

The Sticks of Joseph and the Lost Tribes

By George Potter

The Incas of Peru lined their Golden Temple at Cuzco with thin plates of gold. It was erroneously called the Temple of the Sun by the Spanish. The 700 plates that adorned the outside walls of the Incas' main temple were rudely ripped from the walls of the sanctuary and were irreverently melted into bullion for the conquistadors and the Spanish crown.

Since the plates were destroyed, we will never know if reformed Egyptian characters were etched on some of the plates. However, the Golden Temple had a sacred history recorded on boards adorned in gold. They kept the golden boards in the Holy of Holies in the temple. We cannot be certain of the exact nature of these boards since they were also destroyed. Spanish Chronicler Sarmiento recorded this interesting facet of the Golden Temple:

Besides this they had, and still have, special historians in these nations, an hereditary office descending from father to son.... He [Inca Yapanqui] had them [historians] in Cuzco for a long time, examining them concerning their antiquities, origin, and the most notable events in their history. These [events] were painted on great boards, and deposited in the temple of the Sun, in a great hall. There such boards, adorned with gold, were kept as in our libraries, and learned persons were appointed, who were well versed in the art of understanding and declaring their contents. No one was allowed to enter where these boards were kept, except the Inca and the historians, without a special order of the Inca."ⁱ

In Lehi's era, hieroglyphic characters adorned the walls of Egyptian temples. To this day, calligraphy is a highly praised art form in the Middle East. Large stylized verses of sacred Arabic writings and epic poetry are commonly found on walls of public buildings, mosque and private homes there.

In the case of the Golden Temple in Peru, only authorized Inca priestly historians of the temple were allowed to read the boards in the Holy of Holies. The Inca temple boards bring to mind Mosiah's need to teach his sons the Egyptian language so they could read the words on the sacred Nephite plates (Mosiah 1:2), something that would have been impossible for the common Nephites to read, since they spoke only the language of the people.

At first glance, one might not see the significance of having found an historical record written on wooden boards plated in gold. However to Latter-day Saints this could be a major clue in locating the Book of Mormon lands. The reason for this lies in the Latter-day Saint interpretation of a prophecy made by Ezekiel:

The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: and join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand- (Ezekiel 37:15-17).

Latter-day Saints believe that these verses foretell the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, which is the record or stick of Joseph. We believe that in the Last Days the Book of Mormon, with the Bible, will together testify of the Savior. What most students of the Book of Mormon or Bible do not realize is what Ezekiel meant by the word "stick." Elder Boyd K. Packer stated: "The sticks, of course, are records or books. In ancient Israel, records were written upon tablets of wood or scrolls rolled upon sticks."ⁱⁱ Monte S. Nyman, of Brigham Young University notes:

However, writing on wooden tablets has more recently been discovered. Wooden tablets were discovered and reported to the academic world in 1948. The tablets were discovered in ancient southern Babylonia, the area where Ezekiel was in captivity. *The New English Bible*, a translation sponsored by the Protestant churches and Bible societies in the British Isles, translates Ezekiel 37:15-20 as follows: "These were the words of the Lord to me: Man, take one leaf of a wood tablet and write on it, 'Judah and his associates of Israel.' Then take another leaf and write on it, 'Joseph, the leaf of Ephraim and all his associates of Israel.' Now bring the two together to form one tablet; then they will be a folding tablet in your hand."ⁱⁱⁱ

If the wooden boards in the Cuzco Golden Temple contained the record of the large or small plates of Nephi, then there was a literal "stick of Joseph" preserved among the pre-Columbian Peruvians.

Now let us have a little fun speculating. The Book of Ezekiel tells us that the sticks of the Jews and of Joseph shall be brought together (Ezek: 37:16). The Book of Mormon tells us that added to these scriptures will be the words of God given to the Lost Tribes (2 Nephi 29:13). In my novel *The White Bedouin*, I point out how Isaiah mentions that the gathering of the "remnant" shall come from the nations that are now Muslim (see Isaiah 11:11). The "remnant" in the scriptures refers to the remnant of the coat of many colors that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Thus, the "remnant" refers to the seed of Joseph (Alma 46:23).

The Ten Lost Tribes came from the northern kingdom, the Kingdom of Israel, also known as the Kingdom of Ephraim, (the name of the son of Joseph who was blessed with the principle birthright of Joseph). In other words, it is feasible, that the Lost Tribes are among the Muslim nations, and that the "stick" of the Lost Tribes is the record of the Muslims, the Qur'an, a basic non-Christian record of the lower law or law of Moses. Of course, this is all speculation and reflects my idealistic view that in the Last Days the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim people will come together in peace, love, and mutual understanding through the good word of God.

For this reason, I found it very interesting that a Golden Qur'an has been forged in—
of all places—Russia. The words of the Qur'an have been written on 160 golden plates, with a combined weight of 30 lb. The plates were exhibited at the Puskin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow.



The Gold Qur'an is based on one of ten copies of the 8th-century manuscript of

Uthman's Koran, once preserved in a private collection in Russia. In 1936 the original of the world's oldest manuscript of the Koran was appropriated by the Soviets, and since that time it has been kept in the St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The Golden Qur'an has an estimated value of six million US dollars. If nothing else, the Golden Qur'an provides us a comparative value in today's currency of Mormon's golden plates. The *Book of Mormon* is more than three times the length of the Qur'an. Based on weight alone, a rough value of the gold plates of the *Book of Mormon* would be worth over twenty million dollars! No wonder Joseph Smith had to take such careful measures to protect them.

ⁱ Sarmiento, 41-42.

ⁱⁱ Boyd K. Packer, "Scriptures," *Ensign*, November 1982, 51.

ⁱⁱⁱ Monte S. Nyman, *Abomination of Desolation*, (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort Inc., 2006, 24-25).