

Eastward Voyages

And the Late Medieval European

Worldview

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History at the Department of History, University of Canterbury

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2013

Abstract

This thesis explores the nature of the late medieval European worldview in the context of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century European journeys to Asia. It aims to determine the precise influence of these journeys on the wider European Weltbild. In lending equal weight to the accounts of the eastward travellers and the sources authored by their counterparts in Europe, who did not travel to Asia, the present study draws together two related strands in medieval historiography: the study of medieval European cosmology and worldview, and the study of medieval travel and travel literature. This thesis treats the journeys as medieval Europe's interaction with Asia, outlining how travellers formed their perceptions of 'the East' through their encounters with Asian people and places. It also explores the transmission of information and ideas from travellers to their European contemporaries, suggesting that the peculiar textual culture of the Middle Ages complicated this process greatly and so minimised the transfer of 'intact' perceptions as the travellers originally formed them. The study contends instead that the eastward journeys shaped the late medieval European world picture in a different way, without overturning the concepts that underpinned it. Rather, this thesis argues, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward voyages subtly altered how Europeans were inclined to understand these underpinning concepts. It suggests that the journeys intensified and made the concepts more immediate in Europeans' minds and that they 'normalised' travel itself to the point where it became an essential part of the way Europeans could most readily make sense of the vast and kaleidoscopic world around them.

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Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I am indebted in completing this project, many of them at the University of Canterbury. First and foremost is Chris Jones, my senior supervisor, to whose diligent direction, consistent counsel, and steadfast support I owe any semblance of quality in this and all my other academic endeavours. I am also indebted to my associate supervisor Jennifer Clement, formerly of the UC Department of English, for her sage advice, fresh perspectives, and resolute commitment to refining my prose. More generally I owe a great deal to the University of Canterbury, my academic home for some six years, which has remained a comfortable and remarkably tranquil place to learn, even in the wake of city-shattering earthquakes. I am especially grateful to the University for granting me the UC Masters Scholarship for the academic year 2012, which has been of substantial help over the course of my postgraduate study. It has been nothing but a pleasure to be a part of the Department of History, whose faculty and administrative staff, in their professionalism and amicability, has made for an exceptional environment. Judy Robertson has my utmost gratitude for the countless times she has aided me with all sorts of internal university matters, and my fellow postgraduates, particularly Gregory Hynes and Joshua Tait, for keeping our office atmosphere suitably light-hearted and entertaining.

I am thankful to all my friends their interest in both the particulars of my work and progress, and in my general wellbeing. Their company and humour have provided much needed diversion every once in a while. I am especially obliged to Mike Cheer and Leon Ostick for subjecting my draft to their formidable attentions; any remaining mistakes are truly my own. My deepest gratitude I express to my family. To my Mother and Father: thank you for bringing me to New Zealand, for giving me every opportunity to succeed, and for instilling in me a love of learning. To my parents and all my family: thank you for your unwavering support in all my undertakings. Lastly, I would like to humbly dedicate my thesis to the late Tamerlan Madzhitovich Korkmazov: genocide survivor, musician, outdoorsman, scholar, the first published author in the family, and my dear grandfather.

Introduction

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a number of Latin Christians undertook eastward journeys of unprecedented scale. These men were explorers, in the sense that they journeyed where their compatriots had never set foot before. But the lands they visited were not ‘unknown’ as such. Between early antiquity and the commencement of the great eastward journeys, Europeans had accrued a substantial body of lore on Asia. This ‘knowledge’ was important to the way medieval Europeans conceived of the world around them and the way they perceived its various parts; it formed part of their distinctive worldview, or *Weltbild*. This worldview, though complex and varied, had a cohesiveness throughout the medieval West.

The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries saw a culmination of a general European ‘expansion’, as J.R.S. Phillips puts it, which had had its genesis in eleventh-century economic and social developments.¹ Beginning in earnest with the First Crusade, this expansion resulted not only in military conquest in the Near East, but also in a sustained broadening of geographic horizons beyond the European continent and its immediate surroundings. A push even further afield would begin in the sixteenth century, following the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope and the discovery of the Americas in the late fifteenth. But, because Mongol incursions had destroyed the Islamic polities that had presented a barrier to Christendom since the seventh century, it was in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that medieval Europeans first realised just how vast the world was.

This thesis explores the way in which this realisation affected medieval European conceptions of the world and perceptions of its parts. Because Europeans broadened their horizons predominantly through contact with Asia, European perceptions of ‘the East’ naturally become the focus of the inquiry. More specifically, this contact happened when thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward travellers encountered people and places in Asia. For this reason, traveller accounts offer unique insight into both the European-Asian interaction itself and the process through which this interaction influenced Latin Christian perceptions of ‘the East’ in particular and conceptions of the world in general.

¹ J.R.S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Historiography

In seeking to view the medieval world on its own terms, this thesis eschews modern constructs and anachronisms that run the risk of distorting medieval evidence and giving an inaccurate picture of the past. This maxim places the thesis into a distinct recent trend in medieval historiography. It has not been uncommon for historians of different stripes to see the Middle Ages through a modern lens. Often, this has led to the idea that the medieval period was a precursor to bigger and better things; such was the line of thought of Jacob Burckhardt, one of the great progenitors of cultural studies and ‘discoverer’ of the Renaissance. Orthodox Marxists and dialectical materialists have tended to see the Middle Ages as a stage in the development of the mode or means of production (the terminology varies). Meanwhile, ‘national’ histories gave rise to debates on whether Charlemagne was ‘French’ or ‘German’. The decidedly modern idea of ‘progress’ has been extremely pervasive and persistent. Medievalists themselves, typically historians who genuinely admire the medieval civilisation, have not always escaped it. For instance, those interested in constitutional history, such as Joseph R. Strayer, have looked to the Middle Ages in search of the origins of the institutions and customs that have influenced legal and political developments in more modern times.²

In recent decades, historians have become more conscious of anachronism. The beginnings of this shift are evident as early as 1927, with the appearance of Charles Homer Haskins’ seminal *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*. Dissent from the Burckhardtian thesis and the idea that the Middle Ages are valuable in their own right gave rise to more nuanced understanding of the period. Adherents of the Annales School, such as Marc Bloch, showed greater interest in the social and cultural characteristics of medieval Europe.³ Later historians, notably Elizabeth Brown and Susan Reynolds, ostensibly rejected the Annales School along with ‘feudalism’ as a term.⁴ Yet Reynolds’ and Brown’s approach is arguably

² Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. by L.A. Manyon (Originally 1939, trans. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1961).

⁴ Elizabeth A.R. Brown ‘The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe,’ *The American Historical Review*, 79: 4 (1974), (pp. 1063-1088), pp. 1075-1076; Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

grounded in the same ambition that birthed Bloch: to divorce medieval scholarship from perspectives entrenched in modern preconceptions. This effort continues to this day. Thomas N. Bisson warns against the dangers of applying such modern terms as ‘government’ and ‘bureaucracy’ to medieval European power structures, while, as late as in 2013, Gerson Moreno-Riaño similarly cautions against succumbing to anachronism in overstating John of Paris’ influence on modern political thought.⁵

The history of medieval European geographical knowledge has been particularly susceptible to the notion of ‘progress’. At the turn of the century, C. R. Beazley was content to write off medieval maps as primitive and inadequate; a view dominant even in medieval scholarship.⁶ In 1941, S. E. Morison could not help but see a backwardness and scientific immaturity in Columbus, who had mistakenly concluded from his readings of the North Star that he was approaching Terrestrial Paradise. Morison characterised Columbus as a man who ‘did not draw the proper conclusion from his own observations.’ There was, Morison argued, a ‘curious dualism in [Columbus’] nature; a scientific capacity to observe, fighting against a scholastic habit of mind which squeezed all observed phenomena into pre-conceived ideas’.⁷ Similarly, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that historians ceased to see medieval maps as ‘statements of geographical fact produced by neutral technologies’ and began to see them instead as ‘human documents, artefacts, with all the limitations and interesting qualities

⁵ Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) pp. vii–ix, 12; Gerson Moreno-Riaño, ‘John of Paris, Capitalism, and the Study of Medieval Political Thought’, in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, ed. by Chris Jones (Disputatio, 26. Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

⁶ C.R. Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography: A History of Exploration and Geographical Science*, Vols. I–III (London: J. Murray, 1897, 1901, and Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), Vol. I, p. viii; John K. Wright, *Geographical Lore at the Time of the Crusades* (New York, NY: American Geographic Society, 1925), pp. 43, 71.

⁷ S.E. Morison, ‘Columbus and Polaris’, *American Neptune* 1 (1941), p. 133, cited in Valerie I.J. Flint, *The Imaginative Landscape of Christopher Columbus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 155.

which those terms imply'.⁸ In outlining the broader late medieval European Weltbild, this thesis explores sources, texts as well as maps, precisely as 'human documents'.

On the one hand, none of the sources used in this thesis have been ignored in scholarship. Traveller accounts have received considerable attention, not least from historians of crusading and of European contact with the Mongols. Bernard Hamilton, for example, emphasises the importance of the crusades in shaping the geographical knowledge with which European eastward travellers were equipped.⁹ Peter Jackson and Igor de Rachewiltz also readily utilise European travellers' accounts in studies of European-Mongol interaction, focusing on its geopolitical consequences.¹⁰ Occasionally, historians do comment on how this interaction may have affected broader medieval European thinking, but they tend to analyse the accuracy or otherwise of European knowledge of geography or of the Mongols themselves rather than broader medieval worldview. Rachewiltz's approach to travellers' accounts in his study of the legend of Prester John is emblematic of this focus.¹¹ He deals with European conceptions and perceptions in tracing the legend's growth in popularity in Europe, but rarely goes on to apply his findings to questions of the wider European worldview beyond noting, for example, how specific elements of fourteenth-century maps reflect information that travellers had learned.¹²

Some studies do explore broader European ways of thinking, though approach the subject from a literary rather than a strictly historical point of view. Mary Campbell reads the accounts of travellers such as William of Rubruck primarily as literary texts. She also offers a nuanced and compelling analysis of the place afforded to 'the East' and its contents in

⁸ Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World* (London: The British Library, 1997), p. vii; Matthew Edney, 'Theory and the History of Cartography', *Imago Mundi*, 48 (1996), (pp. 185-91), p. 187. Quotations from Edney and Edson respectively.

⁹ Bernard Hamilton, 'The Impact of the crusades on western geographical knowledge', in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, ed. by Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester Uni. Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005); Igor de Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys to the Great Khans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971).

¹¹ Igor de Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1972).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

medieval European literature.¹³ This naturally leads her to consider questions of wider European identity, particularly with regard to the eastern ‘Other’, but her study is not a systematic analysis of how travellers interacted with Asia, how their perceptions were transmitted to Europe, or of their effect on contemporary conceptions of the world. It is not Campbell’s aim to answer these questions thoroughly, although she touches on some of them.

Other studies focus on the interaction between European travellers and non-Europeans as a way to understand broader European values. In an introduction to a 2009 edited collection that explores a wide range of such cross-cultural ‘encounters’, Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelmann, and Kim Phillips explain that the recent scholarly focus on these encounters has accompanied a ‘shift away from the old paradigm of discovery’.¹⁴ Scholars have increasingly turned to travellers, whose reactions to people and places are thought to ‘reveal some truth about the nature of those we study’, including medieval Europeans.¹⁵ The approach that Bailey, Diggelmann, and Phillips describe indeed has the potential to offer great insight into the medieval European mind. Kim Phillips, for instance, explores representations of sexualities in traveller accounts as ‘a kind of litmus test’ for wider European perceptions of Asia.¹⁶ In focusing on European travellers and their perceptions of the East, this thesis, in part, follows what might be described for convenience as the ‘encounter’ approach.

Although the present thesis borrows from the ‘encounter’ approach in emphasising traveller reports, it aims to account for changes in the wider European Weltbild, beyond that of the individual travellers. The medieval worldview has its own historiography. Especially notable are J.R.S. Phillips’ *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* and Rudolf Simek’s *Heaven*

¹³ Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹⁴ Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelmann, and Kim M. Phillips, ‘Introduction’, in *Old Worlds, New Worlds: European Cultural Encounters, c. 1000-c. 1750*, ed. by Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelmann, and Kim M. Phillips (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), (pp. 1-10), p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ Kim M. Phillips, ‘Oriental Sexualities in European Representations’, in *Old Worlds, New Worlds*, (pp. 53-74), p. 56.

and Earth in the Middle Ages.¹⁷ Iain Macleod Higgins also explores the late medieval world picture in his analysis of the *Book of John Mandeville*, a ‘fictional’ travel account that borrows heavily from, among many other sources, the accounts of the real travellers William of Boldensele and Odoric of Pordenone. Higgins places *Mandeville* in its wider late medieval context, sketching contemporary conceptions of the world, and persuasively explains how each of the work’s numerous recensions reflects parts of this worldview.¹⁸ In many ways, this thesis agrees with Higgins’ findings and is greatly indebted to him, borrowing, for example, his idea of an ‘east-west axis’ as a way to characterise the configuration of the world in medieval thinking.

On the other hand, these studies give comparatively little consideration to the precise traveller experiences and perceptions and the role these experiences and perceptions played in the formation of the late medieval worldview. Higgins’ work touches on travellers while focusing on the broader *Weltbild*, whereas historians of eastward travel, such as Kim Phillips, tend to do the inverse: they touch on the wider worldview where it relevant while focusing for the most part on travellers themselves. In other words, the two approaches deal with much of the same subject matter and sources, but there is a distinct difference in emphasis. Although not quite a ‘gap’ in historiography, this difference still leaves room to draw together two related historiographical strands: travellers’ perceptions on the one hand, and the wider *Weltbild* in late medieval Europe on the other. The present thesis attempts to accomplish this by giving equal attention to both the worldview articulated by the Europeans ‘back home’, and the European-Asian interaction via the great eastward journeys. Because this thesis emphasises an interaction between Western Europe and Asia it also has a place within another area of historiography that, though it is perhaps tenuously related to medieval historiography, has nevertheless been extraordinarily influential.

One can hardly conduct a study of anything involving ‘the East’ and perceptions thereof, especially from a ‘western’ point of view, without acknowledging the works of Edward Said. The spectre of *Orientalism* still looms large some thirty five years after its first appearance. Said himself was concerned mostly with colonialism and the organised study of

¹⁷ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*; Rudolf Simek, *Heaven and Earth in the Middle Ages: The physical world before Columbus*, trans. by Angela Hall (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1996).

¹⁸ Ian Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The ‘Travels’ of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). See also Rosemary Tzanaki, *Mandeville’s Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of the Book of Sir John Mandeville (1371-1550)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

Asia it engendered, but did claim, in a rather throwaway comment, medieval origins for the attitudes that, in his opinion, went on to inform the denigrating and chauvinistic stance towards 'Eastern' peoples in colonial/orientalist scholarship.¹⁹ Although not very prominent in medieval historiography this idea is not without its supporters, and medievalists occasionally find themselves commenting on accusations levelled at their medieval sources. Kim Phillips observes that many of the more superficial accusations seem to accompany attempts to evoke a 'justificatory academic lineage'.²⁰ Some critiques of medieval orientalism are more sustained. Oscar Dathorne argues that 'denigration' of non-Europeans has been the norm in Europe since antiquity, while Syed Manzurul Islam explicitly traces orientalist tropes to Marco Polo.²¹ Dathorne and Islam, and for that matter Said, are neither medievalists nor strictly historians. Still, medievalist have noted, and convincingly refuted, their critique. John Larner devotes a sizeable section in his study of Marco Polo to rebutting Islam's thesis, taking particular issue with Islam's assertion that Marco Polo's representations of non-Europeans are somehow 'deterritorialising'.²² Though she does not target anyone in particular, Kim Phillips is similarly at pains to point out that medieval reality was typically too complicated and multi-faceted to fit into standard orientalist or postcolonial theory.²³ Anti-orientalist sorties into medieval history have been comprehensively repulsed, and so do not merit extensive consideration in this thesis, though they will be acknowledged and addressed where relevant.

¹⁹ Edward W. Said, 'Afterword', in *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Random House, 2003), p. 343. This edition of *Orientalism* includes an afterword from 2003 and two prefaces, from 1994 and 2003 respectively.

²⁰ Kim Phillips, 'Oriental Sexualities', p. 56.

²¹ Oscar R. Dathorne, *Imagining the World: Mythical Belief versus reality in Global Encounters* (Westport, CN: Bergin and Garvey, 1994), p. 42; Syed Manzurul Islam, *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 163-67.

²² John Larner, *Marco Polo and the Discovery of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 97-104.

²³ Kim Phillips, 'Oriental Sexualities', p. 74.

Methodology

On the other hand, Said's work does raise an important broader methodological point. At the core of his critique is an 'anti-essentialist' approach, which rejects the idea that cultures and civilisations have innate, essential qualities, arguing that relationships between them are rather the result of 'historical experience, out of which others evolved, and before which others existed'. Said advocated studying the 'historical dynamics' of these experiences rather than falling into essentialist stereotypes such as 'the conflict between East and West'.²⁴ For Said, 'neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other'.²⁵ This issue needs to be addressed, if only briefly, because it brings into question the validity of some of the most basic methodological conceptions employed in this thesis, not least the idea that there existed a coherent 'medieval western Europe' that could have shared any kind of 'worldview'.

On the whole, the historiographical context of this thesis justifies relegating in importance, if not ignoring, the issue of whether the 'medieval West' is a valid concept. As noted above, medieval historiography has generally shifted away from constructs and sweeping generalisations, yet the 'medieval West' is arguably both of these. Nevertheless, medievalists have never really abandoned the idea of 'medieval Europe'. The implicit consensus has held that, no matter how exceedingly complex and diverse, western Europe in the Middle Ages had some kind of over-arching unity as a civilisation or über-culture. This idea is as strong in modern schools of thought as it has ever been. Bisson, for example, argues for a common power structure, or at least for analogous processes for the transformation of power, throughout Europe.²⁶ The discipline of medieval history almost universally permits and tolerates the use of the concept of the 'medieval West' or at least Latin Christendom, possibly in the interest of moving along to the substantive part of the discipline of History – source analysis – without getting mired in semantics.

It is with this very interest in mind that this thesis will take the concept of the 'medieval West' as a starting point, whatever its ontological status. The question considered here is primarily about the nature of the medieval European worldview. The answer to this

²⁴ Said, 'Afterword', p. 334.

²⁵ Said, 'Preface to the 1994 Edition', in *Orientalism*, p. xvii.

²⁶ See Bisson, *The Crisis*.

question undoubtedly depends on whether there existed a 'medieval West' that would have been capable of sharing a common worldview, so the issue merits some consideration. The approach here is to take the idea of a cohesive and coherent medieval West as a point of departure and begin exploring the evidence. The coherence of the 'medieval West' as a concept is, in a sense, both a necessary presupposition to begin analysis and something that this analysis can then gradually show to be true (or otherwise).

Several other methodological ideas inform the approach taken in this thesis. Because the aim is to come as close as possible to understanding how medieval people thought and felt, there is a degree of commonality with Said's imperative to study the 'historical dynamics' of cultural interaction. This thesis endeavours to understand not only the way medieval Europeans thought of the world but how they came to understand it that way. In other words, the present thesis examines the process through which Europeans formed their world picture. Different sources illuminate different parts of this process. Maps are particularly valuable because they amalgamate the different elements that contribute to the formation of the wider worldview: geographic and ethnographic information, theology, myth and legend, and so forth. Yet maps constitute only the 'end point' of the process; they articulate a complete vision of the world, but do relatively little to show how this vision came to be.

The key to understanding the initial and middle part of the process through which late medieval Europeans formed their *Weltbild* is travellers' accounts. The sources authored by Europeans who undertook the great exploratory journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries detail the most direct interaction between the medieval West and Asia. Focusing the thesis on travellers' accounts serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it allows for a thorough exploration of how Europeans put into practice their existing conceptions of 'the East' and the world more generally (that is, the worldview prior to the journeys). Secondly, travel accounts also record how Asia influenced the European travellers: the actual events, people, and landscapes of the Asian continent that European travellers encountered. Focusing on traveller accounts helps give due consideration to the fact that Asia was active, not passive, in the formation of travellers' perceptions. This is precisely the 'historical dynamic' that Said thought central to understanding the past, as well as the essence of the 'encounter' approach described above.

At the same time, using traveller accounts alone is insufficient. Such an approach would leave unaddressed the second part of the problem: how European interaction with Asia actually affected the worldview of the majority of educated Europeans, who did not travel to

Asia themselves. Looking at travellers' perceptions alone is insufficient because, through their experiences, they effectively ceased to represent a truly 'European' outlook. Most of them spent years if not decades in Asia, and whatever form their own world pictures took following this experience can no longer be said to reflect fully that of their contemporaries and compatriots, who did not have the benefit of first-hand interaction with 'the East'. Kim Phillips stresses this disconnect between the attitudes of travellers and their copyists, translators, and audiences as part of her argument against overly simplistic 'oriental' interpretations of medieval eastward travel accounts.²⁷ This disconnect is the chief limitation of the 'encounter' approach: examining travellers' encounters in order to illuminate the views of the wider society from which these travellers came. The method in this thesis is to scrutinise both travellers' reports and the European texts that followed them. This, in turn, shapes the structure of the thesis.

* * *

The present thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter will outline existing European 'knowledge' of the world generally and 'the East' specifically. It will explain the roots of this knowledge in Antique and early Christian thinking, and trace its evolution in the medieval intellectual and more 'popular', cultural traditions. The chapter will then explain how different travellers accessed different parts of this body of lore and the process through which they reconciled it with what they actually came across in Asia. That is, the chapter will take an 'encounter' approach as far as travellers themselves go: it will describe the process through which travellers formed new perceptions of 'the East' based on pre-conceptions as well as direct experience of other places and people.

Chapter Two will consider in detail the transmission of travellers' perceptions to Europe. It will consider whether the impact the vast majority of travellers' accounts, and consequently their perceptions, had on Europeans was substantial or not. The chapter will examine the assumption that travellers' newly-formed perceptions of 'the East', born out of a direct and sustained interaction with Asia, necessarily reflect those of the wider medieval West. This chapter will also outline the 'open' textual culture of the Middle Ages in which the transmission took place. Specifically, it will show how the 'dialogic' character of the medieval textual culture, even in the increasingly complex linguistic and literary landscape of the Late Middle Ages, makes for a useful methodological tool in assessing the impact of

²⁷ Kim Phillips, 'Oriental Sexualities', p. 74.

travellers' perceptions on the European worldview. The chapter will explore a part of the 'dialogue' about the nature of the world in late medieval literature to determine how travellers' often complex perceptions of 'the East' behaved when they reached Europe.

The third chapter will show what the late medieval European view of the world actually was. It will outline the ideas that underpinned this worldview and consider the continuity and change in these ideas over time. Consequently, it will comment on whether the European worldview had changed fundamentally in the Late Middle Ages. It will then evaluate the role that the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries played in this continuity and change, and thereby assess the impact of these journeys on the overall, wider European Weltbild. In this chapter, *The Book of John Mandeville* will serve to illustrate the nature and scope of the impact of eastward travel.

The last chapter will assess the uniqueness of the world picture of the late medieval West, as outlined in the first three chapters, by examining the Weltbild of medieval Islam, a neighbouring and contemporary civilisation. The chapter will first consider the configuration of the world in the medieval Islamic view and trace the origins of this configuration. It will explore the Muslim perception of the Dar al-Islam ('House of Islam') and the relationship of the Dar al-Islam with God and the rest of Creation in the medieval Islamic understanding. The chapter will then examine the accounts of two travellers from the western edge of the Muslim world, Ibn Battuta (1304-1368/9) and Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217). There were clear differences in temperament and attitude between two men, as well as some commonalities in outlook. These commonalities and differences will allow the chapter to assess the extent to which the two travellers were grounded in the wider Islamic worldview, and, consequently, the strength and pervasiveness of this worldview throughout the medieval Islamic world over time. And this, in turn, can then shed light on whether the processes and conceptions described in the preceding chapters are in any way universal, or whether they were unique to the medieval West.

Throughout four chapters, the thesis will explore the wider late medieval European worldview in the time of medieval Europe's greatest interaction with Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By itself, the 'encounter' approach – exploring travellers' interaction with other people and places – is insufficient for this task. Yet it is also an indispensable component of the two-pronged method adopted in this thesis: an exploration of the input of both the eastward travellers and the Europeans 'at home' into the formation of the late medieval European Weltbild. Much like European encounters with Asia, this thesis must begin with the great eastward journeys themselves.

Chapter One: European Travellers' Perceptions of the East

In the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, several western Europeans undertook lengthy journeys into the heart of the Asian continent. They were the first medieval westerners to venture beyond the Holy Land and experience 'the East', which had been sealed off from Western Europe thanks to the rapid and lasting spread of Islam throughout the Middle East in the seventh century. It may, at first glance, seem a straightforward phenomenon: travellers formed perceptions of Asia from their encounters. While true on the most basic level, the full picture was substantially more complicated than that.

To the medieval western Europeans, the Asian continent was unexplored, but not wholly 'unknown'. Latin Christendom had accumulated a substantial body of information regarding 'the East', arising out of a combination of originally classical ideas and Christianity. By the time the eastward journeys began in the thirteenth century, the East occupied a long-established, firm place in Latin Christian cosmology. It was populated by a kaleidoscopic multitude of peoples and creatures of ancient and Christian origin, ranging from the believable and accurate to the utterly fantastical. The travellers who undertook the great journeys did not venture into the 'unknown' so much as they ventured into the exotic and unvisited. The perceptions they formed of the East were born precisely of the way they reconciled this established 'knowledge' with the reality that they came across.

Existing 'Knowledge'

Greek writers such as Herodotus, Ktesias (both fifth century BC) and Megasthenes (fourth century BC) were the first Europeans to describe the marvels that were to be found in the East.¹ In his *Indica*, Ktesias apparently described such wonders as the *martikhora*, pygmies, gryphons guarding mountains rich with gold, dog-headed people, and giant Indians and Seres who are thirteen cubits tall and live for two hundred years.² Herodotus describes the East in

¹ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 5.

² Ktesias of Knidos, 'The Indika of Ktesias, Fragment I: Ecloga in Photii, Bibl. LXXII, p. 144 seqq.,' in *The Commerce and Navigation of Erythraean Sea and Ancient India as Described by Ktesias the Knidian*, ed. and trans. by J. W. McCrindle (London: Trübner, 1882), (pp. 7-33), pp. 11, 15, 17, 21-22, 33. The *Indica* survives only in incomplete fragments and paraphrasing by other authors, such as Photios, the ninth-century Greek Patriarch

very similar terms. Both writers even employ the same anecdote to illustrate wealth: easterners melt their abundant supplies of gold into clay jars, which can then be broken when the gold needs to be extracted and used.³ There was a coherent body of lore of the East in the ancient world, in which the wondrous and marvellous was particularly prominent.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century European ‘knowledge’ of the East featured many of the same marvels. In his *Imago mundi* (c.1110), Honorius Augustodunensis, the influential twelfth-century theologian, describes Persia as the land of magic, India as full of wondrous animals and monstrous races such as the dog-headed *cynocephali* and single-footed *sciapods*, and the numerous islands in the Indian Ocean as containing mountains full of gold and silver that are guarded by gryphons and dragons.⁴ Honorius explicitly claims that his work is based on ancient sources – ‘a guarantee of quality in the Middle Ages’, as Evelyn Edson puts it.⁵ The fictional *Letter of Prester John* (c.1165) fills John’s kingdom with the same or very similar marvels as the Greek authors used to fill *their* East: precious stones and metals, wondrous beasts, and monstrous races.⁶ However, despite the striking similarities between fifth-century BC and twelfth-century AD stories of marvels and wonders, it does not necessarily follow that these simply had persisted, unaltered.

Ancient ‘knowledge’ of the East was transmitted to medieval Europeans in a very specific way. Firstly, Europeans inherited Greek ideas through Latin texts rather than the Greek originals. Knowledge of the Greek language was already in decline in the Western Roman Empire by late antiquity. As J.R.S. Phillips points out, even ‘a scholar of the calibre of Augustine of Hippo never fully mastered [Greek]’.⁷ Influential Greek authors, such as

of Constantinople, who is cited here. The *martikhora* was a legendary animal the size of a lion with a human face, three rows of teeth and a tail with a stinger.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9; Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 244.

⁴ Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago Mundi*, trans. by Nicholas Ryan Foster, in ‘The Imago Mundi of Honorius Augustodunensis’ (Unpublished MA Thesis; Portland State University, 2008), (pp. 101-305), pp. 113, 115, 118.

⁵ Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 112.

⁶ *Letter of Prester John*, cited in Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Claudius Ptolemy, were still known and referenced, but increasingly lost prominence.⁸ Instead, Latin authors became the more widely read, particularly Pliny the Elder (AD first century) and Solinus (AD third century). They tended to draw on their Greek counterparts, but typically produced works of compilation that were highly abbreviated and less sophisticated.⁹ Some knowledge was lost to the West entirely; Ptolemy's *Geography* would not resurface in Latin Christendom until 1406,¹⁰ and it was for William of Rubruck to re-discover in the mid-thirteenth century what Ptolemy had already known in the second – that 'the Hyrkanian or Caspian Sea is enclosed on all sides by the land, like an island in reverse'.¹¹

Secondly, the transmission of ideas from the ancient world to the medieval West flowed through only a handful of select authors. Pliny and Solinus were most 'in vogue' in the Latin West throughout the Middle Ages.¹² Moreover, Solinus himself, as well as Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius and Martianus Capella (both c. AD 400), largely followed Pliny, especially in describing the wonders and marvels while leaving out much of the factual.¹³ Effectively, not only did medieval European 'knowledge' of the East derive largely from Latin rather than Greek classics in a much truncated and simplified form, but it derived in large part from one man's abbreviation and reiteration of these classics.

'Latinisation' greatly shaped medieval 'knowledge' of the East, especially vis-à-vis the perception of foreigners. Roman values superseded the Greek ones, in part. John Block Friedman persuasively argues that a tendency to view foreigners as 'inferior and

⁸ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, pp. 6-7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 19; Hamilton, 'The Impact of the crusades', p. 15; Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 36.

¹⁰ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 19; J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 19.

¹¹ Claudius Ptolemy, *Geographia*, Book 7. 5, in *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, trans. by J. Lennart Berggren and Alexander Jones (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 109.

¹² Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 19; Dathorne, *Imagining the World*, pp. 41-2; Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 24.

¹³ Dathorne, *Imagining the World*, p. 43; Mary Beagon, 'Introduction', in *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal, Natural History, Book 7*, trans. by Mary Beagon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 35.

untrustworthy' characterised the ancient Greeks.¹⁴ Friedman suggests that ancient Greeks looked down on those they deemed cultural outsiders, people who did not share their dietary, linguistic, and civic norms.¹⁵ Yet, besides xenophobia, Greeks also showed a marked curiosity in the world, being an adventurous, seafaring people. While, in many ways, they disdained foreigners, the Greeks still found them fascinating. The Romans were somewhat different. On the one hand, Pliny exhibits a similar attitude with regard to language. There are people, he remarks, whose speech is so bizarre that it is barely recognisable as human.¹⁶ Generally, though, the Roman world was 'more cosmopolitan than the Greek'.¹⁷ Pliny, after dutifully describing Greek achievements, notes: 'Leading citizens of Rome, too, have borne witness even to foreigners'.¹⁸ As Mary Beagon explains, Pliny is implicitly pointing to the contrast with the Greeks, who, as he 'suggests elsewhere in the [*Natural History*] (3.42), blow nobody's trumpet except their own'.¹⁹ Indeed, Pliny is on occasion quite open-minded. After describing how bizarre alleged Scythian cannibals are, he reminds the reader that even 'in the centre of the world [Europe]', and 'in Sicily' there were once Cyclopes and Laestrygones, 'peoples equally bizarre'.²⁰ If Pliny extols the virtues of the Romans, it is typically in a broader context; the Romans embody the variety and universality of the human race as a whole.²¹ By drawing on the Latin rather than Greek classics, and on Pliny in particular, medieval Europe inherited a softened, less xenophobic, and more accepting, if a very truncated and factually skewed, outlook vis-à-vis the outside world.

¹⁴ Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, p. 26.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-30.

¹⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 3.42, cited in Mary Beagon, 'Introduction', p. 83.

¹⁷ Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 7.112, p. 83.

¹⁹ Beagon, 'Introduction', p. 50.

²⁰ Pliny, *Natural History*, 7.10, p. 61.

²¹ Beagon, 'Introduction', p. 51.

Along with ancient ideas, Christianity was a major source of medieval European ‘knowledge’ of the East, in part through the ‘Christianisation’ of originally ancient material. The many myths and legends of Alexander the Great’s exploits in Asia that began to circulate after his death were woven in late antiquity into the so-called *Alexander Romance* (third or fourth century).²² It is from this amalgamation that nearly all subsequent literary variants of the Romance, including those that made their way to the medieval West, derive.²³ The Romano-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. AD 94), was among the first to associate the biblical people Gog and Magog with north-eastern steppe barbarians (Scythians, in his case), and to suggest that Alexander built the Iron Gates to seal them out of the civilised world.²⁴ By the early sixth century, in a Syrian version of the romance called the *Christian Legend*, Alexander is a pious Christian king, praying to God to move two mountains together and to complete the seal with an iron and brass gate.²⁵ Michael demonstrates that this particular reiteration of the legend proved dominant, influencing, among others, Pseudo-Methodius’ *Revelations*, which in turn was the legend’s chief conduit into western renditions,²⁶ such as Leo of Naples’ *Historia de preliis* (c.950).²⁷

Christianisation continued well after material made its way to Latin Christendom. The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel were mentioned for the first time, according to George Cary, in

²² Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 103; Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 28-29; James Romm, ‘Alexander, Biologist: Oriental Monstrosities and the *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem*’, in *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. by Scott D. Westrem (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1991), (pp. 16-30), p. 16; Albert Mugrdich Wolohojian, ‘Introduction’, in *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes*, trans. by Albert Mugrdich Wolohojian (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 1.

²³ Wolohojian, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

²⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, I, 123 (vi. 1) and VII, 245-46, cited in Ian Michael, ‘Typological Problems in Medieval Alexander Literature: The Enclosure of Gog and Magog’, in *The Medieval Alexander Legend and Romance Epic: Essays in Honour of David J.A. Ross*, ed. by Peter Noble, Lucie Polak and Claire Isoz (Millwood, NY: Krens, 1982), p. 133.

²⁵ *Christian Legend*, cited in Michael, ‘Typological Problems’, p. 133.

²⁶ D.J.A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus* (London, 1963), cited in Michael, ‘Typological Problems’, p. 133.

²⁷ Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 29; Michael, ‘Typological Problems’, p. 133.

Pseudo-Epiphanius's *Vita Prophetarum*.²⁸ By the twelfth century, these Lost Tribes had become associated with Alexander and, to some degree, confused with Gog and Magog. Petrus Comestor's influential *Historia scholastica* (c.1173) makes just such an association: the Tribes are sealed off by Alexander in the same manner as Gog and Magog.²⁹ The trajectory that the tales of Alexander's exploits took in the West is exemplary of how 'knowledge' of the East gradually acquired a progressively more Christian character, both before and after it made its way into Europe.

In addition to popular and semi-popular legends, Christianisation of ancient ideas appears in scholarly works. As well as Latin classics such as Pliny, medieval 'knowledge' of the East was based on the works of early Christian scholars, notably Augustine, Orosius, and Isidore of Seville.³⁰ Orosius was an important 'conduit' into medieval cosmology for the classical tripartite division of the world.³¹ Isidore of Seville, in many ways the first 'medieval geographer',³² in his *De natura rerum* discusses time measurements, the nature of the universe and heavenly bodies, and meteorology, largely following long-established classical theories, though in a distinctly Christian context.³³ The diagrams that Isidore employs to illustrate his text likewise have classical origins, notably the so-called T-O maps.³⁴

Christianisation also introduced wholly new elements to 'knowledge' of the East, based on the Bible and vague information received from eastern Christians. The biblical story of the Magi, the three wealthy kings from the Orient who had recognised Jesus' divinity and come to pay homage at his birth, and stories surrounding the mythical figure of St Thomas,

²⁸ Pseudo-Epiphanius, *Vita Prophetarum*, cited in George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 132.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁰ Hamilton, 'The Impact of the crusades', p. 15; J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 12; Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 31.

³¹ Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 3.

³² J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 12.

³³ Isidore of Seville, *De natura rerum*, cited in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 38-39.

³⁴ Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 46. See Chapter Three of this thesis for a more detailed discussion of medieval cosmological diagrams and world maps, as well as their origins.

who allegedly brought Christianity to India, were perhaps the most prominent elements of Christian origin.³⁵ The legend of St Thomas, appearing in the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* (AD second or third century), persisted in varying forms throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages.³⁶ It was also an important ingredient in the formation of another legend, that of Prester John. Tales of Prester John, which had emerged in the twelfth century, were based on the *Acts of Thomas* specifically, as well as the corpus of stories surrounding St Thomas generally.³⁷ Christian lore was an important base for much of the ‘knowledge’ of the East that had developed by the late medieval period. Moreover, because this lore was ever-evolving, Christianity exerted a continued and sustained influence on the ‘knowledge’ of the East from late antiquity to just prior to the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

There was, moreover, very limited conflict between the existing classical tradition and the new Christian elements. The Book of Genesis describes the four great rivers, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Gihon (Nile) and Phison (Ganges), as having their source in the Earthly Paradise.³⁸ As Hamilton points out, this was ‘congruent with accepted scientific opinion’ that the rivers could very well flow underground from Eden and emerge virtually anywhere.³⁹ Some classical ideas certainly did pose theological problems for Christian scholars. The untraversable equatorial ‘burning zone’ posited by classical thinkers, and the alleged existence of the antipodes beyond this zone, was very difficult to reconcile with the Gospels’ insistence that the Word of God is available to all men.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as Edson demonstrates, the only idea that Genesis (the major source of cosmological information in the

³⁵ Rachewiltz, *Prester John*, p. 3.

³⁶ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 59; Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), p. 17; Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 28.

³⁷ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 59; Rachewiltz, *Prester John*, p. 4; Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John*, p. 17.

³⁸ Genesis 4:10-14, *The Vulgate Bible, Volume I: The Pentateuch*, Douay-Rheims Translation, ed. by Edgar Swift (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

³⁹ Hamilton, ‘The impact of the crusades’, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 55.

Bible) excludes categorically is the cyclical regeneration of the universe. Otherwise, biblical cosmology was ‘perfectly compatible’ with classical cosmology.⁴¹

The combination of ancient and Christian ideas resulted in a medieval synthesis. Cosmographical concepts, such as those regarding orbits, solar and lunar cycles, eclipses, climate and the like, were all retained from the classics.⁴² Works by the early ‘Christianising’ scholars, such as Orosius and Isidore, utilise these classical conceptions and schemas. However, they do not simply reiterate classical ideas. They employ them for a distinctly Christian purpose: to make sense of the world as God’s Creation.⁴³ Initially, this meant defending Christianity against pagan critique. Orosius meant for his *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, as the title suggests, to do just that; Augustine had commissioned the work as a supplement to his own *City of God*.⁴⁴ By Isidore’s time, this approach had become increasingly sophisticated. In his *De natura rerum*, Isidore explains natural phenomena in terms of theological and doctrinal significance.⁴⁵ Honorius Augustodunensis followed the model in the twelfth century. His work employs classical ideas, such as the five climatic zones and the tripartite division of the earth, to find (Christian) meaning in the world.⁴⁶ While classical ideas persisted, Christianisation re-mobilised them to describe a world indisputably centred on God as his creation.

This synthesis extended to ‘knowledge’ of the East too. In 1147, Otto, bishop of Freising, relayed how had heard reports of Prester John, ‘a Christian but a Nestorian’, who reigned over a fabulously wealthy and powerful kingdom somewhere in the east.⁴⁷ Within

⁴¹ Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 37.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 53.

⁴³ Scott D. Westrem, ‘Introduction: “From Worlde into Worlde”’, in *Discovering New Worlds: Essays on Medieval Exploration and Imagination*, ed. by Scott D. Westrem (New York, NY: Garland, 1991), p. xiv.

⁴⁴ Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 3; Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Isidore of Seville, *De natura rerum*, cited in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 38-39.

⁴⁶ Honorius Augustodunensis, pp. 108-110.

⁴⁷ Otto of Freising, *The Two Cities: A Chronicle of Universal History to the Year 1146 A.D.*, trans. by Charles Christopher Mierow, ed. by Austin P. Evans and Charles Knapp (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1928), pp. 443-44.

twenty years, this fairly basic story attained a much greater degree of complexity with the appearance of the *Letter of Prester John*, purporting to have been written by the priest-king himself. The *Letter* is a forgery, in all likelihood penned by a Latin, possibly in the Levant; it ignores some well-established diplomatic conventions, including such basics as a date.⁴⁸ Yet it is a clear example of ancient-Christian synthesis, as it draws on virtually all ‘knowledge’ of the East that then existed, including elements of classical origin, such as the monstrous races, as well as Christian stories and motifs, such as the legend of St Thomas.⁴⁹

Another twelfth-century work, the *Alexandreis*, an Alexander epic by Walter of Châtillon, is very similar in this respect. In one passage, Walter describes the tomb of Darius. The tomb features a dome on which there is ‘beautifully traced the outline of the tripartite world’, which adheres to the classical tripartite schema.⁵⁰ Walter attributes the authorship of this map to Apelles, the renowned ancient Greek painter (fourth century BC).⁵¹ ‘And’, writes Walter, ‘because Daniel’s meaning did not escape Apelles, he engraved on the gilded marble the following inscription: “Here is placed the figurative ram, whose two horns Alexander, the whole world’s hammer, crushed”’. Further:

...following the Jews and their writings and retracing the course of history... Apelles marked thereon the years of the human race from its creation right up to the war-like times of the triumphant Alexander. In all, one could read four thousand, eight hundred and sixty-eight years.⁵²

Walter freely mixes the Book of Daniel with what was, by the twelfth century, already a heavily Christianised story of Alexander, and the classically-derived schema of the tripartite world. The mention by name of Apelles reveals Walter’s familiarity with Pliny, which is unsurprising given Walter’s education at the cathedral school at Paris. The *Alexandreis*, like

⁴⁸ Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John*, p. 46.

⁴⁹ Hamilton, ‘The impact of the crusades’, p. 21; Dathorne, *Imagining the World*, p. 57; Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ Walter of Châtillon, *The Alexandreis*, VII, lines 378-430, trans. by R. Relfryn Pritchard (Toronto, 1986), cited in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 102.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102. This again underscores Pliny’s influence, since Book 35 of *Natural History* is the chief source on the historical Apelles.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

the *Letter of Prester John*, embodies the classical-Christian synthesis that characterises twelfth- and thirteenth-century European ‘knowledge’ of the East.

Ancient and Christian ideas also shaped the broader medieval European outlook, particularly vis-à-vis the people of the East. Dathorne makes a blanket and somewhat embittered accusation that western portrayals of non-Europeans have always been predominantly derogatory and dehumanising. Beginning with Pliny, he argues, ‘the achievements of the non-European world have been downgraded and mocked’ and its inhabitants portrayed as ‘oddities’.⁵³ Such a view is unconvincing. The ‘knowledge’ medieval Europeans had inherited actually predisposed them to a largely broad and somewhat inclusive attitude. Firstly, Pliny is nowhere near as one-dimensional as Dathorne suggests; on occasion he is surprisingly tolerant (as discussed earlier). James Muldoon argues that elements such as the beast races were, above all, a ‘literary and artistic representation’, deliberately cultivated for the purpose of entertainment and very little, if anything, more.⁵⁴ Muldoon points out that alongside these there also existed ‘realistic appraisals’ of foreigners, such as Innocent IV’s exploration of the legality of attacking infidels, which had much more relevance in the long term.⁵⁵ This shows that Dathorne is mistaken, though Muldoon is less convincing in his suggestion that medieval Europeans consciously and deliberately separated the serious from the entertaining (see Chapter Two). There was no malice in these largely intertwined fictional/factual depictions.

An inherently inclusive, if somewhat dogmatic, Christian universalism replaced the Greek and, to a lesser extent, Roman cultural elitism from as early as the fifth century. In the *City of God* Augustine notes that ‘histories of the nations tell of certain monstrous races of men’.⁵⁶ One gets the sense that Augustine is personally sceptical: ‘It is not, of course, necessary to believe in all the kinds of men which are said to exist’.⁵⁷ He declares:

⁵³ Dathorne, *Imagining the World*, p. 42.

⁵⁴ James Muldoon, ‘The Nature of the Infidel: The Anthropology of the Canon Lawyers’, in *Discovering New Worlds*, (pp. 115-24), p. 116.

⁵⁵ Innocent IV, *Commentaria doctissima in quique libros dDecretalium* (Turin: apud haeredes Nicolai Beuilaeque, 1581), fols. 176-77, cited in Muldoon, ‘The Nature of the Infidel’, pp. 117-18.

⁵⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, ed. and trans. by R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Book XVI, Chapter 8, p. 707. Dyson explains (n. 34) that Augustine is referring to Pliny’s *Natural History* 7.2.

... anyone who is born anywhere as a man (*that is, as a rational and moral animal*), no matter how unusual he may be to our bodily senses in shape, colour, motion, sound, or in any natural power or part or quality, derives from the original and first-created man; and no believer will doubt this.⁵⁸

God does not make mistakes. To think that monstrous races are any less human than the deformed ‘among us’ is to doubt His wisdom and perfection.⁵⁹ Augustine’s view is highly inclusive; he is prepared to recognise even the monstrous races as human. He does stress that their humanity would need to be established conclusively, by confirming that they are indeed ‘rational’, as extending this attitude to creatures that are known to be animals, such as apes, would be absurd no matter how thoroughly they can mimic human behaviour.⁶⁰

Medieval Latin Christendom inherited this universal and inclusive attitude. It was precisely Augustine’s principle of rationality that led Innocent IV (in c.1250) to conclude that infidels can rightfully hold land.⁶¹ As Muldoon points out, this universal human rationality was, to Innocent IV, the basis for papal power to begin with.⁶² Innocent’s letters to the Mongol Khan (1245) show this principle being put into practice. Innocent opens with a statement of the nature of Christ, and logically builds an argument for why the Khan should embrace Latin Christianity.⁶³ He states:

For human nature, being endowed with reason, was meet to be nourished on eternal truth as its choicest food, but, held in mortal chains as punishment for sin, its powers were thus far reduced that

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 708.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 708. My emphasis.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 708.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 709.

⁶¹ Innocent IV, *Commentaria doctissima*, cited in Muldoon, ‘The Nature of the Infidel’, pp. 117-18.

⁶² Muldoon, ‘The Nature of the Infidel’, p. 118.

⁶³ Innocent IV, ‘Two Bulls of Pope Innocent IV Addressed to the Emperor of the Tatars, I’, in *The Mongol Mission: The Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey, ed. by Christopher Dawson (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), pp. 73-74.

it had to strive to understand the invisible things of reason's food by means of inferences drawn from visible things.⁶⁴

Innocent appeals to the Khan to exercise his rationality and reason, the assumption being that the Khan is as human and therefore as capable of this as any European (as are the rest of the Mongols, by extension). The medieval Church saw even unknown, alien, and threatening Easterners as capable of reasoning, and therefore of attaining salvation through Christ. This, in turn, meant that it also saw them as potential members of Latin Christendom and, as such, only inferior to Christian Europeans in their *current* lack of Christianity, not inherently so. This is, in a sense, rather dogmatic, but it is also extremely inclusive and universal because it allows, and even encourages, unbelievers to become part of the Christian community. It holds that all humans everywhere are fundamentally the same. Grounded in this paradoxically dogmatic but open-minded way of thinking, and equipped with a particular body of existing 'knowledge', a number of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Europeans set out for Asia.

Encounters in the East: How Travellers Formed Perceptions

How the eastward travellers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reconciled pre-existing 'knowledge' of the East with what they actually came across depended on several factors. As Jackson explains, it has become fashionable in modern scholarship to attempt to delve into the traveller's mind and approach their perceptions with the idea that travellers tended to find things that they intended to find.⁶⁵ However, this approach is too simplistic, as it only accounts for one part of the perception-building process. As Jackson explains, Asia was not a passive canvas for the traveller to project their own mind's eye onto. Rather perceptions arose as much out of the realities of the East as they did out of the traveller's mind; Asia was active in this process.⁶⁶ A traveller's particular background in Europe determined which parts of the corpus of 'knowledge' of the East they were most likely to be familiar with in the first place. Background also dictated, to an extent, the path travellers took on their journeys and thus who and what they were likely to encounter. A traveller's interaction with Asian people and places then shaped their overall perception of 'the East'.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

⁶⁵ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, pp. 337-38.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

Their education determined how much of the established ‘knowledge’, especially the classically-derived elements, travellers were able to draw and comment on. William of Rubruck, for instance, appears to have been well educated. He often quotes Scripture when a parable or moral is applicable to the situation he is describing, and shows extensive familiarity with Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*. In discussing the size of the dogs in the north, William writes: ‘Of this country Isidore says that it contains dogs so large and ferocious that they attack bulls and kill lions’.⁶⁷ He also explicitly references Solinus.⁶⁸ Benedict the Pole, also a Franciscan, accompanied John of Plano Carpini on his journey to Guyuk’s court in 1245, and left a brief account of his own. Describing the Kypchak steppe, he says: ‘This is the land which was once named Pontus and in it there is a great deal of wormwood, as Ovid remarks in his Epistles: “The bitter wormwood shivers in the endless plains”’.⁶⁹ John of Plano Carpini references classical ideas too. Discussing the various bizarre races that allegedly inhabit the north, far from the places he visited, he mentions a certain one-armed and one-legged people, and recalls that ‘Isidore called them Cyclopedes’.⁷⁰ John also shows a familiarity with Pliny throughout his account.⁷¹

Less well educated travellers tended to draw on a slightly different combination of the ‘knowledge’ of the East. Marco Polo’s account contains no direct references to Isidore or any other ancient authority in the manner of the friars. Instead, he tends to draw on the more popular side of pre-existing ‘knowledge’. In one passage, Polo discusses the whereabouts of Prester John’s kingdom, confusing the title of ‘Ung-Khan’ with a tribe called ‘Ung’ and

⁶⁷ William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His journey to the court of the Great Khan Mongke 1253-1255*, trans. by Peter Jackson (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990), pp. 105, 128, 129, 130. NB: each traveller account will be cited in full in the first instance, while subsequent citations will give the traveller’s name and the relevant page numbers from the publication in which their account appears, specifying the title only where there are multiple accounts by the same traveller.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶⁹ Benedict the Pole, ‘The Narrative of Brother Benedict the Pole’, trans. by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey, in *The Mongol Mission*, (pp.79-84), p. 80.

⁷⁰ John of Plano Carpini, *History of the Mongols*, trans. by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey, in *The Mongol Mission*, (pp.3-76), p. 31.

⁷¹ Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, pp. 97-98.

employing the phonetic similarity to suggest that: ‘This is the place which we call in our language Gog and Magog; the natives call it Ung and Mungul’.⁷² Latham points out that this kind of discussion is very rare in Polo’s work: ‘The whole passage exemplifies the sort of scholarly speculation from which the unscholarly Marco is on the whole singularly free’.⁷³ When he does engage with established ‘knowledge’ it is typically with what would have been commonly known Christian elements, such as the Magi and the four rivers of Paradise, or with popular fables and legends, such as the miracle of the mountain and the *rukḥ*.⁷⁴ The few classical elements that he does refer to are those that captured the popular imagination, such as Alexander’s gate and the monstrous races.⁷⁵

In addition to influencing which parts of existing European ‘knowledge’ the traveller drew on, education directly influenced their reconciliation of this information with Asian reality. William of Rubruck is able to note when Isidore was wrong and when he was right. In some cases it is a matter of a simple correction. Isidore is mistaken about the Caspian Sea: ‘at no point does it make contact with the Ocean, being completely landlocked’.⁷⁶ On other occasions, it is more nuanced; some of the information on a subject is correct, while the rest may or may not be. Regarding the above-mentioned giant dogs, William writes: ‘What is true, I learned from tales I heard, is that towards the Northern Ocean dogs are used, on account of their great size and strength, to draw wagons, like oxen’.⁷⁷

Unlike the friars, Marco Polo was not familiar enough with the scholarly side of established ‘knowledge’ to cite its various elements and reconcile them with what he came across in a critical way. Instead of critically exploring the issue, he simply states: ‘You may take it for a fact that all the men of this island [Andaman] have heads like dogs, and teeth and

⁷² Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. by Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 76.

⁷³ Latham, ‘Introduction’, in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. xxiii.

⁷⁴ Marco Polo, pp. 22-26, 28-29, 274. The *rukḥ*, a gigantic bird, frequently appears in folklore throughout Asia.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 229, 230.

⁷⁶ William of Rubruck, p. 129.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

eyes like dogs; for I assure you that the whole aspect of their faces is that of big mastiffs'.⁷⁸ These are the *cynocephali* of antiquity, but Marco does not make the reference explicit. He likely 'knew' the monstrous races existed, to the degree that this 'knowledge' was common, but he did not much care about them beyond their value as curiosities.

A traveller's place in European society also shaped their reconciliation of established 'knowledge' with what they found in Asia. Christianity is still an important part of lay identity; Marco Polo's hostility towards Muslims, a common attitude among Latin Christians, makes this very clear.⁷⁹ 'Indeed', he writes, 'it is a fact that all the Saracens in the world are agreed in wishing ill to all the Christians in the world'.⁸⁰ In general, Marco's understanding of religion is rather superficial. He occasionally describes a ritual he finds interesting or even admirable, notably Buddhist worship.⁸¹ A few zealous statements do appear, but seem so out of place in the work that Latham suggests they may well be the result of later clerical editing.⁸² At no point does Marco demonstrate an understanding of non-Latin Christians, such as Nestorians, beyond a basic awareness that they are schismatics.

Clerical travellers formed much more thorough perceptions of religion. On the Mongols' Tengriism, both William of Rubruck and John of Plano Carpini offer seemingly self-evident observations. They note the importance of sorcery, soothsaying, divination, and magic.⁸³ In reality Mongol spiritual priority was first and foremost to tame nature and secure health and longevity; they had an obsession with magic that would reap benefits in this world, and not just the next.⁸⁴ Jackson argues that western missionaries largely failed to grasp this.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Marco Polo, p. 230.

⁷⁹ Latham, 'Introduction', p. xxi.

⁸⁰ Marco Polo, p. 23. This hostility towards the Muslims is quite consistent in the account; see *ibid.*, pp. 27, 105, 279.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 81, 129, 252, 257.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 18; Latham, 'Introduction', p. xxi.

⁸³ William of Rubruck, pp. 124, 242-45; John of Plano Carpini, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, pp. 276-77; Lev N. Gumilev, *Poiski vymyshlennogo tsarstva: legenda o "gosudarstve presvitera Ioanna"* (Moscow: Di-Dik, 1994), p. 162.

Even so, William's and John's comments about the popularity of magic are very perceptive, even if they did not reach a perfect understanding of the Mongol spiritual/religious outlook. Unlike Marco Polo, they certainly grasped *why* the easterners performed the rituals they did; they merely thought these rituals wrong.

Clerical travellers' perceptions of eastern Christians are even more revealing. William of Rubruck disagrees with the Orthodox Christians living among the Mongols, who consider drinking kumis ('comos') a sin. He suggests that their thinking so shows 'how far they are alienated from the Faith by such a notion'.⁸⁶ Some of William's criticism is reasonable: 'They recite their office and have the Holy Scripture in Syriac, a language they do not know, so that they chant like the monks among us who know no grammar... and for this reason they are completely corrupt'. To this grievance he adds usury, observances of Muslim feasts, episcopal negligence, and polygamy.⁸⁷ Other criticisms are inevitably born of ignorance or misunderstanding. William complains that 'Nestorians and Armenians never put the figure of Christ on their crosses, which makes it seem as if they take a low view of the Passion or find it an embarrassment'.⁸⁸ In fact, the Nestorian cross refers to the 'Parousia', the second coming of Christ, and not to the Passion.⁸⁹ On the whole, though, William's clerically-informed perceptions of Eastern Christianity were much more thorough and nuanced than those of Marco Polo, a layman.

The negative perception of Nestorians is also more broadly symptomatic of the way clerical travellers reconciled their pre-existing 'knowledge' of Eastern Christianity with what they found. The established 'knowledge' gave the impression that there were virtuous and just Christians in the East; Prester John's kingdom promised this and much more. When confronted with reality, clerical travellers were bitterly disappointed in their fellow Christians, who were neither as numerous, powerful, nor pious as Europeans had thought:

⁸⁵ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 278.

⁸⁶ William of Rubruck, p. 104. Kumis (William's 'comos') is the Turkic/Mongol name for an alcoholic beverage made from fermented mare's milk, common among the pastoralist nomadic peoples of Asia.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸⁹ Peter Jackson, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, p. 117, n. 4.

Only a tenth of what they say about him [Prester John] was true. For this is the way with the Nestorians who come from these parts: they create big rumours out of nothing . . . In this way was broadcast the impressive report about King John; and when I myself crossed his pasturelands, nobody knew anything about him except for a few Nestorians.⁹⁰

John of Montecorvino's account shares the sentiment. John claims that local Nestorians impeded him considerably: 'If it had not been for [their] slanders, I might have baptised 30,000 more'.⁹¹ Eastern Christians are thought of poorly not because they are inherently inferior but because they are bad Christians, often going so far as to hinder Latin missionary efforts through poor conduct or even outright sabotage.⁹² Clerical travellers were much better equipped to explore in more depth the reality of Asian religion, whether pagan or Christian, than laymen. As a result, their reconciliation of existing 'knowledge' with this reality was more nuanced. It took the shape of disappointment and bitterness towards Nestorians precisely because, in this case, Asian reality was so different from, and so difficult to reconcile with, existing 'knowledge' of the East.

The circumstances in which travellers undertook their journeys also led to some marked differences in perception and reconciliation. Established 'knowledge' typically gave the traveller some rudimentary understanding of geography. Particular elements were 'known' to be located in particular places. 'India', though a vague term, was still distinct from other places, such as Scythia, Persia, and Seres. This was specific enough that travellers who took a northern route, such as John of Plano Carpini and William Rubruck, did not look for things that were 'known' to be in India, such as the shrine of St Thomas. Instead, they looked for what they 'knew' were supposed to be in the north, hence both John's and William's discussion of the monstrous races traditionally placed north of Scythia.⁹³ Where in the East travellers journeyed influenced which parts of the established 'knowledge' they were inclined to reference and seek out.

⁹⁰ William of Rubruck, p. 122.

⁹¹ John of Montecorvino, 'The Second Letter of John of Monte Corvino' (8 January, 1305), trans. by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey, in *The Mongol Mission*, (pp. 224-27), p. 225.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 224-25; William of Rubruck, p. 164.

⁹³ John of Plano Carpini, p. 31; William of Rubruck, p. 201.

Further, the route dictated which parts of Asia travellers would come into contact with. Travellers who journeyed through the Eurasian steppe but never reached northern China ('Cathay'), had markedly different experiences from those who went to Persia and then to India and/or China by sea. Odoric of Pordenone was struck by size of 'Cansay', associating it with the trope of Eastern wealth to the point where it might almost not be believed: '[it is] so great indeed that I should scarcely venture to tell of it, but that I have met at Venice people in plenty who have been there'.⁹⁴ The friars who travelled almost exclusively through Mongol northern Asia had a very different experience. While they may have been impressed by the size of some of the Mongols' bigger encampments, these were still a far cry from the splendours described in traditional European portrayals, such as the *Letter of Prester John*.⁹⁵ John of Plano Carpini describes much of the land that he passed through as devastated by recent Mongol conquests: 'In this country [of the Kangits] as well as in Comania we came across many skulls and bones of dead men lying on the ground like dung'.⁹⁶ The 'land of the Bisermins' (Khorezm or Khiva) was similarly impoverished, with 'innumerable ruined cities and demolished forts and many deserted towns'.⁹⁷

The difference in expectation and experience that arose from variations in the route also influenced the way travellers reconciled the 'knowledge' of the East with what they came across. John of Plano Carpini is content simply to shift Prester John and his splendid kingdom to a part of the East that he had not visited or heard much about. He describes Prester John as a contemporary of Chingiss Khan who reigned somewhere in 'Greater India', which, unlike 'Lesser India', apparently managed to resist Mongol invasion.⁹⁸ William of Rubruck, writing a number of years later, blames local Nestorians for exaggerating the priest-

⁹⁴ Odoric of Pordenone, 'The Eastern Parts of the World Described', in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, trans. by Henry Yule, ed. by Henri Cordier (London: Haklyut Society, 1915), Vol. I, (pp. 97-277), pp. 193-94. This is modern Hangzhou, called by its Sung-era name 'Lin-ngan' during Odoric's time (Cordier, p. 192, n. 2).

⁹⁵ William of Rubruck, pp. 114, 131.

⁹⁶ John of Plano Carpini, p. 58.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

king's importance to begin with.⁹⁹ This approach of shifting Prester John in time (and importance), rather than space, was a common way later travellers reconciled the legend with reality, as European knowledge of Asia became more thorough. Marco Polo says that Prester John was one of the kings defeated by Chingiss Khan (long dead by Polo's time), who then married the priest-king's daughter, and that Prester John's descendants still hold some of his old lands in fief to the Great Khan.¹⁰⁰ Montecorvino offers a similar view: King George of the Önguts is 'of the family of that great king who was called Prester John of India'.¹⁰¹ Crucially, the traveller's mind was not totally free to project its perceptions onto the East. Asian reality was not passive in this process; neither, for that matter, was European reality, as the importance of education and place in society demonstrates.

On the other hand, there was a degree of commonality in travellers' perceptions and ways of reconciling new information with established 'knowledge'. The lack of separation between what is now known to be fictitious and factual was especially influential in this regard. Many travellers' accounts assert a claim to factual accuracy through personal eyewitness or reliable testimony. John of Plano Carpini is keen to emphasise that his account is accurate: 'To avoid any doubt arising in the minds of anyone as to our having been to the Tatars, we will write down the names of those with whom we came into contact there'.¹⁰² He states that 'the entire city of Kiev is a witness', as well as his companions.¹⁰³ He also 'begs' subsequent editors of his work not to alter it, lest its accuracy suffer.¹⁰⁴ Orderic of Pordenone is equally adamant on his own veracity, even swearing to his 'reverend father... in

⁹⁹ William of Ruburck, p. 122.

¹⁰⁰ Marco Polo, pp. 62-65, 75-76. This is actually reasonably accurate. Chingiss Khan really did have an alliance with Toghril, the Ong-khan of the Kereit tribe. He then overthrew Toghril in 1203, annexed his domain, and married his daughter.

¹⁰¹ John of Montecorvino, 'Second Letter', p. 225.

¹⁰² John of Plano Carpini, p. 70.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

accordance with my vow of obedience and the injunction which he hath laid upon me.’¹⁰⁵

Marco Polo’s Prologue too claims that the ‘great wonders and curiosities’ are all true: ‘Our book will relate them to you plainly in due order, as they were related by Messer Marco Polo... who has seen them with his own eyes. There is also much here that he has not seen but has heard from men of credit and veracity.’¹⁰⁶

Claiming equal accuracy for the wondrous and the mundane meant that the completely fictitious elements of the ‘knowledge’ of the East were reconciled with reality as readily as accurate elements. Travellers did not, of course, find any monstrous races or Prester Johns that matched established European ‘knowledge’. But neither did they reject their existence. Travellers often affirmed these elements by placing them in a further part of the East. Broadly speaking, they reconciled existing knowledge with reality in such a way that new information was added to the old, instead of replacing it. European travellers experienced only a minute portion of Asia first-hand; as Jackson puts it, ‘we might think of the world that these men discovered as a series of oases in a still imperfectly chartered wilderness’.¹⁰⁷ Old information was not obsolete in the traveller’s mind unless his encounters within one of these ‘oases’ categorically disproved it, which was very seldom.

Travellers sometimes came across completely new information that had no reference in established ‘knowledge’. Paradoxically, this led to similarities in perceptions, as travellers often made sense of it in using a similar technique: they compared it with what was familiar. Some comparisons were straightforward. William of Rubruck says that ‘Russian women decorate their heads like ours do, but they trim the outside of their overcoats, from the feet up to the knees, with squirrel or miniver’, while ‘the men wear capes like the Germans, but on their heads they have caps of felt’.¹⁰⁸ The technique is sometimes used to make a value judgement; William lets the reader know that Karakorum is less than impressive: ‘discounting the Chan’s palace, it is not as fine as the town of St Denis, and the monastery of

¹⁰⁵ Odoric of Pordenone, p. 266.

¹⁰⁶ Marco Polo, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 339.

¹⁰⁸ William of Rubruck, p. 110.

St Denis is worth ten of the palace'.¹⁰⁹ Conversely, Odoric's city of Zayton is as large 'as two of Bologna', and each of Hangzhou's ('Cansay's') dozen suburbs is 'greater than Venice or Padua'.¹¹⁰ The comparative reference to some of the larger European cities is a way to convey not just the size of their Asian counterparts, but also their splendour.

Comparison with the familiar can make for a powerful simile or metaphor, which can in turn convey some complex sensations. These comparisons could not only demonstrate how impressive something was in an objective way, but also in a subjective, evocative way. William of Rubruck employs this technique to some effect when he compares the steppe to the sea: 'when on the fourth day we finally came across some people, we rejoiced like shipwrecked men coming into harbour'.¹¹¹ William emphasises the vast and dangerous emptiness of the steppe by likening it to the sea, which would have been far more familiar than the steppe to both himself, a Fleming, and his patron Loius IX, who had sailed the Mediterranean extensively on his crusading adventures. The association is an especially astute one in that it also effectively relays the psychological impact on the traveller of the steppe's endless expanse. Such a deft simile, however, requires some literary skill on the part of the writer. For this reason, this effective type of comparison was not as common as the more mundane one, such as those regarding the size or wealth of cities and provinces.

Several factors shaped the encounters that European travellers had with Asian people and places. They also influenced the way travellers reacted to these encounters. Some factors, such as the traveller's background and level of education, tended to lead to differences in perceptions. Others, such as the lack of distinction between fictional and non-fictional elements in pre-existing knowledge of the East, led to commonalities in traveller views. In every instance, however, travellers formed perceptions of the East through a two-stage process: they set out with pre-existing information about the East and then reconciled this information with what they encountered in Asia, though Asia was active and not passive in these encounters.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 221.

¹¹⁰ Odoric of Pordenone, pp. 184, 195.

¹¹¹ William of Rubruck, p. 110.

The Traveller as an Individual

While the two-stage process offers a coherent explanation for how travellers reconciled established 'knowledge' with reality, its uniformity should not be overstated. The travellers themselves by no means lacked agency. Although theoretically also a cleric, even of the same mendicant order, as John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, Odoric of Pordenone shows far less evidence of education. He does not explicitly refer to any classical authorities, and his literary style is far more formulaic and repetitive. His descriptions of the wealthy cities and provinces of the East are reminiscent of those passages of Marco Polo least embellished by Rustichello's romantic style.¹¹² Both Odoric's and Polo's accounts largely follow a distinct formula in listing provinces and cities. They tend to describe each area in terms of how prosperous it is, or which material things it is otherwise noteworthy for, before moving on to the next one. This is despite the theoretically vast differences in the two men's background and vocation.

William of Rubruck himself in many ways constitutes an exception to many of the factors described above. As Campbell puts it, his account is 'the high water mark of literary excellence' in medieval travel literature.¹¹³ It is particularly notable for the 'revolutionary' author's persona, one that has a consistent first-person perspective throughout the narrative in a way that none of the other travel accounts do; most other accounts tend to fluctuate between a grounded first-person narration and a disembodied geographic or ethnographic overview.¹¹⁴

There is also William's profound scepticism. Regarding monsters, William says: 'I enquired about the monsters or human freaks who are described by Isidore and Solinus, but was told that such things had never been sighted, which makes us very much doubt whether [the story] is true'.¹¹⁵ This critical spirit makes William's account seem eerily modern compared to those of his contemporaries, not least because it is consistently delivered in a

¹¹² Odoric of Pordenone; Marco Polo. Cf. William of Rubruck. See also Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 113.

¹¹³ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 113.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹¹⁵ William of Rubruck, p. 201.

style of ‘dogged realism’.¹¹⁶ It is very tempting to see in William a kind of proto-humanist, proto-Renaissance author. However, it is extremely important not to overstate this. Scholars such as Campbell are perhaps too quick to elevate William to (early) modernity. He still shows a fundamentally medieval worldview and is still a fundamentally medieval, if a rather exceptional, individual. It is appropriate that he only voices his ‘doubt’ regarding the monsters, never quite prepared to reject them outright. William’s case simply demonstrates that, within the larger trends in European-Asian encounters, a great deal depended on the personality and uniqueness of the individual traveller. They were remarkable people to have undertaken such journeys in the first place, so it should come as no surprise that their own quirks, personalities, and idiosyncrasies gave their perceptions similarly unique flair.

* * *

Prior to the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Latin Christendom had virtually no direct contact with Asia beyond the Levant. European ‘knowledge’ of the East derived from antiquity and Christianity. The former consisted of originally Greek ideas which passed to the medieval West via Roman summaries and compilations, particularly that of Pliny the Elder. Classical ideas were then ‘Christianised’ from late antiquity onwards. Christianity also introduced wholly new elements into European ‘knowledge’ of the East, such as legends of the Magi, St Thomas, and Prester John. Within this synthesised Christian-classical ‘knowledge’, the legacy of Greek xenophobia towards foreigners, already relaxed by the more cosmopolitan Roman outlook, was further tempered by the inherently universal, if simultaneously dogmatic, Christian ideals.

The way travellers formed their perceptions of the East and its inhabitants ought to be understood as a process of two stages. There were underlying factors, such as the level of education and place in society, which determined which specific parts of the existing ‘knowledge’ travellers could draw on. These factors also gave travellers a predisposition towards coming into contact with certain elements of the East. For instance, travellers of clerical background were more likely to draw on classical elements of ‘knowledge’ and be interested in Eastern religions than their lay counterparts. The traveller then reconciled parts of the established ‘knowledge’ with the Asian reality they encountered; this was the second stage. The result of this reconciliation constitutes the travellers’ perceptions of the East. Crucially, Asian people and places were active, not passive, in the encounter. Asia was not a

¹¹⁶ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 120.

screen onto which the traveller could project his own worldview. It is precisely because of this dynamism in the encounters between the European travellers and Asian people and places that travellers' perceptions can no longer truly be said to automatically reflect the wider European worldview. The perceptions travellers formed of the East were highly nuanced and complex; whether these nuances and complexities reached medieval Europe at large is a different question.

Chapter Two: The Transmission of Travellers' Perceptions to Europe

Doubtless, most, if not all, of the travellers that came back home from their journeys would have regaled their contemporaries with oral tales of their adventures in the East. Indeed, oral storytelling figured prominently in medieval European culture, though the vast majority of people in the medieval West were illiterate and so little direct evidence of the oral tradition survives.¹ This has led historians such as C. S. Lewis to characterise medieval culture as 'through and through a bookish culture'.² C. S. Lewis certainly oversimplified. Aside from the oral and written, medieval Europe also possessed a rich visual tradition, including a distinctive cartography. Although maps are invaluable sources, they reflect less the concepts and ideas employed by travellers than those employed in Europe, even if they incorporated travellers' discoveries. Because traveller accounts overwhelmingly survive as written texts (and within other written texts), the *process* through which travellers' perceptions were transmitted to European society at large is best understood as a literary one. This process of transmission is inseparable from the literature of the time, even if Europeans frequently articulated the *results* of the process through maps and other non-written means.

Perceptions did not always reach European audiences in the form the traveller-writer first gave them, largely due to the inherent instability of the 'author-book unit' in medieval textual culture. In the absence of printing, there was no other way for texts to circulate except through meticulous copying out by hand. Gerald Bruns distinguishes between two types of texts: the 'closed text of a print culture' and the 'open text of a manuscript culture'.³ Medieval European textual culture was firmly 'open', with no notions of accuracy and

¹ Rudi Künzel, 'Oral and Written Traditions in the *Versus De Unibove*', in *Medieval Narrative Sources: A Gateway into the Medieval Mind*, ed. by Werner Verbeke, Ludo Milis, Jean Goossens (Leuven: University of Leuven Press, 2005), pp. 205-29; G. T. Shepherd, 'The emancipation of story in the twelfth century', in *Medieval Narrative: A Symposium*, ed. by Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote, Andreas Haarder, Preben Menlengracht Sørensen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1979), (pp. 44-57), pp. 44-45.

² C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, collected by Walter Hooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 43.

³ Gerald L. Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 44.

fidelity to the original source in the modern sense. Instead, even the humblest of medieval scribes continuously added to the text as they copied it out, drawing on their own knowledge and imagination – they ‘touched up’ the originals.⁴ C. S. Lewis called this tendency ‘irrepressible’, and supposed that it may have even been subconscious. Every scribe the text passed through in its lifecycle treated it as a modern author treats his draft, with the result that authorship was effectively ‘shared’.⁵

A text continuously morphed as writers and copyists constantly interacted with it and made alterations. In the medieval discipline of grammar, it was common for scribes and scholars to interpret critically a text through adding their own ‘embellishment’.⁶ Such embellishment, often via gloss and interlinear commentary, was instrumental to extracting meaning from a piece of writing. A good writer, as Eugene Vinaver explains, would ‘reveal the meaning of the story... adding to it such embellishing thoughts as he consider[ed] appropriate’ and thereby ‘raise[d] his work to a level of distinction which no straightforward narration could ever reach’.⁷ Only the works of the most highly-regarded *auctores*, typically the ancient authors, maintained a relatively high integrity of the author-book unit.

Conversely, medieval people sometimes ascribed contemporary works of good quality to an ancient *auctor*. Walter Map’s contemporaries thought his *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum* far too good for him to have written it. Instead, they attributed it to the first-century historian Valerius Maximus.⁸ In another work, Map laments:

My only fault is that I am alive. I have no intention, however, of correcting this fault by my death... I know what will happen after I am gone. When I shall be decaying, then, for the first time, [the *Dissuasio*] shall be salted; and every defect in it will be remedied by my decease, and in the most remote future its antiquity will cause the authorship to be credited to me, because, then as now, old

⁴ Lewis, *Studies*, p. 36; Bruns, *Inventions*, pp. 46-47. Quote from Lewis.

⁵ Lewis, *Studies*, pp. 36-38.

⁶ Bruns, *Inventions*, p. 50.

⁷ Eugene Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 17.

⁸ A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic literary attitudes in the later Middle Ages*, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp. 11-12.

copper will be preferred to new gold.... In every century its own present has been unpopular, and each age from the beginning has preferred the past to itself.⁹

Map clearly disapproves of the medieval notions of authority and authorship, and respect for the ancients, but finds himself helpless before them.

Even the ancient *auctores* were sometimes subject to embellishment and modification in order to highlight and extract meaning. In the Prologue to her *Lais*, Marie de France explains: ‘it was the custom of the ancients, as witnessed by Priscian, to speak obscurely in the books they wrote so that those who came later and studied those books might construe the text and add their own thoughts’.¹⁰ All who so much as copied a book became its co-authors to some degree. Most texts initially might have had distinct authors, but quickly morphed as the author-book unit dissolved. As Bernard Cerquiglini aptly put it, ‘medieval writing does not produce variants; it is variance’.¹¹

The process through which the traveller-writers transmitted their perceptions to Europeans at home is best understood in terms of the dissolution of the author-book unit, and can be characterised as having three phases. The traveller’s account usually began life as a reasonably firm author-book unit. Barring the odd case of blurred authorship, such as the collaboration between Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa, travellers typically wrote their accounts themselves or dictated them directly. At their creation, the accounts resembled the modern author-book unit fairly closely. Dissolution then began immediately as Europeans copied or translated the accounts. This was the first phase. In the second phase, successive European writers dismantled the original account to a greater extent and had much greater leeway in reassembling and rearranging its content as they created a new work. This new work then circulated and underwent the same dissolution itself as more writers joined the process and altered the text(s) even further; this was the third phase.

In each phase, there was a dialogue between the traveller-writer (the original author) and their audience. As Higgins explains, this ‘dialogic’ character of texts can offer insight

⁹ Walter Map, *Master Walter Map’s Book De Nugis curialium (Courtier’s Trifles)*, trans. by F. Tupper and M.B. Ogle (London: Chatto and Windus, 1924), p. 197.

¹⁰ Marie de France, *Lais*, cited in Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance*, p. 17.

¹¹ Bernard Cerquiglini, *Eloge de la variante: Histoire critique de la philologie* (Paris, 1989), quoted in Higgins, *Writing East*, p. viii.

into how medieval people transmitted and received ideas via literature.¹² At every step, a part of the European audience – the scribes, translators, and writers – engaged the traveller-writer in dialogue, and so articulated their response to the perceptions the traveller had formed through their interaction with Asia. Variance and the dissolution of the author-book unit are the principles underpinning the transmission of traveller perceptions to Europe, a process that can be traced through three distinct phases. However, not all travellers' accounts circulated widely enough to pass through all three phases.

Obscure Accounts

To all but a handful of individuals, the majority of travellers' accounts remained obscure or virtually unknown until relatively modern times. Many travellers wrote their accounts for specific people. In John of Montecorvino's case, his 'account' is actually a series of letters to the Pope.¹³ The letters are explicitly addressed to the pontiff, which suggests that Montecorvino did not intend them to be read by anyone else, and certainly not the (literate) public at large.¹⁴ Similarly, William of Rubruck's patron, Louis IX, was in all probability the only one who read his report.¹⁵ It is true that people other than the recipient or patron could and did have access to information brought back by these travellers. Roger Bacon, the English Franciscan, apparently met William in France at some point after the latter's return from Asia.¹⁶ This meeting was likely the reason why Bacon included some of William's geographic discoveries in his *Opus majus*.¹⁷ But outside of such rare occurrences, in the case of those accounts that were written for and addressed to a specific recipient, there was little reason for anyone else but said recipient to read them. That is not to say that these travellers intentionally kept their reports secret, but the fact that they addressed them to someone in

¹² Higgins, *Writing East*, pp. 265-66.

¹³ John of Montecorvino, 'Second Letter', p. 224.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁵ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 334.

¹⁶ Jackson, 'Introduction', in *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, pp. 40, 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 51; Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, Vols. I-II, trans. by Robert Belle Burke (New York, NY: Russell & Russell, 1962), Vol. I, pp. 374-89.

particular necessarily limited the extent of their impact. Once they were handed over, there was little reason for them to keep circulating.

The number of surviving manuscripts of these specifically-addressed accounts confirms just how narrowly they circulated. The two letters John of Montecorvino sent from China survive in only three manuscripts (two in Rome and one in Paris). They had remained largely forgotten until their publication by the Irish Franciscan Luke Wadding in the seventeenth century in his *Annals*.¹⁸ William of Rubruck's account survives in only five copies, and the fact that four of these are in England leads Jackson to suggest that it is only thanks to Roger Bacon's interest that it was copied and now survives at all.¹⁹ William's report, much like John's letters, remained mostly unread for the whole of the Middle Ages. It was only made widely known when Richard Haklyut rediscovered and published it in 1598, and even then only partially.²⁰

The extremely narrow circulation of these kinds of travellers' reports severely limited any effect they may have had on European conceptions of the world. This is especially true when a traveller uncovered something new or came to a conclusion that differed markedly from previously established 'knowledge' of Asia. Because William of Rubruck made such major discoveries and stated them so emphatically, it is tempting to treat them as having a direct, immediate, and widespread effect on such existing 'knowledge'. William often explicitly corrects previously held assumptions and expresses more than a little doubt about key elements of European 'knowledge' about Asia, notably regarding Prester John and the monstrous races.²¹ This leads historians such as de Rachewiltz to suggest that William's account 'contributed to shattering the West's lingering dream about Prester John's or King David's co-operation in the crusading movement'.²² But it is important to treat with caution the precise extent of such contributions. William's account specifically did not shatter the dreams of the West but only those of a handful of people at most. It could only have affected

¹⁸ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 222.

¹⁹ Jackson, 'Introduction', in *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²¹ William of Rubruck, pp. 122, 201.

²² Rachewiltz, *Papal Envoys*, p. 143.

people who had met him (as in the case of Roger Bacon) or who had read his account. Simply put, the West at large neither met William nor read what he had written.

Some accounts circulated more widely, as indeed they were intended to. John of Plano Carpini wrote his *History of the Mongols* with the avowed purpose of informing Europeans of the Mongols' history, way of life, and, most importantly, ways of waging war, so that Latin Christendom would be better equipped to deal with the threat. John complains that people whom he had met in Europe on his return had already begun to circulate a truncated and incomplete version of his report.²³ The work does, in fact, survive in two versions, one short and one long, each in a number of manuscripts.²⁴ John's report was evidently somewhat more widely available than those that were written exclusively or mainly for specific individuals. Salimbene of Adam, a contemporary who had met and spoken at great length with John near Lyon, notes that John would often regale crowds with stories of his experiences in Asia or have his account read out loud and then explained anything the listeners did not understand or wanted clarified.²⁵ John of Plano Carpini's account was certainly much better known than William of Rubruck's, and vastly more so than John of Montecorvino's letters. Still, though much wider than that of the specifically-addressed accounts, the circulation of John of Plano Carpini's report was miniscule in the absolute sense.

Obscure accounts only entered the wider European knowledge base through their incorporation into contemporary encyclopaedias and chronicles. In addition to meeting with William of Rubruck, Roger Bacon had also read John of Plano Carpini's report and used his descriptions of Tibet.²⁶ Vincent of Beauvais similarly incorporated large parts of John's report, along with that of Simon of Saint-Quentin's, into the *Speculum historiale* (c.1253).²⁷ However, encyclopaedias were prone to inaccuracy and tended to isolate this information in specific sections. Although the *Speculum historiale* makes rather extensive use of John of

²³ John of Plano Carpini, pp. 71-72.

²⁴ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 2.

²⁵ Salimbene of Adam, *Cronica*, cited in Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁷ Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, p. 2; Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, pp. 88, 343; J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 197. Simon of Saint-Quentin's account does not survive except through inclusions such as these.

Plano Carpini's account, it uses John's first, incomplete redaction.²⁸ Vincent of Beauvais did incorporate long extracts of Simon of Saint-Quentin's account verbatim,²⁹ but Jackson points out that this information is largely confined to the 'historical section' of Vincent's great work, while the section dealing with geography follows traditional authorities completely.³⁰

Such an isolating tendency continued to be the norm throughout the Middle Ages. Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* of the mid-fourteenth century (before 1350) very briefly mentions the Mongols in the historical section. Ranulf says that they went on to subjugate numerous nations after defeating David, the son of Prester John.³¹ John of Trevisa's 1387 translation of the *Polychronicon* into Middle English preserves the passage, though does not elaborate.³² A fifteenth-century redaction omits even this passing reference.³³ Clearly, the Mongols did not make much of an impression on Ranulf's anonymous fifteenth-century translator. 'Updating' the encyclopaedia with new information based on direct interaction with Asia was not the redactor's priority. Indeed, the Mongol dominions barely register in Ranulf's original, when they were still 'current' information. Characteristically of medieval encyclopaedias, Ranulf's original geography section, which outlines the regions of the world, omits the Mongols entirely.³⁴ Even Roger Bacon, one of the chroniclers most receptive to travellers' discoveries, buries geography deeply, treating it as a subset of mathematics in his

²⁸ Gregory G. Guzman, 'The encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais and his Mongol extracts from John of Plano Carpini and Simon of Saint-Quentin', *Speculum*, 49 (1974), pp. 287-307.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-307.

³⁰ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 343.

³¹ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis; Together with the English Translations of John of Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, Vols. I-VIII, ed. by Rev. Joseph Rawson Lumby (London: Longman, 1882), vol. VIII, p. 176. This refers to Chingiss Khan's wars against Toghril, the Ong-Khan of the Kereit tribe, a commonly made connection, not least among travellers (see Chapter One).

³² Ranulf Higden, 'Trevisa's Translation', in *Polychronicon Ranulphi*, vol. VIII, p. 177.

³³ 'Anonymous Translation of the Fifteenth Century', in *Polychronicon Ranulphi*, vol. VIII, p. 177.

³⁴ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis*, Vol. I, ed. by Churchill Babington, pp. 46-154.

mammoth work.³⁵ Traveller accounts typically only sporadically imparted ‘facts’ to encyclopaedias. Far from supplanting or ‘correcting’ existing knowledge, they at most existed alongside it.

Genuine perceptions – those that the travellers formed through a complex process of interaction with Asia – did not survive the transferral into chronicles and encyclopaedias intact. Although they certainly did influence the corpus of ‘knowledge’, they largely broke down and assimilated into existing conceptions of the world. This much is evident even in the case of Roger Bacon, one of the most intelligent and insightful medieval scholars, said to possess an acute and ‘independent’ mind.³⁶ Bacon included William of Rubruck’s information on the Tatar language and phonetics, the identification of China with the ‘Seres’ of antiquity, the Chinese use of paper money.³⁷ This illustrates the best case scenario, so to speak: an encyclopaedist readily incorporating information from travellers’ accounts to expand on European knowledge of Asia. However, even in this best case scenario, the impact of new information was severely restricted. Roger Bacon still defers to antique authorities regularly, as any good medieval scholar ought to, despite their information often being unsubstantiated or erroneous. J.R.S. Phillips cautions that the ‘mixture of very recent accurate information, traditional theories, and imagination in the writings of a scholar of Bacon’s calibre should be a warning not to expect too great a consistency or originality’ from his contemporaries.³⁸

That is not to say there was absolutely no critical reflection on existing knowledge and its basis. Bacon follows William’s observations regarding Prester John’s origins and the fate of his descendants.³⁹ He also follows William’s scepticism more than a little in discussing ‘Prester John or King John whose fame used to be so great and regarding whom many false things have been said and written’.⁴⁰ A few of William’s own observations and

³⁵ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, pp. 116-418.

³⁶ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 199; also Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 343.

³⁷ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, pp. 384-89.

³⁸ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 201.

³⁹ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, pp. 384-86; cf. William of Rubruck, pp. 122-24.

⁴⁰ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, p. 384.

even comparisons make it into Bacon's *Opus majus* directly. In his description of the 'Tanais' (Don) and 'Ethilia' (Volga) rivers, Bacon follows William in describing the width and the crossings and borrows his comparison with the Seine.⁴¹ Bacon also uses William's (unfavourable) comparison of Karakorum, the Mongol capital, with Saint-Denis.⁴² This is more than a simple recording of facts, if only barely, but it is also a rather exceptional case.

The transmission of information from travellers to Europe generally saw a breakdown of the travellers' genuine perceptions. Most travellers ended up imparting to their contemporaries 'de-contextualised', if scientifically important, pieces of information. Such is the nature even of most of what Roger Bacon includes of William's report. It was a revelation to William that the Caspian Sea is not connected to the northern ocean as Isidore of Seville had claimed it was. The phrasing, if not necessarily the exact words, are important to conveying the entirety of this perception. In addition to describing the geography, William boldly states: 'What Isidore says is incorrect'.⁴³ In principle, Bacon relays the same information: 'the Tanais falls into the Pontic [Black] Sea, and the Ethilia into the Caspian, and with many other rivers forms this sea'.⁴⁴ However, in neglecting to make as explicit and forceful a statement on Isidore's authority as William does, Roger Bacon automatically limits the potency of William's original observation. William's perception, originally nuanced and value-laden in its direct and poignant confrontation of Isidore, an *auctor* and a giant in medieval scholarship, is gone. It is reduced to simple, if scientifically important fact.

Bacon also changes the wider context of this description. Explicit references to 'Pliny, Solinus, and others,' including a certain astronomer named 'Ethicus', accompany sections that in practice draw on the accounts of travellers such as William of Rubruck and John of Plano Carpini.⁴⁵ After employing William's observations regarding the Caspian Sea, Bacon happily cites Pliny (whom Isidore followed) as an authority for the distance separating the Black and Caspian Seas in the very next sentence. Changes to both the initial phrasing and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 377; cf. William of Rubruck, p. 109.

⁴² Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, pp. 384-85; William of Rubruck, p. 221.

⁴³ William of Rubruck, p. 129.

⁴⁴ Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, p. 377.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 374, 386.

the context undermine William's original and emphatic observation and the essence of his perception: the East can differ substantially from, and sometimes contradict entirely, what ancient authorities have to say about it. With travellers' reports employed in such a way, any information extracted from them lost much of the context in which travellers' perceptions form, a complex, multi-staged process as Chapter One shows.

Distortion arose due to the way chroniclers and encyclopaedists treated traveller accounts as sources. Bacon was rather exceptional in the extent to which he used traveller reports. In more 'traditional' works, such as Brunetto Latini's *Livres dou Tresor* (1260) and Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, information from travellers' accounts did not feature very much and antique authorities continued to predominate.⁴⁶ De Rachewiltz argues that maps from the early fourteenth century, such as those of Pietro Vesconte, Marino Sanudo and Frà Paolino, were already beginning to incorporate information from John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck.⁴⁷ Sanudo's written work, the *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis* (c.1320), displays a degree of familiarity with Mongol lands.⁴⁸ Geographic information certainly made its way into European scientific knowledge. Yet travellers' perceptions did not impart to Europeans a nuanced understanding of Asia. Rather, they contributed to the general, growing awareness in the Late Middle Ages of just how big the world was.

Well-known Accounts: Polo, Hayton, and Odoric

Travellers' perceptions were only transferred intact when their original reports circulated widely enough. The accounts of only three travellers achieved popularity in their own right and became truly widely disseminated: Marco Polo, Hayton of Gorigos, and Odoric of Pordenone. In contrast to their more obscure counterparts, these accounts survive in numerous manuscripts and translations. Hayton's *Flor des estoires* (1307) survives in over fifty copies, in both French and Latin.⁴⁹ Odoric's book exists in over one hundred

⁴⁶ J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*, p. 196; Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 343.

⁴⁷ Rachelwiltz, *Prester John*, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Marino Sanudo Torsello, *Liber secretorum fidelium cruci*, cited in Bernard Hamilton, 'The Impact of the Crusades', p. 29.

⁴⁹ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 334.

manuscripts; Polo's in around one hundred and thirty.⁵⁰ The fact that they were translated to almost all the major European vernaculars, to Latin (if originally in a vernacular), and sometimes even back to a vernacular from the Latin translation, suggests a geographically wide distribution across Latin Christendom. It is in reading these three accounts that medieval Europeans were most likely to hear the voice of the traveller himself, and thus access the traveller's original perceptions of the East.

To understand precisely how the three widely-read accounts transmitted perceptions to Europe, it is crucial to understand how Europeans read them. There were several characteristics of the broad medieval European literary culture, and of the broader literary milieu, that fostered a unity and flexibility of form and allowed a great multiplicity of meaning. This unity and flexibility, as well as the multiplicity of meaning, in turn allowed thirteenth and fourteenth-century Europeans to receive and assimilate travellers' perceptions into the existing dialogue about the nature of the world.

Some scholars argue that there were rather distinct boundaries between prose and verse in medieval literature right up to the mid-fourteenth century. Campbell suggests that the strength and persistence of this dichotomy, where verse was associated with 'the "fables" of poets' and prose with 'the "truth" of science and history', was the reason *The Book of John Mandeville* was such a novelty. She argues that the prose romances such as *Lancelot* that had existed since the thirteenth century were so outlandish that they could not be mistaken for reality, and that *The Book of John Mandeville* was the first instance of 'realistic prose fiction... since Petronius'.⁵¹ Well into the fourteenth century, Campbell maintains, prose was an automatic cue to the audience that the text intended to 'transmit facts'.⁵² Such a strict and dichotomous distinction does not entirely hold up against evidence, however.

Boundaries between forms of expression were rather blurred. Ernst Curtius points out that there was never a 'generally available word for poetry' in Latin literary vocabulary.⁵³ The same often appeared in both versions. Onulf of Speyer wrote *Rhetorici colores* (c.1050)

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 335.

⁵¹ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, pp. 122-23.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 138-39.

⁵³ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 145-47.

in prose, and then produced a versified version.⁵⁴ Prose and verse could be mixed to create *prosimetra*, texts in which passages of prose alternated with inserts of verse. The mixtures could get staggeringly complicated when the poet made these inserts polymetric and began to utilise rhyme in the prose passages.⁵⁵ Goliard poets even incorporated quotations from ancient *auctores* in the form of a hexameter that rhymed with the original part of their stanza and served to illustrate their point. Walter of Châtillon utilises this technique to satirise the clergy in his poem *Carmen* (twelfth century).⁵⁶

Lawrence Jannuzzi's analysis of Galbert of Bruges, the Flemish notary of the twelfth century, reveals a very similar blurring of the boundary between prose and poetry. Jannuzzi argues that Galbert was so shocked by the murder of Charles the Good (in 1127) that he could not express himself through the typical, 'linear' style of a notary. In his chronicle Galbert consciously uses literary techniques such as metaphor, imagery, and lengthy explorations of themes such as 'home', 'order' and 'community' to construct a text in which there is a constant 'intersection' of poetic and 'linear' expression.⁵⁷ Medieval literature therefore not only lacked distinct boundaries between forms of expression but allowed for and encouraged their mixing. The European literary space, at least in the Latin, was rather porous. Material was not permanently tied to form and was thus free to move between what one might today think of as 'genres'. Travellers' perceptions were free to enter the whole of the literary space without automatically and necessarily being confined to any particular part, such as 'marvels', 'romance', or geography. Indeed, medieval literary flexibility extended beyond forms of expression.

There was no sharp distinction between fiction and non-fiction either. Instead, Geert Claassens explains, texts had different 'degrees of referentiality'. Every medieval story must either be true or have a moral/ethical meaning, otherwise it is little more than lies, a sin that puts both storyteller and audience in spiritual danger. In striving for moral meaning, medieval

⁵⁴ Onulf of Speyer, *Rhetorici colores*, cited in Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 148.

⁵⁵ Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 148.

⁵⁶ Walter of Châtillon, *Carmen*, IV, XII, cited in Curtius, *European Literature*, p. 152.

⁵⁷ Lawrence R. Jannuzzi, 'Galbert of Bruges: The Notary as Poet', in *The Middle Ages in Texts and Texture: Reflections on Medieval Sources*, ed. by Jason Glenn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), (pp. 153-64), pp. 155, 157-59, 161.

narratives might stay close to the perceived reality (highly referential) or stray further from it (non-referential).⁵⁸ Claassens suggests that in every instance of medieval storytelling, the audience and the storyteller entered into a ‘pact’, and together determined the text’s place along the continuum between high and low referentiality.⁵⁹

A traveller might have a clear idea of where on the referentiality scale his account ought to be. He might insist, as Marco Polo does, on the account being true (or highly referential),⁶⁰ but he is not alone in deciding where it is placed. His engagement with the audience determines the final position, which could and did change. In 1310, Pietro d’Abano, the brilliant professor at the University of Padua who had sought Marco’s thoughts on the habitability of equatorial regions, pronounced him ‘the most extensive traveller and the most diligent inquirer whom I have ever known’.⁶¹ Yet, in 1392, the Florentine patrician Amelio Bonaguasi, after copying out Marco’s account, opined:

...these seem to me incredible things; and what he says seems to me not so much lies as more than miracles. And yet what he speaks of could be true, but I don’t believe it – though in the world one finds very different things from one country to another. But these, it seems to me – though I’ve enjoyed copying them – are things not to be believed nor to give faith to...⁶²

John Larner suggests that the dwindling of eastward travel at this time, coupled with an increasingly humanistic outlook, made audiences change the way they approached Marco Polo’s account.⁶³ The audience’s part in the ‘pact’ with the author changed, and the prevalent reading of the work simply shifted along Claassens’ referentiality scale.

Flexibility and interconnection also extended to language. Though vernacular languages became increasingly prominent from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

⁵⁸ Geert H. M. Claassens, ‘The “Scale of Boendale”: On Dealing With Fact and Fiction in Vernacular Mediaeval Literature’, in *Medieval Narrative Sources*, (pp. 231-50), pp. 234-35, 243-45.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁶⁰ Marco Polo, p. 1.

⁶¹ Pietro d’Abano, *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum*, cited in Larner, *Marco Polo*, p. 44.

⁶² Amelio Bonaguasi, in Marco Polo, *Milione. Versione Toscana del Trecento*, ed. by V. Bertolucci Pizzorusso (Milan, 1975), p. 333, cited in Larner, *Marco Polo*, p. 133.

⁶³ Larner, *Marco Polo*, pp. 132-33.

onwards, they did so alongside Latin and not at its expense. This process did not break up the western intellectual and literary space into isolated parts but rather ‘pluralised’ it. Gabrielle Spiegel speaks of vernacular literature being ‘distinct in its origins and modes of operation’ from Latin literature.⁶⁴ Parkes argues that the latter was ‘the learned literature of a closed circle of scholars and savants’.⁶⁵ Such conclusions are not unfounded, but they do not give due consideration to connections and mutual influence between Latin and vernacular literatures, especially vis-à-vis the subjects of travel and geography. They unjustly give the impression that the fourteenth-century intellectual and cultural space into which travellers’ accounts entered was firmly divided into separate Latin and vernacular traditions.

There was enough crossover and interconnection between Latin literature and its vernacular counterparts for the late medieval West to constitute a coherent literary space. Graham Caie shows that vernacular writers such as Boccaccio and Chaucer did seek to usurp for themselves the respect traditionally afforded to *auctores* by deliberately leaving space for interlinear gloss and commentary. They even provided some of this commentary themselves, often in Latin, while claiming to be no more than compilers.⁶⁶ There was a long-standing distinction in Latin literature between *auctoritas*, or true authorial originality, and *compilatio*, a confirmation of *auctoritas* via translation, compilation, and/or gloss.⁶⁷ In one sense, then, writers such as Chaucer and Boccaccio subverted this distinction.

On the other hand, even as they subverted Latin literary norms, vernacular writers still had to engage with them. The scribe of the Ellesmere manuscript, one of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales*, deliberately left enough space for gloss, and

⁶⁴ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ‘The Textualization of the Past in Thirteenth-Century French Historical Writing’, in *Imagining the Past in France: History in Manuscript Painting, 1250-1500* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010), p. 44.

⁶⁵ Malcolm Beckwith Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), p. 275.

⁶⁶ Graham D. Caie, ‘The Manuscript Experience: what medieval manuscripts tell us about authors and texts’, in *Medieval Texts in Context*, ed. by Graham D. Caie and Denis Renevey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), (pp. 10-27), pp. 20-24; Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, p. 210; Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Readers*, p. 228.

⁶⁷ Caie, ‘The Manuscript Experience’, pp. 20-24.

then himself provided gloss, in Latin.⁶⁸ The Hengwrt manuscript, another early copy of the *Canterbury Tales*, likewise has Latin gloss.⁶⁹ This shows that vernacular writers were not only familiar with traditional Latin literary norms, but, through the very act of subversion, they actively interacted with them and so maintained links between the Latin and vernacular literary spheres. Even when Latin and vernacular literary spaces competed ideologically, they remained thoroughly interconnected.

The persistent interconnection between different forms and languages amid the increasing pluralisation of literature in the Late Middle Ages shaped the context in which traveller perceptions reached European audiences. The three well-known travellers' accounts proliferated throughout both the traditional Latin and the new vernacular literature. Rustichello originally wrote Polo's account in a kind of 'Italianate French'; Francesco Pipino translated this text to Latin in c.1302, from which version (itself extant in over fifty manuscripts) various writers then translated it into their own vernaculars, including (d'Oil) French.⁷⁰ Similarly, Hayton initially dictated his account to Nicolas Falcon in French in 1307, who then translated it to Latin at the request of Pope Clement V. Jean le Long of Ypres, a monk at the Abbey of Saint-Bertin in Saint Omer, used this version in translating the work back into French in 1357.⁷¹ Odoric of Pordenone's account, though circulating widely in the original Latin (1330), quickly appeared in Italian, and le Long translated the Latin text into French in 1351.⁷² This translation then proved particularly influential in forming the basis for much of *The Book of John Mandeville*, the anonymous author of which preferred le Long's French to the Latin.⁷³

Certainly, that these accounts were translated back and forth indicates that the audience was not homogenous. Not everyone who could read a vernacular could read Latin.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 20-24; Parkes, *Scribes, Scripts and Reader*, p. 225.

⁶⁹ Caie, 'The Manuscript Experience', p. 24.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 334; Latham, 'Introduction', in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, p. xxv.

⁷¹ Larner, *Marco Polo*, p. 124.

⁷² Henri Cordier, 'Biographical Notices', in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, (pp. 1-39), p. 27; Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 9.

⁷³ Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 9.

Yet, it is telling that le Long, himself a clergyman, thought it worthwhile to re-translate from the Latin to the vernacular. Though the literary space into which travellers' accounts entered was far from monolithic, it was interlinked to the point where it may be viewed as a coherent if highly diverse whole. As Burt Kimmelman puts it, there was, broadly speaking, 'a literate community to which all writers, all composers of texts, belonged'.⁷⁴ The rise of the vernaculars and the growing literacy rates made this community increasingly plural in that it came to include many more voices. But these voices still participated in the same dialogue in articulating a picture of the world. The perceptions that travellers formed on their journeys entered this increasingly plural dialogue through a three-phase process.

The Three Phases of Transmission Illustrated

The Book of John Mandeville illustrates the three phases of transmission of perceptions particularly well. The work is a 'fictional' travel account; its anonymous author likely never travelled anywhere. Instead, he used genuine accounts by William of Boldensele and Odoric of Pordenone as the basis for the parts of *Mandeville* dealing with the journey of Sir John (the fictional protagonist and traveller-narrator) to the Holy Land and the rest of Asia respectively. *Mandeville* is also a 'multi-text', as Higgins terms it, because it exists in multiple recensions deriving from a common, now-lost archetype text (from the 1350s or 60s).⁷⁵ Though Higgins prefers a 'topological' reading that treats all recensions as equally valid, he accepts that some versions are indeed closer to the hypothetical original than others. The so-called 'Continental' and 'Insular' versions (both in French), and several of their descendants, such as the 'Cotton' and 'Egerton' texts (Middle English variants of the Insular), likely resemble the original more than the 'Interpolated Continental' and its descendants.⁷⁶ Higgins' recent translation of the Continental and Insular versions from the French, the first direct translation since the 1400s, marks perhaps the most comprehensive rendition of the work in English

⁷⁴ Burt Kimmelman, *The Poetics of Authorship in the Later Middle Ages: The Emergence of the Modern Literary Persona* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1996), p. 6.

⁷⁵ Higgins, *Writing East*, pp. 17-27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19. Traditional historiography has treated these more 'original' ones, particularly the Cotton text in Anglophone scholarship, as best approximating the now-lost original.

today.⁷⁷ This translation can, in this thesis, serve as a reasonably safe substitute for the ‘original version’ of *Mandeville*.

Odoric’s perceptions can be said to have passed through three groups of texts. First, they were set out in Odoric’s original account and subjected to minor variation via Odoric’s copyists and translators. Next, Odoric’s perceptions were transferred, along with the bulk of Odoric’s account, into the hypothetical ‘original’ *Mandeville* text (approximated here by Higgins’ translation of the Continental and Insular versions). Finally, they appeared in subsequent *Mandeville* recensions. Together, these three groups of texts give an insight into the trajectory that a traveller’s – in this case Odoric’s – perceptions took in their transmission from the original travel account into the wider European dialogue about the nature of the world (here represented by the three groups of texts, together). Each of the three groups of texts corresponds to what might be termed a ‘phase’ in the process of transmission and reception.

The way Odoric’s immediate copyists and translators treated his perceptions illustrates the first phase of transmission. The relationship between the traveller-writer and the copyist/translator was very much dialogical, but this dialogue was not an even one; the majority of the input still belonged to the traveller-writer. The copyist/translator reacted to Odoric’s narrative through *some* alterations to the account, but the Odoric’s perceptions remained largely intact, as the author-book unit remained fairly strong. This is the case with Jean le Long’s 1351 translation of Odoric’s account from Latin into French. There is some discrepancy in the way the two versions present the ‘Nacumerans’, the primitive inhabitants of the ‘Canophales’. Odoric’s Latin text describes them as ‘large of body and very strong in battle’; le Long’s French translation renders them as ‘all black and very cruel in battle’.⁷⁸ Here le Long transforms the fairly neutral original observation into a much more loaded description. Still, the translated version seldom strays far from the author’s original intention.

⁷⁷ *The Book of John Mandeville, with related texts*, trans. by Ian Macleod Higgins (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2011). Higgins includes translated extracts from several other recensions in the appendices, notably the Interpolated Continental version (French), the von Diemeringen and the Velsler versions (German), and the Vulgate Latin version. An early Continental version is published as the ‘The Paris Text’, in *Mandeville’s Travels: Texts and Translations*, ed. by Malcolm Letts (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953), Vol. II, pp. 229-413.

⁷⁸ Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio* (1330), in *Itinera et Relationes*, ed. by A. Wyngaert, (pp. 381-495) p. 453; Odoric of Pordenone, *Relatio*, trans. by Jean le Long as *Le chemin de la peregrinacion et du voyage* (1351); both cited in Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 146. The original Latin reads: ‘magni corpore et valde fortes in bello’, and the French: ‘tous noirs et... tres cruelle... en bataille’.

Jean le Long may have coloured some of Odoric's original phrasing, but the scope he had to re-cast the essential meaning of Odoric's perceptions was still quite limited. Though the description of the 'Nacumerans' has been changed in the translation, it continues to occupy a similar place in the broader structure of the text. Le Long's translation does not break this structure, and this limits the effect of any changes he makes. The translator's part in the dialogue is still a considerably lesser one than that of the traveller-author, Odoric. This is characteristic of the first phase.

The way those *Mandeville* recensions closest to the 'original' text treat Odoric's perceptions illustrates the second phase of reception. In this phase, a European writer used a traveller's account to construct a new work. The Mandeville-author read Odoric, in both the original Latin and Jean le Long's French versions, and used it as the basis for the vast majority of that part of the *Book of John Mandeville* which deals with the East beyond the Holy Land.⁷⁹ Yet the Mandeville-author did more than simply follow Odoric's outline; he frequently lifted entire sections from the account verbatim or almost verbatim, such as the description of Erzurum in Asia Minor.⁸⁰ In other sections the borrowing is more subtle. The Mandeville-author uses Odoric's outline, but fills in the details gleaned from other sources, both travellers and non-travellers, or creates wholly original content. In dealing with the life of Chingiss Khan, for example, most recensions draw on Hayton's work.⁸¹ This is a much more thorough reworking of Odoric. As Josephine Waters Bennett puts it, the Mandeville-author, while for the most part adhering to Odoric's itinerary, 'at every step of the way... illuminates and vivifies and humanizes Odoric's account'.⁸²

The Mandeville-author is much more inclined than Odoric to think about and attempt to rationalise idol-worship in India. Aside from a brief description of the ceremony, and

⁷⁹ Higgins, *Writing East*, p.148; Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p.335; Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John of Mandeville* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1954), pp. 16, 26-38; Malcolm Letts, 'Introduction', in *Mandeville's Travels*, (pp. xvii-xlvi), pp. xxxii-xxxiv. 'Mandeville-author' is adapted (sans Italics) from 'Mandeville-author', Higgins' term for the anonymous original writer.

⁸⁰ Bennett, *The Rediscovery*, p. 27; Odoric of Pordenone, 'The Eastern Parts of the World Described', pp. 100-01. Cf. *The Book of John Mandeville*, p. 93; 'Paris Text', p. 316.

⁸¹ Hayton of Gorigos, *Flor des Histoires d'Orient*, cited in Letts, 'Introduction', in *Mandeville's Travels*, p. xxvii; *The Book of John Mandeville*, pp. 134-39. Cf., for example, 'Egerton Text', pp. 154-161.

⁸² Bennett, *The Rediscovery*, pp. 26-38.

registering shock at alleged child-sacrifice, Odoric's original passage mentions only that the Indians an 'idol, which is half man and half ox'.⁸³ It is a simple descriptive statement, followed by a brief expression of disgust at human sacrifice. In contrast, the Mandeville-author attempts to get to the bottom of *why* the Indians worship an ox idol. He first makes the distinction between idols, unnatural and spiritually-corrupting imagery, and 'simulacra', the 'likeness' of a 'natural object', explaining that Indians employ the latter in their worship.⁸⁴ With this nuance in mind, he rationalises:

... they [the Indians] say that the ox is the holiest animal that exists on earth, and more patient and useful than any other, for it does much good and does no evil, and they indeed know that this could not be without God's special grace. Therefore they make their god partly from an ox, and the other part they make from man, because man is the noblest creature on earth; and because he has lordship over all animals, they therefore make half of the idol out of man and the other half out of ox.⁸⁵

This passage is common to the Egerton, Cotton, and Velsler recensions.⁸⁶ It is a massive departure from the nature of Odoric's original perception. The idol-worshipping Indians are no longer to be seen simply as strange and savage pagans, as Odoric experience understandably rendered them in his mind. Instead, in *Mandeville*, they are to be understood as fellow children of God. In short, they are indeed humanised.

Such departure was possible in the second phase of reception because the author-book unit had dissolved sufficiently by this point. The European writer was no longer simply copying or translating the traveller-writer, but was instead using their material to create something new. Consequently, the dialogue between the two no longer favoured the original traveller-writer; it became more evenly balanced. The traveller-writer's original perceptions survived, especially in those sections lifted verbatim from the original account, but they lost

⁸³ Odoric of Pordenone, 'The Eastern Parts of the World Described', p. 138; Odoric of Pordenone, 'Descriptio Orientalium Partium Fratris Odorici Boemi De Foro Julii Provinciae Sancti Antonii', in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Vol. I, (pp. 278-336), p. 282. The original Latin reads: 'Hii similiter aliud ydolum per os respondet quod adorant quod est per dimidium homo et per dimidium bos: hoc ydolum per os respondet quod multotiensanguinem xl virginum petit et requirit huic ydolo'.

⁸⁴ *The Book of John Mandeville*, pp. 102-03. See also 'Paris Text', pp. 322-23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁸⁶ 'Egerton Text', pp. 118-19; Malcolm Letts, *Mandeville's Travels*, p. 119, n. 2.

their original context as the author-book unit dissolved further. They were instead placed in a context constructed by Europeans who had not travelled. The Mandeville-author's much more tolerant outlook towards idol-worship in India was a case of him having more control than Odoric himself over how he could use Odoric's perceptions.

The function that the Mandeville-author chose to ascribe to the idol-worship passage above was thus different from Odoric's. In Odoric's original, the passage illustrates that particular people's rather bloodthirsty religious rituals. Odoric continues:

And this idol giveth responses out of its mouth and oftentimes demandeth the blood of forty virgins to be given to it. For men and women there vow their sons and their daughters to that idol, just as here they vow to place them in some religious order. And in this manner many perish.⁸⁷

Odoric understandably wants to convey the horrors of the human sacrifice. On the other hand, the Mandeville-author turns this passage on its head and ascribes a completely opposite function to it. Most *Mandeville* recensions, as discussed above, rationalise of the practice of worshipping a half-ox idol as an imperfect but inherently pious act. The passage is made to highlight the unity of humanity and of creation in general under God. This is a prominent theme in the text, as different readers of *Mandeville* have noted.⁸⁸ Higgins suggests that most recensions attempt to construct 'Self-critical mirrors' and 'encourage relativizing reflection'.⁸⁹ The Mandeville-author's part in the dialogue with Odoric was in this second phase sufficiently prominent to ascribe a new function to Odoric's perceptions.

In the third phase of reception other re-writers copied, translated, and otherwise altered the *Mandeville* text. Through these alterations, these re-writers offered their own response to the Mandeville-author, and by extension to Odoric. As Higgins explains, the different versions 'contain the most substantial evidence of reception... revealing that many of its earliest "rewriters" read the text with an actively critical eye'.⁹⁰ The different versions of *Mandeville* effectively constitute a 'reception of the receptions', removed from the original traveller-writer by one more step.

⁸⁷ Odoric of Pordenone, 'The Eastern Parts of the World Described', p. 138. The antiquated English is part of Yule's translation.

⁸⁸ Bennett, *The Rediscovery*, pp. 33-34; Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*, pp. 269-70.

⁸⁹ Higgins, *Writing East*, pp. 175, 266.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The variance present in the different recensions of *Mandeville* shows that travellers' perceptions morphed as they assimilated further into the wider dialogue in European literature. A sizeable minority of versions, such as the Bodley, Metrical, von Diemeringen and Vulgate Latin recensions, do not preserve intact the original Mandeville-author's remarkably open-minded explorations of pagan piety.⁹¹ The Vulgate Latin version in particular, which Higgins suggests was likely translated by a clergyman between 1396 and 1415, is very orthodox. Where the Mandeville-author repurposes Odoric's perceptions to induce self-reflection in the audience, the Vulgate Latin redactor attempts the opposite. As in other recensions, Sir John quotes the Chinese proverb that only the Chinese, and no one else, see with two eyes. However, to dissuade any self-criticism this may otherwise encourage in his audience, the redactor of the Vulgate Latin version has Sir John add: 'but they tell themselves wicked lies, because they see with a single eye earthly and passing things, and we Christians see with two, because with earthly eyes we see spiritual and lasting things'.⁹² The Vulgate Latin version consistently makes these kinds of changes.⁹³ This shows that Europeans who articulated their own response to the Mandeville-author's response to Odoric, so to speak, considerably changed the way travellers' perceptions function in the text. By the third phase of reception, the dialogue widened to include the voices of not only Odoric and his immediate copyists and translators, as well as the original Mandeville-author, but also the voices of the copyists and translators who produced the *Mandeville* recensions. The input of the European participants in this third phase outweighed the input of the traveller-writer as re-interpretations of his original accounts were themselves subjected to re-interpretation. The nature of medieval textual culture allowed for and encouraged this phenomenon.

Extra-textual Factors

As well as the phases of reception within texts or multi-texts, there were important extra-textual factors that influenced transmission of perceptions. Non-travellers who reproduced travellers' material in any form in any of the above-described phases also chose how to

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 234.

⁹² 'The Vulgate Latin version', chapter 36, in *The Book of John Mandeville*, trans. by Higgins, (pp. 206-18), p. 217. The Latin text reads: 'sed mentitur iniquitas sibi, quoniam ipsi vident solo oculo terrena et transitoria, et nos Christiani duobus, quia cum terrenis videmus spiritualia, et mansura' (Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 175).

⁹³ Higgins, *Writing East*, pp. 171, 266.

physically present the text. The variance in how compilers bound the manuscripts illustrates the importance of extra-textual factors. Odoric's and Polo's accounts were very frequently bound together with romance and chivalric legend.⁹⁴ This clearly indicates that the compiler wished whatever information Polo and Odoric imparted to be taken as entertainment (low referentiality in Claassens' terminology). On the other hand, Hayton's account was commonly bound with one or more of the many crusading treatises that were in wide circulation in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, such as the *Memoria terrae sanctae*.⁹⁵ Whenever third-party copyists or compilers bound travellers' accounts with other texts, they shaped the function of these travellers' perceptions in a very powerful way without necessarily altering the text or the perceptions themselves. This could take place during any phase: a copyist, whose first-phase input into the dialogue within the text might be comparatively limited, could still significantly affect its reception through extra-textual manipulation.

There was little to restrict which account could be bound with which type of work. Like Hayton's book, those of Odoric and Polo were also sometimes bound with crusading treatises.⁹⁶ This is a radically different function from the above-mentioned one of entertainment. In binding Polo's work with crusading treatises, the compiler clearly assigned a much more serious function to Polo's perceptions; they became intelligence relevant to the reclamation of the Holy Land rather than idle curiosities. Effectively, Polo's or Odoric's descriptions, and perceptions, of the East, even if they maintained their integrity in the text itself, could be made to have very different meanings based solely on their context. Medieval textual culture allowed and indeed encouraged such multiplication of meaning. This chapter has largely focused on the textual trajectory of travel accounts; it has described how travellers' perceptions could frequently lose their nuance or become imbued with additional meaning within this dialogue. A similarly in-depth exploration of extra-textual factors is beyond the scope of this thesis, and this chapter specifically, but these factors are worth mentioning as yet another layer of complexity in the way travellers' perceptions were transmitted to Europe at large.

⁹⁴ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 339-40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.340.

* * *

As European travellers returned home from their journeys, they brought their perceptions of 'the East' with them. The travellers' contemporaries in Europe certainly articulated their conceptions and perceptions of the world through images, and these images certainly bear the mark of travellers' discoveries. But they represent only the 'end point' of travellers' influence. In order to understand *how* travellers' perceptions entered the wider European dialogue about the nature of the world, and how they influenced it, it is best to turn to the literature of the time. The trajectory of perceptions through European literature was rather complex due to both textual and extra-textual alteration at different stages in a text's life. This chapter has explored textual alteration in particular detail as an illustration of the overall intricacy and complexity of the transmission of travellers' perceptions to Europe.

Transmission was closely tied to the instability of the author-book unit in medieval textual culture. In the absence of printing, the distinctly modern rigidity of the author-book unit, to which modern readers (and writers) are so accustomed, simply did not survive for very long. A text existed in a 'pure', modern form from the first instance a writer put pen to parchment to the moment someone else did. Alterations began as soon as the text was so much as copied in order to keep circulating and survive. Moreover, alteration, via 'embellishment' or 'touching up', was seen as a crucial part of reading and understanding the text, and of extracting meaning from it. Not even the ancient *auctores* were exempt from this practice. Texts were fluid, their authorship effectively shared between copyists, translators, writers who lifted material from the text verbatim (in what today would be termed plagiarism). The number of people that partook in this sharing of authorship increased the further the author-book unit dissolved.

The process of the dissolution of the author-book unit, illustrating how Europeans at home received traveller-writers' perceptions of the East, can be divided into three distinct phases. Because authorship was shared between multiple writers, there can be said to have been a 'dialogue', in any given phase, between the preceding writer(s) and the one(s) currently contributing. As the text progressed through the phases, more writers contributed to the dialogue, and the original author's part in the dialogue progressively diminished. In the case of travel accounts, the original traveller-writer's part diminished even as that of the Europeans at home increased: the voices of the account's scribes, copyists, and compilers and re-writers, such as the Mandeville-author, accumulated and eventually eclipsed that of the original traveller, such as Odoric of Pordenone.

Moreover, very few travel accounts were actually well-known enough to impart to the wider dialogue any intact perceptions in the first place. The vast majority of travellers' reports can be classified as varying degrees of 'obscure'. These were typically addressed to very specific people, as John of Montecorvino's letters were addressed to the pope, and there was no reason for anyone other than these recipients to read them. The only way these obscure reports imparted any information at all was through their occasional inclusion in encyclopaedias and chronicles. However, the information European encyclopaedists and chronicles at home took from travellers' reports amounted to little more than de-contextualised 'fact'. This made the nuance of the perception largely irrelevant, because it distorted the original phrasing, removed the context, and generally divorced 'fact' from 'perception'. Only the accounts of Marco Polo, Hayton of Gorigos, and Odoric of Pordenone became well-known enough in their own right for Europeans to treat them as sources of perceptions, rather just 'facts', of the East.

As the material from these three accounts passed through the phases of transmission, European re-writers came to exercise progressively more control over the travellers' perceptions. Re-writers gained increasingly greater leeway in assigning to them functions that could differ substantially from those originally assigned by the traveller-writers. In this way, the Mandeville-author could turn the Odoric's description of pagan Indians from an anecdote illustrating the baseness of idolatry to one highlighting the universality of God's Creation. By the same token, the redactor of the Vulgate Latin version of *Mandeville* could turn a Chinese proverb into a reassertion of Roman Church dogma, overwriting both Odoric and the original Mandeville-author. Travellers' perceptions assimilated into existing European discussions rather quickly, imparting little of the nuanced understanding of Asia that travellers had acquired throughout their often intimate encounters with Asian people and places.

Chapter Three: How Eastward Travel Changed the European Worldview

At the end of the fifteenth and the onset of the sixteenth centuries, Christopher Columbus' voyages to the Caribbean, John Cabot's landing in North America, and Pedro Álvares Cabral's discoveries in Brazil eventually led to a realisation in Europe that the landmass to the west in fact was not Asia, but, as Amerigo Vespucci contended, a whole new continent. Rudolf Simek vividly described the consequences of this realisation:

The geographical *Weltbild* had been quite literally shattered, and it could never be restored. The earth with its familiar three continents on the northern hemisphere suddenly burst at the seams to the west. Where previously there had been an immense, but theoretically navigatable, ocean between western Europe and Asia, a gigantic new land mass suddenly appeared. The shock for the Europeans could hardly have been greater than if Atlantis had suddenly re-emerged from under the waves in the western Atlantic.¹

Yet, as Simek underscores, this shattering of the medieval *Weltbild* took some decades; Columbus himself remained convinced until the end of his days that he had reached Asia.² At the end of the fifteenth century, the European worldview had not yet burst at the seams. For the time being it remained as firmly medieval as ever, despite the monumental upheaval that Columbus' voyages heralded.

Certainly, the eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries led to no revolution. No new continent appeared, and no 'Atlantis' re-emerged after the travels of either Marco Polo or Odoric of Pordenone. And, although William of Rubruck felt he had 'entered another world', his report caused no stir as Roger Bacon placed a select few of William's observations alongside the familiar pronouncements of the ancient *auctores*. There was strong continuity throughout the Middle Ages in the concepts underlying the medieval European worldview. But this does not mean that the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward voyages had made no significant impact on the European *Weltbild* beyond introducing some additional geographical information.

¹ Simek, *Heaven and Earth*, p. 115.

² *Ibid.*, p. 115.

The great eastward journeys did not break the strong continuity in the underpinnings of the medieval world picture. If anything, they reinforced these concepts and lent them a new-found intensity in Europeans' minds. Yet, in doing so, the journeys had also affected the way Europeans were inclined to understand the world and the ideas that underpinned their conception of it. Eastward travellers managed to impart to Europeans the idea that God's Creation could be experienced first-hand, through travel. There was a 'normalisation' of travel, in conjunction with an intensification of existing conceptions of the world. This process found its most emphatic expression through the voice of 'Sir John', the fictional traveller-narrator of *The Book of John Mandeville*, and culminated naturally in the voyages of Columbus, arguably one of the last of the great medieval European travellers to the East.

The Unity of Creation and its East-West Alignment

Medieval Europeans understood geographic space largely in terms of its relationship with God. Alexandra Walsham explains that they 'regarded the material world as a matrix of points of access to the divine, a network of special places where supernatural power was regularly made manifest to human beings'.³ These 'points of access' emitted a kind of 'holy radioactivity', as Ronald Finucane terms it, often in connection with saints or martyrs and their relics.⁴ Walsham and Finucane speak primarily of medieval perceptions of local geographic space, but the 'matrix of points of access' was by no means restricted to Europe. As this chapter will show, some of the places with the strongest connections to God were in Asia. Although some points on earth were indeed 'closer' to God than others in the medieval mind, the European worldview rested on the idea that the whole 'matrix', that is to say the whole world, was subject to God.

Contemporary world maps reflect the fact that the unity of God's Creation underpinned the medieval European Weltbild. The classical tripartite schema expresses the world visually as a simple circular diagram divided into three parts, with Asia occupying half of the circle and Europe and Africa a quarter each.⁵ Early Christians readily adopted this

³ Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 49.

⁴ Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: Dent, 1977), p. 26.

⁵ Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 4-5.

representation, not least because the tripartite, T-shaped division resembled the cross, and the three continents of the *ecumene* (inhabited world) echoed the Trinity. As Edson puts it, the early Christians ‘could hardly look at two crossed sticks without thinking of the cross of Christ’.⁶ Several of these so-called T-O maps appear in tenth- and twelfth-century manuscripts of Isidore’s *Etymologies* and *De natura rerum*.⁷ That these were not accurate descriptions of geography, but largely abstract reminders that the entire mortal, physical world is a part of God’s Creation, resonated with medieval priorities.

More elaborate maps have similar emphases. The Ebstorf *mappa mundi* (thirteenth century), a richly-detailed world map, showed Christ’s face overlooking the world from the East, at the top of the map.⁸ The world map from the mid-thirteenth-century British Library psalter Additional MS 28681, folio 9 is essentially a *mappa mundi* on a smaller scale (about ninety millimetres in diameter). Christ is depicted as sovereign over Creation in no uncertain terms. He sits directly above the circular world, flanked by two angels, and, as a symbol for authority, holds an orb in his left hand.⁹ The same psalter contains a similar map. Here, Christ does not just preside over the world; he embraces it. Creation itself is presented through a simple T-O diagram, with text rather than images denoting the geographic places.¹⁰ The priorities in these representations of the world are clear: precise geographic and topographic features are relatively unimportant compared to the relationship of these features with God. Christ’s position in the two maps, above and around the world respectively, suggests an inherent unity to the world. The second image, in rendering the ‘map’ in words rather than

⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁷ T-O maps in Isidore, *Etymologies*, Book XIV.2: London, British Library, MS Royal 6. C. 1, fol. 108^v and MS Harl. 2660, fol. 123^v, both reproduced in: Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, pp. 4, 5. The two manuscripts date from the tenth and twelfth centuries, respectively.

⁸ Ebstorf *mappa mundi*, reproduced in: *The History of Cartography*, ed. by J.B. Harley and David Woodward (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), figs. 18, 19. The original map was destroyed in the Second World War.

⁹ London, British Library, Add. MS 28681, fol. 9, reproduced in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, Plate VI. Edson rather vaguely names this the ‘Psalter World Map’.

¹⁰ London, British Library, Add. MS 28681, fol. 9^v, reproduced in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 136. Again, Edson’s terminology (the ‘Psalter map, verso’) is imprecise.

pictorially, is particularly forceful in making the point: the whole world, without exception, is subject to its Creator. Nevertheless, even within this unity, Europeans still thought of God's Creation as having a particular shape or configuration.

A distinctive east-west alignment of Creation was the second idea that underpinned the European Weltbild. Higgins uses the term 'axis' in explaining that the north-south orientation of the world nearly universal in modern thinking, most evident in the orientation and configuration of modern maps, had no relevance in the Middle Ages. The world was instead perceived as configured along an 'east-west axis'.¹¹ The vast majority of medieval world maps are oriented with east at their top and west at their bottom. Some even have an elongated, oval shape, such as the world map accompanying a fourteenth-century manuscript of Ranulf Higden's chronicle.¹² More than cartographic convention, this was at the heart of European views of history and mortal existence itself, as the concepts of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii* illustrate. *Translatio imperii* means the 'transfer of empire', as per Daniel's prophetic vision in the Old Testament.¹³ Daniel's vision featured a statue as a metaphor for imperial succession throughout history: there could only ever be one empire in ascendancy at any one time. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was the original, the 'head of gold' of the statue. Subsequent empires, each represented by a less lustrous material than the last, inherited the mantle. Medieval interpretation held that 'empire' had moved westward until it reached Latin Christendom via Greece and Rome.¹⁴ Knowledge and culture followed a similar trajectory.¹⁵ In his Arthurian romance *Cligés* (c.1176), Chrétien de Troyes remarks: 'Our books have taught us that pre-eminence in chivalry and learning [*clergie*] once belonged to Greece. Then chivalry passed to Rome, and the highest learning, which now has come to France'.¹⁶

¹¹ Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 3.

¹² World map in Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*: London British Library, Royal MS. 14 C.IX, ff. 1v-2, reproduced in P.D.A. Harvey, *Medieval Maps* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), p. 34.

¹³ Connolly, *The Maps of Matthew Paris*, pp. 109-10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

¹⁵ Higgins, *Writing East*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ Chrétien de Troyes, *Cligés*, lines 28-331, cited in Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 5.

More broadly, mankind's own mortal existence mirrored the east-to-west progression of knowledge and power. Man had originated in the Garden of Eden, or Terrestrial Paradise, which *mappae mundi* overwhelmingly show as situated on a peninsula or an island, surrounded by the ocean, at the eastern end of Asia. The Henry of Mainz Map, the Hereford Cathedral Map, and the world map from the mid-thirteenth-century British Library psalter Additional MS 28681, folio 9 all follow the island model.¹⁷ Lambert of Saint-Omer's map places it on a peninsula.¹⁸ In the Beatus World Map from Santo Domingo de Silos the reference to the 'historical' Eden is particularly explicit: Paradise, housing Adam, Eve, and Lucifer (in serpent form), is shown as a vivid green rectangle in the far east of an otherwise largely pale world.¹⁹ The Henry of Mainz Map depicts mankind's first two cities, 'Enoch' and 'Nisa', just to the west of Paradise, and shows the *translatio imperii* from Babylon to Persepolis, Macedonia, Carthage, Rome, and finally Cologne and Mainz in the contemporary Holy Roman Empire.²⁰ Europeans generally understood mankind, civilisation, God-given imperial ascendancy, and history itself to have originated in the East and moved westward.

This axis 'normalised' both the eastern and the western extremities of the world, making the north and south its true periphery. Campbell rightly points out that the periphery of the known world, the most remote, inaccessible, and mysterious lands, was the most natural place to put the most alien and incomprehensible elements of God's Creation, and that most of this periphery was in 'the East'.²¹ But there is a more precise distinction to be made: medieval depictions tended to place the most grotesque marvels and monsters specifically at the northern and southern fringes of 'the East'. Gog and Magog, usually associated with the

¹⁷ Hereford Cathedral map, reproduced in: P.D.A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 1; London, British Library, Additional MS 28681, folio 9, reproduced in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, Plate VI; Henry of Mainz Map, in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 114.

¹⁸ Lambert of St Omer World Map, in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 108.

¹⁹ Beatus World Map from Santo Domingo de Silos: London, British Library, Add. MS 11695, fols. 39^v-40^v, reproduced in: Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, Plate XI.

²⁰ Henry of Mainz World Map, in Harvey, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 23. The choice to depict Enoch and Nisa also reflects the synthesis of Christian and antique ideas; Cain founded Enoch according to Genesis (4.17), while Jupiter founded Nisa (to protect Dionysius from Hera) according to Graeco-Roman myth.

²¹ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 50.

‘barbarians’ of the Pontic steppe, typically inhabited the north-east, and the Alexander cycle of stories has the Macedonian king building the Iron Gates to confine them precisely to this area (see Chapter One).

Similarly, the extreme south-east was home to more bizarre peoples and customs than Cathay or Manzi (northern and southern China, respectively). Honorius Augustodunensis (c.1110), in following classical authorities, does describe Persia as the land of magic, but it is his ‘India’, the southern periphery of ‘the East’, that is full of the truly strange and alien. There are strange animals and monstrous races, such as the *cynocephali* (dog-heads) and the *sciapods* (single-legged), and the islands in the Indian Ocean have mountains full of treasure, guarded by gryphons and dragons.²² The Beatus World Map from Burgo de Osma fills the Eurasian landmass with various apostles, corresponding to their mission regions. A *sciapod*, meanwhile, appears on the hypothetical and unreachable southern continent.²³ The world map in the British Library psalter Additional MS 28681, folio 9, (c.1265) features a whole array of monstrous peoples, including the *blemye* (headless) and the *troglydites* (cave-dwellers), as well as the *cynocephali*, arranged along the southern contour of the world.²⁴

Scholars often note that medieval depictions placed the monstrosities and oddities away from themselves, in the East. This is true, but medieval Europeans associated the most alien and unsettling specifically with the extreme north and south of the *ecumene*. The ‘middle’ of the Eurasian landmass, including even its more remote eastern reaches, remained relatively ‘normal’. The world, in the medieval mind, was aligned along Higgins’ east-west axis, and, within this unique configuration, the whole of it always remained ‘under God’ (an idea often expressed literally in visual representation). It could not be otherwise, because God was omnipotent and so held absolute power over all of his Creation.

The Holy Land was, for late medieval Europeans, naturally the focal point of this Creation. Some maps, such as the two above-mentioned world maps from the British Library psalter (c. 1265) and the Hereford Map, place Jerusalem precisely in the centre of the world. Others, such as the Henry of Mainz Map (twelfth century) and Lambert of Saint Omer’s map (1112-21), evidently intend a little more fidelity to geographic reality. Lambert’s map explicitly confines the *ecumene* to one hemisphere and depicts the hypothesised antipodean

²² Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago Mundi*, pp. 113, 115, 118.

²³ Beatus world map from Burgo de Osma, in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 152.

²⁴ London, British Library, Add. MS 28681, fol. 9, in Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, Plate VI.

fourth continent in the south.²⁵ The existence of this continent, and whether it was inhabited, was a topic of some controversy, even more so in the fourteenth century than in the twelfth or the thirteenth.²⁶ Still, mainstream educated opinion held that the *ecumene* formed only a small part of the globe, or *sphaera mundi*, and lay ‘on top of’ it.²⁷ This is an important reminder that geographic space was never devoid of literal meaning to medieval people, who, as Simek is at pains to point out, were aware of the ‘actual’ proportions of the *ecumene* relative to the globe.²⁸ Yet, in representing Creation, they deliberately chose symbolism over geographic fidelity on a regular basis; hence the *ecumene* typically occupies most of the *sphaera mundi* in the majority of maps. Medieval people prioritised the world’s relationship with God, namely that the world was a unified whole and all equally subject to Him, with the Holy Land at its navel because that was where His power had manifested most readily.

For medieval Europeans the Holy Land was largely inseparable from biblical history. The Henry of Mainz Map renders all the places in Palestine by their biblical names.²⁹ It divides the Promised Land into eleven parts, one for each tribe of Israel.³⁰ The Hereford Map depicts several episodes from the Book of Exodus. The Israelites’ path begins in Egypt and crosses the Red Sea, which is shown in its parted state (and is coloured red); where the route passes Mount Sinai, Moses is shown receiving the Ten Commandments; the route winds through the wilderness, past Lot’s wife turning into a pillar of salt, and ends across the river Jordan at Jericho.³¹ With Creation understood in terms of its relationship to God, the

²⁵ Lambert of St Omer world map in Lambert of St Omer, *Liber Floridus*: Wölfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. I. Gud. Lat., fols. 69^v-70^v, reproduced in: Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 108; Henry of Mainz World Map, in Honorius Augustodunensis, *Imago Mundi*: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Parker Library, MS 66, p. 2, reproduced in: Harvey, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 23. The ‘Henry of Mainz’ map is also known as the ‘Sawley’ map.

²⁶ Simek, *Heaven and Earth*, pp. 48-55.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-51, 80.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

²⁹ Henry of Mainz World Map, in Harvey, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23. The odd tribe out is Levi, which formed the priestly caste instead of receiving land.

³¹ Hereford Cathedral map, in Harvey, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 1.

Holy Land – the site of most scriptural events and the home of Christ – naturally became its focal point. This centrality, along with the unity and east-west alignment of Creation, underpinned the late medieval European Weltbild.

Continuity and Change

On the one hand, the late medieval European Weltbild had not changed very much. Its underpinnings, described above, remained broadly the same as they had been since at least the eleventh century. This continuity is evident especially in how consistently Jerusalem remained the focal point of Creation, and the premier pilgrimage destination, throughout the Middle Ages. Visiting the Holy Land, Suzanne Yeager explains, was an act of ‘remembering abstractions ... in relation to physical places’, or *ars memoriae*.³² Egeria’s *Peregrinatio* (c.380), describes the Holy Land in exactly these terms. Egeria, as she travels through Palestine, sees the land where the events of the Bible took place, not a strange and exotic country. Speaking of a valley by Mount Sinai, she says:

[this is] where the children of Israel lingered, while holy Moses ascended the mountain of the Lord ... It is moreover this valley where the calf was made, which place is shown to this day: for a great stone set there stands in that very place. So this is that very valley, at whose head that place is, where holy Moses, as he fed the flocks of his father-in-law, God spoke to him a second time from the burning bush.³³

As Campbell points out, the marker-stone is the only object that grounds the passage in Egeria’s time; otherwise, the landscape is almost wholly biblical.³⁴ Similarly, Bernard the Monk (c.870) finds Alexandria notable not for its size or wealth, but for its hagiographic features: ‘there Saint Mark preached and carried out the office of pope’.³⁵ The journey itself is not detailed; before long the party reaches Jerusalem, which is notable for its many churches: ‘one is on the east, and inside it are Mount Calvary and the place where the Lord’s

³² Suzanne M. Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 4.

³³ Egeria, *Peregrinatio*, cited in Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 23.

³⁴ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 24.

³⁵ Bernard the Monk, ‘A Journey to the Holy Places and Babylon’, in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), (pp. 141-45), pp. 141-42.

Cross was found'.³⁶ Again, some objects (the churches in this case) provide a link to Bernard's time, but the rest of the space is either biblical or hagiographic.

Margery Kempe's book (1436) recounts her journey to, and through, the Holy Land in terms similar to her early predecessors. The *Book of Margery Kempe* mentions almost nothing of her actual voyage to reach the Holy Land; she sets out and arrives without any notable incident.³⁷ Having landed, 'thei went forth into the Holy Lond tyl thei myth se Jerusalem. And whan this creatur saw Jerusalem, rydyng on an asse, sche thankyd God wyth al hir hert'.³⁸ Margery's book minimises her actual travels within Palestine. She merely arrives at several of the most holy destinations, such as 'the Tempyl in Jerusalem' and the 'Mownt of Calvarye'. At these places, her experience admittedly appears more personal than Egeria's and Bernard the Monk's; she even talks to Christ in a vision.³⁹ Like Egeria's and Bernard's accounts, though, Margery's book does not explore the exotic and curious things that set Palestine apart from her native England. The land she visits is not strange to her, because she is intimately familiar with it through Scripture. The Holy Land connects her to God, just as it connected Egeria and Bernard. In Walsham's terminology, the Holy Land was, for medieval Europeans, a 'point of access' *par excellence*.

The emergence of so-called 'imagined' pilgrimage highlights this unique 'connecting' quality of the Holy Land, and, by extension, its centrality within Creation. By the fourteenth century, an increasingly appealing alternative in some circles to actually going on pilgrimage was to imagine and meditate on the holy places with the aid of texts and images.⁴⁰ The fourteenth-century Tuscan *Voyage to the Holy Land* explains:

³⁶ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁷ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Barry Windeatt (London: Longman, 2000), pp. 159-60. Margery probably dictated the *Book*, but did not pen it herself. The first (longer) part was likely written by a clergyman as she relayed it to him and the second (shorter) part by someone else again, possibly her son.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 160-61.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 170-71.

⁴⁰ Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative*, p. 13; Dianna Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c.700-c.1500* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002), p. 176.

These are the journeys that pilgrims who go beyond the seas to save their souls must perform and that everyone can perform standing in his house, thinking at every place which is described below and saying in every place a *Paternoster* and *Avemaria*.⁴¹

Petrarch evidently had something similar in mind when, instead of going on pilgrimage with his friend Giovanni Mandelli, he wrote the *Itinerarium ad Sepulchrum Domini* (1358).⁴² Similarly, Connolly shows that Matthew Paris made his itinerary-maps (thirteenth century) for the monks of Saint Albans abbey to meditate on as they ‘imagined’ journeys to the Holy Land.⁴³ Medieval Europeans conceived of the Holy Land as a link with God. For them it was a reminder of biblical history culminating in the crucifixion and Resurrection. Yet despite its clear popularity in some clerical circles, the notion that one could achieve through introspective meditation on the Holy Land the same proximity to God as actually visiting it was far from universally accepted. In its emphasis on the symbolic centrality of the Holy Land, the idea reflected the highly educated, clerical worldview more than that of the ‘average’ literate European.

Certainly, the popularity of the Holy Land as a travel destination suggests that most medieval Europeans did not divorce so readily the actual, geographic Holy Land from its capacity to ‘connect’ one with God. At the very least, a great many were not content to simply imagine it. By the fourteenth century, pilgrimage to the major sites of Santiago de Compostela, Rome, and Jerusalem had become a ‘virtual package tour industry’, as Rosalyn Voaden puts it.⁴⁴ Jerusalem and the Holy Land remained by far the preeminent destinations; some five hundred and twenty six accounts of pilgrimage to Jerusalem survive for the period 1100-1500.⁴⁵ This shows that though medieval Europeans readily ascribed symbolic and religious qualities to geographic space, these qualities were, for most people, inextricably tied to the places themselves. That people continued to go to the Holy Land to reap spiritual

⁴¹ Anonymous, *Voyage to the Holy Land*, cited in Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage*, p. 176.

⁴² Yeager, *Jerusalem in Medieval Narrative*, p. 13.

⁴³ Connolly, *The Maps of Matthew Paris*, p. 39.

⁴⁴ Rosalyn Voaden, ‘Travel with Margery: pilgrimage in context’, in *Eastward Bound*, p. 181.

⁴⁵ Donald Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims: Medieval Pilgrimage Narratives and their Posterity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 17; Simek, *Heaven and Earth*, p. 80.

benefits, especially after the fall of the last Latin outpost at Acre in 1291, suggests that its centrality was not a purely symbolic but also a geographic one. The durability of existing ideas about the Holy Land as the navel of Creation points to a considerable degree of continuity in the underpinnings of the European Weltbild throughout the Middle Ages.

The world that Columbus had traversed so much of in the 1490s was a thoroughly medieval one. On one of his westward voyages, the explorer was convinced that he had approached Paradise. As he hugged the coast of Hispaniola, he thought he had reached the eastern coast of Cathay. Having recorded erroneous readings on the position of the North Star, and thinking that the ocean was gaining altitude, he concluded:

I do not hold that the earthly Paradise has the form of a rugged mountain, as it is shown in pictures, but that it lies at the summit of what I have described as the stalk of a pear, and that by gradually approaching it one begins, while still at a great distance, to climb towards it. As I have said, I do not believe that anyone can ascend to the top. I do believe, however... all this provides great evidence of the earthly Paradise, because the situation agrees with the beliefs of those holy and wise theologians and all the signs strongly accord with this idea.... I am firmly convinced that the earthly Paradise truly lies here, and I rely on the authorities and arguments I have cited.⁴⁶

Columbus' observations are entirely congruent with what medieval Europeans 'knew' of Paradise. Scholars such as Morison have attributed Columbus' bold assertion to confusion brought on by illness and fatigue, but Flint persuasively shows the error of this interpretation by putting the explorer and his conclusions in context: mainstream medieval opinion held that Paradise was a real place on earth.⁴⁷ An eleventh-century Beatus map shows Paradise surrounded by a barrier, simultaneously a part of the physical world and inaccessible to man.⁴⁸ Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christianike Topographia* (sixth century) was itself not very influential in terms of cosmology, particularly in arguing for a flat earth. Yet it is a useful illustration of how some of the ideas that did gain currency later on were already in circulation in the sixth century:

⁴⁶ Christopher Columbus, 'Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella, September, 1498', in Flint, *Imaginative Landscape*, pp. 151-54.

⁴⁷ Flint, *Imaginative Landscape*, pp. 155-56.

⁴⁸ Beatus World Map from Burgo de Osma, Cathedral of Burgo de Osma, Cod. 1. fols. 34^v-35, reproduced in: Edson, *Mapping Time and Space*, p. 152.

... the figure of the earth is lengthwise from east to west, and breadthwise from north to south, and it is divided into two parts: this part which we, the men of the present day, inhabit, and which is all round encircled by the intermedial sea, called the ocean by the Pagans, and that part which encircles the ocean and has its extremities bound together with those of the heaven, and which men at one time inhabited to eastward... and in which also Paradise is situated.⁴⁹

Medieval depictions often rendered Paradise inaccessible to man by fire, unsalable rock, and other barriers.⁵⁰ The various interpretations of the barrier were consistent with the scriptural principle that Paradise existed on Earth (hence ‘terrestrial’), though it was inaccessible to man as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve. The world picture of the late medieval Europeans rested on many of the same ideas and assumptions, and was populated by many of the same features, as that of their predecessors. On his westward voyages to the East, Columbus directly upheld two of these ideas: Creation was unified and it was arranged along an east-west axis.

On the other hand, Columbus’ voyages are also symptomatic of a subtle but noticeable change in how late medieval Europeans were increasingly inclined to see the underpinnings of their Weltbild. In contextualising Columbus’ discovery of the Americas, Simek takes every opportunity to put to rest the myth that Columbus’ contemporaries thought the earth was flat. Nevertheless, Simek points out, the earth’s theoretical sphericity and man’s capacity to circumnavigate it were, psychologically, two very different things.⁵¹ He suggests that ‘the concept of reaching the Indies and Cathay by navigating westwards across the supposedly immeasurable stretch of water between Europe and Asia was simply inconceivable for most of Columbus’ contemporaries’, even though they were all aware that it was theoretically possible. Columbus’ plan was ‘shocking and revolutionary’ because it ‘put the theory to the test’, and not because it required abandoning existing ideas and overturning the existing world picture.⁵²

⁴⁹ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, trans. and ed. by J.W. McCrindle (Hakluyt Society first series no. 98. New York, NY: Burt Franklin, 1897, reprint 1970), p. 33.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*, p. 52.

⁵¹ Simek, *Heaven and Earth*, pp. 24-25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Similarly, prior to the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Europeans were aware that the world was theoretically unified under God, and arranged along an east-west axis with, the Holy Land at its navel. The eastward journeys brought a few individuals into direct contact with remote parts of Creation, even though their experiences hardly survived the transfer back to Europe (see Chapter Two). They certainly did not revolutionise the European world picture. Instead, the effect of the journeys was to simultaneously alert Europeans to the size of Creation and to 'prove' to them that it could be experienced first-hand. The journeys 'put to the test' and upheld the, up to that point theoretically acknowledged, underpinnings. As a result, the ideas on which the medieval Weltbild rested remained broadly the same, but attained a much more immediate and intense quality in the European view.

Late medieval conceptions of Terrestrial Paradise illustrate this trend toward a greater immediacy of existing ideas. John of Marignolli travelled to China in 1339-40 as Benedict XII's nominee to the bishopric of Khanbaliq (modern Beijing), which had been founded by John of Montecorvino and left vacant following his death. Writing in 1350s, John of Marignolli says: 'Now Paradise is a place that (really) exists upon the earth surrounded by the Ocean Sea, in the regions of the Orient on the other side of Columbine India, and over against the mountain of Seyllan'.⁵³ To John of Marignolli, Paradise is in the East not only theoretically, but actually. It is just east of Cathay, and the implication is that one might go and experience its presence first-hand if not for the barrier that keeps man out.

This heightened sense of immediacy was not exclusive to travellers. In his *Imago Mundi* (1410), which Columbus consulted extensively, Pierre d'Ailly writes that 'certain people say that on a mountain near the [torrid zone] is to be found the Terrestrial Paradise'. He goes so far as to speculate on the climate: 'when conditions especially favourable to human life concord with other good things – fertile land and the correct amounts of sun – the region will be wholly temperate. It is probable that the Earthly Paradise is a place of this kind'.⁵⁴ To Pierre, writing not in Cathay but in Europe, and some half-century later, Paradise is no less real than it was to John of Marignolli. Like any place, it has a climate that can affect human activity, or it could if it were accessible to man. This was not idle speculation either.

⁵³ John of Marignolli, 'Recollections of the Travel in the East, by John de' Marignolli', in *Cathay and the Way Thither*, Vol. III, trans. and ed. by Sir Henry Yule, Henri Cordier (London: Haklyut Society, 1914), p. 220. Editors' parentheses.

⁵⁴ Pierre d'Ailly, *Imago Mundi*, Chapter VII, cited in Flint, *Imaginative Landscape*, pp. 168-69.

Columbus experienced for himself the outskirts of the approach to Paradise, where the waters gained altitude (according to his readings). While rooted firmly in the medieval worldview, Columbus could conceive of actually approaching Paradise – a place explicitly and totally removed from mankind – with remarkable ease. This speaks to the immediacy and the intensity with which Europeans had come to view the east-west configuration of Creation and its inherent unity by end of the Late Middle Ages: the feasibility of Columbus' undertaking relied on both of these ideas. The idea that Holy Land was the world's focal point underwent a similar intensification.

When Europeans contemplated the East and its riches, their thoughts turned to how these might be used. In about 1317, William of Adam wrote a treatise aiming to 'serve as a guide for a general crusade'; it outlines the problem of Muslim occupation and offers a step-by-step solution in reconquering it, with an emphasis on exploiting the geopolitical situation in the area.⁵⁵ William was just one of a host of writers who, following the fall of Acre in 1291, speculated on how the Holy Land might be recaptured.⁵⁶ This fervour to recover possession of the Holy Land informed much of the European interest in the East. Hayton's *Flor des estoires*, one of the three most widely-read travel accounts, describes the Mongol dominions in terms of how they might help launch a new expedition to the Levant.⁵⁷ Several Latin Christian rulers even established diplomatic relations with the Ilkhanate, the Mongol dynasty in Persia, and sought to cooperate against the Mamluks in the Levant.⁵⁸

In a letter from his fourth voyage, Columbus draws on the same idea as William of Adam and Hayton. 'Jerusalem and the Mount of Zion,' says Columbus, 'are now to be rebuilt by Christian hands ... The abbot Joachim [of Fiore] said that this man was to come from

⁵⁵ William of Adam, *How to Defeat the Saracens: Guillelmus Ade, Tractatus quomodo Sarraceni sunt expugnandi; Text and Translation with Notes*, trans. by Giles Constable (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2012), p. 25.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, 'The Impact of the crusades', p. 29; Giles Constable, 'Introduction', in *How to Defeat the Saracens*, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Hayton, *Flor des estoires*, cited in Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, pp. 334-36.

⁵⁸ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 360.

Spain'.⁵⁹ Harnessing eastern riches and aid from the Great Khan would be the means to achieve the re-conquest.⁶⁰ This was Columbus' stated rationale for going to the East. It is worth pausing to consider how genuine this rationale was. Columbus is not necessarily to be taken at his word; his self-appointment as a figure of prophecy, as per Joachim of Fiore, in particular hints at egoism and vanity. Simek portrays Columbus as a pragmatic, worldly man. He dwells on the explorer's many years of trying to secure patronage and financing for the expedition, following the so-called Talavera Commission's rejection of his initial proposal in 1486.⁶¹ Simek certainly acknowledges the desire to recapture the Holy Land, but characterises it as a rather secondary goal for Columbus, if not quite an excuse to explore and procure fortune.

Flint finds in Columbus both an intense piety and a fixation on procuring personal and familial wealth. She traces Columbus' justification for attaining riches to his admiration of the Franciscans, many of whom, she contends, had developed ideas of legitimately gathering wealth before the imminent Apocalypse.⁶² She persuasively concludes that Columbus constantly struggled with these conflicting motivations, and her analysis serves to warn against dismissing genuine piety as a motivation.⁶³ Columbus was probably sincere in his wish to see the Holy Land's re-conquered. At the very least, that he felt the need to justify his venture with crusading rhetoric shows how powerful an influence the Holy City exerted on the medieval psyche. Further, it shows an intensification of existing ideas about the world: the Holy Land was to be recaptured by exploiting eastern riches, and the eastern riches were, in turn, to be attained via a direct exploration of Creation. The idea of the Holy Land being the navel of Creation intensified as it became increasingly linked with European ventures in the East. These ventures, in turn, underscored and intensified the ideas that the world was unified and configured along an east-west axis.

⁵⁹ Christopher Columbus, *Lettera Rarissima*, in Flint, *Imaginative Landscape*, p. 185. Abbot Joachim of Fiore (c.1132-1202) was a Cistercian from Calabria, whose teachings, though not initially suspect, inspired some radical thought among the Franciscans in the thirteenth century and garnered suspicion of heresy.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁶¹ Simek, *Heaven and Earth*, pp. 1-5, 73.

⁶² John of Marignolli, *Chronicle*, cited in Flint, *Imaginative Landscape*, p. 197.

⁶³ Flint, *Imaginative Landscape*, pp. 204-8.

The unity of Creation, its east-west alignment and, especially, the centrality of the Holy Land within it continued to underpin the European Weltbild in the Late Middle Ages just as they had always done. What had changed by the fourteenth century was rather how these underpinnings were understood. Late medieval Europeans increasingly viewed them with a new-found immediacy and a heightened intensity, grounded in a growing realisation that these underpinnings could be experienced first-hand. The great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were a major catalyst for this realisation.

Mandeville: Travel as a Way to Comprehend the World

While the idea that Creation could be traversed was always theoretically acknowledged, the great eastward voyages of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries put it into practice on an unprecedented scale. Traversing and interacting with God's Creation increasingly became the means through which Europeans were inclined to understand it. This process by no means removed spiritual and symbolic significance from geographic space. On the contrary, this chapter has shown that there was considerable continuity: a strong piety never ceased to inform European understanding of geographic space. Rather, the underpinnings of the European Weltbild underwent an intensification as there emerged a greater appreciation of the immediacy of these underpinnings, and an inclination to celebrate the kaleidoscopic diversity of Creation as testament to God's majesty. This dynamic is best understood by once again turning to *The Book of John Mandeville*. *Mandeville* is more than just a case study for this chapter for two reasons.

Firstly, *Mandeville* amalgamates a vast number of perspectives. The original author drew primarily on William of Boldensele's and Odoric of Pordenone's accounts, but also augmented his work with myriad other sources. Christiane Deluz finds that he drew extensively on around two dozen additional texts. Some of these are pilgrimage writings, such as John of Würzburg's *Descriptio terrae sanctae* (c.1165) and Theitmar's *Peregrinatio* (1217); others are works of history, such as James of Vitry's *Historia orientalis* (early thirteenth century).⁶⁴ Encyclopaedias, such as Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* and

⁶⁴ Christiane Deluz, *Le livre de Jehan de Mandeville: Une 'géographie' au XIV^e siècle*. Textes, Etudes, Congrès 8. (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'Etudes Médiévales de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1988), pp. 57-58, 429-91, cited in Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 9.

Speculum naturale (c.1256-59) also feature among *Mandeville*'s sources, as does Hayton's *Flor des estoires* (1307), as well as material from works of romance, notably a mid-twelfth century Alexander romance.⁶⁵

Although it draws on a multitude of sources, *Mandeville* amounts to more than a simple catalogue or summary. Higgins, one of *Mandeville*'s most influential modern editors and commentators, explains that it 'is distinguished by being an unprecedented fusion and personal interpretation of both learned and popular traditions of writing'.⁶⁶ Through this fusion and interpretation, Higgins goes on to say, *Mandeville* is 'innovative in a typically medieval way: it transforms existing works into something new through active recombination. In our e-jargon, we might call it a "mash-up"'.⁶⁷ The comparison is very apt; it underscores that the work organises often disparate pieces of information into something that is not only coherent, but also reflective of contemporary views.

Specifically, *Mandeville* paints a complete world picture that reflects the wider views and values of its time. That today it survives in over three hundred manuscripts hints at its immediate and astounding popularity.⁶⁸ By comparison, Marco Polo's book, a very popular work in its own right, survives in 'only' one hundred and thirty manuscripts.⁶⁹ Few fourteenth-century works are comparable to *Mandeville* in number of manuscripts. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a notable exception, surviving in a staggering eight hundred manuscripts. But the *Divine Comedy*'s popularity was a narrow one. That it was not translated until a hundred years after its composition indicates that, while the work was immensely popular in parts of northern and central Italy, it did not circulate very widely outside of this region.⁷⁰ In addition to the original French, *Mandeville* manuscripts survive in Czech, Danish, Dutch,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Higgins, 'Introduction', p. x.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. x-xi.

⁶⁸ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p. 335; Tzanaki, *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences*, p. 1; M. C. Seymour, *Sir John Mandeville. Authors of the Middle Ages*, (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), pp. 50-56.

⁶⁹ Jackson, *The Mongols and the West*, p. 335.

⁷⁰ W.P. Friedrich, 'Dante through the Centuries', *Comparative Literature* 1.1 (1949), (pp. 44-54), p. 45. French, not Italian, was the principal international vernacular in this Period.

English, German, Irish, Italian, Spanish, and Welsh, as well as Latin and French variants (such as Anglo-Norman), indicating its enormous popularity throughout the Latin West.⁷¹ *Mandeville* was the ‘mash-up’ that most strongly appealed to the wider late medieval European society, and is therefore the one that can be said to most clearly reflect the preferences and views of said society. For this reason, in this thesis, *Mandeville* may be treated as more than just a case study. The *Mandeville* ‘multi-text’, more than any other work, is an expression of the late medieval European Weltbild. As such, it conforms to the three underpinning ideas described earlier in this chapter, but strongly reflects the greater immediacy and intensity that these ideas were acquiring in the minds of Europeans by the Late Middle Ages.

Mandeville emphasises the unity of Creation via a tolerant and inclusive attitude towards different peoples. The earliest French versions, the Continental and the Insular, describe the pagans of the ‘Isle of Bragmey’ and surrounding islands as a ‘good and trustworthy people’.⁷² ‘[T]hey are not Christians and do not have perfect law,’ the narrator explains, but ‘nevertheless through natural law they are full of all virtues and they flee all vices and all wickedness and all sins’. They thus manage to fulfil the Ten Commandments through following their own virtuous customs.⁷³ Even though they are unbelievers, ‘God loves them and favorably accepts their belief and their good works’.⁷⁴ With the notable exception of the Jews, most peoples are portrayed in similarly positive terms. The narrator goes out of his way to explain that Muslims, though they do not believe in the Trinity, have a piety that is not at all dissimilar to that of the Christians:

they have many good articles of our faith and of our belief, although they do not have perfect law and faith according to Christians, and all those who know and understand the Scriptures and the

⁷¹ Higgins, ‘Introduction’, p. xiii; Seymour, *Sir John Mandeville*, pp. 50-56.

⁷² *The Book of John Mandeville*, p. 172.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 172. See also ‘Paris Text’, p. 397: ‘et combien quil ne soient parfaits Crestiens et quil naient loy parfait selon nous, neantmoins de loy naturele il vont et sont plains de toutes vertus, et si fuient tous vices et toutes malices et tous pechiez’.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.173.

prophecies are easily converted, for they have the Gospels and the prophecies and the Bible all written in their language, and they know much of Holy Scripture.⁷⁵

Although at no point does *Mandeville* stray from Latin Christian orthodoxy and into heresy, the work prefers to emphasise points of commonality and contact between Christians and non-Christians. Even if certain peoples do not have Christian faith ('perfect law'), they are God's children and he loves them; they are part of His Creation as much as the Christians.

Inclusivity remains a strong theme in most recensions of the *Mandeville* multi-text. The majority of redactors tended not to remove the theme, even as they made substantial changes to the rest of the work.⁷⁶ The Interpolated Continental version, the earliest surviving major variant of the Continental, makes a number of such changes. It includes numerous passages detailing the deeds of the legendary hero Ogier the Dane and makes frequent mention of the city of Liège; hence it is also sometimes known as the Liège, or Ogier, version.⁷⁷ The redactor attributes some astounding deeds to Ogier, saying that he 'ultimately converted all these regions [of India] by the sword, as is contained in their histories. And the first Prester John was set up in India through this Ogier, for when he conquered India, he gave it to Prester John, his cousin, who was its first Christian king'.⁷⁸ To the description of Java, the redactor adds: 'And they know his [Ogier's] history over there better than we do over here, even about what he did in France. And they know it through his cousins, who were kings of the regions of India and around there, and of this island of Java itself'.⁷⁹ The Interpolated Continental version, appearing no later than 1396, represents a rather speedy as well as a substantial alteration to the original.⁸⁰ Yet even though its redactor felt free enough to take such liberties in narrative, he chose not to undermine the theme of inclusivity and unity of Creation. He rather sought to spice up this unity with Ogier's epic deeds.

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 82-85, 86.

⁷⁶ Higgins, *Writing East.*, p. 266.

⁷⁷ 'Interpolated Continental (Liège) Version' in Higgins, *The Book of John Mandeville*, pp. 192-97.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 193.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 194.

⁸⁰ Higgins, *The Book of John Mandeville*, p. 192.

Other recensions are similarly content to keep the inclusive character of the work. The Egerton version, a fifteenth-century Middle English rendering, is rather more streamlined than the Insular French recension. The Egerton redactor, as Higgins explains, ‘rearranged, omitted, and added material for coherence, concision, and clarity, revealing him as not only an alert reader, but also pious, intelligent, well read, and something of an English nationalist. It is a translator’s *Mandeville*, not the author’s’.⁸¹ But, despite its major smoothing over of the original, the Egerton version still extolls the virtues of the inhabitants of the ‘Isle of Bragman’ as much as the Continental and Insular versions, and gives largely the same rationale for why they are virtuous despite being pagan.⁸² Moreover, it comes to the same conclusion: ‘And therefore it seems that God loves them well and is well paid of their living and of their faith’.⁸³ With minor variation in wording, the ‘Cotton’ version, another Middle English variant of the Insular, and the ‘Velser’, a German version named after its translator (Michel Velser), both have similar things to say about the righteousness of the people of the ‘Isle of Bragmey’.⁸⁴

Yet there are some versions that deliberately work to undermine this inclusivity. The von Diemeringen and the Vulgate Latin versions, both descending from the Interpolated Continental, are particularly notable in this regard.⁸⁵ The former, a translation, mainly from the French, by Otto von Diemeringen, ‘Canon of Metz’, partially breaks the original structure. It re-organises the work into five books, shifting the descriptions of the different religions to the last two of these.⁸⁶ It is the Vulgate Latin version, though, that works the hardest to reverse these themes. Where the original is at pains to emphasise the ways in which Muslim beliefs resemble Christian ones, the Vulgate Latin redactor does the opposite.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 200.

⁸² ‘Egerton Text’, pp. 204-06. Cf. *The Book of John Mandeville*, pp. 172-74.

⁸³ ‘Egerton Text’, p. 205.

⁸⁴ ‘Cotton Text’, cited in Letts, *Mandeville’s Travels*, p. 207 nn. 1, 5. ‘The Bodleian MS’, in *Mandeville’s Travels*, (pp. 416-82), pp. 468-69; ‘Von Diemeringen’s Version’, Bk iv, ch. 9, in *Mandeville’s Travels*, (pp. 483-94), p. 490.

⁸⁵ Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 266.

⁸⁶ Higgins, *The Book of John Mandeville*, p. 205.

He acknowledges some surface similarities, but uses them to highlight the fundamental differences in belief, and why the non-Christian belief is wrong. The Muslims and the pagans, he explains, believe that souls go to a 'paradise' after death, but this belief is incorrect or incomplete, in part because it fails to distinguish between the Terrestrial and the 'Heavenly' Paradise: 'Those therefore who are without the faith of the Holy Trinity and do not know Christ, who is the true light, walk in darkness. But the Jews and all the baptized rightly understand the Heavenly and spiritual Paradise'.⁸⁷ The Jews, naturally, 'because they speak against their Scriptures of the Holy Trinity and impugn Christ ... do not know where they are going', leaving the Christians as the only ones who do know where they are going.⁸⁸ Where the Continental and Insular versions revel in the opulence of the Great Khan's festivals, the Vulgate Latin redactor takes the opportunity to point out pagan shortcomings:

Let us therefore observe in this place, I urge, how the pagans truly walk in darkness. Their devilish mind darkened by involution does not see how, although the emperor is a mortal human recently born, and likewise just as enveloped by this weakness, and going to die with them in a short time. They do not doubt him, moreover, proclaiming him not God, but God's son, when they do not even know that he should not be praised or worshiped; but they pay no attention to Him, the other Son, the uncreated and conatural Son, who created both Himself and him [the emperor], alone in the world supremely praiseworthy.⁸⁹

This cautions against ascribing too great a uniformity to the late medieval European worldview. If the *Mandeville* multi-text is a dialogic expression of this worldview, then the existence of the Latin Vulgate version demonstrates that there were certainly voices in this dialogue that were not inclined to celebrate pagans as part of the unity of God's Creation. Yet, although the redactor reinforces orthodoxy at nearly every opportunity, he can only do this by 'working against the grain' of its source, as Higgins puts it.⁹⁰ *Mandeville*, in the greater number of its versions, readily celebrates the ostensibly secular diversity of the world as a testament to the majesty of God and the unity of his Creation, going so far as to include pagan people within this celebration. It portrays non-Christians as children of God in their

⁸⁷ 'The Vulgate Latin version', p. 212.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17. Cf. *The Book of John Mandeville*, pp. 140-46.

⁹⁰ Higgins, *Writing East*, pp. 171, 266.

own right, just like the Christians, and in so doing makes the remote parts of the world that much more ‘real’, relatable, and immediate to European audiences.

In addition to emphasising the unity of Creation, *Mandeville* portrays it as aligned along an east-west axis with its focal point in Jerusalem. Like its major source, Odoric, it describes in detail the wondrous and marvellous things to be found in the East. The Mandeville-author presents the Javanese king’s palace with no less opulence than Odoric: ‘all the steps that rise to the halls and the rooms are of alternating gold and silver; and also the floors of the halls and the rooms are of alternating squares of gold and silver’.⁹¹ The Vulgate Latin redactor does not remove these kinds of marvels and wonders from the text; to do so would be to destroy much of the work. He does, however, feel the need to justify explicitly the presence of these wondrous details. He inserts, following on from a lengthy description of the Holy Land, a passage to preface the second part of the book (which describes the East). This passage explicitly reminds the reader that ‘Wonderful God created wonders through Himself alone so that He would be understood by His understanding creatures and through this be loved, and in this the Creator Himself and His Creatures would delight in each other’.⁹² This justification might at first glance appear to reinforce the idea of celebrating God through the kaleidoscopic diversity of his Creation. Yet, as noted above, much of the rest of the Vulgate Latin version works to undermine this theme, which suggests that the Vulgate Latin redactor has a different purpose in including this passage. By making this justification explicit, he is effectively moralising the contents of the book. This contrasts starkly with the majority of *Mandeville*’s recensions, and, likely, with the original Mandeville-author’s intentions.

The Mandeville-author and most of his redactors make the connection between the wonders and the unity of Creation implicit within the overall structure of the book’s description of the world. The marvels are more than simple curiosities because, as Higgins points out, *Mandeville* arranges the world on an east-west axis, with a focal point at Jerusalem.⁹³ The narrator begins in Europe, dwells on the Holy City at some length,

⁹¹ *The Book of John Mandeville*, p. 117. Cf. Odoric of Pordenone, p. 154.

⁹² ‘The Vulgate Latin Version’, p. 214.

⁹³ Higgins, *Writing East*, p. 3.

highlighting its closeness to God, and then proceeds eastward.⁹⁴ Near the end of the work he describes Terrestrial Paradise, ‘which is eastwards at the beginning of the earth’, pointing out that it is ‘the highest land of the world’.⁹⁵ In sections describing the Holy Land and Paradise, references to God are consistently explicit, as these places are naturally closest to Him. Yet the Holy Land and Paradise are still parts of the same world as everything else the book describes. Creation is implicitly a unified whole in *Mandeville*. And because the Holy Land and Paradise are connected to God, the rest of Creation is too. This structure provides context for the marvels and wonders as well as the more mundane elements that populate *Mandeville*’s world. Every marvel and wonder becomes testament to God’s majesty implicitly, without requiring overt justification for its inclusion in the book. The Vulgate Latin version does not share this sentiment, which is why its redactor attempts to make an explicit justification for all the book’s curiosities. For the Mandeville-author and most of his redactors, however, ‘the concealment of a miracle is a crime’, as Tzanaki notes.⁹⁶ The book’s structure is extremely conducive to this attitude.

Mandeville’s structure also illustrates how the great eastward journeys shaped the late medieval European Weltbild. Firstly, the Mandeville-author builds his work around a basic skeleton of two traveller accounts: William of Boldensele’s and Odoric of Pordenone’s. This already hints at the influence of travel on the European psyche that Mandeville caters to and represents. Specifically, the decision to use travel accounts as a foundation speaks to the authority of travel, in the Mandeville-author’s mind, as a way of experiencing and understanding Creation. *Mandeville*’s audiences seemed to have shared the sentiment, as the work’s subsequent popularity and wide circulation indicate. Even those recensions that make substantial alterations or additions to the content of the work, notably the Interpolated Continental version (which adds Ogier the Dane), do not stray from the William-Odoric or Holy Land-East framework of the text. Using the two travel accounts as a foundation provides the Mandeville-author with the easiest way to organise the material to reflect the unity of Creation and its east-west alignment.

Moreover, the Mandeville-author decided to keep travel an integral part of his finished, greatly ‘recombined’ product. The Mandeville-author does not simply lift Odoric

⁹⁴ See *The Book of John Mandeville*, pp. 44-60 for the focus on the Holy Land.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 179-81.

⁹⁶ Tzanaki, *Mandeville’s Medieval Audiences*, p. 270.

and William's material and present it in some other form. In the absence of William and Odoric, the Mandeville-author feels the need to introduce Sir John, a fictional traveller, to serve as narrator and protagonist. The world picture unfolds before the book's audience precisely through Sir John's eastward journey. The use of this device is not incidental. Sir John's journey is what lends the book's Weltbild coherent shape; travel is the means by which the book's audience can best make sense of the world. Moreover, because the book's audience was so vast, *Mandeville's* use of travel can be said to be indicative of the wider shift in the European worldview towards a greater appreciation for the fact that God's Creation could be experienced first-hand. To the Mandeville-author and his audience, ideas such as the east-west axis are not simply vague notions underlying their world picture; they are real characteristics of the world and subject to direct experience via travel.

By the Late Middle Ages, travel had become instrumental to the way Europeans understood the world. In this sense, Columbus' going west to get to the East was the culmination of a process that had been on-going for two and a half centuries. Simek astutely observes that this voyage revolutionary for putting into practice existing ideas about the world, even though it did not turn these ideas upside down. On the other hand, Columbus' voyage was arguably part of a broader trend, and, in that sense, 'evolutionary' rather than revolutionary. John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck had traversed much of the east-west length of the *ecumene* in the middle of the thirteenth century. Marco Polo and Odoric of Pordenone had done so, much more famously, at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries respectively. The above analysis of *The Book of John Mandeville* shows doing so had become so normalised by the mid-fourteenth century as to make travel crucial to the way Europeans understood the world. Indeed, *Mandeville* had spoken about the possibility of circumnavigating the world, though Sir John, its fictional narrator/protagonist, never ultimately takes this step in the text. Columbus did take it, and for this may be called revolutionary, but in the broader sense his voyage was a natural culmination of an on-going process. Columbus may have set in motion the Age of Discovery, but it was his thirteenth- and fourteenth-century predecessors who, in effect, had set medieval Europe on this path.

There is a neat historiographical parallel here with the concept of 'renaissance'. Jacob Burckhardt contended that, following centuries of medieval backwardness, the Italian 'rediscovery' of classical ideas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to a period of cultural and intellectual rebirth, termed 'the Renaissance'.⁹⁷ Subsequent generations of

⁹⁷ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 3rd edn. (London: Pheidon, 1995).

historians also employed the term in their defence of the Middle Ages. As a result, medieval historiography is today replete with renaissances, named variously after regions, dynasties, and time periods. The so-called ‘twelfth-century renaissance’ has been particularly prominent but it is not alone; historians have also proposed the ‘Carolingian renaissance’, the ‘Ottonian renaissance’, and the ‘Northumbrian renaissance’, among others.⁹⁸ Similarly, the period in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that saw Europeans make unprecedented excursions into the depths of the Asian continent might be termed *an* ‘age of discovery’ that preceded *the* Age of Discovery. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to press the comparison any further, but the historiographical parallel with the idea of ‘renaissance’ serves to highlight an important point: historical change is often subtle and incremental before it becomes radical, and it can occur in ‘bursts’ or ‘waves’ that are similar in character. In this sense, the great thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward voyages can be said to have introduced subtle change into the way Europeans understood the concepts underlying their worldview, culminating in Columbus’ voyages and eventually the Age of Discovery, just as successive medieval periods of cultural and intellectual flowering and rediscovery of classical ideas culminated in the expansion of Italian humanism and eventually ‘the Renaissance’.

* * *

When Europeans gradually realised, well after John Cabot’s expedition to North America in 1497-98 and the Portuguese discoveries in Brazil, that America was a new, fourth continent (or fifth, depending on one’s stance vis-à-vis the antipodes), their conception of the shape of the world began to transform. Columbus’ discovery of America is conventionally taken as the starting point for the Age of Discovery, though he himself had been firmly grounded in a

⁹⁸ On the twelfth-century see Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (New York, NY: Meridian Books, 1957); *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Robert Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Christopher Brooke, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1969); Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (London: S.P.C.K., 1972). On the Carolingians see Jacques Boussard, *The Civilization of Charlemagne*, trans. by Frances Partridge (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 118-95, 232-37; Giles Brown, ‘Introduction: the Carolingian Renaissance’, in *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation*, ed. by Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 1-51; Pierre Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*, trans. by Jo Ann McNamara (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978), pp. 203-29. On the Ottonians: John Beckwith, *Early Medieval Art: Carolingian, Ottonian, Romanesque* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1964), pp. 81-152. On Northumbria: *Northumbria’s Golden Age*, ed. by Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton, 1999).

very medieval conception of the world. Although Columbus' discovery doubtlessly heralded the dawn of a new era in European history, it was, on the other hand, just as much a culmination of a process that had been in motion for some time.

Columbus was arguably the last of the late medieval travellers to the East. His predecessors, who undertook eastward journeys in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, often formed genuinely nuanced perceptions of Asian people and places through direct interaction with them. Through relatively wide circulation of a handful of their accounts, and through the occasional impact of the more obscure travel reports, they did pass on sufficient information to impress upon Europeans the sheer size of God's Creation. As the second chapter has shown, though, travellers' perceptions seldom reached their contemporaries in Europe intact; travellers failed to impart to most Europeans the kind of nuanced understanding of Asia that they had themselves attained. As a result, the European worldview continued to rest on largely the same ideas after the journeys as it had before them. These values were the unity of Creation under God and its alignment along an east-west axis, with a focal point at the Holy Land.

The eastward journeys reinforced and intensified these ideas. Whereas Europeans had always been aware of the theoretical east-west alignment of Creation, for example, this notion attained a more immediate quality; it became a concept that could be experienced more directly, and more intensely, via travel. *The Book of John Mandeville*, the most emphatic articulation of the late medieval Weltbild, is indebted to travellers twice over. It employs two travel accounts, among them Odoric's report, to serve a skeleton for the work, and creates a fictional traveller to traverse and so make sense of the world picture that it constructs. By *Mandeville's* time, the eastward journeys had 'normalised' travel, the act of experiencing God's Creation first-hand, to such an extent that travel become the most natural way for Europeans who themselves had never voyaged anywhere, including the Mandeville-author and most of his vast audience, to begin to make sense of the world. Columbus' journey was as much a natural culmination of this intensification of existing ideas about the world, and Europeans' increasing willingness to experience their growing immediacy first-hand, as it was the catalyst for a new age in European history.

Chapter Four: The Uniqueness of the Late Medieval European Worldview Illustrated

The preceding chapters outline the features of the *Weltbild* of the medieval West, and how the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had shaped the way Europeans understood these features. The thesis has argued that these journeys had made travel itself instrumental to European understanding of the world, an outlook that naturally culminated in Columbus' voyages and the genesis of the Age of Discovery. Yet the picture painted thus far is admittedly broad, and begs the question: to what extent was this outlook, and the way in which travel had shaped this outlook, unique to late medieval Europe? A comparison with medieval Islam, a contemporary civilisation, can shed light on this issue.

Despite some similarities, the Islamic worldview had evolved rather differently to its Latin Christian counterpart. In addition to Hellenic ideas, the Muslims had inherited the Persian intellectual tradition. This tradition was particularly important vis-à-vis conceptions of the world, as it imparted to medieval Islam the idea that the 'home' civilisation was at the world's centre. In the medieval Islamic view, no one direction of the periphery of this world was any more important than any other. The Islamic world itself proved remarkably cohesive in the intellectual and cultural sense, even as political and confessional unity ceased to be a reality. This fostered a shared Muslim identity across a vast geographic space, without subverting the uniqueness of local cultures. With Muslims from all regions of the *Dar al-Islam* (the 'House', or 'Abode', of Islam) subscribing to an overarching identity and seeing the whole of the *Dar al-Islam* as the 'middle', and most important part, of God's Creation, everywhere else naturally assumed the role of the periphery. The Latin Christians, in contrast, saw their own home as only the westernmost, and not a particularly significant, part of Creation.

Accounts written by Muslim travellers from the western Muslim lands, Iberia and the Maghreb, are particularly useful in this comparison. The homelands of these 'western Muslims' occupied roughly the same longitudes as Latin Christendom, and were separated from Asia by a similar physical distance. Yet these 'western' Muslims did not view the world to their east, or any other direction for that matter, in quite the same way as Europeans, either before or after the journeys to the East. Ibn Jubayr, a twelfth-century Iberian, and Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century Moroccan, both travelled eastward (among other directions). Despite

some significant differences in temperament and personality between the two men, their accounts show that both of them were grounded firmly in the same Islamic worldview, which had changed remarkably little over the two centuries that separate the two men.

Origins of the Islamic Worldview

The ‘Muslim worldview’ derived in large part from the Greek and Persian foundations of the medieval Islamic civilisation. Muslim scholars seemed to hold the ancient Greeks in especially high regard.¹ This reverence was already prominent in the Near East before the Muslim conquests. Ananias of Shirak, a seventh-century Armenian historian, who wrote his *Geography* (in Armenian) at around the same time the Rashidun Caliphs had established their rule in his homeland, draws on Persian ideas almost as much as Hellenic. Yet he refers by name only to the Greek scholars, such as Ptolemy and Pappus of Alexandria.² Citing the Greeks directly, by name, was seen to be good intellectual practice. Ibn Khurradādhbih, the late ninth-century scholar of Persian origin, claims: ‘I found that Ptolemy has explained the boundaries [of the world’s regions] ... in a foreign language, so I translated it from his language into Arabic’.³ In fact, as Adam Silverstein points out, Ibn Khurradādhbih’s work bears little resemblance to Ptolemy’s *Geography*.⁴ Ptolemy’s stature was such, though, that Ibn Khurradādhbih evidently felt compelled to say that he was following the ancient cartographer. Despite the deference they afforded to the Hellenes, Muslim scholars did more than simply echo them.

By the Abbasid period, Muslim geographers were expanding upon Hellenic ideas. In this, as in the citation of Greeks by name, they also continued established practice. Many

¹ Adam J. Silverstein, ‘The Medieval Islamic Worldview: Arabic Geography in its Historical Context’, in *Geography and Ethnography: Perceptions of the World in Pre-Modern Societies*, ed. by Kurt A. Raaflaub, Richard J.A. Talbert (Chicester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), pp. 273-290.

² Ananias of Shirak, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak: The Long and the Short Recensions*, ed. by Robert H. Hewsen (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 1992), pp. 28-31; S.T. Yeremian, ‘Ash’haratsuits” (Armiaskaia geografia VII veka) – vydaiuschyisia pamiatnik geografii i kartografii drevnevo mira’, *Lraber Hasarakakan Gitut’yunneri* 5 (1968), pp. 43-60.

³ Ibn Khurradādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik w’al-Mamālik*, cited in Silverstein, ‘The Medieval Islamic Worldview’, p. 274.

⁴ Silverstein, ‘The Medieval Islamic Worldview’, p. 274.

scholars of the Abbasid period were *dhimmi*, Christians and Jews, speakers of Syriac and Pahlavi (Middle Persian) as well as Greek.⁵ In addition to the original Greek texts, they worked from copies in these languages. Translation drew not only on the original Greek texts, but also incorporated commentaries and developments from centuries' worth of scholarship, Christian as well as pagan.⁶ Muslim thinkers therefore inherited the virtually unbroken Hellenic intellectual tradition of the Near East, something that the likes of Pliny the Elder and the handful of other Roman middlemen could not impart to the medieval West in anywhere near as comprehensive a way (see Chapter One).

Persian knowledge was equally important. As Silverstein shows, most historians have tended to emphasise the Hellenic component in the Islamic worldview over the Persian, in part because direct references in Islamic works to Persian sources are infrequent.⁷ Such references do occur though; the geographer Yāqūt al-Hamawī (1179-1229) mentions a Sassanid map the size of a room.⁸ One Sassanid work of geography, the *Šahrestānīhā Ērānšahr*, still survives in an eighth-century edition. Touraj Daryaee explains that the work lists the cities of the 'Erān-šahr' ('the domain of the Iranians'), and the kings or legendary figures who founded them, in typical Sassanid style.⁹ To the end of the list of otherwise purely Persian places and persons, the eight-century redactor adds: 'the city of Baghdad was built by Abū Ja'far whom they call Abū Dawānīq'.¹⁰ Persian works of geography were clearly still available and in use in the Islamic period.

As much as their Hellenic counterparts, Persian conceptions formed a pillar of the medieval Islamic worldview. Silverstein points out that, where the Greeks usually employed

⁵ Karla Mallette, 'The Metropolis and its Languages: Baghdad and Venice', in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, ed. John M. Ganim and Shayne Aaron Legassie (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷ Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', pp. 274-75.

⁸ Yāqūt al-Hamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, cited in Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', p. 275.

⁹ Touraj Daryaee, 'Introduction', in *Šahrestānīhā Ērānšahr: A Middle Persian Text on Late Antique Geography, Epic, and History: With English and Persian Translations and Commentary*, trans. by Touraj Daryaee (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2002), pp. 1-12.

¹⁰ *Šahrestānīhā Ērānšahr*, p. 21. The reference is to Caliph al-Mansur (r.754-75).

the tripartite schema in organising the world's landmasses, the Persians divided the world into four instead.¹¹ Strictly speaking, Zoroastrian tradition actually partitions the world into *haft kišwar*, or 'seven climes/continents'.¹² However, unlike the seven climate-bands (*klimata*) that stretch across the world in some Greek models (see Chapter One), the Zoroastrian *kišwars* are more self-contained tracts of land, akin to islands or continents. Six of these are arranged in a circle around the central tract, the *Xwanirah*, which is the size of the outer six combined.¹³ The *Xwanirah* is in turn home to the *Erān-šahr*, the lands 'from the Oxus to the Nile' seen as part of the traditional Persian dominions; the outer six tracts were, in early antiquity, portrayed as uninhabited.¹⁴ Daryaei explains that, by the Sassanid period, the conception had been somewhat modified along the lines of Sassanid imperial ideology. In the late antique configuration, the *Erān-šahr* occupied the entirety of the *Xwanirah*,¹⁵ suggesting that the Persians increasingly saw their own lands as constituting the largest and most important part of the world, while everything else was little more than periphery.

Whatever the precise origins of the quadripartite division and the seven-*kišwar* configuration in which it was embedded, Muslim geographers readily assimilated both these schemas. In his *al-Taḥḥim*, the polymath Bērūnī (d.1048) includes a diagram of the world showing the seven *kišwars*.¹⁶ Hamdallāh Mustawfī, writing some three centuries later, employed the same concept in his own work.¹⁷ Geographers of the Abbasid period, such as al-Ya'qūbī (d.897), Ibn Khurrahādhibī (d.912), and Qudāma (d.948) all organise their

¹¹ Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', p. 276.

¹² Daryaei, 'Introduction', p. 5.

¹³ Daryaei, 'Introduction', p. 5; M. Schwartz, 'The Old Eastern Iranian World View According to the Avesta,' *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 2: The Median and Achaemenian Periods*, ed. by I. Gershevitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), (pp. 640-663), p. 643.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

¹⁵ Daryaei, 'Introduction', p. 6; Georges Dumézil, *The Plight of a Sorcerer*, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 252-53.

¹⁶ Bērūnī, *al-Taḥḥim*, cited in Daryaei, 'Introduction', p. 6.

¹⁷ Hamdallāh Mustawfī, *Nuḥat al-Qulūb*. ed. and trans. by G. le Strange (London, 1919), cited in Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', p. 276, n. 13.

descriptions of the world along quadripartite lines.¹⁸ Qudāma even explicitly acknowledges the idea's ancient Persian origins.¹⁹ Through employing septipartite and quadripartite schemas, Muslim writings emphasise the centrality within creation of their own civilisation, the Dar al-Islam, which had replaced Persia. Just as no one peripheral *kišwar* was any more important than any other peripheral *kišwar* in the Persian conception, so too was no particular edge of the Dar al-Islam more remarkable than any other edge in Muslim thinking. This was the Persian legacy that most strongly influenced the Islamic worldview.

A Uniquely 'Islamic' World

The twin forces of the Islamic faith and the Arabic language reinforced and gave unique shape to ideas inherited from the Greeks and Persians. Paradoxically, the anti-Arab *shu'ubiyya* movement, through its culmination in the so-called Abbasid Revolution, entrenched the Arabic language throughout much of the relatively newly-forged Islamic world. The *shu'ubiyya* was a response by non-Arab Muslims (*mawali*) to Arab privilege under the Umayyad dynasty. It was, as Karla Mallette puts it, 'a movement of outsiders'.²⁰ But the victorious *mawali* maintained the use of the Arabic language. Strikingly, grievances and cultural animosities towards the Arabs found expression in the Arabic language and not in the native tongues. Muslim poets and intellectuals of *mawali*, particularly Persian, heritage derided the Arabs and mocked them for their primitive origins. The poet Bashshār ibn Burd (c.714-83) called them 'lizard-eaters' and 'drinkers of goat milk'.²¹ Yet his chosen medium was poetry in the Arabic language, and he was not unique in this. As Harry Norris observes, 'even the most fanatical Shu'ubi expressed his sentiments in the tongue first spoken by the

¹⁸ Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', p. 276.

¹⁹ Qudāma ibn Ja'far, *Kitāb al-Kharāj wa Sinā'at al-Kitāba* (Baghdad, 1981), p. 139, cited in Silverstein, 'The Medieval Islamic Worldview', p. 276.

²⁰ Mallette, 'The Metropolis and its Languages', p. 25; see also Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

²¹ Bashshār ibn Burd, *Dīwān Bashshār ibn Burd*, ed. by Muhammad Rif'at Mahmūd Fath Allāh and Muhammad Shawqī Amīn, Vols I-III (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta'lif wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1950-1966), Vol. I, pp. 377-80, cited in Mallette, 'The Metropolis and its Languages', p. 26.

Arabian lizard-eaters he so despised'.²² This tongue had, by Bashshār ibn Burd's time, become a cosmopolitan language *par excellence*, giving considerable coherence and unity to the Islamic world, via which a common worldview could permeate.

Just as crucially, the Abbasid takeover had preserved the Islamic faith. This was integral to the movement from the start, as the *mawali* sought equality of status with Arab Muslims within the Caliphate. The anti-Arab but pro-Muslim character of the *shu'ubiyya* movement broke down many of the social and ethnic barriers between the Muslim faithful. It facilitated a more ethnically egalitarian outlook, in which an illustrious (Arab) ancestry and clan backing were no longer prerequisites for political prominence. The Abbasids had, in effect, made adherence to Islam the primary identity among the elite.²³ Through the elite's patronage of art and learning, the same identity gained currency among artists and scholars; Bashshār ibn Burd could claim that 'we [the Persians] restored sovereignty to the family (*ahl*) of the Arab Prophet' while scorning these same Arabs as lizard-eaters.²⁴

On a more practical level, the Abbasid revival gave the Muslim world a unique structure in terms of interaction between centres of culture and learning and 'the provinces'. Various local centres in the Dar al-Islam competed for prominence, but without undermining broader cultural and intellectual unity.²⁵ The overall structure was akin to a 'network' of centres, where pre-eminence shifted between them. Baghdad was in the ascendancy between the ninth and tenth centuries, and Cairo between the eleventh and twelfth, with major cities in

²² Harry T. Norris, 'Shu'ubiyah in Arabic Literature', in *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, ed. by Julia Ashtiany, T.M. Johnstone, J.D. Latham, R.B. Serjeant, and G. Rex Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), (pp. 31-47), p. 47.

²³ Mallette, 'The Metropolis and its Languages', p. 27; Sam I. Gellens, 'The Search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies: a comparative approach', in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, migration, and the religious imagination*, ed. by Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (London: Routledge, 1990), (pp. 50-65), pp. 50-51.

²⁴ Bashshār ibn Burd, *Dīwān Bashshār ibn Burd*, Vol. I, p. 379, cited in Mallette, 'The Metropolis and its Languages', p. 26. The word *ahl* means 'family' in the sense of 'a man and his immediate dependents'. Mallette opines that Bashshār's choice of the smallest family unit is deliberate as a pointed rejection of Umayyad clan privilege.

²⁵ Gellens, 'The Search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies', p. 51; Houari Touati, *Islam and Travel in the Middle Ages*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 1-11.

Khurasan and the Maghreb not far behind.²⁶ This configuration proved resilient, even as the Abbasid polity fractured and competing forms of Islam asserted themselves in different regions. As Marshal Hodgson explains, despite political and sectarian divisions, the Islamic world still remained a ‘trans-hemispheric’ and closely-linked civilisation with a high degree of fluidity of movement of both people and ideas.²⁷ Precisely because of this diversity within a broader unity, one may speak of ‘western’ Muslims who were simultaneously a part of a wider Islamic civilisation and of the ‘local Islam’ of their native lands.

The consequences for Islamic conceptions of the world of the Abbasid preservation of Islam and the Arabic language were twofold. Firstly, the knowledge inherited from Hellenic and Persian civilisations amalgamated into a distinctly new medieval Islamic form, as Muslims comprehensively ‘Islamised’ the conceptions they had inherited. As Silverstein demonstrates, geography seems to have been the least ‘secular’ branch of learning during and following the Abbasid cultural revival. While *dhimmi* scholars remained rather prominent in virtually all other sciences for some time after the revolution yet, geography seemed to have rather quickly become largely, if not exclusively, the domain of their Muslim counterparts.²⁸ Indeed, Muslims authored all extant geographies from the Abbasid period.²⁹

Silverstein is particularly persuasive in tracing the ‘Islamisation’ of geography through the evolution of the originally Hellenic idea that the world has a ‘navel’ or a centre (*omphalos*). Initially, there was little explicit consensus as to where the *omphalos* was, with places such as Baghdad, Fars, and Egypt being especially prominent contenders, but growing consensus gradually moved it towards the Hejaz.³⁰ In the mid-ninth century, al-Jāhiz identified Iraq (*Bābil*) as ‘the centre of the world’ that ‘holds the same status on earth that the navel holds on a body,’ while effectively focusing on Arabia and thereby making it the

²⁶ Gellens, ‘The Search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies’, p. 55; Touati, *Islam and Travel*, pp. 1-11.

²⁷ Marshall Hodgson, ‘Hemispheric Inter-regional History as an Approach to World History’, *Journal of World History* 1 (1954), pp. 715–23.

²⁸ Silverstein, ‘The Medieval Islamic Worldview’, p. 279.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-83.

implied centre.³¹ A century later al-Muqaddasī (c.985) explicitly claimed that ‘the earth extends outwards from Arabia’; by the thirteenth century, Yāqūt fixed the navel firmly in Mecca, and more precisely on the Ka’ba itself.³² Muslim scholars eventually came to identify the world’s centre with the holiest place in their holiest city. This signalled the completion of the synthesis of Greek and Persian conceptions under the aegis of Islam. Like the Christians (see Chapter One), Muslims reconciled these conceptions with their ‘religious sensibilities’.³³

Nevertheless, despite some commonality in their origins, there are key differences between the medieval Islamic and the Latin Christian worldviews. The Muslim focal point lay firmly within the Muslim world; the Hejaz was almost precisely in its geographic centre. The Latin Christian focal point, in contrast, lay overseas, at least by the Late Middle Ages. What was in essence a very similar concept gave the Muslim and the Latin Christian civilisations two different perspectives on the world. In the Latin Christian case, the focal point’s distant location emphasised the relative insignificance of home (Europe) within God’s Creation. With its unrivalled marvels and splendours, not to mention its biblical content, the East became a part of Creation of equal, if not greater, importance than Europe as a testament to God’s majesty. Though the eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries only intensified this idea.

In the Muslim case, the focal point was well and truly within the Dar al-Islam. Building on the Persian idea of the centrality of the *Xwanirah*, it emphasised the importance of the Dar al-Islam within God’s Creation. All of Creation might have been testament to God’s majesty, but the Muslim lands had a special prominence. The Dar al-Islam already included most of what was important or notable; nothing on its periphery was its equal in terms of cultural, intellectual, and religious importance, as far as Muslims were concerned. Moreover, no particular cardinal direction was necessarily any more prominent than any other, so the ‘East’ had no special mystique or intensity in the Muslim imagination.

³¹ Al-Jāhiz, quoted in Tha’ālibī, *Thimār al-Qulūb fi al-Mudāf wa al-Mansūb* (Cairo, 1965), p. 516, cited in Silverstein, ‘The Medieval Islamic Worldview’, p. 281.

³² Al-Muqaddasī, *Ahsan al-Taqāsīm fi Ma’rifat al-Aqālīm* (Leiden, 1906); Yāqūt, *Mu’jam*, Vol. IV, p. 279. Both cited in Silverstein, ‘The Medieval Islamic Worldview’, p. 281.

³³ David A. King, ‘Makka (as the Centre of the World)’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn., Vol. VI (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 180-87.

Where the Islamic world had inherited much more of the Hellenic knowledge (to say nothing of the Persian) and engaged with it so much more comprehensively, the bulk of this knowledge remained unknown in the West. Unfamiliarity with the Greek language and separation from the lands and traditions of Greek learning meant that the Latin West missed out on the kind of intimate understanding of classical knowledge that the Muslims received. The Dar al-Islam actually came to include the vast majority of the world that the Hellenes had known and described. Persia, traditionally the land of wealth and magic in western eyes (see Chapter One), was not only physically part of the Muslim world, but a major source of knowledge for the medieval Islamic civilisation. The Islamic world, much more so than Latin Christendom, was a huge entity, kept culturally and intellectually cohesive by a shared faith, a cosmopolitan language, and a robust tradition of learning.

Lastly, travel itself was a unifying factor in the medieval Islamic world. Every able-bodied Muslim with the means to do so was required, at least once in his life, to complete the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba in Mecca; this is the reason that both Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta set out on their journeys. Because the Hejaz had come to be seen as the focal point of Creation by the tenth century, the *hajj* had become a powerful unifying factor. Undertaking a physical and spiritual journey to the heart of the Dar al-Islam could not fail to reinforce for Muslims its unity and centrality within creation. *Talab al-'ilm*, or travel in search of (religious) knowledge, had a similar effect, though urgency to travel in search of knowledge was not the same everywhere.³⁴ 'Umar ibn Muhammad al-Kindi observed (in 962), that, while 'the people of the world strive to travel to Egypt... the people of Egypt do not seek to make a living in any other country and do not travel anywhere'.³⁵ The people of Nishapur and Khurasan seemed to travel more than Egyptians, but still lacked the zeal of Spanish Muslims.³⁶ Indeed, Ibn Jubayr is so impressed with the quality of teaching at Damascus, that he recommends it to prospective Maghrebi students: 'Whoever of the young men of the Maghrib seeks prosperity, let him move to these lands and leave his country in the pursuit of

³⁴ Gellens, 'The search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies', pp. 53, 57-63.

³⁵ 'Umar b. Muhammad al-Kindi, *Fada'il Misr*, ed. by Muhammad 'Umar (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1971), cited in Gellens, 'The Search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies', p. 57.

³⁶ Gellens, 'The search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies', pp. 62-63.

knowledge and he will find many forms of help'.³⁷ Still, most travelling scholars (*'ulama*) ultimately returned home after having studied in other lands, which contributed to the 'blurring' of boundaries between the centres of learning and the outlying lands in the medieval Islamic world.³⁸

Travellers often wrote accounts of their journeys, which reinforced the centrality of the Dar al-Islam within the world. The *rihla* ('journey' or 'travel') genre, Christine Chism suggests, also 'reaffirm[ed] the truth of Islam'.³⁹ It connected this 'reaffirmation' of the Islamic faith with travel, the act of traversing geographic space (mostly within the Dar al-Islam). This, in turn, connected the 'truth of Islam' with the centrality of the Muslim world. Houari Touati explains: 'Rather than going "elsewhere", Islamic journeyers travelled in the space of the same, and their chief preoccupation was to create more of the same. Rather than psychological, aesthetic, or philosophic, their main aim was dogmatic in nature'.⁴⁰ Secular travel had a similar affect. Travellers' stories and information found their way into the *majlis* (plural: *majālis*) the salon where Muslim men would gather for socialisation and discussion. In these salons, as Montgomery explains, an atmosphere of 'entertaining anecdotes and ribald improprieties' predominated.⁴¹ This kind of storytelling in fact constituted the *'aja'ib* or 'wonder-account' genre. Stories of the 'exotic and unbelievable' were, as Roger Allen puts it, 'intended to amaze and even terrify, and in so doing, to underscore for the audience the pleasing security of its own existence'.⁴²

³⁷ Ibn Jubayr, p. 298.

³⁸ Gellens, 'The search for knowledge in medieval Muslim societies', p. 61.

³⁹ Christine Chism, 'Between Islam and Christendom: Ibn Battuta's Travels in Asia Minor and the North', in *Cosmopolitanism and the Middle Ages*, ed. by John M. Ganim and Shayne Aaron Legassie (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 62.

⁴⁰ Touati, *Islam and Travel*, p. 259.

⁴¹ James E. Montgomery, 'Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 3 (2000), (pp. 1-25), p. 25.

⁴² Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 240.

As secular narrative of the wonders of ‘elsewhere’, *‘aja’ib* was not unlike the European *livres des merveilles*. However, for Muslims, ‘wonders’ were not confined to the ‘eastern’ setting as much as they were for Europeans, being that a great deal of Asia was familiar territory to Muslims. The difference is one of context and historical circumstance rather than of essence. ‘Wonders’ may have had some similar characteristics in both Europe and the Islamic world, such as inspiring awe or terror in order to ‘reaffirm existence’. But For medieval Europeans, they ‘reinforced’ European existence on the western tip of the east-west axis of Creation. For Muslims, wonders, like religious travel experience, reinforced the idea that the Dar al-Islam was in the middle of Creation. Things outside of the Dar al-Islam were lesser, in the cultural, intellectual, and spiritual sense. First-hand Muslim experience in lands and people outside, as well as inside, the Dar al-Islam reflects this world picture.

The Islamic Worldview in Travellers’ Accounts

A traveller’s level of comfort in any one place gives an indication of how alien that place seemed to them, and how out of place or at home they felt there. That Muslim travellers experienced a continuous and largely uninterrupted comfort while they remained within the Dar al-Islam illustrates its centrality within their worldview. On the one hand, accounts occasionally hint at instances where local cultural peculiarities make the traveller weary or discomfort him in some small way. Ibn Jubayr’s impression of the residents of Baghdad is, on the whole, a negative one. For one, they strike him as incredibly condescending:

...you scarce can find among them any who do not affect humility, but who yet are vain and proud. Strangers they despise, and they show scorn and disdain to their inferiors, while the stories and news of other men they belittle. Each conceives, in belief and thought, that the whole world is but trivial in comparison with his land, and over the face of the world they find no noble place of living save their own. It is as if they are persuaded that God has no lands or people save theirs.⁴³

Ibn Jubayr feels that their conduct is not in keeping with the welcoming and cosmopolitan character of the rest of the Muslim world. Ibn Jubayr concludes that they are unworthy of their city’s illustrious legacy: ‘[t]he ill-conduct of the people of this town is stronger than the character of its air and water, and detracts from the probity of its traditions and its report’.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibn Jubayr, p. 227

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 277.

Local peculiarities are sometimes more than just annoying. Though the Tuareg are Sunni Muslims and Ibn Battuta finds nothing else about their customs offensive, their liberal treatment of women is too much for him. He describes visiting a Tuareg acquaintance in his home and finding the man's wife in conversation with her male friend. Quite taken aback, Ibn Battuta asks his acquaintance if he realises that this is contrary to Islamic law. Ibn Battuta is 'astonished at his silliness' when the man responds that 'companionship of women and men' is a 'good thing and an agreeable practice among us'.⁴⁵ This is so disturbing to Ibn Battuta's sensibilities that he wants nothing more to do with this man: 'I left him and did not visit him again. Afterwards he invited me a number of times but I did not accept'.⁴⁶ Moments like these are valuable reminders of local difference; they caution against overstating the cultural uniformity of the various peoples of medieval Islam. Yet they form a miniscule portion of Ibn Battuta's and Ibn Jubayr's interaction with their fellow Muslims; they are all the more notable for being exceptions to the rule.

Most instances of traveller discomfort within the Dar al-Islam tend to come from typical difficulties of travel, and are still rather infrequent. Language issues are usually quickly and amicably resolved due to shared Islamic values. On one occasion, when lodging in the town of Kawiya (near Iznik, Anatolia), a local *fāqih* (Islamic jurist) is brought before Ibn Battuta in order to interpret. It quickly becomes apparent that the jurist has misled the locals: he does not speak Arabic. The *fāqih* cleverly tells the Turks that 'these men speak the ancient Arabic speech and I know only the new Arabic'.⁴⁷ In fact, as Ibn Battuta explains, the man speaks Persian, not Arabic. This episode demonstrates the extent to which the shared Islamic faith was a unifying factor in the Islamic world. Muslim solidarity is exactly what the quick-thinking *fāqih* appeals to in claiming that Ibn Battuta's party speaks 'ancient' Arabic. 'These men,' he says to the local Turks, 'must be honourably treated because they speak the language of the Prophet... and of his Companions'.⁴⁸ The local Turks extend even warmer hospitality as a result of the heightened appeal to their sense of religious duty and solidarity.

⁴⁵ Ibn Battuta, p. 952.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 952.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 455.

⁴⁸ Ibn Battuta, p. 455.

Ibn Battuta experiences this solidarity virtually everywhere he goes. In Anatolia the Turkish *akhīs*, though they typically do not understand his Arabic, usually see to his every need.⁴⁹

There were also more serious problems than language, as the road was not always safe. Brigands, nomads, and especially Bedouins are a constant menace in travellers' accounts. Ibn Battuta says that the town of Faid, about half way between Baghdad and Mecca, 'is a large fortified enceinte', and 'it is the practice of the caravan to enter this place in military formation and warlike array, in order to overawe the Arabs who are assembled there [in considerable numbers] and to cut short their hopes of despoiling the caravan'.⁵⁰ The threat lurks for much of the return journey to Baghdad, as Ibn Battuta hears of this or that tribe of nomadic Arabs molesting pilgrims.⁵¹ Yet the infrastructure to protect travellers is in place, and though the threat is always present, Ibn Battuta's account never gives the sense that he is in mortal danger. The raiders are just an additional adversity to overcome on pilgrimage.

The Frankish enclaves in the Levant have a similar character in Ibn Jubayr's account. Ibn Jubayr does not seem overly concerned with the physical danger they pose. When crossing the border between Muslim and Frankish territory on the road between Damascus and Banyas, he comes across a certain tree that denotes the boundary:

... we were told that it [the tree] was the boundary on this road between security and danger, by reason of some Frankish brigands who prowl and rob thereon. He whom they seize on the Muslim side, be it by the length of the arms or a span, they capture; but he whom they seize on the Frankish side at a like distance, they release. This is a pact they faithfully observe and is one of the most pleasing and singular conventions of the Franks.⁵²

Frankish brigands and raiders appear to be more of a local curiosity in Ibn Jubayr's eyes than a real, tangible threat to his safety.

Virtually all instances when travellers show hostility to people within the Dar al-Islam stem from sectarian divisions. Only Muslim heretics are ever truly looked upon with

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 418-68, see in particular pp. 418-19. The *akhī* was a social institution peculiar to fourteenth-century Turkish Anatolia. Craftsmen and artisans formed guild-like associations and endeavoured to exercise Islamic virtues in everyday life, which included providing for the safety and wellbeing of Muslim travellers.

⁵⁰ Ibn Battuta, p. 252. Beckingham's parentheses.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 271-72.

⁵² Ibn Jubayr, p. 315.

prejudicial hostility, and often go hand-in-hand with the physical dangers. On his journey through southern Iraq, Ibn Battuta passes through some marshlands by the Euphrates, which are infested by ‘nomad Arabs called al-Ma’ādī’ who are ‘brigands of the Rāfidī sect’.⁵³ Conversely, Ibn Battuta finds the Muslims in Anatolia (*Bilād al-Rūm*) so agreeable partly because, in adhering to the Hanafī school of Islamic jurisprudence, they are ‘firmly attached to the Sunna – there is not a Qadarī, nor a Rāfidī, nor a Mu’tazilī, nor a Khārijī, nor any innovator [i.e. heretic] amongst them’.⁵⁴ Ibn Jubayr exhibits the same attitude:

The greater number of the people of these Hejaz and other lands are sectaries and schismatics who have no religion, and who have separated in various doctrines. They treat the pilgrims in a manner in which they do not treat the Christians and Jews under tribute, seizing most of the provisions they have collected, robbing them and finding cause to divest them of all they have.⁵⁵

Ibn Jubayr’s fervent zealotry appears, in another passage, to bring him almost to the verge of complete disillusionment with the state of the Dar al-Islam. Disturbed by the multitude of non-Sunni sects he encounters in Egypt and the Middle East, he despairs:

Let it be absolutely certain and beyond doubt established that there is no Islam save in the Maghrib lands. There they follow the clear path that has no separation and the like, such as there are in these eastern lands of sects and heretical groups and schisms, save those of them whom Great and Glorious God has preserved from this. There is no justice, right, or religion in His sight except with the Almohades – may God render them powerful. They are the last just imams of this time...⁵⁶

Ibn Jubayr appears ready to give up on Islam outside of the Maghreb; it seems to him that ‘all the other Kings of the day follow another path, taking tithes from the Muslim merchants as if they were of the community of the *dhimmah*’. Indeed, ‘these eastern lands’ might indeed have been beyond saving, he says, if not for the efforts of Saladin, whom he constantly praises ‘for his conduct and virtues’.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibn Battuta, p. 271. That is, they follow a form of the Shi’a faith.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 416. The sects listed were, in various ways, considered heretical by mainstream Sunni jurisprudence, including the Maliki school to which Ibn Battuta belonged.

⁵⁵ Ibn Jubayr, p. 71.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Ibn Jubayr need not necessarily be taken at his word in this particular passage. It is possible that he exaggerates the sectarian divisions to highlight Saladin's piety and prestige. Alternatively, he may be doing the same for his sovereigns and patrons in the Almohad dynasty, (in)famously strict in their interpretation of Islam.⁵⁸ Whatever his precise reason for including this passage, its sentiment is largely incongruent with the bulk of his own recorded experiences. In numerous other passages he finds praiseworthy customs and conduct among Muslims outside of the Maghreb. Damascus is particularly notable in this regard.⁵⁹ In general, Ibn Jubayr says, people of 'these eastern lands' are 'admirable [for] their eagerness to show kindness to guests'.⁶⁰ Like Ibn Battuta, Ibn Jubayr certainly disapproves of the sectarianism prevalent in some parts of the Dar al-Islam, but is almost always at home in the Middle East. Within the vast Dar al-Islam, only heretics are truly outsiders of any consequence, as their false beliefs and incorrect doctrines threaten the integrity of Islam.

Only when Muslim travellers step outside of the Dar al-Islam is there a hint of true, deeper discomfort. This happens to occur most frequently in the north and south, though purely out of geographic coincidence. While the travellers' confidence in the superiority of their faith and culture remains unshaken, they exhibit a remarkably even-handed interest in non-Islamic peoples. This is very much the case with the tenth-century Abbasid ambassador to the Volga Bulgars, Ibn Fadlan, and his account of the Rūsiyyah.⁶¹

Ibn Fadlan does not shy away from describing some of the Rūsiyyah's more uncivilised customs and characteristics. His description of their sexual practices is rather candid: 'One man will have intercourse with his slave-girl while his companion looks on.

⁵⁸ Roger Le Tourneau, *The Almohad Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 46-47, 57-58, 77-78.

⁵⁹ Ibn Jubayr, pp. 289-90, 298-99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶¹ This part of Ibn Fadlan's account has received much attention from historians, as it relates to the Vikings and the origins of Rus', the medieval East Slavic polity. To avoid the Normanist and Anti-Normanist meaning with which various translations of the term are loaded, I follow Montgomery in preferring 'Rūsiyyah' and 'Rūs', Ibn Fadlan's own words for the people he encountered, whether they were Slavic, Scandinavian, or whatever else.

Sometimes a group of them comes together to do this, each in front of the other'.⁶² But Ibn Fadlan is only stating fact. There is no accompanying condemnation, though he is a little more repulsed by their lack of personal hygiene: 'They are the filthiest of Allah's creatures: they do not clean themselves after excreting or urinating or wash themselves when in a state of ritual impurity... and do not <even> wash their hands after food'.⁶³ Even so, his even-handedness is remarkable given how contrary such lack of hygiene runs to the Islamic practice of *wudū* (ablution).⁶⁴ Ibn Fadlan also witnesses a chieftain's funeral, a pagan ceremony involving polytheistic invocation, ritual intercourse, and human sacrifice.⁶⁵ These are things that one might expect would disturb a tenth-century Baghdadi. Indeed, Ibn Fadlan never abandons his Muslim point of view. When, shortly before being sacrificed, the slave-girl calls out that she sees Paradise, Ibn Fadlan relays her description of it as 'beautiful and verdant'.⁶⁶ James Montgomery posits that this is a 'cultural solecism on the part of Ibn Fadlan, in view of the lush vegetation of the Muslim Paradise'.⁶⁷ Ibn Fadlan is never a truly neutral observer, as he always sees Rūs culture from an Islamic point of view.

Yet despite their deeply un-Islamic practices, the Rūsiyyah are not important as outsiders. As Montgomery puts it, Ibn Fadlan 'provides useful observations on the (un)suitability of the Rūs as potential members of the Islamic polity and stresses their very distinct alterity to a Muslim audience'.⁶⁸ He underscores (very accurately) their excessive consumption of alcohol.⁶⁹ But on the whole, as Montgomery persuasively argues, Ibn Fadlan's description gives the impression that he genuinely wants to understand the

⁶² Ibn Fadlan, *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān*, ed. by Saml Dahhān (Damascus, 1959), trans. by James E. Montgomery, 'Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 3 (2000), (pp.1-25), p. 9.

⁶³ Ibn Fadlan, p. 7. Montgomery's insert.

⁶⁴ Montgomery, 'Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah', p. 7, n. 23.

⁶⁵ Ibn Fadlan, pp. 12-18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ Montgomery, 'Ibn Faḍlān and the Rūsiyyah', p. 18, n. 61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ Ibn Fadlan, p. 14.

Rūsiyyah. They pose no danger to Islam militarily, and definitely not culturally. Their shortcomings and differences as compared to the Muslims are certainly alien, sometimes even shocking. But, as Montgomery explains, his account has little in common with the ‘tall tales’ of ‘*aja’ib* typically relayed at a *majlis*.⁷⁰

Rather, Ibn Fadlan reinforces the centrality of the Dar al-Islam in a different way. Simply put, the Rūsiyyah are a neutral curiosity to him. Their strangeness does not need to be exaggerated because their quaint ignorance and unrefined lifestyle make the superiority and centrality of the Dar al-Islam self-evident. It makes sense that peoples such as them, curious, and in some ways even admirable, but largely irrelevant, would be outside of the Islamic world, on the very periphery of creation. Ibn Fadlan’s account reflects completely the chief element of the Islamic worldview that the Dar al-Islam is central and supreme in God’s Creation. People outside of the Dar al-Islam might be interesting, but they are unimportant no matter which periphery of Creation they inhabit.

Some of Ibn Battuta’s observations in India similarly underscore the relative unimportance of cardinal direction. Like Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Battuta comes across a rather gruesome ceremony of voluntary self-sacrifice. He describes that Hindu widows have themselves burned alive on their husband’s funeral pyre as a show of their piety and devotion.⁷¹ Much like Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Battuta brings some of his own Muslim values to the observation: ‘The place [where the ceremony took place] looked like a spot in hell – God preserve us from it!’⁷² Yet, again like Ibn Fadlan, he relays the proceedings of the ceremony in a remarkably neutral tone, despite the chilling nature of the actual sacrifice. He is at pains to point out to his audience that ‘when a widow burns herself her family acquire a certain prestige by it and gain a reputation for fidelity... but she is not forced to burn herself’.⁷³ That this is taking place in India, in the east, is entirely immaterial. Rather, the Hindus are, like the Rūsiyyah, a curiosity. They are insignificant beyond that in the sense that they pose no cultural, intellectual, or religious challenge to the centrality of the Dar al-Islam: they are as irrelevant as their northern counterparts.

⁷⁰ Montgomery, ‘Ibn Fadlān and the Rūsiyyah’, p. 25.

⁷¹ Ibn Battuta, pp. 614-16. Ibn Battuta’s observations are entirely correct; the practice of ‘sati’ continues today.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 615.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 616.

Interestingly, even when barbarians from the northern periphery force their way into the Dar al-Islam, compromising Muslim sovereignty and *making* themselves politically relevant, they are still not much of a cultural threat. This is the case with the Mongols. Juvaini, writing relatively soon after the invasions (in 1260), does not shy away from faithfully describing Mongol conduct during the conquest. In the case of Transoxania, ‘since for the most part [its inhabitants] tendered submission, the hand of molestation was to some extent withheld from them’.⁷⁴ However:

It is otherwise with Khorasan and Iraq, which countries are afflicted with a hectic fever and a chronic ague: every town and every village has been several times subjected to pillage and massacre and has suffered this confusion for years, so that even though there be generation and increase until the Resurrection the population will not attain to a tenth part of what it was before.⁷⁵

But not all is doom and gloom. Juvaini recounts numerous anecdotes of different khans’ kindnesses towards Muslims, particularly on the part of Ögödei.⁷⁶ Möngke is commended as *ghāzī* (‘victorious against the infidel’) for his punishment of ‘polytheists and idolaters’.⁷⁷ For Juvaini to say positive things about individual Chingissid rulers, his patrons, is not out of the ordinary, but he does more than rehabilitate the individual khans. As Boyle points out, he rationalises the Mongol conquests as an instrument of God’s will.⁷⁸ Chingiss Khan himself, in a speech to the inhabitants of Bukhara, is made to declare:

O people, know that you have committed great sins, and that the great ones among you have committed these sins. If you ask me what proof I have for these words, I say it is because I am the punishment of God. If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ ‘Ala-ad-Din ‘Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror*, trans. by J.A. Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 96.

⁷⁵ Juvaini, p. 97. By ‘Resurrection’ Boyle means the Muslim final judgement, not Christ’s (second) coming.

⁷⁶ See for example *ibid.*, pp. 204, 206, 223.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 589. *Ghāzī* can also be translated as ‘warrior for the faith’.

⁷⁸ Boyle, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Genghis Khan*, (pp. xxvii-xxlvii), p. xlv.

⁷⁹ Juvaini, p. 105.

Aside from being useful to the Mongol rulers as a legitimisation effort, this sentiment allows Muslims to keep their centrality in the world; putting the words into the mouth of the dynasty's founder only strengthens the point.

Juvaini's rationalisation of the conquest goes beyond mere patronage and dynastic propaganda. He does, it is true, lament Mongol damage to learning. He resents the fact that the upheaval has allowed some undeserving persons to rise in rank.⁸⁰ Juvaini allocates a whole chapter to deride one Sharaf-ad-Din of Khorazm, a porter's son whose career soared under the Mongols due to his knowledge of the Turkish language and un-pious willingness to help in a campaign against Muslim lands.⁸¹ There is likewise more than a hint of scorn in Juvaini's comment on the new currency enjoyed by the Mongol language and the Uighur script, 'in the present age the essence of learning and proficiency'.⁸² But even granting this resentment, Juvaini remains remarkably optimistic in his outlook for the future of the Dar al-Islam, the cultural and religious superiority of which the barbarians from the north may have subjected to upheaval but have by no means destroyed; indeed they could not have, for they were instruments of God.

Whatever concerns Juvaini might have harboured in the middle of the thirteenth century were rapidly dissipating by onset of the fourteenth. In his *Jami al-Tawarikh* (c.1307), Rashid ad-Din chronicles the history and deeds of the Chingissid khans. Like Juvaini, he pays particular attention to the Ilkhans, his patrons and rulers of his native Persia. By Rashid ad-Din's time, the Mongols are almost entirely rehabilitated. Indeed, Islam had survived their invasions and was thriving under the Ilkhans in Rashid ad-Din's time. He thus treats his historical material with a suitable degree of distance. Like Juvaini, he includes anecdotes of certain khans' kind words or deeds towards Muslims, but they now reflect a greater surety in Islamic supremacy.

This is particularly striking when it deals with long-known and familiar non-Muslims, whose inferiority Rashid ad-Din has the Mongol rulers recognise in the text. Ögödei rebukes Chinese actors who show him a depiction of an old Muslim man tied to a horse, bragging that

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 6-8.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 525-46, 532.

⁸² Ibid., p. 523.

‘in this manner our warriors take them from the cities [i.e. enslave them]’.⁸³ Ögödei immediately orders a stop to the actors’ display and has his servants bring in an assortment of expensive items from Baghdad and Bukhara, which are laid out opposite their Chinese analogues to show that they are ‘immeasurably’ more valuable.⁸⁴ Ögödei then says:

It is a rare Muslim pauper that does not have several Chinese slaves to do his bidding, but none of the great Chinese emirs has had a captive Muslim. This circumstance may be taken as proof of the wisdom of God, who knows the virtue and merit of every people in every age. Indeed, this much is also confirmed in the Great *Yasa* of Chingiss Khan, who fixed the worth of a Muslim’s blood at forty golden *balysh*, and that of a Chinese man at one ass.⁸⁵

This anecdote neatly sums up the contemporary Muslim perspective. The Mongols are not only justified as instruments of God’s will, but, through this justification, they are subordinated to Islam. Rashid ad-Din is glorifying Ögödei, and Ögödei is glorifying God. The khan is aware of ‘the wisdom of God’ and acts in accordance with it. He is shown to know that the Dar al-Islam is materially and morally superior to China and, citing his great progenitor, confirms this. Rashid ad-Din is paying homage to his Ilkhan overlords, but he is effectively citing the supremacy of Islam as ‘evidence’. In other words, the Mongols have, by this point, been subordinated and assimilated to Islam, well before their actual conversion. Their political overlordship does not threaten the cultural, intellectual, and religious centrality of the Dar al-Islam as far as Muslims are concerned, but is made to reinforce it. This is ultimately as true for the Mongols, who are politically dominant, as it is for the Rūsiyyah, who are irrelevant. That both peoples originate in the north carries no special significance in either case. The Dar al-Islam is vast in all directions, and the north is just one of many insignificant outlying regions. It has no particular mystique.

The periphery of Creation is only ever a concern when it threatens the Dar al-Islam in a more insidious way. Mixing with the infidels is not something Ibn Jubayr approves of generally. There are hints of this attitude in his description of Frankish Syria, which has ‘continuous farms and ordered settlements, whose inhabitants are all Muslims, living

⁸³ Rashid ad-Din, *Jami al-Tawarikh*, in *Rashid-ad-Din: Sbornik letopisei*, Vols. I-III, trans. by Iu.P. Verkhovsky, ed. by I.P. Petrushevsky (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1960), Vol. II, p. 50. My translation from the Russian.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50. The *Yasa* was a codified set of laws that Mongol tradition ascribed to Chingiss Khan.

comfortably with the Franks'. Ibn Jubayr's response: 'God protect us from such temptation'. Seduced by reasonable taxation and autonomy, 'the Muslim community bewails the injustice of a landlord of its own faith, and applauds the conduct of its opponent and enemy'.⁸⁶ This strikes him as a dangerous and corrupting path.

The multi-confessional society in Norman Sicily is the most threatening to Ibn Jubayr's Islamic worldview. He experiences first-hand a land that not only used to be part of the Dar al-Islam and no longer is, but seems to be no worse off for it. Messina is 'the focus of ships from the world over, and thronging always with companies of travellers by reason of the lowness of prices. But,' he laments, 'it is cheerless because of the unbelief, no Muslim being settled there'.⁸⁷ One gets the sense that Ibn Jubayr feels a very profound and immediate discomfort. 'Teeming with worshippers of the Cross,' he explains, '[Messina] chokes its inhabitants, and constricts them almost to strangling'.⁸⁸ What is more troubling, the Muslims that still reside in Sicily 'live beside [the Christians] with their property and farms. The Christians treat these Muslims well and "have taken them to themselves as friends"'.⁸⁹ The discomfort is brought home when Sicilian Christians address him with the utmost courtesy and in 'supple Arabic', offer advice on customs duties, and reassure him of his safety under the king's protection.⁹⁰ He sees the Church of the Antiochean in Palermo during the festivities on Christmas Day and is utterly awestruck: 'the spectacle... must fail of description, for it is beyond dispute the most wonderful edifice in the world'.⁹¹

The Arab-Norman-Greek hybrid civilisation that Ibn Jubayr encounters in Sicily is sophisticated enough to rival Islamic civilisation. The Franks in the Levant frequently come across as a nuisance in his account, but make for a straight-forward adversary – one that Ibn Jubayr is confident Islam can overcome, given its obvious cultural and religious superiority.

⁸⁶ Ibn Jubayr, pp. 316-17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 339. Broadhurst clarifies that Ibn Jubayr is referencing the Koran (XX, 41).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 346-47.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 349. The church is now known as La Martorana. Founded by the admiral George of Antioch, a Greek Sicilian, its construction would have been completed only a few decades prior to Ibn Jubayr's visit.

In Sicily, this superiority is no longer so obvious. Ibn Jubayr's fellow Muslims appear to be getting along and cooperating with the infidels; and the Christians reciprocate. It is the eerie familiarity of the resulting society, as well as its sophistication, that is so unsettling for Ibn Jubayr. He detects a cultural and religious rival to Islam, and this is more troubling to his sensibilities than any outsider non-Muslims as such. The way he ends his description of the Church of the Antiochate is telling: 'May God, in His kindness and benevolence, soon exalt it with the *adhan* [call to prayer]'; that is, may God make it into a mosque.⁹² Ibn Jubayr goes beyond the northern boundary of the Dar al-Islam and discovers a society that appears to equal it in sophistication. That this society is in the north is immaterial. What is important is that it challenges his confidence in the usually obvious cultural and intellectual superiority of the Islamic world. His response is to shut himself off and reiterate, for himself, the centrality of the Dar al-Islam. But to what extent is this typical of medieval Muslims?

The Case of Ibn Battuta

Ibn Battuta appears to be a much more relaxed and open-minded individual than Ibn Jubayr. He travels well beyond the confines of the Dar al-Islam, and, though himself a jurist, and of the rather conservative Maliki school at that, he is never as zealously prejudicial as Ibn Jubayr. Citing Ibn Battuta's extraordinary open-mindedness vis-à-vis his experiences in Constantinople, Chism makes the case that he is a fundamentally atypical Muslim traveller.⁹³ She even disagrees with Touati's characterisation of his account as a piece *rihla* literature. Instead, she suggests Ibn Battuta's account amounts to something else entirely. She sees it as being closer to the '*aja'ib* (wonder) genre, if anything.⁹⁴

The transformation that Ibn Battuta's attitude towards the Greek Christians undergoes during his trip to Constantinople can certainly be read in a way that supports Chism's argument. At the outset, he is not at all comfortable with Christianity; when he hears church bells in Kaffa (in the Crimea), he is panicked and takes refuge in a local mosque.⁹⁵ A short time later, he travels to Constantinople in the retinue of a one of the Uzbek Khan's wives,

⁹² Ibid., p. 349.

⁹³ Chism, 'Between Islam and Christendom', pp. 59-76.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 62.

⁹⁵ Ibn Battuta, pp. 470-71.

who is also the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor. As the princess moves from the Tatar to the Greek lands, she progressively abandons her ostensible Muslim faith in favour of her native Greek Christianity; she is a ‘confessional chameleon’.⁹⁶ She leaves her mobile mosque behind, ceases to have her servants issue calls to prayer, and begins to drink wine.⁹⁷ This, Chism explains, is troubling to Ibn Battuta, in part because it makes explicit to him the link between changing location and changing inner-most belief.⁹⁸

Ultimately, Ibn Battuta does not retreat into a fortress of beliefs as Ibn Jubayr does in Sicily. Instead, he perseveres and, as Chism puts it, ‘reaches across’ confessions.⁹⁹ He gains the protection of the Emperor, and is free to tour most of the city, taking in sights such the Hagia Sophia and the numerous monasteries. In the latter, he finds a phonetic analogue to the Arab-Muslim hospital (*‘māristān’*), and a functional analogue to the Islamic religious school (*‘zāwiya’*).¹⁰⁰ He is especially moved by the austere beauty of the nuns and the singing of a boys’ choir.¹⁰¹ A senior monk named George (*‘Jirjis’*), whom he mistakes for the Emperor’s father, honours him for having visited the Holy Land, saying: ‘I clasp the hand that has entered Jerusalem and the foot that has walked within the Dome of the Rock and the great Church called Qumāma, and Bethlehem’.¹⁰² Ibn Battuta is ‘amazed at their belief in the merits of one who, though not of their religion, had entered these places’.¹⁰³ Chism points out

⁹⁶ Chism, ‘Between Islam and Christendom’, p. 73.

⁹⁷ Ibn Battuta, p. 501.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 500-03; Chism, ‘Between Islam and Christendom’, p. 73.

⁹⁹ Chism, ‘Between Islam and Christendom’, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Battuta, p. 511. In Maghrebi Arabic dialects *zāwiya* is the word for a religious school or monastery, typically called a *madrassa* in much of the rest of the Muslim world.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 511-12.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 513; Beckingham explains: ‘By no possible chronology can Ibn Battuta have visited Constantinople before the death of Andronicus II,’ who had abdicated and lived as a monk until his death on 12/13 February, 1332. Moreover, Andronicus’ monastic name was Antonius, not Georgius. This is evidently a case of mistaken identity (*Ibid.*, p. 513, n. 342).

¹⁰³ Ibn Battuta, p. 513.

that further exploration is limited not by Ibn Battuta's sensibilities – he is only too eager to enter the Hagia Sophia and the other sacred places – but by his status as a protected Muslim foreigner in the city.¹⁰⁴ In a matter of weeks he goes from panicking at the sound of church bells to being an eager tourist in Constantinople, with no hint of the kind of unease and suffocation Ibn Jubayr experiences in Sicily. Chism takes this as evidence of Ibn Battuta having learned to 'resist withdrawing from discomforts and aversions of transcultural encounters' and to 'improvise grounds of connection'.¹⁰⁵ This is a plausible reading, but it is incomplete, because it ignores much of the rest of the account.

Judging by the entirety of his account, Ibn Battuta, though remarkably open-minded, remains firmly grounded in the Islamic worldview. Set down in writing after he returned home, the account not a day-by-day journal but a coherent work detailing some thirty years of experience. It amounts not to a series of snapshots of his mind at different points during his travels, but to a picture of his attitudes and dispositions *after* he completed his travels. Passages detailing legs of the journey preceding Constantinople do not necessarily show the views he held *while* on those legs. It is a mistake to read the text and trace Ibn Battuta's personal development and growth through the text as Chism does. When recounting events from decades ago, even if referencing hypothetical notes, Ibn Battuta would likely have been looking back at all parts of his journey with the set of values he held at the time of writing. The only possible exception is if he deliberately crafted his account to show a 'development' in outlook. But even in this case Chism's thesis does not hold up, because at no point after Constantinople is Ibn Battuta quite as open to the non-Islamic again, something that would surely not be the case had he wished to emphasise his supposed transformation and growth.

On several legs of the journey post-dating Constantinople Ibn Battuta looks to be grounded in Islamic values not at all dissimilar to those of Ibn Jubayr, albeit in a more relaxed way. China, in Ibn Battuta's account, is nothing short of magnificent. Contrary to Rashid ad-Din's pointed jab (see above), Ibn Battuta admits to Chinese material sophistication. 'The Chinese,' he writes, 'are of all peoples the most skilful in crafts and attain the greatest perfection in them. This is well known and people have described it and spoken at length about it'.¹⁰⁶ They also do a good job of keeping records to ensure honest mercantile practice,

¹⁰⁴ Chism, 'Between Islam and Christendom', pp. 75-76.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Battuta, p. 891.

and the safety of Chinese roads earns Ibn Battuta's appreciation as a veteran traveller: 'China is the safest and best country for the traveller. A man travels for nine months alone with great wealth and has nothing to fear'.¹⁰⁷ He even meets an ascetic hermit in a cave outside of Canton ('Sīn Kalān'), though he is not quite sure what to make of the meeting.¹⁰⁸ Yet, as Ibn Battuta himself summarises:

China, for all its magnificence, did not please me. I was deeply depressed by the prevalence of infidelity and when I left my lodging I saw many offensive things which distressed me so much that I stayed at home and went out only when it was necessary. When I saw Muslims it was as though I had met my family and my relatives.

This is a far cry from the Ibn Battuta of Constantinople. The bulk of the account post-Constantinople shows that Ibn Battuta's fascination with Greek Christianity and culture was singular; one gets the sense that he opened his mind so widely on that occasion rather by accident. The worldview in which he is always grounded is the same as that of Ibn Jubayr. While Ibn Battuta acknowledges the material sophistication of Chinese civilisation, it remains culturally and religiously unsatisfactory. For this reason, and perhaps because Ibn Battuta is after all a much more relaxed man than Ibn Jubayr, China is not as much of a threat to Islam in his view as Norman Sicily is in Ibn Jubayr's. China's lack of faith disturbs Ibn Battuta, but it does not, on balance, threaten the supremacy of the Dar al-Islam. Again, there is no indication of any special mystique associated with the cardinal direction.

Personality is the real difference between Ibn Battuta and Ibn Jubayr. Ibn Jubayr travels to Upper Egypt and Nubia to cross the Red Sea to the Hejaz at the port-town of Aydhāb. He does not think highly of the locals:

This race from the Sudan is more astray from the (right) path, and have less reason, than the animals. They have no religion save the formal words professing the unity of God, which they utter to display that they are Muslims. But behind that are corrupt beliefs and practices that cannot be condoned and are unlawful... In a word, they are a breed of no regard and it is no sin to pour maledictions upon them.¹⁰⁹

As Ibn Jubayr approaches the vaguely-defined and porous southern edge of the Dar al-Islam, he sees people who claim to be Muslims but are clearly only superficially so. Their un-

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 893.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 897.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Jubayr, p. 66.

Islamic conduct, made worse by hypocrisy (in claiming that they are Muslims), earns them Ibn Jubayr's contempt. He is rather quick to write them off.

Ibn Battuta also visits Sub-Saharan Africa, albeit on the western side. He too, is initially unimpressed: 'I was sorry I had come to their country, because of their bad manners and contempt for white people'.¹¹⁰ Much like Ibn Jubayr, he is prepared to give up on the Africans, 'convinced that no good was to be hoped for from these people'. But, unlike Ibn Jubayr, he is open-minded enough to explore deeper, deciding 'to go and see the capital of their king'.¹¹¹ His patience proves justified, as he eventually meets proper Muslims. They exhibit Islamic virtue, not least of which is hospitality: 'I met the qādī of Māllī 'Abd al-Rahmān, who came to me; he is a Black, a Hājj, an excellent man with noble qualities; he sent me a cow as a welcoming gift,' while the dragoman Dūghā is 'one of the most distinguished and important of the Blacks; he sent me a bull'.¹¹² The Sultan of Mali, by contrast, Ibn Battuta deems 'a miserly king' because 'a big gift is not to be expected from him'.¹¹³ Despite the two hundred-year gulf between the two travellers, Ibn Battuta and Ibn Jubayr are grounded in the same worldview: Dar al-Islam is central in Creation, and everything else is relatively unimportant except when it threatens or undermines this centrality. Ibn Jubayr is simply quick to identify and condemn peoples and societies who pose such a threat, while Ibn Battuta is willing to dig a little a deeper.

* * *

The medieval Islamic Weltbild was similar to its Latin Christian counterpart. They both drew on Hellenic ideas and both reconciled these ideas with their respective monotheistic, Abrahamic faiths. That both ultimately saw the world as testament to the power of God is no small commonality; after all, they both subordinated Creation to the same God. Each saw their respective holy lands and holy cities as the focal point or navel of Creation, and reinforced this significance through pilgrimage. In these respects, the Muslim way of looking at the world was profoundly similar to the Latin Christian.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Battuta, p. 950.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 951.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 956.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 957.

Nevertheless, the Persian conception, in which the outer six ‘tracts’ were uniformly sized and arranged around the central tract (*Xwanirah*) imparted to the Muslims the sense that no particular cardinal direction was any more important than any other. The Dar al-Islam, superseding Persia, occupied the middle of Creation, and neither its northern, eastern, nor southern periphery held special mystique. Ibn Jubayr found Norman Sicily unsettling not because it was in the north, but because its sophistication, and seduction of Muslims, undermined a major tenet of his world picture: that the Dar al-Islam is central.

European travellers succeeded in imparting to their contemporaries in Europe an idea of the sheer vastness of the world. As the preceding chapters show, Europeans generally interpreted the new information, alongside the old, by organising it around what they ‘knew’ to be true: that Creation was unified under God and arranged along an east-west axis with Jerusalem at its navel. Meanwhile, the journeys had increased the intensity and immediacy with which Europeans experienced these concepts by making travel itself instrumental to understanding the world.

The Muslims, in contrast, never lost touch with how vast the world was. Most of its important parts were already within the Dar al-Islam anyway. Christianity and imperfectly known, bastardised Hellenic conceptions naturally pulled the European gaze eastward, and filled the westerners with awe in awareness of their own relatively insignificant place within God’s Creation, even as they were gaining an increasing appreciation for the fact that Creation could be experienced first-hand. Meanwhile, Islam and a comprehensively considered Graeco-Persian set of ideas fixed the Muslim gaze, even a remarkably intrepid gaze like Ibn Battuta’s, firmly on the interior of the Dar al-Islam, making the Muslims justifiably confident in the superiority of their own sophisticated civilisation. This was a civilisation not on the edge of Creation but one that occupied a central position within it. Unlike the Europeans, Muslims did not need to look abroad to see the best of what testified to God’s majesty, because God’s majesty was most visible at home.

Conclusion

Much like its medieval Islamic counterpart, the Latin Christian worldview initially arose out of a synthesis of religious and ancient knowledge. In trying to understand God's Creation, learned medieval western Europeans drew on Scripture and an array of sources from antiquity, such as Augustine of Hippo, Orosius, Isidore of Seville, and, above all, Pliny the Elder. While being collectively ignorant of many Greek works, notably Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography*, learned westerners readily employed those Greek ideas that the Roman abbreviators, chiefly Pliny, had imparted to them, such as the division of the world into continents and climatic zones. Yet world description was not exclusively the domain of scholarship. The less educated throughout the Latin West 'knew' that the East contained marvels and wonders, that it was the setting for Alexander the Great's heroic exploits and St Thomas' martyrdom, and, from the twelfth century, that it was home to the kingdom of Prester John. The combination of the views of these people and those of the scholarly elite formed the broader medieval European world picture.

The cultural and intellectual landscape within which this common world picture had evolved did not remain static. The clergy and the Latin language had, up until the late thirteenth century, enjoyed unrivalled pre-eminence in learning and literature, if not quite their complete monopolisation. The rise of vernacular languages and increasing literacy rates among the nobility and townspeople introduced a far greater number and variety of people to the western European literary landscape. This change impacted also on literature dealing with world description, a pursuit that was increasingly incorporating the less scholarly voices by the Late Middle Ages. Highly influential works such as Marco Polo's *Il Milione* and *The Book of John Mandeville*, appeared first in vernacular languages.

This diversification in literacy and literature did not lead to a complete separation of European literature into Latin and vernacular spheres. Gabrielle Spiegel suggests that the French nobility, in patronising chronicle-writing in French in the thirteenth century, gave the rise of vernacular literature a political and social dimension that put it at odds with the Latin and clerical tradition. While true to an extent, the divisions were never so stark, particularly in literature that dealt with world description. Both of the works mentioned above, *Il Milione* and *Mandeville*, were quickly translated not only into other vernaculars such as Catalan, Czech, Flemish, German, and Italian, but also into Latin. That they were sometimes

retranslated back into a vernacular from the Latin only underscores the porous boundary between the two literary spaces. As my second chapter explains, the rise of vernacular literature did not create an entirely or even mostly separate literary space with a separate dialogue about what the world was like; it rather ‘pluralised’ the existing dialogue about the nature of the world by introducing to it a greater number and variety of voices. This was the increasingly complex and diverse cultural and intellectual landscape from which Europeans journeyed to Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and to which they brought back accounts of their travels.

On their journeys, European travellers formed complex and nuanced perceptions of the East through their encounters with Asian people and places. On the one hand, pre-existing knowledge about the East was an important part of this process. Because they were visiting a place that was unfamiliar but not wholly ‘unknown’, travellers invariably drew on pre-existing ‘knowledge’ in forming their perceptions of the East. Yet, over the course of their journeys they were also deeply influenced by what they actually encountered. This is a theme common to many traveller accounts. Certainly all travellers to some extent, but especially those who lacked the political, economic, or social clout to expect luxurious hospitality, on occasion found themselves completely at the mercy of the people and lands they came across.

To speak exclusively of travellers ‘projecting’ onto a passive Asia their own pre-conceived notions and perspectives is to misunderstand the process by which they formed their perceptions. Peter Jackson sums up the issue:

It has become fashionable to represent European observers as reporting what they saw in their own mind’s eye as well as, or sometimes instead of, what confronted them, so that they looked for, and hence found, the fabulous elements that were the stock-in-trade of medieval Christian geography and ethnology.¹

As I demonstrate in my first chapter, projecting pre-existing conceptions was indeed a part of the travellers’ experience, but it was only one part. Travellers met real, breathing people and traversed real, tangible lands in Asia. Invariably, these lands and people influenced the travellers in one way or another: this is the essence of encounter, the interaction that shaped perception. It is very well to say that John of Plano Carpini, when he insisted that Prester John’s kingdom was somewhere in one of the three Indias, was projecting his own conception of the world onto Asia. But it is to miss the point entirely to say that projection was all or even most of what he did. The travel experience was far more complex. John tells

¹ Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, p.338.

us that he and his companions would have surely starved to death among the Mongols if not for one ‘Cosmas’, a Russian goldsmith in the Khan’s service who took them into his care.² Life-threatening hunger, exposure, and having his life and freedom depending on royal whim: *this* was the reality for John as much as his conviction that Prester John existed. This reality was an immensely powerful factor in shaping John’s and other travellers’ perceptions of the East. Through a combination of drawing on pre-existing ‘knowledge’ and the direct experience of and interaction with Asian lands and people, late medieval travellers formed rather unique ways of viewing the world.

Precisely because of the intensity of their encounters, the travellers’ experience reflects only a part of the wider interaction between the medieval West and Asia. While these travellers came out of the European intellectual and cultural milieu, they formed their perceptions having been influenced directly, sometimes profoundly, by Asian people and places. Their non-travelling contemporaries, in contrast, were never subjected to this influence. The vast majority of Europeans did not partake in such a powerful experience and thus cannot be said to have truly ‘interacted’ with Asia. However, they were part of the same society as the travellers, and most of the travellers eventually came back and relayed to their contemporaries and countrymen what they had found, many in written form. It can therefore be said that the medieval West as a whole ‘interacted’ with Asia *via* the travellers, albeit in an indirect and complicated way. This complexity necessitates a closer look at how travellers transmitted what they found to the rest of western society.

Several factors limited the possibility for a direct and uncomplicated transmission of travellers’ perceptions to Europe in their original state. Chief among these was the manuscript – as opposed to printing – culture of the Middle Ages, in which texts were copied out by hand. This was an ‘open’ textual culture, largely devoid of many of the modern ideas taken for granted today, such as standardisation and plagiarism. Even such a basic undertaking as copying a text produced variation; it was common for scribes to add their own thoughts and interpretations to the text via interlinear commentary and gloss. In writing new works, it was seen as good practice and a kind of homage to lift passages verbatim from old authors, particularly the ancient *auctores*, whose statements on any given subject were imbued with near-infallible authority where they did not conflict with Scripture. In short, for texts to survive and keep circulating, they had to be subjected to alteration. As a result, what may be termed the ‘author-book unit’ was extremely unstable, as new ‘authors’ entered into

² John of Plano Carpini, p. 66.

‘dialogue’ with the original writer and overall authorship became progressively more widely shared with each iteration of the text.

As my second chapter shows, this textual culture ensured that those travel accounts that circulated widely were altered to the point where the original traveller-author’s voice was no longer alone, and sometimes not even dominant. The voices of non-travellers became more prominent in the literary dialogue with each level of a text’s assimilation into European literature. I identify three such levels, each corresponding to what may be termed a ‘phase of transmission’ of a traveller’s perceptions to Europe. The process moved from basic reproductions or translations of an account (first phase), to using material from an account in the creation of a new work (second phase), and finally to putting the ‘new’ work through the same process of reproduction and translation as described in the first phase and thereby introducing even more variance (third phase). What amounted to a traveller’s perceptions – observations phrased in a particular way – quickly dissolved and were assimilated into the wider European dialogue, in the process losing the essence of what made them ‘perceptions’ and not simple ‘facts’ in the first place. I illustrate this by tracing the way Odoric of Pordenone’s perceptions broke down as *Mandeville* and its later iterations employed Odoric’s material in new and often substantially different ways.

This unique process of transmission and assimilation of information meant that late medieval Europe, as a society, interacted with Asia via travellers in a very distinct and intricate way. Europe generally did not receive fully-formed perceptions born of travellers’ complex encounters with Asian people and lands. Rather, Europeans mostly received de-contextualised ‘facts’ about the East. The information that did enter into the wider literary dialogue impressed upon Europeans the sheer size of the world without necessarily burdening them with the nuance and complexity of the ‘real’ Asia as experienced by their traveller contemporaries. Certainly, Europeans came to possess more factual knowledge than they had previously; Japan appeared on European maps and familiarity with China far surpassed what little had been known of the ‘Seres’ in antiquity. But this was not the most important consequence of Europe’s interaction with Asia via the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward journeys. Instead, travel simultaneously alerted Europeans to the sheer scale of Creation and broadened their horizons without undermining the essentially ‘medieval’ foundations and character of their broader *Weltbild*.

Within the medieval worldview, Creation itself was, above all, understood as being unified under God. It can be described as arranged along an ‘axis’, as Higgins puts it, from east to west. The navel or focal point of this Creation was in the Holy Land. As my third

chapter shows, there was substantial continuity in these ideas throughout the Middle Ages; they remained as firm in the minds of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Europeans as they had been in the minds of their ancestors. Yet, something had become noticeably different in the way Europeans understood these three ideas by the Late Middle Ages. The three underpinning conceptions had intensified and acquired a greater degree of immediacy, as Europeans became accustomed to the notion that the world, and the concepts that underpinned their conception of it, could be experienced first-hand.

I contend that this phenomenon can be traced directly to the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. My third chapter explores *The Book of John Mandeville* and its various recensions (together the *Mandeville* ‘multi-text’). I treat this work as the most emphatic and coherent articulation of the late medieval European Weltbild, based on the book’s astounding popularity and proliferation throughout the medieval West. My chapter is greatly indebted to Iain Macleod Higgins, both for his comprehensive translation of *Mandeville* into English and for his analysis, in *Writing East*, of its structure, particularly vis-à-vis the ‘east-west axis’. I apply Higgins’ ideas with a different emphasis, however. I highlight that *Mandeville*’s articulation of a world picture owes a major, two-fold debt to eastward travellers. The work employs two travel accounts, one of them Odoric of Pordenone’s report, as a framework for its world-description. It also invents a fictional traveller, Sir John, to narrate his fictional journey through the world. The world that Sir John travels and describes in the book is characterised by the same three ideas that had always underpinned the medieval European Weltbild. But it is no accident that *Mandeville*’s late medieval audience can best make sense of these three concepts through the act of travel. It is rather a legacy of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward travel, which had begun to imbue existing concepts with a greater intensity and immediacy. At the end of the fifteenth century, Columbus had brought this process to its natural and logical end: he journeyed westward, through a unified Creation, to get to the East, even as he rationalised this undertaking in terms of reconquering the Holy Land.

This conclusion points to two main potential avenues for future research. One alternative to the approach taken in this thesis may be to eschew exploration of the broader ‘medieval West’ in favour of a narrower and more focused subject, possibly a particular group within western society. The friars would be an ideal group, given that so many of the European travellers were Franciscans and Dominicans, and their natural connections to a very distinct part of European society. Such a study would be likely to highlight the intricacies of the subsequent transmission of ideas between different segments of society. For instance,

prior to setting out on his great voyages, Columbus had been exposed to strong Franciscan influences, going so far as to employ Franciscan thinking in rationalising his own at times contradictory desire for both wealth and piety. This connection is touched upon briefly in Chapter Three, citing Valerie Flint's perceptive comments, but there is certainly room for further inquiry. This would likely yield a better understanding of peculiarities and nuances, which ought to qualify the conclusions of the admittedly broad approach taken in the present thesis. I have attempted to take into account as many of these qualifications as possible, so as not to force upon the evidence an unjustifiably sweeping conclusion, but a more narrowly-focused study would naturally be more conducive to accounting for nuance and complexity.

Alternatively, future inquiry might follow and expand upon the broad approach used in this thesis. I have traced the growing immediacy in and intensification of existing concepts to the eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but it may well be possible to trace elements of this process further into the past. The crusades and pilgrimage to the Near East would be of particular interest here, even though both have been high-profile areas of research for some time in medieval scholarship in their own right. Intercultural and interreligious contact between Latin Christians and Muslims, as well as non-Latin Christians, have been studied in some detail, including the role it played in shaping European geographic knowledge; Bernard Hamilton offers especially insightful commentary on this subject, and J.R.S. Phillips puts it in context of the wider European 'expansion' outwards.³ Meanwhile, developments in late medieval pilgrimage have also received attention, notably the 'normalisation' of *curiositas* (profane or secular curiosity) as a motivation for pilgrimage.⁴

In my third chapter I note that medieval historiography has found it expedient to speak of medieval periods of cultural and intellectual revival as 'renaissances' that predated *the* 'Renaissance' of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. I suggest that it may be equally expedient to identify 'ages' of discovery prior to *the* Age of Discovery. Although, as noted in the introduction, Lisa Bailey, Lindsay Diggelmann, and Kim Phillips speak of a recent historiographical shift away from the 'paradigm of discovery' and toward encounter, it would

³ See Hamilton, 'The Impact of the crusades on western geographical knowledge'; J.R.S. Phillips, *Medieval Expansion*.

⁴ See for example Christian K. Zacher, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage: The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins Uni Press, 1976); Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978).

still be possible to concentrate on encounters, and give due consideration to their complexity, while identifying broader periods of heightened activity in terms of European exploration and travel. If the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was one such period, there were almost certainly others, whether of pan-European or localised scope (like the ‘renaissances’), likely with their own influences on the European Weltbild. In that sense, it may be worthwhile extending the approach of this thesis to pilgrimage and crusade and how they affected European understanding of the world. The impact that I trace to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century eastward travel may be discernible earlier, or crusade and pilgrimage may have had an independent and altogether different influence.

A Thought on Columbus, By Way of Afterword

Although Columbus’ discovery of the Americas shattered the European Weltbild, it did so quite by accident. Columbus had gone against mainstream scholarly opinion and insisted that the earth’s circumference was small enough to make a westward voyage to Asia possible. Most of his medieval contemporaries knew better. In that sense, he rather stumbled into a discovery that only later, and only by chance, proved revolutionary for European geography and history. The discovery was also an accident in another, broader sense. Although in retrospect it was the harbinger of a new era, virtually everything about Columbus’ voyage was medieval. The man had learned from the Franciscans that acquiring riches could be pious; he had come to fancy himself the hero of a twelfth-century Cistercian’s prophecy; and he had read Marco Polo, Pierre d’Ailly, and *The Book of John Mandeville* in preparation for his voyage. Because Columbus’ plan required going west to arrive in the East, it relied on two things: the earth had to be unified (or uninterrupted), and it had to be traversable from east to west and vice versa. In fact, even a glance at world maps from as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries shows that the unity of the world under God, as His Creation, and the alignment of this Creation along an east-west axis, which was at the heart of medieval conceptions of power, knowledge, and history, had always been two of the three ideas that underpinned the medieval European Weltbild. The third was that the Holy Land was the navel of Creation, and Columbus invoked even this tenet as he rationalised his search for eastern riches in terms of mounting a new expedition to recover Jerusalem.

And yet, for all its medieval context, Columbus’ voyage was quite singular. True, Portuguese explorers had spent the better part of the fifteenth century scouting further and further afield in the Atlantic Ocean, reaching the Azores, and along the western coast of

Africa, but no one had taken a leap of faith quite like Columbus. Doubtless, one reason for this was that few had made the same mistake in calculations as Columbus. But even so, no European before Columbus had yet put to the test the underpinnings of their world in such a radical way. In this sense, Simek is correct: Columbus' voyage was revolutionary, as it put into practice something that was theoretically known to be true but was too psychologically intimidating to attempt to prove or otherwise test. Clearly, something had changed, between the time of eleventh- and twelfth-century mapmakers and that of Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century. Equally clearly, it was not the broad underpinnings of the European Weltbild; these stayed the same.

What had changed was the way medieval Europeans were inclined to understand the concepts on which their worldview rested. In the middle of the fourteenth century, *The Book of John Mandeville* – the most emphatic articulation of the late medieval world picture – presented a world underpinned by these very same concepts, but it organised and articulated its world picture with the aid of travel. William of Boldensele and Odoric of Pordenone had each seen and described about half of this world, so the Mandeville-author used their accounts as a foundation to which to add from other sources. But he did not stop there; he created Sir John, a fictional traveller-narrator, to guide his reader through the finished edifice. Essentially, the medieval world and its underpinnings had become much more subject to personal experience, much more immediate, and much more practically real. They had, in a word, intensified in the minds of medieval Europeans.

This intensification was the legacy of the great eastward journeys of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. By the end of the fifteenth century, it had culminated in Columbus' voyage, compelling him to take the chance that he would re-emerge in the East after sailing long enough westward. The Portuguese explorers did not take this chance, nor, despite explaining how circumnavigation of the earth might be achieved, did the fictional Sir John. In his erroneously-calculated gambit, Columbus, the last great medieval traveller to the East and the European most willing to stake everything on his conception of the world, took to an extreme the 'intensifying' process that his thirteenth- and fourteenth-century predecessors' journeys had begun. It is rather fitting, then, that he was the one to stumble across a fourth continent and so set in motion the undoing of the medieval European Weltbild.

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