

Maps as text: words through images and images through words

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Maps, both in written texts and in images, are not a mirror, but a window to how different conceptions of space in the past can be met. I agree with Harley's (2001) definition of the map as text, but I also think that he does not include in his study texts that are actually maps, which may give further insight into concepts of space and understanding of townscapes in the past. I would like to discuss in this essay how can we deconstruct both visual and textual maps, comparing the information that can be provided by each kind of document. For this, I would like to compare different textual sources of mapping, mainly the testimonies concerning the hanging of William Cragh for medieval Swansea but also Lucian's *De Laude Cestrie* and Bradshaw's *Life of St Werburge*, for medieval Chester, considering also modern and actual visual maps.

Maps are texts, with their own language of symbols and a world of conscious or unconscious but always choices of a signifying consciousness (Barthes, 1973: 110) which create a language. These may be silences, alterations or a hierarchization (Harley, 1988), and understanding their nature is an essential part to understand these documents not as representations of facts, but as the manifestations of a cosmology of the world or a particular way of approaching space, useful for knowing the past, but also to see that even if nowadays we see maps as 'objective', we are after all highlighting some points, omitting others and, even when attempting a totalizing view (De Certeau, 1984: 95), objectivity and totality is never possible.

We do not have visual mappings during the Middle Ages both for Swansea and Chester, and our first images come from the Modern Ages, some of which have proven essential for the elaboration of digital mappings of medieval townscapes (Lilley, 2011). I will not state here an evolution of cartography, but I want to emphasize that, even if we do not have visual town maps for the Middle Ages, we should not just transfer our understanding of townscapes to the past, and we should seek to complete these digital mappings with information that other types of mapping can provide us: the texts.

In the testimonies for the hanging of William Cragh we can read how different characters from different socioeconomic backgrounds move through space and how they refer to it. There are many lectures that can be given to these texts, from the gendered spacing that lady Mary lives to the trails that the characters would have taken according to their testimonies. We have, of course, to take into account that what we read is a text that has been mediated by memory, interrogators and scribes, and there are limitations as to what we can trust.

The texts of Bradshaw and Lucian, even if more elaborate and direct, obey a much clearer objective of the author (Lilley, 2011: 36). Lucian's symbolic interpretation of Chester is a clear tool for praising the religious quality of the town (Faulkner, 2011: 82), and Bradshaw's trajectory through the history of Chester as linked with Saint Werburge, is equally loaded with acclamations for its glory (Book II, III, 414-420):

*Of frutes and cornes there is great habundaunce,
Woddes / parkes / forestes / and beestis of venare*

*Pastures / feeldes / commons / the cite to auaunce,
Waters / pooles / pondes of fysshe great plente;
Most swete holsome ayre by the water of dee:
There is great marchaundise / shyps and wynes strang,
With all thing of pleasure the citezens amonge.*

We must take into account thus the different backgrounds of the texts. The intentionality is more blatant in the Chester texts, even more when we compare these visions with Welsh accounts for medieval Chester; the intentionality behind the testimonies for the hanging of William Cragh is more sly, yet more complex, as we have not only the intentions of who gave the testimony, but also those of who asked the questions and of who wrote down the notes, apart from the ones of the person who translated the notes into a well-organised text.

We also have to take into account not only the intentions of the map-maker, but also of those who would read the map, both the intended imagined reader—for example Webb's walk through the walls of Chester constructed as a guide (Clarke, 2011: 4)—and unexpected readers who may have added something to the interpretation of the map. The idea of who will see the work conditions the maker on what to select, what to make clearer and what to omit (Harley, 2001: 44). Lucian's text is aimed towards a religious reading, making more place to metaphors and symbolism that draws directly from the Bible in a moral sense (Lilley, 2011: 36). When read outside of the monastery where the text was supposed to remain, by people without the formative background the author presumed, part of the meaning is lost. On the other hand, we have more 'flat' texts in the testimonies for the hanging of William Cragh, lacking any metaphor and being supposedly objective. However, Derrida has shown how even supposedly literal levels are intensively metaphorical (Hoy, 1985: 44). Even in these texts, the witnesses are trying to exert their power, however small it might be, while the scribes are also enacting their own intentions. This type of text would be read just by the tribunal, yet it was processed by many agents. We have not one author, and the authors are not even the people who testified, but the person who read the notes of the transcript and made a neat text out of them. This complexity does not make the text less useful for interpretation, but it does make it more indirect.

Another aspect regarding space, visible in the testimonies concerning the hanging of William Cragh, is the positioning of the person. Every location is positioned in relation to a 'monument', for example the gibbet is always located in relation to the town walls, and the house of Thomas Matthews 'near the church of St. Matthews'—or even in the case of John ap Hywel's declaration, near the church of St. Mary's—. Places are located in relation to the castle, a church, or the walls. Even if the streets had names, they were not important, or at least not as important. Even in visual mappings it is rare to see the streets represented before 1500 (Smail, 2000: 2) Also, they never explain the route they took for moving, creating various possibilities for us to map.

This would have had its parallel in early modern visual maps, when even if they adopted a bird's eye view or a perspective one, they highlighted certain points by making them look bigger in the map (Hindle, 1998: 55). This was not a matter of inaccuracy (Edson, 1997: 13), but it was a result of the structuring of geography according to beliefs of how the world should be (Cosgrove, 1984: 8). In William Smith's (1588) map of Chester, the main thoroughfares were presented as wider and more

straight, the houses of peasants diminished and the walls, the castle and religious buildings made bigger. They are, in fact, representing the transition between a feudal world and the 'rational' modern world that tries to bring space discipline in the lives of people and the understanding of towns "just as the clock brought time discipline" (Harley, 1988: 285).

The most modern digital mappings, or the maps from the 19th century worried with 'accuracy' (Harley, 1989) are also a reflect of the values of Western society, worried about rationality, measurements and, above all, representing things 'as they are' without making some buildings stand out more as before, according to democratic ideas. However, these do not show "the city itself" (Gottdiener and Lagopoulos, 1986: 11), there is still a hierarchization present, for example at the symbols (Harley, 2001: 163) used to make a distinction between town and city. There are no fundamental laws of cartography that are immutable (Wood and Fels, 1986: 71), and even if maps nowadays adopt mathematical terms and measurements, there are still intentions, not always conscious, behind producing a map.

For Swansea we see a much more fragmented townscape that what we could see by simply looking into the digital mapping. The bird's eye view of maps from the 16th century (Hindle, 1989: 54) gives us a false totalizing idea of the city, combining into a total the space of the city —much like De Certeau's (1984: 92) account of being lifted to the top of the World Trade Center— seeing everything and, at the same time, missing many others. But we could easily take the differences between each witness interrogated and see that their ways of moving through the space and defining it are varied. The nature of this text, since it is assorted with different views about what should be the same, makes it a very interesting opportunity for study.

For example, we can make a distinction between the spaces transited by each witness and their ethnic and linguistic background. We can easily see a pattern of association between language and space. For example, French (fig. 1) is associated with the castle, the family of the lord, his chapelan and steward, and a priest; English (fig. 2) is spoken by labourers that lived in the town; Welsh (fig. 3) appears in places outside the normative space of the town walls: in the dungeons and the marketplace outside, from where John ap Hywel —who testified in English but was Welsh— saw the hangings. Regarding this, even some references of the text make clear that, even if we now see a map of a town and we might consider it an homogeneous total, deeply interconnected, we must see two clear different spaces: the town and the castle.

And then the witness [William de Briouze junior] himself with other members of his father's household and his [own] men descended from the said castle, went down to the said town adjoining the castle itself, and he saw the aforesaid William who was hanged, and he discovered him in the house of the said burgess (Webster, 2013: 11)

The fact that the lord's son "descended" from the castle to the town is stated as almost a ceremonial act. This is an example of how texts are important to complete the vision of medieval towns that we get through digital mappings. The other space that is regarded as apart from the town is what, in fact, is outside the town walls. In the case of the Swansea texts, the house of Thomas Matthews is regarded as part of the town, even if it was supposed to be near Saint Matthew's church —most probably in the burgages north of the town walls—. However, this is quite different in the Chester texts. Both Lucian and Bradshaw admire the strength of the walls of Chester and its antiquity,

and both marginalize the suburbs (Lilley, 2011: 37). The exclusion in the latter case does not meet with the inclusion of the former, and this may have two reasons. First, is the matter of the intentionality of the text and the people working the texts: Bradshaw and Lucian are writing a praise of a 'perfect' town whose character is reflected in the walls: strong, ancient, civilised and regular. Anything that falls out of it would just ruin the metaphor, and the author is just taking a license. The second possibility is that it is not a matter of literary construction, but the differentiation in the case of Chester derives from individual circumstances: the strong and ancient walls of Chester would have nothing to do with the smaller walls of Swansea. Swansea's defences were stronger in the castle as part of a colonialist dominance on the Welsh Marches (Davies, 1974), whereas Chester's walls were intended to protect not only the lord, but also the local population living on the frontier with Wales. Both physically and symbolically, Chester's walls are more of a division than Swansea's. While the first stands out like a 'fortress', and the castle does not appear in the texts as a separate part of town, though it was clearly a differentiated space; in the case of Swansea the cut is made from the castle. Even in the testimony of John ap Hywel, though the marketplace where he stood was outside the town walls according to modern digital maps, it is mentioned in the text as "*the square in the town of Swansea near the church of Saint Mary*". The outer walls are not a source for exclusion, at least conceptually, though there would have been economic and judicial differences —markets standing outside the walls were often associated with a Welsh background— living inside the town walls. These spaces imply a process of signification (Lefebvre, 1991)

By just regarding the modern map, we would consider that the town walls created a dichotomy, which might be true for the case of Chester, yet I want to sustain here that it is not so for Swansea. By taking into account the texts, we can see that the division in Swansea would have been castle-town, while in Chester it was a matter of urban-suburban. We see there is no straightforward vision of space. Even in two frontier contexts, we have power manifesting itself in different ways, which can be better seen when taking into account mappings, both textual and visual, that by our modern standards would be regarded as 'inaccurate'. Swansea was a garrison town in a frontier region, visible in its first charter in the second half of the 12th century (Robinson, 1978: 264), yet it had a different evolution than that of Chester. By the time of the testimonies for the hanging, lord William de Briouze junior was having problems with insurgents in his territories. He had given away whole manors and even mortgaged a tower of the castle of Swansea (Davies, 1978: 100). By 1306 King Edward I had to intervene and grant a charter to both the tenants of 'The English County of Gower' and the burgesses of Swansea (Dimmock, 2012: 123). Even if the population in the town of Swansea was predominantly English (Davies, 1978: 327), as I have tried to show through the textual mappings, we have to see this charter as liberties forced from the lord by both English and Welsh (Smith, 2012: 23). On the other hand we have Chester, a frontier town which stands on English territory and in which textual mappings draw constantly from past conflicts against the Welsh. What we have to see is that identity in the Middle Ages was multifaceted, even within the same geographical area, and this predominancy of one or another type of identity is subject to idiosyncrasies that may vary through time. These particular conceptions of symbols, such as the walls or the castle, and the significance drawn into them, can only be seen by analysing the rhetoric of space both in text, and images —which are, after all, a form of text—.

I am not saying, of course, that modern mappings are inaccurate or useless, as they are a vital both to help locating archaeological sites and to understand the development of urban space during the Middle Ages. However, these should not be the only tool used for this last task. Digital mappings to reconstruct past townscapes should be a device to help both investigation and conveying ideas to the public, as they are, we must not forget, models that simplify a complex reality to help understanding it.

There is no description without performance (Harley, 2001: 163), and so we need to complete the mappings that suit our understanding of space with what visual and textual mappings of the past let us see of their own concepts of space and landscape. Both text and images have their own rhetoric, which, have to be met in different ways, as to give complementary information that cannot be fully understood if we approach maps with a narrow mind, considering just images or texts. In this paper I have tried to show this by a particular example, comparing how, within the conflict between Welsh and English, there were other identities in play and how the preference for one or another would have different reflections in the representation of space in the mind both of the map-makers and the map-readers.

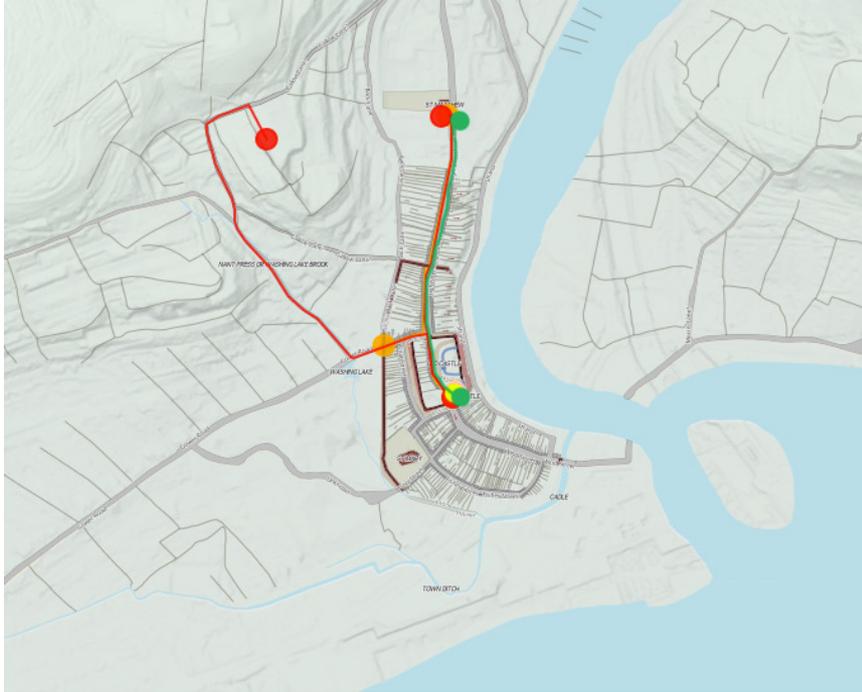


Figure 1: Routes of the different witnesses that knew French. Lady Mary de Briouze (pink), William de Briouze junior (green), William of Codineston (yellow), Thomas Marshall (orange) and John of Baggeham (red). Map provided by <http://medswan-stg.dighum.kcl.ac.uk/en/map>.

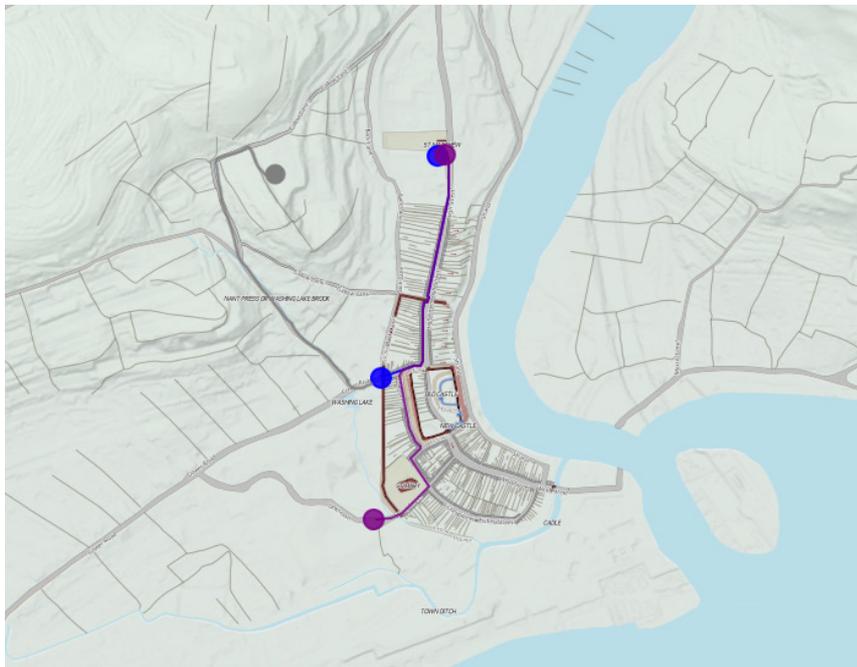


Figure 2: Routes of the different witnesses that testified in English: Henry Skinner (grey), Adam of Loughor (blue) and John ap Hywel (purple). Henry Skinner said he returned to his house, having said before he lived in the town. Map provided by <http://medswan-stg.dighum.kcl.ac.uk/en/map>.

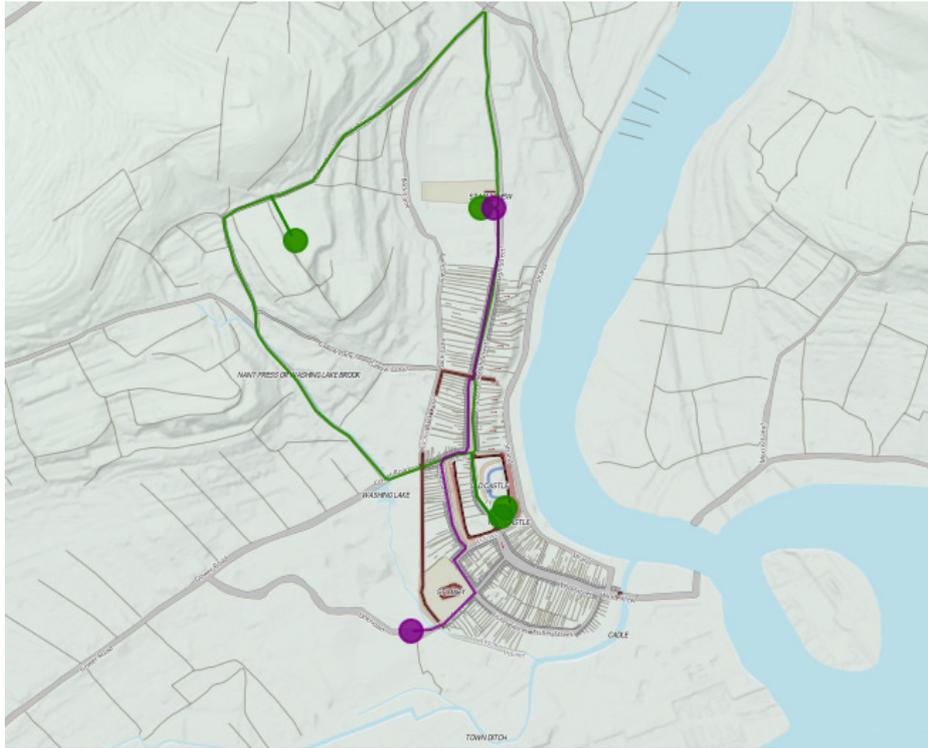


Figure 3: Route of William Cragh (green), the only witness who testified in Welsh, and Adam of Loughor (purple) who testified in English but had Welsh background. Map provided by <http://medswan-stg.dighum.kcl.ac.uk/en/map>.

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