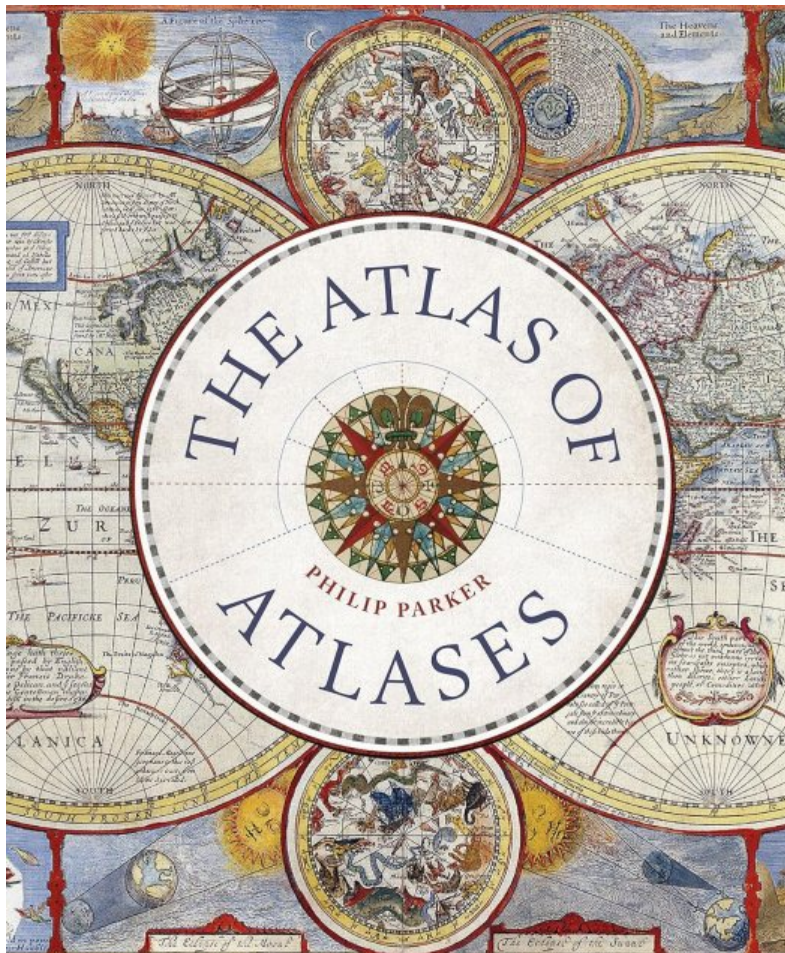




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Book Review: The Atlas of Atlases

reviewed by Maggie Tarmey



Parker, Philip. *The Atlas of Atlases*. London: Ivy Press, 2022. 272 p. \$40. ISBN: 978-0-7112-6805-0.

The Atlas of Atlases documents the history of the atlas through time, beginning with the Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük in 6200 BCE and leading to the present day. The book is designed for a popular audience. The text gives a broad overview of the many people involved in cartography and their processes across ten distinct chapters, including many full-color images of maps and atlases.



This book works as a history of mapping and atlases by European nations, the Middle East, and northern Africa. Absent from this text is huge swathes of the world population, including the majority of Africans, Indigenous people of the Americas and Caribbean, central and east Asians, and Pacific Islanders. On page 86-7, there is an image of “World Map” by Juan de la Cosa which was made in 1500. Parker captions this image with “this contains the first cartographic representation of the Americas.” Indigenous mapping traditions aren’t dismissed in this book, rather they are overlooked entirely.

Parker discusses the Kangnido map produced in Korea by Koreans on page 81. They note that “it has the distinction of being the first map produced in Asia to show an outline of Europe.” This singular reference to early east Asian mapping in the text relates the map back to Europe rather than discussing the importance of this map within east Asian contexts.

It is important to note that Parker attempts to address this gap immediately after their discussion of the Kangnido map, where they write:

In terms of its sophistication, the Kangnido map is a warning not to assume that European cartography was the only advanced mapping tradition to emerge by the fifteenth century, and a reminder that many of the areas ‘discovered’ by Europeans had themselves been host for many centuries to advanced civilizations, whose geographical knowledge about areas such as Central Asia and the east coast of Africa far surpassed that of the first generations of European explorers. (81)

This sentence stands alone in the text and is never fully explored—immediately after this sentence Parker jumps back to the Kangnido map and its explanatory text about the usefulness of maps. If Parker is aware of these civilizations with “advanced mapping tradition,” why not talk about them? Why exclude them from *The Atlas of Atlases*? Maps take a wide variety of forms and this book excludes many of them.

Colonial language is scattered throughout the book, with examples such as “the Portuguese **discovered** the Azores in the early fifteenth century...” (54) and “the American **acquisition** of the Philippines in 1898 and the German **move** into Africa...” (223) [emphasis added]. While there are references in the book to the concept of colonization when referring to colonial powers, there is no discussion of how this power impacts the output of cartographers and atlas creators.



Parker includes at least one image on nearly each page of this book, and they are all interesting maps. However, each individual page is only 9"x7.5" in size, which is woefully small for maps that are in actuality much larger. While the colors are beautiful, many of these maps are challenging to read. For example, on page 209 there is a map called "Map Showing the Illiteracy of the Adult White Male Population" from 1874 in the *Statistical Atlas of the United States*. When the image was shrunk to fit the page, the text outlining the scale of the map became illegible. Parker tries to alleviate this in some cases by stretching certain images across two pages, but the book seems to have no gutter, leaving the parts of the images closest to the seam also challenging to see. This book is targeted towards a popular audience who may not need every fine detail in the images, but they will want to be able to see them clearly. Unfortunately, that isn't possible with many of the images in this book.

The Atlas of Atlases is not appropriate for a research library collection as it is such a broad and generalized overview of the topic while also missing the mark on non-Western forms of mapping. The language and content of this text is appropriate for a popular audience, albeit the text can be dense in parts. This book could be a nice gift for a more casual fan of maps.

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