

Interesting History

The Invention of the Atlas



Sculpture Collins Street
Melbourne, AU

Abraham Ortelius is credited with the invention of the first atlas. After one of Ortelius' clients complained of the inefficiency of using and storing multiple maps, Ortelius solved the problem by binding all of the maps together with cotton thread – creating a single volume. He adapted this technology when he published *Theatre of the World*; the first ever printed collection of maps.

Gerardus Mercator, another important cartographer of this time, was the first to use the word atlas to refer to a collection of maps. He was a student of Greek mythology and enthralled by the story of Atlas the Titan, who lost a war against Zeus's Olympians. Zeus condemned Atlas to holding up the sky for eternity. Read (below) more about the story of "Perseus and Atlas" from Bulfinch mythology.

Influence of Hernando de Soto

Chaves gathered information for *La Florida* from the [Hernando de Soto expedition](#). Learn more about the expedition in this 2-minute presentation from the Florida Humanities Council:
<http://teachingflorida.org/primaryresources/hernando-de-soto>

Interesting Art

Mapmaking Technology

To make a woodblock relief, a reverse or mirror image of a map was drawn on a block of wood. The area around the map lines was carved away. The lines that protruded from the block were raised allowing them to receive ink. The block was pressed onto paper. The maps in Ortelius' *Theatre of the World*, including this one by Chaves, were engraved on copper plates and printed on a press. Copper plate technology was new in 1584 but it caught on quickly since it was easier and faster than the previous methods of hand drawing or woodblock printing.

The process for copper plates was the reverse of that used for woodcuts. Copper plates were engraved so that the incised lines could hold the ink. Copper was the metal of choice because it was soft and less expensive than silver or gold – it also allowed for the reproduction of very fine lines and details. Lines were engraved, the deeper the line, the more ink it held and the bolder the line appeared on a map. The entire plate was covered in ink and then wiped with a rag, leaving ink in the engraved lines. The copper

plate was applied to a sheet of paper with great pressure, causing the ink in the grooves to be transferred to the paper, creating the map.

Different people were hired to do the line work, lettering and shading. Watercolors were hand-washed over a map so that the lettering and lines were still visible. Women were often hired to do the coloring and they used camel hairbrushes to apply the paint.

Visit

[Woodblock Carving and Printing by Hand Crafted Tradition](#)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2hguBvmZb4>



From Bulfinch's *Mythology*

Perseus and Atlas

After the slaughter of Medusa, Perseus, bearing with him the head of the Gorgon, flew far and wide, over land and sea. As night came on, he reached the western limit of the earth, where the sun goes down. Here he would gladly have rested till morning. It was the realm of King Atlas, whose bulk surpassed that of all other men. He was rich in flocks and herds and had no neighbor or rival to dispute his state. But his chief pride was in his gardens whose fruit was of gold, hanging from golden branches, half hidden with golden leaves.

Perseus said to him, "I come as a guest. If you honor illustrious descent, I claim Jupiter for my father; if mighty deeds, I plead the conquest of the Gorgon. I seek rest and food."

But Atlas remembered that an ancient prophecy had warned him that a son of Jove should one day rob him of His golden apples. So he answered, "Begone! or neither your false claims of glory nor parentage shall protect you;" and he attempted to thrust him out.

Perseus, finding the giant too strong for him, said, "Since you value my friendship so little, deign to accept a present;" and turning his face away, he held up the Gorgon's head. Atlas, with all his bulk, was changed into stone. His beard and hair became forests, his arms and shoulders cliffs, his head a summit, and his bones rocks. Each part increased in bulk till he became a mountain, and (such was the pleasure of the gods) heaven with all its stars rests upon his shoulders.