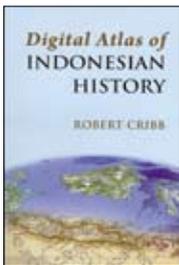


Indonesia



Robert Cribb, *Digital Atlas of Indonesia*

Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010. 80 pages, 487 maps in 5 formats, DVD, and paperback guide. £25.00. ISBN 978-87-91114-66-3.

SINCE AT least the beginning of the twentieth century, the historical atlas has been a useful tool in providing creators and users with a way to present and access huge amounts of information in a concise form. As the generic term implies, the central

organizing feature of a historical atlas is typically the map, in relation to which geographically-based elements are anchored. Historical atlases have traditionally been didactic vehicles for presenting the grand European narrative, implicitly mapping the historical development of “the nation,” of Western civilization, or Eurocentric versions of “world history.” In more recent times the model has been widely adopted to demonstrate the development of nation and cultural heritage.

While all national entities have disparate and complex social, cultural, and political narratives, the geographical and human composition of the Indonesian nation and the ongoing process of national identity formation make it possibly the most complex on the planet. The *Digital Atlas* is therefore a particularly effective use of this (atlas) format. It provides an encyclopedic range of information about Indonesia based on almost five hundred mainly large-scale maps, together with a range of further historical maps available online through its dedicated website. It also brings the advantages of ease of access, portability, and comparability. Thus it represents, both in form and content, a useful upgrade on Cribb’s initial *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (University of Hawai‘i Press and New Asian Library, 2000) which at the time was widely welcomed as providing the first (since colonial times) accessible (for international students) resource mapping Indonesia’s past.

As an internationally-recognized historian of Indonesia and having contributed much to setting out the framework of that history, Cribb’s *Atlas* reflects in outline what has become the standard narrative. Central, of course, is the mapping of Indonesia’s nationalist history in the twentieth century and the historical antecedents to which this lays claim. It is recognizably Indonesia-centric in its treatment of the colonial period and the pre-colonial past. Specific maps cover important developments in the Sukarno era (for example, the Permesta rebellions of the 1950s), the Soeharto era (for example, the transmigration programs) and the more recent “reform era” (for example, the violence in Maluku). It also presents much important detail related to and derived from the colonial era.

Readers of this journal will find the mapping of Indonesia’s linguistic and ethnic communities, including reference to both contemporary and colonial categories, of particular interest. In the “Search by topic” alphabetical index one finds reference to every group and subgroup in the archipelago. It also includes detailed mapping of recent demographic trends which have both anthropological and political significance, such as the presence of Bugis and Javanese communities in Papua. Each map is accompanied by a brief historical summary/description and a limited list of further reading. A sidebar on each map page provides a hyperlink to related maps and thus lures the reader/viewer on through a linked thread (sometimes it may seem a labyrinthine network) of further maps. If lost in this sequence, readers can immediately relocate themselves by using the other side bar where they are reminded that all maps can be located by topic, place name, date, or map name. Users can also approach the digital atlas in a more systematic fashion as it is organized in chapters: “Landscape and Environment,” “Peoples, States and Societies to 1800,” “The Netherlands Indies 1800–1942,” “War, Independence and Political Transformations 1950–1998,” and “The reform era, 1999 to the present.” The latter chapter is the major addition from the earlier book version.

The *Atlas* makes use of simple map graphics, usually providing colour-coded detail linked to a basic legend. These are easily read and can be enlarged, while every encouragement is given to copy them in different formats for use in PowerPoint and so on, which make them perfect for teaching purposes. The accompanying introductory booklet provides a handy hard copy version of the general manual (also included on the CD-ROM) and this is further backed by access to a dedicated website for registered owners. A “Conditions of Use” statement regarding the contents of the *Atlas* makes clear that one is permitted “to make fair use” of the *Digital Atlas* and it generously offers limited royalty-free reproduction of maps for authors.

A special feature emphasized in this version of the *Atlas* is a reproduction of an early twentieth-century school atlas of Nederlandsch Oost-Indië. This historical material is supplemented on the website by five collections of historic maps from the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam), the National Library of Australia, the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, the Ryhiner Collection at the University of Berne, Switzerland, and the State Library of New South Wales. This direct reference to colonial-era documents—rather than graphically generated maps—suggests possibilities for further development of this format. Where much of Indonesia’s modern history remains embedded in Dutch colonial archives, journals, and reports, which typically include numerous maps, a digital form of the atlas—preferably web-based—would seem ideally suited to disseminate such historical map material, particularly that relevant to anthropological, ethnographic, demographic, and geographical studies.

This publication is a useful resource for students of Indonesia. If the current edition can be regarded as a “first attempt” in transferring the mapping of Indonesia’s history into a readily accessible digital format in what the author has rightly already described as “both a labour of love and a work of exploration,” then it perhaps points the way to the possibility of an even larger project to benefit more serious scholarship.

Joost Coté
Monash University