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*La Géographie de Ptolémée en occident (IVe–XVIe siècle)* by Patrick Gautier Dalché

Terrarum orbis 9. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009. Pp. 443 with 30 illus. ISBN 978–2–503–53164–9. Cloth € 95.00

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*Reviewed by*

Florian Mittenhuber

Institut für Klassische Philologie, Bern

[florian.mittenhuber@kps.unibe.ch](mailto:florian.mittenhuber@kps.unibe.ch)

The reviewed work, a piece of meticulous scholarship by Patrick Gautier Dalché, deals with the reception history of the *Γεωγραφικὴ ὕψι-γγησις* by Claudius Ptolemy, written shortly after AD 150 in Alexandria. Dalché covers the work's influence from late antiquity down to the first third of the 16th century. The *Geography*, consisting of eight volumes, was the Alexandrian scholar's second major work beside the better known *Σύνταξις μαθηματικὴ* or *Almagest*. Until its rediscovery by the Byzantine scholar Maximus Planudes around 1295, the *Geography* had largely fallen into oblivion, although the work received mention every now and then in Arabic sources. In the West, it became available only through its translation into Latin by Jacopo Angeli in 1406. Afterwards, however, the distribution of the *Cosmographia*—thus the Latin title—underwent an explosive rise and significantly influenced the cartographical outlook of the West far into the 16th century.

After a short general introduction [ch. 1], Gautier Dalché offers a detailed overview of the transmission history of the *Geography* in late Antiquity and in the Byzantine East until its rediscovery by Maximus Planudes [ch. 2]. Thereafter, he considers the knowledge of the work in the Latin West before Jacopo Angeli's translation [ch. 3]. Presenting many testimonies, Gautier Dalché modifies the widely accepted doctrine that the Ptolemaic *Geography* was not known in the West before its 'rediscovery'. In the realms of astronomy, astrology, and geography, there are numerous indications that the Ptolemaic work was known in outline. It is undisputed that Ptolemy's overall *oeuvre*—especially the *Almagest* and the *Tetrabiblos*—exercised a significant influence on the geographical world view of the Late

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ISSN 1549–4497 (online)

ISSN 1549–4470 (print)

ISSN 1549–4489 (CD-ROM)

*Aestimatio* 7 (2010) 13–15

Middle Ages. This can also be gathered from the field of cartography. Given this background, the ‘rediscovery’ of the *Geography* and its translation into Latin at the hands of Jacopo Angeli must not in fact be overrated. The acceptance of Ptolemy’s view of the world forms rather part of a process that took place in the framework of the intellectual *milieu* of the time (humanists, astrologers, astronomers, and physicians). Yet there seem to be no sources that indicate direct access to the original text of Ptolemy’s *Geography* in the Latin West before 1406—that is, neither to its theoretical parts nor to the catalogue of places and the maps.

In the following three sections [chs 4–6], Gautier Dalché recounts extensively the reception of Ptolemy’s *Geography* and its role as a ‘model’ for the history of science in the 15th and early 16th centuries. The author bases his account on a great number of testimonies. In the first half of the 15th century, humanists increasingly begin to engage with the ancient philosophy of nature, especially its cosmological models. This was also done with a view to doing research on areas of the world unknown to Ptolemy. In a first stage that lasts until the second half of the 15th century, the Ptolemaic maps are ‘brought up to date’—for example, by redrawing the regions of Christian northern Europe—but their value is not put into question in any fundamental way. Only in a second stage, which begins with the editions of Nicolaus Germanus around 1460, are so-called *tabulae modernae* attached to the Ptolemaic maps. Nevertheless, the model of the Ptolemaic *Geography* remains dominant. Gautier Dalché refers to two obstacles to a quicker realization of the new view of the world: the poor translation of Jacopo Angeli, which renders the theoretical parts of the *Geography* insufficiently comprehensible, and the humanists’ habit of using the *Geography* primarily to find out about ancient topography.

According to Gautier Dalché, the true scientific value of the *Geography* in comparison with the descriptive works of Mela, Pliny, or Strabo is only recognized in the works of Johannes Regiomontanus and his successors in southern Germany. These men increasingly directed their attention towards the theoretical parts that constituted the essential goal of Ptolemy’s *Geography*, namely, an adequate cartographical representation of the Earth. This concern became only the more pressing the less the Ptolemaic view of the Earth could be brought in line with the discoveries made at the threshold of the

16th century. As a consequence, the ‘modernization’ of the maps at the beginning of the 16th century triggers a break with the traditional Ptolemaic view of the world. This trend manifests itself in two ways: on the one hand, in an ever more rigorous separation of the Ptolemaic maps from the *tabulae modernae*; on the other hand, in a more thorough critical engagement with the original Greek text of the *Geography*, resulting in the Greek *editio princeps* produced by Erasmus of Rotterdam in Basel in 1533.

Patrick Gautier Dalché’s book offers an excellent *histoire intellectuelle et culturelle* that ranges from the 13th to the 16th century. Its strengths are grounded in its meticulous analysis of the sources. In the epilogue, Gautier Dalché rightly pleads for a more sustained attempt to make the documents accessible. However, the standards of quality that will be imposed on future projects will be quite high in view of the virtues of this book. An extensive catalogue of the sources and bibliography as well as an index and a section of tables round off the work; it is to be highly recommended in every regard.