markers represent approximately fewer than 5% of all genetic markers.

“We look at the minority of markers that allow us to distinguish between different populations, say in this case between African and non-African populations.” Mulligan said.

Mulligan spent 6 weeks traveling through Yemen collecting over 500 blood and saliva samples from the local population to determine if they have genetic markers common in African populations.

“We chose saliva and dried blood samples because they could provide large quantities of high-quality DNA from the saliva and then the dried blood samples let us study any blood-borne diseases such as malaria.” Mulligan said.

These samples will be compared to samples taken from a population in Ethiopia to determine whether their genetic sequences are similar, proving ancient man traveled from Ethiopia to Yemen.

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