

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld: Facsimile-Atlas to the Early History of Cartography with Reproductions of the Most Important Maps Printed in the XV and XVI Centuries

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Abstract: First published in 1889, Nordenskiöld's Facsimile-Atlas represented the first systematic approach to the history of cartography, reproducing 169 of the most important and characteristic maps printed before 1600. These includes maps from early printed editions of Ptolemy, the major source of geographic knowledge for a millenium, the earliest map of the New World, the map of the world found among Leonardo da Vinci's papers, maps from Lafreri's atlas and the 1597 work of Wytfliet, the first general geography of America, and maps from the work of such great geographers and cartographers as Ruysch, Olaus, Apianus Gastaldi, Ortelius and Mercator. Nordenskiöld's lucid, precise and informative text is supplemented by exhaustive catalogues of all known early printed maps. He examines the numerous editions and pseudo-editions of Ptolemy, the prototype of all atlases, pointing out the errors and peculiarities that have been noted in the light of later explorations. He goes on to study such documents as portolanos used by seamen in the Middle Ages which reveal survivals of ancient non-Ptolemaic geographers; maps that trace the gradual northward extension of Ptolemy's oikumene (known world); the first maps of the New World (which was apparently not taken much notice of at first); the first terrestrial globes (by Behaim, Schöner, Mercator and others); and early map projections – conical, cordiform, the Mercator-Postel equidistant polar projection, and Mercator's isogonic cylindrical projection. Then he shows how, towards the end of the 16th century, the growing precision of special regional maps reacted on the general maps and communicated a new completeness which began the modern era of cartography. The work of the great geographers of this traditional era – Apianus, Gastaldi, Ortelius and Mercator – is examined in depth. In the section of two-page plates which takes up almost half of the book, most maps are reproduced in full original size. 84 more maps, reduced as in the original edition, are incorporated into the text. Nordenskiöld made every effort to make his work as definitive as possible – only a few extremely large maps of importance are excluded, and even these are described in detail in the text. This reprint is the first opportunity for most readers to see and use this great atlas, as it has heretofore been impossibly rare and expensive. For all its painstaking scientific precision, it is still an enthralling work, and will prove immensely useful in studies relating to geography and the history of the Age of Discovery. The Nordenskiöld's facsimile-atlas consists of Preface, 10 chapters with Index in 141 pages and reproduction of maps in 102 pages, all in large format 11×16 inches in black and white printed 1973.

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