Folio (400 by 270mm), engraved frontispiece by Oliviero Gatti, 61 engraved maps, contemporary red morocco, gilt panelled, with foliate borders, and floral corner pieces, with central framed device, spine in six compartments separated by raised bands, gilt.

Collation: 2 blanks, engraved frontispiece, 2pp. dedication, index, A-C4 text, 61 engraved maps, of which 58 double-page and 3 single page, 2 blanks.

FIRST EDITION OF MAGINI'S ITALIA

Italia. Data in luce da Fabio Suo figliuolo.

Author
MAGINI, Giovanni Antonio, and Fabio

Publication date
1620.

Publisher
Sebastiano Bonomi,

Publication place
Bologna,

Physical description
Folio (400 by 270mm), engraved frontispiece by Oliviero Gatti, 61 engraved maps, contemporary red morocco, gilt panelled, with foliate borders, and floral corner pieces, with central framed device, spine in six compartments separated by raised bands, gilt.

Collation: 2 blanks, engraved frontispiece, 2pp. dedication, index, A-C4 text, 61 engraved maps, of which 58 double-page and 3 single page, 2 blanks.

Dimensions

Notes
A fine copy of the first edition of Magini's Italia.

The history of the atlas has been the subject of extensive studies, and it is thanks to Roberto Almagià's analysis that we have a reasonably clear picture of the events that shaped this important publication, and the methods employed by its author. Magini himself left a wealth of information in the form of letters and in the preliminary texts to his previous works. It is undoubtedly his most important achievement, and it continued to be used and copied for the next 100 years.

The idea of the atlas was conceived probably as a consequence of the work Magini was doing on his edition of Ptolemy's Geografia, published in Venice in 1596. Aside from the Ptolemaic maps, Magini based his own mostly on those by Mercator and Ortelius, and perhaps found that some of the circulating maps of parts of the Italian peninsula and the islands were inadequate and could be improved. The project took the last 22 years of Magini's life, and was posthumously published by his son Fabio three years after the father's death, albeit with no significant alterations. Magini's great introduction was that of framing each map with the bordering territories in their correct proportions, and thus providing strict continuity between the maps.

The author
Giovanni Antonio Magini was born in Padua in 1555 into a well-to-do family; he went on to study arts at the university of Bologna, and had a specific interest in mathematics and astrology. He lectured and published on these subjects, winning a teaching post at the university in 1588, where he remained until his death. Notably, the losing candidate in this instance was Galileo Galilei. Magini became renowned for his knowledge on astronomy and astrology, and thus attracted the attention of famous contacts, the most important of these the Duke of Mantua Vincenzo Gonzaga, whose sons he educated on the subjects. This relationship proved crucial in the creation and success of the present work.

The atlas
The project started around 1594 with the gathering of maps and data. Magini employed a rigorous method whereby he would compare at least two maps of each territory, and also use lists of names and statistical information. Thanks to his link with the House of Gonzaga he was able to make his requests directly to the local governments, mostly all of whom helped him, apart from the Granduke of Tuscany and perhaps some minor ones. Magini would also contact local experts and examine other published works; once a sketch of the map was engraved, he would forward it to his contacts for comments.

Work proceeded at speed initially, with the Belgian brothers Arnold and Jakob Scherpensiel engraving maps for five years. It was when Arnold moved to Siena to work for Matteo Florimi for a bigger salary, that Magini's quest for another suitable engraver began. A German he hired in Padua drowned whilst inebriated; one from Veneto lost his mind after the first plate Magini gave him; an Amedeo Giovanni from Amsterdam died shortly after finishing the map of Citra the Arnoldis had started. From 1604 to 1606 Magini was left without an engraver, and dedicated his time to compiling the text that accompanied the maps. In 1607 he finally employed Benjamin Wright from London who, despite being a wine-lover and often pawning Magini's copperplates to tavern owners, worked solidly on the engraving to complete the work. Further to these production standstills, Magini's own activity in the field of astronomy also kept him busy and having to halt work on the atlas. Aside from teaching, he continued as a publisher of astronomy books, and in 1610 was invited by Kepler to collaborate in a text.

Whilst the maps of Nothern Italy proved faster to draw, even though they had to be continuously updated as fresh material kept pouring in, those of southern Italy took longer to put together. In order to gather material on the Kingdom of Naples, Magini had travelled to Rome in 1597 to view Danti's painted maps at the Vatican, but was left unsatisfied and rather critical of Danti's work. With insufficient material, Magini could not publish his atlas; however, between the end of 1601 and the beginning of 1602, he received fresh material and started drawing the nine maps. These differ from the rest in that they are of the same type, contain the same information and lettering, and thus likely come from a single source. Almagià suggests that Magini must have used the maps compiled by Stigliola and Cartaro in their atlas of c1595. A close examination between Magini's and Stigliola's maps of the Kingdom of Naples, shows clear similarities, even when toponyms and topography vary. Whilst Magini's work is evidently finer, it does not display the depth of information found in the Stigliola-Cartaro atlas in the shape of control towers and wreath counts, details that would have stood out in the Maginian atlas.

Alongside the atlas, Magini was also working on a large-scale map of Italy, which he successfully published in 1608 by the hand of Benjamin Wright. Titled Italia Nuova and made of six sheets on a scale between 1.250.000 and 1.300.000, it was the largest map of Italy up to that date. It was clearly based on the same work that was shaping the atlas, albeit with some differences. Only one copy is known to survive.

The atlas is composed of 61 maps describing the 23 regions, one fifth of which are based on the best existing maps by Gastaldi, Mercator and Ortelius, and the rest are Magini's personal work. The maps are preceded by Fabio's dedication to the Duke of Mantua, and a preliminary text detailing the peninsula's history and administration. Printing began towards the end of 1616 at the bookseller Sebastiano Bonomi in Bologna. This first printing carries the strongest impression, and some of the maps are without dedications. The second printing was by Clemente Ferroni, also in Bologna, and is more common, and dates to 1630-32. A third one from 1642 was printed by Nicolò Tebaldini. The 10-year break between the printings indicates the passage of privilege rights on the atlas.

The maps, although they appear uniform, bear stylistic differences that testify to the different hands that engraved them. They are all built with an oval or rectangular cartouche for the title, and also elaborate cartouches for the dedications. When available, the sea is populated by sea monsters, but the water is in some cases left blank, in others drawn with zig-zag lines, or as dots. Mountains are shown in perspective, but the shading is sometimes towards the right, whilst in others it is more marked. Towns are in some maps represented as a house, and in others as circles, even when the size of the population is similar; cities are usually represented with more details, only sometimes the same city is represented with lesser details in the next map. Particular attention is given to rivers and lakes.

The atlas is present in institutions worldwide, with the second edition (1630) appearing occasionally on the market. We have been able to trace one other 1620 edition appearing on the market in the last 15 years.

Bibliography

Almagià, Roberto, L'"Italia" di Giovanni Antonio Magini, 1922.

Provenance

Price: £40000

Inventory reference: 17512