

CONFERENCE FINAL REPORT

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"Maps and Images: How They Have Transmitted Visual Knowledge Along the Silk Road"

Zurich, May 14-15, 2004

Conference Organization

On May 14 and 15, 2004, twenty-two speakers and almost thirty registered participants, scholars, and students took part in the conference we organized to discuss the transmission of visual knowledge along the Silk Road. Financial support from the Cogito Foundation, the Zürcher Hochschulstiftung, the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the Swiss Academy for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (SAGW / ASSHS) made this meeting possible. We were delighted to be able to cover the travel and accommodation costs of all the conference speakers and chairs.

The conference consisted of two thematic panels (fine arts and religion, sciences and techniques) and two historical panels (maps up to the 15th century, maps since the 16th century). The first three panels met at the University of Zurich main building, while the fourth panel met at the Collegium Helveticum (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich, ETHZ). The University of Zurich and the Collegium Helveticum graciously agreed to provide fully equipped conference rooms. The welcoming reception took place at the faculty club of ETHZ on Friday evening. A reception with a buffet was organized at the Rietberg Museum Saturday evening. We would like to express our thanks to all these institutions and agencies.

The conference topic seemed so important that as many as sixty scholars replied to our call for papers and respected our deadlines. We selected twenty-four paper proposals on the basis of their potential quality. While encouraging the participation of promising junior scholars, our goal was to find a balance between the disciplines and geographical areas represented. Prior to the conference, twenty-two speakers put their abstracts on the conference website, and seventeen shared their paper drafts. The two speakers who cancelled their participations at the last minute will mail their papers for possible publication in the conference proceedings.

Conference Papers

Hans-Ulrich Feldmann (Swiss Society of Cartography and Federal Office of Topography) and Ulrich Rudolph (Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Zurich) opened the conference Friday morning.

“Paintings and Drawings” Panel

Chaired by Robert Gassmann (Institute of East Asia, University of Zurich), the “Paintings and Drawings” panel put a strong focus on the art history of East and Central Asia.

— In “Geumseong (Gyeongju): Main City of the Silk Road in Korea,” Jeong-Hee Lee-Kalisch (Department of East Asia, Institute of Art History, Free University of Berlin) discussed the Roman-style cups found in the royal tombs of Geumseong, the capital of the Silla kingdom. She argued that the Eastern terminus of the Silk Road laid in Korea or even Japan.

— Nicolas Zufferey (Chinese Studies, University of Geneva) depicted the notion that Han dynasty China had of the “Western Territories” (Xiyü). He showed how different traditions merged into a new visual language in “Traces of the Silk Road in Han Dynasty Iconography: Questions and Hypotheses.”

— Natasha Heller (East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department, Harvard University) investigated the mural paintings of the Buddhist temples located on Mount Wutai in her “Visualizing Pilgrimage and Mapping Experience: Mount Wutai on the Silk Road.” Such paintings acted as maps and guidebooks with instructions on how to visit the sacred mountain.

— Dorothy Wong (McIntire Department of Art, University of Virginia) explained how Buddhism transformed Chinese cosmology in “The Mapping of the Sacred Space: Buddhist Cosmography in Dunhuang Mural Paintings.” She introduced convergent and multi-polar perspectives to the distinction she made between the spiritual and temporal realms.

— Neil Schmid (Department of Philosophy and Religion, North Carolina State University) studied the textual and visual functions of the *Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*Xianyu jing*). He argued that the scripture established a political link between Dunhuang and Khotan in “Imaging Ritual/Space and the Narrative Negotiation of Identities Along the Silk Road.”

— Dickran Kouymjian (Armenian Studies Program, California State University at Fresno) analyzed the 13th Century Armenian frontispieces that employed Chinese and Mongol motives. The discussion of “The Intrusion of Far Eastern Imagery in Medieval Armenia” confirmed that this integration of Asian elements was restricted to themes of power and authority.

“Maps before the 15th Century” Panel

Valerie Hansen (History Department, Yale University) chaired the “Maps before the 15th Century” panel, which dealt mostly with the early cartography of the Islamic world.

— Karen Pinto (American University of Beirut) canceled her presentation. Her paper, “Alternative Influences: What Medieval Islamic Cartography Owes to the West,” may later be considered for publication in the conference proceedings.

— Yossef Rapoport (Oriental Institute, Oxford University) read a paper entitled “The Book of Curiosities: A Medieval Islamic View of the East.” He presented a newly discovered atlas that dates from the 12th-13th Century. Its rectangular map of the world differs from all ancient or medieval maps. A river map represents for instance Central Asia.

— Andreas Kaplony (Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Zurich) stressed the fundamental difference between precision maps and illustrative maps. In “The Map of Mahmud al-Kashghari,” he situated Kashghari’s work within the broader frame of Arabic-Islamic cartography. The map was the key to Kashghari’s textbook of Turkish languages; by using the textbook we might reconstruct the original layout of the map.

— Peter-Karl Soustal (Tabula Imperii Byzantini, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna) surveyed the history of Byzantine cartography in “The Byzantines and Their Maps.”

— Sonja Brentjes (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin) analyzed the Asian elements present in Angelino Dulcert’s portolan chart and the Catalan Atlas (1375). Her paper, “Revisiting Catalan Portolan Charts: Do They Contain Elements of Asian Provenance,” compared the rich repertoire from Asia to the European iconography of rivers, animals, and rulers.

— Jason Neelis (Department of Religion, University of Florida) introduced the Buddhist graffiti inscriptions found in the Karakoram Range, where a corridor connects South Asia and Central Asia. In “Pathways to the Silk Routes as Marked by Buddhist Images and Inscriptions from Northern Pakistan,” he provided visual evidence on the transmission of religious information.

— Sophie Linon-Chipon (Research Center on Travel Literature, Paris-Sorbonne University) focused on the maritime road to China in “The Maps in the Travel Accounts of the Maritime Spice Route in the 17th and 18th Centuries.” She provided an account of the archeological work done at one of the supply stations France maintained in Madagascar.

“Maps after the 16th Century” Panel

The survey of the Silk Road regions by European cartographers was the topic that was especially dis-

cussed Saturday morning. Caverlee Cary (Geographic Information Science Center, University of California at Berkeley) chaired the “Maps after the 16th Century” panel.

— Kathryn Ebel (Department of Geography, Ohio Wesleyan University) read “The Silk Roads and the Spatial Imaginary of the Ottoman Empire.” She argued that 16th century Ottoman city maps and urban projects had more in common with Central Asian traditions than conventionally thought.

— Shamsiddin Kamoliddin (Institute of History, Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, Tashkent) studied map nomenclature in “Abraham Maas' Map and the Evolution of Historical Macrotoponymy of Central Asia.” He explained how the term "Uzbekistan" replaced the older “Turkistan” on Russian and European maps.

— Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz (Institute for the Science of Religion, University of Bern) cancelled her presentation. Her paper on Mongol maps since the 18th century may later be included in the conference proceedings.

— Elio Brancaforte (Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, Tulane University) analyzed the interaction of text and image in “Representative Space: German Baroque Depictions of the Silk Road.” He drew his examples from the engravings found in Adam Olearius’ report on his travel from Germany to Isfahan.

— Philippe Forêt (Institute of Cartography, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich), studied in “The Mapping of the Silk Road by European-Chinese Expeditions (1912-1949)” the maps made during fieldwork in Western China. He created a link between cartographical production and contemporary debates on climate change.

— Håkan Wahlquist (National Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm) related in “Sven Hedin as Artist and Photographer: Visual Representation of the Silk Road” the history of a popular explorer of the Silk Road. Sven Hedin's success depended on his ability to illustrate his texts with his own drawings and photographs.

“Sciences and Techniques” Panel

Erich Neuenschwander (Institute of Mathematics, University of Zurich) chaired the “Sciences and Techniques” panel.

— Paul Kunitzsch (Institute for Semitic Studies and Department for the History of Science, Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich) explained in “Celestial Maps and Illustrations in Arabic-Islamic Astronomy” how Arabic-Islamic astronomers made abstract star maps. Europe influenced the celestial maps that appeared in the 17th and 18th Century.

— Martin Brauen (Ethnographic Museum, University of Zurich) reconstructed in his “Images of the Tibetan Cosmos” the original three dimensions of cosmological conceptions of Tibetan Buddhism. The painters used a multi-polar perspective to overcome the limitations of two dimension representations.

— Marcel Watelet (Wallon Ministry of Equipment and Transportation, and History of Science Research Center at Louvain-la-Neuve University) read a paper entitled “The Maps of Constantinople and the Bosphorus at the End of the 18th Century and the Beginning of the 19th Century: Barbié du Bocage and the Diffusion of François Kauffer's Cartographical Work.” He gave an account of the meticulous ways in which city panoramas were made in Istanbul and reproduced in Europe by several cartographers.

— Johannes Thomann (Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Zurich), reviewed physiognomy theories and practices in major cultural areas (Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome, Muslim countries, India, and China). In “Sources of Physiognomy in the Middle East and Central Asia,” he noticed that the three by three squares used in Chinese physiognomy probably are related to the squares used in Islamic astrology.

— In “Papers and Maps along the Silk Road,” Jonathan M. Bloom (Boston College, Chestnut Hill) spoke on the introduction of map grids to Central Asia in the 15th Century. The use of graticules opened new ways to transmit visual information, which was first verbal and later copied down.

A final discussion led by the panel chairs concluded the conference.

Publication Plans

The papers addressed issues in the entire field of Silk Road studies. We were impressed by the quality of the scholarship, and stimulated by the diversity of perspectives. We have however remained concerned by the difficulty met in directly engaging the conference main topic — the transmission of visual knowledge. We would like to again challenge participants to do pioneering work and examine, in a truly interdisciplinary manner, how spatial representations traveled on the Silk Road. We will soon invite the conference speakers to revise their contributions according to a list of methodological questions we are putting together.

We have been in contact with RoutledgeCurzon (London, www.routledgecurzon.com), and are planning to submit a book proposal to them. Other potential publishers would be the University of Hawaii Press, which has already published the works of several of our participants in Asian studies, and the University of Chicago Press, which has a prestigious series on the history of cartography. Once we have a contract with a publisher, we will apply for grants to cover proofreading, editing and copyright costs.

Because academic presses in the UK and USA rely on the assessments made by external reviewers, we cannot expect that the conference proceedings, despite their overall high quality, will be automatically published. We will receive requests for changes in the book structure and may be asked to delete, resume

or alter several contributions. We are prepared to do a thorough editing work in order to achieve the degrees of coherence and persuasion that internationally reputable presses expect.