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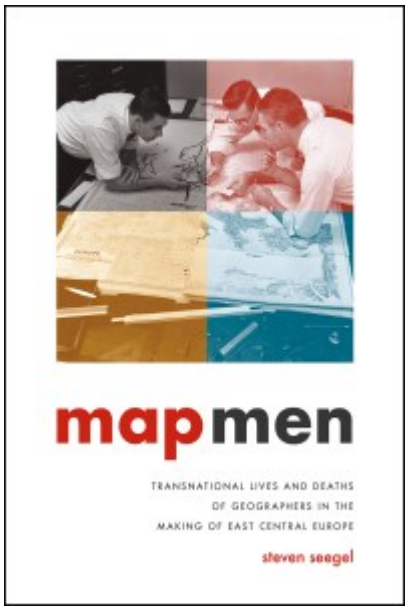
MAP MEN: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of Central Europe



Seegel, Steven. *Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018. 320 p. $55.00. ISBN: 9780226438498.

Map Men looks at the “transnational” lives of five geographers whose work was influential before, during and after the 1919 Paris Peace Talks. They were bound by their relationship with the renowned German geographer Albrecht Penck (1858-1945), who taught and mentored each and helped instill a shared set of academic principles and ideals for MittelEuropa. Seegel’s “map men” are Isaiah Bowman (1878-1950) Canadian-born American geographer, Eugenisz Romer (1871-1954) a Polish geographer from Galicia, Stepan Rudnytsk’yi (1877-1937), a Ukrainian geographer from Galicia, and Hungarian geographer Count Pál Teleki (1879-1941). Using “epistolary geography” (p.7), Seegel examines their entwined lives and attempts to show how their personalities, emotions, and their

psychological make-up is shown in the maps that they made.

Readers are introduced to each in the first chapter when they meet while attending the 1912 American Geographical Society excursion for which Bowman was a marshal. Their passion for geography and the earth sciences created a bond that continued afterward through correspondence. World War One splinters their camaraderie as Seegel's "map men" find themselves on opposing sides of the conflict and their bond further disintegrated during the Paris Peace Treaty Conference and the inter-war period. Map language becomes very important during the peace talks. Bowman, an expert geographer on South American matters serves on the World War One International Boundary Committee for Polish Affairs and became President Woodrow Wilson's chief expert on Central and East-Central Europe settlement issues. Bowman did not speak the languages of, nor understood the cultures of the region. He was highly influenced by Romer's 1916 *Atlas Polski,* as is President Wilson. Ironically, the man most familiar with the region, Rudnytsk'yi, who was considered a Ukrainian expert and who spoke at least seven East-Central European languages is ignored.

During the inter-war period, Penck and Teleki emerge as dedicated revisionists and "veer sharply into nationalist extremism. Penck embraces Nazism and Teleki supports the idealization of Magyar Eurasianism (84)." Seegel argues that their prejudices and personal states of mind are evident in their professional work and cites the following as examples: Penck's 1925 *Volks-und Katterboden* and Teleki's *Ethnographical Map of Hungary According to Population Density* (1918-1919), otherwise known as the *Carte Rouge*. Bowman's star continued to rise throughout the 1920s; he served as an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and became president of Johns Hopkins University (1935-1948). Bowman tried to recreate the camaraderie experienced by American and European geographers before the First World War by helping to organize the 1934 International Geographical Congress. Any good will generated from the congress was short-lived.

Rudnytsk'yi's fate was tragic. In the 1920s he moved into the Soviet Ukraine to establish a geography school but was slowly stripped from his positions because of his pro-Ukrainian work. He was arrested and charged with fascism and counter-revolution in 1933 and died during the purges of 1937. It was not until the fall of the Soviet Union that his work was once again made accessible to scholars. Romer survived World War Two by hiding in a monastery. He sought help from Bowman who did little to help his "friend" emigrate from Poland when World Two began. Count Teleki committed suicide while serving as prime minister of Hungary.

Bowman is the only one of Seegel's "map men" to emerge relatively unscathed from the inter-war period and the Second World War.

Seegel's method of "epistolary geography" succeeds as an excellent biographical account but his attempts to link the "map men's" personality and emotions with their maps are strained. His use of primary sources, particularly the extant written correspondence between the geographers, is instrumental in making *Map Men* a solid work of scholarship. He provides important information about Rudnysk'yi, Romer and Telecki and the fact that he learned Hungarian in order to read Teleki's writings is impressive! Specialists in Hungarian, Polish and Ukrainian studies will find this book an engrossing read. Libraries that focus on collecting materials related to international relations and diplomatic studies should add this book to their shelves. It is a fascinating, original biographical analysis of the transnational lives of five "map men". Readers should note that these men are products of the nineteenth century with nineteenth-century ideals who lived and operated in the twentieth century and shockingly, at times, displayed the prejudices of their era.

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