

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

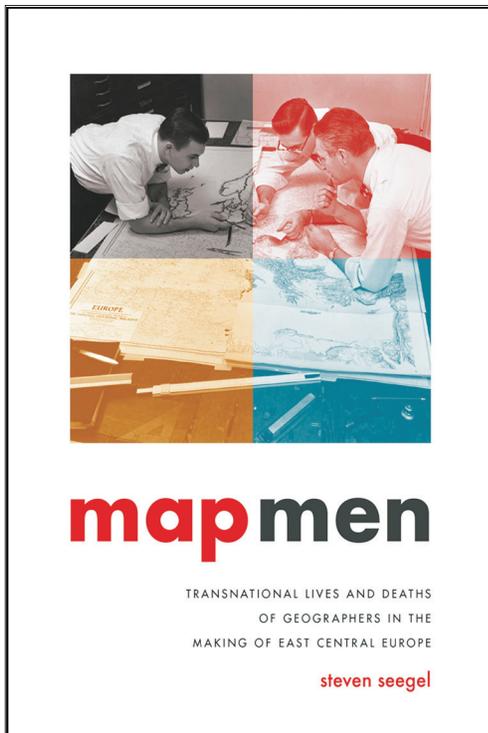
Seegel, S.: Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe. Chicago–London, The University of Chicago Press, 2018. 320 p.

One hundred years ago, fighting ceased on the major fronts of the Great War. Both the victorious Allied Powers as well as the defeated Central Powers started to prepare for peace. Though the guns had fallen silent, the peace preparations mobilised armies of experts, and in particular geographers, for a new struggle, one that required geographical expertise and scientific reasoning to justify new borders and to defend the integrity of state territory. It was in this geopolitically-charged post-war context that geographers who had been working in academia were called upon to serve their nation. The one-hundredth anniversary of the end of the Great War, therefore, is perfect timing for the publication of Steven SEEDEL'S "Map Men: Transnational Lives and Deaths of Geographers in the Making of East Central Europe". Focusing on four East Central European geographers

and one American geographer, SEEDEL'S book tells the story of five scholars well known in the history of geography who either contributed to the making of the new borders or fought to defend the old ones in the immediate post-war period.

The oldest of SEEDEL'S main characters is Albrecht PENCK, born in Leipzig in 1858. He studied at Leipzig and from the mid-1880s served as a professor of physical geography at the University of Vienna for two decades. He was appointed chair of geography at the University of Berlin at the peak of his career, and became without doubt the most influential German geographer after the turn of the century. Polish geographer Eugeniusz ROMER was born in 1871 in Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv, a city that then belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He studied in Kraków, and it was on leave to Berlin and Vienna that he was introduced to the ideas of Ferdinand von RICHTHOFEN and PENCK respectively. ROMER was appointed chair of geography at the university in his home town a few years before the outbreak of the Great War. Like ROMER, the Ukrainian Stepan RUDNYTS'KYI was also a son of Galicia and an Austrian citizen. Born in Peremyshl/Przemysł in 1877, he first studied philosophy at the University of Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv, and later turned to geography. He attended PENCK'S lectures in Vienna, habilitated at Lemberg, and was allowed as a *Privatdozent* to teach in geography in Ukrainian. Next among SEEDEL'S geographers is Isaiah BOWMAN, who was born in Ontario, Canada, and who was a descendant of German Swiss emigrants. His family moved from Canada to the USA when he was young. At Harvard, he studied under William Morris DAVIS, and after defending his thesis, he taught at Yale. The youngest among the five geographers that SEEDEL studies is Count Pál TELEKI, who was born to a Transylvanian-Hungarian aristocratic family in Budapest in 1879. TELEKI studied law at the University of Budapest, and worked at the Institute of Geography at the university under the supervision of Lajos Lóczy. His book on the history of the cartography of the Japanese Islands brought him considerable renown as a geographer, and he was elected general secretary of the Hungarian Geographical Society in 1910.

SEEDEL'S is a story of the several links that connect these geographers. All of them loved to travel, to be outdoors, and to do fieldwork. They were connected through an international scholarly network (BOWMAN, ROMER, and TELEKI participated in the



Transcontinental Excursion of the AGS in 1912), and many of them were in correspondence for decades. Above all, they shared a passionate love of maps. According to SEEDEL's interpretation, theirs was not a harmless romance. Hidden behind a veil of objectivity and civility, the maps they created and revered were tools of nation building, imperialism, and propaganda. The maps themselves were not independent of their makers, SEEDEL argues, and so through the maps we can catch a glimpse of the personality of their authors. As SEEDEL writes, "the book's core argument is that interest in maps was often pathological, a sign of frustration and unfulfilled personal ambition" (p. 3). "Map Men" is not the kind of story that has a happy ending. It is, instead, a dark drama whose protagonists' lives end in tragedy.

The characters of this drama are most definitely not positive heroes in SEEDEL's estimation. According to SEEDEL, the "mobile yet place sensitive" map men were "illiberal, provincial, pre-1914 hyphenated Anglophile Germans ... who envisaged geography as a new megascience" (p. 3). They were "Germans" in the sense that all of them spoke German fluently, and all of them were close to German science and German geography. "Their grasp of maps and geography," SEEDEL claims, "was largely antimodern, anti-urban, and, in some cases anti-Semitic" (p. 3). More than this, maps and geography were mobilised by these men "as defence of privilege and Europe's grand explorer tradition in East Central Europe" (p. 3). Both PENCK and TELEKI, moreover, were dedicated to irredentism after World War I. The maps that they produced and circulated were neither neutral nor purely scientific products. They were, in fact, "affective, not just rational tools" (p. 4).

Prior to the Great War, these map men had taken the opportunity to participate in a flourishing international network of scholarly life. With respect to "scientific pursuits," it was a time in which "the men saw little contradiction between nations and internationalism" (p. 40). The War, however, changed everything. The geographers became "stateside experts" (p. 227). Contradictory national interests turned them against one another. In his efforts to help create a new Poland, for example, ROMER confronted both PENCK and RUDNYTS'KYI, with the Germans supporting the Ukrainian claims much more than the Polish ones. TELEKI, advocating the Hungarian cause, trusted in the power of personal relationships in vain in 1918–20. ROMER, by contrast, was successful in bending BOWMAN's ear. As collegial bonds started to weaken, friendships were replaced by cold emotions, even open hostility. Perhaps as consolation, service to the state opened up new vistas for these geographers after the war. Almost all of them participated in organising and leading geographical and cartographical projects that were closely connected to political goals, though none of them were as successful at fulfilling political ambitions as TELEKI, who twice served as prime minister of interwar Hungary.

With the notable exception of the American BOWMAN, the lives of the East Central European geographers ended in tragedy. RUDNYTS'KYI was the first to suffer a tragic fate. Immediately after the war he worked in Vienna and in Prague, but later accepted the invitation of the Ukrainian SSR to serve as a professor in Kharkov in the mid-1920s. When Stalinisation gained momentum, he was deemed to be a Ukrainian nationalist and "propagator of fascism in geography" (p. 143). (RUDNYTS'KYI had never joined the Communist Party.) The Ukrainian Academy of Sciences expelled him, after which he was stripped of his professorship, imprisoned, and finally executed in 1937. Four years later TELEKI would die at his own hands. As prime minister at the outbreak of World War II, TELEKI presided over some tangible revisionist successes, but he was not able to restrain the growing Nazi German influence in Hungary, and he committed suicide when the German troops crossed the Hungarian border to attack Yugoslavia in April 1941. Both PENCK and ROMER, by contrast, lived out the remainder of their lives in a form of exile. Though not a member of the Nazi Party, PENCK agreed more or less with its goals, but when the heavy air raids started, he fled from Berlin to the relative safety of his daughter's home in Prague, and died there in the spring of 1945. ROMER, in turn, hid in a Catholic monastery as the war raged all around him. In the end he could never return to Lwów/Lviv, as the city was annexed to the Soviet Union after the war. He died in Kraków in 1954.

SEEDEL's work on the life and career of the five geographers is an outstanding scholarly achievement. The array of sources and literature used for the book is really impressive, even more so if we take into account that SEEDEL's extensive use of archival sources and printed material required a fluency in German, Polish, Ukrainian, and Hungarian that is truly rare. Only very few scholars are able to do such comparative work. More importantly, however, SEEDEL has produced a strong and convincing argument that clearly illustrates how politics and ideology were intertwined with scientific work. At the same time, "Map Men" also underlines how strongly the personality, faith, ambition, and fantasies of these five scholars influenced their scientific results. Scientific knowledge is inseparable from its maker, and maps are no exception. It has, in fact, become somewhat of a truism that a map is not an impartial mirror of the Earth's surface or of the spatial distribution of human phenomena, but rather is a socially-constructed scientific product that delivers its message visually. SEEDEL's work illustrates this reality in novel and convincing ways.

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned relationship between an author and his or her work is true in case of book reviews, too. I do not in any way want to pretend that my opinion of SEEDEL's recent work is definitive or final. I can review this book only from the perspective of an East Central European, or more precisely, a Hungarian geographer. In my opinion this work

is important for us, as it destroys myths, and forces us to face up to many inconvenient truths. Compared to the usual Hungarian interpretation, SEEGEL's study clearly illustrates the value of conclusions that are drawn by a researcher who interprets East Central European history from an outsider's perspective. Many good essays and books have been written on TELEKI in Hungarian, for example (chief among them Balázs ABLONCZY's book published both in Hungarian and English; ABLONCZY, B. 2007). SEEGEL adds much to our knowledge. Particularly valuable is SEEGEL's analysis of TELEKI's romantic phantasies of the American West. Largely based on Karl May's novels (which remained favourite reading for TELEKI even as an adult), fantasies of the American West had a profound impact on TELEKI's geographical and political thought (pp. 16, 36, 51, 114).

Despite the many strengths of SEEGEL's study, what is missing from a geographer's standpoint is geography itself. We are well informed about how the bodies and souls of these five geographers influenced their scientific work, but we gain little knowledge with respect to their scholarly thoughts. Readers, therefore, might understandably come to the conclusion that geography was a kind of pseudo-science in the early twentieth century, and that it was nothing more than a useful vehicle for the articulation of political dreams and personal ambitions. I am sure that the geography of the first half of the twentieth century was more than that, and it is perhaps misleading if we judge too harshly one-hundred-year-old scientific concepts using early-twenty-first century norms. SEEGEL also frequently refers to the map men's 'illiberalism,' which seems anachronistic. Speaking from the Hungarian perspective, nobody used this word in Hungary before 2010. It would therefore be prudent to deploy this notion cautiously in a historical context, unless of course the goal is to speak directly to present political issues. To be fair, this is indeed one of SEEGEL's goals. Writing of one of TELEKI's books, for instance, SEEGEL argues that: "On Europe and Hungary went beyond conservatism, for it imagined an exceptionalist Hungary-led Europe united in an illiberal vision" (p. 149). This interpretation seems more relevant to an analysis of a contemporary Hungarian politician's declarations than it is to TELEKI's thinking, and I would find it tenuous to parallel two historically separated politicians in this way. SEEGEL's narrative, moreover, is very dark, and succeeds in creating the atmosphere of a real *géographie noire* (p. 135). In many ways, he has rendered his drama excessively bleak. In my opinion, these geographers may not have been irreproachable heroes, but neither were they excessively evil malefactors. They were mortal human beings, who found themselves in a very desperate situation, and they did what they thought had to be done.

There are some details concerning TELEKI and interpretations of Hungarian history that may have been approached differently by a Hungarian author.

Most Hungarian geographers will admit that TELEKI's famous "Carte Rouge" was a biased visual representation of statistical data, and that TELEKI chose a cartographical method that supported the Hungarian point of view concerning the integrity of Greater Hungary at the Paris (Trianon) Peace Talks in 1920. But only a few would agree with SEEGEL's opinion that "Teleki asserted population density even ahead of nationality. He followed the linear logic of modernisation, that the density of assimilated Magyars increased as peasants moved to the city, became literate and settled naturally into St. Stephen enclaves" (p. 65). Similarly, a number of Hungarian scholars would question the following: "In the map's surreal and subliminal codes, its message was the defeat of the Little Entente, marginalisation of Romanians and Jews, and omission of rural lands and indigenous peoples, whisked out of history" (p. 69). SEEGEL's interpretation implies that the presence of the ethnic Hungarians, who lived in the territories ceded from Hungary between 1918 and 1920, was a result of Hungarian assimilation and colonisation, and, further, that TELEKI exaggerated their importance by utilising inappropriate and ultimately falsifying cartographical tools. There is, of course, some truth in the claim that the increase of the urban population in the non-Hungarian regions or the settlements in Délvidék (today Vojvodina, Serbia) exemplified these processes. But the truth is that the vast majority of the 3.3 million ethnic Hungarians who lived in the territories that Hungary lost were themselves inhabitants of the "rural lands," and that the Hungarian people were arguably one of the "indigenous peoples" in these regions. Unfortunately, SEEGEL also provided inaccurate data concerning the territorial losses of Hungary. He writes that "the country lost roughly two-thirds of its population, one-third of its territory" (p. 86), when in fact Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory, roughly 60 per cent of its population, and one-third of its Hungarian speaking population.

TELEKI has been a controversial figure in Hungary's political history. As SEEGEL indicates, his commemoration was a matter of debate even after the turn of millennium (pp. 220–221). TELEKI's geographical thought was also complex. SEEGEL puts TELEKI among the "Anglophile German map men" and emphasises the impact of RATZEL's theories on TELEKI's geography (pp. 37, 50, 128). At the same time, he writes little about the fact that contemporary French geography also had a significant influence on him, and that it was at least as important (if not even more so) as the German influence on TELEKI's thinking. Historians of Hungarian geography usually stress that it was TELEKI who broke with the strong German orientation in Hungarian geography, turning instead to the French *géographie humaine* (KRASZNAI, Z. 2012, pp. 73–74). TELEKI and his disciples were wary, for example, of Gyula PRINZ's geographical work, and in par-

ticular of “his highly unusual Germanophilia within the Hungarian academia” (FODOR, F. 2006, p. 718). By the same token, nobody at the time regarded TELEKI as a Germanophile. The same goes for TELEKI’s political credo. Despite his apparent anti-Semitism, he was dismissive of Nazi ideology, and as prime minister he endeavoured to shield Hungary from the influence of Nazi Germany. TELEKI was aware of the German plans for the future of Eastern Europe. In contrast to SEEDEL, I do not believe that “Teleki was too blind to grasp that he was being mapped colonially from an imperial Berlin in 1938-39” (p. 182). TELEKI’s political and geographical legacy will no doubt remain controversial, and it is in light of this that SEEDEL’s research is an important contribution to our knowledge of him. At the same time, however, SEEDEL’s harsh judgment of TELEKI and his geography is exaggerated. Can it truly and accurately be said of him that “[t]his hodgepodge geography of the Transylvanian count, not without hackneyed ideas or prejudice draped in science, was surely characteristic of an insecure man who dabbled in studies of the natural world” (p. 131)?

In the final analysis, SEEDEL’s compelling new book should become compulsory reading for those who are interested in the history of twentieth-century geography, and above all, for those who are scholars of East Central European history and geography. SEEDEL’s comparative study on the life and work of five geographers is an outstanding scholarly achievement. Collecting and reading the archival and printed sources was a demanding task in itself, and SEEDEL has constructed a strong and convincing narrative. “Map Men” is a dark and tragic story devoid of positive heroes and a soothing ending. Although I do not agree with every detail of the book, the book’s core argument is sound. “Map Men” is a sad but true story, which in itself is a pity, as it points to uncomfortable truths about our own past.

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