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Time throughout space: the cartography of the boundary demarcation commissions of the Río de la Plata region as “horizons of expectations” (1777-1801)

When contrasting the content of maps and documents produced by the members of the boundary demarcation commissions sent by Spain and Portugal to the Río de la Plata region during the second half of the eighteenth century, these cartographic projections can be identified as prophetic. Far more than a diagnosis of the effective occupation of these disputed areas, the maps reveal a desire to transform those “lands” or “admirable conquests” into “territories,” understood as homogeneous areas belonging exclusively to the jurisdiction of the respective monarchy. Thus Reinhart Koselleck's methodology relating to the analysis of conceptual changes as indicators of new ways of experiencing temporality that are typical of this period, proves extremely useful for this line of study. Because, not coincidentally, the broadening of meanings associated with the word "territory" and its popularization, which can be found in these documents, are contemporary phenomena available to those technologies capable of producing territories through the elaboration of cartographies.

The possibility of measuring time in space, or what is the same, the possibility of using precision instruments to account for the time employed in the journeys, was what allowed to produce modern cartographies such as those of the boundary demarcation commissions. This form of communication aims to analyze the various “spaces of experience” involved in the creation of these maps and documents because the Atlantic biographies of the members of the demarcation commissions explain the exchange of knowledge and the people that made them possible. The objective is to determine to what extent the new ways of experiencing time, typical of the eighteenth century, reveal which was the horizon of expectation used by the Iberian officials responsible for producing them.

The communication shows some of the results obtained in my ongoing doctoral thesis “Passionate physiographies. Territory and patriotism at the crossroads of the Iberian empires. the plate region 1750- 1810,” at the University of São Paulo under the guidance of Joao Paulo Pimenta. This project analyzes maps and documents produced by two officials sent to the Río de la Plata: Joao Roscio from the Portuguese empire and Andrés de Oyarvide for the Spanish empire. The novel interpretation because places the Río de la Plata mapping process in broader global dynamics, instead of focusing on the disputes that each faced, which have been studied. Specifically, I study how changes that occurred in mid-eighteenth century regarding ways of experimenting and measuring time created anticipation and the possibility of mapping different spaces of the globe.

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