

Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore

John A. Tvedtnes

Abstract: One of the great miracles of the Book of Mormon occurred when the brother of Jared asked the Lord to touch some clear stones so they would provide light inside the barges that would take his people across the ocean to the New World. To some modern readers, the story seems implausible. This article surveys a number of ancient and medieval accounts of glowing stones, including some said to have been used in Noah's ark and the "fish" the Lord prepared to swallow Jonah. The parallels to the Jaredite story are remarkable and suggest an ancient milieu for the book of Ether.

Of all the miracles reported in the Book of Mormon, perhaps none has met with as much skepticism as the story of the glowing stones that provided light inside the Jaredite barges. After following the Lord's instructions to construct submarine-like barges, the brother of Jared, worried that they would travel across the great ocean in darkness, "did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass" (Ether 3:1). He brought these before the Lord and pleaded, "touch these stones, O Lord, with thy finger, and prepare them that they may shine forth in darkness; and they shall shine forth unto us in the vessels which we have prepared, that we may have light while we shall cross the sea" (Ether 3:4).

In this essay, I shall review ancient and medieval literature containing reports of glowing stones. This survey will demonstrate that the marvelous nature of such stones was widespread in earlier

times and that traditions about glowing stones are known from Jewish and other Near Eastern sources.

Hugh Nibley has called attention to accounts from Jewish tradition of similar arrangements that were made for the ark of Noah,¹ to which the Jaredite vessels are compared in Ether 6:7. Several early Jewish sources indicate that God told Noah to suspend precious stones or pearls inside the ark to lighten it; in some traditions, it is a jewel-encrusted heavenly book.² The gem would glow during the night and grow dim during the day so Noah, shut up in the ark, could tell the time of day and how many days had passed.³ This was the explanation given by the rabbis for the

¹ Hugh W. Nibley, "There Were Jaredites: The Shining Stones," *Improvement Era* 59 (September 1956): 630–32, 672–75; *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 366–79; *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 337–58; *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 209–10; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 243–44. The first person to bring the Jewish tradition to the attention of Latter-day Saints was Janne M. Sjodahl, in his *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927), 248.

² TB *Sanhedrin* 108b; TY *Pesahim* 1:1; *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 6:16; *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 31:11; *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 23; Rashi on Genesis 6:16. For a recap of the story, see Louis Ginzberg, ed., *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1937), 1:162–63. According to the *Book of Noah*, the sapphire that glowed inside the ark had engraved on it the sacred book given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. In Jewish tradition, the second set of tablets on which the law was written was made of either diamond or sapphire. See *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 46; TB *Nedarim* 38a; and the references given by Ginzberg in *Legends of the Jews*, 3:141 nn. 306–7 (found in his volume 6). According to *Apocryphon of John* 73:5–12, the Ark was not a ship but a luminous cloud.

³ Rabbi Eliezer declared that the crystal surrounding the throne of God in Ezekiel 1:22 refers to precious stones and pearls that illuminate the heavens (*Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 4). According to *Zohar* Genesis 41a (citing Exodus 24:10), the celestial sapphire glows and provides light in the heavenly temple. *Zohar* Exodus 136b speaks of "the manner in which the heavens radiate sapphire brightness to that Glory, .□□ in order that the one should complete itself in the other, and one be illumined by the other from the luminous and sparkling radiance of the Sapphire which is reflected by the heavens back to the central glory." Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul P. Levertoff, *The Zohar* (New York: Bennet, 1958), 3:391. The Arab writer al-Qisa'i reported that "from a green jewel, God created the Canopy [over the throne], neither the magnificence

βôhar that the Lord told Noah to construct in the ark. The word is rendered “window” in the King James Version of Genesis 6:16, but “light” in some other translations.⁴

A similar tradition is found among the Arabs, who may have borrowed it from the Jews. Al-Qisa’i reported that when Noah made the ark, he put the name of one of the prophets (including those yet to be born) on each of the pegs, “and they shone like the stars, except for the one with the name of Muhammad, which shone as brightly as the sun and the moon together.”⁵

Rabbi Eliezer tells a similar story about the “great fish” the Lord had prepared “to swallow Jonah” (Jonah 1:17). He notes that Rabbi Tarphon said that Jonah entered the mouth of the fish in the same fashion that a man enters the great synagogue and that he stood inside it. The fish’s two eyes were like windows of glass that gave light to Jonah. He further notes that Rabbi Meir spoke of

nor the light of which can be described.” W. M. Thackston Jr., trans., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa’i* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 2:6. Knappert reports a Turkish Muslim tradition in which God’s throne was created out of light. See Jan Knappert, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints and Prophets of Islam I* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 28. The idea of glowing heavenly stones is also known from ancient Mesopotamia. Here is part of an unpublished translation of an Akkadian text (KAR 307 UAT 8917) by E. Jan Wilson, used by permission: “The upper heaven is *luludanitu* stone of Anu. He settled the 300 *Igigi* [a kind of heavenly being] inside. The middle heaven is *saggilmut* stone of the *Igigi*. Bel sat on a throne within on a dais of lapis lazuli. He made glass and crystal shine inside (it). The lower heaven is jasper of the stars.” The Falasha *Apocalypse of Gorgorios* describes paradise as being “like a precious pearl of various colors that shines like bright stars and like lamps that ravish the eyes. There were in it thousands of doors of sapphire brighter than the sun. The floor of this place was white as silver and as mirrors.” Of the heavenly temple, the text says it “was built of green emerald, the light of which shone in Paradise. And behold, columns and vaults, topazes, red hyacinths, and gold, and images of sky color adorned with precious pearls. . . . There was in it a white sea pearl which shone brightly, and if one opened the interior of this *Íeyon* it would illuminate the ends of the light. Its light was brighter than the light of the sky. It was made of a shiny pearl and of pure gold, and the crown on its top was made of a green pearl like an emerald, adorned with three white pieces of silver that shone with so brilliant a light that no eye could look at it.” Wolf Leslau, *Falasha Anthology* (New Haven: Yale, 1951), 84–85.

⁴ The idea of a “window” came from the Latin Vulgate translation and is also found in the Greek translation of Aquila. *Targum Onkelos* renders it “light.”

⁵ Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets*, 2:98.

a pearl being suspended inside the fish to give light to Jonah like the noonday sun, and by which Jonah was able to see all that was in the sea (see *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 10). *Zohar* Exodus 48a tells a similar story, noting that the eyes of the fish shone like the noonday sun and that its interior was illuminated by a precious stone.

The idea of pearls providing light is also found in Mandaean lore. Noted folklorists Robert Graves and Raphael Patai cite a Mandaean text that asks, "Who has carried away the pearl which illumined our perishable house?"⁶ The *Mandaean Prayer Book* 252 speaks of a "pure Crystal" containing arcana and guarded by an *uthra* (angel) and of a "Pearl that will enlighten darkened hearts."⁷ Another Mandaean document, the *Diwan Malkuta* also speaks of "the Pearl which came and gave them light."⁸ A medieval Jewish text, *Zohar* Exodus 188a, claims that the Arabs called the sun "the god of the shining pearl" and made oaths by "Allah of the shining pearl."⁹

Jewish tradition holds that Abraham constructed a city for the six sons born to him by Hagar or Keturah, with walls so high that sunlight could not enter therein. To compensate, he provided huge gems and pearls whose glow was more brilliant than the sun. These jewels will provide light on the earth when the Messiah comes to reign.¹⁰

The medieval Jewish text *Bahir* speaks of "the power of the precious stones that are called *Socheret* and *Dar*,"¹¹ saying of the

⁶ Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 118.

⁷ E. S. Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 209.

⁸ E. S. Drower, *The Secret Adam* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 55.

⁹ Maurice Simon and Paul P. Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 4:132.

¹⁰ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:298 and 5:265 n. 312. Compare the statement in *Zohar* Prologue 11a in which it is said that Rabbi Yohai possessed "a precious jewel .□□ and it flashed like the radiance of the sun when he emerges from his sheath, and flooded the world with a light which radiated from heaven to earth and spread to the whole world, until the Ancient of Days was duly enthroned." Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 1:47. In *Zohar* Genesis 217a, Rabbi Judah speaks of the deceased Rabbi Simeon as a "precious jewel which used to illumine it and on which higher and lower beings were supported." Sperling, Simon, and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 2:304.

¹¹ These are mentioned in the Hebrew of Esther 1:6 and TB *Megillah* 12a.

latter, “God took a thousandth of its radiance, and from it He constructed a beautiful precious stone. In it He included all the commandments. Abraham came, and He sought a power to give him. He gave him this precious stone, but he did not want it.”¹² Abraham said that though he did not want the stone, he would “keep all the commandments that are included in it.”¹³ The document further notes that the two stones are alluded to in Habakkuk 3:4 in connection with the “rays” (KJV “horns”) coming from God’s hand.¹⁴

The Urim and Thummim

The description of the stones that provided light for the ark is reminiscent of another instrument from the Lord, the Urim and Thummim.¹⁵ At the same time that the Lord touched the stones for the brother of Jared to make them shine, he gave him two stones prepared for the interpretation of the record he would write (see Ether 3:22–24; 4:5). Two similar stones (if not the same ones) were in the possession of King Mosiah and were passed on with the Nephite records (see Mosiah 8:13, 19; 28:20; Alma 37:21, 24).¹⁶ Moroni sealed up the breastplate and the Urim and Thummim with the gold plates (see Ether 4:4–5) and delivered them to Joseph Smith (see Joseph Smith—History 1:35, 42, 52, 59, 62; D&C 10:1). According to Doctrine and Covenants 17:1, Joseph received the same Urim and Thummim given to the brother of Jared on the mount. Joseph Smith is apparently the “servant Gazelem”¹⁷ to which Alma 37:23–25 refers:

¹² *Bahir* 190, in Aryeh Kaplan, trans., *The Bahir* (York Beach, Maine: Weiser, 1989), 75.

¹³ *Bahir* 192, in *ibid.*, 77.

¹⁴ *Bahir* 193, in *ibid.*

¹⁵ Orson Pratt indicated that Noah had “a Urim and Thummim by which he was enabled to discern all things pertaining to the ark, and its pattern.” *JD*, 16:50. According to Abraham 3:1, 4, it was by means of the Urim and Thummim that the Lord revealed to him the secrets of the stars.

¹⁶ In Mosiah 8:13–16, the use of the “interpreters” made a man a “seer,” that is, “one who sees.” Joseph Smith reflected this in John 1:42 JST, when Jesus gave Simon his second name, Cephas (Peter, “stone”): “Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a seer, or a stone.”

¹⁷ In earlier editions of the Doctrine and Covenants (before 1981), the code-word *Gazelam* was used to denote Joseph Smith (see D&C 78:9; 82:11;

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.

And now, my son, these interpreters were prepared that the word of God might be fulfilled, which he spake, saying:

I will bring forth *out of darkness unto light* all their secret works and their abominations; and except they repent I will destroy them from off the face of the earth; and I will *bring to light* all their secrets and abominations, unto every nation that shall hereafter possess the land.

This passage implies that the “interpreters,” which some have termed *Urim and Thummim*, shone in the dark. The idea is confirmed by David Whitmer, who wrote that in order to use the seer stone, which operated like the interpreters, Joseph Smith would place it in a hat, evidently to exclude the light in the room. Then, “in the darkness the spiritual light would shine.”¹⁸ A similar description is given of the Urim and Thummim mounted in the breastplate of the Israelite high priest, and through which he consulted the Lord (see Exodus 28:30; 39:6–7; Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Deuteronomy 33:8; 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65).¹⁹ Josephus wrote that, in addition to the twelve pre-

104:26, 43). The etymology of the word is uncertain, but should be compared with *gāzrʾn*, a term used in reference to diviners in Daniel 2:27; 4:4; 5:7, 11. The verbal form of the same root is used in reference to the stone “cut” without hands in Daniel 2:34, while another related noun is a heavenly “decree” in Daniel 4:17, 24 (MT 4:14, 21); compare Job 22:28. The noun form appears again in Lamentations 4:7, where we read of the “polishing” of sapphires. There is an Old Akkadian name *Gu-zul-LUM*, but since its meaning is unknown, we cannot confirm a relationship, see I. J. Gelb, *Glossary of Old Akkadian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 121.

¹⁸ David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers in Christ* (Richmond, Mo.: Whitmer, 1887), 12.

¹⁹ An Assyrian text speaks of the high priest of Bel being asked to make stones on the king’s breast shine. Fossey, *La Magie Assyrienne* (Paris, 1902), 301, and George Rawlinson, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*, 4:18

cius stones mounted on the breastplate (see Exodus 25:7; 28:17–21; 35:9, 27; 39:10–14), there was one like a button on the high priest’s right shoulder from which rays of light would shine. He further claimed that the twelve stones shone whenever the Israelite army was marching to victory. He notes, however, that the breastplate and the sardonyx had ceased shining two centuries before his time because of the wickedness of the people.²⁰ Some have seen, in the name *urim*, a plural form deriving from Hebrew *<ôr* “light.”

In *Zohar* Exodus 234b, we read,

The term “Urim” (lit. light, illumination) signifies the luminous speculum, which consisted of the engraving of the Divine Name composed of forty-two letters by which the world was created; whereas the Thummim consisted of the non-luminous speculum made of the Divine Name as manifested in the twenty-two letters. The combination of the two is thus called Urim and Thummim. Observe that by the power of these sunken letters were the other letters, namely, the raised letters forming the names of the tribes, now illumined, now darkened.²¹

In Jewish tradition, the stones representing the tribes of Israel on the high priest’s breastplate alternately glowed or became dim to detect sins committed within one of the tribes. Thus the sin of Achan (see Joshua 7:14–26) was discovered by the fact that the stone of his tribe, Judah, became dim when Joshua looked at the twelve stones.²² The Samaritan version of the Joshua passage indicates that the stones on the breastplate grew dim when Achan’s name was pronounced.

Similar stories are told about other Old Testament events. Thus, when Jonathan unwittingly broke the oath his father had made for the people, all the stones in the breastplate except that of

n. 3, cited in George F. Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1913), 230.

²⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.8.9.

²¹ Simon and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 4:300.

²² *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer* 38.

Jonathan's tribe, Benjamin, remained bright.²³ According to *Zohar* Exodus 230a, the letters engraved in the stones glowed to spell out answers when the high priest inquired of God.²⁴ The Urim and Thummim operated in a similar fashion.²⁵ When David asked the high priest, Abiathar, whether Saul would pursue him (see I Samuel 23:6–13), Abiathar saw the letter *yod* in the divine name (YHWH) glowing, along with the letters *resh* in Reuben's name and *dalet* in Dan's name, producing the word *yered*, "he will pursue."²⁶

Zohar Exodus 231b reads,

Observe that the ephod and breastplate were "behind and before," and so the Priest, when clothed in them, resembled the supernal pattern. As has already been said, when his face was illumined and the letters stood out brightly, then a message was thereby conveyed to him. For this reason the breastplate and the ephod were tied together; and although they had distinct functions, they had the same symbolism and were therefore united by the four rings that held them together, back and front.²⁷

Zohar Exodus 217b has Rabbi Simeon explaining the passage in Exodus 39:30 about the plate of gold on the high priest's crown:

Why was the plate called $\Omega i \Omega$ (lit. gaze, peep)? Because it was a reflector, mirroring the character of any man gazing at it. For in that plate were graven the letters of the Divine Name, and when a righteous man appeared before it the letters so engraved bulged out and rose luminous from their sockets, from which a light shone

²³ Ibid., 38; *Midrash Shemuel* 17:96.

²⁴ Simon and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 4:283–84. The passage also notes that the letters stood out when they glowed and that the high priest's face also glowed as a sign that he was a righteous man.

²⁵ *Zohar* Exodus 230b explains that "Urim signifies the words illumined, whereas Thummim points to the words in their fulfillment." Ibid., 4:285.

²⁶ TB *Yoma* 73a–b; *Targum Yerushalmi* 7:44c, cited in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* 3:172 and 6:69 n. 358.

²⁷ Simon and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 4:289.

on the man's face with a faint sparkling. For a moment the priest would notice the reflection of the letters on the man's face; but when he looked more closely he would see nothing more than a faint light, like the reflection of shining gold. But the first momentary glimpse that the priest caught was a sign to him that that man was pleasing to the Holy One, blessed be He, and that he was destined for the world to come, inasmuch as that light was an illumination from on high and a mark of divine favour. On the other hand, if a man's face failed to show any such sacred sign when he stood before the plate, then the priest knew that that man was an evildoer, and in need of atonement and intercession.²⁸

Three fourth-century Christian Fathers knew the same tradition. Epiphanius noted that the high priest had two emeralds hanging from his left shoulder and a light blue diamond that constituted the Urim. The color of the stone changed when the high priest entered the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple. When the people sinned, the stone became black in color; when God wanted to send them to war, it became red; and if it became bright like snow, the people were sinless and could celebrate. He noted that the stone had become bright when Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, ministered in the temple.²⁹ St. Augustine also noted that the color of the stone changed to denote adversity or prosperity when the high priest entered the holy of holies,³⁰ while John Chrysostom described how the brightness of the stones foretold what would happen.³¹

Orson Pratt, referring to Doctrine and Covenants 130:6–11, suggested that

If a small stone or other material in Aaron's breastplate could be made, by the power of God, to shine forth and illuminate the vision of the Seer; then, by the same power, the whole earth could be filled with the Spirit of

²⁸ Ibid., 4:239. See also *Zohar* Exodus 218b, in *ibid.*, 4:243.

²⁹ *De Duodecim Gemmis*.

³⁰ *Questions on Exodus* 117.

³¹ *Against the Jews*, homily 6.

God, and be made to shine with celestial glory, like the sun in the firmament of heaven.³²

He further described the Urim and Thummim as “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. All Saints cannot see by the illuminations of the Urim and Thummim.”³³ The description of the stone “illuminated by the Spirit” is similar to the Jaredite stones being illuminated by the finger of the Lord.

The glowing nature of the Urim and Thummim is also mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Regarding the sapphires and rubies of Isaiah 54:11–12, the *Isaiah Peshet* (4Q164, 1 4–5) says, “Its interpretation concerns the twelve [chiefs of the priests who] illuminate with the judgment of the Urim and Thummim [.□□ without] any from among them missing, like the sun in all its light.”³⁴ From a fragmentary text that García Martínez calls “4QLiturg of the Three Tongues of Fire (4Q376),” we read of “the anointed priest” with “Urim” that

they will provide you with light and he will go out with him, with tongues of fire; the stone of the left side which is at its left side will shine in the eyes of all the assembly until the priest finishes speaking. And after [the cloud(?)] has been removed [.□□] and you will keep and d[o al]l [that] he tells you .□□ in accordance with all this judgment.³⁵

Joseph Smith described the interpreters as “two transparent stones set in the rim of a [silver] bow fastened to a breast plate.”³⁶ The term *transparent* is used only two other times in the scriptures, in the description of the glowing stones used by the

³² Cited by Nels B. Lundwall, *Masterful Discourses and Writings of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962), 588. Lundwall does not give the source for this discourse, and I have been unable to identify it.

³³ Lundwall, *Masterful Discourses*, 583.

³⁴ Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 190–91.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 279. An even more fragmentary version of the text (1Q29) is found on page 277.

³⁶ *HC*, 4:537.

Jaredites (see Ether 3:1) and of the streets of gold of the New Jerusalem that John saw descending from heaven (see Revelation 21:21). In both cases, the full term is “as . . . transparent glass.”³⁷ In this connection, it is interesting to note that the heavenly city has foundations made of twelve precious stones and also twelve gates of pearls (see Revelation 21:19–21). These remind us of the twelve stones in the high priest’s breastplate and, indeed, John noted that the names of the twelve tribes were inscribed on the twelve gates (see Revelation 21:12), just as the names of the tribes were inscribed on the two stones worn by the high priest (see Exodus 28:9–12).

John further wrote of the heavenly Jerusalem that it had “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, emphasis added).³⁸ Because the heavenly Jerusalem will be lighted by the glory of God, it will have no night and will need neither sun nor moon (see Revelation 21:23–25).

The heavenly city is very much like the residence of God and the future celestialized earth, as described in Doctrine and Covenants 130:6–9, “a globe like a sea of glass and fire, . . . a great Urim and Thummim . . . like unto crystal.” John saw a “sea of glass” that supported the throne of God (see Revelation 4:5–6). In Revelation 15:2, he describes it as “a sea of glass mingled with fire.” Joseph Smith explained that this was “the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1). The crystal that surrounds the throne of God is mentioned by other prophets (see Exodus 24:10; Ezekiel 1:22, 26–28; 10:1; compare 28:13–16) and in various pseudepigraphic works.

After describing the celestialized earth, Doctrine and Covenants 130:10–11 notes that “the white stone mentioned in Revelation 2:17, will become a Urim and Thummim to each individual

³⁷ In *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Exodus 19:17, Mount Sinai, when the Lord’s presence was upon it, is described as being “transparent like glass.”

³⁸ On two other occasions, twelve nonprecious stones were used to represent the tribes of Israel. Elijah used twelve stones to reconstruct the Lord’s altar atop Mount Carmel (see 1 Kings 18:31). Joshua had men from each of the tribes retrieve a stone from the Jordan River, which were set up in a circle (see Joshua 4:2–9). This story reminds us of the tradition that Noah found the glowing stone in a river.

who receives one.” Significantly, this stone, like the high-priestly Urim and Thummim and the precious stone foundations and gates of the New Jerusalem, is inscribed, not with the names of the twelve tribes, but with a “new name [that] is the key word.”³⁹ *Zohar* Exodus 240a–b, citing Isaiah 55:11, notes that the foundations of the future Jerusalem will be of sapphire that “will possess the radiation from the supernal light and will be embedded in the abyss so that no one will be able to loosen them. These are the sapphires that will shed their light above and below.”⁴⁰

Ginzberg mentions a story found in the *Pesikta Rabbati* and the *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, according to which Rabbi Joshua son of Levi stood with Elijah the prophet on Mount Carmel and asked him to show him the precious stones from which the temple would be built at the end of time. Elijah agreed and the following miracle happened in response. A boat sailing on the high seas was caught in a whirlwind and was in danger when Elijah appeared to a Jewish lad on board and told him to do what he asked in exchange for the boat being saved. The lad agreed and Elijah told him to go to Rabbi Joshua in the city of Lod and show him the precious stones in a cave outside town. He came to Lod and had the rabbi follow him to the cave, where he showed him the precious stones, whereupon the whole of Lod became illuminated from the brightness of the stones.⁴¹

The heavenly temple is also said to be constructed of jewels and pearls that glow.⁴² This reminds us of the *<efen sh#tiyah*, which, in Jewish tradition, marked the center of the earth, the cen-

³⁹ Nibley compares the white stone and its new name with a passage from the Egyptian Book of Breathings, “Stone of Truth is thy name.” Hugh W. Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 120. Solomon is said to have had a gold ring with a magic stone engraved with the divine name. Other divine names were cut in charmstones by early Christians in Egypt. See Ernest W. Wallis Budge, *The Bandlet of Righteousness: An Ethiopian Book of the Dead* (London: Luzac, 1929), xi; the citation from Gollanz is from *Book of Protection* (London, 1912), 1, 7, 26, 33.

⁴⁰ Simon and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 4:317.

⁴¹ Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 4:221–22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3:446–47. According to Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 8.3.3, Solomon’s temple was made of polished stones and much of the temple was covered with gold plates, making it dazzle.

ter of the sanctuary, and was the foundation stone of the ancient temple. The stone was formed in Jacob's day, when God miraculously merged twelve gems.⁴³ The name of the Messiah or the ineffable name is engraven on the stone.⁴⁴ Precious stones also play a role in the traditions of the Garden of Eden. After listing the precious stones of Eden⁴⁵ in verse 13, Ezekiel 28:14, 16 mentions "stones of fire."

Of particular interest is "A Parable" published in the *Times and Seasons*. In the story, a bride is adorned with "a crown with twelve precious diamonds" and holds "in her hand a reflecting rod,⁴⁶ by which the bright rays of the sun was [*sic*] brought to reflect upon the diamonds,⁴⁷ giving light both day and night, so that she walked not in the dark, but as in the light of the noon-day

⁴³ In *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Targum Neofiti* on Genesis 28:10, it was the four stones Jacob used as a pillow that he found merged into a single stone when he awoke in the morning. The same story is told in *Zohar* Exodus 229b–230a, which identifies the twelve stones with the ones placed in the high priest's breastplate. Simon and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 4:282.

⁴⁴ *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 35.

⁴⁵ In the Ugaritic literature, precious stones are said to be part of the island where El, the chief god, has his throne.

⁴⁶ The glowing rod is reminiscent of the scepter of fire held by God in *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 4. Note also that Satan, when appearing as an angel of light, is said to have a "staff of light in his hand," in *Conflict of Adam and Eve* II, 5:4. A Coptic text, *The Lady Euphemia and the Devil*, has Michael coming to rescue a woman from the devil, "bearing in his right hand a golden sceptre on which was the Sign of the Holy Cross, and the whole place was filled with light, ten thousand times brighter than that of the sun." Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Tales and Romances* (London: Butterworth, 1935), 245. In an Armenian document *History and Sermon: Concerning the Creation of Adam and the Incarnation of Christ Our God* 44, the flaming sword of the angels (see Genesis 3:24) is said to be "a fiery rod." W. Lowndes Lipscomb, *The Armenian Apocryphal Adam Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 265. *Zohar* Numbers 126b speaks of the three heavenly judges who "hold in their hands fiery rods." Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*, 5:187.

⁴⁷ This description reminds us of the Ethiopic text of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which has material at the end not found in the Coptic Akhmimic version, including: "The Son .□□ will make their crowns shine like crystal and like the rainbow in the time of rain, (crowns) which are perfumed with nard and cannot be contemplated, (adorned) with rubies, with the colour of emeralds shining brightly, with topazes, gems, and yellow pearls that shine like the stars of heaven, and like the rays of the sun, sparkling, which cannot be gazed upon." J.R.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 612.

sun, to guide her steps.”⁴⁸ She married the king’s son, who is obviously Christ, and the king promised to “cause the rod of iron which was in the bride’s hand to reflect light over all the kingdoms in the province.” We are reminded that, in John’s vision, the heavenly Jerusalem is called the “bride” of Christ (see Revelation 21:1–2, 9–10).

The glowing rod can be tied to the rod given to Adam in the garden of Eden and which, like the stone in Noah’s ark, according to some of the rabbis, was a sapphire (see *Jasher* 77:39–51). *Conflict of Adam and Eve* I, 29:6–8 informs us that the golden rods had been brought by an angel from India so that Adam could put them in the cave in which he and Eve lived, that they “should shine forth with light in the night around him, and put an end to his fear of the darkness.”⁴⁹ The eleventh-century Arab writer al-Qisa’i told of how, when brought by God to address the angels, Adam wore:

A bejeweled crown of gold with four points, on each of which was a great pearl so radiant that the light of the sun and the moon was extinguished. . . . He radiated a brilliant light, which shone in every corner of Paradise.

Adam stood on the pulpit in all that radiance, and God taught him all names and gave him a staff of light.⁵⁰

Elsewhere, the same writer speaks of angels carrying “ruby staffs that lit the night like daylight.”⁵¹

The glowing rod may also be tied to the Urim and Thummim, which, according to Joseph Smith’s brother William, was held by a rod that attached to the breastplate given to Joseph Smith.⁵² Ac-

⁴⁸ *Times and Seasons* 6/5 (Whole No. 113, 15 March 1845): 846.

⁴⁹ S. C. Malan, *The Book of Adam and Eve*, also called *The Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1882), 31; see also I, 31:12. The same text informs us that “the golden rods were from the Indian sea, where there are precious stones” (I, 30:6, in *ibid.*, 32). In I, 40:1, Satan appeared to Adam and Eve holding “a staff of light” (in *ibid.*, 68).

⁵⁰ Thackston, trans., *Tales of the Prophets*, 2:29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2:85.

⁵² See the report by J. W. Peterson in *The Rod of Iron* 1/3 (February 1924), 6–7; thanks to Matt Roper for bringing this to my attention. The connection between the rod and the Urim and Thummim and its later imitation,

ording to the original wording of Doctrine and Covenants 8:6–9 (see Book of Commandments 6:3), Oliver Cowdery was to have the “gift of working with the rod,” which he would hold in his hands and which would reveal truths.⁵³ The wording was changed to “gift of Aaron” in Doctrine and Covenants 8:6–7 in line with the rod of Aaron mentioned in Exodus 7:9–10, 19–20; 8:5, 16–17; and Numbers 17:6–10. Significantly, Doctrine and Covenants 8 is the revelation in which the Lord authorized Oliver to attempt to translate the plates comprising the Book of Mormon.

Brigham Young declared that

The breastplate of Aaron that you read of in the Scriptures was a Urim and Thummim, fixed in bows similar to the one Joseph Smith found. Aaron wore this Urim and Thummim on his breast, and looked into it like looking on a mirror, and the information he needed was there obtained. This earth, when it becomes purified and sanctified, or celestialized, will become like a sea of glass; and a person, by looking into it, can know things past, present, and to come; though none but celestialized beings can enjoy this privilege. They will look into the earth, and the things they desire to know will be exhibited to them, the same as the face is seen by looking into a mirror.⁵⁴

the crystal ball or orb, reminds us that the Jewish sages declared an image forbidden (to be employed for any useful purpose) only when in its hand was “a rod, a bird, an orb, a dish, a sword, a coronet, or a ring.” They further noted that the rod denotes rule over the world (see *Midrash Numbers Rabbah* 13:14).

⁵³ Note that Heber C. Kimball, an early member of the Twelve Apostles, “inquired by the rod” in prayer, as indicated in his 1844–45 journal under the dates of 6 June 1844, 5 July 1844, and 25 January 1845 (in Church Historical Department); cited by D. Michael Quinn, “Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles,” *BYU Studies* 19/1 (1978): 83.

⁵⁴ *JD*, 9:86–87. *Zohar* Genesis 231b speaks of how “the righteous put on their crowns and feast themselves on the brightness of the ‘pellucid mirror’—happy are they to be vouchsafed that celestial light! The light of this mirror shines on all sides, and each one of the righteous takes his appropriate portion, each according to his works in this world; and some of them are abashed because of the superior light obtained by their neighbours.” Sperling, Simon, and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 2:341.

The use of the term *mirror* to describe the Urim and Thummim is reminiscent of that found in Mandaean documents. According to Mandaean tradition, the priestly vesture of ʾiḷlam Rba had twelve mirrors,⁵⁵ reminding us of the twelve stones in the Israelite high priest's breastplate, one for each tribe. In one Mandaean story, Hibil Ziwa goes into the underworld, where he makes off with the hidden jewel (*gimra*) and mirror and brings them out.⁵⁶ In the Mandaean document known as the *Alma Riḷaia Rba* ("the great first world") 199–201, we read that "the Lord of Greatness stretched forth His right hand to his great Treasure-chest of Radiance and to the waters quivering with light within it, and took from it this polished mirror, a beam of light which fires and enlightens all minds."⁵⁷ *Zohar* Exodus 23b declares that "Moses was possessed of the 'luminous mirror,' which is above the 'non-luminous,' which alone is vouchsafed to others."⁵⁸ *Zohar* Exodus 82b notes that "Moses derived his prophetic vision from a bright mirror . . . , whereas the other prophets derived their vision from a dull mirror"⁵⁹—a statement repeated in *Zohar* Genesis 170b–171a, Exodus 238b, and Deuteronomy 268b.

Glowing Images

Despite the fact that most of the precious stones in the scriptures are jewels, the Book of Mormon makes it clear that the brother of Jared "did molten out of a rock sixteen small stones; and they were white and clear, even as transparent glass" (Ether 3:1). In the Bible, the term *molten* is used not only of metals,⁶⁰ but of images or idols (see Exodus 32:4, 8; 34:17; Leviticus 19:4;

⁵⁵ Drower, *The Canonical Prayerbook of the Mandaeans*, 221; E. S. Drower, *The Coronation of the Great ʾiḷlam* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 15.

⁵⁶ Drower, *Secret Adam*, 57.

⁵⁷ E. S. Drower, *A Pair of Nabōraean Commentaries (Two Priestly Documents)* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 69. The document is reminiscent of the statement in Doctrine and Covenants 88:11: "And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings."

⁵⁸ Sperling, Simon, and Levertoff, *The Zohar*, 3:78.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:248.

⁶⁰ In Job 28:1–3 we read of metals being molten out of the ground and of "the stones of darkness."

Numbers 33:52; Deuteronomy 9:12, 16; 27:15; Judges 17:3–4; 18:14, 17–18; 1Kings 14:9; 2Kings 17:16; 2Chronicles 28:2; 34:3–4; Nehemiah 9:18). It is in the context of molten images and of glowing stones that we read an ancient Jewish legend about how members of the tribe of Asher hid seven golden idols of the Amorites beneath Mount Shechem. When they told the judge, Kenaz, he sent and found them. The precious crystalline stones of which they were made came from Havilah and shone as daylight during the night, which caused blind Amorites to kiss the idols and touch their eyes to receive sight. Kenaz commanded the Israelites to put the men who worshipped the glowing stones, along with their possessions and whatever was found with them, in the river Fison. But when it was discovered that the idols could not be destroyed by fire, dissolved in water, or broken by iron,⁶¹ Kenaz, following God's instructions, buried them with the Amorite books on Mount Ebarim beside the new altar. An angel of God cast the glowing Amorite stones into the depths of the sea. The next day, on the same spot, Kenaz found twelve other stones brought from the same place as the first by an angel and buried. Following God's instructions, he placed them in the high priest's breastplate and stored them in the ark of the covenant along with the tablets of the law.⁶² As he did so, they shone as if sunlight. God told him that when Israel would sin and the temple would be destroyed, he would take those stones and the Amorite stones and hide them at their source until the last days, when they would become a light to the righteous (see *Pseudo-Philo* 25:10–12; 26:1–15; *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* 57:1–23).⁶³

⁶¹ This description reminds us that St. Augustine described diamond as a stone so hard that neither iron nor fire could crack it (*City of God* 21.4).

⁶² According to *2 Baruch* 6:7–9, in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985), 1:623, the forty-eight precious stones kept in the Holy of Holies were hidden with the other temple implements before the destruction of Jerusalem, to come forth later.

⁶³ Compare the following story: According to the *Pitaron* (explanation) to the Samaritan *Asatir* ("secrets") of Moses, Adam was given a Book of Signs copied on twenty-four precious stones, of which twelve were "hidden away as a secret for the last generation" and another twelve "for the choice of the families of the children of Jacob," which the text suggests may have been the twelve stones of the high priest's breastplate. Moses Gaster, *The Asatir: The Samaritan Book of the "Secrets of Moses"* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1927), 193,

In this story, the river Fison evidently corresponds to the Pison of Genesis 2:11, which is where, according to the rabbinic tradition, Noah found the stone that provided light inside the ark.⁶⁴ The use of precious stones and pearls (which the rabbis said Noah hung in the ark) to manufacture idols is confirmed in *3 Enoch* 5:7.⁶⁵

Teraphim

In the Bible, the Urim and Thummim are found in association with the ephod, and it seems that the breastplate in which the sacred stones were mounted was attached to the ephod that was worn by the high priest (see Exodus 28:28; 39:19–21). In Judges 18:14, we read of “an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image,” indicating that these were items of worship that were associated one with another (compare Judges 17:5). The prophet Hosea wrote, “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim” (Hosea 3:4).

195. In *Asatir* 2:7, Enoch “learned the Book of Signs which was given to Adam. And these are the twenty-four precious stones, twelve for the time of Divine Favour and twelve for the chosen heads of the sons of Jacob and to the descendants of the servants of the high God” (ibid., 198).

⁶⁴ In addition to the story of Noah retrieving a glowing gem from the river Pison in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Genesis 6:16, the same text speaks of the precious stones and pearls of Pison in its paraphrase of Exodus 14:9, 21, while in its paraphrase of Exodus 35:27 it notes that the precious stones placed in the high priest’s breastplate came from the river Pison. Compare Genesis 2:11–12.

⁶⁵ There is even an apocryphal story of a stone that the Lord made to resemble the prophet Jeremiah. When the people wanted to stone Jeremiah for talking about the Son of God who would come to earth, he called for a stone and asked Christ, saying “Light of the aeons, make this stone look just like me. . . . Then the stone, by the command of God, took on the likeness of Jeremiah,” and the people cast stones at it instead of the prophet. After delivering his message, Jeremiah was stoned and his friends set the stone on his tomb, inscribed, “This is the stone (that was) the ally of Jeremiah” (*4 Baruch* 9:21–32). From the translation by Stephen E. Robinson in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:424–25.

An 1841 article by W. W. Phelps refers to this passage and identifies the teraphim, which are usually considered to be “images” (e.g., Genesis 31:19, 34, 35):

Aaron took the Urim and Thummim as instrument, that was as old as Adam for all that is known in the bible to the contrary.—In fact the word *Teraphim* translated into English from the Hebrew, “images,” (Gen. 31:19,) might with more propriety, be rendered spectacles or spy-glass, and actually mean the *Urim and Thummim*; for neither Laban or Abraham are charged with worshipping “images,” or idols. The Urim and Thummim, Seer stones, Teraphim, and Images, whatever name is given to them; are found in the United States of America. And when Israel according to the 3rd chapter of Hosea, shall seek the Lord their God in the latter days, the same instruments of the holy offices of God, will be used as formerly. We are coming back to the light ages.⁶⁶

The concept was first introduced (again by Phelps) in the *Evening and Morning Star* for July 1832 (p. 14) and January 1833 (p. 58). It is supported by the fact that, in the Bible, the teraphim are said to have been used for divination (see Ezekiel 21:21; Zechariah 10:2).⁶⁷ The *Pitaron* to the Samaritan *Asatir* of Moses indicates that Bileam the son of Beor was a descendant of Laban and owned the teraphim (see Balaam in Numbers 22–24). It implies that this is what made him a prophet.⁶⁸

According to *Pirque de Rabbi Eliezer* 37, the teraphim spoke when questions were addressed to them, and Rachel stole her father’s teraphim so they would not tell Laban that Jacob had fled. The passage cites Zechariah 10:2, indicating that teraphim speak. The story is also found in other Jewish sources.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ W. W. Phelps, “Despise Not Prophesyings,” *Times and Seasons* 2/7 (1 February 1841): 298, emphasis added.

⁶⁷ *Teraphim* is variously rendered “images” and “idols,” used with “divination” and “diviners.”

⁶⁸ Gaster, *Asatir*, 263.

⁶⁹ *Midrash Tanhuma Vayeze* 12; *Yalkut Genesis* 130; *Yalkut Zechariah* 578; Jasher 31:41; *Targum Jonathan* on Genesis 31:19.

Of Nimrod, the Samaritan *Asatir* 3:22–23 says, “And he made a likeness of the sun and the moon of crystal and he put into the sun a golden luminous cup. And he put inside the moon a precious stone (*shoham*).”⁷⁰ The Pitaron adds something to this passage: “And he made a sun and a moon in the midst of the four to give light. And he placed in the midst of the sun a luminous cup of gold, and he placed in the midst of the moon a precious stone Shoham. And he said unto Gifna, ‘This beacon is the first which has been made in the world.’”⁷¹

Sanctuary Stones

Ancient sanctuaries often contained sacred stones said to have fallen from heaven (probably meteorites), but it is the stories of glowing stones that are of particular interest. Hugh Nibley has already drawn our attention to the account of Lucian (in chapter 32 of *De Syria Dea*) of the shrine of the goddess Astarte, whose crown contained a luminous stone called *lychnos* (“lamp”) that lit up the entire sanctuary at night but which had only a weak glow during the daytime. He noted the tie to the Greek version of the flood story and wrote of the Indian stories of a glowing stone called “Moonfriend” that borrowed its light from the sun.⁷² To this we can add Pliny’s report of the shining “emerald” pillar in the temple of Melkart at Tyre and of gleaming emeralds set in the eyes of a marble lion at the tomb of King Hermias, which were so bright they frightened away fish.⁷³

From an Egyptian tale about the legendary King Koftim, we read:

when he died his body was embalmed and placed in a cave in a rock wall where the breeze was allowed free passage and fragrant oils were burning day and night to freshen the atmosphere and spread light which reflected in the thousands of precious stones on the stat-

⁷⁰ Gaster, *The Asatir: The Samaritan Book of the “Secrets of Moses,”* 220.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁷² Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 371–75; Nibley, *An Approach*, 356–57. See also Kunz, *Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 163.

⁷³ Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 37.17.

ues of girls which had moving hands with which they gently fanned the king during his eternal sleep. Thieves entering the cave would think the statues were alive and would run away, frightened of all the blinking eyes which were only diamonds.⁷⁴

Another glowing sanctuary stone was noted by mineralogist George F. Kunz in his book, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, in which he wrote that “the author of the [second- or third-century A.D.] poem ‘Lithica’ says that the diamond (*adamas*), like the crystal, when placed on an altar, sent forth a flame without the aid of fire.”⁷⁵

Medieval Glowing Stones

Kunz also describes a number of other medieval stories about glowing stones. He noted, for example, that pseudo-Aristotle wrote of a “sleeping stone” that was luminous and of a bright ruddy hue that gave off a bright light in the darkness.⁷⁶ He further cited an account from Plutarch about a marvelous stone that could be found in the Lydian river Tmolus, which changed color four times daily.⁷⁷ Kunz also noted the account of Claudius Aelianus of a woman of Tarentum named Heracleis who was rewarded by a stork she had helped a year before. Flying overhead, the stork dropped a precious stone in her lap, which she took into the house. She awoke at night and found that the stone illuminated the entire room.⁷⁸ The alchemist Albertus Magnus described a stone named *orphanus* set in the imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire that, according to tradition, formerly shone in the nighttime, but in his day no longer glowed in the dark.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, 46.

⁷⁵ Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 163, referring to “Lithica” line 270.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., citing De Mely, “Le traité des fleuves de Plutarque,” *Revue des Études Grecques* 5 (1892): 331.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 161–62, citing Claudii Aeliani, *De animalium natura* 8.22.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 147, citing Albertus Magnus, *Opera Omnia* (Paris: Borgnet, 1890), 5:42.

Kunz quoted an old English ballad that speaks of a princess who gave her lover a ring with seven diamonds. When far from home, he realized that the diamond had paled and, taking it as an ominous sign, rushed home just in time to prevent the princess's marriage to another. Kunz also refers to a fourteenth-century manuscript of an old English romance in which it is said that the stone in a certain ring grows pale or red as a sign of misfortune and cites several other similar tales of rubies and coral losing their brilliance in times of misfortune and gaining it again during good times.⁸⁰

Another story to which Kunz and Jones draw our attention is one told by Alardus of Amsterdam, in his commentary on Marbodius, of the "chrysolampis," a luminous stone set in a golden tablet dedicated to St. Adelbert and donated to the Abbey of Egmund (where his body lay) by Hildegard, wife of Theodoric, count of Holland. The stone shone bright enough that the monks could read in the chapel at night by its light. One of the monks stole it and cast it into the sea, whence it was never recovered.⁸¹

A number of early stories tell of the glowing qualities of the carbuncle. Kunz writes of a luminous "carbuncle" at the shrine of St. Elizabeth at Marburg, set above the statuette of the Virgin Mary, which reputedly glowed at night.⁸² William Jones cited a story from chapter 107 of the *Gesta Romanorum* in which a clerk in Rome found a hidden subterranean royal burial chamber illuminated by a shining carbuncle.⁸³ He also reports from Hawe's *Pastyme of Pleasure* (1517) the story of an enormous carbuncle that lighted a room and noted that Chaucer's *Roumant of the Rose* also described a carbuncle that glowed at night.⁸⁴ An Arab source reported that one of the rooms inside the pyramid of Cheops in Egypt was lit by an egg-sized carbuncle.⁸⁵ Chalkhill's poem *Thealma and Clearchus* describes shining carbuncles and dia-

⁸⁰ Ibid., 156–60.

⁸¹ Ibid., 164, and William Jones, *History and Mystery of Precious Stones* (London: Bentley and Son, 1880), 14.

⁸² Kunz, *Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 165.

⁸³ Jones, *History and Mystery of Precious Stones*, 57.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 62–63.

monds that light a small room.⁸⁶ In an Arabian tale, the *History of the Seven Champions of Christendom*, also cited by Jones, some knights enter a dark hall and remove their gauntlets so the diamonds on their fingers could provide light.⁸⁷ Medieval stories of Prester John say that his palace was lit by night by two carbuncles.⁸⁸

Kunz notes that the ring of St. Elizabeth was supposed to have glowed at night, but did not do so when he saw it. He mentions several similar tales of glowing gemstones,⁸⁹ including that of a luminous ruby of the king of Ceylon noted by Chau Ju-Kua, a Chinese writer of the thirteenth century, which Chau says shone in the night like a torch.⁹⁰ When Henry II of France arrived at the city of Boulogne, a stranger from India presented him with a luminous stone. De Thou indicates that the story was told by J. Pipin, who saw the stone and later described it in a letter to Antoine Mizauld, an occult writer.⁹¹ Kunz and Jones also note the failed plans of a parson to light a London bridge at night by means of carbuncles.⁹²

Kunz further pointed out that, in his *Conte du Grail*, Chrétien de Troyes indicated that the Holy Grail was made of gold and encrusted with jewels that shone with a brilliance that made candles in the room dim like stars when the sun appears, while in the account by Wolfram von Eschenbach (*Parzival*), the Grail is said to be a stone that was brought down from heaven by a troop of angels. The Sacro Catino, preserved in Genoa and represented in the early sixteenth century as the cup or dish used by Christ at the Last Supper, was thought to be carved from a single immense emerald, but was subsequently shown to be green glass. Its rival was

⁸⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 65, 82.

⁸⁹ Kunz, *Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 165–67.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 165–66, citing the English translation of his “Chu-fan-chi” by Friedrich Hirth and W. W. Rockhill (St. Petersburg, 1911), 72. The story is also recounted in Jones, *History and Mystery of Precious Stones*, 60.

⁹¹ Kunz, *Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 166, citing Johann Beckmann, *History of Inventions*, English trans. (London: Bell, 1846), 2:433.

⁹² Kunz, *Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, 166–68. Jones, *History and Mystery of Precious Stones*, 63. The story was first reported in John Norton’s poem, *Ordinal*, written during the reign of Edward IV.

an emerald green dish or shallow cup, said to be the Holy Grail, kept in a monastery near Lyon, France, and noted in the fifteenth century by George Agricola.⁹³

Of his visit to the palace of King Manuel in Constantinople in 1161, Benjamin of Tudela wrote:

The throne in this palace is of gold, and ornamented with precious stones; a golden crown hangs over it, suspended on a chain of the same material, the length of which exactly admits the emperor to sit under it. This crown is ornamented with precious stones of inestimable value. Such is the lustre of these diamonds, that, even without any other light, they illumine the room in which they are kept.⁹⁴

Conclusions

Though the idea of stones that can glow in the dark may seem strange to the modern mind, we have seen that such beliefs were widespread in earlier times. The account of the stones used to provide light in the Jaredite barges fits rather well into a larger corpus of ancient and medieval literature, including stories related directly to the biblical account. I have not attempted in this essay to explain what made the stones glow. While some natural explanations might be presented, I can only say that the Book of Mormon account attributes their power to divine influence. This is the same explanation given in many of the early texts we have surveyed. We would do well to read the story in Ether with the eye of faith demonstrated by those who passed on these records.

⁹³ Ibid., 258–59.

⁹⁴ Thomas Wright, *Early Travels in Palestine* (1848; reprint, New York: Ktav, 1968), 75.