

## Carte, potere e identità nazionale. Il *Leo Belgicus* come simbolo dell'indipendenza delle Province Unite

### *Maps, Power and National Identity. The Leo Belgicus as a Symbol of the Independence of the United Provinces*

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#### Riassunto

Durante l'ascesa delle Province Unite, tra il XVI e il XVII secolo, la realtà geografica olandese cominciò a essere rappresentata nella forma di un leone, da storici e cartografi. Quello che è conosciuto come *Leo Belgicus* ha simbolicamente rappresentato alcuni passaggi fondamentali della storia olandese nel suo "Secolo d'Oro", come metafora visuale di una identità nazionale in formazione, della lotta contro l'elemento acquatico, della rivolta contro la Spagna imperiale e, inoltre, come simbolo delle metafore di ricchezza acquisita proprio con l'indipendenza nazionale. Durante un periodo di studio ad Amsterdam per il dottorato di ricerca, ho avuto occasione di analizzare alcune mappe raffiguranti il *Leo Belgicus* (studiate solo parzialmente fino ad ora), dalle quali alcuni segni allegorici apparivano chiaramente: si è provato così a collegarli con l'evoluzione della storia olandese e con alcune immagini dell'identità nazionale che emersero in quel periodo "d'oro".

#### Parole chiave

Cartografia simbolica, Cartografia critica, Carte per l'identità nazionale, guerra d'indipendenza olandese, Secolo d'oro olandese

#### Abstract

*During the rise of the United Provinces, between XVI and XVII centuries, the geographical reality of the Netherlands started to be represented as a lion by historians and mapmakers. The so-called Leo Belgicus symbolically characterized some important steps of the Dutch history in its Golden Age, as a visual metaphor of a rising national identity, of the struggle against the water, of the revolt against the Imperial Spain and finally as collector of metaphors of the richness acquired with the national independence. During a period of study in Amsterdam, I was able to critically analyse some of the Leo Belgicus maps (only partially studied until now), from which some interesting allegoric elements clearly appeared: I tried to connect them with the evolution of Dutch history and with the image of a national identity which was emerging in that «Golden» period.*

#### Keywords

*Symbolic Cartography, Critical Cartography, Maps for National Identity, Dutch Independence War, Dutch Golden Age*

## 1. Introduction

Maps have often been a vehicle of power for European monarchs, especially during the Early modern period (Branch, 2014; Kagan and Schmidt, 2007), legitimating the power of national states forming – and then stabilized – in the political, economic and social European theatre (see Leti, 1690), particularly between the 16th and 17th centuries. Already in earlier times, the cartographic production coincided with an accurate image of the world with purposes from time to time different, but from the end of the Middle Ages the connections between cartographic representations and dynamics, intentions and political demands necessarily grew stronger. These relationships took place in the context of the birth of nation states, which – as such and by definition – exercised their power within a territory defined by specific boundaries and with a certain population. The combination of these latter elements – the territorial knowledge of the boundaries delimiting a power and the population on which this power was exercised – put geography and the production of maps at the centre of several dynamics of territorial conquests and national claims (see Salvatori, Ricci, 2015; Raffestin, 2012; Buisseret, 1992). As David Buisseret rightly pointed out at this purpose «the great expansion in mapping activity seems to go back to the later sixteenth century, when, particularly in England and the Low Countries, landowners began commissioning “estate plans” to help them manage their holdings» (Buisseret, 1992, p. 1).

Among these, it is emblematic the Dutch case in its cartographic (Sutton, 2015) – and not only – Golden Age (AA.VV., 2007) and the symbolism of the *Leo Belgicus*, connected with crucially important passages of Dutch history (von Zesen, 1660). Since not many studies have been conducted on these themes (see Tooley, 1963; van der Heijden, 2006), without giving a wide frame of the political, social and cultural contexts in which the *Leo Belgicus* maps have been produced, I propose a recognition of some examples of those maps, analyzing their historical, cultural and political significance, putting them in a new light, in relation to the history and development of the national identity.

The critical cartography – as in the studies of Harley – appears to be the best methodological approach to

connect the signs present in those maps to their original – both cultural and historical – messages. This study does not want to be only a philological reconstruction of the map, but aims at giving even a theoretical contribute to the critical reading of the maps, starting from a first example.

The *Leo Belgicus* is a zoomorphic cartographic representation that reproduces the geographical and political reality of the Netherlands, primarily between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as a lion. The goal was often to connect the requests for independence from the Spanish power with the entire geographic – and therefore social – reality of the Netherlands of the time. As noted by Kagan and Schmidt, «more forthrightly, the multiple versions of the famous *Leo Belgicus* maps announced the political arrival of the Dutch Republic in the form of a heraldic lion superimposed on the outlines of the seven now-liberated provinces of the north» (Kagan and Schmidt, 1992, p. 674) and, for his part, Ton Hoenselaars noted that «the phenomenon of the *Leo Belgicus* is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, it signals an early-modern nation, without natural borders on all sides, in an attempt to capture and visualize its territorial shape. Secondly, the *Leo Belgicus* that emerges demonstrably represents not only the nation, but an *image* of the nation» (Hoenselaars, 1993, p. 96). Three different typologies of cartographic representations of the *Leo Belgicus* were first identified by Tooley (1963) and then resumed, in a more recent itemized but quite exhaustive study by van der Heijden (2006): the first typology is the one proposed by Michael von Aitzing in 1583 and then repeated by many others, and sees the lion facing right; the second one, developed by Janzsoon-Visscher, shows the lion walking to the left; finally, there is the *Leo Hollandicus*, developed by Visscher in 1633, which represents the secessionist symbolic seal of the Republic of the United Provinces.

My first question – which have not yet been faced in detail in the existing literature – is: what kind of message is hidden in the analyzed maps? What society has produced those representations? Is there a strict connection with the politic dynamics of that time?

I will attempt to highlight the historical testimonies of some maps that I were able to examine in Amsterdam, particularly illustrative of the relationship be-

tween secessionist developments and geographical situation, with symbolic references that I will try to put in direct correlation with political dynamics, economic and commercial developments of the time and – where present – with religious references.

## 2. Birth and early development of the idea of Leo Belgicus

The idea of representing the Netherlands in the shape of a lion, as said above, came from Michael Atzinger called «the Austrian» (Michael Aitsingero Austriaco), at the end of the 16th century. Native from Obereitzing, born in 1530, von Aitzing was astronomer, geographer and scholar of languages and mathematics. After the academic studies carried out in Vienna, for about forty years he got closely in contact with the reality of the Netherlands, Holland and Northern France, traveling across them. In 1583 he composed a work (Aitzing, 1583), now available at the University of Amsterdam, of more than 520 pages, in which the Dutch history from 1509 to 1583 is told not only through words and tables describing the key moments, but also through very evocative engravings, very well summed up to the written part. In the updated reprint of two years later, a copy of which is present in the same University, the map with the *Leo Belgicus*<sup>1</sup> is included.

Why von Aitzing started this particular and very evocative depiction in a moment like that of 1583, in which the United Provinces had already moved the first but important steps towards the independence that they will finally reach with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648? Because, while maintaining a constant reference to the Spanish domination and to the emperor, utterly hailed in the introduction («cum privilegio caesareo»), in 1579 the seven northern Provinces of the Netherlands declared their independence, constituting a first hint of

the State then formalized with the Peace of Westphalia. This assimilation of the lion to the Dutch configuration is due to the amount of lions present in the coats of arms of the Netherlands provinces: of 17 provinces reported by von Aitzing in the 1585 map, 13 have coats of arms on which lions are depicted. As well outlined by Ralph Ehrenberg «apparently Aitzinger chose the lion motif because most of the provincial shields or coats of arms of the provinces depicted a lion» (Ehrenberg, 2006, p. 112).

The intention of the author, as explained in the introduction to the map in the upper right corner, is a historical and geographical neutral analysis, in order to give the reader as much as an objective, accurate and clear historical overview of the seventeen provinces of the Netherlands<sup>2</sup>, from 1559 to 1583 (in later editions, it will then be updated). In the introduction to the reader of the book, however, although openly declaring its catholicity, von Aitzing clarifies even better the terms and reasons of his choice: that is to put in close correlation – graphical and historical at the same time – the figure of the lion to the morphology and the borders of the Netherlands, while remaining in a field of substantial neutrality and impartiality with respect to partisan positions in favour of the Empire and of the anti-Spanish riots already triggered at that time in some Netherlands provinces. This is achieved by starting from the analysis of other great writers of the past and mentioning the statements of the most important men in some way related to «Belgium»: Atzinger quotes Lodovico Guicciardini who, in his *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi, altrimenti detti Germania Inferiore* (Guicciardini, 1567), spoke about the absence of fear of the lion, which fearlessly tackles all, proving how it «is the strongest among all the beasts»; he recalls the *Commentarii* of Julius Caesar (1547), in which it is stated that

1 In the image reported by van der Heijden (2006) there seems to be a typo, since at the date of my personal consultation – August 2013 – in the 1583 copy mentioned by him there is no map, while it is present in that of 1585. It might be stolen in these recent years (from 2006 to 2013) or, more likely, it could be an error of the author: from some almost unequivocal details, clearly observable in person, the map of 1583 that he cites seems to be in effect just the one of 1585.

2 «I promise that I will always be none other [than Catholic], by the grace of God, but Catholics shall not expect for this reason that in this book I want to infringe the men of a contrary religion (with those, enough happened from the fathers of the Council of Trent, and I don't want to be a theologian of my religion). The happy reader will be aware that I am undertaking just a topographic and historical description of the Belgian lion in the same book and in that way I accomplish it, and in the introduction of the map of the Lion, I promised to the reader that I will continue», von Aitzinger (1583), *lectorem prelatio* (translation of the author).



FIGURE 1 – The *Leo Belgicus* as seen in von Aitzing's *De Leone Belgico* (1583)

the Belgians are the strongest of all<sup>3</sup>; and finally he reports the statements of Charles V, who had thought of naming those regions as «the kingdom of lions»<sup>4</sup>. For

3 «I actually consider the sentence of the wise Solomon, who says that the lion does not have fear of anyone, but is the strongest of beasts; also from the commentaries of Julius Caesar I observe that the Belgians are the strongest of all: not without reason it seemed to me appropriate to apply to Belgium the shape of the lion», von Aitzinger (1583), *lectorem prefatio* (translation of the author).

4 «The Emperor Charles the Fifth of praiseworthy memory and name, once in the verge of paying homage to the Belgium with the high honours of the kingdom, decided that it should be named

this reason, and for the coincidence that sees a lion on almost every coats of arms of the Dutch provinces, as well as the morphological evidence of similarity with the animal, the author's choice fell on the symbol of the lion, which will become – precisely – the «*Leo Belgicus*»: every part of the «*Germania Inferior*», according to

the kingdom of lions; maybe that's why all or most of those provinces are indicated by lions. For this reason, as well as of first intuition, you may not only see the whole lower Germany in the form of an entire lion, but also the individual parts of regions, in the shape of the same lion; diligently elaborated» (*Idem*, translation of the author).



the Austrian, can be seen and interpreted as part of an organism, «limbs of the same lion», thanks to the ability of Frans Hogenberg, author of the first of these maps.

The aim was to remain faithful to facts and truth, perfectly integrating the history of that last few years, of that land and that people. The *Leo Belgicus* maps have represented, in this direction, a perfect example of integration of history and cartographic representation: they reproduced the Netherlands in the zoomorphic image of a lion, symbolizing the different and signifying steps of the construction of the national identity through the signs, the faces and attitudes that the lions assumed in the several considered maps.

In the case just considered, therefore, a coincidence of the element of the lion with secessionist ambitions or references to the revolt against the Spanish Empire is absent. This is clear both from the statements, already referred, of the absolute neutrality of the author, and from his open admission of Catholicism. The only point was to mention the brave nature of the Dutch, that will be a determining factor in the long war of the small regions against the Spanish Empire (see Israel, 1995). It was one of the bloodiest periods of the war, with the attempts of Philip II, through the action of the Duke of Parma, Alessandro Farnese and the Duke of Alba, Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, still remembered as a sort of monster, equated with the «boogie man» in the Dutch provinces (Kamen, 2004), to bring under its control the Southern regions, succeeding only at the cost of tens of thousands of dead<sup>5</sup> and about one hundred (maybe even one hundred and fifty) thousand emigrants from south to north, with a peak in 1587 (Israel, 1995, p. 308). In 1585, the year – perhaps not coincidentally – of the second edition of the *De Leone Belgico* by von Aitzing, Oldenbarnevelt became Pensionary of Holland, assuming a leading role that will be essential to achieve the independence of the seven Provinces of the North.

5 The only Antwerp went from 84000 inhabitants in 1583 to 55 thousand in 1585, after the siege, up to the 42 thousand of 1589, Israel (1995), p. 308.

### 3. The *Leo Belgicus* and the rise of the Netherlands

In the intermediate steps in the history of the symbol of *Leo Belgicus* it is possible to catch a glimpse of some interesting similarities with the history of the rising Republic and especially with the claims of freedom from imperial domination, until the last phase of this symbolism, which will be represented by the *Leo Hollandicus*, in a transformation not only nominal, but concerning the very spirit of the maps and their more intrinsic meaning. The second example of *Leo Belgicus* is also reported by von Aitzing, in another of his works (von Aitzing, 1584), while Van Doetecum, in 1598 – year of the death of Philip II – shows the *Leo Belgicus* surrounded by portraits of the Netherlands rulers, starting from Philip II, clearly distancing, even here, from any pro-revolt partisanship. In this map, that I was able to study at the library of the Rijksmuseum, an explicit stance is absent, as the inscription reported on the upper right<sup>6</sup> refers to the governors of both parts of Belgium during its history, depicted on the left and right sides, while at the bottom, between the two writings (in Dutch and French), are reported the faces and descriptions of the *stadtholder*, who essentially held the military power of the Republic, having the command of the armed forces and being admirals of the fleet.

Interestingly, however, the Latin inscription placed under the image of Maurice of Orange-Nassau reports: «Venit, Vidit, Vicit, Libertati restituit, et gubernat». In the analysis of this map is important and useful to connect this mentioned inscription to the historical facts that we would like to mention here, for a better understanding of it. The same Maurice of Orange-Nassau defined the map of the future Republic at the end of the 16th century, realizing that partition between Provinces of North and South that will mark the life of the Netherlands in the later stages; partition that this map, as recalled by van der Hijden, emphasizes in many of its elements (Hijden, 2006, p. 35). The sentence mentioned above, which notes – once again – Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, concludes pointing out that Maurice restored freedom

6 «[...] accesserunt icones gubernatorum generaliu qui utrimque belgium gubernarunt».

and ruled the Netherlands, giving a role of preeminent historical importance to the *stadtholder* of the Orange-Nassau dynasty. I will now attempt to mention the main merits of Maurice and how he came to the restoration of Dutch freedom and to the government of the provinces, which is well highlighted in this map.

Only eight years before the drawing of this map, Maurice of Orange – one of the most important exponents of the extremist «party» in the debate within the provinces – had completed an extraordinary strengthening of the armed forces of the young Republic<sup>7</sup>. Under his command and thanks to this renewed military capability, from 1590, the Dutch forces managed to wrest from the Spaniards a big part of five provinces (Gelderland, Overijssel, Drenthe, Groningen and the northern part of Brabant) and to conquer forty-three cities. With a quick attack, made of fast movements and new methods of siege, Mauritius managed to conquer the IJssel, to take the city of Zutphen, Deventer and then some Spanish forts (including Delfzijl and the strategic Ems estuary), the city of Groningen<sup>8</sup>, Hulst in Flanders and Nijmegen, thus obtaining control of several important rivers and restarting the commerce with the German cities. The second major offensive came at the end of the century, in 1597, when Maurice, thanks to the new acquired positions, decided to launch a new attack against the Spanish forces: the first target was the strategic town of Rheinberg, literally considered the «whore of war» (Israel, 1990, p. 35), because it was used by the

7 If in 1588 the military machine had 20 thousand men, seven years later it came to more than 32 thousand units, not to mention the technical developments in transport methods and in the artillery, Israel (1995), p. 242.

8 With a quick attack, made of fast movements and new methods of siege, Maurice managed to conquer the IJssel, to take the city of Zutphen, Deventer and then some Spanish forts (including Delfzijl and the strategic Ems estuary), the town of Hulst in Flanders and Nijmegen, thus obtaining control of several important rivers, as well as jump-start the trade with the German cities. In 1593, with the death of 400 Republicans soldiers and 300 other pro-monarchist with a total of 10 thousand cannon balls shot, the fall of Groningen was inevitable: the Catholic religion was definitively banned and the clergy and people were forced to escape to the south, see Israel (1995), p. 248. The second major offensive came at the end of the century: in 1597, thanks to the new positions, Maurice decided to launch a new attack against the Spanish and the first target was the strategic town of Rheinberg, considered literally the «whore of war», because it served to enemies as a foothold on the Rhine.

enemies as a foothold on the Rhine. Thanks to the efficiency of transport and to the fast moving artillery, Mauritius managed to complete the conquest of the eastern Netherlands. Between 1590 and 1597 the Dutch Republic had shown great military capabilities and from a small rebel region had become a major military power, the second in Europe only after Spain<sup>9</sup>, and the Spanish domination itself was trying, in some way, to re-establish the national sovereignty. Philip II, now at the end of its mandate and in the process of dying, gave the remaining areas under its jurisdiction (the southern part, with the city of Brussels) to his daughter Isabella and her husband, the Archduke Albert of Habsburg (that will be mentioned later in another cartographic representation, as we will see).

The map of the Netherlands was therefore again re-designed: the Dutch forces had in hand, at the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a big part of the northern Netherlands, while the Spanish troops occupied the territories of the south, including Brabant and Flanders. In substance, Mauritius of Orange Nassau had won and ruled at the time, as stated in the map. Another prominent example of *Leo Belgicus* is provided in 1617 by Petrus Kaerius, which has developed a map produced by Hendrik Floris van Langren before 1609, with the lion turned to the right and on the basis of the *Leo Belgicus* provided by von Aitzing, to which he pays personal homage, but with the particular addition of the description of the people and their traditional costumes on the lower right and left, already present in that of van Langren.

#### 4. The *Leo Belgicus* in the Twelve Years' Truce

Among the other typologies of *Leo Belgicus*, the one made by Claes Jansz. Visscher should be mentioned, the dating of which is not certain, because not explicit (but

9 The Dutch Republic, not surprisingly, was one of the first to be able to better interpret the spirit of the military Revolution introduced in Italy in the fifteenth century and culminating with the adoption of the uniforms under Louis XIV. The innovations expressed by the Dutch army – in the allocation of the soldiers and in the use of new techniques – reflect the peculiarity of the wars undertaken by the Dutch and the territory of the Netherlands. On this subject, see Israel (1995), pp. 267 et seq.



FIGURE 4 – Claes Janz. Visscher, *Leo Belgicus* (1611 ca.)

certainly between 1609 and 1621, the years of the Truce, and it is not excluded that it may have been produced in 1611<sup>10</sup>), in memory of the stalemate in the conflict between the Imperial Spain and the United Provinces. The negotiations for the signing of the Truce lasted about two years and had therefore led to develop the consciousness of the population: the symbolic references in this map are therefore countless and it is well worth to report some of the most important, all referring to the celebration of the Truce which had been established and was one of the essential drivers for the political and economic development of Netherlands.

<sup>10</sup> At this purpose, Schilder notes that it could be published in 1611, because in the map the imprint «gives Visscher's address as *inde Calverstraet*, where he lived from 1611 onwards», Schilder (2000), p. 254.

In the map, the image of *Leo Belgicus* is associated to several allegorical figures and highly symbolic images, all aimed at exalting the idle time of the war and the prosperity that ensued. First, however, it should be mentioned the richness of details present in the map, the precision of the topographical description and the high value – even artistic – of the landscape descriptions, never remaining only an end in itself but always reporting an absolutely unique symbolic and descriptive reference. As rightly noted by the Italian historian Alberto Clerici, who well analyzed the historiography of this time, the Truce «represent, as a matter of fact, the “end” of the war itself, a “point of no return”, because that date establishes the independence and international popularity of the Republic of the United Provinces, if not de jure certainly de facto, and consequently



Figures 5-6 – Details of the Visscher map (1611 ca.)

the definitive secession between Northern and Southern Netherlands» (Clerici, 2009, p. 188). Alongside the political dynamics, which certainly played a prominent role in social life and in the debate within the provinces, should be considered, in parallel and in the wake of the firsts, even those of mercantile and commercial nature, that were also resolving for the decision of the Truce itself, which would have guaranteed freedom of trade in individual activity<sup>11</sup>.

It will now be useful to examine the figures and images surrounding the lion: observing them in minute detail, they give a clear message about the Truce, with the

<sup>11</sup> This argument is reflected in some of the articles of Truce, but the eighth note specifies that: «similarly, merchants, captains, pilots, sailors and their ships, merchandise and other property belonging to them will cannot be abducted and detained, neither by virtue of any general or specific mandate, nor for any cause for war, or otherwise; and not even under the pretext of wanting to use it for conservation and defence of the country», Art. 8, Giustiniano (1609), p. 318.

written engravings framing them and explaining, where it is less clear, what the illustrations really want to communicate. Above the one on the right, which seems to whisper in the ear something apparently insidious (Fig. 5 and 6), the message in Dutch says «t' Neerlandt onder Aerthertogh Albertus», namely «the United Provinces under the Archduke Albert of Hapsburg». It is the allegory of the Netherlands under the control of the husband of Isabella, daughter of Philip II: they had the imperial mandate of jurisdiction over those areas, thus representing the counterpart of Maurice of Orange-Nassau, intent to insidiously deceive the other Holland, which seems almost immovable, firm on its position. This figure appear proud and triumphant on the map, with the words «t' Vrye Neerlant» («the free Netherlands») marked on the right shin: the representation of the Netherlands liberated from foreign domination and that cannot be fooled by the governors sent by the Spanish emperor. And with this look of pride and domination, the same leg of the



FIGURES 7-8 – More details from the *Leo Belgicus* by Visscher (1611 ca.)

«free Netherlands» even crush the «old discord» («d'Oude Twist»), an evil figure who succumbs under the weight of new State, free from the constraints of war and foreign sovereignty. The new Netherlands, therefore, not listening to «the United Provinces under the Archduke Albert of Habsburg», with their action succeed in the destruction of the old discord.

The lion, on his behalf, facing right, holds a sword pointing downwards, as a sign of military harmlessness, and two small medals dangles from the handle of the sword, with two highly symbolic inscriptions on them: «Voor Twalef Jaren» is written on the first, which means «For twelve years», clearly referring to the Truce, and the other presents the same sentence given in Latin, indicating that the Truce was valid for both sides, the Dutch (for which the inscription is reported in vernacular) and the imperial (with the inscription in Latin, of course). Around the sword are three figures of soldiers (fig. 7). Two are smaller and on their back, representing,

as marked beside them, the «Frontier Wacht», namely the «border guards». The other figure (Fig. 8) is a soldier absolutely harmless, faceless, sleeping leaning on a cannon with the shield on the ground, holding his spear under his arm, using it just as a means of comfortable support. It is the allegory of the «Slapende Oorlogh» (the «sleeping war»), by virtue of the established Truce, declaring the «cessatione di tutti atti d'hostilità di qualsivoglia modo che si sia tra li sopradetti Rè, Arciduchi, e Stati Generali, così per mare & altre acque, come per terra, in tutti li loro Regni, paesi, terre e Signorie, e per tutti lor Vassalli e habitatori de' lor paesi, di qualsivoglia qualità e conditione che si siano, senza eccectione de luoghi ne di persone»<sup>12</sup>, which means the «end of all acts of hostility of any kind between the King, Archdukes and the States-General, both by sea and other waters and by ground, in all of their kingdoms, coun-

<sup>12</sup> Art. 2, Giustiniano (1609), p. 315.

tries, lands and lordships, and for all of their vassals and inhabitants of their lands, of any quality and condition, without exception of places and individuals». The part of the treat which is more inherent with the images that we are referring to, concerning the state borders, is the art. 3 and reads as follows: «ciascheduno possiederà, e goderà effettivamente de' paesi, ville, piazze, terre e Signorie, che tiene e possiede al presente, senza esserne turbati ne inquietati in essi in qualsivoglia modo che si sia durante detta tregua, in che s'intendono compresi li borghi, villaggi, case, et campagne rase che da quelli dependono»<sup>13</sup>: «Everyone will possess and will effectively benefit from the countries, villas, squares, lands and lordships which owns and holds at the present, including hamlets, villages, houses and lands depending on them, without being disturbed or unsettled within them in any way during the Truce».

In the upper right corner of the map we can see a cherub playing a trumpet, which produces the double inscription (again, in Latin and Dutch, in the latter case entering the mouth of the lion, fig. 10), «the Twelve Years' Truce» («Bestant voor 12 Jaer» and «Treve 12 ann»), while on the other side, on the left, another cherub empties a sack with gifts falling like a waterfall on the landscape of a Dutch city, signifying the beginning of the prosperity originating from the Truce. In addition to the falling gifts, some writings in Dutch emphasize the intrinsic meaning: first, almost propelling the action of the cherub, the word «Zeghen», which means «blessing», significantly a little bigger than the others. Then, starting from the top, the inscription «Const en Wetenschap» stands out, which can be translated as «arts(s) and science(s)», next to which there are an astrolabe and other navigation tools. Beside an hourglass, we can find the inscription «vailighe tijdt», which means «safe (or secure) time». Other gifts include a book, which represents the «knowledge of God» («kennisse goodts», just below the image), coins and goblets, representing the «Rijkdom», the «wealth», precisely deriving from the cherub and the Truce itself.

Above the angelic figure, in the form of a sun radiating on the action of *Leo Belgicus* and therefore of Holland itself, lies the word «God», providing, by means of

the angel, all the above mentioned tributes to the young Republic, as a manifestation of divine blessing and approval, representing the symbolic elements of a wealth never known before in Holland, that will lead it to its heyday during the 17th century, precisely at the peak of the Dutch Golden Age. The gifts are therefore given by the Providence, by the blessing of God expressed through the cherub, symbol of purity, tossing to the Dutch cities the signs of future prosperity resulting from the Truce with Imperial Spain. Even on the Dutch city represented by Visscher inscriptions are reported, telling the feeling of optimism and exuberance that permeates the entire map: in the upper right of the perspective view the inscription says «t' Lants Welvaert», which means «the lands of prosperity»; below a city gate under construction the engraving says instead «t' Vergrooten der Steden», which means «the extension of the town», just to underline the idea of Dutch progress and incredible urban propulsion at the time. A little more to the right, to mark the action of men ready to embark freight on the boat moored at sea, the word «Coophandel», meaning «the», which was one of the three «pillars» on which the Truce itself rested, in addition to the political freedom of the United Provinces and the «juridical» issues. In the internal disputes, among the different positions, also intervened Hugo Grotius, that in the *Mare Liberum* «did not exclude the possibility of making peace or war with Madrid, but only on the condition that Spain conceded total freedom of trade to the Dutch in the Indies» (otherwise, it would have been preferable to continue the hostilities: Clerici, 2009, p. 189): issues partially addressed in the Truce which, as seen above, provided for broad freedom of movements for the traders in carrying out their activities while regulating, in essence, with the Art. 12, the piratical and racing activities.

In this regard, to mark the element of pacification between the two countries and to freeze any discord, the text of the Truce, at the Art. 4, specifies that: «Gli sudditi et abitanti ne' paesi delli sopradetti Rè et Arciduchi, e delli Stati, haveranno e teniranno fra di loro ogni buona corrispondenza et amicitia durante detta tregua, senza far riferimento delle offese e danni ricevuti per lo passato e potranno etiando frequentar' e residere ne' paesi l'uni dell'altri» (Giustiniano, 1609, p. 320): «The subjects and inhabitants in the countries of

<sup>13</sup> Art. 3, Giustiniano (1609), pp. 315-316.



FIGURES 9-10  
The gifts brought by the cherub and the prosperity of the urban Dutch landscape in Visscher map (1611 ca.)



the aforesaid King and Archdukes and of the States will have every good mutual relationship during the Truce, without reference to the offenses and damages received in the past, and they will be able to visit and reside in each other countries». Further down, near a cultivated land cultured by peasants<sup>14</sup>, the inscription says «t' Vredich Lantbouwen», meaning a «peaceful building land», and on the road leading to all this there is the inscription «t' Veÿlich Reylch», which presumably can be interpreted as «the safe riding» or «journey»: this idea of security concerning also the traffics and the trade is also found in the art. 4 of the Truce, which states that the citizens of both countries will be able to «practice their traffic and trade with absolute safety, both by sea and other waters and by land [...]» (Giustiniano, 1609, p. 320). On the other side of the map, close to grazing animals, the inscription «t' Overloedich Vee» seals such security, meaning «the abundant cattle», additional element of extreme vitality of the Dutch living, possible thanks to the Truce. Holland, in this perspective, represent all the positive things that can be found and given to man by nature, thanks to the divine will and to the possibility of prosperity that the Truce was giving to the citizens of the young Republic: a positivity expressed in the security of a country where the abundance would characterize the present moment and their immediate future.

Every symbolic element present on the map refers to that extremely positive and optimistic vision, which evidently permeated Dutch society at the time of the stipulation. With its 38 articles, its secret statement and the twelve-years forecast of armistice, the Truce was absolutely advantageous for the United Provinces, both from the political point of view and from the economical and trading aspects: «the opening article concerns the problem of sovereignty, while the secret final statement solves the issue of oceanic traffics», and the United Provinces had «all their demands recognized, without allowing the freedom of worship for Catholics (except in the newly conquered Southern areas), through a skilful balance of intransigence – sometimes almost ar-

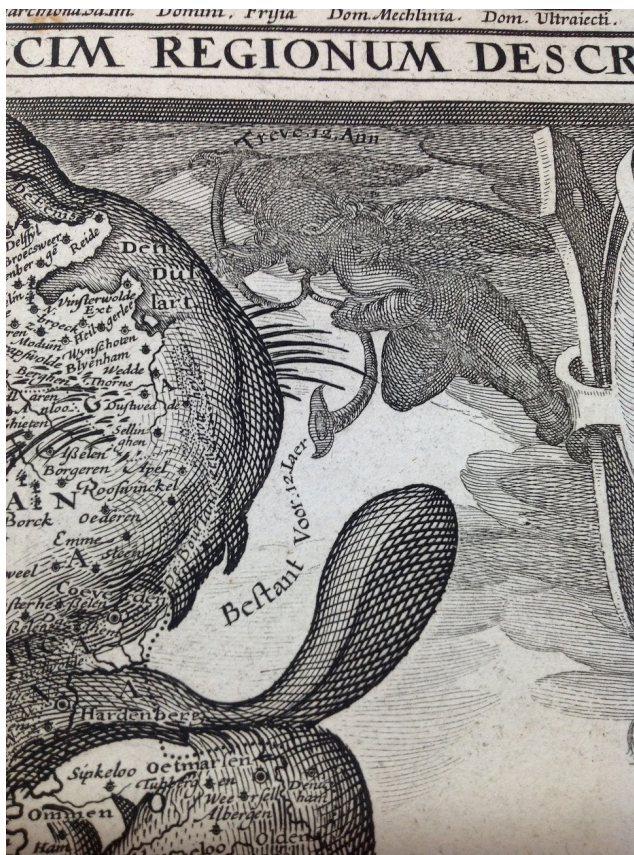
<sup>14</sup> This was a relatively recent operation for the Dutch, who had begun to cultivate the land with regularity only as a result of land reclamations, mainly accomplished between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth century, see Ciriaco (1994).

rogance – and calculated acquiescence» (Clerici, 2009, p. 190). The comment of the time by Giovanni Costa (1610), cited by Alberto Clerici, seems to fit perfectly, in a vision permeated by the religious, Calvinist influence, with the ideals of economic advancement, political independence and freedom of trade established by the Truce, and that the analyzed map celebrate in each of its figurative element:

Così quietando l'armi, riposeranno gli animi di tutti. E questa pace universale, essendo particolarmente in accorcio de' Paesi bassi, potranno essi alleggeriti hormai dal peso di tante calamità, attendere a gli honesti, e soliti lor misteri del mare, del traffico, e del campo. Et in questo numero di beni, si può aspettare, che quel popolo Holandese ispirato da Dio, e forse tra se per varie cagioni discordante, che suole essere il natural tarlo delle Repubbliche, spogliandosi a poco a poco con la pace, della fierazza militare, debba ritornare a' i primi suoi fortunati principij (Costa, 1610, pp. 44-45).

So, with weapons at rest, will rest the minds of all. And this universal peace, being particularly favourable for the Netherlands, will relieve them from the weight of so many calamities and make them able to pursue their honest and usual occupations and traffic on the sea and on the field. And with this riches, it is expectable that this Hollandaise people inspired by God, and perhaps for various causes discordant, that use to be one of the natural seeds of the Republics, gradually abandoning the military pride for peace, should return to its first lucky beginnings.

In 1630, another *Leo Belgicus* (*Nova XVII Provinciarum*) appears in the works of Visscher, with the lion facing left, with the North, shown in the upper part of the wind rose, turned to the right and with the symbol of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the upper right. It is interesting here to see how some elements that characterize the Dutch society of the time are incorporated, in a map where the nautical element is predominant: two writings are the caption for the images of boats and harbours («*Currus veliferi septem miliaria conficientes unius hora spatio*» and «*scapha per glaciem navigans incredibili celeritate*»), to underline the importance of the «water factor» in the life and development of the Dutch Republic (Boxer, 1965; Davids, 2012).



FIGURES 11-12  
Other symbolic elements present in the Visscher map (1611 ca.)

## 5. The Leo Hollandicus and the Peace of Westphalia

From our analytical perspective, among the most interesting maps produced by Nicolaes Ioannis Visscher, for the year of production and for its historical implications, there is that of 1648 (Fig. 12), with the Leo Hollandicus – Hollandicus this time, no more Belgicus in the broadest sense – facing right, holding the sword with an aggressive look on his face, no more harmlessly – as in the map celebrating the Twelve Years' Truce – but ready to strike. On the same weapon are written the words «patria defensio», that is «[in] defence of the homeland», meaning the Dutch determination and courage in defending its independence, gained by force, after decades of rebellion. It was a Hollandicus Lion, because a full

national identity was acquired, based on the centrality of the Holland Province, in which the other ones recognized the most authority, derived mostly from the commercial activity and based on the political weight in the States General<sup>15</sup>. In the year 1648, the Peace of Westphalia had just been signed and the United Provinces were officially recognized as a separate and independent political entity, after eighty years of war with Spain, with the pause of the Truce for twelve. This map has a meaning and a symbolic value which therefore differs from that analyzed above, where the celebratory element was the moment of the Truce reached between the two countries at odds: here, in 1648, the zoomor-

<sup>15</sup> «After the Dutch Revolt it was Holland's military personnel and economic resources that helped sustain the Republic's autonomy. The States General became more instrumental in Dutch government», Frampton (2006), p. 53.



FIGURE 13 – Visscher – t' Graesschap Hollandt (1648)

phic figure wants to express the attainment of the state autonomy as opposed to the foreign domination, with a vigorous lion, strong in its new position, in the years of great economic prosperity and political independence.

The map celebrates this event, also in this case, with evident symbolic references. In the upper part, on the margin of the map, the Dutch citizens in their traditional costumes are represented: aristocrats, merchants and the farmers of the South and the North. On the sides, the views of the major cities and on the lower part, a few coats of arms. In the upper centre, the inscription «t' Graesschap Hollandt», namely «the county of Holland», to emphasize the national dimension now assumed by

the United Provinces, recognizing themselves in the most powerful and influential region among them, Holland. To illuminate the action of the *Leo Hollandicus*, in the upper centre, is the Hebrew tetragrammaton, assimilated to the sun, representing God, the unnameable in the Jewish religion. In this case, unlike the previous one, the words are no longer in Dutch, but in Hebrew, and the closeness of feelings with that people – also saved from the waters – seems obvious: the historical coincidences claimed by the Dutch themselves seem undeniable, in a clear Calvinist vision of their national history (Po-Chia Hsia and Van Nierop, 2002; Berkvens-Stevelinck, Israel and Posthumus Meyjes, 1997).

The action of war and homeland defence of the Dutch people, assimilated to the Jewish – perhaps precisely for the salvation from the water – is essentially blessed by God, and it is a blessing that legitimate independence from foreign sovereign, embodying the devil. As stated by Simon Schama, «in the Calvinist mentality, the eventual messianic chronicle *could only* be comprehended by the history of the Jews, through whom the Almighty had worked his will» (Schama, 1988, p. 95) and this mentality strengthened itself «as a national culture». Basically, in their Calvinist and messianic vision, the Dutch were only performing a secular function, with total respect for the will of God, interpreting the divine light in earthly things and in their own struggle for independence, concluded with success in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, celebrated in this work. Even the wealth hoarded during those years, especially in Amsterdam, was part of the same divine plan: «The Great and Almighty Lord has raised this city above all others... yea he has even taken from them the shipping of the east and the western [...] and has spilled their treasure in our bosom» (Schama, 1988, p. 300). The security of success on Earth, according to the logic of double predestination, which could obviously be applied not only to the personal, but also to the national level, was both an omen of divine vicinity, and, much more, a guarantee proved and certified of the predilection of God for the nation or the person. According to this perspective, the independence of 1648 was therefore wanted by God, who had guided the Dutch actions until the final success and obtainment of autonomy from the Spanish and Catholic Empire.

## 6. Conclusions

The symbolism of the *Leo Belgicus*, then transformed into *Leo Hollandicus*, within the resurgence of the United Provinces liberated from external powers, was perpetuated in the years to come, having an echo and a primary importance at the key moments in Dutch history. It is absolutely not by chance, as we have noted, that precisely for the Twelve Years' Truce and for the Peace of 1648 these milestones – of absolute importance in Dutch history – were celebrated with maps reproducing

the *Leo Belgicus* (or *Hollandicus*) full of symbolism and important allegorical references. In light of what was said, these analysis can lead to read the *Leo Belgicus*, proposed especially in the seventeenth-century maps, as an important element in building a common sense of national belonging, in the birth – without wanting to exaggerate – of a Dutch identity, forged in the anti-imperial struggle, in the water management and in the development, also international, of trade (Israel, 1990); all in consideration of what this type of map has been able to express, not only in merely functional terms, but mostly symbolic, and in terms of creation of national feelings. The intrinsic bond with the historical dynamics appears most evident in the cases mentioned above, and it is of paramount importance also the coincidence of other factors: the religious, economic, social, political, geographical conformation, which are well observed and displayed in the maps here analyzed. In addition to these analogical elements, it is still unclear if, as claimed by Edoardo Boria (2012), the lion has a specific meaning also in the orientation of the maps (and therefore in the direction of the muzzle, against Spain or other enemies), or if instead it is a secondary data, that can be interpreted in different ways depending on the – even arbitrary – angle given to the reading of the map. Between this further references to clarify, there is also the even smaller «coincidence», highlighted by Michele Castelnovi, which sees the «tail» of the lion facing England in many cases, wanting to mock – and not in a veiled way – the direct competitors in the North Sea... In this way, the lion shown on the maps is assimilated to the political reality that the United Provinces were living in key moments: it is not only a strictly geographical representation, but, in a much broader vision, an allegory of the historical reality in which, in the interstices of interpretation left open by the maps, have been incorporated symbolic elements of enormous scope, such as to condition and directly influence the reader – or the owner – of the map, thus acting directly on the possibilities of interpretation and communication of the cartographic representation. Because, as Vladimiro Valerio has very well outlined, «maps, as said and reaffirmed many times, are not vehicle only a geographical message, through a construction more or less correct, but they are even propaganda or report, as

seen, or they can be reporter of other contents which concern politics, economics, didactic, or social instances and even utopian projects» (2014). Those symbolisms of extraordinary immediacy and cultural, historical, social and interpretative scope, which we have analyzed above, especially on the maps celebrating the Twelve Years' Truce and the Peace of Westphalia, seem to be the ones that Emanuela Casti has defined «bizarre [...] aspects which may be present in a map», which «are not negligible, in terms of information, such as aesthetic elements and therefore unnecessary and/or random; on the contrary, it should be taken as clues referring to a particular conception of the world» (Casti, 2013, pp. 18-19). Such a conception of the world, going far beyond a simple representation of the Earth's surface

and involving the processing of graphic and cultural symbols that are directly related to a model of society or to the celebration of a historical fact, leaning on the geographic representative – and interpretive – dimension, include within itself a participation and a strong political communicative «persuasion», also providing an economic and commercial vision and, not least, a strong religious component, which seems to organically and prominently permeate all other areas.

*(All images taken by the author.)*

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