

FairMormon explains seer stones

An example from FairMormon highlighting the openness of the LDS church on the topic of seer stones and the honesty/integrity of FairMormon

Background

- Between 1834-2013, some claim that the LDS church was not open and honest about the method of translation for the Book of Mormon
 - Former members claim that the brown seer stone and white hat method were generally not openly discussed

Unlike the story I've been taught in Sunday School, Priesthood, General Conferences, Seminary, EFY, *Ensigns*, Church history tour, Missionary Training Center, and BYU... Joseph Smith used a rock in a hat for translating the Book of Mormon.

The Church has taught that the translation process of the Book of Mormon looked like this: Joseph Smith read the golden plates like a book, translating the text out loud to Oliver Cowdery, who served as scribe. The context surrounding the translation process raises issues that are not evident to members of the Church. These issues involve the actual translation using a seer stone, Joseph's use of folk magic, and his trouble with the law regarding these circumstances.

<https://read.cesletter.org/bom-translation/>

Letter for my wife, chapter 2:
<https://www.letterformywife.com/the-letter>

What is FairMormon?

- FairMormon is a pseudo-independent group of mostly volunteers that strives to defend the LDS church online and through various conferences
- See <https://www.fairmormon.org/about>

“FairMormon is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing [well-documented](https://www.fairmormon.org/about) answers to criticisms of the doctrine, practice, and history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”.

<https://www.fairmormon.org/about>

The accusation – hiding the facts

Hiding the facts of Church history in plain sight using Church publications

Summary: The Church is routinely accused of suppressing and hiding uncomfortable facts from its own history. Yet, the very same people quote Church sources in order to provide proof of their claims. This concern often rests on a misunderstanding. It is true that the Church's teachings are primarily doctrinal and devotional—Church lessons are neither apologetic nor historical in scope or intent. It is remarkable, however, how many of the issues which some charge the Church with "suppressing" are discussed in Church publications.

JUMP TO SUBTOPIC:

- [Question: What Church sources discuss Joseph Smith and "folk magic"?](#)
- [Question: What Church sources discuss Joseph Smith's involvement with seer stones, treasure seeking or "money digging"?](#)
- [Changes to the Book of Mormon](#)
- [The seer stone and/or the stone with the hat](#)

Arguments from FairMormon:

- 1) The church's main objective is to teach doctrine – not history.
- 2) The church isn't hiding or suppressing information because the said information can be found in church publications

The seer stone and/or the stone with the hat

The fact: Joseph generally utilized a stone placed in his hat to translate

Where it can be found: The *Friend*, The *Ensign*, *lds.org*, and a book by Apostle Neal A. Maxwell

Joseph actually used a stone which he placed in a hat to translate a portion of the Book of Mormon in addition to or instead of the "Urim and Thummim." Sometimes there is reference to Joseph using the stone to receive revelation. Sometimes the hat is mentioned as well. These facts are found hidden in the official Church magazines the *Ensign* and the *Friend* on the official Church website *lds.org*.

Argument from FairMormon:

- 1) Joseph used a stone in a hat and possibly(?) the "Urim and Thummim".
- 2) Joseph sometimes used the stone to receive revelation
- 3) Sometimes Joseph used a hat.
- 4) These facts are "found hidden" in the *Ensign*, *Friend*, and on *lds.org*

FairMormon Claim

Joseph actually used a stone which he placed in a hat to translate a portion of the Book of Mormon in addition to or instead of the "Urim and Thummim."

Sometimes there is reference to Joseph using the stone to receive revelation.

Sometimes the hat is mentioned as well.

These facts are found hidden in the official Church magazines the *Ensign* and the *Friend* on the official Church website lds.org.

A more accurate version of history

Most scholars conclude that the stone in the hat method was the **ONLY** method used after the loss of the 116 pages. **ALL** of the current Book of Mormon was created using this method. This includes active LDS scholars (and other pages on FAIRMORMON itself).

It appears that at least the first 19 sections in the D&C were received via the "rock in the hat" method. Only 6 are labeled as such in the section headings, and these headings were added as the "Urim and Thummim" in 1920. The stone and hat are not mentioned.

Of references to the seer stone between 1900 and 1990, far less than half of them also include the hat.

One reference in the Friend (1974). A few in the Ensign and Improvement Era, but *most of these references actually question whether the seer stone method was used.*

Summary: Highly misleading, but technically accurate

Question: What Church sources discuss either the use of the seer stone or the stone and the hat as part of the Book of Mormon translation process?

The manner of the translation is described repeatedly, for example, in the Church's official magazine for English-speaking adults, the *Ensign*. Richard Lloyd Anderson discussed the "stone in the hat" matter in 1977,^[12] and Elder Russell M. Nelson quoted David Whitmer's account to new mission presidents in 1992.^[13]

The details of the translation are not certain, and the witnesses do not all agree in every particular. However, Joseph's seer stone in the hat was also discussed by, among others: B.H. Roberts in his *New Witnesses for God* (1895)^[14] and returns somewhat to the matter in *Comprehensive History of the Church* (1912).^[15] Other Church sources to discuss this include *The Improvement Era* (1939),^[16] *BYU Studies* (1984, 1990)^[17] the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (1993),^[18] and the *FARMS Review* (1994).^[19] LDS authors Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler also mentioned the matter in 2000.^[20] Elder Bruce R. McConkie talked about the seer stone in his second edition of *Mormon Doctrine* (1966), clearly distinguishing it from the Urim and Thummim, loosely implying that it was involved in the translation of the Book of Mormon, and quoting President Joseph Fielding Smith who said that "[t]his seer stone is now in the possession of the Church."^[21]

https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_history/Censorship_and_revision/Hiding_the_facts#The_seer_stone_and.2For_the_stone_with_the_hat

Claims:

- 1) At least 10 sources discuss the seer stone in the hat
- 2) The details of the translation are not certain and the witnesses do not agree on all of the details

FairMormon Source 1

Claim:

Richard Lloyd Anderson discussed the "stone in the hat" matter in 1977

Link provided:

12: Richard Lloyd Anderson, "[By the Gift and Power of God](#)," *Ensign* (September 1977): 83.

Excerpts:

...Martin Harris spoke with authority of that [early] phase of the translation. But **quoting him raises a key issue**: everything attributed to him does not necessarily represent his exact words. This **caution is necessary** because his statements on translation details are filtered through reporters, some with only casual contact, some claiming to remember exact words years later...

On the means of translation Stevenson reported, "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."

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.**

[two quotes from Oliver about the Urim and Thummim as the method of translation]

[Additional Urim and Thummim quote from Samuel Richards]

[David Whitmer Quote from an Address to All Believers In Christ]

"Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat and put his face in the hat..."

It is tempting to accept the above statement at face value. However, since David Whitmer had not personally translated, his accuracy on details depends on whether he correctly understood what Joseph Smith told him in the first place, and whether he correctly remembered such details after that.

Summary: All of the statements about seer stones are brought into question by the author. Urim and Thummim narrative is reinforced using unreliable sources.

FairMormon Source 2

Claim:

Elder Russell M. Nelson quoted David Whitmer's account to new mission presidents in 1992. [\[13\]](#)

Link provided:

13: Russell M. Nelson, "[A Treasured Testament](#)," *Ensign* (July 1993): 61.

Excerpts:

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." ...

[The Book of Mormon was written on golden plates]... "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."

Excerpts, cont:

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.'" ...

[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."](#)

Summary: Most correct of all official church publications between 1920-2010. However, given the context and misleading information about the Urim and Thummim as stones set in silver bows, the reader could have thought that the Urim and Thummim was put into the hat.

FairMormon Source 3

Claim:

Joseph's seer stone in the hat was also discussed by, among others: B.H. Roberts in his *New Witnesses for God* (1895)

Citation provided:

Brigham H. Roberts, "NAME," in *New Witnesses for God*, 3 Vols., (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909 [1895, 1903]), 1:131–136

Notes:

The citation provided is incorrect. Roberts does indeed talk about the seer stone however several times including the following references:

- New Witness for God, Vol 2, Chapter 7 (1909)
- New Witness for God, Vol 3 (brief mention only – much more complete coverage in Vol 2.)
- Improvement Era, Volume 9 no. 6. (1906) pg 427.
<https://archive.org/details/improvementera0906unse/page/426?q=seer+stone>
- Improvement Era, Volume 7 no. 6. (1904) pg 417-421
<https://archive.org/details/improvementera0706unse/page/416?q=seer+stone>
- Defense of the faith and the Saints: 1907

Summary: Typo? Incorrect reference provided. Possibly unintentional error.

FairMormon Source 4

Claim:

[Roberts] returns somewhat to the matter in *Comprehensive History of the Church* (1912)

Citation provided:

15: Brigham H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1965), 1:130–131

Text is identical or nearly identical to the account given by Roberts elsewhere including in *New Witness for God* vol. II chapter 7

Note: Additional text is more descriptive, but long. Full account can be read here:
<http://www.yorgalily.org/~yorgasor/church/ComprehensiveHistoryOfTheChurch/hc1.html> (search on “seer stone”)

Text:

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, which to him was as Urim and Thummim; that the Prophet sometimes used one and sometimes the other of these sacred instruments in the work of translation; that 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 other characters with their interpretation take their place, and so on until the work was completed.

Summary: Attempt to harmonize conflicting accounts: Dual method hypothesis: Urim and Thummim and seer stone for “convenience”. Explanation probably identical to the Roberts text that FairMormon attempted to quote in Source 3.

FairMormon Source 5

Claim:

Other Church sources to discuss this include *The Improvement Era* (1939),^[16]

Citation provided:

16: Francis W. Kirkham, "The Manner of Translating The BOOK of MORMON," *Improvement Era* (1939), ?.

Correct citation:

Francis W. Kirkham, "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>

Select text from reference

...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. 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.

Summary: This is not an example of the church being open. This is the church actively denying the accurate testimony of the three witnesses and Willard Chase.

The second document can be found here:

<https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/byustudies/id/1354/>

FairMormon Source 6

Source:

BYU Studies (1984, 1990)

Citation provided:

17: Dean C. Jessee, "New Documents and Mormon Beginnings," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 no. 4 (Fall 1984), 397–428.

Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies* 30 no. 1 (Winter 1990), 51–52.

Hyperlink not provided, but the first one can be found online here:

<https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/byustudies/id/1038>

This paper talks about two recently discovered (in 1984) documents dealing with Joseph Smith's treasure seeking. Both are forgeries of Mark Hoffman (unknown to the authors at the time). Hence, it is not surprising that the link is missing

Unfortunately neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery have told us much on how the translation took place

. But four firsthand statements by observers and participants show remarkable agreement:

Joseph Knight (between 1833 and 1847): Now the way he translated was he put the **urim and thummim into his hat** and Darkned his Eyes and then he would take a sentence and it would apper in Brite Roman Letters...

Emma Smith (1879): 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...

David Whitmer (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.

Elizabeth Anne Whitmer Cowdery Johnson (David Whitmer's sister Oliver Cowdery's wife; 1870): ...Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. **He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light, and then..."**

All four accounts mention an instrument of translation in a hat. All refer to Joseph Smith's ability to dictate extensively without using the gold plates or any other physical text.

Summary: The first source is to forged documents, and as such less interesting.

The second source is very accurate and descriptive. This was published a few years after Quinn (Early Mormonism and the magic world view – 1987). This shows clearly that some church historians understood the translation method no later than 1990 and that they understand that it was not an either-or proposition (Urim and Thummim or seer stone), but rather than the seer stone was used throughout.

FairMormon Source 7

Source:

Journal of Book of Mormon Studies (1993)

Citation provided:

18: Stephen D. Ricks, "[Translation of the Book of Mormon: Interpreting the Evidence](#)," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 201–206

[Three accounts of translation presented:]

Samuel W. Richards...

He represented Joseph as sitting at a table with the plates before him, translating them by means of the **Urim and Thummim**, while he (Oliver) sat beside him writing every word as Joseph spoke them to him.

This was done while **holding the "translators" over the hieroglyphics, the translation appearing distinctly on the instrument**, which had been touched by the finger of God and dedicated and consecrated for the express purpose of translating languages. Every word was distinctly visible even to every letter; and if Oliver omitted a word or failed to spell a word correctly, the translation remained on the "interpreter" until it was copied correctly.

Martin Harris explained the translation to Edward Stevenson in this manner:

By the 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.

In his Address to All Believers in Christ, David Whitmer wrote:

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, 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, ...

What elements are common to each of these statements? At least two, both of which I think may be relied upon: (1) some instrument consecrated for the purpose of translation—a **"seerstone," "translators," or "Urim and Thummim"**—that was used by Joseph Smith is mentioned in each account; and (2) words or sentences in English would appear on that instrument and would then be read off to the scribe.

Summary: The Richards account is clearly problematic – mainly because he is (presumably) accurately relaying a lie told to him by Oliver Cowdery who perpetuated the Urim and Thummim legend. Why the author chose to do so is unclear, but it clearly muddies the waters rather than providing clarity.

FairMormon Source 8

Source:

FARMS Review (1994)

Citation provided:

19: Matthew Roper, "A Black Hole That's Not So Black (Review of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book*, vol. 1 by Jerald and Sandra Tanner)," *FARMS Review of Books* 6/2 (1994): 156–

203. <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol6/iss2/14/>

The Tanners cite David Whitmer's description of the Prophet placing the **seer stone in his hat**, and, putting his face into the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light and then dictating what he read from off the stone. Yet while the Tanners clearly accept David Whitmer's testimony and that of other early witnesses who describe the Prophet's use of the **seer stone**, **their rebuttal reveals a failure to come to grips with some of the implications of that testimony...**

This article mentions the seer stone only in reference to the Tanners to criticize their work.

This article has only 63 downloads between July 2016 and Aug 2020. Assuming that all of the readers are church members, about 1 out of 300,000 members will have seen this article.

Summary: The seer stone in the hat is mentioned only to deny the accuracy of the Tanner's claims. This does not indicate openness on the part of the LDS church

FairMormon Source 9

Source:

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration*

Citation Provided

20. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Craig J. Ostler, *Revelations of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2000), commentary on D&C 9.

No hyperlink provided, but it can be found here (pg 89-98):

<https://emp.byui.edu/satterfieldb/Rel121/Process%20of%20Translating%20the%20BofM.pdf>

Spanning a period of twenty years (1869-1888), some seventy recorded testimonies about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon claim David Whitmer as their source. Though *there are a number of inconsistencies in these accounts*, David Whitmer was repeatedly reported to have said that after the loss of the 116 pages, the Lord took both the plates and the Urim and Thummim from the Prophet, never to be returned. In their stead, **David Whitmer maintained, the Prophet used an oval-shaped, chocolate-colored seer stone slightly larger than an egg**. Thus, everything we have in the Book of Mormon, according to Mr. Whitmer, was translated by placing the chocolate-colored stone in a hat into which Joseph would bury his head so as to close out the light. While doing so he could see "an oblong piece of parchment, on which the hieroglyphics would appear," and below the ancient writing, the translation would be given in English. Joseph would then read this to Oliver Cowdery, who in turn would write it. If he did so correctly, the characters and the interpretation would disappear and be replaced by other characters with their interpretation (Cook, David Whitmer Interviews, 115, 157-58).

Such an explanation is, in our judgment, **simply fiction created for the purpose of demeaning Joseph Smith** and to undermine the validity of the revelations he received after translating the Book of Mormon. We invite the reader to consider the following:

[long explanation given as to why we can dismiss the seer stone accounts by Whitmer]

Summary: McConkie and Ostler mention the seer stone then spend several paragraphs to discredit this accurate version of events.

FairMormon Source 10

Source:

Elder Bruce R. McConkie talked about the seer stone in his second edition of *Mormon Doctrine* (1966), clearly distinguishing it from the Urim and Thummim, **loosely implying that it was involved in the translation of the Book of Mormon**, and quoting President Joseph Fielding Smith who said that "[t]his seer stone is now in the possession of the Church."

21: Bruce R. McConkie, "Urim and Thummim," *Mormon Doctrine 2nd edition* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 818-19. Quoting Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation vol. 3* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 225. **It should be mentioned that President Smith did not believe that the seer stone was used during the Book of Mormon translation process.**

No hyperlink provided, but it can be found here:

https://archive.org/stream/MormonDoctrine1966/MormonDoctrine1966_djvu.txt

Joseph Smith received the same Urim and Thummim had by the Brother of Jared for it was the one expressly provided for the translation of the Jaredite and Nephite records. (D. & C. 10: 1; 17:1; Ether 3:22- 28.) It was separate and distinct from the one had by Abraham and the one had by the priests in Israel. **The Prophet also had a seer stone which was separate and distinct from the Urim and Thummim, and which (speaking loosely) has been called by some a Urim and Thummim.** (Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 3, pp. 222-226.)

President Joseph Fielding Smith, with reference to the seer stone and the Urim and Thummim, has written: "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." (Doctrines of Salvation, vol. 3, p. 225.)

...When Moroni first revealed to the Prophet the existence of the gold plates, he also said "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.**" ...

Summary: McConkie tells the traditional story of the Urim and Thummim and how it was used in translation. He admits that Joseph had a seer stone, but denies that it was used in translation.

Summary

- Of the 10 references showing that the church has been open in discussing seer stones, *only one* accurately and unambiguously describes the actual translation process.
- Many of the sources unambiguously deny that a seer stone was used in the translation process
- 2-3 sources reinforce the “dual translation theory” first proposed by B.H. Roberts and currently favored by the LDS church in their official literature.

FairMormon Take II

Another look at hiding the seer stone:

<https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Question: Has the Church tried to hide Joseph%27s use of a seer stone%3F>

Question: Has the Church tried to hide Joseph's use of a seer stone?

The stone is mentioned occasionally in Church publications, but is rarely discussed in the 21st century in venues such as Sunday School

The stone is mentioned occasionally in Church publications, but is rarely (if ever) discussed in the 21st century in venues such as Sunday School, nor is it portrayed in any Church-related artwork. Part of the reason for this is the conflation of the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone under the name "Urim and Thummim." In church, we discuss the Urim and Thummim with the assumption that it is always the instrument that Joseph recovered with the plates. Only those familiar with the sources will realize that there was more than one translation instrument.

Claims:

- 1) Seer stone occasionally mentioned in church publications
- 2) Seer stone rarely (if ever) discussed in Sunday school in the 21st century
- 3) When we discuss the Urim and Thummim, most students don't realize that it might be referring to the seer stone

Was the seer stone ever mentioned in Sunday school?
Actually, yes (though not in the 21st century until the year 2020)

Between 1918 and 1939, the phrase “seer stone” was mentioned in 10 lessons.

Instances where the “seer stone” was mentioned Sunday school:

- 1918 (Dec). Juvenile Instructor
- 1920 (Sept). Juvenile Instructor lesson for Nov 14th
- 1920 (Nov.) Juvenile Instructor lesson 11 for Jan 30th 1921
- 1928 (Nov.) Juvenile Instructor lesson 3 for Jan 20, 1929
- 1932 (Feb.) Juvenile Instructor lesson for Apr 24, 1932
- 1932 (Mar.) Juvenile Instructor lesson 18 for May 1932
- 1932 (Apr.) Juvenile Instructor
- 1934 (Feb) Juvenile Instructor lesson 14 for Apr 22, 1934
- 1934 (Mar) Juvenile Instructor lesson 17 for May 1934
- 1939 (Dec) Juvenile Instructor lesson for Feb 18, 1940

Seer stones were regularly mentioned for about 15 years, with half of the mentions coming over a 2 year period from 1932-1934. In many cases lessons reference the writings of B.H. Roberts on the subject (A New Witness for God, Volume 2, Chapter 7). In all cases translation was said to have been done by both the Urim and Thummim and the seer stone.

It appears that the seer stone was added to the curriculum and then removed shortly after the death of B.H. Roberts (Sept 1933). The 1939 reference refers to seer stones in a biblical context and not with respect to the BOM translation. The gap (1921-1927) corresponds with when Roberts was in the Eastern states serving a mission. Hence, it appears very likely that he was the motivating source for inclusion of the seer stone in the curriculum.

Jan 2020 Come follow me lesson

First mention of seer stones for translation in Sunday school since 1934

Jan 2020 lesson:

How was the Book of Mormon translated?

The Book of Mormon was translated “by the gift and power of God.” **We don’t know many details about the miraculous translation process**, but we do know that Joseph Smith was a seer, aided by **instruments that God had prepared: two transparent stones** called the Urim and Thummim and another stone called a seer stone. Joseph saw in these stones the English interpretation of the characters on the plates, and he read the translation aloud while a scribe recorded it. Each of Joseph’s scribes testified that God’s power was manifest in the translation of this sacred work.

See “[Book of Mormon Translation](#),” Gospel Topics, topics.ChurchofJesusChrist.org.

Comments

- There are numerous accounts of the translation process. Those which reference seer stone usage are largely consistent. Even if we don’t know all of the details, shouldn’t we discuss the details that we do know?
 - Joseph used only the brown seer stone after the 116 pages were lost.
 - He also used the brown seer stone for much of the translation prior to the loss of the pages
 - Joseph put the stone into a white top hat and supported his elbows on his knees while translating.
- The spectacles were described as being transparent by Oliver and Lucy Mack Smith, though the details of their accounts differ (clear vs. triangular crystal-like). Martin Harris described the lenses as being round flat stones similar to *white marble with grey streaks*. Many historians consider the Harris account as more reliable.
- The spectacles were first called “Urim and Thummim” by W.W. Phelps in 1832. They were not used to translate any of the current Book of Mormon

“In church, we discuss the Urim and Thummim with the assumption that it is always the instrument that Joseph recovered with the plates. “

That’s because this is exactly what Joseph Smith said and what is recorded in the canonized version of the History of the Church, contained in every triple combination printed since about 1981

JS History 1

34 He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates...

35 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.

62 ...I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them, which I did between the time I arrived at the house of my wife’s father, in the month of December, and the February following.

Footnote:


Oliver Cowdery describes these events thus: “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.’

Question: Has the Church tried to hide Joseph's use of a seer stone?

The stone is mentioned occasionally in Church publications, but is rarely discussed in the 21st century in venues such as Sunday School

The stone is mentioned occasionally in Church publications, but is **rarely (if ever) discussed in the 21st century in venues** such as Sunday School, nor is it portrayed in any Church-related artwork. Part of the reason for this is the conflation of the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone under the name "Urim and Thummim." In church, we discuss the Urim and Thummim with the assumption that it is always the instrument that Joseph recovered with the plates. Only those familiar with the sources will realize that there was more than one translation instrument.

That said, **the Church has been very frank about the seer stone's use**, though the *product* of the translation of the Book of Mormon is usually given much more attention than the *process*. Note the mention of the stone in the official children's magazine, *The Friend* (available online at lds.org):

“*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.*”
—“A Peaceful Heart,” *Friend*, Sep 1974, 7 [off-site](#) 

Text translated with the Nephite interpreters was lost with the 116 pages given to Martin Harris—see [DC 3:1](#). **The Church's Historical Record** records Joseph's use of the seer stone to translate all of our current Book of Mormon text:

“*As a chastisement for this carelessness [loss of the 116 pages], the Urim and Thummim was taken from Smith. But by humbling himself, he again found favor with the Lord and was presented a strange oval-shaped, chocolate colored stone, about the size of an egg, but more flat which it was promised should answer the same purpose. With this stone all the present book was translated. [Note that the chronology of Joseph's acquisition of the stone is here somewhat confused. The use of the stone,*

This admission is key. You won't find it anywhere on the official church website.

“

As a chastisement for this carelessness [loss of the 116 pages], the Urim and Thummim was taken from Smith. But by humbling himself, he again found favor with the Lord and was presented a strange oval-shaped, chocolate colored stone, about the size of an egg, but more flat which it was promised should answer the same purpose. With this stone all the present book was translated. [Note that the chronology of Joseph's acquisition of the stone is here somewhat confused. The use of the stone, however, is clearly indicated.]^[1]

References to the stone are not confined to the distant past. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Twelve Apostles described the process clearly in an *Ensign* article:

“

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.^[2]

It would be strange to try to hide something by having an apostle talk about it, and then send the account to every LDS home in the official magazine!

However, when read in context this Ensign article clearly mentions the Urim and Thummim (in the traditional sense of clear spectacles in a bow attached to a breastplate). A casual reader wouldn't know the significance of this quote in that context. See source 2 (slide 9)

Why have the stone and hat not received more mentions in popular Church History works?

We already know^[3] that Joseph Smith was reluctant to describe the translation process in detail. Brigham Young University professor Stephen Ricks feels that Joseph's "reticence was probably well justified and may have been due to the inordinate interest which some of the early Saints had shown in the seer stone or to the negative and sometimes bitter reactions he encountered when he had reported some of his sacred experiences to others."^[4] Thus, Joseph never discussed the details regarding which translation instrument he used to both translate the Book of Mormon and to receive revelation. Joseph simply told people that he received his early revelations through the "Urim and Thummim."

During the 1930s, Dr. Francis Kirkham endeavored to "gather and evaluate all the newspaper articles he could locate about the Book of Mormon."^[5] Many of these articles were obtained from newspaper collections located in the New York area and have recently been made available in an online database hosted by the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship.^[6]

As we have seen, many of these news accounts refer to the use of the spectacles or stone together with a hat, consistent with the late statements of Martin Harris and David Whitmer. Kirkham, in the October 1939 Improvement Era, quoted the accounts of the stone and the hat given by Martin Harris and David Whitmer. **Kirkham, however, did not accept the eyewitness accounts** that Joseph actually used a seer stone in the translation of the Book of Mormon, concluding that "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."^[7] In his 1951 book *A New Witness For Christ in America*, Kirkham believed that "it may not have been expedient for the Prophet to try and explain the method of translation for the reason his hearers would lack the capacity to understand. It seemed sufficient to them at that time to know that the translation had been made by the gift and power of God."^[8] Kirkham goes on to say that, "After a lapse of forty years of time, both David Whitmer and Martin Harris attempted to give the method of the translation. Evidently the Prophet did not tell them the method."^[9] Despite the fact that elements of Harris's and Whitmer's story were consistent with each other, Kirkham simply refused to accept the idea that the accounts might have basis in the truth.

Kirkham was a lawyer. His brother was a general authority. He seems more interested in plausible deniability than accuracy. Kirkham's response is very similar to that of Joseph Smith III (a lawyer) in his denial of Joseph Smith's polygamy.

In 1956, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith knew of the seer stone, but did not believe that Joseph actually used it during the translation of the Book of Mormon.

“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.”^[10]

Like Kirkham, Joseph Fielding Smith simply refused to accept accounts of Joseph having utilized his seer stone for the purpose of translation as having any validity. In his opinion, such accounts were simply erroneous.

During the twentieth century, the story of Joseph translating behind a curtain while employing the Nephite interpreters as the Urim and Thummim remained firmly established and generally uncontested among the general Church membership. Latter-day Saint scholars, however, continued to research the stories of Joseph's use of the seer stone. Such references never made it into the general Church curriculum or the awareness of the general Church membership. If you were a scholar, then you knew that Joseph used a seer stone. If you were a regular Church member, then you knew that Joseph used the Nephite interpreters. Discussions of Joseph's use of “seer stones” or the practice of “treasure seeking” remained primarily in the realm of LDS scholars. During the tenure of Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington, from 1972 and 1982, some attempts were made to make certain elements of Latter-day Saint history more accessible to the average member. One 1976 book produced during this period, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, by James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, noted in a straightforward manner Joseph's acquisition of his seer stone and its use in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

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.^[11]

Smith worked with Roberts for decades in the Church Historian's department (from 1906-1933). However, he chose to adopt Kirkham's language in denying the use of the seer stone. The heading “Seer Stone not used in Book of Mormon Translation” was likely added by McConkie who compiled the book. Apart from Kirkham, strong denials started only after the publication of Faun Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith in 1946, likely in large part as a reaction to this book.

The visibility of these issues among the general Church membership began to change significantly in the early 1980s as the result of a very unusual and tragic event: the exposure of the Mark Hofmann forgeries. Suddenly, newspapers were talking about salamanders and treasure guardians in association with some of the Church's founding events.

Mark Hofmann was a member of the Church who became involved with the acquisition and sale of historic documents during the early 1980s. He seemed to have a knack for acquiring missing documents that were alluded to by other documents related to Church history. For example, Hofmann claimed to have located a blessing in which Joseph Smith III was allegedly promised that he would be the next prophet of the Church. Hofmann also produced what he claimed was the Anthon transcript, which matched a description of the document provided by Charles Anthon himself. The most famous document in the collection of Hofmann forgeries was the Salamander Letter, which was purportedly written by Martin Harris. Hofmann's documents were so well crafted that they fooled a number of experts in the field, and they were all considered genuine for a period of time. During that period of time, a new wave of Latter-day Saint historical works were produced, taking into account the "magical" aspects emphasized in the Salamander Letter. There was also an effort to reconcile and integrate the new information with existing accounts.^[12]

Some of Hofmann's documents were created based upon existing eyewitness accounts regarding treasure seeking, and to some extent simply amplified concepts that were already known to historians. Once the forgeries were exposed, it became necessary to re-examine what had been written to support the now discredited documents.^[13] Although the Hofmann forgeries were discounted, the underlying legitimate historical accounts that fueled their creation began to become more well known among the general Church membership. Joseph's early involvement with treasure seeking, beyond what had long been documented in Church publications regarding his efforts with Josiah Stowell, became more well known. Elder Dallin Oaks emphasized that this in no way diminished Joseph's standing as the Prophet of the Restoration.

This analysis is inaccurate in the author's opinion. The much larger push-back on openness pre-dates Hoffman and came from three apostles: Mark Peterson, Ezra Taft Benson, and Boyd Packer who shut down the new history department and sent Church Historian Arrington and his team packing for BYU in 1982. This predates the most controversial Hofmann forgeries. They had resisted Arrington's openness no later than 1976. These apostles had previously expressed concern about two publications which mentioned the seer stone explicitly but briefly (Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* and *Story of the Latter-Day Saints*). *Story* had limited publication volumes due to their concerns. *Beginnings* had its contract canceled by Deseret Press probably on the insistence of Benson and published in a non-church (academic) press in 1984.

“Some sources close to Joseph Smith claim that in his youth, during his spiritual immaturity prior to his being entrusted with the Book of Mormon plates, he sometimes used a stone in seeking for treasure. **Whether this is so or not,** we need to remember that no prophet is free from human frailties, especially before he is called to devote his life to the Lord’s work. Line upon line, young Joseph Smith expanded his faith and understanding and his spiritual gifts matured until he stood with power and stature as the Prophet of the Restoration.”^[14]

Oaks is a lawyer and never admits wrongdoing on behalf of anyone in the church. Is this truly honest?

Notes

1. ↑ *The Historical Record. Devoted Exclusively to Historical, Biographical, Chronological and Statistical Matters* (LDS Church Archives), 632.
2. ↑ David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: n.p., 1887), 12; cited in Russell M. Nelson, “[A Treasured Testament](#),” *Ensign* (July 1993), 61.
3. ↑ This section is a reproduction of Roger Nicholson’s discussion in Roger Nicholson, *The Spectacles, the Stone, the Hat, and the Book: A Twenty-first Century Believer’s View of the Book of Mormon Translation* (Provo, UT: Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship, 2013) 5:121-190 <<https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-spectacles-the-stone-the-hat-and-the-book-a-twenty-first-century-believers-view-of-the-book-of-mormon-translation/#fn104-2896>> (accessed 13 March 2019)
4. ↑ Stephen D. Ricks, *Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, n.d.), <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=10>
5. ↑ Keith W. Perkins, “Francis W. Kirkham: A ‘New Witness’ for the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, July 1984. <https://churchofjesuschrist.org/ensign/1984/07/francis-w-kirkham-a-new-witness-for-the-book-of-mormon>
6. ↑ This effort on the part of the Maxwell Institute was referred to as the “Kirkham Project.” See “Early Book of Mormon Writings Now Online,” *Insights* 30:2 (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute), which notes that “for more than 10 years Matthew Roper, research scholar at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship and head of the project, has been collecting this literature. The collection builds upon the early efforts of Francis W. Kirkham, an educator for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. According to Roper, during the 1930s Kirkham began collecting rare newspapers relating to early Latter-day Saint history. Subsequent researchers and historians have discovered many additional items, all of which are included in this new collection.”
7. ↑ Francis W. Kirkham, “The Manner of Translating the Book of Mormon,” *Improvement Era*, October 1939, 632.
8. ↑ Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America* (Independence, MO: Press of Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1951), 194
9. ↑ Kirkham, *A New Witness*, 196.
10. ↑ Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:225. Emphasis in original
11. ↑ James. B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 40–41.
12. ↑ A list of known Hofmann forgeries related to Church history appeared in “Fraudulent Documents from Forger Mark Hofmann Noted,” *Ensign*, October 1987.
13. ↑ Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Alvin Smith Story: Fact and Fiction,” *Ensign*, August 1987. Anderson states, that “attempts to reposition the foundations of the Church on the basis of documents tied to Mark Hofmann are now outdated, because he has pleaded guilty in open court to selling false documents. Thus, revised histories based on these documents must now be revised themselves.
14. ↑ Oaks, “Recent Events.”

Summary

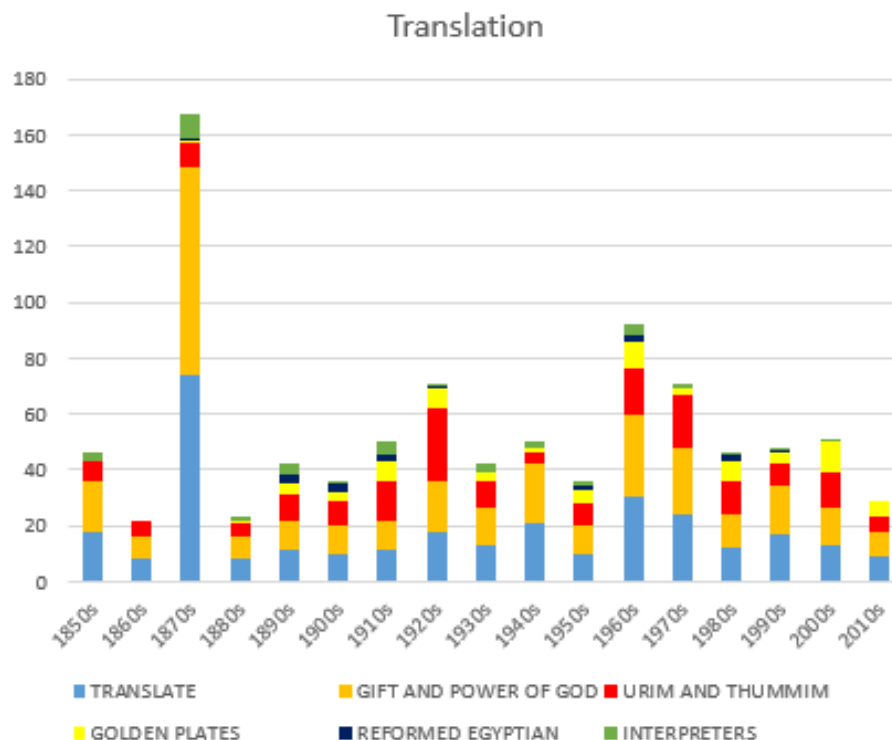
- The second web page is much more accurate, but still some inaccurate or misleading statements.
 - *Why did the authors choose to be more accurate than the first page?*
 - It is tagged with “MormonThink”. Perhaps the author assumes that the readers will have already read an accurate account of the seer stones on MormonThink and will expect a more factual response.
 - See: <http://www.mormonthink.com/essays-bom-translation.htm>
- The author misses several key elements of the seer stone narrative, possibly out of ignorance
 - Early openness about the seer stone by Roberts (1904-1934) is not addressed.
 - No mention of the impact of Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith and the response by the church in the late 1940s.
 - The author does not address efforts of several apostles in the late 1970s and early 1980s to limit openness by the church history department.
- When references do not point the church in a positive light, there are no hyperlinks. When they do point the church in a positive light, there tend to be hyperlinks to the sources so that they can be easily accessed.

How leaders talk about translation in General Conference

Part of the transparency regarding the seer stone is association with how often it is mentioned relative to competitive narratives.

Although the Urim and Thummim have been mentioned 195 times in General Conference, *there has not been a single mention of the seer stone with respect to the translation of the Book of Mormon.*

Number of references per decade to various translation related terms



Is it accurate to claim that the church has been open about seer stones when there hasn't been a single mention of Joseph's seer stone in General Conference?

Coorespondance with FairMormon

Aug 14, 2020 - initial inquiry

Hi,

Looking over this article:

[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%20and%20history/Censorship%20and%20revision/Hiding%20the%20facts#The%20seer%20stone%20and%20the%20stone%20with%20the%20hat)

I came across this citation:

[https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism and history/Censorship and revision/Hiding the facts#cite note-14](https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism%20and%20history/Censorship%20and%20revision/Hiding%20the%20facts#cite%20note-14)

The citation doesn't make any sense to me. Roberts did discuss the seer stones IN DETAIL - a number of times, including in his work "New Witnesses for God". However, he covered it mostly in volume 2 under the chapter 7. He also discusses it in less depth in volume 3. The citation which FAIR made referred to volume 1. I can't find any mention of this in volume 1. I would go with the most accurate reference which is volume 2 chapter 7.

If you want additional references to the seer stone, I can give you about a dozen which you left out between 1905-1950 including Sunday school lessons (about every 4 years) from about 1920-1934. However, I don't know if these bolster your case or not because they indicate that the seer stone was included regularly in the curriculum prior to being removed from church literature for 85 years. Also, in many of these references you will find the seer stone mentioned but references to the hat were often removed. A couple quotes were altered to insert the phase "Urim and Thummim" where it did not originally exist. This was done by Roberts and then copied by others for about 80+ years.

Referencing the 1977 article by Andersson that talks about Seer stones (reference 12) is disingenuous and misleading because Andersson dismisses the stories of the seer stones as false in this article. If you want to be honest and transparent, you should note this in your text or at least in the footnote.

But now I digress. Feel free to update the footnote if you want to be more accurate - or not. whatever works for you.

Response from FairMormon

Aug 15, 2020

Hi [author's name],

Thank you for your input. We will take it under advisement.

However, you should understand that what is one man's "honest history" may be another man's "biased view".

As a history major, I learned long ago that history is not so much "what happened" as it is a distillation of one (or more than one) observer's view. If it diverges from somebody else's history, well, it is not necessarily the case that the other is being "dishonest" (or, alternatively, "incredibly honest" as you would have it). History simply cannot avoid this difficulty, because it is by definition a "summing-up" of events and something will be inevitably left out. The charges of dishonesty that then follow by persons who disagree are rather disingenuous. (The current contretemps over The 1619 Project is a very good example of just this sort of historical sorting in the broader context of US history. Also, I currently live in [Asian country name], and watch with bemusement as the various nationalities of East Asia eternally bash each other for their supposed "wrong" readings of local East Asian history.)

As it is, I disagree with your assessment of the footnotes, based on the few minutes I spent perusing them before this response. I think that the Church has been quite open about its early years, but with the caveat that terminology may change over time (a reference to Urim and Thummin has been shown, for example, to also include Joseph's seerstone from quite an early date, and this became standard LDS terminology over the decades).

The above is my own thoughts and not at all the official position of FairMormon or of the LDS church.

I hope this has been helpful to you in your continuing studies.

Response to FairMormon

Aug 17, 2020, pg 1

Hi [name of FairMormon representative],
Thank you for taking the time to respond and for taking this matter "under advisement".

[personal note, one paragraph, retracted to preserve privacy]

You can change the footnotes or not. A few notes in this regard:

1) Footnote 14 - Brigham H. Roberts, "NAME," in *New Witnesses for God*, 3 Vols., (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909 [1895, 1903]), 1:131–136.

I have searched volume 1 and I find no reference to the seer stone. An online copy is here: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/46202>

However, if you go to volume 2 <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/47316> chapter 7, there are a number of pages which deal with seer stones. I really think that this was just an error on someone's part. I don't ascribe any mal intent, but as an error I would recommend correcting it. Seriously. Roberts is the BEST evidence that the church has that it was being honest about seer stones. He was the only one who was at least partially honest about it between 1900-1936. After that, there is basically radio silence until the 1970s.

2) With respect to footnote 12 - by all means leave this one in. It introduces one story of the seer stones and then has the disclaimer: "Yet as an intimate assistant, Oliver Cowdery stressed the Urim and Thummim in his statements." Then after introducing Whitmer's statement on the seer stone it says, "It is tempting to accept the above statement at face value. However, since David Whitmer had not personally translated, his accuracy on details depends on whether he correctly understood what Joseph Smith told him in the first place, and whether he correctly remembered such details after that." I find it interesting that Anderson is trying to question the accuracy of both of the seer stone accounts, but the fact that he mentions the seer stones gives you the "proof" of openness that you're trying to convey in the article - so leave it in.

If you're trying to show that the church has always been open and honest about the seer stones, there are a lot of additional references which you'll want to add such as:

Response to FairMormon - Aug 17, 2020 – cont pg 2

1) Update footnote 16 (Kirkham) to be correct so that your readers can look it up. Improvement Era, Oct 1939, vol 42 no 10 pg 631. From my cynical perspective it really looks like you left this one out on purpose. Had the person looked it up, this is what they would have found:

"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"

Dang. Never mind. Whoever wrote this is clearly trying to be deceptive.

Well, if you're trying to deceive people, you might as well go the whole way. Here's a very early reference to seer stones: Deseret News, 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."

If you reference this early account, please make sure that you leave out the following part of the text as it might give the indication that the church wasn't completely transparent and honest:

"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"

No changes needed. Clearly you (i.e. FairMormon) are conveying what you want to convey.

[Personal greeting and closing]

No response was received to this second correspondence.
None of the references were updated as of 2020.09.08.

Quoting FAIR

the Church has been very frank about the seer stone's use

<https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Question: Has the Church tried to hide Joseph's use of a seer stone%3F>

The Church is routinely accused of suppressing and hiding uncomfortable facts from its own history... This concern often rests on a misunderstanding.

https://www.fairmormon.org/answers/Mormonism_and_history/Censorship_and_revision/Hiding_the_facts

Feedback

- Please send any feedback, comments, or corrections to admin@mormonscholar.org