



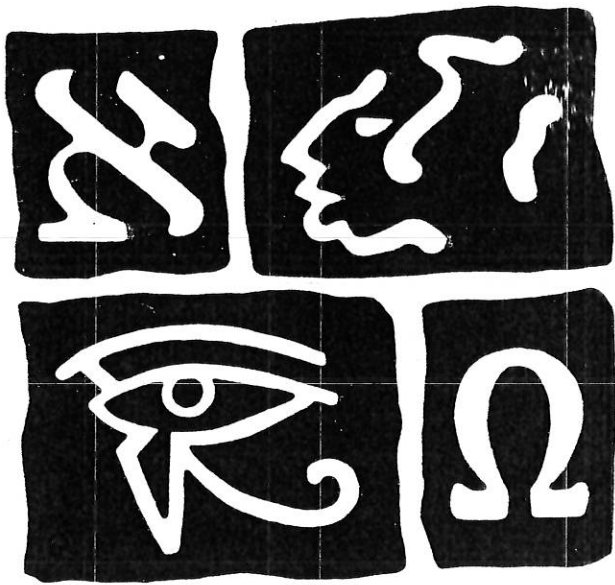
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**The House of Israel  
and Native Americans**

D. Brent Smith

SMT-80

**Preliminary  
Report**

FOUNDATION FOR  
ANCIENT RESEARCH AND  
MORMON STUDIES

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THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AND NATIVE AMERICANS

The Americas lay hidden from the rest of the civilized world for centuries. Columbus' voyage ushered in an Age of Discovery in which the new hemisphere caught the attention of explorers, cartographers, and the popular mind. The presence of native inhabitants, who were called Indians by Columbus, proved an enigma to the learned men of the time. Indeed, for the world, the origin of these native Americans has remained a largely unresolved mystery.

A myriad of theories as to the origin of the American Indian have been advanced. The dominant theory of a migration of major proportion over a landbridge from Northeast Asia has not proven satisfactory in the explanation of a number of anomalous discoveries. The origin of the Indians has been variously attributed to refugees from Troy; Phoenicians whose sailing prowess is legend; Caananite refugees; Egyptians; Hebrews; inhabitants of the lost continent of Atlantis or a similar submerged continent in the Pacific; Ethiopians; Canary Islanders; Carthaginians; descendants of Madoc, Prince of Wales who returned to his homeland after finding an unknown land to the West and then set sail again in 1170 with 10 ships; Druids; Celts; Scandnavians; Polynesians; Malays; Chinese from a lost fleet of Kublai Khan; Hindus; Koreans; Tartars and Mongols. Ophir, a land from whence gold was brought in the time of Solomon, was fancied by some to have been America. The learned scholar Hugo Grotius fashioned Peru to have been settled by Chinese; Central America by Ethiopians and North America by Scandnavians. Some savants have maintained that the early inhabitants of the Americas were indigenous to the hemisphere, human culture and animal life having developed autonomously and without cross-fertilization. Another theory has it that native Americans were the original

aborigines from whence the Old World became populated.

The forementioned theories have been variously based. Lost voyagers, oblique references to unknown lands, and supposed accidents in ocean navigation have provided ample latitude for conjecture. The discovery of a Japanese junk at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1833 or the case of Portuguese explorer Pedro Cabral being blown to Brazil in 1500 on an intended voyage around the coast of Africa might likely have had their pre-Columbian equivalents. Interpretations of Indian rites, customs and traditions have equally provided links and led to suppositions of Old World origins. The discovery of Old World-like artifacts in the Americas have in many cases been offered as the certain proof of a theory. Anthropological investigations of language and racial characteristics have provided empirical certification for the approach being defended. In many cases it would appear that the theory came first, the buttressing with likely evidence later, a relatively easy task given the wealth of archaeological deposits and the potential possibilities for encounters with the Old World. It should appear obvious that no one theory of the origin of the Indians can claim exclusivity and that some degree of skepticism is necessary with regard to each.

The notion of a Hebrew or Israelite descent -- that native Americans are in fact descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes -- was a view that can be traced to 16th Century Europe. It enjoyed particular popularity in the early 19th Century United States at the time of Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Within the scope of this paper I propose first to explore the antecedents and development of the notion of Hebrew descent; next to examine this view vis a vis contending views in the early

years of the American Republic -- both in the dialogue of the learned men of the day and the popular view espoused from the pulpit and published in written form; and lastly to touch upon the relationship between the issue of Indian origins and the ascription of Indian ancestry offered in the Book of Mormon.

In their efforts to place the unanticipated discovery of the new race of inhabitants found in the Western Hemisphere, Europeans were prone to account for the Indians within the context of the Biblical descent from the first human family; a postdiluvian link to the Old World was for the most part assumed. Once it was realized that Columbus had not reached the East Indies, the earliest theories postulated that America was Atlantis or that the natives were descended from Carthaginians. But certain Spanish fathers who followed the conquistadors to the Americas noted Indian rituals and customs that impressed them as strikingly Hebrew and even Christian in derivation. In chronicling the myths and traditions of their people, native Indian writers such as the Aztec historian Ixtlilxochit provided additional sources for comparison and conjecture. Diego de Landa, Bishop of Yucatan, remarked upon the stories of ancestors from the East and a God who had delivered these ancestors by opening paths through the sea. Diego Duran based his opinion of a Hebrew ancestry of the Indians on "their way of life, ceremonies, rites, and superstitions, omens, and hypocrisies," -- including stories bearing marked resemblance to the creation and Tower of Babel accounts in Hebrew tradition and even an account of a major exodus with manna supplied from heaven (Huddleston, 38-39). Suarez de Peralta was first among many writers to trace the origin of the native Americans to the account in the apocryphal Old Testament book of 2nd Esdras of the ten Israelite tribes seeking refuge after being displaced from their homelands by the Assyrians:

....those are the ten tribes, which were carried away prisoners out of their own land in the time of Osea the king, whom Salmanasar the king of Assyria led away captive, and he carried them over the waters, and so came they into another land. But they took this counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt, that they might there keep their statutes, which they never kept in their own land. And they entered into Euphrates by the narrow passages of the river. For the most High then shewed signs for them, and held still the flood, till they were passed over. For through that country there was a great way to go, namely, of a year and a half: and the same region is called Arsareth. Then dwelt they there until the latter time....

(2 Esdras 13:40-45)

The further country -- Arsareth -- was by interpretation of Peralta and others, America. The route proposed by these advocates was through the Caspian Sea area, along the northern perimeter of the Himalayas, either through the territory of the Mongols or Northern China to the land known as Kamchatka -- the northeastern part of the Asian continent -- thence across the Straits of Anian (the Bering Strait) and down the Western coast of North America. A variant theory places Arsareth (given the limited length of the journey) in Northern Europe with presumed further migration to America over the expanse of Greenland and Laborador.

The question of Israelite origin figured prominently in a dialogue initiated among European scholars near the end of the 16th Century. Gregorio Garcia in his Origen de los indios de el nuevo mundo outlined the arguments for a Hebrew descent, though not ruling out other possible migrations. Garcia presented the evidence for each contending theory with the view that each could be substantiated. Garcia's major protagonist was Jose de Acosta who, taking a more restrictive approach in his Historia natural y moral de las Indias, rejected the notion of transoceanic voyages and one-time migrations, postulating the existence of a "continuing connection (such as a landbridge) which induced men to come to America because



it was there." (Huddelston, 52) The Acostan school with its beginnings in the late 16th Century would strongly influence the development of what by the mid-19th Century would become the dominant view in American anthropological thinking.

The Garcian tradition, on the other hand, influenced the thought of two Northern Europeans whose works would become well known among the early North American colonists. In 1648 in London, Thomas Thorowgood published Jewes in America, or Probabilities that the Americans are of that Race, basing his conclusions on purported Jewish origins of native myths, customs and sacred rites as well as similarities in Indian words and phrases to Hebrew. Thorowgood reported the account of Antonio Montesinos, a Portuguese Jew who allegedly discovered a colony of Jews in Peru. Montesinos' good character was attested to by Manasseh ben Israel, chief rabbi of Amsterdam who in 1650 published his own work, Spes Israelis -- The Hope of Israel. This work went through several editions in English, Spanish, Dutch, German and Hebrew. Presenting the older arguments of the Garcian school and emphasizing the general currency of the belief among Spanish settlers in the New World, Manasseh concluded that the Americas were anciently inhabited by part of the Ten Tribes via the Straits of Anian (Winsor, 115). Because of his own Jewish credentials, Manasseh's views were regarded by many as being highly authoritative. Both Thorowgood and Manasseh introduced a strong millennial appeal that was not lost in its influence on their readers -- for the reunification of the tribes of Israel in the case of Manasseh and for the Christianization of both Indians and Jews in Thorowgood's case.

Early American colonists were likely quite familiar with the hypothesis of Israelite origins with this popular tradition prone



to influence their own first-hand observations and pronouncements on the subject. William Penn in 1682 found in the American Indian a "like countenance with the Jewish race" (William Penn's Works, Vol. II, 80). Cotton Mather, noted Boston clergyman, in a series of letters to the Royal Society of London, offered confirmation of the Lost Tribes theory, noting that Indians in Connecticut were practicing circumcision. (It should be noted, however, that Mather -- in the Garcian tradition -- did not rule out other possible sources of Indian origin.) Roger Williams, Thomas Mayhew, Samuel Sewall, the Reverend John Eliot, self-styled apostle to the Indians -- indeed "most of the prominent scholars and theologians of Massachusetts were inclined to the same opinion" (Winsor, 115; Smithsonian Contributions, 5). James Adair, a trader who lived close to forty years among the Cherokee, Choctaw and Chickasaw tribes, authored The History of the American Indians wherein he presented some 23 different proofs to demonstrate descent from "Jewish" tribes. Most of Adair's proofs involve the likening of observed Indian rites and customs to the author's own understanding of Biblical Old Testament traditions. Adair provided a framework that would be heavily borrowed from by Elias Boudinot, Ethan Smith, Josiah Priest and others.

Acceptance of the Hebrew origin theory prevailed in 18th Century colonial America but not without the expression of skepticism on the part of some and the advancement of contending theories. President Stiles of Yale College (in 1783) declared that American Indians are one kind of people -- the same as the people of the northeast of Asia. Thomas Jefferson in his Notes on Virginia states that "the resemblance between the Indians of America and the eastern inhabitants of Asia would induce us to conjecture that the former are descendants of the latter or the latter of the former..."

(Smithsonian Contributions, 74). Benjamin Smith Barton, professor at the University of Pennsylvania and the "earliest American with scientific training to discuss the subject," contended in papers addressed to the American Philosophical Society that "Americans are descended -- at least some of them -- from Asiatic peoples still recognized" (Winsor, 371).

In the decades immediately following independence, a fledgling United States was undergoing transformation, with Americans now focusing on the wide expanse of land inviting settlement. In pushing into the territorial hinterlands, settlers of European descent came into contact anew with the continent's original inhabitants. Coincident with a new period of religious awakening, the American Indian came to be regarded not only as savage and foe, but as potential brother to be proselytized and added to the fold. The assumption of a "white man's burden" and the renewed popularization of the supposition that Indians were of Hebrew lineage were corollary manifestations of the early 19th Century religious revival. (Proselyting efforts among the Indians were, however, never of great consequence.) Interest in the Indians and preoccupation with the question of their origin were intensified as well with the discoveries of major earthworks and burial mound formations (see Silverberg), the uncovering of sundry artifacts many of which were judged to be of Old World cultural origin, and by the popularization of the Latin American expeditions of Alexander von Humboldt and in particular Edward King, Lord Kingsborough, an avowed proponent of the Hebrew origins theory. Such popular interest was manifest in the success demonstrated by Josiah Priest's 1833 work, American Antiquities -- a major best-seller going through several editions.

At another level, quite apart from the fascination with the topic at the popular level, learned men of the day were taking up the issue of Indian origins anew, intensifying the dialogue begun some three centuries earlier -- though now with particular emphasis on the employment of methodologies from the emerging discipline of anthropology. Focal points in this new thrust were learned societies, in particular the American Antiquarian Society (founded in 1812) and the Smithsonian Institution, as well as scholarly journals such as the Journal of Arts and Sciences.

Samuel Lathan Mitchill, Professor of Natural History and a former member of the U.S. Senate and chairman of its Committee on Indian Affairs, DeWitt Clinton, natural scientist and former governor of New York, and Caleb Atwater, historian and intellectual pioneer of the Midwest (Description of the Antiquities Discovered in the State of Ohio and Other Western States, 1820), were among those learned men who "became convinced that the opinions of European historians and naturalists were so full of hypothesis and error (on the subject) that they ought to be discarded" (Mitchill letter of 13 January 1817 to the Corresponding Secretary of the American Antiquarian Society). Based on what he termed to be original pieces of evidence, Mitchill came to "the great conclusion that the three races of Malays, Tartars and Scandnavians contribute to make up the American population." He offered an explanation for the Round Builder fortifications and tombs by hypothesizing that a weaker Malay race was ultimately destroyed by "warlike Tartar hordes that entered our hemisphere from the northeast of Asia." (It was Mitchill, incidentally, who, along with Charles Anthon, was visited in 1828 by Martin Harris, who showed them inscriptions from the Book of Mormon plates.)

Contributors to the dialogue in the learned societies were, as evidenced by Mitchill's forestated view, themselves prone to espouse their own particular notion of Indian origins. Clinton favored a Scandanavian origin; statesman and scientist Hugh Williamson a Hindu descent and merchant John Delafield an Egyptian descent. Much of the focus centered on the question of the earthworks and mounds and on empirical investigations in such areas as linguistic relationships and racial physiology.

While the special claims of Mitchill and others of his genre are themselves open to criticism, those engaged in this dialogue do represent a departure from the popularizing approaches of the time. This thrust found its antecedents in the Acostan tradition and earlier skeptical voices in colonial America and led to the general embracing within the learned societies by mid-19th Century (with few dissenting voices) of the hypothesis of an Asiatic descent and land migration from Northeastern Asia. So dogmatically orthodox did this position become in American anthropological circles that until recently contrary notions were much less seriously considered, if not effectively suppressed. The examinations undertaken by those affiliated with the learned societies are beyond the scope of this paper; two early investigations do, however, bear passing mention. Albert Gallatin, following an extensive study of native American languages, concluded that "however differing in their words, the most striking uniformity in their grammatical forms and structure appears to exist in all the American languages from Greenland to Cape Horn (Smithsonian Contributions, 65). Dr. Samuel Morton of Philadelphia, following some 16 years of comparisons in his collection of *Crania Americana*, declared in an 1842 paper before the Boston Society of Natural History

his conviction "that all the American nations, excepting the Eskimaux, are of one race, and that this race is peculiar and distinct from all others." Within the one race, Morton did, however, offer a distinction between a "Toltecan family of demi-civilized nations" and an "American family" of all "barbarous tribes of the New World, excepting the Polar tribes, or Mongol Americans" (Smithsonian Contributions, 76-80).

Focusing now on the prevalent popular view of Hebrew origins, one is struck by the similarities of approach, the amassing of like evidence and the liberal citing of other proponents of the view in the published literature of the time. Such discoveries as a parchment phylactery in Pittsfield, Massachusetts in 1815 and a stone tablet inscribed with Hebrew-like characters in Newark, Ohio were presented as even more compelling evidence.

The hypotheses of Adair strongly influenced the work of Elias Boudinot, former President of the Continental Congress and director of the National Mint who in the twilight of his career in 1816 authored A Star in the West or an attempt to discover the long lost Ten Tribes of Israel. Ethan Smith, pastor of a church in Foultney, Vermont wrote View of the Hebrews, or the Tribes of Israel in America in 1823, borrowing heavily from Adair and Boudinot while offering a set of eleven "arguments in favor of the natives of America being the descendants of Israel." In the words of Ethan Smith:

Can another people on earth be found exhibiting one-sixth part of the evidences adduced in favor of the American natives? We expect no new revelation, nor miracles wrought to inform who are the ten tribes of Israel. Here is just such evidence as we should rationally look for; but six times as much of it.

Josiah Priest in his 1825 work, The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed offered Ethan Smith's 11 arguments plus one of his own as "proofs that the Indians of North America are lineally descended from the ancient Hebrews." Israel Worsley in A View of the American Indians, Pointing Out their Origin, published in London in 1828, utilized previous authors as sources, though faulting both Boudinot and Smith for "the disposition shewn to intermix religious views and party zeal, which cannot but be offensive to many readers." The testament of a convert to Christianity, William Apes of the Pequod tribe, in an 1829 publication, A Son of the Forest, The Experience of William Apes, attests to the validity of Adair's likening of tribal customs to Hebrew traditions. In 1830 Lord Kingsborough published the first in his series of nine volumes of Mexican Antiquities. In the words of historian H.H. Bancroft, Kingsborough has "a theory to prove (that of Hebrew origin) and to accomplish his object he drafts every shadow of an analogy into his service" (Native Races, Vol. 5, 84).

Epaphoras Jones in 1831 published On the Ten Tribes of Israel and the Aborigines of America. Priest's American Antiquities, which appeared in 1833 and went through 22,000 copies within 30 months, is judged to "have had a wide circulation and perhaps a corresponding degree of influence on the opinions of certain classes of readers.....a sort of curiosity shop of archaeological fragments, whose materials are gathered without the exercise of much discrimination and disposed without much system or classification, and apparently without inquiry into their authenticity" (Smithsonian Contributions, 41). Priest, while promoting the Hebrew origins theory and ascribing to the 2nd Esdras account of migration, also



offers support for the migration of various other peoples, concluding that "all along the different eras of time, different races of men....have colonized different parts of the continent."

Barbara Ann Simon sought to popularize the relatively inaccessible work of Kingsborough in her Ten Tribes of Israel, historically identified with the aborigines of the Western Hemisphere, published in London in 1836. She too accepted the 2nd Esdras theory of migration but posited a lengthy sojourn in Asia where Israelites became Tartars who then eventually emigrated to the New World. Mordecai Noah, an American Jew, an account of whose speech on the subject of Hebrew origins of the Indians was reported in a Palmyra newspaper in 1825 (Glaser, 62), published in 1837 his Discourse on the evidences of the American Indians being the descendants of the Ten Tribes of Israel. Noah relied also primarily on the works and hypotheses of his predecessors.

Fascination with the origin of the Indian and conjecture as to the peopling of the continent also influenced the literature of the period. English poet Robert Southey tied the Aztecs to the Welsh expedition of Prince Madoc. Solomon Spaulding's 1809 historical romance Manuscript Story narrates the encounter in the New World of Mound Builder and savage races by a band of Christian Romans who were blown westward to America. Longfellow's "The Skeleton in Armor" with its account of Norse settlement and William Cullen Bryant's tale of a now extinct agricultural race in "The Praries" are further examples of such literature (Dahl).

It was during this period of increased popular interest in the question of Indian origins that the Book of Mormon was published in Palmyra in 1830. In attesting to be an abridgement of the record of "a remnant of the house of Israel" translated from gold plates,



it did not at the time of its coming forth have a noticeable impact on the ongoing dialogue. Joseph Smith in his History of the Church (Vol. 1, 84) noted that "it was accounted as a strange thing, as the ancient prophet had predicted of it." While Joseph Smith and others subsequently noted as "external evidences" the corroboration of the Book of Mormon in the accounts of archaeological findings and Indian rites and traditions (Times and Seasons, Vol. 3, 640 -- a commentary on "evidences" described in Josiah Priest's American Antiquities; also, Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol. 5, 574-575), it is notably singular that the infant Church and its representatives did not seek to capitalize on the obvious connection of the Book of Mormon to one of the popular issues of the time. There are accounts to be sure of conversions through acquaintance and serious perusal of what Joseph Smith regarded as the "keystone of our religion," but conversion was more than likely in line with a particular resonance found in the teaching of the "restoration of all things."

For those who accept it, the Book of Mormon does shed important light on the pre-Columbian New World civilization and on the origin of at least the dominant group of native Americans. It outlines three separate migrations from the Old World; it suggests an explanation of the presence of extensive burial mounds and earthwork fortifications on the continent; and it confirms the hypothesis of the extermination of one group by another. The Book of Mormon lends general credence to the identification of Indian rites and traditions with Hebrew and in some cases Christian antecedents, demonstrating the loss and distortion of original tradition and the descent into a savage state. One must tread very cautiously, however, in postulating

such linkages, for despite occasional hints and allusions, the Book of Mormon does not qualify either as an archaeological handbook or a geographical gazateer -- nor does it purport to be such. In its clear religious and doctrinal thrust it sidesteps archaeological and anthropological issues. The Book of Mormon plays a catalytic role in linking dispensations and in restoring the ancient order of things spiritual.

The crucial reason why the Book of Mormon had little impact on either the early 19th Century intellectual dialogue or popular views on the subject of Indian origins was its claim to have been brought forth and translated by supernatural means. Neither Charles Anthon nor any religious sectarian of the day could accept the account of the Angel Moroni or Joseph Smith's mode of translation without accepting the ramifications of Divine intervention and new revelation. The Book of Mormon was thus dismissed a priori, having little if any impact on the discussion of Indian origins, and receiving but scant mention in subsequent treatment of the issue by historians (see Winsor, Bancroft). Anathema to religionists, the book initially remained obscure in the secular world, where as the "Mormon Gold Bible," it was indeed an object of curiosity.

In rejecting the claim as to the Book of Mormon's origin, it has been widely assumed that the book must have been the product of Joseph Smith. The inherent difficulty in plausibly demonstrating its composition by an itinerant farmer lent impetus to the notion that Joseph plagiarized or borrowed significant portions from another source, the Spaulding manuscript hypothesis widely assumed to have been the original source. Isaac Woodbridge Riley in his turn-of-the-century Yale PhD thesis on "The Founder of Mormonism" suggested the Book of Mormon to be the product of Joseph Smith's imagination

or fantasy with the book constituting an amalgamation of these fantasies along with wholesale borrowing of often contradictory New England sectarian doctrines. For Riley, "judaizing theories were in the air and were especially prevalent among the clergy. Hence the source of Joseph's antiquarian fancies need not have been literary; what he heard from the pulpit was enough to set his fancy at work" (Riley, 128). Fawn Brodie remains the best-known proponent of this hypothesis. She weaves together the threads for circumstantial evidence in Joseph's penchant for money-digging, his "unsavory" reputation drawn from affidavits of his contemporaries provided for such as Philastus Hurlburt, the presumed ready availability of the works of Ethan Smith, Josiah Priest and others, and Joseph's own preoccupation with the continent's ancient inhabitants as attested to in the accounts of his mother. Unable to establish the crucial link to any particular source, Brodie in the end concludes that "the Book of Mormon was highly original and imaginative fiction" (Brodie, 48).

While superficial parallels to the work of Ethan Smith and other popular views of the time can be found, they are not central but indeed peripheral to the aforementioned thrust of the Book of Mormon. A closer examination reveals even greater inconsistencies and a number of instances in which the Book of Mormon is "unique" in its nonconformity with prevalent views (see particularly the work of Richard Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and The American Revolution," in BYU Studies, Autumn 1976, and his forthcoming volume in the Church History Series). A case in point is the issue under discussion: for the Book of Mormon, the Lost Ten Tribes are located elsewhere, in another locale -- they are likely those to whom Christ refers as yet other sheep during his visit on the

American continent (see 3 Nephi, Chapters 16 and 17).

The position of the Book of Mormon with respect to the currents of early 19th Century intellectual and popular thought is a topic that invites closer examination. This Richard Bushman and others engaged in the study of the issue can hopefully provide.

A full picture of the Americas before Columbus continues to elude the world. The origin of the hemisphere's native inhabitants remains to be fully explained. The Book of Mormon -- while certainly of relevance to the topic itself -- has remained in the background and has had but limited impact in attempts to achieve resolution of the issue.

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