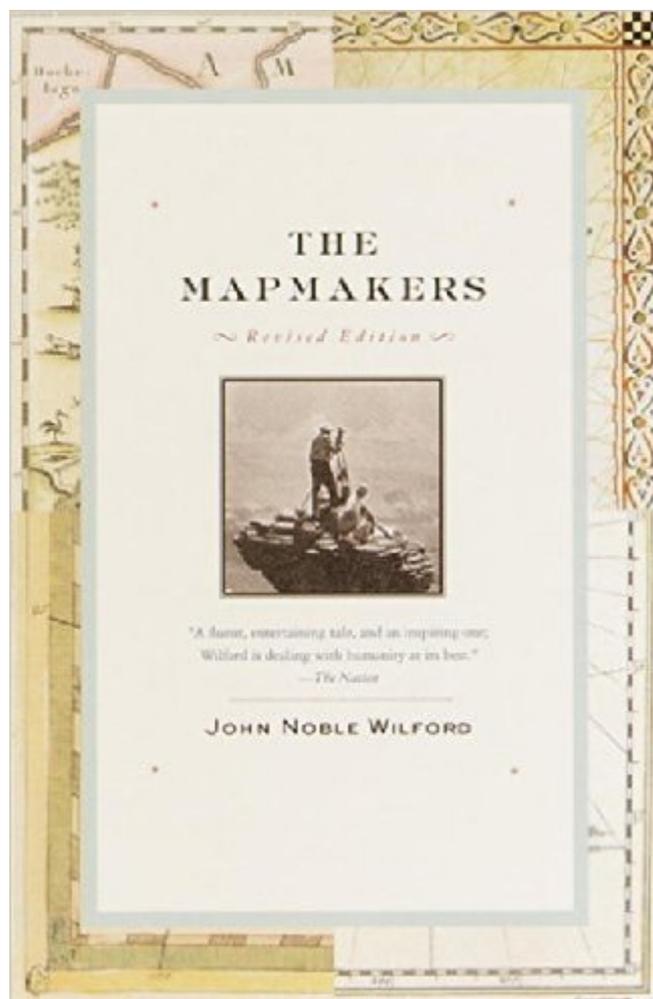


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The Mapmakers: Revised Edition



Synopsis

In his classic text, two-time Pulitzer Prize winner John Noble Wilford recounts the history of cartography from antiquity to the space age. With this revised edition, Wilford brings the story up to the present day, as he shows the impact of new technologies that make it possible for cartographers to go where no one has been before, from the deepest reaches of the universe (where astronomers are mapping time as well as space) to the inside of the human brain. These modern-day mapmakers join the many earlier adventurers including ancient Greek stargazers, Renaissance seafarers, and the explorers who mapped the American West whose exploits shape this dramatic story of human inventiveness and limitless curiosity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Mapmakers" by John Noble Wilford (ISBN 0-375-40929-7) published by Knopf/Random House in August 2000 is an updated version of the 1981 text. The revisions reflect the radical changes in the process of map-making that we already take for granted. It is of interest to anyone who has ever paddled along a complex shoreline, looked at a map, and thought "I could be here, there or anywhere". Or to anyone who has spent a winter dreaming of a lake or river, seen only in the mind's eye aided by a "window" created by maps...This book covers the history of cartography or map-making from ancient times to the present day. Drawing on various sources, it explores the "need" to create maps both as a concrete form of communication describing the physical location of objects and our relationship to them, as well as the philosophical beliefs which can make "maps lie" based on the ideological bias of the map-maker, and the prejudices of the user. It traces in

chronological format the evolution of maps (beginning in pre-history judging from some cave paintings) , from the Near East and Egypt in the period from 2000BC, to Greek philosophical conceptions of the world, to the civil engineering and mapping of the Romans, to the laughably inaccurate and fabricated maps of the early Middle Ages reflecting Europe's inward turning in the pre-Renaissance period. The Age of Discovery and the slow progress in developing maps for coastal trade reaching further and further from home, the new (and rediscovered) technologies that aided the "mapping of both the African route to Asia, as well as the nascent understanding of the New World coastline, are covered in great detail.

This is a well-written book that provides a rich, deep history of the people behind the maps: Mercator, Magellan, Columbus, Cook, Cassini, et al. These historical figures and many others are discussed along with how necessity, ingenuity, and determination combined to drive these men to produce maps used by travellers, adventurers, and politicians. However, a significant lack of technical detail really hurts this book. The author provides ample pages to the mapmakers but not enough to the actual mapmaking process, which is infuriating given that the book is over 500 pages long. For example, the methodology of triangulation is glossed over too briefly; instead of trusting the reader to have even a high school level knowledge of geometry, the author only states that the lengths of the two non-base sides are determined "with some calculation" (chapter 7). Basic trigonometric and geometric concepts are barely mentioned at all. As another example, when discussing the determination of latitude, the author only states that "... Picard was particularly skilled in using angle-measuring instruments and mathematical tables to fix latitude by determining the angular height of the moon above the horizon" (chapter 8). No more detail is given on this important calculation; even the most basic geometrical figures or expressions are left out. Further, throughout the book, I was anxiously waiting for the author to describe how explorers and sailors were able to chart out coastlines accurately, but this topic is never discussed. The last few chapters, presumably written in 2000 as part of the latest edition of this book, are quite lacking as well. GPS, which was already quite popular in the 1990s, is not given enough depth.

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