

ROMA BUFALINIANA

THE FIRST COMPLETE PLAN OF ROME

Allan Ceen
December 2012

INTRODUCTION

ROMA BUFALINIANA: 1551 and after

IN the 1300 years that elapsed between the marble map of Rome known as the Forma Urbis of ca. 203 AD, and Bufalini's map of 1551, we know of no orthogonal plans (plan-maps) of the city. Vague references to a medieval map of the Rome in Charlemagne's day do not enlighten us to whether this lost image was a plan-map or a view-map (Christie 2005; p.177). View-maps of Rome occur before 1551, mostly in the 15th century [Fig. 1a, 1b], but there are no plan-maps of the contemporary city until the mid-16th century. Consequently Bufalini's is the only such map after the Forma Urbis, and since the latter survives only in fragments, Bufalini's is the very first plan of the whole city available to us today.

Only three copies of the Bufalini map survive, one in the British Museum and two (one incomplete) in the Vatican Library. All three were printed from Bufalini's original wood blocks, but only as a second edition, published in 1560 by Trevisi (Ehrle, p.22). None of the first edition copies, presumably published by Bufalini himself, have come to light. However, a hand-drawn and tinted reproduction, possibly of this edition, was found in the Convent of Madonna degli Angioli in Cuneo, and reproduced in the late 19th century [Cat. 6].

The total absence of any kind of map of the contemporary city in the first half of the 16th century (the High Renaissance!) is inexplicable. This makes the source of Bufalini's map difficult to trace. It has been suggested that Marliani's 1544 map of the ancient city was known to Bufalini (Maier 2007, p.6), but his is a far more schematic image of the city [Fig. 1c].

Giambattista Nolli, the creator of the first accurate map of Rome in 1748, recognized the importance of the Bufalini map. Together with his large map, he published a reduced scale version of his own map [Cat. 1], as well as a reprint of the Bufalini at about that same scale [Cat. 9]. The inscription in the cartouche of the latter mentions Bufalini's original map as being produced from wooden blocks (*Ligneis formis*), and that Nolli engraved it on a copper plate at reduced scale. Nolli made no effort to correct Bufalini's inaccuracies, but preserved the original map in most of its details. The major changes he made were the reorientation of the map to magnetic North and the use of the same graphic convention of dark colored blocks for the dense part of the city, which he used in his other two maps. These changes and the scale reduction enabled the Nolli/Bufalini to be compared with the small Nolli map [Cat.7]. While paying

homage to the work of his predecessor, Nolli was apparently inviting the viewer to appreciate the greater accuracy of his own map. One wonders whether Nolli used one of the three existing originals in order to produce his version of the Bufalini map, or whether a different original copy was employed, now lost.

The small Nolli map had a long sequence of imitations. Two years after its publication, John Roque in London reproduced it with minor changes [Cat. 2]. This was the first in a long series of copies and updates that continued well into the 19th century [Cat. 3]. Piranesi used the small Nolli as the base of two of his plans of Rome, and reproduced it almost exactly as part of his 1774 *Pianta di Roma e del Campo Marzio* (Ceen 2011) [Fig. 3].

Nolli's reprint of Bufalini, while having fewer repeats than the small Nolli, was also followed by a series of copies published until the beginning of the 19th century [Table I & Cat. 10]. While Nolli had a reason for publishing a small version of Bufalini, it is hard to explain why others were inspired to do the same in the half century that followed. The very existence of numerous reprints of the accurate small Nolli would seem to have obviated the need for reprints of the far more approximate Bufalini map. A possible reason for the Bufalini reprints is an increase in interest in the historic sequence of plan-maps partly spurred by Nolli's publications. Indeed before Nolli's watershed 1748 work, all but 5 publications were of the view-map variety. After that date the tendency was reversed, and plan-maps far outnumbered view-maps.

The two editions of the Cuneo version of the 1551 map in the late 19th century (see above and Cat. 6) indicate that interest in Bufalini continued at least until then. Less consideration was given to Bufalini in the 20th century as is revealed by Jessica Maier's recent bibliography (Maier 2012, p.268-70). Apart from Ehrle in 1911, no major 20th century publication dealt with the Bufalini map until this century. During a senior fellowship at CASVA in 1988-89 the present author studied the Bufalini distortion and, in an effort to correct it, traced the complete Bufalini street system over the large Nolli map (Ceen 2012, p.128-133) [Cat. 8&9].

While engaged in this endeavor, some elements emerged that gave possible clues to Bufalini's method, and the sequence of steps which were followed by him in producing his innovative, monumental work. These are only a few of the aspects of Bufalini's milestone map considered in the current exhibit. No effort was made to deal with Bufalini's representation of ancient Roman monuments because that subject has been adequately studied by others (Pinto 1976, Maier 2007, Huppert 2008, Maier 2012).

It is hoped that this exhibit will serve as a contribution to the continued study of Rome's pioneer cartographer.