

Review: The Story of the Map of Italy

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## THE STORY OF THE MAP OF ITALY

L' "Italia" di Giovanni Magini e la Cartografia dell' Italia nei secoli xvi. e xvii.— R. Almagià. (Comitato Geografico Nazionale Italiano, pubblicazione n. 1.) Napoli, Città di Castello; Firenze: Soc. Anon. F. Perrella. 1922. Pp. viii. 183; 9 plates; 355 × 250 mm. (14 × 9 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches). Price 60 fr.

AS Prof. Almagià points out in his preface, "the history of the cartography of Italy [and one might add, of most other countries of the world] from the invention of printing to the middle of the seventeenth century, has yet to be written. That is to say, we have not as yet a comprehensive work, investigating and co-ordinating the successive improvements which have been made in it, whether as regards the whole country or its individual parts, from the appearance of the first printed maps to the beginnings of scientific cartography. And the chief reason why this work of synthesis is lacking is, that the works of analysis on which it must rest are not yet in existence."

Prof. Almagià himself has already, in a series of articles published in various Italian periodicals, studied the early cartography of the different regions of Italy; and the present work required, as he points out, an examination of the whole of the great mass of maps which were produced in Italy during the sixteenth century, in order to determine the sources which were at Magini's disposal, and the use which he made of them.

More will, it is true, have to be done in the study and publication of these sources before the material is placed before the world. Nordenskiöld, in his *Facsimile Atlas*, despite the wide range of his title, was mainly interested in representations of the whole world, and in the various editions of Ptolemy, though he also devoted some attention to a collection more nearly concerning our present subject, namely, the famous atlas of Lafreri, an important copy of which was presented by him to the library of Helsingfors, while another has since been given by Lord Peckover to the library of the Royal Geographical Society. Of this a number of other copies are now known, and more are likely to be found in the various libraries of the world.\*

Giovanni Magini was born at Padua in 1555, and became Professor of Astronomy at Bologna in 1588, holding the chair until his death in 1617. He published, mostly at Venice, a large number of astronomical works, of which we need not speak; and in 1596 he published an edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia*, which was several times pirated and reprinted. The maps are, however, without original value, being mere copies from Ortelius and others, while a large part of the text is taken from Leandro Alberti's *Descrittione di tutta Italia*. This work therefore had no value as a preparation for the task which he was afterwards to undertake; but it must have shown him how much yet remained to be done to place the cartography of Italy on a satisfactory basis. He had indeed already begun his new labours; and on 15 March 1595 he announced his intention in the dedication to a map of the territory of Bologna: "Inasmuch as I desire to publish a complete atlas of Italy, showing, besides the provinces, the territories of each city, I have decided to publish first this map of the territory of Bologna," etc. This was soon followed by other maps, and in two years he had the greater part of the maps of North Italy already engraved, and some of them published. They were apparently sold separately,

\* On Lafreri's Atlas see the important articles by Dr. F. C. Wieder in *Tijdschrift van het Kon. Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap*, 2<sup>e</sup> Ser. dl. xxxii. (1915), III sqq. (see also *Geogr. Journal*, vol. 46, p. 68).

and are extremely rare in this state ; \* for, being unable to obtain material for his maps of Southern Italy, he started correcting and revising what he had already done, publishing a new map of the territory of Bologna in two sheets in 1599. At last, in 1602, he received materials for the formation of the maps of the kingdom of Naples ; and in 1604 nearly the whole atlas was ready, and an index of it appeared in the Latin edition of his astronomical work, the *Tavole del Primo Mobile*. But now he was unable to obtain engravers, owing to a series of misfortunes, and began a lengthy descriptive commentary which was to accompany the maps, but which was never published, and is for the most part lost. At last, in 1607, he secured the services of one Benjamin Wright, who, in the following year, engraved for him a large map of Italy in six sheets. Wright, however, was something of a drunkard, and pawned several of the plates which he had done : and it was only in 1613 that the engraving of the plates was finished, after a good deal of further revision. The printing at last began in Bologna at the end of 1616 ; but Magini's death delayed the appearance of the work until 1620, when his son Fabio, who was not fifteen when his father died, finally brought it out.† He dedicated it to Ferdinando Gonzaga, a member of the ducal family of Mantua, with which Giovanni had been in close personal relations, and who indeed had procured him a great deal of manuscript material from the governments of the various states of Italy.

The value of their help can hardly be overestimated. The exhaustive examination which Prof. Almagià has undertaken shows that not more than one-fifth of the maps are based on previously published material, while the rest are derived from manuscript maps of an official character, or from new surveys, of which in almost all cases he obtained the exclusive use. Where he was compelled to rely on older maps, he was at great pains to select the best material available. Many of these older maps are of great rarity, though further search is continually revealing the existence of new examples. Prof. Almagià himself describes a number of important maps in *L'Universo*, iv. 5 (May 1923). They are to be found in Holste's copy of Cluver's *Italia Antiqua*, now in the Barberini library at the Vatican (*Stamp.* EEE. vii. 21-25), the existence of which was pointed out to us both by the Vatican authorities.‡ Holste obviously used this copy while on his travels, and made copious marginal notes, which were published after his death by Cardinal Francesco Barberini.§ Among the contemporary series of maps which Magini carefully studied—in fact, he spent a whole summer in Rome for the purpose, even though he criticized them

\* Two copies of the map of the territory of Bologna are to be found in the Vatican Library, where they were shown me by Mgr. Legrelle, one at the end of a copy of the first (Bonomi's) rare edition of Magini (*Stamp. Barb.*, P. ix. 51), and another among some loose maps which were among the papers of Lukas Holste. On the former, under the words "Territorio Bolognese," the legend "Fran<sup>co</sup> Valegio Form." is inserted.

† He altered the dedications on many of the maps themselves, but otherwise did not in any way alter or revise them.

‡ The map of Sabina (tom. iii. No. 4) is not the only copy known. Cardinal Ehrle (*Le Piantte Maggiori di Roma*, no. 4 : *Roma al tempo di Urbano viii.* ; *la pianta di Roma Maggi-Maupin-Losi del 1625*, p. 14) had already mentioned this very copy, and adds that there is another in the Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe (Corsin. 75, 928). The map is dedicated to Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani by Giuseppe de Rossi (see *Papers of the British School at Rome*, ix. 139).

§ *Annotationes in Italiam antiquam Cluverii*, etc. (Rome, 1666). A collation has shown me that the Cardinal's work was carefully done.

severely—are those painted by Egnazio Danti in the Galleria Geografica at the Vatican. It is difficult to judge of their original character, for they have been a good deal repainted, both under Urban VIII. in 1631 and under Pius VIII. in 1856.\* But Prof. Almagià treats the author of the former restoration as unknown, whereas from a letter of Holste to Peiresc of 4 October 1632 it has long been certain that it was his work.† Even the atlas of Magini is uncommon in its first edition, only six copies having been examined in Italy by Prof. Almagià; but two reprints, one of 1630-2, the other of 1642, are of considerably less rarity. But the large map of Italy was altogether unknown until it was rediscovered by Prof. Almagià, who gives a reduced facsimile of it. It does not contain the results of Magini's most recent work; and it is very likely that he was only prevented by death from including a general map of Italy in the atlas itself.

As to the value of Magini's contribution to modern geography, Prof. Almagià points out that it is considerable. Previous errors both in latitude and longitude are reduced; the political boundaries and physical features are far better indicated than ever before; and a number of names have been added. It was indeed, as he points out, a long time before Magini's work was superseded. He had been unable to secure the Imperial copyright, and a number of pirated reproductions both of the map of Italy and of the regional maps in the Atlas went on appearing until the middle of the eighteenth century, though for the latter the date of their supersession varies considerably with the individual districts.

The reproductions of the map of Italy are most of them, like the original,‡ extremely rare—as, for example, is that which was produced by the German engraver Matteo Greuter, though it was several times reprinted, and though the plates were in existence until 1797.§ The influence of the regional maps on the other hand can be traced in the various atlases, both Italian and foreign, of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and it is only D'Anville's map of Italy, published in 1743, which represents a definite step in advance and marks at the same time the close of pre-geodetic cartography in Italy. It is impossible in this short notice to give an idea of the care and the vastness of detailed knowledge which Prof. Almagià displays, without, be it noted, ever losing sight of his main subject. He is certainly the best historian of Italian cartography, and we may hope for many more works on the subject from his pen.

THOMAS ASHBY.

\* Almagià, p. 144. [Some account of these maps (not to be confused with the better known series in the *Logge di Raffaele*) was given by Everhard Schmidt in the *Geogr. Zeitschrift* for 1911 (see *Journal*, vol. 39, p. 498).—Ed. G.Œ.]

† *Holstenii epistula*, ed. Boissonade, p. 237 (No. xxxix.): "hoc præsertim tempore, dum Summi Pontificis iussu Vaticano ambulacro instaurando laborem molestum sane et ærumnosum impendere cogor." P. 242: "Sed opus adeo negligenter procedit, ut mihi quidem cæpti pœniteat: neque enim tota hac æstate præter duas tabulas, alteram Italiæ novæ, alteram antiquæ, quidquam expedire potui." The whole passage is worth reading.

‡ A parallel case is that of the map of the Campagna Romana of Eufrosino della Volpaia (1547), of which, though it served as the foundation of the cartography of the district for over a century, only a single copy is known.

§ The 1695 edition appears in the catalogue of the De Rossi family at Rome (1700, p. 6), and in that of the Calcografia Camerale (1797, p. 114). Prof. Almagià was unable to find a copy of this edition; but I have seen one in the Topham Library at Eton (in a portfolio in press Bo. 3). [A copy is also in the possession of a Fellow of this Society, Mr. H. Ruffer, who has long been interested in early Italian maps.—Ed. G.Œ.]