

Overall, these two publications complement each other. *National and Regional Atlases* will appeal to map specialists and documents a wider range of atlas production. It is a significant addition to the field. *Kister's Atlas Buying Guide* is meant to help the public when buying a general atlas. It does an admirable job of comparing 105 atlases but it does not present its recommendations as a conclusion. Its usefulness is in collating reviews and giving review guidelines for atlases.

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GREEK AND ROMAN MAPS / O.A.W. Dilke. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985. 240 p.: illus., maps. ISBN 0-8014-1801-1: \$25 US

The question I kept asking while reading this book was, "Why am I having so much trouble staying awake?" Part of the answer, certainly, is the feeling it gave me of slogging through back issues of *Imago Mundi* in an over-heated library, "... zzzzz ... 'the Babylonian world map' ... zzzzz ... 'the Turin Gold Map Papyrus' ... zzzzz ... 'the maps on the painted coffins from El-Bersha'," my head slipping lower, and lower, until I'd come to with a jerk. Not that the *maps* have this effect: they remain as exciting as ever. It is the same old nothing that is said about them that causes the eyes to glaze as they scan the page in search of a thought. I could scarcely believe I was going to be dragged again – with no new data! – through the tedium of the fight over the number of feet in the Eratosthenian *stade*; or review – from no new point of view – the debate whether Ptolemy's *Geography* originally came out with maps. Yet I would have endured these stoically, even with renewed interest, had something in Dilke's book depended on them. But nothing does.

Nothing in the book depends on anything. There is no connective tissue. There are no logical relationships. There are not, despite the book's generally chronological structure, even any chronological relationships. The chapters may be read in any order. And in fact, as they repeat previous 'histories' of cartography, they repeat themselves. Having read on page 25 that, "An oblong or oval shape was suggested by Democritus of Abdera (c. 470 or 460-370 or 360 BC), who with his master Leucippus also drew up the concept of the atom," I was nonplussed to find myself reading on page 59 that, "Democritus of Abdera in Thrace, who is best known as founder with his master Leucippus of the atomic theory, also wrote a *Geography* now lost." Though it was not uninteresting to learn "of the ill-fated Sataspes, executed by Xerxes because he turned back to the Mediterranean from the west coast of Africa ..." on page 57, it was disconcerting to read on page 133 "of one Sataspes, a member of the Persian royal family, who was sent to sail around Africa ... but was unfortunate enough to be executed by Xerxes," as though we'd never been introduced to the man before. I was less surprised – but no less annoyed – to find it said of Alexander in the chapter called 'Evidence from Ancient Greece' that, "Although he believed himself to have a divine mission, military conquest was not by any means his sole aim," and in the chapter called 'Geographical Writers' that, "Although the main objective of Alexander the Great

was to conquer the Persian Empire, he also had a serious purpose in mind," the two phrases introductory to nearly identical treatments of Nearchus' expedition – an event, by the way, of which Dilke is so enamored that he describes it for a third time in the chapter called 'Periploi'.

But this, finally, is no more than sloppy – as is the inadequate and occasionally inaccurate index – and should have been handled by the book's editor (if indeed it had an editor); but for me to deal with the book at this level is to treat Dilke the way he treats his maps, as though describing their errors and placing them in a vaguely chronological setting exhausted any meaning they might have for us, or might have had for the Greeks and Romans. It is, thus, not the way Dilke's text almost never refers to the sad, cheap, low-quality illustrations collected around its middle like a beer gut that infuriates. Or their confusing captions. Or the index. Or even the repetitions. These merely irritate. What crazes is Dilke's tight, narrow focus on what *he* imagines a map *has got to be*, combined with his insistence on seeing this his map-thing as nothing more than an object carrying forward from the past misinformation with which to bedevil the future. Though it is apodictic that chronologism is an inadequate support for a *history* of cartography – dumping it on the desk of the auction-house cataloguer like a coat on the floor by a cheap plastic hanger – then its most insidious aspect is the way, in constantly looking *behind* to see whence this map came, and *ahead* to see which maps shall be derived from it, the map is never allowed to breathe in any sort of *present*. Always deadening, this is egregiously inappropriate in a book like Dilke's, which comes to us in the series, *Aspects of Greek and Roman Life*, intended to provide "a vivid composite of ancient Greece and Rome through succinct, up-to-date surveys of many aspects of classical life that have been heretofore neglected," and published, not just for scholars, but for "the general reader interested in classical antiquity." But Dilke's eye is rarely on Greek and Roman life. It is always somewhere else:

[Eratosthenes'] map of the known world was a very striking achievement and may be considered to be the first really scientific Greek map. Though we do not know its dimensions, as it was presented to the Egyptian court it may well have been fairly large. It must have been drawn as closely as possible to scale, and its influence on subsequent Greek and Roman cartography was tremendous. Indeed, with Ptolemy's inaccurate alterations to the overall dimensions of the world and the oikumene, it can be said to have affected world maps right down to the Age of Discovery.

It is not in this passage the juvenile interest in 'firsts' that rankles. Nor the irrelevant speculation masquerading as historical imagination. Nor even the anachronistic application of a 19th century AD concept ('scientific') to a 3rd century BC artifact – though this is outrageous in an historian. What gets under the skin is the way in trying to say something about this map, Dilke feels constrained, not to let it reflect on the Hellenistic spirit which presumably nurtured it, but immediately to turn away, and stare off into its future, into the 2nd century AD, and still further off to the 16th. There is always in this book this feeling of being in a constricted portion of a long tunnel, lighted at both ends, but dark here, wherever we are, with the walls pressing in, claustrophobic in its denial of the

present of the map. How the work of Eratosthenes might have affected Columbus may have some interest, but it is a matter for the history of the 15th and 16th centuries, not that of Greece and Rome.

Were Dilke to take his eyes off his period's future and immerse himself in its present, not only would the maps be allowed to breathe, but, at home again in the milieu from which they sprang and in which they were used with purpose and effect, they would necessarily start to be seen as something other than more or less 'wrong' versions of the things we call maps today. This is especially sad in Dilke's case because he shows flashes of that sympathy so necessary for the imaginative reconstruction of another time and place. He has, for example, no trouble conjecturing that the violations of scale found on the Peutinger Table might be akin to those found on today's map of the London underground. Or in supposing that the out-of-scale features shown in elevation on the *Forma Urbis Romae* might be "considered as symbols, which like trees on Ordnance Survey maps would not be drawn to scale." These flashes, however, are all but instantly lost in the surrounding gloom of unremittingly invidious comparison. A throwaway line might suggest the possibility of the Peutinger Table's kinship with the map of the London underground, but 'deformation,' 'not infrequently out of proportion,' 'vague,' 'extraordinary telescoping,' 'minor error,' 'major error,' 'lack of information,' 'conspicuous mistakes,' and 'misspelling' – to but hint at Dilke's characterization of the document – suggest otherwise. Page after page is spent detailing Greek and Roman 'deformations,' 'errors' and 'misplacements': "The most curious mistake concerns Urolanion, i.e., Verulamium, which Ptolemy gives as about 95 Roman miles from London, whereas its true distance is about 25," and "Isca (Exeter) is shown as about 115 Roman miles instead of 170 [*sic*]," and "Calleva, known from an inscription to be Silchester, is wrongly oriented." What point is served by these mindless incantations, what insights gained into the worlds of classical antiquity? Or for that matter, our own? Although Dilke chides Pliny for being "obsessed with the unusual and horrific," isn't that what these catalogues amount to, a scholar's form of morbid curiosity? Or is it an obsession with the progress *we* have made, a kind of stultifying pride? Or, as I actually believe to be the case, that he has nothing else to say?

Or nothing much else to say: for when he is not impugning their quality, he is decrying classical representation of the environment for not having the form of 20th century English maps of the globe. This is the other side of the indictment inevitably handed down by this class of cartographic historian, not only that the maps were wrong, but that they were pathetic attempts in the first place: "it was not scientifically compiled," "drawn in what seems to us a combination of the primitive and the formal, partly in plan, partly in profile," "quasi-maps," "one cannot exactly speak of it as a map," "tends to detract from the map-like quality," "plan and elevation are awkwardly combined," "tries unsuccessfully to combine plan and elevation," "an incoherent attempt at a map," "bear some resemblance to a plan of a settlement, though they tend to confuse plan and elevation," "whether the first two were maps or pictorial representations is not quite clear," "maps or something approaching them," "doubtful whether one can claim it as a semi-oblique type of map," and "doubtful, however, if such representations can be

thought to fall within the realm of cartography," all revolve around some unspoken notion of what a map is *supposed* to look like, unspoken, I guess, because Dilke believes it intuitively clear and universally shared, like a Platonic ideal, *known* to every age, but achieved by ours alone. Accordingly he has appended a glossary of "Greek and Roman Words for 'Map'" every bit as though there were no historical chasm separating *tabula* (literally 'tablet'), *descriptio* (literally 'drawing'), or *mappa* (literally 'cloth') from English 'map'. But the chasm is all but unbridgeable: these are *not* Roman words for 'map', but Roman words for 'tablet', 'drawing' and 'cloth' pressed into service to cover objects which would evolve over hundreds of years into what we today call 'maps'. But they were not 'maps' to the Romans or the Greeks and to insist that they were is to insist that the Romans and Greeks were none but contemporary Americans, Canadians and Englishmen who just happened to live a long time ago along the Mediterranean. It is to deny history.

This is the very force of P.D.A. Harvey's insistence that maps as such, as we know and call them, did not exist in Europe prior to the 15th century, although many other things that led in time to maps – *tabulae*, *descriptioes* and *mappae* – did. In his *History of Topographical Maps*, Harvey silently adjusted his notion of what was and what was not a map to conform to that of each age and culture, for to insist again and again that *whatever* they were, they were not maps, or not *quite* maps, or only *sort* of maps, would be to conclude what alone was surely given, that the age and culture were not our own. *We* are in a position to see what the ancients could not, the map germ in each *forma*, in every *itinerarium pictum*, but, as Harvey put it,

... only because we are looking at them with hindsight, because we know what a real map is. The men who made them knew nothing of maps; to them they were simply topographical symbols, topographical diagrams, a particular sort of topographical picture. It is significant that there was no word for map in any European language until the Renaissance; there was no word for a map because maps did not exist. This does not mean for a moment that we are wrong to make use of our hindsight ... But we must recognize that many of our classifications, many of the lines of development that we have distinguished, are entirely artificial in the context of their own time. (p. 173)

Yes: *the context of their own time*. It is this, in his hurry to look backwards and forwards, that Dilke has failed to give us; and in failing this has failed in all. Without this context the maps are no more than objects, hunks of stone, fragments of parchment, sheets of tesserae: meaningless, empty. To give them back their meaning, that context has to be recovered, the world that threw them up has to be restored. When Dilke writes, "Unfortunately, Herodatus is more interested in personalities than in the details of these voyages," he only manages to tear it further apart. But when Harry Carter writes of Herodatus that, "he is at great pains to emphasize the self-discipline of the Greeks; and the moral of his longest story is that a free man's self-imposed law has a greater effect on the course of history than the fear of a despot,"¹¹ the emergent context casts a halo of meaning around it, one that begins to justify the significance of Herodatus not only to the ancients, but to us as well. What he *meant* to them is surely at the heart of what he must *mean* to us if we are ever to more than pick at his story for place-names like a

jackal at a carcass. It is the *meaning* that matters; and as it is this meaning that Harry Carter is attempting to articulate, so it is this meaning that Kenneth Clark is trying to reach when he writes that, "The Greeks perfected the nude in order that man might feel like a god,"² and that Vincent Scully is grasping for when he writes, "The landscape and the temples together form the architectural whole, were intended by the Greeks to do so, and must therefore be seen in relation to each other."³ Temple, sculpture, story: each is allowed to illuminate the culture that gave it birth by being returned to that culture, by being glimpsed again as it must have been when its purpose was new and clear and whole with the lives of its makers.

Only when things are so seen is their life renewed. Marble, bronze and parchment so seen breathe again as sanctuary, god and vital history. The map is not a lesser form of human culture: where is the votary who will return it to its context, reveal its meaning and so let it live once more, not just as it did for the Greeks and Romans, but for us as well?

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NOTES

¹ Harry Carter, translator, *The Histories of Herodotus*, The Heritage Press, New York, 1958, xxviii.

² Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1956, 370.

³ Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods*, Praeger, New York, rev. ed. 1969, 2.