

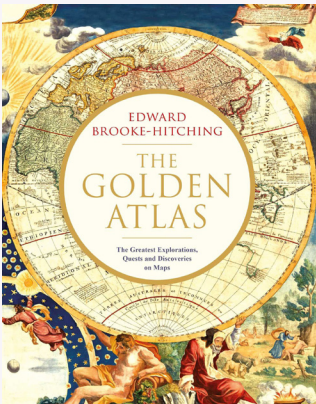
## THE PHANTOM ATLAS: THE GREATEST MYTHS, LIES AND BLUNDERS ON MAPS

By Edward Brooke-Hitching

Chronicle Books, 2018

256 pages, color maps and illustrations, bibliography, index

Hardcover: \$25.95, ISBN 978-1-4521-6840-1



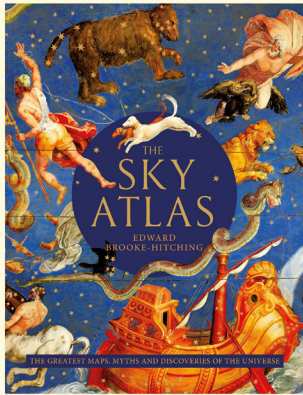
## THE GOLDEN ATLAS: THE GREATEST EXPLORATIONS, QUESTS AND DISCOVERIES ON MAPS

By Edward Brooke-Hitching

Simon & Schuster UK, 2018

256 pages, color maps and illustrations, bibliography, index

Hardcover: \$25.95, ISBN 978-1-4711-6682-2



## THE SKY ATLAS: THE GREATEST MAPS, MYTHS AND DISCOVERIES OF THE UNIVERSE

By Edward Brooke-Hitching

Chronicle Books, 2020

256 pages, color maps and illustrations, bibliography, index

Hardcover: \$29.95, ISBN 978-1-79720-118-4

**Reviews by:** Jenny Marie Johnson, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

EDWARD BROOKE-HITCHING HAS PENNED a trio of extensively illustrated titles exploring facets of notable maps and of the histories of cartography and exploration. *The Phantom Atlas*, *The Golden Atlas*, and *The Sky Atlas* each provide an easy entry for map enthusiasts, armchair historians, and beginning scholars through approachable and understandable text, clean and clear illustrations, and, occasionally, some astonishing examples of geographic

apocrypha that have persisted into the late twentieth, and even the early twenty-first, centuries.

The first title, *The Phantom Atlas*, examines fifty-eight instances where non-existent features or species have appeared on maps—in some cases being propagated from map to map for centuries. Some of these features are well known—such as the Island of California, the Great



© by the author(s). This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

River and the Sea of the West, and Terra Australis—while others are perhaps unfamiliar to North American readers, like Australia’s Inland Sea and the representation of Korea as an island. These non-existent locations appeared on maps for a variety of reasons; while some were mythical—for example: Earthly Paradise, El Dorado, St. Brendan’s Island, and Thule—most were simply errors. In an era when fact-checking information about distant places was difficult or impossible, it was easy for individuals to invent interesting locales in which to set their self-aggrandizing tales. Map compilers, who had to rely heavily on the (hoped for) veracity of traveler’s tales, picked up these stories and their settings, and included them on their maps—places such as Frederick Cook’s Bradley Land, Robert Peary’s Crocker Land, or many of the lands appearing on the 1588 Zeno Map. Some of these locations, including Sandy Island (New Caledonia), Sannikov Island, Maria Theresa Reef, and Dougherty Island, continued to be included on maps and in atlases in the 20th century despite repeated failures to locate them. The author treats each of the fifty-eight apocryphal locations or species in alphabetical order, in sections of between two and ten pages, all of which are illustrated with reproductions of appropriate maps. Often an enlarged portion of a map will be included, tied by a line to its location on the full map. Because each of the sections stand largely alone, with only occasional references to the others, readers can choose to read only those sections of greatest interest. In addition to covering non-existent geographical features, Brooke-Hitching shows and discusses two maps, the *Carta Marina* (1539) and the *Nuremberg Chronicle* map (1493), that depict mythical plant and animal species, and the book also has a section on the numerous appearances of Patagonian Giants on maps from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.

*The Golden Atlas* focuses not only on the stories found on maps, but also stories *about* maps, setting maps in the social and intellectual contexts of their production by highlighting the exploits and tales of great discoverers and discoveries. The volume could almost be considered a history of exploration illustrated with maps. It is organized chronologically, and a timeline marches across the top of each double spread of pages with the era(s) being discussed highlighted. In thirty-nine fairly brief chapters, Brooke-Hitching sweeps through more than four thousand years of human history: from Sixth Dynasty Egyptian explorations (circa 2345–2181 BCE) through Shackleton’s 1914–1917 expedition to the Antarctic, the adventure with

which, the author argues, the heroic age of exploration came to a close. “Cartography too by this point had long shed its artistic plumage to take up residency in its modern division of scientific tool, and it feels right that a curation of its most splendid examples should end here also” (*Golden Atlas* 246).

The bulk of the chapters revolve around the exploits and discoveries of specific individuals. There is one chapter on the Dutch East India Company and the European discovery of Australia and another on the beginning of what the author calls the “age of female travelers,” which he places at about 1846. All of the other chapters center on those personalities who might be considered “the usual suspects” of European exploration, discovery, and eventual exploitation. The *Golden Atlas* is not so much a history of cartography as a history supported by cartographic illustrations. The maps are rarely at the center of the conversation, and only occasionally does the text even briefly explain the importance of the particular map being used as an illustration. For example, the chapter “Willem Barentsz, Henry Hudson and the quest for an Arctic passage, 1594–1611” contains four maps, which include a map by Barentsz (posthumously published in 1598) and another from the journal of a participant in Barentsz’s final voyage. The text does not discuss any of these maps, although the captions do give readers some idea of why the maps were included. Someone interested in a broadly sweeping history of exploration will be happy with *The Golden Atlas*; a reader looking for information about maps produced by or for exploration activities will not.

In *The Sky Atlas*, Brooke-Hitching turns his attention from Earth to the heavens. In his opinion, celestial maps are “the most overlooked genre of mapmaking,” perhaps in part because “maps of the world above reflect little of the world below” (*Sky Atlas* 12), but also because of the differences in how Earth and sky are experienced, and because the sheer vastness of the celestial realm requires some imagination to find place markers and patterns. This work is divided into four sizable sections—“The Ancient Sky,” “The Medieval Sky,” “The Scientific Sky,” and “The Modern Sky”—each with eight to twelve brief, targeted chapters of ten or fewer pages. Chapters have a variety of kinds of focus: the celestial and astronomical map output of entire civilizations or societies, technologies, the work of specific astronomers, or the search for and discovery of specific celestial bodies. Like *The Golden Atlas*, *The Sky Atlas* often is more a cartographically illustrated history

of celestial discovery and philosophies than a history of the graphics that depict the heavens. The text does not focus on discussion of specific maps, but instead presents descriptions of the circumstances or contexts in which maps were produced or used. For example, the chapter on Halley's Comet is illustrated with nine maps and other graphics, not one of which is specifically referred to in the text. Fortunately, in this chapter, and throughout the book, the illustration captions are often extensive and do a good job explaining the connection of image to topic. Most of the text and accompanying illustrations center on European astronomy. There are, however, also chapters on ancient China, the Jain universe, Islamic astronomy (including the development of the astrolabe and its impact on European astronomy), and Mesoamerica. Should *The Sky Atlas* whet the reader's appetite for more, the "Select Bibliography" at the end of the volume could fill that need. It includes a number of core works on the history of astronomy and some works on the history of astronomical mapping.

The three titles were clearly intended to be independent publications, and while a few maps appear in more than one book, they are viewed through slightly different lenses in each. For example, Hondius's *Nieuwe caerte van het Wonderbaer ende Goudrycke Landt Guiana* (1598) appears in the "El Dorado" chapter of *The Phantom Atlas*—because it includes the mythical Lake Parime on which El Dorado was supposedly located—and it also appears in *The Golden Atlas's* chapter on Sir Walter Raleigh's search for El Dorado.

In all three of these titles, the text is easy to read, engaging, and informative. They are intended for the interested lay reader, rather than an academic audience that usually needs footnotes and endnotes. There are no such citations, and, although the map captions usually include the name of the cartographer and the date of publication, the reader must examine the illustration to discover the map title. In this way they serve as partial or casual citations, but unfortunately it is not always clear if a map was a separate publication or part of an atlas or other volume. There are some places where Brooke-Hitching refers to the work of specific scholars, but, again, does not provide enough information to unambiguously identify his sources. In *The Phantom Atlas* section on California as

an island, for example, Brooke-Hitching writes: "In fact 249 maps showing California Island (not including world maps) were identified by historians Glen McLaughlin and Nancy H. Mayo in 1995" (*Phantom Atlas* 66). Similarly, in discussing the Mountains of Kong, he writes that "after the publication of Rennell's map the mountains rose up on a series of other works—forty, in fact, have been found by the American academics Thomas Bassett and Philip Porter to bear the Kong falsity" (*Phantom Atlas* 149).

There is, however, nothing in his bibliography that appears to be a citation to either of these mentioned works—potentially leaving a novice researcher or entry-level enthusiast at a dead end.

The "selected" bibliographies appear to be *highly* selective, as they are quite short—only one page long. Although there are a sprinkling of works that, in the context of Brooke-Hitching's texts, could be considered primary sources—such as Hakluyt's 1589 *The Principall Navigations* or Flinders' 1814 *A Voyage to Terra Australis*—most of the titles are secondary works, some similar to Brooke-Hitching's titles, that were published during the last fifty years. No rationale is given as to why any particular title appears.

Edward Brooke-Hitching's *Phantom Atlas*, *Golden Atlas*, and *Sky Atlas* are a trio of works that are engaging and easy to read. All three are slightly less than 10 inches tall, so they definitely are not glossy coffee table books. Readers looking for larger illustrations will need to look to other titles or online resources. They are, however, lavishly illustrated with maps and other graphics, often with extensive captions. The captions usually allow for the reader to identify what the illustrations are but they are not citations. Because the chapters in all three are more or less self-contained, readers do not need to read the entire book but can elect to read sections of specific interest and still understand the content. These works could be used to guide a student to possible paper topics or to supply images of maps with specific styles or depictions. They might be useful as "starter" texts for someone who comes to the library and simply asks "Do you have anything on. . ." Certainly, Brooke-Hitching's three works on maps and the history of cartography and exploration are ideal for the casual reader and beginning armchair scholar.

