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## Digitization and analytical bibliography

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### *Summary*

Digitization of maps, as of books, aims at diffusing the information they withhold to a large public or in any way a larger public than can ever be reached through the traditional means of diffusion, i.e. through editing houses and libraries. Digitization thus focuses on content, in the case of maps the geographical or cartographical information represented on the maps. From the point of view of the cultural historian (or even just the serious reader, in the words of Anthony Grafton), but even more so for a historically correct insight in maps as a means of communication, (more) attention should be given to the document's form, i.e. the historical information one can obtain from the study of the document as such. This is illustrated by examples of the collection of the Map Room of the Royal Library of Belgium

### Introduction

Digitization is, if we may believe Anthony Grafton, in an article on future reading he published in *The New Yorker*, but "one of a number of critical moments in the long saga of our drive to accumulate, store and retrieve information efficiently". Still according to Grafton, man's urge for classification goes back to the third millennium B.C. when Mesopotamian scribes began to catalogue the clay tablets in their collections. So there is nothing new under the sun and there is no reason to panic: books will not disappear and libraries will never become completely virtual.

His brief overview of the history of classification is an interesting and witty interpretation of a great scholar in cultural history and in the humanities in particular, and a convincing plea in defense of the direct study of books and other material writings. That does not mean that the author neglects or denigrates the importance of technical improvements in the field of classification. Instead the author stresses the compatibility of both and sees automatic information retrieval not only as a starting point for further study, but more so as a parallel way to the study of written texts itself.

Along these lines, we want to propose similar reflections in the field of the history of cartography and perhaps take it a bit further. We would, indeed, like to draw the attention of those who are helping historians of cartography through digitization, to a whole series of material aspects related to the study of maps which nowadays are not yet touched upon by digitization programs and often are even absent from the traditional online catalogues (that is without images), in the hope that if automatic information retrieval can integrate these aspects, parallel ways can become just one and unique road to classification.

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### **Digitization, image and its description**

Digitization projects have to take into account two different things: the image and its description. Although very important, we will address the problem of the image only sideways and concentrate on the description part.

If we talk about descriptions of maps, we have to talk about bibliographic records. Bibliographic records can be very different even if treating the same object, even there where internationally established standards have been generally adopted (for instance the ISBD for cartographic material). In the same institution one can find very different types of bibliographic records, from very simple descriptions (the so-called Minimal Level Record) containing summary and often standardized information about title, author and year of edition, to very elaborate ones giving all kinds of detailed information on content and form. In a contradictory way, 19<sup>th</sup> century catalogues are often more detailed than our online catalogues.

Practical limitations and questions of budget are often invoked when asked for the reasons of certain omissions of information on cards or in library online catalogues. Indeed, cataloguing, especially if it wants to be an answer to the needs of analytical bibliography, can be a time consuming business. Digitization programs will have to evolve with the changes in cataloguing and making of bibliographies libraries have been operating for the last 20 years or so.

Analytical bibliography changed rather recently from the study of text and of image to the material analysis of the production process, the transmission and the reception of texts in all their forms. It necessitates the systematic inventory of the objects' material characteristics. These can be divided into three main categories:

1. Characteristics related to the map's fabrication (e.g. different states of the plate);
2. Characteristics related to the map's diffusion (e.g. casing, slipcase, binding, mounting on canvas);
3. Characteristics related to the map's use (e.g. assembly, annotations, marks of property)

These characteristics provide information on the document's history but can at the same time explain presence or absence of certain information on the map. In other words, it not only gives information about the form but helps us to understand its content.

### **Examples from RLB Map Room**

We will now discuss some examples from the collections of the Map Room of the Royal Library of Belgium to support and illustrate our argument.

Firstly, compare the following pictures of a 16<sup>th</sup> c. plan of Brussels by Jacob van Deventer (1500-1575) one of the more than 200 town plans the cartographer drew for the Spanish king somewhere between 1550 and 1568 (part of the collection is now in Madrid): a picture of the map as you can find it online in the catalogue of the Royal Library of Belgium (and thus in Digma), and a picture of its verso taken in well chosen circumstances such as to show some material aspects of the map's composition: the tiny needle holes which served for copying (which shows that the map was copied, in itself an important information), the watermark (which can also contribute to the identification of stylistic similar but anonymous maps), the

assembly of different pieces of paper showing that initially the drawing was restricted to the inner part of the city alone.

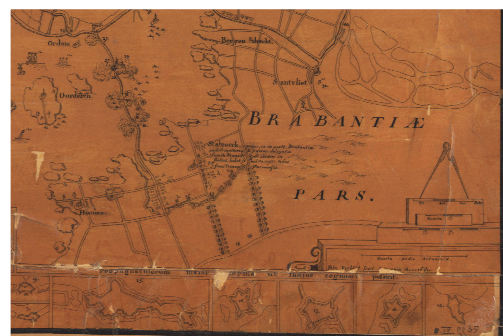
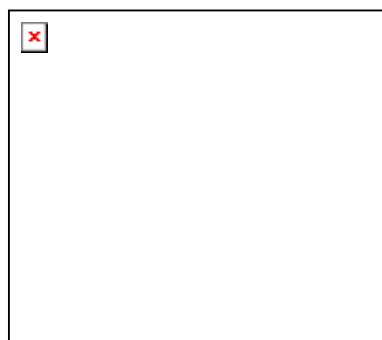
In a certain way, we have come from a rather flat and impersonal image to an image that speaks to the reader and tells him about the document's past and origin.



Sometimes a map's content changes but not its primary bibliographic information such as author, title, place and date of publication.



This 16<sup>th</sup> c. map of Italy for instance, published by Abraham Ortelius is dated explicitly to 1584 in the map itself. On the basis of its verso (its incipit *Italie...* and its pagination, *p. 102*) its date can be rectified and the folio can be identified as belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup> French edition of his *Théâtre de l'Univers*.





The Royal Library holds an undated manuscript copy from the 19<sup>th</sup> c. of a map of the Siege of Antwerp in 1585. The cartouche is incomplete, but the copy mentions a date and an author, Pieter Verbiest 1661. After a few searches, we found an original engraved map in the State Archives of Belgium that seemed related to this copy. The map catalogue of that institution from 1848 and its updated version of 2006 mentioned a map with the same title, but without its author. Thanks to the title, and above all the similar number of insets and the mention of the same unusual verbal scale statement, this engraved map has, after years, finally found his author back.

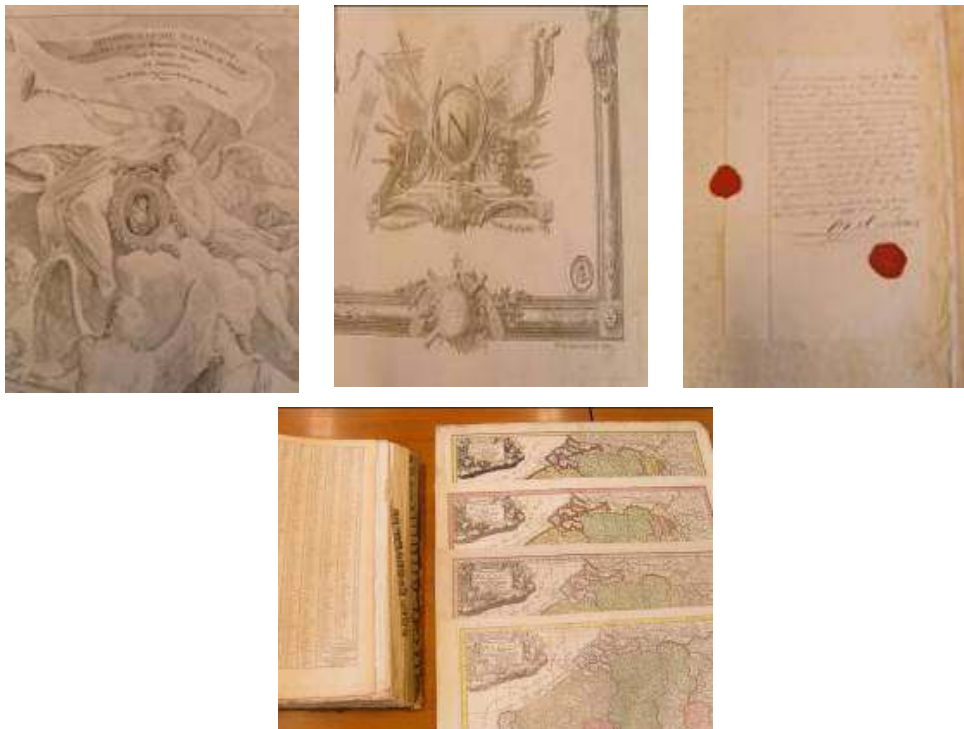
For the map of Lierre in Belgium made by Eugène-Henri Fricx as part of his *Carte des Pays-Bas et des frontières de France, avec un recueil des plans des villes, sièges et batailles données entre les hauts alliés et la France*, published from 1706 to 1712 we have found not less than 7 different states, with differences in geographic information, ink covering and wearing parts of the copper plate (with or without signs of the printer's intervention to remedy). Still, the editor never changed the dates of his atlas nor of the individual maps until 1746 when in different political circumstances he produced a new official version of the atlas.

Fricx's interventions are typographical but of Philippe Vandermaelen, Belgium's most important cartographer and map editor of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c., the library holds his manuscript additions to existing sheets of his topographical atlas of Belgium published from 1846 onwards.

Information not related to its geographic content in and outside the map sheet can give important indications on a map's diffusion and use over time.



Firstly, the publication of this copy of the *Hydrographie françoise*, an atlas with general and particular sea charts ordered by the French marine ministry, made by Jacques Nicolas Bellin and dated from 1737 to 1772, although explicitly dated to 1772, has to be dated rather between 1804 and 1807. On the atlas's frontispiece we find a medallion with the N of Napoleon and the monogram *Dépôt de la Marine EF*, but even on the map sheets themselves we notice in the lower right corner a stamp with the same monogram. The stamp was not added on the sheet but engraved in the copperplate just like Napoleon's monogram and his image on the frontispiece. By the way, on the verso of the book's binding a notary certificate testifies its selling in Utrecht.



Similarly, these five different versions of the same map by Matthäus Seutter from Augsburg, published between 1720 and 1730, can be correctly dated only if one pays attention to certain details such as the presence of privileges and official titles granted to their author. For the fifth version only the inserted topographical index with the name of its new place of edition, Vienna, allows the identification of a new edition.





This title page of the Latin 1628 edition of Hondius's *Atlas minor* is used here for its French version published in 1630. A small vignette with the correct information is simply pasted on the lower cartouche.



Louis Charles Desnos (1725-1805), Parisian engineer and geographer, had his own bookshop *rue Saint-Jacques* at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. His address indication in the cartouches of his maps remains unchanged but for a small detail. At a certain point the editor eliminated the word *Saint* in the name of the street, as can be seen in the second example, which permits us to date this very map between 1793 and 1794, during the period of the so-called *déchristianisation* in Republican France, a violent and almost obsessive movement of eradication of all signs of religion from the public sphere.

Maps were used, they were read, annotated and even corrected. Annotations and corrections are often added on the maps themselves, by authors as we have seen already but also by other often anonymous users.



We do not know the origin of this product, an assembly of two sheets of Fricx's atlas, but it clearly is the work of a contemporary. He added information concerning the different frontiers between the Netherlands and the Austrian or French territories according to the different early 18<sup>th</sup> c. treaties mentioned in a new manuscript legend pasted on the left hand side of the first sheet, in the middle of the North Sea.



From left to right : Cassini map with case; map of the Scheldt river by Stessels with case; map of the 17 Dutch provinces by Jaillot; map of and Kurland by Rücker; cut parts of the map of the Low Countries by Georges Louis Le Rouge of 1744 with brown leather case and flowered inside.

The verso of single sheet maps can tell us a lot about a map's provenance. This map of the 17 Dutch provinces by Jaillot of 1792, pasted on a grey cloth, probably in the 19<sup>th</sup> c., was bought by Pierre Philippe Constant Lammens, Belgian bibliophile and head librarian of the Ghent University. The Royal Library bought large parts of his collection in auctions between 1839 and 1842. According to the information written on the ex-libris, Lammens bought it on an auction as n° 6000 together with the next item of the auction catalogue.

Finally, some examples of cases and slipcases. Slipcases are destined to hold a single sheet map, like the map of Hainaut, while cases contain many sheets of one map. They come up in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. and are related to the practice of cutting up maps in equal parts and gluing them on cloth. Cases change in time in formal aspect and according to the map editor or distributor. These changes and even more so their cataloguing help us to locate and date the production of the specific map. Furthermore, they often contain information on the map's distribution. For instance, on this slipcase we find that the map of the province of Hainaut in Belgium by de Bouge it contains was sold by Deflinne, an important dynasty of publishers, booksellers and bookbinders in Tournai, for 2 French crowns.

V. and A. Mercier sign a luxurious case which imitates a bookbinding of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. They were active in Brussels, rue de l'Hôpital around 1877. The map itself, representing the course of the river Scheldt drawn by the hydrographer Stessels, dates from between 1863 and 1879.

The beautiful blue case with gold ruling dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> c. as is confirmed by the bright orange coloring of the cloth on which the sheets are glued. The cloths are delicately sown and of fine quality. The sheets are thumb-indexed mentioning the sheets' number and shortened title. This product was made and distributed by Bernard-Louis Vignon, publisher and bookseller in France, who often worked for the French *Dépôt de la Guerre*. No wonder that the map contained in these precious cases is the 1750 edition of the Cassini map of France. This kind of information which is not directly related to the map's geographical content receives more and more attention from librarians and particularly from cataloguers.

**Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (KBR)**  
**Eigen collectie**  
**Volledige beschrijving**

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- Uniforme titel : [Hydrographie française](#)
- Titel : Hydrographie française : recueil des cartes marines générales et particulières dressées au Dépôt des cartes, plans et journaux, par ordre des ministres de la Marine, depuis 1737 jusques en 1772, par feu M. Bellin, ingénieur-hydrographe du Dépôt et autres
- Auteur(s) : [Jacques Nicolas Bellin l'ancien](#)  
[J. Arrivet](#)  
[E. Collin](#)  
[Guillaume Dheulland](#)  
Jean Lattré  
- Bouclet  
Jean-Baptiste Croisey  
P.A. Rameau  
[J.B. Besançon](#)  
- Petit
- Editie : [5e version de l'ouvrage?]
- Uitgever(s) : [Paris] : Dépôt de la Marine, [1804-1807]
- Collatie : T.I : [64] f. numérotés 3-54, t.II : [66] f. numérotés 4-5, 56-100 : front., cartes, plans, tab., ill. ; fol.
- Annotatie(s) : 2 tomes  
Page de titre dessinée et gravée par Arrivet ("delineavit, sculpsit 1765")  
Sur la page de front., médaillon figurant Napoléon  
Rajouts sur les cartes de cachets monogrammés "Dépôt de la Marine RF" et "Dépôt de la Marine EF"  
1 carte en 2 f. interfoliée aux n°7bis-8 et datée de 1807  
Sur les plats supérieurs "Dépôt général de la Marine, Service des vaisseaux de l'Empereur"  
Sur le v° du plat supérieur, attestation notariale ms. de la vente de l'ouvrage à Utrecht
- Bibliografie : Brunet, ed. 1862, t. I, col. 756  
Maps in the atlases of the BL, t.II, p.1068-1070
- Herkomst : Schröder 18--  
Rappard H.W.A. Ridder van 18--
- Boeknummer : **II 30.780 E (Magazijn - Kaarten en plans)**
- Onderwerp(en) : [Atlassen \[Franse \] -- Geschriften voor 1900](#)  
: [Nautische kaarten](#)

Bibliographical descriptions in online catalogues become impressively detailed. The different library programs as well as the internationally used formats offer the necessary structure for automatic retrieval and exportation of this information. This information can thus easily be indexed and shared and its diffusion would contribute significantly to the knowledge of the cartographic production and consumption from the 16<sup>th</sup> c. onwards.

## Conclusions



Digitization is already an important tool for research and information retrieval but could become even more important if it grew more sensitive to the changing demands of specialists in the field of written texts: book professionals, librarians and cataloguers.

If we want to come to a real digital library, or to an efficient virtual library, if that would be the ultimate goal, if we want to avoid that, to quote Grafton again, “any serious reader will have to know how to travel down two very different roads simultaneously”: the broad, smooth and open road that leads through the screen, and the old, small and narrow way through library and archive alleys, then we will have to respect much more the documents themselves, their forms and their history and not only concentrate on content.

### Literature

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