

Map Collections as National Treasures

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INTRODUCTION

Maps and cartographic presentations have always been highly valued, for the vital information they contain. Maps have been important to governments, companies and individuals. They have been used to defend and argue for political, military, economic and many other interests.

The development from private map production towards national topographic surveys was long and interesting in many ways. It so happened that in a number of countries government surveyors became a new element in society. They were working for a common cause, national solidarity, and not so much for individual interests such as the rights and liberties of landholders. Surveyors became agents for nation-building without always being aware of it. In other words, since national topographic surveying is an important factor consolidating national identity collections of maps, both old and new, are national treasures *par excellence*.

The development of mapping in Finland affords plenty of evidence for this view. Even if Finland, established in 1917, is rather recent an independent state, as a geographical entity it has been shown on maps as long as its neighbours. Until 1809 the country was an integral part of Sweden and was therefore included in its maps. In 1809 the status of Finland changed, which also influenced its depiction on maps.

The history of the ordnance survey in Finland starts in 1633 when a Corps of Surveyor-Geometers was organized in Sweden under the direction of Andreas Bureus (1571-1646). One of these surveyors was located in Finland. Bureus was a remarkable man. He made the famous map of Sweden of 1626, which was one of the first maps based on measurement. In addition to topographical maps, the new organization also prepared cadastral surveys. Mapping for military purposes was a different matter and was kept in other hands.

During the period of autonomy, as the period from 1809 to 1917 is called, Finland was a political entity of its own and maps were published showing only Finland. The traditions of the Swedish period were continued and the organization of the Finnish ordnance survey was developed. The emerging needs of the society meant increased production of printed maps. Not only did the number of maps increase, but also new types of maps were prepared. At the same time, Russian military mapping took place and certain types

of map were reserved for military purposes only. Although the work was in the hands of Finnish officers in the Russian service, access to these maps was reserved for Russian military needs.

Before 1809 nationalism was not a significant factor in Finland. People were citizens of their parishes and villages and not only the King but also other parts of the country were far away. During the Russian period after 1809 views changed. The big problem, however, was how to identify oneself with the country as a whole without knowing anything about circumstances beyond one's own immediate vicinity. During a time without easy communications, photography and mass media, nationhood and the feeling of solidarity with people in other parts of the large country were not apparent. Geographical knowledge had to be created and distributed. The well-known writer and professor of history and geography at the Helsinki University, Zacharias Topelius (1818-1898), was the man who contributed greatly to the creation of the Finnish identity. For nearly a century, young people read his books, and he also edited illustrated accounts of the country in which the typical Finnish landscapes were shown as beautiful drawings. An increasing number of Finns, at least among the educated classes, became aware of how their country looked, even if they had no opportunity to visit the sites they had seen in Topelius' books. Pictures depicted the country more easily than the more abstract maps. Nevertheless, very soon everybody came to know the shape of Finland on the map, resembling a young maid. It goes without saying that a relationship with a young maid is not a matter of business, but is more personal, more or less a question of love.

In 1899 the Finnish Geographical Society published the first national atlas of the world, consisting mainly of thematic maps. On the one hand, its publication illustrated the development of map-making. Topographical maps were no longer enough; geographers had to go deeper. On the other hand, the political message had become more important. Though still a part of the Russian empire, Finland wanted to show itself in the world, maintaining that there was a Finnish nation with its own culture and identity. The first edition of the atlas was on display both at the International Geographical Congress in Berlin and the World Exposition in Paris. This *Atlas de Finlande* was also well received outside Finland, and a new edition was published in 1911. Since then new editions have been published in 1925 and 1960, the fifth appearing in 1994. This edition was printed in 25 parts and may be the last of its kind. To celebrate the centenary of the atlas, a sixth edition appeared in 1999. This, however, is entirely different from its predecessors, not a scholarly publication but a reference work.

The National Atlas was a powerful political statement. A more recent example of the close relationship between maps and political (or security) issues occurred at the end of the Second World War. In October 1944 the Allied Control Commission required that all maps of the scale 1:500,000 or greater of the areas which were ceded to the Soviet Union be delivered to the Soviet Union, as well as the plates used in printing them. Only a restricted number of institutions had the right to keep their copies. Helsinki University

Library, for instance, was not among them. In a short time, about 16 million copies of maps and great number of aerial photographs, about 40 railway wagons full, were delivered. In 1989 all restrictions were lifted and the maps can now be reprinted and distributed freely. The 40 wagons have, of course, not been returned. With the help of private collectors, the Library succeeded in replacing most of the losses, actually before the limitations had officially been removed.

THE MAP COLLECTIONS OF THE HELSINKI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The map collections which are kept in Helsinki University Library, the National Library of Finland, can be divided into three main groups:

- the Finnish national collection
- collections of old (historical) maps
- research collections of foreign maps

Collections of Finnish Maps

The Library receives all maps printed in Finland as legal deposit. The size of the Finnish map collection is about 70,000 individual maps (sheets). About 900 atlases and a small number of maps of other types are also kept in the collection. About 75 % of the maps are catalogued in the Fennica database, which is the national bibliography of Finland. For cataloguing purposes, the rich collections of the Department of Geography of the University have also been consulted. Retro-cataloguing is in progress.

For obvious reasons handwritten maps is a different matter. Maps produced by the official surveyors are kept partly in the National Archives, and partly in the archives of the National Land Survey and its district offices. Military maps from the Swedish period can be found in the Military Archives (Krigsarkivet) in Stockholm.

Old Maps: The Nordenskiöld Collection

Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld (1832-1901) was a Finnish scientist, explorer and historian of cartography who made his life's work in Sweden. His personal history provides us with several highlights which are closely connected with the history of map-making. One of the reasons why Nordenskiöld became an explorer who devoted much of his time and effort to the arctic waters was connected with the project which somewhat later acquired the name "European Degree Measurement" and which was intended to measure the shape of the earth and to see whether it was flattened at the poles. Spitzbergen was chosen since triangulation had already been done on the European continent for some time and a need was felt to continue it as close to the North Pole as possible. The

Swedish scientist Otto Torell took the young Nordenskiöld with him to Spitzbergen in 1858.

During his second expedition, 1861 Torell started preparations for triangulation there. The work was continued by an expedition three years later, this time led by Nordenskiöld. Although actual triangulation was finally not undertaken, Nordenskiöld made a great contribution to the mapping of the islands. All in all he made five expeditions to Spitzbergen.¹ While sailing through the North-East Passage in 1878-1880 Nordenskiöld made important improvements to the maps of the Siberian coast. He had the latest maps of the region at his disposal; charts of the whole Siberian coastline were not available at that time. A well-known example of the accuracy, or rather inaccuracy of the existing maps was the map of the Taimyr peninsula of 1876. The route of Nordenskiöld's vessel Vega, when plotted on the map, went across the peninsula itself, because its location on the map in the east-west direction was not correct. This failure was caused by an incorrect measurement of the longitude. Although the chronometer had been invented a hundred years before, nobody since then had made new measurements in that remote region. Based on Nordenskiöld's information the German geographer August Hermann Petermann (1822-1878) published a revised map of the area in his *Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen*, thus making the information available to all.

These two examples illustrate Nordenskiöld's activities as cartographer. But he was also a historian of cartography who studied the work of cartographers before him. He devoted the last twenty years of his life to research into old maps. It has been maintained that he was actually the founder of the history of cartography. His most important historical work, the *Facsimile-Atlas*, is still being used. His main achievement was the clarification of the Ptolemaic tradition. Research into the history of cartography was also the reason why he accumulated his unique map collection. Comparative research into the history of map-making would have been impossible without a comprehensive collection in which all the necessary maps and their various editions were always available. That was not the case in libraries at that time, not even in the big ones.

In creating his collection, Nordenskiöld focused on pre-1800 maps. Instead of loose-leaf maps he wanted to purchase original volumes, which at that time was still possible. About 24,000 individual maps as well as about 500 atlases made before 1800 belong to the collection together with a large scientific library. About 4,000 of the maps were printed before 1600. The collection also contains Nordenskiöld's correspondence with booksellers and other people and institutions who were engaged in creating it, whereas Nordenskiöld's scientific archives are kept in the Royal Academy of Science in Stockholm. In Helsinki we also have the family archives, which, include the letters of Nordenskiöld to his father.²

The Nordenskiöld Collection was purchased in 1902 by the Helsinki University Library and is now one of the national cultural treasures. It is also included in the UNESCO

Memory of the World Register.³ The collection is reasonably well-known in Finland, which was demonstrated in connection with the unfortunate map theft in winter 2001. Public interest in the case was considerable and the media reported the progress of the investigations frequently. On the other hand, hardly any of the general public was aware of the real market value of the volumes of Ptolemy. The most precious map of the two, which we obviously have lost forever, was from the edition of Ptolemy of 1486. Some years before, an edition of 1482, also in the Nordenskiöld Collection, was auctioned at Sotheby for US\$ 1,267,500.

When Nordenskiöld started selling his library in 1901 he received an interesting comment from the antiquarian bookseller Muller who had helped him in building the collection: "The value of historical cartography is not yet widely enough appreciated - a scientific library, for instance, would be easier to sell. Now things are entirely different." Nevertheless, the rise in the market prices may have come as a surprise to us. We must ask ourselves whether we really understand what treasures we have been made responsible for. Today rare maps are major investments. Do we protect them properly? The original volumes should never be removed from their vault; facsimile editions or digitised copies should be used instead. Several hundred maps from the Nordenskiöld Collection have been digitised. About a hundred of them are available on the CD-ROM edition *Terra Cognita*, which was produced for a major exhibition in Helsinki in 2000.

Old Maps: The Enckell Collection

Carl Enckell (1876-1959), industrialist, diplomat and foreign minister of Finland for many years, created a remarkable collection of maps of Finland and the Nordic countries, Northern Russia and the Baltic. There are about 600 sheet maps in the collection mainly from the period before 1808, the oldest from 1493. The collection has been accumulated systematically and the top names among European and Swedish map-makers are represented. Enckell himself was an eminent authority in cartography who published a number of scholarly treatises on the history of maps. He also provided his collection with a detailed catalogue. For him maps were not merely objects of intellectual curiosity or a collector's passion. In studying his maps he was interested, among other things, in the question of how informed quarters in Europe in 17th century gradually obtained a more correct picture of the Nordic countries. But his main interest was quite obviously based on his own political career. He was a man who twice had been given the task of negotiating a peace treaty with Russia. In that connection he had to deal with the details of the border between Finland and Russia and the Soviet Union. He discovered that not only the military facts did play a role but also the old borders. For Stalin the border of Peter the Great (1721) was particularly important. It seemed to give legitimacy to his requirements. Old maps had not lost their value. In one of his articles Enckell expressed his great astonishment that it had been possible during the previous centuries to draw and adjust borders without maps.

Map Collections as National Treasures

In 1991 an interactive videodisc of the maps was produced, accompanied by a database describing them. The database was prepared by Cecilia af Forselles-Riska from the information in Enckell's own catalogue. At that stage it was still impossible to know which direction the development of this electronic medium would take, but it soon proved that videodisc technology was a dead end. On the other hand, the disc can still be used and enjoyed.

Old and New Maps: The General Research Collection

In addition to these two collections the Library's General Research Collection also contains maps: about 4,000 foreign maps, 450 atlases and a number of wall maps. Most of them are geographical, but thematic maps, charts and astronomical maps are also included. A great fire destroyed the collections of the Library in autumn 1827, when the Library was still located in Turku (Swedish: Åbo), the former capital of the country. In 1828 the Library, together with the University, was moved to Helsinki, where it had to start to rebuild its collections from the ground up. In that situation it received remarkable donations, first of all from St. Petersburg where the Emperor himself was engaged in making valuable collections available. As a matter of fact, the Library received better collections of older European literature than it had had at its disposal before the great fire. In this way the Library received a basic collection of important old maps and atlases. New items were added to it when current cartographic publications were purchased for use in the University. Much of the cartographic material in the General Research Collection is therefore more recent than that of the Nordenskiöld Collection. Today atlases are mainly bought for reference needs.

Old and New Maps: The Slavonic Collection

The Library's collections of Russian literature from the period before 1918 are internationally known as a unique source for research and scholarship. They were received as legal deposit from the large Russian empire. Foreign scholars also frequently use the collections. I have been told that during July this year (2002), while Finns were having a nice time in their summer cottages, almost all the seats of the Slavonic Library's reading rooms were occupied by foreign visitors. The Slavonic collection contains about 3,000 individual maps, 150 atlases and a number of wall maps. The Library is now trying to purchase a comprehensive collection of maps of present-day Russia.

Maps are the visible part of the collections

The collections of old historical maps have given the Library great visibility both nationally and internationally, both among experts and the general public. The Library will continue with its exhibition and publication activities. For security reasons it is also exploring the possibility of digitising the most precious parts of its map collections on a

large scale.

NOTES

1. Häkli, E.: "Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld and the charting of northern regions". In: *The Northeast Passage from vikings to Nordenskiöld*. Helsinki : Helsinki University Library, 1992. Pp. 50-89, 274-276.
2. Häkli, E.: *A.E. Nordenskiöld. A scientist and his library*. Helsinki : Helsinki University Library, 1980. 2nd printing 1990. The text is a reprint of the author's introduction to the work; Mickwitz, A. & L. Miekkaavaara: *The A.E. Nordenskiöld Collection in the Helsinki University Library. Annotated catalogue of maps made up to 1800*. Vol. 1. Helsinki 1979.
3. Memory of World Register (UNESCO):
<http://www.unesco.org/webworld/mdm/register/index.html>