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**LISBETH S. FRIED, DID SECOND TEMPLE HIGH
PRIESTS POSSESS THE *URIM* AND *THUMMIM*?**

DID SECOND TEMPLE HIGH PRIESTS POSSESS THE *URIM* AND *THUMMIM*? *

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to the *TB Yoma* 21b, the *urim* and the *thummim* and the spirit of prophecy were among the five things missing from the Second Temple.

אלו חמישה דברים שהיו בין מקדש ראשון למקדש שני ואלו הן –
ארון וכפורת וכרובים אש ושכינה ורוח הקודש ואורים ותומים

These five things [distinguish] between the first and second temple: the ark, the ark cover, the cherubim (which all count as one), the fire [from heaven], the Shekinnah, the spirit of holiness (i.e., of prophecy), and the *urim* and *thummim* (*TB Yoma* 21b).

The absence of the *urim* and *thummim* from the second temple is supported by this statement in Ezra/Nehemiah:

Ezra 2:61-63 (*Neh.*7:63-65):

ומבני הכהנים בני חביה בני הקוץ בני ברזלי אשר לקח מבנות ברזלי הגלעדי
אשה ויקרא על-שם: ⁶²אלה בקשו כתבם המתחשים ולא נמצאו ויגאלו
מן-הכהנה: ⁶³ויאמר התרשתא להם אשר לא-יאכלו מקדש הקדשים עד עמד
בהן לאורים ולתמים:

⁶¹...the sons of the priests, the sons of Havaiah, the sons of Haqqoz, the sons of Barzilai who married one of the daughters of Barzilai the Giladite and was called by their name. ⁶²These sought the registry of their genealogies but they could not be found and therefore they were [considered] unfit for the priesthood, ⁶³so the 'Tirshata' said to them that they should not eat from the most sanc-

* This paper is a revised version of a paper read for the Ezra-Nehemiah-Chronicles section of SBL 2005. It has benefited immensely from the comments of C. Batsch, H. Eshel, C. Fletcher-Louis, V. (A.) Hurowitz, L. H. Schiffman, H. G. M. Williamson, and anonymous reviewers on an earlier draft.

tified food [lit. food of the “holy of holies”] until a priest appears to administer the *urim* and *thummim*.

This passage in Ezra (and Nehemiah) is part of the list of returnees, and likely stems from the first decades of the return, perhaps around 500 BCE under Joshua and Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2/Neh. 7:7). According to this verse, the *urim* and *thummim* were missing from the second temple.

Josephus, on the other hand, states that the *urim* and *thummim* did exist for a while in the second temple and were used by second temple priests. He writes in his *Antiquities* (3:218) that the *urim* and *thummim* stopped shining, that is, ceased to function, only 200 years before he wrote the *Antiquities*, that is around 104 BCE, the death of John Hyrcanus (134-104):

But in the empty place of this garment [i.e., the Ephod] there was inserted a piece of the size of a span, embroidered with gold, and the other colors of the ephod, and was called Essen (ἔσσην) [the breastplate,] which, in the Greek language, signifies the Oracle (λόγιον).

Yet will I mention what is still more wonderful than this: for God declared beforehand by those twelve stones which the high priest bare on his breast, and which were inserted into his breastplate, when they should be victorious in battle; for so great a splendor shone forth from them before the army began to march, that all the people were sensible of God's being present for their assistance.

Where it came to pass that those Greeks who had a veneration for our laws, because they could not possibly contradict this, called that breastplate the oracle (τὸν ἔσσηνα λόγιον καλοῦσιν).

Now this breastplate, and this sardonyx, stopped shining two hundred years before I composed this book, God having been displeased at the transgressions of his law (*Ant.* 3: 163, 216-218).

Josephus also connects the high priestly office with the gift of prophecy, but always to high priests living before Hyrcanus' death.¹ Moreover, the priest's prophetic ability is always executed through the high-priestly vestments, the ephod, the breastplate, and the *urim* and *thummim*, which Josephus calls the oracle.² Josephus believed that the

¹ Gray lists the following: *Ant.* 5:120, 159; 6:115, 122-23, 254-58, 271-74, 359-60; 7:72-76 (R. Gray, *Prophetic Figures in Late Second Temple Jewish Palestine* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993] 17, 172 n.30). Two of these 8 instances specifically mention the high priest's vestments as the vehicle for the prophecy (6:115, 359-60), and the other occurrences are so similar to them in terms of the situation and procedure that it is reasonable to conclude that Josephus understood the vestments to have been the key ingredient in these cases as well.

² Gray is likely correct when she says that Josephus refers to the priest Abiathar as “the prophet” (*Ant.* 6:271; Gray, *Prophetic Figures*, 18, *pace* [L. H. Feldman, “Prophets and Prophecy in Josephus,” *JTS* 41 (1990) 386-422; *idem*, *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary: Judean Antiquities 1-4* (Steve Mason; ed.; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 288 n. 566]. Feldman quibbles when he says that Josephus “nowhere calls the high priest a prophet, but rather speaks of him as ‘prophesying’ or uttering ‘prophecy.’” Josephus deliberately introduces prophetic terminology into these accounts. There is nothing in the biblical narrative either in the MT or the LXX requiring this interpretation. Moreover, al-

high priest used his *urim* and *thummim* to inquire of God. He states, for example (*Ant.* 4:311), that “Moses taught them ... how they should go forth to war, making use of the stones [of the high priest's breastplate] for their direction.” Josephus’ alleges (*Ant.* 13:282-83), for example, that Hyrcanus heard a voice from above which revealed that his sons had just defeated Antiochus in battle:

Now a very surprising thing is related of this high priest Hyrcanus, how God came to discourse with him; for they say that on the very same day on which his sons fought with Antiochus Cyzicenus, he was alone in the temple, as high priest, offering incense, and heard a voice, that his sons had just then overcome Antiochus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13:282).

He heard the voice while in the temple, thus while wearing the priestly vestments. To Josephus, Hyrcanus “was accounted by God worthy of three of the greatest privileges: the rule of the nation, the office of high-priest, and the gift of prophecy” (*Ant.* 13:299; *Wars* 1:68).

Which view is correct? Shall we take the word of Josephus that second temple priests prior to John Hyrcanus employed the *urim* and *thummim* and possessed the gift of prophecy? Or shall we accept the view of the Talmud that the *urim* and *thummim* and the spirit of prophecy were not present at all in the second temple? The hypothesis that second temple priests before the death of John Hyrcanus had access to the *urim* and *thummim* (and consequently shared the gift of prophecy) can be tested against the alternative hypothesis that the *urim* and *thummim* did not exist at all in the second temple and that second temple priests were not perceived as having prophetic abilities.³ This can be done by examining second temple texts which describe the contemporary high priest and which can be dated prior to 104 BCE. If these texts imply that their contemporary high priest had access to *urim* and *thummim* and to God’s word it will support the view of Josephus over that of the Talmud. If these texts do not include a reference to the *urim* and *thummim* or imply that priests did not have privileged access to God’s word, it will support the view of the Talmud over that of Josephus.

2.0 THE URIM AND THUMMIM IN THE BIBLICAL CORPUS

Before examining extra-biblical second temple texts, it is worthwhile to look at the biblical corpus. According to the biblical text, the *urim* and *thummim* were attached to the high priest’s breastplate which hung from his ephod-apron by gemstone buttons on his shoulders (Exodus 28:28-30; Lev. 8:8). With the *urim* and *thummim* attached, the breastplate becomes the breastplate of judgment, חוֹשֶׁן הַמִּשְׁפָּט, and the entire ephod becomes a method for accessing the divine will, a method of prophecy

though the MT reports that Doeg slew the priests at Nob “who wore the linen ephod,” plus their wives and children (1 Samuel 22:18), Josephus reports that he killed “three hundred priests and prophets” ἱερέας καὶ προφήτας. It seems likely that to Josephus, the priests who wore the ephod were those prophets. See Gray, *Prophetic Figures*, 173, n. 44, for a discussion of these issues.

³ For the applicability of hypothesis testing in historical studies see L.S. Fried, “Historians Can Use the Scientific Method,” *Transeuphratène* 31 (2006): 125-27.

(Num. 27:18-21). These biblical sections are customarily assigned to P, which is usually considered second temple.

The *urim* and *thummim* appear more frequently in the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch than they do in the MT. Rofé suggests therefore that several references to them have been expunged from the MT.⁴ In the MT of 1 Sam. 14:18, for example, we read that the priest Ahijah, carried the ark, but in the parallel verse in the LXX he carries the ephod with *urim* and *thummim*:

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאוּל לְאַחִיָּה הַגִּישָׁה אֶרֶוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים כִּי־הִיא אֶרֶוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים
בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

And Saul said to Ahijah who carried the ark of God, for the ark of God was on that day before Israel (1 Sam. 14:18; MT).⁵

καὶ εἶπεν Σαουλ τῷ Αχια προσάγαγε τὸ εφουδ ὅτι αὐτὸς ἦρεν τὸ εφουδ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ ἐνώπιον Ἰσραηλ

And Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ephod,” because he took up the ephod that day before Israel (1 Sam. 14:18, LXX).

Rofé suggests that the ephod was deliberately erased from this passage of the MT and replaced with the ark.⁶ He finds a similar substitution in the MT in Hosea 3:4. The LXX reads “and no priesthood and no *urim*,” against the MT which reads “no pillar, no ephod, and no teraphim.”

Hosea 3:4 (MT):

כִּי יָמִים רַבִּים יֵשְׁבוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין מֶלֶךְ וְאֵין שָׂר וְאֵין זָבַח וְאֵין
מִצְבָּה וְאֵין אֶפֹּד וְתַרְפִּים

For the sons of Israel will remain many days with neither king, nor ruler, nor sacrifice, nor pillar, nor ephod or teraphim

Whereas Hosea 3:4 (LXX) reads:

διότι ἡμέρας πολλὰς καθήσονται οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραηλ οὐκ ὄντος βασιλείας οὐδὲ ὄντος ἄρχοντος οὐδὲ οὐσης θυσίας οὐδὲ ὄντος θυσιαστηρίου οὐδὲ ἱερατείας οὐδὲ δῆλων

Therefore the sons of Israel will live many days with neither king, nor ruler, nor sacrifice, nor altar, nor priesthood, nor *urim*.

The Greek makes better sense in the context. Hosea 3 is intended as a threat, a prediction of a dire future. Pillar and teraphim connote idolatrous practices, unrelated to the passage. Hosea does not intend

⁴ Alexander Rofé, “No *Ephod* or *Teraphim*? -- *Oude Hierateias Oude Delon*: Hosea 3:4 in the LXX and in the Paraphrases of the Chronicles and the *Damascus Document*,” *Sefer Moshe: The Sefer Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume* (ed. A. H. C. Cohen, and S. Paul; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004) 135-49.

⁵ Emending “sons of Israel,” ובני ישראל, to the orthographically similar לפני ישראל, “before Israel.”

⁶ Rofé, “No *Ephod* or *Teraphim*,” p. 145.

that Israel will no longer have her idols; rather that she will no longer have a correct way of interacting with God.

Support for the LXX comes from Josephus' paraphrase of 2 Chron. 15:3, a verse based on Hosea 3:4.⁷ Josephus paraphrases this verse, but his *Vorlage* is not the text of our MT or even of the present LXX, but of a text which contains an allusion to the oracle of the priesthood, the *urim* and *thummim*.

2 Chronicles 15:3 (MT and LXX):

וַיְמִים רַבִּים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְלוֹא אֱלֹהֵי אֱמֶת וּלְלוֹא כוּהֵן מוֹרֶה וּלְלוֹא
תוֹרֶה

καὶ ἡμέραι πολλαὶ τῷ Ἰσραὴλ ἐν οὐ θεῷ ἀληθινῷ καὶ οὐχ
ἰερέως ὑποδεικνύοντος καὶ ἐν οὐ νόμῳ

For a long time Israel [was] without the true God, and without a
teaching priest, and without law;

Josephus *Ant.* 8:296:

καὶ γενήσεσθαι χρόνον ἐκεῖνον ἐν ᾧ μηδεὶς ἀληθῆς
εὐρεθήσεται προφήτης ἐν τῷ ὕμετέρῳ ὄχλῳ οὐδὲ ἰερεὺς
τὰ δίκαια χρηματίζων

and a time should come, wherein no true prophet shall be left in
your whole multitude, nor a priest who shall reveal to you a true
revelation from the oracle

The text of Chronicles that Josephus quotes reflects the LXX of Hosea, not the text of the Chronicler of either the MT or the LXX. In agreement with Rofé, Josephus' *Vorlage* seems to reveal an earlier, perhaps original, version of both Hosea and 2 Chronicles.

The Samaritan Pentateuch also preserves traces of the *urim* and *thummim* absent from the MT. Exodus 28:30 of the MT commands their placement on the priest's breastplate and describes the command's fulfillment in Lev. 8:8, but nowhere does it ordain their actual manufacture. The command to create them is preserved in the Samaritan Pentateuch however.

ועשית את הארים ואת התמים ונתתה על חשן המשפט את הארים
והיו על לב אהרן בבאו לפני יהוה: ונשא אהרון את
משפת בני ישראל על לבו לפני יהוה תמיד

And you shall make the *urim* and the *thummim*; and he shall put the
urim and the *thummim* on the breastplate of judgment. They shall be
over the heart of Aaron when he comes before YHWH. Aaron shall
carry the judgment of the people Israel on his heart before YHWH
for ever (*Samaritan Pentateuch* Exod. 28:30).

The Samaritan version is identical to the MT, except it includes the
phrase "and you shall make the *urim* and the *thummim*." Not only is the

⁷ See Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 719, for discussion and references.

command to make them preserved in the Samaritan Pentateuch, but also its fulfillment.

ויעשו את האורים ואת התמים כאשר צוה יהוה את משה

And they made the *urim* and the *thummim* just as YHWH had commanded Moses (Samaritan Pentateuch Exod. 39:21b).

Either the Samaritan Pentateuch fills in a perceived gap,⁸ or it preserves an earlier version, a version which was “sanitized” in the MT. The originality of the Samaritan Pentateuch is supported, however, by 4Q17 (4QExod-Levf).

ויעש את האורים ו[את התמים כאשר צוה יהוה את] משה

And he made the *urim* and [the *thummim* just as YHWH had commanded] Moses (4Q17 (4QExod-Levf), Col II: Fragment 1ii, line 5-6, Exod. 39:21b).

This fragment states that the command to make the *urim* and *thummim* has been fulfilled. Cross holds that 4Q17 is among the earliest manuscripts found at Qumran, dating to the mid-third century, and is original.⁹ If so, then the Samaritan version of Exod. 28:30, which includes the command to make them, must also be original. It is not likely that there would be a statement that the command has been fulfilled without the command itself being present in the text. The command to make the *urim* and the *thummim* may have dropped out inadvertently from Exod. 28:30, but it is not likely that both the command to make them and the statement that they have been made would both have dropped out inadvertently.¹⁰ It is more likely, as Rofé suggests, that references to the *urim* and *thummim* have been excised from the Hebrew text.

In view of these discrepancies it seems possible that the *urim* and *thummim* were in favor and in use in the second temple when 4Q17 and the Samaritan Pentateuch were copied – in the mid-third century, but were excised from later editions of the MT when these devices went out of favor.

3.0 THE URIM AND THUMMIM IN EXTRA-BIBLICAL SECOND TEMPLE TEXTS

If the *urim* and *thummim* were part of the accoutrements of the high priest, and if the high priest was credited with prophetic ability, then

⁸ As suggested by C. Fletcher-Louis who argues that the point of the MT is that they are uncreated (C. H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 42; ed. F. Garcia Martínez; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 234-35.

⁹ F. M. Cross, “4QExod-Levf,” *DJD* 12 1994:133-44, Pl. XXII; quote on p. 134, text on p. 139.

¹⁰ The command to make the *urim* and *thummim* and the statement that Moses made them is also present in Pseudo-Philo (*L_{AB}* 11:15 and 12:1, respectively). Daniel J. Harrington concludes that *L_{AB}* witnesses to an early Palestinian text type similar to the Samaritan or proto-Lucianic text and similar to the one used by Josephus (D. J. Harrington, “The Biblical Text of Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*,” *CBQ* 33 [1971]:1-17).

this should be visible in extra-biblical second temple texts. This third section of the paper will examine second temple extra-biblical texts composed prior to the death of John Hyrcanus which refer to the garments or abilities of the high priest.

3.1 Hecataeus of Abdera

Perhaps the earliest of extra-biblical second temple texts which refer to the garments of the high priest are the remarks of Hecataeus of Abdera regarding the Jews. They are dated to the time of Alexander the Great and the period of the Successors since he apparently served in the court of Ptolemy I (323-282).¹¹ His books are no longer extant but passages attributed to him are found in the *Histories* of Diodorus Siculus (XL 3:1-8) and in Josephus's *Against Apion* (1:183-204, 2:43). In contrast to the passages quoted in *Against Apion*, the passages quoted in Diodorus are believed authentic.¹² The attitude toward the Jews expressed in them is not particularly enthusiastic and is negative about the Jewish way of life (3:4). In a passage quoted by Diodorus, however, Hecataeus reports the awe in which the high priest is held and the high priest's role as a conduit between God and Israel:

He [Moses] picked out the men of most refinement and with the greatest ability to head the entire nation, and appointed them priests; and he ordained that they should occupy themselves with the temple and the honors and sacrifices offered to their god. These same men he appointed to be judges in all major disputes, and entrusted to them the guardianship of the laws and customs. For this reason the Jews never have a king, and authority over the people is regularly vested in whichever priest is regarded as superior to his colleagues in wisdom and virtue.

They call this man the high priest, and believe that he acts as a messenger ἄγγελος to them of God's commands. It is he, we are told, who in their assemblies and other gatherings announces what is ordained, and the Jews are so docile in such matters that straightway they fall to the ground and do reverence to the high priest when he expounds the commands to them (*Hecataeus of Abdera*, quoted in Diodorus Siculus' *Historical Library* XL 3:4-6).

Hecataeus states that the high priest is viewed as a conduit, a messenger (*angelos*), of God's commands. Thus, according to Hecataeus, and in contrast to the Talmud, in the mid-third century, the contemporary high priest was viewed as having prophetic ability.

Bar Kochva points out that Hecataeus, writing under Ptolemy I, would not on his own advocate a society without kings whose sole authority was placed in the hands of a high priest.¹³ It must be con-

¹¹ Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *Pseudo-Hecataeus On the Jews: Legitimizing the Jewish Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 7-8. Information on Hecataeus's life is based on testimonia collected in *FGH* IIA 264 T 1-9 and on the remarks of Josephus in *Ag. Ap.* 1:183, 189, 201. Bar Kochva suggests 302/301 as the *terminus ante quem* for Hecataeus' remarks (*Pseudo-Hecataeus*, 15).

¹² *Ibid.*, 3, 39. One statement only was likely added by Diodorus (XL. 3:8), the statement that the traditional practices of the Jews were disturbed when they became subject to foreign rule (*Ibid.*, 24).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

cluded, therefore, that the information that Hecataeus reports concerning the high priest reliably reflects the attitudes of his Jewish informants.

We are not told if the high priest served as a conduit of God's commands even while not wearing the priestly garments, or if it was the garments which transformed him into a messenger of God. According to the passage, he acted as God's messenger in public assemblies, presumably while wearing the official priestly vestments. Hecataeus does not specifically mention the *urim* and the *thummim*, but he states that the people were so convinced that the high priest participated in the divine word that they fell down in reverence when he spoke. Why were they so convinced? Did the high priest access God's word through a public device, such as the *urim* and the *thummim*, or did he possess God's word simply through his office, or through the force of his personality? Other texts may provide an answer.

3.2 Jesus Ben Sirach

Ben Sira wrote perhaps between 195-175 BCE and his work was translated into Greek by his grandson who arrived in Egypt in 132 BCE.¹⁴ According to Ben Sira, the contemporaneous high priest wore the oracle of judgment, the *urim* and the *thummim*, just as every priest before him had done.¹⁵ He describes the first high priest thusly (45:7-13):

He [God] exalted Aaron, a holy man like Moses who was his brother, of the tribe of Levi. ⁷He made an everlasting covenant with him, and gave him the priesthood of the people. He blessed him with stateliness, and put on him a robe of Glory (περιστολήν δόξης).¹⁶ ⁸He clothed him in perfect splendor, and strengthened him with the symbols of authority, the linen undergarments, the long robe, and the ephod (ἔπωμίδα). ⁹And he encircled him with pomegranates, with many golden bells all around, to send forth a sound as he walked, to make their ringing heard in the temple as a reminder to his people; ¹⁰with the sacred garment (στολή ἁγία, בגדי קודש) of gold and violet and purple, the work of an embroiderer; with the oracle of judgment (חושן משפט; λογείω κρίσεως) of the *urim* and *thummim*; ¹¹with twisted crimson, the work of an artisan; with precious stones engraved like seals, in a setting of gold, the work of a jeweler, to commemorate in engraved letters each of the tribes of Israel; ¹²with a gold crown upon his turban, inscribed like a seal with "holiness," a distinction to be

¹⁴ The date of Ben Sira is surmised from the sure date of his grandson and from the supposition that the high priest Simon II was a near contemporary.

¹⁵ Fragments of the Hebrew text of Ben Sira are known from Qumran, from Masada, and in six separate manuscripts from the Cairo Geniza, Mss A-F. Versions also exist in Greek (LXX), in Old Latin, and in Syriac. For a discussion and comparison of the Hebrew manuscripts see Pancratius C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of all Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of all Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts* (VT Supp 68; Leiden, Brill, 1997). For a review of recent discussions of Ben Sira, see P. C. Beentjes, *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997). For a recent discussion of the date, see F. V. Reiterer, "Review of Recent Research on the Book of Ben Sira (1980-1996)," in *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research*, 23-60, esp. 37.

¹⁶ The Hebrew reads וישרתהו בכבוד, "he ministered to him in glory."

like a seal with “holiness,” a distinction to be prized, the work of an expert, a delight to the eyes, richly adorned. ¹³Before him such beautiful things did not exist. No outsider ever put them on, but only his sons and his descendants in perpetuity (διὰ παντός; **םלדורו**). ¹⁴His sacrifices shall be wholly burned twice every day continually (Ben Sira 45:6-14).

Ben Sirach’s description of the first high priest, Aaron (BS 45:6-14), is based on the LXX of Exodus 28:6-30, but it is not a slavish copy of it.¹⁷ More importantly, Ben Sira assumes that the description in Exodus 28, in which Aaron is said to wear the *urim* and *thummim*, also applies to Simon, the contemporary high priest. Whatever Aaron wore, so also did all of his descendants in perpetuity (διὰ παντός, **םלדורו** 45:13).¹⁸

¹⁷ Three texts testify to the crucial verse 45:10 - the LXX, MS B from the Geniza, and the Old Latin. The entire passage is present in all three texts, but unfortunately 45:10c of MS B has become corrupt. Table 1 presents a comparison of 45:10c in the three versions.

Geniza ms B	LXX BS 45:10	LXX Exod. 28:30	MT Exod. 28:30	Vulgate
		καὶ ἐπιθήσεις ἐπὶ	וְנָתַתָּה	Viri sapientis
ישק משפ	λογείω κρίσεως	τὸ λογεῖον τῆς κρίσεως	ישק-ל משפ	
אפוד ואזר	δήλοις ἀληθείας	ἦν δήλωσιν καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν	םאתהאורים םאתהתמים	iudicio veritate praediti

Table 1
Jesus Son of Sirach 45:10c compared

The Hebrew in MsB does not have “*urim* and *thummim*” as the Greek is usually translated and as exists in the LXX version of Exodus. Rather the Hebrew has **אפוד ואזר**, “ephod and girdle”. This may be an attempt to sanitize the text, as Rofé has argued for other texts, or it may simply be a scribal error. The Greek texts never translate **אפוד ואזר** by **δήλοις** and **ἀληθείας**. This pair of Greek words always translates “*urim* and *thummim*.” Moreover, in only two verses above this one, Greek Ben Sira uses the term **ἐπωμίδα** to translate ephod. Had ephod been in the grandson’s *Vorlage*, he would have translated it as he did there, not by the terms usually reserved for the *urim* and *thummim*. The word after ephod in MS B 45:10c is **אזר**, girdle. The word appears as a noun only seven times in the Hebrew Bible. It never appears in the Pentateuch and is never used to refer to priestly garments. It is extremely unlikely that a term like this is original to Ben Sira. The phrase **אפוד ואזר**, ephod and girdle, which appears in manuscript B from the Geniza, cannot be the *Vorlage* of **δήλοις ἀληθείας**, that is, it cannot be original to Ben Sira. The Greek is to be preferred.

¹⁸ As Table 2 shows, the three extant witnesses agree on this verse (BS 45:13).

Ben Sirach maintains, moreover, that “for the sensible person the law is as dependable as the *urim*” (BS 33:3).

ἄνθρωπος συνετὸς ἐμπιστεύσει νόμῳ καὶ ὁ νόμος αὐτῷ
πιστὸς ὡς ἐρώτημα δῆλων (BS 33:3)

The sensible person will trust in the law; for him the law is as dependable as inquiring of the *urim*.¹⁹

One would not say that “the law is as dependable as the *urim*,” if the *urim* no longer existed and was no longer available to the contemporary high priest. For Ben Sira, then, writing at the beginning of the second century, the *urim* and *thummim* were a viable and valuable means of learning God’s will.

MS B	Greek	Vulgate	English
ל[פניו] ל[א היה כן]	πρὸ αὐτοῦ οὐ γέγονεν τοιαῦτα	ante ipsum non fuerunt talia	Before him such beautiful things did not exist
ל[עולם ל]א זר [לבשה]	ἕως αἰῶνος οὐκ ἐνεδύσατο ἀλλογενῆς	usque ad origi- nem non indu- tus est illa alieni- gena aliquis	No outsider ever put them on,
האמן.... לבניו כזה	πλὴν τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ μόνον	sed tantum filii ipsius soli	but only his sons
וכן בניו	καὶ τὰ ἔκγονα αὐτοῦ	et nepotes eius	and his de- scendants
לדורותם	διὰ παντός	per omne tem- pus	eternally

Table 2

Jesus Son of Sirach 45:13 compared

¹⁹ Unfortunately, this verse is missing or broken in the extant Hebrew manuscripts.

The praise of Simon in Chapter 50 echoes the description of Aaron in Chapter 45. Aaron is described as clothed in “perfect splendor” (45:8; συντέλειαν καυχήματος) and Simon is described as clothed in “perfect splendor” (50:11; συντέλειαν καυχήματος). This perfect splendor includes the *urim* and *thummim* (45:10), which converts Simon’s robe into a robe of glory, στολήν δόξης, בגדי כבוד (50:11). This “robe of glory” is both the glory of wisdom (6:29, 6:31) and the glory of God, the Kabod, which fills the sanctuary (MS B; 36:13; ET 36:19):²⁰

בעטותו בגדי כבוד והתלבשו בגדי תפארת בעלותו על מזבח הוד ויהדר עזרת
מקדש

ἐν τῷ ἀναλαμβάνειν αὐτὸν στολήν δόξης καὶ
ἐνδιύσκεσθαι αὐτὸν συντέλειαν καυχήματος ἐν
ἀναβάσει θυσιαστηρίου ἁγίου ἐδόξασεν περιβολὴν
ἁγιάσματος

When he puts on his robe of glory and clothes himself in perfect splendor, when he goes up to the holy altar, he makes the court of the sanctuary magnificent (Ben Sira 50:11, MS B and LXX).

It is Simon’s garments, not he himself, which makes the sanctuary magnificent. The awe with which the garments of both Aaron and Simon are described is reminiscent of Hecataeus’ words, and is consistent with other passages in Ben Sirach expressing Ben Sira’s attitude toward the priesthood (e.g., BS 7:29-31, also in MS A).²¹

Most instructive is the paean to wisdom (BS 24).²² Ben Sirach asserts that wisdom has made her dwelling in the temple and from there makes instruction enlighten (φωτιῶ) like prophecy for all future generations (24: 32-33). Like wisdom herself, the priest in the temple also enlightens the people with God’s law.

ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ἐν ἐντολαῖς αὐτοῦ ἐξουσίαν ἐν διαθήκαις
κριμάτων διδάξαι τὸν Ἰακωβ τὰ μαρτύρια καὶ ἐν νόμῳ
αὐτοῦ φωτίσαι Ἰσραηλ

[Moses] gave him (=Aaron) authority and statutes and judgments, to teach Jacob the testimonies, and to enlighten φωτίσαι Israel with his law (BS 45:17).

²⁰ The translation is based on the Hebrew, MS B; the Greek reads “fills the people.”

²¹ In BS 7:29-31, the language of the Shema (Deut. 6:5) is adapted so that the honor due God is also commanded toward his priest (B. G. Wright, “Fear the Lord and Honor the Priest: Ben Sira as Defender of the Jerusalem Priesthood,” *The Book of Ben Sira in Modern Research* (ed. P. C. Beentjes; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997), 189-222. See also, S. M. Olyan, “Ben Sira’s Relationship to the Priesthood,” *HTR* 80 (1987), 261-86.

²² Unfortunately, this passage does not appear in any of the extant Hebrew manuscripts.

The role of wisdom and the high priest is thus the same – to “enlighten” Israel. Batsch suggests that the word “to enlighten” here may refer to the shining oracle of the *urim*.²³

O. Mulder writes:

In his use of symbolism in the praise of wisdom (24:13-17) and in his description of Simon’s radiance (50:5-10), [Ben Sirach] identifies Simon with wisdom created from the beginning to minister in the presence of YHWH in the holy tabernacle, to be established on Zion and to wield authority in the temple of Jerusalem.²⁴

To Ben Sirach, the wisdom of the high priest stems not from his human imagination, nor even in his office, but from the glory of his vestments (45:8; 50:11), particularly from the breastplate which contains the oracle of judgment, the spirit of prophecy, the *urim* and *thummim* (45:10). Wearing his priestly vestments, Simon becomes wisdom herself (50:11). In his robes, he shines like the sun and gleams like the rainbow in the clouds (50:7, cf. 24:4,5); he blossoms like the roses, the lilies, and like the green shoot in Lebanon (50: 8-10, 12, cf. 24:13-17). Like her, his entrance into the sanctuary transforms it into a court of glory.

The high priest’s vestments of perfect splendor include the breastplate of judgment and the ever dependable *urim* and the *thummim*. According to Ben Sira, they were worn by Aaron and by every priest after him in perpetuity (לְדוֹרוֹתָם), including, of course, the contemporary high priest, Simon, son of Onias.

3.3 Aramaic Testament of Levi

The role of the priestly vestments in transforming an ordinary man into a messenger of God’s word is paramount in the *Testament of Levi*. Aramaic fragments of the Testament of Levi (hereafter called *Aramaic Levi Document*, or *ALD*) have been found at Qumran and in the Cairo Geniza.²⁵ The Aramaic documents are fragmentary, and a complete text does not exist. Qumran fragments overlap and confirm the fragments from the Geniza (Cambridge Col. A =1Q21 Frag 3; Bodleian Col. A =4Q213b; Bodleian Col. C=4Q214b; Bodleian Col. D = 4Q214; Cam-

²³ C. Batsch, *La Guerre et les Rites de Guerre dans le Judaïsme Du Deuxième Temple* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 93; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 324-5. Unfortunately, this line is missing from the Cairo Geniza B Manuscript.

²⁴ Otto Mulder, *Simon the High Priest in Sirach 50* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 340.

²⁵ For the most recent study of all the Aramaic Levi fragments see now Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary* (Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 19; Leiden: Brill, 2005). For a list of the fragments and the various versions, see pages 4 -6 of this work. See also H. Drawnel, *An Aramaic Wisdom Text from Qumran: A New Interpretation of the Levi Document* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Also relevant for a comparison of the versions is Robert A. Kugler, *From Patriarch to Priest: The Levi-Priestly Tradition from Aramaic Levi to Testament of Levi* (SBL: Early Judaism and its Literature, 9; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), and *idem*, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 47-56. Greenfield, *et. al.* note that although there are textual variants, “in general the Geniza Aramaic text resembles that of the Qumran fragments” (*Aramaic Levi Document*, 8).

bridge Col. C= 4Q214), and both groups provide parallels to the Greek *T. Levi*, a Christian document.²⁶ Since Qumran Cave 4 yielded 6 separate manuscripts of *ALD*, overlaps among their fragments also assist in determining their order. In addition, there is a Greek insertion, labeled E, which is found only in the version of Greek *T. Levi* from the monastery at Mt. Athos. This insertion overlaps with 4Q213. The result is still very fragmentary, so that in spite of the Christian interpolations, the Greek *T. Levi* is indispensable for reconstructing a complete text from the Aramaic fragments.

The *ALD* should be dated no later than the reign of John Hyrcanus (135-104), since paleographically the Qumran manuscripts date from the second half of the second century, so that the *terminus ad quem* is easily established.²⁷ Its composition should be assigned at least to the end of the third or the beginning of the second century, however.²⁸ It served as a source for the *Damascus Document*, probably composed in the first third of the second century, and it was surely a source for *Jubilees*, also usually dated to the beginning of the second century.²⁹

²⁶ John J. Collins, "The Testamentary Literature in Recent Scholarship," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) 268-85, esp. 269. For the English translations of the Greek *T. Levi*, see M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Study of their Text, Composition and Origin* (Leiden: Assen, 1953); M. de Jonge, ed. *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation* (SVTP 3; Leiden: Brill, 1975); H. W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985). The Greek text is available in R. H. Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Oxford: 1908; Reprinted Hildesheim, 1960).

²⁷ K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer samt den Inschriften aus Palästina, dem Testament Levis aus der Kairoer Genisa, der Fastenrolle und den alten talmudischen Zitaten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), p. 189.

²⁸ J. Greenfield *et. al.*, *Aramaic Levi Document*, p. 19-22. Other dates have been proposed. Charles suggests the time of John Hyrcanus I (R. H. Charles, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Translated - with Notes* [London, 1908]), as does Blenkinsopp (J. Blenkinsopp "Prophecy and Priesthood in Josephus," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 25/2 (1974), 251). Kee suggests early second century (H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume One* [ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, INC, 1983] 775-828, esp. 778); as does Stone (M. E. Stone, "Ideal Figures and Social Context: Priest and Sage in the Early Second Temple Age," *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* [eds. J. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987] 575-86, esp. 578.)

²⁹ For the date and recent discussions of the *Damascus Document*, see Magen Broshi (ed.) *The Damascus Document Reconsidered* (Jerusalem, 1992); Philip R. Davies, *The Damascus Covenant. An Interpretation of the "Damascus Document"* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983). For the date and discussion of *Jubilees*, see James C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (HSM 14; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); *idem*, *The Book of Jubilees* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); O. S. Wintermute, "Jubilees: A New Translation and Introduction," in J. C. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume 2* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 35-142; R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees or The Little Genesis* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1917). Drawnel dates the Aramaic Levi document to the period of Ezra and

Because the text of the *ALD* is fragmentary, scholars may disagree on the order of the fragments and on the degree to which the Greek *T. Levi* can be used as a guide to reconstruction. According to the Greek *T. Levi*, Levi is feeding the flocks with his brothers on Abelmaul, when he prays, falls into a deep sleep, and has a vision. In the vision an angel opens the heavens and bids him enter, telling him “you shall stand near the Lord and be his minister and declare his mysteries to men” (2: 9, 10). These events are also portrayed in the Aramaic, evidently the *Vorlage* of this first vision (4Q213 Frag. 2 supplemented by passages from the Greek MS of Mt. Athos to 2:3 which are in italics):

[You] my Lord, have blessed *my father Abram and my mother Sarah, and you have said to give them a just offspring which will be blessed forever. Listen then to the prayer of your servant Levi, to be near to you. Let him share in your words to pass just judgment for all the centuries, me and my sons for all eternal generations. And do not remove the son of your servant from before you all the days of eternity.*” And I became silent, when I was still praying... Then I went to ...to my father Jacob and whe[n] ... from Abel-Mayin. Then ... I lay down and settled up[on] (*Vocat.*) Then I saw visions ... in the appearance of this vision I saw the heaven *opened, and I saw a mountain* underneath me, high reaching up to heaven ... to me the gates of heaven and an angel *said to me, Levi, Enter.*³⁰

As in the Greek, so too in this Aramaic passage Levi prays to be near to God, to share in God’s words, and to pass just judgment for all the centuries. While he is praying he lays down, sees visions, the heavens open, and an angel bids him enter. The Greek *T. Levi* continues with a description of the heavens and with the angel telling Levi that his prayer is heard and that he will become a son to the Most High, a servant, and a minister of his presence (4:2). This part of the vision is not present in any of the Aramaic fragments, but since the request is in a fragment that we have, doubtless its fulfillment would have been there too. That is, he would have been granted his wish to be near to God, to share in his words, to pass just judgment for all the centuries, he and his sons for all eternal generations. As in the words of Hecataeus, and according to this text too, it is the role of the priest to participate in God’s word, that is to have prophetic ability.

In the Greek *Testament*, the angel then commands Levi to execute vengeance on Shechem because of Dinah’s rape. Because the end of the first vision is missing in the *ALD*, we are also missing the command to attack Shechem. Such a command must have existed in the *ALD* however, since *Jubilees* (which seems to be based on the *ALD*) states that a judgment had been ordered in heaven against the men of Shechem because they caused a shame in Israel (*Jub.* 30:5).

Both the Greek *T. Levi* (6:3) and the Aramaic fragments (1 Q21 Frag. 3= Cambridge Col.A) then continue with the story of Shechem. Both then state that Levi “[advises/consults] Jacob my father and

Nehemiah, treating these two literary texts as if they were an historical source for Persian period Judah – a dubious proposition (*An Aramaic Wisdom Text from Qumran*, pp. 67-71).

³⁰ This is taken from F. García Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition Vol. 1* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 451.

Re[euben my bother]....” The Aramaic sentence continues with “and so we said to them ... ‘circumcise the foreskin of your flesh’,” whereas the Greek reads “to tell the sons of Hamor to be circumcised.”³¹ The Aramaic has direct speech, as is customary in biblical texts, whereas the Greek has the more natural indirect speech. Both texts state, however, that Levi talked to Jacob and Reuben before acting, an event not in the Genesis story. It is impossible that both the Greek *T. Levi* and the Aramaic would have this odd passage without one having copied from the other.

According to the Greek *T. Levi*, after killing Shechem and Hamor and destroying the city, Levi and his brothers take their sister to Bethel, where Levi has a second vision. In that vision, seven men dressed in white present Levi with the accoutrements of the priesthood.

I saw seven men in white clothing, who were saying to me, “Arise, put on the robe of the priesthood, the crown of righteousness, the oracle (λόγιον) of understanding, the robe of truth, the breastplate of faith, the turban of the sign [of the tetragrammaton?], and the ephod of prophecy.” Each carried one of these and put them on me and said, “From now on be a priest of the Lord, you and your posterity forever” (Greek *T. Levi* 8:1-4).

The oracle (λόγιον) refers to the *urim* and *thummim*, the breastplate of faith is the breastplate which houses them, and the ephod of prophecy refers not only to the apron upon which the breastplate rests, but also to the breastplate and the *urim* and *thummim* within it. The ordination ceremony described here is characterized by a change in clothes from the normal apparel of the shepherd to the (prophecy enabling) vestments of the high priest. Although this section of the vision is missing from the Aramaic, other parts of this vision are represented. The Greek version of the vision includes the following passage which may be present in the Aramaic:

Every desirable thing in Israel will be for you and your seed; and you will eat everything beautiful to see, and your seed will divide among themselves the table of the Lord. And from them there will be high priests and judges and scribes, because the holy place will be guarded on their command. (Greek *T. Levi* 8:16-18)

An Aramaic fragment is as follows:

....] because they will be three [...
 ... to] your [s]ons, the kingdom of the priesthood is greater than the
 kingdom [of ...
 ...] for [G]od the [most] h[igh] (1Q21 Frg. 1)

This fragment mentions “three” of something for the sons, the greatest being the priesthood. This may have included a reference to three classes of people stemming from Levi’s sons: high priests, judges, and scribes, the priesthood being the greater. The Greek version of the second dream-vision continues as follows:

³¹ The Aramaic is from García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 50-51. The translation of the Greek is from H. W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 146.

And when I awoke, I understood that this (vision) was like the former. And I hid this also in my heart and I did not tell it to anyone on earth. And after two days I and Judah went up with our father to Isaac. And the father of my father blessed me according to all the words of my visions which I had seen. And he did not want to come with us to Bethel. And when we came to Bethel, my father Jacob saw in a vision concerning me that I should be a priest for them to God. And after having risen early in the morning he paid tithes of all to the Lord through me. (Greek *T. Levi* 8:18-9:4).

This ending exists among the fragments:

Now see how we have made you greater than all, and how we have given you the greatness of eternal peace. [*Vocat.*] And these seven departed from me and I awoke from my dream. Then I thought, “this vision is like the other one.”³² I am amazed that the whole vision is to fall to me.” And I hid this one too in my heart and did not reveal it to anyone.

And we went to my father Isaac, and he also did the same [i.e., bless me]. Then when Jacob my [father] was tithing everything that belonged to him according to his vow [and because now] I was first at the head of the [priest]hood, then to me from all his sons he gave the offering of a tith[e] to God, and he clothed me in the priestly clothing and he filled my hands. And I became a priest of God the most high, and I offered all his offerings. And I blessed my father in his life, and I blessed my brothers. Then they all blessed me, and also the father blessed me. And I completed to offer his offerings in Bethel. (MS A, Bodleian A = 1Q21 Frag. 3 and 4Q213 b: 7-23, + Bodleian b: 1.)

Although the Aramaic vision is pieced together from various fragments, the last part of Greek *T. Levi*'s second dream is present here almost verbatim. The Aramaic witnesses to Levi's investiture into the priesthood by seven (men) in a vision. Both include a journey to Isaac and to Jacob after the dream-vision and in both Jacob tithes to Levi. Thus, the *ALD* or something similar must have served as a *Vorlage* to the Greek. It is not possible that two such similar stories would have been written independently.

According to both the Greek and the Aramaic fragments, Levi's earthly investiture occurs when Jacob dresses him in priestly clothing. A change of dress connotes a change of status. The question is whether the *ALD* would have included the bit about the angels dressing Levi in the priestly robes including the oracle of judgment with the *urim* and *thummim*. We know the Aramaic dream-vision ended with the phrase “the seven left him.” It is presumably those seven who before they leave say to Levi, “Now see how we have made you greater than all, and how we have given you the greatness of eternal peace.” We do not

³² This is according to the reconstruction of Drawnel, *An Aramaic Wisdom Text*, pp. 112-18. Most scholars translate 𐤓𐤓 𐤍𐤊 here as “also this one” (also this vision), implying that there was a previous vision. Kugler translates it “this very thing,” due to his contention that there was only one vision. Kugler (*From Patriarch to Priest*, p. 78) is alone in arguing that the Greek *T. Levi* has split a single vision in the Aramaic document into two dream-visions, one before the Shechem incident at Abel-Mayin and one after at Bethel.

know how they make him greater than all, but presumably it is by ordaining him as priest, an ordination that would necessarily have included being robed in the priestly vestments. Receiving new priestly attire is a normal part of priestly ordination in the biblical corpus (Exod. 28:1,2; Zech. 3:4, 5; cf. *ALD* Bodlleian A: 6), so it very likely was part of the second dream-vision as well.³³ Greenfield *et. al.* suggest that the material lost from the second vision describes Levi's priestly consecration and investiture similar to that described in *Greek T. Levi* 8:2-17.³⁴ Himmelfarb agrees, suggesting that since the list of garments in *T. Levi* 8:2 is taken from Exodus 28, the priestly interests of the writer of the *ALD* imply that it would have appeared there as well.³⁵ In view of the great amount of agreement between the Aramaic fragments and the Greek *T. Levi*, we may conclude that this passage existed in a fragment now lost to us.

By putting on the priestly vestments, Levi and all his posterity are changed from ordinary men, to priests. In the Greek *T. Levi*, these vestments include the oracle (λόγιον) which elsewhere refers to the breastplate holding the *urim* and the *thummim* (e.g., LXX Exod. 28:30; Jos. *Antiq.* 3:163), and the ephod of prophecy, the apron-like garment from which the breastplate hangs (Exod. 28: 4-30). Hollander and de Jonge state that the genitives in the passage reflect the author's attitude toward the priesthood as having both priestly and prophetic functions.³⁶ Support for the prophetic nature of the high priesthood is found in the book of Jubilees, likely based on the *ALD*. It states that "the seed of Levi was chosen as priests and Levites to minister before the Lord just as we (the ministering angels) do" likely a reference to Levi's second dream-vision (*Jub.* 30:18, cf. 31:14). In this passage, *Jubilees* confirms an angelic role for the high priest, suggesting the high priest's prophetic ability to declare God's secrets to men.³⁷ This power of prophecy begins with his investiture, when he puts on the priestly robes (*Jub.* 32:4; *ALD* 4Q213b:19).

3.4 Letter of Aristeas

The fictional Letter of Aristeas alludes to the *urim* and the *thummim* in its description of the vestments of the contemporary high priest. It has been dated to about 134-104, the period of the high priesthood of John Hyrcanus.³⁸

It was an occasion of great amazement to us when we saw Eleazar [the high priest] engaged on his ministry, and all the glorious vestments, including the wearing of the robe with precious stones upon it in which he is vested; golden bells surround the hem (at his feet)

³³ Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31; L. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 258; J. Greenfield *et. al.*, *Aramaic Levi Document*, 73.

³⁴ J. Greenfield *et. al.*, *Aramaic Levi Document*, 16.

³⁵ M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 128, n. 34

³⁶ Hollander and de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, p. 152.

³⁷ M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 37, 129, n.36.

³⁸ Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria: A Study in the Narrative of the Letter of Aristeas* (London: Routledge, 2003), 87, convincingly argues for this late date.

and make a very special sound. Alongside each of them are tassels adorned with flowers all of marvelous colors. He was clad in an outstandingly magnificent girdle, woven in the most beautiful colors. On his breast he wears what is called the “oracle” (λόγιον), to which are attached twelve stones of different kinds, set in gold, giving the names of the patriarchs in what was the original order, each stone flashing its own natural distinctive color – quite indescribable. Upon his head he has what is called the tiara, and upon this the inimitable miter, the hallowed diadem having in relief on the front in the middle in holy letters on a golden leaf the name of God, ineffable in glory. The wearer is considered worthy of such vestments at the services. Their appearance makes one awe-struck and dumb-founded. (Letter of Aristeas #96-99).

This passage does not name the *urim* and *thummim* directly, but refers instead to the “oracle” of judgment of the high priest’s breastplate which contains them. Although a paraphrase of Exodus 28, the passage claims to be a description of the reigning high priest. Honigman details the extent to which the author goes to convince his readers of the authenticity of the narrative.³⁹ Because the author wants his readers to regard his work as a “narrative of events that really happened,” he did not “write fabulous accounts,” or “legends.”

There you have, Philocrates, as I promised, my narrative (*diegēsis*). These matters I think delight you more (*terpein*) than the books of the mythographers (*ta tōn mythologōn biblia*).⁴⁰

Rather than including legends in his writing, the author follows the strict rules of historiography set by the Greco-Roman grammarians and rhetoricians.⁴¹ Although the *Letter* is fictional, it enables us to discern what its readers, apparently literate and sophisticated Alexandrian Jews, would have assumed to be true. The use of Exodus 28 (itself a second temple text) as the basis for the description of Eleazar’s vestments suggests that both the author and his readers assumed the contemporary high priest to be equipped in every way exactly as was the first high priest, Aaron.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-91.

⁴⁰ Translation is that of S. Honigman, *ibid.*, 33, 66.

⁴¹ Chief of these is the use of first person, a fixed feature of history-writing since Herodotus. Because the text would have seemed less believable if the narrator had been an Alexandrian Jew, rather than an Egyptian courtier, the choice of narrator was dictated by the story to be told (S. Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship*, 65-91). The author also follows other contemporary practices of good history writing. The insertion of “official” documents in a narrative was general historiographic practice. These may be reworked for the sake of rhetorical embellishment. Sometimes these are entirely fabricated, as in the Letter of Aristeas. The inclusion of lists of all kinds was also a popular mechanism used by historiographers to convey narrative veracity. Genuine lists were used if available, and spurious ones if not. As with Thucydides’ speeches, the intention was always to convey matters as they “must have been” (Thuc. *Hist.* I:XXII). The clear indication that the Letter’s author was writing history and not myth, however, was his eschewal of the fabulous. Every detail is completely plausible in every way. Moreover, to be understood as history-writing by its readers, it had to conform to what its contemporary readers already knew to be true. Thus, its kernel must be a pre-existing oral tradition.

3.5 Three Sectarial Scrolls from the Dead Sea

Sectarial scrolls from Qumran testify to the awe in which the high priest's garments are held and the importance of the *urim* and *thummim* to that community as an oracular device. *4Q ShirShabbat* consists of 13 Sabbath Songs for the liturgy of the Sabbath day on thirteen consecutive weeks. The series climaxes at the thirteenth week with the thirteenth song, a description of the high priests' garments. The texts are fragmentary, but the awe in which these garments are held is still visible and echoes the awe felt by Ben Sira and related by Hecataeus.

4QShirShabbat: Song XIII (A) (11Q17 IX)

3. [...]acceptable [offering]s ...[...] all th[eir] works 4. [...] for the sacrifices of the holy ones [...] the aroma of their offerings ...[...] 5. [...]... and the ar[o]ma of their libations for ...[...] of purity with a spirit of holi[ness] 6 [...] eternity, with [splendor and] majesty for [...] the wonder and the pattern of the breastplates of (חשני) 7. [...] beautiful [th]reads [...] multicolored like [woven] wo[rk ...] purely blended, the colors of 8. [...] splen]dor [and] majesty ...[...]... figures [...] ... ephod 9. [...] angels/messengers [...] his [holi]ness

4QShirShabbat Song XIII (B) (4Q405 XXIII 2):

1. [...] the beauty of the engravings of [
2. they approach the King (=God) when they minister be[fore
3. King and he inscribed his Glory [
4. holiness, the sanctuary of all [
5. their ephodim; they will spread out [
6. holy ones, good will [...]spirits of the holly ones
7. their holy places. (*vacat*) In their wonderful positions are spirits, many colored as the work of a weaver, engravings of figures of splendor (פתוחי צורות הדר)
8. in the midst of Glory an appearance of scarlet, colors of the light of the spirit of the holy of holies standing firm in their holy place before [...
9. the King. The spirits of the colors of [...] in the midst of the appearance of splendor and the likeness of the Spirit of Glory as works of fine gold shedding
10. lig[ht]. And all their crafted things are blended purely; the woven band as the woven work. These are the chiefs of those wonderfully dressed for service.

The song praises “the wonder and pattern of the breastplates” (line 6, Song A) and the ephod (line 8, Song A), as well as the “engravings of figures of splendor” (פתוחי צורות הדר line 7, Song B). These latter can only refer to the “engravings of signets” on the twelve stones of the breastplate described in Exodus 28 (Ex. 28:11, 21: 39:6, 14) which appear in the midst of glory (line 8, Song B).⁴² Their colors are the “light of the spirit of the holy of holies.” The spirit of the holy of holies is the spirit of God himself, the spirit of glory (line 8), and it is the spirit of the stones of the breastplate.⁴³ The color and purity of the high priest's

⁴² Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “Heavenly Ascent or Incarnational Presence?” *SBL Seminar Papers: Part One* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998) 367-99, esp. 388.

⁴³ The plural “ephodim” and the phrase “chiefs” of those dressed for ser-

garments are those of the Kavod of the Glory of God.⁴⁴ Although the *urim* and *thummim* are not specifically mentioned in this fragmentary text, when the high priest puts on the priestly garments he puts on the Kavod of God himself. This high priest is the contemporary high priest, the one participating in the temple liturgy on the Sabbath day.

The Dead Sea Scroll sect not only glorifies the garments of the high priest, but it also stresses the role of the *urim* and *thummim* in decision-making. The scroll *4Q 164 Pesher Isaiah^b*, dated to the second half of the second century (150-100), gives pride of place to judgment by means of the *urim* and the *thummim*.

[He will mak]e all Israel like eye-paint around the eye (Isa 54:11). And I will found you in sapphi[res. Its interpretation] They will found the council of the Community, priests and the peo[ple ...] the assembly of the elect, like a sapphire stone in the midst of stones (Isa. 54:12). [I will make] all your battlements [of rubies]. Its interpretation concerns the twelve [... which (who?)] illuminate/enlighten with the judgment of the *urim* and the *thummim* [without] any from among them missing, like the sun in all its light (Isa 54:12). And a[ll] your gates of glittering stones.] Its interpretation concerns the chiefs of the tribes of Israel in the l[ast days... of] its lot, the posts of...⁴⁵

The statement that the twelve enlighten with the judgment of the *urim* and *thummim* provides a clear association between the twelve stones of the breastplate and oracular divination.⁴⁶ The Qumran community evidently believed that true judgment (and true enlightenment) was by means of the *urim* and *thummim*.

This is made even more explicit in *4Q 376*, the “*Moses Apocryphon*,” also called the “*Liturgy of the Three Tongues of Fire*.” The text presented here is supplemented by two pre-Qumran texts (shown in italics), *1Q29* and *4Q375*, according to the suggestion of J. Strugnell.⁴⁷

vice may suggest that twelve chief priests wear the ephod (line 9) (C. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 228-32, 357-8).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 394.

⁴⁵ J. Allegro, *DJD* 5 1968:27-8, Pl. IX.

⁴⁶ C. Batsch, *La Guerre et les Rites de Guerre*, 328; C. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 229; C. Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 18. The reference to the twelve is likely triggered by the mention of the city’s gates in Isaiah 54:12, of which there were 12. Ten gates are enumerated in Nehemiah 3, but then two other ones – the Gate of Ephraim and the Gate of the Guard – appear in Neh. 8:16 and 12:39, respectively, making twelve. Twelve gates to the city, one for each tribe, are mentioned, of course, in Ezekiel 48 and in Revelation 21. According to Baumgarten’s reconstruction the twelve refer not to the 12 stones of the breastplate, but to twelve chief priests (Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran, Revelation, and the Sanhedrin,” *JBL* 45 (1976) 59-76). That is also the reconstruction accepted by F. García Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 326-7. See also, C. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, 229-32.

⁴⁷ John Strugnell, “Moses-Pseudepigrapha at Qumran: 4Q375, 4Q376, and Similar Works,” in Laurence H. Schiffman, *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Sheffield, JSOTsupp 8, 1990) 221-256, esp. 238.

[...before the anointed priest, upon whose head has been poured the oil of anointment, [...and before the deputy of the anointed priest [...a young bull]lock from the herd and a ram [... ...] for the *urim*[...the stone when...] ... they will provide you with light and he will go out with flashes of fire; the stone of the left side which is at its left side will shine to the eyes of all the assembly *until the priest finishes speaking*. And after [(?)] has been removed [...] and you shall keep and d[o] all [that] he (i.e., the priest) tells you ... in accordance with all this judgment (of the *urim* and the *thummim*?⁴⁸).

Although the text is fragmentary, it seems that the *urim* (and *thummim*) flash their lights in the eyes of the whole congregation while the high priest speaks.⁴⁹ This passage may explain the words of Hecataeus. The flashing lights of these stones may demonstrate that what the high priest speaks is true, that he speaks with divine authority, *ex cathedra*, as it were. While the lights flash and while he speaks, the people bow down hearing the word of God.

This text commands the anointed priest to consult the *urim* (and *thummim*) and commands the congregation to obey the priest when he speaks in accordance with the judgment (of the *urim* and *thummim*). This certainly implies that the contemporary high priest had access to the *urim* and *thummim* and that they were an important and active part of the priestly office.

3.6 The Temple Scroll

The role of the *urim* and *thummim* in the second temple is even clearer in the non-sectarian *Temple Scroll* (11QT), also found at Qumran. Its date is disputed. L. Schiffman argues it was written during the second half of the reign of John Hyrcanus, while others date it prior to the Hasmonian period.⁵⁰ In it the Judaeen king is commanded not to go to war until he has consulted the high priest with *urim* and *thummim* (LVIII:15-20).

ו(ע)אם [המלך] יצא למלחמה ... לוא יצא עד יבוא לפני הכהן
 הגדול ושאל לו במשפט האורים והתומים על פיהו יצא ועל פיהו
 יבוא הוא וכול בני ישראל אשר אתו לוא יצא מעצת לבו עד אשר
 ישאל במשפט האורים והתומים והצליח בכול דרכיו אשר יצא על
 פי המשפט אשר

⁴⁸ Suggested by J. Strugnell, *ibid.*, 244.

⁴⁹ C. Batsch, *La Guerre et les Rites de Guerre*, 330, suggests that the author of this song considers all fourteen stones, the twelve of the breastplate and the two on the shoulders as comprising the *urim* and the *thummim*. In any case, the oracle manifests itself by shining (C. Batsch, *ibid.*; C. Fletcher-Louis *All the Glory of Adam*, 223-4; C. Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 17).

⁵⁰ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 257, and personal communication; Christophe Batsch, "Ourim et Toummim, un Oracle de Guerre dans le Judaïsme du Second Temple," *Zwischen Krise und Alltag : Antike Religionen Im Mittelmeerraum = Conflit et Normalité : Religions Anciennes dans l'Espace Méditerranéen* (ed. C. Batsch, Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Ruth Stepper; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999) 43-56; citing D. Swanson, *The Temple Scroll and the Bible. The Methodology of 11QT* (Leide: 1995), 171-2; and D. Dimant, "Signification et importance des manuscrits de la mer Morte. L'état actuel des études qoumrâniennes," *Annales* 51 (1996) 975-103.

And if he [the king] goes out to war ... he is not to go out until he [the king] has come before the high priest and he has enquired for him by means of the judgment of the *urim* and the *thummim*. On his orders he shall go out and on his orders he shall come in. He and all the people of Israel who are with him shall not go out on the council of his own heart unless he has enquired by means of the judgment of the *urim* and *thummim*. He will succeed in all his ways which are taken according to the judgment which

The Temple Scroll commands the king not to go to war at the dictates of his own heart, but rather first to consult a high priest with *urim* and *thummim*. This strongly implies that the *urim* and *thummim* existed at the time of the scroll's composition, and that they were being used by the contemporary high priest as an oracular device. It is very unlikely that a command to consult the *urim* and *thummim* would have been written if there was no way for the command to be obeyed. The *urim* and *thummim* must have been operative at the time of the scroll's composition, i.e., before the death of John Hyrcanus. Strugnell concludes, as do we, that these manuscripts from Qumran all written before or at the death of John Hyrcanus give laws which presuppose the ready availability of the magical jewels of the high priest's vestments.⁵¹

3.7 1 Maccabees

1 Maccabees is dated to just after the death of John Hyrcanus (1 Macc. 16:23). Its author also seems to have believed that the gift of prophecy inhered in the vestments of the high priest.⁵² Chapter 3 records how Judas Maccabee and his brothers rescued the priestly vestments when they prepared for battle against Nicanor and Gorgias.

⁴⁶ They gathered together and went to Mizpah, opposite Jerusalem, because Israel formerly had a place of prayer in Mizpah. ⁴⁷ They fasted that day, put on sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads, and tore their clothes. ⁴⁸ They opened the book of the law to inquire into those matters about which the Gentiles consulted the likenesses of their gods. ⁴⁹ Then they brought the vestments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they stirred up the Nazirites who had completed their days; ⁵⁰ and they cried aloud to Heaven, saying, "What shall we do with these? Where shall we take them?" ⁵¹ Your sanctuary is trampled down and profaned, and your priests mourn in humiliation. ⁵² Here the Gentiles are assembled against us to destroy us; you know what they plot against us. ⁵³ How will we be able to withstand them, if you do not help us?" ⁵⁴ Then they sounded the trumpets and gave a loud shout. ⁵⁵ After this Judas appointed leaders of the people, in charge of thousands and hundreds and fifties and tens (1 Maccabees 3:46-56).

Prior to battle, Judas and his men consult the book of the law in order to obtain an answer from their god (vs. 48). They then bring out the priestly vestments, plus the first fruits and the tithes. Goldstein suggests that they bring out the latter because it was the third or sixth year of the

⁵¹ J. Strugnell, "Moses-Pseudepigrapha at Qumran."

⁵² J. Blenkinsopp, "Prophecy and Priesthood in Josephus," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 25/2 (1974) 239-62, esp., 250. C. Batsch ("Ourim et Toummim, un Oracle de Guerre," 319-320) misses the fact that Judah Maccabee had with him the vestments of the high priest when preparing for battle.

sabbatical cycle and they had no place to put them, the temple having been defiled.⁵³ Goldstein does not say why they brought out the priestly vestments, but it may have been to suggest first, that Judas was of the high priestly line and entitled to wear them, and second, to mimic the stories of Saul and David in which each consults a priest with *ephod* and *urim* and *thummim* before engaging in battle. A third reason may have been the command in Numbers (Num. 27:18-23), and in the Temple Scroll (cited above), that neither Joshua (nor as in the case of the Temple Scroll, the king) may go to war without first consulting a priest with *urim* and *thummim*. It may be that the author of 1st Maccabees understood that Jews did not go to war without consulting a priest with *urim* and *thummim* and they consulted Judas himself by means of the *urim* and *thummim* in the priestly vestments.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

According to the *TB Yoma* 21b, the *urim* and the *thummim* and the spirit of prophecy were among the things which were missing from the Second Temple. This statement may have been based on that in Ezra 2:61-63 (Neh.7:63-65) which states that the *urim* and *thummim* were lacking at the time of the return. Josephus suggests the *urim* and *thummim* stopped shining, that is they ceased to function, only around 104 BCE, about the time of John Hyrcanus' death. Thus, according to Josephus, they were functioning and used by second temple high priests before then. To decide between these two claims we examined those second temple texts which can be dated to before Hyrcanus' death and which describe the vestments of the contemporary high priest. All these texts reveal the awe that the people held toward the high priest and toward the priestly vestments. They suggest that the high priestly garments conveyed prophetic ability to the bearer. Ben Sira describes the high priest, Simon, wearing the breastplate of judgment, and dressed in every way as did Aaron, the first priest. He portrays the high priest putting on the garments of wisdom and even of his putting on the Glory of God himself when he puts on the high priestly vestments. The temple scroll commands the king not to go to war on his own, but first to consult a high priest wearing and using the *urim* and the *thummim*. Other texts from Qumran command the people to obey the high priest when he speaks according to the judgment of the *urim* and *thummim*. All these were composed before the death of John Hyrcanus and all imply that the contemporary high priest had access to viable *urim* and *thummim*. The hypothesis that the *urim* and *thummim* were used as an oracular device by high priests of the second temple at least until the death of John Hyrcanus cannot be rejected. In contrast, these texts place in doubt the Talmud's contention that the *urim* and *thummim* and the spirit of prophecy were absent during the entire period of the second temple.

If the *urim* and *thummim* did exist for a period of time during the life of the second temple, they evidently went out of existence (or stopped working) at the time of John Hyrcanus' death. When were they installed? According to Ezra 2:61-63 (Neh.7:63-65), they were missing

⁵³ Jonathan Goldstein, *1 Maccabees* (Anchor Bible 41; New York: Doubleday, 1976) 263.

from the second temple in the early decades of the return. May we conclude then that a priest arose in the interim with *urim* and *thummim*, a priest who was able to restore the family of Haqqoz to the priesthood (cf. 1 Chron. 24:10)? It is a tantalizing thought.