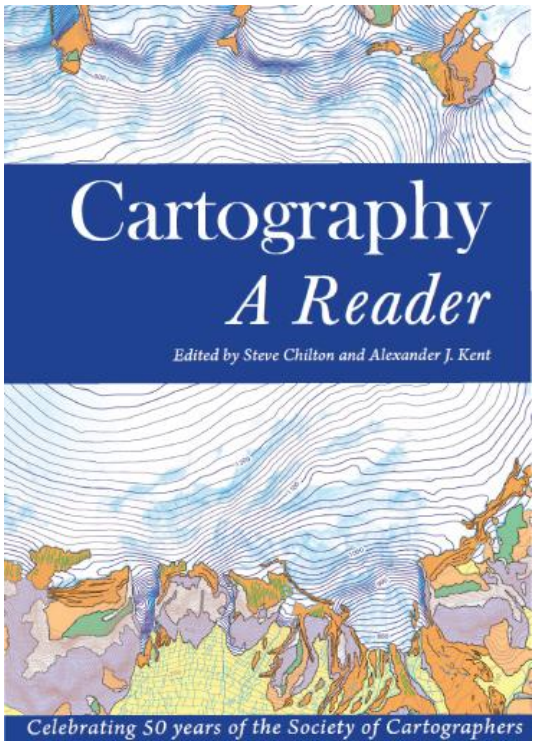
Steve Chilton and Alexander Kent (eds)

# Cartography: *A Reader*

Society of Cartographers (2014) 293 pages




Kevin Lougheed
Kings College, London

kevin.lougheed@kcl.ac.uk

*Cartography: a reader* celebrates fifty years of the Society of Cartography with an extensive collection of articles published in *Bulletin,* the Society's journal. The collection spanning half a century is as impressive as it is wide ranging and illustrates both the importance of the Society and the evolution of cartography in the UK. Expertly edited by Steve Chilton and Alexander Kent there is a positive roll call of important and influential cartographers in the UK, along with engaging insights from elsewhere. In following a chronological approach the book not only serves to illustrate the breadth of work that has been published by the Society but also serves as a lens to understand the evolution of cartography, from a technical profession through an academic discipline to its application in most aspects of society. Established in 1964 the Society of University Cartographers – as it was then known – has continued to encourage the study of cartography and promote high standards of cartographic practices. This central objective is seen throughout this collection with numerous fascinating discussions of cartographic practices and a focus on the importance of map design. The collection does more than this however, and in selecting significant articles spanning the history of the Society it highlights important issues which have often been overlooked by those who create and use maps today.

First of all, the book is beautifully produced. Many of the images and maps have been re-worked and colourised and grab the reader's attention at every turn. If, like me, you feel a gravitational pull of a good map be prepared to lose hours exploring the contexts of the book. This is aided by the easy to follow structure that guides the reader through each decade of the past fifty years, highlighting the various themes that emerge through its

evolution. The various advertisements included in *Bulletin* along with the articles are another interesting addition. These are noteworthy as they chart the shifting technical practices in cartography over this period, with advertisements of drawing pens making way to line plotters through to the availability of advancing digital software and finally to online and open source mapping systems. A scan of the ads will send the seasoned cartographer into a fog of nostalgia or produce a giggle to a newcomer in the digital age.

The book is structured in sections from each decade of the Society's existence. Each section is introduced with an outline of major developments and key publications in cartography during that period. Taken on their own, these introductions contribute a great deal in sketching the evolution of cartography in UK universities. The impact of the Society is also reflected on in these introductions by Chilton and Kent, who also acted as individual editors of *Bulletin* since 1988. Great depth is added to the outlines by the selection of articles from that time period which reinforce and highlight the developments. The first section deals with the 1960s when the Society was established. Practical aspects of map-making and design were the focus of cartography as a technical profession during this period. Articles included focus on the fundamentals of map design and the visual communication of maps. This is a common theme throughout the book a constant reminder of the importance these essentials in the face of easily created maps with standardised and generalised outputs. These articles would still be useful in providing the essentials of map design to anyone concerned today. Another common theme is also introduced with the choice of an article on the history of the Ordnance Survey one-inch maps. This illustrates, not only an interest in the history of cartography, but also the emergence of cartography as its own academic subject at this time.

These themes continue in the discussions of the 1970s and 1980s, shown alongside other significant developments. The introduction of technology occurs alongside advances on theoretical approaches and perceptions of maps in the period. These developments are linked through the various shifts in the technical practices in cartography as it became more of a communication science. The changing nature of technology is charted through this period from the use of plotters through the various computer software's ending with the introduction of remote sensing and GIS. Alongside this are attempts to understand the medium of maps and how different audiences perceive the information and how practices should be taken into account. Highlights among these are articles that discuss the importance of understanding how children develop knowledge of mapping concepts and an interesting article on the links between maps and propaganda. These articles are still useful in today's context and would easily be introduced into classrooms on these topics. The continual outlining and redefining of the academic discipline of cartography is also

represented with research pieces examining the impact of historic and contemporary cartographers with an analysis of work of some of the earliest cartographers to reviewing Arno Peters' 'new cartography' in the late 80s. A fascinating article along these lines looks at points of contact between histories of art and cartography through techniques of representation in the maps of Leonardo da Vinci. The continued outline of the role of cartographer and the discipline in universities occurs with various editorials and reflection pieces as the Society neared its twenty-fifth anniversary.

The articles chosen for the 1990s represent the challenges and uncertainty faced by the discipline and also the various reactions, especially to the changing role of the cartographer. There were increasing questions on the relevance of certain practices in the face of the increasing use of technology. Some articles perceiving this as a threat, forsaking good map design and aesthetics for generalisations as well as lamenting the perceived decline of the importance of maps in everyday life. Others note the enduring relevance of map design and how technology opens new ways and approaches in presenting spatial data. The shift in technology resulted in the changing functions of the cartographer in universities, who were now expected to be competent collectors and interpreters of spatial data along with experts in visualisation techniques. The expanding role is discussed in demonstrating the transferrable skills that could be adopted into other domains such as web design. This shifting role is easily observed by glancing through the various visualisation in this section with different forms of maps on show, such as cartograms and spatial graphs. While some cartographers where discussing the challenges they faced, the period also saw the increasing integration of cartography with other disciplines. Theoretical concepts from other disciplines were applied in cartography which brought about questions on the objectivity of maps, as well as the continuing need to understand perceptions demonstrated by an engaging article on the characteristics of visual perceptions in maps design. Conversely, cartography was also being applied to understand phenomena in many other disciplines such as examining different ways of viewing social structures in the UK, how maps are used in the press in presenting geopolitical views, and the extension of cartography into planetary science.

The uncertainty of the 1990s made way for the full embrace of technical and digital change. Since the early 2000s huge strides in technology have been made, especially in networking and web mapping. The ability to access large up-to-date crowd sources data and interactive maps in open source software revolutionised the discipline. The articles presented since the 2000s show a fast paced state-of-the-art discipline using innovative and creative ways to analyse and visualise the issues in the world around us. Several short articles illustrate attempts at keeping pace and updating cartographers on the latest development,

showcasing new innovations and also providing insights to more traditional fields. Highlights include applying interactive graphics and game technology to historical data, new ways of interpreting the rail networks and the possibilities and application of 3D technologies, web mapping and open source mapping. More reflective articles with reminders of the importance of principles of map design allow the reader to catch their breath through the fast pace of change represented here. The final period represented in the book highlights the ever increasing role maps play in society and how the discipline has expanded to be innovative, interactive and inclusive. The impact of volunteer and crowd sourced data with collaborative open source mapping on social issues were shown in articles on disaster relief efforts in Haiti and community involvement in anti-poaching in Congo. One of the highlights of the whole collection shows the wider adoption of cartography in an article which uses feminist mapping as an innovative and artistic way that challenges the control and exclusionary nature of certain public spaces through fear.

Overall this is a comprehensive collection which charts both the development of the Society of Cartographers and the development of cartography as a discipline. With so many articles on show covering such a period it serves as a great introduction to the topic. That being said, there are some articles that are technical and dry in their content and discussions, especially for those audiences who may not be professional cartographers. As it is a collection of articles from one journal, it cannot be said to be a complete compendium of cartography, but it definitely contributes enough to be a guide to those interested in exploring more. The underlying themes allow for a narrative reading of the evolution of the discipline, but each article also stands on their own. The strength of collections such as this is the breadth and variety of content which is of value to different readers with value. This allows for both an enjoyable perusal and a more complete study of topics within cartography. While this book is aimed at cartographers it is accessible to a much wider audience, which demonstrates the important role that it plays in contemporary research. As a result it makes a valuable contribution in extending issues in cartography to a wider field. A varied audience would find this book of use, which reflects the wide coverage of its contents. As it outlines important technical aspects of map making and also illustrates the power of cartography in wider society it would be useful for those embarking on cartographic research for the first time, or anyone from elsewhere looking to involve map making in their work. It would also be of great interest to students from various backgrounds and could easily be used in different classrooms. In fact, I use this in several different geography classrooms, from helping students to understand the fundamentals of map design, to understanding the links between cartography and geopolitics, feminist landscapes and citizen science. As it outlines important issues in both the development of the discipline and in the underling principles of

contemporary practices it would also be of use to contemporary cartographers. Finally it would be of interest to anyone who has an interest in cartography. I would recommend this book to anyone who has a passing interest in cartography, and would be standard on any academic bookshelf where it could be used as reference, teaching aid and refresher course for cartographers and others alike.