The Siege of Dijon in 1513

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On the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Siege of Dijon, and the re-hanging, after restoration, of a tapestry that illustrates the Siege at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon, Alain Marchandisse and Jonathan Dumont, historians from the University of Liège, have contributed to and directed the book *1513. L'année terrible. Le Siège de Dijon* (1513. The dreadful year. The siege of Dijon). This work is ambitious in the variety of images it contains, and also because of the quality of the scientific analysis. This fine work offers the reader a multivalent deciphering of an event that was a forerunner of future European conflicts.

The traditional heritage of Dijon is based on a number of historical testimonies that continually revive the memory of the Siege of the town in 1513. There are street names that commemorate illustrious persons, and archaeological remains, found during building repair work, may be connected to the miraculous virgin who was supposed to have been the salvation of Dijon, up to the
time of the tapestry, which portrays a crucial moment in the history of France. All these remains of the past testify to it, even if they are often perceptible only as part of the background. The reopening of certain older rooms of the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon that contained historical treasures, taking place at the same time as the 500th anniversary of the Siege, provided an opportune moment to re-examine this event and to display for the Dijonnais a fragment of their heritage.

The Siege of Dijon was of course a large-scale military undertaking, but it also had the distinction of being described by many people, and of being studied in many different respects, as an economic, political, social, and even religious event, and as the subject of artistic representations. It is the object of a classic historical analysis thanks to the availability of numerous archives; it has also been approached through study of archaeological traces, paintings, maps of the old city, sculptures, etc. The possibility of a multidisciplinary approach led Laurent Vissière of the Paris - Sorbonne University to produce a book that (1) tells the story of the Siege as a history from all conceivable viewpoints, one that appeals to all historians, from the amateur to the expert. He wanted to get a group of experts together for this purpose, and so he called on Alain Marchandisse, a specialist in Burgundian history, and on Jonathan Dumont, a specialist in the Italian Wars. Both are researchers working for Transitions, the department specializing in research of the Late Middle Ages and Early Modernity at the University of Liège. He wanted them to illuminate the historical background of the event. Their specialties justify their participation in this project, which is intended to focus on a particular military event from the perspective of many different disciplines at once, not just as an isolated factual occurrence. "The Siege of Dijon lent itself to an attempt to show what can be done with a military event when one has decided not to confine it to the history of classic battles, and to show that it can be part of an approach that is more contemporary, that places the event within a larger context," said Alain Marchandisse.

At the centre of the Italian Wars

The Siege of Dijon lies between the Italian Wars and the Burgundian succession after the death of Charles the Bold in 1477, and is part of a moment in history when the great European nations - France, Switzerland, the Germanic Holy Roman Empire and Spain - were in competition to extend their territories and impose their supremacy. Even if Dijon is not the only town that had its fortifications attacked, it was different from other medieval towns placed under siege because it reflected a symptomatic moment for a Europe of States at war. In other words, this moment produced one of the first Europe-wide conflicts, and was a forerunner of the European wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, especially of the Thirty Years' War.

At the end of the 15th century, the economic and artistic potential of Italy made it a tempting target. The French wanted to conquer Italy in order to make it their possession, creating a single state of France and Italy. The French king Charles VIII had already tried to annex several parts of Italy such as the kingdom of Naples, but this attempt went awry and his forces had to return to France. In 1499 his successor, Louis XII, made a fresh attempt. He captured the Duchy of Milan with the help of the Venetians, and captured Naples shortly thereafter. This French takeover was strongly opposed by the Pope, and by other powers, including Spain, the Holy Roman Empire and England. These countries formed the Holy League. The purpose of this alliance was to attack the French not only at the points at which they had captured Italian territory, but along broad fronts. In 1512, the League forced the French to leave Italy and return within the borders of France. But English and Holy Roman Empire troops continued to attack in northern France, while upon France's eastern border, Burgundy was attacked by Empire forces assisted by troops from Switzerland and Franche-Comté. The latter were subjects of the inheritors of the house of Burgundy, the Habsburgs, and the Habsburgs entered this battle
because as the owners of part of Burgundy (Franche-Comté) they wanted to take over the remaining part, the
Duchy of Burgundy proper, which had fallen into the hands of the French upon the death of Charles the Bold.
"As the regional capital of the Duchy of Burgundy, Dijon was important, because it was necessary symbolically
to capture this city if one wished to unseat the French," says Alain Marchandisse. Jonathan Dumont
emphasized these points: "The Siege of Dijon was the result of a number of things. There was a desire on the
part of the French royal power to create a single state from France and Italy, and there was a desire on the
part of the French, who had recently regained the Duchy of Burgundy, to reinforce their possession of it, which
was still unstable and fragile. The King of France was aware that although Burgundy was once again under
French royal control, some of the members of the Burgundian elites were nostalgic for the period of the Dukes
of Burgundy, and if the descendants of the Duke became interested in seeking independence or a return to
control by the ducal heirs, this could tip the balance of power. Finally, the enemies of France wanted to take
advantage of its weakness to bring down the French royal power altogether".
The governor of Dijon, Louis II de La Tremoille, was a talented negotiator and strategist; he was able to save
the city and France itself from a grim result. He organized the city’s resistance and gave psychological and
moral support to its troops. Above all, he maintained an unequalled sense of what was diplomatically possible
with regard to the attackers. He managed to negotiate a retreat by the attacking forces, including the Swiss
troops whose cooperation was secured by the promise of significant financial compensation.
The Tapestry of 1514: a snapshot of the Siege

The two ULg researchers co-wrote the three chapters of the book that give a broad context for more than 30 years of history, from the death of Charles the Bold to the time of the Siege itself, recreating its political and diplomatic background. The rest of the book approaches this military event from other points of view, based on a tapestry created one year after the Siege by a brotherhood of the Church of Notre Dame, in order to commemorate and celebrate the favourable outcome of the Siege. The tapestry is on exhibit at the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon, and it presents a panoramic view of the social, political, economic, religious and cultural life of the people of Dijon at the time of the Siege.

The tapestry is a major source of information about the geographical and historical background of the Siege, and also with regard to the morals and customs of the protagonists of the city with a hundred bell towers. The tapestry can be seen as a version of the narrative thread of the event, and a number of points of view can be developed with reference to it. The multiplicity of elements portrayed in the tapestry has reinforced the belief, on the part of specialists, that the Siege of Dijon - even though it remains above all a military event - must be approached in the sense of a total, englobing history determined by a multiplicity of parameters. "We wanted
to produce a contemporary military history in which one does not just count the bullets and the soldiers, but in which one studies the event from every point of view imaginable, in terms of all the possible or imaginable consequences. The Siege would be influential in a number of contexts. A religious tradition grew up around it. The city observes the anniversary of the lifting of the Siege. The virgin that was associated with the lifting of the Siege became a figure of veneration among the people, and she is celebrated in parades that pass through the streets of Dijon," Alain Marchandisse said.

**To capture the interest of the general public**

The authors were required to devote a great deal of time and effort to the preparation of this book, and have produced a book containing many images both visually striking and of high quality. From its earliest conception the book was considered an interdisciplinary work, one that would not only benefit from high-level scientific knowledge, but that would also be accessible to a wide readership. The book gives pride of place to its beautiful images, and supported by an in-depth bibliography, explores through copiously illustrated texts the scientific and pedagogical dimensions of the event. It makes use of a wide variety of documentary sources, including computer reconstructions, archive images and actual photographs of the city. *1513. L'année Terrible. Le Siège de Dijon* is unreservedly recommended.

(1) Vissière, Laurent; Marchandisse, Alain; Dumont, Jonathan (Eds.) *1513. L’année terrible. Le siège de Dijon*; *Faton*, Dijon, 2013.