

Configuring New Imperial Spaces through the Realms of Memory. The Journey Notes of a Russian Traveller from the End of the 18th Century

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Abstract: *This study was conducted on the Pavel Sumarokov book, published at Moscow in 1800 under the title *Travel around Crimea and Bessarabia in 1799*. It analyzes, in the historical context of this writing, the discursive practices of the symbolic construction of spaces annexed by Russian Empire, particularly those of configuring the realms of memory, in order to assign identities and borders, to demarcate or to come off the times and spaces adverse to imperial meanings. In the context of projects and practices carried out by the Russian Empire in the south-eastern Europe at the end of the 18th century, the particulars of a Bessarabia between the rivers of Bug and Dniester seem to be a tinge of conceptualization of the given space in its new imperial coordinates, an attempt to endow it with a meaning, a purpose, and a vector of expansion.*

During the recent years, the travel notes regained the attention of scholars and, implicitly, the interest of the specialists attracted by studying the imperial policies. Among other things, these investigations have confirmed that “a profound transformation occurred in the way that the Russian state and the Russian elite understood and acted on territory in the eighteenth century”². It has been mentioned that the consolidation of a state in this period, presided by an elite which visions and ambitions in terms of shaping territory were distinctly different from those that had prevailed a century earlier, have been edifying the models of *modern Russian territorialising*. In this direction, the tsarist authorities have acquired a more essentially spatial view of government and gradually developed a diverse range of tools and practices that allowed it to deepen its conceptual and physical grip on the territory of the state, to emphasise “the size and expansion of Russia’s territory as national achievements and the acquisition and display of Russian territorial knowledge as acts of patriotism”³.

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² Willard Sunderland, “Imperial Space: Territorial Thought and Practice in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Russian Empire Space, People, Power, 1700–1930*, edited by Jane Burbank, Mark Von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 33-66.

³ Sunderland, “Imperial Space,” 53-54.