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## Review Essay:

### Three First-Rate Books on Maps, by Jeremy Black

Each from the world's leading publisher on cartography, the University of Chicago Press (BL Publishing, the British leader matches in quality, but not in quantity.) These are individually important but also speak to the extent to which cartographic studies have long focused on, and developed high expertise in, many issues that have only recently become more generally fashionable. Other such studies are published frequently with rather indifferent quality, namely issues of meaning and relevance.

What about the past, and the present, should and could be mapped, and how, let alone best, to do so, are vexed issues in cartographic studies, not least because they emphasize the extent to which there is no perfect map nor unimpeachable desiderata. This includes topics such as perspective, projection, scale, title, nomenclature, key, captions, and so forth.

*The Atlas of Boston History*, edited by Nancy S. Seasholes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. Pp. x, 224. Illus., maps, append., sources, index., \$40.00, ISBN 978-0-2266-3115-8; e-editions.

*The Atlas of Boston History* is a beautifully-produced, large-format volume, with 57 full-colour spreads tackling a range of pertinent topics, the maps supported by photographs and graphs, and the whole in an appendix that provides additional information and sources. Each spread has a pertinent text and each of the eleven sections, which are essentially chronological, has a valuable introduction. The closest comparison in cartographic impact is the three-volume *Historical Atlas of Canada*, but the scale of coverage is very different, and that provides an opportunity for a very welcome detail. Inevitably there are other topics that could have been covered, I think the battle of Bunker Hill the most obvious one, and I would also have liked more on the politics of the city and a coverage of crime, but the range is excellent.

The spreads offer a very good use of colour and differing scales of engagement. To provide a flavour, the first fourteen spreads are The Boston Basin, before 5,000 BP; The First Inhabitants;

Europeans Arrive in Massachusetts Bay; Boston is Founded; Boston's Economy in the 1640s; Accommodation and Conflict, 1630-1676 (in effect King Philip's War with the Native Americans and its background, which is not centrally about Boston at all); Boston in 1676 (a careful analysis of the Clough Map); Boston's Economy, 1740-1760; Boston and the Slave Trade, 1638-Early 1800s; Boston in 1743; Revolutionary Economy, 1776-1807; Boston in 1800; Connections to the Mainland and Additions of Land. The last nine relate to the situation in recent decades, with topics such as race, economy, tourism and environmental challenges brought into the late 2010s. First-rate throughout.

*The Eternal City: A History of Rome in Maps*, Jessica Maier. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. Pp. vi, 240. Illus., maps, recommended reading. \$40.00. ISBN 978-0-2265-9145-2; e-editions.

Jessica Maier, already author of the first-rate *Rome Measured and Imagined: Early-Modern Maps of the Eternal City*, also from Chicago, approaches Rome's history through maps, although also deploying other sources, including art and photography. The book is divided into ten chronological sections, Rome Takes Shape; Rome of the Caesars; Rome of the Popes; Rome Reborn; Rome of the Scholars; Rome of the Saints and Pilgrims; Rome of the Grand Tourists; Rome of the Mass Tourists; Rome Enters the Modern Age; and Rome Past, Present, and Future. As is inevitably the case, there is much missing, and also somewhat of a rushed feel to the post-Mussolini years. Post-war renewal, city politics, the economy of Rome, and its crime, are all topics that could have been presented through maps. Yet Maier has so much to cover and what she does tackle is done very well, both in the selection and discussion of visual images and in her considerate and humane prose style. A delight of a book.

*Time in Maps: From the Age of Discovery to Our Digital Era*, edited by Kären Wigen and Caroline Winterer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. Pp. viii, 272. Illus., maps, index. \$45, ISBN 978-0-2267-1859-0; e-editions.

*Time in Maps* is a first-rate collection based on a 2017 Stanford conference that considers attempts to insert a sense of time into the spatial medium of maps. This is a formidable undertaking as for most of history there has not been any clear-cut distinction between time and space, or, necessarily, any view of time as linear and the past as separate. The authority of the past moreover rested in the present, as in legal process.

Given what could have been covered, the selection offered is necessarily notable for omission as much as commission, but the latter is impressive. There is coverage of aspects of Japan, China, Korea and the Aztec Empire, as well as more familiar geographies. The latter, however, are treated in an original fashion. Focusing on the Atlantic world, William Rankin deploys an impressive range of maps to consider mapping over the last century. Very differently, Caroline Winterer considers the first American maps of “Deep Time,” Susan Shulten looks at the origins of “Time Mapping” in the United States, for example the extinction of bison, and James Akerman assesses the mapping of historical landscapes of (some) warfare on behalf of travelers in America.

The volume, as the Foreword notes, “gives voice to the ineluctable lure of the undiscovered and uncharted.” It provides an important work for cartographic scholars, and, more generally, offers those interested in historiography much to consider. If the latter subject also has much to offer those interested in maps then possibly it can be incorporated into any second volume on this most interesting topic. The volume is a pleasure to read, with many well-selected maps and a high standard of reproduction.

Originally published in *The Critic*, January 15, 2021, this review appears by the kind permission of Prof. Black and *The Critic*.

***Trajan, Rome's Last Conqueror,***  
by Nicholas Jackson

As the title suggests Nicholas Jackson's *Trajan: Rome's Last Conqueror*, from [Greenhill Books](#), is about the life and achievements of one of the greatest Roman emperors, during whose reign the Empire achieved its greatest territorial extent in history.

Nicholas Jackson was unknown to me before I saw this book; he's not an historian, but a pharmaceutical and medical practitioner, with a passion for Roman history as a hobby. He has no other historical publications in his credit, which made me fear that the content of the book might not meet the basic requirements to make it a satisfactory read. As it turned out, my doubts were quickly dispelled. As he says in his

introduction, Jackson spent several good years writing the book, including the collection and analysis of materials. In addition, he consulted with the eminent historians Anthony Birley and Barbara M. Levick. In consequence, Jackson's work is a credible presentation of Trajan as a man, leader, and emperor, with a clear discussion of what can be considered fiction and the truth about him. Jackson approached the evidence information in a critical manner; for example, he does an excellent job of analysing Trajan's death and the subsequent very unclear evidence as to the transfer of power to Hadrian.

Naturally, Jackson covers Trajan's origins, his adolescent years (about which we do not know much), his familiarization with the military and career in the army, and finally the process of coming to power. Trajan is shown to us as a competent person whose decisions are based on the advice of his trusted *consilium*, which included his wife Plotina, older sister Marciana and friend Sura. The description of the emperor's relationship with his wife, who was rather a companion as the emperor himself had homosexual preferences, seems to be extremely interesting.

Certainly, the descriptions of Trajan's war campaigns in Dacia and Parthia, which the author additionally supplemented with the proposed lists of commanders, units and the number of the army, are of great value in the book. At some points, there appear some author's reflections on Trajan's identification with Alexander the Great, a figure who for many people of antiquity was an unattainable ideal and model of a winner.

From my perspective, an extremely intriguing aspect of Trajan's biography was the issue of the Emperor's relationship with Hadrian, who was in no way particularly favoured during Trajan's lifetime. Jackson's analysis of how this came about is excellent. When in 86 C.E., the then 10 year old Hadrian lost his father and mother, the future emperor Trajan and his friend Publius Acilius Attianus (later Trajan's praetorian prefect) decided to look after him. Upon his accession to the throne in 98 C.E., Trajan could look for a real heir in Hadrian. But his failure to offer over high titles and offices to Hadrian suggests that Hadrian was not in special favour with the new emperor. Certainly, a great honour for Hadrian was the consent for his marriage with Vibia Sabina (who was then 12 years old) – the granddaughter of Trajan's sister; it is possible, however, that permission for the match resulted through the persuasion by Trajan's wife Plotina. As it turned out, however, the marriage was not successful, partly due to Hadrian's homosexual tendencies.