

Maps and Plans Printed in Colour before 1820

Abstract for paper P16, Monday 14 July, for ICHC 2019, Amsterdam, 14–19 July 2019
<https://ichc2019.amsterdam/>

Ad Stijnman

In her article ‘From False Starts to Firm Beginnings: Early Colour Printing of Geological Maps’ (*Imago Mundi*, 1995, pp. 155–172) Karen Cook stated that ‘Geological information was first printed in colour on a map lithographed and published in Mainz in 1820 in Johann Steininger's book about the extinct volcanoes of the Eifel Plateau.’ This is not to be understood as that maps and plans in general started to be printed in colour only from then onward. Although rare, printing them in a monochromatic hue or in multiple colours including black is found from the 1490s. Sometimes the colour ink was only decorative, such as a plan showing the first printed image of the Vesuvius or a plan of the city of Paris in monochromatic red instead of black ink. In other cases the printed colour depicted seas in blue, woods in green and coats of arms around a map in their heraldic colours, not much different from the hand-colouring of maps and plans.

During the Enlightenment colour printing was more used on an epistemological base, such as for depicting rivers and crops in their original colours. In other cases the use of colour in printing more functionally indicated particular geological activities, such as earthquakes.

I am not a cartographer, besides having a good interest in maps, but study the history of printmaking techniques. I therefore want to approach the practical manners of the printing of maps and plans in colours from the point of view of my research of contemporaneous colour prints in other disciplines, such as single-leaf art prints, medical illustrations, militaria and the natural sciences. My talk would typically give an overview of the some three dozen early modern colour printed maps and plans I have found thus far – most are European, some Chinese. I would like to invite the audience to spend some time on it from their perspective as cartographers, in the good hope that more early modern colour printed will be found and their use and function better understood.

Three dozen colour printed maps over more than three centuries is not a spectacular number, but it should be exciting enough that this paragraph in the history of map making was largely overseen by students of cartography. It might also help to bridge gaps between art history, bibliography and cartography, because often the same engravers and printers produced both maps, book illustrations as well as single-leaf art prints with the same colour inks, printing processes and printing presses.