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REVIEW – ON ZION’S MOUNT: MORMONS, INDIANS, AND THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

Reviewed by Irén Annus

Jared Farmer, *On Zion’s Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. Cloth: €22.95, \$29.95.

In his second book, historian Jared Farmer revisits Utah, his former home state, presenting the reader with a truly captivating, interdisciplinary investigation of the cultural construction of space. Through an analysis of two specific Utahan geographical places, Lake Utah and Mount Timpanogos, Farmer maps the various strategies through which one of these places has been rejected, while the other has been assigned cultural significance, resulting from particular historical moments determined by the intersection of specific economic, ideological (both political and religious), and cultural drives and currents, represented by different groups and their interests within the American landscape.

The various chapters of the book offer different historical narratives related to these two sites. Chapter One surveys the history of the Lake Utah region, with a focus on the second half of the nineteenth century, during which the Great Basin region was taken over by Mormon settlers, slowly outnumbering and replacing the Native Utes who had dominated the area before. Farmer is at his best in unfolding the dynamically changing ideological, economic and political dimensions along which relations between native inhabitants and white settlers were structured, from fishing and the slave trade to efforts to proselytise. In the meanwhile, he also reveals how changes in the human landscape brought about changes in the physical landscape, expressed through a series of shifts in the symbolic landscape, i.e. in the meanings assigned to the Lake and its resultant significance in the newly emerging cultural landscape of the United States.

As Lake Utah was becoming marginalized, Mount Timpanogos started to gain prominence in the newly constructed landscape of Utah. The next two chapters describe this process, which lasted well into the

twentieth century. Chapter Two surveys the rise of Mount Timpanogos from a barely noticed peak in the distant vista to the heights of Latter-day Utahan pride and of the American national imagination. The book's exhaustive historical analysis of this is finely integrated within contemporary cultural endeavours and trends, from religious interpretations of mountains as holy places to the cultural construction of the national landscape as integral to the romantic construction of nationhood, as captured in the art of the Hudson River School artists, for example.

As Mount Timpanogos was being appropriated religiously, politically and culturally, it was also beginning to undergo an exoticization and historicization through the constitution of the native touch, analysed in Chapter Three. Farmer offers an impressive account of the creation by E. Roberts of a Native legend tied to the mount that has triggered a process of cultural production through which the invented past has been transformed into reality: it has not only been acted out and ritualised, but also surrounded by an aura of factuality, ultimately being perceived by many as historical reality. Farmer illustrates brilliantly how this fact was not an isolated example; it followed a pattern within a broader cultural production of the American landscape that has appeared in a number of other places.

The book's meticulous research and engaging style makes it an exciting reading experience. It will be an enjoyable read for anyone interested in American or Utahan history, Mormon Studies, Cultural Studies, Cultural Geography, or Cultural Anthropology, among other disciplines.

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