

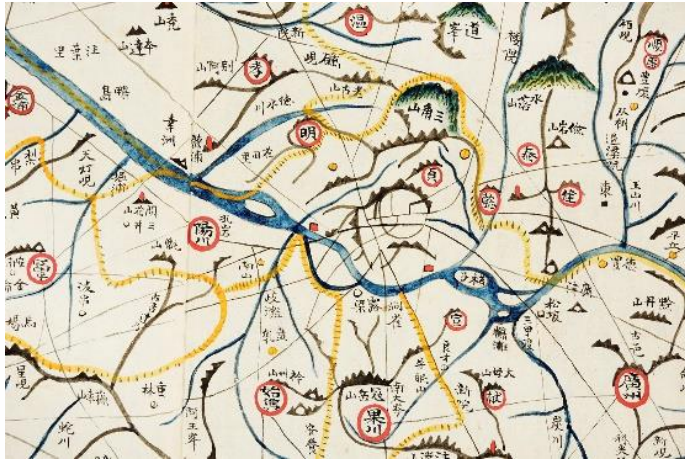
Presseinformation

Museum am Rothenbaum

Rothenbaumchaussee 64 | 20148 Hamburg Germany | markk-hamburg.de

Colour Meets Map

August 27, 2021 until January 30, 2022



Daedongyeojido, "Map of the Great East [Korea]", detail
Kim Jeong-ho, Korea, after 1861, manuscript map, H 30 cm, MARKK 33.215:16
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Maps and colours belong closely together. But anyone who thinks that colours simply make maps beautiful is mistaken: colours have long been applied deliberately and systematically, encoding maps and sending messages. With the exhibition "Colour Meets Map," the Museum am Rothenbaum is dedicated to deciphering these meanings using rare European and East Asian maps from the 15th-20th centuries. They tell of colonial appropriation, geographical world views and knowledge transfer. In addition to the symbolism and cultural significance of individual colours, the exhibition also focuses on their material composition as well as the production and trade of colours.

The exhibition presents the first results of a three-year research project to decipher the meaning of colours on European and East Asian maps. It shows a selection of impressive maps from five centuries together with colourants such as cinnabar, carmine or indigo, which provide information about the exchange between East Asia and Europe. The maps come from two Hamburg collections: European maps from the holdings of the Stiftung Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv and East Asian maps from the MARKK.

Maps and colonial appropriation

Maps depict geographic spaces in reduced and simplified form. Drawn or printed in black and white, they were subsequently coloured to provide additional information. They sometimes aimed at better control over depicted areas by showing economic usability, establishing political affiliation, preparing colonial intrusion, or presenting certain world views. Colours not only embellished, they also controlled the reading of maps, reinforcing their messages.

What colours tell us

In both Europe and East Asia, the majority of maps were coloured according to set systems, and colours also served as "codes". Cities, for example, were depicted in red and "talking colours" were used. The Yellow River was often coloured yellow on East Asian maps, and the Red Sea was always coloured red on medieval maps from Europe. Administrative information was represented on East Asian maps with the help of

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geometric symbols and additionally "coded" in colour. These codes could be deciphered by close analysis and comparison of maps.

Maps and their production

Various groups of people were involved in the process of making maps. Special know-how was needed to put colours on paper. Colourists were trained individuals who had an excellent knowledge of colours and their properties - but were also always open to change. Thus, Berlin or Prussian Blue, discovered by chance in Prussia in 1704, was quickly used on maps in Europe as well as in Asia. Map colouring was closely related to painting: "We were actually able to trace the colourants recommended in painting manuals on the maps," says Oliver Hahn, Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures and project leader of the materials science subproject.

Maps and their provenance

Maps can not only express colonial territorial claims. They may also have entered collections as a result of colonial encroachments. This applies, for example, to the map scroll on display, which not only shows Chinese claims to power over neighbouring regions, but was itself probably looted from the imperial palace in Beijing during the so-called "Boxer War" in 1900/1901. The exact provenance of this map is currently being researched. Most of the European maps held by the Commerzbibliothek and the Stiftung Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv were legally acquired in the 18th and 19th centuries. These include the maps of the former head of the Hamburg government, Johann Klefeker (1698-1775), which came to the Commerzbibliothek in 1776 and are still kept in the archive today. They even survived the destruction of the library in 1943 and the great flood of 1962.

The "Coloured Maps" Project

The idea for the project arose in Hamburg in 2018. The project initiators Kathrin Enzel (Stiftung Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv), Dr. Susanne Knödel (MARKK), Prof. Dr. Oliver Hahn (Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures at the University of Hamburg) and Prof. Dr. Jochen Schlüter (Mineralogical Museum of the University of Hamburg, CeNak) quickly realized that it would be worthwhile to take a new scientific look at the map collections from the perspective of colour. With maps from Europe and East Asia, two endpoints of the Euro-Asian continent were chosen for consideration. On selected hand-coloured maps, colourants were examined and compared with written sources on colouration and colour trade. In this way, historical sequences of colour use and European-Asian technology transfers, as well as cross-cultural similarities and differences in colouring practices, were identified. "In the future, the results of our project will facilitate the dating of maps, the decoding of their messages, and the detection of later revisions or forgeries," explains Kathrin Enzel, coordinator of the collaborative project. Funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research made it possible to bring the three specialist researchers Dr. Diana Lange, Dr. Peter Zietlow and Dr. Benjamin van der Linde on board for three years. "Everyone involved agrees that the intensive work on the maps has been worthwhile. We can no longer look at maps without immediately analyzing the stories behind the colouring, which tell us so much about the world beyond geographic information. Starting August 27, visitors are also invited to plunge into the sea of colour," says Barbara Plankensteiner, director of the MARKK.

The MARKK promotes appreciation for cultures and arts of the world. The program focuses on its global art and cultural holdings, which occupy a unique position within the German museum landscape. Its extensive holdings reflect worldwide historical interconnections of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. In exhibitions, events and

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research, these works enter into a debate with contemporary issues of our globalized society.

The non-profit foundation Stiftung Hanseatisches Wirtschaftsarchiv was founded in January 2008 by the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce. It is the central archive for handwritten and printed testimonies as well as other economic-historical illustrative materials of companies in Northern Germany. In addition, the Hanseatic Business Archives offers to take in documents worthy of archiving from companies, foundations and business associations, as well as the estates of entrepreneurs, and to advice on archival matters. The historical holdings are accessible to researchers of economic and regional history.

Founded in 2012, the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at the University of Hamburg brings together more than 150 scholars from nearly 40 disciplines to study manuscript artefacts from different cultures and eras. In doing so, it combines approaches from the humanities and the natural sciences. Since 2019, the CSMC has been home to the Cluster of Excellence "Understanding Written Artifacts," where 55 individual projects are currently drawing a comprehensive picture of how the production of handwritten artefacts has shaped societies and cultures worldwide and continues to do so today.

The Center for Natural History (CeNak) was an amalgamation of the natural science collections of the University of Hamburg. In July 2021, the collections merged into the newly established Leibniz Institute for the Analysis of Biodiversity Change (LIB).



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