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A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith Junior as Rodsman, Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet

Author(s): Mark Ashurst-McGee

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For the most part, I present Joseph Smith's divinatory development as he himself experienced it. Dowsing with a rod, seeing things in stones, and receiving heavenly revelations were as real to Smith as harvesting wheat. In order to understand his progression from rodsman to seer to prophet, one must first understand his worldview. The mental universe of early American water witches and village seers forms one of the historical and cultural contexts in which Joseph Smith developed his divinatory abilities.

A PATHWAY TO PROPHETHOOD: JOSEPH SMITH JUNIOR
AS RODSMAN, VILLAGE SEER, AND
JUDEO-CHRISTIAN PROPHET

by

Mark Ashurst-M^cGee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

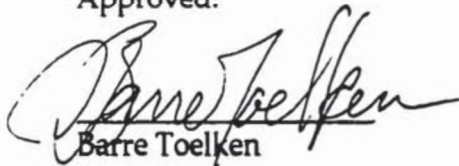
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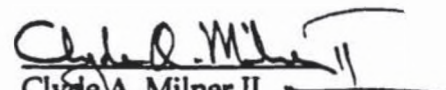
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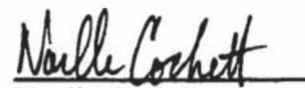
History

Approved:


Barre Toelken
Major Professor


Clyde A. Milner II
Committee Member


Richley H. Crapo
Committee Member


Noelle Cockett
Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

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ABSTRACT

**A Pathway to Prophethood: Joseph Smith as Rodsman,
Village Seer, and Judeo-Christian Prophet**

by

Mark Ashurst-McGee, Master of Arts

Utah State University, 2000

**Major Professor: Barre Toelken
Department: History**

Joseph Smith Junior, founder of the Mormon faith, presented himself to America and the world as a prophet with the same powers as the widely known prophetic figures of the Bible. Like Moses and Elijah, he made God's will known to humankind. Before assuming this role, Smith had used divining rods and then seer stones to find underground water, buried treasure, lost items, and stray livestock. This thesis charts Joseph Smith's progression from rodsman to seer to prophet.

For the most part, I present Joseph Smith's divinatory development as he himself experienced it. Dowsing with a rod, seeing things in stones, and receiving heavenly revelations were as real to Smith as harvesting wheat. In order to understand his progression from rodsman to seer to prophet, one must first understand his worldview. The mental universe of early American

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about the ghost that haunts their building, I no longer worried about being considered superstitious for believing in seer stones.)

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Mark Ashurst-McGee

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The road that led Joseph Smith into the career of “prophet, seer, and revelator” is overgrown with a tangle of legend and contradiction.

—Fawn M. Brodie¹

Lacking prescience or devilish fancy, Dante omitted at least one torment from his *Inferno*. He might have consigned an unredeemed but believing LDS historian to write a book on Mormon origins.

—Ronald W. Walker²

In his study of medieval prophecy, historian Robert E. Lerner wrote, “Because the quest for clairvoyance seems to be a basic human drive, the history of the writing and reception of prophecy should comprise an important part of the emerging study of past mentalities.”³ The same might be said for an historical investigation of the *origins* of prophecy. Isaiah became an instant prophet when a hot coal from the heavenly altar was placed on his lips. Jehovah yanked Ezekiel into heaven by the hair and gave him a prophetic mission that stunned him for seven days. But many others have felt the call more mildly or as a gradual development over a duration of time. Some have never heard any call from the heavens but have attempted to attain one. Perhaps they were dutifully following Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians: “desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye

¹ Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945; rev. and enl. edition, 1971; Vintage Books edition, New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 16.

² Ronald W. Walker, “A Way Station,” review of *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, by Richard L. Bushman, *Sunstone*, April 1985, 58.

³ Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 1.

may prophecy.”⁴ For these, prophecy has not been an immediate realization, but an ongoing pursuit. Many have schooled themselves for ecstatic revelation through inferior and more accessible modes of divination.

A multitude of divinatory methods have flourished in western civilization. By reading omens, or by carefully inspecting the stars, one could forecast the future or obtain information about the otherwise unknown matters of the present. Others have used divinatory instruments and techniques to obtain the information that eluded them when pursued through ordinary means. By casting lots one could shift the responsibility of making a difficult decision over to a supernatural entity—one with superior wisdom. By waiting for his forked rod to dip, a waterwitch could find a site to dig a well. Others have obtained supernatural visions, but not without the help of a speculum of some sort—whether it be a crystal ball, a magic mirror, or a pool of clear water. A number of aspiring prophets have made use of means and methods such as these to aid them in their spiritual journey.

Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of the Mormon faith, followed such a course. He began “exercising” the “gifts of the spirit” by using a divining rod. Later, he was able to obtain visions by using a seer stone. Then, in 1830, the newly organized Church of Christ accepted and “sustained” him as a “prophet.” Joseph Smith’s spiritual development through these successive modes of divination constitutes the primary study for this thesis.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:1. Paul also counseled his brethren to “covet to prophecy” (1 Cor. 14:39).

Some readers will no doubt question the objective reality of early American folk religion and of Joseph Smith's experiences. The ultimate nature of reality falls outside the scope of my analysis. I attempt to understand divinatory methods as Joseph Smith experienced them, and the direction of his life as he understood it. My methodology is principally informed by folklorist David J. Hufford's "experience-centered approach to the study of supernatural belief."⁵

Joseph Smith and the Genesis of Mormonism

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has grown to over ten million members in 160 countries around the world. Most of the "saints" live outside of the United States of America. University of Washington sociology professor Rodney Stark claims that Mormonism is a "new world faith" and projects that it will have over 250 million adherents by 2080.⁶ As an emerging world religion, Mormonism constitutes an important topic of study.

The beginnings of Mormonism in the Palmyra-Manchester area of western New York are much more humble, but still historically important. R. Laurence Moore, historian of American religion, argues that religious "outsiders" have strongly influenced America's religious past by defining what was central to religious life and belief. As for the Latter-day Saints, he writes:

⁵ This methodology is discussed below.

⁶ Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26: 18-27; reprinted with a postscript in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members*, James T. Duke, ed. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 9-27.

If sustained controversy denotes cultural importance, then Mormons were as significant as any other religious group in nineteenth-century America. In all kinds of ways Mormons made American religious experience seem vigorous. They aroused opposition precisely because they were so profoundly a part of the American scene.⁷

Religious historian A. Leland Jameson states that "the historical evolution of the Mormons furnishes the most thrilling chapter in the whole chronicle of American Religion. By comparison, the adventures of the settlers in New England seem tame."⁸ But Mormonism is not historically important just for its story. Jameson adds that "no other nineteenth-century group, orthodox or deviant, was able to discipline the peculiar vitalities of that century in so comprehensive a religio-social structure" and that "the Mormon system of thought is at once an irreconcilable Christian heresy and the most typically American theology yet formulated on this continent."⁹

In his monumental history of American religion, Sydney E. Ahlstrom agrees. He writes that, "for the drama of its story no less than for its revelations of the American religious character, Mormonism deserves far more extensive and intensive consideration than any of its contemporary parallels." Ahlstrom assures us that "interpreted in detail," Mormonism provides "innumerable clues to the religious and social consciousness of the American people."¹⁰ Likewise,

⁷ R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), xiii.

⁸ A. Leland Jameson, "Religions on the Christian Perimeter," in *The Shaping of American Religion*, ed. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jameson, Religion in American Life Series (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), 213.

⁹ Jameson, "Religions on the Christian Perimeter," 213-14.

¹⁰ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 502, 509.

Joseph Smith has been called “the American Prophet,”¹¹ and Harold Bloom goes so far as to say that “there is something of Joseph Smith’s spirit in every manifestation of American Religion.”¹²

Jan Shipps, professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University in Purdue, places Joseph Smith and Mormonism in an even larger context. She argues that Mormonism is not a cult, not just a sect, and not even a church, but a new religious tradition—standing in relationship to Christianity as Christianity stands in relationship to Judaism.¹³ University of Washington Sociology of Religion professor Rodney Stark counts Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Joseph Smith as “the four most important cases of revelation in Western history.”¹⁴

What then is the essence or core of this new religious tradition? According to Leonard J. Arrington—known as “the Dean of Mormon history”—the “most fundamental doctrine [of the Latter-day Saints] is the belief in the need for and the actuality of present-day revelations of the character usually associated with

¹¹ Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: MacMillan, 1992), s.v. “Mormonism, an Independent Interpretation.” [Hereafter *EM*]. Jan Shipps authored this entry.

¹² Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 127. See also 81.

¹³ Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985; Illini Books edition, 1987). Viewing Mormonism in this respect has already yielded results. For example, New Testament scholar John G. Gager looked at Mormonism and other new religions to inform his study of early Christianity. He found that both early Christianity and early Mormonism were millenarian movements of the disinherited. John G. Gager, “Early Mormonism and Early Christianity: Some Parallels and Their Consequences for the Study of New Religions,” *Journal of Mormon History* 9 (1982): 56-58.

¹⁴ Rodney Stark, “A Theory of Revelations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (June 1999): 289. Harold Bloom, America’s foremost literary critic, deems Joseph Smith an “authentic religious genius, unique in our national history.” Moreover, he asserts that “Smith’s genius for restoration exceeded that of Muhammed.” Bloom, *The American Religion*, 82, 104.

the Old Testament prophets.”¹⁵ Richard L. Bushman and Larry C. Porter, LDS historians with expertise in the founding period, explain that “the principle of continuing revelation greatly disturbed their fellow Christians, but from the beginning nothing was more basic to the Church.”¹⁶ In this thesis, I will explore in detail the historical origins of this most fundamental aspect of Mormonism. I argue that Joseph Smith’s prophethood and his revelations originated to some extent in less ecstatic modes of divination. Astrology, divining rods, and seer stones provided an historical background for Joseph’s later revelations as well as did dreams, visions, angel visitations, and theophanies. I lay out a series of divinatory modes through which Joseph Smith progressed on his pathway to prophethood.

Most American Mormons with an interest in their history are aware that Joseph Smith owned and used a seerstone. The well-known, encyclopedic *Mormon Doctrine*, by LDS general authority Bruce R. McConkie, states that “the Prophet had a seer stone which was separate and distinct from the Urim and Thummim.”¹⁷ Other General Authorities and LDS historians have affirmed the

¹⁵ Howard R. Lamar, ed. *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), s.v. “Latter-day Saints.” Leonard J. Arrington authored this entry.

¹⁶ *EM*, s.v. “History of the Church: c. 1820-1831, Background, Founding, New York Period.” This entry was authored by Larry Porter and Richard L. Bushman. Larry Porter is a professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. See also Jan Shipp, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading Toward A More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 15; Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979; Random House, Vintage Books, 1980), 34-36. In his teachings, Joseph Smith addressed revelation more than any other gospel topic (Larry E. Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *The Teachings of Joseph Smith* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], ix).

¹⁷ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 818.

same. Most Latter-day Saints, however, do not know that Smith possessed more than one stone. Richard E. Turley, Jr., Managing Director of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, notes Joseph's use of seer stones in his *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* entry on seer stones. After describing the Urim and Thummim spectacles, he writes, "Joseph used these *and other stones* that he found in various ways for various purposes, primarily in translating the Book of Mormon and receiving revelations."¹⁸ Brigham Young, who succeeded Joseph Smith's as church president, stated that Smith owned five seer stones.¹⁹ Apostles Brigham Young and Orson Pratt called the ability to see visions in stones "the gift of seeing."²⁰

There is also evidence that, like Moses and Aaron of the Bible, Joseph Smith, Senior, Joseph Smith, Junior, and early Mormon Oliver Cowdery used divining rods. In particular, in a revelation that was published in the Book of Commandments, the Lord informed Cowdery that he could be blessed with the spirit of revelation. Then the Lord stated,

¹⁸ *EM*, s.v. "seer stones" (emphasis mine).

¹⁹ Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Council," Ms, General Church Minutes, 30 September 1855, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Office Building, Salt Lake City, Utah [hereafter LDS Church Archives]. Minutes of this Council were taken by Thomas Bullock. See also Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing," *Dialogue: Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 63 and 68n83; and Andrew Jenson, et al, comps., "Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," 6 May 1849, p. 2. D. Michael Quinn fleshes out the documentary evidence for these five stones and provides evidence for a possible sixth stone (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998], 42-45, 242-47).

²⁰ For Brigham Young's use of the term, see Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing," 63 and 68n83. See also Jenson, et al, comps., *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 May 1849, p. 2. For Orson Pratt's use of the term, see Orson Pratt, *A Series of Pamphlets* (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1852), 72.

Now this is not all, for you have another gift, which is the gift of working with the rod: behold it has told you things: behold there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God; and therefore whatsoever you shall ask me to tell you by that means, that will I grant unto you, that you shall know.²¹

When the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants was published in 1835, “the gift of working with the rod” was changed to “the gift of Aaron.”²² If this emendation removed a possible point of controversy for incoming converts, it explained to earlier members that Oliver’s rod was like Aaron’s rod in the Bible.²³

Historical context helps us understand the use of seer stones and rods by early Mormons. A host of early Americans used rods and stones to find missing objects or to locate buried treasure. In the early 1980s, document forger Mark Hofmann produced sensational documents that connected Joseph Smith with the use of divining rods, treasure-seeking, and magic.²⁴ In one forged letter, Joseph Smith gives instructions for cutting a divining rod. The LDS First Presidency

²¹ *A Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Zion [Independence, Missouri]: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833), 7:3. Hereafter Book of Commandments.

²² *Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Some Additions by His Successors in the Presidency of the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 8:6-9. Hereafter Doctrine and Covenants. The Book of Commandments was published in 1833. *Mormonism Unveiled*, which ridiculed the Smiths’ use of divining rods and seer stones, was published in 1834 (E[ber] D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, From Its Rise to the Present Time. With Sketches of the Characters of Its Propagators, and A Full, Detail of the Manner in which the Famous Golden Bible Was Brought Before the World* [Painesville, Ohio: E. D. Howe, 1834]). The Doctrine and Covenants was published in 1835.

²³ Richard Lloyd Anderson explains the historical and theological context of this change. See Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” *BYU Studies* 24, no. 4 (fall 1984): 521-32.

²⁴ On the Hofmann debacle, see Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, with forensic analysis by George J. Throckmorton, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders, with a New Afterword*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Richard E. Turley, Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

explained that this document could be understood if placed “in the context of the times.”²⁵

Spurred on by the Hofmann controversy, a number of Latter-day Saint historians began to reassess the historical record and to explore the context of time in which Mormonism emerged. Although the Hofmann documents proved spurious, historians discovered that Joseph’s involvement in such practices had been substantial. Over the last two decades, a number of scholarly studies by devout Latter-day Saint scholars and empathetic secularists have concluded that Joseph Smith was involved in treasure seeking and an early American milieu of beliefs and practices that many modern Americans would label “magic.”²⁶ Now, as LDS Historian Richard L. Bushman notes, “the magical culture of nineteenth-century Yankees no longer seems foreign to the Latter-day Saint image of the Smith family.”²⁷

²⁵ “Early Letter Contains First Known Writing of Prophet Joseph,” *Church News* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 12 May 1985, 10.

²⁶ See for example, Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 9-12; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984, Illini Books edition, 1988), 69-76; Ronald W. Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” *BYU Studies* 24, no. 4 (fall 1984): 461-72; Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 489-99; Alan Taylor, “Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith’s Treasure Seeking,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 4 (winter 1986): 18-28; Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism: Correspondence & a New History*, ed. John Phillip Walker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986); Shipps, “The Prophet Puzzle,” 3-20; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976, 1992), 40-42; *EM*, s.v. “History of the Church: c. 1820-1830, Background, Founding, New York Period”; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁷ Richard L. Bushman, “Just the Facts Please,” Review of *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 2 (1994): 132.

Historiography

Mormon origins have received respectable attention in some important books on early American religious history, such as *The Democratization of American Christianity*, by Nathan O. Hatch,²⁸ and *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, by Jon Butler.²⁹ However, only publications with a specific emphasis on Mormonism—mostly from within the Mormon publishing community—have traced with specificity the central question of this thesis: How did Joseph Smith become a prophet?

For most believing Latter-day Saints, the answer is quite simple: he was called by God. Smith claimed that God the Father and Jesus Christ visited him in his youth sometime in the early 1820s. Latter-day Saints call this event “the First Vision,” although they consider it an actual visitation. Many Mormons, with a greater appreciation for historical development, believe that aside from this initial call Joseph learned to be a prophet gradually. Pointing to a prophetic tradition which transcends the bounds of normality and mortality, they hold that Joseph Smith was tutored in the ways of prophethood by a resurrected being named Moroni—who had been the last prophet among an ancient American race whose sacred history is given in the Book of Mormon. Moroni is the being who revealed to Joseph Smith the location of the golden plates from which he

²⁸ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

²⁹ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). See also Jon Butler, “The Dark Ages of American Occultism,

translated the Book of Mormon. Moroni mentored Joseph much as the Old Testament prophet Elijah mentored his successor Elisha.³⁰

From the beginning, unfriendly critics and friendly skeptics have offered other explanations. Abner Cole, the sardonic editor of the Palmyra *Reflector*, was one of the very first public commentators on the new church. In a series of newspaper articles appearing in 1830–1831, Cole pointed to money-digging as Joseph Smith’s prophetic training grounds.³¹ Up until the time when enlightenment rationalism finally had trickled down to the lower class, many eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century Americans participated in a centuries-old European tradition of using supernatural means to discover buried treasure. In 1834, Ohio printer Eber D. Howe reiterated Cole’s thesis in *Mormonism Unveiled*, the first major anti-Mormon book.³²

Biographer Fawn M. Brodie further developed this idea in *No Man Knows My History*, her landmark study of Joseph Smith. “One of the major premises of this biography,” she wrote, “was that Joseph Smith’s assumption of the role of a religious prophet was an evolutionary process, that he began as a bucolic scryer, using the primitive techniques of the folklore of magic common to his area, most

1760-1848,” in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 58-78.

³⁰ See for example, H. Donl Peterson, “Moroni—Joseph Smith’s Tutor,” *The Ensign of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), January 1992, 22-29. Hereafter *Ensign*.

³¹ O[bediah] Dogberry, pseud. [Abner Cole], “The Book of Pukei,” *The Reflector* (Palmyra, New York), 12 June 1830, 36-37; 7 July 1830, 60; Dogberry [Cole], “Gold Bible,” *The Reflector* 6 January 1831, 76; 18 January 1831, 84; 1 February 1831, 92-93; 14 February 1831, 100-101; 28 February 1831, 109; 19 March 1831, 126-27.

³² Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 43. See also 11-12, 17-18, 31-32.

of which he discarded as he evolved into a preacher-prophet.”³³ Although Brodie focused on Smith as a “money digger,” she also referred to him as a “rural diviner” and—as in the quotation above—a “bucolic scryer.” A scryer is one who sees visions by looking into a crystal ball, magic mirror, seer stone, or other object. The word *scrying* derives from the word *descry*, which means to discover or to view from a distance. Brodie’s use of the terms “rural diviner” and “bucolic scryer” — as opposed to “money digger” and similar terms which emphasize treasure seeking — seems to indicate that she understood that the common practice of labeling Joseph Smith strictly in terms of treasure seeking placed him in a narrow category.³⁴ Joseph’s gift of seeing in the stone extended beyond treasure quest. He also used stones to look into the future, to find stolen property, and to locate missing livestock. Although Brodie hinted at Joseph’s larger role, many later authors either missed or underappreciated this critical concept. Almost all have focused on the treasure seeking aspect of Smith’s use of seer stones.

Wesley P. Walters, a scholarly, anti-Mormon evangelist, developed Brodie’s thesis in his 1977 article, “From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.” Walters wrote that “the period when he was a sorcerer and glass looker using occult religious practices in a superstitious confidence enterprise [was] transformed by Joseph into the period of preparation for him to become the

³³ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 405.

³⁴ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 20, 31, 405.

instrument of the Lord”³⁵ Walters called Joseph a “glass looker” rather than a treasure seer, but his bias and rhetoric distorted his analysis in other ways.

Mormon scholars eventually came to terms with Joseph’s early involvement with seer stones and treasure seeking. In her 1977 biography, *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon*, Donna Hill discusses Joseph’s treasure seeking. She also argues that the significance of Joseph’s use of a seer stone extended beyond treasure seeking. She notes that “some money-diggers were religious mystics who only incidentally dug for treasure.”³⁶ In *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (1984), Richard L. Bushman gives an even-handed treatment of Joseph’s early involvement in treasure hunting.³⁷ As Bushman’s work reached the bookstores, Mark Hofmann’s “money-digging letters” hit the national press.

In 1986, as the authenticity of Hofmann’s documents began to crumble, Ronald W. Walker, an associate at Brigham Young University’s Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, maintained that there was strong evidence for a magical influence upon early Mormonism “with or without” the Hofmann letters. His *BYU Studies* article, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,”³⁸ makes explicit what Brodie may have implied: that Joseph’s role in using a seer stone was considerably larger than treasure hunting. Joseph also found lost articles and

³⁵ W[esley]. W[alters]., “From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.” *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 1, no. 2 (summer 1977): 121-137.

³⁶ Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977; Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1982; reprint, 1999), 68.

³⁷ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 69-76. Bushman was H. Rodney Sharp Professor of History at the University of Delaware.

³⁸ Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” 461-72. This number was published in 1986.

looked into the future. For this reason, Walker calls Joseph a “village seer” rather than a “treasure seer.”³⁹ Aside from Hill and Walker, most writers have continued to miss this important distinction and have focused on treasure seeking. For example, Religious Studies professor Jan Shipps, in her now standard study of *Mormonism* (1986), writes, “Smith’s efforts to find ordinary buried treasure were gradually transformed into a search for treasure of infinitely greater value.”⁴⁰ Likewise, BYU history professor D. Michael Quinn’s *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (1987) discusses the full range of activities in the village seer’s role, but focused sharply on treasure seeking.⁴¹

³⁹ Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” 465.

⁴⁰ Shipps, *Mormonism*, 11.

⁴¹ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987). See especially chapter 2: “Divining Rods, Treasure Digging, and Seer Stones,” 27-52. For reviews of the first edition, see: David Azzolina, in *Small Press*, April 1988, 67; M. Guy Bishop, in *New York History* 69, no. 2 (April 1988): 237-39; Newell G. Bringhurst, in *Pacific Historical Review* 58, no. 3 (August 1989): 379-80; Jon Butler, “Magic and the Complexities of Mormon History,” *Sunstone*, January 1988, 36-37; Jan C. Dawson, in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (April 1988): 80; Klaus J. Hansen, in *Church History* 59, no. 1 (March 1990): 110-12; Danny L. Jorgensen, in *Contemporary Sociology* 17, no. 5 (September 1988): 682-83; Mark S. Joy, in *Journal of the West* 27, no. 2 (April 1988): 106; Sterling M. McMurrin, in *Utah Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (spring 1988): 199-200; F. Michael Perko, in *The Christian Century*, 25 January 1989, 84-85; Charles S. Peterson, in *New Mexico Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (April 1989): 242-43; Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, “The Mormon as Magus,” *Sunstone*, January 1988, 38-39; Stephen E. Robinson, in *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (fall 1987): 88-95; Alan Taylor, “Mormon Magic,” in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 2 (summer 1988): 157-59; Benson Whittle, in *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (fall 1987): 105-121; Peter Wiley, in *Utah Holiday*, January 1988, 26-28; William A. Wilson, in *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (fall 1987): 96-104; William A. Wilson, in *Western Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (August 1989): 342-43. See also Kristine Wilson, “Folk-magic Book Arouses Controversy: ‘Early Mormonism and the Magic World View’ Written by BYU History Professor,” *Daily Universe* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University), 22 October 1987, 7; Paul H. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction [to the *BYU Studies* reviews],” *BYU Studies* 27, no. 4 (fall 1987): 87; and Richard L. Bushman, “Treasure-Seeking Then and Now,” *Sunstone*, September 1987, 5-6. For Quinn’s initial responses, see his letter to the editor of *BYU’s Daily Universe*, 29 October 1987; and Quinn, “Mormonism: Without Parallel, or Part of a Context?” *Sunstone*, January 1988, 40. Quinn’s revised and enlarged second edition, published in 1988, responds to reviewers throughout.

H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters examine Joseph Smith's treasure seeking in *Inventing Mormonism* (1994).⁴² Their chapter title "Manchester Scryer" obviously plays on Walker's "Palmyra Seer." The Smith's associated with the villagers of Palmyra, but because their farm lied just inside the border of Manchester township, Marquardt and Walters prefer "Manchester" over "Palmyra." Because they wish to associate Joseph more with magic than biblical religion, they prefer "scryer" over "seer." Although scrying, like "seeing," may cover the full range of seer stone use, Marquardt and Walters focus primarily on treasure digging. Tufts history professor John L. Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844*, published the same year, argues that Joseph "began his engagement with the supernatural as a village conjurer but transformed himself into a prophet of the "Word," announcing the opening of a new dispensation."⁴³ A conjurer uses a seer stone or magical ritual to summon preternatural identities.

Taking stock of this historical and historiographical establishment of a "village seer" role which preceded the prophetic role, a question naturally arises: How exactly did Smith get from the former to the latter? Brigham Young, Joseph's successor in the prophetic office, taught that "the gift of seeing was a natural gift" and that "there are thousands in the world who are natural born Seers, but when the Lord selected Joseph Smith to be his vice-gerent and

⁴² H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record* (n.p. [San Francisco (Salt Lake City)]: Smith Research Associates, 1994).

⁴³ John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644-1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

mouthpiece upon the earth in this dispensation, he saw that he would be faithful and honor his calling."⁴⁴ While Young's statement acknowledged Joseph's prior role as a seer, it returned to the simple explanation of a calling; God's calling transformed Smith from *a* village seer to *the* prophet. If God did indeed call Joseph Smith to be his prophet, this simple explanation is undoubtedly the best and most important explanation. But even for the believer, there are historical factors that merit consideration. Many historians have recognized a meaningful and causal connection between the two roles. How exactly have people traced Joseph's pathway from village seer to prophet? We now return to Abner Cole.

Writing in his newspaper under the pseudonym Obediah Dogberry, Cole held that Joseph Smith used a seer stone to search for buried treasure and communed with a gnome-like "old spirit" who guarded the treasures of the land. Joseph then invented a treasure of gold plates covered with writing. Then, he transformed the preternatural treasure guardian into a supernatural angel (Moroni) and he translated the writing on the plates into the Book of Mormon.⁴⁵ Abner Cole's treasure seeking interpretation of the origins of Mormon revelation would influence many others.

Like Cole, Eber D. Howe argued that Joseph's prophetic role developed out of his treasure seeking.⁴⁶ Whereas Abner Cole saw all of Joseph Smith's

⁴⁴ "Tabernacle," *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City), 26 December 1860, p. 337, col. 3. This article reports a discourse delivered by President Brigham Young at the tabernacle in Salt Lake City on 23 December 1860.

⁴⁵ Dogberry [Cole], "The Book of Pukei," and Dogberry's "Gold Bible" series in *The Reflector*, 1830-31.

⁴⁶ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 43. See also 11-12, 17-18, 31-32.

activities as pure imposture, Howe held that Mormon revelation was real.

However, he felt the devil was the source of the revelation. In Howe's schema, Satan himself guided Smith along the path from money-digger to false prophet.

In *No Man Knows My History*, Fawn M. Brodie pointed to the Book of Mormon as the major link between the two roles. For Brodie, Joseph Smith's 1826 court appearance provided the impetus for the transition. The Chenango County Court either examined or tried him as a disorderly person for his treasure seeking. This "shocked Joseph into a sense of the futility of his avocation, for he now gave up his money-digging altogether, although he retained his peepstone and some of the psychological artifices of the rural diviner." Turning away from treasure seeking, Joseph decided to write a book on the identity of the people who had constructed the burial mounds that dotted the landscape. Accordingly, he concocted one final treasure: a set of engraved golden plates which contained a history of the moundbuilders.⁴⁷

Joseph began translating the record with his seer stone, but when someone stole the first batch of manuscript he found himself in another crisis situation. To complete the book, he would need to reproduce the missing portion. But, Brodie argued, because his "translation" was an unrepeatable imposture, whoever had purloined the first portion could expose him by contrasting it with its replacement. Joseph's solution to this crisis was to receive a revelation from God in which Smith claimed that God had instructed him not to

⁴⁷ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 31.

worry about retranslating the missing portion. This, the first of Joseph Smith's revelations, set the pattern for further revelations and Joseph's assumption of the prophetic role. Thus, for Brodie, Joseph "stumbled" into prophethood "more by accident than by design."⁴⁸ In addition to accident, Joseph's ambitious nature, creative imagination, need for an audience, and desire for financial security served as the driving forces that led to his assumption of the prophetic role. "Apparently he slipped into it with ease," Brodie wrote, "without the inner turmoil that preceded the spiritual fervor of so many of the great religious figures of the past."⁴⁹ Thus Joseph's transition was at some times very difficult and at others quite easy. All along it was gradual.

In her revised and enlarged second edition (1971), Brodie added inner spiritual turmoil to the transition. She noted that in Joseph's "upward climb from diviner to prophet he had first of all the problem of converting his own family."⁵⁰ The family dimension of Joseph's religious journey would receive further development from later historians. Brodie also interpreted the Book of Mormon's recurring battles between the wicked, dark-skinned Lamanites and the God-fearing, white-skinned Nephites as an autobiographical reflection of Joseph's inner conflict as he changed his identity from a cunning practitioner of black

⁴⁸ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 87.

⁴⁹ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 84.

⁵⁰ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 411.

magic to a divinely called prophet.⁵¹ Brodie's argument that Joseph worked out this resolution as he translated the Book of Mormon reinforced her position that the book formed the major link between the two roles.⁵²

In *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, Richard L. Bushman combines natural evolution with supernatural incursion to chart Joseph's transition. According to Bushman, when Joseph first went to Cumorah he viewed the golden plates in a treasure-hunting context. He intended to secure them as a treasure with which he could relieve his family's poverty. As Joseph grasped the plates, the angel Moroni appeared, interrupting the natural course of events. The angel rebuked him, reminded him that this gold could not be sold, and informed him that the Lord's purposes were bigger than the Smith family's financial situation. In a later appearance, Moroni instructed Joseph to "quit the company of the money-diggers." These moments of divine intervention served as impetus for Joseph's evolution. "Although he did not repudiate the stone or ever deny its power to find treasure, Joseph, Jr., began to orient himself toward a new mission—obtaining and translating the book of Mormon."⁵³

In Ronald W. Walker's essay, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," he accepts that Joseph's role as a prophet had partially grown out of his role as a

⁵¹ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 416. This conception of the Book of Mormon tribes is stereotypical. It does not accurately reflect the complex history of these peoples as presented in the book.

⁵² Wesley P. Walters embellished Brodie's thesis in his article, "From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.," 121-137. Jan Shipps provided a more careful variant of Brodie's general theory in her essay "The Prophet Puzzle," 15-17.

⁵³ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 73-74. Bushman also considers the possibility that the 1826 trial expedited this reorientation (75).

village seer. But, like Bushman, he discounts an entirely naturalistic evolution between the two roles. Rather, he claims that “with Providence’s intervention, he transformed himself from ‘Joseph, the Palmyra Seer,’ who likely understood his early religious experiences in one way, to the mature ‘Joseph, the Mormon Prophet,’ who saw them in quite a different light.” “Coming to understand his divine call,” Walker writes, Joseph “set aside or minimized those portions of his cultural inheritance that conflicted with his work.”⁵⁴ Thus, Walker invokes both providential guidance and a prophetic calling in combination with a natural maturation to carry Joseph from one role to the next.

In 1986, when the Hofmann documents were enjoying their zenith, the Mormon History Association invited Alan Taylor to its annual meeting to respond to the preliminary work of LDS historians D. Michael Quinn and Ronald W. Walker on early Mormonism’s connections to magic in general and treasure seeking in particular.⁵⁵ Taylor had previously studied treasure seeking as a common phenomenon in the American northeast.⁵⁶ Although his work incorporated the Hofmann documents, it did not depend on them. Focusing his

⁵⁴ Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” 470.

⁵⁵ Taylor was a fellow at the Institute of Early American History and Culture and an assistant professor at the College of William and Mary. He is now a professor of history at the University of California at Davis. Quinn, Walker, and Taylor delivered their papers in a session of the 1986 Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association. D. Michael Quinn’s work was eventually published as *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987). Ronald W. Walker’s paper was published as “Martin Harris: Mormonism’s Early Convert,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 4 (winter 1986): 29–43. Taylor’s work was published in the same issue: “Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith’s Treasure Seeking,” 18–28.

⁵⁶ Alan Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780–1830,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (spring 1986): 6–34.

attention on Joseph Smith, Taylor stated, "I would argue that Joseph Smith, Jr.'s, transition from treasure-seeker to Mormon prophet was natural, easy, and incremental."⁵⁷ Although Taylor said that he *would* argue this position, he did not. It remained an intriguing hypothesis.

In D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, the Book of Mormon again forms the major link between the treasure seer and the prophet. Quinn examines in detail how Joseph Smith used the same stone he had employed in treasure hunting to discover the buried plates of gold. Then he used this seer stone to translate the plates into the Book of Mormon. Finally, he received the first revelations for the church through the stone.⁵⁸ Quinn argues for a continuation of seer stone use and even the treasure seer role; prophethood was a new level, not a stage. Quinn summarizes: "Even though Joseph Smith was not the only seer at Palmyra in the 1820s, he soon became remarkable for the manner in which he dramatically expanded the religious dimensions inherent in folk magic."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Taylor, "Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith's Treasure Seeking," 21. Taylor's essay has recently been republished—*sans* Hofmann—in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 141-153.

⁵⁸ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed., 27-52, 143-45 and 195-200. Quinn implicitly argued for a continuum between necromantic encounters with magical spirits and the restoration of Mormonism by Moroni and other heavenly angels (69, 100, 107-9, 114-15, 124-34, 152-3, 154). This is also the position taken by Marquardt and Walters in their *Inventing Mormonism*, 75.

⁵⁹ D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed., 51. Like Quinn, Dan Vogel points to the seer stone as a bridge between the two roles. He writes, "a clear distinction between Smith's role as treasure seer and religious seer cannot be made. In fact, Smith's use of the same stone and the same *modus operandi* (i.e., placing the stone in his hat) in translating the gold plates are simply two sides of the same coin. It is impossible to understand fully the mature Joseph Smith without coming to terms with his early role as treasure seer" (Dan Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon*

On the heels of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, Richard L.

Bushman wrote two essays on treasure digging. In the first, he clarifies his position that God had “redirected” Joseph Smith from treasure seeking to a prophethood.⁶⁰ In the second, Bushman argues that the Book of Mormon and prophet-led church solved the religious quarrels in Joseph’s family. His father, a treasure seeker, refused to affiliate with any local congregation. His mother joined the Presbyterian church. The plates of gold conformed with his father’s treasure-seeking beliefs while the translation of those plates into a sacred book accorded with his mother’s pursuit of Bible religion. Joseph’s role as a prophet fulfilled his father’s belief in the need for spiritual gifts while the newly revealed church satisfied his mother’s need for religious community.⁶¹ In this context, one might view Joseph Smith’s transition from village seer to prophet as a Hegelian synthesis of the “thesis” held by himself and his father with the “antithesis” held by his mother. Joseph’s synthetic project aimed to resolve his parents’ differences and unify the family. Here again the element of struggle plays into the transition.⁶²

Thought, 27, no. 3 [fall 1994]: 231). Vogel, a former Latter-day Saint, holds a B.A. in history from California State University at Long Beach. He has written a number of significant works on early Mormonism.

⁶⁰ Bushman, “Treasure Seeking Then and Now,” 5-6.

⁶¹ Richard L. Bushman, “Joseph Smith’s Family Background,” in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988), 1-18.

⁶² Investigation into family dynamics began with Fawn Brodie, Marvin Hill, C. Jess Groesbeck, and Dan Vogel. See the epilogue in the second edition of Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History*; Hill, “Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of No Man Knows My History,” *Church History* 43, no. 1 (March 1974): 84; Groesbeck, “Joseph Smith and the Shaman’s Vision,” presentation delivered in Salt Lake City at the 1985 Sunstone Theological Symposium, 21-24

John L. Brooke, in *The Refiner's Fire*, presents a complex argument for Joseph's assumption of the prophetic role. Brooke describes Joseph's transition as part of a family transition which began with a previous phase: Joseph Smith Senior's alleged counterfeiting in Vermont. "Turning from false coin to fantastic volatile treasures in the earth, the Smith's found them inaccessible, protected by evil spirits from the diviners' rituals." Eventually, Brooke tells us, "they began to turn away from the futile search for these slippery treasures in the earth to contemplate treasure in heaven, as Solomon Mack had urged upon the family two decades before in his *Narrative*. Declaring eternal enmity with witchlike counterfeiters, Joseph Smith abandoned divining for prophecy. Rather than multiplying filthy lucre, he would reveal sacred mysteries."⁶³ In Brooke's analysis, treasure-seeking frustrations led to a spiritual reorientation modeled by Lucy Mack Smith's father.

Brooke pursues another more complicated and problematic argument for Joseph's transition that he interweaves with his "failure hypothesis." This rendition of Joseph's transformation can be broken into five steps. First, some of Joseph's neighbors scorned his claim to seership. Second, Joseph interpreted local

August 1985; audiocassette recording in *The Search for Buried Treasure in Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: The Sunstone Foundation, 1985), SL85-1; Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988). Vogel and Groesbeck are currently furthering the exploration into family dynamics. See Vogel, *Joseph Smith's Family Dynamics*, audiocassette of presentation given on 30 July 1988 at Faith Seeking Understanding: The 1998 Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, sponsored by the Sunstone Foundation (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1995), SL98#112; C. Jess Groesbeck, *The Smiths, Their Dreams and Visions: Part II—Joseph Smith and the Family Triangle*, audiocassette of presentation given on 15 July 1999 at the 1999 Sunstone Symposium, Salt Lake City, sponsored by the Sunstone Foundation (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1999), SL99#113.

⁶³ Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 178-79.

counterfeiting activities and charges of corruption in a nearby Masonic lodge as plagues that the Lord had sent upon the land in consequence of rejecting his divine calling. Third, Joseph decided to counteract this corruption “by assuming priestly spiritual powers long since renounced by mainstream Protestants.” Fourth, having assumed these powers, Joseph “declared an occult war on the witchlike art of the counterfeiters”—exposing them by writing the Book of Mormon, which denigrated “secret combinations.” Fifth, and finally, as a prophet-leader, he “would work within the lines of affinity connecting the religion of a true, restored church with human spiritual powers one step removed from white magic.” In this reconstruction, Joseph’s interpretations of his problems and the solutions that those interpretations influenced drove his transformation from village seer to prophet.⁶⁴

Richard L. Bushman has recently taken up Alan Taylor’s hypothesis that Smith’s transition was incremental. In an essay on “Joseph Smith as Translator,” he writes that the “treasure-seeking stones from the magic culture . . . helped Joseph move step-by-step into his calling.” The one step Bushman lays out is that when Joseph received the Urim and Thummim spectacles he knew how to use them because of his previous experience with the stones.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire*, 149-183. See especially pages 177-79.

⁶⁵ Richard L. Bushman, “Joseph Smith as Translator,” in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 79. For a theological interpretation of this historical development, see Bushman, “The Secret History of Mormonism,” *Sunstone*, March 1996, 66-70. Bushman is now Gouverneur Morris Professor of History at Columbia University.

Historians' narrow focus on the treasure-seeking component of the village seer role follows understandably from the historical record. When Smith's early neighbors wrote about him, they usually emphasized treasure seeking in order to denigrate his religious claims. We get a different picture in the record of Joseph Smith's court appearance—the *only* source mentioning seer stones that is contemporary to the time period in which Joseph functioned as a village seer. Notes of Joseph's testimony read, "he had a certain stone, which he had *occasionally* looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were . . . and while at Palmyra he had *frequently* ascertained in that way where lost property was of various kinds."⁶⁶ Although finding treasure was actually less important to Joseph than finding lost property, none of his contemporaries wrote much about that aspect of his scrying. Treasure seeking was more sensational and easier to ridicule and so that is what they wrote about. For those who left early antagonistic accounts and for the historians who have used them, the context of treasure digging has provided an easy explanation of early Mormonism. In later years, Joseph's childhood friend Porter Rockwell stated that the "most sober settlers of the district . . . were 'gropers' though they were ashamed to own [up to] it; and stole out to dig of moonlight nights. . . . Joseph Smith was no gold seeker by trade; he only did openly what all were

⁶⁶ A reproduction of the court minutes appears in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate* (Salt Lake City), January 1886, p. [1], cols. 1-2 (emphasis mine). This point was originally made by Richard Lloyd Anderson ("The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 533).

doing privately”⁶⁷ As far as Joseph did participate in treasure seeking, we should apply an observation made by D. Michael Quinn: “For the treasure-seer the primary reward was expanding his or her seeric gift.”⁶⁸

In this thesis, I will trace Joseph’s expansion of his divinatory capabilities. Though I recognize the importance of struggle and rupture, I will focus on the gradual nature of his metamorphosis. What I intend to demonstrate can be best explained in relationship to Richard L. Bushman’s “step by step” observation and Alan Taylor’s position that “Joseph Smith, Jr.’s, transition from treasure-seeker to Mormon prophet was natural, easy, and *incremental*.”⁶⁹ Taking the Taylor-Bushman theory as a jumping-off point, I intend to reformulate, elucidate, and expand it.

To reformulate their theory, I stress that treasure seeking comprised only one part of the village seer role. To elucidate the theory, I will specify four precise increments in Joseph Smith’s transition. First, Joseph Smith used the seer stone of a neighborhood girl to find a seer stone for himself. Second, he used his own seer stone to find a better seer stone. Third, he used this new superior stone to find a special seeric instrument that resembled a pair of glasses. Joseph

⁶⁷ This is Elizabeth Kane’s paraphrase of her conversation with Rockwell, as noted in her diary shortly after their conversation. Elizabeth Kane, *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah’s Dixie, 1872-1873: Elizabeth Kane’s St. George Journal*, prefaced and annotated by Norman R. Bowen (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1995), 74.

⁶⁸ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2d ed., 65 (the term “seeric” is not uncommon in the relevant literature). Similarly, Jan Shipps wrote that Joseph’s treasure seeking was “an important indication of his early and continued interest in extra-rational phenomenon, and that it played an important role in his spiritual development” (Jan Shipps, “The Prophet Puzzle,” 1; see also, Shipps, *Mormonism*, 11-21).

⁶⁹ Emphasis mine.

considered these spectacles the ultimate seeric instrument, and identified them as a "Urim and Thummim" similar to that used in the Old Testament. Fourth, he used the Urim and Thummim spectacles to train himself for unaided revelation. These increments not only increased Smith's seeric abilities, but sequentially aligned him with the role of the Old Testament prophets. To expand upon the Taylor-Bushman theory, I will argue that Joseph's transition from village seer to prophet forms only one phase in a larger progression. Joseph was born into a family tradition of wisdom divination. Coming out of this background, he learned to use a divining rod. After becoming a rodsman, he then progressed to village seer.⁷⁰ Finally, he attained prophethood. With each step, Joseph moved further from mechanical divination and closer to ecstatic revelation. I further explore the possibility that from the beginning Joseph Smith and his parents had some understanding of this process and its direction.

I agree with Taylor that Joseph Smith's transition was "natural," but, like Bushman, I do not assume that it was entirely so. My analysis is generally naturalistic in its approach, but does not necessarily exclude supernatural interpretations. Whether or not and to what degree supernatural incursions play into the story I leave up to the reader. Believing Mormons will no doubt wonder how the First Vision, Moroni's visits, and the priesthood ordinations by John the

⁷⁰ In December of 1998, Signature Books (Salt Lake City) published D. Michael Quinn's revised and enlarged edition of *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. In this second edition, Quinn argues for a rodsman phase that predated but overlapped Joseph's village seer phase (see chapter 2: "Divining Rods, Treasure-Digging and Seer Stones," 30-65; see especially 33, 43, 54). This is an argument that I have been independently developing since 1997. It forms a significant part of my thesis.

Baptist and Jesus' apostles fit into the evolutionary development I intend to lay out. I personally believe in these visitations—as I believe in the gift of Aaron, the gift of seeing, and the gift of prophecy. More important to this study, Joseph Smith believed that he conversed with these heralds of a new dispensation. Whether or not Jesus Christ visited the Smith farm or even exists, Joseph believed both. Jan Shipps avers that “he probably did have a vision,”⁷¹ and even the skeptical Fawn Brodie allowed for the possibility that Joseph experienced the First Vision in a “vivid childhood dream.”⁷² Therefore, Joseph’s experiences with divine messengers—whether entirely subjective or not—must be factored into any account of his prophetic development.

At first it may appear that these supernatural punctuations contradict any thesis of gradual and natural development. I argue that they functioned as stimuli. They gave impetus and direction to Joseph’s incremental growth. Theophany and angel visitation acted as motivating forces that directed Joseph Smith’s journey from rodsman to village seer to prophet. A revelation received in 1833 stated that God “will give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon precept.”⁷³ In this passage, supernatural incursion (God’s giving), gradual evolution (“line upon line”), and internal struggle (“to the faithful”) combine to explain the origins of Mormonism.

⁷¹ Shipps, “The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 11.

⁷² Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 275.

⁷³ Doctrine and Covenants 98:12.

Because historians of Mormonism—the devout, the detractors, and the uninvested—have already shown that Joseph’s prophetic role was rooted in earlier activities, my thesis is not unique in a fundamental sense. However, my detailed investigation of this particular pathway to prophethood significantly contributes to our understanding of Mormon origins. Also, it exemplifies a pattern of divinatory development that many others have followed in their religious lives. The trajectory that I sketch for Joseph Smith does not eradicate every other interpretation of Joseph Smith’s development. I will chart one pathway to prophethood.

Methodology

The historiography given above manifests the problems of writing early Mormon history. Martin E. Marty, the foremost authority of American religious history, writes of the need for “both Mormons and non-Mormons in the historical profession [to] understand each other and do some justice to the generative events without being mired in the prophet/fraud polarity or posing.”⁷⁴ BYU history professor Marvin Hill shows how a focus on the prophet/fraud dichotomy distracted Fawn Brodie from seeing some historical developments. In particular, he notes her assumption that “if Smith were a money digger he could not have been sincerely religious.”⁷⁵ In a fifty-year

⁷⁴ Martin E. Marty, “History: The Case of the Mormons, a Special People,” in *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 317.

⁷⁵ Hill, “Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of *No Man Knows My History*,” 85.

retrospective of *No Man Knows My History*, RLDS⁷⁶ historian Roger Launius shows how Brodie's preoccupation with the prophet/fraud dichotomy had polarized most historical work on Joseph's early years, particularly with respect to treasure seeking. Launius called for studies that could overcome the problems of approach.⁷⁷

Attempting to work through these problems, I tell the story from Joseph Smith's vantage point. The best historians of Mormonism and the best biographers of Smith, from both within and without the Mormon tradition, now agree that whether or not Joseph Smith saw gods and angels he believed that he did.⁷⁸ Similarly, locating underground water with a forked stick was as real to Smith as digging a well, seeing in stones as real as watching the weather, receiving revelations as real as receiving a letter. We must understand Joseph's life as he experienced it in order to understand how he grew into the role of a

⁷⁶ "RLDS" stands for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

⁷⁷ Roger D. Launius, "From Old to New Mormon History: Fawn Brodie and the Legacy of Scholarly Analysis of Mormonism," in *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1996), 195-233. See especially 202-4. Launius is also NASA's historian.

⁷⁸ See for example, Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*; Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, Chicago History of American Religion, ed. Martin E. Marty (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 10-27; Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon*; Shipps, *Mormonism*, 1-64; Walters and Marquardt, *Inventing Mormonism*, 197-98. Marvin S. Hill has addressed Smith's sincerity with respect to the treasure seeking issue (Hill, "Joseph Smith and the 1826 Trial: New Evidence and New Difficulties," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 2 [winter 1972]: 232-33; Hill, "Money-Digging Folklore and the Beginnings of Mormonism: An Interpretive Suggestion," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 4 [fall 1984 (this number appeared in 1986 and reflects the events of 1984-1986)]: 473-88).

Barry L. Beyerstein writes concerning Mohammed, Martin Luther, and other religious visionaries: "That all experienced their voices and visions as 'coming from beyond' is uncontested. It is not equally apparent, however, that these events transpired outside the theater of their own minds" (Gordon Stein, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Paranormal* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), s.v. "Visions and Hallucinations")

prophet. My approach is principally informed by folklorist David J. Hufford's "experience-centered approach to the study of supernatural belief."⁷⁹

Approaching the topic in terms of Joseph Smith's subjective reality works well for a variety of reasons. The first is a simple recognition of the limits of historical analysis. As Martin E. Marty explains, "historians cannot prove that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates and have not proven that it was simply a fiction of Joseph Smith. Instead, they seek to understand . . . the claims it makes."⁸⁰ Mircea Eliade elaborated upon this point: "The ultimate aim of the historian of religions is to understand, and to make understandable to others, religious man's behavior and mental universe." This is especially important when confronted by Joseph's use of rods and seer stones. Eliade explains that "to us in this day their culture seems eccentric if not positively aberrant; in any case it is difficult to grasp. But there is no other way of understanding a foreign mental universe than to place oneself *inside* it, at its very center . . ."⁸¹ Whether the historian prefers to speak of a Kuhnian paradigm, Foucauldian episteme, *weltanschauung*, or world-view, the general idea is the

⁷⁹ For an explanation of this approach, see Hufford's series of articles in *New York Folklore* [NYF]: "Traditions of Disbelief," NYF 8, nos. 3-4 (winter 1982): 47-55; "The Supernatural and the Sociology of Knowledge: Explaining Academic Belief," NYF 9, nos. 3-4 (winter 1983): 21-29; and "Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology versus Folk Belief," NYF 11, nos. 1-4 (1985): 177-94. For applications of this approach, see Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); and Hufford, "Beings Without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits," in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1995), 11-45.

⁸⁰ Marty, "History: The Case of the Mormons, a Special People," 324.

⁸¹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1987), 162, 165. See also Shipp, *Mormonism*, xii, on the importance of understanding "Mormonism as perceived from the inside."

same. All of these historical concepts relate to the anthropological principles of emic perspective and cultural relativity, which I accept and employ.⁸²

Post-structuralist thinkers have gone beyond these concepts to the point of giving up on the possibility of attaining objective knowledge. Many have given up on the very existence of objective reality. They speak of societal and individual "truths." In contrast, folklorist David J. Hufford maintains the position that all truth can be circumscribed within one great whole. It is the human grasp of truth, not truth itself, which is relative. But Hufford's experience-centered "does not require presuppositions about the ultimate nature of the events investigated."⁸³

One advantage of using this approach is that it avoids the pitfall of mistakenly excluding objectively real data from the analysis just because that data seems supranormal. Hufford states:

The primary theoretical statement of the approach might be roughly summed up as follows: some significant portion of traditional supernatural belief is associated with accurate observations interpreted

⁸² For anthropological discussion on epistemology, academic ethnocentrism, and the problems of writing about culture, see John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Allison James, Jenny Hockey, and Andrew Dawson, eds. *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁸³ Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night*, 256. University of Washington Sociology of Religion Professor Rodney Stark recently posited a sociological theory of revelations. He writes that although his model is "limited to the human side of revelations, it is inappropriate to rule out the possibility that revelations actually occur. . . . while methodological agnosticism represents good science, both methodological atheism and theism are unscientific." Rodney Stark, "A Theory of Revelations," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38, no. 2 (June 1999): 288.

rationally. This does not suggest that all such belief has this association. Nor is this association taken as proof that the beliefs are true.⁸⁴

By not discounting supernatural accounts *a priori*, the analyst does not run the risk of excluding relevant data.⁸⁵

A few examples show the wisdom of this course. For centuries, sailors told stories of huge, tentacled sea-monsters. Skeptics considered that these stories were neither empirical nor rational. They believed that the seagoers, in a state of fright and panic (irrational), had actually seen floating trees (inaccurate observation). This alternative explanation for a seemingly fantastic yarn held sway up until the discovery of the giant squid. Similarly, Norse records of merman sightings were discounted as manatee sightings, although manatees are tropical animals and look nothing like the legendary merman. Later interpreters, taking the accounts seriously, discovered an optic phenomenon unique to the northern seas that better fits the Norse descriptions.⁸⁶ Cultural and medical interpreters of Newfoundland's "old hag" phenomenon held that Newfoundlanders experienced sleep paralysis as an attack by a malevolent supernatural being because of the region's old hag folklore. Hufford showed that similar lore exists cross-culturally and that these "mara attacks" occur in those cultures with the same frequency. This indicated that experience was shaping

⁸⁴ Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night*, xviii.

⁸⁵ Hufford, "Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology versus Folk Belief," 183; and Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night*, x-xiv.

⁸⁶ Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night*, xi-xiv.

culture rather than culture shaping experience.⁸⁷ Finally, anthropologists explained the Haitian belief in zombies entirely in terms of what social functions such belief would fulfill. Then, in 1986 we found out that zombies are real (though not supernatural).⁸⁸ These examples remind us to resist the urge to quickly dismiss historical data that does not immediately fit into our beliefs about how the world is. Supernatural accounts must be taken seriously and as well as skeptically. Yale Historian Jon Butler writes on the importance of “treating healers and charismatic leaders seriously, not as poor and ignorant believers whose behavior historians can pleasantly ridicule and explain away.”⁸⁹

By applying the experience-centered approach to Joseph Smith, we will not accidentally pass by actual empirical observations or reasonable interpretations he made of those experiences.⁹⁰ For example, most waterwitches

⁸⁷ Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night*; Hufford, “Beings Without Bodies,” 12-14, 38-39.

⁸⁸ Gino Del Guercio, “The Secrets of Haiti’s Living Dead,” in Elvio Angeloni, ed., *Anthropology 91/92, The Annual Editions Series* (Sluice Dock, Guilford, Connecticut: The Dushkin Publishing Group, 1991), 173-76. This article was first published in *Harvard Magazine*, January / February 1986, 31-3.

⁸⁹ Jon Butler, “The People’s Faith, in Europe and America: Four Centuries in Review,” review of *The Religions of the People in Sixteenth-Century Champagne*, by A. N. Galpern, *All Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America*, by David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *In the Shadow the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America*, by Herbert Leventhal, and *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland: The Borderlands During the Reformation*, by E. William Monter, *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 1 (fall 1978): 166.

⁹⁰ Barry L. Beyerstein writes: “It should be emphasized that although pathologies such as psychoses, brain damage, infestations, and epilepsy can produce vivid hallucinations, not all hallucinations are pathological. They also occur in normal, healthy individuals—in fact, more often than is widely believed. . . . sane, honest people are frequently convinced they have seen and heard things that investigators cannot confirm. Granted, they have had an *experience* and are honestly reporting how real it *felt*. Fortunately, our emerging understanding of the brain’s perceptual and cognitive machinery can suggest naturalistic—and not necessarily pathological—explanations for these dramatic interludes” (Stein, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*, s.v. “Visions and Hallucinations”). See the assessment of psychologist T. L. Brink (not LDS), who argues that “Whatever our stance vis-a-vis the Mormon religion, there is no basis in theory or fact to doubt

insist that the rod moves on its own. Skeptics have often taken this claim as imposture. However, scientists studying this phenomenon now contend that while the dowser does move the rod, the muscle movement is involuntary and unconscious to the dowser.⁹¹ Therefore, whether the dowser moves the rod or not, both he and the scientist are now agreed that the movement is involuntary. Whether Joseph Smith had a supernatural gift or not, the experience of the rod moving involuntarily in his hands must be considered.

Another benefit of presenting Joseph's subjective reality relates to the nature of the historical record. Historian Robert F. Berkhofer explains that "the documentary evidence available to historians tells them more about the subjective states of the actors than about their actual behavior."⁹² Similarly, Richard L. Bushman explains why even sharp critics often write about the golden plates and the Urim and Thummim: "it is far easier to tell the story of Mormon origins with the divine events left in because people close to the history told it that way." By presenting Smith's subjective reality, I follow precedent. This is the approach used in Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, the finest study of the New York period of Mormonism, and in Quinn's *Early*

the basic sanity or religious sincerity of Joseph Smith" (Brink, "Joseph Smith: The Verdict of Depth Psychology," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 [1976]: 73-83).

⁹¹ Stein, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Paranormal*, s.v. "Dowsing."

⁹² Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis* (New York: The Free Press; and London: Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1969), 17-18.

Mormonism and the Magic World View, the most comprehensive treatment of Joseph's connections with magic.⁹³

Still, every approach has its disadvantages as well as its benefits. Both Bushman and Quinn recognize the limits of their approach. For example, Quinn writes: "While I have tried to sympathetically present the issue of magic from the perspective of those who believed in it, the thorny question arises as to the objective reality of magic itself" ⁹⁴ Jan Shipps states the problem particularly well. She explains that "the 'facts' of LDS history do not necessarily speak for themselves. . . . the very same descriptions of the very same events can take on radically different meanings when they are placed in different settings" ⁹⁵ And, as Martin E. Marty notes, the datum discourse of early Mormon history confronts the reader and forces a reaction of belief or disbelief.⁹⁶ It is the source material itself that provokes and intensifies the disparity between the "radically different meanings" referred to by Shipps. Radically differing interpretations of the objective events may be relevant to historical analysis in spite of an agreement on Smith's sincerity.

Granting that Smith was sincere, historians of Mormonism have largely overcome the prophet/fraud dichotomy. However, the historical record in some

⁹³ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 3; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2d ed., 324.

⁹⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed., 227. And see Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 3.

⁹⁵ Shipps, *Mormonism*, 4.

⁹⁶ Marty, "History: The Case of the Mormons, a Special People," 303-25. See especially 317-324.

cases forces a new quandary: the visionary / delusionary dichotomy. For example, if Joseph believed he was conversing with an angel in his bedroom and actually there was no angel there (or anywhere), what does that tell us? If Joseph Smith's experiences are interpreted strictly in terms of hallucination or abnormal psychology, could further implications of this interpretation invalidate this thesis presented here?⁹⁷ Aside from this concern, there are still a few holdouts who question Smith's sincerity.⁹⁸ Therefore, in attempting to fully satisfy everyone the historian may face a prophet/delusional/impostor trichotomy.

Because I am dealing with such perplexing issues, this study will be truly experience-centered and not exclusively experiential. In other words, based on the historically supported and now generally accepted position that Smith was sincere, I will center the study on his development as he experienced it, but will ensure that the periphery of the study encompasses interpretations imputing delusion or fraud to Smith when it is necessary to show that the thesis will bear up regardless. In these situations I will try to use inclusive language to accommodate more than one view. When necessary, I will address the delusionary or impostor interpretations separately and secondarily.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Klaus Hansen has utilized the speculative theories of evolutionary psychologist Julian Jaynes in an attempt to explain a Joseph Smith who did not receive objectively real revelations, who was sincere, and yet was not delusional. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 15-24.

⁹⁸ For example, Dan Vogel has recently argued that Joseph Smith was a pious fraud. Vogel, "The 'Prophet Puzzle' Revisited," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 3 (fall 1998): 125-140. See also Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

⁹⁹ By delusion I mean only misperception. Proponents of the delusion hypothesis usually resort to psychopathological disorders and self-induced hypnosis. But delusion need not invoke abnormal psychology. Rodney Stark theorizes that "normal people can, through entirely normal

Hufford argues that second-guessing religious experiences also poses an ethical problem. Fortunately, Joseph Smith has excused the doubter. Shortly before his assassination he stated, "I don't blame you for not believing my history. If I had not experienced what I have, I could not have believed it myself."¹⁰⁰ Psychological interpretations of Smith's experiences do not necessarily exclude supernaturalistic interpretations. Hufford explains:

The primary significance of context in most systems of supernatural belief lies in the idea that the supernatural interacts with the natural in complex ways, a point that is generally overlooked by both 'positivists' and contextualists. Failure to appreciate this element has the effect of dramatically reducing one's ability to understand or even acknowledge the empirical claims to objective reality that are inherent in such systems, reinforcing alternately the positivist claim that these beliefs make no sense or the contextualist's claim that their sense can only be understood within their peculiar context. The supernaturalist generally concedes (believes in)

means, believe they communicate with the divine" ("A Theory of Revelations," 288). For psychological treatments of Joseph Smith, see I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1902); Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*; Howard J. Booth, "An Image of Joseph Smith, Jr.: A Personality Study," *COURAGE: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 1, no. 1 (September 1970): 4-14; Brink, "Joseph Smith: The Verdict of Depth Psychology," 73-83; Groesbeck, "Joseph Smith and the Shaman's Vision"; C. Jess Groesbeck, *Joseph Smith and His Individuation: A Psychoanalytic Exploration into Mormonism*, audiocassette of a presentation given at the Sunstone Theological Symposium, Salt Lake City, 20-23 August 1986, sponsored by the Sunstone Foundation (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1986), SL86072; Gary James Bergera, "Joseph Smith and the Hazards of Charismatic Leadership," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 6 (1986): 33-42; C. Jess Groesbeck, "The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions," *Sunstone*, March 1988, 22-29; Gary James Bergera, "Toward 'Psychologically Informed' Mormon History and Biography," *Sunstone*, December 1991, 27-31; Robert Bruce Flanders, "Dream and Nightmare: Nauvoo Revisited," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 75-100; Lawrence Foster, "The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 26, no. 4 (1993): 1-22; Robert D. Anderson, "Toward an Introduction to a Psychobiography of Joseph Smith," 249-272; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith's Family Dynamics*, (with response by C. Jess Groesbeck); William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr., and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, D.C. and London, England: American Psychiatric Press, 1998); and Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (winter 1978): 208.

the reality of psychological factors and expects that those factors plus physical and spiritual ones will interact with one another.¹⁰¹

Hufford also demonstrates that even “the specification of physiological correlates of putatively supernatural experiences is not in itself disconfirming of supernatural belief because of this interactionism.”¹⁰²

Leonard J. Arrington made a robust statement of the contextualist approach in the preface to his classic work, *Great Basin Kingdom*. He wrote:

The true essence of God’s revealed will, if such it be, *cannot be apprehended* without an understanding of the conditions surrounding the prophetic vision, and the symbolism and verbiage in which it is couched. . . . A naturalistic discussion of “the people and the times” and of the mind and experience of Latter-day prophets is therefore a perfectly valid aspect of religious history, and, indeed, makes more plausible the truths they attempted to convey.¹⁰³ [emphasis mine]

While Arrington may have overstated his point, he does show that cultural, historical, and psychological factors do complicate supernaturalistic interpretations: “While the discussion of naturalistic causes of revelations does not preclude its claim to be revealed or inspired of God, in practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish what is objectively ‘revealed’ from what is subjectively ‘contributed’ by those receiving the revelation.”¹⁰⁴ The gray zone between divine revelation and human culture can serve as an area for LDS readers to consider naturalistic interpretations. Whether readers tend to perceive

¹⁰¹ Hufford, “Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology versus Folk Belief,” 190.

¹⁰² Hufford, “Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology versus Folk Belief,” 191.

¹⁰³ Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1958; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and the Tanner Trust Fund, 1993), xxiv.

¹⁰⁴ Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom*, xxiv.

a naturalistic evolution or a spiritual progression in the thesis which follows, they will find the central argument sustained. Those who suspect I use Hufford's experience-centered approach only to smoke-screen my personal, confessional perspective, may rest assured that other seers and dowsers will fall under the same methodology.

Terminology

I often follow the *Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. For example, I capitalize the initial letter of the first word in the Mormon church's official name: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.¹⁰⁵ However, I use earlier church titles when historically appropriate. For example, the first official name of the church was the "Church of Christ." I follow LDS usage in capitalizing "First Vision." This also helps distinguish that theophany from the first vision Joseph Smith had in a seer stone. Although the LDS style guide makes "seer stones" one word ("seerstones"), I prefer the usage in the contemporary documents.

In current LDS usage, "the Urim and Thummim" (Yur'•im and Thum'•im) usually refers only to the seeric spectacles that Smith discovered with the golden plates. However, Joseph Smith and his contemporaries used the terms "the Urim and Thummim," "Urim and Thummim," or simply "Urim," to refer to the spectacles found with the golden plates, the biblical "Urim and Thummim"

¹⁰⁵ *Style Guide for Publications of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972, 1978).

(oo'•reem and t^hoo'•meem), and to the seer stones.¹⁰⁶ I follow this early usage and the only formal definition ever offered by one of Joseph Smith's followers. Apostle Orson Pratt, one of the original members of the Quorum of the Twelve, provided a clear and useful definition: "The Urim and Thummim is a stone or other substance sanctified and illuminated by the Spirit of the living God, and presented to those who are blessed with the gift of seeing."¹⁰⁷ Smith and his contemporaries often used the term "spectacles" to specify that particular seeric device. For example, in his 1832 history, Smith wrote, "the Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book [of Mormon]."¹⁰⁸

A number of authors have used the words "magic" and "magical" to describe Joseph Smith's use of divining rods and seer stones. Some Latter-day Saint authors have expressed reservation or disagreement with using these terms to describe Joseph Smith's activities. They argue that the precise meaning of the word "magic" remains unclear and that the word has usually been used in a pejorative sense.¹⁰⁹ What is magic as opposed to religion? In its technical sense, stripped of pejorative usage, magic is usually more manipulative and coercive as opposed to religion being more supplicative and submissive. Magic tends to be

¹⁰⁶ Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" 49-68; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 174-75.

¹⁰⁷ Pratt, *A Series of Pamphlets*, 72.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph Smith, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.," Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1989), 1:9. Hereafter *PJS*.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Stephen D. Ricks, and Daniel C. Peterson. "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *To Be Learned Is Good If . . .*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 129-47. See also Douglas J. Davies, "Magic and Mormon

individualistic whereas religion tends to be communalistic. When I use the word “magic” I refer only to these abstractions. Alan Taylor writes of the “nineteenth century cult of rationality that so complicates our attempt to understand people in the past who mixed magic with their Christianity. For we today have inherited that cult’s rigid insistence that magic and Christianity are polar opposites when in fact they have usually been inseparable and natural allies.”¹¹⁰ Recognizing the problems of using the term “magic,” I prefer to speak of “divination.” This word carries less negative connotation and accurately describes the mantic enterprise across the religion-magic spectrum. Divination typology and terminology are treated in the following chapter.

Working against the snobbish terminology employed in sources derived from upper-class critics, Alan Taylor favors the term “treasure seeking” over “money digging.” I extend this approach. The revelation to Oliver Cowdery regarding his use of a divining rod stated that “there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God”¹¹¹ This revelation conveys the way in which early Mormons understood the use of rods and stones. Instead of referring to the use of rods and stones as rhabdomancy and scrying, I usually use terminology closer to that used by early

Religion,” in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. by Douglas J. Davies, (London: Cassell, 1996), 143-49.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, “Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith’s Treasure Seeking,” in *The Prophet Puzzle: Interpretive Essays on Joseph Smith*, ed. Bryan Waterman (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 142.

¹¹¹ Book of Commandments 7:3.

Mormons: “the gift of working with the rod” or “the gift of seeing.”¹¹² Similarly, I prefer “prophecy” to “fortune telling,” “revelation” to “theomancy,” “the gift of dreams” to “oneiromancy,” and “angelophany” to “necromancy.” Mormons saw these phenomena as the spiritual gifts discussed by Paul in the New Testament. “Rhabdomancy,” “crystallomancy,” and “theomancy” are far too often sensational and pejorative—they operate as distancing terms that alienate us from the perspective of those who worked with rods, saw in stones, and prophesied.

Whereas the word “supernatural” describes these phenomena better than “magic,” it requires definition itself. I prefer the definition given by folklorist Timothy C. Lloyd: “The supernatural is not a separate, exotic, largely closed realm; rather, it is connected to, or underlies, all life. It is supernatural not in the sense of being unnatural or in being separate from the natural, but in the literal sense of being the largest version of the pattern of the natural.”¹¹³ As used in this thesis, the term “supernatural” may refer to an objective supernatural reality or to a subjective religious experience, depending on context. Also, I use the term “preternatural” (outside of the ordinary) instead of “supernatural” (above or encompassing the ordinary) when the distinction is helpful.

The names that I affix to Joseph Smith’s roles require a word of explanation. The term “rodsman” was used in Joseph Smith’s day to refer to men

¹¹² On “the gift of seeing” or the “seer’s gift,” see Pratt, *A Series of Pamphlets*, 72.

¹¹³ Timothy C. Lloyd, “Folklore, Foodways, and the Supernatural,” in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1995), 60.

who used divining rods. The term “village seer” is a recent, academic label, but it accurately describes those who filled that role.¹¹⁴ As the leader of the Church of Christ, Joseph Smith was designated “a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church.”¹¹⁵ However, early Mormons usually just called him a “prophet.” When he introduced himself to early convert Newell K. Whitney he said, “I am Joseph the prophet.”¹¹⁶

A Note on Sources

Dale Morgan wrote that the “precise by-path by which Joseph Smith reached the high-road of his calling has been obscured by the dust of time.”¹¹⁷ There are precious few contemporary sources for the Vermont and New York periods of early Mormon history. Retrospective accounts abound, but are marked by either antagonism or apology. In spite of this bleak historical situation, Joseph’s enigmatic early life continually captivates historians, challenging them to solve the puzzle of the new religion’s genesis. The project at hand requires the sometimes frustrating process of considering any relevant source possible, and questioning the reliability of every one of them. This thesis

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer,” 465; Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 21.

¹¹⁵ Book of Commandments 22:1.

¹¹⁶ Orson F. Whitney, “WHITNEY, Newell Kimball,” in *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, comp. Andrew Jenson (Salt Lake City: The Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901), 1:223; c.f. Orson F. Whitney, *Through Memory’s Halls: The Life Story of Orson F. Whitney as Told by Himself* (Independence: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Company, 1930), 13.

¹¹⁷ Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism: Correspondence & a New History*, 233.

draws on hundreds of documents—some never before used. I use the standards of historical criticism in my attempt to cut a path through the source material.

One of the most important of these sources is the record of Joseph Smith's 1826 trial or pre-trial examination. It is the only contemporary source that speaks directly to Joseph's use of seer stones in the 1820s. The court record is no longer extant. A verbatim transcript was published in 1886 in an anti-Mormon newsheet. Many believed that this published version of an alleged court proceeding was a fraud. However, a record of bills for Justice Albert Neely, who presided over the court, later turned up in the Chenango County Courthouse. Smith's case is recorded with the date and fines given in the published court record. Historians now accept the court record as a genuine document.¹¹⁸ Joseph Smith's own accounts of his experiences, while retrospective, often provide the only first-hand accounts of the events under consideration. Events from the 1820s can also be determined when the statements of early Mormons and of old Vermont and New York acquaintances of the Smiths corroborate each other. Other relevant, but less reliable sources are also considered, especially when not contradicted by weightier evidence.

In this study, I occasionally resort to the Bible as an interpretive key.

David J. Whittaker points out that Joseph Smith and other early Mormons "grew up with, respected, and regularly used the biblical text in their quest for self-

¹¹⁸ The court record is published in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, p. 1, cols. 1-3. On the authenticity of the record, see Marvin S. Hill, "Joseph Smith and the 1826 Trial: New Evidence and New Difficulties," *BYU Studies* 12, no. 2 (winter 1972): 223-233; "The 1826 Examination," Bibliographic Essay 2, in Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 222-30.

understanding He loved and believed in the Bible, and no serious study of his life and thought can ignore this fact."¹¹⁹ The text of the Bible in the context of early American biblicism can help us understand a number of early Mormon sources.

John L. Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire* has drawn heavy fire for its (mis)use of the Bible. Brooke argues that Joseph Smith created Mormonism by drawing on Hermetic traditions. D. Michael Quinn's main objection to *The Refiner's Fire* was that many of the Hermetic parallels Brooke found in Mormonism and Hermeticism were more immediately available to Joseph Smith in the Bible.¹²⁰ This charge has also been leveled by Mormon scholars Philip L. Barlow, Davis Bitton, William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, and Catholic scholar Massimo Introvigne. Barlow termed this problem a "master defect" and chided Brooke for his "inadequate command of the Bible." Hamblin, Peterson, and Mitton expressed their indecision as to whether they should charge Brooke with biblical illiteracy or conscious suppression of Bible parallels.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ David J. Whittaker, "The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought," in *By Study and Also By Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990), 1:159.

¹²⁰ See Quinn's comments in *Mormonism in American Historiography: John L. Brooke's The Refiner's Fire and Competing Versions of Mormon Origins*, audiocassette of presentations given by John L. Brooke, Clyde Forsburg, Bill Martin, and D. Michael Quinn, at *Mormons as Americans*, a symposium co-sponsored by the Sunstone Foundation and Boston University's American and New England Studies Program, Boston, November 1995 (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1995), 1995NE-4, side A.

¹²¹ Philip L. Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," *Christian Century*, 17 January 1996, 52-55; Philip L. Barlow, "Decoding Mormonism," *The John Whitmer Historical Association JOURNAL* 16 (1996): 123-31; Davis Bitton, *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994): 182-92; William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, "Mormon in the Fiery Furnace: Or, Loftes Tryk Goes to Cambridge," *The Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 2 (1994): 3-58; William J. Hamblin,

These reviewers did not read the book quite as closely as they could have.

Brooke addressed this very issue. He argued that Hermeticism influenced the way in which Joseph Smith read the Bible.¹²² Several years earlier, Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton had noted early Mormon missionaries' selective biblicism and the interests driving their selectivism. Even Philip Barlow, in his book *Mormons and the Bible*, emphasized the importance of early American biblicism as well as the sacred text itself.¹²³ Notably, a review of *The Refiner's Fire* by Grant Underwood—who has written on the need to study the ways in which early Mormons understood the Bible and LDS scriptures—did not criticize Brooke on this particular point.¹²⁴ Joseph's use of the Bible differed markedly from that of the mainstream Christians in his day. They spoke little of the rods of Aaron and Moses, the Urim and Thummim, or the gift of prophecy. John L. Brooke had not entirely ignored the Bible as a source of doctrine, but had explored what a background in hermetic magic may have brought to reading it.¹²⁵

Daniel C. Peterson, and George L. Mitton, in *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-95): 167-81; Massimo Introvigne, presentation given in a session of Mormons as Americans, a symposium co-sponsored by the Sunstone Foundation and Boston University's American and New England Studies Program, Boston, November 1995; audiocassette recording in *Mormonism and the Occult Connection* (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1995), 1995NE-3, side A. See also Jan Shipp's introductory essay to *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831-1836*, ed. Jan Shipp and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, BYU Studies; Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 3.

¹²² Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 160-61, 197-98, 200, 205, 208, 212, 260. See also p. 133 on Asael Smith's use of the Bible.

¹²³ Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 30; Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹²⁴ Grant Underwood, "The Earliest Reference Guides to the Book of Mormon: Windows into the Past," *Journal of Mormon History* 12 (1985): 69-89; Underwood, Review of *The Refiner's Fire*, by Brooke, *Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (May 1996): 323-4.

¹²⁵ Consider Brooke's comments in *Mormonism in American Historiography*, side B.

Although Joseph read the Bible through a magical lense, this lense was neither hermetic nor of any other strain of esoterica. To his reading of the Bible, Joseph brought his background in dowsing, scrying, treasure seeking, and other folk practices. He knew nothing of the high-browed philosophies of the hermeticists. Ronald W. Walker noted in 1986 that waterwitches and treasure dowsers identified their forked branches as the staffs of Moses and Aaron.¹²⁶ This is the style of biblicism that influenced Joseph Smith's study of the good book. Disaffected RLDS psychoanalyst William D. Morain and BYU Professor of Church History and Doctrine Richard Lloyd Anderson ascribe to a different theory. While Brooke and Walker hold that Joseph interpreted the Bible in terms of folk belief, Morain and Anderson hold that Joseph interpreted folk belief in terms of the Bible.¹²⁷ I allow for a complex interplay between text and reader—between the Bible itself and early American biblicisms.

To elucidate Joseph's early experiences I will sometimes use Joseph's later, written revelations—being careful to avoid the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy. Believers will see the parallels between Joseph's early experiences and later revelations as part of a divine pattern. Skeptics will see the later revelations as possible articulations of earlier experiences. I cite the Bible and Mormon scriptures according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* instructions for citing "Judeo-

¹²⁶ Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24, no. 4 (fall 1984): 441.

¹²⁷ Morain, *The Sword of Laban*, 65; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 546.

Christian Scriptures.”¹²⁸ Unless otherwise noted, I rely on the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible and the other LDS Scriptures published by the LDS Church in 1989.¹²⁹

I adopt standard practices of document editing. Square brackets supply missing words or letters. Words or letters struck through indicate material crossed out in the original document. Text appearing in angled brackets represents interlinear material in the original document. This sentence provides an ex[ample] of this ~~style~~ <style> of documentary ed[itin]g. The sources used in this thesis contain frequent misspellings. Like other historians, I have chosen not to point these out with the parenthetical explanation “[sic].” I abbreviate neither “Senior” nor “Junior.”

¹²⁸ *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 594-95.

¹²⁹ The Holy Bible. *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989); *The Doctrine and Covenants*; *The Pearl of Great Price*. All four works published in Salt Lake City by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989.

CHAPTER 2

DIVINATION

In common with their neighbors they lived in a spiritual world as well as a material one It may be admitted that some of them believed in fortune telling, in warlocks and witches Indeed it is scarcely conceivable how one could live in New England in those years and not have shared in such beliefs. To be credulous in such things was to be normal people.

—LDS General Authority B. H. Roberts on Joseph Smith's ancestors¹

It is bad luck to be superstitious.

—Andrew Mathis²

Humankind has employed various methods of divination for millenia, attempting through preternatural means to gain knowledge concerning that which could not otherwise be determined. This chapter provides a background for Joseph Smith's progression from rodsman to seer to prophet in three ways. First, it presents a theory of divination. Second, it provides a brief history of divination, which focuses on dowsing and scrying. Third, it surveys the methods of divination used by Joseph's parents.

A Theory of Divination

In Mircea Eliade's commanding *Encyclopedia of Religion*, religious studies professor Evan M. Zuesse divides divinatory methods into three general

¹ B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century 1* (Salt Lake City: Published by the Church, 1930), 1:26-27.

² Larry Bertholf, Albuquerque, New Mexico, to Skip M'Gee, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 9 December 1997. TMs. Copy in my possession.

categories.³ He uses the term “intuitive divination” to refer to knowledge gained through insight, hunch, or presentiment. “Wisdom divination” involves the use of an organized body of theory that assumes correspondences between the personal and impersonal elements of the cosmos. The diviner uses knowledge of these correspondences to interpret naturally observable phenomena. Astrology exemplifies this category of divination. Its practitioners analyze patterns in the heavens in order to predict the future. Zuesse uses the term “possession divination” to classify a number of methods whereby preternatural entities communicate through intermediary entities.

Zuesse further divides possession divination into possession of human agents and non-human agents (augury). For example, a group of people using a planchette and ouija board expect a spirit to “possess” or control the planchette to spell out a message from the spirit. In the Old Testament, when the High Priest cast lots he expected the Lord to determine their outcome.⁴ In Old Testament prophecy, the Lord communicates directly through a human agent. The term “possession” inaccurately describes prophecy because the prophets retained self-consciousness during their revelations. The Lord did not possess

³ Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), s.v. “Divination.” Evan M. Zuesse was Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the South Australian College of Advanced Education and formerly an associate professor at Case Western Reserve University. He authored *Ritual Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979).

⁴ Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55-56; 33:54; 34:13; 13:6; 1 Samuel 14:40-42; I Chronicles 24-26; Proverbs 16:33.

them to speak through them, but rather communicated his message to their minds. For this reason, I employ the classic distinction between "ecstatic" and "non-ecstatic" styles of divination. By "ecstatic" I do not necessarily imply any loss of reason or self-control, but simply a preternatural event experienced within the body, mind, or soul of the diviner. I find the term "mechanistic divination" more descriptive of divination through non-human agencies than the term "augury," and use it accordingly.

Zuesse rejected the standard "ecstatic/non-ecstatic" usage because "indigenous interpretations of so-called objective omens [wisdom divination and mechanistic divination] often assume spirit possession of the omens and/or ecstatic insight in the diviner." In other words, in the belief system of the diviner it is possible that the non-human entity which became an agent for divination exists as an *identity*, an entity with an id or "soul" of some sort, and may have experienced an ecstatic state. Nevertheless, in the diviner's mind the agent is non-human and its ecstasy external to the human diviner who interprets the effects of its possession. Thus, even from an emic perspective the classical categorization can be appropriately applied. The possession of the non-human agent may be ecstatic for that agent, but it is mechanistic to the human diviner.

Zuesse also noted that the human diviner's interpretation of augury or mechanistic divination often involved an "ecstatic insight." But this need not confuse ecstatic and mechanistic divination. Rather, a divinatory method of this type should be considered as a sequence of two different categories of divination: mechanistic or wisdom divination external to the diviner followed by an ecstatic

interpretation internal to the diviner. Divinatory methods often come in pairs. For example, in the Bible dreams are sometimes followed by inspired interpretations and speaking in tongues by the "interpretation of tongues."⁵

Zuesse demonstrates that different cultures order these categories of divination in different ways. For example, Hindu belief holds intuitive divination in the highest regard followed by augury with ecstatic experience at the bottom of the list. Western civilization, informed by Judeo-Christianity, places prophetic ecstasy at the top of the heap.⁶ In addition to prophecy, Israelite religion had also sanctioned lesser forms of divination such as Urim and Thummim and lots. A strand of occult intellectual traditions in western culture have held wisdom divination in the highest regard, but most ordinary Europeans have looked to the biblical prophets as the pinnacle of divinatory experience. For the most part, I have eliminated the category of intuitive divination. This study employs a modified version of the Zuesse typology adjusted according to the concerns and argument heretofore given and ordered in accordance with western values. This revised typology places ecstatic divination above mechanistic and wisdom divination.

To this modified version of the divination schema given in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, I overlay another typology that distinguishes between divination initiated by a diviner and divination initiated by a preternatural

⁵ On divinatory dreams followed by divinatory interpretations, see Genesis 41:1-39; Daniel 2:1-47. On speaking in tongues followed by the interpretation of tongues, see 1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:26.

⁶ Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. "prophecy."

entity—in this case God. By the end of his life, Emanuel Swedenborg developed the ability to voluntarily enter and exit an ecstatic divinatory state whenever he wished to.⁷ His visions stand as an example of divination initiated by the diviner, which I term “ascensional divination.” In contrast, while on the road to Damascus the Pharisee Saul was confronted by the risen Christ, commanded to cease his persecutions against the Christians, given an apostolic commission, and renamed Paul.⁸ This is an example of divination initiated by God, which I call “descensional divination” or “revelation.”

Skepticism concerning the objective reality of preternatural experiences and entities loses its relevance in an experience-centered approach to divination. The skeptic may believe that a person who has experienced “descensional” divination brought that experience upon himself or herself—that all divination is actually ascensional. But the person who receives revelation or thinks they receive revelation experiences it as such. In the subjective reality of the diviner, the experience was descensional, not ascensional. Because the distinction between ascensional and descensional divination exists as a reality within the mind of the diviner, it becomes an important qualitative difference in this study.

The visions of Swedenborg and Paul clearly illustrate the difference between ascensional and descensional divination. Other divinatory experiences

⁷ Stephen Larsen, “The Visionary Tradition,” in *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision: A Pictorial Biography & Anthology of Essays & Poetry*, ed. Robin Larsen, Stephen Larsen, and William Ross Woofenden (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1988), 192-94; D. T. Suzuki, *Swedenborg: Buddha of the North*, trans. by Andrew Bernstein (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996), 21.

⁸ Acts 9:1-9.

complicate this simplicity. Ascensional and descensional divination are more accurately conceptualized as the endpoints of or directions on a spectrum rather than as discrete categories. Also, they can occur in succession as parts of a larger divinatory experience.

These principles are illustrated in the third chapter of Ether in the Book of Mormon, which recounts the history of a prophet known only as “the brother of Jared.” Jared and his people built eight barges with which to sail to the new world. To have light in these barges, which were entirely enclosed, Jared’s brother “did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass; and he did carry them in his hands upon the top of the mount, and cried again unto the Lord, saying . . . prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness.” The brother of Jared’s prayer on the mountain can be classified as an ascensional effort in divination.

In response to his prayer, Jesus “stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord.” This part of Jared’s experience can be classified as descensional divination or revelation. But because the Lord had “showed himself,” the brother of Jared “had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting. Wherefore, having this perfect knowledge of God, he could not be kept from within the veil; therefore he saw Jesus . . .” This stage of the experience can be classified as ascensional divination. There was a veil between God and man. Ascensional and descensional modes of divination can be distinguished by the sides from which this veil was breached. At first, the brother

of Jared ascended the mount and offered up a prayer. Next, Christ poked his finger through the veil. After this, the brother of Jared passed through the veil onto the Lord's side. The vision continued and then the Lord "showed unto the brother of Jared" a vision of the world's history from beginning to end. This constitutes another example of revelation.

Jared's supernatural experience shows not only that both directions of divination can occur in one experience, but that they can be causally related within that experience. Christ showed his finger to the brother of Jared because of his faithful prayer on the mountain. Jared was able to step through the veil because of the knowledge he gained from seeing the Lord's finger. Then the Lord showed the brother of Jared a panoramic vision because "he knew that the Lord could show him all things." The Book of Mormon portrays the interplay between ascensional and descensional divination as the Lord's use of revelation to guide the divinatory ascension of his prophet. When the brother of Jared saw the Lord's finger, the Lord provoked him to continue his divinatory ascent by asking him, "Sawest thou more than this." If the story of the brother of Jared's theophany does not show how God uses descensional divination to provoke and direct ascensional divination, it shows that Joseph Smith ascribed to such a theology.

A History of Divination

Historians and anthropologists have documented the practice of divination and its various methods over the entire face of the globe. A number of

cultures use sticks and stones for divination. In a study of the history and use of divining rods, William Barrett and Theodore Besterman found evidence for indigenous stick dowsing in Europe, India, Indonesia, Melanesia, and central and south Africa.⁹ Besterman, in his study of crystal gazing, documented indigenous scrying among several cultural groups on every inhabited continent of the world.¹⁰ Had Joseph Smith been aware of the global culture of scrying he probably would not have been surprised. An article by his friend William W. Phelps, which appeared in the church organ Smith edited, speculated that Aaron's Urim and Thummim "was as old as Adam." Apostle Orson Pratt taught that Noah "had a Urim and Thummim by which he was enabled to discern all things pertaining to the ark, and its pattern."¹¹ The "Urim and Thummim" was a divinatory instrument that Moses gave to his brother Aaron when he appointed him to be the High Priest of Israel. Aaron wore the Urim and Thummim over his heart in a breastpiece ("breastplate" KJV).¹²

⁹ William Barrett and Theodore Besterman, *The Divining Rod: An Experimental and Psychological Investigation* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1968), 3-5.

¹⁰ Theodore Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing: A Study in the History, Distribution, Theory and Practice of Scrying* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1965), 40-101.

¹¹ William W. Phelps, "Despise not Prophesyings," *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo, Illinois), 1 February 1841, 298, col. 1; "Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Ogden, Sunday Morning, 18 May, 1873," *Journal of Discourses* 16 (1874): 50. [Hereafter JD].

¹² Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 7:8. Many readers will recognize the "im" on the ends of the Hebrew words *Urim* and *Thummim*. Usually, the "-im" ending signifies a plural—yielding "Urs and Thumms." Indeed, most scholars have translated "Urim and Thummim" as "lights and perfections" (ur = light, thum=perfection). However, some ancient near eastern languages used plural suffixes to declinate nouns for objects owned by monarchs and deities. Cornelis Van Dam holds that this applies to the Urim and Thummim, reducing it to the 'ur and thum' belonging to God and/or his High Priest. Most scholars have taken the Urim and Thummim to be two objects rather than two sets of objects. Van Dam further argues for a case of hendiadys, rendering the Urim and Thummim a 'thummish ur.' This theory yields a single object literally translated as "perfect light"—or, as Van Dam interprets it, "infallible revelation" (Van Dam, *The Urim and*

Over the last century, Bible scholars have interpreted the Urim and Thummim as a pair of dice used for lot divination. However, in a recent exhaustive study, Cornelis Van Dam, a Dutch Bible scholar, has demonstrated the inadequacy of the lot theory. Drawing on the Hebrew text, early Jewish midrash, and a study of ancient near eastern contextual parallels, Van Dam has forwarded a new theory that the Urim and Thummim was a single, precious gem that would shine while the High Priest received prophetic revelation.¹³ German Bible scholar C. Houtman responds to Van Dam's bold revisionism with partial acceptance. He states that Van Dam has convinced him of the improbability of the lot theory, but not of the probability of his new theory. Houtman points to Bible passages that state that the Urim and Thummim was the actual medium through which revelation came, not a sign that the High Priest was receiving direct revelation. He suggests that the Urim and Thummim was a "big precious stone" that functioned as a speculum through which the High Priest could commune with an angel or see the future.¹⁴ The use of the Urim and Thummim faded with the rise of the classical Old Testament prophets.¹⁵

Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997], 221-26).

¹³ Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 221-26.

¹⁴ C. Houtman, "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion," *Vetus Testamentum* 40, no. 2 (1990): 229-32. Whether Moses existed or not, there exists a consensus among Bible scholars that the Urim and Thummim was a real form of divination and very old—perhaps as old as the time period ascribed to Moses among the Israelites or proto-Israelites (Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 4-5).

¹⁵ Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), s.v. "Urim and Thummim"; Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 233-55.

Moses and Aaron owned rods that were invested with supernatural power. By striking a rock with his staff, Moses produced a spring of water for the wilderness wandering Israelites.¹⁶ Aaron's rod was used for divination. When an internal rebellion among the Israelites challenged Aaron's right to the priesthood, Moses placed a rod from each tribe in front of the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle. "And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."¹⁷ In this way Aaron's divining rod legitimated his possession of the Urim and Thummim.

Diviners in ancient Greece and Rome also used rods and specula.¹⁸ The oracle at Delphi, the widest known and most influential oracle in ancient Greece, is depicted in ancient art holding a laurel branch while looking into a bowl of water.¹⁹ Thus rods and specula were used for divining in both the Judeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman traditions—the two major roots of western

¹⁶ Numbers 20:8.

¹⁷ Numbers 17:8. See chapters 17-18. A similar practice may have occurred in the days of King David (1 Chronicles 13:3).

¹⁸ Richard Cavendish, ed., *Man, Myth, and Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion, and the Unknown* (B.P.C. Publishing, 1970; Reference edition, New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1983), s.v. "Hazel"; Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 40-44.

¹⁹ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts on File, 1989), s.v. "Oracle at Delphi." See also E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 70-75.

civilization. These two traditions and their divining methods blended during the early middle ages.²⁰

As Roman civilization pushed westward through Europe, it fused with local traditions of divining with sticks and stones. Germanic tribes used hazel wands for divination as early as the first century.²¹ The use of seer stones is also documented as an indigenous Germanic form of divination.²² In the middle ages, both rod and stone divining persisted and proliferated throughout the continent.²³ Church and state, however, usually considered divination a threat.²⁴ In the fifth century, St. Patrick anathematized the pagan scryers of Ireland.²⁵ By the thirteenth century, scrying had come under inquisitorial jurisdiction.²⁶

Both dowsing and scrying survived the Protestant Reformation; whereas protestant clerics condemned magic and divining with more zeal than the

²⁰ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

²¹ Christopher Bird, *The Divining Hand: The Art of Searching for Water, Oil, Minerals, and other Natural Resources or Anything Lost Missing or Badly Needed* (Atglen, Pennsylvania: Whitford Press, 1993), 68-69. See also Cavendish, ed., *Man, Myth, and Magic*, s.v. "Hazel."

²² Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 63-64.

²³ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 47-51. See also Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 151, 158, , 165, 190.

²⁴ W. R. Jones, "'Hill-Diggers' and 'Hell-Raisers': Treasure Hunting and the Supernatural in Old and New England," in *Wonders of the Invisible World, 1600-1900: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings, 1992*, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 97-106.

²⁵ *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Edited, After Spelman and Wilkins, by Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 2:329.

²⁶ Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 190.

Catholic church, they had less effect.²⁷ Of course, many who stood beyond the pale of the reformation continued the ancient methods. Like the oracle at Delphi, the French diviner Nostradamus sat before a basin placed on a stand. "With divining rod in hand" he stirred the water, causing it to reveal visions.²⁸

In the 1556 treatise *De Re Metallica*, German author Georgius Agricola described and illustrated the method of dowsing with a forked rod used by the miners of the Harz mountains to find underground ore. In addition to using rods, their "wizards" also used "rings, mirrors and crystals."²⁹ The German method reached the British Isles when Queen Elizabeth hired German miners to develop the mines of Cornwall.³⁰ Dowsing for precious minerals branched into dowsing for water and also for buried treasure. By the end of the seventeenth century, waterwitching and treasure-seeking with divining rods was common in England.³¹ In 1563, the protestant-controlled Parliament outlawed divining for treasure and missing objects.³²

²⁷ Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. "Magic."

²⁸ Century I:1-2. I have used *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, trans. Henry C. Roberts (Oyster Bay, New York: Nostradamus Co., 1982).

²⁹ Georgius Agricola, *De Re Metallica*, trans. Herbert Clark Hoover and Lou Henry Hoover (Basileae, 1556; New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 38-40.

³⁰ Charles R. Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1933), 55.

³¹ George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 206. For this period, see also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³² Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformatio*, s.v. "Magic."

With such a rich European heritage, it was inevitable that divination would cross the Atlantic. Even in Puritan New England, dowsing, scrying, astrology, palmistry, and other forms of divination have been documented.³³ The established church simply could not satisfy all the needs of its members. Puritan cleric Anthony Burgess complained, “if men have lost anything, if they be in any pain or disease, then they presently run to such as they call wise men.”³⁴ “Wise men and “wise women” fell into two camps—good and evil. The witch trials in Salem stand as a grim witness to early American belief in black magic. John L. Brooke notes that “ordinary folk throughout the eighteenth century continued to protect themselves from witchcraft with countervailing white magic.”³⁵

Unorthodox supernatural belief and divining practices persisted into the early republic. Whereas the upper crust of society had imbibed the doctrines of Enlightenment rationality, most ordinary Americans had not. Contemporary sources show that dowsers in the early republic used rods in precisely the same way the Harz miners of the fifteenth century had.³⁶ American men used their rods to find artesian water, mineral wealth, and buried treasure.³⁷

³³ Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 34-38. On this period, see also Jon Butler, “Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600-1760,” *American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (April 1979): 317-346.

³⁴ Anthony Burgess, *CXLV Expository Sermons upon the Whole Seventeenth Chapter of the Gospel According to Saint John* (London, 1656), 95, quoted in Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion*, 24.

³⁵ Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 71.

³⁶ “The Divining Rod,” *The American Journal of Science and Arts* (New Haven, Connecticut), October 1826, 201-12.

³⁷ For a Freudian interpretation of the male use of divining rods, see Emilio Servadio, “La Baguette des Sourciers: Essai D'interprétation Psychanalytique,” *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse* 8 (1935): 488-500.

The quest for buried wealth and its ideology have, for the most part, slipped away into a forgotten world. Though strange to us today, treasure-seeking beliefs have probably influenced hundreds of thousands of Europeans. People have been digging for treasure for centuries if not millennia—usually in the form of grave-robbing. Treasure seeking's transatlantic transplantation from Europe to America involved elements of both survival and dynamic development.³⁸

A nuts and bolts look at this folkway in early America is instructive. Many believed that treasures had been secreted in the earth by the ancient inhabitants of the continent, Spanish explorers, pirates, or even the dwarves of European mythology. Treasure hunters usually looked to hills, caves, lost mines, and Native American mounds as places to find these hidden deposits. A legend, a map, or a dream of buried wealth initiated the treasure quest. Local specialists were enlisted to use their divining rods or seer stones to locate the treasure. To keep their hoard to themselves, treasure seekers worked under the cover of darkness.

Although the hoard had been located, further preparation was required. The party staked out magical circles around the treasure; used Bible passages, prayers, hymns, and incantations; ritual swords and other magical instruments;

³⁸Wayland D. Hand, "The Quest for Buried Treasure: A Chapter in American Folk Legendry," in *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh*, ed. Nikolai Burlakoff and Carl Lindahl, with Harry Gammerdinger, Elissa R. Henken, Egle Victoria Z'ygias, and Barry E. Childs, and Merry Weed, and Betty Jane BeLanus, and Elizabeth Peterson (Bloomington, Indiana: Trickster Press, 1980), 112-19; Jones, "'Hill-Diggers' and 'Hell-Raisers': Treasure Hunting and the Supernatural in Old and New England," 97-106.

or even propitiatory animal sacrifices to keep the treasure guardian at bay. Excavation usually commenced under a rule of silence. Should someone carelessly mutter or curse, the guardian could penetrate the circle or carry the treasure away through the earth. For one reason or another, the treasure seekers usually returned home empty handed.³⁹

Treasure seeking was common in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Historian Alan Taylor sees it as “part of an attempt to recapture the simplicity and magical power associated with apostolic Christianity.”⁴¹ He documents 48 episodes in the American northeast,⁴² but this number represents only a fraction of America’s activity in treasure quest. Unlike the organized churches and congregations of early America, the treasure-seeking “companies” and “gangs” employed no clerks and kept no records. We usually only see them through the eyes of those who lampooned their nocturnal adventures in newspapers and periodical literature.

Treasure seekers felt uneasy about this scrutiny. Working under the cover of darkness not only concealed the location of hidden wealth they sought, but

³⁹ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 6-34; Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 429-459; Gerard T. Hurley, “Buried Treasure Tales in America,” *Western Folklore* X, no. 3 (July 1951): 197-216; Byrd Howell Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures Applied to Redaction of Arizona Legends, and to Lost Mine and Treasure Legends Exterior to Arizona* (n.p., Finland: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica; Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1977).

⁴⁰ Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 445-48; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 7-9. Consider also the comments of Clyde Forsburg in *Mormonism in American Historiography*.

⁴¹ Taylor, “Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith’s Treasure Seeking,” 141.

⁴² Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 26-27, table 1: “Treasure-Seeking Episodes in the American Northeast.”

spared them from the ridicule of “sophisticated” onlookers. Alan Taylor writes that “contempt for treasure seeking became universal among the genteel by the early nineteenth [century] as part of their wider criticism of the common folk for inadequate ambition, lackluster work discipline, labor, and attachment to tradition.”⁴³ Waterwitching fell under the same opprobrium. And yet, as Jon Butler points out, very few had the confidence to dig a well without having it witched first.⁴⁴

Waterwitches used freshly cut branches of wood because of the water inside them. This practice rests on the principle of sympathy so prevalent in magic. The most well-known example of sympathetic magic is the Voodoo doll. By sticking needles into an imitation of an enemy, one can injure the actual person. The sympathies between the water in the “succulent twig” and the water under the ground resulted in an attraction that made discovery possible.⁴⁵ One Pennsylvanian German formula for cutting a rod included a consecration: “Divining wand, do thou keep that power that God gave thee in the very first hour.” This “power” was apparently the ability to draw water.⁴⁶

Dowsers trying to find metal held similar ideas. In 1826, the *American Journal of Science* reported the general notion that “the rod is influenced by

⁴³ Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 16.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 228-29.

⁴⁵ “The Divining Rod,” *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, October 1826, 204.

⁴⁶ Letitia Humphreys Wrenshall, “Incantations and Popular Healing in Maryland and Pennsylvania,” *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* 15, no. 59 (October-December 1902): 271.

ores."⁴⁷ An article appearing in 1825 stated that the dipping of a divining rod "closely resembles the dip of the magnetic needle, when traversing a bed of ore."⁴⁸ In the late eighteenth century, English traveller Thomas Pennant recorded the belief in Wales that the divining rod, "by powers sympathetic with the latent ore, was . . . to point out the very spot where the treasure lay."⁴⁹ Almost half century earlier, Benjamin Franklin had parodied American treasure-seekers who used a "*Mercurial Wand and Magnet*."⁵⁰ In fact, this idea had been around at least as early as 1639 when British dowser Gabriel Plattes wrote of his rod, "it guided mee to the Orifice of a lead mine." Plattes explained the rod was "of kin to the Load-stone, drawing Iron to it by a secret vertue, inbred by nature, and not by any conjuration as some have fondly imagined."⁵¹ Plattes preferred a strictly scientific explanation for dowsing.

The American population boom and westward migration into trans-Appalachia that followed the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 necessitated thousands of new wells. This in turn required waterwitches to locate sites for digging. Both waterwitches and treasure seekers enjoyed more prestige in the West. Freed from the Puritan stranglehold of the north Atlantic seaboard,

⁴⁷ "The Divining Rod," *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, October 1826, 204.

⁴⁸ "The Divining Rod," *The Worcester Magazine and Historical Journal*, October 1825, 29.

⁴⁹ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Wales, 1770*, (London: Henry Hughes, 1778), 1:53-54.

⁵⁰ Benjamin Franklin, "The Busy-Body, No. 8," *The American Weekly Mercury*, 27 March 1729; reprinted in Leonard W. Labaree, ed., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 1:136.

⁵¹ Gabriel Plattes, *A Discovery of Subterranean Treasure* (London: 1639), 11-13.

treasure-seeking flourished in Vermont. The Green Mountains running North and South through the middle of the state formed its treasure belt.⁵²

In Rutland County's Middletown, Congregationalist excommunicant Nathaniel Wood led a "fraternity of rodsmen" who called themselves the "New Israelites." This movement has been more commonly referred to as the "Wood Scrape" because of the heightened anxieties they caused in Middletown when they predicted 14 January 1802 as a day of apocalypse. We know very little of the New Israelites. The earliest source that mentions them is a short article that appeared in a Vermont newspaper in 1828. This article explained their use of rods for divination.

They claimed . . . inspired power, with which to cure all sorts of diseases—intuitive knowledge of lost or stolen goods, and ability to discover the hidden treasures of the earth The instrument of their miraculous powers, was a cleft stick, or *rod*, something of the form of an inverted Y; and when this talisman was firmly grasped in either hand, by its two points, it was believed to indicate the proper course to be pursued, or point out some substances of medicinal utility, or fix the locality of some valuable mine;— whichever of these the agent was pleased to wish.
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⁵² Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 28; Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 447; Stephen Greene, "Money Diggers," *Vermont Life* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1969): p. 46, col. 1; p. 48.

⁵³ Ovid Miner, "The Rodsmen," *Vermont American* (Middlebury, Vermont), 7 May 1828, p. [2], cols. 3-4. On the New Israelites, see also P., n.p., "to the Editor of the American, Middlebury, Vermont, n.d., in *Vermont American*, 1828 August 6, p. [2], col. 5; Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middleton, Vermont* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle and Co., 1867), 37, 42-64; Barnes Frisbie, "Middletown," in *Orleans and Rutland Counties*, vol. 3 of *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer: A Magazine Embracing a History of Each Town, Civil, Ecclesiastical, Biographical and Military*, ed. Abby Maria Hemenway (Claremont, New Hampshire: The Claremont Manufacturing Company, 1877), 809-19; *History of Wells, Vermont, For the First Century After Its Settlement; By Hiland Paul, with Biographical Sketches by Robert Parks, Esq. With an Introduction to the New Edition* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1869; Wells, Vermont: Wells Historical Society, 1979), 79-82; David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (Montpelier: The Vermont Historical Society, 1948), 240-242; Elmer J. Culp, "Early Vermont Roots of Mormonism," *Ts* (Vermont: Wells Historical Society, 6 February 1980); Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 53-55; David Pursuitte,

When the anticipated day of destruction came and went, the New Israelites decided to leave town. Most resettled in St. Lawrence County, New York. Perhaps their rods indicated “the proper course to be pursued.”

Treasure seeking also flourished throughout New York state.⁵⁴ Caroline Rockwell Smith, who grew up just down the road from the Smith family farm, remembered “considerable digging for money in our neighborhood by men, women, and children.”⁵⁵ Smith neighbors Joshua Stafford, William Stafford, and Sally Chase used seer stones in an effort to locate these treasures.⁵⁶ While living in Vermont and New York, the Smiths found themselves in a culture that included treasure seeking, divining rods, and seer stones.

Smith Family Divination

Friends and enemies of the Smith family recounted them using a variety of divination methods. Joseph Smith Senior may have inherited a tradition of

Joseph Smith and the Origins of The Book of Mormon (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 1985), 234-238; Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 521-25; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 20, 24; Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire*, 31, 50-8, 102-6, 121-4, 132-142, 213, 282, 355n53, 357n12; Brooke, “The True Spiritual Seed’: Sectarian Religion and the Persistence of the Occult in Eighteenth-Century New England,” in *Wonders of the Invisible World, 1600–1900: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings, 1992*, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 123-24; Dan Vogel’s editorial notes to the original Frisbie account in *Early Mormon Documents* 1:599-621, [hereafter *EMD*,]; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 35-36, 121-135; Larry E. Morris, “Oliver Cowdery’s Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 106-18.

⁵⁴ Walker, “The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting,” 451; Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 26-27.

⁵⁵ Mrs. M. C. R. Smith, statement, 25 March 1885, in Arthur B. Deming, “Mormon Prophet,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 3.

⁵⁶ These seers receive full treatment in chapter 4.

divination from his father Asael. Writing for Joseph Smith Junior, one of his scribes recorded, "My grandfather, Asael Smith, long ago predicted that there would be a prophet raised up in his family, and my grandmother was fully satisfied that it was fulfilled in me."⁵⁷ This extraordinary presentiment may have operated to some extent as a self-fulfilling prophecy. What descendants of Asael, aware of the prediction, would not wonder if they or one of their children might become the promised prophet? In 1828, Joseph Senior or maybe Hyrum wrote a letter to his father's family telling them about his son's recent spiritual experiences. But the story of the golden plates was just too strange for the extended family. Then Joseph Junior himself wrote a letter. Asael's son John read the letter and was impressed. His son George A. Smith later recounted, "I well remember the remark he made about it. 'Why,' said he, 'he writes like a prophet.'"⁵⁸ Was John looking for a prophet?

Grandfather Asael Smith may have expected to see the fulfillment of this prediction, for he was a man with a millennialist mind-set. Like other millennialists of his day, he anticipated the 1000 years of peace promised in the Bible. In a Christian eschatological timetable, the fulfillment of Asael's prediction would precede the millennium. Chiliastic belief, then, determined that the predicted prophet must soon arise.

⁵⁷ *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols., (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1976), Period 1, "History of Joseph Smith the Prophet," vol. 2, 443. [Hereafter HC.]

⁵⁸ "A Discourse by Elder George A. Smith, delivered in the Bowery, Great Salt Lake City, Sunday Afternoon, August 2, 1857," *JD* 5 (1857):102-3.

Asael's millennial beliefs appear in the two documents we have in his hand. In a 1796 letter, he wrote:

He [the Supreme Ruler of universal nature] has conducted us through a glorious revolution and has brought us into the promised land of peace and liberty. And I believe that he is about to bring all the world into the same beatitude in his own time and way.⁵⁹

Such Americanization of the millennium abounded in the early Republic.⁶⁰ Asael continued:

I believe that the stone is now cut out of the mountain without hands, spoken of by Daniel, and has smitten the image upon his feet, by which the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold — viz., all monarchial and ecclesiastical tyranny — will be broken to pieces and become as the chaff of the summer thrashing floor. The wind shall carry them all away that there shall be not place found for them.⁶¹

When Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image and the stone, he prophesied, "in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44). Citing Daniel's dream interpretation also marks Asael as a chiliast. Daniel's prophetic interpretation was standard millenarian fare. Indeed, a number of early American writers invoked the second

⁵⁹ Asael Smith, Tunbridge, Vermont, to Jacob Towne Junior, Topsfield, Vermont, 14 January 1796, Ms; photograph and edited transcript in Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage: Influences of Grandfathers Solomon Mack and Asael Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1971), 119-123.

⁶⁰ George M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1990), 40-1; Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968; Midway reprint, 1980); David J. Whittaker, "The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought," 1:180n9.

⁶¹ Asael Smith to Jacob Towne Junior, 14 January 1796, Ms; edited and photographically reproduced in Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 119-123.

chapter of Daniel — including the image of the stone cut without hands — to interpret the establishment of American liberty.⁶² Transverse in the margin of Asael's letter, he penned, "I expect my son Joseph will be married in a few days."⁶³ The fruit of this union would end up playing a part in Asael's eschatology.

The millennialist views of Joseph Smith Junior's grandfather were constant to the last. Near the end of his life, Asael expressed millennial expectations in his parting words of advice to his wife and children. The dying patriarch closed his remarks with the following: "So come Lord Jesus come Quickly Amen."⁶⁴ This quotation of Revelation 22:20 is the apostle John's response to the resurrected and glorified Jesus' revelation to him: "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12).⁶⁵

Like his grandfather, Joseph Smith Junior anticipated the millennial reign of Christ. Joseph's particular brand of apocalyptic millenarianism has been ably

⁶² For a list, consult Whittaker, "The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought," 181n12.

⁶³ Asael Smith to Jacob Towne Junior, 14 January 1796, Ms; edited and photographically reproduced in Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 119-123.

⁶⁴ Asael Smith, "A few words of advice which I Leave to you my Dear wife and children whome I expect ear Long to Leave," 10 April 1799, Ms; photographic reproduction in Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, 140.

⁶⁵ Both post-millennialists and pre-millennialists, or apocalyptic milenarians, abounded in Asael's day. post-millennialists believed that a universal spiritual renaissance would prepare the earth so that Christ could return. In this eschatology humans play a role in bringing the millenium. Apocalyptic milenarians believed that Christ would arrive according to a divine timetable, destroy the wicked, and then usher in the bright millennial day. Asael's plea, "come Lord Jesus come Quickly," seems to imply a pre-millennial eschatology, wherein Christ will bring the millenium. Asael's use of Daniel is more ambiguous, and seems somewhat post-millennial. Daniel's prophecy did however figure in premillennialist eschatologies. For example, Asael's grandson, Joseph Smith Junior, certainly an apocalyptic millenarian, incorporated an American interpretation of Daniel's prophecy into his eschatology. I class Asael as a pre-millennialist.

expounded by others.⁶⁶ However, his eschatology has not been compared to his grandfather Asael's. In particular, Joseph shared his grandfather's vision as to how the American revolution and the establishment of American liberty would usher in the bright millennial day: According to Council of Fifty member Benjamin F. Johnson, Joseph "taught us relating to the Kingdom of God as it would become organized upon the Earth, through all nations . . . adopting the God-given Constitution of the United States as a palladium of liberty and equal rights."⁶⁷

Like Asael, Joseph spoke of the stone cut out of the mountain without hands. Indeed, he used the imagery of Daniel chapter 2 throughout his ministry.⁶⁸ In 1844, he even proclaimed, "I calculate to be one of the Instruments of setting up the Kingdom of Daniel, by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world."⁶⁹ Joseph's cousin George A. Smith later stated, "My grandfather, Asahel Smith, heard of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and he said it was true, for he knew that something would turn up in his family that would revolutionize the world."⁷⁰ True to his

⁶⁶ See especially Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

⁶⁷ B[enjamin] F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, Salt Lake City, 1903, Ms; edited by Fred Collier in *Doctrine of the Priesthood* 7, no. 5 (May 1990): 12.

⁶⁸ Whittaker, "The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought," 155-201.

⁶⁹ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980; Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991), 367.

⁷⁰ George A. Smith, "Joseph Smith's Family — Details of George A. Smith's Own Experience, Etc.," 2 August 1857, Salt Lake City, *JD* 5 (1858): p. 102, col. 1. Church Historian B. H. Roberts wrote, "In the fall of 1828, Asael Smith . . . received a letter from Joseph Smith, Sen.,

word, Joseph Smith formally established the political kingdom of God on earth, and told its leaders that it was the stone cut out of the mountain without hands.⁷¹ Finally, Jesus Christ's promise, "behold, I come quickly," occurs frequently in Joseph Smith's revelations.⁷²

These strong parallels between Asael and Joseph Junior's millennialist thought point to Joseph Smith Senior as a conduit of transmission. Like his father, Joseph Smith Senior was a millennialist. Although their evidence is slim, D. Michael Quinn and John L. Brooke argue that while in Vermont Joseph Smith Senior was one of the New Israelites—an apocalyptic millenarian cult of the strongest variety.⁷³ Whether Joseph's father associated with the New Israelites or not, he lived in a national culture of millennialism.⁷⁴ As an inheritor and perpetuator of a family tradition of millennial expectation, and living in a national environment wherein such expectations were common, Joseph Smith Senior must also have scanned the temporal horizon for an imminent eschaton.

informing him of some of the visions the youthful Prophet had received" (HC 1:285n*). The location of this letter is unknown.

⁷¹ Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967; Bison Book edition, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974); Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1958; Salt Lake City: Hawkes Publishing, 1972); D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844-1945," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 2 (winter 1980): 163-197; Andrew F. Ehat, "It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth': Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 (spring 1981): 253-279.

⁷² *PJS*, 1:7; Doctrine and Covenants 33:18; 34:12; 35:27; 39:24; 41:4; 49:28; 54:10; 68:35; 88:126; 99:5; 112:34; see also HC, 2:20.

⁷³ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 116-135; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 31, 50-58, 102-6, 121-24, 132-142, 213, 282, 357n12.

⁷⁴ Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (n.p.: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984; New York: Penguin Books USA, The Penguin Group, 1985), 186, 190; Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, 60.

He probably expected that his father's prediction of a prophet in the family would soon be fulfilled.

Nothing indicates how Asael made his prediction. It seems to have been a mere presentiment—which Zuesse would classify as intuitive divination. The modes of divination employed by Joseph Smith Senior are better documented. He used a divining rod to find artesian water, buried treasure, and stray livestock. In 1830, Palmyra businessman Fayette Lapham and an acquaintance of his visited father Smith to ask him about the golden plates. Forty years later, Lapham reminisced that Joseph spoke of his family's treasure seeking and claimed "that he himself had spent both time and money searching for it, with divining rods."⁷⁵ In 1833, Peter Ingersoll, whose farm adjoined the Smith farm, reported that he had seen father Smith divine with "a small stick in his hand" in the spring of 1822 or 1823 and on another occasion sometime before 1827.⁷⁶ These and a few other late accounts speak of father Smith rod divining while residing in the state of New York.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Fayette Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, (Boston), May 1870, p. 306, col. 1.

⁷⁶ Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232-34. Ingersoll first met the Smiths in 1822. He places the second story chronologically before first story and August of 1827. I establish the date of the first story below.

⁷⁷ Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine* (Philadelphia), August 1880, 198; [James]. H. Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism: Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1888), 19; Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois: From Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Co.; New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1854; new edition, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 174; John W. Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New York; Containing a General Collection of the Most Interesting Facts, Traditions, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, &c. Relating to its History and Antiquities, with Geographical Descriptions of Every Township in the State* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1842), 580; Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middleton, Vermont*, 37, 42-64. British traveler Edward S. Abdy published a travel narrative of his visit to America. He wrote

One contemporary account exists—a letter from his brother Jesse. It provides details about Joseph’s use of the divining rod if critically read. Jesse wrote to Joseph Senior’s son Hyrum in response to a letter Hyrum had sent regarding the golden plates and the Book of Mormon translation. Jesse warned:

it is true he [God] passeth by iniquity[,] transgression[,] and sin in his redeemed ones, he sees their shield, and for his sake receives them to favour, but to such as make lead books, And declare to the world that they are of the most fine gold, calling on the great & dreadful name of the most High to witness the truth of their assertions, He says “depart from me ye that work iniquity,” and again “these shall go away into everlasting punishment, they shall be cast into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” these are the angels that tell where to find gold books.⁷⁸

Jesse’s rejection of his kinsman’s claims is clear. It remains unclear whether Jesse believed that Joseph had constructed the plates himself from lead or had received them from a demon.

Jesse’s stinging letter was also provoked by the visit of a Mormon missionary—probably Book of Mormon scribe and golden plates witness Martin Harris.⁷⁹ Jesse wrote, “he says your father has a wand or rod like Jannes & Jambres who withstood Moses in Egypt that he can tell the distance from India to Ethiopia &c[.]” In his second epistle to Timothy, the apostle Paul named Jannes and Jambres as the two magicians who challenged Moses and Aaron in

that while in New York he spoke with an early settler of Rochester who claimed to have known Joseph Smith Junior. The Rochestarian described a man “between forty and fifty years of age.” At the time of the book’s publication, Joseph was only 29. The description better fits his father. E. S. Aaby, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834* (London: John Murray, 1835), 317-18, 324-25.

⁷⁸ Jesse Smith, Stockholm, New York, to Hiram Smith, Palmyra, New York, 17 June 1829; transcribed in Joseph Smith Letterbook, 1837–1843, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, vol. 2, p. 59-61.

⁷⁹ EMD, 1:553n2, 554n5.

Pharaoh's court (3:8). The seventh chapter of Exodus tells the story of this confrontation. As the Lord commanded:

Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. (10-12)

Drawing on Jesse's biblical allusions, Richard Lloyd Anderson attempts to reconstruct the original content of Martin Harris' comments regarding Joseph Senior's rod.

Since his rhetoric associates the Smith rod with God's enemies, a 180 degree correction must be made. Jesse consistently takes the words of his visionary kinsmen and makes exact reversals. His sarcasm changes their "gold book" to a "lead book" and makes their "angel of the Lord" into one of Satan's angels. Jesse regularly changes the good source to an evil one, and the opposite of the wands of Jannes and Jambres would be the rod of Aaron.⁸⁰

Two months before Jesse penned his letter, Joseph Junior had received a revelation for Oliver Cowdery regarding the latter's "gift of working with the rod." Smith and Cowdery later published this revelation with the wording changed to read "gift of Aaron." Thus, both Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith Senior had Aaronic rods in mid-1829.⁸¹

When did father Smith begin using a divining rod? In 1843, Mormon schismatic James C. Brewster—who had searched for treasure with Joseph Smith, Senior, in the Kirtland, Ohio, area—recounted that in the summer of 1837 the elder Smith claimed, "I know more about money digging, than any man in this

⁸⁰ Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 527.

⁸¹ Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 521-32.

generation, for I have been in the business more than thirty years.”⁸² If Brewster can be trusted, Joseph had been hunting treasure as far back as 1807. One might hazard the guess that he began treasure hunting sometime between 1797 and 1807. If he hunted before this time, he would have claimed to have been in the business more than forty years. Brewster’s reminiscence dates Joseph Smith Senior’s treasure hunting back to his Vermont years. He moved New York in 1816. Vermont sources affirm that Joseph did dig for treasure there.⁸³

Some historians take father Smith’s assertion to mean that he had been treasure dowsing for at least thirty years.⁸⁴ Vermont treasure diviners used rods more than any other method to locate treasure.⁸⁵ So if Joseph divined treasure in Vermont, he probably used a rod. However, most treasure seekers were not treasure diviners. It remains unclear whether Joseph Smith Senior wielded a rod or a shovel during the early Vermont adventures. Joseph probably dug for treasure before he dowsed for it—picking up the latter skill by watching the treasure diviners who lead these parties. Frederic G. Mather and James H. Kennedy spoke with Smith’s former neighbors in New York and reported that

⁸² James Colin Brewster, *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Diggers* (n.p. [Springfield, Illinois?], n.p. [James Colin Brewster?], n.d. [1843?]), 4. This pamphlet ends with “JAMES COLIN BREWSTER, *Springfield, Ill.* March 20, 1843.” On the dating of their treasure ventures, see the Z. H. Brewster certificate printed on page 5. See also Dan Vogel, “James Colin Brewster: The Boy Prophet Who Challenged Mormon Authority,” in Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 126.

⁸³ See *EMD*, 1:597, 624-25.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire*, 133-39.

⁸⁵ See Table 1 of this thesis.

when he moved to New York he dowsed only water.⁸⁶ Later, he began dowsing for treasure.

Reading dowsing into digging probably derives in part from a desire to link Joseph Smith Senior to the “fraternity of rodsmen” led by Nathaniel Wood. As noted before, Quinn and Brooke attempt to tie Joseph Smith Senior into the Wood Scrape of 1802.⁸⁷ Six decades after the Wood Scrape occurred, a local historian reported a rumor that Joseph Smith Senior had resided in nearby Poultney during this time and had participated in the group as one of its “leading rods-men.”⁸⁸ The Smiths, however, lived in the White River Valley on

⁸⁶ Mather, “The Early Days of Mormonism,” p. 198, col. 2; Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 19.

⁸⁷ Brooke argues that Joseph Smith Senior was initially exposed to mining and metalurgy culture and folk beliefs in the late eighteenth century when copper mines were developed around Tunbridge. In fact, he speculates that Joseph and Asael may have labored in the mines and that Asael’s and Joseph’s coopering and Joseph’s well-digging may have grown out of the local mining industry (*The Refiner’s Fire*, 72-78). In Jesse’s 1829 letter, he asserts that the golden plates were “dug from the mines of atheism”—perhaps an allusion to Joseph’s former employment in the Tunbridge copper mines. When interviewed in 1881 by RLDS elders William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, John Stafford of Manchester recalled that “old Joe claimed he understood Geology and could tell all kinds of minerals” (John Stafford, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Rochester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library Archives, Independence, Missouri, pp. 14v-15r, in *EMD*, 2:87).

⁸⁸ Frisbie, *The History of Middleton, Vermont*, 62. William Cowdery, the father of Joseph Smith’s friend Oliver Cowdery, may have had an association with one of the New Israelites’ leading rodsmen (*ibid.*, 46; Parks, *History of Wells, Vermont, for the First Century After its Settlement*, 80). However, he apparently did not belong to the movement. Nancy Glass, who grew up in Wells, knew the Cowderys and thought William Cowdery had been a member of the New Israelites, but expressed some reserve on this point (*ibid.*, 80-82). Nancy Glass was apparently married to one of the sons of Rufus and Huldah Fuller Glass, who moved to Wells around 1787. Huldah Fuller Glass was sister to Rebecca Fuller Cowdery, William’s wife. The Cowdery family followed the Glass family to Wells and associated closely with them there. If Nancy married into the family, she may have had some knowledge of William’s participation through her husband. On the Rufus and Huldah Glass family, see Miller, “Oliver Cowdery’s Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism,” 107-109. Miller, however, provides evidence that William did not participate in the Wood Scrape (115-16).

the other side of the Green Mountains.⁸⁹ Current historical efforts to place Joseph Smith Senior in Poultney at the turn of the century remind one of the former project of placing Sidney Rigdon in Palmyra before 1830.⁹⁰

Joseph Smith Senior's brother Jesse Smith resided in Tunbridge during the time of the Wood Scrape and would have known if his brother had visited Poultney to lead the New Israelites with a rod. However, as Dan Vogel perceptively observes, the antagonistic Jesse reacted with surprise when he learned from a messenger that his brother had a divining rod.⁹¹ This observation should be further applied to the entire period of time in which Jesse and Joseph lived near each other. If Joseph dowsed before leaving Tunbridge, Jesse probably would have known about it. Joseph's departure from Tunbridge and brother Jesse took place sometime in 1808 or 1809.⁹² His initial use of a divining rod, therefore, should not be dated prior to this time.

The summer frosts of 1816, caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora the previous year, encouraged Joseph Smith Senior to move to a better climate.

⁸⁹ There do exist some strong parallels between the New Israelites and the Mormons. For example, both groups received revelations to build a temple (Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont*, 52). Vermont historian David M. Ludlum and Mormon historian Richard L. Anderson observe that parallels shared by the Mormons and the New Israelites derive from "common cultural roots, not direct relationships" (Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850*, 242; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 523).

⁹⁰ From 1834 to 1945, the prevailing counter-explanation for the Book of Mormon was the "Spalding theory," which held Sidney Rigdon responsible for producing the Book of Mormon. See Lester E. Bush, "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 4 (autumn 1977): 40-69.

⁹¹ EMD, 1:599.

⁹² EMD, 1:590.

Joseph heard of opportunity to be had in Palmyra, New York.⁹³ He may have used a divining rod to decide whether or not to leave Vermont or to decide where to move. The New Israelites asked their rods yes/no questions and waited for a “nod of assent” or stillness.⁹⁴ Joseph may have used this technique to decide whether or not he should leave the state or whether or not he should move to Palmyra.

As early Mormon history unfolded, divining implements cropped up in relation to other moves. In 1830, Book of Mormon witness Hiram Page received a series of revelations through his seer stone—one of which apparently located the New Jerusalem. Joseph Smith Junior received a revelation in September of that year stating that Page’s revelations had come from Satan. In Smith’s revelation, the Lord stated, “I say unto you, that it is not revealed, and no man knoweth where the city shall be built, but it shall be given hereafter.”⁹⁵

Like Moses, early nineteenth-century Vermont prophet Issac Bullard led his people with a staff.⁹⁶ Joseph’s disciples Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball used rods in association with moving. In 1837, while voyaging to the British Isles,

⁹³ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 41. John L. Brooke suggests that the Smiths moved to New York as part of a larger group of Vermont diviners (*The Refiner’s Fire*, 362n2). The New Israelites may have used their rods to decide to move to New York. If so, this would argue against Joseph Smith Senior being a “leading rodsman” in the group. The New Israelites preceded him in moving to New York. Neither does this mean Joseph followed the New Israelites into New York. Westward movement was general and Joseph Smith Senior did not leave Vermont until driven out by the summer frosts of 1816.

⁹⁴ Miner, “The Rodsmen,” *Vermont American*, 7 May 1828, p. [2], cols. 3-4.

⁹⁵ Book of Commandments 30:8, 11. For an analysis of the Page and Smith revelations, see Bruce G. Stewart, “Hiram Page: An Historical and Sociological Analysis of an Early Mormon Prototype” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1987), 112-139, 145.

⁹⁶ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 37.

Heber C. Kimball had a visionary dream in which Joseph Smith appeared to him and gave him a rod “with which . . . to guide the ship.”⁹⁷ On his return, Joseph gave rods to Kimball and to Brigham Young. Kimball held his rod when praying for revelation.⁹⁸ Rueben McBride remembered that “Joseph marked with his cane in the sand the track the saints would take to the Rocky Mountains.”⁹⁹ An early Church historian wrote that Brigham Young carried Oliver Cowdery’s Aaronic rod with him when he led the way to the Salt Lake Valley and then used it to point out where the temple should be built.¹⁰⁰ This was actually a cane.

⁹⁷ “Synopsis of the History of Heber Chase Kimball,” *Deseret News*, 21 April 1858, p. 1, col. 1.

⁹⁸ Kimball recorded rod revelations in his diaries and specified them as such (Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981], 248–49; Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 530–32). Quinn contends that “divining rods can give only yes-no answers” and that if Kimball’s rod was not the traditional forked stick, “then he still used a very old method of divination” of letting the staff fall to the ground and reading a yes or no answer from the direction in which the staff fell (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 257). Heber’s cousin-in-law Sarah M. Kimball stated, “Bro. Kimball showed me a rod that the Lord through the Prophet Joseph had given to him. He said that when he wanted to find out anything that was his right to know, all he had to do was to kneel down with the rod in his hand, and that sometimes the Lord would answer his questions before he had time to ask them” (Sarah M. Kimball, statement, 21 June 1892, quoted in Solomon F. Kimball, “Sacred History,” TMs, LDS Church Archives). Heber’s son Solomon stated that he heard the same from his mother and older sister, who added that “Pres. Young received a similar rod from the Lord at the same time” (Kimball, “Sacred History”). These accounts clarify that Kimball’s rod was not forked, but was rather a straight staff held in one hand. There is no divining rule against receiving complex revelations while holding a rod. Furthermore, one cannot receive answers to yes-no questions by determining the direction in which a staff falls *before* enquiring by this method. Early Kimball family sources outweigh Quinn’s environmental interpretation. Kimball appears in one photograph holding a staff or cane—perhaps the rod he received from Joseph Smith (Stanley B. Kimball, *On the Potter’s Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1987], ii).

⁹⁹ A. Karl Larson and Katherine Miles Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1980), 2:524–25.

¹⁰⁰ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 258.

Jesse Smith's vitriolic letter to his nephew Hyrum may imply that Joseph Senior used a rod to decide to move from Vermont to New York. Jesse's denunciation of his brother and nephew contain the clue:

. . . Alas, what is man when left to his own way, he makes his own gods, if a golden calf, he falls down and worships before it, and says this is my god which brought me out of the land of Vermont. If it be a gold book discovered by the necromancy of infidelity, & dug from the mines of atheism, he writes that the Angel of the Lord has revealed to him the hidden treasure of wisdom and knowledge

The parallel structure in Jesse's letter can be used to decode what he had heard from Martin Harris about Joseph Smith Senior. Joseph Junior did write that an angel of the Lord revealed the plates to him. Likewise, Joseph Senior apparently did say that his God had brought him out of the Land of Vermont. Joseph Junior did claim to have the golden plates. Likewise, Joseph Senior apparently did possess a "golden calf." Of course, even if the elder Smith had the resources to obtain a mass of gold, he would not have created an idol with it.

Whatever Jesse meant by the "golden calf," his word choice was excellent for two reasons. First, the *golden* calf in Jesse's critique of the elder Joseph paralleled the *golden* plates in his critique of the younger Joseph. Second, while journeying from Egypt the children of Israel made a golden calf idol and worshipped it as their deliverer from bondage. These reasons made the golden calf an appropriate metaphor for whatever "god" brought Joseph Senior out of Vermont.

What are we to make then of this "golden calf?" Again, as noted by Richard L. Anderson, Jesse's sarcasm requires a 180-degree correction. Jehovah,

not the golden calf, led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Therefore, Jehovah is the God who led Joseph Smith Senior out of Vermont. Just as Jannes and Jambres competed with Moses for power and authority, the golden calf competed with Jehovah for the Israelites' devotion. Reversing roles within Jesse's own metaphor produces a reconstruction that associates Joseph Senior with Moses. Just as Moses lead his people to the promised land, Joseph Senior lead his family to Palmyra. The Lord told Moses, "lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea" (Exodus 14:16). Like Moses, Joseph Senior may have used a rod to lead his family to their new promised land.

Jesse asserts that the Smiths made their gods with their own hands. He apparently believed that Joseph Junior constructed a bogus set of plates from lead. His charge that Joseph Senior made a god out of his own hands probably refers to Joseph Senior cutting a divining rod from a bush or tree.

Based perhaps on the magnetic principles associated with divining rods, they could serve as compasses. For example, in the early nineteenth century a rodsman known as "the Commodore" was challenged to use his rod to find "some curious stone monuments." To find the monuments, he "turned round on his feet to each point of the compass, watching carefully in what direction it [his rod] leaned." The Commodore also asked his rod yes/no questions.¹⁰¹ Joseph may have used a rod in this manner to decide whether and where to go.

¹⁰¹ "A History of the Divining Rod; with the Adventures of an Old Rodsman," *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review* (Washington, DC), April 1850, 318-19. Walker D. Wyman

In the beginning of the Book of Mormon, father Lehi leads his family to “the promised land” by following the directions of a “compass” that the Lord placed in front of his tent in the night. Wandering in the wilderness, Moses used his rod to draw water from a rock. Similarly, the spindles of the compass led Lehi’s family to the “more fertile parts of the wilderness”—places with water.¹⁰² For those who take the Book of Mormon as disguised autobiography, Lehi’s use of the compass to find the promised land will confirm father Smith’s use of a rod in choosing to move to Palmyra. Those who accept the historicity of the Bible and the Book of Mormon may see the use of rod and compass in the exodi of Moses, Lehi, and Joseph Smith Senior as part of a divine pattern.¹⁰³

Joseph and Lucy had moved their family a number of times, but always within the vicinity of their ancestral homeland. Pulling up roots to move westward posed a more difficult decision. If Joseph Senior had a rod by this time, it makes sense that he would have inquired by it concerning the family move.¹⁰⁴

The Smith family spent their first three years in New York in the village of Palmyra. After that, they moved southward to the Palmyra-Manchester township line to farm. Local historians and former neighbors recalled that when

gives an example of using a divining rod to find true north (Wyman, *Witching for Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals: A Persistent Folk Belief from Frontier Days down to the Present* [Park Falls, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977], 45).

¹⁰² 1 Nephi 16:16; Alma 37:38.

¹⁰³ In 1888, a *New York Times* reporter visited Palmyra. His report, apparently based on local rumor, seems to imply that Joseph Senior brought his practice of dowsing from Vermont. “A Looked for Exposure,” *New-York Times* (New York, New York), 26 February 1888, p. 16, col. 6.

¹⁰⁴ Robert D. Anderson recognizes that Jesse’s letter implies that Joseph Senior “chose Palmyra through magical direction,” but Anderson does not specify the method (*Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith*, 33).

the Smiths first moved to Palmyra they opened a “cake and beer shop,” and Joseph Senior and the boys supplemented the family income by hiring out as harvesters and well-diggers.¹⁰⁵

In the 1930s, the LDS Church sent a representative, Willard Bean, to Palmyra to acquire and manage church historical sites. Based in part on the local traditions about the Smiths that he gathered while in the area, Bean wrote his *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of “Mormonism.”* Bean wrote that in addition to digging wells, the Smith males rocked wells, dug and rocked cisterns, and built fireplaces and rock walls.¹⁰⁶ These forms of labor related to his work as a well-digger. Water witching did as well. In their mid-twentieth century study of American water witching, anthropologist Evan Z. Vogt and psychologist Ray Hyman found that the five most common occupations held by water witches were—in order—farmer, well-driller, retired people or pensioners, ranchers, and general laborers.¹⁰⁷ The Smiths had farmed in Vermont and would farm again as

¹⁰⁵ Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism: Biography of Its Founders and History of Its Church: Personal Remembrances and Historical Collections Hitherto Unwritten* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1867), 12; W. H. McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York; with Illustrations Descriptive of its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Manufactories, From Original Sketches by Artists of the Highest Ability* (Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1877), p. 149, col. 2; Ellen E. Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 29; “Mormon Leaders at their Mecca,” *New York Herald* (New York, New York), 25 June 1893, p. 12, col. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Willard Bean, *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of “Mormonism”* (Palmyra, New York: Palmyra Courier Co., 1933), 19. See also Donald L. Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers on the Genesee,” in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1993), 222.

¹⁰⁷ Evan Z. Vogt and Ray Hyman, *Water Witching U.S.A.*, 2d ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1959; Phoenix Book ed., 1979), 164.

soon as possible. They also dug wells and hired out as general laborers. Joseph Senior fit squarely within water witching culture.

Joseph Senior seems to have dug wells in association with his ability to dowse water. J. H. Kennedy, who interviewed the Smith's Wayne County neighbors in preparation for his 1888 book on Mormonism, wrote that Smith Senior had been a water witch.¹⁰⁸ In the summer of 1880, investigative journalist Frederic G. Mather visited the old Smith neighborhood and spoke with Orlando Saunders. He reported father Smith's use of a "forked stick or hazel rod" to find water and treasure.¹⁰⁹

The term "water witch" derives from the witch hazel. Early American dowsers preferred this wood for its elasticity, and because its unseasonal budding reminded them of Aaron's rod that budded. Those aspiring for gentility, however, applied the connotations of the word "witch" to express their disdain for dowsing¹¹⁰—one of "the monstrous births of the dark ages which yet survive"—as a contemporary science magazine put it.¹¹¹ Joseph's water witching and subterranean dirty work probably contributed to the negative statements some of his neighbors later made about him. In 1887, Joseph Rogers recalled,

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 19. On Kennedy's interviewing, see v-vi.

¹⁰⁹ Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, August 1880, 198. On Joseph Smith Senior's water witching, see also Enders, "The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family," 222.

¹¹⁰ In an 1830 issue of a literary magazine, one unidentified author referred to dowsers as "water-wizards" rather than "water-witches." The etymology of this term traces back to black magic, not hazelwood. "The Money Diggers," *The Casket Flowers of Literature Wit and Sentiment* (Philadelphia), June 1830, p. 247, col. 1. Abner Cole, editor of Palmyra's local tabloid wrote that a person who used a seer stone was a "wizzard or witch" (Dogberry [Cole], "Gold Bible, No. 3," *The Reflector*, 1 February 1831, p. 93, col. 1).

¹¹¹ "The Divining Rod," *American Journal of Science & Arts*, October 1826, 211.

“old Joe, was called a devil. He was very intemperate, profane, and vulgar in conversation.”¹¹² James H. Kennedy called Joseph Smith Junior “the well-digger’s son” as a term of opprobrium.¹¹³

In 1825, the Smiths lost title to their farm and began paying rent to Lemuel Durfee who lived north of Palmyra Village. The Smiths paid part of their rent in labor. Donald L. Enders, curator of New York LDS sites, suggests that the Smiths dug and rocked some of the wells on the Durfee farm.¹¹⁴ It may have been at this time that the Smiths met Martin Harris, who lived just down the road from Durfee. Based on a conversation with Martin Harris Junior, Willard Bean wrote that Joseph Senior and Hyrum dug and rocked the well on the Martin Harris farm in the mid-1820s. Bean did not mention whether Joseph witched the well, but one of the reasons Bean wrote the book was to counter local traditions about the Smith family’s treasure seeking.¹¹⁵

Folklorists Austin and Alta Fife visited Palmyra, New York, in 1946 to collect folklore about Joseph Smith for their book *Saints of Sage and Saddle*—still

¹¹² Joseph Rogers, statement, Los Gatos, California, 16 May 1887, quoted in Arthur B. Deming, “Mormon Prophet,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism* (Oakland, California), April 1888, p. 1, col. 2.

¹¹³ James Harrison Kennedy, “The Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon,” 1890, Diedrich Willers Papers, Seneca Falls Historical Society, Seneca Falls, New York, pp. 1, 10.

¹¹⁴ Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family,” 222.

¹¹⁵ Bean, *A.B.C. History of Palmyra and the Beginning of “Mormonism,”* 35. Bean wrote that the Smiths dug the well in the fall of 1824, before they began exchanging labor for rent with Durfee. I suggest a reverse chronology. On Martin Harris Junior (1838–1913) as the source of the well story, see Rhet Stevens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years: A Play about Martin Harris, 1824–30* (Cache Valley, Utah: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), 113n71. For Bean’s treatment of treasure tales, see pp. 36–44.

the classic collection of Mormon folklore.¹⁶ They collected this item from a “Mrs.

Cryder” then living on the Martin Harris property:

The well was dug by Joseph Smith, the prophet’s father, and Hyrum, the brother of the Prophet. It is about thirty-three feet deep, goes right down in heavy gravel. They had to curb it. We are using it today. It was while they were digging this well that Martin became acquainted with the Smiths¹⁷

¹⁶ Austin and Alta Fife, *Saints of Sage and Saddle: Folklore Among the Mormons* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1956). The folklore items collected by the Fifes during their fieldwork in New York can be found in the Fife Mormon Collection [FMC], Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Milton R. Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. See FMC I, nos. 150-67.

¹⁷ “Mrs. Cryder (Kreider?),” Palmyra, New York, 15 April 1946, TMs, in FMC I, no. 169. In *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, the Fifes write: “Joseph Smith, Senior, and his sons were employed by various people to dig wells—an occupation they pursued intermittently for a number of years. While they were digging a well for the prosperous and respected Martin Harris of Palmyra, the latter was converted to the new sect . . . Both Joseph, Senior, and his son gained a reputation as water wizards . . . We are also told that Joseph, Junior, used a similar device to locate buried treasure.” (Austin and Alta Fife, *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, 110). For this information, they cite Th[omas] Gregg, *History of Hancock County, Illinois, Together with an Outline History of the State, and a Digest of State Laws* (Chicago: Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1880), 105; and “Nan Hill, ‘The Beginning of Mormonism,’ MS, Oxford, New York, c. 1938, 7 pp” (348n4). The information regarding Martin Harris does not come from Gregg, who merely repeats the information given by former Governor Thomas Ford in his history of Illinois (Ford, *A History of Illinois*, 174). The Fifes may have meant to cite Cryder at this point. I have tried in vain to locate the Nan Hill manuscript. It is not to be found in the Fife Mormon Collection in the Fife Folklore Archives or in the unprocessed Fife papers in the Manuscripts Collection of Special Collections and Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University. Michael C. Sutherland, curator of the Special Collections in the Mary Norton Clapp Library at Occidental College in Los Angeles, informs me that there is no such manuscript among the Fife papers there. Likewise, the Oxford Historical Society holds no such document. Oxford’s local historian, Charlotte Stafford, informs me that Nan Hill of Oxford married late in life to George Stratton. Both passed away about 20 years ago—Nan leaving no survivors who would have inherited a copy of the manuscript. It is now apparently impossible to know whether the Nan Hill manuscript actually discussed the Martin Harris well, and if so, whether she relied on a published source or local lore. The latter is a possibility: Oxford is about 35 miles from Harmony, where Martin Harris helped Joseph translate the golden plates. Information about Joseph Senior and Joseph Junior may have been brought to the Oxford area by one of their former treasure-seeking associates. Charles A. Newton, who dug with them in Harmony, Pennsylvania (Isaac Hale, David Hale, P. Newton, Chas. A. Newton, Jos. Smith, Sen., Isaiah [Josiah] Stowell, Calvin Stowell, Jos. Smith, Jr., Wm. I. Wiley, “Articles of Agreement,” Harmony, Pennsylvania, 1 November 1825, in *The Journal*, [Susquehanna, Pennsylvania], 20 March 1880, in “An Interesting Document,” *The Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, 23 April 1880, p. [4], col. 2), may be the Charles Newton who died in Oxford in 1841 (*Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 325, 397n2).

If Harris watched Joseph Senior successfully find water with his rod, it may have helped him believe Joseph Junior's later claim to have found golden plates with his seer stone.

In 1826, the *American Journal of Science* reported that while many looked down on dowsing, water witches maintained a certain degree of respect due to community reliance on their services. However, it also reported that "in all parts of the land, if the diviner hunt for metals, he becomes distrusted by the better sort of men."¹¹⁸ In February of 1831, the *Palmyra Reflector* reported, "soon after his [Joseph Smith Senior's] arrival here he evinced a firm belief in the existence of hidden treasures . . ."¹¹⁹ The Smiths probably began treasure-seeking in 1820.¹²⁰ As a water diviner and a treasure digger, treasure divining was a logical move for Joseph Senior. Frederic Mather wrote that father Smith eventually felt his "profession of a water witch did not bring enough ducats to the Smith family; so the attempt was made to find hidden treasures."¹²¹

How did one use a rod to find treasure? In old Germanic tradition, the dowser would say, "Rod, rod, I ask of thee, where may the best treasure lie?"¹²² The early nineteenth century dowser known as "the Commodore" followed this practice. "When inquiries were to be made as to the discovery of anything but

¹¹⁸ "The Divining Rod," *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, 204.

¹¹⁹ Dogberry [Cole], "Gold Bible, No. 3," *The Reflector*, 1 February 1831, p. 92, col. 3.

¹²⁰ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 45.

¹²¹ Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, August 1880, p. 198, col. 2.

¹²² Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, trans. James Steven Stallybrass (Gloucester, Massachussets: Peter Smith, 1976), 3:975-76.

minerals, such as stray animals, stolen goods, &c, his course of procedure was to swear the rod."¹²³ Peter Ingersoll, whose farm adjoined the Smith farm, recalled that Joseph Senior dowsed for treasure by whispering to his rod "work to the money."¹²⁴

Ingersoll stated that father Smith also used his rod to find stray livestock. Smith's and Ingersoll's animals had wandered off together. "Day after day was spent in fruitless search, until at length he proposed to find them by his art of divination." Smith found the cattle. Ingersoll believed that Smith had known where they were all along.¹²⁵

For the most part, dowsing with a rod constituted a mechanistic form of divination. The diviner followed the pull of the rod or waited for it to dip. But dowsing also had an ecstatic element. The rod would only work in the hands of someone who had a "gift" to use it.¹²⁶

Joseph Smith Senior also experienced descensional forms of divination. In her history of the Smith family, Lucy recorded a series of seven visionary dreams that her husband had in the 1810s.¹²⁷ The central concern of these dreams was finding true religion.¹²⁸ Lucy also had visions in the night. In Vermont, she had a

¹²³ "A History of the Divining Rod," 319.

¹²⁴ Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232-36.

¹²⁵ Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 234.

¹²⁶ On dowsing as a gift, see Vogt and Hyman, *Water-Witching U.S.A.*, 33; Wyman, *Witching for Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals*, 2, 13, 31, 38, 39-40.

¹²⁷ See the manuscript and published versions of Lucy's narration in *EMD*, 1:254-59.

¹²⁸ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 39.

dream in which her husband and her husband's brother Jesse were represented by two trees near a stream. The wind caused the branches of one tree to bend down toward the stream. Lucy recounted that the stream seemed to share "every sensation felt by the tree, for, as the branches danced over the stream, it would swell gently, then recede again" A band "that shone like burnished gold" around the trunk of this tree "moved in unison with the motion of the stream of the tree."¹²⁹ In contrast, the tree that represented Jesse stood stiffly in the wind. Lucy stated that she was given the interpretation of these symbols in this dream. The dream meant that in later life her husband would eventually find and accept the gospel of Jesus Christ with all his heart, but that Jesse never would.

The golden ring seems to have identified her husband's tree from Jesse's. Lucy stated that the wind that caused Joseph's branches to bend down over the stream represented the spirit of God. The branches that "danced over the stream" may represent Joseph's use of divining rods for water witching. The attraction between the branches and the stream may represent the principle of natural sympathies behind dowsing with a wooden branch freshly cut. However, it was the heavenly zephyr which caused the branches of the tree to turn downward over the water. This might affirm the belief held by Joseph and later by his son that "the gift of working with rod" came from God. Revelations received through Joseph concerning Oliver Cowdery's use of a rod reminded the latter that "it is

¹²⁹ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 251-53.

sacred and cometh from above” and that “there is no other power save God, that can cause this rod of nature, to work in your hands, for it is the work of God.”¹³⁰

Lucy’s dream, which occurred in 1804, may date Joseph’s use of divining rods to that year.¹³¹ However, Lucy asserted that the dream was prophetic of future events. Joseph’s acceptance of the gospel and Jesse’s rejection of it would take place in the next decade.

Lucy also had visionary dreams in New York. When visiting St. George, Utah, in the 1870s, Elizabeth Kane, the wife of American diplomat Thomas L. Kane, recorded in her diary a conversation she had with Porter Rockwell about Lucy. “Rockwell said his mother and Mrs. Smith used to spend their Saturday evenings together telling their dreams He often heard his mother and Mrs. Smith comparing notes, and telling how Such an one’s dream, and Such another’s pointed to the same lucky spot”¹³² Perhaps Joseph Senior used his rod to find the treasures dreamed of by Lucy.

In a 1932 interview with BYU Professor M. Wilford Poulson, Wallace Miner related another Lucy Smith dream. Miner, who lived between the Smith farm and the hill Cumorah, told Poulson that the neighbors “used to say mean things about Smith but I think they were a good family. Mrs. Smith was told in a

¹³⁰ Book of Commandments 5:5; 7:3.

¹³¹ EMD, 1:248-53, 248n41, 249n42.

¹³² Kane, *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah’s Dixie, 1872-73*, 74.

dream she would give birth to a son who would be a great leader.”¹³³ Miner’s report of a local rumor a full century after the alleged fact renders it highly unreliable. Still, it deserves consideration because Lucy recounted in her history that from before her son Joseph’s birth she “believed confidently that God would ~~a[t] some time~~ raise up some one who would be able to effect a reconciliation among those who desired to do his will at the expense of all things else.”¹³⁴ This belief may have derived from the dream that Miner attributed to her. In 1829, the Book of Mormon translation would reveal that another dreamer, Joseph of Egypt, had himself revealed that in the last days the Lord would raise up a great leader that would bring about the religious reconciliation that Lucy anticipated.

Yea, Joseph truly said: Thus saith the Lord unto me: A choice seer will I raise up out of the fruit of thy loins; and he shall be esteemed highly among the fruit of thy loins. And unto him will I give commandment that he shall do a work for the fruit of thy loins, his brethren, which shall be of great worth unto them, even to the bringing of them to the knowledge of the covenants which I have made with thy fathers. . . . And he shall be great like unto Moses . . . to bring forth my word unto the seed of thy loins—and not to the bringing forth my word only, saith the Lord, but to the convincing them of my word. Wherefore, the fruit of they loins shall write; and the fruit of the loins of Judah shall write; and that which shall be written . . . shall grow together, unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace among the fruit of thy loins, and bringing them to the knowledge of their fathers in the latter days, and also to the knowledge of the covenants, saith the Lord. . . . And thus prophesied Joseph, saying . . . his name shall be called after me; and it shall be after the name of his father. (2 Nephi 3:6-21; c.f. JST Genesis 50: 30-31)

¹³³ BYU Professor M. Wilford Poulson interviewed Miner in August 1932. See Poulson notebook, M. Wilford Poulson Papers, 1808-1965, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, p. [43].

¹³⁴ Lucy Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” 108, in *EMD*, 1:404-5.

According to Wallace Miner, Lucy, like Joseph of Egypt, expected this latter-day leader to arise “out of the fruit of [her] loins.” If Lucy’s anticipation of a religious reformer was indeed sparked by a dream, and, if this dream determined that the reformer would be one of her own children, then the dream may have caused her and Joseph Senior to look for Asael’s predicted prophet among their own children. John Stafford, who had known Lucy in New York, told RLDS interviewers that “[the] old woman Had a great deal [of] faith [that] their Child - was going to do something great.”¹³⁵

In addition to visionary dreams, Lucy also heard the voice of Christ. In 1798 Lucy Smith hovered on the verge of death, which deeply troubled her because she had not been baptized. During one “dark night of the soul,” she determined to make a covenant with God. Then she heard a voice declare, “Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Let your heart be comforted, ye believe in God, believe also in me.”¹³⁶

James H. Kennedy, who had spoken with former acquaintances of the Smith, wrote that Lucy “told fortunes.”¹³⁷ Astrology provided one method whereby to gain insight regarding the future. A folk astrology was very common

¹³⁵ John Stafford, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Rochester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 16, in *EMD*, 2:87, (bracket-edited according to Kelley’s published version: “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald* [Plano, Illinois], 1 June 1881, p. 167, col. 1). The edited version changes from the singular to the plural: “The old woman had a great deal of faith that their children were going to do something great.”

¹³⁶ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: Published for Orson Pratt by S. W. Richards, 1853; sold in London at the Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot), 47.

¹³⁷ Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism: Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo*, 11.

in early America and used for a variety of reasons. The Smith family may have used astrology to determine auspicious days for personal and family events. D. Michael Quinn argues that the Smiths relied heavily upon astrological wisdom.¹³⁸

For the modern city dweller, astrology seems quite foreign. We measure our lives in hours and minutes, constantly glancing at the clocks that hang or sit in every room. But on the early nineteenth-century family farm time was measured by the rising and setting of the sun, by the waxing and waning of the moon, and by the seasonal movements of stars. Astrology made more sense for those living in natural time and served as somewhat of a secondary calendar.

A basic astrology could be found in most American homes in the annual almanacs that proliferated at this time. Mormon historian David J. Whittaker asserts that it “would be inconceivable to argue that the Joseph Smith, Sr., family would not have owned and used an almanac or two.”¹³⁹ Although they despised astrology, enlightenment rationalists like Benjamin Franklin and evangelical Christian organizations like the American Tract Society included astrological tables and data in their Almanacs because they would not sell otherwise. Americans used almanac astrology to determine appropriate times for a wide variety activities—from mundane activities like weaning livestock to special events like digging for treasure.

¹³⁸ Quinn’s emphasis on astrology crops up throughout *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. See especially pp. 70-81.

¹³⁹ David J. Whittaker, “Almanacs in the New England Heritage of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 29, no. 4 (fall 1989): 93.

Early American almanacs included the “Man of Signs”—a figure of the human body showing which constellations in the zodiac governed which parts of the body.¹⁴⁰ The Man of Signs provided one connection between astrology and folk medicine. Astrological manuals also assigned signs of the zodiac to different parts of the face.¹⁴¹ The diary of early American midwife and herbalist healer Martha Ballard shows how she mixed astrology and other elements of folk-magic into her practice.¹⁴²

Lucy Smith may have relied upon astrology in her community role of folk-healer. Former neighbors remembered her as a wise woman with a reputation for ministering to the sick.¹⁴³ Orlando Saunders recalled that the Smiths “were the best family in the neighborhood in case of sickness. One was at my house nearly all the time when my father died.”¹⁴⁴ Hiram Jackway recollected that “old lady Smith was kind in sickness.”¹⁴⁵ The sister of Porter Rockwell, who lived just down the road from the Smiths, remembered that “Jo Smith’s mother doctored

¹⁴⁰ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 21-24.

¹⁴¹ Peter Benes, “Fortune Tellers, Wise-Men, and Magical Healers in New England, 1644–1850,” in *Wonders of the Invisible World, 1600–1900: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings, 1992*, ed. Peter Benes (Boston: Boston University Press, 1995), 144-47.

¹⁴² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990; New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1991), 49-58.

¹⁴³ On wise women and men in general, see Benes, “Fortune Tellers, Wise-Men, and Magical Healers in New England, 1644–1850,” 127-48.

¹⁴⁴ Orlando Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Palmyra, New York, 6 March 1881, William H. Kelley, Notebook No. 5, p. 6, in *EMD*, 2:85. See also William H. Kelley, “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 165, col. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Hiram Jackway, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Palmyra, New York, 6 March 1881, William H. Kelley, Notebook No. 5, p. 6, in *EMD*, 2:86. See also William

many persons in Palmyra.”¹⁴⁶ And, according to Anna Eaton, Lucy “knew the virtues of remedial roots and herbs, and was ever ready to administer and assist when her lowly neighbors were sick or dying.”¹⁴⁷ In Vermont the Smith family had spent a year growing ginseng, an herb widely known in that state for its healing properties.¹⁴⁸ The family’s “cake and beer” shop featured ginger bread and root beer.¹⁴⁹ They also peddled “rutes and yarbs” from their cart.¹⁵⁰

In addition to the Man of Signs, there is evidence that Lucy believed in other methods of wisdom divination based on human anatomy. Anna Eaton said that Lucy “turned many a penny by tracing in the lines of the open palm the fortunes of the inquirer.”¹⁵¹ Many early Americans owned magic chap-books with instructions for various methods of divination like palmistry. In 1797, a Boston company published *The Complete Fortune Teller; Or, An Infallible Guide to the Hidden Decrees of Fate; Being a New and Regular System for Foretelling Future*

H. Kelley, “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 166, col. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Mrs. M. C[aroline]. R[ockwell]. Smith, Statement, 25 March 1885, in Deming, “Mormon Prophet,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Mr. Dr. Horace Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism* (New York: Woman’s Executive Committee of Home Missions, 1881), 3. Dan Vogel informs me that the author’s name is Anna Ruth.

¹⁴⁸ EMD, 2:243, 243n34.

¹⁴⁹ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ James H. Smith, *History of Chenango and Madison Counties, New York, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers, 1784–1880* (Syracuse, New York: D. Mason & Co., 1880), p. 153, col. 1.

¹⁵¹ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 1.

*Events By Astrology, Physiognomy, Palmistry, Moles, Cards, Dreams.*¹⁵² Evidence indicates that Lucy used astrology, palmistry, and dreams to predict the future. Perhaps she used physiognomy, moles, and cards as well. Physiognomy was the determination of personal qualities by the shape of the head and contours of the face. Like palmistry, mole interpretation, and the astrological Man of Signs, this method of wisdom divination was based on human anatomy and therefore had a natural connection to her healing work.

If Joseph and Lucy were looking for Asael's prophet to come from their family, the circumstances of the birth of their fourth child in 1805 may have been taken as a sign that the prophet had arrived. Joseph Smith was apparently born with a caul—"part of the amnion [innermost fetal membrane] sometimes covering the head of a child at birth,"¹⁵³ A long-standing European tradition attributed supernatural power to people who had been born with a caul. Because childbirth has always fallen within the realm of health care, caul beliefs existed in folk medicine. Although no one reports Lucy acting as a midwife or birth attendant, as a wise woman and a healer she probably had some knowledge concerning caul folklore. According to an encyclopedia of occultism, "from an

¹⁵² *The Complete Fortune Teller; Or, An Infallible Guide to the Hidden Decrees of Fate; Being a New and Regular System for Foretelling Future Events By Astrology, Physiognomy, Palmistry, Moles, Cards, Dreams* (Boston: n.p., 1797).

¹⁵³ *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1967), s.v. "caul" and "amnion."

inspection of this caul, the wise women predicted the sort of future the baby would have." This method of divination is known as "amniomancy."¹⁵⁴

In 1843, the Prophet published and sent a petition to the "Green Mountain Boys" of his home state Vermont, asking for help redressing the grievances suffered in Missouri.¹⁵⁵ Residents of Orange County, Vermont, who had known the Smiths when they lived there, responded to the Prophet's petition. Addressing Joseph Smith, these "Green Mountain Boys" wrote, "you was old enough when you left here to remember a great many things about him [Joseph Smith Senior] and how he used to tel about your being born with a veil over your face, and that he intended to procure a stone for you to see all over the world with."¹⁵⁶ "Veil," like "silly hood" and "hallihoo," was a folk term for the caul.¹⁵⁷ The letter was sent for publication to anti-Mormon news editor Thomas C. Sharp, who conspired in the assassination of the Prophet. For some unknown reason, Sharp did not publish the letter.

In 1977, Mormon history buff David C. Martin published the Vermonter's retort in his *Mormon Miscellaneous* newsletter. In his editorial introduction to the letter, Martin reported the existence of "a story common to Mormon folklore

¹⁵⁴ Leslie Shepard, ed., *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*, 2d ed. (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, Book Tower, 1984), s.v. "amniomancy." See also Thomas R. Forbes, "The Social History of the Caul," *The Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* 25 (June 1953): 497.

¹⁵⁵ EMD, 1:595.

¹⁵⁶ Green Mountain Boys, Strafford, Vermont, to Thomas C. Sharp, 15 February 1844, in EMD, 1:597.

¹⁵⁷ Iona Opie and Moira Tatem, eds. *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), s.v. "caul."

down to the present generation, to the effect that the Mormon prophet's calling was evidenced at his birth."¹⁵⁸ This Mormon folklore that Joseph Smith's calling was evident at his birth apparently included a version in which Joseph was born with a caul. In Vardis Fisher's novel *In Tragic Life*, the protagonist Vridar Hunter is born with a caul. Rose, Vridar's mother, "said he would be a prophet; for Joseph Smith, she had been told, was born with a veil over his face."¹⁵⁹ If such a folktale existed among the Mormons, *In Tragic Life's* 1933 publication dates the tale to that year.

However, it probably dates the story back a few decades earlier. *In Tragic Life* is the first volume of Fisher's *bildungsroman*, or autobiographical novel. Vardis Fisher, like his autobiographical protagonist Vridar Hunter, grew up in an Idaho Mormon community and had a mother with high hopes and expectations for him. That Fisher's *bildungsroman* is as much or more of an autobiography than a fictional novel has been ably demonstrated by Joseph M. Flora, Fisher's biographer.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, in an autobiographical sketch, Fisher wrote, "I was born . . . with a caul which for my mother augured that I'd be a bishop at least and perhaps an apostle."¹⁶¹ Flora suggests that some of Fisher's self-hatred derived

¹⁵⁸ David C. Martin, "The Thomas C. Sharp and Allied Anti-Mormon Papers," *David C. Martin's Mormon Miscellaneous*, March 1977, 1-2.

¹⁵⁹ Vardis Fisher, *In Tragic Life* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, & Company, 1933), 31-32. See also Vardis Fisher, *Orphans in Gethsemane: A Novel of the Past in the Present* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1960), 18.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph M. Flora, *Vardis Fisher* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), 17, 26-48.

¹⁶¹ Vardis Fisher, autobiographical sketch, August 1940, quoted in Stanley Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds., *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1942), s.v. "Fisher, Vardis," p. 459, col. 1.

from identifying himself Joseph Smith, whom he loathed.¹⁶² Therefore, it is quite likely that Vardis Fisher's mother actually did tell him that Joseph Smith entered life with a veil over his face.

If Temperance Fisher actually relayed this story to young Vardis, it would not only confirm David C. Martin's report of Mormon folklore that Joseph's calling had been evidenced at his birth, but it would also specify a caul as the evidence. Furthermore, it would document the folktale back over half of a century. Vardis Fisher was born in 1895 and left home at the age of 16.¹⁶³ So if Vardis heard this folk tale from his mother in his youth, as he does in his autobiographical novel, he would have heard it before 1912. In the *bildungsroman*, Temperance held this belief at the time Vardis was born and therefore raised him under a great deal of pressure. The resentment Fisher felt toward his mother for this upbringing comes out strongly in the narrative. It is safe to say that Temperance Fisher held caul beliefs in 1895 when Vardis was born and that they may have included the story about Joseph Smith. Temperance Fisher's life overlapped with the lives of those who had known Joseph Smith. Her parents had lived in Nauvoo.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Joseph M. Flora, "Vardis Fisher and the Mormons," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 3 (autumn 1969): 50-51.

¹⁶³ Flora, *Vardis Fisher*, 13, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Tim Woodward, *Tiger on the Road* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1989), 20-21. See also *AncestralFile*, 2000.

The reply elicited by Joseph's petition to the Green Mountain Boys remained unpublished, unquoted, and uncited until 1976.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, it did not create the Mormon folklore about Joseph Smith's birth. The letter hailed from Strafford, Orange County, Vermont. Joseph Smith Junior was born in Sharon, in the neighboring county of Windsor, in 1805. After moving back and forth between Orange and Windsor counties, the Smiths left the area permanently in 1817, when young Joseph was eleven.¹⁶⁶ Thus, while the letter is dated 1844 and the Mormon folklore about a providential sign at Joseph's birth can only be dated to 1977 (or 1933, or 1912, or 1895), both sources are historically independent of each other back to 1817. This points to the Smith family as the common origin of both the Vermont and Mormon versions of the caul story. This, in turn, would imply that Joseph Smith was in fact born with a caul.

Three decades after the publication of *In Tragic Life*, Fisher rewrote his *bildungsroman*. This new version, *Orphans In Gethsemane* (1960), repeated the story of his birth:

Vridar was born with a caul. From this circumstance his mother and grandmother took augury of great achievement. Rose said he might be a prophet; Joseph Smith, she said, was born with a veil over his face. "And I've hear," she said, "Jesus Christ was too." The caul became a matter of legend and had a profound and unhappy influence on the child's life.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Annette P. Hampshire, "Thomas Sharp and Anti-Mormon Sentiment in Illinois, 1842-1845," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 72 (May 1979): 84-89.

¹⁶⁶ Dan Vogel, "Introduction to Vermont and New Hampshire Documents," in *EMD*, 1:589-91.

¹⁶⁷ Fisher, *Orphans in Gethsemane*, 18.

Cindy Fisher, Vardis' paternal grandmother, did live with the family at this time. At her insistence, the veil-born child was named Vardis, a name that had been in their family for generations.¹⁶⁸ The importance Cindy Fisher attached to Vardis' caul may stand as further evidence of a Mormon folktale regarding Joseph Smith's nativity.

At the same time, this account of Vardis' birth, if historical, may weaken the validity of the tale. Rose's comment regarding a folktale about Jesus' birth suggests the possibility that someone had committed the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent. In other words, someone may have reasoned that because Joseph Smith became a prophet, he must have been born with a caul. Perhaps there is a human tendency to provide for a great leader his or her own star of Bethlehem. Napoleon claimed to have been born in a caul.¹⁶⁹ He may have made this claim to garner power for himself. Or, if he was born in a caul, it may have fired his ambitions.

Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that Vardis himself developed the story. In his autobiographical sketch, he wrote that because of his caul his mother believed he would be "a bishop at least and perhaps an apostle." In his first autobiographical novel, his mother "said he would be a prophet; for Joseph Smith, she had been told, was born with a veil over his face." In the revised *bildungsroman*, both mother and grandmother commented on the caul and Jesus

¹⁶⁸ Woodward, *Tiger on the Road*, 16.

¹⁶⁹ André Castelot, *Napoleon*, trans. Guy Daniels (New York Harper & Row, 1971), 3; Vincent Cronin, *Napoleon Bonaparte: An Intimate Biography* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 20. Napoleon was a well-known celebrity in young Joseph's America.

was added to the ranks of the veil-born. The author's creative license may explain the additional details provided in the *bildungsroman* accounts. If Fisher did hear the Joseph Smith caul story from his mother or someone else, he must have doubted its veracity, for when he wrote *The Children of God*, his historical novel of early Mormonism, he made no mention of it. Instead, he began with the First Vision.¹⁷⁰ Due to the prevalence of caul-lore, perhaps former Vermont neighbors and early Mormons back-reasoned Joseph's veiled birth.

New York sources add further pieces to the puzzle. Daniel Hendrix, who had known the Smiths in Palmyra, later recounted that Lucy "always declared that he [Joseph Smith Junior] was *born with a genius*."¹⁷¹ In his anti-Mormon book *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, Palmyran Pomeroy Tucker stated that Joseph Junior "seemed to be the pride of his indulgent father, who has been heard to boast of him as the '*genus of the family*,' quoting his own expression."¹⁷² Anna Eaton, who later moved into the Palmyra area, blamed this "genius"—which Hendrix connected with Joseph's birth—for his assumption of the prophetic mantle.

Even in the old Green Mountain State, before the family immigrated to the Genesee country, the then West, Mrs. Smith's mind was made up that one of her sons should be a prophet. The weak father agreed with her that Joseph was the "genus" of their nine children. So it was established that Joseph should be the prophet.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Vardis Fisher, *The Children of God: An American Epic* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939).

¹⁷¹ Daniel Hendrix, interviewed by Henry G. Tinsley, in "Origin of Mormonism," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 May 1893, p. 12, col. 1 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷² Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 17 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷³ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 1.

How she could have known Lucy's sentiments in Vermont, Eaton did not say. However, a member of the Home Missionary Society who labored in Vermont between 1809 and 1813 knew of the Smiths and wrote that in 1812 Lucy Mack Smith predicted her son "would be a prophet, and give to the world a new religion. Joe was raised with this idea before him. All the family were taught and believed it. Joe's father used to speak of Joe as the 'genus,' as he termed it, of the family."¹⁷⁴ These accounts may confirm Daniel Hendrix's claim that Joseph's family believed he had been born with something special.

Independent sources from Vermont, New York, and the Great Basin Kingdom affirm that Joseph's greatness had been made known at his birth. The Vermont letter claimed that Joseph Smith Senior had said his son was born with a caul. Some early Mormons apparently believed the same. On the other hand, if Joseph actually entered life in a caul, one might expect that more sources would mention it. Lucy's biography of her son mentions nothing special about his birth. Though inconclusive, a substantial body of evidence requires us to consider the plausible possibility that Joseph Smith was born with a caul.

If he was, it may have been taken as a sign that grandfather Asael Smith's predicted prophet had arrived. Anna Eaton of Palmyra wrote of Lucy as one who paid attention to portents: "All ominous signs were heeded. No work was

¹⁷⁴ This unidentified autobiography was cited by Disciples of Christ minister Clark Braden in his 1884 debate with RLDS Elder Edmund L. Kelley. *Public Discussion of the Issues Between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Disciples), held in Kirkland, Ohio, Beginning February 12th and Closing March 8th, 1884, between E. L. Kelley, of The R. C. of J. C. of Latter Day Saints, and Clark Braden, of The Church of Christ* (St. Louis: Clark Braden, 1884), p. 46, col. 2.

commenced on Friday. The moon over the left shoulder portended calamity; the breaking of a mirror, death."¹⁷⁵ As a "wise woman" and a healer, Mother Smith may have ascribed the qualities of the veil-born to her new child. It may be that Joseph Smith Senior, who professed the importance of the caul to his Vermont neighbors, gained this understanding from his wife. Caul belief, however, was so common during this time that there is no need to invoke Lucy's role as a healer to explain her husband's caul beliefs. For Joseph Smith Senior to have held folk-beliefs attached the caul only meant that he was an ordinary person. Lucy's community role of healing only heightens the probability of caul belief in the Smith family.

Folk belief in the portent of a caul extends back to ancient Rome and can be traced through England into America.¹⁷⁶ The caul generally signified good fortune and health.¹⁷⁷ The folk term "hallihoo" (holy hood) indicates that some degree of sacrality was imputed to children born with one. In the seventeenth century, some midwives kept cauls and sold them to lawyers because they served as "an especial meanes to furnish them with eloquence and perswasive speech, and to stoppe the mouthes of all, who should make an opposition against them." Cauls continued to be advertised in newspapers for sale until the turn of

¹⁷⁵ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Forbes, "The Social History of the Caul," 495-503; Shepard, ed., *Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*, s.v. "caul;" Opie and Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, s.v. "CAUL, possession of: lucky." William Henderson, *Notes on the Folklore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1866; Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 13-15.

the century.¹⁷⁸ While caul beliefs are rare today, they were common in the early nineteenth century.

In the letter from Vermont, Joseph Smith Senior is said to have spoken of his son's "veil." This was a common name for the caul, but not the only one. The elder Smith's apparent use of the term "veil," as opposed to silly hood, hallihoo, or other folk-terms for the caul, may be relevant. It evokes the thirty-fourth chapter of Exodus, wherein Moses spends forty days with God on Mount Sinai. When he returned to the camp of Israel, "the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him" (Exodus 34:30). To remedy the situation, Moses "put a veil on his face" while he addressed "the congregation" (Ex. 34:31-33). An amniotic "veil" may have associated the newborn infant with Moses, the greatest of the Bible prophets.

Some early Latter-day Saints compared Joseph Smith with Moses. Many recorded sermons during which the prophet's face would shine as Moses' had.¹⁷⁹ For example, Lydia Knight "saw his face become white and a shining glow

¹⁷⁷ Forbes, "The Social History of the Caul," 495-503; Opie and Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, s.v. "caul"; Cavendish, ed., *Man, Myth, and Magic*, s.v. "caul"; Henderson, *Notes on the Folklore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders*, 13-14.

¹⁷⁸ Opie and Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, s.v. "CAUL, possession of: lucky"; Forbes, "The Social History of the Caul," 502, 508n91. In 1843, a London sarcasm and wit periodical lampooned this practice: "To be Sold—A Child's Caul. THE principal reason for parting with it is that it has become so exceedingly loud, as considerably to disturb the family. Any retired persons wishing to introduce a little noise into the house, will find this an eligible purchase" (*Punch, or the London Charivari* 5 [July to December 1843]: 18). Such sarcasm implies a widespread familiarity with actual advertisements.

¹⁷⁹ Truman G. Madsen, *Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 89-91.

seemed to beam from every feature."¹⁸⁰ An 1837 entry in Wilford Woodruff's journal combines the imagery of Exodus 34 with the caul associated powers of persuasive speech and the ability to silence naysayers. Woodruff recorded:

I . . . stood in the midst of the Congregation of the Saints where I beheld President JOSEPH SMITH Jr. arise in the stand & for several hours addressed the Saints in the power of God. Joseph had been absent from Kirtland on business for the Church, though not half as long as Moses was in the mount, & . . . some were against him as the Israelites were against Moses. But when he arose in the power of God in their midst, as did Moses anciently, they were put to silence for the complainers saw that he stood in the power of a Prophet.¹⁸¹

Early sources emphasize good luck as a quality of the veil-born. A 1787 encyclopedia of provincial "superstitions" stated that among rural people, it was "deemed lucky to be born with a caul, or membrane, over the face."¹⁸² Porter Rockwell, Joseph's friend from early childhood, reported that "Joseph Smith was no gold seeker by trade; he only did openly what all were doing privately; but he was considered to be 'lucky.'"¹⁸³ In 1825, Palmyra's *Wayne Sentinel* carried a story that said one could see in a seer stone "provided he is fortune's favorite."¹⁸⁴

A number of specific examples can be given of caul beliefs. In 1797, a "New Englander" named Rice Williams entered Adams county, Pennsylvania,

¹⁸⁰ *Lydia Knight's History*; ed. "Homespun" [Susa Young Gates], Noble Women's Lives Series (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), 18.

¹⁸¹ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal: 1833-1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 1:124-5.

¹⁸² Francis Grose, *A Provincial Glossary; With a Collection of Local Proverbs, and Popular Superstitions*, 2d ed. (1787), quoted in Opie and Tatem, eds., *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, s.v. "CAUL, possession of: lucky."

¹⁸³ Kane, *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah's Dixie, 1872-73*, 74.

¹⁸⁴ "Wonderfull Discovery," *Wayne Sentinel* (Palmyra, New York), 27 December 1825, p. 2, col. 4 (reprinted from the *Orleans Advocate*, [Orleans, New York]).

and announced that “he had been born with a veil over his face—that he could see spirits,” and that one of these spirits had brought him to Adams county to discover an enchanted buried treasure.¹⁸⁵ An early New York diary records that “Uncle Charles Quinland came here this afternoon. What a strange man he is! Aunt Hepsa says he was born with a *veil* over his face, and says he can see things that we must not inquire about.”¹⁸⁶ Jeeana Veeder Carpenter DeGraff was born with a veil over her face in 1794, in New York’s Mohawk Valley. Near the end of her life, she saw the spirit of her nephew’s wife (recently deceased).¹⁸⁷ In 1952, A folklorist gathering birthmark folklore in New York found that “Midwives in Schenevus Valley a generation ago were always on the look-out for a caul, or a ‘veil over the face’ as they called it.” Midwives believed that if a caul were properly removed “the child will have second sight and predict the future.” One such child, when reaching adulthood, could predict death, read letters in sealed envelopes, and find missing objects.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ “The Deeds of Dr. Dady in Early New York,” *The Pennsylvania Dutchman*, 15 November 1950, 1. An early local history identifies Rice Williams as the notorious treasure-seeking imposter Ransford Rogers (Charles H. Bell, *History of the Town of Exeter, New Hampshire* [Exeter: The Quarter-Millennial Year, 1888], 412). On Rogers’s activities in New Hampshire, see Bell, 411-414. For Rogers’s activities in New Jersey, see Philanthropist, *An Account of the Beginning, Transactions, and Discovery, of Ransford Rogers, Who Seduced Many by Pretended Hobgoblins and Apparitions, and Thereby Extorted Money from Their Pockets* (n.p.: n.p. [“printed for every Purchaser”], 1792). See also Brooke, *The Refiner’s Fire*, 124-127; Brooke, “The True Spiritual Seed,” 122.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Quinland diary, quoted in *Quinland; or, Varieties in American Life* (London: Richard Bentley, 1857), 186 (emphasis in the original). Thomas later recorded, “Uncle Charles . . . told me he had found a new Bible, the Mormon Bible. . . . He says that it is just as good as the other Bible, and that he should like to see some Mormons” (220-221).

¹⁸⁷ Neil B. Reynolds, “The Supernatural in Scotia,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 16 (1960): 298-300.

¹⁸⁸ Wheaton P. Webb, “Birthmarked Destiny,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (summer 1952): 85-91. For Utah Mormon folklore about conception, pregnancy, and childbirth —

As the discipline of folklore grew, its practitioners further documented beliefs about the caul. Folklorists working during the mid-twentieth century collected a number of items. An informant in Maryland stated, "A baby born with a veil of afterbirth over its face will grow up to be a prophet."¹⁸⁹ Informants in Ohio connected the caul with "a sixth sense," "clairvoyant power," "second sight," "spiritual sight," "supernatural visions," and "prophetic powers." One Ohio informant averred, "if a baby is born with a veil on its face, it means that he will be a prophet."

Another item of caul-lore connected the veil with the "seventh son" tradition: "The seventh son or daughter born with a veil has the power to foresee the future."¹⁹⁰ A concrete example of this belief surfaces closer to Joseph Smith's time and place. Mary Lambert of Rochester, New York, was hauled into court in 1851 on the charges of defrauding a group of treasure seekers who had hired her to locate treasure. When Mary gave her testimony, she affirmed her powers:

including determining the sex of a child, a parent's desires influencing the personality of the child while yet in the womb, and the "marking of babies"—see Austin E. and Alta S. Fife, "The Cycle of Life among the Folk," in *Lore of Faith and Folly*, comp. Folklore Society of Utah, ed. Thomas E. Cheney assisted by Austin E. Fife and Juanita Brooks (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), 227-32; Austin E. Fife, "Birthmarks and Psychic Imprinting of Babies in Utah Folk Medicine," in *American Folk Medicine: A Symposium*, ed. Wayland D. Hand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 274-283. These folk beliefs are not confined to Utah. They are European in origin and pan-American. In fact, Claire Noall, a contemporary of the Fifes, found that "less of it circulated among Mormon midwives than among practitioners elsewhere" (Noall, "Superstitions, Customs, and Prescriptions of Mormon Midwives," *California Folklore Quarterly* 3, no. 2 [April 1944]: 103).

¹⁸⁹ George G. Carey, *Maryland Folklore and Folklife* (Cambridge, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1970), 85.

¹⁹⁰ Wayland D. Hand, Anna Casetta, and Sondra B. Thiederman, eds., *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore: From the Ohio Collection of Newbell Niles Puckett* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Company, 1981), 2:1048-1051. See especially items 25117 and 15119 on p. 1051. See also, C. C. Baines, "Children Born with a Caul," *Folk-Lore* 61 (June 1950): 104.

I was the seventh daughter, and was born with a veil over my face. I look in a little stone, which I found when I was twelve years old, and see things, and then everything looks like stars, and I pray. I do not tell fortunes for money. I look in the stone for people and tell them what I see, and they give me what they please.¹⁹¹

Mary was bailed out by one of the treasure seekers in her company, Benjamin L. Northrop, who had been searching for buried treasure in the Rochester area since 1815.¹⁹²

Mary Lambert and others connected their powers of seership not only to their births in the caul but to their being the seventh son or daughter.¹⁹³ Early Americans commonly believed that seventh sons and seventh daughters had special powers. There is some evidence for seventh son belief in the Smith family. When Joseph Smith Junior's seventh male child arrived, he was duly noted in the family Bible as "the seventh son."¹⁹⁴ However, this baby died the day it was born. The child was probably recorded with a number because he did not have a name. However, it may be significant that he was given a birth order among sons and

¹⁹¹ "Gold Digging in Brighton!" *Rochester Daily Times*, 27 May 1851, p. [2], col. 3.

¹⁹² "Gold Digging in Brighton!" *Rochester Daily Times*, 27 May 1851, p. [2], cols. 2-3. On Northrop's earlier involvement, see "Imposition and Blasphemy!!—Money-diggers, &c." *The Gem, a Semi-monthly Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* (Rochester, New York), 15 May 1830, p. 15, cols. 1-3. See also Geo[rge] H. Harris, "Myths of Onandaga. or, Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," Ms, Local History Division, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York (see both "the first manuscript," 1886, and the second manuscript, 1887); Dorothy Dengler, "Tales of Buried Treasure in Rochester," *New York Folklore Quarterly* 2 (August 1946): 174-81.

¹⁹³ Similar claims were made toward the end of the nineteenth century in a circular that appeared in Lakewood, New Jersey, which advertized the clairvoyant powers of a "Mrs. Dr. Edwards" who would soon visit town: "She was born with the wonderful gift of second sight, and with a veil. She is the seventh daughter of the seventh daughter." Henry Carrington Bolton, "Fortune-Telling in America To-day: A Study of Advertisements," *Journal of American Folk-lore* 8, no. 31 (October-December 1895): 305.

¹⁹⁴ Joseph Smith Junior Family Bible, in private possession, in *EMD*, 1:583.

not among the children generally.¹⁹⁵ Also, the precise phraseology used in this Bible record argues for seventh-son belief.

The special abilities invested in seventh sons/daughters derived not only from the significance of the number seven in biblical numerology, but from their rarity. The average seventh son or daughter arrived in a family that already had ten to thirteen children. Even in the early nineteenth century, this occurred rarely. High infant mortality kept numbers lower for families who only counted living children. A seventh son of a seventh son, an even rarer person, wielded even more supernatural power than his father.

¹⁹⁵ Recording the child by number instead of name leaves two possibilities. He might have been numbered among the other children (the eight child) or among the other sons (the seventh son). The patriarchal culture and family into which this child was born may have determined that the child was numbered among the sons. This scenario reconstructs the decision to record the child as "the seventh son" with less implication of seventh-son beliefs. However, when Joseph Smith listed his siblings in his family bible, he did not include the first son of Joseph Senior and Lucy, who (like the seventh son) died before named. Apparently, the seventh son was recorded as such because of seventh-son folk beliefs, which were common in the early republic. Shortly before Joseph Smith Junior was murdered, he declared that his yet unborn child would be a male, would succeed him as King of Israel, and would fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of a second King David (Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham, and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 [summer 1981]: 318, 318n60, see also 333-341; William S. Harwell, "The Matriarchal Priestesshood and Emma's Right to Succession As Presiding High Priestess and Queen," *Doctrine of the Priesthood* 8, no. 3 [March 1991]: 10-12; D. Michael Quinn, *Origins of Power*, vol. 1 of *The Mormon Hierarchy* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994], 230-39; Valeen Tippetts Avery, *From Mission to Madness: Last Son of the Mormon Prophet* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998], 22-23). Born on 17 November 1844, David Hyrum Smith was Joseph's and Emma's eighth natural son, but as noted above the seventh had died within a day and was never given a name. (Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, 12-13, 103, 324n29). Like his mother, Joseph Junior may have recounted his children, which would make David the seventh son. Unfortunately, Joseph did not live to see David come into the world, and his heir did not take the throne. "Seventh son" status does not appear in the written record as a rationale behind David's royal appointment. Some evidence suggests that it was linked to his being Joseph's first son "born in the covenant." Nevertheless, relevant data—in particular the use of the precise phrase "the seventh son"—opens the door to the possibility of seventh son beliefs among the Smiths. Seventh son beliefs corresponded with the structure of the church council of seven men who presided over the seventy. "The seventh president of these presidents is to preside over the six" (*Doctrine and Covenants* 107:94).

While the rarity of a seventh son or daughter contributed to their power, that rarity might also serve as an incentive for a family to substitute or add a smaller holy number to this particular numerology. According to one encyclopedia of magic, "7 is powerful in magic and frequently appears in spells and charms, often in association with the number 3. In folk belief a seventh child has magical and clairvoyant powers, and these are particularly marked in the seventh son of a seventh son, who has second sight."¹⁹⁶ D. Michael Quinn ascribes to the Smith family a numerology in which the numbers seven and three are *both* significant, but with three favored over seven.¹⁹⁷

The Smith family had a third son tradition. Asael Smith named his third son Asael.¹⁹⁸ Joseph Smith Senior reserved the bestowal of his name for the third of his sons.¹⁹⁹ Joseph Smith Junior would later name his third natural son Joseph,

¹⁹⁶ Cavendish, ed., *Man, Myth, and Magic: The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Mythology, Religion and the Unknown*, s.v. "seventh son."

¹⁹⁷ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 1st ed. Three figures significantly more often than does seven. On three, see 48-9, 61-62, 97, 103-7, 114-16, 123-26, 143, 147, 152-53, 174-75, 180-81, 182-83, 184. On seven, see 60, 99-104, 180-81. The rare three-tiered heaven is preferred over the classical seven heavens (173-74, 184). The triad of magical angels is preferred over the septet (104, 115, 173, 182-83). The highest priesthood quorum had three members. Seven presidents were to choose seventy other to make the number of general authorities equal "the magic number of the triangle" (180-81). Joseph married more women on astrological dates based on seven than on dates based on three, but "seven was the number of Venus, the planet governing love" (60-61). Later, revelations that structured the hierarchy of the church included a group of "seven presidents" to preside over the seventy, and a quorum of "three presiding high priests" to preside over the entire church (D&C 107: 22, 93; 124:126).

¹⁹⁸ John Smith, Journal, 20 July 1839, LDS Church Archives, in *EMD*, 1:556.

¹⁹⁹ The newborn child was a boy, which made the infant Joseph Senior's third living son. Joseph Smith Junior was actually the fourth son born into the family, but Joseph's and Lucy's first son died the day he was born and was never named. In Lucy Smith's manuscript history, she calls Joseph Smith Junior "my 3[rd] son." Although not in Lucy Smith's manuscript history, the published version specifically states that Joseph was called "after the name of his father." Compare the birth narratives in *EMD*, 1:253.

and designate him as his successor in the presidency.²⁰⁰ Similarly, Joseph and Lucy named their third daughter Lucy. This suggests a “third son” concept alongside or in lieu of seventh son belief.²⁰¹ The birth of a third son may have been notable to the elder Smith in relation to the folk belief about the qualities of a seventh son. It is possible that Joseph Senior projected onto Joseph Junior seventh-son qualities.

Folk culture ascribed a variety of special abilities to seventh sons. They were commonly believed to have healing powers. As one source has it, “they professed to cure by prayers and in the name of God.”²⁰² Joseph later exercised “the gift of healing.”²⁰³ The ability to use a divining rod figured in seventh son

²⁰⁰ Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon*, fig: “Joseph Smith’s Family Tree.” See also “Genealogy of President Joseph Smith Junior,” in *EMD*, 1:575-76, in which Joseph Smith Junior places his third son, the adopted Joseph Smith Murdock Smith (so named by his natural father, John Murdock), after his natural third-born Joseph III. On Joseph Smith III as Joseph Smith Junior’s intended successor in the presidency, see Esplin, “Joseph, Brigham, and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity,” 333-341.

²⁰¹ Asael and Mary also named a daughter Mary. John Smith records her as the second daughter. It may be that there was a previous daughter, unrecorded by John, who died in infancy. This would make Mary the third daughter of Mary just as Asael was the third son of Asael. While most of Asael’s children joined Joseph Junior’s Church of Christ, Asael’s oldest son Jesse, a convert to Presbyterianism, was bitterly opposed. In his letter to Hyrum Smith, he complained that “your good, pious & Methodistical uncle Asahel induced his father to give credit to your tale of nonsense, your abominable wickedness.” Asael Junior’s ability to persuade his father may have derived in part from his status as the third son and namesake. The sarcastic remarks made by Jesse, the firstborn, about Asael Junior may have derived from jealousy felt toward the younger but favored brother. Joseph Knight Senior named his third son Joseph. All three of these sons lived to adulthood. See the family chart on the inside front cover of William G. Hartley, *They Are My Friends: A History of the Joseph Knight Family, 1825-1850* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1986).

²⁰² Opie and Tatem, eds., *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, s.v. “seventh child.”

²⁰³ Madsen, *Joseph Smith, the Prophet*, 45-46.

belief, as did the ability to locate stolen property.²⁰⁴ Finding stolen property had always been the realm of the rodsmen and scryers.²⁰⁵

Standing at the threshold of the millennium, having their third son born in a caul would have provided Joseph's parents with a sufficient number of cultural resources to see the child as the prophet predicted by Asael and the religious reformer anticipated by Lucy. Joseph may have been marked for prophethood from day one.

Old Yorker neighbors of the Smiths affirmed that the parents expected Joseph to attain special supernatural powers. After visiting with former acquaintances of the Smiths in 1882, Ellen E. Dickinson reported, "Very early Mrs. Smith instructed her son Joseph to set up a claim for miraculous powers, which he willingly adopted."²⁰⁶ This story and others like it, however, were certainly motivated at least to some extent by a desire to provide a naturalistic explanation for Joseph Smith's assumption of the prophetic role. Lucy herself left us with only the following: "what was my joy and astonishment to hear my own son though a boy of 14 declare that he had been visited by an angel from

²⁰⁴ An 1849 source holds that "the person who generally practises this divination boasts himself to be the seventh son of a seventh son. The twig of hazel bends in his hands to the conviction of the miners that ore is present." And an 1866 source speaks of a wise man "resorted to in cases of sickness, distress, or loss of property, and this not by the lower orders alone He owed his powers to his being the seventh son of a seventh daughter." Opie and Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, s.v. "seventh child."

²⁰⁵ For an interesting North Carolina folktale in which a third son is able to secure a buried treasure from headless guardians after taking a wife, see Paul G. Brewster, et al., eds., *Games and Rhymes • Beliefs and Customs • Riddles • Proverbs • Speech • Tales and Legends*, vol. 1 of *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, ed. Newman Ivey White (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1952), 693-94.

²⁰⁶ Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 30. On Dickinson's visits and correspondence with locals, see p. 4.

Heaven.²⁰⁷ This “astonishment” has been taken as surprise, implying that she had no expectations of young Joseph.²⁰⁸ Astonishment, however, could also have meant amazement.²⁰⁹ And who would not be amazed if an angel were visiting the home?

Perhaps the elder Joseph. The editor of the *Palmyra Reflector* asserted that the angel’s appearances “corresponded precisely with revelations made to, and prediction made by the elder Smith a number of years before.”²¹⁰ “I . . . rehearsed the whole matter to him,” Joseph Junior wrote. “He replied to me, that it was of God, and to go and do as commanded by the messenger.” And so, Joseph recorded, “I left the field and went to the place where the messenger had told me the plates were deposited.”²¹¹

According to some sources, the Smith family initially looked to Alvin, the oldest son, to become a prophet.²¹² According to these stories, Joseph’s “calling” did not come until Alvin’s death in November of 1823. However, Smith family records are clear that the Angel Moroni had visited Joseph Junior earlier in that

²⁰⁷ Lucy Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” 108, in *EMD*, 1:404-5.

²⁰⁸ Dan Vogel, “Introduction to Joseph Smith, Jr., Collection,” in *EMD*, 1:5

²⁰⁹ Noah Webster, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (1806), s.v. “astonishment.”

²¹⁰ Dogberry [Cole], “Gold Bible, No. 4,” *The Reflector*, 14 February 1831, p. 101, col. 2.

²¹¹ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 7, in *PJS*, 1:281.

²¹² O[rsamus] Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve; Embracing the Counties of Monroe, Ontario, Livingston, Yates, Steuben, Most of Wayne and Allegany, and Parts of Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming* (Rochester, New York: William Alling, 1851), 213. See also Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2d ed., 159; and Ian Barber, *The Seer, The Key, and the Treasure*, audiocassette recording of a presentation given at the Sunstone Theological Symposium, Salt Lake City, 21–24 August, 1985, sponsored by the Sunstone Foundation (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1985), SL85-102, side A.

year. It may be that both sons showed promise. Daniel Woodward, an old Royalton, Vermont, neighbor of the Smiths, recalled when Joseph Senior, “with all his family, including the prophets, departed for New York.”²¹³

The Smith family acquaintances from Vermont claimed that Joseph was old enough before he left that state to remember his father talking about his son’s birth with a veil and plans to get his son a seer stone. At the latest, this was in 1816, when Joseph was ten. Within six years, Joseph Smith Junior was using a seer stone. Based on a caul birth, Joseph and his parents may have understood that his use of a seer stone would constitute a transitional stage in his prophetic trajectory. Like many of Joseph Smith’s early neighbors, critics will undoubtedly interpret this pathway to prophethood as a wholly naturalistic evolution. Asael Smith, Joseph Smith Senior, Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph Smith Junior, George A. Smith, and early Mormons interpreted these events in terms of providence and inspiration. In either perspective, Joseph and his parents seemed to have had a sense of direction for his life from very early on—perhaps even from his birth.

A lack of evidence necessitates that caution be taken here. It would be a mistake to conclude that Joseph Smith’s entire life was scripted from day one. To what extent did Joseph Smith and his parents see the end from the beginning? This question remains unanswered. Nevertheless, the evidence and argument presented here demonstrate a plausible case that Joseph Smith’s spiritual journey

²¹³ “Birthplace and Early Residence of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” *Historical Magazine* 8 (November 1870): 315-16, in *EMD*, 1:625.

from rodsman to village seer to prophet had both impetus and direction throughout his childhood.

D. Michael Quinn asserts that Joseph's mother and father both used seer stones.²¹⁴ The only account of Joseph Smith Senior using a seer stone comes from Peter Ingersoll, whose farm adjoined the Smith farm. Ingersoll tacked this seer stone story on to the end of a story about waterwitching:

While the old man was standing off some rods, throwing himself into various shapes, I told him the rod did not work. He seemed much surprised at this, and said he thought he saw it move in my hand. It was now time for me to return to my labor. On my return, I picked up a small stone and was carelessly tossing it from one hand to the other. Said he, (looking very earnestly) what are you going to do with that stone? Throw it at the birds, I replied. No, said the old man, it is of great worth; and upon this I gave it to him. Now, says he, if you only knew the value there is back of my house, (and pointing to a place near)—*there*, exclaimed he, is one chest of gold and another of silver. He then put the stone which I had given him, into his hat, and stooping forward he bowed and made sundry maneuvers, quite similar to those of a stool Pigeon. At length he took down his hat, and being very much exhausted, said, in a faint voice, "if you knew what I had seen, you would believe." To see the old man thus try to impose upon me, I confess, rather had a tendency to excite contempt than pity. Yet I thought it best to conceal my feelings, preferring to appear the dupe of my credulity, than to expose myself to his resentment. His son Alvin then went through with the same performance, which was equally disgusting.

Ingersoll goes on to say that Joseph Smith Junior confessed to him that the golden plates were a hoax—just some sand he had scooped into his frock.²¹⁵

Mormon excommunicant Philastus Hurlbut collected the statements of Ingersoll and others to be published in E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*.

²¹⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 42.

²¹⁵ Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232-36.

Mormon historian Richard L. Anderson, who demonstrates Hurlbut's hand in composing some of these statements, rejects the Ingersoll statement as "seriously suspect."²¹⁶ In *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, Rodger I. Anderson argues for the general accuracy of the Hurlbut statements. But even he concedes that a combination of historical flaws and dubious claims "casts a shadow of suspicion over Ingersoll's entire affidavit."²¹⁷

The chronology of this event, if it did occur, is noteworthy. Ingersoll stated that he first met the Smiths in 1822, placing a lower limit on Smith stories given in his statement.²¹⁸ Alvin died in November of 1823. So Ingersoll's allegation that this transaction occurred while he was plowing dates it to the spring of 1822 or 1823. As I argue in a later chapter, Joseph acquired his first seer stone in late 1821 or early 1822. So he probably owned a stone prior to the event mentioned by Ingersoll. Furthermore, Joseph used the stone of a neighborhood seer at least two years earlier. If Joseph Smith Senior had a seer stone before this time, his son would have used it instead of the neighbor's. Therefore, even if one accepts Ingersoll's story regarding father Smith's use of a stone, it had no causative influence on Joseph Junior's initial use of seer stones.

As evidence for Lucy Mack Smith using seer stones, Quinn quotes Samantha Stafford Payne, who claimed that Lucy "once came to my mother to

²¹⁶ Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (spring 1970): 298.

²¹⁷ Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 56. See also p. 114.

²¹⁸ Peter Ingersoll, statement, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232.

get a stone the children had found, of curious shape. She wanted to use it as a peepstone."²¹⁹ Samantha's older brother John stated, "My father Wm S. had a stone which some thought they could look through—and Old Mrs. S. came there for it but never go[t] it."²²⁰ John does not say whether Lucy was one of those who could see in the stone or thought they would be able to if given the chance. At any rate, she did not procure it.

It may be appropriate to question Samantha's memory. John, who was older than Samantha and would have had a better memory of this event,²²¹ did not say why Lucy came for the stone. Furthermore, neither Stafford dates this event. If Lucy tried to borrow the stone after Joseph Smith's first seer stone vision, it had no bearing on his initial use of stones. If Lucy came for the stone prior to Joseph's first seer stone vision, it was probably to obtain a stone for *him* to use. In this case, the event would have transpired around late 1819 or early 1820, making Samantha Payne only eleven or twelve.²²² This would explain her apparently cloudy memory that Lucy wanted to use the stone for herself. In any case, it seems clear that if Joseph's parents tried to use seer stones it was because of their son's influence, not vice versa.

Aside from seer stones, a survey of the methods of divination ascribed to Joseph's parents produces the following list: hearing the voice of Christ,

²¹⁹ Samantha Payne, statement, c. 1884, quoted in *EMD*, 2:121n3.

²²⁰ John Stafford, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Rochester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library Archives, Independence, Missouri, pp. 13-14, in *EMD*, 2:87.

²²¹ John was born in 1805. Samantha was born in 1808. *EMD*, 2:120, 172.

visionary dreams, dowsing, astrology, numerology, palmistry, amniomancy, and the observation of omens. Joseph's and Lucy's dreams, which came unbidden in the night, constitute a pure form of descensional divination, as does the voice of Christ that Lucy heard. Joseph's use of a divining rod falls between the categories of mechanistic and ecstatic divination. It is certain that the Smiths experienced these modes of divination. Whether the Smiths actually practiced all of the other divinatory methods ascribed to them by early critics and later historians is doubtful. However, the general observation can be made that each of these leftover methods fall under the category of wisdom divination.

This analysis provides a general picture of the divinatory tradition that young Joseph stood to inherit. When Fayette Lapham and his friend visited with father Smith in 1830, they talked about his family's practice of divination. "This Joseph Smith, Senior, we soon learned, from his own lips, was a firm believer in witchcraft and other supernatural things; and had brought up his family in the same belief."²²³ Naturally, Joseph learned about divining from his parents. Growing up in the Smith family, however, did not guarantee an inheritance of visionary dreams or hearing the voice of God. These revelations came of their own accord. Except for the divining rod, all forms of ecstatic divination were descensional. For the aspiring diviner, this left wisdom divination and dowsing as methods to pursue.

²²² See Vogel, *EMD*, 2:120, 172.

²²³ Fayette Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *The Historical Magazine*, May 1870, 306.

CHAPTER 3

JOSEPH SMITH AND THE GIFT OF WORKING WITH THE ROD

There comes a time in every rightly constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure.

—Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*¹

He carried a magic divining-rod,
And miraculous crystal stone
Which, laid in the darkened crown of his hat,
Would mirror a scene unknown

— A Ballad of Old Pocock, Vermont²

Augmented by later sources, Jesse Smith's contemporary letter establishes Joseph Smith Senior's use of a divining rod. As also noted in the previous chapter, Joseph gave rods to Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. Kimball, if not Young, used his rod when praying for revelation. These facts point to Joseph Smith Junior as an inheritor and transmitter of a tradition of rod divining. This chapter reviews the evidence for Joseph Junior's use of a rod in the context of his times and in the context of his own spiritual development. Very little is known about Joseph's use of a divining rod. I explore possibilities suggested by relevant sources.³ Later, Joseph would use seer stones for divination. His use of a rod may have been rooted in an earlier stage of wisdom divination.

¹ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 175.

² Leonard Twynham, *A Ballad of Old Pocock, Vermont* (North Montpelier, Vermont: The Driftwind Press, 1931), 6.

³ In the mid-1980s, a spurious letter from Joseph Smith to Josiah Stowell, which instructed the latter how to cut a divining rod, gained considerable public attention. Later, it was discovered that this letter was the handicraft of document forger Mark Hofmann. Richard E. Turley Jr.,

From his mother, Joseph inherited an appreciation for health and healing, and may have become familiar with associated methods of wisdom divination. The "Word of Wisdom," his 1834 revelation that prescribed grains, fruit, and "all wholesome herbs," was received within a cultural and family context of health and hygiene concern.⁴ As noted, the Smith family grew ginseng in Vermont. Later, Joseph's wife Emma used ginseng.⁵ Joseph Junior may have passed on an appreciation for its qualities. He taught that sickness should be treated with herbs and mild food.⁶

There is some evidence that Joseph grew in wisdom as he grew in stature. Christopher M. Stafford of Manchester claimed that Joseph read his palm.⁷ Joseph may also have subscribed to the related principles of physiognomy. In 1843, Mormon apostle Wilford Woodruff recorded Joseph teaching this method of divination or a nearly identical theory.

Handsome men are not ~~off~~ wise & strong-minded men but the Strength of a strong minded man will Create coarse features like the rough & strong bough of the oak. You will always discover in the first glance of a man in the outlines of his features sumthing of the mind of the man.⁸

Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 74-76, 356; Sillitoe and Roberts, *Salamander*, 557.

⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 89; Lester E. Bush, "The Word of Wisdom in Early Nineteenth-Century Perspective," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 161-85.

⁵ As noted, the Smith family grew ginseng in Vermont. Later, Joseph's wife Emma used ginseng (*EMD*, 1:243n34). Joseph Junior may have agreed on its qualities.

⁶ Lester E. Bush, Jr., *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scripture* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 89-93.

⁷ C[hristopher] M. Stafford affidavit, Auburn, Ohio, 23 March 1885, in Arthur B. Deming, "Mormon Prophet," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 1.

⁸ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 2:232.

An entry in the journal of Joseph Smith's brother-in-law Oliver B. Huntington indicates that Joseph practiced what he preached. In 1846, while on a mission in England, Huntington and his missionary companion visited a wise woman who belonged to the church there:

Nothing in her did we discover contrary to the order of truth & righteousness, yet she like . . . others who have had true gifts <might> look unwisely, and sometimes tell that which they do not know, through over anxiety of themselves or others. She tells what she does by the Planates, from the person's looks and moles She would look at a man and tell him all about himself; and such an eye I never saw. She would do just as the Prophet Joseph used to; look a person from head to toe. Her eye commencing at the face, go down and then up. This she called "Taking Stock" . . . she said she was a seer and not a fortune teller; she would be mad in a minute if the word fortune was spoken.⁹

A background belief in physiognomy may have been what caused Joseph to take phrenology seriously. Practitioners of this nineteenth-century pseudo-science determined human qualities from the bumps on a person's head. Notes of an 1841 discourse record, "Joseph Smith said . . . to the Congregation that he for a lenth of time, thought on phreknoleagee [phrenology]; & that he had a Revalation. the Lord Rebuking him sharply in Crediting such a thing" ¹⁰ Interest in palmistry and physiognomy would have come from Lucy Mack Smith.

⁹ "Oliver B. Huntington's Journal, 1846," Ms, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, "Book 3," pp. 51-53 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰ McIntire Minute Book, LDS Archives, quoted in Ehat and Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 61. See also Davis Bitton and Gary L. Bunker, "Phrenology among the Mormons," *Journal of Mormon History* 9, no. 1 (1974): 42-45; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 309-10.

Joseph may also have had a rudimentary knowledge of the basic astrology so common in his day. Astrology entwined itself with numerology, another form of wisdom divination. D. Michael Quinn argues that the Smiths used numerology and that astrology was important in Joseph's life.¹¹

Living on the edge of Palmyra, Joseph could gaze into a magnificent night sky that was unaffected by a lantern or two shining in the village. If Joseph believed that earthly matters could be divined by tracking the moon's movement through the constellations of the zodiac, this belief was subsumed by an overarching theology of God's omnipotent dominion over the universe. In 1832, he recalled:

... from the age of twelve years to fifteen [1817/18 – 1820/21] I pondered many things in my heart . . . I looked upon the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their magesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses and the earth also upon which I stood . . . all these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipreasant power a being who makith Laws and decreeeth and bindeth all things in their bounds . . .¹²

If Joseph subscribed to the principles of astrology, this belief may have been reinforced for him when he translated "The Book of Abraham" from Egyptian

¹¹ This argument crops up throughout *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. See especially chapter 3: "Ritual Magic, Astrology, Amulets, and Talismans," 66-97.

¹² "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.," in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, pp. 2-3, in *PJS*, 1:5-6. See also Neal A. Maxwell, "The Disciple-Scholar," in *On Becoming a Disciple-Scholar: Lectures Presented at the Brigham Young University Honors Program Discipline and Discipleship Lecture Series*, ed. Henry B. Eyring (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 8-14.

papyri that he acquired in 1835. Joseph's "explanation" of one figure on the papyri speaks of the "governing power" of certain stars.¹³

Water Witching and Treasure Dowsing

Some of Joseph's New York neighbors remembered him dowsing in his youth. He may have taken up the rod for a number of reasons. While Joseph's mother practiced wisdom divination, his father dowsed with a rod. In adolescence, males typically break away somewhat from their mothers and begin to model their behavior after their fathers. American water witches have often considered their gift an inherited one—usually passed down through a father-to-son tradition.¹⁴ Also, as Joseph entered adolescence, he began working with his father away from home. As Joseph Smith Senior taught his sons how to safely dig wells, it was only natural for him to pass on the art of dowsing as well.¹⁵

Most dowsers discover the gift in their youth, but do not use it regularly until they reach adulthood because farmers and others who need wells trust adult dowsers more than children.¹⁶ The scarcity of sources regarding Joseph's use of a divining rod probably stem from the fact that he rarely used it. By the

¹³ Abraham, "explanation" accompanying facsimile no. 2. The Book of Abraham constitutes a book of scripture in *The Pearl of Great Price*. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989). See also Robert F. Smith, *Oracles & Talismans, Forgery & Pansophia: Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Renaissance Magus* (n.p. [Salt Lake City]: n.p. [Zion Book Store], 1987), 25-26.

¹⁴ For a general assessment of this practice, see Vogt and Hyman, *Water Witching U.S.A.*, 33, 153; Wyman, *Witching for Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals*, 1, 18.

¹⁵ Morgan, Quinn, and Marquardt and Walters hold that Joseph Junior learned to use a divining rod from his father. Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism*, 229; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 33; Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 65.

early 1820s, Joseph was using a seer stone. This stood out more in the memories of both friends and enemies.

If Joseph Smith Senior wanted his son to be able to use a seer stone, he may have decided to teach him to use a divining rod as an intermediary step. Or, failing to find a stone for him, perhaps he taught him to dowse as a substitute. Relying on local rumor, Thomas Ford, who had been Governor of Illinois during the Mormon sojourn there, wrote concerning the Smiths' dowsing—possibly in connection with a caul birth. "He [Joseph Smith Junior] and his father before him were what are called 'water witches,' always ready to point out the ground where wells might be dug and water found, *and many are the anecdotes of his early life giving bright promise of future profligacy.*"¹⁷

Joseph Senior probably wanted to pass on his knack for dowsing. In 1799, Asael decided to give "A few words of advice whic[h] I Leave to you my Dear wife and children whome I expect ear [ere] Long to Leave." He asked his children to be good parents to his grandchildren: "make it your cheafest work to bring them up in the ways of Virtue that they may be usefull in their generation." The most useful community role that Joseph Smith Senior filled was witching wells. Asael's patriarchal counsel may have motivated Joseph Senior to pass on

¹⁶ Vogt and Hyman, *Water Witching, U.S.A.*, 159-161.

¹⁷ Ford, *A History of Illinois*, 174 (emphasis mine). After speaking with some men from the Palmyra-Manchester area, Barnes Frisbie—who attempted to document the Wood Scrape in the 1860s—concluded that Joseph Junior learned rod divining from his father. Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont*, 60-64. Although not entirely dismissable, Frisbie's research and reasoning remain dubious.

this skill.¹⁸ After speaking with Orlando Saunders, an old friend and neighbor of the Smith family, journalist Frederic G. Mather reported that “father and sons believed in witchcraft [water-witchcraft?], and they frequently ‘divined’ the presence of water by a forked stick or hazel rod.”

Of the sources that mention the Smiths’ use of divining rods, only Mather ascribed dowsing to more than one son. All others mention only Joseph Junior. As some early Americans ascribed dowsing ability to seventh sons, perhaps Joseph’s father singled him out for dowsing because he was the third son.¹⁹

Joseph’s use of a divining rod may have grown out of a background in his family’s wisdom divination. In one study of rural divination, astrology and dowsing were lumped together under the category of “agricultural magic.”²⁰ Astrology may have provided Joseph a bridge from the wise ways of his mother to the dowsing practiced by his father. As evidence that Joseph Smith believed in the astrological significance of Jupiter, the ruling planet of his birth year, D. Michael Quinn suggests that Joseph took up the rod because Jupiter ruled over hazel—the wood most preferred by early American dowsers.²¹ To document

¹⁸ The Book of Mormon begins, “I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father . . .” (1 Nephi 1:1). Those who take the Book of Mormon as disguised autobiography have taken this to mean that Joseph Smith Junior learned the ways of treasure seeking from his father. See, for example, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 315-318.

¹⁹ Joseph Smith Junior gave a straight, staff-like cane to Joseph Knight Senior. Joseph Knight Senior named his third son Joseph (See the family chart on the inside front cover of Hartley, *They Are My Friends: A History of the Joseph Knight Family, 1825-1850*). The cane has been handed down to descendents named Joseph (see the photograph of the cane and the caption for this photograph in *ibid*).

²⁰ Vogt and Hyman, *Water Witching, U.S.A.*, 211.

²¹ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 81.

Jupiter's rule over hazel Quinn produces three arcane sources, only one of which had been reprinted since the 1650s. Also, according to each source, Jupiter rules over not only hazel, but also almond, ash, fig, oak, olive, pear, and vines.²² Furthermore, one of these sources informed the reader that Mercury also rules over hazel.²³ Even if Joseph Smith did have access to the astrological doctrine that Jupiter ruled over hazelwood, it probably meant nothing to him.

However, cutting a divining rod may have provided a bridge for Joseph Smith between wisdom divination and dowsing. Many American dowzers followed a long-standing European practice of cutting divining rods from trees during astrologically significant days and times.²⁴ A number of dowzers—ranging from Germany to America—preferred to cut rods on St. John's day—the celebration of the Summer Solstice.²⁵ This was probably the day on which Nathaniel Wood—the patriarch of the New Israelites—cut his forked witch-

²² William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (London: Thomas Brudenell, 1647), 64; Henry Cornelius Agrippa Von Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy or Magic: Book One—Natural Magic* (London: Gregory Moule, 1651; Chicago: Hahn & Whitehead, 1898), 100; William Ramesey, *Astrologia Restaurata; or Astrology Restored: Being and Introduction to the General and Chief part of the Language of the Stars* (London: "Published by Authority, Printed for Robert White," 1653), 53. Lilly went through several reprints.

²³ Ramesey, *Astrologia Restaurata; or Astrology Restored*, 62.

²⁴ Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 443. For drawings of seventeenth-century horoscopes for determining times to cut a rod, see Bird, *The Divining Hand*, 94-95.

²⁵ On "St. John's Day," or "Midsummer's Day," as a day for cutting rods, see Bonnie Blackburn and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The Oxford Companion to the Year* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), s.v. "24 June." On cutting divining rods on this day, see James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, part 7, *Balder the Beautiful: The Fire Festivals of Europe and the Doctrine of the External Soul*, vol. 2, 3d ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 67-68; Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove*, 55; Cavendish, ed., *Man, Myth, and Magic*, s.v. "Hazel"; Joshua Trachtenburg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, a Temple Book, 1987), 225. See also Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures . . .*, motif h 1.8.4.1: "St. John's Day."

hazel, which he called "St. John's rod."²⁶ The Judeo-Christian religious tradition has always associated divine revelation with light. As Wood used his rod to receive revelation, the day with the longest period of sunlight provided an auspicious day to cut one.

D. Michael Quinn asserts that Joseph Smith's culture "required" him to cut rods on auspicious days.²⁷ Joseph's father may have been one to observe such practices. Mormon schismatic James Colin Brewster remembered that a group of treasure hunters in Kirtland, Ohio, which included Joseph Smith Senior, anointed their rods and prayed over them before using them.²⁸ Astrology is absent, however, in the Peter Ingersoll affidavit.

I was once ploughing near the house of Joseph Smith, Sen. about noon, he requested me to walk with him a short distance from his house, for the purpose of seeing whether a mineral rod would work in my hand, saying at the same time he was confident it would. As my oxen were eating, and being myself at leisure, I accepted the invitation.—When we arrived near the place at which he thought there was money, he cut a small witch hazle bush and gave me direction how to hold it.²⁹

Even if Joseph Smith's first divining rod was cut in accordance with folk astrology, it may have been cut by his father, rather than by himself.

²⁶ Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont*, 50. On the other hand, Wood may have associated his rod with St. John for masonic reasons. William Morgan's contemporaneous expose shows that the Freemasonic "blue lodges" of the early nineteenth century were dedicated to St. John. John L. Brooke draws a possible connection between Freemasonry and the New Israelites (Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 140-146).

²⁷ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 97.

²⁸ Brewster, *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Diggers*, 3.

²⁹ Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232-36.

Establishing a direct link between wisdom divination and Joseph's initial use of a rod is less important than seeing the place of Joseph's dowsing against the background of the family's wise ways. In his theory of revelation, sociologist Rodney Stark notes that "even the least intense form of religious experience contains the potential for more intense encounters."³⁰ By taking up the rod, Joseph laid hold on the one accessible form of divination practiced in his family that had an ecstatic element.

For the most part, dowsing constitutes a mechanistic method of divination: The dowser walks around with the tip of the rod pointing up into the air and waits for the rod to dip. Still, dowsing may also be classified as a weak form of *ecstatic* divination because the rod has to be held in the hands of the dowser in order to work. Alan Taylor explains that "religious seekers wanted direct contact with divinity; they yearned for a religion that they could experience physically. For some, no experience with the supernatural seemed more tangible than the pull of a divining rod"³¹ In their study of American water witching, Vogt and Hyman note that some have taken up dowsing because they wanted to develop "the gift."³²

Joseph's later use of a seer stone constituted another step toward ecstatic divination. As with dowsing, scrying falls under the category of mechanical divination because it requires a tool, in this case a speculum with which the seer

³⁰ Stark, "A Theory of Revelations," 291.

³¹ Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy," 22.

³² Vogt and Hyman, *Water Witching U.S.A.*, 168.

can focus his or her vision and concentration. However, the stone brought supernatural visions to the eyes and mind of the seer. This experience proved more ecstatic than feeling a stick move.

Some of Joseph's old New York neighbors spoke of his divinatory progression. In 1885, Isaac Butts, a former school-mate of Joseph's, stated that "Young Jo had a forked witch-hazel rod with which he claimed he could locate buried money or hidden things. Later he had a peep-stone which he put into his hat and looked into it. I have seen both."³³ Sarah F. Anderick, an old school friend of Joseph's older sister Sophronia, reminisced about Joseph's claims. She stated, "when a young man, he could tell where lost or hidden things and treasures were buried or located with a forked witch hazel I heard that Jo obtained . . . a peep-stone, which he used in the place of the witch hazel."³⁴

Investigators gathered similar reports. Frederic G. Mather, who interviewed Orlando Saunders in 1880, affirmed that Smith used a rod before he obtained a seer stone.³⁵ Ellen E. Dickinson, who interviewed New York

³³ Isaac Butts, statement, South Newbury, Ohio, n.d. [c. 1885], quoted in "Isaac Butts," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 5. On the dating of this statement, see Dan Vogel's editorial introduction in *EMD*, 2:202.

³⁴ Mrs. S. F. Anderick, statement, Monterey County, California, 24 June 1887, quoted in "Mrs. S. F. Anderick's Statement," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 4. Dan Vogel has found evidence that Anderick's first name was Sarah (*EMD*, 2:207). Anderick believed that the peep-stone Joseph obtained was Sally Chase's, but Sally's brother Abel corrected this misconception. He told William H. and Edmund L. Kelley that he had a "sister that [had] a stone she could see in, but it was not the one that Smith had" (Abel Chase, interviewed by William H. and Edmund L. Kelley, Manchester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 8, in *EMD*, 2:85; c.f. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," *Saints' Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 165, col. 2).

³⁵ Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, August 1980, p. 198, col. 2. See also p. 199, col. 1. Mather, however, was unaware of Joseph's first stone.

neighbors the following year, also affirmed that “he carried a rod of witch-hazel, to assist in the discovery of water.”³⁶ Disciples of Christ preacher Clark Braden, who corresponded with old Palmyrans in preparation for his 1884 debate with RLDS elder Edmund L. Kelley, spoke of Joseph’s “primitive, supernatural capacity as a water-witch.”³⁷ James H. Kennedy, who interviewed neighbors in preparation for his 1888 publication, confirmed Butts and Anderick: “The first venture made by young Smith in the line of mystification was as a ‘Water Witch.’”³⁸

During John C. Bennett’s 1843 anti-Mormon lecture tour, a broadside announced that on 13 January in Alton, Illinois, he would speak on a number of topics:

*Joe Smith’s Golden Bible; the Divining Rod; the Urim and Thummim; the Daughter of Zion, (Danites); Destroying Angel, (Destructives); Mormon Miracles; Joe’s Spiritual Wife System; the Great Mormon Seraglio; Holy Order Lodge; the Mormon Priesthood, &c.*³⁹

Before his apostacy, Bennett had served as a counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency. His statements and writings freely mix accurate insider

³⁶ Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 30. On her interviewing, see p. 4.

³⁷ *Public Discussion of the Issues Between The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and The Church of Christ [Disciples] Held in Kirtland, Ohio, Beginning February 12, and Closing March 8, 1884 Between E. L. Kelley, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Clark Braden, of The Church of Christ* (Lamoni, Iowa: The Herald Publishing House, 1913), p. 367, col. 2. Braden received information about the Smiths from John H. Gilbert and others (see *EMD*, 2:146-48, 535-37).

³⁸ Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 19. The Regional historian Arch Merrill, who collected local lore about Joseph Smith in the early twentieth century, picked up stories about his water witching (Arch Merrill, *Pioneer Profiles* [“Manufactured in New York, New York, by American Book-Stratford Press; distributed from Rochester, New York, by Seneca Book Binding Company,” 1957], 157).

³⁹ *MORMONISM!* (n.p. [Alton, Illinois?]: n.p., n.d. [c. 13 January 1843]). A photocopy of this broadside can be found in the Library of the LDS Church’s Historical Department.

information with bald-faced lies. His slate of lecture topics, which certainly contains some of the latter, may also contain some of the former. In this roughly chronological list, the divining rod precedes the urim and thummim.⁴⁰

When did Joseph begin divining with a rod? The fact that Joseph had a rod before he had a stone helps date the initial practice. As argued later, Joseph probably obtained his first seer stone in late 1821 or early 1822. He obtained his second seer stone in 1822. So Joseph was using a divining rod by that year.

But Joseph began developing the gift of seeing before he obtained his own stone. Some time prior to his move from Palmyra village to the Palmyra-Manchester township line, he began looking into a neighbor's seer stone.⁴¹ Dating this move, therefore, helps to date the period of time in which Joseph began dowsing. Road tax lists of April 1819 and April 1820 show that sometime between the days on which these lists were made, Joseph Smith Senior moved from the west end of Palmyra's main street to the south end of Stafford road at the township-county line. Apparently Lucy and some of the younger children remained on the west end of the village while Joseph and the older boys built the family's new log home and began clearing land for farming.⁴²

A consideration of further historical data helps to sharpen the interval. Wayne County historian W. H. McIntosh wrote that for the "two and a half years

⁴⁰ Barnes Frisbie also asserted that Joseph Smith Junior used a divining rod prior to his use of a seer stone. However, Frisbie's position was connected to his untenable opinion that Joseph Junior and Oliver Cowdery inherited dowsing from their New Israelite fathers. Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont*, 63-64.

⁴¹ See chapter 4. of this thesis.

the family resided in the village” Joseph Senior and the boys earned money by hiring out as harvesters and well-diggers.⁴³ Lucy and the children had followed Joseph Senior to Palmyra from Vermont, arriving around January of 1817.⁴⁴

Adding the two and a half years given my McIntosh to this arrival date places the Smith boys near the township line as early as the summer of 1819.

Considering another set of evidence, Donald L. Enders concludes that the Smiths “could not have moved to the Palmyra-Manchester town line any later than mid-1819.”⁴⁵ Combining these arguments dates the move to the summer of 1829.

Joseph apparently began using a neighbor’s seer stone prior to this move. The succession of divinatory modes laid out in this thesis suggests that Joseph’s use of a rod preceded his use of seer stones. This, in turn, suggests that Joseph began dowsing by mid-1819 at the latest.

How early could Joseph Smith have begun using a rod? D. Michael Quinn asserts that Joseph’s old neighbors “indicated that this occurred during the first stages of his father’s treasure digging in the Palmyra area.”⁴⁶ Actually, former neighbors indicated that young Joseph initially took up the rod as a water-dowser in imitation of his father. James H. Kennedy inferred that this occurred in

⁴² Marquardt and Walters, *Inventing Mormonism*, 3-4. Alvin may have remained in the village for a year or so to manage the shop. *Ibid.*

⁴³ McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York*, 149. McIntosh calculated that the family moved from the village in 1818, but Joseph Smith Senior did not arrive in the village until late 1816 and the family came even later.

⁴⁴ EMD, 1:273n69, 275n73.

⁴⁵ Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family,” 215-16.

⁴⁶ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 33.

the early New York years and prior to his father's treasure dowsing.⁴⁷ Joseph probably began using a rod in association with the well-digging that characterized the Smith males' work between early 1817 and mid-1819.⁴⁸

Kennedy writes that Joseph began water witching by "successfully locating some hidden streams." Then, driven by ambition, he developed the ability to find underground water. Next came treasure: "From locating subterranean veins of water he advanced to the discovery of hidden riches . . ."⁴⁹ Kennedy presents a plausible sequence for Joseph's divinatory development, but it may derive more from an "evolution at all costs" interpretation than from his New York interviews. Mather, based perhaps on his interview with Orlando Saunders, asserted a similar progression: "The profession of a water-witch did not bring enough ducats to the Smith family; so the attempt was made to find hidden treasures."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 19.

⁴⁸ Quinn dates Joseph's initial use of a rod to sometime between 1817 and 1819 (33). While I agree with this periodization, I arrive at it for different reasons. Quinn writes that neighbors implied Joseph began dowsing with his father when his father began treasure hunting in Palmyra. However, Joseph Smith Senior probably did not start treasure hunting or treasure dowsing until 1820. Old neighbors actually associate Joseph Junior's initial dowsing with his father's water witching. This did occur as early as 1817. Quinn states that Joseph began dowsing by 1819, when he found his first seer stone. Here he relies on Pomeroy Tucker's dating, which is probably inaccurate. Actually, Joseph probably found his first seer stone in late 1821 or early 1822. However, Joseph began using a neighbor's seer stone in or before the summer of 1819. Therefore, since his ability to use a rod seems to have preceded his ability to see in stones, Joseph did probably had begun dowsing by 1819.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 19.

⁵⁰ Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine*, August 1980, p. 198, col. 2. For examples of twentieth-century dowzers who expanded their gift from water witching to mineral dowsing, see Wyman, *Witching for Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals*, 48, 53. At the turn of the century, Texan Guy Findlay moved from water witching to doodlebugging oil (Mody Boatright, *Folklore of the Oil Industry* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 17-20.

New York neighbors affirmed that Joseph did use a rod to find buried treasure. Daniel Hendrix remembered that "Joe, in his excursion after gold, carried a divining rod to tell him where there was hidden treasure . . ." ⁵¹ Christopher M. Stafford, who had lived down the road from Joseph, stated that "Jo claimed he could tell where money was buried with a witch hazel consisting of a forked stick of hazel. He held it one fork in each hand and claimed the upper end was attracted by the money." ⁵² This ubiquitous method of dowsing, originally documented by Georgius Agricola in the Harz mountains of Germany, has persisted down to the present time. ⁵³

Residents of Fayette, Seneca County, New York, where the Church of Christ would later be organized, remembered Joseph Smith dowsing in that area. Joseph and his brother Hyrum had hired out in this area as day laborers around 1820. ⁵⁴ After reading Daniel Hendrix's newspaper interview, Diedrich Willers

⁵¹ Daniel Hendrix, interviewed by Henry G. Tinsley, in Tinsley, "Origin of Mormonism," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 May 1893, p. 12, col. 1.

⁵² C[hristopher] M. Stafford, statement, Auburn, Ohio, 23 March 1885, quoted in Arthur B. Deming, "Mormon Prophet," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 1.

⁵³ Ellen E. Dickinson wrote that an "old man" from New York's Onondaga Valley claimed Joseph Smith had used his rod and stone there to find water and treasure around 1817–1826 (*New Light on Mormonism*, 21, 31). Joseph did hire out for labor to other areas of New York, but there are a number of other Joseph Smiths in New York, a number of other dowsers and scryers, and this source is second-hand. More problematic is that this report seems to be motivated by an attempt to establish the now discredited Spalding theory for the origins of the Book of Mormon. Solomon Spaulding's widow lived for a time in the Onondaga Valley. See Bush, "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," 40–69.

⁵⁴ Daniel S. Kendig, of Fayette, inferred that this occurred prior to his 1823 discovery of the golden plates (*History of Seneca Co., New York, with Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Manufactories, from Original Sketches by Artists of the Highest Ability, 1786–1876* [Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign & Everts, 1876], 129). Kendig further specified that Smith was in the area "about the year 1820," a fact confirmed by local postal notices in 1819 and 1820 for he and Hyrum (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 51, 397n185).

wrote to him, "I have heard of him as a day laborer in this county [Seneca] for a couple of years prior to 1830, when he used to use a rod of some kind in pretending to hunt water for farmer wells. <or minerals.>"⁵⁵ Daniel S. Kendig, another resident of Seneca County, remembered Joseph working for Jacob Chamberlain and others, "when not engaged with his mineral rods digging for gold in various places."⁵⁶

In addition to subterranean water, minerals, and treasure, Joseph's rod served other purposes. Both Isaac Butts and Sarah Anderick stated that Joseph used it to find "hidden things." He may also have used a rod to find stray livestock, as his father did.

Rod, God, and Rodsman

Exploring the system of belief held by early American rodsman offers possible insights into the Smith's use of divining rods. A dowser's success could depend on three ingredients: the quality of his rod, his degree of dowsing talent, and the grace of God. About 1824, the "Commodore," who hunted zealously for buried treasure, found that "it was necessary to be provided with a rod, constructed by someone versed in the true principles of the art."⁵⁷ A half-century earlier, the notorious treasure-seeking con-man Ransford Rogers promised to

⁵⁵ D. Willers, Fayette, New York, to Daniel Hendrix, Ontario, California, 27 July 1895, (apparently a retained copy), Diedrich Willers Papers, Seneca Falls Historical Society, Box 4, folder 2; photocopy in the H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Box 149, folder 25, item 5.

⁵⁶ *History of Seneca Co., New York . . .*, 129.

⁵⁷ "A History of the Divining Rod," 224.

find the gold buried in Exeter, New Hampshire. Local residents later told the story of Rogers explaining that finding the treasure would require “a particular kind of divining-rod. It must be made of dear materials, but it was infallibly sure of doing the business.” Rogers collected money to purchase the rod, left town to get it, and was never seen again.⁵⁸ His scam took advantage of a widespread belief that special rods divined more effectively than any old branch.

By 1851, some rods were elaborately constructed. In that year, when a young man asked Rochester seer Mary Lambert to help him locate mineral wealth, she made him a special rod for five dollars. “It consisted of two pieces of whalebone bent round a small piece of wood enclosing a small vial of mercury. The whole covered with a piece of old silk.”⁵⁹ Special preparations such as these invested the rod with power.⁶⁰

Dowsers could also increase the effectiveness of their rods by maximizing the sympathetic principles that governed their operation. Rodsmen at the

⁵⁸ Bell, *History of the Town of Exeter, New Hampshire*, 413.

⁵⁹ George G. Cooper, “A Green ‘Un Done For,” *Rochester Daily Times*, 4 May 1851, p. [2], col. 3.

⁶⁰ The Book of Mormon prophet Lehi used a device called the “Liahona” when travelling through the wilderness. It was described as a ball-shaped compass, which had two spindles. Apparently, one spindle directed their journey to the promised land, while the other spindle pointed them to food sources. The Liahona only worked when the Lehites were righteous. See 1 Nephi 16:10, 16; 18:12, 21; 2 Nephi 5:12; Alma 37:38–44. A mid-twentieth-century folklorist spoke with one informant in or from the South who described a divining instrument somewhat similar to the Liahona: “It’s a round thing like a clock and has three points sticking out. One was set for gold, one for silver and the other for brass. It has two handles of hickory. You hold them two handles and walk along like you witch for water” (Harry Middleton Hyatt, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork: Beliefs Accepted by Many Negroes and White Persons These Being Orally Recorded Among Blacks and Whites* [“Printed in the U.S.A., for Harry Middleton Hyatt, by Western Publishing, Inc., Hannibal, Missouri,” 1970], vol. 1, p. 120, item 402 [emphasis in original]). There is no historical connection between this device and the Liahona. However, this device exemplifies the tendency of some diviners to create superior dowsing instruments. It shows how Joseph Smith could have appreciated the Book of Mormon’s descriptions of the Liahona.

Ephrata Commune on the banks of Pennsylvania's Wissahickon River followed this course of action. "When it was desired to locate special metals, small nails made of the metals sought for were introduced into the long end of the rod."⁶¹ In the sixteenth century Georgius Agricola documented the practice of using hazel rods to find silver and iron rods to find gold.⁶² Just as a "fresh twig" could find water, some early Americans used metal rods called "mineral rods" to find precious ores and treasure.⁶³

Consecration bridged the idea of power internal to the rod and God's grace; by consecrating a rod, a dowser could ask the Lord to empower it. For example, in a sixteenth-century cutting formula, the rodsman prayed, "I ask you, o great Adonay, Elohim, Ariel, and Jehova, to give this rod the force and virtue of those of Jacob, Moses, and the great Joshua."⁶⁴ One Pennsylvanian German dowser explained, "I call on him [God] to make her successful, when I cuts her, and so she *must* be true."⁶⁵ James Brewster remembered a group of Kirtland diviners to which Joseph Smith Senior belonged anointing their rods and praying over them. Even with God's favor and a good rod, however, one could not "work" a rod without the gift to do so.

⁶¹ Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author, 1895), 113.

⁶² Agricola, *De Re Metallica*, 39.

⁶³ "A History of the Divining Rod," 218.

⁶⁴ *Le Dragon Rouge ou L'Art de Commander les Esprits* (1521; Nismes, France: Célestes, 1823, quoted in Bird, *The Divining Hand*, 69.

⁶⁵ Frederick Starr, "Some Pennsylvania German Lore," *Journal of American Folklore* 4 (1891): 323.

Most Americans who believed in dowsing probably would have agreed that not all dowsers had been created equal. An 1825 article informed its readers that the “inclination is much more free when the twig is in the hands of some individuals than others.”⁶⁶ The “Commodore” was well known as a “master of the divining rod.” He could not only locate subterranean water and tell how deep it was, but discern its direction of flow.⁶⁷ Joseph Knight, one of the first Mormon believers, described Alvah Beaman, one of Joseph Smith’s former treasure-seeking companions, as “a grate rodsman.”⁶⁸ Lucy Mack Smith remembered Beaman as “a man in whom we reposed much confidence, and who was well worthy of the same.”⁶⁹

What made for a great rodsman? Twentieth-century sources suggest that highly gifted dowsers are able to internalize the gift. While dowsers always use rods when they first learn their art, some eventually reach the point when they no longer need them. Lloyd Farley of Ohio and Evelyn Penrose of England provide two examples of this level of achievement. They dowsed with their outstretched arms.⁷⁰ Penrose prided herself on her highly developed gift, but found “bare hands” dowsing quite exhausting. She usually used a rod and

⁶⁶ “The Divining Rod,” *The Worcester Magazine and Historical Journal*, October 1825, 29.

⁶⁷ “A History of the Divining Rod,” 219.

⁶⁸ Dean Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (autumn 1976): 33.

⁶⁹ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 67. For more on Beaman, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 39.

⁷⁰ Lloyd, “Folklore, Foodways, and the Supernatural,” 61-62; Evelyn Penrose, *Adventure Unlimited: A Diviner Travels the World* (London: Neville Spearman, 1958), frontispiece. See also Mody Boatright, *Folklore of the Oil Industry*, 17-20; Bird, *The Divining Hand*, 109.

pendulum because they made dowsing easier. As Lloyd Farley, another twentieth-century water witch, explains, the rod is just “something to hold on to.”⁷¹ Most rodspersons first experience dowsing as movement of the rod. Some may begin to feel the movement in their arms or hands. “Particularly sensitive persons” may even come to feel the pull of water in their internal organs.⁷²

Most water witches have used a forked rod because it gives them *two* handles “to hold on to.” An article on divining rods that appeared in an early American historical journal prioritized three types of rods.

A fresh twig taken from any tree will diverge from a perpendicular, or dip below a horizontal line, by a greater or less angle with its first position, when brought directly over, or in the near vicinity of a vein of metal or water. The effect is more perceptible when two twigs are taken and brought closely in contact at the cut extremities. When a forked branch is used, the degree of diverging is much greater than with the single or double sticks.⁷³

While a good divining rod made for good dowsing, a great rodsman could dowse with less reliance on gadgetry.

Early Mormon revelations addressed all three ingredients of the dowsing formula: rod, God, and dowser. The Book of Mormon included a revelation received by Joseph of Egypt promising him that God would some day raise up a Moses for his people and would “give power unto him *in a rod.*”⁷⁴ The revelations to Oliver Cowdery regarding his “gift of working with the rod”

⁷¹ Wyman, *Witching for Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals*, 12.

⁷² Bird, *The Divining Hand*, 4. See also Barrett and Besterman, *The Divining Rod*, xci.

⁷³ “The Divining Rod,” *Worcester Magazine and Historical Journal*, October 1825, 28.

⁷⁴ 2 Nephi 3:17 (emphasis mine).

stressed that this gift came from God and reminded, “without faith you can do nothing.”⁷⁵

Early American and early Mormon beliefs about water witching and mineral dowsing may explain Joseph Smith Junior’s switch from the traditional forked rod to a straight stick or staff. Palmyran Pomeroy Tucker wrote that Joseph Smith began divining for treasure in 1820 with his newly discovered seer stone and “some sort of wand” held in only one hand.⁷⁶ Anna Eaton wrote that this wand was witch-hazel.⁷⁷ This indicates that Joseph had developed his dowsing abilities to the point that he could use a straight stick or staff and no longer required the more effective forked branch so commonly used.

Joseph Smith Senior also developed this ability. According to Peter Ingersoll, sometime between 1822 and 1827 Joseph Smith Senior found their stray cattle with “a small stick in his hand” and showed Ingersoll how to hold a rod single-handedly.⁷⁸ Jesse Smith’s 1829 letter compared Joseph Senior’s rod to the rods of Jannes and Jambres. Their rods and the rod of Aaron turned into snakes—implying that they were one-dimensional staffs. Based on his biblical allusion or what he had heard of his brother’s rod, Jesse referred to it as a “wand.” “Black Dinah Rollins,” treasure-seeker of Portsmouth, New Hampshire,

⁷⁵ Book of Commandments 7:4.

⁷⁶ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19-22.

⁷⁷ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 2.

⁷⁸ Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 232-34.

used a straight rod that “resembled a common walking-cane.”⁷⁹ Arguing that Oliver Cowdery’s rod was forked, D. Michael Quinn notes that aside from the staff used by Vermont Prophet Isaac Bullard, “a straight rod of divination was apparently unknown in Joseph Smith’s America.”⁸⁰ Tucker, Ingersoll, and Jesse Smith, therefore, indicate that Joseph Smith and his father had advanced into rare position. Similar to Joseph Senior’s instruction in single-handed dowsing, Joseph Junior gave his disciples Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball straight rods. Joseph’s ability to internalize a degree of dowsing power foreshadowed his later ability to see visions without the aid of a seer stone.

Jesse’s letter to Hyrum and Joseph Smith’s revision of the revelation he received concerning Oliver Cowdery’s rodding gift imply that the Smiths viewed their rods in terms of the rods used by Moses and Aaron. Richard Lloyd Anderson argues that this suggests a straight stick of wood.⁸¹ In response, D. Michael Quinn notes that rod diviners applied the terms “Rod of Aaron” and “Mosaical rod” to their forked branches.⁸² In the book of Exodus itself, Moses’ rod is his shepherd’s staff, the rods of Moses and Aaron turn into serpents (suggesting uni-dimensionality), and are held in one hand. However, in the

⁷⁹ Geo. Alex Emery, *Ancient City of Gorgeana and Modern Town of York (Maine): From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, 2d. ed., rev. and enl. (Boston: G. Alex Emery, 1874), 202-4. “Black Dinah Rollins” is the only female dowser I have encountered for this time period. She was considered a witch.

⁸⁰ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 38.

⁸¹ Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 521-32.

⁸² Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 38. Aaron’s rod served as a symbol that he was Moses’s spokesman. The text and historical context of revelations regarding Oliver Cowdery’s rod also include the concept of delegated authority. Anderson therefore stresses that

folkway and folksay of early American dowsing, this did not pose a problem. Nevertheless, Joseph Smith may have come to interpret the rods of Moses and Aaron as straight staffs based on a study of the biblical text.

As Philip Barlow writes, "Joseph Smith grew up in a Bible-drenched society and he showed it."⁸³ His family seems to have regularly read from the good book. William Smith recalled, "we always had family prayer since I can remember. I well remember father used to carry his spectacles in his vest pocket [pocket] . . . and when us boys saw him feel for his specks, we knew that was a signal to get ready for prayer . . ."⁸⁴ Of course, one does not need glasses to close their eyes in prayer. William also mentions them singing an evening hymn, but it was always the same hymn, so there was no need to read a hymnal. Apparently, the Smiths followed a common American practice of daily evening worship consisting of reading a passage from the Bible, singing a hymn, and praying. When Joseph Senior reached for his glasses, the family knew it was time to read the Bible. Neighbor John Stafford remembered that the Smiths "studied their Bible."⁸⁵

terminology "is not the issue but the authentic context of delegated power" (Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 530). Quinn does not respond to this argument.

⁸³ Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible*, 11. Barlow writes of Joseph's early study of the Bible in chap. 1: "Before Mormonism: Joseph Smith and the Bible, 1820-1830," 11-42.

⁸⁴ "W[illia]m. B. Smith's last Statement," *Zion's Ensign* (Independence, Missouri), 13 January 1894, p. 6, col. 2.

⁸⁵ John Stafford, interviewed by William H. and Edmund L. Kelley, Rochester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 15, in *EMD*, 2:87; c.f. , Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," *Saints' Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 167, col. 1.

In addition to family study, Joseph apparently would read the Bible in solitude for hours at a time. Lucy remembered Joseph telling her, "I can take my Bible, and go into the woods, and learn more in two hours, than you can learn at meeting in two years, if you should go all the time."⁸⁶ Joseph wrote that he began "searching the scriptures" in 1818—a year or more into the period of time in which he would have taken up the rod.⁸⁷ Reading the Bible accounts of Moses' and Aaron's rods turning into snakes and being held in one hand may have prompted Joseph's advancement within this mode of divination.

The Joseph Smith cane on display in the "Presidents of the Church" exhibit in the LDS Museum of Church History and Art confirms that Joseph Smith owned a straight staff and that he associated it with the rod of Moses or Aaron. The handle of the cane has been carved to represent a serpent. Scales cover the curve of the handle, which terminates with the serpent's head. This staff turns into a snake and coils down to form a cane handle.⁸⁸ There is no

⁸⁶ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and his Progenitors for Several Generations*, 90.

⁸⁷ Joseph Smith Junior, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.," in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, Ms, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, p. 2, in *PJS*, 1:5.

⁸⁸ Joseph Smith cane, on exhibit in the "Joseph Smith Jr." panel of the perpetual "Presidents of the Church" exhibit, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City. Noting the astrological association between Jupiter and snakes, D. Michael Quinn forwards a magical interpretation of this cane that explicitly excludes a Christian interpretation (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 90). Considering possible magical parallels is one thing. Excluding religious interpretations is quite another.

The Martin Harris cane terminates with the carved head of a ram whose throat has been cut. Scott Harris, past president of the Martin Harris Family Organization, informs me that he believes Martin carved the cane himself because the Harris family once owned a quilt made by Martin that featured a ram. This quilt was lost in the Teton Dam flood. As Harris participated in at least one treasure-dig with the Smiths (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 60-62), and as the Smith's neighbors told stories of them sacrificing animals to propitiate treasure guardians (Jerald and Sandra Tanner, "Joseph Smith's Use of Magic Circles and Animal Sacrifice," *Salt Lake City Messenger* no. 50 [March 1983]: 8-12), it might tempt some to interpret the

evidence that Joseph ever used this cane for divining. If he did, there is no way to determine when this would have occurred. The cane merely confirms Joseph's (eventual) belief that the rods of Aaron and Moses were straight.

Whereas the Smiths used forked hazel rods to find water in their early New York years, they may have used mineral rods when they began treasure divining. In 1842, New York historians John W. Barber and Henry Howe wrote that Joseph and his father "at one time procured a mineral rod, and dug in various places for money."⁸⁹ Daniel S. Kendig of Seneca County remembered Joseph using "mineral rods" while laboring there in the summer of 1820. James C. Brewster wrote that the Kirtland treasure seekers used "mineral rods."⁹⁰ Early American rodsman Nathaniel Sartell, of Groton, Massachusetts, found water, silver veins, and Captain Kidd's treasure with rods of witch hazel and steel.⁹¹ William Stafford, who accompanied the Smiths on one treasure hunt, recounted that after the treasure had been located,

Martin Harris cane in a treasure-seeking context. However, even if the stories have some truth to them, no one ever claimed that the Smiths sacrificed rams. As with Joseph's serpent cane, an Old Testament interpretation is more legitimate. God provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice in the place of his son Isaac (Genesis 22:13). The ram symbolizes God's providence. Members of the Harris family often exhibit the cane at the Martin Harris gravesite in Clarkston, Utah, during The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints's annual "Martin Harris: The Man Who Knew" pageant. The pageant is held in the summer adjacent to the Clarkston cemetery where Harris is buried. The cane was shown to me by its current caretaker, Scott Harris, of Logan, Utah. For a photograph of Martin Harris holding this cane, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981), 106.

⁸⁹ Barber and Howe. *Historical Collections of the State of New York*, 580.

⁹⁰ Brewster, *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Diggers*, 2. Peter Ingersoll stated that the Smiths used a "mineral rod," but he mistakenly applied this term to a wooden rod (Peter Ingersoll, statement, Palmyra, New York, 2 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unraveled*, 232). Howe wrote that the Smiths used a "mineral rod" (31-32), but this was probably based on the Ingersoll statement.

Joseph Sen. first made a circle, twelve or fourteen feet in diameter. This circle, said he, contains the treasure. He then stuck in the ground a row of witch hazel sticks, around the said circle Within this circle he made another, of about eight or ten feet in diameter. He walked around three times on the periphery of the last circle . . . He next stuck a steel rod in the centre of the circles⁹²

As the Smiths used hazel sticks for dowsing, they may also have used the steel rod mentioned by Stafford. This treasure venture took place between 1821 and 1827.⁹³ If Joseph did use a mineral rod, he had a superior dowsing device.

From Dowser to Seer

When Joseph began using a seer stone, he made an even greater qualitative advance. Historian Alan Taylor documents a number of early American treasure quests and analyzes the use of divining rods and seer stones for treasure hunting. As Joseph Smith used both rods and stones to find treasure, the American treasure-hunting scene described by Taylor provides an appropriate context in which to understand the meaning of Joseph Smith's advancement from rodsman to seer.

Taylor outlines two struggles the treasure seekers had to face. During the night, they struggled with the spirit who guarded the treasures they sought. During the day, they faced the ridicule of genteel neighbors who considered

⁹¹ Caleb Butler, *History of the Town of Groton, Including Pepperell and Shirley, from the First Grant of Groton Plantation in 1655* (Boston: Press of T. R. Marvin, 1848), 256n6.

⁹² William Stafford, statement, Manchester, New York, 8 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238. On staked circles, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 46-47.

treasure seeking a superstitious tradition incompatible with the achievements of their enlightened age. The treasure seekers themselves saw their practice as a rational science of its own, and yet it yielded no rewards. The successful recovery of an impressive hoard would convince their neighbors of their belief's validity.

Taylor shows that the dynamic caused by these two struggles produced an increased attention to the rules of treasure seeking.⁹⁴ With magical circles properly circumscribed, and incantations properly quoted, the guardian spirit would not be able to move the treasure to a new location or intimidate its seekers. Increased focus on the theology of treasure seeking is what had caused the creation of more elaborate divining rods during the early nineteenth century.

It also accounts for an increased usage of seer stones. A seer stone functioned as a subterranean searchlight. Knowing that the treasure had actually been seen (albeit in vision) encouraged its seekers more than watching a rod point out where to begin shoveling. By the 1820s, using a seer stone to find treasure was as common as dowsing for it (see figure 1). However, because of the prevalence of ordinary water dowsers, those who had developed the ability to use seer stones stood out as superior diviners.

Whereas treasure diviners in Vermont and the other New England states overwhelmingly used divining rods, their counterparts in New York and throughout the old Northwest were as likely to use seer stones (see table 1). The

⁹³ Stafford stated that the treasure had been located by Joseph Junior with his seer stone. This dates the venture to 1821 or later. Stafford also states that this occurred before Joseph obtained the golden plates.

⁹⁴ Taylor, "Rediscovering the Context of Joseph Smith's Treasure Seeking," 141-53.

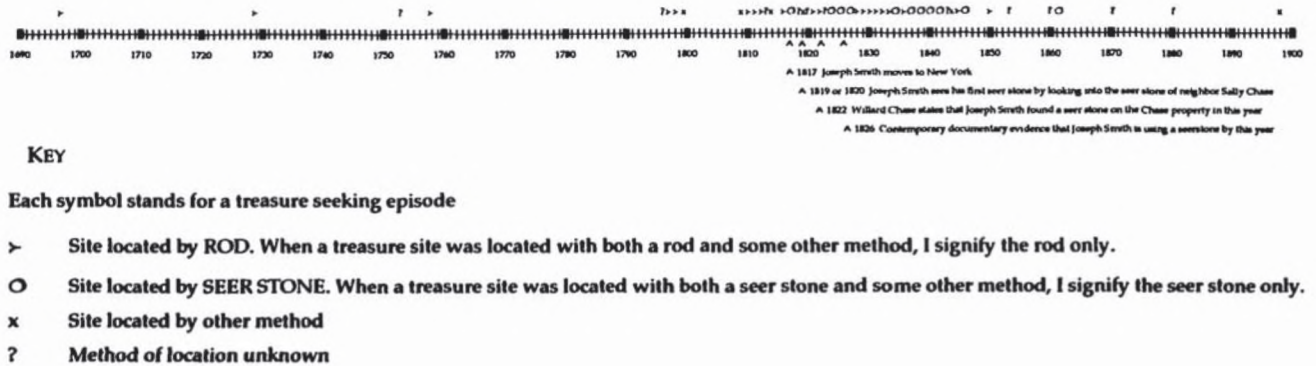


Fig. 1. Timeline of Treasure-Seeking Episodes in the American Northeast.¹

¹ Based on Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure-Seeking in the American Northeast, 1760-1830," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (spring 1986): 26-27, "Table 1: Treasure-Seeking Episodes In The American Northeast." When an episode spans more than two years, I mark both the first and last years with the appropriate symbol. I have eliminated episode 33 from the timeline because Joseph Smith used his seer stone in connection with this site. Although Taylor refers to Mormon history sources to document episode 29, one of those sources discusses the use of a seer stone by Sally Chase to find buried wealth. Taylor's source for episode 34 mentions only Joseph Smith and his seer stone. However, Smith's treasure digging in episode 34's location (Harmony, Pennsylvania) was historically related to a woman's previous use of a seer stone to locate "concealed treasure" (Joseph Lewis and Hiel Lewis, "Mormon History: A New Chapter about to be Published," *The Amboy Journal*, 30 April 1879). For this reason I have retained episode 34.

Table 1

Methods for Locating Treasure in the American Northeast¹

place	methods			rods vs. seer stones
	rod	seer stone	other	
Vermont and New Hampshire	8	2	4	8:2
New England	15	5	7	15:5
New York	2	3	2	2:3
northeast (not including New England)	5	4	4	5:4
comparisons				
New England vs. the Northeast	15:5	5:4	7:4	
Vermont and New Hampshire vs. New York	8:2	2:3	4:2	

¹ Based on Alan Taylor, "The Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure-Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830," *American Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (spring 1986): 26-27, "Table 1: Treasure-Seeking Episodes In The American Northeast." I have eliminated episode 33 from the table because Joseph Smith used his seer stone in connection with this site. Although Taylor refers to Mormon history sources to document episode 29, one of those sources discusses the use of a seer stone by Sally Chase to find buried wealth. Taylor's source for episode 34 mentions only Joseph Smith and his seer stone. However, Smith's treasure digging in episode 34's location (Harmony, Pennsylvania) was historically related to a woman's previous use of a seer stone to locate "concealed treasure" (Joseph Lewis and Hiel Lewis, "Mormon History: A New Chapter about to be Published," *The Amboy Journal* [Amboy, Illinois], 30 April 1879). For this reason I have retained episode 34.

increasing use of seer stones generally and the considerably higher frequency of their use in New York are probably two facets of the same phenomenon. As Americans moved forward in time they moved westward through space. The Smith family moved from Vermont to New York within this spatio-temporal context.

Focusing in on the towns where the Smiths lived sharpens this picture. Whereas treasure dowsing can be documented in one of the Vermont towns the Smiths had lived in, they were the only treasure rodsmen that lived in the Palmyra-Manchester area.⁹⁵ Furthermore, whereas at least three Manchester residents owned and used seer stones, scrying cannot be documented in the White River Valley. In Vermont, Joseph Smith Senior had expressed a desire for his son to have a seer stone. By moving to western New York, this became an option.

Joseph's progression from rodsman to seer also corresponded with his movement through the life cycle. First, as a young child, Joseph may have gathered bits of divining wisdom from his mother. Second, as an adolescent, he apparently began using a rod when he started digging wells with his father. Third, in teenage years, young men enter a period of identity creation in order to individuate themselves from their parents. Mormon historian Klaus J. Hansen applies an Eriksonian approach to Joseph's First Vision of God, the Father, and

⁹⁵ On treasure-dowsing in Randolph, a town in which the Smiths had lived, see "Money digging," *Wayne Sentinel*, 16 February 1825, p. [1], col. 5. Luman Walters and Alvah Beaman visited the Palmyra-Manchester area to hunt for treasure, but lived some distance from there. On Beaman, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 39. On Walters, see chapter 4 of this thesis.

Jesus Christ.⁹⁶ Erikson's theory of adolescent individuation can be equally applied to Joseph's first seer stone vision.

Although most water *diviners* discover their ability in their youth, water *seekers* prefer to have their wells dowsed by adults. In contrast, the European tradition of scrying had always attributed the gift of seeing to youths—because of their purity. Youths who could scry were sought out by anxious querents.⁹⁷ While digging wells in and around Palmyra in the late 1810s, Joseph's rodsmanship was probably overshadowed by that of his father. However, in the 1820s, a treasure-hunter named Josiah Stowell would seek out Joseph for his gift of seeing. By obtaining a seer stone, Joseph Smith not only fulfilled his father's expectations but also developed an individual identity. The Old Testament prophet Joel had prophesied that in the last days "your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."⁹⁸ Joseph Senior was a rod diviner whose life was periodically punctuated by visionary dreams. Joseph Junior became a stone seer whose life would be punctuated by the visits of gods and angels.

Emphasizing that the Smiths used divinatory media for more purposes than treasure hunting, Richard Lloyd Anderson points out that the Jesse Smith

⁹⁶ Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, 25-26.

⁹⁷ This long-standing tradition is documented throughout Besterman's study of *Crystal-Gazing*.

⁹⁸ Joel 2:28. The apostle Peter repeated this prophecy (Acts 2: 17). Joseph Smith considered waking visions a mode of divination superior to visionary dreams (Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet*, 114).

letter “ridicules the idea of receiving *information* through the rod.”⁹⁹ Anderson refers to Jesse’s enigmatic comment that Joseph Smith Senior used his rod to “tell the distance from India to Ethiopia.” A number of early American water witches not only located well-sites, but read the motions of their rods to determine how deep within the earth the water would be found.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps Joseph Senior was able to determine distances along the surface of the earth as well. This may illuminate the Vermonter claim that he wanted a stone for his son “to see all over the world with.”

Taking up a stone did not require setting down the rod. Some treasure diviners used both. Vermont treasure seekers who dug for silver and gold near Essex in 1824 “gathered around the spot indicated by the mystic stone and the charmed stick.”¹⁰¹ Fayette Lapham recalled Joseph Smith Senior telling him that his son traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, “at the request of some one who wanted the assistance of his divining rod and stone in finding hidden treasure.”¹⁰² Eber D. Howe and Ellen E. Dickinson wrote that Joseph used his rod and stone in combination to find treasure.¹⁰³ Palmyran Anna Eaton, who gathered stories about the Smiths, also wrote that Joseph used both rod and stone: “Not a sod was disturbed by the spades till Joe’s mystic wand, the witch

⁹⁹ Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Seeking,” 527.

¹⁰⁰ “The Divining Rod,” *The American Journal of Science and Arts*, 205; “A History of the Divining Rod,” 219.

¹⁰¹ L. C. Butler, “Essex,” in *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer: A Magazine Embracing a History of Each Town, Civil, Ecclesiastical, Biographical and Military*, ed. Abby Maria Hemenway (Burlington, Vermont: published by Miss A. M. Hemenway, 1868), 784-85.

¹⁰² Lapham, “IL—The Mormons,” *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 307, col. 1.

hazel, guided by the sacred stone, pointed out the golden somewhere.”¹⁰⁴ Eaton’s account manifests an ignorance of how divining rods worked, but affirms Joseph’s simultaneous use of both instruments and recognizes the seer stone as the superior divinatory device.

Divination became an important part of Joseph Smith’s life when he began using a rod. By becoming a stone seer, Joseph Smith significantly increased his divinatory abilities. After finding the golden plates, he would travel even further down his prophetic trajectory.

¹⁰³ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 12; Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁴ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 2.

CHAPTER 4

JOSEPH SMITH AND THE GIFT OF SEEING

"Are you quite certain, Mr. Gow, that you have at last found the real genuine sort of stone, which you have this wonderful faculty of seeing things in?"

—Martin to Gow, in *The Money Diggers: A Green Mountain Tale*¹

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

—Jesus of Nazareth²

And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light, that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.

—Alma 37:23

The Lord had prepared spectacles for to read the Book.

—Joseph Smith, 1832³

What made a seer stone a seer stone? What was it that differentiated a seer stone from an ordinary rock? This section investigates the qualities that made a stone good for seeing in. To understand Joseph Smith's acquisition of seer stones one must first understand the belief system surrounding their use.

¹ "The Hon. Judge Thompson" [Daniel Thompson], *May Martin; or, The Money Diggers: A Green Mountain Tale* (London: Published by J. Clements for the Proprietors of the Romancist and Novelist's Library, 1841), 11.

² Matthew 5:8.

³ This epigraph is my edited version of Joseph's 1832 history: "... the Lord had prepared specticke spectacles for to read the Book..." (Joseph Smith, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.," in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, Ms, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:9).

The Science of Seer Stones

In 1841, Vermont judge and novelist Daniel Pierce Thompson, who may have tried treasure seekers in his court, wrote of the belief "that there was a peculiar kind of stone in which certain individuals had the faculty of discovering hidden things." Thompson averred that this belief "formerly existed to a considerable extent in many parts of Vermont."⁴ Besterman, in his study of scrying, notes that "there are several special stones which are supposed to possess some inherent virtue which makes them especially suitable for scrying."⁵

In New York, Joseph Smith Senior told Fayette Lapham that not any stone would do. Lapham later recounted, "Smith claims and believes that there is a stone of this quality, somewhere, for every one." Like his father, Joseph Smith Junior held this belief. Neighbor Christopher Stafford reported him saying "there was a peepstone for me and many others if we could only find them." Paraphrasing the younger Joseph, Lorenzo Saunders, who lived just over the hill from the Smiths, remembered him saying that "men can pick stones out of this Earth . . . any one can get a stone, & see knowledge of futurity." Joseph Smith passed this idea on to the Twelve Apostles in a meeting with them in Nauvoo, Illinois. Brigham Young recorded in his journal Joseph's teaching that "every

⁴ Thompson, *May Martin; or, The Money Diggers*, 10n. Thompson's story, which involves a judge and trial, may be somewhat autobiographical. It displays impressive confirmable details of treasure seeking practices as well as upper-class stereotypes of its practitioners.

⁵ *Crystal-Gazing*, 6.

man who lived on the earth was entitled to a seer stone." In 1855, Young, in turn, instructed his brethren in this doctrine.⁶

But what exactly made for "a stone of this quality"? Ronald W. Walker notes, "there were green, yellow, white, and 'speckled stones,' opaque and polished stones, and round and oblong stones. Their only common quality was their 'unusual' or 'peculiar' nature."⁷ Indeed, peculiarity in a seer stone was all that was needed to identify it as such. However, seers gazed not only into their stones, but at them, and they had an eye for certain properties. What qualities did the scryers value in a stone? Early Mormon Priddy Meeks knew, though not a seer himself. In about 1857, an orphan named William Titt came to live with Meeks in his home in Parowan, Utah. Titt had been "born a natural seer," Meeks wrote. "I believe the Lord overruled his coming to me, I having the knowledge of the science of seer stones and being somewhat gifted in knowing one when I saw it. I used to find many . . ."⁸

Though now almost entirely forgotten, there was once a large body of seer stone lore, "a science of seer stones," which involved a discriminating eye for the

⁶ Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 1; C[hristopher]. M. Stafford, statement, 23 March 1885, in "Mormon Prophet," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 1; Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by E. L. Kelley, 12 November 1884, in "Miscellany," Ms, E. L. Kelley Papers, Library-Archives, The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Missouri, 9-10, in *EMD*, 2:154; "History of Brigham Young," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 20 February 1864, 118-119; The Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Council," 30 September 1855, Ms, General Church Minutes, LDS Church Archives.

⁷ Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 442.

⁸ "Journal of Priddy Meeks," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 10, nos. 1-4 (January, April, July, October 1942): 179, 200.

right sort of stone.⁹ Understanding the European American practice of identifying and using seer stones is impossible without a serious study of their religious belief system. A survey of several relevant sources produces a list of ten qualities that seers valued in a stone: size, shape, smoothness, luster, translucency, color, shade, encasing, the history of the stone, and whether it had been consecrated.

The size of a seer stone counted. One early English manuscript directed a would-be scryer to “take a christall stone or glasse, *the greater the better*, so that it be fayre & cleare without any ragges, cracke or holes broken within it and thou must have a thonge of hart skinn to wrappe thy stoune in so that thy stoune may be well seen in the middst of the bindinge”¹⁰ In this example, the prescribed stone is not only large, but clear, smooth, and encased in a thong to facilitate viewing. Rochester seer Zimri Allen, a contemporary of Joseph Smith, owned a seer stone noted for its size.¹¹ The “interpreter” of the treasure seekers in Rose, Wayne County, New York, used a “large, peculiar stone” in his efforts to find buried wealth.¹² In 1898, the *Wisconsin Leader* reported that C. E. Boynton of Merrilan, Wisconsin, owned a discoid seer stone about the size of a regulation hockey puck: “It is a magnificent specimen, nine inches in circumference,

⁹ The related culture of treasure-seeking also involved a complex if not always consistent body of rules and regulations. On the general idea of rules in treasure seeking, see Hurley, “Buried Treasure Tales in America,” 199.

¹⁰ Sloane MS 3848, f. 148, quoted in Northcote W. Thomas, *Crystal Gazing: Its History and Practice, with a Discussion of the Evidence for Telepathic Scrying*, with an Introduction by Andrew Lang (London: Alexander Moring Limited, 1905), 85 (emphasis mine).

¹¹ Allen and his stone receive further treatment in a later section of this chapter.

¹² McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York*, p. 155, col. 2.

weighing 22½ oz.”¹³ Other sources clearly demonstrate that with seer stones—as with many other possessions—western civilization’s maxim “the bigger, the better” applied.

More important than size, however, was shape. Scryers appreciated a stone that displayed symmetry or even workmanship. For example, one of the “shew stones” owned by Elizabethan magus John Dee has been described as “a small black stone with a shining surface, and cut in the form of a diamond.”¹⁴ Rather than cutting a polygon, the lapidary more often used tool and art to carve in circular form. Again, the Dee seer stone inventory is illustrative. A large, highly polished, obsidian disk—apparently an Aztec scrying mirror—had been brought to Dee from the new World.¹⁵ In 1696, English author John Aubrey wrote of scrying in a “Mineral-Pearl.” His accompanying illustration shows a beveled disk.¹⁶ C. E. Boynton, mentioned above, had a crystalline disk.

Circularity usually passed into three dimensions. The well-known crystal ball enjoys an age-old European heritage. When Sigurd the Volsung—the

¹³ H. C. Warren, “Local Matters,” *Wisconsin Leader* (Merrillan, Wisconsin), 11 February 1898, p. [1], col. 4.

¹⁴ J. Mitchell and John Dickie, *The Philosophy of Witchcraft* (Glasgow: Paisley, 1839): 392, quoted in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 40.

¹⁵ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 20-23. For a photograph of this stone, see the plate between pages 230 and 231 of Richard Deacon, *John Dee: Scientist, Geographer, Astrologer, and Secret Agent to Elizabeth I* (London: Frederick Muller, 1968).

¹⁶ John Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, viz. *Day-Fatality, Local-Fatality, Ostenta, Omens, Dreams, Apparitions, Voices, Impulses, Knockings, Blows Invisible, Prophecies, Marvels, Magick, Transportation in the Air, Visions in Beril, or Glass, Converse with Angels and Spirits, Corps-Candles in Wales, Oracles, Exstasie, Glances of Love, Glances of Envy, Second-Sighted-Persons* (London: Printed for Edward Castle, 1696), 129. [Hereafter *Miscellanies*].

original and archetypal Germanic hero—entered the hall of Gripir, the monarch sat enthroned,

With the ivory rod in his right-hand, with his left on the crystal laid,
That is round as the world of men folk, and after its image made,
And clear is it wrought to the eye that may read therein of fate,
Though little indeed be its see, and its earth no wondrous great.¹⁷

Gripir's crystal ball had been spherically fashioned to imitate the earth, and apparently even had oceans and continents inscribed on its surface. The illustrations in the frontispiece of Meric Casaubon's 1659 edition of John Dee's "Liber Mysteriorum" include one of Dee holding an immense crystal ball, which features the continents of the Atlantic hemisphere.¹⁸ These specula constitute textbook examples of imitative or sympathetic magic. Cutting a crystal into the shape of the planet enabled the seer to view things in distant places of the globe without traveling there.

The mimetic principle is explicit in the description of Merlin's crystal ball as given in Spenser's *The Fairie Queen*. King Arthur's magus knew well the sycr's science:

The great Magitian Merlin had devized,
By his deepe science, and hell-dreadèd might,
A looking glasse, right wondrously aguized [formed],
Whose vertues through the wyde world soone were

¹⁷ The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs II.v.29-32. I used William Morris, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1903), 109.

¹⁸ Meric Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation of What Passed for Many Years Between Dr. John Dee (A Mathematician of Great Fame in Queen Eliz. and King James their Reignes) and Some Spirits: Tending (Had it Succeeded) to a General Alteration of Most States and Kingdomes in the World* (London: "Printed by D. Maxwell for T. Garthwait, and sold at the Little North door of St. Pauls," 1659). Crystall balls sold here in Logan, Utah, at Earthly Awakenings (21 Federal Avenue) are illustrated with the earth's continents.

solemnized

It vertue had, to shew in perfect sight,
 What ever thing was in the world contaynd,
 Betwixt the lowest earth and heavens hight,
 So that it to the looker appertaynd;
 What ever foe had wrought, or frend had faynd,
 Therein discovered was, ne ought mote pas,
 Ne ought in secret from the same remaynd;
 For thy [therefore] it round and hollow shapèd was,
 Like to the world itselfe, and seemed a world of glas.

 Such was the glassie globe that Merlin made¹⁹

The lumpy, ovate, crystalline stone discovered in 1845 by early Mormon Edwin Rushton does not strike the modern viewer as particularly globular.²⁰ Nevertheless, Rushton understood the ideal and saw it in his own stone when he wrote that "it was located like the world and would reach any part of it."²¹

The shape of a seer stone did not need to be symmetrical; other unusual shapes also pleased the eye of the beholder. Geodes naturally drew the eye to gaze into their crystalline interiors. Joseph Smith apparently owned a vitreous, botryoidal, prehnite geode, which he considered a seer stone.²² Samuel F.

¹⁹ Edmund Spenser, *The Fairie Queen* (1589), III.ii.18-21.159-181. On "for thy" meaning therefore, see the edition in M. H. Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1962; 1986), 1:709. "Aguise" means to "dress, attire, array" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "aguise," v). Hence, "aguized," as used here by Spenser, would mean arrayed, or as I insert, formed.

²⁰ For photographs of this stone, see Ogden Kraut, *Seers and Seer Stones* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), p. 54; and Photograph 60: "Seer Stone, n.d." LDS Church Archives. The LDS Church Archives Catalogue description of this photograph identifies Edwin Rushton as the stone's owner.

²¹ This quotation comes from an Edwin Rushton statement excerpted in an untitled manuscript by one of his children: "Information concerning Edwin Rushton," n.d., Ms, LDS Church Archives, [1]. Arch S. Reynolds, *The Urim and Thummim: And Other Media Used by the Prophet Joseph Smith to Translate the Scriptures* (Springville, Utah: Art City Publishing Company, 1950), 24.

²² On my classification of this stone, see Richard M. Pearl, *Gems, Minerals, Crystals, and Ores: The Collector's Encyclopedia* (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1964), 43, 53, 60, 73, 192, 281, 282. On the the stone's provenance, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 44. For

Whitney, brother of Kirtland's Presiding Bishop Newell K. Whitney, wrote that "Mormon Elders and women often searched the bed of the river for stones with holes caused by the sand washing out, to peep into. N. K. Whitney's wife had one." Samuel had borrowed his sister-in-law's stone to try to find a missing bandage.²³

The practice of searching for stones like these may have originated earlier when the church was based in New York. Abner Cole related that stone seers in his area found their stones "in the brook."²⁴ William Stafford, who lived down the road from the Smith's, had a similar stone. His son John Stafford reported that "father had [a] stone[,] which some thought they could look through."²⁵ According to Porter Rockwell's sister, who also lived down the road from the Smith family and near the Staffords, Joshua Stafford (perhaps a nephew of

photographs of the stone, see Kraut, *Seers and Seer Stones*, 57-59; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, fig. 9; Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 153. I examined this stone personally in 1989 (Seer Stone, Collections of Western Americana, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey). Subsequent to my viewing the stone, it was anonymously purchased. During my examination of the stone, I described it in these terms: "It was the size of a large egg. It was very light <weight> and must have been igneous. It was Quasi-transparent and grayish green with small dark green speckles on it and some irregular brown spots that were from air bubbles or something. It was lumpy. It was almost completely hollow. It had a hole that you could stick your finger into. The edge of the hole looked kind of as if it had been sliced off (it hadn't) the inside of the hole was kind of like cave pearls. And it seemed as though there were rust lightly covering it. it was a deep hole and in fact there were a few pin size holes coming out on the opposite side" (Mark M'Gee, Missionary Journal, 11 January 1989, Ms, holograph in my possession; copy available in the Mark Ashurst-M'Gee Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah).

²³ S[amuel] F. Whitney, statement, 6 March 1855, in "Statement of Rev. S. F. Whitney on Mormonism," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 3. col. 4.

²⁴ Dogberry [Cole], "Gold Bible, No. 3," *The Reflector*, 1 February 1831, p. 93, col. 1.

²⁵ John Stafford, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook No. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, Library-Archives, The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, p. 13-14, in Vogel, *EMD*, 2:87; bracket-edited to match the Kelley's edited version of the interview as reported in William H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," *Saints' Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 167, col. 1.

William Stafford) also had a stone of this quality. "I saw Joshua Stafford's peepstone," she stated, "which looked like white marble and had a hole through the center."²⁶

The Stafford stones may have been *gorgets*—a particular class of stone artifacts tooled by pre-Columbian Indians and deposited in burial mounds.²⁷ They have been found in Vermont, western New York, on the Susquehanna River in both Pennsylvania and New York, and in several other locations in eastern North America.²⁸ Most gorgets were carefully crafted and smoothly polished.²⁹ Joseph Smith owned a disk-shaped gorget with a hole in the center,

²⁶ Mrs. M. C[aroline]. R[ockwell]. Smith, Statement, 25 March 1885, in "Mormon Prophet," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 3.

²⁷ Gorgets are discussed in detail throughout Warren K. Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada: Being a Description of Certain Charm Stones, Gorgets, Tubes, Bird Stones and Problematical Forms* (Andover, Massachusetts: The Andover Press, 1917). On their burial in mounds, see 61, 68, 204. For examples of gorgets found in mound in New York, see 209, 216.

Gorgets were made by the pre-Iroquoian Woodland cultures. They were probably used as jewelry (59, 69, 204). Some seem to have been worn as ornamental buttons while others seem to have been worn as necklace pendants (204). Early Latter-day Saints also wore seerstones around their necks as pendants (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 96). The woodland tribes who created most archeological gorget specimens reworked older gorgets that they had discovered or created new ones based on the ones they found. The original gorgets were made by archaic tribes. Their original use is unknown (Moorehead, 57, 63, 204, 216). The prevalent two-holed gorget may be a development of a one-holed prototype (66).

²⁸ For Susquehanna gorgets, see Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, p. 53, fig. 27, and p. 223. For gorgets found in Vermont and New York, see William A. Ritchie, *The Archaeology of New York State*, rev. ed. (Garden City, New York: Published by the Natural History Press for the American Museum of Natural History, 1965; 1969), pp. 40-41, fig. 4, locations 18, 30, 38, 43-5, 53; 133-34; c.f. p. 135, plate 48, nos. 3-5; p. 170, plate 56; p. 182, plate 60, nos. 15,19; p. 186, plate 64, no. 17; p. 203, plate 72, no. 14; p. 225, plate 77, no. 17. For a general distribution of gorgets, see Moorehead, fig. 202.

²⁹ Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, p. 216; Jesse D. Jennings, *Prehistory of North America*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968; 1974), 224.

which he apparently found in Illinois and used as a seer stone.³⁰ In Pittston, Maine, around 1812, "it began to be whispered about that a negro boy named 'Mike' had a rare faculty bestowed on him. He could place a perforated stone which he had in his possession, in his hat, and immediately he could reveal the hiding places of buried treasure."³¹ "Mike" seems to have owned a gorget seer stone. In 1835, Presiding Bishop Edward Partridge wrote in his journal about a small seer stone "with a hole in one corner."³²

³⁰ Joseph apparently found this stone on the shores of Nauvoo, where the mound dappled "bluffs of the Mississippi" meet the river. In an 1855 council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, President Brigham Young, Joseph Smith's successor, informed his brethren that "Joseph found two <small ones> [seer stones] on the beach in Nauvoo, a little larger than a black walnut without the shock on" (Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Council"). D. Michael Quinn identifies the Joseph Smith gorget-seerstone as one of these stones (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 246-247). For a photograph of this stone, see Quinn, fig. 10. For the stone's provenance, see pp. 246-247 and the caption to figure 10.

Quinn asserts that the stone was tooled by Joseph Smith or its inheritors. Actually the stone was worked by early Native American. It is a rare class of gorget—a "circular pendant gorget," class 9, subclass C, in the Moorehead-Peabody nomenclature and classification system (on the nomenclature and classification of circular gorgets, see Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 55; see also form #331 in figure 209: "Plummets, Pendants, Complicated and Bar Forms"; on the rarity of this type, see the caption to fig 191 on p. 245). For photographs and drawings of other circular pendant gorgets, with decorations and ridged edges very similar to Joseph Smith's gorget-seerstone, see p. 245, fig. 191; p. 249, fig. 193; p. 250, fig. 194, no. 1; p. 351, fig. 213, p. 254, fig. 196, no. 21. Many of these items are from New York (276). Moorehead also lists circular gorgets from Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Iowa (p. 276; p. 337; p. 351, fig. 213).

³¹ J. W. Hanson, *History of Gardiner, Pittston and West Gardiner, with a sketch of the Kennebec Indians, & New Plymouth Purchase, Comprising Historical Matter from 1602 to 1852; with Genealogical Sketches of Many Families* (Gardiner, Maine: William Palmer, 1852), 15.

³² "An Account of the travels and ministry of Edward Partridge," TMs, LDS Church Archives, 34-35. Mormon author Cecil McGavin viewed a seer stone, apparently a gorget-seerstone, in the Archives-Library of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He wrote that a "small hole has been drilled through one end of it as if a string had been threaded through it." Both Whitmer stones have two holes in them, not one. McGavin identified this stone as the Hiram Page stone (E. Cecil McGavin, *Historical Background of the Doctrine and Covenants* [Salt Lake City: Paragon Printing Company, 1949], 93). The Page stone, however, had been destroyed (Emer Harris sermon, 6 April 1856, Provo, Utah, in Utah Stake, General Minutes, Ms, LDS Church Archives, vol. 10, p. 273).

Perhaps following McGavin, LDS General Authority Alvin R. Dyer mistakenly identified the Jacob Whitmer family gorget seer stone as the Page seer stone (Dyer, *The Refiner's Fire: The*

Most New York gorgets, however, have two holes.³³ Early Latter-day Saint John D. Mikesell owned a two-holed gorget seer stone.³⁴ Also, grandchildren of early New York Mormons David and Jacob Whitmer owned symmetrically drilled two-hole gorgets that were used in their families as seer stones, and had apparently belonged to their grandfathers.³⁵ Both of these gorgets are

Significance of Events Transpiring in Missouri [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978], 262-3). McGavin may also have been describing the Jacob Whitmer family stone, which is owned by the RLDS church. On the other hand, if McGavin's memory served him correctly, the stone he observed had only one hole, and therefore cannot be the Jacob Whitmer family stone.

³³ Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 209. Three-holed gorgets are rare (63).

³⁴ Jay Burrup, an archivist at the LDS Church Archives, shared with me the family tradition regarding Mikesell.

³⁵ Mayme Koontz, Richmond, Missouri, to Alvin R. Dyer, Richmond, Missouri, 12 June 1955, quoted in Dyer, *The Refiner's Fire*, 262-63; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 247-8, figs. 11-13. The David Whitmer family seer stone is a "convex-sided rectangular gorget," class 5, subclass C, in the Moorehead-Peabody nomenclature and classification system (Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 55; see also form #154 in fig. 206: "Gorget, Spatulate and Tablet Forms"). Many gorgets of this shape have been discovered in New York (211). For a distribution of 71 samples, including 2 from New York, see p. 296. For a convex-sided, rectangular gorget exactly like the David Whitmer family seer stone, see p. 208, fig. 163, no. 4. This gorget was found in Ontario County, which adjoined Seneca county where the Whitmers lived (211). For a photograph of another convex-sided, rectangular gorget found in New York, see p. 210, fig. 164, no. 5. See also Ritchie, *The Archaeology of New York State*, p. 170, plate 56; p. 182, plate 60, no. 19; p. 186, plate 64, no. 17; p. 203, plate 72, no. 14; p. 225, plate 77, no. 17. For a photograph of a convex-sided, rectangular gorget found in the Genesee valley, where the Smiths had previously lived, see Moorehead, p. 212, fig. 164A. For photographs of other convex-sided, rectangular gorgets, see Moorehead, p. 23, fig. 6; p. 208, fig. 163, nos. 2-4; p. 254, fig. 196, no. 5; p. 364, fig. 225; p. 393, fig. 248; James A. Tuck, "Regional Cultural Development, 3000 to 300 B.C." in *Northeast*, ed. Bruce G. Trigger, vol. 15 of *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), p. 40 fig. 9, artifact d.

The John Whitmer family seer stone is a "concave-sided rectangular gorget," class 5, subclass A, in the Moorehead-Peabody nomenclature and classification system (Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 55, see also form #199 in fig. 207: "Gorget, Lunate, Winged and Other Forms"). It is also termed a "reel-shaped gorget" (Jennings, *Prehistory of North America*, p. 225, caption to fig. 6.11). Gorgets of this shape have been discovered in New York, Delaware, and Ohio (Moorehead, 273-4, 303). For a photograph of a concave-sided, rectangular gorget found in New York, see Moorehead, p. 213, fig. 165, no. 4. For other photographs of concave-sided rectangular gorgets, see Moorehead, p. 23, fig. 6; p. 52, fig. 26; p. 393, fig. 248; Jennings, p. 225, fig. 6.11; Tuck, "Regional Cultural Development, 3000 to 300 B.C." p. 40, fig. 9, artifact j.

“rectangular gorgets” with the symmetrically drilled holes lying along the length axis of the stone. The distance between the holes of the David Whitmer family gorget seer stone matches the distance between David Whitmer’s eyes.³⁶ The seer stone owned by early Mormon Elias Pulsipher, a convex-sided rectangular gorget similar to the David Whitmer family seer stone, features symmetric holes of similar distance.³⁷ Gorget holes spaced like this may also have attracted a seer stone seeker.³⁸ In some double-holed gorgets, the holes are much further apart.³⁹ Perhaps large gorget-seerstones reinforced the belief held among some early Americans and early Mormons that giants had once roamed the land.⁴⁰

³⁶ In 1877, at age 72, Whitmer stood at 5’10” (Lydon W. Cook, ed. *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* [Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1991], 11, 14). Four years later, in 1881, he was described as having “his shoulders slightly bent as with the weight of years” (59). In 1884, George Q. Cannon interviewed him and wrote that he “probably stood in his early manhood 5 feet 10 inches or perhaps 5 feet 11 inches in height” (107). With a ruler, a calculator, a full-body photograph of Whitmer in middle age (the third photograph between pages 104 and 105), and an estimate that he stood at 5’10” at the time of this photograph, I calculated the distance between his pupils at exactly 2 1/2 inches. The distance between the holes of the David Whitmer family gorget-seerstone is 2 7/16 inches (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, fig. 12).

³⁷ The Pulsipher stone is “about 2 1/2 inches wide” (Elaine Mullins [descendant of Elias Pulsipher], statement, n.d., in Kraut, *Seers and Seer Stones*, 55). For a photograph of this stone, see Kraut, 56. Using the Mullins width estimate and the photograph, I calculated a distance of 2 3/4 inches between the holes. According to Mullins, Joseph Smith had “examined it and declared it to be a seer stone.”

³⁸ The average two-holed gorget from New York is 12 cm x 5 cm (Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 205), the approximate inclusive measurement between the eye sockets of the human skull. In some specimens, the holes are drilled very far apart or very close together. However, most could prompt viewers to fit them to their eyes.

³⁹ See, for example, Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 297; Ritchie, *The Archaeology of New York State*, p. 186, plate 64, artifact 17.

⁴⁰ On early American belief in Giants, see David Levin, “Giants in the Earth: Science and the Occult in Cotton Mather’s Letters to the Royal Society,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (October 1988): 751-70. On belief in giants among treasure seekers of the Palmyra-Manchester area, see Martin Harris’s interview with Joel Tiffany in “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly* (New York, New York), June 1859, 165. On early Mormon belief in giants, see Mather, “The Early Days of Mormonism,” *Lippincott’s Magazine*, August 1980, p. 204, col. 1. Joseph Smith’s inspired

Gorgets may have been appreciated by seers not only for their shape, but their shine. Priddy Meeks wrote:

I have seen peepstones as well polished as a fiddle with a nice hole through one end that belonged to the ancients. I asked Brother [Hyrum] Smith the use for that hole; he said the same as a watch chain to keep from losing it. He said in time of war the Nephites had the advantage of their enemies by looking in the seerstone which would reveal whatever they wished to know.⁴¹

For Meeks, the hole was not for peeping through and only incidental. He was more impressed by the artifact's fine polish. Most gorgets do have a smooth surface, which lends to their polished appearance.⁴² Archeologist Jesse D. Jennings notes that "gorgets are quite well made, often being . . . polished to a

revision of the Bible elaborates on the antediluvian giants mentioned in Genesis 6:4 (Moses 7:15 and 8:18). Joseph located the antediluvian world in America (*EM*, s.v. "Garden of Eden"; Alma P. Burton, *Toward the New Jerusalem* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 5-6). In 1834, while traveling from Kirtland, Ohio, to Jackson County, Missouri, members of "Zion's Camp" excavated an Indian mound. One of the participants wrote, "we came to the bones of an extraordinary large person or humane being the thigh bones being 2 inches longer from one so[c]ket to the other than of th[e] Prophet whi who is upwards of 6 feete high which would have const[it]uted some 8 or 9 feete high" (Moses Martin, "Journal of Moses Martin from Kirtland to the State of Mis<S>ouri which commenced May the 1th 1834," LDS Church Archives). For more on this incident, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," *BYU Studies* 29, no. 2 (spring 1989): 31-56. Just as the height of this skeleton was determined from its femurs, a gorget with widely spaced holes could be used to inductively reason that it had belonged to a giant.

Gorgets with holes close together, like the Jacob Whitmer family seer stone, may have helped preserve the European dwarf. Gorgets were often discovered in Native American mounds. Rochester seer Zimri Allen saw ancient American gnomes burying their treasures in mounds to hide them from a race of invading giants (Geo[rge] H. Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," "the first manuscript," 1886, Local History Division, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York).

⁴¹ "Journal of Priddy Meeks," 180.

⁴² Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 204.

high luster."⁴³ LDS General Authority Alvin R. Dyer, who viewed the Jacob Whitmer family gorget seer stone, described it as "highly polished."⁴⁴

Scryers commonly valued shiny specula.⁴⁵ Some medieval seers used mirrors, shields, sword blades, and silvered balls.⁴⁶ The Zohar, the classic Kabballistic text of medieval Jewish mysticism, makes this manifest when it explains why "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses" (Deut. 34:10). "Moses derived his prophetic vision from a bright mirror . . . whereas the other prophets derived their vision from a dull mirror."⁴⁷ In *Teutonic Mythology*, Jacob Grimm cited a fifteenth-century German manuscript that excoriated the "false castaway Christians" who used a "fair-polished crystal" to communicate with angels (as they supposed).⁴⁸ The *Wisconsin Leader* considered C. E. Boynton's seer stone a masterpiece: "Very few of these perfect crystals are known to be in existence, and their polishing means many weary years of work, and almost more than human skill."⁴⁹

⁴³ Jennings, *Prehistory of North America*, 224. See also Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 75, 209, 216.

⁴⁴ Dyer, *The Refiner's Fire*, 263.

⁴⁵ Guiley, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, s.v. "scrying." See also Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 50.

⁴⁶ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 8, 48, 77.

⁴⁷ Zohar Exodus 82b. I have used *The Zohar*, trans. Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul P. Levertoff (New York: The Rebecca Bennet Publications, n.d.), 3:248. See also John A. Tvedtness, "Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997), 114-115.

⁴⁸ Doctor Hartlieb's *Book of all forbidden arts, unbelief and sorcery*, Ms, 1455, quoted in Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 4:1774 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁹ Warren, "Local Matters," *Wisconsin Leader*, 1 February 1898, p. [1], col. 4.

The *Leader* also stated that this stone's "luminous depths have given forth many visions." Here, the virtue of luminosity is connected to the virtue of translucency. Most rocks could be polished well enough to reflect light, but few allowed light to pass through them. Seers valued topaz for its translucency.⁵⁰ The *Dictionary of Symbols* states that translucent stones "are the symbol of the transmutation of the opaque into the translucent and, in a spiritual sense, of darkness into light and imperfection into perfection."⁵¹ Early Mormon James Burrup owned a translucent seer stone.⁵²

The best stones for scrying were not merely translucent, but transparent. And the more clear a stone was, all the better to descry. Some of the stones in the fifteenth century German manuscript discussed by Grimm were "exceeding clear."⁵³ In New London, Connecticut, in 1827, a woman discovered "by the aid of a crystal pebble" a legendary Spanish treasure buried by the port. Unfortunately, "the pebble was not clear enough to reveal the exact place of the box."⁵⁴ If one were unable to obtain a clear stone, perhaps the stone could become so when in use. In 1825, Palmyra's *Wayne Sentinel* announced the discovery of a buried

⁵⁰ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 8n1, 94.

⁵¹ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2d ed., trans. John Buchanan-Brown (Paris, France: Éditions Robert Laffont S.A. and Éditions Jupiter, 1969; 2d ed., 1982; first English translation, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994; reprint, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Reference, 1994), s.v. "stone."

⁵² LDS Church archivist Jay Burrup, a descendant of James Burrup (1831-1888), shared with me family traditions concerning his ancestor's translucent stone.

⁵³ Doctor Hartlieb's *Book of all forbidden arts, unbelief and sorcery*, ms., 1455, quoted in Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 4:1774 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ Charles M. Skinner, *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1896; Detroit: Singing Tree Press, Book Tower, 1969), 282-83.

treasure "by the help of a mineral stone, (which becomes transparent when placed in a hat and the light excluded by the face of him who looks into it)."⁵⁵

The value of transparency may have derived in part from the Bible. When John the Revelator had a vision of the New Jerusalem descending from heaven, he noticed that it displayed "the glory of God, and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal . . ." (Revelation 21:11). The note to Exodus 28:30 in the Calvinist Geneva Bible, which identified the Urim and Thummim as the stones of the breastpiece, valued transparency in seer stones: "Urim signifieth light, and Thummim perfection: declaring that the stones of the brest plate were moste cleare, and of perfect beautie."⁵⁶

Because of the seeric value of transparency, many seers used stones of either beryl, a transparent silicate, or quartz crystal. Edwin Rushton wrote that his was "a beautiful seer Stone, clear as crystal."⁵⁷ Dictionaries of symbols state that crystal represents purity and "a level intermediate between the visible and the invisible."⁵⁸ "Since crystals have tangible, material form but are transparent, they represent 'the spiritual in corporeal form'."⁵⁹ These symbolic qualities help explain the preference for crystal specula.

⁵⁵ "Wonderfull Discovery," *Wayne Sentinel*, 27 December 1825, p. 2, col. 4. This article was reprinted from the *Orleans Advocate*, Orleans, New York.

⁵⁶ Geneva Bible (1650), Exodus 28:30n, quoted in Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 21.

⁵⁷ "Information concerning Edwin Rushton," [1].

⁵⁸ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, s.v. "crystal"; Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore, and Symbols* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962), s.v. "crystal."

⁵⁹ Hans Biederman, *Dictionary of Symbolism*, trans. James Hulbert (New York and Oxford: Facts on File, 1992), s.v. "crystal."

The color of a stone could also carry import. Any bright or unusual color bested an ordinary brown or gray stone. Besterman documents the use of blue sapphire, purple amethyst, bluish-green aquamarine, and yellow topaz for scrying.⁶⁰ One of the seer stones owned by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is gray with “gracefully interwoven” purple veining.⁶¹ In 1835, Presiding Bishop Edward Partridge learned of a seer stone described as “a small blue stone with a hole in one corner.”⁶² Manchester seers Sally Chase and Joseph Smith Junior owned green seer stones.⁶³ The seer in Daniel Pierce Thompson’s treasure seeking novella owned a yellow seer stone with speckles.⁶⁴ A late nineteenth-century scryer in Cairo, Egypt, used a red gemstone set on a golden ring. When in use as a speculum, the stone turned white.⁶⁵

In the Bible and in western civilization generally, white symbolizes purity. Although his stone was transparent and colorless, Edwin Rushton would have said it was white. “It is my firm conviction,” he stated, “that this stone is one of the stones spoken of by John the Revelator, second chapter, seventeenth verse.”⁶⁶ The Revelator had written to the seven churches in Asia saying “he that hath an

⁶⁰ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 8n1, 88, 94; Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 255.

⁶¹ McGavin, *Historical Background of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 93.

⁶² “An Account of the travels and ministry of Edward Partridge,” 34-35.

⁶³ Joseph’s prehnite geode has been discussed above. Sally’s green glass will be discussed below.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *May Martin; or the Money Diggers*, 11.

⁶⁵ A. J. Butler, *Court Life in Egypt* (London, 1887), 238-39, quoted in Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 77.

⁶⁶ “Information concerning Edwin Rushton,” [1].

ear, let him hear what the spirit saith . . . to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone . . ." (Revelation 2:17).⁶⁷

While a young Mormon girl in Alberta, Canada, Harriet Maria Carter Thomas believed she found a seer stone just for her. She described it as a "beautiful creamy stone."⁶⁸ Ivory and opal had also been used for scrying.⁶⁹ The symbolic association of whiteness with purity in the Bible and then western civilization generally applied to seer stones.

If whiteness denoted virtue, darkness could symbolize evil—although not necessarily so. Shading figured in a complex, sixteenth-century formula for making a speculum. The scryer began by conjuring up some of the kings of Hell. Then, by cunning art, and in the name of God, angels, saints, and martyrs, the scryer coerced these overlords to retrieve one of their subjects—a smart one—and bind it into the stone. The formula informed the conjurer that when this intelligent demon entered, "thou shalt see the christall made blacke." Finally, the spirit was magically bound never to deceive the querent.⁷⁰ Emer Harris, the brother of Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris, reported that in 1830,

⁶⁷ On the relationship between the Old Testament Urim and Thummim and the New Testament white stone, see Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 540.

⁶⁸ B. W. Johnson, "Harriet Had a Peepstone", quoted in "Looking at Alberta Mormon Women," unpublished paper read at the Canadian Mormon Studies Association Conference, Alberta, 6-7 May 1990, p. 8, quoted in Ian G. Barber, "Mormon Women as 'Natural' Seers," 171-72.

⁶⁹ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 48, 94.

⁷⁰ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 342-44.

“Br[other] Hiram page Dug out of the Earth a black stone.” Joseph Smith, however, “prayed and got revelation that the stone was of the Devil.”⁷¹

Valuable seer stones usually had some kind of receptacle for safe keeping, a practice dating back at least as far as ancient Israel. The High Priest of Israel kept the Urim and Thummim in his breastpiece.⁷² Europeans have apparently been encasing seer stones for centuries. Antiquarian Sir E. A. Wallis Budge of the British Museum reported that little “balls of crystal, set in metal bands, are found all over Europe, and in England and Ireland.”⁷³ Encasing a stone offered the advantage of allowing the seer to plumb its depths without holding it in the hand. John Dee referred to his crystal ball once as “the stone in the frame.”⁷⁴ After framing this stone, Dee asked one scrying companion “if ever he had seen it since it was set in gold; and he though that he had not seen it: Whereupon I went speedily to my Chest, unlocked it, and took it out, and undid the Case, and set the Stone in his due manner.”⁷⁵ The chest provided a secondary level of protective encasement. Dee and other magicians set their framed crystal balls in the middle of tables painted with symbols or within a magic circle traced on the

⁷¹ Emer Harris sermon, 6 April 1856, Provo, Utah, in *Utah Stake, General Minutes*, vol. 10, p. 273.

⁷² Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8.

⁷³ E. A. Wallace Budge, *Amulets and Talismans* (New Hyde Park, New York: University Books, 1961), 312. Besterman reports the discovery of these stones in Saxon tombs (*Crystal-Gazing*, 46).

⁷⁴ See Richard Deacon’s photograph of a page from the Dee’s “*Libri Mysteriorum*,” which includes Dee’s illustration of this stone in the margin (Deacon, *John Dee*, fig. “*Libri Mysteriorum*”).

⁷⁵ Casaubon, *A True and Faithful Relation . . .*, part 3, page 40.

floor. These peripheries served symbolically as further layers of encasement.⁷⁶ Aleister Crowley, the notorious occultist of the early twentieth-century, had a topaz seer stone set in the center of a wooden cross.⁷⁷ The cross provided not only the immediate encasing, but a handle so that Crowley could hold the stone to his eye. In the legend of Sigurd the Volsung, Gripir's crystal ball is mounted on the tip of his rod.⁷⁸

Seers usually encased their stones within a band of precious metal. Two hoops of gold held one crystal ball created and used about 500 AD.⁷⁹ As noted above, John Dee encased his crystal ball in gold. But seers more commonly encased their crystals in silver. Aside from being less expensive, silver shared an astrological correspondence with crystal.⁸⁰ Ireland's famous Curraghmore crystal is encased in silver.⁸¹ In the seventeenth century, astrologer William Lilly examined a beryl seer stone as large as "a good big Orange, set in Silver, with a Cross on the Top, and another on the Handle."⁸² Early Mormon Frederick Kesler,

⁷⁶ See for example, Grillot De Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic, & Alchemy*, trans. J. Courtenay Locke (n.p: Frederick Publications, n.d.), 307, plate facing 308.

⁷⁷ Guiley, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*, s.v. "scrying."

⁷⁸ "And the kingly staff in his hand was knobbed with the crystal cold" (The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs, II.ii.106).

⁷⁹ Gordon C. Thomasson, "Mosiah: The Complex Symbolism and Symbolic Complex of Kingship in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (spring 1993): 29.

⁸⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, s.v. "stone." See also Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, 64; Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy or Magic*, Book 1, *Natural Magic*, 100; Ramesey, *Astrologia Restaurata; or, Astrology Restore*, 53.

⁸¹ Walker, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Occult* (New York, New York, and Avenel, New Jersey: Crescent Books, 1995), s.v. "Crystal-Gazing."

⁸² W[illiam]. Lilly, *History of His Life and Times, From the year 1602, to 1681, Written by Himself* (London, 1715), 101-3, quoted in Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 26.

a friend of Joseph Smith, owned a small cylinder shaped crystal, a "peep stone," with a band of silver wrapped around it.⁸³

Consecrating a seer stone added to its power. An early German manuscript cited by Jacob Grimm averred, "they have it consecrated and keep it very clean, and gather for it frankincense, myrrh and the like."⁸⁴ These seers may have used frankincense and myrrh oils to anoint their stones. The practice of consecrating a stone with oil appears in magical literature dating back as far as the seventeenth century.⁸⁵ Accessing the preternatural world connected one with the heavenly realm, but also ran the risk of demonic interference. Consecration afforded a protection against deceptive spirits. Reginald Scot, in his 1584 treatise *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, gives the following formula "to enclose a spirit in a christall stone":

I desire thee O Lord God, my mercifull and most loving God, the giver of all graces, the giver of all sciences, grant that I thy welbeloved N [name of the seer] (although unworthie) may knowe thy grace and power, against all the deceipts and craftines of divels. And grant to me thy power, good Lord, to constraine them by this art: for thou art the true, and livelie, and eternall GOD, which livist and reignest ever one GOD through all worlds, Amen.⁸⁶

⁸³ "PEEP STONE," item 4533, Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum, Salt Lake City, Utah. Edith Menna, curator of artifacts at the DUP Museum, informs me that the stone belonged to Frederick Kesler. On Kesler's friendship with Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, see Allen D. Roberts, *Pioneer Mills and Milling*, Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Lesson for November 1983 (n.p. [Salt Lake City]: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1983), 115.

⁸⁴ Doctor Hartlieb's Book of all forbidden arts, unbelief and sorcery, ms., 1455, quoted in Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 4:1774.

⁸⁵ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 40, 266.

⁸⁶ Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 342.

Early Mormon Edwin Rushton believed that his stone had been consecrated. In a visionary a dream, Rushton saw his stone next to a well containing water “so clear and transparent it looked like the bottom of the well was lined with silver.” This water represented “the purity of the stone—that it could not be changed from the pure dedication, consecration and organization.”⁸⁷

“How much would you give for even a cane that Father Abraham had used? or a coat or ring that the Saviour had worn?” asked LDS First Presidency Counselor Heber C. Kimball.⁸⁸ If a stone had been previously used by a notable seer, this added to its esteem. When Edwin Rushton’s wife exhibited his stone to Heber C. Kimball and his wife Mary, she claimed that it “formerly belonged to Moses.”⁸⁹ C. E. Boynton boasted a chain of ownership for his crystal disk that traced back to Joseph Smith, “who saw in its infinite depths.” Beyond Smith, he posited an even more dubious provenance: The stone had been handed down from father to son for generation upon generation through a Scottish patriline whose apical ancestor obtained it about 400 AD, when Eurasian monks were driven out of Egypt. “It is said to have been stolen originally from an Egyptian seer,” the newspaper reported. Magical lore had long considered Egypt the legendary Eden of all occult wisdom.⁹⁰ Without further detail, the news article

⁸⁷ “Information concerning Edwin Rushton,” [1].

⁸⁸ Heber C. Kimball, “The ‘Deseret News,’ its Value—Worth and Virtue of Sacred Relics—Resurrection—Confidence in our Leaders,” *JD*, 4 (1857): p. 294, col. 1. This discourse was given in Salt Lake City on 15 March 1857.

⁸⁹ Mary Ellen Abel Kimball diary, 8 May 1858, quoted in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 252. Presiding Patriarch John Smith later used the Rushton stone (254).

⁹⁰ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 271, 360; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 200.

informed readers that the stone's history "reaches far back into the mystic past, and is connected with priests, prophets and seers whose names are famous in the world's annals."⁹¹ Claims like this demanded the respect due any holy relic—the older, the better.

The seer stone standards of size, shape, smoothness, luster, translucency, color, encasement, consecration, and history often appeared in combination. The number and excellency of these qualities determined the power of the stone. For example, John Aubrey described an impressive "Consecrated *Berill*" owned by one Sir Edward Harley.

This Berill is a perfect Sphere, the Diameter of it I guess to be something more than an Inch: It is set in a Ring, or Circle of Silver resembling the Meridian of a Globe: The stem of it is about Ten Inches high, all gilt. At the Four quarters of it are the Names of Four Angels, viz. *Uriel, Raphael, Michael, Gabriel*.

The accompanying illustration shows that the stem attached to the encasement served as a handle so the stone could be held up to the eye. A minister in Norfolk had previously owned this beautiful specimen. "To this Minister the Spirits or Angels would appear openly . . ."⁹² John Dee valued a seer stone that he described as "big as an egg, most bryght, clere and glorious," but "the great Christaline Globe" held his highest regard.⁹³

In 1830, shortly after the publication of the Book of Mormon and the organization of the Church of Christ, a Rochester periodical compared Joseph

⁹¹ Warren, "Local Matters," *Wisconsin Leader*, 11 February 1898, p. [1], col. 4.

⁹² Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 129-130.

⁹³ John Dee diary, quoted in Deacon, *John Dee*, 116.

Smith to a young man who had lived near Rochester during the war of 1812. In 1815, he found a "round stone of the size of a man's fist" that reflected "all the dazzling splendor of the sun in full blaze."⁹⁴ In 1887, local historian George H. Harris interviewed Guy Markham, of Rochester, and others who remembered this boy and his stone. Harris wrote that "the shining stone" was a "large quartz pebble three or four inches in diameter." Quartz and diameter indicate translucence and circularity. Harris referred to this stone as "his white stone."⁹⁵ If late accounts embellished the qualities of the stone, well-known seer stone values informed that embellishment.

In 1898, Helen Gould of Philadelphia paid eight thousand dollars for a crystal ball eight inches in diameter. A Philadelphia newspaper described it as "the most perfect mystic globe in existence. It comes from Japan, where three illuminati spent their lives in polishing the giant rough crystal into the perfect sphere it now is." This crystal was perfectly transparent, "as clear as the air itself." Gould placed her ball in a gold setting and covered it with a veil. "In addition to this," the news reported, "she has had a special room constructed in her residence . . . to contain this mystic treasure. The room is circular, with arched ceiling, and is draped throughout in black velvet." This room provided a sacred space that effectively served as a second layer of encasing. Gould's crystal was highly refractive. The paper reported that "it flashes with an intense

⁹⁴ "Imposition and Blasphemy!!—Money-Diggers, &c." *The Gem, A Semi-Monthly Literary and Miscellaneous Journal* (Rochester, New York), 15 May 1830, p. 15, col. 2.

⁹⁵ Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," second manuscript, 1887, Local History Division, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York, p. 10, 12, 16.

iridescent splendor only comparable to that of a large diamond”⁹⁶ For most scryers, a large, smoothly polished crystal ball constituted the most effective speculum possible. Stones like this were consecrated and encased in silver or gold. Perhaps a remarkable claim could be made regarding previous ownership of the stone. Before the age of skepticism, establishing the orb’s provenance required only the authority of the wealthy owner.

Ordinary people used stones of lesser qualities.⁹⁷ To this day crystal balls cost more than many people who would like to use them are willing to pay. The modern world’s mass market for glass, however, has in this century provided a less expensive and easily obtainable substitute. Machine-manufactured glass balls are large, perfectly round, and flawless. Some twentieth century catalogues and curio shops dealt as much or more in glass balls than crystal.⁹⁸ But what the glass ball achieved in transparency, it lost in luster. Recently, the New Age interest in crystals has renewed desires for the genuine article.

The overall quality of a speculum determined its visual powers. A French manuscript that gave instructions for water scrying instructed the reader that the present could be viewed in an earthen vase, the past in a vase of copper, and the future in silver.⁹⁹ Reynard, the “Dutch Fox,” owned a glass “of such vertu that

⁹⁶ “Miss Gould a Crystal Gazer,” *Wisconsin Leader*, 4 February 1898, p. [3], col. 6. This article was reprinted from the *Philadelphia Press*.

⁹⁷ Besterman wrote that “Lithomancy”—scrying in non-crystal stones—was rare (*Crystal-Gazing*, 6). Because the ordinary people who used inferior stones did not write much about them they escaped the notice of this literati.

⁹⁸ Shepard, ed., *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, s.v. “crystal,” “crystal gazing (or crystallomancy).”

⁹⁹ de Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic, & Alchemy*, 307-8.

men myght see therein alle that was don within a myle."¹⁰⁰ A legend told of Roger Bacon (1214?-1294) maintained he had owned a crystal ball "of that excellent nature, that any man might behold any thing that he desired to see, within the compass of fifty miles round about him."¹⁰¹ As rumor had it, Catherine de Médicis owned a magic mirror by which she could see the future and all of France, while Père Cotton, Henrie IV's confessor, used a mirror which ranged all of Europe.¹⁰² In 1816, treasure seekers in Dresden, Maine, consulted a seer who had a stone "in which he could see everything that existed, or was transacted in any part of the world."¹⁰³ The legendary glassy globe used by Merlin had even more power: "It vertue had, to shew in perfect sight, What ever thing was in the world contaynd, Betwixt the lowest earth and heavens hight."¹⁰⁴ The legendary Persian king Jamshíd had a divining cup within which he could see the entire universe—natural and supernatural.¹⁰⁵

However, even with Jamshíd's legendary speculum most would see nothing but the dregs in the bottom of the cup. Priddy Meeks wrote, "A seer's stone appears to me to be the connecting link between the visible and invisible

¹⁰⁰ *The History of Reynarde the Foxe*, xxxii, quoted in Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 32.

¹⁰¹ R. Greene, *The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay* (London, 1594), scene 2, quoted in Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 14.

¹⁰² de Givry, *Witchcraft, Magic, & Alchemy*, 305-306.

¹⁰³ *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts), 21 November 1816, quoted in George G. Carey, "Folklore from the Printed Sources of Essex County, Massachusetts," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (March 1968), 30.

¹⁰⁴ Spenser, *The Fairie Queen*, III.ii.19.163-65 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰⁵ Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 87-88.

worlds."¹⁰⁶ The stone constituted only the mediating instrument between the seer and the seen, between nature and preternature. Seeing required not only a stone, but a seer. Only a person with a gift for seeing in stones could do so. Many posited the existence of a third necessity. If the querent had the gift of seeing, there must also exist a bestower of that gift. In this schema, supernatural vision required three components: a seer, a speculum, and the grace of God—or some other preternatural (id)entity, either willing or coerced, but necessarily able to bring images into the stone. A gift given, a gift received, and the right stone: these were three ingredients of the scryer's science.

Gift and Giver

Joseph Smith believed that people could use seer stones, whether within his movement or not. This, however, should not be taken to mean that he approved of all seership or that in his mind his sense of divine mission did not distinguish himself from other seers. Smith held a theocentric conception of the gift of seeing. He believed all three ingredients were necessary for seeing, but God's favor held the most importance. Sometime between 1825 and 1830, Joseph told Alvah Hale, his wife's brother, that his "gift in seeing with a stone and hat, was a gift from God."¹⁰⁷ During the translation of the Book of Mormon, when

¹⁰⁶ "Journal of Priddy Meeks," 180.

¹⁰⁷ Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 268. Isaac Hale stated that Joseph spoke also of "glass-looking" (Isaac Hale, statement, Harmony, Pennsylvania, 20 March 1834, quoted in Howe, 264).

Joseph “transgressed the commandments and the laws of God,”¹⁰⁸ Moroni took away all of Joseph’s stones.

On the other hand, Joseph did not accept all revelations that came through seer stones because not all revelations came from God. When early Mormon Hiram Page began receiving revelations through his black seer stone, Joseph Smith received a revelation stating that “those things which he hath written from that stone are not of me . . . satan deceiveth him.”¹⁰⁹ The *source* of revelation stands as the primary doctrine in Joseph’s theology of supernatural vision. Most early Mormon concepts regarding the gift of seeing were gradually forgotten. However, because this doctrine came in a revelation and was subsequently canonized, it remains Mormon doctrine. Mid-twentieth-century General Authority Bruce R. McConkie affirmed that “in imitation of the true order of heaven whereby seers receive revelations from God through a Urim and Thummim, the devil gives his own revelations to some of his followers through *peep stones or crystal balls.*”¹¹⁰

Smith worshipped the *Almighty* God, but he did not ascribe *omnipotence* to God in the same sense that Greek philosophers or the doctors of classical Christian theology had. Although God constituted the most important element of

¹⁰⁸ Book of Commandments 2:3 (1-3); c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 3:6 (1-8).

¹⁰⁹ Book of Commandments 30:11; c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 28:11. In an early church court concerning the revelations of a female seer, William Batson testified “that Sally Crandle’s gift of seeing was not of the Lord but it was of the Devil.” Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 91. It is unclear whether Crandle used a stone or not.

the gift of seeing, the seer also held a degree of power within himself. In his reply letter to Hyrum Smith, uncle Jesse sneered at Joseph's claim that "he has eyes to see things."¹¹¹ Book of Mormon witness David Whitmer wrote of seership and its relationship with God's favor:

At times when Brother Joseph would attempt to translate [the Book of Mormon from the golden plates] . . . he found he was spiritually blind and could not translate. He told us that his mind dwelt too much on earthly things, and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation. When in this condition he would go out and pray, and when he became sufficiently humble before God, he could then proceed with the translation.¹¹²

Even with a divine gift, it was possible for a seer to misuse his or her power. In Jesus' parable of the talents, the lord gave his servants talents with a stewardship that lasted over a period of time.¹¹³ Not all of the servants used their talent well. As Smith informed Brigham Young, "most of those who do find one [a seer stone] make an evil use of it."¹¹⁴

If God were willing to give revelation through a stone and a seer were ready to receive it, still the right stone was required. Martin Harris later recounted a story to Edward Stevenson that illustrated this principle.

When they became weary, as it was confining work to translate from the plates of gold, they would go down to the river and throw stones into the water for exercise. Martin on one occasion picked up a stone resembling

¹¹⁰ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), s.v. "Peep Stones."

¹¹¹ Jesse Smith to Hyrum Smith.

¹¹² A Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon [David Whitmer], *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Missouri: David Whitmer, 1887), 30.

¹¹³ Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-25.

¹¹⁴ "History of Brigham Young," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* (Manchester, England), 20 February 1864, 118-19.

the one with which they were translating, and on resuming their work Martin placed the false stone in the hat. He said that the Prophet looked quietly for a long time, when he raised his head and said: "Martin, what on earth is the matter, all is dark as Egypt." Martin smiled and the seer discovered that the wrong stone was placed in the hat. When he asked Martin why he had done so he replied, to stop the mouths of fools who had declared that the Prophet knew by heart all that he told him to write, and did not see by the seer stone; when the true stone was placed in the hat, the translation was resumed, as usual.¹¹⁵

While the wrong stone would not work, even a genuine seer stone could be evil. Apostle George A. Smith brought home to America a pair of seer stones that had been used by converts in Staffordshire, England. Early Mormon Wandle Mace heard that upon his return George A. Smith "gave them to Joseph the Prophet who pronounced them to be a Urim and Thummim—as good as ever was upon the earth—but he said, 'they have been consecrated to devils.'"¹¹⁶ If the Mace account can be relied on, it shows not only that a seer stone could be dedicated for evil purposes, but more importantly that Smith believed some seer stones exceeded others in quality. The Staffordshire stones, though demonic instruments, were of very high quality—"as good as ever was upon the earth."

Linked together, the three ingredients of seeing could influence each other. For example, Meeks explained that even if a righteous seer was using the right stone it could be dangerous.

It is not safe to depend on peepstone in any case where evil spirits have the power to put false appearances before them while looking in a peepstone. If evil influences will not interfere, the verdict will be as true as

¹¹⁵ Edward Stevenson, "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. III," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 21 June 1886, 390.

¹¹⁶ Wandle Mace heard this story from Alfred Cordon, who apparently heard it from George A. Smith. Wandle Mace Diary, 66, quoted in Kraut, *Seers and Seer Stones*, 49. See also Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 249-50.

preaching. That is my experience in the matter; also the Patriarch, Hiram Smith, the brother of the Prophet Joseph Smith, held the same idea, but stated that our faith was not strong enough to overcome the evil influences that might interfere, but seemed to think that time would come.¹¹⁷

Even if evil spirits tried to influence the seer from their side of the stone, the godly faith of the seer on his side of the stone could overcome these effects.

In Joseph Smith's mind, seeing could go wrong with respect to the seer, the stone, or the agency issuing the vision. Therefore in Smith's mind, out of eight possible combinations of these three elements, only one was pleasing unto the Lord. Joseph's theology and history of the gift of seeing falls into a general pattern. He believed the Bible, but only as far as it had been transmitted and translated correctly.¹¹⁸ He believed in primitive Christianity, but that it also had been grossly corrupted by the mother of harlots and her sectarian daughters.¹¹⁹ He believed that Masonry derived from ancient, legitimate roots, but had been likewise corrupted.¹²⁰ Aaron of the Bible and the Brother of Jared of the Book of Mormon had the gift of seeing as did many who followed them. Moses and Aaron had rods. Eventually, however, the gifts of seeing and working with the rod also were imitated by Satan or misused by unrighteous seers and rodsmen.

¹¹⁷ "Journal of Priddy Meeks," 180.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 709, col. 2. C.f. The Articles of Faith 9 (*Pearl of Great Price*). See also Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1985).

¹¹⁹ Grant Underwood, "The Earliest Reference Guides to the Book of Mormon," 80.

¹²⁰ Robert N. Hullinger, "Masonic Ritual and Lore," chap. 8 in *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism*, 99-120. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire*, 164-68.

With the aid of revelation and providence, Joseph extracted legitimate elements from the Bible, Christianity, Masonry, and folk divination. He restored them to their original purity, revealed what was missing, and combined it all together into a consistent religion. Smith wrote, "it is necessary in the ushering in of the dispensation of the fulness of times . . . that a whole and complete and perfect union, and welding together of dispensations, keys, and powers, and glories should take place, and be revealed from the days of Adam even to the present time."¹²¹

Even among legitimate seers using legitimate stones, Joseph Smith and his followers saw him as something different. He was God's chosen prophet-leader. Joseph's revelation regarding Hiram Page's seer stone had identified the source of Page's revelations as Satan, but the main concern throughout the revelation is one of jurisdiction. Oliver Cowdery, who apparently had accepted the Page revelations, may have had some of his own. Joseph's revelation instructed Cowdery, "thou shalt not command him who is at thy head, and at the head of the church, for I have given him the keys of the mysteries and the revelations which are sealed . . ." The revelation compared Joseph and Oliver to Moses and Aaron, respectively. "But behold," the revelation warned,

verily, verily, no one shall be appointed to receive commandments and revelations in this church, excepting my servant Joseph, for he receiveth them even as Moses: And thou shalt be obedient unto the things which I shall give unto him, even as Aaron, to declare faithfully the commandments and the revelations, with power and authority unto the church.

¹²¹ Doctrine and Covenants 128:18.

The revelation further clarified that Oliver and others could receive personal revelations, but not for the church as a whole.¹²² In an 1860 sermon, President Brigham Young echoed these principles. He explained that “the gift of seeing was a natural gift, that there are thousands in the world who are natural born Seers, but when the Lord selected Joseph Smith to be his vice-gerent and mouthpiece upon the earth in this dispensation, he saw that he would be faithful and honor his calling.”¹²³

Brigham Young’s journal provides one evidence that Joseph Smith was familiar with the qualities that distinguished seer stones. In 1841, Young recorded Joseph’s doctrine that “every man who lived on the earth was entitled to a seer stone, and should have one, but they are kept from them in consequence of their wickedness.”¹²⁴ Where did this idea come from? It does not appear in the European tradition of scrying. It was Joseph’s reading of Revelation 2:17: “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone.” In his gospel, John had recorded Jesus’ teaching: “Our fathers did eat manna in the desert . . . but my father giveth you the true bread from heaven . . . I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger . . .” (John 6:31-35). In his book of Revelation, John promised that the faithful would receive a white stone and eat “hidden manna.” This otherwise mysterious passage was plain to Joseph Smith. The white stone was a seer stone that would reveal

¹²² Book of Commandments 30; c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 28.

¹²³ “Tabernacle,” *Deseret News*, 26 December 1860, p. 337, col. 3.

¹²⁴ “History of Brigham Young,” *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, 20 February 1864, 118-119.

doctrines sacred and therefore hidden from the world. Like all readers to all texts, Smith brought his background (with seer stones) to his reading of the Bible.

The seer stone quality of transparency associated with the words “glass” and “crystal” influenced Joseph’s readings of Revelation 4:6, “before the throne [of God] there was a sea of glass like unto crystal,” and Revelation 15:2, “I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast . . . stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.” The sea of glass under the throne of God was the planet on which God resided—an immense crystal ball. Joseph’s folk-magical reading of the Bible produced a unique cosmology. In March of 1832, he revealed that “the sea of glass spoken of by John . . . is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (Doctrine and Covenants 77:1).

His clearest exposition of these principles was delivered to a gathering of Saints in Ramus, Illinois, on 2 April 1843. William Clayton, Joseph’s personal scribe, recorded it:

The angels do not reside on a planet like our earth but they dwell with God and the planet where he dwells is like crystal, and like a sea of glass [and fire] before the throne. This is the great Urim & Thummim whereon all things are manifest both things past, present & future and are continually before the Lord. The Urim & Thummim is a small representation of this globe. The earth when it is purified will be made like unto crystal and will be a Urim & Thummim whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom or all kingdoms of a lower order will be manifest to those who dwell on it. and this earth will be with Christ Then the white stone mentioned in Rev. c 2 v 17 is the Urim & Thummim whereby all things pertaining to an higher order of kingdoms even all kingdoms will be made known and a white stone is given to each of those who come into this celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written

which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is a key word.¹²⁵

Modern Latter-day Saints are familiar with these instructions, which appear in section 130 of the Doctrine and Covenants. Most sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are “thus saith the Lord” revelations. Although canonized, section 130 and a few other sections are exceptions to this rule.¹²⁶

Joseph’s instructions manifest the seer stone values of size, shape, smoothness, luster, transparency, and color. The planet whereon God resides is an immense crystal sphere whose surface is smooth like the sea. This heavenly sphere is not only *translucent*, but *lucent*—“a sea of glass and fire.” The seer stones used in heaven are white. The sympathetic principle also appears in Joseph’s teaching that the Urim and Thummim “is a small representation of this globe.” But Joseph extended and inverted this principle. Not only does a seer

¹²⁵ William Clayton Diary, quoted in Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 169; bracket-edited with respect to the edited version that appears in HC 5:323-24. Regarding Clayton’s accuracy as a reporter, George D. Smith, the editor of Clayton’s journals, notes that “his journals present a reliable and literal account,” and that “meticulous detail . . . was the hallmark of his writing” (Smith, foreword to *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991], xx, xii). James B. Allen, Clayton’s biographer and an editor of Clayton’s Manchester journal, writes that “His mind delighted in the specific and the concrete, which helps account for his success as a scribe and a clerk. . . . as a diarist and historian he described what he saw around him, usually with skill and great descriptive power but seldom with any interpretive imagination” (James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, A Mormon* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987], 71; James B. Allen and Thomas G. Alexander, *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton, 1840 to 1842* [Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974], i).

¹²⁶ See verses 7-11.

stone represent the earth, but the earth itself is patterned after a seer stone—the world on which God resides.¹²⁷

Joseph Smith absorbed the principles of seership in his youth. He probably gained much of his knowledge from his father. In 1830, Joseph Smith Senior had informed Fayette Lapham that a seer's stone was a stone of a peculiar quality. He knew that something made a seer stone a seer stone, but did he know what those qualities were? In 1843, Mormon schismatic James C. Brewster—who had searched for treasure with Joseph Smith Senior in the Kirtland, Ohio, area—recounted that in the summer of 1837 the elder Smith claimed, "I know more about money digging, than any man in this generation, for I have been in the business more than thirty years."¹²⁸ This amount of treasure-seeking knowledge would require a considerable knowledge of seer stones. Smith's claim can be confirmed to some extent. Brewster also wrote that in preparation for one treasure quest with Joseph Smith Senior and others, "to prevent the Devil deceiving them they anointed the mineral rods and seeing stones with consecrated oil, and prayed over them in the house of the Lord . . ." ¹²⁹ Some seers anointed their stones. By 1837, Joseph Smith Senior apparently considered himself knowledgeable in the "science of seer stones."

¹²⁷ See also Hyrum Smith's sermon of 27 April 1843, as reported in George Laub's Nauvoo journal (Eugene England, ed. "George Laub's Nauvoo Journal," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 [winter 1978]: 177; c.f. "Remarks made by President Heber C. Kimball, made in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, Sunday Morning, November 8, 1857," *JD*, 6 [1859]: 36).

¹²⁸ Brewster, *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Digger*, 4. On the dating of their treasure ventures, see the Z. H. Brewster certificate printed on page 5. See also Vogel, "James Colin Brewster," 126.

¹²⁹ Brewster, *Very Important! To the Mormon Money Diggers*, 3.

But what did he know in Joseph's youth? Old Vermont acquaintances affirm that Joseph Smith Senior hunted for buried treasure while residing in that state.¹³⁰ If Brewster accurately quoted Joseph Senior regarding his three decades of treasure-seeking experience, then he began accumulating his treasure-seeking wisdom no later than 1807, when his son Joseph Junior was only one year old. Before the elder Smith left the state 1816, he had spoken with neighbors about the relationship between seer stones and being born with a veil. Although Joseph Smith, Senior, is known for being a rodsman, by 1816 he also knew something of seer stones. The "Green Mountain Boys" who responded to Joseph Smith in 1844, wrote, "you was old enough when you left hear to remember . . . how he used to tel[l] about your being born with a veil over your face, and that he intended to procure a stone for you to see all over the world with."¹³¹ According to this source, Joseph had heard his father discussing seer stone lore and was old enough that he should be able to recall such discussions, but could have been no more than eleven. This indicates that Joseph Junior had absorbed some of "the science of seer stones" by adolescence, including some knowledge of the qualities appreciated in stones. These values would be at play as Joseph Smith acquired his seer stones and grew in the gift of seeing and in favor with God.

¹³⁰ See the four documents in section A: "Miscellaneous Sources," of "Part II: Mormon Origins in Vermont and New Hampshire," of vol. 1 of *EMD*.

¹³¹ "Us Green mountain boys," Strafford, Vermont, "to the Editor of the Warsaw Message or Warsaw Signal if that has commenced" [Thomas C. Sharp], Warsaw, Illinois, 15 February 1844, Ms. Thomas C. Sharp and Allied Anti-Mormon Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, in Vogel, *EMD*, 1:597.

Obtaining a Seer Stone

How did one go about obtaining a seer stone? The “science of seer stones” addressed this question. Some received stones through inheritance, or as a gift. Others purchased them. But these solutions only push back the real question. How would the original owner of a seer stone obtain it? Some magical treatises contained elaborate rituals for creating and consecrating stones.¹³² However, even using one of these guides, the proper stone had to be found from which to make the speculum. Olmecs and Aztecs preferred obsidian for their scrying mirrors. Most Europeans wanted crystal or beryl. Some early Americans tried to find gorgets or a geode or a streambed stone with a hole washed through it. If unable to purchase the right rock, would-be scryers could hunt for it in their natural surroundings and quarry it themselves. Or, a seer stone could simply be stumbled upon. Samantha Stafford Payne, a neighbor of the Smith family, spoke of “a peepstone” that “the children had found, of curious shape.”¹³³ Joseph found his gorget seer stone while strolling the beach of Nauvoo. Those who looked for seer stones subscribed to a belief system in which the preternatural world existed and could be accessed. Serious stone hunters could access the preternatural world to aid them in their search for proper stones in the natural world.

In a preternatural quest for the right stone, the science of seer stones connected with the methods of treasure seeking. Precious stones often

¹³² See for example, Thomas, *Crystal Gazing*, 88-89.

¹³³ “Samantha Payne, Statement, circa 1884”, in *EMD*, 2:121n3.

constituted the object of treasure quest. Medieval treasure hunters searched for garnets, crystals, and other gemstones.¹³⁴ Toward the end of the seventeenth century, English treasure seeker and Whig politician Goodwin Wharton hoped to recover the Urim and Thummim and its bejeweled breastplate.¹³⁵ In the Enoch legend of Royal Arch Masonry, a “quantity of treasure” was discovered on Mount Zion that included “precious stones.”¹³⁶ The early nineteenth-century treasure seekers who toiled in Rose Valley, Wayne County, New York, were after “precious stones.”¹³⁷ In responding to a letter from the Smith family, Joseph’s uncle Jesse Smith spurned their belief that they would be able to discover and secure “great wealth, gold and silver and precious stones.”¹³⁸ Anna Eaton of Palmyra alleged that among other treasures, the Smith family dug for “coffers of gems.”¹³⁹ In 1833, Joseph would bless his brother Hyrum with “an abundance of riches of the earth: gold, silver, and treasures of precious stones, of diamonds and platina.” Two years later, he would bless William W. Phelps with “treasures of gold, silver, precious stones, and with all precious metals.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove*, x, 82.

¹³⁵ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 236-37.

¹³⁶ Thomas S. Webb, *The Freemason’s Monitor; or, Illustrations of Masonry: In Two Parts* (New York: Southwick and Crooker, 1802), 250.

¹³⁷ McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New York*, p. 155, col. 2. See also Laurence A. Johnson, “The ‘Money Diggers’ of Rose,” *New York Folklore Quarterly* 13 (1957): 215.

¹³⁸ Jesse Smith to Hiram Smith. Jesse’s “gold . . . and precious stones,” however, may be a reference to the golden plates and the urim and thummim (Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 555n125).

¹³⁹ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Smith’s blessing of Hyrum Smith, 18 December 1833, Patriarchal Blessing Book 1, Ms, p. 10, quoted in Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 520; Joseph Smith’s blessing of William W. Phelps, 22 September 1835, Patriarchal Blessing Book 1, pp.

Recognizing seer stones as treasure enables a consideration of treasure-seeking methods as seer stone-seeking methods. Treasure seekers used dreams, rods, and seer stones to find treasure. Accordingly, these means could be used to find a seer stone as well. Edwin Rushton saw the precise location of his seer stone in a visionary dream. It lay on top of a pot of treasure buried near the Nauvoo temple. With assistance from the shovels of early Mormon Joseph Knight and two other brothers, he found it.¹⁴¹ In 1860, Brigham Young recorded in his office journal that a Danish brother had been taken to a cave in the mountains by an angel in a dream and shown the location of a seer stone.¹⁴²

Divining rods might also be used to find seer stones. Uncle Jesse Smith ridiculed Joseph Smith Senior's reputed ability to use a rod to "tell the distance from India to Ethiopia." Jesse apparently referred a particular passage from Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft*, a sixteenth-century treatment of folk-magic. This book reported the magical tradition that the sun not only caused subterranean treasure to rise toward the surface of the earth but also created stones of "certeine proper vertues." This idea "appeareth by plaine proofe of

14-15, quoted in Anderson, 519. Smith gave the Phelps blessing on 22 September of 1835. On this day in 1823, he first beheld the golden plates and the Urim and Thummim spectacles. On this day in 1827, he obtained them. On this day in 1828, Moroni returned the Urim and Thummim to Joseph after a period in which the translation of the Book of Mormon had ceased. Anderson demonstrates that portions of Joseph Smith's blessings for Hyrum Smith and William W. Phelps may be metaphorical (519-20). If so, they show that Joseph considered precious stones good metaphors for other blessings.

¹⁴¹ "Information concerning Edwin Rushton," [1].

¹⁴² Ian G. Barber, "The Seer, the Key, and the Treasure: A Recurring Tradition in Mormonism," TMs, [8]. Copy in my possession. Barber quotes, cites, and discusses the 17 March 1860 entry of the "Journal of President B. Young's Office Great Salt Lake City Book D," Brigham Young Collection, LDS Church Archives.

India and *Aethiopia*, where the sunne being orient and meridionall, dooth more effectually shew his operation, procuring more pretious stones there to be ingendred, than in the countries that are occident and septentrionall. Unto this opinion doo diverse ancients accord."¹⁴³ Richard Lloyd Anderson suggests that Jesse used Scot's report of this "witchcraft" or an early nineteenth-century survival of this belief to sarcastically revise Martin Harris's report that Joseph Smith Senior could use his rod to find "precious stones" with "certain proper virtues."¹⁴⁴

Anderson's hypothesis may be supported by Anna Eaton's late collection of New York rumors. She wrote that the Smiths sought "the wealth of Ormus and of Ind"¹⁴⁵ among other treasures. "Ind" is an archaic name for India. "Ormus," is a name for an ancient town on the northeastern tip of the Arabian peninsula (hence, the strait of Hormuz).¹⁴⁶ It lies within the same "oriental" and "meridional" region that encompasses Ethiopia and India. The Indian Ocean's Arabian Sea separates both Ethiopia and Ormus from the subcontinent. The belief referred to by Jesse Smith and Reginald Scot may derive from an early Christian legend that an angel brought golden rods to Adam in the Garden of Eden. "The golden rods were from the Indian Sea, where there are precious

¹⁴³ As to the "ancients" who held this opinion, Scot cites Hermes, Evax, Alexander Peripatecticus, Bocchus Zoroastes, Isaac Judæus, Zacharieas Balylonicus, an anonymous work entitled *Dactylotheica*, and "manie more beside" (Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 249-50).

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 527.

¹⁴⁵ Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism*, 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "Ind." See also "Ormuz" in the "Geographical names" appendix.

stones."¹⁴⁷ When Anna Eaton wrote that the Smiths believed that "coffers of gems, oriental treasures, the wealth of Ormus and of Ind, gleamed beneath the ground *in adjacent fields and woodlands,*" she apparently meant that the Smiths believed that stones of certain proper virtues could be found near their home. However, there is no evidence that Joseph Smith Senior ever found such a stone—with or without his divining rod.

One could also try to find a seer stone by looking into another seer stone. In 1835, Presiding Bishop Edward Partridge learned of a seer stone from a young woman in Kirtland. "This girl sees by the help of a stone," Partridge wrote. "She told me she saw a seer's stone for me, it was a small blue stone with a hole in one corner, that it was 6 or 8 feet in the ground, not far from the lake shore a little west of Buffalo on a hill, a tree growing near the spot . . ." ¹⁴⁸

One who already owned a seer stone could use it to find a better stone. Zimri Allen followed this pattern. Allen, a contemporary of Joseph Smith, lived in Rochester, about twenty-five miles northwest of Palmyra. In 1886, local historian George H. Harris recorded John A. Nutt's reminiscences regarding his first cousin "Zim":

When Zim was quite a lad he came into possession of a small transparent stone, which he called a "diamond." It was also termed a "looking-glass," "magic stone" and "seer-stone" by others . . . but Zim said that he had learned through the means of this "diamond," of the existence of a larger and better seer-stone, that was buried in his father's garden. Uncle J[ustice] and Zim dug the ground over several times and were finally

¹⁴⁷ S. C. Malan, *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 32, quoted in Tvedtness, "Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore," 112n49.

¹⁴⁸ "An Account of the travels and ministry of Edward Partridge," 34-35.

rewarded by the finding of a fine, large crystal which Zim pronounced a "proper diamond."¹⁴⁸

Nutt further described this bigger, better stone as having "clear depths" and "polished sides."¹⁵⁰

These are the methods Joseph Smith used in his acquisition of seer stones. He looked into a neighbor's seer stone to find his first seer stone—a brown rock. Then Smith used this stone to find a white stone. This second stone is the well known seer stone that was unearthed on the property of Willard Chase under the pretense of digging a well. Next, at the angel Moroni's direction, he used his white stone to find the Nephite "interpreters"—a large pair of clear, white, seer-stone spectacles. Joseph Smith's gradual development as a seer can be traced in part through his succession of seer stones and seer stone discoveries. Furthermore, as Smith successively acquired superior seer stones, he also grew closer to the role of a prophet. This particular three-phase process, from one seer stone to the next, illustrates Joseph's gradual development from village seer to prophet.

Sally Chase's Green Glass

Unraveling the history of Joseph's acquisition of seer stones poses a difficult task. As noted, with precious few exceptions, the source material relevant to this time and topic was not recorded until years or even decades after

¹⁴⁹ Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," "the first manuscript," p. 2.

the fact. As also noted, bias abounds in both Mormon and non-Mormon accounts. The best possible reconstruction of Joseph's development requires careful historical criticism of all relevant sources, with a sharp focus on the earliest possible accounts and on those given by eyewitnesses. By far, the most important of these sources is the record of Joseph Smith's 1826 court appearance. The critical points in Joseph's prophetic pathway can be fixed by the corroboration of independent Mormon and non-Mormon sources. Less reliable, but still relevant data helps string these points into a continuous trajectory.

The tangle of sources begins with the question of how Joseph obtained his first seer stone. When Ellen E. Dickinson visited the Palmyra-Manchester area in 1882, she heard a story that Joseph inherited his first stone:

While he [Joseph] was watching the digging of a well, or himself digging it, he found, or pretended to find, a peculiarly shaped stone that resembled a child's foot in its outlines. It has been said that this little stone . . . had been in the possession of Mrs. Smith's family for generations, and that she merely presented it to Joseph when he was old enough to work miracles with it; and that he hid it in the earth to find it again when it was convenient.¹⁵¹

This account makes no sense. Willard Chase, who dug the well with Joseph, said that he found the stone "about twenty feet below the surface of the earth."¹⁵² Burying a seer stone this deep on someone else's property certainly precluded a "convenient" recovery. This rumor is also negated by the fact that Lucy Mack

¹⁵⁰ Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," "the first manuscript," p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 30.

¹⁵² Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240-41.

Smith tried to borrow a seer stone from William Stafford. If Lucy had inherited a stone from her family, this would have occurred before she left Vermont for New York. She would have had no need to borrow one from Stafford.

A second theory appears in a Susquehanna County history. Around 1873, Pennsylvanian John B. Buck told local historian Emily Blackman that the green geode seer stone was Joseph's first. When Joseph arrived in Pennsylvania, it belonged to a man named Jack Belcher who had worked at the salt mines in Salina, New York. Belcher bought the stone hoping to find salt by it. According to Buck, Joseph Smith purchased the stone from Belcher hoping to find treasure with it.¹⁵³

Contrary to Buck, the geode was probably Joseph's third stone. Buck claimed that "Joe Smith was here [the Great Bend area of Pennsylvania] lumbering soon after my marriage, which was in 1818, some years before he took to 'peeping,' and before diggings were commenced under his direction." Relying on the late reminiscences of Buck and others, D. Michael Quinn argues that Joseph first visited Pennsylvania between 1818 and 1822. Quinn uses Buck's marriage in 1818 as an early benchmark, but suggests that Joseph first visited Pennsylvania in 1822.¹⁵⁴ However, Joseph cannot be placed in Pennsylvania with

¹⁵³ Narration of Mr. J. B. Buck, in Emily C. Blackman, *History of Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1873; reprint, Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1980), 37. See also "Joseph Smith's 'Seeing Stone,'" *Syracuse Journal* (Syracuse, New York), undated newspaper clipping. This clipping—which was on file at the Palmyra King's Daughters Free Library, Palmyra, New York—has been stolen. A photocopy can be found in the H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Box 156, folder 16. Dan Vogel identifies J. B. Buck as John B. Buck (Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," 213n64).

¹⁵⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 47-56.

certainty until November of 1825. When Joseph found his brown seer stone in late 1821 or early 1822,¹⁵⁵ he probably had not yet obtained the Belcher stone because he probably had not yet been to Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, according to Lucy Mack Smith, Josiah Stowell recruited Joseph in 1825 to come work with him in Pennsylvania because “he possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye.”¹⁵⁶ Lucy later used the term “key” in her history to refer to the Urim and Thummim spectacles, which Joseph later obtained with the golden plates. She also used the term(s) “urim and thummim” to refer to Joseph’s seer stone(s).¹⁵⁷ But, since Stowell hired Joseph in 1825, two years before he received the spectacles, the “keys” which Lucy mentioned must have been the brown and white seer stones. If Joseph first visited Pennsylvania with Stowell in 1825, the green geode would have been Joseph’s third seer stone. By November of 1825, Joseph had already located and seen the Urim and Thummim spectacles. He probably procured the green geode simply for its beauty. Outside of J. B. Buck’s flawed, half-century reminiscence, there is no evidence of Joseph ever using this stone. Like the disk-

¹⁵⁵ See below.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 91-92.

¹⁵⁷ “That of which I spoke, which Joseph termed a key, was indeed, nothing more nor less than the Urim and Thummim.” Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 106. See also pp. 101, 104, 126, 135. The latter references to the Urim and Thummim are to seer stones.

shaped gorget found on the shores of Nauvoo, Joseph probably kept this geode as a curiosity. Philo Dibble inherited the stone when Joseph died.¹⁵⁸

In an 1859 meeting of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Brigham Young discussed Joseph's first seer stone. Apostle Wilford Woodruff recorded Young's remarks in his journal: "Preside[n]t Young also said that the seer stone which Joseph Smith first obtained He got in an Iron kettle 15 feet under ground. He saw it while looking in another seers stone which a person had. He went right to the spot & dug & found it."¹⁵⁹ Young's remarks clarify that Joseph's first stone was not obtained by purchase.

Accounts given by Palmyra businessman Fayette Lapham and Susquehanna resident William Purple corroborate Young. However, they disagree on the identity of the other seer. Lapham recalled conversing with Joseph Smith Senior about Joseph's first stone:

His son Joseph . . . happened to be where a man was looking into a dark stone and telling people, therefrom, where to dig for money and other things. Joseph requested the privilege of looking into the stone, which he did by putting his face into the hat where the stone was. It proved to be not the right stone for him; but he could see some things, and, among them, he saw the stone, and where it was, in which he could see whatever he wished to see¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 43-44. The lack of information regarding the green seer stone probably stems from the fact that it meant little to Joseph Smith.

¹⁵⁹ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5:382-3. Quinn mistakenly has "25 feet," which confuses this stone for the stone found in the Chase well at about that depth (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 43).

¹⁶⁰ Fayette Lapham, "The Mormons [part II]," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 1.

Dale Morgan suggested that this unidentified seer was the vagabond magician Luman Walters.¹⁶¹ It may also have been William Stafford, who lived down the road from the Smiths.¹⁶² William Stafford's relative Joshua Stafford, who also owned a stone, and Samuel Lawrence, another local seer, must also be considered as possibilities.

William D. Purple remembered Joseph discussing his first seer stone in his 1826 court case, but the court record itself does not include testimony to this affect. However, in light of the Young and Lapham accounts, Purple's memory must be somewhat accurate:

He [Joseph] said when he was a lad, he heard of a neighboring girl some three miles from him, who could look into a glass and see anything however hidden from others, that he was seized with a strong desire to see her and her glass, that after much effort he induced his parents to let him visit her. He did so, and was permitted to look in the glass, which was placed in a hat to exclude the light. He was greatly surprised to see but one thing, which was a small stone, a great way off. It soon became luminous, and dazzeled his eyes, and after a short time it became as intense as the mid-day sun. He said that the stone was under the roots of a tree or shrub as large as his arm, situated about a mile up a small stream that puts in on the South side of Lake Erie, not far from the New York and Pennsylvania line.¹⁶³

D. Michael Quinn identifies this seer as Sally Chase.¹⁶⁴

Which seer's stone did Joseph use? Both Lapham and Purple gave their accounts in the 1870s—about half of a century after the event in question. Purple

¹⁶¹ Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism*, 368n3.

¹⁶² Whether the Smiths lived at this time on Stafford road (or trail) at the county line (post-1819) or further north where Stafford road met Palmyra main street on the west end of town (pre-1820), the Staffords lived "down the road."

¹⁶³ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism: Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 42.

heard the story in 1826 from Joseph Smith himself, as well as from Smith's father.¹⁶⁵ He therefore provided both second-hand and third-hand accounts of Joseph's experience. Fayette Lapham heard the story from Joseph Smith, Senior, in 1830. At this point in time, Smith Senior was reminiscing from the distance of about a decade, and may himself be the source of confusion. If the elder Smith witnessed Joseph's experience, Lapham provided a second-hand account—if not, Lapham provided a third-hand account. The basic historical standards of source criticism favor the Purple account. This suggests that Joseph found his first seer stone by looking into Sally Chase's glass.

Sally's local prominence as a stone seer and the obscurity of the male seers supports this conclusion. Luman Walters apparently had a seer stone. Abner Cole, editor of the local tabloid, wrote of Walters using "his *magic* stone" to find buried treasure.¹⁶⁶ This, however, appeared in Cole's *Book of Pukei*, a work of semi-historical fiction, based on local rumor, and written in Book of Mormon phraseology in order to lampoon Joseph Smith. Diedrich Willers, minister of the Dutch Reformed church in Fayette, New York, wrote that people there would consult Walters to find things they had lost and to search out "mysteries."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Purple added, "Joseph Smith, Sr., was present, and sworn as a witness. He confirmed at great length all that his son had said in his examination. He delineated his characteristics in his youthful days—his visit to Lake Erie in search of the stone—and his wonderful triumphs as a seer." "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," p. 3, col. 9. On the integrity of Purple's memory, see Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism*, 329-31. See also W[esley]. P. Walters, "Joseph Smith's Bainbridge, N.Y., Court Trials," *Westminster Theological Journal* 36, no. 2 (winter 1974): 132.

¹⁶⁶ Pukei 1:9. Dogberry [Cole], "The Book of Pukei.—Chap. 1," *The Reflector*, 12 June 1830, p. 37, col. 1.

¹⁶⁷ Willers wrote, "many in this neighborhood where ever they wish to find out something <anything> which is lost, or pry into the <hidden> mysteries of <hidden things> will consult Dr Walters." Diedrich Willers Junior, "Ambition and Superstition," *Miscellaneous*

People often consulted stone seers in order to find lost property. We read in Pukei 2:2 that after Walters left the area, Joseph exclaimed, "Behold! hath not the mantle of Walters the Magician fallen upon me."¹⁶⁸ Cole may have been implying that Joseph succeeded Walters as the seer who led local treasure ventures. Even if Walters did have a seer stone, his interactions with Joseph Smith are much less established than Sally Chase's. Furthermore, he cannot be placed in the Palmyra/Manchester area with surety before 1825.¹⁶⁹ Quinn suggests Walters visited the area in 1822 or 1823.¹⁷⁰ But, as argued below, this postdates Joseph's first use of a seer stone.

Aside from Walters, if the stone seer in question was male, it could have been William Stafford, Joshua Stafford, or Samuel Lawrence. William Stafford did dig for treasure with the Smiths.¹⁷¹ William's daughter Samantha recollected that Lucy Smith had come to her mother to borrow their family's stone.¹⁷² This could have occurred previous to the Smith's move to Stafford road. Donald

Undated Items, Diedrich Willers Papers, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, Box 1, quoted in Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," 207n33.

¹⁶⁸ Dogberry [Cole], "Book of Pukei.—Chap. 2," *The Reflector*, 7 July 1830, p. 60, col. 1. For further argument that Walters used a seer stone, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 118-19. Following Cole, Quinn argues that Walters mentored Joseph Smith Junior (116-121). In light of this hypothesis, Willers statement that his neighbors consulted Walters concerning "hidden mysteries" is noteworthy. Joseph later taught, "the white stone mentioned in Rev. c 2 v 17 is the Urim & Thummim whereby all things pertaining to an higher order of kingdoms even all kingdoms will be made known and a white stone is given to each of those who come into this celestial kingdom, whereon is a new name written which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it."

¹⁶⁹ EMD, 2:233n21.

¹⁷⁰ *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 117.

¹⁷¹ William Stafford, statement, Manchester, New York, 8 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238.

¹⁷² "Samantha Payne Statement, circa 1884", in EMD, 2:121n3.

Enders argues that the Smiths carefully chose their particular plot of farmland.¹⁷³ The Smiths quite possibly met the Staffords while looking for land near their home. Therefore the event remembered by the Stafford children may have occurred before the Smiths met Sally Chase, who lived by the town line, but over the hills on Canandaigua road. If father Smith wanted Joseph to have a stone, he may have sent Lucy to borrow the stone. In any case, she returned home empty-handed.

Joshua Stafford, perhaps William's nephew, dug for treasure with Joseph,¹⁷⁴ But when Joseph acquired his first stone, Joshua Stafford was only 21¹⁷⁵—hardly the “man” Lapham remembered Joseph Senior discussing. Early Mormon Joseph Knight called Sam Lawrence a “Seear.”¹⁷⁶ Like Joshua Stafford, Lawrence was associated with the Smiths in their treasure-seeking endeavors,¹⁷⁷ but it is unclear whether Lawrence was a stone seer. He may have been a dreamer or a visionary. Lawrence and the Staffords seem even less likely candidates than Walters.

Unlike these male seers, Sarah (“Sally”) Chase appears several times in the reminiscences of her neighbors. Also, the Chase family hunted for treasure with

¹⁷³ Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family,” 216-18.

¹⁷⁴ A former resident of Palmyra stated, “Joshua Stafford, a good citizen, told me that young Jo Smith and himself dug for money in his orchard and elsewhere nights” (Isaac Butts, statement, Newbury, Ohio, [c. 1887], quoted in *Naked Truths About Mormonism*, January 1888, 2.).

¹⁷⁵ EMD, 2:27.

¹⁷⁶ Dean Jesse, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (autumn 1976): 32.

¹⁷⁷ Martin Harris’s interview with Joel Tiffany appears in “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 164-65.

the Smiths. Recalling the events of 1827, Lucy Mack Smith referred to Sally as a “young woman.”¹⁷⁸ At this time, Joseph Smith was a young man of 21. Born about 1804,¹⁷⁹ Sally was probably a little older than Joseph Smith Junior and grew up with him.

A number of neighbors later wrote or spoke of Sally’s role as a village seer. Caroline Rockwell stated, “Sallie Chase, a Methodist, had one [a seer stone] and people would go for her to find lost and hidden or stolen things.”¹⁸⁰ John Stafford recalled that his neighbors “use[d] to Claim Sally Chase Could look through [a] stone she had & find money—Willard Chase use[d] to dig when she found where the money was[.]”¹⁸¹ When William and Edmund Kelley visited Sally’s brother Abel in 1881, he confirmed that his sister had “a stone that she could see in.”¹⁸² In 1893, Orson Saunders, who lived adjacent to the old Chase

¹⁷⁸ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations*, 109. The manuscript version reads, “a young woman who was sister to willard chase had found an a green glass that <&> by looking through the it she could see many wonderful things . . .” (Lucy Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” LDS Archives, 69, in *EMD*, 1:342-43).

¹⁷⁹ Two family histories give 1800 as Sally’s birth date. However, in the 1860 census, taken when Sally should have been 59 or 60, she reported her age as 52 (*EMD*, 1:342n154). Census historians have noted that young men often boosted their age by a few years and that older women often shaved a few years off. Still, Sally herself should probably be trusted at least as much as later family histories. Splitting the difference, I place her birth around 1804.

¹⁸⁰ Mrs. M. C[aroline]. R[ockwell]. Smith, Statement, 25 March 1885, in Deming, “Mormon Prophet,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, col. 3.

¹⁸¹ John Stafford, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Rochester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook No. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 15v-16r, in *EMD*, 2:87. C.f. William Kelley’s reconstruction of this conversation in Kelley, “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” p. 167, col. 1.

¹⁸² Abel Chase, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Manchester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook No. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 9, in *EMD*, 2: 85: “Jo[sep]h got a [singular] looking stone which was dug up out of my father[’s] well[.] A sister that [had] a stone she could see in, but it was not the one that Smith had . . .” C.f. William Kelley’s reconstruction of this

property, remembered the stories of “a ‘peep’ stone which the Chase children had used as a plaything.”¹⁸³ Orson’s uncle Benjamin Saunders was an eyewitness to Sally’s glass-looking. Benjamin stated, “I have seen Sally (Sarah) Chase peep or look in her seer Stone a many a time. She would look for anything. . . . My oldest Brother had some Cattle stray away. She claimed she could see them but they were found right in the opposite direction from where she said they were.”¹⁸⁴ Benjamin’s brother Lorenzo Saunders stated that he consulted her when he lost a piece of farm equipment. Another local resident consulted Sally when he could not find his wallet.¹⁸⁵

Lucy Smith believed in Sally’s abilities. In her 1845 history, she stated that Sally “found a green glass, through which she could see many very wonderful things.”¹⁸⁶ Both Purple and Lucy termed Sally’s stone a “glass,” but this does not necessarily imply that it was transparent. Because of the long tradition of valuing transparency in a seer stone, the word “glass” became an appropriate name for any seer stone.¹⁸⁷ Lorenzo Saunders boasted, “I have seen her peep stone a

interview in Kelley, “The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon,” *Saints’ Herald*, 1 June 1881, p. 165, col. 2.

¹⁸³ “Mormon Leaders at Their Mecca,” *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, p. 12, col. 2.

¹⁸⁴ Benjamin Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, circa September 1884, 29-30, “Miscellany,” RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, in *EMD*, 2: 137.

¹⁸⁵ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by E. L. Kelley, 12 November 1884, in “Miscellany,” E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 10, in *EMD*, 2: 154-55.

¹⁸⁶ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations*, 109. The manuscript reads, “a young woman who was sister to willard chase had found an a green glass that <&> by looking through the it she could see many wonderful things . . .” (Lucy Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” LDS Archives, p. 69, in *EMD*, 342-43.

¹⁸⁷ An early magical treatise gave directions for anointing a “glasse or stone” for scrying (Sloan MS 1727, Manuscript Department, British Museum-Library, London, England, folio 5,

hundred times; It was a little bit of a stone & it was green & she would hold it before light."¹⁸⁸ He confirms Lucy's statement that the stone was green and shows that if the stone was not transparent, it must have been translucent, because Sally would hold it up to light. He also states that the stone was small. Lorenzo's brother Benjamin Saunders had also seen Sally's stone. William Kelley took hasty notes of Benjamin's recollection: "I have had it in my hand . . . It was a bluish stone about the Size of my thumb. She had it fit in to a paddle like fit in very nicely."¹⁸⁹ Benjamin specifies the stone's size and shows that Sally or someone else had encased the stone in a paddle, with which Sally could hold the stone up to light. In describing her sister's stone, Abel Chase only stated that "it was a dark looking stone; it was a peculiar stone."¹⁹⁰

According to Purple's memory of the legal proceedings of 1826, Joseph had said his parents did not want him to look in Sally's stone. He only prevailed

quoted in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 40). Justice Albert Neely's 20 March 1826 bill for Joseph Smith's trial label's him "the glass looker" (Albert Neely Jr., bill, Chenango County Clerk's Office, Norwich, New York; Scanned copy in my possession). One early disaffected Mormon referred to Joseph's brown, opaque seer stone as "the dark glass" (Ezra Booth, Nelson, Ohio, to Rev. Ira Eddy, 24 October 1831, in "Mormonism—No. III," *Ohio Star*, (Ravenna, Ohio), 27 October 1831, p. [3], col. 3).

¹⁸⁸ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by E. L. Kelley, 12 November 1884, in "Miscellany," E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 9, in *EMD*, 2:154.

¹⁸⁹ Benjamin Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, circa September 1884, in "Miscellany," RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 29, in *EMD*, 2: 139.

¹⁹⁰ Abel Chase, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, in W. H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," p. 165, col. 2. Fayette Lapham wrote that Joseph found his first seer stone by looking into a "dark stone" owned by a man. If Lapham is mistaken on the gender of the stone owner, his description of the stone matches Abel's. Scryers had used both emerald (a green transparent beryl) and aquamarine (a pale, bluish-green transparent beryl) as seer stones (Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 255; Besterman, *Crystal-Gazing*, 94). Noting Lucy Mack Smith's and Lorenzo Saunders's descriptions of the stone as "green," and Benjamin Saunders's description of the stone as "bluish," Dan Vogel suggests it "may have been a bluish-green colored

upon them “after much effort.” Why would Joseph Smith’s father be disinclined to such a prospect if he had wanted Joseph to be able to use a stone when in Vermont?¹⁹¹ Perhaps the elder Joseph wanted “to procure a stone” for Joseph himself using his rod. Perhaps he preferred that Joseph associate with male seers. Until the second decade of the nineteenth century, treasure was located primarily by adult males with divining rods. The New Israelites, who had hunted for treasure in Vermont at the turn of the century, were described as a “fraternity of rodsmen.” Joseph Senior may have preferred that either he himself or another male mentor would help Joseph begin his career as a seer. Instead, Sally Chase, a neighboring adolescent female, provided Joseph Junior with his first experience of supernatural vision and also provided him a role model of the village seer. Gender, age, and kinship all may have been at play in the younger Joseph’s efforts to obtain permission to visit Sally.

When did this occur? The earliest Joseph could have looked into Sally’s dark green glass would have been shortly after moving to Palmyra from Vermont, probably in January of 1817.¹⁹² The only other reliable chronobar—or historical benchmark—for dating Joseph’s acquisition of his first seer stone happens to be the acquisition of his second seer stone. Willard Chase stated that he unearthed Joseph’s white seer stone while digging a well on the Chase farm in

stone” (*EMD*, 2:154n30). Aquamarine is bluish-green, but is pale. Abel Chase said the stone was “dark.”

¹⁹¹ Green Mountain Boys, Strafford, Vermont, to Thomas C. Sharp, 15 February 1844, in *EMD*, 1:597.

¹⁹² *EMD*, 1:273n69, 275n73.

1822.¹⁹³ Sometime between 1817 and 1822 Joseph beheld his first stone in vision and then obtained it.

Sharpening the interval in which Joseph first used Sally's stone proves frustrating, but the importance of the relationship between this first vision and the First Vision requires an attempt. According to Fayette Lapham, Joseph's seer stone vision of his first stone occurred "when about fourteen years of age."¹⁹⁴ Joseph was fourteen between 23 December 1819 and 23 December 1820. This places the vision of the first seer stone at about 1820. The reliability of Lapham's dating, however, must be questioned. Aside from being a late reminiscence, he confuses Joseph's first and second stones. Lapham states that Joseph obtained this stone "under pretence of digging a well."¹⁹⁵ This clearly refers to the stone found on the Chase property.

William Purple's account of the 1826 trial also bears on the dating of the discovery of the first seer stone. Purple recalled that the "neighboring girl" Joseph visited lived "some three miles from him."¹⁹⁶ The Smiths moved from the west end of Palmyra's main street to the south end of Stafford road at the township-county line between April 1819 and April 1820—probably in the summer of 1819. Before the move, the Smiths lived over 2 1/2 miles from the

¹⁹³ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240-241.

¹⁹⁴ Fayette Lapham, "II—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, 306.

¹⁹⁵ Fayette Lapham, "II—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, 306.

¹⁹⁶ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8.

Chase residence. After the move, they lived within 1/2 mile of the Chases.¹⁹⁷

Purple's account, to the extent it can be relied upon, dates the vision of Joseph's first stone prior to April 1820, when the Smiths appear on the south end of Stafford road in that year's road tax list. This is consistent with the date given by Lapham for Joseph's seer stone vision of a stone for himself.

Purple's narrative further reinforces this chronology. He also wrote that Joseph's vision "occupied his mind for some years" before he actually left home "in search of this luminous stone."¹⁹⁸ At the latest, Joseph acquired his first stone in 1822, shortly before his second stone was unearthed on the Chase farm. Purple's chronology determines that the vision occurred "some years" previous to the actual acquisition. This also dates the vision to 1820 at the latest. The chronology produced by combining Lapham and Purple suggests that the seer stone vision occurred in late 1819 or early 1820. Willard Chase stated, "I became

¹⁹⁷ In 1820, the intersection of Stafford road and Main street was the West end of the village (Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and T. Jeffery Cottle, *Old Mormon Palmyra and New England: Historic Photographs and Guide* [Santa Ana, California: Fieldbrook Productions, 1991], 119). The first measurement is calculated in road distance. When living in the village, the Smith's would have traveled by road to the Chase farm. The second measurement is calculated as the crow flies. The Smiths would have walked over the two small hills between their farm on Stafford Road and the Chase farm on Canandaigua Road rather than taking a long, unnecessary detour by road. Vogel, *EMD*, 2:2: "Map of Palmyra and Manchester Townships"; *Palmyra, New York* (Washington, DC: United States Department of the Interior Geological Survey, 1952), 7.5 minute series. Visiting the area in 1882, Ellen Dickinson wrote of Joseph's discovery of his second seer stone on the Chase property: "The tradition is that Joseph ran home across lots" (Dickinson, Palmyra, to "Dear Evangelist," June 1882, Appendix 9 in Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 247). Joseph would have traveled over the hills whether in a hurry or not.

¹⁹⁸ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8. Brigham Young said that Joseph "went right to the spot & dug & found it" (*Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5:382-3). This could mean he went to get his stone right after he saw it in vision or that he had little difficulty finding the location. Purple's account leads me to the second interpretation. Even the first interpretation is consistent with Purple's chronology of a time lapse between initial vision and later acquisition. He writes that Joseph "often had an opportunity to

acquainted with the Smith family . . . in the year 1820.”¹⁹⁹ Shortly thereafter, before April of that year, the Smiths moved to the Palmyra/Manchester township line. After the move, visiting the Chase home would have required only a short walk. According to Purple, Joseph “often had an opportunity to look in the glass, and with the same result.” These periodic viewings probably took place after the Smith family’s move. In effect, Sally’s green glass became Joseph’s first seer stone. Yet Joseph saw “but one thing, which was a small stone, a great way off.”

Purple’s chronology determines not only an upper limit on Joseph’s vision of the stone, but a lower limit on Joseph’s acquisition of the stone. Because Joseph saw the stone no earlier than January of 1817, 1819 is the earliest year he could have unearthed the stone. But Lapham dated the seer stone vision to about 1820. This would date the actual discovery to about 1822, shortly before Joseph acquired his second seer stone.

Palmyran Pomeroy Tucker, who wrote an anti-Mormon history of Mormonism in 1867,²⁰⁰ provided a date more specific, yet more problematic than

look in the glass, and with the same result.” It makes sense that Joseph would have taken another close look at the distant stone’s location before venturing forth to obtain it.

¹⁹⁹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240. Vogel states that Chase probably became acquainted with the Smiths when they moved to the Palmyra/Manchester township line (*EMD*, 2:65n2). If Purple is correct, the Chases and Smiths met before the move. Perhaps Joseph met Sally before he moved out of the village, and then met Willard later.

²⁰⁰ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19. Tucker was a long-standing and established Freemason. His distaste for Mormonism may have derived in part from passages in the Book of Mormon commonly perceived as denunciations of Freemasonry. On Tucker’s Masonry, see “Return of Mount Moriah Lodge N^o 112 held in the town of Palmyra in the County of Wayne and State of New York from June 4th AS 5827 to June 4th AS 5828, p. 2; photostat in *EMD*, 3:455; Rev. C. N. Pattengill, *Light in the Valley: Memorial Sermon Delivered at the Funeral of*

Lapham's. In Tucker's narrative, Joseph owned only one seer stone, which he obtained in September of 1819. Tucker described the stone as "whitish" and asserted that it was discovered while digging a well on the Chase property. However, he also noted the stone's "peculiar shape, resembling that of a child's foot."²⁰¹ Whereas the white stone was discovered on the Chase property, contemporary accounts explicitly describe Joseph's earlier brown stone as shaped like a baby's foot or shoe. Relying on neighborhood rumor, Tucker apparently conflated the color and location of the second seer stone with the shape and discovery date of the first.²⁰²

Relying on the dates given by Lapham and Tucker, but not accounting for the time lapse between vision and acquisition, Quinn dates both to 1819.²⁰³ Dan Vogel objects to Quinn's chronology on the grounds that the 1826 court record "limits Smith's stone gazing to the previous three years (ca. 1823)."²⁰⁴ To the contrary, the court record states only "that he has occasionally been in the habit of looking through this stone [the brown seer stone] to find lost property for 3

Pomeroy Tucker, Palmyra, Wayne County, N.Y., July 3d, 1870 (Troy, New York: The Times Steam Printing House, 1870), 9, 35, 39. On perceived anti-Masonry in the Book of Mormon see Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,'" *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 17-30. See also Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormonism*, 128-131; and Underwood, "The Earliest Reference Guides to the Book of Mormon," 81-82.

²⁰¹ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19.

²⁰² Tucker did not consult Willard Chase when writing his book. *EMD*, 2:152n24.

²⁰³ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 43, 391n12. Quinn also cites Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 247; McIntosh, *History of Wayne County, New Yor*, 150; and Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 19-20. McIntosh and Kennedy clearly rely on Tucker. Dickinson almost certainly relies on Tucker as well. She cites him on page 5.

²⁰⁴ Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," 202n11.

years.”²⁰⁵ Prior to this time, Joseph used the brown stone for treasure seeking and perhaps for locating stolen livestock. Lacking any further relevant data and reaching a point of educative exhaustion, I tentatively date the first seer stone vision to 1819 or early 1820 and the actual disinterment to 1821 or early 1822. Though uncertain in its result, this attempt to date the first vision and later acquisition of the first seer stone allows a more informed consideration of the relationship between Joseph’s discoveries of the first stone and his “First Vision” of deity.

Joseph’s transition from rodsman to seer was provoked in part by the Second Great Awakening and his First Vision. New ideas and social forces challenged Christianity in America during the second half of the eighteenth century. The disestablishment of state churches, rapid migration to the frontier, and deist thought threatened to disorganize and weaken Christian churches. In response to these perceived dangers, zealous church leaders and their followers mounted a comprehensive campaign of religious regeneration. From approximately 1780 to 1830, rural camp meetings, urban revivals, and seminary retrenchments contributed to a general American experience of spiritual renewal. Frontier camp meetings, especially, created a firestorm of religious upheaval. Churches opened their doors more freely to Americans of all classes. The

²⁰⁵ People of State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, in “A Document Discovered,” *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, p. 1, cols. 1-2 (emphasis mine).

percentage of Americans who went to church roughly quadrupled.²⁰⁶ W. R. Ward wrote that this period constitutes “the most important single generation in the modern history not merely of English religion but of the whole Christian world.”²⁰⁷ Because of the intensity and frequency with which western New York underwent this baptism by fire, historians call it “the burned-over district.”²⁰⁸ Joseph Smith spent his adolescence in this inferno.

The Second Great Awakening first burned through the Palmyra area in 1817, just after the Smith family’s dislocation from Vermont and in a time of trying financial circumstances. The Smith scraped together a living with a small cake and root beer shop. The boys often peddled their goods from a cart along main street. Joseph may have received much of his exposure to the camp meetings of that summer as a concessionaire.²⁰⁹ He later wrote that he “attended their several meetings <as often> as occasion would permit.”²¹⁰ Camp meeting preachers used hellfire and brimstone sermons to bring people to an awareness of their awful states of sin. Then the preachers would issue the call to Christ. Convicted sinners could come forward and receive the Lord’s salvation. Revival

²⁰⁶ This consensus view of the Second Great Awakening is based loosely on Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, new and rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 128-134.

²⁰⁷ W. R. Ward, “The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control, 1790-1830,” in *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 237.

²⁰⁸ Whitney R. Cross’ seminal work is still a classic: *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950; New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

²⁰⁹ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 12, 14.

²¹⁰ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 2, in *PJS*, 1:270.

preachers impressed upon Joseph his sinful situation, but they did not immediately provoke the intended experience of salvation. Joseph stewed and pondered over his religious concerns.

The local churches had cooperated in 1817 to produce the revival, but then they began to haggle over the affiliation of their new crop of converts. As this sectarian strife played itself out over the next few years, Joseph became confused. "In the midst of this war of words," he wrote, "I often said to myself, what is to be done? Who of all these parties are right? Or are they all wrong together? And if any one of them be right which is it? And how shall I know it?"²¹¹ Worst of all, the conflict divided his family. Joseph's mother became somewhat partial to Presbyterianism.²¹² His father wanted nothing to do with any of the sects; he remained an unchurched treasure hunter. Joseph turned to the Bible for answers to his concerns. Eventually he determined to seek out the Lord in prayer. Retiring to the woods, he sought forgiveness for his sins and a knowledge of the true gospel.

Joseph claimed that his prayer was answered. He wrote that "a pillar of fire light above the brightness of the sun at noon day come down from above and rested upon me . . ." ²¹³ God, the Father, descended in the pillar. Then the

²¹¹ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 2, in *PJS*, 1: 271.

²¹² Searching for a denomination marks the years following Lucy's experience hearing the voice of Christ. After the revival of 1824–1825, she would officially affiliate.

²¹³ Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, 1832, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:6.

resurrected Jesus Christ descended.²⁴ The Father introduced the Son, who informed Joseph that his sins were forgiven and instructed him not to join any of the churches, for they were all wrong. Joseph experienced persecution for claiming to have seen the Father and the Son. He later wrote, "why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen, for I had seen a vision, I knew it, and I knew that God knew it, and I could not deny it"²⁵ This open vision was as real to Joseph as his seer stone vision.²⁶

Joseph wrote that his First Vision occurred "early in the spring of Eightteen hundred and twenty."²⁷ This vision evidently followed shortly after his first vision of his first seer stone, but before he actually obtained it. It is possible, however, that it occurred prior to his first look in Sally's stone.

In an 1831 revelation, the Lord stated that he gave commandments to men "in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding."²⁸ This theology of revelation may have applied to Joseph's First Vision. Apostle John Taylor later gave an account of Joseph's vision in which the

²⁴ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 121, in *PJS*, 1:127; David White, "The Prairies, Nauvoo, Joe Smith, the Temple, the Mormons, &c." *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), 15 September 1843, 3, in *EMD*, 1:182; Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, LDS Church Archives, in *PJS*, 1: 461.

²⁵ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 4, in *PJS*, 1:275.

²⁶ On the First Vision, see Milton V. Backman, Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2d ed., rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971, 1980).

²⁷ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:272. Historians of Mormonism have debated vigorously over the dating of the "First Vision," some arguing that it occurred much later than Joseph said it did. I follow the chronology recently proposed by Richard L. Bushman. See his discussion of this chronology in reference to others in "Just the Facts Please," review of *Inventing Mormonism*, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 2 (1994): 126-29.

Lord rejected the modern churches because they “had forsaken God the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water.”²¹⁹ As a well and cistern digger, this message spoke particularly to young Joseph.

When Joseph went to the grove he was not just wavering between Presbyterianism and Methodism, but between organized religion and folk magic. Should he join one particular denomination or were they all wrong together? Should he convert to Evangelicalism or obtain his seer stone? “Go thy <way>,” the Lord told him, and rejected the churches of the day in part because, as he told Joseph, they taught “the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness but they deny the power thereof.”²²⁰ As historian Marvin Hill notes, the power and gifts of God were not denied by treasure seers and diggers and other practitioners of folk-magic.²²¹ Richard Bushman explains that the First Vision would have driven Joseph away from the organized churches in his mother’s social orbit toward the treasure-seeking culture of his father.²²² Referring to the period of denominational affiliation that followed the conversions of the revival, Joseph later wrote, “in process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the

²¹⁸ Doctrine and Covenants 1:24.

²¹⁹ “Discourse by President John Taylor, Delivered in the 14th Ward Meeting House, Sunday Evening, December 7th, 1879,” *JD*, 21 (1881): p. 161, col. 2. In this account, the Lord repeated words he had spoken to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (2:13).

²²⁰ Joseph Smith Junior, “A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.,” in Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:6; Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:273.

²²¹ Hill, “Money-Digging Folklore and the Beginnings of Mormonism,” 484-86.

²²² Bushman, “Joseph Smith’s Family Background,” 1-18. See especially 11-14. See also Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 31.

Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them”²²³ Joseph later told his friend Alexander Neibaur that he “wanted to get Religion too wanted to feel & ~~sh~~ shout like the Rest but could feel nothing”²²⁴ And so, Joseph turned to the religious belief system of the treasure seekers, which was actually more methodical than Methodism.

Joseph claimed that he shared his experience in the grove with one of the ministers in his area. It was only natural for Joseph to want to talk with others about his vision. Some people, when they undergo a dramatic spiritual event, seek out a religious specialist who may have insight for them regarding their experience. Folklorist Erika Brady terms this “priesting the supernatural predicament.”²²⁵ The minister Joseph spoke with denounced his vision “with great contempt.”²²⁶ Then, as Joseph recalled, “I soon found . . . that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion and was the cause of great persecution . . . men of high standing would take notice sufficiently to excite the public mind against me”²²⁷ As Richard L. Bushman observes, the preacher reacted sharply “not because of the strangeness

²²³ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 2, in *PJS*, 1:270.

²²⁴ Alexander Neibaur Journal, 24 May 1844, LDS Church Archives, in *PJS*, 1:461.

²²⁵ Erika Brady, “Bad Scares and Joyful Hauntings: ‘Priesting’ the Supernatural Predicament,” in *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and the Supernatural*, ed. Barbara Walker (Logan, Utah: Utah State University, 1995), 145-158.

²²⁶ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:273.

²²⁷ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 132nB, in *PJS*, 1:273n1.

of Joseph's story but because of its familiarity. Subjects of revivals all too often claimed to have seen visions."²⁸

Although a number of people experienced visions in Joseph's day, some critics have doubted whether Joseph did because of a lack of independent evidence. When anti-Mormons visited the area to take negative statements about Joseph, neighbors complained about him claiming to have seen the angel Moroni, but no one mentioned him claiming to have seen God. Joseph, however, did not write that he told anyone about the vision except for this minister. When he returned home weakened from the vision and his mother asked him what was the matter, he only replied, "never mind . . . I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true."²⁹

Joseph wrote that because he had claimed to see a vision the local ministers united against him and spoke against him to their congregations, but they did not speak against his visions. As Joseph had claimed that Jesus told him all current churches were false, he posed a threat to the clergy. By denouncing Joseph's treasure dowsing, the ministers could undercut his visionary claim to any who might have heard it without informing any of the flock who had not. Treasure seeking is what Joseph's neighbors complained most about when visited for statements. In the face of sectarian persecution, Joseph apparently decided to keep the First Vision to himself. This persecution confirmed for him

²⁸ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 58-59.

²⁹ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 4, in *PJS*, 1:274.

the corruptness of organized religion and turned him further toward the culture of divining.²³⁰

Although the event is referred to by Latter-day Saints as “the First Vision,” Joseph Smith described an actual *visitation*. This theophany falls into the category of condescensional revelation. “I cried unto the Lord for mercy,” Joseph wrote, “and the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness.”²³¹ When Joseph looked into Sally’s green glass, he acquired limited supernatural vision. Now, he had seen God. The vision provoked Joseph to desire further spiritual development. What could he do to attain further supernatural vision? By obtaining the seer stone he had seen in Sally’s green glass, Joseph could increase his divinatory abilities. In this way, the First Vision may have provided further impetus and direction for Joseph’s divinatory development. Joseph wrote that Jesus Christ “forbade me to join with an of them [the denominations] and many other things did he say unto me which I cannot write at this time.”²³² Other accounts of the First Vision fill in some of the blanks Joseph left out. Apostle Orson Pratt stated that the Lord elaborated on the sectarian rejection of spiritual gifts.

[T]hey had denied communication and revelation from heaven; denied the administration of angels; denied the power that was in the ancient church that comes through the gift of the Holy Ghost, *and gave him much instruction on this point*, but did not see proper upon that occasion to give him a full knowledge of the Gospel, and what was necessary to constitute

²³⁰ Assuming that Joseph already had a seer stone, Alan Taylor writes, “preachers’ skepticism only reinforced his psychological need to validate his powers regularly by consulting his seer stone” (Taylor, “The Early Republic’s Supernatural Economy,” 23). More likely, hostile preachers may actually have contributed to Joseph’s desire to obtain his stone.

²³¹ Joseph Smith, Letterbook 1, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:6.

²³² Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 3, in *PJS*, 1:273.

a true church, and gave him some few commandments to govern him in future time, with a promise that if he would abide the same and call upon his name, that the day would come that the Lord would reveal to him still further, making manifest what was necessary to the constitution of the true Church. The vision withdrew.²³³

On another occasion, Pratt would explain that Joseph became familiar with the spirit of revelation by using urim. Did Jesus instruct Joseph to obtain a stone?

D. Michael Quinn casts the First Vision as a purification ritual necessary to launch Joseph's career as a treasure seer.²³⁴ This interpretation exemplifies the tendency to reduce Joseph's role as a village seer to that of a treasure seer. Joseph may have believed that the forgiveness he received in the First Vision purified him for using a seer stone, but would not have limited this use to finding treasure. Joseph probably used his first seer stone to locate stray livestock as well.

Purple wrote that Joseph saw his first stone in the ground about a mile from Lake Erie, "not far from the New York and Pennsylvania line."²³⁵ This was about 150 miles from Palmyra. Purple's report may sound exaggerated to modern ears, but to reject it because of this great distance may only mirror a modern mindset. After placing stone seeking within the context of treasure seeking and taking that belief system seriously, Purple's report no longer seems so outlandish. Joseph Smith would travel 130 miles to dig for silver in Harmony,

²³³ "Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, March 19, 1871," *JD*, 14 (1872): 141 (emphasis and deemphasis mine).

²³⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 30-31, 136-37.

²³⁵ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism: Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8.

Pennsylvania, with Josiah Stowell. The Smiths were struggling at this time to make the annual payment on their land. Joseph and his Mother later stated that he went with Josiah Stowell because of the high wages he paid.²²⁶ However, on top of that, Joseph and his father believed in buried treasure. By going with Stowell they stood to gain much more than a steady wage.

Later, Alvah Beaman of Livonia and Luman Walters of Sodus Bay would travel over twenty miles to dig for treasure in the Palmyra-Manchester area. Treasure seeking had never been convenient. Most worked at night without the benefit of sunlight. The Smiths were said to dig under a new moon²²⁷—depriving them of moonlight as well. In the treasure seeker's belief system, supernatural obstructions added to the difficulty of obtaining treasure. The time away from work that a journey of 150 miles would require may account for the time lapse between seeing the stone in vision and acquiring it.

Still, Purple recounted the story from the distance of over fifty years. His report of a trip to Lake Erie is not dubious because of the distance through space he had Joseph traveling, but because of the distance through time from which he was reporting. The great lake Purples remembered hearing about may have actually been lake Ontario, about twenty miles from the Smith home. Regional

²²⁶ See Dan Vogel's discussion of this point in *EMD*, 1:53n2.

²²⁷ William Stafford, Manchester, New York, 8 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238.

historian Orsamus Turner reported that the stone was “such a pebble as may any day be picked up on the shore of Lake Ontario”²³⁸

Whether he traveled twenty miles or 150, Joseph embarked on a considerable journey. Evan M. Zuesse, in his essay on divination, demonstrates a connection between divination and rites of passage:

divination requires the radical submission of the diviner and indeed the client to the transcendental sources of truth, before their lives can be transformed and set straight, before they can be reincorporated harmoniously into the world. In short, divinatory rites follow the pattern of all rites of passage. The client, having learned in the course of the rite to offer up to the divine all egocentric resistance, ends the session reoriented to the world and able to take positive and confident action in it.²³⁹

Marking the beginning of his new role as a village seer, Joseph’s First Vision conforms to this pattern. Also, as with his walk into the wooded grove, Joseph’s journey to obtain his first stone constitute a type of vision quest—removing him from his former role in society as a rodsman and placing him in a liminal state that would prepare him to be reincorporated into society in his new role.

Whether Joseph traveled to Erie or Ontario, his quest for a seer stone probably took him to unfamiliar territory. And yet Brigham Young said he “went right to the spot & dug & found it.”²⁴⁰ William Purple wrote that Joseph “did not have the glass [Sally Chase’s seer stone] with him, but he knew its exact

²³⁸ O[rsamus] Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve; Embracing the Counties of Monroe, Ontario, Livingston, Yates, Steuben, Most of Wayne and Allegany, and Parts of Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming* (Rochester: William Alling, 1851), 216.

²³⁹ Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. “divination.”

²⁴⁰ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5:382-3.

location."²⁴¹ Joseph may have found the exact location in which to dig for his first seer stone by using his divining rod.

Some treasure seekers used rods to find treasure that had been seen in vision. An 1830 publication told the treasure tale of Christopher Colwort of Massachusetts, who had visionary dreams of buried treasure, "but they were rather of a vague nature, and the particular location of the buried treasure was not very satisfactorily defined." In order to find the hoard, "Kit" hired a "water-wizard" who fixed the spot with a hazel rod.²⁴² In January of 1825, Ashbel Tucker of Tunbridge, Vermont, had three visionary dreams that a pot of money lay buried on a small island in Agre's brook near Randolph. Tucker went to the brook and used his mineral rod to find where he should dig.²⁴³ While in Vermont, the Smiths had lived in both towns. In Vermont Judge Daniel Pierce Thompson's short story about Green Mountain money digging, the villain Gow used both rods and stones. When Gow placed his seer stone in his hat and drew it around his face, he saw "a clear view" of Spanish silver coins in a nearby

²⁴¹ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8.

²⁴² "The Money Diggers," *The Casket Flowers of Literature Wit and Sentiment*, June 1830, p. 247, col. 1.

²⁴³ "Money digging," *Windsor Journal* (Windsor, Vermont), 17 January 1825; reprinted in the *Wayne Sentinel*, 16 February 1825, p. [1], col. 5; H. Royce Bass, *The History of Braintree, Vermont, including a Memorial of Families That Have Resided in this Town* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle & Co., State Printers, 1883), 46. See also Hyatt, *Hoodoo-Conjuration-Witchcraft-Rootwork*, vol. 1, p. 120, item 403.

mountain. Later, on the mountain top, he made "frequent trials of the divining rod."²⁴

According to Pomeroy Tucker, Joseph used both rod and stone in combination. Tucker wrote that in the spring of 1820, Joseph Smith used a rod to find a treasure that he had seen in a nearby hill with his seer stone. Tucker claimed that he heard this particular story from eyewitnesses.²⁵ Joseph may have used this combined method of treasure location to find his first stone. In 1859, Brigham Young told Wilford Woodruff that "the seer stone which Joseph Smith first obtained He got in an Iron kettle 15 feet under ground."²⁶ This kettle contained a treasure far more valuable than silver or gold.

A parallel sequence may have occurred in Lehigh history. Recalling his 1830 conversation with Joseph Smith Senior, Fayette Lapham wrote that the elder Smith gave him an account of the Book of Mormon. According to Lapham's recollection, Smith stated that when the Lehighites reached the promised land the "Liahona," or "compass," led them to find a strange object. When they took it into their temple, a voice told them to look into it. "They did so, and could see

²⁴ Thompson, *May Martin; or, The Money-Diggers*, 10-12, 14, 19. Though fictional, and very biased against treasure seekers, Thompson's *May Martin* is an informed work. It speaks of a number of motifs that can be confirmed as actual elements of the treasure-seeking belief system and practice: treasure-seeking companies, aspirations of socioeconomic mobility, familiar types of treasures, familiar stories of treasure buryers, circumstances of burial, mountains and caves, methods for finding treasure, seer stone beliefs, the use of a stone in a hat, night digging, treasure throwing off light, classical treasure guardians, typical treasure guardian behavior, slippery treasure, attempting to fix treasure with a crowbar, and connection with counterfeiting. As with Joseph Smith in 1826, the treasure seekers in this story eventually wind up facing a judge in court. This leads me to wonder whether "The Hon. Judge Thompson," of Vermont, who wrote *May Martin*, has provided a somewhat autobiographical fiction.

²⁵ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 21-22.

²⁶ Wilford Woodruff's *Journal*, 5:382-83.

everything of the past, present, and future.”²⁴⁷ Such a story is nowhere to be found in the Book of Mormon, but may convey some of the content of the 116 pages of Book of Mormon manuscript which were lost. Joseph Smith Junior may have informed his father of the contents of the lost manuscript—which covered this period of Lehite history.

Lapham’s account of a speculum discovery solves a problem in the Book of Mormon story line, which has King Mosiah II already in possession of “interpreters” when he received the plates that had been made by the Jaredite race, which had previously inhabited the land. The brother of Jared had stated that he “sealed” his “interpreters”—the spectacle stones Joseph Junior later found with the Book of Mormon—with the plates he made.²⁴⁸ How could Mosiah II have been in possession of the “interpreters” before they were discovered with the Jaredite record?

Book of Mormon scholars have puzzled over this problem. One recent critic has pointed to it as evidence that Joseph Smith could not keep his story straight.²⁴⁹ Lapham’s account of Joseph Smith Senior’s narration solves this

²⁴⁷ Lapham, “II.—The Mormons,” *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 308, col. 2-p. 309, col. 1.

²⁴⁸ Ether 3:27-28; 4:5. The Book of Mormon records that the members of the Zeniff colony who found the Jaredite plates also “brought breastplates, which are large, and they are of brass and of copper . . .” (Mosiah 8:10). Apparently, the spectacle stones had been sealed in one of these breastplates. Joseph Smith found the spectacles in a pocket of a large breastplate. His mother recounted that she handled this breastplate while “wrapped in a thin muslin handkerchief, so thin that I could see the glistening metal, and ascertain its proportions without any difficulty. It . . . extended from the neck downwards, as far as the centre of the stomach of a man of extraordinary size” (Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of the Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Several Generations*, 107).

²⁴⁹ Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith*, 207-8.

problem by positing the existence of another set of interpreters. Like Joseph Smith, the Nephites apparently had seer stones of their own before obtaining the spectacles. Prior to Mosiah II's acquisition of the Jaredite record, "interpreters" are mentioned. But not until that time does the Book of Mormon mention the "two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow."²⁵⁰

If Lapham's late reminiscence accurately reflects content from the missing portion of the Book of Mormon (or an episode from Lehiite history divined in some other way), it could mean one of two things. First, for those who see Lehiite history as Joseph Smith's disguised autobiography, Lapham's account of the discovery of a speculum with the Liahona compass may serve as evidence that Joseph located his first seer stone with a divining rod. Second, for those who accept the historicity of Joseph's revelations regarding the Lehiites, Lapham's account may point to a pattern by which the Lord helped both the Lehiites and Joseph Smith increase in their power to communicate with him. If Lapham inaccurately remembered something Joseph Smith Senior actually said, perhaps he injected Joseph Smith's discovery of his first seer stone with a divining rod into the Book of Mormon story line.²⁵¹ Finally, Lapham's forty-year recollection may be his creation entirely. Whatever one makes of the Lapham story, some treasure diviners used a rod to locate treasure that had been seen in vision and this method had been ascribed to Joseph Smith. If Joseph used a rod to find his

²⁵⁰ Mosiah 28:11-13.

²⁵¹ On the other hand, perhaps Joseph Smith Senior conflated the histories of his son and the Lehiites.

first seer stone, it formed another bridge between his use of a rod and his subsequent use of a stone.

The Dark Brown Stone

Most historians hold that Joseph discovered his brown stone while digging a well on the Chase farm.²⁵² The stone found there was white and was Joseph's second stone. David Whitmer, who spoke frequently about the brown seer stone, but never the white one, observed Joseph using the brown stone while living with the Whitmer family in 1829. David later wrote that Joseph gave this brown stone to Oliver Cowdery in 1830.²⁵³ David and Oliver, brothers-in-law, remained close friends through life and usually lived near each other—providing Whitmer further opportunity to view the stone. After Cowdery's death, Phineas Young procured the stone and brought it to his brother Brigham in Utah.²⁵⁴ In 1855, Brigham Young told his counselors and the apostles, "Oliver sent me Joseph's *first* Seer stone, Oliver always kept it until he sent it to me."²⁵⁵ As noted

²⁵² See, for example, Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 44; Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 69; Dan Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," 202, n11; Alex Baugh, "Parting the Veil: The Visions of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 29.

²⁵³ Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 32. See also the Whitmer account given in "Mormon Relics," *Inter Ocean* (Chicago), 17 October 1886, p. 17, col. 5.

²⁵⁴ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 242-43.

²⁵⁵ The Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Council" (emphasis mine). Young also stated, "the second Seer Stone Dr Williams had." This is Frederick G. Williams, a practitioner of Thomsonian medicine, who became a one of Joseph's counselors in the First Presidency (HC, 2:291). Williams, who was baptized in November of 1830, did not meet Joseph Smith until August of 1831 (Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 104-5). By this time, Joseph had already given the brown stone to Oliver Cowdery.

previously, Young also taught that “the seer stone which Joseph Smith first obtained” he found by looking in another seer’s stone. This establishes that Joseph acquired his brown stone first.

Joseph’s seer stone and Sally’s seer stone can be compared with respect to the qualities that seers appreciated in their stones. Both William Purple and Emma Smith described Joseph’s seer stone as “a small stone.”²⁵⁶ David Whitmer said the stone was “about the size of an egg.”²⁵⁷ Purple described it as “about the size of a small hen’s egg.”²⁵⁸ Joseph Anderson, while an assistant to the Twelve Apostles, is said to have described it as “slightly smaller than a chicken egg.”²⁵⁹

Williams probably borrowed the white stone for a period of time that stuck out in Brigham Young’s mind.

²⁵⁶ Emma Smith Bidamon, Nauvoo, Illinois, to Emma Pilgrim, Independence, Missouri, 27 March 1870, in *EMD*, 1:532; Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8. David Whitmer also described the stone as “small” (Whitmer, interviewed on 1 June 1881 in Richmond, Missouri, *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881, quoted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 62. See also 72, 241-42).

²⁵⁷ David Whitmer, interviewed in “Mormon Relics,” *Inter Ocean* (Chicago), 17 October 1886, p. 17, col. 5. On 25 February 1856, Hosea Stout recorded in his journal that this stone was “about the size but not the shape of a hen’s egg” (*On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, ed. Juanita Brooks [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press; Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1964; reprint, 1982], 2:593).

²⁵⁸ Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 8.

²⁵⁹ David C. Martin, “Hiram Page’s ‘Peep’ Stone,” *Restoration Reporter*, June 1971, 8n. Grant Palmer, who observed the stone in 1966, described the stones’ size “between [an] egg and a handball” (Palmer, telephone conversation with H. Michael Marquardt, Ms, 31 December 1991, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Box 156, folder 15, item 5). This, however, is a 25 year recollection based on a single viewing (Palmer, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee, 21 March 2000; Grant Palmer, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000; see also H. Michael Marquardt, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee, 16 March 2000; Earl Olsen, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee, 15 March 2000; James Clayton, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee, 23 March 2000; manuscript notes of interviews in the Mark Ashurst-McGee Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah). In 2000, Palmer described its size to me as larger than a hen’s egg (Palmer, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000). Mary Brown Firmage stated that the stone was “3-4 inches long, 2 inches wide, and had a hump in the middle which made it perhaps 2 inches thick at the thickest point” (“Richard S. Van Wagoner

Though small, the stone was perhaps larger than Sally's stone. Benjamin Saunders, who handled the stone on at least one occasion, measured it about the size of his thumb. His brother Lorenzo, who claimed to have seen the stone on numerous occasions, called it a "little bit of a stone."

People who observed the brown stone did not entirely agree on its shape. Mary Brown Firmage, who observed the stone about 1983, stated that the stone "had a hump in the middle" and that it was "flat on the bottom."²⁶⁰ Lorenzo Saunders said the stone had the shape of a "babies foot."²⁶¹ Pomeroy Tucker described Joseph's first stone as having a "peculiar shape, resembling that of a child's foot."²⁶² The shape of a foot does not change with age. Saunders and Tucker may have meant that the stone exhibited the shape of a baby's shoe. Samuel Bateman, one of President John Taylor's bodyguards, wrote in his journal, "On Sunday last I saw and handled the seer stone that the Prophet Joseph Smith had. It was dark, color, not round on one side. It was shaped like the top of a baby's shoe, one end like the toe of the shoe [flat], and the other round."²⁶³ Purple described it having "the shape of a high-insteped shoe."²⁶⁴ In

interview with Mary Firmage [11 August 1986]," TMs, Richard S. Van Wagoner Papers, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, Box 14, folder 19; item 1). The Firmage account, also based on a single viewing, is a three- or four-year reminiscence (*ibid*).

²⁶⁰ "Richard S. Van Wagoner interview with Mary Firmage (11 August 1986)."

²⁶¹ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, Manchester, New York, 17 September 1884, E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 2-3, in *EMD*, 2:127-28.

²⁶² Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19.

²⁶³ "Diary of Samuel Bateman, 1886-1909," Ts, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, p. 69 (entry for 17 August 1887).

a report of an interview with David Whitmer, the stone is described as “a small oval kidney-shaped stone.”²⁶⁵

On another occasion, David Whitmer described the stone as “nearly egg shaped.”²⁶⁶ In another, he said it was “a strange, oval-shaped, chocolate-colored stone, about the size of an egg, only more flat”²⁶⁷ Joseph Anderson is reported to have said the stone was “oval.”²⁶⁸ The brown seer stone may have been valued for its strange and peculiar shape. Insofar as it resembled an egg or oval shape, it approximated the quality of circularity or globularity. The shape of Sally’s green glass remains unknown.

Observers agreed on the brown stone’s smoothness. William Purple wrote that it was “very hard and smooth.”²⁶⁹ Similarly, when Utah Mormon Frederick Kesler observed the stone, he recorded in his diary that “its color was

²⁶⁴ Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism: Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton,” *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, cols. 8-9.

²⁶⁵ David Whitmer, interviewed on 14 October 1881 in Richmond, Missouri, *Chicago Times*, 17 October 1881, quoted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 76.

²⁶⁶ David Whitmer, interviewed on 1 June 1881 in Richmond, Missouri, *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881, quoted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 62. See also 72, 241-42. In 2000, Grant Palmer described the stone as “nearly egg-shaped,” except that it did not taper on one end like an egg does—it was “a little elongated” (Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000).

²⁶⁷ David Whitmer, interviewed in “Mormon Relics,” *Inter Ocean*, 17 October 1886, p. 17, col. 5. On 25 February 1856, Hosea Stout recorded in his journal that this stone was “not the shape of a hen’s egg” (*On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2:593). Stout wrote that Brigham Young had exhibited the stone that night at a meeting, but Stout apparently did not see the stone at that time.

²⁶⁸ Martin, “Hiram Page’s ‘Peep’ Stone,” 8n.

²⁶⁹ Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism: Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton,” *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, cols. 8-9. In 2000, Grant Palmer remembered “it was smooth” (Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000).

mahogany: & was verry Smoothe."⁷⁰ David Whitmer remembered it as "perfectly smooth."⁷¹ No one ever said whether Sally's seer stone was smooth.

The brown stone's smoothness may have given it some luster. Early Mormon Hosea Stout wrote that the stone was "said to be a silicious granite."⁷² Silicates often refract light. Grant Palmer, an instructor in the LDS Church Educational System, claims he viewed the stone in the spring of 1966. In 1991, he described it as a "shiny or polished stone."⁷³ Because Sally's stone was translucent, it may also have refracted light. Whereas Sally's glass was translucent, perhaps even transparent, observers of Joseph Smith's brown seer stone agree on its opacity.⁷⁴

Sally's stone was colored green or bluish-green. Although Joseph's first stone was brown, observers found its coloring worthy of comment. Purple remembered the stone being "composed of layers of different colors passing

⁷⁰ Frederick Kesler Diary 7, 1885-1888, Ts, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, 1 February 1899.

⁷¹ David Whitmer, interviewed on 1 June 1881 in Richmond, Missouri, *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881, quoted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 62. See also 72, 241-42.

⁷² *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2:593.

⁷³ Palmer, telephone conversation with Marquardt.

⁷⁴ Both David Whitmer and Mary Brown Firmage stated explicitly that the stone was "not transparent" (David Whitmer, interviewed on 1 June 1881 in Richmond, Missouri, *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881, quoted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 62, see also 72, 241-42; "Richard S. Van Wagoner interview with Mary Firmage [11 August 1986]"). J. L. Traugher, Jr., wrote that the stone was "opaque." He claimed that his statement was given with "the sanction of David Whitmer, and by his authority" (Traugher, Mandeville, Missouri, to "Editors Herald," Independence, Missouri, 13 October 1879, in "Testimony of David Whitmer," *Saints' Herald* (Plano, Illinois), 15 November 1879, p. 341, col. 3). In 2000, Grant Palmer stated that the stone was neither transparent nor translucent (Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000).

diagonally through it.”²⁵ Hosea Stout heard it described as a “dark color almost black with light colored stripes some what resembling petrified poplar or cotton wood bark[.]”²⁶ Mary Brown Firmage stated that it had “three black, concentric circles on the top 1/2 inch. Below the circles were many small black circles.”²⁷ These features would have made the brown stone comparable in color value to Sally’s green stone.

Observers of Joseph’s brown stone generally agreed on its dark shade. Regional historian Orsamus Turner classified the stone as a hornblende—a dark variation of aluminous amphibole.²⁸ While Frederick Kesler had described it as “mahogany,” David Whitmer and Joseph Anderson described it as “chocolate” in color,²⁹ Grant Palmer described it as “dark brown.” The 1826 court record, David Whitmer, and Samuel Bateman all used the phrase “dark colored” to

²⁵ Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, cols. 8-9.

²⁶ *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2:593. In 2000, Grant Palmer remembered it as having “several whitish stripes” (Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000).

²⁷ “Richard S. Van Wagoner interview with Mary Firmage (11 August 1986).”

²⁸ Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve; Embracing the Counties of Monroe, Ontario, Livingston, Yates, Steuben, Most of Wayne and Allegany, and Parts of Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming*, 216; Webster’s *Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “hornblende.” For an example of a Vermont seer who used a hornblende, see Ephraim H. Newton, *The History of the Town of Marlborough, Windham County, Vermont* (Montpelier, Vermont: The Vermont Historical Society, 1930), 54-55.

²⁹ Kesler Diary 7, 1 February 1899; Whitmer, interviewed on 1 June 1881 in Richmond, Missouri, *Kansas City Journal*, 5 June 1881, quoted in Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 62. See also 72, 241-42; Martin, “Hiram Page’s ‘Peep’ Stone,” 8n. Mary Brown Firmage stated that the stone “was not chocolate brown but rather the color of brown sugar.” Her statement, however, was given three or four years after a single observation (“Richard S. Van Wagoner interview with Mary Firmage [11 August 1986]”).

described the stone.²⁸⁰ Hosea Stout wrote that the stone was a “dark color almost black,” while Grant Palmer remembered it being “dark brown almost black.”²⁸¹ Emma Smith wrote that the stone was “not exactly black, but was rather a dark color.”²⁸² Sally’s stone had also been described as dark, but was probably not as dark as Joseph’s stone.

It is not certain whether Joseph’s stone was consecrated—or dedicated to God for his purposes. Mormon schismatic James Brewster later alleged that Joseph Smith Senior consecrated a seer stone in Kirtland. This practice probably stemmed from his earlier treasure-seeking activities in New York. No evidence indicates whether Sally’s stone had been consecrated. However, someone had encased her stone in a paddle. Joseph found his brown stone in a kettle, but for the next few years, this stone apparently had no other container than his pocket.²⁸³ Later, some time after Joseph acquired the white seer stone, his wife Emma would make a pouch for it.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ People of State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, in “A Document Discovered,” *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, p. 1, col. 2; Traugher to “Editors Herald”, in “Testimony of David Whitmer,” p. 341, col. 3; Bateman Diary, 17 August 1887, p. 69.

²⁸¹ *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2:593; Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000.

²⁸² Bidamon to Pilgrim, in *EMD*, 1:532.

²⁸³ Purple wrote that the stone was “very hard and smooth, perhaps by being carried in the pocket” (Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 9).

²⁸⁴ After Joseph’s marriage, Emma made a pouch for this stone. When Mormon apostle Franklin D. Richards inspected the seer stone that “Oliver Cowdery gave Phineas Young [the brown stone],” he noted that “the pouch containing it [was] made by Emma” (Franklin D. Richards diary, 9 March 1882, LDS Church Archives, quoted in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 242-43).

It is unknown whether any previous history was ascribed to Sally's green glass. Lucy Mack Smith stated that Sally had found her stone, but did not mention how or where. Joseph's stone, however, did have a previous history. He found it buried in an iron kettle. Native Americans of this area had worked in metal and may have made pots or kettle-like containers. By the early seventeenth century, New York Indians were using European kettles.²⁸⁵ In 1810, a copper kettle was unearthed from a native burial ground near Canandaigua, about ten miles to the south.²⁸⁶ Digging for relics in burial mounds, treasure seekers probably unearthed kettles and pots on a regular basis.²⁸⁷ The *Poultney Journal* reported a local treasure tale in which three men found a cave containing an iron kettle, Spanish gold, and five skeletons.²⁸⁸ Lampooning the treasure hunters who pitted the periphery of Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "a mighty hole is dug, and perhaps several cartloads of Earth thrown out, but alas, no Cag or Iron Pot is found!"²⁸⁹ Martin Harris related that when he first heard rumors about the golden plates, he surmised that "the money-diggers had probably dug up an old brass kettle, or something of the kind."²⁹⁰ William Stafford stated that among

²⁸⁵ Ritchie, *The Archaeology of New York State*, 320.

²⁸⁶ Hill, *Joseph Smith, the First Mormon*, 71-72.

²⁸⁷ See the sources listed in Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures . . .*, p. 185, motif a 10.8.1: "pot/jar/kettle/dutch oven/can/horn/flint."

²⁸⁸ Greene, "Money Diggers," 51.

²⁸⁹ Franklin, "The Busy-Body, No. 8," 137.

²⁹⁰ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 164.

other treasures, the Smiths searched for "brass kettles filled with gold and silver."²⁹¹

Who buried these kettles? Roswell Nichols, who lived next door to the Smiths, claimed that Joseph Smith Senior had informed him that "the ancients, half of them melted the ore and made the gold and silver, while the other half buried it deeper in the earth, which accounted for these hills."²⁹² Martin Harris later affirmed that Joseph Smith's treasure seeking company dug for artifacts

²⁹¹ William Stafford, statement, 9 December 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 237 (emphasis mine).

²⁹² Roswell Nichols, statement, Manchester, New York, 1 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 257-58. On Nichols, see *EMD*, 2:37. During North America's great ice age, a glacier slowly scraped its way across the land south of Lake Ontario. This left what would one day be upstate New York covered with a current of smooth hills called drumlins. See Richard H. Jackson, "Hill Cumorah," in *Historical Atlas of Mormonism*, ed. S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 8-9.

The William Stafford statement alleges, "They [the Smiths] would say, also, that nearly all the hills in this part of New York, were thrown up by human hands . . ." (William Stafford, statement, Manchester, New York, 8 December 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 237). The remarkable similarity between the statements made by Nichols and Stafford can be seen by juxtaposition:

Nichols	Stafford
he [Joseph Smith Senior]	They ["Joseph Smith, Sen., and his family"]
had often said	would say, also
that the hills	that nearly all the hills
in our neighborhood	in this part of New York
were nearly all erected by human hands	were thrown up by human hands

Richard Lloyd Anderson points to this parallel phraseology as one of several evidences of Hurlbut ghost-writing (Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reappraised," 286-90). Rodger I. Anderson responds to Anderson's charges of ghost-writing with the hypothesis that similarities in the statements "may only mean that Hurlbut submitted the same questions to some of the parties involved" (Anderson, "Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined," 28-29). Richard Lloyd Anderson responds to Rodger I. Anderson with the point that even this hypothesis leaves Hurlbut guilty of prompting the witness (Richard Lloyd Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined*, by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 [1991]: 59-62). Returning our focus from these general Hurlbutian problems to Stafford's comment in particular shows its unreliability. Hurlbut interviewed Stafford a week after he interviewed Nichols. Apparently he asked Stafford a question based on the information he received from Roswell Nichols—perhaps to confirm what Nichols had said. Hurlbut's question to him can be reconstructed as something like "Did Joseph Smith Senior say that nearly all the hills in this part of New York were thrown up by human hands?" This constitutes a severe case of prompting the witness.

“supposed to have been hidden by the ancients.”²⁸³ In 1825, the *Wayne Sentinel* printed a story that “by the help of a mineral stone” treasure seekers in Orleans, New York, had discovered “a monstrous *potash kettle* in the bowels of old mother Earth, filled with the purest bullion.” The treasure seekers believed this kettle had been buried “prior to the flood.”²⁸⁴ The “ancients” were probably the mythical mound builders of early American archeology. European Americans would not or could not attribute the construction of impressive Native American mounds to the Indians, whom they considered lazy and savage. European Americans reasoned that the mounds must have been built by a “civilized,” but now vanished, people. These mythical mound builders were conceived of as agriculturist and industrious. They were most commonly believed to have been antediluvians, refugees from Babel, or the lost ten tribes of Israel. To explain their disappearance, many reasoned that the American Indians had warred against and annihilated them. This myth crumbled at the turn of the century as the field of archeology was professionalized.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ “Mormonism—No. II,” 164.

²⁸⁴ “Wonderful Discovery,” *Wayne Sentinel*, 27 December 1825, p. [2], col. 4 (emphasis in original). This article was reprinted from the *Orleans Advocate*.

²⁸⁵ Robert Silverburg, *Mound Builders of Ancient America: The Archaeology of a Myth* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1986); Stephen Williams, *Fantastic Archeology: The Wild Side of North American Prehistory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 23-4, 43-76, 168-175. Dan Vogel argues that the Book of Mormon drew on this myth (Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* [(Midvale, Utah): Signature Books, 1986]). For an LDS response to Vogel’s argument, see Kevin Christensen’s review in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2 (1990): 214-257.

According to Lorenzo Saunders, Joseph spoke of one cache of treasure buried with the king of one of the “tribes.”²⁸⁶ The “tribes” in question may have been American Indian tribes or the lost tribes of Israel. After the angel Moroni’s visitation in 1823, Joseph probably identified “the ancients” as the Book of Mormon peoples and may have believed that his brown stone had been buried in the kettle by one of these people. The Book of Mormon gave the histories of people who had lived in the American continents prior to the arrival of Columbus. Therefore, it was natural for Joseph Smith and early Mormons to attribute Native American artifacts and archeological sites to the Book of Mormon peoples. For example, in an 1842 letter written to explain the basic beliefs of the Church, Joseph wrote that in the Book of Mormon “the history of ancient America is unfolded.”²⁸⁷

The Book of Mormon recounted the histories of three groups of trans-oceanic colonists: The Lehites (composed of the Nephites and the Lamanites), the Mulekites, and the Jaredites. The Mulekites traveled to the new world at about the same time the Lehites did, but these two peoples did not discover each other’s presence for hundreds of years. When they did, the Mulekites joined the Nephites. Because the Mulekites had not kept records, the Book of Mormon

²⁸⁶ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, 17 September 1884, E. L. Kelley Papers, pp. 7-8, in *EMD*, 2:130. This dig occurred prior to 1825 (*EMD*, 2:131n23)

²⁸⁷ Joseph Smith, “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 707, col. 2. The full quotation reads: “In this interesting and important book, the history of ancient America is unfolded, from its first settlement by a colony that came from the tower of Babel, at the confusion of languages to the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era.” By the time Joseph penned this letter—the well-known “Wentworth letter”—Joseph had taught that the ante-diluvians from Adam to Enoch to Noah had lived in the Americas. Still, as this letter shows, Joseph’s tendency was to think of ancient America in terms of the Book of Mormon.

makes only brief mention of their history. Also, the record of the Jaredites composes only a brief portion of the Book of Mormon. The Lamanites did not keep historical records. It was the Nephites that kept the records that later composed the Book of Mormon. They wrote mostly about themselves. When Joseph and early Mormons read the Book of Mormon they read principally about the Nephites. For this reason, Joseph and other Mormons usually identified Native American remains as "Nephite." For example, in 1834, after examining a mound in the Illinois River valley, Joseph wrote home to his wife that he had been "wandering over the plains of the Nephites."²⁹⁸ Brigham Young, relaying treasure-seeking stories he had heard from Porter Rockwell, taught that in New York there were "a great many treasures hid up by the Nephites."²⁹⁹ Hyrum Smith told Priddy Meeks that gorgets had been used by Nephites as seer stones. Perhaps Joseph believed that his seer stone had been used as such by a previous Nephite seer. But if Joseph ever held such a belief it would have been after the discovery of his second seer stone in 1822. Still, *someone* had buried it in a kettle. This gave the first stone a previous history and made it more than just a brown rock found in the ground.

In an overall comparison of Sally's stone and Joseph's first stone, with respect to the qualities seers valued in stones, Joseph's comes out ahead. It was

²⁹⁸ Joseph Smith Junior to Emma Smith, 4 June 1834; copied by James Mulholland into Joseph Smith's Letterbook 2, Joseph Smith Papers, pp. 56-58, in Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 324.

²⁹⁹ "Discourse by President Brigham Young, Delivered at a Special Conference held at Farmington, for the Purpose of Organizing a Stake of Zion for the County of Davis, on Sunday Afternoon, June 17, 1877," *JD*, 19 (1878): 37.

obviously better in Joseph's mind simply due to the fact that it was his own.

Joseph had used one seer stone to find a better seer stone. He would repeat this pattern two more times as he developed the gift of seeing.

William Purple gave the following account of the actual discovery of the first stone:

With some labor and exertion he found the stone, carried it to the creek, washed and wiped it dry, sat down on the bank, placed it in his hat, and discovered that time, place and distance were annihilated; that all the intervening obstacles were removed, and that he possessed one of the attributes of Deity, an All-Seeing Eye.³⁰⁰

But the brown stone was not the panopticon that Purple's triumphant discovery narrative suggests. Later in Purple's account of the legal proceedings of 1826, he writes that Josiah Stowell placed a limit on Joseph's range of visibility. Stowell testified that Joseph "could see things fifty feet below the surface of the earth."³⁰¹ With the legendary glassy globe of Merlin one could view "what ever thing was in the world contaynd, betwixt the lowest earth and heavens hight."³⁰² It penetrated the deepest layers of the earth.

Its range of vision also extended into the heavens. The brown stone, however, was not powerful enough to view holy things. Lorenzo Saunders told the following story to Edmund L. Kelley:

We went to Smiths one day, it was a rainy day; We went into the old mans shop, he was a cooper, and the old man had a shirt on it was the raggedest & dirtiest shirt, and all full of holes. & we got Jo. Smith to look & tell us what color our Girls hair was. well you see by & by some of them says go

³⁰⁰ "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," p. 3, col. 8.

³⁰¹ "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," p. 3, col. 9.

³⁰² Spenser, *The Fairie Queen*, III.ii.19.163-65.

to Jo. says he Jo. come look into futurity & tell us how it is there? Jo. says I can not do that, I can not look into futurity I can not look into anything that is holy. The old man stood there and says: "I guess he can not look into my shirt then[.]"³⁰³

This anecdote, aside from showing Joseph Senior's good-natured wit, shows that at this time Joseph did not have the ability to see the future or see "holy" things with his brown stone. When Lorenzo told this same story to Edmund's brother William, he specifically identified the stone in question as the stone shaped like a "babies foot"—the brown stone.³⁰⁴

James H. Kennedy, who interviewed some of Joseph's neighbors before writing his early history of Mormonism, wrote that when Joseph found his seer stone he used it to discover where "the treasures of Kidd and others lay concealed; locate the trail of wandering flocks; point out the deposit of stolen goods; and perform other wonderful things . . ." ³⁰⁵ But Joseph could not look for misplaced personal property or look into the future until he discovered his white seer stone. Joseph may have used it to look for missing animals. Ellen Dickinson gathered reports of Joseph using his stone in this way.³⁰⁶ E. W. Vanderhoof, in his *Historical Sketches of Western New York*, related that his grandfather had visited

³⁰³ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by E. L. Kelley, 12 November 1884, "Miscellany," E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 11, in *EMD*, 2: 155.

³⁰⁴ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by William H. Kelley, 17 September 1884, E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, pp. 2-3, in *EMD*, 2:127-28.

³⁰⁵ Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism*, 20. On Kennedy's fieldwork, see pp. 5-6.

³⁰⁶ Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 30. See also "Mormon Leaders at their Mecca," p. 12, col. 2.

Joseph Smith “to learn what had become of a valuable mare stolen from his stable.”³⁰⁷

As with his rod, Joseph did use the stone to locate treasure. When Joseph obtained his first stone—probably in 1821 or 1822—this added to the arsenal of treasure tools. Joseph’s former neighbors later told of the Smith family searching for a variety of buried treasures. William Stafford recalled them speaking of “keys, barrels and hogsheads of coined silver and gold—bars of gold, golden images, brass kettles filled with gold and silver—gold candlesticks, swords, &c. &c.”³⁰⁸ The Smiths searched for natural as well as artificial treasures. Joel K. Noble, of Bainbridge, New York, wrote that Joseph dug for “Salt[,] Iron Oar[,] Golden Oar[,] Silver Oar[,] and almost any thing and everything”³⁰⁹ While these reports probably cover the range of treasure sought, they also exaggerate the Smith’s involvement in treasure seeking. For the eight year period the Smiths hunted for treasure, fewer than twenty ventures can be documented.³¹⁰

Joseph’s most extensive dig in the Palmyra-Manchester area was on Miner’s Hill. His company tunneled forty feet into the hillside, just below the

³⁰⁷ E. W. Vanderhoof, *Historical Sketches of Western New York* (Buffalo, New York: Printed for Private Distribution by the Matthews-Northrup Works, 1907), 138.

³⁰⁸ William Stafford, statement, 9 December 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 237 (emphasis mine).

³⁰⁹ Joel K. Noble, Bainbridge, New York, to Jonathan B. Turner, Jacksonville, Illinois, 8 March 1842, Jonathan B. Turner Collection, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois; photostat in W[alters], “From Occult to Cult with Joseph Smith, Jr.,” 133.

³¹⁰ Vogel, “The Locations of Joseph Smith’s Early Treasure Quests,” 197-231.

crest.³¹¹ Joseph's most famous treasure quest occurred in 1825 in Pennsylvania.

Of this venture he wrote:

. . . I hired with an old Gentleman, by name of Josiah Stool [Stowell] who lived in Chenango County, State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehanna County, State of Pennsylvania . . . he took me among the rest of his hands to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it.³¹²

Lucy Mack Smith explained that Stowell hired Joseph because of his ability to see in stones.

Peter Bridgeman, Stowell's nephew, attempted to put an end to his uncle's treasure seeking by hauling Joseph into court as an impostor. The court record states that Stowell testified "that Prisoner looked through stone and described

³¹¹ Christopher M. Stafford stated that "Jo had men dig on a tunnel forty or fifty feet long in a hill about two miles north of where he claimed to find the plates. I have been in it" (Stafford, statement, Auburn, Ohio, 23 March 1885, quoted in "Mormon Prophet," *Naked Truths About Mormonism*, April 1888, p. 1, cols. 1-2). Sylvia Walker stated, "Jo claimed to receive a revelation to dig forty feet into a hill about two miles north of where he pretended to find the gold plates . . ." (Sylvia Walker, statement, Chester, Ohio, 20 March 1885, quoted in Deming, "Mormon Prophet," p. 1, col. 4). Wallace Miner, who lived at the foot of Miner's Hill, affirmed that Joseph "dug a 40 ft. cave right on this vary farm" (Miner, interviewed by M. Wilford Poulson, M. Wilford Poulson notebook, p. [43]). The author visited Miner's Hill in the summer of 1999 and examined the excavation, which has apparently been dynamited shut. It lies just below the leveled top of the mountain. The natural collapse or dynamiting of the excavation has left a trench-like depression on the top of the hill about forty feet in length—confirming the reports of former residents that the draft extended this far into the hill. For a photograph of Miner's Hill when it was cleared of trees, see *Church History in Black and White: George Edward Anderson's Photographic Mission to Latter-day Saint Historical Sites: 1907 Diary, 1907-8 Photographs*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, T. Jeffery Cottle, and Ted D. Stoddard (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1995), 188. For a photograph of the tunnel entrance before its current state of erosion, see the Papers of H. Michael Marquardt, Box 156, folder 2, item 1. For a photograph taken from inside the draft, see "Palmyra Farmer Claims: Cave Dug By Mormon Prophet, Church Founder," *Courier-Journal* ("Serving the Southwestern Wayne County Towns of Palmyra, Macedon, Walworth, and Marion" [New York]), 1 May 1974, 3.

³¹² Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, pp. 7-8, in *PJS*, 1:282. For a photograph of one of the silver mine excavations, see *Church History in Black and White*, 198.

Josiah Stowell's house and out houses, while at Palmyra at Simpson Stowells correctly . . . that he had been in company with prisoner digging for gold, and had the most implicit faith in Prisoners skill."³¹³ Because Stowell, the supposed victim, testified in Smith's defense, the case was apparently dismissed.

According to the court record, Joseph testified "that he had a certain stone, which he had occasionally looked at to determine where hidden treasures in the bowels of the earth were, that he professed to tell in this manner where gold mines were a distance under ground, and had looked for Mr. Stowell several times and informed him where he could find those treasure . . ." ³¹⁴ Joseph's experience in court dampened his interest in treasure seeking, but he may have participated in one or two more digs before his recovery of the golden plates in September of 1827. Many people in Joseph's time and place hunted for treasure. Mean-spirited reports of Joseph treasure seeking only show that he stirred things up religiously.

As noted earlier, the court record stated that "he has occasionally been in the habit of looking through this stone [the brown seer stone] to find lost property for 3 years."³¹⁵ By 1823, Joseph had apparently developed his gift of seeing to where he could see lost property in the brown stone. This was after his

³¹³ People of State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, 20 March 1826, Bainbridge, New York, in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, p. 1, col. 2.

³¹⁴ People of the State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, quoted in "A Document Discovered," p. 1, col. 1.

³¹⁵ People of the State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, quoted in "A Document Discovered," p. 1, col. 2.

1822 discovery of the white stone. So, Joseph not only gained better seer stones, but improved his personal ability to see in them.

When Joseph obtained his brown stone he could see underground and may have been able to see stray animals, but he could not see missing property, the future, or holy things. This was not everything his father had hoped for him. According to the letter from the "Green Mountain Boys," his father wanted Joseph to get a stone that would allow him "to see all over the world with." By using his brown stone to find another superior stone, Joseph would take another step toward that objective.

Gazelem: Joseph's White Stone

The 1826 court record mentions two stones—the well-known brown stone and "another stone which was white and transparent."³¹⁶ These two stones have been confused by New York sources, early church historians, and modern revisionists.³¹⁷ A careful evaluation of all relevant sources, with an emphasis on

³¹⁶ People of the State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, quoted in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate* (Salt Lake City), January 1886, p. [1], col. 2.

³¹⁷ Lorenzo Saunders, who lived across the street from the Chase farm, identified the stone found there with the stone shaped like a baby's shoe—the brown stone. Saunders was eleven when the stone was found (Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by Edmund L. Kelley, Reading, Michigan, 12 November 1884, in "Miscellany," E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 9, in *EMD*, 2:154). Pomeroy Tucker may have spoken with Saunders in preparation for his book, which confuses the white stone and the stone shaped like a baby's shoe (Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19). B. H. Roberts was familiar with the Chase affidavit and David Whitmer's accounts of the brown seer stone. His assertion that the brown stone was found in a well was apparently a conflation of these two sources (Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century I*, 1:129). Most historians have followed Roberts. See, for example, Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" 54, 58; Ogden Kraut, *Seers and Seer Stones*, 47-48; Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith & Money Digging*, 8; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 42, 44; Dan Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," 202n11.

the most reliable accounts, leads to the conclusion that the stone found in the Chase well was the white seer stone and was Joseph's second stone. Both stones are currently in the possession of the LDS First Presidency.³¹⁸

Willard Chase lived on Canandaigua road in Manchester township, just south of the Manchester-Palmyra township line. In 1833, Willard gave Philastus Hurlbut a statement regarding his association with Joseph Smith and the seer stone found in his well. The accounts of other New York neighbors and of early Mormons help round out this episode as given in the Chase account. "In the year 1822, I was engaged in digging a well. I employed Alvin and Joseph to assist me." So Chase begins the story.³¹⁹ Clark Chase, the father of the family, had passed away the year previous. His son Willard, now twenty-four, remained on the family farm. Joseph Smith was sixteen.³²⁰

Of course, Joseph and Willard knew each other before the well episode took place. Chase stated, "I became acquainted with the Smith family, known as the authors of the Mormon Bible, in the year 1820. At that time, they were engaged in the money digging business" ³²¹ Chase, however, never mentioned that he, himself, hunted for treasure. His neighbors did. John Stafford attested that Willard dug in places where his sister Sally saw treasure in her

Ronald W. Walker correctly identified the Chase stone as the white stone (Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," 442).

³¹⁸ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 242-247.

³¹⁹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unraveled*, 240.

³²⁰ Walters and Marquardt, *Inventing Mormonism*, 65, 79n12.

green stone.³²² According to Lorenzo Saunders, who lived across the road from Chase, Willard had dug for treasure with Alvin, who helped him dig the well: "Well I will tell you they did dig," Saunders averred, "Willard Chase & Alvin, the one that died. Willard Chase told me about a place; He said he & alvin Smith went there to dig & there was a chest there"³²³

In fact, Joseph and Alvin were not digging for water on the Chase property. Lorenzo Saunders explained this to Edmund L. Kelley. "Jo Smith . . . dug one [a seer stone] out of a well on Chases Farm in the Shape of a baby's foot. They dug that hole for money. Chase's & Smiths altogether was digging it. I knew all about the stone; Edmund Chase told me all about it"³²⁴ Actually, Joseph did not dig "for money" any more than he dug for water. As Saunders clarified, he understood that *the stone* was the true object of their delving. Recognizing Saunders' "money digging" rhetoric as condemnation of the Smith's belief in "treasure seeking" and recognizing seer stones as treasure harmonizes the information he gathered from Willard's younger brother. Saunders' mistaken

³²¹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240.

³²² John Stafford, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Rochester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 16r, in *EMD*, 2:87; c.f. William H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," p. 167, col. 1.

³²³ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by Edmund L. Kelley, Reading, Michigan, 12 November 1884, in "Miscellany," E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 9, in *EMD*, 2:153-54.

³²⁴ Lorenzo Saunders, interviewed by Edmund L. Kelley, Reading, Michigan, 12 November 1884, in "Miscellany," E. L. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 9-10, in *EMD*, 2:153-54.

“baby’s foot” description of the stone probably derives from the history of early Mormonism written by Palmyran Pomeroy Tucker.

Although the date on which Chase made his statement cannot be precisely determined, he probably made the statement close to 11 December 1833, when he made oath before Wayne County Justice Frederick Smith attesting to its truthfulness.³²⁵ By 8 December, Philastus Hurlbut had been in the area over a month and had gathered negative statements from at least seventy-three residents of the Palmyra-Manchester area.³²⁶ Social impact theory explains that the “social impact or effectiveness of influence on a target individual increases with the number, immediacy, and importance of the sources of influence.”³²⁷ After his neighbors had dragged Joseph through the mud for treasure digging, Willard was not about to admit his belief in buried treasure or seer stones.

A knowledge of Hurlbut’s interviewing tactics also helps to interpret the Chase statement. Hurlbut regularly prompted his witnesses with questions about the Smith family’s drinking habits, involvement in treasure seeking, and alleged lying and laziness.³²⁸ Immediately following Willard’s affirmation that the Smiths did dig for treasure, he launched into the well story. Hurlbut’s question about treasure seeking prompted the story of the well, revealing that it was dug in a

³²⁵ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 248.

³²⁶ See the various individual and group statements as published in E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled* (231-269).

³²⁷ Rita L. Atkinson, Richard C. Atkinson, Edward E. Smith, and Daryl J. Bem, *Introduction to Psychology*, 10th ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), 760.

³²⁸ Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reappraised,” 286-90; Rodger I. Anderson, *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined*, 28-9.

context related to treasure seeking. Treasure seeking context implies that the object of the digging had been to unearth a seer stone. A number of other “retrieval cues” help decipher the events of that day.³²⁹

In later years, the Smiths were forthcoming as to the true purpose of the dig. Joseph Smith Senior informed Fayette Lapham that Joseph found the stone “under the pretence of digging a well.” A statement in the George A. Smith family papers recalls a conversation with LDS President Wilford Woodruff in 1893 which confirms Lapham’s allegation. Woodruff spoke about “the seer stone known as ‘Gazelem’, which was shown of the Lord to the Prophet Joseph to be some thirty feet under ground, and which he obtained by digging under the pretence of excavating for a well”³³⁰ The statement goes on to mistakenly identify “Gazelem,” the stone found on the Chase property, as the well-known brown stone that passed from Joseph Smith to Oliver Cowdery to Phineas Young to Brigham Young. However, the unknown author does not attribute this identification to Woodruff; it is a redaction.

Woodruff’s own journal shows his correct identification of the stone. On 18 May 1888, in connection with the dedication of the LDS temple in Manti, Utah, Woodruff wrote, “I consecrated upon the Altar the seers Stone that Joseph Smith found by Revelation some 30 feet under the Earth [and] Carried By him through

³²⁹ On retrieval cues, see Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, and Bem, *Introduction to Psychology*, 294.

³³⁰ No author, untitled statement, n.d., George A. Smith Papers, Box 174, folder 26, Manuscripts Division, Marriott Library, University of Utah. The register to these papers describes this statement as “Statement of Wilford Woodruff, concerning Joseph Smith’s seer stone, Gazelem, and the death of the Lamanite prophet, Zeph, as related by Joseph Smith.”

life.”³³¹ Woodruff’s comment that this stone had been discovered thirty feet under the earth indicates that it was the stone found on the Chase property. Other sources confirm the depth of the well between twenty and thirty feet.³³² In contrast, Woodruff, who kept his journal with exceptional care and detailed numerical accuracy,³³³ wrote that Joseph’s first stone had been found fifteen feet below the ground.³³⁴

Woodruff’s comment that the stone found at thirty feet had been carried by Joseph “through life” also identifies it as the white stone. According to David Whitmer, Joseph gave the brown stone to Oliver Cowdery in 1829, four years before Woodruff ever met Smith. The brown stone, then, could not have been the stone that Woodruff said that Joseph owned through life. On 27 December 1841, Woodruff recorded in his journal that in a meeting with the Twelve Apostles, Joseph Smith showed him a seer stone.³³⁵ When Woodruff later wrote of the stone carried by Joseph through life he certainly meant that stone, which could not have been the brown stone given to Cowdery in 1829. Brigham Young’s journal account of the 27 December 1841 meeting of the Twelve Apostles

³³¹ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 8:500.

³³² Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240-241; Martin Harris statement in “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 163; Lapham, “II.—The Mormons,” *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 1.

³³³ On the high quality of historical accuracy in Wilford Woodruff’s journal, see Scott G. Kenney, introduction to *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 1:ix-x; Dean C. Jessee, “Wilford Woodruff: A Man of Record,” *Ensign*, July 1993, 28-31.

³³⁴ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5:382-3. Quinn mistakenly has “25 feet” (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 43). This confuses the first stone with the second stone found in the Chase well, at about 25 feet. Quinn cites the Kenney edition of Woodruff’s journal.

³³⁵ *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 2:144.

records that Joseph “showed us his seer stone” and taught them that “every man who lived on the earth was entitled to a seer stone, and should have one, but they are kept from them in consequence of their wickedness.”³³⁶ Joseph had showed them *his* stone—the stone he was entitled to for his righteousness. This was the white stone. John the Revelator had promised a white stone to those worthy of heaven.

Woodruff’s comment that Joseph found this stone “by revelation” confirms that the well was a cover story. In 1822, Joseph received revelations through his brown seer stone. He found the white stone by a revelation received through his brown stone. D. Michael Quinn writes that—in contrast to other treasure hunters—the treasure-seer’s “primary reward was expanding his or her seeric gift.”³³⁷ Joseph’s use of one seer stone to find a superior stone epitomized this principle.

In 1881, Danish Mormon Jens Weibye recorded a story he heard concerning this episode.

James Wareham said to me after Elishad R. Snow Smith [Eliza Roxcy Snow, on of Joseph Smith’s plural wives] that the Prophet Joseph Smith had a Peepstone (Caled in the Book of Doc. & Covenant Gaslum) that he got by digging in a Ladies Garden 25 feet down in the Ground. The Lord Reviled [revealed] to Joseph Smith that such a Stone was 25 feet down in the Ground but he (J. Smith) did not know how to get it; but he went to the Lady there owned the Garden and asked her if she did not wish to have a Well dug in her Garden, she said yes, he could find no plase where there was Watter only in the Center of the Garden, she did not like it so well to have the Well in the Center, but rather then not have the Well she

³³⁶ “History of Brigham Young,” *Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, 20 February 1864, 118-119.

³³⁷ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 65.

concluded to have the Well in the Centre of the Garden and Joseph Smith the Prophet found the Peepstone 25 feet down he could see many thing[s] in that Stone, but Oliver Cowdery stol the Stone from Joseph Smith, and years afterwards gave it to Phinehas Young who was there on visit for him to give it to Prs^t Brigham Young, but he did not do it, but kept it till after Pres^t Brigham Young was dead, but before Phinehas Young died he gave the Peepstone to Pres^t John Taylor.³³⁸

This account—fourth-hand at best—contains errors.³³⁹ A corrupted version of the brown stone’s Smith-Cowdery-Young-Young provenance slipped into this story somewhere along the line between Eliza R. Snow and Jens Anderson. Also, like Woodruff, Weibye names the stone Gaslum (Gazelem). But in the the Doctrine and Covenants “Gazalam” referred to Joseph Smith, not his stone.³⁴⁰

However, parts of the well story fit the historical context of the episode as given by Chase and others. Joseph’s negotiations with the woman of the home fits with the recent decease of her husband Clark Chase. And it provides a plausible explanation for how Joseph went about trying to get the stone he saw under the Chase garden. The Chase family owned a large farm, but the garden lay in front of the house.³⁴¹ Joseph could not just dig a hole right right outside of the front door. His reputation as a well digger fits. And, his ability to dowse with

³³⁸ “Jens C. A. Weibye 6th Daybook. from January 1st 1880 to December 31st 1881,” Ms, LDS Church Archives, p. 143-44.

³³⁹ Early Church historian Andrew Jenson wrote, “Elder Weibye was one of the best record keepers in the Church, and his private journals, which are very full and accurate, are now on file at the Historian’s Office” (Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* [Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901], 818). Weibye probably gave a good account of the story as he heard it, but it had already been through two or more hands.

³⁴⁰ David J. Whittaker, “Substituted Names in the Published Revelations of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 23, no. 1 (winter 1983): 103-12.

³⁴¹ The sites of the old home and garden are pointed out in “Mormon Leaders at Their Mecca,” *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, p. 12, col. 6.

a stick explains his ability to pace the garden and insist on digging in its center.

But Joseph was not witching for water.

In his 1833 statement, Chase discussed the disinterment of the stone and other incidents relative to the issue of its ownership.

After digging about twenty feet below the surface of the earth, we discovered a singularly appearing stone, which excited my curiosity. I brought it to the top of the well, and as we were examining it, Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat. It has been said by Smith that *he* brought the stone from the well; but this is false. There was no one in the well but myself.

Apparently Joseph and Willard were digging together in the well when Joseph found the stone. At first, Chase stated, "*we* discovered" the stone. Then he mentioned Joseph looking into it. At this point, Chase probably realized that he was undercutting his claims on the stone. This may explain his insistence that—Joseph's claims to the contrary—only he had been in the well when the stone was found. Of course, Joseph was the one searching for the stone. When they found it, Joseph probably showed a great deal of excitement. It seems that at this point the real reason for the dig became apparent to Willard. The issue of ownership ensued.

Whereas a chest of coins could be divvied up among a group of treasure hunters, a single item could not. A single treasure could, however, be sold and the proceeds divided. This actually took place in 1754 in Lebanon, New Hampshire, where the Smiths would live in 1813–14. In a letter written in May of 1754, Congregationalist minister Eleazer Wheelock chided Ephraim Loomis for his treasure seeking, which Wheelock considered inappropriate behavior for a

Christian. Loomis and others had unearthed a golden candlestick located by an African American named Samuel Davise. The group planned to sell the candlestick, "and that said price was to be divided among said partners and that said negro was one and to have a larger share than the rest because it was by his intelligence principally that it was found" ³⁴² This solution, however, did not work on the Chase farm in 1822. Neither Joseph nor Chase wanted to sell the stone.

Both Smith and Chase could argue ownership of the stone within the "supernatural economy" of the treasure seekers. Even if (as Chase insisted) only he was in the well, Joseph could still lay claim to finding the stone because he had located it with his stone and rod. According to the case of Samuel Davise, Joseph was entitled to the "larger share"—which for this indivisible stone would be the entirety of the find. On the other hand, Joseph had found his first stone by looking into the stone of Willard's sister Sally. Just as Joseph could own a stone seen in the stone owned by Sally Chase, her older brother could claim ownership of a stone seen in the stone owned by Joseph. Willard may have considered the white stone a kind of payback.

Just as he did not let on that he had dug for treasure, Willard did not let on that he wanted the rock as a seer stone for himself or as a superior seer stone for his sister Sally. Chase told Hurlbut, "I told him [Joseph] it was of no

³⁴² Eleazer Wheelock, Lebanon, New Hampshire, to Ephraim Loomis Junior, Lebanon, New Hampshire, 27 May 1754, quoted in James Dow McCallum, *Eleazer Wheelock: The Founder of Dartmouth College* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Publications, 1939), 52-53.

particular worth to me, but [that I] merely wished to keep it as a curiosity."³⁴³ But Chase failed to mask his bitterness over losing the stone. In fact, the issue of the stone's ownership constitutes the central thread of Chase's narrative throughout the seven pages of the published statement. Both he and Joseph apparently claimed "finders keepers"—Willard naturally and Joseph supernaturally. But Willard Chase could also assert mineral rights. When Ellen Dickinson visited the Chase farm and spoke with the people living in that area, she reported that the Chases claimed the stone "as a matter of possession, but young Joe advanced the claim of discovery."³⁴⁴

Chase began his narrative with the claim that he had personally hired Joseph to dig the well. He got what he paid for. As Fayette Lapham later recounted, "they found water and the stone at a depth of twenty or twenty-two feet."³⁴⁵ Abel Chase affirmed that his family got water from the well. As he later told William and Edmund Kelley, "Jo[sep]h got a [singular] looking stone which was dug up out of my father[']s well[.]"³⁴⁶ When subjected to questions by Philastus Hurlbut, Willard maintained the boundary between himself and the money digger Joe by conveniently adopting the well cover story.

³⁴³ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 241.

³⁴⁴ Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 20.

³⁴⁵ Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 1.

³⁴⁶ Abel Chase, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, William H. Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 9, in *EMD*, 2: 85.

In addition to *finding* the stone, Joseph claimed that he could *see* in it. Chase stated that the day after the find, Joseph “came to me, and wished to obtain the stone, alledging that he could see in it; but I told him I did not wish to part with it on account of its being a curiosity, but would lend it.”³⁴⁷ By claiming that he could see in the stone, Joseph staked another claim on its possession. Fayette Lapham, who conflated the story of Joseph finding his first stone by looking into another seer’s stone and the story of his finding his second stone in the Chase well, stated that Joseph

happened to be where a man was looking into a dark stone and telling people, therefrom, where to dig for money and other things. Joseph requested the privilege of looking into the stone, which he did by putting his face into the hat where the stone was.

Joseph’s brown stone was dark and he used it by placing it in the bottom of a hat and drawing the edges of the hat around his face. Perhaps the dark stone mentioned by Lapham was not Stafford’s or Walters’s, or even Sally Chase’s dark green glass, but Joseph’s own stone. Lapham continued:

*It proved not the right stone for him; but he could see some things, and, among them, he saw the stone, and where it was, in which he could see whatever he wished to see. Smith claims there is a stone of this quality, somewhere, for every one. The place where he saw the stone was not far from their house; and, under the pretence of digging a well, they found water and the stone at a depth of twenty or twenty-two feet.”*³⁴⁸

Because he could see so well in it, Joseph believed the stone found on the Chase property was meant for him. John the Revelator had promised a white stone for

³⁴⁷ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 240-42.

³⁴⁸ Lapham, “II.—The Mormons,” *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 1 (emphasis mine).

those worthy of heaven. Joseph apparently considered the Chase stone his own white stone.

Willard Chase stated that after Joseph borrowed the stone, “he began to publish abroad what wonders he could discover by looking in it, and made so much disturbance among the credulous part of [the] community, that I ordered the stone to be returned to me again.” However, as Hugh Nibley points out, Chase was hardly keeping the stone to save the “credulous” neighbors. Chase asked for the stone because he believed Joseph’s claims regarding its powers.³⁴⁹ Chase may have asked to have the stone back because it worked.

Chase remembered that Joseph had had the stone in his possession “about two years,” which would have been from 1822 to about 1824. Then Chase had the stone from about 1824 to about 1825. He stated:

I believe, some time in 1825, Hiram Smith (brother of Joseph Smith) came to me, and wished to borrow the same stone, alledging that they wanted to accomplish some business of importance, which could not very well be done without the aid of the stone. I told him it was of no particular worth to me, but merely wished to keep it as a curiosity, and if he would pledge me his word and honor, that I should have it when called for, he might take it; which he did and took the stone.”³⁵⁰

Then, in the fall of 1826, a neighbor came to visit Willard to see the stone “about which so much had been said.” The two went to the Smith’s home to get it. Hyrum refused to return the stone and Joseph “observed that if it had not been for that stone, (which he acknowledged belonged to me,) he would not have

³⁴⁹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 241; Hugh Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 118-19.

³⁵⁰ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 241.

obtained the book.”³⁵¹ Actually, Joseph had not yet obtained the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. Although the angel Moroni had not yet given Joseph permission to remove the plates from their stone container on the Hill Cumorah, Joseph had seen them and hefted them. Joseph apparently told Willard that he had had them in his hands and that he found them with the white stone. Learning that Joseph had actually seen a treasure that he had found with the stone could only have increased Willard’s interest in the stone and his desire to repossess it.

In April of 1830, Chase would ask for the stone again. As he recounted: “I again asked Hiram for the stone which he had borrowed of me; he told me I should not have it, for Joseph made use of it in translating his Bible.”³⁵² David Whitmer wrote that Joseph gave the brown stone to Oliver Cowdery sometime before the revelation of March 1830.³⁵³ Therefore, when Chase asked Hyrum for the stone found on his property, Joseph did not even have the brown stone anymore. Hyrum’s retort as given by Chase seems to support the theory that the Chase stone was not the brown stone. Chase stated, “I reminded him [Hyrum] of his promise, and that he had pledged his honor to return it; but he gave me the lie, saying the stone was not mine nor never was.”³⁵⁴ Chase presents the Smith’s

³⁵¹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 246.

³⁵² Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 247.

³⁵³ A Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon [David Whitmer], *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 32, 56.

³⁵⁴ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 247.

claim on the stone as an evolutionary process. Joseph, however, considered the stone his own from the moment he viewed it in his brown stone.

The dispute between Joseph and Willard over the seer stone foreshadowed the dispute over the ownership of the golden plates that would ensue when Joseph obtained them. In 1827, Chase led the group of men who attacked Joseph and tried to steal the plates. They had hunted for treasure with him in earlier years and viewed the ancient record as a treasure—as plates of *gold* rather than as golden *plates*. When precious metal was finally unearthed, they wanted their share.³⁵⁵ Chase may have based his claim to the plates in part on the fact that Joseph had discovered them with the white stone, which Chase considered his own property.³⁵⁶

Abel Chase spoke of this stone that “belonged to my brother Willard,” and also mentioned his sister’s seer stone, which he described as “dark.” Abel’s description of Sally’s green glass as “dark” has been mistaken for a description of the stone found on the Chase farm,³⁵⁷ which has lead some to believe that the stone found on the Chase farm was Joseph’s dark brown stone. Abel—who was

³⁵⁵ See Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 83-84; and Andrew H. Hedges, “‘All My Endeavors to Preserve Them’: Protecting the Plates in Palmyra, 22 September–December 1827,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 14-23.

³⁵⁶ This possibility is forwarded in Rhett James’s dramatic rendition of Martin Harris’s involvement with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (Rhett Stevens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years: A Play about Martin Harris, 1824–30* [Cache Valley, Utah: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983], 33). Joseph’s discovery of the golden plates with the Chase stone is discussed in the following section.

³⁵⁷ Quinn errs on this point (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 44).

only five or six when the stone was discovered,³⁵⁸—had never actually seen the stone. A full quotation of his interview with the Kelleys clarifies this point:

He [Joseph Smith] got a singular looking stone, which was dug up out of my father's well; it belonged to my brother Willard, and he could never get it. His mother, old Mrs. Smith, got the stone from mother.

How do you know Joe ever had it?

'Oh, I don't know that; but my brother could never get it back.'

Your sister had a stone she could look through and see things, so they have told us; Did you ever see that, Mr. Chase?

'Yes; I have seen it; but that was not the one that old Mrs. Smith got.'

Well; could you see things through that?

'I could not; it was a dark looking stone; it was a peculiar stone.'

Do you really think your sister could see things by looking through that stone, Mr. Chase?

'Well, she claimed too; and I must say there was something strange about it.'

....

How did the stone look, you say Mrs. Smith got?

'I don't know; I never saw that.'

How do you know she got it?

'They said she did; I was young, and don't remember myself.'³⁵⁹

According to Willard, Hyrum obtained the stone, not Lucy.

Sarah F. Anderick stated that Sally Chase used the stone found on her farm. This would have occurred in 1824 or 1825, when Willard had the stone.

Anderick stated:

Willard Chase, a Methodist who lived about two miles from uncle's, while digging a well, found a gray smooth stone about the size and shape of an egg. Sallie, Willard's sister, also a Methodist, told me several times that young Jo Smith, who became the Mormon prophet, often came to inquire of her where to dig for treasures. She told me she would place the stone in

³⁵⁸ EMD, 2:105.

³⁵⁹ Abel Chase, interviewed by William H. Kelley and Edmund L. Kelley, Manchester, New York, 6 March 1881, as reported in Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," p. 165, col. 2; c.f. Abel Chase, interviewed by William H. and Edmund L. Kelley, Manchester, New York, 6 March 1881, in William Kelley, Notebook no. 5, William H. Kelley Papers, RLDS Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, p. 8, in EMD, 2:85.

a hat and hold it to her face, and claimed things would be brought to her view. Sallie let me have it several times, but I never could see anything in or through it. I heard that Jo obtained it and called it a peep-stone, which he used in the place of the witch hazel.³⁶⁰

Whereas Sally looked through her green glass by holding it up to light in a paddle, she used this gray stone in a hat. This affirms that Anderick, who personally saw the well stone, did not confuse it with Sally's own stone. This gray stone was definitely not the Joseph Smith stone that others described as dark brown approaching black.

The qualities that seers appreciated in their stones can be used to compare Joseph's first stone and the stone he obtained from the Chase well. Descriptions of the white stone are rarer than those of the brown. Willard Chase only mentioned "a singularly appearing stone."³⁶¹ Orson Pratt was said to have described the Chase stone as "a small stone."³⁶² Sarah F. Anderick, who had seen the stone on a number of occasions in her youth, remembered it being "about the size and shape of an egg."³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Anderick, statement, 21 December 1887, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 4.

³⁶¹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 241.

³⁶² James Vancleave was with David Whitmer and Orson Pratt in 1878 when Orson Pratt recounted the circumstances of the revelation Joseph Smith received for him when he was ordained an Elder in the Church of Christ. This revelation was received in November of 1830 (see Book of Commandments 36; c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 34). Three weeks after their conversation, Vancleave wrote to Joseph Smith III that Joseph Smith Junior had "produced a small stone" to give the revelation regarding Pratt's ordination (James R. B. Vancleave, Richmond, Missouri, to Joseph Smith III, Plano, Illinois, 29 September 1878, quoted in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 239).

³⁶³ Anderick, statement, 21 December 1887, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 4.

Around the turn of the century, LDS President Lorenzo Snow showed the white stone to Richard M. Robinson and told him it was “the Seer Stone that the Prophet Joseph used.” Three decades later, Robinson wrote that this “Seer Stone was the shape of an egg though not quite so large, of a gray cast something like granite but with white stripes running round it. It was transparent but had no holes, neither in the end or in the sides.”³⁶⁴ Description of the white stone’s size compare with descriptions of the brown stone as slightly smaller than a hen’s egg.

William R. Hine, who saw the Chase stone in the 1820s compared it to a duck egg: “He [Joseph Smith] had a very clear stone about the size and shape of a duck’s egg.”³⁶⁵ Hine lived near the Great Bend of the Susquehanna and later moved to Geauga County, Ohio.³⁶⁶ Of the ten species of duck that nest in these two areas, the Wood Duck lays eggs similar in color to the grayish-white seer stone.³⁶⁷ Hine may have compared the stone to the eggs of this common duck not only for their size, but their color. The Wood Duck uniformly lays eggs 1.9 inches by 1.5 inches.³⁶⁸ This is about the same size of a small hen’s egg. Hine was quite

³⁶⁴ Richard Marcellas Robinson, “The History of a Nephite Coin,” Ms, 30 December 1934, LDS Archives.

³⁶⁵ “W. R. Hine’s statement,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 5.

³⁶⁶ “W. R. Hine’s statement,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, cols. 5-6.

³⁶⁷ Sandra Romashko, *Wild Ducks and Geese of North America* (Miami, Florida: Windward Publishing, 1978); John Gooders and Trevor Boyer, *Ducks of North America and the Northern Hemisphere* (New York and Oxford: Facts on File Publications, 1986).

³⁶⁸ Lawton L. Shurtleff and Christopher Savage, *The Wood Duck and the Mandarin: The Northern Wood Ducks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), inside front cover. On the general uniformity of size within all specie of duck eggs, see Gooders and Boyer, *Ducks of North America and the Northern Hemisphere*, 9.

familiar with the stone. In fact, he claimed that he had used it. He stated, "I have had it many times and could see in it whatever I imagined. Joe claimed it was found in digging a well in Palmyra, N.Y. He said he borrowed it."³⁶⁹ This remark confirms that the Chase stone, which Joseph borrowed, was not the opaque brown stone, but the "very clear stone" described by Hine.

In 1966, Grant Palmer observed both stones at the same time. Twenty-five years later, he remembered the white stone being smaller than the brown one.³⁷⁰ Overall, the white and brown stones are comparable in size. The white stone may have been a little smaller. In any case, it was not considerably bigger.

Anderick, Robinson, and Hine all compared the stone's shape to that of an egg.³⁷¹ The brown seer stone was described by some viewers as ovate, and by David Whitmer on one occasion as "nearly egg shaped." But, like an old-fashioned baby shoe, the brown stone has a flat bottom and a flat end. The white stone definitely stands as the brown stone's superior in approximating the spherical ideal. Later, Joseph would invoke the mimetic principle in teaching that a white seer stone symbolizes the planet earth in its future glory. As the white stone more perfectly represented the earth, the sympathetic principle determined that it better served to "see all over the world with." This is the quality of stone Joseph's father wanted for him.

³⁶⁹ "W. R. Hine's statement," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 5.

³⁷⁰ Palmer, telephone conversation with Marquardt, 31 December 1991; c.f. Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-M'Gee, 22 March 2000.

³⁷¹ When I questioned Palmer about the shape of the stone in 2000, he stated it was "maybe somewhat roundish" (Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-M'Gee, 22 March 2000).

Anderick used the term “smooth” to describe the grayish-white stone.

Some who had seen the brown stone described it as “smooth” or “very smooth.”

The white stone may not be as smooth as the brown.

The white stone’s translucency and smooth surface may have given it some shine. Pomeroy Tucker, who reported neighborhood rumor, described a stone with luster: “It was of a whitish, glassy appearance, though opaque, resembling quartz.”³⁷² Quartz crystals refract light. Tucker, however, confused this stone with the brown stone, which may have shown some shine.³⁷³ Grant Palmer, who viewed both stones in 1966, stated in 1991 that the brown stone was shiny. He did not address the quality of luster in his description of the white seer stone.³⁷⁴ In 2000, when I questioned Grant Palmer about the stones, he told me that he had focussed his interest on the brown stone because of the reports of Joseph using that one. Regarding that stone, he told me that he seemed to remember it being shiny, but stated that he could not remember clearly. He did not remember the white stone exhibiting any luster.³⁷⁵

As noted, Pomeroy Tucker, who conflated Joseph’s stones, described the white stone as “opaque.”³⁷⁶ Most eyewitnesses disagreed with this description.

³⁷² Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19.

³⁷³ Clark Braden’s description of “a singularly shaped stone of cloudy quartz” seems to be based on Tucker (*Braden and Kelley Debate*, 47).

³⁷⁴ Palmer, telephone conversation with Marquardt, 31 December 1991.

³⁷⁵ Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000.

³⁷⁶ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19. E. W. Vanderhoof, in his *Historical Sketches of New York*, describes the stone as “whitish, glossy, and opaque in appearance” (138). Based on Vanderhoof’s description, Quinn concludes that the stone was opaque (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 43). Vanderhoof, however, relied directly on Tucker for this description and for the story of the stone’s discovery. Tucker, who never viewed the stone,

The 1826 court record includes Arad Stowell's statement that he observed Joseph "looking through another stone which was white and transparent; held the stone to the candle" ³⁷⁷ Another witness, David or Cyrus McMaster, ³⁷⁸ testified that the "prisoner pretended to him that he could discern objects at a distance by holding this white stone to the sun or candle" ³⁷⁹ Stowell and McMaster had seen this stone within a year of their testimonies. As they report Joseph holding the stone up to light, both accounts affirm the stone's translucence. Like Stowell, Richard M. Robinson described it as "transparent." William R. Hine described the stone as "a very clear stone." ³⁸⁰ After speaking with Orson Saunders, who lived across the street from the old Chase farm, a news reporter described the stone as "a clear white stone" and "quite transparent." ³⁸¹ This description as well as Hine's may indicate that the stone was mostly clear but not entirely so. ³⁸² In contrast, those who had viewed the brown stone consistently described it as opaque.

conflated neighborhood stories of the transparent white stone and opaque brown stone. Eyewitnesses described the white stone as transparent.

³⁷⁷ People of State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, in "A Document Discovered," p. 1, col. 2.

³⁷⁸ Dale Morgan on *Early Mormonism*, 398-99n11.

³⁷⁹ People of State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, p. 1, col. 2.

³⁸⁰ "W. R. Hine's statement," *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 5.

³⁸¹ "Mormon Leaders at their Mecca," *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, p. 12, col. 2.

³⁸² In 2000, when I questioned Grant Palmer about his 1966 viewing of the white stone, he could not remember it having any transparency or translucency (Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000). However, Palmer told me that his attention was directed toward the brown stone.

Descriptions of the white stone's color, or shade, fall between gray and white. Stowell and McMaster, who had recently seen the stone, described it as "white." Similarly, the reporter who spoke with Orson Saunders reported Orson's memory that the stone was "white." In 1887, Anderick, who had seen the stone in 1824 or 1825, described it as "gray." Robinson remembered it having the light gray cast of granite, but with "white stripes running round it." Tucker described it as "whitish." Similarly, Palmer states it was "whitish . . . it wasn't pure white."³⁸³ In the important category of color, Joseph's second stone easily bests the dark brown stone. The white and brown stones compare in size, shape, and smoothness. The brown stone was apparently more smooth, but the white stone more closely approximated the ideal sphere. The white stone was clearly superior to the brown stone in that it was white and clear.

The 1826 court record shows that Joseph carried the brown stone on his person. He apparently kept the white stone in a safe place. Emma would later make a pouch for the brown stone. This probably occurred some time after their wedding in January of 1827. In contrast, the white stone may have been kept in a box. In 1851, regional historian Orsamus Turner related a story told by a neighbor of the Smiths who saw a seer stone at their house. The Smiths showed him a stone that was "carefully wrapped in cotton, and kept in a mysterious box. They said it was by looking at this stone, in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph

³⁸³ Palmer, interviewed by Ashurst-McGee, 22 March 2000.

discovered the plates.”³⁶⁴ Like Tucker, Turner conflated Joseph’s seer stones into a single, dark rock—“the common horn blend.” However, as shown in the following chapter, Joseph used the white stone to find the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. This was apparently the stone kept safely encased in a box of cotton.

According to Brigham Young, Joseph found his first stone in a kettle—which gave the stone a history. Sometime between 1823 and 1827, Joseph saw and/or learned of the existence of the Urim and Thummim spectacles—which obviously had a history. In contrast, the white stone was dug right out of the dirt. However, the Smiths had stated their belief while in New York that a special stone existed for every individual.³⁶⁵ This idea seems to have been informed by John the Revelator’s doctrine that a white stone would be given to those who overcame the world. If Joseph had come to this understanding before seeing the Urim and Thummim spectacles, the seer stone question of provenance may be moot. The white stone was meant for Joseph Smith himself and needed no pedigree of owners. Just as Joseph’s particular reading of the Bible seems to have caused him to switch from a forked rod to a straight staff, it may also have provoked him to use the brown stone to find his own white stone.

Mormon belief in the biblical “white stone” doctrine can be firmly documented to August of 1831—just over a year after the church’s legal

³⁶⁴ Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve*, 216.

³⁶⁵ See above.

organization. In that month, a news reporter from the Philadelphia *Sun* visited Kirtland, Ohio, where the Church of Christ had recently relocated. He reported that some Mormons “pretend to have received a ‘white stone’ . . . [as in the Book of] Revelations.”³⁸⁶

Later sources explicate a developed theology that confirmed the superior status of the white stone. This theology included the concept of a new name. John the Revelator had written that those worthy of heaven would receive “a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”³⁸⁷ In 1843, Joseph taught that “the white stone mentioned in Rev. c 2 v 17 is the Urim & Thummim” and that on this stone “is a new name written which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it. The new name is a key word.”³⁸⁸

In 1878, LDS Apostle Charles C. Rich recalled, “Joseph tells us that this new name is a key-word, which can only be obtained through the endowments.”³⁸⁹ The “endowments” or “endowment” consist of a set of sacred, exclusive rituals that faithful Mormons receive in temples. In one of the endowment’s initiatory rituals, the candidate receives a new name. Some Mormons believed that the new name a person received in the temple was the

³⁸⁶ “Mormonites,” *The Sun* (Philadelphia), 18 August 1831, [1], original in Library of Congress, “Newspaper Articles About Mormonism, 1830–1844,” microfilm, LDS Church Archives, quoted in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 248.

³⁸⁷ Revelation 2:17.

³⁸⁸ William Clayton Diary, quoted in Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 169; c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 130: 10–11.

³⁸⁹ “Discourse by Elder Charles C. Rich, Delivered at the Quarterly Convergence held in Paris, Bear Lake County, Idaho, Feb. 10, 1878,” *JD* 19 (1878): 250.

original name of that person in their pre-mortal life.³⁹⁰ For example, in 1847, when the Latter-day Saints were leaving Nauvoo, Illinois, and the temple they had just completed there, apostle Heber C. Kimball said that “all the brethren who have so far forgotten their sacred [temple] instructions as to disremember their original names, had better return home and take further lessons.”³⁹¹

Although the name was considered an original name, it could be properly called a “new name” because it had been newly revealed. Similarly, the Latter-day Saints believed that Christ’s church had been upon the earth originally with Adam, later drifted into apostacy, and then through Joseph Smith was restored. The gospel Smith restored was both a “new and everlasting covenant.”³⁹² Early Mormon William W. Phelps, an associate of Joseph’s, stated that Joseph Smith’s original name was Gazelem. In 1855, when trying to write from memory the sermon that he had delivered at Joseph’s funeral, Phelps penned, “Joseph Smith, who was Gazelam in the spirit world, was, and is, and will be in the progress of Eternity:—The Prince of Light. ‘Tis so; and who can dispute it?”³⁹³ How did Phelps know Joseph’s new/original name? In 1835, he printed the first edition of

³⁹⁰ For examples of the new name as an original or ancient name, see also David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994; distributed by Salt Lake City: Signature Books), 84, 85n32, 94. Latter-day Saints believe that they lived with God as his spirit children before being born on the earth.

³⁹¹ Brigham Young and W[illard] Richards “in behalf of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, Camp of Israel, Omaha Nation, Winter Quarters, near Council Bluffs,” to “Dearly beloved brethren [Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, and John Taylor], England, 7 January 1847, quoted in *Messages of the First Presidency*, ed. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 1:313.

³⁹² See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 22:1.

³⁹³ William Wines Phelps, “The Funeral Sermon,” Ms, Salt Lake City, 13 June 1866, LDS Church Archives, pp. 1r (transverse), 3v.

the Doctrine and Covenants—a collection of Joseph Smith’s revelations—which substituted code names for certain individuals named in revelations. “Gazalam” served as a code name for Joseph.³⁹⁴ In a letter to Brigham Young, which identified the men whose names he had encoded, Phelps explained that “Gazalam” meant “the Light of the Lord.”³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God, and compiled by Joseph Smith Junior, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, [Presiding Elders of said Church.]* (Kirtland, Ohio: “Printed for Frederick G. Williams & co. for the Proprietor,” 1835); David J. Whittaker, “Substituted names in the Published Revelations of Joseph Smith,” 109, 111.

³⁹⁵ William W. Phelps to Brigham Young, no date [1863?], Brigham Young Letter Collection, LDS Archives, quoted in David J. Whittaker, “Substituted names in the Published Revelations of Joseph Smith,” 109, 111. On the possible Hebrew etymology of this term, see also Tvedtness, “Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore,” 104n17; Blake T. Ostler, “The Book of Mormon as an Expansion of an Ancient Text,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 1 (spring 1985): 72-73. In the funeral sermon, Phelps stated that Joseph was “one of the holy ones commissioned by his father among the royal seven, when the high council of heaven set them apart.” This “royal seven” apparently corresponded with the seven heads of gospel dispensations in LDS theology and with the seven archangels of Jewish legend. In the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, Phelps used “Baurak Ale,” the name of one of the seven archangels, as another code name for Joseph (see Doctrine and Covenants 103:21 in editions issued between 1835 and 1971 inclusive). Although the Doctrine and Covenants used “Gazelam” as a code name for Smith, he really was named Gazelem. Similarly, although “Baurak Ale” was used as a code name for Smith, he may have believed he really was Baurak el. Just as Joseph identified himself as Gazelem and as the key-holder of the last dispensation, he apparently identified himself as the archangel Baurak el. Smith claimed that he received visits from the archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael. He identified Michael and Gabriel as the dispensation heads Adam and Noah. He apparently drew a correspondence between the archangels of classical angelology and the major figures of his own dispensationalist view of world history. As the head of the “dispensation of the fulness of times,” it made sense for Joseph to count himself among the archangels. Joseph is also called “Beurach Ale” in the privacy of his own journal, where there is no need or use for secrecy (*An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, ed. Scott H. Faulring [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in Association with Smith Research Associates, 1989], 416). The name of this angel had various spellings, the most common of which were Barchiel and Barkayal (Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 224). The name translates into English as “lightning of God,” which compares with Phelps’s translation of Gazelem as “the Light of the Lord.” The Doctrine and Covenants’s spelling “Baurak Ale” is unique and seems to manifest Joseph’s study of the Hebrew language. It correctly parses “Baurak”=lightning, from “Ale”=el=God. Also, whereas most spellings had apparently contracted a form of the word for lightning, the Mormon spelling includes the letters “ur” in Baurak. “Ur,” as in “Urim,” means “light.”

For the careful reader of Mormon scripture, this name held little secrecy.

The Book of Mormon prophet Alma quoted a Jaredite prophecy that involved a prophet named Gazelem:

And the Lord said: I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, which shall shine forth in darkness unto light, that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations.³⁹⁶

In the darkness of Joseph's felt hat, the seer stone shined with the words of the Book of Mormon translation. As early Mormon Joseph Knight explained, "the way he translated was he put the urim and thummim into his hat and Darkened his Eyes then he would take a sentance and it would apper in Brite Roman Leters."³⁹⁷ On a symbolic level, Joseph's translation of the Book of Mormon brought into the light the dark and secret works of evil ancients.

The index to the 1841 edition of the Book of Mormon prepared by Brigham Young and Willard Richards references this Book of Mormon passage with "Gazelem, a stone, (secret)."³⁹⁸ Actually, this index entry shows that the name was not a secret—at least not to Young and Richards. Also, while the Book of Mormon text refers to a prophet named Gazelem, Young and Richards identified Gazelem as "a stone." And as noted above, President Wilford Woodruff spoke about "the seer stone known as 'Gazelem,' which was shown of

³⁹⁶ Alma 37:23.

³⁹⁷ Jessee, ed., "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," 35.

³⁹⁸ *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, trans. Joseph Smith (Liverpool, England: Printed by J. Tompkins for Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Parley P. Pratt, 1841), p. 640, col. 1.

the Lord to the Prophet Joseph to be some thirty feet under ground, and which he obtained by digging under the pretence of excavating for a well”³⁹⁹ Jens Weibye also called the well stone “Gaslum.”

The name Gazelem was applied to both Joseph Smith and the seer stone found in the Chase well because the Bible taught that “in the [white] stone [there is] a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” To this day, Latter-day Saints keep their new names secret. However, the Lord revealed Joseph’s name to a Jaredite prophet and it found its way into the Book of Mormon. If Joseph’s white stone had not been owned by an ancient seer, it had been prophesied of by one. LDS theology clarified that the stone found in the Chase well was not the brown stone, but Joseph’s own white stone. This is not necessarily to interpret earlier events by logic of later theology, but to recognize that this theology could not have been applied to the Chase stone if it had been dark brown.

It is possible that Joseph believed the white stone had belonged to an ancient inhabitant of the land. A treasure-seeking context suggests this possibility. In Pennsylvania, Joseph looked not only for treasure, but for natural metals and minerals. But reports of ventures in his own neighborhood mention only treasures that had been previously owned. On the hill just east of the Smith home, where the Palmyra temple now sits, Joseph was said to have located kegs

³⁹⁹ “Statement of Wilford Woodruff, concerning Joseph Smith’s seer stone, Gazelem, and the death of the Lamanite prophet, Zelph, as related by Joseph Smith,” Ms, George A. Smith Family Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, Box 174, folder 26.

or chests of gold and silver. On the Joseph Capron farm, just down the road from the Smith farm, Smith was said to have located a chest of gold watches. On the Joshua Stafford farm, further down the road, he was said to have looked for money. On Miner's hill, just south of the Chase farm, he was said to have looked for golden furniture. On the Chase property's "Old Sharp" hill, he was said to have dug for treasure.⁴⁰⁰ When he dug the Chase well under the shadow of "Old Sharp," did he consider the object of his delvings a stone formed naturally or a stone that was also an artifact? The descriptions of the Chase stone as white and transparent match the description of the sixteen rocks that the Brother of Jared took up to the mount for the Lord to touch. These stones were "white and clear, even as transparent glass." The Brother of Jared prayed, "touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness."⁴⁰¹ The Lord touched these stones in connection with giving the Brother of Jared the two stones which would become the lenses of the spectacles Joseph found with the golden plates.⁴⁰²

This passage of the Book of Mormon must have struck Joseph Smith when he translated it. When he unearthed Gazelem, the white stone, had he unearthed one of the sixteen white stones that the Brother of Jared "did molten out of a

⁴⁰⁰ Vogel, "The Locations of Joseph Smith's Early Treasure Quests," 197-230.

⁴⁰¹ Ether 3:1-4.

⁴⁰² On the relationship between the sixteen stone made by the Brother of Jared and the Urim and Thummim spectacles stones, see Samuel W. Richards, statement, 21 May 1907, Samuel W. Richards Papers, LDS Church Archives, pp. 2-3, in *EMD*, 2:501; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 71; Tvedtness, "Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore," 99-123.

rock?" While the brown stone may have belonged to a Nephite seer, the white stone may have belonged to the Brother of Jared.

The Book of Mormon contained a revelation in which the Lord stated that he would "prepare" the white stone for his servant. Joseph or his father may or may not have consecrated the brown stone, but the Lord himself had consecrated the white stone. An overall comparison of the brown and white stones demonstrates the superiority of the white stone.

David Whitmer's well-publicized descriptions of the brown stone, which he had seen, focussed the attention of later Mormons away from the white seer stone. Based on the greater number of sources describing the brown stone, D. Michael Quinn concluded that "Smith and his followers had the highest regard for his brown stone."⁴⁰³ However, the 1826 court record explicitly states Joseph's preference for the white stone. McMaster testified that the "prisoner pretended to him that he could discern objects at a distance by holding this white stone to the sun or candle; that prisoner rather declined looking into a Hat at his dark-colored stone as he said that it hurt his eyes."⁴⁰⁴

"After obtaining the stone," Willard Chase stated, "he [Joseph] began to publish abroad what wonders he could discover by looking in it."⁴⁰⁵ As Joseph had owned and used a seer stone before obtaining the well stone, Chase's

⁴⁰³ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 44.

⁴⁰⁴ People of the State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, quoted in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate*, January 1886, p. [1], col. 2.

⁴⁰⁵ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 241.

comment about Joseph's abilities with the white stone indicate that he could see considerably more with it than he had been able to see with his brown stone. Willard also stated that about 1825, Hyrum borrowed the stone on behalf of the Smith family because "they wanted to accomplish some business of importance, which could not very well be done without the aid of the stone." Joseph still had his brown seer stone, but it was not powerful enough for the endeavor Hyrum had in mind. Late in life, Lorenzo Saunders recounted Joseph telling him that he could not see into the future or into things holy with his brown stone. Perhaps the Smith family borrowed the white stone because they needed Joseph to look into something future or holy.⁴⁰⁶ A white stone could be used to view holy things. In 1843, Joseph taught that with a white stone "all things pertaining to an higher order of kingdoms even all kingdoms will be made known and a white stone is given to each of those who come into this celestial kingdom."⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ This probably occurred before November of 1825, when Josiah Stowell hired Joseph to help him find a lost Spanish mine. Lucy recalled that Stowell hired Joseph because "he possessed certain keys, by which he could discern things invisible to the natural eye" (Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations*, 91-92). These "keys" were apparently the brown and white seer stones.

⁴⁰⁷ Ehat and Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 169; bracket-edited with respect to the edited version that appears in HC 5:323-24. Regarding Clayton's accuracy as a reporter, George D. Smith, the editor of Clayton's journals, notes that "his journals present a reliable and literal account," and that "meticulous detail . . . was the hallmark of his writing" (Smith, foreword to *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991], xx, xii). James B. Allen, Clayton's biographer and an editor of Clayton's Manchester journal, writes that "His mind delighted in the specific and the concrete, which helps account for his success as a scribe and a clerk. . . . as a diarist and historian he described what he saw around him, usually with skill and great descriptive power but seldom with any interpretive imagination" (James B. Allen, *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, A Mormon* [Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987], 71; James B. Allen and Thomas G. Alexander, *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton, 1840 to 1842* [Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974], i).

Joseph continued looking for treasure in his stone. In November of 1825, Josiah Stowell came to the Smith home to hire Joseph to help him find treasure near Harmony, Pennsylvania. Joseph and his father went with Stowell to earn wages and to recover treasure, but neither felt good about Joseph concentrating his gift on buried wealth. William Purple remembered Joseph Smith Senior's court testimony to this effect: "He swore that both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre" ⁴⁰⁸ While in Pennsylvania, Joseph met his future wife Emma Hale and her family. Emma's brother Alvah stated that Joseph told him "that his (Smith's) gift in seeing with a stone and hat, was a gift from God." ⁴⁰⁹

Joseph's role as a village seer expanded when began looking for lost property and into the future. The ability to find lost items may have grown in part out of treasure scrying. Most treasures were property that had been hidden or lost. Martin Harris related that on one occasion Joseph used a seer stone to help him find a missing toothpick:

I was at the house of his father in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra village, and was picking my teeth with a pin while sitting on the bars. The pin caught in my teeth, and dropped from my fingers into shavings and straw. I jumped from the bars and looked for it. Joseph and Northrop Sweet also did the same. We could not find it. I then took Joseph on surprise, and said to him—I said, 'Take your stone.' I had never seen it, and did not know that he had it with him. He had it in his pocket. He took it and placed it in his hat—the old white hat—and placed his face in his

⁴⁰⁸Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chenango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 9.

⁴⁰⁹"Mormonism," *The Susquehanna Register, and Northern Pennsylvanian* (Montrose, Pennsylvania), 1 May 1834, p. 1, col. 4.

hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin.⁴¹⁰

With a seer stone, one could find a needle in a haystack. Harris identified this stone as the one Joseph used to find the Book of Mormon—the white seer stone.⁴¹¹ Other neighbors and acquaintances spoke of Joseph’s role as a finder of things lost.⁴¹²

Around 1823, Joseph was using the brown stone to find missing things. The 1826 court record states that Joseph had “been in the habit of looking through this stone [the brown stone] to find lost property for 3 years.”⁴¹³ This signifies that Joseph had grown in his personal abilities to that point that he could now see more in the brown stone.

Pomeroy Tucker wrote that as soon as Joseph obtained the well stone, the pretension transpired that he could see wonderful things by its aid. This idea was rapidly enlarged upon from day to day, and in a short time his spiritual endowment was so developed that he asserted the gift and power (with the stone at his eyes) of revealing both things existing and things to come.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹⁰ “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 164.

⁴¹¹ On Martin’s identification, see “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 163. On Joseph using the white stone to find the golden plates, see the following section of this chapter.

⁴¹² Fayette Lapham, “II.—The Mormons,” *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 1; Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 20; “W. R. Hine’s Statement,” *Naked Truths About Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 5; Frederic G. Mather, “The Early Mormons,” *Binghampton Republican* (Binghampton, Pennsylvania), 29 July 1880; photocopy in H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, Box 154, folder 13; Jesse Townsend, Palmyra, New York, to Phineas Stiles, 24 December 1833, quoted in Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 288.

⁴¹³ People of the State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, quoted in “A Document Discovered,” *Utah Christian Advocate* (Salt Lake City), January 1886, p. [1], col. 2.

⁴¹⁴ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 19-20.

To some extent, the ability to see into the future may also have grown naturally out of treasure scrying. Some treasure seers looked into their stones to discover the identity of a treasure's buryer or the circumstances of burial. For example, Rochester seer Zimri Allen saw that treasures in his area had been made by an ancient American race of pygmies and had been buried in order to hide them from an invading race of giants.⁴¹⁵ During Joseph Smith's 1826 court appearance, Jonathan Thompson testified that during a recent treasure quest Joseph had looked into his stone and saw two American Indians burying the treasure that he and Joseph sought.⁴¹⁶ Treasure scryers tried to view the past. Theoretically, the direction of such a temporal breach could be reversed. Rochester seer Mary Lambert used her stone not only to see treasure, but to see into the future.

With the white stone, Joseph began viewing individual futures. Henry Harris, who knew the Smiths, stated that Joseph "used to pretend to tell fortunes; he had a stone which he used to put in his hat, by means of which he professed to tell people's fortunes."⁴¹⁷ A number of other neighbors spoke of Joseph's "fortune telling" and "oracles."⁴¹⁸ Joseph Smith, himself, never used these terms. He referred to these practices as "blessings" and "prophecies."

⁴¹⁵ Geo[rge] H. Harris, "Myths of Onanda, or Treasure Hunters of the Genesee," "the first manuscript," 1886, Local History Division, Rochester Public Library, Rochester, New York.

⁴¹⁶ People of the State of New York, vs. Joseph Smith, quoted in "A Document Discovered," *Utah Christian Advocate* (Salt Lake City), January 1886, p. [1], cols. 2-3.

⁴¹⁷ Henry Harris, statement, n.p., n.d., quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 251.

⁴¹⁸ D. Michael Quinn has assembled the citations for "fortune telling" sources (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 539n53). On oracles, see "Mormon Leaders at their Mecca," *New York Herald*, 25 June 1893, p. 12, col. 2.

Apparently the angel Moroni instructed Joseph to look into his stone to see the person he should marry. Early Mormon Joseph Knight wrote that Smith “looked in his glass and found it was Emma Hale.”⁴¹⁹ This was another way in which Joseph used his stone and developed his gift.

Eventually Joseph may have outgrown his use of a rod. Some of Joseph’s old New York neighbors spoke of a divinatory progression. Sarah F. Anderick, an old school friend of Joseph’s older sister Sophronia, remembered hearing “that Jo obtained . . . a peep-stone, which he used in the place of the witch hazel.”⁴²⁰ In 1885, Isaac Butts, a former school mate of Joseph’s, stated, “Young Jo had a forked witch-hazel rod with which he claimed he could locate buried money or hidden things. Later he had a peep-stone which he put into his hat and looked into it. I have seen both.”⁴²¹ The prevalence of extant sources that mention Joseph’s use of a stone and the relative dearth of sources that mention a divining rod seem to affirm that Joseph used his stone more than his rod.

⁴¹⁹ Jesse, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” 31. See also Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 163-64.

⁴²⁰ Mrs. S. F. Anderick, statement, Monterey County, California, 24 June 1887, in “Mrs. S. F. Anderick’s Statement,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 4. Dan Vogel has found evidence that Anderick’s first name was Sarah (*EMD*, 2:207).

⁴²¹ Isaac Butts, statement, South Newbury, Ohio, n.d. [c. 1885], quoted in “Isaac Butts,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, p. 2, col. 5. On the dating of this statement, see Dan Vogel’s editorial introduction in *EMD*, 2:202. Butts stated that he moved from Palmyra in 1818—probably with his family. At this time, Joseph used a divining rod, but had not yet obtained his first seer stone. Butts also stated that he returned to live in Palmyra on two occasions for periods of two years each. He may have been staying with relatives. Lemuel Durfee, who lived north of Palmyra, recorded in a day book a visit to a Pardon Butts around November of 1823. Palmyra doctor Gain Robinson listed a visit to an Abner Butts on 11 September 1826 in his medical day book. Joseph Smith’s use of a seer stone was contemporary to these dates of residence for other Butts with whom Isaac may have stayed. Lemuel Durfee, “Day Book A,” 266; Gain Robinson, “Day Book B Palmyra, July 27 1827–30 August 27,” under 11 September 1826; both day books in the Palmyra Historical Society, Palmyra, New York.

Joseph had advanced as a visionary, but his abilities still had limits. As previously noted, Purple remembered Josiah Stowell testifying in court that Joseph could only see fifty feet below the surface of the earth.⁴²² Isaac Hale stated that Joseph excused his inability to locate a particular treasure on account of an enchantment on the treasure that “was so powerful he could not see.”⁴²³ Hale resented Smith for eloping with his daughter, so his statement—like others—must be questioned. If accurate, Hale’s statement implies that Joseph’s abilities could not overcome all obstacles to vision. It may be that Stowell’s and Hale’s statements can be reconciled. Many treasure seekers believed that enchanted treasure would sink further into the earth when dug after.⁴²⁴ This belief was attributed to Joseph Smith.⁴²⁵ If Smith peered into his stone to try to see a legendary treasure and failed to see anything, he may have reasoned that the treasure was enchanted and had slipped beyond his range of vision.

As noted previously, Joseph taught that the white stone of the Book of Revelation was a seer stone and that a stone existed for each righteous person. And, New York sources confirm that Joseph believed there was a seer stone for everyone. It seems likely then that early on Joseph identified his grayish white stone as the white stone the Bible promised to the righteous. If so, his acquisition

⁴²² “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” p. 3, col. 9.

⁴²³ “Mormonism,” *The Susquehanna Register, and Northern Pennsylvanian* (Montrose, Pennsylvania), p. 1, col. 1. See also Joseph and Hiel Lewis, “Mormon History,” *Amboy Journal*, 30 April 1879, p. 1, col. 4.

⁴²⁴ Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures . . .*, motif h 5.5.5: “will sink of its own accord, particularly if uncovered.”

⁴²⁵ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 61, 196, 197.

of the white stone symbolized that he had grown spiritually. When Joseph obtained the Urim and Thummim spectacles in 1827, this growth accelerated.⁴²⁶

The Urim and Thummim Spectacles

Joseph Smith claimed that an angel named Moroni appeared to him on the night of 21 September 1823 and told him that in a nearby hill "there was a book deposited written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it" Moroni further informed Joseph that, with the plates, "there were two stones in silver bows and these . . . constituted what is called the Urim & Thummim."⁴²⁷ The silver bows of the Urim and Thummim wrapped around the stones to form a pair of spectacles. The plates and spectacles lay buried in a stone box that was covered by a flat stone. The following day Joseph went to the hill, Cumorah, and found the plates. On 22 September 1827, exactly four years

⁴²⁶ In a 31 December 1991 conversation with historian H. Michael Marquardt, Grant Palmer, an institute instructor in the LDS Church Education System, related seeing a seer stone in the First Presidency vault that he described as "milk chocolate, like a baseball, no stripes" (Palmer, telephone conversation with Marquardt, Ms, 31 December 1991, H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Box 156, folder 15, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah; c.f. Palmer, interviewed by Mark Ashurst-M^cGee, 22 March 2000, TMs, Mark Ashurst-M^cGee Papers, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah). In 1855, Brigham Young stated that Joseph's third stone was "very large" (Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Council"). Perhaps Young referred to the stone Palmer claims to have seen. There is no other evidence for a Mormon seer stone like this. It is uncertain that such a stone ever belonged to Joseph Smith. If it did, there is no way to know whether he obtained it before or after obtaining the Urim and Thummim spectacles. The seer stones he acquired after obtaining the spectacles seem to have been only curiosities. The dearth of information on this alleged stone argues against its meaningfulness to Joseph.

⁴²⁷ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:278.

later, the angel allowed Joseph to obtain the plates and the Urim and Thummim spectacles. Joseph used the spectacles to translate the writings on the plates into English. This translation—the Book of Mormon—was published in 1830.

In 1835, Joseph explained how he found the plates: “. . . he [the angel] told me of a sacred record which was written on plates of Gold, I saw in the vision the place where they were deposited.”⁴²⁸ In this and Joseph’s other retellings, it seems that the vision of the plates was opened directly to Joseph’s field of perception. In contrast, a number of sources indicate that Joseph found the plates with the white seer stone found in the Chase well.

Many Latter-day Saints are uncomfortable with the idea that Joseph Smith discovered the plates with a seer stone because this detail is not included in the traditional telling of Mormon history and because it appears to contradict Joseph’s own account of the event. However, a close examination of all sources produces a reconciliation of the angel and seer stone versions of the story.

As historians have addressed this issue, they focused on the golden plates because of the importance the Book of Mormon would have in Mormon history. And yet, according to Joseph Smith, “with the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called ‘Urim and Thummim,’ which consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow”⁴²⁹ Therefore, rather than

⁴²⁸ Joseph Smith, “Sketch Book for the Use of Joseph Smith, Jr.,” 24, in *PJS*, 2:70.

⁴²⁹ “Church History,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 707, col. 2. See also *EMD*, 1:44, 47, 52, 67, 185, 204.

discussing how Joseph found the plates, one could with equal legitimacy pose the question as “how did Joseph locate the Urim and Thummim spectacles?”

In fact, this reframing of the question may be more historically appropriate because Joseph Smith thought in these terms in 1827. The accounts of Joseph’s return from the hill given by Lucy Smith and Joseph Knight show that Joseph thought more of the spectacles than the plates. “I trembled so with fear,” Lucy wrote, “lest all might be lost in consequence of some failure of keeping the commandments of God.” When Joseph returned he noticed his mother’s anxiety and comforted her. “Do not be uneasy mother,” he told her, “all is right—see here, I have got a key.” Joseph then let her handle the spectacles, which were wrapped in a silk handkerchief. Then, as Lucy recounted, Joseph “took them again and left me, but said nothing respecting the record.”⁴³⁰ Joseph Knight, who waited with the Smith family in their home for young Joseph to return with the record, reported that when Joseph arrived he exuberantly exclaimed “. . . ‘it is ten times Better then I expected.’ Then he went on to tell the length and width and thickness of the plates, and said he, ‘they appear to be Gold.’ But he seemed to think more of the glasses or the urim and thummim then he Did of the Plates, for, says he, ‘I can see any thing; they are Marvelus.’”⁴³¹ When Joseph secured the Urim and Thummim spectacles, he obtained the ultimate speculum. How had he found it?

⁴³⁰ Compare the manuscript and published versions in *EMD*, 1:328-29.

⁴³¹ Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” 33.

A number of Mormon and non-Mormon sources attest that Smith used a seer stone to find the plates and spectacles.⁴³² In 1833, Willard Chase stated that Joseph had admitted to him "that if it had not been for that stone, (which he acknowledged belonged to me,) he would not have obtained the book."⁴³³ Shortly after obtaining the golden plates, Joseph and his family found a friend in Martin Harris. When Joseph began translating the plates, Martin served as his first scribe. Interviewed in 1859, Harris stated that "Joseph had a stone which was dug from the well of Mason Chase, twenty-four feet from the surface. In this stone he could see many things to my certain knowledge. It was by means of this stone he first discovered these plates."⁴³⁴ Mason and his brother William held the Chase property jointly.⁴³⁵ Later in the same interview, Martin Harris identified the sources of this information: "Joseph . . . described the manner of his finding the plates. He found them by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing."⁴³⁶ The Book of Mormon prophesied of its own coming forth by means of the stone prepared for Gazelem.

⁴³² Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steve Walker reviewed these accounts in their article, "Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing," 56-57.

⁴³³ Chase, statement, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 246.

⁴³⁴ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 163.

⁴³⁵ EMD, 2:302n3.

⁴³⁶ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 169. That Smith located the plates with his seer stone exists as a possibility in an 1833 statement made by Abigail Harris, who spoke with the Smiths at the Harris home. Abigail stated, "In the early part of the winter of 1828, I made a visit to Martin Harris' and was joined in company by Joseph Smith, sen. and his wife . . . They told me that the report that Joseph, jun. had found golden plates, was true . . . that such plates were in existence, and that Joseph, jun. was to obtain them, was revealed to him by the spirit of one of the Saints that was on this continent, previous to its being discovered by Columbus . . . They said that Joseph had also discovered by looking through his stone, the vessel in which the gold was melted from which the plates were made . . ." (Abigail Harris, statement, Palmyra, 28

William D. Purple, who took notes during Joseph Smith's 1826 court appearance, recalled that these legal proceedings "occurred some four years before Smith, by the aid of his luminous stone, found the Golden Bible, or the Book of Mormon."⁴³⁷ Of course Joseph had already discovered the plates—in September of 1823—but did not recover them until 1827. This may account for Purple's mistaken statement concerning a four-year period. Or, perhaps Purple referred to the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon, which did take place four years after the trial. Purple may have learned the method of location during the 1826 examination or during Joseph's periods of residency in the area.⁴³⁸

November 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 253). In this account, it initially appears that Moroni showed Joseph the location of the plates. Joseph's parents, however, said only that Moroni informed him of their existence and told Joseph he would translate them. How "Joseph Smith, jun. had found golden plates" is not immediately explained. This brings our attention to the allegation that "Joseph had also discovered by looking through his stone, the vessel . . ." It is unclear whether "also" modifies "discovered" or "discovered by looking through his stone." If the latter, then the Abigail Harris statement confirms the idea that Smith found the plates by looking through his stone.

In 1833, Martin's wife Lucy stated that "About a year previous to the report being raised that Smith had found gold plates, he [Martin] became very intimate with the Smith family, and said he believed Joseph could see in his stone anything he wished" (Lucy Harris, Statement, Palmyra, New York, 29 November 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 255). Finding the plates with the seer stone is a possible implication in Lucy's statement.

Palmyran John H. Gilbert set the type for the first edition of the Book of Mormon at the Grandin Press. Interviewed in 1877, he related that "his [Joseph's] story was that by the aid of his wonderful stone he found gold plates on which were inscribed the writings in hieroglyphics" ("Joe Smith," *Post & Tribune* (Detroit, Michigan), 3 December 1877, 3, in EMD, 2:520). Gilbert may have gained this information from Martin Harris. He once admitted, "I had no acquaintance with any of the originators of this humbug, except Martin Harris. Jo Smith I never saw but once" (J. H. Gilbert, statement, Palmyra, New York, 29 December 1880, quoted in Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 249).

⁴³⁷ Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chanango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 9.

⁴³⁸ Frederic Mather considered the golden plates one of the "treasures," which Joseph claimed he found "by the use of" his stone (Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," p. 198, col. 2, p. 200, col. 2).

On 25 February 1856, Brigham Young met with the Board of Regents of the University of Deseret. In his diary, Hosea Stout recorded that

President Brigham Young exhibited the Seer's stone with which The Prophet Joseph discovered the plates of the Book of Mormon, to the Regents this evening[.] *It is said to be* a silicious granite dark color almost black with light colored stripes some what resembling petrified poplar or cotton wood bark[.] It was about the size but not the shape of a hen's egg[.]⁴⁹⁹ [Emphasis mine]

Historians have relied on the Stout diary's clear identification of the brown stone as the one used to find the spectacles. However, Stout did not see the stone. In fact, he does not actually say whether he attended the meeting in question. Whether he did not attend, left early, or could not see through the crowd, he did not see the stone. He gave a description that he had heard from someone else. Apparently, Brigham Young displayed a seer stone at the meeting and may have stated that Joseph had used it to find the Cumorah reliquary. Stout reported Young's showing of the stone and then jotted down what he had heard of the well-known brown stone and connected it with the story about Joseph using a stone to find the plates.

Seer stone finding and treasure-digging contexts illuminate and support the several accounts which claim that Joseph Smith discovered the plates with his brown stone. This cumulative case falters, however, if Joseph Smith's version of the event differs. It falters historically because Smith stands as the only mortal eyewitness to the event. It falters historiographically because most Mormons will

⁴⁹⁹ *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2:593.

not accept a version of early Mormon history which disagrees with the version given by the Prophet Joseph.

Incongruity in the reports does pose a problem. The regional historian Orsamus Turner articulated the discrepancy:

After he [Joseph Smith Junior] had told his story, in his absence, the rest of the family made a new version of it to one of their neighbors. They shewed him such a pebble as may any day be picked up on the shore of Lake Ontario — the common horn blend — carefully wrapped in cotton, and kept in a mysterious box. They said it was by looking at this stone, in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph discovered the plates. This it will be observed, differs materially from Joseph's story of the angel. It was the same stone the Smiths had used in money digging, and in some pretended discoveries of stolen property.⁴⁰

Indeed, Joseph's manuscript and printed accounts of finding the plates do not mention a seer stone. Furthermore, some seem to exclude the possibility. In 1842, Joseph wrote, "I was also told [by Moroni] where there was deposited some plates on which were engraven an abridgement of the records of the ancient prophets that had existed on this continent."⁴¹ Consider the stark contrast between this version of the story and Hosea Stout's report of when "President Brigham Young exhibited the Seer's stone with which The Prophet Joseph discovered the plates of the Book of Mormon." Juanita Brooks, the editor of Stout's diaries, tagged his 25 February 1856 with the following note: "Stout was wrong here. The Prophet Joseph Smith maintained that he was directed to the

⁴⁰ Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve*, 216.

⁴¹ "Church History," *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, 707, col. 1.

plates of the Book of Mormon by a heavenly visitor who showed them to him in a vision."⁴²

Brooks allowed herself to be trapped in an unnecessary either/or dichotomy. The 1833 statement of Palmyran Henry Harris shows that both the Angel and seer stone stories can legitimately apply. His statement delineates both a visitation external to the stone and a vision internal to the stone. Harris talked to Joseph Smith about Moroni's visit sometime between 1828 and 1830.⁴³ He stated, "I had a conversation with him, and asked him where he found them and how he come to know where they were. He said he had a revelation from God that told him they were hid in a certain hill and he looked in his stone and saw them in the place of deposit."⁴⁴ Harris placed the two renditions side by side, but how is it they are reconciled?

Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker attempt to harmonize both versions of the event as given in Joseph Smith's 1839 account of the Moroni visitation. Joseph recounted, "Moroni, the person who deposited the plates . . . appeared unto me, and told me where they were; and gave me directions how to

⁴² *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861*, 2:593n67.

⁴³ *EMD*, 2:76n7.

⁴⁴ Henry Harris, statement, [1833], in Howe, *Mormonism Unraveled*, 252. Dan Vogel compares the statement of Henry Harris to an account in the autobiography of early Mormon Joseph Curtis. Vogel transcribes this account as follows: "Joseph Smith . . . saw an angel with a view of the hill Cumorah & the plates of gold had certain instructions got the plates by the assistance of the Urim & Thumin translated them by the gift and power of God" (*EMD*, 1:37, 37n4). A missing ampersand changes the meaning of the passage. It appears in bold type-face in the following correct transcription: "Joseph Smith . . . saw an angel with a view of the hill Cumorah & the plates of gold had certain instructions got the plates & by the assistance of the Urim & Thumin translated them by the gift and power of God" ("A Short History of Joseph Curtis," Ms, LDS Church Archives, p. 6).

obtain them.”⁴⁴⁵ Van Wagoner and Walker write, “The seer stone could have been the medium through which Moroni’s instructions were given.”⁴⁴⁶ While they use the term “instructions,” Joseph spoke of “directions.” The word choice is significant because in the Book of Mormon, the Urim and Thummim are called “directors.”⁴⁴⁷

To support their argument, Van Wagoner and Walker point to another event in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: Joseph’s seer stone vision of Emma.⁴⁴⁸ According to Joseph Knight, Moroni “appeared and told him . . . he mite have the Book if he Brot with him the right person. Joseph says, ‘who is the right Person?’ The answer was you will know. Then he looked in his glass and found it was Emma Hale.”⁴⁴⁹ Martin Harris related a similar story. When Joseph needed help to translate the Book of Mormon, the angel “told him to go and look in the spectacles, and he would show him the man that would assist him. That he did so, and he saw myself, Martin Harris, standing before him.”⁴⁵⁰ The discovery of the gold plates could have followed a similar pattern: a visitation of the angel followed by a seer stone vision locating the object (or subject) under discussion.

There are other examples of Joseph Smith viewing the plates with a speculum. Joseph’s mother Lucy stated that when he first obtained the plates and

⁴⁴⁵ *Elder’s Journal* (Far West, Missouri), July 1838, p. 42, col. 2- p. 43, col. 1.

⁴⁴⁶ Van Wagoner and Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing,’” 57.

⁴⁴⁷ Lancaster, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 103.

⁴⁴⁸ Van Wagoner and Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing,’” 66n42.

⁴⁴⁹ “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” 31.

⁴⁵⁰ “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 169.

the spectacles, "Joseph kept the urim and thummim [spectacles] constantly about his person as he could by this means ascertain at any moment whether <if> the plates were in danger."⁴⁵¹ Mother Smith went on to mention a specific occasion when "he looked in the Urim and thummim, and saw that the Record was as yet safe."⁴⁵² Because Joseph would later use seer stones to see the plates in their hiding places, it makes sense that he saw them through through seer stones in the place where Moroni initially hid them.

With all of this information as background, we can flesh out the details in Joseph's official account of the Moroni visitation: "While he was conversing with me [in the bedroom] about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind [by looking into a seer stone] that I could see the place where the plates were deposited, and that so clearly and distinctly that I knew the place again when I visited it."⁴⁵³ Van Wagoner and Walker write, "Joseph does not relate how the vision was opened to his mind, but . . . it may have been through the Chase seer stone."⁴⁵⁴ This reconstruction is also consistent with the narrative given by Oliver Cowdery in the 1834–35 history that he wrote with Joseph's help:

While describing the place where the record was deposited, he [Moroni] gave a minute relation of it, and the vision of his mind being opened at the same time, he was permitted to view it critically; and previously being acquainted with the place, he was able to follow the direction of the

⁴⁵¹ Lucy Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 64, in *EMD*, 1:333–34. See also Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 308, col. 1.

⁴⁵² Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for many Generations*, 104.

⁴⁵³ Joseph Smith—History 1:42. Joseph Smith—History constitutes a part of *The Pearl of Great Price*.

⁴⁵⁴ Van Wagoner and Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing," 56.

vision, afterward, according to the voice of the angel, and obtain the book.⁴⁵⁵

Cowdery later gave a similar version of the story: “while those glorious things were being rehearsed, the vision was also opened, so that our brother [Joseph Smith] was permitted to see and understand much more”⁴⁵⁶

As further argument that the plates were located with the seer stone, Van Wagoner and Walker suggest the possibility that Moroni appeared in the stone: “The fact that the Smith brothers who shared Joseph’s bedroom were not disturbed by Moroni’s visitation adds support to the possibility of a seer stone vision.”⁴⁵⁷ This argument falls short theoretically. For those who do not believe in Joseph’s visions, there was nothing to wake anyone anyway. For those who do believe in Joseph’s visions, the argument sounds theologically naive. Could not Moroni manifest himself to Joseph only? None of Paul’s companions on the road to Damascus saw the resurrected Christ. A vision needs only to hold the attention of the visionary. Joseph’s brothers can sleep in peace. There is no need to put Moroni in the stone.

Aside from its theoretical shortcomings, this argument contradicts the most reliable accounts of the event. Moroni’s appearances external to the stone stand out in these accounts.⁴⁵⁸ This distinguishes Joseph Smith from other

⁴⁵⁵ Oliver Cowdery, “Letter IV,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, February 1835, p. 80, cols. 1-2.

⁴⁵⁶ Cowdery, “Letter VI,” *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, April 1835, p. 112, col. 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Van Wagoner and Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing,’” 57.

⁴⁵⁸ Joseph stated that Moroni stood “between the floors of the room” (Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS

scryers. A number of stone seers communicated with preternatural beings *through* their stones. Magical books and manuscripts contained formulae for binding an intelligent spirit into a stone or mirror.⁴⁵⁹ Joseph Capron, one of Hurlbut's antagonistic informants, asserted that Joseph communicated with "ghosts" and "infernal spirits" that appeared in his stone.⁴⁶⁰ However, the account given by Henry Harris, a non-Mormon, and others from within and without Mormonism, place Moroni outside the stone. This is important for two reasons. First, it distinguishes Joseph from other seers who communicated with preternatural identities through their stones. Second, it reiterates the thesis that descensional impulses drove Joseph's divinatory ascent. An angel from heaven directed Joseph to use his seer stone to find the spectacles.

D. Michael Quinn places Moroni's visit within the context of treasure scrying and necromancy, and in the even larger context of magic, as opposed to religion. "Magic" is usually more manipulative and coercive in its approach to the preternatural, whereas religion is defined more in terms of supplication and

Church Archives, p. 121, in *PJS*, 1:127). This account was given when Robert Matthews visited Joseph Smith in 1835. Joseph's 1832 history recorded that the angel "came and stood before me" (Joseph Smith, "A History of the Life of Joseph Smith Jr.," Joseph Smith Letterbook 1, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, p. 4, in *PJS*, 1:8). His 1839 history records that Moroni appeared "at my bedside standing in the air for his feet did not touch the floor" (Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:276). In 1848, early Mormon William I. Appleby recorded an 1839 discourse by Orson Pratt wherein Pratt reported that Joseph "saw a personage about the ordinary size of man in the middle of the room before him" ("Biography and Journal of William I. Appleby, Elder in the Church of Latter Day Saints," Ms, LDS Church Archives, p. 31).

⁴⁵⁹ Add. MS 36, 674, folio 66, Manuscript Department, British Museum-Library, London, England, quoted in Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 222; Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove*, 19; Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 342-44, 351-52, 356-58.

⁴⁶⁰ Joseph Capron, statement, Manchester, 8 November 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 259.

submission. Magic tends to be individualistic whereas religion tends to be communalistic. Treasure seers and other scryers attempted to entrap or bind familiar spirits into their seer stones or crystal balls so that they could force them to reveal buried treasures or occult knowledge. These manipulative endeavors were pursued to achieve personal ends.

With Joseph Smith and Moroni we get an entirely different picture. Joseph supplicates God for forgiveness, he submits to Moroni's chastening instruction, and he uses his seer stone to bring about divine purposes that will benefit all of humanity, not himself or his family. His encounter with Moroni is marked by supplication and submission to bring about communal purposes, as opposed to manipulation and coercion to effect a personal end. This encounter is by definition religious, not magical.

Rather than confirming Mormonism as a magical phenomenon, Moroni's visit indicates that Mormonism originated in distinction from "magic." In the late 1810s, Joseph and his father dowsed for water in connection with the well-digging they performed to support the family income. Joseph held a rod in his hands to find water. By 1823 things had changed. "I was informed," he wrote, "that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation." John A. Clarke, who spoke with Martin Harris about Joseph and the plates in the fall of 1827, wrote that when Moroni first appeared to Joseph, he assured him "that he, Joseph Smith, was chosen of the Lord to be a prophet of the Most High God . . ." Clarke wrote that the call to prophethood deeply impressed Joseph. Brigham Young later declared,

"from that time he went on, step by step, until he obtained the plates and the Urim and Thummim, and had power to translate them."⁴⁶¹

Joseph continued looking for treasure in his stone. In 1825, Josiah Stowell came to the Smith home to hire Joseph to help him find treasure near Harmony, Pennsylvania. Joseph and his father went with Stowell to earn wages and to recover treasure, but neither felt good about Joseph concentrating his gift on buried wealth. William Purple remembered Joseph Smith Senior's court testimony to this effect: "He swore that both he and his son were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre . . ."⁴⁶² Joseph and his father had been brought to Pennsylvania only to find the lost mine. These journeymen treasure seekers were probably longing for family and home, and the more complete and satisfying roles of rodsman and village seer for which they were appreciated in their neighborhood. Eventually, as Martin Harris related it, Moroni instructed Joseph that "he must quit the company of the money-diggers."⁴⁶³

On the face of it, the Orsamus Turner rumor may appear inconsistent. Turner repeats a neighbor's story that, after Joseph said an angel showed him where the plates were, his family said he found them with the stone. "This it will be observed," writes Turner, "differs materially from Joseph's story of the

⁴⁶¹ Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 707, col. 1; [John]. A. C[larke], "Gleanings by the Way, no. VI," *Episcopal Recorder*, 5 September 1840, p. 94, col. 5; "Discourse by President Brigham Young, Delivered in the Third Ward Meeting House, Salt Lake City, Sunday Evening, June 23, 1874," *JD*, 18 (1874): p. 239, col. 2.

⁴⁶² Purple, "Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism," *Chanango Union*, 2 May 1877, p. 3, col. 9.

angel." Difference does not amount to inconsistency. The noncorroborating yet consistent stories told by Joseph and his family point to the harmony that the Henry Harris account confirms. Both former neighbors and faithful Mormons stated that Joseph used his seer stone to find the plates. The angel Moroni directed young Joseph to his seer stone, which in turn directed him to Cumorah's sacred deposit.⁴⁶⁴

Joseph went to the hill the following day, 22 September 1823, and easily located the cover-stone he had seen in vision. He removed the stone with a branch that he used as a lever. In 1839, he recounted, "I looked in and there indeed did I behold the plates, the Urim and Thummin and the Breastplate as stated by the messenger[.]"⁴⁶⁵ Although Joseph remembered seeing both the plates and the spectacles on this occasion, he may actually have seen only the plates. Oliver Cowdery wrote that when Joseph first saw the plates, "he thought, perhaps, there might be something more equally as valuable, and to take only the plates, might give others an opportunity of obtaining the remainder."⁴⁶⁶ Joseph's

⁴⁶³ "Mormonism--No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 169.

⁴⁶⁴ Parley P. Pratt's fictional short story *The Angel of the Prairies* may have been informed by Joseph's experience. The story, told in first-person narrative, recounts that an angel "suddenly stood before me, arrayed in robes of dazzling splendor." Later during this visitation, the angel directs the narrator to look into a speculum: "'Young man,' said the Angel of the Prairies, 'take this glass and look around thee.' He then handed me a *curious glass* by which I was enabled to view the entire country from sea to sea." *The Angel of the Prairies; A Dream of the Future*, by Elder Parley Parker Pratt, *One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: A. Pratt; Salt Lake City: Deseret News Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1880), 7-8 (emphasis mine). Joseph Smith called the Urim and Thummim glasses a "curious instrument" (Smith, "Church History," p. 707, col. 2).

⁴⁶⁵ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 7, in *PJS*, 1:281.

⁴⁶⁶ Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, p. 197, col. 2.

brother William recounted that when Joseph took the plates from the box, "the thought came into his mind that there might be a treasure hidden with them. While stooping forward to see, he was overpowered, so that he could not look farther." At this very moment Moroni retrieved the plates, sealed the box, and told Joseph he was not ready to receive the sacred record.⁴⁶⁷

The arrangement of the contents of the stone box prevented Joseph from seeing the spectacles when he first removed the box's lid. All accounts agree that when Joseph first looked into the box he saw the plates. Oliver Cowdery stated that the breastplate was under the plates.⁴⁶⁸ This would imply that the Urim and Thummim was under the plates because the Urim and Thummim and breastplate were connected. Martin Harris affirmed that "the two stones set in a bow of silver by means of which the plates were translated, were found underneath the plates."⁴⁶⁹ One early source claimed that "the angel indicated . . . that under these plates were hidden spectacles."⁴⁷⁰ Another account had the

⁴⁶⁷ "The Old Soldier's Testimony," *Saints' Herald* (Plano, Illinois), 4 October 1884, 643, in *EMD*, 1:504. Fayette Lapham asserted that Joseph went to the hill at night. This account contradicts other accounts of a daytime visit, but provides an explanation for Joseph not seeing the other items in the bottom of the stone box (Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306, col. 2).

⁴⁶⁸ Cowdery, "Letter VIII," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, October 1835, p. 196, col. 2.

⁴⁶⁹ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 165.

⁴⁷⁰ D. Michael Quinn, ed. and trans., "The First Months of Mormonism: A Contemporary View by Rev. Diedrich Willers," *New York History* 54, no. 3 (1973): 326.

spectacles lying beneath the breastplate, which would exclude Joseph seeing them even after removing the plates.⁴⁷¹

Other sources indicate that the spectacles were *inside* of the breastplate. John W. Peterson recollected a conversation with William Smith in which Smith explained that the spectacles fit into a pocket “where the instrument was kept when not in use by the Seer.”⁴⁷² According to the logic of this source the spectacles would have been in the breastplate while in the stone box. This description is supported by Joseph Smith’s first draft of his official history. He stated that “there were two stones in silver bows and these (put into a breast plate) constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim.”⁴⁷³ This description parallels the account in Exodus 28:30, wherein the LORD commands Moses to “put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron’s heart, when he goeth in before the LORD.” If the spectacles were in the pocket of the breastplate, Joseph could not have seen them when he uncovered the stone box. If Joseph saw the spectacles in 1823, it was through the white seer stone during his encounter with Moroni.

⁴⁷¹ Truman Coe, “Mormonism,” *The Ohio Observer*, (Hudson, Ohio), 11 August 1836, pp. 1-2, quoted in Milton V. Backman, Jr., “Truman Coe’s 1836 Description of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 17 (spring 1977): 350.

⁴⁷² “Statement of Elder J. W. Peterson concerning his acquaintance of William B. Smith a brother of the first president and prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints,” Independence, Missouri, 1 May 1921, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, in *EMD*, 1:508-9.

⁴⁷³ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:278. The manuscript now reads, “there were two stones in silver bows and these (~~put <stones fastened> into~~ a breast plate) which constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim” (*PJS*, 1:278). I deleted “which” from the above rendition of the first draft because it may have been written after the description of the relationship between the spectacles and the breastplate was rewritten.

In 1825, Joseph visited the Hill Cumorah with neighborhood seer Samuel Lawrence.⁴⁷⁴ Willard Chase stated that Joseph took Lawrence "and shewed him where the treasure was."⁴⁷⁵ Early Mormon Joseph Knight affirmed that Lawrence "had Bin to the hill and knew about the things in the hill."⁴⁷⁶ According to Chase:

Lawrence asked him if he had ever discovered any thing with the plates of gold; he said no: he then asked him to look in his stone, to see if there was any thing with them. He looked, and said there was nothing; he told him to look again, and see if there was not a large pair of specks with the plates; he looked and soon saw a pair of spectacles, the same with which Joseph says he translated the Book of Mormon.⁴⁷⁷

In 1825, when Smith and Lawrence visited the hill, Willard Chase had retrieved the grayish-white stone which he had always considered his own property. Therefore, when Chase stated that Lawrence told Joseph to look in "his stone," he meant that Joseph looked into his dark brown stone.

In the Chase version of events, although Joseph discovered the location of the spectacles in 1823 with the white seer stone, he did not know the spectacles were there until he viewed them in 1825 with the brown seer stone. Thus, while the Chase account includes the concept of using one speculum to find a superior speculum, it disagrees as to which stone Joseph used to find the spectacles. If the Chase account is accurate, it shows that Joseph had developed the gift of seeing to the point that he could now view "holy things" with his brown seer stone. Whether Joseph first saw the spectacles in 1823 or 1825, he would not obtain

⁴⁷⁴ On the dating of this event, see Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 162-63. On Lawrence, see Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 216n1.

⁴⁷⁵ Willard Chase, statement, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 243.

⁴⁷⁶ Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," 32.

them until 1827. As with finding his brown stone, a considerable amount of time elapsed between initial discovery and actual acquisition.

In the Fayette Lapham and Pomeroy Tucker accounts, Joseph did not know about or see the spectacles until 1827, when he obtained the record.⁴⁷⁸ Recounting his history from the vantage point of 1839, the events that occurred between 1823 and 1827 may have blurred somewhat.⁴⁷⁹ In Lapham's and Tucker's version of the story, Joseph did not understand his recovery of the spectacles as the use of speculum to find a superior one until he actually obtained it. This might explain his statement to Joseph Knight that "it is ten times Better then I expected."

Those who described the Urim and Thummim used the words "stone," "glass," and "crystal"—the very terms used to describe or identify seer stones. For example, Joseph Smith described the instrument as "two stones in silver bows."⁴⁸⁰ His mother related, "I . . . took the article in my hands and upon examining it, with no covering but a silk handkerchief, found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glass was set in silver bows. The stones were connected with each other in the same way that old

⁴⁷⁷ Chase, statement, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 243.

⁴⁷⁸ Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 306-7; Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 28-33.

⁴⁷⁹ On Joseph Smith as an honest man with an average memory, see Marvin S. Hill, "Positivism or Subjectivism? Some Reflections on a Mormon Historical Dilemma," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (spring 1994): 13-14, 19-21.

⁴⁸⁰ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:278.

fashioned spectacles are made."⁴⁸¹ Early Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt explained that it "consisted of two transparent stones, clear as crystal, set in two rims of a bow."⁴⁸² Descriptions of the Urim and Thummim that used these terms manifest that this "curious instrument" was composed of seer stones. Diedrich Willers, the minister of the Reformed Church in Fayette, wrote that Joseph began translating the plates "by the aid of certain mysterious seer stones, which he called Urim and Thummim."⁴⁸³

The spectacles and the white stone can be compared with respect to the values that seers appreciated in their specula. By all accounts, the spectacles were quite large.⁴⁸⁴ Parley Chase, the brother of Willard Chase, exaggerated their size. He wrote that Joseph Smith Senior visited his home one morning "just after breakfast, and told that Joe had a book . . . and that he also found a pair of EYE-

⁴⁸¹ This is my edition of Lucy's words based on both the manuscript draft and the published 1853 edition. The manuscript reads: "I . . . took the article in my hands and upon ~~after~~ examining it* <found> that it consisted of 2 smooth <ooth 3 cornered diamonds set in glass and the glass was set in silver bows> stones connected with each other in the same way that old fashioned spectacles are made[.]" A note at the bottom of the page reads ""(with no covering but a silk handkerchief)" (Lucy Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 60-61, in Vogel, *EMD*, 1:328-9). The 1853 edition reads: "I . . . took the article of which he spoke into my hands, and, upon examination, found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as old fashioned spectacles" (Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Several Generations*, 101).

⁴⁸² Orson Pratt, *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Printed by Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 8-9. See also *EMD*, 1:157n8.

⁴⁸³ Diedrich Willers, "Joseph Smith," *Ms*, n.d., Diedrich Willers Papers, Seneca Falls Historical Society, Seneca Falls, New York, Box 3, fd. 2, item 10, p. [1].

⁴⁸⁴ Lancaster, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 106.

GLASSES . . . and that the glasses were as big as a breakfast plate”⁴⁸⁵ Daniel Hendrix, who had known the Smiths in Palmyra, stated that he spoke with Joseph concerning the spectacles, “which he described as having very large round glasses, larger than a silver dollar”⁴⁸⁶ The U.S. silver dollar has always had a diameter of 1 1/2 inches.⁴⁸⁷ In 1842, apostle Orson Hyde wrote that the lenses had a diameter “the size of an English crown (coin) but a little thicker.”⁴⁸⁸ The English crown, the model for the American silver dollar, has always had a diameter of 1 1/2 inches.⁴⁸⁹ Hyde probably gained his information about the spectacles from Joseph. The three witnesses—Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer—claimed to have seen the spectacles in vision. David Whitmer stated that they were “shaped like a pair of ordinary spectacles, though much larger, and at least half an inch in thickness.”⁴⁹⁰ In addition to his vision,

⁴⁸⁵ Purley [Parley] Chase, Rollin, Michigan, to unidentified recipient, n.p. [Salt Lake City?], 3 April 1879, quoted in W. Wyl, *Joseph Smith the Prophet, His Family and His Friends: A Study Based on Facts and Documents*, vol. 1 of *Mormon Portraits, or the Truth about the Mormon Leaders, from 1830 to 1886* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Publishing Company, 1886), 276 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁸⁶ Henry G. Tinsley, “Origin of Mormonism,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 May 1893, p. 12, col. 2.

⁴⁸⁷ R. S. Yeoman, *A Guide Book of United States Coins*, 38th ed., rev. (Racine, Wisconsin: Western Publishing Company, Whitman Coin Products, 1984), 147-52.

⁴⁸⁸ Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste, eine Stimme aus dem Schoose der Erde* [*A Cry from the Wilderness, a Voice from the Dust of the Earth*] (Frankfurt, Germany: 1842), 27, in *PJS*, 1:422-23 (with English translation by Marvin H. Folsom). The German reads: “Diese zwei Steine, genannt Urim und Thummim, im Durchmesser einer englischen Krone (Münze) nur etwas dicker.”

⁴⁸⁹ Chester L. Krause and Clifford Mishler, *Standard Catalogue of World Coins*, ed. Colin R. Bruce II, 16th ed. (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 1989), 766-67.

⁴⁹⁰ “The Golden Tables,” *Chicago Times*, 7 August 1875, p. 1, col. 3.

Martin Harris may also have observed the spectacles in a natural setting.⁴⁹¹ He stated:

The two stones set in a bow of silver were about two inches in diameter, perfectly round, and about five-eighths of an inch thick at the centre; but not so thick at the edges where they came into the bow. They were joined by a round bar of silver, about three-eighths of an inch in diameter, and about four inches long, which, with the two stones, would make eight inches.⁴⁹²

The white seer stone—about the size of a small chicken egg—measured about two inches in length, but less in width. Each lens of the spectacles probably had less volume, but more surface area. Taken as a combined pair, the lenses easily exceeded the white stone in size.

The spectacles had a special shape. Lucy Smith said they “consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass.”⁴⁹³ The Bible and the western

⁴⁹¹ On Harris’s vision, see William Pilkington, Testimony Read at Martin Harris Grave, Clarkston Cemetery, Clarkston, Utah, 19 May 1934, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah, in *EMD*, 2:358. Early Mormon reminiscence collector Edward Stevenson wrote, “I have conversed with Martin Harris, who handled them, and he said he had placed them as he would a pair of spectacles, but they were too large for him . . .” (Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of Joseph, the Prophet* [Salt Lake City: Published by the Author, 1893], 31). In 1859, Harris, himself, stated, “I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat, because Moses said that ‘no man could see God and live,’ and we could see anything we wished by looking into them; and I could not keep the desire to see God out of my mind. And beside, we had a command to let no man look into them, except by the command of God, lest he should ‘look aught and perish’” (“Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 166). This may contradict Stevenson’s assertion that Martin tried on the spectacles.

⁴⁹² “Mormonism—No. II,” *Tiffany’s Monthly*, June 1859, 165-66.

⁴⁹³ This is my edition of Lucy’s words based on both the manuscript draft and the published 1853 edition. The manuscript reads: “I . . . took the article in my hands and upon after examining it” <found> that it consisted of 2 smooth <ooth 3 cornered diamonds set in glass and the glass was set in silver bows> stones connected with each other in the same way that old fashioned spectacles are made[.]” A note at the bottom of the page reads “(with no covering but a silk handkerchief)” (Lucy Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” 60-61, in Vogel, *EMD*, 1:328-9). The 1853 edition reads: “I . . . took the article of which he spoke into my hands, and, upon examination, found that it consisted of two smooth three-cornered diamonds set in glass, and the glasses were set in silver bows, which were connected with each other in much the same way as

religious and magical traditions based on it gave special status to the number three. Martin Harris stated that the glass within which the three-cornered diamonds were set was "perfectly round"⁴⁹⁴ While the white seer stone approximated equidistance in three-dimensional space, the lenses of the spectacles achieved perfect equidistance within the plane. In this sense, Joseph's successive acquisition of seer stones departed from the typical ideal. One might expect Joseph to have used the white egg-shaped stone to find a single crystal sphere. Instead, he found two crystal disks. Whereas Sarah Anderick used the word "smooth" to describe the white seer stone, Lucy used it to describe the diamonds of the spectacles.

Most described stones that were transparent and therefore likely to refract light. However, Martin Harris stated that the stones "were white, like polished marble, with a few gray streaks."⁴⁹⁵ In his description, the material that composed the lenses was apparently opaque, but exhibited a shiny, "polished" appearance. Recounting a conversation with Joseph Smith Senior, Fayette Lapham described "a pair of spectacles, about one and a half inches longer than those used at the present day, the eyes not of glass, but of diamond."⁴⁹⁶ Diamond

old fashioned spectacles" (Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for Several Generations*, 101).

⁴⁹⁴ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 165-66.

⁴⁹⁵ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 165-66.

⁴⁹⁶ Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 307, col. 2. Quinn, citing the account of Rochester seer Zimri Allen, holds that "diamond" is merely a folk-term for a seer stone that could be applied to a stone of any type (*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 171). Lapham's memory of the information he received from Joseph Smith Senior, if accurate, contradicts this interpretation. Quinn cites the case of Rochester Zimri Allen and his

is well-known for its high refraction. The spectacles certainly had more luster than the white stone.

Some discrepancy exists as to whether the spectacles were transparent or not. Joseph Smith, who saw the spectacles on a number of occasions, wrote that the stones were "transparent."⁴⁹⁷ In 1840, Apostle Orson Pratt quoted an unknown source, perhaps Joseph Smith, which explained that the spectacles "consisted of two transparent stones, clear as crystal."⁴⁹⁸ On a later occasion, he stated that the stones were indeed crystal.⁴⁹⁹

In 1881, Edward Stevenson recalled a conversation with Martin Harris in 1870 in which the latter described the spectacles as "two clear stones."⁵⁰⁰ In contrast, Martin Harris had stated in 1859 that the stones were white, "like polished marble, with a few gray streaks."⁵⁰¹ Regional Historian Orsamus Turner reported a Palmyra rumor that Martin Harris had stated that "the stones or glass . . . were opaque to all but the Prophet."⁵⁰² Reporting a recent interview with David Whitmer, the *Chicago Times* described the spectacles as "perfectly opaque

"proper diamond." We don't know what kind of stone Allen used. It may in fact have been diamond. More likely, it was a quartz crystal that Allen considered a diamond.

⁴⁹⁷ Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 707, col. 2.

⁴⁹⁸ Orson Pratt, *Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Printed by Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), in *The Essential Orson Pratt*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 8-9.

⁴⁹⁹ "Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, Delivered in the Twelfth Ward Meeting House, on Sunday Afternoon, Dec. 9, 1877," *JD* 19 (1877): p. 214, col. 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Edward Stevenson to "Editors Deseret News," 30 November 1881, in *Deseret Evening News* (Salt Lake City), 13 December 1881, p. [4], col. 5.

⁵⁰¹ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 165-66.

⁵⁰² O[rsamus] Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve*, 215.

save to the prophetic vision of Joseph Smith."⁵⁰³ This description has been attributed to Whitmer,⁵⁰⁴ but probably derives from Orsamus Turner. Another article—based on another Whitmer interview—describes “a pair of transparent stones.”⁵⁰⁵ In yet another interview, conducted at about the same time, David Whitmer described a pair of “whitish stones”⁵⁰⁶ It remains unclear whether Whitmer imputed opacity to the stones with this comment or merely attempted to described their colorlessness and lack of shading. In 1831, Oliver Cowdery, the third plates/spectacles witness, was reported to have described the spectacles as “two transparent stones, resembling glass.”⁵⁰⁷

Lucy Smith’s report of diamonds set within the lenses may explain the discrepancy between the transparency and opacity descriptions. Perhaps the lenses consisted of clear diamonds encased in circular lenses of cloudy white crystal.⁵⁰⁸ Thus, whereas the circular lenses may have been less transparent than the mostly transparent white stone, the diamonds were more transparent than

⁵⁰³ “The Golden Tables,” *Chicago Times*, 7 August 1875, p. 1, col. 3.

⁵⁰⁴ Van Wagoner and Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing,” 67n78.

⁵⁰⁵ “Mormon Relics,” *Inter Ocean*, 17 October 1886, p. 17, col. 5.

⁵⁰⁶ David Whitmer, interviewed by Zenas H. Gurley, 14 January 1885, Richmond, Missouri, Gurley Collection, LDS Archives, quoted in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 152.

⁵⁰⁷ A[bram]. W. B[enton]., South Bainbridge, New York, to “Mssrs. Editors,” Utica, New York, March 1831, in “Mormonites,” *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, 9 April 1831, p. 120, col. 2.

⁵⁰⁸ Some quartz crystal is milky white.

the white stone. Orson Pratt stated that the spectacle stones were as "clear as crystal."⁵⁰⁹

As noted, only Whitmer and Harris mention any coloring or shading with respect to the spectacles. Whereas the Chase stone was described as having "a gray cast . . . with white stripes running round it," the lenses of the spectacles were described as "white . . . with a few gray streaks."⁵¹⁰ The circular lenses of the spectacles may have edged the white stone in this regard. The entirely clear diamonds within the lenses easily bested the grayish-white stone in terms of shade.

The spectacles easily surpassed the white stone with respect to the seer stone quality of encasement. Joseph Smith, William Smith, Martin Harris, and Oliver Cowdery stated that a silver bow framed the stones. In 1859, Martin Harris explained that the stones "were joined by a round bar of silver." William Smith may also have viewed the spectacles. John W. Peterson, who interviewed Smith in 1890, wrote that "William informed us that he had, himself, by Joseph's direction, put the Urim and Thummim before his eyes, but could see nothing, as he did not have the gift of a Seer."⁵¹¹ William explained that the silver bow "ran

⁵⁰⁹ I. Woodbridge Riley provided a possible explanation of the Urim and Thummim spectacles for the skeptic: "If one may hazard a guess, these 'curious instruments' . . . were probably a couple of prisms from an old-fashioned chandelier" (Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism*, 190). These prisms would be transparent.

⁵¹⁰ Robinson, "The History of a Nephite Coin"; "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 165-66.

⁵¹¹ J. W. Peterson, "The Urim and Thummim," *Rod of Iron* (Independence, Missouri), February 1924, p. 7, col. 1.

over one stone, under the other, around over that one and under the first in the shape of a horizontal figure 8 much like a pair of spectacles."⁵¹²

The spectacles were fastened to a breastplate by a rod. In fact, Joseph Smith would later define the Urim and Thummim as the spectacles and breastplate connected. In an 1842 historical sketch written in 1842, he wrote that the spectacles "consisted of two transparent stones set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breastplate."⁵¹³ The High Priest of Israel had kept the Urim and Thummim within the breastpiece. Joseph's 1839 history adds and then removes this detail when it mentioned "these (put <stones fastened> into a breast plate"⁵¹⁴ William Smith elaborated on this aspect of encasement. He explained that the spectacles were attached to the breastplate by a rod,

which was connected with the outer edge of the right shoulder of the breast-plate. By pressing the head a little forward, the rod held the Urim and Thummim before the eyes much like a pair of spectacles. A pocket was prepared in the breastplate on the left side, immediately over the heart. When not in use the Urim and Thummim was placed in this pocket, the rod being of just the right length to allow it to be so deposited.⁵¹⁵

All accounts agree that Joseph found the spectacles and breastplate in a stone box on the Hill Cumorah. This hill was special in Book of Mormon history. And, according to Brigham Young and other early Mormons, a cavern within the

⁵¹² "Statement of J. W. Peterson Concerning William Smith," 1 May 1921, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, in *EMD*, 1:508.

⁵¹³ Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons*, 1 March 1842, p. 707, col. 2.

⁵¹⁴ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:278.

⁵¹⁵ J. W. Peterson, "The Urim and Thummim," *Rod of Iron*, February 1924, p. 7, col. 1; c.f. "Statement of J. W. Peterson Concerning William Smith," 1 May 1921, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, in Vogel, *EMD*, 1:508-9.

hill held a number of other Lehiite records.⁵¹⁶ Thus, the speculum found with the plates was protected by several layers of encasement. It consisted of two three-cornered diamonds set within glass or crystal framed within a silver bow folded into the protective pocket of a breastplate hidden in a stone box constructed in a sacred, archival hill. The Book of Mormon revealed that the spectacles had been “kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord.”⁵¹⁷ It was no wonder then, as Pomeroy Tucker wrote, that Joseph found the spectacles “in a perfect state of preservation.”⁵¹⁸ In contrast, the white stone was found in the ground.

The spectacles clearly had a history. The Brother of Jared received the spectacle stones from the Lord when he ascended the mountain and asked the Lord to touch his clear white stones to make them shine. He ascended the mount with sixteen stones and returned with eighteen. The Lord apparently created the spectacle stones when he created the earth. As the Book of Mormon taught, “these things *were prepared from the beginning*, and were handed down from generation to generation.”⁵¹⁹ Orson Pratt later explicated this verse: “You will perceive, Latter-day Saints, how this Urim and Thummim was formed in the first place. It was not something that existed on the earth in a natural state, it was

⁵¹⁶ Alexander L. Baugh, “Parting the Veil: The Visions of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 1 (1999): 33-34.

⁵¹⁷ Mosiah 28:14-15.

⁵¹⁸ Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 32.

⁵¹⁹ Mosiah 28:14-15 (emphasis mine). See also Alma 37:25; Mormon 9:34; Ether 3:23, 28; and Doctrine and Covenants 20:8.

something made by the Lord.”⁵²⁰ When Joseph translated the Book of Mormon, he may have considered the brown stone found in the kettle a Nephite stone, the white stone found on the Chase farm one of the “white and clear” stones “molten out of a rock” by the Brother of Jared and then touched by the finger of the Lord, and the spectacle stones a special creation of the Lord’s. In this possible reconstruction, each successive stone had a more ancient history and was attributed to a more esteemed original owner/creator.

Like Gazelem, the white stone, the spectacles had been “prepared” by the Lord, and thus consecrated. Lucy said that Joseph “was not permitted to exhibit them to any one, except those whom the Lord will appoint to testify of them.”⁵²¹ During the initial period of translation, when Joseph used the spectacles, he hung a curtain up between himself and Martin Harris.⁵²² In contrast, Smith showed his brown seer stone to many, including those who ridiculed him for using it.⁵²³ An overall comparison of the spectacles and the white stone demonstrates the former’s superior history and status.

The Old Testament records the use of the Urim and Thummim by the High Priest to divine the will of Yahweh.⁵²⁴ Joseph would at some point in time identify the spectacles with this biblical instrument. Exactly when Joseph first

⁵²⁰ “Discourse by Elder Orson Pratt, Delivered in the Twelfth Ward Meeting House, on Sunday Afternoon, Dec. 9, 1877,” *JD* 19 (1877): p. 214, col. 1.

⁵²¹ Lucy Smith, “Preliminary Manuscript,” LDS Church Archives, p. 71, in *EMD*, 1:347. See also Mosiah 8:13; Ether 3:24.

⁵²² Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 90.

⁵²³ For example, Smith displayed the brown stone during his 1826 court appearance.

made this association remains unknown. Mormon usage of the term “Urim and Thummim” has not been documented prior to 1833.⁵²⁵ If Joseph had identified the spectacles as Urim and Thummim by 1832, one would expect the historical narrative he wrote in that year to describe the breastplate and its speculum in those terms. Joseph, however, only referred to “spectacles.” However, the unpunctuated, running narrative of the 1832 history is very brief, and appears to have been hastily written. It cannot be used to decide with finality that Joseph had not associated the spectacles with the Urim and Thummim by this time.

The term “Urim and Thummim” does not appear in the Book of Mormon. Its authors referred to their specula as “interpreters.” Based on the absence of the term in the Book of Mormon, some have argued that Joseph had not identified his spectacles as urim by 1829, when he translated the book. This argument rests on the assumption that the Book of Mormon is entirely a nineteenth-century document. However, if the Book of Mormon is an ancient document, the absence of the term “Urim and Thummim” may tell us only about the understanding of the Lehites and not of Joseph Smith.

Only one of Joseph’s own first-hand accounts can be construed to mean Moroni told Joseph that the spectacles were “Urim and Thummim.” The 1839 history, written and rewritten by Joseph and his scribes, recounts that when Moroni first appeared to Joseph, he told him about the plates, and said “that

⁵²⁴ Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65.

⁵²⁵ Van Wagoner and Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing,” 53.

there were two stones in silver bows and these (~~put~~ <stones fastened> into a breast plate) ~~which~~ constituted what is called the Urim & Thummin deposited with the plates⁵²⁶ This passage explicitly states that Moroni told Joseph Smith that a pair of stones accompanied the plates. However, the statement “these stones fastened to a breast plate constituted what is called the Urim and Thummim” may have been an explanatory insertion made by Joseph Smith or his scribes. It also remains a possibility that Moroni spoke with Joseph about the biblical Urim and Thummim on another of his several visits. Joseph may have conflated these events.

If Moroni did not identify the spectacles as a Urim and Thummim in 1823, Joseph easily could have come to this conclusion himself at any time between his initial conversation with Moroni and his assumption of the prophetic role. The breastplate was a dead giveaway. Jan Shipps, though not LDS, allows for the possibility that Joseph “actually found some Indian artifacts.” And the skeptical Fawn Brodie wrote that “Joseph may have found a copper breastplate, for such objects were frequently discovered in the mounds.”⁵²⁷ Neighbors Willard Chase, Abigail Harris, and Joshua M’Kune stated that they had spoken with Joseph about the breastplate by 1828.⁵²⁸ In the Old Testament, the High Priest of Israel

⁵²⁶ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 5, in *PJS*, 1:278.

⁵²⁷ Shipps, “The Prophet Puzzle,” 11; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 40n4.

⁵²⁸ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 246-47; Joshua M’Kune, statement, n.d., quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 267; Harris, statement, Palmyra, New York, 28 November 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 253. See also Doctrine and Covenants 17:1. This revelation, which mentions both the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim, was given in June of 1829, but was not printed until 1835. Some

kept the Urim and Thummim in a bejeweled breast piece. The King James translation of the Bible rendered this breast piece "breastplate." For one unaware of "-im" as a Hebrew plural or Hebrew usage of hendiadys, "Urim and Thummim" would appear to be two objects. Therefore, the breast plate and stones that Joseph Smith claimed to have discovered would have matched his understanding of the King James Bible. Furthermore, the Book of Mormon was the record of an Israelite people. It was only natural then for Joseph to identify the breastplate and spectacles found on Cumorah with the instruments worn and used in ancient Israel.

From the Middle Ages to the time of Joseph Smith, there had always been western exegetes who interpreted the biblical Urim and Thummim as a speculum.⁵²⁹ Joseph read the Bible within the western tradition and from the perspective of a stone seer. The biblical culture of his family and society increased the likelihood of him recognizing the spectacles as urim. Traditions about the Urim and Thummim also existed in the scrying culture. One of these held that the High Priest of Israel "had his Visions in the Stone of the Breast-plate The Magicians, now, use a Crystal-Sphere, or Mineral-Pearl for this purpose,

speculate that the term "Urim and Thummim" was added or replaced another term such as "interpreters" that appeared in the original manuscript revelation. See, for example, H. Michael Marquardt, ed., *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text and Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), page 49, notes 34-35.

⁵²⁹ Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 25-33.

which is inspected by a Boy, or sometimes by the Querent himself."⁵³⁰ D. Michael Quinn presents the possibility that this tradition influenced Joseph Smith.⁵³¹

Others have argued that Joseph Smith based the Book of Mormon on the Enoch myth of Royal Arch Freemasonry. These arguments rest on the assumption that Joseph knew of the biblical Urim and Thummim.⁵³² Others argue that Joseph relied on Ethan Smith's book *View of the Hebrews* when he conceived the basic Book of Mormon storyline. Proponents of this theory discuss Ethan Smith's discussion of the Mound Builder Myth and his identification of a recently discovered Native American breastplate with attached buckhorn buttons as an Israelite Urim and Thummim.⁵³³ Also, the European tradition of treasure seeking had included a subtradition of seeking for arms and armor, Israelite treasure, and lost relics.⁵³⁴ One late seventeenth-century treasure seeker embarked on a quest

⁵³⁰ Aubrey, *Miscellanies*, 128-29.

⁵³¹ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 40. A Paracelsian text associates scrying with the Urim and Thummim. See Lance S. Owens, "Joseph Smith and Kabbalah: The Occult Connection," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 3 (fall 1994): 162n89. Owens speculates that, because Walters was a physician as well as a magician, when he went to study magic in Europe, he would have studied Paracelsian medicine (Owens, "Joseph Smith: America's Hermetic Prophet," *Gnosis: A Journal of the Western Inner Traditions* no. 35 [spring 1995]: p. 61, col. 1).

⁵³² Jack Adamson, "The Treasure of the Widow's Son," in *Joseph Smith and Masonry: No Help For the Widow's Son: Two Papers on the Influence of the Masonic Movement on Joseph Smith and the Mormon Church*, [edited by David C. Martin]. (Nauvoo, Illinois: Martin Publishing Company, 1980), 7, 12; Robert N. Hullinger, "Masonic Ritual and Lore," chap. 8 in *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism*, 99-120. See especially pp. 108, 111.

⁵³³ See, for example, Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 47.

⁵³⁴ On arms and armor, see Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove*, 58, 67, 217-18. On Israelite treasure, see "The Lost Treasures of Israel," chap. 8 in Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove*, 302-18. On relics, see "Treasures of the Church," chap. 14 in Beard, *The Romance of Treasure Trove*, 229-250; Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures*, d 3.1.1.

for the Urim and Thummim itself.⁵³⁵ Therefore, scrying tradition, treasure lore, Masonic legend, the Mound Builder Myth, western biblicism, and most plausibly the Bible itself all may have contributed to Joseph associating the spectacles with the biblical Urim and Thummim from early on. Whenever Joseph did come to recognize the spectacles as a Urim and Thummim, this identification with the divining instrument of Israel's High Priest would valorize the spectacles over and above his previous seer stones.

As noted, Joseph Knight wrote that when Joseph returned from obtaining Cumorah's treasure in 1827, he exclaimed "it is ten times Better then I expected." But Joseph had seen and held the plates in 1823. He knew what to expect when he obtained them. Knight's narrative shows that Joseph was talking about the spectacles. Joseph had just looked into them for the first time. If Smith or Chase accurately reported the discovery of the spectacles, Joseph knew of and had seen them with or without a seer stone by 1825. Therefore, it was the visionary ability of the spectacles that so exceeded Joseph's expectations. As he told Knight, "I can see any thing; they are Marvelus."⁵³⁶ David Whitmer stated that when Joseph first put on the spectacles "he saw his entire past history revealed to him."⁵³⁷ Fayette Lapham wrote that when Joseph tried on the spectacles, "he could see everything—past, present, and future."⁵³⁸ Martin Harris stated, "I never dared to

⁵³⁵ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 236.

⁵³⁶ Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," 33.

⁵³⁷ *St. Louis Republican* (St. Louis, Missouri) 16 July 1884, quoted in *David Whitmer Interviews*, 150.

⁵³⁸ Lapham, "II.—The Mormons," *Historical Magazine*, May 1870, p. 307, col. 2.

look into them by placing them in the hat, because Moses said that 'no man could see God and live,' and we could see anything we wished by looking into them; and I could not keep the desire to see God out of my mind."⁵³⁹ With these powers, the spectacles became Joseph's primary speculum. As Palmyran Pomeroy Tucker observed, this "seer's instrument . . . was to supersede the further use of the magic stone."⁵⁴⁰ Joseph's successive acquisition of superior seer stones had reached a culmination (see table 2).

Joseph's former treasure-seeking associates, with whom he had agreed in the past he would share any wealth obtained, now staked their claims on the plates of gold. As mentioned, Willard Chase may have felt he had an extra claim on the plates because they had been discovered with the stone found on his property. Mother Smith recounted, "ten or twelve men were clubbed together, with one Willard Chase, a Methodist class leader, at their head . . ."⁵⁴¹ Willard got his sister Sally to use her "green glass" to try to find the plates. As Joseph Smith would later teach the twelve apostles, "most of those who do find one [a seer stone] make an evil use of it."⁵⁴² Lucy Smith maintained that Sally saw "the precise place" where Joseph had hidden the plates—under the floor of the cooper

⁵³⁹ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 166.

⁵⁴⁰ Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, 34-35.

⁵⁴¹ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations*, 102.

⁵⁴² "History of Brigham Young," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 20 February 1864, 118-19.

Table 2
Sequence of Seer Stone Use in Terms of Seer Stone Qualities

seer stone qualities									
seer stones	size	shape	smoothness	luster	translucency and transparency	color and shade	casing or container	previous history	consecration
Sally Chase stone	"a little bit of a stone" about thumb size	?	?	translucency may have given this stone some luster	translucent	green or bluish-green dark	paddle	?	?
brown stone	slightly smaller than a chicken egg	flat bottom somewhat ovate	very smooth	shiny	opaque	brown with stripes very dark, almost black	discovered buried in kettle no casing between discovery and 1827 pouch sometime in or after 1827	buried in kettle Nephite?	? James Brewster alleged that a group that included Joseph Smith Senior consecrated a stone in Kirtland
white stone	slightly smaller than a chicken egg	egg-shaped	smooth	glassy appearance	transparent may have contained some imperfections	grayish-white	by late 1820s: carefully wrapped in cotton and kept in a box	May have been one of the stones fashioned by the brother of Jared and touched by Jesus Christ	see above Book of Mormon translation (1829) states that the Lord "prepared" it
spectacles	two lenses of 1 1/2 to 2 inches in diameter and about 1/2 inch thick at the center	three-cornered diamonds encased in beveled disks	smooth	"polished" lenses encasing diamonds, which are highly refractive	entirely transparent diamonds encased in cloudy crystals	colorless white	diamonds encased in glass or crystal, encased in silver frame, in breastplate pocket	Created by Jesus Christ and given to the Brother of Jared	prepared by the Lord

shop—but Joseph moved them before the gang arrived. After tearing up the floor of the shop, Chase and the others went home empty handed and full of fury.⁵⁴³

Ironically, Joseph Smith's discovery of the plates and spectacles can be traced back through the white and brown seer stones to his initial vision in Sally Chase's green glass. Now Sally was using her stone against him. This episode illustrates the extent to which Joseph had reoriented his life and differentiated himself from his former treasure-seeking associates. Eventually, Joseph would outgrow the use of seer stones altogether.

⁵⁴³ Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and his Progenitors for many Generations*, 109.

CHAPTER 5

JOSEPH SMITH AND THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

—Amos 3:7

Having obtained the ultimate speculum, Joseph needed to grow in his personal gift and in favor with the Lord. Eventually, he would develop his gift to the point that he no longer needed the Urim and Thummim spectacles. Joseph's translation of the Book of Mormon and his "new translation" of the Bible, combined with the restoration of priesthood orders through angelic ministration, mark his transition from seer to prophet and revelator. With urim, Joseph could translate the golden plates of the Book of Mormon into English. He began translating the ancient record with the spectacles he found buried with the plates. His brother William explained that by wearing the breastplate with the spectacles connected Joseph could have his hands free to handle the plates.¹

But Joseph did not always use the Jaredite instrument in that fashion. According to John W. Peterson, who interviewed William Smith in 1890, William explained that the spectacles could be "detached from the breastplate" and said "Joseph often wore it detached when away from home."² Lucy stated that when he first obtained the plates and the spectacles, "Joseph kept the urim and thummim [spectacles] constantly about his person as he could by this means

¹ J. W. Peterson, "The Urim and Thummim," *Rod of Iron*, February 1924, 7.

² Peterson, "The Urim and Thummim," 7.

ascertain at any moment ~~whether~~ ^{<if>} the plates were in danger"³ On one occasion, while Joseph was digging a well for a woman in Macedon, his wife Emma felt that the plates were in danger and came to tell Joseph. Lucy wrote that Joseph, "having just looked into them before Emma got there[,] he perceived her coming and came up out of the well and met her"⁴ It seems doubtful that Joseph would have the eight-inch long pair of glasses with him while at work in the well. It seems that Joseph eventually detached the lenses from their frame and carried them in a pouch as he had his brown seer stone.

Joseph did not always use the lenses when translating. Martin Harris, who served as Joseph's scribe for most of the first 100 or so pages of the Book of Mormon, stated that Joseph also used one of his seer stones to translate. Edward Stevenson, a devout Latter-day Saint who interviewed Harris in 1870, recorded Martin's recollection that Joseph "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."⁵ In April of 1828, when Martin traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to serve as Joseph's scribe, Joseph had had the spectacles in his possession for over six months. By Martin's arrival, Joseph apparently had developed his gift of seeing to the point that he could translate the plates with a seer stone as well as with the spectacles.

³ Lucy Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 64, in *EMD*, 1:333-34.

⁴ Lucy Smith, "Preliminary Manuscript," 64, in *EMD*, 1:333-34.

⁵ Edward Stevenson to "Editors Deseret News," 30 November 1881, in *Deseret Evening News*, 13 December 1881, p. [4], col. 5.

Still, why would Joseph use an inferior speculum when he had the spectacles at his disposal? Harris said that Joseph used a stone for "convenience." How was the seer stone more convenient? William explained this to John W.

Peterson:

. . . the instruments were much too large for Joseph and he could only see through one at a time using sometimes one and sometimes the other. By putting his head in a hat or some dark object it was not necessary to close one eye while looking through the stone with the other. In that way sometimes when his eyes grew tires [tired] he releaved them of the strain.⁶

Charles Anthon, who discussed the golden plates with Martin Harris in 1828, wrote that the spectacles "were so large, that, if a person attempted to look through them, his two eyes would have to be turned towards one of the glasses merely, the spectacles in question being altogether too large for the breadth of the human face." To remedy the situation, Anthon wrote, Joseph would often look through "one of the glasses."⁷ The size of the spectacles made them inconvenient to translate with.

To remedy this problem, Joseph apparently disassembled the spectacles. Removed from their frame, the lenses became seer stones. It was only natural then for Joseph to use them by placing them in a hat. Martin Harris apparently informed the editor of the *Palmyra Freeman* that Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by "placing the spectacles in a hat."⁸ Years later, Martin Harris would

⁶ "Statement of J. W. Peterson Concerning William Smith," 1 May 1921, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, in *EMD*, 1:508.

⁷ Cha[rle]s Anthon, New York, to E. D. Howe, Painesville, Ohio, 17 February 1834, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 270-71.

⁸ "Golden Bible," *Rochester Daily Advertiser and Telegraph* (Rochester, New York), 31 August 1829, p. [2], col. 4. This article was reprinted from the *Palmyra Freeman*, no longer extant.

state, "I never dared to look into them by placing them in the hat."⁹ Removing the lenses from their frame and placing them in the bottom of the hat would have allowed Smith to use both eyes. It also would have allowed him to view both stones, but the optical physics of such a scenario would have made it impossible to see one image in both lenses as one does when wearing glasses immediately over the eyes. Because Joseph had always looked at a single stone in his hat, he probably removed one of the lenses from the hat.¹⁰ At this point, substituting one of his earlier seer stones for the lens became a minute step. By doing so, he could reassemble the spectacles, reattach them to the breastplate, reinsert them in their protective pouch, and hide them in a safe place.

Which stone did Joseph use? Because he preferred his white stone over the brown one, he probably started using it first. In 1830, Willard Chase asked Hyrum Smith to return the stone to him. "He told me I should not have it," Chase wrote, "for Joseph made use of it in translating his Bible."¹¹ An 1830 source informed by Martin Harris stated that to translate the Book of Mormon "Smith would put his face into a hat in which he had a *white stone*, and pretend to read

It mentions Martin Harris and his beliefs. See also Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 169-70.

⁹ "Mormonism—No. II," *Tiffany's Monthly*, June 1859, 166.

¹⁰ Using only one lens may have been forced upon Joseph. A county historian reported that Lyman Stowell, a nephew to Josiah Stowell, told a story that one day he, Lyman, "found the prophet in the wood house searching earnestly, Smith explaining that he had lost one of the magic glasses . . ." (*The Biographical Record of Henry County, Illinois* [Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1901], 714).

¹¹ Willard Chase, statement, Manchester, New York, 1833, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 247.

from it"¹² Because Martin Harris served as Smith's scribe during the first phase of Book of Mormon translation, Smith's use of the white stone for translation should be dated to this period. Witnesses of Joseph's later translations in Harmony and at the Whitmer farm in Fayette reported Joseph's use of the brown seer stone.¹³

Lucy Harris, Martin's wife, strongly disapproved of his assistance to Joseph Smith. Martin believed that if she could read the translation it would convince her of the validity of their work. He badgered Joseph into letting him

¹² This statement appears in an untitled article in the *Cincinnati Advertiser, and Ohio Phoenix* (Cincinnati, Ohio), 2 June 1830, p. 1, col. 2 (emphasis in original). Dale Morgan identified the news writer's informant as Martin Harris (*Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, 386n8). In a story recounted to Edward Stevenson, Martin Harris claimed that on one occasion he tried to test Joseph Smith: "When they became weary, as it was confining work to translate from the plates of gold, they would go down to the river and throw stones into the water for exercise. Martin on one occasion picked up a stone resembling the one with which they were translating, and on resuming their work Martin placed the false stone in the hat" (Edward Stevenson, "The Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. No. III," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, 21 June 1886, 390). In the summer of 1999, the author visited Joseph's home site on the Susquehanna. The rocks along the river there are brown and gray, but all of a medium shade. None were so dark or so light to shed any light on which seer stone Harris found a substitute for.

¹³ Oliver Cowdery wrote: "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'" (O. Cowdery, Norton, Ohio, to W. W. Phelps, 7 September 1834, quoted in *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, Ohio), October 1834, p. 14, col. 2). As Oliver Cowdery helped Joseph translate during the period in which Joseph was using the seer stone, Robert D. Anderson questions Cowdery's honesty on this point (*Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith*, 120n87). However, three observations should be made here: (1) Early Mormons applied the term "Urim and Thummim" not only to the spectacles, but to seer stones. Cowdery followed this usage here. Anderson seems to be aware of this early Mormon usage, but believes that Cowdery was identifying the particular speculum in question as the "interpreters" used by the Nephites. However, (2) Cowdery did not say that the Nephites *did* call the speculum in question "interpreters," but that they *would* have. As the Nephites called the spectacles "interpreters," it was reasonable for Cowdery to state that they would have used the same term to describe other seer stones. Furthermore, Anderson believes the Nephites had only one pair of interpreters, but (3) Mosiah II already had "interpreters" when the Jaredite plates and the spectacle stones sealed with them were discovered. Just as Joseph Smith had seer stones prior to obtaining the spectacles, Mosiah II had interpreters (perhaps seer stones) prior to *his* obtaining the spectacles. Anderson takes Mosiah II's possession of interpreters prior to his obtaining the Jaredite plates as evidence that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon and could not keep his

take the first 116 pages of manuscript home to show her. When Harris lost the manuscript, he and Joseph came under the condemnation of the Lord. Moroni retrieved the golden plates and the means to translate them. Joseph later wrote that “the Urim and Thummim . . . had been taken from me.”¹⁴ He used the term “Urim and Thummim” for both the spectacles and his seer stones.¹⁵ Moroni took the urim from Joseph to remove his ability to translate. As Joseph could translate with his seer stones as well as the spectacles, Moroni retrieved both. Joseph still possessed the gift of seeing, but was warned that if he did not strictly follow the Lord’s instructions, he would have “no more gift.”¹⁶

After sincere repentance, means for translation were restored. Lucy Smith related her son’s account of this episode:

I continued my supplications to God, without cessation, and on the twenty-second of September, I had the joy and satisfaction of again receiving the Urim and Thummim, with which I have again commenced translating, and Emma writes for me, but the angel said that the Lord would send me a scribe, and I trust his promise will be verified.¹⁷

story straight. Ironically, Mosiah II’s possession of interpreters prior to obtaining the spectacles better fits Anderson’s hypothesis of the Book of Mormon as disguised autobiography.

¹⁴ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 10, quoted in *PJS*, 1:287.

¹⁵ Van Wagoner and Walker, “Joseph Smith: ‘The Gift of Seeing,’” 49-68; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 174-75.

¹⁶ Book of Commandments 2:4. C.f. Doctrine and Covenants 3:11.

¹⁷ Compare the manuscript and published versions of Lucy’s narration in *EMD*, 1:370-71. Joseph’s 1839 history presents a more complicated version. First, “it,” the spectacles, were taken from Joseph for wearing the Lord. The seer stones may also have been taken. The plates seem to have been taken as well. Second, Moroni returned the spectacles so Joseph could receive a revelation from the Lord that chastened him for his errors. Third, as Joseph writes, “both the plates and the Urim and Thummim were taken from me again.” Here, the term “Urim and Thummim” apparently included both the spectacles and the seer stones. Joseph and other early Mormons used this term for both. The only time after this that the spectacles would be seen was during the visions that Joseph and the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon had. Fourth, the “Urim and Thummim”—the seer stones only—were returned. Joseph himself did not specify that his stones were the only urim returned, but the historical record clarifies his usage here.

Although Moroni returned Joseph's seer stones, he retained possession of the spectacles. Emma Smith explained: "[t]he first that my <husband> translated, was translated by the use of the Urim, and Thummim [spectacles], and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather a dark color"¹⁸ Two months after the arrival of Oliver Cowdery, the promised scribe, he and Joseph traveled to the home of David Whitmer in Fayette, New York, to finish the translation. Unaware of Joseph's previous ownership of the brown seer stone, David Whitmer thought Joseph received it for the first time after his period of repentance.

By fervent prayer and by otherwise humbling himself the prophet, however, again found favor, and was presented with a strange, oval-shaped, chocolate-colored stone, about the size of an egg, only more flat, which, it was promised, should serve the same purpose as the missing urim and thummim (the latter was a pair of transparent stones set in a bow-shaped frame and very much resembled a pair of spectacles). With this stone all of the present Book of Mormon was translated.¹⁹

Those who witnessed Joseph finishing the translation of the Book of Mormon at the Whitmer home in Fayette affirmed that he used the brown stone.²⁰ His white seer stone served as a bridge between the white lenses of the spectacles and the brown seer stone.

Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, pp. 10-11, quoted in *PJS*, 1:287.

¹⁸ Emma Smith Bidamon, Nauvoo, Illinois, to Emma Pilgrim, Independence, Missouri, 27 March 1870, Emma Smith Papers, RLDS Church Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri, in *EMD*, 1:532.

¹⁹ "Mormon Relics," *Inter Ocean*, 17 October 1886, p. 17, col. 5. This article also appeared on the same day in the *Omaha Herald* (Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews*, 193n21). See also Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 12; and Baugh, "Parting the Veil," 32, 52n33.

When Joseph resumed translation of the Book of Mormon, he found it difficult. He soon received a revelation through the seer stone that addressed this problem by extending the gift of translation to Oliver Cowdery. Furthermore, the Lord delivered to both Joseph and Oliver “the keys of this gift.”²¹ In Mormon terminology, “keys” refers to the controlling authority over ceremonies and spiritual gifts. Joseph had enjoyed the gift of translation before, but now he held the keys of this gift. This marked the beginning of an increase in his abilities of supernatural vision. Still, at the onset, he needed Oliver’s help. Why?

Some accounts state that Joseph’s experience of translating, as well as his experience with other spiritual gifts, exhausted him. In 1832, Joseph and his counselor, Sidney Rigdon, experienced a joint vision of heaven. Philo Dibble, who was present at the time, recalled that when the vision closed, “Joseph appeared as strong as a lion, but Sidney seemed as weak as water, and Joseph, noticing his condition smiled and said, ‘Brother Sidney is not as used to it as I am.’”²² By this time, Joseph no longer needed seer stones to see visions, and had grown in his abilities of seership. Perhaps Joseph needed help when he resumed the translation of the Book of Mormon because he could no longer use the spectacles to translate. But, Joseph had used a seer stone to translate the Book of Mormon when Martin Harris served as his scribe.

²⁰ James E. Lancaster, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 97-112.

²¹ Book of Commandments 5:11-13. C.f. Doctrine and Covenants 6:25-28.

²² *Early Scenes in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 81; c.f. “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor* (Salt Lake City), 15 May 1892, p. 304, col. 1. See also *Joseph Smith, the Prophe*, 14.

Without the plates or the spectacles, perhaps Joseph felt he did not have the resources to proceed. Mormon historian Thomas Alexander writes:

Joseph Smith often found physical artifacts useful in receiving revelations. Early in his career he used a seerstone and the Urim and Thummim. Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants indicate that he used Biblical texts to concentrate his mind on particular problems. Later, he seems to have used some Egyptian Papyri for the same purpose.²³

When Joseph resumed translation with the brown stone, he no longer needed physical artifacts—the plates—in front of him. With his face buried in a hat, he could not see the plates anyway. The physical presence of the plates became irrelevant.

On the other hand, perhaps Joseph needed help from Oliver because he was now translating with the brown seer stone instead of the white one. Lorenzo Saunders claimed that Joseph had earlier stated that with this stone he could not look into “anything that is holy.” The religious beliefs surrounding seer stones would suggest that, if not using the spectacles, Joseph would use the white stone, which the 1826 court record clearly implies that he favored. And, as noted above, there is evidence that he did so. However, every account concerning the period following Moroni’s retrieval of the urim maintains that Joseph used the brown stone. Joseph’s possession of the white seer stone in later years proves that Moroni returned both stones. Why then did Joseph begin using the brown one?

²³ Thomas G. Alexander, “A New and Everlasting Covenant: An Approach to the Theology of Joseph Smith,” in *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 52.

Perhaps this was one of the many “strict commandments” that Joseph received in connection with his translation of the ancient record.²⁴

Oliver Cowdery helped Joseph translate a brief portion of the Book of Mormon, but soon failed in his efforts. Joseph then received another revelation for Oliver, which stated, “it is not expedient that you should translate now. Behold it was expedient when you commenced, but you feared and the time is past, that it is not expedient now: for, do you not behold that I have given unto my servant Joseph sufficient strength, whereby it is made up?”²⁵ In Manchester, Joseph had not been able to see holy things with his brown stone. Now, the Lord had bestowed on him the keys of the gift of translation and the ability to translate the sacred record with the brown stone. Moroni may have instructed Joseph to use the less powerful brown stone to further direct the inner development of Joseph’s gift of seeing. This reconstruction of the events under consideration entwines itself with theology as well as history, but the theological principles utilized in this interpretation derive from early Mormon sources. Understanding Joseph’s theology of revelation enables a reasonable explanation of his switch from the white stone to the brown. Aside from the question of the objective reality of seer stone visions, it is necessary to understand Joseph’s own understanding of his progress from seer to prophet.

²⁴ See Book of Commandments 2:3. C.f. Doctrine and Covenants 3:5. See also Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 8, quoted in *PJS*, 1:283.

²⁵ Book of Commandments 8:4; c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 9:9-12.

As he continued the translation of the Book of Mormon, Joseph received further revelations through the brown seer stone.²⁶ On 15 May 1829 Joseph received a revelation through the stone that he and Oliver Cowdery should pray concerning baptism.²⁷ They went down to the Susquehanna River and prayed. Joseph recounted that while praying, John the Baptist “descended in a cloud of light” and gave them the priesthood authority to baptize. “He said this Aaronic priesthood had not the power of laying on of hands, for the gift of the Holy Ghost, but that this should be conferred on <us> hereafter” The angel informed them “that he acted under the direction <of> Peter, James, and John, who held the keys of the priesthood of Melchisedeck, whi[c]h priesthood he said should in due time be conferred on us.” When John ascended into heaven, Joseph baptized Oliver Cowdery. Joseph later recounted, “the Holy Ghost fell upon him and he stood up and prophecied many things which should shortly come to pass.” Then Oliver baptized Joseph, who later remembered that “so soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the Spirit of Prophecy, when standing up I prophecied concerning the rise of this Church, and many other things connected with the Church and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our Salvation.”²⁸ Angelic

²⁶ Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 30.

²⁷ This is my reconstruction of the incident based on the accounts given by Joseph and his mother Lucy. Lucy remembered that the seer stone instructed Joseph and Oliver to baptize each other. Joseph remembered that he and Oliver went to the river to pray concerning baptism. For Lucy’s account, compare the manuscript and published versions in *EMD*, 1:381. For Joseph Smith’s account, see *Manuscript History of the Church*, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 16, quoted in *PJS*, 1:290.

restoration of authority and baptism caused Joseph and Oliver to experience an ecstatic state.

The influence of the Holy Ghost persisted. "Our minds being now enlightened," Joseph wrote, "we began to have the Scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us, in a manner which we never could attain to previously . . ." Joseph and Oliver had not yet, however, formally received the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. For this, they would have to wait for the restoration of the Melchizedek priesthood that the angel had promised them. This seems to have occurred within the next few weeks.²⁹

Joseph wrote that while proselytizing their new faith in Fayette, "the Lord continued to pour out upon us his Holy Spirit . . ." ³⁰ Shortly thereafter, Joseph and Oliver received the promised authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost.³¹ Prior to receiving the Melchizedek priesthood, Joseph's history records his reception of revelations through the urim and thummim. After this time, his

²⁸ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, pp. 17-18, quoted in *PJS*, 1:290-291.

²⁹ Larry C. Porter, "Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," *Ensign*, June 1979, 5-10; Gregory A. Prince, *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 6-30.

³⁰ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, pp. 18, 26, quoted in *PJS*, 1:291, 298.

³¹ Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, Book A-1, p. 27, in *PJS*, 1:299-300; Book of Commandments 15; c.f. Doctrine and Covenants 18.

history records that revelations “were given by the spirit of prophecy and revelation.”³²

Joseph wrote that during the first conference of the fledgling Church of Christ, “the Holy Ghost was poured out upon us in a miraculous manner.” He exulted in the events of the day.

To find ourselves engaged in the very same order of things, as observed by the holy Apostles of old; To realize the importance and solemnity of such proceedings, and to witness and feel with our own natural senses, the like glorious manifestations of the powers of the Priesthood; the gifts and blessings of the Holy Ghost; and the goodness and condescension of a merciful God, unto such as obey the everlasting gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ combined to create within us, sensations of rapturous gratitude, and inspire <us> with fresh zeal and energy, in the cause of truth.³³

The restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the organization of the church marked Joseph’s transition from visions through the medium of the seer stone to unaided revelation (see Figure 2). In 1866, early Mormon Zebedee Coltrin recalled that he had once asked Joseph “what he had done with the Urim and Thummi[m].” Joseph replied that “he had no further need of it He had the Melchizedick Priesthood, and with that he had the key to all knowledge and intelligence.”³⁴ Joseph later taught that all of the Old Testament prophets held the Melchizedek priesthood.³⁵

³² See, for example, *Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, A-1, p. 29*, quoted in *PJS*, 1:300.

³³ *Manuscript History of the Church, Joseph Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives, A-1, p. 42*, quoted in *PJS*, 1:308-9.

³⁴ “Record and Minute Book of the High Priests of Spanish Fork Ward opened 29th April 1866 [-1898],” 128-29, *LDS Church Archives*.

³⁵ William Clayton’s *Private Book*, quoted in Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds. *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 59.

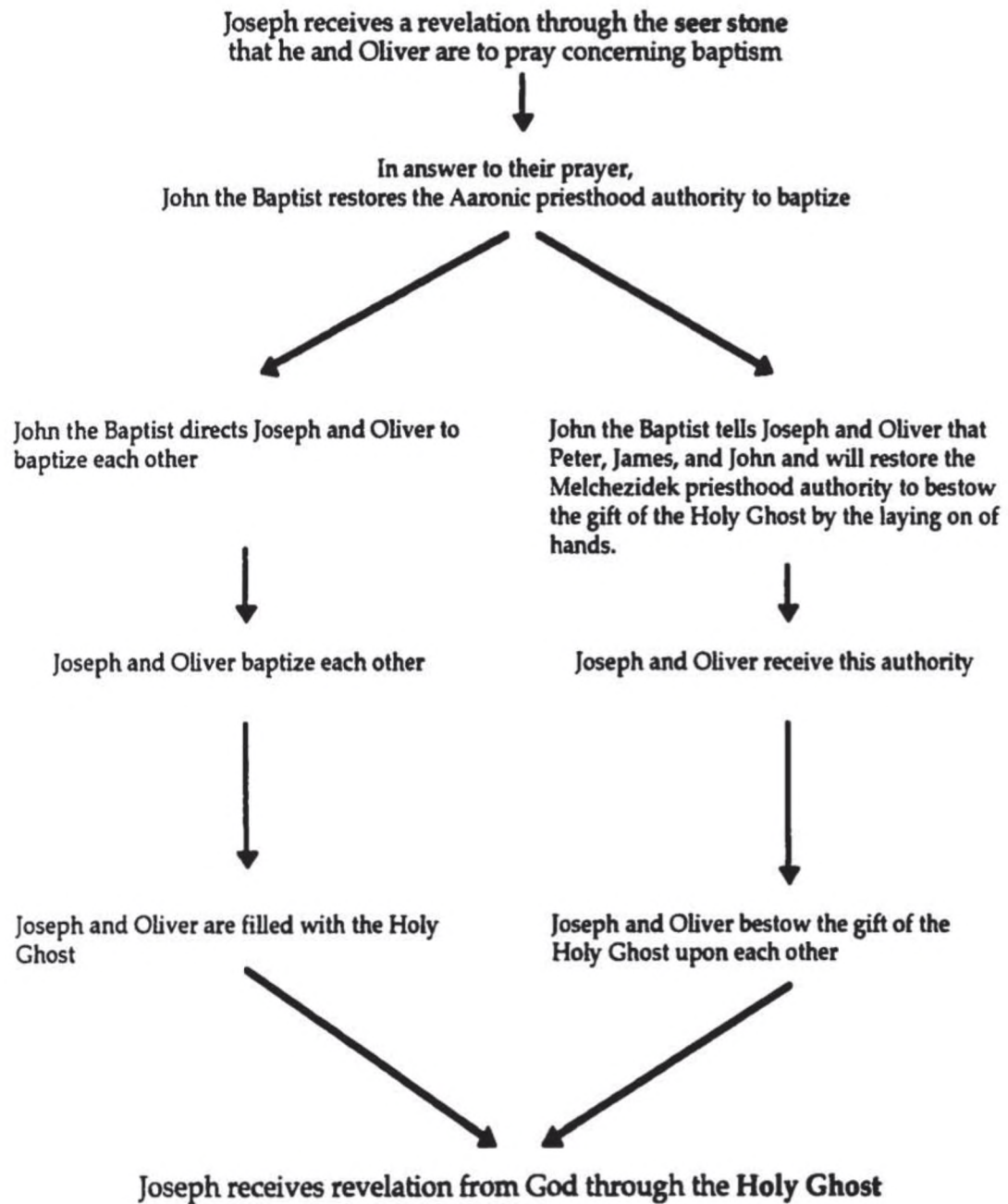


Fig. 2. Chart Tracing Joseph Smith's Transition from Seer to Prophet. Angel visitation drives the transition from revelation through the seer stone to revelation through the Holy Ghost.

Smith's interpretation of the Old Testament conformed to his divinatory development. Whereas Aaron and his successors in the High Priest's office received revelation through the Urim and Thummim, the Old Testament prophets received revelation directly from God into their minds. After John the Baptist's restoration of the Aaronic priesthood, Joseph still used the seer stone. After receiving the Melchizedek priesthood, he received direct revelation.

David Whitmer later wrote concerning Joseph's transition from seer to prophet.

After the translation of the Book of Mormon was finished, early in the spring of 1830, before April 6th, Joseph gave the [brown] stone to Oliver Cowdery and told me as well as the rest that he was through with it, and he did not use the stone any more. . . . He told us that we would all have to depend on the Holy Ghost hereafter to be guided into truth and obtain the will of the Lord. The revelations after this came through Joseph as "mouth piece;" that is, he would enquire of the Lord, pray and ask concerning a matter, and speak out the revelation, which he thought to be a revelation from the Lord³⁶

The published collections of Joseph's revelations—which appeared in the Book of Commandments in 1833 and in the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835—defined Joseph Smith's role as a revelator to his people. He developed this ability to receive unaided revelation shortly before the organization of the Church. As prophet and president of the Church, he received revelation for God's people much as the prophets of the Old Testament.

In June of 1830, Joseph began his "new translation" of the Bible. Early Mormon Lorenzo Brown later recounted Joseph saying that he began his revision

³⁶ A Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon [David Whitmer], *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, 32. See also pp. 30-36.

of the Bible with the Urim and Thummim. Brown's statement, given in 1880, contains errors that call into question its reliability.³⁷ However, it would make sense for Joseph to initially revert to using his white seer stone for a scriptural translation because he used that method to translate the Book of Mormon. Joseph would again fall back on a seer stone when he began translating the Book of Abraham.³⁸

If Joseph did begin his new translation of the Bible with the seer stone, he quickly abandoned it. Apostle Orson Pratt later recounted a discussion with Joseph Smith about the method he used to revise the Bible.

Joseph explained to him that the experience he had acquired while translating the Book of Mormon by the use of the Urim and Thummim had rendered him so well acquainted with the Spirit of Revelation and Prophecy, that in the translating of the New Testament he did not need the aid that was necessary in the 1st instance.³⁹

Likewise, the prophet's initial use of the white stone to translate the Book of Abraham was short-lived.⁴⁰ Orson Pratt, however, also stated that Joseph used a

³⁷ For the Brown account and a discussion of its reliability, see Matthews, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible*, 25.

³⁸ Jay M. Todd, *The Saga of the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1969), 220-23; Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 244.

³⁹ "Minutes of the School of the Prophets in Salt Lake City," 14 January 1871, quoted in Robert J. Matthews, "Joseph Smith—Translator," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Religious Studies Center, 1993), ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate, Jr., 84. In an 1874 sermon, "Elder Pratt said he [Pratt] . . . had been present many times when he [Smith] was translating the New Testament and wondered why he did not use the Urim and Thummim, as in translating the Book of Mormon. While this thought passed through the speaker's mind, Joseph, as if he read his thoughts, looked up and explained that the Lord gave him the Urim and Thummim when he was inexperienced in the spirit of inspiration. But now he had advanced so far that he understood the operations of that spirit, and did not need the assistance of that instrument." "Two Days Meetings at Brigham City, June 27th and 28th, 1874," *The Ogden Junction* (Ogden, Utah), 29 June 1874, p. 2, col. 2.

⁴⁰ Orson Pratt observed Joseph translating the Book of Abraham without the seer stone. See Pratt, "Personal Reminiscences and Testimony concerning the Prophet Joseph and the

seer stone to receive a revelation in November of 1830—after he had commenced his inspired revision of the Bible. As well, on a few occasions during his ministry, the prophet fell back on the seer stone.⁴¹ His roles of seer and prophet thus overlapped just as his roles of rodsman and seer had overlapped earlier in his divinatory development. Pratt, who witnessed several of Joseph's revelations, explained:

... sometimes Joseph used a seer stone when enquiring of the Lord, and receiving revelation, but that he was so thoroughly endowed with the inspiration of the Almighty and the spirit of revelation that he oftener received them without any instrument, or other means than the operation of the spirit upon his mind."⁴²

Joseph's own mind became a speculum for visions and a conduit of revelation.

With the priesthood authority to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, Joseph sketched a new pathway to prophethood for the Latter-day Saints. They needed neither rods nor stones to develop spirituality. With the gift of the Holy Ghost, they could cultivate the spirit of revelation in their personal lives. On 27 June 1839, Joseph taught:

A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the Spirit of Revelation for instance when you feel pure Inteligence flowing unto you it may give you sudden strokes of ideas that by noticing it you may find it fulfilled the same day or Soon. (I.E.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God will come to pass and thus by learning the Spirit of God. & understanding it you may grow into the principle of Revelation. until you become perfect in Christ Jesus[.]"⁴³

Church, etc.: A Sermon by Elder Orson Pratt, Delivered in the Tabernacle, Great Salt Lake City, July 10, 1859," *JD*, 7 (1860): 176.

⁴¹ Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 244-45.

⁴² "Report of Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith," *Deseret Evening News*, 23 November 1878, p. [1], col. 5.

⁴³ Willard Richards Pocket Companion, quoted in Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 5-6.

Brigham Young, Joseph's successor in the Presidency, followed this course. As one legend has it, while traveling to the Great Basin, Brigham Young instructed a water witch in his pioneer company to use his divining rod to locate artesian water.⁴⁴ Presumably Young could have developed this gift, but he did not. Young inherited Joseph's seer stones, but never used them. In 1855, he told his brethren, "I don't [k]no[w] that I have ever had a desire to have one."⁴⁵ Apostle John

⁴⁴ Winfield H. Petersen, interviewed by Robert R. Jones, Provo, Utah, February 1976, *Supernatural Non-religious Legends, Genre Collection, Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah*. Petersen heard this story in 1964 from a man named Johnston, who claimed that Brigham Young would tell his grandfather to "find us some water" when the company camped far from streams or rivers. Jarvis or Jervis Johnston may have been the grandfather of "Brother Johnston." Mel Bashore, of the Library Division of the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, informs me that "Jarvis Johnston" appears in Brigham Young's company for 1848 in a Historical Department database of pioneers and pioneer companies. However, a "Jarvis Johnson" appears in the Heber C. Kimball company for 1848 in the same database. Johnson appears in the Richards Company in the *Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* addendum for 1848. See also "Pioneers of 1848," in Kate B. Carter, comp., *Heart Throbs of the West*, vol. 9 (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1948), 494. Andrew Jenson compiled the lists in the *Journal History* many years later and used some unreliable information. The Historical Department database relies on two main sources: Jenson's *Journal History* addenda and a manuscript list of company members—perhaps an original roster—which is in an unprocessed collection in the LDS Church Archives. Bashore believes that Johnston's appearance in the Historical Department database as a member of Brigham Young's company derives from his listing in that company in the unprocessed manuscript list (telephone conversation with author, 27 April 2000). The pioneers generally followed waterways on their westward trek. However, Lorenzo Brown, a member of Young's 1848 company, recorded in his overland diary that they would "Sometimes dig for water to drink which is cool & good" (*The Journal of Lorenzo Brown: 1823–1900* (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), p. 13, col. 1. Jarvis Johnston may have witched these wells. An Artemas Johnson and a Luke S. Johnson travelled with Young in 1847 (Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846–1848* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1997], 347).

⁴⁵ Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Council." The Brigham Young exhibit at the Valentown Museum and Country Store in Fishers, New York, includes a "rod" and "seerstone" that were excavated from Young's homesite in nearby Mendon. The alleged rod appears to be nothing more than a branch. The "seerstone" is a convex-sided ovate gorget—class 2, subclass C, in the Moorehead-Peabody nomenclature and classification system (Moorehead, *Stone Ornaments Used by Indians in the United States and Canada*, 55, see also form #133 in figure 206: "Gorget, Spatulate and Tablet Forms"). For a similar gorget found in New York, see p. 203, fig. 161, no. 4. In a conversation among the author, LDS Church Archives Director Steven Sorenson, and the museum's curator Sheldon Fisher, Fisher explained that the exhibit labels are based on the photographs of divining rods and gorget seer stones in D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (see figures 10-13, 37, 86-87). Brigham Young

Taylor, who would succeed Young, acknowledged that many had “the gift of seeing through seer stones” and that although Brigham Young “had not this gift naturally . . . He was an Apostle & the Preside[n]t of the Church & kingdom of God on the Earth and all the Keys of the Holy Priesthood & of Revelation was sealed upon him & the spirit & power of Revelation was upon him daily.”⁴⁶ Every member of the Church, if worthy, could receive revelations in their personal life and within their proper ecclesiastical jurisdiction. In 1857, First Presidency Counselor Heber C. Kimball expounded this principle: “Prophets! There is not a man or woman in this congregation, if they live their religion and have the Holy Ghost upon them, but what are prophets, every one of them.”⁴⁷ To this day, Latter-day Saints are taught to develop the gift of personal revelation through the Holy Ghost and to follow the President of the Church, who receives revelation through the Holy Ghost for the church as a whole and for the entire world.

probably built his mill and home over this gorget without ever knowing it. If he ever did own the stone, he probably considered it merely an archeological curiosity and apparently did not think it worth taking with him when he moved.

⁴⁶ *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5:550.

⁴⁷ Heber C. Kimball, “Oneness of the Priesthood—Impossibility of Obliterating Mormonism—Gospel Ordinances—Depopulation of the Human Species—The Coming Famine, etc.,” *JD*, 5 (1858): p. 88, col. 1.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In Joseph's typology of divination, unaided prophecy stood as the ultimate mode of revelation. Forms of wisdom divination—such as observing order in the starry heavens—required only study, not a divine gift. Dowsing with a rod did require a gift. However, the ecstatic experience of dowsing involved only the sensation of feeling the rod move. Seeing in a stone constituted a large step up the divination ladder. Through the eye, a seer stone brought visions to the mind of the seer. Still, a physical aid was required. When Joseph outgrew the stone, he had attained the powers of the biblical prophets. His progression from rodsman to seer to prophet constitutes a succession through modes of divination.

The process sketched above shows how Joseph's role as a prophet was deeply rooted in his previous role as a seer. He developed the gift of seeing over the entire decade of the 1820s. As shown, Joseph began scrying by looking into the seer stone of Sally Chase. Using Sally's stone he found one for himself. With his brown stone, Joseph located a white stone that expanded his powers of seership. With this stone he found the Urim and Thummim spectacles, which dramatically improved his supernatural vision and oriented him further toward the role of a prophet. Using the spectacles, he developed the gift of seeing to the point that he no longer needed them. He was able to finish translating the Book of Mormon and receive the first revelations through his seer stones. By the time

he finished translating, he had developed his abilities to the point that he no longer needed any assistive media to receive revelation. Historian Dan Vogel asserts that “Smith’s failure as a treasure seer leads us to a greater understanding of his success as a religious leader.”¹ This observation may be true, but Smith’s *triumphs* as a *village* seer provide an even greater understanding of his success as a prophet.

Joseph not only advanced through a series of roles, but increasingly expanded those roles from within. He began dowsing for water, but soon used his rod to find buried treasure and then stray animals. He began using his seer stone to locate treasure and perhaps stolen livestock, and then expanded this role to include the discovery of missing property and prophecies of the future. Then he further expanded this role to include translation of ancient scripture and revelations of direction from God. As a prophet and leader, Joseph greatly expanded the normal realm that his society allowed for religious specialists. Unlike Alexander Campbell and the other restorationists of his day, Joseph moved beyond the reestablishment of New Testament Christianity to “the restoration of *all things*”—including Old Testament elements of patriarchy, polygyny, the declaration of Israelite lineage, a divinely sanctioned kingdom, a temple with ancient ritual, and a prophet.²

Mormonism burst through the boundaries of organized religion’s acceptable ecclesiastical sphere to include political, economical, familial, and

¹ Vogel, “The Locations of Joseph Smith’s Early Treasure Quests,” 231.

² *EM*, s.v. “Mormonism, an Independent Interpretation.” Jan Shipps authored this entry.

social innovations. Joseph reached across the highly compartmentalized components of western civilization and culture—claiming authority over matters of church and state, kinship structure, and social order. In Brigham Young's estimation, "Joseph continued to receive revelation upon revelation, ordinance upon ordinance, truth upon truth, until he obtained all that was necessary for the salvation of the human family."³

As Joseph moved through successive stages of divination, he also expanded his sphere of influence. He began as a rodsman dowsing in and around the village of Palmyra. Historians (including myself) have termed him a "village seer," but the spatial scope of his work in the seer's role, which took him as far afield as the Great Bend area of Pennsylvania, more appropriately denominates him a *regional seer*. Finally, he became "the American Prophet." Today, the international Church stands as a legacy to the mature stage of his spiritual development.

As he followed his pathway to prophethood, Joseph also distinguished himself from contemporary diviners. Rodney Stark, in his sociological study of prophets, notes that "the earliest revelations reported by a 'prophet' tend to be substantially more conventional than do their later ones."⁴ With Joseph Smith, this observation applies not only to content but to mode. Water witches abounded in the early republic. In contrast, seers were considered religious

³ "Discourse Delivered in the Tabernacle, Ogden, Sunday Afternoon, May 18, 1873," *JD*, 16 (1874): p. 42, col. 2- p. 43, col. 1.

⁴ Stark, "A Theory of Revelations," 303.

specialists. Prophets who modeled themselves after the Old Testament figures who filled that role appeared even more rarely on the American landscape.

Unable to cover Joseph's entire life, I have focused on the early stages of his spiritual development. A balanced picture, however, would require an emphasis on his role as a prophet. From 1830 to 1844 Joseph filled this role. He claimed to restore the principles and ordinances of the gospel in their primitive purity and ancient order—untarnished by creed or tradition. Like Moses, he led the children of Israel. Like Peter, he presided over the church. As Richard Bushman notes, Joseph was *living* the Bible.⁵

Joseph abandoned divining rods for seer stones and then abandoned seer stones for direct revelation. Nevertheless, he considered all three modes of divination valid methods for gaining direction from God. In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Lehi and his family traveled through the desert following the rod-like spindles of a supernatural compass they called a "director."⁶ Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery Johnson—sister of David Whitmer, wife of Oliver Cowdery, and eyewitness of the Book of Mormon translation—termed the brown seer stone a "director."⁷ The Book of Mormon prophet Alma used the word "directors" to describe the spectacles.⁸ In an 1833 letter, the prophet Joseph

⁵ Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 183–88.

⁶ 1 Nephi 16:16, 30; Alma 37:38, 45.

⁷ Lancaster, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 103.

⁸ The word has been changed to "interpreters" in the current Book of Mormon, but in the 1830 edition read "directors." *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, trans. Joseph Smith Junior and Oliver Cowdery (Palmyra: Printed by E. B. Grandin, for the Author, 1830), 328; c.f. Alma 37:24 in twentieth-century editions.

referred to himself as an “unerring director” sent from the Lord.⁹ Finally, in a revelation that Joseph had received in 1828 through the seer stone, God referred to himself as Joseph’s “director”—identifying himself as the source of all divine direction regardless of the divinatory method by which that direction had been received.¹⁰

In her biography of Joseph Smith, Fawn Brodie wrote that he “reconstructed his past as . . . a succession of miracles and revelations, and in no sense an evolution.”¹¹ Actually, while Joseph did view his past as a succession of visitations from gods and angels, he considered it a cumulative series of events—an evolution of sorts. In a letter penned in 1842, Joseph blazed through some of these past hierophanies. He mentioned the “glad tidings” of Moroni; hearing the voice of the Lord and the voice of Michael; seeing Peter, James, and John; and visits from Gabriel and Raphael; “all declaring their dispensation, their rights, their keys . . . giving line upon line, precept upon precept . . .”¹² Joseph saw his past as an evolution of the supernatural variety.

These supernatural irruptions formed one half of his divinatory history. His gradual progression from rodsman to seer to prophet formed the other half. Because Joseph believed in the efficacy of rods and stones, his successive use of

⁹ Joseph Smith, Kirtland, Ohio, to Vienna Jaques, Independence, Missouri, 4 September 1833, quoted in *HC*, 1:408.

¹⁰ Book of Commandments 2:5. C.f. Doctrine and Covenants 3:15.

¹¹ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 275.

¹² Doctrine and Covenants 128:20-21.

them also constituted a supernatural evolution. His spiritual development consisted of overlapping histories of ascensional and descensional divination.

These histories not only overlapped, but intertwined. The First Vision probably provoked and prepared Joseph Smith to find and use a seer stone. The angel Moroni instructed Joseph to look into a seer stone to discover the location of the Urim and Thummim spectacles. Up to this point, Joseph developed his abilities by obtaining superior divinatory media. After this point, Joseph reversed this process in order to gradually wean himself of the need for assistive instruments. Moroni's retrieval of the superior spectacles was followed with the Lords' bestowal of the keys of the gift of translating, which enabled Joseph to make up for the loss of the spectacles by developing his gift. A revelation in the seer stone instructed Joseph and Oliver to pray concerning baptism, leading to the bestowal of priesthood keys by John the Baptist. Descensional irruptions provided impetus and direction to Joseph's gradual course toward prophethood.

The increase in Joseph's abilities of ascensional divination was matched by a decrease in his experiences with descensional divination. Joseph's divinatory ascent began with learning to dowse from his father. Later, he used a seer stone. Finally, he received unaided revelations. Joseph's history of descensional divination began when he saw God, the Father. Moments later, he saw the resurrected Christ. Then, he received God's word from heavenly messengers: Moroni and Nephi, John the Baptist, and Peter, James, and John. Finally, he received God's word without the need of an accompanying visionary

experience.¹³ Joseph's upward reach and God's downward reach met in the burst of revelations that accompanied and followed the organization of the Church and Joseph's calling to lead God's people as their prophet.

Joseph never denied his use of seer stones or repudiated their efficacy, but he did not speak of them publicly. Why did Joseph recount only the descensional half of his history? One reason is that he did not want his past to be misunderstood in a way that would hurt the church. Bushman writes:

Conventional Christianity was fighting to protect itself from the Enlightenment critics' charges of superstition, and, to prove their rationality, Christian apologists vented their anger on the remnants of magic carried down from an earlier time when magic and religion mingled. Joseph did not want to make himself a target for attacks that would cripple the work.¹⁴

Another reason that Joseph neglected to write of his ascensional divination with rods and stones was simply that it held less meaning for him when compared to his experiences with descensional divination.¹⁵ Speaking face to face with God, the Father, prepared Joseph to be a prophet more than locating a well site. Joseph's First Vision of the risen Christ made a larger impression on him than his first vision of his first seer stone. His discussions with the angel Moroni concerning the plates and the spectacles stood out in his memory more than when he used his white stone to see their location. With maturity, the Book of Mormon eventually eclipsed the spectacles in importance.

¹³ Richard Lyman Bushman outlines Joseph's development from visionary to prophet in "The Visionary World of Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 37, no. 1 (1997-98): 193-97.

¹⁴ Bushman, "Joseph Smith as Translator," 79.

¹⁵ This reason has been given by Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," 560n202.

The thesis that Joseph Smith progressed from rodsman to seer to prophet does not depend on the view one takes of him. Those who accept him as conduit for God's word will see his development in terms of providence and divine revelation. Those who accept Joseph as a deluded but sincere religious leader will see his development in terms of a progression that made sense to him within his culture and personal belief system. Those who consider Joseph a fraud—whether pious or conniving—will see his progression as a series of logical moves in a hidden agenda. And, finally, that class of evangelistic Christians who prefer to view Mormonism as a Satanic dispensation may view Joseph's divinatory development as an objective reality by substituting Satan for God as the dispenser of Joseph's gifts. Regardless of one's viewpoint, the central thesis holds.

Joseph would continued to grow in prophetic power. He claimed that on 3 April 1836, in connection with the dedication of the Kirtland temple, the prophet Elijah appeared and gave Joseph special "keys" by which he could "ask the Lord and receive an answer."¹⁶ With the ability to receive revelation at any time, Joseph had perfected prophecy. Toward the end of his life, he would progress through another series of roles. In July of 1843 he announced, "I will advance from prophet to priest & then to King."¹⁷ Two months later, Joseph was anointed

¹⁶ HC, 4:404; Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 53-54n19.

¹⁷ See the accounts of this statement given in Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 233-34. See also Melodie Moench Charles, "Joseph Smith: Prophet, Priest, and King," *Task Papers in LDS History*, no. 25 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Historical Department, History Division, 1978).

a priest.¹⁸ In April of 1844 he was anointed a king.¹⁹ Joseph's fifteen-year career as a prophet can be seen as nested between these two triads: rodsman, seer, and prophet; and prophet, priest, and king. The culminating role of Joseph's first progression became the jumping-off point for another. When Joseph was anointed King in the Council of Fifty, he was actually anointed "Prophet, Priest, and King."²⁰ The roles represented *levels* as much or more than stages. Similarly, Joseph stood as rodsman, seer, and prophet.

¹⁸ This occurred on 28 September 1843. *An American Prophet's Record*, ed. Faulring, 416; David John Buerger, "The Fulness of the Priesthood: The Second Anointing in Latter-day Saint Theology and Practice," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 1 (spring 1983): 21-22. On 10 March 1844, Franklin D. Richards recorded a sermon delivered by "Joseph the Priest" (Ehat and Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith*, 334 [emphasis in original]).

¹⁹ This occurred on 11 April 1844 (D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844-1945," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 2 [winter 1980]: 186).

²⁰ Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844-1945," 186.

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