

Couto, Dejanirah, Bacqué-Grammont, Jean-Louis, and Taleghani, Mahmoud (eds.) (2006). *Atlas historique du golfe Persique (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Zoltán Biedermann (coord.). Turnhout: Brepols Publishers. ISBN 978-2-503-52284-5

Francisco Roque de Oliveira
Department of Geography, University of Lisbon
f.oliveira@fl.ul.pt

Trans. André Murteira

Aim and Contents

The work under discussion is the first volume of a historical atlas of the Persian Gulf and is the result of a joint editorial project of the Parisian *École Pratique des Hautes Etudes*, the University of Tehran and the Iranian Center of Documentation and Diplomatic History. It was edited by Dejanirah Couto, Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Mahmoud Taleghani, and coordinated by Zoltán Biedermann. Patrick Gautier Dalché and Elio Brancaforte collaborated in the production of this volume. The editors of this trilingual publication (French, English and Persian) set themselves the task of tracing the evolution of the cartographic representations of the Persian Gulf between the beginning of the sixteenth century and the middle of the eighteenth century. For this purpose, they selected around a hundred western maps, both prints and manuscripts, some of which had never been published before. The presentation of these maps – which consists almost always of the reproduction of the full image of the maps side by side with the amplified image of the Gulf area depicted in them, even when they are just maps of this specific region – is organized according to the main national traditions that produced the most representative pieces of the whole during the period under consideration: the cartographic “schools” of Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Britain and Germany. Each of these traditions is dealt with in a separate chapter, introduced by an essay which sums up the general conditions of production, circulation and preservation of the maps in question. All the maps’ reproductions are accompanied by notes identifying them from a technical point of view and by a brief historical comment, which helps to retrace the relations between the several “schools” by giving indications of the charts’ genealogy. A list of the toponyms to be found in the amplified section of each of the maps in the atlas is also included.

Chapter I introduces the traditional geographical representations of the late medieval period, which formed the starting point of the new geography of the Renaissance and interfered for a long time in the construction of the world image that resulted from the great European discoveries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Patrick Gautier Dalché deals with the subject in a contribution entitled “Knowledge and representation of the Persian Gulf from Antiquity to the Middle Ages” (pp. 43-45 – all page references relate to the English text), where he reviews how the Persian Gulf entered the geographical consciousness of the West from the moment of the expedition undertaken by Nearchus between the mouth of the Indus River and the Euphrates delta at the end of the fourth century BC. He also points out how this part of Asia gradually became less distinct in the mental and cartographic representations of the *oikoumene*, until the Mongol domination, the period of the Ilkhans and

accounts such as that of Marco Polo made it appear again in a clearer form. Despite the importance that the drawing of the *sinus Persicus* inherited from Nearchus continued to enjoy in the Western imaginary until the early modern period, in the thirteenth century it was possible to establish a relative differentiation vis-à-vis the two other geographic entities with which the Persian Gulf was more often confused – the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean as a whole. Furthermore, around the same time, the commercial dimension associated with the route linking Baghdad and India via Basra and Hormuz began to be emphasized. In order to illustrate this fact, P. Dalché refers to maps like the portolan chart of the Pizzigano brothers (1367), the *Catalan Atlas* attributed to Abraham Cresques (c. 1375) and the Venetian world map of Fra Mauro, which is the most ambitious known synthesis of cartographic knowledge about Asia produced before the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean (1459). In addition to the corresponding sections of the *Catalan Atlas*, the editors illustrated this article with images from the 1478 Roman edition of Ptolemy's *Geographia*, and from one of the known versions of Henricus Martellus Germanus' *mappa mundi* (c. 1489), all of them images that helped to perpetuate a drawing of the Gulf which would only be revised as a result of the successive surveys of the coasts of the area by the Portuguese during the first decades of the sixteenth century.

In Chapter II, D. Couto and Z. Biedermann introduce the Portuguese cartography of the Persian Gulf and its later echoes in sixteenth-century Europe (pp. 67-73). The text begins by confronting the main phases of the reconnaissance of the coasts between Hormuz and the Shatt al-Arab – which took place from 1507 onwards – with a concise review of the processes of gathering and synthesizing information that were practiced in the cartographers' workshops of Lisbon and Seville. The complex outline of the Persian Gulf, marked by the continuous coexistence of successive improvements in the hydrographic definition of the coasts with more elementary models, leads the authors to stress the non-linear character of the evolution of its representations and allows them to attempt to trace the genealogy of the main existing maps. The occasional recourse to the Ptolemaic drawing of the Persian Gulf, which reappeared in several maps produced during the sixteenth century in Italy and Germany – at a time when Portuguese cartography had already freed itself, for quite some considerable time, from that doubtful heritage – helps the authors to locate, in maps, the boundary separating the countries that first overcame ancient and medieval inaccurate geographic conceptions from those that only managed to do so later. On the other hand, a comment on the engraving of the Persian Gulf by Giacomo Gastaldi (1561) and its later insertion in the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* by Abraham Ortelius (first printing 1570) serves the purpose of introducing the central subject of the different diffusion levels attained by manuscript and printed cartography in Europe, while, at the same time, affording a glimpse of the consequences that stemmed from this for the popularity of the several available models. 31 maps were selected to illustrate this chapter, most of them drawn in Portugal and based on information collected in the East, or, alternatively, drawn in other parts of Europe and based on previous Portuguese charts or resorting directly to Portuguese cartographers. It should be noted that only two of the maps of this series do not correspond to a planisphere or to a relatively wide-ranging regional chart: the folios representing the Persian Gulf belonging to the anonymous Portuguese Atlas kept in the National Maritime Museum of Greenwich ("Portulan 14", c. 1550-1560) and to the Atlas drawn possibly at Goa by Lázaro Luís in 1563.

In the following three articles of the book (Chapters III-V), Z. Biedermann presents a synthesis on the subject of the representations of the Persian Gulf in Dutch, French and English cartography from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. In the first of these articles, special attention is paid to the complex network of international contacts that made it possible for the geographic knowledge gathered by the Portuguese about Asia during the sixteenth century to be transmitted to the professionals who inaugurated the "golden age" of Dutch cartography at the end of that century. Some well-known connections are reviewed, such as the links between the manuscript production of the Portuguese Bartolomeu Lasso and Domingos Teixeira and the maps engraved by Jacob Florisz van Langren, Petrus Plancius, Cornelis Claesz and Jodocus Hondius, for instance, which were decisive in the composition of the most popular models of the Persian Gulf reproduced in the cartographic

workshops of the Netherlands until the middle of the seventeenth century. From that moment on, this dependence was broken by a series of hydrographic surveys undertaken by the Dutch in the Gulf region, allowing for the gradual replacement of most of the prototypes used until then, of both Portuguese and Italian origin. The notes that accompany the reproduction of the 23 charts selected for the chapter supply complementary information on this evolution, as well as on the distinct “lineages” of the outlines of the Persian Gulf included in several of the maps of the “Dutch school” (pp. 162-235). In contrast with the material made available in the preceding chapter, here we can find six charts dedicated exclusively to the Persian Gulf, most of them based on a prototype produced after the expedition to Basra carried out by Cornelis Cornelisz Roobacker in 1645. This model was a true starting point for the Dutch surveys of the area and it would be adopted afterwards by several French, English and Dutch cartographers (*cf.* pp. 188, 260, 280, 290, 328, 342 and 360).

The French cartography of the Persian Gulf seems to have been a different case, as it continued during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to be highly dependent on charts previously drawn by Dutch, English and even German cartographers (p. 243). Despite successive reforms of the discipline put into practice as from 1666, the year of the foundation of the *Académie Royale des Sciences*, the fact is that the main maps produced in France do not point to any possibility that the French systematically gathered new hydrographic data on the Gulf, an area where they were only sporadically present during the whole period. At least, this is the conclusion to be reached when reading the text that introduces this chapter and the comments accompanying the 17 charts selected to illustrate it (pp. 244-297). The map of Persia printed by Giacomo Giovanni de Rossi in 1679, which is included in this series, helps to visualize the work of Italian cartographers at the end of the seventeenth century, a time when interest in the discipline underwent a revival in Italy (*cf.* Moreland and Bannister, 1989: 64). As regards the English cartography of the Persian Gulf, Biedermann once more stresses the contrast between a prolonged presence in the area by the British – which dated from the last years of the sixteenth century, but was reinforced by the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hormuz in 1622 – and the relatively discontinuous progress that can be observed in the cartographic objects produced in England by public or private initiative, whether prints or manuscripts. Once more, the permanent recourse to imported elements (Dutch or others) hindered the identification of a truly original and autonomous cartographic tradition (pp. 305-309). This idea is illustrated by 18 maps, among which the most notable are the six drawings on paper representing either the entrance to or the whole of the Persian Gulf (pp. 310-363).

“German Baroque and Enlightenment cartographers and their representation of the Persian Gulf from 1650 to 1760” is the title of the last chapter of the book, written by Elio Brancaforte (Chapter VI). On the basis of a sample of nine German charts produced between 1647 and 1773, the author retraces the evolution of the Persian Gulf representations offered to the German-speaking public during the period. The map of Persia produced by Adam Olearius (1647), still full of Ptolemaic resonances, is his starting point. Brancaforte stresses the fact that we are faced with a very peculiar cultural universe, which did not benefit from a regular relationship with the Gulf and where geography mainly performed the subsidiary role of illustrating the teaching of history, heraldry, politics, law or genealogy. Therefore, few of these maps seem to reflect a real interest in the incorporation of the new data gathered in the field, and most of them are no more than a belated, and often inexact, copy of the Dutch, French and English models (pp. 373-409).

On “national” issues and usages.

This stimulating book offers a broad view of the history of representations of the Persian Gulf in European cartography. Through the geographic scope covered and the number of reproduced materials, it complements other publications, such as the *Atlas of Geographical Maps and Historical Documents on the Persian Gulf*, published by Sahab Publishing Company (2nd edition Tehran, 1974), *Arabia in Early Maps: A Bibliography of Maps Covering the Peninsula of Arabia Printed in Western Europe from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1751*, by G.

R. Tibbetts (Naples & Cambridge, 1978), *La Péninsule Arabique dans les cartes européennes anciennes: Fin XV^e-début XIX^e siècle*, by Kh. Al-Ankary (Paris, 2001) and *General Maps of Persia, 1477-1925*, by C. Alai (Leyden, 2005). The notes analyzing each of the maps chosen to illustrate this *Historical Atlas of the Persian Gulf* help to interconnect the six essays that introduce the different cartographic traditions identified. In these six main texts, we note a recurring concern with inserting maps in the particular context of the society that produced them, a standard procedure among art historians, but one which is only now becoming common among historians of cartography (*cf.* Buisseret, 2003: XIII). On the other hand, the editors also found a good solution to the ever delicate problem of selecting cartographic specimens, providing a representative sample of the hundreds of maps available. The period under consideration – from the beginning of the exploration of the Persian Gulf by Europeans to the moment when the discovery of an accurate method of measuring longitude led to decisive improvements in the drawing of maps – was also well-chosen. The graphic quality of the volume is irreproachable.

Nevertheless, it is surprising that a project resulting from an original French-Iranian association does not examine or reproduce any Islamic map. This is the main flaw of the book, one which its title does not allow us to guess at. On the other hand, it might have been better to specify from the beginning that only a minority of the maps presented – mostly the latter ones – do in fact correspond to autonomous images of the Persian Gulf. On account of this, several of the chapter titles, as well as passages in which somewhat generic references are made to “maps of the Persian Gulf” (p. 34), are not always the clearest options. This question leads us to the problems that may stem from retracing the different “lineages” of the joint drawing of the Persian Gulf in this type of maps. As we have just recalled, most of them are small-scale general maps, in other words stylized world maps or charts of a part of the East that is much larger than the Gulf and its immediate surroundings. Thus, many of the doubts raised by the “evolution” of the outlines under examination can only begin to be cleared up after studying all of the available maps, retracing the genealogy of the remaining profiles and comparing all their toponyms. Of course, the comparative analysis of a certain segment, which is chronologically based, can offer countless clues about the complex construction of successive representations. Nevertheless, we should not generalize from the observation of small portions of a map, and, in particular, we should not be too surprised whenever the outline of a coast or a territory appears inexplicable in the light of a series of previous maps. As we know, what defined the art of the cabinet cartographer – which was what most of the cartographers represented in the book were – was the ability to combine different sources in order to produce a single, apparently homogeneous chart (*cf.* Pelletier, 2001: 92).

Another question raised by the reading of this Atlas has to do with the so-called “national schools” of cartography. Let us consider, for instance, the case of Portuguese cartography, which is dealt with in chapter II of the book. We should recall some of the many Portuguese-born cartographers and cosmographers who were in Spain’s service before and during the preparation of the voyage of Ferdinand Magellan: João Dias de Solis, Estevão Gomes, Diogo Ribeiro, Simão de Alcáçova Sotomaior, João Rodrigues, Francisco and Rui Faleiro. Or we should consider the case of the cartographers Pedro and Jorge Reinel, who worked in Seville during the first quarter of the sixteenth century, as the available documentation testifies. Or also the case of the already mentioned Diogo Ribeiro, appointed *Cosmógrafo y maestro de hacer cartas e instrumentos de navegar* by the Emperor Charles V, and whose only known biographic details are those pertaining to the several years he worked in La Coruña and Seville. Finally, let us recall the work carried out by some of the most remarkable Portuguese cartographers at the Madrid court between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, such as Luís Jorge de Barbuda, João Baptista Lavanha – who, before settling in Spain, probably studied mathematics in Rome and knew in detail the work of Gemma Frisius – or Pedro Teixeira Albernaz (*cf.* Cortesão and Mota, 1987, I: 20, 87-89; *id.*, 1987, II: 123-125; Núñez de las Cuevas, 1991: 185; Cerezo Martínez, 1994: 174).

Situations such as these, characterized by the intense circulation of the more highly rated scientific agents, were, from very early on, the rule in the history of Iberian cartography. Without having to go back to the Iberian-Balearic origin of portolan cartography, we only need to recall the contribution made in the fifteenth century by cartographers and astronomers such as Jacome of Majorca (Jafuda Cresques?) and Abraham Zacuto to Portugal and to the preparation of its Atlantic navigations. Therefore, the shift in the scientific focus of attraction from Portugal to Spain that took place after the discovery of America – a trend that seems to have resumed after 1580, during the period when both crowns were united under the same king – is part of a long tradition of exchanges of people and ideas, which linked Majorcans, Catalans, Portuguese and Castilians from an early stage, but also several Genovese, Venetians, Germans and Arabs (*cf.* Martín Merás, 1993: 66-68; Núñez de las Cuevas, 1991: 174). This helped to shape a sort of common heritage of geographic knowledge, which makes the partitions of the history of cartography based on strictly national criteria appear very problematic. On the subject of some of the most important scientific and technological innovations in the field of astronomy in Britain and France during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, Biedermann correctly notes that they should be seen, first of all, as the result of the intense cooperation that existed at that time between experts from different countries (*cf.* p. 306). Should that not also be the norm in the history of cartography, even in those circumstances when progress in the art of map-making depended not on letters exchanged between scientific societies, but rather on the competence of exiles or deserters and on the efficiency of spies?

Apart from these general questions, we have also identified a few cases where the writing lacks some precision. We list them here, so that they can perhaps be corrected in a second edition of the book. In the first place, there is the attribution of the authorship of the *Catalan Atlas* to Abraham and Jafuda Cresques, a view which is not consensual among historians of cartography (*cf.* p. 46). On the other hand, a couple of misprints must have been responsible for the misspelling of the names of the researcher Brian Harley and of the cartographer Henricus Martellus (*cf.* pp. 24, 32 and 56). On the subject of the “Cantino map” (1502), at a certain point it is said that: “The extremely accurate depiction of Africa, including its western, eastern and northern shores makes it particularly clear that diverse cartographical traditions were systematically blended in the royal cartographical workshop of Lisbon while ‘purely Portuguese’ data was not yet available” (p. 68). Once more, we do not doubt the “composite” character of a map of this nature, which was built upon a collection of materials of different origin. Nevertheless, this passage could be reformulated, considering that the data on the coastline of Africa between Gibraltar and the Bab-el-Mandeb strait included in the “Cantino” map is mainly the result of roughly a century spent by Portugal systematically gathering information in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Finally, we do not understand on what information the authors base their suggestion that the fragment of the planisphere by Diogo Ribeiro, kept in Dillingen’s Kreis- und Studienbibliothek, representing the northeast of Africa, Asia and the Indonesian Archipelago, might correspond to an autonomous regional chart (*cf.* p. 106). We believe that no doubts remain that it is but a fragment of a map, similar to the several planispheres produced by the author, which still survive and of which, furthermore, a second fragment exists, depicting a large part of the Atlantic (*cf.* Cortesão and Mota, 1987, V: plate 523).

Researchers know that objectivity is an illusion in cartography. Before projecting the world or part of the world in a map, a mapmaker projects in them a certain idea of order which precedes his own empirical observations. To say the same in other words: every society chooses to represent in maps what interests it, always pretending that these fabulous objects pass for an accurate representation of reality (*cf.* Black, 2000: 17-21; Besse, 2003: 309; Tricoire, 2004: 18). But the question is this: can a book dealing with maps shrink away from this illusion of the cartographic absolute? And when that book has the Persian Gulf as its subject? In a *New York Times* editorial of September 20, 1987, a journalist described the region as “a body of water nearly surrounded by Arabians who hate the name” and who, on account of that, prefer to call it the Arabian Gulf (*cf.* Nelson, 1997: 147). This kind of toponymic question resurfaces on the subject of the sea called the Sea of Japan by the

Japanese and the Sea of Korea or Tong Hae (East Sea) by the Koreans. The same could be said about Macedonia, Manchuria or the Malvinas. The editors of this Atlas politely avoid directly approaching this sensitive question, but everyone who knows the importance of names will understand that it was present from the beginning.

References

- Besse, Jean-Marc (2003). *Les grandeurs de la Terre. Aspects du savoir géographique à la Renaissance*. Paris: Ens Éditions.
- Black, Jeremy (2000). *Maps and Politics*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Buisseret, David (2003). *The Mapmakers' Quest. Depicting New Worlds in Renaissance Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cerezo Martínez, Ricardo (1994). *La Cartografía Náutica Española en los Siglos XIV, XV y XVI*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
- Cortesão, Armando, and Avelino Teixeira da Mota (1987). *Portugaliae Monumenta Cartographica*. Vols. I, II, and V. Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda.
- Martín Merás, Luisa (1993). *Cartografía marítima hispana. La Imagen de América*. Barcelona: Lunwerg Editores.
- Moreland, Carl, and David Bannister (1989). *Antique Maps*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Nelson, Derek (1999). *Off the map: the curious histories of place-names*. New York: Kodansha International.
- Núñez de las Cuevas, Rodolfo (1991). Historia de la cartografía española. In *La cartografía de la Península Ibérica i la seva extensió al continent americà. Cicle de conferències sobre Història de la Cartografia – 2on curs (Barcelona, 1991)*. Barcelona: Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya, 153-223.
- Pelletier, Monique (2001). *Cartographie de la France et du monde de la Renaissance au Siècle des lumières*. Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale de France.
- Tricoire, Emmanuelle (2004). 'Un savoir qui vient de loin', in *La Documentation photographique*, 8036: 18-19.

Copyright 2007, ISSN 1645-6452-Vol. 5, number 2, Winter 2007