Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism:

'Histories of Geography' by Paul Stock

Autobiographical Information

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Chapter Abstract

This chapter discusses the history of geography during the Romantic period, concentrating on contemporary books which attempt to describe the whole earth and, in doing so, set out procedures for geographical study. Noting that 'geography' can refer both to the physical characteristics of the earth's surface, and to the disciplined interpretation of those characteristics, the chapter begins by outlining the range of methodologies employed by these works. At the heart of geographical enquiry in the Romantic period are a set of significant epistemological questions about knowledge acquisition, and the perception and interpretation of the world. The chapter illustrates this by showing how two contemporary maps of Europe use different methods to justify and represent the limits of 'European' space. Furthermore, an understanding of geographical epistemologies – with their different assumptions about how to comprehend and intervene in the world – can help us interpret the tumultuous political events of the period.

Key terms

geography, methodology, epistemology, political change, borders, idea of Europe

Histories of Geography

What does it mean to write about the history of geography? This is not a straightforward question to answer, principally because the word 'geography' can refer both to the physical characteristics of the earth's surface, and to the study and interpretation of those characteristics. When we describe the 'geography' of a space, we are seeking to establish its physical features and arrangement. In empirical terms, therefore, a history of geography might refer to the development of, say, the natural environment in a given period – gradual changes in climate, coastlines, or landforms across geological time. Conversely, it might also refer to the history of a discipline; that is, the academic study of a subject called 'geography' which attempts to analyse the world's properties within codified parameters. Related to this, a history of geography might refer more generally to historical understandings of space: how humans have sought to interpret the world and intervene in it – an enormous topic which might incorporate, among other things, ideas about territory, borders, and attitudes to the environment. Clearly there are a number of complexities here, regarding not only the object of 'geographical' analysis, but also the methods most suitable to acquire geographical knowledge. Indeed, these are issues which still preoccupy the modern discipline with its broad diversity of mathematical and humanistic approaches. What I want to show here is that significant epistemological and methodological questions – questions about knowledge acquisition, and the perception and interpretation of the world – are at the heart of geographical enquiry in the Romantic period. Having outlined the principal trends and tensions in

geographical thought, I will then show how two contemporary maps use different methods to justify and represent the limits of 'European' space. Importantly too, I will suggest how an understanding of geographical epistemologies – with their different assumptions about how to comprehend and intervene in the world – can help us interpret the tumultuous political events of the period.

How can we find out what Europeans in the Romantic period thought about geography? Perhaps the best place to look is in geographical texts from the period – specifically, books which attempt to describe the whole earth, and, in doing so, set out methodologies for geographical study. The production of such books increased significantly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Confining ourselves to works in English for a moment, between 1650 and 1770 geographical books for adults (i.e., non-schoolbooks) were published at a rate of roughly four per decade. The 1780s alone, however, saw the publication of thirteen geographical works, followed by another thirteen in the 1790s and fourteen between 1800 and 1810. The pattern is similar in works produced for younger readers or for use in schools. Between 1670 and 1770, there were nineteen such geographies published in Britain, but between 1770 and 1830 there were sixty-two such new titles. These figures do not include multiple editions: for instance, William Guthrie's *New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar*, first published in 1770, went through forty-five editions by 1827.[1] The pattern can perhaps partly be explained by more general increases in book production in the period, and it also seems likely that contemporary events – such as Captain Cook's voyages and prolonged global conflict – stoked interest in reading about different parts of the world.[2] Evidently though, the market for books about 'geography' was sufficiently robust to sustain frequent production of texts with very similar purposes and content.

Working out who might have actually read these books is, of course, a slightly more difficult prospect. Notwithstanding the dangers of discerning readers' identities from the internal evidence of texts, the vast majority of these geographical books make explicit statements about who might benefit from them. They usually present themselves as practical guides for people who need to be well-informed about the world for professional reasons: statesmen, soldiers, merchants, and naturalists. Crucially, though, they also communicate a 'necessary branch of education' for 'people of *every* rank' from 'the lady's library to the tradesman's parlour'.[3] In this respect, geographical books are not straightforwardly elite books, and while there are lavishly expensive editions for limited consumption, there are also a great many cheap titles on poor-quality paper targeting educational and non-elite readerships. It would be naïve to assume that these books straightforwardly express 'popular' mentalities, but on the other hand, their intended reach and evident commercial viability helps us to approximate broad cultural assumptions about geographical ideas in the period. Another key point concerns the internationalism of these texts. Just as the *Encyclopédie* began life as a translation of Chambers's *Cyclopedia*, so too did geographical works freely adapt, borrow and translate from books in various languages. For example, Anton Friedrich Büsching's *Neue Erdbeschreibung* (1754-68), and Conrad Malte-Brun's *Géographie Universelle* (1810-29) became particularly important source-texts for works in English.[4] Furthermore, some authors employed broad ranges of texts in several languages to compile their works.[5] Indeed, all are drawing on a common stock of classical and Renaissance texts – including Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy, Münster, and Ortelius – which influenced both the content and procedure of 'geographical' writing. What this means is that while geographical works in the Romantic period sometimes indulge in patriotic sentiment – proclaiming

their country of publication to be superior and so on – they are not uniformly or simplistically 'nationalist' texts, as they often incorporate broader traditions not delimited to particular states or local perspectives.

How, though, do these books write about geography? How do they define their purposes, and how do they structure and present geographical knowledge? Perusal of their contents pages might initially suggest an extraordinary lack of focus: they cover subjects as diverse as astronomy, political constitutions, inhabitants' 'moral character', and other topics which stretch twenty-first-century conceptions of the discipline. In fact, however, as Robert Mayhew has argued, geography books are 'defined very tightly' in this period, operating within established conventions which mandate coverage of specific topics.[6] In this respect, we need to explore the paradigms and expectations which filter and organize spatial knowledge in the period.

A key figure for this investigation is Bernhard Varen (1622-50), the German-born geographer who lived and worked in the Netherlands from 1645. What makes Varen significant is that his two books *Descriptio Regni Japoniae et Siam* (1649) and *Geographia generalis* (1650) together make a rare and explicit statement about the aims and scope of early-modern geographical study.[7] For Varen, geography is 'a science mixed with mathematics, which teaches about the quantitative states of the earth and of the parts of the earth'. As a result, he distinguishes between *general* or *universal* geography, and *special* or *particular* geography. The former 'studies the earth in general, describing […] the phenomena which affect it as a whole': the form and dimensions of the earth; the distribution of lands and water; as well as general questions about latitude, longitude and climactic zones. By contrast, particular geography focuses on specific places and is subdivided into three broad categories. The first, 'terrestrial', concerns physical dimensions and features: the limits, bounds,

and situation of places, and the mountains, rivers, forests and creatures within them. The 'celestial' category studies a place in relation to the stars: its distance from the equator and poles, its climactic zone, the motion of stars from that position and so on. Lastly, 'human' particulars focus on inhabitants: their customs, capacities, government, and histories.[8] These specifications had their roots in ancient sources: Ptolemy's *Geographia* distinguished between the mathematical methods of 'geography', concerned with measuring the whole world, and the descriptive approach of 'chorography', which focused on particular places.[9] However, Varen's expanded designations were, and still are, enormously influential. Though the exact terminology varies, almost all eighteenth-and nineteenth-century geographical works include information on astronomy, the natural world, and human societies: Büsching talks about mathematical, natural, and civil description of the earth; James Playfair divides the subject into mathematical, historical, and 'physical or natural' branches; while Malte-Brun uses the terms *mathématique*, *physique* and *politique* in his review of different approaches.[10] Even the most recent edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) lists the common divisions of the discipline as 'mathematical', 'physical', and 'political' ('geography', definition 1a).

Significantly, these frameworks for geographical enquiry suggest different approaches to the understanding of space. Varen's 'celestial' category – like his 'general' geography – uses universal mathematical laws to interpret the world. Space is understood in terms of abstract calculation premised upon geometric and astronomical principles, and not in terms of materiality, superficial content, or sensation. For example, climate is often defined as 'a certain space upon the surface of the terrestrial globe contained between two parallels, and so far distant from each other that the longest day in one differs half an hour from the longest day in the other

parallel'. In other words, it has nothing to do with 'the seasons [or] the quality of the soil': mathematical principles are what distinguish different climactic zones.[11] Sometimes whole continents are understood as geometric shapes. Africa is commonly referred to as a 'pyramid', and some books even describe Asia as a 'cone' and Europe as an 'oblong square'.[12] These phrases define the continents as idealized abstractions, paying relatively little attention to material physicality.

By contrast, Varen's 'terrestrial' category is driven by observation of the physical environment: it defines spaces by the contents of the 'natural world'. Setting the aside the problem of whether it is possible to perceive the world directly, or whether such perception is always filtered and distorted by human senses, the implication here is that the world and its contents are 'out there' in an objective form, separate from, but readily comprehensible by, humans. In epistemological terms, the emphasis is on empirical experience and observation as the principal means to gather and organize knowledge. Indeed, many works place a high premium on first-hand travel accounts as sources.[13] Particular spaces are therefore defined by their material characteristics: the number of mountains, the length of rivers, the quality of soil, the variety of animals, and so on. Information is observed, collected and delivered, rather than being deduced or calculated by universal mathematical laws.

Lastly, Varen's 'human' particulars – with their focus on customs, government, and history – place human activity and perception at the centre of understandings of space. In other words, spaces are defined by human action and intervention: the construction of towns and borders, for example, or the performance of certain social practices. The epistemological implications of this are significant. In 'terrestrial' geography, spaces and their contents are seen, at least on the surface, as being distinct from their observers. But here, human activities, priorities, and

perspectives – including those of the observer – structure how spaces are viewed and understood. In this sense, 'geography' is a human construct, both in the sense that it concerns human intervention in the world, and, more fundamentally, in that it is premised upon interpretative parameters grounded in human perceptions rather than the 'objective' world. In his work on natural history, Oliver Goldsmith says that merely discovering the productions of nature is 'dry, mechanical and incomplete'. But an outline of the 'properties, manners and relations, *which they bear to us*' 'exhibits new pictures to the imagination, and improves our relish for existence by widening the prospect of nature around us'.[14] Goldsmith speaks in terms of 'pictures' and 'prospects', that is to say, constructed perspectives: nature is interpreted and comprehended in terms of its relationship with human observers and their intellectual frameworks. To take another example, Michael Adams says that, in his work, 'the prospect of all the objects will be rendered clear and distinct by the aptness of their arrangement, and the beautiful order of their succession'.[15] In other words, beauty and order lie in the medium and the perspectives offered by it, not directly in the world itself.

Overall, then, Varen's different approaches to geographical study engage with a number of critical issues, including the methods of knowledge gathering, the concept of 'objectivity', and the nature of human perception. It would be misleading to suggest that they present fully-articulated positions in an explicit debate; instead, such questions shape a conceptual framework which underpins the way geographical works define and set about their tasks. Nor should we assume that these different approaches are mutually exclusive; indeed, Varen's purpose is to articulate the various methods which can together comprise geographical knowledge. Most geographical books, for example, include a standard section on the two meanings of

the word ‘horizon’. The ‘rational horizon’ refers to the mathematical division of the earth into two equal parts; the ‘sensible horizon’ to the apparent edge of the earth visible from ‘the very place whereon we stand’ – that is, the horizon comprehensible by human senses.[16] At such moments, authors acknowledge the different implications of diverse methodologies, but also incorporate both – with their tensions – in the corpus of geographical enquiry. In summary then, geography books engage with some of the key epistemological questions of the Enlightenment and Romanticism: the legitimacy of using universalized laws to interpret reality; the relative merits of pure mathematics and eyewitness observation as means to acquire knowledge; the problem of whether order is intrinsic to the world or an imposition by human systems. We are used to thinking about these questions as the province of elite texts. Here, however, we can see how they both inform and are reflected in popular, high-circulation works intended for utilitarian consumption and educational use.

I now want to amplify these implications by turning to an example especially relevant to a volume on European Romanticism. How do the different approaches I have mentioned affect understandings of European space? How are they related to the political and ideological concerns of the period? Consider these two maps of Europe, both from geography books of the kind just discussed. One, ‘A Map of Europe from the Best Authorities’ is from Michael Adams’s *New Royal System of Universal Geography* (1794), though the same plate appears to have been previously used in John Seally’s *Complete Geographical Dictionary* (1783-4) (Figure 33.1). The other, titled ‘An Accurate Map of Europe Compiled from the Best Authorities 1791’, is from the ninth edition of Richard Brookes’s *The General Gazetteer, or Compendious Geographical Dictionary* (1795). As the title suggests, the plate was in fact first used in the earlier, seventh, edition of 1791 (Figure 33.2).[17] On the surface,

these two maps look extremely similar to the point of being nearly identical. They both depict the whole continent of Europe stretching from Iceland to western Russia. They also show surrounding parts of Asia and Africa, though these areas are blank, whereas Europe itself is filled with names (of states and cities) and major topographical features. Both maps overlay the region with a graticule of longitude and latitude, thus placing Europe within the context of an unseen globe comprehensible by mathematical laws. Significantly too, the maps place a strong emphasis on rivers, which are by far the most prominent topographical features on the maps. This, in fact, reflects a theory common to many geography books – that multiple rivers are a defining characteristic of Europe. Rivers apparently facilitate 'intercourse and commerce between different nations', but also 'check the progress of conquest of despotism', thus explaining the prevalence of trade in Europe and the supposed absence of 'oriental' tyrants.[18] In this respect, we can see the influence of environmentalist thought: the belief – often particularly associated with Jean Bodin and Montesquieu – that environmental circumstances directly affect the development of cultures and individuals.[19] It is also notable that both maps, and particularly the later one in Brookes, do not show state borders very clearly, if at all. I will return to this apparent lack of interest in state territoriality in due course.

Presently though, I want to focus on the eastern edge of Europe as depicted in both maps; that is, the border between Europe and Asia. The border is not identical in the two maps, but follows a very similar trajectory. Starting in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, it follows the River Don for a short distance before traversing to the River Volga. It then continues north, joins the rough location of the Ural mountains, and follows them to the Arctic Circle. By beginning with the Sea of Azov and the Don, these maps tap into an ancient tradition which saw the Don (or Tanais) as

marking the limit of Europe. According to some authorities, including Strabo and Ptolemy, the river originated somewhere in the far north near the Northern Ocean and, consequently, formed a barrier of water between Asia and Europe. However, as information about the region grew, the apparent absence of such a definitive demarcation provoked much speculation about alternative sites for the border. In the 1570s, for example, Ortelius proposed a simple straight line linking the Don to the White Sea by Archangel, whereas fifty years later, Philip Clüver suggested the River Ob in Siberia as the probable northern boundary. In the mid-seventeenth century, French cartographer Nicholas Sanson even argued for a boundary-line connecting the White Sea to the River Dnieper in modern Ukraine – thus placing Moscow firmly in Asia. As W. H. Parker explains, controversy about the Europe-Asian boundary continues to the present day: while 'there were at various times prevailing boundaries, each had many variations and rivals […] There was never general agreement about any particular boundary'.[20]

Amidst these uncertainties, the fact that both the Adams map and the Brookes map settle on a similar trajectory is significant. Their chosen line follows very closely the one prescribed by the Swedish military officer Philip Johann von Strahlenberg in his *Das Nord-und Ostliche Theil von Europa und Asia* (1730). Captured in 1709 during the Great Northern War (1700-21), Strahlenberg mapped Russia on behalf of Peter the Great, eventually returning to Sweden to publish his work. Decrying other proposed boundaries as 'fictitious', Strahlenberg settled on the Urals as the most readily comprehensible dividing line. Not only do the mountains separate lands which differ in 'situation and surface', but they also connect with the River Volga's 'high and remarkable shore' and from there to 'a chain of very high mountains' linked to the Don and the Caucasus. In this way, mountains and rivers form 'the visible

marks of the bounds between Europe and Asia'.[21] It is surely no coincidence that Strahlenberg's border places a larger section of Russia firmly in Europe, and thus serves Peter's wider objective to 'recast the geopolitical self-image of the country' in European terms.[22] The fact that the Adams and Brookes maps reproduce this border suggests the spread and success of this ideological mission: they both show Russia as residing solidly in European space, and thus as a participant in European affairs. Indeed, the Urals boundary would go on to be employed by Immanuel Kant, Malte-Brun and others deep into the nineteenth century.[23]

Where the two maps differ, however, is in the *way* they depict the European-Asia border. The Adams/Seally map emphasizes the Urals themselves, showing a single uninterrupted line of mountains running from the Arctic to the Volga. Importantly too, they are by far the largest mountains shown: the Alps are tiny in comparison, and the Pyrenees and the Carpathians are the only other ranges on the map. The effect is to grant the Urals both symbolic and material significance: unlike the Alps, they are a physical barrier separating two continents. This implies that the division between Europe and Asia is a natural one, clearly denoted by the obvious physical properties of the earth. In other words, borders are inscribed into the land – they are part of a natural order, perhaps even purposely created according to a divine plan. Of course, there is a sleight-of-hand taking place in that the map depicts the Urals in an exaggerated and stylized manner in order to emphasize their supposed empirical significance. Nonetheless, we can detect here the epistemological implications of Varen's 'terrestrial' geography: specifically, that humans gain knowledge about the world by observing the signs and details intrinsic to the natural order. The task of human learning is therefore to observe the earth and its content closely and discern their inherent purposes and qualities.

This has political implications particularly resonant in the Revolutionary period. If borders are engraved in the earth, then this adds credibility to the concept of 'natural frontiers': the idea that certain borders are determined by natural features and that states should fulfil their proper destiny by expanding to fill them. This notion had strong currency in *ancien régime* and Revolutionary Europe. Peter Sahlins has shown how 'the idea of natural frontiers was a powerful, recurrent image in the shifting repertoire of French political culture', serving to 'shape the concept of a unified state'. Montesquieu and Rousseau make reference to the '*limites naturelles*' of states, and the concept appears to have influenced French expansion and diplomacy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even featuring in the geographical writings of the royal tutors. In the 1790s, the Revolutionaries spoke about 'the ancient and natural limits of France […] the Rhine, the Alps and the Pyrenees'.[24] For example, in a debate about whether to incorporate Savoy into the French Republic, the Abbé Grégoire advised the National Convention to 'peruse the archives of nature, to see what the law permits to you, what duty prescribes to you in this regard'.[25] Taken at face value, the implication here is that political practice should follow the guidance of the natural world. Some historians have been tempted to see 'natural frontiers' merely as a rhetorical veneer to the hard calculations of *realpolitik*.[26] Clearly, it would be unwise to discount this in all cases, but nor should we necessarily assume that such ideas are disingenuous. Perhaps a 'territorial' view of geography – in which the earth presents signs to be interpreted – here inspires certain approaches to foreign policy and international relations. In this respect we might see how specific kinds of geographical knowledge can frame and underpin political ideas and activity. Indeed, as Sahlins notes, the interest in natural frontiers marks an important shift in the self-conception of early-modern states – a gradual movement away from feudal

kingdoms of accumulated rights and 'overlapping jurisdictions', and towards notions of a shared polity marked by 'bounded, delimited territory'.[27]

In summary then, the Adams/Seally map shows the edge of Europe as a natural border marked by the Ural mountains. The Brookes map is very different. The Europe-Asia border is in roughly the same place, but it does not follow any natural feature: indeed, the Urals are not shown at all. Instead, the border intersects otherwise empty space in what some contemporary texts describe as an 'arbitrary line'.[28] This suggests that any division between Europe and Asia is not founded on objective natural features, but is rather a human imposition. In this respect, borders are contrivances of human culture: they are a creative intervention in the world derived from human politics and history, rather than something intrinsic to the natural order. Evidently, this has quite different epistemological implications to the Adams map. Rather than receiving knowledge by reading the pre-existent signs of nature, humans here impose categories onto the world in order to make sense of it. In other words, we understand the world by inventing terms of reference – and this includes the idea that 'Europe' and 'Asia' are discrete and identifiable spaces. As the *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia* (1830) says rather carefully, 'Europe is the name given to one of the four great divisions into which geographers have divided the earth'.[29] In effect, 'Europe' is something determined by geographers' disciplinary practices, not by observations of the natural environment.

Ultimately, these issues are related to a long-running philosophical debate about whether humans understand the world via perception or conception. This was a topic of great interest to humanist and Enlightenment thinkers, from Francis Bacon's focus on empirical observation to David Hume's scepticism about the reliability of sense experience. Later, of course, it would become a key Romantic theme – we need

only think of the famous moment in the *Prelude* when Wordsworth crosses the Alps and reflects on the relationship between the observed scene and the power of his own imagination. Moreover, this debate also has implications for political practice, especially foreign policy. If borders are not naturally inscribed in the earth, and are instead the products of human imposition as the Brookes map implies, then they can be changed according to political expediency. Every historical period sees new polities and regimes, but the extent of large-scale territorial change in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period is remarkable. An exhaustive summary would require much patience, but in brief France expanded aggressively in the 1790s, absorbing the Austrian Netherlands, the Rhineland, Savoy, and Nice. A number of satellite states were founded under French influence or occupation: the United Provinces became the Batavian Republic and the Swiss Confederacy the Helvetic Republic; in Italy, the Venetian Republic, the Republic of Genoa, the Papal States, and the Kingdom of Naples were abolished and replaced with the Cisalpine, Ligurian, Roman, and Parthenopean Republics respectively. In eastern Europe, Russia, Austrian, and Prussia divided Poland between them, removing it from the map of Europe until its reconstitution in 1918.

Under Napoleon, significant changes continued apace, with more French annexations in the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and the German states, and new states allied to France, including the Kingdom of Westphalia in northern Germany and the Duchy of Warsaw on former Polish land. Most notably, Napoleon dissolved the Holy Roman Empire, replacing its hundreds of tiny statelets with the Confederation of the Rhine. After Napoleon's defeat the victorious powers reapportioned Europe again at the Congress of Vienna, though in some respects the settlement was characterized as much by new acquisitions and confirmation of Napoleonic changes as by restoration

of the *ancien régime*.[30] In short, the continuous wars and treaties of this period meant that borders were open to constant re-interpretation and re-designation: they are the products of human contrivances and endeavours, not fixed by natural laws. Perhaps this is the reason why Adams's *System of Geography* (1794) and Brookes's *General Gazetteer* (1795) both use map plates which make relatively little attempt to outline state territoriality precisely; it is a strategy to cope with unpredictable change. As John Pinkerton says in his *Modern Geography* (1802), describing the present state of European affairs is like 'writing on the sands of a troubled ocean, as the whole may be radically changed in the short space that this sheet is in the press'.[31]

In general terms, the different representations of the Europe-Asia border on these two maps reflect wider uncertainties about how to define and understand borders in the period. This was a question of particular urgency, not merely thanks to the tumult of international conflict, but also due to the intensification of state-building preceding and resulting from those wars. In some respects we can detect rising interest in identifying and enforcing both 'natural' and 'arbitrary' borders. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'maps came to be increasingly used in diplomatic business' and, as a consequence, 'a firmer grasp of the nature of a linear frontier developed'. This, in turn, contributed to 'a more spatially territorial' conception of statehood; indeed, one might see the definition of 'linear boundaries' as a critical component in wider ideas about 'undivided sovereignty' and the uniformity required by state centralization. For some historians, the French Revolution marks a decisive phase in this process, with its creation of new administrative boundaries, abolition of feudal jurisdictions, and attempts to introduce a universal legal code.[32] As the wars continued, a number of states – especially France and Britain – became concerned to regulate travel and distinguish 'familiar' people from strangers by

issuing and passports and travel permits.[33] Underpinning this is an assumption that particular people 'belong' to certain spaces; indeed, that individuals are defined by their containment within specific boundaries. We can also detect increasing interest in economic borders, designed to control the movement of goods and to maximize taxation revenues. The most well-known example is Napoleon's Continental Blockade (1806-13), a large-scale attempt to exclude British goods from French-controlled markets, which stemmed from a longer tradition of maritime and economic warfare. The Blockade required quarantined trading zones and watertight customs barriers, though in the event it was undermined by a lack of sufficient naval and customs resources.[34] In this respect, the reach of centralized power had not caught up with the ambitions of theoretical interest in borders.

All of this might suggest a relentless drive towards tightly-defined bordered spaces – a process sometimes proclaimed as central characteristic of modernity.[35] In other respects, however, we can note a strong interest in erasing or breaking down borders – and not simply in the events that saw borders rearranged by military and diplomatic strategy. On the one hand, centralized state-building requires a firmer delineation between countries, but also demands the removal of different taxation and jurisdictional regimes *within* states in order to confirm central control. The French Revolutionaries divided France into new *départements* in 1790 precisely in order to abolish the administrative, judicial and fiscal subdivisions of the *ancien régime* and to both create and control an idea of shared 'national space' governed by the Revolutionary centre. Crucially, the *départements* were initially based on a grid scheme and then modified and named according prominent natural features – a technique which tries to evoke mathematical and topographical certainties even as it radically redesigns political and administrative spaces.[36] Napoleon's preference for

highly centralized government is well known, but his expansion of common practices across Europe – for example his introduction of French-based legal codes in the Italian states, Poland and elsewhere – might be seen as a sustained attempt to break down (inter)national division in favour of centralized uniformity. Some have even interpreted Napoleonic rule as an exercise in European integration, though this perhaps underestimates the degree of French primacy involved.[37] In ideological terms too, we must remember the universalism integral to political debate in the period. The 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen' begins with a reference to 'the French people', but then issues imperatives for 'all men', 'all citizens' and 'any society'.[38] This is a manifesto which recognises no boundaries and explicitly wants to abolish localized distinctions in favour of universalised principles. Indeed, as Volney remarks in his *Les ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (1791), 'the communication of knowledge will extend from society to society till it comprehends the whole earth. By the law of imitation, the example of one people will be followed by others, who will adopt its spirit and its laws […] and civilisation will be universal'.[39] In 1792, the French Revolutionary government even professed universalism to be a cornerstone of its foreign policy, allowing France to assist 'all peoples wishing to regain their liberty' – though there is considerable historiographical dispute about the practical impact of this declaration.[40]

To sum up, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods saw considerable debate about the role and significance of borders. The international conflict and state centralizations crucial to the period both act to solidify and dissolve (different kinds of) borders, and the different emphases of the Adams and the Brookes maps tap into these contemporary developments. It is significant too that these issues are foregrounded in depictions of the Europe-Asia border. The idea of Europe had long

been a problematic issue, but recent scholarship has suggested heightened interest throughout this period in the unity, disunity, and limits of a space called 'Europe'. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, 'with [their] prolonged military and ideological conflicts, oversaw profound debate about Europe's history and potential future', evident in various media from literary texts to newspapers and diplomatic correspondence.[41] In this respect, the maps participate in wider contemporary concerns, offering different ideas about Europe premised upon 'natural' and 'human' interpretations of space.

Overall, my point is that the maps' different depictions of the Europe-Asia border represent very different ways of understanding the world and gaining knowledge about it. Underpinning this is an epistemological debate about the perception and conception of spaces – an issue which has its roots in continuing methodological discussions about the purposes and scope of geographical study. Nor is this merely an intellectual matter. I have tried to suggest that these questions have a bearing on contemporary geopolitical activity; that questions about how to interpret and study geographical spaces are integral to contemporary considerations of, say, borders and state-building. This is not to imply that geographical texts and their methodological concerns directly inspire politicians in some teleological sense, although evidently some authors hoped that their books would exert such influence. Rather, it is to situate the contemporary events of international politics – large-scale state formation, interest in 'natural borders', or borderlessness universalism – within a wider set of questions about how humans understand and influence the world.

Importantly, these debates are articulated not simply in elite and specialist texts, but in geographical books for a wider readership, including educational and general reference volumes. This means that geography in the period is alive to some

of the crucial philosophical issues of the late Enlightenment and Romanticism. Romantic interest in subjective human experiences, for example, can be seen not in terms of a 'reaction' to the supposed rationalism of the eighteenth century, but within the context of Enlightenment concern with sensibility, human perception, and knowledge gathering. In this sense, some of the great Romantic tropes – a preoccupation with the natural world, say, or (the limits of) sense experience – are firmly located within a set of issues which extend all the way from Kantian metaphysics through to contemporary political undertakings and popular geographical works. The point here is not to see geography – with its methodological breadth and self-defined utilitarian application – as a 'missing link' connecting high philosophy to hard politics in an overly prescriptive or causal way. Instead, it merely is a reminder that a 'history of geography' concerns both the development of disciplined thought and the course of political events 'on the ground' – and both are interrelated at this crucial juncture in European intellectual and political history.

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Figure 33.1. 'A Map of Europe from the Best Authorities', from Michael Adams, *New Royal System of Universal Geography* (London, 1794)

Figure 33.2. 'An Accurate Map of Europe Compiled from the Best Authorities 1791', from Richard Brookes, *The General Gazetteer, or Compendious Geographical Dictionary*, 9th edn (1795)

[1] Statistics are drawn from O. F. G. Sitwell, *Four Centuries of Special Geography* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), 16-23; 273-84.

[2] William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially chapter 6.

[3] E. and J. Bruce, *An Introduction to Geography and Astronomy* (Newcastle: Longman, 1805), p. xxiii; Christopher Kelley, *New and Complete System of Universal Geography*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Kelley, 1814-17), I, preface.

[4] Büsching was translated into English twice (in 1762 and in 1778) and was cited by, for example, the *New and Complete System of Universal Geography* (1796), and John Pinkerton's *Modern Geography* (1802). Rival publishers even alleged that Guthrie's *Geographical Grammar* plagiarised Büsching: see Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment and the Book: Scottish Authors and their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland and America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), 156. Malte-Brun (translated 1822-33) is described as 'the most illustrious geographer of modern times' by James Bell's *System of Geography*, 6 vols. (Glasgow: Fullarton, 1832), I, 1.

[5] Robert Mayhew, 'Mapping Science's Imagined Community: Geography as a Republic of Letters, 1600–1800', *The British Journal for the History of Science* 38 (2005), 73-92. For a sample source-list see John Bigland, *A Geographical and Historical View of the World*, 5 vols (London: Longman, 1810), I, ix-xiii.

[6] Robert Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography: The Political Languages of British Geography, 1650-1850* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 32.

[7] See Margret Schuchard (ed.), *Bernhard Varenius (1622-1650)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[8] William Warntz, 'Newton, the Newtonians, and the Geographia Generalis Varenii', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 79, no. 2 (1989), 165-191; J. N. L. Baker, *The History of Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell 1963), 105-18.

[9] Lucia Nuti, 'Mapping Places: Chorography and Vision in the Renaissance', in Denis Cosgrove (ed.) *Mappings* (London: Reaktion, 1999), 90.

[10] Büsching, *A New System of Geography*, 6 vols. (London: Millar, 1762), I, 6, 12; James Playfair, *A System of Geography*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Hill, 1808-14), I, i-ii; Malte-Brun, *Précis de la géographie universelle*, 8 vols (Paris: Buisson, 1810-29), I, 6-7.

[11] *A New Historical and Commercial System of Geography* (Manchester: Sowler and Russell, 1800), p. viii.

[12] Guthrie, *Grammar* (1770), 515; Thomas Bankes et al, *A New Royal Authentic and Complete System of Geography* (London: Cooke [1787/8]), 107; John Smith, *A System of Modern Geography*, 2 vols. (London: Sherwood, 1810-11), I, 4.

[13] Some geographical works are effectively edited collections of travel writings. See Cavendish Pelham, *The World, or the Present State of the Universe*, 2 vols (London: Stratford: 1810).

[14] Oliver Goldsmith, *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, 8 vols (London: Nourse, 1774), I, i. My emphasis.

[15] Michael Adams, *New Royal System of Universal Geography* (London: Hogg, 1794), p. vii.

[16] Richard Brookes, *The General Gazetteer* (London: Newbury, 1762), p. vi.

[17] Barbara Backus McCorkle, *A Carto-Bibliography of the Maps in Eighteenth-Century British and American Geography Books* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Digital Publishing, 2009), entry nos. 28, 26, 4 and 3. http://hdl.handle.net/1808/5564.

[18] See, for example, Guthrie, *Geographical Grammar*, ninth edition (London: Dilly et al, 1785), 59.

[19] See Charles Withers, *Placing the Enlightenment: Thinking Geographically about the Age of Reason* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 135; David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 97, 121-4.

[20]W. H. Parker, 'Europe: How Far?, *The Geographical Journal* 126, no. 3 (1960), 278, 281-2.

[21] Strahlenberg, *An Historico-Geographical Description of the North and Eastern Parts of Europe and Asia* (London: Innys and Manby, 1738), 121-2.

[22] Mark Bassin, 'Russia between Europe and Asia: The Ideological Construction of Geographical Space' *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991), 5-7. The Ural-border was further championed in the 1730s by the Russian historian Vasilii N. Tatishchev.

[23] Parker, 'Europe: How Far?', 286.

[24] Peter Sahlins, 'Natural Frontiers Revisited: France's Boundaries since the Seventeenth Century', *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 5 (1990), 1450, 1430-46; Norman J. G. Pounds, 'France and "Les Limites Naturelles" from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 44, no. 1 (1954), 51-5.

[25] '*…compulser les archives de la nature, voir ce que le droit vous permet, ce que le devoir vous prescrit à cet égard*' (my translation). Cited in Pounds, 'France and "Les Limites Naturelles", 54.

[26] See Gaston Zeller 'La monarchie d'ancien régime et les frontières naturelles', *Revue d'histoire moderne* 8 (1933), 305-33; and 'Histoire d'une idée fausse', *Revue de synthèse* 11-12 (1936): 115-31.

[27] Sahlin, 'Natural Frontiers', 1424, 1427.

[28] John Pinkerton, *Modern Geography*, 2 vols (London: Cadel and Davies, 1802), I, 2; II, 465.

[29] David Brewster (ed.), *The Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, 18 vol. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1830), IX, 235.

[30] For an excellent summary see Charles J. Esdaile, *The French Wars: 1792-1815* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[31] Pinkerton, *Modern Geography*, I, 253.

[32] Jeremy Black, 'Boundaries and Conflict: International Relations in *ancien régime* Europe', in Carl Grundy-Warr (ed.), *World Boundaries Volume 3: Eurasia* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19-54.

[33] Andreas Fahrmeir, *Citizenship: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale, 2007), 46-50.

[34] Geoffrey Ellis, *The Napoleonic Empire*, second edn. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 109-19.

[35] See David Turnbull, 'Cartography and Science in Early Modern Europe: Mapping the Construction of Knowledge Spaces', *Imago Mundi* 48 (1996), 5-24.

[36] Michael Heffernan, 'The Changing Political Map: Geography, Geopolitics and the Idea of Europe since 1500', in R. A. Butlin and R. A. Dodgshon (eds.), *An Historical Geography of Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 151-3; Joseph Konvitz, *Cartography in France 1660-1848: Science, Engineering and Statecraft* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 43-45

[37] Stuart Woolf, *Napoleon's Integration of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[38] Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007), 16-17.

[39] Volney, Comte de, *The Ruins, or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires, Translated from the French* (London: Searle [1795]), 115-16.

[40] T. C. W. Blanning, *The Origins of the French Revolutionary Wars* (London: Longman, 1986), 136-7.

[41] Paul Stock, *The Shelley-Byron Circle and the Idea of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10. See also Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (In Theory)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).