



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 2 | Number 1

Article 24

1990

David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon*

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Norwood, L. Ara (1990) "David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon*," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 24.

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Title

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Reference *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 2/1 (1990): 187-204.

ISSN 1050-7930 (print), 2168-3719 (online)

Abstract *Review of Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (1985), by David Persuitte.

David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1985. vii + 295 pp., subject index and bibliography. \$19.95.

Reviewed by L. Ara Norwood

This is an anti-Mormon book. However, it is not "just another" anti-Mormon book. David Persuitte's debut work is a thorough attempt to discredit Joseph Smith's prophetic calling and to present the most complete case to date for the "View of the Hebrews" theory of the Book of Mormon.

It is not "just another" anti-Mormon book for the simple reason that, unlike his anti-Mormon colleagues, Persuitte is very open and candid as to his motives. He doesn't put on any facades about how he loves the Mormon people and is only doing what is best for them. He doesn't make exuberant claims of being interested in uncovering the "truth and only the truth." And, most importantly, he never claims to be "objective" or to be "without bias"¹ (something most anti-Mormons claim, either explicitly or implicitly). In all of these ways and more, he separates himself from his anti-Mormon predecessors.

Before launching into the heart of this review, it may be proper to present in capsule form a summary of the origins and history of the "View of the Hebrews" theory for the Book of Mormon.

I

In 1823, a man by the name of Ethan Smith (no relation to Joseph Smith) published the first edition of a book he called *View of the Hebrews*. A second edition was released in 1825. Ethan Smith was a pastor of a Congregational church in Poultney, Vermont. His book was a presentation of a theory he had concerning the origin of the American Indians. Pastor Smith believed the American Indians were descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel, and as such, needed to be restored to Christianity by the Protestants of the day. But how did this book ever get tied to the Book of Mormon?

¹ In developing a body of parallels, Persuitte notes Ethan Smith's use of a peculiar Isaianic locution and states, "I must admit I had hoped to find that expression in *The Book of Mormon*" (p. 112). He is to be credited for his candor.

In 1922, a man by the name of Couch wrote a letter to a Latter-day Saint friend asking five pointed questions concerning the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Couch, a non-Mormon from Washington, D.C., had read the Book of Mormon and concluded that it contained various anachronisms, so he wrote his letter asking, in essence, "How can the Book of Mormon be true if" The friend to whom he wrote was not equipped to respond to the questions, so he forwarded the letter to Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve, who in turn delegated the task of answering the letter to Elder B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy.

Although the questions Couch posed failed to include any mention of *View of the Hebrews*, Roberts, with a gusto for controversy, debate, and thoroughness plunged head on into the task of trying to find answers to these five (and other) questions. He produced several studies on the subject, and one of these studies included a comparison of the Book of Mormon with the little-known work by Ethan Smith. Roberts was able to put together, in parallel form, eighteen similarities between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon.

It is unclear what motivated Roberts to do the comparison, or where he first learned of *View of the Hebrews*,² but he never intended his study to be published. It was published, however, first in 1956 when Mervin Hogan had a small portion of it printed in the Rocky Mountain Mason, then in 1980 when anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner printed the complete but unedited manuscripts, and again in 1985 when the University of Illinois Press released a poorly edited text.

From the time of Roberts in the 1920s until the University of Illinois Press published their volume in 1985, the *View of the Hebrews* theory received only limited attention. Other than Fawn Brodie discussing it in her 1946 book, *No Man Knows My History*, and Hugh Nibley analyzing Roberts's parallels in his 1959 article in *The Improvement Era*,³ the only others to refer to the theory were anti-Mormons who are relatively

² An early publication (perhaps the earliest) suggesting the Book of Mormon contained parallel material with *View of the Hebrews* is I. Woodbridge Riley's *The Founder of Mormonism* (New York: Dodd, 1903), 124-30. This may be where Roberts first learned of the theory.

³ Hugh Nibley, "The Comparative Method," *Improvement Era* 62 (October and November 1959): 744-47, 759, 848, 854, 856; reprinted in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, vol. 8 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 193-206).

unknown to the Mormon population at large. To my knowledge it is not until Persuite that we get a more thorough treatment of the subject.

II

Persuite's book consists of four major sections containing twenty chapters and an epilogue. This is followed by appendices consisting of four parts. The opening section of eight chapters focuses on Joseph Smith's early life, his first vision, the 1826 trial, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and other like episodes of early Mormon history. All of these chapters are written to paint the particular portrait of Joseph Smith as conceived by Persuite—that of a deceiver. Consequently, he borrows heavily from anti-Mormon sources for his information.⁴

The second section contains two chapters which give some valuable background information concerning the *View of the Hebrews* theory. While spending a considerable amount of time in responding to previous apologetic statements by both Latter-day Saint and RLDS scholars concerning the *View of the Hebrews* theory for the Book of Mormon, it is in this section that the methodology used by Persuite in his analysis of the two works in question first presents itself.

First, he tells us up front that the Book of Mormon does not (and would not) sound like *View of the Hebrews* because Joseph, being a deceiver, would not want to appear obvious in his deception. "Because of this, one must often look beyond the actual wording in the comparisons and analyze the underlying ideas and meanings in order to see the relationship between the two books" (p. 126). Second, Persuite cautions us not to be surprised if the two works read differently because the viewpoints and the writing style of both works are different. "Again, because of this, one must look at the ideas each book presents rather than at the exact language and style" (p. 126). Third, he makes the comment that both books are dependent on the Bible and that this shows that Joseph was dependent not on one or the other, but on both *View of the Hebrews* and the Bible.

⁴ In addition to relying on the writings of Fawn Brodie, Wesley P. Walters, and others of the same ilk, he references E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled* at least eighteen times in five of the first eight chapters.

Part Three contains the heart of the book. Here we have eight chapters loaded with comparisons between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon. Much of this work seems to be original with Persuitte and thus seems to be his main contribution. The comparisons, mostly parallels, deal with the common topics of the voyage to the land of promise, things of a prophetic nature, the division into two camps of people, wars, the cycles between righteousness and wickedness, the visitation of Christ, and the final battles. The final chapter in this section presents an interesting theory of how the book of Ether functions in relation to the rest of the Book of Mormon.

It is not my desire to present an exhaustive analysis of Persuitte's work. To do so would run several hundred pages and would not fit in this collection of book reviews. I will, however, present a few of my findings on his comparison of *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon.⁵

A careful examination of the passages in the Book of Mormon treated by Persuitte reveals that most of them deal with one or two broad themes: the land of promise (i.e., America) or the gathering of Israel. This is interesting because much of the Book of Mormon deals with additional Christian doctrine, yet few of these doctrinal passages were accused of being the result of pilfering from *View of the Hebrews*. The few times doctrinal passages are so accused, they are often found to have their alleged source not in *View of the Hebrews* but in some other nineteenth-century work such as Alexander Campbell's *Christian Baptist* (see p. 122).

One of the more important parallels in his book is the one concerning the Title Page of the Book of Mormon (see pp. 109-11). Persuitte finds a corresponding theme in *View of the Hebrews* on pages 247 and 249. After reading the entire passage in *View of the Hebrews*, I would summarize its purpose as follows: If it can be demonstrated that the American Indians are actually members of the house of Israel, then those of us who are Christians should assist in bringing about their

⁵ Previous reviewers have approached this book in other ways. For instance, Kenneth Godfrey demonstrates Persuitte's one-sided and limited use of the sources available, resulting in a book which raises questions that have already been answered in Mormon sources (see "Not Enough Trouble," *Dialogue* 20 [Fall 1986]: 139-44), while John W. Welch takes Persuitte to task for faulty logic on a number of issues (see *Pacific Historical Review* [August 1986]: 619-23.)

conversion to Christianity, partly by teaching them of a heritage they have long forgotten.

I would summarize the gist of the message of the Title Page of the Book of Mormon in this manner: This sacred book of revelation you now hold in your hands was written for the benefit of all people (Lamanite, Jew, and Gentile); the purpose of this book of revelation is to affirm the primacy of the house of Israel, and to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, the God over all.

The Book of Mormon purpose is much more concrete and far-reaching than the *View of the Hebrews* purpose. Note the tentative clause in *View of the Hebrews*, "Should we find ample conviction . . .".⁶ Notice the *View of the Hebrews* passage deals with one relatively small group of people (i.e., the Indians), whereas the Book of Mormon addresses the whole world population. Granted there are parallels here, but some of them are highly strained. Both do mention the word "remnant," both indicate that the people being referenced will not be cast off indefinitely, both mention the notion of "spirit of prophecy" or "prophetic spirit," both mention the name "Christ," and both contain the notion that God works in behalf of their respective nations. Yet even with these bits of surface resemblance, the *View of the Hebrews* passage, although referring to Christ as "the true star from Jacob, the Shiloh,"⁷ does not seem to place as much emphasis on the divinity of Christ as does the most quoted portion of the Title Page, whose purpose is "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God." The word "convincing" is what makes the Title Page passage so climactic and central.

Now and then we find that a parallel does exist between the two works, but it involves something so common to human experience that citing such as an example of plagiarism is rather catachrestic. This occurs with Persuite's analysis of Jacob 3:7 and *View of the Hebrews*, p. 175. Both mention the idea of Lamanites/Indians being kind and loving to their wives and children. None can dispute that a parallel does exist. But what of it? Is anything so unusual about that? Would Joseph Smith need to rely on Ethan Smith to dream up such a concept? And besides, the passage in Jacob is used in connection with condemning the Nephites for not being true to their marriage

⁶ Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 247.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

vows; nothing of a similar nature is found in the corresponding passage in *View of the Hebrews*. Suffice it to say that this particular parallel (and several others like it) is rather trivial.

Occasionally Persuitte will cite a parallel between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon which probably should not have been cited even though a parallel did, in fact, exist. This is because on occasion, the passage from *View of the Hebrews* is not Ethan Smith's work but actually a passage from the Bible.⁸ When this is the case, is it fair to say Joseph is borrowing from Ethan? Or is the Latter-day Saint position at least possible, that Nephite peoples were quoting from the brass plates or some other source common to both their prophets and those living in Palestine?

In contrast to the above, Persuitte provides some compelling examples of parallels, the interpretation of which needs further analysis before concrete conclusions can be attained. For instance, his analysis of Mosiah 8 is fairly persuasive (see p. 160). There are a number of common motifs found therein, including the finding of a large number of human bones, a land with adjoining waters, the presence of various types of buildings, a vast population, copper breast-plates,⁹ and swords with blades which suffer from rust. I credit him for finding that many resemblances, even though he had to rely on widely scattered passages from *View of the Hebrews* and in one instance he even relied on a source outside of *View of the Hebrews*.

⁸ For examples, see *ibid.*, 18, 19, 21, 22, 147, 153.

⁹ At first I thought I had discovered another error by Persuitte when I found that the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon did not contain a hyphen between the words "breast" and "plates." Since *View of the Hebrews* and Persuitte's rendering of Mosiah 8:8 do contain the hyphen, this would be a fairly serious flaw on his part. But then I remembered that he is using the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon in his analysis and that that edition does contain the hyphen. However, the Printer's Manuscript does not contain the hyphen but renders them as two separate words, "breast plates." It is likely that the hyphen in the 1830 edition was actually the work of John H. Gilbert who was responsible for the punctuation of the Book of Mormon. (See George A. Horton, Jr., "Book of Mormon: Transmission from Translator to Printed Text," in Paul R. Cheesman, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* [Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988], 238-39.) This fact would soften the parallel somewhat.

On a few occasions, Pursuite seems to stack the deck a bit. An example of this is his treatment of 1 Nephi 19:13-14; 1 Nephi 22:5; and 2 Nephi 25:15, all of which he assumes come from the same brief passage in *View of the Hebrews* (see pp. 141, 144, 149-50).¹⁰ This tendency occurs several times, including an analysis of *View of the Hebrews*, p. 71, which Pursuite feels is the source for brief passages in 1 Nephi 22; 2 Nephi 1; 3 Nephi 15; and Mormon 8. A few of the more extreme examples of this include his analysis of *View of the Hebrews*, p. 249, which he feels is responsible for seven different Book of Mormon passages. He outdoes himself only in his analysis of *View of the Hebrews*, p. 172, which he feels is responsible for ten Book of Mormon passages, including 2 Nephi 5:1, 5; 2 Nephi 5:21-23; 2 Nephi 5:24; Enos 1:20; Alma 2:35-38; Alma 28:2; Alma 48:22; 3 Nephi 7:2-3; Mormon 6:4-10; and Mormon 8:2-7.

The questions we must ask ourselves here include: Is it likely that Joseph Smith read page 172 of *View of the Hebrews* and then used material from it in widely scattered passages as those cited above? Would 3 Nephi 7 seem more at home if verses 2 and 3 were absent? Or do those verses seem to fit naturally right in with the overall theme of the chapter? And just how similar are the various passages between the two books? Do they both contain identical words that are unusual, or do they merely mention similar themes?

A retrograde of the above occurs on pages 149-50. Here we find Joseph Smith accused of pilfering twelve different pages scattered throughout *View of the Hebrews* (comprising 13 different passages) to compose fragments of 2 Nephi 25:10-18. The odds against this happening the way Pursuite presents it are formidable at best.

Finally, it is important to examine the implications of Pursuite's parallels. He has done an enormous amount of work finding them, and it behooves us to ask ourselves just how much of *View of the Hebrews* he feels influenced Joseph Smith and just how much of the Book of Mormon he feels is influenced.

My analysis of Pursuite's parallels reveals that, with one exception, no single book in the Book of Mormon received more than 8.09% influence from *View of the Hebrews* (see chart 1). According to Pursuite, two of the fifteen books in the Book of

¹⁰ Smith, *View of the Hebrews*, 67-78.

Mormon received no influence whatsoever from *View of the Hebrews*, and in one book (Moroni), only one out of 163 verses had some influence. After doing a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the Book of Mormon, I found that, according to Persuitte, less than 4.5% of the Book of Mormon was influenced by *View of the Hebrews*.¹¹ I also discovered by doing a page-by-page analysis of *View of the Hebrews* that, again according to Persuitte, 111 out of 284 pages (39%) of *View of the Hebrews* had some influence on that 4.5% of the Book of Mormon.¹²

Chart 1

Book	Number of Verses with Parallels	Number of Verses in Book	Percentage of Influence
1 Nephi	50	618	8.09%
2 Nephi	52	779	6.67%
Jacob	5	203	2.46%
Enos	1	27	3.70%
Jarom	1	15	6.66%
Omni	0	30	.00%
Words of Mormon	0	18	.00%
Mosiah	31	785	3.94%
Alma	32	1975	1.62%
Helaman	27	497	5.43%
3 Nephi	50	759	6.58%
4 Nephi	1	49	2.04%
Mormon	35	227	15.41%

¹¹ In evaluating Persuitte's material, I have elected to focus on individual verses from the Book of Mormon as my denominator. However, to be fair, it is important to note that other factors could be used in place of individual Book of Mormon verses and render varying results (some less damaging to Persuitte's analysis, and others more so.) If the use of individual verses from the Book of Mormon is deemed a fair measuring rod in evaluating Persuitte's analysis, the implications are striking; Persuitte claims *View of the Hebrews* is "the primary source of material for the Book of Mormon" (p. 3), yet his best efforts cannot account for 95% of the Nephite record.

¹² It should be pointed out that in most cases, Persuitte indicated only a fraction of a given page of *View of the Hebrews* had some influence on a given passage in the Book of Mormon. Never does Persuitte claim a full page of *View of the Hebrews* contributed to the Book of Mormon.

Ether	10	433	2.30%
<u>Moroni</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>163</u>	<u>.61%</u>
Total	296	6578	4.49%

III

In order to understand how David Persuite (or any other author) arrived at his conclusions, it is imperative to understand something about the nature of bias and how certain premises, when adopted, unavoidably lead to certain conclusions. It is also important that we understand the differences between "evidence" and "proof."

To begin with, Persuite assumes right from the start that the Book of Mormon is a product of the nineteenth century:

There is evidence to show that The Book of Mormon had its origin in Joseph Smith's time instead of in ancient America as the founder of Mormonism claimed. (p. 11).

Several questions present themselves right away. Does Persuite mean that the evidence he presents not only indicates a nineteenth-century origin for the Book of Mormon, but also nullifies any evidence of an ancient source for the Book of Mormon? If so, it is curious that he never presents any findings that abrogate the evidence we presently have in support of an ancient origin for the Book of Mormon.¹³ It might have been more accurate to say that "there is evidence to show that the Book of Mormon had its origins in Joseph Smith's time" and then to leave it at that, for that seems to be the essence of Persuite's premise.

When you adopt this premise, when you look through this particular lens, you not only limit your vision to a certain shade but you also risk a great deal. On the one hand, if you are correct in your assumptions you will bring into focus those items that provide the building blocks (i.e., evidence) that may ultimately result in the established structure (i.e., proof). On the other hand, even if you are incorrect in your presupposition, this will not deter you from producing evidence in support of your

¹³ Some examples that come to mind are John Sorenson's work, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1985), and Hugh Nibley's classic *Since Cumorah*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988).

false premise, yet it will cripple your ability to deal adequately with any evidence which nullifies your conclusions or thwarts your direction.

So what is Persuitté's premise? He formulates it in expressing a flawed question: "Who authored the Book of Mormon? Was it Joseph Smith? or was it one of his contemporaries?" (p. 11). And there we have it. Rather than embracing a balanced premise by asking "who authored the Book of Mormon?" Persuitté refuses to even consider the notion that the source of the Book of Mormon might lie in the ancient arena, or that the process of translation into a modern language can result in a document which bears the superficial appearance of an entirely modern origin. For Persuitté, the Book of Mormon was obviously either Joseph Smith's brain child or else that of one of his contemporaries. Although he never firmly decides which, this rules out the possibility of ever arriving at a conclusion that may support the Latter-day Saint (or the book's own) claim for its origins—in spite of the fact that evidence for its ancient origin is frequently adduced.¹⁴

Another manifestation of his narrow presumption is found in his introduction. In disclosing his thesis, he states, "It is one thing to say, for example, that *View of the Hebrews* was the primary source of material for *The Book of Mormon*; it is quite another thing to prove it. By providing an extensive comparative analysis of the two books, I feel that I have proved it quite conclusively" (p. 3).

This is the typical anti-Mormon knee-jerk response to parallels. The critics' assumption all too often is that if there are parallels between the Book of Mormon and any other pre-1830 work available in Joseph Smith's world, then obviously plagiarism has taken place. Yet it is the erudite scholar who is not so fast in making such assumptions. Concerning the treatment of parallels, a very able scholar has written:

Surface resemblance may conceal profound difference. It requires competence, much goodwill and bold caution properly to distinguish what is remotely parallel, what is like, what is very like, and

¹⁴ Many of the publications put out by F.A.R.M.S. bear this out. See, for example, John W. Welch's paper, "The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon," and Stephen Ricks' paper, "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address." Also, the F.A.R.M.S. Update series

what is identical. It is harder still to trace these threads to original influences and beginnings.¹⁵

We know Persuitte isn't wholly foreign to this concept either when he makes parenthetical statements like, "An opposition of ideas, as well as a concurrence, can indicate influence" (pp. 119, 109). And there you have it. Joseph Smith has been declared guilty regardless of the data. If there are parallels, then of course the only conclusion is certain plagiarism. And if there are "unparallels,"¹⁶ then again, the only conclusion is plagiarism. These are the only conclusions one can reasonably arrive at when one adopts Persuitte's unreasonable governing premise.

It should be pointed out that in his effort to prove his thesis, Persuitte uses much language that is not supportive of his objective to "prove" anything.¹⁷ Some examples follow:

There is no absolute proof that Oliver Cowdery played a part in authoring . . . The Book of Mormon. (p. 7)

Despite the hints suggesting that there was a collaboration [between Joseph and a colleague], it cannot be proven that such a collaboration existed. (p. 19, see also p. 114)

In the final analysis, it is the evidence. . . that is important. The evidence is valid regardless of whether Joseph Smith had any collaborators. (p. 20)

treats a whole range of such ancient characteristics of the Book of Mormon very succinctly.

¹⁵ Truman G. Madsen, "Introductory Essay: Mormonism as Historical," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaean-Christian Parallels* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), xvii.

¹⁶ This idea of "unparallels" was first developed in detail by John W. Welch in "Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts' Questions, and 'An Unparallel'," F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985.

¹⁷ In almost every page of his book, Persuitte employs language that is highly tentative and speculative. In fact, the book is loaded with conjecture, with phrases such as, "He [Joseph Smith] might even have . . .," "If this were the case . . .," "Joseph apparently felt . . .," "This perhaps indicates . . .," "Joseph could have found . . .," much of which carries on the risky tradition of psychohistory that the late Fawn Brodie reveled in.

After engaging in some speculation about Joseph Smith's abilities to produce the Book of Mormon, Persuitte summarizes with this statement: "None of this is proof that Joseph was the author of The Book of Mormon" (p. 18).

So Persuitte openly admits that he has no proof that either Joseph Smith or a particular nineteenth-century person was responsible for the Book of Mormon. What he does instead is try to link the Book of Mormon with *View of the Hebrews*, assuming that if he can find enough parallels, then he will have established his proof by circumstantial evidence. Thus, he writes, "Saying that, and proving it, are two different things. To prove it, one needs to show that there is a substantial connection between the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews*" (p. 104). Here he leaves out a very important component. He must also somehow account for the equally substantial (or more substantial) connections between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world. But this he does not do, for he "knows" that there is no connection between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world (having decided that up front), in spite of mountains of evidence to the contrary.¹⁸

On one occasion, Persuitte speculates how Joseph Smith ever conceived the idea of the Book of Mormon after reading *View of the Hebrews*. "How, then, did Joseph Smith get such an idea? We can only guess" (p. 116). On another occasion, in wondering why the colossal difference exists in the two books' notions of who the ancestors of the Indians were, Persuitte states, "Of course, we can only speculate about what that reason might have been but, by putting ourselves in [Joseph's] place, we can perhaps perceive why he might have wanted to make the change" (p. 128). We must ask ourselves, in what ways does this "guesswork" aid him in "proving" his theory about the source for the Book of Mormon?

So the question naturally arises, does Persuitte succeed in "proving" anything? He does; he proves that it is very difficult to "prove" anything at all; he proves that there is a world of difference between "proof" and "evidence."¹⁹ He proves

¹⁸ For a quick overview of the evidence gathered thus far, scan any current F.A.R.M.S. catalog.

¹⁹ Evidence is not proof; it merely helps lead to proof. Evidence suggests; proof establishes as fact. Persuitte has provided a fair amount of evidence to support his assumptions about the origins of the Book of Mormon. He has not proved anything, mostly because much of his evidence is based on sheer speculation, and also because he has largely failed

Professor Nibley's statement of 20 years ago is still valid, "The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist."²⁰

One final comment is worth scrutinizing: "All that remains for us to do now is to attempt to prove [the Book of Mormon is a product of the nineteenth century] by analyzing The Book of Mormon in relation to its sources" (p. 125). This sentence is both highly valid and somewhat illegitimate. It is sound, for Pursuite has every right (and obligation) to attempt to prove whatever he wants. His entire book is a bold attempt to prove his thesis, but to *attempt* to prove and to *actually* prove are two different things.

The illegitimate part of his statement above lies in the notion of his analyzing the Book of Mormon in relation to its sources. The very comment is extremely presumptuous, for it assumes right off that the only source (or even the primary source) for the Book of Mormon is *View of the Hebrews*. There could be dozens of other sources, mostly ancient, to examine as well, unless of course one accepts in advance as fact Pursuite's narrow premise that *View of the Hebrews* is the primary source for the Book of Mormon. Finally, even as a partial test of one theory, Pursuite's work fails primarily because it is based on extrapolation from asserted rather than from proven facts.

IV

Every author, especially when writing in the genre we call history, undertakes an unspoken, unwritten oath that he or she will be responsible to the audience addressed. This oath of responsibility involves not only reporting an event "as it was," but also involves maintaining an even, balanced portrayal of all relevant data. Readers have become more and more discriminating in recent years and have become rather intolerant of fallacy. Thus, it shouldn't surprise us to find many a book review delineating the errors, inconsistencies, and flaws of the work in focus. This review is no exception.

to deal with the evidence which opposes his position and which supports the Latter-day Saint position.

²⁰ Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, viii.

I would take Pursuette to the woodshed on the following nine issues:

1. His handling of the Anthon episode was poor scholarship, pure and simple (see page 76). I do not fault him for relying on a Mark Hoffman forgery (which invalidates some of his evidence), but, while he is quick to point out the fact that Joseph Smith's account of the episode contradicts Anthon's, he fails to inform his readers that Anthon's two written accounts contradict each other.²¹
2. His reporting of the time it took to translate the Book of Mormon is inaccurate. Pursuette reports the rate at 2-4 pages per day (see p. 85). Actually, it was a rate of at least 7 1/2 pages per day and possibly as much as 11 1/2 pages per day.²² This is important only because the greater number of pages translated per day would require much greater effort—or divine inspiration—and make forgery far less likely.
3. Pursuette makes much of the fact that the first edition of the Book of Mormon has Joseph Smith's title listed as "author" rather than "translator" (see pp. 11, 114). Not only has it been demonstrated that the title "Author and Proprietor" conformed to the laws governing copyright in 1830,²³ but another question must be raised: If Joseph Smith goofed by identifying himself as "author"—if he made a blunder of that magnitude while trying to deceive the public, could it reasonably be said that such a harlequin could produce the Book of Mormon? Would a forger be so inept as to blow his cover in such a major way in producing the Book of Mormon?
4. After quoting 2 Nephi 30:3-5 (p. 116), a footnote on page 277 claims that Joseph Smith blundered by saying that Book of Mormon peoples were descendants of the Jews.

21 In his letter to E. D. Howe, Anthon states that "He [Martin Harris] requested an opinion from me in writing, which, of course, I declined to give." Later on, in a letter to T. W. Coit, Anthon states that Harris "requested me to give him my opinion in writing. . . . I did so without hesitation." See B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Corporation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 1:102-9.

22 See "How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" F.A.R.M.S. Update, February 1986.

23 See "Joseph Smith: 'Author and Proprietor'," F.A.R.M.S. Update, August 1985.

Persuitte's argument is that only descendants of the tribe of Judah would rightly be called Jews and that an actual Israelite such as Nephi would not have made such an error. First, it must be remembered that many of the Book of Mormon peoples were descendants of the Mulekites, who were from the tribe of Judah. Even more importantly, Israelites such as Nephi seem often to use the term "Jew" in terms of citizenship rather than in terms of specific lineage (see 2 Nephi 33:8). Thus, Paul the Apostle calls himself a "Jew" even though he is a Benjaminite (see Acts 21:39, Romans 11:1).

5. Persuitte assumes that 1 Nephi 13:4-5, when referring to the great and abominable church, is a direct reference to the Roman Catholic Church (see pp. 123, 140). This is simply not a part of Mormon doctrine, but merely Persuitte's guesswork.²⁴
6. On page 147, Persuitte relies on the much-used anti-Mormon argument that 2 Nephi 1:14 is actually pilfered from either Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, or Josiah Priest's *The Wonders of Nature*. Although this has been brought up before by many other critics,²⁵ Robert F. Smith has tackled this issue and has come up with very different conclusions.²⁶
7. On page 195, Persuitte questions the notion that the original text of the Book of Mormon was written in a type of "reformed Egyptian" rather than Hebrew, his argument being that Egyptian would have been the last language chosen since, as Persuitte claims, "Egyptian hieroglyphics, even in the hieratic and demotic forms, are not very conservative of space." In fact, demotic was a type of short-hand Egyptian.²⁷

²⁴ See Stephen E. Robinson, "Warring against the Saints of God," *Ensign* (January 1988): 34-39, and "Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13-14," in Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 177-91.

²⁵ One that comes to mind is Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse, 1982), 81-82.

²⁶ Robert F. Smith, "Shakespeare and the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. Paper SMI-80a, 1980.

²⁷ See "Martin Harris' Visit with Charles Anthon: Collected Documents on Short-hand Egyptian," compiled by the F.A.R.M.S. staff,

8. Stating that Wayne Cowdrey was a descendent of Oliver Cowdery (p. 250) is erroneous. In 1984, one year before Pursuitte's book was published, Robert L. and Rosemary Brown published *They Lie In Wait To Deceive, Vol. II*, in which they spent an entire chapter documenting the activities of Wayne Cowdrey and adequately demonstrated that Wayne Cowdrey falsely claimed to be a descendant of Oliver Cowdery for the simple reason that he and his colleagues were in desperate need of some credibility.²⁸
9. Finally, readers will find that this book is sloppy; it is laced with typos, misspellings, and other errors. It appears Pursuitte wasn't very careful in the proofreading of his work (something he accuses Joseph Smith of on pages 91-92). For instance, he is guilty of incorrect use of ellipses for the text of *View of the Hebrews* at least fourteen times.²⁹ He also makes many minor errors in his reconstruction of the actual text of *View of the Hebrews* in at least seventeen places.³⁰ Also, his own text is not devoid of typos (pp. 79, 113-14, 119, 129, 139, 142, 170, 172, 178, and 191).

V

In spite of the above weaknesses, Pursuitte's book does contain a number of strengths. For instance, in spite of his

first printed in 1985 as a preliminary report. The evidence provided therein leads one to believe that hieratic and demotic Egyptian are abbreviated and short-hand modes of writing which could have been used to write in less space than that taken by Hebrew.

²⁸ Robert L. and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive, Vol. II* (Mesa: Brownsworth, 1984), 49-74. The Browns are investigative researchers and reporters. They convincingly demonstrate that (a) Wayne Cowdrey frequently claims to be a descendant of Oliver Cowdery; (b) that this claim is false because Oliver Cowdery had no descendants; and (c) Wayne Cowdrey joined the Latter-day Saint Church solely so that he could leave the Church after only a few months of membership and then claim that he was a former Mormon, thus supposedly enhancing his credibility as an anti-Mormon.

²⁹ For examples, see pp. 110, 115, 136, 147, 160, 163-65, and 191, then compare with the original text of *View of the Hebrews*.

³⁰ For examples, see pp. 110, 115, 144-46, 149, 155, 158, 164-65, 169, 173, 183, 191, 195, 197, and 199.

regular use of conjecture, he is fairly persuasive in his writing style. He is able to take seemingly disjointed associations and make them sound as plausible as possible.

One aspect of his writing style that assists him in establishing credibility is the tone. Unlike most anti-Mormon authors, Persuette sounds almost like a professional historian, writing in a matter-of-fact, somewhat detached style. Contrast that with his anti-Mormon colleagues whose writings often lose credibility at the outset because they are presented in a style that brings to mind a choleric teeming with trumpety, amphigory, and arrogance.

He is also to be credited for being perhaps the first to complete an analysis of *View of the Hebrews* in any depth. Although I found his very thesis somewhat one-sided and unbalanced, Persuette is very complete and thorough in that thesis. Also, I would have to credit him for dealing with several old arguments with which Latter-day Saint apologists of yesterday would have countered him.

Finally, every so often Persuette came up with something he noticed that very few have previously noticed. For example, he notes that a Book of Mormon passage (in 1 Nephi 19:15-16) uses the *View of the Hebrews* wording "isles of the sea" and "four quarters of the earth" yet later on, in quoting Isaiah 11, the Book of Mormon mirrors the KJV translation "islands of the sea" and "four corners of the earth" (see p. 142).

Thus, although his book is highly speculative, it is well-written speculation. He clearly does a good job in his attempt to establish a connection between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon. He does fall short in those areas I mentioned above as well as in others.³¹

In the final analysis, many detractors of the Book of Mormon may continue to accept Persuette's analysis as accurate and fair; Latter-day Saints who have been endowed with a testimony of the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is a divine record will continue to hold Persuette's research in a very skeptical light. And for those who are not so endowed? Who

³¹ One issue I thought was important on which Persuette remained silent was the fact that Joseph Smith, on one occasion, actually quoted from *View of the Hebrews* in a published article (*Times and Seasons*, June 1, 1842, Vol. III, pp. 813-14.) It is doubtful that a deceiver would deliberately reveal the source of the plagiarism of his *magnum opus*.

knows? Perhaps this review will aid them in taking a step in the right direction.

One aspect of his writing style that assists him in establishing credibility is the tone. Unlike most anti-Mormon authors, Fensholt sounds almost like a professional historian writing in a matter-of-fact, somewhat detached style. Contrast that with his anti-Mormon colleagues whose writings often lack credibility at the outset because they are presented in a style that tries to mind a chaotic tangle with verbosity, ambiguity, and imprecision.

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