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Mercator: The Man Who Mapped the Planet

Nicholas Crane

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An enthralling biography of the man who created the first real map of the world and changed civilization

Born at the dawn of the age of discovery, Gerhard Mercator lived in an era of formidable intellectual and scientific advances. At the center of these developments were the cartographers who painstakingly pieced together the evidence to create ever more accurate pictures of the planet. Mercator was the greatest of all of them-a poor farm boy who attended one of Europe's top universities, was persecuted and imprisoned by the Inquisition, but survived to coin the term "atlas" and to produce the so-called projection for which he is known. Devoutly religious, yet gripped by Aristotelian science, Mercator struggled to reconcile the two, a conflict mirrored by the growing clash in Europe between humanism and the Church.

Mercator solved the dimensional riddle that had vexed cosmographers for so long: How could the three-dimensional globe be converted into a two-dimensional map while retaining true compass bearings? The projection revolutionized navigation and has become the most common worldview.

Nicholas Crane-a fellow geographer-has combined a keen eye for historical detail with a gift for vivid storytelling to produce a masterful biography of the man who mapped the planet.

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