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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Ricci, Alessandro, and Carlotta Bilardi.

Cartografia, arte e potere tra Riforma e Controriforma. Il Palazzo Farnese a Caprarola.

Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2020. Pp. 217 + 24 ill. ISBN 978-88-570-1680-1 (paperback) €28.

This book is a study of sixteenth-century maps that places them within the broader debate on the power of images in Reformation and Counter-Reformation religious writings. The authors selected the Farnese Palace at Caprarola as their case study because its main audience hall, the Sala della Cosmografia, is decorated with marvellous mural maps representing the four continents, the world, and the sky. For the authors, the room, the decoration of which was commissioned by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, is “the apotheosis not only of geography as a response to the Reformation from the point of view of sublime aesthetic, but also a place that condenses the [patron’s] aspirations to the papal throne” (89). (All quotations have been translated from the Italian by this reviewer.)

Ricci and Bilardi’s book is divided into seven chapters and introduced by an essay by Giorgio Mangani, an expert in early modern cartography and its relations to religious debates. In the first half of the book, the authors provide an excursus on the role of images in the early modern period in order to place the Sala della Cosmografia in its broadest historical, cultural, and religious context. Chapter 1, “Arte e cartografia nella modernità,” discusses the power of maps as images that provide “political certainty” (19) to the rulers of emerging nations and delight to visitors of princely palaces. In chapter 2, “Arte e cartografia della Riforma,” the authors review Protestant ideas on images, embracing Gerhard Ritter’s argument that the Reformation favoured a more “secular” form of art, Sveltana Alper’s distinction between southern narrative art and northern descriptive art, and Hans Belting’s view that art became modern when it became less sacred. The works by these influential scholars have inspired many studies over the decades, but their arguments have been considerably revised in later works since plenty of secular and descriptive art was produced in sixteenth-century Catholic countries, as well as sacred art that opened up to modernity. But the authors argue that “even though the Reformation was against the very concept of sacred images, nonetheless it gave enormous impulse to modern art and cartography, which were understood only as useful and aesthetic

images" (54). Chapter 3, "La risposta cattolica all'eresia: La Controriforma delle immagini," reviews the main Counter-Reformation texts on images, inserting maps within the acceptable subjects for Catholic art.

Ricci and Bilardi devote the second half of the book to their case study, the Farnese Palace at Caprarola, a palace that has been heavily studied in terms of architecture, garden design, and decoration. Even its main audience hall, the Sala della Cosmografia, and its painted maps have received detailed studies by geographers and art historians such as Roberto Almagià, Jurgen Schulz, and Loren Partridge, as did the patron of both the palace and the audience hall as he was one of the sixteenth century's most discerning art patrons and collectors. Relying on those earlier studies, Ricci and Bilardi dedicate chapter 5, "I Farnese," to the role of the Farnese family in the Counter-Reformation, from Pope Paul III, who was Cardinal Alessandro's grandfather and who opened the Council of Trent and instituted the Society of Jesus, to the cardinal himself who fought against the Protestants and funded the building of the Gesu in Rome. Farnese's deeds are represented in the Sala dei Fasti, another large hall at Caprarola, which the authors examine in relation to the Sala della Cosmografia. In chapter 6, "La Sala della Cosmografia," the authors focus on the literary, visual, and cartographic sources of the four continents and allegorical images of the map room, as well as on the four explorers portrayed in it—Colombo, Magellan, Vespucci, and Marco Polo—while endorsing previous interpretations of the ceiling's sky map as an astrological chart of the cardinal's destiny to the papacy (in works by Loren Partridge, Mary Quinlan McGrath, and Kristen Lippincott). In the last chapter, "Theatrum mundi e globalizzazione cattolica," the authors show how the Sala della Cosmografia is the culmination of a path that, winding through the palace's rooms, stresses "the power of the family and its role in the theater of European politics" (175) and in the implementation of the Counter-Reformation, from their support to the Jesuits to the evangelization of the Americas.

The merit of Ricci and Bilardi's book is in considering the Sala della Cosmografia within the entire Farnese Palace, which, in their reading provides "a political and religious narrative, dictated by the ambitions of its patron and by the Catholic mindset in response to internal and external threats to the ecclesiastical world, reaffirming truths and dogmas as well as the Church's centrality not only in spiritual power, but also in temporal and geopolitical power" (200). In so doing they enrich the interpretation of sixteenth-century

mural maps as a means to convey the political, cultural, and religious aspirations of their patrons.

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