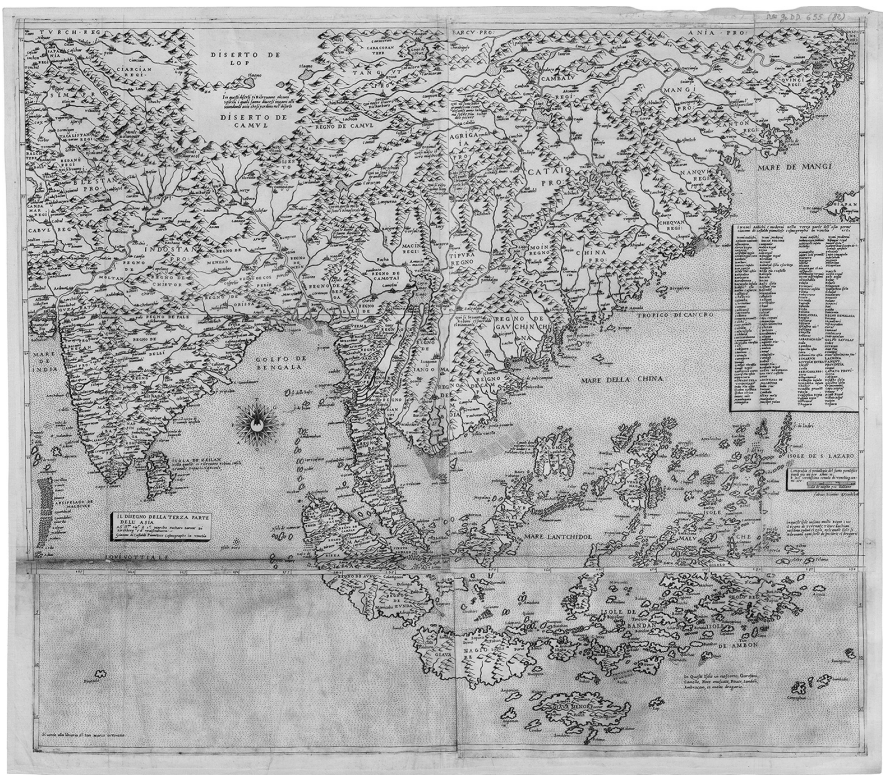
INTRODUCTION: THE PAINTED MAP

A Perugian cartographer who has never left Italy paints a map of an inland Indian region for a Florentine sovereign who has no commercial or military presence in the region (Plate I). A painted map – not a printed map – entitled *Indostan fuori il Gange* ("Indostan beyond the Ganges") and measuring 112 by 55 centimeters, the completed work was fitted into the door of a custom-built cabinet, where it stood alongside fifty-two similarly scaled painted maps of the regions of the world (Plate II). The sovereign in question, the newly minted Grand Duke (previously simply "Duke") of Tuscany, Cosimo I de' Medici (ruled 1537–84), referred to the space housing the maps as the "cosmography in the Guardaroba,"[1] the latter term usually translated as "wardrobe" and referring to the area of the Palazzo Vecchio, the granducal palace in Florence, housing the riches of the Medici family collection. The map stood on a hinged door that could be opened to reveal wonders, diplomatic gifts, small icons, tapestries – the treasures gathered from the world beyond Florence, some from perhaps as far away as the land depicted on the map.

Egnazio Danti's *Indostan* (c. 1573–75) could not have been made without consulting sources that even a century earlier would have been unavailable to an artist–cartographer in Florence. The enterprising Danti began the Guardaroba maps by gathering prints, manuscripts, nautical charts, and travelers' reports to use as sources for representing foreign territories that neither he nor (as far as we know) any other Florentine of the period had seen firsthand. Naturally, printed maps were the most widely available sources



1. Giacomo Gastaldi, *Il disegno della terza parte del Asia* (Venice, 1561). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

for a landlocked cartographer making a site-specific painted map. For the basic information and toponymy of *Indostan*, Danti turned to a recent print by his Venetian contemporary Giacomo Gastaldi, *Il disegno della terza parte del Asia* (Venice, 1561; Fig. 1). Gastaldi's map covered a much wider area than Danti's, which is limited to a section of East Asia containing what is today Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and parts of India, Tibet, and Southern China.[2] But the debt to the earlier map is obvious, as Danti borrowed some of the more eccentric features of Gastaldi's map, such as locating Marco Polo's mythical Caindu alongside a central body of water (labeled *Lago salso nel quale si pescano perle bellisime* – "a salt lake, in which they fish for beautiful pearls") in the map's center, for example.[3] *Indostan*'s border contains a checkerboard design measuring latitudinal and longitudinal degrees, indicating that this previously little-known land was now subject to the same manner of quantifiable measurement as territories closer to home.

The *Indostan* map relies not only on geographical depiction but also upon an inscription discussing the territory, its products, and its history (Fig. 2). The text is rich in fables, again drawing heavily on the three-hundred-year-old travel narrative of Marco Polo:

2. Detail of Color Plate I.

> The part of India beyond the Ganges extends in length as far as Cathay and contains many provinces in which are found many notable things. As in the Kingdom of Kamul near Campichu, the true rhubarb grows [here]. And in Erguiul of said province is found the most perfect musk. In the Ava Mountains are found very beautiful rubies, and in the Salgatgu mountains besides rubies are also found diamonds. In Caindu and in neighboring cities they spend coral in place of money, and in the salt lake they fish for beautiful pearls. In the territory of Carajan are found snakes of stupendous size, and in the mountains of the lakes there are very ferocious lions. In Egrigaia province one finds oxen the size of elephants that have wool as fine as silk. Rhinoceroses are also found in the mountains below Carajan. They say that in the desert of Kamul are found many spirits that deceive travelers, showing them the wrong path to get them lost in the desert.[4]

With its emphasis on precious minerals and exotic animals, the inscription fills the mind with wonders that the map itself does not otherwise visualize – we see no elephants or rhinoceroses stampeding between the zigzagging mountain ranges dotting the landscape. The land depicted is mostly barren aside from those stylized mountain chains and the web of rivers that slowly wind their way downward to the Bay of Bengal.

Danti's *Indostan* was painted at an auspicious point in the history of European cosmography – at a moment when Western exploration and the revision of

Ptolemaic cartography were well underway, and scarcely a few years before the public voicing of Copernican ideas would challenge the long-held view of the Aristotelian cosmos. Naturally, sixteenth-century printed maps participated in this epistemological change. It was an era of circulating, rapidly updated maps, reflecting shifting knowledge or conceptions of territories previously unknown or poorly explored and understood. Gastaldi's Asia map, which served as Danti's source, is a good example of that paradigm. It was republished several times over two decades, in places as far away as Antwerp.[5] Yet despite being based upon Gastaldi, Danti's *Indostan* does not dialogue with other contemporary maps, nor was it ever updated or repainted to register developments in Western exploration or knowledge of the area. It was unique, and could be viewed only under controlled conditions, by a select audience invited by the grand duke and his courtiers. Instead of standing alone, *Indostan* formed part of a greater project, a cycle of fifty-three painted maps dazzling the viewer with their erudition, complexity, and richness.

The painted maps of the Palazzo Vecchio Guardaroba were not an anomaly; rather, they were part of a trend. During a relatively brief span in the late sixteenth century, beginning around 1550 and continuing uninterrupted through around 1590, a culture of decorative cartography arose in Europe on a scale that had never before been witnessed. Princes, civic governments, and high ecclesiastics throughout the continent filled their most important reception rooms, audience halls, and corridors with large-scale maps, painted in fresco or on wood or canvas. They included images of local territories, the continents, the hemispheres, and the heavens. So striking was their appearance and novelty that Michel de Montaigne, during his 1580–81 journey through Italy, paused often to study the newly decorated halls filled with painted maps. Touring the Villa Farnese at Caprarola, about thirty-five miles north of Rome, Montaigne singled out for praise the Sala del Mappamondo, decorated less than a decade earlier with a world map, four continental maps, and two territorial maps (Fig. 3): "One of these [public rooms] is wonderful: on its vaulted ceiling (for the building is vaulted throughout) you see the celestial sphere, with all the constellations; around it on the walls, the terrestrial globe, the regions and the whole world, everything painted very richly directly on the wall itself."[6]

The idea of painting maps of distant lands was not a development of the sixteenth century, nor of the fifteenth. As Early Modern patrons and viewers recognized, the practice stretched back to antiquity, and usually appeared in a courtly environment or a governmental context in which a moral or allegorical reading was intended. The effect of the maps created for these physical spaces depended in part upon their encircling the viewer and placing that viewer in a position of all-seeing mastery from within: the world shrunk down to a human scale to be studied, understood, and potentially controlled. Maps zeroing in on

3. Sala del Mappamondo, Villa Farnese, Caprarola, decorated 1573–75. Album/Art Resource, NY.

local territories could have an even more explicit element of control. A frescoed map of the Romagna region of Italy painted for the Gallery of Maps in the Vatican (1580–81) conspicuously places the dragon symbol of Pope Gregory XIII on lands that had recently been reclaimed by papal forces – the map as tactical chessboard marking the latest military progress (Fig. 4).[7] The same view of the Romagna further contains narrative events from the region's history, such as Julius Caesar's troops crossing the Rubicon. The purpose of the Romagna map is not pure geographic description but to define the region as a locus for political, military, and spiritual action in the past, present, and future, with the papacy's latest gains in the territory marking its inheritance of ancient imperial authority.

This display of monumentally scaled painted maps in governmental structures or "private" buildings like domestic palaces or villas (which regularly featured decoration with a decidedly public purpose) occurred at a moment when normative trends in cartography were moving in the opposite direction. Since the advent of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, maps had been one of the primary and most popular subjects for print, whether inserted into geographical textbooks or travel narratives or assembled from multiple looseleaf sheets for study or as a reasonably low-cost means of popular decoration. Printed maps functioned especially well to represent newly explored lands: they could be produced in great quantities to satisfy the curiosity of collectors and armchair travelers, and they could be updated or replaced as European knowledge of the Americas, Africa, or Asia shifted or stabilized. Although sixteenth-century print culture should not be treated solely as a positivistic narrative of progress, there can

4. Egnazio Danti, *Flaminia* (Fig. 7), detail of Julius Caesar's troops on the Via Emilia and the Buoncompagni dragon emblem, 1580–81, Gallery of Maps, Vatican, Rome. Photo: Vatican Museums.

be little doubt that in the aggregate the culture of printed cartography during this era depended on the circulation of multiple copies of a single image that would eventually give way to successive maps made by others that appended, corrected, renamed, or challenged the geographical depiction of earlier cartographers.[8] Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, first published in Antwerp in 1570, was the most important result of the changes wrought by sixteenth-century print culture. The atlas brought the work of eighty-six cartographers into a single book that would become the standard circulating work codifying European knowledge of the regions of the world for a wide readership.[9]

By contrast, the late sixteenth century also witnessed a countermovement in cartography that stood outside this international discourse. Sovereigns decorating their palaces oversaw increasingly elaborate projects involving painted maps whose effect depended in part upon their uniqueness and the impression they made on selected visitors viewing them within the palace walls. This exclusivity formed part of the painted map's appeal: it was a unique cartographic object which could be manipulated as the patron wished, surrounded with Virtues or allegories to give the map a particular moral reading.[10] As in the Vatican Romagna fresco, narrative scenes of the depicted region's history – such as an ancient battle or a saint's martyrdom – often were

placed nearby or integrated into the painted map itself, giving a sense of the distinguished ancient, sacred, or contemporary events that had taken place in the represented region. Late-sixteenth-century painted maps rarely stood alone in their room's decoration; instead, they often were part of a series in a single room, where (as in a narrative fresco cycle) they could be sequenced to respond to each other or imply a progression across space and time.

Spain, England, France, and many smaller duchies and republics commissioned map decoration during the late sixteenth century, but Italy was at the center of the culture of painted maps, despite – or perhaps because of – its political fragmentation. As the Italian courts vied with one another for real or imagined supremacy over the peninsula and beyond, nearly every important center of power, including the papacy in Rome, the oligarchy in Venice, and the Medici duchy in Florence, became involved in the competition to outdo its rivals. Some map halls featured *mappaemundi* (maps that encompass the entire world in one image or, as became more common in the mid-sixteenth century, in a double-hemisphere arrangement) or a few large-scale continental maps based upon the latest published sources. Other map rooms portrayed bird's-eye views of the local *dominio*, often based upon freshly made surveys, projecting onto a monumental surface the contours of the local territory and its major monuments, waterways, and fortifications. At its most pointed, the painted map could be used to imply a patron's connections through access to information not necessarily available to all others, depicting new knowledge about the contours of the coastline or the boundaries of a region made possible by the patron's sponsorship of exploration, commercial voyages, or land surveys. Or it could make a dynastic claim: among the Florentine decorations for the wedding of Francesco de' Medici and Giovanna of Austria in 1565 was a cycle of frescoed views of Habsburg cities (such as Prague, Vienna, and Graz) for the Palazzo Vecchio courtyard (Fig. 5), likening dynastic marriage to territorial transfer.

How these painted maps signified in late Cinquecento culture is the subject of this book. Traditionally they have been discussed primarily as appendages of print, or as square-peg, non-narrative curiosities of an era otherwise devoted to the symbol-laden schemes of the *maniera*, the dense, quotation-heavy courtly style of late-sixteenth-century Italian art. Yet painted maps were often overseen by the same courtiers who selected the obscure historical and mythological events for court artists to paint elsewhere in the palace. In the Palazzo Vecchio, Cosimo I and Giorgio Vasari programmed neighboring rooms with imagery of battles, Florentine history, Medici family progenitors, and obscure ancient gods and goddesses, all with the purpose of establishing a providential view of the past leading up to Cosimo's reign.[11] The painted maps of the Guardaroba and similar contemporary cartographic–decorative projects also factored in a longer view of history, as illustrations of cosmography: how patrons or courts conceived of the universe and their place in it. The form cosmographical decoration took in

5. Courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, detail of cycle of Habsburg views by Bastiano Veronese, Giovanni Lombardi, Cesare Baglioni, and Turino da Piemonte, 1565. Author photo.

maps may have looked different from the figural imagery surrounding it, but it too was intended to be read not only on a literal level but also for its symbolic and allegorical dimensions.

In the words of Juergen Schulz – the first important scholar to consider the late-sixteenth-century "map room" as a unique typology with a different function from printed atlases – painted maps often were "the vehicle for elaborate nongeographical ideas."[12] That is not to say that they were uninformed by print culture; indeed, as Danti's borrowings from Gastaldi make clear, they heavily depended upon it. Nor were they so preoccupied with those "nongeographical ideas" as to neglect fresh and marvelous details about a distant land. In the inscription of his 1565 map of Mexico in the Florentine Guardaroba (Plate III), Danti uses information gathered from prints, nautical charts, and even from a personal acquaintance to discuss the religion of the natives, the recently established university (founded 1551), and the standard estimate of Mexico City's population. The inscription at the top (Fig. 6) reads:

> The inhabitants of said city [Mexico City] are today all Christians. Men of little invention but docile, they learn with great facility all that they are taught, which I have seen in the experience of Friar Alfonso, a Dominican friar born in that city to a Mexican father. When he came to Spain and

Italy, he made enormous strides in a short time not only in languages but also in philosophy and Theology. He recounted to me that a few years have passed since the King of Spain ordered [built] there a university, where there are more than 4,000 students. There are 100,025 houses in that city, as some have written; and Friar Alfonso has many times confirmed to me that Venice, which he has seen, was two-thirds smaller than Mexico [City], although Cortés claims there to be only 70,000 souls, unless the printing was wrong and meant 700,000.

The present map has been drawn up, with regards to its borders, from nautical charts made by the Castilians. And the rest with respect to the land is taken from the reports of Cortés and others that have been there, and from some [printed] maps of this region.[13]

6. Inscription of Color Plate III. Courtesy of the Musei Civici Fiorentini.

Compared to his *Indostan*, Danti's approach here is current and synthetic, informed by prints, hand-drawn charts, and even oral reports. Elsewhere in the inscription Danti discusses the minerals discovered, the types of trees seen, and the hydrography of the territory.[14] Formed out of disparate sources and even containing a personal aside in its inscription, Danti's *Nuova Spagna* is a singular object viewable only in the palace and rewarding to those who studied it carefully.

The Mexico map, of course, has no equivalent in ancient or medieval cartography; it is a product of an era that has often (and contentiously) been labeled a time of discovery, exploration, contact, or genocide. Danti's inscription mentioned earlier signals curiosity and a desire to compare Mexico to a European referent, and the tone strikes a balance between wonder and measured skepticism. The mid-sixteenth century, the moment of Danti's map, was the first historical moment in which true globalism had been achieved, at least from the European perspective. The earth had been circumnavigated by Western ships and the possibility for new mercantile and military opportunities had opened up greatly. Some rulers, like the patron of Mexico's "conquest," Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, revived ancient motifs to the new purpose of an expansionist imperative. In 1516, Charles took as his emblem the Pillars of Hercules, which to the ancient world represented the spot at the Straits of Gibraltar beyond which no prudent traveler would venture.[15] He reversed its significance by placing two words, PLUS ULTRA ("onward!"), on a banderole linking the two columns, indicating his ambition to move beyond age-old restraints to increase European dominion. Even more so than such emblems, maps were important role in propagating (and commemorating) the knowledge gained by sovereigns' sponsorship of exploration, detailing the routes taken by European ships, the new ports built, and the spheres of influence established from abroad. Printed maps communicated this information rapidly, and could be quickly updated with new detail to confirm how one power's

7. Egnazio Danti, *Flaminia*, 1580–81, Gallery of Maps, Vatican, Rome. Photo: Vatican Museums.

knowledge of a distant territory had improved. It was not expected that any map of Africa, Asia, or the Americas would be final or definitive – only that it would be better than what came before, making those earlier maps redundant. Yet to collectors of maps today that is hardly the case, obviously.

By the very fact of their permanence, however, painted maps did claim to be definitive enough for ongoing display over the decades and possibly centuries, and their mode of communication was different. Even though painted maps could (and did) engage with the latest information gleaned from published and unpublished sources, they typically functioned beyond their borders to relate to the viewer, the surrounding imagery, and the architectural space in ways that had no precedent in print. A map cycle could function as a scenic backdrop for a dining room, a gallery, or a loggia; not only did a map's meaning shift in the differing environments, but each was tailored to fit its particular physical and architectural space. Painted maps could offer geographical or chorographical representation on a scale unparalleled in their printed counterparts: the frescoes of Italian regions in the Vatican Gallery of Maps, for example, each measure about 330 by 425 centimeters, which in print was rivaled only by the largest multi-sheet maps (Fig. 7). A visitor walking through the Gallery of Maps took in each of the regions of Italy one at a time, surveying the peninsula while