

Charting the Role of the Times Atlas in the Evolution of Trustworthy Cartography

Alexander J. Kent ^{a,*}, Jethro Lennox ^b

^a Canterbury Christ Church University, alexander.kent@canterbury.ac.uk

^b HarperCollins Publishers, jethro.lennox@harpercollins.co.uk

* Corresponding author

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Abstract:

[A]s soon as men begin to talk about anything that really matters, some one has to go and get the atlas.

Rudyard Kipling (1914: 368)

For nearly 130 years, The Times series of atlases have earned their place amongst the most authoritative commercial cartographic products available. From the first publication of “*The Times*” Atlas in 1895 to the current (16th) edition of *The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World* (2023), these large-format compilations of up-to-date detailed mapping have provided a definitive reference point for understanding the topography, toponyms, and territories of a dynamic globe. Their origins and ongoing production are inextricably linked with the name Bartholomew; the cartographic firm founded by John Bartholomew in Edinburgh in 1826 that was subsequently renamed the ‘Edinburgh Geographical Institute’ by his sons in 1888, and, following a merger in 1989, Collins Bartholomew (a subsidiary of HarperCollins). The twentieth century saw dramatic geopolitical change across the globe, and by responding to events such as the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 with the production of *The Times Survey Atlas of the World* (1920) to meet the changing demands of the market with maps based on the latest sources of geographical information, the longevity of the Times atlases has been assured.

Atlas production requires an editor to impose a logic and order, to select, design and arrange the maps to a pre-ordained purpose (Barclay, 2013). Nevertheless, the emergence of new geopolitical outcomes also requires new methods of cartographic representation that imply authority and credibility. The creation and application of new cartographic symbologies – including the suggestion of uncertainty, with, for example, new styles of linework for showing contested borders – is a particular challenge that requires. New realities need new cartographies, especially those which more accurately reflect real-world conditions. Moreover, ethics has emerged as an important topic in recent years, at a time when the quantity of maps produced and disseminated by mapmakers without any formal training in cartography is especially high (Kent, 2017; Griffin, 2020; Prestby, 2023).

This paper presents a study to classify and analyse the cartographic representation of geopolitical hotspots in over 20 atlases produced by Bartholomew and Collins Bartholomew from 1895 to 1999. These pre-selected areas and regions incorporate changes in, for example, boundary status and toponyms. The study identifies and charts the cartographic innovations that have been introduced to better symbolize de facto situations, particularly over contested territories. It demonstrates how cartographic symbology has evolved in the production of a virtually unchanged product from 1895 and provides insights into the processes of constructing trust in cartography.

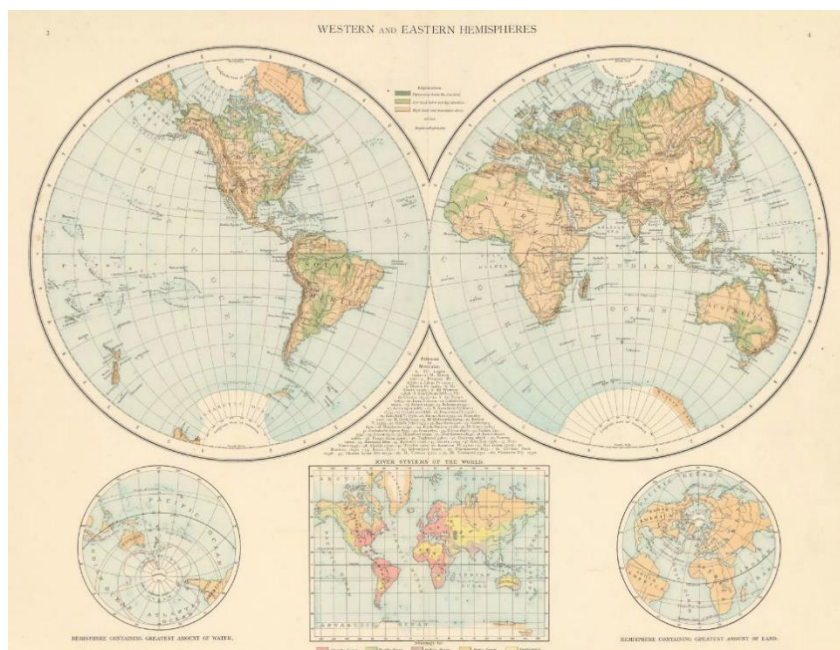


Figure 1. Western and Eastern Hemispheres from “*The Times*” Atlas (1895).

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