

**A VINDICATION OF THE
AUTHENTICITY OF THE ELEPHANT
PIPES AND INSCRIBED TABLETS IN
THE MUSEUM OF THE DAVENPORT
ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES**

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A vindication of the authenticity of the elephant pipes and inscribed tablets in the museum of the Davenport academy of natural sciences by Charles E. Putnam

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CHARLES E. PUTNAM

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A
VINDICATION

OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE

Elephant Pipes and Inscribed Tablets

IN THE MUSEUM OF THE

DAVENPORT ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES,

FROM THE

ACCUSATIONS OF THE BUREAU OF ETHNOLOGY,

OF THE

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

BY
CHARLES E. PUTNAM,

PRESIDENT OF THE DAVENPORT ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES.

— *Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.* —

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1885.

PREFATORY NOTE.

The following paper was prepared in response to an earnest feeling entertained by members of the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences, and in its preparation the writer has had their hearty coöperation and active assistance. Especial acknowledgments are due to Mr. William H. Pratt, the Curator and Corresponding Secretary of the Academy, whose extensive researches in archaeology enabled him to furnish much valuable material for incorporation in this paper; to Rev. A. M. Judy, Mr. James Thompson, and Dr. C. H. Preston, who, as a special committee on behalf of the Academy, thoroughly investigated all the circumstances connected with the transactions in question, and freely placed at the disposal of the writer the results of their investigations; and to our honored associates, Prof. D. S. Sheldon and Rev. W. H. Barris, of Griswold College, who carefully reviewed the paper, and favored the writer with excellent suggestions. An expression of grateful appreciation is also due to those correspondents, in various parts of the country, who, in strong terms, have expressed their condemnation of the unjustifiable attack made upon the Academy by the United States Bureau of Ethnology; and, in entering upon the preparation of this vindication, the writer has derived great encouragement from the hearty assurances of approbation and support received from these eminent archaeologists.

DAVENPORT, IOWA, February 9th, 1886.

C. E. P.

Recd. 5-20-35 N.A.

ELEPHANT PIPES AND INSCRIBED TABLETS OF THE MOUND-BUILDERS.

BY CHARLES E. PUTNAM.

IN the sharp controversy now being waged among archaeologists, as to the origin of the Mound-builders, the Bureau of Ethnology connected with the Smithsonian Institution has taken decided position as the champion of the theory that this mysterious race can be traced with comparative certainty to the ancestors of our American Indians. In the first annual report of the Bureau, Major Powell, its accomplished Director, thus emphatically states its position upon this question:*

"With regard to the mounds so widely scattered between the two oceans, it may also be said that mound-building tribes were known in the early history of the discovery of this continent, and that vestiges of art discovered do not excel in any respect the arts of Indian tribes known to history. There is, therefore, no reason for us to search for an extralimital origin, through lost tribes, for the arts discovered in the mounds of North America. The tracing of the origin of these arts to the ancestors of known tribes, or stocks of tribes, is more legitimate."

The position thus assumed by Major Powell finds recent and strong support in the work of Marquis De Nadaillac, on "Prehistoric America," just issued from the press, whose conclusions upon this interesting question are thus stated:†

"In closing this chapter, what, it may be asked, are we to believe was the character of the race to which, for the purpose of clearness, we have for the time being applied the term 'Mound-builder?' The answer must be, they were no more nor less than the immediate predecessors, in blood and culture, of the Indians described by De Soto's chronicler and other early explorers—the Indians who inhabited the region of the mounds at the time of the discovery by civilized men."‡

* First Annual Report of Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, 1879-80, p. 74.

† Prehistoric America, by Marquis De Nadaillac, p. 139.

‡ Foster makes this strong statement of the opposite position concerning the American Indian: "He was never known voluntarily to engage in an enterprise requiring methodical

Another class of archaeologists as strongly maintain the opposite theory, that the Mound-builders were more advanced in civilization than the American Indian, and hence have endeavored to trace them to a Mexican origin, or to some earlier common ancestry. The leadership on this side must be accorded to Messrs. Squier and Davis, who, in their great work upon "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley," thus state their conclusions:*

"Without undertaking to point out the affinities, or to indicate the probable origin of the builders of the western monuments, and the cause of their final disappearance, we may venture to suggest that the facts so far collected point to a connection, more or less intimate, between the race of the mounds and the semi-civilized nations which formerly had their seats among the sierras of Mexico and Peru, and who erected the imposing structures which, from their number, vastness, and mysterious significance, invest the central portion of the continent with an interest no less absorbing than that which attaches to the Nile. These nations alone, of all found in possession of the continent by the European discoverers, were essentially stationary and agricultural in their habits, conditions indispensable to large populations, to fixedness of institutions, and to any considerable advance in the economic or ennobling arts. That the Mound-builders, although perhaps in a less degree, were also stationary and agricultural, clearly appears from a variety of facts and circumstances, most of which will no doubt recur to the mind of the reader."

After the lapse of nearly half a century, and in the light of subsequent researches, a more recent statement of this position was made by Prof. F. W. Putnam, of the Peabody Museum, at the British Association during its session at Montreal. At this meeting Prof. Putnam gave an interesting account of discoveries made in a group of mounds in Hamilton County, Ohio, and his conclusions were subsequently reported in *Science*, as follows:†

"These relics seem to show a more complex social life, more abundant and varied artistic products, and a higher status altogether, than can be deemed consistent with the views of those who hold that these Mound-builders were merely the ancestors of our present Indians, and in the same state of culture."

An abstract of another paper by Prof. Putnam, presented before the

labor; he dwells in temporary and movable habitations; he follows the game in their migrations; he imposes the drudgery of life upon his squaw; he takes no heed for the future. To suppose that such a race threw up the strong line of circumvallations and the symmetrical mounds which crown so many of our river terraces, is as preposterous, almost, as to suppose that they built the pyramids of Egypt." ("Prehistoric Races," p. 300.)

See, also, Johnson's Cyclopædia, title "American Antiquities," wherein Prof. J. S. Newberry arrives at the conclusion that "the Mound-builders belonged to a distinct and now extinct race."

*Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, Vol. I., p. 391.

†*Science* for September 26th, 1884.

American Association for the Advancement of Science at its recent meeting in Philadelphia, was also published in *Science*, wherein an account is given of his explorations of a group of mounds in Madisonville, Ohio, and it is stated that, "as a result, one of the most remarkable series of objects ever discovered in America had been obtained:"*

"Among the objects taken from the largest mound of the group were the following, some of them never found before in mounds: Shell-beads, disks, and rings, which were obtained in thousands; cones cut from alligator teeth; ornaments cut from plates of buffalo horn, mica, and native copper, and even gold and meteoric iron; pearls, most of them pierced and injured by heat (not less than fifty thousand were found); small stone dishes, beautifully carved to represent some animal form; and last, and perhaps most important, terra-cotta figurines of exceedingly artistic form, and strangely Egyptian in character."†

In these extracts we have stated in clear contrast these conflicting theories. While largely engaged in archaeological work, the Davenport Academy has postponed decision upon these important deductions, awaiting further discoveries. Its conservative position is well stated by its late Corresponding Secretary, Joseph Duncan Putnam, in a letter to Rev. Dr. Peet, of the *Antiquarian*, bearing date October 10th, 1878:

"I am, of course, only an outsider, and look upon the workers in the field of archaeology from over the fence; still I am so close that I feel like offering a suggestion occasionally, and I do wish you archaeologists could introduce some scientific methods into so interesting a study, gather up the facts, arrange them systematically, and then deduce the theories. But this is an age of speculation, and even in entomology there is a strong tendency to get up a theory and then hunt for facts to support it."

And in a subsequent letter to the same gentleman, Mr. Putnam thus explicitly states the position of the Academy upon the questions raised by the discovery of its inscribed tablets:

"Whether they are modern Indian, or Mound-builder, or Mexican, or European, or post-Columbian, or ante-Columbian — whether the characters are phonetic, sym-

**Science* for October 3d, 1884.

†The late Lewis H. Morgan, in a series of admirable papers, expressed the opinion that the Mound-builders were derived from the "Village Indians" of New Mexico, and he advanced some strong reasons in support of this conclusion. He further remarks that, "from the absence of all traditional knowledge of the Mound-builders among the tribes found east of the Mississippi, an inference arises that the period of their occupation was ancient. Their withdrawal was probably gradual, and completed before the advent of the ancestors of the present tribes, or simultaneously with their arrival." While his conclusions may not in all cases be accepted, these thoughtful papers of Mr. Morgan will well repay perusal.

See Johnson's Cyclopædia, title "Architecture of the American Aborigines," Vol. I., p. 217; "Montezuma's Dinner," *North American Review*, April, 1876; "Houses of the Mound-builders," *North American Review*, July, 1876.

bolic, hieroglyphic, or meaningless—is yet to be decided; we have no means of knowing."

And in looking over the many statements made by Mr. Gass, the principal discoverer of these relics, as published in the Proceedings of the Academy, it will be found that they contain no suggestion of a theory. On the contrary, in giving a description of some inscribed rocks in Cleona Township, Scott County, Iowa, he thus states his own position upon these mooted questions:*

"But for what purpose the people selected them, by what intention they were guided, with what kind of tools the inscriptions on such hard material were made, by what nation the engraving was executed—Indian or Mound-builder—these are questions which I do not venture to answer."

In these utterances on behalf of the Academy will be found the language, not of the champions of a theory, but of earnest seekers after truth.

That the theory advanced by the Bureau of Ethnology as to the origin of the Mound-builders should be maintained with consummate ability, was to be expected of the able and accomplished scholars enlisted in its service. It is, however, to be regretted that, actuated by intemperate zeal to establish this theory, its promoters have sometimes abandoned scientific methods, indulged in hasty generalizations, and even violated the amenities of literature. It will be found that the second annual report of the Bureau of Ethnology, recently issued under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, is open to this criticism. In that report there appears a monograph by Henry W. Henshaw, entitled "Animal Carvings from Mounds in the Mississippi Valley,"† and therein an attack of no ordinary severity is made upon the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences. In this bitter assault Mr. Henshaw is ably supported by the strong endorsement of Major J. W. Powell, the Director of the Bureau. The Smithsonian Institution occupies a commanding position in the world of science; and, inasmuch as it has given special attention to researches in archaeology, it may properly be considered entitled to speak with authority upon these questions. Its sharp criticism, therefore, presents to our Academy a conspicuous opportunity for a careful review of the circumstances, and a plain restatement of the facts establishing, beyond reasonable doubt, the genuineness of its valuable discoveries.

* Proceedings of Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences, Vol. II., p. 173.

† Second Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, Washington, 1886-87, p. 154.

In the line of archæology the Davenport Academy has attained deserved eminence. Its inscribed tablets, elephant pipes, cloth-covered copper axes, and rare collection of ancient pottery have attracted the attention of archæologists throughout the world of science. These remarkable relics, received with enthusiasm by antiquarians, are generally accepted as authentic additions to the "unwritten history" of the past. That discoveries so rare and unique should be subjected to severe scrutiny might reasonably be expected; and, when exercised in the spirit of an earnest quest of truth, it was even to be desired. Discoveries which are to become the foundations for important historical deductions should be securely entrenched, beyond the reach of adverse criticism, on the bed-rock of truth. These valuable contributions to the science of archæology have undoubtedly given the Davenport Academy conspicuous position. The assumed fact, emphasized by Mr. Henshaw, that "it has fallen to the good fortune of no one else to find anything conveying the most distant suggestion of the mastodon," is found to be even embarrassing, inasmuch as it places our Academy in the range of fire between contending archæologists. It is certainly a misfortune of the Davenport Academy that the museum of the Smithsonian Institution contains neither elephant pipes nor inscribed tablets.

The discoveries in question are two elephant pipes and three inscribed tablets. Of the latter, the first two were found in what is known as Mound No. 3, on the Cook farm, adjoining the city of Davenport. The principal discoverer was Rev. Jacob Gass, a Lutheran clergyman, then settled over a congregation in Davenport. In this exploration Mr. Gass was assisted by J. H. Willrodt and H. S. Stoltzenau, with five other persons who were accidentally present during the opening of the mound. The discovery was made on January 10th, 1877. An exact and careful statement of the facts connected therewith was soon after prepared by Rev. Mr. Gass, and read at an early meeting of the Davenport Academy. It was published, and may be found in its "Proceedings."* Upon the announcement of the discovery, the officers and many members of the Academy were early on the ground to verify the statements made by the discoverers. The gentlemen engaged in the exploration are well known, and held in high esteem; their testimony as to all essential facts is clear and convincing, and the circumstances narrated seem to fully establish the genuineness of these relics. That their statement contains only facts, all who know them will not ques-

*Proceedings Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences, Vol. II., p. 96.