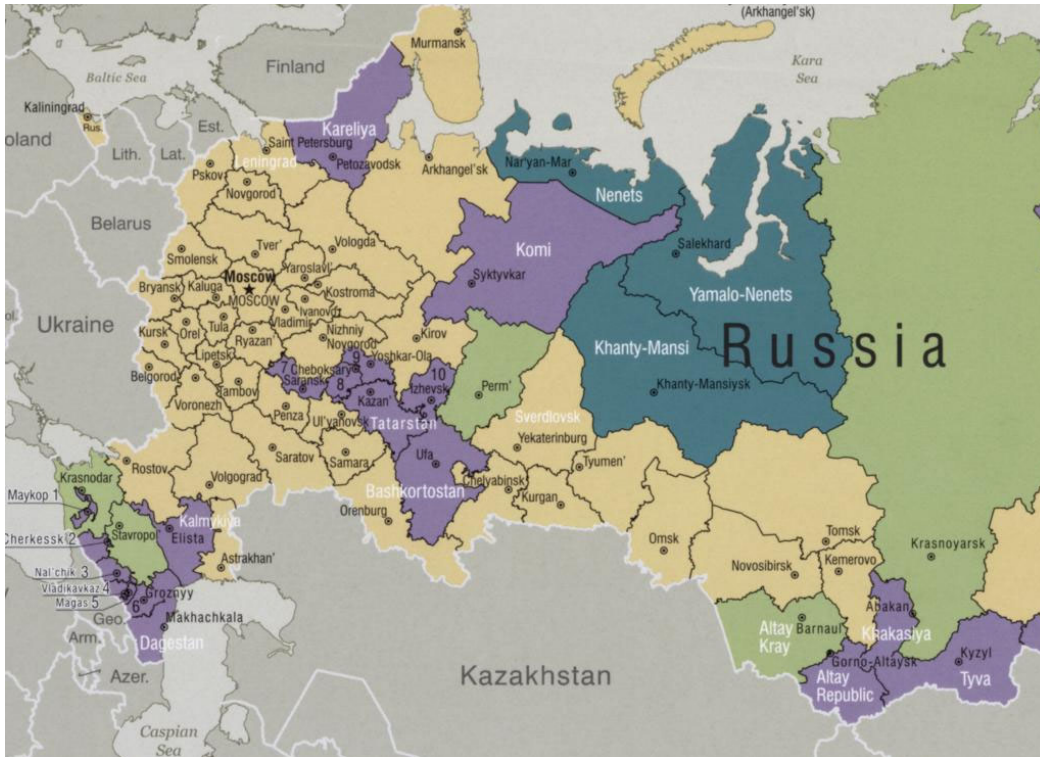




19th century is “Tartary” – no Tartary can be found on a 21st century map, and what’s more, the area labeled as “Tartary” never seems to be in quite the same place on two different maps. What’s the story of this wandering place name?

The English term *Tartary* is a modification of Latin *Tartaria*; using a typical Latin suffix *-ia* (think “Germania” or “Brittania”), “Tartaria” refers to the land of the Tartars. But who were the Tartars? The term “Tatar,” usually with only one “r,” was and is used for a group of primarily Turkic peoples living in Eastern Europe and Northern Asia. It may have had its origins, as many of these people groups did, in the Mongol invasions of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia in the 13th century. Whether the majority of these peoples referred to themselves as Tartars or their lands as Tartaria throughout the several hundred years this designation appeared on maps is highly doubtful. Today, groups that identify themselves as Tatars live in Russia, Ukraine, and various countries in Central Asia (and around the world). The Republic of Tatarstan is a semi-autonomous administrative region of western Russia, as seen on this 2009 map (in purple):



Detail of *Russia—administrative divisions*. United States. Central Intelligence Agency, 2009. Geography and Map Division.

The extra “r” appeared when “Tatar” and “Tartaria” were conflated by European writers with the ancient Greek Tartarus, an underworld of torment and suffering.

A vast region of Asia called Tartary (or Tartaria) started appearing on maps in the early modern period. Possibly the earliest map in the Library of Congress which shows place names in Asia is this 1482 edition of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, published in Florence. Ptolemaic atlases were based on a 2nd-century geographical work and, accordingly, show 2nd-century toponyms. This map of the eastern hemisphere includes Scythia, Sogdia, India, and Serica, but no Tartaria:



*Geografia*, image 89. Francesco Berlinghieri, [before Sept. 1482]. Rare Book and Special Collections Division.





The first edition of Abraham Ortelius's groundbreaking world atlas *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, however, includes this dedicated map of Tartaria:



*Tartaria siue magni chami imperium*. Abraham Ortelius, 1570. Geography and Map Division.





The area labeled Tartaria extends from the Volga River and Caspian Sea in the west to the Pacific Ocean in the east, and from Persia and India in the south up to the Arctic Ocean. The map's depiction of land and coastline is somewhat dubious: among other things, the Korean, Chukchi, and Kamchatka peninsulas are missing entirely, not to mention that North America (including California!) is placed only a stone's throw from Asia across the non-existent Strait of Anian.

The full title of the map is *Tartariae siue magni Chami regni*: “Tartaria or the kingdom of the great Cham.” The map even includes this illustration of the great Cham – or Khan – seated in a tent.



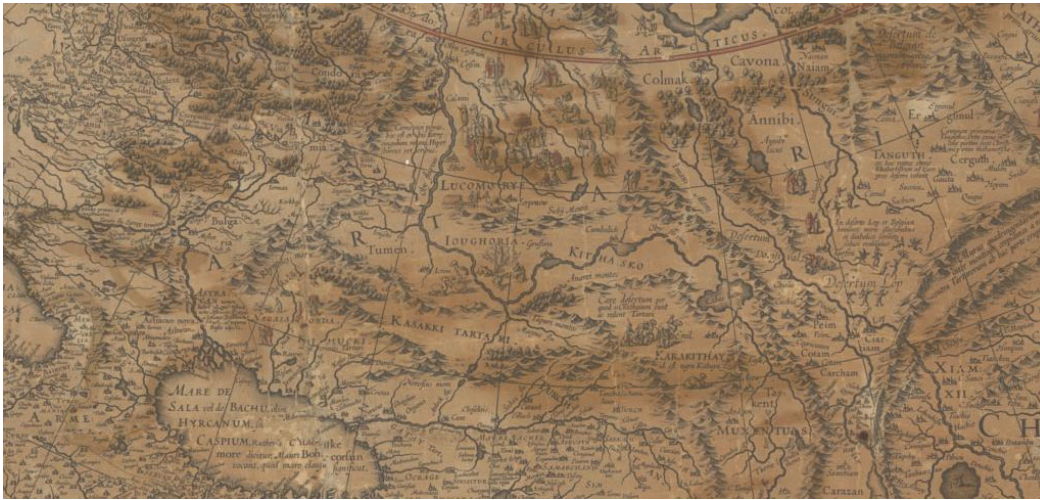
Detail showing the Great Khan.

The location and extent of Ortelius's Tartaria means that it was likely intended to represent the Mongol empire. However, by 1570 when the atlas was printed, the Mongol empire had been fragmented for about 200 years. While many Khanates endured, no single “great Khan” ruled over such a large area. The map also includes in Tartaria areas of North Asia which were never incorporated into the Mongol empire. Likely, legends about great rulers and conquests in the great Eurasian steppes influenced the mapmaker's choice of labels; like all mapmakers, he compiled information from a variety of sources, and some of those sources were more reliable than others.

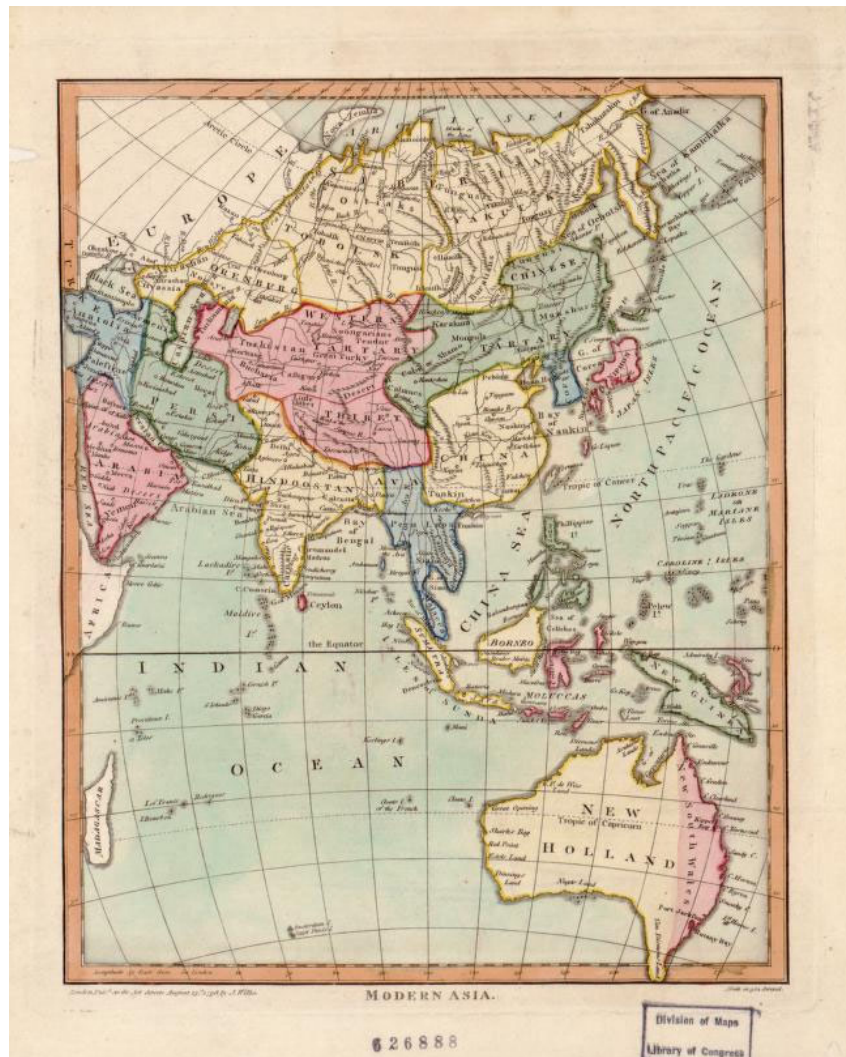
In this “new and accurate map of all Asia” produced by Nicolaes Visscher in 1657, the label “Tartaria” again stretches across most of northern and central Asia. This single large region covers areas inhabited by numerous Turkic peoples, who may or may not have called themselves Tatars. It also included a wide variety of other ethnic groups, including Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and many others. The lack of colored regions or borders on this map, unlike Ortelius's map, reflects the reality that “Tartaria” was not a political designation.



Detail of *Nova et accurata totius Asiae tabula*. Nicolaes Visscher, [1657?]. Geography and Map Division.



Later maps held onto the label "Tartary," but the wider variety of information sources available to European cartographers by this time meant that their maps were more refined. Many maps from the 18th century on include multiple regions designated as "Tartary," often with a modifier, which each of which occupied a more defined area than the Tartary of 16th century maps. This 18th-century British map of *Modern Asia* includes two Tartaries: "Western Tartary," extending from the Caspian Sea to Tibet and parts north; and "Chinese Tartary," encompassing Manchuria, Mongolia, and parts of northern China. Much of North Asia, having now been incorporated into the Russian empire, has now been given the label "Siberia" in addition to the specific regional names Orenburg, Tobolsk, and Yakutsk.



*Modern Asia*. John Wilkes, 1796. Geography and Map Division.

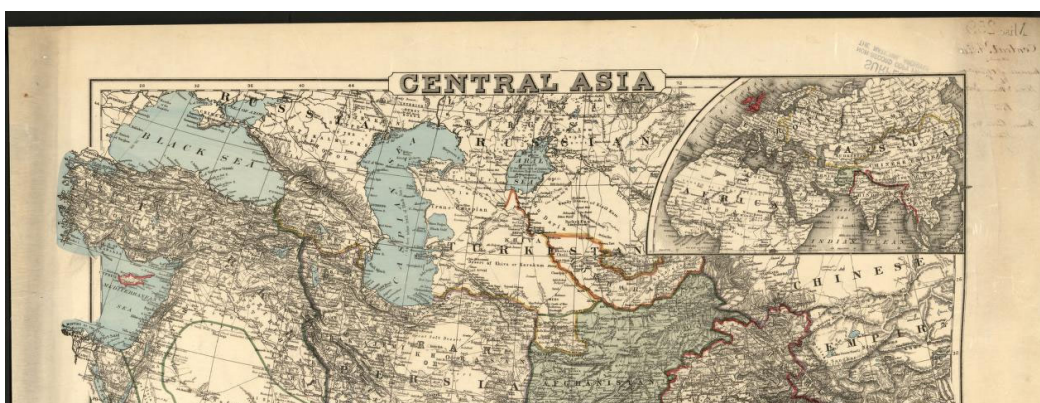


This 1757 *Carte de Tartarie*, also titled *Magnæ Tartariæ Tabula*, or "Map of the Great Tartary," contains a whole mess of Tartaries: "Independent Tartary," extending east from the Caspian Sea; "Chinese Tartary," occupying northeast China north of Korea; "Western Tartary," a label which appears between the previous two; "Eastern Tartary," north of Chinese Tartary; and across much of the northern region of the map, "Muscovite Tartary." In the center-west of the map, part of modern Ukraine is labeled "Little Tartary;" in the Caucasus there are "Tartars of Kuban" and "Tartars of Dagestan." And in the center-north of the map, you find "Tartars of Tumen." Have I missed any?



*Carte de Tartarie: dressée sur les Relations de plusieurs Voyageurs de différentes Nations et sur quelques Observations qui ont été faites dans ce pays la.* Guillaume de l'Isle, 1757. World Digital Library. Original at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

Tartary continued to appear on European and American maps until the late 19th century. The term is absent from this 1885 map of *Central Asia*; instead, areas previously labeled as Tartary are now "Turkestan," "Mongolia," or "Manchuria," or identified politically as part of the Russian or Chinese empires.



*Central Asia.* G.W. & C.B. Colton & Co. [1885]. Geography and Map Division.



No modern nation-state has taken the term "Tartary" as part of its name, and it does not appear on modern maps. While Tatarstan can still be found, any map which includes "Tartary" is surely showing its age.