



Type: Magazine Article

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## Proof from the Gold of Pyrgi

Author(s): Henry A. Smith

Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 101, No. 11 (November 1966), pp. 444-445

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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**Abstract:** Discusses recent discoveries that provide evidence that ancient people did write on metal plates, including the finding of gold plates found in Pyrgi, Italy, that bear ancient inscriptions.

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The Prophet Joseph Smith claimed that he translated the Book of Mormon from ancient inscriptions written on plates of gold. Recent discoveries provide substantial evidence that ancient peoples did write on metal plates, and we present . . .

# PROOF FROM THE GOLD OF PYRGI

by Henry A. Smith\*

The richest "finds" of modern archaeologists are dispelling the world's doubts regarding the story of Joseph Smith and the gold plates.

When the young Mormon prophet, nearly a century and a half ago, announced that a holy messenger, an angel of the Lord, had given him custody of ancient records engraved on paper-thin plates of gold, his story was immediately labeled a myth, a fanciful tale.

However, in recent years archaeologists have discovered scores of instances where ancient records have been kept on plates of metal. Some are gold, some silver, and others bronze, copper, brass, and even tin. These discoveries are continuing to be made, and with each new discovery the "gold plate" story of Joseph Smith becomes a more intensely interesting one.

The latest such discovery, related in a recent issue of *Illustrated London News*, London, England, was the finding of some very thin gold plates, bearing ancient inscriptions. The plates were almost as thin as gold leaf.

The discovery was made at the site of the ancient port city of Pyrgi, Italy, about thirty miles north of Rome on the Tyrrhenian Sea. Work has been underway on this site since 1956 under direction of archaeologists of the University of Rome. It was the

(For Course 6, Lesson of December 11, "Joseph Smith--The Great Latter-day Prophet"; for Course 8, lesson of December 11, "Israel and Idol Worship"; for Course 12, lesson of November 27, "The Conquest of Mexico"; for Course 7, lessons of January 15 and 22, "Joseph Received the Plates from Moroni" and "Joseph Smith Reads the Sacred Record"; for Course 11, lesson of January 22, "Origin of the Book of Mormon" and "Purpose and Mission of the Book of Mormon"; for Course 15, lesson of January 15, "Structure and Purpose of the Book of Mormon"; and of general interest.)



Art by Ron Wilkinson.

report of Massimo Pallottino, director of the expedition, that was published in the London paper.

Mr. Pallottino told of discovering two large Etruscan temples plus many items of painted terracotta relief, statues, slabs with geometric motifs, pottery, and a vast number of silver coins.

But the top find of the excavation in Pyrgi, which dates back to five centuries before Christ, was three rectangular sheets of gold, all about the same size, eight inches long and five wide. Along one edge of each sheet were three holes, with the rivets still in place. This indicates the plates were designed to be fastened together as in a book.

Each of the three sheets bore engraved inscriptions. One of these was in the Phoenician language and the other two in ancient Etruscan. After translation, the writings proved to be tributes to a pagan goddess, expressing gratitude for her protection.

Mr. Pallottino was quoted as dating the inscriptions "securely" to about 500 B.C.

\*Henry A. Smith is editor of the *Church News*. He has served as Pioneer Stake president and as Central Atlantic States Mission president. He is a member of Winder Ward, Winder (Utah) Stake, and a member of the Priesthood Missionary Committee. He married Lovell Wagner; they have four daughters.

The excavation in Italy is the sixty-third such location around the world in which archaeologists have located metal plates. Most of these plates have contained ancient engravings.

Discovery of these metal plates with ancient writings voids what has been taught for years in the universities of the world: that ancient records were kept only on clay tablets, papyrus and sheepskin. No longer can critics of the Book of Mormon refute the fact that ancient records were kept on metal plates such as those given into the custody of Joseph Smith by the Angel Moroni.

The date of these Italian plates is also interesting. The date of 500 B.C. corresponds quite closely with the time Lehi left Palestine for the continent of America (600 B.C.). It also closely corresponds to the date given other metal sheets—the plates of Darius—which were found in Persia. Archaeologists have dated these at 585 B.C. These two plates, one of silver and one of gold, were also engraved and told of the works of King Darius. It was this king who threw Daniel into the lions' den.

But these engraved plates of metal were not the only finds which supported Joseph Smith's story. One of the most interesting things about the plates of Darius is that they were found in a stone box. The description of this box coincides remarkably with the Prophet's description of the box in which he found the gold plates, near the summit of the Hill Cumorah in western New York State, and from which he translated the Book of Mormon.

Professor Hugh Nibley, in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, writes this of the Book of Mormon plates:

*We learn from the Book of Mormon itself that gold plates were indeed a rarity, and that the rule was to keep records on plates of copper (ore) or bronze (brass), and that the practice of keeping records on metal plates was of great antiquity in*

*Palestine, and by no means an invention of the Nephites. We know that the ancient Hebrews, like the Egyptians, wrote on leather, and from the Lachish seals, discovered in 1938, for the first time 'we now know for certain that around about 600 B.C., papyrus was being commonly used as writing material in Judah.' A private letter written in Hebrew on a copper plate has turned up and been dated to the 12th century B.C. No doubt the highly literate and educated Lehi had all sorts of writing materials.'*

Professor Nibley's account tells of many examples of engravings on plates that have been uncovered, and it mentions the more recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls as another evidence in this field. He said:

*In 1956 the two copper rolls from the Qumran Cave on the Dead Sea were unrolled and found to contain, like the Kalawan copper plate, a record of the depositing of relics.*

One thing we must not overlook in a discussion of gold plates in this land of the Americas is the abundance of this metal and its frequent use for things of a sacred nature, the metal nearly always being linked with religious worship. A recent display of pre-Columbian art in "The World of Ancient Gold" exhibit in the New York World's Fair, gave evidence of the fabulous wealth in gold possessed by the ancient Americans.

This fact is further evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, which tells of the skill of the ancient inhabitants of this land and of their use of gold. These people were skilled in making gold plates for decoration, as well as for keeping records. With gold so plentiful and the skill in its use so highly developed, it is not at all surprising that they would use it not only for record keeping but for the writings of their own prophets who thus recorded their revelations from God.

'Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*; Deseret Book Company, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1964; page 18. Quoted by permission of the publisher.  
Library File Reference: PLATES, METAL.

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