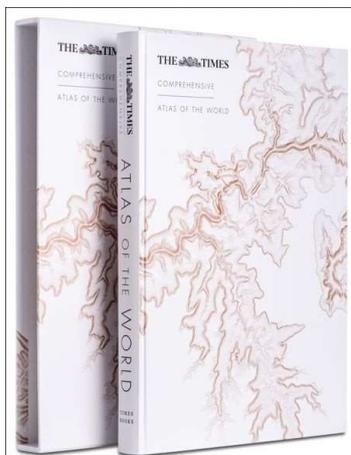


## MAP, BOOK and ATLAS REVIEWS

Edited by Steve Chilton



### **The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World**

*Pages: 528*

*Format: Hardback*

*Publication Date: 06/09/2018*

*ISBN: 978-0-00-829338-3*

*Price: £150*

First impressions? Love it. And it's not out of the case yet.

I instantly love the lighter, cleaner and more modern presentation that begins with the white cover and its brown Grand Canyon contours – the first non-dark cover for a long time. Very striking. The next thing I spot is the new sans-serif font for texts and titling throughout the atlas. Love that too.

The atlas comprises 41 introductory and thematic pages, 132 map plates and 223 pages of glossary and index – 528 pages in total. The number of plates in the heart of the atlas is unchanged from the previous edition and the maps are in the same design as before but the new font for the marginalia together with the removal of the outer frame gives them a fresher look.

With an atlas of this calibre and reputation one expects the editorial integrity of the topographic plates be up to scratch. It is four years since the 14<sup>th</sup> edition and a lot has changed in the world. There are no new countries but there are a number of administrative changes in Democratic Republic of the Congo, France, Morocco, Northern Ireland and Bangladesh as well as lots of updates to place names in Spain, India, Indonesia and Iraq specifically. Czechia and Eswatini are in there too. The crisis of migrants fleeing war zones in recent years has led to the establishment of large refugee settlements, some of which have become large cities. For example, Bidi Bidi in Uganda with 285,000 residents and Dadaab in Kenya with 245,000 are the largest camps in the world for displaced people – on the maps. So, as far as representing the world as it is today, it would seem that the content is indeed up to scratch.

The cartography remains superb – 'a benchmark of cartographic excellence' is the claim. I won't dispute that – the maps are clear and legible and the layer colouring pleasing and aesthetic. There is something comforting about this familiarity, which proves the maxim 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. Some of the type is exceedingly small (the price to be paid for so much information being included, I guess) but nothing that cannot be overcome with the judicious use of a magnifying glass.

The greatest difference in this edition becomes apparent in the introductory section, which has been completely redesigned. The title pages, imprint and foreword all benefit from the new font. Compressing the Contents from four to two pages gives a tighter appearance without looking squished. There are eleven thematic topics with elements of previous pages revamped into the new design. Essays have been commissioned from leading experts on topics ranging from the composition of the Solar System to modern global communications with Health and Migration now covered. Texts are presented in two columns in place of three on the left page, accompanied by maps or graphics on the right. The result is very light and 'minimalist' which is most refreshing but occasionally at the expense of useful information. For example, there is a full page of climate graphs but no climate zones map. Without the map the geographical context has gone. In contrast, on the Physical features pages, the illustrations (highest mountains, longest rivers, etc.) are now keyed into a world map, adding the context but the tables of geographical comparisons have gone so there are fewer features included. On the urbanization page fewer cities are named on the map but the table of city populations is much larger.

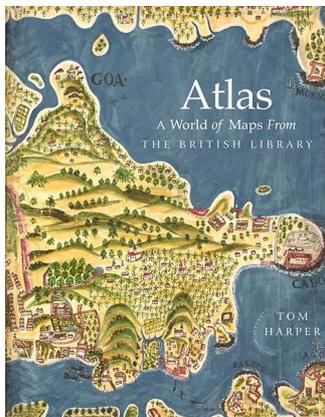
But none of this is of serious concern, just me being picky. No two editors would make the exact same decisions based on common data. The main point is that this new material addresses issues of global change, is thought provoking and demands our full attention. The thematic maps are generally larger and clearer than before so that has to be a plus. The Migration graphic is a triumph of design and conveys the information far more effectively than could be done on a map – for once geographical context can take a back seat. And the Human global presence illustration on the Communications page is simply mesmerizing.

Each new edition of the atlas addresses what is happening in the world at the time of publication. The 15<sup>th</sup> keeps that tradition. I may prefer the North America and Europe key maps to be on the front endpaper in place of the blank map; I may question why there isn't more large-scale coverage of China and India; I may wonder why the index itself has not been reset in the new font and why the first five pages are labelled as 'INDEX' when they are in fact 'GLOSSARY' as itemized on the Contents. Oh, and the Tectonics map may be the wrong way round. But none of this detracts from the joy of studying the atlas – except perhaps the orientation of the Tectonics map, which is still troubling me.

Altogether, the new design and content make it feel like a totally new atlas, not just an update of an old favourite. There is so much to get stuck into – lots of reading and some striking graphics to interpret. Plus, the topographic plates are reassuringly familiar and yet totally updated.

It may be big and heavy and need a table all to itself as some critics say, but I urge you to clear the space and create some free time to absorb the contents. It will become your go-to reference work, just as it has for our famous explorers, adventures and travellers; Jon Snow sums it up perfectly – 'It remains one of those prized possessions which even the age of the internet can never upstage.' Quite so.

### Mary Spence



### **Atlas: A world of maps from the British Library**

*By Tom Harper*

*Hardcover 224 pages*

*£30.00*

*British Library Publishing, 2017*

*ISBN 978-0712352918*

The last decade or so has seen a remarkable increase in the publication of what might loosely be called coffee-table map books. There seem to be a couple, at least, published every year chock full of beautiful reproductions of some of the world's finest maps, just in time for the Christmas market. And 'Atlas' is no exception.

This lavish 200+ page volume illustrates the British Library's magnificent maps collection but differs from previous books which were closely tied to exhibitions. Harper is a mine of information and offers a wonderful insight into the maps presented within. The use of the term atlas is slightly misleading but only in the sense that it's unconventional as explained in the book. The term atlas came to mean a systematic collection of accurate and uniform maps of part of all of the world. And while this is certainly a collection they are not accurate (in comparison with modern maps) or uniform. But they are a collection, and it's precisely this lack of uniformity that showcases the rich and varied approaches that cartographers (and map-makers, for not all maps in this or pretty much any collection have been made by trained cartographers) take in making a map of their interests.

Most of these coffee-table books are often thought of as pictures of the past, and of glossy tableaux of historical cartography. Yes, there's plenty of *olde worlde* maps in Harper's book but the first map you see after the title page is a very modern density equalizing cartogram made by Ben Hennig (worldmapper.org) showing the world thematically distorted by the incidence of territories covered in the book itself. I find the map intriguing because it paints a picture that many will assume reflects some

sort of measure of global cartographic prevalence. Yet the Americas (particularly North America) don't come out very well on this map. And the European countries do. So in reality it's simply a graphical device to visualize the spread of the book's contents. That's clearly noted in the title of the map but intriguing because it illustrates how, all too easily, a map can be seen differently from the author's intent.

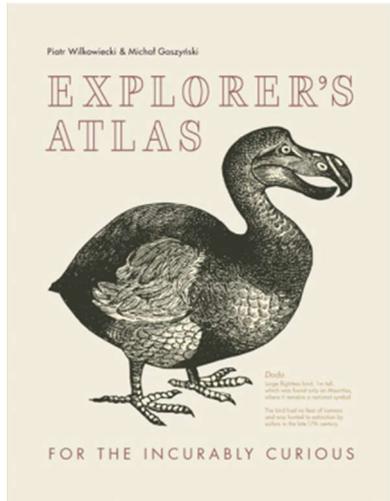
The book is ordered by geographical region plus a few oddities like celestial maps and fantasy maps. But it is at pains to explain the alphabetical ordering (Europe comes pretty much last) as a break from the traditional practice of placing those places deemed 'most important' toward the front of atlases. A nice touch. Throughout the book, Harper touches on how the maps included here were part of other publications too and so the context of a map's origins and purpose are explained. For instance, there's a wonderful illustration of a map of Australia and New Zealand that shows a watercolour relief map intended to form part of the front sections to Odham's *New Illustrated Atlas of the World*. Much of the explanation of this stunning map is taken up by exploring its production and context in that atlas, as much as in its design.

While there's inevitably a bias towards older maps from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the temptation to simply use well-known and well-seen maps has been avoided. Not filling the book with maps that people largely either know about, or have at least seen, is both brave but necessary. Most of us could probably name a set of maps you'd expect to see in this sort of book but they aren't there. Instead, Harper has selected and curated a set of interesting maps that are perhaps less obvious, but deserving of a moment in the spotlight. For instance, if you're expecting to see Harry Beck's original 1933 London Underground map you'll be disappointed. But then we've all seen it, right? In multiple books. Instead, we get a diagrammatic map published c.1255 that shows the route from the Holy Land to London as a strip map. The map was drawn by Benedictine monk Matthew Paris who, presumably, we now must credit as the originator not only of schematic transit maps (or, diagrams if you prefer) but also the strip map format which is more commonly associated with the work of John Ogilby in the mid-1600s. Old is always new again! But its evidence of the inclusion of a map that many will never have seen and, certainly, the eyes of this reviewer has never seen.

There's actually very little from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century or more recently. I find this a little disappointing given the massive surge in mapping that has taken place at the turn of this century. Though, once again, there's a few really interesting entries such as the 1969 SYMAP generated maps of Britain showing Dudley Stamp's 1962 'Great Britain Land Use Survey' as a dot matrix map of land use classes and a 3D perspective view of the distribution of arable land. The latter would now be seen as a trendy display technique given the way in which new mapmakers have revisited the idea of stacked and layered transects and called them 'Joy plots' after the famous Joy Division album cover for 'Unknown Pleasures' by Peter Saville. There's also a predominance of topographic maps as opposed to thematic though this is inevitable given the natural tendency for the maps of a collection like that at the British Library to have more of the former. But picking on what isn't in the atlas as opposed to what is in it is always going to be a pointless exercise. With around 4 million maps to choose from, any collection of around 100 will inevitably have some bias or miss out your personal favourite. They can be found in other books. This one does a great job of giving us a taste of some of those that might be less seen or, as Harper says 'a celebration of some of the oldest, prettiest, most significant, unusual, delightful, confusing and compelling maps from the 13th to the 21st centuries from the vaults of the British Library.'

One final comment: the typeface. The book is set in Palatino Linotype Roman. A perfectly good and appropriate choice. Except, in the view of this reviewer, in the use of a stylistic ligature connector for the 'st' letter pairing throughout. It jolts as I read. I get that it gives the overall appearance of the text somewhat of a nod to the historical content but it actually disturbs the process of reading. It's a minor quibble. I wouldn't get too hung up on it, though inevitably, getting hung up on small details is what cartographers do. At least this one.

**Kenneth Field**



## EXPLORER'S ATLAS - for the Incurably Curious

*Authors: Piotr Wilkowiecki & Michal Gaszynski*

*Published by Collins / Harper Collins, 2017*

*Size: 34.5 cm x 27 cm (13.5 inch x 10.5 inch)*

*Cost: £20 (RRP) and available from £14*

The title of this book attracted me to offer to review it as I had just completed a 53,000 mile 60-day Round the World trekking trip exploring continents and countries I had never seen. It would have been interesting to have explored this atlas before my world trip as it is not as I first thought, a historical atlas of exploration, but an atlas for explorers who wish to seek out some of the world's curiosities before embarking on a journey. The two Polish authors have produced a book of interesting and curious facts portrayed spatially on basic outline maps in the

form of an atlas. It has sections arranged by Continent and Country with factual categories for Science, Economy, Geography, History, Social, Flora and Fauna. In addition, there are special sections for Geographic Features based on largest, smallest, longest, highest etc. The 144-page atlas contains 3277 facts of which 1051 come under the category Geography, it could be a great source for a pub quiz e.g. did you know that Denmark produces approx 19 million Lego bricks each year. While a book like this cannot of course cover ever fact or map feature, I find it surprising that two modern wonders of the world that I recently visited, the Great Wall of China and Machu Picchu in Peru are omitted. However I have learnt quite a few new and interesting facts from the atlas, e.g. the shortest river in the world is the Tamborasi River in Indonesia at 20m long; the Taal volcano crater lake in Sulawesi, The Philippines is the world's largest lake on an island in a lake on an island; Ferdinand Magellan credited with the first circumnavigation of the world (1519-22) died during the voyage in 1521 and only 18 of the original 270 sailors completed the voyage.



Each map is extensively annotated and symbolised with curious and not so curious facts which holds the reader's attention on each page. In fact, there are an incredible 434 different well-designed point symbols in the atlas, some easily identifiable, some not so, but that only adds interest and mystery to what they may represent. Unfortunately, from a cartographic design perspective I find the atlas disappointing due to the lack of colour on each map and often poor contrast between the area colours and the

annotations/symbols. While acknowledging the authors desire to have a standardised and simplified map design throughout the atlas, I personally would have found the maps more visually appealing if a more conventional cartographic design style had been adopted. Each continent had a fixed colour scheme for its maps using a single strong saturated colour and a second mid/light brown/gold colour for annotations, names and symbols. I often found the annotations difficult to read unless I used a really bright table lamp to illuminate the maps. The most legible atlas pages were the 'Greatest Explorers' map which uses a pastel area colour with dark grey/brown annotations/symbols and the 'Largest Countries' map which uses strong saturated area colours with white annotations, both maps succeed in meeting the cartographic design criteria of good contrast.

While I would recommend this atlas to those planning to travel the world and or those who wish to learn more about the world and its curiosities, I would not rank it high on my list of must have atlases. It is however a very interesting and fascinating atlas book which I thoroughly enjoyed over the many days it took to read, every page had some new fact to explore.

**Mike Shand**