

Publication

eröffnete sich vor unseren Augen ein neues, schillerndes, von uns noch nirgendwo gesehenes Bild...“ Die gedankliche Neuvermessung des Zarenreiches im Eisenbahnzeitalter

JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

ID 2507705

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Year 2014

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Journal Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung

Volume 63

Number 1

Pages / Article-Number 4-23

The paper deals with discourses of mental mapping in Russia in the second half of the 19th century. The focus is on reports of Russian railway passengers who wrote down their impressions of the travelled territory in corresponding texts. The case study is based on travelogues documenting train journeys through the western provinces of the Empire. The article scrutinizes the wide spread assumption that the construction and use of railroads in the 19th century contributed significantly to the integration of nation-states and empires in the sense of their “territorialisation” (Charles Maier). Using the example of the Russian Empire, it argues that the construction and use of the new means of transportation had both integrative and dis-integrative effects in terms of the representation of the imperial space on the mental maps of Russian travellers. The spatial experience of an integrated transportation system evoked notions of Russia as a large, indivisible whole. At the same time the railroad created completely new opportunities to personally experience the cultural front-tiers within the multi-ethnic Empire. This promoted not only the pride felt in the size of the Russia but also fears about the “Other” in one’s own country. In the western regions of the Russian Empire these experiences were made above all in encounters with the Jewish population in the Pale of Settlement.

Publisher Herder-Institut

ISSN/ISBN 0948-8294

URL <https://www.zfo-online.de/index.php/zfo/article/view/3730/3730>

edoc-URL <http://edoc.unibas.ch/dok/A6254469>

Full Text on edoc Available;