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Gold Plates and the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: Ferguson reports on the discovery of two Persian gold plates. One was engraved in the 4th century B.C. in the days of Darius II and the other dates to the 5th century B.C.

GOLD PLATES AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

BY THOMAS STUART FERGUSON

On April 5, 1961, when Dr. Argudonni, director of the Persian Museum of Antiquities in Teheran, capital of Iran, turned on the lights and pulled the draperies from the windows of the upper room which he had unlocked, Bishop Keith Garner of Menlo Park Ward and I saw a beautiful collection of recently discovered ancient artifacts of gold, including two gold tablets covered with the cuneiform script discovered at Hamadan, Persia.

These tablets are thin, and one of them has about the same dimensions as the tablets comprising the Book of Mormon—said by the Prophet Joseph to be about six inches wide and eight inches long. This tablet of gold was engraved in the fourth century BC in the days of Darius II. The other tablet is slightly larger, being eight inches wide and ten inches long, telling of Artaxerxes and dating to the fifth century BC. Artaxerxes was the son of Darius I, who conquered the entire Middle East toward the end of the sixth century BC. The museum director, to my great joy, permitted me to photograph these wonderful and priceless tablets.

Of all the ancient inscriptions which have been discovered in the Bible world—Old World homeland of the Book of Mormon nations—confirming the claim of the Book of Mormon that the ancient scribes engraved historical data on metal tablets, perhaps none is more noteworthy or remarkable than these gold tablets recently discovered in Iran.

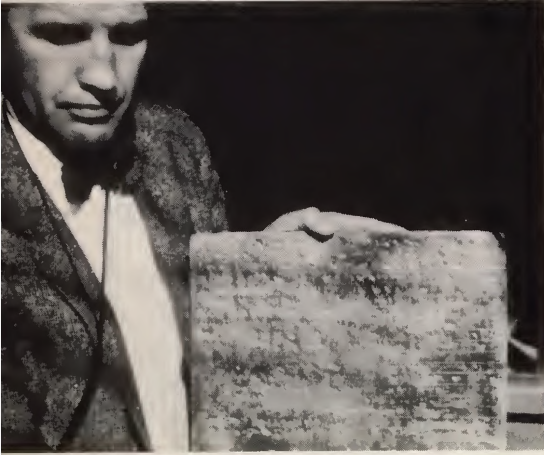
During the first week in April 1961, I visited the Persian Museum of Antiquities in Teheran, capital of Iran, with Bishop Garner, Sidney Badger, and Robert Ord, all of Palo Alto Stake, California, for the precise purpose of seeing the gold and silver tablets of Darius.* The director of the museum, on learning of our great interest in the engraved tablets discovered in the palace of the great Persian contemporary of Nephi, King Darius, removed the tablets from the locked glass case, in which they were displayed, permitting us to handle the tablets and to photograph them.

The next day, Bishop Garner and I returned to the museum, and the director took us to the locked room containing the more recently discovered treasures mentioned above. He stated that this wonderful display would not be shown to the public until the Shah dedicated the exhibit.

The tablets of Darius I were discovered in the great palace of the Persian kings at the ruins of Persepolis, located near the present-day city of Shiraz in southern Persia. Our party went by plane from Teheran to Shiraz. It is but a short drive from Shiraz to Persepolis. Persepolis is one of the most magnificent of the ruined cities of Old Testament times. There lived the great Darius I, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, during Book of Mormon times. The writings on gold and silver tablets of the scribes of these great Persian kings help prove the validity of the claim of the Book of Mormon that the ancients of the Bible world recorded important historical events on metal tablets.

One of the grounds for attacking Joseph Smith and the restoration of the gospel has been that the idea of a book of gold tablets is, in and of itself, absurdity.

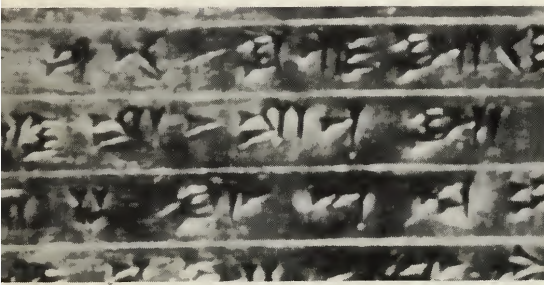
*See "Gold Plates in Persia," *The Improvement Era*, Vol. 43, p. 714.



When the Book of Mormon appeared in 1830 scientific archaeology was not yet born. The now-known ancient gold, silver, bronze, and brass tablets, bearing early inscriptions, had not been discovered. Scientific archaeology is said to have begun in the Jaredite homeland, Mesopotamia, in 1842. "The first excavations in Mesopotamia were those of Paul-Emile Botte at Nineveh in 1842 and Khorsabad in 1843," states the ranking British archaeologist, Glyn E. Daniel, professor at Cambridge University. Chapter three of his book, *A Hundred Years of Archaeology*, is entitled "The Birth of Archaeology: 1840-70." In that chapter, Daniel says: "The real beginnings of Egyptian excavation are not, however, with tomb robbers like Belzoni and Drouetti, but the Mariette. Mariette was sent out of Egypt in 1859 by the Louvre. . . ."



Speaking of the beginnings of excavations in Palestine, Daniel says: "Excavations began with Warren's work in and around Jerusalem in 1867-70 and the work of Petrie and Bliss at Tell el-Hesi in 1891-92."



Archaeological work in Mexico and Central America began with the explorations of John Lloyd Stephens in 1839.* Not until the coming into use of the atomic clock—radio-carbon dating—within the last ten years, have the scholars had a knowledge of the truly great antiquity of civilization in ancient Middle America.

Dr. Franklin Harris, Jr., of the University of Utah and Dr. Ariel Crowley of Boise, Idaho, both students of the Book of Mormon, have recently compiled and published long lists of inscribed tablets discovered and made a matter of record by archaeologists. These compilations also establish that the references *(Continued on page 270)*

*Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *Maya Explorer, John Lloyd Stephens and the Lost Cities of Central America and Yucatan*, University of Oklahoma Press (1947), chapter 7.



From top to bottom: Gold plates discovered at Papantla, Vera Cruz, held by bearded man (beard of gold wire); Bishop Keith Garner holding one of two gold tablets excavated from the foundation walls of the Audience Hall (the Apadana) of the palace of King Darius of Persia; Persian Museum of Antiquities, Teheran, Iran; gold plate found in Persia (Iran), 1961, dating to fifth century, B. C., and telling of Persian king Artaxerxes. Plate is about eight inches wide and ten inches long; note that ancient script is legible. Columns of King Darius' Audience Hall are sixty feet high.