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John A. Tvedtnes

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Author(s) John A. Tvedtnes

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Abstract Review of *Truths from the Earth*, vol. 2: *The Story of the Creations to the Floods* (1996), by David T. Harris.

David T. Harris. *Truths from the Earth*, vol. 2: *The Story of the Creations to the Floods*. New York: Carlton/Hearthstone, 1996. 338 pp., with bibliography. \$.75.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

This book is a sham from cover to cover. It was brought to our attention by some FARMS subscribers who purchased a copy at Deseret Industries for 75 cents. (They said DI had many more copies on the shelves, so I presume that most readers saw little value in this recently published work.) Ordinarily, it would not be worth our time to write (or worth your time to read) a review of such a publication. But I felt it was necessary to warn Latter-day Saints that they will not be getting what they hope from this book.

It was chapter 3 that had raised eyebrows of suspicion on the part of those who brought the book to FARMS. Entitled "The Story of the Creations [according] to the Spanish Archive Manuscripts (SAM)," it begins by explaining that "this is a non-published biblical document, so named for its place of discovery. The Spanish Archive Manuscripts (SAM) came into my hands in 1972, sent to me by Bishop Alexis, a Roman Catholic bishop, doing theological research in the Madrid Archive, Madrid, Spain." The author then goes on to describe how the bishop had sent him "a number of photostated [*sic*] pages, all hand written," and that "I had them typed and filed." Some nine years later, in 1981, "I began bible scripture comparison. Remembering them, I pulled them from the file and discovered that they were divided into two sections—one, the book of Moses, and the other the book of Abraham" (p. 84). Sure enough, when one reads the document included in the chapter, it is the book of Moses, as found in the Pearl of Great Price, with a few minor changes.

At first, I imagined that the Catholic bishop had copied the text from the 1851 pamphlet that introduced the title Pearl of Great Price a few decades before it was canonized. The author had, after all, noted that "the books were not broken down into

chapters and verses”—something he corrected before publication. But on further investigation, I came to reject this idea. The back inside flap of the book’s jacket begins its description of the author’s background by saying “Davis [*sic*] T. Harris was born in Tremonton, Utah.” It looked suspiciously like someone acquainted with Latter-day Saint scriptures had simply lifted the book of Moses from those scriptures without attribution. (The book of Abraham does not appear in the book, though he mentions it.) I find it hard to believe that anyone could have lived in Tremonton and not known of these two Latter-day Saint scriptures.

My suspicions were strengthened when I read more of the author’s explanation of how he came to publish what he labels “Spanish Archive MSS Book of Moses” (pages 85–134): “I therefore broke the books down into chapters and verses. To avoid religious controversies and modern-day scoffers, and make certain of their merit, this is the first time they have been revealed to the public. I certify that I have not changed one word, and have copied it word for word, for comparison with the bible . . . nor are they open for debate!” (p. 84). This enigmatic declaration gave rise to all sorts of speculation. Was the author an active Latter-day Saint “lying for God” by inventing a story about old “manuscripts” that would provide outside verification for Joseph Smith’s work on the book of Moses? Had Bishop Alexis found a copy of the Pearl of Great Price with the title page missing and passed it on?¹ Was Harris just out to make money from someone else’s work?

After examining the rest of the book, I believe the latter to be the case. All or most of Harris’s book consists of material that has already been published. But in no case does he credit the original translators or publishers—not even in the bibliography at the back of the book.

For example, chapters 4 and 5 bear the same title, “The Story of Adam and Eve according to the Christian Egyptian Manuscripts.” Harris claims that “just when the Book of Adam I and II

¹ As readers who have viewed the LDS Church’s videotape production, *How Rare a Possession*, are aware, this is not an implausible scenario. But the existence of the videotape suggests that Harris got the idea for Bishop Alexis from that story.

were discovered, is unknown, but, surely were among those discovered in Egypt, after Napoleon invaded Egypt, and opened up the Eastern nations to Christianity, after one thousand years of Persian rule” (p. 168). Not only is Harris weak on history (the Persians had not controlled Egypt for some two millennia before Napoleon), he is much too certain (using the word “surely”) about something that is simply untrue. The “Egyptian Manuscripts” that he labels “Book of Adam I” and “Book of Adam II” are, in fact, Malan’s late nineteenth-century translation of an *Ethiopic* text also known as *The Combat of Adam and Eve with Satan*. Malan originally published four portions of this document, Adam and Eve I through IV. Two of these were later extracted for the Alpha House publication known as *The Forgotten Books of Eden* (sometimes published in the same volume with *Lost Books of the Bible*). Harris clearly drew these from the secondary publications, without acknowledging this source nor yet the original source.

The rest of the chapters have similar problems. Chapter 6 comprises extracts from the thirteenth-century collection of Jewish legends known as the book of Jasher. But Harris takes it to be the book of that name mentioned in the Bible (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18). Acknowledging that “it has been condemned as a forgery,” he notes, “however, the manuscripts are older than those underlaying [*sic*] modern-day Bibles. Therefore, it cannot be a forgery—not copied from the Bible” (p. 340). This, of course, is false, since the Bible manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls are many centuries older, some as early as the third century B.C.

Having established in chapter 4 that the books of Adam and Eve were discovered after Napoleon invaded Egypt, Harris carries the same theme to his description of the provenance of the book of Jasher: “The book was recorded by the Jews as being lost during the Babylonian Captivity, discovered in a tomb, in Egypt, shortly after Napoleon invaded and captured Egypt (1799), and I doubt that any theologian or historian has taken the time to compare its contents effectively” (p. 340). None of this is true, including the assertion that no scholars had studied the book. To all this, Harris adds the rather obvious fact that “upon discovery, the book was not known” (p. 340).

Harris tries to make the book of Jasher a mysterious document opposed by the churches. "Several decades" after its discovery in Egypt, he informs us, it "was discovered in the Spanish Archives in Spain" (p. 341). (Why are we not surprised to find another important document coming from the same place?) But the book, he says, "was quickly suppressed [*sic*] and disappeared. A number of years later the book reappeared in England. Here again, the book was quickly suppressed [*sic*] by the Church of England" (p. 341). He neglects to tell us that it was actually published in England in 1840 and became quite a sensation.² From England, "in 1886, the Codex translation appeared in the United States, where it was secretly published in 1887, without translator's or publisher's names. However, powerful religious church politics quickly suppressed [*sic*] its publication and distribution. It again disappeared" (p. 341). As many of our readers are aware, the English translation made its way to the United States in 1840—not 1886—and even came into the hands of Joseph Smith and other Latter-day Saints at that time. It became the basis for the 1887 publication by J. H. Parry & Company of Salt Lake City. And rather than being "suppressed," the Parry edition has been frequently reprinted over a number of decades in our century. Harris suggests that its reappearance "in the 1960s" was thanks to "the rise of the 'hippie' revolution . . . who flouted and ignored church rules and doctrines," prompting "the church hierarchy to change many rules," resulting in the reappearance of the book "in 1967" and its publication "in 1967" (p. 341).

Despite this errant saga of the book as recounted by Harris, he makes use of the 1840 translation, probably taking it from a reprint of the 1887 edition, with minor changes. Thus, for example, he changes "help meet" of Genesis 2:18 to "help mate" in Jasher 1:3, and even draws attention to the difference by underlining the words (p. 343). Anyone who knows Hebrew is aware that "help mate" (a long-used *English* overcorrection) is incorrect and that the Hebrew of Jasher and Genesis have the same reading here. This puts the lie to Harris's contention (made also in the case of the book of Moses) that "the author has not deleted, changed, or added one word" (p. 341).

² The Hebrew text was first printed in Venice in 1613.

Chapter 1 is entitled "The Story of the Creations according to the Torah (Jewish Bible)," while chapter 2 bears the title "The Creations of Adam and Eve according to the Torah (Jewish Bible)." In chapter 2, the author correctly represents the Torah as the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy (p. 42). Yet the text given in these two chapters is *not* from the Hebrew version of these biblical books, despite the fact that Harris says they were "taken directly from the Jewish Bible" (p. 3). Rather, the material was taken from volume 1 of Louis Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*. Harris mentions Ginzberg's work, but calls it "the modern Bible version, compiled by Louis Ginzberg" (p. 3). He indicates that "Louis Ginzberg, the author, condensed the one-volume book, from the seven huge volumes, used for centuries by the Jews. The seven huge volumes, having been condensed from the massive Hebrew library, which existed at the time of Ptolemy I Sotor [*sic*] (367–285 B.C.), the pharaoh of Egypt" (pp. 2–3). This, of course, is sheer fantasy. Ginzberg's work comprises seven volumes, not one, of which two contain notes and another the index. So Ginzberg's seven volumes become, in the Harris account, "the seven huge volumes, used for centuries by the Jews," while Ginzberg's volume 1, from which Harris takes his text, is reinterpreted to be the single "condensed" version of the seven supposed earlier volumes. Since Harris clearly is aware of Ginzberg's work, this is pure fabrication on his part. Moreover, though mentioning Ginzberg in chapter 1, he does not list his *Legends of the Jews* in the bibliography (pp. 387–8).

I should add that the bibliography is essentially worthless, since none of the information contained in Harris's book seems to depend on the information in those books. I suspect that he just looked at the books on a library shelf (perhaps his own library) and wrote down the ones that he thought might impress readers.

This book represents vanity press at its best—or worst, depending on your viewpoint. It is replete with spelling and grammatical errors that a spell checker, proofreader, and editor would have easily caught. Even in the "About the Author" portion of the jacket, the author's first name is misspelled "Davis" instead of "David." The jacket also indicates that the book was copyrighted by "Carlton Press Corp., New York," despite the fact that the copyright page says it was copyrighted "by David T. Harris."

I suspect that Carlton Press is merely a printing establishment, not a publisher, and that Harris is himself author (read “plagiarizer”) and publisher, the words “A Hearthstone Book” perhaps referring to his living room or den.

My suggestion to Mr. Harris is that he hire a good lawyer, lest any of the publishers of the books from which he has extracted material without due credit read this admittedly harsh review and decide to sue him for plagiarism. This is truly the most blatant case of plagiarism that I have come across in my years of reading.