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The World of Gerard Mercator: The Mapmaker Who Revolutionized Geography

Andrew Taylor

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A biography of the mapmaker who revolutionized geography

The story of discovery and mapmaking is one of pushing back shadows," writes Andrew Taylor, and "none in the last two thousand years achieved as much as Gerard Mercator in extending the boundaries of what could be comprehended." His life encompassed most of the turbulent, extraordinary sixteenth century, a time when revolutions would engulf religion, science, and civilization. Almost extinguished by the Inquisition, Mercator's genius lay in making maps, and his achievement did nothing less than revolutionize the study of geography.

Appropriately for an era undergoing radical change, Mercator was full of contradiction, tied to knowledge and beliefs of the past while forging a new path. He never traveled beyond northern Europe, yet he had the imagination to draw the entire world anew and to solve a problem that had baffled sailors and scientists for centuries: how a curved Earth could be faithfully rendered on a flat surface so as to allow for accurate navigation. His "projection" was so visionary that it is used by NASA to map Mars today. Andrew Taylor has beautifully captured Mercator amidst the turmoil and opportunity of his times and the luminaries who inspired his talent?his teacher and business partner, Gemma Frisius; the English magus, John Dee; his benefactor, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, his cartographic collaborator, Abraham Ortelius. *The World of Gerard Mercator* is a masterful biography of one of the men most responsible for the modern world.

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