



# ICHC 2015 in Antwerp – An After Action Report

By Bert Johnson, et al.

There were 24 Washington Map Society (WMS) members among the 239 registrants at the 26<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the History of Cartography (ICHC). This includes three persons who joined during the conference. The event was held at the Aula (Theatre) Rector Dhanis, University of Antwerp, Belgium, from 12 through 17 July 2015. Fourteen WMS members traveled from the United States, three from the United Kingdom, three from the Netherlands, and one each one from Austria, Canada, Croatia, and France. One made opening remarks; four gave papers; four chaired sessions; one moderated a panel discussion. Fifteen members shared their experiences for this report.<sup>1</sup>

Conferees from 34 nations attended this ICHC. As often happens, the bulk of the conferees came from the host nation: Belgium (42), the US (42), the UK (23), the Netherlands (19), and Germany (12). Most other attendees were European or East Asian, but some came from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South America.

The organizers of ICHC 2015 were the City of Antwerp, University of Antwerp, and Imago Mundi (IM) Ltd. Joost Depuydt, Curator of Special Collections in the FelixArchief, was conference director, and Thomas Vervaet, Communications Officer of the FelixArchief, was conference secretary. The FelixArchief (phay'-lix ar-keef) is the archive of the City of Antwerp. Sponsors included KBC Bank, Acmis Group, Pictura, and Sanderus Antiquariaat. Other Belgian sponsors included AGIV (Ghent), Ahlers nv (Antwerp), Aquaterra (Ghent), Brussels Map Circle, Brepols Publishers (Turnhout) and Henri Godts Antiquarian Bookseller (Brussels). Dutch sponsors included Antiquariaat Plantijn (Breda) and Boekrestauratie De Valk (Middleburg).

The strongest impression ICHC 2015 made on participants was the excellence of event planning and execution. **Ron Grim:** *The conference events and program were well organized. Everything seemed to run smoothly and on time.* **Cyrus Alai:** *[It] was well organized, and well run...satisfying in every respect.* **Hal Meinheit:** *I was especially*

*impressed by the very broad support provided by the city... which seemed to reflect [its] pride in its historic role in 16<sup>th</sup>-century cartography and printing/publishing.* **Kris Butler:** *I had [seen] Antwerp before, but not like this. [It] was beautifully showcased.* A special word of praise must go to Joost and his team for the incredible detail in which this was planned and executed. They set a high standard, and passed with colors flying.

Asked to name the one aspect of the conference they enjoyed most, there was a greater diversity of opinion, but the personal contact with like-minded people figured heavily, as always. **Anonymous:** *The social aspect—meeting old friends, and making new ones...not just the fun, but... good solid conversations about...the broad field of the history of cartography.* **Tom Sander:** *Hard factor to identify. I will narrow it to interaction with the full range of people—the organizers, the presenters, and the audience. It is the people that make these events, and especially this ICHC, so special.* Many also mentioned the host city. **Bill Ginsburg:** *Single best aspect: Antwerp!*

The opening ceremony, held at the Antwerp Music Center, a former monastery, got high marks: **Cyrus Alai:** *I enjoyed the opening ceremony very much. The venue, the professional presenter, the music, the chorus—in short, everything.* **Ron Grim:** *I liked the opening ceremony the best...the integration of music and visuals...explanation of...conference themes was particularly good.* **Bert Johnson:** *The narrator did a great job...cogent remarks but not long-winded...setting was first rate...highlight was Clari Cantus, the choral group.*

The conference themes continued an innovation from ICHC 25—broad, ethereal concepts with highly diverse topics in each: *Theatre of the World in Four Dimensions—Space, Time, Imagination, and Spectacle.* Space, for example, included urban maps, maritime maps, exploration maps, and atlas production. The obligatory ICHC category of “any other facets of the history of cartography” was included as a fifth dimension—*Variety.* A few persons found the theme(s) confusing but said this had little impact on the event.

The program offered 68 papers in 21 sessions of three or four papers, the largest number in over a decade. Each session had a broad theme. Some themes were fairly specific, whereas others were less so. Six presentations were in special sessions (“Mapping the Malleable” and “Medieval European, Asian and Islamic Cartography”). Six were slightly shorter presentations in the context of panel discussions (“Unlocking the Treasure-Houses of Map Collections” and “Bound Images: Maps and Books since 1453”).

We asked WMS conferees to name up to twelve favorite papers or posters, and 14 persons cast a total of 98 votes. Eleven nominated Chet Van Duzer’s paper *Let There be Multispectral Light: Imaging the ca. 1491 World Map by Henricus Martellus at Yale* as outstanding; some called it the best paper of the conference. This strong showing reflects the importance of the technology discussed, excitement over hidden map inscriptions already disclosed, and, said **Evelyn Edson**, *great images of the technical process*. Eight persons named Catherine Dunlop’s *Mapping Alsace-Lorraine: A Story of Cartographic Exchange between France and Germany*. This is the third consecutive ICHC in which WMS members have cited a Dunlop paper. Eight votes went to Tom Harper’s *Institutional Collection of Early Maps During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Isabella Alexander, a law professor from Australia, received seven votes for *Entering Uncharted Waters: Maritime Charts and Copyright Law in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Britain*. Several persons cited this as a new area they want to learn more about. **Bert Johnson**: *Fascinating—which I had not expected*. Linda Rui Feng received seven nods for *What the Map Readers Saw: Writing and Cartography in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE)*. Two papers received six votes each: Diana Lange for *Mapping Tibet in mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century: The British Library’s Wise Collection*; and Madalina Veres for *An Untraceable Border: Cartographic Projects During Habsburg-Parmesa Negotiations (1750–1790)*. Receiving four votes each were Mirela Altic for *Dalmatia and the Southern Ottoman Borderland in the Eyes of Jan Janssonius*, and Stephen Hornsby for *Picturing the World: American Pictorial Maps (1920–1970)*. These nine papers accounted for 67 of the 114 votes cast (59%). Seventeen more papers received two or three votes. Clearly the power session was *Session 6, Borders and Frontiers*, chaired by Petra Svatek, which contained the papers of Dunlop, Veres, and Altic. **Hal Meinheit (retired US diplomat)**: *“I found Session 6 especially interesting as [it] linked geopolitics, diplomacy and cartography.”*

Exhibits and receptions, closely linked in past ICHCs, were handled differently this time. After the opening

ceremony and first paper session, conferees were taken through the old quarter to the Museum aan de Stroom (Museum on the River), better known as MAS. Conferees viewed a world class exhibit titled *The World in a Mirror*, tracing the Western view of the world as it grew from antiquity to the present. It was an ambitious and outstanding exhibition, and was a high point for many conferees. **Tom Sander**: *What a treat! Arranged so well, with a clear written pamphlet to carry to explain the items...especially memorable was the wide variety of maps from so many different collections*. The exhibit was followed by a sumptuous “walking dinner” and drinks on the glass enclosed tenth floor, with views of the city all around and an open air terrace one floor up. The next night brought a wonderful reception at Antwerp Town Hall. The Renaissance landmark is an attraction in its own right, and a reception in its ornate main hall even more so. The heraldry and paintings (inc. a larger than life Mercator) dazzle the visitor. The deputy mayor for tourism gave an interesting welcome and then it was time for more eat and drink. Many WMS conferees ranked this among the highlights of their visit. **Kris Butler**: *The reception at Antwerp City Hall was special for its warm welcome and hidden stash of beer, kicking off the usual love fest of collegial imbibing that makes all of the events even better*.

There were five additional exhibits of varying scale and complexity. The one which drew the most interest was *View of the City* at the Plantin-Moretus Museum, a Renaissance printing house and home. It showcased maps of Antwerp from the tumultuous 16<sup>th</sup> century. Seeing the city so many ways illuminated changes in both the city and the cartography which portrayed it. *Ortelius Under the Spell of Antiquity* at the Royal Art Museum at the Rockoxhuis highlighted his personal interest in history and disclosed the way certain events were regarded or understood in his day. *The Seven Seas* at the Hendrik Conscience Library focused on maritime charts and atlases. Smaller than the other two, it had the most sumptuous setting in its Nottebohm Room, famous for its beauty. **Tom Sander**: *I found all useful and interesting, and each was so different, and each setting was so wonderful*. There was also a mini-exhibit at the FelixArchief which featured five attractive panels of surveying maps. The Archief also collaborated with Antwerp University to produce an on-line exhibit about the first International Geographical Conference, which took place in Antwerp in 1871. It can be found at <http://kaga.anet.be/omeka/geographical-initiatives-in-antwerp>.

Other Notes: Repeated praise for the conference book. **Hal Meinheit**: *...very well done...good abstracts of...the*

*papers and photos and bios of the presenters...the exhibits and posters...beautifully packaged. ...a tremendous amount of attention and hard work went into the book. Lavish praise for a surprise last minute treat: Matthew Edney: Free lunch! John Docktor: The quality of the meals...was excellent. Fay Huidekoper:...the fact that we all came together for lunch...gave more time for contact...the greater opportunity...contributed to the very pleasant atmosphere. The farewell dinner at the Archief was most enjoyable and the Saturday post tour to the Mercator Museum in Sint Nicklaas and the University Library in Leuven was very well done. The disbound Lafreri atlas at the Mercator Museum was "especially interesting," "incredible!" "spectacular!"*

There were aspects which could be improved. The volume of papers (15–20% more than most ICHCs) was too large to fit comfortably into five and a half days. This overload was widely discussed, but opinion was divided between a need for split sessions or a reduction in papers. Some also felt some session chairs should have taken a stronger hand with some presenters. A great concern was the number of speakers who were difficult to understand. Some non-English speakers' accents could not be understood; this could be partly offset by good organization and graphics. There was less patience with fluent, even native, English speakers who organized material poorly, rushed their delivery, had no idea if they were being understood, and did not seem to care. Many—not all—were younger, less experienced speakers who apparently ignored both written guidance for papers and on-scene instruction regarding the audio visual capability of a fine lecture hall. This problem has always existed, but it seemed more acute at ICHC 26—a shame, given the excellence of the organization and execution of the event.

At the closing, the conferees expressed heartfelt gratitude to Joost Depuydt and his team, who had produced a truly amazing week. It was then time to consider the future. ICHC 2017 will venture to South America for the first time: Belo Horizonte, Brazil's sixth largest city. Junia Furtado, professor at the *Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*, is the secretary. Just south of the Equator it will be tropical winter, with temperatures of 55–75 degrees. Furtado showed pictures of flowers in bloom which her daughter had sent her that day to underscore this. More information will be forthcoming in *The Portolan*.

**What WMS Members Contributed: Remarks during Opening Session:** Matthew Edney – *Role of J.B. Harley Fellowships*; **Papers:** Mirela Altić – *Dalmatia and the Southern*

*Ottoman Borderland in the Eyes of Jan Janssonius*; Imre Demhard – *Re-discovering the Arctic: Cartographic Treasure Troves: 19<sup>th</sup>-Century German Geographic Journals*; Daniel Shelley – *A Study of Andrés de Morales' Map of Hispaniola of 1509 and the Origins of New World Cartography*; Petra Svatek – *Nature Paintings and Thematic Cartography: Early Panoramic Maps in Austria (1848–1884)*. **Session Chairs:** Mirela Altić – *Session 20: Cartographic Forms and Shapes*; Matthew Edney – *Session 12: Mapping the Malleable*; Evelyn Edson – *Session 17: Mapping between Science and Imagination*; Petra Svatek – *Session 6: Borders and Frontiers*; **Panel Moderator:** Matthew Edney – *Session 18: Bound Images: Maps and Books since 1453*; (names listed alphabetically within categories).

**What Interested WMS Members: Most Interesting Paper (11 votes):** Chet Van Duzer. **Very Interesting Papers (7–8 votes):** Isabella Alexander; Catherine Dunlop; Linda Rui Feng; Tom Harper. **Interesting Papers (4–6 votes)** Mirela Altić; Stephen Hornsby; Diana Lange; Madaline Veres. **Papers Noted (2–3 votes):** Catherine Burdick; Mario Cams; Marian Coman; Karen De Koene; Maika De Keyser; Sjoerd De Meer; Imre Demhardt; Cornelia Dreer; Maria Gussarsson; Markus Heinz; Thomas Horst; Katarina Kosonen; G. Salim Mohammed; Mark Monmonier; Benjamin Sacks; Zef Segal; Barbara Uppenkamp. (see text for details of first three categories; names listed alphabetically within categories).

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—Bert Johnson has compiled reports on the last ten ICHCs. Photos by Tom Sander, Bert Johnson and Kris Butler.

## ENDNOTE

- 1 Listed attendees were Cyrus Alai\*, Kris Butler\*, Ed Dahl\*, Catherine Delano-Smith, Imre Demhardt, John Docktor\*, Matthew Edney\*, Evelyn Edson\*, Bill Ginsberg\*, Ron Grim\*, Fay Huidekoper\*, Bert Johnson\*, Christophe Klein, Hans Kok, Hal Meinheit\*, Ken Nebenzahl, Ljiljana Ortolja-Baird\*, Jeremy Pool\*, Tom Sander\*, Petra Svatek, and Marcel van den Broeke. Mirela Altić, Jay Reinfeld, Dan Shelley were recruited at the conference. Asterisk indicates those who shared their views for this article; not all are identified and/or cited by name. WMS members constituted 10% of the total attendance. Space limitations precluded the use of many of the useful observations submitted; some will be submitted to IM by letter.





**Figure 1.** *World in a Mirror* exhibit at the Museum aan de Stroom.



**Figure 2.** Food, drink, and spectacular views of Antwerp at the "walking dinner" on the top floor of Museum aan de Stroom.



**Figure 3.** Welcome Reception by the City of Antwerp at Town Hall.



**Figure 5.** Lunch break.



**Figure 4.** WMS members Hal Meinheit (L) and John Docktor (R) with new member Dr. Mirela Altic, University of Zagreb.



**Figure 6.** WMS member Cyrus Alai (R) talks with Mark Monmonier, well known author and editor of Volume Six of the *History of Cartography*.



**Figure 8.** Huge four sided city display in Antwerp's main shopping precinct promotes exhibits staged in support of ICHC 26.



**Figure 7.** Lunch on the university green.



**Figure 9.** Over a century of WMS experience at the table: L to R: Tom Sander, Bert Johnson, Cyrus Alai, Dan Shelley, John Docktor, and Hans Kok.



**Figure 10.** Joost Depuydt.