

PORTRAITS OF THE CITY: RETHINKING METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGMS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CITY

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Author: Katrien Lichtert (Ghent University) - Katrien.Lichtert@ugent.be
Co-authors: Prof. M. P. J. Martens (Ghent University)
Prof. J. Dumolyn (Ghent University)
Eva Chodějovská (Czech Academy of Sciences, History Institute)
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Representations of cities are omnipresent in medieval and early modern visual culture. Examples appear within a broad range of media including illuminated manuscripts, paintings, drawings, prints, maps, stained windows, tapestries, etc. Their character and physical appearances widely divergent. This differentiation ranges from the embellishment of religious scenes through the integration of urban architecture encountered in medieval manuscript illumination or in the paintings of the Flemish Primitives, to large-scale panorama's of cities in regal tapestries and meticulously detailed city views in maps. Only recently, (art) historians started to pay the attention it deserves to these depictions, since they are valuable sources for gaining knowledge on social, cultural and political realities in urban contexts. In this respect, the notion of representation is essential since these objects are obviously visual constructs and not merely objective reproductions of the world as we know it. Rather, they reflect an image of an individual (the artist or / and the patron) or a social group's experienced urban reality, filtered through processes of perception, assimilation and reproduction. Therefore, investigating these images requires a critical methodological approach, one which encounters the visual in terms of cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded. During our last session at the EAUH 2010 conference in Ghent (M18 Depicting the City: Urban Views as Historical Sources), we merely focused on the nature and character of these sources. Continuing on these achievements, we will now further explore the different paradigms used when studying representations of the city.

The aim of this session is to reflect on and to redefine the different methodological frameworks through which these sources are investigated. Therefore, we would like to invite (art) historians who investigate representations of the city (in all different constellations), roughly between 1200 and 1750. Moreover, we would like to invite specialists from other fields of study where representations of cities are being investigated, although not in a pictorial form, such as specialists in human geography reflecting on the mental and spatial dimensions of cities, and medieval and early modern literary historians specialized in descriptions of cities. Researchers working in other fields of study focusing on this topic are also warmly invited. With this topic, we hope to create a platform for crossdisciplinary discussion (between scholars from different fields of study) on the methodological aspects involved in studying representations of cities.