

A New Historical Atlas of the Low Countries (ca. 1350-1795) **Rombert Stapel, International Institute of Social History**

A hundred years have passed since the publication of the first volume of the *Geschiedkundige Atlas van Nederland* [Historical Atlas of the Netherlands] under supervision of Anton Beekman et al. In total, it encompassed 30 descriptive volumes and countless maps of the Netherlands and its colonies, from the Roman times to the nineteenth century. With the advent of the computer, techniques to create and analyse maps have developed rapidly, and increasingly are attracting the interest of humanities scholars as well. In contrast to printed maps, digital GIS maps allow the user to easily combine different maps or information layers and analyse these more thoroughly. Though this has led to many interesting spatial humanities projects, for the Netherlands most notably the [HISGIS.nl project](#) which aims at creating a national atlas of buildings and plots of land using early cadastral maps, the maps by Beekman et al. are yet to be surpassed as the principal source for historical boundaries in the Netherlands.

This paper will concern the process of creating a new, digital GIS map of historical boundaries of cities, parishes, *heerlijkheden*, and other meaningful entities in the Medieval and Early Modern Low Countries. Such a process involves the selection of sources, including historical maps, the drawing of digital maps, and the creation of a data model for the maps and related historical statistics. As the project is expanding, issues such as data curation and data access need attention as well. The principal reason for creating these maps is the desire to be able to tie socioeconomic developments to specific geographic contexts. The map creates the conditions to geographically define historical statistics much more precise than before. Current emphasis in the project lies on linking the maps to all available Late Medieval surveys stating the number of hearths and/or houses in the various parts of the Low Countries. These surveys have also turned out to be a crucial element in the methodology for the creation of the GIS maps.

Currently, maps have been created for Holland, Utrecht, Guelders, Cleves (partially), Brabant, Ponthieu, Vermandois, Boulonnais, Artois, and various smaller areas. Maps of Flanders, Cambrésis, Tournaisis, Hainaut, Namur, Liège and Luxembourg are almost finished. The Duchy of Brabant is the first region that is fully implemented in the new spatial database structure.

The ultimate goal is a digital GIS map of historical boundaries, stretching from the north of France to the Waddenzee, which can be used for various historical research.

Legenda	
Northern Low Countries	
Buren	Henegouwen
Culemborg	Hertogenrade
Friesland	Kamerijk
Gelre	Dalhem
Groningen	Limburg
Gulik	Bouillon
Holland	Luxemburg
Kleef	Luik
Münster	Mechelen
Oost-Friesland	Namen
Utrecht	Picardië
Vianen	Amiëns
Zeeland	Eu
Horn	Ponteland
Thorn	Vermandland
	Stavelot
Southern Low Countries	
Artesië	Terwaan
Bonen	Valkenburg
Brabant	Vlaanderen
Doornik	Various small states
	Engeland

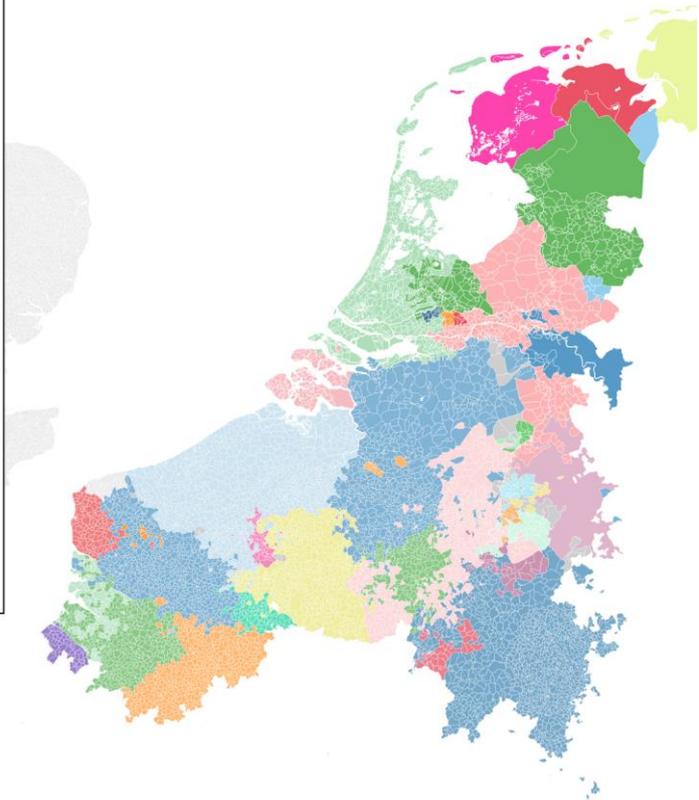


Figure 1. Current status of the atlas, showing the late medieval boundaries in the Low Countries.

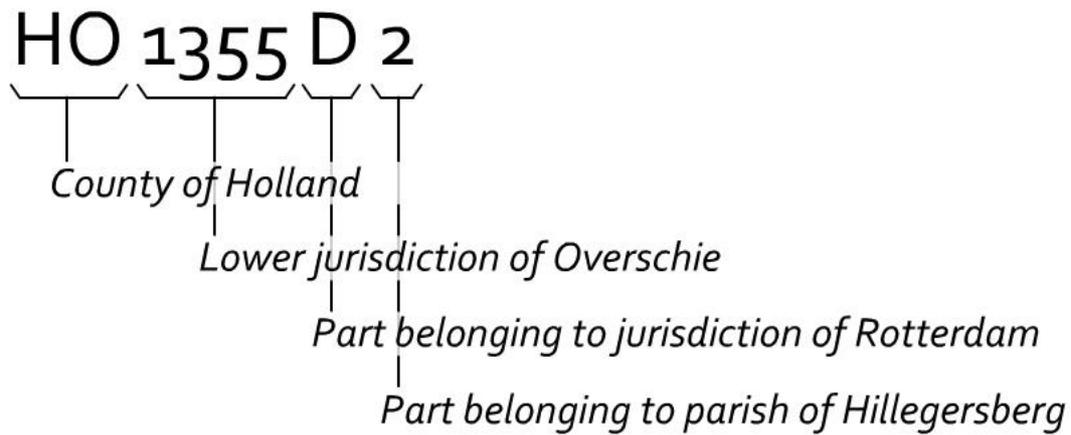


Figure 2. Example of the uniform polygon identifiers used in the spatial dataset.