

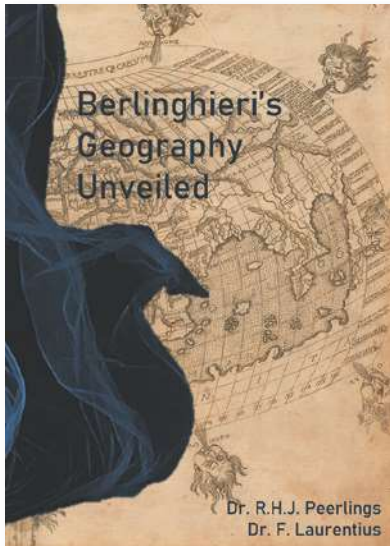
# IMCS MAP JOURNAL

INTERNATIONAL MAP COLLECTORS' SOCIETY

MARCH 2024 | No.176

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled** by R.H.J. Peerlings and F. Laurentius. Peerlings and Laurentius, 2023. Free and fully accessible online via <https://berlinghieri.eu>



Presented as an open-access resource and comprising more than 400 pages of data and analysis, *Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled* represents the most comprehensive study yet attempted of the composition and printing of one of the Quattrocento's most intriguing cartographic undertakings. In one crucial sense, the unveiling promised by Peerlings' and Laurentius' title is hardly an exaggeration. Making available a vast data set drawn from dozens of individual copies of the printed book, the authors provide a previously unimaginably granular view of the Florentine humanist's work. So too, by eschewing traditional publication and its limitations of format these observations can be presented alongside a staggering 744 illustrations.

The result is both a treasure trove for future research on Berlinghieri's project and a considerably more nuanced understanding of the once enigmatic idiosyncrasies of the multi-year printing process in which the *Geographia's* printer, Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna engaged. Through a more systematic analysis of paper and a greatly expanded corpus of watermarks, once speculative hypotheses on this

timeline are brought into clear focus. So too, these maps are convincingly differentiated by printing state and, for the first time, the confusing web of toponyms drawn from Ptolemy and variously parsed by Berlinghieri and his engraver are gathered in a single place. While less disruptive to the status quo than these contributions, a clear reconstruction of the sources used to produce these maps is also helpfully included building upon – and sometimes correcting – the pioneering work of scholars like Roberto Almagià. The technical and chronological clarity provided here can serve, for example, to make more precise our understanding of how and when copies of the book were dispatched by its author, its printer, and actors like the Florentine *Signoria* for personal influence, commercial success, and diplomatic network building.

In elevating multiple printed copies of a single text and its maps to the object of monographic study, this project builds upon several decades of valuable scholarship not just on Berlinghieri but on print's embeddedness within material culture. This book can, in this way, be seen as of a piece with studies by art historians including Suzanne Karr Schmidt, and most recently, Heather Madar that break from longstanding assumptions to treat prints as mobile, sculptural, and sometimes unique. These are barriers I was working to break in my own study *Printing a Mediterranean World* which appeared a decade ago. At that time, Elizabeth Eisenstein and even William Ivins with their assumptions of print's replicability and 'exactly repeatable pictorial statements' still cast long shadows. In retrospect, the very length of those shadows pointed to the approaching twilight of important but ultimately inflexible notions of technology and communication.

I began conducting research for *Printing a Mediterranean World* in 2001. Most of the archives and libraries that held copies of the *Geographia* did not allow digital photography. Some did not yet allow laptop computers in their workspaces. No collections were digitized, and many catalogues were not yet online. Even the lavish illuminated manuscripts produced for Lorenzo de' Medici and Federico da Montefeltro had not been reproduced comprehensively and were unavailable without direct consultation at the Vatican and Milan's Biblioteca Braidense. The unprecedented access – including in electronic form – to the number

of copies available to Peerlings and Laurentius have allowed them to correct some persistent and oft-repeated mistakes in previous scholarship, including my own. Thanks to heavy paper that had been applied to the back of several significant sets of Berlinghieri's maps, I mistakenly identified what I called a 'ribbon' watermark, generating later confusion on this point. While I have not had the opportunity to return to examine several copies, including that in Istanbul, I am satisfied by the present authors' corrections. The ribbon mark indeed seems to have been my own misreading of the tail end of the 'P' watermark when obscured by sheets used to back and reinforce these maps through later conservation.

For all of its evident strengths, *Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled* should be approached with a caveat: the authors do not engage with some important recent scholarship intersecting with this material. In particular, the Italian and English studies on the *Geographia's* printer by Lorenz Böninger are entirely unacknowledged. This includes both his Harvard University Press monograph of 2021 and, even more crucially, his 2016 discovery and explication of the contract for Landino's commentary on the *Divine Comedy*. It will be of paramount importance for scholars to consider Peerlings' and Laurentius' conclusions in relationship to Böninger's proposals before several matters of the *Geographia's* printing history can be considered closed.

The authors are not, as they openly acknowledge, cultural historians of early modern Italy nor art historians. The web of Ottoman diplomacy and Florentine politics which has long attracted scholars to Berlinghieri's book are not explored here in any detail. Likewise, Peerlings and Laurentius largely steer clear of the poem itself, a complicated (and awkward) *terza rima* composition. Those of us who have worked on it have even now barely scratched the surface of its dense web of classical and contemporary references and its value not just to geographic culture but also the literary milieu of Quattrocento Florence remains an open investigation. The patronage of the *Geographia* most recently revisited by Chet van Duzer receives no definitive answer here. Finally, no stylistic or visual analysis is attempted regarding the engraved maps leaving us no closer to a resolution of the disagreement between me and Suzanne Boorsch over their attribution to Francesco Rosselli.

Such qualifications aside, Peerlings' and Laurentius' project should be considered essential not only for those interested in Berlinghieri but for historians of printing

and of the codex more broadly. It provides, among much else, a template for how open access and digital-native studies can take full advantage of developing formats to provide scholars not just with pre-packaged arguments and analysis but with the kind of raw data that proves unwieldy and commercially prohibitive in traditional publications. This work will, among much else, serve as the starting point for all future studies of Berlinghieri and his maps.

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