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Goldsmiths of Ancient Times

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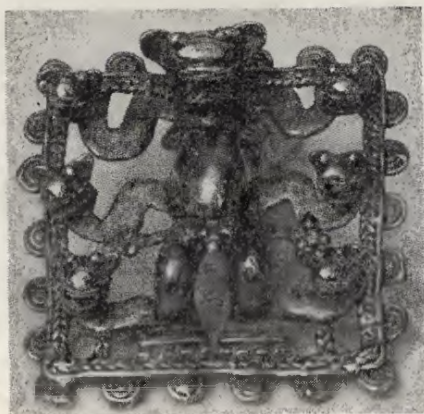
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Abstract: This article discusses Spanish libraries containing historical accounts that describe a chamber in which gold plates were found. Ancient American goldsmiths made plates of gold that were thin like paper and on which ancient hieroglyphs were engraved.

GOLDSMITHS OF

By President
OF THE FIRST COUNCIL



A gold ornament from Panama

—Illustrations from Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York City

GOLD and precious stones and jewels have from the dawn of civilization played a large part in the worship and adoration of the divine. The goldsmith's art is one of the oldest arts practised by man and was brought to a high degree of excellence at an early period. The writings of the prophets of the Holy Bible give many examples of the love that men had for gold and precious metals and jewels. A famous passage in the Book of Job proclaims this truth:

As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire.

The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold. (Job 28: 5-6.)

(Now Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon . . . with gold. . . .)

And Hiram sent to the king sixscore talents of gold. (I Kings 9:11, 14.)

. . . And (the Queen of Sheba) came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones. . . .

And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and spices very great store, and precious stones. . . . And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir. (I Kings 10:2, 10-11.)

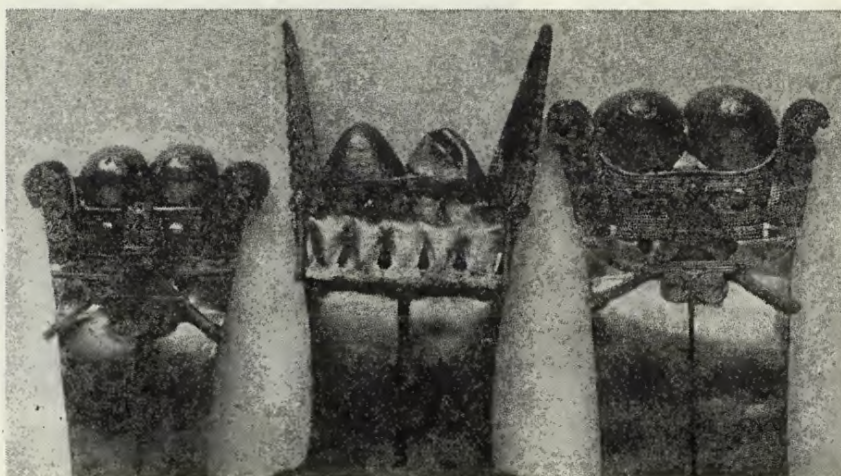
In the book of Genesis, we are told that when Abraham went into Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac, he gave to Rebekah "a golden earring of half a shekel weight, also two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight," and after the betrothal was made, presented her "jewels of silver and jewels of gold." Pharaoh wore a ring upon

his hand which he took off and put upon Joseph's hand, and he also put a gold chain about his neck. Gold—alluvial gold washed from the sands of rivers—was used from earliest times. Gold ornaments wrought 3,000 years before the Christian era have been discovered in Egyptian tombs, and of most exquisite workmanship. The sacred scarabaeus, or beetle, considered by the Egyptians the emblem of eternal regeneration, has been found in golden models. From Greece came noted goldsmiths of ancient days who, invited to Rome by the Emperor Cæsar Augustus, and others, were the fashionable artificers of golden brooches, necklaces, bracelets, and earrings, as well as elaborate objects studded with precious stones. Quantities of wonderful jewels were accumulated by the Emperor Justinian and his successors in the Church of St. Sophia in Rome. The Emperor Charlemagne brought from Byzantium noted jewelers and goldsmiths. His crown and sword are still preserved in the Imperial Treasure of Vienna. His crown was composed of eight plates of gold, four larger than the others, joined together by hinges. The large pieces are studded with different gems, while the smaller are enameled with figures and in-



Golden statuette of Tizoc, great lord of the Aztecs

Gold breast ornaments, from Colombia, the largest measuring ten inches



Gold mummy mask from Peru



ANCIENT TIMES

Levi Edgar Young
OF THE SEVENTY

scriptions. Britons and Anglo-Saxons alike wore necklaces of beads, often made of gold and silver. Amethysts set in gold and hanging from a band have been found. The belts and girdles of the Anglo-Saxons were ornamented very elaborately. Not only were the buckles by which they were fastened of the richest workmanship, but they were sometimes enriched with plates of gold beautifully cased and set with precious stones or jewels.

The word *jewel* is significant. It means a "thing of joy," the diminutive of the French word *joie*. It was applied to precious stones and precious metals because they have been used from the earliest stages of civilization to commemorate and signalize human joy.

"In ancient days," says Maurice Maeterlinck, "the search for gold was only a symbol concealing the search for the divine faculties in man." Gold was the emblem of purity and formed a part of the offering of the Wise Men to the infant Savior.

PETER MARTYR was the first chronicler of events of Spanish history in America. His book, *De Orbe Novo*, tells how the Spaniards through their "... insatiable desire for gold, oppressed these poor

wretches with extreme labor and toil to find gold, although before the Spaniards came, the natives lived pleasantly and at liberty, given only to plays and pastimes, as dancing, hunting, fishing. . . ."

Chaplain Juan Diaz mentions that in the first voyages along the coasts (Yucatan), "a mask of gold was obtained." He says that one day the "cacique told an Indian that he should clothe the Captain (Crijalva), and the Indian dressed him in a corselet and some armlets of gold, and on his head he placed a crown of gold, only that the crown was made of very thin gold leaves."

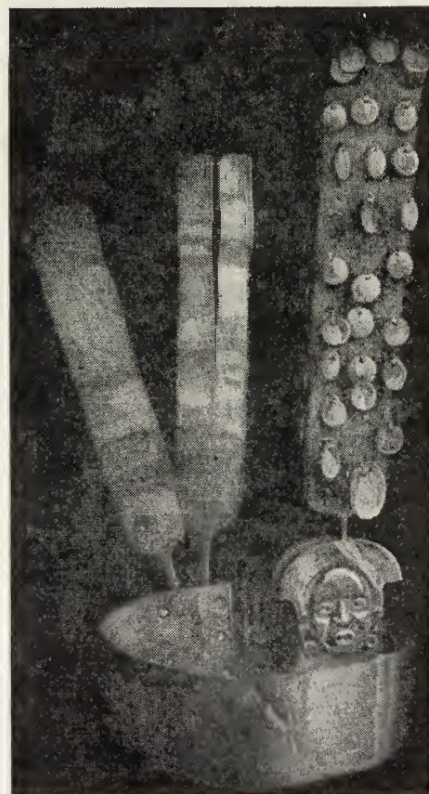
Marshall H. Saville, in his *Goldsmiths' Art in Ancient Mexico*, gives the translation of a report of one of the soldiers under Cortez, F. Francisco de Aguilar. Sr. Aguilar "was a devout soldier and devout man." He was wealthy and had the support of many Indians. He joined the order of Dominicans, and, when over eighty years of age, he wrote his famous account of the Indians and Cortez. The manuscript has only recently been found in one of the old libraries of Spain. It was apparently written about 1579. He with other soldiers found the wardrobe and treasure of Montezuma and, after describing how they had discovered a secret chamber in one of the palaces of Montezuma, says:

When it was open Cortez and some of his captains went in first, and they saw such a number of jewels and slabs and plates of gold and other great riches, that

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Gold ornaments, from Chiriqui, Panama

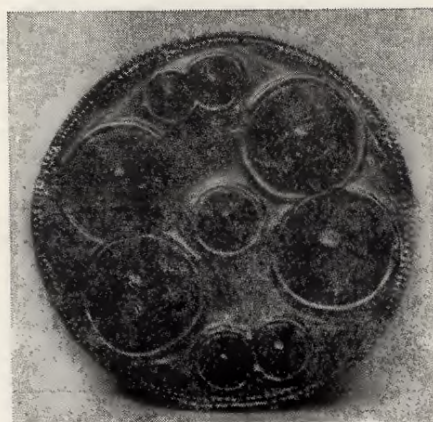


Gold Crown from Sigsig, Ecuador

Sheet gold ornament over ten inches long from Vasca, Peru



Gold breast ornament ten and a half inches in diameter, Colombia



GOLDSMITHS OF ANCIENT TIMES

(Concluded from page 207)

they were quite carried away and did not know what to say about such wealth. The news soon spread among all the other captains and soldiers, and very secretly we went in to see it. When I saw it, I marveled, and as at that time I was a youth and had never seen such riches as those in my life before, I took it for certain that there could not be another such store of wealth in the whole world. It was decided by all our captains and soldiers that we should not dream of touching a particle of it, but that the stones should immediately be put back in the doorway, and it should be sealed up and cemented just as we found it, and that it should not be spoken about, lest it should reach Montezuma's ears; until times should alter.

Bernal Diaz also describes the secret chamber and writes:

When it was opened, Cortes and some of his captains went in first and they saw such a number of jewels and slabs and plates of gold . . . and other great riches, that they were quite carried away and did not know what to say of such wealth.

None of this loot is known to exist. Many estimates as to the value of it have been made. Prescott, in his *Conquest of Mexico*, makes the amount in present-day money \$6,300,000.

In a report of the jewels, shields, and clothing sent to the Emperor Charles the Fifth by Cortez and the Town Council of Vera Cruz, we find reference made to two books that the Indians had made. The sentence reads:

Moreover two books of those which the Indians have here.

It is not certain just what was meant by this statement.

Oaxaca is a valley in southern Mexico, where many towns existed in ancient days. From this region were sent to Montezuma twenty large gold plaques the size of average plates and the thickness of the thumb. The Mexican natives were able to work the metal into very thin gold leaf. Sahagun, in his scholarly work on the "Things of New Spain," says that they worked gold with the hammer, pounding it to make it thin like paper.

Padre Gay mentions that the Mixtecan Indians ". . . sold to some European antiquarians, very thin plates of gold, evidently worked with the hammer, which their ancestors were about to preserve, on which were engraved ancient hieroglyphs." In the work written by

Carl Lumholtz, entitled *Unknown Mexico*, Vol. II, p. 295, is a description of the finding of two skeletons: on the breast of one of the dead was a large plate of solid hammered gold which had been used as an ornament.

WITH the discovery of America, Spanish and Italian noblemen led expeditions to the Indies, Mexico, and South America. Through the search in ancient burial grounds, enormous quantities of gold, fashioned in a multitude of forms, have been discovered. The countries where gold is most abundant in graves, are Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru; and the ancient peoples of Ecuador were among the most proficient workers of gold in South America. The German archeologist, Dr. Max Uhle, is quoted in a brochure published by the Heye Foundation of New York City as finding an immense amount of gold in the province and town of Sigisig. One tomb alone contained forty-four pounds of gold and another over two hundred pounds. Dr. Uhle describes a deep shaft in which a skeleton was found covered with gold and silver plates, alternating regularly, as if they had been affixed to a cloak thrown over the body. "This cloak may have had a fringe formed of small tubes of gold. The arms were discovered with bracelets and the head with a crown all of pure gold. Chonta-wood sticks were found covered with *lamellae* (leaves) of gold." We read further that gold leaf of the finest quality and as thin as paper has been found in great quantities. On some of the *lamellae* are carefully carved hieroglyphics. Gold plates, held together by small gold nails, are shown in the Museum at Quito. Gold bangles attached to crowns worn by ancient "kings" were fastened with gold wires. The article written by Marshall Saville

from which we have obtained our information concerning the gold plates, crowns, and rings of ancient Ecuador and Peru, says:

We may say that the picture presented by the occurrence of vast quantities of gold artifacts in the various culture areas of South America . . . shows a glittering magnificence in connection with the ceremonial and civic life of the people which perhaps were not excelled even in ancient Egypt or Etruria. In the native architecture there is evidence that precious metals were used to sheath the rooms of important buildings.

BEAUTIFUL gold plates were collected by the museums of Europe before World War I. The writer saw in the Royal Museum of Berlin, some years ago, a large and beautiful assortment of gold plates, some of them circular and others rectangular or square. Some were as thin as an ordinary sheet of paper and showed careful workmanship. There was no writing on them, but they were found in the old temples of the Mayas and were made ages ago.

Of recent date, the writer was shown the collection of gold plates now in the collection of the Museum of the American Indian in New York City. The plates were about twelve inches long by ten inches wide and as thin as ordinary paper. They were of beautiful workmanship, and quoting the words of the old historian, Las Casas, when he had seen the thousands of gold fabrics in Mexico, that the workmanship ". . . appeared like a dream, and not as if made by man's hands."

From the writings of the Abbe Francisco Clavijero, Antonio De Solis, Garcilasso de la Vega and other noted Spanish historians of the days of the Spanish Conquest of America, we learn that gold plates were made in all the ages of the history of the peoples of ancient America.

* * *

The ancient records of the forbears of the American Indians, written on gold plates which were given to the Prophet Joseph Smith by the Angel Moroni, must have been very beautiful. After their translation by the Prophet, under the title of the Book of Mormon, the plates were given back to Moroni; and today the book is one of the most widely read sacred books that we have.

THE MORNING STAR

By Adrienne L. DeWitt

THE Great Designer placed a flawless gem
Upon the trailing, velvet hem of Night.
He pinned this perfect, sparkling diadem
Upon her draperies to give delight
To countless millions of the human race
Who gaze upon this harbinger of light
That lovely Night so gracefully displays.