The Psalter Map

TITLE: The Psalter Map
DATE: 1225-1265 A.D.
AUTHOR: unknown
DESCRIPTION: According to such cartographic scholars as Beazley, Santarem, and Miller, this small 13th century map belongs to a group or family of maps called Orosian-Isidorian, consisting of the maps known as Sawley, Guido of Pisa, Vercelli, Ebstorf, and Hereford maps (#215, #216, #220.3, #224, #226) - presumably all derived from a common original. The design of the Psalter map reveals an extremely small circular map, only 8.5 cm (3.5 in.) in diameter, crowded with written matter, supplying no less than 145 inscriptions. The title of this map is reflective of its tone and intent, ‘a book or collection of Psalms’. In addition, there is another mappa mundi of the same size and similar marginal decoration on the verso of the same folio of this document that is highly unusual. According to Chet van Duzer their manuscript context is unique: no other surviving mappa appears in a psalter. The much more famous of the two maps, that on fol. 9r, is the earliest surviving mappa mundi that has the gallery of monstrous peoples along the southern edge of Africa that also appears on the Duchy of Cornwall fragment (c. 1286), the Ebstorf map (c. 1300), the Hereford map (c. 1300), the Ramsey Abbey Higden map (c. 1350, #232) and the Aslake map (c. 1360). The map on fol. 9r has often been asserted to be a much smaller copy of a mappamundi that decorated Henry III’s Painted Chamber at Westminster that was destroyed in 1263.

In its current state, this Psalter manuscript, mostly written in Latin, opens with six folios containing six full-page illustrations of scenes from the New Testament but these were added to the manuscript towards the end of the 13th century. Originally, the manuscript opened with the two maps (fols 9r-9v), which are followed by a calendar, an element often included with psalters; some prayers and then the psalter with the Canticles; followed by verses praising the Virgin, prayers in Anglo-Norman, the Office of the Dead and prayers. Both liturgical and iconographical evidence indicates that the manuscript was made in London after 1262.

The map on fol. 9r is on a blue background decorated with groups of three white dots (cintamani) inside a border. The border is inlaid with diagonal bands separating divided four-petaled flowers, with the space around the flowers painted ochre, and
eight-petaled flowers in the corners. In the upper part of the image, Christ’s torso emerges from behind the map, and in his left hand he holds an orb, a symbol of power. The orb is inscribed with the cartographic T that designates the borders between the parts of the tripartite world on traditional T-O maps: Asia, Europe and Africa. He gives the sign of benediction with his right hand and is flanked by two angels swinging censers. The map encroaches on the border to the left and right. Below the map, there are two wyverns [winged two-legged dragons with a barbed tail] arranged symmetrically with their heads meeting at the center of the page; their tails grow into floral ornamentation. The two wyverns certainly allude to evil - this is confirmed by the surprisingly malevolent expression of the adjacent head representing the zephyr or west wind as compared with the benign expression of the subsolanus or east wind between Christ and Paradise - and should probably be understood as indicating the presence of hell in the west, opposite Paradise in the east. Thus the map seems to reflect Hugh of St Victor’s (c. 1096-1141) theory that human history began in Paradise in the east and progressed westward, ending with the Last Judgment in the west.

This map is, along with the Hereford and Ebstorf maps, a highly developed and climaxing example of the religious cosmography that evolved during the European Middle Ages, or as the critical Beazley puts it, “a highly developed but scientifically debased example of semi-mythical Geography, an elaborate exposition of strictly medieval habits of thought, applied to Geography.” The Psalter map displays world knowledge removed as far as possible from the comparative science of the classical (Greek) world, and as yet quite untouched by the new light of the later Middle Ages. Or, simply the world as viewed by the didactic theocracy of medieval Europe.

As mentioned at the top of the world-circle is the Savior Jesus Christ with uplifted hands; in His left He holds the globe of earth; the latter has the familiar T-O design of the continents sketched on its surface. On both sides of the Savior stand angels swinging censers; below are two dragons facing one another. On the reverse of the page the dragons are again sketched below the earth-circle, and crushed beneath the feet of the Savior, whose form thus serves as a background and support to the circuit of the earth, as in the Ebstorf example and in so many other medieval European pictures. The border that surrounds the map is almost identical in design with that of the Hereford; but the Psalter border is executed in pure Romanesque style, the Hereford in the Gothic style. This fact helps us date the former at least fifty years earlier than the latter, i.e., ca. 1250 A.D. (it should be noted that some authorities date the Psalter as early as 1225 A.D.).

What is a Psalter? The Psalms consist of 150 ancient songs, grouped together to form one of the Old Testament books of the Bible. In the Middle Ages (and down to the present day) they formed a fundamental part of Christian and Jewish worship, for ecclesiastics and lay-people alike; many people learned to read by being taught the Psalms. The Psalms were often written out separately from the rest of the Bible, often preceded by a calendar of the Church’s feast-days, and followed by various types of prayers; such a book is known as a Psalter.

One feature of the Psalter map that is immediately apparent is the cartographer’s emphasis on the centerline that runs from east at the top to west at the bottom. Christ’s head is directly above the head of the east wind, which blows straight down and is just above Paradise, from whose lower (western) edge the rivers of paradise flow. The Sea of Galilee is on this same line, as is the Jerusalem “bullseye”, the center-point of the map - the Psalter map is among the early maps that emphasize the centrality of Jerusalem. The Mediterranean runs down the centerline from Jerusalem, and that line is further
emphasized by the head of the west wind and the two wyverns facing each other below the map. This emphasis on the map’s centerline was probably intended to render Jerusalem more prominent.

In addition, the features above the “bullseye” marking Jerusalem are arrayed concentrically with that circle, so as to emphasize it. These features, moving from Jerusalem to the east, are the ‘torrens cedron’ [Cedron brook]; the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee; a range of mountains probably to be identified as Galaad or Gilead; and the western of two branches of the Euphrates. No other surviving mappa mundi shows this same disposition of features east of Jerusalem, and it bespeaks a particularly strong belief in Jerusalem’s centrality on the part of the cartographer; it is as if the city’s holiness has reconfigured the geography of surrounding regions so that they express their respect and subservience.

In this map the ocean appears as a watery zone, of equal breadth in every part, encircling the world. The various winds, each represented by a head, as in the Hereford map and on the Paris III-Beatus of 1250 (#207E), are designed in suitable places along the outer rim of ocean. This sort of plan is also prominent in later works, like the mappamundi of Ranulf Higden (#232). In the titles of these winds, the draftsman of the Psalter map is unusually and severely classical, giving us the famous old names of Aquilo and Septentrio for the North, Zephyrus for the West, Auster or Nothus for the south and Eurus or Euro-Nothus for the East and Southeast. The term Vulturnus, usually applied by classical writers to the southeast wind, is assigned rather to the North-North-East by the Psalter draftsman.

The Mediterranean, Black Sea, Propontis, Caspian and Red Sea are all represented; the waters of the Levant show unusual exaggeration; the Euxine [Black Sea] is brought (as often elsewhere) very close to the Northern Ocean. The coast from the delta of the Nile round to Caesarea is grossly distorted, almost resembling the shore of a lake. The Caspian appears as a narrow indent of the Northern Ocean, divided in two by a long peninsula (in the extreme northeast of Asia), and encircled by the greatest mountain-wall in the world (the region of Gog - Magog), pierced apparently at one point by the Gates of Alexander.

As with many medieval European maps the city of Jerusalem is the map’s central geographic focus and emphasis. Often, when European medieval mappaemundi are mentioned, it is taken as a given that Jerusalem lies at their center. And indeed, on the Psalter map, Jerusalem is not just at the physical heart of the image – its central placement is underlined and emphasized by a large red circle that marks its location like a bull’s-eye. The circle mirrors and forms the center point of a series of concentric rings that structure the image; it is not just a focus, but a seismic epicenter of the image’s form, and the compass point from which the whole composition was drawn. The placement of Jerusalem at the center of the world corresponds to the medieval tradition of the city as the umbilicus mundi (omphalos in Greek), itself based on ancient Jewish understandings of the city as the navel of the world. The T-O structure that shapes this and many other medieval world maps emphasized this conception; Jerusalem occupies the juncture of the bars of the T. Yet the Psalter map is not necessarily typical in the visual weight given to the city. On many other mappaemundi, (such as the Vercelli map and Matthew Paris’ world map, #220.3 and #225), Jerusalem occupies a position in the general – but not geometric – center of the map, while in other mappaemundi traditions, such as the maps in the famous Spanish ‘Beatus’ Apocalypse manuscripts (#207), the city is not represented at the center at all. Indeed, David Woodward in the History of Cartography, Volume One
(1987) pointed to entire categories of medieval world maps (the ‘zonal’ and ‘quadripartite’ types in particular) that do not place Jerusalem at the center. Similarly, the placement of Jerusalem at the center of the Psalter map is emphasized by the depicted world’s circularity, another feature taken as a given outside of the specialist field; in fact, medieval mappaemundi come in many shapes, including ovals, squares, and even almond-shaped mandorlas (particularly Ranulf Higden’s maps, #232). The circle/center model found in the Psalter map suggests a uniformity of the medieval world image that did not in fact exist.

The Psalter map is also not necessarily a ‘representative example’ in its religious manuscript context. The placement of the map within a book of Psalms is fascinating, but hardly typical. Mappaemundi were found in all sorts of contexts in the 13th and 14th centuries. Certainly many of them were explicitly religious: maps were hung in churches, placed in biblical texts like the Apocalypse, and included in theological commentaries. Yet, while acknowledging that any separation between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ contexts in medieval culture is anachronistic, world maps were also found in contexts that were not explicitly religious: painted or hung in town halls and palaces, drawn in manuscripts on natural history, geography, or climatology, and kept in private collections for reference or display. When the Psalter map is held up as a typical example, both its context in a psalter and its emphasis on Christ holding or even containing the earth within his body leads the reader/viewer to assume that such images usually have a theological or devotional function – that they operate primarily to provide an image of the order of the Christian cosmos. This is indeed their function in many contexts, but it can become too easy to underemphasize the true interest in geography and the accuracy of geographical description that is often manifested in medieval maps.

The Psalter map’s small size also leads to it being a perfect example for reproduction in publications. Larger (and more influential) examples like the Hereford or Ebstorf wall maps are nearly incomprehensible in small reproductions, since their details remain illegible. The Psalter map, in contrast, is small enough (less than ten centimeters in diameter), that its details, in both text and image, are easily legible. Thus we have in this image a map that is easily understood within the basic outlines of the study of
medieval *mappaemundi*: it is visually accessible (both because of its size and excellent state of preservation), explicitly religious in context and content, and structured according to a paradigmatic Jerusalem-centric organization. Its inclusion of the monstrous races at the corners also conforms to, and is held up as evidence of, medieval conceptions about the center and periphery.

While centered precisely on Jerusalem, *Paradise*, in the Far East (top), is conceived in a somewhat exceptional manner. The sun pours out of its mouth the flood waters which flows through the *Garden of Eden*, and supplies the five sacred rivers; for the author has entered both the *Ganges* and the *Phison* in this list. Usually tradition identifies four sacred rivers, using either the *Ganges* or *Phison* (see Cosmas #202). The heads of Adam and Eve appear within the enclosure, which seems to be marked off with lofty and symmetrical mountains. The *Tree of Temptation* is roughly drawn between the two faces. (Bevan and Phillot, *Medieval Geography*, xlii, suggest the *Arbre Sec*, which they make identical with the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*; and Yule, *Marco Polo*, II.397, refers us to legendary language about the *Dry Tree* which would perhaps support such an identification; "in the midst of Paradise was a fountain, whence flowed four rivers, and over the fountain a great tree bare of bark and leaves"). The trees of the *Sun and Moon* are here separately indicated, close to *Paradise* on the south; while the Tigris River flows direct from *Paradise* to the Indian Ocean, and the Euphrates River (or rather one of two rivers so named) enters a mountain chain west of *Paradise*, named *Orcatoten*, and thence flows to the Persian Gulf. Of the Nile River only the Egyptian portion is given. The *Arae Liberi et Colimae Herculi*[s] occurs near the Indus River, but the *Arae Alexandri* are near the border of Europe; Albania, in northeast Asia, recalls the *Anglo-Saxon* or *Cottoniana* map (#210); *Cyropolis*, near the Caspian, is perhaps for *Cyreschata* on the *Jaxartes*, famous for Alexander’s siege; *Sclaveni occidentales*, near the Black Sea, are suggestive of much more modern times, like the island of *Norvegia*. The Arabian and Persian Gulfs appear to be melted into one by the draftsman of the *Psalter* map, and in the same great indent he has put the ocean, off the coast of India, filled with large islands. The Ganges River has an
utterly false direction, flowing from the northern mountains, not into the sea, but to Paradise, like one of the two Euphrates rivers, here delineated. Northwest Africa is marked off, like the northeast of Asia, by a belt, which was perhaps intended for mountains, as in the other case, but remains as a mere linear mark with the legend, Sandy and Desert Land.

The gallery of 14 monstrous peoples along the southern edge of Africa between the western branch of the Nile and the ocean is a fascinating innovation. No surviving text locates all of these monstrous peoples at the southern edge of Africa; in fact, many of them are usually located in India, in some cases explicitly near the Ganges River. Thus, it seems to have been the cartographer’s decision to locate these peoples together at the edge of the world. It is difficult to know how to interpret these images of the monstrous peoples, each within its frame. Chet van Duzer asks are we to understand that the frames represent physical confinements? If so, who restrained them? Are they confined in the far south by the Nile, the same way Gog and Magog were confined behind the mountains in the north? The Duchy of Cornwall fragment and the Ebstorf and Hereford maps similarly locate the monstrous peoples in frames or enclosures; on the Ebstorf map these peoples are separated from each other by mountains, which does imply confinement.

Among the monsters of this region are Dog-headed Folk and people with heads in various stages of aggressiveness, having either descended between their shoulders or else absorbed the entire trunk of the body. Besides these there are cannibals, a race with six fingers, Troglodytes, Serpent-eaters, Skiapodes, and a nation that obtained shadow from the hugeness not of their foot but of their lip; tribes also without tongues, without ears, or without noses; others who, having only a little hole for mouths, were forced to suck their food through a reed; Maritime Aethiops with four eyes; and beings who never walked, but crawled on hands and feet. These races, fourteen in all, come mostly from Solinus; many of them occur also on Ebstorf, on Hereford, or on both.

The draftsman’s excessive regard for a literal interpretation of the Old and New Testaments explains the orbo-centric position of Jerusalem. In fact much the same reason may be used to account for the Psalter’s eastern orientation. So many biblical references and place-names within Palestine and adjacent Bible lands are given that this area occupies more than a third of Asia. The Ark of Noah appears very clearly on a mountain of Armenia, and a large fish swims in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, perhaps as a reminiscence of the New Testament history. The Barns of Joseph, close to Babylon and Egypt, show us that our artist has heard of the Pyramids. The most famous cities of the ancient world, and the most famous sites of the Bible, are nearly all represented;
while the immense and symmetrical Jerusalem, in the very middle of the world, forms a
perfect center to an exact circle.

_Nubia_, as it is commonly known, was called _Æthiopia_ in classical antiquity, a
name that remained widely used throughout the Medieval Period and even later. The
importance still attached to the term “Ethiopia” in the Middle Ages may be explained by
the nature of the sources that supplied the medieval knowledge about Africa. The works of Latin classical
authors like Pliny the Elder and Solinus or post-classical and early medieval writers such as Orosius
and Isidore of Seville were still regarded as the main authorities on geographical subjects. Another reason
lies in the fact that “Ethiopia” is mentioned several times in the Bible, in both the Old and New
Testaments.

One must bear in mind, however, that
medieval writers used the word _Ethiopia_ (or _Ethiopes_) to designate a variety of geographical and ethnic
realities. Etymologically, Ethiopia is the territory of the _Ethiops_, whose skin has been burnt by the
scorching sun of the southernmost extremities of the
earth. Therefore, Ethiopia is usually not conceived as
as a vast and vague area covering the southernmost part of Africa, along the shores of
the encompassing Ocean.

_Nubia_ is not mentioned on the _Psalter mappamundi_ and the more common term
“Ethiopia” is found instead. Nevertheless, both the mountains and the gates of _Nubia_ are
depicted in the relevant place, across the Nile, between the Red Sea and the surrounding
Ocean.

The closest relation of the _Psalter_ map is the _Ebstorf_, which is probably junior by
at least half a century; but the former is remarkable for a number of old names which do
not occur on the maps of either _Ebstorf_ or _Hereford_ maps. Its delineation of the
monstrous races of the south show a more antique character, and so probably a closer
relationship to the common 11th (?) century original. This original probably contained
many names and legends, attached to various indications of cities and natural features,
which have only partially survived in the derivatives. In the text of the _Psalter_ map there
seems to exist a very imperfect copy of this original, both in amount and style, though it
gives us an astonishingly large mass of matter for its size. In its delineation the world-
picture the _Psalter_ perhaps reproduces its model better than in its text; the scribe was
presumably better as a draftsman than as a scholar.

The _Psalter_ and _Ebstorf_ maps also have a curiously similar treatment of the
Caspian Rampart (otherwise _Alexander’s Wall_, the _Hyrcanian Mountains_, or _Barrier of the
Jews_ - some scholars believe that this feature is actually the reflection of a vague or
confused reference to the Great Wall of China), shutting in the Gog-Magog and other
monsters of the North; but the _Gates of Alexander_ are more clearly marked on the _Psalter_
than anywhere else in this family of maps. As shown below, Noah’s Ark on Mount
Ararat is next to the Caspian Rampart. The two bays that run off northward from the
_Erythraean_ indent of the ocean are somewhat unusual in their position and conception;
one corresponds to the upper part of the Persian Gulf, the other to the sea at the mouth
of the Indus, the Gulf and Runn of Cutch, or perhaps the Gulf of Cambay. On the Psalter, Jerome, Hereford and Ebstorf maps alike, Africa stretches round very close to the neighborhood of India; and further similarities may be observed in the unnatural abridgement of the three major peninsulas of southern Europe: Greek, Spanish and Italian.

With the Hereford map the textual correspondence is almost as noticeable as with the Ebstorf map; the difference in cartographic form are often probably mere arbitrary eccentricities of the designer. One may consider this little circular plan in the Psalter, so minute in scale, so immense in the quantity of its details, as a sort of bridge or transition between the types represented by Ebstorf, Hereford and Sawley maps. At the same time, like Ebstorf and Hereford, it stands much further away from the Jerome maps (#215) than does the work of Henry; but, with the Jerome map of the orient, it helps us to fill in the gap which has been left in the Far East of the Ebstorf example. Perhaps the Trees of the Sun and Moon, as shown on the Psalter, correspond to the Pillars of Alexander and of Hercules in the original design.

Outside its own ‘family’, the Psalter map has some points of agreement both with Lambert of St. Omer (#217) and with Beatus (#207) maps. Of modern names it gives us several in Europe, one in Africa, but none in Asia. The most interesting of these are Damietta, held by the Crusaders in the middle of the century but in an entirely wrong position; the Rusciae or Russians, perhaps derived from the Ruzia of Adam of Bremen, the Olcus or Volga, the ‘Land of the Western Slavs’, Ala or Halle in Germany and three names in Britain, viz. Scotland, Walni [Wales] and Cornwall. About 145 geographic names are noted. The semicircle of the Caucasus Mountains with the Caspian Cates and the rivers of Scythia are not named, but they are easily recognizable. New names in Europe can be found in the north and east (Halle, Norway, Western Sclavenia), as well as in Great Britain.

In coloration, the Psalter map shows seas in green (except the Red Sea which is colored red), the rivers are blue, and the relief is represented by naturally colored lobed chains. The settlements are displayed as ochre triangles. The English Channel, and thus Britain’s island nature, is not clearly indicated on the Psalter map; this is largely due to fading of the green pigment used to paint the Channel. But the depiction of England is much less detailed and emphatic than we would expect on a map made for English royalty. The only names on it are ‘britannia’, ‘cornubia’ [Cornwall] and ‘walni’ [Wales]. An ochre dot represents what one supposes must be London, for it is not labeled, and very tellingly, this dot is smaller than every other ochre city symbol on the map. Medieval cartographers certainly knew how to place visual emphasis on particular
regions when they wished to do so. There is no such graphic emphasis on the Psalter map. Britain on the Psalter world map, with its emphasis on Cornwall, and the relatively detailed river systems probably ultimately derive from a Roman source.

There is, however, considerable emphasis on France. This emphasis is particularly visible when one compares the size of the French territory, not only with Britain but also with the Iberian Peninsula, which seems compressed south of the Pyrenees. The river system in France is well depicted, which, as noted above, is based on the Descriptio mappe mundi. The city of Paris is named (parisius) and its location on an island is clearly indicated; moreover, the ochre symbol for the city is large and unique on the map. Most of the city symbols are ochre triangles representing buildings and, by synecdoche, the city; the more important cities of 'alexandria, 'roma, 'constantinopolis, 'cartage' and 'troia' are represented by threefold triangles, and Jerusalem is uniquely represented by the large "bullseye", as discussed above. The symbol for Paris has a rectangular base with a tower rising from the middle, evidently an attempt to depict rather than merely symbolize a building, like the drawings for Calais (Callia) and St Denis (Deinsia). According to Chet van Duzer the mappa mundi on the Psalter recto is not a copy of the Westminster mappa mundi. Its model was French: this is demonstrated by the exaggerated prominence of Paris and of France.

The most luxurious medieval Psalters contain full-page illuminations before the text, and a series of illuminated initials within it; this Psalter has both. In addition, its map is a unique representation of the world, in an age when foreign travel was difficult and hazardous, and the art of map-making - in the modern sense - in its infancy. In fact medieval people knew that the world was not flat: a 13th century encyclopedia compares the way in which humans can walk around the surface of the globe to the way in which a fly can walk around an apple without falling off when it is upside-down at the bottom. Despite this, the world was conventionally represented as a flat circle, oriented with the East at the top ('to orient' something literally means to make it face east). The upper part of the circle is occupied by Asia, and the lower half divided into two quarters for Europe and Africa.
The fact that Jerusalem is in the center of the map, and the whole world is presided over at the top by Christ attended by angels, clearly shows that medieval people saw geography in terms of the biblical world, and Earth’s creation by God. But within this overall structure, the map demonstrates an interest in more local places: the countries of the British Isles are discernable in the lower left quadrant, and despite the very limited space available one can make out rivers such as the Thames and Severn, and London is marked with a gold dot.

It would be easy to assume, looking at a map like this, that medieval map-makers were ignorant or incapable of making maps that are ‘accurate’ in the modern sense, but this would be to overlook their purpose. A map such as this was not intended, like a modern atlas, to guide someone in their travels from one place to another, but to show important places in an overall scheme. The distortion of ‘real’ geography can be compared to the way in which modern maps of city subway systems - such as Harry Beck’s *London Underground* map - radically re-arrange distances and placements to make a more comprehensible diagram.

The map and manuscript was almost certainly made in England sometime in the mid- to late-13th century, perhaps in or near the city of Westminster or London. The inclusion of certain saints in the litany of the manuscript, however, suggests an association, if not origin, to Worcester. Traditionally, the manuscript, and thus the map, is dated to sometime after 1262, the year in which the feast of Richard of Chichester, which appears on f. 12v, was established. He appears as such in the calendar. Other saints in the calendar (such as the relatively obscure St Erkenwald, a seventh-century bishop of London) indicate that the book was probably made in London, and this is supported by the style of the illumination. It has also been proposed that the map is a miniature version of one that is known to have been painted on the wall of the King’s bed-chamber in the palace of Westminster. The *Psalter* map’s small size and high level of detail suggest that it was copied from a larger model map, and the question arises as to whether the images of the monstrous peoples on the *Psalter* map (or its model) came from the *Mirabilia mundi* (a French bestiary from 1277), or the images in the *Mirabilia* from a map. The discussion on copying from a large detailed map raises questions about the model for the *Psalter* map, and whether it was the *mappa mundi* in Henry III’s (1207-72) *Painted Chamber* at Westminster. It has been repeatedly asserted that Henry III’s map was the source of the *Psalter* map. That map was lost in a fire in 1263, and the *Psalter* map was produced in London after 1262, so there may have been a window of time during which the one could have served as a model for the other. Theoretically, such a copy could have served as an intermediary, even if the Westminster map was destroyed before the *Psalter* map was painted. Peter Barber suggested that in terms of time, location and access, the Westminster map would seem the likeliest prototype for the *Psalter* map. He and others have repeated this theory in later works. Daniel Birkholz accepted the suggested close similarity of the *Psalter* and Westminster maps as fact, and on that basis drew detailed conclusions about how the Westminster map expressed Henry III’s sacralized body and changing ideas about the nature of kingship in the 13th century.

Found in a private book, the map is unlikely to have been influential in its day – it is likely a vestige of a larger tradition, rather than an exemplar for other works of the period. Yet it is this map, perhaps more than almost any other, which is reproduced as a typical *mappamundi* in the broader field of medieval art history. Thus, this one page in an illuminated manuscript is one of the most important surviving examples of 13th century
map-making. It tells us much about 13th century English men and women’s knowledge of the world around them, and about their understanding of their place within it.

Text Translation:
I. City of Iazaron. Land of Cora. Saima.
8. [Lesser] Scythia.

LOCATION: British Library (Add. MS. 28681, fol. 9r)
SIZE: 10 x 15 cm, 8.5 cm diameter

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#223


Hahn-Woernle, Brigit (ed.), Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte (Ebstorf: Kloster Ebstorf, 1987), 32


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*illustrated
Reproduction of the Psalter Map by Konrad Miller, 1895
Gog and Magog behind the Caspian Rampart and Noah’s Ark on Mount Ararat
Psalter mappamundi, 1225-1265 A.D., 8.5 cm (3.7 inches) diameter  
(oriented with East at the top)  
Manuscript on vellum: BL Add. MS 28681
The area of the Psalter mappamundi superimposed on a modern map outline (East at the top)
The Psalter List Map contains approximately 75 individual inscriptions. Here the earth is embraced by Christ, who tramples the two dragons underfoot. Instead of a pictorial representation of the world, a list of provinces, cities and islands is given, divided into the three continents. See also the Psalter map #223 British Library, BL Add. MS 28681, fol.9v (#205V/#223)
The Psalter Map

On the verso of the Psalter world map (fol. 9r) is this Psalter List map. This T-O List map is on fol. 9v, and has a large 'T' that divides the circle into Asia, Europe and Africa, and each part is filled, not with the outlines of coasts or other geographic features, but rather with text listing the important provinces and cities of each region. The map is on a reddish ochre background decorated with çintamani inside a border of foliate scrolls set against a blue ground. Christ is flanked by four angels and embraces the world, as he does on the Ebstorf mappa mundi; his feet extend below the map and crush the heads of the two wyverns. The tail of the wyvern on the left grows into floral decoration, while the tail of the wyvern on the right curls into a knot and extends upwards.

The use of alternating red and blue backgrounds to distinguish adjacent illustrations is common in medieval art and may be seen close at hand in the gallery of monstrous peoples on the fol. 9r map. This technique was not necessary to distinguish the maps on folios 9r and 9v, as they are on opposite sides of the page, but its employment confirms that a programmatic relationship is intended between the two maps, as is suggested by their similarity of size and iconographic context that includes Christ, angels and the wyverns. But what is that relationship, and why was it thought necessary to include two maps in the psalter?

As discussed by van Duzer, the striking difference between the maps, of course, is that one is graphic and the other almost purely textual. A number of medieval authors, including Gervase of Tilbury (d. c. 1220) and Roger Bacon (c. 1214-92), addressed the complementarity of maps and texts, and while it seems that this dichotomy must be part of the intended relationship between the maps, these authors discussed the complementarity of maps and discursive texts, rather than lists of place names. Hugh of St Victor also discussed this kind of complementarity. He also wrote texts that include extensive lists of toponyms; word-and-image complementarity and visualist listing were key components of his mnemonics, pedagogy and theography, his theological cartography.

The other notable contrast between the two images involves the wyverns: on fol. 9r the wyverns are unimpeded, while on fol. 9v Christ is crushing them beneath his feet. It is tempting to see a connection between Christ’s embracing of the world and his crushing of the wyverns on fol. 9v: both indicate a greater involvement with sublunar matters than we see on fol. 9r. This difference suggests that perhaps we are to see the map on fol. 9v as representing a later stage in Christian history than that on fol. 9r. The matter is not clear, and van Duzer does not see any differences in the details of the two maps that would support such an interpretation. Despite the fact that the maps were painted by different artists, it is entirely possible that a program of two maps was planned from the beginning; we must also allow the possibility that the map on the verso was painted later, and the program conceived only when it was painted.

While Orosius and Isidore of Seville influence much of the Psalter List map’s contents, a large percentage of the toponyms can be found in Hugh of Saint-Victor’s Descriptio Mappe Mundi, and a lesser percentage in Lambert de Saint-Omer's maps of the world and Europe (#217). And while much of the content is found in the Descriptio Mappe Mundi, the format of the lists follows more closely Hugh's Chronicon, which is also in list format, divided into provinces, cities in each province, and geographical features. The Psalter List map retains the traditional T-O construction, which draws attention to the three known continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. The world is represented as a sphere, but instead of a pictorial image of the world, this map lists the provinces and cities that are located in each of the three continents. As with almost all mappaemundi, the
cardinal directions have been rotated 90 degrees to the left so that the East, here India, is at the top of the map. It appears that the same compass hole was used to draw both the Psalter List map and the world map (fol. 9r, above) on the other side of the folio. Here, the point sits barely off center of the intersection of the “T” diagram.

The map’s inscriptions, are mostly the work of at least two hands, one who copied the lists for Asia and Europe, and another who copied the list for Africa; two different inks were used. Asia, the top semi-circle section, is split between its Major and Minor regions. Asia Major is described as a place that has 18 provinces and 31 cities. Asia Minor has 11 provinces and 13 cities, though only 11 cities are listed. The city after Scythia Inferiore appears to be missing. Likewise, after the province of Crete, the rest of the word insula has been scraped away, was never finished, or was completed with a different type of ink that has since disappeared. The scribe oscillates between writing the word civitates to begin the list of cities using an upper-case “C” (see Sicilia), or a lower-case “c” (see Armenia.)

Larger “I” initials begin the word “In” and provide a visual cue for each province within Asia Major and Minor. Gold leaf was applied to a few chosen initials, and creates a visual path that carries the eye diagonally across the Asia section. The gold leaf was laid on top of a yellow-ochre, painted as a base to help hold the metal in place. The larger “I” initials were painted first, with either blue or ochre/gold, then flourishes painted in a red or blue wash were added.

The Africa section is unique not only because it was written by a different hand and ink, but also because it does not list the number of provinces and cities within the region. Instead, the section begins with a statement that outlines the limits of the continent: The boundaries of Africa: in the east, the Nile; in the south, the torrid zone; in the north, the Mediterranean Sea; in the west the reflux of the Mediterranean Sea [Straits of Gibraltar]. It has the below-written provinces. Nine provinces follow, each are marked with a larger letter; five have gold leaf.

Ethiopia is divided into three sections: west, east and outer. These inscriptions are unique from the rest in the map in that they provide geographical information. Cadiz, for instance, in western Ethiopia, is described as a place that is near the Atlas Mountains. Damage prevents a full translation for Outer Ethiopia’s inscription, however the word monstra is legible.

Europe is described as a place with 34 provinces and 25 principle cities, though only eight cities are listed. No larger letters in this section distinguish the provinces from the cities, the only flourishing letter in this section marks the "E" in Europa. The scribe varies in using an abbreviation for in quae (see Ytalia), and "c" for civitas (see Belgis). The last inscription, Norvegia, is spread out to fit the rest of the quadrant. It is moments like this, along with the varying method of inscribing civitas, civitates, or just “c”, that suggest that the scribe is more concerned with matters of space and design.

Despite the tears and repairs on the outer edges, the Psalter List map remains in remarkable condition. The outermost rim of the map is painted with a deep green color whose chemical composition is likely the cause of the corrosion of the lower right quadrant. The paint was perhaps verdigris, known for its destructive chemical composition. Modern repairs have fixed this damage. Tears through Scotia and Mauritania confirm that both Psalter Maps are painted on one single folio.