

Ashley Baynton-Williams. *The Curious Map Book*. London: The British Library, 2015. 240p., ill. ISBN 9780712356190. £25.00 (hardback).

This beautifully-illustrated book is divided into sections that chronologically address the creation and use of 100 unusual maps, from Hartmann Schedel's world map derived from Ptolemy's *Geography* (1493) to an anonymous textile map of the Middle East prepared in 2008. It is not immediately clear if the intended audience for this book was meant to be scholarly or general, although given the details concerning print and book history within the contextual information contained on the page facing each map, it seems likely that an educated reader must at least have an academic interest in one or both of these subjects.

The first section captures cartographic curiosities created in the sixteenth century and features several specimens by Heinrich Bünting, such as his map of Europe arranged as a woman whose crown is Spain from 1581 (22-23). The second section spans the years 1598-1760, although the significance of this grouping is not immediately clear. Like the first section, this one also focuses on published material, much of it containing figurative maps featuring either satirical or visual commentary on the socio-political circumstances of the day. Hessel Gerritsz's 1608 map of the Netherlands, for example, configures these territories as a powerful lion (36-37), which surely reflects the country's successes in exerting its sovereignty from counter-reformational powers. The third section offers the reader a selection of maps generated for the purposes of commerce and education, and encompassing the years 1761-1848. Thomas Kitchin's 1787 world map also functioned as a jigsaw puzzle with which the player was meant to apply his or her knowledge of the world and thus bring the puzzle to completion (100-101). The final section continues this thematic trend and extends from 1850 to present, although as we have already noted, the last map in this book certainly predates the present.

This reader was disappointed not to find a scholarly bibliographic apparatus within the textual companion to each map, if for no other purpose than to provide the reader with further reading; in fact, the book lacks a bibliography. Just as absent are pre-modern maps. The rationale for this exclusion is not clear, and more so because the publisher as an institution holds an unusual Beatus mappamundi (twelfth century, Add. Ms. 11695, fol. 39v-40r) as well as the Psalter world map (thirteenth century, Add. Ms. 28681, 9r), in addition to many other pre-modern cartographic jewels that would have proven worthy material for this book.

The collection of maps studied, moreover, is decidedly western. With four exceptions, two of which were published in European colonies, none were published outside of Europe and therefore the cartographic traditions that developed in other parts of the world are ignored. Indeed, the exceptions published in Afghanistan and Japan contain extensive English-language content (196-197, 224-225). The rationale for focusing so exclusively on European maps also remains unclear, and again, surprising, particularly in light of the bounty of non-western possibilities contained in the British Library's collections.

A greater variety of cartographic objects and traditions would have strengthened this book: maps included in paintings or book illustrations, Roman mosaic maps, Native American maps of the cosmos and the regional maps they made for European colonizers, the woven creations that were sometimes cartographic in nature created by Chilean *arpilleras*, Japanese floor maps, and tattoo maps all only glimpse the potential cartographic variety that is simply absent from this book, which tends to favour printed, mass-produced maps. Certainly, if the intention was to focus on European cartographical contributions, there should have been more content relating to colonial spaces. Maps about these regions often emphasised peoples, places, and things that the colonizer's eye found curious. These sorts of details tend to seem even more unusual decades and centuries after the map was produced, which merits their consideration.

In terms of the writing, the brief introduction fails to establish the aims of the book in a clear fashion and offers no critical framing for its contents, nor does it provide coherence for an otherwise diverse collection of maps loosely housed within a series of chronological, rather than thematic, sections. The themes briefly alluded to in the introduction can cross temporal boundaries and such an organization may have made this book more successful because the chronologically divided sections seem randomly conceived. At times the structure of the prose fails to support the arguments and simply does not read well, and in the introduction it retreats to a bulleted list of themes and ideas (6).

The quality of the colour images is excellent and ensures that the maps can be useful for future study. The price of the book is more than reasonable given its size. In summary, the book's shortcomings outweigh its strengths, which is most unfortunate because its subject matter is both worthwhile of examination and intriguing in nature.

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