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VOLUME 7, ARTICLE 3 doi:10.5508/jhs.2007.v7.a3

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

LISBETH S. FRIED
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

1.0 INTRODUCTION

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

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

The absence of the *urim* and *thummim* from the second temple is supported by this statement in Ezra/Nehemiah: Ezra 2:61-63 (Neh.7:63-65):

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

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*This paper is a revised version of a paper read for the Ezra-Nehemiah-Chronicles section of SBL 2005. It has benefited immensely from the comments of C. Batsch, H. Eshel, C. Fletcher-Louis, V. (A.) Hurowitz, L. H. Schiffman, H. G. M. Williamson, and anonymous reviewers on an earlier draft.*
tified food [lit. food of the “holy of holies”] until a priest appears to administer the urim and thummim.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Gray is likely correct when she says that Josephus refers to the priest Abiathar as “the prophet” (Ant. 6:271; Gray, Prophetic Figures, 18, p. 359-60). Josephus deliberately introduces prophetic terminology into these accounts. There is nothing in the biblical narrative either in the MT or the LXX requiring this interpretation. Moreover, al-
high priest used his urim and thummim to inquire of God. He states, for example (Ant. 4:311), that “Moses taught them … how they should go forth to war, making use of the stones [of the high priest's breastplate] for their direction.” Josephus' alleges (Ant. 13:282-83), for example, that Hyrcanus heard a voice from above which revealed that his sons had just defeated Antiochus in battle:

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

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

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

2.0 THE URIM AND THUMMIM IN THE BIBLICAL CORPUS

Before examining extra-biblical second temple texts, it is worthwhile to look at the biblical corpus. According to the biblical text, the urim and thummim were attached to the high priest’s breastplate which hung from his ephod-apron by gemstone buttons on his shoulders (Exodus 28:28-30; Lev. 8:8). With the urim and thummim attached, the breastplate becomes the breastplate of judgment, שׁוַעְדוֹן, and the entire ephod becomes a method for accessing the divine will, a method of prophecy though the MT reports that Doeg slew the priests at Nob “who wore the linen ephod,” plus their wives and children (1 Samuel 22:18), Josephus reports that he killed “three hundred priests and prophets” Ιερέας καὶ προφήταις. It seems likely that to Josephus, the priests who wore the ephod were those prophets. See Gray, Prophetic Figures, 173, n. 44, for a discussion of these issues.

3 For the applicability of hypothesis testing in historical studies see L.S. Fried, “Historians Can Use the Scientific Method,” Transuphratène 31 (2006): 125-27.
SECOND TEMPLE HIGH PRIESTS POSSESS THE ŪRIM AND THUMMIM

These biblical sections are customarily assigned to P, which is usually considered second temple.

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

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

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

Hosea 3:4 (MT):

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

Whereas Hosea 3:4 (LXX) reads:

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

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

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5 Emending “sons of Israel,” to the orthographically similar "םשבה (correo אWithContextualizador של ישראל) קָשָׂר בְּאַתֶּנֵו רְבָכָה (בְּאַתֶּנֵו רְבָכָה) נַשְּׁמַה (בְּאַתֶּנֵו רְבָכָה) יָשָׂר אֶל (בְּאַתֶּנֵו רְבָכָה)

6 Rofé, “No Ephod or Teraphim,” p. 145.
that Israel will no longer have her idols; rather that she will no longer have a correct way of interacting with God.

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

2 Chronicles 15:3 (MT and LXX):

καὶ ἡμέρα πολλαὶ τῷ Ἰσραήλ ἐν οὐ θεῶ ἀληθινῷ καὶ οὐχ ἰερέως ὑποδεικνύοντος καὶ ἐν οὐ νόμῳ

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

Josephus Ant. 8:296:

καὶ γενόστηθαι χρόνον ἐκείνον ἐν ὧ μηδείς ἀληθῆς εὐφημηται προφήτης ἐν τῷ ὑπερέῳ ὄχλῳ οὐδὲ ἰερέως τὰ δίκαια χρωματίζων

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

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

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

ענתו את הארמים ואה תמים ונוגתה על תמים הממשת את הארמים

את תמים: ויהי על לבל אくる בצא לפליה: ושת אתא את

משמה בכנ ישראל על לבל הוה תɦיד

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

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

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

'ונייש את האורים ואת התמימות כ벌ש צד יוהו ואת משש

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

Either the Samaritan Pentateuch fills in a perceived gap,8 or it preserves an earlier version, a version which was “sanitized” in the MT. The originality of the Samaritan Pentateuch is supported, however, by 4Q17 (4QExod-Lev).7

'ונייש את האורים ואת התמימות כ벌ש צד יוהו ואת משש

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

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

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

3.0 The Urim and Thummim in Extra-Biblical Second Temple Texts

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

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


10 The command to make the urim and thummim and the statement that Moses made them is also present in Pseudo-Philo (LAB 11:15 and 12:1, respectively). Daniel J. Harrington concludes that LAB witnesses to an early Palestinian text type similar to the Samaritan or proto-Lucianic text and similar to the one used by Josephus (D. J. Harrington, “The Biblical Text of Pseudo-Philo’s Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum,” CBQ 33 [1971]:1-17).
this should be visible in extra-biblical second temple texts. This third section of the paper will examine second temple extra-biblical texts composed prior to the death of John Hyrcanus which refer to the garments or abilities of the high priest.

3.1 Hecataeus of Abdera

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

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

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

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

Bar Kochva points out that Hecataeus, writing under Ptolemy I, would not on his own advocate a society without kings whose sole authority was placed in the hands of a high priest. It must be con-
cluded, therefore, that the information that Hecataeus reports concerning the high priest reliably reflects the attitudes of his Jewish informants.

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

3.2 Jesus Ben Sirach

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

He [God] exalted Aaron, a holy man like Moses who was his brother, of the tribe of Levi. He made an everlasting covenant with him, and gave him the priesthood of the people. He blessed him with stateliness, and put on him a robe of Glory (ΔΉΕ΍ΗΘΓΏχΑ), 8 He clothed him in perfect splendor, and strengthened him with the symbols of authority, the linen undergarments, the long robe, and the ephod (πΔΝΐϟΈ΅). 9 And he encircled him with pomegranates, with many golden bells all around, to send forth a sound as he walked, to make their ringing heard in the temple as a reminder to his people; with the sacred garment (στόλι) of gold and violet and purple, the work of an embroiderer; with the oracle of judgment, the work of an artisan; with precious stones engraved like seals, in a setting of gold, the work of a jeweler, to commemorate in engraved letters each of the tribes of Israel; with a gold crown upon his turban, inscribed like a seal with “holiness,” a distinction to be

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

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

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

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

17 Three texts testify to the crucial verse 45.10 - the LXX, MS B from the Geniza, and the Old Latin. The entire passage is present in all three texts, but unfortunately 45:10c of MS B has become corrupt. Table 1 presents a comparison of 45:10c in the three versions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geniza ms B</th>
<th>LXX BS Exod. 28:30</th>
<th>LXX Exod. 28:30</th>
<th>MT Exod. 28:30</th>
<th>Vulgate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>מַשְׁפַּט</td>
<td>λογεῖον κρίσεως</td>
<td>τὸ λογεῖον τῆς κρίσεως</td>
<td>ἀνίψιν</td>
<td>Viri sapientis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אָבוֹר</td>
<td>δήλοις ἀληθείας</td>
<td>ἡν δήλοιν καὶ τὴν ἀληθείαν</td>
<td>ἁρδήταιμος</td>
<td>iudicio veritate praediti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1
Jesus Son of Sirach 45:10c compared

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

18 As Table 2 shows, the three extant witnesses agree on this verse (BS 45:13).
Ben Sirach maintains, moreover, that “for the sensible person the law is as dependable as the urim” (BS 33:3).

\[\text{άνθρωπος συνετός ἐμπιστεύεται νόμῳ καὶ ὁ νόμος αὐτῷ πιστὸς ὡς ἐρώτημα δήλων} (BS 33:3)\]

The sensible person will trust in the law; for him the law is as dependable as inquiring of the urim.\(^{19}\)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MS B</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Vulgate</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[לָעֶשֶׁה]</td>
<td>πρὸ αὐτοῦ οὗ γέγονεν τοιαυτα</td>
<td>ante ipsum non fuerunt talia</td>
<td>Before him such beautiful things did not exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[לָעֶשֶׁה]</td>
<td>έκς αἰώνος οὐκ ενεδύσατο αλλογενής</td>
<td>usque ad originem non induitus est illa alienigena alquis</td>
<td>No outsider ever put them on,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אֲמֹן...לבני בו</td>
<td>πλήν τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ μόνον</td>
<td>sed tantum filii ipsius soli</td>
<td>but only his sons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>זָק בָּנִי</td>
<td>καὶ τὰ ἐγγονα αὐτοῦ</td>
<td>et nepotes eius</td>
<td>and his descendants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חָדוֹתָם</td>
<td>διὰ παντός</td>
<td>per omne tempus</td>
<td>eternally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

*Jesus Son of Sirach 45:13 compared*

\(^{19}\) Unfortunately, this verse is missing or broken in the extant Hebrew manuscripts.
The praise of Simon in Chapter 50 echoes the description of Aaron in Chapter 45. Aaron is described as clothed in “perfect splendor” (45:8; συντέλειαν καυχήματος) and Simon is described as clothed in “perfect splendor” (50:11; συντέλειαν καυχήματος). This perfect splendor includes the *urim* and *thummim* (45:10), which converts Simon’s robe into a robe of glory (50:11). This “robe of glory” is both the glory of wisdom (6:29, 6:31) and the glory of God, the Kabod, which fills the sanctuary (MS B; 36:13; ET 36:19).  

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

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

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

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

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

22 Unfortunately, this passage does not appear in any of the extant Hebrew manuscripts.
The role of wisdom and the high priest is thus the same— to "enlighten" Israel. Batsch suggests that the word “to enlighten” here may refer to the shining oracle of the urim.25

O. Mulder writes:

In his use of symbolism in the praise of wisdom (24:13-17) and in his description of Simon’s radiance (50:5-10), [Ben Sirach] identifies Simon with wisdom created from the beginning to minister in the presence of YHWH in the holy tabernacle, to be established on Zion and to wield authority in the temple of Jerusalem.26

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

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

3.3 Aramaic Testament of Levi

The role of the priestly vestments in transforming an ordinary man into a messenger of God’s word is paramount in the Testament of Levi. Aramaic fragments of the Testament of Levi (hereafter called Aramaic Levi Document, or ALD) have been found at Qumran and in the Cairo Geniza.27 The Aramaic documents are fragmentary, and a complete text does not exist. Qumran fragments overlap and confirm the fragments from the Geniza (Cambridge Col. A =1Q21 Frag 3; Bodleian Col. A =4Q213b; Bodleian Col. C=4Q214b; Bodleian Col. D = 4Q214; Cam-

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


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

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

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

[You] my Lord, have blessed my father Abram and my mother Sarah, and you have said to give them a just offspring which will be blessed forever. Listen then to the prayer of your servant Levi, to be near to you. Let him share in your words to pass just judgment for all the centuries, me and my sons for all eternal generations. And do not remove the son of your servant from before you all the days of eternity.” And I became silent, when I was still praying… Then I went to …to my father Jacob and wh[en] … from Abel-Mayin. Then … I lay down and settled up[on] …. (Vacat)

Then I saw visions … in the appearance of this vision I saw the heaven opened, and I saw a mountain underneath me, high reaching up to heaven … to me the gates of heaven and an angel said to me, Levi, Enter.30

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

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

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

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

According to the Greek T. Levi, after killing Shechem and Hamor and destroying the city, Levi and his brothers take their sister to Bethel, where Levi has a second vision. In that vision, seven men dressed in white present Levi with the accoutrements of the priesthood. I saw seven men in white clothing, who were saying to me, “Arise, put on the robe of the priesthood, the crown of righteousness, the oracle of understanding, the robe of truth, the breastplate of faith, the turban of the sign of the tetragrammaton, and the ephod of prophecy.” Each carried one of these and put them on me and said, “From now on be a priest of the Lord, you and your posterity forever” (Greek T. Levi 8:1-4).

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

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

An Aramaic fragment is as follows:

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

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

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

This ending exists among the fragments:

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

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

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

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

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32 This is according to the reconstruction of Drawnel, An Aramaic Wisdom Text, pp. 112-18. Most scholars translate †N as “also this one” (also this vision), implying that there was a previous vision. Kugler translates it “this very thing,” due to his contention that there was only one vision. Kugler (From Patriarch to Priest, p. 78) is alone in arguing that the Greek T. Levi has split a single vision in the Aramaic document into two dream-visions, one before the Shechem incident at Abel-Mayin and one after at Bethel.
know how they make him greater than all, but presumably it is by ordaining him as priest, an ordination that would necessarily have included being robed in the priestly vestments. Receiving new priestly attire is a normal part of priestly ordination in the biblical corpus (Exod. 28:1-2; Zech. 3:4, 5; cf. ALD Bodleian A: 6), so it very likely was part of the second dream-vision as well. Greenfield et. al. suggest that the material lost from the second vision describes Levi’s priestly consecration and investiture similar to that described in Greek T. Levi 8:2-17. Himmelfarb agrees, suggesting that since the list of garments in T. Levi 8:2 is taken from Exodus 28, the priestly interests of the writer of the ALD imply that it would have appeared there as well. In view of the great amount of agreement between the Aramaic fragments and the Greek T. Levi, we may conclude that this passage existed in a fragment now lost to us.

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

3.4 Letter of Aristeas

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

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

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34 J. Greenfield et. al., *Aramaic Levi Document*, 16.
35 M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 128, n. 34
37 M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 37, 129, n.36.
and make a very special sound. Alongside each of them are tassels adorned with flowers all of marvelous colors. He was clad in an outstandingly magnificent girdle, woven in the most beautiful colors. On his breast he wears what is called the “oracle” (Αύγιον), to which are attached twelve stones of different kinds, set in gold, giving the names of the patriarchs in what was the original order, each stone flashing its own natural distinctive color – quite indescribable. Upon his head he has what is called the tiara, and upon this the inimitable miter, the hallowed diadem having in relief on the front in the middle in holy letters on a golden leaf the name of God, ineffable in glory. The wearer is considered worthy of such vestments at the services. Their appearance makes one awe-struck and dumbfounded. (Letter of Aristeas #96-99).

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

There you have, Philocrates, as I promised, my narrative (diēgēsis). These matters I think delight you more (terpein) than the books of the mythographers (ta tòn mythologiaìn biblia).\(^\text{40}\)

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

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 65-91.

\(^{40}\) Translation is that of S. Honigman, ibid., 33, 66.

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

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

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

3. […]acceptable [offering]s […] all th[eir] works 4. […] for the sacrifices of the holy ones […] the aroma of their offerings […]

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

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

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

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43 The plural “ephodim” and the phrase “chiefs” of those dressed for ser-
garments are those of the Kavod of the Glory of God. Although the urim and thummim are not specifically mentioned in this fragmentary text, when the high priest puts on the priestly garments he puts on the Kavod of God himself. This high priest is the contemporary high priest, the one participating in the temple liturgy on the Sabbath day.

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

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

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

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

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

44 Ibid., 394.
45 J. Allegro, DJD 5 1968:27-8, Pl. IX.
46 C. Batsch, La Guerre et les Rites de Guerre, 328; C. Fletcher-Louis, All the Glory of Adam, 229; C. Van Dam, The Urin and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 18. The reference to the twelve is likely triggered by the mention of the city’s gates in Isaiah 54:12, of which there were 12. Ten gates are enumerated in Nehemiah 3, but then two other ones – the Gate of Ephraim and the Gate of the Guard – appear in Neh. 8:16 and 12:39, respectively, making twelve. Twelve gates to the city, one for each tribe, are mentioned, of course, in Ezekiel 48 and in Revelation 21. According to Baumgarten’s reconstruction the twelve refer not to the 12 stones of the breastplate, but to twelve chief priests (Joseph M. Baumgarten, “The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran, Revelation, and the Sanhedrin,” JBL 45 (1976) 59-76). That is also the reconstruction accepted by J. Allegro, J. Allegro, “Moses-Pseudepigrapha at Qumran: 4Q375, 4Q376, and Similar Works,” in: Lawrence H. Schiffman, Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Sheffield, JSOTsupp 8, 1990) 221-256, esp. 238.
[…before the anointed priest, upon whose head has been poured the oil of anointment, […] and before the deput[y]y of the anointed priest […] a young bull]lock from the herd and a ram […] for the urim …[the stone when…] … they will provide you with light and he will go out with flashes of fire; the stone of the left side which is at its left side will shine to the eyes of all the assembly until the priest finishes speaking. And after […] has been removed […] and you shall keep and do all that he (i.e., the priest) tells you … in accordance with all this judgment (of the urim and the thummim).

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

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

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

48 Suggested by J. Strugnell, ibid, 244.
49 C. Batsch, La Guerre et les Rites de Guerre, 330, suggests that the author of this song considers all fourteen stones, the twelve of the breastplate and the two on the shoulders as comprising the urim and the thummim. In any case, the oracle manifests itself by shining (C. Batsch, ibid.; C. Fletcher-Louis All the Glory of Adam, 223-4; C. Van Dam, The Urin and Thummin, 17).
And if he [the king] goes out to war … he is not to go out until he [the king] has come before the high priest and he has enquired for him by means of the judgment of the urim and the thummim. On his orders he shall go out and on his orders he shall come in. He and all the people of Israel who are with him shall not go out on the counsel of his own heart unless he has enquired by means of the judgment of the urim and thummim. He will succeed in all his ways which are taken according to the judgment which ….

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

3.7 1 Maccabees

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

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

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

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

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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