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## Thomas Coomans, Bieke Cattoor and Krista De Jonge (eds.). Mapping Landscapes in Transformation: Multidisciplinary Methods for Historical Analysis. Leuven (Belgium): Leuven University Press, 2019. 373 pp. [https://doi.org/10.2307/j. ctvjsf4w6](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjsf4w6)

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Innovation in mapping methods for historical research on cultural landscapes is flourishing. Where once the map was one of the final results of research, in the twenty-first century the map itself has become an essential part of the research process. Recent advances in geographical information systems (GIS) and other technologies from the digital humanities allow us to create a palimpsest from the diverse information embedded in historic maps and to stitch, stack and combine these maps together using GIS. They also provide us with the opportunity to connect spatial maps with other quantitative and qualitative socio-spatial data. As a result, we can gain new insights into historical processes that have shaped cultural landscapes. However, according to Thomas Coomans, Bieke Cattoor and Krista De Jonge, editors of *Mapping Landscape in Transformation*, one of today's major challenges in historical landscape research concerns the concepts and methods to be applied in mapping processes of transformation – that is, in interpreting and imagining the relational complexity of urban and rural landscapes, both in space and in time and on multiple scale levels.

In response to this challenge, *Mapping Landscapes in Transformation* provides us with a varied selection of recent methodological experiments in mapping cultural landscapes. The contributions in the book are written by experts from different disciplines – historians, architects, geographers, urban and landscape designers and archaeologists – who are active in the fields of historical geography, urban and landscape history, and history and heritage conservation in a wide variety of time-space contexts, from antiquity to the twenty-first century and

in Europe, Asia and America. Each author applies mapping methods to construct a different reading of the landscape in transformation. Together the contributions make up a widely varying set of mapped space-time dialogue that opens up a broad range of multidisciplinary research questions.

Over the past decade, multiple books have been published on cartography, theoretical reflections on the power of maps and the advantages of GIS in the humanities, as well as on mapping approaches and their application in research projects, such as deep mapping and historical GIS (HGIS). *Mapping Landscapes in Transformation* is in line with previously published volumes of mapping-based research projects based on a specific theme. The aim of this type of book is more to advance cartographic practices than it is to provide new insights into the topic itself. The individual chapters function as useful examples and inspiration for mapping and studying the transformation processes of cultural landscapes.

The thirteen contributions are grouped into two parts. The first part presents six reflections and methods that refer to the dual meaning of *projection* as a cross-disciplinary approach to visualization on the one hand and a leap in imagining landscape futures on the other. A central theme that unites these contributions is the integration of cartographic and experiential methods for studying the spatial patterning of human culture, such as Karl Beelen's method based on the traditional ways of life of local communities in India as a counterpart of state and local government planning. Cecilia Furlan presents a reverse approach to understanding the industrial landscape of Charleroi as palimpsests and Cristina Purcar,

focusing on railway and landscape in Transylvania, develops an interactive landscape catalogue, in which she interrelates a corpus of historical photographs, maps and plans. Bieke Cattoor shows, in her contribution, a 'designerly' approach to research by cartography and Jill Desimini analyzes cartographic methods of incorporating time into topographic maps as well as design plans. The essay of Ian Gregory and others, on analysis of literary modes in the English Lake District – presented in part two of the book – can also be counted under this theme.

The described methods in this section can be seen as derivative of the concept of deep mapping, but surprisingly enough the term itself is only mentioned five times in the whole volume (373 pages). Furlan uses in her contribution the term 'thick mapping', an equivalent of deep mapping, invoking the key anthropological concept 'thick description' that emphasizes the integration of cultural context and human practices in the description of space.<sup>1</sup> Purcar further acknowledges this when defining her own particular mapping approach as 'the associative operation that topologically connects (...) historic railway photography to contemporary and historic cartography'.<sup>2</sup> Since deep mapping is a platform, process, and product at the same time<sup>3</sup>, there is no single way to put deep mapping into practice. Every project must translate the concept's assumptions, ambitions and technical possibilities into a feasible research design that fits the research questions and sources. Avoiding the term 'deep mapping' seems here a way to avoid the tricky question: when does a method or a result comply with the definition of deep mapping or a deep map?

The second part of the book, *Focus*, presents seven cases from different time-space contexts, each innovative by adapting existing methodologies to their specific research questions and sources. The contributions in this section seem to apply the more conventional technical possibilities of digital humanities and experiment with the combination of (new) techniques, such as the application of computer drawing (CAD) software and

GIS applications for the reconstructions of the (past) humanscapes of Roman cities, by Piraye Hacigüzeller and others. Or the high-resolution multi-scalar methodology by Arlo McKee and May Yuan, who use drone photogrammetry technique to develop a 3-D model of an archaeological site. Bram Vannieuwenhuyzen and Reinout Klaarenbeek use the advantages of historical GIS for their studies of the urban development of early-modern cities (Vannieuwenhuyzen) and the afterlife of religious houses (Klaarenbeek). Steffen Nijhuis' study – presented in section one – focuses on spatial reconstructions of historical landscape gardens, using GIS-based modeling techniques. Sanne Maekelberg and Chang-Xue Shu seem to benefit from the possibilities of data analysis and data-mining of (quantitative) archive data in combination with geographical visualization.

John Bintliff concludes the book with an overarching chapter in which he reflects on the various contributions and elaborates on them from his own anthropological, archaeological and historical experiences in townscape and landscape research. Bintliff places the essays in a broader context of recent developments in the field of historical landscape research on the basis of some key themes. However, the choice of these specific themes remains unclear. Further explanation or an introduction on how they relate to historical research on cultural landscapes would provide more coherence in the book and could have led to some concluding insights, which are now missing. Bintliff does list some key points for future discussions and elaborations that emerge from the various contributions in the book, but these are not explained in detail. As an attempt to foster cartographic experiments in cultural landscapes studies, the book as a whole lacks internal coherence and further justification of the subject. Nevertheless, together the essays make an important contribution to the literature on cartography. The diversity of research questions and mapping methods makes the book valuable and inspiring to read.

## Endnotes

1. Furlan, C. (2019). "Unfolding Wasteland. A Thick Mapping Approach to the Transformation of Charleroi's Industrial Landscape." In *Mapping Landscapes in Transformation: Multidisciplinary Methods for Historical Analysis*. Coomans, T., Cattoor, B., and De Jonge, K., eds. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 134.
2. Purcar, C. (2019). "Photography, Railways and Landscape in Transylvania, Romania: Case Studies in Digital Humanities." In *Mapping Landscapes in Transformation: Multidisciplinary Methods for Historical Analysis*. Coomans, T., Cattoor, B., and De Jonge, K., eds. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 149.
3. Bodenhamer D.J., Corrigan J. and Harris T.M. (2015). *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives*. Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 3.