

Why North is Up? Map conventions and where they came from

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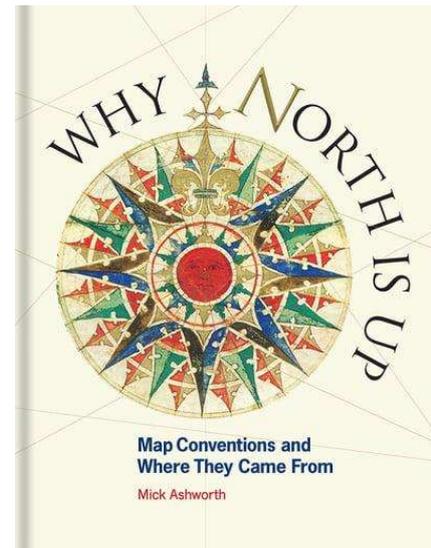
This is a fascinating and easily accessible romp through many topics about maps that many may wonder about, but not know where to find simple clear explanations. For anyone with an interest in maps it should be essential reading.

The book is divided into seven part, each containing between two and seven chapters. Part I is about Map Structure, covering orientation, co-ordinate systems and map projections, and map composition. Part II Symbols, has a general introduction before considering point, line and area symbols, colour and generalisation. Relief representation methods are covered in Section III with Names and Boundaries in Section IV. Parts V and VI cover more specialist mapping, including quantitative and qualitative thematic mapping, geological map and charts. Finally, Section VII looks at 'Post-Conventional Mapping' which tries to bring things up to the contemporary period, looking at the developments of conventions specifically for on-line mapping and how mapping has become democratised in recent years with the boundary between map makers and map users becoming increasingly blurred. This is a very logical sequence and largely mirrors what one would expect in an introductory textbook on cartography even although this would not be expected to be used as a textbook.

The book is highly illustrated, with virtually every spread having at least 1 figure. The illustrations are wide ranging and universally reproduced to a very high standard. Not all of the figures are referred to in the text and a few are included in one chapter (generally appropriate to the topic), but not referred to until much later when discussing something else that it also illustrates. Most are historical, illustrating early examples of the particular aspect being discussed, but more recent and contemporary examples are used where these are appropriate.

With over 30 years of professional engagement in cartography and even longer being fascinated by maps, a lot of what is in this book I was already familiar with, but that did not prevent it being an enjoyable and worthwhile read. I only found two things I would disagree with. When discussing map symbols a distinction is made between pictographic and ideographic (iconic) symbols, with the latter defined as being geometric. I would argue that iconic symbols convey meaning by some association with the object being represented, but not a direct picture of the object, e.g. the use of an anchor for somewhere ships might anchor. Geometric symbols are better referred to as 'arbitrary' as they bear no obvious relationship to what they represent. Later, in talking about international boundaries an example is given of Google Maps showing different international boundaries if you were accessing it from India or China; this is no doubt the case but having spent a considerable amount time in China in recent years, Google Maps and all other Google applications are blocked in China, so it is a mute point. The principle is of course correct, and the real point being made was that content can be tailored depending on the user's location.

My biggest frustration with this book was that I wanted to know more. Almost every time I turned the page to find a new chapter, it was a disappointment – not at the new topic, but that I wanted the coverage of the previous topic to continue. I guess this is inevitable in a book of this nature; obviously there has to be a limited number of pages to make it commercially viable and the content



has to be broad enough to appeal to a wide range of potential users. That said, the format of the text is quite open so it would not have been difficult to fit in significantly more words in the available space.

From a more academic point of view, I was also frustrated by the lack of referencing to sources of information. These days, a student submitting an essay with such a lack of referencing would be severely criticised. I can understand not wanting to interrupt the flow with constant citations, but there are only 7 footnotes for the whole book, only 3 of which are to cartographic sources. There could easily have been that number of footnotes per chapter to allow the interested reader to following up more detail without having to search for sources themselves. There are 21 suggestions for further reading, most of which are a mixture of 'coffee table' books on maps and more academic cartographic textbooks.

I would expect this book to be popular - it certainly deserves to be. It is very readable and I would certainly agree with the Jerry Brotton's quote on the back cover "Elegantly written and beautifully illustrated, . . . Essential reading for any map lover".

David Forrest