Journal of Research and Didactics in Geography (J-READING), 1, 6, June, 2017, pp. 75-81
DOI: 10.4458/8579-06

J - READING
JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND DIDACTICS IN
GEOGRAPHY
homepage: www.j-reading.org

On uses of utopian maps: The Map of New Geneva in Waterford (1783) between colonialism and republicanism

Federico Ferretti[a]

[a] School of Geography, University College Dublin, Belfield – Dublin 4, Ireland
Email: federico.ferretti@ucd.ie

Received: April 2017 – Accepted: April 2017

Abstract

This paper analyses a handwritten 1783 map surviving in the Département de Cartes et Plans at the Geneva Public Library, whose first version in colours has remained unpublished until now. The map represents the project of New Geneva, a utopian settlement of Genevan watchmakers exiled after their participation in the 1782 Geneva Revolution, in the southern Irish county of Waterford. I first analyse the contexts of this map by crossing Irish and Swiss sources. Then, I address the iconographic document drawing on recent literature on the imperial map and unorthodox mappings. I conclude that, though contributing to studies on the geographies of revolution and the unorthodox uses of cartography, this document reproduces some features of more classical maps of empire, as it was part of a project which was functional to British imperialism in Ireland. Finally, the project was not realised owing to the lack of agreement between all the actors of this complex story.

Keywords: Utopia, Imperial Map, Colonialism, Republicanism, Geographies of Revolution

1. Introduction

This paper addresses a cartographic document kept in the Map Collection of the Geneva Public Library, representing a project to establish a colony of Swiss watchmakers in the Irish county of Waterford.

These workers were exiled after the defeat of the 1782 popular uprising in Geneva, considered as the first of the "Genevan Revolutions" (1782-1798) which paralleled the historical movements leading to the 1789 French Revolution (Fornara, 1989).

The Geneva *Département de Cartes et Plans* has been already the subject of works on the cartographic collection of anarchist geographers, Elisée Reclus and Charles Perron (Ferretti, 2014 and 2015). Though conserved with their materials, the Waterford map did not belong to the collection put together by Reclus and Perron, as it lacks its typical inventory numbers. It is apparently the result of a successive donation, associated with the Henri-Albert Gosse Papers.

It is ironic that a "revolutionary" map of the eighteenth century randomly joined a collection made by political revolutionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This coincidence appears less striking if we consider the Swiss traditions of political unorthodoxy and the specificity of Geneva as traditional refuge for political exiles as Reclus was. The map of Waterford also addresses an experience of exile, which concerned in this case a group of Geneva citizens, and provides an example of the varied political uses of cartographical documents. While Brian Harley had stated that maps are the language of power, never that of contestation, because their "ideological arrows have tended to fly largely in one direction, from the powerful to the weaker in society" (Harley, 2001, p. 79), recent studies have shown a range of "unorthodox" uses of maps (Boria, 2015; Ferretti, 2015).

While Irish local history reconstructed the documentary history of New Geneva (Butler, 1913, 1914 and 1915), this short paper is the first attempt to discuss this cartographic document and its contexts by crossing Irish and Swiss sources from a geographer's perspective. My main argument is that this map can contribute to the study of Geographies of Revolution and the spatialities of the Enlightenment (Livingstone and Withers, 2005; Withers, 2007), addressing the Geneva 1782 Revolution. I argue in particular that, changing its place, the Geneva revolution also changed its political direction, because the project to establish a republican colony of exiled workers who had challenged power in their city, ended up being included in an imperial project, that of British colonialism in Ireland.

2. Genevan Revolutions

In June 1782, a few years before the French revolution, the bourgeoisie of Geneva rose up and got rid of the aristocratic power, taking the control of the city. Though formally an independent republic, Geneva was ruled by a system still inspired by the theocratic dictatorship instituted in the sixteenth century by Jean Calvin, whose intolerance and totalitarianism were implicitly compared to Hitler's by historian Stefan Zweig (Lestringant, 2006).

In the following weeks, the armies of the Kings of France and Savoy, supported by Swiss troops from Bern (Geneva was not yet a part of Switzerland) had converged onto the city restoring the formal government and compelling the leaders of the rebellion to seek refuge in the nearby town of Neuchâtel. The social basis of the uprising was formed by skilled workers in the watchmaking industry. Thus, a few days after the revolution's defeat, one of its most enthusiastic leaders, the young Francis d'Ivernois (1757-1842), wrote to Lord Montstuart, "who knew Geneva well and was then British envoy at Turin, requesting facilities for transporting the watchmakers and their families to England and announcing his intention to travel to London as soon as possible to consult with Lord Shelburne, the prime minister" (Jupp, 1970, p. 29).

D'Ivernois's first steps were successful because King George III and the British government were interested in the bargain that could result from the immigration of skilled and disciplined workers, proven Protestants and opposed to the French regime. Nevertheless, the settlement of the colony in England was problematic because of the possible opposition of English watchmakers fearing competition. Therefore, Shelburne offered the Geneva commissioners to settle in Ireland, "putting D'Ivernois in touch with Lord Temple, the newly appointed Lord Lieutenant" (Jupp, 1970, p. 30). In Dublin, Earl Temple and several other local politicians welcomed this proposal enthusiastically. This occurred in a moment of turmoil in Irish politics, because in the same year the so-called "1782 Constitution" had increased the power of the Irish parliament and hence the autonomy of the island (Butler, 1913). A rhetoric of freedom was then released by the local press, in the *Dublin Journal* for instance, writing that it was "quite natural that the victims of oppression should be soliciting an asylum in this rising land of liberty" (Jupp, 1970, p. 31).

Nevertheless, it would be anachronistic to confuse these claims for "Irish liberty" with the republican and nationalist claims for Irish

independence of the two following centuries. The Anglo-Irish ruling classes which welcomed the Genevan leaders were mainly composed of protestant aristocrats and functionaries acting on behalf of the British Crown with varying degrees of autonomy. A very telling anecdote concerns the Count of Ely, who offered D'Ivernois his lands in Wexford to settle there "the first protestant colony upon the Earth" (Karmin, 1920, p. 125). Several places were then considered, and when Temple received the Genevan delegates in Dublin Castle on 14 February 1783, he offered them the lands of the Passage village, county Waterford, to build a new town there with a governmental contribution of £50,000. The location was decided on the grounds of geopolitical (imperial) considerations: these watchmakers were protestants, but also republicans, then Temple "wished to remove them from the Northern republicans and to place them where they might make an essential reform in the religion, industry and manners of the South, who want[ed] it more" (Jupp, 1970, p. 31). Waterford was one of the regions affected by the peasants' revolts promoted by movements such as the Whiteboys, who struggled against landlordism and social inequality (Featherstone, 2007).

Thus, the Genevan migrants were implicitly assigned the task of performing soft social control and educational work among local populations, deemed "backward" consistently with the mainstream stereotypes despising and later racialising the Irish peasant as intrinsically "inferior" (Finnegan, 2014). A project for transferring the Genevan Academy in Waterford in addition to the workers' settlement was clearly consistent with these colonial purposes (Powell McNutt and Whatmore, 2013). The French-speaking commentators released a classical imperial rhetoric on an Irish (allegedly) empty "Far West" to settle and civilise. "It is a new country, refuge of liberty … rich in resources" (Brissot, 1783, p. 148).

3. The document

In Geneva, the map of Waterford survives in two handwritten versions. The first one, drawn with watercolours and never reproduced until now to the best of my knowledge (Figure 1), and a black-and-white one, ready for engraving and printing, which presents the situation of Waterford bay and the position of the planned town more schematically (Figure 2). This second version was accordingly used to circulate the information among the Genevan watchmakers who remained in Switzerland between 1782 and 1784 to convince them to emigrate. This hypothesis seems confirmed by the fact that Figure 2 does not only survive in the Gosse paper, but is also published in his biography (Plan, 1909, p. 140). Henri-Albert Gosse (1753-1816) never travelled to Ireland, but was one of the supporters of the project while he was exiled in Neuchâtel.

Although there is no indication of date or author inside these maps, it is possible to make a number of hypotheses. First, Gosse's biography and an archivist's note pencilled on Figure 2 suggest 1782 as the document's date, but the map is more likely to have been produced in the following year, as Waterford was proposed to the Geneva commissioners only in early 1783, and the first survey of Genevan people took place in Waterford in March 1783 (Karmin, 1920). Second, its author was almost certainly a member of the Genevan group which discussed with Earl Temple and then visited Waterford. According to Otto Karmin, "in mid-March [1783] Clavière, Gasc, Mellyand Ringler went to Waterford, accompanied by Mr. Cuffe, while D'Ivernois, Duroveray and Grenius remained in Dublin to perfection the agreement" (Karmin, 1920, p. 36). It is likely that the map's authors were members of this expedition; Gosse, who later became a naturalist, might have been involved in its engraving and circulation in Switzerland.

A striking characteristic of this map is its bilingualism: in the first version (Figure 1) a Genevan hand added an explanation in French to the basic map, probably started by a local map-maker. This explanation concerns the scale, the names of the local counties (*Comté de Waterford, Comté de Wexford*…) and the territory around the planned settlement, including terrestrial communications, such as the main road called "Route de Waterford à Passage".

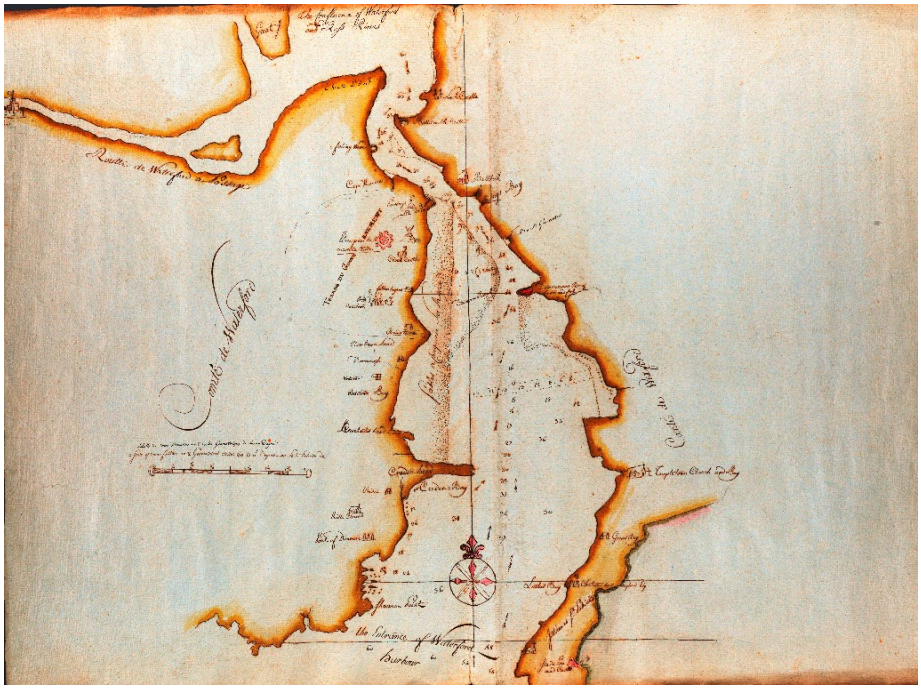

Figure 1. Map of New Geneva in Waterford, Bibliothèque de Genève, Département de Cartes et Plans, Papiers H.A. Gosse (1).

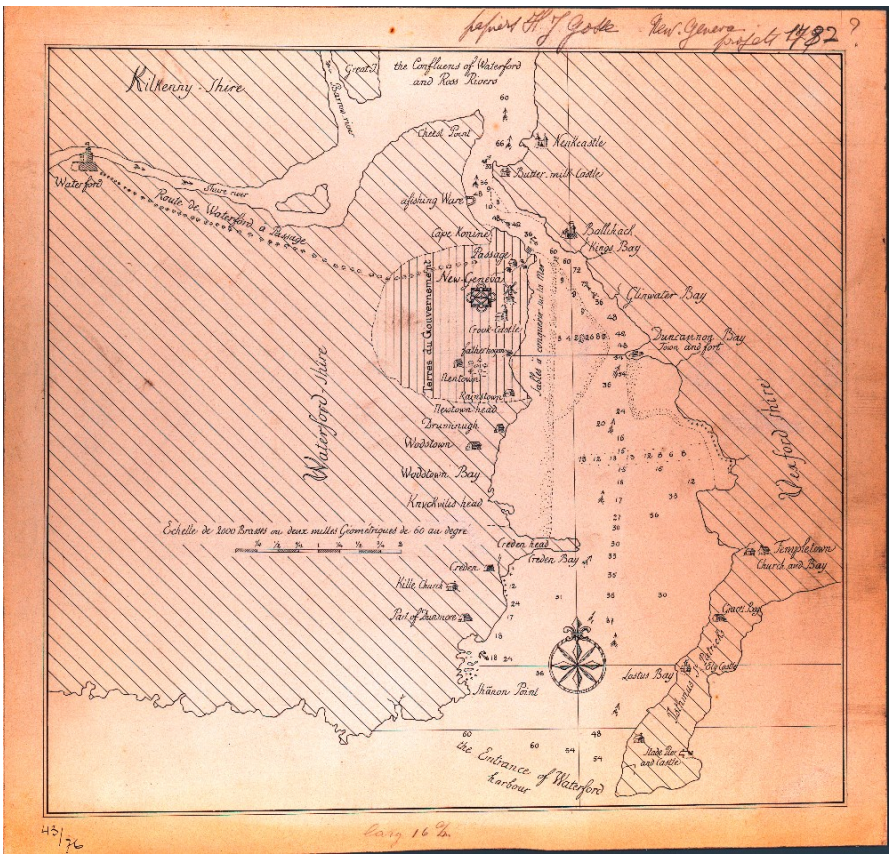

Figure 2. Map of New Geneva in Waterford, Bibliothèque de Genève, Département de Cartes et Plans, Papiers H.A. Gosse (2).

In the "printable" version (Figure 2), the information in French added by the Geneva commissioners is further highlighted and integrated. There is a clear representation of the extension of the territory the local government had allotted to the Geneva community. Communications are outlined, including the path of the terrestrial road and the line representing the ferry connection from New Geneva to Duncannon, the place of the fort which had to guarantee the military defence of the bay in case of a French attack. Bilingualism is not a common sight in maps and, in this case, it clearly shows the propagandist nature of this document. According to Harley, maps are always instruments of propaganda and persuasion, also when they claim neutrality (Harley, 2001, p. 55). In this case, the task of convincing the reader is performed through the transcultural nature of this map: translation had to be provided to convince Genevan watchmakers that this place was suitable to transfer their industry there, as it provided a safe harbour, good terrestrial and maritime connections, available land and a favourable government.

Nevertheless, this map also represents a shifting from a geography of revolution to a geography of empire. On the one hand, it represents a utopian settlement for exiled people, anticipating some features of the phalansteries and Icarian communities of nineteenth century socialism, though these utopian settlements were criticised by anarchists such as Reclus (Reclus, 1900). On the other, the territory which had to be annexed to New Geneva contained local villages and farms, including mills, churches and a castle. The local sources published by Matthew Butler (1914-15) show the disappointment of local tenants with this project which would have entailed their eviction, and the map states this superposition without using one of the most common expedients used by imperial mapping, i.e. the blank spaces, said by Harley to foster "the notion of socially empty space"(Harley, 2001, p. 60).

Yet, this map was part of an imperial project. While the performative power of maps, which invent and anticipate the territory, is widely acknowledged by current literature, the map of New Geneva stands beyond a practical representation of physical features such as the depths of the Waterford Bay, and what not yet exists, i.e. the town of New Geneva. Finally, the map failed to accomplish its performative role, because the project for a settlement was abandoned for the reasons I explain below.

4. Between map and reality

In 1784, the project failed owing to contingent causes including the transfer to Britain of the strongest supporter of New Geneva, Earl Temple, and to more clearly political reasons. First, Genevan and French diplomacies exercised pressure upon the British Crown to not grant protection to revolutionaries, which would have hindered the "measures taken by the [European] powers to stabilize the situation in Geneva" (Karmin, 1920, p. 144). Subsequently, the Irish administration became increasingly slow and inefficient in granting the watchmakers the loans they had requested to start their activities. Second, the new political leaders in Geneva targeted a reconciliation with former revolutionaries, and most of the watchmakers who were about to emigrate (from 1,000 to 2,000 according to the different sources) became increasingly less seduced by such a radical and risky plan.

The Genevan government also made violent intimidations against the inspirers of migration towards Ireland, as shown in an exceptional document, the self-defence of Ami Melly. Melly, a trader involved in the Waterford project and naturalised Irish there, was put under trial and sentenced to a jail term in Geneva. Against this, Melly exposed classical Enlightenment arguments to confute the *ancien régime* legislation which considered the individual not as a citizen, but as a property of the state, not allowed to emigrate without explicit permission (Melly, 1784). Finally, the real Genevan presence in Passage hardly exceeded one hundred people, and the first stone of New Geneva was posed in July 1784, two months after "the Genevan decided to quit Ireland" (Butler, 1913, p. 22) in May 1784.

5. Conclusion

The end of New Geneva was paradoxical, because the houses built with the first funding allocated became barracks, now in ruin, which served as a prison for the prisoners in the 1798 uprising led by the United Irishmen. This was highly ironic if we consider that this important step in the story of the struggle for Irish independence was inspired by the continental revolutions of these years (Kearns, 2013; Featherstone, 2013).

It is possible to conclude that, even though "unorthodox", this map was likewise inserted in the context of colonial modernity. Irish people weres apparently not involved in its project, and utopia is an ambiguous concept, as it served both political progress and European colonial imaginations. Yet, the revolutions of 1789-1848, anticipated by the 1782 Geneva uprising, had a global impact for social emancipation which went well beyond their premises and likewise influenced the movements for de-colonisation, including that of Ireland (Ferretti, 2017).

References

1. Boria E., "Representing the politics of borders: unorthodox maps in Reclus, Mackinder and Others", *Geopolitics*, 20, 1, 2015, pp. 142-170.
2. Brissot de Warville J.P., *Le Philadelphien à Genève ou Lettres d'un Américain sur la dernière révolution de Genève*, Dublin [i.e. Carouge], 1783.
3. Butler H., "New Geneva in Waterford", *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 77, 2, 1947, pp. 150-155.
4. Butler M., "New Geneva: some correspondence relating to its foundation", *Journal of The Waterford & Southeast of Ireland Archaeological Society*, XVI, 1913, pp. 1-17, 86-92; XVII, 1914, pp. 164-169; XVIII, 1915, pp. 21-26, 108-112.
5. Featherstone D., "Skills for heterogeneous associations: the White boys, collective experimentation, and subaltern political ecologies", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 25, 2007, pp. 284-306.
6. Featherstone D., "'We will have equality and liberty in Ireland': the contested geographies of Irish democratic political cultures in the 1790s", *Historical Geography*, 41, 2013, pp. 120-136.
7. Ferretti F., "Pioneers in the History of Cartography: the Geneva map collection of Élisée Reclus and Charles Perron", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 43, 2014, pp. 85-95.
8. Ferretti F., "A new map of the Franco-Brazilian border dispute (1900)", *Imago Mundi*, 67, 2, 2015, pp. 229-242.
9. Ferretti F., "Political geographies, unfaithful translations and anti-colonialism: Ireland in Élisée Reclus's geography and biography", *Political Geography*, 59, 2017, pp. 11-23.
10. Finnegan D., "Race, space, and politics in mid-Victorian Ireland: the ethnologies of Abraham Hume and John McElheran", *Historical Geography*, 42, 2014, pp. 152-170.
11. Fornara L. (Ed.), *Révolutions genevoises: 1782-1798*, Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, 1989.
12. Harley B., *The new nature of maps*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
13. Jupp P., "Genevese exiles in County Waterford", *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 75, 1970, pp. 29-35.
14. Karmin O., "Sir Francis d'Ivernois: 1757-1842: sa vie, son oeuvre et son temps", *Revue historique de la Révolution française et de l'Empire*, 1920.
15. Kearns G., "Introduction to special issue: historical geographies of Ireland, colonial contexts and postcolonial legacies", *Historical Geography*, 41, 2013, pp. 22-34.
16. Lestringant F., "Stefan Zweig contre Calvin (1936)", *Revue de l'histoire des religions,* 223, 2006, pp. 3-30.
17. Livingstone D.N. and Withers C.W.J (Eds.), *Geography and revolution*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.
18. Melly A., *Dissertation apologétique et justificative, en faveur de M. Ami Melly*, London, A la nouvelle Genève, 1784.
19. Plan D., *Henri-Albert Gosse (1753-1816): un Genevois d'autrefois*, Geneva, Kundig, 1909.
20. Powell McNutt J. and Whatmore R., "The attempts to transfer the Genevan Academy to Ireland and to America, 1782–1795", *The Historical Journal*, 56, 2, 2013, pp. 345-368.

21. Reclus É., “Les colonies anarchistes”, *Les Temps Nouveaux*, 7-13, 1900, pp. 1-2.
22. Withers C.W.J., *Placing the Enlightenment: thinking geographically about the age of reason*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007.

