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# Review of: Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters translated by J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones

James C. Evans

*University of Puget Sound*, [jcevans@pugetsound.edu](mailto:jcevans@pugetsound.edu)

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**Ptolemy** : *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, trans. by **J. Lennart Berggren** and **Alexander Jones**,

Ptolemy's *Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* by Ptolemy;

J. Lennart Berggren; Alexander Jones

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longevity of the Industrial Revolution. Joel Mokyr has long concerned himself with big questions and making connections that delineate historical processes in new and interesting ways. *The Gifts of Athena*, with its special emphasis on the centrality of the “knowledge economy,” amply testifies to his stature as a leading historian of the Industrial Revolution.

MERRITT ROE SMITH

### ■ Antiquity

**Ptolemy.** *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters.* Translated by **J. Lennart Berggren** and **Alexander Jones.** ix + 192 pp., illus., figs., tables, apps., bibl., index. Princeton, N.J./Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001. \$39.50, £24.95.

The *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy is the only book of cartography that has survived from classical antiquity. Like most of Ptolemy's other works, it represents the culmination of a long tradition. Ptolemy himself mentions predecessors in cartography, such as Marinus of Tyre, whom he drew upon but also criticized and corrected. J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones's skillful and readable translation is based on the Greek text of C. F. A. Nobbe (1843–1845). It replaces the seventy-year-old translation by Edward Luther Stevenson (*Geography of Claudius Ptolemy* [New York Public Library, 1932]), which has been useful in some ways but never, even in its own day, met adequate standards of scholarship. It is high time that English readers had available a reliable translation of one of the culminating works of ancient science.

Or at least a portion of it—for, as the title of the book discloses, this is a translation of the theoretical chapters of the *Geography*. Ptolemy's book consists of several distinct parts. By sheer size, the longest is his catalogue of places, which gives the latitudes and longitudes of cities, mountain peaks, capes, parts of rivers, and so on. A closely related part is the set of descriptive labels, or captions, for regional maps. Berggren and Jones have decided not to print the catalogue, as its manuscript tradition is notoriously corrupt. A historian of geography who wishes to consult the catalogue will always need, in any case, to go back to the Greek text. However, to give the reader a sense of the catalogue, they have translated a short extract covering Roman Gaul. In the same way, they have foresworn printing all the descriptive labels but give as a sample Ptolemy's caption for the map of Gaul.

While understandable, this was a somewhat regrettable decision.

Many students of Ptolemy's *Geography* have complained of its heterogeneous content, some even seeing it as a late compilation rather than the genuine work of a single author. Berggren and Jones, however, see the *Geography* as a well-planned and coherent guide to a single complicated task, the making of a world map. As they point out, the Greek title of the work, *Geōgraphikē hyphēgēsis*, can be translated “Guide to Drawing a World Map.” The apparently unrelated major sections of the book are then essential parts of the toolkit required for completing the project. The theoretical chapters give the mathematical background necessary for cartographic projection. The catalogue of places provides the data to be represented. And the captions are the labels to be added to the finished maps. Berggren and Jones then weigh into the old debate over whether Ptolemy actually included maps when he published his book: “There is no more reason to imagine that Ptolemy published his *Geography* in a form that incorporated the maps than there is to think that he provided a star globe along with the *Almagest*” (p. 49). I am not sure it is an apt analogy. Even on the authors' own theory of the book, maps would have been a logical accompaniment. The *Geography* had the making of maps as its *raison d'être*. By comparison, the star catalogue is but a small part of the *Almagest*, which is largely devoted to planetary theory.

Whether or not Ptolemy included maps, a tradition of maps certainly grew up around his *Geography* in the Middle Ages. Berggren and Jones's translation is beautifully illustrated by a selection, in color, of the maps in the Vatican codices, as well as the Ulm edition of 1482. A fifty-page introduction sets out essential technical and contextual aspects of ancient cartography. The translation is lightly and cogently annotated throughout. This book can be warmly recommended to all students of ancient science.

JAMES EVANS

**Jaap Mansfeld.** *Prolegomena Mathematica: From Apollonius of Perga to Late Neoplatonism.* (*Philosophia Antiqua*, 80.) viii + 178 pp., bibl., indexes. Leiden/Boston: E. J. Brill, 1998.

Introductions to technical and learned treatises have proven a rich ground for much recent research in the history of science. Prologues, introductions, and prolegomena have been used as source material on authors' self-representations,