

2015

A Blank Space: Mandeville, Maps, and Possibility

Asa Simon Mittman
California State University, Chico

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal>



Part of the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation

Mittman, Asa Simon. "A Blank Space: Mandeville, Maps, and Possibility." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 5, 2 (2015): 1-22. <https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol5/iss2/2>

This Feature Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Art History at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* by an authorized editor of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

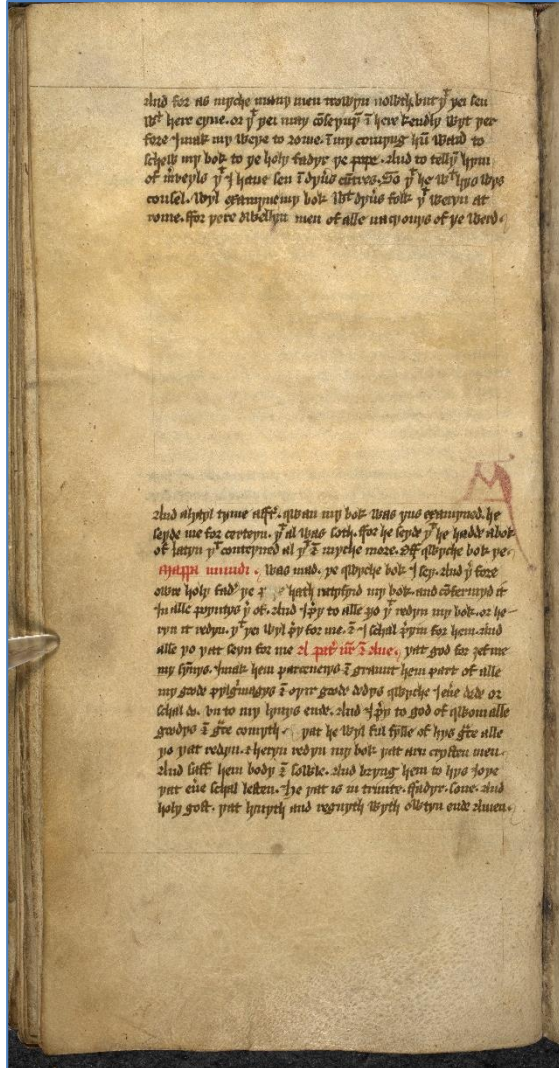


Figure 1 “A blank space,” London, British Library MS Harley 3954 f 69v. Photo: The British Library Board

A Blank Space: Mandeville, Maps, and Possibility

By Asa Simon Mittman, California State University, Chico

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.¹

(Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*)

British Library Harley MS 3954's *Book of Sir*

John Mandeville has ninety-nine images, and

another thirty-five blanks, carefully framed by thin

lines of ink as part of the ruling of the

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (Charlottesville: Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, 1999, orig. pub. 1902), 68, available online as Joseph Conrad, “*Heart of Darkness*,” *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library* (April 5, 2014) <<https://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/g/i21/hod-uva.pdf>> (accessed May 2015). My thanks to Dan Terkla for his care in editing this essay, for his easygoing style of collaboration, and for his reminding me of this passage from Conrad.

manuscript. As is so often the case, the blanks appear more frequently toward the end.² On the final folio (69v) there appears a neatly framed blank space (**Figure 1**).³ The manuscript's final text block appears just below this space and tells us of "a bok of Latyn that conteyned al that and myche more, aff wych bok the *mappa mundi* was mad." As if to tantalize the reader, "*mappa mundi*" is rubricated and so stands out from the black ink in which the rest of the page (and the book) is written. While I sat there, staring at the blank space, and the red name for an absent image, I caught myself dreaming of finding a new *mappa mundi* hidden within that empty frame, the perfect place for a map of the world according to Mandeville. What would it look like, and what would imagining it tell us about the *Book*'s portrayal of Jews?

Medieval representations of Jews are, to say the least, fraught.⁴ Little work has been done on the role of cartography in the larger Christian projects of anti-Judaism (that is, the definition of Christianity against notions about Jewish beliefs and practices⁵) and anti-Semitism (prejudice against Jewish peoples, involving what Peter Biller has called "proto-racial thought")⁶ though Daniel Birkholz, Kathy Lavezzo, and I have made a start.⁷ We argue that medieval Christian

² There is also one later image added on a previously blank leaf.

³ *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*, BL MS Harley 3954, England (East Anglia), 1425-1450. For the complete record, see "Detailed record for Harley 3954," *British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* (no date) <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=4469&CollID=8&NStart=3954>> (accessed May 2015). For excellent introductions to *The Book*, see Iain Macleod Higgins, *The Book of John of Mandeville, with Related Texts* (Cambridge: Hachett Publishing, 2011) and Anthony Bale, trans. and intro., *Sir John Mandeville: The Book of Marvels and Travels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴ See, for example, Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews: Making Monsters in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵ See David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2013). Nirenberg, 6, argues that "anti-Judaism should not be understood as some archaic or irrational closet in the vast edifices of Western thought. It was rather one of the basic tools with which that edifice was constructed."

⁶ Peter Biller, "Proto-Racial Thought in Medieval Science," in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 157-80.

⁷ At the New Chaucer Society Congress in July of 2014, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, Lavezzo organized a thread of sessions on "(Absent) Jews in the Middle" in which Daniel Birkholz delivered a paper on

maps, including the Hereford, Psalter and Ebstorf Maps, as well as Matthew Paris's innovative maps of the "Holy Land," make assertions about Jews and Jewishness through three strategies that are organized along global, eschatological chronologies: the presentation of ancient individuals and events, such as the Wandering of the Israelites; the effacement of medieval Jewish populations who were sometimes living quite near where the maps were created⁸; and the deployment of fear-mongering images of and rhetoric about the purported role Jews, who are often conflated with Gog and Magog, would play during the End-Days. Looking at the blank space in Harley 3954 and imagining it filled provides an opportunity to think through the power and importance of these cartographic conventions.

A few Mandeville manuscripts contain maps, such as BL MS Royal 17 C.xxxviii (**Figure 2**), which was produced perhaps a decade earlier than Harley 3954.⁹ This makes sense, of course, given that the narrative is so deeply tied to geography.¹⁰

"Coincident Departures: Mapping the Expulsion in the Hereford *Mappamundi* and Harley MS 2253." I spoke on "Jews of the Past, Jews of the Future." For a record of this conference, see "2014 Congress," *The New Chaucer Society Website* (2014) <<http://newchaucersociety.org/pages/entry/2014-congress>> (accessed May 2015). I am currently working on a book on the subject, entitled *Cartographies of Exclusion*.

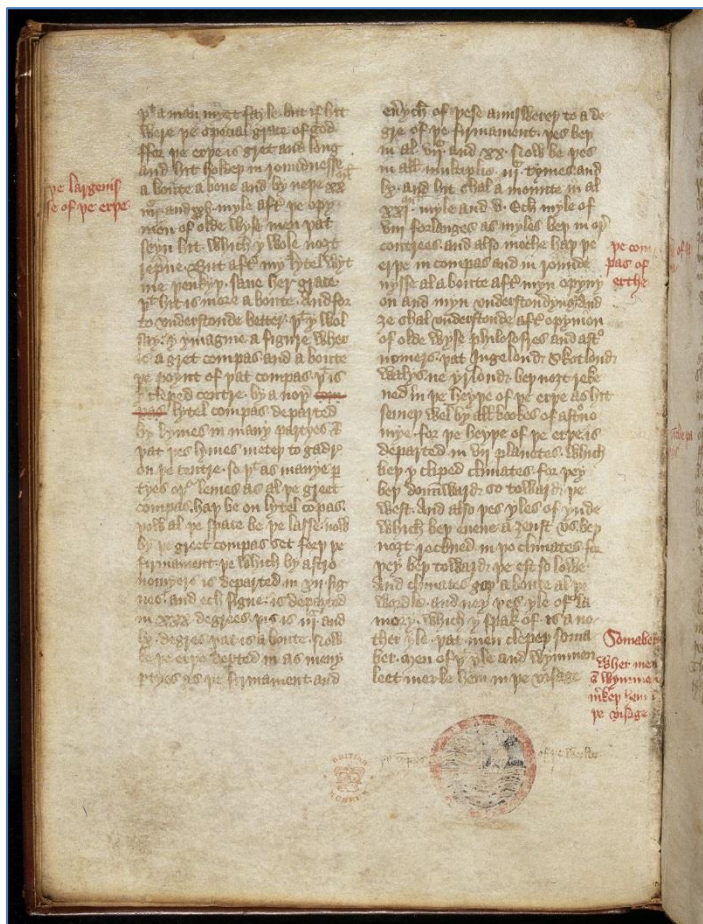
⁸ Matthew Paris, for example, produced his highly defamatory maps while living in St. Albans, a dozen miles from the Jewry of Hertford and two-dozen miles away in main Jewry of London. Joe Hillaby, "Jewish Colonization in the Twelfth Century," *Jews in Medieval Britain: Historical, Literary and Archeological Perspectives*, ed. Patricia Skinner (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003, paperback 2012), 14, Map 1, lists all the English Jewries present in the twelfth century. Robin Mundill, *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262-1290* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 286-90, provides a complete list of records of Jewish settlement in England, 1262-1290.

⁹ There is no single "Mandeville" text, but rather, a series of interlocking texts, all in turn based on other sources rather than on the putative travels of its likely fictional narrator, "not a singular thing but a diffuse and volatile concatenation," according to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Pilgrimages, Travel Writing and the Medieval Exotic," *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, Elaine Treharne and Greg Walker, eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 611-628, 625. See also Iain Macleod Higgins, "Defining the Earth's Center in a Medieval 'Multi-Text': Jerusalem in *The Book of John Mandeville*," in Sealy Gilles and Sylvia Tomasch (eds), *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 29-53.

¹⁰ *The Book of Sir John Mandeville*, BL MS Royal 17 C.xxxviii, England, 1410-1420. For the complete record, see "Detailed record for Royal 17 C XXXVIII," *British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* (no date) <

Figure 2 “Compass of the World,”
British Library, MS Royal 17
C.xxxviii, f. 41v. Photo: The
British Library Board

A small image in the lower margin labeled “The Compass of the World” is an inverted T-O map, dividing the world with straight lines into three schematic continents.¹¹ This tiny map is badly abraded, but it is clear that east – occupying half the earth – appears at the bottom, in contrast with the norm in medieval western Europe, where it appears on the top (though there are numerous counter-examples, especially those in which the image of the world is held by Christ or kings). Asia (lower half) and Africa (the upper-left quadrant) are filled with wavy lines that suggest water rather than land, creating a further inversion of expectations. The upper-right quadrant, presenting Europe, contains shapes in different colors, but nothing is clearly discernable. And so, sadly, the image provides little more opportunity for speculation about the



<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7518&CollID=16&NStart=170338> (accessed May 2015).

¹¹ For a description of the T-O, or tripartite, map type, and numerous examples, see David Woodward, “Medieval Mappaemundi,” *The History of Cartography, Volume 1: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. J. B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987): 286-370, esp. 296. For discussions of the role of the eastward orientation of many medieval maps, see Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 125ff and B. L. Gordon, “Sacred Directions, Orientation, and the Top of the Map,” *History of Religions* 10:3 (February 1971): 211-227.

Mandevillian worldview than the blank space in Harley 3954. More complex maps do survive in a few manuscripts containing *The Book of Mandeville*, such as the elaborate T-O map in BL MS Add. 37049, f. 2v, which appears a few folios before a series of excerpts from Mandeville, and therefore might or might not be associated with it. This map is an unusual variant on the T-O structure, with terrestrial earth somewhat abridged to allow room within the map's circle for the spheres of the elements of fire and air, each of which is labeled. The right branch of the water comprising the "T" of the T-O, the Tanais or Don River, is labeled as the Element of Water, and a forested stretch of northern Asia just above it is labeled as the Element of Earth. The map, then, is rendered into a diagram of the four elements. As Chet Van Duzer and Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez note, the map *may* respond to passages in Mandeville that "emphasize the centrality of Jerusalem," though they admit this is not likely. In any case, it does not otherwise seem to respond to Mandeville, which is only one of the "startling variety of texts and images" in this volume.¹² Even this interesting map, then, provides little guidance about what the "missing" map of Harley 3954 would have looked like.

If not a map, what else might have been intended for this blank space? An image of Mandeville before the pope? After all, as he writes, "I mad my weye to Rome, in my comyng humward to schew my bok to the holy fadyr the pope."¹³ Such an image would work well as part of the larger visual program, which begins with several images of Mandeville, and which contains numerous depictions of him in audiences with various priests and bishops. Indeed, the

¹² Chet Van Duzer and Sandra Sáenz-López Pérez, "Tres filii Noe diviserunt orbem post diluvium: The World Map in British Library Add. MS 37049," *Word & Image* 26:1 (2010): 21-39, 25. For a high-resolution image of this map, as well as the rest of the manuscript, see "Add MS 37049," *British Library Digitized Manuscripts* (no date) <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_37049_f002v> (accessed July 2015).

¹³ Harley 3954, f. 69.

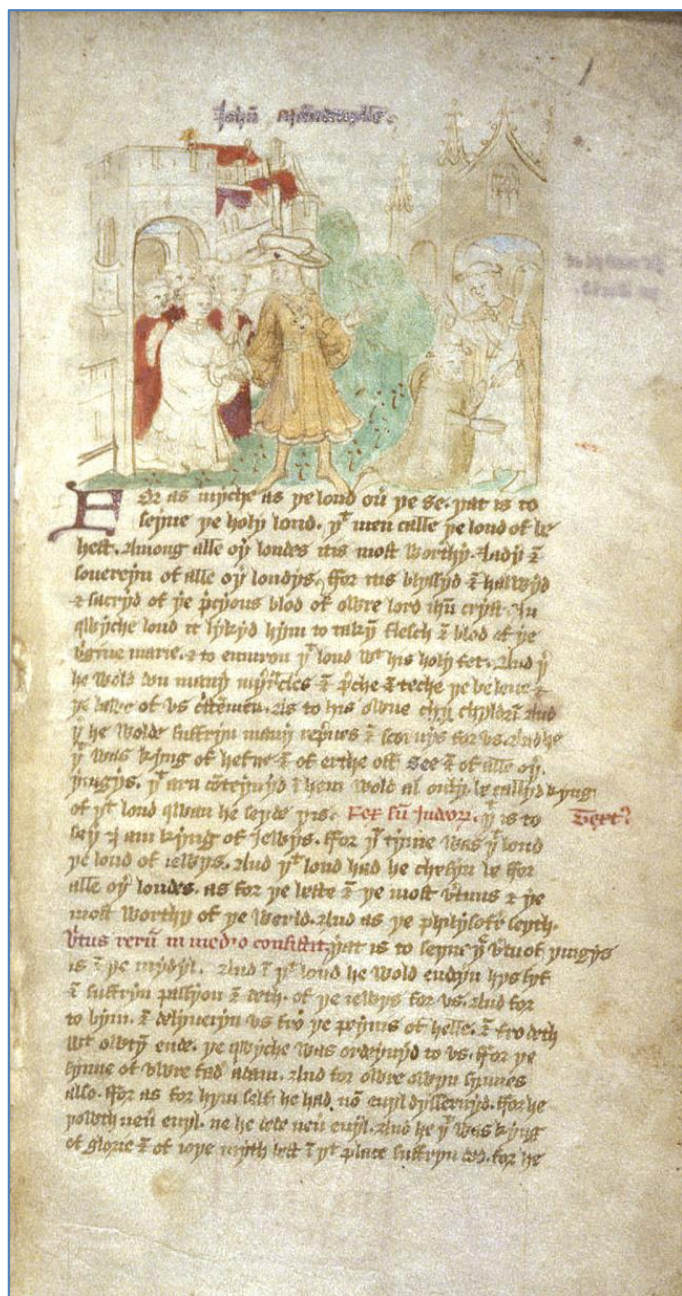


Figure 3 Mandeville Sets Out, London, British Library, MS Harley 3954, f. 1. Photo: The British Library Board.

manuscript’s first image is of this type (**Figure 3**). Mandeville appears on the left in sumptuous garments – fur-lined robes, a jeweled necklace, and an elaborate hat – as he takes leave of the apparently adoring people of his native St. Albans, who kneel before him. To the right, Mandeville appears in the simple garb of the humble pilgrim kneeling in the entrance to a church, before a cleric who blesses him. None of the Mandeville texts describe these scenes.¹⁴ It would be fitting to complete this manuscript with an image of Mandeville again kneeling in receipt of a blessing, not from his local vicar, but from the pope, the Vicar of Christ.

But a map. A *mappa mundi*. That is what I wanted to find. This is a text centered on

geography, using geography to make claims about peoples and their proper places. A map could show how the illuminator synthesized this mass of complicated information, which sections were

¹⁴ This manuscript also lacks the preface, which precedes the prologue and provides more background information.

deemed most important, and how the confusing textual geography might be rendered accessible for readers.

The generous British Library staff allowed me to look at the Harley 3954 folio under a black light. I squinted, looked through my magnifying glass, took off my glasses, put them back on, and squinted harder. I saw nothing; no drypoint underdrawings; not even small, incidental scratches that I might have misread as preparatory marks. It is a smooth, clear stretch of velum. The reading room superintendent offered me a “cold light,” a 1960s-looking contraption with a steel box housing a light source that allows one to examine fragile manuscripts without subjecting them to the potentially damaging heat of more conventional lights. I was instructed to shine the light on the blank space on the recto, and through it from the verso. Nothing. No pope, no Mandeville, *no map*. Nothing to be written up, no fame, no glory from having found an unknown map. Just a blank space. Or *maybe a blank space*.

I borrow “a blank space,” from the “Manifesto” of the Material Collective, “a collaborative of art historians and students of visual culture [that] seeks to foster a safe space for alternative ways of thinking about objects.”¹⁵ The manifesto, for which I was one of a dozen co-authors, establishes the Collective’s goals – “to cooperate, encourage, share,” and so on – and lists actions and qualities it values: “experimental processes; risk-taking; transparency, revelation; *a blank space*; joy in faltering.”¹⁶ The fourth value was originally a placeholder, a blank space, but we in the Collective found that we liked it that way. “Blank space” signifies openness and possibility. That is, our blank space, any blank space, is not *merely* a blank space.

¹⁵ “Manifesto,” *The Material Collective Website* (May 2013) <<http://thematerialcollective.org/manifesto/>> (accessed May 2015).

¹⁶ “Manifesto,” emphasis added.

It might stand in for positive prospects, for example, thereby leaving room for discovery, innovation, and creativity.

The narrative and rhetoric of *The Book of Mandeville* is driven by strategies similar to those operative in maps. *Mandeville* is often referred to as a medieval bestseller, having been translated into nine languages, and seems to have had “popularity ... greater than that of any other prose work of the Middle Ages,” as attested by the 300-some extant manuscripts.¹⁷ The popularity of this text may be, at least in part, attributable to its subtle but pervasive anti-Jewish rhetoric. Indeed, this is a work *about* Jews, or, seen another way, about English identity formed in opposition to customary beliefs about Jews and Judaism.¹⁸ It contains a chronological pattern of associations very similar to that found on medieval *mappae mundi* and other medieval maps, such as Matthew Paris’s maps of the “Holy Land.” The text of *Mandeville*, much in concert with notions espoused on maps, claims, for example, that Jerusalem, “*belonged* to the Jews”¹⁹ in the past, and then looks ahead, through conflation, to the time when “the Jews of the Ten Tribes, who are called Gog and Magog,” will escape their enclosure behind the Caspian Mountains in “Antichrist’s time and ... will slaughter a great many Christians.”²⁰ His Jews plot to smuggle

¹⁷ Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400–1600* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 122. For a detailed account of surviving manuscripts and manuscript groups of the Continental French version, see Susanne Röhl, *Der livre de Mandeville in 14. und 15. Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung der kontinentalfranzösischen Version* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004). For a chart of all surviving manuscripts, see Deluz, *Le Livre de Jehan de Mandeville*, 370-382. Further, several early printed versions were published, beginning in 1470, rendering it more popular in incunabula than any other medieval prose text.

¹⁸ See my forthcoming “Mandeville’s ‘East,’ Colonialism, Certainty, and Art History,” *Postcolonising the Medieval Image*, eds. Eva Frojmovic and Catherine Karkov (London: Ashgate).

¹⁹ Higgins, *Mandeville*, 3, emphasis added.

²⁰ Higgins, *Mandeville*, 157-58; 159.



Figure 4 Psalter Map, London, British Library, MS Add. 28681, f. 9. Photo: The British Library Board.

arms to their compatriots, as part of a global conspiracy to overthrow and enslave the Christian rulers of Europe, to “oppress them in our turn ... to bring the whole world to subjection.” A customs collector on a bridge, though, uncovers the concealed arms and, with them, “the hidden treachery and extraordinary deceit of the Jews, who chose rather to assist these open enemies of the world in general” – that is, the so-called “Tartars,” whom Matthew takes to be Jews – “than to aid the Christians, who allowed them to live amongst them.”²¹ Matthew did not illustrate this episode on any of his surviving maps, though it would not seem out of place on several of them, amidst other strange tales and accusations of Jewish colonial aggression.

The passages condemning Jews in *Mandeville*, Matthew Paris’s *Chronica*, and a great many other medieval English texts, form part of the intellectual context in which Harley 3954 was produced. So what would a map on its final folio look like? The space is small, only three inches high, but the circle of the world on the richly detailed Psalter Map is only half an inch larger (**Figure 4**).²² Given how much material that tiny map contains, the non-existent Mandeville map *could have contained* over 125 inscriptions and dozens of images. It could have shown the wandering of the Israelites and Moses’s parting of the Red Sea; it could have shown Gog and Magog behind their wall. It could have shown cannibalistic Jews, murderous Jews, violent Jews, monstrous Jews.

Figure 5 Alexander Encloses Gog and Magog, London, British Library, MS Harley 3954, f. 53. Photo: The British Library Board.

²¹ J.A. Giles, *Matthew Paris’s English History: From the Year 1235 to 1273* (London: G. Bell, 1889), 357-8, available online through the Hathi Trust Digital Library at <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.3200000637670> (accessed March 2014)

²² BL MS Add. 28681, fol. 9r, c. 1265. See Konrad Miller, *Mappaemundi: Die ältesten Weltkarten* (Stuttgart: J. Roth, 1895–98), vol. 3, pp. 37–43; Peter Barber, “Medieval Maps of the World,” in P.D.A. Harvey, ed., *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and their Context* (London: The British Library, 2006), pp. 15–19 and Chet Van Duzer, “*Hic sunt dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters,” *Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, Asa Simon Mittman and Peter Dendle, eds., (London: Ashgate, 2012).



Figure 5 Alexander Encloses Gog and Magog, London, British Library, MS Harley 3954, f. 53. Photo: The British Library Board.

Harley 3954 does have a grand image of Alexander walling in Gog and Magog (**Figure 5**).

The text directly above it innocuously informs the reader that the trees that bear cloves and nutmeg. The passage describing Gog and Magog does not start until the next page, so we first confront their image, with only its caption to identify them. We might gaze at this complicated, murky image for a while, before moving to the text that labels them as “the Jews.” In the half-page illumination, we see a great mass of figures, some in armor and helms and others wearing crowns, suggesting that these



Figure 6 Flat-Faced People, London, British Library, MS Harley 3954, f. 42v. Photo: The British Library Board.

are some of the twenty-two Jewish kings imprisoned with their followers. The image bristles with swords and spears and is splashed with bright red like so much blood. The background is a dusky maroon that seems to wave and sway, looking like flames of Hell – an impression furthered by the sharp, flame-like rocks that seem to press the Jews toward the water on the right. This implies that their temporal imprisonment foreshadows the eternal imprisonment awaiting these “enemies of Christ.” Above them, the Caspian Gate looms, visually confirming the text’s assertion that they have no way out; more to the point, though: the map designer and the tradition within which he worked excluded Jews from the otherwise ecumenical world of the ecumene. Therefore, text and image assure the viewer that, although the many heavily armed Jews here are securely enclosed, their containment is eschatologically temporary. They are

conflated with Gog and Magog and thus will eventually overrun their walls, and all of the Christian world beyond. The map that is *not* in this manuscript could have had any of these elements, or all of them. Although these are *standard* features of medieval cartography, they have received little commentary from modern historians.

Just above the dramatic image of Gog and Magog in Harley 3954 is an image of people eating giant grapes. The rubric beside them reads “*merveyl*,” and so is redundant, given that nearly every image in this manuscript depicts a “*merveyl*.” There is really nothing more *merveylous* about these giant grapes than about the astonishing Flat-Faced People (**Figure 6**) or great-lipped Amyctreae, for example. Therefore, I find myself reading the inscription against its intended nominative, and instead in the imperative mood: “Marvel!” That is, “Reader, *merveyl* at this.” The giant grapes get a rubric, and several of the blank spaces are labeled “*merueyllys*.” But the final blank has no label, unless the rubricated “*mappa mundi*” within the text block qualifies. Latin is rubricated throughout the manuscript, and that is likely all the coloration signifies, of course. And so *a blank space*. Nothing on the page, nothing, that is, but space for readerly flights of fancy, opportunities for medieval readers to draw in the final image – or, to turn to their mental images of illustrated *mappae mundi* or of other anti-Semitic Christian images in other media.

Other images have been added – a lovely city on 44v (**Figure 7**), and a few odd, amusing doodles, like the bald, bearded man with a long nose on 33v (**Figure 8**). At some point, a reader scribbled and wrote in a few of the blanks, but someone scrupulously scratched these out, following the lines carefully and leaving blurred scratches in place of the texts and images that were once there. Folio 69r, which backs the not-*mappa mundi*, had some text written on it, also scratched carefully away. Though I cannot read these erased words, the hand is clearly larger and

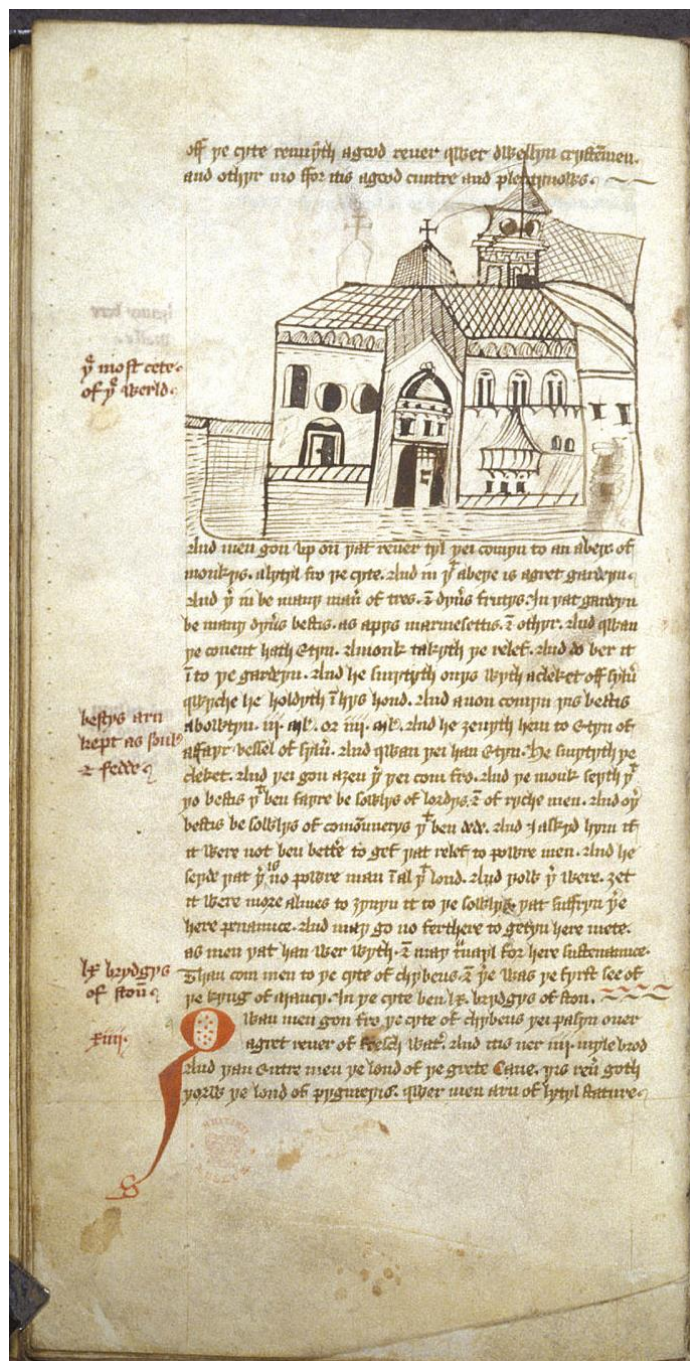


Figure 7 City of Cassay, later addition, London, British Library, MS Harley 3954, f. 44v. Photo: The British Library Board.

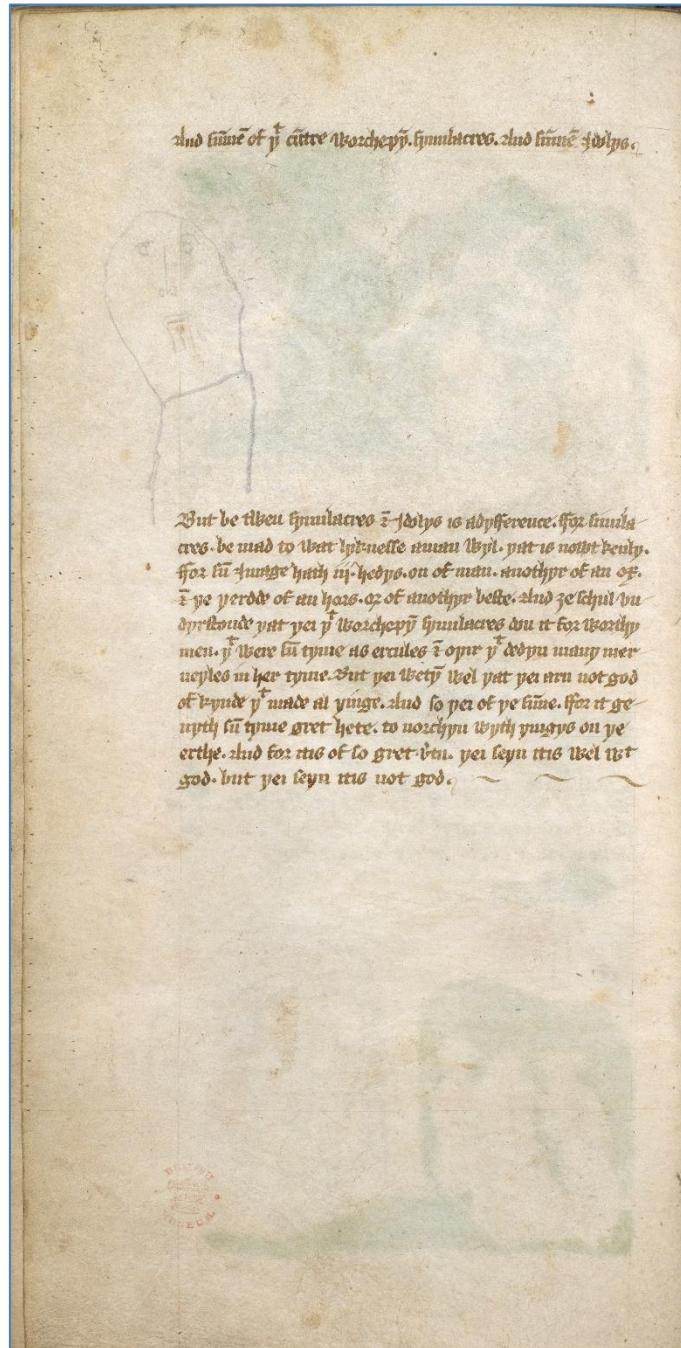
much later than that of the manuscript's scribe. This text was added later and removed later still, resulting, as it presumably was at the time of the manuscript's "completion," in a blank space. Such later additions of text and image are so common in medieval manuscripts that they almost seem to be natural accretions of time, building up like stalactites. Often, when modern historians mention them, they do so with a note of scorn, as in C. R. Dodwell's commentary about the later hand in the *Old English Illustrated Hexateuch*, BL MS Cotton Claudius B.v:

Then, after the end of the Middle Ages, the manuscript fell into the hands of a person, more meddlesome than artistic, who decided to touch up a number of the pictures with his pen. What he succeeded in doing by his childish efforts was simply to bodge up the pictures concerned and he has left his unhappy mark on almost all the folios between 70v and 128r.²³

²³ C. R. Dodwell and Peter Clemoes, *The Old English Illustrated Hexateuch (British Museum Cotton Tiberius B. IV)*. Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 18 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1974), 61.

Figure 8 Marginal Face, later addition, London, British Library, MS Harley 3954, f. 44v. Photo: The British Library Board.

And yet, we often value these additions, embedded in “complex relationships to scholarly disciplines, cultural values, and material practices,” because they teach us about the history of the manuscript, and the periods through which it has passed.²⁴ We should be cautious about rendering such judgments, especially in the context of a discussion of medieval maps, part of what Richard Gough referred to in a letter to the Reverend Michael Tyson in 1770 as the “barbarous Monkish System of Geography.”²⁵ We view medieval maps, and later markings on maps and manuscripts, as valuable,



²⁴ William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 24.

²⁵ Richard Gough, letter of November 13, 1770, printed in full in John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century; Comprizing Biographical Memoirs of William Bowyer and Many of his Learned Friends; an Incidental View of the Progress and Advancement of Literature in this Kingdom During the Last Century; and Biographical Anecdotes of a Considerable Number of Eminent Writers and Ingenious Artists; with a Very Copious Index*. Vol. 8 (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1814), 668.

regardless of their status as “meddlesome.” Indeed, Renaissance readers were actively taught to mark up their books – some of which were medieval manuscripts – and they did so with great vigor.²⁶ As William Sherman argues, the consideration of marginalia “takes us back, finally, to that crucial *space* from which ‘marginalia’ itself takes its name.”²⁷ That is, the predicate for all of this energetic addition – one reader added 59,600 words to a 68-page volume of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics!*²⁸ – is the *blank space* of the margin. For the “meddlesome” post-medieval artist who added small drawings to almost fifty folios of the Hexateuch, sometimes the blank spaces were large, as was the case with the then-empty lower frames on f. 87v and f. 149v;²⁹ in other cases, though, they were smaller, like the blank faces of the Israelites who spy on the giant Sons of Anak on f. 118r (**Figure 9**).³⁰ The vacant faces of the rightmost Israelite and of the giants beneath their arch to the right remain only lightly sketched in with drypoint, but the rest of the figures’ faces have been “bodged up” by the later hand (to me, rather amusingly). How much more “meddlesome” are these than the very extensive twelfth-century commentary that at times overwhelms the images, as on f. 99v?³¹ Really, the efforts of the “bodger” are rather weak in comparison to those of the commentator. For that matter, are either of these more meddlesome than the red “MUSEUM BRITANICUM” stamps that appear as vigorous marks of ownership on

²⁶ Sherman, *Used Books*, 3.

²⁷ Sherman, *Used Books*, 24.

²⁸ Sherman, *Used Books*, xii.

²⁹ These images are online at:

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_f087v and

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_f149v (accessed July 2015).

³⁰ For a similar example, here with a rather skeptical-looking Moses, see f. 112r, online at:

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_f112r (accessed July 2015).

³¹ This image is online at:

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_f099v (accessed July 2015).

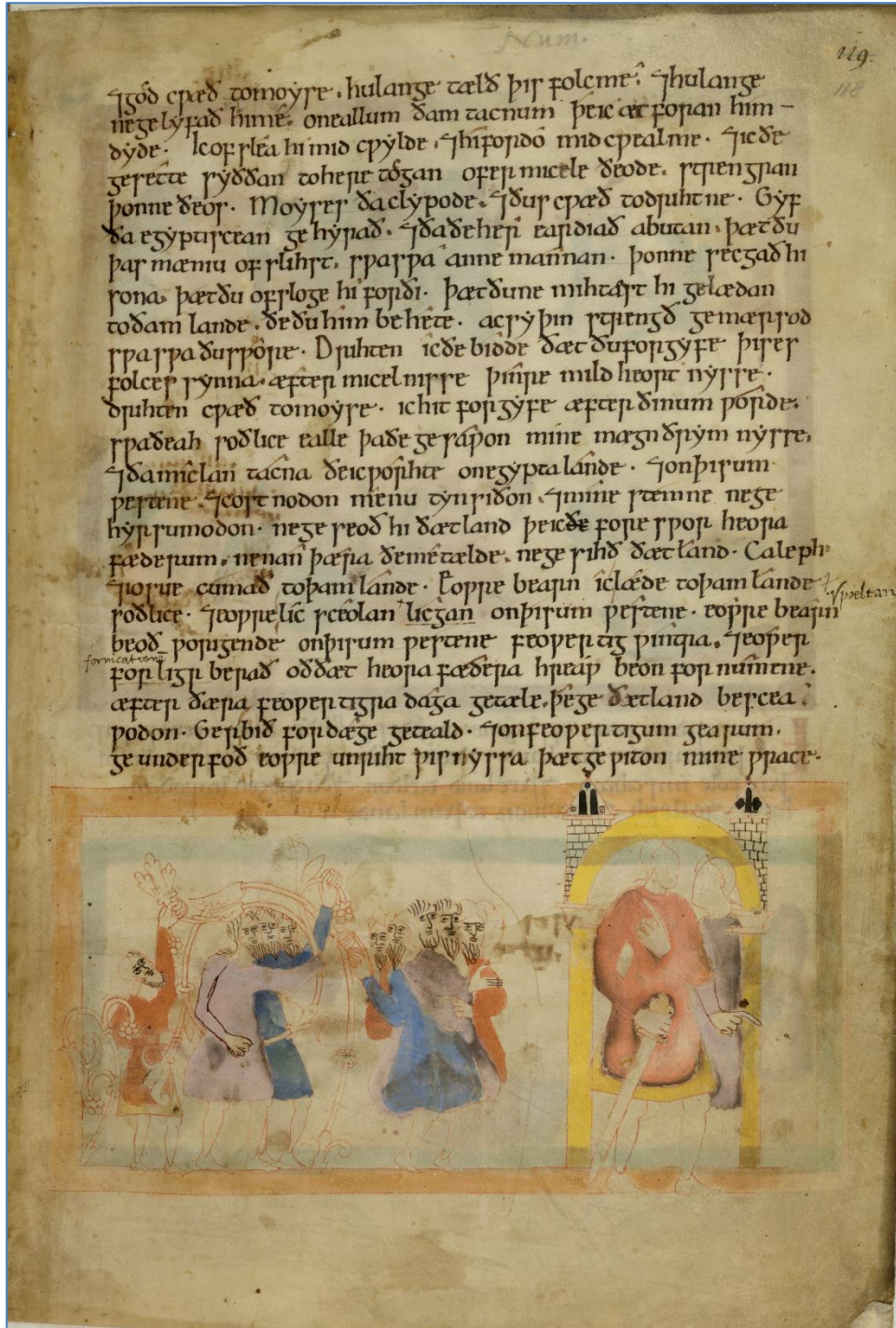


Figure 9 Sons of
 Anak, London,
 British Library,
 MS Cotton
 Tiberius B.iv, f.
 118r. Photo: The
 British Library
 Board.

a few folios of this manuscript, and many others?³² These, too, step into the breaches left by the manuscript's original creators, and by many generations of its users.

Indeed, it is not just the creators of a manuscript who have the opportunity to mark it up; all users do (though modern library practices *strongly* forbid this, and with good reason³³).

Benjamin C. Tilghman, also a founding member of the Material Collective, inherited a small fifteenth-century Book of Hours from his grandfather and muses on the Collective's blog about his ability to leave his traces in its blank spaces:

It suddenly occurred to me that the book bears no traces of its years in my grandfather's care, and I have been very careful so far not to leave any of my own. After all, I'm a historian entrusted with the care and maintenance of our cultural heritage: of course I'm not going to write in it, or mark it up, or erase anything.

But really, why shouldn't I? The marks of readers, the traces of the past lives of artworks are some of my favorite things about works of art. I love imagining all the people who have come into contact with a work of art, who have touched it and been touched back by it.³⁴

As in the Material Collective's manifesto, every empty space is an invitation. Open spaces in manuscripts call for personal inscription by owners, scholars, students, children, and vandals.³⁵

As poet Kay Ryan implores,

³² For example, f. 2v and 85v, online at:

<http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_f002v> and <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_claudius_b_iv_f085v> (accessed July 2015).

³³ Perhaps most famously, the Bodleian Library at Oxford still has its readers sign a pledge, originally written in Latin, declaring, "I hereby undertake not to remove from the Library, or to mark, deface, or injure in any way, any volume, document, or other object belonging to it or in its custody; not to bring into the Library or kindle therein any fire or flame, and not to smoke in the Library; and I promise to obey all rules of the Library." See "Library Regulations," *Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford* website (2015) <<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about-us/policies/regulations>> (accessed July 2015).

³⁴ Benjamin C. Tilghman, "Marking Time," *The Material Collective Blog* (April 2, 2013) <<http://thematerialcollective.org/marking-time/>> (accessed July 2015)

³⁵ This is also true of empty spaces in churches, as evidenced by Matthew Champion, "The Medium is the Message: Votive Devotional Imagery and Gift Giving amongst the Commonality in the Late Medieval Parish," *Peregrinations* 3:4 (Autumn 2012): 103-123.

Why isn't it all
 more marked,
 why isn't every wall
 graffitied, every park tree
 stripped like the stark limbs
 in the house of
 the chimpanzees?³⁶

Dario Gamboni argues of *all* artifacts that “it is their normal fate to disappear.”³⁷ Similarly, since it is not only nature but also culture that abhors a vacuum, it is the normal fate of blank spaces to be filled.

In a way, I have been trying to virtually fill in that blank space on the final folio of Harley 3954, to use my words to occupy the gap left behind, creating my own version of the epigraphic text inserted “between square brackets in a fragmentary text,” and then generating from it an example of that “peculiar brand of historical fiction created by those (most often primarily historians, not epigraphists) who build far-ranging historical theories on words or phrases [or, here, images] which their epigraphist predecessors have inserted – meaning no harm” into the “text.”³⁸ It is difficult, as the “bodger” of the Hexateuch seems to have felt, to let emptiness *be*.³⁹

³⁶ Kay Ryan, “Why Isn’t It All More Marked,” *Odd Blocks: Selected and New Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2011), unpaginated. My thanks to Kerr Houston, whose comment on Tilghman’s post (April 2, 2013 at 3:27 pm: <<http://thematerialcollective.org/markings-time/#comment-1412>>) drew my attention to this beautiful poem.

³⁷ Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 25.

³⁸ Ernst Badian, “History from ‘Square Brackets,’” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 79 (1989): 59–70, 59.

³⁹ Elina Gertsman has been producing excellent work on emptiness in medieval art, including “The Gap of Death: Passive Violence and Visual Void in the Encounter of the Three Dead and the Three Living,” in *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, eds. Erin Labbie and Allie Terry, 85-104. Burlington, VT; Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2012), and a book in progress on *Figuring Absence: Empty Spaces in Late Medieval Art*. Anne Harris, Alexa Sand, and Jacqueline Jung have also begun working on emptiness and absence, and spoke in a session at the 49th International Congress On Medieval Studies (2014) called “No/Thing: Medieval Art and Apophasis,” Sponsored by the International Center of Medieval Art: <scholarworks.wmich.edu/medieval_icms/2014/Schedule/487/> (accessed July 2015).

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the protagonist, Charlie Marlow, reminisces about the role of blank spaces in his childhood fascination with maps:

When I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, "When I grow up I will go there."⁴⁰

The "blank spaces" enticed Marlow, because blank spaces are openings, invitations, calls to viewers (or travelers, from Mandeville to Marlow) to fill them. In my epigraph, the narrator introduces Marlow by cryptically claiming that the meanings of his stories lie "not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine."⁴¹ The "blank spaces" of Marlow's earth, the places not yet colonized by white Europeans and their cartographic representations, are rendered visible, are given meaning, by those who literally or figuratively inhabit them. Put another way, Harley 3954's blank space and the blank spaces around and within other medieval maps, do not present readers with epistemological kernels. Rather, the contexts in which readers find them, the contexts that envelop them like "a haze," prompt readers to supply meaning, visual information pulled from memory that complements *The Book's* text.

Were there a simple T-O map on Harley 3954's final folio, like the one in Royal 17 C.xxxviii (**Figure 2**), or even a simpler one, like the oft-reproduced map in an eleventh-century copy of Isidore's *Etymologies*⁴² (**Figure 10**), its meaning, its Conradian "kernel," would not be

⁴⁰ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 70-71, emphasis added.

⁴¹ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 68.

⁴² BL MS Royal 6 C.i, f. 108v. For the complete record, see "Detailed record for Royal 6 C I," *British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* (no date) <<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7436>> (accessed May 2015).



Figure 10 T-O Map, Isidore's *Etymologies*, British Library, MS Royal 6 C.i, f. 108v. Photo: The British Library Board.

contained within its boundaries.

Here, three thin, brown pen lines, drawn with a compass, delineate the universe, then the encircling world ocean, and finally the boundary of the ecumene. And yet, despite their comprehensive reach, despite their resemblance to “the shell of a cracked nut,” opened to reveal its contents, “the whole meaning” is determined, controlled and corralled

by the text, which crowds around this universe, encircling it yet again. So, were there a map at the end of the Harley 3954 Mandeville, it would not have been an independent work, any more than any medieval map. All maps from this time, including wall maps like the Hereford and Ebstorf maps, enabled their readers to produce meanings with reference to the texts and the contexts in which they – the maps and their readers – were embedded. Put another way, their meanings resonate through and are derived from their architectural situations, their relationships to their exegetical sources, and their buildings' liturgical, processional, or educational uses.⁴³

⁴³ On “resonance,” see Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43:4 (January 1990): 11-34, 19-20: “By ‘resonance’ I mean the power of the object displayed to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which—as metaphor or, more simply, as

The “missing” Mandeville map would surely have been another brick in the cultural and legal wall that imprisoned real Jewish people during the Middle Ages. Like most of its cartographical contemporaries, it would have presented and reinforced *difference* and *separation*, *otherness* and *exclusion*. It would *not* have been one of the rare medieval displays of interreligious affection and appreciation of humane feeling like we see in some of the writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln.⁴⁴ Not on a map, and not in a Mandeville manuscript. *The Book of Mandeville* is all about certitude.⁴⁵ It ends on a particularly strong note of certitude in some of the Middle English versions, including the one in Harley 3954, which informs us in the lines beneath the “*mappa mundi*” rubric that “owre holy fadyr the pope hath ratyfyed my bok and confermyd it in alle poyntys.”⁴⁶ This leaves little room for the reader to object, resist, press back, contradict, struggle, or invent. So, perhaps we are better off having found within this frustrating and insistent text not a map, but *a blank space*. 🙄

metonymy-it may be taken by a viewer to stand.” For relations of maps to contexts, see, for example, Dan Terkla, “The Original Placement of the Hereford *Mappa Mundi*,” *Imago Mundi* 56:2 (2004): 131-151, 142: “Knowing where the map was originally displayed would allow us to more confidently on how it was used . . . purpose helps determine placement, and placement enables purpose.” Merton College, Oxford, had a map (or maps) hung on the college library’s wall, which is where lectures were delivered. See Rodney M. Thomson, “Medieval maps at Merton College, Oxford.” *Imago Mundi* 61:1 (2009): 84–90, especially 87–89.

⁴⁴ In a letter to Margaret de Quincy, countess of Winchester, regarding the Jews of Leicester (c. August 1231–November 1232), Robert asks her to “consider carefully how Christian princes should welcome and protect Jews,” and therefore to have her agents cease to harass them, because “[t]his people is vagrant because of the dispersal, and an exile from its own home, that is, Jerusalem.” *The Letters of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln*, trans. F.A.C. Mantello and Joseph Goering (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 68.

⁴⁵ Mittman, “Mandeville’s ‘East,’” forthcoming.

⁴⁶ Harley 3954, f. 69v.