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Territories, Borders and Communities in the Imperial Practices of the 18th and 19th Centuries Viewed from the Perspective of Cartography and Nation-building (the Case of the Russian Empire)

Abstract

The modern phenomenon of a nation is directly connected with the outcomes of the French Revolution, the latter having predetermined the political, social and economic processes of the 19th century. With cosmopolitan empires becoming, so to say, “incubators” for the nations, the Russian Empire was no exception. Perception of the borders, territories and the population of the empire shaped the processes of capturing new territories, their further attribution to the newly formed imperial historical framework, which in the course of time impacted national constructs. The scientific implications of the phenomenon of an empire and imperial practices triggered the research in the field of imperial history. The tools of image-based geography allow to reveal additional details and peculiarities of states and nations developing within the imperial environment. The author focuses on the processes of projecting, mapping and visualizing the territories with their ethnic population. The article demonstrates the ways the political relevance impacted the layouts of regions, borders and demographic characteristics.

Keywords

Empire, maps, borders, mental cartography, image-based geography, national territory

The notion of mental cartography, or image-based geography emerged in the 20th century and is closely associated with the constructivist method in modern historiography. In early 80s of the 20th century the work of Benedict Anderson “Imagined Communities” inspired the use of new research tools, with many innovative scientific works to follow. In the papers of E. Said,¹ L. Wolff² the methods of image-based geography find their practical application in studying perceptions, images, stereotypes regarding the East, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the peculiarities of their development.

Due to B. Anderson’s legacy, space, as well as a nation, is treated as a phenomenon that may be imagined having certain borders and sizes, such borders being features of an imagined construct and having nothing to do with actual historical boundaries. “Triangulation by triangulation, war by war, treaty by treaty, the alignment of map and power proceeded.”³ The scientist stated that in the era of nationalism it was a map that forged the mass knowledge and awareness of one’s own nation.⁴

John Harley, a British cartographer and a map historian, a co-editor of “The History of Cartography”, stood at the origins of yet another scientific field close to mental cartography: critical cartography. R. Kaplan, representing this discipline, wrote that “Maps don’t always tell the truth. They are often as subjective as any fragment of prose.”⁵

The following are the objectives of the article: to analyze patterns of imagining, capturing and attributing territories with heterogeneous practices, cultural, political and confessional traditions into the Russian imperial space; to study the degree of dependency of the perception/imagination on the subjective factors, namely the cartographers’ origins, educational background and practical activity, as well as on the degree of their involvement in the process of realizing a national project of any kind.

¹ E. Said, *Orientalism*, Kiev 2001, “Osnovy”.

² L. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* / Larry Wolff, Preface by A. Miller/ Moscow 2003, Series “Historia Rossica”, NLO, pp. 3–6.

³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Moscow 2001, Kuchkovo Pole.

⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Moscow 2001, Kuchkovo Pole, p. 214.

⁵ R. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, translated from English by M. Kotova, Moscow 2015, KoLibri.

The military were the first imperial cartographers/topographic surveyors (both in the Russian and the European scenarios), which was coherent with the continued process of rationalizing the newly established borders resulting from wars that differed in scale and outcomes. “They were on the march to put space under the same surveillance which the census-makers were trying to impose on persons.”⁶

The perceptions of borders, territories and their population became fundamental factors in the processes of capturing and attribution to the new imperial historical field, and later, to the national constructs. Versatile institutions and structures joined the process of establishing the Russian Empire in the aspect of territory and cartography. First and foremost, their members faced the task of outlining, describing, systematizing, unifying and suggesting the bright “wrapping” for the purposes of external consumption, particularly for the political and intellectual elites of the Western world. Secondly, they were to create the vision of the empire, its character, and later, its titular nation for internal consumption. For the mass consumer in the craftwork era a preparation period was required, and new tools to expedite the perception of new ideas.

The peculiarity of geographic perception, and mapping the territory of the Russian empire and its population, lay in engaging foreign experts, since there were no local specialists. Such experts used the tools of the French, German, Italian schools of cartography to outline the territories and create the face of the empire on paper. The images produced ranged from geographical maps to playing cards, cartouches on maps and atlases, art books with maps and drawings featuring the so-called ethnographical types. First appearing in the 19th century, it was these images that laid the foundation for stereotypes about appearance and national costumes of various population groups.

The first atlas of the Russian Empire appeared in 1745.⁷ It was the result of comprehensive and thorough surveying and cartographic works of Joseph-Nicolas Delisle, a Frenchman in the Russian service, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences established in 1724, and L. Euler, a worldwide renowned mathematician and physicist of Swiss and German descent. It took ten years to render the atlas ready for the publication. The atlas introduced the first-ever

⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Moscow 2001, Kuchkovo Pole, p. 75.

⁷ Atlas, 1745, *Atlas of Russia consisting of nineteen special maps representing the Russian Empire with border lands*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, 1745, p. 20, engraved maps. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132527901@N07/17452189969/sizes/l> (14.02.2019).

system of map keys, the majority of them went out of use in cartography later. All symbols were made in handwriting and marked the following types of settlements: capital city, city, harbour, provincial town, pogost, selo, selso, priselok, derevnia.⁸ Such explicit details reflected the peculiarities of the initial period of establishing the cartographic tradition, as well as the specific characteristics of settlements in the regions in scope.

Rivers were viewed as natural borders and key cartographic objects that allowed to create a graphic image of the territories around them. The atlas featured a specific way of marking parts of modern-day Ukrainian territories, their location and borders; Kiev Governorate (guberniya) appeared twice as a cartographic object: “Small Tatariya with Bordering Kiev Guberniya and Belgorod Guberniya”, and “Geographical Map Featuring Smolensk Guberniya with Parts of Kiev, Belgorod and Voronezh Guberniyas.”⁹

Although the Crimean Peninsula and a significant part of the southern lands of modern-day Ukraine did not belong to the Russian Empire at the time, these lands were represented in the atlas. The first map contained an undisguised implication, emphasis laid on the territories providing access to the Black Sea that had been the first priority for the Russian Empire for a long time. The map commentary was rather clear: “This map features lands lying along the Dnepr, Don and Donets, the Crimea and part of Kuban with the Black Sea, and is as such established on the said triangle between Kiev, Ochakov and Azov, and on the true data on the river courses of the Dnepr, Donets and Don.”¹⁰

The unpopulated areas (as rendered by the atlas’ authors) under the rule of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire were a gray area, a transition zone between civilizations often called the Wild Fields. No settlements are marked here, only rivers, individual geographical features of the terrain (hills, gorges, bridges etc.). Standing in contrast are parts of Russian guberniyas of Kiev, Belgorod and Oryol, thickly marked with various types

⁸ Atlas, 1745. *Atlas of Russia consisting of nineteen special maps representing the Russian Empire with border lands*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg 1745, p. 20, engraved maps. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132527901@N07/17452189969/sizes/l> (14.02.2019).

⁹ Atlas, 1745. *Atlas of Russia consisting of nineteen special maps representing the Russian Empire with border lands*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg 1745, p. 20, engraved maps. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132527901@N07/17452189969/sizes/l> (14.02.2019).

¹⁰ Atlas, 1745. *Atlas of Russia consisting of nineteen special maps representing the Russian Empire with border lands*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, 1745, p. 20, engraved maps.

of settlements. The map features the Zaporozhian Sich with natural borders presented by rivers – Samara and Orel. The map had a visual component, the title placed on a cartouche that contains an inscription and a drawing of horsemen, Tatar and a Russian, arms in hands, which presumably conveyed the results of the Russo-Turkish War of 1735–1739.¹¹

The second map depicts part of the Kiev guberniya bordering on Smolensk guberniya. We may presume that this approach was purposeful, as the lands of Smolensk and part of Kiev guberniya both had a Polish period in their history. The aforementioned depiction transferred the lands into newly acquired territories with similar social groups (most notably – szlachta, the Polish gentry). Naturally, this component could not have been depicted on the map. However, the cartouche drawing accompanying the map conveyed the message: one of the depicted men obviously belonged to the upper class judging by his clothes, posture and a wineglass in his hand, while the other character was a musician playing a string instrument (presumably bandore or domra) to entertain the nobleman. It appears that drawing historical parallels was an objective pursued by the atlas' authors. Viewed as a whole, the characteristic schematic view featuring common borders and cartouche drawings created the perception of proximity and similarity of two territories that, in fact, were distant.

It should also be noted that the map description emphasized the perception of Kiev as integral territory of the Russian Empire. Although Moscow guberniya was not mentioned in the title, the description named Moscow guberniya as the center of the depicted territory, “founded and outlined within the triangle formed by Kiev, Saint Petersburg, Moscow and the river of Don.”¹²

The late 18th century and the first half of the 19th century saw the appearance of a series of atlases featuring newly annexed lands. Thus, the atlas of 1792 “comprising forty-four maps and dividing the empire into forty-two vice-regencies” (by A. Wilbrecht, graphic art by A. Savinkov, I. Aksenov) suggested dividing the empire into three zones: Northern, Southern zones and the Midland, such division reflecting the concept of Charles-Louis Montesquieu that was popular during the age of Enlightenment and favoured by Catherine the Second.

¹¹ Atlas, 1745, *Atlas of Russia consisting of nineteen special maps representing the Russian Empire with border lands*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, map VII, Saint Petersburg, 1745, p. 20, engraved maps.

¹² Atlas, 1745, *Atlas of Russia consisting of nineteen special maps representing the Russian Empire with border lands*, Imperial Academy of Sciences, Map V Saint Petersburg, 1745, engraved maps.

According to the authors, the midland of the empire comprised Chernigov and Kharkov vice-regency. The southern zone was formed by the Caucasian regency, the lands of the Don Cossack Host, Kiev and Yekaterinoslav vice-regencies (including the lands of the Black Sea Cossacks) and the “territories newly acquired from the Sublime Porte and annexed to the Yekaterinoslav vice-regency.”¹³ The atlas was supplemented in 1793–1795, the adjustments being made to reflect the results of the Second Partition of Poland and the abolition of Iziaslav governorate. The latter was transformed into two new governorates of Volhynia and Podolia.

It was due to the imperial cartographers that the image of modern-day Ukrainian territories as the empire’s southern lands was established and developed. This approach allowed to consolidate the idea of no connection between the Lithuanian and Belarusian lands and their common past under the Republic of Two Nations. However, in due course of time, another interpretation became prevailing that joined these lands viewed as “western”, in some cases preceded by “south” as “south-western”. The Partitions of Poland, outcomes of the war between Russia and France and the Congress of Vienna, impacted the borders and the image/perception of the territories of the victorious states.

The Atlas of 1823 published in Russian and French provided an extended version of the empire with newly subordinated territories – the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Finland. In a few years, namely in 1831, the first historical atlas appeared, compiled by Colonel V.P. Piadyshev. As stated in the preface, it was “for the benefit of those who study or travel, servicemen of the Military Topographic Depository and people of His Imperial Majesty.”¹⁴ Another Atlas published in 1835 was intended for the benefit of the young people who studied Russian geography, and for those who travel. From the 40s of the 19th century onwards, atlases were incorporated into the printed materials used in grammar schools.

There are known cases of unconventional use of cartography, presenting and disseminating geographical perceptions, and visualizing the so-called ethnographic types in the education system. Facilitating public knowledge of the vast empire and its drastically different regions found its way in elegant

¹³ Atlas, *The Russian Atlas, consisting of forty-four maps and consisting of forty-two governorships, separates the empire*, Saint Petersburg 1792.

¹⁴ Atlas, *Historical, Chronological, and Geographic Atlas of the Russian State*, compiled by I. Akhmatov on the Basis of Karamzin’s History, Saint Petersburg, 1831.

methodological findings of Russian publishers and public servants in the field of education. For instance, in 1829 they published a deck of playing cards with 101 geographical maps with sketchy images of guberniyas and regions, as well as local “types”, this deck was reprinted with amendments in 1856¹⁵. The Imperial Russian Geographical Society founded in 1845 greatly contributed to attributing territories and outlining their borders. Numerous works emerged under its auspices, among them was the research of P.I. Keppen, a scientist of German descent, one of the founders of the society, who compiled the first ethnographic map of the European part of Russia¹⁶ a solitaire card deck series¹⁷, publications and maps of A. Rittich.¹⁸

P. Keppen designed a questionnaire for the purpose of his research that contained questions to study the number, religious denomination, ethnic background of the population, mainly of the so-called Western Krai (the term embodied the lands of Vitebsk, Mogilev, Minsk, Vilna, Koven, Grodno, Kiev, Volhynia and Podolia governorates / guberniyas).¹⁹ Priests were actively engaged in the process of surveying. Despite the use of downright archaic terms and concepts, mainly referring to the no more existent tribes like the Buzhans, the Yotvingians, the Chernorus tribes etc., the data collected during the survey circulated in the scientific community and popular science editions for a long time. A. Rittich's maps and P. Keppen's maps contained occasional mistakes, some of them rather gross, and yet they were in great demand since they met the needs of the time, both scientific and political.

The Spring of Nations, or the European revolutions of 1848–1849 whose suppression in Hungary Russia was involved in, was another stimulus for conducting a grand study of the empire by officers of the General Staff of the Armed Forces

¹⁵ *The Album of Geographical Playing Cards of Russia*, 1856. <http://dighist.fas.harvard.edu/projects/imperiiia/document/243?tags=geography&type=22> (14.02.2019).

¹⁶ P. Keppen, *Ethnographic Map of European Russia*, Saint Petersburg 1851, Reprint 2008.

¹⁷ Album, *Album of Geographical Playing Cards of Russia, arranged on 80 cards according to maritime basin, or A Wonderful and Instructive Child's Game of Patience*, Saint Petersburg 1859.

¹⁸ A. Rittich, *Atlas of the population of the West-Russian Territory by Confession*, Saint Petersburg, Printing house of V. Weleng; A. Rittich, *Ethnic Map of European Russia*, Saint Petersburg 1875, Printing House “Obshchestvennaya Polza”; A. Rittich, *Slavic World*, Warsaw 1885, Printing House of V.M. Istomin.

¹⁹ P. Keppen, *On Ethnographic Map of European Russia*, Saint Petersburg 1852; P. Keppen, *The ninth census: study on the population of Russia*, Saint Petersburg 1857.

of Russia. This refers to the seventeen-volume edition of the Military Statistical Review of the Russian Empire initiated by Emperor Nicholas II of Russia. Each volume was devoted to different governorates (guberniyas) and krais, the edition was published during the period of 1848–1858. The review contained military-topographic description of guberniyas and oblasts, data on natural environment, routes of communication, population number and migration, traditions, the state of farming, industrial arts, industry and trade.

1862 was established by the court ideologists as the year of the millennium jubilee of Russia. In fact, this period marks the beginning of establishing the new Russian nation. This year saw the appearance of several exciting published works commemorating the event and summarizing the achievements of the previous periods in the development of cartography and ethnic studies of the empire. One of the most interesting issues of the year is “Ethnographic Description of the Peoples of Russia” under the editorship of Theodore de Pauly, a full member of the Russian Geographical Society of Prussian descent. The book was compiled based on the unique collections of the society. The ethnographic images featured in the luxuriously illustrated issue went on to become stereotypical. They were used as samples when creating national costumes for actors, dancing groups and choirs. Speaking of “Little Russians” (modern-day Ukrainians) he emphasized that the “lands they populate are favourably located in the South, and without doubt hold untold riches that in the future will secure the wealth of the Little Russians.”²⁰ A. Rittich’s atlas gained vast popularity in 1864.²¹ As stated in the foreword, the atlas was compiled based on the information collected by the eparchial services, the Department of Foreign Confessions, the Central Statistics Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Imperial Academy of Sciences and on M. Lebedkin’s article on the composition and confessions of the tribal population.²² A. Rittich analyzed the population of the westernmost lands of the empire. We, herein, illustrate the specific aspects of the analysis suggested by Rittich with the case of Volhynian guberniya (the north-western part of modern-day Ukraine). These lands belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth up to its second partition, the guberniya was one of the largest in the European

²⁰ G. Pauly, *Ethnographic Description of the Peoples of Russia*, Saint Petersburg 1862.

²¹ A. Rittich, *Atlas of the population of the West-Russian Territory by Confession*, Saint Petersburg 1864, Printing house of V. Weleng.

²² M. Lebedkin, *On the Composition of the Tribal Population of the Westernmost parts of the Russian Empire*, Saint Petersburg 1861 / Notes of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, Book III, pp. 131–160.

part of Russia, its population being cosmopolitan and multiconfessional. According to the calculations conducted by A. Rittich and his team, the territory of the Volhynian guberniya was inhabited by 12 214 “Great Russians”, including 8634 Orthodox Christians, 3580 Old Believers (*staroobriadtsy*) representing 0,8 % of the total population. The population of “Little Russians” (*malorosy*) amounted to 1 092 734 (72,68% of the total population), including 1 087 905 Orthodox Christians and 4829 Roman Catholics. For this region it was important to specify the Catholic tradition, given the fact that up to 1839, the majority of the Ukrainian peasants belonged to Greek Catholic Church. In 1831, the Synod of Polotsk disestablished this church in the Russian Empire. The Jewish people, accounting for 12,08 % of the population in the guberniya, were characterized by Rittich as an ethnic group solidly adhering to Judaism. When analyzing the religious denomination of the Polish population of the guberniya, A. Rittich claimed that 12 828 people practiced Orthodox Christianity, while 167 866 people were parishioners of Roman Catholic churches. The percentage of Roman Catholics within the total population was 11,34 %. As for the Belarusians living in Volhynia, Rittich specified that the majority of them were concentrated in Kremenetsk parish (*uyezd*). Rittich claimed that all Belarusians were Orthodox (which was a debatable statement), their total number amounting to 28 534 people. Rittich introduced an error in percentage number, putting in 0,87 % instead of 1,87% (which was an actual number). It seems to be one of the characteristic “Rittich’s mistakes”.²³ The Great Russians by definition could not have constituted the smallest national group in Volhynia that was actively promoted as a “ancestral Russian habitat”. Therefore, they had at least to be levelled with Belarusians, even if it took a thinly-veiled manipulation.

The geographical perception of the Ukrainian lands was undergoing modifications for a long period of time due to the wide range of cartographic traditions that went back to the 16th–18th centuries, starting from French and German and followed by Polish, Czech and Russian. The territory of modern-day Ukraine being partly under the rule of the Austrian (later, Austro-Hungarian) Empire, and partly within the Russian Empire, which made the process of imagining even more difficult. Pavel Jozef Šafárik, a renowned Czech and Slovak Slavonic scholar, published his work named “Slavic ethnography” (“*Slovansky narodopis*”) in 1842

²³ In the “Ethnic Map of European Russia” of 1875 by Aleksandr Rittich that gained popularity far beyond the Russian Empire, the “Little Russians” or “malorosy” (as the Ukrainians were commonly referred to in the Russian Empire) inhabiting the mainland of Taurida Governorate (*gubernia*) were attributed to the “Great Russians”.

where he visualized the distribution of the “Small Russians” on the ethno-lingual map, their territory nearly corresponding to that of modern Ukraine.²⁴

Although the Ukrainian territories (and therefore, the maps) under the control of Austria and Russia could not be reconciled by default, in the mental cartography the area of the historical Rus included the lands of Galitsiya and Lodomeria (former Halych-Volyn Principality), which was consistent with the “Russian idea” and thus facilitated the development of Russophile tendencies within the Austrian Empire. Parallels like these, however, also contributed to consolidating the standpoint of the Ukrainian national project.

Immediately after the launch of the Emancipation reform of 1861, a group of General Staff officers of the Russian Army joined another geographical project. The multivolume edition comprised archival documents, statistical data, geographical overviews, maps and plans. The collection included brief historical reviews of guberniyas (governorates), unique ethnographic materials, a study of education peculiarities, historical reviews of towns and cities, with special attention paid to economic, religious patterns and climate of the regions. Thirty-nine volumes of the “Materials for geography and statistics of Russia, collected by the officers of the General Staff” were compiled over the period of 1862 through 1865.

The officers engaged in compiling the collected works, as a rule, belonged to a geographical or historical society. For instance, A. Zashchuk who worked on the volumes on the Guberniya of Bessarabia, was a full member of Odessa Society of Antiquity and History. Therefore, the edition represents very unique approaches to perceiving and describing local population: on the one hand, it features the ambiguity of terms, names, identification markers characteristic of the period until mid-19th century; on the other hand, one can witness the attempt to maximize the “Old Russian” space.

The military officers had been actively involved in expanding the imperial frontier and imposed their own vision of the territories and the population thereof. This vision was in line with the targets set by their “employer”. The said peculiarities rendered unexpected outcomes, both for empires and the fast-paced national projects.

In particular, most mid-19th-century military analysts qualified the majority of ethnic Ukrainians residing in Right-Bank Ukraine, Polesye, and left-bank

²⁴ P. Šafárik, *Description of Slavic People* / P. Šafárik [translated by O. Bodiansky], Moscow 1843, Universitetsjaya tipographia.

Kiev guberniya to the Chervonorus people affiliated with the medieval Halych-Volyn Principality. Hence, without realizing it the officers of the Russian General Staff contributed to developing and consolidating the idea of unity of the Ukrainians who at the time were Austrian and Russian subjects. This approach definitely aimed to serve the imperial idea and territorial claims. However, the net result was quite the reverse. Considering the geographical and territorial perceptions of members representing various national movements regarding their “national” territories, one can observe the ambitions similar to those of the empire – to maximize the size of the territory and the length of the borders.

Thus, borders as elements of an imagined construction are different from their historical counterparts. Their representation (visualization) on the geographical maps was used as a tool, or factored in territorial claims. The new (although claiming to be ancient) imperial space outlined in late 18th century required historical legitimation and attribution to the respective historical field.

Mental cartography developed and, in due time, took a foothold in the political treaties and borders that reflected imperial, and thereafter national claims. Along with visualizing territories and their borders, the process was also accompanied by establishing images and national “types”. Created in the 19th century by scientists who were imperial subjects of foreign descent or educated abroad, these images would eventually transform into stereotypes.

The image of the empire was incomplete without the borderlands. Each region was contextualized into the imperial space in its own way. Establishing the imagined imperial territories and outlining the national lands in due course of time, the borders became one of the crucial markers of designing modern-day national projects.

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