

The Interpreters-Seer Stone

Speaking Today: A Treasured Testament: By Elder Russell M. Nelson

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Adapted from an address given 25 June 1992 at a seminar for new mission presidents, Missionary Training Center, Provo, Utah. **Ensign**, July 1993, 61 Extracts:

“Many of you are experienced in the difficult task of translating written text from one language to another. I am intrigued, as you are, with the process Joseph Smith used to translate the Book of Mormon, which he said was done through “the gift and power of God.” (Book of Mormon, title page.) The Prophet learned the nature of that gift the night the angel Moroni first visited him. Moroni told him that “there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of [the American] continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants;

“Also, that 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.” (JS—H 1:34–35)

The inscriptions on the plates were written in a Semitic language, using a modified Egyptian type of script. Some critics have scoffed at such a linguistic mix. May I tell you of Doctor Moses Maimonides, one of the greatest rabbis and Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. He died in A.D. 1204. He served as a court physician in Cairo and is one of the most famous figures in the early history of medicine. Hospitals are named after him today. In Cairo he read and pondered the words of earlier Muslim thinkers and wrote his philosophical books in Arabic using the Hebrew alphabet. This is but one of many instances from ancient and medieval periods in which the script of one language has been used to write in another language. (See Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided; An LDS Perspective on the Middle East*, Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992, p. 205.) Indeed, history confirms that such a linguistic mix was not unusual at all.

I am intrigued that Joseph Smith—an unschooled young man in rural America—could have translated this Semitic language mix into the English language. That unlikely scenario relates to Isaiah’s remarkable prophecy: “I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder.” (Isa. 29:14)

The Hebrew text of the Old Testament from which that phrase was translated uses the word *pele*, meaning “miracle.” Thus one could also accurately interpret “a marvellous work and a wonder” as a “miraculous miracle.”

Truly, this latter-day work is precisely that. Think of the short time Joseph took to translate the Book of Mormon. Working from April to June of 1828, Joseph translated the 116 pages that Martin Harris later lost. Joseph began translating again on Tuesday, April 7, 1829, with Oliver Cowdery as scribe. The manuscript was completed eighty-five days later, on June 30 of that year. Of course, not all of that time was spent working on the translation. The Prophet and his scribes also took time to eat, to sleep, to seek employment, to receive the Aaronic and

Melchizedek priesthoods, to make at least one (and possibly two) trips to Colesville thirty miles away, to receive and record thirteen revelations that are now sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, to move from Harmony to Fayette, to acquire the Book of Mormon copyright, and to begin making arrangements for the publication of the Book of Mormon. Conservatively estimated, this left sixty-five or fewer working days on which the prophet and his scribes translated this book, which contains 531 pages in its current edition. (See John W. Welch, *Ensign*, Jan. 1988, pp. 46–47) *That calculates to an average of eight pages per day. Consider this when you translate a book, or as you schedule your own reading of the Book of Mormon.*

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 1:71)

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. 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.” (David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, Richmond, Mo.: n.p., 1887, p. 12)

<http://www.lds-mormon.com/transltn.shtml> states:

I offer a brief summary of what we know of the Book of Mormon "translation" process. I welcome corrections if anyone is aware of any. There are a number of articles that have been written on the subject, all of which are in substantive agreement (Refs follow commentary).

After reviewing the accounts from Joseph Smith (1838, 1842), Emma Smith Bidamon (1870, 1879), David Whitmer (1875, 1879, 1881, 1885, 1886, 1887), Oliver Cowdery (1834, 1859), Martin Harris (1882), Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery Johnson (1870), Michael Morse (1879), Isaac Hale (1834), Alva Hale (1834), William Smith (1883, 1884, 1891), and neighbors of Joseph Smith collected in 1833 by Dr. Philatus Hurlburt,

James E. Lancaster provides this summary:

"An examination of the foregoing eyewitness testimonies produces the following consensus on the method of translation of the Book of Mormon:

(1) Nephite interpreters often called "Urim and Thummim" were found with the plates on Hill Cumorah; *[my note: The words "Urim and Thummim" were never used to describe the stones until after the Book of Mormon was published. Even then the term was first used by people other than Joseph Smith.]*

(2) **These interpreters were used first in the translation of the plates;**

(3) The portion translated by use of the interpreters was copied into 116 pages of foolscap and was later lost by Martin Harris;

(4) Because of the loss of the first 116 pages of translation, the interpreters were permanently taken away [June/July 1828];

(5) **The Book of Mormon that we have today was translated by use of the seer stone;**

(6) **Smith translated by placing the seer stone in a hat and covering his face with his hat to darken his eyes;**

(7) **The plates were not used in the translating process and often were not even in sight during the translation;**

(8) Other persons were sometimes in the room while Smith dictated to a scribe; and

(9) [Almost] **all witnesses agree to these facts.**

The earliest newspaper accounts do not differ significantly from this scenario." ("The Translation of the Book of Mormon", pp. 105-6)

How a seer stone helped in the Book of Mormon translation- Mormon Times
23 Nov 2009 Michael R. Ash

Last week we talked about the frontier treasure-digging environment in which Joseph Smith lived and how his own pre-prophet world view was shaped by that environment.

As we've discussed in past articles, Joseph -- like any other prophet -- was a fallible human with preconceived ideas, opinions, and assumptions, who was divinely called to an important role. Worldviews don't change immediately or all at once. God reveals his word, line upon line, and those who listen can enlarge their understanding of truth a little here and there as they are willing to grasp new concepts.

In approximately 1819, Joseph borrowed a seer stone from a friend to find another whitish seer stone in an iron kettle 25 feet underground. Then, in 1822, Joseph found a brown stone while digging a well for Willard Chase. In Joseph's world, the ability to use a seer stone to "see" the location of lost objects was a gift from God. Joseph, his family, and many of his associates believed he had this gift.

Martin Harris recounted an incident when he literally lost a needle in hay (shavings and straw) and asked Joseph to find it with his seer stone. In a manner common to frontier diviners, Joseph put his seer stone into the bottom of a hat and then put his face into the hat -- obscuring all ambient light -- and somehow was able to see something in the stone. Martin watched Joseph closely to see that he did not peek from out of the hat. According to Martin, Joseph "reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin" (Tiffany's Monthly [June 1859], 164).

We don't know how Joseph was able to do this, and we don't know what his success rate was for finding lost or hidden objects. The important thing is that Joseph believed that he was able to find lost objects and that this gift was granted him by God.

When Joseph received the plates and the Nephite Interpreters, the Interpreters would have seemed both familiar and peculiar; familiar in that they were stones that could be used as tools to see things as shown by God; peculiar because they were to be used to translate a strange text.

We don't know what instructions Joseph received in utilizing the Interpreters but it seems that he may have been on his own to figure them out. Since they were shaped like glasses, Joseph apparently tried to use them -- at least initially -- as one would use spectacles. **This proved to be difficult, however, because the lenses were set wider than Joseph's eyes and caused eyestrain. Apparently Joseph likened the Interpreters to his seer stone and, according to Martin Harris, tried to use them in the bottom of a hat but found they were too big to fit.**

Somewhere during the early stages of translating, Joseph tried his seer stone and found that they -- like the Nephite Interpreters -- could serve as a tool for receiving the Book of Mormon translation. Once Joseph used his seer stone for translating, he never went back to divining.

Martin Harris, Joseph's first scribe during the translation process, wanted to test the veracity of Joseph's seer stone and related the following incident: During a break from translating, the two men would sometimes go to the river and throw stones. Once, Martin found a rock that closely resembled Joseph's seer stone and, when the prophet wasn't looking, switched the stone with the one in the hat. When the translation resumed, Joseph paused for a long time and then complained that he was unable to see the translation. Martin confessed to switching the stones because he wanted to "stop the mouths of fools" who said that Joseph merely memorized material and repeated it back to Martin.

Eventually, Joseph dictated 116 pages of text. Martin begged Joseph to let him take the pages to show his wife who was skeptical of the entire venture. After repeatedly petitioning the

Lord -- who initially told Joseph "no," Martin took the pages to his wife and ended up losing the translation. Joseph was reprimanded and the Lord took away the plates, the Interpreters, and Joseph's ability to translate. When the plates were restored, so was Joseph's gift and the remainder of the Book of Mormon was likely translated by way of the seer stone. END

Some Mormons may not understand Joseph's translation process 30 Nov 2009 Michael R. Ash Mormon Times.com

As we continue our discussion about the Book of Mormon translation, **some members may be troubled that the process doesn't match their conceptions of how they thought the process worked. For members who were unaware of the seer stone in the hat, at least two questions or concerns may arise: 1) Is it strange that Joseph used a stone in a hat? 2) Why have we have always been told that Joseph used the Urim and Thummim?**

To answer the first question we might also ask: Is it strange that a man could rise from the dead, walk on water, heal the lame, create the heavens, and answer the prayers of billions of people? There are basically two kinds of non-Mormons who reject LDS beliefs: A) those who believe that there is no God (or that if such a being exists he doesn't interact with humans), and B) those who believe that a supreme being exists and has communicated with mankind.

For those who don't believe in a God, all supernatural and miraculous events are automatically brushed aside as imaginary, impossible, etc. All spiritual experiences are seen as "strange," superstitious, and possibly the result of the evolutionary process of the mind. Joseph's translation process is just as strange as any other supernatural claim.

For those who believe that God can and has communicated with mankind, it seems hypocritical to summarily dismiss Joseph's method of translation because it doesn't fit with pre-conceived views of how God communicates. As with all spiritual claims, the only way to know if they come from God is to ask God for a witness.

For Mormons who think the seer stone in the hat is strange compared to a translation through the Nephite Interpreters, one might ask: Why is a translation through a stone outside of a hat (the Nephite Interpreters) acceptable, while a translation through a stone inside of a hat (the seer stone) is unusual? It should be obvious that if someone finds the one normal and the other odd, that such a perspective is based on nothing more than pre-conceived assumptions.

2: Why have we have always been told that Joseph translated the book with the Urim and Thummim? The answer is simple: The early Saints referred to both the Interpreters and the seer stone as the "Urim and Thummim." The real problem is not that the seer stone is called the Urim and Thummim, but rather that when most modern members hear the phrase they typically envision the Interpreters. Why is this? The critics claim that most members don't know about the stone and the hat because the church hides the information. This claim, however, is false.

That Joseph used a seer stone in a hat to translate the Book of Mormon has been mentioned in several official church publications such as the Improvement Era, the Ensign, and even the Friend by such people as B.H. Roberts, Richard Lloyd Anderson, Neal A. Maxwell and Russell M. Nelson. It stretches the imagination to believe that the church would hide this information if it has been included in official church magazines.

So why are some members unfamiliar with the translation process? The answer is a bit more complex. This topic and the frequent but false claim that the church "hides its history from members" will be discussed in greater depth in a future issue.

3: Why isn't the seer stone used today? In Joseph's world, he and many of his contemporaries believed that God could reveal things through a seer stone. Joseph's mind was already open and prepared for revelation and a translation process through the Urim and Thummin. The Lord utilized Joseph's worldview to help restore the gospel. If Joseph had been skeptical of seer stones, he may not have been receptive to translating the Book of Mormon.

As Joseph continued to receive more revelations, he discovered that the seer stone was merely an elementary tool for teaching him how to focus his thoughts on the things of God. By the time he was working on the Inspired Version of the New Testament, he no longer needed the seer stone. Joseph apparently told Orson Pratt that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim "when he was inexperienced in the Spirit of inspiration. But now he had advanced so far that he understood the operations of that Spirit and did not need the assistance of that instrument," (Richard L. Anderson, BYU Studies 24:4, 489-560).

Notes from Blogs for the 30th of November article

Normally, I have a healthy amount of curiosity about how things work. In an effort to be cautious and logical, I also do considerable critical thinking about people's stories. When it comes to the sacred, however, we have to look at things with spiritual eyes. For me, it works like this: I have a personal, spiritual witnesses that the Book of Mormon is true; therefore, I have a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet. I don't care how he translated the writing on the plates, as long as I know he did. By what process did Jesus turn water to wine, walk on water, or raise the dead? Why does the exact process matter?

Joseph Smith had at least 2 seer stones in his possession. One he found while digging a well with Willard Chase, and another he showed to the 12 in Nauvoo and told them that each would have their own one day. The first seer stone was eventually consecrated on an altar in the Manti Temple in 1888 by Wilford Woodruff. The fate of the second seer stone is uncertain, although there are theories that it is in the possession of the Community of Christ today

Additional articles connected to the same subject by Michael R. Ash

Michael R. Ash 2 Nov 2009 Mormon Times

Because the Book of Mormon was written in a unique and unknown script, we are told that God would provide means for the interpretation (Mormon 9:34). In addition to the golden plates, Joseph also received the Nephite "interpreters" and a "breastplate." Joseph's mother Lucy, who handled these items while they were covered in a thin muslin handkerchief, described the interpreters as "two smooth three-cornered" stones "set in silver bows" like "old fashioned spectacles." The breastplate, she wrote, 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."

Attached to one side of the interpreters was a rod that could connect the "spectacles" to the breastplate thereby freeing the hands of the translator to hold the item being interpreted. In order to understand the origin of the Nephite interpreters we need to go back to the brother of Jared prior to the Jaredite departure to the New World. After following the Lord's instruction to build barges, the brother of Jared came to the Lord with a problem. In making the barges watertight, they had no light in the vessels. The brother of Jared asked the Lord what they should do, and the Lord put the problem right back on the brother of Jared: "What will ye that I should do that ye may have light in your vessels?" (Ether 2:23).

Possibly relying on ancient traditions of Noah's ark (which I'll discuss in some future issue), the brother of Jared "did molten" 16 small stones out of rock and brought them back to the Lord, asking Him to "prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness ... that we may have light while we shall cross the sea" (Ether 3:1-4). The Lord touched the stones so they provided light during the ocean voyage.

Before I continue on as to how this ties to the Book of Mormon translation, I want to point out that the Lord doesn't typically drop revelation into the minds of prophets. More often than not, the Lord grants revelation according to petitions for help or understanding. In the example of the brother of Jared, the Lord could certainly have told him about the light problem when he instructed them to build barges. Instead, he allowed the Jaredites to build their own barges, discover problems on their own, seek a solution, and then come to him for help when they were unable to continue on their own.

We find the same example of revelation-as-answer-to-queries when we look at Joseph Smith's First Vision, the revelation on the Word of Wisdom, or Oliver Cowdery's attempt to translate the plates. In each case the Lord allowed them to find things out on their own and then they asked him for a solution once they had reached the limits of their own abilities. This is important to understand as we seek our own personal revelations -- we are supposed to use our brains and abilities first, then seek divine confirmation and help as we proceed.

It's also an important insight into understanding why prophets don't know everything about everything. No one can possibly conceive of every question to ask until confronted with situations that necessitate some additional input. The Lord reveals only those things that are expedient or important (D&C 88:64) and then, typically, only when asked for guidance or a solution to issues that have already been studied out in our own minds.

The brother of Jared's faith was so strong that when the Lord touched the stones he was able to see the Lord's finger through the veil. Then the Lord opened the veil even more, revealing himself as Jesus Christ. Jesus promised the brother of Jared that if he recorded this experience that it would come forth in the appropriate future. Because future generations would not know the brother of Jared's language, the Lord told him that when he sealed up the record he should include two of the 16 shining stones so they could be used to interpret the writings.

What exactly were the Nephite interpreters Mormon Times 9 Nov 2009

Michael R. Ash

Last week we revisited the brother of Jared's experience when the Lord touched sixteen stones to light the barges for their oceanic voyage. The Lord told him write a record and to seal it up with two stones (possibly two of the sixteen) so future generations could interpret the text.

These interpreters eventually ended up in the hands of Mosiah the younger, who used them to translate the Jaredite record -- the Book of Ether. We don't know exactly how Mosiah acquired the interpreters. It's possible they were found with Ether's plates or that Mosiah was led to them by an angel. It's also possible that he received them from his grandfather, the first Mosiah. Many years earlier, Mosiah 1 and several other Nephites had merged with the Mulekites in Zarahemla -- which was the final resting place of Coriantumr the last Jaredite king. Mosiah 2 eventually passed the interpreters to other Nephite prophets and it seems they were included in the stone box with the Book of Mormon plates.

As the Book of Mormon translation came to end, Oliver Cowdery, Martin Harris, and David Whitmer asked Joseph to ask the Lord if they could be witnesses to the record as foretold in Book of Mormon (see Ether 5:4, 2 Nephi 27:12). The Lord replied that if they remained faithful they would see "the plates, and also ...the breastplate, [and] ...the Urim and Thummim, which were given to the brother of Jared upon the mount..." (D&C 17:1).

Because the Book of Mormon never uses the phrase "Urim and Thummim" we don't know if the Lord revealed this designation or if Joseph and the early Saints simply applied it on their own. Like any revelation, D&C 17 reflects the Lord's directives as articulated in Joseph's language.

The biblical references to the Urim and Thummim are a bit ambiguous but modern scholars argue that, according to ancient sources, the Urim and Thummim was used for revelatory

purposes and that the term can be translated as "light" and "perfection." Several sources also tell us that they glowed.

While the Nephite interpreters would not have been the very Urim and Thummim from the Bible, they obviously operated in a similar fashion. They were used to receive revelation and they glowed in the Jaredite vessels during the oceanic voyage (more on this in a future issue). We can see, therefore, that the term "Urim and Thummim" can refer to more than one item.

Abraham also had a Urim and Thummim whereby he learned about the cosmos (Abraham 3:1-4). Joseph Smith taught that the place where God resides is a "great Urim and Thummim" and that the celestialized earth will become a Urim and Thummim. He also taught that the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17 would be an individual Urim and Thummim to all those who received one (D&C 130:6-11). The "white" stone may refer to the glowing nature of this device. In Joseph's day, the Urim and Thummim referred to more than one translating tool.

Today, when most members think of Joseph Smith translating the plates, they often envision Joseph on one side of a curtain while a scribe sat on the other side. They also may envision Joseph translating the record in one of two possible scenarios: 1) Joseph looked at the plates with his natural eyes as a scholar would study an ancient manuscript, and -- by way of revelation -- was able to discern the interpretation of the text, or 2) Joseph looked into the Nephite interpreters -- possibly holding them over the plates like a lens -- and saw the English translation of the text.

From what we know from witnesses to the translation process (or those who had talked with Joseph about the process), however, there are several things wrong with and missing from these recreations. First let's talk about the curtain. There was a curtain between Joseph and Martin Harris when Joseph copied some characters from the plates for Martin to take to Charles Anthon. Joseph had to look directly at the plates and Martin was not authorized to view them, so a curtain was necessary.

During the actual translation, however, the only time a curtain was used was in a doorway on those occasions when they wanted to keep visitors from disturbing the prophet and scribe as they worked. In many instances the translation was done in the presence of others. Some parts of the Book of Mormon, for instance, were translated in the Whitmer home in full view of all those inside the house. What did those witnesses see?

Seer stone-Nephite interpreters-Magic Mormon Times 16 Nov 2009

Last week we talked about the Nephite "Interpreters" and how they may have transferred from the brother of Jared to Joseph Smith. We also explained that their more common label, the "Urim and Thummim," has been applied to more than one tool through history.

This week we'll continue by noting that in Joseph Smith's day the term "Urim and Thummim" applied to two different translating tools -- the Nephite Interpreters as well as a special "seer stone" owned by the prophet. For members who aren't familiar with the seer stone some questions or concerns may arise. What was Joseph's seer stone? Where did it come from? How did the prophet use it to translate? Why would he use two different tools? And why are some members unfamiliar with the seer stone? In order to answer these questions, we need to understand the context in which Joseph translated the Book of Mormon. The place to start is with the "treasure digging" world-view of many frontier Americans. In Joseph's day many people (of all levels of education) believed in divining and treasure digging. Many people today still accept such practices. Diviners, wielding rods or seer stones, were often called to locate lost objects or treasure. Believers of such "magical" techniques were often devout Christians or even clergymen and typically attributed these powers to manifestation of Godly gifts. Frontier Christians had no problem integrating Christianity with what some call "magic." The label "magic," however, is problematic. In religious discourse, the term is loaded and often implies something false, deceptive, or maybe even Satanic. People tend to invoke the term to denote those things which they find distasteful, or for those things which they believe are disapproved by God. "What you do is magic; what I do is religion." Due to the ambiguous and pejorative nature of the label "magic," many scholars suggest that it be jettisoned from academic discussions on religion.

All religions rely on some things which -- from an outsider's view -- can be termed as magical or superstitious. The Bible, for example, records several instances or forms of "magic" as practiced by the righteous followers of God. We read, for instance, that Aaron had a magical rod (Exodus 7:9-12). Jacob also used magical rods to produce speckled offspring from Laban's cattle (Genesis 30:37-39). We read that a priest could tell if a woman had committed adultery by seeing if her thigh swelled after drinking a special potion (Numbers 5: 11-13, 21).

The Old Testament Joseph had a silver cup which he used to divine (Genesis 44:2, 5). Modern scholars refer to practice as "hydromancy" and explain that it was also practiced by the surrounding pagans. The casting of lots (known as "sortilege") to choose a new Apostle (see Acts 1:26) was known and practiced by the pagans of Jesus' day. Even some of Christ's miracles were similar to the magic of surrounding pagans. Jesus' healing of the deaf man by putting his fingers in his ears (Mark 7:33-35) and Jesus' healing of the blind man by touching his eyes with spittle and clay were also common pagan practices.

God works through men according to their environment, intellect, language, and worldviews. As we learn from the Doctrine and Covenants, God reveals things to his servants "in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (1:24). While those who reject God may scoff at supernatural practices as "magic," believers know that God has the power to perform miracles, to reveal His word, to manifest his power, and to advance His work, in spite of -- and even according to -- the weakness of mankind.

Joseph Smith wasn't raised in a cultural vacuum. There is ample evidence that the Smith family was no different in cultural beliefs than the rest of their contemporaries. Joseph and some of his closest associates -- including Methodist leader Willard Chase -- believed that Joseph had the God-given ability to discern hidden and lost objects or treasure by looking into a seer stone.

When Chase heard rumors that Joseph had acquired golden plates he was angry and felt that he was owed a share of the booty. He and a dozen other men sent for a Baptist diviner, who lived 60 miles away, to come find Joseph's plates. Later, Chase's sister used a green glass to divine for the location of Joseph's plates, and nearly found them!

Notes from Blogs on the seer stone for the 16 Nov 2009

The Mormon historian B. H. Roberts acknowledged the use of Joseph Smith's seer stone. He made the following statement in the Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 129:

"The Seer Stone referred to here was a chocolate-colored, somewhat egg-shaped stone which the Prophet found while digging a well in the company of his brother Hyrum, for a Mr. Clark Chase, near Palmyra, N.Y. 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." Joseph Smith's father-in-law, Isaac Hale, also noticed a definite relationship between the method Joseph Smith used to translate the Book of Mormon and the way he searched for buried treasures. In an affidavit that Isaac Hale provided we find some very interesting information:

"I first became acquainted with Joseph Smith, Jr. in November, 1825. He was at that time in the employ of a set of men who were called "money-diggers;" and his occupation was that of seeing, or pretending to see by means of a stone placed in his hat, and his hat closed over his face. In this way he pretended to discover minerals and hidden treasure... Smith, and his father with several other "money-diggers" boarded at my house while they were employed in digging for a mine that they supposed had been opened and worked by the Spaniards, many years since. Young Smith gave the "money-diggers" great encouragement, at first, but when they had arrived in digging, to near the place where he had stated an immense treasure would be found -- he said the enchantment was so powerful that he could not see."

David Whitmer, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, described how Joseph Smith placed the "seer stone" into a hat to translate the Book of Mormon:

"I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. Joseph 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. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. (An Address to All Believers in Christ, by David Whitmer, 1887, p.12)"

Mormon Scholar: To Someone Concerned, In a letter written March 27, 1876, Emma Smith acknowledged that the entire Book of Mormon, that we have today, was translated by the use of the seer stone. James E. Lancaster wrote:

How can the testimonies of Emma Smith and David Whitmer, describing the translation of the Book of Mormon with a seer stone, be reconciled with the traditional account of the church that the Book of Mormon was translated by the "interpreters" found in the stone box with the plates? It is the extreme good fortune of the church that we have testimony by Sister Emma Smith Bidamon on this important issue... a woman... wrote to Emma Bidamon, requesting information as to the translation of the Book of Mormon. Emma Bidamon replied... March 27, 1876.

Sister Bidamon's letter states in part:

"Now 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." According to the testimony of Emma Smith and David Whitmer, the angel took the Urim and Thummim from Joseph Smith at the time of the loss of the 116 pages. This was in June 1828, one year before David became involved with the work of translation. David Whitmer could never have been present when the Urim and Thummim were used. All of this he clearly states in his testimony to Brother Traugher:

"With the sanction of David Whitmer, and by his authority, I now state he does not say that Joseph Smith ever translated in his presence by aid of Urim and Thummim, but by means of one dark colored, opaque stone called a 'Seer Stone,' which was placed in the crown of a hat, into which Joseph put his face, so as to exclude the external light. Then, a spiritual light would appear before Joseph, upon which was a line of characters from the plates, and under it, the translation in English; at least, so Joseph said." (Saints' Herald, November 15, 1962, page 16)

According to the testimony of Martin Harris, Mr. Smith often used the "seer stone" in place of the Urim and Thummim, even while the later remained in his possession – using it as a mere matter of convenience.

"But now, alas! After all this trouble and pains and care on the part of God, and on the part of so many holy men of old, this "Urim and Thummim" is found at last to be altogether superfluous; not needed at all. This "peep stone" found in a neighbor's well will do the work just as well – and is even more convenient, "for convenience he used the seer stone." So we are left to infer that when he used the Urim and Thummim at all, it was at some inconvenience. And probably he only did it out of regard to the feelings of his God, who had spent so much time and anxiety in preparing it so long ago, and preserving it to the present day for his special use! (The Golden Bible, 1887, pages 250-51)" 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.” (Elder Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," Ensign, July 1993, p.61) (emphasis added) Since Joseph openly employed the seer stone in the hat for translation, at one point during the translation of the 116 pages, Martin Harris apparently tested the Prophet’s abilities. After translating for a time each day, the two would often take a break and walk to a nearby river and throw rocks into the river to unwind:

“Once Martin found a rock closely resembling the seer stone Joseph sometimes used in place of the interpreters and substituted it without the Prophet’s knowledge. When the translation resumed, Joseph paused for a long time and then exclaimed, ‘Martin, what is the matter, all is as dark as Egypt.’ Martin then confessed that he wished to ‘stop the mouths of fools’ who told him that the Prophet memorized sentences and merely repeated them.” (Told in Millennial Star 44:87; quotation from Kenneth W. Godfrey, "A New Prophet and a New Scripture: The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon," Ensign, January 1988, p.6)

Reality: It is undisputed that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon with a chocolate colored seer stone he found in a well: "One item mentioned by President Woodruff about the private dedicatory services at Manti is of more than passing interest. ‘Before leaving,’ he writes, ‘I consecrated upon the altar the Seer Stone that Joseph Smith found by revelation some thirty feet under the earth, and carried by him through life.’ This is the very Seer Stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith used part of the time when translating the Book of Mormon; the one he took from the well he was digging with his brother Hyrum, near Palmyra, for Mr. Clark Chase. (C.H.C. 6:230)"

Chocolate Rock On February 25, 1856, Brigham Young displayed the seer stone to the regents at the University of the State of Deseret (Later re-named University of Utah), one of which was Hosea Stout. He described it that night in his journal: "a siliceous granite dark color with light colored stripes somewhat resembling petrified poplar or cotton wood bark...about the size but not the shape of a hen's egg." (Stout Diary, February 25, 1856)

To Some one Concerned Modern Church authority Bruce R. McConkie confirmed the use of the stone by Joseph: "The Prophet also had a seer stone which was separate and distinct from the Urim and Thummim" (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 1966, 818)

In about 1982, a descendent of Brigham Young, Mary Brown Firmage was told by the First Presidency's secretary that the seer stone was in First Presidency's vault. She was allowed to see it when she visited that office. She reported:

"The stone was not chocolate brown but rather the color of brown sugar. It was 3-4 inches long, 2 inches wide, and had a hump in the middle which made it perhaps 2 inches thick at the thickest point. It was fiat on the bottom and had three black, concentric circles on the top 1/2 inch. Below the circles were many small black circles. The stone was not transparent." (Mary Brown Firmage interview with Richard S. VanWagoner, 11 Aug 1986. Van Wagoner papers, Marriott Library)

Martin Harris was one of the scribes Joseph Smith used to record the writing on the plates. This enabled him to give a first-hand account of how Smith performed this translation. Harris noted,

"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, the 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" (**CHC 1:29**).

Further Notes and Quotes

Emma Smith said:

"Now the way he translated was he put the urim and thummim into his hat and Darkened his Eyes than he would take a sentence and it would apper in Brite Roman Letters. Then he would tell the writer and he would write it. Then that would go away the next sentence would Come and so on. But if it was not Spelt rite it would not go away till it was rite, so we see it was marvelous. Thus was the hol [whole] translated."---Joseph Knight's journal.

"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." (History of the RLDS Church, 8 vols. (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1951), "Last Testimony of Sister Emma [Smith Bidamon]," 3:356.

"I, as well as all of my father's family, Smith's wife, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, were present during the translation. . . . He [Joseph Smith] did not use the plates in translation." (David Whitmer, as published in the "Kansas City Journal," June 5, 1881, and reprinted in the RLDS "Journal of History", vol. 8, (1910), pp. 299-300.

In an 1885 interview, Zenas H. Gurley, then the editor of the RLDS Saints Herald, asked Whitmer if Joseph had used his "Peep stone" to do the translation. Whitmer replied: "... he used a stone called a "Seers stone," the "Interpreters" having been taken away from him because of transgression. The "Interpreters" were taken from Joseph after he allowed Martin Harris to carry away the 116 pages of Ms [manuscript] of the Book of Mormon as a punishment, but he was allowed to go on and translate by use of a "Seers stone" which he

had, and which he placed in a hat into which he buried his face, stating to me and others that the original character appeared upon parchment and under it the translation in English."

B.H. Roberts

Although Mormon historian B. H. Roberts claimed that Joseph Smith used the Urim & Thummim, he frankly admitted that he sometimes used a "Seer Stone" to translate the plates: "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 & Thummim, since by means of it - as described above - as well by means of the Interpreters found with the Nephite record, Joseph was able to translate the characters engraven on the plates." (Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, vol. 1, page 129)

B.H. Roberts explains the difference between the seer stone and the translating device found in the stone box:

"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 witnesses 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 bow, 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,' possessed of similar qualities to the Urim and Thummim; the prophet sometimes used one and sometimes the other of these sacred instruments in the work of translation; that whether either 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" (B.H. Roberts, The Seventy's Course in Theology, First Year, p.111).

See also Pages 48-52; 71-73 of Joseph Smith Rough Rolling Stone

Other uses of the Seer Stone

Apostle Orson Pratt tells of Joseph using the seer stones for revelation

On 4 November 1830 Joseph Smith used the white stone to dictate for Orson Pratt, a recent convert, what is now Doctrine and Covenants 34. Forty-eight years later, Pratt related the circumstances of this experience during a visit to David Whitmer's home with Joseph F. Smith: "he asked Joseph [Smith, Jr.] whether he could not ascertain what his mission was and Joseph answered that he would see. & asked Pratt and John Whitmer to go up stairs with him. and arriving there Joseph produced a small stone called a seer stone. and putting it into a hat soon commenced speaking."

Pratt, who met Smith after the church president had stopped using the brown stone, subsequently told a congregation of Mormons that he was present "on several occasions" when Smith received revelations and that "sometimes Joseph used a seer stone when enquiring of the Lord, and receiving revelation."

Smith also used the white stone to give a prophetic blessing. According to Newel K. Whitney, who would become one of the church's presiding bishops, Smith gave him a patriarchal (prophetic) blessing on 7 October 1835 "through the Urim and Thummim," or the white seer stone. This is the only known use of a seer stone for giving a patriarchal blessing in the church.

Hiram Page also used a seer stone?

Hiram Page, one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon and a leader in the Church, had a peep stone which he used to obtain revelations. Joseph Smith himself admitted that Hiram Page gave false revelations through his stone and that the other witnesses to the Book of Mormon were influenced by his revelations:

To our great grief, however, we soon found that Satan had been lying in wait to deceive,... Brother Hiram Page had in his possession a certain stone, by which he obtained certain "revelations" ... all of which were entirely at variance with the order of God's house, ... the Whitmer family and Oliver Cowdery, were believing much in the things set forth by this stone, we thought best to inquire of the Lord concerning so important a matter ... (History of the Church, by Joseph Smith, vol. 1, pp.109-10).

The Doctrine and Covenants 28:11 instructs Joseph Smith to have Oliver Cowdery tell Hiram Page that **"those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me, and that Satan deceiveth him."**

Where is the seer stone today?

Joseph had given the seer stone that he used to translate the Book of Mormon with to Oliver Cowdery. Until his death in 1850, Cowdery kept this brown stone as a sacred relic of the Book of Mormon translation. Brigham Young's brother Phineas, who was Cowdery's brother-in-law, obtained the stone from Cowdery's widow in 1850 and made a gift of it to Brigham Young.

Three years later, one of Young's counselors in the First Presidency confirmed to a Salt lake City congregation that Young had "the Urim and Thummim" (JD 2:111). Following Young's death in 1877, his widow Zina D.H. Young obtained this seer stone at an estate auction of her husband's personal effects, and she and her daughter Zina Y. Card eventually gave it to his successor John Taylor.

In 1882 Apostle Franklin D. Richards examined "the Seer Stone that Oliver Cowdery gave Phineas Young," observing that "the pouch containing it [was] made by Emma [Smith]." One of John Taylor's body guards recorded in 1887, "On Sunday last I saw and handled the

seer stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith had. It was a dark color, not round on one side. It was shaped like the top of a baby's shoe, one end like the toe of the shoe, and the other round."

Wilford Woodruff, as new president of the church in 1888, dedicated the Manti, Utah temple. While there, Woodruff had the stone upon the altar: "Before leaving I Consecrated upon the Altar the seers Stone that Joseph Smith found by Revelation some 30 feet under the Earth [and] Carried By him through life" (Wilford Woodruff's journal, 18 May, 1888)

After Woodruff's death in 1898, his successor Lorenzo Snow displayed the brown, Book of Mormon seer stone to a local bishop of the church. Frederick Kesler wrote in his diary that Snow "showed me the Seers Stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith had by which he done some of the Translating of the Book of Mormon with. I handled [sic] it with my own hands. I felt as though I see & was handling a very Sacred thing. I trust & feel that it will work in his hands as it did in the Prophet Joseph Smith's hands," and added that this stone's "color was mahogany."

This seer stone is now kept in the First Presidency's private vault (SOURCES: Roberts 1930, 6:231n; J. F. Smith 1954a, 3:225; McConkie 1966, 818; Joseph Anderson 1971).

Joseph Fielding Smith, the tenth President of the LDS church: "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.**" (Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. 3, p. 225)

In about 1982, a descendent of Brigham Young, Mary Brown Firmage was told by the First Presidency's secretary that there were 3 seer stones in First Presidency's vault. She was allowed to see one when she visited that office. She reported: "The stone was not chocolate brown but rather the color of brown sugar. It was 3-4 inches long, 2 inches wide, and had a hump in the middle which made it perhaps 2 inches thick at the thickest point. It was fiat on the bottom and had three black, concentric circles on the top 1/2 inch. Below the circles were many small black circles. The stone was not transparent."

Translated in a Hat –Church articles

On March 29 & 30 of 2012, there was a presentation held at the Utah Valley University entitled 'Mormonism and the Internet'. Guest speakers included FAIR president Scott Gordon. In his presentation he brought up how the church doesn't hide the translation in a hat method.

In Scott's presentation at the 41:07 mark he has a slide that says "Translation with a Hat". He then lists 5 LDS sources that he claims states that Joseph translated the BOM with a hat.

I looked them up and 3 of the references do not even say the word "hat". They talk about the translation but do not say he put his face in a hat, which is the issue:

He lists:

Ensign Jan 97, pg 36 (NO HAT MENTIONED)

Ensign, Jul 93, pg 61 (HAT IS MENTIONED)

Ensign, Jan 88, pg 6-13 (NO HAT MENTIONED)

Ensign, Sep 77. pg 79 (HAT MENTIONED)

Friend, Sep 1974, 7 (NO HAT MENTIONED)

If FAIR wants to claim that the critics are wrong, when they say that the church isn't forthcoming in much of its history like the actual BOM translation process, and attempt to prove this by showing 5 examples taken from the church, they should at least be truthful in the sources they use as examples. Only twice was the word "hat" mentioned. Take in mind that the title of FAIR's presentation is 'Translation with a Hat'. Hat is the keyword here.

Looking at the two times the word "hat" was actually used in the articles discussing the BOM translation, one was 19 years ago and the other was 35 years ago. The church has of course had many opportunities to mention the "stone in the hat" method in the many articles and images used in its publications over the last 35 years, but to only mention hat twice and to have ever single image showing Joseph actually using the plates while translating with no image of his face in the hat is very misleading.

Perhaps the Church occasionally mentions some of the problems of its history in some article, that is glossed over by the average member, just so it can say that it doesn't hide anything. But the reality is it isn't plainly taught to the members and certainly NEVER to investigators.

PBS did a special called 'The Mormons'. It aired in two parts on April 30 and May 1, 2007. The first part briefly mentions the 'stone in the hat' method of translation. What's astonishing is that it is mentioned, not by a critic of the Church, but by defender of the faith Daniel Peterson, who is a faithful LDS apologist and member of FARMS and FAIR.

Emma Smith, who acted as an earlier scribe for Joseph, gave this account in 1856:

“When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made any mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling although it was impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word *Sarah* he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.

“When he stopped for any purpose at any time he would, when he commenced again, begin where he left off without any hesitation, and one time while he was translating he stopped

suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, ‘Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?’ When I answered, ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘Oh! [I didn’t know.] I was afraid I had been deceived.’ He had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.” (Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of History*, Jan. 1916, p. 454.)

On another occasion, **Emma Smith** recorded: “The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen tablecloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.” (“Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 Oct. 1879, p. 290; spelling modernized.)

See http://www.fairlds.org/FAIR_Conferences/2009_Joseph_the_Seer.html “Joseph the Seer—or Why Did He Translate With a Rock in His Hat?” by Brent A Gardner

He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fullness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants. Also, that there were two stones in silver bows (and these stones, fastened to a breast-plate, constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim) deposited with the plates, and the possession: and use of these stones was what constituted Seers in ancient or modern times, and that God had prepared them for the purpose of translating the book." - (History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, 2:34-35)

The 2008 Sunday School manual on Joseph Smith (Chapter 5 on repentance - first page) states that:

For a time, the Lord took the Urim and Thummim and the plates from Joseph. But these things were soon restored to him. "The angel was rejoiced when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim," the Prophet recalled, "and said that God was pleased with my faithfulness and humility, and loved me for my penitence and diligence in prayer, in the which I had performed my duty so well as to . be able to enter upon the work of translation again."

Reference given for this is: Quoted by Lucy Mack Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet," 1844-45 manuscript, book 7, p. 11, Church Archives.

The History of the Church Vol. 1, ch 3 states that "the former heavenly messenger appeared and handed to me the Urim and Thummim again".

However, David Whitmer and Emma Smith said that the original Urim & Thummim was taken back by the angel after the 116 pages were lost and not returned. This seems more likely because if Joseph did have the original Urim & Thummim, why would he use a common stone he found while digging a well to translate the rest of the BOM? The fact that he used a single stone for translating the BOM is not in dispute as is mentioned many times

by faithful LDS historians such as B.H. Roberts and even apostle Russell M. Nelson. Also the Church has this stone in its possession today but not the original spectacle-version of the Urim & Thummim, that was reportedly in the stone box.

Also, it should be noted that FAIR also apparently disagrees with the above statement recorded in the 2008 Sunday School manual. FAIR's web site states

Thus, "it" (Joseph's gift) was restored to him, but there is no indication that the Nephite interpreters (Urim and Thummim) were also returned, Joseph having also lost "them." That is, after repenting, Joseph would recover his seer stones, but apparently not the the Urim and Thummim. Some Church sources have seen this as the point at which Joseph received the seer stone for the first time, but this is likely incorrect.

http://en.fairmormon.org/Joseph_Smith_and_seer_stones