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Reviewed by Philip Barlow

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## Book Reviews

Brandon S. Plewe, S. Kent Brown, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard H. Jackson, eds. *Mapping Mormonism: An Atlas of Latter-day Saint History*. 2nd edition. Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2014.

*Reviewed by Philip Barlow*

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IT NEVER OCCURRED TO MY YOUNGER SELF to enroll in a geography course. Mea culpa. Forces of modern technology conspire to make us less literate than we might be regarding our space and its implications. Cars, radio, telephones, television, and airplanes have this ironic effect—muting for some the significance of region even as they transport us to wider spaces. This irony patterns that of Facebook and texting, which can multiply yet trivialize our relations with “friends.” The radical democratization of society brought in particular by the Internet has many virtues. Yet it is also arguably related to today’s selective erosion of community and regard for institutions, typified by the widening movement of the religious Nones: “I’m spiritual, not religious.” Whether one celebrates or laments the trend, it behooves students of religion and history not to ignore it. Location *matters*.

Space becomes place when inhabitants interpret it. Place is intrinsic to much of religion. We sense this when we imagine a Hindu ritually entering the Ganges River or on pilgrimage toward the sacred city of Benares, when we observe Muslims around the world facing Mecca during each of their daily prayers, when we consider the promised land

of Abraham's ancient covenant and the consequent contested space in turmoil today and for millennia prior. We must think spatially to comprehend the potent zones of holiness embraced by different constituencies in old or modern Israel: the nation as a whole, Galilee, Bethlehem, Judea, Jerusalem, Gethsemane, the Dome of the Rock, the temple, the holy of holies, the mercy seat.

In the world's most religiously complex nation, the United States, geography has affected most everything. The religion of America's earliest inhabitants *was* the land, and the spirits, peoples, herds, crops, and cosmos that interacted with it. Lakota aligned their tepees with sacred points on the horizon. Africans made Americans against their will had their minds, fate, and religion shaped by a land that grew cotton. Puritans erected chapels in the literal and symbolic centers of their New England towns.

From its earliest days, no religion has proved more inherently spatial than Mormonism. The Book of Mormon is nothing if not a sacralized interpretation of American space. And scarcely months after organizing the new Church of Christ, Joseph Smith proclaimed a geographical revelation (D&C 29) that would control Mormon history for a century. If not for "the Gathering," Mormon history as we know it would unravel.

Under the direction of editors Brandon Plewe, Kent Brown, Donald Cannon, and Richard Jackson, more than forty researchers from BYU, the seminaries and institutes, and the church's historical department have teamed with a dozen others to grapple with their religion across time and space by assembling *Mapping Mormonism*, the finest and most comprehensive historical atlas of Mormonism. Published in 2012, the 2014 second edition includes modest additions: recently called General Authorities, Utah voting patterns in the 2012 election, new buildings accruing on BYU's campus, and updated church statistics. Its 270 pages boast more than five hundred maps, timelines, and charts, supported by brief historical narratives. This is an achievement to celebrate for anyone serious about understanding this complex, fascinating, and consequential religion. *Mapping's* importance may be grasped by comparing it to its more modest predecessor, *Historical Atlas of Mormonism* (1994), which featured seventy-eight simpler, two-color maps.

Mormonism is more fundamentally about relations than doctrines or scripture, just as math is basically about relations and only incidentally about numbers. And relations among events, facts, and phenomena across time and space are what the atlas depicts. Cartography and poetry share a definitional trait in *compression*; there is enough information compacted into even single examples of the excellent maps and timelines of *Mapping Mormonism* to dazzle the careful reader.

Maps do require careful readers. As all remembering (history) entails forgetting (necessary selection of topic and sources and shaping of narrative), so also all maps are white lies that tell the truth of the landscape. Conceptions in any visual representation may obscure potential or unnoticed competing conceptions; topics chosen may hide (even from their creators) those unchosen or unthought or differently imagined. Politics, bias, psychology, and chauvinism may lurk in something so apparently innocuous as the convention of placing North America above South America, since above and center implies superiority to below and margin, there being no objective “above” and “below” in the space in which the earth moves. If we grant ourselves an awareness of such hazards of mapping, it remains that the representations in *Mapping Mormonism* tend to be lucid and skillful. Many are handsome and imaginative. They represent the state of the art of modern cartographic techniques. The full-color visuals and high-quality paper alone would render this an expensive volume to produce. The modest price tag signals a bargain and unquestionably represents a well-subsidized enterprise.

Four sections organize the treatment: “The Restoration,” “The Empire of Deseret,” “The Expanding Church,” and “Regional History.” The range of topics the atlas addresses seems at first glance exhaustive. Beyond inevitable subjects—Nauvoo, the westward colonization—the atlas maps the historical basis for a trait still evident in Salt Lake City: the geography of the town’s businesses owned by Mormons between 1860 and 1910 and those, trending to the south side of downtown, that were owned by “Gentiles” in an era when Mormonism morphed from a defiantly independent kingdom toward statehood and national acceptance. Two atlas pages embody the hoary Mormon impulse to map the

Book of Mormon onto the American landscape, displaying ten maps among the almost ninety geographical theories the atlas informs us have been published since 1830. The splintering of Mormonism that broke out soon after the murder of Joseph Smith is demonstrated in surprising detail, with almost eighty churches still extant that claim more than a few members. As the most numerically significant of these, apart from the large LDS Church, the Reorganized Church (now Community of Christ) receives cartographic and narrative attention, as do the Restoration Branches (nationally and in more detail in the Independence–Kansas City area), which broke from the liberalizing RLDS Church in and after the 1980s.

Two dozen pages of the atlas treat the church in the Mideast (including the Iran mission in the late 1970s) and in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere. The authors do not skirt controversial matters, including the infamous massacre at Mountain Meadows in 1857. One map displays all property in Brigham City in 1880 owned by families practicing, respectively, monogamy or polygamy. After seven decades of determined gathering to their Zion in the Rocky Mountains, a “great outmigration” of Saints, leaving Utah for education and fortune, changed the distribution of church members, affected the outlook of many, and eventually altered the church’s own perspective on the world. This inversion from gathering to scattering is graphed, cartographed, and analyzed, including vignettes and photographs of nineteen figures who went on to make their mark in the church and the wider world by 1970. All such topics merely sample the dozens the atlas addresses.

This superior work deserves the year’s “best book” plaudit it received from the Mormon History Association (2013)—more notable because the association does not often grant such honor to a reference volume. This apt tribute naturally does not mean that the work could not be improved or extended. In some instances, population maps too full of dense, overlapping, proportional circles—cast in deference to contemporary cartographic style—present as artistic chaos; they would have communicated more intuitively if rendered as older-fashioned, shaded, choropleth maps. Other maps confuse by being too dense with

information, too small, and accompanied only by obscure or overly innovative legends (some of which are even hard to find). Reproductions of certain documents are illegible while lacking a transcription, such as Henry Bigler's diary noting the 1848 employment of Mormon Battalion veterans by John Sutter after the discovery of gold in California (p. 78). This leaves the innocent merely to behold an old document of interest, if only we could read it. Occasional timelines or legends have markings or shadings whose purpose I could not divine.<sup>1</sup> The volume's extensive bibliography is useful but of erratic quality (see entries under "Latter-day Scriptures," for example), often including titles from Deseret Book and church education materials while lacking more penetrating treatments.

Such flaws shrink in proportion to the atlas's magnificent contribution. Refinements, additions, and updates could be added indefinitely to a work so ambitious as this one. Nonetheless, one interrogative gauge of a great book is, to what future work shall it provoke us? Beyond the treasures the atlas offers, what may its arrival mean for the future study of the Mormon spatial past?

I offer two suggestions in response. The first is that serious and aspiring scholars should consider the atlas in company with Richard Francaviglia's terrific *Mapmakers of New Zion* (hot off the press from the University of Utah, 2015). Whether by neologism or a more graceful term, there is such a genre as *cartographigraphy*. Francaviglia's treatment is uniquely capable of casting *Mapping Mormonism*, as a cartographical enterprise, into historical context. This may, in turn, stimulate the imagination of some future graduate students to ponder, where to from here?

One road to which that query might lead is deeper analysis of the meaning and implications of the spatial relations that *Mapping* uncovers for us. This, in turn, might induce in us additional productive charting. *Mapping Mormonism* is a visual treasure of historical information. Still, there is more "what" than "so what?" in this book. The observation is not to chide the editors and contributors for lacunae in their fine gift

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1. The simplest and most harmless example is on p. 81: What is the import of the episodic gray shading on the narrative legend parsing the graceful map overlooking the Salt Lake Valley in July 1847?

to us, but to suggest that the size of their accomplishment may create the mirage that all has been done. We now have maps that tell us much of the routes of the pioneers toward Brigham Young's Zion, but have we sufficiently explored the liminality of the trek for those who did and did not "cross over"? We progress in visualizing the space occupied by Mormonism's international growth, but to what extent have we probed how this spread correlates to Correlation, and Correlation to the changing character of Mormonism, and this change to the broadening crisis of faith besetting so many—with geographical unevenness? Is there correspondence between the midwestern home of the Community of Christ and the transforming path of its recent decades?<sup>2</sup> What does it mean to be Mormon in Utah rather than in Seattle, Birmingham, or Johannesburg? What does it mean to be "not Mormon" in Utah? Garrison Keillor discerns that "in Minnesota, everyone is a Lutheran, whether they are Lutheran or not," but the joke would not transpose to Utah, and thereby hang many tales. Did Wallace Stegner exhaust the task of portraying "Mormon country," or do there remain unheard Stegners and Kathleen Norrises to disclose the Mormon people and their land(s) to us and themselves?<sup>3</sup>

In 1977 two nearly identical *Voyager* spacecraft lifted from Earth. Traveling at 38,000 miles per hour for thirteen years, they at last passed Neptune, the outermost planet of our solar system. With several years of lobbying, Carl Sagan and others persuaded NASA command to send a signal to *Voyager 1*, on Valentine's Day 1990, to briefly turn back toward our home planet to take a family snapshot of our sun and its system of planets.<sup>4</sup>

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2. See Philip Barlow, "Space Matters: A Geographical Context for the Reorganization's Great Transformation," *Journal of the John Whitmer Historical Association* 24 (2004): 21–39.

3. I'm thinking of works in the spirit of Stegner's *Mormon Country* (1942) and *The American West as Living Space* (1987) or Kathleen Norris's *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (1993).

4. Many officials at NASA were concerned that taking a picture of Earth near to the Sun risked damage to the spacecraft's video system.

From that distance of almost four billion miles, Earth registered as barely a solitary pixel—a “pale blue dot” in Sagan’s words—among the 640,000 pixels in the resulting photograph. The picture became an instant icon, spawning wonder about the speck we call home, for this almost indiscernible dot was the birthplace of every known person and all events of our planet’s history. It has been the stage for every war waged by a Caesar or a Genghis Khan to claim more of the blue pixel—and every peace that ever ensued. Every hopeful love and every broken heart, every symphony written and performed, every plague, every stegosaurus and bacterium, every evolved species to arise and every one to fall extinct. Every passion, every discovery, every secret, every prayer.

Simon and Garfunkel serenaded us into noticing that, short of Frank Lloyd Wright,

architects may come and  
architects may go and  
never change a point of view.

But *Voyager 1* went, took a snapshot, and changed our point of view. The snapshot put Copernicus on steroids: Earth *really* is not the Center.

Among those who write and chart and map the Mormon universe, is there a scholar to arise who may yet baptize the dead Copernicus: not merely adding to our information but changing our perspective?

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