

---

**THE IMAGINARY GEOGRAPHY OF SIBERIA IN THE COLONIAL CONTEXT**

**(On V. Kivelson's monograph "Land and its definitions in Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century". Moscow, Novoe literaturnoe obozreniye, 2012)**

Growing interest in the historical geography of Russia and its eastern territories, actualized in recent years with facsimile reprints of famous drawings by S.W. Remezov, finds its worthy reflection in the newest Russian studies. One of the most interesting and original works is a book published in 2006, written by Professor Valerie Kivelson of the University of Michigan, recently translated into Russian and published by the "Novoe literaturnoe obozreniye" in the series "Historia Rossica". Defining its novelty, the scientific editor of the translation M. Krom notes that "a lot has been written about Russian conquests in Eurasia since the time of V.O. Kliuchevskiy, but the spatial imagination in pre-Petrine Russia has not been described yet". Analyzing the characteristics of the research approach, Krom also points out that the researcher is interested not only and not mainly in maps as ready artifacts, but in the practice of their creation. In other words, this work is not about mapping in the conventional sense of the term, it is about the role of space and spatial imagination in the administration and the colonial policy of Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the obvious advantages of this work is a unique set of original maps and written sources, brought together by the author from the Gufton library of Harvard University and the Pusey Map Library, the Hiland Library of Ohio State University and the Newberry Library (USA), the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, the Department of Manuscripts of the Russian State Library and the Russian National Library. In the book there are many monochrome pictures and 31 color illustrations.

We do not set ourselves the task of comprehensive analysis of the monograph, the first half of which is devoted to the study of maps as a means of establishing land titles and designations of property boundaries in the era of legal and actual formation of the land registration system in the European part of Russia, and the second to Siberian cartography in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Attention will be drawn at present to the last part. Let us first note, however, the use of the term "cartography" in the plural in the title of the book, which could lead to some confusion among cartographers and geographers. It seems in this case to be justified, if we look at mapping as a way of expressing political and spatial thinking. This is the concept and the idea of the work: to consider through the study of maps two aspects of the history of Moscow State — serfdom, and the expansion into Siberia — each with its own mapping.

Expanding the scope and impact of actual presence in the east, the Moscow authorities and their agents understood the importance of documentary, including graphical presence, of displaying the processes. Serving people, founding towns and forts, driving native peoples into tribute-paying allegiance, were ordered to constitute a "painting" and "to draw a map". Drawing paths and descriptions of the objects of an area served as a tool of conquest. The frontier workers, facing a new dangerous

world of taiga and tundra, left texts and drawings that reflected their geographic and ethnographic experiences, their perceptions of the relationship between landscape and religion. Kivelson focuses on identification of this connection, as it allows to overcome the purely utilitarian understanding of space by man. Noting that the landscape “of the Siberian steppe” is filled with “a slightly different Christian narrative than the one that lit up the fields and forests of Central Russia”, it refers to the metaphor, chosen from the title of the work by G. Diment and Yuri Slezkine dedicated to the sacred values of Siberia in Russian Culture, *Between heaven and Hell*.

Analyzing unemotional descriptions by pioneers and diplomats (I. Petlin, V. Atlasova, F. Baikova, Spafarij) and some of the first drawings and maps (“Map of the Anadyr River”... (1654), Spafarij’s map (1682)), the author attempts to correlate the fear of, and admiration for, the forces of nature “in her Siberian image” expressed in these works, with observations by Avvakum, exiled to Siberia, permeated with reverence and awe before the creation of God. Another version of Siberia as a metaphorical representation of paradise, according to Kivelson, is Godunov’s drawing (1667) and based on it the “drawing of all Siberia”... (1673) in which the space is “tamed by native visual and verbal images”, turning them into a familiar and accessible terrain. Siberia appears here as a part of the possessions of the Russian tsar, as a continuation of Russia, despite the difference between Russia and Siberia, typical for that time. The cartographic material is studied in the context of contemporary chronicles and theological works. The most interesting and productive things are readings and interpretations of drawings and atlases, drawn by Remezov, to whose heritage is devoted the main place in the relevant sections of the monograph.

For the American researcher, the extent to which the works by Remezov are typical of Russian cartography and geographic thinking of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is not clear. I will assume that Russian historians of cartography are also not ready to answer this question comprehensively. Remezov is very individual in his creative aspects. However, it is obvious that his drawings can be seen as an expression of the pre-Petrine cartographic style and aesthetics. Somewhat more complicated is the case of attribution to a particular era of his historical chronicles and works. E.I. Dergacheva-Skop and V.N. Alekseev rightly point out that the central work by Remezov, “The History of Siberia”, appeared at the turn of the era, which instantly made it “antique”, and therefore, like its author, it was not accepted by the next generation. Twenty years after the death of Semen Ulyanovich, the document was assessed by G.F. Miller as a significant historical work. Remezov himself, who was the harbinger of a new era in the epoch, which can be defined as “old” in the new time, was immediately assessed as a “figure of the past”. For Kivelson, Remezov as a creative person is rather a “figure of the past”. In his cartographic work and written texts, he uses the trail and form used at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These works were completed before the Petrine reforms took effect. Through the unique vision of the Tobolsk servitor, the researcher attempts to understand how “the Moscow imperial, Orthodox mission was formed in the periphery”; as a frontier worker Remezov was aware of his role in Russian expansion in the moment before the Petrine reforms.

---

In Remezov's works the idea of divine predestination of the Russian conquest of Siberia, for the first time consistently stated in the chronicle story by Sava Yesipova "About Siberia and Siberian taken", finds its complete literary-isographic incarnation. In the first article of his "History of Siberia", the appropriate illustration, anticipating a story about Ermak's campaign, symbolizes protection by the "Christian God" of all Siberian towns which arose since 1586 as a result of the Russian conquest. Kivelson sees it as an example of "cartographic theology". The term "mapping" in this case is not correct, because we are dealing with administrative and political geography represented in allegorical form. However, the theological content of the picture is clear: under the all-seeing eye on the background of diverging rays is depicted an open Gospel. The text of the article informs the reader of the fisheries of the Creator, whose will destined Tobolsk to preach the Gospel "through Siberia to the ends of the world [...] on the edge of mountains".

The central place of Tobolsk, by right of its administrative and religious status, would be clearly reflected not only in the historiography, but also in the geographical imagery of Remezov. A typical example is the "Descriptive drawing of Tobolsk. Page 24" and the "Drawing of Tobolsk city. Sheet 28" from the service book of drawings. Kivelson says of it that the Siberian cartographer immortalized in texts and maps a life devoted to the glorification of his native city and Siberian homeland.

Revealing the hidden meaning of the Russian invasion of Asia, Kivelson draws attention to two opposing views in historical literature regarding the "Christianized aspect of Moscow colonialism" of the period. Considering that neither one nor the other fully reflects the Russian feature of the colonial relationship to Christianization, he comes to a conclusion wonderful in its originality: in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Russians behind the Urals practiced a "program of Christianization without rituals". In my view, it is difficult to talk about the existence of such a program as such, based on Kivelson's material; however, the argument must be accepted as a hypothesis for further development. At least, one can judge certain mental attitudes of the "frontier workers" in this light. Darkened since ancient times by "pagan beliefs", Siberia "became full of divine holy glory", there was the coming of the "image of the Almighty" and "the Most Pure Virgin Mary". It is likely that Christian education during this period was associated not as much with the conversion of the Gentiles and Muslims to Orthodoxy, but with signs and miraculous events that accompanied the emergence and consolidation of Russia in the Trans-Ural territories. The physical space was filled with new content: cities, castles and settlements, churches and monasteries. The image of Siberia, firstly settled by "unclean" and "impure" people and then compared by Remezov to an "Angel of Peace", was transformed. Thus, we are dealing with a kind of Christianization of colonized territories, inhabited by "yasak foreigners", which creates conditions for the conversion of these areas into Russian ones, and the natural inhabitants to prospective converts.

All this does not mean that the existing differences between sub-regions and Siberian peoples were leveled. On the contrary, the government and local authorities were trying to understand this diversity, including the development of drawings and maps. The first

experience of this kind of systematization should be recognized in the drawing of lands of Siberia, witnessed by Cornelius, Metropolitan of Siberia and Tobolsk, in June 1673. It has not been preserved in the original, but was well known and later used by Remezov in the preparation of the drawing “similarity and availability of lands across Siberia”... placed in a drawing book. In this ethnographic drawing, created, according to A.I. Andreeva, no earlier than September 1698, Remezov solves the problem of identifying the location and boundaries of the Siberian territory inhabited by “natives”<sup>1</sup>. He indicated it in several colors, highlighting the habitats occupied by the Tatars, Voguls, Samoyads, “Motley hordes of Ostyaks” the Tungus clans, “and Chulyms and Kachints”, etc. In almost each of these areas were indicated cities founded by Russians, which suggests an effort to correlate the ethnographic boundaries with the “faces” of administrative areas, areas of responsibility of Siberian voivodes. Kivelson rightly points out that this map “represents Muscovites’ trait of recognizing the connection between certain peoples and their territories and establish political rule based on the submission of various lands, not on homogenization or elimination of subjugated groups”. This elimination was typical for the politics and cartography of the European colonizers of America. The Map of the New World, as it is said by the author of the monograph, “generally afforded a lack of visual tools for locating indigenous inhabitants”. In Russia, however, there was a practical need for visual representation of the topography of the developed territory and spatial patterns of social order located there, and this resulted in a necessary indication and specification of natives’ habitat.

The results of the research carried out by Valerie Kivelson, devoted to Siberian cartography of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially to the work of Remezov, show how wonderfully were interwoven mental, metaphorical images of space conquered by Russians with its actual physical characteristics. This multi-layered narrative is not so easy to read. On the one hand, it is filled with sacred meaning and the personal impressions of the compilers, on the other it is replete with specific data, drawn from various sources, including official ones. Historical, literary and ethnographic texts are refracted in the “drawings”. The latter were not just “isographic” explanations of the details of arrival, paintings, stories, and other documents. Remezov’s atlases should be seen as a fundamental point in the formalization and visualization of known and at-the-time-available graphical displays of data and compilations of information. Commissioned by the central and local governments, they do not only mark the external borders of Russian possessions in Siberia, features of the landscape, the location of new administrative centers, but also “catalogued” and “mapped out” new subjects, recorded the results of integration with the indigenous population in the local administrative units. In this sense, we see the geography of Russian political and Orthodox influence in the area from the Urals to the Pacific Ocean in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The work under review is an example of a very productive and non-trivial interpretation of map material from the standpoint of historical, cultural and socio-historical research, and seems to be very useful for local historians, especially in terms of methodology.

*A. Yu. Konev*