

# Mapping the early modern state: the work of Ignaz Ambros Amman, 1782–1812

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## Abstract

In the late eighteenth century, various European rulers turned to topographic surveys as a new way to delineate space. Besides the major projects, such as the Cadastral Survey of Maria Theresa or Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte*, similarly detailed though less extensive surveys were carried out in some of the smaller kingdoms and principalities as well. Ignaz Ambros Amman is widely recognised for his pioneering *Charte von Schwaben* (1798–1828), authored jointly with J.G.F. Bohnenberger, but in an earlier decade (1782–1792) he had single-handedly produced some of the earliest topographic surveys of the southern reaches of the Prince-Bishopric of Augsburg. Drawing on new archival evidence, this study presents a critical episode in Amman's life and highlights the tensions between traditional delineations of space, based on descriptions and terriers, and modern ones, based on mathematical and empirically replicable topographic surveys.

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In the spring of 1792 the people of Sonthofen, a small market town on the northern slope of the Alps (in what is now southern Germany), drove the local schoolmaster from his post. This was hardly a unique event in these tumultuous times, but the person in question was exceptional.

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Ignaz Ambros Amman was a pioneer of modern mapping.<sup>1</sup> During his formative years at Sonthofen, he carried out some of the most advanced topographic surveys of the time, and his regional map of 1796 ‘ranks in every respect far above all existing maps of the Holy Roman Empire.’<sup>2</sup> Amman’s work illustrates a new way of delineating and organising space. His early maps, focussing on Sonthofen, are modest in scope compared to the grand scheme of his later project, the *Charte von Schwaben* (Map of Swabia, authored jointly with J.G.F. Bohnenberger), ultimately covering not only the new Kingdom of Württemberg but also Baden to the west and the Bavarian province of Swabia-and-Neuburg to the east. On an imperial scale, the Cassinis’ *Carte géométrique de la France 1:86,400* (1756–1789) and the Cadastral Survey of Maria Theresa (1764–1787) had set the pace for the Napoleonic enterprises in Egypt and across continental Europe as well as for Britain’s Ordnance Survey, founded in 1791, and the extraordinary challenge of mapping India.<sup>3</sup> The new methods, in short, were implemented at a variety of levels, the designs of clients and patrons ranging from the pragmatic to the visionary. Locally, however, such projects were bound to meet with resistance.

The events at Sonthofen highlight the tensions that existed between the traditional concerns at the local level and the priorities of an emerging nation-state. They are embodied, I argue, in the figure of Ignaz Ambros Amman, who represented the emerging nation-state in two distinct functions: as school teacher he was to some extent subject to local strictures, as ‘state’ cartographer he was beyond the reach of the community. These tensions came to a head as the highly fragmented region around Sonthofen was being dragged into a new age where borders were clearly defined and the mapped and contained nation-state would become a salient social construct.

Before presenting the details of Amman’s case, we need to examine the historical and geographical context. The conflict at Sonthofen was part of a much wider development in the Prince-Bishopric of Augsburg and beyond. Amman certainly was not the first schoolmaster to feel the wrath of his community, here or elsewhere. His case is remarkable for other reasons. First, it is well documented.

<sup>1</sup> His surname clearly reads ‘Amma’ (often with ‘mm’ represented by a single ‘m’ with a bar above it) on his earlier maps (for instance, 1789, 1790; see Fig. 4). The same form appears in most of the early documents, notably the court records (some of them including his own signature) on which I draw for most of the period under review. This is most likely the dialect form rather than an orthographic variant. As Siegmund Günther notes (*Eine Kartierung Oberschwabens um die Wende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts, Sitzungsberichte der mathematisch-physikalischen Klasse der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München, Jahrgang 1921* (1922) 315–330, 317n), Franz Xaver von Zach also used the even more abbreviated form ‘Ama’. In the later documents (beginning at least with his 1802 map; see Fig. 3), the name appears in the form ‘Amman’ (and even such further variants as ‘Amann’ and ‘Ammann’). In the *Charte von Schwaben*, for example, two sheets published in the same year 1805 show the name both as ‘Amann’ (actually ‘von Amann’, sheet 41 [Friedrichshafen], engraved by Abel) and as ‘Amman’ (sheet 43 [Leutkirch], engraved by Ausfeld). Note that the German term for map also shows three distinct written forms in Amman’s maps: ‘Karte’ (1790), ‘Carte’ (1802), ‘Charte’ (1798–1812).

<sup>2</sup> Günther, *Kartierung* (note 1), 329.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Theresian and Josephinian cadastral surveys in Tyrol and Vorarlberg see I. Kretschmer, 150 Jahre Österreichische Grund-Kataster, *Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft* 110 (1968) 62–71, and also the section on ‘The Austrian Habsburg lands, with the Principality of Piedmont’ in R.J.P. Kain and E. Baigent (Eds), *The Cadastral Map in the Service of the State: A History of Property Mapping*, Chicago, 1992, 175–204. For a detailed discussion of Bavaria, see K. Winschiers, 500 Jahre Vermessung und Karte in Bayern, *Mitteilungsblatt des Deutschen Vereins für Vermessungswesen, Landesverein Bayern*, Sonderheft, 34(2) (1982). For the corresponding ideas and developments in India, see M.H. Edney, The patronage of science and the creation of imperial space: the British mapping of India, 1799–1843, *Cartographica* 30 (1993) 61–67.

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