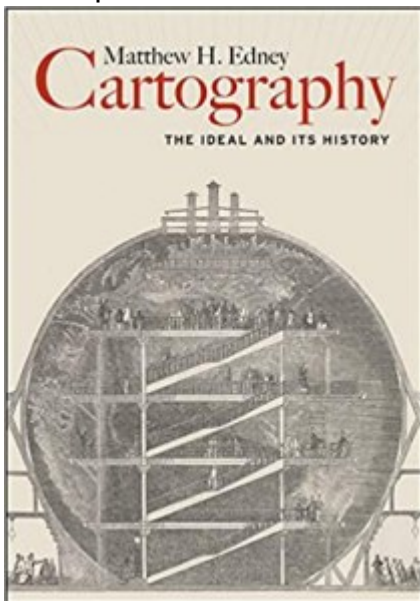




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Edney, Matthew H. *Cartography: The Ideal and Its History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. 309 p. \$30.00. LCCN 2018025842 ISBN: 97800226605685

As a reviewer who does not have a professional standing in geography or cartography I must preface my review with the fact that I have never thought of cartography as simply map making. My background is in the studies of world politics and from that perspective I have recognized that some maps are less of a true representation of the world than a political or cultural instrument. Yet other maps must be based entirely on fact and pure data (tactical pilotage charts for one example).



The audience for this volume is a small one of professionals, academics and graduate level students. Much of the book is esoteric and abstract. It is a philosophical look at the ideal of cartography and has scattered illustrations in support of the arguments made but is not intended to be a book of maps. The author has well footnoted the work and included an extensive bibliography to aid in further research.

The approach the author has taken to the study of maps is of great interest. Adopting a processual method, that of looking at the processes of how maps are produced, circulated and consumed, the author's argument allows more historical understanding. He argues that the idea of studying more of how maps are



circulated and consumed is an important consideration that has not been undertaken to a great extent, but that it offers the opportunity to broaden our understanding of maps and their use. The author suggests an extensive checklist of ten broad categories of preconceptions to help scholars avoid these preconceptions in the study of maps. He provides examples of occurrences of the preconceptions both in maps and the study of maps.

In a following chapter the author provides a history of the “ideal of cartography” and how it emerged over time. This chapter is a solid telling of the evolution of mapping and uses the perspective of the author’s checklist of preconceptions of cartography to tell the story. This chapter alone is well worth reading and will stimulate many conversations. The chapter following is equally as interesting — providing a thorough discussion of map scale and its evolution as well as its influence on maps and map scale’s meaningfulness. Living in region with rugged terrain I commonly have encountered the lack of meaning in distances measured in miles rather than the time needed to traverse the terrain.

Overall, I think the author’s argument is too big. There are a myriad of important points in the author’s well researched and documented argument centering on the problems with the ideal of cartography, but the sum of the parts does not make the argument that cartography must die true. I think the argument of the “why” behind maps is one that deserves more attention and I think in the past few decades the “why” behind maps has begun to receive more attention. But rather than say “cartography deserves to die” perhaps cartography must evolve like all things do.

The book is a well-documented volume that challenges the way one thinks of cartography and maps. While not a necessary read it is one that investing time in will allow one to see cartography and map making, circulation, and consumption in a different way.

William Rafter
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