

History of Colonial Cartography

The idea of a Working Group (WG) on the History of Colonial Cartography came up in 2003. During the ICA Conference in Durban, South Africa, a group of delegates felt that sufficient interest existed in the colonial cartography of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to justify the formation of an interdisciplinary WG. Not only is this period considered the “second age of exploration” but it also constituted the formal foreign dominance of most continents and the beginning of the cartographic unveiling of those territories. The WG exists separately from the ICA Commission on the History of Cartography and has its own terms of reference. The current chairperson is Prof. Elri Liebenberg of South Africa (elri@worldonline.co.za) and co-chair is Dr Imre Josef Demhardt of Germany (demhardt@t-online.de)

The main aims of the WG are to promote and encourage the study of colonial mapping during the period from about 1800 to 1950. It will do this by establishing a database of interested researchers, encouraging co-operative activities, holding a minimum of one meeting per annum to monitor and discuss recent research work, and publishing research findings in accredited international journals. For practical reasons, the WG decided to focus on two alternating research subjects. For the period 2003-2007 Sub-Saharan Africa has been identified; Australasia has been chosen for the period 2005-2009. Members are encouraged to devote their attention to these two areas and as part of its current research programme the WG also intends to compile regional bibliographies of publications relevant to the history of colonial cartography during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Members of the WG featured prominently at the recent International Cartographic Conference in La Coruña, Spain (9th to 16th July 2005) and the International Conference on the History of Cartography in Budapest, Hungary (17th to 23rd July 2005). In La Coruña the History of Colonial Cartography was one of the conference themes and the WG was allocated three technical sessions. In Budapest members of the WG participated in a number of conference themes.

Dr Demhardt played an important role in promoting WG's aims when he curated the exhibition *Der Erde ein Gesicht geben: Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen und die Anfänge der modernen Geographie* (Giving a face to the globe: Petermann's “Geographische Mitteilungen” and the beginnings of modern geography). This ran in Gotha, Germany from 23rd June to 9th October 2005. The exhibition mainly drew on the Perthes Collections, which are the most complete publisher's archives, map collections and geographical library for study of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, next to the collections of the Royal Geographical Society.

For 2006 the WG plans a Regional Workshop on the mapping of West and Central Africa, to be held in Yaounde, Cameroon in June, and a Symposium in August hosted by the University of Utrecht in The Netherlands. The theme of the Symposium will be “Old Worlds - New Worlds” and participation will be open to cartographers, map historians, historical geographers, map librarians and map collectors. More particulars and an accompanying Call for Papers will be published on the WG website.