

**TITLE:** *Olomouc [Olmütz] mappamundi*

**DATE:** ca. 1450

**AUTHOR:** *unknown*

**DESCRIPTION:** Formerly in *Olomouc* (now the Czech Republic) Studienbibliothek, MS g/9/155. Reproduced from Anton Mayer, *Mittelalterliche Weltkarten aus Olmütz* (Prague: Geographisches Institut der Deutschen Universität in Prag, 1932). Glued to the back of a medieval codex (M I 155), this is the oldest map held by the library, originating in all likelihood from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This map combines the medieval *mappamundi* styles of both “zonal” and “T-O” maps (#201 and #205, Book II). It depicts the world on the basis of the prevalent conceptions at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This West-oriented anonymous *mappamundi* is thought to have been lost after WW II. The outline of the Mediterranean Sea clearly has not been taken from a *portolan* [nautical chart]. The Caspian Sea is open to the outer ocean. The Holy Land, at the center of the map, is heavily emphasized. The four rivers flow out over the world from a peripheral *Paradise* situated in the farthest east.

The *Olmütz* map is another rather conservative world map made in southern Germany around 1450. While it was bound in a volume of religious writings, it does not appear connected to any of these, so we really do not know the purpose for which it was made. This small map (15 cm or six inches in diameter), as mentioned, is oriented to the West, but other than that, its features are the traditional ones. *Paradise* is in the East with the four rivers flowing from it. The inscription notes that it is guarded by venomous serpents and an angel with a flaming sword. The Red Sea is colored red and shown divided by the passage of the fleeing Hebrews: “The Red Sea which the children of Israel crossed with dry feet.” Jerusalem is at the center, and the area of the holy land is much enlarged, including a very large Sea of Galilee and Dead Sea with the five drowned cities. The geographical forms are abstract, showing no influence from the sea charts. For example, the Mediterranean shore of southern Europe is a gently undulating line with no depiction of the Italian or Greek peninsulas. A narrow band of ocean surrounds the round earth, with a small patch added in the northwest to accommodate the island of *Hibernia*.

Outside are the names and descriptions of the classical twelve winds. There are no pictures on the map, but several of the monstrous races are named in inscriptions. *Gog* and *Magog* are shown twice, once in north Asia and once in India. Scott Westrem speculates that the mapmaker was copying from an East- or North-oriented map and got the directions mixed up. Place-names are largely traditional, but two islands in the Indian Ocean, *Insula piperum* and *Tarrnelim*, recall the Sanudo /Vesconte map (see #228). A special feature of the map are plotted climatic zones and their unusual number. Individual bands are separated and shown by red lines. It is interesting that the otherwise fairly regular line of climate zones are in the northern Asian territory suddenly deformed. In addition to the aforementioned deformation is also notable for its curving arc that seems to reflect the roundness of the earth. Notations on the side and these faint arcs drawn over the map indicate the nine different climates, from that of Meroe in the south to a ninth climate located north of Denmark and labeled *uninhabitable because of the cold*. The *Olmütz mappamundi* stands out for its unique orientation to the West. For the vast majority *mappaemundi* East is typically the chosen orientation. The map is on paper with a watermark that dates it to the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. Otherwise, it could have been designed at almost any time in the later Middle Ages.

**Size:** 21.5 x 16 cm/15 cm or six inches in diameter

**Reference:**

Edson, Evelyn, *The World Map, 1300-1492*, pp.179-180.

\*Scafi, A., *Mapping Paradise*, p. 214, Figure 8.10.

Westrem, S., "Against Gog and Magog", *Text and Territory: Medieval Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, pp. 54-75.





