

Richard V. Francaviglia. *The Mapmakers of New Zion: A Cartographic History of Mormonism*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2015.

*Reviewed by Brandon S. Plewe*

This book is the most comprehensive treatment of historical cartography of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to date. It is beautifully illustrated with over one hundred maps that have been created by, or at least used by, Mormons over the past two hundred years, and it further discusses many more, demonstrating that cartography has been an important, and underappreciated, part of the history of the Church. It should be noted that the term “historical cartography” can be interpreted two ways: a history of maps (as in this work) or maps of history (see *Mapping Mormonism*<sup>1</sup>). As Francaviglia discusses in his afterword (240), the two approaches are very different but can complement each other well.

*The Mapmakers of New Zion* is only partially a survey of historical cartography; in fact, that titular focus, “A Cartographic History of Mormonism,” is probably of secondary importance. What Francaviglia has really created is a book about the evolving sense of place in the Mormon psyche: the sacred and secular way in which Mormons have viewed the spaces they have encountered and those they have created. As he states, “All maps function as complex texts that convey stories about people’s changing relationship to place” (226). In this book, maps serve as a primary source for gleaning this sense of place in ways that cannot be found in more traditional source documents.

The introduction is a “prerequisite,” introducing several key concepts of cartography and geography that are used throughout the book but may be unfamiliar to many readers. While such introductory material

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1. Brandon S. Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson, eds., *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2014).

is often presented rather dryly, Francaviglia places it in the context of religious history, so even those who are already well versed in these concepts will gain new insights from his unique perspective.

Each chapter then focuses on a particular time period and/or theme that epitomizes how contemporary maps elucidate the Mormon sense of place and how it evolved over time. Thus, each chapter describes a nexus of history, religion, geography, and cartography.

Chapter 1 generally discusses maps created during Joseph Smith's tenure as prophet (1830–44) but focuses particularly on the urban plans he created or commissioned, starting with the abstract City of Zion Plat and continuing to subsequent variations. The spiritual significance of the City of Zion as the spatial manifestation of a utopian society has been covered before.<sup>2</sup> What Francaviglia adds is an analysis of the plat maps themselves as evidence of that significance and the meaning of changes in subsequent plans. It is important to note that none of the plans he shows were ever fully built—even Kirtland was never completed more than about four blocks, and the extent to which Far West was constructed is unknown but ephemeral at best. It is therefore surprising that Francaviglia never mentions Nauvoo, the only one of Joseph's city plats that was ever fully realized. The Nauvoo plat differs from that of the original City of Zion in a number of significant ways: most notably, the larger lot sizes and the lack of any central square (the temple and commercial center were actually built in a neighboring plat developed by Daniel H. Wells, then non-Mormon but future member of the First Presidency). I had hoped that this book would explore why Joseph departed so radically from his original vision of a Zion city when given the perfect opportunity to implement it, but I am left wanting.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 focus on the use and creation of maps in the settlement of the American West during the second half of the nineteenth century. Francaviglia effectively demonstrates how crucial maps were in finding a new gathering place west of the Rocky Mountains in the Salt Lake Valley, in locating a route to get there, then in finding and establishing additional settlements across the intermountain West. The variety of maps the author references, from rough sketches to commercial-grade prints, illustrates the wide variety of purposes that maps served during the Pioneer Era and reminds us that the quality of

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2. Richard H. Jackson, "Sacred Space and City Planning: The Mormon Example," *Architecture et Comportement/Architecture and Behaviour* 9, no. 2 (1993): 251–59.

a map is not necessarily judged by its aesthetic appeal or its professional craft but by how well it is suited to the task at hand.

In chapter 5, Francaviglia broaches the subject of portraying the geography of the Book of Mormon. While this is not technically part of the history of the Church, it is relevant for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the endeavor of mapping a sacred narrative is another evidence of the Mormon sense of place (or rather, the variety and evolution of Mormon senses of place). In fact, in the mind of many members, “Mormon Geography” is synonymous with “Book of Mormon Geography.” I have often had to explain to people that the modern Church has a geography also.

Any scholarly commentary on Book of Mormon research is problematic because the book itself is not a proven fact, but an article of faith. Thus, every statement is colored by whether the original researcher, and the commentator, believes the book to be true or false. This chapter is no exception. While Francaviglia frequently claims to be taking an objective view, with statements such as “I leave to others the task of defending or criticizing the Book of Mormon” (156), he cannot resist raising a number of objections to the book that have nothing to do with geography or mapping, and his discussion of the attempts to map the events described therein has a dismissive tone that is not found in the rest of the book. When talking about detailed theories of the geography of the Book of Mormon, Francaviglia chose to focus on just two of the more than ninety published theories, two that are virtually impossible scientifically and have no support from the community of Mormon scholars. He uses these to imply that Mormon scholars happily disregard science and archaeology to support faith, while he largely ignores the dozens of publications that have far more justification.

While I am someone who believes the Book of Mormon to be factually correct (but who does not espouse any particular theory about Book of Mormon geography, for many of the reasons stated in this chapter), Francaviglia does not. We should be able to have a rational dialogue about the history of this avenue of research (which has largely been undertaken by believers) without worrying about whether the Book of Mormon is actually true or false. This chapter is not that dialogue, although one can find a number of good points amid the negative rhetoric. For example, the chapter effectively illustrates the way in which implausible theories that disregard science, archaeology, geography, and textual analysis give the entire enterprise a poor reputation; it is therefore imperative that theories of Book of Mormon geography be objectively validated by the scholarly community. Francaviglia also demonstrates

the inherent danger in pinning one's testimony on a particular interpretation of scripture that could be disproven by future evidence.

Besides this concern, I was surprised to find that this chapter generally displayed a lower quality of scholarship than the rest of the book. Misquotations and factual misstatements about the text of the Book of Mormon (that have nothing to do with whether it is true or false) are forgivable for someone who has not studied it in depth. However, there are basic lapses in logic, such as the frequent assumptions that because some Mormon somewhere claimed something (such as the Hohokam ruins around Phoenix, Arizona, being constructed by Nephites), Latter-day Saints in general must believe the same. There are also maps and observations that Francaviglia misses that would seem obviously relevant (at least more relevant than some of what was included). For example, on page 184 he discusses the scriptural maps found on the lds.org website but fails to acknowledge the fact that the same maps are published in the printed versions of the Bible and Doctrine and Covenants carried in the hands of every member, with the clear implication this carries about the value that the Church places on geographic understanding. Lastly, in the latter part of the chapter, concerning the contemporary mapping of the Church's own history, Francaviglia misstates several basic historical facts; for example, that the "farm of Josiah Stowell" is one of the "new sites settled by the Mormons" (184). In the rest of the book, he has clearly done better research.

Chapter 6 discusses the creation and use of maps in the global proselytizing efforts of the Church and its members. Missionary work is a crucial nexus of religion, history, and geography that is illuminated by the cartography presented by Francaviglia. While the maps drawn by Walter Murray Gibson came from before his brief and tragic foray into Mormonism and do not reflect the actual missionary focus of the Church at the time, Gibson's story is just as enlightening as any of the other vignettes found in *The Mapmakers of New Zion*.

The telling of Gibson's story is one example of a very useful method Francaviglia employs to portray how maps reflect a mindset: to focus on individual mapmakers for whom we have additional sources to better understand why they made the maps they did. Understanding the personalities and backgrounds of Mormon mapmakers such as Walter M. Gibson, W. W. Phelps, Thomas Bullock, Albert Carrington, John Steele, and especially James H. Martineau gives a special insight into how Mormons have thought about the world around them. Francaviglia recognizes traits in Martineau and others to which cartographers aspire, being "scientifically disciplined, spiritually engaged, and artistically imaginative" (146).

One general problem in *The Mapmakers of New Zion* could be shared with many works of rhetorical critique: in many cases, Francaviglia, in his quest to tie all of these maps into a coherent thesis, imbues a given map with far more significance than it warrants. For example, the design of Lehi, Arizona, portrayed on page 182 took advantage of the existing Hohokam canals, as stated in the caption, but there is no evidence of the mythic meaning of the design described in the text. In the same vein, I agree that the map of Paiutes on page 183 “reveals the Mormons’ long-standing interest in native peoples,” but this document clearly has a lot more to do with the practical interests of living among the Paiutes than any supposed connection to the Book of Mormon. A third example is the map on page 186, documenting the twentieth-century parcels, buildings, and roads that were involved in the Church’s effort to purchase the Hill Cumorah; there is nothing about the historical narrative of Joseph Smith, as posited in the text (184). In some cases, these over-the-top interpretations are accompanied by much simpler and more likely alternatives that emphasize how superfluous the former is. For example, on page 227, Francaviglia raises the very relevant question of why almost all Mormon maps were created by men. After a lengthy discussion of the possible geographic ineptitude of women and the literature on feminist critiques of cartography, he arrives at the obvious, and rather prosaic, answer: it was because, unfortunately, the professions related to mapping were traditionally dominated by men, inside and outside of the Church.

That said, I acknowledge that in many cases, it is completely appropriate to search for subtexts in the superficially mundane. For example, I wholly agree that the bas-relief maps of the world adorning the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City (224) are deeply symbolic of the way in which the Church views its global reach and significance, which is similarly demonstrated by the Mapparium at the headquarters of Christian Science in Boston (10).

On a related note, while the vast majority of the maps that Francaviglia has chosen to highlight clearly fit into the general storyline he is weaving, others seem a stretch. Sometimes I wondered if he had found a random map that was too intriguing to leave out and then had to invent an interpretation to fit it into a given chapter. For example, I thought the maps portrayed on pages 191–95 were interesting, but I could not follow Francaviglia’s attempt to tie them into any general thesis.

Francaviglia demonstrates that he has successfully collected a fairly comprehensive set of the maps used by, created by, or created about Mormons since the 1830s. In addition to the hundred or so maps beautifully illustrating the book, Francaviglia discusses at least a hundred

more, and I'm sure this is a fraction of what he encountered in his research. This collection is potentially an invaluable resource for future scholars of the history, geography, doctrine, and practice of Mormonism, so *The Mapmakers of New Zion* seems incomplete without an annotated bibliography of these maps. I would encourage the author to make such a bibliographic database available online if possible. This would also have allowed Francaviglia to get around the coherence issue mentioned before by allowing him to include maps without needing to relate them to any broader storyline.

On a technical note, one frequent annoyance was that the figures were often four, five, or more pages away from the text that discusses them. I'm sure this was not the author's fault, but more careful layout would have made the book easier to read.

The book concludes by making a number of profound observations about the relationship between cartography and Mormonism. For example, as a fellow geographer, I too have wondered why maps are not more common in Church history scholarship (229), although I have seen a great increase in the number of historical works that feature maps, such as the Joseph Smith Papers. A second conclusion is that the vast majority of LDS-produced maps are a reflection of some basic traits of Mormons and Mormonism (230–32): our maps have tended to be as conservative, serious, respectful of authority, technologically advanced, and zealous as we are.

*The Mapmakers of New Zion* thus effectively makes the case that maps are an important, and underutilized, source for understanding the history and geography of the Latter-day Saints. More importantly, this work enlightens us as to how the Latter-day Saints have thought about their own history and geography.

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