



Type: Book Chapter

---

## Of the Discovery of Relics Other than Hebrew

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

Source: *New Witnesses for God: Volume III - The Book of Mormon*

Published: Salt Lake City; Deseret News, 1909

Pages: 57-66

---

---

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### OF THE DISCOVERY OF RELICS OTHER THAN HEBREW.

#### I.

#### *The Cincinnati Gold Plate.*

Other discoveries of ancient American records, though evidently not of Hebrew origin, should also be recorded, since they bear important testimony to the fact that the ancient Americans did engrave records on metallic plates. One of these records was found in the state of Ohio, the other in Illinois. The first is the discovery of a gold plate with raised characters engraven upon it, near Cincinnati, under the following circumstances:

Mr. Benjamin E. Styles of Cincinnati, Ohio, while excavating the earth for a cistern, in the year 1847, found, a few feet above high water mark on the Ohio river, a gold plate. It was thrown out with the loose earth while excavating about nine feet beneath the surface. Said plate is of fine gold, three or four inches in length, averaging about three-fourths of an inch in width, about one-eighth of an inch in thickness, with the edges scalloped. In the face of which was beautifully set another plate of the same material, and fastened together by two pins, running through both. This latter plate is full of ancient raised characters, beautifully engraved upon its surface; the whole exhibiting fine workmanship. The plate was examined by Dr. Wise, a very learned Rabbi of the Jewish synagogue in Cincinnati, and editor of a Hebrew paper there, who pronounced the characters to be mostly ancient Egyptian.

Such was the description of the circumstances under which the discovery was made, and of the plate itself, by

Elder Parley P. Pratt, to whom Mr. Styles exhibited the plate, and related the circumstances of its discovery. Elder Pratt communicated the facts to the "Mormon," published in New York, in a letter bearing date of January 1st, 1857.<sup>g</sup> A cut of the relic was afterwards made and published by Drake and Co., of St. Louis, printers, and with it the following certificate was given:

We do hereby certify that we did print from a gold plate, the above fac-simile, handed to us by Mr. Benjamin Styles, which he said he found while digging for a cistern in Cincinnati, Ohio.

No. 1 is a frame of gold containing a thin plate, No. 2, and appears to have been executed by a very superior workman.

DRAKE AND CO., PRINTERS,  
Saint Louis, Missouri.<sup>h</sup>

## II.

### *The Kinderhook Plates.*

The Illinois discovery is summarized as follows from the "Quincy Whig," a paper published in Quincy, Illinois):

#### SINGULAR DISCOVERY. MATERIAL FOR ANOTHER MORMON BOOK.

A young man by the name of Wiley, a resident in Kinderhook, Pike county, went by himself and labored diligently one day in pursuit of a supposed treasure, by sinking a hole in the centre of a mound. Finding it quite laborious, he invited others to assist him. A company of ten or twelve repaired to the mound and assisted in digging out the shaft commenced by Wiley. After penetrating the mound about eleven feet, they came to a bed of limestone that had been subjected to the action

<sup>g</sup>Mill. Star, Vol. XIX., p. 103.

<sup>h</sup>A fac-simile of the plate is to be found in Mill. Star, Vol. XIX., p. 632.

of fire. They removed the stones, which were small and easy to handle, to the depth of two feet more, when they found six brass plates, secured and fastened together by two iron wires, but which were so decayed that they readily crumbled to dust upon being handled. The plates were so completely covered with rust as almost to obliterate the characters inscribed upon them, but, after undergoing a chemical process, the inscriptions were brought out plain and distinct. There were six plates, four inches in length, one inch and three-quarters wide at the top and two inches and three-quarters wide at the bottom, flaring out to points. There are four lines of characters or hieroglyphics on each. On one side of the plates are parallel lines running lengthways. By whom these plates were deposited there must ever remain a secret, unless some one skilled in deciphering hieroglyphics may be found to unravel the mystery. Some pretend to say that Smith, the Mormon leader, has the ability to read them. If he has, he will confer a great favor on the public by removing the mystery which hangs over them. A person present when the plates were found remarked that it would go to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, which it undoubtedly will. In the place where these plates were deposited were also found human bones in the last stage of decomposition. There were but a few bones found; and it is believed that it was but the burial place of a person or family of distinction in ages long gone by, and that these plates contain the history of the times, or of a people that existed far, far beyond the memory of the present race. But we will not conjecture anything about discovery, as it is one which the plates alone can reveal. The plates above alluded to were exhibited in this city last week, and are now, we understand, in Nauvoo, subject to the inspection of the Mormon Prophet. The public curiosity is greatly excited; and if Smith can decipher the hieroglyphics on the plates, he will do more towards throwing light on the early history of this continent than any man now living.<sup>h</sup>

---

<sup>h</sup>Mill. Star, Vol. XXI., p. 44.



In a communication to the "Times and Seasons" (Nauvoo, Illinois), the following testimony concerning the discovery was given :

On the 16th of April last, a respectable merchant, by the name of Robert Wiley, commenced digging in a large mound near this place: He excavated to the depth of ten feet and came to rock. About that time the rain began to fall, and he abandoned the work. On the 23rd, he and quite a number of the citizens, with myself, repaired to the mound; and after making ample opening, we found plenty of rock the most of which appeared as though it had been strongly burned; and after removing full two feet of said rock, we found plenty of charcoal and ashes; also human bones that appeared as though they had been burned; and near the encophalon a bundle was found that consisted of six plates of brass of a bell shape, each having a hole near the small end, and a ring through them all, and clasped with two clasps. The rings and clasps appeared to be iron very much oxydated. The plates appeared first to be copper, and had the appearance of being covered with characters. It was agreed by the company that I should cleanse the plates. Accordingly I took them to my house washed them with soap and water and a woolen cloth, but, finding them not yet cleansed, I treated them with dilute sulphuric acid, which made them perfectly clean, on which it appeared that they were completely covered with hieroglyphics that none as yet have been able to read. Wishing that the world might know the hidden things as fast as they come to light, I was induced to state the facts, hoping that you would give it an insertion in your excellent paper; we feel anxious to know the true meaning of the plates, and publishing the facts might lead to the true translation.

They were found, I judged, more than twelve feet below the surface of the top of the mound. I am, most respectfully, a citizen of Kinderhook.

W. P. HARRIS, M. D.

We the citizens of Kinderhook, whose names are annexed, do certify and declare that on the 23rd of April, 1843, while excavating a large mound in this vicinity, Mr. R. Wiley took from

said mound six brass plates of a bell shape, covered with ancient characters. Said plates were very much oxydated. The bands and rings on said plates mouldered into dust on a slight pressure.

ROBERT WILEY,	GEORGE DECKENSON,
W. LONGNECKER,	G. W. F. WARD,
J. R. SHARP,	IRA A. CURTIS,
FAYETTE GRUBB,	W. P. HARRIS,
W. FUGATE. <sup>i</sup>	

Since these plates were sent to Nauvoo for the inspection of the Prophet Joseph, it will be of interest to know what view he took of them. The following occurs in his journal under date of Monday, May 1st, 1843:

I insert fac-simile of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook, in Pike county, Illinois, on April 23, by Mr. R. Wiley and others, while excavating a large mound. They found a skeleton about six feet from the surface of the earth, which must have stood nine feet high. The plates were found on the breast of the skeleton, and were covered on both sides with ancient characters. I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth.<sup>j</sup>

It is proper here to call attention to the fact that the genuineness of this discovery of the Kinderhook plates is questioned by some anti-Mormon writers, among them Professor William A. Linn, in his late work, "The Story of Mormonism," where he says:

But the true story of the Kinderhook plates was disclosed by an affidavit made by W. Fugate of Mound station, Brown county, Illinois, before Jay Brown justice of the peace, on June

<sup>i</sup>Mill. Star, Vol. XXI., p. 44.

<sup>j</sup>Mill. Star, Vol. XXI., p. 40.

30, 1879. In this he stated that the plates were a humbug, gotten up by Robert Wiley, Bridge Whitton, and myself. Whitton (who was a blacksmith) cut the plates out of some pieces of copper; Wiley and I made the hieroglyphics by making impressions on beeswax and filling them with acid, and putting it on the plates. When they were finished, we put them together with rust made of nitric acid, old iron and lead, and bound them with a piece of hoop iron, covering them completely with rust. He describes the burial of the plates and the digging up, among the spectators of the latter being two Mormon Elders, Marsh and Sharp. Sharp declared that the Lord had directed them to witness the digging. The plates were borrowed and shown to Smith, and were finally given to one Professor McDowell of St. Louis, for his museum.<sup>k</sup>

Of this presentation of the matter it is only necessary to say that it is a little singular that Mr. Fugate alone out of the three said to be in collusion in perpetrating the fraud should disclose it, and that he should wait from 1843 to 1879—a period of thirty-six years—before doing so, when he and those said to be associated with him had such an excellent opportunity to expose the vain pretensions of the Prophet—if Fugate's tale be true? For while the statement in the text of the Prophet's Journal to the effect that the find was genuine, and that he had translated some of the characters and learned certain historical facts concerning the person with whose remains the plates were found, may not have been known at the time to the alleged conspirators to deceive him, still the editor of the *Times and Seasons*—John Taylor, the close personal friend of the Prophet—took the find seriously, and expressed at once explicit confidence in an editorial in the *Times and Seasons*, of May 1st, 1843, that the Prophet could give a translation of the plates. And this attitude the Church, continued to maintain; for in *The*

---

<sup>k</sup>"The Story of the Mormons," Linn, p. 87.



*Prophet*, (a Mormon weekly periodical, published in New York) of the 15th of February, 1845, there was published a *fac-simile* of the Kinderhook plates, together with the *Times and Seasons* editorial and all the above matter of the text. How easy to have covered Joseph Smith and his followers with ridicule by proclaiming the hoax as soon as they accepted the Kinderhook plates as genuine! Why was it not done? The fact that Fugate's story was not told until thirty-six years after the event, and that he alone of all those who were connected with the event gives that version of it, is rather strong evidence that his story is the hoax, not the discovery of the plates, nor the engravings upon them.

### III.

#### *The Tuccabatchey Plates.*

In further evidence that the native Americans engraved records on metallic plates I quote the following from Adair's "History of the North American Indians." The passage is a footnote on the custom of the Indians burying a dead person's treasures with him:

In the Tuccabatches on the Tallapoose river, thirty miles above the Allabahamah garrison are two brazen tables, and five of copper. They (the Indians) esteem them so sacred as to keep them constantly in their holy of holies, without touching them in the least, only in the time of their compounded first-fruit offering, and annual expiation of sins; at which season, their magus carries one under his arm, ahead of the people, dancing round in sacred armor; next to him their head warrior carries another; and those warriors who choose it carry the rest after the manner of the high priest; all the others carry white canes with swan-feathers at the top. Hearing accidentally of these important monuments of antiquity, and inquiring pretty much about them, I was certified of the truth of the report by four

of the southern traders, at the most eminent Indian trading house of all English America. One of the gentlemen informed me, that at my request he endeavored to get the liberty of viewing the aforesaid tables, but it could not possibly be obtained, only in the time of the yearly grand sacrifice, for fear of polluting their holy things, at which time gentlemen of curiosity may see them. Old Bracket, an Indian, of perhaps one hundred years old, lives in that old beloved town, who gave the following description of them:

The shape of the five copper plates: One is a foot and a half long and seven inches wide, the other four are shorter and narrower.

The shape of the two brass plates was circular, about a foot and a half in diameter.

He [Bracket] said that he was told by his forefathers that those plates were given to them by the man we call God; that there had been many more of other shapes, some as long as he could stretch with both his arms, and some had writing upon them which are buried with particular men; and that they had instructions given with them, viz., they must only be handled by particular people, and those feasting [fasting?]; and no unclean woman must be suffered to come near them or the place, where they are deposited. He said none but his own town's people had any such plates given them, and that they were a different people from the Creeks. He only remembered three more which were buried with three of his family and he was the only man of the family now left. He said, there were two copper plates under the king's cabin which laid there from the first settling of the town.

This account was taken in the Tuccabatchey square, 27th July, 1759, per Will. Bolsover.<sup>k</sup>

The foregoing account of engraven records on gold and copper plates is important as evidence to the truth of the Book of Mormon only this far; the Book of Mormon repeatedly declares that such was the manner of keeping rec-

---

<sup>k</sup>Lord Kingsborough's Mexican Antiquities, Vol. VIII., pp. 356, 358.

ords among the Nephites and the Jaredites, Mormon's abridgment of the larger Nephite records being engraven in this manner on plates of gold. And the discoveries related above, all of which were unknown to Joseph Smith, prove that in ancient America records were so kept, and constitutes at least important incidental evidence to the truth of that part of the Book of Mormon statement.