

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MAP LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES
BULLETIN

Book Reviews

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The GIS 20 Essential Skills, third edition

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Clemmer, Gina. ***The GIS 20 Essential Skills, third edition***. Redlands, California: Esri Press, 2017. 182p. \$49.99 US. ISBN 9781589485129.

Gina Clemmer is the president of the research and training company New Urban Research Inc. and holds a Master's degree in urban planning from the University of Iowa. ***The GIS 20 Essential Skills*** from Esri Press is now on its 3rd edition, having recently been updated for ArcGIS Desktop 10.6. This book is intended for absolute beginners to GIS, with the goal of teaching 20 “essential” GIS skills using plain language (no jargon). The book provides an EVA code for a 180-day trial

of ArcGIS Desktop, along with 200 credits to use with ArcGIS Online (some of which are used in the geocoding activities in the book).

The book starts with detailed instructions on how to obtain and install ArcGIS Desktop. After that, each chapter focuses on one skill and provides step-by-step instructions on how to accomplish a simple task. The 20 skills are:

1. Downloading shapefiles and using essential ArcMap tools
2. Creating basic maps and layouts
3. Projecting shapefiles
4. Preparing data for ArcMap [using Excel]
5. Joining data to maps
6. Creating thematic maps
7. Working with data tables
8. Address mapping [using ArcGIS Online for geocoding and creating an address locator]
9. Creating a categorical map
10. GPS point mapping
11. Editing
12. Creating attribute queries
13. Creating location queries
14. Using geoprocessing tools [how to use buffers, merge, union, append, clip and dissolve]
15. Creating geodatabases
16. Joining boundaries [i.e., spatial joins]
17. Working with aerial photography [i.e., georeferencing an image]
18. Creating reports
19. Sharing work
20. Publishing maps [to ArcGIS Online and to geoenabled PDFs]

In a few chapters, the book also directs the reader to find and download common US data, such as county boundaries through the TIGER/Line Shapefiles web interface or census data from American FactFinder. In other cases, data has been provided by the author. However, the data is packaged up in an executable that “installs” the data in a folder that does not match the folder/directory structure described in the book. As a result, files were missing references to the source layers, an error that would likely confound the target “absolute beginner” reader.

The book is a very quick read (a number of chapters are very brief, only 3 pages long) and covers all of the topics (and a bit more) that we cover in the Introduction to ArcGIS Desktop workshops that we offer at our library. All the steps are outlined, and there are a number of screenshots to supplement the steps. The steps are easy to follow and complete; however, I noticed on a few occasions the screenshot or special “tip” was not near the corresponding step, which could cause confusion. In other cases, I believe a few more screenshots would help a new GIS user to better understand some of the instructions. In any case, I was able to follow the examples in the text, and feel that they would be useful for students learning these new skills.

The book contained some tips that were new to me, so I definitely learned something, even not being a novice GIS user. There were a few topics that I felt could have benefited from some more explanation, such as projections, thematic maps or publishing maps (and some topics were never explained at all, such as vector vs. raster, even though the terms were used in the book). However, this could be because the author's goal was to keep the book simple and action focused. This goal is mirrored in the tone of the book, which might be jarring to some readers because it is very casual and jokey at times with no references or additional resources provided, but this may strike the right tone for a student beginning to work with GIS.

Despite the criticisms described above, I feel that the book could be helpful for beginners who want to start learning GIS basics fast, and could complement workshops that the library delivers. But for readers who want to learn more about why they are doing something or more theory and in-depth explanations, I suggest turning elsewhere.

Atlas of Empires
Martin Chandler
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Davidson, Peter. *Atlas of Empires*. Pennsylvania: Fox Chapel Publishing, 2018. 240p. \$19.99 US. ISBN 978-1504800891.

Atlas of Empires by Peter Davidson has a title with intrigue and splendour. Sadly, it does not live up to this. What it has in glitz, it misses in rigour.

The book holds some value for the beginning historian, with general sketches of some 32 "empires" - a term only nebulously sketched in the introduction - and bolstered by 60 maps showing approximate geographical considerations as well as images of cultural artifacts, including roads and works of art. The scope of this book is broad, spanning from the ancient (Sumer) to the modern (European Union), and is organized into 9 themes, presented in chronological order. The concept and philosophies of "empire" have shifted over time, and this forms the book's thesis.

In the publisher's release, Davidson is noted as a freelance writer and a restorer of antiquities, as well as a tutor on the Politics, Philosophy and History degree at Birkbeck College, University of London. He has written and directed documentaries on World War II "and related subjects" for the History Channel, a background that explains the fine styling of the text.

Atlas of Empires is very much an introductory text; it may serve the young student well as an inspiration for further study. However, in outlining so many empires, and so many themes, the history presented becomes a light gloss. As a piece historical prose, it fits firmly between popular non-fiction and coffee table reading. It is engaging, but hardly academic, an opinion bolstered by a dearth of sources. The images used are offered scant credits on the final page; the informational sources for the text and maps do not exist. There is a "further reading" section, which offers more in-depth explorations of each of the empires discussed, however sources for the arguments made are left to the best guess of the reader.

The maps, too, offer a popular non-fiction/coffee table book style, and the visual aesthetic would be as apt in a video or board game as it is in a textbook. The use of projections is well-executed, relative to the scope of each particular map, however the symbols are generic and the maps offer only a bare reinforcement of the information in the surrounding text. The maps seem incidental to the writing.

Ultimately, I found that *Atlas of Empires* would be best suited to a public library's collection, where the amateur historian might find it a good introductory text to further explore the field. An academic collection would not find it as useful, however, as the text did not have the rigour one would hope for, and the maps offered little to the field. It is an intriguing idea, but I was left wanting.

The Red Atlas; How the Soviet Union Secretly Mapped the World

Andrew Nicholson

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Davies, John and Kent, Alexander J. *The Red Atlas; How the Soviet Union Secretly Mapped the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 272 p. \$35.00 US. ISBN 9780226389578.

Opening the *Red Atlas* for the first time, one will notice that this is not really an “atlas” in the way that map librarians or even the general public would think of a reference atlas in a library collection. The *Red Atlas* is really a history and guidebook on Soviet topographic mapping especially during the time of the Cold War.

Believed to have been the world’s largest mapping project, the Soviet Union after World War II undertook to map in high resolution detail not only their own country but also all areas of the globe for military purposes. The *Red Atlas* provides a brief history of this mapping using aerial photos, satellites, copying maps from non-Soviet countries, and even using spies on the ground.

As the book makes clear, the Soviets took their mapping very seriously, devising different series for civilian and military use, and a very advanced and detailed nomenclature of symbols and colours to indicate maps features, landmarks, and prominent buildings. In many ways, Soviet mapping was far more detailed and richer than what was being produced in non-Soviet countries. Especially fascinating are the maps which were classified as “secret” and are still considered sensitive today in Russia. For example, out of the seven scales of topographic maps produced, maps of 1:200,000 scale or larger such as city plans of Soviet and World cities were marked as “Secret” or “For Official Use”, while smaller scale maps up to 1:1,000,000 were unclassified and available for general use.

Perhaps the most tantalizing aspect of the book is the section where it is speculated that Soviet spies obtained data used in maps of western countries. Precision details such as bridge clearance heights. and spaces between trees, among others, are listed in some city plans for American and

British cities. As the authors point out, only an “on the ground” observer would have been able to document this information as it was not found in any published maps of the time.

Although it is not an atlas in a classic sense of the term, the *Red Atlas* does include many illustrations showing examples of Soviet mapping, including snippets of cities most familiar to North American readers, such as New York City and San Francisco. These are included to show examples of classified information as these were restricted for “Official Use” to Soviet eyes. Comparisons of Soviet and American topographical maps are also a special highlight of the book where information is clearly copied from one to another, or information has been gathered by Soviet sources, and errors appear due to inaccurate, out of date, or incomplete information.

The authors point out early in the book that the maps described in the book come from rarely displayed private collections and that their creators have been largely silent on how they were made. More map series and details may still be tucked away in Russia and await further discovery.

For someone interested in maps and cold war history, the *Red Atlas* provides an interesting perspective on Soviet mapping and data collection practices. This reviewer highly recommends it for those libraries with Soviet maps in their collections or where there is research and teaching taking place on Soviet History and the Cold War.

The First Mapping of America: The General Survey of British North America

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Johnson, Alexander. *The First Mapping of America: The General Survey of British North America*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2017. 320 p. \$110 US (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-806-442-9.

The First Mapping of America is a monographic study of the General Survey of British North America from 1764 to 1775. The book’s author, Alexander Johnson, who is an authority on historical cartography and an antiquarian book dealer, states that the General Survey “was by far the most extensive cartographic enterprise ever undertaken to date in the British Empire, and one of the greatest scientific endeavors of the Enlightenment era.” Drawing mostly from archival sources, the author examines the operations of the General Survey set in the broader administrative and cartographic context. Johnson’s focus is on understanding the objectives of the General Survey, how it was conducted, the consequent maps and reports that it produced, and the maps’ reception and use by colonial administrators.

The central narrative follows the story of Samuel Holland and William Gerard De Brahm, who were the Surveyor Generals assigned to the Northern and Southern Districts. Johnson recounts the natural and political obstacles both men had to endure to produce their maps as well as the administrative reality under which they had to operate. The book shows that the success and progress of the General Survey was often at the mercy of key-policy makers whose political

agendas and personal interests were not always in accord with the survey's mandate, making the achievements of these two men "all the more remarkable".

The book is organized into five sections arranged chronologically. The first section looks at the development of state-sponsored mapping programs in North America, breaks down the socio-political events and figures that led to the establishment of the General Survey, and introduces the reader to Holland and De Brahm. The following three sections look at the operational years of the General Survey, dividing this period into three phases: the first three operational years of the Survey and the years during the administration of both the Earl of Hillsborough and the Earl of Dartmouth. The chapters devoted to the mapping activities of Samuel Holland and his deputies are the most relevant to those interested in the mapping of Canada. Chapter 5 in particular focuses on the surveying of the Atlantic Provinces and Quebec. The final section of the book looks at the militarization of the maps by the British during the American Revolution and their use as important strategic and operational aids to military commanders. In the conclusion, the author discusses the lasting legacy of the General Survey as laying the foundation for subsequent centralized government mapping programs including the establishment of the Ordnance Surveys in 1791 and the Admiralty's Hydrographic Office in 1795.

The book contains 41 black and white illustrations and maps integrated into the main text and 16 colour maps printed on high gloss paper in 8pp plates. The colour maps are quite stunning, but details on maps, particularly those printed in black and white, are diminished and not easily discernible. The book provides bibliographic descriptions for each map, including the originating repository and reference number.

I would recommend this as a good resource to humanities and social science research libraries. As a monograph, the book is geared mostly towards scholars of history and cartography and will appeal to colonial and pre-confederation historians, geographic historians and rare map enthusiasts. Readers will appreciate the historical and administrative context the book provides to many of Canada's and the United States' foundational maps and gain a better understanding of their influence on the long-term administrative planning and strategic policy decisions that shaped two great nations.

A History of Canada in Ten Maps, Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land

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GIS Librarian

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Shoalts, Adam. **A History of Canada in Ten Maps, Epic Stories of Charting a Mysterious Land**. Canada: Allen Lane, 2017. 344p. \$36 CND. ISBN 978-0-670-06946-0.

Jacques Cartier, right this way... (Hip, 1992)

Many of us have looked upon these maps and the events surrounding their creation in many journal articles, and numerous historical atlases, but it is interesting to see them as a “Top-Ten-List” that Shoalts pulled together. Having said that, upon opening the book, and scanning the Table of Contents with sections relating to Vikings, Champlain, Bellin, Pond, Hearne, and Mackenzie, Chapter Eight jumped straight out at me: “David Thompson’s Demons”. I had no choice but to immediately start there.

Like many, I have always been fascinated by the story of the rise and fall of David Thompson, who described himself as “a solitary traveler”, yet others like J.B. Tyrell judged him the “greatest practical land geographer that the world produced” and the Ktunaxa (Kootenay) people gave him the name Koo-Koo-Stint, meaning “The Stargazer”.

In this wonderfully engaging chapter, Thompson’s travels through the Rockies are recounted, with mentions of the discovery of what were thought to be mammoth tracks or those of a monster bear. Thompson wrote about this in his journal - a note that would later be used by 20th century believers as early proof of Sasquatch. Following this with stories involving wendigo and cannibalistic madness, one comes away from this chapter with not only an understanding of the physical hardships of the land but the immeasurable physiological strain of the overpowering presence of these landscape-inducing demons. Not to mention Thompson’s own demons of being forgotten for the mapping he did, pawning his survey instruments, and dying in poverty.

The other chapters follow similar story arcs as that of Thompson’s Demons, an underlying emphasis of the harsh and unforgiving conditions in the “New World” for mapmakers and the parties that served their expeditions. The lines etched on these maps keep circling back to blunders, misfortune, madness, and providing the pathways and geographical knowledge that would allow for the colonization and genocide of indigenous communities.

I would not classify this work as an academic tome, but rather a work that is accessible to a wide range and levels of the population. Shoalts’ book is a great read and clips along while delivering a balanced readable view of the interaction of the old and new world. If you are so inclined to further study the cartographers and the maps that resulted in their push westward, there are effective footnotes facilitating that. I am personally knee-deep in David Thompson’s Narrative (1784 – 1812). Finally, this would make a great addition to an early undergraduate course on Canadian History as there are parts of every chapter that which serve as places for discussions related to reconciliation and the decolonization of the spatially expressed history of Kanata.

Recommended

From the Book Reviews Editor:

Thanks to those who submitted book reviews and to all who have expressed interest in reviewing! I’ll continue to request review copies from publishers - but please let me know if you have read a book of interest to the ACMLA and would like to submit a review, and if you have any suggestions for titles/sources. Here are the review guidelines:

Review Format

1. Bibliographic Citation

This should include: author, title, edition, place of publication, publisher, date, number of pages, price (if known) and ISBN. Example:

Bussey, Ben and Paul D Spudis. *The Clementine Atlas of the Moon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 316p. \$80.00 US. ISBN 0-521-81528-2.

2. Content

The review should describe and critically evaluate the work. Typical review elements include: scope, purpose and content of the work; intended audience; writing style; background and authority of the author; how the work compares with other titles on the same subject; its usefulness as a research tool; any unique features; and its suitability for library collections.

The length of the review is at the reviewer's discretion, but should normally reflect the importance of the work. A typical review is about 500 words.

3. Your name, title, institutional affiliation, city and province/state

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Sarah Simpkin
Book Reviews Editor