

Rare Map Cataloging: A Case of Special Considerations

By Joel Kovarsky and Maryke Barber

INTRODUCTION

Within the world of library catalogers, those working with maps and geospatial materials are a land apart. Extending the topographical metaphor, those working on rare map cataloging are in a remote village, only loosely connected to their more general brethren. As we start this discussion, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by 'rare map', recognizing that certain modern facsimiles and other types of map materials may be quite scarce. What we are really discussing here are old, i.e. antiquarian maps. While the definition of what constitutes an antique is open to predictable squabbles, we are, for the most part, referring to maps and related materials (such as old atlases) that predate the mid-nineteenth century. The focus here is on printed maps.

One might legitimately raise the question as to why all the fuss over old maps? They are, after all, tools reflective of scientific advancement of the times, but perhaps not worth the investments of time and money. For now, it seems as though this view prevails, at least in many quarters. Paper maps are actually on their way out in several major organizations (US Geological Survey 2006).

Our response emphasizes the importance of maps as historical documents themselves. These paper records do not simply represent scientific mapping techniques, but rather are historical documents in their own right, reflecting a wide variety of disciplines including science, art, cartography, political/social/economic history and more (Woodward, et al 1987 and onward; Wood 1992; Laxton 2001; Pedley 2005; Jacob, in press). Accurate bibliographic description is essential for the ongoing study of these important documents.

The idea that these old maps need special cataloging attention is not new. We do not know the earliest

consideration of the problem, but over six decades ago Boggs and Lewis commented (1945, 50):

Old and rare maps, similarly to old and rare books, should be described in more detail than current maps as to small particulars on the map, and details of appearance, such as kind of reproduction, color, illustrations, colophons, panels, and location of title.

Even Larsgaard's well-respected tome, *Map Librarianship. An Introduction*, makes short work of the discussion of rare cartographic materials (1998, 196-7). For example:

These are usually maps and atlases. The atlases are often facsimiles and almost always expensive; and the wise cataloger with one of these on the desk either waits for the LC [Library of Congress] to do it or uses as a pattern records LC has generated for other facsimile atlases, such as those published by Theatrum Orbis Terrarum...

Also:

...the cataloging of rare maps requires extensive knowledge of the rare-map oeuvre, and a great deal of care and attention to detail, all of which is fully justifiable in light of the value of the items involved.

Early versions of AACR2 (Anglo-American Cataloging Rules) made little mention of cataloging regulations for rare map material. There is some brief discussion of special characteristics of rare map (early cartographic) materials in Appendix G of AACR2's 2003 edition of their *Cartographic Materials* supplement (pp. G1-G8), mainly

considering the assessment of early letter forms, scale, citation forms for published descriptions of cartographic material, title access points, and reproductions. It is not a specific guide for rare map cataloging, and the main focus of the *Cartographic Materials* supplement is modern cartographic materials.

Vick & Romero (1990, 5) specifically comment that the problems in applying *Cartographic Materials* "...occur most frequently when transcribing title, statement of responsibility, and imprint information." They prefer the rules for printed texts found in *Bibliographic Description of Rare Books* (1981).

Although not specifically intended for rare map materials, Williams' 2005 article, "Where Do I Start? A Cartographic Cataloguing Code", offers some general advice that may be applicable, specifically with her mnemonic CODE: is it Cartographic?, is there Ownership?, Description, Explanation (p. 227). She notes an age-old problem in her discussion, i.e. that there will likely never be enough time to adequately catalog these materials (p. 230), even if there were general consensus on format.

Kandoian's 1999 article, "Cataloging Early Printed Maps", is far more detailed, and written with the eye of a skilled and experienced rare map cataloger. This should be no surprise, since she is the cataloger for the New York Public Library's well respected and well endowed The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division (<http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/map/map.html>). Kandoian advocates a "...step-by-step approach, rather than breaking new ground." (p. 230). Ten sample catalog records, including their MARC 21 (Machine-Readable Cataloging) tags, are appended to the paper, and the text discussion consistently refers to those examples as didactic exercises. She specifically notes:

Cataloging early maps to create standard, consistent records for library catalogs...involves, like all library cataloging, not simply following a set of rules but also making a series of decisions.

She then outlines a number of competing, and at times conflicting, factors that affect those decisions (p. 230):

1. The amount of information content vs. the level of physical detail of the individual map.

2. The unique features of the individual map vs. matching it with the appropriate and specific cartobibliographic citation.
3. Application of the general rules for cartographic cataloging vs. special rules and considerations for early material.
4. Reconciling cataloging rules for early maps with those for rare books.
5. Reconciling the desire for meticulous and detailed citation records with the desire to get a larger number of existing items into the catalog.
6. Enhancing and clarifying the map cataloging rules, so as to ease and speed the work of the cataloger vs. allowing adequate flexibility and judgment where needed.

Kandoian then goes on to discuss, in pragmatic fashion, seven major areas of early map description: title transcription, statement of responsibility, edition statement, mathematical data, publication/distribution area, physical description area, and notes. She reviews a body of cartographic literature available to guide the cataloger, albeit a literature not simply focused on simply on the mechanisms of cataloging. Robert W. Karrow's extensive works (1976, 1977, 1985) are prominently and appropriately cited.

Figures 1 and 2 give some examples of what is being discussed. Figure 1 shows a map title within a decorative cartouche. The detailed title is in French, and the cataloger must be careful with respect to the exact title entry/transcription. Figure 2 is a general map image, with an upper full title and extensive bottom notations in German. In addition, each of the four encompassed images has their own English title. Decisions must be made as to how much detail to include and how to format the catalog entry. In both cases it would be necessary, if at all possible, to determine the atlas where the map was originally published, which requires substantial knowledge of available sources.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS AND CONCERNS OF RARE MAP CATALOGERS

Given the numeric scarcity of rare map catalogers, we decided to attempt a short (uncontrolled and unvalidated) survey of people experienced in rare map cataloging, via the web. To this end, we posted our query to two major

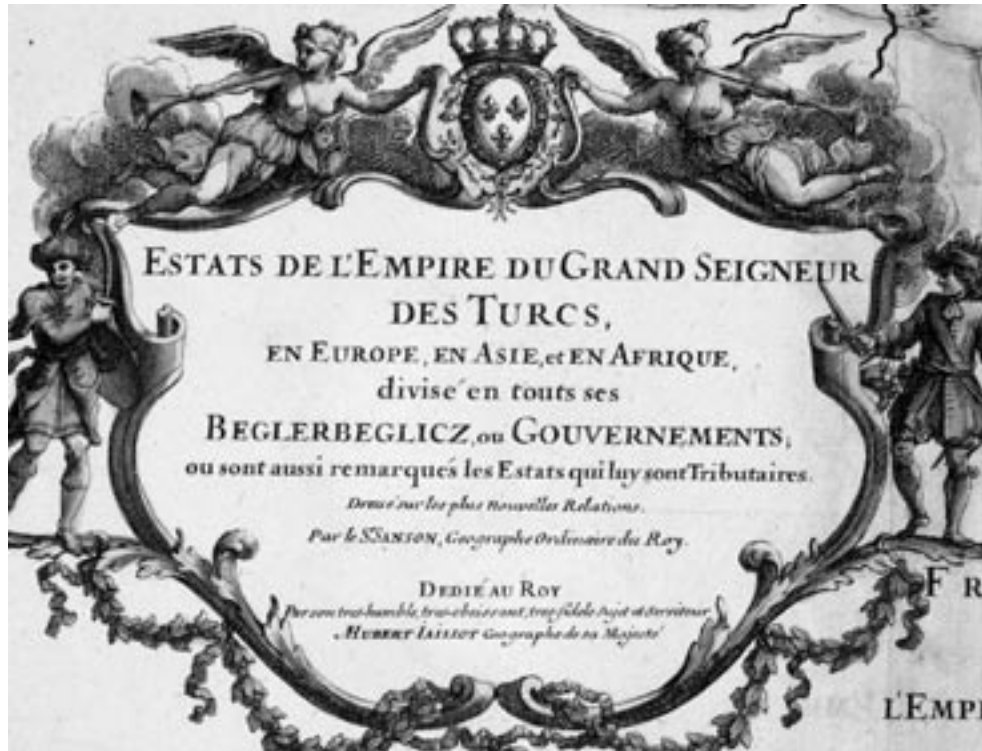
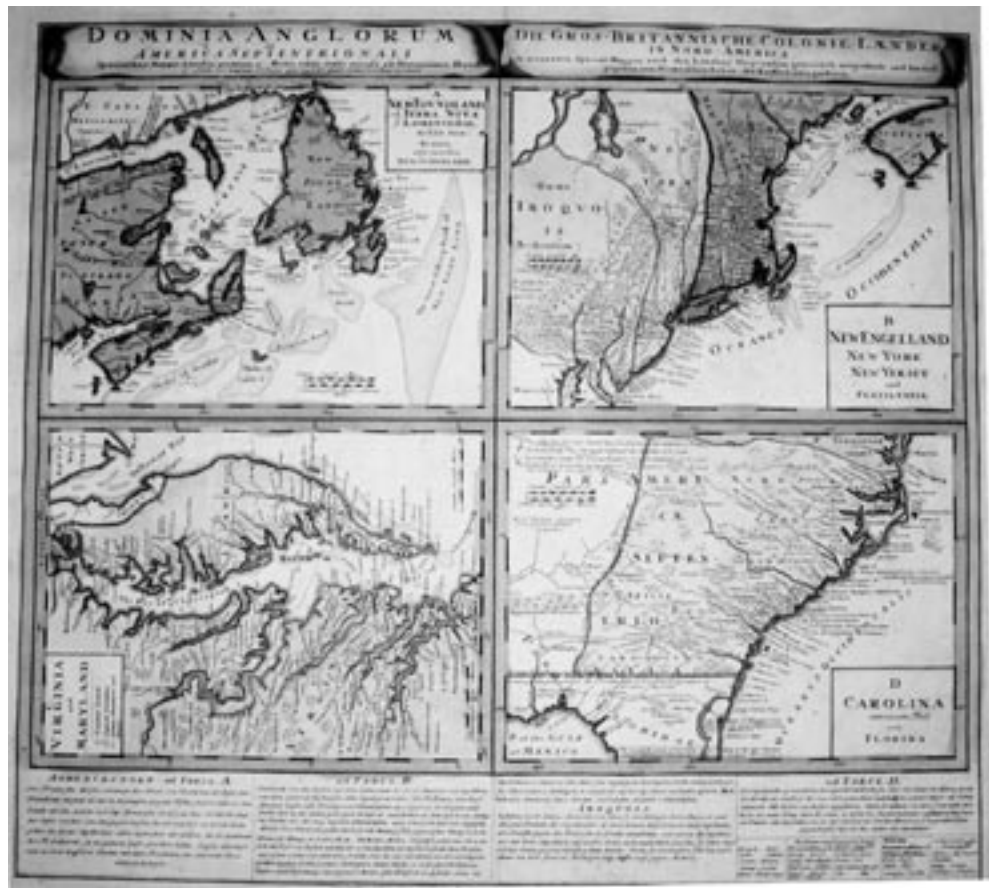


FIGURE 1: A. Jaillot. *Map of the Ottoman Empire.* ca. 1695 (detail of title cartouche)

FIGURE 2: Homann Heirs. *British Dominions in North America.* ca. 1740.



discussion lists on June 6, 2006: Maps, Air Photo & Geospatial Systems Forum (<http://www.listserv.uga.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=maps-l&A=1>) and the Map History Discussion List (<http://www.maphist.nl/>). The solicitation posted (in Joel Kovarsky's name as an active member of both lists) was:

I am writing a paper for a cataloging class, dealing with a number of issues specific to rare map cataloging. This is not a request for specific references, as I have a number of those (among which is Nancy Kandoian's 1999 article). I am, rather, interested in the two or three top perceived problems that catalogers on this list encounter when dealing with rare/antiquarian map material. For those of you willing to respond, please do so off-list, either to the private email in this header, or to Joel.Kovarsky@earthlink.net. Any thoughts would be appreciated. For those who wish it, I would be happy to share a response summary once I've completed the short project.

There were thirteen respondents (11 from the USA; 2 from Australia), all with some contact with rare map material, and several with extensive experience. As expected, there were a range of comments, reflecting the experience and experiences of the individual respondent. A few overriding concerns repeatedly surfaced:

1. The difficulties in identifying the bibliographic source of a map. Many old/rare maps were removed from atlases and other books, and tracing those origins to allow adequate bibliographic description and authority control is a sizable problem. Publishers would reissue atlases and recycle their more popular maps in separate publications, both of their own and others.
2. This ties to problem number one. There are not enough people with experience in the rare map world to allow for the existing backlog of materials to be adequately cataloged. Even in skilled hands, adequate cataloging of rare maps is often more labor intensive (hence time-consuming) than for most books.
3. The limitations imposed by the current state of cartobibliography. Some countries and historical periods have much more extensive tools than others, and language barriers pose additional problems for international consensus. The major illustrated

cartobibliographies, which are not that common, give the advantage of being able to see an image, markedly enhancing any pure bibliographic description. This type of problem is not fixable by map catalogers.

4. The problems posed by historical place-names, and how to reference these in a sensible way, tying to modern counterparts, if available.

In addition to these general concerns, a number of skilled individuals (map librarians, catalogers, dealers) offered their own individual and insightful remarks. These types of comments might not be culled from other types of surveys, prepared in advance with checklist formats.

1. "Institutional commitments to full MARC records, which are slow to produce and unnecessarily complex...I think there may be hope for a less-than-full-level MARC record (what OCLC [Online Computer Library Center] used to call 'level K')..." The latter has apparently not been applied to maps (Robert W. Karrow, Jr., personal communication, June 2006). He also mentions the "inadequacy of LCSH for subjects of topical maps".
2. "Determining the best geographic subject headings for former political entities (struggle over whether to use modern names or older ones or both, e.g., Saxony, Dakota Territory, Indian Territory)." (Philip Hoehn, personal communication, June 2006)
3. "...reading foreign languages and old style text is a challenge. German script comes to mind and of course, Latin..." (Angie Cope, personal communication, June 2006).
4. "One problem is blindly following an institution's or dealer's cataloging or even OCLC without verifying details such as size, letterpress titles, text verso, cartouches, exact wording, and in rare cases, differences in capitalization among editions." (Luke Vavra, personal communication, June 2006)
5. "I would say that title statement is one of the areas where cataloguers have a lot of problems especially when the elements of the title are scattered about the map. One decision I did not agree with was the rule devised for "Scattered title" in which the punctuation suggested is commas... Probably the mathematical data field would floor most cataloguers who have never been exposed to it before. Each of the components of scale, coordinates, and projection not

to mention prime meridian would be new concepts to most, hence the emphasis on geographical training." (Dorothy Prescott, personal communication, June 2006)

6. "I think catalogers of rare or early materials should be more sensitive and have at least a very minimal training in preservation/conservation and history of printing materials and processing; in the same manner, catalogers should be adept at using the bibliographies and become familiar with secondary & primary literatures of their respective cataloging concentration/period/*sitz im leben*." (Amy Phillips, personal communication, June 2006)
7. One skilled observer struck a note of optimism, based on a hopeful merger of online imagery coupled with careful bibliographic description. This is predicated on the observation that a high-quality visual image of a map can provide rapid and accurate information about the individual map in a form not feasible with textual description (Ian Goldsmith, personal communication, June 2006). This type of project is both ambitious and expensive, beyond the resources of most institutions.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We recognize that the opinions obtained for the preceding section are of limited scope, since many individuals from major institutions worldwide did not respond. The format of the query limited potential respondents to those frequenting the discussion lists we used. We had no respondents from the United Kingdom, continental Europe or Asia, where some difficulties and priorities may be perceived differently. Perhaps queries made directly to the major map libraries would paint a different picture (though not without its own bias).

The Internet is facilitating wider access to varied materials focused on the history of cartography, and hence calls attention to the need for accurately described original materials. Several major gateway sites exist, including Map History / The History of Cartography (<http://www.maphistory.info/>) and Oddens' Bookmarks (<http://oddens.geog.uu.nl/index.php>) One of the most striking examples of cartobibliography on the web, taking full advantage of the ability to maneuver visual images, is the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection (<http://www.davidrumsey.com/>), the result of a major digitization project begun in 1997, and built on the shoulders of an extensive historical map

and atlas collection that had begun in the early 1980s. There are even basic workshops on map cataloging (Moore & Hall 2001) and cataloging early cartographic materials (ALA Workshop 2003) available via the web. A number of magnificent cartobibliographies continue to appear in print (Burden 1996; Shirley 2004; Van der Krogt 1997 and ongoing).

A shortage of skilled catalogers, versed in the general literature of the history of cartography and geography, is a serious problem for future researches relying on these multifaceted documents. We have attempted to discuss some of the special considerations pertaining to the cataloging of these old and specialized pieces of history. Our conversations with catalogers, outlined in the prior section, lead us to the conclusion that there is no simple solution to the problems discussed herein. There will be ongoing conflict between expediency, the need to get a large volume of material cataloged into electronic records, and accurate cartobibliographic detail. This latter need will require catalogers with far more specialized background training early cartographic material. A detailed discussion of issues surrounding the subject of cartobibliography is far beyond the scope of this short article (Harley 1987).

One potential note of optimism is that as more records appear online, skilled catalogers can comment on and correct many errors. A potential downside is that fewer and less skilled catalogers (and hence researchers) will blindly copy faulty bibliographic records. As seen with the recent theft case of Forbes Smiley, lack of accurate bibliographic records can impede both the investigation and restitution of stolen materials. These latter concerns take particular hold in an era of declining library budgets, creating difficulties in maintaining and cataloging these specialized cartographic collections.

WMS member Joel Kovarsky is the owner of The Prime Meridian (www.theprimemeridian.com) and a frequent contributor to this journal. Maryke Barber is the Government Documents & Media Collection Coordinator for the Wyndham Robertson Library of Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia. Both are graduate students in the Master of Science distance education program of the School of Information Sciences, University of Tennessee (Knoxville) and completed this paper as a course requirement in that program.

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