Patrimoine

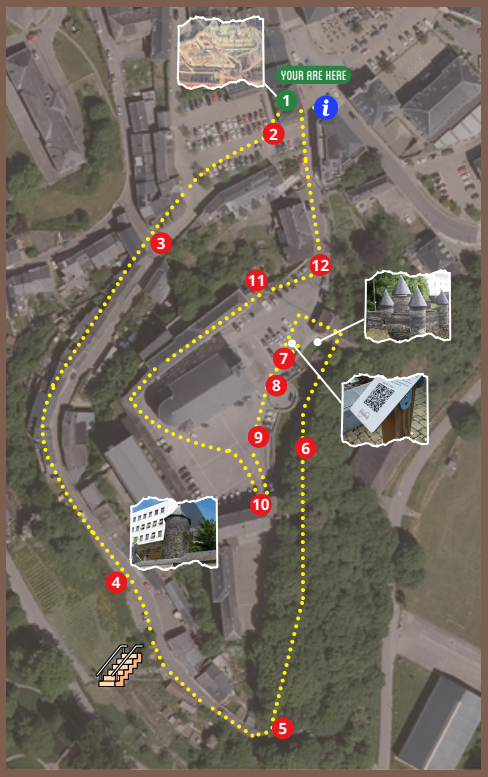
NEUFCHÂTEAU AND ITS REDISCOVERED CASTLE

1

The Arenberg map



(Translation done by AI)

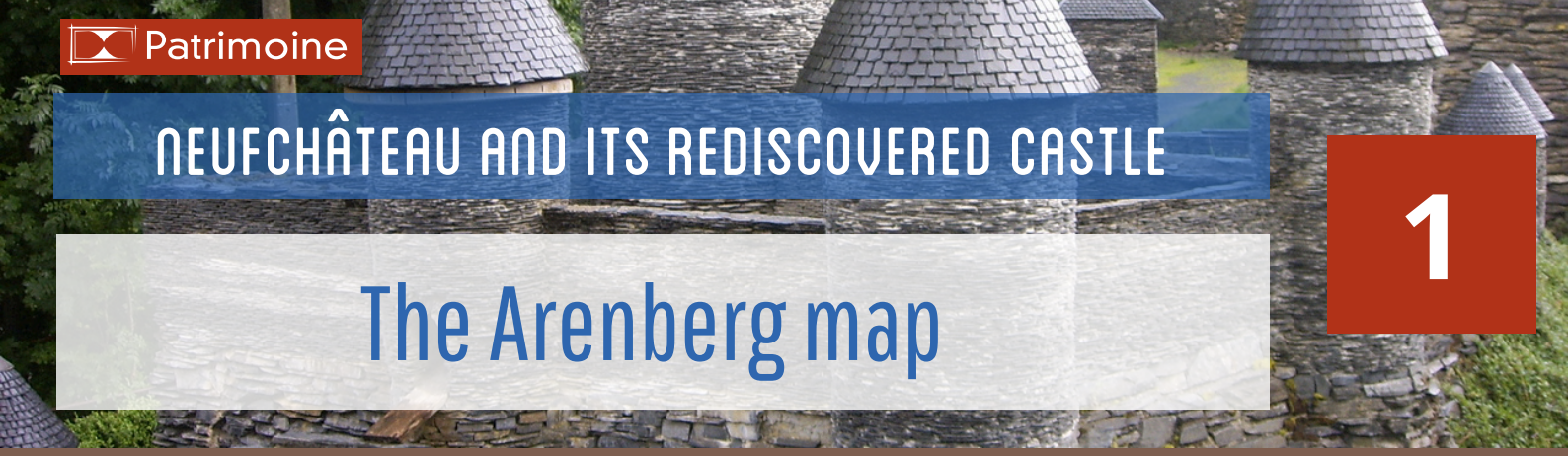


The map of the "Land and Provostry of Neufchasteau with its dependencies" (Terre et Prévostée de Neufchasteau avecq ses despendences) was painted in 1609 at the initiative of Charles d'Arenberg, co-lord of Neufchâteau.

The original oil painting on canvas, measuring 3.7m by 2.10m, is kept in the State Archives of Arlon.

Since 1444, following the succession of Jacques de la Marck, the Arenberg family owned half of the Land of Neufchâteau. The other half belonged to the Counts of Rochefort (with the Löwenstein family holding one-third and the Stolberg family one-sixteenth).

This map remained in the possession of the Arenberg family until 1919. As a German-origin family, many of their properties and archives were seized by the Belgian state after World War I.



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The Arenberg map

This map is a valuable and picturesque testimony to the administrative, parish, and economic history of the region.

The author not only outlined the landscape and described its features but also acted as an ethnographer, illustrating numerous scenes of daily life.

The Origin of the Map

At the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, Charles de Croÿ, brother-in-law of Charles d'Arenberg, commissioned drawings and paintings of his properties (known as the "Croÿ Albums").

Did Charles d'Arenberg wish to do the same to decorate the salons of his residence, the Castle of Enghien, acquired in 1607? A similar map was created for the Land of Mirwart, which he also co-owned.

Another theory suggests that, due to significant expenses incurred from acquiring the seigneury and castle of Enghien, Charles d'Arenberg considered selling Neufchâteau and Mirwart.
These distant lands, co-owned in a way that often led to complex disputes, could have provided much-needed financial relief through their sale. However, this sale never took place.

Creating the Map

While the painting provides a relatively faithful representation of reality, down to fine details (the painter visited the site, made sketches, and then painted the map in his studio), it also has some inaccuracies:

- **The cardinal directions are reversed :** The map's frame correctly labels North (Septentrio), South (Meridies), West (Occidens), and East (Oriens), but the villages are misplaced. The ones at the top should be at the bottom, those at the bottom at the top, and left and right are also swapped.
- **There is no scale :** Some buildings are exaggerated in size to please authorities and nobles, such as the castle and churches.
- **The painter shortened distances** and roads to fit the entire land onto the map.
- **In the bottom right, some locations are shown that did not belong to Neufchâteau** but were held by Charles d'Arenberg, also in joint ownership: Nevraumont, Rossart, and present-day Bertrix with its three districts.

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The castles





The first thing that stands out on this map is the castle, placed in the center. Oversized, it symbolizes the lord's power as the seat of authority.

The "new castle" (Neufchâteau) was built in the early 12th century. The first recorded mention of Neufchâteau appears in a document from 1199, where Thierry de Mellier grants the Abbey of Saint-Hubert a rent of two muids of rye and wheat flour, to be taken from his mill in front of the New Castle. At the time, the castle mainly consisted of a tower and a few buildings enclosed by walls. It was gradually expanded to become the one depicted on the map. It was largely destroyed in the mid-17th century, likely in 1641, during the Thirty Years' War and frequent military incursions. By 1656, a drawing referred to it as the "Castle of Desolation" (Castrum Desolationis).

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The castles





Upon closer inspection, two other castles (in ruins) can be seen : one at Mellier, at the top of the map.

Mellier, once the center of a Carolingian estate, was the birthplace of the lords of Mellier and Neufchâteau. The first known lord was Hugo de Mellier, who received the land exclusively from his father, Louis I or Louis II of Chiny. The castle was located on the promontory behind the current church.



To the left of the castle, towards Longlier, lies "Vieu Chesteaux" – a ruin.

The "Old Castle," located between Neufchâteau and Longlier, rises 20 meters above the river bend. Little is known about it, but it was likely built in the 11th century by the lord of Mellier to protect the Longlier priory, which had been granted to the Abbey of Florennes in 1064.

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The churches





At the time of the map, two parishes divided the territory : Léglise and Longlier.

Four other churches are represented: Hamipré (a semi-parish church), Les Fossés, Mellier (where the former castle chapel was later transformed and replaced by the current church in the 19th century), and Neufchâteau.

The latter was located on the site of the present town hall. The Saint-Michel Chapel, built in 1542, became a parish and deanery church in 1802.
The current church replaced it in 1844.

Longlier : Next to the church was a priory, belonging to the Abbey of Florennes since 1604, following a donation by the lord of Mellier.

Two or three monks resided there, ensuring the rights of the mother abbey and collecting significant revenues (including part of the parish tithe).
They also engaged in farming and operated a slate quarry known as "la Chaurnô."

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The churches





Hamipré. The Church is Semi-Parochial but of Great Importance

Already mentioned in 1304 in a bequest made in its favor by Bertrand de Mellier, the 1609 map indicates the presence of burials of the "late Princes Counts of Arenberg and de la Marck."

Inside the current church, there is a large tombstone, probably that of Marie de Looz, widow of Everard de la Marck, who passed away in 1410.

Provosts (officers representing the lords) continued the tradition by choosing to be buried in Hamipré.

Three of their tombstones are set against the church wall in the old cemetery.

Hospital. Next to the church is a building known as the "hospital".

It was managed by a priest known as the "hospitalier," appointed by the lords, who ran a school, celebrated mass, and provided shelter and food for the poor and pilgrims. In 1633, the Récollets friars replaced the "hospitalier" priest.

A pilgrimage to Our Lady of Hamipré, whose miraculous statue was said to have been found in a tree, takes place during two major fairs. Pilgrims come from afar in large numbers. The church is located along one of the routes of the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage.

It is also a "respite sanctuary," where the Virgin's statue was believed to have the power to "revive" stillborn children long enough for them to be baptized, allowing them to leave limbo and enter paradise.

Additionally, the church served as a judicial pilgrimage site: convicts—such as two women from the Arlon region who had beaten their parish priest—were required to visit it as a form of public penance.

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The Mills





Several mills are depicted on the map:
The banal mill (to the right of the castle) and its pond. It was mentioned in the 1199 document that first cited the name of Neufchâteau. This mill was built and maintained by the lords. Local inhabitants were obligated to grind their grain there in exchange for a "tax" (a ban).

Near the "old castle" is another establishment: this was the original banal mill (linked to the castle), which had been transformed into a fulling mill—a workshop where wool was degreased and felted by tightening the fibers to give fabrics more suppleness, body, and softness.
The banal mill of Mellier, near the ruined castle.

Other mills are marked in Bertrix, Fineuse, Gomchy, Lahérie, Neufchâteau, and Straimont. The Neufchâteau mill was likely a tanning mill, supplying tanneries.
The other mills were allowed to operate in exchange for a tax paid to the lords. Some were also sawmills, such as the mill and silk factory—sawmills—of Fineuse and Gomchy.

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The economy







The livestock fairs of Hamipré and Neufchâteau were well-known.
The lords granted special privileges to these fairs, including tax reductions or exemptions (hence the term "free fair"). They were held several times a year.

Alongside livestock sales (sheep, pigs, cattle, and horses), many merchants offered their goods, including textiles, trinkets, and more exotic products from Germany and Champagne...
Street performers and traveling artists frequently attended these fairs.

Markets were held weekly in the market hall located within the city walls, next to the chapel.

Today, this space is occupied by the Athénée Royal buildings, and part of the schoolyard is now part of the road running past it.

Agriculture

Agriculture is not prominently depicted on the map, except for the presence of livestock near the fairs.

However, it is represented by two farmers plowing a field with an ard (a light plow) pulled by two horses in a straight line (to the right of the free fair of Neufchâteau).

In Morival, two buildings are marked as farms—one belonging to the Dukes of Arenberg, the other to the Counts of Rochefort (feudal estates of the Lords).

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Justice and hunting









The lords held high, middle, and low justice (today, this would be equivalent to judges in Peace Courts, Criminal Courts, and Assize Courts).

This authority is symbolized by the gallows and two wheels placed on the Hill of Justice (between Neufchâteau and Longlier).

Hunting and Fishing Rights

Hunting and fishing in the Land of Neufchâteau were reserved for the lords. These rights are indicated on the map in two locations.

The heronry ("la heronneri") in the Ospôt forest (above the castle). This area was used to raise herons, valued for their plumage rather than their meat. Their feathers adorned the hats and outfits of noblewomen at court.

On the stream leading to Straimont, the map contains the note: "river where pearls are found." Freshwater pearl mussels, which produce pearls much like oysters, were once abundant in this river.

These pearls were reserved for the lords. However, intensive harvesting in the 19th century and increasing river pollution led to the species' disappearance. In recent years, a small population has reappeared, signaling improved water quality.

Lastly, in several villages (Habaru, Léglise, Montplainchamps, Wittimont), some larger buildings are marked. These were the residences of feudal lords and local nobility.

The roofs of these buildings, like those of the castle, churches, and market hall, were depicted in blue, indicating they were covered in slate, unlike most other buildings, which had thatched roofs.