

## THE CONTROVERSY

### Chapter II

One crisp Spring morning in 1874, a farmer newly arrived from the East, clearing timber nearby the village of Crystal, in central Michigan northwest of Detroit, unearthed a beautifully worked piece of black slate in the form of a shuttle covered with curious markings adjacent to a drawing of a man's head wearing queerly fashioned head gear (Fig. 1). Within the course of the next few months, additional unexplainable pieces came to light in an area between the villages of Crystal, St. Louis and Edmore-a copper stiletto, a small clay box and a large slate tablet-each bearing undecipherable markings-together with some strange looking cryptic characters.

Wonderment stirred the community. Never suspecting that any large group, other than Indians, had preceded them on this land tucked away in the heart of Michigan, farmers in Montcalm and Gratiot Counties stood in profound amazement at this assortment of copper tools, pictured tablets, spear-points and bracelets now spread before them. How could such unrecognizable material come to have been buried in this sparsely populated farming community? Who, they asked, might have buried them? Were they remains of a race long since wiped out? Certain it was that human beings once occupied this land-here was tangible evidence made by human hands. Markings unmistakably bespoke a writing. No one could read it. Wonderment spread as a bewildered country-side found itself the center of nation-wide attention. Curiosity-seekers flocked to the tiny village. Everyone offered suggestions

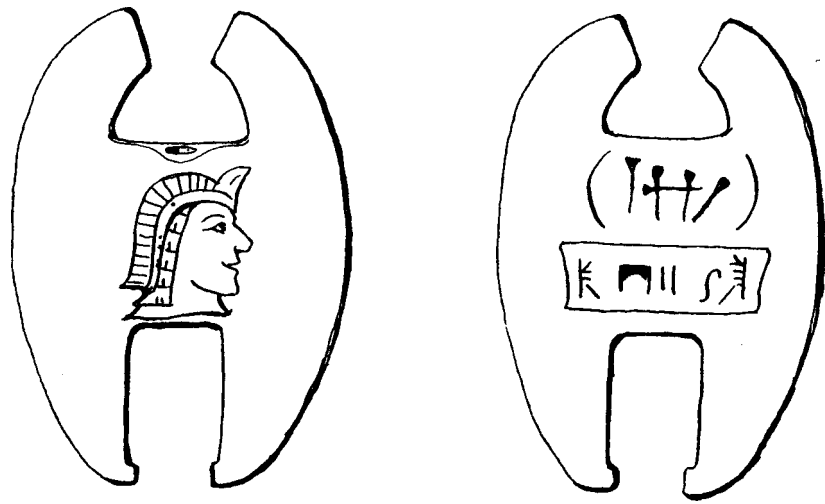


Fig. 1

*Shuttle of Black Slate*

*(I have the original in my possession)*

Some bethought the marks to be Egyptian offering pictures from their encyclopedias; others equally certain the marks stemmed from Hebrew, countered with samples from their Bibles. If the writing were Hebrew, could this then be remains of one of the so-called "lost tribes?" Many thought so. Imaginations soared.

Into this early perplexed community came Professor J. O. Kinnerman, Editor of the *Michiganian*, living in nearby Berrien Springs, to investigate on his own. As did others, he stood speechless in astonishment. Recognizing certain resemblances to Egyptian, he was yet aware of great differences, so much so as to be frankly embarrassed by being unable to offer adequate explanation. Many years later, during the course of the 1910 heated controversy, Prof. Kinnerman took occasion to refer to this early period in the 1870's and 1880's with which he himself had been familiar.

Between 1870 and 1920, farmers from seventeen counties in Michigan stumbled across footprints of this strange people and

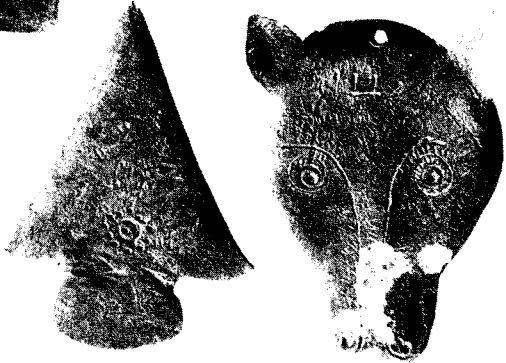
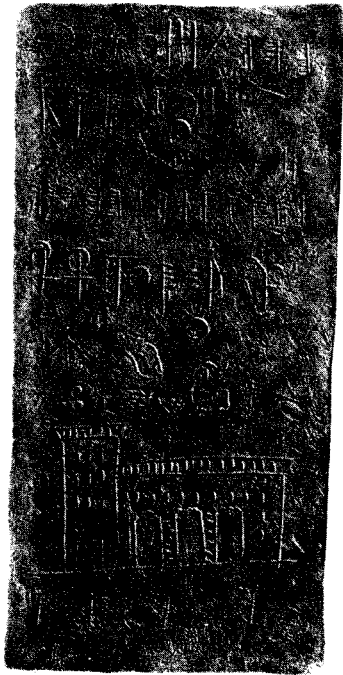
from these finds seven major collections developed. Some 125 miles southeast of Crystal, in the Detroit area, another large group of identically marked material turned up in the 1860's to the 1880's. Much of this fell into the hands of Prof. Edwin Worth. Unbeknownst to farmers in Montcalm County, the Wayne County specimens were exhibited in Detroit by Prof. Worth in his privately owned museum. Later moving his exhibit to New York, his collection was on display there for about forty years. Desiring to retire to be near his only living relative, a sister, when nearing 70 years of age, in 1906, he purchased land near Springport, Indiana, where he built a large frame museum as a permanent home. Records indicate that Prof. Worth started collecting as a small boy in 1848. In addition to inscribed stones, he also had an extensive coin collection, an outstanding collection of fine oriental pearls and the head of the assassin of President Garfield! During the

years in Springport, his museum became famous-so much so that on Sundays in summer as many as 600 persons streamed through the museum to look at this fantastic collection. In 1916, Prof Worth's museum burned. From the ashes of that fire some twenty pieces of this inscribed material from Michigan were recovered by Thad Wilson-five of those pieces were sold to Philip Schupp of Chicago in 1924. Photograph of those scarred remains appears here as Plate I.

Earlier excitement and curiosity sparked by Franklin's 1874 find in Crystal, barely subsided when consternation and furor burst upon Wyman, Montcalm County. This was the famous find of James O. Scotford, in 1890-the find over which bitter controversy seethed for some thirty years. This was the jar which was

later to become associated with the notorious "Soper Frauds" the group of artifacts that sent mercurial tempers soaring.

So it had happened in the late Fall of 1890, that a young hired hand digging post holes on the Davis farm near Wyman, spaded up a clay jar covered with peculiar marks. James Scotford, who, as most persons raised in backcountry at this time had little formal education, could not have been expected to recognize the strange markings-he did recognize that it was not Indian for Indian



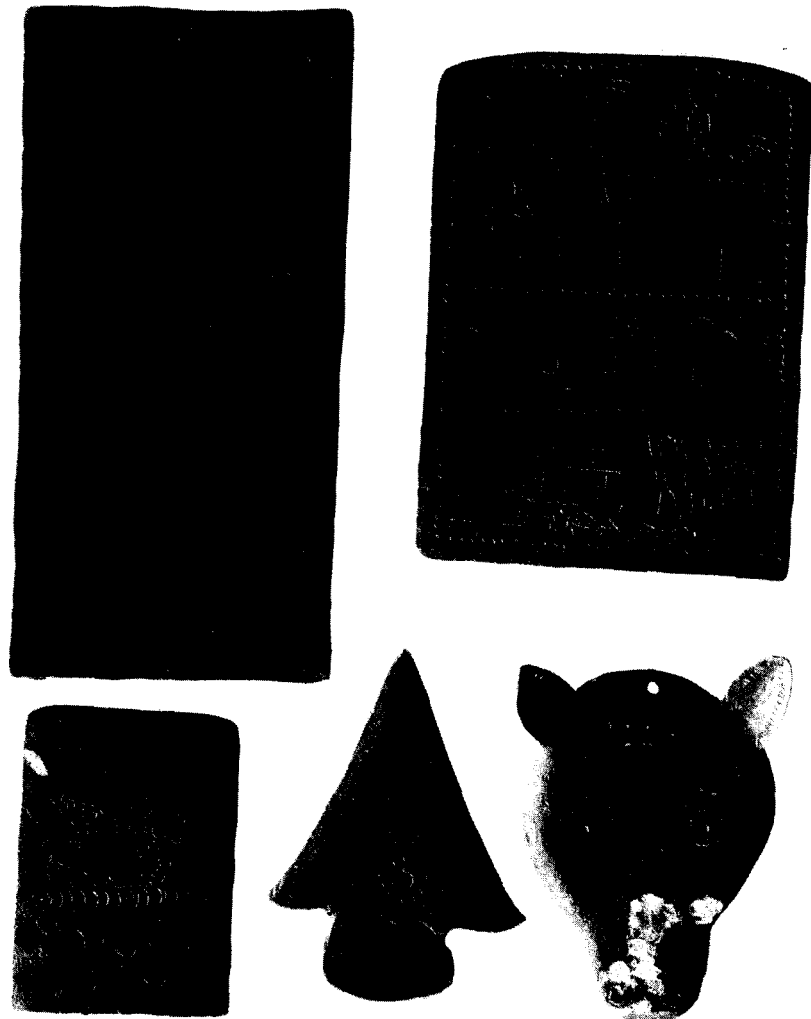


Plate 1

*These five copper pieces came from collection of Edwin Worth, started sometime in 1850's, and were five of the ten pieces first submitted to me for examination. The other pieces were slate.*

material he knew well. Curiosity seekers flocked to the Davis farm to look at the odd jar and again persons satisfied themselves that markings must be Egyptian hieroglyphics or, as some thought, Hebrew or even Greek. Scotford's find sparked a chain reaction of unprecedented controversy followed with interest by archaeologists particularly in Europe amongst groups who had earlier raised questions concerning inscribed artifacts dug from American soil.

Before the year 1890 ended, Scotford had dug up a score of more objects each bearing an identical cryptic mark. Persons from Stanton, the County seat, interested in what they assumed to be a fantastic remains of some ancient race inhabiting the very land on which they lived, formed a small society to study Scotford's material. Photographs hopefully were sent to universities and museums throughout the United States trusting that someone somewhere might recognize the markings as writing and identify the objects. No one could. Instead, back came heart-breaking answers, one after another, that all pieces were spurious-not one was authentic. Typical of reactions came from Professor Alfred Emerson of Lake Forest College, who replied: "The articles were bad enough in the photograph. Examination proved them to be humbug of the first water. They were all of unbaked clay and decorated with bogus hieroglyphics in which cuneiform characters appeared at intervals. These were all stamped. By way of economizing labor, the characters were turned upside down, or laid sideways."

Disillusionment brought on by disheartening replies dampened enthusiasm and within a few months the little archaeological society of Stanton, which started out with so much hope, disbanded.

Adding to this widespread confusion, Francis W. Kelsey, Professor of Latin on the faculty of the University of Michigan, contributed an article to *The Nation* under date of 28 January 1892, denouncing the material as fraudulent. Professor Kelsey titled his article-"Archaeological Forgeries at Wyman, Michigan." In his own words, he told the following story:

"Wyman, Michigan, is a small village on the Stanton branch of

the Detroit, Lansing and Northern Railroad about 60 miles northwest of Lansing. It is a region from which in recent years the pine woods have been cut away. Only a small portion of the land is under cultivation and as the saw mills have been removed, the country presents a desolate appearance. The ground is covered with low, rounded elevations a few feet across, most of which were produced by the uprooting of trees in times past and the decaying of roots in the soil around them. Among these are larger, sepulchral mounds of an aboriginal population which yield human bones and a few neolithic remains of the common sort. The soil is sandy.

"In October, 1890, a man digging post-holes in a field near Wyman found a small cup of unbaked clay. In the spring and summer of 1891 other discoveries were made, and the inhabitants of the region passed into a state of great excitement which has hardly yet subsided.... Three or four archaeologists have pronounced the relics forgeries; yet a considerable number of people believe in them. ... The favorite explanation is that these objects are the remains of a colony that in a remote period found its way to Michigan from the Valley of the Tigris and Euphrates.... Three pieces recently came into the possession of the University of Michigan—a sphinx, a vase and a tablet—these were taken from a low mound near Wyman.

"In view of the perishable quality of the clay, the slight elevation of the mound, the nearness to the surface of the objects and the amount of yearly rainfall in this region, it is clear that the objects could not have been in the ground more than one year.

"Here is evidence then, of a deliberate and laborious attempt at imposition.... Is this the work of an unbalanced religious fanatic, for whom some prophet will arise in due time and interpret the supposed mystic symbol into a new creed?"

Following Prof. Kelsey's article, an independent opinion rendered by Prof. Morris Jastrow, Jr., leading anthropologist on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, confirmed in principle that which Prof. Kelsey had contended. In part, Prof. Jastrow stated:

"In view of the wide publicity given to the report of the discovery of 'Assyrian' antiquities in a Michigan mound, I beg of you to announce that the tablets and monuments claimed to have been excavated are willful forgeries, remarkable only for their clumsy character and the great ignorance betrayed by the forger. Photographs of the objects have been sent to me, and a glance is sufficient to reveal the true character of the 'find.' The inscriptions are largely a horrible mixture of Phoenician, Egyptian and ancient Greek characters taken at random from a comparative table of alphabets such as is found at the back of Webster's Dictionary. As for the cuneiform characters found on one of the tablets, they are, in the main, variations of a single letter which the forger happened to stumble across, perhaps in the article 'Cuneiform' of Appleton's Encyclopedia, while the sculptures, which include a sphinx of an 'Irish' cast of features are evidently copied from some illustrated handbook on archaeology. ... It is surprising that any sensible persons should have been for one moment deceived by so evident a fraud—and yet a correspondent writes that there are some 57 affidavits testifying to the genuineness of the discovery just 56 more than there ought to be."

After publication of these two articles, national interest that had bathed Montcalm County in an unexpected aura of publicity subsided and fever-pitch excitement gradually tapered off enwrapping the tiny village of Wyman once again in a veil of obscurity.

Then, sometime around 1907, oddly marked objects for the second time started to appear in the Detroit area. The earlier museum collection of Prof. Worth long since removed from Detroit to New York, passed from memory of an older generation. Precise location and circumstances under which the first of this second series of objects was found do not appear to have been recorded—resulting in three or four independent versions.

Excerpt from a letter many years after the event, dated 28 October 1924, written by Rev. James Savage, recites the finding as he remembered hearing it from Daniel Soper the evening Soper made the original find. Therefore, it is Rev. Savage's account that we shall follow as being written as nearly contemporaneous with

the find as would be possible. His letter in part stated:

"I am an old man and have collected Indian artifacts a long number of years. I have between 9 & 10 thousand Indian artifacts. I have never sold nor do I intend to sell an article. I have also some 700 specimens of these artifacts of which you are making inquiry. I think it was in 1906 Mr. Dan. E. Soper rambling through the woods-then north of Detroit, saw a large pile of sand, more than a ton, thrown out from the side of a hillock on which stood the trunk of a large Bass wood tree. The trunk was not dead, broken off, with some 3 large shoots sprung from the roots, which made the digging more difficult. It struck me it was where a large woodchuck intruded making his winter quarters. It had rained that morning & the fragments of Pottery the animal threw out were washed off & Mr. Soper noticed the writing & marking on these fragments. He went home-got his man & opened what proved to be a mound or burial place of a Prehistoric People. This mound contained-a Clay Lamp (Dip Lamp)-a box in which were 3 copper spears. If I remember-the box was slate. This was the first of his finds of this Prehistoric People." (In a letter dated 14 January 1919, Mr. Soper gave the date of his first find as October 1907-not 1906 as Rev. Savage thought.)

That same October evening of his first find, Mr. Soper went to consult with his good friend Rev. James Savage, Pastor of the Most Holy Trinity Church, 1050 Porter Street, Detroit, an amateur archaeologist whose letter in part has been quoted above. Intrigued by the unfamiliar markings, Mr. Soper and Dean Savage pored over this strangely marked material until nearly morning.

Under no circumstances could Dean Savage be considered a mere novice at examining material-although an amateur archaeologist he commanded respect in a field where few, if any, professionals outranked him. Dean Savage had been a collector of Indian artifacts from the time that he was a small boy. He accumulated and classified a collection of between nine and ten thousand specimens-acknowledged as the finest collection of Indian material of that day in the midwest. He knew Indian craftsmanship perfectly and he instantly recognized that the material spread

before him matched nothing in his vast collection. Both Dean Savage and Mr. Soper were at a complete loss.

Scotford, meanwhile having come to Detroit, read newspaper accounts of strange objects that had been found in and around Detroit bearing three wedge-shaped characters which he recognized as being similar to those that he had found in Montcalm County some sixteen years earlier. Scotford immediately arranged for a meeting with Mr. Soper and Dean Savage. Thereafter, and within a comparatively short span of time, these three men, working together, located and excavated over 500 mounds primarily around Detroit.

Into this bizarre and puzzling picture in 1910, came Rudolph Etzenhouser, a general missionary for the Church of Latter Day Saints. Bishop Etzenhouser, as he was known, published a brochure of forty pages of photographs showing a portion of material he himself had gathered together along with photographs of objects excavated by Mr. Soper and Dean Savage. Believing sincerely in the genuineness of his material, as well as that which Mr. Soper and Dean Savage had excavated, Bishop Etzenhouser started on a nationwide lecture tour during the course of which he proclaimed his tablets and artifacts to be the "finest collection of pre-historic relics ever exhibited in the United States." Academic circles, believing the entire group of artifacts to be forgeries, ridiculed this brazen intrusion into the archaeological field with animosity mounting higher on each succeeding Etzenhouser lecture.

National publicity accorded Bishop Etzenhouser irritated Prof. Kelsey, who railed at this unforeseen turn of events. Sensing that his reputation as well as his article published in 1892, had been assailed, Prof. Kelsey marshalled his forces to do battle. Enlisting cooperation from a group of academic friends- outstanding professors and museum directors-Prof. Kelsey proposed to liquidate the men who he alleged manufactured and sold this fraudulent material. Sufficient money was collected to provide for formation of a formal "Syndicate." Once organized, this Syndicate sponsored articles which appeared from time to time in the *American*

*Anthropologist* and other journals of similar professional interest.

By nature, leaders of these two opposing factions-Prof. Kelsey on one side and Mr. Soper on the other-were men of strong temperament, domineering and arrogant-both supremely egotistical, headstrong and argumentative. Each instinctively felt total repugnance toward the other.

Prof. Kelsey, having taken the initiative, felt duty-bound by reason of his position on the faculty of the University, to curb spreading rumors that enticed a gullible public into misbelief that these artifacts were authentic. Aided by C. E. Brown of the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Director of the Detroit Art Museum as well as the newly formed Syndicate, a wide-scale program designed to reeducate the public soon materialized. Importance attached to this undertaking was of such magnitude that a hand-picked group from various universities and museums was called together for conference to plan strategy in combating the unquenchable Mr. Soper and Bishop Etzenhouser. Prof. Kelsey himself addressed the opening session which was held in Chicago. From the platform, Prof. Kelsey, Prof. G. B. Brown of the University of Pennsylvania, Prof. W. K. Moorehead of Phillips Andover Academy and others, spoke at considerable length-increasingly disturbed by the contemptuous attitude of the two men, their arrogance and persistence. At this first meeting of the conference, the group unified in concluding that Scotford alone had been guilty of willfully forging the material, that Mr. Soper and Bishop Etzenhouser were co-conspirators-Dean Savage, they concluded, had been innocently led astray.

Prof. J. O. Kinnerman, who had examined Mr. Franklin's 1874 collection of this material, as noted above, was present on the platform during that first meeting but "desiring to remain neutral" inconceivably sat mute-making no comment of any nature from the platform. In his article published in the first issue for 1911, of the *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, Prof. Kinnerman wrote: "Long before the first date mentioned by Prof. Kelsey (1890), we knew the existence of and examined personally many of the same kind of 'finds' mentioned in above article.

"In a small hamlet of Crystal, Montcalm County, Michigan, resided a gentleman by name of Franklin, a very aged man even at that time, but a devotee of American archaeology. This man has for years been a collector and his collection was so large that a special building had been erected to house it. Quite a fortune had been expended by him in his efforts to solve the riddle of America's pre-historic peoples.

"Among his collection were clay tablets that especially attracted our attention, one of which was designated by Mr. Franklin as the 'Deluge Tablet.' This tablet was of baked clay 22 x 7, divided into two sections. Many copper relics were in the collection including axes, spears, knives and objects for which no known use could be assigned. Also, incense burners, caskets, pipes and figurines.

"In 1891, we repeated our visit, taking notes and even squeezes which we have been so unfortunate as to have destroyed. Again in 1901, we visited Mr. Franklin. On this occasion he presented us with three coins which we still have. We showed them to Prof. Dorsey of the Field Museum in Chicago. He, without due consideration, at once in an impulsive way, pronounced them a 'fraud.'

"We are not going to take sides and express our opinion at this stage of the discussions, but we will say that if Mr. Franklin was duped, he was so unknowingly for he spent thousands of dollars making his collection.

"An archaeologist may be critical and conservative but yet he may be too impulsive in the expression of his preconceived hypothesis and thus be blinded to the truth even when it is thrust at him."

So wrote Prof. J. O. Kinnerman in 1911.

At its second formal meeting, a committee was appointed to proceed to Michigan on behalf of the Syndicate to investigate and observe excavation of a mound. Prof. Frederick Starr, well-known and much-beloved anthropologist on the faculty of the University of Chicago, placed on the committee at special request of the Chicago *Examiner*, was accompanied to Michigan by Roswell Field of the Editorial staff of that daily newspaper. Due to unusual

circumstances surrounding the investigation, the Mormon Church has a particular interest in the controversy and they delegated Dr. James E. Talmage, Director of the Deseret Museum of Salt Lake City, as a member of the committee to represent the Mormon Church.

At the outset, it seemed apparent that individual members of the committee found their duty an unpleasant one. Mr. Soper's attitude has been exasperating making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to maintain an objective viewpoint. Into that disquieting atmosphere the committee arrived in Detroit. Later that same day, they participated in the opening of two mounds within which five relics were found.

Prof. Starr rendered an official report on behalf of the committee. His report, published in the *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, summarized findings of the official committee and, in part, stated:

"The two mounds we opened were undisturbed and brush-grown; they had not yet been prepared against our coming; nothing has been 'planted' in them.... Seven or eight of us looked on. All agree that usually only one mound in eight or ten contains anything; both of ours were productive! ... What of our objects? (1) None of the five is old, yet each bears the 'mystic sign.' (2) None of them has laid in the earth for any time. (3) One of which I removed at Scotford's request 'with my own hands' could have been at the place from which I took it two minutes before; this I can demonstrate to anyone, even to an intelligent child of ten years. These five objects were not 'planted' in the mound; they were 'introduced' as we looked on and one would not need to be a skilled sleight-of-hand man to do it."

So wrote Professor Starr.

While Prof. Starr reported that neither of the mounds had been disturbed or prepared prior to their coming, nor has any of the five objects recovered been 'planted' in advance-yet he denounced Mr. Scotford as being a prestidigitator who "introduced the relics" as the "eight or ten" professors anxiously watched-that the sleight-of-hand was so quick none of the group,

sent there for the very purpose of observation and with eyes glued to the spot, saw it happen! Prof. Starr's official report on behalf of the committee was accepted by the Syndicate and published without question.

In this same issue of the *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, two other articles treating of these alleged forgeries were published-one by Prof. Kelsey and the second by Prof. John Andrew Russell.

Tucked away within this complex array of charge and counter charge-of bitter denunciation and defiant opponents-yet another still small voice emerged from the wilderness. Prof. Russell, who originally concluded this material has been forged, now changed his mind and expressed his growing awareness that all was far from being settled. His article reflected a strongly held opinion contrary to that of the remainder of the academic community. Due solely to his position, his article received publication for what it might be worth-with no comment.

In his article, curiously enough, Prof. Russell championed the cause of Mr. Soper and Dean Savage. In his opening statement, he acknowledged that he has been among the original group censoring both the men and the relics, but after prolonged study and exhaustive investigation on his own part, he reversed his original opinion and was now prepared to state that his later extensive findings have convinced him that the specimens were genuine. His lengthy detailed description of the objects and conditions under which they had been found appears to be the only source published in which the material itself was treated. Aside from opinions expressed in his article, Prof. Russell set down many surrounding circumstances that preserved invaluable historical information regarding these relics not found in any other place.

Objectives of the Syndicate founded by Prof. Kelsey have ample publicity and now reflected changed attitudes on the part of the public-changes for which the Syndicate has fervently hoped. Their meetings have been pre-eminently successful and they were agreed amongst themselves that the public has been protected against irresponsible peddlers of fraudulent material. Having thus

accomplished its purpose, the Syndicate disbanded.

Adverse publicity surrounding the four men against whom the Syndicate waged their campaign gradually waned-yet from 1912 to 1920, Mr. Soper, Dean Savage and Mr. Scotford quietly continued with their program of excavation without further molestation.

Insofar as records indicate, the last known mound opening, the digging of which Mr. Soper supervised, took place on September 20, 1920, at Halfway, a small hamlet near Detroit-Mr.Soper being then 79 years of age. Three mounds were opened that day in the presence of Mr. Soper, Dean Savage, Mr. Scotford, Dr. R. B. Orr, Director of the museum at Toronto, Canada, Major James of the same museum, Harry L. Spooner, an amateur archeologist and Mr. Spooner's small son Al.

Mr. Spooner observed that none of the mounds had been disturbed prior to their digging on that September day in 1920. Atop the third mound grew a large beech tree which he described as very slow growing and appearing to him to have been well over 100 years old. Enormous roots had to be cut in order to excavate and, embedded deeply within the tangled network of two roots, a beautifully carved stone pipe came to light-four superb heads as exquisite as anything he had ever seen. Mr. Spooner remembered that Dr. Orr asked for the pipe as a specimen to display in the museum and he put it in his coat pocket taking it back with him to Toronto.

Some two years after this dig at Halfway, Mr. Soper died.

In 1924, Mr. Phillip Schupp of Chicago obtained directly from Thad Wilson of Springport, Indiana, five remaining pieces of copper recovered from Prof. Edwin Worth's museum fire, as noted above. Mr. Schupp, a collector of Indian and other artifacts, became fascinated by inscribings on these copper pieces and instituted correspondence with Dean Savage. In October 1924, Dean Savage wrote to Mr. Schupp summing up his activity. This letter, a portion of which was quoted above, appears to be the last account written by the hand of one of the three persons originally involved in the controversy. Nothing further was learned of either James Scotford or of Bishop Etzenhauser.

Since 1924, sporadic reference has appeared in print concerning these relics.

In an issue dated December 20, 1925, the New York Times devoted a double-page spread to "Bogus Relics of the Past and Counterfeits Foisted on the Public." Included among counterfeits such as the famous Cardiff Giant, these Michigan relics received lengthy comment. The Times' article stated that Walter C. Wyman, of Wyman, Michigan, an amateur archaeologist, who had been a collector of relics for some forty years, ruled this group of artifacts to be fraudulent. According to the New York Times:

"Mr. Wyman got into communication with Scotford under an assumed name, and finally without indicating his intention, paid the paper-hanger a visit at his Michigan home. Scotford was busy that day. He was at work in his shed, and so the archeologist came upon him unexpectedly, surrounded by curious objects in various states of manufacture. 'He was not at all embarrassed' Mr. Wyman said the other day, 'and tried to sell me for \$100.00 a stone casket bearing hieroglyphics. I didn't like to say that I knew he was a faker, and gave various excuses, but before I left the place he offered me the casket at the bargain rate of \$25.00. I managed to escape him somehow and walked three miles in the snow so as to get out of town and away from his importunities. Subsequently I warned the priest who had been buying these forgeries, and who had an attic full of them, as well as other customers.' ... Since then Mr. Wyman has greatly increased his collection, and has turned over the bulk of the authentic objects to the Field Museum of Chicago. The pieces, which he regards as obvious fakes, and which he acquires sometimes by purchase sometimes by confiscation, he sends to the department of forgeries in the Smithsonian."

Dean Savage died in the early 1930's. The Detroit News published a biographical sketch of him in part stating:

"It is perhaps through his pursuit of Michigan archaeology that he gained his greatest reputation as a scientist and established his most important friendships. He was always interested even as a boy, saving Indian relics. This collection grew with the years and he had at one time, before he transferred them to a museum,

some of the finest collections of Indian arrow-heads and axes in the middle west. Nearly all of these were found in Wayne and Crawford Counties.

"It was following the discovery of 3,000 objects of an earlier civilization than that of the American Indian that Dean Savage and his associate discoverers became the center of a controversy regarding the genuineness of the discovery. These objects were of slate, copper, stone and a few of dry clay. While the controversy waged, Dean Savage had as his correspondents and friends such men as John Hays Hammond; Warren K. Moorehead; Sir John Lubbock of England; Dr. Bourguillon, French Commissioner for exploration; and Rabbi Morganstern of Cincinnati.

"Dean Savage's position as a collector of these objects was clear. He made no claim for any of the objects he unearthed. He merely wanted to gather together, before civilization wiped out the record, as many of these objects as was possible and then turn these over to specialists. The controversy died down and was soon forgotten after several archaeologists of international standing identified the objects as belonging to a civilization which many historians believe preceded that of the American Indian on this continent."

A book published in 1946, entitled *Hoaxes*, in devoting space to these Michigan artifacts, contributed a few conjectures of its own to the already kaleidoscopic picture. Following accounts of the day the author reviewed the story much as he found the journalistic version headlined in Detroit newspapers. He noted:

"'Old Noah Surely Wrote His Diary on Carbon Paper' was the heading given by the Detroit Daily News to one of a series of stories with which it helped to expose an extensive fake relic ring in 1907. This antique factory was as remarkable for the men involved as for the ingenious methods employed to obtain eye witness testimonials to archaeological finds in all parts of Michigan.

"According to the News, 'The scheme is so unique as to win absolute admiration for the perpetrators. If committed in a spirit of humor, it is the most colossal hoax of the century.'"

Last noted of published material concerning these Michigan artifacts appeared under date of April 18, 1953, when a small brochure titled *Michigan's Controversial Finds* written by A. L. (Al.) Spooner, son of Harry L. Spooner, was published by the Aboriginal Research Club of Detroit. Al. Spooner, it will be remembered, was present with his father when Mr. Soper opened his last mound at Halfway in September 1920.

In his monograph, A. L. Spooner included unpublished private correspondence between his father and Mr. Soper, Dr. W. K. Moorehead and Dean Savage among others. In his summation of historical background, A. L. Spooner ends his invaluable account with the statement that he himself has no answers to the authenticity of the inscribed artifacts. In his own words, he states: " I might add that my father never finished his investigations because he couldn't find the answers either."

In November, 1953, Harry L. Spooner gave a spirited talk reviewing the history of the alleged "Soper Frauds" before the Anthropology Section of the Peoria Academy of Sciences, telling at some length of the last mound opening at Halfway. Mr. Phillip Schupp, of Chicago, was present with his five specimens of incirbed copper remaining from Prof. Worth's original collection-present also was Judge Claude Stone of Peoria, who for many years had special interest in these relics. These three men spoke earnestly-all held strong convictions that the material was authentic and not forged but could offer no explanation as to how it might have come to be buried in the heart of Michigan. This author was also present at that meeting. Judge Stone believed the material to be authentic but said he was unable to prove it. Knowing of my back ground in this field, he asked if I would examine the writing and if I also, found it to be authentic, could I prove it. I told him yes, if it were authentic, I could prove it. This book is the result.

## MICHIGAN RELICS

## Chapter III

What made this material suspect? What was it that the academic community apparently recognized, or failed to recognize, that instantly aroused their animosity? Why was it that one man alone had been charged with fabrication of more than 3000 artifacts? Why would he have buried them in seventeen counties in Michigan-many far removed from any habitation? Why, if only one mound in eight or ten yielded a specimen, would he have gone to the extra labor of constructing mounds with nothing inside? How long would it take for one man to manufacture 3000 articles in four different substances-slate, clay, stone and copper-transport them to isolated areas where no roads existed, bury each one in a mound and then construct additional mounds in which he put nothing? These are questions that the academic community failed to answer but must be answered.

Each and every artifact unearthed from these Michigan mounds bore some type of writing-Greek, Egyptian, Phoenician or Sumerian as observed by Prof. Morris Jastrow. Could this writing not then have been deciphered as was the Rosetta Stone or Cretan Linear B? Apparently no Champollion nor Ventris fired by burning curiosity arose. Records fail to reveal serious study of the writing, yet many outstanding philologists or faculty members acquainted with these artifacts and well-versed in ancient languages, particularly Greek, either apathetic or lacking an inquisitive mind, displayed no interest in decipherment-even granting the material to be fraudulent. In no instance, other than Prof.

b Russell's article, has the record disclosed objective scholarly study of the objects or the writing for what it might be worth-good or bad.

Out of this welter of inorganic matter many strange and seemingly unrelated artifacts stood forth-many objects for which no known use could be assigned. Material substance ranged from crude unbaked clay to polished copper, stone and finely worked slate-lovingly smoothed by some skilled craftsman. Written characters incised on each article intermingled with drawings-some had been scratched on slate, others stamped on clay. Spear-heads, thinly-beaten copper sandals, chisels, coins and mechanical drawing instruments represented specimens fashioned of copper-a mummy case, pipes and bowls had been modeled in clay.

Many tablets-slate, clay, stone and copper-contained row after row of regularly formed characters in some unknown writing (Plate #1)-tablet after tablet was entirely covered with them (Plate #2 and 2A). No single piece had failed to bear the three character, wedge-shaped marks, noted both by Prof. Kelsey and Prof. Starr-the famous so-called "mystic symbol", a cryptic sign which set this group so singularly apart from any other group.

Of specimens still in existence, by far the larger proportion were slate. Clay objects disintegrated or became broken with mishandling since comparatively few of those once known now remain. Known copper tablets and objects number less than a scant handful-although more than 200 copper pieces once had been catalogued by Dean Savage in his own collection. In size, relics range from stone tablets four feet in length weighing upwards of sixty pounds, to tissue-thin copper coins three-quarters of an inch in diameter weighing a fraction of an ounce. The greater number are small-varying from an ounce to a few pounds-pots, pipes, jars, altars, scimitars, axes, hammers, crosses, chisels, amulets and a motley assortment of other paraphernalia.

Countless slate tablets bespoke an advanced technical knowledge which most clay articles lacked. Clay crumbled due to its inferior gritty quality-sun-dried not kiln baked. Copper which had been hardened by cold forging fell short of the craftsmanship

Handwritten text in an ancient script, likely Old Norse or Old English, arranged in approximately 25 horizontal lines. The script is dense and somewhat irregular. At the bottom of the page, there are three distinct lines of text: a line starting with 'H/X', a line with 'K~KXLIIEAIEVXRERER', and a line with 'H/H/0'.

Handwritten text in an ancient script, likely Old Norse or Old English, arranged in approximately 25 horizontal lines. The script is dense and somewhat irregular. At the top of the page, there is a line starting with 'H/H/0'. The text continues in several lines, ending with a line that appears to be 'H/H/0'.

so conspicuous on slate and stone items. Polished surfaces of granite indicated familiarity with handling of hard stone—each polished face glistened with a sheen that could only have come from countless hours of patient rubbing. In preparing slate or copper tablets, these unknown workmen apparently used both saw and file—teeth-marks, not rubbed down, scarify surfaces as do file marks left on bevelled edges.

Baraga, at the head of Keweenaw Bay, on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, had been traced as the spot from which slate had been taken—stone came from a quarry near Amherst, Ohio, while copper had been mined from pits in and around Calumet and Houghton as well as on Isle Royale.

Imagination and artistic ability went into the creation of these relics—both as to shape and design. Pieces unfamiliar to us apparently had been devised for ritualistic purposes—we can puzzle nothing out of their meaning from their shapes. On the other hand, various items unquestionably denoted their use by their shape.

Stone and slate shuttles may well have been the tool of some tent-maker or weaver—they may likewise have been intended as a memorial to one who had died and this shuttle had been left as a remembrance of his craft. Shuttles had a hole about a quarter of an inch in diameter bored lengthwise through the center as well as smoothly bevelled edges with notched ends preventing slippage of cord. The almost machine-like professional skill that had gone into fabrication of these polished articles would have prevented even the finest silken thread from being snagged so smooth were they.

Copper spear-heads and scimitars numbered into scores. Illustrations amply witness what looks to have been one long continuous battle—with broken spears protruding from the dead and dying who lie strewn over the battle-grounds. Gruesome and blood-curdling scenes leave nothing to one's imagination. Trying to reconstruct one tragedy that had taken place in this far-off wilderness which left a headless body shown at the feet of a man with raised scimitar, one can only assume that some heinous

crime had been committed.

Carpenter's and architect's tools of copper show considerable wear—protractors and squares, cold chisels and saws—surprisingly undistinguishable from those in use today—hammers such as we would purchase in our hardware stores and, incredible as it may seem, a copper compass with adjustable legs. (Figs. 2, 3, 4, 5) Essential tools had been hardened steel hard—ringing with an unmistakable vibrating "ping." Decorative, or ceremonial objects, most of which were quite malleable, objects such as bracelets and crowns, lacked resonance giving a dull leaden tone.

By far the greater number of relics consisted of tablets—in all substances—clay, copper, stone and slate. These tablets fell into three major categories—those completely covered with writing; those containing writing together with pictorial illustration; and those entirely pictorial with only a word or two added.

Tablet inscriptions, like the Maya glyph or Inca quipu, remain undeciphered. Yet all characters were of uniform style in that like characters repeated themselves on tablets whether recovered near Wyman or 150 miles away in the Detroit region. Whosoever did the inscribing, whether one person or many, followed an established pattern indicating a common language familiar to a group communicating with each other by written word understood over a widely extending area.

As noted by Prof. Jastrow letters were a "horrible mixture" of ancient Greek, Phoenician, cuneiform or Egyptian hieroglyph. Yet Coptic had its origin in similar fashion—fusion of Egyptian with later Greek. Few early writings were pure anything—for all people borrowed from one another by way of commercial intercourse depending on mutual convenience of understanding. Insofar as mixtures of letters and words are concerned, English itself presents an excellent example—everyday words as kindergarten borrowed from the German; garage from French; smorgasbord from Swedish; pronto, fiesta and siesta from Spanish. Why then should a mixture of Phoenician, Greek, cuneiform or hieroglyph provoke sarcasm? Various tablets written in an ancient Semitic manner from right to left, comingled with inscriptions written

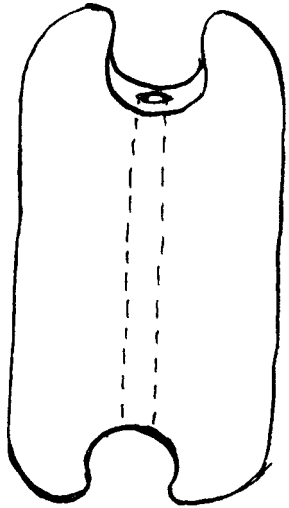


Fig. 2

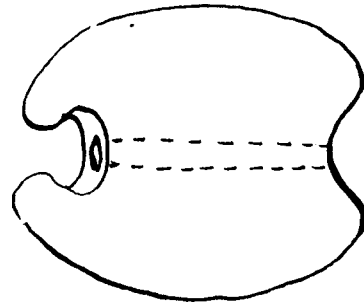


Fig. 3

## SLATE SHUTTLES

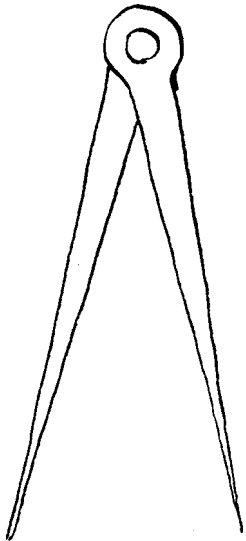


Fig. 4

## COPPER COMPASS

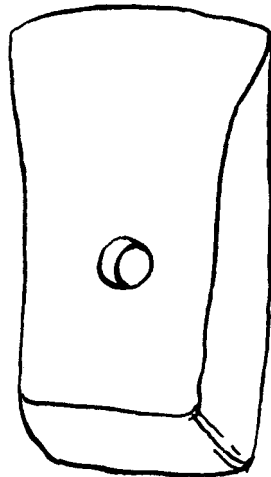


Fig. 5

## COPPER HAMMER

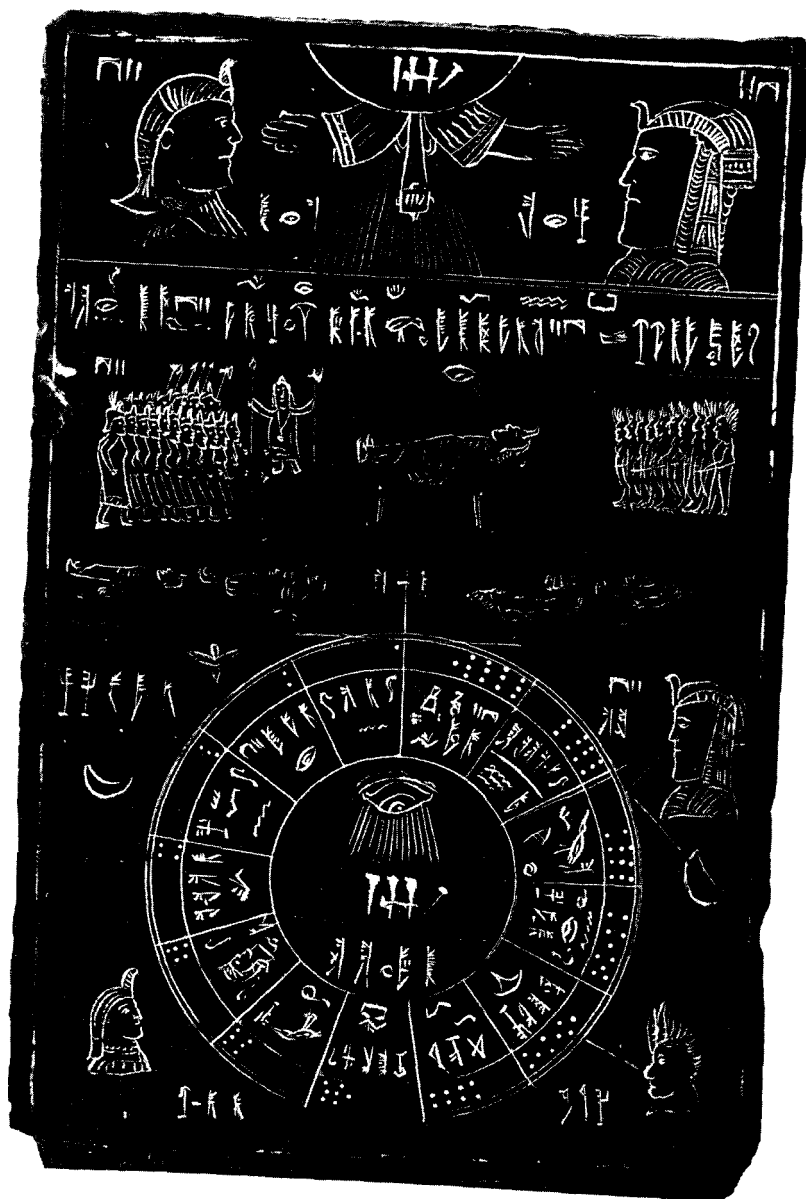
boustrophedon-wise-that is the first line read from right to left, the second from left to right, the third from right to left and so on. Boustrophedon means "as the ox plows"-up one line and down the next. Boustrophedon writing is characteristic of Eastern Mediterranean countries from earliest times-and one writing Phoenician letters might well have been expected to have written in boustrophedon manner.

Of the second group-tablets containing both pictures and writing-like the three major groups-themselves fell into three general groups: Biblical, battle scenes and calendar records.

Bible stories, mainly Old Testament, appealed most strongly to these artists the majority of whom seemed obsessed with the legend of Noah and his Ark-folk-lore the typified reliance placed on God's promise to keep His covenant with Noah. The Creation, Tower of Babel and Confusion of Tongues, never faltered in portraying scenes, detail of which can be read today in the Old Testament-a close acquaintanceship with legendary material ranging from Abraham to the "Sidicus Bird" that spoke with the tongue of humans associated with the Confusion of Tongues at the Tower of Babel.

Precise legends and letters occupy an identical position on each Noah tablet whether inscribed on slate or copper and whether found in Northern Michigan or 250 miles south near Detroit. One peculiar thing stood out-even though the letters be a mixture, the mixture within itself appeared consistently uniform. The writing, therefore, must have been in common usage in the day when it was written and the legend together with the Biblical drawing familiar to members of the community.

The third group-calendars-again uniformly contain thirteen months and read counterclockwise, as was true of both the Near Eastern and oriental countries (Plate #3). Incised with the delicate line of a metallic compass, each of the thirteen segments fell into equal divisions-normally divisions not possible without the use of some type of protractor. No attempt has been made, as yet, with reference to dating these calendars although the matter has



*Plate ,3*

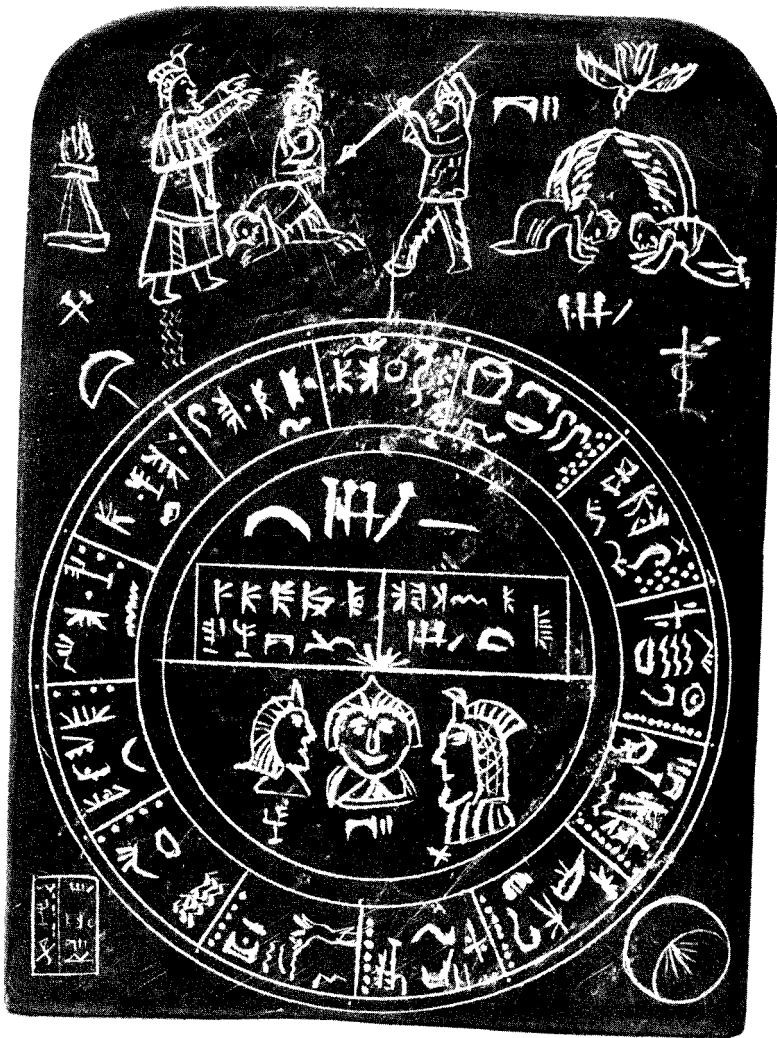
*Sample of Calendar of 13 Months*

been submitted to those who study calendars of this particular period of time without result.

Circular figures, however, were not all calendars-some had been divided into twelve sections illustrating what appear to be signs of the zodiac. Signs of the zodiac, with a history lost in antiquity, represent many of the oldest symbols that have come down to us-symbols of Cancer, Taurus and Libra can be identified on our plates. Antedating by a thousand years the classic period of Rome, a large zodiac once existed painted on the walls of the Temple of Dendera in Egypt-in Babylon, as far back as the time of Nebuchadnezzar, boundary stones depicted zodiacal allegory.

Two other circular forms, neither calendar nor zodiac, puzzle one. At first glance these two look to be sun-dials-but a closer study reveals no normal time sequences had been drawn although a pencil-like tube of copper had been inserted in a hole cut in the center for insertion. It seems in all probability that someone had fashioned a unique type of gnomes, an ancient reckoning device commonly used by mariners.

While the Deluge story received the major portion of attention from artists, other well-established incidents had not been neglected for we find unexpected detail throughout this maze of unsorted matter. In the upper corner of Plate 4, two winged figures protectively flutter, reminiscent of the cherubim in Exodus 25:18-20-"Turned toward each other" with "their wings spread out above." From the Near East also comes the stylized symbol of the winged figure shown on Plate 5 which compares favorably with the more ancient representation of the Assyrian God Ashur shown by Chiera. One of the more provocative plates depicts a series of pictures showing a circular platform, bearings on which the platform rotated, a belt-driven shaft-an apparent grinding operation coupled with heat treatment. Fascinating would it not be to speculate on whether this might have been Michigan's first introduction to "moonshine" or, on the other hand, it pictured an early metallurgical smelting operation--it could have been either. In the final scene, a man is shown drink-



!late 4

Two *Winged 2,5:]S-20*

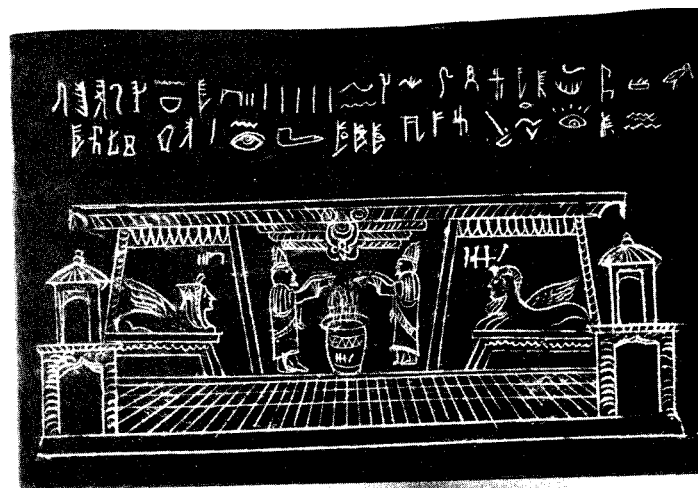
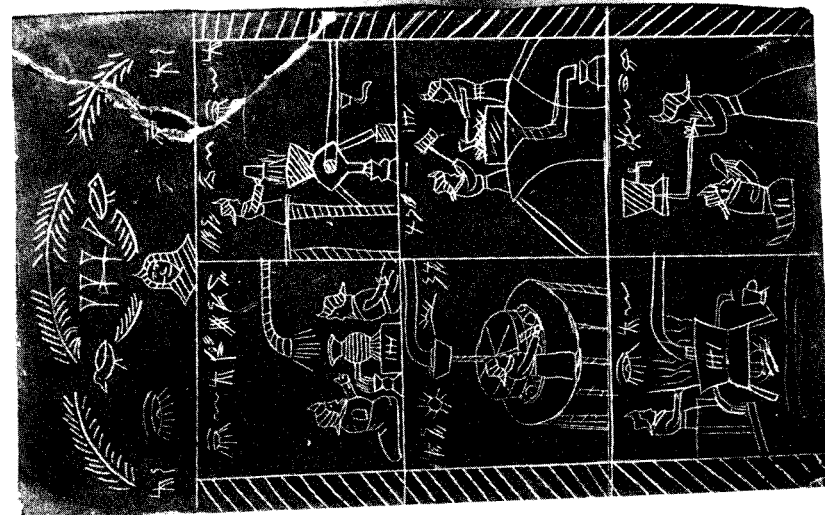


Plate S

*Winged Figures "Moonshine" or Copper Refining'*



the first of these is a sketch of a man drinking a fatty substance, possibly a metal alloy, from a horn. The second sketch shows a volcanic eruption with a large plume of smoke and lava flows. The third sketch depicts a schoolroom or assembly room with a teacher standing at a lectern and students seated at desks. The fourth sketch shows a man holding a scroll, possibly a scroll of writing or a scroll of metal. The fifth sketch shows a man holding a scroll, possibly a scroll of writing or a scroll of metal. The sixth sketch shows a man holding a scroll, possibly a scroll of writing or a scroll of metal.

Still another enigmatic sketch traces out a volcanic eruption, with rocks and convulsed bodies strewn over the ground. (Plate #1): Again, one might ask—who in Michigan suffered through so horrible a nightmare? Michigan has no volcanoes. Illustrating such a catastrophe one must himself of necessity have lived through such a phenomenon. This is not something to be conjured up out of an artist's imagination—he would not have seen it in Michigan.

What might well prove to be one of the more important of the tablets shows a schoolroom—an assembly room or church of some sort (Plate #1). A teacher, who looks to be a woman, stands beside a lectern—placed on the lectern is a scroll on which writing

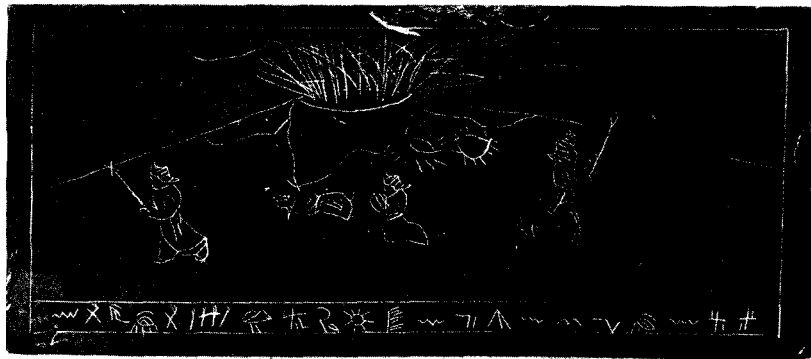


Plate 0  
 oieainC l'rnlpitot7

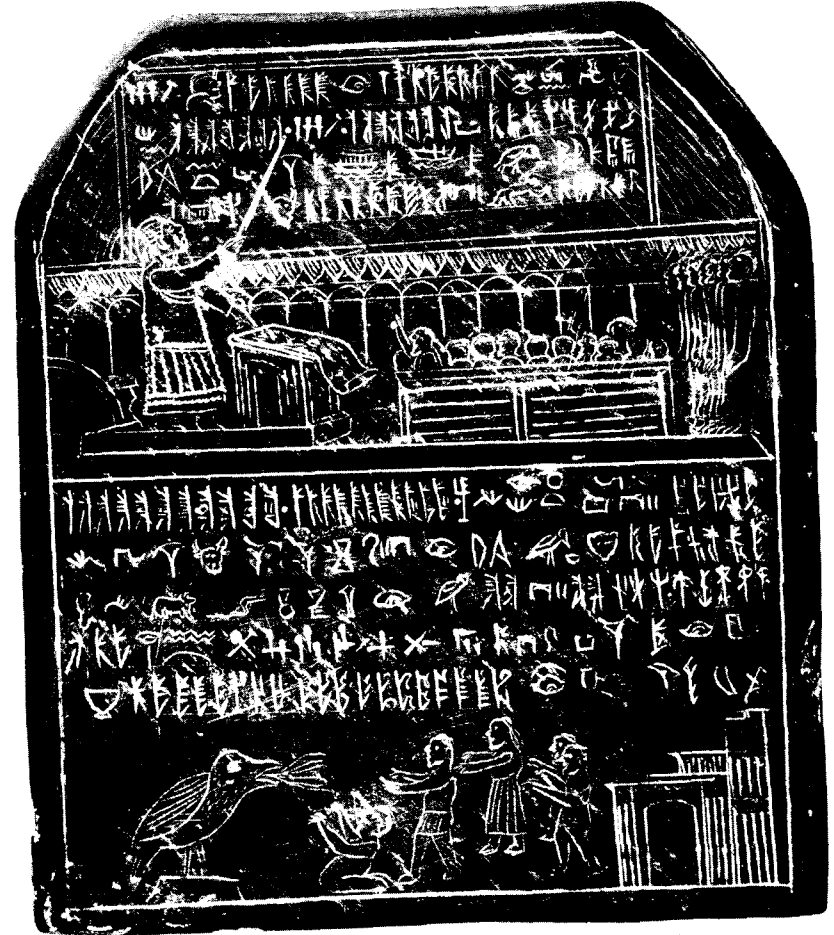


Plate 7  
 Schoolroom

Also at hottom-Tories of Babel and "5idicus" Bird--  
 (:n!t!i~ii<sup>17</sup>) f.!utilises

ing from a cup. Does he sample a new batch of beer or does he drink a fatty substance essential when refining ore? Medieval metallurgical processes shown so magnificently in Herbert and Lou Hoover's translation of Georgius Agricola, *De Re Metallica*, bear a close resemblance to the general scheme pictured on our tablet. Metallurgists from earliest times drank melted butter or some analogous substance to absorb poisonous fumes thrown off during refining operations. One might ponder long over whether this be beer or melted fat.

Still another enigmatic sketch traces out a volcanic eruption with rock shooting skyward and convulsed bodies strewn over the ground. (Plate #6) Again, one might ask-who in Michigan suffered through so horrible a nightmare? Michigan has no volcanoes. Illustrating such a catastrophe one must himself of necessity have lived through such a phenomenon. This is not something to be conjured up out of an artist's imagination-he would not have seen it in Michigan.

What might well prove to be one of the more important of the tablets shows a schoolroom-an assembly room or church of some sort (Plate #7). A teacher, who looks to be a woman, stands beside a lectern-placed on the lectern is a scroll on which writing

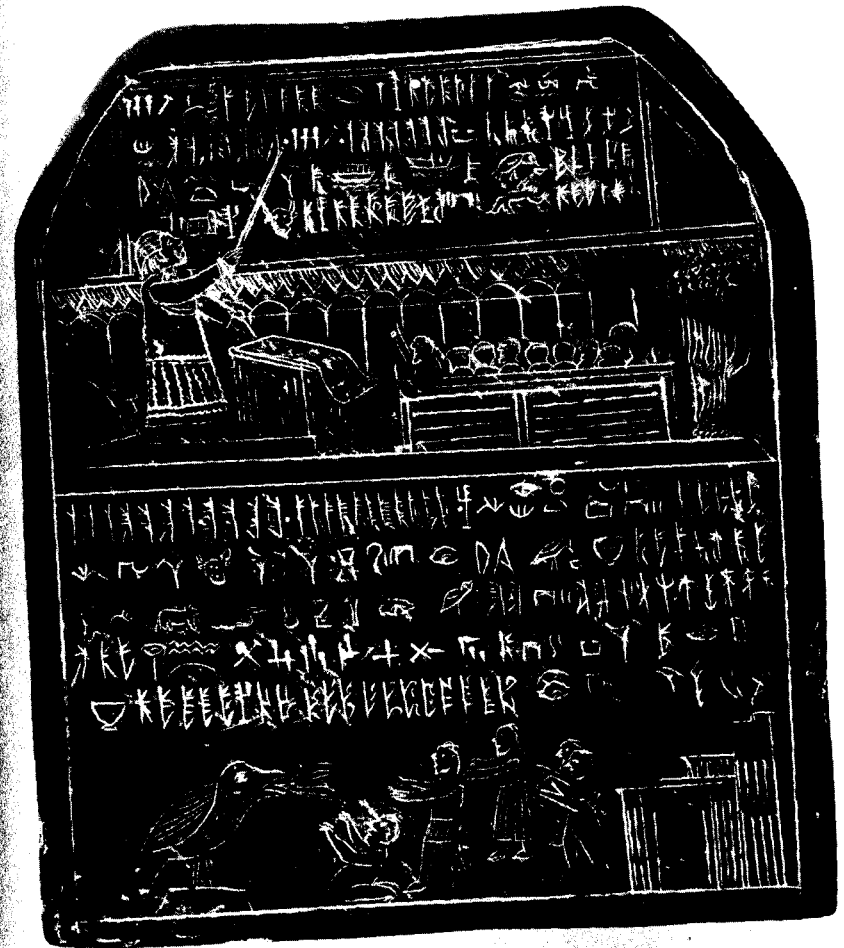


Plate 7

Schoolroom

Also at bottom-Tower of Babel and "Sidicus" Bird-  
Confusion of Tongues

Plate 6

Volcanic Eruption

appears and to which she is pointing. With a pointer in her other hand, the instructor points to a blackboard apparently indicating that information on the black board corresponds to that on the scroll and had been transcribed on the board so that all might read at one and the same time. As can be observed, information written on the blackboard was set down in several different types of characters apparently to accommodate a mixed group. In passing, it might be noted that in Synagogues from ancient days, the Torah-or sacred scroll-traditionally combined with a characteristic pointer such as noted here. From the nature of the material on the blackboard, it might be inferred that the lesson being taught was that of their migration-the history of the migration-for a ship can be seen. If that assumption has merit, then this plate alone might well give us the answer to the entire collection. Since a fairly good-sized audience closely follows the pointer, we might understand that the entire community could read and write. The whimsical artist executing this tablet betrayed his keen sense of humor-a matter conspicuously lacking on other tablets. He portrayed no stiff, formal audience. Instead, he placed two small boys sitting with their class on a hard bench, frantically waving their hands bursting with impatience to be recognized. Notice, too, a large group of "elders" standing at the right-apparently what might amount to a pre-Columbian "Parent-Teacher Association."

From this rather brief outline, some slight appreciation might be gained of inscriptions covering the 3000 or more relics that formerly comprised the major portion of seven large collections of this Michigan material.

Pronounced by the daily press as the "most colossal hoax of the century" one man alone, James Scottford, stands accused by the academic community of forgery-fabricating more than 3000 specimens. No explanation as to how he might have accomplished so prodigious a feat has ever been offered.

## MICHIGAN COPPER MINES

### Chapter IV

Copper is man's oldest known workable metal. In this chapter and the one following, this soft, lustrous metal threads its way through a network of history. Copper which forms part of our tangled web of controversy, colors tapestries dating back to a Methuselian era.

Thousands of years ago, Michigan's Upper Peninsula had been mined for copper but, until a comparatively recent date, nothing was actually known as to who might once have discovered this great deposit. Early French explorers, amongst the first Europeans known to be in this region, reported that copper abounded throughout the area-but to suggest that mining operations had taken place a thousand or more years earlier would have been unthinkable.

First knowledge that these copper mines stemmed from an ancient date came in 1954, when Dr. Roy W. Drier, metallurgical engineer on the faculty of the Michigan College of Mining and Technology, under grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, led an expedition to Isle Royale for purposes of study and to obtain specimens of organic matter taken from mine pits, for testing by the then new carbon-14 dating process. Two carbon-14 dates resulted from his study giving figures of  $3800 \pm 300$  and  $3000 \pm 300$  or dating this pit at 1800 B.C. to 1000 B.C. with a possible variation of 300 years earlier or later.

Copper objects found in mounds throughout North America adjudged to be historic Indian, aroused considerable interest but until Dr. Drier's research, received little, if any, scientific study.