The Narrative of the Urban Landscape in the Frescoed Galleries of the Vatican Museums and Palazzo Doria Spinola

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Abstract

"He who has experienced flight will walk looking at the sky because there he has been and where he wants to return", so began the genius Leonardo about the studies he was making on flying machines. Not only Da Vinci, but the man in general, has always had a propensity for what he could not reach, an urge to create tools that would allow him to reach different points of view. Between Humanism and the Renaissance, the new cultural liveliness led man to undertake great geographical explorations, undertaking numerous studies to create detailed maps and charts.
The wealthiest families and prominent personalities, in general, began to take an increasing interest in cartography, asking astronomers and cartographers to make maps for their homes that initially only contained descriptions of the ancient world, to be progressively updated with newly discovered areas. The fashion became so widespread that aristocratic and clerical buildings began to be decorated in paintings or frescoes; the pictorial maps in the Gallery of the Vatican Museums and the Gallery of Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa are famous examples.
Therefore, the research aims to analyse the similarities and differences between these two cartographic representations in bird's eye perspective views of the Ligurian capital.

Keywords: cartography, Palazzo Doria Spinola, Vatican map gallery, urban landscapes, bird's eye perspective.

Introduction

The representation of the Earth on the elevations of public buildings has a very ancient tradition. However, it was only during the Renaissance that the image of the Italian peninsula began to be reproduced. This subject spread in a historical period when there was a greater interest in forming images that conveyed a sense of superiority and power. During Humanism and the Renaissance, 15th-16th centuries, Italy, the lively centre of this new historical period, went through a phase of evolution in stark contrast to the medieval philosophical thought that had characterised it in the previous century. Cultural renewal led to the re-reading of Hellenic-Latin texts, and, at the same time, the first geographical explorations outside the Mediterranean basin began. New maps began to be drawn up with bird's eye or pseudo-orthogonal views; they no longer had merely practical purposes but were produced for scientific and political-cultural interests.
"The use spread so widely in Italy that the *mappa mundi* mural became, in the 15th and 16th centuries, an almost ritual decoration of the seats of power, in both public and private spheres. However, the phenomenon is not just Italian: the general spread of maps and geographical representations in the 15th century is attested throughout Europe" [Milanesi 2012, p. 100]. The representation of cartographic maps in buildings of power represents, in the Renaissance, the relations of a sovereign or a state with the rest of the world and continues into the 16th century, when the *mappa mundi* is transformed into a series of maps representing

the different parts of the world using the oval 'universal' or the double hemispheric. "The choice of a geographical theme, for the decoration of a princely or prelatial flat, has nothing unusual or original about it: on the contrary, it is even codified in the well-known text by Cardinal Paolo Cortese, according to whom maps, offering the viewer the noble and dignified entertainment of contemplating the beauty, vastness and variety of nature, which consoles and improves the mind, are well suited to a prelatial residence. For all princes, then, the '*ex rerum et locorum cognitione utilitas*', the utility that comes from knowledge of things and places, referred to in the plaque with which Gregory XIII placed the seal of his arms on the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican in 1581, always applies" [Milanesi 2012, p. 108].
The case study of the map gallery on the first piano nobile of the Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa will be taken as an example in comparison with the famous map gallery in the Vatican Palaces. A historical, geopolitical and geometric-representative analysis of bird's-eye perspectives will be developed.

Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa

The Doria Spinola palace (fig. 1), today the seat of the prefecture of Genoa, was built in the Acquasola area for Admiral Antonio Doria, former marquis of Santo Stefano, between 1541-1543 [Labò 1970] and was included in the prestigious list of the Rolli as early as 1575 in the highest level of the palace destined to host "Pope, Emperor, and Legate Cardinal or other great Prince" [1].
In 1624, the palace passed to the Spinola di San Pietro family, who raised it by one floor and owned it until the 20th century. Then, after a brief period under the ownership of the Municipality of Genoa, the building passed to the Province of Genoa in 1879.
The palace's area is land of considerable strategic and socio-political importance as it is located close to the monastic complex of Santa Caterina; this area is prized as private individuals cannot usually build on it. The most plausible explanation for this type of concession is that Antonio Doria had close relations with the church and the Spanish crown of Charles V [Santamaria 2011]. The Doria family in general, but in the specific case of Antonio, brought to Genoa the feverish desire for building and renovation that would last throughout the Renaissance; the property anticipates what was to be the Strada Nuova project in Genoa with the subdivision and building of the new noble palaces. The area purchased by Antonio contained within it a series of medieval *domus* characterised by a stone portico on the ground floor, of a public nature, and a private first floor; in the building renovation practice previously anticipated, the project attributed to Bernardino Cantone [Labò 1970] with the help of Giovan Battista Castello, envisaged an amalgamation of the existing buildings behind an apparent symmetry of plan and elevation. The façade is laid out according to a regular partition frescoed by Lazzero and Pantaleo Calvi, depicting the triumphs of the ancient Romans, accessed through a marble portal with coupled columns designed by Taddeo Carlone in 1580.
The interior is distributed around a square loggia courtyard on two levels with Doric capitals leading to the private rooms and connecting the gallery built under the Spinola family. In the mid-19th century, a new urban layout of the city of Genoa was outlined, leading to the construction of Via Roma in connection with Via Assarotti, which was a break in the mediaeval fabric and led to the elimination of the Renaissance gallery and the cutting off of the right-hand edge of the main façade; the original appearance remains documented in the Flemish panels executed by Pieter Paul Rubens.
The interior frescoes in Palazzo Doria Spinola are by Luca Cambiaso, Valerio Castello and the Calvi. The latter were

Fig. 1. Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa (by Di Superchilum – Opera propria, CC BY-SA 3.0: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=31937743> (accessed May 15, 2023).

16th-century Genoese Mannerist painters, pupils of Perin del Vaga; they obtained numerous commissions for façade frescoes throughout 16th century Genoa but were made famous by the work they executed for this building; in it, they depicted the exploits of the Doria family in comparison with those carried out by ancient Roman figures.
The Calvi family not only frescoed the façades but also devoted themselves entirely to the decoration of the upper loggia (fig. 2) in 1584, with views of fortified Italian and foreign cities realised in large panels above a faux marble plinth decoration. Rome, Venice, Milan and Palermo are depicted on the south side; Messina, Florence, Jerusalem and Constantinople on the east side; Bologna, Antwerp, Genoa and Naples on the north side and Ancona on the west side. Unfortunately, with the renovation of the plan, which led to several doors opening, traces of the maps of Constantinople, Bologna, Ancona and Palermo were almost wholly lost.
The decision to decorate the gallery of Palazzo Doria Spinola with views of cities was probably taken from the recently completed gallery of Vatican maps due to the close relations Antonio Doria had with the Pope and the Spanish crown; however, it is more plausible that the choice was also dictated by the specific interests of the owner being "a local unicum, since no other examples of such decoration are known in Genoa" [Boccardo 1982].
The Calvi family almost certainly used the geographic maps of the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (figs. 3, 4) as their primary iconographic source and the available geographic tables as support. Curiously, the only city that is not a perspective plan is precisely the city of Genoa, which is primarily a view of it. Labò showed how it, although perfectly representing the historical urban fabric of the 16th century, is the result of a later realisation in 1889 attributable to Nicolò Varni (figs. 5, 6). The portion of the wall on which it was painted was previously intended to represent a city plan that was lost with the transformations that occurred after the purchase of the property by the Province of Genoa [Santamaria 2011].

Fig. 2. Loggia superiore of Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genova (photo by the authors).

Belvedere Gallery of the Vatican Palaces

The Belvedere Gallery, famous under the name 'of the maps' (fig. 7) and now part of the Vatican Museums in Rome, was built between 1578 and 1579 by the Bolognese Pope Gregory XIII Boncompagni to a design by

Fig. 3. Naples in the Gallery of Palazzo Spinola in Genoa (photo by the authors) and in Civitates Orbis Terrarum by G. Braun and F. Hogenberg: <https://archive.org/details/civitatesorbiste00brau/page/n3/mode/2up> (accessed May 15, 2023).

the architect Ottaviano Mascarino with the support of Egnazio Danti and Girolamo Muziano for the decorative apparatus [Moretti 2020].
In texts of the time, such as in the *Ambulatio Gregoriana*, reference is made to the Pope's particular request to depict the entire Italian peninsula within his gallery in order to "reflect on the government of the territories, on the resolution of discord, on the maintenance of peace among peoples: as if to declare that the entire decorative scheme on a monumental scale has an ethical and civil value even before being religious" [translation from Watt 2005, p. 179] [2]. In the Renaissance, the Dominican Egnazio Danti, an Italian architect and cosmographer, was commissioned by various noble families, such as the de' Medici, to draw up maps and charts to be placed inside their wealthy palaces or villas as wall decorations. During his stay in Rome, he was called upon by Gregory XIII to reform the calendar, which will go down in history as the Gregorian Calendar, and to draw up, together with his brother Antonio, the gallery above. Danti most likely took up the idea of the circumnavigation of the peninsula from the plates of Leandro Alberti, published in 1550 in the text '*Descrizione di tutta l'Italia et isole pertinenti ad essa*', depicting the exact sequence of the regions within the individual frames, enriching them with quotations, inscriptions and war episodes of particular relevance [Moretti 2020].
Gregory XIII's gallery was designed to be enjoyed not only privately but also by a limited public in order to make them aware of the Pope's territories; this intention was also stated in an inscription above the north portal: 'Italy, the noblest region in the whole world: as it is divided by nature by the Apennines, in the same way for this purpose the gallery is divided into two parts, on this side the one bounded by the Alps and the Upper Sea, on this side the other bounded by the Lower Sea […] Gregory XIII, *pontifex maximus*, in the year 1581, wanted these things, begun by himself, to be finished with skill and splendour, not so much for his benefit as for that of the Roman pontiffs, and so that the utility would not be absent from the delight and knowledge of things and places' [3]. The original plan was for the gallery to link with the Sistine Chapel located on the third floor of the west wing of the Cortile di Belvedere; therefore, it was conceived as a large elongated room extending 120 metres covered by a coffered barrel vault.
The latter hosts a series of scenes of a historical, hagiographic and biblical nature, depicting episodes related to

the geographical locations below, framed within mock architectural parts adorned with putti and characters from the Old Testament: the authorship of these decorations is attributed to Girolamo Muziano and Cesare Nebbia [Fiorani 1996].
The gallery was designed as a walk through all of Italy's territories from north to south. The central part houses thirty-two maps, called primary, measuring 4.30x3.30 metres, depicting the regions of Italy (fig. 8) to the right and left of the Apennine chain, and eight maps, called minor, depicting the large port cities (Civitavecchia, Ancona, Genoa, Venice) and the smaller islands (Tremiti, Elba, Malta and Corfu) located at the ends of the gallery. In the south portal, two maps of the entire Italian peninsula represent '*Italia antiqua and Italia nova*', as the inscription states.

Comparison and analysis of the urban landscape representations of Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa and the Belvedere Gallery at the Vatican

During the 15th-16th centuries, the interest in cartography became increasingly preponderant thanks to the spread of the very first printed atlases; aristocratic families began to request astronomers and cartographers at court to produce maps of old and recently discovered areas to embellish their residences. During the mid-16th century in Rome and Venice, several publishers, commissioned by aristocratic families, began to print and disseminate maps following the example of the emblematic *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius printed in Antwerp in 1576. Examples of this new decorative impetus include Pope Innocent VIII who commissioned Pinturicchio to depict various perspective views of Italian cities in the loggias of Belvedere; those by Bellini commissioned by the Gonzagas; those of Cosimo I de' Medici; the gallery of Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa and finally the gallery of maps in the Vatican of Gregory XIII. The last two examples mentioned above were produced almost at the same time: for this reason they are comparable in terms of representative geometric techniques, knowledge of places and also in political and cultural practices.
By analysing the Roman and Genoese maps in terms of similarities and differences, an initial similarity can be seen in the choice of representing specific geographical areas or cities rather than the entire known world (figs. 9, 10): Palazzo Doria Spinola depicts the most important Italian

Fig. 4. Milan in the Gallery of Palazzo Spinola in Genoa (photo by the authors) and in the Civitates Orbis Terrarum by G. Braun and F. Hogenberg: <https://archive.org/details/civitatesorbiste00brau/page/n3/mode/2up> (accessed May 15, 2023).

cities and some large foreign cities such as Jerusalem, Antwerp and Constantinople. In contrast, in the Vatican, all Italian regions and the possessions of the papal state are represented in a monothematic manner, except for a few islands such as Corfu and Malta. The reason for this particular choice can be inserted in an exact socio-cultural and political context in which Gregory XIII decided to create a space where the binomials ancient-contemporary and Roman-Christian history would merge into a single topographical and historical narrative within the drawing highlighting his possessions; "The presence of islands and promontories [...] complete the space and resolve the political borders in the liquid confines of the Mediterranean. Of this terrestrial space, crossing it as in the ceremonial practice of every possession, the modern pontifex, the new Augustus, symbolically assumed spiritual dominion: Gregory, commissioner of the Gallery of Maps […] the pope of space and time" [Moretti 2020, p. 91].
The Genoese case, on the other hand, depicts several Italian and foreign cities to emphasise the power of the Doria family, which, thanks to its prestigious fleet and its wealth, was able to weave relationships such as that with the Spanish crown of Charles V, honoured by the depiction of the city of Antwerp, or that with the papal state, honoured by the maps of Rome and Jerusalem.

The point of view of the frescoes designed by the Calvi brothers is almost zenithal, the street layout of the cities depicted is perfectly legible, generating a feeling of control over the entire urban fabric.
The architectures are represented in cavalier axonometry with particular attention to the details of those strongly recognisable elements that characterise and make the city recognisable. The colour schemes used in these frescoes are repeated in a similar manner.
The urban fabrics are set in a landscape context that mirrors the real one with references to natural elements such as rivers or mountains.
The Belvedere Gallery is configured as a space animated by the presence of maps and enriched by allegorical paintings and historical events related to the maps themselves. They are almost all pseudo-bird's-eye views of regional thematic maps in which reliefs, architectural elements of the most important cities, allegorical and mythological figures and toponymic inscriptions praising and explaining a specific area are depicted; there is no indication of scale, graduation or orientation, which is however likely to be north. Also, thanks to the aid of a solar wind rose [Gambi, Pinelli 1994]. Despite being maps of a historical-geographical nature, there are explicit references of a religious nature, such as figures of saints or sacred episodes, and of a warlike

Fig. 5. Genoa in the Civitates Orbis Terrarum of G. Braun and F. Hogenberg: <https://archive.org/details/civitatesorbiste00brau/page/n3/mode/2up> (accessed May 15, 2023).

nature, such as armies lined up in a battle with weapons and horses (fig. 11), which had increased papal power. The figures present that animate the maps are the most diverse, for example, in the map of Liguria Christopher Columbus in the guise of Neptune with a trident and his ships sea monsters, naval fleets and small military camps.
The result is a representation that not only returns geographical data but a narrative that also includes socio-economic aspects of that territory (fig. 11). As for the maps of Palazzo Doria Spinola, they represent a closed portion of the territory as they focus on specific cities with the inclusion of elements that animate the scene, such as animals (fig. 12), people and means of transport; in this case, there is a faithful narrative of the city and not a strictly cartographic monothematic representation. They are also depicted with a pseudo-perspective view from above, almost zenithal, with architectural elements in cavalier axonometry, thus making them look more like real city views than maps. Also, in this case, there is no reference to scale, graduation or orientation; furthermore, compared to the Vatican maps, in this case, there are no toponomastic or didactic inscriptions other than those identifying the city depicted.
Both representations are pictorial rather than cartographic, even if from an urban and topographical point of view,

Fig. 6. Detail of the fresco of Genoa in the Gallery of Palazzo Spinola and detail of the Jan Massys of Metsys: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Crop_on_Genoa_from_Jan_Massys_of_Metsys_-_Venus_van_Cythera.jpg> (accessed May 15, 2023).

Fig. 7. Vaulted ceiling of the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche, in the Vatican Museums. (By Jean-Pol GRANDMONT - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18222511> (accessed May 15, 2023).

Fig. 8. Liguria and Nice, with allegorical representation of Cristoforo Colombo, Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican Museums (photo by the authors).

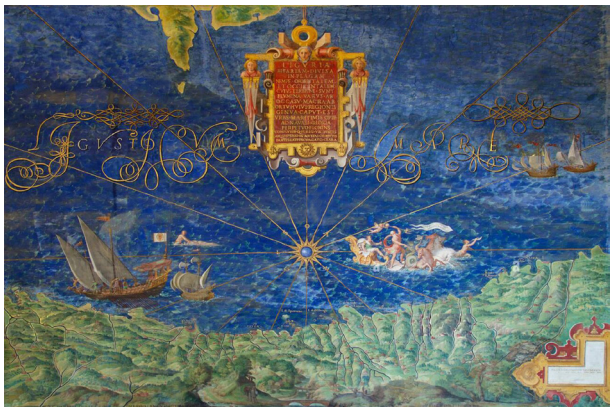


Fig. 9. Detail Map of Venice, Geographic Map Gallery of the Vatican Museums: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Citt%C3%A0_di_Venezia_-_Galleria_delle_carte_geografiche_-_Musei_vaticani_-_Roma_(ph_Luca_Giarelli).jpg> (accessed May 15, 2023).

Fig. 10. Fresco of Venice, Galleria Doria Spinola, Genoa (photo by the authors).

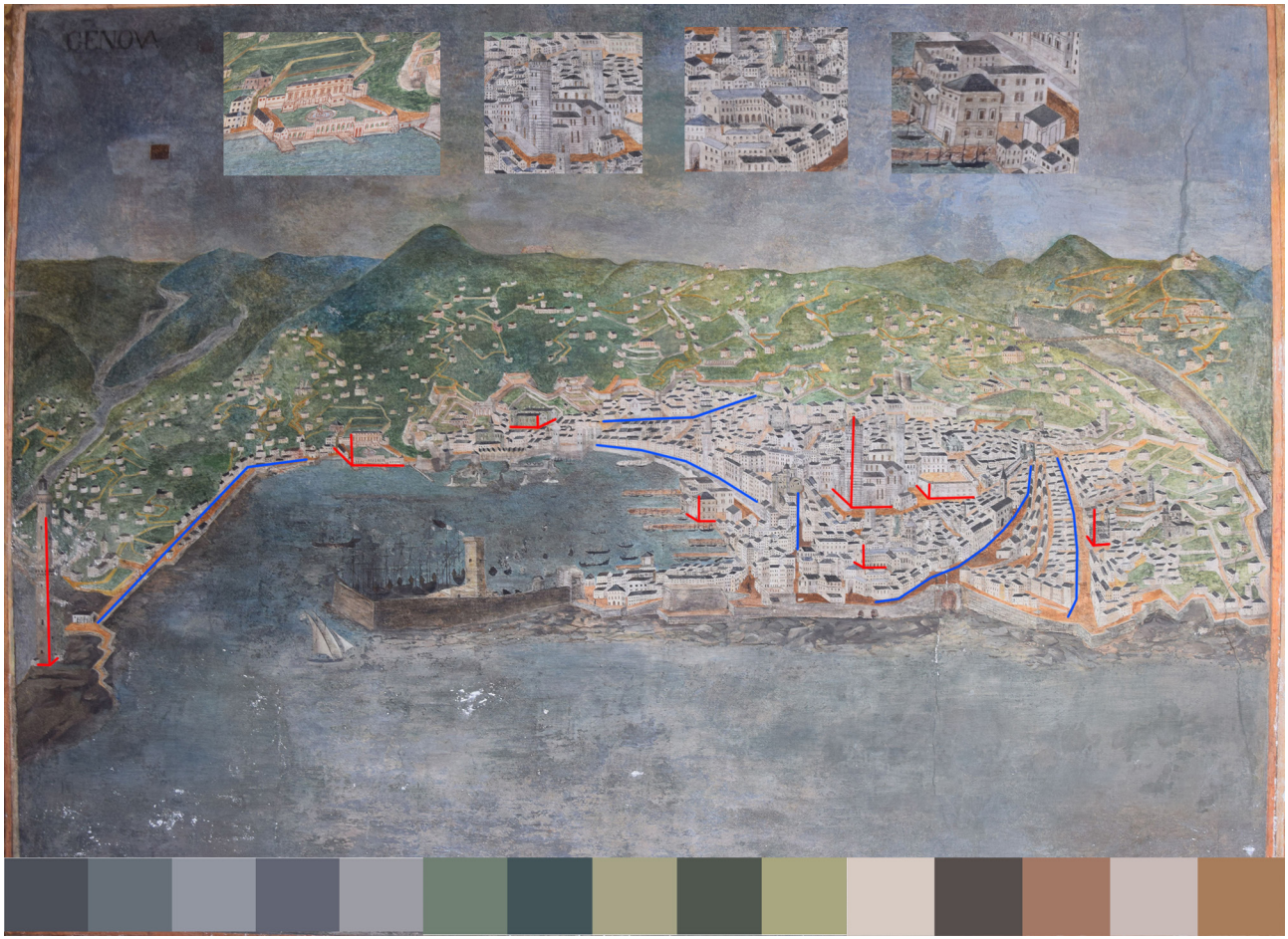
they are of remarkable precision. They leave the viewer fascinated by the minuteness of the graphic description that makes the human eye lose itself in the created narrative. The urban layout of the depictions is definable both in the Genoese maps, in which the street layout is also outlined, with precise architectural and natural references, and in the Roman maps, which, although covering a larger area, make the general town planning clear, also thanks to the inclusion of punctual architectural elements. The colours in both galleries are conventional; there is the use of a range of greens for the territory and of blues for the elements characterised by water; as far as the architectural elements are concerned, it is evident that in the Vatican maps, the colours are homologated given the modest dimensions, while in the Doria Spinola gallery maps, there is a correspondence with reality in the colours of the various cities.
The fresco of Genoa (fig. 12) presents some differences with respect to the others in the Gallery of Palazzo Doria Spinola: in addition to having been realised later than the city cycle designed by the Calvi, it presents a bird's eye perspective with a lower point of view that generates a greater coinvolution effect in the volumes of the urban fabric.
The main architectures, drawn in cavalier axonometry, are clearly visible in the urban fabric, the basic building blocks follow the shapes of the streets, contributing to the reading of the street layout.

Conclusions

This research aims to bring to attention the unique Genoese representation of maps located in the loggia of the piano nobile of the present-day Palazzo della Prefettura in Genoa. Therefore, the research aims to analyse the similarities and differences between these maps and the contemporary maps in the Belvedere Gallery in the Vatican. We have been able to analytically ascertain that, in both cases, there is a cartographic accuracy due not only to the

Fig. 11. Above: detail of Pope Julius II's Siege of Mirandola, Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican Museums. (Public domain: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=59630551> (accessed May 15, 2023). Below: detail of hunting scenes in the carta di Anversa, Doria Spinola Gallery, Genoa (photo by the authors).

Fig. 12. Geometric and chromatic analysis of the Genoa fresco in the Gallery of Palazzo Spinola in Genoa (graphic elaboration by the authors).



same choice of sources by Calvi and Danti but also due to their study of the places represented. Socio-cultural and political choices are preponderant in the selection of the required cartographic representations that serve to manifest the power of the patrons' possessions and the network of relationships and interests that both Antonio Doria and Pope Gregory XIII had with the Italian territory and major foreign cities; these ties are honoured by the presence of certain portions of territory or cities.
Pseudo-bird's-eye perspective representations, in both Genoese and Roman maps, are valuable support for the study of 16th-century possessions and offer the possibility of glimpsing a cross-section of life different from that proposed in the classical pictorial views that began to take hold during the Renaissance. The viewer's eye is not led to focus purely on direct everyday scenes but can see how they relate to the vastness of the territory in the Belvedere gallery and the intricate urban layout of the city in the Doria Spinola gallery. In the Vatican maps, this animation is taken up by figures such as armies and allegories. In contrast, in the Genoese maps, there is an animation of the scene through the presence of a few people, animals, boats and the opening of some windows and doors.

Credits

While totally agreeing with the ideas expressed in this article, the paragraphs *Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa and Belvedere Gallery of the Vatican Palaces* are to be attributed to Martina Castaldi while *Introduction*, *Comparison and Analysis of the Urban Landscape Representations of Palazzo Doria Spinola in Genoa and the Belvedere Gallery at the Vatican* and *Conclusions* are to be attributed to Michela Scaglione.

Notes

[1] The Palazzi dei Rolli are Genoese aristocratic palaces that, at the time of the Republic, were also used to host high dignitaries who were in Genoa on state visits or for the Grand Tour. The general list of rolli was in turn divided into prestige brackets, based on the family that owned it, the luxury of the dwelling and its location; these subdivisions were called *bussoli* and based on the location within them, it was indicated more precisely which type of personality the palace was able to accommodate. In the case of Palazzo Doria Spinola, being part of the first compass and therefore the one with the most prestige, it was suitable for popes, sovereigns and royals in general.

[2] "But Gregory does not treat his eyes to empty scenes that would delight the senses, but walking the length of the room, the two rows of paintings, which he can gaze on again and again, depict the whole of Italy. He can consider how best to administer and govern it, how to resolve civil discord and maintain lasting peace for his people. Gregory attends to the maps' every detail, nothing escapes his attention, neither remote castles on snow-capped Alpine crags, nor the most secluded nameless villages" [Watts 2005, p. 179].

[3] Inscription above the north portal of the Map Gallery in the Vatican: "*Italia Regio Totius Orbis Nobilissima ut Natura ab Apennino Secta Est Hoc Itidem in Duas Partes Alteram Hinc Alpibus (…) Haec ne Iucunditati Deesset ex Rerum et Locorum Cognitione Utilitas Gregorius XIII Pont. Max. non Suae Magis quam Romanorum Pontificum Commoditati hoc Artificio et Splendore a se Inchoata Perfici Voluit anno MDLXXXI*"

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