

Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met: Border Making in Eighteenth-Century South America. Jeffrey A. Erbig Jr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Pp. xx+280, figures, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$99.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-1-4696-5503-1. \$34.95, paperback, ISBN 978-1-4696-5504-8. \$19.99, eBook, ISBN 978-1-4696-5505-5.

In *Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met* Jeffrey Erbig gives an account of the mid-eighteenth-century cartographic encounter between native peoples (under the ethnonyms Charrúas, Bohanes, Yaros, Guenoas, and Minuanes) of the Río de la Plata borderlands (now Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina) and the Spanish and Portuguese empires. At first glance his work appears to align with prior studies on the history of cartography and the mapping of indigenous peoples. He reiterates the importance of indigenous collaborators and informants in the mapmaking process and how maps wield power not just as representations but also as actors in the transformation of geographical imaginaries of empire into physical features of the landscape. Indeed, at points the woven narrative reads like yet another tale of dispossession and genocide wrought by colonialism and empire building. But in his analysis of “the dynamic production of space and the interplay between territorial imaginings and spatial practices” (7) he makes apparent the underlying goal to reformulate “the historical memory—professional, political, and popular—of the boundary commissions in the Río de la Plata connecting the entrenched narratives of Native disappearance to colonial geographic imaginings that emerged in the eighteenth century” (11). It is this underlying goal and his success in showing not only indigenous agency in the historical account but also the contemporary persistence of indigenous presence that makes the monograph worth the read; in the end it is a story of resilience and victory.

The story centers on two border-making efforts, the Treaty of Madrid (1750) and the Treaty of San Idelfonso (1777), through which Portugal and Spain sent joint cartographic expeditions to rectify conflict that emerged from the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and subsequent imperial expansion in the New World. Erbig uses an array of primary sources to meticulously recount events leading up to, including, and after the boundary-making expeditions. While he acknowledges the lack of indigenous voice and the bias in the colonial sources he uses,

the vignettes he creates attempt to (mostly successfully) highlight how “Native peoples did not simply foil or adapt to Iberian efforts; they altered the very structure of imperial governance, making borders necessary and transforming the meaning and form of mapped lines” (7). His historiographic approach is meticulous, full of rich detail (almost biblical at points), and is a pleasure to read. But what makes this work stand out is the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and a digital humanities approach to geographically and temporally locate all mentions of indigenous individuals, encampments (referred to as *tolderias*), and movements from the seven-hundred-plus primary sources that span 1680 to 1834. Arguably the design of the resulting maps could be improved (the addition of scale bars, for example), but the content along with the historical narrative is remarkable and presents a unique approach to and perspective on this moment in history.

The book is organized into five chapters. The first two explore the period from 1680 up until the first cartographic expedition in 1752. The discussion of movement and location of indigenous groups and the colonial settlements centers on how access to natural resources, wild cattle for the most part, and European ideas of natural law came together as a form of ad hoc governance in which indigenous people retained control of the hinterlands of the colonial settlements. Chapter 3 outlines the joint Portuguese/Spanish border-mapping expeditions. Erbig highlights the fact that the conflict between empires was set aside in a moment when European powers were fully aware that “maps were not simply representations of territorial possession but rather the preeminent determinants of it” (67). The expeditions were specifically designed to weaken indigenous groups’ hold in the region. Indeed, reminiscent of the phrase “more indigenous territory has been claimed by maps than guns” penned by Bernard Neitschmann in 1995, Erbig writes, “Their [the cartographic expedition’s] presence would have a much more dramatic effect than the Spanish military campaigns on territorial relations in the region, both immediately and in the long run” (70). In chapters 4 and 5 the outcomes of these expeditions are explored with a framework that borrows from frontier and borderlands literature. The history elicited from the sources bears a remarkable resemblance to current day resource conflicts centered on the making of property and the governance of access in indigenous territories. In the Río de la Plata borderlands the

brief but notable rise of indigenous agency as the frontier is created subsequently fades to their “disappearance” from the colonial discourse in 1834 as struggles for independence come to a close and new national, as opposed to imperial, borders are drawn.

In the history that emerges, Erbig purposefully undermines the binary view that borders drawn to separate territories of empire are distinct from indigenous geographical conceptions of territory. His attention to the enabling role imperial boundaries played in the process of property creation under shifting natural law of the emerging liberal economic paradigm is complemented by evidence that indigenous groups were able to influence, and at times literally move, the lines being drawn. The cartographic encounter was a coproduction of resource governance in which both the indigenous groups and the colonial powers shaped the outcomes. While a “close reading of the accounts and maps produced by the boundary commission reveals the superimposition of an idealized territorial structure on extant territories” (106), Erbig insists that the response of indigenous peoples cannot be simply placed into categories of resistance or accommodation. Reminiscent of contemporary political ecology literature on neoliberal environmental governance, Erbig’s scholarship gives us an armchair view of “liberal environmental governance” during the rise of classical political economy.

Where Caciques and Mapmakers Met will likely never be hailed as groundbreaking historical geography. Yet Erbig’s final point to elucidate indigenous presence in current-day Uruguay is timely and important. The indigenous peoples did not disappear from the Río de la Plata borderlands. In 1989 the Association of Descendants of the Charrúa Nation (ADENCH) became the first indigenous organization in Uruguay, and recent “DNA studies showing Indigenous ancestry have led to approximately five percent of Uruguay’s population to self-identify as Indigenous or of Indigenous descent” (173). In addition to this powerful acknowledgment, the creative use of GIS, the parallels between historical political economy and recent work in political ecology, and the scholarship that bridges historical and indigenous cartography (or cartography of the indigenous) makes for a useful teaching text that spans disciplinary boundaries. This reviewer will use excerpts to teach upper-division cartography courses, yet the text will also be useful for scholars and students of colonial studies, indigenous studies, historical

political economy, Latin American studies, and political ecology, among others.

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Structures of the Earth: Metageographies of Early Medieval China. D. Jonathan Felt. Harvard University Asia Center, 2021. Pp. xii+391, 2 photos, 11 illustrations, 17 maps, footnotes. \$68.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-6742-5116-8.

One of the most problematic geographical units in world history is “China.” In contrast to the historiographies of classical societies like Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome, or Angkor, the narrative of Chinese civilization continues to spark debate on the insidious influence of teleological thinking in the field. Moreover, emphasis on the theme of Chinese unification has overshadowed counternarratives of fragmentation. D. Jonathan Felt’s *Structures of the Earth* is a delicate project that unveils the “ruptures, inconsistencies, and disjunctions” (11) in the historical geography of a place often oversimplified as “China.”

Structures of the Earth tells the spatial history of four centuries, from around 200 to 600 CE, a period during which a unified Chinese empire did not exist. Felt’s central argument is that the framework of imperial unification is only one among many spatial paradigms that the various peoples living in historical China perceived. To illustrate, Felt analyzes four spatial schemes, or metageographies, that emerged in the eastern part of the Eurasian landmass between the third and seventh centuries. They include ecumenical regionalism, the Northern and Southern dynasties, the hydrocultural landscape, and the Indo-Sinitic bipolar worldview. Chapters 2 to 5 each analyze one of these spatial schemes. In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the first chapter discusses in detail how geography emerged as a new literary genre in early medieval China.

As suggested in its title, this monograph speaks of spatial history and historical geography. Inspired by the work of Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen, Felt’s use of “metageographies” aims to identify the kind of spatial structures that were (and have been) unconsciously accepted as natural entities. For instance, Felt shows in chapter 3 that the metage-