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Military Cartography

EDITED BY MIRELA ALTIĆ



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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3-foot Ramsden theodolite from 1791 used during the principal Triangulation of Great Britain. Now in the Science Museum, London.
Photo by User:geni, December 2008. CC-BY-SA GDFL

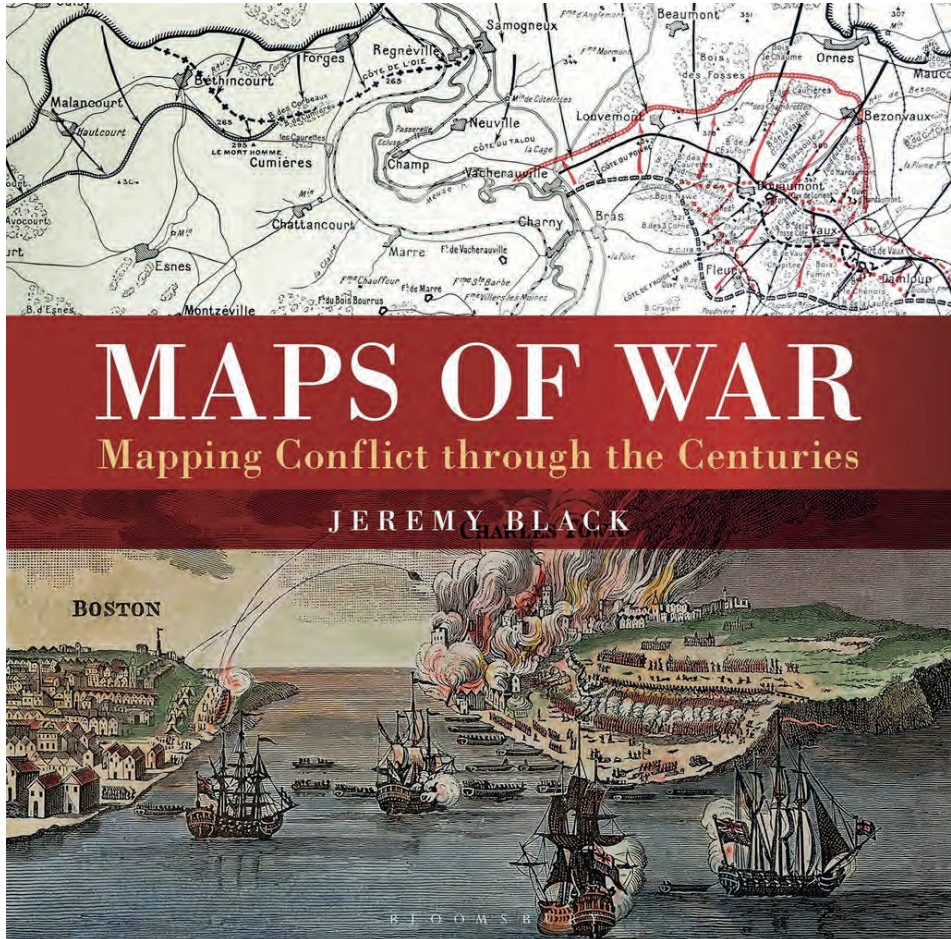
Military Cartography

by JEREMY BLACK

This important collection underlines a key element in military cartography, its range, its variety, and the two related, but different directions of causality and consequence, that from the military to cartography, and that from cartography to the military. The classifications of the various links can then be presented in terms of a series of grids or matrices. Principally, there are those of geography, chronology and types of conflict and cartography, although that does not exhaust the situation for we are confronted with palimpsests of both war and cartography. The typology given excludes for example personnel. The key typology, however, is that imposed by the needs of war, notably tactical, operational, strategic, geopolitical, reportage and propaganda; and with the land, sea, air typology offering crucial variations.

It is overly easy, as so often with military history, to provide a developmental account of the subject that is ‘Whiggish,’ notably in the senses of being unidimensional, teleological and judgmental; each of those being aspects of the other. In such an approach, we adopt an approach in which there is a paradigm of progress and, as a result, an apparent guide to assessing significance, effectiveness and achievement, a guide, moreover, that enables us to consider relative importance both geographically and chronologically, and, thereby, to direct those matrices and determine attention. This is an aspect of the naïve usage of the somewhat bogus notion of military revolution, and it is no accident that similar assumptions and language can be found, as with the consideration of institutionalisation and bureaucratisation as also unequivocal progress.

This approach is naïve, but so also is that which assesses the subject in a positivist fashion, one based on the survival of maps and, separately, on their inherent quality. This begs the question of the relationship between mapping as a process and maps as a product. In reality, mapping as an aspect of situational location



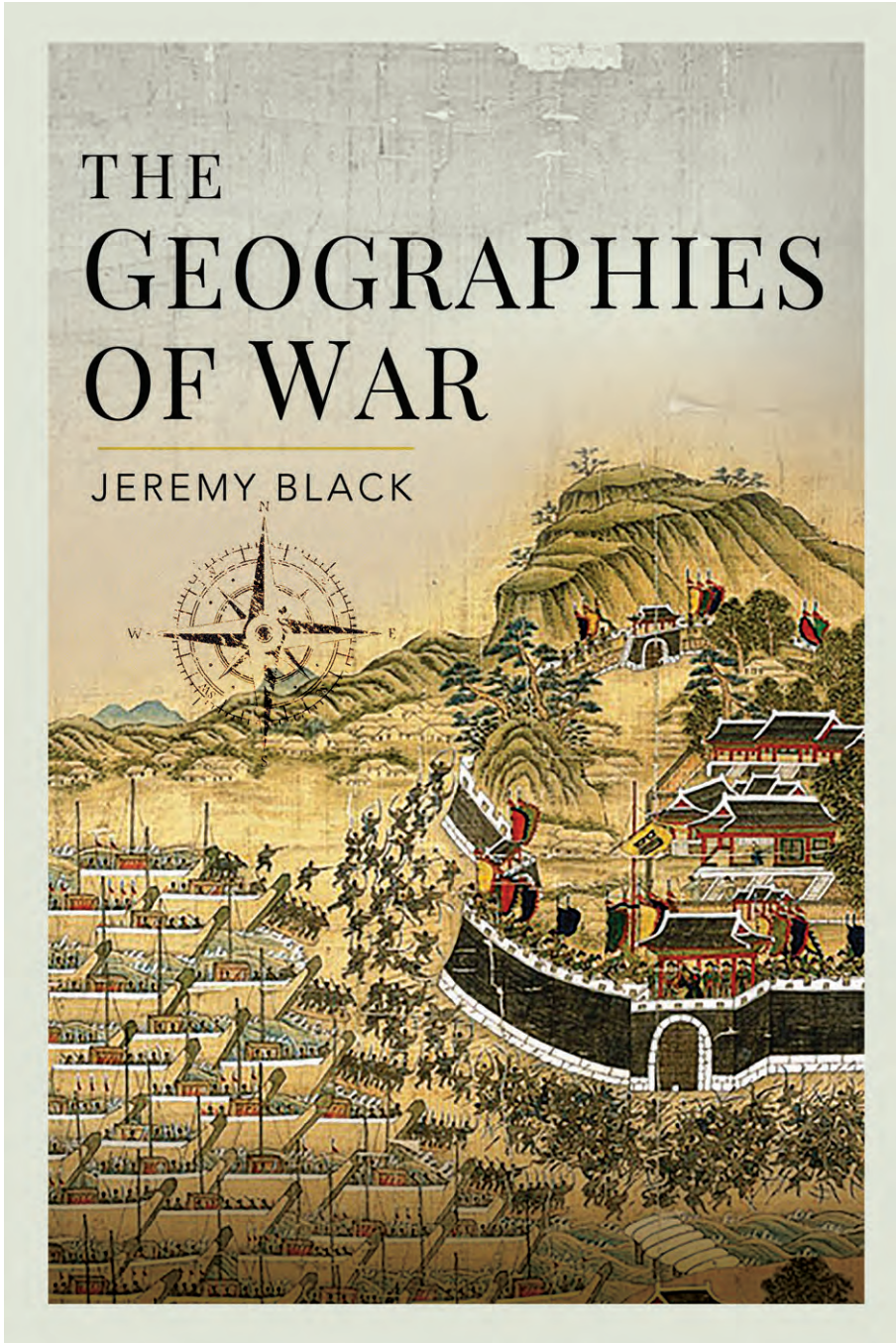
Jeremy Black, *Maps of War: Mapping Conflict Through the Centuries*, Conway, 2016.

and understanding is largely a mental process and, if not that, one that left an ephemeral presence as in indicators in the dirt, for example with a stick, usually of terrain and locations. These are maps, but not ones for which we have much, if any, survival, and notably so before the age of photography. Sketch maps on paper are a different variant, one of which we must be wary of saying that it is more developed lest we lapse again into a teleological model.

So, for most of the history of military cartography, we would need to consider geographies primarily of the mind, and how space and distance accordingly were assessed.

These factors remain pertinent for the essays discussed in this volume reflecting as they do largely state activity over the last 120 years, and not, for example, the cartography of military ngos, notably insurrectionary movements such as Shining Path in Peru. As the contributors show, institutional provision provides the resources and need to offer more programmatic mapmaking. That means different but not necessarily more ‘developed,’ as all forms of mapmaking should be judged in terms of fitness for purpose.

The recent history of historical cartography is made more concrete in this collection by consideration of particular case-studies, more specifically from the two world wars and notably aspects of the Allied invasion of Italy in 1943. These are all valuable, but also atypical. They relate to periods in which the resources of the major societies were uniquely focused on war, as opposed to periods of lesser activity. Moreover, there were unprecedented new requirements and opportunities, notably with air warfare and reconnaissance. The particular nature of air activity, and, notably, the location in three dimensions, ensured that location-finding, the key element in cartography, was given a new direction in range, scale and speed. The classic response, the feeding of information as to speed and height onto navigation maps, was a new version of naval mapping, but in a very different context. So also with the three-dimensional requirements for amphibious invasion mapping. These challenges provide a particular historical interest for the contents of this collection.



Jeremy Black, *The Geographies of War*, Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2022.



French Engineer geographers
Gouache, 1812, by Carle Vernet (1758–1836) and others after design by Bardin. From a series:
Règlement sur l'habillement (..) des troupes de terre de l'armée française,
vol. 4. Paris, Musée de l'Armée.
(Commons de. wikipedia)

Military Cartography

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