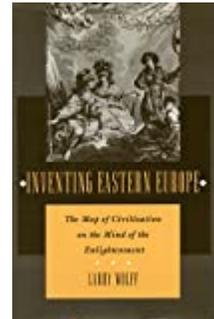




**Larry Wolff.** *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994. xiv + 419 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-2314-5.



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## Mapping Space and Knowledge in Europe

Larry Wolff's book is an excellent example of the genre of interdisciplinary writing being done by historians, anthropologists, economists, cartographers, and sociologists of knowledge in which politico-economic processes are linked with ideological constructions. "Eastern Europe" is not so much an existing geographical region as an intellectual invention of a cultural zone constructed during the Enlightenment through travel diaries and maps, imaginary travelogues, and armchair philosophizing. Thus the book itself is not so much about a place as it is about a process. It may be recommended not only for its information about descriptions of Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century (from the selective descriptions of actual travelers, such as William Coxe, to the vicarious travelogues of armchair philosophers such as Voltaire), but for its critical treatment of the ideas of Said, Wallerstein, Hobsbawm, and others concerned with the establishment of intellectual boundaries and the invention of tradition.

Wolff introduces his discussion of "Eastern Europe" with the speech made by Winston Churchill in 1946 that described an iron curtain dividing the "Continent"

into eastern and western parts (p. 1), and then argues that such a division dates to the Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, the more prominent division of Europe into north and south (obvious to Mediterranean-encircling Romans, and reinvented during the Renaissance) was overlaid by an east/west axis that began to take on significance in the "north." Northern cities in Western Europe such as Paris, London, and Amsterdam had become economically and politically powerful, whereas northern lands in Eastern Europe (such as Poland and Russia) were places of potential conquest by the West. During the Enlightenment, Western Europe took on the connotations of "civilization" (previously reserved for the Italian Renaissance cities of the "south"), and Eastern Europe took on the characteristics of civilization's antithesis (previously associated with the barbarians of the "north").

The term "map" in Wolff's title reflects the conception of maps not as positivistic descriptors but as social and ideological documents connoting political, economic, and cognitive ownership. Wolff does not quote J. B. Harley, but Harley's "cartographic philosophy" as

developed in numerous essays between 1980 and his death in 1991 represents the cartographic equivalent of Michel Foucault's gaze conferring power (see, for example, Harley's essay, "Maps, Knowledge and Power," in *The Iconography of Landscape* edited by Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels [Cambridge, 1988]). Maps are of interest not only for what they represent but also for what they do not represent, the silences. In Wolff's book, the voices and visualizations of "Eastern Europe" are conveyed by travelers and philosophers in the West; local voices and visions are not heard or seen. The questions raised about the "paradoxes" of Eastern Europe (a place of elegance and debris, fire and ice, culture and nature) are imposed, not indigenous.

The "mapping" of Eastern Europe should be seen as part of the mapping and colonization of the world associated with the expansion of Europe outside of Europe, and the expansion of Occidental Europe (those emerging powers along the Atlantic seaboard that combined trade with urban and industrial developments) into a more agricultural and Muslim-influenced Oriental Europe, Western Europe setting out in both cases to identify and make use of unknown or incompletely known lands. The "mapping" of these lands was an extension of the Enlightenment's powerful agenda of coordinating knowledge with control.

The Introduction includes a thoughtful critique of Wallerstein (who takes Eastern Europe for granted rather than examining its creation; where do the concepts of "core" and "periphery" come from?).

Chapter one, "Entering Eastern Europe: Eighteenth-Century Travelers on the Frontier," traces the journey of French and English travelers from the civilized West into barbarous eastern lands—an extension of the Grand Tour. Louis-Philippe de Segur, who had served under George Washington in the American War of Independence (and for whom neither America nor Russia competed favorably with Paris as the premier locus of civilization), journeyed from France to Russia. William Coxe accompanied the nephew of the Duke of Marlborough on a five-year Grand Tour that included a journey through Poland to Russia. Wolff revels in examples of paradoxical rhetoric culled from the travel diaries. Eastern Europe is neither Occident nor Orient but a paradoxical combination of both. The savagery that lurks in the core of civilization is manifest even in its illnesses (p. 30). Lady Mary Wortley Montagu traveled from Vienna toward Constantinople where her husband was to be the English ambassador, in anticipation of which she wrote letters to her sister

expressing fear of "the Tartars who ravage that part of Hungary I am to passe" (p. 39). "Tartars" (variously defined, often incorrectly located, but always terrifyingly rendered) were symptomatic of the barbarism identified with the vast region that lay between West and East.

Chapter two, "Possessing Eastern Europe: Sexuality, Slavery, and Corporal Punishment," explores specific aspects of barbarism used to distinguish West from East—the association of the East with slavery. Wolff opens the chapter with a discussion of Casanova's purchase of a thirteen-year-old Russian girl. Uncomfortable, as a Westerner, with the idea that he is buying a slave, he justifies his purchase by describing how he civilizes her by changing her name, her clothes, and her language. That he beats and uses her sexually are merely the burdens of a dominant civilization forced to take harsh measures with savagery. Examples from other travelers develop the image of Eastern Europe, and particularly Russia, as a place of Oriental despotism.

Eastern Europe was constructed not only by travelers who clothed their experiences with fantastic imaginings but by scholars who traveled only in the imagination. Chapter three, "Imagining Eastern Europe: Fiction, Fantasy, and Vicarious Voyages," describes Eastern Europe through the eyes of Western Europeans who never set foot out of Western Europe. Wolff attributes the idea of Eastern Europe to Voltaire, who, long before he wrote *History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great* (two volumes published in 1759 and 1763) or corresponded with Catherine the Great in the late eighteenth century, had written, in 1731, a book about the Swedish king Charles XII. In describing Charles's conquests across the Baltic, Voltaire distinguishes between a Europe that "'knew' things" and a Europe (less civilized) that was itself lost and "waited to become 'known'" (p. 90). In typical Enlightenment fashion, "knowing" meant classifying and contrasting; an east-west axis was added to the existing north-south axis.

Adding to this imaginative literature were Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (whose uncompleted play, "The Horoscope," was about Poles and Tartars and the boundaries between civilization and barbarism, science and superstition), Jean-Paul Marat (who, imitating Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, imagines a Pole visiting Western Europe as a means of criticizing French society), Rudolf Erich Raspe (whose *Travels and Surprising Adventures of Baron Munchausen* describes Eastern Europe as a land of savage beasts waiting to be tamed by the enterprising Western traveler), Mozart (whose travels to Prague became an

opportunity to indulge in Slavic-sounding word play and freedom from classical musical constraints), and others. The chapter culminates with a description of the journey of Catherine the Great through her empire (as if it were a stage setting for the confrontation of rational civilization with illusion, magical superstition, and exotic barbarism) and the designation, provided by Segur, of Russia as “the east of Europe” and “the Orient of Europe” (p. 141).

Chapter four, “Mapping Eastern Europe: Political Geography and Cultural Cartography,” is particularly interesting for its description of the uses of maps in organizing knowledge about east and west. During the Enlightenment, the “lost lands” of Eastern Europe were discovered, politically defined, and incorporated into western atlases. Changing political boundaries (Russia expanding, Turkey contracting, Hungary separating from the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and Poland being partitioned at the end) posed dilemmas for mapmakers. Of particular interest is how the boundary between Europe and Asia was conceived. Sanson’s *New Introduction to Geography* in 1695 placed Muscovy on the eastern border of a map of Europe, and on the western border of a map of Asia. The *Almanach Royal* of Paris excluded the kingdom of Muscovy from European status in 1716 but included it in the following year. Wolff reviews the history of cartographic definitions of Europe, from Ptolemy on, linking these changes to political events and relationships. He looks at specific rivers, cities, and countries—for example, the Don, Constantinople, Hungary—and how they are represented cartographically. He considers the political role of geographers, and describes decisions made by travelers about how to incorporate cultural material in maps (including illnesses [p. 182]).

Chapter five, “Addressing Eastern Europe, Part I: Voltaire’s Russia,” explores in greater detail the correspondence between Voltaire and Catherine the Great, the purpose being to illustrate the development of the Enlightenment’s relationship with Eastern Europe. Catherine, for Voltaire, brought the Enlightenment to Russia. German in origin, enlightened in her despotism, she battled the cold climate, the degradation of Christian peoples by Muslim Turkey, and barbarous customs in an effort to reclaim the lost lands of Europe for Europe.

Chapter six, “Addressing Eastern Europe, Part II: Rousseau’s Poland”: Covering her bets among the competing savants of the West, Catherine wrote not only to Voltaire but also issued an invitation to his dissenter, Rousseau, to seek pastoral simplicity in Russia. Al-

though Voltaire and his cohorts glorified Russia whereas Rousseau supported Poland against Russia, both used their respective favorites to explore what the Enlightenment meant in the context of an Eastern Europe. Rousseau, in his treatise, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, encouraged Poles to develop their unique genius and resist the aggression of what was for Voltaire the inevitable march of civilization embodied in Catherine’s Russia. In an interesting footnote to the current debates about whether a unified Europe is possible, Rousseau seems to suggest that, at the time he was writing, the national differences among Western Europeans were insignificant; that they were all “Europeans” (p. 239). Nations in Eastern Europe, however, had distinctive national characters. Whereas Voltaire submerged Poles, Russians, Tartars, and Hungarians in a common Eastern European identity, Rousseau eulogized and encouraged distinctiveness. Whereas Voltaire wrote to an empress, Rousseau wrote to the people. Voltaire mapped the spread of empire; Rousseau saw Eastern Europe as “a crucible for the formation of national identity” (p. 241). Travelers to Poland took up the debate about whether the Poles were worthy of a separate identity or should be embraced by enlightened despotism. Poland was one of the most talked-about countries in French salons during the second half of the eighteenth century (as Hungary had been during the first half).

Chapter seven, “Peopling Eastern Europe, Part I: Barbarians in Ancient History and Modern Anthropology,” is about the eighteenth-century attempt to reconstruct the ancient history of barbarian migrations with existing populations in Eastern Europe. The movement of Scythians from the east into the west, or Slavs from the north into the south, could be traced by studying languages. Eastern Europe was a chaotic blend of many migrations; the job of a good eighteenth-century linguist was to sort through the evidence about multiple movements of peoples and sort out their origins and pattern of settlement. The chapter explores in particular Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Herder’s *Journal of My Voyage in the Year 1769* for how they contributed to definitions of barbarian peoples and languages associated with Eastern Europe. In his efforts to establish a “map of mankind” through folklore studies, Herder submerged the uniqueness of Poland into a generic Slavdom and thus transformed Eastern Europe into a region of Slavs whose distinctive costumes, songs, and dances served (and still serve today) as a subject of “complex condescension” (p. 331).

More dangerous than an entertaining, if somewhat

condescending, fascination with quaint folkloric customs was the tendency to link customs with biological characteristics, a topic explored in chapter eight, "Peopling Eastern Europe, Part II: The Evidence of Manners and the Measurements of Race." While Herder was reflecting on the Slavs, Fichte was teaching in Poland and writing negative, racist comments about the Poles. Polish women were slovenly and with a stronger sex drive than Germans (p. 335); Poland was full of wild animals, wild people, and Jews. A racist diatribe published in 1793 (Joachim Christoph Friedrich Schulz's *Journey of a Livonian from Riga to Warsaw*) was republished in 1941 after the Nazis had conquered Poland, reflecting a trend among German scholars from the eighteenth into the twentieth century to perceive, in the difference between Germany and Poland, a boundary between civilization and barbarism, high German *Kultur* and "primitive Slavdom" (p. 336).

Although concerned primarily with the emergence of racial classifications of Eastern Europeans, Wolff's chapter includes an interesting discussion of the writings of Georg Forster, a German born in Poland who traveled in Russia and with Captain Cook's second voyage to the South Pacific, for whom racial differences were significant only between white Europeans and Negroes (Poles, although oppressed, were still Europeans). In other writings, the black/white distinction was grafted onto the barbarian/civilization distinction in Europe itself, appearing in such extreme statements as Ledyard's claim that there were "no white Savages." Eastern Europeans, as barbarian, were therefore not white (in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Ledyard interpreted the Tartars—a broad category that included, on occasion, Jews, Poles, and Russians—to be American Indians [p. 348]).

The final "Conclusion" restates the author's thesis that the Enlightenment had an agenda in its cultural construction of Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe constituted an arena in which Enlightenment thinkers worked

out the defining characteristics of Enlightenment values. Eastern Europe was good to think with because it was politically unstable, fought over by emperors and competing religious ideologies. In this cauldron of change, Enlightenment thinkers worked out their political philosophies, social theories, and racial classifications. Their ultimate goal was not to define, empirically, an objective reality of "Eastern Europe" but to validate a conception of Western European civilization.

To conclude: Wolff suggests that many of our assumptions about Eastern and Western Europe have a long history that should be carefully examined. It will be difficult, after reading Wolff, to respond to grant invitations, lecture opportunities, and European Union symposia addressing what to do about the "backward" economies of Eastern Europe without looking over one's shoulder at the long historical shadow of invidious contrast.

Wolff's book also raises an important point about the history of anthropology. Historians of anthropology, in trying to explain the emergence of cultural and racial classifications of Us and Other, usually emphasize the importance of the expansion of Europe outside of Europe during the Age of Discovery. After reading Wolff, I am convinced that an even more important arena for the development of these classifications existed in Europe itself—in the zones of internal conflict and ambiguity such as those described by Wolff for Eastern Europe. It would be interesting to trace specific anthropological classifications to other arenas of conflict, as for example, in Britain (where the contrast between English Teuton and Scottish/Welsh/Irish Celt was explored, for example, by another Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume).

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