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In memoriam Alan E. Astin

Mapping the classical world: major atlases and map series 1872-1990

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A report published by the American Philological Association a decade ago did not exaggerate on either count when it cited cartography as “an area of extremely great importance, where the state of our tools is utterly disastrous”.¹ The resuscitation of this vital branch of classical studies should be a matter of urgent concern, and the Association’s commissioning of a new atlas of the Greek and Roman world under the editorship of the present writer is intended to serve as a seminal contribution. As background to that effort, the purpose of this article is to review significant initiatives of approximately the last century and a quarter, starting with the only major atlas to have been completed since the 1870s.

As will at once become apparent, the exercise is no mere matter of piloting the reader through materials already well known from standard works of reference.² In the 20th c. at least, the formerly unified disciplines of classics on the one hand and geography and cartography on the other have drifted apart: the mapping of the classical world has been a prime concern of neither, and has languished as a result. Good maps are in any case costly to produce, and thus often highly priced. Print-runs tend to be small, and never repeated. Individual maps designed to form a series are liable to appear haphazardly and at long intervals. In plenty of instances the sequence has petered out, leaving a series incomplete: all too often, death or war have been responsible. Such additional factors as limited reviewing of maps in classical periodicals, ineffectual marketing, and differing decisions by librarians on how to catalogue and accommodate them, have all contributed to reduced awareness of the cartographic dimension of classical studies. Among map materials a bound atlas is the most likely to circulate widely and prove accessible, yet by nature its preparation imposes more delay, greater risk, and higher costs than the piecemeal issue of sheets over a period. It is understandable that few major projects have chosen this means of publication, yet their impact has repeatedly been diminished in consequence.

It must be stressed that this review deliberately confines itself to significant initiatives designed to map all, or at least a major part, of the classical world. Three related, and much less neglected, areas of activity feature only in passing. These are, firstly, local, regional or national mapping projects, ranging from town plans to surveys of entire countries: here the level of activity has been much higher than on the broad front, though predictably very diverse.³ Secondly, the many maps and atlases compiled principally for teaching purposes feature little here, because their preparation and circulation are governed in large part by a range of distinct factors not generally applicable to the major projects.⁴ Thirdly, the continuing scholarly interest shown in the rich fields of ancient geography (both theoretical and historical)⁵ and

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- 1 R. S. Bagnall (ed.), *Research tools for the Classics: the report of the American philological association's ad hoc committee on basic research tools* (Chico 1980) 27.
 - 2 *L'Année philologique* seems not to be relied upon for a full listing of maps and related literature (cf. section V.B and subsequent preliminary entries under 'monde grec' and 'monde romain et byzantin'). See also *A list of geographical atlases in the Library of Congress* 1, and 3-5 (Washington 1909-58) ss.vv. 'World/Special/Ancient', 'Ancient History', and similar headings.
 - 3 A bibliographic survey, *Map resources for the Greek and Roman worlds* (ed. W. V. Harris), sponsored by the APA, is in preparation; 15 regional sections are planned. For a brief listing of older material region by region, note L. Delaporte, A. Piganiol, E. Drioton and R. Cohen, *Atlas historique I. L'antiquité* (ed.3, Paris 1955) 7-20.
 - 4 Note A. Badziag et al., *Schulatlanten in Deutschland und benachbarten Ländern vom 18. Jahrhundert bis 1950: ein bibliographisches Verzeichnis* (München 1982). See also C. Foss, "Classical atlases," *Classical world* 80 (1987) 337-65. F. B. Lloris and F. M. Simón, *Atlas de historia antigua* (Zaragoza 1987) has appeared subsequently.
 - 5 For discussion and bibliography see E. Polaschek, *PWSuppl X* (1965) cols. 680-833, esp. 820 on ancient geography in general; and J. B. Harley and D. Woodward, *The history of cartography* 1 (Chicago 1987) part 2.