

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

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## Abstract:

When wikipedia.com went online on January 15, 2001, no one thought it would revolutionize the field of encyclopedias, which had been around for nearly 2000 years. About a decade later, the Encyclopædia Britannica and the Brockhaus Encyclopedia discontinued their paper editions and went online. Today, the latest printed editions often live an almost unnoticed existence in the general knowledge sections of libraries, if they have not already been sold to collectors or book butchers who are only interested in valuable printed historical illustrations or maps. However, encyclopedias, like atlases, remain important sources of historical knowledge, spatial narratives and thus the production of space.

As early as Pliny the Elder's 1st-century *Naturalis Historia*, the earliest encyclopedia to survive into modern times, geography was an inescapable 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), constituting the prevailing view of the spatial structure of the world in the Middle Ages.

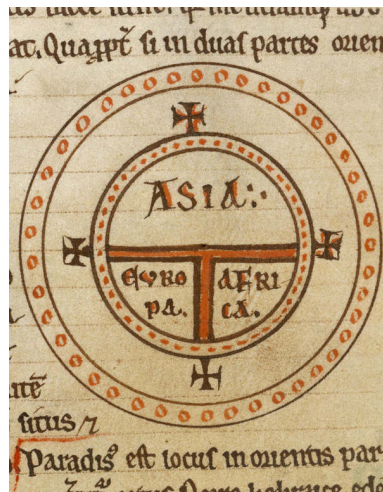


Fig. 1: T and O style mappa mundi (map of the known world) from the first printed version of Isidore's *Etymologiae* ([http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary-store/Components/707/70737\\_2.jpg](http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/britishlibrary-store/Components/707/70737_2.jpg)).

Since the advent of printing in Europe in the fifteenth century, encyclopedias have become popular throughout the continent. By the eighteenth century, dictionaries and other books that conveyed knowledge were a major part of the book market, defining everyday knowledge, including information about the entire world that was cultivated by periodicals and travel journals.

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 period focused almost exclusively on text. The presentation will examine the differences and suggest possible reasons for them.



Fig. 2: Specialized knowledge: Verbreitung der Deutschen in Mitteleuropa (Distribution of Germans in Central Europe) from: Meyers Konversationslexikon Konversations-Lexikon, 6. Ed. Volume 4, p. 748a.

The paper will trace the scope and content 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 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 editions, later as separately published renowned atlas works in the late 19th/early 20th century and unveils frequent links between map and atlas publishers and producers of encyclopedias.

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