Bouquet: A Digital Library of Historical Maps of Wallonia

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The Bouquet Cartographique Wallon project – in short, Bouquet - is a digital library of historic maps of Wallonia. This project is directed by the PolleN research center at the University of Namur (Pôle de l'Histoire environnementale de l'Université de Namur, Dr Isabelle Parmentier) and hosted by the library of the University (Bibliothèque Moretus Plantin). The growing collection is constituted of contemporary maps selected from history books. The maps concern past social, structural, political and environmental issues in Wallonia, and, when applicable, in surrounding territories such as Flanders, northern France, Luxemburg, etc. The maps are not ancient documents but rather visual material constituted by historians in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries in order to illustrate facts which took place in the past, since Antiquity to the 1970s. As these maps are usually difficult to access per se (they are usually included into article, books, monographies rather than published apart), Bouquet makes them more visible and accessible to university students and researchers as well as teachers and the wider public. All of the books from which the maps are extracted are kept at the Moretus Plantin Library. The maps will be accessible on NEPTUN (NumÉrisation du PaTrimoine de l’Université de Namur), a platform dedicated to the digitisation of the historical collections of the Moretus Plantin Library.

The welcome page of Bouquet, on the Neptun platform (see neptun.unamur.be).
Readers will both access the maps online as well as obtain bibliographical references in order to reach for the original books at the library if needed. All images are of high resolution and can be zoomed in online as well as downloaded when allowed by the editors.


Bouquet will also be accessible through the Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de la Communauté française de Belgique DONum (Dépôt d’Objets Numérisés) portal. DONum is a portal which centralises since 2009 all of the digitised collections of francophone universities in Belgium (UCL, ULB, UMons, UNamur, Ulg), giving access through all of the resources available through a single search engine.

The collection is currently being constituted, using state-of-the-art scanners and an Omeka-run database. Omeka is a free, flexible, and open source web-publishing platform for the display of digital collection using an unqualified Dublin Core metadata standard. Its easy-to-use design has allowed historians at the UNamur and the NEPTUN staff to work in a partnership over the making of the Bouquet collection. On top of the metadata regarding the bibliographical source of the maps, specific information regarding the content of the maps have been included and allow users to select material through the search engine. This information includes:

* current district (i.e. “Province du Luxembourg”, “Région Wallonne”),
* past district (i.e., “Comté de Namur”, “Gaule”),
* chronological timeframe (usually time period + century; i.e.: “Temps Modernes, 18e s.”)
* main topic (i.e.: “Histoire des routes et voies ferrées”, “Histoire sociale”, “Histoire industrielle”).

All of these data are also included in the key words, which makes navigation through the different themes easier.

The initial target of 500 maps should be reached by the end of 2016 and put online shortly thereafter.