



Newsletter No **48**

JANUARY 2014

[www.bimcc.org](http://www.bimcc.org)

ISSN 1379-3306

# MAPS IN HISTORY

## An intriguing globe...



Also in this issue:

- *1600, the battle of Nieuwpoort*
- Report on the *Mapping India* Conference
- Report on the historical week-end in the French Hainaut
- ... and the usual departments



## How I got into cartography

**Colin Dupont, PhD student under a joint project of the University of Leuven and the Royal Library of Belgium, talks to the Newsletter.**



colin.dupont@kbr.be

Colin Dupont is studying the maps of Jacob van Deventer which are in the Royal Library's collection, and took time out to talk to the Newsletter.

### **What does Cartography mean to you?**

I came late to cartography when I started work at the Library, but I had always been interested in maps. At school I always liked maps as they often help you understand what people are talking about.

### **What exactly does your research involve?**

I am part of the IAP 7/26 *City and Society in the Low Countries (1200-1850)*<sup>1</sup> financed by the Belgian Science Policy Office. This is a system that supports networks of (young) researchers from different Federal Institutions and Universities in order to set up collaboration between the different communities of Belgium. In my case it allows me to work here at the Royal Library of Belgium under the direction of Wouter Bracke and at the same time study for a PhD at the University of Leuven under the direction of Jelle Haemers and Bram Vannieuwenhuyze.

I'm working on the city maps made by Jacob van Deventer during the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the request of the King of Spain Philip II. More precisely, I am working on the maps that are preserved here in the library. We are talking about 74 maps of cities in what is now Belgium, the north of France and Luxembourg.

My research has two aspects: on the one hand I'm making a critical study of the collection. I would like to find the answers to questions such as: How accurate were these maps? In which year were they made? Why were they made? What was the relationship between Jacob van Deventer and the Spanish authorities?

On the other hand I use these maps to study the history of the landscape of the cities. They are quite accurate sources for the study of the morphology and the growth of the cities they represent.

Besides the more classical study, I analyse these maps using a new method developed by Bram Vannieuwenhuyze: Digital Thematic Deconstruction [see BIMCC Newsletter No 47]. Basically I redraw each element of the map into a Geographical Information System. By doing this, I am sure to have seen all the information that the map contains. Each of the items is then put into a category. These categories are functional; they correspond to the role of the elements on the map. There are the fortifications, the roads, the metadata, the blank space, etc. Redrawing the maps and dividing them into categories allow me to do two things: on the one hand I can see the spatial spread of similar items, on the other hand I'm able to

deliver map 'occupation' statistics for each category. For example, I've discovered that on these so called 'city-maps', the city in question in fact occupies only 5 to 20 % of the sheet!

### **What did you need to study to get this far?**

I started to work here at the Map Department in February 2011. I was working on the Cartesius project that aims to put online the Belgian federal cartographic heritage. My job was to georeference the collection of maps made by Philippe-Christian Popp in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Working all day long on these documents threw up a lot of questions. So I tried to do some research on my own but I realised that not much was written about this cartographer. So, with the support of Wouter Bracke, I started to put together a research project focusing on this collection. Unfortunately this project was not accepted.

One year later, in May 2012, I applied to work on the research project on Jacob van Deventer. Thanks to my History studies (my first degree) but also to my experience here in the Map department, I got the job.

As regards skills, I have needed to learn to use several digital tools, among them GIS and MapAnalyst.

### **In your experience, are there a lot of young people interested in cartography?**

In my experience as a historian, we might think that cartography is History's poor relation. This is perhaps because the discipline lies at the crossroads between humanities and the exact sciences. Nevertheless, last year at the University of Leuven we had many students in history who were working on historical maps.

But there are other ways for young people to get interested in cartography. I'm thinking of video games for example. A lot of these use maps as tools to play

## **André Vanden Eynde**

Rue de Stassart 59  
**B-1050 Brussels**  
Tel. +32 (0)2 514 40 47

**Maps, prints, views  
of all parts of the world**

**Specialist in plans and views of**

1- <http://www.cityandsociety.be>



'Valenchiene' [Valenciennes] map by Jacob van Deventer, c. 1555 (KBR)

the game or even as the subject of the game. There, the maps can be imaginary or realistic. SimCity for example proposes building a city and therefore mapping it. Among the more realistic games, you have Assassin's Creed that takes place in old cities, for example Jerusalem during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Crusade or Rome during the Renaissance. Then there are two series of historical games that I particularly like: Europa Universalis and Victoria. In both of them, you have to choose a country and rule it – during the Ancien Régime for Europa Universalis and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Victoria. The game experience in these two products is all about maps. The basis of the game is a world map with terra incognita to discover and your country to expand.

In fact, if you think about this point, there are very few games without maps. Maps form the basis for most of them. Of course we're talking here about other forms of cartography (digital and entertainment). But this is one of the new opportunities for this discipline... and maybe a new way to grab young people's interest. As teenager it was probably one of my ways to get into cartography.

Video games recently became a subject of research. Samuel Rufat of the University from Cergy-Pontoise and Hoviq Ter Minassian from the Faculty of Tours wrote several articles and books on this subject. They also use some of these games with didactical goals, for the explanation of urban models of development for example.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Are there careers to be made in cartography?**

Yes, several, and different kinds of career. You could work as cartographer and produce maps into different contexts: topographical maps for the knowledge of a country, road maps for drivers, tourist maps for guidebooks or 'entertainment' maps for video games.

You could also work as a scientist. Here you have two possibilities. On the one hand, you could design new ways to represent the world or a part of it. On the other hand, you could study maps as representations of the world doing history of cartography, here, at the Royal Library for example.

**As a final comment, perhaps you'd like to tell us the 'best thing', in your view, about your cartographical life right now.**

The best thing is the opportunity I have been given to do research on the really interesting collection of maps by Jacob van Deventer. I've travelled a few times for my work and have always been surprised to see that there are people who know this collection, including in other countries.

What I also really enjoy is the opportunity I now have to study and discover new tools such as QuantumGIS, MapAnalyst, and so on.

Interview by Nicola Boothby  
nicola.boothby@telenet.be

2- See for example RUFAT (Samuel), TER MINASSIAN (Hoviq) (dir.), *Les jeux vidéo comme objet de recherche*, L>P, Questions Théoriques, Paris, 2011 or TER MINASSIAN (Hoviq), RUFAT (Samuel), 'Et si les jeux vidéo servaient à comprendre la géographie ?', in, *Cybergeo : European Journal of Geography*, Science et Toile, document 418, on line since 27 March 2008 ([cybergeo.revues.org/17502](http://cybergeo.revues.org/17502))