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## Others Kept Records on Metal Plates, Too

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**Abstract:** Book of Mormon peoples kept records on metal plates. Early critics claimed that this was impossible since ancient metallurgy was not sufficiently advanced, but many other metal records have been discovered since the days of Joseph Smith. Includes a table of plates found and a map of sites.

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# Others Kept Records on Metal Plates, Too

By Franklin S. Harris, Jr.\*

THE use of metal plates for record keeping has always been interesting to members and non-members of the Church alike since the days when Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon from plates. The earliest people in the Book of Mormon, the Jaredites, who migrated from the Mesopotamian region in the third millennium, B.C., left records on 24 gold plates. These plates were found in the time of King Mosiah. Lehi took with him from Jerusalem some "brass" plates, and his son Nephi made plates which in our day eight witnesses said had "the appearance of gold."

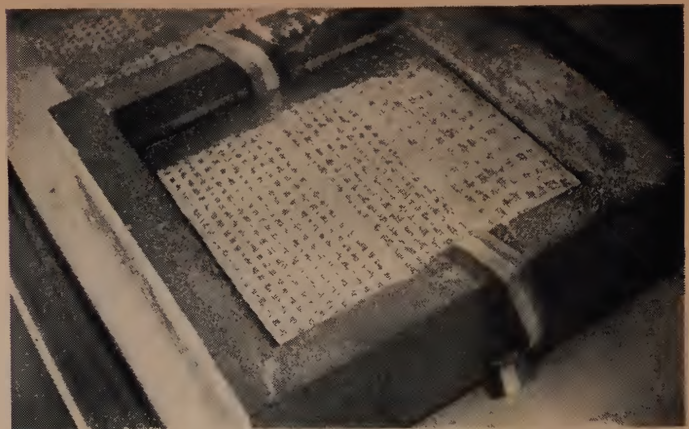
Some early critics of the Book of Mormon argued that the use of metal plates for record keeping was not reasonable because metallurgy was not advanced sufficiently in ancient times to produce the materials and that no such records had been found anyway. In Joseph Smith's day with the limited information then available, such criticism seemed plausible, but not in our day. A large number of metal plates with records have been found, particularly in the last few years; and this must be only a small fraction of those made and used anciently.

In Joseph Smith's day little was known of ancient civilizations; modern archaeology had not begun. John Lloyd Stephens had not yet started for Central America (1839), Schliemann had not yet started to dig out Homer's fabled Troy (the 1870s), and Champollion was making the first real progress on Egyptian hieroglyphics with the help of Thomas Young (1822). Today, however, there is a great variety of examples of the use of metal plates for record keeping by even the earliest civilizations and in many regions. It seems that when important

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Sealed in Stone Box—

These metal plates of gold and of silver, inscribed during the reign of Darius I, were sealed in a box of stone and carry a text repeated in three ancient languages.



information was to be preserved, care was taken to use non-perishable materials such as metals, stone and baked clay. Wood, leather and paper required special conditions for preservation.

For conciseness, a table of examples is shown on the following page; and for visualization, a map on the inside back cover shows the location of records found. The exact place of discovery of the individual plates and other details, such as when they were made, are often not known definitely and are therefore to be considered as approximate.

It is interesting to notice as David Diringer does in his book *The Alphabet* the many instances of writing one language in the script of another, and also the considerable number of languages and scripts with which so far not much progress has been made in translation.

One of the most striking examples of the recent discovery of plates is of those found in modern Iran. Six plates of silver or gold have the same text. At Persepolis two pairs of plates, with one of silver and one of gold in each pair, were found at two foundation corners. The four plates were 13 inches square with writing in cuneiform characters of the same text in three languages: Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian. A gold plate is shown in the picture above and was taken by John W. Payne in the Tehran museum. At Ecbatana (modern Hamadan), a gold tablet was found 7.5 inches square and a silver one 4.1 x 5.3 inches with the same writing as the Persepolis plates. These plates date from 518 to 515 B.C. during the reign of the great Persian king, Darius I. For further data, see tablets Nos. 17-19 on the opposite page.

The great museums of the world now have many such plates. For example there are many bronze

plates or tablets from Lehi's time from South Arabia. Some in the British Museum, London, are shown in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on "Arabia," and were apparently those referred to by Sir Richard Burton. Sir Richard, the famous traveler and translator of the *Arabian Nights*, after visiting Salt Lake City, wrote in 1861 in *City of the Saints*:

"As regards the golden plates [of Joseph Smith] it is contended that the Jews of old were in the habit of writing upon papyrus, parchment, and so on, not upon metal, and that such plates have never been found in America. But of late years Himyaritic inscriptions upon brass tablets have been forwarded from Yemen [south Arabia] to the British Museum . . ."

There are some traditions of records on metal plates in America, but there are not any with appreciable writing similar to the plates of the Old World which have survived destruction. Though almost all the precious metals discovered by the Spanish conquerors were melted down, there has since been found much wonderful metalwork, such as that shown in Pal Kelemen's *Medieval American Art*. There are many plates of copper, gold, silver and their alloys with various designs and figures.

In museums there are a number of sheets of thin gold or silver which would be suitable for record keeping. Examples in gold are to be found in a museum in Lima, Peru; Guatamala City, Guatamala; the National Museum, Mexico City; the Museum of the American Indian and the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco.

The scores of plates shown in the table indicate that the ancients did indeed use metal plates for preserving important records!

# Old World Writing on Metal Plates

Compiled by Franklin S. Harris, Jr.

(For discovery locations, see map on inside back cover.)

	<i>Object and Material</i>	<i>Civilization, Place</i>	<i>Language and Script</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<b>Asia</b>					
1.	Gold plate	Javanese	Javanese		Now in British Museum, London.
2.	Copper plate	Javanese	Kavi (old Javanese)	Up to A.D. 1473	
3.	Gold sheets	Siam	Siamese	A.D. 1,300-1,500	King's letters to princes. 2 x 18 in.; Buddha's first sermon; now in British Museum, London.
4.	Silver plates	India	Singhalese		
5.	Copper plates	Harappa, Pakistan	Indus Valley script	3rd millennium B.C.	
6.	Copper plate	Gorakpur District, India	Indo-Aryan	4th century B.C.	
7.	Many copper plates	Pakistan and India		A.D. 324	Example: the Kesarbeda plates are three on a ring, text is a royal charter records of relics in a shrine.
8.	Copper plate	Kalawan, Pakistan		A.D. 134	
9.	Silver scroll	Taxila, Pakistan		A.D. 136	
10.	Copper plate	Malabar Coast of India	Tamil characters	Middle 1st millennium A.D.	25 names in Arabic, Pahlavi and Hebrew characters. Buddhist scripture. Inscriptions of Pallava kings.
11.	Gold plate	India	Pali-Maunggun	5th century A.D.	Pali scripture.
12.	Copper plates	India	Grantha script	5th-7th centuries A.D.	
13.	Silver object	India	Mixed Pali-Pyu	6th-7th centuries A.D.	
14.	Twenty gold leaves	India	Pyu characters	6th century A.D.	
15.	Gold plate	India	Pyu characters		
16.	Bronze Buddha	India	Sanskrit in Gupta characters		
17.	Gold and silver tablets	Persepolis, Iran	Trilingual: Old Persian, Elamite and Babylonian in cuneiform characters	518-515 B.C.	Darius I, 13 in. square, two pairs found at separate corners of palace. 7.5 in. square. 4.1 x 5.3 in.
18.	Gold tablet	Hamadan, Iran	same text as 17		
19.	Silver tablet	Hamadan, Iran	same text as 17		
<b>Europe</b>					
20.	Plate	Portugal			Found in 1876, mining regulations.
21.	Lead, bronze, silver	Spain	Iberian	5th century B.C. to Roman times	
22.	Plates	Roman	Latin	2nd century B.C.	Treaties between Rome and Carthage.
23.	Lead tablet of Magliano	Etruscan, Italy	Etruscan	6th century B.C.	Inscribed both sides; now in Florence, Italy.
24.	Lead tablet of Volterra	Etruscan, Italy	Etruscan	3rd century B.C.	Has about 80 words. Nine lines of text.
25.	Gold plate of Tarquinia	Etruscan, Italy	Etruscan		Long list of local divinities.
26.	Agnone bronze tablet	Italy	Oscan	3rd century B.C.	Local laws.
27.	Bantia bronze tablet	Italy	Oscan	2nd century B.C.	
28.	Bronze tablet	Italy	Umbrian	Earlier than 500 B.C.	Acts of a corporation of priests, 19.5 x 11.3 in.
29.	Base of a bronze pillar	Italy	Trilingual: Latin, Greek and Phoenician	160-150 B.C.	Found in Sardinia in 1860; now in Turin, Italy.
30.	Bronze plate	Italy	Greek	4th century B.C.	Found at ancient Greek City of Thurii, Italy.
31.	Bronze plates	Greece	Greek	5th century B.C.	Treaties between cities; now in Athens museum.
32.	Bronze helmet	Greece	Greek	478 B.C.	Inscription presented to Jupiter Olympus by Hiero of Syracuse.
<b>Egypt</b>					
33.	Thin gold bar	Egyptian	Hieroglyphics	3000 B.C.	Inscription; "Menes" (the ruler).
34.	Gold plates	Egyptian	Hieroglyphics?	2800 B.C.	From tomb of Menkure, builder of the third pyramid.

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(Concluded from preceding page.)

(For discovery locations, see map on opposite page.)

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<b>Egypt (continued)</b>				
35. Gold leaf	Egyptian	Hieroglyphics	2000-1788 B.C.	Found at Lisht.
36. Lead	Egypt	Pseudo-hieroglyphic		Found by Maurice Dunand.
37. Silver tablet	Egypt	Egyptian	1254 B.C.	Treaty between Egypt and Hittites.
38. Silver and gold tablets	Egypt	Egyptian	1198-1167 B.C.	Decree of Rameses III.
39. Metal plates	Egyptian	Demotic	After 4th century B.C.	Chronicle inscribed on 13 plates.
40. Gold plate	Egypt	Greek	242-222 B.C.	Inscription for temple dedication.
<b>Mesopotamia</b>				
41. Gold tablet	Sumerian		3rd millennium B.C.	Found at Umma, modern Mesopotamia in 1937.
42. Three copper tablets	Sumerian (Iraq)		2900-2425 B.C.	Temple inscription of ancient Adab.
43. Copper	Sumerian	Cuneiform	2900-2425 B.C.	
44. Bronze inscription figure	Assur (Iraq)	Hurrian language in cuneiform	Mid 3rd millennium B.C.	Found, 1905, now in Metropolitan Museum, New York, and a similar one in the Louvre, Paris; temple dedication by Tisari, king of Urki Urk.
45. Six bronze tablets	Byblos, Lebanon	Pseudo-hieroglyphic	2000-1800 B.C.	Found by Maurice Dunand in 1930s.
46. Gold and silver plates	Assyrian		883-858 B.C.	Assurnasirpal II.
47. Gold tablet	Assyrian		858-824 B.C.	Foundation record of Shalmaneser III; found at source of Tigris, Iraq.
48. Bronze plates	Assyrian		858-824 B.C.	Found in 1876 at palace at Balawat; records campaigns of Shalmaneser III.
49. Round silver plate		Hittite and cuneiform	9th century B.C.	Tarkondemos seal.
50. Gold, silver, bronze, lead tablets	Assyrian		722-705 B.C.	Sargon II.
51. Six bronze, one silver, one gold plates	Assyrian		722-705 B.C.	Found in foundations of Sargon II's palace in 1854.
52. Lead plates	Mesopotamia	Mandean (of Aramaic type)	7th-8th century A.D.	
53. Seven lead rolls	Assyrian	Hittite	7th century B.C.	
54. Silver, lead plates	Semitic	Late Hittite	(600 B.C.?)	Found in 1950 in Beritz valley.
<b>Palestine and Arabia, Turkey</b>				
55. Bronze tablet	Lower Galilee, Palestine	Ugarit cuneiform	14th century B.C.	
56. Copper or bronze plate	Palestine	Hebrew	12th century B.C.	
57. Bronze tablets	South Arabia	Himyaritic	6th-7th century B.C.	Religious inscriptions; some now in British Museum, London.
58. Tablets of brass	Palestine		2nd century B.C.	Treaties of Romans with Jerusalem, letters from Spartans, Jewish events.
59. Copper scrolls	Dead Sea Caves, Palestine	Hebrew	Middle of 1st century A.D.	Eight feet in length; religious writings.
60. Gold and silver plates	Palestine	Hebrew-Aramaic	200 A.D.	Two sheets.
61. Silver plates		Arabic script		Part of Koran; now in Evkaf Museum, Istanbul, Turkey.
62. Copper plate	Maghreb (NW Africa & Spain)	Arabic		



# OTHERS KEPT RECORDS on metal plates, too

