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Notes and Discussions

Critical Note: *Representations of the continents by means of allegorical figures in the early modern period. (Bodies and Maps: Early Modern Personifications of the Continents*, edited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz and Louise Arizzoli, Brill, Leiden 2020)

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Abstract. In the early modern period, the representation of the continents by means of allegorical figures enjoyed great popularity. The book *Bodies and Maps: Early Modern Personifications of the Continents*, edited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz and Louise Arizzoli, is very stimulating, richly documented and fundamental with regard to the detailed source-critical examination of concrete individual visualisations of the continents. The focus of the book rather lies with the 16th century, while part 5 focuses on the 18th century. In the 18th century, continent allegories entered into the public sphere and reached broader strata in the society. In this century, Eurocentrism progressed considerably, but did not invent it. The volume's co-authors pose the question of Eurocentrism as well as that of racism with regard to the late Middle Ages and the 16th century. Because of their widespread use, continent allegories can be counted among the most important primary sources from which we can draw conclusions about how extra-European cultures could be represented, interpreted and viewed from a European perspective. They represent much more than just an art-historical source, they are, especially when one thinks of their accessibility in public spaces for everyone, actually a historical source of the first rank, behind which not least travelogues and theoretical concepts such as the history of civilisation as a universal history compete with the Christian history of salvation in the Bible.

Keywords. Continent Allegories, Eurocentrism, Racism, Gender History, Modern and Art History.

In the 18th century, the representation of the continents by means of allegorical figures enjoyed great popularity. We find these allegories as frescoes in castles and villas, in churches and monasteries, they adorn facades, fountains and gardens as sculptures, they were a popular subject for porcelain figures and porcelain painting, they are found in frontispieces and more generally in prints, they were painted in oil on canvas or wood, we encounter them in elab-

orately woven tapestries, they were placed as terracotta figures on mantelpieces. The list could be continued.

Continent allegories were by no means aimed only at the educated and scholars. In southern Germany they can be found in well over 100 village churches, and in towns they were easily accessible to the general public, to passers-by, as fountain and façade figures¹.

In many cases, the representation of the continents was not limited to four allegorical figures; rather, entire civilisations were depicted. The most famous example of this is the staircase fresco by Giambattista Tiepolo in the staircase of the prince-bishop's residence in Würzburg (Lower Franconia, today Bavaria)², which he created with two of his sons in 1752–53 and which covers more than 600 m².

For the sake of simplicity, let us stick to the term continent allegory. In the 18th century, we are actually always talking about four continents, between which a hierarchy is usually also assumed: Europe, Asia, Africa, America or Europe, Asia, America, Africa. This group of four emerged in the 16th century and manifested itself as a coherent group of four for the first time in the frontispiece of Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* of 1570³.

In the 16th century, it was possible to fall back on ancient continent allegories with regard to Europe, Asia and Africa (Libya), the pattern (personification with easily recognisable attributes) was then transferred to the allegory for America.

Continent allegories are still being produced today. The most recent exploration of this theme is by the Canadian painter Kent Monkman, who sees his four continent paintings as a response to Tiepolo⁴. In Vienna, the painter Maître Leherb created six large-format faience pictures (Arctic/Antarctica, Australia, Africa, America, Asia, Europe) for the new building of the Uni-

versity of Economics between 1980 and 1992, which one inevitably passes on the way to the lecture hall⁵. The 20th century offers countless examples of continent allegories, as did the 19th century. The advent of world exhibitions in the second half of the 19th century gave continent allegories a new popularity. They illustrated world trade, worldwide postal traffic or the just developing telecommunications, they stand in front of or at libraries and museums, and not only in the 'Old World' but also in the 'New World', as the example of New York (in front of the National Museum of the American Indian) shows⁶.

The 18th century and the Enlightenment stand in the middle of this history of continent allegories, which stretches from the 16th century to the present day. It goes without saying that the artistic visualisation of the continents changed again and again, and with it their semantics. And it goes without saying that the visualisation of other continents or other non-European regions was practised not only in antiquity but also in the Middle Ages.

Even though the first attempts to standardise the four continent allegories were made in 1570 with the aforementioned frontispiece by Ortelius and the first, as yet unillustrated, edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* in 1593, this was only a moderately successful endeavour. Allegories are usually female, but the continents were also represented by men from the beginning. In the 18th century, despite models and schools of painting, the creative freedom was great: one finds four women, four men, four couples and all kinds of mixed-gender variants. Africa and America often resemble each other, the attributes that actually belong to each are sometimes exchanged or simply confused. If in the 16th century the visualised hierarchy of relations between continents was based on domination and Christianity, in the Enlightenment it tended to follow the concept of the history of civilisation, which passed through different stages from the invention of fire to the highest progress of the human spirit. In this scheme, America (or sometimes Africa) represented the first and lowest stage in the history of civilisation, Europe the highest and last. But since the path to the highest stage was in a sense prescribed and inevitable, the implicit message was that non-European cultures also progressed along this path.

¹ See the database < <https://erdteillallegorien.univie.ac.at/> > (6/2022). Project leader: Wolfgang Schmale; main collaborators: Marion Romberg, Josef Köstlbauer. In addition see: *The Language of Continent Allegories in Baroque Central Europe*, ed. by W. Schmale, M. Romberg and J. Köstlbauer, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2016. See also W. Schmale, *La représentation de l'humanité. Les allégories peintes 'al fresco' des «quatre parties du monde» au XVIII^e siècle*, «Diciottesimo Secolo», 3, 2018, pp. 175-185, < <https://doi.org/10.13128/ds-23071> > (6/2022).

² <https://erdteillallegorien.univie.ac.at/#/erdteillallegorien/wuerzburg-wuerzburg-fuerstbischoefliche-residenz-treppenhaus> (6/2022).

³ <https://www.deutsches-museum.de/forschung/bibliothek/unserschaeetze/reisen/theatrum-orbis-terrarum> (6/2022).

⁴ Cf. K. Monkman, *The Four Continents*, Black Dog Press, London 2017 (catalogue of the allegoric paintings and essays). A complete list of Monkman's paintings is to be found here: <https://www.kentmonkman.com/painting> (6/2022). Forthcoming: W. Schmale, *Kent Monkman's Four Continents (2012–2016) – A 21st-Century Answer to Giambattista Tiepolo's Four Continents (1752/53)*, in *Controversial Monuments: Continent Personifications from the 18th to the 21st century*, ed. by L. Arizzoli, M. C. Horowitz and M. Romberg, Brill, Leiden 2023.

⁵ See W. Schmale, *David's Member or Eurocentrism and Its Paintings in the Late Twentieth Century. The Example of Vienna*, in *Eurocentrism in European History and Memory*, ed. by M. Broelsma, R. de Bruin and Matthijs Lok, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2019, pp. 105-120.

⁶ Cf. *Bodies and Maps: Early Modern Personifications of the Continents*, ed. by M.C. Horowitz and L. Arizzoli, Brill, Leiden 2020, chpt. 1, p. 9, fig. 1.4.

Despite this hierarchy in the history of civilisation, continent allegories were not the genre that would have been used to visualise racist views. When frescoes were in village, pilgrimage and monastery churches, the superiority of the Christian religion over other religions, especially Islam, was depicted. Mostly, they are conversion scenes or the veneration of the heart of Jesus by the four continents in a peaceful commonality. The Christian continent allegories adhered to the principle of the unity of mankind because this principle was derived from the biblical story of creation.

Because of their widespread use, continent allegories can be counted among the most important primary sources from which we can draw conclusions about how extra-European cultures could – could, not had to – be represented, interpreted and viewed. They represent much more than just an art-historical source, they are, especially when one thinks of their accessibility in public spaces for everyone, actually a historical source of the first rank, behind which not least travelogues and theoretical concepts such as the history of civilisation as a universal history compete with the Christian history of salvation in the Bible.

The value of continent allegories as historical sources has only really been recognised in recent times. The special attraction of research on and with continent allegories is, of course, the close connection between general history and art history. These allegories can only be understood if one deals with semiotics, communication theory, public sphere and various theories such as ‘Othering’.

In this context, various new research projects have been carried out in recent years, which are also increasingly networking with each other. The book to be reviewed here, *Bodies and Maps. Early Modern Personifications of the Continents* represents an important contribution in this context.

The 15 chapters cover a long period – from the Middle Ages to the first half of the 20th century⁷. The frontispiece by Ortelius forms a kind of basso continuo, as most of the chapters refer to it. Maryanne Cline Horowitz deals with this pictorial work in detail in her introduction (chpt. 1) and her contribution on *Exotic Female (and Male) Continents: Early Modern Fourfold Division of Humanity* (chpt. 4).

The frontispiece is distinguished by a special feature, as it not only depicted the four continents as a group for the first time, but also (at the bottom right, next to the reclining and naked America holding up the cut-off head of a European) shows a fifth allegory depicting

Tierra del Fuego or Magellanica or terra australis (this was not Australia). The allegory refers to Magellan’s descriptions of the circumnavigation of the southern cape of the Americas (Cape Horn). However, this feature did not have a canon-forming effect. It was not until the 19th century that five continents were depicted instead of four, with the fifth continent being Australia and not Magellanica sive terra australis.

The frontispiece by Ortelius is the starting point for a multitude of questions. What does the way in which the bodies of the female allegories were designed tell us? Can any concepts of race be inferred from the hand-colouring of the frontispiece? What identities were ascribed to the continents by means of the allegories and the attributes as well as other design features? Such questions run through all the chapters of the book.

The individual chapters deal with the best-known continent allegories of the early modern period, some of them very detailed and source-critical, but also with lesser-known representations. The approximately 150 illustrations are extremely helpful and form almost a *Who’s Who?* of early modern artists who produced continent allegories. Admittedly, most of the continent allegories were made for the elite, not for the people. Only chapter 12 on continent allegories in village churches in Bavaria, written by Marion Romberg with a focus on the 18th century, focuses on the broader population⁸, to whom the unity of humankind was brought before their eyes – a unity that resulted from the common worship of the Christian God, which in turn was due to the missionary activities of the Catholic missionary orders. This is the plot of many representations in a nutshell. In Protestant churches, such continental scenes were rarer, but did occur.

A number of examples refer to walk-in places. These are the Camposanto in Pisa (chpt. 7) with its frescoes essentially from the 14th century⁹, the Sala del Mappamondo from the last third of the 16th century in the Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola (chpt. 8)¹⁰ and the Citizens’ Hall (Koninklijk Paleis) in Amsterdam from the 17th century (chpt. 4)¹¹. Tiepolo’s continent allegories in the staircase of the Würzburg Residenz from the middle

⁸ M. Romberg, *The Visible Church. The Discourse on an Ecclesia Triumphans and the Four Continents in Parish Churches of Baroque Southern Germany*, in Horowitz and Arizzoli (ed. by), *Bodies and Maps*, cit., pp. 275-312.

⁹ H.A. Haakenson, *Casting the Continents: Sacred History and Spiritual Odyssey in the Camposanto of Pisa*, *idem*, pp. 159-190.

¹⁰ E.A. Daniele, «Portraits of the World» – *The Four Continents at Palazzo Farnese in Caprarola: The Figurative Code, Sources and Comparisons*, *idem*, pp. 191-214.

¹¹ M.C. Horowitz, *Exotic Female (and Male) Continents: Early Modern Fourfold Division of Humanity*, *idem*, pp. 67-98.

⁷ See the table of contents: <https://brill.com/view/title/39485> (6/2022).

of the 18th century are only treated in passing, although this place must be considered a prime example of a walk-in room that was furnished with enormous representations of the earth. One could add gardens such as those at Herrenhausen Palace near Hanover, also 18th century, but these are not examined in the book. In any case, there was a tradition, beginning in the Middle Ages, of furnishing publicly (or partially publicly) accessible sacred or secular rooms with representations of the respective known parts of the earth.

In the case of the Camposanto in Pisa, it was based on biblical stories whose setting was the Mediterranean, but extended across North Africa, the Middle East and Southern Europe. In the Middle Ages and early modern period, the story of the Magi also offered a starting point for representing three continents, whereby the third king was only gradually imagined as black, as African (chpt. 6)¹². In the context of the Magi, it would have been useful if there had been a chapter on the nativity scenes elaborately produced in 18th century Naples: there, as the collection in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich shows, the three kings were equipped with numerous entourages. The entourage of the black king consists of many muscular, detailed carved figures¹³, on the basis of which the question of the existence or not of racial categories could be discussed. Such nativity scenes were seen by many more people than frescoes in palaces and monasteries.

The chapters of the book clearly emphasise that maps and, literally, embodiments of parts of the earth were developed together. This is already true of those medieval world maps in which the earth fills the body of Christ, as in Pisa. Ortelius' frontispiece introduces his famous atlas and communicates with the world map and other texts. In the Sala del Mappamondo, the four continent allegories are added; in Amsterdam, one walks across the world map of the marble floor. Walking through rooms with world maps and personifications of the continents refers the visitor himself to his physicality and thus takes him into the representation and the action, as in Pisa and Würzburg.

It is not possible to deal with every chapter in this Critical Note, but it should be underlined that all are of very high quality and scholarly in the best sense of the word. However, from the point of view of source criticism, a few comments need to be made. This refers less

to the material and art historical analyses, but more to the historical contextualisations.

En passant, it should be mentioned that the woodcut by Johannes Putsch mentioned by Michael Wintle¹⁴, which depicts the continent of Europe in the form of a female ruler, has since been re-dated: Previously it was assumed that only one copy of the woodcut had survived; it is the copy in the Tyrolean Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck (Tyrol/Austria). It is dated 1537. In the meantime, however, an older version has been discovered in the Retz City Museum in the Weinviertel region of Lower Austria (Austria), which was produced in 1534¹⁵. This print also contains the lament belonging to the woodcut, which Peter Meurer had already pointed out¹⁶.

The following source-critical aspects would need to be discussed further: the book correctly points out that frontispieces like Ortelius' were printed in black and white and later coloured by hand. This is where it gets exciting: some publishers gave instructions on how to colour. Did Ortelius give such instructions or not? The comparability of the numerous coloured copies of the frontispiece depends on this. Depending on the copy, the colouring of Africa is lighter or darker, i.e. it does not differ, hardly differs or differs more clearly from that of America – and vice versa! Is this significant? The colouring by hand, if it was not done in the print shop according to certain specifications, was done on behalf of the owners. Was influence exerted? Who coloured? And when actually? 1570 or perhaps only (much) later?

These questions are difficult to answer, since at most letters, diaries or similar ego documents could contain information, if that had been considered important by contemporaries. In any case, behind every copy of the frontispiece still preserved today there is also an individual situation that would at least have to be addressed, even if it cannot be elucidated. Moreover, without all this information, that is, without additional ego documents, we do not know – this must also be admitted – what the viewers were thinking when they looked at this frontispiece or other pictures with the continents. These remarks apply analogously to all visualisations of continents.

With regard to the interpretation of the continent allegories for Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, the book focuses more on Africa and the Americas, which is

¹² P.H.D. Kaplan, *Magi, Winds, Continents: Dark Skin and Global Allegory in Early Modern Images*, *idem*, pp. 130-156.

¹³ The museum's object database is under construction but its usefulness may be considered limited up to now: <https://bayerisches-nationalmuseum.de/sammlung/krippen> (6/2022). I visited the collection of nativity sets in the Museum in February 2016.

¹⁴ M. Wintle, *Gender and Race in the Personification of the Continents in the Early Modern Period: Building Eurocentrism*, in Horowitz and Arizoli (ed. by), *Bodies and Maps*, cit., pp. 39-66: 52.

¹⁵ <https://www.museumretz.at/de/node/44> (6/2022).

¹⁶ P. Meurer, *Europa Regina. 16th century maps of Europe in the form of a queen*, «Belgeo», 3-4, 2008, pp. 355-370: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/7711> (6/2022).

a welcome change of emphasis. With regard to the figure of Europa, close attention should be paid to the crown when she wears one. This happens less in the chapters, so that the Habsburg-propagandistic content of some Europa allegories is lost. Does the Europa wear a crown that resembles or even copies the type of the imperial bow crown? If so, the Europa stands for the propagandistically claimed European universal monarchy of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, who mostly came from the House of Habsburg. In the 18th century, this semantics is sometimes made clear by replacing the Europa with the male figure of Emperor Franz-Stephan of Lorraine. Equally well, female rulers can also take the place of Europa in the circle of the four continent allegories: Anne d'Autriche, the mother of Louis XIV, appears in this role, as does Maria Theresa.

In relation to the semantics of continent allegories, the history of words and concepts as well as the history of notions plays a major role. The book attempts to answer the question of what it means when the Africa and the America are depicted almost naked and with dark skin. The answer is more complicated than one might initially think. First of all, it should be noted that all four allegories appear in a great many variations. Africa and America do not have to be naked, they *can* be naked or almost naked. Africa *can* be partially clothed and America not, her skin colour *can* be differently coloured, but it does not have to be. The America *can* be shown as a cannibal, but does not have to be. The Asia *can* have bare breasts, but she *can* also be fully clothed. All four *can* be portrayed as dignified rulers over their continent, but they do not have to be. And so on.

With regard to the female allegories, there are references in the book to the mostly male readers and viewers. Heinrich Bünting even commented directly on this question. His *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae* (1st ed. 1582) is mentioned in the book, and M. Wintle reproduces the map of Europe printed in this work (Fig. 3.5, p. 54, Czech edition of the book, 1592), which according to my research¹⁷ first appeared in the 1589 edition, based on Putsch's map of Europe. Wintle does not address the explanations that the Protestant pastor Bünting gave about the female form. Bünting explained the female form didactically, saying that it helped in memorising the information about Europe. Whether he wanted to address exclusively male readers and viewers remains open.

¹⁷ W. Schmale, *Europa – die weibliche Form*, «L'homme. Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft», 11, 2000, 2, pp. 211-233: https://lhomme-archiv.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_lhomme_archiv/PDFs_Digitalisate/11-2-2000/lhomme.2000.11.2.211_Schmale.pdf (6/2022).

As already indicated above, the continent allegories have mixed-sex groups, all-male groups as well as couples, by no means only all-female groups of four. It has not yet been possible to uncover a consistent principle behind this, not even in the present book. However, this wealth of variants does not really come to light in the book. So far, therefore, it has always been the case that the concrete and consequently individual contexts of origin of the depictions of the continent allegories must be assumed, although these are often not entirely clear-cut. If the interpretation is immanent to the work, which is the case in the majority of the chapters of the book, generalisations can only be made with caution. This caution prevails in all chapters.

Contemporary horizons of imagination and mentalities are an exciting field. One can assume that with regard to the 18th century, generalisations can rather be ventured, since more and more strata of the population were able to participate in the public sphere and communication in the course of the development of the media into mass media. One problem that runs through the chapters of the book is the question of the extent to which continent allegories represent European superiority and Eurocentrism. The problem presents itself differently in the 18th century than it did in the 16th century in the perspective of the new mass media, which reached a great many people. Moreover, the Enlightenment attempted to analyse the phenomena of the world systemically, which was not the case in the 16th century.

European expansion across the sea to the south (African coasts) and west (America or, at first, supposedly the West Indies) drew in the wake of the Ottoman Empire's westward expansion. The European rulers submitted militarily to a non-Christian and non-European empire, which incidentally offered the people in the conquered territories unimagined social advancement and general career opportunities, of which use was made. The propaganda in the 16th century against the Ottoman Empire as the hereditary enemy of Christianity obscures the fact that the same empire was attractive to many people. As a consequence, something like a European identity developed for the first time, which was charged with Christianity and instrumentalised politically-propagandistically against the Ottoman Empire¹⁸. At the same time, the humanists initiated the empirical study of Europe. Not only did they learn more about Africa and America, but almost more about Europe itself. In addition, they recognised the need to deal with the phenomenon of plurality, which finds its continu-

¹⁸ For details see my *History of European Identity: W. Schmale, Geschichte und Zukunft der Europäischen Identität*, Kohlhammer Verlag, Stuttgart 2008.

ation in the concept of diversity. For Europe, there are numerous learning processes that have been going on since the 15th century. What does Eurocentrism mean in this context? This question is not clearly answered in the book.

In this context, an important concept was still missing in the 16th century, which only became tangible in the 18th century. The designation 'the European' was unusual in the 16th century; even the proper word 'europaeus' was not coined until the 15th century by the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini. The term 'the European' did not become established until the 18th century. It was not until Carolus Linnaeus introduced the term 'homo europaeus' in his groundbreaking work on the *Systema Naturae* (initially in tabular form in 1735) that this designation of humans began to make a career in Europe. In other words, I advise some caution when applying the concept of 'Eurocentrism' to the 16th century in the context of continent allegories. It is only in the 18th century that everything that constitutes Eurocentrism can be retrieved.

What is of interest is what is missing and what is being lost. In chapter 9, Elizabeth Horodowich asks why there were no continent allegories in Renaissance Venice, when Venice had been a capital of art, book and print-making¹⁹. Asking such questions more often would help map the production of continent allegories or the gaps.

And what was lost? Until the early 16th century it was common to identify Europe, Asia and Africa according to the story of Noah and his sons among whom God had divided the world: Japhet – Europe; Shem – Asia; Ham – Africa (chpt. 5)²⁰. America, however, could not be accommodated in the scheme and at some point no one felt like interpreting this story as real history at all. In the context of salvation history, however, this story was adhered to until the 19th century.

The 18th century is also the subject of the 13th chapter by Benjamin Schmidt, which deals with continent allegories from the Meissen porcelain manufactory in Saxony²¹. The author sees a parallel between two developments: In the course of the 18th century, China's reputation declined. In the early 18th century, Johann Friedrich Böttger succeeded in producing porcelain without requiring a transfer of knowledge and technology from China. The best-kept secret of porcelain production in China had been successfully revealed by Böttger's

tireless manufacturing experiments. Porcelain continent allegories were among the early subjects of the Meissen porcelain manufactory. Schmidt shows how the newly achieved technical independence, which was then interpreted as superiority in the 18th century, was reflected in the design of the allegorical figures.

This is one of many hundreds of elements that led in the 18th century to the singular-concept of European civilisation, which was interpreted as the highest level of civilisational development.

In the 19th century, continent allegories initially fell out of use somewhat, but only somewhat. The World Exhibitions then pushed the theme back into the public eye. The 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris may have inspired the American James Hazen Hyde, who had lived in Paris since 1905, to collect allegorical representations of the continents. Co-editor Louise Arrizoli writes about this collector, to whom we owe the most comprehensive (yet incomplete) documentation of such allegories, in chapter 14²². Hyde professionally documented continent allegories photographically and undertook targeted journeys for this purpose, but he also collected such objects himself, several hundred in total. His personal collection has unfortunately not been kept together, starting with the fact that after the occupation of Paris and the northern half of France by Germany in 1940, he hastily decided to return (1941) to the USA and apparently could not transfer the complete collection. What he had brought to the USA he gave to various museums, a small part fell into the family inheritance. Today, the photographic documentation is of very great value. Louise Arrizoli is working to make the documentation more available for research in a database.

Overall, the book is very stimulating, richly documented and fundamental with regard to the detailed source-critical examination of concrete individual visualisations of the continents. The 18th century is represented mainly in two chapters (Romberg; Schmidt) and in this respect does not form a focus of the book, which rather lies with the 16th century²³.

¹⁹ E. Horodowich, *Why were there no Continental Allegories in Renaissance Venice? The Amerasian Personifications of Giuseppe Rosaccio*, in Horowitz and Arizzoli (ed. by), *Bodies and Maps*, cit., pp. 217-237.

²⁰ C. Van Duzer, *The Pre-History of the Personification of Continents on Maps: Earth, Ocean, and the Sons of Noah*, *idem*, pp. 101-129.

²¹ B. Schmidt, *The Rearing Horse and the Kneeling Camel: Continental Ceramics and Europe's Race to Modernity*, *idem*, pp. 313-342.

²² L. Arizzoli, *Collecting the Four Continents: James Hazen Hyde (1876-1959), an American in Paris*, *idem*, pp. 343-375.

²³ The translation of this Critical Note from German into English was carried out with the support of the translation machine DeepL Translator.