

*Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth*, by Alessandro Scafi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

Alessandro Scafi, who lectures at universities and museums in Bologna, Italy, and in London, England, draws upon his 1999 doctoral dissertation at the University of London for much of the content of this volume. In this thoroughly researched and beautifully illustrated book, Professor Scafi explores the cultural history of maps that attempt to represent the Garden of Eden as a location in space and time. He retraces the history of map-making from the very early Christian era through the modern period, with particular emphasis on medieval and early modern examples. Moreover, he clearly demonstrates how cultural attitudes about the function of maps have changed over time.

Most of the maps examined here made no attempts to display mathematically accurate relationships between landmarks and must be regarded as concept charts rather than as cartographic models of an objective geographic reality. This allowed early mapmakers to represent the known world as linked entities appearing in both space and time but also in a purely contemplative or allegorical arena. For instance, the *mappa mundi* displayed continents and bodies of water relative to each other and the four cardinal points (with east usually at the top). At the same time, the history of the world as it proceeded from Eden in the East toward Jerusalem, then to Rome in the West, was overlaid on the same map. In some cases, superposing the map onto the body of the crucified Christ allowed yet another layer of meaning for eschatological interpretations.

Scafi repeatedly points out that the question of whether the Garden

of Eden should appear on a map at all stemmed from a problematic translation from the Hebrew Bible. The ambiguous word מִקְדֶּם (*miqedem*) as a modifier of the name of paradise was translated in the Septuagint as “eastward” but in Jerome’s Vulgate as “from before the beginning.” Hence, the early interpreters of the Bible sought to represent Eden as both a place and a time.

In *Mapping Paradise*, the author also examines in detail the various theories over the centuries as to the location and accessibility of Eden. He mentions briefly the Jehovah’s Witnesses among the modern proponents of a literal Garden but makes reference to neither Joseph Smith nor Adam-on-di-Ahman. The unquestionable strength of the volume remains in the analysis of pre-Enlightenment representations of Eden in the world.

—Jesse D. Hurlbut