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# The Image of Persia in Western Medieval Cartography

In the fourteenth century, the European writer John Mandeville reported that Prester John sojourned often in the Persian city of Susa, in a splendid palace rich in gold and precious stones.[1] Prester John was the mythical Christian king thought to be a descendant of the Magi, related by marriage to the Great Khan, and ruler of a vast empire far away in Asia, near the earthly paradise.[2] This reference to Mandeville is a way of saying that, in the medieval European mind, Persia was the gateway to the marvels of a remote and mysterious Far East. The aim in this paper is to explore the ways in which Persia was perceived in the Latin West by looking at how geographical and historical knowledge of it was conveyed on medieval world maps.[3] We shall see that the map reveals more of contemporary European perceptions of Persia, and its place in the European view of the world, than about the reality of Persian civilization in the thirteenth century and later. An idea of the way Persia and the Near East was integrated into Christian universal history and geography can be gained by looking at the thirteenth-century Hereford map of the world. The thirteenth-century Ebstorf map also shows how a different civilisation was accounted for in terms of Western, Christian culture. Finally, maps from the later Middle Ages show us how contemporary Persia was portrayed by European cartographers on the eve of the Renaissance.

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[1] See Michiel Hendericus Braaksma, *Travel and Literature: An Attempt at a Literary Appreciation of English Travel-Books about Persia from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Groningen-Batavia: J. B. Wolters' Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1938), pp. 16-17. *The Book of John Mandeville* was a fourteenth-century encyclopaedia of geographical lore presented as the account of a real voyage to India and China, but almost certainly a work of fiction, albeit based on earlier true accounts: see Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Mandeville was the first European to mention the dialect of the Yezdi Zoroastrians.

I am grateful to Catherine Delano-Smith for her help in the final stages of this paper.

[2] John Mandeville, *Itinerarium*, English translation: *Mandeville's Travels*, ed. Michael C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 218-222 (XXXIII), describes the Christian Kingdom of Prester John. There is a vast literature on Prester John: see, e.g., István P. Bejczy, *La Lettre du prêtre Jean: une utopie médiévale* (Paris: Imago, 2001); *La lettera del Prete Gianni*, ed. Gioia Zaganelli (Milan: Luni, 2000); Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1996); Jacqueline Pirenne, *La Légende du "Prêtre Jean"* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1992); Bernard Hamilton and Charles F. Beckingham, eds, *Prester John, the Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1996); Vsevolod Slessarev, *Prester John: The Letter and the Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959).

[3] Mohammad Reza Sahab gave a paper on 'Old and Historical Maps of Iran', on 19 July 2005, in the XXI International Conference on the History of Cartography, 17 to 22 July, 2005, Budapest, Hungary. He considered maps of the world, maps of Asia and maps of the Middle East that included Persia, but his attention was mainly focussed on maps of Persia itself, and, for the medieval period, on Islamic cartography. Likewise, Cyrus Ala'I has worked on the image of Persia in the history of modern cartography: see his *General Maps of Persia 1477-1925* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

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## Persia on the Hereford Map

The Hereford *mappa mundi*, still displayed in the cathedral in the English city of Hereford, is thought to have been made about 1300 (Figure 1).[4] East is at the top. The map portrays the three parts of the world as it was then known, with Asia, Europe, and Africa surrounded by an outer ocean. The Persian Gulf and the Red Sea are on the upper right, both coloured red. Lower down, the Mediterranean Sea is packed with islands. Jerusalem is placed in the centre. Persia is located between the Far East and the Christian Holy Land (Figure 2). Two legends make it clear that Persia is one of the five regions located between the rivers Indus in the east and Tigris in the west, and that the name usually given to the entire area that stretches from India to Mesopotamia was Parthia, as defined by classical and early medieval authorities such as Pliny, Orosius, and Isidore.[5] The sixth-century encyclopaedist Isidore had defined the limits of Parthia as the Caspian Sea, to the north, and the Red Sea, to the south, with rivers marking the other two borders: the Indus on the east, and the Tigris on the west. According to Isidore, Parthia was divided into five regions, all lying between the Indus and the Tigris: Arachosia, Parthia proper, Assyria, Media (greater and smaller), and Persia. Persia was described by classical authors as mountainous, with few plains, but several valleys of great beauty and fertility. The coastal zone was said to have been sandy and hot, and, according to Pliny, made uninhabitable by poison-bearing winds.[6]

By the end of the thirteenth century, then, we see that ancient Persia had not faded from European memory. The medieval map also records the conquests of the fourth-century BC ruler, Alexander the Great, who had broken the barriers between Greek and Iranian culture. His adventures are abundantly portrayed on the map, where, for example, the altars he built to mark the easternmost extent of his conquest remind us that he had passed through Persia.[7]

Interestingly, the most prominent map sign, just below Persia, portrays the Tower of Babel (Figure 2). As the Old Testament Book of Genesis records, God punished the pride of the builders of the Tower, and checked their impudent aspiration to reach heaven, by so confusing their language that they could no longer understand each other.[8] The Tower, shown as an elaborate architectural structure through which the Euphrates flows, serves as reminder that the Tower of Babel and the city of Babylon were closely associated. The city

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[4] On the Hereford map see Scott D. Westrem, *The Hereford Map: A Transcription and Translation of the Legends with Commentary* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001). See also Paul D. A. Harvey, ed., *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and their Context*, proceedings of the 1999 conference (London: British Library, 2006); Naomi R. Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001); Paul D. A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: the Hereford World Map* (London: Hereford Cathedral-British Library; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

[5] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 56-57 (n. 114); pp. 80-81 (n. 167): 'Parthia ab Yndie finibus generaliter dicitur usque ad Mesopotamiam. Sont in ea Aracusia, Parthia, Assiria, Media, Persida'; 'Parthia is generally the name [of the territory] from the borders of Yndia to Mesopotamia. In it are Arachosia, Parthia, Assyria, Media, Persia'. See Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, VI.31.137; Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos*, I.2.17, 19; Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIV.3.8,9.

[6] See William Smith, ed., *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, 2 vols (London: Walton and Maberly-John Murray, 1856-1857), II (1857), *sub voce* 'Persia'.

[7] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 34-35, 40-43, 56-57, 68-69, 96-97 (nn. 62, 82, 86, 115, 141, 205-206). See also Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, pp. 165-190 (with a visual summary of the references to Alexander the Great on the Hereford map at pp. 66-67).

[8] Genesis 11.1-9.

of Babylon, portrayed nearby, was, as the text close to the sign informs us, founded by Nimrod and restored by Ninus and Semiramis.[9] The great empire of Babylonia was the land in which the people of Israel were held captive. This is why the city of Babylon, which is named in the Book of Revelation as the apocalyptic earthly city in opposition to the Heavenly Jerusalem,[10] is so prominent on the map. However, it was the Persian king Cyrus who, as also recorded in the Old Testament, eventually freed the Jews from their captivity in Babylonia,[11] and the vignette on the map reminds us of the importance of Persia for medieval Christendom.

Another city that we see on the Hereford map is Persepolis. As the legend explains, Persepolis, built by king Perses, was the capital of the Persian kingdom.[12] For his information about Persepolis, the medieval compiler of the Hereford map drew on Isidore, whereas his information about the mountain chains between Mesopotamia and India came from Orosius's review of the whole of human history, *Historia adversus paganos* (ca. 418), in which the regions lying between the Indus and the Tigris are described as mountainous.[13] Right to the south of Persia the desert waste of Carmania is seen.[14]

When we look more carefully at the way Persia is represented on the Hereford map, we detect a different type of cartographical description from our own. Most people today are familiar with maps that give a static picture of the earth at a specific moment in time. The Hereford map, in contrast, links geography with history in a marriage of space and time that is unfamiliar to most of us today.[15] From a brief survey of place names in Persia, we realize that the *mappa mundi* does not provide a geographical description of contemporary Persia, but projects historical events on to a geographical framework. The map was not intended to portray a thirteenth-century Persia, but Persia as part of mankind's universal history. Not only is the Perses's founding of Persepolis, the royal residence of the Achemenides, explained on the map, but so also is Susa, defined by the classical writers Solinus and Isidore as an 'exceedingly noble city'.[16] Interestingly, *Susa civitas* was also the setting for the biblical Book of Esther, in which a Jewish woman was married to a Persian

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[9] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 86-87 (n. 181): 'Babilonia, a Nembroth gigante fundata, a Nino et Seramide reparata'; 'Babylon was founded by the giant Nimrod, and restored by Ninus and Semiramis'. The legend reports Orosius's account, *Historiae adversum paganos*, II.6.8-10.

[10] Revelation 17-3-6; 18.21-24.

[11] Ezra 1.1-11. See also 5.11-16.

[12] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 58-59 (n. 119): 'Persipolis, capud Persici regni, a Perseo rege constructa'; 'Persepolis, capital of the Persian kingdom, built by king Perses'.

[13] Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XV.1.8; Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 54-55 (n. 111): 'Omnes hee regiones situ terrarum montuoso sunt aspero'; 'All these regions of the earth are situated in mountainous, rugged territory'. See Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos*, I.2.17.

[14] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 62-63 (n. 128): 'Carmania regio'; 'The kingdom of Carmania'.

[15] I discuss this aspect of medieval cartography in my *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (London: British Library; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, 'Mappa mundi und Chronographia: Studien zur *imago mundi* des abendländischen Mittelalters', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 24 (1968), pp. 118-186, has seen *mappae mundi* as visual chronicles paralleling the textual chronicles. See also Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World* (London: The British Library, 1997, 1999); David Woodward, 'Medieval *Mappaemundi*', in Brian Harley and David Woodward, eds, *The History of Cartography*, I, *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 286-292; Woodward, 'Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 75/4 (1985), pp. 510-521.

[16] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 60-61 (n. 123): 'Susa civitas'; 'The city of (...) Susa'.

emperor who ruled from India to Ethiopia.[17] On the map, the legend about Susa is placed to the left of an architectural feature on the west bank of the Indus river. South-east of Susa, we also find the vast region of the Elamites, the noblest people of Persia, who, according to Isidore, were the descendants of Elam, the eldest of Shem's five sons.[18] Beyond the Tigris, west of Persia, is Assyria, named after Asshur, another son of Shem, who was the first to settle in the region.[19] Assyria's ancient capital, the city of Nineveh, features in the Bible as the evil city where Jonah was reluctant to preach and whose destruction delighted the prophet Nahum.[20] In the south of the country, in Chaldaea, is Ur, birthplace of the Jewish patriarch Abraham.[21] In fact, everywhere on the map, and not only in Persia, past events and past places, relating equally to historical, mythological and biblical lore, are depicted alongside contemporary features. Other biblical details include, beside the Tower of Babel, Joseph's barns, Noah's Ark, the Crossing of the Red Sea, the Crucifixion of Christ in Jerusalem, and, right at the top, the Last Judgement and the Garden of Eden.[22] The point of the map is that human history is being shown in its totality on the stage of the whole world, from the beginning of time in the Garden of Eden to the end of time, the Heavenly Jerusalem. On the world view portrayed by the Hereford *mappa mundi*, Persia has its place.

Looking again at the Hereford map as a whole, it is possible to recognize a vertical, east-west axis, starting from the earthly paradise, in the east, passing through Enoch (the first city founded by Cain),[23] Noah's Ark in Armenia, the Tower of Babel in Mesopotamia, Abraham's home town in Chaldaea, Mount Sinai, Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land, right down the Mediterranean, through Rome to the Pillars of Hercules in the extreme west of the world (Figure 3). In fact, according to a common medieval way of structuring the progression of history, the centre of gravity of human history moved westwards from the Orient in an echo of the sun's daily course. In the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo had already drawn attention to the way the end of the Assyrian empire in the east had been followed by the beginning of the Roman empire in the west, suggesting that the providentially determined succession of earthly kingdoms followed a specific temporal and spatial order.[24] Orosius's account of world history had persuaded him too of a pre-ordained transfer of imperial power (*translatio imperii*) and culture (*translatio studii*) from east to west, through Assyria, Macedonia, and Carthage to Rome.[25] The succession of the four

[17] Esther 1.1; 2.

[18] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 62-63 (n. 125): 'Lamite, principes Persidis'; 'The Elamites/ Khuzistanis, the noblest [people] in Persia'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, IX.2.3 and Genesis 10.22.

[19] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 82-83 (n. 174): 'Assiria dicitur ab Assur, filio Sem, qui hanc regionem primus incoluit'; 'Assyria is named after Asshur, son of Shem, who first settled this region'.

[20] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 80-81 (n. 168): 'Civitas Ninivee'; 'The city of (...) Nineveh'. See Jonah 1; Nahum 3.

[21] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 88-89 (n. 183): 'Hur habet et patria et Caldea'; 'Ur has ... and the homeland and Chaldaea'.

[22] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 176-177, 106-107, 124-125, 166-167, 4-6, 34-37 (nn. 416, 224, 278, 387-389, 6-9, 64-70).

[23] Westrem, *The Hereford Map*, pp. 34-35 (n. 63): 'Enos civitas antiquissima'; 'The extremely ancient city of Enos'.

[24] Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XVIII.2, eds Bernard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* XLVIII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), p. 593.

[25] Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos*, II.1.4-6; VII.2.1-16. See Joseph Ward Swain, 'The Theory of the Four Monarchies Opposition History under the Roman Empire', *Classical Philology*, 35/1 (1940), pp. 20-21.

world powers was suggested by the Christian reading of Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a large statue made out of four different materials and smashed into pieces by a divine rock.[26] There was no general consensus about the identity of the four empires, but the various models all included the Assyrian/Babylonian, the Median/Persian, the Greek/Macedonian, and the Roman empires.[27] In the twelfth century the theologian Hugh of Saint Victor developed the idea of the four empires more explicitly. Hugh explained that time had begun in the east (in the earthly paradise) and that the weight of events was proceeding from the Orient to the Occident.[28] Political and cultural excellence had passed in turn from Chaldaea to Persia, to Greece, and thence to Rome, following an east-west path on the way towards the culmination of human history in the Incarnation of Christ and the ultimate revelation of the truth of the Kingdom of Heaven. The ideas of Hugh of St Victor may have had a strong influence on medieval world maps, which visualized on geographical space the transfer of dominion through the four successive empires.[29]

The importance of the four kingdoms in human history was indicated on medieval maps of the world by visual or textual references to their rulers, people, or monuments. In the westward march of history portrayed on the Hereford map, Persia played a major role. The Median/Persian Empire was the second of the four empires identified in the Book of Daniel. The geographical sequence of the empires from east to west mirrored their historical succession. The important exception was Persia, which was known to be east of Babylon and which was described as the second kingdom, after the Babylonian. The third empire was the Greek/Macedonian; and the fourth empire, which was supposed to last until the end of the world, was the Roman. Many contemporary chroniclers saw the Holy Roman Empire as the continuation of the fourth empire, that of the Romans. What has to be realized is that ancient Persia was being portrayed on the Hereford map as an important early point on the continuum of world history. The compiler did not intend to represent contemporary – *i.e.* late thirteenth-century – Persia because there was no need to. By the late thirteenth century, long after the establishment of the Roman Empire and the Incarnation of Christ, the weight of history had already moved west down the Mediterranean.

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[26] Daniel (2.26-45) describes the statue as having a head made of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay; the rock that smashed it is 'cut out of the mountain without hands', which became a huge mountain filling the whole earth.

[27] For the many identifications of the four empires see Harold H. Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1935) and Swain, 'The Theory of the Four Monarchies Opposition History', pp. 1-21.

[28] Hugh of SaintVictor, *De Archa Noe*, IV.9, ed. Patrice Sicard, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* CLXXVI (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 111-112. See also *Libellus de formatione arche*, XI, ed. Patrice Sicard, *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis* CLXXVI (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), p. 157; *De vanitate mundi*, II, *Patrologia Latina* CLXXVI, col. 720, and *Praesens saculum*, in Dominique Poirel, *Livre de la nature et débat trinitaire au XIIe siècle: le* De tribus diebus *de Hugues de Saint-Victor* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), pp. 446-451. See Patrick Gautier Dalché, *La « Descriptio Mappe Mundi » de Hugues de Saint-Victor* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1988), pp. 109-111.

[29] For example, it is likely that the so-called 'Isidore map' now in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm, 10058, fol. 154v) was closely related to Hugh's writings: Gautier Dalché, *La « Descriptio Mappe Mundi » de Hugues de Saint-Victor*, pp. 81-86.

## Persia on the Ebstorf Map

Other medieval maps of the world also show Persia, but sometimes differently according to the context of the map. On many versions of the map of the world in some medieval manuscripts of the *Commentary on the Book of Revelation* by the eighth-century Spanish monk Beatus of Liébana, for example, Persia (together with Assyria and Chaldaea) is represented only by a name placed on the map not far from the earthly paradise.[30] On a quite different type of map, also from the eleventh century, the so-called Anglo-Saxon map, which is thought to have been modelled on a Roman map, Media and Persia are marked close to the outer ocean.[31] On two twelfth-century maps of Asia and Palestine, inserted into a manuscript containing Jerome's *Liber locorum*, Persia appears between the Tigris and the Indus, much as on the Hereford map.[32] On the late twelfth-century Sawley map, the region is also shown as on the Hereford map.[33] A schematic map of the world sketched on an empty folio at the back of the Arnstein Bible, also twelfth century in date, includes Persia in its list of regions, as part of Parthia, between India and Mesopotamia.[34]

The Ebstorf map, another thirteenth-century world map, this time one made in Germany, reinforces the view of Christian world history we saw in the Hereford *mappa mundi* (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7).[35] As on the Hereford map, so also on the Ebstorf map there is a sign, west of Persia, for the Tower of Babel, which – as reported in the Bible – was built in the land of Shinar, between Media and Assyria, a region marked on the map (*Campus Sennaar*).[36] An accompanying legend reminds us that the Tower was four thousand paces high.[37] Another text says that the nearby city of Babylon had been founded by Nimrod and embellished by the Assyrian Queen Semiramis.[38] Again as on the Hereford map, Persia is shown as part of

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[30] See John Williams, 'Isidore, Orosius and the Beatus Map', *Imago Mundi*, 49 (1997), pp. 7-32; Williams, *The Illustrated Beatus: A Corpus of the Illustrations in the Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 5 vols (London: Harvey Miller, 1994-2003).

[31] London, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius B.V, fol. 56v. See Catherine Delano-Smith and Roger J. P. Kain, *English Maps. A History* (London: British Library, 1999), pp. 34-36; Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 74-80.

[32] London, British Library, MS Add. 10,049, fol. 64, recto (map of Asia) and verso (map of Palestine). See Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 26-30; Woodward, 'Medieval *Mappaemundi*', pp. 288-292, 322-325.

[33] The Sawley map is in a copy of the world chronicle of Honorius Augustodunensis, twelfth century, now in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 66, p. 2. See Paul D. A. Harvey, 'The Sawley (Henry of Mainz) map', *Imago Mundi*, 49 (1997), pp. 33-42; Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 111-117; Danielle Lecoq, 'La Mappemonde d'Henri de Mayence ou l'image du monde au XIIIe siècle', in Gaston Duchet-Suchaux, ed., *Iconographie médiévale: Image, texte, contexte* (Paris: Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1990), pp. 155-207.

[34] London, British Library, MS Harley 2799, fols 241v-242r. See Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 92-94; Jörg-Geerd Arentzen, *Imago mundi cartographica: Studien zur Bildlichkeit mittelalterlicher Welt- und Ökumenekarten unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Zusammenwirkens von Text und Bild* (Munich: Fink, 1984), pp. 72, 102-106.

[35] On the Ebstorf map, see Jürgen Wilke, ed., *Kloster und Bildung*, Proceedings of the conference in Kloster Ebstorf, 17-21 March 2004 (Göttingen: Vandenhöck und Ruprecht, forthcoming); Jürgen Wilke, *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte*, 2 vols (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2001), bibliography pp. 307-331; Birgit Hahn-Woernle, *Die Ebstorfer Weltkarte* (Ebstorf: Kloster Ebstorf, 1987), bibliography pp. 100-101.

[36] Genesis 11.1-9; Konrad Miller, *Mappaemundi: Die ältesten Weltkarten*, 6 vols (Stuttgart: J. Roth, 1895-1898), V, *Die Ebstorfkarte* (1896), p. 44.

[37] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 45: 'Babel quatuor milia passuum alta dicitur'.

[38] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 45: 'Babylonia civitas magna (...). Hanc Nemroth gygas fundavit, sed

the region of Parthia, located between India and Mesopotamia. Another text expounds the classical sub-divisions of Parthia.[39]

The northern part of the Persian region, corresponding to the vast Iranian deserts, is described as mountainous and rough. The area is uninhabited, says an inscription on the map, because of the presence of wild animals.[40] We can see them: a lion, a bear, a leopard, a tiger, three snakes and a lizard are portrayed on the map (Figure 7, top left). In northern Persia is the city of Edessa, another of Nimrod's foundations, as the inscription says.[41] Towards Armenia, we can see the bridge built by Alexander the Great over the river Oraxis, later destroyed by the power of the current.[42] In Parthia proper is the tomb of King Darius, built by Alexander the Great.[43] West of that, beyond the river Arbela, is another tomb, that of the Apostle Matthew.[44] Still in Parthia, we find Arbelacum, famous as the site of one of Alexander the Great's victories, and the city of Carras, where, as the legend explains, the Roman triumvir Crassus was defeated by the Parthians.[45] The map also records the tradition of the *Arbor Medica*, a tree that, as the text next to it on the map explains, is not found anywhere on earth except in Media (hence the name 'the Median Tree'), whose perfumed fruit was a powerful remedy against poison and the breathlessness of old age.[46] The Ebstorf map also shows the Persian cities of Andropolis and Aracusa and the river Choaspis, of wonderfully sweet waters, on the banks of which – as Isidore and Solinus reported and the text on the map relates – the ancient Persian kings would halt until they were brought a cup of its water.[47] In the city of Susa, according to the rubric, which was repeating Isidore, was a representation of the starry firmament and the tomb of Cyrus.[48]

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Semiramis regina Assyriorum ampliavit murumque eius cemento et cocto latere fecit'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XV.1.4.

[39] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 45: 'Ab India usque ad Mesopotamiam generaliter Parthia dicitur propter invictam virtutem Parthorum. Assyria et relique proxime [regiones] in eius vocabolum transierunt. Sunt autem Aracusia, Parthia, Assyria, Media, Persida'.

[40] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 44: 'Hic montuosa et aspera sunt loca'; 'Hic nulli habitant propter leones et ursos et pardes et tigrides. Hec terra etiam [serpenti]bus est referta'.

[41] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 46: 'Edissa. Hanc civitatem condidit [N]emroth filius Chus, postquam de Babylone migravit, que Annare cognominata est, ipseque in ea regnavit, id est Edissa'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XV.1.13. On Arach see Genesis 10.10.

[42] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 37: 'Pons Alexandri. Oraxis fluvius Armenie uno cum Eufrate et Tygri monte oritur, a rapacitate dictus, unde et cum Alexander transgredi vellet, pontem fabricavit, sed flumen tanta vi inundavit, ut pontem dirueret'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIII.21.6 and Virgil, *Aeneis*, VIII.728.

[43] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 46: 'Hic est sepulchrum Darii regis Parthorum a Magno Alexandro conditum'. See Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, V.13.30.

[44] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 46: 'Hic Scs. Matheus corpore requiescit'.

[45] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 45: 'Arbelacum'; 'Carras civitas. Hic captus est Crassus et cesi sunt Romani'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XV.1.12.

[46] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 44: 'Media (...). Haec habet arborem pomiferam, nomine Mediam, omnibus aliis terris exceptam, robore fortem, fructu uberrimam, pomis odoriferis proficuisque contra venena et anhelitus seniles'. See Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, XII.15.16; Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XVII.7.8; XIV.3.11.

[47] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 45: 'Andropolis civitas Persici regni fortissima et famosissima a Perseo Parthe filio, a quo et Persida dicta est'; 'Aracusa civitas'; p. 47: 'Coapsis fluvius Persarum vocatur eorum lingua, quod miram dulcedinem aque habeat, adeo ut Persici reges quamdiu inter eius ripas morantur fluminis, ex eo sibi pocula vendicarunt'. See Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, CLXXX.4; Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIII.21.15.

[48] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 46: 'Susis civitas (...). Symulachrum stellis celis micantibus presignatum, et regio [regia] Cyri lapide candido et columnpnis aureis continetur'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XV.1.10.

The Ebstorf map also shows how in the Latin Middle Ages the name of Zoroaster persisted as a source of Chaldaean astrology and magic. One of the texts on the map explains that the art of magic was invented in Persia and that it was here, in the days before the Tower of Babel, that Nimrod had taught the Persians to worship fire.[49] In fact, Zoroaster had long been identified by Jewish and Christian authorities with various biblical figures: not only Nimrod, but also Ezekiel, Seth, Balaam and Baruch. The identifications remind us that Zoroastrianism was considered as related in some way to the Bible; thus it may be that the star shown shining over Bethlehem was intended to remind viewers of the map not only of the Nativity, but also of the three wise men who travelled from the east to worship Christ in another reference to the tradition that wisdom came from the east. To the west of Persia, the map portrays Chaldaea, the land in which astronomy was invented, and in which we also see a flaming tower representing Ur, with an adjacent explanation that Ur in Hebrew means fire (Figure 7).[50]

As on the Hereford map, so also on the Ebstorf map there is an abundance of both geographical and historical features. Above all, the Ebstorf map was meant to be read simultaneously for both the geography and the history of the world, progressing from east to west, and from the creation to the final triumph of Christ, a world that is embraced by Christ, who is shown on the map with his head in the east, his feet in the west and his arms outstretched from north to south. Here again, Persia plays a role within an overall scheme of universal history structured on the idea of the succession of empires.

## Persia on Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Maps

The first of the later maps to be considered here is the most elaborate version of the world map that is found in a number of the manuscript copies of Ranulph Higden's fourteenth-century chronicle of world history (Figures 8, 9 and 10).[51] On Higden's map, the emphasis is still on places connected with biblical history, such as Jerusalem (here depicted by a church) and the Israelites's crossing of the Red Sea. The achievements of Alexander the Great are also described on the map. The provinces of Parthia, Assyria, Media, Persia, and Carmania are clearly demarcated by boundary lines between the rivers Tigris and Indus. Thus, we see that the traditional way of illustrating the progression of world history was still being followed in the later Middle Ages, and Persia was still important on that east-west axis that had structured the earlier *mappae mundi*. By the fifteenth century, however, the depiction of Persia on world maps had a different connotation. On the south-orientated

[49] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 45: 'Persida regio. In hac primum or[t]a est ars magica, ad quam Nemroth gygas pro confusione abiit linguarum ibique Persas ignem docuit colere. Nam omnes in illis partibus solem colunt, qui eorum [lingua] hel dicitur'. See Isidore, *Etymologiae*, XIV.3.12.

[50] Miller, *Die Ebstorfkarte*, p. 44: 'Caldea. In hac primum inventa est astronomia' (see Isidore, *Etymologiae*, III.24.1); p. 47: 'Ur Chaldeorum, id est ignis'.

[51] London, British Library, Royal, MS 14. C. IX, fols 1v-2r and 2v. On the Higden maps see Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 126-131; Peter Barber, 'The Evesham World Map: A Late Medieval English View of God and the World', *Imago Mundi*, 47 (1995), pp. 13-17. On Higden's historical chronicle, John Taylor, 'Ranulf Higden', in John B. Friedman, Kristen Mossler Figg, and others, eds, *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (New York-London: Garland, 2000), pp. 252-254; Taylor, *The Universal Chronicle of Ranulf Higden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), with a discussion of the map at pp. 63-68.

Walsperger map of 1448, for example, Parthia is still shown near the Persian Sea, and the city of Persepolis is marked by a vignette (Figures 11 and 12) but the map now portrays contemporary Asia with, for example, the residence of the Great Khan in Cathay.[52] The non-European lands are no longer shown as part of the historical succession of past empires before the advent of Christendom. Indeed, on Walsperger's map these lands are openly acknowledged as non-Christian. Walsperger colour-coded his place signs with – as he explains at the bottom of the map – red for Christian cities and black for non-Christian cities.

The emphasis on Walsperger's map on contemporary places rather than biblical history underscores the importance of changes in mapping practice during the fifteenth century. For this, and other, reasons, the south-orientated world map made by Fra Mauro is particularly interesting for the way it reflects the shift from medieval world maps (like the Hereford and Ebstorf) towards the wholesale adoption of mathematically-based maps, those constructed on the newly discovered Ptolemaic model (Figures 13, 14 and 15).[53] In one of the many texts on his map, Fra Mauro describes Persia in familiar terms. He repeats the tradition that magic had originated in Persia, and describes the 'Rochbarlani', a cruel and dangerous race, who were necromancers and who made the air dark in order to rob travellers.[54] He also relates how Nimrod taught the Persians to worship the sun and the fire. At the same time we find something new. The map has been updated to give details about contemporary human geography. For instance, Fra Mauro explains that Persia contained eight kingdoms (*chassu*, *lor*, *curdistan*, *tymochain*, *celstan*, *istaruch*, *ceraci*, and *sonçara*), bred good horses and donkeys, which were traded in India, and cultivated cotton. He noted too that various forms of idolatry and a variety of faiths were also to be found in Persia, although the majority of the population had converted to Islam.[55]

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[52] Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Palat. Lat. 1362b. See Roberto Almagià, *Monumenta Cartographica Vaticana*, I, *Planisferi carte nautiche e affini dal secolo XIV al XVII* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1944), pp. 30-31. See also Karl-Heinz Meine, 'Zur Weltkarte des Andreas Walsperger, Konstanz 1448', in Wolfgang Scharfe, Hans Vollet and Erwin Herrmann, eds, *Kartenhistorisches Colloquium Bayreuth 1982* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1983), pp. 17-30; Woodward, 'Medieval *Mappaemundi*', pp. 316-317, 325-327, 358.

[53] On Fra Mauro's map see Piero Falchetta, *The Fra Mauro World Map* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Angelo Cattaneo, *Fra Mauro's Mappamundi and Fifteenth-Century Venetian Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Cattaneo, 'Fra Mauro *Cosmographus Incomparabilis* and his *Mappamundi*: Documents, Sources, and Protocols for Mapping', in Diego Ramado Curto, Angelo Cattaneo, and André Ferrand Almeida, eds, *La cartografia europea tra primo Rinascimento e fine dell'Illuminismo* (Florence: Olschki, 2003), pp. 19-48; Wojciech Iwánczak, 'Entre l'Espace ptolémaïque et l'Empirie: les cartes de Fra Mauro', *Médiévales* 18 (1990), pp. 53-68; Woodward, 'Medieval *Mappaemundi*', pp. 286-370; Tullia Gasparrini Leporace, *Il Mappamondo di Fra Mauro* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1956).

[54] Gasparrini Leporace, *Il Mappamondo di Fra Mauro*, pp. 35-36: 'In Persia sono fra le altre do' generation de populi. Hi primi sono diti curtistani, hi secondi Rochbarlani, e questi sono crudel e pericolosissimi homeni e de pessima conditione più li secondi cha li primi, perché sono necromanti et obscurano l'aiere cum suoincantamenti per poder robar i viandanti'.

[55] Gasparrini Leporace, *Il Mappamondo di Fra Mauro*, p. 36: 'Persia contien viii Reami, de i quali el primo vien dito chassu, secondo lor, terço curdistan, quarto tymochain, quinto celstan, sexto istaruch, septimo ceraci, octavo sonçara. Ma nel regno de thymochain nasce nobilissimi cavali e aseni de gran priesio e sono potenti e veloci, di qual se ne fa gran marchadantie in india. E qui nasce goton e vien biave de ogni condition. Item in questa persia fo trova da l'arte magica et in questa persia da può la confusion de le lengue vene Nembrot çigante, el qual insignò i persi adorar el sol e ancor el fuogo. E perhò chiamano el sol hel, ma hora sono gran parte machmetani, parte adorano idoli per diversi modi e cum molte varietà de fede'.

There were good reasons for the change in the way Persia was portrayed on maps between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. A number of factors had led, throughout Europe, to major changes in map making.[56] First of all, an entirely new kind of map, the portolan chart, which was for use in navigation but which was also often copied by those compiling world maps, had appeared in the Mediterranean world by, at the latest, the beginning of the thirteenth century. Portolan charts were made for practical use and involved a different perception of space, for which measurable distance and direction was essential.[57] Secondly, there was the rediscovery of Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography.* The arrival in Venice from Constantinople, in 1406, of a Greek manuscript of this work of Ptolemy, and its translation into Latin by Jacobus Angelus in the following year, introduced another new type of map, the 'Ptolemaic' map. Maps constructed according to instructions set down by Ptolemy in the Book One of the *Geography* were no longer built up from historical landmarks, but were drawn on geometrical and astronomically-defined projections to depict only contemporary features.[58] They also had north at the top of the map, a fact that undermined the traditional privileging of east. Once east was no longer at the top of the world map, the visual impact of the east-west progression of history was lost. A third major factor in the changes in the fifteenth century to medieval cartography was the in-coming flood of new information about distant parts of the world, most especially about Asia and the Far East, reaching Western Europe. European travel in, and trade contacts with, the east, were never completely blocked during the period of Islamic dominance in central Asia.[59] After the fourteenth century, however, maritime cartography offered the European compilers of *mappae mundi* an alternative perspective on those eastern regions that encouraged the chart makers to represent the Asian parts of the known world as contemporary, not historical, regions.

Another factor to take into consideration is that of political relationships. The new, sharper, interest in contemporary non-Christian lands was appropriate in the context of developments since the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth century the Christian Church found itself obliged to redirect its missionary efforts in the face of the expansion of Islam,

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[56] On the so-called 'transitional period' in the history of cartography (1300-1460) see Woodward, 'Medieval *Mappaemundi*', pp. 314-318. I discuss the shift from medieval *mappae mundi* to Renaissance cartography in my *Mapping Paradise.*

[57] See Tony Campbell, 'Portolan Charts from the Late Thirteenth Century to 1500', in Harley and Woodward, eds, *History of Cartography*, I, *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, pp. 371-463. Patrick Gautier Dalché, *Carte marine et Portulan au XIIe siècle. Le «Liber de existencia riveriarum et forma maris nostris Mediterranei», (Pise, circa 1200)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1995), suggests that the charts emerged a century earlier than is generally thought.

[58] The first Latin manuscript with maps of Ptolemy's *Geography* is Biblioteca Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 5698. On the fifteenth-century 'rediscovery' of Ptolemy's Geography see Patrick Gautier Dalché, 'The reception of Ptolemy's Geography', in David Woodward, ed., *The History of Cartography*, III, *Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, in press); Germaine Aujac, 'Ptolemy', in Friedman, Mossler Figg, and others, eds, *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, pp. 507-511 and bibliography; Sebastiano Gentile, 'Umanesimo e cartografia: Tolomeo nel secolo XV', in Ramado Curto, Cattaneo, and Almeida, eds, *La cartografia europea tra primo Rinascimento e fine dell'Illuminismo*, pp. 3-18.

[59] For example, in the twelfth century, Benjamin of Tudela had travelled to Baghdad. See *The World of Benjamin of Tudela: A Medieval Mediterranean Travelogue*, ed. Sandra Benjamin (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1995); *The Itinerary*, ed. Ezra H. Haddad (Baghdad: Eastern Press, 1945). Before the thirteenth century, various Italian cities and the Catalans had trading posts in various parts of the Islamic world.

as after the Mongolian invasion of Central Asia and the establishment of Mongolian rule, sufficient security returned to the region to allow the full renewal of contacts with Europe.[60] For a century or so, from about 1250 to 1350, certain European travellers, mostly diplomats, traders, and missionaries, had been allowed to journey through Persia to India and China. Some of these travellers had recorded their experiences: William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, John of Monte Corvino, Odoric of Pordenone, John of Plano Carpini, Simon of Saint-Quentin.[61] All this new material had filtered through to European map makers only very slowly. Eventually, after the collapse of the Mongolian empire and the rise of the Ottoman Turks, late fourteenth-century map compilers began to borrow from sources made available in the previous century. In the light of the thirteenth-century *mappae mundi*, their creations represented a relative advance in the state of knowledge about contemporary central Asia, but it was not until the fifteenth century, when map makers became able to draw on sufficient new information, that they were encouraged to portray non-European lands as regions of the present, not of the past, and not just a stage for the display of Christian universal history.

A final factor to consider here in connection with changes in the cartographical context was another shift that went back to the thirteenth century, when book and map production was associated above all with the predominantly rural monastic *scriptoria*. In the later Middle Ages, the centre of gravity of book (and map) production had moved from the countryside to the university towns and mercantile cities. This meant that, by the end of the fourteenth century, a more broadly based system of book production, involving guilds of lay and ecclesiastical scribes and artists was challenging the traditional monastic monopoly and reducing the influence of clerics on the portrayal of the world on maps.[62]

The complex interplay of all these factors led to a gradual weakening of the intimate connection between the historical dimension and geographical description and the gradual loss from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century world maps of the traditional components of the medieval *mappae mundi*. The representation of the world was reduced to its

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[60] I am grateful to Sonja Brentjes for her comments on the Arabic, Persian and Ottoman material incoporated into the Western maps and portolan charts and for providing me with the text of her paper 'Revisiting Catalan Portolan Charts: Do They Contain Elements of Asian Provenance?', presented at the Conference *Maps and Images: How They Have Transmitted Visual Knowledge Along the Silk Road*, Zurich 14-15 May 2004. On the missionary and crusading late medieval approach to the East see Kenneth M. Setton, gen. ed., *A History of the Crusades*, 6 vols (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969-1989), III (1975), *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Harry W. Hazard; and V (1985), *The Impact of the Crusades on the Near East*, eds Harry W. Hazard and Norman P. Zacour, especially Marshall W. Baldwin, 'Missions to the East in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', pp. 452-518.

[61] William of Rubruck, *Itinerarium*, XVIII.5, in *Sinica Franciscana*, 3 vols (Ad Claras Aquas, Quaracchi, Florence: Apud Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929-1936), I (1929), *Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. Anastasius van den Wyngaert, p. 211; Marco Polo, *Il Milione*, ed. Luigi Foscolo Benedetto (Florence: Olschki, 1928); John of Monte Corvino, *Epistolae*, in *Sinica Francescana*, I, *Itinera et relationes* (1929), pp. 333-355; Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio*, in *Sinica Francescana*, I, *Itinera et relationes* (1929), pp. 379-495; John of Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, in *Sinica Francescana*, I, *Itinera et relationes* (1929), pp. 1-130; Simon of Saint-Quentin, *Histoire des Tartars*, ed. Jean Richard (Paris: Geuthner, 1965). On the travel literature on the East Scott D. Westrem, ed., *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination* (New York: Garland, 1991).

[62] See Catherine Delano-Smith, 'Maps and Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', in David Woodward, Catherine Delano-Smith, and Cordell D. K. Yee, *Plantejaments i objectius d'una història universal de la cartografia / Approaches and Challenges in a Worldwide History of Cartography* (Barcelona: Institut Cartogràfic de Catalunya, 2001), p. 246, where she quotes Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *Medieval Illuminators and Their Methods of Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 22-23.

geographical horizons only, which put the emphasis on contemporary rather than historical features. Persia was still there on the maps, but now only as just one piece in the jigsaw of contemporary regions, a land that happened to stride the great trade routes that connected China and India with the West, and no longer as the second empire of world history.

## Plates

Fig. 1. The Hereford world map. Lincoln (?and Hereford). *c.* 1300. 158 × 133 cm. Hereford Cathedral.

Fig. 2. The Hereford world map. Lincoln (?and Hereford). *c.* 1300. Detail of Asia, with Parthia, including Persia.

Fig. 3. The Hereford world map. Lincoln (?and Hereford). *c.* 1300. Drawing of the Author.

Fig. 4. The Ebstorf world map. ?Ebstorf, Lower Saxony. *c.* 1239. 3.56 × 3.58 m. Destroyed in an Allied bombing raid over Hanover on the night of 8/9 October 1943, and now available as a pre-war facsimile.

Fig. 5. The Ebstorf world map. ?Ebstorf, Lower Saxony. *c.* 1239. Drawing of the Author.

Fig. 6. The Ebstorf world map. ?Ebstorf, Lower Saxony. *c.* 1239. Detail of Central Asia from Jerusalem to the Indus, including Persia.

Fig. 7. The Ebstorf world map. ?Ebstorf, Lower Saxony. *c.* 1239. Detail of Western Persia and Chaldaea.

Fig. 8. Map of the world from Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. Ramsey, England. *c.* 1350. 46 × 34 cm. London, British Library, Royal MS 14.C.IX, fols 1v-2r.

Fig. 9. Map of the world from Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. Ramsey, England. *c.* 1350. Drawing of the Author.

Fig. 10. Map of the world from Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. Ramsey, England. *c.* 1350. Detail of Asia.

Fig. 11. World map by Andreas Walsperger. Constance, southern Germany. 1448. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. Lat. 1362b, unfoliated. Detail of Central Asia.

Fig. 12. World map by Andreas Walsperger. Constance, southern Germany. 1448. Drawing of the Author.

Fig. 13. World map by Fra Mauro. Venice. *c.* 1450. Diameter 196 × 193 cm (outer frame, approx. 223 cm). Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana.

Fig. 14. World map by Fra Mauro. Venice. *c.* 1450. Drawing of the Author.

Fig. 15. World map by Fra Mauro. Venice. *c.* 1450. Diameter 196 × 193 cm (outer frame, approx. 223 cm). Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana. Detail with Persia.