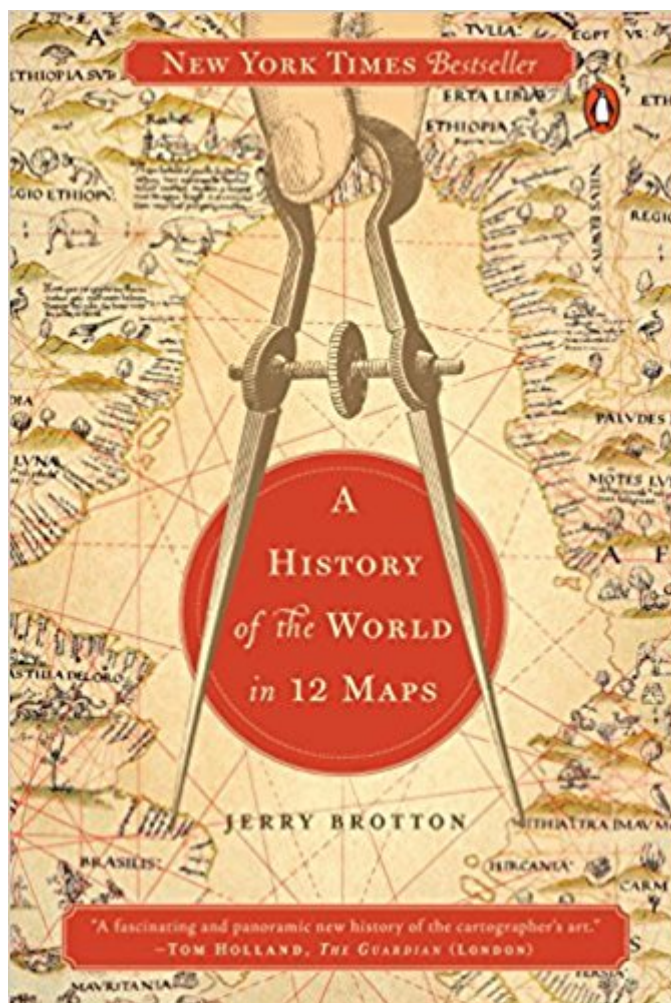


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A History Of The World In 12 Maps



Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller “Maps allow the armchair traveler to roam the world, the diplomat to argue his points, the ruler to administer his country, the warrior to plan his campaigns and the propagandist to boost his cause—rich and beautiful.” —Wall Street Journal Throughout history, maps have been fundamental in shaping our view of the world, and our place in it. But far from being purely scientific objects, maps of the world are unavoidably ideological and subjective, intimately bound up with the systems of power and authority of particular times and places. Mapmakers do not simply represent the world, they construct it out of the ideas of their age. In this scintillating book, Jerry Brotton examines the significance of 12 maps - from the almost mystical representations of ancient history to the satellite-derived imagery of today. He vividly recreates the environments and circumstances in which each of the maps was made, showing how each conveys a highly individual view of the world. Brotton shows how each of his maps both influenced and reflected contemporary events and how, by considering it in all its nuances and omissions, we can better understand the world that produced it. Although the way we map our surroundings is more precise than ever before, Brotton argues that maps today are no more definitive or objective than they have ever been. Readers of this beautifully illustrated and masterfully argued book will never look at a map in quite the same way again. “A fascinating and panoramic new history of the cartographer’s art.” —The Guardian “The intellectual background to these images is conveyed with beguiling erudition.” There is nothing more subversive than a map. —The Spectator “A mesmerizing and beautifully illustrated book.” —The Telegraph

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In an era when Google Maps is regarded as a standard convenience, this history of 12 epoch-defining maps—including Google's—is a revelation. Renaissance scholar Brotton examines a cross-cultural sampling of historic world maps, exploring them as representations of both the Earth, and of the philosophical mores of the cultures that produced them. The maps range in function from the practical maintenance of empire to the spiritual concerns of uniting the earth and the heavens in a harmonious, universal whole. Each simultaneously represents a geographical survey, an aesthetic achievement, technological progress, theological instruction, and political demarcation. These multiple functions are mirrored in the structure of the book, which reflects political, philosophical, and cultural development. The maps are about humanity's changing relationship with itself, others, the Earth, and the heavens, and this broad scope makes for rich reading. Ultimately, the unifying function of each map is to rise above the earth and see with a divine perspective, and Brotton offers an excellent guide to understanding these influential attempts at psychogeographical transcendence. Of course, each historic map, despite the cartographer's efforts, contained inaccuracies, necessitating revisions—a humbling lesson for our current information-dense age. Maps. (Nov.) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Maps, both ancient and current, can reveal more than hard, physical facts such as rivers, mountains, and lines of latitude and longitude. They can also indicate the perceptions and biases of the cartographers and the cultures in which they labored. That is a recurring theme throughout this striking collection of maps, ranging from a world map based on Ptolemy's second-century CE calculations, to a current Google Earth map. The maps and excellent commentaries that accompany them illustrate, of course, the advances of scientific knowledge about the earth. But they also show how these creators were influenced by their ethnocentric views and the political pressures of various interest groups. For example, a map from medieval Europe shows the Far East as a land under the sway of cannibals and outcasts, while a Chinese map portrays lands to the west controlled by savages. This is a stimulating and thought-provoking study of how the mixing of science, politics, and even religion influenced and continues to influence cartography --Jay Freeman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Bottom Line First: 3.5 stars rounded up. Jerry Brotton's *A History of the World in 12 Maps* (paperback edition) has an interesting but narrow hypothesis. His intent is to limit his discussion to just world maps and thereby artificially promote his belief. I accept his argument that maps reflect the purpose of the map maker but I am not sure that his conclusion is as significant as he does. *12 Maps* gave me a lot of history and a lot to think about. The writing tends to be ponderous. This makes it hard to be sure who he is speaking to. The style is not academic nor particularly inviting to a general reader. For me, tugging through Brotton's book was worth it. I am not sure what readers will most enjoy his book.

The central thesis of *A History of the World in 12 Maps* is that maps, and especially world maps are heavily reflective of the times and purposes of the both the map maker and the spirit and philosophy of their times. The earliest Western maps, mostly represented by the *mapaemundi* can be thought of as maps made to illustrate the prevailing belief in the Holy Trinity as being mirrored by a cruciform image of the earth. By the 3rd map we are introduced to the political map, drawn closer to a modern form but serving the imperial and diplomatic needs of the earth bound governments in Asia and later dividing the newly discovered lands between Spain and Portugal. Eventually map will be designed to serve commercial needs and even humanitarian ones. By the time Brotton discusses the important maps designed in France and the Netherlands, he concludes an earlier argument that there can never be a 100% accurate, flat, world map and that the best humans can do is make and remake new maps as humans change the geography of the planet and new methods are developed to portray geography. If we strictly limit ourselves to world maps produced for official purposes, to stand church based illustrations or submitted for government negotiations, it is not hard to accept that these maps have no day to day practical function. That they reflect prevailing beliefs and the needs of the institutions that sponsors them seems, if only upon reflection, obvious. Brotton makes no mention of the types of navigational charts that traders and sailors would have needed to cross the Asian grasslands or the Mediterranean Seas. I do not remember much discussion of maps in the works of Cesare, but it is an old Army truism that geography is fate. It is hard to believe that there was no one producing the kinds of maps that were designed to give navigators local or regional maps to serve the less exhausted purposes such as marking out the location and frequency of safe water along desert trade routes or safe harbors for ships crossing the Indian Ocean. If we limit ourselves to just these maps, this question goes unanswered. The absence of this answer itself invokes a larger discussion that Brotton could have productively addressed. Initially Brotton gives himself an out by declaring his examples limited to world maps. But many of his maps are not. The wonderful maps of Napoleonic France, reflecting Cassini surveys and Capitaine skills are wonderful. But they were

intended to be maps of France. They helped Napoleon's General to plan their movements, if only those maneuvers conducted in France, again begs the question: what had been generals been doing before Cassini? When Brotton discusses Mercator, we are suddenly presented with the fact that there had been a number of projections developed before the Mercator projection. When? By Who? For what purpose? Why are these maps not important if we are to understand the relationships between maps and the societies that created the need for them? In terms of the production of the book, there was a convention in book publishing that discussions of illustration in the book should be referenced. The description of the floor maps in the Amsterdam Town Hall, should direct the reader to Illustration 37. The absence of this kind of help tends to make it hard to know that a particular map is illustrated in the book and where to find it. Too often important maps are not illustrated. A delicious speculation by Brotton is that the map makers of the time can't accept the name America as an act of political correctness. Brotton retells the problems with and the understanding of Amerigo Vespucci's naming rights to the New World. Almost every aspect of these claims can now be regarded as doubtful. His contemporaries were clearly not unanimous in their support for his primacy, but they may have given over the argument rather than place themselves in awkward positions between rival religious and national claims against naming rights.

I bought this book specifically for my boyfriend. He had already read part of it after borrowing it from the library when it first became popular, but it was in such high demand, that he wasn't allowed to check it out again until after a waiting list had gone through it first. My boyfriend now has his own copy and can read it at his leisure. He is really into maps and history, so he really liked the book - hence my reason for buying it for him. I would recommend this book for anyone who likes history, particularly history that influenced how maps were drawn up or how country borders were created, destroyed, and rebuilt/moved after huge events like wars. I definitely feel like twelve maps alone is not enough to really delve into a full account of "the history of the world". European countries alone itself have changed country borders hundreds of times, so I think they should've renamed the book as if it was more like one of a set and just keep it to a specific era or range of years. They could've also made more money that way having a set of books rather than just one. I like the cover image of the book, but I myself am really into old style maps, so maybe I'm biased on that. I would've preferred there to be a lot more actual images of the maps in the book and better quality. It would've also been interesting to see each map as drawn by

someone in a different country to compare the differences in cartography throughout the ages as well.

First paragraph ... I winced at the author's overwrought narrative style ... too many adjectives, adverbs and thesaurus derivatives ... too little Strunk & White editing. I'm perfectly comfortable reading overly complicated narrative but it wastes time wading through it ... I can't help being irritated by the style and so risk missing the substance. If you can get past the overwrought writing style, you might think that the cartographer author would have taken a lesson from his own history and replaced words with sketches and notes. Every map discussed would be improved by the authors own sketch rather than 1000 words. One would expect a map book to be well illustrated but this one is not. The 5' long Hereford Mappa Mundi for example is deconstructed in narrative fashion. If the author had photographed his chosen maps ... imaged them with the best camera available... and then described them with side by side sketches, translations and notes, the book would be 100% better. Cartography is a reading hobby for me and there are better books. The 12 maps the author chose are interesting, but by comparison, the author makes much ado ... way to much ado, over these. I paid \$26 for the book expecting quality maps illustrations and drawings as Kindle doesn't do maps well. As there are so few maps in this hardback, and the few maps that are here are dark, illegible, and downright terrible ... if you think that you must read the book, save the hardcopy money, buy the Kindle and use wiki to bring in the higher fidelity original images this author should have included in his book. p.s. I write reviews to help consumers cut through the publishers representations and call the book as I see it. The "no" vote this review got the day after I wrote it is typical of the publisher/author money making side of the transaction punishing a less than flattering review and hiding behind an anon "No" vote with no comments. These aren't going to make the work any better. I would have preferred to write a glowing review that might attract more readers to this arcane subject. But ... I said it's "OK" ... it' is just as easily tipped to 2 stars= I don't like it but give it the benefit of doubt because I want to see more authors writing great books in this genre.

I heard about this book on NPR and over the years I have become a big fan of science history. This book was outstanding. The early history was fascinating and the chapter on the Cassini's and their work to map France was especially good. Note: I read this book on a Kindle and there were minor issues with some of the foreign characters being rendered correctly.

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