



# PUBLISHED REFERENCES TO THE SEER STONE

1850-2013

## [Abstract](#)

This document attempts to locate all mentions of the seer stone used to create the Book of Mormon published in official LDS literature between 1850 and 1980 and to provide a context regarding their accuracy relative to the most correct narrative available based on current research

[Mormonscholar.org](http://Mormonscholar.org)

[admin@mormonscholar.org](mailto:admin@mormonscholar.org)

Version 0.3 – 2020.09.06

## Contents

Version Information – V0.2.....	3
Early references to the seer stone in official church literature.....	3
Analysis .....	3
Key players .....	4
Martin Harris.....	4
Edward Stevenson .....	5
Lucy Mack Smith .....	5
Emma Hale Smith.....	5
David Whitmer .....	5
Brigham H. Roberts .....	6
David O. McKay.....	6
Joseph Fielding Smith.....	6
Francis Kirkham.....	7
A brief history of what probably happened.....	7
Current narrative: .....	11
Methodology.....	12
Urim and Thummim Sources .....	12
U1: Oliver Cowdrey, 1834 .....	12
U2: Joseph Smith.....	13
U3: Lucy Mack Smith.....	13
Antagonistic Sources and Retellings .....	15
A2: 1867 - Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism: Biography of its founders and history of its church .....	15
A3: 1945 - No Man knows my history, Brodie .....	15
A4: 1963: Mormonism: Shadow or Reality, Tanners .....	16
A5: The God Makers.....	16
Seer Stone Sources – Original Accounts not references in LDS writings: .....	16
O1: 1834 Mormonism Unveiled: Willard Chase Affidavit .....	16
O2: 1870 – Emma Bidamon Smith .....	17
O3: 1879 – Emma Bidamon Smith .....	17
Spectacle Accounts – Original accounts in LDS publications .....	17
Goodwillie, “Shaker Richard McNemar,” .....	17

Oliver Cowdrey, 1831 - "Mormonites." Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate.....	17
Whitmer (via Orson Pratt?) – Deseret News 1878.10.09 .....	18
Whitmer interview with Dr. Poulson – Deseret News 1878.08.21.....	18
Seer Stone Sources – Original Accounts Referenced in LDS publications .....	18
S0 : Pratt – 1878.12.04 – Deseret News .....	18
S1: David Whitmer 1881 Kansas City Journal .....	18
S2: David Whitmer 1881 – Chicago Times, Oct 14/Deseret News, Nov 10 .....	19
S3: Martin Harris via Edward Stevenson 1881, Deseret News Dec 13, Dec 28 .....	19
S4: David Whitmer, Apr 9, 1884 - Deseret News Mar 18 .....	21
S5: David Whitmer Dec 1885 – Chicago Daily Tribune/Deseret News Dec 24, Jan 6 .....	22
S6: Martin Harris via Edward Stevenson, 1886 Millennial Star, June 21 .....	22
S7: David Whitmer 1887 – An address to All Believers in Christ, SL Tribune. Dec 11. ....	23
S8: David Whitmer 1888 - Richmond Democrat. June 15 <sup>th</sup> .....	24
Mentions of Seer stones in LDS literature, 1880-1959.....	24
Church owned newspapers.....	24
Church Magazines.....	26
Sunday School Lessons.....	34
Church Books .....	37
Additional Seer Stone Sources available in Utah: 1880-1980.....	44
Mentions of Seer Stones: 1960-2015: (LDS magazines) .....	47
Places that should have mentioned the seer stone, but did not.....	52
Additional insight from David Whitmer .....	52
Spectacle details .....	53
Urim and Thummim in LDS Scriptures .....	54
Bible – only in the OT .....	54
Book of Mormon (introduction) .....	54
Book of Mormon (text) .....	54
D&C .....	55

## Version Information – V0.3

This is a preliminary version. While it is believed that the data is substantially complete and accurate, the commentary is weak in places and additional work on the text is required. Please send comments/corrections to [admin@mormonscholar.org](mailto:admin@mormonscholar.org).

## Early references to the seer stone in official church literature.

Although much has been said about the lack of transparency of the LDS church regarding Joseph Smith's use of a seer stone to translate the book of Mormon, there are a few early references which indicate that some of the membership and much of the leadership were intimately familiar with the seer stone and its usage in translating the book of Mormon.

The placement of one of the seer stones on the Manti Temple during the dedication ceremony, as well as the passing of the seer stones from one prophet to the next (after Brigham had collected them) can be seen as an indication of their perceived value to church authorities.

In order to increase understanding of how transparent the LDS church has been with respect to seer stones, a literature review of LDS periodicals between 1880 and 2013 was performed. The survey, using available online search tools, was extensive but not exhaustive.

In this work we will review:

- 1) The primary sources for the concept of Urim and Thummim
- 2) The primary and secondary sources for the use of the Seer Stone
- 3) How the concept of seer stones was included or excluded from official teaching materials between 1880 and 1980.

## Analysis

Between 1880 and 1887, there were 5 unique interviews of the Martin Harris and David Whitmer that were published in the Deseret News and the Millennial Star. Three of these were republished reports originally carried by "Gentile" publications in the east. The remaining two were recollections of Edward Stevenson of stories which Martin Harris had told him and a group of other members around 1870. One of these accounts was likely edited by an anonymous Deseret news writer, while the other was likely written by Stevenson himself. In each of these accounts seer stones were mentioned. In most of the accounts, a description of the stone was given (brown, oval, egg, or kidney shaped) and the method of use was described (placed in a tall hat, Joseph placing his face tight against the rim). The accounts indicate that Joseph may have used spectacles at an early juncture, but indicate that during the time that Harris and Oliver assisted, the rock in the hat method was the only method employed. Some accounts talk of seeing the Urim and Thummim when they were shown the plates by the angel. This experience is often described as a vision or "second sight" experience.

In 1887, Whitmer published "An Address to All Believers in Christ". This publication clearly address the method of translation, but was not republished by the Deseret News. John Taylor was president of the church from October 10, 1880 to July 25, 1887. In Jan 1888, the last first-hand Witness of the translation, David Whitmer died. In May 1888, the Manti Temple was dedicated. A seer stone was placed on the alter during this event.

Of the original references published by the LDS church in the 1880s, only two were widely published after that decade. The original quote regarding the seer stone from Whitmer took an altered form (omitting the hat) in all periodical publications for the next 100 years.

Most publications which acknowledge the use of the seer stone were written by B.H. Roberts. Later publications acknowledging the seer stone generally reference his works on the topic published in 1907 and 1909<sup>1</sup>.

Seer stones were included in the curriculum in Sunday school between 1918 and 1934. David O. McKay was General President of the Sunday school during this period. In 1937/1942, Kirtland published a work which became the primary resource advertised and referenced for about the next 25 years (a New Witness for Christ in America) which largely displaced Roberts work (New Witnesses for God vol ii: The Book of Mormon). After 1937, there were very few explicit mentions of seer stones and their role in translating the book of Mormon until 2013. Some publications which mention the seer stone specifically deny their role in translation<sup>2</sup>. A couple of vague reference in the 1993 by Maxwell and Nelson appear to have been largely overlooked by the greater body of members who may have not understood their significance without a knowledge of the actual history of translation. Read in context, these references and others indicate a confused dual method – that the Urim and Thummim was used in addition to the seer stone or that the seer stone was the Urim and Thummim. The clearest reference in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a Friend article in 1974 which mentions the egg-shaped brown seer stone was used *in addition* to the “Urim and Thummim”.

## Key players

### Martin Harris

Martin Harris was the first scribe for Joseph apart from Emma, and was the financial backer of the Book of Mormon project. He was an active member in New York and later Missouri until 1838. He joined a variety of churches, but ended up back with the Mormons in Utah between 1870 and his death in 1875. He gave a series of house meetings when he arrived in SLC in 1870 to interested citizens. The person who had helped in his “reconversion” and migration to SLC was Edward Stevenson, an early member who had joined the church in 1833. Stevenson gave two accounts of the stories told by Harris regarding the translation process, one published in Deseret News in 1881 and a second published in the Millennial Star in 1886. Stevenson was likely in Great Brittan on a mission at the time of this second publication<sup>3</sup>. The two accounts are quite similar, though the Deseret News account leaves out key details regarding of the use of the hat to hold the seer stone during translation. Given the importance of this detail to the story being told, it seems likely that this may have been edited out by the publisher. Shortly after the

---

<sup>1</sup> Most references from Roberts come from his “New Witness for God” 3 volume series. The greatest detail regarding the seer stones is found in volume 2 chapter 7, though seer stones are also mentioned in volume 3. The first volume of this 3 volume series was published in 1895.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, Doctrines of Salvation volume 2 and Mormon Doctrine seem to indicate that seer stones were not used in translating the book of Mormon. However, the story of the Latter-day Saints (1970s) does accurately mention the seer stone and that it was used in translation.

<sup>3</sup> <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/missionary/individual/edward-stevenson-1820?lang=eng>

2<sup>nd</sup> account was published, B.H. Roberts escaped to England<sup>4</sup> and served as assistant editor to the press between late 1886 and 1888. He would likely have come across this 2<sup>nd</sup> publication.

Given the series of lectures which Harris did around 1870, it possible that other second hand accounts of his telling about the translation process survive in the form of journals kept by members who attended meetings where he spoke.

### Edward Stevenson

Born in 1820, Stevenson joined the church in 1833. He served several missions and while visiting Kirtland in about 1868, he convinced Martin Harris to join with the Brighamites after the church agreed to cover his travel costs. Harris arrived in SLC in late 1870 and held a series of meetings with interested parties. Stevenson appears to have been a host for Harris, who after a period of a few months settled in with one of his sons in Utah where he resided until his death in 1875. Beginning in 1881 and later in 1886 Stevenson published accounts of what Harris had told him, including a story about him replacing Smith's seer stone to test if it would impact his ability to translate. The first version (1881) is sanitized and has details about the hat removed, but these are added in the later account printed in England while Stevenson was serving as a missionary there.

### Lucy Mack Smith

As mother of the prophet, Lucy's late autobiography is both an invaluable and problematic source of information. She talks about Joseph keeping the Urim and Thummim on his person (in his pocket) and looking into them to see if robbers are coming to get the plates. Clearly this would make sense if the Urim and Thummim were the brown seer stone, but not if they were the large spectacles attached to a breastplate. She is the sole source of the description of the Urim and Thummim where it is attached to a large breastplate. At least some of her statements appear to be fabricated and written for the purpose of cementing the legacy of her family and as such are not historically accurate accounts. She was not living with Joseph during the bulk of the translation and should not be considered a firsthand witness to the translation.

### Emma Hale Smith

As wife of the prophet, Emma was one of the earliest scribes. She lived with Joseph during most of the translation process and would have witnessed most of the translation. Her statements made near the end of her life clearly point to the brown stone and hat as the method of translation after the loss of the 116 pages. However, Emma's statements are viewed by some with caution, as she was aware of at least some of Joseph's polygamy, something which she emphatically denied in statements throughout her life.

### David Whitmer

David Whitmer never served as a scribe, but he did get a close view of everything that was going on. The vast majority of the translation took place in his father's home (Peter Whitmer), and David had a front row seat. He did a series of interviews in the 1880s, 4 of which were picked up with the Deseret News. His most famous testimony was published as "An address to all believers in Christ" in 1887. This

---

<sup>4</sup> Roberts had been arrested on polygamy charges and left during the night to escape imprisonment.

last publication was not reprinted by the Deseret News, but was picked up with the local “anti-mormon” press, the SLC Tribune.

With one exception where David talks about two seer stones (small, brown), all of this other accounts are consistent. He describes the oval or kidney shaped brown stone being the sole instrument used for translating the book of Mormon. David adds some key details such as the fact that the small oval stone was “called Urim and Thummim”. He describes the stone as “chocolate color, nearly egg-shape, and perfectly smooth, but not transparent.” In all of his accounts, he underscores the importance of the hat: “When the seer-stone was not placed in the hat, no characters or writing could be seen therein”. He further explains that one character on the plates (which would appear on a piece of parchment that Joseph could see in the stone) could correspond to a single proper noun or one or two sentences of text. This pattern of having a single character represent a sentence or more of text is consistent with Joseph’s later translation project, the Book of Abraham.

### Brigham H. Roberts

Born in 1857, B.H. Roberts is considered by some to be the most important intellectual or apologist in the history of the LDS church<sup>5</sup>. He served a mission from 1886 to 1888 in England in order to avoid incarceration due to polygamy and was the assistant editor of the Millennial Star during that time. He was called to the presidency of the 70 and served in that position from 1888 to his death in 1933. As an assistant church historian from 1902-1933, Roberts had direct access to church records, journals, etc. He was a strong revisionist with respect to the translation method, and argued passionately for the concept that both the seer stone and the Urim and Thummim (as described by Smith & Cowdrey) were used. His approach to the subject in many ways forms the basis for the teachings adopted by the LDS church after 2013. After his death in 1933, the church distanced itself from seer stones in the official teaching material.

### David O. McKay

McKay was president of the Sunday school from 1918 to 1934. This corresponds well to when the seer stones were part of the curriculum for the Sunday school classes. However, the drop-off in seer stones from the lessons also corresponds to the death of Roberts. Which of these events was more influential may be difficult to ascertain. As president of the church from 1951-1970, there were essentially no references to seer stones in official church literature indicating the actual method of translation.

### Joseph Fielding Smith

As keeper of the Church history department and records for more than 50 years, Smith had access to countless documents which would show that the brown stone was used. As the church president, he had personal access to both the brown and white seer stones. However, he chose to indirectly deny that the seer stone was used in 1956, stating that he thought “It hardly seems reasonable to suppose that the Prophet would substitute something evidently inferior under these circumstances.”. As Roberts was his assistant in the church history department from 1902-1933, he would have been aware of Roberts strong opinion on the matter.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.deseretnews.com/top/168/10/BH-Roberts-Top-10-LDS-6Intellectuals7.html>

## Francis Kirkham<sup>6</sup>

Apologist and author of Source Material on the Book of Mormon which later was published as A New Witness for Christ in America. His brother, Oscar Kirkham<sup>7</sup> was a general authority from 1941 to 1958. Kirkham denied that seer stones were used in the translation process starting in 1937 and was one of the best published authors on this topic from 1937-1960. His most famous publication: “A new witness for Christ in America” may have been meant to replace the work “A new witness for God” by Roberts. Kirkham’s book was mentioned approximately 41 times between 1943 and 1966 in the Improvement Era. By comparison, Roberts’ book was mentioned about 66 times<sup>8</sup> between 1909 and 1927.

## A brief history of what probably happened

1822 (roughly): Willard Chase finds the brown stone while digging for buried treasure on his property with the Smiths. The stone was reportedly found at a depth of about 20-24 feet. Joseph Smith sticks it into a hat and claims that he can see things. He borrows the stone from Chase and returns it months or years later. In about 1825, Hyrum borrows the stone again but this time fails to return it.

1820-1826: Smith involved in at least 15 separate digs for buried treasure. He also uses his hat and the brown stone to find other things for neighbors, charging on one occasion \$0.75 - roughly the cost of purchasing a bible.

1827 (Sept 22): Book of Mormon translation project starts. Smith uses spectacles which he reportedly found with the plates for a brief period prior to losing the 116 pages. Harris mentions the spectacles, but notes that Joseph used the brown seer stone most of the time when he was the scribe (i.e. prior to the loss of the 116 pages).

1828 (summer): Harris loses the 116 pages of the manuscript. They were likely stolen and burned by his wife who was worried that his financial backing of Smith would result in the loss of their farm or other property. Various later accounts point to the “Urim and Thummim” being taken at this point. However, it is likely that the “spectacles” were what actually went missing (if they existed). They were not called the Urim and Thummim until 1832 or 1833. No reputable account notes the magical Nephite interpreters (Urim and Thummim *or* spectacles) being used after this point. For the entire period the Oliver served as scribe, the brown stone + top hat method was employed. All of the current Book of Mormon was revealed/dictated/translated in this manner. The plates were not used in any substantive way in the creation of the Book of Mormon manuscript.<sup>9</sup>

1829 – (June): Book of Mormon complete. Printing complete on Mar 26, 1830. The Book of Mormon contains passages which indicate that a seer is:

... a man that can translate the records; for he has wherewith that he can look, and translate all records that are of ancient date; and it is a gift from God. And the things are called *interpreters*,

---

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis\\_W.\\_Kirkham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_W._Kirkham)

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar\\_A.\\_Kirkham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_A._Kirkham)

<sup>8</sup> This is not an exact count. There are 66 mentions, but some of these are probably to Volume 1 and/or volume 3 which does not discuss this topic in the way that seer stones are discussed in volume 2.

<sup>9</sup> This is a point on which both critical and faithful scholars are agreed. See for example the statements of Larry Morris of the Joseph Smith Papers project (102:30-104:50, Benchmark Books lecture Apr 25, 2019).

<https://youtu.be/53z8Tly8IX0?t=3750>



and no man can look in them except he be commanded, lest he should look for that he ought not and he should perish. And whosoever is commanded to look in them, the same is called seer.

... And *the king said* that a seer is greater than a prophet.

... Ammon said that a seer is a revelator and a prophet also; and *a gift which is greater can no man have*, except 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.<sup>10</sup>

1828-1829: Smith receives a number of revelations using the brown seer stone. These revelations are later published as having been received through the “Urim and Thummim”<sup>11</sup>.

1830 – early spring: Joseph gives his brown seer stone to Oliver.

1830 – Apr: Church of Christ formally established. Joseph tells followers that they are no longer to rely on the stone for revelation but that they will need to rely on the Holy Ghost going forward<sup>12</sup>.

1830 - June: Smith put on trial in New York for glass-looking (i.e. use of a seer stone). Acquitted due to statutes of limitations. Oliver testifies that Joseph used spectacles in the translation process and *not* the brown seer stone.

1830 – Aug: Hyrum Page is receiving revelations from his seer stone for the church. Hyrum was one of many New York members who had their own seer stones. Other members with seer stones included at least 2 of the Whitmers. After a heated internal debate, Oliver and others are convinced that Joseph is the only one who can receive revelations through his seer stone and they crush up Hyrum’s seer stone and burn the revelations.

1830 – Dec: Oliver preaching in Ohio on his was to preach to the “Lamanites”. While there, he preaches to a shaker community. A journal entry from one of the listeners indicates that he taught a hybrid story at this time involving the spectacles and the top hat:

It claims its origin from original engravings on *plates of brass* deposited in a stone box & buried in the earth sometime in the fourth century & showed to the said Smith by an angel, & dug up

---

<sup>10</sup> Mosiah 8:13-17. Note: This was among the first pages translated in the Book of Mormon. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosiah\\_priority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosiah_priority)

<sup>11</sup> The indication that the *Urim and Thummim* was used was first published in the section headings in the 1921 version of the D&C. Only sections 3, 6, 7, 11, 14, and 17 are noted in the chapter headings as coming from the *Urim and Thummim*. However, based on the testimony of Whitmer, it appears likely that sections 1-19 were all received via the brown rock placed in a top hat.

<sup>12</sup> Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ, pg 32: “He told us that we would all have to depend on the Holy Ghost hereafter to be guided into truth and obtain the will of the Lord. The revelations after this came through Joseph as ‘mouth piece;’ that is, he would enquire of the Lord, pray and ask concerning a matter, and speak out the revelation, which he thought to be a revelation from the Lord”

by the said Smith & translated by inspiration. The engraving being unintelligible to learned & unlearned. There is said to have been in the box with the plates **two transparent stones in the form of spectacles** thro which the translator looked on the engraving & **afterwards put his face into a hat & the interpretation then flowed into his mind.** Which he uttered to the amanuensis who wrote it down, The said amanuensis by name Oliver Cowdery, was lately at the North lot & gave this account.<sup>13</sup>

1831 – Apr: Smith moves to Ohio. Other New York Saints move to Ohio and then most continue on to Missouri.

1831 – Oct 25: After moving to Ohio, Joseph Smith was no longer willing to talk about the seer stone in relation to the translation process. This might be due to limited beliefs regarding seer stones in the Ohio area.

After being asked to talk about the translation process by his brother Hyrum,

Br. Joseph Smith jr. said that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things &c.<sup>14</sup>

1832: Phelps conflates the Urim and Thummim with the Nephite interpreters for the first time.

1833: Phelps again refers to the Nephite interpreters as the Urim and Thummim.

1834: Oliver publishes the now famous account of the translation process:

These were days never to be forgotten – to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he **translated, with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, “Interpreters,” the history, or record, called “The book of Mormon.”**<sup>15</sup>

1838: Smith publishes his own account of the translation:

“I obtained them [the plates], and the Urim and Thummim with them; by the means of which, I translated the plates; and thus came the book of Mormon.”<sup>16</sup>

1842: Smith statement in the Wentworth letter:

“With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called ‘Urim and Thummim,’ which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rims of a bow fastened to a

---

<sup>13</sup> Shaker Richard McNemar: The Earliest Book of Mormon Reviewer, by Christian Goodwillie, Journal of Mormon History, Vol 37, No. 2 (Spring 2011). pp 138-145. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23291640?read-now=1&seq=6#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23291640?read-now=1&seq=6#page_scan_tab_contents)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/15>

<sup>15</sup> Messenger and Advocate, Vol 1 No 1. October 1834. Spelling corrected.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Smith, “Answers to Questions,” Elders’ Journal, July 1838, in Early Mormon Documents, ed. Vogel, 1:52.

breastplate. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God.”<sup>17</sup>

1840s: Smith continues to use seer stones including during his translation of the Book of Abraham (1835-1842). He continues to collect at least 2 new stones in Nauvoo and indicates that they will be part of the temple ceremony when complete<sup>18</sup>. He gives a white seer stone to at least one individual and proclaims (in D&C) that everyone in the celestial kingdom will have a white seer stone.

1844: Smith dies. Brigham later records that there were 5 seer stones collected/used by Joseph and that they all went to separate parties.

1850: As Oliver is dying, Brigham sends out a brother (Phineas Young) who obtains the brown seer stone from Oliver’s widow. Brigham has this stone until his death, after which it is given to one of his wives in his will. Later it again becomes the property of the LDS church and remains in their possession from about 1880 onward. The LDS church also has the white seer stone during this time period. Two other seer stones (green and the round one with holes) are in private collections during this time period. The green stone was given to the church around 1990 by a wealthy lawyer who purchased the stone at the request of Hinckley.

1870: Edward Stevens convinces Harris to come out to Utah. Harris agrees to go through rebaptism and other ordinances even though he claims that he has never apostatized. Shortly after arriving he holds a series of house meetings and tells at least one story about the brown seer stone and how it was used in the translation. Not widely published at the time, these would be widely published in the 1880s about 5 years after Harris’ death. There are likely multiple journal accounts of the stories that Harris told at this time.

1880s: David Whitmer gives a series of interviews – about 72 during his lifetime. During the 1880s, at least 3 of these interviews were republished in Deseret News, sometimes multiple times. Each of these 3 interviews tells similar stories and each underscores that the translation method consisted of placing the brown egg-shaped seer stone in a tall top-hat and then placing his head against the rim, whereupon he would see a piece of parchment and read off the translation. One interview incorrectly reports that there are two small brown seer stones. This may have been confusion on the part of the reporter.

1888: Manti temple is dedicated. Sources report that one of the seer stones (brown or white?) was placed on the alter during the dedication. It is called the “Urim and Thummim” when used in this capacity.

In 1885 and 1901, official publications denounce various forms of superstition: astrology, palm reading, and the use of peep-stones. No mention is made in these articles of the use of such stones by Joseph Smith.

Between 1882 and 1902, there were 8 reprints of the original 6 accounts published in the 1880s. However, almost all of the reprints concentrated on the second hand 1881 account of Martin Harris which mentions a seer stone, but not the hat.

---

<sup>17</sup> In Early Mormon Documents, ed. Vogel, 1:171; see his similar account in 1843, 1:185.

<sup>18</sup> D&C Section 130.

In 1904, Roberts addresses seer stones and the Urim and Thummim with an apologetic argument comparing these instruments to a telescope. Roberts is the main publisher who espouses the idea of the seer stone being used in addition to the Urim and Thummim for the next 30 years. However, he changes/abridges the quotes when retelling them and in most cases entirely omits the hat.

Between 1918 and 1934, there were 8 clear references to the seer stone. In all cases, they were presented as being used in addition to the Urim and Thummim. In the 1921 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, several section headings noted that they were received through the “Urim and Thummim” for the first time. They were actually received using the brown seer stone.

After 1934, there were only a few references to the seer stone. Starting in 1939, most of the references to seer stones deny or question their use in the translation process. The denials intensify after 1945 when Brodie publishes “No Man Knows My History”. The 1956 and 1958 publications of Doctrines of Salvation and Mormon Doctrine cemented this view. “Peep stones” were said to be Satan’s imitation of the Urim and Thummim – not the Urim and Thummim itself.

A single reference in 1974 is a clear indication that a brown seer stone was used. A 1977 article poses the question, but does not answer it. The 1993 article by Nelson breaks new ground for being the first article to quote Whitmer correctly but also introduces a modified quote by Cowdrey (omitting the Urim and Thummim) to avoid direct contradiction.

The 2013 Gospel Topics essays clearly states that the proposed translation narrative put forth by Roberts in 1907 had become the official doctrine of the church. This theory prostates that Joseph used the Urim and Thummim and the brown seer stone to translate or reveal the text and that they were interchangeable. It does not give details regarding the statements that a single character could stand for a proper name or 1-2 sentences of text. Nor does it point out that the rock would glow and that parchment would appear whereupon a character would appear on the top and the translation would appear below it.

This 2013 account quotes Oliver as being authoritative regarding the 1831 court account of the spectacles (which are termed the Urim and Thummim) without noted that Oliver perjured himself to free Joseph from charges of being a glass looker. In the 2013 and 2015 articles, inaccurate quotes from Oliver and Smith regarding the use of the Urim and Thummim are absent from the articles.

After the 2015 article outlining the contents of the 2013 Gospel topics essay, church members have largely adopted a dual-translation technique paradigm. According to this theory, Joseph could use the Urim and Thummim (spectacles?) and brown seer stone interchangeably and these two tools were both used to translate the book of Mormon.

## Current narrative:

The LDS church currently (2013-2019) maintains that:

- Joseph used both the (brown) seer stone and the Urim and Thummim to translate the book of Mormon.
- Joseph translated the text from a foreign language – “reformed Egyptian”.
- Joseph didn’t really talk about the translation – he only said that it was done by the Gift and Power of God.

- The seer stone is similar to other physical instruments used in the bible such as the rod of Aaron.
- The seer stone does not have any special power – it is simply a rock. However, it allowed Joseph to accomplish an important task and helped people to believe in him and him to believe in himself. The stone served as a medium for Joseph to receive revelation.
- White Seer stones will be given to those who go to heaven.
- Joseph used the hat because the light was hard to see otherwise. No images produced between 2015 and 2019 by the church show Joseph with his face against the hat. Starting in 2017, he is generally shown viewing the hat at a distance, using his hand to block out strong light coming from a nearby window. Since 2015, there have been no new images showing the Urim and Thummim depicted as glasses. Images showing the glasses generally use clear lenses and have dimensions which are similar to those that would fit a modern human.

## Methodology

LDS periodicals were searched on Archive.org using the following basic query for the words “seer stone”.<sup>19</sup> All references which indicated that the seer stone was something outside of the Urim and Thummim were extracted for this document. In addition, key word searches in Google Books and on LDS.org in their periodical searches were conducted. Lastly, Utah newspapers were searched for the term “seer stone” and “peepstone” between 1850 and 1980<sup>20</sup>. The results shown are thought to be relatively thorough, but not exhaustive.

## Urim and Thummim Sources

### U1: Oliver Cowdrey, 1834

...on Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup>, commence to write the book of Mormon. These were days never to be forgotten – to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, **with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, “Interpreters,”** the history, or record, called “The book of Mormon.”<sup>21</sup>

### U1B – 1993 Nelson modification

“These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated ... the history or record called ‘The Book of Mormon.’”

---

<sup>19</sup> Basic query:

[https://archive.org/search.php?query=seer%20stone&sin=TXT&and\[\]=subject%3A%22Church+periodicals%22](https://archive.org/search.php?query=seer%20stone&sin=TXT&and[]=subject%3A%22Church+periodicals%22)

<sup>20</sup> Basic query: [https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/search?q=%22seer+stone%22&year\\_start=1869&year\\_end=1910](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/search?q=%22seer+stone%22&year_start=1869&year_end=1910)  
or

[https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23389690&q=%22seer+stone%22&year\\_start=1881&year\\_end=1990](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=23389690&q=%22seer+stone%22&year_start=1881&year_end=1990)

<sup>21</sup> Messenger and Advocate, Vol 1 No 1. October 1834.

## U2: Joseph Smith

### U2A: 1831 Oct 25 Statement from the conference in Ohio:

Br. Hyrum Smith said that he thought best that the information of the coming forth of the book of Mormon be related by Joseph himself to the Elders present that all might know for themselves.

Br. Joseph Smith jr. said that it was **not intended to tell** the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the book of Mormon, & also said that it was not expedient for him to relate these things &c.<sup>22</sup>

### U2B: 1832 Journal Account Written by Joseph Smith:

...the Lord had forbid it and he returned to me and gave them to <me> <to> translate and I said I said cannot for I am not learned but **the Lord had prepared ~~spectticle~~ spectacles for to read the Book** therefore I commenced translating the characters and thus the Propicy [prophecy] of Isiaah was fulfilled<sup>23</sup>

### U2C: 1838 statement

"I obtained them [the plates], and the **Urim and Thummim** with them; by the means of which, I translated the plates; and thus came the book of Mormon."<sup>24</sup>

### U2D: 1842 Wentworth letter statement:

"With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called '**Urim and Thummim**,' which consisted of **two transparent stones** set in the rims of a bow fastened to a breastplate. Through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God."<sup>25</sup>

## U3: Lucy Mack Smith

Lucy published "Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations" was written by Lucy Smith in 1845 and published by Orson Pratt in 1853. It was ordered destroyed by Brigham Young in 1865. A committee was set up to "carefully review and correct the original work throughout" which they did at that time. This "corrected" version was published as the History of Joseph Smith by his Mother, Lucy Smith (revised by George A. Smith and Elias Smith) in 1902.

Lucy does not mention seer stones or peep stones in the text, but in several places talks about the Urim and Thummim. It is clear that at least some of these references give insight regarding the brown seer stone and its used in spite of her attempt to cover-up the details regarding this stone. Most of the references to the Urim and Thummim are copied from official church accounts and are omitted here for brevity.

---

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/15>

<sup>23</sup> "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 5, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/5>

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Smith, "Answers to Questions," Elders' Journal, July 1838, in Early Mormon Documents, ed. Vogel, 1:52. Also canonized as Joseph Smith History, 1:62. "I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them..."

<sup>25</sup> In Early Mormon Documents, ed. Vogel, 1:171; see his similar account in 1843, 1:185.

Unique mentions include the following:

**Joseph kept the Urim and Thummim constantly about his person**, by the use of which he could in a moment tell whether the plates were in any danger. Just before Emma rode up to Mrs. Wells, Joseph, from an impression that he had had, came up out of the well in which he was laboring, and met her not far from the house. Emma immediately informed him of what had transpired, whereupon **he looked in the Urim and Thummim, and saw that the Record was as yet safe**; nevertheless, he concluded to return with his wife, as something might take place that would render it necessary for him to be at home where he could take care of it.<sup>26</sup>

That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was, indeed, nothing more nor less than the **Urim and Thummim, and it was by this that the angel showed him many things which he saw in vision**; by which also he could ascertain, at any time, the approach of danger, either to himself or the Record, and on account of which **he always kept the Urim and Thummim about his person**.<sup>27</sup>

Lucy gives one of the very few accounts of the breast plate and Urim and Thummim as follows:

...he handed me the **breast-plate** spoken of in his history.

It was wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief, so thin that I could feel its proportions without any difficulty.

It was concave on one side, and convex on the other, and extended from the neck downwards, as far as the center of the stomach of a man of extraordinary size. It had four straps of the same material, for the purpose of fastening it to the breast, two of which ran back to go over the shoulders, and the other two were designed to fasten to the hips. They were just the width of two of my fingers, (for I measured them,) and they had holes in the end of them, to be convenient in fastening. **After I had examined it, Joseph placed it in the chest with the Urim and Thummim**.<sup>28</sup>

Note that in one account she says that he always kept the Urim and Thummim on his person and in the other account they are placed in a chest.

(after loosing the 116 pages)... I had sinned in delivering the manuscript into the hands of a wicked man, and, as I had ventured to become responsible for his faithfulness, I would of necessity have to suffer the consequences of his indiscretion, and **I must now give up the Urim and Thummim into his (the angel's) hands**.

"This I did as I was directed, and as I handed them to him, he remarked, 'If you are very humble and penitent, it may be you will receive them again; if so, it will be on the twenty-second of next September'<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> 1902, pg 104.

<sup>27</sup> 1902, pg 106.

<sup>28</sup> 1902, pg 107.

<sup>29</sup> 1902, pg 124.

... "After the angel left me," said he, "I continued my supplications to God, without cessation, and on the twenty-second of September, I had the joy and satisfaction of *again receiving the Urim and Thummim*, with which I have again commenced translating, and Emma writes for me, but the angel said that the Lord would send me a scribe, and I trust his promise will be verified."<sup>30</sup>

...One morning they sat down to their work, as usual, and the first thing which presented itself *through the Urim and Thummim*, was a commandment for Joseph and Oliver to repair to the water, and attend to the ordinance of baptism. They did so...<sup>31</sup>

... Near this time, as Joseph was translating by means of the Urim and Thummim, **he received instead of the words of the Book**, a commandment to write a letter to a man by the name of David Whitmer, who lived in Waterloo...<sup>32</sup>

It is clear from the stories that:

1. Joseph kept the "urim and thummim" – i.e. probably the brown seer stone in the leather pouch – always on his person in order to be able to see if any danger was coming.
2. Joseph would see other things in the seer stone than simply the book of Mormon and its translation. Two cases are mentioned: 1) The commandment to get baptized and to baptize Oliver and 2) The commandment to write a letter to David Whitmer to request assistance.

## Antagonistic Sources and Retellings

Note: This list is not exhaustive and concentrates on accounts to which replies were made in official or semi-official church literature.

### A2: 1867 - Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism: Biography of its founders and history of its church

By Pomeroy Tucker. This book, which is clearly negative in tone outlines the use of seer stones found in the Chase well in sept 1819. It describes the stone as the shape of a child's foot and white. Note: This conflicts with other accounts that the brown stone was found in Chase's well or treasure dig. After describing the Urim and Thummim (glasses) and their use in the translation, it says, "The spectacle pretension, however, is believed to have been purely an after-thought, for it was not heard of outside of the Smith family for a considerable period subsequent to the first story."<sup>33</sup>

### A3: 1945 - No Man knows my history, Brodie

Though it was first given neutral or even positive reviews by the LDS church, by 1947 Brodie had been excommunicated and a series of articles in the ERA were written to try to disprove her findings and claims in the book. Among other things, the book claimed that Joseph used the same brown stone for treasure hunting that he later used in translation of the Book of Mormon.

---

<sup>30</sup> 1920, pg 126.

<sup>31</sup> 1902, pg 131.

<sup>32</sup> 1902, pg 135.

<sup>33</sup> Pg 33. Origin and Rise of Mormonism.

[http://www.fullerconsideration.com/images/Origin\\_rise\\_and\\_progress\\_of\\_Mormonism.pdf](http://www.fullerconsideration.com/images/Origin_rise_and_progress_of_Mormonism.pdf)



#### A4: 1963: Mormonism: Shadow or Reality, Tanners

Starting around 1963, Jerald and Sandra Tanner published a number of books including *The Changing World of Mormonism*, *The Case Against Mormonism Vol 1-3*, *The Mormon Kingdom (Vol 1,2)*, and *Evolution of the Mormon Temple Ceremony: 1842-1990*. Their publications detailed the seer stones and their usage in both treasure hunting and the translating of the Book of Mormon. These publications were widely considered to be “anti-Mormon propaganda” by church leaders and members at the time of their publication.

#### A5: The God Makers

In 1982, a film and book called “the God Makers” was released. It was distributed widely among Baptist congregations and Evangelicals with the purpose of dissuading people from joining the Mormon Church. Widely criticized by both those inside and outside of LDS church due to its inflammatory nature and lack of accuracy. In the film, the use of a “peep stone” as the method for translating the Book of Mormon is mentioned.

### Seer Stone Sources – Original Accounts not references in LDS writings:

This section/list is not exhaustive:

#### O1: 1834 Mormonism Unveiled: Willard Chase Affidavit

I became acquainted with the Smith family, known as the authors of the Mormon Bible, in the year 1820. At that time, they were engaged in the money digging business, which they followed until the latter part of the season of 1827. In the year 1822, I was engaged in digging a well. I employed Alvin and Joseph Smith to assist me; the latter of whom is now known as the Mormon prophet. After digging about twenty feet below the surface of the earth, we discovered a singularly appearing stone, which excited my curiosity. I brought it to the top of the well, and as we were examining it, **Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat.** It has been said by Smith, that he brought the stone from the well; but this is false. There was no one in the well but myself. The next morning he came to me, and wished to obtain the stone, alleging that he could see in it; but I told him I did not wish to part with it on account of its being a curiosity, but would lend it. After obtaining the stone, he began to publish abroad what wonders he could discover by looking in it, and made so much disturbance among the credulous part of community, that I ordered the stone to be returned to me again. He had it in his possession about two years. --I believe, some time in 1825, Hiram Smith (brother of Joseph Smith) came to me, and wished to borrow the same stone, alleging that they wanted to accomplish some business of importance, which could not very well be done without the aid of the stone. I told him it was of no particular worth to me, but merely wished to keep it as a curiosity, and if he would pledge me his word and honor, that I should have it when called for, he might take it; which he did and took the stone. I thought I could rely on his word at this time, as he had made a profession of religion. But in this I was disappointed, for he disregarded both his word and honor.

In the fall of 1826, a friend called upon me and wished to see that stone, about which so much had been said; and I told him if he would go with me to Smith's, (a distance of about half a mile) he might see it. But to my surprise, on going to Smith's, and asking him for the stone, he said, "you cannot have it;" I told him it belonged to me, repeated to him the promise he made me, at

the time of obtaining the stone: upon which he faced me with a malignant look and said, "I don't care who in the Devil it belongs to, you shall not have it."

#### O2: 1870 – Emma Bidamon Smith

Now the first that my husband translated, was translated by use of the Urim, and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he **used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather a dark color.**<sup>34</sup>

#### O3: 1879 – Emma Bidamon Smith

In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his **face buried in his hat, with the stone in it**, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.<sup>35</sup>

### Spectacle Accounts – Original accounts in LDS publications

#### Goodwillie, "Shaker Richard McNemar,"

...The engraving being unintelligible to learned & unlearned. There is said to have been in the box with the plates **two transparent stones in the form of spectacles thro which the translator looked on the engraving & afterwards put his face into a hat & the interpretation then flowed into his mind.** Which he uttered to the amanuensis who wrote it down, The said amanuensis by name Oliver Cowdery, was lately at the North lot & gave this account. He & others being on their way to Missouri to open this new revelation to the Indians whose genealogy it professes to trace from the line of Joseph & from the time of their first settlement in America at the period of the Babylonian captivity...<sup>36</sup>

#### Oliver Cowdrey, 1831 - "Mormonites." *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*<sup>37</sup>

During the trial it was shown that the Book of Mormon was brought to light by the same magic power by which he pretended to tell fortunes, discover hidden treasures, &c. Oliver Cowdry, one of the three witnesses to the book, testified under oath, that said Smith found with the plates, from which he translated his book, **two transparent stones, resembling glass, set in silver bows.** That by looking through these, he was able to read in English, the formed Egyptian characters, which were engraved on the plates. So much for the gift and power of God. by which Smith says he translate his book. Two transparent stones, undoubtedly of the same properties, and the gift of the same spirit as the one in which he looked to find his neighbor's goods.

---

<sup>34</sup> Emma Smith Bidamon to Emma Pilgrim, 27 March 1870," in Early Mormon Documents, 1:532 as quoted on [https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-spectacles-the-stone-the-hat-and-the-book-a-twenty-first-century-believers-view-of-the-book-of-mormon-translation/#footnote\\_33\\_2896](https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/the-spectacles-the-stone-the-hat-and-the-book-a-twenty-first-century-believers-view-of-the-book-of-mormon-translation/#footnote_33_2896)

<sup>35</sup> Emma Bidamon Smith interview, 1879, available in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents, Volume 1, p. 541. Also published in Life of Joseph the Prophet, 1880 by Edward W. Tullidge pg 792. See <https://archive.org/details/lifeofjosephprop01tull/page/792>

<sup>36</sup> Goodwillie, Christian. "Shaker Richard McNemar: The Earliest Book of Mormon Reviewer." Journal of Mormon History, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 138–145. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23291640](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23291640).

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.mrm.org/mormonites>

Whitmer (via Orson Pratt?) – Deseret News 1878.10.09<sup>38</sup>

“Mr. Whitmer...(asserted that) the book (or Mormon) was translated (from Golden plates by) Joseph Smith, through the medium of a pair of rock spectacles; that each inscription or cypher on the plates was a sentence, and that the plates were in the shape of a tablet, one half of which were sealed.”

Whitmer interview with Dr. Poulson – Deseret News 1878.08.21

“I – Did Joseph use the Urim and Thummim when he translated?

He – The Urim and Thummim were two white stones, each of them cased in as spectacles are, in a kind of silver casing, but the bow between the stones was more heavy, and longer apart between the stones, than we usually find it in spectacles. Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, Emma and my brother John each at different times wrote for Joseph as he translated.”

Seer Stone Sources – Original Accounts Referenced in LDS publications

S0 : Pratt – 1878.12.04 – Deseret News<sup>39</sup>

Elder Pratt then gave a plain, simple narration of his early experience in the Church... explained the circumstance under which several revelations were received by Joseph the Prophet, and the manner in which he received them, he being present on several occasions of the kind. Declared that **sometime Joseph used a seer stone when enquiring of the Lord, and receiving revelation**, but that he was so thoroughly endowed with the inspiration of the Almighty and the spirit of revelation that he oftener received them without any instrument, or other means than the operation of the spirit upon his mind.

Note: Orson Pratt joined the church on sept 19, 1830 – after Joseph stopped using the seer stone to receive revelations according to Whitmer<sup>40</sup>. However, Woodruff also reported in one journal account that Smith used a seer stone in translating the Book of Abraham.

S1: David Whitmer 1881 Kansas City Journal<sup>41</sup>

David Whitmer published in the Kansas City Journal June 5, 1881:

“He (meaning Joseph Smith) had two small stones of a **chocolate color, nearly egg-shape, and perfectly smooth, but not transparent**, called interpreters, which were given him with the plates. He did not see the plates in translation, but would hold the interpreters to his eyes and cover his face with a hat, excluding all light, and before his eyes would appear what seemed to be parchment on which would appear the characters of the plates in a line at the top, and immediately below would appear the translation in English, which Smith would read to his

---

38

[https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2651378&q=whitmer&sort=rel&year\\_start=1878&year\\_end=1878&facet\\_paper=%22Deseret+News%22](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2651378&q=whitmer&sort=rel&year_start=1878&year_end=1878&facet_paper=%22Deseret+News%22)

39

[https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2651950&q=stone+whitmer&sort=rel&year\\_start=1870&year\\_end=1878&facet\\_paper=%22Deseret+News%22](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2651950&q=stone+whitmer&sort=rel&year_start=1870&year_end=1878&facet_paper=%22Deseret+News%22)

<sup>40</sup> An Address to All believers in Christ, pg 32 indicates that Joseph stopped using the stone around the spring of 1830. Online copy available here: <http://latterdaytruth.org/pdf/100023.pdf>

<sup>41</sup> [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Kansas\\_City\\_Journal,\\_June\\_5,\\_1881](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Kansas_City_Journal,_June_5,_1881)

scribe, who wrote it down exactly as it fell from his lips. The scribe would then read the sentence written, and if any mistakes had been made, the characters would remain visible to Smith until corrected, when they would fade from sight to be replaced by another line.”

This appears to have first been republished in an LDS source by Roberts in his 1907 “Defense of the Faith”.

### S2: David Whitmer 1881 – Chicago Times, Oct 14/Deseret News, Nov 10

A correspondent of the Chicago Times detailing their visit with Mr. Whitmer, on October 14th, 1881, reprinted in the Deseret Evening News on Nov 10, 1881.

The tablets or plates were translated by Smith, who **used a small oval or kidney shaped stone, called Urim and Thummim**, that seemed endowed with the marvelous power of converting the characters on the plates, when used by Smith, into English, who would then dictate to Cowdery what to write. Frequently one character would make two lines of manuscript while others made but a word or two words. Mr. Whitmer emphatically asserts, as did Harris and Cowdery, that while Smith was dictating the translation he had no manuscript notes or other means of knowledge, save the Seer stone and the characters as shown on the plates, he being present and cognizant how it was done.<sup>42</sup>

In the Deseret News version<sup>43</sup>, “errors” in the story that are “corrected” including the following:

**The next error is that the seer stone which Joseph used in the translation “was called Urim and Thummim.”** The instrument thus denominated was composed of two crystal stones “set in the two rims of a bow.” The seer stone was separate and distinct from the Urim and Thummim. The latter was delivered to the angel as well as the plates after the translation was completed; the former remained with the Church and is now in the possession of the President...

We are pleased to reproduce the letter to the Times for the benefit of our readers, and look upon it – **those few errors excepted** – as a valuable addition to the cloud of witnesses to the divine origin of a Book which is a stumbling-block to the worldly wise, but a joy and blessing to the humble and meek of the earth.

### S3: Martin Harris via Edward Stevenson 1881, Deseret News Dec 13, Dec 28

Printed Dec 13<sup>th</sup> in the Deseret Evening News<sup>44</sup>, and reprinted Dec 28, 1881 in the Deseret News<sup>45</sup>, also reprinted in Feb 6, 1882 Millennial Star<sup>46</sup>. The account is a 2<sup>nd</sup> hand telling by Elder Edward Stevenson of a presentation or talk that Harris gave to a gathering in a house about 10 years earlier. Harris had

---

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/49432/pg49432.txt>

<sup>43</sup> Evening News (Deseret News Co.) pg 2. Nov 10, 1881.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6pk4g1b/23173965>

<sup>44</sup> Evening News (Deseret News Co.) Dec 11, 1881. Pg 4.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s66d9svn/23174102>

<sup>45</sup> Deseret News, Dec 28, 1881.

[https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2634097&q=seer+stone+harris&year\\_start=1870&year\\_end=1882&facet\\_type=%22article%22&facet\\_paper=%22Deseret+News%22](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2634097&q=seer+stone+harris&year_start=1870&year_end=1882&facet_type=%22article%22&facet_paper=%22Deseret+News%22)

<sup>46</sup> Millennial Star vol 44, pp 86-87. Feb 6, 1882

recently arrived in Salt Lake City and was 88 years old at the time. He arrived in the city on around Aug 31, 1870.

Martin Harris related an *incident that occurred* during the time that he wrote that portion of the translation of the Book of Mormon which he was favored to write direct from the mouth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. **He said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone.** Martin explained the translation as follows: **By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, "Written," and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.** Martin said, after continued translation they would become weary, and would go down to the river and exercise by throwing stones out on the river, etc. While so doing on one occasion, Martin found a stone very much resembling the one used for translating, and on resuming their labor of translation, Martin **put in place the stone** that he had found. He said that the Prophet remained silent unusually gazing in darkness, no traces of the usual sentences appearing. Much surprised, Joseph exclaimed, "Martin! What is the matter? All is dark as Egypt!" Martin's countenance betrayed him, and the Prophet asked Martin why he had done so. Martin said, to stop the mouths of fools, who had told him that the Prophet had learned those sentences and was merely repeating them, etc.

Martin said further that the seer stone differed in appearance entirely from the Urim and Thummim that was obtained with the plates, which were **two clear stones set in two rims, very much resembling spectacles, only they were larger.** Martin said there were not many pages translated while he wrote, after which Oliver Cowdery and others did the writing.<sup>47</sup>

*Significance of full quote:*

In this account we note the following:

1. In this account, it states that Martin "put in place" the stone that he found. However, the 1886 retelling makes it clear that the hat was used and that Stevenson knew this. Perhaps the editors of the Deseret News (even at this point) were embarrassed about the account of the stone in a hat. In the Whitmer account they also go out of their way to ensure that the reader knows that the seer stone is not the Urim and Thummim.
2. Martin is describing both the seer stone and the "Urim and Thummim", or spectacles. The description of the spectacles as "clear stones" differs from the Harris interview with Joel Tiffany (1859)<sup>48</sup> wherein the spectacles are described as being composed of white stones with grey streaks. Based on the other first and 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand accounts, it seems likely that this account was heavily edited/altered by the Deseret news prior to publication.

---

<sup>47</sup> Millennial Star vol 44, pp 86-87. Feb 6, 1882

<https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5128/rec/44>

<sup>48</sup> Early Mormon Documents, Dan Vogel, vol 2 pg 305.

It is possible that some details regarding the Urim and Thummim (or at least the naming) were suggested to Harris. Indeed, he seems to be open to suggestions later in the article.

Brother Harris was taught the necessity of being rebaptized... He claimed that he had not been cut off from the Church, but said if that was required of him it would be manifested to him by the Spirit. Soon after his arrival in Utah he applied for baptism, saying that the *Spirit had made known to him* that it was his duty to renew his covenant before the Lord.

He was also taught a principle that was new to him – baptism for the dead...After consideration he came and said it had been made known to him that baptism for the dead was a correct principle, for he had *seen his father in vision* at the foot of a ladder, and he was above, and had to go down and help him up.

#### S3B: Martin Harris, abbreviated

By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, "Written," and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.

Note: By failing to mention, "the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone.", the reader might conclude that the seer stone mentioned was in fact the "Urim and Thummim".

#### S4: David Whitmer, Apr 9, 1884 - Deseret News Mar 18

Interview on Mar 18, 1884, published by the Deseret news on Mar 18<sup>th</sup> and Apr 9, 1884<sup>49</sup>. Also published in the Deseret Evening News on Mar 25, 1884<sup>50</sup>. Republished in the Utah Journal on Mar 29, 1884<sup>51</sup>.

..."Oliver told me they knew just when I started, where I put up at night and even the name on the sign board of the hotel where I stayed each night, for he had asked Joseph to look in the Seer stone, and he did so, and told him all these particulars of my journey, which Oliver had carefully noted in his book.

..."In regard to the translation," said Mr. Whitner, "it was a laborious work for the weather was very warm, and the days were long and they worked from morning till night. But they were both young and strong and were soon able to complete the work."

"The way it was done was thus: **Joseph would place the seer-stone in a deep hat, and placing his face close to it, would see, not the stone, but what appeared like an oblong piece of parchment, on which the hieroglyphics would appear, and also the translation in the English language, all appearing in bright luminous letters. Joseph would then read it to Oliver, who would write it down as spoken.** Sometimes Joseph could not pronounce the words correctly, having had but little education; and if by any means a mistake was made in the copy, the

---

<sup>49</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6d22s6w/2648947>

<sup>50</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6m65k77/23177719>

<sup>51</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6fx8pqk/20882718>

luminous writing would remain until it was corrected. It sometimes took Oliver several trials to get the right letter to spell correctly some of the more difficult words, but when he had written them correctly the characters and the interpretation would disappear, and be replaced by other characters and their interpretation.

When the seer-stone was not placed in the hat, no characters or writing could be seen therein, but when so placed then the hieroglyphics would appear as before described. **Some represented but one word, or name, but some represented several, and some from one to two lines.**

Emma, Joseph's wife, came to my father's house a short time after Joseph and Oliver came, and she wrote a little of the translation, my brother Christian wrote some, but Oliver wrote the greater portion of it.

#### S5: David Whitmer Dec 1885 – Chicago Daily Tribune/Deseret News Dec 24, Jan 6

Chicago Daily Tribune, Dec 15, 1885, reported in the Deseret Evening News on Dec 24, 1885<sup>52</sup> and again in the Deseret News on Jan 6, 1886<sup>53</sup>.

(after the loss of the 116 pages by Harris) The plates, however, were not returned, but instead Smith was given by the angel, a Urim and Thummim of another pattern, it being **shaped in oval or kidney form**. This seer's stone he was instructed to place in his hat, and on covering his face with the hat the character and translation would appear on the stone.

This worked just as satisfactory as the old method, but at no time thereafter was the backsliding Joseph intrusted with the precious plates.<sup>54</sup>

#### S6: Martin Harris via Edward Stevenson, 1886 Millennial Star, June 21

He also stated that the Prophet translated a portion of the Book of Mormon, with the seer stone in his possession. The **stone was placed in a hat** that was used for that purpose, and with the aid of this seer stone the Prophet would read sentence by sentence as Martin wrote, and if he made any mistake the sentence would remain before the Prophet until corrected, when another sentence would appear. When they became weary, as it was confining work to translate from the plates of gold, they would go down to the river and throw stones into the water for exercise. Martin on one occasion picked up a stone resembling the one with which they were translating, and on resuming their work Martin placed the false stone in the hat. He said that the Prophet looked quietly for a long time, when he raised his head and said: "Martin, what on earth is the matter, all is dark as Egypt." Martin smiled and the seer discovered that the wrong stone was placed **in the hat**. When he asked Martin why he had done so he replied, to stop the mouths of fools who had declared that the Prophet knew by heart all that he told him to write, and did not see by the seer stone; when the true stone was placed in the hat, the translation was resumed, as usual.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6jd8wt5/23180569>

<sup>53</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6sj2f5j/2661030>

<sup>54</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune, Dec 17, 1885:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chicago\\_Daily\\_Tribune,\\_December\\_17,\\_1885](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chicago_Daily_Tribune,_December_17,_1885)

<sup>55</sup> Millennial Star, Vol 48 No 25, June 21, 1886. <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/28210>



Note: Stevenson was set apart for a mission to the US and Great Brittan on Feb 1, 1886. It seems plausible that he would have been in Great Brittan and written this account for publication. If this is the case, it could explain why he included the details of the hat which were left out of the 1881 account published in the Deseret News. Note also that in this account there is no description of the spectacles or Urim and Thummim which occurred in the 1881 Deseret News account.

Note also that this account was not republished or referenced in the US (unlike the 1881 quote from Stevenson which was widely repeated).

S7: [David Whitmer 1887 – An address to All Believers in Christ, SL Tribune. Dec 11.](#)

An address to all believers in Christ – David Whitmer 1887. Also published in the Salt Lake Tribune on Dec 11, 1887.

Joseph Smith would **put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine.** A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.<sup>56</sup>

S7B: [Whitmer quote as used by the LDS church between 1906-1924](#)

A piece of something resembling parchment did appear (i.e. in **the Urim and Thummim**), and on that appeared the writing, one character at a time would appear and under it was the translation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Brother Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and then it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct; then it would disappear and another character with the translation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.

S7C: [Whitmer quote, abbreviated](#)

A piece of something resembling parchment did appear (i.e. in the Urim and Thummim), and on that appeared the writing, one character at a time would appear and under it was the translation in English” (An Address to all Believers in Christ, page 12).<sup>57</sup>

S7D: [David Whitmer 1887 – An address to All Believers in Christ, Quote #2](#)

**At times when Brother Joseph would attempt to translate he would look into the hat in which the stone was placed, he found he was spiritually blind and could not translate.** He told us that his mind dwelt too much on earthly things, and various causes would make him incapable

---

<sup>56</sup> [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An\\_Address\\_to\\_All\\_Believers\\_in\\_Christ/Part\\_First/Chapter\\_I\\_pg\\_12](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/An_Address_to_All_Believers_in_Christ/Part_First/Chapter_I_pg_12). Also printed in the SLC Tribune, Dec 11 1887 under the title: The Very Latest from the Newest Hevenly Kolob.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6669phv/12384446>

<sup>57</sup> Millennial Star, Vol 86 number 34, pg 532 (Aug 21, 1924)

<https://archive.org/details/millennialstar8634eng/page/532?q=seer+stone>



of proceeding with the translation. When in this condition he would go out and pray, and when he became sufficiently humble before God, he could then proceed with the translation...

S8: David Whitmer 1888 - Richmond Democrat. June 15<sup>th</sup>.

The "Urim and Thummim" mentioned in the account of the vision were a pair of transparent stone spectacles. Smith would put on the spectacles, when a few words of the text of the Book of Mormon would appear on the lenses. When these were correctly transcribed by Cowdery, who acted as his amanuensis these words would disappear and others would take their place. When one hundred and sixteen pages were completed Smith entrusted them to Martin Harris, to take to his home with a view to convert his family to the new faith. They were placed at night in the bureau drawer and next morning were missing, having been stolen. They were never found and never replaced, so that the Book of Mormon today is short that number of pages of the original matter. As a chastisement for this carelessness, the Urim and Thummim was taken from Smith. But by humbling himself he again found favor with the Lord and was presented with a strange ovalshaped, chocolate colored stone about the size of an egg but more flat which was promised should answer the same purpose. **With this stone all the present book was translated. The Prophet would place the stone in a hat, then put his face in the hat and read the words that appeared thereon.**

This stone is the only relic of the Prophet's work in existence which is non in possession of Mr. Whitmer. It was confided to Oliver Cowdery and preserved by him until his death in 1852. After that event Phineas Young succeeded in getting it from Cowdery's widow and it is now among the sacred relics preserved at Salt Lake City.<sup>58</sup>

## Mentions of Seer stones in LDS literature, 1880-1959

### Church owned newspapers

1881: S2 Deseret News: David Whitmer (Nov 10<sup>th</sup>).

S2 (Chicago Tribune) account.<sup>59</sup>

1881: S3 Deseret News: Martin Harris (Edward Stevenson) Dec 13, Dec 28

Printed Dec 13<sup>th</sup> in the Deseret Evening News, and reprinted Dec 28, 1881 in the Deseret News<sup>60</sup>, also reprinted in Feb 6, 1882 Millennial Star<sup>61</sup>. The account is a 2<sup>nd</sup> hand telling by Elder Edward Stevenson of a presentation or talk that Harris gave to a gathering in a house about 10 years earlier. Harris had recently arrived in Salt Lake City and was 88 years old at the time. He arrived in the city on around Aug 31, 1870.

---

<sup>58</sup> <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86063662/1888-06-14/ed-1/seq-4/> - This is where it should be, but the online image is wrong for page 4 for this date.

<sup>59</sup> Evening News (Deseret News Co.) Nov 10, 1881. Pg 4.

<https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6pk4g1b/23173965>

<sup>60</sup> Deseret News, Dec 28, 1881.

[https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2634097&q=seer+stone+harris&year\\_start=1870&year\\_end=1882&facet\\_type=%22article%22&facet\\_paper=%22Deseret+News%22](https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/details?id=2634097&q=seer+stone+harris&year_start=1870&year_end=1882&facet_type=%22article%22&facet_paper=%22Deseret+News%22)

<sup>61</sup> Millennial Star vol 44, pp 86-87. Feb 6, 1882

<https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5128/rec/44>

Interesting points in this account are:

- 1) Mention of the seer stone
- 2) Allusion to the hat, but no direct mention. The false stone was “put in place”
- 3) A clear indication that the seer stone was different than the Urim and Thummim and that both could be used

In 1886, the account was again given by Stevenson, but in this later account:

- 1) No indication is given that it was an either/or: only the seer stone was used.
- 2) The hat was clearly mentioned as the placement for the seer stone during the translation process.

It appears that editors at the Deseret news may have altered the original story to make it more faith-promoting and more in line with the current narrative. When Stevenson was in England, he may have told the story more closely to the way that he had learned it from Harris (without the editor being involved).

1885: Deseret Evening News: Mar 7 – Denouncing Seer Stones

An article titled *Expressions From the People: Astrology and Kindred Topics: Evils That should be avoided by the people*. Among the topics listed is “The Science of the Stars”, Spirit of Witchcraft, The Gypsy Prognosticator, and...

#### THE “SEER STONE” OR “PEEP STONE”

*Which differs little in appearance from an ordinary stone, the finding of which has generally been the result of accident, though some have claimed that they were made known to them by revelation. They are found in the hands of men, women and children, but are not numerous. Those in possession of these stones claim to be endowed with the gift of the seer, and are besieged by all classes to learn something in regard to their individual affairs: such as the whereabouts of lost animals or stolen goods, the character of a man or woman with whom the enquirer is anticipating marriage. In some instances where persons are suspected of evil designs the “peep stone” has been used to verify the suspicion: the sex, and also the future of an unborn child has been enquired after. In this Western country they have been often used to determine the location of a good paying mine, etc. Strange to say most individuals who have had recourse of this source for information exercise considerable faith in the findings of the individuals who claim inspiration through the method.*

Reprinted on Mar 18, 1885 in the Deseret News<sup>62</sup>.

1885: S5 - Deseret News (David Whitmer Dec 1885 – Chicago Daily Tribune) Dec 24, Jan 6 Chicago Daily Tribune, Dec 15, 1885, reported in the Deseret Evening News on Dec 24, 1885<sup>63</sup> and again in the Deseret News on Jan 6, 1886<sup>64</sup>.

---

<sup>62</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s64t7cww/2661539>

<sup>63</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6jd8wt5/23180569>

<sup>64</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6sj2f5j/2661030>

(after the loss of the 116 pages by Harris) The plates, however, were not returned, but instead Smith was given by the angel, a Urim and Thummim of another pattern, it being **shaped in oval or kidney form**. This seer's stone he was instructed to place in his hat, and on covering his face with the hat the character and translation would appear on the stone.

This worked just as satisfactory as the old method, but at no time thereafter was the backsliding Joseph intrusted with the precious plates.<sup>65</sup>

1895: S8 - Deseret Weekly, July 6<sup>66</sup> (Richmond Democrat).

An article, marking the death of David J. Whitmer, son of David Whitmer, one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. It included the following account which was a reprint of the Richmond Democrat from June 15<sup>th</sup>., originally published in 1888(?):

The "Urim and Thummim" mentioned in the account of the vision were a pair of transparent stone spectacles. Smith would put on the spectacles, when a few words of the text of the Book of Mormon would appear on the lenses. When these were correctly transcribed by Cowdery, who acted as his amanuensis these words would disappear and others would take their place. When one hundred and sixteen pages were completed Smith entrusted them to Martin Harris, to take to his home with a view to convert his family to the new faith. They were placed at night in the bureau drawer and next morning were missing, having been stolen. They were never found and never replaced, so that the Book of Mormon today is short that number of pages of the original matter. As a chastisement for this carelessness, the Urim and Thummim was taken from Smith. But by humbling himself he again found favor with the Lord and was presented with a strange ovalshaped, chocolate colored stone about the size of an egg but more flat which was promised should answer the same purpose. **With this stone all the present book was translated. The Prophet would place the stone in a hat, then put his face in the hat and read the words that appeared thereon.**

This stone is the only relic of the Prophet's work in existence which is non in possession of Mr. Whitmer. It was confided to Oliver Cowdery and preserved by him until his death in 1852. After that event Phineas Young succeeded in getting it from Cowdery's widow and it is now among the sacred relics preserved at Salt Lake City.

## Church Magazines

1882: S3 - Millennial Star, Feb 6<sup>67</sup>

Here Edward Stevenson related the story of Harris and his attempt to test the prophet by replacing his seer stone with another stone. No mention of the hat is given. This is a republication of the story first published in the Deseret News.

1884, Contributor Magazine

George Reynolds reported in the Contributor, a publication of the YMMIA and YLMIA that:

---

<sup>65</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune, Dec 17, 1885:

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chicago\\_Daily\\_Tribune,\\_December\\_17,\\_1885](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Chicago_Daily_Tribune,_December_17,_1885)

<sup>66</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s67d3psj/2710133>

<sup>67</sup> <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/5128>

We are given to understand that the translation **through the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone** was a most literal one, and as there were no punctuation points in the original, therefore none appear in the translation.<sup>68</sup>

#### 1886: S6 - Millennial Star<sup>69</sup>

This quote is significant because it is one of very few references which point to the seer stone being used in conjunction with a hat and the only one by Martin Harris.

#### 1887: S4 - Juvenile instructor – Copy of the Deseret News, 1884.04.09

In 1887, E. Stevenson records an account of visiting with David Whitmer, at that time the only surviving member of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. In related the story of visiting the prophet in June 1829 he states:

The journey required about three days each way, and it was necessary to put up at inns on the way. David having forgotten the name of inns and their proprietors, **Joseph looked through the seer stone and told him them.** Oliver Cowdery made a note of these, and by inquiry on the journey found that the Prophet had stated correctly.<sup>70</sup>

#### 1894: S3 - Juvenile Instructor

This article notes that the Book of Mormon was translated “by means of the Urim and Thummim or the seer stone (see note 1)”.<sup>71</sup> In note 1, it quotes Cannon’s account following a brief introduction.

Notes: 1. The Seer Stone. Joseph dictated to Martin Harris from the plates of gold, as the characters thereon assumed **through the Urim and Thummim** the forms of equivalent modern words which were familiar to the understanding of the youthful Seer. **Martin Harris was a critical man without superstition.** Listening to the words dictated day by day, and becoming familiar with Joseph, he sought to make another test. *One of Joseph’s aids in searching out the truths of the record was a peculiar pebble or rock ....*(the text continues with S3 as related by Edward Stevenson ).

#### 1901, Improvement Era – Denouncing Seer Stones

In 1901, the use of seer stones (by modern church members) is discouraged in an article by Dr. John Widtsoe entitled, “The Folly of Astrology”. This reference indicates that there were still members of the church at this date who were using seer stones or believed in their power.

There are men among us, holding the Holy Priesthood, who in events of their lives would rather stare into a bit of flint-glass that enterprising dealers name a seer-stone, for the solution of their

---

<sup>68</sup> <https://archive.org/details/contributor0510eng/page/366?q=seer+stone>

<sup>69</sup> Millennial Star Volume 48 No 25, June 21 1886. The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, No. III. <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/28210>

<sup>70</sup> Juvenile instructor Vol 22 no 4. Feb 15, 1887. Pg 55. <https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstructv224geor/page/54?q=seer+stone> This story is retold in the Millennial Star in Vol 49, No 16. April 18, 1887 under the article, “Historical Items”.

<https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id/32099>

<sup>71</sup> Juvenile Instructor, 1894, Vol 29 No 15 page 474.

<https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct2915geor/page/474?q=seer+stone>

troubles, than to go with the power and authority of the Priesthood to the Almighty Father in prayer.<sup>72</sup>

#### 1904, Improvement Era, Roberts

B.H. Roberts tells the story of Joseph Smith and uses the seer stone as something in addition to the Urim and Thummim. He is giving an analogy regarding why it makes sense that Joseph would use a seer stone as an instrument. The analogy is in many ways similar to the cell phone analogy proposed by D. Uchtdorf in 2016<sup>73</sup>. Roberts' account states:

As for the media of revelation used by the ancient prophets in Israel, and by Joseph Smith in modern times – **Urim and Thummim and also the “Seer Stone”** – I say again that our scientific skeptic in such things live in the midst of such achievements of man's ingenuity, and in the daily use of such marvelous instruments invented by men for ascertainment of truth, that men of science ought not to stumble at accepting, at least as possible, and even as probable, the existence of such media. Take for instance the telescope.... (Roberts continues for 2 pages to explain how the telescope has improved the field of astronomy)....

What more shall I say? Is not enough here presented concerning the instruments of man's invention to justify the probability of the existence of media that can accomplish all that is ascribed to **Urim and Thummim and Seer Stone** by Joseph Smith? Will the reader say no, because to **Urim and Thummim or Seer Stone** there seems to have been ascribed by some almost intellectual qualities – the power to take the characters of an unknown language and present the interpretation of them in intelligible English; while to all these other instrument, to which reference is made, there seems to be ascribed only a mechanical quality – the power merely to extend the vision of the human eye...<sup>74</sup>

B.H. Roberts mentions the Seer stone with the Urim and Thummim 5 more times in the article, always using the phrase “and” or “or” in conjunction, which clearly indicates that the seer stone was both used and distinct from the Urim and Thummim. This article was used as source material for New Witness for God, Vol 2 (pp 330-333).

#### 1905, Millennial Star - Ambiguous

“translations that were reflected mirror-like, in the seer-stone, or Urim and Thummim...”<sup>75</sup> Ambiguous reference.

#### 1906: S7B, S3B - Improvement Era, April – BH Roberts

In this article regarding the translation of the Book of Mormon, Roberts quotes Whitmer and Harris. However, the quote from Whitmer is changed to omit the part about the stone and the hat and the concept of the Urim and Thummim is inserted instead:

A piece of something resembling parchment did appear (i.e. in **the Urim and Thummim**), and on that appeared the writing, one character at a time would appear and under it was the

---

<sup>72</sup> Improvement Era, Vol 4 no 4, Feb 1901, pg 290.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera0404unse/page/290?q=seer+stone>

<sup>73</sup> See: <http://www.ldsliving.com/President-Uchtdorf-Shares-What-He-Believes-About-Seer-Stones/s/82469>

<sup>74</sup> <https://archive.org/details/improvementera0706unse/page/416?q=seer+stone>

<sup>75</sup> Millennial Star, Vol 67, no 24 pg 372. <https://archive.org/details/millennialstar6724eng/page/372?q=seer+stone>

translation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Brother Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and then it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct; then it would disappear and another character with the translation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God, and not by any power of man.<sup>76</sup>

This is the first time the LDS church published this Whitmer quote (S7B) – which was later repeated in other articles.

The article then quotes Harris using (S3B) – again modified from its original form to minimize some facts related to the significance of the seer stone – i.e. that it was separate and distinct from the “Urim and Thummim”.

**By aid of the seer stone**, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, “Written,” and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used.

The article’s main purpose is to prove that the translation of the book of Mormon was not a mechanical process. It starts by quoting both Joseph Smith<sup>77</sup> and D&C 8-9. It goes on to say that Joseph was using his intellect to help during the translation process. This may have been in response to reactions to changes in the 1905 edition of the Book of Mormon edited by James E. Talmage.<sup>78</sup>

The article also gives the following disclaimer prior to mentioning the seer stone:

We have no statement at first hand from Martin Harris at all, only the statement of another, Edward Stevenson, as to what he heard Martin Harris say was the manner of translation.... (followed by the account from Severson<sup>79</sup>).

Rather than a discussion of the seer stone, the article tends to downplay the possibility of a seer stone and concentrates on the mental aspects of translation. However, it does not explicitly deny that a seer stone was used. This article was republished in at least two other books by Roberts<sup>80</sup>.

1906: S7B, S3B - Juvenile Instructor (July) - Denial

A July 1906 article in the Juvenile Instructor includes the aforementioned quotes of Whitmer and Harris using the same wording (and manipulation of the Whitmer quote) as previously discussed.<sup>81</sup> The article has only one mention of the “seer stone” and a dozen or more references to the Urim and Thummim,

---

<sup>76</sup> Improvement Era, Volume 9 no. 6. (1906) pg 427.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera0906unse/page/426?q=seer+stone>

<sup>77</sup> The quote from Joseph is from the Wentworth’s letter, Millennial Star, vol 9 page 118 and is, “Through the medium of Urim and Thummim I translated the record by the gift and power of God;”

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Question: What is the list of Book of Mormon editions%3F>

<sup>79</sup> Harris’ Statement to Edward Stevenson, Mill. Star, Vol. XLIV, pp. 78, 79; 86,87.

<sup>80</sup> In Defense of the Saints, 1907, pp

<sup>81</sup> Juvenile Instructor, Vol 41 no 13, pg 386.

<https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct4113geor/page/n1?q=seer+stone>

concluded that these were the only tools used. The author quotes from Smith and Cowdery among others in coming to this conclusion.

The article is in fact a reply and refutation of Elder Roberts' April Improvement Era article and provides these quotes only as reference before refuting them. The author Joel Ricks explains:

...it did not seem to me that the explanation there given (by Roberts) exactly harmonized with the facts as recorded in the various works of the Church, with the possible exception of the revelation to Oliver Cowdery...

In analyzing my objections to Elder Roberts' theory I find the following:

1<sup>st</sup>. It is opposed to the actual facts of translation in general

2<sup>nd</sup>. It is opposed to the theory of translation by means of the Urim and Thummim as *understood by the Nephites*.

3<sup>rd</sup>. It is directly opposed to the manner of translating as understood by the associates of the Prophet in the work.

4<sup>th</sup>. It is opposed to the methods of translating as recorded in the writings of the Prophet himself.

5<sup>th</sup>. It is not the method contemplated in the revelation on which it is based.

6<sup>th</sup>. It is not necessary in order to explain the errors in grammar, the use of modern words, New England localisms, etc., in the book.

#### 1907: S3B, Juvenile Instructor (Oct)

In October 1907 the Juvenile Instructor discusses the restoration and Martin Harris. The account of Harris replacing the seer stone with his own from George Q Cannon's *Life of Joseph Smith* is repeated, but with an added detail regarding the details of the stone.

At times the Prophet used the Urim and Thummim to translate with, but sometimes he used a stone **about the size of half an egg**, which he and Hyrum had found while digging a well...<sup>82</sup>

#### 1915: S7B, S3B, Improvement Era

In 1915, the Improvement Era contains an article by Joe Ricks entitled "Urim and Thummim". After giving a detailed description of the Urim and Thummim (transparent stones, rim of a bow, brother of Jared, etc) before discussing Josephus and Biblical Encyclopedias on the topic. On the 4<sup>th</sup> page of the article, quotes from David Whitmer (S7B) and Martin Harris (S3B) are repeated. The David Whitmer quote is given in the modified form, first published in the 1906 Improvement Era. The Martin Harris quote is taken from History of the Church, Vol 1. Pg 21).<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Juvenile Instructor, Vol 42 no 19, pg 583.

<https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct4219geor/page/582?q=seer+stone>

<sup>83</sup> The Improvement Era, vol 18 no 07. May 1915. Pg 614.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera1807unse/page/614?q=seer+stone>

### 1920, Improvement Era

The Sept 1920 Improvement Era includes a study guide for the “Advanced Senior Classes of the M.I.A” discusses the value of isolation and alone time. The article postulates that social isolation of Joseph Smith was preparatory for his first vision. “The Urim and Thummim, the seer stone, the curtain between Joseph and his amanuensis, were all instruments of isolation utilized in the bringing forth of the gospel.”<sup>84</sup>

### 1924: S7C - Millennial Star

In 1924, the Millennial Star quotes Harris regarding the sentences which would appear on the seer stone. In the preceding paragraph however it misquotes David Whitmer (copying Roberts in his 1906 Improvement ERA quote as follows:

A piece of something resembling parchment did appear (i.e. in the Urim and Thummim), and on that appeared the writing, one character at a time would appear and under it was the translation in English” (An Address to all Believers in Christ, page 12).<sup>85</sup>

### 1932, Millennial Star

A brief mention in 1932 indicates that Joseph Smith “could read by Seer Stone and Urim and Thummim.”<sup>86</sup>

### 1937: S3, Millennial Star

In 1937, the Millennial Star repeated the story of Harris regarding the seer stone and replacing it with the fake stone.<sup>87</sup> This account adds important details regarding Harris’ reconversion, including that he was somewhat destitute in his old age and went to Utah only after being given a return ticket from the LDS church. He lived with his son in Salt Lake City and died on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1875 at the age of 93. Evidently he was reconverted around the age of 88.

### 1939, Improvement Era, Kirkham - Denial

In 1939, the Improvement Era published an article by Kirkham titled “The Manner of Translating the Book of Mormon”.<sup>88</sup> It quotes the 1887 account from David Whitmer in his address “to all Believers in Christ including the method of translation which included placing the seer stone in a hat. It further quotes Harris and his account involving the seer stone. The author then turns to B.H. Roberts and refers to New Witness for God, Vol. II pages 106-133 and claims that the accounts given are not consistent with the true manner of translation described in D&C section 8. The author then makes the following statement:

...they (Whitmer and Harris) refer to the use of a seer stone by the Prophet. But no publication during his life contains such a statement.

---

<sup>84</sup> The Improvement Era, Vol 23 no 11. Sept 1920. Pg 1017.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera23011unse/page/1016?q=seer+stone>

<sup>85</sup> Millennial Star, Vol 86 number 34, pg 532

<https://archive.org/details/millennialstar8634eng/page/532?q=seer+stone>

<sup>86</sup> Millennial Star, Vol 94 number 51 (1932) pg 826.

<https://archive.org/details/millennialstar9451eng/page/826?q=seer+stone>

<sup>87</sup> Millennial Star, Vol 99 number 27 pg 426.

<sup>88</sup> Improvement Era, Oct 1939, vol 42 no 10 pg 631



A neighbor, Willard Chase, asserted Joseph stole a “singularly appearing stone” which he had found in 1822 when Joseph and his brother Alvin were employed by him in digging a well. “Joseph put it into his hat and then his face into the top of his hat... alleging that he could see in it.” Mormonism Unveiled, Eber D. Howe, 1834.

This is an attempt to explain the alleged power of Joseph Smith to translate the plates by a person who denounced him as a fraud and an ignorant deceiver.

**In the opinion of the writer, the Prophet used no seer stone in translating the Book of Mormon, neither did he translate in the manner described by David Whitmer and Martin Harris.** The statements of both of these men are to be explained by the eagerness of old age to call upon a fading and uncertain memory for the details of events which still remained real and objective to them.<sup>89</sup>

#### 1946, Improvement Era, Aug – Denial

In 1945, Brodie published No Man Knows My History, a biography of Joseph Smith. Brodie details how Smith used at least one seer stone to hunt for buried treasure and that he used this same stone to translate the book of Mormon. In June of 1946<sup>90</sup> she was excommunicated from the LDS church. Between 1946 and 1947, a series of articles responding to her claims were published in the Improvement Era.

From the Aug article, there is a clear denial that Joseph used peepstones for finding money. No mention of possible use in translation is mentioned:

...These effusions of hate may be reduced to three charges: 1, The Smith family were unworthy people; 2, Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was a money digger; and 3, he was a user of peepstones...

Honest historians cannot safely make the charge that Joseph Smith was a professional money digger.

**Likewise, no credence can be placed upon the charge that Joseph was a peepstone user.** Anti-Mormon writers are prone to suggest that the Prophet spent his time in leading people into many a fruitless chase for lost money supposed to be revealed by peepstones. Included in these stories are incantations, digging in the full of the moon, sprinkling the chosen spot with blood from a black sheep, and other like absurdities. According to these writers, every form of black art was practiced by this lad. From the age of fourteen on, he must have had the whole community by the ear. It is curious that in the Paymyra newspaper of the day, seldom is mention made of such affairs! Perhaps the editor was himself a party to these negotiations with Lucifer!

The claims that Joseph Smith had had communication with the supernatural beings furnished the foundation for the later tales of Mormon-haters about Joseph’s peepstone activities. Then, by the usual accretions from many lips, the story grew, and was fed and fostered by those in

---

<sup>89</sup> The Manner of Translating the Book of Mormon. Improvement Era, Oct 1939. Vol 42 no. 10 pp 631-632.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera4210unse/page/n57?q=seer+stone>

<sup>90</sup> Improvement Era, Vol 49 No 7, July 1946. Pg 470.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera4907unse/page/n55?q=brodie>

whose hearts was a hate for the work to which Joseph Smith was called by God. All of the Prophet's history points away from superstition, and towards belief in an unseen world in which God and his associates dwell.

Carefully examine, the charges against the Smith family and Joseph Smith, the boy and young man, fail to be proved. There is no acceptable evidence to support them, only gossip, and deliberate misrepresentation. The Smith family were poor but honest, hard-working, and religious people. Joseph Smith was not a money digger, nor did he deceive people with peepstone claims. It is almost beyond belief that writers who value their reputations, would reproduce these silly and untrue charges. It suggests that they may have set out to destroy "Mormonism," rather than to detail true history.

The life of Joseph Smith as boy and youth, was normal, and worthy of imitation by all lovers of truth.<sup>91</sup>

#### 1947, Improvement Era, Mar - Denial

In 1947 the topics of seer stones is address to respond to Brodie's claims. In an article entitled, "Joseph Smith in Chenango County, New York and its Alleged Court Record", Francis W. Kirkham<sup>92</sup> addresses accusations that Joseph Smith was put on trial in 1826 for glass looking and disorderly conduct.<sup>93</sup> As part of the denial the article states:

*No account of the life of Joseph Smith* written either by those who accepted his message as the truth, or those who tried to find a human explanation for the origin of the Book of Mormon, prior to Tuttle in 1883, *asserts that Joseph Smith confessed in a court of law that he had used a seer stone for any purpose*, and especially that the record of such confession was in existence...

**If any evidence had been in existence that Joseph Smith had used a seer stone for fraud and deception, and especially had he made this confession in a court of law as early as 1826, or four years before the Book of Mormon was printed, and this confession was in a court record, it would have been impossible for him to organize the restored Church...**

The conclusion must be: Joseph Smith during the four years of 1823 to 1827... spent considerable of his time in Chenango County, New York... There exists no evidence to prove he lived other than a normal life. *No record exists, and there is no evidence to prove one was ever made in which he confessed in a justice of the peace court that he had used a seer stone to find hidden treasures for purposes of fraud and deception.*<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> Improvement Era, Aug 1946 Volume 49 number 8 pg 542-543.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera4908unse/page/n63?q=peepstone>

<sup>92</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis\\_W.\\_Kirkham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_W._Kirkham)

<sup>93</sup> Improvement Era, Mar 1947 Volume 50 No 3 pg 149, 182-183.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera5003unse/page/n21?q=seer+stone>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid pg 184

### 1949, Improvement Era, Jan

In 1949, an aerial photograph is published showing “The Cradle of Mormonism”. Labeled on the photograph is “Seer Stone found here on Clark Chase Farm”.<sup>95</sup> Page 2 gives an explanation of the aerial view, but no additional information on the farm or seer stones.

### 1950, Improvement Era (Mar, July)

In 1950, “A Church History Travel Service” is announced to “...provide information and assistance for Era readers to enable them not only to visit important places in Church history, but also to enjoy to the fullest extent their visits to such points.” Listed among the sites to visit in the Palmyra (New York) area is the “Clark Chase Farm (**Seer Stone found here**)”.<sup>96</sup> The series of articles continued on a monthly basis and in July published the detailed article about the Palmyra area, but this time there was *no mention of the Chase farm or Seer Stone*.<sup>97</sup> Locations mentioned in the expanded article include most of those listed in the Mar 1950 issues including the farm mortgaged by Harris, the grave site of Alvin, the Exchange building where the Book of Mormon was published, Hill Cumorah, the Sacred Grove, and the Smith family farm.

### 1956, Improvement Era (June)

Peepstones (presumably that belonging to Hyrum Page) are mentioned in a negative light:

He (the prophet) made it clear that there is never more than one man on the earth at any time authorized to receive revelations for the Church. This principle answered the claims of the **purported peepstone revelations**.<sup>98</sup>

### Sunday School Lessons

Joseph F. Smith died on Nov 19, 1918. Between 1918 and 1934 under the tenure of David O. McKay as Sunday school president (and during the lifetime of B.H. Roberts), seer stones were part of the Sunday school curriculum.

There are some references in a 1906 article by BH Roberts which indicate that the 1905 senior manual (possibly MIA manual) may contain a lesson with reference to seer stones. His 1904 article refers to the MIA manual for 1903-4 chapter 7 (also by Roberts) as possibly discussing seer stones. It therefore seems possible that Joseph F. Smith may have been uncomfortable with seer stones in the same way that his son later avoided admitting their role in the translation process.

### 1918, Juvenile Instructor (Dec)

In Dec. 1918, the Juvenile Instructor outlines the Feb. lessons for church history for the year 1919. In the outline under the topic of translation of the plates, the “Seer-Stone” is mentioned in reference to “Harris tests Joseph’s authority. Substitutes another. Result.”

---

<sup>95</sup> Improvement Era. Vol 52 No 01. Jan 1949. Pg 32-33.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera5201unse/page/n33?q=seer+stone>

<sup>96</sup> Improvement Era. Vol 53 No 03. Mar 1950. Pg 182.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera5303unse/page/n23?q=seer+stone>

<sup>97</sup> Improvement Era. Vol 53 No 07. July 1950. Pg 564, 585-586.

<sup>98</sup> Improvement Era, Vol 59 No 06. June 1956. Pg 424.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera5906unse/page/n57?q=peepstone>

1920, Juvenile Instructor, Sept

The lesson for Nov 14<sup>th</sup>, 1920 for the “Advanced Theological” class relies on Roberts “A New Witness for God” vol 2 and included in the outline is a discussion of “Media for ascertaining Divine Knowledge both scriptural and reasonable.” The list includes:

1. Urim and Thummim
2. Interpreters.
3. Divining cup.
4. Seer Stone.
5. Man made instruments.<sup>99</sup>

1920, Juvenile Instructor, Nov

On Jan 30, 1921, Lesson 11 on Church History included telling “the incident of ‘The Seer Stone’ in Martin trying to test Joseph’s authority.”<sup>100</sup> This lesson also includes instructions to “Describe the plates and the use of the Urim and Thummim.”

1922-1927 – BH Roberts missing from SLC

From 1922 to 1927, Roberts was appointed president of the Eastern States Mission. There were no mentions of the seer stone during this time period.

1928, Juvenile Instructor, Nov

The Jan 20, 1929 Lesson 3 from the Church History Department entitled “The Days of Translation references New Witness for God, Vol. 2, Ch 6,7,8,23 and requests that instructors “(6) Describe the seer stone and the Urim and Thummim”.<sup>101</sup>

1932, Instructor, Feb

The April 24, 1932 lesson on “Days of Translation” included an outline as follows:

1. The Sacred treasures returned to Joseph. Revelation given to translate Small Plates.
2. The Mother’s statement. She was happy that Joseph had again received the plates.
3. God Speaks Through Urim and Thummim to Joseph’s father.
4. **The Urim and Thummim and Seer Stone used for Revelations as well as for translating.**
5. Oliver Cowdery comes to aid (....).
6. Aaronic Priesthood given. John the Baptist teaches baptism.
7. The Higher Priesthood Given. Peter, James, and John.<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>99</sup> Juvenile Instructor, Vol 55 No 09. Sept 1920. Pg 457. (Numbering corrected)

<https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct559geor/page/n39?q=seer+stone>

<sup>100</sup> Juvenile Instructor, Vol 55 No 11. Nov 1920.

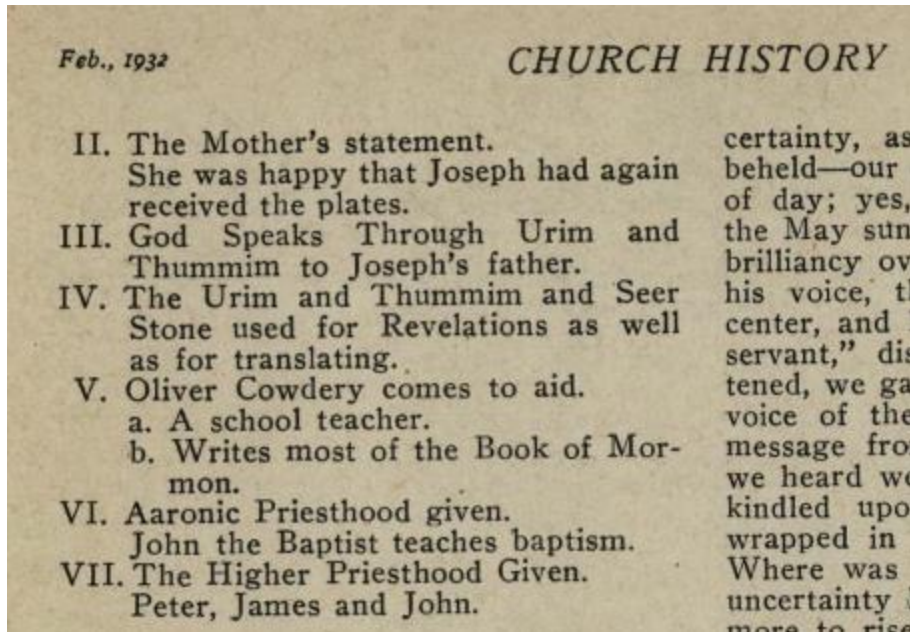
<https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct5511geor/page/n41?q=seer+stone>

<sup>101</sup> Juvenile Instructor, Vol 63 no 11, pg 647.

<https://archive.org/details/juvenileinstruct6311geor/page/n51?q=seer+stone>

<sup>102</sup> The Instructor, Voll 67 no 2, Feb 1932. Pp 110-111.

<https://archive.org/details/instructor672dese/page/n47?q=seer+stone>



1932, Instructor, Mar

The May 1932 Sunday school lesson 18: "Proofs that the Book of Mormon was God's Work" includes this outline after referencing Robert's "New Witnesses for God" Vol II:

1. Ancient prophecies concerning the book.
2. In harmony with the Bible.
3. Internal evidences.
4. External evidences.
5. Witnesses.
6. **The Seer Stone; Urim and Thummim.**
7. Truth manifested by power of the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 10:4).<sup>103</sup>

1932, Instructor, April

In April 1932, The Instructor published a quiz/game for Sunday school students. Part of the quiz included the question:

Besides the Urim and Thummim, Joseph used the \_\_\_\_\_ Stone.

The correct answer, included in the text is "Seer" Stone.

1933 – Roberts Dies

On Sept 27 1933, B.H. Roberts died due to complications related to diabetes. Roberts was the Assistant Church Historian (under Anthon Lund and later Joseph Fielding Smith) between 1902 and 1933.

<sup>103</sup> The Instructor, Vol 67 no 3 pg 168. Mar 1932

<https://archive.org/details/instructor673dese/page/n43?q=seer+stone>

1934, Instructor, Feb

The April 22, 1934 Lesson 14: Days of Translation is a repeat of the April 24, 1932 lesson and contains an identical outline which mentions the Seer Stone.<sup>104</sup>

1934, Instructor, Mar

In 1934, an outline for Sunday lessons in The Instructor gives lesson instruction for 10-11 year olds on church history. Lesson 17 for May 1934 lists the New Witness for God, Roberts, Vols II, III among the reference materials and then includes in the outline a mention of “the Sacred Stones” including “A. *Urim and Thummim*; **B. Seer Stone**; C. *How used*; D. *Martin’s test (New Witnesses for God, Roberts, Vol 2, p134)*”.<sup>105</sup>

1939, Instructor, Dec

The Feb 18, 1940 Gospel Doctrine lesson for those over 20 years of age entitled “Joseph Smith’s Seership as revealed in the Doctrine and Covenants” contains this passage:

It is interesting to know that the passage in chapter 1, verse 42, “And when Jesus beheld him (Peter), he said, Thou art Simon the Son of Jonah; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone,” was rendered thus by the Prophet Joseph Smith, “Thou art Simon the Son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a seer, or a stone.” **A “seer stone” was common among certain of the ancients.**<sup>106</sup>

## Church Books

1883: S3 - Myth of Manuscript Found: Or the Absurdities of the “Spaulding Story”. Juvenile Instructor Office – DENIAL – Republishing of S2 – Deseret News, Nov 10, 1881.

Repeats notes of a correspondent with Mr. Whitmer on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1881 as published in the Chicago Times. The quote is taken from the Nov 10, 1881 Deseret news repeating and in addition to mentioning the seer stone, it calls into question part of Whitmer’s quote (as did the original Deseret News account). Written by Elder George Reynolds, Pub. Juvenile Instructor Office, SLC, 1883.

The tablets or plates were translated by Smith, who used a small oval or kidney-shaped stone, called *Urim and Thummim*... Mr. Whitmer emphatically asserts, as did Harris and Cowdery, that while Smith was dictating the translation he had no manuscript notes or other means of knowledge, save the Seer stone and the characters as shown on the plates...

Even though this information is correctly given by Whitmer, the book itself calls the information errant on pg 85,

“The next error is that the seer stone which Joseph used in the translation 'was called Urim and Thummim.' The instrument thus denominated was composed of two crystal stones 'set in the two rims of a bow.' The seer stone was separate and distinct from the Urim and Thummim. The

---

<sup>104</sup> The Instructor, Vol 69 no 2 pg 102. Feb 1934

<https://archive.org/details/instructor692dese/page/n47?q=seer+stone>

<sup>105</sup> The Instructor, Vol 69 no 3 pg 151. Mar 1934

<https://archive.org/details/instructor693dese/page/n39?q=seer+stone>

<sup>106</sup> The Instructor. Vol 74 no 12. Dec 1939. Pg 445.

<https://archive.org/details/instructor7412dese/page/n39?q=seer+stone>

latter was delivered to the angel as well as the plates after the translation was completed; the former remained with the Church and is now in the possession of the President.”

#### 1888: S3 retold - The Life of Joseph Smith

George Q. Cannon wrote “The life of Joseph Smith”. In this book, he explained:

One of Joseph’s aids in searching out the truths of the record was a peculiar pebble or rock which he called also a seer stone, and which was sometimes used by him in lieu of the Urim and Thummim. This stone had been discovered to himself and his brother Hyrum at the bottom of a well; and under divine guidance they had brought it forth for use in the work of translation. Martin determined to deprive the Prophet of this stone. He obtained a rock resembling a seer-stone in shape and color and slyly substituted it for the Prophet’s real medium of translation. When next they were to begin their labor, Joseph was at first silent; and then he exclaimed: “Martin, what is the matter? All is dark.”

Harris with shame confessed what he had attempted. And when the Prophet demanded a reason for such conduct, Martin replied: “I did it to either prove the utterance or stop the mouths of fools who have said to me that you had learned these sentences which you dictate and that you were merely repeating them from memory.”

(Later after Martin lost the 116 pages)... because of Joseph’s wearing applications to God, the Urim and Thummim **and seer stone** were taken from him....

For his disobedient pertinacity in voiding to the Lord the request of Martin Harris Joseph had been deprived of the Urim and Thummim **and seer stone**...<sup>107</sup>

The inclusion of this account seems to have been made in order to tell the faith promoting story regarding how only the correct or true seer stone would work for translation. Some details regarding how the stone were found (by Joseph and Hyrum) are probably incorrect, but otherwise the story is an accurate retelling of Harris’ Statement to Stevenson.<sup>108</sup> It does however leave out entirely that this was found on Chase’s farm.

#### 1902, History of the Church

Although the seer stone as used in translation is not mentioned, seer stones are briefly mentioned on page 2628:

Elder Pratt gave a plain, simple narration on his early experience in the church... Declared [that] at such times **Joseph used the Seer stone when inquiring of the Lord, and receiving revelation**, but that he was so thoroughly endowed with the inspiration of the Almighty and the spirit of revelation that he often received them without any instrument, or other means than the operation of the spirit upon his mind.<sup>109</sup>

#### 1907, S3, S7B, S7D: Defense of the Faith and the Saints, Roberts

Also in 1907 in “Defense of the faith and the Saints”, BH Roberts again talks about the seer stones in detail, and includes the testimonies of several early witnesses. In a chapter entitled “Manner of

---

<sup>107</sup> <https://archive.org/details/lifeofjosephsmit01cann/page/58?q=seer+stone>

<sup>108</sup> Harris’ Statement to Edward Stevenson, Mill. Star, Vol. XLIV, pp. 78, 79; 86,87.

<sup>109</sup> <https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheChurchcVolumes1-7original1902EditionPdf/page/n2627>



Translating”, Roberts goes into detail with many of the early sources which describe the use of the seer stone including statements that scrolls with words would appear on the stone which Joseph would read off to the scribe. The entire description is too long to quote, but suffice it to say it lasts from page 256-265 and continues on pp 276-279. The seer stone is again addressed on pages 350-351 (this time by an outside source to whom Roberts will reply). The main points which Roberts makes are that:

- 1) The translation was done with the Urim and Thummim *and* the brown seer stone (using the Martin Harris quote as his justification).
- 2) The seer stone was chocolate colored and egg-shaped.
- 3) The process was not merely a mechanical reading of the words. Effort was required by Joseph and much of the language used was Joseph’s language, grammatical errors, etc.<sup>110</sup>

Roberts quotes: **S7** (but *omits the details about the hat* by saying, “After describing the means the prophet employed to exclude the light from the “Seer Stone,” he says: “In the darkness the Spiritual light would shine....”

Roberts then quotes S3, but adds (inaccurately) that using the seer stone was (possibly) confined to the period when Harris was translator. He quotes Cannon (1888) who (probably inaccurately) stated that Joseph and Hyrum found the seer stone.

Roberts DOES include at least one quote where the hat is mentioned from David Whitmer (S7D)<sup>111</sup>

1909: S3, S7B, S7D: *New witnesses for God: II. The Book of Mormon*, B.H. Roberts<sup>112</sup>

In 1909, B.H. Roberts again writes about the seer stone in “New witnesses for God: II. The Book of Mormon.” In chapter VII, it describes the Book of Mormon translation process in detail under the heading, “The Manner of Translating the Book of Mormon”.

The explanations in this book is very similar and identical in some cases to that given in *Defense of the Faith and the Saints* Vol 1. Roberts begins with Joseph Smith’s declaration, “Through the medium of the **Urim and Thummim** I translated the record by the gift and power of God”. He then relays Cowdery’s statement from 1848: “I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages), as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated by the gift and power of God, by the means of the **Urim and Thummim**, or, as it is called by that book, ‘Holy Interpreters.’” Next he turns to David Whitmer:

David Whitmer, another of the Three Witnesses, is more specific on the subject. After describing the *means the Prophet employed* to exclude the light from the “Seer Stone,” he says: “In the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another

---

<sup>110</sup> <https://archive.org/details/defenseoffaithsa00robe/page/256?q=seer+stone>

<sup>111</sup> <https://archive.org/details/defenseoffaithsa00robe/page/260/mode/2up/search/seer+stone?q=seer+stone> pg 261.

<sup>112</sup> See <https://archive.org/details/newwitnessforgod00roberich/page/112/mode/2up/search/seer+stone>



character with the interpretation would appear. Thus the Book of Mormon was translated by the gift and power of God and not by any power of man.”

Before going further, it is important that we note the following:

- 1) Though B.H. Roberts understood from the extended quote that Joseph was putting the rock in a hat to keep the light out, but chose to leave out this detail. *He does however include the hat in a quote from Whitmer on page 112.*
- 2) A single character in the Book of Mormon (said to be “reformed Egyptian”) corresponded to a phrase or sentence in English. This follows the pattern that Joseph would later use in “translating” the Book of Abraham from Egyptian.
- 3) Whitmer clearly states that the seer stone was employed while Oliver was the scribe – i.e. during the period when more than 90% of the book was produced. This is a direct contradiction to the statements of both Joseph and Oliver.

Roberts continues:

There will appear between this statement of David Whitmer’s and what is said both by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery a **seeming contradiction**. Joseph and Oliver both say the translation was done by means of the Urim and Thummim, which is described by Joseph as being two transparent stones set in a rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate;” while David Whitmer says that the translation was made by means of a “Seer Stone.” **The apparent contradiction is cleared up**, however by a statement made by Martin Harris, another of the Three Witnesses. He said that the Prophet possessed a “Seer Stone,” by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then (i.e., at the time Harris was acting as his scribe) used the Seer Stone. \*\*\*\* Martin said further that the Seer Stone differed in appearance entirely from the Urim and Thummim that was obtained with the plates, which were two clear stones set in two rims, very much resembling spectacles, only they were larger.

When we inspect Harris’ statement as quoted in the Millennial Star. At the time, Harris was visiting Salt Lake City as the guest and under the care of Elder Stevenson. He was 88 years old at the time. He met with George A. Smith and John Taylor and gave a presentation in a house “crowded to overflowing”. The text was written down by Edward Stevenson and reported after the death of Harris.

On page 108, Roberts Continues:

The “Seer Stone” referred to here was a chocolate-colored, somewhat egg-shaped stone which the Prophet found while digging a well in company with his brother Hyrum. It possessed the qualities of Urim and Thummim, since by means of it – as described above – as well as by means of the “Interpreters” found with the Nephite record, Joseph was able to translate the characters engraven on the plates.

Here Roberts is largely accurate. The seer stone was found digging a well or digging for treasure on Chase’s farm and Hyrum was helping with the digging in some of the accounts, though Chase claims that he found the stone.

Roberts next quotes an account by David Whitmer published in the Kansas City Journal June 5, 1881:

“He (meaning Joseph Smith) had two small stones of a chocolate color, nearly egg-shape, and perfectly smooth, but not transparent, called interpreters, which were given him with the plates. He did not see the plates in translation, but would hold the interpreters to his eyes and cover his face with a hat, excluding all light, and before his eyes would appear what seemed to be parchment on which would appear the characters of the plates in a line at the top, and immediately below would appear the translation in English, which Smith would read to his scribe, who wrote it down exactly as it fell from his lips. The scribe would then read the sentence written, and if any mistakes had been made, the characters would remain visible to Smith until corrected, when they would fade from sight to be replaced by another line.”

Here it seems likely that either Whitmer or the recorder is confused. It is generally accepted that only one stone was used in the translation process. Perhaps Whitmer was confused because of later talk (esp after 1833) of the Urim and Thummim. Perhaps he decided that there must have been two stones because he remembered one stone but now people including the prophet were referring to them in the plural. Regardless, the bulk of the testimony seems accurate.

Roberts notes the inaccurate account, but draws the conclusion that *the more likely scenario* is that Whitmer was confused about the color of the stone and was actually describing the Urim and Thummim in this quote.

Roberts concludes with this summary:

The sum of the whole matter, then concerning the manner of translating the sacred record of the Nephites, according to the testimony of the only witness competent to testify in the matter is: With the Nephite record was deposited a curious instrument, consisting of two transparent stones, set in the rim of a box, somewhat resembling spectacles, but larger, called by the ancient Hebrews “Urim and Thummim,” but by the Nephites “Interpreters.” In addition to these “Interpreters” the Prophet Joseph had a “Seer Stone,” which *to him* was a Urim and Thummim; that the Prophet sometimes used one and sometimes the other of these sacred instruments in the work of translation; and whether the “Interpreters” or the “Seer Stone” was used the Nephite characters with the English interpretation appeared in the sacred instrument; that the Prophet would pronounce the English translation to his scribe, which, when correctly written, would disappear and the other characters with their interpretation take their place, and so on until the work was completed.

In volume III of the same work, Roberts again addresses the seer stones, but the mention is brief and inconsequential compared with his other remarks.

[1930: U1, S7B, S3 - Comprehensive History of the Church, Roberts](#)

In Volume 1 pg 129, several quotes are given from Oliver (U+T, 1834); David Whitmer (In the darkness the spiritual light would shine...); Martin Harris (dual method) and concludes with the dual method – i.e. that both the U+T and the chocolate-colored Seer stone were used. The conclusion is identical to his 1909 New Witnesses for God vol II.

[1937, Source Material on the Book of Mormon, Francis W. Kirkham](#)

In 1937, Francis W. Kirkham published *Source Material on the Book of Mormon: America's Strangest Book*. This title includes excerpts from many original publications about seer stones. However, the

author concludes that all of these sources are unreliable or inaccurate. This volume may not have received wide distribution<sup>113</sup>.

1942, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, Kirkham

Republished in 1947, 1951, and 1956, Kirkham's *A New Witness for Christ in America* was a widely distributed apologetic text of the era defending the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. While acknowledging several quotes regarding seer stones, Kirkham flatly rejects this explanation as the method of creation for the Book of Mormon. He concludes that this was a lie or theory of Chase, first published in 1834 and then spread by others. He also rejects the claim that Joseph used seer stones to seek for buried treasures.

1956, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Joseph Fielding Smith

In 1956, *Doctrines of Salvation* was published (Bruce R. McConkie, Joseph Fielding Smith). Joseph Fielding Smith had been the Church Historian since 1921. The book was very widely distributed and is still readily available on the used market. This denial follows the pattern laid out by Kirkham in his 1937 Improvement Era article<sup>114</sup>. The book addresses seer stones as follows:

SEER STONE NOT USED IN BOOK OF MORMON TRANSLATION. We have been taught since the days of the Prophet that the Urim and Thummim were returned with the plates to the angel. We have no record of the Prophet having the Urim and Thummim after the organization of the Church. Statements of translations by the Urim and Thummim after that date are evidently errors. The statement has been made that the Urim and Thummim was on the altar in the Manti Temple when that building was dedicated. The Urim and Thummim so spoken of, however, was the seer stone which was in the possession of the Prophet Joseph Smith in early days. This seer stone is now in the possession of the Church.

While the statement has been made by some writers that the Prophet Joseph Smith used a seer stone *part of the time* in his translating of the record, and information points to the fact that he did have in his possession such a stone, yet there is *no authentic statement* in the history of the Church which states that the use of such a stone was made in that translation. The information is all hearsay, and personally, **I do not believe that this stone was used for this purpose**. The reason I give for this conclusion is found in the statement of the Lord to the Brother of Jared as recorded in Ether 3:22-24.

These stones, the Urim and Thummim which were given to the Brother of Jared, were preserved for this very purpose of translating the record, both of the Jaredites and the Nephites. Then again the Prophet was impressed by Moroni with the fact that these stones were given for that very purpose. It hardly seems reasonable to suppose that the Prophet would substitute something evidently inferior under these circumstances. It may have been so, but it is so easy for a story of this kind to be circulated due to the fact that the Prophet did possess a seer stone, which he *may have used for some other purposes*.

---

<sup>113</sup> Republished in 2010 due to its rare nature. Available on Amazon. <https://www.amazon.com/Source-Material-Concerning-Origin-Mormon/dp/1162970944>

<sup>114</sup> The Manner of Translating the Book of Mormon. Improvement Era, Oct 1939. Vol 42 no. 10 pp 631-632. <https://archive.org/details/improvementera4210unse/page/n57?q=seer+stone>

NOTE: The statement made by Smith seems to resemble that made by Kirkham in his 1939 Improvement Era article.

1958, *Mormon Doctrine*, Bruce R. McConkie

First printed in 1958 and in publication for half a century until 2010. McConkie was likely influenced by his father-in-law Joseph Fielding Smith. The topic of seer stones is addressed as follows:

Peep Stones

*See DEVIL, REVELATION, URIM AND THUMMIM.*

In imitation of the order of heaven whereby seers receive revelations from God through a Urim and Thummim, the devil gives his own revelations to some of his followers through peep stones or crystal balls. An instance of this copying of the true order occurred in the early days of this dispensation. Hiram Page had such a stone and was professing to have revelations for the upbuilding of Zion and the governing of the Church. Oliver Cowdery and some others were wrongly influenced thereby in consequence of which Oliver was commanded by revelation: "Thou shalt take thy brother, Hiram Page, between him and thee alone, and tell him that those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that Satan deceiveth him." (D&C 28: 11.)

1976, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, by James B. Allen and Glen M Leonard

This book discussed the seer stone as follows:

Sometime around 1822, before his first visit from the angel Moroni, Joseph was digging a well with Willard Chase, not far from the Smith home, and he discovered a smooth, dark-colored stone, about the size of an egg, that he called a seerstone. He later used it to help in the translation of the Book of Mormon and also in receiving certain revelations.<sup>115</sup>

Due to this and other topics discussed in the book, the book was not republished for years after the first printing sold out. Some of the more conservative members of the 12 were highly opposed to the book because they thought that it wasn't faith-promoting. For additional information, see:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Story\\_of\\_the\\_Latter-day\\_Saints#Controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Story_of_the_Latter-day_Saints#Controversy)

1983, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, Richard Bushman

Originally intended to be one of roughly 15 volumes in an updated Church History and published by Deseret Books, drafts of this book were read by assistants to some of the more conservative apostles prior to publication. The new history project was canceled as a result and the book was published by University of Illinois Press in 1984. The book addresses the translation process by giving the most weight to the primary witnesses Joseph, Oliver, and Lucy Mack Smith who emphasize the Urim and Thummim or "interpreters" throughout the main text. However, note 51 on page 221 does give a fairly accurate account of the translation process:

David Whitmer said that Moroni did not return the Urim and Thummim in September, and instead gave Joseph a seerstone that was used for the remaining translation...(source). A monthly periodical of church history published between 1882 and 1890, confirmed Whitmer's

---

<sup>115</sup> See Chapter 2: The Restoration Commences, 1820-1831, pg 40-41

story. Of the translation process, Emma said, “the first that my husband translated was translated by the use of the Urim and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly black, but was rather a dark color.”

2005, *Opening the Heavens* (John W. Welch<sup>116</sup>, BYU press)

This book contains numerous first person accounts of the translation process including about 29 references to seer stones.<sup>117</sup> The attempt to provide many or all of the first person accounts along with the faithful narrative may have been a response to *Early Mormon Documents* (Dan Vogel), a five volume account of numerous original documents related to the restoration published in 5 volumes between 1996 and 2003. It may also be a belated attempt to respond to Greg Prince’s *Power from on High*.

As Bushman notes on the rear cover of this volume (emphasis added):

All the crucial documents are laid open for inspection with enough commentary to *put them in context*. For serious students of Latter-day Saint history, nothing could be more helpful – and inspiring

The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition was published on Jan 27, 2017 and available from Deseret Press. It is also available online.<sup>118</sup>

## Additional Seer Stone Sources available in Utah: 1880-1980

These accounts are not published by the church, but would have been available to church members and leaders as they were published in Utah. Until 1920, the SLC tribune was considered to be an anti-mormon publication.

Salt Lake Tribune 1886-10-17<sup>119</sup>

Reprint of an account given in Richmond Mo. on Oct 9, 1886. Also printed by the Sunday Inter Ocean, Chicago, IL on Oct 17, 1886<sup>120</sup>.

By fervent prayer and by otherwise humbling himself, the prophet however, again found favor, and was presented with a **strange, oval-shaped, chocolate-colored stone, about the size of an egg, only more flat**, which, it was promised would serve the same purpose as the missing Urim and Thummim (the latter was a pair of transparent stones set in a bow-shaped frame and very much resembled a pair of spectacles). With this stone all of the present Book of Mormon was translated. It is the only one of these relics which is not in the possession of the Whitmers. For years Oliver Cowdery surrounded it with care and solicitude, but at his death, old Phineas Young, a brother of Brigham Young, and an old-time and once intimate friend of the Cowdery

---

<sup>116</sup> John (Jack) Welch is a lawyer and well-known LDS apologist. Among other contributions, he proposed in 1969 the Chiasmus is found in the Book of Mormon and that this is an evidence that it is an ancient text of Hebrew origins. He is on the board of Book of Mormon Central.

<sup>117</sup> As reported by Fair Mormon:

[https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism\\_and\\_history/Censorship\\_and\\_revision/Hiding\\_the\\_facts#The\\_seer\\_stone\\_and.2For\\_the\\_stone\\_with\\_the\\_hat](https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_history/Censorship_and_revision/Hiding_the_facts#The_seer_stone_and.2For_the_stone_with_the_hat)

<sup>118</sup> <https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/opening-heavens-accounts-divine-manifestations-1820-1844-second-edition>

<sup>119</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6sr08ph/13163037>

<sup>120</sup> <http://www.sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/IL/mischig.htm#101786a>

family, came out from Salt Lake City, and during his visit he contrived to get the stone from its hiding place, through a little deceptive sophistry, expended upon the grief-stricken widow. When he returned to Utah he carried it in triumph to the apostles of Brigham Young's "lion house."

Salt Lake Tribune 1887-12-11<sup>121</sup>

"David's Revelations" is a report on "An Address to All Believers in Christ" and quotes that regarding the method of translation including seer stones. Included in this account is the brown stone, the shape, and that it was placed in a deep top hat during use. The article is mocking in tone and concludes: "I confess I end in sadness, being more than ever impressed with the terrible delusion and imposturs of Mormonism. How many lives it has utterly blighted and laid waste?...More than anything else it has been a contagion of folly and depravity."

Salt Lake Tribune 1903-12-06<sup>122</sup>, Tribune Editor

Written in response to "Elder Roberts's Defense of the Book of Mormon". The author is response to reply from Roberts from his original article published on Nov 22, 1903. The author quotes Martin Harris from 1881 (S3). He then quotes David Whitmer from 1887 (An Address to All believers in Christ – S7).

Salt Lake Tribune 1909-01-17<sup>123</sup> Tribune Editor

This article mentions "seer stones" or "Urim and Thummim" as both being absurd in writing a response to Roberts regarding "The Manual Theory vs. the Mechanical Theory of the Book of Mormon".

Ogden Daily Standard 1909-03-13<sup>124</sup>

An article which challenges B.H. Roberts regarding his statements on the non-mechanical method of Book of Mormon translation. It mentions seer stones, without taking a definitive stance regarding the seer stone or Urim and Thummim method.

Salt Lake Tribune 1909-03-22<sup>125</sup>, Rev. J.A. Livingston Smith

Upheaval in the Mormon Church by Rev. J. A. Livingston Smith. In the article he condemns the shift in doctrine from the "mechanical theory" of translation to the "mental effort theory". Seer stones are mentioned in passing, along with the Urim and Thummim as possible methods of translation.

Salt Lake Tribune 1909-05-02<sup>126</sup>, Rev M. T. Lamb

"More Problems for Elder Roberts – Ridiculous Errors in the Book of Mormon Pointed out by the Rev. M. T. Lamb, Author of "The Golden Bible". After quoting Harris (S3 - 1881, via Myth of Manuscript Found, pg 90), David Whitmer is also quoted (S5 - Chicago Daily Tribune, 1885 via the Deseret Evening News, Dec 24, 1885). The author goes on to explain:

Funny isn't it, that God could allow a prophet of his or the angel who controlled the prophet thus to play "hide and seek" with deity! After taking so much pains and trouble for over 2000 years to prepare and preserve those unspeakably-valuable plates and the instrument for their

---

<sup>121</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6669phv/12384446>

<sup>122</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6rz0nxz/13511114>

<sup>123</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s64q953t/13999253>

<sup>124</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6d83cd2/7317024>

<sup>125</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s67s8zww/14035960>

<sup>126</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s69s325f/14075817>

translation for the especial use off his highly favored prophet – that now said prophet should discover that neither of them are essential, but that a certain **kidney-shaped stone found in a neighbor's well** when he was 15 years old could do the whole business just as well and was even “more convenient!”.

Salt Lake Tribune 1909-10-10<sup>127</sup> J.F. Gibbs

Human Origin of Book of Mormon (Criticism of Elder B. H. Robert's “Defense”). A few bits from the article:

The entire fabric of Mormonism rests on the important question of whether or not the book of Mormon was divinely inspired....Elder Brigham H. Roberts, whom every one in Utah recognizes as the most able writer, speaker, and logician in the Mormon church, was delegated to straighten out the “inspired” tangle. In his “Defense of the Faith of the Saints,” vol 1, 1907, Elder Roberts devotes fifty-six pages to an effort to settle the vexed question as to how, and by what means, the Book of Mormon was translated.

The article proceeds to give a description of the manner of translation as outlined in Roberts 1907 Defense prior to responding. Quotes of Harris and Whitmer are repeated. In its response, it quotes Lucy Mack Smith and that Joseph would “describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them”. After additional rebuttals, it concludes:

In his despair because of this failure to satisfy even himself, Elder Roberts cries out: “I wish Messrs. Whitmer and Harris . . . had left the whole matter where the Prophet Joseph left it;” page 286. And again he wails: “Yea, let God be true but every man a liar,” and to that worthy sentiment every unbiased reader of his voluminous effort to harmonize the translation of the Book of Mormon with common sense, will utter a fervent, “Amen!”. J.F. Gibbs.

Salt Lake Tribune 1910-07-21<sup>128</sup>, Josiah F. Gibbs

An article by Josiah F. Gibbs titled, “Sidelights on Mormon History, Doctrines and Trickery; a Brief Discussion of Them. The article gives two examples of places where the biography of Lucy Mack Smith had been changed when reprinted and revised by George A. Smith in 1902. “Peek stones” are mentioned, and the description of the brown seer stone by Whitmer is discussed as quoted from Roberts (1881, Kansas City Journal account).

Provo Daily Herald 1980-05-12

An article entitled “Book of Mormon Translation Not Word for Word” summarizes an interview with Edward H. Ashment, LDS Church Supervisor of Scripture Translation Research. It give the Harris seer stone account, but points out that he was 88 years old and that the account was recorded 50 years after the actual event, possibly in an effort to downplay its significance. This method for obfuscation follows the example of Francis Kirkham<sup>129</sup>. It goes on to quote arguments from Roberts and Nibley with respect to the manner of translation for the Book of Mormon and Book of Abraham.

---

<sup>127</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6p85p13/14018639>

<sup>128</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6np3fkf/14102618>

<sup>129</sup> See Improvement Era, Oct 1939, vol 42 no 10 pg 631.

## Mentions of Seer Stones: 1960-2015: (LDS magazines)

### 1960, Improvement Era

In 1960, the Improvement Era published an article titled “Language of the Book of Mormon”. It is an apologetic response to “arguments against the Book of Mormon based on the language of the book.” In quoting BH Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol 1 . 130, the author writes:

“It should not be supposed, however, that this translation though accomplished by means of the interpreters and Seer Stone... was merely a mechanical procedure; that no faith, or mental or spiritual effort was required on the Prophet’s part; that the instruments did all, while he who used them did nothing but look and repeat mechanically what he saw there reflected.”<sup>130</sup>

### 1963, Improvement Era (Mar)

There is one unclear reference to peepstones in the translation of the Book of Mormon:

The History of Susquehanna County tells in twisted narratives about Joseph Smith and his scribes secretly at work with their “peepstone” and “golden records” in their small home upon the Susquehanna.<sup>131</sup>

### (Events of the early 1970s)

1970: Joseph Fielding Smith released as church historian to become president of the church. Smith died in July 1972.

1971: A William Lund (Assistant Church Historian and gate-keeper for those seeking access to the records) dies.

In 1972, Arrington became the Church Historian for the LDS church. He quickly started a number of projects, including a 15 or 16 volume official church history to update the now dated publications. He also open the archives to a number of scholars for the first time since the 1940s.

### 1974, Friend Magazine (Sept)

In 1974, there was an article about translation including the seer stone in the Friend – the relatively new publication for children under the age of 12. The author of the article remains anonymous.

To help him with the translation, Joseph found with the gold plates “a curious instrument which the ancients called Urim and Thummim, which consisted of two transparent stones set in a rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate.”

Joseph also used an egg-shaped, **brown rock for translating called a seer stone...**

Martin Harris said that on the seer stone “sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by [the one writing them down] and when finished [that person] would say ‘written;’ and if correctly written, the sentence would disappear and another take its place; but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates.”

---

<sup>130</sup> Improvement Era. Vol 63 No 06. June 1960. Pg 452.

<sup>131</sup> Improvement Era. Vol 66 No 03, pg 192, Mar 1963.

<https://archive.org/details/improvementera6603unse/page/n49?q=peepstone>



Even with the help of the Urim and Thummim **and the seer stone**, it wasn't easy to translate the sacred record.<sup>132</sup>

Per the trend set by Roberts, the hat was not mentioned.

#### 1977, Ensign, Anderson - Denial

In 1977 in the Ensign magazine, apologist Richard Anderson clearly addresses the idea of seer stones in the translation of the Book of Mormon quoting from both Harris and David Whitmer (source 1 and 3 – both quoted correctly). He then adds:

After Martin Harris lost the part of the translation done in 1828, Oliver Cowdery became chief scribe for the entire Book of Mormon as it is now printed. Toward the end of this new work of 1829, David Whitmer on occasion watched and afterwards spoke of the seer stone. Yet **as an intimate assistant, Oliver Cowdery stressed the Urim and Thummim in his statements**. While editor of the Church newspaper in 1834, he made the comment already quoted on the inspiration of writing for Joseph Smith. Then the Prophet's scribe added:

"Day after day I continued uninterrupted to write from his mouth as he translated, with the **Urim and Thummim**, or as the Nephites would have said, 'interpreters,' the history, or record called 'The Book of Mormon.'"<sup>133</sup>

It is strongly implied that Harris and Whitmer are mistaken and that Oliver is giving the accurate account of the translation process. The article concludes:

Though at this time we do not comprehend the exact way in which the Urim and Thummim were used in the translation of the Book of Mormon, we are promised that the miraculous gift given to the Prophet Joseph Smith in order to receive revelation and translate scripture will be given to all who live worthy to enter into exaltation; and then "things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms will be made known."<sup>134</sup>

#### 1986, The Truth about the God Makers (U2B, U2C) - Denial

In 1982, a movie highly critical of the LDS church was first shown. In addition to exposing details of the temple ceremony, a number of provocative claims (including several false claims) were made. One of the claims was that Joseph "...looked into his hat, and there, shining on the seer stone were the hieroglyphics...". This claim is rebutted on page 140:

The authors seem to "know" a lot about the translation details, again without documentation. If this was the way the Book of Mormon came forth it has nothing to do with its authenticity.

Two explanations by Joseph Smith that I am aware of are, that the plates were "translated by the gift and power of God" (HC 1:315) and "through the medium of the Urim and Thummim I translated the record through the gift and power of God" (HC4:537). *The authors chose not to give Joseph Smith's version.*

---

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/friend/1974/09/a-peaceful-heart?lang=eng>

<sup>133</sup> The Ensign, Sept 1977. Pg <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/09/by-the-gift-and-power-of-god?lang=eng>

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

*Comment: This is not an official publication, though it was published by a member in good standing for an LDS audience. Following the trend of the God Makers, in 1993 and 2013, the LDS church also chose also to omit Smith's version of events. Smith's claims to have translated via the Urim and Thummim have not been repeated in official church publications in the last two decades.*

1993, July Ensign, "A Treasured Testament" Nelson (S7, U1B)<sup>135</sup>

In 1993 discussing the process of translation, Nelson of the Q12 wrote:

As Oliver Cowdery testified a few years later: "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated ... the history or record called 'The Book of Mormon.'" (JS—H 1:71n.)

The details of this miraculous method of translation are still not fully known. Yet we do have a few precious insights. David Whitmer wrote:

"Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine....

(Nelson proceeds to give full and correct quote from An Address to All Believers in Christ, pg 12).

This translation method is listed as one of several possibilities in the article. However it is interesting to note that Nelson changed the quotes of both Oliver (omitting the Urim and Thummim from the quote) and restored the correct/full quote from Whitmer which the church had misquoted in its magazines between 1906 and 1924 (B. H. Roberts)<sup>136</sup>. This appears to be the first time that the hat is mentioned as plausible in official LDS publications since the 1880s.

1993, "Gift and Power of God", Maxwell – Video Address<sup>137</sup>. Later reprinted in Jan 1997, Ensign "By the Gift and Power of God"<sup>138</sup>, Maxwell (S4, S3, both abbreviated).

**The Prophet Joseph alone knew the full process, and he was deliberately reluctant to describe details.** We take passing notice of the words of David Whitmer, Joseph Knight, and Martin Harris, who were observers, not translators. David Whitmer indicated that as the Prophet used the **divine instrumentalities** provided to help him, "the hieroglyphics would appear, and also the translation in the English language ... in bright luminous letters." Then Joseph would read the words to Oliver (quoted in James H. Hart, "About the Book of Mormon," Deseret Evening News, 25 Mar. 1884, 2). Martin Harris related of the **seer stone**: "Sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin" (quoted in Edward Stevenson, "One of the Three Witnesses: Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris," Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star, 6 Feb. 1882, 86–87). Joseph Knight made similar observations (see Dean Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," BYU Studies 17 [Autumn 1976]: 35).

---

<sup>135</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1993/07/a-treasured-testament?lang=eng>

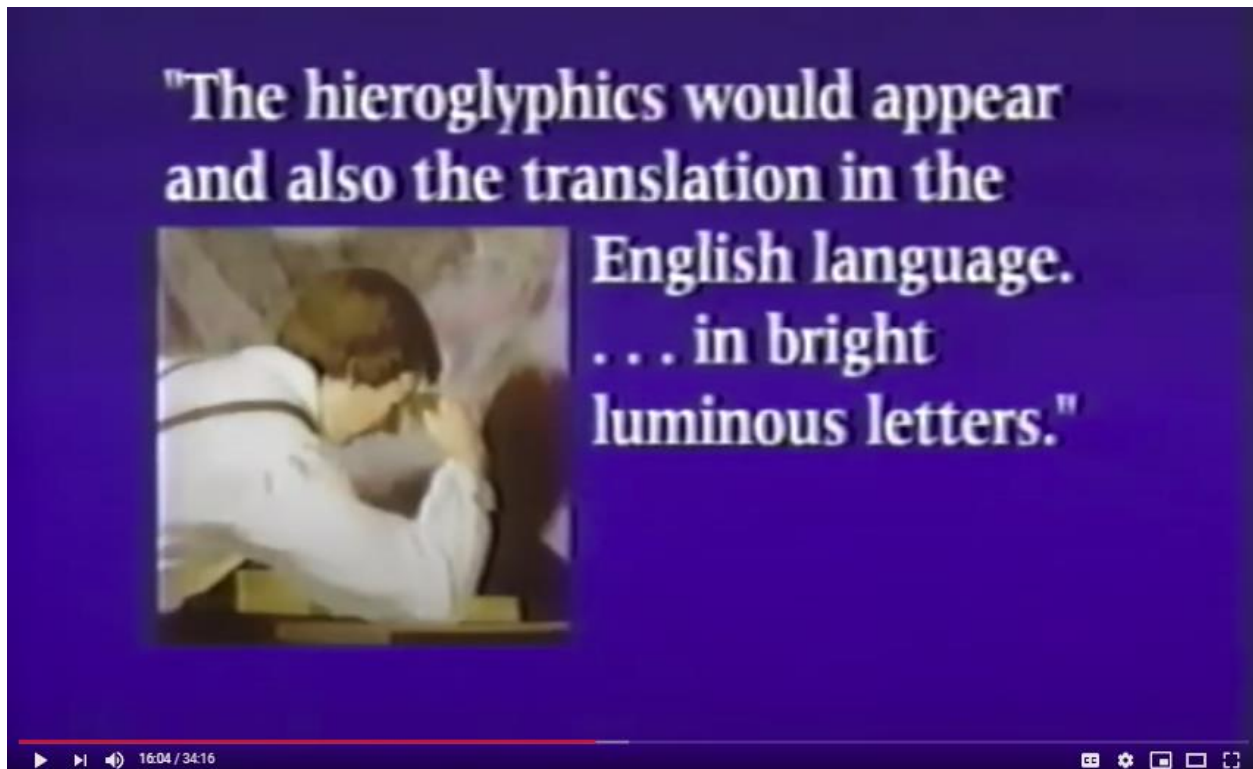
<sup>136</sup> The said "misquote" refers to the elimination of the "hat" from the quote and the addition of the "Urim and Thummim".

<sup>137</sup> Available on Youtube at: <https://youtu.be/1KIdaOLJgS8>

<sup>138</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1997/01/by-the-gift-and-power-of-god?lang=eng>

Oliver Cowdery is reported to have testified in court that the **Urim and Thummim** enabled Joseph “to read in English, the reformed Egyptian characters, which were engraved on the plates” (“Mormonites,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, 9 Apr. 1831). If these reports are accurate, they suggest a process indicative of God’s having given Joseph “sight and power to translate” (D&C 3:12).

Note: While the seer stone and hat are clearly mentioned by Whitmer in the source quote, Maxwell leaves out the hat and calls the seer stone “divine instrumentalities”. Also note, the term “Urim and Thummim” used by Maxwell was *not* mentioned by Cowdery who simply stated that “two transparent stones, resembling glass, set in silver bows” were employed to translate in the 1831 account. In the video presentation, the following visual is shown while Maxwell is talking about the hieroglyphics:



Later in the talk Maxwell foreshadows the church’s current (2020) approach toward the Book of Mormon – that it was a revelation more than a translation:

If by means of these divine instrumentalities the Prophet was seeing ancient words rendered in English and then dictating, he was not necessarily and constantly scrutinizing the characters on the plates—the usual translation process of going back and forth between pondering an ancient text and providing a modern rendering.

The revelatory process apparently did not require the Prophet to become expert in the ancient language. ~~The revelatory process~~<sup>139</sup> *The constancy of revelation* was more crucial than the

---

<sup>139</sup> <https://youtu.be/1KIdaOLjgS8?t=1035>

constant presence of opened plates, which, by instruction, were to be kept from the view of unauthorized eyes anyway.

This talk may have been a direct or indirect response to D. Michael Quinn's book "Early Mormonism and the Magic World View". Quinn was excommunicated for his writings in 1993 along with several other prominent Mormon authors and historians as part of the September 6.

2013, *Gospel Topics: Book of Mormon Translation* (U1B, O3, S3)

While this is by far the most accurate article since Roberts in 1907 and 1909, it is still misleading in several statements:

- 1) The article states that "Joseph Smith consistently testified that he translated the Book of Mormon by the "gift and power of God." In fact, he also testified on at least 3 occasions that he used the "Urim and Thummim". One of these accounts is canonized in LDS scripture.
- 2) Oliver Cowdery quote: "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven." – *following the precedence set by Nelson in 1993, the authors leave out the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the quote which clearly defines the Urim and Thummim as the instrument used during this part of the translation.*
- 3) There is no indication in the article that the entire current Book of Mormon was created using the seer stone and hat methodology.

2015, *Ensign*

In 2015, the LDS published its most accurate description of seer stones to date in the *Ensign*. The article states:

...historical evidence shows that in addition to the two seer stones known as "interpreters," Joseph Smith used *at least one other seer* stone in translating the Book of Mormon, often placing it into a hat in order to block out light. According to Joseph's contemporaries, he did this in order to better view the words on the stone.

By 1833, Joseph Smith and his associates began using the biblical term "Urim and Thummim" to refer to any stones used to receive divine revelations, including both the Nephite interpreters and the single seer stone. This *imprecise terminology* has complicated attempts to reconstruct the exact method by which Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. In addition to using the interpreters, according to Martin Harris, Joseph also used one of his seer stones *for convenience* during the Book of Mormon translation. Other sources corroborate Joseph's changing translation instruments.<sup>140</sup>

The Martin Harris account described here is the 2<sup>nd</sup> hand account from 1870 first published in the *Deseret News* in 1881.

Without addressing the quote of Joseph Smith that he translated the Book of Mormon with the Urim and Thummim, the article concludes:

The most salient point Joseph Smith made about the translation of the Book of Mormon was that he did it "by the gift and power of God."

---

<sup>140</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2015/10/joseph-the-seer?lang=eng>

Statements of both Joseph and Oliver regarding the Urim and Thummim are again left out from this article.

## Places that should have mentioned the seer stone, but did not.

1897 lecture, Elder Richards – Ogden Daily Standard 1897-04-09<sup>141</sup>

Covers the Urim and Thummim (Cowdrey), but ignores the seer stone.

1922 - Essentials in Church History, by Joseph Fielding Smith

Mentions “peepstones” being used by enemies of the church to find the golden plates. Also mentions the peepstone of Hyum Page. “Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses, obtained a stone with which he was receiving revelations purporting to be for the guidance of the Church...” However, there are no mentions of any seer stone or peepstone in conjunction with Joseph Smith.

1983 – Ensign – “The coming forth of the Book of Mormon” (U1)

In 1983, an article called “The coming forth of the Book of Mormon” includes the full quote from Cowdrey regarding the Urim and Thummim (U1) as well as quotes from Joseph Smith regarding the “Gift and power of the God.” No mention of the Seer Stone is given.<sup>142</sup>

1986 - Neil A. Maxwell – “Joseph Smith: A Choice Seer” devotional at BYU<sup>143</sup>

In a 30 minute talk about seers, Maxwell briefly addresses the topic of translation but avoids seer stones entirely concluding “we cannot presently be definitive about methodology.”

We naturally would like to know about that process of translation. In October 1831, Joseph Smith was asked by his brother Hyrum, at a conference held in Orange, Ohio, to give a firsthand account concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The Prophet replied “that it was not intended to tell the world all the particulars of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and. . . it was not expedient for him to relate these things” (HC 1:220). Since Joseph, who knew the “particulars,” chose not to describe them in detail then, we cannot presently be definitive about methodology.

## Additional insight from David Whitmer

Though Orson Pratt later stated that Joseph continued to use seer stones on occasion to receive revelations, the observations of David Whitmer recorded in 1887 provide some of the best information available regarding the use of the brown seer stone and why it was discontinued.

Brother Hyrum said it had been suggested to him that some of the brethren might go to Toronto, Canada, and sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon for considerable money: and he persuaded Joseph to inquire of the Lord about it. Joseph concluded to do so. **He had not yet given up the stone.** Joseph looked into the hat in which he placed the stone, and received a

---

<sup>141</sup> <https://newspapers.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6v70kn7/7603995>

<sup>142</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1983/12/the-coming-forth-of-the-book-of-mormon?lang=eng>

<sup>143</sup> <https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/neal-a-maxwell/joseph-smith-choice-seer/>

revelation that some of the brethren should go to Toronto, Canada, and that they would sell the copy-right of the Book of Mormon.<sup>144</sup>

..Joseph did not know how it was, so he enquired of the Lord about it, and behold the following **revelation came through the stone**: "Some Revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil."

... After the translation of the Book of Mormon was finished, early in the spring of 1830, before April 6th, Joseph gave the stone to Oliver Cowdery and told me as well as the rest that he was through with it, **and he did not use the stone any more**. He said he was through the work that God had given him the gift to perform, except to preach the gospel. He told us that we would all have to depend on the Holy Ghost hereafter to be guided into truth and obtain the will of the Lord. The revelations after this came through Joseph as "mouth piece;" that is, he would enquire of the Lord, pray and ask concerning a matter, and speak out the revelation, which he thought to be a revelation from the Lord'; but sometimes he was mistaken- about it being the word of the Lord. As we have seen, some revelations are of God and some are not.<sup>145</sup>

The Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates by the gift and power of God, by means prepared of God - the stone of which I have spoken. Soon after' Brother Joseph finished the translation, he gave up the stone, and all his revelations after that - including the one on polygamy- he gave by his own mouth.<sup>146</sup>

The revelations in the Book of Commandments up to June, 1829, were given through the "stone," through which the Book of Mormon was translated. These are the only revelations that can be relied upon, and they are not law.<sup>147</sup>

## Spectacle details

From interview with Joel Tiffany, 1859 reprinted in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents volume 2 page 305:

The two stones set in a bow of silver were about two inches in diameter, perfectly round, and about five-eighths of an inch thick at the centre; but not so thick at the edges where they came into the bow. They were joined by a round bar of silver, about three-eighths of an inch in diameter, and about four inches long, which, with the two stones, would make eight inches.

The stones were white, like polished marble, with a few gray streaks. I never dared look into them by placing them in the hat, because Moses said that 'no man could see God and live,' and we could see anything we wished by looking into them; and I could not keep the desire to see God out of my mind. And beside, we had a command to let no man look into them, except by the command of God, lest he should 'look aught and perish.'

John H. Gilbert Interview, 1877, reprinted in Vogel, Early Mormon Documents volume 2 page 520:

---

<sup>144</sup> David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ, 1887, p. 31 <http://latterdaytruth.org/pdf/100023.pdf>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid Pg 32.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid Pg 42

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. Pg 53.

He translated them (i.e. the book of mormon) by means of a pair of magic spectacles which the Lord delivered to him at the same time that the golden tablets were turned up. *But nobody but Joe himself ever saw the golden tablets or the far-seeing spectacles.*

## Urim and Thummim in LDS Scriptures

### Bible – only in the OT

Several brief mentions of something called the Thummim and Urim, usually associated with the breastplate of Aaron.

Exodus 28:30

And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the aUrim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.

Additional reference: Numbers 27:21; Nehemiah 7:65; Ezra 2:63 (identical to Neh 7:65); Deuteronomy 33:8; Leviticus 8:8; 1 Samuel 28:6

### Book of Mormon (introduction)

Testimony of Joseph Smith in the introduction to the Book of Mormon:

“(the angle showed me) there were two stones in silver bows—and these stones, fastened to a breastplate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim—deposited with the plates; and the possession and use of these stones were what constituted ‘seers’ in ancient or former times; and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book. ...

“Again, he told me, that when I got those plates of which he had spoken—for the time that they should be obtained was not yet fulfilled—I should not show them to any person; neither the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim; only to those to whom I should be commanded to show them; if I did I should be destroyed.

### Book of Mormon (text)

No direct mentions, but the following mentions are critical to understanding LDS theology on the topic:

- 1) 2 Nephi 3:6-7, 11, 14,17: Book of Mormon prophecies that a choice seer will be raised up in the last days by the name of Joseph. “I will give unto him a commandment that he shall do none other work, save the work which I shall command him.” “...he shall be great like unto Moses” and have “power to bring forth my word”. “...his name shall be called after me (joseph); and it shall be after the name of his father.” “...thus prophesied Joseph: I am sure of this thing”. “I will raise up a moses; and I will give power unto him in a rod... Yet I will not loose his tongue,... I will not make him mighty in speaking... I will make a spokesman for him”
- 2) The Book of Mormon includes the Liahona – a mysterious instrument which had words written on it by miraculous means. In many ways, the writing described is similar to how Joseph Smith explained that the seer stones worked. (1 Nephi 16:10, 28-29, Alma 37:38, 43-45).
- 3) Talks about a seer who can translate by the power of god and hints that such a person is greater than a prophet (Mosiah 8:13-19).

## D&C

According to the current D&C (first noted in 1921), 6 sections (3, 6, 7, 11, 14, and 17) were written through the Urim and Thummim. According to Whitmer, “The revelations in the Book of Commandments up to June, 1829, were given through the ‘stone,’ through which the Book of Mormon was translated.”<sup>148</sup>

If this is correct, then all of the revelations 1-19 in the current D&C would have been received through the brown seer stone (placed in a top-hat). It is possible that portions of section 20 were also received with this methodology.

---

<sup>148</sup> David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 1887, p. 53