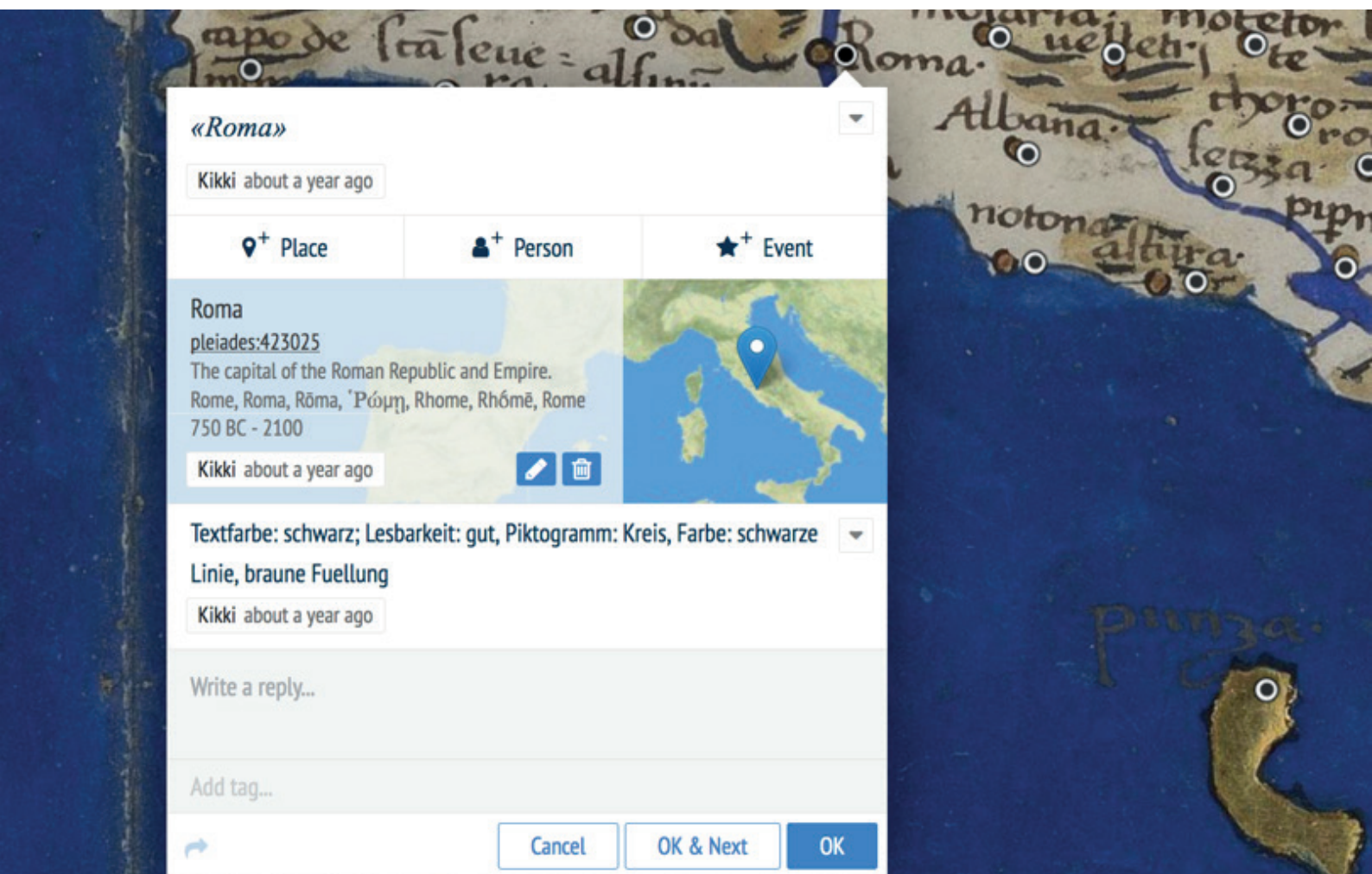


Walking Through History

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Flavio Biondo's Spaces in the "Italia illustrata"

Edited by Tanja Michalsky & Martin Thiering



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Biondo's *Italia Illustrata*: The Example of Latium

keywords – *Linked Open Data, Map annotation,
Text annotation, Text analysis, Spatial cognition*



In his chorographic work Italia Illustrata, Flavio Biondo wishes to generate in his readers' minds a more or less complete image of Italy. The present paper aims at elucidating how he does that. Surprisingly, Biondo makes only sporadic use of maps. The line of thought which he expects his readers to envisage, is, in the end, an imagined itinerary: the reader is invited to follow strings of locations along the coasts, rivers, streets etc., without resorting to maps, sketches or other pictorial devices. Ubiquitous measurement data helps in qualifying and enhancing the underlying mental map or script. In this sense, Italia Illustrata must be considered a typical work of 'common sense geography' which was the master model for geographical and chorographical descriptions in Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Early modern time.

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Measurements, Maps, and Other Source Material in Biondo's *Italia Illustrata*: The Example of Latium

Kurt Guckelsberger
Klaus Geus

1. Describing Italy in *Italia Illustrata*: Some Problems

Flavio Biondo's project of writing an *Italia Illustrata* was a huge and daunting task. It started in 1448, was cut short in 1453,¹ taken up again over a period of several months in 1462, and, sadly, was never brought to the end which Biondo originally envisaged. His work was finally published posthumously in 1474 by his son Gaspare Biondo (Biondo 1474). Although – indeed because – Biondo was a thoughtful, experienced, and prolific writer, he faced some major challenges and unexpected problems while working on his *Italia Illustrata*.² He himself points to this in his first chapter:

It is very difficult indeed, amidst such huge changes in the history and topography (as those who have carefully read Roman history realize), to find a means to delimit the regions and to verify the names of their cities, towns, mountains, and rivers in proper fashion. (Est vero perdifficile in tanta mutatione rerum regionumque – quantam vident factam qui Romanas historias attente legunt – modum adinvenire dividendis regionibus, recensendisque ordine civitatum, oppidorum, montium, fluminumque vocabulis.)(1.5)³

In the following, we analyze and discuss some of the problems related to writing a geographical or topographical treatise in premodern times. These problems especially concern the

availability and usage of Biondo's sources. In approaching the challenge, we pay particular attention to the measurement data which figure prominently in Biondo's text.

Biondo's *Italia Illustrata* is, as far as the geographical information is concerned, a mixture of different sources and literary genres. Biondo has the habit of citing his sources regularly throughout the text. They are, first and foremost, literary sources from antiquity. Among them are Ptolemy's *Geography* (clearly in a Latin translation), Strabo's *Geography* (most probably in Guarino's then unpublished Latin translation),⁴ Pomponius Mela's *Chorography*, and – because of the geographical information connected with Hannibal's campaigns in Italy – Livy's *History of Rome*. Of primary importance for the geographical framework of *Italia Illustrata* are Pliny the Elder's chapters on Italy in his *Natural History* (III.95–131). Biondo cites – and uses – Pliny more often than any other geographical author. He even considers Pliny more reliable than Ptolemy, the ultimate authority in geographical matters in the fifteenth century.⁵

But, as figure 1 and figure 2 below show, Biondo is not shy of diverging from his Roman literary model, Pliny. His changes are not only 'updates' of nomenclature or historical transformation, often involving the insertion of modern towns into his text, but also concern traditionally held factual truths, like the boundaries of regions or the numbering and ordering of the Italian regions.⁶

1 On the genesis of the *Italia Illustrata*, see esp. Biondo 1927, p. 241; Gentile 1992; Salmeri 1988, pp. 303–305; Paolo Pontari's introduction, in Biondo 2011; and Dalché 2017, esp. p. 370.

2 The concept of physical changes to the human environment, especially regarding toponyms, can be traced not only to Petrarch and Boccaccio, see Gentile 1992, but to Pliny's *Naturalis historia* (VI.105): "[...] quae omnia [...]

nomina apud neminem priorum reperiuntur, quo apparet mutari locorum status."

3 The English translations are our own.

4 See Diller/Kristeller 1971; see Geus 2020.

5 See 12.36: "Ptolemy lists Ortona, along with the mouth of the Aterno, as being in Paelignian territory. But Pliny (who when it comes to Italian matters is in my view more trustworthy) assigned the whole stretch from the mouth of the Aterno to the territory

of Larino to the land of the Frentani. Not only that, but Ptolemy himself puts the city of Frentana to the left of the Aterno, where Francavilla now is, as Pliny does too, so that I am quite sure that either Ptolemy's map was distorted [ut aut Ptolemaei picturam esse depravatam], since it is self-contradictory, or his informants were in error."

6 In 1.7 Biondo claims that Iginus (elsewhere "Hyginus", i.e., the 'Ravenna



Figure 1

The Regions of Italy according to Pliny. Image by the authors.

Why does Biondo choose different boundaries to Pliny? And how does he do it? A key may be found in 12.1, where Biondo, when starting to describe the region of Abruzzo, drastically modifies the traditional boundaries (see figure 3).⁷

Here Biondo writes of the remaining regions to be described (Samnium, Campania, Apulia, Lucania, and the territories of the Salentini, Calabri, and Bruttii). These seven regions had since been fused into a single entity called “the Kingdom” (“septem hae regiones in unicam regni appellationem sunt confusae”).

Cosmographer’) and Guido of Pisa knew of 700 towns in Italy see Parthey/Pinder 1860, 249.15-287.17 but Biondo, who follows the *Romanae ecclesiae stilum* (i.e., *loca quae episcopos habent*), counts only 264, ignoring 40 civitates, which now belong to other dioceses. Biondo concludes from these numbers that since the time of Guido (which was, according to his statement in 1.8, around 600 years ago), 396 towns or settlements had been destroyed or abandoned. He adds his personal observation that more than 30 civitates et oppida were razed to the ground in his own lifetime. That Biondo cites a number of 700 towns is puzzling. In the standard edition of the *Ravenna Cosmography* we

find 492 entries. Subtracting the number of duplications in the text and adding the additional toponyms from Guido’s periplus in Book V of his *Geographia*, we arrive at approximately 450 towns at the very most. This huge discrepancy is difficult to explain. As the first edition was only published by David Placidus Porcheron in 1688, Biondo may have had access to more or different manuscripts than the surviving three (now in Paris, Basel, and the Vatican).

7 In this sketch the previous two maps are superimposed to emphasize the changes Biondo introduces with his textual mind-map of Latium compared to Pliny’s earlier version (broken lines). Only the Tiber, Biferno, and Sele rivers remain as defining features.

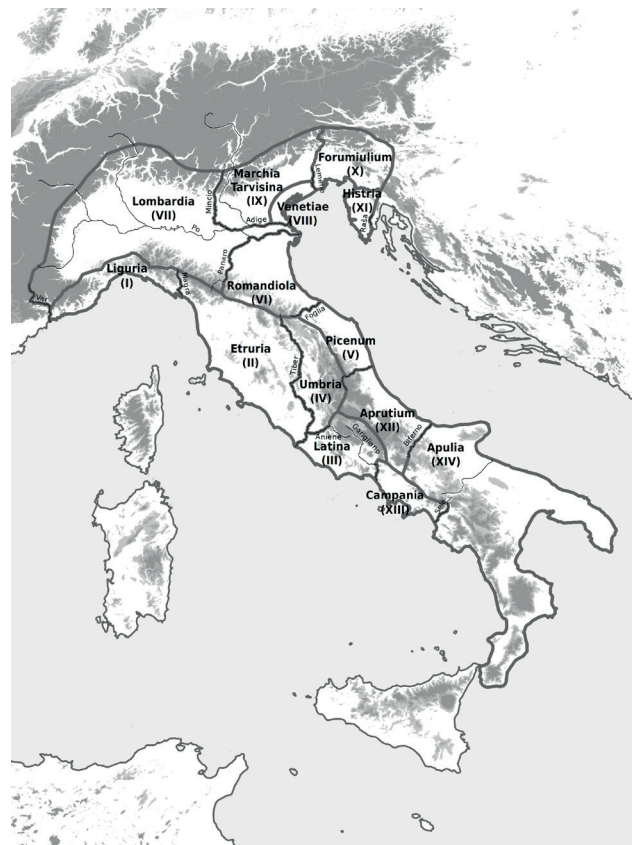


Figure 2

The Regions of Italy according to Biondo. Image by the authors.

The political landscape of central and southern Italy had drastically changed in the century before Biondo, and therefore so too had the organization of the different regions.⁸ In the same passage Biondo goes on to say:

[...] what and where the enemies of these regions in more ancient times did will be easily gathered from the Histories of our ancestors or from my own, and will be easily expounded through the individual descriptions of cities and places, as I have done earlier [...]

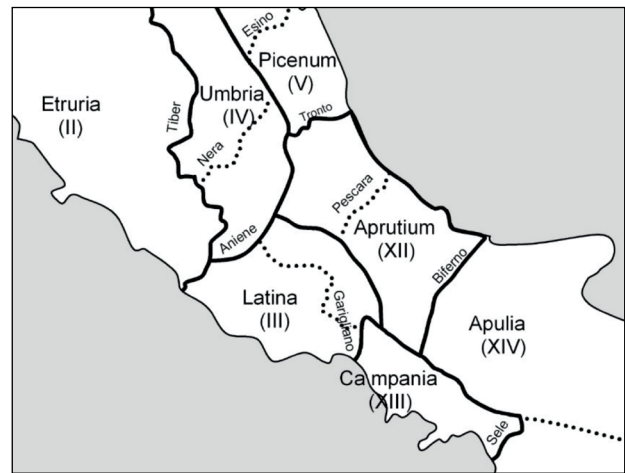
The former unity of Latium and Campagna is now divided along the Liris/Garigliano. Pliny’s Samnium is redeployed with regio Latina advancing to the main ridge of the Apennines. Ancient Picenum, once reaching from the River Esino to the River Pescara is nearly cut in half to form newly founded Aprutium between the Tronto and Biferno (14.1: “Having dealt above with the region of the Samnites on the right bank of the River Biferno, I should have passed over to the left bank and started on Puglia”). Finally, Umbria advances from the River Nera to the Aniene, barely three miles from Rome.

8 For the concept of “regional geography” in early modern times, see esp. Tolias 2015.

Figure 3.

Regio 12 (Aprutium/ Abruzzo) in Biondo's *Italia Illustrata*.

In this sketch the previous two maps are superimposed to emphasize the changes Biondo introduces with his textual mind-map of Latium compared to Pliny's earlier version (broken lines). Only the Tiber, Biferno, and Sele rivers remain as defining features. The former unity of Latium and Campagna is now divided along the Liris/Garigliano. Pliny's Samnium is redeployed with regio Latina advancing to the main ridge of the Apennines. Ancient Picenum, once reaching from the River Esino to the River Pescara is nearly cut in half to form newly founded Aprutium between the Tronto and Biferno (14.1: "Having dealt above with the region of the Samnites on the right bank of the River Biferno, I should have passed over to the left bank and started on Puglia"). Finally, Umbria advances from the River Nera to the Aniene, barely three miles from Rome.



([...] a maiorum aut nostris Historiis sumere et per singulas civitatum locorumque descriptiones [sicut supra fecimus] edocere [...]).(14.1)

Biondo explicitly enumerates the sources he has used in his previous chapters. Interestingly, these are descriptions – not maps – of cities and places.⁹ Note also that such *descriptions*, i.e., literary texts, often consisting of simple lists of place names, remained popular until the eighteenth century. If one only takes into account the literature of the 'Western' world, the tradition harkens back to the Catalogue of Ships in Homer's *Iliad* (II.494–759), if not earlier. Ancient geographical literature such as Strabo's *Geography*, Pomponius Mela's *Chorography*, and the books on Europe, Asia, and Africa in Pliny's *Natural History* were full of lists and lacked maps, which, after all, were expensive and difficult to produce (and reproduce). As modern geographical information systems are mostly image-based (atlases, GPS systems, Google Earth, etc.), it is sometimes not easy for us to appreciate the importance of such lists and the skill of authors who compiled, arranged, and 'narrated' seemingly endless lines of place names.

Of course, the lists and borders in Biondo's sources needed to be updated and organized according to contemporary (i.e., fifteenth

century) administrative and ecclesiastical domains. How exactly Biondo approached this kind of updating remains unclear. He almost exclusively quotes authors from Greco-Roman and early medieval times. That he indeed makes use of very few contemporary sources can be gleaned from a passage in the *Additiones correctionesque Italiae illustratae*. In this passage, Biondo claims that he has prefaced the original version of his *Italia Illustrata* with a catalogue of the authors of his time. It was later deleted by the "perfidious bishop" (Francesco Condulmer?) who brought his work – prematurely – to light ("viros aetatis nostrae in catalogum principio promissum multis in operis urbibus et oppidis a me positos").¹⁰ As such a catalogue has not come down to us, we can only speculate about the quantity and quality of contemporary authors. Occasionally, Biondo mentions modern historical and regional studies (for example, Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People*) which was surely important for his own chapter on Etruria (Tuscany) in the *Italia Illustrata*. It is difficult to make an educated guess as to the extent of use of contemporary sources. This is especially true for the source material outside the humanist canon of exemplary authors: travel reports, archival material, administrative documents, oral sources,¹¹ and

⁹ For the current *communis opinio* that Biondo depends heavily on maps, see, for example, Stauber 2005, p. 294, (here in translation): "Time and again, Biondo's basic idea of roaming, wandering through the country is to be heard, and, correspondingly, a *cartographically* [our emphasis] inspired ordering of the lore and maps [our emphasis] were of importance for Biondo's work." ("Immer wieder klingt bei Biondo die Grundidee des Durchstreifens,

des Durchwandern des Landes an, und entsprechend wichtig war ein kartographisch inspiriertes Ordnen der Überlieferung und waren Karten selbst für Biondos Arbeit.") Especially on the use of maps, see Clavuot 1990, pp. 55–84; see also Clavuot 2007, p. 146: "ausgiebig von Kartenmaterial Gebrauch gemacht". See also Pontari 2009b; Pontari 2009a; Pontari's extensive introduction in Biondo 2014, pp. 155–178; and rather more cautiously now Tanja Michalsky, who speaks

of "mental maps" from a historical point of view, see Michalsky 2019. We cannot discuss Biondo's use (or non-use) of maps here due to the constraints and objectives of this article. We plan to come to this point in another paper soon.

¹⁰ Biondo 2016, appendix 1.2. One may wonder why Biondo (or his son) did not insert this list into the book again. Did the author (or the editor) feel it was no longer up to date?

¹¹ The role of oral reports (and, probably,

– perhaps – regional maps may have been used by Biondo. But, again, this falls into the realm of speculation.¹²

2. Describing Italy Without Maps

Despite the huge differences between the regions of Italy in terms of morphology, culture, and history, Biondo constructs and narrates spaces throughout his work in a rather stereotypical fashion. Of primary importance are the waterways. The larger regions in Italy are mostly shaped by the coastlines and by the rivers emptying into the sea. Quite often, rivers subdivide these larger regions into smaller units, thus also structuring the interior of the country.

The Puglia chapter at the end of Biondo's work illustrates his method. It consists of only eight paragraphs but contains no less than 57 toponyms¹³ and 23 distance specifications. As we may be dealing here with a section of *Italia Illustrata* that has to a large extent remained a fragment, it is best suited to study Biondo's methodology. At the very beginning¹⁴ we find an explanation for his approach:

Having dealt above with the region of the Samnites on the right bank of the River Tifernus [Samnium or Aprutium in regio 12], we could have passed over to the left bank of the river and started there with Puglia; but we were obliged to describe Campania first, because Campania is connected¹⁵ with Samnium (as was shown before). But with Campania completed, we therefore must go back [to Puglia].

(Oportuit supra Samnitium regione ad Tiferni amnis dexteram a nobis expedita ad eiusdem fluvii sinistram transire et ibi inchoantem

Apuliam exordiri, sed connexam [sicut ostensum est] Samnio Campaniam prius describere coacti fuimus. Itaque ad Apuliam, finita Campania, redeundum est.)(14.1)

Here Biondo explains why he feels the urge to abandon the 'natural' course of his narrative. And here, as elsewhere,¹⁶ we see Biondo prioritizing historical considerations over geographical ones. In the following, Biondo, like a virtual ship captain, cruises along the Adriatic coastline of Puglia to the mouth of the first river, Tifernus (Biforno), which he follows upstream. In the beginning, he only names the places lying on the one side (the right-hand side) of the river. The distances between the locations are indicated in miles, whenever they are known to him. Having arrived at the source of the river, Biondo does not 'sail back', now describing the locations on the other (left-hand) side of the river, but instead starts his voyage anew at the mouth of the River Tifernus.¹⁷ This 'redemption' was probably induced by his source material. Having again reached the source of the river, Biondo now turns to the second Apulian river, the Fortorius/Fortore, the mouth of which is claimed to be twenty miles from that of the River Tifernus "along the coast [*viginti milia passuum in litore distat*]" (14.4). And once again, the virtual cruising along the river enables Biondo to enumerate the towns, castles, lakes, etc. in the interior of Puglia. This kind of narrative – which is reminiscent, *mutatis mutandis*, of a string of pearls or rosary – is both simple and effective.

Again, it harkens back to ancient times, when geographical authors like Strabo and Pliny employed it on a regular basis to describe regions

autopsy, too) is underestimated in modern scholarship. Biondo did indeed question the locals for geographical information. See, for example, 13.18: "But who later effected the relocation of the city to a spot two miles away, where it is now, and when I have been unable to find out, either from reading or from the local inhabitants [ab his, qui inhabitant civibus]..."

¹² Biondo makes mention of maps only six times in his whole *Italia Illustrata*, citing only the "maps of Ptolemy", "carte nautiche", and the mysterious "carta d'Italia" of Petrarch. See, for example, Pontari 2009a. For Petrarch's map, see also Cesareo 1904;

Cesareo 1918; Siragusa 1918; and, for its cultural context, Bouloux 2002; Bouloux 2006; and Edson 2008.

¹³ We find 51 toponyms, excluding those of 14.1, and 57, if one includes the overview.

¹⁴ In 14.1 Biondo also gives a general overview where Bari, Aequum Tuticum, Argyrippa, and Tarentum are located in (our understanding of) Apulia, before starting his proper description of Puglia in 14.2.

¹⁵ White, in Biondo 2016, p. 351, translates connexam with "adjacent" but, clearly, the relation between Samnium and Campania is more than a 'topological' connection.

¹⁶ See, for example, 3.3: "Near the mouth of the Aniene, where it enters the Tiber, but beyond it in the region of Umbria, was where I calculate the ancient city of Fidenae was located. In his Life of Tiberius, Suetonius writes of Fidenae [...]" Biondo then goes on to describe the "Umbrian" city in his chapter on Latium.

¹⁷ We have not found any instance where Biondo does not adhere to his alternate definition of orientation on a river. One always finds him looking upstream, regardless of starting point: the sea, a tributary, or even a shore of a lake. Our modern convention of looking downstream was only instituted in Germany in the Eighteenth century (see, for

and spaces without resorting to a map (arguably resorting instead to a cognitive map). We may call Biondo's method 'hodological' (from the Greek *hodós*, for road, path, way),¹⁸ as the reader is left without a bird's-eye view, i.e., without a cartographic perspective of the region, and has instead only the 'street view' of someone traveling virtually along a road or coastline (or any other route).

Sticking to such a 'one-dimensional' view has certain consequences. For one, the transmitted distances between two locations are rarely meant as linear distances, but as routes along roads or coastlines, which deviate more or less from any lines that may be drawn 'as the crow flies'.¹⁹ Such distances, regularly expressed in miles (or rather, in steps, as a mile is defined as 1000 steps: *mille passuum*), are contingent to many factors, among them the length of the stride, the morphology of the terrain, the condition of roads, the currents of the waterways, the possible existence of barriers and obstacles, etc. In fact, in premodern times, when there was no practical means to measure distances between towns, distances were either calculated or rather counted in steps or recalculated based on the amount of time (normally in hours) spent walking or sailing. It goes without saying that distances in this 'hodological' system provide a relatively good estimation of the time required for a journey between any two points, but are difficult to use and adapt for a cartographical or geographical representation

of space. In other words, depending on the context, distances can be of either a more 'practical' or more 'theoretical' nature.

Biondo is obviously aware of this intrinsic problem. For him, distances are neither geometrical lines nor simple roads. Therefore, every once in a while, he adds some qualification to his measurement data, as the following in his Aprutium (Abruzzo) chapter (14.54): "[...] these places are ten miles from Beneventum (at the points where the crossing of the rivers is possible) [absunt haec loca a Benevento (fluviis ubi expedit transmissis) decimo [sc. miliario]]".²⁰

While the number of distances transmitted by Biondo is impressive in itself, he is also interested in the *quality* of the data. As Biondo often cites the sources of the measurement data – in nearly all instances works from Greco-Roman antiquity – this underlines his broad reading and diligent extraction from sources.²¹ Apparently, he pays much attention to distances throughout his work, which eventually resulted in a considerable amount of metrological information. Sometimes, he even makes an explicit effort to evaluate his data by refining his numbers with certain qualifiers like "plus/minus" (3.8). To his mind, informing the readers about the exact distances is an integral part of his endeavor. But distances are rarely simple elements of geographical information. Distances are very important for conveying a *sense* of spatiality.²² By using words and

example, Wikipedia, URL: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orographisch_links_und_rechts, accessed 20.04.2020). For the upstream/downstream perspective in early Greek prose, especially Herodotus, see Boshnakov, forthcoming.

¹⁸ See Janni 1984. This hodological principle can be interpreted as the application of a device known from ancient rhetoric and mnemonics (described in Engels 2006, p. 409) to transform complex entities into linear structures and to connect the various elements of this scheme. With the help of measurement data it is even possible to define the size and distances of these elements and thus make them well-structured and reproducible for others.

¹⁹ Very rarely, Biondo gives linear distances, qualified as being "on a straight line, directly [recto itinere instituto]", for example, in 3.21, between Velitrae and Sarmineta. In Biondo 2005, p. 110, White translates the passage concerning the distance between

Viterbo and Valeria as: "six miles [...] as the crow flies [...]". But this is not in the Latin text and contradicts Biondo's geographical vocabulary, with *ad sextum lapidem* ("at the sixth milestone") being reserved for distances along roads. In modern literature, such deviations are often exaggerated. In a few cases they may even yield multiples of the linear distances and contribute to some geographical confusion and misconceptions in geographical literature. On the contrary, as our database on measurement data shows, on average, such deviations are approximately 30 percent off. Ingeniously, Ptolemy in his *Geography* (1.12.3; cf. 1.13.2) gives the practical advice of shortening such distances by a third in order to arrive at the linear distance.

²⁰ As an example, see also 4.18: "Close to these [towns] and to Interamnia [Terni], too – were it not for the River Nar [Nera] – is Sanctus Geminus [San Gemini], a prominent town in the region [of Umbria]." The

'proximity' of a place – in this case between Interamnia/Terni and Sanctus Geminus/San Gemini – is clearly not measured in terms of distance (which here is approximately twelve kilometers or eight miles), but by the accessibility of a place, which was apparently obstructed by the flow of the river. Both modern Terni and San Gemini are located north of the Nera but the ancient name of Interamnia (literally, "between the rivers") shows that Terni was thought to lie to the south of the Nera.

²¹ We tend to think here – to a large extent – of textual sources, as it is difficult to read off distances from premodern maps, which either have no scale whatsoever or often exhibit toponyms of settlements which lie only a few kilometers from each other. Only the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and, centuries later, Erhard Etzlaub show numbers in miles next to the intervals.

²² See, for example, Thiering 2014.

numbers, Biondo evokes mental images not only of the absolute and relative location of places, but also of the intervals between them and thus of the position, shape, and size of the regions described in *Italia Illustrata*.

3. Measurement Data According to the Regions in *Italia Illustrata*: Some Remarks

So in describing the eighteen regions of Italy (excluding the islands) – for we determined that she could be most conveniently divided so – we shall follow that nomenclature (out of the many possible) that is most familiar to our era [quae cum in aetate nostra sint notiora]²³ and seems best adapted to my purpose. These names are: Liguria (or the Genoese territory), Tuscany (Etruria), Latium (or Campania and the coastal region [Campania et Maritima]), Umbria (or the Duchy of Spoleto), Picenum (or the March of Ancona), Romandiola (or Flaminia et Aemilia), Cisalpine Gaul (or Lombardy), Venice, Transpadine Italy (or the March of Treviso), Aquileia (or Foroiuliana), Istria, Samnium or Aprutium, Terra di Lavoro (or Old Campania), Lucania, Apuglia, the Salentines (or Terra d'Otranto), Calabria and the land of the Brutii.(1.9)²⁴

For reasons explained in quite vague detail in the appendix titled *Additiones correctionesque* in later editions, Biondo was unable to finish the task he himself outlined in the passage cited above. *Italia Illustrata* has remained a torso. Out of the eighteen regions of Italy mentioned in his introduction, the last four are not treated at all. And the fourteenth region, Puglia, contains

some features that suggest it was worked on hastily, not the least because, as can be seen from Biondo's text cited above, Puglia should have come behind Lucania as *regio* 15.

In the following, we discuss the measurement data in Biondo's *Italia Illustrata*. As outlined in the previous paragraph, distances play a crucial role in establishing a cognitive map²⁵ of Italy in the minds of Biondo's readers. We present some numerical tables for the whole *Italia Illustrata* at the outset, then analyze Biondo's source material, and finally go into detail by looking at Biondo's Latium chapter more closely. A summary will conclude our findings.

Figure 4 presents the toponyms and distances in Biondo's *Italia Illustrata*, arranged according to the fourteen regions he describes.²⁶ The first two columns give the number and names of the regions in Biondo's ordering.²⁷ As Biondo has a paragraph on the size of Italy as a whole (1.3), we have excluded four distance specifications on the length and width of Italy contained therein. On the other hand, we have included from the *Additiones correctionesque* the toponyms and distances for Liguria and Etruria. The third column shows the number of words for each chapter. As Paolo Pontari's definitive "national edition" has not yet been completed, we have used Jeffrey A. White's version of 2005–2016.²⁸ The fourth column states the number of *regional toponyms*. In this, we excluded generic terms like "Italy", "Latium", or the "Tyrrhenian Sea", names of locations which do not in fact lie in the described region (for example, Alexandria in Egypt, or Verona, which

²³ In 1.11, Biondo is more precise: "[...] regarding it sufficient if I adapt to our own times the regional division of Italy obtained while the Roman state was at the height of its power (satis fore tenemus, si divisionem Italiae, quae Romana re publica florente fuit, nostris temporibus accomodare poterimus)." In his 2005 translation (Biondo 2005, p. 11), White translates *res publica* here with "Republic", which we consider wrong in this context: the Roman state was at the height of its power and most expansive in imperial times.

²⁴ For the sake of clarity, we do not follow in our translations an abstract rule in nomenclature but use interchangeably the Latin, old Italian, and modern names, selecting according to the context the ones

which we deem most common and familiar to our readers.

²⁵ In recent years, some scholars – Martin Thiering first and foremost among them – have advocated the utilization of theories and methods of cognitive linguistics in a diachronic perspective. This novel approach, adopted by the Berlin 'Common Sense Geography' group, first bore fruit in Geus/Thiering 2014. See also Dan et al. 2016; and Geus/Thiering, forthcoming.

²⁶ See also the contributions by Thiering and Berthele in this volume; and Richter in this volume.

²⁷ From regio 8 (*Venetiae*) through to regio 9 (*Histria*), attributing toponyms is complicated by the fact that Biondo states in Regio 8.2 that: "the region of the duchy

is 80 miles long from Aquae Gradatae/San Canzian to Lauretum/Loreo [...] and variable in breadth (habet autem eius ducatus regio longitudinem milium octoginta, ab Aquis olim Gradatis [...] Latitudo autem varia)." The problem arises from the fact that San Canzian is east of the Isonzo and some coastal towns belong to Venice but are again listed as being in either regio 9 or regio 10. Here we have chosen all names mentioned in regio 8 south of the swamp line, as compared to places mentioned in regio 9 and regio 10. The sole remaining ambiguity is Monselice near Este, but that was only mentioned in regio 8.

²⁸ A preliminary comparison shows only minuscule differences in terms of toponyms and distances.

Number	Region	Latin text word count	Toponyms	Toponyms per 10,000 words	Distances	Distances in miles	Distances in other measurement units	Distances per 10,000 words
(0)	Praefatio (+ Italy)	619	-	-	4	4	-	65)
1	Liguria	3840	56	146	16	15	1 (strides)	42
2	Tuscany	9049	215	238	19 (+ 5 AeC)	19 (+ 5 AeC)	-	21 (27)
3	Latium	10125	143	141	53	45	8 (strides, stadia)	52
4	Umbria	4827	108	224	18	17	1 (stadia)	37
5	Picenum	4465	101	226	33	30	3 (feet, stadia)	74
6	Romandiola	9407	249	265	31	30	1 (stadia)	33
7	Lombardy	8636	389	450	10	9	1 (day's journey)	12
8	Venice	3633	25	68	1	1	-	3
9	Transpadine Italy	6498	125	192	7	7	-	11
10	Aquileia	1375	31	225	6	5	1 (day's journey)	44
11	Istria	1448	29	200	14	13	1 (feet)	97
12	Samnium	11,001	366	333	54	53	1 (stadia)	49
13	Campania	9674	36		37	31	6 (feet, stadia)	38
14	Puglia	1259	53	421	23	23	-	183
	Sums	85,856	1926	224 (average)	326 (+ 5 AeC)	302 (+ 5 AeC)	24	83 (average) (39 AeC)

Figure 4
Toponyms and distances

is mentioned in the Liguria chapter: “a Plinio Veronense”), variants of names, subcategories (for example, a church within a settlement or town), anonymous towns, and – quite often – mountains and rivers. Mountains and rivers are included, however, whenever Biondo indicates a specific ‘landmark’ in association with them, such as the source or mouth of a river, or a part of a mountain, island, or coast. In other words, we have taken “toponym” to mean “point in the landscape”. The sixth column states the number of distances in the chapter.²⁹ Distances

are defined here as the “extension of space between two points on a measured course”. The “extension” is usually expressed in a specific unit of measurement and defined by a certain quantity. “The distance from A to B is x miles” is an example of the standard phrasing used in Biondo’s *Italia Illustrata*. In most cases, Biondo’s mile is the traditional Roman mile, equaling, roughly,³⁰ 1.5 kilometers. This can be inferred from passages when Biondo feels compelled to make a conversion to the ‘modern’ mile³¹ or adds a qualification to his numerical statement,

²⁹ Distance specifications concerning measurement across boundaries are counted separately.

³⁰ As mentioned above, the Roman

mile simply equals 1000 steps, the latter contingent to the height of the body, the terrain, weather, and other factors.

³¹ See 1.38: “The ancients have passed on

to us a figure for the length of the Ligurian coast which we have surveyed from the River Varus to the mouth of the River Macra as being more than 211 miles, but in our

like “as today [*ut nunc*]”.³² That said, however, he also uses other units of measurement, like feet,³³ steps,³⁴ stades,³⁵ or day’s journeys,³⁶ often depending in each case on his ancient and medieval sources. In our statistics, we have not included unspecific general statements such as “in the vicinity” or “not far from” and have only included *numerical* distances.³⁷

The fifth and eighth columns give the numbers of toponyms per 10,000 words in *Italia Illustrata*, which helps us understand how often distances appear in the text and how Biondo attempts to create a mental map of Italy.

In all, we find 297 distance specifications in the *Italia Illustrata*. As an average, this equates to 21 stated distances per region or a ratio of 423 words of description per every numerical distance. For the sake of comparison: Strabo’s *Geography*, which lends itself to comparison with *Italia Illustrata* in scope and form, has an average of 77 measurements of distance per country (or more exactly, 65 for the northern part of Italy and 94 for the southern), which in turn equates to a ratio of 211 words of description for every numerical distance.³⁸ This means that Biondo conveys less than half the measured distances that Strabo gives over the same amount of words. Even if we do account for differences in language, historical period, and topic, the discrepancy is nevertheless remarkable. To our mind, it cannot be explained merely by the difference in availability of source material. In fact, the most comprehensive collection of measured distances in the Greco-Roman world, the *Itinerarium Antonini* or Antonine Itinerary, which contains nearly 2900 distance specifications, was indeed known to

Biondo – he actually quotes it twice in his *Italia Illustrata*.³⁹ However, it remains, strangely enough, hardly exploited, if at all, in this regard. The same holds true for the eighth-century *Ravenna Cosmography*, which Biondo attributes to a “Guido of Ravenna” or “Guido Presbyter of Ravenna”.⁴⁰ Most likely, Biondo’s approach to the topography of Italy was induced by *historical* rather than geographical considerations. As we have seen while discussing the changes of the regional border made by Biondo, his ‘Herodotean’ objective consists in battling against historical oblivion. Geographical exhaustiveness is not his primary goal.

We turn now to the measurement data in Biondo’s chapter on Latium, which contains 53 distance specifications.⁴¹ Several of them are taken from Strabo’s *Geography*.

4. A Change of Plan? Biondo’s Latium Chapter

In order to follow the most knowledgeable author in antiquity and also Pliny (who drew on him), we are compelled to attach the region of the Latins to our present-day Campania and the coastal region [Campania et Maritima]. And I do not know for sure as to whether I can do justice to the present-day Latium in the same way as I could do justice – with the help of Livy of Padua, the divine Augustus, Vergil, Strabo, and Pliny – to the ancient times [...]

(Unde peritissimum hunc vetustatis scriptorem et simul Plinium [qui ab eo sumpsit] secuturi, eam Latinorum regionem nostrae nunc Campaniae et Maritimae cogimur applicare. Nec satis scio si in nostra Latina regione rebus praesentibus

era the length is calculated as hardly 180 miles”; 12.24: “[Hadria] was three miles from the sea according to Pliny, but five miles as calculated now”. See also 3.13, where Biondo has a conversion rate of 1:5 (instead of 1:8) for miles:stades. Cf. also 13.4.

32 13.4.

33 5.6; 11.3; 11.8; 13.30; 13.56.

34 1.22; 3.15; 5.14.

35 3.5; 3.8; 3.11; 3.12; 3.13; 3.40; 4.10; 5.7 (where White, vol. 1, p. 253, translates secundo [...] stadio as “a quarter of a mile”); 6.58; 12.58.

36 7.44; 10.5.

37 To cite just a few examples in Latin:

“paululum abest” (1.35), “paribus prope intervallis” (1.35), “remotius ad sinistram” (2.14), “proximo” (2.21), “paulo inde abest” (2.25), etc. It needs to be added here that we find far fewer expressions of such kind in Biondo than in ancient authors like Strabo and Pliny. The scope of this paper prevents us from discussing this interesting element of common sense geography.

38 See Geus/Guckelsberger 2017.

39 In 7.4, Biondo quotes among his sources the *Itinerarium Antonini*, but makes no use of it for the many distances it offers for Lombardy. In 12.55, Biondo writes: “Nam Antoninus Pius in Itinerario viam describens a Benevento ad Columnas, ad Mercurialem

primum, post ad Matrem Magnam posuit.” Neither the plural “ad Columnas” nor the site of Mercurialis are mentioned in the *Itinerarium Antonini*. Is Biondo perhaps playing here with the homonymy of Columna in order to flatter his patron Colonna?

40 1.7; 1.8; 12.43; 13.24, see also note 6.

41 We do not include measurement data which feature as ‘non-itinerary’ expressions, such as “the Neptunians cover all the shoreland’s dunes of ancient Antium with continuous netting for a space of five miles” (3.7) or “circuit of the island of Circeo as being eighty stades” (3.11).

ita satis potero facere sicut Livii Patavini,
Divi Augusti, Vergilii, Strabonis [...] (3.2)

In the Latium chapter, Biondo claims to follow – among other authors like “Augustus”,⁴² Vergil,⁴³ and Livy⁴⁴ – both Strabo, “peritissimum hunc vetustatis scriptorem” (3.2), and Pliny, who allegedly drew upon his predecessor.⁴⁵ The last statement is pure guesswork on Biondo’s part. Nowhere in his *Natural History* does Pliny mention Strabo and according to modern scholarship it is questionable that he even knew his writings.⁴⁶

While Biondo names more than 200 toponyms and ethnonyms in this chapter, 143 can be defined as toponyms of Latium.⁴⁷

Here is a list of the toponyms in Biondo’s Latium chapter (3.3ff.):

1 = Ostia; 2 = Antium; 3 = Neptunium;
4 = Lanuvium/Lavinia (White: Civita Indivina Properi Columnae cardinalis); Lavinium (the reading has rightly been emended to Lanuvium); 5 = Ardea; 6 = Astura/Astur;
7 = Mons Circeius/Oppidum Sanctae Felicitatis;
8 = Pontine Sea; 9 = Terracina/Terracinae/Anxur/Anxurus/Amyklai; 10 = Satura;
11 = Praetorium; 12 = Formium/Formiae/Formia/Hormiae; 13 = Fundana/Fondi/Funda; 14 = Villa;
15 = Lacus Fundanus; 16 = Itrum; 17 = Caieta;
18 = Turris Sancti Anastasii; 19 = Spelunca/Sperlonga; 20 = “well-known village”;
21 = Castellonum oppidum et Honorarum villa; 22 = (island of) Pandana; 23 = (island

of) Pontia; 24 = Caecubum; 25 = Sinuessa/mouth of Liris/Gaurianus; 26 = Speninum;
27 = Fractae; 28 = Pons Corvus (Fregellae);
29 = Ceperanum; 30 = Marinum/Villa Mariana/Portium/Marianum; 31 = Velitrae; 32 = Cora;
33 = Mons Catilius; 34 = Sarmineta; 35 = Aquae Foetidae; 36 = Setia; 37 = Privernum;
38 = Maientia (oppidula); 39 = Gorga (arx);
40 = Sicca (arx); 41 = Somnium; 42 = Alba;
43 = village of the Savelli (with monastery);
44 = Aricia; 45 = Forum Appi/Fossa Nova;
46 = Columna; 47 = Valmontonum (= Lavici?);
48 = Gallicanum (= Gabii?); 49 = Praeneste/Palestrina; 50 = Cavae; 51 = Zinzanum;
52 = Anagnina; 53 = Ferentinum; 54 = Frusinona;
55 = Pallianum; 56 = Serronum; 57 = Pillium;
58 = Acutum; 59 = Trivillanum; 60 = Colla Pardi; 61 = Anticulum; 62 = Verulae;
63 = Alatrum; 64 = Babucum (= Bovillae);
65 = Turrinum; 66 = Pofae; 67 = Vicus;
68 = Ripae; 69 = Porcilianum; 70 = Trevum;
71 = Felectinum; Lavicanum/Lavici/Lavicum/Valmontone (= no. 47); 72 = Monsfortinus;
73 = Zanchatum; 74 = Gavignanum;
75 = Signia; 76 = Scurcula; 77 = Merulum;
78 = Supinum; 79 = Patrica; 80 = Caecanum;
81 = Castrum; 82 = Tibur; 83 = Vicus Varroni;
84 = Portella; 85 = Cantalupum; 86 = Rivas Frigidus (mountain); 87 = Arceolum/Carseoli;
88 = Cellae; 89 = Sculcula; 90 = Peretum;
91 = Taliacotium/Tallacoccium; 92 = Valeria (= town of the) Marsi; 93 = Alba (probably not the same as no. 42, but Alba Marsorum);
94 = Marubia; 95 = Sanctus Apetitus

⁴² With the “divine Augustus”, Biondo is surely thinking of the so-called *Divisio orbis terrarum*, a late-antique topography, which claims to have been initiated by Augustus: “Terrarum orbis divitur tribus nominibus: Europa, Asia, Libya. quem divus Augustus primus omnium per chorographiam ostendit” (*Praefatio*).

⁴³ The mentioning of Vergil/Virgil in this context may come as a surprise here. But the laudes Italiae passage in the second book of Vergil’s *Georgics* was considered not only a literary masterpiece but also a traditional model in terms of topography.

⁴⁴ Due to his description of Hannibal’s campaigns in Italy, Livy’s *History of Rome* is, next to Pliny, Biondo’s most important source for his Latium chapter.

⁴⁵ On the coastline of Latium, Pliny (NH III.56) says: “[formerly] from Ostia to Circei 50 miles”. The *Tabula Peutingeriana* has it as 70 miles; the geodesic would be 87

kilometers or 1.74 kilometers/mile for Pliny and 1.24 kilometers/mile for the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (which equates to a 16 percent discrepancy, which is reasonable). Pliny then goes on to state “from whence the name Latium reached as far as the River Liris”, before listing several points along the coast, starting with Ostia, the town of Laurentum, the sacred grove of Jupiter Indiges, the River Numicius and Ardea, the former site of Aphrodisium, the colony of Antium, the river and island of Astura, the River Nymphaeus, the Clostra Romana, Circeii (formerly an island), the River Ufens, the city of Terracina (“called in the language of the Volsci ‘Anxur’”), Amyclae, a cave, Lake Fundanus, the port of Caieta, the town of Formiae (formerly Hormiae), the town of Pyrae, the colony of Minturnae, through which the River Liris flows (also known as the Glanis), and the town of Sinuessa – the last point of the new Latii (NH III.56–60). We do not claim that Biondo is

citing Pliny here, but it is useful to compare the distances with those Biondo read elsewhere. This also highlights the reliability of ancient sources in the area. At the very least, such a literary comparison gives us a sense of the ‘variability’ in the length of a mile, as compared to those which Biondo reports.

⁴⁶ For Strabo as a source for later authors, see Sørensen 2017.

⁴⁷ As outlined above, we have neither included toponyms from other regions and countries (e.g., Capua, Olympus, Crete), nor names of rivers or roads (except where they form a crossroads), nor parts of a city (e.g., a temple or forum), nor names of peoples (e.g., Ausoni), nor areas (e.g., Campus Pontinus). If a toponym shows up more than once in Biondo’s narrative, we have assigned the number according to its geographical position.

(castellum); 96 = Sancta Iona (castellum);
 97 = Paternum; 98 = Transacum; 99 = Gaianum;
 100 = AVECIANUM; 101 = Mallianum;
 102 = Celanum; 103 = Piscina; 104 = Oppidum
 Veneris; 105 = Viticula; 106 = Castrum Vetus;
 107 = Gorgianum; 108 = Rhoca Cavarum;
 109 = Guadagnolum; 110 = Folium; 111 = Casa
 Corbola; 112 = Sanctus Gregorius; 113 = Rocha
 Liricis; 114 = Caecilianum; 115 = Sambuca;
 116 = Sarracinescum; 117 = Rocha Mutiorum;
 118 = Giranum; 119 = Ceretum; 120 = Anticulum;
 121 = Rivate; 122 = Afite; 123 = Civitella;
 124 = Olibanum; 125 = Piscianum; 126 = Sanctus
 Vitus; 127 = Sublacum/Sublaquaeum;
 128 = Tusculum; 129 = Sanctus Iohannes
 in Campo Horatii; 130 = Sancta Maria de
 Gripta Ferrata/Tusculanum Ciceronis;
 131 = Rocha Papae; 132 = Lucullanum/
 Frascatum; 133 = Lake Alban; 134 = Lake
 Nemorensis; 135 = Nemus; 136 = Cinthianum;
 137 = Castrum Gandulfum; 138 = Pons
 Mamolus; 139 = Bridge of the Via Numentana;
 140 = Bridge of the Via Salaria; 141 = Fidenae/
 Fidenae; 142 = Vatican; 143 = Pupinia.

The sheer number dwarfs the toponyms we find in the descriptions and catalogues of Ptolemy, Strabo, Pliny, Mela, Livy, and others. In fact, the sum of toponyms found in Biondo's Latium chapter is much higher than the sum of all the ancient sources combined.

It goes without saying that the list of toponyms presented in the previous paragraph shows only cumulative and average numbers per chapter. The actual distribution of toponyms in the text is rather uneven. Biondo has a propensity of assembling consecutive toponyms into clusters, without explanatory text. According to Ottavio Clavuot, "[...] nearly two thirds of the place names are given as uncommented clusters".⁴⁸

The structure of such conglomerations of toponyms, hereafter termed "clusters", reveal what type of source Biondo may have used:

a) a 'one-dimensional' itinerary or a two-dimensional sheet map or

b) an administrative document (be it civil, military, or clerical), organized in exhaustive lists or
 c) a mixture of two or three types.

Especially the latter may have a geographically random sequence of names, their structure dominated by other considerations such as date of acquisition, economic importance, or similar principles.

For Latium we find four clusters.⁴⁹ They are all related to the ancient roads (*viae*), which Biondo intends to follow, by declaring:

But in the inland areas there were many cities and almost numberless towns and castles, of which, according to Pliny, fifty-three peoples have perished without trace. In describing this inland region, we shall not be able to adhere to the method which we have used in other [regions] – starting with the mouths, sources, and courses of the rivers. But we shall adopt another, which will meet our needs better and which cannot be applied to other regions of Italy: by proceeding along the three roads – Appia, Latina, and Tiburtina – which by different routes will lead to the River Liris and to Sinuessa and Caieta. Nor will we be able to advance with such steady progress step by step, to avoid the appearance of digressing and going astray (inevitably so, since the roads have sometimes deviated from their route), when bridges have been ruined, sometimes because they have since been completely destroyed and are completely unknown as a result.(3.18–19)

Interestingly, Biondo does not inform his readers that he has inherited the "new method" of presenting locations "on", "near", and "between" from the Greek geographer Strabo. In Book v of *Geography*, Strabo, an ardent admirer of Roman craftsmanship, writes as follows:

As for the rest of the cities of Latium, their position may be defined, some by a different set of distinctive marks, and others by the best-known roads that have been constructed through Latium; for they are situated either on

⁴⁸ Clavuot 1990, p. 85: "Von den [...] Ortsnamen hat Biondo 65% ohne Erläuterungen [...] aufgelistet." On p. 86 Clavuot continues: "[...] in my opinion they were read off from maps

and other documents including autopsy [...]" (our translation).

⁴⁹ One finds along the Via Appia also a small aggregation of three names (3.22):

"Around Priverno are the little towns of Maenza, Roccagorga, and Roccasecca [...]" We do not consider a body of less than four elements to constitute a "cluster".

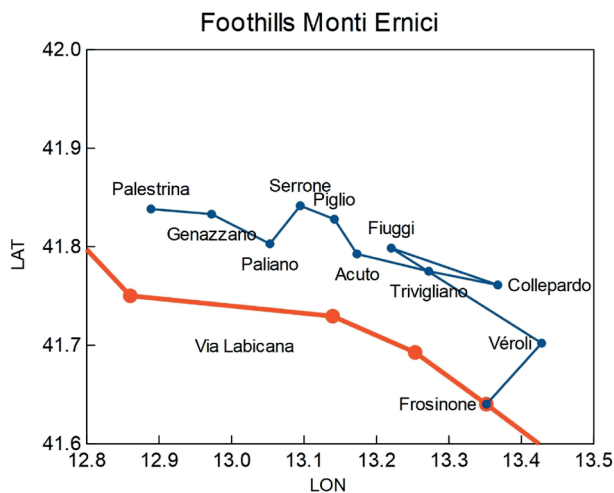


Figure 5
Foothills Monti Ernici.

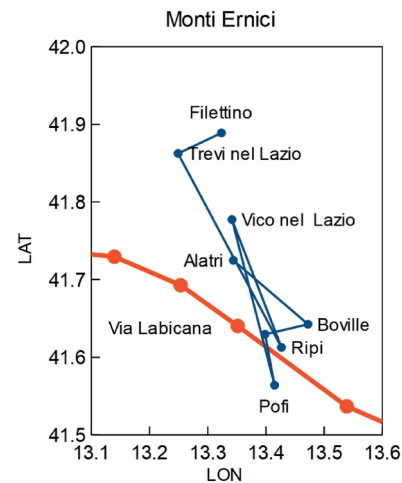


Figure 6
Monti Ernici

these roads, or near them, or between them. The best known of the roads are the Via Appia, the Via Latina, and the Via Valeria [...]. (V.3.9, C 236)

Why does Biondo choose to pass over this fact in silence, given his fondness of citing Strabo as his main authority throughout the Latium chapter?

In 3.19, after “narrating” the coastline of Latium until Sinuessa and some settlements along the River Liris, Biondo claims that he can no longer use the “traditional method”, “Ariadne’s thread”, as employed in his description of the previous regions (i.e., using the rivers from their mouth and heading upstream as his ‘unspooling’ guide in describing the inland regions). Instead he declares his intention of following the three *viae Appia, Latina, and Tiburtina*, which lead to the River Liris and the towns of Sinuessa and Caieta.

As one may guess from the titular endpoints of these three roads (which are in fact rivers!), Biondo, like his predecessor Strabo, is unwilling to entirely give up his proven ‘river method’. For example, in 3.33, when describing locations along the *Via Tiburtina*, he writes as follows: “To the left of the River Aniene in these mountains is first a town called Vicovaro [...]. Higher up

are the little towns of Portella and Cantalupo. Then there is Riofreddo on a steep hill [...] etc.” Obviously, even the “new method” was unable to solve every problem.

The three ‘surrogate rivers’ (i.e., the ancient roads first skirting the Pontine Marches [*Via Appia*], then following the River Sacco [*Via Latina*], before heading eastwards [*Via Tiburtina*]) were separated by the western Monti Lepini and the eastern Monti Ernici respectively.⁵⁰ In the case of the central valley, the route taken was the *Via Lavicana* of the *Itinerarium Antonini*, but in other documents and in other times or sections it was variously known as the *Via Latina* or *Via Casilina*. East of the Monti Ernici, Biondo follows the *Via Tiburtina* which changes its name beyond Tivoli/Tibur to *Via Valeria* and still further east in the vicinity of Lake Fucino to *Via Claudia Valeria*. Biondo is perfectly clear by saying that he is unable to follow these ancient roads, due to their general disintegration and changes to the landscape since ancient times. In fact, in Biondo’s time, the *Via Appia* was replaced by an *Appia Pedemontana*, following the foothills of the Monti Lipini.⁵¹

The first cluster, consisting of eight towns and settlements, apparently follows the

⁵⁰ It is obvious that – even in the vicinity of Rome – the requirements of a system of local roads were in medieval times quite different to those of antiquity. This essay merely contains a collection of known distances from various epochs, with the focus (unfortunately) lying predominantly on ancient sources. Throughout, our kilometric

distances are geodesic shortest paths. An effort was made to retrace medieval pilgrim and trade routes using visible roads on the ground. Evidently, many of these roads have since been subsumed by modern construction, especially in the heavily urbanized centers of Rome, Naples, and the cities in Lombardy. However, none of these

‘modern’ (i.e., fifteenth century) routes are available in Latium (the only exception being the former *Via Flaminia*).

⁵¹ Most toponyms in Biondo’s Latium do not follow classical roads or urban sites but trace out hilltop settlements. This is unsurprising in the context of historical evolution after the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Climate

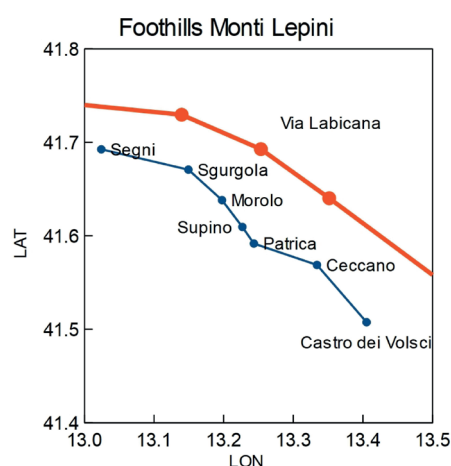


Figure 7
Foothills Monti Lepini

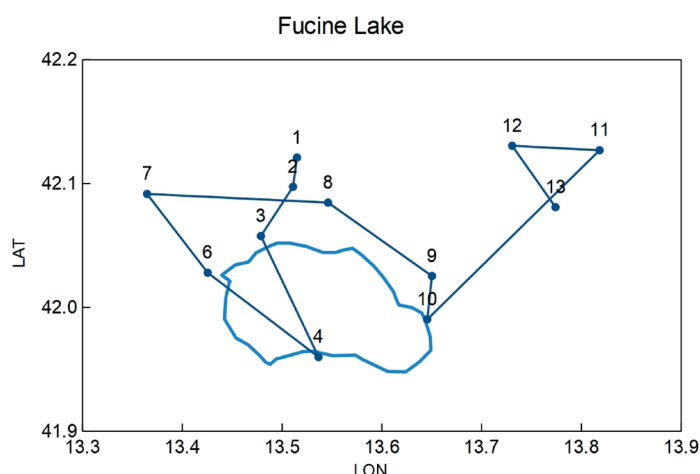


Figure 8
Fucine Lake

fifteenth-century road from Palestrina to Frosinone:

But on the road near this town [Frosinone], are, on the right side of Zinazani [Genazzano]: Pallianum, Serronum, Pillium, Acutum, Trivilianum, Collis Pardi, Anticulum [and] the ancient town of Verulae, about which Livy in Book IX says [...].(3.29)

This is indeed a collection of ‘interior towns’ mostly located in the Monti Ernici and surely lying, on our map, all “to the right of Zinazani [Genazzano]”, as Biondo says. Except for Frosinone, Biondo’s selection occupies the foothills dominating the valley and following the ancient road at a distance of roughly eight kilometers. The wrong sequence between Acutum (modern-day Acuto) and Trivilianum (modern-day Vérolì) is difficult to explain. It may be a simple *lapsus calami*.⁵² We cannot trace it to either a map or an itinerary as a single source. Both types of records occasionally feature two switched points but rarely see-saw back and forth between several.

The second cluster closely follows 3.29, consisting of nine towns and settlements:

Then comes Alatrum [...] and Babucum, formerly a town by the name Bovillae in

Livy, [then] Turritium, Pofae, Vicus, Ripae, Porcilianum, Trevum, [and] Felectinum.

This cluster appears to be a disorderly complement to the previous selection, which is difficult to trace to an itinerary as a possible single source.⁵³ Searching for a (hypothetical) use of historical records, we have not found any statistically relevant information on ‘family records’ of any kind in this selection of towns. During Biondo’s lifetime, only Alatri, Vico, and Rieti belonged to the Colonna family. The third cluster of six towns occurs in 3.31:

And farther on [beyond Segni] are Scurcula, Merulum, Supinum, Patrica, Caecanum, and Castrum, where there is another border of our region of Latium [now Campania].

As in the previous clusters, the settlements do not follow the ancient road, the *Via Labicana*,⁵⁴ but a somewhat parallel course in the foothills of the Monti Lepini. Again, there is no trace of dominance by the Colonna family and, by extension, no archival documentation.

The fourth cluster in 3.38, consisting of no less than thirteen settlements, is grouped around Lake Fucine, including an ‘excursion’ along the *Via Claudia Valeria*, the main road across the Apennines, connecting Latium to the Adriatic Sea.⁵⁵

change and the breakdown of infrastructure such as roads and engineering (drainage, Pontine Marshes) made fertile valleys unsafe for habitation. Later, Arab raids increased the necessity to ‘take to the hills’ (see Purton 2010, p. 99). Subsequent marauding French (Angevin), German (Suebian), and Spanish (Aragonese) soldiery sustained the pressure and reinforced the transition to the medieval

feudal system, in which protection, control, and exploitation of the population at large emanated from these predominantly hilltop installations. Regional variants arose and are subject to intense archaeological study with findings that are still ongoing.

⁵² Biondo writes: A-T-C-F-V-F. A more realistic itinerary would read A-F-T-C-V-F. Single line switches do occur occasionally in manuscript

copies of records. But the above sequence requires a double line switch: Biondo (or the scribe he consulted) had to amend the omission of Fiuggi two lines later, which is rare.

⁵³ As we have no clue as to an archival documentation, the sequence could be randomly read off from a map.

⁵⁴ See Barbetta 1995.

⁵⁵ As a dominant feature, the Apennines are

Around the lake stand the castles of St. Apetitus and St. Iona and the towns of Paternum, Transacum, Gaianum, AVECIANUM, and Mallianum and also Celanum, which is ruled by Leonellus, who, distinguished by the title of Count, is very dedicated to the liberal arts and history in particular. And along the shores of [Lake] Fucine and Celano there are also Piscina, the town of Venus, Viticula, Castrum Vetus, [and] Gorgianum, which also forms the border in this part of our region of Latium.

The sequence of towns and settlements does not follow the ancient road nor the shoreline and seems unlikely to have been read off a map. Perhaps it is ordered into three localized sub-clusters: the first lies to the northwest of the lake (San Potito–Magliano), the second is connected to the eastern part of the lake (Celanum–Venere), and the third would be the three settlements marking the outer limits of Latium (Goriano Sicoli–Vittorito). Note that these last three towns are beyond the watershed on the Adriatic side of the Apennines range.

Another statement by Biondo adds to the confusion. In 3.38 he informs his readers that he “has left out some *castella* and *oppida* [...] which do not lie in the vicinity of the three roads mentioned above [*omissa vero sunt a nobis superius nulli praedictarum trium viarum propinqua aliquot castella et oppida*].” What a bewildering statement! Effectively, Biondo admits here that he has deliberately chosen to ignore geographical information which does not fit in to his preconceived authorial framework. He nevertheless then mentions Rhoca Cavarum, “lying between Palestrina and Tivoli as well as Vico-varo and Gennezauno [*Praeneste Tiburque inter et Vicum Varronis ac Zinazanum sita*]” as the origin of the “Capranica”. After an *elogium* on the noble ancestry of this family, he then spouts the names of another eighteen settlements, whose location remains unclear as Biondo merely uses the adverbial expressions *deinceps*, *his proxima*, *post*, *propinquum*, without, however, bothering to state the directions (a common circumstance

in the *Italia Illustrata*, which has very few indications of compass roses or winds).

None of the clusters describes the modern sites along the ancient roads, rather they broadly follow their path through the foothills in Latium. The structure of the sequence of settlements suggests Biondo was drawing from a mixture of literary records, maps, and personal experience as possible sources. Family estates (after all, Biondo was apostolic secretary to Pope Eugene IV and the next two popes) do not seem to play a role. Indeed, the many *Baroni di Roma*, including the papal administration of Campania et Maritima, presided over estates in Latium that were exceedingly scattered – territorially and temporally.

The number of cluster names – 36 – compared to a total of 143 toponyms shows, on the one hand, that Biondo resorts to this means in presenting geographical information at his disposal (and, moreover, feels at liberty to leave it out, if inconvenient). On the other hand, however, it does not support, at least not in the case of Latium, Ottavio Clavuot's exaggerated claim that on average 65 percent of them are to be found in textual conglomerations of such kind.

Interestingly, Biondo makes no mention anywhere of maps for the Latium chapter. In fact, our discussion of the distances suggests that Biondo has neither a map of Latium nor an itinerary with all the distances. He seems not even to have had access to a ‘road map’ containing distances for points along the *Via Latina*.

On a final note: despite the fact that Biondo cites Strabo throughout the Latium chapter more often than any other source, we nevertheless can state that the Greek geographer played only a limited, if not marginal role. It is true, Biondo loves to quote Strabo, especially for distances and information otherwise unknown, but he clearly does not adopt his structure or narrative accordingly. These were already defined *before* his acquaintance with Strabo. And even his novel idea of illustrating Latium, not by rivers

readily apparent in our first three maps (see above), marking the political divisions along the ridge's spine.

but by roads – an idea which does indeed date back to Strabo – is not really carried out.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Biondo's *Italia Illustrata* makes (at best) sporadic use of maps; neither does Biondo require it of readers to use a map alongside his text. Following *le tre corone* of the fourteenth century, Biondo wishes to generate in his readers' minds a more or less complete image of Italy.⁵⁶ The line of thought which Biondo expects his readers to follow, is, in the end, an *imagined* itinerary, based on a mental map or cognitive script. For this purpose, he does not feel the need to rely on a map (certainly not for his description of Latium, although he uses or claims to have used them for other regions), and instead employs the dominant master-model of premodern times, the hodological view. Those rare passages where he does employ a bird's eye view change neither his basic approach to topography nor the fundamental construction principle of his narrative.

Common sense geography in the broadest sense is concerned with a premodern 'geometric'

model of reality which is intuitive and therefore non-mathematical. It works surprisingly well with approximated directions and distances because it can 'crystalize' into real locations and meeting places (like Stonehenge, for example) by way of a sequence of remembered and memorized landmarks.

Seen like this, a river or a road is a reassuring sequence of landmarks leading to sites of reverence (like Rome or Jerusalem) as well as being of military or mercantile nature. In this sense, Biondo appears to stand at the turning point in history, solidly anchored in traditional and proven usage while collecting the proud but non-mathematical heritage of the past. The future lies ahead of him – already in sight, but still vague and fuzzy: Ptolemy's purely mathematical model, rendering the surface of the earth to scale and defining its respective elements in pairs of geodesic coordinates (i.e., longitudes and latitudes). In the absence of sufficiently precise instruments and methods to properly locate the landmarks in mathematical terms, this task would eventually take several centuries to complete.

⁵⁶ See Michalsky 2019.

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