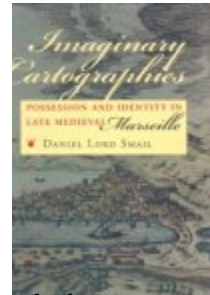


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Daniel Lord Smail. *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999. xix + 256 pp. \$37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3626-0.

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Unique for a book on the history of cartography, Smail's *Imaginary Cartographies* does not examine or incorporate a single pre-seventeenth century map, in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, he examines the mental mappings created, but never reduced to writing, by notaries public in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Marseille. Notaries created these mental maps primarily, it seems, as an *aide memoir* to facilitate their work recording the various transactions they composed on behalf of their clients. Over time, these mapping conventions became codified and were eventually taken over by the central government during the process of state formation in the early modern period. Smail's book examines a crucial change in the way individuals identified themselves or were identified by others at a time when most individuals were known only by their first name. Location and profession rather than family name seems to have been one of the first methods of differentiation in the late medieval and early modern periods.

Smail's book makes significant contributions to both the history of cartography and the history of power and state formation in the later middle ages. Smail's primary source is notarial records from fourteenth-century Marseilles. Notaries functioned with state approval but without state power or agency; their primary function was to make and record contracts between individuals. These contracts most often concerned the transfer of land, property, or money, but could entail any transaction between two people. Useful only until the obligation was met or until the death of one or both of the individuals in question, the original contracts (charters), in most cases, have perished, but notaries kept detailed accounts, either in books or rolls, that recorded the names of the parties to the transaction, the details of the transaction, and the date. These registers, surviving when the

original charters did not, eventually made their way into municipal or state archives where they can be found today; they have been mined for social, diplomatic, and economic history, but Smail reads these records in a new way: for their sense of space and location, making them essentially a complex verbal or intellectual map.

Verbal "maps" that could be translated into imaginary or intellectual maps are not new; early pilgrimage itineraries and *portolanos* supplied text that located an individual in space, and later medieval travel narratives and pilgrimage accounts gave a more complex, if less geographically accurate, vision of distant lands. However, few studies, other than those on local topography (almost always rooted in graphic rather than textual sources), have been done with the attention to detail that Smail provides in his book. He opens up a new area of study that combines history of cartography, diplomatics, semiotics, and social history to give insight into how individuals constructed a place in their local territory.

A wealth of information on one hand, notarial registers provide data that can often be frustrating to marshal into an argument. While hundreds of names may be listed, the sort of biographical information useful to historians is often absent. As Smail convincingly argues, in most cases address clauses that locate where an individual resided often served only a mnemonic function for the notary himself; they did not indicate how an individual saw him or herself and therefore only reflect the notary's perception of what biographical features were worth recording. It is also difficult, if not impossible, to gauge what role the agents of the contracts played in the identification and location process. By examining large bodies of different types of records, Smail is able to make convincing arguments on the subtle differ-

ences that might indicate notarial (as opposed to some other) intervention. Different records recorded varying identifying information: for example, Smail examines the records of contemporary confraternities and discovers that members tended to identify themselves by locality. Seigniorial records are more precise than notarial registers in identifying the location of the individuals who owed them rent, as were instruments recording debts; both, Smail argues, may have listed location to aid in collecting outstanding debts or to disgrace debtors in their neighborhood if they could not pay. Both seem plausible, but the argument is made mostly from silence because no record exists that would record such motivation.

Within the notarial registers, Smail finds a surprising consistency among notaries, who, he argues, developed their own spatial language to describe where individuals lived. Such identification, even if only as a mnemonic device, was vital to the notary in placing and differentiating the numerous individuals whom they served. Within these distinctions, areas were identified according to different criteria: some vicinities were named after dominant streets, themselves often named after a significant trade that at one time, often in the remote past, was practiced in that area. Others regions were named after geographical features (as, for example, Marseille's unusual "upper" and "lower" city) or landmarks, such as the Jewish Fountain. Notably, the notaries adopted neither the municipality's division into administrative quarters (sixains in the case of Marseille), nor the church's division into parishes. This has significant ramifications for Smail's larger thesis, a critique of the historiography on the development of state power exercised over their subjects through identification and location. Certainly locating individuals in space was vital to the modern state's exercise of power, but Smail argues that it was not the state itself that initially developed the practice of addressing, but notaries, who developed the system appropriated by the state for their own purpose—that is, not to control individuals, but to locate them, primarily in the notary's mental map. Although Smail's stated debt is to Peter Burke and his call to study language as a social institution, he is equally indebted to the work of Brian Harley, especially Harley's reading of maps to illustrate the rendering of state power. He deftly uses Harley's graphic vocabulary and semiotic theory in his analysis of textual and intellectual maps. Smail's thesis argues for a more haphazard, less conscious development of the methods of surveillance and control by state, noting that the notaries themselves were barely state agents, and their mental maps were ad hoc, mnemonic devices,

likely developed with little consciousness of how such mapping might have been used by a religious or secular authority to control, locate, and label its subjects.

Smail's study also makes significant contributions to late medieval social history, particularly the study of pre-modern communities. Dipping into the identity clauses found in the notarial records, Smail is able to isolate significant differences in the way various groups identified themselves. The work is especially significant in noting how Jews, as a community, described themselves in contrast to the Christian community. Jews, he notes, had unique forenames, and tended not to need to differentiate themselves from similarly named individuals as the Christians did by using either a patronym or a location. Women tended to use their father's name until they were married and widowed. Such prosopographical research has been done exhaustively for the cities of Italy, but Smail's focus on Marseille and his ability to tie identity to location adds depth to his study. In addition to notarial registers, Smail examines confraternity records and episcopal and seigniorial rent accounts. Each, he notes, uses both identity clauses and location differently, according to the needs of the individual or group for whom the record was made. It is in these records of rents and monies owed that Smail sees the beginnings of identity and address used to coerce and control individuals, not a direct result of the notary's work, but due to use by the powerful land-owning agent who directed and paid for the notary's work.

If there is a weakness in Smail's book, it is one necessitated by the originality of his work. At several points, Smail is forced to create a vocabulary to describe the process of mental mapping undertaken by the notaries. The most problematic lexical choice is Smail's concept of a "template," by which Smail means the mental grid of the city and, more complex, the various types of naming (by street, neighborhood, landmark) that the notary employed when listing addresses. While there were great similarities between templates, no two templates were the same because each notary constructed and employed his own. It is often difficult to determine, as Smail notes, whether a given designation was applied by the notary himself or by the individuals who were the agents of the contract. In many cases, Smail allows that the template was shaped by both the notary and the agents of the contract—allowing room for conflict and compromise in the development of a linguistic topography. When the word "template" is used, however, it is often difficult to remember that is not a universal, but a flexible, concept, one specific to time, context, and person. Through re-

peated use over time these templates “harden,” but never enough to be universally applicable until the emergence of the modern state, which seizes, standardizes, and incorporates these address templates to extend and exercise its power over its citizens.

Ultimately, Smail convincingly concludes the early modern state did not develop the use of address and identity to control its citizens (and as importantly, its non-citizens); such a view is teleological at best. More interesting, Smail shows how such identities are formed over time through a complex and relatively long process of lin-

guistic development that engages and reflects social and cultural change. The mechanisms for locating people at a specific, universal, and easily identifiable address was not a tool forged by the state, nor was it the idea of a single individual or even group of individuals, but a negotiated process including multiple agents of authority, often shaped or in conflict with an overriding popular mentality that established certain ways of defining both who and where the individual was in any real sense in the late medieval city. Smail’s book provides an excellent foundation for comparative studies of local linguistic topography.

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