

**TITLE:** *Canistris Maps*

**DATE:** 1335-1350

**AUTHOR:** *Opicinus de Canistris*

**DESCRIPTION:** While some earlier scholars would have labeled these maps as “the epitome of medieval European cartography”, due to the very ecclesiastical form and content, they were, indeed, an exception in this period’s mapmaking. Opicinus de Canistris (1296 to ca. 1350), a Pavian who worked at the papal court in Avignon, drew a series of imaginative maps, while acknowledging in a text written between 1334 and 1338 his use of nautical charts. Canistris’ maps are fanciful anthropomorphic perspectives on geography, cartography and religion, a style that was to become a popular form of social and political commentary in the 17<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In his recent book, *Body-Worlds, Opicinus de Canistris and the Medieval Cartographic Imagination*, Karl Whittington writes that on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 1334, this Italian priest named Opicinus de Canistris fell sick. Opicinus was a minor functionary and scribe at the papal court, which had moved to Avignon some thirty years earlier, and luckily for us he kept a kind of day-book that still survives. In a passage that describes what sounds like a stroke, Opicinus details how his body slowly became paralyzed; he temporarily lost his ability to speak, and much of his memory. But during this illness, Opicinus relates, he had a divine vision, writing that “my interior eyes were opened to discern the images of the earth and the sea.” These “images” were visions of continents and oceans transformed into human figures — the forms that Whittington calls “body-worlds.” As Opicinus slowly recovered from his illness, he regained the use of his right hand, and he took this healing to be a sign from God — he writes that his arm and hand would only move when he used them to make drawings of his visions. But like so many medieval visionaries, Opicinus had only been granted the image. Its interpretation was left to him. The representation and interpretation of this divine image of the earth would occupy much of the rest of his life. In over eighty surviving drawings, now kept in the Vatican Library and referred to by scholars as the *Vaticanus* and *Palatinus* manuscripts, he experimented with how he could uncover the meaning that he was sure God had planted in the vision he saw, in the hope that his drawings would help to renew the faith of all Christians.

As mentioned above, Opicinus’ drawings survive in two manuscripts, both kept in the Vatican Library in Rome. One is the “day-book” or diary mentioned — Vat. lat. 6435, usually called the *Vaticanus* by modern scholars. It is a medium-size book on paper, containing 90 folios. The first 48 contain little visual material besides a few marginalia, while the second half of the book includes some text-only pages, some full-page drawings, and some smaller drawings with extensive text on or around them. In all, the manuscript contains 36 substantial drawings. The other surviving drawings are found in Pal. lat. 1993, called the *Palatinus*. This “manuscript” is a collection of 27 huge unbound parchment sheets, averaging about two by three feet, although some are significantly larger. On either side of each sheet is a single large drawing or diagram.

There is no way of knowing how many other drawings Opicinus completed, and certainly no reason to believe that all or even a majority of his works have survived. Those that have survived are dated to the 1330s and 1340s. Opicinus almost always dated the *Vaticanus* drawings, which were composed between June and November of 1337. He returned to these folios frequently in the years that followed — many include changes, graphic additions, or new captions, which he dated individually (we find dates from the years 1338-1341, especially). The dating of the *Palatinus* is more complicated —



the large autobiographical calendar on fol. 11r, which provides the most complete information about his life, ends with June 1336, suggesting that this drawing was finished by that date. Other dates in the manuscript are scarce; most scholars agree that the bulk of the drawings were completed between February 1335 and June 1336, with later additions stretching all the way to 1350.

Victoria Morse's 1996 doctoral dissertation for the first time performed a large-scale study in order to demonstrate the logic of Opicinus' works. Describing her conception of the manuscripts' logic, she writes that "[Opicinus] did not set out to produce a treatise devoted to the logical exposition of his topic ... he used the manuscripts as a series of studies or probes into the nature of human perception, affection, and faith in order to gain insight into the mysterious process of salvation." Opicinus' logic was not linear, but rather contained an internal thread of ideas and positions. Morse's other crucial innovation, in addition to asserting the rational and intentional basis of Opicinus' thought, was to place the *Vaticanus* manuscript at the heart of her research. The *Vaticanus* was often mentioned by earlier authors, but had never been the object of extensive study, perhaps because its visual material is smaller and less elaborate than the large *Palatinus* folios. In contrast, Morse demonstrated that the *Vaticanus* holds the key to understanding Opicinus' thought: its drawings are more intimate and revealing, and it contains over a hundred pages of text.

Many have mischaracterized the actual subject matter of Opicinus' drawings. Numerous scholars such as Camille, Kris and Salomon point to Opicinus' "frequent" self-representation in the drawings. Others make claims about his treatment of gender binaries that turn out to be false. Salomon and others characterize the themes of the *Vaticanus* manuscript as just an extension of those in the *Palatinus*. These and other claims are refuted by Whittington with a basic statistical analysis of the manuscripts' subject matter. There are 88 extant drawings: 36 in the *Vaticanus* and 52 in the *Palatinus*. Whittington has also made the following observations/analysis: A number of statements can be made based on the above statistics regarding the differences in subject matter between the *Vaticanus* and *Palatinus* manuscripts. Far more drawings in the *Vaticanus* portray body-worlds (23), while few in the *Palatinus* do so (6). Nearly all of the drawings in the *Palatinus* feature what Whittington calls an "overarching containing structure" — a geometrical framework that contains all of the drawing's content. Almost none in the *Vaticanus* contains such a structure. This observation prompts the next — that the *Palatinus* drawings almost always include calendars (usually as part of the overarching containing structure), while few of the *Vaticanus* drawings do. Graphic sexual anatomy appears regularly in the *Vaticanus*, but not in the *Palatinus*. From these observations, Whittington generalizes some of the basic differences between the two manuscripts. The *Vaticanus* seems to be more of a personal manuscript, perhaps never intended for a wider audience. Its drawings are less structured and presentational, contain more sexual imagery, and include more personal themes, all of which we might associate with a private, rather than public function (although such distinctions were perhaps more fluid in 14<sup>th</sup> century Italy than they are today). Secondly, the drawings in the *Vaticanus* and *Palatinus* have very different structures; the *Vaticanus* uses the form of the *portolan* [nautical] chart to structure meaning and representations of bodies, while the *Palatinus* drawings use larger geometric, ecclesiastical, and temporal frames, which in turn often contain representations of the earth. Finally, the *Palatinus* drawings contain a temporal, cyclical element (numerous calendars and representations of the zodiac) that the *Vaticanus* drawings usually lack.

In an entry in the *Vaticanus* manuscript, Opicinus de Canistris wrote that “my interior eyes were opened to discern the images of the earth and the sea and to integrate them into my conscience ... and I composed them on ten pieces of paper.” This short passage conveys the initial inspiration for the geographical forms that Opicinus constructed, in a dizzying array of combinations, arrangements, and superimpositions, in dozens of drawings in the *Palatinus* and *Vaticanus* manuscripts. The passage describes a visionary experience: through *oculus meis interioribus*, Opicinus is granted a new view of the earth, one in which the land and the sea take on human attributes. The shapes of Europe, Africa, and the Mediterranean Sea each contain (or form) a human figure; these are the forms that Whittington calls “body-worlds,” and they constitute Opicinus’ most original and perplexing contribution to 14<sup>th</sup> century visual culture. Their enigmatic forms, expressions, and arrangements have the power to arrest the attention of modern viewers, reversing expectations about what sorts of imagery were possible in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

It was not unusual during the later Middle Ages to bring together the body and the earth in pictorial representations. Medieval *mappaemundi* often organized the land-forms of the earth around the shape of a crucifix (sometimes even a cruciform body), medieval astrological drawings commonly showed human figures at the center of cosmic and planetary networks, and the concepts of macrocosm and microcosm had been fully developed for a millennium. Most examples, however, lie in the realm of the theoretical, the academic, or the theological. One of the things that makes Opicinus’ drawings so unusual is that they also incorporate a visual tradition that was practical, empirical, and scientific — medieval sea charts, usually called *portolan* charts. The “world,” in Opicinus’ drawings, is always represented using these charts; they form the drawings’ structural basis and frame their meanings. *Portolan* charts were modern, cutting-edge diagrammatic maps of the Mediterranean region, and Opicinus’ use of them transforms what would otherwise have been old-fashioned, theoretical, and primarily textual drawings into a completely new type of representation. Opicinus was working during a crucial moment in the history of cartography, when numerous artists and mapmakers sought to combine old and new forms.

The relationship on the page between texts, diagrams, and pictures throughout Opicinus’ work is an especially important issue. It is possible, and productive, to partially separate Opicinus’ texts from his diagrams and pictures, especially those that represent his body-worlds vision. A significant problem with many previous studies of Opicinus’ drawings is that they take a few lines of text, from folios of the *Palatinus*, or from distant pages of text in the *Vaticanus*, and use them to “explain” the content of Opicinus’ strangest imagery. However, most of the *Vaticanus* texts are not connected to specific drawings, and Opicinus himself stated that he believed visual material to have a different, more direct appeal to the reader/holder than texts.

According to Whittington the captions on most of the drawings seem to interact with them in the following way: Opicinus created the visual material first, usually to address a particular theological question or theme. He intended the drawings to be available to any person for their spiritual self-analysis. The captions (and some of the texts), then, are often the evidence of Opicinus’ self-analysis — he uses himself as a case study, personalizing the drawings through the text. He often kept adding to the drawings over many years, including new details or textual explanations, and dating them to a specific day. Still, crucially, this does not make the drawings, in their inception, “about” Opicinus. Interpreting the vision with relation to his own body and

life was only one of the tactics that he used. Most of the drawings suggest other interpretive avenues, through personifications, allegorical confrontations, or superimposition; one does not have to turn to Opicinus' biography to explain them.

A word must also be said on the issue of audience. Opicinus' works present a conundrum when it comes to audience and reception, since there is no textual or visual evidence that anyone ever actually saw the drawings. Simply put, we do not know if they were ever viewed as more than a curiosity by those who encountered them. As mentioned above, it seems possible that the *Vaticanus* was never meant to be viewed by others; much of it is arranged chronologically (like a diary), rather than thematically, and the subject matter of the texts and images suggests a private function. The large size of the *Palatinus* folios suggests a more public function, given their physical similarity to large medieval wall maps and *portolan* charts. The drawings in both manuscripts could have been preparatory studies for some larger-scale project or commission that was never carried out. It is also possible that these works were intended, like several of Opicinus' earlier treatises, for the Pope. But in the end, we know little about the audience they were intended for. Finally, one must face head-on the issue of these drawings' strangeness. The danger of any study of Opicinus is that in seeking out the contexts in which one may understand Opicinus' work as logical and coherent, one risks losing sight of what makes them so exceptional. Looking at the drawings as a whole, there can be no doubt that there are distinct threads running through them – themes, problems, and possibilities that Opicinus set out to explore.

The elaborate, complex, and beautiful drawings that Opicinus created in the years following his illness and vision are the subject of this monograph. Their unusual forms complicate our most basic assumptions about what and how medieval artists could represent. The drawings took many forms – there is no representative example. But a look at just the following drawing instantly reveals their uniqueness. Here one sees before a map of the Mediterranean world – Europe, North Africa, Anatolia and part of the Near East are left the white color of the paper, and the seas around them are tinted with a reddish-brown wash. Inside, above, or coexistent with the continents, the bodies begin to appear. In this example, Europe is embodied as a man – his head occupies the Iberian Peninsula, his chest and stomach lie in France (where some kind of beast in the ocean tries to bite at his shoulder), his arm arches up through the lowlands and Germany, and his legs occupy the Italian peninsula and the Dalmatian coast. Across the Mediterranean, we see the figure of Africa, depicted as a woman. Her face is to the west, shown in profile as she seems to whisper into the ear of the European figure across the Straits of Gibraltar. Her pointing hand lies in modern-day Tunisia, and her legs and feet occupy Egypt.

What we see, then, is an embodied map – a picture of the earth's surface that is also a depiction of human bodies. Many of Opicinus' drawings contain maps, and nearly all contain bodies. Visual parallels to these drawings certainly exist: body-maps have been produced in numerous periods, including such famous examples as the *Ebstorf Map* (#224, a medieval world map that placed Christ's body in the corners of the earth), the *Leo Belgicus* (a map of the Netherlands and Belgium formed into the shape of a lion, the earliest example of which dates from 1583), or the *Europa Regina*, a depiction of Europe as a royal female (see below). The meaning of such imagery obviously depends on context, but these diverse examples demonstrate how a land, country, or region has often been embodied within a human figure, to show the potential power of that space, or even the dominion of a figure over it.





Opicinus de Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vatican, Vat. Lat. 6435 fol 79v (detail)

Opicinus' beliefs and hypotheses about the earthly, the heavenly, and the human are encoded in the very structures of his drawings. These structures form the core of the drawings' disorientation and strangeness — maps are piled on top of other maps, sometimes transparent and sometimes opaque, in a seemingly endless play of permeability and superimposition. In these drawings, Opicinus was not trying to express a single concept or doctrine, but rather to visualize the possibilities raised by an entire new way of looking at the world, based on what he had seen during his visionary experience of 1334. The images of Africa and Europe as human figures were the core of this experience, but the interpretation of the vision was left up to him. The incredibly diverse drawings that he created in the years that followed were his way of exploring the meaning of this vision and experimenting with different strategies for representing its shape and scope, searching for the arrangements and combinations that would lead him to the deepest meaning.

Over half of Opicinus' 80 drawings in the *Vaticanus* and *Palatinus* manuscripts include at least part of a *portolan* chart. Some drawings contain one chart, others up to four; sometimes the continents and seas are embodied, while other times they are left plain. The varied formats of these diagrams cannot be taken for granted — their arrangements form a crucial and underexplored aspect of their meaning. According to Whittington the formats of Opicinus' body-world drawings can be grouped into four

categories: (1) single *portolan* charts, (2) *portolan* charts overlapping with local maps, (3) multiple *portolan* charts overlapping with each other, and (4) multiple, mirrored *portolan* charts.

Opicinus' body-maps are far more complicated than any of the examples above, and the question of what they mean is more difficult to answer. His drawings are so diverse and disorienting that generalizations about their design or meaning are difficult and often misleading. But looking at them as a group, perhaps the first thing one notices is that the map itself is incredibly accurate. The coastlines of the Mediterranean and the relative scale and position of the landforms are almost exactly the same as we know them to be today. Opicinus' maps were based on the most modern and technically accomplished cartography of his day — mariners' sea-charts, which we call *portolan* charts. According to Whittington, to explain what the body-worlds "mean," one must explore how and why Opicinus harnessed these maritime maps to a completely different purpose from that for which they were created. He used this technical, practical, scientific cartography to probe deeper into the nature of God and the created world. This encounter between the scientific and the spiritual is best explored by looking at the structures that Opicinus used to create the drawings. On the one hand, creating the body-worlds allowed Opicinus to literalize and simplify micro/macrocsmic connections between bodies and worlds in a way that few had been able to do before him. But he also used this idea in order to create images unrivalled in their complexity and interpretive difficulty, multiplying maps and figures across the page in kaleidoscopic networks. And just as the drawings' forms combine simplicity and complexity, their content also veers from the straightforward to the impenetrable. In either case, form and content are completely intertwined.

### **A Single Portolan Chart: Folio 74v in the *Vaticanus* Manuscript**

In a number of drawings, Opicinus used the most basic form of the body-worlds - presumably the one that he describes having received in his 1334 vision. These drawings depict a single Africa and a single Europe, separated by the Mediterranean Sea. The drawings in this first "category" are not all alike, and there is no evidence that Opicinus thought of them as a group, but finding language to describe and categorize their forms is a critical first step in their interpretation. Indeed, the drawings in this first category are very diverse. Several folios depict only the western portion of the standard Mediterranean *portolan* chart, limiting their view to the area between Gibraltar and the boot of Italy. Others include the entire range of the chart, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea and the Holy Land. But all of the drawings in this category share a single feature: they include only one map, one level of cartographic reality on the page.

Fol. 74v of the *Vaticanus* manuscript exemplifies this type. This folio includes a cartographic picture in the upper two-thirds of the page, and text at the bottom. Embodied drawings of Africa and Europe confront each other at the top of the page. The geographic range of the depicted *portolan* outline is narrow - we see Gibraltar, Tunisia, France, Spain, and Italy, but none of the eastern Mediterranean, which is cut off by the drawing's lower edge. Small captions and *rotae* are positioned at various points on the map; some of these are placed to comment specifically on a geographical feature, while others remark more generally on the drawing and its characters. The two figures that constitute, lie within, or coexist with Africa and Europe are classic examples of Opicinus' body-worlds (the third figure that often appears in the Mediterranean is not included, in this particular drawing). The female figure of Africa faces north, her

features seen in profile along the coastline. She seems to speak directly into the ear of the European figure, depicted partly in profile and partly from the front. Europe's head occupies the Iberian peninsula; the chest and stomach are in France, with an arm and shoulder arching through the lowlands and Germany; the Italian peninsula is a leg with a booted foot. The relationship between these human figures and the landforms is, as is always the case in Opicinus' drawings, very difficult to describe. Depending on the individual viewer's perception, the figures can seem to be lying on top of the land, growing out of it, or somehow placed under it — as if the landforms are windows through which we are looking. Most of all, however, these enigmatic forms seem to depict the earth and the bodies as coextensive, and of the same material — bodies made out of the earth. The more one looks at these body-worlds, the more one sees the human figures as figures — the stranger parts of their bodies, where the landforms do not align so easily with a normative human shape, become less and less noticeable.

As in all of Opicinus' drawings of the body-worlds, each figure takes on a specific identity, though in this example these identities are complex. The figure of Africa appears to be a woman; she is labeled *Babilon maledicta* [cursed Babylon] by the small caption above her forehead. She is a rare example of a figure with a distinct racial identity: Opicinus darkened her skin with a grey-brown wash, in a clear reference to an African or Middle-Eastern skin tone. The figure appears to be bare-chested, although no breasts are visible (perhaps they are covered by her long hair). Little is visible of her lower body, but she wears some kind of cloth wrapped around her waist. A worm or snake emerges from an otherwise empty circle on her stomach, twisting along the North African coast, its mouth gnawing on the figure's thumb near Carthage.

The identity of the European figure is far more complex. Captions suggest various identities: Christ, Opicinus, and a female personification of prudence are all indicated. One could even identify Europe in this drawing as a kind of conglomerate figure of Christianity. But the label above the head of the figure seems to identify it as Opicinus assuming the identity of "the house of God." Another caption in the Mediterranean Sea off the southern coast of France labels the figure as an *Ymago Prudentie*. However, the most prominent indicator of the figure's identity is the large *rota* around the face in the Iberian peninsula, which seems to label the figure as Christ. Large red capital letters spell out C-R-I-S-T-U-S, with each letter also being the first letter of one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. In two outer concentric rings Opicinus places the names of the seven planets and the days of the week. Another *rota* lies inside France, near the location that Opicinus usually associates with the "heart" of the Europe figure — Avignon. At the center of the roundel is a seated figure of Christ showing his wounds; around this are the names of seven episcopal seats, and the seven planets and their positions.

It seems most likely that the figure depicts a sort of hybrid — a personification of Christianity, with Christ at its head and its heart, surrounded by elements of the cosmic order. Opicinus then relates the figure to himself in a separate caption. Yet the figure remains enigmatic, and its gender seems deliberately indeterminate. The fact that the face is labeled as Christ's would indicate on the surface that the figure is male.





Opicinus de Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6435401. 74v



Its chest is bare (we can see the cloak falling away from the shoulder on the northern coast of France), but the lower roundel covers the place where a breast is often revealed in Opicinus' female European figures. The face is smooth and beardless (many male figures in Opicinus' work wear beards), and has long, flowing hair. The strongest indicator that the figure is female is the small child lying over Lombardy – the area always associated with the womb of the European figure. It appears that Europe is pregnant. The drawing thus suggests a combination of male and female elements: a pregnant female personification of Christendom, with Christ at the head and heart.

So what, then, is the drawing's content? According to Whittington it is mainly a confrontation between two figures: a figure of Babylon (probably representing Islam) and a figure of Christianity. The simplicity of this contrast stands out despite the extensive texts and interpretations written around it. Yet beyond the basic characters and the captions, the drawing's meaning is clearly activated or shifted by the placement of the two personifications within the geographical forms of the *portolan* chart; after all, it is not difficult to imagine a much simpler way to express this confrontation, using only pictures and no maps. In this first example, where the contrast between the two figures is simple and direct, we can more easily explore two ways that the form of the drawing – its geographical frame – may change the meaning of these figures. Opicinus uses the *portolan* chart to construct a binary system in which values can be opposed, and also to place these allegories or personifications within a space that is, in the broadest sense, real.

The forms of the body-worlds encouraged a binary opposition: Europe versus Africa. We find this again and again in the drawings that include only one map. Binary themes in similar drawings include a contrast between the mouth of hell and the temple of the Lord (fol. 79v), allegorized figures of Opicinus and Pope Benedict XII (fol. 69r), and personifications of infidelity and faith (fol. 73v). Yet their placement within a map, particularly an empirical one that was actually used for travelling, emphasizes the tenuousness of such binary oppositions. On a map you can literally sail by sea from one "place" or "body" to the other – each place is accessible to the other. In these simplest drawings, though, such a possibility is only hinted at; a much fuller manipulation of the metaphor of travel and movement between binaries, and indeed a subversion of the very concept of binary opposition, is found in Opicinus' more complicated images, discussed below.

### **Global/Local: Folio 84v in the *Vaticanus* Manuscript**

In three folios near the end of the *Vaticanus* manuscript, Opicinus' cartographic drawings add one more layer of meaning on top of the basic arrangement outlined above: he superimposes a gridded local map of Pavia, his hometown, on top of a single *portolan* chart. This interplay between the local and the global is not unusual within Opicinus' texts and captions on other drawings, which often comment on the everyday world of his youth and family (we must remember that he made these drawings in Avignon, not Pavia), but the specific visual alignment of parts of Pavia with parts of the Mediterranean region is unique in these three drawings. Opicinus played with this arrangement differently in each of the three drawings, changing the scales and position of the two maps, presumably seeking different correspondences.

Fol. 84v offers a clear example of this type of format. On the page we see the body-worlds with which we are now familiar: here, a female Europe confronts a female Africa, and the Mediterranean devil lies between them, his head to the east. The scene is

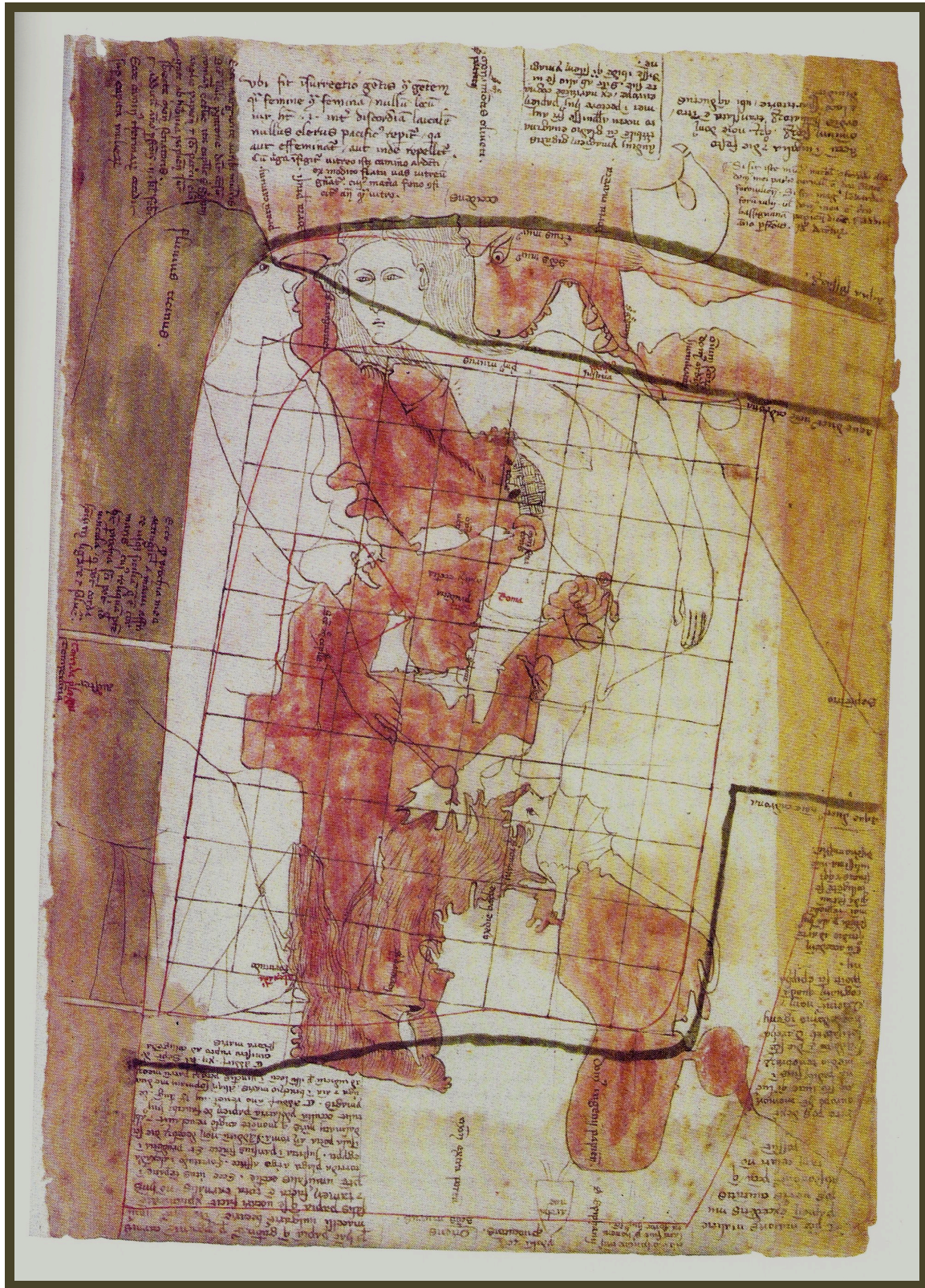


full of interesting and surprisingly graphic details, many of them interpreted in the marginal texts. For example, the Mediterranean figure appears to have two sexual organs — one massive penis that seems to be ejaculating onto the southern coast of Spain, and another that he clutches in his fist (presumably in an act of masturbation) near Venice. On the southern coast of France, a basket-woven pattern is explained in a caption as a basket to catch the excrement of the sea-figure. Despite these and other details on the figures, the actual bodies seem less important to Opicinus in these three drawings; the commentary focuses more on the physical interplay and connections between the two overlapping maps. The body-worlds are covered by the city grid of Pavia. This grid, eight squares by ten, is oriented in the same way as the map below, with east at the top of the page (the street grid of Pavia was, and still is, slightly off-axis from the cardinal points because of its alignment with the river, which is reflected in its positioning at a slight angle on the page). The local grid is filled in with detail; the numerous small labels in brown indicate churches, city gates, bridges, and monasteries in Pavia, while the few red captions refer to cities or regions on the *portolan* below (here, like elsewhere, Opicinus uses color to clarify his content for the reader). The huge green swath at the right of the page indicates the Ticino River, which is coextensive with the long veil or cloak worn by the Africa woman. The green lines at the top and bottom of the page show the path of several Pavian canals, and the three concentric red boundaries drawn around the page indicate the city walls.

According to Whittington the precise placement and scale of the two maps is certainly not accidental; the maps have been placed in a precise relation to one another in order to create and explain correspondences between them. This assertion is supported by the similar drawing on **fol. 84r**, in which the scale of the *portolan* chart is completely different (much smaller in comparison to the grid of Pavia); here, Opicinus identifies different correspondences and comes to different conclusions as a result of the change in scale. Back on **fol. 84v**, numerous captions explore the moral, theological, quotidian, and incidental correspondences created by the overlay of the city grid on the *portolan* chart. For example, in a short passage in the upper left corner of the page, Opicinus mentions that the body of the sea-devil extends beyond the inner city wall of the Pavian map, which he interprets as a sign that malice and mischief are spread out in the city; beyond the old city walls. It is not that he thinks that this image of the two maps placed in this particular arrangement is necessarily “correct” or “true” — on fol. 84r, the body of the sea-figure does not transgress the city walls. Opicinus just seems to be testing each possible arrangement on either side of the folio, turning it back and forth to see which parts of it align with things he believes to be true.

In contrast to this relatively simple correspondence, another caption shows how complicated his spatial interpretations could become. In the bottom right corner of the page is a caption that reads, “Just as the islands of purgatory pay a tax to the Roman Church, so too the Chapel of St. Gregory (of the England of Pavia) and the Chapel of St. Patrick (off to the side of the Ireland of Pavia) are subject to the monastery of the senator.” This cryptic passage explains a parallel that Opicinus noticed, probably incidentally, when he drew the two maps in this particular relation to one another: that the Pavian Church of St Gregory (a saint who led a vigorous campaign of conversion in England and Northern Europe at the end of the sixth century) fell over England on the *portolan* below, and the Pavian Church of St Patrick fell close to Ireland (though not directly over it). In addition, the monastery with which they were both associated fell near Rome on the *portolan* chart. In this example, there is no great meaning or revelation





Opicinus tie Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6435, fol. 84v



that is uncovered — just a recognition of the structural similarity between these local and global relations. Opicinus seems to say that when any two maps are placed in relation to each other, if they are true empirical representations of God’s created earth, one will find correspondences between them.

Other captions on the drawing allude to different connections. One interprets the significance of the placement of Opicinus’ home parish district, around the Chapel of Saint Mary, delineated with a red outline near Tunisia and Sicily on the lower map. Another seeks the “global” meaning of the location of Opicinus’ father’s house. Such interpretations are, I think, meant as models; as Morse demonstrated, Opicinus hoped that the drawings could be used by others to probe their own consciences and personal histories. The revelation and the experiment were meant to be used by anyone — Opicinus is using himself as a test case, taking examples from his own life, family history, and childhood, and using them to interpret the correspondence between the two charts. But anyone else could do the same, and would arrive at a different set of connections.

On fol. 84v each part of Opicinus’ hometown is given multiple interpretations, usually based on its placement on the *portolan* chart, but other times simply based on etymological connections, family stories, dreams, or coincidence. Yet the drawing is all about experimentation, layering, and play; to claim that creating or interpreting a drawing like this is a burden or struggle may be a modern misperception. Many parts of it must have been intentionally humorous, such as the basket for collecting the seaman’s excrement, the graphic sexual organs, the interpretation of the Europe woman’s pearl earrings, or the depiction of the Africa woman’s cloak as a green river. These are all examples of Akbari’s horizontal allegory, or of allegory as a primarily interpretive act; Opicinus creates the structure (which may or may not have an intrinsic meaning — in this case, it seems not to), but the primary work is put into interpretation, play, and the creative exploration of his visual construction.

Experimentation is the key concept for this drawing and the two others like it. Certainly the drawing contains multiple levels of reality: it is an allegorical depiction of three body-world characters in contact and dialogue, a depiction of the structural connections between local and regional realities, and a series of interpretive musings about the significance of these connections for Opicinus’ own life and family. But Opicinus piles on meanings, multiplies forms, and plays with realities seemingly as a form of experimentation. Even when texts in the *Vaticanus* indicated the stressors in Opicinus’ life — spiritual, moral, legal — the drawings remain exploratory and even lighthearted. Opicinus created, an over-determined world because of its opportunities and flexibility, not to build a burdensome system that would collapse on top of him. An over-determined world allowed him to make visible to himself and his potential readers the primary concerns, impulses, histories, and spaces of his world and his body in a way that led to potentially productive connections and revelations.

As a final word on this drawing, I want to return to one more visual feature: the form of the local city grid. As the reader may already have noticed, this grid strongly evokes the rhumb-line grids that were placed over contemporary *portolan* charts. The grid may offer a clue to Opicinus’ working process, or the way he was inspired to create these drawings. Without any words from him on the subject it is impossible to know where such an idea comes from, but perhaps the grids on the *portolan* chart(s) from which Opicinus was working reminded him of a gridded map of Pavia that he had seen, or perhaps even made. The very idea of creating this local/global drawing may have

been inspired by seeing the *portolan* grids. Even beyond this suggestion, the grid on fol. 84v offers further evidence that Opicinus viewed the *portolan* charts as empirical representations. Here, the grid structures the space of the local map, but also shapes the way we view the *portolan* below. Any resident or visitor familiar with the city would recognize that the local map of Pavia was a measured, accurate representation, and the fundamental hypothesis of this image and its interpretation is that correspondences can be deduced through the alignment of one measured map with another. Once again, a grid serves two functions, measuring the space of one reality and indicating the measurability of another.

### Two Charts, Overlapped: Folio 61r in the *Vaticanus* Manuscript

In the two previous examples, Opicinus constructed a drawing using only one *portolan* chart; on fol. 61r he uses the skeletons of two *portolan* charts of the Mediterranean region, which have been rotated and overlapped to form one image. Each of the two charts is rendered in a different scale, with a larger one oriented toward the top of the page and a smaller one pointed toward the bottom. The two images have been flipped along both a north/south and an east/west axis (in effect, mirrored two ways), so that they are positioned as complete opposites. This basic format is repeated on at least eight other pages in the *Vaticanus*; again, there are variations in the size and placement of the two maps, but all of these examples include two *portolan* charts that are laid on top of one another.

On fol. 61r, parts of each of the charts remain intact, while others are distorted or hidden by the overlapping forms. On each map, the western Mediterranean retains its integrity — France, Spain, and the northwestern coast of Africa are clearly visible both at the top and the bottom of the page. At the center, however, the confusion becomes overwhelming for the uninitiated viewer. In the smaller, lower image, the negative space of the chart — the sea — is tinted with a light brown wash, delineating the body of the so-called “Mediterranean Man,” often labeled “Lucifer.” His head and beard occupy the eastern Mediterranean (his ear tucked against the Nile delta and curving beard shaping the coast of the Anatolian peninsula), his arms gesture near Italy (one fist plunging violently east of Italy, forming the Adriatic), and his feet poke out near Gibraltar, between the faces of Europe and Africa. In contrast, the sea of the larger top map is not embodied, and retains the color of the paper. At the centre of the page the embodied eastern Mediterranean of the lower map (including the Black Sea) overlaps both the land and the sea of the upper map, so that its eastern half (part of Italy and all of Greece, Egypt, and Turkey) is obscured.

But is the map beneath really hidden? If one looks closer, certain parts of it are still present, if only in textual form. In the Italian peninsula of the upper map, for example, which is overlapped by the eastern Mediterranean of the lower map, we see the word *Roma* written over the sea (on the sea-man’s forehead), signaling where the city would have been on the map below. The maps’ superimposition encourages the viewer to seek correlations between them, and Opicinus reinforces these correspondences by drawing actual lines and lines of text to connect various parts. On this page he connects the two representations of the Adriatic with a diagonal line that slices through the center of the image, running from Venice on one chart to Venice on the other. This line could help the viewer perceive the image’s orientation, by providing a reference point for the location of the same city on each map at this crucial juncture at the center. Or, given the opposing genders of the two Europes in the maps, and the fact that the area at the top of

the Adriatic was understood as the erogenous zone of the European body, the line could suggest a sexual point of contact — even intercourse — between the two figures. It looks like a kind of symbolic twin to the spatio-indexical rhumb lines of the original *portolan* charts.

According to Whittington what Opicinus emphasizes with a drawing like fol. 61r is that both the physical and spiritual senses can be deceived. Visualizing this problem, he seems to suggest, can help one to avoid it. He grafts a spiritual system of correspondences and coordinations onto this new representation of the physical world, but specifically includes details that undermine both systems, seeking instead a negotiation between the two.

This doubling and mirroring of the *portolan* chart served a specific purpose: as Victoria Morse has argued, it allowed Opicinus to contrast the world as it was seen and known with the possibility of an alternate world converted to a state of grace. In this particular example, the map shows the natural world at the bottom and the spiritual world at the top: labels on the drawing indicate that *Affrica naturalis ypocrita* and *Europa naturalis* occupy the continents of the smaller chart while *Affrica spiritualis* and *Europa spiritualis* talk to each other in the larger chart above. Both figures of the “natural world” are male (a bearded, older figure in Europe and a tonsured monk in Africa), while both of the “spiritual” figures are female (Africa is a robed nun and Europe is a younger woman with long, flowing hair). Ms. Morse also points out that different renderings of the sea in the two charts likely correspond to their content; the embodied “devil sea” lies between the natural worlds, while the “spiritual sea” is left empty, perhaps to indicate its purity. The sea-figure takes control of the page’s center, superimposing his twisting body over the eastern half of the upper, spiritual chart — his “negative” space dominates the positive space of the other chart.

Each of the four land-figures bears an emblem on its chest — these signify the intention or motivation of each character. *Europa naturalis* bears a *tarasque* (a river demon from the Rhone) and *Europa spiritualis* contains an image of Christ showing his wounds, his side-wound situated suggestively close to Avignon, where Opicinus was living when he made the drawing. The two figures of Africa contain circular *rotae*, each labeled with the word *lanua*, [door] that show how different mental/sensual processes can lead to (or are the door to) sin or God. The *rota* on the breast of *Affrica naturalis* shows the mental processes that lead to sin: thinking, imagining, deciding, and delighting in (*cogitatio*, *ymaginatio*, *electio*, *delectatio*) lead the sinner to consent to sin (*consensus peccati*). Small lines connect the first four concepts to the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth of the Africa-figure, indicating the complicity of the exterior senses in this pathway to sin. In contrast, a caption on the *rota* for *Affrica spiritualis* points to the interior senses (*sensus interiores*) that indicate spiritual progress: meditation, contemplation, discernment, and rumination (*meditatio*, *contemplatio*, *discretio*, *degustatio*). These lead to the comprehension of God (*comprehensio Dei*).











Together, these elements constitute an allegorical representation. The message itself is simple enough: one must abandon the external senses that lead to sin in order to follow the internal senses to redemption. The question, just as in the previous examples, is how its meaning is changed, activated, complicated, or simplified by its construction within the doubled and overlapped forms of the *portolan* charts. We saw on **fol. 74v** how Opicinus, by framing his allegories within the *portolan* charts, solidified their meaning into measured form, aligning the world's shapes with the truths and figures they revealed. But if fol. 74v showed this process to be relatively straightforward, fol. 61r demonstrates that Opicinus was also aware of the dangers of aligning appearance with truth; appearances could just as easily deceive as reveal.

On **fol. 58r** of the *Vaticanus* Opicinus combines four small embodied *portolan* charts to create juxtapositions between the four seasons, the four cardinal directions, and the four states of the soul. Within the drawing, small lines suggest points of correspondence between elements in each of the four quadrants. These can either connect the same geographical location between two separate maps (as in the line drawn between the two Carthages on the upper left map and the lower left map), or establish a point of contact between the same physiological parts of two body-worlds on the same map (as in the line drawn between the reproductive areas of the Europe-woman and the Africa-woman in the upper-right map). The meaning of such lines remains ambiguous, but they do suggest points of contact and interconnection between elements that are otherwise set in opposition to one another. They also establish that the body-worlds' identities as both bodies and maps remain significant on their own; because connections rely on their status as both maps and bodies, one is not emphasized over the other.

#### **Four Charts, Mirrored: Folio 82r in the *Vaticanus* Manuscript.**

In a final example, **fol. 82r**, we see many of the principles and techniques of the other drawings pushed to the limits of recognition and interpretability. The three previous drawings were characteristic of a particular type; in contrast, this drawing is unique in Opicinus' oeuvre. It contains four complete *portolan* charts, all the exact same size, placed in careful relation to one another through overlapping and mirroring. All four of these *portolan* charts are embodied, creating eight distinct characters: four male figures of Europe, and four figures of Africa (two angels and two male figures). The seas remain empty and un-embodied. It is necessary first to describe and explain the drawing's complex structure, before discussing its content in relation to several captions that surround it.

The drawing contains two primary layers. On its surface lie two complete *portolan* outlines that retain the white color of the paper. These meet at the center of the drawing, where their forms are mirrored. This is different from the numerous drawings in the previous category, in which the two charts overlapped one another; here, the two white charts on the surface of the page are both complete diagrams of the region, reflecting one another along an invisible horizontal line in the Holy Land and Asia Minor. Rather than containing the figure of the diabolical sea, the spaces of the Mediterranean and Black Seas on these two charts are left as windows through which the viewer can see the other maps in the drawing. This window or outline — the negative space of the upper drawing — provides a view onto a world of color. In the space below, the continents are shaded a brick red, while the seas are painted a soft brown-grey. The arrangement of these colored maps beneath the surface of the white



ones is the most complicated aspect of the drawing. One complete map lies below the upper white map, and one complete map lies below the lower white map, but each is placed in a different relation to its chart above. On the top half of the page, the tinted map below is a precise mirror image of the upper map, reflected from it along a red horizontal line that bisects the upper, white body-worlds. The white body-worlds in the top layer always overlap the lower, colored ones, which are only visible in the negative space of the sea. The same system is repeated in the lower half of the drawing, except that the lower tinted map is reflected along a vertical line, also colored red. The two maps on the bottom half of the page are also mirror images of one another, but along a different axis. The two red axes are thus crucial to understanding the drawing: they must have been used to construct it and also intended to aid in its decoding.

The brown labels on the white upper charts do little to clarify this confusing situation. On the upper half of the page, the brown labels all point out the location of cities on the colored chart, even though all lie on the space of the white chart; they indicate the continued presence of the map below, even when it is obscured by the upper chart.

On the bottom half of the page, however, similar captions placed on the white chart actually point to cities on that chart, rather than on the one below. Other captions around the drawing indicate the identity of the characters. At the top of the page are two labels for Europe and Africa: Europe is the *advena rector novus*, the strange new priest, and Africa is the *parrochia aliena*, the parish of another. The figures seem to present the encounter between a new priest and his new parish (a situation that Opicinus underwent several times in his early career). The colored worlds below are not labeled, but the figures seem to be a precise mirror of those on top, in both gender and physical appearance. The four figures in the lower half of the page are labeled with much greater precision. Here we see two angels and two male figures of Europe. The angels are labeled *angelus lucis* and *angelus tenebrarum* — an angel of light and an angel of darkness. The angel of light in the surface map whispers into the ear of the upper male Europe, labeled *homo spiritualis*, while the angel of darkness whispers to *homo carnalis*. The arrangement recalls nothing so much as the angel and devil of the human conscience that perch on the shoulders of cartoon figures in modern movies and comics, offering advice and urging the character towards good or bad decisions; in the drawing, the heads of the angels seem to rest directly on the shoulders of the figures below them.

Yet one more ghostlike form is created from this arrangement of maps and bodies. At the precise center of the drawing, a cruciform shape is formed by the two mirrored shapes of Asia Minor and the Holy Land; Asia Minor forms the two arms, and the land below forms the body of a cruciform vestment. This is labeled in a caption on the right side of the page, which reads “behold the vestment of the Church soaked in blood.” Opicinus accentuated the form of the vestment by adding a small cutout for the neck. The role of this form in the drawing is ambiguous — its cruciform shape and its “soaking in blood” certainly evoke Christ’s sacrifice, and its position at the heart of the drawing, precisely where the two white maps are mirrored, suggests that it may be significant in the transition between the two. It also visually unites the two charts by combining part of each into the same garment.

Even after all of the figures in the drawing have been identified, its meaning remains elusive. While other drawings seem designed to convey a single allegory or a primary confrontation between figures (which are often reinforced by the particular cartographic forms that Opicinus chose for the drawing), this drawing resists this type

of analysis. The longer captions on this folio do not always contain a single focus, and many make no comment at all on the drawing. One caption on the left side of the page is a short rant about the mosquitoes that were bothering Opicinus while he made the drawing, while another, longer text at the lower left is an extended metaphorical description of the penis, describing how, like a heretic disobeying the Church, the penis disobeys the orders of the body.

There is one caption on the page that offers a tantalizing comment on its form and content. In the lower right corner of the page, Opicinus writes:

It was once said in error that men are changed into good angels or bad angels. According to the letter, this is a heretical position, since one species cannot be transformed into another. But spiritually there is truth in this mirror [i.e., in this drawing], since no heresy, fiction or allegory can be found that in this mirror does not give birth, at least in part, to a certain truth?

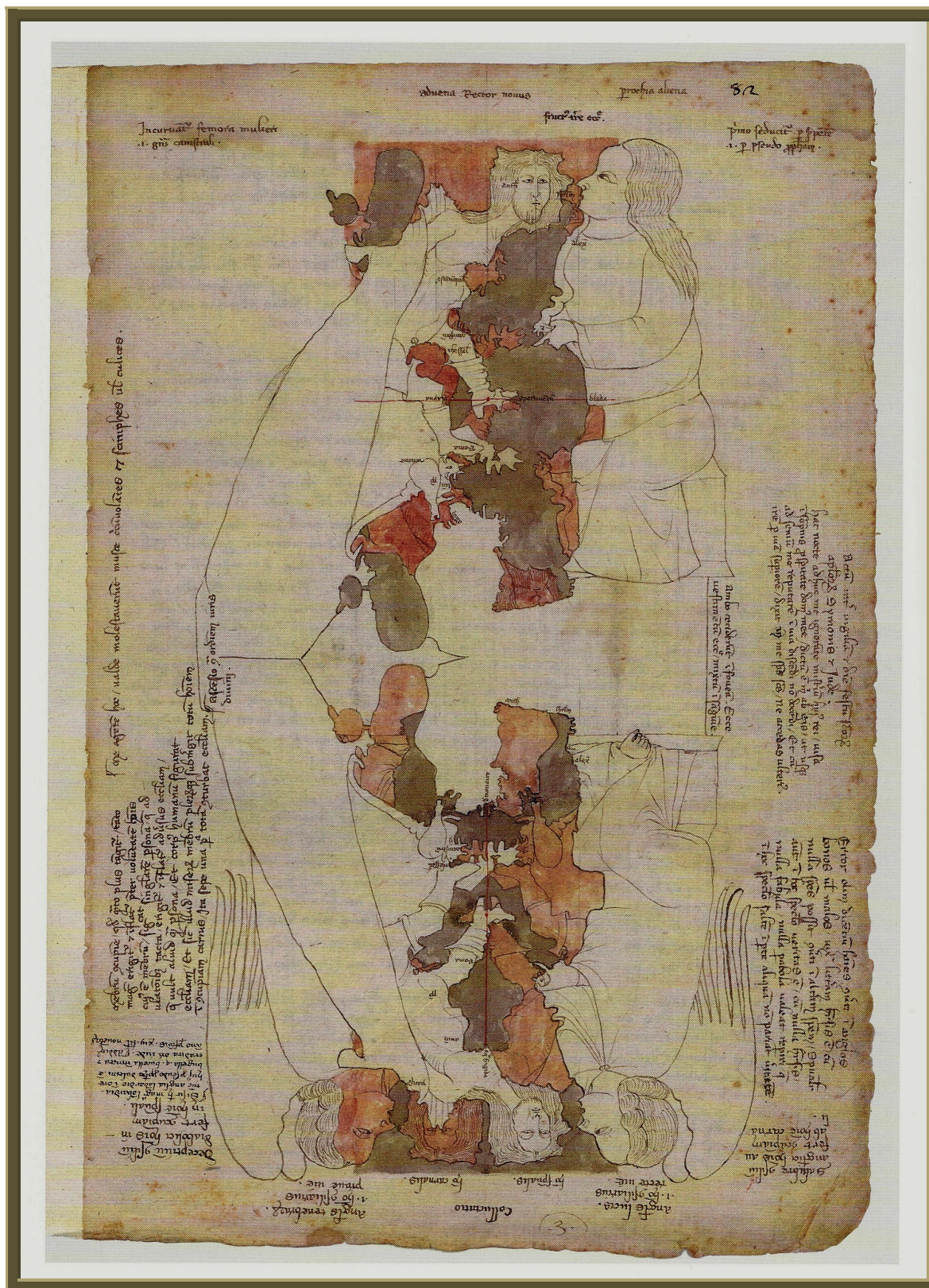
This quoted caption outlines the general principle that Opicinus follows in these drawings that employ mirroring or correspondence — that the multiplied forms are generators of multiple truths and realities. Second, it raises the crucial issue of the mirror, a subject investigated below. Here, Opicinus seems to say that men do not transition literally into angels of light or darkness — the figures of the priest and parish at the top of the page do not actually become the figures at the bottom of the page. But “according to the letter,” their mirror image contains these qualities. Opicinus’ statement about the generation of meaning seems to apply both to this drawing and to many others that depict multiple levels of reality (usually through multiple iterations of the body-worlds). The mirror of any of his creations, which he acknowledges are fabrications (in the sense that they are imaginary and exploratory), will always contain some new level of meaning.

Fol. 82r depicts Opicinus’ allegorized geography at the height of its complexity and beauty. Even as Opicinus’ drawings make use of the natural world and empirical science, the arrangement of their forms expresses the detachment from reality that characterizes a dream. But even as the complexity in an image like fol. 82r becomes overwhelming, Opicinus provides the viewer with visual cues to make sense of the drawing’s disorienting forms. The two red lines indicate the precise point where worlds are mirrored, and the differentiation in color — white, brown, and red — brings the forms of the body-worlds into a near-sculptural relief. The interpretive paradigm for this drawing must be one of experimentation; it is the only image in the manuscript with this particular arrangement of forms, and through it Opicinus only seems to have arrived at fragments of meaning.

In addition to **fol. 84v**, there are several depictions (or suggestions) of male genitalia in the *Vaticanus* manuscript, each of which is unique. The first two are on **fol. 77**. This drawing contrasts two complete sets of body-worlds, one overlapping and partially obscuring the other, and two very different depictions of genitalia are found in the area around Venice on both depictions of Europe. In the overlapped body-worlds, which are tinted with red and brown wash, we see a small penis depicted inside the figure of Europe, just past the fist of the Mediterranean figure. The small caption nearby simply reads *Venetie* [Venice] and without further explanation it is unclear whether the penis belongs to the European body, depicted lying back against his stomach, or whether he is somehow being penetrated by a small penis belonging to the sea-figure. Given the penises in this region that we discussed above, this latter proposition is not



without basis, but it seems more likely that it belongs to the European figure, since it is tinted the same color.



*Opicinus tie Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6435, fol. 82r*

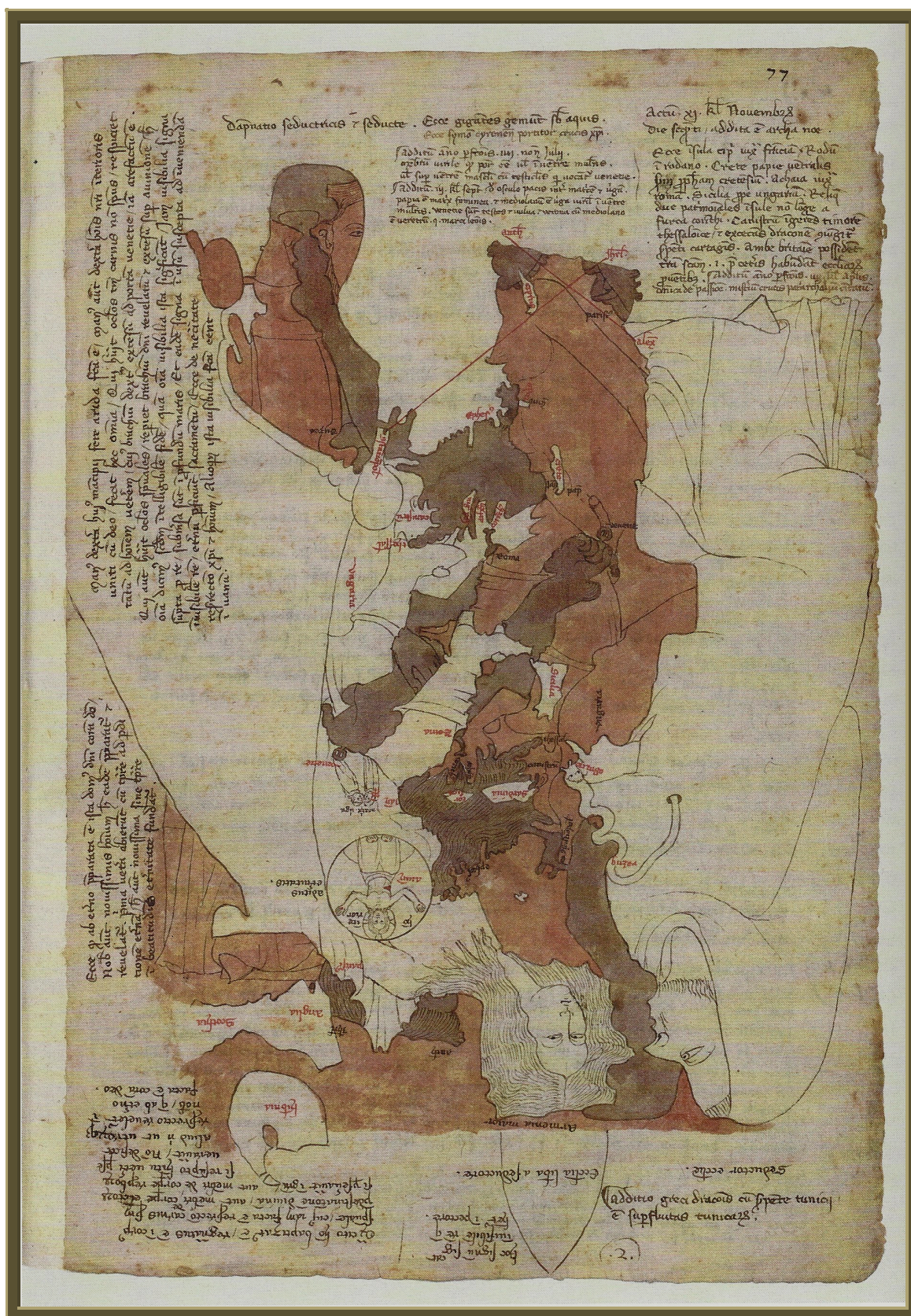


Across the page on fol. 77, inside the body of the female European figure, we see two tiny figures. At first, we would not identify these as genitalia — they are simply two small, robed bodies that stand within the genital region of the European body. It is the caption that tells us something different; over their heads are written the words “matrix” and “virga” — womb and penis. It seems that these two tiny bodies represent the male and female reproductive systems. It must be acknowledged that both figures are shaped like small penises, but it is also true that in medieval anatomical texts the female genitalia are often described as an interiorized mirror image of a male penis, so perhaps we should not be surprised that the two are “personified,” if we want to use that term, in similar ways. Still, the strangeness of this representation is breathtaking. We find an almost-identical representation on fol. 61v, where two tiny figures with the same labels hold between them a baby, its head positioned downward, pointing toward the area near Venice through which we presume it would be born. Here, the two “personifications” of the penis and the womb have produced a tiny child and are preparing it for birth. These personifications’ sexuality is normative and non-transgressive — male and female members come together inside of the female body. A caption on fol. 77 describes their encounter as a “kiss of peace; with Pavia as the womb, Milan as the penis, and Venice as the “testicles” (the medieval medical term for ovaries) and the vulva.” The meeting of male and female within these European female bodies depicts reproduction as it should be, as opposed to the sexual aggression and engorgement of the devil-figure in the sea.

Many *Vaticanus* drawings contain more explicit imagery of birth and reproduction; metaphors of birth and rebirth seem to have been one of Opicinus’ primary ways of expressing the spiritual transformation that he underwent following his illness of 1334. At least six drawings in the *Vaticanus* represent birth or pregnancy. Four of these drawings depict the body-worlds, and the reproduction always takes place within the body of the European figure. Representing pregnancy and birth inside of Europe was a way for Opicinus to convey how both good and evil tendencies enter the world. In a passage early in the *Vaticanus*, Opicinus describes how the “diabolical sea” inseminates an already-pregnant Europe, splitting the child unnaturally into two figures — Europe and Africa. According to Victoria Morse, Europe’s pregnancy was also related to local political situations, visualizing the (sexual) corruption of Lombardy within an otherwise holy European body. Here, reproductive sexuality is a sign of corruption; elsewhere, as we will see, it is a marker of generative spirituality.

The interest in the local ramifications of the pregnancy of the European figure is explored even more closely in two drawings in which Europe is actually pregnant with a tiny map — fols. 53v and 87r. In each of these drawings, Opicinus drew a small copy of the body-worlds over the area of Lombardy, even extending it slightly into the sea near Genoa. Some researchers have convincingly explained this positioning of the tiny body-world figures as indicating a Caesarian birth; as Opicinus explains, the two figures are born through Genoa, the “forced port” in the stomach of the European figure, rather than through Venice, the “natural port” of the figure’s vaginal canal (Opicinus makes the pun about Venetian “canals” several times). Victoria Morse shows the way that Opicinus read meaning even into the precise position of these two tiny body-worlds over Lombardy below, determining which local cities fell under Africa and Europe. She then contrasts this “violent” delivery of the figures with the small baby depicted on fol. 74v, which is positioned for a normal delivery through Venice, with its head down and its arms folded peacefully in prayer.





*Opicinus tie Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6435, fol. 77r*







But beyond these convincing interpretations of the specific content, one must also take a step back to appreciate the multiplicity of meaning that is being suggested in these two drawings: their forms simultaneously imply a world giving birth to another world, a human body giving birth to two human children, a world giving birth to human bodies, and a human body giving birth to an entire world. The drawings visualize medieval concepts of microcosm and macrocosm in a way that is both breathtakingly simple and highly complex. Bodies and worlds not only align, but can also recreate themselves or each other. These visual metaphors convey more clearly than any of the other drawings the sense that the body-world drawings were both the evidence and the impetus for Opicinus' spiritual rebirth. He saw the world as something that could reproduce and recreate in the same way as humans. Sexual reproduction becomes a metaphor for all creation of worlds and beings, both good and evil.

### **Folio 78r of the *Vaticanus Manuscript***

Fol. 78r is drawn using a structure found nowhere else in Opicinus' oeuvre. Broadly speaking, it would fall under the category of two different body-worlds overlapped. But rather than only overlapping certain parts of the two maps, Opicinus places them completely on top of one another, with the top map left the white color of the paper and the body-worlds beneath tinted red and brown. Both maps show a sleeping male figure of Europe, with his eyes closed, and an alert female figure of Africa. As in so many of his drawings, Opicinus uses the structure of the overlapping map to draw connections between the lands and figures above and those below. Some of these are straightforward interpretations of what is immediately visible. In a caption on the lower left side of the page, for example, Opicinus comments on the superimposition of Tunisia on the bottom map and Brittany on the top one: "reuniting Tunis with Brittany is clothing a poor person who is naked." Indeed, we see the hand of the lower Africa figure pulling up the cloak that falls off the naked upper figure of Europe.

In other captions, Opicinus allegorizes these figures in ways that are far more ambiguous; of particular interest is the reproductive area of the "upper" figure of Europe (the white figure). The figure as a whole is labeled "Holy Christianity repose and sleeps." Between the figure's legs, three small bodies emerge from the land near Venice — a large full body in the center, with two faces at its base. Without reading the captions, these figures are interpreted by Whittington in two ways. One - what is most strongly suggested is that the larger figure is actually in the process of being born. Despite the fact that the Europe-figure from which it is born is clearly represented as male, the detail near Venice evokes external female genitalia, and a tiny male figure in the process of being born. The other visual interpretation is that this figure represents Europe's penis, and the two small faces at its base depict his testicles.

The captions make it clear that the latter interpretation is correct — the figure represents Europe's penis. It is really the only explicit and to-scale representation in the manuscript of the European figure's genitalia; it is the sea-devil whose sexual organs are usually on view. Most shockingly, however, the penis also appears to be a representation of Opicinus himself. A caption above it begins with a large "O" written on his forehead, and reads "Opicinus, minister of the Church." Given that Europe as a whole is labeled as a personification of Christianity (and that the figure has some of the markings of Christ, such as the nails through the feet), Opicinus is interpreting his own body in this drawing as the penis of the Church (and possibly even of Christ). This detail does tempt the modern viewer, perhaps more than any other in the manuscript, to

consider the possibility of a psychoanalytic interpretation, and indeed Guy Roux interprets the imagery in relation to the fact that none of the other male figures of Europe really seem to have genitalia, which he views as a sign that they have all been castrated. For him, this fluid switching, exchange, or loss of sex organs is not unusual among “psychotic” artists.

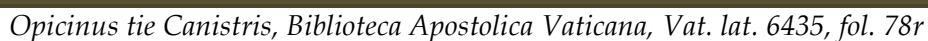
In this drawing, however, the depiction of the sexual organs, and of Opicinus himself as a sex organ, is a part of a concrete iconographic statement. It is just one part of an elaborate metaphor that contrasts physical circumcision with what Opicinus calls “spiritual” circumcision. In several long, confusing captions, at the top and left of the drawing, he writes,

The first of January. Fundamentally this page deals with the circumcision of the Lord, that is to say the crown of the foreskin; more visibly it has to do with the rebirth of man, when a personal name is given. In effect, when a man is baptized, he is circumcised from the old man into the new man, as the new year attests. And as long as he is a layman, he hides his spiritual circumcision. But when he assumes the marks of the cleric (the crown of the foreskin, so to speak), he shows his circumcision in the flesh as testimony to his hidden spiritual circumcision

In these examples of Canistris’ maps the physical geography is adapted somewhat to animal and human forms - the image of a king conforms to the shape/content of Europe, with the image of his queen forming North Africa. There is no further attempt to personify any other landmasses, however, the Bay of Biscay adjacent to France takes on the form of a lion with his mouth agape; and the Eastern Mediterranean is shown as an old bearded man holding a dove, a book and a scepter. There is no real attempt to depict the landmasses with any degree of current geographical knowledge, the British Isles, Ireland, and Scandinavia are drawn crudely even by the standards of the day. However, the purpose of these maps were obviously not geographical or navigational, but purely a fascinating, eye-catching medium for conveying a set of ideas. A form of expression that has continued intermittently even to today, and even today we take liberties with the geography in order to fit the message. Among the various irregular lines on this map (many of them introduced to complete the human forms), Charles Hapgood (*Maps of the Ancient Sea Kings*) noticed a few straight lines that suggested the survival of an original pattern resembling the *portolanos* [nautical charts] reflecting possibly a twelve-wind system, vice the customary eight-wind system.

In her article for *Mercator’s World*, Darby Lewes describes the context in which these maps were produced. “Mother Earth” was used as a paradigm for acquiescent female domesticity, completely subsumed by her biological imperative, which frequently took the form of suckling infants. The maps of Europe as woman stare blankly from the page, awaiting the whim of male aggressors or protectors. Such passive imagery might seem innocuous — mere reflections of contemporary social and cultural contexts. Yet their true impact was insidious, for such maps and images operated as both sexual and political propaganda. They simultaneously confirmed and perpetuated the notion of women as subordinate property and, in some cases, promoted the concept of non-Britons as fundamentally “Other”.



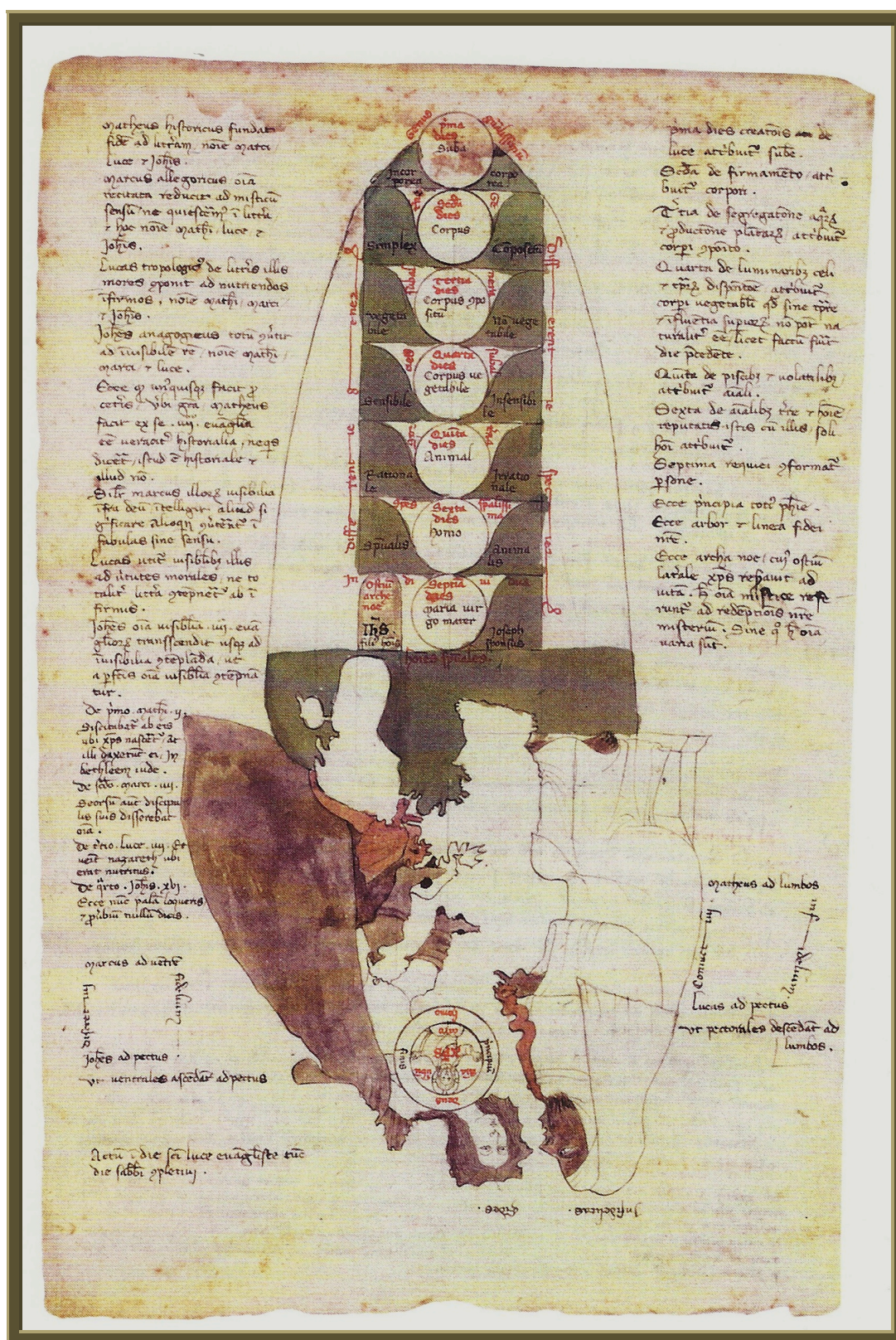






*Opicinus tie Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. lat. 6435, fol. 53v*





*Opicinus de Canistris, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat lat. 6435, fol. 73v*

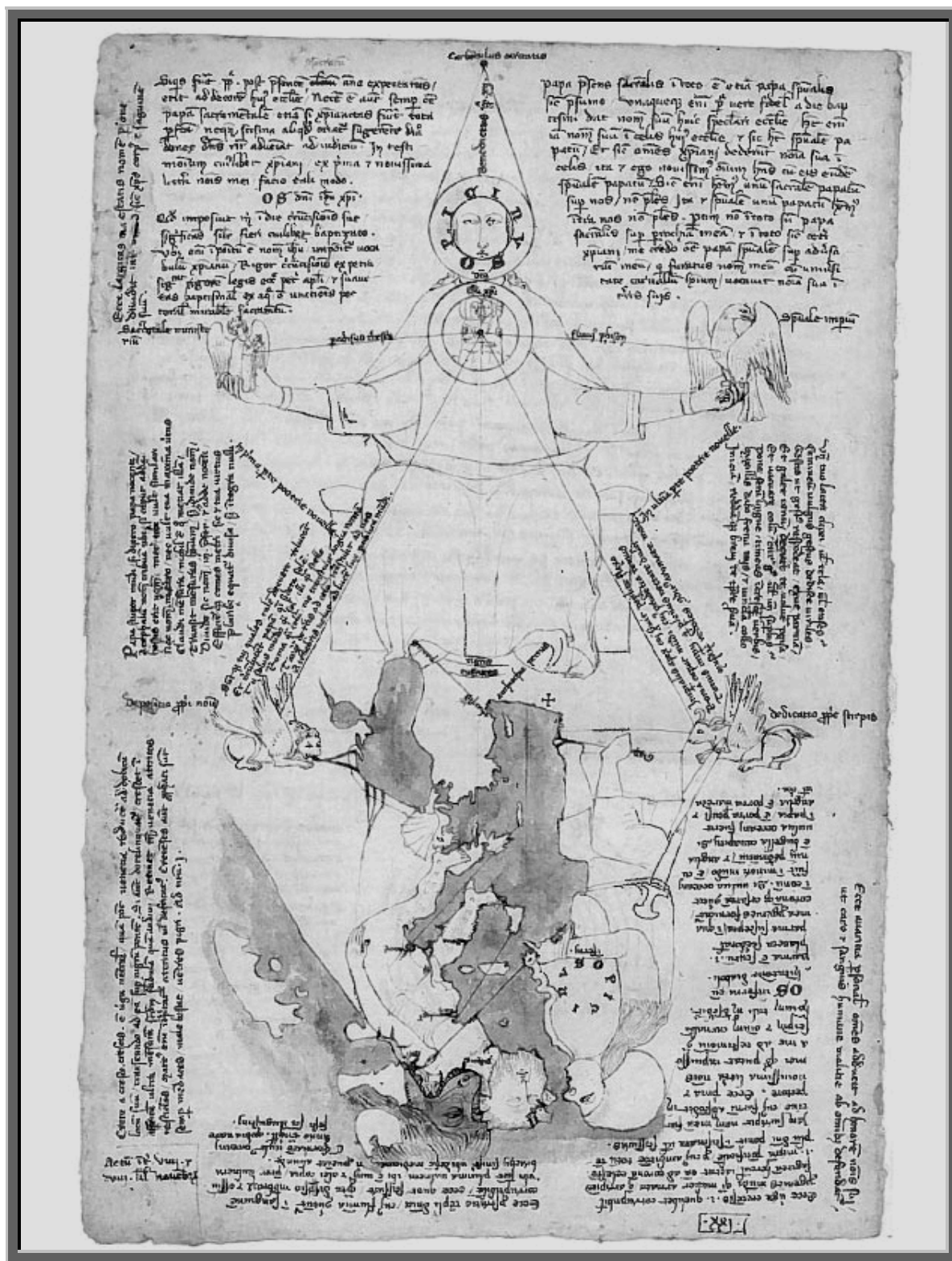
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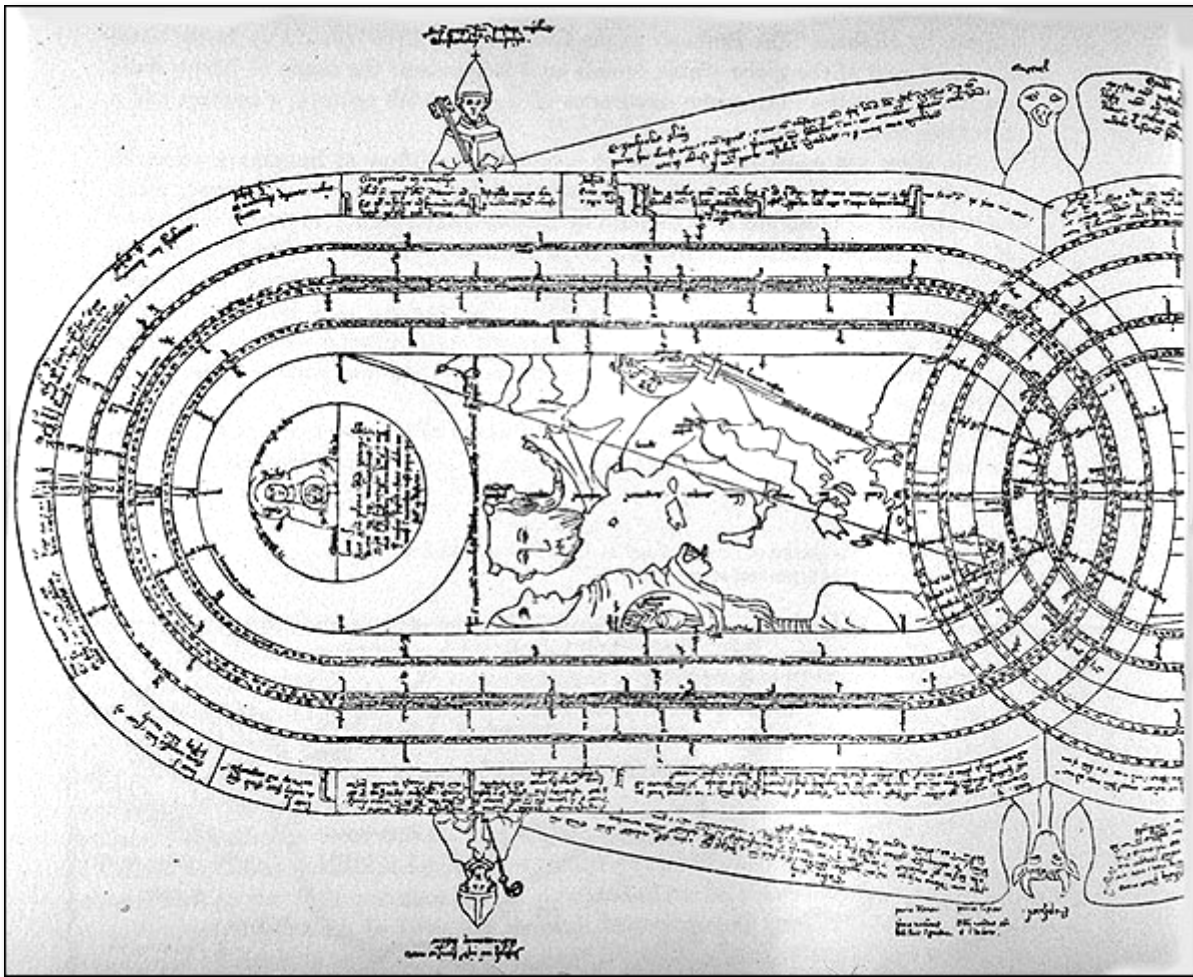
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\*illustrated

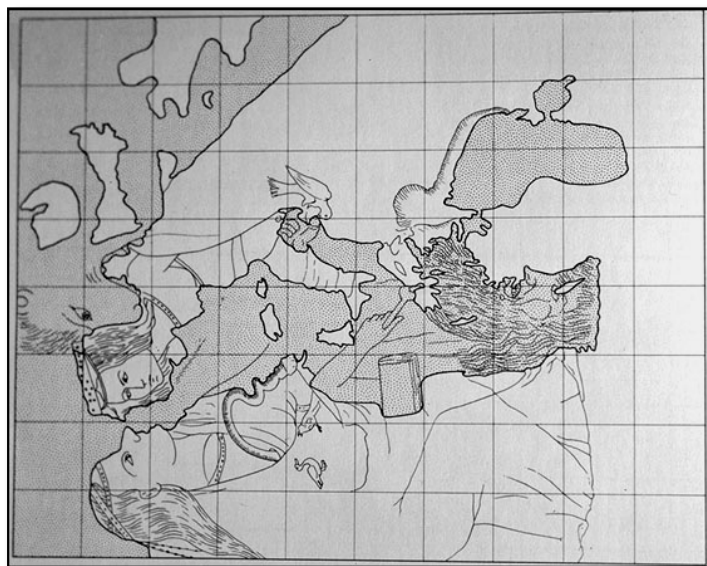
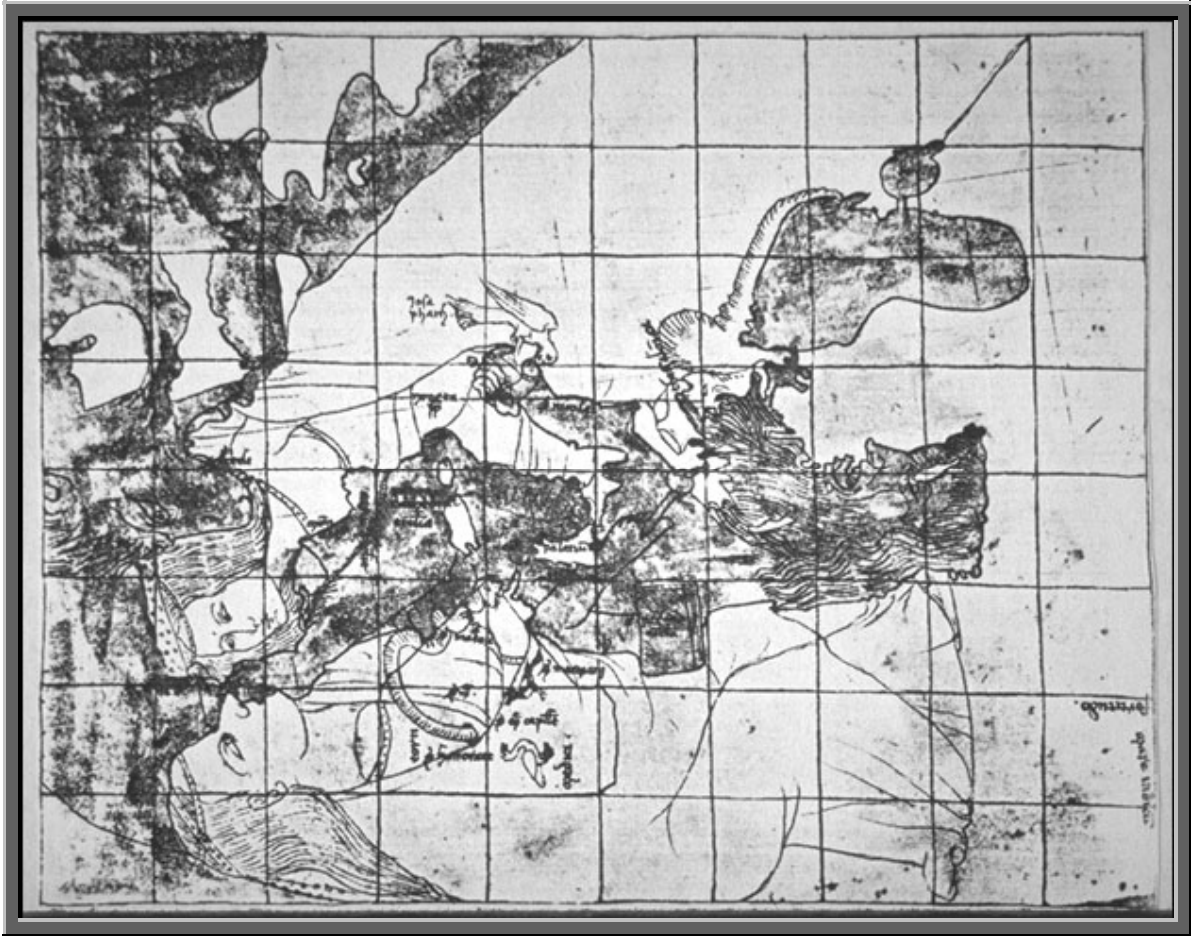




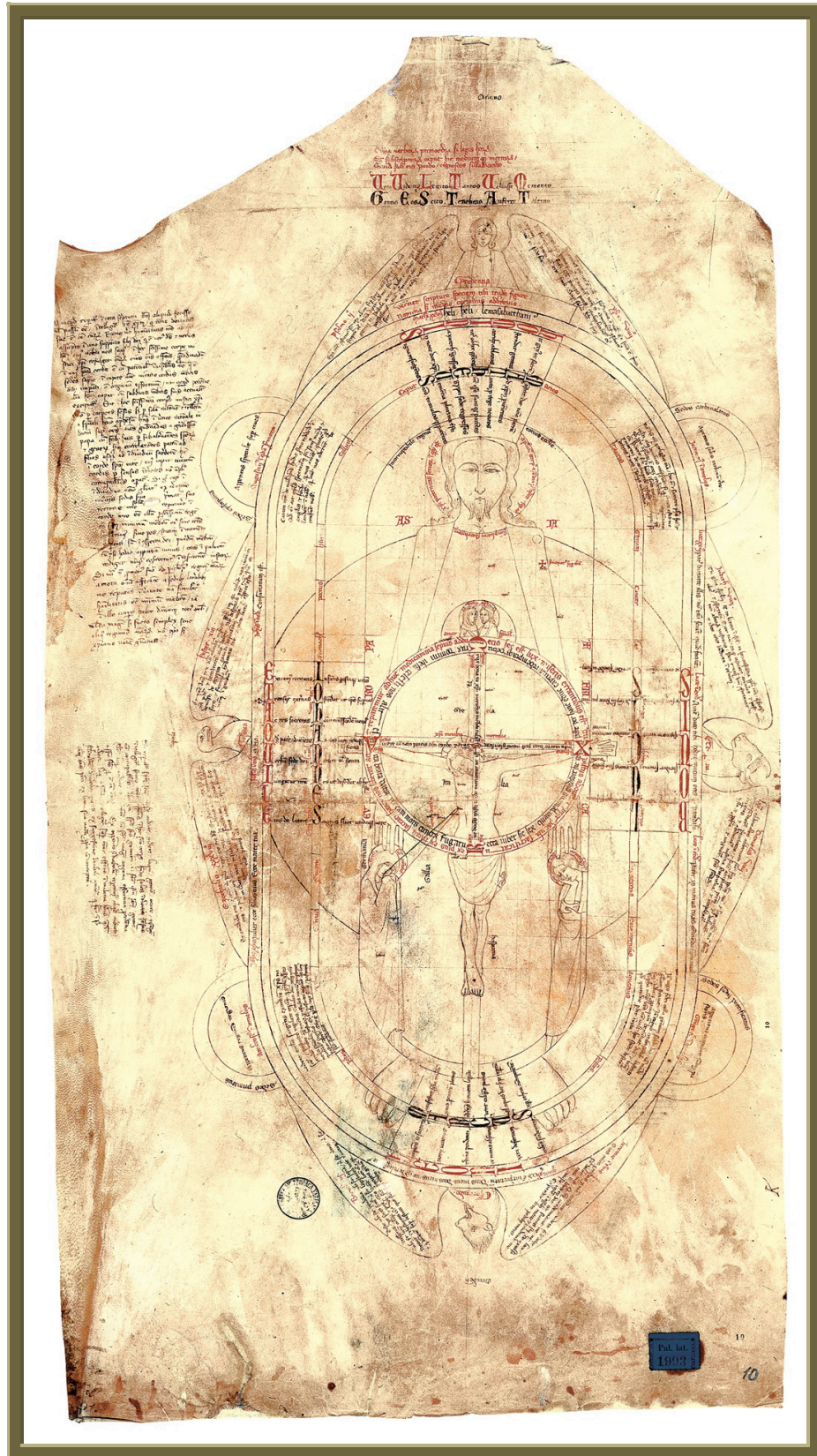
*Opicinus de Canistris world map, 14<sup>th</sup> century*



*Opicinus de Canistris world map, detail, left-hand side, 14<sup>th</sup> century*







Opicinus de Canistris (1296–ca. 1354) "Diagram with Crucifixion, Avignon, France;  
1335–50 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, Pal. Lat. 1993



Depicting Europe as a woman was a logical metaphorical step, given that the continent got its name from the princess *Europa*, who had been carried off and raped by Zeus. The woman represents the “Mother Church”, who is being seduced from the true path. A monk, who holds a suggestively wriggling snake, whispers into the ear of a young woman wearing a bishop’s miter. Her fall has already begun: Her robe has partially slipped from her body, genitals, appropriately placed in Venice (with the name’s link to Venus and venery) and represented by two additional plotting monks. The emblem of the risen Christ, set directly over Avignon, is the only hopeful sign that the Church may still retain her purity.

In 1537 the Tirolese cartographer Johann Putsch celebrated the Hapsburg rule over Europe by presenting a placid *Europa Regina* wearing Charles V’s Spain as a crown and Ferdinand’s Austria as a medal at her waist. Although supposedly representing the triumphant Hapsburgs, she passively gazes into the distance, past whatever (presumably male) eyes might observe her. The queen’s crown (Spain), orb (Sicily), and heart (Bohemia) form a triangle that directs the viewer’s eye away from eastern Europe toward the west. Surrounding territories are indistinct, in no way distracting from the central image. The British Isles have been reduced to a shapeless blob perched parakeet-fashion near her shoulder; similar clumps of vague African and Norwegian terrain float shapelessly at her head and hip. Her skirt is composed of the Baltics and Greece; Turkey and Russia are beneath her feet. Putsch’s quiescent queen established the conventions of a highly popular image that would be copied by subsequent generations of mapmakers — including Sebastian Munster, Heinrich Bünting, and Matthias Quad — and would evolve into a genre of sorts.



Munster’s atlas *Cosmography* originally was published in 1544, but an untitled version of the Putsch map did not appear in it until the 1588 edition. By then the Netherlands had revolted against Spain, and the *Europa* image no longer flattered the Hapsburgs. Indeed, one can read Munster’s map as an indictment of Spanish rule, which figuratively reduced poor *Europa* to a raped woman without honor. Her face is crueler and harder. The line of mountains through Hungary and the Baltics makes her body seem crouched for action rather than relaxed in quiet triumph. The waters surrounding Europe are darker and seem more troubled. African mountains loom like enemy troops. Her left arm, holding the scepter, is lowered slightly, as if to be used in defense. The entire image projects a disturbing sense of uneasiness.

Protestant theologian Heinrich Bünting’s *Europa*, featured in the 1581 *Europa Prima Pars Terrae Forma Virginis*, differs only slightly from Putsch’s. Aragon and Navarre are included as the two sections of the snood, and there is a fuller awareness of other nations, such as the British Isles, Denmark, and Norway. The queen retains the serenity of the Putsch map, although her face is harder and the classical nose is thickened and shortened.

