

Steven Seegel, *Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018, xv + 346, index, color plates, black and white illustrations, 9780226438498 (hbk), \$55

'Transnational Germans' in the New Brave World

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During the second half of the 19th century, geography emerged as an academic discipline, especially in Prussia / the German Empire. Its early practitioners, led by the Saxonian Albrecht Penck, proposed that geography is an exact science. By and large this view was readily accepted in Europe and North America, because it well merged with the epoch's colonial prejudices, racism, anti-Semitism and patriarchalism. What is more, geography's presumed 'scientific' character allowed for 'justifying' and furthering a variety of colonial and imperial projects. It was of import, especially to Germany, a late-comer to colonial empire building. Geographers' 'objective' descriptions and analysis of Earth's surface were conveyed to the public at large and colleagues abroad through the malleable medium of maps. Inventing cartographic methodologies and techniques, producing and discussing maps, deploying them for political ends, and criticizing their colleagues' maps constituted this age's transnational 'language of map,' which geographers-cum-map men spoke so well.

The transnational confraternity of map men – which Seegel discusses in a highly engaging manner and with the use of lively turns of phrase – shared their training, knowledge of German as then the global academia's lingua franca, and paid (at least, initially) reverence to the master of this geographic lodge, Penck. Their feverish cartographic production went into overdrive at the end of the Great War, when the Americans fell back on map men's expertise for implementing the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination in 'east Central Europe' (*Ostmitteleuropa*), or in the zone of the vanished or curtailed empires. Emotions ran high, when Penck's American pupil, Isaiah Bowman, gained the upper hand in this novel game of creating and unmaking nation-states. Due to his pro-Polish attitudes, shared by Woodrow Wilson, Bowman struck ready rapport with Eugeniusz Romer, of which Penck took a dim view. Not much could be done for Pál Teleki, who strove for preserving the historic-cum-ethnic integrity of historic Hungary in the wake of the breakup of Austria-Hungary. The Polish-Bolshevik partition of the Ukrainian lands at the 1921 Peace of Riga left Stepan Rudnyts'kyi without a country, to which he could offer his services. Romer gave short shrift to Rudnyts'kyi's ethnolinguistic argument, which claimed Galicia for Ukraine. In the former's view Poland's historic and 'civilizing' role in this region trumped any Ukrainian rights to Galicia. Penck and his German pupils expressed exactly the same opinion, when proposing that the Allies had erred in handing over 'culturally superior' Germany's eastern lands to 'inferior' Poland on the ethnolinguistic grounds. Romer disagreed, while Rudnyts'kyi took the fateful decision to accept the Kremlin's offer to develop geography in Soviet Ukraine. In 1937, he perished in the Great Purge, when among others, the 'national-bourgeois' deviation was liquidated across the Soviet Union. A semblance of

genteel respect for one another – couched in reciprocal exchanges of maps and reviews, at times extended in the form of behind-the-scenes help for their children's transnational education and careers – was unravelling during the interwar decades, and largely came to an end in the course of World War II. The Hungarian Prime Minister Teleki committed suicide, unable to maintain Hungary's neutrality vis-à-vis Yugoslavia under Berlin's pressure. Penck survived the war to die at its end of pneumonia in Prague. Workaholic Bowman died of massive heart attack in 1950. Despite all odds, Romer survived the war, and cut a career for himself and his sons in communist Poland. But in this yet another new age of the Cold War, economists and political scientists sidelined map men. (Maybe this development explains the dire plunge in the quality and number of maps in English-language books after the mid-20th century?)

The five 'unlikeable heroic explorers, intolerant antiheroic careerists, and privileged transcultural racists,' that is, the aforementioned eponymous map men, 'reduced citizens to pixels, geography to geopolitics, language to nationality, and race to space.' Through the fine-grained description and analysis of their interconnected education, scholarship, careers and family lives, Seegel convincingly shows that maps are artifacts of emotions, desires and folly, not any objective representations of the observed reality. The use of archival and printed material in German, Hungarian, Polish and Ukrainian is meticulous and wide-ranging, as evidenced by the 100 pages of references and bibliography, which account for a third of this monograph. Strangely, the bibliography is printed in bigger font than the main text. The color plates are bunched up, and the reproduction of the maps impossible to decipher without a magnifying glass, which is a shame. A much better job in this regard was done, for instance, by the Catalan publisher Publicacions de la Universitat de València for Rafael Company i Mateo's recent monograph *Cartografia, ideologia i poder* (2014), which is half the price of the book under review.

I was a bit surprised that Seegel did not include in the narrative Leon Dominian (1880-1935) – US diplomat, working in Italy and Germany, and a fellow map man of Armenian origin born in Constantinople – as another main, or at least walk-on, character. Arguably, Dominian's monograph *The Frontiers of Language and Nationality in Europe* (1917) decisively shaped the thinking of Wilson's Inquiry team on central Europe's frontiers as 'language boundaries.' Dominian corresponded with Bowman from 1913 until his own death. From minor quibbles: the Polish term *kresy* is not 'frontiers' (152), but 'borderlands' that accounted for half of interwar Poland's territory; while Teleki did not have to learn *Magyar* (35), because it is the Hungarian word for 'Hungarian,' which was his native language.