

Map of Arenberg

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The map of the « Terre et Prévostée de Neufchâteau avecq ses despendences » was painted in 1609 on the initiative of Charles of Arenberg, co-lord of Neufchâteau. Since 1444 and following the succession of Jacques de la Marck, the Arenberg family owned half of the land of Neufchâteau. The other half was owned by the Counts of Rochefort (Löwenstein family for 1/3 and Stolberg family for 1/6).

This map was still in the possession of the Arenberg family in 1919. As a family of German origin, part of their possessions and archives were confiscated by the Belgian State after the First World War. The original of this oil canvas of 3,7 meter by 2,10 meter is in the Archives of the State of Arlon.

The origin of this map

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Charles of Croÿ, Charles of Arenberg's brother-in-law, commissioned drawings, and paintings of his properties (known as the "Croÿ albums"). Did Charles of Arenberg want to do the same to decorate the salons of the castle of Enghien, his place of residence acquired in 1607? A similar map was drawn up for the Land of Mirwart which he also indivisibly owned. Another theory exists. Due to the costs involved in the acquisition of the seigneurie and the castle of Enghien, Charles of Arenberg wanted to sell Neufchâteau and Mirwart, distant lands whose indivision sometimes posed inextricable problems. The sale could replenish the funds. But this sale would not take place.

Realisation of the map

If the painting is a relatively faithful reflection of the reality up to the detail (the painter came on site, made sketches, then painted the map in his studio), it shows some weaknesses:

- The cardinal points are reversed. In the frame, they are well noted: Septentrio (North), Meridies (South), Occidens (West) and Oriens (East). However, the villages are not well set out: the villages above should be below, those below above, those on the left on the right and vice versa.
- There is no scale. Some buildings are oversized to please the authorities and the privileged: for example, the castle, the churches...
- The painter had to shorten the distances, reduce the paths to fit the whole land on the map.
- Down on the right, there are localities that do not belong to the Land of Neufchâteau, but to Charles of Arenberg, also in an undivided manner: Nevraumont, Rossart and Bertrix with its three districts.

Description

This map is a precious and picturesque testimony for the administrative, parochial, and economic history of the region. The author has not only drawn the outlines and mentioned the constituent elements, but has also acted as an ethnologist, multiplying the scenes of daily life.

1. The castles



The first thing you see on this map is **the castle, placed in the centre**. Oversized, it shows the power of the local lord. It's the place of power.

The « new castle » was built in the second half of the 12th century. The first mention of the name Neufchâteau was found in an act of 1199 where Thierry de Mellier gave to the abbey of St-Hubert an annuity of two muids (French measure: obsolete) of rye and wheat flour to be taken from his mill in front of the New Castle. At that time, it consisted mainly of a tower and a few buildings surrounded by walls. It would be gradually extended to become the castle on the map. It was largely destroyed in the middle of the 17th century, probably in 1641. It is the period of the Thirty-Years War and of a lot of passages of troops. In 1656, a drawing represented it as a "castle of desolation" (Castrum Desolationis).

If you look a little closer, you can see two **other castles (in ruins)**: at Mellier: at the top.

After being the centre of a Carolingian domain[1], Mellier, was the cradle of the lords of Mellier and Neufchâteau. The first known lord was Hugo of Mellier who received the property exclusively from his father Louis I or Louis II of Chiny. The castle was situated on the headland behind the present church.



On the left of the castle, towards Longlier:
The vieu chesteaux - ruin

The "old castle", situated between Neufchâteau and Longlier, overlooks the loop of the river by twenty meters. Very little is known about it. It was probably built in the 11th century by the lord of Mellier to protect the priory of Longlier situated on lands given to the abbey of Florennes by the aforementioned lord in 1064.

2. Les églises et autres symboles religieux



At the time of the map, two parishes shared the territory: Légglise and Longlier. Four other churches are represented: Hamipré (semi-parochial church), Les Fossés, Mellier (the former castral chapel transformed and then replaced by the present church in the 19th century) and Neufchâteau (situated on the site of the present city hall, the Saint-Michel chapel built in 1542 became the parochial and decanal church in 1802. The present church replaced it in 1844).

Longlier. There is a priory next to the church. It is a property of the Abbey of Florennes as a result of a donation made by the lord of Mellier in 1064. Two or three monks lived there and made sure the rights of the mother abbey were respected and the important revenues (notably part of the tithe of the parish) collected. The monks also raised livestock and exploited a slate quarry at a place called "la Chaurno".

[1] Two villas (Maslare - Mellier and Longolare - Longlier) are mentioned during the Merovingian and Carolingian periods. They would welcome Pepin the Short, Charlemagne and their itinerant court on several occasions.

Hamipré. The church is semi-parochial but of great importance. Already mentioned in 1304 in a legacy made in its favour by Bertand of Mellier, we can see on the 1609 map that the graves of the « feu Princes comtes d'Arenberghe et de la Marck » are mentioned there. Inside the present church there is a large tombstone, probably of Marie de Looz, widow of Everard de la Marck, who died in 1410. Provosts (officers representing the lords) continued the tradition by being buried in Hamipré. Three of their tombstones are leaning against the church wall in the old cemetery.

Next to the church there is a building called «hospital». It was a building managed by a «hospitable» priest, appointed by the lords, who gave schooling, celebrated mass, and welcomed poor people and pilgrims by giving them shelter and food. In 1663, the Récollets replaced the «hospitable» priest.

A pilgrimage to Notre Dame of Hamipré, whose miraculous statue is said to have been found in a tree, took place during the two big fairs. A lot of people came from far away. The church is situated on one of the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela. It is also a sanctuary of respite. The statue of the Virgin is said to have the power to "resurrect" stillborn babies just long enough for them to be baptized and so allowing them to leave limbo and go to heaven. The church is also a centre of judicial pilgrimage. The convicted, such as the two women who had beaten their priest in Arlon, had to go there as a public reparation.

3. The judiciary



The lords had the right to high, medium, and low justice (today we would say that they were police court magistrates from the Criminal Court and from the Assize Court). This power is represented by **the gallows and the two wheels** situated on the Justice Hill (between Neufchâteau and Longlier)

4. The economy

Les moulins

Several mills are represented on the map:

- The **common mill** (on the right of the castle) and its pond. This mill is mentioned in the act of 1199 quoting the name of Neufchâteau for the first time. It was built and maintained by the lords. The inhabitants were ordered to go there to grind their grain in exchange of a tax.
- Near the « old castle » there is another building: it is the first common mill (linked to the castle) and transformed at that time into a fulling-mill, a workshop where wool was degreased and felted by tightening the threads to give the fabric more flexibility, body, and softness.
- The common mill of Mellier, near the ruined castle.
- Other mills are represented in Bertrix, Fineuse, Gomchy, Lahérie, Neuchâteau and Straimont. The mill in Neufchâteau is probably a tanning mill, feeding the tanneries. The other mills were authorized to grind in exchange of a tax paid to the lords. Some of them were also sawmills (molin et soierie – sawmill – of Fineuse and of Gomchy).



Fairs and markets



- The cattle fairs of Hamipré and Neufchâteau were renowned. The lords granted favours to these fairs, notably tax reductions or allowances. They were held several times a year. Beside the livestock (sheep, pigs, cattle, horses), a lot of merchants came to offer their goods: draperies, trinkets, more "exotic" products coming from Germany, Champagne... Tumblers and other travelling artists were regularly present at these fairs.

- Markets were held weekly in the covered market situated inside the city, next to the chapel. Today the site is occupied by the High School buildings, the schoolyard and part of the road passing along it.

Agriculture



Hardly visible on the map, except for the presence of animals near the fairs, agriculture is represented by two peasants ploughing a field with a swing plough pulled by two horses in line (to the right of the Neufchâteau fair). In Morival, the two buildings are farms belonging, one to the dukes of Arenberg, the other to the counts of Rochefort.

5. Hunting and fishing rights

Fishing and hunting on the Land of Neufchâteau is reserved for the lords. These rights are indicated on the map in two places:



The heronry (la heronneri) situated in the Ospôt wood (above the castle). In this area, herons were bred, renowned for their plumage and not for their flesh. The feathers were used to decorate the hats and costumes of the ladies of the lord's court.



On the bank of the stream leading to Straimont, we can read **"river where pearls are found"** ("riviere ou se trouvent des perles"). In the bed of this river there were pearl mussels that produced pearls, like oysters. The product of fishing was reserved for the lords.

More intensive fishing in the 19th century and increasing pollution of the rivers made these mussels disappear. Since a few years, a small population of these mussels has been present again in our region, indicating a better water quality.

Finally, in several villages (Habarou, Léglise, Montplainchamps, Wittimont), we can see more important buildings. These were the residences of feudal people and other members of the local nobility. The roofs of these buildings, as well as those of the castle, the churches and the covered market are shown in blue. This indicates that they had slated roofs, unlike most other buildings that had thatched roofs.

