Reading History Maps

The Siege of Ypres Mapped by Guillaume du Tielt

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Abstract

Old maps convey messages about early spatial arrangements. In some cases, they also tell a story, and hence can be qualified as ‘history maps’. The interpretation of such maps is not easy, because they are witnesses to a strong dichotomy between the static representation of the landscape and the dynamic sequence of historical events. Digital Thematic Deconstruction allows to break through the iconographic composition and to extract the visual discourse from such an image stuffed with information. In this article, the method is applied to the bird’s-eye view of the siege of Ypres in 1383, engraved by Guillaume du Tielt at the beginning of the seventeenth century, in order to assess the accuracy of the mapped topography and to get at the visual narrative. The results not only help interpret the meaning of such a history map, but also offer perspectives for comparing and juxtaposing history maps and textual records.

Keywords

old maps – urban history – iconography – bird’s-eye views – digital humanities – GIS

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Introduction

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Flemish engraver Guillaume du Tielt (c.1585/90-1653) produced one of his most important works: a bird’s-eye view of the city of Ypres besieged by troops from Ghent and England in the summer of 1383 (Fig. 1).1 The city centre of Ypres, clearly circumscribed by a broadly moated rampart, is depicted in the middle of the engraving. Around the rampart we notice a chaotic accumulation of access roads, ribbon development, camps, fires, armies standing or marching, offensive and defensive troop movements, windmills, ordnance, trees, fields, and so forth. Most of these elements are to be found within a second city wall comprising a broad double moat and nine city gates. Beyond the walls we mostly see countryside, except on the left side, where troop movements are taking place as well. In addition to the three-dimensional view on the city and its surroundings, the engraving also contains a legend at the bottom and two cartouches at the top.

The engraving produced by Guillaume du Tielt is very similar to the various three-dimensional maps of towns and cities that were for instance included in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century city atlases published by Münster, Braun and Hogenberg, Blaeu, de Wit and others. In the sixteenth-century Low Countries, this type of three-dimensional city map was called *pourtrature, conterfeytsel, descriptie* or *quaerte.*2 Today scholars prefer to use terms like ‘bird’s-eye view’, ‘chorographic view’ or ‘oblique view’, which emphasize the three-dimensional representation of the landscape from a virtual viewpoint high in the sky. As a result, bird’s-eye views are not drawn to a uniform scale and hence have often been considered as inaccurate and unreliable records. In the 1960s, Skelton already rebuked those quibblers who disparaged the qualities of early modern bird’s-eye views. In his eyes, they were too greatly offended by the general multiplication of detail and failed to appreciate the purpose of the publishers, whose ‘primary aim was not to produce well-balanced landscapes, but to give as much information as possible in a pleasing visual form’.3

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1 For this article, I have worked with a digital scan of a loose sheet of the engraving, preserved in the Municipal Museum of Ypres (cat. SM 3185). The dimensions are 17.2 × 20.3 cm. For biographical notes on Guillaume du Tielt, see A. Vandenpeereboom, *Guillaume du Tielt, graveur. Notes sur sa vie et sur ses œuvres* (Ypres 1882); G. Gyselen, ‘De Ieperse graveur Guillaume du Tielt opnieuw geïnventariseerd’, *Biekorf. West-Vlaams archief voor geschiedenis, archeologie, taal- en volkskunde*, 3 (1986), pp. 284-5.


According to Blakemore and Harley, the degree of accuracy should not be applied to an old map as a whole, ‘but only to facets of its interrelated content’.  

The Dutch map historian Koeman proposed to assess the topographical values of old maps on the basis of both the map’s intrinsic qualities and the availability of other evidence.  

Unfortunately, historians did not always react to the

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appeals of these scholars. In many publications old maps are merely published as nice pictures, which only accompany the texts.

Rather than nice and inaccurate pictures, old bird’s-eye views should be considered and approached as very complex and multi-layered documents. They represent the complex, multi-layered morphology of the landscape, by showing hundreds or even thousands of topographic elements, juxtaposed in one single image. In most cases, map elements (scales, compass roses, etc) and textual information (legends, cartouches, place-names, etc) – what the art historian Wagner has called ‘iconotexts’ – are added too. It is impossible to grasp all juxtaposed details at a glance, not least because they appear all together, but also because the documents often contain distortions (‘useless’ data, errors, damage, etc). Moreover, our eyes are usually guided through the image. In the case of du Tielt’s bird’s-eye view, the impressive double city walls and their remarkable shape draw our attention, while we hardly notice, for instance, the small fence blocking a winding road on the right side of the engraving.

Guillaume du Tielt’s primary purpose was certainly not to provide a topographically and geodetically accurate map of the city of Ypres and its immediate surroundings. Instead, he stuffed his engraving with an abundance of topographical information. In addition, he also wanted his map to tell a story: the history of the city under siege in 1383. Hence, his bird’s-eye view reminds us of the ‘history prints’ (historieprenten, historieplaten, Geschichtsblätter), that offer a visual representation of historical events in order to commemorate these events or to spread political or religious propaganda. They are characterized by an iconographical narrative, since they show a sequence of events, arranged in a visual ‘discourse’. History prints are of course closely related to the genre of newsprints (nieuwsprenten), which were increasingly produced from the last quarter of the sixteenth century onwards. Battle pieces in particular became very popular, and many of them were produced as bird’s-eye views, representing

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8 P.D.A. Harvey, The History of Topographical Maps. Symbols, Pictures and Surveys (London 1980), pp. 169-70. Among the earliest examples Harvey cites the mid-fifteenth-century district map of Verona showing the war of 1437-41 and the view of the lake Constance with scenes from the war of 1499. According to Pfaffenbichler, painted depictions of military events had their origins in the sixteenth century, with the Battle of Pavia by a follower of Joachim Patinir (c.1530) and the Siege of La Goletta by Jan Cornelisz. Vermeyen (1546-50) as the oldest examples; see M. Pfaffenbichler, ‘Documenting Military Events in Seventeenth-Century Scenes’, in: Mapping Spaces. Networks of Knowledge in 17th Century Landscape Painting, ed. U. Gehring & P. Weibel (Karlsruhe-Munich 2014), p. 245. Koeman distinguished synthetic topographic maps showing the positions of the troops during the battle or siege from what
the military and political events of the Eighty Years’ War that scourged different parts of Europe at that time.9

I propose to call the engraving produced by Guillaume du Tielt a ‘history map’, since his bird’s-eye view combines cartographical information with a visual narrative. According to Vanrolleghem, it is a ‘dynamic interpretation’ of what happened in 1383, since consecutive events are portrayed simultaneously.10 Yet, the interpretation of such a history map is far from easy, especially because it is characterized by a strong dichotomy between the static, lifeless representation of the landscape and the dynamic sequence of historical events. It is necessary to grasp the arrangement and proportion of both types of information inserted by the mapmaker/artist in order to interpret the map’s content and meaning(s) properly. We can easily compare this process with reading a book: it is impossible to catch all the ideas, statements, thoughts and conclusions only by browsing through the pages for a few seconds. Anyone who really wants to plumb the depths of the argument has to gain insight into the composition of the work and read the chapters, paragraphs, sentences and words attentively.

Reading a book requires some skills: the reader must know how to read the words and understand the language that is used. He or she must understand the meaning(s) of the words and interpret the text by decoding their reciprocal relationships. The vision that reading implies for analysing intertextual codes (the ‘interrelated content’) is of course tributary to Barthes’ famous literary theory and criticism. Barthes contested the fact that the intention(s) of the author determined the meaning(s) of the text. Instead, readers attach significance to the texts they read, by discovering and interpreting the sometimes overlapping and incompatible intertextual codes.11 The same holds true for old maps and views. With regard to history prints, Burke argued that the metaphor of ‘reading an image’ helps to discern and interpret the visual narrative, so there is no

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doubt that it also works for interpreting history maps.\footnote{Burke, op. cit. (n. 7), pp. 143-4; see also H.-M. Lee & M. Pérez-Simon, ‘Relations texte/image’, in: Les images dans l’Occident médiéval, ed. J. Baschet & P.-O. Dittmar (Turnhout 2015), p. 294.} Unfortunately, Burke and other art historians did not concretely propose a method for identifying the narrative conventions of the visual discourse. Is it for instance sufficient to have a look at the image and read the iconotexts in order to understand the story that is inserted?

In this article I argue that a meticulous digital analysis is needed in order to ‘read’ history maps properly. Evidently, a quick look gives a general impression of the content and composition of the image, but a meticulous analysis (‘reading’), element by element, can lead to the discovery of numerous other details, patterns and ‘hidden’ messages. The digital techniques that have become available in the last few years now allow a wider community of scholars to analyse, interpret and estimate the intrinsic qualities of old maps and bird’s-eye views more directly. More concretely, I propose to apply the ‘Digital Thematic Deconstruction’, a research method that allows to break through the iconographic composition and to extract the visual discourse from an image that is stuffed with information. By applying the Digital Thematic Deconstruction to the siege view of Ypres engraved by Guillaume du Tiel, I hope to demonstrate that it is definitely possible to discern and unfold – the sometimes ‘hidden’ – meanings in early modern history maps and bird’s-eye views.

**Engraving, Book and Siege**

Within the fields of literary and cultural history, the work of Barthes and other poststructuralists has led to greater attention being paid to the context of texts, e.g. their representative forces and the social milieu in which they originated.\footnote{J. Blaak, Geletterde levens. Dagelijks lezen en schrijven in de vroegmoderne tijd in Nederland 1624-1771 (Hilversum 2005), p. 15; see also W. van den Berg, ‘Literatuurgeschiedenis en cultuurgeschiedenis’, Spektator, 16 (1986-7), pp. 29-40.} Following the same epistemological path, map historians also gradually became interested in the historical and archival context of old maps and processes of mapmaking. Unfortunately, this remains a very difficult undertaking, since the archival contexts of so many old maps have been lost or even destroyed, due to the creation of separate map collections in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For this particular case, we also lack evidence about the actual mapmaking process, since we do not know when,
how and under what circumstances Guillaume du Tielt produced his engraving. According to Vandenpeereboom, du Tielt’s works reached maturity from the beginning of the 1610s, so we can presume that the siege view was an early, or even perhaps his very first, important work.14

Luckily, the city accounts of Ypres contain various references to the works of du Tielt.15 In 1611-2, he was paid for having engraved four plates with the figures of the so-called Tuindag. According to Vandenpeereboom, these four copper plates are the siege view, a view that represents the procession in honour of Our Lady of the Tuine and two frontispieces.16 They were all published in 1610 in a book written by Adriaan van Schrieck, a noble alderman of the city and intimate of the Archdukes Albert and Isabella.17 In his book van Schrieck attempted to establish the origins of the Tuindag, an annual civic festival commemorating the raising of the siege of the city of Ypres in the summer of 1383 thanks to the intercession of Our Lady of the Tuine.18

The siege of Ypres was one of the many local military engagements that took place in the course of the Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453), an interminable struggle for the French crown between the royal houses of Valois and Plantagenet. Ypres lay in the county of Flanders, a fief of the kingdom of France. In the last quarter of the fourteenth century the conflict between the pro-French Louis of Male, count of Flanders, and the three big Flemish cities (Ghent, Bruges and Ypres) reached new heights.19 In 1382 the notorious rebel Philip van Artevelde seized power in Ghent. He attempted to forge an alliance with the English, as English wool imports were of crucial importance to the Flemish cloth industry.

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14 Vandenpeereboom, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 4.
15 From 1611 onwards the Ypres’ magistracy offered him several favours, tried to convince him to settle permanently in the city and paid him almost yearly for delivering engravings and other ‘services’, see ibid., pp. 4-5, 8-9 and 12.
16 Ibid., p. 37.
17 For biographical notes on van Schrieck, see J.-J. Lambin, Beleg van Ypre door de Engelschen en Gendtenaers, ten jaere 1383, en oorsprong van de feest gezegend den Tuindag (Ypres 1833), pp. xiii-xv.
18 The Middle Dutch word tuine originally meant an enclosure; the word in fact referred to the wooden breastwork that once demarcated the farmyards and gardens; see O. Mus, ‘Het beleg van Ieper in 1383. De vernietiging van de buitenwijken en de gevolgen voor de binnenstad en de bewoners ervan’, in: Destruction et reconstruction de villes, du Moyen Age à nos jours. 18e Colloque international. Spa, 10-12 IX.1996. Actes (Brussels 1999), p. 33.
An English army soon invaded the Flemish coastlands. Since Ypres had submitted to the authority of the count in 1382, it was besieged by the urban militias of Ghent and by English troops the following year. The besiegers fled, however, when the news spread that a French relief force was approaching. The people of Ypres considered this to be an answer to their prayers and dedicated the victory to Our Lady of the Tuine, who consequently became the city’s patron saint. Nevertheless, the siege had a devastating impact on Ypres. The trade embargo on English wool spelled the end of the local cloth industry, while the city’s outermost wall and suburbs had been razed.

Logically, van Schrieck’s and du Tielt’s intentions were not to recall the disastrous consequences of the siege in 1383, but to celebrate the miraculous liberation of the city thanks to the intervention of Our Lady of the Tuine, in a manner typical of the Counter-Reformation antiquarianism that developed in the Southern Netherlands in the wake of the Dutch Revolt. An annual procession had been organised from 1384 onwards, and although this was abolished during the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century, it had been re instituted in 1609. According to Arblaster, ‘when such processions and devotions were reintroduced it was with a self-conscious appeal to tradition, not unaccompanied by invented traditions and open innovations’. That was exactly van Schrieck’s intention in 1610, when he published his book on the origins of the Tuindag, one year after the reintroduction of the procession. Logically, the inclusion of du Tielt’s engravings has to be placed in the same devotional and political context.

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22 Since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Ypres had a series of suburbs comprising four parishes, which were added to the territory of the city after the building of the 7.6 km uterste veste in the early fourteenth century. In 1383, this militarily ineffective rampart and the suburbs were leveled as a defensive measure. They were not rebuilt after the raising of the siege, meaning that the city’s surface area was spectacularly reduced; see Mus, art. cit. (n. 18), pp. 21-2 and 28-30.
It remains however unclear if du Tielt’s siege view was especially made for being inserted in the book, or if he produced his work separately from van Schrieck. In the epistle by which he dedicated his book to the city council of Ypres, van Schrieck explained that he partly based his narrative on two maps of the city showing the causes of the *Tuindag*. Hence, it seems that van Schrieck himself had ‘read’ two history maps in order to write his book. Presumably, du Tielt did the same in order to document his work. In this article, written more than 400 years later, we repeat the operation for Du Tielt’s own bird’s-eye view. We will ground our interpretation on the results of the Digital Thematic Deconstruction, and deliberately ignore the content of the book by van Schrieck, in order to analyse the bird’s-eye view without any preju-idences and presumptions.

**The Digital Thematic Deconstruction of the Ypres’ Siege View**

Scholars from the humanities too often lack or have little access to appropriate analytical tools and techniques to make the most effective use of old maps. Digital Thematic Deconstruction was developed in order to resolve this kind of problem. The research method was designed, applied and tested in the context

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25 ‘And as we among other such points of decay had a few days since touched upon the obscurity of the causes of our *Tuindag*, which grow more and more unknown to most of the populace, howbeit that the Feast is solemnly maintained to the honour of God, Master Pieter Vanden Broucke, Pensionary to the Council and Clerk Civil, having exhibited to us two maps of the city showing the same causes, I thought it fitting to investigate the business, to extract the oldest and surest memorials, to add them together, and so to derive this Narrative, that I present to Your Worships in the hope that others will take my example and do better, the more to help repair and add lustre to the city’ (translation of the original Dutch fragment, published in Vandenpeereboom, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 38).

26 Vandenpeereboom stated that both maps in turn were based on an old painting, which showed on one side the siege of Ypres in 1383, and on the other the procession in honour of Our Lady of the *Tuine*. The painting was said to have been produced to mark the first centenary of Our Lady of the *Tuine* and of the liberation of Ypres in 1483; see A. Vandenpeereboom, *Ypriana: notices, études, notes et documents sur Ypres. Tuïndag et Notre Dame de Tuïne* (Brussels 1881), vol. 5, p. 89.

27 Vanrolleghem argued that du Tielt would have been in a position to base his depiction on ‘credible documents’ from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; see Vanrolleghem, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 32. Unfortunately she did not provide concrete details of these documents.

of a doctoral project on the urban and environmental development of medieval Brussels, for which two sixteenth-century city maps were crucial sources of data.29 Briefly put, Digital Thematic Deconstruction requires the systematic analysis of a high-resolution scan of an old map or image, followed by its transformation into a thematically multi-layered file. GIS technology allows users to transform and save the initial rasterized file as vector data.30 The shape and surface of this particular type of digital data depend on mathematical objects defined by coordinates. Basically, three types of vector data exist: points (one coordinate), lines (two coordinates) and polygons (more than two coordinates). Digital Thematic Deconstruction using GIS implies redrawing/recreating every detail that lies in the map or image as a polygon. In addition, GIS makes it possible to link these polygons to a database, in which different kinds of textual and/or numerical attributes (e.g. a unique ID, spatial and temporal data, memo-texts) can be stored. Digital Thematic Deconstruction implies a thematic categorisation of the dismantled image, by registering a typology for every single polygon in the database: buildings, roads, waterways, open space, and so forth. Hence it is possible to quickly find particular elements in the image, or to provide a summary of the different thematic categories that were discovered. Moreover, the digital analysis offers the opportunity to quantify the results by calculating the proportion of these thematic categories within the entire image.

Digital Thematic Deconstruction not only allows the isolation of every single cartographic or iconographic detail from the initial image, but also provides insight into its complex composition and accuracy. It especially offers the opportunity to study the topographic features and patterns of the represented landscape with greater clarity. Indeed, one of the many possible approaches of landscape studies implies considering it as the sum of a set of parts, as Moskowitz argued: ‘Although individual elements of landscape are interrelated, and need to be studied in conversation with one another, they are helpful as a means of observation and analysis; if one can temporarily disaggregate


30 For more information on the use of GIS by historians, see among others: I.N. Gregory & P.S. Ell, *Historical GIS. Technologies, Methodologies and Scholarship* (Cambridge 2007); Knowles, op. cit. (n. 28).
the whole of the landscape, the historical sequence of its features and influences might become more readily apparent.\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Mutatis mutandis}, the Digital Thematic Deconstruction of old maps and views makes it possible to unravel features and patterns that remain hidden at first sight, and hence offers help in interpreting both the composition of the image and the patterns of the represented landscape more profoundly.

In short, Digital Thematic Deconstruction leads to the creation of an entity of vectorized polygons, which represent the entirety of cartographic and/or iconographic elements of the old map or image and which are subsequently registered in a thematic database. Hence, the method implies the conversion of a static image (an illustration, a nice picture) into a dynamic file (a research tool), which subsequently can be used for different inquiries and digital applications.\textsuperscript{32} Yet, a very important guideline for Digital Thematic Deconstruction is to consider the image as such. Only the inherent content of the map/image may be taken into account, and of course that is why I deliberately ignore the content of the book by van Schrieck. It is a golden rule not to add extra content, for instance by duplicating parts of the image, correcting mistakes made by the mapmaker/artist or adjusting deformations.

The Digital Thematic Deconstruction of the bird’s-eye view of Ypres has allowed to isolate several hundreds of individual cartographic elements from the engraving.\textsuperscript{33} The classification of these cartographic elements makes it possible to provide a summary of the different thematic categories which


\textsuperscript{33} The Digital Thematic Deconstruction of du Tielt’s engraving of the siege of Ypres was done by Marieke Moerman, MA student at Ghent University in 2009-10; see M. Moerman, \textit{Diepgaande analyse van twee Ieperse kaarten: het stadsplan van Thévelin-Destrée (1564) en de gravure over het beleg van leper van Guillaume du Tielt (1610)} (Ghent 2010; unpublished Master’s thesis Ghent University).
were discovered, and to quantify the results by calculating their proportion. Table 1 for instance shows the proportion of the thematic categories for the area within the inner city wall. The analysis clearly shows that we cannot always rely on what we see with the naked eye. Indeed, while the engraving gives a visual impression of a heavily built-up city centre, the digital analysis clearly shows that only 32% of the area within the inner city wall consists of buildings. Du Tielt’s seventeenth-century engraving indicates that the fourteenth-century city centre of Ypres primarily consisted of open space: roads, squares, waterways, empty lots, infrastructure, and so forth.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thematic categories</th>
<th>Pixel percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buildings</td>
<td>32.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypical buildings</td>
<td>28.4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct buildings</td>
<td>4 %</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>First city wall</th>
<th>Pixel percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moats</td>
<td>14.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slopes</td>
<td>3.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gates</td>
<td>1.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone walls</td>
<td>3.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towers</td>
<td>0.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrol roadways</td>
<td>2.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water gates</td>
<td>0.2 %</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Street network</th>
<th>Pixel percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streets</td>
<td>11.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squares</td>
<td>2.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridges</td>
<td>1.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street furniture</td>
<td>0.2 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34 Moerman, op. cit. (n. 33), pp. 56-8.
35 The inclusion of the inner city wall does, admittedly, skew the ratio somewhat. If we leave it out of account and recalculate the percentages, we find that buildings occupy 44%.
With regard to the major category of buildings, the engraver has made a clear distinction between a number of stereotypical houses, which he depicted very rudimentarily, and landmark buildings, which are, naturally, given in greater detail. However, even within the first category there are distinctions to be made. Some stereotypical houses are only sketched in outline, while others have windows and doors. Further distinctions can be made between corner houses, houses with front or side gables, and detached houses. In short, it seems that du Tielt provided a sample of vernacular building that could be found in Ypres during the late medieval and early modern times.

Landmark buildings catch the eye due to their architecture, size and/or function. Digital Thematic Deconstruction allows us to isolate the famous Cloth Hall of Ypres, twenty churches and chapels, two religious houses with cloisters, four windmills, two aristocratic residences (including the so-called Zaalthof, the count’s residence), and a large square building on the second city wall (the fortress) (Fig. 2). As these landmark buildings are recognizable, it seems fair to
say that they are depicted accurately, albeit sketchily. If we compare Guillaume du Tielt’s engraving with Thévelin-Destrée’s very detailed bird’s-eye view from 1564, we notice that the architectural outlines of the landmark buildings are present, but that the finer details are lacking.\textsuperscript{36} The Cloth Hall is, for instance, recognizable by its location, its trapezoidal shape, and a number

\textsuperscript{36} For more information on Thévelin-Destrée’s map, see Vanrolleghem, op. cit. (n. 10), pp. 50-3; Moerman, op. cit. (n. 33), pp. 16-24 and 35-52; O. Mus, \textit{De geschiedenis van de middeleeuwse grootstad Ieper. Van Karolingische villa tot de destructie in 1914} (Ypres 2010), pp. 95-105.
of architectural features (tower, entrance, pinnacles). The moated Zaalhof is made up of two long building volumes and a perpendicular construction.

It is however difficult to say how accurate Du Tielt’s map actually is. It is, of course, necessary to keep in mind that the three-dimensional perspective and the non-uniform scale of bird’s-eye views affect the results of the analysis. While some landscape features are represented prominently, others remain absent or are obscured. Hence, Table 1 does not provide an objective account of the topographic layers of the former urban landscape. Yet, it is possible that the figures have an indicative value. Vandenpeereboom, for instance, affirmed that the engraving is interesting for its view of the old topography of both the city and its lost suburbs.37 Vanrolleghem was much more prudent, when she suggested that the engraving provides a plausible image of medieval Ypres just past its prime.38 Yet, the characteristic shape of the city centre, traversed by a number of thoroughfares running parallel to one another, is clearly depicted (Fig. 3). In other words, there is no doubt that du Tielt’s bird’s-eye view represents the city of Ypres.

When we zoom in on the details, however, the shortcomings become apparent. The main streets are generally depicted accurately, but side streets are missing, as can be seen from a systematic comparison of a number of blocks south of the main market square.39 The buildings show structural similarities to representations in other documents (houses with front and side gables, walls and fences and gates are in more or less the right places), but the number and precise alignment is not always correct. Other details suggest that du Tielt based his bird’s-eye view on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century topography he was familiar with, rather than representing the presumed fourteenth-century cityscape (Fig. 4). One such detail is that the aristocratic residence in the southwestern suburb has a slender watchtower, a typically fifteenth- and (especially) sixteenth-century architectural feature.40 Another anachronism is that the city wall had ten gates in 1383, while the engraving only depicts nine.41

38 Vanrolleghem, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 32.
39 For instance, there are only six blocks of houses between the road to Lille and the D’hondtstraat, while all other historical maps show that there should be nine; see Moerman, op. cit. (n. 33), pp. 101-2.
41 The Komen gate is not shown, but instead we notice a squadron of Ypres’ troops leaving the city. Either Guillaume du Tielt simply forgot to depict the gate, or he based his
The engraver located the gates in the city’s outer wall at the same level as the ramparts and moats, while archaeological research has shown that these gates were set back to the inside of the ramparts.\textsuperscript{42} The case of the gallows and pillory on the marketplace, both represented to the right of the Cloth Hall, is much more difficult to interpret. The pillory of Ypres is only mentioned from 1456 onwards,\textsuperscript{43} meaning that du Tielt’s representation must be seen as an anachronism. Contrarily, the gallows of Ypres were already mentioned in the famous account of the murder of Charles the Good in 1127,\textsuperscript{44} so it is plausible that they were still present in fourteenth-century Ypres as well.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3}
\caption{The city centre of Ypres as depicted on the bird’s-eye views of Guillaume du Tielt from 1610 (left) and Thévelin-Destrée from 1564 (right).}
\end{figure}


Some mistakes and anachronisms on Guillaume du Tielt’s bird’s-eye view: A/ the absence of the Komen gate; B/ the aristocratic residence with its slender watchtower; C/ the locations of the gates in the city’s outer wall; D/ the gallows and pillory on the marketplace.

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All of this gives the impression that Guillaume du Tielt’s engraving might be a simplified derivative of other bird’s-eye views or maps, such as both maps mentioned in the epistle by van Schrieck or the bird’s-eye views made by Thévelin-Destrée in 1564, and those published in Braun and Hogenberg’s Civitates Orbis Terrarum and Guicciardini’s Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi. Simplification was of course necessitated by the relatively small size of the

Further research is however necessary in order to define to what extent du Tielt actually made use of these maps.
engraving, but also by the engraver’s choice to produce a history map: du Tielt had to ‘sacrifice’ space in order to show the events of the siege. Especially in the area of the lost suburbs of Ypres, he represented hardly any buildings at all. The list of distinctive buildings is remarkably short for this area: six churches, two windmills and an aristocratic residence. The stereotypical buildings are ribbon development along the city’s arterial roads, although here and there they also stand on secondary roads in locations that might be described as residential neighbourhoods. Then there are also a number of connecting roads between these residential clusters, the canalized river Ieperlee, and a series of rows of trees. With these exceptions, the suburbs are largely made up of open space, which is filled with scenes of military activity in the engraving. This is of course also the case for the rural hinterland (Fig. 5).
Thanks to the extensive archaeological excavation campaigns in the so-called Verdraken Weide (‘Marshy Meadow’), archaeologists have been able to reconstruct the former topography of the medieval suburb of Saint Michael, both on a reconstruction map (Fig. 6) and on a three-dimensional view (a kind of modern bird’s-eye view, Fig. 7). If we compare these reconstructions to du Tielt’s depiction of the lost suburb (Fig. 8), we notice some differences. His depiction of the suburb of Saint Michael does not give the impression of a wetland; the river Ieperlee and its small harbour are not depicted, as is the case for the secondary roads, brooks and ditches, and for the buildings and parcels between the two arteries. The sole massive, cubic-shaped gate on du Tielt’s engraving does not correspond with the description of the new Komen gate provided by the archaeologists.

Nevertheless, we can also find some striking similarities, proving that the engraver must have been aware of at least some topographical features of the lost fourteenth-century suburb. First, the general impression of both arteries with their ribbon development seems quite accurate. The archaeological findings clearly show that the houses and workshops of the craftsmen along the Komen road were freestanding (Fig. 9), exactly as du Tielt depicted them. Second, the location of the church of Saint Michael, that would be dismantled after the siege, is correct. The fact that the engraver knew where the lost church was situated, suggests that du Tielt actually made use of older maps or documents, which informed him about the topography of the lost suburbs.

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47 ‘A large rectangular building (31 × 7 m) was erected on the inside of the ditch. A small outer gate measured 6.5 by 3.5 m. A dyke, with the road surface on top of it, ran through the gateway.’ (Dewilde & Van Bellingen, art. cit. (n. 46), p. 61).

48 The church was located to the left of the road to Lille and was definitely dismantled between 9 July and 20 August 1384; see Mus, art. cit. (n. 18), p. 29.

49 It seems improbable that the remains of the church were still visible in du Tielt’s time, since these are not present on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century bird’s-eye views and maps. Yet, it is of course possible that the location and dismantling of the church were still commemorated by the locals.
FIGURES 6 Impression of the spatial organization in the suburb of Saint Michael, based on the archaeological excavations.
© MARC DEWILDE & STEPHAN VAN BELLINGEN – AGENTSCHAP ONROEREND ERFGOED

FIGURE 7 Topographical impression of the medieval suburb of Saint Michael, seen from the city centre.
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In sum, we may conclude that Guillaume du Tielt produced a structurally accurate view of the late medieval topography of Ypres, albeit greatly simplified in detail. He has inevitably made errors, so we cannot say that his knowledge of the fourteenth-century situation was perfect. Yet, the comparison with other records at our disposal (sixteenth-century maps, archaeological findings) shows that, in general, his bird’s-eye view gives a quite good impression of fourteenth-century Ypres and its lost suburbs. However, this does not mean that du Tielt produced an objective record, or that he portrayed the city of Ypres ‘from nature’ (naar’t leven). Hence, his engraving cannot be seen as a ‘topographical battle scene’, which attempts to precisely document both geographical and military events and was intended for a specialized audience of officers and generals.\textsuperscript{50} Instead, du Tielt should rather be considered as one of those mapmakers who walked the ‘fine line between providing an acceptable

\textsuperscript{50} Pfaffenbichler, art. cit. (n. 8), p. 245.
Figure 9  Excavation plan of the houses and workshops along the road to Komen.
© MARC DEWILDE & STEPHAN VAN BELLINGEN – AGENTSCHAP ONROEREND ERFGOED
semblance of reality, and simultaneously capturing the symbolic identity of the place depicted.\footnote{51} Indeed, many city views and maps were intentionally modified and amended, in order to draw attention to particular topographic and historical features.\footnote{52} In this case, the city of Ypres surely had to be identifiable,\footnote{53} but for the rest it seems that the topographic representation was subordinate to the visual narrative of the engraving.

The Siege Mapped

While Vandenpeereboom praised the usefulness of du Tielt’s bird’s-eye view for studying the old topography of the city, Vanrolleghem interpreted the engraving as a series of ‘key moments’ of the siege and the victory of the city.\footnote{54} Most striking in this respect are some map elements and iconotexts added to the image: a portrait of Our Lady of the Tuine, a cartouche and a legend (Fig. 10). They forced the engraver to sacrifice space, reducing the surface for the representation of the city under siege. Our Lady of the Tuine is shown in the top left corner of the engraving, in the posture of ‘Seated Virgin and Child’ enthroned on a cloud from which rays of light emanate.\footnote{55} It is an eye-catching part of the engraving, referring to her influence on the course of battle, and rather distracts from the lifeless cityscape.

The texts in the cartouches at the edge of the engraving indicate an additional reason for the commemoration of the siege. The Latin chronogram to the right of the image of the city’s patron encodes the year of the siege and alludes to the protection of the Virgin and the Child, but also evokes the loyalty and bravery of the citizens of Ypres: ‘O citizens loyal to the prince, O, fight bravely. Lo, from above Mother and Child stretch out their arms to suffering Ypres’.\footnote{56} The unity of the citizens is also evoked in the oval cartouche in the top right corner of the engraving. A bishop’s crosier (representing ecclesiastical power) and two crossed lances (representing military and judicial civil power)

\footnote{52}{Ibid., p. 29.}
\footnote{53}{For the notion of ‘identifiability’ (\textit{vereenzelfbaarheid}), and its distinction from ‘recognizability’ (\textit{herkenbaarheid}), see De Rock, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 243-4.}
\footnote{54}{Vanrolleghem, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 30.}
\footnote{55}{Ibid., p. 33.}
\footnote{56}{The original text of the chronogram reads: \textit{Elà fIDeLeIs prhClpl CIVeIs, Elà, pVgnate fortIter èn parens ab œthere èt gnatVs, lprls passa tenDVnt braChla}. The capitals taken as Roman numerals add up to 1383.}
are held by two clasped hands and enclosed in the inscription *concordia civium* (‘civil concord’), which further underlines the sentiment.⁵⁷ According to Vandenpeereboom there was yet another inscription on the back of the first prints of the engraving.⁵⁸ Freely translated, it reads: ‘In the year of Salvation 1610, the senate and people of Ypres, in piety and devotion, dedicated this monument to the eternal and mighty Virgin Mother of God, protector of the common weal, in commemoration of the siege in which the struggles, resistance, constancy, loyalty, fortitude, patience and concord of the citizens, wonderful

⁵⁷ Vanrolleghem, op. cit. (n. 10), p. 33.
⁵⁸ These printings probably were lost during the First World War, but luckily Vandenpeereboom published the text in 1880.
and worthy of remembrance, preserved the city for themselves and for their prince, and delivered Flanders from its enemies.\(^{59}\) This text clearly shows that the commemoration of the events of 1383 was ‘only’ a means, the end being the propagation of a sense of civic common purpose and urban cohesion.

Below the frame of the engraving, du Tielt added an extensive legend to the bird’s-eye view (Table 2). As one might expect, it includes references to both the topography (the map) and to the acts of war (the history). Reading the legend thus helps in interpreting the story of the siege within its urban setting. In this respect, the bird’s-eye view could serve as an ‘aid of learning’ or a ‘mnemonic device’, as Carlton had put it. In her view, ‘geography, when combined with memory, could aid intellectuals in placing histories or other stories in their actual locations’.\(^{60}\) That was perhaps also the main reason why Adriaan van Schrieck inserted the bird’s-eye view in his book.

Battle pieces mostly represent a condensed image of the acts of war, reducing war history to a few major events and to the actions of some individuals. In other words, the grand narrative is fragmented into smaller ones.\(^{61}\) Evidently, these small narratives help emphasize the discourse of the image. In this particular case, it is not surprising to find references to the union of the besieged inhabitants of Ypres (letter A) and to the miracles attributed to the Virgin (letter D). In addition, the victory (letter H) and bravery (letter P) of the Ypres’ troops are stressed, while the acts of the enemy are associated with violence (letter G), rebellion (letter L), and their final withdrawal (letter R).

Another problem is the sequence of the events.\(^{62}\) Wars are often described textually as a chain of actions and reactions. Mapping and depicting acts of war are of course much more difficult, unless they are depicted as a series of successive individual scenes. In the case of the Ypres’ bird’s-eye view, different events are juxtaposed in one single image. As a result, the sequence of these events remains unclear. The legend does not offer any help, since the different acts of war are completely mixed up. It starts, for instance, with the inhabitants swearing to remain united (\textit{concordia civium!}), which certainly


\(^{60}\) Carlton, art. cit. (n. 51), p. 24.

\(^{61}\) Burke, op. cit. (n. 7), pp. 146-7.

\(^{62}\) According to Lee and Pérez-Simon, art. cit. (n. 13), p. 293: ‘la narrativité, comme la description, est un défi pour l’image, qui se donne dans la synchronie’.
was not the first thing that happened in 1383. But for du Tielt – and/or his commissioners – it was the most important thing to commemorate.

On the bird’s-eye view itself, the acts of war are plotted in the landscape. The enormous density of cartographic elements and the presence of eye-catchers make it very difficult to discover the small capitals and the events the legend refers to, but thanks to Digital Thematic Deconstruction they can easily be highlighted (Fig. 11). The central position of the letter A, referring to the very

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Dutch text</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. De Maerct daer die van binnen zweeren eendrachtichet.</td>
<td>A. The Marketplace where those from inside swear to remain united.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Voorbourghen hier ende rontomme de stede ghebrant.</td>
<td>B. Burned suburbs, here and around the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Miracle van de Jonghe Maecht.</td>
<td>D. Miracle of the Young Virgin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Cloostre van den augustinen.</td>
<td>E. Friary of the augustines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Uutval van binnen, afdryvende tbestiael van den vian.</td>
<td>F. Counterattack from inside, drifting back the cattle of the enemy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Sterckte ter Stove met ghewelt inghenomen.</td>
<td>G. Fortress at the Stove, seized with violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Keeren naer stadt victorieux met buut, artillerie ende s’graven banniere rechte.</td>
<td>H. Returning victoriously to the city, with the booty, artillery and the count’s banner upright.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Onse L. Vrauwe van den Brielen.</td>
<td>I. Our Lady of Brielen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Quartier van den rebelle.</td>
<td>L. Quarter of the rebels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Stormbuus op wielen.</td>
<td>M. Battering ram on wheels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Zillebeke.</td>
<td>N. Zillebeke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. S. Michiels kercke.</td>
<td>O. Church of Saint Michael.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Tclouck faict van den voldere.</td>
<td>P. The brave acts of the fullers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q. Tlogyst van den generael van den Inghelschen daer hy tracteert die van binnen by hem ontboden om parlamererens.</td>
<td>Q. The lodgings of the general of the English, where he entertained those from inside, summoned by him to negotiate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Retraictve van den viant.</td>
<td>R. Withdrawal of the enemy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Secours van verden.</td>
<td>S. Support for peace.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
important notion of civic concord, stands out. Guillaume du Tielt ‘mapped’ this notion on the big central marketplace of Ypres. Without any doubt, the marketplace indeed played a crucial role as meeting point for the organization of the city’s defense, but at the same time it is represented as an eye-catcher which emphasizes the major role of these central marketplaces in pre-modern cities and towns. ‘They were symbols of civic image and they framed political, cultural and economic life’, Stabel argued; ‘they staged the massive public assemblies of the cities, they witnessed scenes of revolt [. . .] and of inter-guild conflict, but also of oaths of fidelity to the counts’.63

Most of the other letters are concentrated in the suburbs, which heavily suffered from the siege in 1383, as is recalled by the letter B in the legend. The location of the four parish churches is indicated (letters I, K, O and C), as is the case for the friary of the augustines (letter E), correctly situated near the road to Vlamertinge.64 The other letters represent acts of war, that took place at specific locations: a counterattack from inside (letter F), the attack of the fortress (letter G), the victorious return to the city (letter H), the positioning of battering rams (letter M), the brave acts of the fullers (letter P), and the headquarters of the English general, where negotiations took place (letter Q). Furthermore, outside the second city walls du Tielt showed the withdrawal of the enemy (letter R), the arrival of supporting French troops (letter S) and the church of the nearby village of Zillebeke (letter N). Rather surprisingly, the rural landscape depicted in this area merely reminds us of a pastoral scene, with swans floating on the water and a running hunter with his dog. War seems far away here. The engraver probably wanted to show the naturally peaceful situation of the area, unjustly disturbed by the besiegers in 1383.

In most cases, early modern bird’s-eye views do not use a uniform scale, but the perspective generally ensures that the elements in the foreground are larger.65 In du Tielt’s view, however, both the topography (buildings, trees, roads, etc) and the ‘movable elements’ (soldiers and troops, siege guns, tents, and so forth) in the suburbs and surroundings of Ypres are depicted on a larger scale than the elements in the city centre. In other words, the distortion of scale is concentric: the scale is the smallest in the centre of the engraving. As a result, there is enough space to depict the events of the siege, which mostly took place in the suburbs, while the city centre remained intact. In addition, the small scale of the city centre provokes a centripetal effect. It gives the impression of a compact and resilient core resisting its besiegers, which again can be linked to the main theme of the visual narrative, civil concord.

Conclusion

In 2011 Prunty and Clarke published a guidebook to the splendid Irish historic towns atlas series. The title Reading the Maps echoes the famous phrase

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‘reading the runes’. Just like runes, maps have an air of mystery about them, the editors argued, since ‘they make extensive use of symbols and of conventions that need to be explained; they convey messages about spatial arrangements in a three-dimensional present and early maps do this in a four-dimensional past’.\(^{66}\) This ‘air of mystery’ possibly discourages scholars to analyse and interpret them profoundly, since too often old maps are only used as nice illustrations, which accompany or embellish the texts. Yet, many old maps also show and ‘tell’ a (hi)story, which is worth interpreting apart from textual records. The metaphor ‘reading the map’ is very appropriate here, since these history maps not only provide information about early spatial arrangements, but also include a visual narrative or discourse, including themes, subthemes and narrative sequences.

History maps are complex compositions and therefore ask for a thorough analysis of their content. In this article Digital Thematic Deconstruction was used in order to extract and interpret both the cartographic data and the visual narrative of such a history map, the siege view of Ypres engraved by Guillaume du Tielt. While the analysis has clearly shown that du Tielt made some errors, these are not that crucial since they do not hinder the ‘identifiability’ of the city. By juxtaposing some of the cartographic elements to other sources at our disposal, we were able to determine that the engraver probably based his work on older documents, presumably late medieval maps or views. In other words, du Tielt himself must have ‘read’ (history) maps too, and we may indeed assume that he made use of at least two older maps in order to document his siege view. Furthermore, the engraver deliberately sacrificed space for adding map elements and iconotexts in order to provide background information for the mapped siege. He was also obliged to make a clear choice in the acts of war he represented, and failed to demonstrate the sequence of the events, since the many episodes of the conflict are depicted chaotically.

A quick look allows the reader to consider the commemoration of the siege and the intercession of Our Lady of the Tuine as the main theme of du Tielt’s engraving. Yet, the in-depth analysis of both the mapped landscape and the map elements has shown the omnipresence of the notion of ‘civil concord’, which turns out to be the underlying (and somewhat hidden) discourse of the engraving. In this respect, the commemoration of the siege and the Virgin’s intercession should be interpreted within the broader context of the promotion of urban cohesion and unity. Recently, Arlinghaus has convincingly argued that ‘processions that took place to honour the patron saint of a city

have seemed to be ideally suited to fostering a feeling of unity in the urban population’. Hence we may presume that du Tielt did not really intend to produce a mnemonic device, nor to glorify the victors (since the events were more than 200 years old), but rather hoped that his intertwining of the city’s topography, the history of the siege, the intercession of Our Lady of the Tuine and the central idea of civil concord, could promote and instigate a sense of urban cohesion among the viewers of his engraving.

This article does of course not claim that the sole application of the Digital Thematic Deconstruction would be sufficient for fully analysing and interpreting a history map. Obviously, collecting background information on the map-maker/artist, the map and its content is also necessary in order to interpret a history map properly. For this article, I briefly made use of the scarce scholarly literature and some archaeological results and compared du Tielt’s engraving to other bird’s-eye views of the city of Ypres. Nevertheless, it is also crucial to study old maps and images in their own right, without too much prejudices and presumptions. Foreknowledge can indeed influence iconographic and cartographical analysis. In this respect the interpretation of the image can be ‘contaminated’ by a parallel textual tradition, as Lee and Pérez-Simon have stated. In this particular case, using the book by Adriaan van Schrieck would possibly have led to a wrong contextualisation of the engraving, since it remains unclear whether both documents were produced together, or not, and to what extent the engraver and author did cooperate. These questions can only be answered by juxtaposing – not mixing! – the ‘reading of the history map’ to a systematic and in-depth ‘reading of the book’ by van Schrieck. If it turns out that the same historical events, topographic features and visions of history are emphasized in both documents, the engraver and the author were probably using the same sources. Then du Tielt and van Schrieck may have worked for the same commissioners and/or influenced each other. If not, the analysis will certainly help us discern different ways in which histories were reproduced and for what purposes.

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