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Commissioned by Katherine Parker (Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc., Hakluyt Society)

The exhibition, accompanied by a book of the same title (as a bilingual Italian-English edition), is designed to explore how humans built the image of the world as we know it today. By displaying forty world maps as high-definition reproductions—from the eleventh-century mappae mundi through the depiction of the world in the age of early encounters and exploration, all the way to contemporary artistic world maps on rugs and high-tech digital maps of Google—it invites us to draw our attention to the role of maps in various historical and social contexts.

This fascinating exhibition is the result of a collaboration between Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche and Fondazione Imago Mundi. It is part of a larger exhibition project, Treviso Contemporanea, which is held at no less than three different venues. Curated by Massimo Rossi, the major map exhibition, Mind the Map!, is open at Ca’ Scarpa (Via Canova, 11). The other two concurrent artistic exhibitions, Atlante Temporaneo (temporary atlas), curated by Alfredo Prigioni, is hosted by the nearby Gallerie delle Prigioni (Piazza del Duomo, 20), while Terra Incognita, curated by D. Harding, is open at the church of San Teonisto (Via San Nicolò, 31), which has been recently restored and adapted into a cultural venue.

The main exhibition consists of three sections that clearly reflect changes in the human vision of the world. The first part is symbolically called "Non plus ultra" (nothing further beyond), according to a postclassical aphorism referring to the Columns of Hercules as the end of the ancient world. The phrase was not bequeathed to us from antiquity or the Middle Ages but probably derives from Dante’s Inferno and was adopted during the Renaissance. It is used here as a metaphor for the stifling influence of ancient philosophy on the progress of thought.

To illustrate the paradigmatic shifts and changes that altered our early vision of the world, the exhibition starts with reproductions of medieval mappae mundi such as schematic maps by Isidore of Seville (eleventh cent.), Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (eleventh cent.), Macrobius (twelfth cent.), and Pierre d’Ailly (1410). It then continues with world maps such as the Psalter (ca. 1265) and Hereford (ca. 1290) maps, which highlight the spiritual role of cartography, and with nautical charts (thirteenth to fourteenth cent.) and world maps by Al-Idrīsī (1154), Pietro Vesconte (1330), Ptolemy (the 1480 edition), and Fra Mauro (ca. 1450). It thus enables virtual pilgrimages to the medieval world, from its scholastic beginnings to the threshold of the Renaissance. To make a juxtaposition to Western maps, the curator closes the section with two oriental maps—the Korean Kangnido world map (1479/sixteenth cent.), which illus-
trates how the West was seen from the East, and a large map embroidered on silk in North Korea in 2016 that depicts the round journey undertaken by Marco Polo between 1271 and 1295.

The second part of the exhibition is called "Plus ultra" (further beyond), a Latin phrase that not only makes the reversal of the original non plus ultra formula but also refers to the interconnected imperialist ideas of exploitation, evangelization, and conquest of the New World, far beyond the Columns of Hercules. No less important, in 1516, it was adopted as a royal motto by Charles V of Spain and thus incorporated into the Spanish coat of arms.

As the title of this part of the exhibition clearly suggests, this section illustrates the early European transoceanic voyages. The new vision of the world is presented through numerous maps, of which I will mention only the most emblematic. Two of Enrico Martello's planispheres (ca. 1490) document the early Portuguese voyages around Africa, while the Carte del Cantino (1502), which was smuggled to Ferrara via Genoa by Alberto Cantino, reveals the Portuguese endeavors of Vasco da Gama (India), Pedro Álvares Cabral (Brazil), and brothers Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real (Labrador, Newfoundland). A monumental Carta Universal (1500) by Juan de la Cosa, a privileged observer who sailed with Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Alonso de Ojeda carries information on Spanish, Portuguese, and English ventures in the New World until 1499. In this part of the exhibition we can also see maps such Martin Waldseemüller's planisphere from his Universalis Cosmographia (1507), which features the new continent designated for the first time with the name of America; Diogo Ribeiro's map known as the Castiglioni Planisphere (1525), actually a copy of a padrón real produced by the Casa de la Contratación in Seville, which noted geographical knowledge from Ferdinand Magellan's circumnavigation; as well as Caspar Vopel's Nova et integra universalisque orbis totis (1558), which still seeks to identify Mexico with China. All the above mentioned maps help us to understand how newly gathered geographical knowledge circulated in Europe and represented new geographical realities.

The third section of the exhibition, titled "Theatrum Orbis Terrarium," shows the post-Columbian world, understood as a global market, and features maps used as tools designed to help increase profits, territorial expansion, and geographical knowledge. Then, more than ever before, the map as an image of the world became a matter of imperial and cultural reinterpretation and constant reconsideration of the center and the periphery, which particularly reflected the orientation of the map, its geographical centering (scope), and cartographic projection.

Abraham Ortelius's atlas is a metaphor of that world, in which the imperial powers and their mapmakers became the main actors of the great theatrical performance, which enabled them to explore the whole world and present it in one methodologically organized book with maps that all conform to a single format. Accordingly, this part of the exhibition opens up with Ortelius's iconic world map, Typus orbis terrarium (1570), which shows the world in a new cartographic projection created by his friend, Gerhard Kremer, better known as Mercator. This map and its template, Mercator's Nova et aucta orbis terrae descriptio (1569), were much more than a sum of geographical knowledge, gathered by numerous expeditions, as they addressed the problem of how the world should be represented and understood on a single map in a completely new and innovative way. By introducing a new projection, Mercator facilitated the navigation of the oceans in much greater safety, above all in terms the route navigator should follow. Yet this cylindrical projection distorted the shapes of the continents, progressing from the equator toward the poles and distorting economically richer areas at the expense of poorer zones, thus becoming a symbol of Euro-
centrism. To highlight different visions and perspectives, Ortelius’s and Mercator’s world maps are contrasted by Matteo Ricci’s planisphere (1602). This has China and the Pacific centrally positioned on the map, thus offering very different visions of the center and the periphery of the world. Invented in 1569, the Mercator projection had strong reverberations up to the present day, as it forms the base of the world’s most widely adopted application, Google Earth, which was launched in 2005. As a counterpart to Mercator’s vision of the world, the exhibition closes with a world map in the Peters projection, a twentieth-century invention that reflected the new social context of anticolonialism. A new projection that introduces an egalitarian image of the world that pays attention to the presentation of real surfaces of the continents is also presented by two remarkable carpets made in Afghanistan. According to the words of the curator, the conclusion of the cultural and scientific representation of the world with a geographical tapestry made in Afghanistan revives the extinct dialogue between the place and the space inhabited by human communities.

The goals of Mind the Map! go far beyond the presentation of maps as part of the intellectual effort to depict the world in the form of a world map. This is a story about humanity, of how we understood ourselves and the world around us. By placing each map in a historical, scientific, and social context, the curator skillfully decodes the maps, revealing to us a narrative about the society and culture that created them. The author proves that world maps of all periods reflect much more than the current state of knowledge, they are also an expression of a planned concept and convey the social values of the communities whose world view they present, making them a temporal expression that stimulates universal considerations and emotions.

Exhibiting the reproductions instead of the originals has been turned into a great advantage here. The high-resolution digitization has made it possible to reproduce the maps in considerably larger dimensions than their originals, as well as in separate enlargements of details that are otherwise difficult to see on the original maps. The exhibition is accompanied by a free audio guide (in Italian) and a series of videos that are already available on the foundation’s website, as well as on Instagram. The exhibition is open on Fridays from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., and on Saturdays and Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

The exhibition book by Massimo Rossi was co-published by Fondazione Benetton Studi Richerche and Antiga Edizioni. Richly illustrated, the book offers a total of 217 full-color pages. It is not a simple catalogue of the exhibition but a much broader study of the topic, with 102 color illustrations and a very inspired and highly intellectual interpretation of the maps.

As the exhibition and the book are part of a much larger cultural project, they are also accompanied by a series of additional events such as public lectures designed to explore the major themes evoked by the exhibition, as well as a program of live concerts.[1] In April will begin the concert season of the Benetton Foundation (also supported by the Municipality of Treviso) in close connection with the exhibition, for this occasion entitled Mind the Music! The program will offer an opportunity to listen to live pieces that testify as to how both music and maps are cultural hybrids.

Images
https://tinyurl.com/5d8x78ta
https://tinyurl.com/2re4768c
https://tinyurl.com yc39a8br

Note
[1]. For update on the events, visit https://www.fbsr.it/en/event/mind-the-map/.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
https://networks.h-net.org/h-maps


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