

Spatial knowledge in atlases and encyclopedias - structural commonalities and differences in the production of space.

Eric Losang ^a

^a Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

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Abstract:

When on January 15th 2001 wikipedia.com went online, nobody thought it will revolutionize the realm of encyclopedias that already existed for nearly 2000 years. About a decade later, the Encyclopædia Britannica and the Brockhaus Encyclopedia terminated their paper editions and went online. Nowadays, the latest printed editions often maintain an almost wholly unnoticed existence in the general knowledge sections of libraries if they were not already sold to collectors or book butchers who are only interested in valuable printed historical maps and illustrations. However, encyclopedias - like atlases - remain important sources of historical knowledge production about space and spatial narratives.

Already in the 1st century Naturalis Historia of Pliny the Elder, the earliest encyclopedia to have survived to modern times, geography was an inevitable part of these world descriptions. Probably the first map published in an encyclopedia was a schematic T and O map in the first printed edition of Isidore de Seville's 7th century *Etymologiae* (Fig. 1) reflecting the prevailing conception of the spatial structure of the world in the Middle Ages.

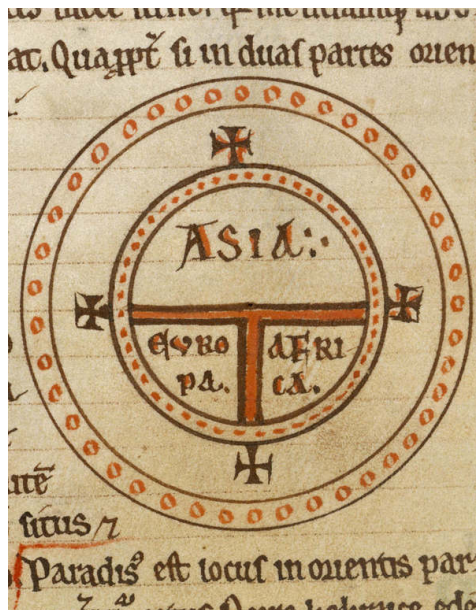


Fig. 1: T and O style *mappa mundi* (map of the known world) from the first printed version of Isidore's *Etymologiae* (http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary-store/Components/707/70737_2.jpg).

Although atlases became the dominant "book of maps" during the 16th century, the dissemination of spatial knowledge through maps remained a significant component in general knowledge publications, accompanying entries on spaces and places as well as spatial/geographical concepts throughout the centuries. As both publication forms include historical spatial information that only has temporarily been updated printed editions preserving spatial knowledge and narratives of the respective time of publishing.

Following the universalizing approach of Diderot, the visualization of specialized knowledge became a key issue in the 19th century when printing methods facilitated the easy integration of illustrations and maps. Atlases of the same time focused almost entirely on texts. The presentation reviews distinctions and points to possible reasons.



Fig. 2: Specialized knowledge: Verbreitung einiger wichtigen Infektionskrankheiten im Deutschen Reiche in den Jahren 1892 und 1893 (Distribution of some major infectious diseases in the German Empire in 1892 and 1893) from: Brockhaus Konversations-Lexikon, 14. Ed. XVII, p. 605a.

The paper will trace the scope, content and origins of maps and spatial visualizations in the two dominant German-language Encyclopedias, the Meyers and Brockhaus Konversations-Lexika (example map Fig. 2), from the early 19th century until their merge in the F. A. Brockhaus AG in 1984.

It sets the agenda to compare spatial information disseminated through encyclopedias and atlases and focusses commonalities and differences in the production of space in both media. In addition, it considers some undertakings of encyclopedia publishers to producing separate atlas editions, first as supplements to the multi-volume encyclopedia editions, later as separately published atlas works in the late 19th/early 20th century and unveils frequent links between atlas publishers and producers of encyclopedias.

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