

University of Groningen

Poseidonians and the tragedy of mapping European Empires

Lobo-Guerrero, Luis

Published in:
Mapping, Connectivity, and the Making of European Empires

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2021

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Lobo-Guerrero, L. (2021). Poseidonians and the tragedy of mapping European Empires. In L. Lobo-Guerrero, L. Lo Presti, & F. dos Reis (Eds.), *Mapping, Connectivity, and the Making of European Empires* (pp. xv-xxii). Rowman and Littlefield.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Preface

Poseidonians and the Tragedy of Mapping European Empires

Luis Lobo-Guerrero

Mapping, Connectivity and the Making of European Empires is a collective reflection on the connectivities and spatial imaginaries immanent to maps, map-making, map-using and map interpretation from a specific Western (epistemological) perspective. Such reflection betrays a continuous tragedy which results from re-discovering and coming to terms with the idea that an allegedly secular and scientific approach to mapping the world relies intensely on sedimented cosmological imaginaries of space and power and their multiple ways of life. These, in turn, challenge a Western pretension of uniform spatial objectivity and factualness. In such tragedy, the space of the world's others becomes evident in the process of making explicit the practices, beliefs, conducts, principles and economic considerations upon which European ways of mapping imperial acts, aspirations and failures have operated.

Perhaps nobody has better described this tragedy as Constantine Cavafy unknowingly did in his poem *Poseidonians*.

The Poseidonians forgot the Greek language after so many centuries of mingling with Tyrrhenians, Latins, and other foreigners. The only thing surviving from their ancestors was a Greek festival, with beautiful rites, with lyres and flutes, contests and garlands. And it was their habit towards the festival's end to tell each other about their ancient customs and once again to speak Greek names that hardly any of them still recognized. And so their festival always had a melancholy ending because they remembered that they too were Greeks, they too once upon a time were citizens of Magna Graecia.

But how they'd fallen now, how they'd changed,
 living and speaking like barbarians,
 cut off so disastrously from the Greek way of life.

(Cavafy 1998)

In Greek mythology, Poseidon, god of the sea, storms, earthquakes and horses, was known for his bad temper, greediness and moodiness. His ways prevailed, and insult would be answered with vengeance. His was the Truth. When Odysseus, on his voyage from Troy back to Ithaca, blinded the god's son, Poseidon sent him storms, made him shipwreck and caused on him a ten-year delay (Homer 2006). On the other hand, Tyrrhenians, Latins and other barbarians represented alternative ways of life which, in Cavafy's poem, slowly changed that of Poseidonians and made them live and speak like barbarians, showing them that there is always the possibility of being otherwise, and simultaneously so, even if in their memory lived an ideal past, an ideal truth.

As explored by the various authors in this book, the 'beautiful rites, with lyres and flutes, contests and garlands' of the various practices of mapping European empires, become sites of interrogation where the knowledges underlying lines, symbols, monsters, monuments, voids, colours and styles in maps can be politically historicized in their contextual complexity. In doing so, it is possible to reconstruct the stratified conditions of possibility (cf. Hacking 2006, 136) of specific spatial (imperial) imaginaries and their attempt to connect ideas, people, places, values and interests into (coherent) political aspirations and projects. It is possible to observe that the very terms under which these elements are connected, or attempted to be so, can be explored to reveal the creativity and resourcefulness involved in making them possible. In this respect, *Mapping, Connectivity and the Making of European Empires* is an attempt to approach maps and mapping practices as experimental sites from which to make strange what has become invisible over time and through normalized mapping practices. The imaginaries and processes behind the making, consciously or not, of spatial orders, leave their traces in maps and mapping.

As good barbarians, map-makers, map-users and map interpreters are the result of diverse experiences and interactions with cultures, contexts and power relations over time. The life that creates, uses and interprets maps is always more than the knowledge and the ideas through which individuals are educated, trained and normalized. It exceeds their role of workers, citizens, market players, religious believers, sensual beings and political subjects. Such life reveals the experience of being in particular moments and places, in specific worlds. The imaginary of map barbarians always exceeds the frames upon which they seek to know the world through what Foucault referred to as the 'already encoded eye' and 'reflexive knowledge' (Foucault 2002, xxii).

The tragedy of mapping European empires, where the alleged objectivity of the map reveals the life excess of those involved in it, is therefore a

wonderful opportunity for us, to cease being Poseidonians, to reflect on our perceived Greekness and embrace our barbarism by assuming an attitude of wondering about how, and why, we see the world through maps in the ways we do. The tragedy opens for us a space in which to identify markers that can help us understand the sedimented cosmological imaginaries of space and power that seem to have been forgotten when the ink of the maps dried out. Our role as barbarians is therefore to think with maps, rather than through them, about the lives, forms of life and relationships of power that the map is anxiously wanting to reveal. In doing so, we come to realize that the alleged empires depicted by maps were never more than an aspiration which map-makers never truly realized. The tragedy of mapping reveals the brittleness of the very idea of an empire as a projection of spatialized power.

A WONDERING EPISTEMIC COMMUNITY

The origin of this book responds to acts of curiosity imbued by an attitude of wondering about how cartography could be ‘domesticated’ as an empirical space from which to interrogate relationships of power and of empire-making from the situated perspective of modern Europe. The use of the term *domestication* reveals, of course, an attempt to relate cartography with our intellectual ‘home’, normally, if not innocently, understood as a disciplinary ground. Coming from the wider discipline of International Relations, at first, but with a broad understanding of it as the study of order, power and governance unconstrained by (political) borders and temporalizations, it came as a surprise, through initial discussions, that not much work had been produced from ‘within’ International Relations on this problem (see chapter 1). With at first skeletal knowledge of the serious contributions made by scholars engaged with critical cartographic studies, I initially posed the idea of constituting a small research group with the aim of exploring the epistemological conditions underlying the role of maps as instruments of power, and of supporting each other on learning about this topic. The idea was that this would allow us to produce an edited volume to inspire others in joining us in these reflections.

The book project thus began in the context of a visit I made to the University of Erfurt in December 2017 under an Erasmus teaching mobility grant. Widely inspired by a tour of some of the collections and globes kept at the University’s research library at Schloss Friedenstein in Gotha, organized by Filipe dos Reis who was one of my hosts, the focus of exploring how mapping and cartographic imaginaries related, started to be developed. Filipe was then exploring together with Zeynep Gülşah Çapan some maps at the Justus Perthes publishing house at Gotha and had a particular interest in understanding how the idea of Germandom and Germanness figured in those maps. This initial enthusiasm led us to brainstorm further about the possible contents of

an edited volume during a workshop held two months later at La Sage, in the Swiss Alps, as part of a consortium we had created between colleagues at universities of Groningen, Lausanne, Oslo, Brussels and Erfurt (the GLOBE consortium). The workshop sponsored a broad discussion on epistemologies of order, power and governance and allowed us to engage with some complex literature on cartography and the creation of space.

Months later, within the context of a call launched by the European International Studies Association (EISA) for proposals on exploratory symposia to be held at Rapallo, Italy, in September 2018, Filipe and I decided to take it as an opportunity to give shape to a small research team. To broaden the scope, we invited a cultural geographer, Laura Lo Presti, whom I had met in April 2017 at a workshop in Duisburg on 'Mapping, Mercator and Modernity'. Laura had published a very inspiring piece in an edited volume that came out of that event on the problem of how to reframe cartographic exhaustion at a time of mapping excess. She would bring an erudite insight on critical cartography and a fresh cultural geography angle to the group, as well as a solid southern European perspective. We also invited Jeppe Strandsbjerg whom I had to find a way to contact since he had left a fancy associate professorship at the Copenhagen Business School some years before to work with an academic publisher in Denmark. Jeppe, who had published his doctoral thesis as one of the two existing books on cartography and International Relations, enthusiastically embraced our invitation and brought a mature angle to the wider problem of space and power as well as a perspective from a Nordic life experience. To complete the group, we invited Kerry Goettlich who was then working on his doctoral thesis at the London School of Economics on the problem of boundaries and linear borders in International Relations and was engaging with the details of practices of surveyance in the British colonies. He would bring his knowledge of surveying together with an Anglo-Saxon experience to the group. I would contribute through my work on the epistemologies of mapping, my reflections on historical epistemology and the politics of global connectivity, and I would provide the institutional support of my chair at Groningen, and would facilitate leadership and coordination to the team. We were ready to apply for an exploratory symposium grant . . . and we got it.

At Rapallo, with the energizing Italian riviera as frame, we took the opportunity to learn from each other's work and from what we had found particularly interesting in the course of exploring this topic. Hoping for the inspiration that Nietzsche had derived from the mountains and sea at that location when writing his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, we worked on a programme where everyone contributed to through their own writing on maps, three pieces of scholarship that had influenced our thoughts on the topic, as well as a 2,000-word reflection on what we all thought maps, as empirical spaces for analysis, had to offer to a critical understanding of empire. This all prepared us for very fruitful conversations. We learned enormously from each other,

enjoyed our walk-and-talk sessions, and on the basis of our individual reflections, began to focus the project. As a result, we chose to continue with the problem of mapping and the making of empire privileging epistemological elements without falling into nationalist narratives or disciplinary angles. We agreed to start working on some draft pieces for a subsequent workshop in the spring of 2019 which Jeppe kindly offered to host and sponsor.

By now, we were operating as a research group with five different, if overlapping, small research projects. To facilitate interaction and work, we all contributed to, and shared, a digital library and an online archive. Jeppe and Laura were offered visiting research fellowships at the University of Groningen to facilitate access to further academic resources. During the course of the project, it was very reassuring to see how we were all advancing in our endeavours. In August 2019, Filipe had just completed his PhD and left Erfurt to join us at the University of Groningen as assistant professor. Laura remained associate researcher at the University of Padova, and her visiting fellowship at Groningen was extended for another period. Jeppe has continued with his exciting projects as senior editor at the Danish publishing house Djøf Forlag and has now partially returned to the academic world with the Danish Institute for International Studies. Kerry completed his PhD in 2019 and moved onto a lectureship at the University of Reading.

As the group consolidated, and as a way to reach out to other students and colleagues working on this topic, we launched a call for papers for a panel on Epistemologies of Mapping and the Making of Empire at the Pan-European International Studies Conference in Sofia, September 2019. The result was very positive, and we constituted a panel that attracted an engaged audience. The conference also coincided with the launch of the Global Epistemics Book Series with Rowman & Littlefield International edited by Inanna Hamati-Ataya and the presentation of its first book, *Imaginaries of Connectivity and the Creation of Novel Spaces of Governance*, more on which will be said in the following.

Our second meeting was a workshop entitled ‘Mapping and the Making of Empire’ which took place at Snekkersten, Denmark, on 1–3 May 2019. Jeppe, as host, took us first on a guided tour of the map collection of the Royal Library of Denmark in Copenhagen where we had the opportunity to enjoy, among others, a large map of Christian VI of Denmark and Norway’s visit to Norway in 1733, a beautiful example of itinerary maps used to display territorial possession. We then made our way to Snekkersten, on the north-east of the island of Zealand, north of Copenhagen. Our objective was to have extensive discussions on how to interrogate maps as empirical objects to reveal the historical rationalities of power involved in the making, projection and reading of spatial imaginaries in given moments. The workshop was aimed to help us understand not only the effects but also the production and

translation involved in imperial map-making. To spice up our work, Jeppe took us on a second tour, this time to the nearby Kronborg, a XVI C castle (Elsinore in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*) from where the famous Sound Dues (or Sound Tolls) were collected. These were a tax charged by the king on foreign ships crossing the Danish Sound connecting the North Sea with the Baltic between 1497 and 1857.¹ During our walk to the castle we could also see the island of Hven where Tycho Brahe had established in 1576, under the patronage of Frederick II of Denmark, the observatory castle of Uraniborg – after Urania, the muse of astronomy. Urania is famous for being the first custom-built observatory of modern Europe, the last built before the invention of the telescope. Observing the monumentalization of the history of a site of state revenue at a key geopolitical chokepoint for North European maritime connectivity, together with the location and story of a state-sponsored astronomical observatory, and having enjoyed the wonderful maps of the Royal Library's collection, was inspiration enough for us to proceed with our individual study of particular cases as chapters for the book.

Following the second workshop, we constituted an editorial team with Laura Lo Presti and Filipe dos Reis, and myself, to provide some clear markers that would allow us to produce a book. At this stage we invited Louis Le Dourain to contribute a chapter drawing on his work on mapping parts of the French (post)colonial space. With all the authors in place, and after the EISA Sofia conference in September, we had planned to hold a third workshop in Groningen in the spring of 2020 to share advanced drafts and enable cross-fertilization. By late February that year, however, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in restricted travel in Europe and the partial closure of universities. Due to the extra workload that resulted from performing our academic duties online, we decided to cancel the final workshop, continue to work individually on the chapters, provide detailed editorial reviews and support to our authors and collaborate amongst the editorial team remotely toward the completion of the book.

BOOK TRILOGY ON CONNECTIVITY AND THE (IM)MATERIAL CREATION OF SPACES

Mapping, Connectivity and the Making of European Empires is the second volume of a trilogy of edited books devoted to exploring how the problem of connectivity relates to the (im)material creation of spaces in time. The general problematic of the trilogy addresses connectivity as a quasi-transcendental category of thought that enables particular forms of political orders, reveals the exercise of specific relationships of power and materializes in regimes of governance in given times and spaces (see Lobo-Guerrero,

Alt, and Meijer 2019, 1–3). Connectivity is usually invoked but normally not thought of and reflected upon. It is difficult to think of it in the abstract, although it becomes visible when approached in relation to any political and spatial practice. It allows deep reflections on the complex conditions of possibility of the terms under which something is made to connect and disconnect, or remain connected. An apparently banal problem, it enshrines the very practice of politics and the production of space(s), and allows for, as Michael Shapiro put it in his review of the first volume, a creative indisciplinaryity. Seeking to explore the developing of an original approach to ontopolitical connectivity, as Larry George nicely stated in his review, the trilogy aims to firmly locate connectivity as a central problem in the analysis of order, power and governance in time and space.

The first volume, *Imaginarities of Connectivity and the Creation of Novel Spaces of Governance*, addressed the problem of how the creation of novel spaces of governance relates to imaginaries of connectivity in particular historical and geographical settings. This second volume explores the problem of connectivity in relation to the use of maps and mapping practices in the attempt to make modern European empires. The third volume, currently at a stage of conception, will explore the problem of navigation and connectivity in relation to the invention of spatial orders. Common to all three volumes are the active practices of creation, making and invention, which betray political agency. Focusing on imaginaries, mapping and navigation as complex empirical sites of investigation, the books seek to ‘ground’ the analysis of connectivity on specific fields of power relations. Analysing novel spaces of governance, European empires and spatial orders as connectivity effects, the volumes aim to make a distinct contribution to the study of connectivity as productive of specific spatial-political formations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As in any collaborative project, many institutions and people intervene in making it possible. We wish to express our gratitude to the University of Groningen, its Research Institute for the Study of Culture (ICOG), and the members of the Chair Group on History and Theory of International Relations for institutional support and active encouragement. We also want to thank the European International Studies Association for funding our exploratory workshop, the Copenhagen Business School as well as Jeppe Strandsbjerg and Leonard Seabrook for facilitating the second workshop, Oliver Kessler and members of his Chair on International Relations at Erfurt, as well as the GLOBE consortium and participants of the doctoral training schools organized by Jean-Christophe Graz in Leysin in February 2018 and 2019 where

parts of some of the chapters of the book were presented. Naturally, we want to thank our authors Louis Le Douarin, Kerry Goettlich, Jeppe Strandsbjerg, Laura Lo Presti, Filipe dos Reis and Luis Lobo-Guerrero for their enthusiastic commitment and patience. Through their engagement and energy this book is more than the sum of its chapters, it is the result of an intensive and engaged collaboration: a connectivity effect!

Last but not least, we want to thank the editor of the Global Epistemics book series, Inanna Hamati-Ataya, for her enthusiastic support and confidence, and our editor at Rowman & Littlefield International, Dhara Snowden, for her commitment to our project. We hope this current book will continue with the tradition of frontier scholarship established by the series.

Luis Lobo-Guerrero

NOTE

1. The Sound Toll Registers, the historical register of the Sound Dues, remains one of the most accessible sources for maritime and seaborne trade history in the early modern period in Northern Europe. Access to the registers and research about it has been made available by the project Sound Toll Registers Online, led by Dr. Jan Willem Veluwenkamp, University of Groningen: <http://www.soundtoll.nl/index.php/en/over-het-project/str-online>, accessed 29 October 2020.

REFERENCES

- Cavafy, Constantine P. 1998. The Poseidonians. In *Collected Poems*, translated by Edmund Keelye and Philip Sheered, 141. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Foucault, Michel. 2002. *The Order of Things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Hacking, Ian. 2006. *The Emergence of Probability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Homer. 2006. *The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fagles, London: Penguin.
- Lobo-Guerrero, Luis, Suvi Alt, and Maarten Meijer. 2019. 'Introduction'. In *Imaginations of Connectivity: The Creation of Novel Spaces of Governance*, edited by Luis Lobo-Guerrero, Suvi Alt, and Maarten Meijer, 1–11. London: Rowman & Littlefield.