

NOTES

¹ R. A. Skelton, *Maps: A Historical Survey of their Study and Collecting*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 92.

² J. Piaget, *Structuralism*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 137.

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While there can be no question of the significance of the service M. J. Blakemore and J. B. Harley have rendered the study of the history of cartography with their review, *Concepts in the History of Cartography*, it must be immediately conceded that for a review of concepts in the *history* of cartography it is at best a bit bizarre. By my rather generous count no more than fifteen pages – or 14% of the text – are at all related to concepts in the history of cartography. Blakemore and Harley's review is centered, not on the history of maps, but on interesting facets of maps that historians of the subject would do well to keep in mind.

Almost every point Blakemore and Harley make applies with equal force to maps new or old. Tagging topics with 'early maps' only fools the fools. There is nothing, for example, in their chapter 'Early Maps as Artefacts' that could not be said as well of modern maps. Maps old and new are equally physical things, and cartographic style was no more intimately related to the techniques of the past than it is to those of the present. This is not a concept peculiar to the history of cartography, but to cartography. I was, in fact, quite forcibly struck by the near identity of Blakemore and Harley's Figure 16, illustrating variations in lines made by various tools – a knife, a burin and so on¹ – and the almost precisely contemporaneous Figure 4 of George Jenks' 'Lines, Computers and Human Frailties,' illustrating variations in lines attributable to differences in post data-capture processing techniques.² The point that representations vary with the techniques used to make them is important, but in a review of concepts in the history of cartography, Blakemore and Harley were obligated to at least make a stab at its historiographic role, to ascertain what it has been, if not to prescribe what it should be. I, for one, leave the chapter nonplussed: is the concern with technique merely methodological, solely useful for dating the artefact? or has this issue a broader place to occupy in the history of cartography?

While each chapter proffers similar examples of this refusal to deal with the history in the history of cartography, the most egregious is the final chapter itself. Claiming to advance an "appropriate underlying structure for the history of cartography" (p. 87), it actually articulates a 'linguistic' model of the map. It is true that I don't know what they mean by 'linguistic'. On one page (p. 90) they profess to have progressed beyond "the older notions derived from information theory," while on the very next they are discussing information loss like a couple of telephone engineers, oblivious to their quotation from Petchenik to the effect that meaning is *not* carried by maps, but triggered or released by them. While in their introduction to the chapter they would seem to be discussing 'structuralism' (though how they squeeze Panofsky into that mold I cannot say), they rapidly move through 'semantic' studies and 'semiotic' perspectives to 'cognitive interpretations' as though these were all pretty much the same thing! Though precisely why cartographers should rush to adopt a

'linguistic paradigm' when linguists (and cognitive psychologists) are toying with a 'mapping paradigm' escapes me, my real objection to the simple communications model underlying Blakemore and Harley's opaque *nouvelle vague* terminology is that it is given no historiographic relevance, *and is in fact praised for its spaceless and timeless character!* As if by a snake I am fascinated by their conceit that the structure most appropriately underlying the history of cartography should be atemporal, adevelopmental and ahistorical.

It must be stressed that this is not an oversight. Their advocacy of an ahistorical model constitutes an implicit refusal to entertain the possibility that the history of cartography has a structure; as well as a denial that such a structure might be developmental. In the preposterously few pages explicitly devoted to 'chronological frameworks', Blakemore and Harley discuss two 'paradigms'. It will not need laboring that they are not enamored of "The 'Old Is Beautiful' Paradigm", although calling it a paradigm dignifies immeasurably what is nothing more than slovenly habit. Slovenly habit is largely what they seem to feel constitutes 'The Darwinian Paradigm' as well: "The Darwinian assumption is almost certainly a subliminal rather than a conscious ordering of material by most historians of cartography. Its base premise seems to be that as civilization improves so map-making also progresses" (p. 17). It should be superfluous to observe that there is nothing even distantly 'Darwinian' about this postulate, not Darwinian, nor Lamarckian, nor even evolutionary, though Blakemore and Harley nowhere indicate their awareness of the existence of such elementary distinctions. *Progressivist* might be an appropriate label for the 'chronological frameworks' – such as they are – implicit in most histories of cartography. Since such 'progress' is usually referred to 'increasing accuracy' it would have been insightful of Blakemore and Harley to have discussed 'the search for accuracy' as an expression of the progressivism that both needs and dictates it. Though this is not it, a Darwinian framework *is* possible. It is actually probably implicit in most carto-bibliography, concerned as it is with the Darwinian issues of generational variation. When such variation is expressly attributed to environmental change, the implicit framework could be construed as Lamarckian. Evolutionary frameworks of great variety and richness would have leapt from the pages of the history of cartography had Blakemore and Harley been the slightest bit concerned with the *history* in it.

Certainly no term could be less apt than 'Darwinian' applied to the work of P. D. A. Harvey and myself, of which both are explicitly *developmental*.³ My paper, from which Blakemore and Harley quote, even specifies the *organismic developmentalism* of Cassier, Wemer and Kaplan,⁴ which gains its strength from the comparison of varying developmental sequences, among which Darwinian evolution (an hypothesized mechanism for phylogenesis) would constitute but a single instance. In the case illustrated by Blakemore and Harley (pp. 20–21), an ethnogenetic sequence (the development of hill signs by human beings) is compared with an ontogenetic sequence (the development of hill signs in an individual human). Though there is nothing remotely Darwinian about this – or about Harvey's superficially similar work⁵ – Blakemore and Harley have no hesitation about discussing "a flaw in the 'Darwinian paradigm' as implied by Harvey and Wood" (p. 19). Though I could not agree less with their discussion at this point in the text (who of any of us has made the "facile equation of the development of animal with cognitive systems" Blakemore and Harley

condemn? – as if animals were not cognitive organisms and humans not animals!!), still it has to be granted that they have the grace to keep ‘Darwinian paradigm’ within quotation marks and to maintain some sort of distinction between the progressivists and the developmentalists (with not a Darwinian in the bunch!).

Such grace is not granted for long. Only a few pages farther on we find Blakemore and Harley suggesting that their ‘nationalist paradigm’ is “no more than the spatial expression of the Darwinian paradigm, insofar as the greatest ‘value’ is given to the maps of the culturally advanced societies of Western Europe” (p. 28). With the quotation marks, scholarship has been left behind; while Wood and Bagrow, Harvey and Brown have been *cuisinarted* into one smooth homogeneous blend. Not only is there nothing Darwinian about their ‘nationalist paradigm’ but there are competing explanations of far greater persuasiveness close at hand. After all, in rejecting ethnocentrism – the self-evident cause – Blakemore and Harley themselves suggested the ‘spatial friction of distance’ (p. 16)!! There are too many such stings. For example, in their discussion of ‘the search for accuracy’ they note that, “There has been a long-standing tendency (an aspect of the Darwinian paradigm) to judge early maps from the platform of present-day maps” (p. 75) – Harvey’s eloquent stand on this issue to the contrary notwithstanding. Or again, they conclude their discussion of the putative split between art and science with, “Eventually, but with certain Darwinian inevitability, the stems split and science claimed cartography” (p. 77), though how to construe this – as sarcasm or a *volte-face* – is hard to know.

The unrelenting harassment of the Darwinian position leads one to expect that Blakemore and Harley will unveil a compelling alternative in their final chapter. It is a bitter disappointment to realize that they have been sniping from everywhere because they take their stand nowhere. As far as the history in the history of cartography is concerned, it is business as usual, the old random collection of events arranged in chronologic order. Though they use the word ‘development’ in their definition of the field (p. 13), their heart is not in it. There are hundreds of evolutionary, historical and developmental models waiting to be examined and deployed. Blakemore and Harley badly botch the one they touch. Many things need to be debated in the history of cartography: can’t history be one of them?

NOTES

¹ This illustration originally appeared in David Woodward, ed., *Five Centuries of Map Printing*, University of Chicago Press, 1975.

² In the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 71, no. 1, March 1981, pp. 1–11.

³ Denis Wood, “Now and Then: Comparisons of Ordinary Americans’ Symbol Conventions with Those of Past Cartographers,” *Prologue, The Journal of the National Archives*, vol. 9, no. 3, Fall 1977, pp. 151–61; and P. D. A. Harvey, *The History of Topographical Maps: Symbols, Pictures and Surveys*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1980.

⁴ See, for example, Heinz Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development*, International Universities Press, New York, 1948; or Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan, *Symbol Formation*, Wiley, New York, 1963.

⁵ See my review of Harvey’s book, *Cartographica*, vol. 17, no. 3, Autumn 1980, pp. 130–33.

⁶ It is one of the strengths of Harvey’s work that he does not view maps of the past from the perspective of the present. See his book, especially page 173.