



Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art

FIG. 1. A slate tablet showing the Flood story. This is one of the supposedly ancient artifacts that James O. Scotford and Daniel E. Soper claimed to have discovered in Michigan from the 1890s to the 1920s.

Mormonism's Encounter with the Michigan Relics

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One of the strangest and most extensive archaeological hoaxes in American history was perpetrated around the turn of the twentieth century in Michigan. Hundreds of objects known as the Michigan Relics were made to appear as the remains of a lost civilization. The artifacts were produced, buried, “discovered,” and marketed by James O. Scottford and Daniel E. Soper. For three decades these artifacts were secretly planted in earthen mounds, publicly removed, and lauded as wonderful discoveries. Because the Michigan Relics allegedly evidence a Near Eastern presence in ancient America, they have drawn interest from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This article traces the intriguing history of this elaborate affair and Mormonism’s encounter with it. At the center of this history lies the investigation of the artifacts by Latter-day Saint intellectual and scientist James E. Talmage.

The Hopewell and Adena Native American societies are commonly referred to as the Mound Builders because they built hundreds of thousands of earthen mounds throughout the greater Mississippi River valley and in surrounding areas.¹ These Indian mounds have long provoked the curiosity of European Americans.² Exploitation of this curiosity has led to a series of bizarre archaeological hoaxes. Many a schemer and prankster secretly buried bogus artifacts in the Indian mounds and then offered such items to the public, claiming they were removed from a mound.³

The mounds and hillocks of Michigan’s lower peninsula became the temporary repositories of scores of archaeological forgeries. The Scottford artifacts—by artifacts I mean human-made objects—were made of clay, copper, and slate. Scottford produced a wide range of items, including tablets, caskets, amulets, coins, axheads, daggers, chisels, saws, and smoking pipes. Most of these pieces have inscriptions of one kind or another, whether hieroglyphics, a cuneiform stamping of ancient alphabets, or unknown characters. Almost every piece bears a prominent cuneiform symbol—“IH/”—which various interpreters have called the tribal mark, the mystic symbol, or the forger’s signature. The tablets are especially notable: they illustrate battles, Bible stories, and calendars. Divided into panels, the biblical tablets tell the stories of the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the



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FIG. 2. Slate tablet crudely depicting stories from Genesis: the creation of man, the creation of woman, Eve partaking the fruit, Adam and Eve being cast out of the Garden, Cain slaying Abel, and Abraham sacrificing Isaac. The Michigan Relic collections contain many similar images of Old Testament scenes.

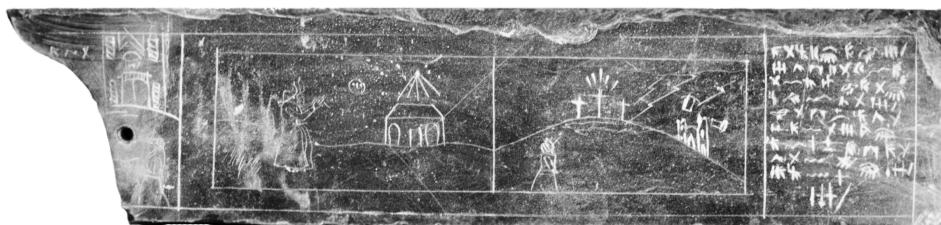
Tower of Babel, and the life of Christ (figs. 1, 2, 3). Most common are the Flood tablets, which depict in succession scenes of the wicked drowning, the ark floating, the dove flying from the ark, the animals unloading, and the rainbow token of peace.⁴ This striking scenery captured the attention of thousands, and the ensuing debate over the Scotford-Soper frauds played a part in the professionalization of archaeology around the turn of the century.⁵

The Initial Discovery

The fraudulent relics first appeared in October 1890 in Montcalm County, in central Michigan. James O. Scotford exuberantly announced to the village of Wyman that he had found ancient pottery while at his job digging post holes. The excitement of his “discovery” spread, and during the following spring and summer, Scotford and several residents of Wyman and nearby Edmore spent time digging in dozens of local mounds, hoping to find more relics.⁶ One unfortunate man dug too deep into the soft sand and died in a collapse.⁷ Others successfully uncovered wonderful objects, though no one found as many as Scotford (see fig. 4).⁸

M. E. Cornell, a Seventh-day Adventist minister from Michigan and a collector of Native American artifacts, authored and published a booklet describing the new findings and the circumstances of their discovery. Many of the items and all of the tablets, including a deluge tablet, featured inscriptions and were composed of sunbaked clay.⁹ Cornell wrote:

Scores of the citizens of Wyman and Edmore are familiar with all the circumstances of the discovery, and have been eye-witnesses of the excavating and taking out of the relics; and to them the evidence of genuineness is so clear that doubts are never entertained for a moment. . . . Three caskets have been found pierced by roots of the trees growing on the mounds over them. We found one with the cover broken in by the root of a tree, and the casket was filled with sand. The root was coiled up inside the box.¹⁰



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FIG. 3. Engraved slate with two scenes from the life of Christ: the star over Bethlehem and the three crosses on a hill. New Testament images are rare in the Michigan Relic collection. Such images piqued the curiosity of members of several Christian religions.



FIG. 4. Early Scotford forgeries. Unearthed in the early 1890s, these artifacts were among the first unburied. These relics were made from clay, while later finds were often slate or copper. Francis Kelsey observed that these poorly fired artifacts could not have remained intact in the wet Michigan ground for long.

The circumstances of discovery truly were impressive. Cornell repeated such accounts to promote the finds as genuine artifacts.¹¹

Actually, some of the locals did entertain doubts. A group of people from the county who formed a syndicate to financially exploit the situation decided to check first with Michigan archeologists. When the archeologists determined that the artifacts were forgeries, the syndicate disbanded. All of these events occurred within a year of the initial “discovery.”¹²

In early 1892, at the same time Cornell published his glowing report, Francis W. Kelsey, a professor of Latin at the University of Michigan, with Morris Jastrow Jr., a colleague from the University of Pennsylvania, dealt a serious blow to the hoax. Kelsey and Jastrow considered the inscriptions (fig. 5) a linguistic disaster. Several ancient scripts had been jumbled together, they claimed, resulting in a “horrible mixture.” Furthermore, the inscriber used too few characters at too high a frequency for his work to represent authentic language.¹³ The two concluded that the alleged artifacts had been produced by someone with no linguistic knowledge.¹⁴

Although Kelsey was a linguist, the fakes were so crude that no archaeological expertise was needed to spot serious flaws in the artifacts. He found that one tablet was molded “in a frame of machine-sawed boards, as may be seen from the edges, which were not rubbed down enough to remove the impressions of the splinters.”¹⁵ In a letter to a New York newspaper, he wrote that the clay contained a large amount of drift sand and that the objects would “dissolve immediately in water. In view of . . . the nearness of

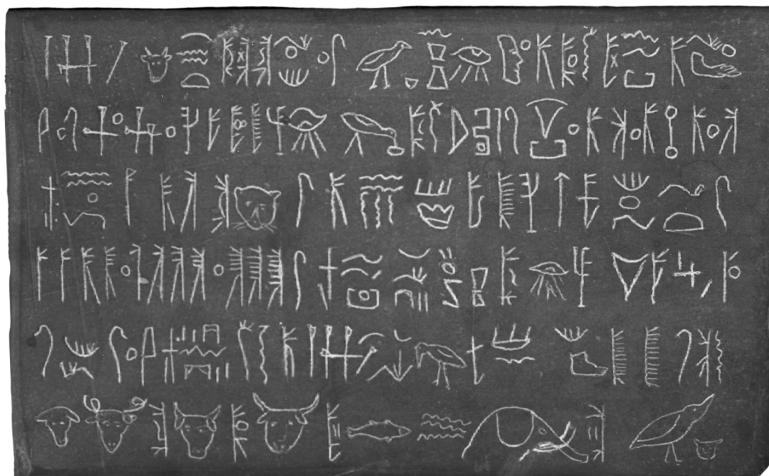
the objects to the surface, and the amount of the yearly rainfall in this region, it is clear that the objects could not have been in the ground more than one year." Kelsey foreshadowed Mormon interest when he wondered if "some prophet will arise in due time and interpret the supposed mystic symbols into a new creed."¹⁶

In 1893, James O. Scotford submitted a stone casket to be exhibited at the World's Fair in Chicago. Walter C. Wyman, head of the fair's archeology department, rejected the casket as a fraud in spite of Scotford's bitter protest.¹⁷

The Hoax Perpetuated

Five years later (1898) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Francis Kelsey encountered a new batch of the same type of material. This second batch was billed as "the finest collection of prehistoric relics ever exhibited in the United States."¹⁸ A certificate of authenticity accompanying these items claimed they were discovered in Mecosta County (which adjoins Montcalm County, the site of the initial discoveries). The certificate bore the signatures of four witnesses to their discovery. One was William H. Scotford, apparently an alias used by James O. Scotford.¹⁹

This same year, John Campbell, professor at the Presbyterian College in Montreal, Canada, defended the Michigan Relics in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*.²⁰ Campbell compared their characters with an illustration of alleged inscriptions from a stone discovered on Monhegan



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FIG. 5. Slate artifact displaying the type of script Scotford created. Francis W. Kelsey, a Latin professor at the University of Michigan, judged such unsophisticated writing to be proof that the Michigan Relics were not authentic.

Island, off the coast of Maine, in 1856²¹—the year Scotford was born.²² Campbell claimed to have translated some of the inscriptions from both the Monhegan stone and the Michigan relics. In his estimation, the Michigan Relics were the charms of a tribe of wandering Japanese Buddhist monks.

When a third batch of artifacts began appearing around Detroit in the opening years of the new century, Francis Kelsey commented publicly again, noticing in the three successive phases a gradual improvement in manufacture.²³ These most recent items were being “found” and sold by Scotford, who was now living in Detroit.²⁴

Like Francis Kelsey, Walter Wyman also followed the unfolding saga of the frauds. After hearing that the hoax was growing and taking in more people, Wyman decided to pay Scotford a visit. According to a *New York Times* reporter,

He [Scotford] was at work in his shed, and so the archaeologist 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 a stone casket bearing hieroglyphics. I didn’t like to say 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.”²⁵

Soper and Savage Join Scotford

In 1907, Daniel E. Soper and James Savage entered the scene.²⁶ Both became extensively involved with the Scotford “relics.” Soper had collected genuine mound artifacts for years. He had once served as Michigan’s Secretary of State but had been forced to resign for corrupt behavior.²⁷ Soper moved to Arizona to put this scandal behind him. While living there, he privately planted some of his genuine Native American artifacts. Then, in the presence of some local archaeologists, Soper pretended to discover them. The intended dupes caught and exposed the fraud, recognizing that the artifacts did not originate in the Southwest.²⁸ Not long afterward, he returned to Michigan.

After years of collecting mound artifacts, Soper now became involved in their production. As the main promoter and distributor of the material, he served as front man for Scotford, who remained the creator, planter, and digger (fig. 6).²⁹ Soper trumpeted the relics as “the most wonderful discovery ever made in this country.”³⁰ Although he often claimed that he never sold the material, documents exist wherein he offers the items for sale through the mail under such letterheads as “Happy Hollow Gold Mining Co., immense dividends assured, millions in sight, no mining scheme, no long wait, quick action guaranteed, no debts, no danger of loss.”³¹

James Savage, dean of the Western Detroit Diocese and pastor of the Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church, joined the Scotford enterprise shortly

after Soper. Savage, who had collected Native American artifacts for almost three decades,³² came to fervently believe that the Michigan Relics were genuine. In 1907 he purchased a large collection from Scotford.³³ Savage read the “/” in “IH/” as a mutated S, rendering the Christian symbol “IHS” (the initials for *In Hoc Signo*).³⁴ At first, he believed that pre-Columbian Norsemen created the artifacts. Later, with Soper, he asserted they were made by the lost ten tribes, who were then killed by the Indians. Finally, he thought they were produced by a colony of ancient Jews.³⁵ Savage became a partner with Soper in excavating and invested the rest of his life in the discoveries.

It was also in 1907 that the imposture received broad exposure in the *Detroit News*. Calling them “the most colossal hoax of a century,”³⁶ the *News* attacked the artifacts in a series of articles. One article pointed out that the artifacts were only discovered in the presence of Scotford, Soper, or their associates. Another article complained that the thin green coating on the copper pieces could be wiped off with a finger, as opposed to the tough, encrusted surfaces of genuine copper artifacts. Also, it was reported that one of Scotford’s sons “works in metals and is something of a chemist.”³⁷ The *Detroit News* did not quash the Scotford-Soper enterprise but did slow it down for a couple of years. In 1909 things picked up again.³⁸ By the end of 1911, Scotford, Soper, and Savage had opened over five hundred mounds together.³⁹

Another person who soon became interested in the Michigan Relics was Rudolph Etzenhouser (fig. 7), a traveling elder of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. With Scotford, Soper, and Savage, Etzenhouser had unearthed some of these artifacts himself.⁴⁰ He sincerely viewed them as evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. In 1910 he published a collection of photographs of the material (see figs. 8, 9).⁴¹ Ironically, Etzenhouser did not understand the full meaning of his own words when in the introduction to his brochure he wrote, “To Mr. Daniel E.



Courtesy Church Archives

FIG. 6. James O. Scotford, left, and Daniel E. Soper, ca. 1911. The diggers stand with artifacts disinterred from this earthen mound in Michigan.



Courtesy Church Archives

FIG. 7. Six men digging up a mound in Michigan, ca. 1911. From left to right: Rudolph Etzenhouser, Rowland B. Orr, James Savage, Daniel E. Soper, John A. Russell, and Clarkston W. James.

Soper . . . belongs the credit of having been for several years the moving spirit in the investigation of these prehistoric relics of Michigan.”⁴²

James E. Talmage’s Investigation

James E. Talmage directed the Deseret Museum in Salt Lake City, which had been closed to the public since July 1903 and would move to a new building in July 1910.⁴³ In May 1909, Talmage traveled east as part of his efforts to reopen the museum. He visited a number of museums and attended the American Association of Museums conference in Philadelphia.⁴⁴

Talmage knew little or nothing about the Michigan Relics until William C. Mills, state archaeologist of Ohio and an associate in the American Association of Museums, conversed with Talmage concerning the subject. Their interchange prompted Talmage to visit Mills at the University of Ohio, where Mills showed him a tablet unearthed by the Scotford-Soper group. Mills believed that this tablet and all of the Soper materials were genuine. Fascinated by the tablet, Talmage soon opened correspondence with both Soper and Savage.⁴⁵ Soper sent him blueprints of some artifacts, which Talmage found “inspiring.”⁴⁶ On September 8, 1909, he wrote to Soper, “I have been impressed with the seeming parallelism between the

facts brought to light by your discoveries and the historical story given in the Book of Mormon.”⁴⁷ A month later, on October 12, 1909, he wrote to Soper again, reiterating that he was “very deeply interested” in the artifacts.⁴⁸

The next day Talmage met with the First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, Jon R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund) and a special committee, which had been called at his insistence to consider the issue. The committee included Apostles John Henry Smith, Orson F. Whitney, Anthony W. Ivins, Heber J. Grant, and, later, Joseph Fielding Smith. Book of Mormon scholar B. H. Roberts also sat on this committee. In his journal, Talmage recorded, “The consensus of opinion was that the alleged discoveries should be investigated. If genuine they are certainly of importance to Book of Mormon students; but their genuineness is by no means assured.”⁴⁹ On November 9 he met with the First Presidency again. As a result of their deliberations, he left for Detroit the next day—“solely in the interest of this investigation.”⁵⁰ Talmage conducted the investigation “under the auspices of the Deseret Museum.”⁵¹ He intended to procure the Michigan artifacts for the museum. He may have considered using the alleged relics as a special exhibit for the reopening.

Upon his arrival in Detroit, Talmage met with Soper and Savage to examine their collections and discuss the artifacts with them. He wrote, “I find that both Mr. Soper and Father Savage know of the seeming parallelism between the pictographs they have unearthed and the Book of Mormon record. They discussed the matter quite freely.” Rudolph Etzenhouser had likely talked with them about the Book of Mormon by this time and shared with them his writings on Book of Mormon archaeology. In the course of their discussion, Soper and Talmage arranged to excavate some mounds together the following day. That night Talmage wrote in his journal, “Prof. Kelsey has written to me reiterating the charge of fraud. On the other hand, Prof. W^m C. Mills of the University of Ohio is equally insistent that the finds are surely genuine. . . . The discoveries are certainly surprising, and I await opportunity of fuller examination.”⁵²

The next day Talmage went digging with Soper. James Scotford accompanied them and acted as the spade man. The dig was a success. The trio



FIG. 8. Clay box topped by a sphinxlike creature, approx. 10" x 12" x 2". Note the “IH/” carved into the front on the left. This item was unearthed near Edmore, Montcalm County, Michigan, in June 1899. From Rudolph Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 35.



FIG. 9. Slate tablet, $8\frac{3}{16}$ " by $5\frac{5}{8}$ ". This artifact was unearthed near Detroit on May 14, 1908. From Rudolph Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 20.

opened two mounds and unearthed three objects: the copper head of a battle-ax, a small perforated slate tablet or pendant, and a knife blade. They planned to meet for further excavations the next day but were rained out. Inclement weather precluded digging the following day as well, so Talmage visited both Soper and Savage to examine their collections further. Finally, on the fourth day, they resumed their work under clear skies. Talmage, Soper, and Scotford returned to the area of their previous venture and opened a dozen mounds over the course of the day. Again, they struck it rich. With his own hands, Talmage removed from the excavations two slate tablets and another knife blade.⁵³ One slate exhibited the Flood story on one side and on the other a battle between Indians and a “civilized” group.⁵⁴

Talmage realized the implications these objects held concerning Book of Mormon historicity. He saw in the slates the story of a white, civilized people with biblical knowledge and an ancient Near Eastern language, who fought with and were eventually exterminated by the Indians.⁵⁵ Talmage noted that, if authentic, the Michigan Relics “would furnish strong external evidence of the main facts set forth in the Book of Mormon narrative” and that “their discovery must be considered as marking one of the most important developments in American archaeology.”⁵⁶

Leaving Detroit, Talmage traveled further east to submit his newfound specimens to the scrutiny of archaeological experts on the Atlantic seaboard. First, in New York City, he met with Harlan I. Smith, curator of the ethnology department at the American Museum of Natural History. Smith told Talmage, “They just don’t look like anything heretofore found.” After a homesick Thanksgiving, Talmage traveled down to Washington, D.C. He recorded that a Mr. Holmes, chief of the Bureau of American Ethnology, told him, “The objects are plainly non-Indian, and are therefore not genuine archaeological specimens from [the] region.” For Talmage, who believed in the Book of Mormon, it was easy to see that both of these men were begging the question. Whether these strange new relics evidenced

a hitherto unknown people was precisely the issue. He felt that he had not received any “definite and specific reasons” for rejecting the items he showed them.⁵⁷

Unsatisfied, Talmage traveled to Columbus, Ohio, to visit his friend William C. Mills. He wrote,

I submitted for his inspection all the articles taken by me from the mounds near Detroit. Prof. Mills has been emphatic in his belief that the relics are genuine, and that they represent an ancient people once inhabiting the Michigan region. I pointed out to him some inconsistencies in the record of the finds, and he agrees with me that further critical examination is required. We were together until a late hour.⁵⁸

Pressing on with the investigation, Talmage returned to Detroit. He conscripted a pair of Latter-day Saint missionaries and returned to the site of his former diggings. Talmage disguised himself in case of a run-in with Soper, Savage, or Scotford. After two long days, Talmage and his helpers had thoroughly excavated twenty-two mounds. But, lacking the oversight of Soper and Scotford, they were unable to locate anything. Talmage noted in his journal, “Negative evidence is certainly valuable, but it is less inspiring than a positive find.” He traveled to visit Mills once more and then returned home to Salt Lake City, arriving on December 10.⁵⁹

The next day, a Saturday, Talmage “made a preliminary and partial report” to the First Presidency and arranged to meet with them again after the Sabbath. On Monday, he gave a full report of his month-long investigation. The Presidency was “greatly interested” and decided to hold a meeting on the subject. Attended by the First Presidency, the Presiding Bishopopric, Henry Peterson, George H. Brimhall, Joseph B. Keeler, Joseph Fielding Smith, and the special committee, the meeting was described by Talmage as follows: “Diverse views were expressed as to possible genuineness of the finds. Conference lasted over two hours. I was accorded a vote of thanks for work done, and was instructed to continue my investigations.”⁶⁰

Now that he was home in Utah, Talmage could take a closer look at the items he had exhumed in Michigan. Applying his scientific competence as a geologist and chemist, he commenced a rigorous physical examination of the material (fig. 10). Following one set of experiments, he apparently wrote to Soper regarding the evidence of fraud found on one of the tablets. In a reply letter, Soper demanded that Talmage return the item. Talmage responded, “I[f] these relics are found to be genuine we shall . . . exhibit them as such; and if they prove to be spurious we shall be equally desirous of exhibiting them as examples of forgery and fraud.”⁶¹ Soper, infuriated, lashed out at Talmage, telling him that he had “outraged my feelings as they never have been before.” Soper further stated, “This transaction is the most



FIG. 10. James E. Talmage at work in the laboratory of the Deseret Museum in Salt Lake City, ca. 1911. Talmage's meticulous analysis led him to conclude that the Michigan Relics were frauds. From James E. Talmage, "The Deseret Museum," *Deseret Museum Bulletin*, new ser., no. 1 (August 1911): 29.

cold-blooded, barefaced, contemptible deception that the writer ever ran up against."⁶² Soper threatened to sue Talmage and have him arrested.⁶³

Talmage's investigation was not entirely turned over to lab work. He made three more trips to the East. In the summer of 1910, during his trip to the annual American Association of Museums conference, Talmage visited Independence, Missouri. There, he "had a long talk" with some leaders of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, including Frederick M. Smith, first counselor in the presidency. The RLDS elders did not agree on "the proper course to pursue in the matter" and did not wholeheartedly approve of Rudolph Etzenhouser's brochure.⁶⁴

In the fall, Talmage went east again. He excavated seven mounds near Grand Rapids, Michigan, and spoke with local archaeologists. On the second leg of this trip he visited Detroit, where he met with Etzenhouser and Savage. Shortly after arriving home, he reported to the First Presidency and the Presiding Bishopric. A month later, he met again with the First Presidency, "regarding Museum affairs and Michigan relics."⁶⁵ On February 8, 1911, Talmage submitted a report to the First Presidency which stated, "The matter of the Michigan relics is still one of doubt and perplexity. In my mind the evidence of forgery is very strong; but the absolute proof of

forgery, the identification of the forger, and the location of the factory are yet incomplete.”⁶⁶

In June 1911, Talmage was back in Detroit. After some sleuthing, he contacted Etta Riley, James Scotford’s stepdaughter. After speaking with her, Talmage confided to his journal,

She solemnly declared to me that she positively knows her step-father, James Scotford, has made, buried, and dug up many of the articles reported to be genuine archeological relics. She gave circumstantial details, and agreed to sign a written statement with the proviso that such statement shall not be made public without her consent during the lifetime of her mother, Mrs. Jas. Scotford.

Riley also informed Talmage that Scotford made the objects at his home. So, in addition to considerable scientific evidence, Talmage now had the forger and the factory. The next day Etta Riley signed a statement of the facts in the presence of Talmage and her friend as witnesses. Talmage kept his promise; he never made her statement public. The Riley statement appears here for the first time (fig. 11).

The Michigan Relics received their greatest amount of scholarly attention during the time that Talmage worked on them. In 1909, Soper had shifted his project into high gear. To arouse interest, Etzenhouser mailed his brochure of photographs to archaeologists and curators from coast to coast.⁶⁷ Although the brochure was mostly received with skepticism, it aroused interest. In 1911, the *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* noted that the alleged antiquities were provoking “widespread discussion among the archeologists and curators of the country.” This issue of the nation’s oldest archaeological journal included another denunciation of the Soper artifacts by early critic Francis Kelsey. Kelsey’s critique was countered by J. O. Kinnaman, an archaeologist, Latin professor, dean of Benton Harbor College, and editor of *American Antiquarian*. Kinnaman stated that “long before the first date mentioned by Prof. Kelsey,” he had “examined personally many of the same kind of ‘finds.’” A Montcalm man by the name of Franklin owned these Michigan Relics. In particular, Kinnaman recalled viewing a Flood tablet.⁶⁸ Defenses such as Kinnaman’s kept the controversy in the spotlight. The journal called Michigan “the storm center of American Archeology.”⁶⁹

It was during this period (1911) that Father James Savage defended the artifacts in the *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society*. Among other arguments, Savage discussed his copper artifacts in light of contemporary archaeological evidence of copper mining in the area around Lake Michigan.⁷⁰ But the main reason he accepted the finds was his personal experiences in digging. He described one mound, upon which was a live tree and an old stump. From this mound he had personally removed a copper tablet that was underneath the stump with one of the live tree’s roots

Detroit, Michigan, June 6, 1911.

I, Mrs. Etta Riley, residing at 253 Fifth Street, Detroit, Michigan, make the following statement of my own free will and choice, and without compulsion or restraint:

I am the daughter of Mrs. James Scotford. James Scotford is ~~the~~ ~~work~~ my stepfather. I hesitate to reveal what I know about the work Mr. Scotford has done, in consideration of my mother's peace of mind. She is now old and feeble, and God knows she has suffered much from the perfidy of her husband, James Scotford.

With the assurance given me that this statement will not be made public during the life of my mother, ~~otherwise~~ without my express consent, I declare as follows:

I have seen and witnessed the preparation of plates in slate, clay and copper, which plates have afterward appeared as purported archeological finds. I know that James Scotford makes and prepares tablets of slate, hammered pieces of copper and pieces in clay, simulating works of ancient art, and that he buries such and afterward digs them up as per demand.

As an instance in fact I was recently a guest at the Au Sable residence of the Rev. Father James Savage. My stepfather, James Scotford, Daniel E. Soper of Detroit, and the Rev. Father James Savage were there. They found certain relics, or purported relics, and showed them to me. I told them I had seen the pieces before, -- that I had seen the identical pieces before they were buried; then the gentlemen named became indignant and angry; they even threatened my life.

As God lives, I know that the tablets and other pieces found on the shores of the Au Sable were made and prepared at the home of James Scotford in Detroit, Michigan.

I make this statement with the full assurance and understanding that it will not be made public during the life of my beloved mother. After she has passed away this statement may be published.

Signed in duplicate this 6th day of June, 1911.

Mrs. Etta Riley.

SIGNED in presence of the
following witnesses:

Mrs. O'Dell

Rev. T. J. Palmyre

FIG. 11. Etta Riley Statement. This sworn affidavit by the stepdaughter of James O. Scotford testifies that Scotford was the manufacturer of the Michigan Relics.

laid across it.⁷¹ Savage concluded his article by remarking that critics do not “seem to appreciate the credit of Herculean energy, versatility and genius they attribute to the maker of these finds, as thousands of them have been found in the sixteen counties of Michigan thus far heard from, and no two of these specimens are alike.”⁷²

In a general study of hoaxes, Curtis D. MacDougall found that many frauds have required an “enormous amount of ingenuity and energy.”⁷³ Making a lucrative investment would require just such careful, deceptive techniques of burial. And moreover, although the geography of the finds was large, it corresponded with the known digging enterprises of Soper and Scotford.⁷⁴ This duo uncovered the mysterious relics everywhere they went. The extent of the hoax is impressive, but is less astounding considering Soper’s other financial schemes and Scotford’s former occupation as a magician and hypnotist.⁷⁵

As Talmage quietly arranged his evidence, Soper forged ahead. He intended to make 1911 the greatest year yet. To the local newspapers he announced, “A party of Canadian and American experts is coming to Detroit this spring . . . then they can investigate whether I am right.” “I’ll show Prof. Kelsey,” he told the papers, “I’ll show them all.”⁷⁶ William C. Mills had been orchestrating this gathering.⁷⁷ Ontario’s Minister of Education sent his secretary, Clarkson W. James, who brought Dr. Rowland B. Orr, curator of the Provincial Museum at the University of Toronto. The party also included Professor J. O. Kinnaman and Rudolph Etzenhouser. On June 9, the party found four objects. Again, the experience of unearthing artifacts overpowered skepticism. All believed the finds were genuine and signed an affidavit to that effect.⁷⁸

A month later, on July 11, 1911, the Deseret Museum reopened—without a grand exhibit of Michigan artifacts. Talmage’s Scotford-Soper material was instead shown as an archaeological frauds display.⁷⁹ Five days later, Kinnaman announced an epistemic rupture in the field of archaeology. He averred the Michigan artifacts evidenced “a Caucasian race, with civilization developed to a point that was equal to any ever developed in the valleys of the Nile and the Tigro-Euphrates.” If deciphered, he stated,

Not only the history of the American continent will be revolutionized and rewritten, but the entire ancient history of the world will have to be revised, and as a result our knowledge of civilization and of the Caucasian race in general, will extend thousands of years back of the wildest dream of the most enthusiastic archaeologist now working in Oriental fields.

Kinnaman denounced all critics as blind dogmatists.⁸⁰ His news quickly spread throughout America and to Europe, exciting both archaeologists and laymen.

Breaking in the *Chicago Examiner*, the news of Kinnaman’s archaeological revolution prompted University of Chicago Professor Frederick Starr to

investigate. Starr was dean of the Department of American Archeology and Anthropology and enjoyed an international reputation as one of the foremost American archaeologists. In late July, he led a team of Chicago archaeologists to Detroit. They inspected James Savage's collection and excavated with the famous trio. The party opened two mounds and discovered five artifacts, including a slate tablet. All five bore the "IH/" inscription. Like Talmage and others, Starr removed artifacts from the mounds with his own hands.

After returning home, Starr stated publicly, "I have serious doubts regarding the authenticity of these objects." He remarked that the tablet he had disinterred looked too fresh. Some of the other items looked so clean, he suspected that they had never been in the ground; he suspected that Scotford had been placing them in the digs by sleight-of-hand the moment before removing them as a find. (Later, Scotford did admit to skill in sleight-of-hand.) Starr also expressed grave doubts about the authenticity of the inscriptions on the tablets. Citing the work of Henry Gillman, Starr questioned the antiquity of the finds. Gillman had excavated in Michigan for decades without finding anything of the Scotford-Soper variety. Starr found it suspicious that only Scotford and his cohorts could find the artifacts. The respected archaeologist warned against purchasing the artifacts.

Because Starr was held in such esteem, many had eagerly awaited his evaluation. His well-publicized doubts settled the question for most. Still, he was unwilling to deliver a decisive verdict, and he also considered further investigation. This left the door open for many others. Soper responded to Starr's criticism with the Big Lie: "The discovery is so stupendous," he said, "that it is hard for a man to grasp it and give it credence."⁸¹

Kinnaman soon met with Starr to compare notes. Afterward, he realized he had been taken in. In a press release, Kinnaman confessed that the earliest he had seen objects of the Scotford type was "a little" earlier than August 1891—the *end* of the first big summer of finds. "Yes, I was badly fooled," Kinnaman admitted. "And for that matter," he added, "so were the gentlemen with me . . . and Dr. James E. Talmage, of Deseret Museum, Salt Lake City."⁸² Unbeknownst to Kinnaman, Talmage was within days of releasing the results of his comprehensive analysis.

Unaware of Kinnaman's reversal, the *Deseret Evening News* enthusiastically covered his initial glowing report. The paper wondered whether the Michigan Relics provided "a confirmation of the history of the Jaredites as given in the Book of Ether." James E. Talmage must have rushed to the news office to extinguish the excitement because the next day the *Deseret Evening News* announced that Starr and Talmage disagreed with Kinnaman and that the paper would publish Talmage's position.⁸³ It appeared the following day. After considerable scientific experiment and some detective work,

Talmage came forward with the results of his careful and thorough investigation.⁸⁴ A refinement of his argument was published that September in the Deseret Museum's *Bulletin*.⁸⁵ Talmage concluded, "As a result of my investigation, I am thoroughly convinced that the alleged 'relics' are forgeries and that they are made and buried to be dug up on demand."⁸⁶ He laid out eight specific reasons for his assessment, which are excerpted below.⁸⁷

1. According to the evidence I have been able to gather, practically all discoveries of the Michigan 'relics' thus far announced have been made by James O. Scotford, of Detroit, or by his son-in-law, Scoby, or by parties who, like myself, have been operating for the time-being under guidance of the men named. . . .
2. The conditions of burial seem to preclude a possibility of ancient interment. The objects are generally found within a foot or two feet of the surface, and I have heard of no credible instance of any one of these objects having been exposed through nature's weathering, attested by parties other than those well known to be skilled in making these finds. Nevertheless did these objects exist by the hundreds in these little mounds, within a short distance of the surface, it is beyond human belief that they should never be uncovered except by pre-arranged digging.
3. Most of the objects are so fresh as to be practically new. Some of the slate tablets I have seen and handled suggest the thought that they may have just left the maker's hands [fig. 12]. The lines made by the graving tools, when examined microscopically, show fresh fractures, practically indistinguishable from others made in the course of experiment at the time of the examination.⁸⁸
4. The copper pieces . . . have evidently been corroded by rapid chemical treatment and not by the slow processes of time. The green layer on every piece I have seen is thin and non-adherent, easily wearing off even with careful handling, leaving a surface clean and smooth Moreover, the surface of the copper pieces generally shows the outlines of crystal aggregates due to the formation of copper compounds in the process of chemical corrosion.⁸⁹
5. The copper of which these articles are fashioned is ordinary commercial copper, smelted from sulphur-bearing and arsenical ores. It is not native copper, such as the copper objects taken from genuinely ancient mounds in this country are known to be. This conclusion as to the character of the metal is based on chemical analyses made in my own laboratory and elsewhere, and on conductivity determinations made at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington [fig. 13].⁹⁰
6. The way in which the pieces of slate and copper have been fashioned indicates their modern origin. [Talmage noticed plainly visible saw marks on one of his artifacts, and under the microscope he found file marks on another.]
7. [The articles exhibit] haphazard, off-hand, slovenly sketching [unlike the careful work of ancient artists].⁹¹
8. The characters are a jumble thrown together without regard to origin.⁹²

While Talmage declined to name the forger, he did express his feeling that Savage and Etzenhouser were innocent victims.⁹³

James E. Talmage had finally provided a thorough and careful scientific evaluation of the Michigan relics. The Detroit newspapers seized upon Talmage's exposé of the Scotford-Soper frauds. Talmage's conclusive work was also acknowledged by the *New York Times*.⁹⁴ He played a large role in debunking what modern archaeologist Stephen Williams calls "one of the largest-running scams in prehistory."⁹⁵

Talmage's report incensed Soper and Savage. Calling it a "flow of twaddle," Savage—the hoax's perpetual unwitting supporter—took issue with its conclusions in the *Detroit Free Press*.⁹⁶ In response to Talmage's first point, regarding Scotford's ability to find the stuff, Savage claimed that others had also discovered these "Michigan relics." A few discoveries did occur independent of Scotford and his associates but took place in areas they had promoted (for example, around Detroit and within the immediate vicinity of the village of Wyman), where a few people stumbled across material while digging a cellar or plowing.⁹⁷

In response to Talmage's second point, about the conditions of burial, Savage stressed the number of objects and their detail, as well as the amount of effort it would take to plant them if fake. In particular, he wrote about an undisturbed layer of black stria through which he had dug on a few occasions and under which he found artifacts of the Scotford-Soper type. Savage apparently never considered the possibility of any kind of interment other than vertical shaft deposit. However, other methods of burying bogus artifacts, such as slant-planting, have been documented.⁹⁸ This technique would also account for the Scotford artifacts found under tree stumps.

Attempting to counter Talmage's third point, regarding the fresh appearance of the artifacts, Savage referred to authentic relics he had discovered that looked fresh when he unearthed them. But Talmage's investigation went beyond natural appearance to microscopic examination. Savage made no counter-attack on Talmage's fourth point regarding rapid chemical corrosion.

In response to Talmage's fifth point, concerning metallurgical composition, Savage held that "experts"



Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art

FIG. 12. Slate depicting a fanciful dragon.

had examined the artifacts and determined they were made of native copper. But Savage's undocumented newspaper assertion lacked the credibility of Talmage's museum bulletin, which named the experts who tested his samples. As far as Savage's claim can be taken seriously, three explanations may account for items of pre-industrial copper. First, because in his article Savage confused the items of the Scotford-Soper type and genuine items he had exhumed before his association with Scotford, the native copper objects may simply be authentic artifacts collected by Savage previous to his association with Scotford. Second, the items of pre-industrial copper may be genuine artifacts exhumed from the Native American mounds within which Scotford planted fakes. Third, as with other objects, they may be once authentic pieces that have been fraudulently reshaped and anachronized.⁹⁹

Finally, Savage dismissed Talmage's observation that saw marks were visible on one particular object (point six). He justified his dismissal on the grounds that excavators had unearthed saws, chisels, and axes, and if they had found these, they would probably still find "other methods of reducing." This, he figured, provided an internally consistent explanation for the saw and file marks found on this and other objects.¹⁰⁰ But Savage's rejoinder falls short because, as Talmage had noted, the saw that left marks on his artifact was "modern" and "almost surely . . . machine-made."¹⁰¹ "By the way," wrote Talmage,

this piece, which of all the pieces examined by me is the most flagrant instance of modern workmanship, has been the subject of a somewhat animated correspondence. Its *return* has been demanded. As the piece was unearthed by a digger in my employ, whose services were engaged and paid for by me, I cannot understand any claim of ownership superior to my own, except possibly that of the man who made and buried the object.¹⁰²

Savage did not respond to Talmage's seventh and eighth points. His fierce rebuttal failed to vindicate the Scotford-Soper material.

While mound relics drew general interest in America, the Scotford-Soper material evoked a particular fascination. According to Francis Kelsey, this



FIG. 13. Michigan Relic battle-ax. James E. Talmage uncovered this copper ax from a mound in Palmer Park, near Detroit, on November 15, 1909, while in the company of Scotford and Savage. Talmage took this item to Salt Lake City and punched disks from it and sent them to the Smithsonian and other institutes to test the metal's composition. He discovered that the ax was made from factory smelted copper. Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art.

was due to the biblical and religious illustrations on the slates.¹⁰³ The keen interest that Savage, Etzenhouser, and Talmage—all church men—had in the material affirms Kelsey's assertion.¹⁰⁴ Of course, the implications for Book of Mormon historicity fueled the attention of Etzenhouser and Talmage. Besides implying that ancient Hebrews had been in America, the relics incorporated other elements that paralleled the Book of Mormon.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, in March 1911, the *Detroit Journal* claimed it had uncovered evidence that Soper was behind a scheme to market the artifacts in Utah.¹⁰⁶

In light of this evidence that Scotford exploited religious interests, Talmage's conclusion that the material was “made and buried to be dug up on demand” deserves a closer look. Were some artifacts produced with Talmage or Etzenhouser in mind? For example, the Babel scene from Talmage's Flood tablet depicted a group of people praying or paying homage to a bird with several tongues protruding from its beak.¹⁰⁷ Some interpreted the bird as a representation of God's confusion of tongues, as recorded in the Bible. Talmage, thinking that the actions of the people in the scene were “not easily explained by the record in Genesis,” wondered if this part of the scene had been “intended as a representation of the petition presented by Jared and his followers asking the Lord not to confound their tongues” (Ether 3:33–37).¹⁰⁸

Similarly, following the initial excavations, Talmage recorded that in one mound “we found a tablet of dark gray slate with inscriptions on both sides. . . . I was somewhat suspicious when Scotford, pointing to the inscribed circle with rays, said: ‘This is like what was found on one of the plates from Mormon Hill, at Cumorah, New York.’”¹⁰⁹ Talmage apparently suspected that this artifact had been manufactured specifically for him. On another occasion, Scotford had mimicked the Ten Commandments tablets (fig. 14) and perhaps he sought to replicate the golden plates as well.¹¹⁰ However, the Anthon transcript characters from the Book of Mormon plates had by this time been published,¹¹¹ and nothing resembling a circle with rays can be found among them.¹¹² What then did Scotford have in mind when he made this suspicious remark about the inscribed circle with rays and Cumorah's plates?

Inscribed circles with rays are prominent on the Kinderhook plates,¹¹³ which have from time to time been mistaken for the Book of Mormon plates.¹¹⁴ The Kinderhook plates were an archaeological hoax perpetrated in Illinois in 1843 to trick local Mormons.¹¹⁵ A comparison of photographs reveals that the Talmage tablet compares with the Kinderhook plates in size, shape, and appearance.¹¹⁶ Scotford may have made a loose replica of a Kinderhook plate, hoping to sway Talmage or Etzenhouser with religious enthusiasm.¹¹⁷ By the turn of the century, descriptions of the Kinderhook plates had been widely published—some by Rudolph Etzenhouser himself.¹¹⁸



FIG. 14. Copper plate. This Michigan Relic is shaped to suggest the traditional concept of the Ten Commandments. Note the dots down the center and right edge, numbering the ten text panels. From Rudolph Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 8.

In the wake of Talmage's exposé, Mary Robson, a neighbor of Scotford's sons, informed a news reporter that the young men had told her they helped their father make and bury the artifacts and that they grew plants on the sites to make them appear undisturbed.¹¹⁹ Scotford's sons protested the charges, explaining that they had just been playing tricks on the elderly woman.¹²⁰ But none of this exposure stopped Scotford, Soper, or Savage. They kept right on digging, hoping to revive their cause.

Such a revival would prove difficult owing to the publicity that Talmage's investigation had received. In 1914, Savage wrote to Soper of his efforts to interest the secretary of the Archaeological Society of America: "I saw the foot prints of the 'cloven foot' of Kelsey & Talmage. He [the secretary] mentioned both their names."¹²¹ In another letter to Soper, Savage lamented that "Kelsey & Talmage still keep up their devilish work."¹²² Both Soper and Savage remained involved with "the cause" until their deaths in the 1920s.¹²³ They died leaving large collections of the bogus material. Savage donated his collection to the University of Notre Dame, and Soper's collection was inherited by his son Ellis Clarke Soper.¹²⁴

Professional archaeologists have not taken the Michigan Relics seriously since the events of 1911. Based on Talmage's investigation, even rogue archaeologist Barry Fell and his Epigraphic Society have rejected them.¹²⁵ Modern historians and archaeologists recognize James E. Talmage's major role in exposing the hoax.¹²⁶ In a small but significant way, he contributed to the professionalization of the field of archaeology that took place around the turn of the century.

The Scotford-Soper Frauds since Talmage

Of the Michigan Relics, historian John Cumming writes,

In the passage of years in which countless archeological explorations under controlled scientific conditions, have taken place, not a single tablet or artifact of this type has been discovered. With all of the building and highway construction, nothing of the kind has been found. The discoveries ceased when Soper stopped digging.¹²⁷

Of course, public and scholarly interest waned long before the digging stopped. Today there are relatively few who know of the Scotford-Soper frauds. Still, they remain a curiosity among some historians, religious groups, and amateur archaeologists.

Forty years after the digging stopped, the Michigan Relics captured the attention of Milton R. Hunter, the president of the New World Archaeological Foundation. Hunter, who was also a General Authority in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, researched and wrote about archaeological evidence regarding Book of Mormon historicity.¹²⁸ In 1960, he received a letter from two Latter-day Saint missionaries who discovered the Savage collection while proselytizing at the University of Notre Dame. In 1962, he visited Notre Dame to view them. He showed so much interest that Notre Dame gave him the collection. In the course of this transaction, Hunter learned of Ellis Clarke Soper, who still had his father's collection. He contacted Ellis, who lent him a number of items. Hunter responded so favorably that Ellis decided to give him the entire collection. So, by 1963, Hunter had acquired the bulk of Scotford's productions.¹²⁹

Though aware of Talmage's published study,¹³⁰ Hunter hoped that the Michigan Relics would prove authentic. In a letter to Ellis Soper, Hunter wrote, "I . . . feel that the artifacts are all genuine. I intend to devote much of my future years in finding proof to demonstrate that they are. I want to vindicate your father and Father Savage in this whole matter." In the same letter he expressed his disappointment that "the General Authorities, or head officials of the Church, except myself, seem to have very little interest in the collection." He had tried for years to get President David O. McKay to look at the material, and had made a number of appointments with him, none of which materialized.¹³¹

Hunter's primary objective was to decipher the inscriptions on the relics. Searching for a translator, he sent photographs of the Michigan Relics to over fifty institutions—including universities, museums, governments, militaries, and private research institutes. Most replied that (1) the characters were a mixture of Asian scripts, (2) the language was unknown to them, or (3) the inscriptions were fraudulent. In this third category Hunter received responses from New Testament scholar William F. Albright, the Egyptian Antiquities Department of the British Museum, the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, the Department of Mediterranean Studies at Brandeis, and diffusionist Cyrus H. Gordon, among others.¹³²

Hunter completed a draft of the first of his projected two-volume work on the Michigan Relics. Discarding contemporary archaeology, he recycled the classic sources behind the old mound-builder myth. Then, after rejecting the staple theories that the mound builders were the lost ten tribes or refugees from Babel, he suggested that the mound builders were Nephites. Hunter perceived the following parallels between the Nephites described in the Book of Mormon and the Michigan mound builders depicted on the Scotford-Soper tablets: white skin, civilization, written language, use of stone as a medium for writing, Hebrew religion, Egyptian-influenced culture, mining, domesticated animals, horse-drawn chariots, highways, a monetary system, and expert weaving technology.¹³³

Before passing away, Hunter deeded his collection to the Church.¹³⁴ Some of his research was included posthumously in a 1977 Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center report supervised by religion professor Paul R. Cheesman. Like Hunter, Cheesman was interested in archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon.¹³⁵ His report recognized but underestimated the evidence of fraud. Unaware of facts known today, Cheesman generally argued that the material was genuine and concluded that the artifacts be considered “possibly authentic.”¹³⁶ According to the report, one linguist held that the characters “show order.”¹³⁷ It may be that some order can be found in some inscriptions, but the report failed to adequately address the basic linguistic problems raised by Francis Kelsey almost a century earlier. The other substantial point in the report concerned a copper knife blade from Hunter’s collection. A metallurgist observed that the blade appeared to be made out of unsmelted native lake copper.¹³⁸ As the method behind this observation was not given in the report, it probably did not match the rigor of Talmage’s tests of metal composition. Even if there were a native lake copper blade within Hunter’s collection, explanations for such an anomaly have been given above.

Conclusion

In his general study of fraud, Curtis D. MacDougall discovered a “cardinal truth about hoaxes.” That is, “they survive a great deal of debunking.”¹³⁹

There will probably always be some people who believe that some or all of the Scotford-Soper artifacts are authentic, despite the extensive and competent physical, historical, and epigraphical investigations that have found them fraudulent.¹⁴⁰ (See, for example, the scientific study in the accompanying article by Richard B. Stamps, “Tools Leave Marks: Material Analysis of the Scotford-Soper-Savage Michigan Relics.”)

The story of Mormonism’s encounter with the Michigan Relics contains a model of investigative research as well as a cautionary tale. James E. Talmage was both open-minded and careful throughout his investigation. He performed the necessary research and he followed the evidence. His judicious investigation of the Michigan Relics can serve as a model for Latter-day Saints interested in Book of Mormon and biblical archaeology.

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1. For a basic introduction to the Mound Builders, see *Mound Builders and Cliff Dwellers* (Alexandria, Va.: Time-Life Books, 1992), 6–77.
2. Robert Silverberg, *Mound Builders of Ancient America: The Archaeology of a Myth* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968).
3. Stephen Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology: The Wild Side of North American Prehistory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).
4. Examples of Scotford’s Bible story tablets can be found in Rudolph Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens from Michigan, U. S. A.* (Detroit: John Bornman and Son, 1910); and David Allen Deal, “‘The Mystic Symbol’ Demystified,” *The Ancient American: The Voice of Alternative Viewpoints* 1 (March–April 1994): 16–23. Calendars: Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 14, 19, 33, 37. Battles: Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 15, 22, 34. The Garden of Eden: Deal, “‘Mystic Symbol’ Demystified,” *Ancient American*, 17. The Flood: Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 6, 16, 18, 22, 25, 30, 32, 36. The Tower of Babel: Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 17. The life of Christ: Deal, “‘Mystic Symbol’ Demystified,” 30. The precise number of objects Scotford created is not known.
5. Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology*, 71–76. Most academic fields were professionalized during the progressive era.
6. M. E. Cornell, *A Brief Account of the Wonderful Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics Consisting of Caskets, Tablets, and Altars with Written Records of the Mound Builders* (Battle Creek, Mich.: By the author, n.d. [circa 1893]), v–6; Francis W. Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 16, 1892, in “Archaeological Forgeries at Wyman, Michigan,” *New York Nation*, January 28, 1892, 71. See also James Savage, “The Prehistoric Finds of Michigan,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society* 22 (1911): 28–29.
7. Francis W. Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 16, 1892, 71.
8. Francis W. Kelsey, “Some Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” *American Anthropologist* 10 (January–March 1908): 58.
9. Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, v.
10. Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, 7. See also the Levi Burkholder affidavit on Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, 32.

11. Cornell also put forward some weak supportive evidence for authenticity. He found the ancient scripts on the material proof of antiquity. Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, 14. He took as evidence for authenticity that there were no patterns in the material, as in other Mound Builder pottery (14–15); that some figures, which Cornell considered idols, compared to similar mound artifacts (26–27); and that a copper dagger found in Genesee County was finer than could be made with the technology of his time (27). Even if there was such a dagger, there is no indication that this was Scotford material.

12. Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 49–53; [William A. Denscotter], “Keeps Fake Relic Just As Souvenir,” *Detroit News*, November 16, 1907, p. 5, cols. 3–4.

13. Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 16, 1892, 71; Morris Jastrow Jr., “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 19, 1892, in “Archaeological Forgeries at Wyman, Michigan,” *New York Nation*, Jan. 28, 1892, 71–72.

14. Jastrow, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 19, 1892, 71–71; Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 16, 1892, 71–72.

15. Years later, Kelsey also claimed that one of the casket lids “had been dried on a machine sawed board.” Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 50.

16. Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 16, 1892, 71.

17. Silas Bent, “Bogus Relics of Past Tempt Collectors,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1925, p. XX5, col. 6.

18. Francis W. Kelsey, “A Persistent Forgery,” *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 33, no. 1 (January–February–March 1911): 26; Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 53, 55.

19. Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 53–56, 58. Later, when asked to identify this “William H. Scotford,” James O. Scotford declined to comment. “Men ‘Higher Up’ May Be in Fake Relic Business,” *Detroit News*, November 20, 1907, p. 2, col. 3.

20. John Campbell, “Recently Discovered Relics of the American Mound-Builders,” *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 2d ser., 4 (May 1898): 3–19.

21. Campbell, “Recently Discovered Relics,” 10–11. The marks on the “Monhegan stone” bear only a superficial resemblance to those on the Scotford material. Moreover, the Monhegan stone does not actually contain inscriptions. Its surface is covered with bedding and cleavage resulting from naturally occurring cracks and weathering of the stone. This information was supplied to the author by Maine archaeologist Bruce Borque. The misperception of language in the grooves of the Monhegan stone does not stand as an isolated incident of fantastic archaeology. There have been a number of “misinterpreted cracks in rocks.” Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology*, 12.

22. James O. Scotford, in Ancestral File, ver. 4.19, Salt Lake City, ID # 49D6-HD.

23. Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 53–59; Francis W. Kelsey “To the Editor of the Nation,” May 31, [1910], in “Correspondence: A Persistent Forgery,” *New York Nation*, June 16, 1910, 603–4.

24. Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 58. Supporter John A. Russell gave the locations of most of Scotford’s digs. John A. Russell, *Prehistoric Discoveries in Wayne County, Michigan* (Detroit: Shelby Printing, 1911), 6–7.

25. Bent, “Bogus Relics,” p. XX5, col. 7.

26. John Cumming, “Humbugs of the First Water: The Soper Frauds,” *Michigan History* 63 (March–April 1979): 34, 36.

Daniel E. Soper may have been a distant cousin of Parley P. Pratt’s wife Phoebe E. Soper. Daniel E. Soper—born in Genesee, Michigan, in 1873—was the son of

Theodore Soper and a woman called Ann or Anna. In 1868, a Theodore W. Soper married a woman named Mary Ann Henning in Genesee, Michigan. Theodore W. Soper was born in New York state in 1848 to William Soper and a woman named Amelia. Around 1847, a William Soper married an Amelia Weeks in New York state. This William Soper was born in 1807 in Hempstead, on Long Island. Phoebe Soper Pratt was the daughter of Samuel Soper and Hannah Bornlay, both of Hempstead. This information comes from International Genealogical Index and the Ancestral File.

27. Soper was accused of extravagance with state funds, official carelessness, and demanding kickbacks for an appointment to public office. "Soper in Disgrace," *New York Times*, December 18, 1891, p. 8, col. 2; "Charges against Soper," *New York Times*, January 1, 1892, p. 2, col. 6.

28. A[llbert] L. Spooner, "Cuneiform Tablets' from Michigan: The Soper Frauds," *Cranbrook Institute of Science News Letter* 25 (October 1955), 18.

29. In his general study of hoaxes, Curtis D. MacDougall writes, "Although it is customary for the originator of a hoax to make certain that it is related or published at the proper time and place, not infrequently it is someone else who is most responsible for its becoming widespread." Curtis D. MacDougall, *Hoaxes* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 283.

30. "Daniel E. Soper in a Fake Relic Business," *Detroit News*, November 14, 1907, p. 2, col. 3.

31. "Soper in a Fake Relic Business," p. 1, cols. 7-8, p. 2, cols. 1-4; "Soper Plans Extensive Relic Hunt as Soon as Frost Leaves the Ground," *Detroit Journal*, March 23, 1911, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection, Milton R. Hunter Collection, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Albert L. Spooner stated that he owned "a letter in which Soper stated that he never sold, traded or gave away a single piece, but, I also have letters in which he offered hundreds of pieces for sale." A. L. Spooner, "The Soper Frauds," in possession of the author, 5. Spooner wrote this before March 23, 1977, the date on the cover letter he sent to Dr. Paul R. Cheesman. A[llbert] L. Spooner to Dr. Paul R. Cheesman, March 23, 1977, in possession of the author.

32. "Relics Branded Fakes Unloaded on Dean Savage," *Detroit News*, November 15, 1907, 1; "Others Have Found Relics," *Detroit Journal*, March 25, 1911, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

33. Savage would later make two more large purchases—one from Scotford and one from "a relative of Scotford's by marriage." Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 36. Letters from Savage to Soper show Savage was not a coconspirator. Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

34. *In Hoc Signo* means "under this sign." This is a reference to the Emperor Constantine's dream in which Constantine was shown a cross and told that he would conquer "under this sign."

35. "Relics Branded Fakes Unloaded," p. 2, col. 1; "To Prove Genuine Their Prehistoric Finds Here," *Detroit Free Press*, February 12, 1911, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; "Daniel Soper Finds 'Prehistoric Tablet' Ten Miles from City," *Detroit Journal*, March 22, 1911, 2, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; "Prehistoric Relics Found Here Branded by Starr as Fakes," *Detroit News*, July 28, 1911, 2.

36. "Soper in a Fake Relic Business," p. 1, col. 7.

37. "Soper in a Fake Relic Business," p. 1, cols. 7-8, p. 2, cols. 1-4; "Relics Branded Fakes Unloaded," p. 1, col. 8, p. 2, cols. 1-2; "Keeps Fake Relic," p. 5, cols. 3-4; "Men 'Higher Up,'" p. 2, cols. 2-3.

38. "Dan Soper Is Digging Again," *Detroit Journal*, September 9, 1909, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.
39. Savage, "Prehistoric Finds," 31.
40. "Others Have Found Relics."
41. Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*. Etzenhouser included a reproduction of John Campbell's comparison of Scotford characters and Monhegan stone characters. He mistakenly labeled the entire plate "The Monhegan Stone: Found . . . in 1856." Campbell, "Recently Discovered Relics," page 11, plate 3; reproduced in Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 2. This made it appear that both the Monhegan characters and the Scotford characters appeared on the stone that had been discovered in Maine a half-century earlier.
42. Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 4.
43. James E. Talmage, "The Deseret Museum," *Deseret Museum Bulletin*, new ser. (August 16, 1911): 23. For a biographical sketch of Talmage, see Becky White Workman, "James Edward Talmage," in *Utah History Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Kent Powell (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 544.
44. James E. Talmage, Journal, May 1, 1909, James Edward Talmage Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
45. James E. Talmage, "The 'Michigan Relics,'" *Deseret Museum Bulletin*, new ser. (September 16, 1911): 3–4 (this article was reprinted in the *Improvement Era* 14 [October 1911]: 1048–73); Talmage, Journal, May 22 and October 13, 1909.
46. James E. Talmage to Daniel E. Soper, September 8, 1909, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.
47. Talmage to Soper, September 8, 1909. On Talmage's interest on the historicity of the Book of Mormon, see James E. Talmage, *The Book of Mormon: An Account of Its Origin, with Evidences of Its Genuineness and Authenticity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1899), 12, 16, 31, 32.
48. Quoted in Daniel E. Soper to James E. Talmage, April 1, 1910, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.
49. Talmage, Journal, October 13, 1909.
50. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 3, 5; Talmage, Journal, November 9, 1909.
51. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 3.
52. Talmage, Journal, November 14, 1909.
53. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 8–15; Talmage, Journal, November 15–18, 1909.
54. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 7, illus. 5, and 9, illus. 6.
55. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 6–8; James E. Talmage, "Archaeological Finds Declared Spurious," *Deseret Evening News*, August 5, 1911, pt. 2, p. 11.
56. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 8; Talmage, "Finds Declared Spurious," 11.
57. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 15; Talmage, Journal, November 20–27, 1909.
58. Talmage, Journal, November 28–30, 1909; "Relics Found Here Branded," p. 2, col. 2.
59. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 15; Talmage, Journal, December 1–10, 1909.
60. Talmage, Journal, December 11–14, 1909.
61. Soper wrote to Talmage on February 10, 1910. James E. Talmage to Daniel E. Soper, February 26, 1910, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. This letter is incomplete and cuts off in the middle of the above quotation. A typescript of the contents, however, can be found elsewhere in the collection.
62. Soper to Talmage, April 1, 1910.

63. Statement, James E. Talmage, fall 1910, relayed in "Relics Found Here Branded," p. 2, col. 3; Daniel E. Soper to [the father of Albert L. Spooner], no date [circa January 14, 1919 (the date received)], quoted in Spooner, "Cuneiform Tablets" from Michigan," 19.
64. Talmage, Journal, June 8, 1910.
65. Talmage, Journal, August 30–October 21, 1910.
66. James E. Talmage to President Joseph F. Smith and Counselors, February 8, 1911, 4, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. See also James E. Talmage to A[rmond] H. Griffith, December 16, 1910, and James E. Talmage to Herbert E. Sargent, January 21, 1911, both in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.
67. R[udolph] Etzenhouser to Daniel E. Soper, March 29, 1910, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; "To Prove Genuine." Hoaxes often find themselves an unwitting popularizer. MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 283–84.
68. J. O. Kinnaman, "Michigan the Storm Center of American Archeology," *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal*, 33, no. 1 (January–February–March 1911): 12, 29.
69. Kinnaman, "Storm Center of American Archeology," 12; Kelsey, "Persistent Forgery," 26–29.
70. Savage, "Prehistoric Finds," 21–26. Combining the battle scenes and the fact that indigenous Michigan Christians did not presently exist, Savage reasoned that they had been destroyed in battle. He compared this theory to an alleged Indian legend about killing a white race in the distant past (27–28). Savage also asserted that the scenes from the new relics paralleled known ancient customs (36).
71. Savage, "Prehistoric Finds," 33. In another dig, a stone pipe was found encircled by a root. Both sides of the root had to be cut to remove the pipe. Spooner, "Cuneiform Tablets" from Michigan," 20. Similarly, several mounds were overgrown with plants. See, for example, Russell, *Discoveries in Wayne County*, 8; Affidavit quoted in *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection of Inscriptions and Drawings*, comp. Leonard D. Carter in cooperation with Paul R. Cheesman from the files and papers of Milton R. Hunter (Provo, Utah: Center for Religious Studies, Brigham Young University, 1977), 22.
72. Savage, "Prehistoric Finds," 37–38.
73. MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 283.
74. See map on page 212 of Richard B. Stamps, "Tools Leave Marks: Material Analysis of the Scotford-Soper-Savage Michigan Relics," in this issue of *BYU Studies*. See also Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 36–37. Dorothy L. Hayden, executive director of the American Institute of Archeological Research, holds that plates of the Michigan Relic type were found in Ohio and Canada. Dorothy L. Hayden, "Introduction [to Deal, "Mystic Symbol" Demystified?]," *On Site* 3 (spring 1992): i. Similarly, Wayne May holds that Michigan Relics of the Scotford type were found "throughout the state" between 1848 and 1920. Wayne May, "Christ in North America?" *Ancient American: The Voice of Alternative Viewpoints* 4, no. 26 (January–February 1999), 6. Claims such as these are never documented.
75. Soper's financial schemes and Scotford's former occupations are discussed in Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 34–36, 41, 42. See also "Mrs. Robson under a Hypnotic Spell Say Scotford Boys," *Detroit News*, September 7, 1911, p.1, col. 5, p. 2, col. 6.
76. "Soper Plans Extensive Relic Hunt."
77. W[illiam] C. Mills to Daniel E. Soper, November 9, 1910, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

78. "Believers in Soper Swear He Found Relics in Highland Park," *Detroit Journal*, June 16, 1911, last edition, p. 21, cols. 4-6; "Prehistoric White Race Preceded the American Indian: Kinnaman Discoveries in Michigan Overthrew Science," *Chicago Examiner*, July 23, 1911, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

79. The display placards can be found in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

80. "Prehistoric White Race Preceded the American Indian."

81. On Starr's investigation, see "Detroit Relics Interest Starr," *Detroit News*, July 24, 1911; "Starr Finds Soper Relics Interesting; Will Say No More," *Detroit News*, July 27, 1911; "Professor Starr Is Skeptical about Proof of an Ancient Caucasian People in Michigan," *Chicago Examiner*, July 28, 1911; "Relics Found Here Branded," p. 2, col. 3; "Prof. Starr Doubts Relics Are Genuine," *Detroit Journal*, July 28, 1911, last edition, 1; "Scotfords Alone Find Relics, Says Starr," *Chicago Sunday Examiner*, July 30, 1911, pt. 1, 10; "Scotfords Have Fine Relic Scent," *Detroit News*, July 31, 1911, clippings in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. See also "Professor Starr and the Soper Relics," *Detroit Journal*, July 29, 1911, 4. On Starr's suspicion of sleight-of-hand placement, see "Prof. Kinnaman 'Taken In' by Soper Relics, He Admits," *Detroit News*, August 2, 1911, 1, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; on Scotford's skill, see "Robson under a Hypnotic Spell," 1-2; see also "[Mrs. May Robson] Lays Bare Fake Relic Industry: Adds Final Word in Fake Relic Expose," *Detroit News*, September 6, 1911. Gillman himself expressed grave suspicions in "Cardiff Giant Brought into Discussion of Soper Relics by Henry Gillman, Scientist," *Detroit News*, July 29, 1911, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

82. "Kinnaman 'Taken In,'" 1.

83. "A Remarkable Find," *Deseret Evening News*, August 3, 1911, pt. 1, p. 4, col. 1; "The Other Side of the Story," *Deseret Evening News*, August 4, 1911, pt. 1, p. 4, col. 1-2.

84. Talmage, "Finds Declared Spurious," 11.

85. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 2-27.

86. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 22.

87. The reasons are numbered and are found in Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 22-26.

88. See also Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 2, 6, and 20, illus. 4. Talmage noted that the copper tablets had been "impressed with dies" (22). Perhaps this explains the noisy hammering that neighbors of Scotford's involved sons complained of. "Lays Bare Fake Relic Industry," p. 2, col. 7.

89. See also Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 17-18. Herbert E. Sargent, director of the Kent Scientific Museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan, also noticed the thin, even corrosion on the Scotford-Soper artifacts as opposed to the uneven corrosion on genuine relics. Furthermore, he examined one piece of the Scotford variety upon which a common housefly became stuck and left its outline in the oxidized layer. "This would hardly have occurred in the earth," noted Sargent. He concluded, "A close inspection of this specimen, microscopic and otherwise, thoroughly convinced me that it was the work of a comparatively unskilled artisan with a sixty-fourth inch machine made file." H[erbert] E. Sargent to J[ames] E. Talmage, January 17, 1911, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; H. E. Sargent, "Notes on a Notched Point, Submitted by Daniel E. Soper," n.d., attached to Lena E. Baker to J[ames] E. Talmage, July 10, 1911, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

90. See also Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, to J[ames] E. Talmage, May 24, 1910, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

Native Michigan copper is characterized by flecks of silver. E. J. Pranke, a chemist at Ohio State University, analyzed one of the copper Michigan relics and concluded, "The degree of hardness and the absence of silver give to Arizona the preference as its

probable source." E. J. Pranke, "Analysis of a Copper Relic," June 7, 1910, 3, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. The determination of Arizona as the source of this copper is particularly interesting in light of Soper's former residence in that state. Soper was exposed for planting in Arizona genuine ancient artifacts he had discovered in Michigan. Perhaps using a similar ruse, he later planted an authentic Arizona piece in Michigan.

91. This point has been made by several others. See, for example, Morris Jastrow Jr., "To the Editor of the Nation," January 9, 1892, in "Archaeological Forgeries at Wyman," 71; Kelsey, "Archeological Forgeries from Michigan," 48, 60; Miriam Brooks [open letter] to "Dr. James E. Talmage," August 8, 1911, in *Deseret Evening News*, August 12, 1911, quoted in Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 28–30. Since not all ancient artists were careful, this argument is a less important one.

In a similar vein, Talmage claimed to have detected anachronisms in a tablet's pictures, such as the allegedly modern nature of a soldier's costume. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 20, illustration 4 on page 6, illustration 17 on page 24. Some of the tablets were clearly intended to represent decalogues. They anachronistically mimic the traditional, though not ancient, conception that the Ten Commandments were written on stones shaped like traditional English Christian gravestones. Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, figure between pages 10 and 11; Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 8; Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 36.

92. Here Talmage repeated Francis W. Kelsey's linguistic criticism.

93. Talmage, "Michigan Relics," 5; "Finds Declared Spurious," 1. In a historical analysis of the Soper frauds, John Cumming charged Soper and Scotford with fraud and exonerated Savage and Etzenhouser as victims. Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 42–43.

94. "Soper Relics Are Again Denounced as Patent Frauds," *Detroit News*, August 10, 1911, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; "Soper Relics Marked by Modern Saw and File, Says Talmage," *Detroit Journal*, August 10, 1911, last edition; "Another Skeptic on the Soper Relics," *Detroit Journal*, August 11, 1911, last edition; "Gives Relics Acid Test," *New York Times*, August 14, 1911, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

95. Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology*, 185.

96. James Savage, "To the Editor" of the *Detroit Free Press*, November 1, 1911, in "Flow of Twaddle Begs Question," *Detroit Free Press*, clipping in Scrapbook 13, Frederick Starr Papers, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

97. Savage, "To the Editor." See also Savage, "Prehistoric Finds," 37. For example, see the affidavits in Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 2. See also "Prehistoric Tablet of Great Value Found by Dr. Hyvernaut in Michigan," *Washington Post*, September 18, 1916.

98. For example, James Strang slant-planted a set of inscribed metal plates. Roger Van Noord, *King of Beaver Island: The Life and Assassination of James Jesse Strang* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 34–37, 56–57.

99. The Albert L. Spooner collection includes a copper piece that appears to be an old artifact that has been reworked into the shape of a butter knife. Another copper item appears to be an awl that was hammered into a spoon shape. Descriptions of items A89.1-9 through A89.1-10 in Archaeological Collections, Bureau of History, "Catalog: Spooner Donation," in possession of the author. This would not be the first case of manufacture by reshaping; Scotford apparently reshaped some pennies. When Francis W.

Kelsey observed the material, he noticed “a few coins of copper beaten out thin, and adorned with various alphabetic signs. The weight of two coins which have been examined is suspiciously near that of our one-cent pieces.” Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” January 16, 1892, 71. Criticisms regarding file and saw marks prompted Scotford to produce allegedly ancient files and saws. Kelsey’s criticism of the unbaked clay of the first phase tablets prompted Scotford to make baked clay and then slate tablets. Similarly, Talmage’s criticisms of the metal composition could have spurred Scotford to solve this problem by reshaping authentic Native American copper into his type of artifact. There are other examples in the history of American archaeology when authentic items have been reshaped and anachronized as part of a hoax. See Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology*, 120.

100. Savage, “To the Editor.” Talmage made the same point in James E. Talmage, “Finds Declared Spurious,” 1, quoted in Carter, *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection*, 31. On the discovery of saws, see Savage, “Prehistoric Finds,” 21, 26.

101. Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 2, 25.

102. Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 26.

103. Kelsey, “Archeological Forgeries from Michigan,” 59. Francis W. Kelsey, “To the Editor of the Nation,” May 31, [1910] in “A Persistent Forgery,” *New York Nation*, June 16, 1910, 603–4; Kelsey, “Persistent Forgery,” 29. See also “Starr and the Soper Relics,” p. 4, col. 1.

104. Some Protestant ministers also took the bait. See “Men ‘Higher Up,’” p. 2, col. 3. In his general study of hoaxes, Curtis D. MacDougall found that hoaxes often take advantage of religious predispositions. MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 95, 102, 146.

105. Scotford had produced battle tablets like the ones which interested Etzenhouser and Talmage before his contact with either of them. The parallels to the Book of Mormon on such depictions derive from the Mound Builder myth rather than the Book of Mormon itself. European Americans who could not attribute the construction of the more impressive mounds to the Indians, whom they perceived as lazy and savage, reasoned that the mounds must have been built by a “civilized,” but now vanished, people. These mythical Mound Builders were conceived of as agriculturist and industrious. They were commonly believed to have been refugees from Babel or the lost ten tribes. To explain their disappearance, many reasoned that the Indians had warred against and annihilated them. This myth was crumbling at the turn of the century. Silverberg, *Mound Builders of Ancient America*; Williams, *Fantastic Archeology*, 23–24, 43–76, 168–75. Dan Vogel argues that the Book of Mormon incorporated the Mound Builder myth. Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986). For a Latter-day Saint response, see Kevin Christensen’s review in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 214–57.

Utilization of this myth abounds in the Michigan Relics literature. For example, see Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, 8, 9–10, 22, 25, 28; Russell, *Discoveries in Wayne County*, 16–17; Bent, “Bogus Relics,” p. XX5, col. 8; “Dan Soper Is Digging Again,” *Detroit Journal*, September 9, 1909, last edition, 2; “Chattanooga’s Wonderful Collection of Ancient Relics,” *The Chattanooga News*, late mail edition, March 1, 1916, p. 8.

106. “Soper Plans Extensive Relic Hunt,” 1.

107. Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 19, 22, illus. 14.

108. Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 19–20.

109. Talmage journal, quoted in Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 12.

110. These representations followed the traditional conception of the stone tablets—the English Christian gravestone shape. They were divided into ten panels,

with five on each tablet, and script inside of each panel. In figure 3 of Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 8, there is a series of from one to ten dots that mark each panel. Savage held this decalogue tablet as his prize possession. [Denscotter], “Relics Branded Fakes Unloaded,” p. 1, col. 8, p. 2, col. 1. Talmage noted that this tablet was “one of the most carefully inscribed artifacts.” Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 18. For another decalogue tablet, see Cornell, *Discovery of Pre-Historic Relics*, figure between pages 10 and 11.

111. Stanley B. Kimball, “The Anthon Transcript: People, Primary Sources, and Problems,” *BYU Studies* 10 (spring 1970): 325–52, especially 349–50.

112. For a photograph of these characters, see Danel W. Bachman, “Anthon Transcript,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:44.

113. They appear on seven of the twelve sides of the six Kinderhook plates. For facsimiles of the Kinderhook plates, see Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), 5:374–76.

114. It would be a simple error for a non-Mormon to confuse the Kinderhook plates and Cumorah’s plates. The mistake has been made on other occasions. When Wilford Poulson found the one extant Kinderhook plate at the Chicago Historical Society, it was on display as one of the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. “Kinderhook Plate” [statements of F. C. A. Richardson and M. Wilford Poulson], fifteenth item in the folder entitled “Kinderhook Plate” items in the “Mormon Collection,” Archives and Manuscripts Department, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, copied from the museum file corresponding to Accession Number 1920.487, Decorative and Industrial Arts Department, Chicago Historical Society. In 1913, the *St. Louis Times* ran a story about the Kinderhook plates entitled “Book of Mormon Plates ‘Planted’ by Illinois Man,” September 23, 1913, 1. The *Warsaw Signal*’s 1844 article about the Kinderhook plates is entitled “New Book of Mormon,” May 22, 1844. In 1888, the *Chicago Inter Ocean* ran an article entitled “Second Book of Mormon,” morning edition, January 31, 1888, 1. Mormon publications borrowed a news story and its title from the *Quincy Whig*: “Singular Discovery—Material for Another Mormon Book,” *Quincy Whig*, May 3, 1843; “Singular Discovery—Material for Another Mormon Book,” *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 10, 1843, p. 2, col. 3; “Ancient Records,” *Times and Seasons* 4, (May 1, 1843), 186–87; *A Brief Account of the Discovery of the Brass Plates Recently Taken from a Mound near Kinderhook, Pike County, Illinois*, broadside printed in Nauvoo, Illinois, photocopy in Perry Special Collections.

115. For more information about the Kinderhook plates, see Stanley B. Kimball, “Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax,” *Ensign* 11 (August 1981): 66–74.

116. For a photograph of the piece in question, see Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 5, illus. 3. Actually, the Kinderhook plates are significantly smaller, but their size was not known until 1929 when an extant plate was found (see previous note). Prior to this time, they were always described with the dimensions given in the newspapers at the time of their discovery: “four inches in length, one inch and three quarters wide at the top.” “Singular Discovery—Material for Another Mormon Book,” *Quincy Whig*, May 1, 1843, p. 187; “Ancient Records,” 185–86. These are the dimensions given in Rudolph Etzenhouser’s works (see note 118 below). The article Talmage unearthed measures $4\frac{3}{8}$ ” by $1\frac{1}{8}$ ”. Both have a perforation in the middle of the very top. Both have somewhat rounded edges at the top. Both have inscriptions on front and back.

117. It is more likely that Etzenhouser was the intended dupe. Talmage, who had only contacted Soper a few months previously, felt that the mounds he opened in 1909 had not been disturbed for years. Talmage, *Journal*, quoted in Talmage, “Michigan Relics,” 11. Etzenhouser became involved as early as 1907. (He wrote that he became involved after James Savage had. Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 5.)

118. R[udolph] Etzenhouser, *The Book Unsealed: An Exposition of Prophecy and American Antiquities* (Independence, Mo.: Ensign Print, 1892), 42–43; R[udolph] Etzenhouser, *From Palmyra, New York, 1830, to Independence, Missouri, 1894* (Independence, Mo.: Ensign Publishing House, 1894), 88–89; R[udolph] Etzenhouser, *The Book of Mormon and Its Translator: Archaeological and Historical Evidences* (Independence, Mo.: Ensign Publishing House, 1899), 6–7.

Compare also the Kinderhook plates with the artifact Soper is holding in the photograph in the introduction to Etzenhouser’s book. Etzenhouser, *Engravings of Prehistoric Specimens*, 3. This piece looks similar to the Kinderhook plates and appears to be a slim metal plate. Etzenhouser may have opened his book with this photograph because of the similarity. The book was published after Talmage’s visit. The plate in Soper’s hand may be another instance of improvement in manufacture.

In a truly bizarre news story regarding the Soper frauds and the Kinderhook plates, the *Quincy Herald-Whig* published an article implicating the Mormons for producing both. “Brass Tablets Found near Kinderhook Believed Planted in Grave by Mormons: Efforts Made to Substantiate Claims to Antiquity of Religion,” *Quincy Herald-Whig*, April 14, 1929, 9, 19. James Savage wrote that a Catholic periodical had blamed the Strangites for planting the stuff. Savage to Soper, November 20, 1919, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. At the other end of the uncritical spectrum, Stephen B. Shaffer, a Latter-day Saint author, mistakenly pointed to both frauds “to show the reader the close relationship between the Adamic language, Nephite language, Jaredite language and several other ancient languages of people that populated the North and South American continent before the Jaredites and after the Nephites (but before Columbus).” Stephen B. Shaffer, *Treasures of the Ancients* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 1996), xv–xvi.

- 119. “Lays Bare Fake Relic Industry,” p. 1, cols. 3–4, p. 2, col. 7.
- 120. “Robson under a Hypnotic Spell,” p. 1, col. 5, p. 2, col. 6.
- 121. James Savage to Daniel E. Soper, November 3, 1914, in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.
- 122. James Savage to Daniel E. Soper, January 19, 1916, in Soper and Savage Artifacts Collection. In the years following the discrediting of the Scotford-Soper artifacts, those with an interest in the material usually contacted University of Michigan professor Francis Kelsey—the first and best known detractor—who would direct them to Talmage’s bulletin. Francis W. Kelsey to M[ary] Pellen, December 20, 1914, typescript copy by M. Pellen, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.
- 123. For an example of the hoax continuing after 1911, see “Still Finding Soper Relics,” *Detroit Journal*, August 26, 1911, last edition, p. 18, col. 6. See also letters from Savage to Soper in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. Savage refers to “the cause” in more than one of these letters.
- 124. “College Given Mound Curios,” [unknown newspaper], October 13, 1921, clipping in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. The materials were offered to the Anthropology Department of the University of Michigan. The department did not accept them, feeling they were not “worthy of storage space.” Henriette Mertz, “Report Re[garding] Savage Collection,” 1, in possession of the author.

125. Barry Fell, "The Michigan 'Relics,'" *Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications* 17 (1988): 287–318.

126. Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 39–40; Williams, *Fantastic Archaeology*, 176–86; MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 81–82.

127. Cumming, "Humbugs of the First Water," 42. See also MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 81. Albert L. Spooner excavated mounds with his father and Soper as a young boy. Later in life he researched the Scotford-Soper materials and was generally considered an expert on the material. In an unpublished manuscript he concurs with Cumming: "To my knowledge nobody has claimed to have found any in the last 50 years." A. L. Spooner, "The Soper Frauds," manuscript in possession of author, 5; see also Spooner, "Cuneiform Tablets" from Michigan," 15.

128. See for example, Milton R. Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956).

129. On Hunter's acquisition of the Savage collection, see Milton R. Hunter, "Savage and Soper Collections: Ancient American Tablets Testify," 41–44, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. On Hunter's acquisition of the Soper collection, see the letters between Hunter and Ellis Clarke Soper in Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

130. I make this inference based on the fact that Talmage's relevant papers are now in the Hunter collection. Hunter apparently removed them from the Talmage collection.

131. Milton R. Hunter to Ellis Clarke Soper, January 20, 1965, copy in possession of the author.

132. "Letters to Translators and Replys," Soper and Savage Artifact Collection.

133. Hunter, "Ancient American Tablets Testify," 33–40.

134. Hunter, "Deed of Gift," January 8, 1974, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection; Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Agreement," January 8, 1974, Soper and Savage Artifact Collection. The Soper and Savage Collections, together with authentic artifacts Hunter owned, are now classified as the "Milton R. Hunter Archeological Collection." They are currently in a storage room of the Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, as are the Talmage artifacts.

135. Carter, *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection*. Like Hunter, Cheesman authored books about Book of Mormon archeology.

136. The report argued well that the conditions of the mounds appeared undisturbed, but this point had been made before. Carter, *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection*, 15, 22, 25, 32. Criticizing Talmage's second point, the report stated that since Talmage's day, "shallow graves had been authenticated." Carter, *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection*, 31. But Talmage never questioned the existence of shallow graves. Rather, he questioned the absence of exposed Scotford material. To refute Talmage, the report also pointed out that saws and files had been discovered, that there were independent discoveries, that Soper was honest (22), and that several articles were found by several people over a wide space (19). These arguments have been addressed above.

137. Carter, *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection*, 27–32.

138. The blade's copper contained flecks of silver as does raw native lake copper. Carter, *Historical Background of the Soper-Scotford Collection*, 28, 33.

139. MacDougall, *Hoaxes*, 286.

140. Some amateur archaeologists believe the Scotford artifacts are authentic. See Henriette Mertz, *The Mystic Symbol: Mark of the Michigan Mound Builders* (Gaithers-

burg, Md.: Global Books, 1986); and articles on the Michigan Relics in *Ancient American* magazine.

Henriette Mertz and others have mistaken the so-called Newberry stone and its accompanying figurines for Scotford articles. The inscribed stone, discovered in 1896 in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, does not fit within the spatio-temporal context of the Scotford scheme. Scotford worked in the state's main land mass. Except for the first phase of the hoax, which was very localized, Scotford's work took place after 1896. The Newberry tablet bears only a superficial resemblance to the Scotford-Soper artifacts. Figurines of the Newberry type are without parallel among Scotford's known productions. For a brief introduction to the Newberry items, see Betty Sodders, "McGruer's Gods and the Newberry Stone," *The Ancient American* 1 (March-April 1994): 24–26.