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Confirmatory Evidences of "Mormonism": Writing on Metal Plates in the New World

Author(s): Franklin S. Harris, Jr.

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Abstract: Metal plates prepared by the ancients have been found in several locations in America. There are many historical accounts of metal plates that no longer exist as they were melted down to be used in other ways. Melvin J. Ballard describes plates seen in a museum in Lima, Peru, that were gold sheets, the size of the Book of Mormon plates (DN April 30, 1932).

dence. Let us honour the nation in which we now live, let us take the finer ideals of these people to our hearts, let us build friendships by being honest with these our brothers about the praiseworthy things of this great land—and let us expand in a religion that knows no nationalism, no bounds but the barriers of evil and ignorance, by preaching “Peace on earth, good will toward all men.”—ELDER GORDON B. HINCKLEY.

CONFIRMATORY EVIDENCES OF “MORMONISM”

WRITING ON METAL PLATES IN THE NEW WORLD

WHEN the story of the Book of Mormon is told and mention is made that the record was written on gold plates, interest is almost always aroused. To many it seems to be an incredible thing that records should be kept on gold plates, and especially considering the nature of the record taken from the Book of Mormon plates. It is oft-times thought too unusual to be possible. Yet when the gold plates are considered in the light of available external evidence, it becomes a striking evidence for the consistency of the Book of Mormon claims. Joseph Smith, to whom the plates were given for the purpose of translation, did not attempt to argue and explain as an impostor or deceiver would have done, when the existence and use of such plates was questioned. He spoke from personal knowledge, supplemented by the testimony of groups of reliable witnesses, who had also seen and handled the plates, evidence worth more than all the vain speculation and theories concerning the existence and use of such plates.

In the *Star* of January 25th, evidence was given of the practice of writing on metal plates in the Old World, from whence the Book of Mormon peoples and historians came, bringing with them a set of records engraved on brass—the plates of Laban. The contention that such writing on plates was also to be found in the New World, is supported by evidence mostly made available since the Book of Mormon was published.

In the New World various metals have been used as material for writing. Lead, for instance, has been found as an alloy. Metal plates made of such material were found in the State of Arizona, in 1924, in the form of double crosses, fastened together with lead rings, or rivets. These plates were covered with very legible inscriptions, dated by scholars at 880 and 895 A.D.* Copper alone and also alloyed with other metals has often been used. Recently copper plates were found in Georgia by Dr. Warren K. Moorehead.† Adair in his *History of the North American Indians*, tells of five copper tablets and two brass ones among the Tuccabatchey Indians. Old Bracket, an Indian, gave the following description of them :

The shape of the five copper plates: One is a foot and a half long and seven inches wide, the other four are shorter and narrower. The shape of the two brass plates was circular, about a foot and a half in diameter.†

**Improvement Era* 30: 41.

†*Improvement Era* 30: 531.

These records, according to tradition, "were given to them by the man we call God."*

Not many years after the publication of the Book of Mormon, there were found at Kinderhook, Illinois, in 1843, six brass plates, covered with characters, four lines on each plate. Facsimiles of these plates were published in the *Millennial Star* (volume 21, pp. 41-43.)

The Book of Mormon plates were, however, of gold. Gold was to be found in abundance in ancient America, especially in the highly developed civilizations, in Mexico and Peru. Indeed, the Inca of Peru bought his ransom from the Spaniards by filling a room 17 by 22 feet to a depth of 9 feet with gold. The worth of this gold was estimated at £3,500,000 sterling.† Montezuma, the native ruler in Mexico, at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards, ate from "fair large dishes made like platters all of gold, very elaborately worked, so big as a large shield."

Marshall H. Saville, in his book *The Goldsmith's Art in Ancient Mexico*, tells of the fine quality of the gold workmanship, and lists many of the gold articles that have been found, including several references to gold plates (pp. 44, 175, etc.). As an instance of the fine art and craftsmanship in metal of the Indians, the Chimus of Peru are especially outstanding. They were skilled in hammering, casting, welding, plating, embossing, etc. A. Hyatt Verrill says:

They wrought huge vessels of solid gold and of gold alloyed with silver and copper; objects of great beauty of form, magnificently chased, embossed and carved or decorated by open fretwork.‡

Skill such as this enabled the early Americans to make thin plates of gold suitable for engraving with characters, the quality of which is attested to by Rivero and Tschudi, who say: "The hieroglyphics of the Mexicans were very distinct and graven on stone or metal."§

During the course of excavating for a cistern, near Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1847, a gold plate was discovered. Said plate is of fine gold, three or four inches in length, averaging about three-fourths of an inch in width, about one-eighth of an inch in thickness, with the edges scalloped. In the face of which was beautifully set another plate of the same material, and fastened together by two pins, running through both. This latter plate is full of ancient raised characters, beautifully engraved upon its surface; the whole exhibiting fine workmanship. The plate was examined by Dr. Wise, a very learned Rabbi of the Jewish synagogue in Cincinnati, an editor of a Hebrew paper there, who pronounced the characters to be mostly ancient Egyptian. (*Millennial Star*, Volume 19, p. 103, facsimile of plate on p. 632.)

Padre Gay mentions (*Historia de Oaxaca*, Volume 1, cap. 4, p. 62) that the Mexican Indians "sold to some European antiquarians very thin plates of gold, evidently worked with the hammer, which their ancestors had been able to preserve, and on which were engraved ancient hieroglyphs."||

*Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3, 64-65.

†Prescott, *Conquest of Peru*, pp. 205, 221.

‡*Under Peruvian Skies*, p. 27.

§*Peruvian Antiquities*, 1853, p. 105.

||Saville, *The Goldsmith's Art in Ancient Mexico*, 1920, p. 175.

Although most of the articles of gold have found their way into the melting pot, there are still some which have been preserved down to the present time. Elder Melvin J. Ballard describes some plates he saw thus:

Brother Pratt and myself saw in a museum in Lima, Peru, a stack of gold sheets almost identical with the size of the Book of Mormon sheets, approximately eight inches long and seven inches wide, as thin as paper. The whole stack was nearly an inch thick, not a thing upon either side but just good sheets, prepared for just such work as the plates of the Book of Mormon. (*Deseret News*, April 30, 1932.)

According to the Book of Mormon, the Jaredites' history was recorded on 24 gold plates (Ether 1:2); and the Nephites kept at least two histories, one of them was the secular, and the other religious (1 Nephi 9:2-4.) The record from which the Book of Mormon was translated was an abridgment of the other records, and also engraved upon gold plates. (Words of Mormon.)

The Book of Mormon account of the writing on metal plates, as confirmed in Ancient America, is another evidence confirmatory of the truth of "Mormonism."—FRANKLIN S. HARRIS, JR.

WHAT IS MORMONISM?—BY ELDER JOHN A. WIDTSOE

A REVIEW

HAVE you ever wondered what to tell your friends when the subject of "Mormonism" has come up in conversation and they ask: "What is 'Mormonism'?" Have you ever had a friend who has shown interest in the Church, and wanted further information about it—something readable, not too long, and yet comprehensive in its scope? What do you say when asked about the results of "Mormonism," as an organization, and as reflected in the lives of its adherents? Or, have you ever wanted a good summary of "Mormonism" for your own information? If any or all of these questions receive your affirmative answer, then you will find the new booklet *What Is Mormonism?* written by Elder John A. Widtsoe, of the Council of Twelve, in his smooth, convincing style, an invaluable addition to your Church literature. Designed to discuss this question briefly, in an informal way, *What Is Mormonism?* is the best short reply yet given to this oft-plied query, and may be read in a two-hour sitting. The cost of the booklet is sixpence. It may be obtained through District Presidents.

What is the first of man's desires? What is the aim of "Mormonism?" Both are happiness. "Happiness, as the aim of life, may be defined as the increasing joy of living that comes from robust health—of body, mind and spirit." How may this happiness be derived? It may be won by the practice of principles of truth. The search for truth, and its acceptance and application are thus given as fundamental principles of "Mormonism."

How is the Church governed? The operation of the Church through the principles of self-government and self-support is given a clear, well-organized treatment, revealing a marvellous