

Ex. 28:30

Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim [אֶת־הָאֲוִרִים וְאֶת־הַתּוּמִּיִּם], so that they are over Aaron's heart when he comes before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall carry the instrument of decision for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD at all times.

Ex. 28:15 You shall make a breastpiece of decision,<sup>c</sup> worked into a design; make it in the style of the ephod: make it of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. 16 It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width. 17 Set in it mounted stones, in four rows of stones. The first row shall be a row of <sup>d</sup>carnelian, chrysolite, and emerald; 18 the second row: a turquoise, a sapphire, and an amethyst; 19 the third row: a jacinth, an agate, and a crystal; 20 and the fourth row: a beryl, a lapis lazuli, and a jasper. They shall be framed with gold in their mountings. 21 The stones shall correspond [in number] to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, corresponding to their names. They shall be engraved like seals, each with its name, for the twelve tribes.

Victor Hurowitz, "True Light on the Urim and Thummim," JQR 88 (1998): 263-274

The best attested means of communicating with God was prophecy. YHWH could contact his people by sending a prophet, and the nation or its leaders could inquire of him through the same agency. God could communicate with individuals through dreams, and people could, so it seems, incubate dreams and thereby merit divine revelations. But there were also other means of contacting God to receive his guidance. Although reviled by prophets and legislators, various forms of divination called *qesem* and *nahas'* were practiced by professionals and lay-people, and even such well-known non-Israelite practices as liver divination and necromancy were employed. But the only form of divination through physical means expressly sanctioned by various biblical authors was the Urim and Thummim.... although all readers of the Bible are familiar with the Urim and Thummim, no one really knows what they were.

1Sam. 14:36 Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder among them until the light of morning; and let us not leave a single survivor among them." "Do whatever you please," they replied. But the priest said, "Let us approach God here." 37 So Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hands of Israel?" But this time He did not respond to him. 38 Then Saul said, "Come forward, all chief officers of the troops, and find out how this guilt was incurred today. 39 For as the LORD lives who brings victory to Israel, even if it was through my son Jonathan, he shall be put to death!" Not one soldier answered him. 40 And he said to all the Israelites, "You stand on one side, and my son Jonathan and I shall stand on the other." The troops said to Saul, "Do as you please." 41 Saul then said to the LORD, the God of Israel, "**Show Thammim.**" Jonathan and Saul were indicated by lot, and the troops were cleared. 42 And Saul said, "Cast the lots between my son and me"; and Jonathan was indicated.

v. 41, NRSV Then Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant today? **If this guilt is in me or in my son Jonathan, O LORD God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.**"

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Cornelis van Dam [per Hurowitz review]

The Urim and Thummim was a physical means of inquiring of God, and was stored within the Ephod and operated by the High Priest. Contrary to the majority opinion, van Dam claims that the term is a hendiadys designating a single object and not two or more items. He suggests that the name probably means "Perfect Lights." He asserts that the Urim and Thummim was associated intimately with prophecy, and that its operation probably involved some sort of emission or refraction of light.

Victor Hurowitz and Wayne Horowitz: LKA 137, a psephomancy ritual from Assur

OED: **psephomancy, n.** Divination by drawing a number of small stones from a heap or vessel, the stones being previously marked with symbols which may be interpreted by the diviner.

Irving L. Finkel [per Hurowitz review]

“[I]t hardly needs to be stated that LKA 137 can have nothing to do with either Urim or Thummim, and that the persistent association of this cuneiform text with the Biblical devices is much to be regretted.”

But:

- (a) Both practices are divinatory actions performed in the presence of deities;
- (b) Both processes are described by the verb *sa'al* (ask, inquire), and the Hebrew *mishpat* (judgment) associated with the Urim and the *hoshen* is parallel to the verb *danu* (to judge) and noun *dinu* (judgement) used in the Assyrian text;
- (c) Both LKA 137 and the Urim and Thummim display strong binary characteristics;
- (d) [they disagree on whether both can provide an inconclusive result];
- (e) Both are associated with the ritualist's garment;
- (f) The questions posed in both rituals are formulated in a similar manner;
- (g) The words Urim and Thummim are semantically related to the Akkadian designations of alabaster and haemetite, *gishnugallu* (great lamp) and *aban kitti* (truth stone).

- Urim and Thummim (two stones + 3 x 4 rows of inscribed stones of *hoshen*)
- LKA 137 (black and white stones + seven blocks with divine names/pictures)
- Game of Princes (astragali + 3 x 4 rows of inscribed boxes) [Botteró and Weidner]

Dice or lots may be manipulated in conjunction with a game board, but may also be cast or drawn alone. Accordingly, it is quite possible that the Urim and Thummim could be used either by themselves, or together with the twelve stones of the breastplate, following the rules which would have been known to the Priest (but which we have no way of knowing).

Ezra 2:63 [= Neh. 7:65]

The Tirshatha ordered them not to eat of the most holy things until a priest with Urim and Thummim should appear.

[Likely suggestion:] the complicated rules governing the use of Urim and Thummim were lost during the Exile. In other words, Urim and Thummim were operated also by rules known only to a select few.

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