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Gold Plates in Persia

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Abstract: Provides photos and notes of a stone box containing silver and gold plates of Darius I and stone memorial tablets of Xerxes.

GOLD PLATES *In* PERSIA

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DR. FRANKLIN S. HARRIS

ANYONE who is interested in the Book of Mormon naturally pricks up his ears whenever gold plates are mentioned. This is probably the reason why my wife and I were so interested in the fine new Museum of Archaeology in the capital city of Teheran in Iran. While the museum has not been officially opened to the public, its exhibits are all in order. The building is well arranged so that the priceless exhibits can be seen in their true historic setting. The cases are of the most modern design and everything about the museum is impressive and beautiful. A number of the best European and American archaeologists have assisted with the explorations that have yielded the treasures which have contributed so much to a knowledge of ancient Persia, or Iran, as it is now officially called.

All parts of this museum are interesting, but whenever we were there we always came back again and again to a certain case centrally located in the main hall which contained plates of gold and silver in a stone box. When I was in the museum at odd hours to borrow a lantern for showing slides, the case was empty. Its contents were considered too precious to be left out except during exhibition hours; it was stored in a safe at other times.

Even before we visited the museum, our friend, Dr. Erick Schmidt of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, had given us much information about the exhibits there. He has spent many years making archaeological investigations in Iran. A large part of the materials discovered had to be left in the country; some of them could be taken to the Oriental Institute, which sponsored his explorations. Last winter he had to spend a number of months in Teheran preparing his materials and unwinding the red tape necessary to a project of this kind. Thus, at dinner parties and on other occasions, he and his assistants whetted our appetites for more information regarding the early his-

tory of that most interesting country.

During a number of years Dr. Schmidt has been at Persepolis; he has also flown to all parts of the country and made aerial photographs to assist in getting more accurate information regarding ancient structures, the presence of which can be detected better from the air than from the surface of the ground.



TOMB OF CYRUS THE GREAT IN PERSIA.
(Photo by F. S. Harris)

He told us of the gold and silver plates in the museum. This made us all the more eager to see the exhibits. In a country like Persia there are so many interesting things to be seen that we might have overlooked this particular museum had it not been called to our attention. After seeing the museum, we were determined to take the first opportunity to visit Persepolis, where the plates were found and where so much other interesting archaeological material was uncovered.

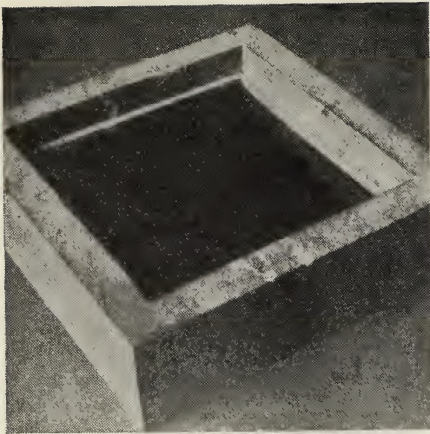
The history of the discovery of these plates will doubtless be of interest. In 1923, two small metal tablets, one of silver and the other of gold, were discovered at Hamadan, which was known in Bible times as Ecbatana. This city contains the tomb of Queen Esther. At the present time it is one of the most prosperous sections of Persia. These tablets each bore inscriptions regarding the erection by Darius I, the great Achaemenian king (521

EDITOR'S NOTE

DR. HARRIS, recently returned from having served a year as agricultural adviser to the Government of Iran (Persia), is by training and habit a thoughtful observer of all things that are significant in the search for truth. As a scholar, writer, educator, churchman, and scientist, his travels have taken him on official missions at various times into Russia, Europe, and the Far East, and into many lands that lie in the path of these distant places. Always he returns with freshening spirit, a broadened outlook, new facts, and a greater perspective of the course of human events.

to 485 B. C.), of certain palaces in the city.

When describing this discovery three years later, Professor Herzfeld, of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, predicted that similar tablets might be found at Persepolis. In 1933, members of the Iranian Expedition of the Oriental Institute began a search for these tablets in the main hall of Darius's palace at Persepolis. On September 18 of that year, an excavation was made in the north-eastern corner of the hall under the personal supervision of Professor Herzfeld. After work had been in progress for about two hours and a depth of six feet had been reached, a stone box measuring 15 x 45 x 45 centimeters was unearthed. This box, which was of fine workmanship, had been very securely fitted with a lid, but the sides had been broken, either because of the pressure of the surrounding earth or because of the effects of fire. It will be remembered that Alexander the Great, during his conquest of Persia, burned all that would burn of the palace of Persepolis, but the great stone work was indestructible.



ONE OF THE TWO STONE BOXES WHICH WERE FOUND AT PERSEPOLIS CONTAINING GOLD AND SILVER MEMORIAL TABLETS OF DARIUS I. ONE OF THE TABLETS IS SEEN IN POSITION AS IT LAY WHEN THE BOX WAS FIRST OPENED.

INSIDE this box were two metal tablets measuring 33 x 33 x 1.5 centimeters. The upper of these tablets was of silver and the lower of gold. Both tablets bore identical cuneiform inscriptions consisting of ten lines in Old Persian, seven in Elamite, and eight in Babylonian.

On lifting up this stone box the archaeologists found beneath it four gold and two silver coins. The gold coins, each of which weighed 8.15 grams, belonged to the reign of Croesus, the celebrated king of Lydia, whom Cyrus the Great had conquered in Sardis in 546 B. C. The silver coins, which were badly oxidized, belonged to Greek cities. On September 20, further excavation was made, this time on the southeastern side of the hall. Once again success was achieved, for at a depth of four feet seven inches, the stone case of a column was found, and underneath it was a stone box identical with the one previously discovered. This box, which was undamaged, had a lid so securely placed in position that it could be opened only with difficulty. Inside were a pair of silver and gold tablets which were slightly lighter than those found in the other box; the inscriptions were, however, the same. Under this box also were four gold and two silver coins similar to those discovered two days previously.

Professor Herzfeld has translated these inscriptions as follows:

Darius, the Great King, King of Kings, King of Countries, son of Hystapes the Achaemenian.

Saith Darius the King, this is the country which I possess: from Scythia in Trans-Soghdiana to Kusha [Ethiopia], and from Sind to Sardis, which territories have been bestowed on me by Ormuzd, who is the greatest of the Gods. May Ormuzd take care of me and my kin.

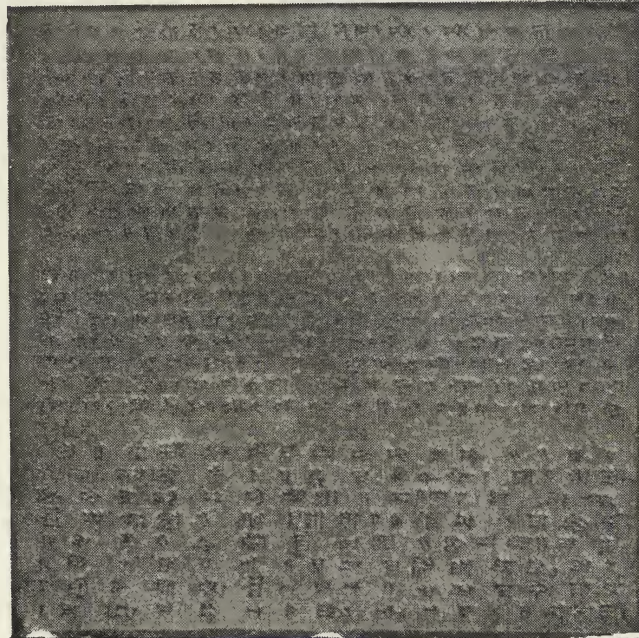
The above inscription is identical with that on the tablets found in Hamadan.

In 1935, a further important discovery was made by Dr. Erick Schmidt. In the southeastern part of one of the walls of the rooms which had served as a storehouse he found six stone tablets and came upon another in an adjoining room. One of these tablets bore inscriptions in Elamite. Two of the other tablets gave its translation in Old

Xerxes, the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries and of many tribes, the King of this territory, vast and extending far, the son of Darius, the Persian, Aryan, of the Aryan line.

Saith Xerxes the King: By the wish of Ormuzd over the following countries outside Pars was I king. I have governed them. They brought me tribute and what I ordered they obeyed. My law kept them.

Media, Elam, Arachosia, Armenia, Zranga, Parthia, Arlia, Bactria, Soghdia, Khorasmia, Babylonia, Assyria, the Sattagydae, the country of Sardis, Egypt, the Ionians who live in the sea and those who live beyond the sea, Gedrosia, Syria,



ONE OF THE GOLD TABLETS FROM PERSEPOLIS WITH ITS CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTION IN OLD PERSIAN, ELAMITE, AND BABYLONIAN.

Persian, while others gave it in Babylonian. The remaining three tablets repeated the inscription written on the metal tablets mentioned above. Professor Herzfeld has made the following translation of these inscriptions:

A great God is Ormuzd, who created the world, who created the heavens, who created humanity, who created peace for men, who made Xerxes King, a king for the multitude, a giver of laws for the multitude.

Gandhara, the country of the Indus, Capadocia, the Bahae, the Amyrigian Sacae, the Orthokorybanthian Sacae, the Macedonians, the Akanfaciya, the people of Pontis, the Carians, the Kush.

Saith Xerxes the King: When I became King certain among the countries named above had rebelled. Then Ormuzd aided me. By the will of Ormuzd I defeated these countries and restored them to their place. Among these countries were some which formerly adored the *deivas*. Then by the

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THE STONE MEMORIAL TABLETS OF XERXES DISCOVERED AT PERSEPOLIS.



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GOLD PLATES IN PERSIA

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will of Ormuzd I sapped the foundations of the temples of the *deivas*, and I commanded that the *deivas* should not be worshipped. Where the *deivas* was worshipped, I made them worship Ormuzd with Rtam the exalted. There were other things ill done and these I put right. This is what I have done. I did it entirely by the will of Ormuzd.

Ormuzd aided me until I had finished this work.

O thou who wilt come later, if thou thinkest I wish to be happy in life and in death, I wish to belong to Rtam, I walk in the way which has been established by Ormuzd and worship Ormuzd together with Rtam, the exalted.

The man who walks in the way established by Ormuzd and who worships Ormuzd together with Rtam, the exalted, that man will be happy in life, and in death will belong to Rtam.

Saith Xerxes the King: Ormuzd will guard me from evil as well as my kin and this country.

This is what I crave from Ormuzd and this will Ormuzd grant to me.

This later inscription is of interest because it gives for the first time a list of the provinces of Xerxes' empire, and, what is even more important, it mentions a matter of which all record had been lost, namely, the successful suppression by Xerxes of a revolt against the Zoroastrian religion.

IT WILL be remembered by students of ancient religion that Zoroastrianism remained dominant in Persia until the Mohammedan conquest in the seventh century A. D., when that religion became supreme in most of the Near East.

Those who desire to connect the reign of Darius the Great with the Bible account should read the sixth chapter of the book of Daniel, which, among other things, says:

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage.

Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.

It was our privilege to see the tomb of Daniel near the ancient city of Susa, which was the winter capital of Darius.

After having seen these gold and silver plates in the museum in Teheran, we were glad when my work as Adviser to the Government took us to the vicinity of the ancient city of Persepolis. We wanted to see the very holes from which these stone boxes and plates were dug. It was on the nineteenth of last April

that we came to this ancient city. We had hoped to get there early in the afternoon, but some projects I had to look over on the way delayed us so that we arrived after dark. But we were not sorry because this gave us an opportunity to see the remains of this great ancient palace first by the light of a full April moon.

The magnificent columns with their deep shadows and the broad steps leading up the palace seemed all the more enchanting and impressive because of the subdued light. During succeeding days we had an opportunity to examine in detail the great stairs with their historic carvings, the remains of the open courts, the impressive doorways, and, most interesting of all, to look into the holes from which the stone boxes with their precious records had been taken.

This experience makes it much easier for us to visualize the stone box with its gold plates taken from Cumorah. It is interesting to note that the Persepolis records were deposited soon after the time when Lehi and his family left Jerusalem and many centuries before the Book of Mormon records were buried.

It was a great pleasure to inspect the modern developments in the vicinity of the ancient city of Persepolis. In my official duties there, I was called on to assist with the problems of a recently erected sugar factory near by. I also examined irrigation structures that were being installed in the vicinity of the great ancient irrigation works that furnished water to Persepolis and its vicinity so many centuries ago. The dam of this great irrigation system on the Kor River was made of cut stone, each piece of which weighed many tons. These ancient structures were long since destroyed by invading armies. In looking over the damage wrought by earlier military invasions, I could not help feeling the same hatred for war that we all feel today when we read of the destruction of many of the finest cities of the modern world.

The satisfaction felt in helping to restore to production some of the areas that previously were so fruitful but which have long lain unused, was heightened by the opportunity we had of coming in contact with these ancient records which help to make more real the scriptures that have been restored to us in this modern day.