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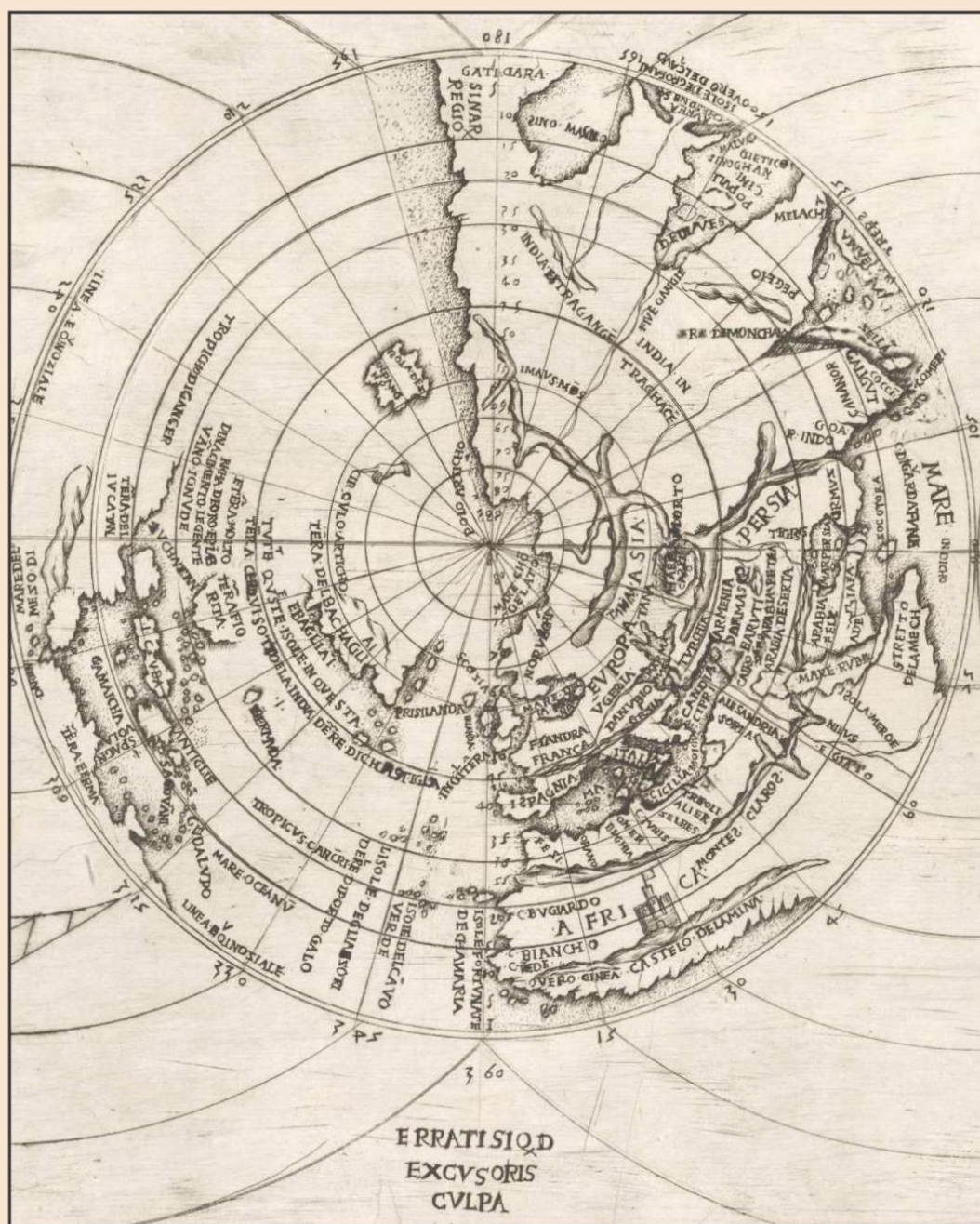
JOURNAL OF THE WASHINGTON MAP SOCIETY

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2023 Ristow Prize for Academic Achievement in the History of Cartography

Polar Hemispheres: The Overlooked Alternative to Nautical Planispheres in Renaissance Iberia

by Luis A. Robles Macias



Detail. World map in PAE projection dated 1524 that claims to be the work of "Juan Vespucci of Florence, pilot of the King of the Spains". Harvard Map Collection, Vespucci1524.

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Recent Publications

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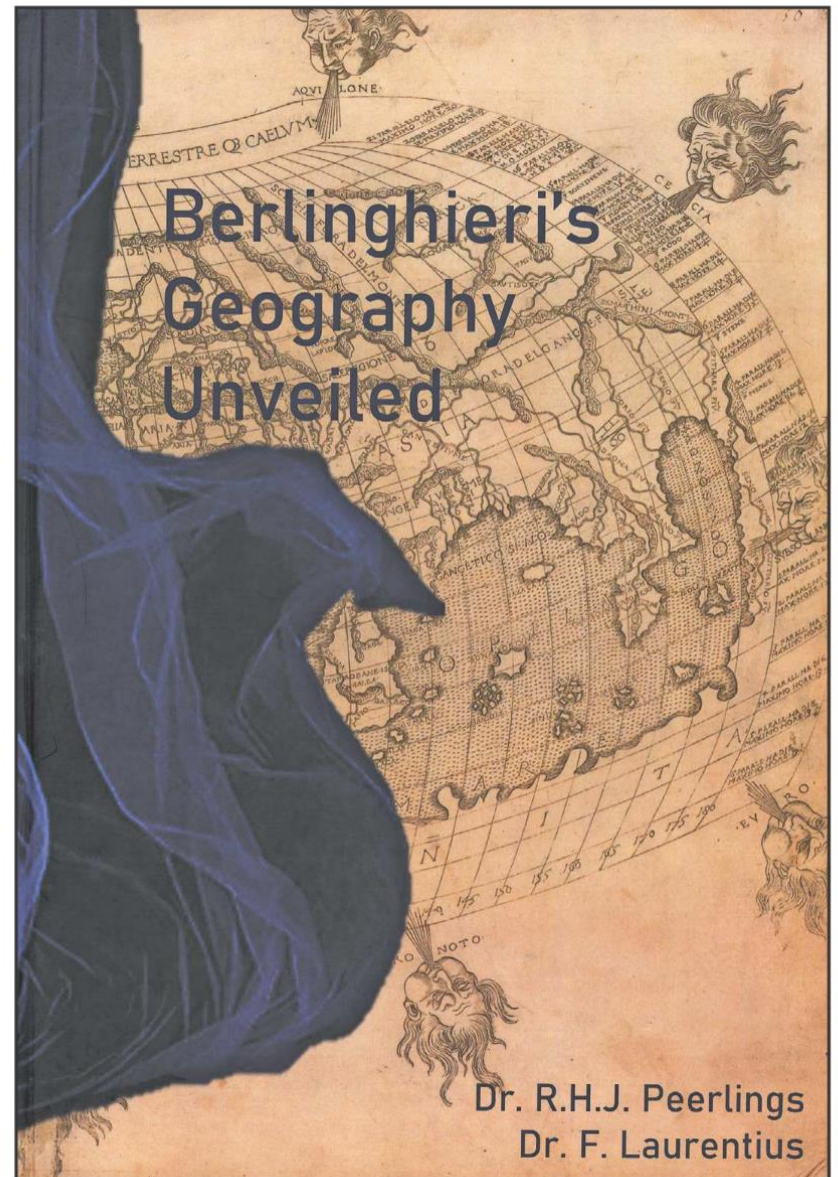
Peerlings, Robert H.J. and Frans Laurentius. *Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled*. Middelburg, Netherlands: Peerlings and Laurentius, 2023. Hardback, 8.375x12 in., 420 pages, 6 tables, 744 color illustrations, index. ISBN 978-9090370453. Free to download at <https://berlinghieri.eu/>.

Reviewed by Benjamin B. Olshin

This is an impressive book—an intensely detailed, well-illustrated, and thorough examination of the Ptolemaic atlas by the Florentine scholar Francesco di Niccòlo Berlinghieri (1440–1500). Berlinghieri's 1482 atlas was “one of the first atlases with separately printed maps” (11). Berlinghieri's *Geography* is also important in that it includes the earliest printed maps of Italy, Spain, and France. Moreover, the text of the work is written in vernacular Italian rather than Latin, and composed in what is known as *terza rima*—a poetic form famously used by Dante Alighieri for his *Divina Commedia*. Finally, the atlas is unusual in that the regional maps employ the rectangular projection of Marinus. Peerlings and Laurentius, citing a study by R. A. Skelton, note that in Berlinghieri's *Geography*, each “of the 26 regional maps was designed according to Marinus' plane projection with equidistant meridians and parallels” and thus those maps “have rectangular borders... unlike all other early printed editions of Ptolemy's *Cosmography* which contain regional maps with trapezoidal borders” (46).

The approach of the authors is marked by their unusual background: Robert H.J. Peerlings is a practicing orthodontist who has also carried out research in that field, and has an active interest in cartography and map collecting (with a focus on Ptolemy); Frans Laurentius is an art historian and art dealer, with specialties in the study of paper and watermarks. The result, as evident in this book, is a distinct focus on the physical aspects of the atlas itself, as well as a contextual study in terms of printing and paper production of the period. *Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled* looks at Berlinghieri's work as one might examine a beautiful and intriguing physical artifact. As Peerlings puts it in the Preface, “Although the subject of this book is an atlas, the nature of our book is more book-historical than cartographic” (12).

However, Peerlings and Laurentius also offer historical context at the beginning of their study. The first chapter here introduces Ptolemy and his *Geographia* (or *Cosmographia*), and how that work came to the knowledge of Renaissance scholars. The discussion is quite thorough—although not without minor errors, e.g., the reference to “libers” (15). A vital point that the authors communicate well here is that the cartographic content of Ptolemy that survived from the ancient period comprised sets of coordinates, and that this presented a challenge to subsequent readers who wished to create maps from



that data. The introductory material given by Peerlings and Laurentius also covers the issues of toponyms, projection methods, and the appearance of printed editions. The book then shifts to a specific discussion of printed editions of Ptolemy's work, which were produced in Vincenza, Bologna, Rome, and then—outside of Italy—in Ulm, in the latter decades of the fifteenth century. This second chapter includes extensive notes on watermarks, as well as a discussion of printing methods.

In the third chapter, the reader is introduced to Francesco di Niccòlo Berlinghieri, and given some background. The authors note how Berlinghieri was part of a notable circle of teachers, humanist scholars,

Neoplatonists such as Ficino, and Florentine patrons including the Medici family. This chapter also introduces Berlinghieri's *Geography*, noting that it was dedicated to Federico da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino, and that it was written in Tuscan dialect (39). Besides the printed edition of the *Geography*, the authors point out that manuscript versions exist, now residing in the Vatican and in Milan. The discussion here includes a study of printing in Florence in this period, and some details about Niccolò Tedesco, who printed Berlinghieri's work. The chapter concludes with an overview of the text, the maps, and the dedication of the *Geography*.

Peerlings and Laurentius then devote the next several chapters to a series of detailed studies, based on their examination of extant copies of Berlinghieri's *Geography* in Europe. These studies include a look at paper production and use in Italy in the fifteenth century; watermarks and their usefulness in dating a work; fonts and typographic characteristics of Berlinghieri's *Geography*; the copperplates, and the printing process utilized in the work; adjustments and changes in the maps; and the characteristics of the various printed editions.

The book concludes with a chapter on two manuscripts of Berlinghieri's *Geography*. The authors note how these "manuscripts and several printed copies of Berlinghieri's *Geography* are a wonderful example of the transition from manuscripts to the printed book and the intermediate co-existence of both types of publications at that time" (262). An Epilogue sums up the authors' conclusions about the date of Berlinghieri's *Geography*, the types of paper used, and the sources or "templates" for the maps. The Epilogue also includes a personal note from Peerlings about the process of research and writing this vast study, his visits to various libraries in Europe, and his work with his co-author, Laurentius.

There are a few flaws in *Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled* that should be noted. For one, the index is oddly formatted and difficult to use. For example, if one wishes to look up where Skelton is cited, one finds his name under "A", then the sub-heading "authors" in the index. So, one cannot easily find the citations for Skelton, Almagià, or other authors. Alexander Jones, a key translator and commentator of Ptolemy is cited in the footnotes but does not appear readily in the index. The footnotes in the book are extensive, but there is no bibliography; the use of *op. cit.* and *ibid.* alternately in the footnotes is executed correctly, but is very confusing to a reader who genuinely wishes to look up a source for a citation. Finally, the book as a whole requires an editor who is a native speaker of English, as there are several grammatical errors in the text of the book, particularly in the Preface.

However, as the saying goes, *Berlinghieri's Geography Unveiled* is clearly "a labor of love", and Peerlings and Laurentius should be praised for compiling a volume that can serve as a groundwork for future research. In addition, their work is an excellent example of the setting aside of conjecture, speculation, and artifice—three characteristics one finds all too often in contemporary scholarship—and instead focusing on evidentiary material, primary source documents, and sound methodology.

Benjamin B. Olshin is a historian of cartography, and a member of the Washington Map Society and the Society for the History of Discoveries. He is the author of *The Mysteries of the Marco Polo Maps* and *Lost Knowledge: The Concept of Vanished Technologies and other Human Histories*.

