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Confirmatory Evidences of "Mormonism": The Urim and Thummim

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Abstract: Harris cites evidence that many ancient American cultures used “seer stones” and breastplates that suggest a corrupt form of the Urim and Thummim used with the breastplate. He shows how many Indians from North America to Peru in South America used clear stones or crystals for divination.

a few, the fact that I did all I could entitled me to the joy of one who tries to help onward the cause of the Lord. If I had found none, I might yet have won joy by doing service for someone not of my blood. Since a soul is so valuable for me to accomplish my own high destiny, it does not matter so much, when I run out of names that belong to my own family, whose names I take. My first obligation is to my own, but my ultimate obligation is to the human race. If every person will take care of his own family, of course, in time the whole human race will be looked after.

In our work of gathering genealogy, doing our temple work, sealing the dead who have been endowed, that is, finishing the work as far as we can here upon this earth by opening the doors of salvation for those who have gone before—we realize measurably the high ideal which should rest in the bosom of every Latter-day Saint.

The worth of a soul can best be measured in its effect upon man's realization of his highest ideal. Without my brother I cannot attain my highest. Without loving him I cannot look forward to the highest place. Without sacrificing for him I cannot hope to win the fullest recognition. Without him I cannot achieve my likeness to the Lord. We are bound together, one great human family, moving on to a glorious destiny.—(Adapted from a synopsis of a Genealogical Class exercise, appearing in the *Deseret News*, January 20th, 1934.)

CONFIRMATORY EVIDENCES OF "MORMONISM"

THE URIM AND THUMMIM

IN His work of aiding man in eternal progression, God has dealt with him since the beginning of human history. He uses every good means to meet the various conditions; thus in the Bible, stories, allegories, similies, proverbs, parables, poetry and prose are utilized to give God's message. So also in communicating with His children He has adopted various means. Sometimes He appears directly, personally, sometimes He speaks to His people with His voice, at times He sends messengers. Dreams and visions may be used to impart information or instruction. Often such instruction comes through the impressing of an idea upon the mind by the Holy Spirit. At various times, for certain purposes, God has aided His servants in still another way—by means of a sacred instrument, the Urim and Thummim.

The Urim and Thummim was understood and used by the Israelites, though there has been but a meagre description of it handed down to us. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* it consists of "Objects connected with the breastplate of the high priest, and used as a kind of divine oracle." The words themselves are supposed to mean "lights and perfections." Aaron carried the Urim and Thummim whenever he appeared before the Lord in behalf of His people. (Exodus 28:30; Lev. 8:8.) From the blessing Moses pronounced upon Levi (Deut. 33:8-11) it is evident that it was a part of the equipment of one whose special office it was to teach the people "the judgments" and "the law." In the

days when Saul was king of Israel the Urim and Thummim was still in existence. Sammel had, evidently, received revelations from the Lord by means of it, but after the death of that prophet the Lord refused to answer the questions of the king. (1 Sammel 28: 3-6.) The newer translations of the Bible render 1 Sammel 14: 41 as: "O Lord, God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If the guilt be in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim; but if it is in thy people Israel, give Thmmim." (Smith and Goodspeed translation.) This shows that the servants of the Lord anciently inquired of the Lord through the Urim and Thmmim.

THOUGH certain Israelitish people had lost their genealogical records, after the return from captivity, they were to be allowed to keep their stand among the people, "till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thmmim," who could declare the will of the Lord concerning them. (Ezra 2: 59-63; Nehemiah 7: 65.) Post-exilic Israel, so far as history records, had neither the sacred Urim and Thmmim, nor the sacred breastplate to which it was attached. According to Kitto, *Encyclopedia Biblical Literature*, the breastplate of the high priest was "a splendid ornament covering the breast of the high priest. It was composed of richly embroidered cloth, in which were set, in four rows, twelve precious stones, on each of which was engraven the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel."

In the Book of Mormon the Urim and Thmmim is called the "interpreters." The Lord gave these two stones to the brother of Jared and commanded him to seal them up with his writings. (Ether 3: 21-28.) Mosiah had such an instrument which he used to translate the Jaredite record (Omni 20; Mosiah 8:13, 19), and which he handed down to Alma (Mosiah 28: 20.) Alma gave them to Helaman (Alma 37: 20-25), and finally Moroni sealed them up with his writings. (Ether 4: 5.) From Doctrine and Covenants 17: 1, we learn that the Urim and Thummim which came into the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith was the very instrument which God had given to the brother of Jared upon the mount. It was through this instrument that the Prophet Joseph was enabled to translate the characters of the Book of Mormon plates. The Prophet gave the following description of it:

With the records was found a curious instrument, which the ancients called "Urim and Thummim," which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to the breastplate. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God. (*History of the Church*, 4: 537.)

It is interesting to note that though many centuries have elapsed since Moroni buried the "interpreters" with the Book of Mormon records, following the apostacy and destruction of the Nephite civilization, yet there are evidences in native American beliefs and religious practices which seem to point to a knowledge of the "interpreters," or Urim and Thmmim. The use of small stones, transparent or otherwise, usually highly polished, as instruments to help in trying to get information from the Unseen World is to be found among several peoples. The Hnile-che treasure seekers in South America look earnestly for the object of

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From then until midnight of December 31st, branches will test the worth of their ideas and plans. To the branch raising the largest sum of building fund money before midnight of December 31st—all money that finds its way into the building funds from February 10th until the deadline will count—will go the first prize of five pounds. The branch coming second in the rush to fill its coffers will receive two pounds. Other branches who are not fortunate enough to win the coveted prizes, but who nevertheless have worked conscientiously, will all of a sudden discover that, in the meantime, their building funds have doubled or trebled, anyway. And everyone will be happy.

Rules and regulations for this unique contest are now in the hands of each branch M. I. A. presidency. The contest has none of the uncertainties of an Irish Sweepstake. Governing the prizes of the M. I. A. Building Fund Competition will be the unchangeable law of Cause and Effect. The awards await the branches who work swiftly, surely, conscientiously and wisely to win them.

Dr. Ray M. Russell has shown his faith in the ability and power of the British Mission Youth to realize that which collectively they most desire—better places in which to carry on Church activities. He and the committee have placed substantial cash values on good ideas and their accomplishment. The competition is on! Does your branch realize it?—R. S. B.

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their search in a smooth black stone. A crystal was used among the Iroquois, in North America, to attempt to find the identity of one person supposed to be bewitching another.* "The Cherokee magicians by means of their *volunsade* or crystals, obtained power to go to the spirit world and back. In them they beheld events anywhere and anytime they wished. . . . The Zuni priests used crystals for like purposes."† It is reported that "amongst the Mayas the *h'menes* or priests were enabled by gazing into the *Zaztun*, a crystal of quartz or other translucent material, to behold reflected therein the past, present and future, to locate lost articles, to see what was happening to absent ones, to learn by whose witchery sickness and disaster had been caused. Scarcely a village in Yucatan was without one of these stones. (Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist*, p. 165.)"†

Lewis Spence, who has spent thirty-five years in research on Central America, says:

We can glean much regarding the magical propensities of the Maya priesthood from a study of the customs of the related Zapotec priests of southern Mexico, whose religion was of Maya origin. Their high priests

*N. W. Thomas, *Crystal Gazing*, p. 44.

†Stanbury Hagar, in Hasting's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* 1: 434; see also Bancroft, *Native Races*, 2: 697.

were known as Uija-tao, or "great seer," and their chief function was evidently to consult the gods in important matters relating either to the community or to individuals. . . . They employed stones for visionary purposes. (*Magic and Mysteries of Mexico*, pp. 227-28.)

A small crystal was found in an urn in Chichen Itza (in Yucatan) by Dr. Augustus le Plongeon. Speaking of the crystal his wife said: "It may be regarded that he whose remains were there preserved had been a seer and a prophet."*

These concepts remind one forcibly of Ammon's explanation of the power of the seer (Mosiah 8:16-18):

A seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and a gift which is greater can no man have, except that he should possess the power of God, which no man can; yet a man may have great power given him from God. But a seer can know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light, and things which are not known shall be made known by them, and also things shall be made known by them which otherwise could not be known. Thus God has provided a means that man, through faith, might work mighty miracles; therefore he becometh a great benefit to his fellow beings.

It is even reported that "In Peru one of the Incas is said to have discovered crystal gazing."† Could this be a tradition referring to Mosiah?

AT the village of Tecpan, Guatemala, "the judges heard and decided the causes brought before them and their sentences were executed on the spot. Previous to executing them, however, it was necessary to have them confirmed by the oracle for which three of the judges left their seats and proceeded to a deep ravine, where there was a place of worship containing a dark transparent stone, on the surface of which Deity was supposed to indicate the fate of the criminal."‡ Does not this remind one of the somewhat similar use of the Urim and Thummim in Israel?

Breastplates also were of importance, indeed Rivero and Tschudi, in their *Peruvian Antiquities* (1853, p. 10) give us this striking statement: "The American priests scrupulously guarded their sanctuary, and the High Priest carries on his breast a white shell adorned with precious stones which recalls the Urim of the Jewish High Priest." Gold breastplates were worn as a mark of distinction and office by Incas, priests, and their gods were adorned with them on their monuments. M. H. Saville, American scholar, relates of gold breastplates: "Golden breastplates in the form of discs have been found in various parts of ancient America, notably Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Some are plain discs, while others are embossed with figures, or, as in the case of some specimens from Colombia, bear in high relief the representation of two breasts. Curiously they are not so common in Peru as in the northwestern part of South America. . . . Markham, in his *Incas of Peru*, 1910, says: 'Gold plates 5.3 inches in diameter, representing the

**London Magazine*, 1910, p. 129.

†N. W. Thomas, *Crystal Gazing*, p. 45.

‡Hasting's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 4: 782.

sun, with a border apparently designed to denote the months by special signs were worn on the breast of the Incas and the great councillors.'**

In a stone grave in Tepic, two skeletons were found "around whose necks were altogether 26 small bells of solid gold, besides some turquoises. On the breast of one of the dead was a large plate of solid hammered gold, which had been used as an ornament."†

Saville tells further in recording his researches :

Discs were called *teocuitlacomalli* by the Aztecs, and were used as breast ornaments by the caciques (kings) and often placed on the chests of idols, the central piece of a necklace of jadeite beads. Many such are represented in the codices (ancient picture writings), and it was the decoration par excellence of Tezcatlipoca, "the shining moon." In the Codex Ramirez this deity is represented with the breast covered by a circular plate of gold.

As at the time of Christ, the apostate Scribes and Pharisees were following the outward forms of a religion whose power had been lost, so also, the apostate descendants of the Book of Mormon peoples, in their degenerate use of "seer" stones, and the wearing of breastplates—though mixed with error and superstition, give evidence of the possession of the Urim and Thummim, and a knowledge of the sacred breastplates by their ancestors.

The use of the Urim and Thummim in ancient Israel, and in Book of Mormon times, confirmed by evidences given above, give added reasonableness and consistency of the use, in the translation of the Book of Mormon, of a sacred instrument, as a means through which God may work. "Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God." It is another confirmatory evidence of "Mormonism"!—FRANKLIN S. HARRIS, JR.

NORWICH DISTRICT CONFERENCE

THE Norwich District Spring Conference was held at Norwich, February 11th, a culmination of several weeks of intensive effort to make the people of the District "Mormon"-conscious. Mission Authorities present were European Mission President Joseph F. Merrill and Sister Emily T. Merrill, and British Mission President James H. Douglas and Sister Rintha Pratt Douglas. The day's three sessions were well attended.

The morning session was devoted to auxiliary and divisional work, under the direction of President and Sister Douglas. First speaker in the afternoon session, after the customary items of the district business had been presented, was Sister Merrill. She spoke of the frailty of human nature, and the degree to which one is prone to be satisfied with half-measures; concluding with a prayer that each member would survey his own attitude, and rectify it, if necessary, to cure the malady of "not doing," and thus bring about the accomplishment of our aims. Sister Annie

**A Golden Breastplate from Cuzco, Peru*, Heye Foundation, New York, 1921.

†Saville, *Goldsmith's Art in Ancient Mexico*, pp. 180-81, 183; see also p. 183; *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 20, 1933.