Ordering the Unknown

{ European Maps from 1600-1850

an exhibition Fall 2014
Ordering the Unknown
The European Mapping Tradition from 1600 to 1860

Fall 2014
History Department, Stokes Hall, South Wing
Reception: Thursday, September 23, 2014, from 4-6pm
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The European Mapping Tradition from 1600 to 1860
Familiarizing: George Sandys the Ethnographer, a Man Before His Time

Familiarizing: Cornelis de Bruyn’s Russia

Classifying: Alexander von Humboldt and the Mapping of New Spain

Images taken from "Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain," a scientific and national survey of the province of Mexico by Alexander von Humboldt. A textile image can be found in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC.

When Alexander von Humboldt, a Prussian naturalist, studied one of the brightest scientific minds of his era, he was a young man venturing into South America. In the 18th century, the Spanish empire of New Spain was considered the most expansive and the most scientifically advanced. Humboldt was drawn to the study of the region's natural history, hoping to unravel its mysteries. His journey was marked by a passion for exploration and a desire to understand the region's unique geography and biodiversity.

As a child of the Enlightenment, Humboldt believed in the power of knowledge and the scientific method to transform society. He sought to uncover the secrets of the natural world and apply their lessons to improve human understanding and progress. In the realm of cartography, Humboldt's work was a testament to this belief. His maps not only depicted the physical landscape but also conveyed the intellectual and cultural richness of the region.

In his "Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain," Humboldt's scientific inquiry transcends the boundaries of geography. He sought to understand the human dimensions of the region, from the indigenous populations to the European colonizers. His maps included not just terrains and bodies of water but also the distribution of plant and animal life, the extent of urbanization, and the influence of climate on agriculture. This approach was revolutionary, as it placed humans at the center of the natural world, recognizing the interdependence of the environment and the human experience.

Humboldt's work, "Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain," is a testament to the power of scientific inquiry to shape our understanding of the world. It demonstrates how cartography can serve as a tool for enlightenment, where the scientific method is not just a means to an end but a way of life. Humboldt's legacy continues to inspire cartographers and scientists alike, reminding us of the importance of integrating knowledge from diverse fields to create a more comprehensive understanding of the natural world.
Possessing: Legitimizing New Spain

Herrera y Tordesillas was the royal chronicler of Spain and is famous for his historical account of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, which is commonly referred to as The Decadas. These maps and engravings appear in John Stevens’ translation of that work and act as reference tools for the reader.

In writing a historical account of this crucial era in Spain’s history, one of Herrera y Tordesillas’ tasks was to justify the conquest of an entire population of people in which Spain claimed possession of all of Mexico and Central America. One way of justifying their actions was by portraying the native people as savages or even subhuman creatures. Perhaps the most effective way of doing that was by describing the religious practices of the native people. The polytheistic worship of multiple gods and the practices of human sacrifice were extremely disturbing for many of the Catholic Spanish explorers. The engraving of the “Vieiltiputi, the Principal Idol of the Mexican” shows an example of this idol worship that Spaniards found so appalling. This idol would have been located in one of the great temples of Tenochtitlán. The engraving of “The Great Chapel House in ye City of Mexico” shows a display of human skulls from victims of the sacrificial rituals of the Mexica people. Images like these reinforced the Spanish descriptions of barbarism within the native religions. The idea that the native people were heathens was useful in justifying their conquest and solidifying their claims of possession because they could act in the name of civilizing and Christianizing the Native Americans.

The two maps were added to the translation of Herrera y Tordesillas’ work more than a century after the original Decadas was first published. They were used as reference tools in order to assist readers in understanding the historical account of Spain’s conquest of the New World. After they had already solidified and justified their possession, they were able to create these maps and include images of churches that signified the locations of towns and cities named after Spanish saints. It was clear that they claimed to control and possess this land.

“A New Map of ye South Sea and ye South Sea Islands”

“A Hidrographical Draught of Mexico as it Lies in its Lakes”

“Vieiltiputi, the Principal Idol of the Mexicans”

“The Great Church House in ye City of Mexico”

“A New Map of ye South Sea and ye South Sea Islands”

“Vieiltiputi, the Principal Idol of the Mexicans”

“The Great Church House in ye City of Mexico”
Possessing: The Wilkes Expedition

Map of the Fijis Islands from Men of 1841. Wilkes and his men killed 80 Fijians on the island of Wallis after negotiations between the native leaders and crew of Wilkes’ ship were killed while attempting to barter for food. Wilkes was attempting to make a U.S. whaling port on the island.

Map of Antarctica from January 1842. Wilkes and his men crossed paths with the French who were also exploring the continent. A small crew and ten mules wanted to leave the area and give claim to the particular location to the other country. Wilkes finally backed off and moved further down the continent.

Map of the Oregon Territory from April of 1841. Note the extensive detail that went into the creation of this map and the cut away of the Columbia River. Also note the above and below map that Wilkes takes along the Columbia River.

Map from the "Narrative of the United States Exploring Expeditions during the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, and 1842 during the Wilkes Expedition between 1840 and 1842." The maps for the Wilkes Expedition reveal a different approach. In this case, a map publication itself made the claim of possession. Though the Wilkes expedition mapped the islands of Fiji, the continent of Antarctica, and the Oregon Territory, only the last was a U.S. possession. And yet the travel accounts and the mapping of Antarctica and Fiji class otherwise. In the travel accounts, Wilkes mentions that his crew was easily able to overpower and overcome the indigenous people of Fiji when a battle ensued and only twenty-two members were lost while eighty Fijians were killed. And while no country owns Antarctica, some countries have made territorial claims recognized by other nations. Unfortunately, the United States was not one of these countries initially when they landed in the same area of Antarctica that was previously explored by the British in connection with their then territory of Australia. Upon arrival in Antarctica, Wilkes claimed and renamed the British territorial claim "Wilkesland." As the Wilkes Expedition reveals, possession can occur both before or after the actual mapping of an area. In some cases, possession can not be an action but a claim made on paper.

Joseph Bridgman
Extrapolating: Herman Moll, Enlightenment Geographer

Moll was a painter, engraver, and cartographer in London. Herman Moll made a significant contribution of maps of the English Enlightenment, including John Locke, Robert Hooke, and Jonathan Swift. The Dutchman’s contemporaries influenced his work as well. He adopted an attitude characteristic of the Enlightenment in his presentation - an attitude that is particularly conspicuous in the context of the English Enlightenment.

Although the English Enlightenment was not as pronounced as in Moll’s works, it had a significant impact on his work as well. He adapted an attitude characteristic of the Enlightenment in his presentation - an attitude that is particularly conspicuous in the context of the English Enlightenment.

Extrapolation

The extrapolation principle is the most important factor in the success of any model. It allows us to extend the model’s predictions beyond the experimental conditions. However, extrapolation often complicates the process of model development. Without careful consideration of the model’s limitations, the extrapolation process can lead to significant errors.
Extrapolating: Uniformity of Heights and Depths in Flacourt’s Madagascar


The image contains a map titled “Carte de Carcanso de, Vallee d’Ambovle, et partie du pays des Macheores en l’Ile de Madagascar, diffusée par le S. de Flacourt.” The map is a sketch created by the author, shown between 1646 and 1654 and published in 1658 in Paris.

In 1642 the French East India Company was granted a charter to establish a colony on the Southeastern corner of Madagascar. After six unsuccessful attempts establishing a prosperous trading outpost in the new French colony of Fort Dauphin, Etienne François de Flacourt was appointed as new governor of the colony. His original mission was to establish a trading network with the local Malagasy population, but lack of cooperation from the locals and negative support of the colony from France caused Flacourt to abandon this mission. He turned instead to documenting and mapping the island around him.

Flacourt published “La Histoire de la Grande Ile de Madagascar” in 1658, a 384-page work that gave the first European indigenous account of Madagascar. Included in “La Histoire” are seven maps of the island and nine sketches of the local Malagasy people and the distinct plant and animal life in Madagascar.

Here, Flacourt maps the section of current Southeast Madagascar using extrapolation. The mountains that Flacourt plots are particularly uniform in height, this is not a coincidence, but shows a lack of cartographic extrapolation in heights and depths. With little accurate information of the true topography of this region, Flacourt replaced this knowledge gap with an invented and uniform topography. Flacourt populated the maps with mountains, each of nearly equal height and shape. When compared to accurate topographical depictions, this method of height and depth extrapolation seems suspect. This extrapolation, however, allowed Flacourt to create a sense of order and familiarity with a completely foreign and distant land.

Presented in these two images are Flacourt’s extrasensory treatment of the local Malagasy plant and animal life. Shown here are 35 of the 180 plant representations included in “La Histoire,” and 12 of the 70 animal representations. The “Nypafrax Madagassica,” plant number 15, was one of the first extraneous plants to be documented by a European. Flacourt also documented several animal species never before seen by Europeans.

The detail and complexity of these sketches demonstrate how Flacourt was able to capture an accurate representation of Madagascar’s local plant and animal life. The lack of extrapolation in these sketches continues with the use of each in his maps.
Prof. Sylvia Sellers-Garcia and Ben Shapiro class of ‘16
Extrapolating: Uniformity of Heights and Depths in Flacourt’s Madagascar

Map taken from "La Histoire de la Grande Île Madagaskar," a travel account by Étienne Flacourt. The map is a sketch created by the author, published between 1641 and 1644 and published in 1658 in Paris.

In 1641 the French East India Company was granted a charter to establish a colony on the Southeast corner of Madagascar. After six unsuccessful years in establishing a prosperous trading outpost in this new French colony of Fort Dauphin, Étienne Flacourt was appointed as new governor of the colony. His original mission was to establish a trading network with the local Malagasy population, but lack of cooperation from the locals and inadequate support of the colony from France caused Flacourt to abandon this mission. He turned instead to documenting and mapping the island around him.

Flacourt published "La Histoire de la Grande Île Madagaskar" in 1658, a 54-page work that gave the first European in-depth account of Madagascar. Included in "La Histoire" are seven maps of the island and nine sketches of the local Malagasy people and the distinct plant and animal life in Madagascar.

Here, Flacourt maps the section of current Southeast Madagascar using extrapolation. The mountains that Flacourt plots are particularly uniform in height, this is not a coincidence, but showcases one idea of cartographic extrapolation of heights and depths. With little accurate information of the true topography of the region, Flacourt replaced the knowledge gap with an imagined and uniform topography. Flacourt popularized this map, with mountains, each of nearly equal height and shape. When compared to accurate topographical depictions, this method of height and depth extrapolation seems reckless. This extrapolation, however, allowed Flacourt to create a sense of order and familiarity with a completely foreign and distant land.

Meko Knew

Presented in these two images Flacourt’s cartographic foundation of the local Madagascar plant and animal life. Some like the birds and the 140 plant representations included in La Histoire and 12 of the 38 animal representations. The "Nymphadora Madagascariensis" plant number 13, was one of the first cinnamon plants to be documented by a European. Flacourt also documented several animal species never before seen by Europeans.

The detail and comprehensiveness of these sketches demonstrate how Flacourt was able to capture an accurate representation of Madagascar’s local plant and animal life. The lack of extrapolation in these sketches contrast with the use of such in his maps.
Kathy Clark, class of ‘15
Works cited


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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people for their invaluable assistance with this exhibit:

Justine Sundaram, Burns Library Senior Reference Librarian/Bibliographer
Kevin Tringale, Bapst Library Exhibits Specialist/Senior Library Assistant
Elliott Brandow, O’Neill Library Senior Reference Librarian/Bibliographer
Andrew Isidoro, Library Assistant, Burns Library
Barbara Adams Hebard, Conservator, Burns Library
Rachel Ernst, Burns Library Reading Room Graduate Student Assistant
Michael Swanson, Assistant Director of Media & Technology Services
Chris Soldi, Photographer, Media & Technology Services
Mai Hoang, Jack Uesugi, Media & Technology Services Staff
Colleen O’Reily, History Department Administrator
Kevi Kenney, History Department Chair
Robin Fleming, History Department Chair
Gregory Kalscher, Interim Dean of Arts & Sciences
Boston College Facilities Paint Shop
Prof. Sylvia Sellers-Garcia, Christian Dupont, Head of Burns Library, and Kevin Kenny, chair of the History Dept.
Tom Wall, University Librarian, Prof. Ginny Reinburg and Prof. Lynn Johnson, both of the History Dept.
Tom Wall, University Librarian and Justine Sundaram of Burns Library