

# Egyptians in Ohio?

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The Ohio Historical Society

Forty years ago, H. K. Landis (1937) described a curious hollow brass hemisphere covered with Egyptian hieroglyphics. The small amulet-like object (Figure 1) was found around 1910 by Charles H. and William Martzall in a gravel pit "along the Greenville River near the westward trail of Anthony Wayne." Nothing more, unfortunately, is known of the location or of the Martzalls, although a W. F. Martzall is listed in a 1913 Darke County rural directory as living at Gettysburg, Adams Township, Darke County, which is very close to Greenville Creek. Presumably the brass object was found in that area.

Landis suggested several possible theories regarding the origin of the brass article but apparently accepted it as genuinely Egyptian. "Perhaps it is a trader piece or perhaps a trophy or treaty present," he thought. Landis discounted the idea that it might be a relic of the Anthony Wayne expedition of 1794 and believed that the cost of casting the brass ornament prohibited the possibility of its being a joke, hoax, or reproduction.

Today, all but the most heterodox of American archeologists would dismiss the Greenville amulet as one of those three alternatives. Even during the blithe days of the 1840s and 1850s, when it seemed nearly every nation on earth was credited with being the antecedents of the mound builders, few people were rash enough to suggest the ancient Egyptians.

The purpose of this present note is to call attention to a remarkably similar metallic object, reportedly found while digging a cistern in Cincinnati, and to suggest a common origin for the two pieces. Found in the Charles Whittlesey papers preserved at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland is a small printed notice (Figure 2) that is largely self explanatory.

Information on Benjamin Styles (or Stiles) is meager: born in England, he probably arrived in America around 1844, with his wife Ester and three children. He is listed in the Cincinnati city directories from 1849 to 1857, as "tinner" in 1849 and as "coppersmith" in 1857. Though circumstantial, this bit of evidence suggests that he also dabbled in goldsmithing. Drake and Co., printers, appear in the available St. Louis city directories only in 1857, a year that Stiles was not listed in the Cincinnati directory, indicating that he was

then in St. Louis and paid to have the notice of his gold plate printed at that time.

It is interesting to note that Styles may have resided in Cincinnati as early as 1847, for in April of that year the celebrated popularizer of Egyptology, George R. Gliddon, gave a series of lectures "illustrated by splendid diagrams and Egyptian antiquities" in Cincinnati. The course of lectures was not well attended, as the irrepressible Gliddon explained to his friend Ephraim George Squier of Chillicothe (letter, April 23, 1847, E. G. Squier papers, Library of Congress):

"Owing partly to the utter novelty of our Egyptian science in this the "Queen of the West" (as it certainly is); partly to the *Histories* which have occupied the press incessantly since my arrival; partly to the pressure of this the busiest season; partly to theatres, concerts, meangeries, sable harmonists, dancing dogs, and similar entertainments, which seem to have combined to crowd into this month; partly to thunderstorms; and chiefly to heavy expenses; my course has been unprofitable. And my patience being exhausted, I 'give in' and 'clear out' . . . Tis true the *Elite*, about 200, comprising the McLeans, Schoenbergers, Longworths, Kings . . . and others have attended and been pleased with my subjects, as much as I am with their cordialities—but '*le jeu ne vaut pas les chandelles*,' the *masses* being quite impenetrable; and having had to pay for my own *candles* I cannot afford it and so give it up. Pittsburgh could turn out a class of 700 to listen to Champollion's discoveries, whilst *Cincinnati* has not mustered the *half!*"

Gliddon's unhappiness notwithstanding, it seems clear that Cincinnati had been introduced to the "Nilotic mysteries," as Gliddon termed it, well before Benjamin Styles discovered (or made) his gold plate. For that matter, Joseph Dorfeuille's famed Western Museum boasted numerous Egyptian artifacts as early as the 1820s and 1830s, including a genuine Egyptian mummy (or, to be precise, the head of an Egyptian mummy), and many of these Egyptian relics undoubtedly existed in the successor of Dorfeuille's museum during the time Styles lived in Cincinnati. By 1857, numerous Egyptian gram-

so that no one would have difficulty in obtaining models for copying purposes. It is important to note, also, that the engravings on the two metal objects, while incorporating many accurately drawn Egyptian hieroglyphics, are not translatable but merely heterogeneous melanges of various syllabic and determinative signs, without any order or sense. Accurately drawn determinatives include the sign for water, birds (or flying insects), and—less accurate—those for sight and crocodile. The Greenville ornament bears several fanciful glyphs of a seated figure wearing a feather headdress, apparently intended as an Indian version of the determina-

tive for royalty; the intent of its manufacturer clearly was to suggest Egyptian contact with the Indians.

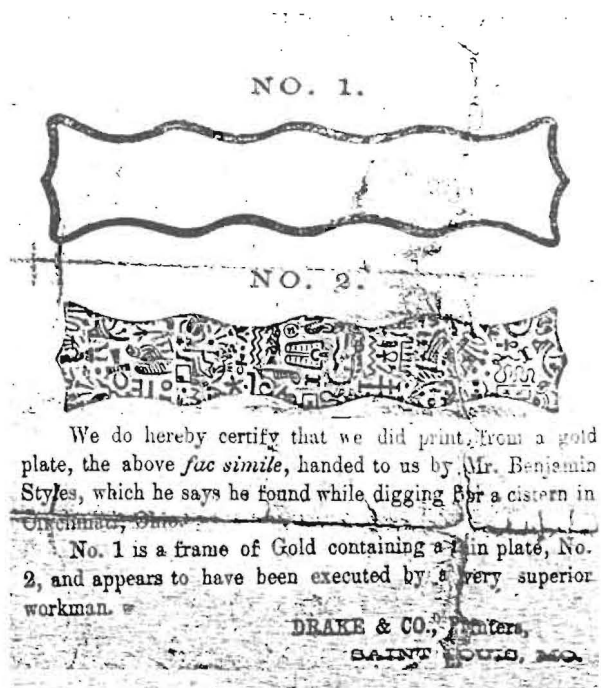
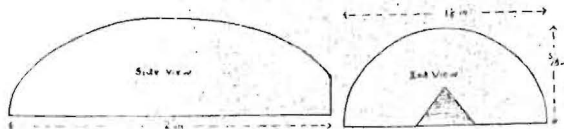
The similarity of execution of the hieroglyphics on the Cincinnati plate and the Greenville ornament suggest that they were produced by the same person, and the available evidence, meager though it is, suggests that Benjamin Styles was the person. Which was manufactured first, however, and how the Greenville amulet got to Darke County remain a mystery and perhaps always will.

Landis, H. K.

1937 Egyptian Glyphs in Ohio. *Pennsylvania Archaeologist*, 7(1):13-15.



ENLARGED VIEW OF BRASS ORNAMENT  
DRAWN BY H. K. LANDIS



We do hereby certify that we did print, from a gold plate, the above *fac simile*, handed to us by Mr. Benjamin Styles, which he says he found while digging for a cistern in Cincinnati, Ohio.

No. 1 is a frame of Gold containing a 2 in plate, No. 2, and appears to have been executed by a very superior workman.

DRAKE & CO., Printers,  
SAINT LOUIS, MO.