



1-1-1978

Zion in the Far West {A Modern Israeli View of the Mormons}

Ahoran Ellern

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>

Recommended Citation

Ellern, Ahoran (1978) "Zion in the Far West {A Modern Israeli View of the Mormons}," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol18/iss1/11>

This The Historians Corner is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

ZION IN THE FAR WEST

[A Modern Israeli View of the Mormons]

Ahoran Ellern

[Editor's note: The following review of Leonard J. Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom* appeared in *Amudin*, No. 366, a Hebrew language monthly publication of the Religious Kibbutz Movement, Tel Aviv, Nissan 5736 (April 1976) 24:286-87. It was translated by the author and sent to Dr. Arrington at the suggestion of Cyrus McKell, the Utah State University professor mentioned in the review. It struck our interest because of the author's cogent comparison between Mormon history and recent Jewish history, as well as his comments on why the people of Israel should take some interest in the Mormons. The review is reprinted here by permission of the publisher and reviewer.]

When I arrived at Salt Lake City airport in the course of a study visit, and turned to the bank with a traveller's cheque, I was struck by the name of the bank: "Zion's First National Bank." Two hours later I saw in the city center the high rising building housing the Administrative Center of the Mormon Church, the Church building [the temple] that a "gentile" such as myself must not enter, and the "Tabernacle" which is the cultural center of the Mormon Capital.

When I reached the university town in the north of the state I was met by my host the Professor. He pointed out the handsome ultramodern church building where he is active amongst the students outside working hours.

When he invited me for supper at his home, I thanked him, but begged off; and in consequence, had to explain to him the meaning of "Kosher." I noticed that he did not seem at all displeased that his children should meet a "gentile" who is as particular as any Mormon about what he may or may not eat. (Mormons, at any rate those with the standing of the Professor and his family, abstain from tea, coffee and liquor; and they do not smoke.)

The history of the white man's settlement of the West is closely intertwined with the history of the Mormon Church, and the book under review is part of the research thereon. Reading it I found that the settlement of this Church anteceded Zionist settlement by thirty years if we count from the BILU (Russian pioneer immigrants) movement and the first Jewish Agricultural Colonies; and very much more if we count from the onset of the organized large-scale settlement. Not only that, but every stage and event in

our settlement history has its parallel in that of the Mormon Church.

At least two traits characterise the two settlement movements, theirs and ours:

(1) The inspiration both received from the Holy Writ to go up and settle in "a goodly land—a land of brooks of water" (and indeed, Utah has a Jordan of its own running down to the "salt sea").

(2) The settlement movement was guided by a religious-social concept far above class struggle, but firmly anchored in economic reality.

In both movements, this concept was translated into action by central bodies; in both the work was supported by congregations and branches in all parts of Europe, where "Shlihim" (emissaries) both collected contributions to the "Permanent Emigration Fund" (tithe), and organised groups of emigrants from supporters in the "diaspora." These emigrated to their Zion in Utah by ships, and continued in wagons and even on foot, with their cattle and all their goods. The railroad did not reach "Zion" till 1869.

In marked contrast with the many Utopian attempts to found a better society that nineteenth century North America witnessed, the Mormon settlement, or rather, in their own parlance, The Latter-day Saints, like our own effort, succeeded beyond all expectations. But in both cases, this success came after great suffering, failures, and trouble.

These included, in the case of the "Saints," actual pogroms, in one of which the Prophet and Founder of the Church, Joseph Smith, was murdered; and their expulsion from the States of Illinois and Missouri, and finally also from their city of "Nauvoo" on the banks of the Mississippi; as well as a war of suppression, which caused the United States to send 5,000 troopers to invade the Utah territory. To this the "Saints" reacted by raising a larger volunteer army of their own, and by implementing a "scorched earth" policy, all the while harassing the U. S. Army. This, in the end, brought about a reconciliation with President Buchanan, and the acceptance of a governor appointed by Washington for the State of Utah.

Space does not permit further details. We have before us a large volume, yet a fascinating narrative in spite of the book's meticulous historical scholarship. Those who do not feel equal to a work of this size may prefer the *National Geographic* maga-

zine's account of Utah, illustrated in gorgeous color (April 1975, pp. 440-73).

And finally, a moment of reflection. The relatively unsuccessful public relations and politico-economic struggle of our State of Israel is all too well known. How could it happen that none of us thought of cementing relations with this Church that has congregations in all the Western World?

When I warned the professor, prior to his paying a return visit to our country, that on Passover he would get only Matza, the "bread of affliction," to eat, he replied, "I, too, am orthodox in my beliefs, and I should be happy to celebrate the important Passover festival amongst you."

It seems to me that we in Israel, and especially our religious settlements, may have an attraction for people like the Mormons; and that in spite of our differences in the religious sphere, they could be friends of Zionist endeavour.*

Ra'anana

*According to a reader's letter published this year in the "Jerusalem Post," hundreds of Mormons danced the "hora" with the Jews of Salt Lake City in its central square when the United Nations declared for a Jewish State on November 29, 1947.