

Imagined Geographies: Europe

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The idea that Europe is a continent is an old one, as is the belief that it is distinct from Asia. The resulting opposition has long been a defining element in European identity – despite the fact that these two ‘continents’ actually form part of a single landmass. References to Europe’s boundaries, divisions and component parts can seem equally arbitrary, even paradoxical. What does it imply when Greeks, from a country conventionally lauded as ‘Europe’s cradle’, nonetheless write of a journey to Paris or Vienna as ‘going to Europe’ (Jezernik 2004: 29)? Or when an American journalist ends a tour southwards, from Kaliningrad through post-socialist Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, by greeting the minarets of Istanbul with relief: ‘I was back in the West’ (Applebaum 1995: 305)?

Like all imaginative geographies, Europe’s symbolic maps are highly contingent, varying according to perspective and purpose as well as changing over time. There is no one unified mental map of Europe, nor are its cultural coordinates – North, South, East, and West – fixed and immutable. Consequently it often makes less sense to ask ‘what is Europe?’ than ‘*whose* Europe?’ Travel accounts, as the products of explicitly situated knowledge, show very clearly that the world looks different when viewed from different starting points.

Edward Said’s far-reaching influence not only popularized the phrase ‘imaginative geography’ but also prompted much work on the mental maps of Europe generated by travellers from centres of political power and cultural authority, whether London, Paris or Vienna. Precisely how far approaches derived from extra-European colonial relations can appropriately be applied *within* Europe has prompted considerable debate. Still, the postcolonial impetus did much to turn scholars’ attention to the power relationships and ideological assumptions framing much metropolitan travel

writing, and to the ways these helped shape imaginative geographies of difference within Europe. Earlier works of cultural history collating travels to a particular destination generally assumed a self-evident fit between physical or political geography and cultural constructs, for instance when discussing the Mediterranean or Scandinavia (e.g. Pemble 1987). Later studies asked, more explicitly, how such concepts as Eastern Europe (Wolff 1994), the Balkans (Todorova 1997) or the European South (Dainotto 2007) were brought into being, with an emphasis on their function as Europe's internal Others in the eyes of (predominantly) French or British elites.

There have been trenchant warnings of the danger of reading travel writing as the manifestation of an imperialist consciousness to the exclusion of all else, but imaginative geography does not need to be reduced to grids of power, or the construction of unitary images of 'the Other'. In one of the most original treatments of the subject, Chloe Chard (1999) focused on the rhetoric of pleasure and guilt rather than the intersections of knowledge and power in exploring 'what it was possible to say and write' about 'the foreign' in the context of the Grand Tour. Equally, Maria Todorova distinguished different images of the Balkans, surveying Italian, Habsburg, German, French and Russian 'discoveries' of the region, as well as British and American ones, while Manfred Pfister (1996) demonstrated the 'pluralization of discourses about Italy' even within a single national tradition, a fact emphasized by his subtitle, 'the Italies of British travellers'.

However, the scholarly focus on travellers from Europe's political centres has tended to marginalize the practices and perspectives of those from elsewhere, particularly when such people are viewed primarily as the immobile objects of others' observations, or when their positions (e.g. as 'Balkan') are treated as by-products of discourses originating elsewhere. It is clear that not all mental maps carry the same authority, and that Europe's many Others have had to grapple with categories and coordinates not of their own making. Yet this has not stopped them from travelling and writing, nor has it prevented them from locating themselves with reference to these or other, locally generated projections, for their own purposes. Scholarship is only beginning to come to terms with these

issues, and with the complexities of power, agency, and cultural exchange revealed in such travel accounts.

This survey of European travel writing's imaginative geographies sketches some of the ways Europe has been delineated and divided in travel writing, whether from its centres or its frontiers, over the past several centuries. It adopts two concepts as analytical tools: the *itinerary*, the set of routes and sites mapped out by particular intersections of travel and writing; and the *zone*, culturally defined spaces delineated by textually-marked boundaries and characteristics (specifically, for the purposes of this chapter, Europe's North, South, East, West and Centre).

Itineraries

European travel writing has had many different sub-genres, usually defined thematically (e.g. the Grand Tour account) or in literary-historical terms (the Romantic travel narrative). Many of these sub-genres can be characterized by their itineraries, each having favoured routes, notable sites, blank spaces and destinations – and, in consequence, their own distinctive ways of representing European space. Here I single out only a few widely shared travel genres and their itineraries, asking how each imagined Europe and its divisions.

The pilgrimage account is one such genre. Pilgrims to the Holy Land, whether Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian, or Jewish, construed their journey as a devotional practice that linked the point of departure to their ultimate destination, conceived not only as a specific site (the Holy Sepulchre, Temple Mount) but also a point of direct contact with a living past. In effect, these itineraries mapped out a single sacred space that transcended space and time. In practice, however, frontiers feature dramatically in such texts – like the tempestuous sea-crossings that so often represent a spiritual trial for the pilgrim to overcome, but that also underline the physical separation of Europe from the Holy Land. Accounts of devotional pilgrimage within Europe follow much the same logic,

though along different routes, and implying different though overlapping cartographies of faith: Catholic Europe, the Orthodox ecumene (and indeed, a Protestant Europe defined in part by the *rejection* of religious pilgrimage).

The prestige of Rome as a pilgrimage destination implied a 'centripetal' map of Europe: all roads led to this ecclesiastical and cultural centre. From the sixteenth century, members of Europe's educated elite shared the ideal of an Italian tour, with Rome as its goal, whether their journeys were made for spiritual purposes or whether they took a more secular form, inspired by reverence for classical antiquity. The 'Grand Tour' of British, French or Germanic travellers was just one aspect of this Europe-wide tradition. Polish Catholics, Czech Protestants and even Orthodox travellers from Russia and the Balkans also left accounts of their journeys to Rome, with their accounts asserting the travellers' participation in a Europe-wide heritage. Such self-affirming journeys to the centre of a shared civilization bound together even the farthest reaches of Europe in a single imagined space.

However, the centripetal pull of Rome or the Orthodox centres of gravity represented by Constantinople or Kiev was counterbalanced by multi-polar accounts of Europe. These were traced by the itineraries of travel accounts that collated information on Europe's diversity, 'methodized' by apodemic manuals that taught the traveller to see and describe Europe as made up of cities, provinces, states and peoples, each with their own characteristic languages, customs, confessions and climates. The 'varieties of Europe', to borrow the title of a seventeenth-century Hungarian travel account, comprised different but comparable units within a single framework. Both these model itineraries, the centripetal and the multi-polar, afforded a cosmopolitan elite from across the continent a secure position from which to assess Europe and its peculiarities. The coordinates of difference they mapped most consistently were relatively static social and confessional ones. These could be mapped spatially (city vs. countryside), even according to political geography ('*cuius regio, eius religio*'), but they didn't contradict the framework of a Europe that was imagined in common.

This began to shift with the eighteenth century. Enlightenment travel writing is associated above all with overseas voyages of discovery, but the same deliberate pursuit of Otherness also guided enlightened travel accounts of Europe and its parts. State-funded initiatives lay behind some such travels (e.g. Peter Simon Pallas in Russia, or Linnaeus in Lapland), but private individuals, too, recounted their European travels as explorations and discoveries, in regions as diverse as Scandinavia, Russia, Greece and the Levant, Dalmatia, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Indeed, a newly-minted eighteenth-century cliché characterized parts of Europe as even more 'unknown' than the territories being mapped by overseas expeditions: the *Critical Review* commented in 1763 that 'the Hottentots themselves, and the Esquimaux of America, are better known [...] than the Spanish Nation is at present' (Bolufer Peruga 2009: 86); and similar claims were often made about regions such as the Scottish Highlands, Lapland and the Balkans. Unknown to *whom* was rarely asked. Those described knew perfectly well where they were, and occasionally protested the terms in which they were 'discovered', particularly when travellers explained their idiosyncrasies with reference to Hottentots or to bygone ages.

In this way a new imaginative geography emerged, in which Europe was less a matter of physical geography than a qualitative assessment. Travellers regularly depicted places and peoples as more or less European, judging them according to the criteria of 'reason', 'civilization' or 'progress'. These terms were used in the eighteenth century to differentiate Europe from the other parts of the world; they also made an uncontested Europeaness a characteristic of only certain parts of the continent, while others were graded on a scale which distanced them, both spatially and temporally, from the epicentres of modernity. Significantly, the term 'Europeanized', which first came into use in this period, was originally applied to people dwelling *within* the geographical confines of Europe; its first recorded use in both English and French comes from travellers in Wallachia and Moldavia (Bracewell 2008).

The equation made between Europe and modernity could also be treated critically, as it was by Romantic travellers who deliberately turned their backs on modern urban uniformity and 'sought an itinerary of locales characterized by originality' (Angheliescu, 2004: 173). Their travelogues reversed the values of enlightened explorations: the Romantic authentic and picturesque were simply 'backwardness' romanticised. And despite claims to originality, they followed similar itineraries to earlier enlightened travellers in their pursuit of exotic people, uncorrupted nature and a living past: Spain, Sicily, Albania, Greece, Russia, the Caucasus, Scandinavia, Ireland, the Scottish Highlands. These travellers embraced alterity, even dreamed of renewal through encounters with other ways of life, but such dreams required that European difference should continue to exist, usually in stereotyped form – thus the complaints about 'the progressive shrinkage and degradation of the field of the "exotic"' within Europe (Thompson 2012: 162). And the coordinates used by these travellers still located modernity's Others as being somehow non-European, even if the images conveyed aesthetic pleasure or the thrill of exoticism rather than disparagement.

Such Enlightenment and Romantic imaginative geographies may have fit the self-congratulatory or self-critical agendas of French or British travellers very well, but they were scarcely the only ones contributing to mental maps of European difference. Other travellers also found the itinerary through Europe a way of defending a contested modernity or Europeanness at the expense of others. Germans anxious about asserting their rightful place in Europe were not the only ones who oscillated between this sort of 'compensatory Eurocentrism' and various forms of anti-Westernism (Kontje 2004; Milutinović 2011; Malmberg & Strath 2002). Conversely, travellers from Spain, or southern Italy, or the Balkans, or Russia could find it useful to emphasize that Europe lay somewhere beyond their own borders, or even to locate their homelands in terms of Asia, Africa or the Orient. Reformers held up 'Europe' as a model and a goal to achieve, attempted to shame their compatriots out of their putatively less-than-European habits, or vented frustration by comparing them to primitive Tatars, American savages or barbarous Hottentots (e.g. Moe 2002; Offord 2005; Drace-Francis 2009). Alternatively, nationalist or colonialist agendas could be furthered by re-evaluating

pluricultural historical legacies in terms of a desirable hybridity or by laying claim to 'strategically essentialist' non-European difference – as in Spanish re-discoveries of their own African, Arab or Gypsy heritage (Martin-Márquez 2008), Hungarian quests for an Asian past (Köves 2013), or Russian semi-European, semi-Asiatic self-imaginings (Lim 2013).

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century imaginative geographies of European difference were thus not *imposed* from Europe's centres onto its peripheries. The agents were too multifarious, the purposes too diverse, and the geometry too complex. Furthermore, even if political and economic power could be mapped onto states and metropolitan centres, the cultural capital that underwrote the travels and the books was far more mobile and fluid to be understood in terms of 'centre and periphery'. Elite travellers even from the continent's margins were educated in the same cultural heritage. Instead, travel writing and other forms of representation staged oppositions of a normative Europe and various hemi-semi-demi Europes, and projected this imaginary construct onto the continent's physical map.

However, European travel writing's cartography cannot be reduced to a project of mapping degrees of Europeanness. Europe (and indeed, the world) could be imagined very differently, for instance according to a shifting scale of 'fission and fusion' among essentially equivalent units: a 'grammar of segmentation', rather than an 'orientalizing grammar' of binary difference (Baumann and Gingrich 2004). Here the exemplary itineraries are those explicitly plotted according to political criteria. We are accustomed to identify the European political tour with the reportage of the interwar period, fellow travellers' reports from the Soviet Union or Cold War exchanges (Schweizer 2001; Farley 2010). However, from the French Revolution onwards, engaged travel writers had presented their journeys as mapped from 'a political point of view' (Shelley 1844: viii). To be sure, some such commentators divided Europe into stark categories of 'us and them', asserting affinities or antagonisms according to ideological, cultural or historical categories. Others, however, charted different maps. Radical egalitarians tested their visions of a single humanity divided only by forms of

government, for example emphasizing pedestrian itineraries in contrast to travel in a carriage, which 'immediately removes one several degrees from ordinary humankind' (Seume 1806:vi). Similarly, accounts of exilic and expatriate travels and sojourns not only connected a cosmopolitan nineteenth-century 'Liberal International' but also helped reinforce an imagined Europe of unity-in-national-diversity (Isabella 2009; Stock 2010).

If travels abroad mapped a more or less transnational 'Europe of nations' in the nineteenth century, the 'home tour' aimed to give substance to the imagined community of the nation. Patriotic travellers justified their domestic itineraries with reference to foreign travels (the home tour was just as revelatory as travel abroad) or foreign travellers (whose calumnies were inappropriate reading for the patriot). These domestic tours serve diverse functions and interests. They attempted to define and fix a 'national spirit', claim people or landscapes for the nation, integrate disparate identities or regions into the polity, or erase existing frontiers to trace new maps of national community. Travel accounts had the power to reconstitute a nation that no longer existed as a state, as with Poland after the Partitions, or summon up nations such as the Slavs that did not exist on any political map, tracing their extent but also revealing their internal divisions and hierarchies. Some of these itineraries would subsequently be codified by national guidebooks, intended to educate readers not just in what to see, but how to think about it. As with other itineraries, however, convention also bred parody, brilliantly exemplified, for instance, in Heinrich Heine's treatment of earnest patriotic tourism in his 1826 *Die Harzreise*.

Other itineraries have been more directly charged with drawing and policing Europe's divisions – but the results have not always been as straightforward as the routes might suggest. Take the Cold War journey across the Iron Curtain, a demarcation line that is supposed to have reproduced an East-West division of Europe already marked out by the Enlightenment *philosophes* in a project of 'demi-orientalization' (Wolff 1994: 7). Cold War journeys, in either direction, do indeed insist obsessively on the boundary between the two halves of the continent, though by the mid-twentieth century the

primary criterion had become ideological rather than cultural (and so no longer innate). This had interesting effects. A common strategy, among travellers from both camps, was that of noting East-West political polarization while simultaneously foregrounding the shared humanity of ordinary citizens across this divide, whether this is framed as 'working class solidarity' and 'proletarian internationalism' or else as 'universal human nature' manifested in the petty concerns and pleasures of everyday life (Guentcheva 2008). Paradoxically, to this extent at least, the socio-political geography of the Cold War travel account might be said to have *de*-orientalized Eastern Europe.

Other itineraries, and other maps, could be multiplied. There were routes across the continent that deviated from the widely shared variants described here, whether these took the form of counter-itineraries, deliberately chosen to contest or subvert dominant regimes of representation, or whether they followed more idiosyncratic signposts. And the traveller's awareness of competing mappings and perspectives could sometimes work to disrupt more conventional geographical understandings, for instance in those diasporic itineraries that oscillate between old and new homelands, blurring the distinction between home and abroad, known and unknown, self and other (Garrett 2003). Equally, explorations of a multi-ethnic, creolized home in the postcolonial or globalized metropolis have generated alternative mappings of 'domestic' spaces as both familiar *and* exotic, simultaneously here and there (Forsdick 2005).

The widely shared itineraries surveyed here produced strikingly similar imaginative geographies. But we should not forget that when applied they could produce very different effects. Spanish and French travellers might agree that Andalucia was Oriental and Other, but did so within competing national discourses. Similarly, while a Romanian and a Bosnian could both present a Spanish Orient as disconcertingly *familiar*, Mihail Kogălniceanu saw in a shared heritage of Islamic rule the possibility of reimagining his own country in a Romantic mode (Tudorică Impey 1997) but Zuko Džumhur (1982) deflated any such direct legacy by instead recognizing in the Alhambra an architectural model imported into Bosnia by nineteenth-century Habsburg Orientalism. The Italian

Mario Praz, in his debunking counter-itinerary of 1928, would even paradoxically re-Orientalize his 'unromantic' Spain (monotonous, provincial) by emphasizing the influence of Arabic art (formulaic, repetitive). When viewed across different traditions, what looks like a stable, taken-for-granted imaginative topography of Romantic, Oriental Spain turns out to be far more complex, and this is also true of other maps.

Zones

Zones such as Romantic Spain, the Balkans or the Mediterranean are built up through the constant repetition of sites and experiences, and the accretion or sedimentation of standard images. Such zones are cultural and textual constructions, and need to be understood in 'ideological and mythical, rather than merely geographical, terms' (Holland and Huggan 2000: 68). Lisle's complaint that the analysis of such zones reproduces, rather than challenges the 'discourse of modern cartography' misses the point: deconstructing the over-written, over-determined character of such zones both deflates their air of inevitability and highlights the ways travellers deployed them for their own varied agendas. Examining the construction and manipulation of Europe's North, South, East, and West reveals these zones, only ostensibly geographical, as anything but 'measurable, divisible, immutable' (Lisle 2006: 187).

To illustrate: large parts of the 'Eastern Europe' of nineteenth-century French or British travellers could at the same time be 'the West' in Russian eyes. While this clash of perspectives encouraged the emergence of 'Central Europe', its periodic existence and its very location have depended on whose interests it was defending, and from what direction the threat came. Perhaps none of this is surprising: after all, East and West are relative coordinates, as are North and South, and the meridian or equatorial division depends on the position and the purposes of the cartographer. However, these coordinates have also been defined in terms of symmetrically opposed cultural attributes, each with its own history, often reaching back to antiquity (e.g. Southern civilization

opposed to Northern barbarism – or uncorrupted innocence). Europe's geographical 'zoning' is shaped by this logic of binary opposition, but it also has a history which reflects specific circumstances and choices.

Both travellers and historians of Europe have debated where the North, South, East or West begins. Historians, however, have not always paid enough attention to how and when these and similar terms have actually been used. It is not enough to see the concept in operation and to supply the terminology anachronistically. Names matter: they carry their histories with them. A survey shows just how ambiguous these zones could be, while simultaneously exposing the myth of Europe as a separate, self-contained entity. Classical tradition initially positioned the Occident as the opposite of a non-European Orient, though the later division between Latin West and Greek East complicated the continental opposition, given the geographical spread of Byzantium and Orthodoxy in Europe and Asia. It was only gradually, particularly in humanist discourse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that the terminology of 'Europe' succeeded that of 'Christendom', specifically in opposition to the 'Asiatic Turk', though at the same time Ottoman expansion implanted the 'Orient' in Europe's east. From the sixteenth century on, Western travellers first saw, or expected to see, the characteristics of the Orient when crossing into 'Turkey in Europe', and the use of the designation 'Oriental' for southeastern Europe continued into the twentieth century, for instance as *'l'Orient européen*, with rather different connotations from *Europe orientale*, *Osteuropa* or Eastern Europe. Little wonder Greeks and others spoke of travelling to 'Europe'. Simultaneously, Muscovy was both 'northern' and associated with Asia, by association with Tatars and 'Oriental' despotism. However, despite the disparaging language of barbarism used by western travellers through the eighteenth century for the 'uncultivated' peoples of Europe's eastern marches, and the associations made with Asia and the Orient, 'Eastern Europe' as a generalizing term only came into habitual use in the nineteenth century among French and German observers (Adamovsky 2006); only rarely to be adopted by the peoples so located as self-ascription.

Instead of East and West, from the early modern period through the eighteenth century the more significant zones of geo-cultural demarcation were those of North and South, deriving authority from Classical sources and mapped onto other divisions: the dispute between Ancients and Moderns, the Catholic/Protestant divide, the European balance of power. Though the qualities associated with each zone were symmetrically defined, their valance could be reversed according to perspective and purpose: Northern barbarism or rude liberty vs. Southern civilization or decadence. The dividing line between these zones lay where the traveller chose, according to purpose: the Alps, the Romance/Germanic linguistic frontier, climate, or some other criterion. Inconvenient geographical location posed no problem in such generalizing schemes: northern European Catholic Poles could still figure themselves as the civilized South to the Russian North.

Here too, intra-European polarities were not always differentiated from those that opposed Europe to Asia. Thus, when in 1748 Montesquieu theorized the causes of European human diversity in terms of climate, he introduced a striking overlap between South and East, and Europe's internal and external others: first asserting the moral superiority of Europe's cold North over its hot South; then of temperate Europe as a whole over the peoples of the South in the Indies and the peoples of the East in Asia, and then in a final move superimposing the traits associated with the Indies and Asia on those of the European South, which became another internal European Orient (Moe 2002; Dainotto 2007). Just as travellers could locate Russia as both Northern and Asiatic, so too Spain and Italy could be simultaneously Southern, African and Oriental. Victor Hugo seemed to appeal to history and ethnography when he remarked in 1828 that 'Spain is still the Orient: Spain is half African, Africa is half Asiatic', but the comment recycled long-standing commonplaces (Domínguez 2006: 426.)

A broad eighteenth-century definition of the North, which (depending on the traveller's starting point) could include Britain, the Low Countries, Switzerland and Germany, the Nordic countries, Poland and Russia, only gradually shifted in the nineteenth century to produce a much reduced

North and an Eastern European zone labelled as such, largely as a result of new Slavic and Scandinavian ideologies and the decreasing threat of Ottoman power (Lemberg 1985). The backward, barbarous image associated with the North could now be combined with the Oriental or Asiatic characteristics already associated with Russia and the Balkans and applied to a newly cohesive 'Eastern Europe', while the German and Scandinavian North could be left as sublime, democratic and original. While Eastern Europe and the West (gradually also expanding its reach out of Europe) exerted a powerful influence on the European geographical imagination through the twentieth century, North and South also continued to function as important symbolic zones, to the extent that the concept has now moved back out of Europe to supply the shorthand for post-Cold War divisions of the world: the Global South.

What further complicates the idea of geographical zones in Europe is the fact that the polarities associated with a cultural compass were applied independently of a wider geography. North/South or East/West could be applied fractally, within any given area, repeating the same patterns of explanation on a diminishing scale. Thus both travellers and Italians themselves relied on a wider European North and semi-European South to interpret Italian specificities (and justify their own agendas), producing an Italian South within Europe's South; while Hans Christian Anderson visited Spain as a man of the North seeking Southern authenticity, but then reproduced these distinctions at the Spanish level, differentiating between boringly familiar and up-to-date Barcelona in the North and excitingly Southern and Oriental Andalusia (Cifuentes 2007). Similarly, insiders and outsiders could operate geo-cultural '-isms' as graded or 'nesting' technologies of differentiation: sometimes intensifying degrees of difference with distance (e.g. from a merely 'free' to a 'wild' North); sometimes off-loading difference consecutively onto each neighbouring territory or culture (Bakić-Hayden 1995); sometimes undermining the expectation of difference by its infinite deferral.

An example of this last possibility is found in Hamilton Fish Armstrong's *Where the East Begins* (1929), in which the Balkan East repeatedly slips just beyond the next border, until it becomes the

West – a realization sparked in Istanbul when the music he hears is an American popular hit (one with its own ironic geo-cultural freight): 'Valencia'. This returns us to Anne Applebaum's return to 'the West' in Istanbul, cited at the beginning of this chapter, and prompts the reader to recognize it too as ironic, though reinforcing rather than undermining the message of essential difference. Such rhetorical manoeuvres, and the varying purposes identified in many of these representations, suggest that it is important not to overestimate the absolute power exerted by imaginative geographies. They reveal the 'common-places' that have shaped a society's or an era's topographical imagination, but they are not the mere reflection of a collective imagination, whether this is understood nationally, socially or in other terms. Like maps and compasses, they helped travellers (and readers) locate themselves with reference to conventional cardinal points, and gave borrowed authority to their perceptions and generalizations. Yet, at the same time, the individuals who used these maps both travelled and wrote for particular purposes: their choices – as well as the constraints on them – helped shape the ways Europe could be imagined.

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