



NEWSLETTER N° 8, SEPT. 2000

Dear Map Friend,

In this issue we review three of the exhibitions announced in the last Newsletter – these, we feel, and their catalogues (where available), merit a résumé just as much as the books on maps we’ve found of interest, three of which are presented here. Lighthearted glimpses of the past take a more serious turn in a brief commemoration of Nicolas Sanson d’Abbeville, born 400 years ago, and not forgotten. A special mention goes to IMCoS, born only 20 years ago. Please note that our excursion to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (6th October) is booked out. On the other hand, registration for the 9th December Conference *From the Low Countries to the High Seas* is open – full details below. You might also wish to reserve already now (tempus fugit !) the date of the 17th February 2001 - that’s when we’ll have a Study Session with special hands-on « Looks at Books », so to speak : some of the most interesting reference works on cartography will be presented by carto-historians from Belgium, The Netherlands, France and the UK, and a small exhibition of books will be arranged concurrently. Plenty of opportunities to get to know the Circle and learn about maps and their makers – the easy way.

(WB)

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Enclosed with this issue : a flyer on the 9th International Antiquarian Book Fair Mechelen

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From Flanders to the Lower Rhine

Introduction

From Flanders to the Lower Rhine was the title of an exhibition held from 10 May to 6 August at the culture - and town historical museum (Kultur- und Stadthistorisches Museum) of the town of Duisburg (Germany). The major aim of the exhibition was to recall the interdependence of the lower Rhine area with the neighbouring Low Countries or what are to-day mostly The Netherlands and Belgium.

The uppermost north-western corner of the German federal state of Northrhine-Westphalia represents the lower Rhine area. The area of Kleve, Duisburg and Wesel was for centuries an active partner in the trade with the Low Countries for cloth and textiles while exporting wines and other goods.



Duisburg lay at the crossroads of major West-East and North-South thorough-fares. An important trade route for instance from Bruges, the centre of Flemish commerce, to the lower Rhine area and further on to Cologne took traders via Ghent, Mechelen (Malines), Diest and Maastricht to Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) and Cologne or from Bruges to Antwerp and then on via s'Hertogenbosch and Ravenstein to the Kleve and Duisburg areas.

It goes without saying that the major contestant in terms of traffic density in those days was the river Rhine; Cologne was within easy reach by seafaring sailing ships.

This method of transport was possible because of the width of the Rhine and its slower flow rate in comparison to to-day's.

The exhibits – views, plans and maps

While Duisburg may be best known for one of its prominent citizens, Gerhard Mercator, another cartographer of international standing moved to Duisburg in around 1562: Johannes Corputius. A descendant of a wealthy family from Leuven (Louvain), Corputius stayed in Duisburg between 1562 and 1566 at the house of Mercator who taught him mathematics and very probably also trained him in the art of practical cartography. It is during this period that most likely Corputius drew the town plan of Duisburg, a bird's eye view remarkable for its detail and accuracy. He may have drawn from other learned men of the Southern Low Countries who may have had knowledge of the earlier plans of Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp.

The prospect of the town of Kleve, seen from the East, is also of interest. The engraver is to date unknown; it was however engraved on copper in 1653 after a view by Henrik Feltman and printed at Jacob van Biesen's in the same year. The prospect is composed of 4 individual views pasted together measuring 2m by 0,6m. It represents an authentic impression of what the Kleve Residence looked like after the death of the last Duke.

Several Braun and Hogenberg bird's eye views could not have been omitted from being displayed, notably: the views of Kleve, Duisburg, Emmerich and Gennep, on one sheet, of 1572; the view of Kalkar, to-day of atomic plant fame, of around 1570, coloured; the views of Wesel, from the Civitates Orbis Terrarum, Vol. 4, of 1588 and the panorama of Wesel of ca. 1570 from the Civitates Orbis Terrarum, Vol. 1, with unfortunately part of the sheet missing.

One of the Gerhard Mercator atlases was displayed, showing the map of FLAN | DRIA COM | MIT. The matriculation of Mercator from the Leuven university dated 29/8/1530 was on view; following this, it appears Mercator studied mathematics with Gemma Frisius.

The Theatrum Orbis Terrarum of Ortelius was present too, opened at the page of FLANDRIA, in the oval, by G. Mercator, a beautiful map and work of art indeed.

A wall map of Flanders in the form of a pocket atlas proved to be of particular interest. It would have gone almost unnoticed, considering it measures only 20 by 13 by 4 cm, had it not been for the most detailed and expertly written 20 page article by Wulf Bodenstein, contained in the book

accompanying the exhibition.¹ The author of the map, done in 1656, is given as Nicolas Visscher I. Some 200 years ago a hitherto unknown customer ordered the twelve sheets of this wall map of to-day's Belgium to be pasted together, and to have this cut into pieces of adequate size to be bound into the pocket size atlas now on display.

Many scholars may not realise that the oldest maps of Flanders are not the ones by Pieter van der Beke, 1538, or by G. Mercator, 1540; the oldest map stems from the Italian Chronicles of 1452 of the Openbare Bibliotheek in Bruges and is described by Jozef Bossu in the book accompanying the exhibition.² This anonymous manuscript map clearly demonstrates the importance allocated at the time by the Italian trade to Flanders.

There were many more documents and manuscripts of interest, and several large oil paintings of Antwerp and Ghent. Not all of the documents and copper engravings can be mentioned here. Instead, the author should like to finish reporting about a small, quaint and somehow loveable sketch of Gerhard Mercator. It is drawn in just a few lines, probably in ink, like quickly thrown on a piece of paper, perhaps 8 or 10 cm high and not more than 5 or 6 cm wide, and took the sketcher possibly not more than 5 minutes to finish. It shows the elderly Mercator, fullbearded, drawn on a blank page of the *Cordiale de quatuor novissimis*, Cologne, Petrus in altis de Olpe 1477, kept in the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. According to the explanatory text given, this little picture is largely unknown.

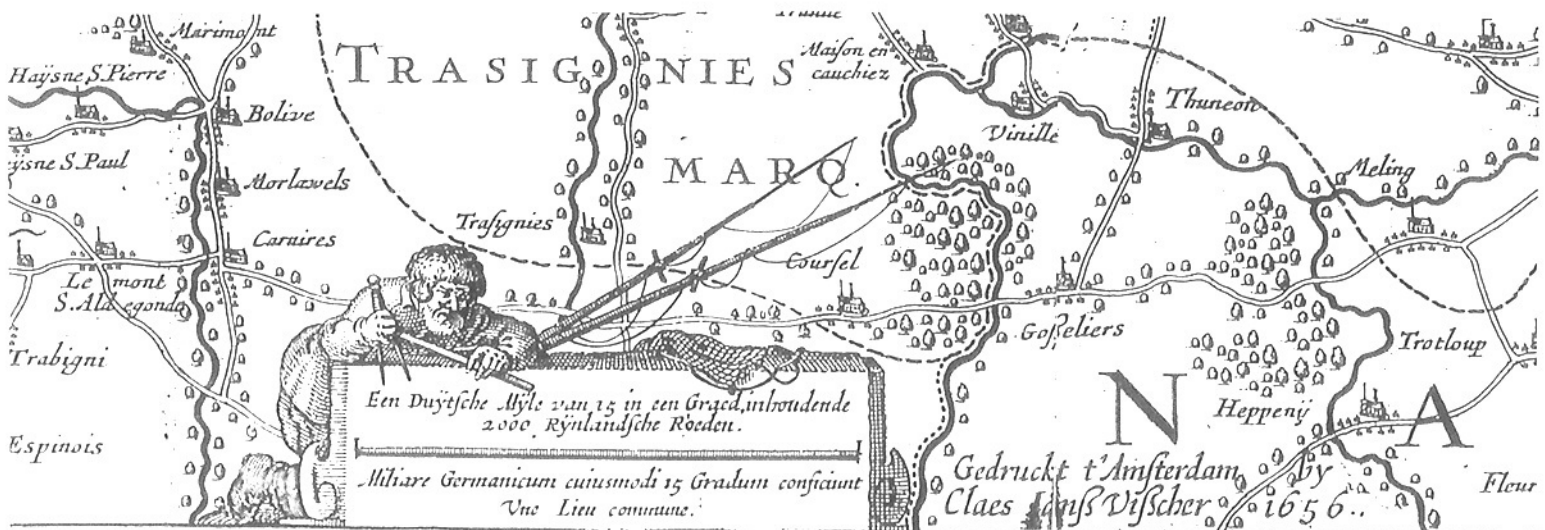
Conclusion

The exhibition was well worth a visit. Although there were hardly any visitors the day we were there, the subsequent press-release attested to the wide-spread interest from a large audience which attended to contemplate the pieces on display and to realise how interesting the past can be surrounded by a wealth of history in an area which just a few years ago was part of the busiest coal and steel industries

Rolph Langlais



(Sketch of G. Mercator, Duisburg Press Release)



(Imprint of Visscher's wall-map of Flanders)

¹ Article in English, in *Von Flandern zum Niederrhein*, H. Frosien-Leinz, W. Pöhling, G. Tromnau et al. (Ed.), Kultur- und Stadthistorisches Museum Duisburg, 2000, pp 67 – 86 ; ISBN 3-89279-560-6

² Idem, pp 35 - 40

Pictures at an Exhibition (II)

A most remarkable exhibition of Globes

Collecting globes is far more unusual than collecting maps. Globes are rather expensive and are difficult to store, especially the larger and thus the nicest ones. Much easier is to collect the *gores* (Fr. *fuseaux*, Germ. *Globusstreifen*). Gores are segments of the world's surface (usually 12 or 18) printed on thin paper which are cut out, moistened to make them pliable, and later on glued to the surface of a sphere. This becomes a globe. Colouring follows after the gores have been glued onto the sphere. There are terrestrial globes, which are the most common, and celestial ones with the stellar constellations and other astronomical data. The latter are made in the same way as the terrestrial globes, except that the gores in some cases may be glued inside the concavity of a globe, as though we were looking at the celestial vault from the earth. Both kind of globes were sometimes brought together in a pair so that one globe fits in the other, the first one being the terrestrial, the second one the celestial globe.

The oldest known terrestrial globe³ dates from 1492, the year America was discovered by Christopher Columbus, and was made by Martin Behaim (Böhemia or de Bohemia, 1459-1507), cosmographer from Nuremberg but working for the Portuguese. It shows the Atlantic Ocean abundant of islands⁴, but by no means an American continent. Behaim indeed used, as everyone else before him, the erroneous calculations of Ptolemy. It was the Alsatian Martin Waldseemüller (1470-±1520) who in 1507 drew the first gores for a terrestrial globe with a rudimentary representation of the new continent⁵. From then on globes were made by almost every mapmaker: Gemma Frisius (1508-1555), Jodocus Hondius (1563-1612), Willem Blaeu (1571-1638), etc. From 1650 on we meet the early serial productions. Very famous are the globes of the Franciscan monk of Venice, Vincenzo Coronelli (1650-1718) for Italy and Charles-François Delamarche (1740-1817) for France, and the school of mapmakers of Nuremberg for Germany. The family Wilson (end 18th and 19th century) of Albany, N.Y., had a very good reputation in the U.S. and throughout the world for their fine craftwork. And nowadays you

can buy a globe as a matter of course in any stationery store.

Many of these interesting items and much more can be viewed at the exhibition "Il était une fois la terre et l'espace – Les globes à travers quatre siècles d'histoire" "Es waren einmal Erde und Raum – Globen aus vier Jahrhunderten", held in Luxembourg-City at the Banque de Luxembourg (41, avenue J.F. Kennedy, Kirchberg), from May 11th to September 30th 2000. These items are for the greater part belonging to the collections of Mr. Rudolf Schmidt and Mrs Heide Wohlschläger, members of the "Internationale Coronelli-Gesellschaft" (Globe and old Instrument Collectors' Association). In total one hundred ninety-two items are exposed. Most of them are, of course, terrestrial or celestial globes, but also many fine maps and printed gores are on display, as well as lunar globes (including a Russian lunar globe, of 1961, showing 290° of the lunar surface, the surface then known from the photographs of the space capsule *Lunik 3* which showed for the first time in history parts of the invisible surface of the moon). Furthermore one sees armillary spheres, pocket globes, and many other curiosa. Attention is also devoted to the so-called educative globes and armillaries used at school.

Fascinating is a twin disposition of two globes standing next to each other; the oldest globe is a copy of the Waldseemüller globe of 1507 (see above), the latter is about a century younger and shows both Americas and the Australian continent (the *Terra Australis incognita*). Both globes turn around their axes at the same speed and show simultaneously the same part of the terrestrial globe so that one can compare the concepts of the world with one century of difference. Also interesting is a globe of 1700 made by Gerard Valck (1652-1726), on which California is represented as an island. Marvellous are the globes of Willem Blaeu (1571-1638) and the many drawings of gores of Vincenzo Coronelli. A terrestrial globe with Chinese engravings, probably made under supervision of the Flemish Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest (Pittem 1623-Peking 1688), and an islamic celestial globe with stellar constellations of the XIIIth century (only to be seen at the Banque de Luxembourg, Avenue Royale branch), are certainly very rare and valuable pieces.

For those who like globes and prints of gores together with other curiosa of the globemaker's art this exhibition is certainly a must. An interesting illustrated brochure in French and German is available free of charge.

Pierre Mattelaer

³ The first known celestial sphere dates from 150 BC and is known as the Atlas Farnese of Naples (a copy is at the exhibition).

⁴ From 1486 Behaim stayed at the Flemish trading-post Fayal on the Azores

⁵ Waldseemüller was the first to name on his world map and globe of 1507 the American continent *America* after Amerigo Vespucci

Pictures at an Exhibition (III)

Orbis Terrarum – ways of worldmaking

During the summer (and until 24 September 2000) the Museum Plantin-Moretus at Antwerp hosted a marvellous exhibition. The location of the historical *Officina Plantiniana* could not have been better chosen for this confrontation of old atlases and modern art. Most editions of Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarum* were printed there. In rooms 18 and 19, titled as the 'Worldlibrary', the atlas of Ortelius is surrounded by other famous atlases by Mercator, Hondius, Blaeu, Cellarius, Vandermaelen among others. But the main focus of the exhibition is modern art. The visitor strolls through the unpredictable views of the world portrayed by 37 modern artists. It creates a path along different worlds, in which time, space, scale and gravity are getting shift.

Chris Burden's *Scale Model of the Solar System* welcomes the visitor at the entrance with the *Sun*, a sphere of 33 cm in diameter. The rest of the planets are spread around the exhibition, and even into town, on the same scale. It gives an interesting impression of the dimensions of our solar system. Jan Fabre created an enormous glittering *Globe* with a human spine in the axis. Does the world really rotate around humanity? Frédéric Hage was able to create a panoramic view of 360° of a room, by drawing what he was seeing on the inside of his *Sphère Visuelle*, a plexi globe. The video projection of Christoph Rütimann's

camera, mounted on a roller coaster in the garden of the museum, is not suitable for visitors who have just enjoyed a lavish spread.

One of the most amazing artworks to me was the *Map* by Mona Hatoum. She used hundreds of glass marbles to create a world map of 4.8 by 8.6 m on a wooden floor. Hundreds of little 'globes' created a flat map, a projection, of our world. Fortunately, my respect for the ingenuity of the artist repressed my impulse to jump into this world.

It is impossible to give an overview of all artworks, let alone to discuss the impression they left. As Pierre Bismuth shows in his *Synonymes*, every word can be shown as a world of its own in a kind of 'literary cartography' in which all meanings are mapped. Bismuth used the word 'spread' to make his point, I spread the word to pay tribute to this exquisite exhibition.

Orbis Terrarum – ways of worldmaking (22.06 – 24.09.2000)

Museum Plantin-Moretus and surrounding area - Vrijdagmarkt 22, 2000 Antwerpen

Open Tuesday-Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. - www.dma.be/cultuur/museum_plantinmoretus/expo_eng.html

Joost Depuydt

Glimpses of the past (I) : Commemorating Charles V (1500-1558)

Readers who receive our Newsletter by mail, at least those living outside Belgium, may have remarked the strikingly large and beautiful postage stamp that adorns their envelope this time. Issued as a 34 BEF (0.84 EUR) stamp in April 2000 by the Belgian postal authorities, in connection with the festivities to mark Charles's birth in Gent 500 years ago, it represents the Emperor in an equestrian pose portrayed by Le Titien, in front of a 16th century world map symbolizing the extent and importance of his empire, the largest and most powerful political entity of his time.

For the benefit of those closer to our point of origin whose envelopes carry smaller value stamps, we reproduce here a black and white copy, with the permission of the Belgian Post Office, in reduced size (the original measuring 8.9 x 12.5 cm overall).



©BELGIUM POST (75% of original size)

There is, however, a slight incongruity in this collage, as you may have noticed : Charles V was already 12 years dead when the world map serving as a backdrop was first published by Abraham Ortelius in his *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, in 1570. Of course, this map of the world is of symbolic nature in this context. One might even be tempted to interpret its presence here as a belated homage to its author, considering that Belgium did not publish a commemorative stamp in the year we celebrated the quadricentennial of Ortelius's death, in 1998.

To be complete on this issue, the Spanish postal authorities concurrently issued the same stamp, with a different imprint of course, value 150 Pesetas.

So here it is : a remarkable stamp, with a remarkable map.

Philatelists may address themselves to the « Direction Timbre-poste & Philatelie », Centre Monnaie, B-1000 Brussels, e-mail philately@philately.post.be.

(WB)

Glimpses of the past (II) : the Paris Meridian revisited

Trust the French to celebrate the year 2000 in style ! On 14th July, their national holiday, they organized an « incredible picnic » along the 1.000 km of the meridian of Paris, from Dunkirk to the Spanish border. A 600 km long red-and-white checkered table cloth, typical of the French bistrot, was especially woven for the occasion, to be spread along the historical imaginary line across 337 Communes in 20 Départements. Paris alone was to display a 20 km stretch. So as to later mark the meridian in the terrain, some 10.000 trees had previously been planted along it, last November.

In order to put an end to on-going disputes about a prime meridian, Louis XIII issued a decree in 1634 fixing it at the westernmost point of the Canary Islands, and the island of Ferro became the adopted landmark. This convention, however, did not survive for long since beginning national surveys favoured a national reference. In 1667, the year Nicolas Sanson died (see article in this Newsletter), Colbert, the eminent statesman, created the Paris Observatory in a north-south orientation which was to become the starting base for the first triangulation carried out in France, and this alignment became the Paris meridian. In 1668 Picard began his survey towards the north, followed by Cassini I towards the south until 1718 ; a repeat exercise from 1739 to 1744 provided the basis for the famous Cassini map of France in 181 sheets reproductions of which, incidentally, can still be obtained in original size from the IGN in Paris⁶.

Interesting to note that in 1740 it was decided to place 96 obelisks along this meridian throughout the French countryside – only three are known to still exist to-day. But attentive visitors to Paris may come across one of the 135 bronze medallions (12 cm in diameter) which were

placed along the meridian in 1995, embedded in pavements, greens and other public spaces of the French capital.

Since the adoption, in 1884, of the Greenwich meridian as the universal prime meridian, Paris has lost a bit of its global prestige, being no more than « 2°20'14" East of Greenwich ». Fortunately, another historical phenomenon could be invoked to add impetus to the celebrations : just over 200 years ago, in 1790, Talleyrand proposed to the national assembly the introduction of a unified system of weights and measures in order to put an end to the anarchy which reigned in the country in this respect. The Académie des Sciences, charged with a study to determine a unique inalterable measure derived from Nature, proposed that this be the ten millionth part of a quarter of a terrestrial meridian, that is of the arc from pole to equator, and that this unit be calculated on the basis of a renewed measurement of the Paris meridian. Between 1792 and 1798 Delambre and Méchain undertook a new triangulation campaign ; in 1799 the prototype of a standard measure was presented to the assembly which adopted the law introducing the metric system the same year, on the « 19 frimaire an VIII ». The metre was born. The Convention of 1875 raised the metric unit to a world standard, adopted to-day by 130 nations, except Liberia and Bangladesh (for which reasons we don't know).

Among the 14th of July festivities one, organized in the geographical centre of France, stood out : the village of Vesdun had programmed, with the help of the IGN and the AFT (Association Française de Topographie), a re-enactment of an historical triangulation exercise on top of the nearby « Peu de Vesdun » (alt. 367m) where an oaken pyramidal signal, modelled on the original of two centuries ago, provided the scene for a costumed party demonstrating the measurements with authentic instruments of the time.

⁶ Institut Géographique National, 107, rue de la Boétie, F-75008 Paris, Tel. 33/1/43.98.80.00

Whilst on the whole, I think, the weather was a great disappointment that day along most of the meridian, I can tell you that on top of our mountain it was nothing less than appalling : 10°, heavy rain in strong winds, visibility < 2km. Fortunately some modern geodetic equipment was also on display since line-of-sight contact with other prominent points like the cathedral of Bourges, could not be established. Vive le GPS !

In any case, we felt we had contributed, my wife and myself, in our modest ways to honouring this historical event, and we've come more than a few metres closer to understanding how it all worked. (Historical data provided by the Journal XYZ of the Association Française de Topographie, through the good cooperation with its President, André Bailly).

(WB)

Nicolas Sanson d'Abbeville

1600 – 1667

Four hundred years ago, on 20th December 1600, one of the world's great map makers, the first cartographer to have created a French world atlas, was born in the small town of Abbeville in the North of France.



(Bibliothèque Municipale d'Abbeville)

The quadricentennial of his birth seems to have aroused little, if any, interest ; neither his home town nor other relevant institutions in France or elsewhere (as far as could be ascertained) are marking this event. A notable exception is the Haack calendar of old maps for the current year which has a timely entry in its December page.

It is true that most commemorations are linked to celebrities' deaths rather than their birth. But as I shan't be around when that happens for Sanson, I thought a short note from our Circle was in order,

in honour of a cartographer whose maps accompanied my earliest steps as a collector, and probably of a few others, too.

Nicolas Sanson inherited a penchant for geography from his father, an important civic personality of Abbeville. Still at college, he drew a map of ancient Gaul which, after an unsuccessful spell as a haberdasher, he took to Paris as his visiting card, determined to make a career as a geographer. He managed to get this map engraved and printed ; Richelieu remarked it and introduced Sanson to Louis XIII who, having received some lessons in geography from the young cartographer, bestowed upon him the title of « ingénieur-géographe », later upgraded to « Géographe ordinaire du Roy ». At a time when French map makers generally limited their production to copying Dutch maps, this high-level encouragement was certainly meant to promote original French map production.

His first commercial engagement came in 1632 through the association with Melchior Tavernier who published some 20 of Sanson's maps until he abandoned his business in 1644. The two most famous maps from this period are the one of the stage-coach network of France (1632), and that of the rivers of France (1641). In parallel, Sanson developed a didactical approach to geography which earned him renown and success : he added geographical tables to his maps which give a hierarchical overview of essential map contents in the form of cascades, from general to specific items of nomenclature ; this useful aid to memorizing geographical data such as names of countries, provinces, towns, rivers, mountains, became very popular and was largely copied by others, among them his nephew Pierre Duval (1618 – 1683).

Firmly established in Paris now, Sanson continued to obtain orders for new maps of France, frequently of an administrative nature, from the highest personalities of his time : Richelieu, Mazarin, Fouquet, Colbert .