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Toponymy in the Demarcation Diaries of the Madrid Treaty: a quantitative and qualitative study

At this presentation my objective is to share my research on the topic of toponymy in the diaries produced by the demarcation committee for the Treaty of Madrid (1750). This attempt by both the Portuguese and Spanish crowns to establish a fixed border for their South American holdings may have been unsuccessful, but it resulted in a great production of texts (written and cartographic) about the meridian regions of both Portuguese and Spanish America. One such text was the diaries written by the committee responsible for demarcating the border stipulated in Madrid. According to Article 25° of this treaty, the diaries were not only to relate the journey along the “border in the making”, but also to record scientific information on the region’s fauna, geography, peoples and costumes.

By their very nature these diaries are valuable primary sources for understanding how both Iberian monarchies sought to better know and control the borderlands of their American possessions in the mid-18th century. The toponyms recorded in these diaries are of special interest for map studies, given how many of their authors were mapmakers whose cartographic work is tied to The Treaty of Madrid and the demarcation expeditions they took part in and the overall importance place names have in the language of maps.

By analyzing the diary’s toponymy with both qualitative and quantitative methods my goal is to explore these toponyms as a resource in the study of South American cartography and borderlands during the middle 18th century.

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