

The two surviving copies
of the 1525 Moscovia map
by Paolo Giovio:
A comparative study



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Abstract

The first printed map carrying the name “Moschovia” in its title was compiled in Rome in 1525 by Paolo Giovio. He announced it in *Libellus de legatione Basilii magni* (Rome, 1525), a book he published based on his conversations with Dimitri Gerasimov, an envoy to Pope Clement VII from Grand Duke Vasili III of Moscow. The map’s importance transcends Muscovy, extending to the other medieval *Rusian* states: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Novgorod Republic, the lands of the sedentary and nomadic successors of the Mongol Empire (Tartaria), as well as the modern states of Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, and the Russian Federation.

For a long time, only several mid-century manuscript renditions of the 1525 map were known, while the original printed version was presumed lost. An article in *Imago Mundi* Vol.72:1 (2020) reported the discovery of an original imprint of the 1525 map back in 2006 at Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. In fact, this was the second known imprint of the map. The first one was sold on Dec 7, 1993, by Sotheby's in London and subsequently made its way to the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA) in Moscow.

A comparative study of the two imprints leads to a conclusion that the RGADA copy is a proof pulled to make the necessary corrections, which can now be seen in the Venice copy. Besides, a thorough analysis of Giovio's printed map and other sources reveals that the title date, October 1525, corresponds to the time of the interviews, not the time when the map was created, and provides cartographic evidence proving that Dimitri Gerasimov contributed no cartographic materials and had no role in map compilation.

Description

Compiler: Paolo Giovio

Title, quoting imprint [V]:

MOSCHOVIAE Tabula ex relatione De- /metrii legati descripta sicuti ipse a pluribus / accepit cum totam prouinciam minime se pera /grasse fateatur. Anno. M.D.XXV. Mēse Octob.

Map of MOSCOVIA, per relation of Demetrius the envoy compiled, which he himself gathered from many, since among all the provinces he said to have visited only a few. Year 1525, month October.

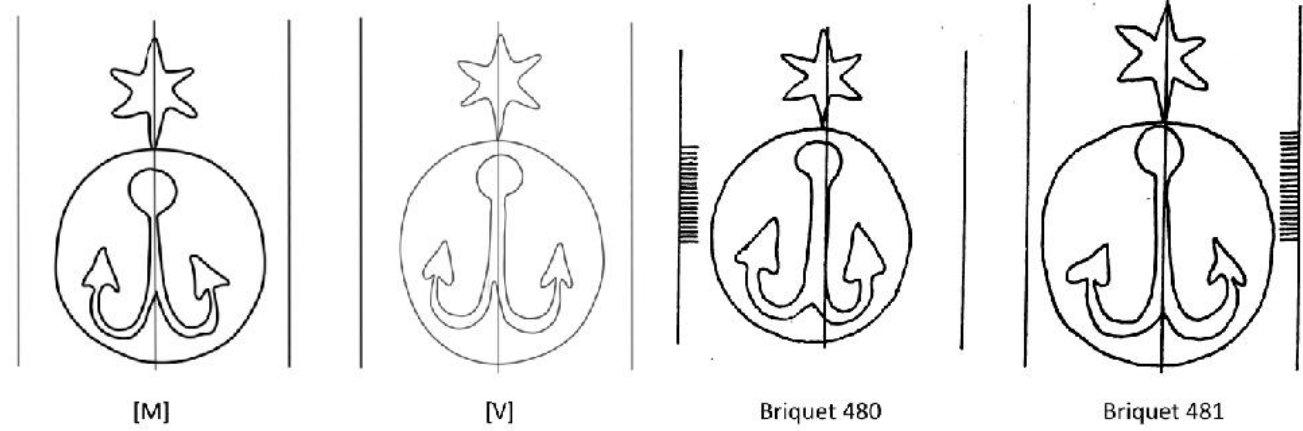
Note: Presuming that the Moscow legation stayed in Rome in June–July of 1525, the cartographic historians have long believed that the October 1525 date refers to map creation. In fact, the stay was from September till November. Evidently, the title date refers to the time of the interviews between Giovio and Gerasimov. It was quite natural for Agnese to use the same date in his MS maps issued decades later.

Technique: Mixed relief print. Woodblock, with names of cities and rivers, title and text legends set in movable type. Laid paper with no text on verso.

Size: [M] 46.7 x 33.2 cm by the neat line, on an untrimmed sheet of irregular shape and approximate size of 48.5 x 35 cm.

[V] 45.3 x 32.8 cm, cut to the neat line with some loss at the binding edge.

Watermark: “Anchor in a circle under a six-point star”, [M] & [V] are quite similar although not identical to each other and to Briquet 480, 481.



The 1525 watermarks have been sketched by the author after the photographs taken by Alexei Boulatov [M] and Marica Milanese [V].



[M] Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, Moscow. F.192.Inv.6.Act 963
Image: RGADA

Comparative analysis

A thorough study of the typeset text reveals the following differences.

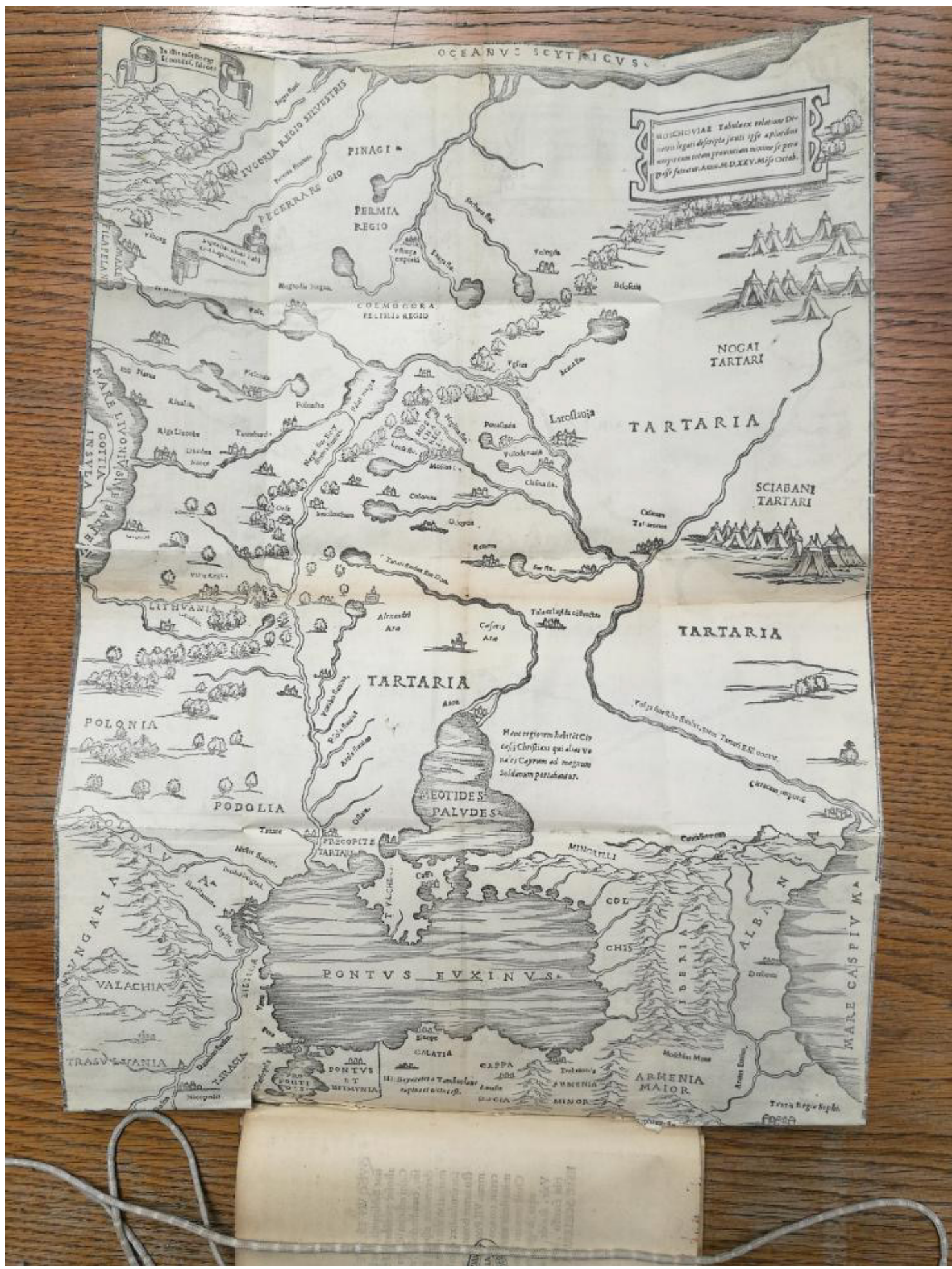
Fragment	[M]	[V]
Title	Tabula ex relatione De / metrii egti descripta	Tabula ex relatione De-/ metrii legati descripta
Hydronym	Volga five Rha fluvius, Quem Tartari Edil uocant	Volga five Rha fluiuis, quem Tartari Edil uocant.
Tamerlane legend	Hic Bayazetes a Tamburlane / uictus et captus est	Hic Bayazetes a Tamburlane / captus et uictus est

Can the temporal direction of these changes be established?

The first fragment is inconclusive: the typeset defect apparent in [M] could have either been fixed at a later date or, conversely, appeared with time. The second fragment suggests a deliberate correction applied in [V]: capital *Q* in the middle of a sentence is replaced with lowercase *q*, and on three occasions an allograph *v* is replaced with *u*, achieving uniform spelling across the entire map. The third fragment, despite its symmetry, decisively confirms this suggestion: in all Agnese’s MS maps that contain the Tamerlane legend, the word order matches that of [V]. Therefore, it is [V] that was ultimately published and became a basis for derivative work.

We conclude that imprint [M] had been pulled as a proof which was used to make corrections to the movable type inserts, later applied to imprint [V]: word order in *captus et uictus* was changed, the accidentally scattered letters in the word *legati* were fixed, and other routine proofreading was made. The conclusion is supported by the irregular shape of the sheet, which has been preserved in the very form it came from the press. In the a half a millennium history of the imprint, no one has ever tried to trim it and to bind into a book.

Interestingly, the spelling of *Tamburlane* offers an insight into the relationship between Gerasimov and Giovio as that of a talkative celebrity and a thorough critical interviewer. While they both were familiar with the historical episode (Battle of Ankara of 1402), the Moscow envoy confused Tamerlane/ Tamburlane, the famous founder of the Timurid Empire, and Temir-Kutluk, a short-term khan of the Golden Horde. Giovio calmly recorded the confusion in his book, but left it out of the text legend.



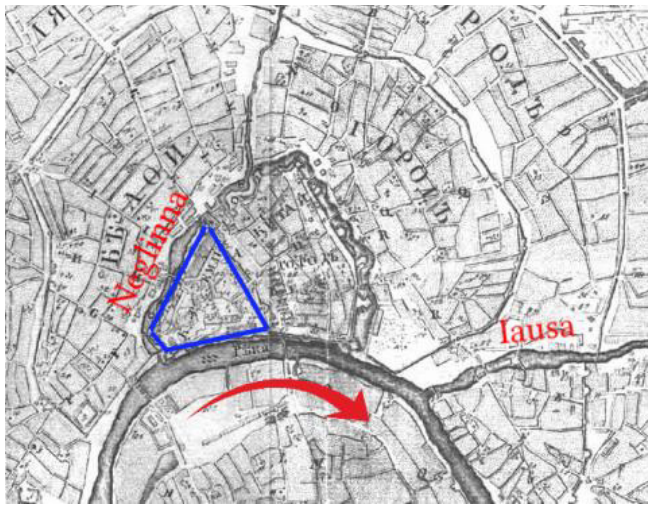
[V] Biblioteca Marciana, Venice. C 214 C 108.1

Image: Marica Milanese

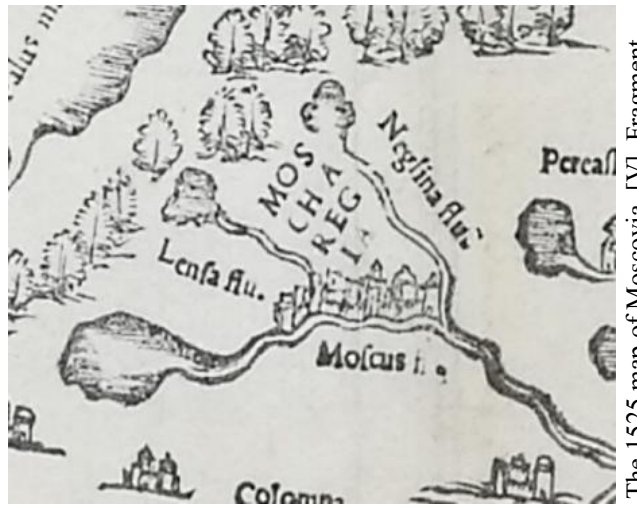
The role of Moscow envoy in map compilation

The matter has been controversial. The strongest evidence is provided by sequence inversion of two Moskva river tributaries: Neglinna and lausa. But is it just a printer's error, insertion of wrong letter sets into the woodblock slots?

The 1739 plan of Moscow by Ivan Michurin.



Ad ipsum urbis caput, Neglina fluiuiolus ...Mofchum annem ingreditur, penin-sulamque efficit, in cuius extremitate Arx ipfa cum turribus ac propugnaculis admirabili pulchritudine Italarum architectorum ingenio conſtructa eft.... Vrbs etiam ab aduerſo latere, alio flumine quos laufa dicitur, munita eft, id pariter in Mofchum paulo infra urbem euoluitur.



The 1525 map of Moscovia. [V] Fragment.

At the very head of the city, the Neglinna stream... discharges into the river Moschus forming a peninsula, on the extremity of which the castle with the towers and bulwarks of admirable beauty is erected by the genius of Italian architects... The city is protected also from the opposite side by another river called lausa, which unfolds into Moschus slightly below the city.

The text of *Libellus*, which represents Gerasimov’s words recorded by Giovio, is perfectly faithful to the actual configuration of the rivers, including the mouth of lausa being located closely *down the river* from the city. The map is accurate to the text, except for the map compiler’s intuitive but flawed idea that two rivers at their confluence flow in *the same direction*. In reality the direction of both Moskva tributaries is *opposite* to that of the mainstream. The map compiler, who must have understood the expression *infra urbem* in reference to elevation, is confused, and that leads to a reversal of tributary sequence. At the same time, the city location on a peninsula formed by the Moskva and Neglinna rivers, exactly as *Libellus* states, exonerates the printer.

Had Gerasimov provided any MS maps or cartographic sketches to Giovio, the river configuration within the capital city, as the major contribution of the map, would have surely been among them, avoiding any confusion. Thus, the tributary sequence inversion proves their communication was purely verbal.

History

As no known *Libellus* copy seemed to contain a map, it had long been considered lost, until in 1884, H. Michow (Hamburg) discovered a *manuscript* map of Moscovia matching Giovio’s description in a 1554 MS portolan atlas by Battista Agnese. He hypothesized that in 1525 Agnese compiled the map on Giovio’s orders as a prototype of the printed map, but for some strange reason it was never engraved. Michow also published a line drawing of the map. In 1899, B.A. Kordt reproduced it in Kyiv, making Michow’s ideas available to Russian readers. However, those ideas were proven wrong.

Subsequent research on Agnese revealed that in 1534–1564 he made more than 70 MS atlases with the Moscovia map present in at least 14 of them. Besides, in 1525 he turned 11. Thus, Agnese’s MSS are the later derivatives.



Image: Yale University Library.

One of the lesser known MS maps by Battista Agnese. Yale, Beinecke MS 560.

Two copies of the original printed map were discovered in 1993 and 2006. Until the 2020 IM publication, the researchers in both Russia and Italy considered their copy to be the only surviving imprint of Giovio’s map.

Personalia



Engraving by Nicolas de Larminasson, 1682. PD.

Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) — Italian historian, physician, prelate; a confidant of Pope Clement VII, bishop of Nocera since 1528. In 1525, the host of Moscow envoy Demetrius Erasmus (Dimitri Gerasimov) in Rome. Author of *Libellus de legatione Basilii magni, principis Moschoviae ad Clementem VII, Pont. Maximum*. Romae. Anno M.D.XXV. Presumed compiler of the 1525 map of Moscovia.

Battista Agnese (1514–1564) — commercial mapmaker, Genovese by origin, working in Venice. Over his atlas-making career spanning 30 years between 1534 and 1564, he produced at least 14 manuscript maps of Moscovia and Tartaria, which were partially modeled after Giovio’s printed map.

Dimitri Gerasimov (c.1465–after 1536) — Muscovite religious philologist, professional translator, and diplomat. In 1525 he visited Rome as an envoy from Grand Duke Vasili III of Moscow to Pope Clement VII. In Latin translation, his name was rendered as **Demetrius Erasmus**. The Russian historiography celebrates him as one of the most educated people of his time, identifying with several persons known in the primary sources only by first name and ascribing him many extra virtues. Information on his age, character, education in Livonia, and extensive diplomatic experience is due primarily to Giovo.

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