



Type: Book Chapter

Kinderhook Plates & Translator Claims Concerns & Questions

Author(s): Jim Bennett

Source: *A CES Letter Reply: Faithful Answers For Those Who Doubt*

Published: Sandy, UT; n.p., 2018

KINDERHOOK PLATES & TRANSLATOR CLAIMS

Concerns & Questions

“I insert fac-similes of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook...I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the Ruler of heaven and earth.”

– JOSEPH SMITH, JR., *HISTORY OF THE CHURCH, VOL. 5, CHAPTER 19, P.37*

Although this account [i.e. the one referenced above] appears to be the writing of Joseph Smith, it is actually an excerpt from a journal of William Clayton.”

– “Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth- Century Hoax.” AUGUST 1981 ENSIGN

“Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a Nineteenth- Century Hoax.”

– AUGUST 1981 ENSIGN

You clearly haven't read the August 1981 Ensign, because it points out that you are in error when you attribute your first quote on this page to Joseph Smith. You owe it to your readers to be at least passingly familiar with your own source material.

- JIM BENNETT, *A FAITHFUL REPLY TO THE CES LETTER FROM A FORMER CES EMPLOYEE*, 10/2018

1. KINDERHOOK PLATES

SHORT ANSWER:

Joseph Smith did not translate the fraudulent Kinderhook Plates and wrote nothing about them. There is nothing substantive to this accusation at all, and other than the Keokuk, Iowa lands of Joseph Smith's youth, this may well be the weakest section of the entire CES Letter.

LONG ANSWER:

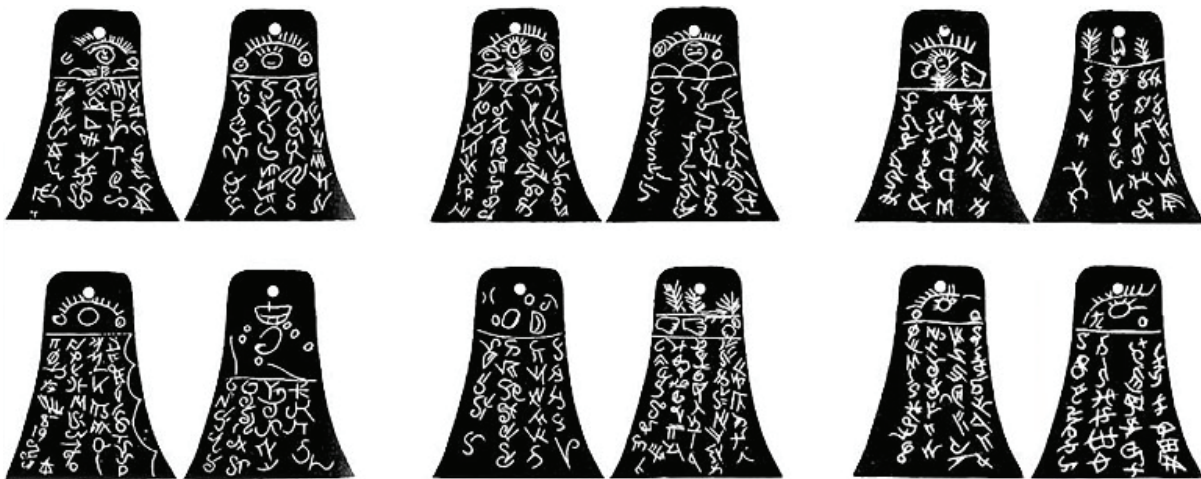
In CES Letter 3.0, I recommend removing this section altogether. Pinning so much of your argument on such an easily debunked assertion is quite foolish.

“Church historians continued to insist on the authenticity of the Kinderhook Plates until 1980 when an examination conducted by the Chicago Historical Society, possessor of one plate, proved it was a nineteenth-century creation.”

– LDS Historian Richard Bushman, [Rough Stone Rolling, p.490](#)

Not really. Read Bushman's footnote - #27 in this chapter. He's referencing the fact that B.H. Roberts relied on William Clayton's journal language in the History of the Church as a first-person statement from Joseph Smith. So while this could be considered the de facto position of the Church until it was specifically repudiated, there are no recent historical defenses of the Kinderhook Plates, and, really, no significant references to them anywhere other than in William Clayton's journal.

FACSIMILES OF THE SIX DOUBLE-SIDED KINDERHOOK PLATES



Yep! There they are!

And, once again, you plagiarize MormonInfographics.com. Here's your new, plagiarized version:

| JOSEPH SMITH'S TRANSLATION | THE HOAX UNCOVERED |
|---|---|
| <p><i>"I insert facsimiles of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook... I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth." —Joseph Smith, Jr.</i></p> | <p><i>The plates turned out to be a hoax. Metallurgical tests revealed the plates to be of late 19th century construction. In addition, the script was created using a 19th-century chemical etch process. In August, 1981 LDS Ensign Magazine conceded: "Kinderhook plates bought to Joseph Smith appear to be a 19th-century hoax."</i></p> |

- The plates were named after the town in which they were found - Kinderhook, IL. A farmer claimed he dug the plates out of a mound. They took the plates to Joseph Smith for examination and he translated a portion.

71


- Not only did Joseph not discern the fraud, he added to the fraud by "translating" the fake plates. The LDS Church now concedes it's a hoax. What does this tell us about Joseph Smith's gift of translation?

And here's the original MormonInfographics version, perhaps with "tone problems."

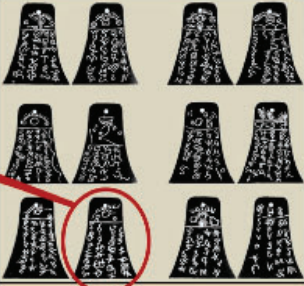
Kinderhook Plates

History of the line of Ham or Hoax?

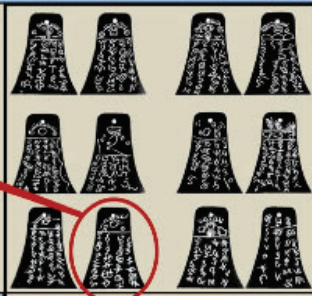
This is an actual plate that is currently with the Chicago Historical Society. [1]



Plates were named after the town in which they were found.



Chicago ●
Nauvoo ●
Kinderhook ●
A farmer claims he dug the plates out of a mound. They took the plates to Joseph Smith for examination, he translated a portion. [2]



Above are facsimiles of the 6 double-sided Kinderhook Plates.

Joseph Smith translation:

"I insert fac-similes of the six brass plates found near Kinderhook... I have translated a portion of them, and find they contain the history of the person with whom they were found. He was a descendant of Ham, through the loins of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and that he received his Kingdom from the ruler of heaven and earth."
Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. [3]

The Hoax Uncovered [4]

The plates turned out to be a hoax. Metallurgical tests revealed the plates to be of late 19th century construction. In addition, the script was created using a 19th-century chemical etch process.

In August, 1981 LDS Ensign Magazine conceded: "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to be a 19th-Century Hoax"

Joseph couldn't discern the fraud. The LDS church now concedes it's a hoax. What does this tell us about Joseph Smith's gift of translation?

[1] Letter from the Chicago Historical Society, 5/23/2005, <http://www.mormonthink.com/kinderhookplates.html#hereplatestoday>

[2] Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends, Volume 1, 3886, Affidavit, pp 20 / 4

[3] History of the Church, v. 5, p. 322

[4] Ensign Magazine, August 1981, "Kinderhook Plates Brought to Joseph Smith Appear to Be a Nineteenth-Century Hoax", Stanley B. Kimball

This is a bit more egregious plagiarism on your part than your previous cribbing from the MormonInfographics folks. You actually use text from the graphic as if it's your own original language, and you ignore the footnotes in the original graphic. Any student turning in this kind of sloppily plagiarized work would get a failing grade and may well get kicked out of their program of study.

So, assuming you've actually read the work you've stolen, let's deal with the charges here.

As the Ensign article you quoted makes clear, Joseph never said anything about the Kinderhook Plates. Quoting from your own source, which you haven't read:

Although this account appears to be the writing of Joseph Smith, it is actually an excerpt from a journal of William Clayton. It has been well known that the serialized "History of Joseph Smith" consists largely of items from other persons' personal journals and other sources, collected during Joseph Smith's lifetime and continued after the Saints were in Utah, then edited and pieced together to form a history of the Prophet's life "in his own words." It was not uncommon in the nineteenth century for biographers to put the narrative in the first person when compiling a biographical work, even though the subject of the biography did not actually say or write all the words attributed to him; thus the narrative would represent a faithful report of what others felt would be helpful to print. The Clayton journal excerpt was one item used in this way. For example, the words "I have translated a portion" originally read "President J. has translated a portion. ..."

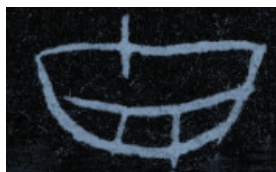
(So you could probably get away with your plagiarism if you were a 19th Century biographer, but that's about it.)

The problem here is that William Clayton was incorrect. The details are all available [here](#), but the TL/DR version is that he compared one character to a character on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers that looked like this:



(The previous image and the other Kinderhook Plate images are taken from Don Bradley's [article](#), and he credits them to the Church Historical Department.)

So according to the KEP, that character had reference to Ham, son of Noah, and it looked like a boat-shaped image on plate 2 of the Kinderhook Plates, which looked like this:



Joseph apparently took a look at the plates, compared the two images, and then got excited, thinking that he'd found a true mark of antiquity and that this was somehow Ham-related. He makes some remarks to that effect, and William Clayton writes all this down in his journal as if Joseph had "translated a portion of them..." i.e. one character. Nothing supernatural; no Urim and/or Thummim, and not even a rock in a hat.

And that was it. No more about the Kinderhook Plates; no translation, nothing. It's almost as if, after that single moment of excitement, Joseph quickly realized someone was pulling his leg, and he moved on to other things.

The end.

2. BOOK OF ABRAHAM

As outlined in the "Book of Abraham" section, Joseph Smith got everything wrong about the papyri, the facsimiles, the names, the gods, the scene context, the fact that the papyri and facsimiles were 1st century CE funerary text, who was male, who was female, etc. It's gibberish.

It isn't gibberish. Gibberish is defined as "unintelligible or meaningless speech or writing." What Joseph wrote was both intelligible and meaningful, whether or not it was an accurate translation. "Gibberish" might refer to nonsense syllables that Kevin Mathie, your single Egyptological expert with only musical theatre training, might put into a singalong in the latest version of *Saturday's Voyeur*. Regardless, just summarizing your previous charges doesn't make them any truer.

There is not one single non-LDS Egyptologist who supports Joseph's Book of Abraham, its claims, or Joseph's translations.

And there is barely one non-LDS Egyptologist who has bothered to investigate Joseph's Book of Abraham, its claims, or Joseph's translations. Despite your quotes from three long-debunked 19th Century dudes who never saw the Joseph Smith papyri, you have Robert Ritner. That's it.

Even [LDS Egyptologists](#) acknowledge there are serious problems with the Book of Abraham and Joseph's claims.

You use a plural noun - "Egyptologists" - and then link to an article from precisely one LDS Egyptologist, who disagrees with the majority of LDS Egyptologists. That's misleading. And since you just toss this out without comment, you clearly haven't read the article, so you have no idea what's in it.

To be fair, this time I haven't read it either, as I presume that if this dude had anything new to add, he wouldn't be getting a throwaway mention in a late summary of your argument. Although my guess, even without reading it, would be that he would be a much more credible source than Kevin Mathie.

Joseph Smith made a claim that he could translate ancient documents. This is a testable claim.

Not if you don't have the original documents to compare to the translation.

Joseph failed the test with the Book of Abraham.

Only if you mistakenly assume that the scraps we have are the actual source material, which they aren't.

He failed the test with the Kinderhook Plates.

Unless you know of a translation of the Kinderhook Plates that everyone else has missed, your assertion is demonstrably false.

With this modus operandi and track record, how can I be expected to believe that Joseph translated the keystone Book of Mormon?

Because the Book of Mormon came first, and you haven't been able to lay a finger on it. The Book of Mormon defies all of your weak and contradictory attempts to discredit it, and it stands as an incontrovertible witness to the miracle of its own creation.

And that he translated with a rock in a hat?

A rock in a hat?! Have you mentioned this before?!!

That the gold plates that ancient prophets went through all that time and effort of making, engraving, compiling, abridging, preserving, hiding, and transporting were useless?

Who says they were useless? They were extraordinarily useful. They provided tangible evidence of the Book of Mormon's divine origins, and they were viewed by multiple witnesses, including many not mentioned in the official Three and Eight Witness testimonies. They also provide a stumbling block for critics who want to pretend Joseph made it all up have to account for the overwhelming physical evidence that Joseph actually had some kind of plates. (Hence the theories of forged tin plates, etc.)

The plates tangibly tied the Book of Mormon to the ancient world and to what Richard Bushman calls the "transcendent sphere." They are, as Bushman said, indeed some of "the most gritty and appealing parts of the Mormon story." Very useful, indeed.

Moroni's 5,000 mile journey lugging the gold plates from Mesoamerica (if you believe the unofficial apologists) all the way to New York to bury the plates, then come back as a resurrected angel, and instruct Joseph for 4 years only for Joseph to translate instead using just a...rock in a hat?

Alas, we keep coming back to the rock in a hat. What have you got against rocks in hats? Some of my best friends have rocks in their hats. (Or maybe in their head.)

In all seriousness, I wonder what process would have been sufficient to impress you. You sound like Naaman in the Old Testament. He got ticked off because the prophet told him to bathe seven times in the Jordan River to cure his leprosy. He wanted some far grander process, or at least a better river. If the rock hadn't been in the hat, would that have been better? Maybe if Moroni had stuck around personally to dictate to Oliver? What if the rock were the Hope Diamond? What if the hat was that cool, huge hat from the opening of *Lidsville*?

In all seriousness the rock in the hat is culturally odd to Jeremy Runnells and Jim Bennett and 21st Century folks, but it wasn't culturally odd to Joseph Smith, and since he was the one doing the translating, I don't see any problem with the Lord communicating with him by means of methods that would have been familiar to Joseph, even if they are strange to us.



He's gonna need a bigger rock.

A rock he found digging in his neighbor's property in 1822 and which he later used for treasure hunting – a year before Moroni appeared in his bedroom and 5 years before he got the gold plates and Urim and Thummim?

That's the one! It probably put his mind at ease to be able to have familiar frame of reference to help him relate to the overwhelming task of transitioning from "a boy of no consequence in the world" to a prophet, seer, and revelator.

Joseph Smith claimed to have translated three ancient records.

No, Joseph claimed to have translated two ancient records. There is no translation and no claim of translation of the Kinderhook Plates.

The Book of Abraham: proven a fraud.

Nope. Not even close. (Unless you like musicals.)

The Kinderhook Plates: found to be a hoax.

Good thing Joseph didn't try to translate them.

The Book of Mormon: the only one of the three for which we do not have the original.

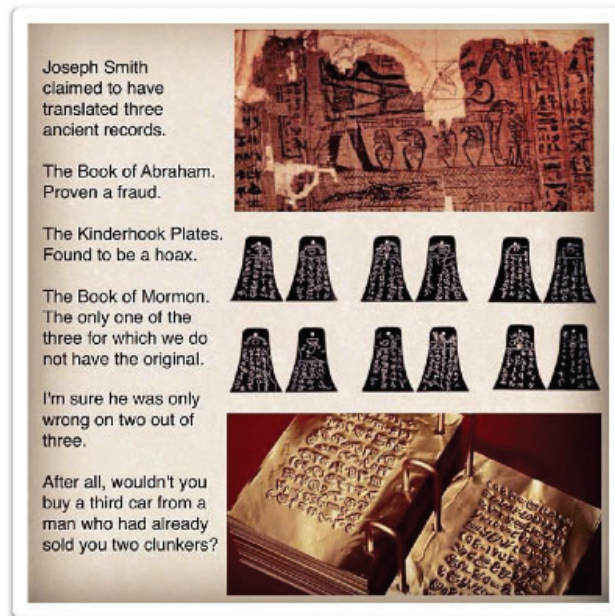
Wholly incorrect. The only one of the three for which we do have the original is the fraud that Joseph made no attempt to translate.

I'm sure he was only wrong on two out of three.

So far, you haven't proven him wrong on any of them, and you've completely misrepresented the facts on the Kinderhook Plates.

AFTER ALL, WOULDN'T YOU BUY A THIRD CAR FROM A MAN WHO HAD ALREADY SOLD YOU TWO CLUNKERS?

The capital letters are impressive, I'll give you that. What's not impressive is that, once again, you lifted all this language from a graphic in your previous version.



A graphic for which we have the original.

In any case, it's still weird to call the Book of Mormon the third "clunker" when it's the one that came first. Trying to discredit it by misrepresenting what came later isn't a way to make a strong case.

But if you want to rely on this logic, how many clunkers about the Book of Mormon should we buy from the CES Letter? Is it stolen from the *View of the Hebrews*, *The Late War*, *The First Book of Napoleon*, the King James Bible, Captain Kidd, or the lands of Joseph Smith's youth from over 2,000 square miles?

More importantly, why should your readers buy any of the clunkers from sources you haven't read? Or the sources that don't mean what you say they mean? Or the graphics you plagiarize without giving attribution?

With the CES Letter, the clunkers just keep on comin'!