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THE 287  
ORACLE OF YAHVEH

URIM AND THUMMIM, THE EPHOD,  
THE BREASTPLATE OF JUDGMENT



BY

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LO-PAN OR NET TABLET.

From J. J. M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, Vol. III, Plate XXVI.

## INTRODUCTION.

THE ancient Hebrews had a method of consulting God by an oracle of lots called "Urim and Thummim," and in connection with it the ephod is mentioned as the utensil of divining.

Though the oracle by the Urim and Thummim played an important part in the ancient history of the people of Israel, its practice fell gradually into disuse. It was first abandoned, presumably as a relic of paganism, and its methods were absolutely forgotten during the Exile, while in the post-Exilic age the loss of it was deeply deplored. Josephus<sup>1</sup> says that two hundred years before his time the Urim and Thummim had ceased to light up, but his statement is based on the very lowest margin, for they are no longer mentioned as being consulted after Solomon's reign.

How much the oracle of the ephod by the Urim and Thummim formed part of Israel's religion previous to the temple reform appears from Hosea<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Antiqu., III, 7.

<sup>2</sup> iii. 4-5.

who prophesies that "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."

Our text of the prophet Hosea adds: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

By an almost unanimous consent of the higher critics, the addition is regarded as a post-Exilic gloss, and we note in it the omission of a reference to an image, an ephod, and the teraphim, which latter were the *penates* or family gods of the ancient Israelites. In Hosea's time sacrifices, image worship, the use of the ephod and of teraphim were not yet tainted with the reproach of paganism.

The priestly redactor of the Gideon<sup>3</sup> story condemns the setting up of the ephod as "idolatrous," using the strongest possible term, and adds, "which thing became a snare unto Gideon and his house."

An attempt was made to restore the oracle of the Urim and Thummim in the Jerusalem temple service, but we have no assurance that it was the same institution as in the days of Samuel, Saul and David. In fact though the high priest was in possession of the Urim and Thummim and bore them on his heart in the Holy of Holies, we do not know that the

\* Judges viii. 27.

oracle was ever consulted in those later times. Josephus and Philo<sup>4</sup> mention the Urim and Thummim, but it is apparent that their comments are mere guesses and can not be relied upon.

Josephus describes the ephod as a kind of garment with sleeves, but open in front; and under his influence Luther translated the word by *Leibroek*.

We may assume that Philo and Josephus knew as much about the ephod and the Urim and Thummim as any educated Jew of their age, but their comments are contrary to established facts; they are no longer based upon positive knowledge and must be regarded as a product of pure imagination.

Accordingly we have three sources of a widely different character on the Urim and Thummim as well as the instruments connected with the oracle of Israel: (1) the references to them in the historical books, (2) the description of the dress of the high priest, and (3) the passages in Philo and Josephus as well as all later rabbinical explanations. It is obvious that only the passages in the historical books can be relied upon. The utensils of the post-Exilic age are the manufacture of an archaistic reform, for the absence of this divine oracle is sorely felt as early as in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. This is indicated in the passage that men

<sup>4</sup>De Vita Mosis VIII, p. 670 C, 671 DE and De Monarch, p. 824 A.

whose Hebrew descent was doubtful should not be priests, and it was decided that "they should not eat of the most holy things until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim," which means that their unproved claims could be tested only by the unequivocal verdict of a direct and divine decision not obtainable at the time.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Neh. vii. 65; Ezra ii. 63; 1 Esdras v. 40.



## HISTORICAL REFERENCES.

THE way in which the ephod was employed in the oracle of Urim and Thummim does not receive a detailed explanation in any of the historical books of the Old Testament. It is assumed that the reader is familiar with it. Sometimes the ark takes the place of the ephod. The man who wants to consult the oracle says: "Bring me hither the ephod" (1 Sam. xxx. 7) or "Bring hither the ark of God" (1 Sam. xiv. 18). The ephod or the ark was brought and the hand was needed to do the work, for when Saul wanted to stop the consultation, "he said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand."

The ephod was worn by the Levites, priests and prophets (1 Sam. xiv. 3), and in 1 Sam. xxii. 18 we read of "fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod."

It is stated that in the days of Moses everything, both the going out and the coming in, was undertaken only after consulting "Eleazar the priest who

shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord." (Num. xxvii. 21.)

Once the Israelites had omitted to consult Yahveh (Joshua ix. 14), and it is plainly indicated that in consequence of it they pursued a wrong policy toward the Gibeonites.

When not used the ephod was carried on the body, and it is spoken of as being girded around the loins. The verb *aphad*,<sup>6</sup> from which ephod<sup>7</sup> is derived, means "to gird."

In the priestly writings the belt is specially mentioned as distinct from the ephod, and it is called *khesheb*,<sup>8</sup> i. e., "the thing curiously wrought," from *khashab*,<sup>9</sup> "to think, to muse." In the historical writings, however, the *khesheb* is unknown.

The Urim and Thummim are said to be put into the ephod and so the ephod is commonly regarded as a pouch. Yet there are other data which seem to contradict this view.

The ephod is frequently described as being made of linen, but we have also references to it as manufactured of metal. Gideon melted the spoils of war, golden earrings to the weight of a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold, and made of them an ephod (Judges viii. 24-27). Further we read that the sword of Goliath was "wrapped in a cloth

<sup>6</sup> אָפָד

<sup>7</sup> אֶפֶד

<sup>8</sup> חֶשֶׁב

<sup>9</sup> חָשַׁב

behind the ephod" (1 Sam. xxi. 9), which accordingly was not a mere pouch but a solid thing erect upon the altar.

These apparent contradictions have suggested the idea to biblical scholars that the word ephod denotes two different things, (1) a garment that is worn, and (2) an idol made of metal which formed a part of ancient idolatry, an interpretation which also did good service to explain why the ephod is mostly mentioned with reverence and sometimes counted among the paraphernalia of paganism, to be discarded and looked upon with scorn by the reformers. Hosea (iii. 4) classes it in the same category with the teraphim, the pessel, and massepah (i. e., the graven and molten images).

It seems improbable, however, that the word "ephod" should have meant two different things, an idol and a piece of dress, but the several traditions can easily be explained when we consider that the ephod was always a receptacle. The portable ephod must have been worn as a pouch dangling from a belt. Possibly the strings that closed it served at the same time as a girdle. This form of the ephod does not exclude that other receptacles were used for the same purpose. We know that the ark of Yahveh was sometimes substituted for the ephod, and so it is by no means impossible that ephods could be made of metal as a vase that could

be carried in the hand, or a large urn that was too weighty to be carried about easily and was placed upon the altar. Such an urn which was used for divining would naturally be regarded as sacred, and, representing the oracle of Yahveh, might have easily received undue veneration, hence its use as an idol.

In the story of David we read that he danced before the ark girded with a linen ephod (2 Sam. vi. 14) and so incurred the contempt of his wife Michal, who reproached him for "uncovering himself" (vi. 20) and denounced his demeanor as improper. The probable explanation of this passage is that in wearing the ephod David followed the old practice of prophets of a more primitive age in being otherwise naked,—a custom which is still observed in many religious ceremonials.

In the post-Exilic age the ephod and the Urim and Thummim appear to have become an exclusive privilege of the high priest, but in olden times it seems that any priest could use them and there are indications that the Levites were thought to understand their use as if by an inborn instinct of the race. We read for instance in the story of Micah (Judges xvii. 4 ff.) that his "mother took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image and they were in the house of Micah." But when a Levite of Bethlehem-judah, of the family of

Judah, passed through his place, he engaged him for an annual salary of ten shekels. Presumably the Levites were originally priests and might be descendants of any clan, but when their profession became more and more hereditary they were regarded as a special tribe.

We read in the blessing wherewith Moses blessed the children of Israel before his death (Deuteronomy xxxiii. 8) :

“And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One whom thou didst prove at Massah and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The names “Massah” and “Meribah” refer to the incidents in Israel’s pilgrimage through the desert (mentioned in Ex. xvii. 7, and in Num. xx. 13) when God miraculously supplied the people with water. *Massah* means “temptation,” and *Meribah* “water of strife.”

## THE MEANING OF THE WORDS.

THE Greek versions of Urim and Thummim are δῆλωσις καὶ ἀλήθεια (i. e., "revelation and truth") and φωτισμοὶ καὶ τελειώσεις<sup>11</sup> (i. e., "the shining ones and perfections"), or τελειότης καὶ διδαχὴ (i. e., "perfection and instruction").

Latin translators follow their Greek predecessors. Symmachus uses the terms *ostensio* and *demonstratio et veritas*. Jerome translates *perfectio et doctrina*. The Vulgate translates *doctrina et veritas* or *perfectio*.

The English translation for Urim and Thummim is "light and perfection," or for Thummim alone "perfect lot." Luther translates the two terms by "light" and "right" (*Licht* and *Recht*).

Among modern translators Luther clings most faithfully to the tradition suggested by the Greek meaning which chimes in well with the view of Philo and Josephus who thought that, in indication of an affirmative answer, the gems in the breastplate would light up. The opinion that "light and right"

<sup>11</sup> Aquila and Theodocion.

were represented in the Urim and Thummim has found considerable support in the fact, related by Diodorus (1, 48, 75) and Aelianus (*Var. Hist.* XIV, 34), that the Egyptian high priests, when appearing in court to sit in judgment, wore breastplates with the symbol of justice and truth. In the monuments of Egypt we find this emblem, the fig-



Ra and Ma, the god of light and the goddess of truth on the breastplate of an Egyptian high priest. Worn, as assumed, in court.

ure of *Ma*, frequently grouped together with *Ra*, the sungod, as it appears in the adjoined illustration reproduced after Wilkinson from Riehm's *Handbook of Biblical Antiquity*," the standard work of German theology.<sup>12</sup>

If we consider that *Ma*, the goddess of truth, with prefixed article reads *Tma*, we can find a similarity of sound between *Thummim* and *Tma* and also between *Urim* and *Ra*. The latter word *Ra* recalls *Urim* still more when we compare it to the Coptic word *eroyoïni*, which means "illumination" and may have had the meaning of "revelation."

The Hebrew word *Urim*, if it is originally a

<sup>12</sup> Riehm, *Handwörterbuch des biblischen Alterthums*, I, 931.

Hebrew word, can be derived directly from *Or*,<sup>13</sup> "light," and should in that case be pronounced *Orim*,<sup>14</sup> not as the text reads, *Urim*.<sup>15</sup> The Greek translations still indicate this meaning.

The meaning of Thummim is not easily determined, for we can not doubt that the Greek translation "truth" is more an interpretation than a literal version. The other translation preserved by Jerome (*perfectio*) may be more correct just because it is more difficult to understand, for it seems to be based upon a more ancient and more obscured tradition.

Considering the fact that the words *urim* and *thummim* are two plural terms, and that they denote a contrast; that they were lots and must have been two sets of objects opposed the one to the other; we ought to find this contrast in the words themselves, and we see a possible solution in the proposition to explain "Thummim" as the symbols denoting innocence and "Urim," those denoting guilt, in which case, if the former is identified with the adjective *tamim*,<sup>16</sup> "innocent, guiltless, upright," the latter would have to be derived from *arar*,<sup>17</sup> "to curse." Plausible though this seems at first sight, we reject it because good and evil are not so sharply divided between the two, and an appli-

<sup>13</sup> אור perhaps related to the Latin *urere*, "to burn."

<sup>14</sup> אורים

<sup>15</sup> אורים

<sup>16</sup> תמים

<sup>17</sup> ארר



cation to juridical cases is by no means a primary feature of the oracle.

The German translation, "light and right," seems to me as untenable as the English one, "light and perfection," for after all what we need is a contrast, —moreover a contrast between two sets, and assuredly not between two things of the same kind. If a lot of the set Urim means "light," any one of Thummim ought to mean "darkness"; if the former means "yes," the latter means "no"; if one denotes "guilty," the other indicates "innocent," but it acquires the meaning by contrast only.

Accepting the traditional and most probable derivation of *thummim* from *thammam*,<sup>18</sup> "to become perfect," we are inclined to explain the term to mean "the perfected ones," as denoting things which have reached their consummation.

The term *orim* as derived from the root *or* means "light," or "sunrise," or "morning," or "beginning," or "east"; *tom*,<sup>19</sup> perhaps *tam*<sup>20</sup> or *tum*,<sup>21</sup> should mean "completion," or "sunset," or "evening," or "end," or "west." They may fitly be translated by "the shining ones and the dim ones," or "start and finish," or "motion and rest," or "beginning and end," and when we consider that they were carried in a bag, it is more than probable that they

<sup>18</sup> תמם<sup>19</sup> תם<sup>20</sup> תם<sup>21</sup> תם

were pebbles of two different colors, presumably white and black.

Though we may be pretty well assured that such was the meaning of the words *urim* and *thummim* and that they were so understood in the times of Samuel, the ultimate derivation of these terms may, for all we know, be Babylonian or even Sumerian, and attempts have been made to trace them in cuneiform inscriptions. *Urim* has been identified with *U'uru* (Piel of *a'uru*), kin to the noun *urtu*, "decision, command"; and *Thummim* with *tamitu*, "oracle." We must be satisfied with mentioning these propositions as not impossible and abstain from any further discussion for lack of definite evidence.

## HOW THE ORACLE ANSWERED.

**T**HE answer which the Urim and Thummim gave when consulted was sometimes limited to a selection between yes and no, (as, e. g., in 1 Sam. x. 19-21), or between guilt and innocence (as in Joshua vii, and 1 Sam. xiv. 38-46). In the last-mentioned instance Saul chooses for himself "Thummim," and it seems a clear instance of an alternative decided by lot.

The Septuagint which must either have been translated from a more complete text, or intends to render the situation more indubitable, relates Saul's prayer thus: "Lord God of Israel, why hast thou to-day not answered thy servant? If the iniquity is with me or my son Jonathan, let there be Urim, and if it is with the people, let there be Thummim."<sup>22</sup>

As a rule a repeated choice is made between two alternatives until the final decision is reached. When Samuel consulted Yahveh for the appointment of a king, he limited the choice until the lot fell on Saul.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Sam. xiv. 41.

In the same way the cause of God's wrath was determined by singling out the guilty party when in one instance the lot fell on Achan (Josh. vii. 18) and in another on Jonathan (1 Sam. xiv. 42).

Sometimes the oracle refuses to answer (1 Sam. xiv. 37), and this is regarded as a sign of God's wrath; as, for instance, in the case of Saul who had been rejected by Yahveh. We read that "When Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim and Thummim, nor by prophets."<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes the oracle yields a definite answer of which case the following instances are preserved:

When Israel was ready to invade Palestine, Yahveh was consulted and the answer was given: "Judah shall go up: behold I have delivered the land into his hand." (Judg. i. 2).

When Israel waged a war of extermination against Benjamin the question arises, "Which of us shall go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin," and the oracle answers: "Judah [shall go up] first." (Judges, xx. 18).

The children of Benjamin were victorious and Israel suffered a grievous defeat at Gibeah. So they prayed and fasted and burned incense to Yahveh again, and when next they consulted the oracle, the answer came: "Go up, for to-morrow I will

<sup>23</sup> 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

deliver them [the children of Benjamin] into thine hand." (Judges xx. 28.)

With reference to the place where Saul could be found after his election as king, the oracle declared: "Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff." (1 Sam. x. 22.)

David consulted the oracle of Yahveh not less frequently than his predecessor. On one occasion he received the following answer:

"Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand."

When the Amalekites had made a raid on Ziklag, David consulted Yahveh. We read in 1 Sam. xxx. 7-8:

"And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, 'I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod.' And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David enquired at the Lord, saying, 'Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?' And he answered him, 'Pursue; for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.'"

It must forever remain an open question whether the oracle yielded these answers in the form they are reported or whether they were mere repetitions of the several questions answered in the affirmative.

## THE BREASTPLATE OF JUDGMENT.

IN the description of the dress of the high priest the Urim and Thummim are mentioned in connection with both the ephod and the breastplate of judgment. The main passage is in Exodus xxviii, which is to be compared with Leviticus viii. Both belong to the priestly writings and are now agreed upon to be post-Exilic.

The breastplate of the high priest is called in Hebrew *khoshen hammishpat*.<sup>24</sup> The word *khoshen* is of doubtful meaning and of unknown etymology, but *mishpat* is well known and means "judgment, decision, destiny." This breastplate of judgment was ornamented "with cunning work" and was wrought of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet, and of fine-twisted linen. The high priest wore it on his breast, fastened with chains of pure gold on the four corners. Twelve precious stones, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, were set on it in four rows. The breastplate was tied by its

<sup>24</sup> השן המִשְׁפָּט

rings to the rings of the ephod with a lacing of blue (Ex. xxviii. 28) so as to be inseparable from the latter, and here the Urim and Thummim were kept.

The proposition of Josephus (Ant. III, 8, 9) that the precious stones on the breastplate were the Urim and Thummim, is refuted by the fact that they are distinctly mentioned in one and the same passage (Ex. xxviii. 17 and 30) as two different things and so his theory needs no refutation; but the idea that the breastplate was a receptacle or, as Professor Moore proposes, a pouch, and was made for the special purpose of receiving the Urim and Thummim is commonly accepted and seems at first sight quite plausible. It is based upon the translation of the mooted passage in the authorized version which is grammatically quite irreproachable, yet must be rejected as improbable and lacking, outside of this isolated passage, any positive support.

Here are the objections that should be made.

We know positively that the ephod, and not the breastplate, was the receptacle of the Urim and Thummim. Is it probable that the breastplate was only another form of the ephod? If so, why did the high priest wear both the breastplate and the ephod? Further if the breastplate was a pouch as much as the ephod, the main purpose of the breastplate must have been to serve as a receptacle, but we know

that its significance consisted in the twelve symbolic gems which were placed on it.

The theory that the breastplate was a pouch rests wholly and solely on this one passage in Exodus xxviii. 30, which in our authorized version is rendered "And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and Thummim," but we must bear in mind that the original is not so unequivocal as the English. The preposition *el*<sup>25</sup> is much less definite than our "in" or "into," and may as well mean "behind" or "below" or "underneath." In fact the text suggests the latter, and I should propose to translate it by "under" in preference to the "in" in the sense of "into"; for there is an obviously intentional contrast between the prepositions *el* and *'al*,<sup>26</sup> suggesting that the Urim and Thummim should be between two things, under the breastplate and above the heart. We translate as follows: "Thou shalt put *under* the breastplate of judgment the Urim and Thummim, and they shall be *above* the heart of Aaron when he comes *before* [literally 'to the face of']<sup>27</sup> Yahveh."

The breastplate of judgment is an emblem of authority, and its entire significance lies in the symbols shown on its surface. It is a tablet of deep mystical meaning and for that reason it should

<sup>25</sup> אֶל

<sup>26</sup> עַל

<sup>27</sup> לְפָנָי





THE JEWISH HIGH PRIEST IN HIS PONTIFICALS.





THE BREASTPLATE OF THE JEWISH HIGH PRIEST.

Reproduced from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

cover the Urim and Thummim kept in the ephod. It sanctifies them and displays in a duodecimal arrangement of gems the secret of their efficiency as a divine oracle.

We must bear in mind that the description of the breast plate in Exodus (xxviii. 30) is postexilic and as such is to be regarded as the product of an archaistic tendency. There is no allusion to the breastplate in the historical writings, and it does not seem to have played the same important part as the ephod and the Urim and Thummim. Nevertheless it must have existed, and its use in connection with divination is not only guaranteed by tradition but also by indications that come to us from a comparison with similar institutions among other nations.

## THE BABYLONIAN TABLETS OF DESTINY AND JUDGMENT.

**I**T is interesting to notice that a utensil similar to the Hebrew breastplate of judgment is mentioned in Babylonian inscriptions; indeed the institution of a breastplate as an emblem of highest authority — nay also wisdom and magical power, goes back to the most primitive days of Akkad and Sumer. In the Creation Epic we read that Tiamat, the monster of the deep, selected Kingu as her consort and as the leader in the battle against the gods. In this capacity Kingu received the tablets of judgment. We read in this ancient cosmological epic:

“Tiamat, Mother of the gods, rebelled against them,  
A band she collected wrathfully raging.

.....  
She raised Kingu and made him great in their midst,  
‘The army to lead, that be thy mission.’

.....  
She gave him the destiny tablets, placed them upon his  
breast.

‘Thy decision be valid; firm shall stand the behests of thy  
mouth.’”

When Kingu was overcome by Marduk, it is especially mentioned that the victorious god took away from Kingu his tablet of judgment. We read in the same epic :

“But Kingu who had power over them all [viz., the host of Tiamat],  
Him he [Marduk] vanquished and dealt with as the other gods,  
He snatched from him the destiny tablets which hung on his breast;  
He sealed them with his seal and hung them on his [own] breast.”

When the gods were assembled in council, Marduk wore the destiny tablets on his breast.

The tablets of judgment are furthermore mentioned in the primitive mythology of the Babylonians. We read in a text discovered in Assurbanipal's library (published in the original, transcribed, and translated by Schrader) the following passage which mentions a tablet of judgment worn by the high priest and used for divination. The text reads :

“Enme-duranki, King of Shippar, the favorite of Anu, Bel, and Ea, Shamash with Ebabbara . . . . Shamash and Ramman (Adad<sup>28</sup>) in communication [called (?) him]. Shamash and Ramman (Adad) on a golden throne. . . . To inspect oil upon water. . . . the secrets of Anu, [of Bel, and of Ea],

<sup>28</sup> Ramman is the thunder-god; he is also called “Adad.”

the tablet of the gods, the tablets of spells(?)<sup>29</sup> of the mysteries of heaven [and earth], the staff of cedar, the favorite of the great gods, they ga[ve into his hand]. He himself, however, when he had re[ceived these things taught them to his] son.... Shippar.... Babylon.... Sacrifices he offered and he made them abundant.... To inspect oil upon water, the secrets of Anu, of Bel and [of Ea], the tablet of the gods, the tablet of spells(?), of the mysteries of heaven and earth, the staff of cedar, the favorite of the gods, gave he into his hand. The tablet of the gods, the tablet of spells(?), of the mysteries of heaven and earth, to inspect the oil upon water, the mysteries of Anu, of Bel and Ea, the spells(?) 'When Anu, and Bel, etc.'<sup>30</sup> and '....' they had command of. The sage, the initiated one, he who is in possession of the mysteries of the great gods, makes his son<sup>31</sup> whom he loves swear upon the tablet before Shamash and Ramman (Adad) and makes him learn 'When the Soothsayer'; he who is conversant with the oil, who also is of ancient family, is a descendant of Enme-duranki, the King of Shippar, who puts up the holy

<sup>29</sup> Schrader's word *Omen* is here translated "spell."

<sup>30</sup> The words in quotation marks are the beginning of a spell (or as Schrader translates, of an omen) the recitation of which exercises magic power.

<sup>31</sup> All priests are presumably regarded as the sons of Enme-duranki.

tablet of spells(?) and lifts the staff of cedar. . . . King. . . . Shamash. . . . a creature of Nin-kharsag<sup>32</sup> of priestly tribe, of pure origin, himself perfect in stature and all measures of his body, is allowed to approach before Shamash and Ramman (Adad), the place of divination and of oracles. The son of a soothsayer, however, who is not of pure origin, or imperfect in stature or measures of limbs, who is stare-eyed,<sup>33</sup> who has broken teeth, a mutilated finger, deficient in manhood, suffering from diseases of the skin, such a one is not allowed to observe the decisions of Shamash and Ramman (Adad), nor to approach the oracle of the service of divination. A secret verdict they do not reveal to him. Into the hand of such a one they [do not give] the staff of cedar, the favorite of the great gods."

Enme-duranki is called a king of Shippar, and he corresponds to Henoch of the Bible. Like the latter he is obviously a mythological, not a historical, person. Henoch lived 365 years and was the revealer of the secrets of the heavens.

The name Enme-duranki is explained by Schrader to mean, *Enme*, "the high priest," and *duranki*, "of the place where heaven and earth meet," but it

<sup>32</sup> Ninkharsag, "Mistress of the Mount," is one of the names of the great goddess Belit, the wife of Bel.

<sup>33</sup> I. e., squinting.

may be more correct to say, "the high priest of the earth and heaven secret." It is obviously not a name but a designation of his office. He is the high priest in possession of the mysteries of heaven and earth.

The name of Shippar is connected with the idea of written revelation for Shippar is derived from *Shipru*, which means a message, a writing, or a book, and corresponds to the Hebrew *Sepher*.<sup>34</sup> The Greek translation of Shippar is *Pantabiblia*,<sup>35</sup> which may be translated by "book of the All."

<sup>34</sup> סֵפֶר

<sup>35</sup> πανταβιβλια.



## THE CHINESE SYSTEM OF DIVINATION.

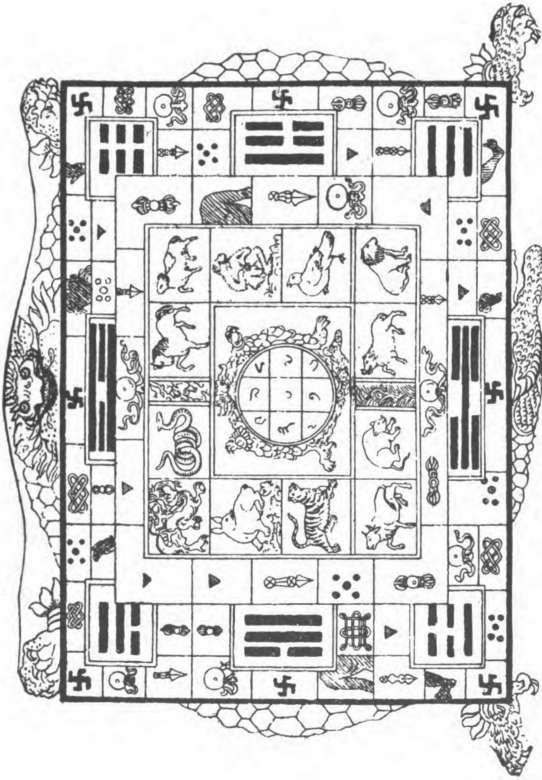
WE have restricted our inquiry into the nature of the ancient Hebrew oracle to the materials furnished by the Old Testament and the cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria with their references to Sumerian traditions. But we hope to throw more light on them by a comparison with the Chinese system of divination which at any rate has helped us to form a clearer and more definite conception of the Urim and Thummim. It must be of very ancient origin, and may in its rudiment have been imported into China by the primitive settlers of the Yang-tze-Kiang Valley from their former homes in Eastern Asia, perhaps from Sumer, or some country affected by Sumerian civilization.

The Chinese too have a tablet of the mysteries of heaven and earth. They too have certain symbols, called in Chinese Yang and Yin, corresponding to the Urim and Thummim, and they too have oracles in which they attain similar results as in ancient Israel. We know that Fuh Hi, the mythical founder of Chinese civilization, carries in his

hands a tablet inscribed with some mystic combination of Yang and Yin symbols, corresponding to the tablet of destiny. This tablet has gradually been worked out into a more complicated system of cosmic significance, and on the very start of its further development we find the number twelve playing an analogously prominent part to that of the breast-plate of the high priest in Jerusalem, only that the number twelve preserves a more primitive and wider range of interpretation.

A comparison of the Yang and Yin with the Urim and Thummim corroborates in my opinion the hypothesis that they must have been two sets of symbols forming a contrast of opposites. They may have been painted, the Urim white, and the Thummim black. That the Urim were of bright color is indicated by their name, "the shining ones," while the meaning of the Thummim by contrast must have been "the dark ones."

It is not necessary to assume, indeed it is improbable, that the Urim should have stood for everything good and the Thummim for things evil; all we may dare to assert is that they were contrasts. As Yang represents motion, heaven, light, odd numbers, unrest, and the male principle, so Yin stands for steadiness and rest, for even numbers, for earth, for darkness, for completion, and the feminine principle, and the Urim and Thummim reflect the same



THE TABLET ON THE TORTOISE.





FUH HI.

contrast and are in themselves neither good nor evil. In consulting the oracle one may have one's choice, as Saul selects for himself Thummim (1 Sam. xiv), not Urim.

The Yang and Yin are two sets of symbols which since the invention of the brush are represented as straight (—) and broken (- -) lines, but in ancient times they were pictured as white (○) and black (●) disks, and the latter mode of representation indicates that the diviners may originally have employed bright and dark balls or pebbles.

The Chinese used in connection with their system of divination, stalks of the milfoil plant, so-called divining sticks (*shi tsao*). The details of their divining practices<sup>36</sup> are of no consequence here and would lead us too far. It is sufficient to know that stalks were in use from the earliest days of Chinese civilization, and that similar customs prevailed among other nations who seem to have no historical connection with China. We mention especially the sacred rods of the Germans as recorded by Tacitus, and the arrows among the North American Indians and pre-Mohammedan Arabian nomads, and we know that shafts or arrows were used in ancient Babylon.

There is an interesting passage in Ezekiel (xxi.

<sup>36</sup> For details see the author's *Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 13-15. Compare also his *Chinese Thought*, pp. 34 ff.



21) in which several methods of divination are mentioned. The prophet warns Jerusalem of an intended attack by the king of Babylon, and describes him as standing where the road divides trying to find out whether he should attack Judah or Ammon. The lot decides in favor of Judah. The passage reads in the translation of the Polychrome Bible:

“For the King of Babylon stands at the fork of the road, at the head of the two roads, to practice divination; he shakes the arrows, he consults the Teraphim, he looks at the liver. Into his right hand comes the lot marked Jerusalem.”

Prof. G. F. Moore in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* makes the following comment on divination by arrow shafts:

“Moslem writers describe a similar mode of divination among the Arabs before Islam. Two arrow-shafts (without heads or feathers), on one of which was written ‘command,’ on the other ‘prohibition,’ or words of similar purport, were placed in a receptacle, and according as one or the other of them was drawn out it was known whether the proposed enterprise was in accordance with the will of the god and destined to succeed, or not (cp. Prov. xvi. 33; Acts i. 26). At Mecca, it is said, these lots were in the keeping of the guardians of the Holy House, one of whom drew an arrow when a man

wished to decide whether to go on a journey, to marry, etc. Sometimes three arrows were used, one of which was blank; if this was drawn the god refused a response."

Among the other instruments used in China for divination is a tablet which in more than one respect bears a resemblance to the table of Enmeduranki, the table of judgment on the breast of Kingu and of Marduk and also to the breastplate of the Hebrew high priest; and this table, which is mentioned in the most ancient documents, contains a systematic mode of grouping the symbols of Heaven and Earth, called Yang and Yin. It is attributed to Fuh Hi, the founder of Chinese civilization.

The tablet in the hands of Fuh Hi represents the world. The several combinations of Yang and Yin stand for the four quarters with their four intermediary directions. In its more complicated form as the tablet on the divination tortoise it shows also the duodenary cycle of the twelve mansions pictured in the twelve animals. They stand for everything that has a twelfefold relation, the twelve months, the twelve double hours, and generally a division into twelve of the whole cosmic constitution. The tablet on the tortoise has finally been developed into an elaborate disk of symbols called the "Lo-pan" or "Net Tablet," because it has the

appearance of a net, or rather a spider's web. It is still used by the geomancers of China for divination.<sup>37</sup>

The Chinese claim that the system of the Yih (this theory of mutations among the Yang and Yin, the positive and negative principles, also called: the former, heaven, the latter, earth) contains the secret of the universe. In the beginning there was the absolute, the Tai Chih (mostly translated the Grand Limit, which means the ultimate foundation of all things); and creation begins by a differentiation of it into Yang and Yin, the former becoming heaven, the latter earth. All things that exist are but mixtures of the two, and all events that happen are due to their peculiar combinations, and so the Yih contains the quintessence of all wisdom and the key to all the mysteries of heaven and earth. The same claim is made in Babylon. There too it is firmly believed that all the sciences and all possible knowledge had been revealed in the beginning. Berosus tells us that Oannes (a form of the god Ea) had risen in the shape of a fish-man from the Erythræan sea; he dwelt among men teaching them all the arts and sciences during daytime, and, as the sun nightly sets, went down every evening in the western sea.

<sup>37</sup> For further details of the Chinese method of divination see the author's pamphlet *Chinese Philosophy*, and especially his little book *Chinese Thought* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co.)



It can only have been the gist of this same knowledge that was contained in Enmeduranki's tablet of spells, or of divination, the tablet of the mysteries of heaven and earth.

It is not impossible that the contrast of heaven and earth is as much implied by the Urim and Thummim as it is in the Chinese Yang and Yin, and if that be so the first verse of Genesis, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth," may originally have possessed a philosophical meaning which in time has been obliterated.

The wisdom that centered in the symbols of Yang and Yin has been incorporated in a book which is called *Yih King*, i. e., "the Book of Changes," and this book of changes contains definite answers to definite questions, given according to the composition of Yang and Yin elements selected with reference to definite rules.

That a connection must have existed in primitive days between China and Babylon is well assured through other coincidences, such as the similarities of the most primitive script in both countries, in the arrangement of their calendars, their sexagenary numerical system, and also in some mythological and religious notions.<sup>38</sup>

While our comparison of Chinese methods with

<sup>38</sup> For details see the author's *Chinese Thought*, passim; also Prof. C. J. Ball's article on "The Accadian Affinities of Chinese."

the ancient Semitic oracle may give no light as to details, it is helpful to form an opinion as to the general nature of the Urim and Thummim, which in bygone ages played a part among the Israelites, corresponding to that still played by the Yang and Yin in China.

## CONCLUSION.

ALL divination of primitive mankind is based upon the supposition that the world is regulated by law and that all existence forms a system that can be represented in symbols. The symbols possess a definite meaning and are arranged according to prescribed rules, the intention being to imitate in them the actual course of events. Having produced conditions in the symbols corresponding to the situation of the problem in question, the theory of divination assumes that the result will in either case be the same, and the soothsayer is assumed to be able to foretell the future.

Accordingly the nature of the tablet of Enmeduranki can only have been a system of symbols somehow representing the universe, and it is more than probable that the twelve signs of the zodiac played a prominent part in it. For many reasons twelve was a sacred number and so it was but natural that this feature of the ancient tablet of destiny has been preserved in the breastplate of judgment worn by the high priest of Jerusalem, but in con-

formity with the general tendency of Judaism the cosmic significance of the twelve gems was replaced by a narrow nationalistic interpretation.

We will conclude with a comment of a general application, which, however, in our opinion will be helpful to folklorists who make a specialty of games. Not only all divination of primitive man is based upon cosmic considerations, but the ancient plays and games are also derived from the same source. Originally the games of children are acts of divination in which they attempt to discover the future. In their origin games are not mere pastime but either practicing or imitating religious ceremonies. An investigation into the nature of old games that have been handed down to us from prehistoric ages will most likely prove all of them to be schemes that symbolically represent the universe in which the player tries his luck and consults fate as to the outcome either of a definite enterprise or of his life in general.

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