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Maps on Stamps

A map is usually a reproduction of the whole or a part of the Earth drawn to scale in two dimensions. As the shape of the Earth is approximately a sphere, it is not possible to portray that sphere without some form of deformation when it is projected on a flat plane, such as a map. Thus, each map is a compromise between true shape and faithful representation of distance on the Earth's surface.

Map projections

Depending on the purpose and the part of the Earth that is being shown, it is necessary to choose a map projection which matches

the requirements of the final design. When maps are shown on stamps, the projection used is critical only when the entire world or a wide area is being depicted.

When most people think of a world map they usually visualize an image of the world using the so-called Mercator projection (1)

However many other projections suitable for world maps exist, such as elliptical projections (2), interrupted projections (3) and azimuthal projections, where the North or South Pole is in the middle – commonly used in the UN symbol (4). Even combined forms and other exceptional projections are used such as the Van der Grinten projection (5).

Old maps on stamps

The earliest known maps were made by the Babylonians around 3800 BC. Ptolemy's *Geographia* was one of the first map compilations made. However, it was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that the production of maps flourished in Europe, as a result of the voyages of discovery. Muslim culture was also focused on geography and cartography, as shown in Al Idrisi's *Tabula Rogeriana* from 1154 (6). The first map where the word "America" was used was the *Waldseemüller Map* of 1507 (7). The *Cantino planisphere* from 1502 is the earliest known map detailing Portuguese expeditions and discoveries (8).

Maps from that period were not only made for practical navigation but also served as decorative works. Stamps portraying these type of designs look beautiful and many countries have produced such issues.



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Despite having a long and historic cartographic tradition, the Netherlands have only issued a few stamps with map themes. One issue (9) shows a world map from the Citizens Hall in Amsterdam's Royal Palace, issued in 1997.

A small, but special category is reserved for stamps depicting paintings that contain old maps.

Virtually all of these stamps are paintings by Vermeer. For example, in "Woman in Blue Reading a Letter," (10) the map in the background is of Balthasar Florisz of Berckenrode (1620).

The only other example of a map depicted in a painting on a stamp, painted by an artist other than Vermeer, is, to the best of my

knowledge, a stamp from Fujeira of a painting by Pieter de Hooch, "Woman Drinking with Two Men," (11) where a map of Holland can be seen on the wall in the painting.

Border disputes

One of the most exciting topics related to maps on stamps is the issue of border disputes. Over the



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between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932-1935). The Chaco War was the bloodiest conflict between the two world wars, and was fought for control of the supposedly oil-rich Chaco region. The claims of both countries were unceremoniously shown on their stamps. On Bolivian stamps the area was marked "*Chaco Boliviano*" (12), and on Paraguayan stamps (13), the slogan "*The Chaco is Paraguayan and always will be*" was inscribed.

Ultimately, Bolivia gave up most of the Chaco region to Paraguay (14). The Chaco was the final piece of territory lost since Bolivia's defeat in the "Saltpeter War" (1879-1883) while fighting with Peru against Chile. For Bolivia the outcome meant losing its coastal province to Chile and becoming a landlocked country (15).

In the first sixty years of the twentieth century, Venezuela claimed a large part of Guyana known as "*Essequibo*." Venezuela emphasized its claims to Essequibo by issuing stamps using various old maps, (16) trying to prove that the Essequibo region belonged to Venezuela. Guyana in turn then issued a series of map stamps, that were originally revenue issues, imprinted with the slogan "*Essequibo is ours*" (17).

Another unresolved border dispute in South America exists between Guyana and Suriname. Suriname argues that because of erroneous boundary demarcation in the past, a region in the southwest Tigris or the New River Triangle, (18) actually belongs to Suriname. Almost every stamp from Suriname contains a map showing its claimed border. However, on each map stamp from Guyana, the same region is shown as belonging to Guyana.

In a similar case stamps from Haiti and the Dominican Republic (19) were indirectly the cause of a border dispute. That conflict continued to be "fought" on stamps by the two countries for some years. On various stamps from

Haiti (20), the Dominican Republic was not shown.

Border disputes between some countries in Central America are also depicted on stamps. The cause of these disputes can be traced back to colonial times when all of these countries were provinces in the Spanish empire. At the time, the need for precise determination of boundaries was not a high priority in regions that were difficult to access.

Other fine examples of stamps with border disputes are the claims by several countries to Antarctica (Figures 21a through 21e). These countries are Great Britain, Argentina, Chile, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, and France. All of these countries are either located in the closest proximity to Antarctica or were involved in exploration on the polar continent. The most complicated situation occurs on the Antarctic Peninsula. It should be noted, however, that ownership claims in Antarctica are forbidden by the Antarctic Treaty.

From Antarctica we move to the Middle East, where there are a number of stamp issues containing maps relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first stamps that address this topic were issued by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) immediately before the proclamation of the State of Israel and were postally used in Palestine (22). These stamps depict the plan for the division between the Jewish and the Arab areas as proposed by the United Nations in 1947. Over the years, all Arab countries and Iran have issued stamps showing Israel and the Occupied Territories as a single region along with the word "*Palestine*" in English and in Arabic (23).

Definitive stamps

Another category of map stamps are definitive series that have a map design. These stamps are primarily used for the actual reason they were made – namely to post letters and other articles.

years, many border disputes have been "fought" on stamps. One example was the Chaco War



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21a

21b



21c

21d

21e





Some representative examples of definitive series are the stamps from Reunion (24a), and those of the former Portuguese colonies (24b), Australia (24c), Panama, Bahrain, India, and more recently Iran (24d) and Mayotte. Definitive stamps are typically issued in great numbers, and because of this, occasional variations and rarities occur. Examples of such rare issues are the map stamps from Gabon, issued during 1993 and 1994, (24e). In addition are a few stamps from St. Vincent and the green 20 cents from Mayotte (25) that was sold on the island for only a few weeks. The Mayotte variation was only discovered

when the original stamps were no longer on sale.

British Commonwealth countries have long issued definitive series and while most sets have map stamps, the map theme is normally limited to only one or two stamps in each set.

Separate maps

Another interesting category of maps exist in the “gutters” or non denomination strips of paper between groups of stamps in a sheet. The problem with collecting this category is that they are quite difficult to find. Often there are no maps on the actual

stamps and they are seldom described in catalogs as having any type of map motif, let alone information about the gutters.

Beautiful examples of sheets with “gutter” maps include certain issues from French Polynesia (26), various stamps that marked the 21st birthday of Princess Diana issued by a number of British colonies (27), and also a number of sheets issued by the Falkland Islands (28) feature detailed “gutter” maps.

In addition to “gutter” maps similar images can be found in the edges or “selvage” of a number of

sheets. One important example of selvaže containing a map design can be found on the German Waldseemüller sheets (37).

Some of the most beautiful stamps in the world depicting maps include the issues of the

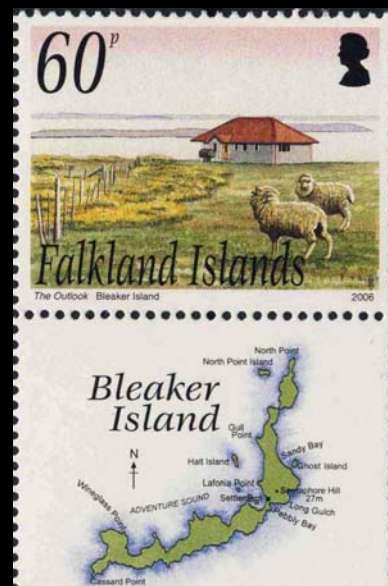
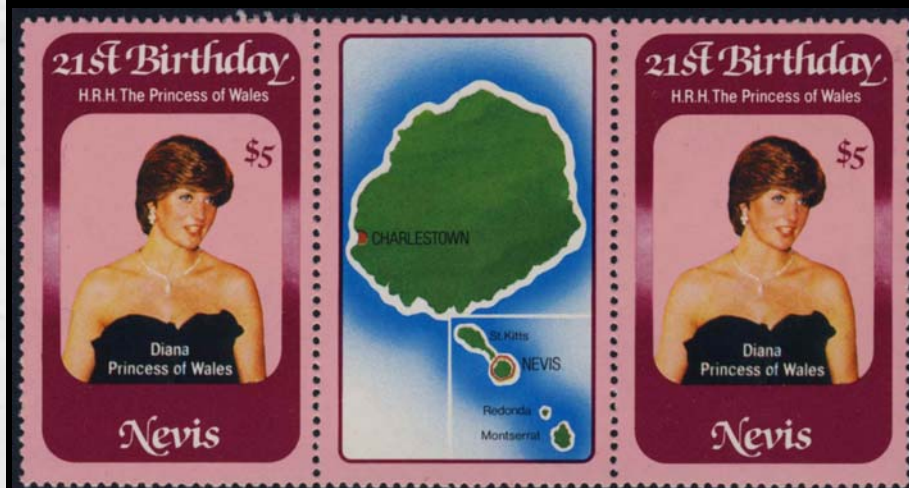
Comoros, Territory of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands (TAAF) (29), and Wallis and Futuna (30). These engraved stamps were issued by France during the 1970s and could be considered a kind of claim or confirmation of sovereignty.

After gaining independence from France in 1975, issues from the Comoros were overprinted with "Etat Comorien." Remarkably, a stamp with a map of Mayotte also appeared with the same overprint (31) even though the island remained under French rule, only



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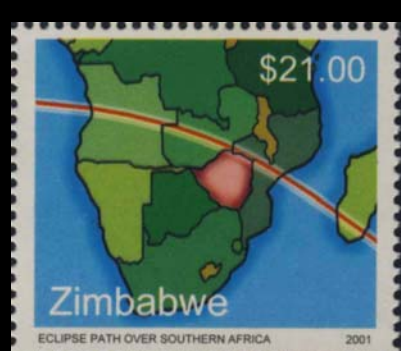
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recently becoming a French Overseas Department in March 2011.

Many collectors are familiar with Latvia's first 5 k stamps issued just after World War I when, in the absence of paper, they were printed on the back of German topographic maps (32). This topic in itself, has become a specialized collecting area. Similar to the aforementioned Latvia issue, although not officially issued, there are stamps from the Ukraine that were also printed on topographic maps. Even in modern times, a number of issues from Tonga have an ocean chart printed on the backing of the adhesive stamp sheets.

Sierra Leone was the first nation to issue self-adhesive stamps in an unusual shape. The first issue of self-adhesive seals were in the form of a map (33). Subsequent issues were sometimes cut in the outline of the country (Sierra Leone), and there are other issues cut in the shape of the African continent (34).

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Another interesting area of collecting are maps in combination with other themes such as transportation, exploration, lighthouses (35) and eclipses (36) to name just a few.

There are many rewarding possibilities for assembling a collection of maps on stamps, and when combined with a specialized subject or theme, many more unique possibilities are awaiting to be discovered.

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Biography

In addition to being a cartophilatelist, Mark Honig is also an avid eclipse hunter, and is currently the vice president of the CartoPhilatelic Society.
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