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van Schaik, A.-R.

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Thesis in Progress

Story Mapping in the Dutch Republic (c.1600–1700)

'Story mapping,' which combines narrative and spatial information to tell a story about current or historical events, flourished in Europe in the early modern period, as cartography became accessible to a broader public and the printing press enabled a rich news and media culture.[1] Story maps circulated as loose broadsheets, pamphlets, book illustrations, drawings, paintings, medals, and in other formats. The Dutch Republic was the largest seventeenth-century production centre of these story maps. There, numerous competing mapmakers produced works that were widely copied abroad. Warfare and conflict, in particular, generated a strong demand for cartographic representations of events, especially during the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648), when the Protestant Dutch overthrew their Catholic Habsburg rulers as they expanded imperial and colonial ventures overseas. This thesis addresses both the tools and techniques which mapmakers employed to combine narratives with maps, and the reasons why cartography was the preferred medium for telling these stories.

Despite their widespread dissemination and use, early story maps remain highly underexplored. Existing research is mostly limited to isolated case studies or specific corpora and rarely adopts an interdisciplinary approach.[2] By contrast, I propose a new narratological approach to analyse the intertwined textual, cartographic, and visual elements of story maps, through five key aspects—place, time, characters, actions/events, and resolution—which receive treatment in separate chapters. The dissertation shows how mapmakers drew on the classical Aristotelian three-act narrative structure (Act 1: Set-up; Act 2: Conflict, and Act 3: Resolution) in their story maps.

The results this method produces are illustrated here through consideration of all five aspects in a 1604 news and commemorative map from the Eighty Years' War (Fig. 1) by mapmaker Floris Balthasarszoon van Berckenrode, who joined stadtholder Maurice of Orange's campaign against Sluis. Floris Balthasar accompanied the military, producing sketches of the landscapes and the events, as well as depictions of the commander, troop movements, naval arrivals, and skirmishes. The resulting print, published months after the events, enables viewers to trace Maurice's campaign from his arrival to the siege of Sluis and immerses them in the events. Floris Balthasar presented the map to the States General, the governing body of the Republic, which approved the mapped narrative and responded with generous payments.

Geographic place (Aspect 1) is a given factor in cartography but, in story maps, place is determined by the narrative being told. Floris Balthasar did not simply map terrain but visualised the sequence of advances and battles leading up to the siege, thereby emphasising Dutch dominance over the wider region. The town of Sluis itself covers a relatively small area at the centre of the image, while above it, from left to right, are depicted the captures of IJzendijke, Aardenburg, and Middelburg.

Time (Aspect 2), essential to storytelling, appears in the map's careful conveyance of temporal sequence in text and image.[3] The title refers to the beginning of events on 24 April 1604, when the fleet arrived at Cadzand. Textual labels on the map, together with the map's index and explanatory text, indicate key dates, such as 'the route to Aardenburg on 12 May' at the top and 'His Excellency's order of battle when he defeated the enemy on 16 May,' beside

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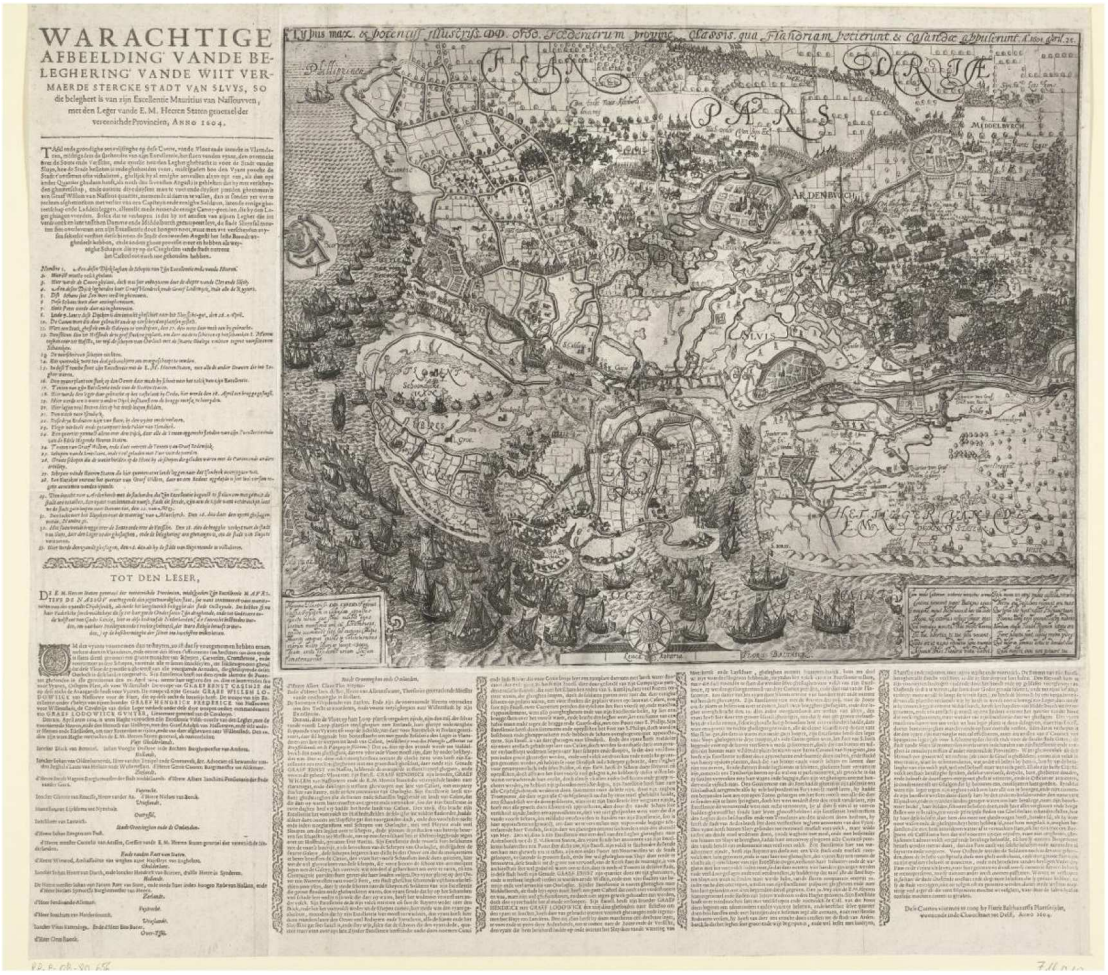

Fig 1. Floris Balthasarszoon van Berckenrode, *Siege of Sluis,* 1604. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (RP-P-OB-80.656).

the skirmish at the bottom right. These labels encourage viewers to read the actions in chronological order. Puffs of smoke and lines of movement further suggest movement, reinforcing the map's temporal and dynamic character.

Every story has characters (Aspect 3). Floris Balthasar's map shows these characters through the movement of humans (and non-human animals as well). Maurice of Orange, the principal protagonist, appears in three different locations: at the large skirmish near Sluis, along the route to Aardenburg at the top, and at his army camp just below Sluis. As a political rather than military actor, 'the States General of the United Provinces that invaded Flanders' appears in the accompanying text as a list of deputies. Their sponsorship of the map explains their representation here as the masterminds of the operation. On land and at sea, the States' cavalry, infantry, and fleet dominate the mostly anonymous 'enemy' troops.

The actions (Aspect 4) performed by the characters range from the capture of forts to confrontations in the field. The viewer's eye is guided along locations where action unfolds: from the fleet's landing at Cadzand (bottom left), through the captures of IJzendijke, Aardenburg, and Middelburg, along an S-shaped route that culminates in the encirclement of Sluis (middle right). Almost like a comic strip, Floris Balthasar presents Maurice's campaign as a narrative path across space and time. The final action depicted is a failed enemy relief attempt on 7 August (lower right). This episode hints at, but does not explicitly show, the ultimate resolution of the narrative (Aspect 5): the capture of Sluis by the States' army. In deliberately withholding closure, Floris Balthasar expresses, in the text, the hope that Ostend will soon be relieved

—the siege of Sluis was a strategic diversion, intended to draw the Spanish army away from Ostend. By leaving the larger story open, he created demand for a second state of the map, which completed the story with the capture of Sluis and generated additional profits when published later.[4]

Floris Balthasar's map exemplifies all aspects of a map narrative and, like other story maps, was intended to actively shape public opinion of current events. His propagandistic publication highlighted Dutch victories, silenced losses such as the siege of Ostend, and reinforced the authority of the States General and stadtholder Maurice. Distributed to foreign dignitaries and sold on the map and print market, such story maps commemorated the triumphs in private and public space across the Republic and beyond. Story maps shaped perceptions of contested places and the histories attached to them. This project sheds new light on the dynamic interplay between maps, storytelling, and memory in early modern Europe, revealing how cartography shaped —and shapes—our view of history.

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Anne-Rieke van Schaik
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9348-4849
University of Amsterdam
Cartographiae Historicae Cathedra (CHC) Foundation

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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