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Hidden Records

Author(s): John A. Tvedtnes

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chapter 2

Hidden Records

And I am the same who hideth up this record unto the Lord; the plates thereof are of no worth, because of the commandment of the Lord. For he truly saith that no one shall have them to get gain; but the record thereof is of a great worth; and whoso shall bring it to light, him will the Lord bless. (Mormon 8:14)

Moroni's hiding of his father's abridgment of the Nephite records served at least two purposes. First, it kept the plates out of the hands of those who would destroy them either to eliminate the evidence (see Enos 1:14; Mormon 6:6)¹ or to profit from the precious metal from which the plates were made (see Mormon 8:14; JS—H 1:46). Second, concealing the plates in the earth preserved them from the elements until the time came for them to come forth (see 1 Nephi 13:35; 14:26; 2 Nephi 27:22; Enos 1:13, 15–16; Words of Mormon 1:11; Mosiah 12:8; Alma 37:4, 18–19; Mormon 5:12–13; 8:16; D&C 3:19).

In recent years, some critics have noted that while ancient manuscripts of the books in the Bible exist, there are no such manuscripts for the Book of Mormon. In making such decla-

rations, however, they ignore the unique character of the Book of Mormon as a hidden book, of which there was only one ancient copy. Mormon prepared this book and passed it on to his son, Moroni, who buried it and later revealed its location to the prophet Joseph Smith.

The concept of hiding books for future generations to discover is evident in a large number of early documents from the ancient Near East, whence came the peoples of the Book of Mormon. The practice has also been confirmed by numerous archaeological discoveries, most of which were made in the Near East.

Secret Books

Hidden books are, by their very nature, also secret. The concept of books meant to be kept secret from unbelievers or the uninitiated is as old as writing. Early Christians preserved the secrecy of some of their writings. For example, in the *Epistle of Peter to James* that prefaces the *Clementine Homilies*, the apostle wrote, “I beg and beseech you not to communicate to any one of the Gentiles the books of my preachings which I sent to you, nor to any one of our own tribe before trial; but if any one has been proved and found worthy, then to commit them to him, after the manner in which Moses delivered *his books* to the Seventy who succeeded to his chair.”² A similar charge is found in the *Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Disciple*: “Do not let this book come into the hand of any man who is an unbeliever and a heretic. Behold, this is the seventh time that I have commanded thee, O my son Thaddaeus, concerning these mysteries. Reveal not thou them to any impure man, but keep them safely.”³

The *Book of the Rolls* claims to be one of the hidden books passed from Jesus to his disciples Simon and James, then from Simeon Cepha (Peter) to Clement, who commanded that it be

kept secret from the laity (see *Book of the Rolls* f.89b). In *Book of the Rolls* f.138b, Peter speaks to Clement of the “secret books of the Hebrews” from which the accuracy of the Israelite genealogies was ascertained after the books of the genealogies had been destroyed. This statement is immediately followed by Mary’s genealogy.⁴

Some of the fifth-century documents found in a buried jar at Nag Hammadi (Chenoboskion), Egypt, in 1945 tell a similar tale. In the I,2 *Apocryphon of James*, the apostle James said that he was sending to an unknown recipient a secret book that the Lord revealed to him and Peter. He also indicated that ten months earlier he had sent another secret book that the Savior revealed to him, and he mentioned that all twelve apostles recorded both secret and open sayings that Jesus delivered to each of them (see 1.8–18; 1.28–2.16). Another of the documents (II,2; IV,2) gives its name near the end: “the Gospel of <the> Egyptians. The God-written, holy, secret book.”⁵ The document II,1 *Apocryphon of John* 31.28–34 informs us that the resurrected Christ told the apostle John to write down what he had told him and to keep it secure.

Some early Ethiopic Christian documents also speak of secret books written by Christ. In the first section of the *Lefafa Sedek* (Bandlet of Righteousness) we read, “And Jesus wrote with a pen of gold. . . . And [Christ] said unto her (Mary), ‘Take this [book] which I have given unto thee. And thou shalt not reveal it to the man who is not able to bear it, or to keep guard over this Book, but [only] to the wise who believe on Me, and who walk in My commandments.’”⁶ In *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth* (folios 62a–b) we find these words: “Now hearken unto me so that I may tell thee about the Books which are hidden in the New Law. Four are in the Holy Gospel, as the Book sayeth. And there are in it others which our Lord Jesus composed, many which are not written

in this book. And in Peter he saith Twelve . . . And of Paul Four . . . And of John Seven . . . And of James One. And behold all these Books are Twenty-eight. And this word is given to . . . those who are followers of Me.’ And this Book shall not be revealed to every man whom thou shalt meet, but only to those who are learned and to men of understanding.”⁷ The same text speaks of hidden books from the time of the biblical patriarch Serug (Sîrâk in Ethiopic), great-grandfather of Abraham (see Genesis 11:21–23): “And from Sîrâk [there were] two [books] even as he himself saith, ‘Until the reason therefore shall be found, hide my word.’”⁸ Abraham noted that “the records of the fathers” had come into his hands (Abraham 1:31).

Another group who believe in keeping some writings secret from nonbelievers are the Mandaean of Iraq and Iran. The Mandaic *Haran Gawaita* warns them not to reveal the contents of the books in the anonymous writer’s library “in the presence of foolish persons.”⁹ Another Mandaean text, *The World of Light*, speaks of *uthras* (angels) reciting “hidden books.”¹⁰ The Mandaean *Story of Shum bar Nu* (Shem, son of Noah) contains a declaration from Shum often found in Mandaean literature: “I do not forget my hidden books.”¹¹

The writing of Nicotheus “the hidden” is mentioned numerous times, for example, by Porphyry, by Zosimos the alchemist in *On the Letter Omega* and in the *Untitled Treatise* in the Bruce Codex, and in Manichaean writings. A Greek magical papyrus, the *Eighth Book of Moses*, orders the reader to “dispose of the book so it will not be found.”¹²

In one tradition, the practice of keeping books secret goes back to the time of biblical Ezra, who is said to have written ninety-four books. The Lord told him to make twenty-four of these public but to keep seventy for the wise (see *4 Ezra* 14:44–48). This tradition is recounted in one of the books of

the biblical Apocrypha, reminding us that the Greek word *apocrypha* means “hidden” and originally denoted books that were not to be circulated among the general public.

The Egyptian priest Calasiris, during his visit to Delphi, declined to answer all the questions put to him by the Greeks, saying that “prophets alone may read and learn” from the “sacred books.”¹³

The Hermetica

Among the traditions common to alchemy and freemasonry is one of ancient texts handed down by the Egyptian scribal god Thoth, who is identified with the Greek messenger god Hermes. The traditions are explained principally in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, in which we read (13.13) that Hermes Trismegistus told his son Tat (a later form of the name Thoth) that he had writings for him that he should not share with the masses. Though the texts are known largely because they were used by medieval European alchemists, the corpus actually originated in Egypt. Clement of Alexandria (circa 160–215) noted that the forty-two sacred books of the Egyptians were all written by Hermes (see *Stromata* 17.1.46). Other early church fathers who cited Hermetic texts are Lactantius (260–330), Cyril of Alexandria (died 444), and Marcellus of Ancyra (died circa 374).¹⁴

Some Hermetic texts contain elements found in other stories of hidden books. One Arabic tradition, told by al-Qiftî in his *Taʾrîkh* (History), describes a Babylonian named Hermes who recorded the wisdom of antediluvian mankind. The records were recovered after the flood.¹⁵ A similar story is told in the Arabic *Kitāb ḍaḥīrat Aliskandar* (Book of the Treasures of Alexander): Hermes deposited the books, which were meant to be recovered later, in the sea.¹⁶ In other tales, as noted later in

this chapter, it was Noah who hid the texts. Some Hermetic works seem to identify Hermes with Enoch, who, according to the pseudepigraphic literature, left books behind when he was translated. Thus the Greek *Kore Kosmou* 8 indicates that Hermes wrote the mysteries of the heavens in sacred books, which he hid away before being “received into the sanctuary of the everlasting zones.” Hermes intended that the books remain “unseen and undiscovered by all men who shall go to and fro on the plains of this land, until the time when Heaven, grown old, shall beget organisms worthy of you.”¹⁷

Of particular interest is the story of Apollonius, who visited Trophonius and found, in an underground passage, a holy book which he removed and placed on display in Antium.¹⁸ The Hermetic text known as the *Book of Apollonios, the Sage, on the Causes*, describes how Apollonius found this holy book: He “entered a chamber, and behold, I met with an old man sitting on a throne of gold, a tablet of green emerald being in his hand.” Apollonius stole the tablet, which contained “the *Secret of Creation* and the *Knowledge of the Causes of the Things*.”¹⁹ Widengren suggests that this mysterious book is probably identical to the well-known Hermetic text known in Arabic as *Sirr ʿal-ḥalīkah* (Secret of Creation).²⁰

The *Tabula Smaragdina* (Emerald Tablet), an alchemical tract thought to date to the mid-thirteenth century, recounts the legend of the original emerald slab on which the teachings of Hermes were supposedly written in Phoenician. Alexander the Great is said to have discovered the tablet in the tomb of Hermes when he came to Egypt. In a variant story, found in Johann Albert Fabricius’s sixteenth-century *Bibliotheca Graeca*, Abraham’s wife Sarah removed the tablet from Hermes’ tomb in the cave at Hebron, where the patriarchs were later buried.²¹ The Arabic version of the *Tabula* notes that a man named

Balinas (from the Greek Apollonius) found the book in “a dark chamber.” The book was written in Syriac, “the primordial language,” and was in the possession of “an old man sitting on a throne of gold, a tablet of emerald being in his hand.”²²

De Virtutibus Herbarum, a first-century-A.D. Hermetic text attributed to one Thessalos, tells how the author made his way to Egypt to continue his literary studies. During this time, he sought to attain hidden knowledge. At Thebes he met an aged priest who prepared him for a vision by means of a three-day fast, and on the fourth day they entered a special chamber. There Thessalos encountered the god Asclepius (Imhotep), who delivered to him a book from which he could learn.²³

Widengren notes that “the entering of a dark, subterranean chamber in order to find a book of revelation is a theme often recurring in Egyptian and Hellenistic tales” and that “it has further been rightly emphasized that, in this literature, descent into the nether world and ascent to heaven always correspond.”²⁴ To illustrate the latter point, he cites “the so-called *Krates-Book* [which] relates how Krates is elevated to heaven, where he has an experience of the same kind as Apollonios” in the underworld. Krates saw “an old man, the most beautiful of men, sitting on a throne-stool and wearing white garments, in his hand a shining tablet, containing a writing . . . And I inquired about the old man, and it was said to me: this is Hermes Trismegistos.”²⁵ According to Pastor of Hermas, it is an elderly woman wearing a white robe and seated on a chair who delivers the book. (See the discussion in chapter 5, “Angels as Guardians of Hidden Books.”)

Support for the medieval Hermetic tradition is found in other sources as well. The Arabic *Kitāb al-falakīyah al-kubrā* (Book of the Great Astrologers) “is said to have been deposited by Hermes in an underground cave.”²⁶ The Egyptian *Berlin*

Medical Papyrus states that it was discovered rolled up in a case under the feet of an Anubis statue in the days of Tet (or Thoth, who was identified with Hermes), after whose death it was transmitted to King Sent (a second-dynasty monarch) and then restored to the feet of the statue. The same story is told in Papyrus Ebers 856, which contains a recipe “according to what was found in writing under Anubis’ feet in Letopolis. It was brought to the majesty of King Smty.”²⁷

A large stela found at the Egyptian site of Abydos tells how King Neferhotep I wanted to see writings from the earliest times of Atum. He went to the library and searched through the papyri, finding a document that no previous scribe had found. From the long-lost text, he learned of the god Osiris and reinstated his cult. Another large stela at Abydos indicates that Ramses IV did not neglect any of the sacred books written by Thoth, because he wanted to properly learn of the gods. He particularly wanted to know the mysteries of Osiris.²⁸ One Egyptian papyrus, *Papyri Graecae Magicae (PGM) XXIVa*, claims to be a copy of a holy book found in the archives of Hermes/Thoth.²⁹

Chapter 137 of the Egyptian Book of the Dead reads, “And thou shalt write down these things in accordance with the instructions which are found in the books of Prince Herutātāf, who discovered them in a secret coffer (now they were in the handwriting of the god [Thoth] himself (*i.e.*, they were written in hieroglyphs) and had been deposited in the Temple of the goddess Unnut, the Lady of Unu) during a journey which he was making in order to inspect the temples, and the temple-estates, and the sanctuaries of the gods.”³⁰

An important Christian Egyptian Hermetic document is the Nag Hammadi text known as the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. In this fifth-century-A.D. document, found con-

cealed in a large jar buried in the earth, Hermes cautioned his son to “keep silent about what is hidden” and told him that the praise he sings to God should “be written in this imperishable book.”³¹ Hermes then told him, “My son, write this book for the temple at Diospolis [Thebes] in hieroglyphic characters.” After his son promised to do so, he said, “My <son>, write the language of the book on steles of turquoise . . . in hieroglyphic characters.” “I command that this teaching be carved on stone, and that you place it in my sanctuary,” surrounded by divine guardians. “And put a square milk-stone at the base of the turquoise tablets and write the name on the azure stone tablet in hieroglyphic characters.” Again the son said he would do it, whereupon Hermes said, “And write an oath in the book, lest those who read the book bring the language into abuse, and not (use it) to oppose the acts of fate.” Of he who is not “begotten at the start by God,” “he will not be able to read the things written in this book.”³²

An important cache of documents came out of Thebes, Egypt, in the early nineteenth century. The third- or fourth-century-A.D. papyri, thought to have been concealed in a tomb many centuries ago, comprise a temple archive containing temple rituals, including detailed instructions for making records on metal plates. The collection was acquired by the Alexandrian merchant Giovanni Anastasi in 1828, and the documents, now housed in London, Paris, Berlin, and Leiden, are similar in content (and perhaps even handwriting) to an alchemical papyrus held in Stockholm. The Paris papyrus contains a ritual for rendering a person immortal that is similar to some of the initiatory Hermetica, and it includes the prayer found at the end of the *Asclepius* text from Nag Hammadi. One of the Leiden papyri (Papyrus Leiden I 395) may also contain Hermetic material and is entitled *A Holy Book, called Monas, or*

the Eighth Book of Moses. It refers to another work by Moses, *The Key*; to a “holy book” by Hermes, *The Wing*; and to an untitled work by the Egyptian priest Manetho.³³

Some Hermetic traditions made their way into freemasonry. According to Masonic tradition, Enoch invented writing, and fearing that secrets would be lost in the coming flood, he engraved them on a white oriental porphyry stone, which he hid in the earth.³⁴ Another Masonic tradition holds that the two pillars of Solomon’s temple were hollow and that ancient records were hidden therein.³⁵

What is significant about the Hermetica for the present study is their long-standing tradition of documents hidden away for use by the wise. Equally important is the fact that some of the Hermetic documents were themselves concealed in ancient times and discovered relatively recently. Such Hermetic texts confirm the antiquity of the practice followed by some of the Nephite scribes in the Book of Mormon, who also hid up records to come to light at a future time.

The Story of Rabbi Abraham Eleazar

The Hermetic works of ancient Egypt were preserved for the West by European kabbalists and alchemists. One of the later alchemists, Rabbi Abraham Eleazar, in his 1735 *Uraltes Chymisches Werck* (Age-Old Chemical Work), noted that when Jerusalem was destroyed by the emperor Vespasian in A.D. 70, the “Fathers walled in and buried the secrets.” Those who went in search of the hidden books were destroyed by a fire. The rabbi indicated that the books were concealed “at the entrance to the Holy of Holies,” beneath a stone two cubits in depth that was marked with the Hebrew word for fire. They would remain hidden until the coming of Elijah and the Messiah. Eleazar also wrote of “the book of the secrets of Tubal-Cain,” a “secret

book” that was passed down to the prophet Moses and described, among other things, “the movement of the stars of heaven” and “the movement and rotation of the earth.” The tale is reminiscent of Abraham’s gleaned knowledge of the earth and the heavenly bodies from records handed down from “the fathers” (Abraham 1:31).

Eleazar claims that he “found this secret written on copper tablets by Samuel Baruch of our race, in figures, in Chaldaic, Syriac, and Arabic language,” difficult to understand, though “the great Jehova soon opened it up for me, by His power, so that I could grasp and understand these secrets.” The rabbi copied the material engraved on the copper tablets onto tree bark, known from other sources as material for writing.

The story of Rabbi Abraham Eleazar is retold by the eminent twentieth-century Jewish scholar Raphael Patai.³⁶ After discussing the rabbi’s transcription of the text onto tree bark, Patai notes that this is reminiscent of the alchemist Flamel’s assertion that the Book of Abraham the Jew “was made of thin barks . . . its cover was of very thin copper.”³⁷ He includes the following in his footnote to the Flamel reference: “The idea that sacred texts were originally inscribed on metal tablets recurs in the Mormon belief that the *Book of Mormon* came down inscribed on gold tablets. Important documents were in fact inscribed on metal tablets and preserved in stone or marble boxes in Mesopotamia, Egypt, etc.”³⁸ Patai references this idea to an article by LDS scholar H. Curtis Wright and thanks another LDS scholar, John M. Lundquist, for bringing this information to his attention.³⁹

Parts of Eleazar’s story resemble that of Joseph Smith. In addition to its original text being on plates, the book the rabbi found was said to have been written “in Chaldaic, Syriac, and Arabic” characters. Similarly, when Martin Harris took a

transcription made by Joseph Smith from the Book of Mormon plates to Professor Charles Anthon in New York City, Anthon characterized the writing as “Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic” (JS—H 1:64).

The Preservation of Hidden Books

The Book of Mormon records were clearly intended to be kept hidden to preserve them for future generations (see 1 Nephi 13:35–36; 4 Nephi 1:49; title page of the Book of Mormon). Several Nephite prophets asked God to protect the records over time (see Enos 1:13–18; compare 1 Nephi 3:19–20; 5:21; 2 Nephi 27:22; Jacob 1:3; Mosiah 28:20; Alma 37:14, 18, 21; Ether 12:22). This would explain their hiding them up “unto God.” After Ether finished his record, he “hid them in a manner that the people of Limhi did find them” (Ether 15:33).⁴⁰

In an early Jewish text, the *Testament of Moses* 1:16–18, Moses instructed Joshua on how to preserve the books (parchments) he was leaving in his charge: anoint them with cedar (oil?) and deposit them in earthen jars until the day of recompense.⁴¹ We can compare this with Hermes’ anointing of the holy books with “the drug of imperishability,” noted in the earlier discussion of the Hermetic literature.⁴² The Third Section of the Ethiopian *Lefafa Sedek*, patterned after the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, instructs readers, “Guard ye it (*i.e.* the Book), and make it to endure, and ye shall be saved from the fire.”⁴³

The Mandaean of Iraq and Iran, who claim to be descendants of the disciples of John the Baptist, have a number of traditions about the preservation of sacred books. According to *Mandaean Canonical Prayerbook* 73, a letter sent from heaven and sealed by God is hung about the neck of the soul when it is

sent to the Gate of Life. Prayer 74 gives instructions about how to seal the letter in a bottle with clay and impress the clay with a ring.

Burying the Books

The Book of Mormon is but one of a number of ancient texts that were buried in the ground and later brought to light. Others, including large caches such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi texts, are discussed in chapter 10, “The Records Come Forth.” A number of early traditions also note the practice of burying books in the the ground, some suggesting that the practice began with the first man. Hugh Nibley noted the Jewish tradition recounted by Bin Gorion that Adam received a golden book from the archangel Michael and “hid it in the crevice of a rock.”⁴⁴ The twelfth-century rabbi Moses Maimonides reported a Sabaeen tradition that writings of Adam still existed in the ground (see *Moreh Nebukim* 3.29).

The second recension of the medieval *Book of Noah* tells how Enoch was shown in a dream the location (in a cave) of the heavenly book delivered to Adam. After reading the book, he hid it away. It was later delivered to Noah, who also hid it away.⁴⁵ Eusebius, citing Polyhistor, recorded that Noah inscribed a history of everything and buried it at Sippar (*Chronicon* 1.19). The first recension of the *Book of Noah* indicates that the book received by Noah contained cures for the various illnesses afflicting mankind. On a similar note, the Talmud says that King Hezekiah hid away the Book of Cures (see TB *Berakot* 10b; TB *Pesahim* 56a).

Jubilees 8:1–4 reports that Cainan, son of Arpachshad (Noah’s grandson), was taught by his father to write. This enabled him to transcribe a stone he found that contained writings of his ancestors, but he kept the book’s existence from

the knowledge of Noah. A similar story is found in *Zohar* Genesis 76a, which, commenting on Genesis 11:2, indicates that “they found remnants of the secret wisdom that had been left there by the generation of the Flood, and with that they made their attempt to provoke the Holy One, blessed be He.”⁴⁶ *Book of the Rolls* f.121b notes that “when Nimrod was passing through the East, he deposited books making known what Bouniter the son of Noah had taught him.”⁴⁷

Similar stories are told of the ark builder by non-Judaeo-Christian writers. Berossus, the third-century-B.C. Babylonian historian, wrote that the god Chronos appeared to Xisuthros (the Babylonian Noah) in a vision to warn him of the flood. Chronos told Xisuthros to bury in Sippar all available writings to preserve them during the deluge, after which the flood survivors were to retrieve and disseminate them to all mankind.⁴⁸ As mentioned previously, in Arabic and Masonic traditions it was Hermes who hid the records before the coming of the flood.

Paul Cheesman has pointed out two accounts of sacred texts hidden by Mesoamerican Indians. The first comes from an early Spanish friar, who learned from an Otami Indian man a tradition about a book that spoke of God and Christ but had perished after being buried in the ground by its guardians.⁴⁹ The other is the “Golden Book” of the Maya Indians, said to have been hidden away to prevent it from falling into the hands of the invading Spanish. Tradition indicates that the fifty-two gold plates comprising the record contained the history of the Maya.⁵⁰

It should be noted that the practice of burying records was not restricted to those records that were considered sacred. Hugh Nibley noted that when the fabulous Arab king of Hira, Nu'man, built his White Palace around A.D. 400, he ordered

that a copy of Arabic poems be buried beneath the palace for future generations.⁵¹ A more extreme example concerns the oaths of the Gadianton robber band, which oaths were buried and later retrieved (see Helaman 11:10, 26). Similarly, in an Armenian document called by one translator *Adam, Eve and the Incarnation*, Satan tricks Adam into making a pact with him by having him place his hand on a stone, leaving an imprint of Adam's hand and fingers. Satan then buries the stone in the Jordan river, but later, at the baptism of Christ, it was destroyed.⁵²

Records Buried in Tombs

While some records were buried in the ground, others were buried in tombs. Mentioned earlier was the Hermetic tradition of records buried in the tomb of Hermes, known to the Egyptians as Thoth. Egypt is, in fact, a prime example of using tombs to preserve sacred records. In early Egyptian history, texts designed to assist the dead were carved on the coffin itself. Later, papyri and even metallic plates with such spells were buried with the mummies. Many of these are in the tradition of what has been called the Book of the Dead. Wall inscriptions are typically found in the tombs of Egyptian royalty and government officials. Because they frequently recount the accomplishments of the deceased, these have been a source of important information for historians.

In connection with the Egyptian practice, the story of the Joseph Smith papyri and mummies comes readily to mind. A small booklet found among the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, held by the LDS Church (KEPE6), is labeled "Valuable Discovery of *hid[d]en records* that have been obtained from the ancient bur[y]ing place of the Egyptians. Joseph Smith Jr."

Writing about A.D. 1226, the Arab writer Idrîsî noted that a

few years before, a group of Arabs had dug for treasure in the pyramid of the pharaoh Mycerinus (Menkaura) at Giza, Egypt. After six months of hard labor, they found the decayed remains of a man with some golden tablets inscribed in a language none of them understood. The tablets were taken for their gold content, suggesting that they were probably melted down.⁵³

Examples of metal records buried in tombs is well attested. The early Greek writer Plutarch said that when the tomb of Alcmena, mother of Hercules, was excavated, a bronze tablet with a long inscription resembling Egyptian writing was found (see *Moralia*, “De Genio Socratis,” 577E–F).⁵⁴ Similarly, Agesilaos of Sparta, opening a tomb at Haliartos, found an inscribed bronze tablet.⁵⁵ The nine gold plates of Orphism were interred in coffins as guidebooks for the dead,⁵⁶ and the Phoenicians, following an Egyptian practice, wrote letters to the dead on small rolls of thin sheets of lead. These rolls were then dropped into the tomb through openings designed for that purpose.⁵⁷

In 1980 archaeologists opened an ancient tomb adjacent to the Scottish Presbyterian church of St. Andrew in Jerusalem. There they discovered two small rolled-up strips of silver with a Hebrew inscription. Using paleographic evidence, they dated the rolls to the end of the seventh century B.C. or the beginning of the sixth century B.C., the time of Lehi. Both plates include quotations of the priestly blessing from Numbers 6:24–26.⁵⁸

Interment of the dead and of texts in tombs is analogous to the burial of records in the ground. Just as the dead will be resurrected, so too the records will come forth to future generations. Sometimes, as in the case of the Book of Mormon, the concealed documents are placed inside a coffinlike box, as we

shall discuss in chapter 3, “Hiding Records in Boxes.” Indeed, in Judaism, worn-out synagogue scrolls are buried in a solemn funeral service—a practice that will be discussed in chapter 9, “Books in the Treasury.”

Summary

This chapter has used numerous examples to illustrate the long history of concealing documents. While various parts of the world share that tradition, it is most prominent in the ancient Near East, the land from which the Book of Mormon people emigrated to the New World. From this we can suggest that the concealment of the Book of Mormon in the earth is *prima facie* evidence of the book’s ancient origins.

Notes

1. Enos 1:14 notes that the Lamanites wanted to destroy the Nephites, their records, and their traditions. King Benjamin later noted that had it not been for the written records they possessed, the Nephites would have “dwindled in unbelief” like the Lamanites because of the false traditions passed down by their Lamanite ancestors (Mosiah 1:5). Alma believed that the Nephite records would someday convince the Lamanites of the falsity of those traditions (see Alma 9:16–17). His friends, the sons of Mosiah, hoped to convince the Lamanites of this very thing by using the scriptures they possessed (see Alma 17:9; 18:34–40; 21:9, 17; 23:3; 24:7; 25:6; 26:24).

2. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:215. Originally published in 1886.

3. Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), 182.

4. See Margaret Dunlop Wilson, ed. and trans., *Apocrypha Arabica* (London: C. J. Clay, 1901), 1.

5. *The Gospel of the Egyptians*, 69, in James M. Robinson, ed.,

The Nag Hammadi Library, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990), 218.

6. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Bandlet of Righteousness: An Ethiopian Book of the Dead* (London: Luzac, 1929), 63.

7. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Mysteries of the Heavens and the Earth and Other Works of Bakhayla Mîkâ'êl (Zôsîmâs)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 123–24.

8. *Ibid.*, 107.

9. E. S. Drower, *The Haran Gawaita and the Baptism of Hibil-Ziwa* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1953), 17.

10. Werner Foerster, *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 2:154.

11. Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala, Sweden: University of Uppsala, 1950), 73, citing the text published by M. Lidzbarski, *Das Johannesbuch der Mandäer* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1915), 2:63.

12. Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation: Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 179.

13. Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 53, citing Heliodorus.

14. See *ibid.*, 207–9.

15. Cited in Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 83–84.

16. Cited in *ibid.*, 83–84 n. 4.

17. *Ibid.*, 82. The Greek text is included in a note. The story is also recounted in Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 33.

18. See Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 8.19–20.

19. Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 78–79, citing the Arabic text and the German translation in J. Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1926), 135.

20. See Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 79.

21. Both texts are noted in Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 22–23.

22. Cited in Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 77–78. Widengren refers to the Arabic text and German translation in Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina*, 112–14.

23. See Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 162–64. See also the discussion in Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 218–19.

24. Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 80. The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus wrote that in Egypt there were “subterranean passages, and winding retreats, which, it is said, men skillful in the ancient mysteries, by means of which they divined the coming of a flood, constructed in different places lest the memory of all their sacred ceremonies should be lost. On the walls, as they cut them out, they have sculptured several kinds of birds and beasts, and countless other figures of animals, which they call hieroglyphics.” *Roman History* 22.15.30, in C. D. Yonge, trans., *The Roman History of Ammianus Marcellinus* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1902), 311–12.

25. Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 81, citing the Arabic text and the German translation in J. Ruska, *Arabische Alchemisten* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1924), 16–24. Widengren compares the old man with the ancient of days or God, in Daniel 7:9. While Joseph Smith identified the “ancient of days” as Adam, or Michael (a fact supported by some pseudepigraphic texts that have Adam seated with the books of judgment), in *1 Enoch* (from which many scholars believe Daniel borrowed the terminology) and other early Jewish texts, the title is used for God.

26. Widengren, *Ascension of the Apostle*, 80 n. 3.

27. Robert K. Ritner, *Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and their Religious Context*, vol. 18 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 3367 (part 18, section 5).

28. See Georges Posener, *De La Divinité du Pharaon* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1960), 71–72. The stela has since disappeared, probably a victim of the black market in Egyptian antiquities.

29. See Ritner, *Egyptian Magical Practice*, 3367.

30. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1967), 660–61. For the use of temples to preserve sacred texts, see the discussion in chapter 9 of this volume, “Books in the Treasury.”

31. VI,6 *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* 59.13–14; 60.13–16, in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library*, 325. Hermes, under his name Trismegistus, is one of the participants in the dialogue found in another Nag Hammadi text, VI,8 *Asclepius* 21–29 66.26; 69.1, 28; 74.18, 33; 78.14, 31, in which his son Tat is also mentioned (72.30). This text may be the *Perfect Discourse* attributed to Aesclepius in some of the Hermetic literature.

32. *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* 61.18–20, 25–30; 62.1–15, 22–27; 63.1, 4–5, in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library*, 326.

33. See Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 168–73.

34. See Graham Hancock, *The Sign and the Seal* (New York: Crown, 1992), 182, citing Kenneth Mackenzie, *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1987; first published 1877), 200–202.

35. See Hancock, *Sign and the Seal*, 369–70, 573 n. 38.

36. See Patai, *Jewish Alchemists*, 239–53. All quotes used in this section are from Patai.

37. Flamel’s story is recounted in chapter 5 of this volume, “Angels as Guardians of Hidden Books.”

38. Patai, *Jewish Alchemists*, 573 n. 19.

39. See H. Curtis Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 273–334.

40. The records of the Nephite secret combination, sponsored by the devil, were also concealed in the earth and brought forth later (see Helaman 11:10, 26).

41. See James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 1:927. This kind of preparation using oil may be what is meant by one of the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q536), which speaks of “writ[ing] the words of God in a book which does not wear out.” Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 264. Note also the *Cologne Mani Codex*, in which an angel tells Adam “take and write these things which I reveal to you on most pure papyrus, incorruptible and insusceptible to worms.” P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780, 49–50, in Ron Cameron and Arthur J. Dewey, *The Cologne Mani Codex* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979), 39.

42. See the discussion in chapter 8 of this volume, “A Book That Does Not Wear Out.”

43. Budge, *Bandlet of Righteousness*, 78.

44. Hugh Nibley, *Enoch the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 151, citing M. J. Bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (Frankfurt: Kütter and Loening, 1913), 1:263.

45. The Hebrew text was published in Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1967), 3:156–59.

46. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, trans., *The Zohar* (New York: Rebecca Bennet Publications, 1958), 1:259. The story is reminiscent of the finding of the concealed records of the Gadianton band (see Helaman 11:10, 26).

47. Wilson, *Apocrypha Arabica*, 37.

48. See Berossus, according to Polyhistor and Abydenus, cited in W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 135–36. The story is also found in Eusebius (*Chronicon* I.3).

49. See Peter De Roo, *America Before Columbus* (New York: Lippincott, 1900), 224–25, cited in Paul R. Cheesman, *Ancient Writing on Metal Plates: Archaeological Findings Support Mormon Claims* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1985), 52.

50. See Hyatt Verrill, *America’s Ancient Civilizations* (New York: B. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1953), 23, 42, cited in Cheesman, *Ancient Writing on Metal Plates*, 53.

51. See Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 24 n. 19, citing Jawad ʿAli, *Tarikh al-ʿArab qabl al-Islam* (Baghdad: Matbaʿat, 1950), 1:14.

52. See Michael E. Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha relating to Adam and Eve* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 53, 65–67. For other translations of the same story, which exists in three different versions, see also W. Lowndes Lipscomb, *The Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 138–41, 268–69.

53. The story is reported in Budge, *Book of the Dead*, xix n. 3.

54. My thanks to William J. Hamblin for this information. See his “Sacred Writings on Bronze Plates in the Ancient Mediterranean” (FARMS, 1994), 13.

55. See Lillian H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 55–56, cited by Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents,” 278.

56. See William K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (New York: Norton, 1966), 176, pl. 8–10, cited by Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents,” 279. See also the discussion in C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book,” *BYU Studies* 22/3 (1982), 259.

57. See Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 253.

58. The finds were reported by Gabriel Barkay, “The Divine Name Found in Jerusalem,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9/2 (1983): 14–19, and “Priestly Blessings on Silver Plates” (in Hebrew), *Cathedra* 52 (1989): 46–59. The discoveries are discussed by William J. Adams Jr., “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Metal Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 204–6; “More on the Silver Plates from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 136–37. See the discussion in John Gee and John A. Tvedtnes, “Ancient Manuscripts Fit Book of Mormon Pattern,” *Insights*, February 1999.