

Engraved Brass Plates Discovered at Nephi's Harbor

By George Potter

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Perhaps the most surprising and important discovery we made during our September 2006 Expedition to Oman was that Engraved Brass (Bronze) plates had been excavated near the natural harbor of Khor Rori. Richard Wellington and I were the first LDS researchers to claim that Nephi built his ship at the frankincense harbor of Khor Rori. (See our book *Lehi in the Wilderness*.)

The discovery of these brass plates could possibly answer the question that scholars have long debated: *How did Nephi learn how to make metal plates and engrave on them?* BYU professor William R. Phillips has suggested that Nephi "... may have learned [metallurgy skills] from the local smiths of Dhofar [Khor Rori is the frankincense harbor at Dhofar] or from the Indian traders that passed through nearby trading ports..." Recently excavated artifacts at the ruins at Khor Rori include iron axes, iron nails, an iron knife, an iron razor, and iron smelting slag, as well as bronze nails, coins, a bronze bell, and a **small bronze plaque** (see figure accompanying this article), which in lifesize is roughly 8"X4").

Scholars at BYU believe that the brass plates of the Book of Mormon were actually made from a copper and tin alloy, which constitutes bronze.ⁱ While in Oman, we learned that during the first excavation of the harbor of Khor Rori in the early 1950's, the American archaeologist Wendell Phillips excavated seven other bronze plates. The plates Phillips discovered were engraved with text. Four of the metal plates had Talmudic script etched on them, while three other plates were written in the yet-to-be-deciphered south Arabian Shahri language.ⁱⁱ It would appear that when Nephi arrived in the land of Promise, he found a sufficient supply of an even softer metal to etch upon—gold.

During our Oman Expedition to Khor Rori, we visited the Al-Balid Archaeology Park at Salalah. Displayed in the park's museum was the bronze plate that had been recently excavated in the ruins at Khor Rori. It was a fascinating example, showing that bronze plates were being made where Nephi built his ship.

Why did we find the little plate so interesting? It just might provide evidence that Lehi and Nephi taught the people at Khor Rori the gospel (D&C 33:7-8). This would be consistent with my theory that the Wise Men came from Bountiful, the area around Khor Rori. The figure is a chasing, the art form of hammering a design on the back of a thin sheet of metal, resulting in a bas relief of the design appearing on the front of the metal sheet. Notice the robes the man is wearing, the headdress, and the position of the right arm (to the square) and left arm (bent at the elbow then projecting forward).



ⁱ William R. Phillips. Provo,

Utah: FARMS, 2000. Pp. 36-43 <http://home.exetel.com.au/wvduivenvoorde/WAMM-Report130.pdf>

ⁱⁱ "Excavations and Restoration of the Complex of Khor Rori, Interim Report" (October 2000-April 2001), (Pisa: Università di Pisa, 2001), 12-15, 4

ⁱⁱⁱ FARMS, "Copper, Bronze, and Brass," (Provo, Utah: FARMS/ BYU, 2000) p.na. See <http://farms.byu.edu/display-print.php?table=jbms&id=226>

^{iv} Ali Shahri, Khor Rori historian, conversation with author 23 September 2006.