Popular scientific summary

The Renaissance map and its voices

In the 16th century, the image of the world changed significantly. This transformation took place due to geographic discoveries and the dissemination of knowledge about these discoveries through geographic treatises and maps. One of the areas that was then discovered and mapped was Eastern Europe. It was then that the oldest printed maps of Russia were created, such as the map drawn in Vilnius (Lithuania) around 1542 and published in 1555.

The map was drawn by the German painter Anton Wied. His main informant was a Russian boyar, Ivan Lyatskoi, who fled to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for fear of repressions from Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Lyatskoi provided Lithuanian politicians and commanders with a range of military and geographical information. These politicians hired Wied to create a map that they originally needed for the war with Russia.

Texts on this map are written in two alphabets: Cyrillic and Latin. It is the oldest known map printed in Cyrillic. It provides a lot of important knowledge on geography (the location of towns, rivers, lakes, and seas), nature (e.g. a bear hunting is depicted on it), culture (it shows e.g. Tartar horse breeding), politics and history (e.g. the victory of the Lithuanians over Russians at Orsha in 1514).

The map is a kind of 16th-century "encyclopedia" of Eastern Europe. So far, however, it has not been extensively studied. There is a lot we do not know about it. **Our aim is therefore to describe and interpret it taking into account numerous perspectives.**

To be able to read it comprehensively, we had to figure out how to do it. The **method** we want to use is new in the history of cartography. We base it on the theory of the Russian philosopher and literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin studied the novels of Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Analyzing them, Bakhtin came to the conclusion that there is not just one dominant message or standpoint in the novel—there are many. He called these messages voices. And multiple voices form **a polyphony**. They enter into a dialogue or even polemics with each other.

We have noticed that in the map known as Anton Wied's map one can notice a similar polyphony to the one Bakhtin discerned in the novel he analysed. There are many voices, senders, and messages in it. We would like to investigate how this polyphony of the map works.

The map of Wied has yet another feature—it is **a borderland map**. The voices speaking through it belong to representatives of various national, ethnic, religious, and social groups. We called this multi-source cartography a **polyphonic cartography**. It is a new term that we would like to introduce to the research on the history of Renaissance mapmaking.

The study will involve six scholars with different competencies. The team will consist of historians of cartography and art, a literary scholar, a classical philologist and East Slavonic philologist, as well as a paleographer. The project will therefore be **interdisciplinary** in nature. If our study with regard to the map of Russia proves successful, we intend to test its results on other Renaissance maps as well.