

**EARLY VOYAGES TO
AMERICA: A PAPER
READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOCIETY**

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Early voyages to America: a paper read before the Rhode Island Society by James Phinney Baxter

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JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER

**EARLY VOYAGES TO
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Early Voyages to America.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE

Rhode Island Historical Society

BY

JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER, A. M.



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NOTE FROM THE SOCIETY.

This valuable monograph on American history was read by Mr. Baxter, at a meeting of the Rhode Island Historical Society, held in its Cabinet, March 6, 1888, when its author, a corresponding member of the Society, received, on motion of the Hon. Royal C. Taft seconded by the Rev. S. L. Caldwell, D. D., a unanimous vote of thanks for his elaborate and scholarly paper. The branch of the subject relating to the voyages of the Northmen awakened much interest among members of the Society half a century ago, and the general interest therein is illustrated by works published by the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries at Copenhagen, which, though on the shelves of our library, are practically beyond the reach of most of our members, being in a foreign language with which they are not familiar.

INTRODUCTION.

The following account of Early Voyages to America was prepared in order to place before an audience in a somewhat popular form, a subject requiring for its proper exposition, much larger space and more critical treatment.

This statement should disarm the criticism of scholars, and explain to those who have made an exhaustive study of the various phases of the subject, and to whom nothing that I am able to present can be novel, the *raison d'être* of this publication, made by friends, who have thought it of sufficient interest to be put in type.

Novelty in the method of identifying places described in the Sagas is disclaimed, and the casual reader is reminded that this branch of the subject is purely conjectural; at the same time, the accuracy with which the Sagas describe localities about and in the vicinity of Rhode Island, Nantucket, Cape Cod and Massachusetts Bay, is so remarkable as to be entitled to most careful consideration.

JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER.

Portland, August, 1889.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

EARLY VOYAGES TO AMERICA.

READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

BY
JAMES PHINNEY BAXTER.

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The history of this Continent prior to its discovery by Europeans is veiled in mystery. There are many dim allusions of voyages made to it by adventurers, to be found in ancient writings, but nothing of a strictly definite nature prior to the fifteenth century; for hitherto, the great ocean which beat upon the western shores of Europe, bore appropriately the title of the Sea of Darkness, on account of the absence of knowledge respecting it by the civilized World.

Speculations too chimerical to be profitably considered, have been indulged in by fanciful writers respecting the colonization of our Continent. Athanasias Kircher has given the Egyptians the credit of colonizing it,¹ basing his argument upon the religious worship found here; while Edward Brerewood contends upon linguistic grounds, that the Tartars are entitled to that credit;² and Marc Lescarbot, with a faith

almost enviable, strives to show, that the Canaanites, driven out by Joshua, emigrated hither ; that Noah was a native of this country, and was borne back to his ancestral home by the flood.³

The first really serious attempt, however, to trace geographically a voyage to this Continent, has been made by De Guignes,⁴ who, basing his arguments upon the historian Li Yen, contends that the Chinese reached our western shores from Asia in the seventh century. This view has been considered of sufficient importance to engage the attention of several able writers, who have opposed it with varying degrees of ability.⁵ That this Continent was inhabited in prehistoric times by a race of men of a very different type from the red men whom our forefathers found here is evident from the remarkable remains which are found so abundantly throughout the West.

Of these earth works particularly, many are of such remarkable extent as to strike the beholder with wonder. Those at Marietta, in Ohio, cover an area of three-fourths of a mile in length by half a mile in breadth, and consist of two immense squares, one containing fifty, and the other twenty-seven acres, the walls of the larger being nearly six feet in height and more than twenty feet broad at the base. Near by is an elliptical structure thirty-five feet high, enclosed by a circular wall. Within the larger enclosure are four truncated pyramids ; three being approached by graded passage ways to their summits, and from the south wall runs a graded way to the Muskingum valley six hundred feet in length by over

one hundred and fifty feet in breadth. So thick were similar works where the City of St. Louis now stands that it was called Mound City. A group between Alton and St. Louis contained as many as sixty structures.⁶

One of these works in the form of a parallelogram, ninety feet in height, with sides at the base respectively seven hundred and five hundred feet in length, and a terrace on the Southwest one hundred and sixty by three hundred feet, was reached by a graded way, the summit being truncated and affording a platform two hundred by four hundred and fifty feet. Upon this platform was a small mound about ten feet high, containing human bones, vases, and stone implements.

It is supposed that a temple once stood on the platform, and that the rites of the priests could be beheld by the multitudes below. In many of the mounds have been found cists covered with slabs of limestone, enclosing skeletons, and often at the head of the skeletons beautiful specimens of pottery, statuettes, urns and drinking vessels.

Isle Royal and the Northern shores of Lake Superior are the Northwestern limits where these works of a lost people are found. A recent writer says, "that the Mound builders were in the distinctive character of their structures, as marked a people as the Pelasgi, whose prehistoric works can yet be traced throughout Greece and Italy. These Pelasgi were the Wall Builders, for wherever they went they threw up fortifications made of polygonal blocks. So we can trace the Mound builders by their structures, from