CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAP HISTORY

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https://www.mappingasprocess.net/contributions

Contents

** a number of posts from 2022 have been incorporated into published essays and are therefore not incorporated here **

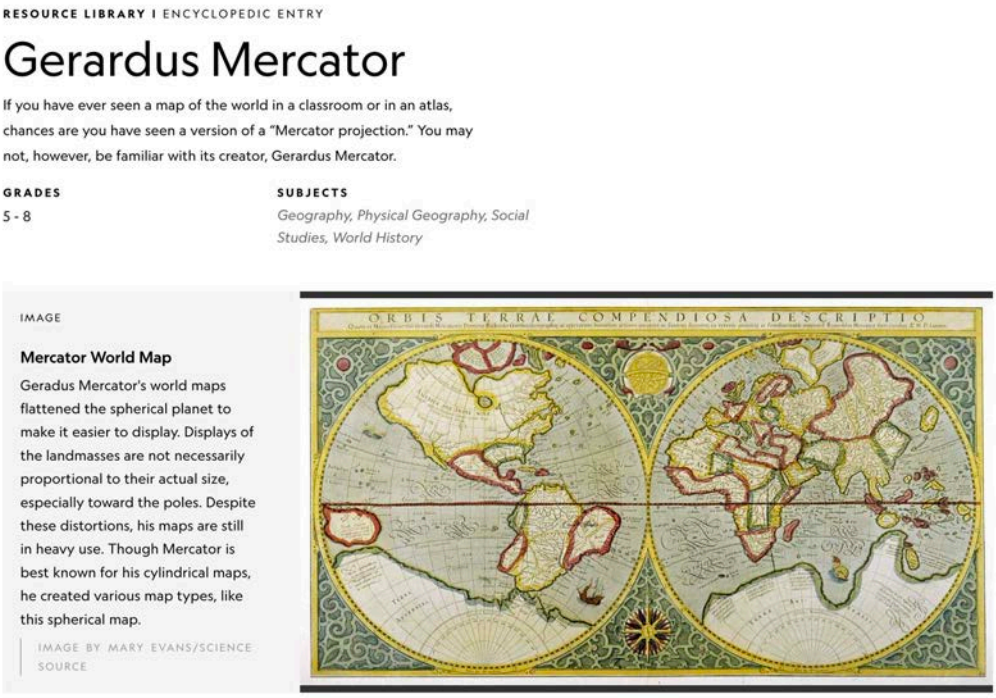
A Case of Mistaken Identity and Severe Historical Confusion

Originally posted: 20 February 2022

https://www.mappingasprocess.net/blog/2022/2/20/a-case-of-mistaken-identity-and-severe-historical-confusion

Update 10 March 2022: another example of the confusion!

It is *de rigueur* to complain about Wikipedia's flaws and shortcomings as a source for information. Teachers warn of the traps it lays for the unwary student, of its intellectual pitfalls and actively curated biases. And, to be honest, I find the Wikipedia pages concerning maps and map history to be in dire need of correction, expansion, and balance. But even I use Wikipedia, and digital-born students flock to it. And I must admit that the Wikipedia entry on Gerardus Mercator is actually quite good. Indeed, it is stunningly good by comparison to an online piece on the great renaissance cosmographer, which a student found on no less an authoritative website than the "Resource Library" provided by the National Geographical Society. Here's a screen shot of the beginning:



RESOURCE LIBRARY | ENCYCLOPEDIC ENTRY

Gerardus Mercator

If you have ever seen a map of the world in a classroom or in an atlas, chances are you have seen a version of a "Mercator projection." You may not, however, be familiar with its creator, Gerardus Mercator.

GRADES
5 - 8

SUBJECTS
Geography, Physical Geography, Social Studies, World History

IMAGE

Mercator World Map

Geradus Mercator's world maps flattened the spherical planet to make it easier to display. Displays of the landmasses are not necessarily proportional to their actual size, especially toward the poles. Despite these distortions, his maps are still in heavy use. Though Mercator is best known for his cylindrical maps, he created various map types, like this spherical map.

IMAGE BY MARY EVANS/SCIENCE SOURCE

Screen shot from National Geographical Society, last updated 15 January 2020.

While I really dislike this essay, for reasons I will explain, it is exactly the kind of bad history that reveals how people think about maps, mapping, and their history. It was written by a committee—its credits list six individuals in addition to the author, the NGS itself—for a target audience of 5th–8th graders (11–14 year olds), It encapsulates what a group of professional educators and writers think are the key factoids about Mercator and maps. Shame it's mostly wrong and that when it is technically correct, it is nonetheless quite misleading.

Misrepresenting Gerardus Mercator

The overall issue is made plain by the entry's hook, directly below the title:

> **Gerardus Mercator**
> If you have ever seen a map of the world in a classroom or in an atlas, chances are you have seen a version of a "Mercator projection." You may not, however, be familiar with its creator, Gerardus Mercator.

The entry "sees" GM almost entirely through the lens of map projections, and in particular through the lens of the projection he devised for his large 1569 world map *ad usum navigantium*, "for the use of navigation." The fact of this projection, its inherent distortions, and its continuing ubiquity together form a great, warped mirror that distorts everything in this short article.

Consider the summary statement in the initial box, shown above, that needs to be considered sentence by sentence:

> Geradus Mercator's world maps flattened the spherical planet to make it easier to display.

Yes, GM's world maps flattened the spherical plant to make it easier to display, a statement that neatly reinforces students' knowledge of the technical nature and function of map projections. The specification of "GM's world maps," however, suggests that *only* GM had figured out how to project the globe onto a plane or that other geographers' world maps were ineffective in some way. Not also the conflation throughout this entry of "projection" with "world map."

> Displays of the landmasses are not necessarily proportional to their actual size, especially toward the poles.

This sentence is also technically correct, proportionality of areas being a function only of specifically "equal area" map projections, and the map shown does indeed distort areas towards the poles. Yet the complaint about poleward distortions is of course a standard comment concerning Mercator's 1569 projection, much less so of the map depicted. (Has any reader actually read any criticism of the distortions of the projection behind the map shown here?) Again, the 1569 map is the lens through which GM's work is seen.

Despite these distortions, his maps are still in heavy use.

This cliché again refers to GM's 1569 projection and world map. The world map and its projection shown here is *not* in heavy use. And, to be clear, the conflation of map projection with world map bugs me no end: GM's "maps" are *not* still in heavy use; the maps that he had a direct hand in are rare. Finally, the *coup de grace*:

> Though Mercator is best known for his cylindrical maps, he created various map types, like this spherical map.
>
> How many ways is this statement wrong?
>
> • its implication is that Mercator made "various map types" in addition to his "cylindrical map." How many is "various" and what is meant by "map types"? Given the emphasis throughout on world maps as conflated with map projections, we might translate the question into "how many different world map projections did GM make"?" Answer, excluding the globes he made in 1544 (which are not really map projections), just *two*:
>
> 1) 1538 double-hemisphere world map projecting northern and southern hemispheres in a cordiform manner;
>
> 2) 1569 rectangular world map in 18 sheets.
>
> GM did not make many world maps nor did he design many world map projections. Such work was not the be-all and end-all of his work, as this entry suggests. **He did not make the map that is illustrated.**
>
> • GM is *not* credited with making the map that is reproduced in this entry. That is the work of GM's son, Rumold. In fact, I find it possible, because of the cosmographical connotations of this world map—each hemisphere is projected using the transverse aspect of the azimuthal stereographic projection, used since antiquity for mapping the heavens; also, the armillary sphere set between the hemispheres indicates the integration of the earth into the cosmos, perhaps further symbolized by the fretwork pattern—that the old cosmographer himself had a hand in designing the world map. Yet Rumold might equally well have worked in homage to his father. I have not encountered a map historian who has provided any evidence that Rumold only published a map already prepared by his father. **Overall, if GM is known today for his "cylindrical map," why not show that map rather than a map he did not make?**
>
> • technically, the reference to the 1569 map projection as a "cylindrical map" is valid, because its "developable surface" is a cylinder, onto which the earth is projected and then opened out to make the flat, rectangular plane of the map. Yet the parallel concept of "spherical map" is meaningless. It seems to be a coinage by the NGS authorial committee that draws a distinction between the distorting world map and other world maps.

So, throughout this entry, NGS sees GM above all as a designer of world map projections. The entry does note his coinage of "atlas" for a systematic collection of maps (although really for the first

volume of the much larger cosmographical project under that name that GM intended but did not complete) and briefly notes his maps of other regions, which *were* his major map work. But the hegemonic image of maps on the 1569 projection has led NGS to completely reconfigure GM's life around map projections, to the point where NGS actively distorts the empirical record, puffing up GM's work in map projections and attributing to him works that he is not known to have designed or produced.

Misrepresenting Maps

To be fair to NGS, map historians have had a habit of saying that Rumold Mercator's map is a "reduced version of GM's world map" (I paraphrase) and thereby conflating the two maps. You can see GM's excessively rare map at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and Rumold's much more common map at many sites, including the Osher Map Library. The issue is that Rumold copied the geographical content of his father's map, reducing it down from a large wall map that measures 200 x 133 cm to hemispheres measuring 11 cm in diameter. That's a reduction from 26,600 square centimeters of map area to just 760 square centimeters.

Such a degree of reduction (to just one thirty-fifth of the area of the wall map) requires active manipulation of the content. Rumold further used a different projection, giving it decoration that had contemporary significance. How significant? Rodney Shirley, in his huge bibliography of European printed world maps before 1700 included 45 world map as being on the 1569 projection, but 259 on the double-hemisphere stereographic, of which Rumold's was the first! Rumold's was a seriously important intervention that must not be downplayed.

The older presumption that Rumold's map is factually equivalent to his father's effectively argues that geographical mapping is essentially algorithmic. The map is defined by the content; the reduction of the archive of geographical information to the map is a straightforward process.

So, NGS permits a hero-worshipping entry in their apparently authoritative resources for teachers and students that reduces Gerardus Mercator's work to a single point that can then be promoted as his life's work which is then hopelessly exaggerated by the claim that he created "various [world] maps." Yet maps are not defined by the creator of their data, but are the work of designers and engravers and printers who create the thing. The choice of the double-hemisphere stereographic was utterly innovative! No one else had previously used it!!

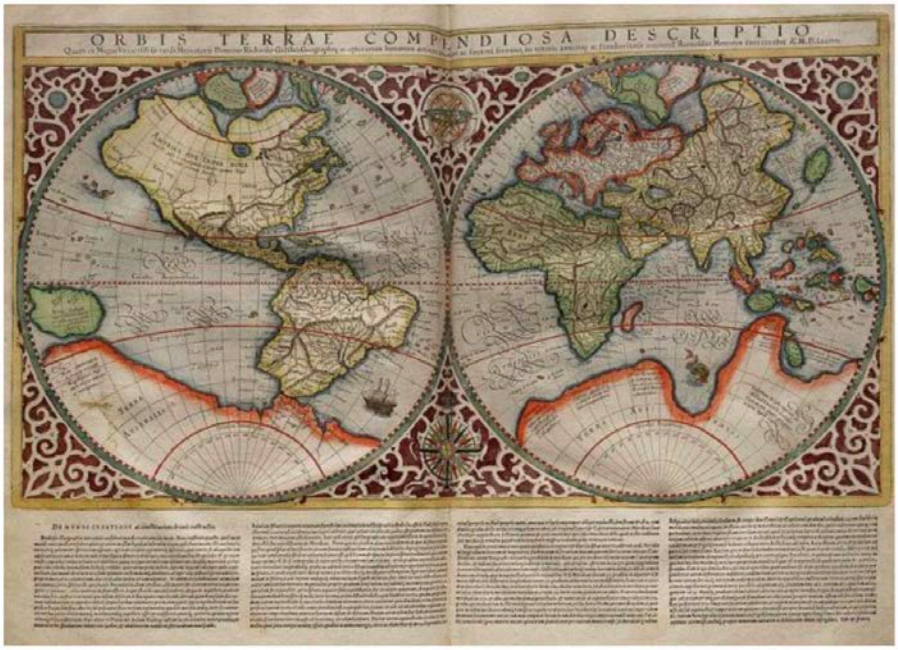
Update 10 March 2022

A piece about Gerardus Mercator on his birthday provides another instance of the confusion between Mercator father and son and their maps:

The Birth of Gerardus Mercator

The Flemish cartographer was born on March 5th, 1512.

Richard Cavendish | Published in History Today Volume 62 Issue 3 March 2012



Rumold Mercator's world map, drawn in 1587 after his father's map of 1567 (published in 1595)

The caption to this digital image is telling: Rumold published the map in 1587, and then used it to complete his father's *Atlas* in 1595; and while Rumold took the content from his father's wall map of 1569, it cannot be said that this double-hemisphere map was "after" the large wall map.

COMPARATIVE MAP HISTORY IN THE INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL UNION

Originally posted: 20 February 2022

https://www.mappingasprocess.net/blog/2022/2/20/traditional-map-history-in-the-international-geographical-union

Note (24 July 2023): this post was originally entitled "Traditional Map History…" but I have since changed my name for that historiographical mode to "Comparative Map History"

Map history was long a topic discussed in the International Geographical Congresses [IGC], the formal meetings of the International Geographical Union [IGU], since the first congress in Antwerp in 1871. For some decades, the IGU organized official commissions and working groups on map history. This work was resolutely comparative map history, i.e., the history of coarser resolution maps and charts that display a society's accumulated geographical knowledge. The IGU commissions were uninterested in the kinds of maps and research questions studied by academic cartography (internal map history) and historical geographers (substantive map history).

The role of IGU and early maps remains somewhat confused. The basic literature is brief and unclear (esp. Skelton 1972, 98–99; Harley 1987, 18–19). Much more research is needed in the IGU archive (in the Royal Geographical Society) and in the papers of the last head of the map history working group, George Kish (in the Bentley Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor). A future project, for sure, especially in terms of how and why the IGU working group lingered and finally came to an end ca. 1990. For now, I'm taking advantage of a chilly and icy holiday weekend to write up what I have been able to glean from secondary sources and IGU publications I have at hand (Bagrow 1935).

Any and all information gratefully received!

Early Period

1871–1904: many presentations about early maps, but generally from the standpoint of the history of geography (discoveries and expeditions).

1908: Geneva – for Bagrow (1935) the IGC when an interest in early maps "awoke."

- specific concern for the reproduction of early maps in proper color and at full size, leading at the proposal of a Swiss delegate, Charles Perron, to the appointment of a **Commission for the Reproduction of Early Maps**.
- the commission's membership was: Gabriel Marcel (Paris); Konrad Miller (Stuttgart); Otto Nordenskjöld (Gothenburg); Eugen Oberhummer (Vienna); and Charles Perron

(Geneva).

• the plan was for commission members to approach their respective governments for financial support.

1913: Rome IGC – Oberhummer reported on the difficulties and potential for the commission's work (see Bagrow 1935, 65).

• given that it was not always necessary to reproduce early maps at size and in color "because scaled-down, single-color reproductions usually lose none of their scientific value," and that many maps had already been reproduced in a manner sufficient for study, so the first task should be to compile a list of adequate facsimiles and then to identify those maps that had yet to be reproduced. Actual reproductions would be produced by local institutions as interest and funding permitted.

• with Marcel's and Perron's deaths, the IGC recreated the commission's membership: Eugen Oberhummer, Franz von Wieser, Paul Graf von Teleki (Austria-Hungary); Jean Denucé (Belgium); H. Yule Oldham (Britain); Oskar Nachod, Taguji Ogawa, Giovanni Vacca ("Far East"); Lucien Gallois (France); Hermann Wagner, August Wolkenhauer (Germany); Roberto Almagià, Carlo Errero (Italy); I. E. Heeres (Netherlands); Ernesto Julio de Vasconsellos (Portugal); Benjamin Cordt (Russia); and Otto Nordenskjold (Scandinavia).

• the commission was renewed on this new program, but of course its work was immediately interrupted by the outbreak of World War I.

1925: Cairo IGC – first post-war IGC

• the Central Powers did not participate, so Oberhummer did not represent the commission to the congress and the commission was not discussed.

• Bagrow (1935) noted that several of the commission's members had died since 1913: Wagner; Wolkenhauer; Oldham; von Wieser; Gallois; Herres; and Nordenskjöld.

1928: Cambridge IGC – featured many map historical talks, several exhibitions in Cambridge and London, and special publications

• the Central Powers again did not participate in the congress.

• Roberto Almangià presented his *Monumenta Italiae cartographica* (1929) to the congress and gave a lecture on the need for more such works. Congress accordingly created a new **Commission on Early Maps**, with Almagià as chair and with a two-part remit: first, each member to organize a catalog of maps of their country in their country's public libraries and private collections; second, to form an expert sub-commission to select maps worth photographic facsimiles in the manner of Almagià's new facsimile collection.

1931: Paris IGC – including several exhibitions

• the key decision by the congress re map history was that the commission's expert subcommittee should meet separately to develop plans for *Monumenta Europae cartographica*. The subcommittee met in Paris in May 1932: Roberto Almagià; Charles de la Roncière; F. C. Wieder; Yves M. Goblet; and Charles du Bus. Using the collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, this committee developed plans for a first volume of 65 renaissance maps.

1934: Warsaw IGC – the Germans and Austrians participated in this congress, the first since World War I

• Bagrow (1939) noted that the congress perpetuated the commission, which tried to have a business meeting in June 1935, but this could not be arranged. No work was accomplished.

1938: Amsterdam IGC – several map historical papers and exhibitions (Bagrow 1939)

• Only two of the commission's members were able to be present, not including the chair, Almagià; Almagià sent a dispirited report, which Bagrow recollected as comprising a series of questions about the need to revise the outline for the *Monumenta Europae cartographica* and to raise funding for it. To prevent the congress from eliminating the commission, Bagrow made a proposal to publish a facsimile collection for the IGU. Congress ended up re-upping the commission, but both Almagià and Wieder withdrew from it (Bagrow 1939).

Later Period

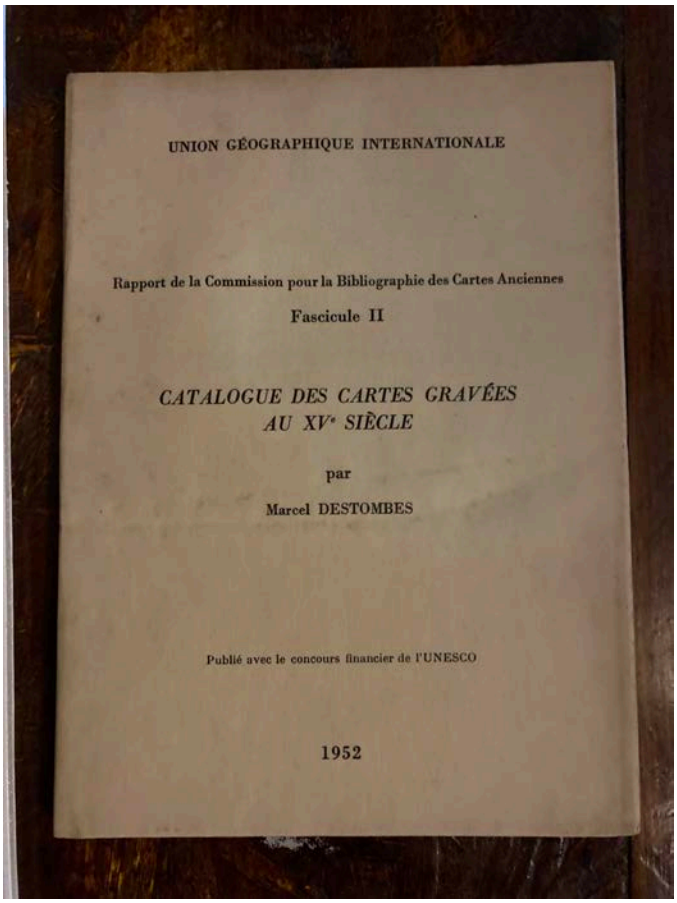
1949: Lisbon IGC – the first IGC since the outbreak of World War II

• The commission on early maps was slated for disbandment, but survived as the **Commission for the Bibliography of Early Maps** in line with a new proposal by Almagià that a thorough, international bibliography of early maps was needed to establish the priority of eventual facsimile reproductions.

• the initial plan was for a bibliography of manuscript maps, pre-1500 to be completed by the time of the next congress in 1952, thereafter to be extended in stages and with the collaboration of member countries, all to serve as the basis for an eventual program of facsimile production (Skelton and Codazzi 1949; Almagià 1952, 5).

1949–64: Almagià's post-war commission made some headway with this strictly comparativeist agenda. It published Almagià's report to the 1952 congress in Washington, D.C. (Almagià 1952), laying out plans for a two-part catalog of manuscript and printed maps surviving from before 1500. In his report, Almagià (1952) explained the expansion of the project to four volumes: *mappaemundi*, marine charts,

regional maps, and all printed maps. Most of the report, however, comprised example entries for the first catalog, mostly by Marcel Destombes (world maps in Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's Dream of Scipio; fourteenth-century Catalan charts) and G. R. Crone (Richard of Haldingham's *mappamundi* in Hereford Cathedral) (Destombes 1952a). At the same time, the commission also published a preliminary checklist, also by Destombes, of early printed maps (Destombes 1952b).


UNION GÉOGRAPHIQUE INTERNATIONALE

Rapport de la Commission pour la Bibliographie des Cartes Anciennes

Fascicule II

CATALOGUE DES CARTES GRAVÉES AU XV^e SIÈCLE

par

Marcel DESTOMBES

Publié avec le concours financier de l'UNESCO

1952

Work continued well (Almagià 1959) and led to the publication by Nico Israel in Amsterdam of Destombes' catalog of *mappaemundi* from before 1500; this work was accomplished in large part through Destombe's personal commitment to the project, not to the active support of the IGU. Destombe's book was the first—and last—volume of the intended series, *Monumenta cartographica vetustioris aevi (MCVA)* (Destombes 1964).

1964–ca. 1990: Ironically, at the same time as Destombes was finishing his catalog of pre-1500 *mappaemundi*, the 1964 IGC in London voted to downgrade the commission to a working group. By this point, Almagià having died in 1962, the group was under the chair of R. A. Skelton. The same congress was also the occasion for a "symposium on the history of cartography" organized by Crone at the Royal

Geographical Society." Harley (1987, 19) suggested that the downgrading of the commission was the result of the then-changing intellectual status of "the history of cartography"; certainly, this symposium featured a mix of scholarship, including internal and substantive map historians, that did not mesh well with the IGU's concerns and that led to the formation of the International Conferences on the History of Cartography (Sims and Krogt 1995).

To be honest, I am quite unclear as to the history of the working group. After Skelton's death in 1970, the chair passed to Crone (Kish in Campbell 1987, [vii]) with the main task of finishing off the catalog of map incunabula. This work was finally completed by Tony Campbell (1987) with the financial support of a coterie of US special collections libraries (James Ford Bell, Kansas University Libraries, Clements Library [Michigan], Newberry Library, and Universtiy of Virginia Library).* One of these was the Newberry Library: in my own work on the history of the Nebenzahl Lectures, I found several references through the later 1960s to somehow involve the IGU in the creation of a research center in map history at the Newberry (Edney 2022). The financing of Campbell's catalog suggests however that the eventual relationship went in the opposite direction than had been anticipated by the Newberry's president, Bill Towner: the Newberry ended up giving money to the IGU! Crone died in 1982 and I think Kish then took over as chair of the working group; Kish died in 1989.

The IGU's working group in the history of cartography seems to have faded away.

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Bagrow, Leo [attrib.]. 1935. "Übersicht der Tätigkeit Internationaler Geographenkongresse auf dem Gebiete der Geschichte der Kartographie." *Imago Mundi* 1: 65–68.

———. 1939. "16th International Geographical Congress, 1938." *Imago Mundi* 2: 100–2.

Campbell, Tony. 1987. *The Earliest Printed Maps, 1472–1500*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

* There's a further catalog of early map works that I once thought was part of the work of the IGU's map history commission/working group, specifically Ena Yonge's (1968) catalog of early globes in the USA. In her introduction ([v]), she wrote that this had begun life as a contribution to an "international catalog of early globes" to be prepared specifically for the IGU. However, she misidentified the sustaining institution: what had met in Washington, D.C. in 1952 and that agreed to this globe catalog, reacting to a 1951 proposal by Skelton, was the International Union of History of Science (IUHS), established in 1947, and its Commission des Instruments Scientifiques (today the Scientific Instrument Commission) established in 1952.

Destombes, Marcel, ed. 1952a. "Contributions pour un catalogue des carte manuscrits, 1200–1500." In *Rapport de la commission pour la bibliographie des cartes anciennes*, 1: 21–63. 2 vols. [Paris]: Union géographique internationale.

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Sims, Douglas W., and Peter van der Krogt. 1995–. "The International Conferences on the History of Cartography: A Short History and Bibliography of Papers." http://www.explokart.eu/ichc/.

Skelton, R. A. 1972. *Maps: A Historical Survey of Their Study and Collecting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Skelton, R. A., and Angela Codazzi. 1949. "International Geographical Congress, Lisbon, 1949." *Imago Mundi* 6: 93–95.

Yonge, Ena L. 1968. *A Catalogue of Early Globes Made Prior to 1850 and Conserved in the United States: A Preliminary Listing*. New York: American Geographical Society.

A Curious Implementation of Copper-Plate Printing

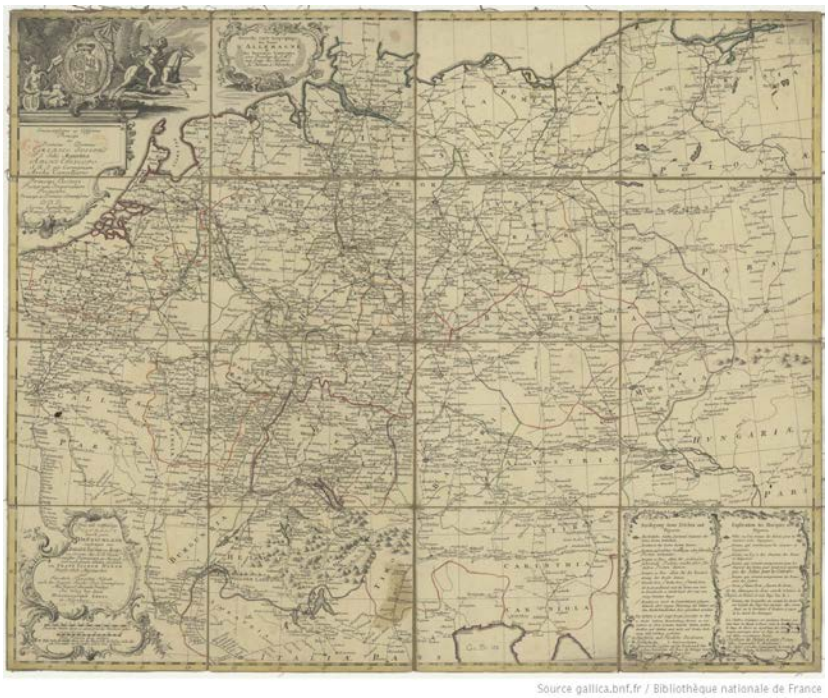
Originally posted: 14 June 2022

https://www.mappingasprocess.net/blog/2022/6/14/a-curious-implementation-of-copper-plate-printing

Here's a nifty permutation of copper-plate printing that was quite new to me. I encountered it among the teaching materials in the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia; I had asked for it sight-unseen, as a possibly useful work to show the students in the first course I have taught at RBS. (RBS has given permission for me to use the images I took with the iPhone in this blog.) Now that I've studied this work in person, I'll be sure to use it in future incarnations of the course!

> The map was a posthumously published "post-map" showing the roads of Germany:
>
> Johann Jacob von Bors, *Neue und vollständige Postkarte durch ganz Deutschland / Nouvelle carte geographique des postes d'Allemagne*, edited by Franz Joseph Heger (Nuremberg: Homann Heirs, 1764)

See Neumann (2019) for more on the phenomenon of post maps in Germany. The Bibliothèque nationale de France has one assembled into a large map …

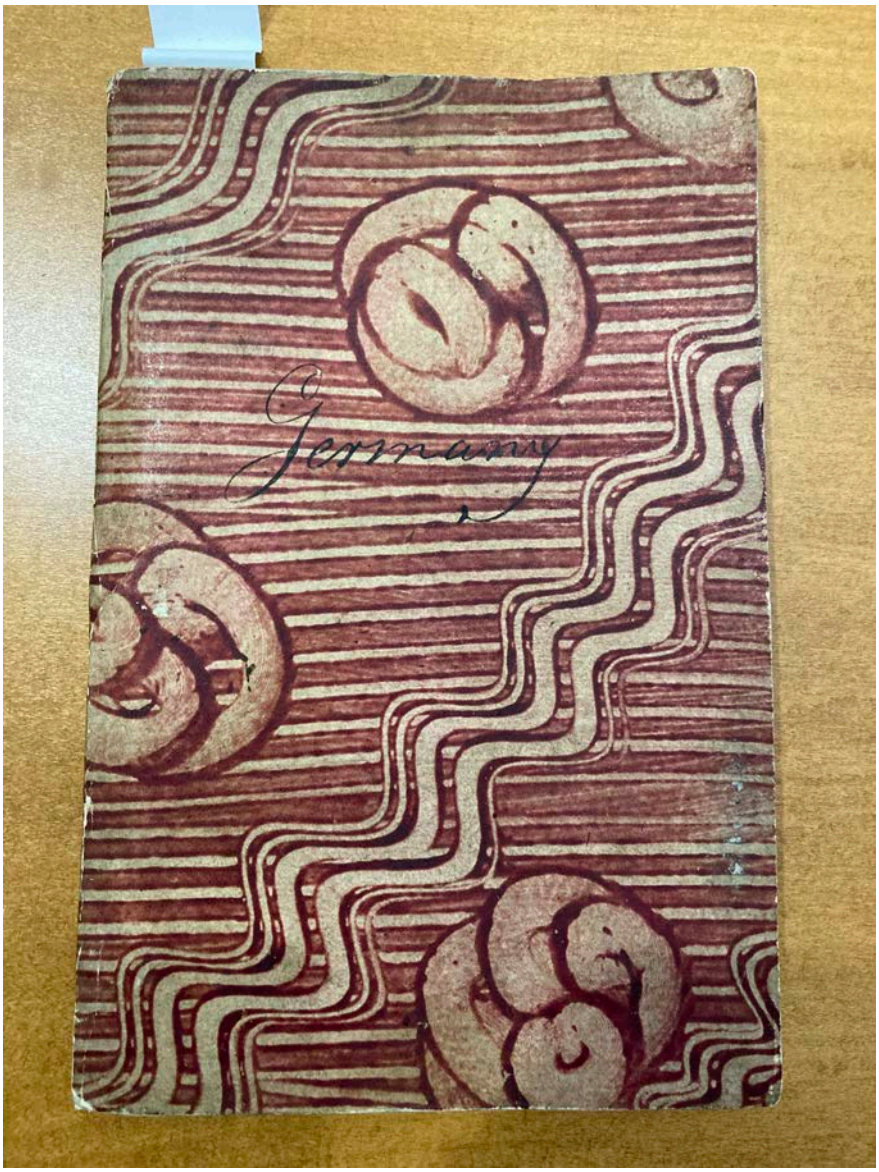


J J von Bors, postmap of Germany, assembled into one map, 78 x 96 cm, with each already dissected sheet trimmed and pasted onto cloth for folding down into a case. Bibliothèque nationale de France (Cartes et plans, GE B-132); online at gallica.bnf.fr

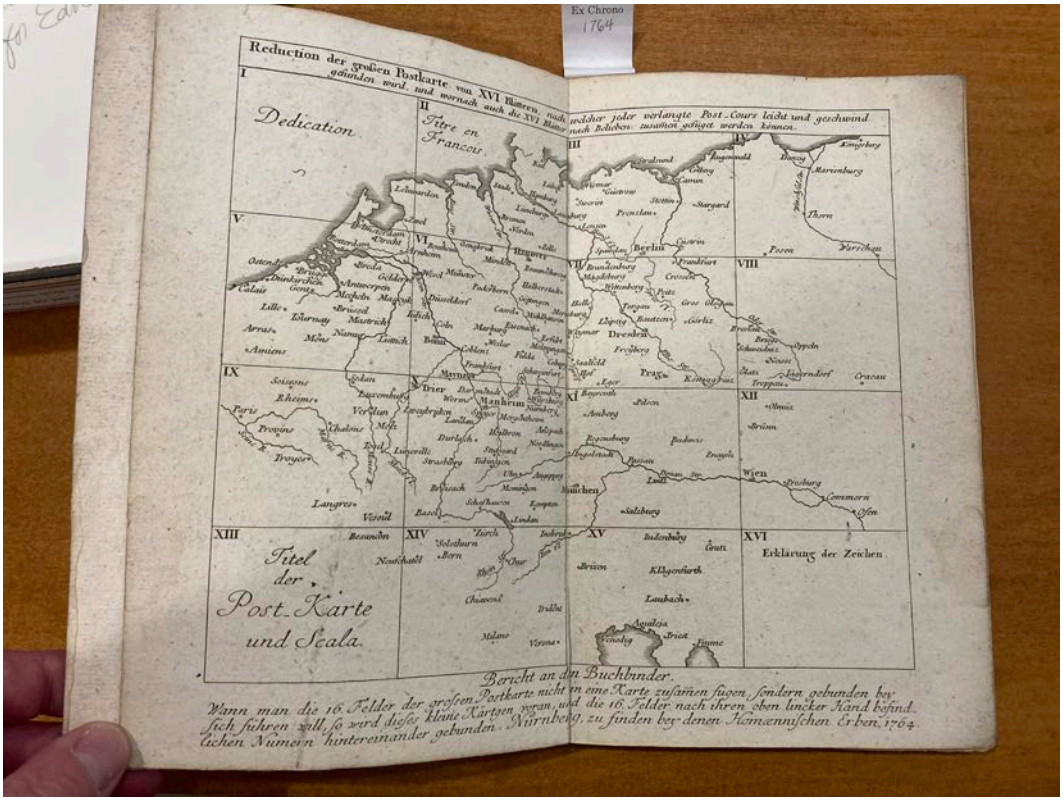
… although this might be a later variant published after 1764. (In addition to the two scales below the

title cartouche at lower-left, there's a third, simple scale squeezed in below the title.) Dealers have recorded a 1784 variant with the individual sheets housed in a leather case or in marbled-paper wrappers. The dealers want to call this work a "wall map" because of its size, but it seems not to have been intended to be mounted on a wall (see Brückner 2019).

Rather, we can see from the RBS impression that the map was actually **intended** to be bound as a small atlas or pasted onto cloth for folding down. The RBS atlas (above) was bound in stiff cardboard wrapped in colored paper, and with a manuscript title on the cover, in English:



It also has a small index map at the front:



Across the bottom of the page are the instructions to the binder:

> Instructions to the bookbinder. If you do not want to assemble the 16 sheets of the large postmap together into one map, but want to keep them bound, then this small map is to be placed first, and the 16 sheets are bound one after the other according to their numbers in the upper left hand. Nuremberg, sold by [to be found at] the Homman Heirs, 1764.*

So far, so normal. The interesting part is the evidence of the plate marks on the index map and on the 16 sheets of the atlas.

> Note: plate marks are a physical deformation of the paper as it is forced down over a copper plate in a high-pressure rolling press. The high pressure is needed to force the (damp) paper into the lines engraved or etched into the copper plated (heated for printing)

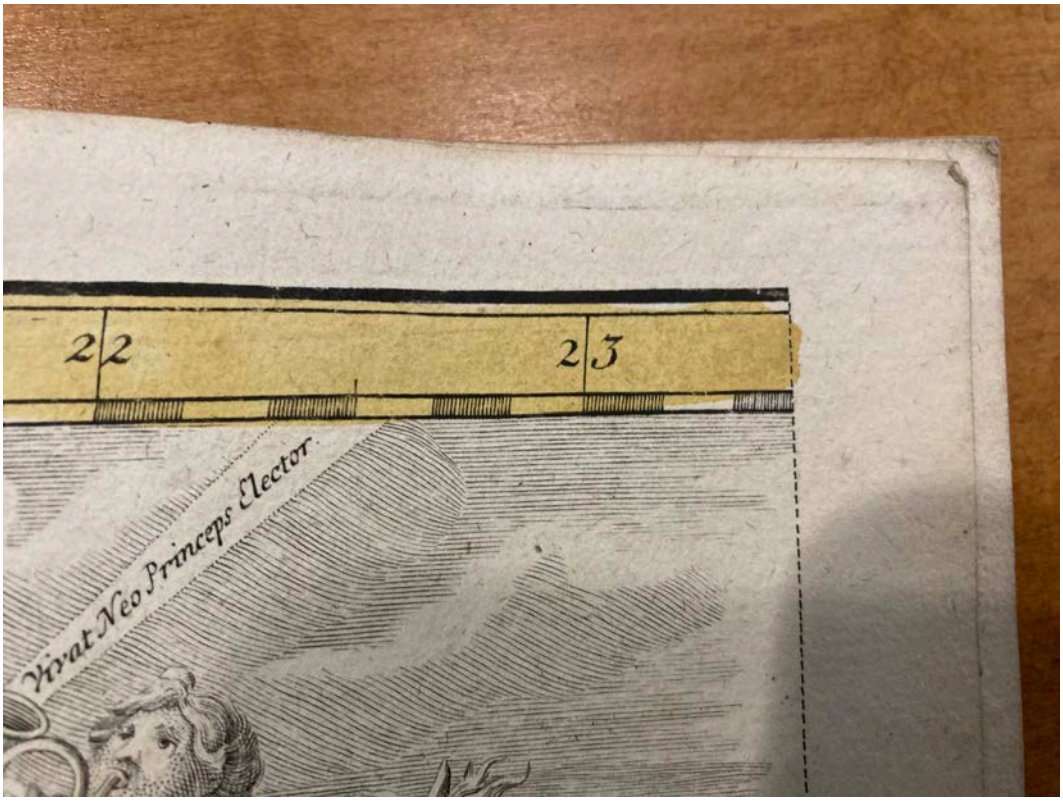
* Bericht an den Buchbinder. Wann man die 16. Felder der grossen Postkarte nicht in eine Karte zusam[m]en fügen, sondern gebunden bey sich führen will, so wird dieses kleine Kärtgen voran, und die 16. Felder nach ihren oben lincker Hand befindlichen Numern hintereinander gebunden. Nürnberg, zu finden bey denen Homännischen Erben, 1764.

> in order to pick up the ink. Plate marks can be felt and, if the surface of a plate is inadequately cleaned between inking and printing, by the collection of ink.

In all of the small, pocket-sized atlases I've seen, each sheet was printed from its own copper plate; the impression on each sheet is therefore surrounded by a plate mark. But in looking at this postmap-atlas, I was immediately struck by the odd pattern of plate marks on the separate sheets. Here's sheet one, bearing the dedication:

The plate mark is plainly evident *only* across the top and down the left side of the impression. There is, at top left, a curved corner expressing the corner of the printing plate:

The thing is, the plate mark does not continue around the other edges. Sheet 2, to the right, has only a plate mark across the top of the impression. Here's a detail of the upper-right corner of the sheet, with the sole plate mark running off the edge of the paper:



The next rounded corners of the plate mark are found only on sheets 4 (upper right), 13 (lower left), and 16 (lower right). The last can be seen here:

The four interior sheets have no plate marks at all; nor, for that matter does the index sheet. What all this implies is that all sixteen sheets were printed from the one, large printing plate:

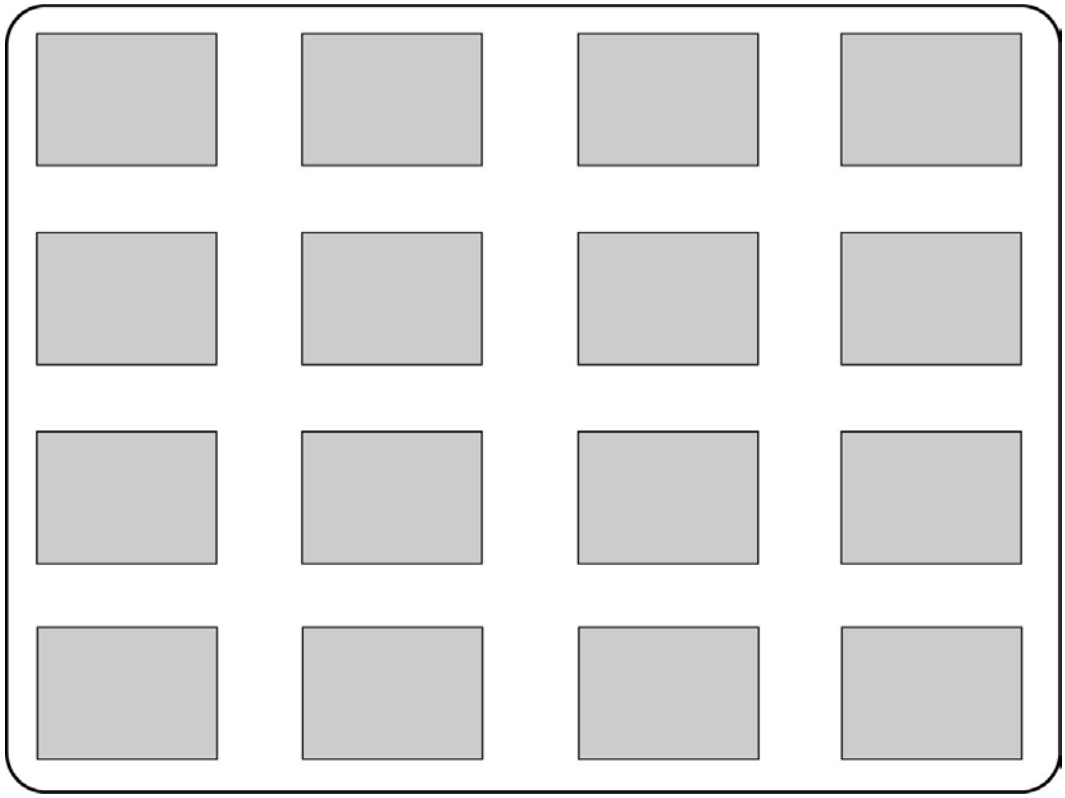


Diagram of the postmap's 16 sheets engraved on a single plate.

That is, the entire map was pulled as a single impression from the printing plate, them the page trimmed into sixteen equal pieces, leaving a margin around each impression, for binding into the pocket atlas. Alternatively, the individual pieces might be trimmed tightly for assembly into a single map (as the BnF impression, above).

This strategy strikes me as a wonderful way to cut down on printing time and thereby reduce the unit cost of the map, while permitting the map to be sold in two handy formats (atlas or dissected onto cloth).

Anyone know of a similar implementation of copper-plate printing???

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THE PERILS OF LITERALITY

On reading a deeply flawed essay, I am stunned that it could ever have passed peer review. (How stunned am I? I now have the mental capacity of a concussed bee.)

Originally posted: 6 December 2022

https://www.mappingasprocess.net/blog/2022/12/6/the-perils-of-literality

> **update** 8 January 23: I've made a few small corrections, I also need to note the existence of another article in an earlier issue of *Cartographica* by the same author (Simon 2017). This earlier essay is not as flawed as the article discussed in this post, but it is certainly a paper that lacks an argument and intellectual significance.

Prompted by a recent email notifying me that the more recent issues of *Cartographica* are available online, I went online to look at some essays. In the process I encountered an essay in the Spring 2022 issue that I hope is a really clever and sustained April Fool's Day joke. Somebody really committed! Alas, I don't think it is, and I am utterly gobsmacked that this deeply flawed essay ever passed peer review.

The Essay

The essay in question is Zoltan A. Simon, "Robinson Crusoe's Travels on Maps from Costa Rica to Russia," *Cartographica* 57, no. 1 (2022): 80–108. I have been interested in the maps included in Daniel Defoe's three Crusoe books (1719–20) ever since the late J. H. Andrews (2001, 7) used Crusoe in a thought experiment that exemplified the individualistic preconception of the ideal of cartography, and I accordingly took exception to Andrews' ideas (Edney 2005, 8–12; Edney 2019, 65). I was therefore immediately intrigued by what this essay was about.

The author is a literalist. That is, texts are read only for their surficial meaning and the context for interpreting those texts relates only to their overt content. This is an attitude surprisingly common among map scholars, for whom a map is a map is a map; things like politics and culture are simply irrelevant to the question of how best to show the earth's surface.

Why do I characterize the author this way? Because, contrary to every commentator since the early eighteenth century (Adams 1962, 1983), the author reads Defoe's conceit literally. For this author, Robinson Crusoe was not a fictional device but a completely real person, who sailed the oceans in around 1700, who made the maps that were included in the books, and whose memoirs were only edited by Defoe for publication. The author also identifies *the* exact island where Crusoe was marooned. Such a remarkable argument requires powerful proof; unfortunately, what the author provides is a maze of

self-reinforcing circular logic and unsupported presuppositions.

> Consider the opening paragraph:
>
> The first edition of *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner...Written by Himself* and edited by Daniel Defoe was entered in the Stationers' Register in London as of 23 April 1719 and published on 25 April. The author's handwritten manuscript for Robinson Crusoe is lost, unlike Defoe's many other manuscripts. The real author probably requested him to return it after the editing or printing. The sequel, entitled *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, appeared on 20 August. Defoe would have been unable to write two books within a few months' time. Defoe implies that the book was really written by a man named Robinson Crusoe, and that he was only the editor of the manuscript (Trumbull 1965, xxx). Defoe repeatedly denied the authorship of the book. He was likely pressed to make that statement, since Crusoe was still alive in 1719, as he admitted. Besides, no author would deny that he had written a bestseller. (Simon 2022, 80–81)

This statement reveals a profound lack of understanding not only of the nature of writing but also of publishing and of the ownership of published works in early modern Britain. And, there are NO citations to any works that support the statements: where, for example, are all the manuscripts that survive from Defoe (the literary scholars who debate the attribution of works to Defoe would love to know!) and how does one know that Defoe could not write quickly? Ultimately, the author mistakes the literary voice as a literal voice.

The author goes through an opportunistic array of maps to identify the actual island where Crusoe was first shipwrecked, and then traces Crusoe's arduous circumnavigation (in the second volume) on a number of other maps that the author happens to know. There is no systematic evaluation of the relevant cartographic record. The key analytical method is simply visual comparison: if it looks like, it must be like, a principle that has long been disputed (Skelton 1965). The author concludes with the matter of treasure maps (never a real thing) and concludes by arguing that Robert Louis Stevenson did not imagine "Treasure Island" and create a map of a fictional place as a diversion—"but no child could have drawn that map," he claimed with absolutely no evidence—but inherited it from Crusoe's own depictions of his own island.

The Peer Review Process

I am aghast that this essay passed successfully through the peer review process. It is full of problems, **each and every one of which should have precluded publication:**

- it rests on repeated assertions that are unsupported by actual evidence, other than presuppositions based on whatever the author wants to believe.

- there is no overall argument.
- it cites as authoritative works and authors who are irrelevant and by no means authoritative.
- it is overly literal and as such is unable to adduce any relevant contextual material.
- it does not explain why Crusoe was real, contrary to three centuries of recognition that Crusoe was a fictional character.
- there is no engagement with recent literature on Defoe. With the brief exception of a 1989 book on Defoe (cited as 1992) by a scholar whose other work I know and trust, only pre-1930 works are cited and it is unclear that the author appreciates the significance of the works he does cite re Defoe. The evidence of the literary works seems instead to have been cherry picked.
- it rests on an incoherent corpus of maps that supposedly show the information Crusoe collected from his travels, all gathered opportunistically from online sources; there is no systematic analysis of the map evidence.
- the selection of sources, primary and secondary, appear to all be as available online and therefore evidently excludes any other sources and systematic engagement that might, possibly, be relevant and appropriate.
- instead, the essay adduces irrelevant evidence about other voyages, modern maps reconstructing Crusoe's travels (why not use the map of those travels provided in the second volume of Crusoe's travels?), and the environment of Crusoe's island (climate, geology, plant life), all seen through the lens of modern expectations.
- one of the maps that is reproduced—a supposed treasure map of the island, supposedly drawn in 1820—is a) from an unknown source and authority and b) completely illegible even on the uncurated website from which it was taken; there is absolutely no way to say that this map is in any way what it is purported to be.

And my favorite (if that's the word for permitting such a mind-boggling thing):

- the author cites as a source the original submission of the essay to the journal, described as a "preprint" and posted on academia.edu. I can accept self-citation (heck, I do it all the time), but citing the version of the paper as originally submitted within the paper as published is a betrayal of the entire concept of peer review. The fact that the actual citation refers to the photographs included in the submitted paper of Crusoe's fortified cave as it still supposedly exists on this one island is beside the point.

What truly horrifies me—what *insults* and distresses me, viscerally and painfully—is that the editors of *Cartographica*, and whoever they got to review the essay, think that this article is good history, or even just good. The essay is a travesty of logic, of history, of intellectual practice. I am serious. This is not a

good essay, in that it does not meet basic academic standards, and if the editors think that this is good enough to publish, then their opinion of map history is clearly very low, indeed.

I can forgive much, knowing how publication systems work, and how easy it is for systems to fail. I was reminded in a meeting earlier today that one should not ascribe to malice or conspiracy what can be explained by incompetence. I do not think that the appearance of this essay in the pages of *Cartographica*, a journal with an honorable history of innovative and provocative essays, was an act of malice. Its appearance is, however, an outstanding example of incompetence. I don't blame the author; he's clearly telling his truth as he sees it. The issue is that he has not had the training nor, it seems, the access to paywalled academic resources needed to appreciate the inadequacy of a strictly literal reading of the source materials he can access. But everyone within the hallowed halls of academia who were involved in reviewing and approving and editing this essay for publication in a journal that claims academic rigor should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

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