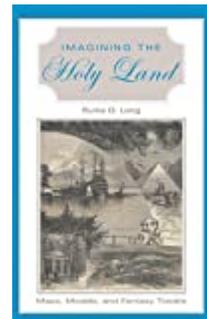




**Burke O. Long.** *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. xi + 258 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34136-5.



**Reviewed by** Linda Maizels (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

**Published on** H-Judaic (November, 2003)

Inspired by the gospel of Matthew, Massachusetts Bay colonist John Winthrop spoke of his visions of the New World and proclaimed that it would be “as a city upon a hill,” a beacon of light to the corrupt and morally bankrupt nations and church of Old Europe. Echoes of this Puritan past can be found in Burke O. Long’s *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels*, an investigation of American middle- and upper-class Protestant fascination with the Holy Land in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Long discusses the various tools and methods used by individuals and institutions of the period to encourage the study of, and identification with, the lands and stories of the Bible. Travel to Palestine as a means of acquiring knowledge was not necessarily emphasized in part because of the prohibitive cost, but also because the Orient was often seen as unhygienic and culturally backward by American travelers. Instead, the Holy Land was recreated and repackaged to fit American expectations. This was understood to be a way of bolstering faith in Christianity, but it had the added benefit of allowing Americans to imagine their country as the New Jerusalem and themselves as the new chosen people. This was accomplished by physically replicating holy sites on American soil, and by interpreting contemporary maps and pictures of Palestine in a way that catered to American tastes and

supported American ideals.

Promoting the ascendancy of America in this manner required a corresponding reevaluation of the status of the Jerusalem of old, which was seen as having been superseded by the power and progress of Europe and the United States. Consequently, the Holy Land was described as having been preserved in its backward state in order to act as a living testament to the literal truth of Scripture. However, the actual messages of the Bible would no longer be interpreted and spread by the inhabitants of this land but, instead, by the Americans themselves. Therefore, visitors to the Chautauqua Institute in upstate New York who participated in Biblical re-enactments in the Institute’s model of the Holy Land, Palestine Park, “found a kind of religious assurance through the artificial realism of fantasy” (p. 27). Players could effectively conflate two opposing worlds in order to “move, if only temporarily, from their American status as a metaphorical chosen race in the New World to the actual favored nation of the Old” (p. 27). Chautauqua participants could thus “claim their rightful Christian inheritance, even without leaving the United States” (p. 33).

The Chautauqua Institute and the Jerusalem exhibit at the St. Louis World’s Fair of 1904 used this Christian legacy to promote the American way of life, emphasizing arguably positive concepts and doctrines such

as capitalism, consumerism, democracy, and individualism. But there was also a darker side to the Protestant American dream. Long touches lightly on the anti-Semitism, virulent anti-Communism, segregationist sentiments, and far-right Christian nationalism of Gerald L. K. Smith, founder of a Holy Land project in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. While emphasizing that Smith's more repugnant political views are hardly in evidence at the site, Long does conclude that "the exhibits hardly give much offense, as long as one accepts the cultural coordinates that define the space as Christian, patriotic, and evangelical" (p. 71). The dominant Protestant view, however much it might trumpet the virtues of universalism and tolerance, was unfortunately susceptible to either condescending particularism or, worse, outright xenophobia.

This narrow focus on Protestant Christianity also characterized the photographs, maps, and the once-popular stereoscope "tours" of modern-day Palestine. In these representations, the uncomfortable tension between an idealized biblical past and the realities of contemporary life, which featured mostly Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and Jews, was analyzed away by stressing, again, the Protestant eclipse of all other religious views. This supersessionist analysis, along with attempts to prove the authenticity of biblical sites through textual interpretation of Scripture and "scientific analysis," continued to reflect the agenda and goals

of Protestant Christians. Even academic attempts, such as those fostered by the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem, reflected the mostly Christian bias of its scholars and researchers. Long does mention one Jewish scholar of the American School, Max Leopold Margolis, who preferred to marshal Biblical evidence in support of Zionist causes. This serves to emphasize Long's point that each scholar represented not the Holy Land but a Holy Land that was reflective of that individual's goals and motives.

*Imagining the Holy Land* gives the reader a fascinating look at the way the concept of the "city upon a hill" continued to animate and inform American society long after the original Puritans and their stern creed were a distant memory in the larger American cultural consciousness. At a time when the country was experiencing rapid growth and change, including the massive influx and absorption of immigrants who no longer represented the Anglo-Protestant ideal, middle- and upper-class Americans sought to justify and consolidate their right to lead both within their own country and through their emerging role as a world power. The idea of the Holy Land, rather than the actual physical space, was a powerful if romantic tool in shaping some American Protestant Christians' view of themselves and what they felt was their destiny as the new standard bearers of Biblical chosen-ness.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

**Citation:** Linda Maizels. Review of Long, Burke O., *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. November, 2003.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8429>

Copyright © 2003 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).