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**VISUALISING THE EASTERN FRONT:  
HEIMATSCHUTZ AND SURVEY PHOTOGRAPHY  
DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

**Abstract**

This article discusses the photographic surveys undertaken on Polish occupied lands in the framework of the German war-time *Landeskunde* and *Kunstschutz* research projects. It presents the photographic collections produced in the General Government and *Ober Ost*, held in larger and smaller archives, widely popularised both on the front and at home by means of the press, albums, scientific and popular publications, postcards, lantern lectures and exhibitions. It argues that the advancement of the front provided a unique opportunity for such explorations and that the German surveys were the first of such reach and scale to cover all of Polish territories. The article also traces the possible close collaboration between German and Polish scholars, photographers and institutions. In particular it juxtaposes the survey initiatives undertaken by the Warsaw civic societies with the projects of the *Landeskundliche Kommission* and the Warsaw *Hofbauabteilung*. In addition, it focuses on the close collaboration between Jan Bułhak and the German art historians in Vilnius.

**Keywords:** survey photography, cultural heritage, First World War, Poland, German occupation

In 1915, the great advance on the Eastern Front placed a huge area of the Western provinces of the Russian Empire under the German and Austro-Hungarian Armies' control: an unknown and complex cultural landscape, a patchwork of peoples, languages, religions, cultures, and identities scattered on vast, poor, often non-urbanised, even desolated, areas badly devastated by war. The encounter of the thousands of German soldiers with this physical territory and its ethnic and cultural landscape produced what Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius called "the mental landscape conjured up by looking out over an area: ways of organising the perception of a territory, its characteristic

features and landmarks.”<sup>1</sup> In his ground-breaking book, *War Land on the Eastern Front*, he argued that the vision of the East and what might be done there constituted the most enduring effect of the German occupation. By focusing both on the single impressions of the soldiers of all ranks expressed in diaries or letters and on the various cultural, economic, scientific, and social projects undertaken by the German administration in the *Land Ober Ost*, he presented the occupation as an encounter with the hostile and barbarian, on the one hand, and as a complex and ambitious project to describe, organise, and order it according to civilisational and cultural standards, on the other.<sup>2</sup> Liulevicius’s vivid reconstruction of the German mindscape of the East misses however an important element: it lacks illustrations.

In this article, I will argue that the German encounter with unknown landscapes and spaces was also visual. I will consider the photographic collections produced in the General Government and the *Ober Ost*, held in larger and smaller archives, widely popularised both on the front and at home by means of the press, albums, scientific and popular publications, postcards, lantern lectures, and exhibitions.<sup>3</sup> Such collections were the result of wartime photographic surveys undertaken both in the framework of the German research projects – *Landeskunde* [regional geography] and *Kunstschutz* [monuments preservation] – and as a result of a specifically German sensibility to landscape and cultural heritage, popularised in late

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<sup>1</sup> Vejas G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front. Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in the World War One* (Cambridge MA, 2000), 151.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, 279.

<sup>3</sup> Due to the limits of space and the state of research on the issue of German survey photography on the Eastern Front, this article presents the survey initiatives undertaken on the Polish occupied lands without entering into details regarding the aims and organisation of such projects in the single administrative units established on the occupied lands of the Russian Empire. Moreover, this article will not relate such projects to the different institutional, state-building, social or cultural policies of the *Ober Ost* and the General Governments of Warsaw and Lublin. On this, see, among others: Jesse Kauffman, *Elusive Alliance: The German Occupation of Poland in World War I* (Cambridge MA, 2015); Stephan Lehnstaedt, ‘Das Militärgeneralgouvernement Lublin. Die “Nutzbarmachung” Polens durch Österreich-Ungarn im Ersten Weltkrieg’, *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, lxi (2012), 1–26; Arkadiusz Stempin, *Próba “moralnego podboju” Polski przez Cesarstwo Niemieckie w latach I wojny światowej* (Warszawa, 2014).

nineteenth-century *Heimatschutz* [homeland protection] movement.<sup>4</sup> I will also demonstrate that one of the main and far-reaching effects of such visual projects can be traced through their influences on the local scientific and visual culture. On the one hand, the advancement of the front provided a unique opportunity for such explorations in a land with an undeveloped train and road network. Thus, the German surveys were the first of such reach and scale in Eastern Europe. On the other, the German surveyors involved in their projects local – in particular Polish – scholars, photographers, and organisations. This collaboration was an incentive for the creation of original and widely popularised local photographic surveys, which shared the sensibility and scientific approach of the German ones.

## I

*HEIMATSCHUTZ, PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE WARTIME  
MEMORY BOOK*

In his eyewitness account of the years 1915–18 in Warsaw, the historian Aleksander Kraushar described one particular photographic album as one of the most arresting overviews of the German occupation and an example of truly effective propaganda.<sup>5</sup> He was referring to *General-gouvernement Warschau. Eine Bilderreihe aus der Zeit des Weltkrieges*, an in quarto volume filled with 315 photographic reproductions published in Oldenburg in 1918 and distributed both in Germany and in Warsaw.<sup>6</sup> The album follows the administrative division of the General Government, presenting in separate sections Warsaw and the ten Military Governments. Each section is illustrated along the same pattern: single and group portraits of German officers and pictures of the administrative seats serve as an introduction to a carefully chosen set of photographs illustrating the particularities of the region and the historical moment. Warsaw is shown in its historical monuments, Orthodox churches, parks, panoramic views, snapshots from its busy streets, the Old Town district, views of festivities,

<sup>4</sup> Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature. Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885–1945* (Cambridge MA, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Aleksander Kraushar, *Warszawa podczas okupacji niemieckiej 1915–1918* (Lwów, Warszawa, and Kraków, 1921), 56–9.

<sup>6</sup> Kraushar mentions that several dozens of copies were found in the headquarters of the General Government in the Warsaw Royal Castle; *ibidem*, 57.

the landscapes, villages, folk life and ethnographic types from its environs. Such pictures are intermingled with views of military bridges, cemeteries, forts, and destroyed monuments. Many have German soldiers in the foreground. The chapters on the single Military Governments, although not as richly illustrated, follow a similar pattern. One of the album's illustrations – a panorama view of the Warta River being admired by a German soldier – is a perfect expression of its visual propagandistic message: a total and ordered control of the occupied territories and its cultural landscape (fig. 1). Kraushar, who was particularly struck by the minuteness with which the German officers and administrators were represented, noticed the danger of such visual propaganda: “the Russian invasion, despite its long duration, did not leave a portrait series of individuals who enforce despotic rules. Meanwhile, this occupation, with peculiar German meticulousness, endowed us with such a souvenir in the form of an impressive photographic album illustrating the four-year activity of the *Kulturträgers*.”<sup>7</sup>

The General Government album belongs to a new publishing genre: the German illustrated overview of the Great War. In particular, it shares the format, layout, and propagandistic iconography of the most impressive edition of the kind, the *Grosser Bilderatlas des Weltkrieges*.<sup>8</sup> This three volume atlas aimed to give a complete chronologically and geographically organised German insight into the nature and events of the war on all fronts, as well as coverage of the main battlefields, in 6,000 illustrations based on press photographs of the highest quality, reproduced maps and documents.<sup>9</sup> Of course, it is difficult to juxtapose a total view of the military theatre of the *Bilderatlas* with the small section of its Eastern Front of the *Generalgouvernement Warschau*. However, there is one general and striking difference between the two visual narrations. While in the *Bilderatlas* survey photographs appear randomly, in the *Generalgouvernement Warschau* they form the core of the narration, which builds an evocative and in-depth image of the varied and multi-ethnic cultural landscape of the occupied lands. This distinctive feature is intentional: in the album's introduction, the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 56.

<sup>8</sup> (München, 1915–19).

<sup>9</sup> Julia Encke, *Augenblicke der Gefahr: Der Krieg und die Sinne 1914–1934* (München, 2006), 40–1.

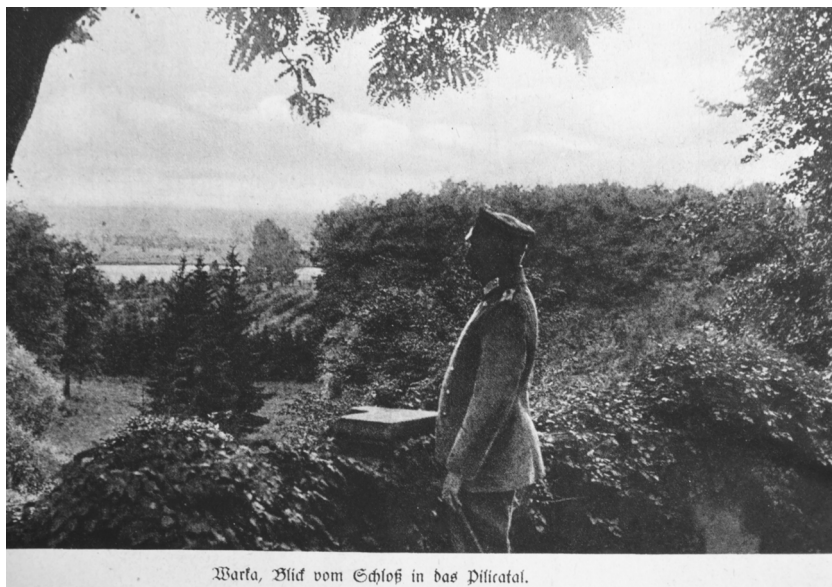


Fig. 1. A page from the album *Das Generalgouvernement Warschau. Eine Bilderreihe aus der Zeit des Weltkrieges* (Oldenburg, 1918).

photographic plates are described as “pictures and memories of the [wartime] experiences ... bringing to life the beauty of these lands.”<sup>10</sup>

The *5. Reserve-Division im Weltkrieg. 300 Bilder aus Belgien, Polen, Litauen und Frankreich*,<sup>11</sup> another album with photographic coverage of both fronts, shows very clearly that the visual mindscape based on survey photography was a distinctive feature of the Eastern Front experience. The Division fought in Belgium, France and *ca.* two years on the Eastern Front, and the album offers a narration of changing views and landscapes, which follows chronologically the path traversed by the soldiers. The coverage of the Belgian campaign is dominated by an urbanised landscape, views of damaged medieval and renaissance monuments, rivers, roads, scenes from the trenches, and single and group portraits of the Division’s soldiers and officials. The French section, with its peopleless landscape of mutilated towns and monuments

<sup>10</sup> *Der Generalgouvernement Warschau. Eine Bilderreihe aus der Zeit des Weltkrieges* (Oldenburg, 1918), 2.

<sup>11</sup> (München, 1918).

combined with close-ups of weapons and battle scenes, reflects a war experience marked by industrial warfare. The landscape of the Eastern Front, on the other hand, with its kaleidoscope of ethnographic pictures of villages, types, folk scenes, and winter and summer views is rural and dominated by everyday people. It is intermingled with, but not dominated by, war scenes, close-ups of the daily life of the Division, as well as portraits of its officials and soldiers. The *5. Reserve-Division im Weltkrieg*, just like the General Government album, is described as an “illustrated chronicle”, “a durable memory” of the wartime “generational experience”. Such memory books addressed to the German soldier, his family and heirs, as well as to the German society as a whole, aimed at an approachable, complete and encaptivating visual description of the war. On the Eastern Front, this was first and foremost an experience of the unknown territories conquered during the military operations. While the urbanised and already largely popularised landscape of Belgium and France was rather familiar and graspable to the German soldier, the Eastern Front awakened distress and curiosity.

As stated in the introduction, most of the 5th Reserve Division’s album documentation was taken by the soldiers themselves.<sup>12</sup> The good quality of the pictures, alongside the experience in dealing with such subjects as folklore, landscape, and architecture, should not come as a surprise. The German army not only employed professional photographers to keep a documentary record for press releases and other propaganda purposes,<sup>13</sup> but it also had in its ranks numerous amateur photographers. The cultural phenomenon defined by Elizabeth Edwards as the survey movement, involving the photographic recording of landscapes, buildings, art works, and folklore, was a transnational, widespread leisure activity of the middle class pursued across Europe in late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth.<sup>14</sup> In the German Empire, more than in other countries,

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<sup>12</sup> A few pictures, such as the aerial view of a German aeroplane flying over the battlefield of Skrobowa or the picture of a military balloon, came from the German press and propaganda archives.

<sup>13</sup> Anton Holzer, *Die Andere Front. Fotografie und Propaganda im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Darmstadt, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Edwards, ‘Between the Local, National and Transnational: Photographic Recording and Memorializing Desire’, in Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory. Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (Berlin, 2014), 169–94.

it attracted a vast group of practitioners among teachers, doctors, librarians, militaries, scientists, artists etc.,<sup>15</sup> who took part in it not only as a hobby, but also as the primary tool of the newly emerged monuments and landscape preservations movement.<sup>16</sup> Pursued by numerous regional antiquarian, folklore, or photographic societies across the country, it was an important element of local sociability. Organised photographic excursions fostered a fascination with and a visual sensibility towards the surrounding monuments, landscape and ethnographic groups. They produced suggestive visual definitions following the instructions of ethnographers, historians, geographers, and local amateurs. At the interface of science and amateur photography, a universal visual language was elaborated and the regional space was organised according to a standardised set of motifs, such as castle ruins, landscape views, and ethnographic types. Such photographic surveys, popularised in cheap guidebooks and albums, by means of lantern lectures or photographic exhibitions, fostered a way of perceiving cultural landscape and imbuing in it the sense of *Heimat*: home and identity. In the recently established state, such a universal way of presenting local heritage was the main means of creating a feeling of national belonging. According to Ann Applegate, the Germans were a “nation of provincials”, who through research, appreciation, and popularisation of local cultures and heritage centred in local *Heimat* societies created the wider idea of nationhood.<sup>17</sup>

The German soldiers applied the same sensibility and the same conventions in picturing the alien landscape of the Eastern Front as their native environment. This is well illustrated by an evocative description of the Grodno panorama from a fire tower, published in the *Grodnoer Zeitung*.<sup>18</sup> Written by an anonymous soldier, it was intentionally modelled on the photographic panorama, a genre consisting of a sequence of pictures pieced together to form a complete image of the city. Its author starts his detailed description from the north and

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<sup>15</sup> Christian Joschke, *Les yeux de la nation. Photographie amateur et société dans l'Allemagne de Guillaume II 1888–1914* (Paris, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Astrid Swenson, *The Rise of Heritage. Preserving the Past in France, Germany and England 1789–1914* (New York, 2013); Lekan, *Imagining the Nation*.

<sup>17</sup> Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> ‘Aus der Vogelschau’; republished in: *Grodno. Eine Sammlung von Artikeln aus der Grodnoer Zeitung und anderes* (Grodno, 1916), 40–3.

moves around with the camera to capture the whole city, identifying its geographical position, the river and every single monument. The viewing and describing is an act of detachment from the reality of war, on the one hand, and of domesticating the foreign landscape, on the other. When gazing at the shining waters of Niemen, “the German river Memel”, the soldier feels at home and goes with his mind to the *Heimat*.<sup>19</sup> Grodno’s particular cityscape, pictured and domesticated by means of the genre of the panorama, becomes the tangible visual evidence of territorial conquest.<sup>20</sup> This description was republished in *Grodno. Eine Sammlung von Artikeln aus der Grodnoer Zeitung und anderes*, a booklet, which, through the choice of articles on Grodno’s particular history, culture, and monuments, as well as its German past and present, created the German view of the city. Its ten full-page illustrations were in line with this message: the survey photographs of the city and its main monuments (the panorama, the wooden synagogue and the German church, among others) and its contemporary wartime landscape (the destroyed railway bridge and a view of the German military cemetery) made physical Grodno’s redefinition as German.

*Zur Erinnerung an den Weltkrieg*, the subtitle of the Grodno booklet, recalls the memory book genre. The albums discussed here were just examples of much larger impressive visual framings and iconographies of the cultural landscape of the Eastern Front. The numerous German newspapers established on the occupied lands, in particular in the *Ober Ost*, issued both larger illustrated overviews of the region, booklets, guidebooks, post card series, and articles focusing on particular monuments, cities, customs etc. In addition, the main titles came with weekly illustrated supplements. The *Scheinwerfer* of the *Zeitung der 10. Armee* included numerous articles illustrated with photographs or drawings of the city of Vilnius, the Pažaislis monastery, the Lithuanian crosses, the wooden Jewish synagogues, local Jews, and Easter traditions. Surprisingly, such visual framings often rose out of collaboration with local artists, photographers, scholars, and amateurs. Even the Grodno booklet’s illustrations were based on

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 43.

<sup>20</sup> On the national framings of the city panorama, see: Catherine T. Dunlop, *Cartophilia. Maps and the Search for Identity in the French-German Borderland* (Chicago, 2015), 159–89.



the photographs of a local atelier: L. Gelor, who during the war was commissioned to take numerous studio portraits of German officials and document the army's festivities, and thus contributed to the German visual redefinition of the city.

## II

### LANDESKUNDE: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SENSIBILITY OF AN ACADEMIC SURVEY PROJECT OF THE EASTERN FRONT

Virtually all the survey illustrations in the *Generalgouvernement Warschau* album reproduced pictures from the archive of the *Landeskundliche Kommission*, a geographic institute established in Warsaw in 1915 with the aim of creating the basis for an efficient territorial administration and to describe and evaluate the natural resources of the occupied lands, both for the needs of the present-day military reality and for a future colonisation project.<sup>21</sup> *Landeskunde* linked physical and human geography in an attempt to delimit particular areas and portray them in the totality of natural and human relations. The *Kommission's* multi-faceted research projects aimed at a complete scientific description and were grounded in direct contact with the occupied spaces. Thus, in the years 1916–17, several expeditions under the aegis of various scholarly disciplines were organised directed toward a cartographic, ethnographic, geological, and architectural description of the General Government.

Each of the *Kommission's* members was a skilled photographer and the visual output of the surveys is impressive: it was organised in an archive, which towards the end of the occupation contained 3,000 negatives.<sup>22</sup> This collection reflects a focus on land, people, customs, and heritage. The wartime references are limited to few pictures of refugees, destroyed churches, and the figures of soldiers in the background. The bulk of the photographs were taken by the *Kommission's* members (Erich Wunderlich, Hans Praesent, or Max Friederichsen) and several photographers (Mohl, Knoth, Wolff, Lindau, or Behmcke),

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<sup>21</sup> Nicolas Ginsburger, 'La guerre, la plus terrible des érosions'. *Cultures de guerre et géographes universitaires. Allemagne – France – États-Unis (1914–1921)*, PhD dissertation, Université Paris Ouest-Nanterre La Défense, 2010, <<https://bdr.u-paris10.fr/theses/internet/2010PA100195.pdf>> [Accessed: Feb. 15, 2016], 317–38.

<sup>22</sup> The archive of prints is preserved in the Ethnographic Museum in Cracow.



Fig. 2. Behmcke, A boy and girl with a samovar at the Łęczycza market, ca. 1917; Cracow, Ethnographic Museum, inv. no. III 17419.

possibly soldiers or military officials, whose names do not appear on the lists of the *Kommission's* employees. Surprisingly, this collection goes well beyond the scientific and reveals several photographic personalities. Behmcke's pictures of the Warsaw Jewish sellers or of the Łęczycza region peasants are taken with an artistic eye and sensibility, and should be described more in terms of artistic portrait studies than ethnographic typology (fig. 2). Hans Praesent, the *Kommission's* librarian and scholar responsible for statistical research, was particularly fascinated by the street market scenes of the towns and villages. Arved Schultz took numerous picturesque ethnographic impressions of the crowds before Sunday mass, playing children, and women carrying water.

The archive played a central role in the *Kommission's* activity. One of its first and main outputs contained 55 photographic illustrations. The *Handbuch von Polen*, a joint effort by the *Kommission's* members under the direction of Erich Wunderlich, offered a concise and total

vision of the General Government by mapping, describing and visualising the region in its geopolitical borders, geological construction, climatic qualities, botanical and zoological particularities, ethnographic distribution, and in the specificity of its settlements, in its agriculture and industry, in the mineral resources, in the distribution of its forests etc.<sup>23</sup> This was the first volume of the 'Beiträge zur Polnischen Landeskunde', a series conceived in four parallel runs: academic monographs, atlases and richly illustrated popular science books, articles published in German academic journals, and thematic lanternslide lectures. While none of the planned academic monographs was published before the end of the war, and the articles were addressed only to a small group of scholars, the popular series of atlases and lanternslides formed the main output of the *Kommission's* activity.

Erich Wunderlich in the introduction to the *Ethnographischer Bilderatlas von Polen* explained that the volume was based on the photo archive (*Bildersammlung*) and that its narration was visual.<sup>24</sup> He noticed that it was possible to give a scientific overview of a land and peoples only by means of illustrations and that such a narration, contrary to its written equivalent, was truly objective. Moreover, he defined the Warsaw photo archive as a historic source, documenting a primitive and primordial cultural landscape already subject to change and modernisation.<sup>25</sup> The author of the *Bilderatlas*, Arved Schultz, a geographer from the University of Giessen, based his narration on a choice of 112 photographs from his own surveys, organised according to ethnographic categories: anthropological types, ethnographic groups, dress, material culture, and a separate section on Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ruthenian ethnic groups (fig. 3). The pictures appeared only with a short description and each section was preceded by a concise one-page introduction. An analysis of several hundreds of Schultz's photographs preserved in the *Kommission's* archive reveals an interest in the outstanding and already studied regions of folk culture in the General Government, *Ober Ost* and Galicia (Łowicz, Zakopane, and the environs of Vilnius),

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<sup>23</sup> (Berlin, 1917). See: Ginsburger, 'La guerre, la plus terrible des érosions', 335–7.

<sup>24</sup> Erich Wunderlich, 'Geleitwort', in Arved Schultz, *Ethnographischer Bilderatlas von Polen (Kongress-Polen)* (Berlin, 1918), 1.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

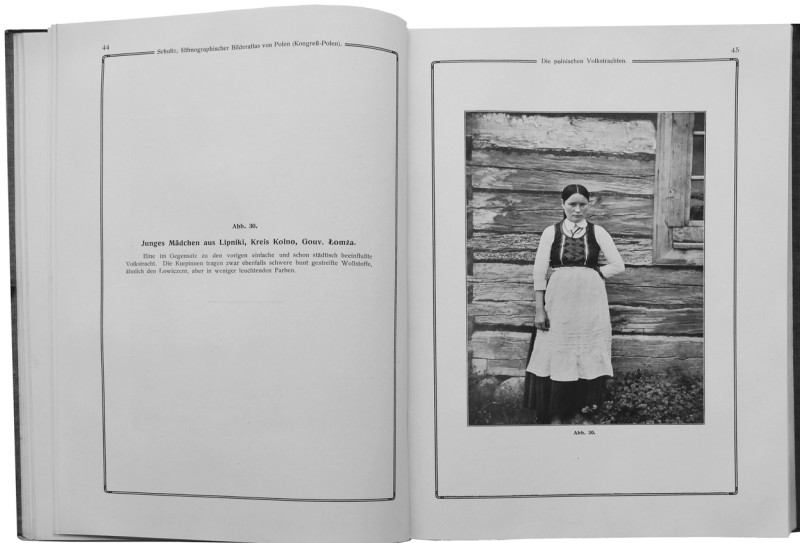


Fig. 3. A page from the *Etnographischer Bilderatlas von Polen* (Berlin, 1918).

a focus on the ethnographic cultural landscape, and a good knowledge of ethnographical and anthropological photographic instructions. Similarly, the other volumes of the atlas series should be connected to the photographic surveys pursued by their authors. Erich Wunderlich focused on geological and land relief photographic surveys, and on landscape views, which he used as an illustration of his chapter *Die Oberflächengestaltung* in the *Handbuch von Polen* and in his *Geographischer Bilderatlas von Polen*.<sup>26</sup> Max Friederichsen from the University in Greifswald, one of the *Kommission's* most established academics, focused on landscape and city views for the volume *Landschaften und Städte Polens und Litauens*.<sup>27</sup>

The plan of a total *Landeskunde* delineation of the occupied lands on the Eastern Front was never fully realised. Just one volume of the scientific monograph series was published, and that only in 1921.<sup>28</sup> This shall not come as a surprise: it was virtually impossible for a very

<sup>26</sup> (Berlin, 1917).

<sup>27</sup> (Berlin, 1918).

<sup>28</sup> Ferdinand Pax, *Pflanzengeographie von Polen* (Berlin, 1921).

small group of scholars to achieve an exhaustive academic survey of a quite large region in the short time span of two years during a war. Even the *Handbuch* was strongly criticised by Polish academic circles, not only for its propagandistic overtone, but also for the numerous mistakes and lacunae.<sup>29</sup> The popular series of atlases and illustrated handbooks with six parallel lanternslide shows addressed to German primary and high schools was certainly a bigger success: of the planned 16 titles, as many as 9 were published between 1917 and 1921.<sup>30</sup> The impression of an organised and scientific photographic vision was however elusive and the use of the photographic language only partially covered the *Kommission's* basic research gaps and errors. The photo archive, seen as a whole, is characterised by movement (numerous panoramic views, roads, carriages etc.), hastiness, and scientific superficiality. It resembles more the collection of a local *Heimatschutz* amateur society than that of a serious scientific institution, and it reflects first and foremost the German photographic sensibility towards culture and landscape. Thus, the archive fitted well both the genre of the memory book and that of the scientific atlas. Its vision was approachable and appealing, but superficial. The true novelty of the *Landeskunde* survey project consisted, therefore, in its ambitions to create and popularise by means of photography an image of the Polish occupied lands.

### III

#### KUNSTSCHUTZ: POLISH AND GERMAN COLLABORATION AND THE PHOTOGRAPHIC DELINEATION OF ARTISTIC HERITAGE ON THE EASTERN FRONT

In 1916, the Association for the Protection of Ancient Monuments published a photographic album, *Wieś i miasteczko* [The village and the country town], which in 200 survey photographs presented the particularities of Polish rural architecture organised by ancient regions in the borders of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This was a choice of examples to follow in the post-war reconstruction of the heavily damaged provincial cultural landscape. Importantly, such

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<sup>29</sup> Maciej Górny, *Wielka Wojna profesorów. Nauki o człowieku 1912–1923* (Warszawa, 2014), 135.

<sup>30</sup> Ginsburger, 'La guerre, la plus terrible des érosions', 1472–3, 1475.

projects were also pursued at that time by the German administration in the framework of the *Landeskundliche Kommission* and the *Hofbauabteilung* office. One of the volumes from the 'Beiträge zur Polnischen Landeskunde' series reveals a possible collaboration between Polish and German scholars, architects, and photographers. Hans Grisebach, the author of *Das polnische Bauernhaus*,<sup>31</sup> an atlas of the Polish rural house, richly illustrated with his own photographic surveys of the territories of Northern Galicia and the Kingdom of Poland, reproduced several pictures from the *Wieś i miasteczko* album (fig. 4). This juxtaposition reveals a clear affinity in the photographic framings and interpretations of the same territories. Both albums, by means of the same illustrations and the same language of survey photography, create strongly antithetical interpretations of the same territories. While *Wieś i miasteczko*, by presenting a national architectural landscape in its pre-partitioned borders, was expressing Polish independence and territorial pretensions, the *Polnische Bauernhaus*, by tracing the origins of the Polish rural house in the German *Bauernhaus* model, not only blurred its national provenance, but also created an imperialist focus. Importantly, the *Wieś i miasteczko* album constitutes one of the first Polish attempts of a serious photographic overview of national heritage. Projects of such reach were undertaken only following the outbreak of the war and were strongly inspired by the German survey projects. The album was the first volume of a planned series 'Architektura Polska', which in the photographic surveys of towns, monumental churches, palaces, and castles, and of the future capital in Warsaw, aimed at a complete visual delineation of the Polish architectural heritage. This never realised series is mirrored in the published and planned volumes of the 'Beiträge zur polnischen Landeskunde': a monograph of the Polish rural house, an atlas on Polish and Lithuanian landscape and towns<sup>32</sup>, and an atlas of Polish architecture.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the *Kommission* also planned an atlas on Polish towns<sup>34</sup> and a handbook on the reconstruction of Poland with a section on architecture.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> (Berlin, 1917).

<sup>32</sup> Max Friederichsen, *Landschaften und Städte Polens und Litauens* (Berlin, 1918).

<sup>33</sup> Paul Juckoff-Skopau, *Architektonischer Atlas von Polen (Kongress-Polen)* (Berlin, 1921).

<sup>34</sup> K. Hager, 'Städtebauliche Bilder aus Polen' [not published].

<sup>35</sup> 'Wiederaufbau und Linderung der Kriegsschäden in Polen' [not published].



Fig. 4. A photograph from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments' archive reproduced in the *Wieś i miasteczko* (Warszawa, 1916) and the *Polnishes Bauernhaus* (Berlin, 1917).

Grisebach's work, just like Paul Juckoff's *Architektonischer Atlas von Polen*, was written in the framework of the collaboration between the *Landeskundliche Kommission* and the Warsaw *Hofbauabteilung*. This latter office coordinated another ambitious survey project centred on the protection and registration of artistic monuments on the Eastern Front. *Kunstschutz* was the German response to the French and Belgian accusations of pillage and despoilment of cultural heritage. The bombardment of the pearls of universal art and culture on the Western Front, in particular the Leuven Library and the Reims cathedral, were condemned as uncivilised acts of barbarism. Newspapers, professional journals, academic books, and popular albums were filled with photographs documenting the French and Belgian historic cities and medieval cathedrals damaged by German bombs, using them as an image of Germany's uncivilised proverbial barbarism. Thus, a group of German art and architecture experts (the *Kunstoffiziers*, who accompanied the troops on every battlefield), launched a large scale project of surveys to prove that under occupation the priceless cultural heritage of France and Belgium was safeguarded, fully studied and appreciated.<sup>36</sup> Paul Clemen, an art historian famous for his inventory of the artistic heritage in the Rhein province, was the mastermind of the *Kunstschutz* project: the founder of a state sponsored commission for the photographic documentation of monuments in the General Government in Belgium, and of the *Hofbauabteilung* offices in the General Government in Warsaw and in the *Ober Ost*. Moreover, Clemen also coordinated such documentation in the territories of the Russian Empire under the Austrian administration. This was realised in the framework of the activity of the imperial-royal Central Commission for the Investigation and Conservation of Historic Monuments. In Belgium, *Kunstschutz* was a truly German academic project, which engaged ca. 40 top German art historians and produced an impressive archive of ca. 12,000 photographs and drawings for the exclusive use of German scholarship.<sup>37</sup> Such surveys of the cultural heritage, well established in international scholarship, constituted a true act of appropriation and contained a strong element of propaganda.

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<sup>36</sup> Christina Kott, *Préserver l'art de l'ennemi? Le patrimoine artistique en Belgique et en France occupées, 1914–1918* (Bruxelles et al., 2006).

<sup>37</sup> *Eadem*, 'Photographier l'art de l'ennemi. Les inventaires photographiques allemands en Belgique, 1917–18 et 1940–44', in *Citigraphy # 1* (Bruxelles, 2006), 56–9.



On the Eastern Front, the *Kunstoffiziers* had to deal with a *terra incognita* for Western art history.<sup>38</sup> Even the main monuments of Warsaw were still hardly known, studied, or popularised. In contrast to the *Kunstschutz* project in Belgium, the discovery and survey of this unknown artistic heritage was a joint venture of the German administration and Polish societies and scholars. In Warsaw, for example, the *Hofbauabteilung* strictly collaborated with the network of the main civic societies. The custody over the former residences of the Russian administration was entrusted to the Committee for the Protection of Public Monuments established by the members of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments, the Polish Touring Club, the Warsaw Scientific Society, the Society of the Lovers of History, the Society of Polish Teachers and the Circle of Architects. Its activity in the years 1915–17 created the framework for the largest Polish wartime survey project, which produced, among other outputs, hundreds of detailed professional plans, architectural drawings, and photographs of the former seat of the Russian administration in the Royal Castle and the residence of the tsars in Łazienki.<sup>39</sup> Exemplary photographs from this survey were published as illustrations to the chapter on the General Government in *Kunstschutz im Kriege*, an impressive two-volume richly illustrated panorama of the German *Kunstschutz* project.<sup>40</sup> Its authors, Clemen and Grisebach, underlined that a systematic survey and registration of monuments in the General Government and other territories of the former Russian Empire was launched and organised by the highest representatives of the German administration and entrusted both to the *Hofbauabteilung* and Polish societies and scholars. The visual part of both volumes of the *Kunstschutz im Kriege* strengthens the impression of order and uniformity in a narration centred on architecture, art, and monument protection.

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<sup>38</sup> Beate Störkuhl, 'Art Historiography during the World War I. Kunstschutz and Reconstruction in the General Government of Warsaw', *Kunstideadusilkke Uurimusi*, xxiii (2014), 157–81.

<sup>39</sup> Ewa Manikowska, 'Od miasta do stolicy', in Ewa Manikowska and Piotr Jamski (eds.), *Polskie dziedzictwo kulturowe u progu niepodległości. Wokół Towarzystwa Opieki nad Zabytkami Przeszłości* (Warszawa, 2010), 262–3.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Clemen and Helmuth Grisebach, 'Kunstdenkmäler und Denkmalschutz in Generalgouvernement Warschau', in Paul Clemen (ed.), *Kunstschutz im Kriege* (2 vols., Leipzig, 1919), ii: *Die Kriegsschauplätze in Italien, Osten und Südosten*, 82–100.

Ugo Ojetti's photographs from Venice, Tadeusz Szydlowski's from Galicia, and those from the German surveys in Belgium follow similar picturing rules. The work is filled with peopleless photogrammetric views (that is, allowing exact measurements from the photographs) of destroyed architectural monuments often juxtaposed with the illustrations of their pre-war state of preservation. Thus, the *Kunstschutz* program was harmonised in every single detail. Its main organisers travelled between the distant centres of the war to make a general survey of the main monuments, and the local actors were presumably provided with detailed instructions.<sup>41</sup>

#### IV

#### JAN BUŁHAK AND THE *KUNSTOFFIZIERS*: THE DISCOVERY OF VILNIUS

One can assume close German-Polish collaboration in the research and survey of the cultural heritage of the occupied lands on the basis of an analysis of the short notices in the official reports of institutions involved and on the juxtaposition of the Polish and German photographic archives and publications. Such collaboration, even if difficult to prove, most certainly also had an interpersonal character. Alfred Lauterbach, one of the most active members of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments, undertook at the time of the occupation research on the monuments of Warsaw, strictly connected to the wartime surveys. Importantly, their results were published first in German, in one of the war issues of the established academic journal *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*.<sup>42</sup> In this richly illustrated article, Lauterbach inscribed the heritage of Warsaw's classicism in Western art history by adapting to it the model of Louis-period styles. Moreover, in 1918, he published the first handbook on the city's history and artistic heritage in the popular series 'Berühmte Kunststätten'.<sup>43</sup> Lauterbach studied in Leipzig and Bremen, and his

<sup>41</sup> In September 1915, Paul Clemen organised such a meeting at the seat of the Warsaw Society for the Protection of Ancient Monuments for all the German and Polish actors involved in the project. See Ewa Manikowska, 'Polska historia sztuki a Wielka Wojna', *Rocznik Historii Sztuki*, xl (2015), 6–12.

<sup>42</sup> Alfred Lauterbach, 'Der Still Stanislaw August, Warschauer Klassizismus des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, lii (1917), 33–48.

<sup>43</sup> *Idem*, *Warschau* (Leipzig, 1918).

first larger study came out in German. However, during the occupation, he was presumably encouraged and supported by the German art historians involved in the *Kunstschutz* movement. On the one hand, they published the results of the research pertinent to the project in the same journal.<sup>44</sup> On the other, they also pursued serious research on Warsaw's monuments.<sup>45</sup>

One of the few insights into the personal ties between the German and Polish surveyors and researchers can be found in the published memoirs of the leading Vilnius photographer, Jan Bulhak. This case is the most spectacular example of the involvement of local photographers and scholars in the German survey project. Vilnius, with its picturesque location, unusual baroque churches, Jewish district and cul-de-sacs, belongs to one of the most important German discoveries on the Eastern Front. Its encaptivating image, established at the time of occupation by means of lantern lectures, press articles, guidebooks, postcards etc., owes much to the extensive use of photography. Initially, Vilnius was growing as an important centre of photography in the Russian Empire. The first daguerreotype was made here in the year of its invention, and the first photographic studio was opened as early as 1845. However, as a result of restrictions introduced after the fall of the January uprising in the Western provinces of the Russian Empire, the photographic activity – both professional and amateur – became strictly controlled.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the right to open a studio could only be granted by the Governor General, and, similarly, outdoor surveys in the city and in the province required special administrative permission. While all over Europe towards the turn of the nineteenth century the urban scene became one of the most encaptivating, popular, productive, and lucrative subjects of photography, in Vilnius the slow development of this important branch was made possible only with the tsarist edict of tolerance of 1905 and the October manifesto, which reinstated several basic civic and national freedoms. The outdoor survey still required administrative permission. However,

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<sup>44</sup> For example: Paul Clemen, 'Der Zustand der Kunstdenkmäler auf dem westlichen Kriegsschauplatz', *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*, li (1916), 49–112.

<sup>45</sup> See in particular: Cornelius Gurlitt, *Warschauer Bauten aus der Zeit der sächsischen Könige* (Berlin, 1917).

<sup>46</sup> Dainus Junevicius, 'Przepisy regulujące działalność zakładów fotograficznych w Rosji w XIX wieku i przykłady ich stosowania', in Małgorzata Plater-Zyberk (ed.), *Spojrzenie na Wilno: fotografia wileńska 1839–1939* (Warszawa, 1999), 23–8.

in 1912, at the initiative of Ferdynand Ruszczyk, a painter and central figure of Vilnius cultural life, the City Photographic Archive was established. Its director, Jan Bułhak, was an amateur photographer, member of the Paris Photo Club, and participant in national and international photographic exhibitions. In 1912, he moved to Vilnius from his manor house in Piereseka near Minsk and dedicated himself to the meticulous documentation of the Vilnius monuments. Over ca. 3 years, he prepared over 450 pictures bound in albums, with the survey of the Old Town, the Astronomical Observatory, the cathedral, St Peter's and Paul's baroque church, the General Governor's palace, panoramic views of the city from different viewpoints etc.<sup>47</sup> Bułhak also offered his views for sale. However, his survey pictures attracted the attention only of few artists, historians, and connoisseurs. According to Bułhak's own words, the true turn in the city survey came only with the German occupation: "I never had such an artistic fervour and productivity ... as in the summer of 1916, when the collection of my photographs of Vilnius grew several times."<sup>48</sup> This turn was grounded in the cultural and photographic sensibility of the German occupier, on the one hand, and in the *Kunstschutz* project, on the other.

Vilnius and its monuments were actually intact and did not suffer from military operations. The main role of the *Kunstschutz* mission was the description, survey, and wide dissemination of the art, architecture and culture of this centre as "one of the most picturesque and most beautiful cities of the whole East."<sup>49</sup> Such research was inscribed in the German cultural mission. However, its main target was not so much the search for German stylistic and cultural influences, but rather the inscription of the city and its monuments in Western art history. Art and architectural historians involved in this project – Paul Clemen, Manfred Bühlmann, and Paul Weber, to name just the main ones – traced the German patterns in the Medieval urban and architectural forms, while also noticing the complexity of this cultural influence and avoiding such definitions as "Ganz Deutsche Gotik".<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The albums are kept today in the Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. See Jolanta Kucharska, 'Prace dokumentacyjne Jana Bułhaka dla Zarządu Miasta Wilna w latach 1912–1915', *Dagerotyp*, iv (1995), 8–14.

<sup>48</sup> Jan Bułhak, *26 lat z Ferdynandem Ruszczycem* (Wilno, 1939), 122.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Weber, 'Die Baudenkmäler in Litauen', in: Clemen (ed.), *Kunstschutz im Kriege*, ii, 100.

<sup>50</sup> Manfred Bühlmann, 'Der Kampf um Wilno', *Polnische Blätter* (5 April 1918), 13.

In the popular and scientific publications, the typical German propagandistic overtone and sense of superiority gave way to the expression of discovery and true admiration of the cultural and stylistic complexity of Vilnius's architectural landscape. In particular, the attention was focused on the baroque architecture defined for the first time with the term 'Vilnius style'.

Photography, as in other *Kunstschutz* centres, was one of the main tools of this mission. Otherwise, however, the photographic delineation of this large urban centre was achieved by just one local photographer. Bułhak's skills and unmistakable style were noticed right away, and the artist was promptly involved in the mission of protecting, studying, and describing the cultural landscape of the conquered lands. Bułhak wrote in his memoirs that even in the first days of occupation, the General Chief of the German railways was assisting him in the panoramic survey of the city taken from the highest building in the Pohulanka district. Presumably it was Paul Clemen who first appreciated Bułhak's photographic project and saw its great potential. In a short article on Vilnius published in the journal *Velhagen & Klasings Monatsheft*, he prized Bułhak's views higher than the output of numerous German urban photographers.<sup>51</sup> Subsequently Manfred Bühlmann, an architect and art historian from the Technical University in Munich appointed as the city conservator, employed Bułhak in the survey of the Vilnius monuments and granted him considerable freedom to photograph outdoors (fig. 5). We can presume that Bułhak was also Bühlmann's cicerone. The Vilnius photographer not only recalled in his memoirs these joint excursions during which Bühlmann carried his equipment, but he even immortalized his companion in several photographs.

It is not clear who exactly financed Bułhak's surveys and what they consisted of. It seems that a large number of photographs was commissioned by the German administration and designed as a continuation of its art historical city archive.<sup>52</sup> Bühlmann mentioned in 1918 that in this institution there were several hundreds of Bułhak's prints. This output was both archived as a scientific source and used in various popular cultural and publishing projects. For example, Bułhak's images were used by Paul Weber, a professor of art history

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Clemen, 'Wilna', *Velhagen & Klasings Monatshefte* (August 1916).

<sup>52</sup> Bühlmann, 'Der Kampf', 18.



Fig. 5. Jan Buhak, *Vilnius from the cathedral campanile*, ca. 1915.

from Jena University, appointed in winter 1916 as the conservator of Lithuania responsible for the registration of architectural monuments in the region. During his surveys, he organised popular lantern lectures addressed to German soldiers on the cultural and artistic landscape of the conquered lands, focusing in particular on Vilnius and illustrated almost exclusively with Buhak's slides. The most captivating panoramas, views of the city and single monuments also filled the pages of Weber's booklet edited by the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*.<sup>53</sup> *Wilna. Eine vergessene Kunststätte*, defined in the introduction as a guide and a souvenir for the German soldier, was a comprehensive art history of the city's monuments filled with 135 illustrations. Starting with 7 encaptivating panoramas of the city, it continued with the views and details of the monuments under discussion. As already mentioned, the majority of illustrations consisted of Buhak's survey photographs, which formed a visual narration in its own right. In the opinion of the German *Kunststoffiziers* on the Eastern Front, it was as important

<sup>53</sup> Paul Weber, *Wilna. Eine vergessene Kunststätte* (Wilna, 1917).

to describe in a scientific and comprehensive way the artistic and architectonic landscape as to visualise it by means of photography. Moreover, Bühlmann was convinced that neither of the German guidebooks (including Weber's richly illustrated one) could render the image of the city as well as Bułhak's photographs.

Bułhak's growing survey collection became an attraction in its own right in this period. In March 1917, an exhibition of his Vilnius and Lithuania cycles was held in the Pac Palace.<sup>54</sup> In this venue, the German administration organised numerous art exhibitions, devoted almost exclusively to the work of German artists.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Bułhak's solo exhibition in March 1917 must be seen as a confirmation of the role played by his survey project in the German cultural mission on the Eastern Front.<sup>56</sup> Bułhak did not limit himself to his survey photographs. On the contrary, he displayed his artistic skills and unmistakable picturesque style. Thus, on the walls and in the loose sheets and albums piled on the tables, one could admire his most atmospheric views of Vilnius and close-ups of its monuments, usually shot in the evening sun or during religious celebrations, next to artistic portraits and landscape views. The review in the *Zeitung der 10. Armee* and Bułhak's own memoirs left no doubt that it was this peculiar, artistic view that strongly captured the eye of the German soldier. Unfortunately, we have no data regarding the impact of the exhibition on Bułhak's commercial activity. We may, however, presume that this period brought a widening audience and demand for his works, which were used by the Germans as a captivating, intelligible visual guide and explication of the occupied lands. His pictures were also reproduced in the illustrated supplements of popular German newspapers: the *Zeitung der 10. Armee*, the *Wilnaer Zeitung*, and the *Kownoer Zeitung*, as well as in German illustrated booklets and postcard series. The German newspapers had their own photographers on the editorial boards and made an extensive use of the output of the amateur photographers among the soldiers. However, in the reproductions of Vilnius, they almost exclusively used Bułhak's images.

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<sup>54</sup> *Dziennik Wileński* (1 March 1917).

<sup>55</sup> Laima Laučkaitė, 'The Image of an Occupied City: Walter Buhe's Vilnius of the First World War', in Laima Laučkaitė and Gierdė Jankevičutė (eds.), *Art and Artistic Life During the Two World Wars* (Vilnius, 2012), 122–3.

<sup>56</sup> J. W., 'Bułhak-Schau', *Zeitung der 10. Armee* (17 March 1917).

In 1920, Bułhak, together with the professors of the Stefan Batory University, was evacuated to Warsaw. In the span of a year, he went from being the inhabitant of a provincial manor house in Lithuania to a Polish citizen, and his perspective inevitably changed from a regional to a national one. This referred also to his photographic activity: "I have moved my work forward and widened its Vilnius focus to a much larger one."<sup>57</sup> In the few months of exile, he realised two large scale surveys – of Warsaw and Cracow, the actual and symbolic capitals of Poland. The passage from Vilnius to Warsaw and from Lithuania to Poland was a smooth and natural one. The regional geographic perspective of his pre-1921 surveys ('Wilno/Lithuania in the photographs of Jan Bułhak') was enlarged into a state one ('Poland in pictures by Jan Bułhak'). Even the albums with the 1916–18 photographs commissioned by the occupier were recast according to this new focus. I would argue that this ambitious project sprang from and was grounded in the wartime encounter with the German visual sensibility towards landscape and in Bułhak's involvement with the German *Kunstschutz* survey. Bułhak's photographs are a true incarnation of the German concept of *Heimat*, which simultaneously referred to the local and the national:<sup>58</sup> they were framed and interpreted in different, often competing visions of the city, of landscapes, of territories. Thus, Bułhak's unmistakable pictorialism was the style of both the German mindscape of the East and the Polish national imagination.

*proofreading Christopher Gilley*

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>58</sup> Dunlop, *Cartophilia*, 94.



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