

Institutional Database of Staff Publications Tennessee Division of Archaeology

Title: The Bat Creek Stone Fraud: A Final Statement
Year: 1993
Name(s): Robert C. Mainfort, Jr. and Mary L. Kwas
Source: *Tennessee Anthropologist* 18(2):87-93.

THE BAT CREEK FRAUD: A FINAL STATEMENT

Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., and Mary L. Kwas

"Back off, man! I'm a scientist."
(Dr. Peter Venkman, *Ghostbusters*, 1984)

Introduction

Debate over the so-called Bat Creek stone and related issues has monopolized a substantial amount of journal space that could have more profitably been used for scholarly articles in the field of anthropology, rather than fantasy. Unfortunately, the *Tennessee Anthropologist* now has the dubious distinction of catapulting the stone into some degree of national notoriety (McCulloch 1993b). We regret imposing again upon the editor and readers, but the recent attack on us in this journal leaves little choice.

Since we would have preferred not to publish additional commentary on this matter, we will simply cut to the heart of the matter and refer readers to previous articles for background material (Mainfort and Kwas 1991; McCulloch 1988).

The Inscription

In an earlier article, McCulloch (1988: 116) encouraged readers of this journal to "seek out the views of qualified Semitic . . . scholars" concerning the Bat Creek stone. This we did (Mainfort and Kwas 1991). Frank Moore Cross is recognized as *the* authority on paleo-Hebrew (cf. McCarter 1993). Yet McCulloch (1993a: 2), an economist by profession, claims that Cross "makes no less than three elementary and readily documentable errors of Hebrew paleography" and goes on to accuse Cross of "shooting from the hip" in his (Cross's) assessment of the inscription (1993a: 5). What is one to make of these statements? Here we have an economist, lacking professional credentials in paleography and ancient languages, accusing a highly regarded professional Semitist of making "elementary errors" and worse. We feel that, particularly in this context, such remarks have no place in a scholarly publication.

It would seem that McCulloch has little use for the opinions of Semitists (or archaeologists) whose views do not equate with his own. Since McCulloch dislikes Cross's evaluation of the inscription, he suggests that "readers would do well to seek out additional

qualified opinions" about the Bat Creek Stone (1993a: 5). We therefore call attention to recent published comments on this topic by the Semitist P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., of Johns Hopkins University (1993):

"There are, however, paleographical difficulties with the forms of the five letters (characters i - v in McCulloch [1988] and 7 - 3 in McCulloch [1993b]; McCarter's comments reference the 1993 article - authors) some of which do not correspond to their proposed paleo-Hebrew prototypes closely enough to be considered authentic (*he* [letter 5], *waw* [letter 6], *daleth* [letter 7]). Considerations of this kind have already been raised by Frank Cross, whose observations McCulloch has attempted to rebut in detail. So, for example when Cross objects to the form of the alleged Bat Creek *he* (letter 5) as 'impossible in the period 100 B.C. - A.D. 100,' McCulloch responds by calling this a 'clearcut error,' citing an example of what he considers an 'essentially identical' paleo-Hebrew *he* from Mark McLean's doctoral dissertation, which Cross himself directed. In fact, however, although this *he* may look similar to an *untrained eye* (emphasis added), it is quite unlike the Bat Creek sign, most especially because it has a clear vertical stem extending below the bottom horizontal, as is always the case with the paleo-Hebrew *he*. There does not seem much point in reproducing here the other details of the exchange between Cross and McCulloch, except to say that after looking it over in detail, it strikes me that Cross's analysis is reasonable and convincing" (1993: 54-55).

McCarter's statement regarding an "untrained eye" aptly summarizes our own sentiments about the content of McCulloch's (1988, 1993a, 1993b) excursions into epigraphy, historical archaeology, metallurgy, physics, and the history of North American archaeology.

Further:

"The traces of the sign (letter 8) that follows this sequence cannot be interpreted as a paleo-Hebrew *he* under any circumstances, and this rules out the reading *lyhwdh*, 'to Judah.' Gordon's suggestion that it be completed with a *mem* (as also strongly advocated by McCulloch [1993a: 3] -- authors), giving *lyhwdm*, 'to (the) Judeans/Jews,' can be accepted only on the unlikely assumption that the writer omitted a *yod* (y) while intending to write *lyhwadm*" (McCarter 1993:55).

McCarter (1993: 55) also notes that McCulloch's "translation" of the sequence *lyhwd* as "to Yehud/Judea" is "ruled out by other considerations." Namely:

"Yehud was a name used in the late Persian period (538-332 B.C.) for the district of the Persian empire that corresponded to Judea in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and though it appears commonly as *yhwd* on coins and seals of the late Persian period (i.e., the fourth century), it would be out of place on an artifact from the time of the First Jewish Revolt. McCulloch's appeal to a personal name

in a paleo-Hebrew tomb inscription (the Abba inscription) is beside the point, since it is not simply a question of orthographic convention, as he seems to understand it, but of the currency of the name itself. It would be as if a contemporary citizen of New York should refer to his home as New Amsterdam."

McCulloch (1993a: 6) accuses us of misrepresenting the views of Semitist and stone proponent Cyrus Gordon. He is incorrect. We were very explicit in stating that Gordon "considers some [but not all] of the signs to be Paleo-Hebrew" (Mainfort and Kwas 1991: 14) and noted elsewhere that Gordon and Cross agree that at least three of the signs are not decipherable as Paleo-Hebrew, an assessment further supported by McCarter. Parenthetically, McCulloch (1993a: 5) also mentions that Gordon also made "a few outright errors" in translating the inscription.

We will also note that McCulloch (1993a: 5-6) himself presents the views of McCarter in such a way that they do not accurately reflect McCarter's *published* statements about the stone. McCarter (1993: 55) has, in fact, stated that:

"It is probably not a case of the coincidental similarity of random scratches to ancient letters, since, as noted above, the similarity extends to an intelligible sequence of five letters -- too much for coincidence."

but goes on to say that:

"It seems probable that we are dealing here not with a coincidental similarity but with a fraud," and, "In any case, the Bat Creek stone has no place in the inventory of Hebrew inscriptions from the time of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome." It is quite obvious that McCarter no longer "reserves final judgment on the inscription" (McCulloch 1993a: 5). The stone, quite simply, is a fake.

The Brass Bracelets

As we noted previously (Mainfort and Kwas 1991), C-shaped brass bracelets are fairly common on archaeological sites of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in eastern North America. Although specimens cut from heavy gauge wire seem to occur more frequently, hammered examples exhibiting seams (usually with a B-shaped cross-section) are by no means rare. Specimens of this type have been reported for the Grimsby site (Kenyon 1982), the Gros Cap cemetery (Nern and Cleland 1974), Chota-Tanasee (Newman 1986), and numerous other sites (e.g., Birk and Johnson 1992). An exhaustive listing is hardly necessary for most readers of this journal.

McCulloch (1993a:7) faults us for not citing "a single (C-shaped brass bracelet) that is actually known to have been wrought and not drawn or cast." Yet in attempting to marshal evidence for his contention that similar objects were "a popular ornament in the Mediterranean

world," he cites only examples of bronze, silver, and gold bracelets. Nor does he indicate that these specimens are structurally similar to the Bat Creek artifacts. This is quite unconvincing, since the issue (at least as framed by McCulloch [1993a]) involves narrow brass bracelets that exhibit seams.

The Radiocarbon Determination

The inscription is a fraud, so the radiocarbon date is immaterial. McCarter (1993: 55) rather neatly summarizes the issue:

"But even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that the wooden fragments are as old as the carbon-14 test indicates, the relevance of their date to that of the stone depends entirely on the integrity of their association with it. And if, as I've already suggested, this is a case of fraud, that integrity can hardly be assumed."

The association of the brass bracelets with the burial and the wood fragments is also extremely dubious. The bracelets represent relatively modern European trade items, and simply represent another element in this hoax.

It should go without saying that no professional archaeologist would (or at least, should) use a single radiocarbon determination as the basis for a revolutionary claim. Regarding the association of the wooden disk with the stone, we stand by our previous statements that considering the primitive excavation techniques of the day and the unreliability of John Emmert, the degree of association between the dated material and the stone is, at best, very tenuous. Nowhere do we suggest that it is only McCulloch who "alleges" an association between the stone and the wood fragments.

Cyrus Thomas And Other Early Researchers

We stand by our previous statements that Cyrus Thomas became aware that the inscription was a fraud sometime after the publication of the Mound Survey volume (1894) and prior to his North American archaeology book (1898). To reiterate, despite the significance attributed to the stone in his previous works, Thomas (1898, 1903, 1905) did not mention the stone in his three major subsequent volumes on North American archaeology and ethnology. Moreover, the absence of the stone from the other early archaeological and ethnological works we cited previously strongly underscores the fact that other researchers did not regard the stone as genuine.

We again note the circumstances regarding the fraudulent Holly Oak gorget (Griffin *et al* 1988). McCulloch (1993a: 16) is not correct in stating that: "Silence is hardly the equivalent of denunciation." By this kind of illogic, the lack of articles on extraterrestrial artifacts in *American Antiquity* must be viewed as condoning the views of Erick van Daniken.

John Emmert

We stand by our previous assertion that John Emmert is the most likely culprit in this hoax. Andrew Whiteford (1952), who himself had WPA experience in the Tennessee Valley, commented about Emmert's untrustworthiness over 40 years ago. Emmert also reported some non-credible discoveries during his employment with the Peabody Museum (Williams 1993).

Concluding Remarks

The Bat Creek stone is a fraud. Other related issues raised by stone proponents, including the radiocarbon date, are therefore irrelevant. The current leading proponent of the stone's authenticity is an economist, lacking professional credentials in paleography, ancient languages, and archaeology.

The sentiments of professional archaeologists about frauds such as the Bat Creek stone were ably summarized over 100 years ago by the Reverend Stephen D. Peet (1892):

"One of the greatest among many annoyances to archaeologists is that so many fraudulent relics are found in mounds. It seems difficult to fasten the frauds on any one, for they are planted probably in the night and are adroitly covered up. Some of them are wrought with reference to the special sensation that may be made, and are very starting in their resemblance to foreign articles. These are very easily detected and are rejected at once; others, however, bear a resemblance to the relics of the Mound-builders, and are very deceiving. The most of these have some ancient alphabet, Hebrew, Phoenician, Hittite, and are recognized as frauds by these means. Among these are the Grave Creek Tablet, the Newark Holy stone, the Pemberton Ax, the Stone from Grand Traverse Bay, and a great many others. Not one of these has been accepted by the skilled archaeologists, but they have been discussed and defended by others until they have grown wearisome."

References Cited

- Birk, Douglas A., and Elden Johnson
1992 The Mdewakanton Dakota and Initial French Contact. In: *Calumet and Fleur-de-Lys*, edited by J.A. Walthall and T.E. Emerson, pp. 203-240. Smithsonian Institution, Washington.
- Griffin, James B., D.J. Meltzer, B.D. Smith, and W.C. Sturtevant
1988 A Mammoth Fraud in Science. *American Antiquity* 53(3): 578-582.

Kenyon, W.A.

- 1982 *The Grimsby Site: A Historic Neutral Cemetery*. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Mainfort, Robert C., Jr. and Mary L. Kwas

- 1991 The Bat Creek Stone: Judeans in Tennessee? *Tennessee Anthropologist* 16(1): 1-19.

McCarter, P. Kyle, Jr.

- 1993 Let's be Serious About the Bat Creek Stone. *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19(4): 54-55, 83.

McCulloch, J. Huston

- 1988 The Bat Creek Inscription: Cherokee or Hebrew? *Tennessee Anthropologist* 13(2): 79-123.

- 1993a The Bat Creek Stone: a Reply to Mainfort and Kwas. *Tennessee Anthropologist* 18(1): 1-26.

- 1993b Did Judean Refugees Escape to Tennessee? *Biblical Archaeology Review* 19(4): 46-53, 82-83.

Nern, Craig F., and Charles E. Cleland

- 1974 The Gros Cap Cemetery Site, St. Ignace, Michigan: A Reconsideration of the Greenlees Collection. *Michigan Archaeologist* 20(1): 1-58.

Newman, Robert D.

- 1986 Euro-American Artifacts. In: *Overhill Cherokee Archaeology at Chota-Tanasee*, edited by G.F. Schroedl, pp. 415-454. University of Tennessee, Department of Anthropology, Report of Investigations 38 and Tennessee Valley Authority Publications in Anthropology 42.

Peet, Stephen D.

- 1892 Frauds and their Perpetrators. *American Antiquarian and Oriental Journal* 14(1): 52.

Thomas, Cyrus

- 1890 *The Cherokee in Pre-Columbian Times*. N.D.C. Hodges, New York.

- 1894 Report on the Mound Explorations of the Bureau of Ethnology. *Twelfth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1890-91*. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

- 1898 *Introduction to the Study of North American Archaeology*. Robert Clarke, Cincinnati.

- 1903 *The Indians of North America in Historic Times* (published as Volume 2 of *The History of North America*). George Barrie and Sons, Philadelphia.

Thomas, Cyrus and W.J. McGee

- 1905 *Prehistoric North America*. (published as Volume 14 of *The History of North America*). George Barrie and Sons, Philadelphia.

Whiteford, Andrew H.

- 1952 A Frame of Reference for the Archaeology of Eastern Tennessee. In: *Archeology of Eastern United States*, edited by J.B. Griffin, pp. 207-225. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Williams, Stephen

- 1993 *Fantastic Archaeology: Another Road Taken by Some*. Paper presented to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Boston, Massachusetts.