TREASURES OF A FINNISH COLLECTOR

The Juha Nurminen Collection of World maps

Maria Grönroos

When Juha Nurminen (1946–) was fifteen his mother Laila Nurminen gave him a beautiful map as a Christmas present. It was Gerard Mercator's map of Scandinavia dating from the late sixteenth century. Juha's keen interest in the history of cartography began as teenager, and now, over fifty years later, he has one of the finest private collections of world maps, not only in Finland but worldwide.

Fig 1 Juha Nurminen is a fourth-generation family entrepreneur who has been granted various awards for his achievements in protecting the marine environment and maritime culture. He is also a third-generation Maritime Counsellor (honorary title granted by President of Finland). He is a member of the IMCoS Advisory Council.

Left Fig. 2 World map, *c.*1750, Anonymous (Persian), 320 x 410 mm. Juha Nurminen Collection. This manuscript map was copied from a Persian original by an Indian follower of Islam. Although the map does not resemble the known maps of Arab provenance, its non-Indian details largely reflect those of Arabian maps and suggest that the work is Arabic. The land area is encompassed by an ocean in a manner that corresponds to medieval ideas. Extending across the entire map is an east-west [mountain] range representing the Himalayas, Caucasus mountains and the Alps. Two hundred and twenty-one place and country names are identified against a numbered key translated into French and with descriptive annotations. Buildings are shown representing some major cities including Baghdad (14), Medina (20), Mecca (24) and Basra (25).

Relative to its size, Finland is a 'cartographic superpower'. There are several significant map collections in our country, the jewel of which is the A.E. Nordenskiöld collection included in 1977 in the UNESCO Memory of the World, but amongst private collections, the Juha Nurminen Collection of World Maps is one of the foremost in Finland. It is unique because it is so well preserved, so meticulously catalogued and what is most important to Juha as a collector, is that the collection is a harmonious selection of the history of printed European world maps. It is also essential that the maps have been carefully studied and used as a source for many printed publications concerning the history of cartography, seafaring and explorations.[1]

Juha Nurminen curiosity in maps may have been awakened on Christmas Eve in 1961, but collecting maps was already a family tradition: his father Matti Nurminen (1911–2000) was a collector who often brought home precious antique maps from his extensive travels abroad. His collecting did not follow any strict guidelines, however, as a member of the John Nurminen shipping and forwarding company family, sea charts were naturally of interest to him.[2] On business trips to Paris in the early 1930s, Matti purchased his first maps from the *bouquinistes*, traders in old books and prints along the River Seine. The first maps that roused his interest were maps of the regional waters of Finland, drawn by the French hydrographer Jacques Nicolas Bellini.

Initially, Juha continued in his father's footsteps, collecting maps mostly of the Nordic area, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic. The collection grew to hundreds of items, which later were, by donation, transferred to the John Nurminen Foundation.[3] As a result, the Foundation now holds one of the world's most comprehensive collections of sea charts of the Baltic Sea.

Tragically, Matti Nurminen's map collection was almost completely destroyed in a fire in 1982; after this incident Juha decided to concentrate on collecting printed world maps. Today, the Nurminen world map collection features 150 individual world maps, of which nine are large wall maps and eighteen miniature

A PLAT of all the
WORLD.
Nova Zemla
Asia
Africa
America
Virginia
Tropicus
Tropicus
Canaria
Mare Caspium
Euxin Sea
Holandia Nova
Cabo de Buona Esperanza
Cape Comorin
Madagascar
Cape Verde
Cape Bonadore
Cape Blanco
Cape Bona Esperanza
Cape Lopez
Cape Negro
Cape Corrientes
Cape Frio
Cape Gallegos
Cape Horn
Cape Mala
Cape Tiburon
Cape Sta Helena
Cape Sta Marta
Cape Sta Maria
Cape Sta Lucia
Cape Sta Cruz
Cape Sta Anna
Cape Sta Catharina
Cape Sta Ysabel
Cape Sta Ana
Cape Sta Fe

Fig. 4 Girolamo Ruscelli, 'Carta Marina Nuova Tavola', Venice 1561, 185 x 240 mm. Juha Nurminen Collection. One of the first sea charts to depict the whole world was published in Girolamo Ruscelli's Ptolemy miniature atlas in Venice in 1561. The map has many interesting features depicting Asia and America as one continent and a land connection between Europe and America. In the Northeast the Montagna Verde appears just below an isthmus that connects to Greenland and then onto Scandinavia. It includes one of the earliest depictions of California as a peninsula and Florida.

maps. The scope of the collection covers some 500 years, dating between 1477 and 1914. It also includes ten globes and 22 atlases and several other rare books on cosmography, cartography and navigation which contain world maps. Although the collection is mostly based on European maps, Japanese, Chinese, Persian and Korean maps present the non-European viewpoint (Fig. 2).[4]

The uniqueness of the Juha Nurminen Collection lies in the number and quality of its early maps. Juha has managed to acquire an example of both the first and second ever printed world maps of Ptolemy: the Bologna 1477 and the Rome 1478. Amongst the collection of incunables are also the 1486 Ulm edition of Ptolemy and two works by Hartmann Schedel dating to 1493 and 1496. Ptolemy's Ulm (1482/1486), purchased a few years ago, was the last item to be added to the collection. This incunable is a special piece not only because of its rarity but because it is the first representation of Scandinavia. Moreover, it is an excellent companion to the Nicolaus Germanus map of Scandinavia of the same period, which also belongs to the Foundation.

The sixteenth century is well represented by such maps as Bernand Sylvanus' cordiform map of 1511 and Sebastian Münster's / Hans Holbein's 'Typus

Opposite Fig. 3 Edward Wright and Joseph Moxon, 'A Plat of all the World / Projected according to the truest Rules / Being far more exact than either the Plain-Card / or the Maps of the World described in two Rounds / First set forth by Mr Edw. Wright And now newly corrected / and inlarged with many New Discoveries by Jos. Moxon / And Sold at his Shop in Cornhill at the Sign of the Atlas, London, 1655'. (1657), 520 x 770 mm. Juha Nurminen Collection. The map is one of the very earliest to present Mercator's projection. It was first published in 1599 in Wright's *Certain Errors in Navigation detected and corrected by Edw. Wright* in which he explained the mathematical basis of the Mercator projection.

ETHIOPIA INTERIOR
CAPRICORNVS
CIRCVLVS
LIBIA INTERIOR
MARE
INDIA
TERRA INCOGNITA
CIRCVLVS SANCTI
LONGITVDO ELVS STADIORVM
PORTVNATE INSVLA

Cosmographicus Universalis' of 1532. From the seventeenth century are gems such as Philip Eckebrecht's 'Nova Orbis Terrarum' (1658) and Edward Wright's / Joseph Moxon's 'A Plat of all the World' (1657). The Dutch Golden Age is well represented by the great mapmakers of Ortelius, Mercator, Hondius and Blaeu. Examples of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century world maps demonstrate the new science and technology available to mapmakers and the distant corners of the globe that were being discovered and mapped. Among these are Edmund Halley's 'Nova et Accutarissima Totius Terrarum' (*c.*1730), the large-scale 'Le Globe Terrestre' (*c.*1750) by Jean Baptiste Nolin, Aaron Arrowsmith's 'Map of the World' of 1794 and 'Imperial Federation' (1886) by Walter Crane.

Miniature world maps also feature in the collection. It was Rodney Shirley who first encouraged Juha to collect them. They met in 1985 at the IMCoS Symposium in Helsinki, and Juha remembers how Rodney Shirley advised him to collect miniature world maps, which then were much more expensive than they are today. "I had a warm memory of Shirley, he was very helpful and sympathetic to a younger collector like me," Juha concludes. Among these miniature maps one of his favourites is the 'Carta Marina Nuova Tavola' (1561) by Girolamo Ruscelli (Fig. 4).

Maps in the collection were acquired mostly from antiquarian bookshops and auctions in London, Amsterdam, Paris and Vienna. Up to the early 1990s, before a global, digital market for maps was created on the Internet, map collecting was exciting detective work. For Juha it was fascinating to rummage through the storerooms of dealers, making surprising discoveries at times.

One of the most memorable days for Juha as a collector occured almost ten years ago when he secured the Bologna Ptolemy (1477), the world's first printed world map. It is the only known single sheet copy of the map. When Finland hosted the ICHC (International Conference on the History of Cartography) in 2013, it was this map that aroused most discussion and speculation when conference participants visited the Nurminen Collection in Helsinki (Fig. 5).

Over the years, the monetary value of many of the maps purchased in the early period of Juha's collecting career has multiplied. But he reminds us: 'The enchantment of a collection does not lie in its commercial aspects. Many maps that are commercially less valuable are just as important for the collection to complete it as an entity. It has to be admitted, though, that the acquisition of some exceedingly rare maps has been on a personal level extremely pleasurable'.

The collection, which over the past fifty years has been compiled with great thought, cared for with love and studied enthusiastically, is now complete. Its future is undecided, it might be sold one day.

Opposite Fig. 5 Claudius Ptolemy, World map, Bologna 1477, 350 x 530 mm. Juha Nurminen Collection. The first printed world map is the crown jewel of the collection and acquiring this piece was a personal triumph for Juha Nurminen. This map must have been excised from one of the 500 copies printed of the *Cosmographia* printed by Dominico de' Lapi. It was the first atlas in which the maps were engraved on copper plates using the newly acquired German technique. The project was hastily prepared as Bologna was in competition with a parallel printing in Rome overseen by the German printing master Konrad Sweynheym. As a result the first printed atlas is peppered with typographical errors and crude engraving and was quickly superseded by the Rome edition that came out a year later.

Notes

1 For example, see Marjo T. Nurminen, *The Mapmakers' World. A Cultural History of the European World Map*. John Nurminen Foundation and The Pool of London Press, 2015. The book has been translated into several different languages and received many awards including the Royal Geographical Society's Fordham Award for collaborative research and writing on the cultural history of mapping.

2 The Nurminen family business was established in Rauma in 1886, when Johan Matinpoika, the great-grandfather of Juha Nurminen, set up a store selling timber, ship supplies, and imported goods. Johan gave up farming and moved from the Rauma rural commune to the city of Rauma. In connection with the move, Johan began using the name Johan Nurminen. In 1891, Johan Nurminen commissioned the construction of the schooner *Uljas* and became a shipping entrepreneur.

3 The John Nurminen Foundation was established in 1992 by Juha to safeguard the cultural heritage of Finnish seafaring and maritime history and the marine environment. The cultural activities of the Foundation focus on the history of seafaring, exploration and cartography, and on disseminating information on these topics to the general public. The Foundation has a publishing arm and lend items from the collection to exhibitions.

4 A catalogue *Juha Nurminen Collection of World Maps* was published in 2013 and is available to purchase from the John Nurminen Foundation, maria.gronroos@jnfoundation.fi.

References

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