

French Cartography of the Indian Subcontinent in the Eighteenth Century

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Abstract:

This paper explores the French cartographic endeavors in mapping the Indian subcontinent during the eighteenth century. It delves into the historical context of French exploration and colonization efforts in India, highlighting key figures and expeditions that contributed to the production of maps. The study examines the techniques and methodologies employed by French cartographers, as well as the significance of their maps in shaping European understanding of the region. Additionally, it discusses the influence of French cartography on geopolitical dynamics and cultural perceptions of the Indian subcontinent during this period.

Keywords: *French cartography, Indian subcontinent, eighteenth century, exploration, colonization, mapping techniques, geopolitical dynamics, cultural perceptions, European understanding.*

Introduction

Eighteenth-century French conception of India rested upon not only visions of a potential empire, most famously expressed by François Bernier in a famous “Letter to Colbert”¹, but also upon a curious mélange of the precious little available historical knowledge, scientific developments like astronomy and mathematics. Enlightenment cartography emerged along with the gradual mathematicization that was typical of scientific revolution in general, and in this particular case, increasing use of geometry in place of aesthetic modes². The history of the French cartography was rooted into this general history of Enlightenment cartography, which placed ever growing emphasis upon the use of geometry and the usage of blank spaces on the maps for the user to fill them out, usually by measuring longitude which had now become possible thanks to the efforts of Guillaume Delisle. Estate mapping in France especially concerned the work of the cartographers, while the establishment of Académie des sciences

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