Matthew Paris, therefore, appears as the author of six geographical designs; a world-map, in two slightly different forms; a map of England, in four variants; a purely conventional sketch of the Heptarchy, in the form of a Rose des Vents; a plan, or schema, of the Roman roads of the same country; a ‘routier’ to Apulia from the English Court; and a map of Palestine, which tradition has wrongly joined with the former, to make a Pilgrim Itinerary from London to Jerusalem.

Matthew Paris' world map, unlike his England (#225.2, #225.3), according to the cartographic historian Charles Beazley, is of small value geographically or cartographically, though it is curiously different from all other medieval designs. It measures 34.8 x 23.6 cm and seems to have been constructed on “projections” approaching the azimuthal logarithmic, where the central part of the map (of most interest) is enlarged in scale. It contains about 80 legends and perhaps its most interesting feature is an inscription, placed in the neighborhood of Mount Taurus, which alludes to the three great wall-maps existing in or near London at this time (ca. 1250). One of these is ascribed to a certain Robert of Melkeley; another is called the mappamundi of Waltham in Essex; the third is termed the property of the Lord King at his court in Westminster. Yet compared to Matthew’s England, his surviving mappamundi is a disappointment; and if we were to assume that his wall-maps at Westminster and elsewhere presented merely the same features on a larger scale, there would be less reason, according to Beazley, to regret the loss of these Orbis picti.

The coloring of the Paris mappamundi is mostly red for place-names, except those in the Mediterranean, such as Tyre, which lie to the right of the Adriatic; these are colored black. Mountains are portrayed in ochre, rivers in blue, for the most part; and the Mediterranean Sea in colored green. Like most other medieval maps, but unlike his England, Paris' mappamundi is oriented with the East at the top.

Again, according to Beazley, the chief thing worthy of remark in this world-map is its limitation. For it is not really a mappamundi, but rather a sketch of Europe and the adjacent coasts; only the extreme northern edge of Africa is portrayed; as to the parts of Asia here given, the author has so little intention of working them out in detail, that he covers most of the spaces with the inscription mentioned above, about the three wall-maps. In this region (Asia) Paris depicts a broad arm of the sea running west from the
Euxine [Black Sea]. The Palus Maeotis is represented by two lakes near the North Ocean, into which he shows a river. Even in Europe the detail is wanting; its northern coast is absolutely straight, and apparently follows the requirements of the sheet or page without attempting to represent the actual shoreline. Many unnamed rivers occur in Europe; the only ones that are named are the Rhone, Danube and Elple [Scheldt]. For more contemporary names there are Hungaria, Polonia, Austria, Saxonia, Bavaria, Theutonia, Braibe [for Brabant]; Dacia [for Denmark]; and the towns of Cologne, Pisa, Bologna and Jauua [Genoa].

The text has some resemblance to the Hereford and Ebstorf maps (especially the latter), and to Lambert of St. Omer, Henry of Mainz/Sawley, the Psalter and the Cottoniana (#226, #224, #217, #215, #223 and #210). Most of the newer names may be found on Ebstorf, as, for instance, Holland, Burgundy, Flanders, Austria, Poland, Venice, Bavaria, Metis, Hierapolis, Teutonia; but, after all, the great mass of name-forms in this mappamundi are old.

The form of the design is, on the contrary, novel and peculiar, it has some relation to Henry of Mainz/Sawley and Lambert of St. Omer maps; the former of whom is not unlike Matthew in his islands, his Italy, and his Balkan Peninsula with its curious western projection; while the latter gives a similar course to the Danube River flowing into the North Sea; but the present scheme must not be regarded as a derivative of either of these, but rather as itself a stem-form not directly borrowed from any other plan that has come down to us.

The western littoral is scarcely better; England, which Matthew knew so well, is entirely omitted; and it would be difficult to rate the compiler’s geography at a high level, if we only possessed this design, and could not also refer to the four maps that he has left us of his native country.

Matthew Paris also created four manuscript maps of Britain that survive today. The most comprehensive of these maps, which was made c. 1250 (#225.2), is at the beginning of Matthew’s Abbreviatio chronicorum, one of his abridgements of his Chronica majora, a history of England from the Creation to 1259. In the upper left margin of this map there is an interesting legend about sea monsters in the Atlantic. The legend, which is located off the northwestern coast of Scotland, has been damaged by trimming of the page, but reads: [Hec] pars inter aquilōnem & autrum [vas]turn mare res[pici]t ubi non est nisi [m]onstrorum habita[lio]n. Verumtamen ibi [inve]nitur insula [an] etum fortissima, that is, “This part between the North and South looks out on a vast sea where there is nothing but the abode of monsters. But an island is found there that has many rams” Unfortunately we do not know Matthew’s source for his claim about the Atlantic, and this legend does not appear on his other three maps of Britain. This legend is paradigmatic in its placing of monsters in the furthest and unknown reaches of the world. In fact, it discourages exploration through its assertions that there is no land in the Atlantic except for an island of rams, and that the ocean is full of monsters. Thus while one of a map’s primary functions is to depict the earth’s geography, the allusion to sea monsters on Matthew Paris’ map of Britain discourages voyages that would add to the area that could be portrayed on maps.
LOCATION: Mappamundi - Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. 26, p. 284

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* illustrated
Matthew Paris’ world map, 1250, 34.8 x 23.6 cm  
(or oriented with East at the top)
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