



# Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline

*Daniel Rosenberg , Anthony Grafton*

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What does history look like? How do you draw time?

From the most ancient images to the contemporary, the line has served as the central figure in the representation of time. The linear metaphor is ubiquitous in everyday visual representations of time—in almanacs, calendars, charts, and graphs of all sorts. Even our everyday speech is filled with talk of time having a "before" and an "after" or being "long" and "short." The timeline is such a familiar part of our mental furniture that it is sometimes hard to remember that we invented it in the first place. And yet, in its modern form, the timeline is not even 250 years old. The story of what came before has never been fully told, until now.

*Cartographies of Time* is the first comprehensive history of graphic representations of time in Europe and the United States from 1450 to the present. Authors Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton have crafted a lively history featuring fanciful characters and unexpected twists and turns. From medieval manuscripts to websites, *Cartographies of Time* features a wide variety of timelines that in their own unique ways—curving, crossing, branching—defy conventional thinking about the form. A fifty-four-foot-long timeline from 1753 is mounted on a scroll and encased in a protective box. Another timeline uses the different parts of the human body to show the genealogies of Jesus Christ and the rulers of Saxony. Ladders created by missionaries in eighteenth-century Oregon illustrate Bible stories in a vertical format to convert Native Americans. Also included is the April 1912 Marconi North Atlantic Communication chart, which tracked ships, including the Titanic, at points in time rather than by their geographic location, alongside little-known works by famous figures, including a historical chronology by the mapmaker Gerardus Mercator and a chronological board game patented by Mark Twain. Presented in a lavishly illustrated edition, *Cartographies of Time* is a revelation to anyone interested in the role visual forms have played in our evolving conception of history.

## Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline Details

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Author : Daniel Rosenberg , Anthony Grafton

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## From Reader Review Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline for online ebook

### Mahasweta says

The book is a visual treat! More than that, it is a comprehensive and lucid survey of the timeline. Intended by the authors or not, *Cartographies of Time* provides a holistic view of history, as it unfolds simultaneously across different spaces and places.

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### Patrick says

Visually pleasing, with much background on ancient representations. Includes some classics that Tufte et al. have referenced. Nevertheless disappointing - I was hoping for a more fundamental discussion of conceptual models of time, and how these shape our visual representations. Lacking are such models as those from narrative time (e.g., Paul Ricoeur and Gérard Genette). A discussion of animated representations is also sorely lacking, since these incorporate time into the representation itself.

The net result here is more of a coffee-table art book than a serious discussion of this (potentially) rich theme.

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### mali says

I couldn't get more than halfway through. There's almost no narrative here - no story. That makes the myriad examples appear as scattered cases without much relationship to each other. It was hard to stay interested. The pretty pictures didn't make up for a lack of substance; random exemplars do not a riveting book make.

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### Charles says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It's full of very interesting history and stories. The author must have spent untold hours in research. I liked the graphics too but even though I could enlarge them on my iPad, they were still mostly unreadable. I wish they had been vector images. That way they could have been enlarged to any degree desired without affecting image quality. The images did make me appreciate the graphic tools that I have.

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### Michael Scott says

TODO full review:

+++/- A book dedicated to visualizing time! Great idea, if only the implementation would deliver.  
+ Claim that time is not fully understood and charted in sync with Edward R. Tufte's similar idea.  
+/- Excellent coverage of the idea of time in Western culture, from historical time onwards. Only occasional contributions from Asia, Arabia, and Native America.

++ Good historical explanations on the origins of time charts and graphs in Western culture, related to how religion (the major filter of daily life since at least the 7th century and until the late 16th century in Europe) allowed various ideas to be developed. (In the wrong century, depicting time without matching the Genesis, creating confusion with the timing of the various events described in the Bible, confronting historical figures and dates with historical figures from the Bible, placing celestial objects over time, and so many other time-related concepts were highly controlled subjects; dissidents would be cautioned, exiled, tortured, or plain murdered.)

+++ Excellent early chronology of figures inventing and refining time charts and graphs in the Western culture. Excellent tracing of key ideas, across centuries of refinement.

+ Good coverage of North American use of the notion of time, including in games. Nice link between the notion of (sequential) time and games in the Ladders and Chutes family.

+/-- Good introduction of artistic use of time, but limited and lacking the depth of the first chapters.

--- No room for modern representations of time in professional and commercial use. Watch faces, digital clocks (and watches), all sorts of time diagrams (see the circular representations in Manuel Lima's *The Book of Circles: Visualizing Spheres of Knowledge*, and various modes in Edward Tufte's *Envisioning Information* and Nathan Yau's *Data Points: Visualization That Means Something*), etc.

- No room for fun, personal use of time charts and diagrams. For example, consider the personal analytics of Feltron's Annual Report (2005-2014), the computational linguistics work of Stefanie Posavec, and her collaboration with Giorgia Lupi on a year-long conversation over time-related data analytics. Plenty more exists along these lines.

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## **Nathanael Coyne says**

A beautiful, comprehensive but very interesting book about the history of chronology and timelines from very basic linear lists organised by intervals of time through to amazing hand-illustrated maps the like of which we don't see produced any more. I bought this book to help me get out of the constrained thinking of basic calendars controls and drop-down lists when designing user interfaces ... and it certainly did that. I admit I was mainly interested in the pictures, but the narrative is definitely worth reading too and explains the drawbacks of various innovations that designers still face (though often fail to recognise and address).

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## **Elijah Meeks says**

This beautifully referenced, beautifully illustrated exploration of the visualization of temporal phenomena is even more impressive than the many syllables that began this sentence. It turns on its head the normalization of temporal representation began by Priestley and documents so many different forms of temporal representation that it is a must for anyone concerned with the visualization of knowledge, especially if they intend to have a temporal element to that visualization.

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## **Benjamin says**

Grafton crafts an excellent and engaging tale of the evolution of the timeline since the days of ancient Greece. Incredibly lush visually, the text is also very well constructed and nearly perfectly matched to the illustrations in rhythm and impact. A coffee-table book that is well worth your time to actually read and

digest.

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### **Matthew says**

The illustrations in the book present a wide range of intriguing documents, from the intricate and esoteric to the refined and minimalistic. For me, the illustrations form the core value of the book, making the small size of many of the images puzzling. There's plenty of space that could be used without cramping the design, but some pictures are left stamp-sized and illegible in a sea of white.

The accompanying text is generally clear, presenting a written chronology to accompany the images. As another review mentions, there is little discussion of time at a conceptual level, but then that's not the aim of the book. After the first four chapters it starts to drift. Unless you are specifically interested in American examples the last half of the book is probably better skimmed – just look for the text relating to the more interesting illustrations.

It's still a great resource representing what must have been a vast amount of research and resource gathering. I'd recommend it to both the general reader and those with a specialist interest.

If possible, i'd have rated this 3.5 (the small illustrations are very frustrating, given how much effort must have gone into collating the sources and getting them into print!).

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### **Ashish Goyal says**

Big effort that probably pleases the specialists in the area of graphical representation of history/timelines.

The narrative needed to weave a story. Couldn't hold my interest.

The visuals needed to be significantly larger or least have portions blown up so that they could be legible.

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### **catechism says**

This is a very pretty book (although many of the illustrations could have been bigger), and it's sometimes an interesting and well-written one (assuming you are into hilarious chronography puns!), but I didn't feel it hung together very well, and I'm not sure if it was because the authors were trying to do too much or too little. eg: It mentions that the evolution of the timeline is a conceptual one, but the concept of time itself is largely ignored. The work of narrative historiography, while outside the scope of the book, probably should have featured just a little more prominently in the sections of the book talking about historical narratives. I also felt like it jumped around way too much when discussing religion, and it stayed pretty firmly in the camp of western civ.

That all said, I thought the individual chapters were generally pretty good (my favorite was the chapter on artistic representations of time); it just lacked some larger coherent point.

In my head, it goes pretty well on a shelf with with Tufte and other designy books (100 Diagrams That Changed the World); nerdy pop-sci books about calendars (The Calendar); extra-nerdy math books (Calendrical Calculations); and I don't know, some philosophical survey book like Philosophy of Time. It

doesn't quite fill the gaps between those things, but it's a start.

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## Charles says

Ordered this book from Amazon.

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## Antonio Delgado says

Cartographies are often ignored or considered secondary or complimentary sources of knowledge. This book shows that cartographies are not merely representation of information but producers of historical data and appropriations of knowledge for different uses. That includes, being a tool for knowing the past and the future: from creationism to eschatology, from financial data to transportation, from communication to entertainment, from art (photography, paintings and music) to virtual representation.

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## Em says

This book took FOREVER to read, for a few reasons:

- \* It mentions a lot of fascinating things and people in passing, so I kept looking those up and reading about them.
- \* Although the content is really interesting, it's not written in a particularly engaging way.

I learnt a lot, but I wouldn't recommend the ebook version. The pictures are just too small and low-resolution; they don't do the topic justice.

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## Liam says

"Already in the fourth century Eusebius had developed a sophisticated table structure to organize and reconcile chronologies drawn from historical sources from all over the world. To clearly present the relations between Jewish, pagan, and Christian histories, Eusebius laid out their chronologies in parallel columns that began with the patriarch Abraham and the founding of Assyria." (15)

"Chronographics had lost its original function as the key to the Bible [by the eighteenth century], but had gained a new one as the record of culture and its transformations." (95)

"Priestly's charts mark a crucial transition in the history of chronographic representation. After Priestly, most readers simply assumed the analogy between historical time and measured graphic space, so the nature of the arguments around chronographic representation shifted dramatically. The issue was no longer how to justify the analogy but how to best implement it." (126)

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