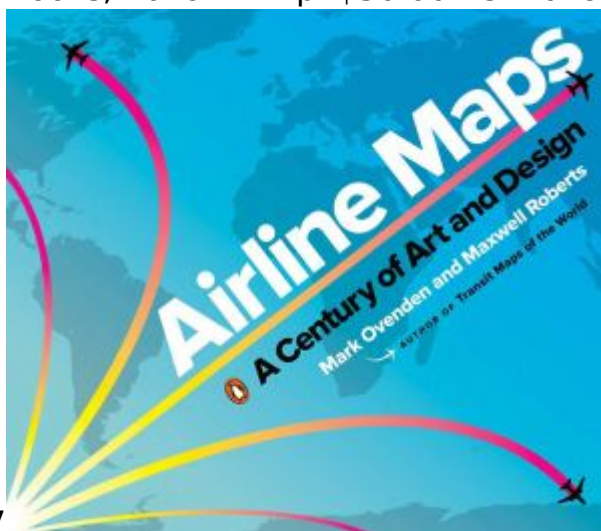




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Ovenden, Mark and Roberts, Maxwell. *Airline Maps: A Century of Art and Design*. New York: Penguin Books, 2019. 144 p. \$30.00 LC: 2019-26243 ISBN



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*Airline Maps: A Century of Art and Design* by Mark Ovenden and Maxwell Roberts explores the evolution of maps utilized in the airline industry between 1919 and 2019. Aimed at a popular audience, rather than a scholarly one, the book is divided into seven chapters that, collectively, represent one hundred years of commercial aviation history. The authors trace this history to identify trends in graphic design that characterized different intervals of time, providing insight into how and why airline maps are unique in the landscape of cartographic resources.

The authors explain that commercial aviation maps were used less for navigational purposes than as public relations tools for airlines. The distances depicted on two points of an airline map are arbitrary and vary from map to map rendering them useless as navigational tools. Airline maps, in fact, were a means to engage commercial air travelers and sell the notion that air travel was superior to ocean travel. The artwork not only reiterated this idea but pushed the narrative that planes were a more modern, sophisticated and expedient means of transportation.

Throughout the book, the authors identify thematic elements that pervade airline map artwork. The period from 1919 to 1929, for example, was marked by a combination of “simplified diagrams” and “stunning graphics” that had socio-political undertones: “The British government had a far-flung empire, from the



Americas to Africa to the Antipodes and it realized that air travel could fulfill a vital role in binding it all together.” Artwork in airline maps supported this idea, quite literally drawing a line between colonies and the metropole.

Ostensibly, the book is about airline maps but a significant amount of the narrative is focused on commercial aviation history. The authors make some intriguing, if not astounding, observations about themes within the maps that beg for further analysis; it does not, however, give the kind of erudite examination of either the commercial aviation industry or airline maps that would satisfy a scholarly audience. The book, with some exceptions, also neglects to look at the commercial artists who, in the process of their everyday work, created truly astounding maps. A peek at the individuals who created them, their techniques and inspirations would provide much-needed nuance.

The book’s appeal lies within its accessibility. Anyone can pick up this book and enjoy it. The authors provide a truncated history of the development of commercial aviation that put these maps into context but wisely choose to emphasize the visual aspects of what is ultimately an esoteric corner of cartography. The omission of geographic utility within these maps render them void as hard scientific tools but they are compelling as artwork. When appreciated for their artistic endeavors, the maps reach across disciplines and can be fully appreciated. The authors have selected some truly exquisite examples of airline maps to populate this book giving the reader a sampling of the creativity and artistry that supported the commercial aviation industry.

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