



Ink rubbings from stone steles.

THE ICONOLOGY OF EMPIRE

[a, b] Yu ji tu 禹跡圖 (Map tracing the tracks of Yu the Great); Hua yi tu 華夷圖 (Map of the Chinese and non-Chinese).

[c] Pingjiang tu 平江圖 (Map of Suzhou city).

[d, e, f] Dili tu 墜理圖 (Geographic Map of China); Tianwen tu 天文圖 (Map of the heavens); Diwang shaoyun tu 帝王紹運圖 (The chronological table of Emperors).

Author

[a, b] ANONYMOUS [c] Li Shoupeng [d, e, f] [Wang Zhiyuan after Huang Shang]

Publication date

[a, b] Xi'an, c1900 [1136].

[c] Suzhou, [紹定二年, 1229]. [d, e, f] [Suzhou, 1247 but later].

Publisher

Publication place

Physical description

Ink rubbings from stone steles.

Dimensions

[a, b] 800 by 790mm (31.5 by 31 inches); 790 by 780mm (31 by 30.75 inches).

[c] 2680 by 1365mm (105.5 by 53.75 inches).

[d, e, f] 1790 by 960mm (70.5 by 37.75 inches); 1810 by 985mm (71.25 by 38.75 inches); 1830 by 965mm (72 by 38 inches).

Notes

A collection of six stone stele rubbings comprising the earliest geographically accurate map of China, the first urban plan made within the realm, and the oldest stone-engraved celestial map of the Chinese heavens.

The original engravings were made between 1136 and 1247 during the Southern Song dynasty. Together they represent a comprehensive study of ancient Chinese cartographical rubbings.

Among the earliest techniques in the art of Chinese cartography is that of making rubbings from stone steles. Unlike copperplate or wood- block prints which show the reversed image of the carved surfaces, rubbing is akin to photography, drawing the image directly from the object. Ink is applied to paper laid over engraved stone or wood, thus registering the entire surface of the object; the engraved inscription or image appears white against a black background. The present rubbings were taken in the late nineteenth century; whilst the stone steles themselves remain intact, they are now significantly weathered, and it is no longer possible to take impressions. Thus, each rubbing is incredibly rare and to have a set of six is remarkable.

Some of the earliest Chinese imperial maps are stone rubbings. Empire maps were graphic representations of territories that symbolised imperial power and bore the transhistorical significance of the Chinese dynasties.

The present collection includes some of the earliest examples of such maps, including the twelfth century Yu ji tu 禹跡圖 (Item a) and Hua yi tu 華夷圖 (Item b). The present pair of Yu ji tu and Hua yi tu were engraved in the same year, AD 1136, on the two sides of the same stone tablet. The former is the earliest extant map of China intended to be geographically accurate, and the latter the earliest surviving map of China to relate the empire with foreign states.

Pingjiang tu 平江圖 (Item c) is the largest extant stone rubbing map, displaying the first ever city plan made in China, of Pingjiang, now Suzhou, in the Jiangsu Province. The map was originally engraved on a large stone stele in AD 1229 during the Southern Song Dynasty, and is one of the most complete and detailed Chinese urban plans. It depicts the city walls and gates, government and police buildings, water channels, streets, 359 bridges, 250 temples, public venues and residential blocks.

The original stele Pingjiang tu is held at the Confucian Temple in Suzhou, along with the other three stone steles engraved with Dili tu 墜理圖 (Item d) - one of the earliest extant maps of the entire geography of China, Tianwen tu 天文圖 (Item e) - the earliest extant stone - engraved example of a celestial map, and Diwang shaoyun tu 帝王紹運圖 (Item f) - the only extant chart depicting the lineage of the emperors throughout the imperial history of China.

These three maps were part of a set of eight paintings originally made and presented to the future Song Emperor Ningzong (r.1194-1224 AD) in c1190 by scholar official Huang Shang 黃裳, who was appointed Ningzong's tutor. The set was intended as a warning of how much land had been lost to the northern barbarians, and as a reminder of the sovereign's responsibility to reunite the empire. In the year of 1247, Wang Zhiyuan 王致遠, who was a scholar during Emperor Ningzong's reign, obtained the set of eight paintings and engraved them onto stone steles. Common to all three maps is the text in the lower half which accounts for the image above.

The Chinese empire was thus preserved and promulgated by the engraving of such maps on the enduring medium of stone, serving as a concrete means of asserting authority and territorial claims.

Bibliography

De Weerd, 'Maps and Memory: Readings of Cartography in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Song China', 'The International Journal for the History of Cartography', volume 61, part 2, pages 145-167 (2020); Smith, 'Mapping China and Managing the World; Culture, Cartography and Cosmology in Late Imperial Times', pages 56-58 (2013).

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 20503