TITLE: *Maps of Matthew Paris: England*
DATE: *ca. 1250 A.D.*
AUTHOR: *Matthew Paris (1195-1259)*
DESCRIPTION: In the 12th and early 13th century, the monastery of St. Albans in England possessed what may be called an historical school, or institute, which was then the chief center of English narrative history or chronicle, and with a different environment might have become the nucleus of a great university. Among the writers of this school, the greatest was a Benedictine monk Matthew Paris, whose three chief works contain various maps and plans unsurpassed in European medieval geography, before the rise of the *portolani* [nautical charts]. Thus, in the *Historia Major*, or *Cronica Majora*, we have the so-called *Itinerary to the Holy Land*, or *Stationes a Londinio ad Hierosolymam*, as well as a *mappamundi*, a map of Palestine, and the first of Matthew's four maps of England. Again, in the *Historia Minor*, or *Historia Anglorum*, there is another form of the *Palestine Itinerary*, the second and third maps of England, and the *Situs Britanniae*. Lastly, in the *History of St. Albans*, a portion of the supposed Pilgrim-road, as far as southern Italy, is given in another shape, together with the S*chema Britanniae*.

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.

Among all designs of purely medieval origin in Europe, Matthew's plans of England, as he knew it, show the best evidence of critical study, the most systematic attempt at an exact delineation of a specific country. They are, in fact, remarkable instances of what Claudius Ptolemy called *Chorography* or regional geography *(see #119)*; and they would be even more important, but for another consideration. At the very time that the English chronicler was drafting these maps, compass-charts (based on coast-surveys, of a minuteness hitherto unknown) were beginning in southern Europe. In comparison with these *portolani*, Matthew's work has been considered secondary; for at his best he only represents approximate and traditional knowledge; the only bases of true geography, the fixing of terrestrial positions by celestial observations, and the independent and detailed examination of limited areas by practical travelers, were first given us on an adequate scale by the new school of Mediterranean pilots and map-makers. The monk of St. Albans was, after all, a student and a bookman, rather than an independent investigator of nature.

The four maps that Matthew Paris has left us of his native country (and especially the two examples in the Cotton Library) are the finest achievements of medieval student-geography, according to the highly critical Charles Beazley. All four copies appear to be from the annalist's own hand, though the two not in the Cotton Library are cruder by comparison. The Cotton form of Paris' *England* (British Library, Cotton MSS, Claudius, D.) measures 33.8 x 22.4 cm and is the best and most complete. The execution is admirable, the coloring detailed and systematic. The sea on west and east is colored green, like the inland gulfs and salt waters; rivers are either blue or red; the province divisions are marked (in some cases) in red and blue; the mountains and Roman walls (of Hadrian and the Antonines) are yellow; the legends and inscriptions are by turns red and black. To the north, however, the sea has been left uncolored. At

the edges this map is somewhat bent inwards, and on the left border something has been cut away. The outlines of the coasts are, in general, admirably shown, especially the west coast, with the westward reaching promontories of Galloway, Wales and Cornwall. The east coast is less satisfactory, for neither the indentation of the Wash nor the broad eastward projection of Norfolk appear, and by some confusion a point on the coast of Suffolk is taken as the southeastern corner of Britain, with the result that the Thames is shown as debouching into the English Channel.

In the far north, the sketchy outlines of Scotland show that relatively little was known of this remote part of the island. Indeed, on two of the maps the Firths of Clyde and Forth join in such a way as to cut off *Scocia Ultra-marina* from the remainder of Britain, with which it is connected by a bridge. The courses of the main rivers, Severn, Humber, Avon, Thames, on the whole are well delineated. A large tract in the east is labeled *mariscus* to designate the Fen country, and the mountains Snowdon, Plynlimon and Cheviot appear in their correct positions. The northern Scottish Highlands are described by long legends as mountainous and woody regions which generate an uncultivated and pastoral people, inasmuch as a great part of this area is boggy and full of reeds. Argyll is a "*trackless and watery district well adapted to cattle and pasturage,*" and South Wales is spoken of in much the same way. Among the islands off the coast we notice *Sheppey, Thanet, Wight*, possibly some of the Channel Islands, *Sephe, Thanet, Vecta, Ven, Grenese* [Guernsey], *Purland, Sulli, Lundeth, Engleseia insula, Man, Tyren insula, insula Columkilli, Orkades insule* [Portland Head, Sicily, Lundy, Anglesey, Man, Tiree, lona and, to the east of Scotland, Icolmkill or Iona and the Orkneys]. The Hebrides are conspicuously absent, and in their place a legend reads *immense and trackless sea.*

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 aqui[lo]nem & autrum [vas]turn mare res[pici]t ubi non est nisi [m]onstrorum habi[ta]cio. 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.

A large number of cities are placed more or less in their proper positions, together with the names of counties and other territorial divisions; and finally the Roman walls from Forth to Clyde and from Carlisle to Newcastle make the most prominent feature among the works of man. Here also, for the first time in Northern Europe, we have a map with the North at the top; and in this we may see a victory of revived scientific feeling over the ecclesiastical preference for the East, and of North-European feeling over the Arabic and other influence which had made the South the primary quarter of the heavens. But the Ptolemaic arrangement, here reproduced by Matthew, was also better adapted for a sketch of the long and narrow island of Britain, tapering towards the North, and hence the possible explanation of its reappearance in this map. Again, practically speaking, orientation to the East would have made

Matthew's England run on to two pages of the manuscript, broken in the middle by the fold. A legend on Paris' map of Britain demonstrates how map scale could be adjusted to fit the circumstances: "*if the page had allowed it, this whole island would have been longer*". And since the places named on his basic route are more or less equidistant on the ground - he very likely viewed them as staging points - as well as on the map, where they are simply entered one below the other without much space between, they provide a very rough basis of scale as well as relative position.

LOCATION: Great Britain - British Library, Cotton MS., Claudius D.vi, fol. 12v
British Library Board, BL Royal 14C vii, fol 5v

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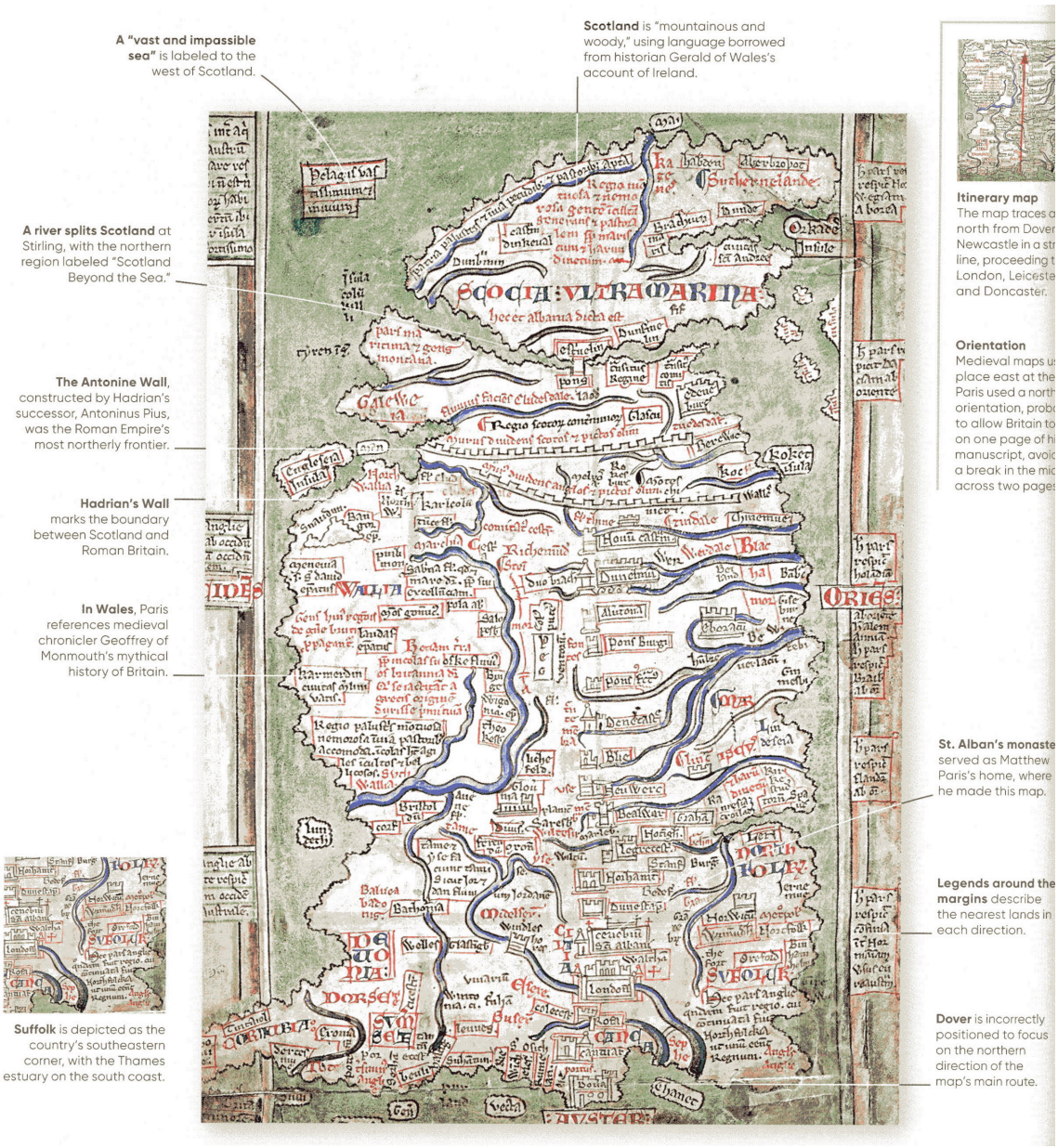
*illustrated


SCOCIA: VLTRAMARINA:
hec et albania dicta est
Pelagus vas
Suthernelande.
Orcades
Insule
Regio scotor cohabitancium
Glasgu
Galwegia
Cumberlanda
Walli
Wallia
Anglesey
Insula
Richemund
Duncimu
Alurond
Pons Burgi
Pons fracti
Denedale
Bliebi
Heuuerc
Bealuar
Hoxhamscr
Dunestapl
Cenobiu sci albani
Waltha
London
Cantuar
Sudsaxum
Cicestr
Wintonia
Hantescira
Dorsetsc
Middlesex
Bedefordscr
Hertfordscr
Buchingehamscr
Oxenefordscr
Glouuecestrescr
Herefordscr
Salopescr
Cestrescr
Lincolnscr
Northfolk
Suffolk
Cantebrigescr
Huntedunescr
Northamptonscr
Warwicscr
Leicestrescr
Notingehamscr
Derbyscr
Staffordscr
Cornubia
Devonia
Somersetscr
Wiltescr
Bristou
Exonia
Cruca
Wintonia
Hantescira
Dorsetsc
Middlesex
Bedefordscr
Hertfordscr
Buchingehamscr
Oxenefordscr
Glouuecestrescr
Herefordscr
Salopescr
Cestrescr
Lincolnscr
Northfolk
Suffolk
Cantebrigescr
Huntedunescr
Northamptonscr
Warwicscr
Leicestrescr
Notingehamscr
Derbyscr
Staffordscr
Cornubia
Devonia
Somersetscr
Wiltescr
Bristou
Exonia
Cruca
AVSTER:
ORIGES:
Humbra
Lincolia
Lincolnia
Lincolnia
Lincoln


A "vast and impassible sea" is labeled to the west of Scotland.
Scotland is "mountainous and woody," using language borrowed from historian Gerald of Wales's account of Ireland.
A river splits Scotland at Stirling, with the northern region labeled "Scotland Beyond the Sea."
The Antonine Wall, constructed by Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, was the Roman Empire's most northerly frontier.
Hadrian's Wall marks the boundary between Scotland and Roman Britain.
In Wales, Paris references medieval chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth's mythical history of Britain.
Suffolk is depicted as the country's southeastern corner, with the Thames estuary on the south coast.
Itinerary map
The map traces a north from Dover Newcastle in a st line, proceeding t London, Leiceste and Doncaster.
Orientation
Medieval maps us place east at the Paris used a north orientation, probe to allow Britain to on one page of h manuscript, avoid a break in the mid across two pages
St. Alban's monaste served as Matthew Paris's home, where he made this map.
Legends around the margins describe the nearest lands in each direction.
Dover is incorrectly positioned to focus on the northern direction of the map's main route.
SCOCIA: VLTRA MARINA
Suthereneslande
Galeshe
WALLIA
ORIGES
SVEOLK
DORSETA
AVSTER



Map of Britain by Matthew Paris, British Library Board, BL Royal 14C vii, fol 5v



Cotton form of Paris' England (British Library, Cotton MSS, Claudius, D.)
measures 33.8 x 22.4 cm