

*Portraits of the City: Representing Urban Space in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe.* Katrien Lichtert, Jan Dumolyn, and Maximiliaan P. J. Martens, eds.

Studies in European Urban History (1100–1800) 31. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014. vi + 200 pp. €79.

---

*Portraits of the City* is an edited collection of essays that contributes to a growing literature on the interdisciplinary study of early modern city maps and views, considering a range of cities from across Europe. As the editors point out in their introduction, the collection brings together a relatively broad range of disciplinary approaches, leading to some theoretical and methodological discussion as to how these predominantly visual sources might be handled by historians not primarily concerned with images. To an extent, of course, this rehearses familiar material in what is at times a sterile polemic around objectivity leveled by historians against the subjectivity of any constructed image (by extension a critique of art historians' lack of concern for such problems). Over recent years historic maps have ceased to be the exclusive preserve of historians of cartography, and an approach proposed in a number of chapters adopts digital and quantitative methods to analyze city maps; in these cases it is implied that transforming the image into a form of data facilitates its objective analysis. Thus Bram Vannieuwenhuyze and Elien Vernackt propose a rather grandly titled methodology of "digital thematic reconstruction," which essentially sets out to code a map through topographic typologies (popular housing, public space, waterway, walls, etc.), and thus propose statistical comparisons of the composition of different cities and towns in Flanders. Petra Maclot, on the other hand, focuses on Virgilius Bononiensis's spectacularly detailed map of Antwerp (1565), to identify the degree to which the image can be relied upon as a representation of the city at the time. Chodejovska and Krejcí in turn consider two eighteenth-century maps of Prague by Joseph Huber, and show how GIS and other digital tools have enabled them to compare the information of these two, while also bringing them to a wider public through web platforms. The most valuable contribution these studies make, as a result of the pixel by pixel analysis of the image that is required for the transposition of early

modern prints into compliant digital formats, is to focus on the close reading of the visual text, something that is all too often overlooked, as maps are simply used as stock images to illustrate a city at a particular moment in time.

The rest of the collection turns to pictorial images of diverse sorts, and the degree to which these can be considered as reliable sources for urban history. While extensive and subtle studies have been made of the depiction of cities in the background of paintings, Jelle De Rock's quantitative analysis of the backgrounds of Netherlandish art (1420–1520) is rather simplistic, reducing key data to a city/rural backdrop distinction. Certainly, given the subtitle of the collection, "urban space" is noticeably absent from the characterization of depicted urban environments, and indeed is largely overlooked in most of the contributions to the collection. One exception is Katrien Lichtert's study of Bruegel's well-known *Battle between Carnival and Lent* (1559), which proposes a series of parallels between the open public space — with the Blue Barge and Dragon taverns depicted — and theatrical rituals of everyday life played out in such arenas. A number of the chapters draw attention to the variety of media settings within which urban portraits can be identified: Cecilia Paredes discusses a series of tapestries depicting a number of cities made around the reign of Charles V, while Sarah Van Ooteghem discusses the *vedute* drawings of Netherlandish artists in Rome to consider the extent to which these were taken from life. Oliver Kik traces the influence of the Bramantesque Prevedari engraving on the evolution of *all'antica* taste in the Low Countries, while Silvia Beltramo combines visual and literary sources to offer a somewhat sweeping overview of how Italian cities were depicted in the late medieval period.

A question that is not asked often enough in this collection is who the representations of cities discussed were intended for. This of course is a central concern for the diplomatic accounts of Rome discussed by Megan Williams, although it would be equally interesting to read how such accounts subverted the image of the city. Maria Clelia Galassi offers an interesting interpretation of Jan Massys's painting *Venus with a View of Genoa*, attributing the commission to Ambrogio di Negro, a Genoese merchant active in Antwerp; here the city view — itself dependent on Anton van der Wyngaerde's etching of the same city — documents the interrelationship and connections between artists and patrons between Genoa and the Low Countries. In a similar vein is the remarkable 1622 city view of Constantinople, discussed by Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, created by the Franciscan friar Niccolò Guidalotto for Pope Alexander VII Chigi; while drawn from life in Istanbul, Guidalotto focused on Byzantine heritage and thus his depiction reveals a clear political stance toward the city's Ottoman rulers. In conclusion, then, this is a useful collection that draws attention to an interesting range of examples, although a somewhat tighter editorial framing of the themes identified in the subtitle would perhaps have made for a more coherent collection.

Fabrizio Nevola, *University of Exeter*