

# Accuracy, veracity, and theological truth in the 16<sup>th</sup> century atlas *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae*

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## Abstract:

The characteristics and appearance of an authentic map (in conformity with reality), together with the convention about how authenticity should be obtained in a map, continued to change since the beginning of modern cartography along the centuries. As Critical Cartography has emphasised, the authenticity of a map was in many cases just a convincing appearance, hiding intricate ideologies. However, the political role of maps is just one aspect of their significance, which does not exclude the existence of genuine beliefs and ideals which were guiding cartographers and map authors in the creation process.

With a long tradition of understanding maps as illustration devices, Renaissance geography blended intimately with the assumptions and debates of the artistic domain of painting. Among these, veracity was a much praised ideal, signifying the ability of the art work to make present the absent things or giving a new life to people or events gone long ago, a perspective which allowed for rich metaphysical implications. In his theological atlas *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae*, Christian Adrichom used a variety of formula through which he expressed his view on the evocative power of maps, deriving from contemporary theories concerning truth, vision and representation. In this article we will employ the textual analysis of Adrichom's affirmations, approaching them through the filter of the *Intellectual History* methodology. This method allows us to discover that the author explored the metaphysical implications of painting realism in order to present and use his maps as Christian devices, equating the veracity of the cartographic medium with the authenticity of Christ's life and with the theological understanding of *truth*.

**Keywords:** veracity, Christian van Adrichom, historical cartography, theology, geography, Renaissance

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the cartographic medium employs a communication mode which relies on precise rules and conventions, such as projections, labels, and legends, colour schemes etc. On the contrary, Renaissance maps did not follow a rigid pattern in terms of cartographic language. As other Renaissance intellectual products, maps and atlases combined the literary and visual means of expression for rendering visually attractive and often rich imaginary depictions of places. The subjective mode of presenting a territory or a city by the Renaissance cartographers was not seen, however, in contradiction with the high ideals such as accuracy, scientific grounding and veracity. All these characteristics ensured, as the authors claimed, truthful map products, offering an impacting reading experience, transporting the viewer within a different space through mind travel.

The truthfulness of the map was a cumulative result of at least two aspects:

- a) the scientific method and mathematical grounding of the geographical domain
- b) the visual quality of the map, presenting the information in a realistic form

On the other hand, especially in the religious circles, the authority of religion and the truth of revelation, provided by the Scriptures, were still overcoming the truth

provided by the other domains of human knowledge. In his atlas, Adrichom read in theological key the evocative power of maps, by ascribing to them almost the characteristics of an icon (as a help in prayer and in the reconnection with the Biblical events). In doing so, Adrichom relied on the various ideas concerning truth and veracity constituted at the interplay of different intellectual fields, all claiming affiliation with a form of knowledge, such as geographical accuracy, artistic realism and the virtue of the belief in revelation.

After a short presentation of the atlas and its author, we will explain in separate sections each of the points emphasised above.

## 2. The atlas

*Theatrum Terrae Sanctae et biblicarum historiarum, cum tabulis geographicis aere expressis*, considered as one of the first theological atlases in Europe, presents the localization of biblical events.

There are very few things known about the author of the map, Christian Adrichom/Adrichem. He was a Dutch Catholic priest, in the time of Reformation, who had to flee in Koln because of the religious revolution in the Netherlands. He was born in 1533 as the son of the mayor of Delft, Adriaen Claesz. In 1584 Adrichom writes a letter addressed to Rme Presul (*Reverindissime Presul – venerable patron*), in which he asks for support, probably

to William Damasus Lindanus, bishop of Ghent, regarding the publication of his map of Jerusalem, in which he invested thirty years of work - *quo in opere jam plus minus triginta annis laboravi* (Kist, 1847). The map and the atlas were published in Koln, in 1590.

The book contains three parts covering both the spatial and the temporal dimension of the Biblical content. The first chapter deals with the tribes of Israel, as geographical demarcations. According to the Old Testament Book of Joshua, the Holy Land was divided by Moses between the tribes of Israel, after the conquering of Canaan. This part of the book presents in ten maps the distribution of the tribes' territories.

The second part of the book, concerning Jerusalem, opens with the map of the Holy City with 270 points of interest. All the maps contained in the atlas are abundant in vignettes (small visual, narrative scenes displaying characters in action), which enliven the maps and confer to the described places a sense of human presence. Most of the vignettes have a number that sends the reader to a longer textual explanation, containing more details about the events taking place there, as well as bibliographical information, which reveal the careful documentation and erudition of the author.

### 3. Geographical accuracy

In the context of an emerging Scientific Revolution, the exact sciences, among which Geography could be considered, enjoyed a great authority. So, in the beginning of the first chapter of the book, the one regarding the Jewish tribes, Adrichom introduces one of his first references to the objective and scientific dimension of his publication. Here he relies on the classic formulae and strategies used in geographic publications:

*Terrae promissionis et singularum tribuum, locorum, ac finitimarum regionum eius [...] accurata descriptio* - The accurate description of the Promised Land and of each tribe along their neighbouring regions.

The term *descriptio*, which had the meaning of plan, diagram or drawing appeared frequently in the title of the Renaissance cartographic works and emphasized at the same time the visual aspect of the chapter. Moreover, these plans or diagrams were characterized as being *accurate* - precise.

Secondly, the Latin term employed by Adrichom along the publication in order to refer to maps, was *tabula*, which means a flat surface, as well as a document, and it was commonly used by the Latin geographical publications of the time. The *tabula* is expected to contain information in a strictly organized way, rather than freely depicting something.

One can also remark that Adrichom follows in his book the typical style and structure of atlases and geographic publications when a new map was introduced: the first thing was to refer to the various names given to a specific province, then trying to trace its borders by reference to credible sources.

*Terra promissionis, quam S. Biblia & Josephus terram Chanaan vocant, Ptolomeus, Palestinam & vulgo Terram sanctam appellant...* - The promised land, that in the Holy Bible and by Josephus is called Canaan, named Palestine by Ptolemy and Sacred Land by the people.

Moreover, in the preface to the tribes' chapter, the author continues to discuss distances in Roman miles between different points and details concerning climate and natural riches of the province, just as any geographical report of the time would do concerning any region.

Another place which clearly shows the intention of the author to align his theological atlas with the standards of the cotemporary geographic publications can be found in the preface, where he includes a geographic conventional system. Through this system of conventional signs information concerning space is coded and transmitted. The author introduced the signs for cities, military camps, and other places, that he was going to use later in the topographical representations.

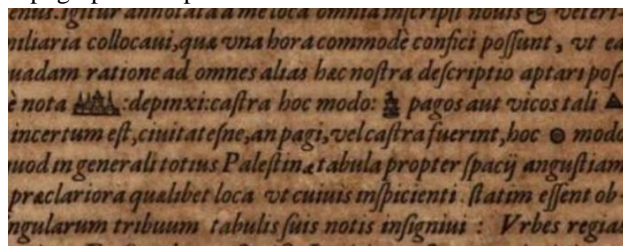


Figure 1. Conventional signs

Moreover, the preface contains references to *millaria* (unit of measurement for distances) and to the latitude and longitude.

### 4. The map as image

One of the most important way of affirming the visual virtues of maps in the Renaissance and before was by contrast with the textual environment, through the complementary pair image-text.

In his treatise *De mapa mundi*, the 14th century monk Fra Paolino Veneto, explained the complementarity of cartography and text: "Without a world-map, I think it impossible to make an image of, or even for the mind to grasp, what is said of the children of Noah, and of the Four Kingdoms and other nations and regions in both divine and human writings. Hence what is needed is a two-fold map [mapa duplex, picture ac scripture], of painting and writing. Nor will you deem one sufficient without the other, because without writing, painting indicates regions or nations but unclearly, and writing, without the aid of painting, truly does not mark, in their various parts, the boundaries of the provinces of a region sufficiently for them to be made manifest almost at a glance" (Moffitt, 1993).<sup>1</sup>

The affirmation of the visual dimension of maps was also more subtly and implicitly performed through the utilization of terms pertaining to the field of painting or vision, such as *portrait/portrayal* and *theatrum*, as in the

<sup>1</sup> quoting Paolino Veneto, *De mapa mundi*.

1564 atlas of Antoine du Pinet - *Plantz, pourtraitz et descriptions de plusieurs villes et forteresses* or in the title of the chorographic depictions included in the Belleforest edition of Münster's *Cosmography – le vray portraict de la ville de Semur*.

The very title of Adrichom's atlas *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae et biblicarum historiarum cum tabulis geographicis aere expressis* (The view of the Sacred Land and Bible history, with geographic maps portrayed from above) includes the term *theatrum*, which bears a direct connection to sight and perspective, to observation and study. *Theatrum* derives from the Greek term *theasthai* which means to behold, to see or look at something. It captures the idea of an encompassing view which is usually provided by the orthogonal perspective of maps, but it also implies a viewer, a public.

The visual dimension of maps, the fact that maps were images, was placing these cartographic works in the sphere of sight, considered by the tradition of the antiquity the most noble of the senses, as the one offering the most direct knowledge on the world (Squire, 2015)<sup>2</sup> The influence of ancient philosophy on the Renaissance intellectual environment is well-known. And the authors of atlases and cartographic works frequently referred to this antique inheritance in the introductions to their publications, such as Belleforest does in his version of the *Cosmography*:

“Therefore we propose to the very subtle sense of sight, about which Aristotle said that it surpasses every other, the maps and figures of cities very carefully portrayed, which being artfully painted on boards offer a much clear judgement about them, than the obscure knowledge that we would have obtained by looking only through the letters” (Belleforest, 1575).<sup>3</sup>

Since the beliefs system of the Renaissance promoted the authority of sight and visual representation (Pickles, 2004), the association of maps with the sense most closely related to knowledge and truth was granting as well to maps a solid reliability and veracity. Adrichom too aligns with the tradition of the antiquity concerning sight and realism through a reference to Apelles, a Greek painter from the 4th century BC, famous for his narrative realism: Hierosolymae, [...]veram ac vivam imaginem in tabula Apelleo penicillo ad unguem delinearem – “to trace/draw exactly, the true and lifelike image of Jerusalem through a map in the style of Apelles”.

Apart from the privilege of being a visual creation, thus most prone to offer access to knowledge, maps were also, more specifically connected with the domain of *painting*,

through several aspects, ranging from technical aspects and construction principles to some theoretical and philosophical principles underlying them.

First, both maps and other graphical figurative works were realised through the same technical process of engraving. The printing of maps was often performed by artists, such as Albrecht Dürer or Matthäus Merian, which were painters as well.

Moreover, both cartographers and painters of the Renaissance were preoccupied with optical and geometrical issues concerning the rendering of three-dimensional subjects on a flat surface. These issues meant as well a common scientific grounding of Geography and Painting, which relied on central axes of vision, points of references and measurements. The introduction of Perspective in art and the utilization of projections in mapmaking were reflecting a common preoccupation for minimising errors, rendering distances between points and keeping the accurate proportions of the natural world model (Edgerton, 1774), which meant both domains had deep roots in the exact sciences and the truth they provided.

However, while their visual function was placing maps in the domain of knowledge, the intimate relation with the domain of painting added something extra - a step towards the spiritual domain, and towards a superior level of knowledge than that provided by the senses or by science.

As such, the art theoretician, but also cartography amateur, Leon Battista Alberti considered that “Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, as friendship is said to do, [Cicero, De amicitia, vii,23], but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive” (Alberti, 2011).<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, this metaphysical opening of visual representations was extending as well in the domain of Religious Painting. Catholicism recognised the painter's capacity and authority to depict God or gods, religious or mythological scenes and spiritual elements (Nutti, 2003). Even with the rise of the Protestant ideas, in which the depiction of the divine was considered a sin, the merit of the painting did not fade. It shifted towards the capacity of making other things to come alive: nature, fruits, landscapes, textures, portraits. The miracle of Painting remained intact, and it even received a name in the expression *ad-vivum*.

The expression was often used in Western Europe in premodern times, denoting one of the most wanted ideals of the art of painting and representation: the ability to capture the spirit of life (Balfe & Woodall, 2019).

In books and engravings, the *ad-vivum* expression started to flourish and it extended to the domain of cartography, bringing in the realm of maps the same ambition of conferring realism to the depictions, but also the spiritual opening implied by its significance. Adrichom uses it too, along so many contemporary authors: *Hierosolymae*,

<sup>2</sup> quoting Shane Butler & Alex Purves, *Synesthesia and the Ancient Senses* - “Vision is that of a reader who reads in order to know.”

<sup>3</sup> « En tant que nous proposons au sens tres subtil de la veue, lequel selon Aristote surpasse tous les autres, les cartes et figures des villes tres diligemment portraictes, lesquelles estans artificielement peintes en tables, donnent beaucoup plus clair jugement de soy, que si on en cherchoit une obscure cognoissance et telle qu'on la peut avoir par les lettres seulement »

<sup>4</sup> Original work, *De pictura*, published in 1435.

[...] *veram ac vivam imaginem* – true and lively image. Adrichom use of abundant pictorial elements and sequences in his maps might be one of the reasons for using this expression.



Figure 2. Example of vignettes in Adrichom's maps

The atlas gave a huge importance to vignettes, so that no part of the maps, not even the peripheral areas lacked such representations. Therefore, the image of the Holy Land was not just a cartographic one but as well a collection of miniature depictions presenting events from the sacred history of Jerusalem and other regions.

In the preface to the French edition of the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, a well-known city atlas of the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, one finds the French variant of the Latin expression: "quelques figures et portraits des villes d'Espagne tirez tres exactement au vif."

*Vif* means to be full of life, alive, dynamic, or something happening at big intensity. One can read here another dimension of maps' veracity, that of capturing the "spirit of a place".

As imaginative tools, maps had a mind transportative power, as well as an entertainment role. The attribute of liveliness, which was recurrently mentioned in the titles and descriptions of maps, meant first of all, that readers could visualize those distant places that were inaccessible by travel to most of them. That was a knowledge opportunity that texts did not present to the reader.

While in the travel publications and travel maps veracity was a way through which to enhance the reader's experience of a place, in Adrichom's atlas, veracity takes in addition a religious connotation, supporting the theological aim of the publication.

## 5. Map as Christian instruments

When analyzing the subjects of the vignettes, we can see that their vast majority is used for bringing forth an event connected to the divine presence in history.

Additionally, the expressions used by the author show that the experiential effect of veracity is brought on a religious/theological level. Among other terms used for describing the communication process implied by map

illustration, Adrichom employs constructions such as: *in lucem prolata* – "coming to light",<sup>5</sup> *ad vivum expressa topographica delineation* – "topographical drawing after life/lifelike", *veram ac vivam imaginem* – "true and lively image", *haec tabula nos manu ducit fidei mentisque nostrae oculis* – "this map leads us by hand, through the eyes of our mind and our faith" etc.

These formulae include reference both to *truth* and to *life*, which are central attributes of Christ in John, 14:6 – "I am the way and the truth and the life."

These expressions refer as well to the visual dimension of maps which have the special capacity to reflect a multi-layered reality, defined by the metaphysical truth of Christ embodiment and miracles, which descend further on, through the vignettes, all the way to the concrete topographical level of the maps.

Apart from the objective difference between the two media of communication – image and text – Adrichom takes the text-image tension to another level of significance by ascribing to the maps the role to illustrate theological claims. He does that by introducing an analogy between two pair of concepts text – image ad word – deed. Several passages speaking about Christ reflect this association:

*quae Salvator noster toto praedicationis suae tempore, cum verbo, tum exemplo nos docuit* – "that our Saviour has taught us all the time in his preaching, by *words* as well as by *example*".

Continued by a later passage saying: *quare si Christum non solum verbo, sed etiam opera imitare voluerimus, ex viva ipsius in monte Calvariae crucifixi effigie, [...] docti partier & illiterate facili compe(n)dio perfectam Theologiam, summam Iuris ac iustitiae peritiam, Artium liberalium scientiam, verae humilitatis, obedientiae, pietatis, chatitatis, patientiae addiscere, [...] possumus.*

"So, if we want to imitate Christ not only through *word* but also through *deeds*, both learned man and unlettered, we can easily and in a short time, from the *lively portrait/effigy* of his crucifixion on the Mount of Calvary, [...] perfect theology, gain skill in law and justice, and additionally learn the liberal arts, true humility, obedience, piety, mercy, patience."

From this last fragment, we understand that the visual medium of the maps breaks out from a strictly intellectual or literary understanding of the sacred history, and facilitates real action, real transformation. The effigies / vignettes (such as the lively portrait of the crucifixion), have the purpose to re-establish the connection between *word* and *world*, generating a religious feeling, stimulating awareness and ample moral transformations within the reader.

The parallel between a verbal and a metaphysical reality, which face each other in the textual fragment above,

<sup>5</sup> *Ex sacra scriptura medulla, [...] antiquitatibus eruta, & in lucem prolata* – "Coming and brought to light from the core of the sacred scriptures, and coming even from the ancient times"

represents a claim about the power of image, which although is not a sacred depiction, is still meant to serve a religious experience of the reader.

So, the lifelikeness of the map and its visual impact were important for Adrichom because of their evocative power. As the author affirms, the maps as well as the book had, as main scope, to inspire faith, through bringing people closer to the Biblical events, through reminding people of the passions of Christ, or teaching them about the Holy Land. The map is not only there to make people think and meditate, but to actually motivate them to imitate God:

„Nec solum ad considerandum et meditandum haec, sed ad imitandum/imtandum [?] Deus in sacra Sriptura spirituali sensu interpretata nos hortatur.” – in the Sacred Scripture, translated in a spiritual sense, God urges us not only to consider and meditate at these, but to imitate them,

The maps are not for a single time use, or lecture, but the author expects that once seeing them, the readers will be able to call to their mind more often places from the Holy Land, and so to remember the sacred history and their faith to be strengthened: *Grataque animi pietate saepe ea recolamus loca, que passionis Christi memoriam salubriter nobis ingerunt. Et ad quae haec tabula nos manu ducit fidei mentisque nostrae oculis* – “Let us gratefully and often recall, in the piety of our heart, those places that take us to salvation, through the memory of Christ’s passions. Those very places where this map leads us by hand, through the eyes of our mind and our faith...”

So, the map was a means of rendering a truth, in an accurate form, bringing together the truth of the revealed text of the Bible with the reality of the land. The map had to be lifelike, which it claimed to achieve both by geographic accuracy and by visual realism. This attribute of lifelikeness made the map appropriate for depicting sacred events and places, in an evocative way, so that to stimulate learning, memory and faith.

## 6. Conclusion

Combining the scientific dimension of geography with the authority of the painted image in the Renaissance, Adrichom wished to keep his publication in the sphere of truth, knowledge, and authenticity. Through an abundance of expressions referring to the evocative power of maps, Adrichom relates the cartographic veracity with the spiritual truth of the Cristian faith.

The maps of the 16<sup>th</sup> century atlas *Theatrum Terrae Sanctae*, rich in pictorial details, allowed the author to profit from the prestige of the painted image as a mediator between worlds and as an instrument of knowledge. Through the vignettes, the space of the Holy Land became a place of happening, full of action and interaction between man and God, in a continuous flow from the Old Testament episodes to the martyrdom of the Christian saints.

The visual dimension of the maps aimed at veracity, not only to support an enhanced experience of a place such as

Jerusalem, but also to stimulate religious meditation on the central Christian topics such as Christ’s sacrifice.

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