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Egyptian Writing on Gold “Plates”

A recent issue of a popular journal on ancient Egypt discusses a number of sheets of gold foil incised with Egyptian writing.¹ These artifacts provide some interesting parallels to the Book of Mormon.

The sheets of gold foil come from the inside of a coffin found in 1907 in Tomb 55 of the Valley of the Kings, near Luxor, Egypt. A single inscription runs through all the foil sheets and is legible despite folds and wrinkles. The inscription reads: “The King of Upper and Lower Egypt who lives on truth, lord of the two lands [name missing] the son of the living solar disk which is here who lives forever.”² The text and archaeological artifacts found in the tomb date this find to the Amarna period in Egypt and, more specifically, between the reigns of Akhenaten and Tutankhamun (1351–1333 B.C.), or a little before the time of Moses and the Exodus.

While this inscription is certainly an example of Egyptian writing engraved on gold “plates,” it differs from the Book of Mormon plates in significant ways besides the obvious differences in content. The foil was part of the gilded decoration of a *rishi*-style (feather-decorated) coffin and is comparable to the gilded-foil inscriptions found on the furniture in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres, the mother of Cheops (ca. 2600 B.C.). It was common in ancient Egypt for royal coffins to be


overlaid with gilded strips containing inscriptions, which, because of their gold, were highly prized by tomb robbers. One ancient tomb robber described entering a tomb:

We opened the sarcophagi and the coffins that were in them, and we found the noble mummy of this king, equipped with a dagger [literally “scimitar”],³ a great number of amulets and jewelry of gold about his neck, his mask of gold upon him, the noble mummy of this king was entirely covered with gold, while his coffin was overlaid with gold and silver inside and out, and inlaid with all manner of precious stones. We stripped the gold which we found on this noble mummy of this god along with his amulets and jewelry that was about his neck and the coffin in which they lay.⁴

The gold overlays described in that account are of the same type as those found in Tomb 55 of the Valley of the Kings. Although such funerary inscriptions clearly differ from the Book of Mormon plates in format and use, the two records share interesting parallels:

- *Egyptian writing on gold plates.*
- *Scimitars in use in the ancient Near East.* Some critics of the Book of Mormon have claimed that “the cimenter [was only] a Turkish weapon, not known until after the time of Mohommed [*sic*].”⁵ Research has demonstrated, however, that scimitars were known in

the ancient Near East at least as early as the Late Bronze Age, several hundred years before the time of Lehi.⁶

While neither of these discoveries is new in and of itself, it is interesting to find both in confluence and to note their parallels to the Book of Mormon. 

Notes

1. Dennis Forbes, “Cairo Museum in Possession of a Quantity of Gold Foil Which Once Partially Lined the Lid of the Coffin from KV55,” *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt* 12 (summer 2001): 19–25.
2. My translation of the original Egyptian is based on the photos in *ibid.*, 22–23. The line drawings accompanying the photos are inaccurate.
3. The Egyptian word *ḥpšy* is probably a variant of the well-attested Egyptian word *ḥpš*, “scimitar.”
4. My translation of P. Leopold-Amherst 2/12–16 (labeled 2/3–7) in T. Eric Peet, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), plate V. To account for archaeological details, my renditions of certain words differ from those given in some dictionaries.
5. Samuel Hawthornthwaite, *Mr. Hawthornthwaite’s Adventures among the Mormons, as an Elder during Eight Years* (Manchester: Samuel Hawthornthwaite, 1857), 69.
6. See Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Scimitars, Cimenter! We Have Scimitars! Do We Need Another Cimenter?” in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 353.

By John Gee