



839. CHARLTON HESTON'S TEN COMMANDMENTS TABLETS FROM *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*. (Paramount, 1956) DeMille's greatest film, and his last, has joined the pantheon of epic films revered from generation to generation. It has become an annual staple of the Easter season, and the few items that have become available from it are dearly treasured – but none more so than the actual tablets of the Ten Commandments, “written with the finger of God”. There are few props in the history of film that are so easily recognizable, and so coveted by seasoned collectors of original Hollywood film relics.

DeMille's recognized the enormous burden of responsibility he faced in bringing this story to the silver screen, and consulted a number of scholars in various disciplines of antiquity to ensure complete authenticity. Respected Egyptologist Henry Noerdlinger was brought in, as well as a host of experts from the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. The challenge was daunting. Dr. Ralph Marcus, another Chicago scholar, wrote a version of the Commandments in an early Canaanite script, practiced in the late Bronze Age (c. 13th century B.C.), Moses' era. The script is a precursor of what was to become the square Hebrew alphabet, with which the Hebrew Old Testament is written today. Of additional concern was the order and number of Commandments on each tablet. Early Hebrew writings suggest that the tablets were inscribed with

four Commandments on one and six Commandments on the other, the four dealing with Man's relationship with God, and the six on Man's relationship with other men. This order was also incorporated into the film Tablets.

Once the design was researched, the actual prop Tablets were created by Paramount Studios scenic artist A.J. Ciralo using thick, richly hewn fiberglass with hand-applied paint speckling to resemble the red granite of Mount Sinai – one of DeMille's key requirements. As they were to be carved with God's “fire bolts”, Ciralo made them to be slightly irregular with molded chips, craters and dings. The finished tablets measure 23-1/2 in. x 12 in. x 1 1/4 in., which approximates a “six handbreadths” dimension as noted in ancient Midrashic descriptions of the tablets.

As with most important props, more than one set of Tablets were made and used in the production. To our knowledge, only five pair – including this set – are known to exist. Mr. DeMille wrote with great pride in his autobiography that he had one set of tablets cut from original Mount Sinai granite, used for some of the more famous publicity stills showing Heston holding them in his arms (albeit supported at the lower edge due to their weight); they are quite easy to spot as to their texture, grain and lack of side seams, and were not used in the film. The four sets of lighter-weight fiberglass Tablets were used for the Mount Sinai scene

and the Den of Iniquity scene when Moses confronts the Golden Calf-worshipping Israelites. One pair of these prop Tablets was sold at Christie's New York in June of 1995 for \$81,700. Another pair, which were discovered in a garage and were extremely weathered from exposure to the elements for over 43 years, were sold at our 1999 sale of Hollywood Memorabilia for \$63,250. The third pair were sold by Profiles in History in 2004 for \$74,750. Offered here is the fourth – and arguably the finest – set of original Ten Commandments Tablets known to exist. With impeccable provenance, these were given by Paramount Studios to the The Sands Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey where they were on display. These Tablets retain the beautiful red and black-speckled patina of the Sinai-inspired granite, with translucent white engraved letters and nearly pristine edges. Four small holes are on the verso of one of the tablets from mounting. Overall the Tablets remain in exceptional condition.

Cradled by Heston in the key scene of the greatest acting role of his life, these tablets are the most instantly recognizable icon from the greatest of all biblical epics, a film that crowned DeMille's illustrious career. Yet they also transcend film history and use. Based on the collective agreement of the leading experts in antiquity, they are the most accurate physical rendition ever created of God's solemn Law as given to his people – the Ten Commandments as they would have appeared to Moses himself. **\$30,000 – \$50,000**