MAPS, MONSTERS AND MISERICORDS: FROM CREATION TO APOCALYPSE

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Early Maps and Monsters: The Apocalyptic Dilemma

Scythia, India, Ethiopia, were some of the distant lands long ago described by Pliny and Solinus as exotic, alien, and populated by strange peoples in comparison to the known Roman world. In the Middle Ages, the same descriptions of far-away places and strange peoples again captured the imagination insofar as many Europeans heard reports of distant lands from returning crusaders and pilgrims that whet their appetites for more.
Known only through hearsay and inhabiting countries beyond the reach of the crusades, the stories of the strange and monstrous races unleashed a fascination with imagined deformities of these folk. Their bodies, attire, habits of eating and locomotion, sexual behavior, treatment of elders and methods of rulership, as described by the ancients, rekindled interest in that rich source of the fantastic to be revisited as comparisons to the European Christian standard. Strange and monstrous peoples were originally described by ancient texts and they were incorporated into the medieval collective lore of the distant through the «Wonders of the East», bestiaries, and other odd assortments of information about freakish folks.

The debate regarding the question of redemption for human monstrosities had a long history. In the Middle Ages, scholars referred to St Augustine’s Civitas Dei for guidance in dealing with the predicament that monsters posed for the Church. Expanding upon such treatises as Isidore of Seville’s discussion of monstrous races, Augustine grappled with the question of how the Church could reconcile the presence of monstrous races with a world of God’s creation. To begin, Augustine described monsters as prodigies, placed on this earth as indication of God’s power to create all things. By arguing that they were related to the sons of Noah, and therefore redeemable, he provided the means by which these peoples could be incorporated into the biblical structure with purpose and meaning. According to Augustine, God placed monsters on this earth to participate in the Last Judgment, at which time God’s power to refashion the bodies of the dead would be Faith’s witness. According to St Augustine, the monstrous races provided, in their many guises, material proof of God’s plan and final judgment. And yet, as we

3 St Augustine in City of God, Chapter XVI ('The City of God from the Flood to King David') describes human monsters such as Hermaphrodites, Pygmies, Sciopodes, Blemyae, Cynocephales, all deriving from Adam. In City of God, Chapter XXI:8 Augustine describes 'monsters as divine omen'. For translation of St Augustine, esp. discussion relating to monstra, ostenta, portenta, prodigia, see William M. Green, trans., Saint Augustine, The City of God Against the Pagans, vol. 7, Cambridge MA, 1972, 57-8.
shall see, given the events of the crusades, the question of reconciliation of the « monstrous » with Christian redemption developed as urgently problematic. A brief pictorial review of medieval maps of the world indicates an attempt to reconcile this Christian dilemma pictorially.

The three types of maps of early date to be considered here are the T-O Map, the Zonal Map, and the Beatus Map. These maps show in a diagrammatic way, the dilemma of a distrust of the world beyond the Christian West's ken as well as attempts to reconcile Christian thinking with geographical information.

The T-O Map

As early as the seventh century, Isidore of Seville, in his encyclopedic treatise *On nature and his Etymologies* (Book XX) introduced a number of rotae to explain geographical and cosmological theories. Amongst them was a visualization of the world in tripartite division known as a T-O map (fig. 1). Isidore's works contain some of the earliest images of T-O maps known and were frequently copied by later authors. East is given prominence by being placed at the top of the map and marks Asia as the largest continent. The map represents the biblical division of the world amongst the three sons of Noah (Genesis 10): Shem, Cham, and Japheth, descendants of Adam and Eve. The « T » of the Great Sea is surrounded by the « O » of the Great Ocean, which encircles the entire earth. In medieval art, the T-O Map becomes a symbol for the earth or in this case, the oikoumene, the habitable world of humans.

The Zonal or Climatic Map

Zonal Maps (fig. 2) showed the world divided into temperature zones. Here the oikoumene, inhabited by the descendants of Adam and Eve, is located in a temperate zone. Beyond the oikoumene however were zonal regions thought to be uninhabitable due to frigid temperature. Between the oikoumene and these uninhabitable zones was the Antipodes. The Antipodes, although temperate in climate, was believed to be uninhabited by human beings because it was separated from the oikoumene by the fiery heat of the regions labeled Perusta through which no human being could cross. Zonal maps, therefore, provided an early pictorial argument that the family of humanity was limited to the descendants of God’s Creation as described in the biblical Book of Genesis.

The Beatus Map

Beatus Maps were meant to accompany Beatus of Liebana’s Commentary on the Book of Revelation written at the end of the eighth century. In a variety of examples, the maps were meant to accompany the description of the Mission of the Apostles in Beatus’ Prologue to Book II. For example, in Burgo de Osma Beatus manuscript the twelve apostles are shown at the site of their burials. The world is divided with Asia at the top, Europe at the bottom left and Africa at the bottom right. On the Beatus maps a fourth part of the world (the Antipodes) is always shown. In this case, it is uniquely inhabited by a sciapod. In effect, the fourth part as shown on this map, opens the possibility that the Antipodes not only existed but that it was also inhabited. Although it is clearly separated from the oikoumene of the apostles’ reach, here is introduced the dilemma of whether at the end of time, these deformed beings, shown separated from the oikoumene are redeemable. The question was particularly relevant for Beatus of Liebana, given that he wrote the commentary on the Apocalypse shortly before the year 800 when it was believed that the world would come to an end5.

And so by the year 800 the fear of the end of the world and the Last Judgment was real and there is evidence that Augustine's theory of inclusion was translated into cartographic imagery.

In the T-O Maps of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such as the Psalter Map, and the larger Hereford (fig. 3) and Ebstorf Mappaemundi of ca. 1300 we find a telling development—the sciapod, along with a well-developed encyclopedia of monstrous figures are included in the map of the oikoumene. For instance, in the tiny Psalter Map, on folio 9 recto one finds Christ above the world as Creator. On the verso, that idea is made more powerfully clear in that the map of the world of creation is incorporated into his body. The strange races, once relegated to the Antipodes are now included on the edges of the world.

The same is true in both the larger Hereford and Ebstorf Mappaemundi. The strange folks are largely placed along the southern and northwestern edges of the world and thus within the oikoumene and thus redeemable at the end of time. They are placed along the edge of the world where they represent the « other », a world of portents unknown. Remember that deep-down many Christians still believed that deformed characteristics were signs of God's displeasure, corroborated by crusading literature that was replete with evidence of projection of monstrous traits upon the enemy.

It is in this region according to Solinus, there are those with heads like dogs (Cynocephale), those born with only one leg, some who move swiftly and shield themselves from the sun with their large feet, others whose lips are enormous and must drink through straws. Amongst others there are people without heads but mouths and eyes on their shoulders (Blemmyae), cannibals like Ephiphaghi, and a race of wild men with

6 John Block Friedman, following Wittkower's ground breaking article, has provided a starting point for much new scholarship on this topic, see J.B. Friedman, The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought, Cambridge, MA, 1981; Mary Campbell, The Witness and the Other World, Ithaca, 1988; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, « The Limits of Knowing: Monsters and the Regulation of Medieval Popular Culture », Medieval Folklore, 3, 1994, 1-37. For list of strange races and schematic diagram, see Kline, Maps, pp. 142-145.
teeth like dogs who gnarl like dogs, amongst whom are bigamists and whose wives offer themselves as sacrifice upon their husband’s funeral pyre. Himantopodes who walk on all four, and Hermaphrodites of dual sex, and the list goes on. These peoples form a J-shaped chain surrounding the Nile extension. Lined up, one above the other, individually mounted on pedestals of rocks representing frightening mountainous places, the viewer is shown a parade of deformities and customs. Piles of rocks located these people in mountainous places, which set them apart from those who inhabited cities symbolized by castles, churches, and towers, the buildings symbolic of civitas. The figures set on the rocks were the relatives of the wildmen who were believed to live as savages in the undeveloped wilderness. In the Middle Ages, nature was feared; the uncontrollable wilderness or barrens loomed frightening against the security of the enclosed. In the Middle Ages, mountains were associated with fear and loathing and « were taken as examples of God’s anger ».

The map was not a carefully composed doctrinal instrument so much as a rather crude effort to impose a Christian system upon relatively unmediated information. The fact that these strange peoples were visually included in the oikoumene within the body of Creation, provided the rationale for the Mission of the Apostles to bring the word of God to the four corners of the earth. On the other hand the image of the Last Judgment weighed heavily as a signal of the coming apocalyptic end. Artistic devices bestowed a scale of importance and meaning - on the Hereford Map up, down, east, west and the importance of the edges of the map are useful clues. Tellingly most of the strange and monstrous peoples are relegated to the southernmost and northernmost reaches of the world far from the navel of Jerusalem. Ironically, whereas the classical

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texts emphasized the distant locations of these indigenous folk, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many far places, while still considered exotic, no longer suggested the same degree of « strangeness ». And although there were contemporary reports and descriptions of the « others » of peoples encountered with discussion of their disgusting ways and appearances - the world of the monstrous pushed beyond the Islamic world to the furthest edges of the map.

It appears that once the discourse regarding monsters was reopened within the context of the crusades as a continuation of the Mission of the Apostles, a step was taken toward the conscious assimilation of these individuals and peoples within the discourse of conversion. The Last Judgment at the pinnacle of the map’s painted « frame » was seen as the prelude to an inclusive apocalyptic end where the Church would contain all. In effect, the Hereford map paid homage to the authority of the ancients and to the authority of a Church that attempted to incorporate what remained of ancient knowledge in the west contained within the framework of Christianity. One would think that by ca. 1300 the scientific pressures of curiosity would overcome the « perimeter » of Church dogma but the dilemma of « other » continues into the « age of discovery and beyond9 ».

In the XVth and XVIth centuries portolan charts were invented for seafaring and Ptolemy’s work was rediscovered. And yet, concurrent with the « age of discovery », the depiction of the « wonders » and strange races continued unabated. Not only do the strange races, the strange animals, oddities unknown, continue to be found on maps, they proliferate onto the margins of manuscripts and onto the margins of church art, on choir stalls and misericords. The world of the strange, the « other » appears prominently once again as portents, to the apocalypse. In spite of scientific enquiry and expanded travels, the year 1500 was similarly an apocalyptic milestone marking the half-millennium. The 1490s were

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frightening years. The vision of the Revelation seemed portentous. The Greek Orthodox Church calculated that the seventh and final millennium would conclude in the year 1492. In Florence, Savonarola’s crusade culminated with the Bonfire of the Vanities in 1497 and his excommunication and execution in 1498. The Ottomans penetrated the European continent and by the summer of 1493, Emperor Maximilian I campaigned for a crusade to secure the outer boundaries of the empire. In 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella had conquered Granada, the last Moorish stronghold on the European continent. Simultaneously they expelled or required conversion of the entire Jewish population of Spain - as Columbus voyaged to the New World, he left a world rise with intolerance, enforced cleansing and a sense of doom. Once again, the « other » is shown apart from the peoples of the Christian world. We can see this in a selection of contemporary maps and related texts, specifically in German and Spanish maps and objects.

A series of fifteenth century German maps provide evidence that the « age of discovery » did not necessarily change attitudes toward the « other ». The Borgia map is a mappamundi, probably of south German manufacture, engraved on a copper plate, anonymous, ca. 1430. It is the first map to list the iudei inclusi identified as Gog and Magog. As such, Jews and Muslims (Turks) are placed together as the warriors of the Antichrist.

Shortly after the invention of printing, Werner Rolevinck (1425-1502) a Carthusian monk wrote Fasciculus Temporum, « the little bundle of things of time », one of the most popular books printed throughout Europe. It was a history of the world starting with the Creation. Filled with information about such current things as gunpowder, cannons,


11 Andrew Gow, « Borgia Map », in Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages, eds John Block Friedman, Kristen Mossler Figg, New York, 2000, 69.
machines, lunar eclipses - it also depicted monstrosities such as dog-headed or fish tailed people\textsuperscript{12}. Similarly, the Bell \textit{Mappamundi} was prepared ca. 1450 by a scribe from Southern Germany. It is a product of the Vienna Klosterneuberg school of maps and related to the Walberger and Zeitz maps. All of these maps partake of the intellectual tradition of precision. Yet they show images of monstrous races in the remote parts of the world\textsuperscript{13}.

And finally, the Nuremberg Chronicle (fig. 4) a cosmographical account of the history of the world published in 1493 endorsed St Augustine’s forecast that the existing age was the sixth and final one before the universal Dance of Death and the Second Coming. The Chronicle inscribed those events that would bring it about and therefore peculiar meteorological phenomena were recorded. The Town Council met to petition the Emperor for permission to expel the Jews and their wishes were carried out in 1499. Thus Nuremberg joined a long list of German cities that had forced the Jews of Western Europe to seek asylum elsewhere.

All of the above fifteenth century maps and chronicles showed the world as better understood - yet the monstrous races still remain in the guise of the « other », in Germany the Jew, in Spain it will be shown to be the Moor. In the Nuremberg Chronicle the « strange folks » are physically and visually relegated beyond the world - no longer within the \textit{oikoumene} as defined by the Christian world. They have been entirely marginalized. Whereas in the medieval maps, the strange races, the deformed, were placed at the edges of the world - now they are excluded.

On the choir stalls of Cappenberg, Germany, the « strange folks » (fig. 5), possibly including Jews, are also relegated to the margins, in this case the arms of the choir stalls.

\textsuperscript{12} Laviece Ward, Rolevinck, Werner (1425-1502), in \textit{Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages}, eds John Block Friedman, Kristen Mossier Figg, New York, 2000, 522-4.

\textsuperscript{13} Scott D. Westrem, « Bell mappamundi », in \textit{Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages}, eds John Block Friedman, Kristen Mossier Figg, New York, 2000, 57.
In Spain (as already noted in Germany) as the year 1500, the half millennium, approached, a number of ominous happenings of a variety of sorts were noted with growing intensity. Unnatural births, called « prodigies » were especially noted. Apocalyptic thinking was rife at this moment in time in Spain. In Spain, the continuation of the Spanish Reconquest, and the Inquisitions that followed represented the continued attempt of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to force outsiders into the Christian fold or to remove them entirely from the Christian world. At this time, the question of who would or would not be redeemed once again took on new meaning given the belief in the coming Apocalypse.

If we look at the choir stalls at Toledo Cathedral, they are an extensive series that chronicle the reconquest of the south of Spain from the Moors. The historical events which document the expulsion and later forced conversion of the Islamic population shows the « enemy » as worthy of respect. However within the spandrels and bottom border (I shall refer to them as « margins ») we find an array of the world of outcasts such as musicians and acrobats and strange figures including like wildmen, blemmyae, a sciapod and a panoti (figs. 7, 8). It is difficult to know whether they are there as fantastic marginalia or a gloss on the actual historical event. They frame the historical images of conflict that are reiterated below by numerous pairs of fantastic characters in conflict in the « margin » of the bases below (fig.7).

It appears that although these misericords are not directly related to the literal text of the Book of Revelation - the themes of prophecy and conflict, apocalyptic concerns - are tied together in this amalgamation of complex imagery.

By the year 1500 the lingering animosity toward Jews and Moslems becomes particularly pronounced. Although they may inhabit the oikoumene, they were doomed to the outskirts through forced expulsion.

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The prophecy of their future was to be « marginalized » along with the strange races and social outcasts of the spandrels and borders. As Jonathan Alexander so aptly states « the Christian doctrine of an eternal reward, whether in Hell or in Heaven was a socially unifying belief as strong as any incipient sense of national identity in medieval European society. »

As in the images of maps, the world of misericords captured the recurrent themes of the strange and marginalized as well as the fact of the earth created by god but slowly devoured by sin (fig. 9). This survey of maps and misericords suggests that the « other » has persistently been envisioned as strange and threatening and thus a constant challenge that tests morality.

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fig. 1. T-0 Map (schematic diagram, Naomi Kline)

fig. 2. Zonal Map (schematic diagram, Naomi Kline)
fig. 3. Hereford Map, Hereford Cathedral, ca. 1300. By kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of Hereford Cathedral and the Hereford Mappa Mundi Trust.

fig. 6. Cappenberg Castle Chapel, Arm-rest (photo: Elaine C Block)

fig. 5. Cappenberg Castle Chapel, Arm-rest (photo: Elaine C Block)
fig. 7. Toledo Cathedral, Dorsal Panel, spandrels (photo: Elaine C. Block)

fig. 8. Toledo Cathedral, Dorsal Panel, bottom frieze (photo: Elaine C. Block)
fig. 9. Gassicourt, Misericord (photo: Elaine C. Block)