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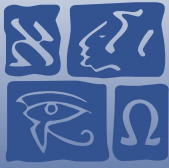
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# Insights

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<http://farms.byu.edu>

## Etruscan Gold Book from 600 B.C. Discovered

The Bulgarian National Museum of History in Sofia, Bulgaria, recently placed on public display an ancient book comprising six pages of 23.82-karat gold (measuring 5 centimeters in length and 4.5 centimeters in width) bound together by gold rings. The plates contain a text written in Etruscan characters and also depict a horse, a horseman, a Siren, a lyre, and soldiers. According to Elka Penkova, who heads the museum's archaeology department, the find may be the oldest complete book in the world, dating to about 600 B.C.

The content of the book suggests that it was made for the funeral of an aristocrat who was a member of the Orpheus cult.<sup>1</sup> The Greek philosopher Pythagoras spread the beliefs of the cult (which originated in Thracia) in southern Italy and among the neighboring Etruscan tribes. Accord-

ing to Penkova, about 30 pages from Etruscan books are known from elsewhere, but only in single sheets. The Bulgarian find is the only complete version.

An 87-year-old Bulgarian man from Macedonia, who wishes to remain anonymous, donated the book to the museum. He had discovered the treasure in a tomb unearthed 60 years ago when he was a soldier working on the construction of a canal along the Strouma River in southwestern Bulgaria. According to Bozhidar Dimitrov, director of the museum, the find has been authenticated by experts in Sofia and London. Bulgarian professor Valdimir Georgiev is working on a translation of the text.

The find is significant to Latter-day Saints because the book was prepared about the time Lehi and his family left Jerusalem<sup>2</sup> and generally fits the description of the Book of Mormon plates given by Joseph Smith in his letter to John Wentworth:

These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold, each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long, and not quite so thick as common tin.

They were filled with engravings, in Egyptian characters, and bound together in a volume as the leaves of a book, with three rings running through the whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book

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Like the Book of Mormon record, this diminutive book from about 600 B.C. found in Bulgaria was written on gold plates held together by rings. AFP/Getty Images



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exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction, and much skill in the art of engraving. (*History of the Church*, 4:537)

While the size and number of plates comprising the two documents differ, it is interesting that both sets of plates were of gold<sup>3</sup> and were held together by rings. (For a news report of the book, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2939362.stml>.)  —contributed by John A. Tvedtnes

### Notes

1. For a discussion of Orphic gold plates buried with the dead, see C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982): 259–78; republished in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon*

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that Nephi made a clear distinction between the “curse” of the Lamanites (being cut off from the presence of the Lord by Nephi’s departure) and the “mark” of a “skin of blackness,” the latter being intended to keep the Nephites from mingling with the Lamanites and partaking of their wickedness (see 2 Nephi 5:1–7, 19–24; Alma 3: 14–16). Further, Jacob chastised his people for hating the Lamanites because of their skin color and warned that the Nephites could also be cursed because of unrighteousness (see Jacob 3).

The Nephites’ frequent attempts to convert the Lamanites shows that the Book of Mormon does not promote notions of racial inferiority. Tvedtnes also noted that, as an anthropologist, he does not use the term *race*, having concluded several years ago that it is an artificial construction.

Tvedtnes discussed Joseph Smith’s emendation of 2 Nephi 30:6. In this verse, the Nephites are promised that they will receive a knowledge of the Savior. They are also promised that “the scales of darkness shall fall from their eyes; and not many generations shall pass away among them, save they shall be a pure and delightful people.” Although this passage read “white and delightful” in the original manuscript, Joseph Smith changed the word *white* to *pure*, prob-

*Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982; reprinted by FARMS).

2. The Etruscan find makes it likely that the brass plates of Laban were also held together by rings, though the Book of Mormon is silent on that subject. These brass plates may have been what influenced Nephi and later Mormon to keep their records on metal plates.
3. It is likely that the plates used by Mormon for his abridgment of the Nephite records were gold alloyed with another metal, perhaps copper. As we have noted, Joseph Smith wrote to Wentworth that the plates had “the appearance of gold.” Similarly, the Eight Witnesses declared that the plates had “the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship” (Book of Mormon, Testimony of the Eight Witnesses).

ably to avoid the misinterpretation that skin color would literally change. In the Bible and other ancient texts, the term *white* is sometimes used in the sense of “pure” rather than of color.

Daniel C. Peterson, codirector of research for the Institute, noted that theism in general and Mormonism in particular have become popular targets in recent months. “There are people out there who see religion as the cause of violence, and this gives rise to a book like Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*,” he said. But while some see Krakauer’s book as an attack on the church, it actually attacks the very concept of religious faith itself, questioning whether rational individuals are justified in believing in a moral authority greater than themselves. Peterson went on to explain that given Krakauer’s hostility toward religion in general, religious people cannot fairly use the book to criticize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (just as evangelical critics cannot fairly use DNA evidence to discount the Book of Mormon when the same DNA evidence shows that migrations to America took place more than 10,000 years ago, long before many evangelicals believe the earth was created).

Peterson noted that while millions of people were murdered in the 20th century at the hands of atheists, it would be simplistic to blame these atrocities on atheism. By the same token, evil acts committed by “religious” people must be viewed in their