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Famous Maps in the British Museum: Discussion

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- ²⁶ Add. 31,317. The map of the East Indies, on ff. 27 and 28, measures 15×21 inches. Coloured. Vellum.
- ²⁷ Add. 5415A. The maps measure 22×31 inches. Coloured. Vellum.
- ²⁸ Add. 24,065.
- ²⁹ Reproduced from *Die älteste Karte mit dem Namen Amerika . . . und die Carta Marina* by Fischer and von Wieser. 1903. B. M. maps 109. d. 21.
- ³⁰ World. Antonio Lafreri. B. M. 920 (256).
- ³¹ Nordenskiöld, *Facsimile Atlas*, p. 90.
- ³² World-map on double cordiform projection by Orontius Finæus. $11\frac{1}{2} \times 16\frac{1}{2}$ inches. B. M. maps 920 (39).
- ³³ The British Isles. K. 5. 1. $29\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
- ³⁴ The British Isles. *Cotton. Aug. I. 1. 9.* $25\frac{1}{4} \times 18$ inches. Coloured. On vellum. Attributed to 1534. Cf. *Globus*, No. 96. 1909.
- ³⁵ Map of the World. B. M. maps, 116. b. 13. $21\frac{3}{4} \times 32\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
- ³⁶ Nordenskiöld, *Facsimile Atlas*, p. 90. Though no map on this projection was published by Bordone until 1528 (in *Tutte l'Isole del Mondo*), one resembling it in its rectilinear parallels appeared in 1524 in *De Orbis Situ Epistola*, published by Franciscus Monachus at Antwerp.
- ³⁷ B. M. Maps, 46. c. 8. $15\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
- ³⁸ B. M. Maps, 34. c. 3. 16×21 inches.
- ³⁹ B. M. Maps, 93. c. 5. Size of map, exclusive of surrounding descriptive text, $15 \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
- ⁴⁰ Add. MS. 17,940A. $27 \times 31\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Vellum.
- ⁴¹ B. M. Maps 93. c. 5 (9). $14\frac{1}{2} \times 20\frac{3}{4}$ inches.
- ⁴² Guiana by Willem Blaeu, 1630. 83,955 (4). $14\frac{3}{4} \times 19\frac{5}{8}$ inches.
- ⁴³ Guiana by Jan Janssen, 1647. Maps 115. d. 16. $14\frac{3}{4} \times 19\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
- ⁴⁴ South America, by d'Anville, 1748. 83,000 (25). $48\frac{1}{2} \times 30\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
- ⁴⁵ South America, by d'Anville, 1760. S. 63 (2) fol. 19. $48\frac{1}{2} \times 30\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
- ⁴⁶ *Among the Indians of Guiana*, by E. F. im Thurn, pp. 36, 37; *Journal of the Roy. Soc. of Arts*, vol. 9, p. 97; *Historical Geography of British Guiana*, by J. A. J. de Villiers (London, 1913), p. 11.
- ⁴⁷ K. 21, 34.

The PRESIDENT (before the paper): To-night we are to have a paper of a rather different character from those we often assemble to listen to in this theatre; a paper in the main of a historical and partly of a literary type. The reader of the paper, Mr. de Villiers, was appointed on account of his linguistic attainments to a post in the British Museum as far back as twenty-six years ago. For the past five years he has been in charge of the maps in that collection, and for the same period he has been the Honorary Secretary of the Hakluyt Society, whose name you know well, and which, I am glad to say, is now in a very flourishing condition. Mr. de Villiers has himself edited three volumes brought out by that society, and supervises generally the annual issues for which it is responsible. He worked for eight years under Sir Richard Webster, now Lord Alverstone, with the permission of the Trustees, in preparing evidence for the boundary arbitration between Venezuela and Brazil, and some two or three years ago he lectured to us on the rise of British Guiana. He has taken pains to make himself thoroughly acquainted with the map treasures of the British Museum, and it is the results of his experience and studies that we are about to hear from him.

Sir FREDERIC KENYON (after the paper): You have made a little mistake when you say you are certain that I shall wish to say something. There is nothing, at the present moment, that I wish less. There is a misapprehension from which I am still suffering, though for four years I have done my best to disillusion people, and that is, that the official head of the British Museum knows something about

everything inside the Museum. I shall take another step to-night in disillusioning this portion of the public. My own knowledge of maps is, I think, due in a sense to the Royal Geographical Society, because, I think in 1895, when I was a junior assistant in the Museum, there was a Geographical Congress in this country, and the Geographical Society intimated that the Museum might assist by putting out a display of maps, and, I suppose because I was considered the most unoccupied person in the Manuscript Department at the time, I was deputed to make a selection. It was a subject that happened to be congenial to me, and I was much interested in making the acquaintance of the maps in the Manuscript Department of the Museum. As a rule one discovers what there is in the Museum when one is asked by somebody outside to tell them about it, and in that way I made acquaintance with many maps Mr. de Villiers has shown to-night. All that I really can do now is to add my testimony to his knowledge of the subject. If Mr. de Villiers were not here, and if I were in any other company than that of the Geographical Society, I might, by drawing on his inspiration, assume the appearance of having a certain amount of first-hand knowledge, but under existing circumstances it seems useless for me to pretend to contribute any valuable information. This I can say, that since the Map Department of the British Museum has been in Mr. de Villiers' charge it has been worked with an efficiency which I think has never been surpassed. He has shown you to-night what a profound knowledge he has of the manuscript and printed maps in the British Museum, and here it is not necessary to emphasize the interest of the subject. Elsewhere one might have much to say of the interest to be found in studying early maps; nor do I consider, as Mr. de Villiers does, that modern maps are dull. Personally, I find, whenever one goes into some new bit of country, the interesting thing to do is to have the Ordnance map of the country and make yourself acquainted with it. I think there is as much interest to be found in that as there is in studying mediæval maps, with Jerusalem in the middle and strange beasts round about the circumference.

One point must have struck you in the maps shown, and that is the extraordinary superiority of the knowledge of the world in the Roman period over that of the Mediæval period. Take those early Ptolemy maps, and look at our own country on the extremity of the Roman world: but for the fact that the cartographer lost his sense of direction somehow when he crossed the Scottish frontier, did not realize he was going straight on, and thought he had turned to the right, the map is extremely accurate. Whereas, when you take mediæval maps, how do you suppose anybody found their way about the world with the assistance of those maps? And yet it was not that those people were not travelling; a very great many more people travelled across Europe in the Middle Ages than in the period of the Roman Empire; they knew more about Central Europe than than Ptolemy did, yet they produced maps that have no relation to facts, and which would be perfectly useless. The only explanation is, that in the Middle Ages the traveller merely thought about his next night's lodging. He was passed on from one monastery—that is, practically, from one public-house—to another, and he did not trouble himself about the relations of one part of the country to another; whereas the Roman geographer thought of the world as a whole; he thought of it imperially. He knew Britain or Germany or Spain as a country, and a country with which his Empire had to deal, and he took the trouble to get some acquaintance with the general shape of it, so that from him we get maps which have some relation to facts. Throughout the long period of the Middle Ages you lose that altogether, and then geographical science makes a fresh start at the Renaissance, when the

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world came into contact with Greek knowledge. Then we start a fresh period of geography, and you see maps which really represent the facts, and then you see (that is one of the interests in following these manuscript maps) the gradual progress of knowledge as the names spread down the blank sides of the continent of Africa, and subsequently of America. Year after year the maps are produced, and you see the names spreading till they get down to the Cape of Good Hope, and turn round the other side. Similarly with America. Gradually you see the knowledge grow and the shape approaching reality; and so again later with Australia. It is not easy to express an opinion as to whether those early maps which show a great continent in the place of Australia have any foundation in fact, but it is conceivable that the early travellers in the parts about Java heard that there was a country on the other side, and they represented it on their maps with a diminution of the true amount of sea between them. However, that is not a point on which I am qualified to speak. I should merely like to express, as a listener, my gratitude to Mr. de Villiers for a paper of very great interest.

Mr. EDWARD HEAWOOD: The paper to-night, as has been remarked, is something of a new departure, and one, I think, that is entirely to be welcomed, for it seems to me that the study of maps and their history has met with less attention than it deserves in this country. I had meant to say something on the value and advantages of this study, particularly as helping us to put ourselves in the place of our predecessors and realize in part their outlook on the world—so extraordinarily restricted as it was compared with our own. But enough has perhaps been said on this side of the subject. I cannot help wishing that the study of maps might be taken up by some of the young geographers at the universities. As it is, we too often owe it to foreigners that the treasures even in our own national collection are made generally known to students. Only a year or two ago Father Joseph Fischer, who was referred to in the paper as the fortunate discoverer of the Waldseemüller maps, brought to light the fact that the missing portion of the well-known Mt. Athos MS. of Ptolemy is to be found at the British Museum—a fact that I believe was till then quite unknown to the authorities themselves.* And at least two other cases of the same kind have occurred within the past dozen years.

To come now to one or two points of detail. One could have wished that, in dealing with Ptolemy's maps, Mr. de Villiers had discussed them a little more fully. It may be known to some here that a new impetus has been given to the study of Ptolemy by Father Fischer's untiring labours. He has ransacked the libraries of Europe in quest of still-existing manuscripts of the geography, of which the total number brought to light now amounts to over forty. A general result has been to show that, side by side with the atlas of twenty-seven maps with which we have been made familiar by the early printed editions, there exists a second type equal in antiquity to the first, in which the number of maps reaches a maximum of sixty-eight; the reason being that smaller units of area are shown in each. Now, if I am not mistaken, one of the most important examples of this less-familiar type is the very British Museum MS., containing the two maps of Great Britain and

* The *provenance* of the British Museum fragment from Mt. Athos, was known to C. Müller, the editor of Ptolemy (see *Archives des Missions*, etc., Ser. II. vol. 4, 1867, p. 281), who does not, however, seem to have been aware that it formed part of the codex reproduced by Sebastianoff.

Ireland (separately), shown on the screen at the beginning of the lecture. The contrast in the treatment of the British Isles between this and the later MS. of about 1470 is, in fact, but an outcome of the different plan adopted in the two types as regards the division of the Earth's surface. All the early examples of the better-known type, including several even earlier in date than 1400, agree, I believe, in showing the British Isles as a whole. One more point in reference to the Ptolemy maps. Mr. de Villiers spoke throughout of these as having been *drawn* by Ptolemy, and I certainly agree that in their original form the maps must have been contemporaneous with the text of the geography, whether drawn by Ptolemy's own hand or not. But it should be remembered that some competent authorities—chief among them Prof. Kretschmer of Berlin—hold that Ptolemy neither drew nor directed the drawing of maps, but that these were added in the fifth century A.D., on the basis of his tables of positions. Personally, I do not see how this can be accepted.

Mr. de Villiers has been good enough to refer to certain suggestions made by me. As regards the first, relating to Cardinal a Cusa's map, I am bound to say that the suggestion was not original, but was based on the conclusions of the German experts who have written on the subject. I have had no opportunity of personally inspecting the MS. map of Martellus lately brought to light. But its discoverer, Prof. von Wieser, says that it is in every way superior to the British Museum map shown to us to-night, being on a larger scale and containing much more information.* He believes it to come much nearer the lost original than the Museum map, though both seem to be modified versions rather than copies. There exist several other maps of the Cusa type (including the Germany of the famous Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493), and a careful comparison of all these seems necessary before the question of their relationships can be satisfactorily settled. Then there is the question of the French maps with 'Jave la Grande.' These, I confess, have always seemed to me an extraordinarily slight foundation for the idea of a discovery of Australia early in the sixteenth century, considering the vagueness of the delineation of the southern land, and the fact that this is not limited to the position of Australia, but stretches completely round the southern hemisphere, in some (including the earliest) of the maps. That it comes farthest north where Australia happens to be is merely due to the arbitrary junction with Java, of which the southern coast was then unknown, and which from Marco Polo's time had been thought to be of enormous extent. The discovery of Waldseemüller's *Carta Marina* seemed at once to add strength to the belief in a hypothetical origin for Jave la Grande, his representation serving as the first stage in the process of evolution.

In discussing the productions of the middle of the sixteenth century, Mr. de Villiers seemed to me hardly quite fair to the Cis-Alpine cartographers, when he spoke of the period as absolutely barren of printed maps from this part of Europe. This may be true of the *collections* of maps (shortly to be known as atlases), but it surely is not, if we think of detailed maps of special regions, based to some extent on actual survey. This was in fact just the period that saw the first serious attempts in this direction, and it was precisely in Cis-Alpine Europe that some of the best results were obtained—witness the maps of

* The section dealing with the Tirol (where the Cardinal was long Bishop of Brixen) is particularly good for the time. This was reproduced by Oberhammer in the *Zeitschrift* of the German and Austrian Alpine Club for 1909.

Bavaria by Aventin and Apianus,* of Salzburg by Setznagel, of the Tirol by Paul Dax. Then there was the fine atlas of Austria by Wolfgang Lazius, and the three splendid maps by Mercator, of Europe, the World, and the British Isles. Even the maps of Münster, somewhat crude productions as they are, are not entirely to be despised. Most at least of the above were *printed* maps.

I could not but admire the skill with which Mr. de Villiers used the material at his disposal to present to us such an admirable outline of the progress of map-making and the evolution of geographical ideas through the ages. Still we must remember, as he says, that there must necessarily be gaps in the story as told by even the best individual collection of maps. It is his misfortune, not his fault, if the material for some chapters is scanty. In conclusion, I wish to thank him heartily for bringing forward the subject of early maps in so interesting a manner.

The PRESIDENT: I will conclude the proceedings by offering your thanks to the reader of the paper. We shall all of us agree that his paper, so full and so learned, has given a positive encouragement to the study of the science of cartography in our midst, and I hope that his advice will be borne in mind, and that some of our younger students, who are looking out for new worlds to conquer, will turn to maps. It must, I think, have been a source of interest, perhaps of surprise, and in any case of national pride, to us to realize what great treasures in the shape of maps we have in our national collection at Bloomsbury. On this point it occurs to me to say a word. Many and rare as these treasures are, the number of them that is exhibited to the public under existing arrangements is extraordinarily small. Mr. de Villiers will correct me if I am wrong when I say there is only one case in which maps are exhibited. In view of the wealth of these resources, I suggest to Sir Frederick Kenyon that he is not perhaps doing full and adequate justice to that branch of his treasures. But I have another suggestion. We have in our new premises at the Royal Geographical Society in Kensington a large museum, not yet as fully stocked as we should like to make it. The reader of the paper in one place observed that the portals of the British Museum are very wide. My experience of those portals is, they are very wide to things and people as they go in, but that they let little out. I do not know whether the conditions as to maps there would ever admit of the loan of maps to us. Anyhow, if we cannot get any maps from the Librarian, I would suggest to him that the relative importance of cartography and music is not duly illustrated by the fact that only one case in the British Museum is given to the exhibition of maps, and I believe six or seven to music. Then there is another point. Sir Frederick Kenyon in his remarks said something about manuscript maps and his own interest in that branch of the subject, and Mr. Heawood again alluded to the manuscript maps of earlier times; but my belief is that the manuscript maps in the British Museum are not in the custody of the reader of the paper, who has charge of the map department, but are under some one else. May I suggest a new principle of classification? Is it well that all the printed maps should be in the printed department and the manuscript maps in the manuscript department? It seems to me—*prima facie*—that the maps, whether manuscript or printed, should be collected in one place under a single head. I ask you to join me in giving a vote of thanks to the reader of the paper.

* The actual wood blocks from which one version of Apianus' map was printed still exist and have been used for a reprint in modern times.