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JOVANE MENSSIS, *La longhezza e la larghezza de la Italia* (The Length and Breadth of Italy)

In Italian, illustrated manuscript on paper

Northern Italy (Trento), c. 1525-before 1566

18 pen, ink, and watercolor drawings by Jovane Menssis

ii + 47 + iii folios on paper, watermark: two columns surmounted by a cross, banderol with the name illegible (unidentified, loosely similar to Briquet 4448, Beauvais, 1589, and Briquet 4449, Arras, 1592), watermark on the end flyleaves: clover with the letters "E G" (G inverted) (unidentified), modern foliation in pencil (made after the loss of two leaves), 1-47, lacking two leaves with illustrations (i²⁴ [-2, lacking one leaf after f. 1, with loss of the illustration of Italy and text] ii²² [-15, lacking one leaf after f. 38, with loss of the illustration of Alessandria] iii²), no catchwords or signatures, written in brown ink in littera hybrida script on 15-22 lines, no visible ruling, 18 VERY FINE PEN AND INK DRAWINGS, 16 with watercolor washes, all but two full page, by Jovane Menssis, a group of three tiny cuts in the upper part of the outer margin on ff. 42-47 as intentional "page markers", some stains and signs of use, otherwise in very good condition. Bound in the eighteenth century in limp parchment covers, parchment stained especially on the lower cover, pastedowns of gilt floral paper, in overall good condition. Dimensions 153 x 216 mm.

Very rare, early atlas of towns, providing a unique and previously unknown witness of Renaissance cartography. It was most likely made for the famous Italian topographer, Bartolomeo Marliani, who later gave it to the architect, Bernardo Fogari. The oblong volume includes eighteen very fine pen, ink, and watercolor drawings representing aerial views of the most important Italian cities, which predate the first Italian printed collection of town views by Forlani and Zenoi (Venice, 1567).

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was made for Bartolomeo Marliani (Marliano, Mariano), whom we suggest may be identified with the Italian antiquarian and topographer who lived from 1488 to 1566, and who published in 1534 his most famous work, *Antiquae Romae topographia*, which remained the standard work on the topography of Rome until the eighteenth century (Marliani, Online Resources). The manuscript was made by his cousin, Jovane Menssis of Trento, as Menssis states in an inscription on f. 47v: "Jovane Menssis Tridentino fezit il presente libro & fazio donation al mio cugino et quanto fratello mio Car[issi]mo Me[sse]r Bertolomio Mariano da Udene." Menssis was undoubtedly an artist, and perhaps an engraver. Bartolomeo Marliani was born in Robbio and studied in Milan and Padua (not far from Udine) before settling in Rome. It is not clear why the inscription in this manuscript mentions Udine, but perhaps he lived there before settling in Rome, or had some other association with that city, now unknown. The quality and contents of the manuscript make him the most likely recipient.

The manuscript can be dated to the second quarter of the sixteenth century, and in any case before 1566, the death of Marliani; the style of the handwriting supports this date.

2. Bartolomeo Marliani gave the manuscript to his friend, the architect and miniaturist, Bernardo Fogari, when he left from Cattaro (part of the Venetian Republic from 1420 to 1797, now Kotor in Montenegro), as he noted in his inscription on f. 47v below the Menssis's inscription: "Io Bartolamio Mariano facio donation del presente libro a messer Bernardo Fogari da Vicenza mio carissimo amico in questa mia partenza da Cattaro." Fogari famously designed a triumphal arch filled with allegories and mottos on the Piazzetta San Marco in Venice for the guild of butchers, in order to celebrate the procession of Morosina Morosini to the Ducal Palace after her coronation as Dogess of Venice in 1597.
3. Unknown nineteenth-century private collection, with a paper label on the front pastedown: "Descrizione delle principali città d'Italia con la pianta della maggior parte di esse disegnata a penna. Cod. Cartaceo del sec. XVII in 4° - legato in pergamena // Lib. 1. Scaf. 7 (shelfmark)".
4. In 1927 in the collection of the Swiss bookseller Ulrico Hoepli based in Milan: see his catalogue *Manoscritti, miniature, incunabuli, legature*, Milan, 1927, p. 25.
5. Federico Patetta (1867-1945), law scholar and collector, who left most of his library, including manuscripts and incunabula, to the Biblioteca Vaticana. His research library, which he left to his heirs, was later donated to the University of Torino (cf. Patetta in Online Resources). This manuscript was no. 22 in his collection; his ownership inscription is in the lower margin of f. 1: "Federico Patetta Ms. N. 22".
6. Finarte Minerva Auctions, auction 122, February 8, 2016, lot 208.

TEXT

ff. 1-38v, *La longhezza et la larghezza de la Italia*, incipit, "La Italia senza dubbio, e in Europa Regione di tutte le altre de Europa celebra ...citta e regina de le altre per mare"; [f. 39, blank];

Contents as follows: f. 1r-v, general description of Italy [lacking a leaf with the illustration on the recto]; f. 2, Venice [illustration only; lacking the preceding leaf with the description on the verso]; ff. 2v-3, Naples; ff. 3v-4, Gaeta; ff. 4v-5, Ancona; ff. 5v-6, Rimini; ff. 6v-7, Florence; ff. 7v-8, Aquileia; ff. 8v-9, Luni (founded as Luna by the Romans); ff. 9v-11, Padua; ff. 11v-12, Treviso; ff. 12v-13, Pisa; ff. 13v-15, Rome; ff. 15v-16, Syracuse; ff. 16v-17, Constantinople (Istanbul) [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 17v-18, Milan [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 18v-19, Pavia; ff. 19v-20, Bergamo [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 20v-21, Brescia; ff. 21v-22, Verona [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 22v-23, Vicenza [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 23v-24, Mantua; ff. 24v-25, Piacenza [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 25v-26, Torino; ff. 26v-27, Aosta (Augusta Pretoria) [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 27v-28, Vercelli [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 28v-29, Paris [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 29v-30, Parma [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 30v-31, Ravenna; ff. 31v-32, Siena [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 32v-33, Perugia [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 33v-34 Trier [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 34v-37, Jerusalem [the illustration planned was not executed]; ff. 37v-38, Venice [the illustration

planned was not executed]; f. 38v, Alessandria [lacking the leaf with the illustration of Alessandria],

Jovane Menssis, *La longhezza et la larghezza de la Italia* (title given on f. 1), with eighteen very fine pen, ink and watercolor drawings representing aerial views of the most important Italian cities. There are a further sixteen descriptions of important cities, including Paris and Jerusalem, which were also intended to have images, but which were never completed. As in the editions that were later printed throughout central Europe, the city views in our manuscript are accompanied by texts on the facing pages. Ortelius explained that the text in his *Theatrum orbis terrarum* of 1570, were "based on first-hand information, ... intended to deepen knowledge of each town with geographical, historical and academic information" (cf. Nuti, 1994, p. 106). That may also be true in the case of our manuscript; it is possible that the text in our manuscript is unique, but further research is necessary to analyze its sources. The descriptions of the cities summarize their place in history, invoking antique and Christian historical references, famous names, and monuments.

ff. 39v-47v, incipit, "Di alcuni segni et miracoli parsi in Roma de la nativita dil salvator n'ofro ... et poi de tutto la discriptione del mondo de quanto e longo et alto equanti mari estole e monti piu famosi: Et la larghezza e longezza de Italia ... Tanti grilli salu(t)atichi aparveno questo anno 1478 in Bresa e Mantua fu universalmente pesta per tutta la Italia: in modo tale che morir[o]no in Bresa circha 20 milia persone et pin di 30 milia in Venecia et simelmente per tutta quanta la Italia. Et ben che la predisse sechi per le sole che fu in gesto anno et ancora quelli grilli salu[t]atichi."

Descriptions of miracles, natural phenomena and strange events in chronological order, copied by the same hand as the previous text, beginning with the miracle of the birth of Christ, including icy winters, floods (the 1454 flood of Danube evoked on f. 46v), plagues, two rains of blood, comets sited in 982, 997, 1301, 1350, 1472 (ff. 42v, 45, 45v, 47), humans giving birth to monsters or animals (a woman giving birth to a dog in Brescia in 1471 and another woman giving birth to a cat in Pavia in 1471), and earthquakes (in 367, 1119, 1183, 1228, 1357, 1449, 1457).

ILLUSTRATION

Eighteen pen and ink drawings, sixteen with watercolor washes:

f. 2, Venice;

f. 3, Naples;

f. 4, Gaeta;

f. 5, Ancona;

f. 6, Rimini;

f. 7, Florence

f. 8, Aquileia;

- f. 9, Luni;
- f. 11, Padua;
- f. 12, Treviso
- f. 13, Pisa;
- f. 15, Rome (uncolored study);
- f. 16, Syracuse;
- f. 19, Pavia (uncolored study);
- f. 21, Brescia;
- f. 24, Mantua;
- f. 26, Turin;
- f. 31, Ravenna.

The beginnings of the idea of gathering town views in one volume can be seen in a group of three copies of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia* illuminated by the Florentine Pietro del Massaio between 1469 and 1480 (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 5699 and MS Urb. Lat. 277, and Paris, BnF, MS lat. 4802; Nuti, 1994, p. 105). In this work, Pietro del Massaio appended images of ten capitals of the ancient and medieval world, including Rome, to the usual Ptolemaic texts.

Printed collections of town views were developed in Italy and France as early as the first half of the sixteenth century; the earliest known surviving town book printed in Italy is *Il primo libro delle città e fortezze principali del mondo* by Paolo Forlani and Domenico Zenoi, printed in Venice in 1567 (Nuti, 1994, p. 105). It predates the famous *Civitates orbis terrarum* of Braun and Hogenberg printed in six volumes in Cologne beginning in 1572.

Our manuscript contributes to the study of the creation of town atlases before they were circulated widely and became famous through engravings in printed editions. The town views in our manuscript resemble those in Forlani and Zenoi's *Il Primo libro delle città...* (cf. Nuti, 1994, p. 106, fig. 1), and they may also be compared to earlier town views. For example, it is interesting to compare the view of Florence on f. 7 of our manuscript with the famous Rosselli engraving of Florence made around 1480 (known only through derivatives), which is commonly referred to as the first modern town view. It is traditionally attributed to Francesco Rosselli (1448-before 1513), a Florentine engraver with an important workshop specializing in selling maps at the time. However, in comparing Rosselli's Florence view with Flemish landscape painting, Lucia Nuti has suggested that Rosselli was only the engraver and the drawing was provided by a Flemish artist (Nuti, 1994). Although the viewpoint in Menssis's Florence is almost the same, and a number of details are similar, significant differences suggest that Menssis was unaware of

the earlier print; for one, he placed the major landmarks of the Duomo and Giotto's Campanile almost immediately on the banks of Arno. For the history of cartography and art, therefore, the drawing by Menssis offers a new and previously unknown view of the period portraying Florence from the hills.

The present volume concludes with intriguing descriptions of miracles, strange events, and recordings of natural phenomena such as comets and earthquakes (ff. 39v-47v). These might be excerpts copied from the Book of Miracles, or the Calendar of Miracles and Signs, texts that were common in the sixteenth century and sometimes illustrated. The author viewed this section as integral to his text on the descriptions of the cities (on f. 39v he refers back to the title given in the beginning of the manuscript on f. 1, *la larghezza e longhezza de Italia*).

LITERATURE

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Bocchi, F. and R. Smurra. *Imago urbis: l'immagine della città nella storia d'Italia*, conference proceedings, Bologna, 5-7 September 2001, Rome, 2003.

Nuti, L. "The Perspective Plan in the Sixteenth Century: The Invention of a Representational Language," *The Art Bulletin* 76:1 (1994), pp. 105-128.

Woodward, D. "The Italian Map Trade, 1480-1650," *Cartography in the European Renaissance*, vol. 3, ed. by D. Woodward, Chicago, 2007, pp. 773-803.

Woodward, David. "Paolo Forlani: Compiler, Engraver, Printer, or Publisher?" *Imago Mundi* 44, (1992), pp. 45-64.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Bartolomeo Marliani in Treccani

[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-marliani_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bartolomeo-marliani_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

Bartolomeo Marliani in Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bartolomeo_Marliani

Federico Patetta in Treccani

[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/federico-patetta_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/federico-patetta_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

Paolo Forlani

<https://www.digitaldisci.it/forlani-paolo/>

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