The Vatican’s Gallery of Maps presents a complicated simulacrum of post-Reformation Christian propaganda. The Galleria delle Carte Geografiche (herein the Galleria) was completed by the Dominican Danti Ignazio for his patron Pope Gregory XIII in 1585. A masterpiece of ecclesiastical cartography, the Galleria mapped all the territories which Pope Gregory claimed to have both a temporal and divine jurisdiction over. The maps were conjoined by frescoed panels on the Galleria’s vaulted ceiling which depicted special historical or biblical moments of importance to the Church. These vault scenes were complemented by diminutive historical vignettes on the map cycles which presented a history of the peninsula being defended from external foes. As a whole, the Galleria presented a series of what historian Eric Wolf has labeled ‘imagined entities’. Such entities were embossed into the Galleria’s iconography so as to provide the Pope and Church with a visual defence by which to underscore a metaphysical construction of authority which was claimed by Pope Gregory as the Vicarius Christi of the Universal Church. Together, the ‘imagined entities’ provided the physical properties of the Galleria with a thematic spine which warped time and space in service of its patron. The following paper will explain how each entity operates within the Galleria and what they denote.

The formation of the Galleria represented an innovative turn for Renaissance cartography. The polities of Central Europe had earnestly embraced the conflation of geography and politics, prolifically producing administrative maps from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. In contrast, cartography produced in the Italian States often lacked the

1 Eric Wolf, Europe and the People without History (California: University of California Press, 1982), Part I: Introduction. Wolf argues that micro-populations and nation states create historical myths which abstractify external “bounded systems” for the benefit of enfranchised internal cultures and actors. These myths, or imagined entities, “create false modes of reality”, p. 6.

sophisticated cartographic and mathematical formulas of their Central European counterparts. Producers were also inspired by the Reformation, as Protestants created maps that combined the specificity of geography with a religious critique of the Church in their polemics against the Papacy. Such maps attempted to circumvent the religious magnetism of Rome, by providing Rome with a religious and geographical counterpoint, the Holy Land.

In response, the post-Tridentine papacy sought to reaffirm the primacy of the Church within the peninsula by imitating Protestant ecclesiastical cartography. Unlike Protestant exegesis, the Church followed in the tradition of European state actors who created technically precise maps in order to legitimate the existence of political boundaries. However, in the Galleria, the result was that map cycles challenged the tangible political and geographical realities of the regions depicted by overlaying them with a cosmological or religious frame in conjunction with the vault scenes.

Each imagined entity provided the Galleria with a thematic narrative which anchored its propagandistic iconography. The first entity, the ‘Kingdom of Italy’, propagated the historic military, political and religious exceptionalism of the Peninsula across the map cycles. Entwined within this narrative was an argument about the role of the Pope as an Italian prince who purportedly acted as a protector to the mapped regions. The second entity concerned the operation and presence of the Church across the Papal States under the authority of the Pope. Taken together, these two narratives provided elaboration for third and most substantive imagined entity, that of the Universal Church, in the Galleria represented as Italy, which was

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3 Ibid., p. 382-383.
8 The ‘imagined entities’ thesis is laid out by Pauline Moffitt Watts, “The Donation of Constantine,” for each respective entity, see p. 93; 98; 100.
ruled over by the *Vicarius Christi*. What follows is an examination of the visual devices and motifs used to accomplish these projections.

By the Galleria’s logic, the exceptionalism of the Peninsula was forged through its defence of the Papacy. In the fifteenth century, Christian scholars, chiefly Carlo Signiro, produced histories which postulated that the defence of Italy secured *libertas* and in so doing maintained the independence of the Papacy from predatory imperial powers. The Galleria reflects this conceptualisation of *libertas* by presenting a selective digest of diminutive vignettes which shows indigenous Italian resistance to foreign foes throughout history. In these vignettes, the geographic and ethnic strangeness of the invading enemies were exemplified. (Fig. 1). In the Battle of Pavia vignette, the respective Italian armies approach from the northern end of Pavia so as to highlight their relationship with the city they are defending, in contrast to the strategically unfavourable position of the invaders. This effect is heightened by the use of colour. The dull green of the invaders pikes contrasts against the off-white of the Italian kind, a visual distraction which invites attention on the Italian forces. The choice to give visual relief to Roman battle scenes was not to a gesture of support towards a pagan past, however. Instead, by opting to overlay the map cycles with the vignettes geographically and not chronologically, the Galleria attempted to propagate a providential history of the peninsula.

In order to give weight to the notion that Italy was a ‘Kingdom’ the Galleria gave the impression that the the regions depicted represented a privileged theatre of divine intervention. At its most basic operation, this was achieved when an historical episode was overlaid on a map cycle which corresponded with a vault scene above it. This relied on the viewer noting the relationship between physical place and the imagined divine. In this respect, the map cycle of Flaminia and its corresponding vault scene is instructive. Above the map of

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12 It should be noted, however, that creating visual distinctions through the use of colour is not universally applied in the Galleria. For example, Figure 3 depicts Attila’s armies in eye-catching yellows and whites.

Flaminia, a vault scene records the mythical intervention of the Heavens as summoned by Pope Leo against Attila (Fig. 2). The visual drama of the vault scene hijacks the viewer's gaze with the effect of implicating the religious mythologies of the Church into the secular history of the Peninsula. More obvious artistic or functional details also help communicate this message by making the Pope a focal point of viewer attention. Descriptive cartouches, which accompanied each map cycle, narrativised the events on the map, providing a filter through which map cycles were interpreted (Fig. 3). The cartouche for the map of Flaminia refers directly to the “golden dragon” of Pope Gregory which was restored to his “Apostolic dominion”. Art historian Jeremy Brown has posited that the use of golden, yellow and blue paints were specially used on the Pope. A vignette on the map of Flaminia shows the Pope repelling Atilla I, the latter being identifiable because his appearance is mirrored in the corresponding vault scene (Fig. 4). These features went beyond ornate. The cartouche provided a geographic and political context to the map cycle, the golden dragon connects the region directly with Pope Gregory, and the color coding exaggerated the presence of the Pope. Together, these devices emphasised the interdependence between the Pope and the peninsula. When considered with the vault scenes, the meaning is transformed again: it was only through the patronage of the Pope, initiated by a defense of the peninsula itself, which could ensure divine salvation.

The starkness of this revelation, that beatitude bequeaths salvation, has prompted much historiographical discussion as to the overall tonality of the vignettes. Walter Goffart argues that the vignettes are reminders about the fragility of human life, a theme supposedly inspired by the writings of early Church historian, Orosius. This theme is convincingly transmitted in the modern Battle of Pavia vignette (Fig. 1). By choosing to depict this battle, Goffart argues that Danti is attempting to draw attention to the great loss of life which it caused. If the operation of this message relied on making meaning out of death this was not universally applied in the Galleria. The Donation of Matilda scene, for example, shows Matilda

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of Tuscany donating her allodial properties to Pope Gregory VII, a dubious depiction because upon her death the Church failed to make public documents which affirmed the veracity of the donation, a source of great and lasting controversy thereafter. (Fig. 5). In this way, the subject of death appears to of been problematic for Danti.

In contrast to Goffart, Antonio Pinelli and Lucio Gambi have argued that the vignettes are ‘triumphant’ in tone because they depict ‘Christian victories,’ whilst Fiorini argues that they are ‘utopian constructions of place’. Rather than presenting life and death as mutually exclusive motifs, the tonality of the Galleria appears on the whole to revolve around the sombre notion of the promise of salvation which naturally required both. If anything, as Pauline Moffitt Watts has identified, the juxtaposition of the Galleria’s tonality was deliberately so, a means by which to remind Pope Gregory about the utility of human life and its past and future uses for the furtherance of the Church. Rather than ‘utopian’ or ‘pessimistic’ then, the Galleria seems to strike a compromise on ‘sacrifice’. This allowed the Galleria in the case of the Donation of Matilda scene, as in the Pavia vignette, a means by which present the outcomes of those events as eventual victories for the Church.

An examination of the tonality of the Galleria reveals its important dialogic function. A sense of hopelessness and socio-political dislocation pervaded contemporary literature produced during the sixteenth century. The Galleria was receptive to these shifts in politics and mood. In a vault scene, Pope Gregory is shown accepting a delegation of Corsica notables, Corsica having long been an enviable strategic asset for mediterranean powers (Fig. 6). The unidentifiable Corsica notable prostrating himself in front of Pope Gregory strikingly conveys the Church’s expectation of deference in times of stress, but also stresses unity and cooperation. It is in this light then that the two maps of Italy which flank the southern entrance of

17 The Donation of Matilda scene refers to the broader Investiture Controversy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries which enhanced the feudal power of the Church at the expense of monarchy. The specific qualities of this scene are discussed in Simon Ditchfield, Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 331. Ditchfield argues that the scene of Matilda was part of Danti’s “sumptuously decorated” Galleria.
20 For a brief overview as to why pessimism pervaded contemporary literature, see Brown, The Historical Vignettes, p. 19.
the Gallery can be viewed in. Together, they invite the viewer to consider the prospect of a *Pax Italia* in the post-Tridentine, post-Italian wars period, akin to what the *Pax Romana* ushered in.\(^{21}\) In these ways, the Galleria optimistically presented the past and future of the peninsula as being under the special protection of the Church, a prospect which required acquiescence to the Papacy.

The second imagined entity which the Galleria projects is an affirmational history of the Church. This history operated on varying levels of abstraction. At first, the Galleria presented as a series of what Pauline Watts has termed “working documents”, designed to provide the Pope with an overview of Church holdings on the Peninsula.\(^{22}\) To satisfy this end, descriptive *cartello* accompany each map cycle and identify important towns or monasteries, with crosses above some cities denoting their exalted status with Gregory’s court (Fig. 7, 8). Christopher Black has argued that the crosses signified the dispersion of confraternities amongst the Peninsula, a feature which reflected the post-Tridentine Church’s efforts in reformulating its public image amongst the lay masses.\(^{23}\) Also adorning the maps are heraldic dragon crests, which were placed above cities or territories which Pope Gregory had claimed as belonging to the Church during his pontificate (Fig. 9). Marco Ruffini has identified these crests amongst other projects commissioned by Gregory as being part of the Boncompagni’s own coat of arms.\(^{24}\) The appearance of the crests in the Galleria then not only provide a direct link between the Pope and his familial heritage, a microlcosm of his persona, but give clear visual expression to the immediate past actions of Pope Gregory’s papacy in securing certain tracts of land. To heighten the administrative features of the maps, each mapped territory sat within a painted stucco frame which gave the appearance that the map cycles have been tacked on over other maps as

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if ready to be updated. Unlike the first imagined entity, these adornments represented temporal realities and obligations on the part of the Church which mostly conformed to existing geo-political boundaries.

The more abstract and propagandistic element of the second entity, the Galleria mapped territories not strictly considered politically or geographically part of the peninsula. This element was based on the transformative actions of Emperor Constantine in performing *translatio* with Pope Sylvester, known as the Donation the Constaintine. The ‘Donation’ of Constantine was a false decree which transferred lands to Pope Sylvester, a blight which had been recognised in contemporary Protestant and Catholic works. As a result, the act of *translatio* between Sylvester and Constantine was not pictured in the Galleria. Instead, the Galleria maps the territories reportedly given to Sylvester, Avignon and the Comtat of Venaissin, as personifications of the Donation (Fig 10). Whereas the administrative features of the second entity had generally corresponded to tangible political entities, by including the Donation map cycles the Galleria blurred past and present so as to flag the Pope’s historic spiritual claim to the former papal states. The imaging of the Church’s presence was achieved in two extremes then, either by minute admisuaistaive detail or in simply being included, benefiting in the case of the Donation maps, from the Galleria’s imposing physicality. That the maps themselves were “working documents” as ever at risk of being re-drawn heightened their dialogic nature and contributed to the construction of an artificial historical continuum. In giving visual permanence to Church possessions, real and imagined, the Galleria imparted the impression that Pope Gregory revelled in the Church’s parochial operations.

The first two entities of the Galleria compartmentalised the conjoined ideologies of the third, the Universal Church. Conceptually, the Universal Church was a heavily negotiated claim of leadership to both the temporal and divine worlds of the peninsula. The Galleria at once

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25 Pauline Moffitt Watts, “A Mirror for the Pope,” p. 181. The extent to which this aspect of the Galleria can be seen is perhaps best represented by the map cycle which depicted the ancient port of Ostia, which at the time of the Galleria’s construction lay abandoned, was in the map cycle for the papal states shown to be completed (Fig. 18).
functioned to justify this claim and to simultaneously provide it with a visual canon. What follows in the final section of this paper is a discussion of how this aspect of the Galleria can be seen.

Compressed into the Galleria’s imagery was a rich corpus of Christian theology. This corpus provided the justification for Pope Gregory’s claim to overlordship over the peninsula as the *Vicarius Christi*. The basis of this justification rested on the twelfth century treatise, *De consideratione ad Eugenium pam tertiam libri quinque*, by Bernard of Clairvaux, written in 1148-1153 for Pope Eugene III. On *Consideration* suggested that the Pope was the conduit between the divine and the earthly realms. In the thirteenth century, Barnard’s teachings were given new meaning when Catholic scholars expanded the definition of the *Vicarius Christi*. These new scholars argued that the *Vicarius Christi* had sway over the *Corpus Christi mysticism*, all beings of faith from the past, present and future, and the *Corpus Christi iuridicum*, defined as the spatial properties of the Church in historical continuum. This conflation was complemented by the belief that the Pope possessed divine authority to ensure the beatitude of his followers in temporality, the *plenitudo potestas*. The division between the mysticism and iuridicum were represented in the Galleria as the first two imagined entities which, while already containing their own complex heritages, here combined to represent the two persona of the Pope as the gatekeeper between earth and Heaven.

Pope Gregory’s claim to be the earthly manifestation of the *Vicarius Christi* was premised on the refutation of Protestant iconoclasm. Protestant polemics lambasted the Pope and his Church for indulging in temporal political affairs, a consequence of the duality of the Pope’s persona. This was combined with a critique on the spatial isolation of Rome juxtaposed with the burgeoning polities of Central Europe, an increasingly sharp distinction which led to the open defiance of the Bourbon court against Papal bulls. The Galleria combatted these

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30 Ibid., p. 176.
32 Ibid., p. 33.
attacks by seeking to highlight the special authority of the Pope to grant salvation and provide spiritual leadership. This tact appears to of been of special importance for Gregory, as the centre of the Galleria is devoted to a vault scene which depicts Christ reminding St Peter of his obligation to tend to His flock on earth (Fig. 11). To reinforce the persona of the Pope, this vault scene was contiguous with the map of Bologna, the birthplace of Pope Gregory, sitting to its right. The physical interplay of the two reliefs served here to firmly remind the viewer of the Pope’s own personal history with the Peninsula which, when considered in conjunction with the vault scene, gave the Pope both a geographical and theological grounding for his provision of spiritual nourishment to the Peninsula.

Whilst a providential history had been telegraphed in the ‘Kingdom of Italy’, and the ‘Donation of Constantine’ had provided the Pope with a claim to the Papal States, the Universal Church’s instantiation of history was designed to altogether reassert the position of Rome as the seat of spiritual power within the Peninsula. This was a project which had captured the attention of Pope Gregory elsewhere. Other works commissioned by Pope Gregory, such as the The Tower of Winds and the Loggia of Palazzo Farnese, contained painted frescos which presented idealized cityscapes of Rome replete with Christian iconography. These works jointly recast the city as an historic centre of pilgrimage which antedated the foundation of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, a popular trope in Protestant works. The reimagining of Rome as the foundational epicentre of the Christian universe persisted into the Galleria. A vault scene portrays Constantine momentously presiding over the foundation of St Peter's Basilica and his directing its subsequent construction (Fig. 12). The invocation of Rome’s special physical properties were in these scenes given explicit Christian points of reference, accounting for the presence of Constantine. In the Galleria, Rome was not merely a notable city, but a functioning cosmological orientation for the Universal Church.

rejection of Papal influence as stemming from the Bourbon court, starting with ecclesiastical decisions deferred to Parlements under Louis XVI. Perhaps tellingly, this process has been called Gallicanism, hinting at the extent of this rejection beyond the Alps.


36 Ibid., pp. 538-539.
The extent of the Universal Church’s cosmological reach required definition, however. To communicate this, the Galleria contained a visual metaphor which attempted to conjoin the histories of Italy and Rome in a such a way as to render one’s fate to the other. This was a complicated task. In popular Christian thought, the Middle Ages were characterised by the protraction of Christian influence because the seat of the Papacy had been displaced from Italy to Constantinople. It followed that to provide the Galleria with a map of the Middle Ages was to explicitly visualise the ‘Babylonian captivity’ of the Church, a feature which would of disrupted the overall tonality of the Galleria. To bypass this, Constantinian scenes were situated directly above the twin maps of Italy which faced each other at the southern entrance of the Galleria. Italia Antiqua (Fig. 13) and Italia Nova (Fig. 14) were replications of the entire peninsula, the former during Roman times and the latter a roughly contemporary representation. By mapping Italia as a geographic whole the Galleria emphasised the pivotal transformation of Rome through its impactful interactions with Constantine. This impression was further imparted by the use Ptolemaic mapping principles. The disjointed map cycles conformed to Ptolemy’s conception of chorography, which subscribed that mapped entities could be pictured as ‘an impression of a part’. As the Galleria was elsewhere broken up by mapped region, the choice here to map the entirety of Italy from Antiqua to Nova emphasised the actions of Constantine in bringing Rome, and thus Italy, into modernity. In creating this metaphorical device and relying on the juxtaposition between Antiqua and Nova, the Galleria purposefully provided the Universal Church with geographical limitations.

Finally, the Galleria provided a composite view of sovereignty in light of the Church’s claim universality. Paolo Prodi has argued that the political and religious implosions of sixteenth century Europe challenged the roles of monarchs in presiding over wars, famines and social dislocation. As a means to capitalise on these upheavals, Renaissance Popes had sought to present the church as supplementing the functions of secular governments, a process which

38 Francesca Fiorani, The Marvel of Maps, p. 188.
Prodi argues contributed to the “metamorphosis of the Renaissance Papacy.” This new ideology of sovereignty was responsive to Protestant criticism of the practice of monarchs who “hold the stirrup and bridle of his mule when he [the Pope] mounts to go riding”. This was refuted by a vault scene which showed that even Emperor Constantine was required to acknowledge the ascendancy of the Pope (Fig. 15). The Italian States were attacked too. The Galleria’s chorographical composition highlighted the political and geographical divisions of the States. In contrast, the presence of the Church was represented as being omnipresent. The repetition of the dragons and crosses imagery above each town denoted Church favorability, a reminder that that material benefits might flow from acceding to Papal influence.

The real ‘metamorphosis’ of this ideology was not communicated solely on the basis of undermining the Italian States however, but rather by the Galleria’s imaging of the Church’s evangelical militarism. In concert with Gregory’s diplomatic efforts to reform the Holy League, the Galleria showed Christian victories over the Turkish armada on vignettes on the map of Corfu (Fig. 16, 17). In the same way that the Galleria had elsewhere promulgated a providential view of history in part as a means by which to soothe the trauma caused by the Italian War, in these vignettes religious conflict was again framed as a process of redemption. This idea was tethered to the prophetic works of Catholic scholars who predicted the coming of a ‘Golden Age’ should the Turkish ‘infidels’ be defeated.

The framing of the future of the peninsula as resting on the retention of its earthly and divine properties by way of battle, a universal theme which echoed across every vignette, could thus only be ensured by the Pope’s execution of plenitudo potesta which was uniquely combined in his personage as Vicarius Christi of the Universal Church.

This paper has explained how the visual fictions present in the Galleria functioned as propagandistic devices to justify the history and actions of Pope Gregory’s Church and Papacy.

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40 Ibid., p. 43.
42 See Francesca Fiorani, The Marvel of Maps, p. 227, for a discussion on the importance of the maintenance of ecclesiastical revenues in the post-Tridentine period.
43 Fiorani, The Marvel of Maps, pp. 234-235
44 John W. O’Malley, Praise and Blame, p. 199. O’Malley charts the development of the notion of a Christian ‘Golden Age.’
Of most importance was how the Galleria’s cartographic functionality enabled it to propagate the incidence of three imagined entities which warped time and space to create a transhistorical pastiche.

**Bibliography**


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Appendix

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