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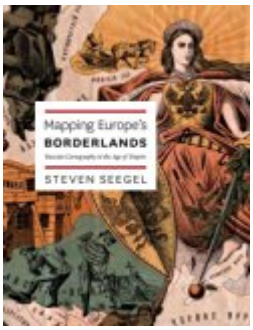
Steven Seegel. *Mapping Europe's Borderlands: Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. XI, 368 S. $55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-74425-4.



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The title of this book is unfortunate, because it is potentially ambiguous or misleading. Thus one has to ask: what is meant by “Europe’s borderlands”? Surprisingly, these turn out to be not regions bordering the Urals, the Caucasus, or Anatolia, or even Great Britain, Ireland, or Scandinavia, but Poland, Ukraine, and neighboring territories. In view of the book’s temporal scope, it would surely have been less misleading to refer to them not as Europe’s borderlands, but as the western borderlands of the (former) Russian Empire. This relates to a broader ambiguity, which is discussed below. The book’s subtitle is also misleading. Those expecting a general discussion of Russian mapmaking in this period will be disappointed. The book is only partly about imperial Russian mapmaking. It is also about mapmaking, and associated geographically oriented activities, by those opposed to many of the official mapmaking projects of the imperial authorities, notably Poles, Ukrainians, and others living in the empire’s “borderlands.” Furthermore, this is not a book about mapmaking in general, but about the deliberate use, or misuse, of maps for political ends, such as making territorial claims, establishing historical legitimacy, or standardizing and assimilating different regions into the centralized polity. In numerous places the author emphasizes that maps are not objective or “scientific” representations of reality in the way that some seem to imagine, but are rather politically or ideologically weighted. This is perfectly true--all maps have a political dimension--but this is by no means a new or original insight despite what some popularizers like Jerry Brotton seem to think. The point is, however, that this is not a book about cartography in general, but primarily about maps deliberately designed to serve a political purpose.

That said, this work is underpinned by impressive scholarship. The author has evidently examined hundreds of original maps and associated materials in many libraries and archives across Europe and the United States, has consulted numerous scholars, and appears to have command of several languages. The range of sources he was able to encompass is therefore admirable and a

real model for others. Such scholarly breadth, of course, is essential when dealing with a region as complex and as multicultural as imperial Russia's western borderlands. Relatively few scholars would be equipped to pursue such a task.

On page 2 of his introduction, the author discusses (by no means lucidly, it must be said--this book cannot be said to be a relaxing bedtime read) his main purpose: "The book looks at how the history of cartography intersected with Europe's early modern dynastic states and intellectual and political currents of imperialism and nationalism in the 19th century. It tests how mapped populations in empires and nations structured borders, negotiated frontiers, and protested against the confines that Europe's maps created for them." In other words, the book is about two things (if I have understood this correctly). On the one hand, it is about the rulers of states and empires, and their servants the cartographers, who attempted to use maps to control peoples and the spaces they inhabited: "In the borderlands of East Central Europe, cartography was a means of control, used by governments to conquer and then engineer territorial space.... Cartography was a tool of imperial governance, by which states structured visual control over specific territories through maps, encyclopedias and atlases." On the other hand, it is about the subjects of empires and states who struggled against the visual and verbal representations which were being imposed upon them: "Realities of interethnic conflict, class disparities, and mutual suspicions led many to question the benefits of modernization in the great-power equilibrium of restored dynastic empires structured by the Vienna Congress." But this was by no means a straightforward struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed. The former were not always united, whilst the latter had very disparate ideas about what the alternatives were to the state-imposed representations being forced upon them: "In every 19th century topographic and thematic map that was produced in these contested spaces, territorial imaginaries and political truth claims conflicted." The author, moreover, is not concerned to pass judgement on one side or the other, but to question the "truth claims" that were being made. This is, he says, "a critical approach" (p. 12).

The book's introduction is followed by ten chapters. Chapter 1, entitled "Early Modern Cartography and Power in European Russia and Poland-Lithuania," considers in general terms the development of cartography in both Muscovite and Imperial Russia and in the Polish-Lithuanian state down to the latter's partition by Russia, Prussia, and Austria in 1772, 1793, and 1795. The author shows how, even at this initial stage, maps served a political purpose, providing the Muscovite and Russian imperial state with an oversight over its expanding empire and scholars and cartographers in Poland-Lithuania with the incentive to try to justify the continued existence of their threatened state. In many ways this is only an introductory chapter but unfortunately the sections on Russia are some of the weakest in the book, based largely on secondary sources, some now dated. Those dealing with Poland are, by contrast, much stronger and this is obviously where the author's real expertise lies.

Chapter 2 moves the story forward into the period from the late eighteenth into the early nineteenth century, in other words, from the world of the Enlightenment into that of Romanticism. There is a strong focus on the work of the Russian imperial patriot Nikolai Karamzin (1766-1826), the Polish historian Joachim Lelewel (1786-1861), and the Lithuanian Romantic nationalist Simonas Daukantas (1793-1864). The author points out how, in their various ways, these and other scholars used maps and historical sources to justify the territorial claims of their respective nations, often in imaginative though hardly scientifically objective ways. Maps and history, in other words, were weapons in the struggle between competing nationalisms.

The remaining chapters of the book competently describe the evolution of this struggle down to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 when statesmen met to resolve the many problems which the First World War had abetted. Maps were, of course, much used by the conference delegates but unfortunately their inherent unreliability as political tools was insufficiently appreciated. In a world of irreconcilable nationalisms, territorial ambitions, and conflicts over such matters as ethnic designation and boundary definition, the statesmen faced an impossible task, especially in the culturally and ethnically complex "borderlands" with which this book is concerned. It is little wonder that they failed in their aim of securing long-term peace.

The scholarly underpinning of this book is reinforced by frequent black-and-white prints illustrating maps and other sources, as well as by a splendid set of color plates. There is a full set of notes and a bibliography of sources, but inconveniently the book lacks a bibliography of secondary sources.

Despite its merits, for a book allegedly about "Russian" cartography, what most strikes the Russian academic specialist is the author's somewhat oversimplified perspective on that country. This is very much the view of Russia from the outside, from the "borderlands" in fact, a view which unfortunately manages to reinforce some hoary old stereotypes. Thus Peter the Great emerges as a kind of totalitarian *avant le mot*, with a secretive approach to maps and a determination to exercise absolute power at all costs. The reader is offered little understanding of the stark realities which faced a reforming tsar. Peter was determined to modernize his realm, but faced an unsympathetic and largely uneducated populace, which included the aristocratic elite on which other European rulers could rely. No wonder he relied on foreigners as well as on only a handful of homegrown sympathizers to carry out his reforms, kept maps largely for state purposes since few Russians even knew what maps were, and felt personally obliged to check up on what his underlings were doing. The fact is, Peter was a realist rather than a power-crazed autocrat like Stalin, realizing that he had little choice in Russian conditions but to centralize if he wanted to get things done. Conditions in Poland, say, were very different since Poland was a Catholic land which had long been open to the outside world. Poland had little need for a Peter the Great. Unfortunately, the uninformed reader of this book is unlikely to understand this background.

In a rather similar way, the Russian Geographical Society, founded in 1845 on the model of London's Royal Geographical Society and playing a significant role in the scientific study and mapping of Russia's imperial territories, emerges as little more than a department of the Russian bureaucratic state and its denizens as little more than imperial civil servants, solely concerned with "intelligence gathering" for the imperial authorities. The author informs us several times that the Society was "supervised" by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, without ever spelling out what "supervised" might mean. This really will not do. It runs quite contrary to the recent historiography on Russia (even, it should be said, to that on the Stalinist period). Of course, almost all the national geographical societies emerging at this period were routinely involved in imperial projects of many kinds and were robust supporters of territorial acquisition, and the Russian Geographical Society was no exception. But that does not mean it was merely a department of state. It did indeed gather "intelligence" of use to the imperial authorities, like other national geographical societies. But it was also an important center for Russian science, one of the most important in Russia for many years. By the nineteenth century Russia had become a complex society in which European science had begun to flourish. The significance of the Geographical Society should be seen in that context.

A similar issue lies in the author's treatment of the complex story of Russian territorial expansion from the late medieval period onwards. Time and again this is described as "statist," as if imperial planners in the Kremlin and Winter Palace were constantly at work plotting the next move in an inexorable process of aggrandizement. Whilst the word "statist" certainly applied to the partition of Poland in the late eighteenth century, it is hardly sufficient to account for Russian expansion northwards into the coniferous forest, southwards across the steppe, or eastwards across Siberia. Here the pioneers of territorial expansion were often runaway peasants, Cossacks, hunters, and others, with the state only gradually moving in to organize defense, taxation, and so on. The exact situation depended on circumstances on each frontier, just as it did elsewhere in the world. Likewise, this complex process can hardly be said to have been motivated by a simple "urge to the sea."

A final point, and one that relates to the issue of the book's ambiguous title, is Russia's status as a European state and empire. This book is allegedly about mapping "Europe's" borderlands, but borderlands with what? There is much talk about "European Russia," but one is never quite sure what is meant by "European Russia." For example, on page 59 we are told that for Lelewel maps "could articulate Poland's challenges to Russian claims of European Russia, Russian Poland," as if "European Russia" were a territory outside Russia itself. One is led to wonder whether this reflects a deep unease with the idea of Russia as a European state. This is obviously an old debate, but the point is, if Russia is not part of "Europe," then where is it? And, moreover, what is meant by "Europe"? One suspects that the author, whether consciously or not, is trying to "other" Russia by placing it at a distance from the western "borderlands" and other European regions. One has the impression that he is equating "Europe" with the traditionally Catholic and Protestant lands of central and western Europe. Russia, of course, is traditionally part of the Orthodox world which also embraces most of Ukraine, Belarus, and much of the Balkans. These regions are surely part of Europe, particularly as Greece, very much part of the Orthodox world, is regarded by many as the original homeland of European, and "Western," civilization. There are, in other words, many Europes and no one part can claim the exclusive right to be regarded as European.

One therefore comes away from this book with mixed feelings: admiration for the breadth of its cartographic scholarship, but disappointment at its simplistic and one-sided treatment of Russia. Perhaps the author will now consider writing a more comprehensive (and much-needed) account of "Russian Cartography in the Age of Empire," but one that approaches its subject with greater empathy.

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