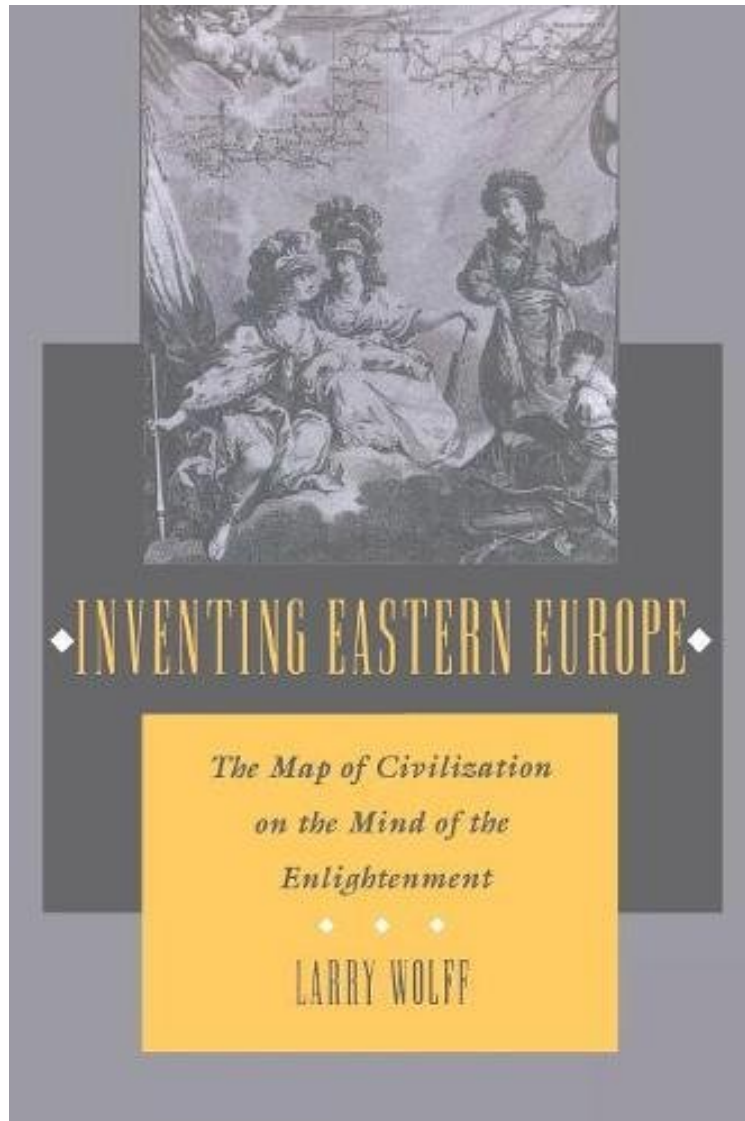


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# **Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment**

*Larry Wolff*

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**Larry Wolff : Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*:

3 of 6 people found the following review helpful. I loved this book even though I did not agree with it By ObsessiveReader Larry Wolff provides an important corrective to the idea of Eastern Europe itself. Eastern Europe has

suffered by being in thrall to empires: the Ottoman, the Austro Hungarian and finally the Soviet. Wolff points out the history of how the area has been seen as backward, uneducated and in need of civilizing. The idea is not new- it was used by various rulers as an excuse for conquest. the area also suffers geographically by being easy to invade. where Wolff falls down in my opinion is in his insistence in following Edward Said's insistence on the idea of an area as "other." I'm not going to get into why I think this is a lame idea. Ibn Warraq's superb book "In defense of the west" is available on . However Eastern Europe really was different: the second serfdom which occurred later and was far more repressive than in Western Europe, the belief in Russia that all people were subjects, and possessions of the tsar, rather than citizens, and the lack of industrialization all point to the fact that Eastern Europe was different. However if I did not read this book I could not make these arguments. It is important and even though I am an armchair reader I loved it and learned from it. 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By bg - Florida Delivered as advertised. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. It's a foundational text for a reason By David This is widely seen as a (or even the) foundational text for anyone interested in studying Western understandings of Eastern Europe, and with good reason. The writing is clear and the argument is well made and supported. Early Modern historians often already know all about the ways in which the Enlightenment radically transformed European modes of thinking, not always for the better. Yet as products of the Enlightenment ourselves, a lot of these thought patterns get normalized and ignored as normal or natural. Wolff lays out how the distinction between Eastern and Western Europe, rather than reflecting any clear reality in the period, was arbitrarily created during the Enlightenment, just as were ideas of distinct racial hierarchies. Importantly, these ideas were usually not held by people before the Enlightenment, and Wolff does an excellent job of showing the emergence of new patterns of writing and why they were so popular.

This is a wide-ranging intellectual history of how, in the 18th century, Europe came to be conceived as divided into "Western Europe" and "Eastern Europe". The author argues that this conceptual reorientation from the previously accepted "Northern" and "Southern" was a work of cultural construction and intellectual artifice created by the philosophes of the Enlightenment. He shows how the philosophers viewed the continent from the perspective of Paris and deliberately cultivated an idea of the backwardness of "Eastern Europe" the more readily to affirm the importance of "Western Europe".

"The distinction between East and West Europe is a seemingly immemorial cliché that desperately needs dismantling, and Wolff does it with erudition and a lively dramatic sense." (Voice Literary Supplement) "Thought-provoking and well written, . . . Wolff's book provides a valuable treatment of the ways in which 'Enlightened' thinkers conceive of the lands east of the Elbe. . . . A very welcome contribution to both the history of the Enlightenment and the Western understanding of Eastern Europe." ?The Russian From the Back Cover "Thought-provoking and well written, . . . Wolff's book provides a valuable treatment of the ways in which 'Enlightened' thinkers conceive of the lands east of the Elbe. . . . A very welcome contribution to both the history of the Enlightenment and the Western understanding of Eastern Europe." —The Russian "The distinction between East and West Europe is a seemingly immemorial cliché that desperately needs dismantling, and Wolff does it with erudition and a lively dramatic sense."—Voice Literary Supplement