

Cartographic Propaganda for Estonian and Latvian Independence at the Paris Peace Conference

Isaiah Bowman, the American Chief Territorial Advisor to the Paris Peace Conference, famously said that: “Each one of the Central European nationalities had its own bagful of statistical and cartographical tricks [...] A new instrument was discovered – the map language. A map was as good as a brilliant poster, and just being a map made it respectable, authentic.” Estonia and Latvia were no exceptions. Encouraged by Woodrow Wilson’s rhetoric of self-determination and seeking to monopolise the Allied desire to support anti-Bolshevik and anti-German sentiment in the region, Estonian and Latvian representatives travelled to Paris in January 1919 to lobby for statehood recognition. Armed with brochures, journals, and memoranda, they sought to inform the international diplomatic community about the history, geography, economy, society, and culture of their states and peoples. In this paper, I look more closely at an aspect of the activities of the Estonian and Latvian delegations to the Paris Peace Conference which has been thus far neglected in historical research, namely their use of cartography as a tool for persuasion and propaganda. Through a close examination of the maps and explanatory texts produced by the Estonian and Latvian delegations and their supporters, I analyse and compare the spatial discourses and representative strategies employed in the spring and summer of 1919 to convince the Allies of the future of Estonia and Latvia as independent states. I argue that by the summer of 1919 the Estonian and Latvian delegations increasingly used maps to demonstrate the economic viability, developed transport/communication infrastructure, and valuable strategic position of their “small” states nestled between Russia and Germany. Estonia and Latvia thus function as important case studies to broaden our understanding of the ways in which maps were used at the end of World War I to explore ideas about territoriality beyond ethnicity and nationality.

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