The Noachide Dispersion in English Mappae Mundi c. 960 – c. 1130

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How did medieval inhabitants of the British Isles understand their place on the Atlantic fringe of the known world, a place that, from the classical Roman perspective, put them outside the civilized order? Exploring texts, maps, and pictorial art through the lens of cultural geography, historians have delineated various responses to the challenge of remoteness and insularity. Three mutually compatible solutions stand out. First and foremost are compensatory strategies of spiritual and ecclesial incorporation. Thomas O’Loughlin, Jennifer O’Reilly and Diarmuid Scully, for example, explicate Adomnán’s and Bede’s concern to integrate their respective communities into God’s unfolding plan for humanity. Membership in Christendom, under the aegis of the Roman church, voided the extreme spatial and temporal remove from the

1 I am especially grateful to Martin Foyx whose question during a discussion at Leeds 2011 prompted this study, and to Diarmuid Scully and Faith Wallis for their comments on an earlier draft. Ideas elaborated here were first sketched out for a piece on a different topic, “The Jerusalem Effect: Rethinking the Centre in Medieval World Maps,” in Visual Constructs of Jerusalem, ed. Bianca Kühnel with G. Noga-Banai and H. Vorholt (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming 2014). Some overlap has proved unavoidable.

scriptural wellspring of grace and election in the Holy Land. Patrick Gautier Dalché similarly interprets the production at Iona, perhaps during Adomnán’s abbacy, of the earliest detailed mappa mundi for which there is now compelling evidence. The cartographic representation brought the conversion of the oceanic frontier into relation with the mission of the apostles and early desert saints in the world’s interior regions.

This centripetal propensity, albeit foundational, should not be taken for granted. Martin Foys and Kathy Lavezzo have observed ways in which later Anglo-Saxon and English works reclaimed the periphery as a center in its own right. The hinterland of the frozen north became a zone of spiritual privilege akin to the desert where alienation from human society allowed for closeness to God. Separation from the world conferred an exceptionalism that validated a national identity in tension with the unifying project of res publica Christiana. Yet a third dynamic evades the binary of center and periphery. Asa Mittman has considered the artistic ramifications of Britain’s location on a continuum with the world’s monstrous circumference. Not only did the “marvels of the east” propagate in manuscript illumination, but liminality—both dangerous and powerfully transformative—energized the very role of ornament. For his part, Nicholas Howe, in framing the Anglo-Saxon predicament, moves elegantly between all three

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Figure 1  *Mappa mundi* in the Thorney Computus, c. 1110. Oxford University, St Johns College, MS 17, fol. 6r. Photo: by permission of the President and Fellows of St John’s College, Oxford).
complementary possibilities, magnetic attraction to Christian Rome, investment in the local and 
the vernacular, and fascination with the distant mirror of radical otherness.6

The inquiry at hand develops the “centripetal” argument in a reading of triplet English 
*mappae mundi*—three nearly identical versions of the same cartographic template—from the late 
eleventh and early twelfth century. The best-known and most artistically accomplished appears 
in the deluxe *computus* manuscript of c. 1110 from Thorney Abbey (Oxford, Saint John’s 
College, MS 17, fol. 6r, hereafter SJ), a digital facsimile of which can be consulted in an Internet 
resource side-by-side with an extensive scholarly apparatus by Faith Wallis.7 (Figure 1) A 
sibling *computus* manuscript of c. 1120 from Peterborough includes a less carefully executed 
iteration (London, British Library, Harley MS 3667, fol. 8v, hereafter H).8 (Figure 2) Both 
compilations derive from, among other sources, an exemplar associated with the computist 
Byrhtferth of Ramsey Abbey (d. c. 1016), whose famous cosmological diagram lies in close 
proximity to the map in each book (SJ, fol. 7v; H, fol. 8r). Because the cartographic scheme 
pushes Jerusalem into the center of the *orbis terrae*, its design is usually attributed to new 
European engagement with the holy city during the era of the First Crusade.9 Wallis

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acknowledges the maps’ alignment with contemporary continental examples that radially link “home” communities at the far west to Jerusalem at center. However, she also notes the strong

Figure 2  
*Figure 2*  

appeal of such spatial connectivity in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Already at the Synod of Whitby (663/664), in Bede’s retelling, his champion Wilfred enlisted universalizing geography on behalf of the drive to orient the Insular liturgical calendar to the Roman date for Easter, the operation at the heart of the computus.\textsuperscript{10} Thematic and codicological ties between the map and Byrhtferth’s Diagram in both SJ and H lead Wallis to posit an origin for the cartographic template at Ramsey.

Martin Foys has introduced yet a third, if unfinished, version into the picture.\textsuperscript{11} (Figure 3) This example (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 265, p. 210, hereafter C) was begun c. 1090-1100 on an originally blank page in a Worcester book containing no computistical materials at all. Rather, the map was added to a collection of ecclesiastical extracts traced to the “commonplace book” of Bishop Wulfstan II (1065-95). Evidently, the cartographic template circulated earlier and more widely than previously thought. Comparative analysis of the subtle differences between the three versions in their larger manuscript settings may well illuminate the genealogy of the prototype and the stemma of the copies, matters as yet unresolved. Foys has promised such an investigation. In the meantime, he suggests that the source map initially served a pastoral function and traveled through Worcester to Ramsey, where it was only then incorporated into the scientific framework of the computus. Furthermore, he maintains that agreements between the Peterborough and Worcester analogues make Thorney the outlier. Whereas Wallis sees correlations with Byrhtferth materials as integral to the map’s original formulation, Foys cautions that the linking components may be additions.

\textsuperscript{10} Howe, Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England, pp. 126-128, 158, fleshes out this point.

Figure 3  Unfinished *mappa mundi* in Commonplace Book of Bishop Wulfstan II, c. 1100. Cambridge University, Corpus Christi College, MS 265 p. 210. Photo: by permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.
Whether the cartographic template is an Anglo-Saxon invention, a product of the First Crusade, or a turn-of-the-century revision of an earlier design, I cannot answer. My purpose is to elucidate the maps’ formal organization and programmatic rationale, heretofore misunderstood. In clarifying the logic of the cartographic scheme, I will not so much adjudicate Wallis’s and Foys’s competing perspectives as triangulate them. Finally, I insert a fourth element into the conversation, an unfinished map of c. 1125 that shares the rhetorical conceit, but not the design of the triplets. (Figure 4) Its content, attenuated as it is, may shed light on missing elements unique to the Worcester version.

Wallis aptly characterizes the SJ map (and by implication its two analogues) as “a rather exceptional graphic gazetteer constructed of three overlapping lists: . . . provinces of the inhabited world . . . ; nations . . . descended from the three sons of Noah . . . ; and . . . places associated with Biblical and apostolic history.” It is the idiosyncratic spatialization of the lists that remains to be explained. The triplet maps embed a T-O schema, but refuse its formulaic means of establishing a tripartite orbis terrarum. The normative referential armature of the “T,” signifying the aquatic boundaries between the “continents,” is redefined along the horizontal axis and violated along the vertical axis. When at some point during the early Middle Ages the T-O schema for the tripartition of lands was amended to include reference to the Noachide dispersion

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12 I am inclined to date the map as it is found in the form preserved in SJ and H to c. 1100 for reasons outlined in my forthcoming article, “The Jerusalem Effect: Rethinking the Centre in Medieval World Maps,” cited in n. 1. This dating is upheld in a brilliant study by Faith Wallis, “Computus, Crusade, and Construction: Writing England’s Monastic Past and Future in Oxford, St John’s College 17” in Writing England: Books 1100–1200, eds. Elaine Trehearn and Oriana Da Rold, New Medieval Literatures 13 (2011), forthcoming. I am grateful to Professor Wallis for sharing her article with me prior to its publication.

13 See above n. 7.
of peoples, the resultant maps typically assigned Europe to Japheth, Asia to Shem, and Africa to Ham. The triplets, however, do not follow through on this score. Then, too, remarks Foys, the location of places “appears quite jumbled.” He and Evelyn Edson address the “muddled

Figure 4 Unfinished mappa mundi concluding Isidore’s De natura rerum in the Computus of William of Malmesbury, c. 1120–before 1125. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. F. 3. 14., fol. 19v. Photo: Author’s, reproduced by permission of The Bodleian Libraries, Oxford University.

geography” and “confusion” by picking up Anna Dorothee von den Brincken’s idea that the maps adapt a north-oriented Byzantine model to the conventional true orientation of the Western medieval *mappa mundi*.¹⁶ Yet no evidence supports such a hypothesis, doubtful on its face, given that the minimal, scattered cartographic production extant from the Byzantine realm is altogether unrelated to the *mappa mundi* tradition.¹⁷ I show that the disruption of the T-O schema, the representation of the Noachide dispersion, and the arrangement of places go hand in hand, the whole homing closely to exegetical topoi rooted in Latin etymological gloss.

Within the imbricated lists enumerated by Wallis, the treatment of Jerusalem is especially salient. *Hierusalem* (without the *H* in the Peterborough version) boldly stretches across most of the horizontal bar of the “T;” the title is centered in SJ, but not quite in H, where it is roughly double the width. A miniscule *crux xpi* is written in superscript between the second and third letters, and a cross is drawn between the *E* and *R*; in SJ a second, partially encircled cross diagram the Noachide dispersion in copies of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* (Book 14), where it is almost always juxtaposed with a T-O map. The V-in-square figure does *not* correlate Noah’s sons with the world’s *partes*, which are nowhere included: the name Shem written inside the “V” cannot be said to “indicate” Asia, nor Japheth at left Europe, nor Ham at right Africa. Rather, the V-in-square functions precisely to offer an *alternative* to the tripartition of the T-O; the former epitomizes the distribution of peoples according to passages in *Etym.* 9.2, esp. lines 9, 25, and 37, which depend on Jerome, *Hebraicae Quaestiones in libro Genesis*, 10.2–22. Early exegetical tradition hesitated too rigidly to align Noachide inheritance with the geographic division of lands. For example, Bede in *Hexaemeron*, 3.10.1–2: “the first-born Shem obtained Asia, the second son Ham Africa and the last-born son Japheth Europe—at any rate with the proviso that, since Asia is greater by far in the geographical area of its lands than either Europe or Libya, the descendants of Ham and Japheth also possessed some portions of Asia,” quoted from *On Genesis*, trans. Calvin B. Kendall, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 215, see also 22–27. To read the V-in-square “by analogy” (278) with the T-O is thus to miss their *complementarity*—the two spatializing figures are based on different premises, both equally valid to the medieval editor(s) who interpolated them into Isidore’s text. Van Duzer finds “confusing” the “curious arrangement of the cardinal directions” around the V-in-square figure in *Etymologiae* manuscripts (279). Fair enough; however, the disposition—three directions instead of four, with east at top, south at right, and west at left instead of at bottom—cannot be dismissed as “a strange error” (293, fig. 2). What is needed is an explanation for the why the west substitutes for the north, which is elided.

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accentuates the juncture with the vertical stem. These elements bring into play not the crucifixion, but the sign of the cross, an iconographic distinction on which it is necessary to insist. The image visually identifies Jerusalem not as a place, but as a dynamic movement of the cross that spans the world’s breadth. The explosive burst of spiritual energy reaches all the way north, while at the south end, a small piece of the band is allotted to Jericho. If Jerusalem is the crossbeam that girds the ecumenical edifice, the tie that binds, it is also the foundation for the blocks of labels above even as it is the horizon for the sectors below.

Seconding the name Jerusalem is the inscription at the joint of the “T,” Mons Syon. In SJ, the two stacked words fall just below the visible compass hole; in H the composition centers on this landmark. Next to the inscription at right appears a graphic symbol for “mountain,” rows of arcs in one, a triangle in the other. The combined verbal and graphic device performs a double role: it designates a particular hill in the Christian topography of Jerusalem, while introducing the primary cognomen for the holy city itself. The treatment of the two names, Jerusalem and Zion, cues a commonly-known etymological gloss, originating in the Latin writings of the Church Fathers, absorbed into Old English homiletics, and widely circulated in any number of exegetical contexts on both sides of the Channel. To put the matter succinctly: as Hierusalem means visio pacis, so Sion means speculatio, a beholding from a watchtower or elevated look-out (specula). 


19 For a sense of the patristic tradition, see Allan Fitzgerald, Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), pp. 462-463. Augustine reiterates the gloss many times; particularly apt examples include his Enarrationes in psalmos 50.22, 64.3, 101.2.4, 134.26; and De civitate Dei 17.16. For the Old English tradition, see Paul E. Szarmach, “Visio Pacis: Jerusalem and Its Meanings,” Georgia State Literary Studies 7, Typology and English Medieval Literature (1992), pp. 71-87, esp. 72 and 84 n8. On the importance of the specula to the function of the mappa mundi, see Patrick Gautier Dalché, “De la glose à la contemplation. Place et fonction de la carte dans les manuscrits du haut moyen âge” in Testo e immagine nell’ alto medioevo (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’ alto medioevo, 41, 1994), vol. 2, pp.693-771, esp. pp. 753-769, reprinted in Géographie et culture. La représentation de l’espace du Vle au XII siècle (Aldershot, Hampshire, Great Britain: Ashgate, 1997),
embodied soul fixes its gaze far off on the eternal reward, Jerusalem/vision-of-peace, that awaits the blessed at the end time. The allegorical senses of Zion and Jerusalem overlap in that both refer to the universal church, the former signifying its earthly existence and the latter its heavenly status, one the church militant, the other the church triumphant.

The ecclesial symbolism of the semantic nexus Zion/Jerusalem finds confirmation in the prominence accorded in the maps to Noah’s ark, figure of the church par excellence. One thread in the rich exegetical fabric woven around the ark seems particularly relevant to the earthly/heavenly distinction triggered by the paired cognomina. For Bede, drawing on Augustine (Contra Faustum 12.19) and Isidore (Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum 7.21), the ark at rest signifies the “Sabbath rest of the church expectant,” the middle phase between its present tribulations and post-saeculum peace. The ark atop the “mountains of Armenia” means that the church: “not only awaits rest in this life but also acquires eternal rest in the next. And … having trampled underfoot the peak of earthly ostentation, the church draws near to the soul with heavenly joys even while living in this exile on earth (Hexaemeron 2.8.4).” Earlier in his


commentary on the Flood, Bede offers that mountains submerged in the turbulent waters symbolize “all those who are proud and puff themselves up in the glory of this world (Hexaemeron 2.7.18-19).” The maps situate Armenia and the ark farther to the south than usual, above Babilonia. The displacement is productive. It effectively creates new meaning by coupling tropological analogues—Armenia with its mountains, Babylon with its great tower—and eschatological antitheses, the ark of the church vs. its persecutor. The ark, like the cross, is a graphic sign rather than a narrative device. And, as will become increasingly clear, the organizing principle of the image is not geographical, but rhetorical.

Expanding laterally from Zion at the map’s core juncture, Jerusalem embraces the world in the church. But how is the spiritual plenitude of the cross relayed along the east-west axis? This ecclesial concern, I submit, lies behind structural dislocations that distinguish the triplet maps. Uniquely in the Thorney version, the lead inscription couples Iafeth with Sem. Edson has suggested that the displacement of Japheth from Europe to Asia “could reflect” adherence to the biblical verse Genesis 9.27: “May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Sem, and Chanaan be his servant.” Foys nonetheless finds it “puzzling” and “odd” “given the overwhelming cartographic tradition of locating Japheth in Europe.” The interpretive difficulty arises, however, because we remain fixated on a convention from which the cartographic design intentionally and meaningfully deviates. Edson’s insight applies to more than just the inscription. Noah’s blessing of Japheth, universally understood in Latin exegesis to be a prophecy pertaining

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24 Bede Hexaemeron 2.7 line 1645 in LLT-A; On Genesis, trans. Kendall, p. 189.

25 Edson, Mapping Time and Space, p. 89.

to the church, motivates the program as a whole. The absence of Japheth’s name from the Worcester and Peterborough versions is a red herring, a point to which I will return.

To the extent that the maps override the tripartite order of the T-O formula, they strengthen the ascendency of Europe in association with Asia. The upper half of the orbis terrae, the more densely packed with inscriptions, comprises not only Asia as usual, but also the eastern portion of Europe (e.g. Athens, Constantinople, Achaia). The spilling over of Europe into Asia—the cartographic expression of Europe’s enlargement—quite literally illustrates Genesis 9.27. Straddling both lower sectors, the label Europa “rules over” the peoples descended from Cham in Affrica. This layout turns Africa into a subsection of Europe in conformity with the alternative, bipartite division of lands reported by Orosius (Historiarum adversum paganos libri septem 1.2.1).²⁷ Because Africa is set beneath Europe, the legends Terra Iuda and Palestina at right below the arm of the “T” are not relegated to the wrong continent, but belong, like Mons Syon and Iericho, to the same Holy Land toponymy in which Jerusalem is embedded. The visual and calligraphic hierarchy of the design makes Europa the second most important word after Jerusalem (emphatically so in SJ), the former echoing the latter both formally (in SJ, down to the triangular formation of dots at the end of each word) and symbolically.²⁸ By virtue of the position at which Europa intersects the T’s vertical stem, the label forms the horizontal arm of a proper Latin cross “written” into the earth (in H, the lettering, though not its rectangular framing, maintains the conceit). The visual economy of the image realizes Europa as a veritable crux christi geographica, claiming the world’s western partes for the church.


²⁸ Baumgärtner, “Erzählungen kartieren,” pp. 199-200, similarly notes the mirroring of the legends for Jerusalem and Europe in SJ.
The key source for the wording of the maps’ lead inscription supplies an exemplary reading of Genesis 9.27. Foys has pointed out that *Quod sunt septuaginta duae gentes ortae* “matches almost precisely text from Isidore’s *Chronicon* and his *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum.*”²⁹ In the *Quaestiones*, Isidore declares that the benediction foretells how “in the people of the nations the church has taken possession of the whole world.”³⁰ The gentile progeny of Japheth, Noah’s Benjamin, have moved into the domain of the patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, born of Shem, the eldest; the minor in temporal terms has become the major according to grace. Most importantly, Isidore interprets the blessing by way of Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians, directly quoting verse 2.19: “you are now no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are citizens with the saints and members of God’s household.” The maps show the top half of the world to be the home of the apostles, three of whom preach in Greece and one in the Holy Land: Paul at Athens, John at Ephesus, Andrew at Achaia, Peter at Caesarea. To be sure, interest in representing the apostolic mission is an important aspect of the *mappa mundi* tradition since at least the seventh century, as Patrick Gautier Dalché has determined from the lost Iona work.³¹ But the maps under discussion have additional concerns to which they owe their peculiar form and content. They spatialize the ecclesial typology that informed Isidore’s recourse to a Pauline

²⁹ Foys, “An Unfinished Mappa Mundi,” p. 276 and n. 21


hermeneutic. For Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 16.2), Japheth’s merger into Shem stands for the union of Greek and Jew, that is, the uncircumcised and the circumcised.

In the triplet maps, the Noachide prophecy unfolds cartographically through Pauline metaphor. Paradigmatic order takes precedence over geographic location, with places layered in delineated horizontal strata. Japheth’s presence in Asia increases “latitude” by “latitude,” a formal strategy that coincides with the standard Latin etymology of the name Japheth, meaning *latitudo* (breadth, enlargement). Athens and Israelite tribes inhabit the same band above Jerusalem. In the next, the transition to a new spiritual regime occurs, for now Ephesus is paired with Caesarea, where Jesus had proclaimed the Petrine foundation of the church (Matthew 16.18) and where, later, Peter instructed his brethren among the circumcised to perform the first gentile baptisms (Acts 10.44-48). Caesarea, in SJ, falls exactly on longitudinal axis with Mount Zion; thus the historical site where the nascent church initiated its universal mission lines up with the allegorical figure of the same. Finally, the bundling of the Noachide origins of the church into the metaphor of Greek and Jew accounts for the translocation of Achaia, situated in the far southeast corner of *Asia Maior* diagonally across from Athens at north. In the first stratum, Greek Athens, however close to the Holy Land, represents the foreign party who receives God’s message originally designated for the children of Israel; in the third, it is from Greek Achaia, however distant, that the good news spreads to the eastern ends of the earth. The younger Japheth has now completely supplanted the elder Shem. The supersessionist argument proceeds through chiasmus.

Geographic subordination to paradigmatic logic is equally evident in the lower half of the *orbis terrae*. The maps combine the eastward dynamic of Japheth’s blessing with the westward progress of *translatio imperii*. The legends for the second and third world empires according to
the Orosian series, *Terra Macedonum* and *Cartago*, lie directly across from each other at the cardinal north and south in a temporal stratum between *Babilonia* and *Roma*, the first and fourth, which lie on an east-west diagonal equidistant from the center point. Why the repetition *Kartago Magna* at the extreme west in the place where we might expect Gaul and Spain? Because here the iteration, respecting the design’s visual hierarchy, shows vanquished Carthage to be *inferior* to Rome in parallel with Africa’s subservience to Europe. Japheth, following the scriptural verse, has both entered into the house of Shem and become, through Rome, the master of Ham.

Says Paul in Ephesians, “you, who were once afar off, have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (2.13). These words, implied by Isidore’s reference to the Epistle, are the maps’ refrain. As Achaia, so too the British Isles have been radically displaced. Tailed by *Hibernia* and *Thile* (Thule) beyond the outer perimeter of the *orbis terrae*, *Britannia* is pinned to the end of the word *septentrio* in SJ and lined up with it in H. The visual linkage makes explicit Britain’s arctic association, a familiar geographical trope.32 Especially striking, however, is the archipelago’s northeastern position: instead of taking its usual place toward the western *fines*, Britain floats into the Greek sector of Asia (in H, fitting between Jerusalem and Athens). The archipelago’s eastward shift neither reflects a shaky grasp of geography, nor is it the result of a confused rendition of some prior model. On the contrary, Britain’s re-orientation signals a spiritual reversal of the physical order paralleling, as per Isidore’s exegesis, the spiritual upset in the sons’ birth order. The dislocation makes a statement about apostolic communion and renewal: through the power of the cross reaching to the farthest north, the farthest west is reborn in Shem’s domain a full “citizen with the saints and member of God’s household.”33


33 The coupling of west and north in the world’s Christianization is a trope also found in Radulfus Glaber’s gloss relating the cardinal directions to Christ’s crucifixion: “But here is matter for meditation. We have told how it very
Britain’s change of geographical place reflects its people’s change of heart. Conversion to Christianity reverses the hardened disposition that follows from the glacial climate of the natural world. Diarmuid Scully’s observations on the ways in which Gildas and Bede weave the arctic trope into their histories also pertain to the visual interpretation of the maps. The island experiences a “spiritual melting” as “part of the first warming of the cold gentile world that occurred in the age of the apostles, when Christ’s followers began to preach the faith from Jerusalem at the center of the earth to its uttermost periphery.”

To quote from a papal letter that Bede transcribes into his story of Northumbria’s conversion, “it has pleased God . . . by the heat of his Holy Spirit wonderfully to kindle the cold hearts also of the nations seated at the extremities of the earth in the knowledge of Himself.” Given the historical weight of this topos, the correlation in Byrhtferth’s Diagram of the cardinal north with the element fire, usually

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assigned to the south, cannot be anything other than deliberate. With air at west, rather than at its usual place at east, the seasonal warming of spring and summer is laterally transposed to privilege the northern region inhabited by the archipelago. As Wallis has observed, Byrhtferth’s Diagram and map overlap in some details: the two share the ADAM acronym of the Greek words for the cardinal directions; the Diagram in SJ seconds the cartographic reference to Noah, with the name’s appearance among the cryptic symbols in the upper band of the inner diamond. Diagram and map, it turns out, further have in common the rhetorically strategic use of inversion.

In mapping the Pauline union of the uncircumcised and circumcised, the cartographic images express a sentiment to which Bede gives voice: “the Lord has not summoned the Jews alone, but us too, who are able to cry out to him from the ends of the earth.” Christian expansion to the “ends of the earth” is a well-known spatial corollary to the culmination of history. Bede’s exegesis of Genesis 9:26-27 builds on the Augustinian and Isidorian themes already considered. In addition, he takes up the word “tents,” the gear of warfare and wandering, to see in Japheth’s blessing the earthly peregrination of the gentile faithful who, “placed on the

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36 Contra John E. Murdoch, *Album of Science: Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984), p. 365 and Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 92. Wallis, “Ms Oxford St. John’s College 17,” p. 798 does not explain the displacement of the elements, but shows how, as a result, the corresponding equinoctial and solstitial coordinates point to the following season, the whole creating a clockwise temporal rotation that repeats the dynamic of the central star-like wheel.


38 “non solum iudaeos sed et nos qui de finibus terrae ad eum clamare . . . advocavit.” Bede, *Homiliarum evangelii libri ii.*, 19, line 222, in LLT-A. The English is cited after O’Reilly, “Islands and Idols at the Ends of the Earth,” p. 126 n.32. On the map’s relationship to Bede’s writing, see Lucy E.G. Donkin, “‘Usque ad ultimum terrae’: Mapping the Ends of the Earth in Two Medieval Floor Mosaics,” in *Cartography in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, pp. 189-217, esp. 196-198.

road of this life, sigh for the heavenly fatherland.” The maps orient their readers, proleptically, to the eternal peace of the New Jerusalem, yet not without recalling the prior ordeal of Judgment to which the earth will be subjected. God once destroyed the world through the waters of the Flood; a second judgment will come through fire (Hexaemeron 2.8.22, 2.9.11-15). Just as Noah’s ark brings to mind the element of water, so the prominent mons Ethna does for that of fire. Although parallel signs with respect to the physical world, the ark and Mount Etna are contrary eschatological symbols. Whereas the ark exemplifies salvation through the church, the restive volcano exemplifies just the opposite—according to Isidore, Gehenna, whose perpetual fires torment the bodies of the damned unto eternity.

I mentioned above that Japheth’s name appears only in SJ’s version of the map. Foys may well be right that the prototype lacked the name, and that the Thorney scribe added it in the process of creating an artistically more accomplished version. Even so, the scribe’s intervention

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should be considered less a revision that alters the map’s original purpose than a clarification of an aspect integral to the cartographic image. Medieval readers of H, and by extension C, would hardly need Japheth’s name written out in order to supply the final term of the Noachide triad, an automatic mental act. Diametrically opposed in the two complete maps, the inscriptions De sem gentes xxvii and De cham gentes xxx relegate the descendants of the first and second sons to comparatively small sectors at top and bottom; by contrast, the “house” of Japheth ever increases to fill the expanse between. In fact, one could argue that the absence of the third name amounts to a refusal to pin down an ongoing movement, a diffusion that exceeds geographical bounds and ends only by overtaking the world. With the words De iafeth, the Thorney scribe makes explicit the youngest son’s rightful place in the eldest’s domain. Still, the formulation does not enumerate peoples, so can be read as a spatial reference to the universalizing mission of the gentile church.

Wallis points to elements similarly unique to SJ, notably in its version of Byrhtferth’s Diagram (the band of symbols in the inner diamond), which may represent initiatives or “refinements” on the part of Thorney scribes. 44

Wallis and Foys have eloquently written about the maps’ purpose to demonstrate the interconnection between center and periphery, specifically the English periphery, within a unified orbis christianus. In crediting the maps with a rhetorical purpose, I have only fleshed out the interpretive consensus. The new finding to emerge from my analysis is the significance of Japheth’s blessing, which extends beyond the triplet maps.

The spatialization of Genesis 9.27 takes a pictorial turn in an unfinished map in a computus manuscript made for William of Malmesbury c. 1120-before 1125 (Oxford, Bodleian,

44 Wallis, “Ms Oxford St. John's College 17,” p. 792.
MS Auct. F. 3. 14, fol. 19v). Isidore’s *De natura rerum* here concludes with a T-O map in which roundels form part of the diagrammatic armature. (Figure 4) The design is a variant of a rare type found, to my knowledge, only in manuscripts that belong to an Anglo-Saxon edition of the text. The earliest analogue (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3507, fol. 97v) dates from c. 960–

80 (Figure 5); a second appears in a much later Salisbury manuscript (second half of the

Figure 5  Mappa mundi concluding Isidore’s De natura rerum in a Computus compilation, c. 960–80. Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3507, fo. 97v. Photo: author.
eleventh century) copied from a common exemplar (London, BL, Cotton MS Vitellius A. xii, fols. 63v–64r). The sister list-maps, the provinces of the tripartite world, follow an interpolated note: *Tres filii noe diviserunt orbem terrarum in tres partes post diluvium. Sem in Asia. Cham in Affrica. Iaphet in Europa.* This pair of Isidore maps have attracted attention on account of their transposition of Europe and Africa, for which ingenious explanations have been advanced. A simple rationale, however, should not be overlooked. What appears to us a lateral reversal of the geographic order is merely an effect of our taking the maps out of their material context in the book. In fact, the cartographic content perfectly corresponds to the *writing/reading order* of the introductory inscription naming the sons according to their *birth order*: Asia occupies the maps’ top sector as usual (top=first), while Africa and Europe, assigned to the second and third sons, occupy the left and right sectors respectively. As with the triplet maps in SJ, H and C, geography per se is not an absolute value; rather the spatialization of toponymic lists privileges rhetorical values. In the Exeter map, the active distribution of lands (*diviserunt*) aligns with the chronology of filial descent. Parallel temporal modalities—Noachide propagation and textual processing—govern the visual disposition of the image. Because the Malmesbury map, without caption, was abandoned before the scribe tackled the list, the would-be disposition of the two western sectors remains indeterminate.

46 The Vitellius map is reproduced in Edson, *Mapping Space and Time*, p. 6, fig. 1.3. See N. R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 813-814. This particular edition of the DNR is discussed by Wesley M. Stevens, “Sidereal Time in Anglo-Saxon England” in *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, eds. Calvin B. Kendall and Peter S. Wells (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), pp. 125-154, esp. 136-137. A third copy of the DNR that belongs to the same textual recension but features a map of the traditional T-O design is found in London, BL, Cotton MS Domitian I (mid-tenth century). Conversely, the Malmesbury text of the DNR has not, so far as I am aware, been identified as a member of the group.

47 On the textual source of the inscription, see Van Duzer and Sáenz-López Pérez, “*Tres filii Noe,*” pp. 28-30.

48 Wesley M. Stevens, “The Figure of the Earth in Isidore's *De natura rerum,*” *Isis* 71/2 (1980), pp. 268-277, esp. 274-277; Mittman, *Maps and Monsters*, pp. 21-23. I will consider these Isidore maps, along with Stevens’s and Mittman’s ideas about them, in my forthcoming book mentioned in n. 19 above.
Uniquely, the Malmesbury map turns the medallions into *clipei* for half-figures, left in the state of leadpoint underdrawings. The top roundel at the cardinal east clearly portrays the figure of Christ in Majesty. The central medallion at the crux of the “T” contains a female figure; like the Majesty directly above, she is shown frontally, her arms raised in the *orans* pose. The outer medallions, placed at the cardinal north and south, but lower than the central one, enclose identical male figures in lay garb; they are turned toward the central figure, looking up at her with arms raised in acclamation. Wallis has identified these “praying” figures as “standing in for the three continents.”

But why would only one continent take the form of a female personification even as the draftsman insisted on twinning the lateral pair? How to explain the privileged status accorded the female bust, a compositional strategy reinforced by the deferential attitudes of the facing males? An alternative identification better fits the iconography: the cartographic framework must present Shem and Japheth, types of the two branches, circumcised and uncircumcised, that unite in the one church, *Ecclesia* personified.

Might the iconographic transformation of this Isidore map be brought to bear on the unfinished version of the map in C? Remarking on two empty drypointed roundels that intersect the top left and right of the main circle, Foys wisely admits that “the intended content . . . remains a mystery.” Nevertheless, he goes on to say, “Possibilities for content range widely, from the sun and the moon in a computistical context to any of a number of Old and New Testament figures in a scriptural mode.”

Shem and Japheth, I venture to speculate, might make good candidates.


Deciphering the triplet *mappae mundi* raises questions about the nature of their form. If we are correct to call these images maps—and we are—how do they work cartographically and, given the subservience of geographical order to hermeneutics, what is it that they map? We can use the maps’ material context in SJ and H to help sort out their distinctive visual status on the one hand and integrated functionality on the other. The immediately proximate materials—astronomical *rotae*, alphabet and calendrical tables, diagrams pertaining to kinship, types of knowledge, and macro-/microcosmic linkage—graphically process intangibles through color-coded geometric (including columnar) grids whose formal relationship to content is purely arbitrary. By contrast, the maps correspond to a physical entity, the *orbis terrarum*, from which they extrapolate their overall representational structure however conventionalized and abstract. But such iconicity only goes so far. The tables and diagrams spatialize concepts and the maps conceptualize space according to common principles. The maps share, with the surrounding tables and diagrams, an approach to the generation of thought: verbal signs create meaning associatively by virtue of juxtaposition, parallelism and opposition. Inscriptions perform the cartographic task of mapping Britain into an exegetical legacy, a spiritual patrimony that establishes the island’s claim to a place in the unfolding telos of election and salvation.

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51 For example, in SJ (see [http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/index.htm](http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/ms-17/index.htm)): alphabet table and astronomical schema (fol. 5v), map and feria table (fol. 6r), degrees of consanguinity (fol. 6v), taxonomy of knowledge (fol. 7r) and Byrhtferth’s Diagram (fol. 7v). In H (see [http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts)): taxonomy of knowledge (fol. 6v), diagram of Creation (fol. 7v), Byrhtferth’s Diagram (fol. 8r), map (fol. 8v).