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# I

## Taken in the Spirit: Imagined Pilgrimage in Medieval Spirituality and Art

### ☞ The maps

In the opening folios to the first volume of Matthew Paris' renowned and monumental universal history, the *Chronica majora* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College [hereafter CCCC], Ms. 26), lies a remarkable series of itinerary maps [color plate 1 and figs. 1–6]. Considering that they come from the otherwise distant and seemingly alien visual culture of the Middle Ages, these pages, with their depictions of roads, travel times and movements, strike our modern eyes as artifacts oddly familiar and accessible. Taken together, the itinerary's unique seven pages constitute a kind of medieval road map, linking London [color plate 1] with the great centers of pilgrimage, Rome and Jerusalem. Usually, the more well-known examples of medieval cartography, those heavily wrought medieval *mappae mundi* (literally "cloths of the world"), tend to confound the modern viewer with their plethora of detail and profusions of legends about fantastic peoples. The Hereford world map [fig. 7], for example, is so densely packed with schematic displays of theological truths that the viewer is easily lost amongst its twisted and distorted geographies, which overflow with legendary peoples, creatures, and events of history and myth. Even specialists, then, are used to having to tease out of this thick array of information something discernible, like the location of Jerusalem (in the center) or Rome (directly beneath), and work from there to get the overall sense of how these kinds of maps display the medieval world. But such confusion is patently not the case in the pages by Matthew Paris. Instead, we sense something more immediately available, familiar and comprehensible; they look like strip maps, those maps designed by travel clubs or the internet to aid their members in planning out their travels or vacations.

And indeed, there are interesting intersections between these maps and our modern "trptych planners" – the need to determine how long each leg of the journey will take, the sense of anticipation they encourage, and the desire to trace the route with our fingers and imitate with our bodies the depicted journey. And yet still their appreciation, their reception and comprehension by a medieval monastic audience, for whom these maps were made, suggest that different connotations would have attended their workings and manipulations.<sup>1</sup> For in their day, these pages brought the spaces of Europe and the Holy Land before the desirous gaze of the

<sup>1</sup> As we will discuss below, there are four different versions of these maps, two of which prefaced Matthew's *Chronica majora*. The third version, less complex, yet more finished and decorated, prefaced the *Historia anglorum* and was likely intended for the gaze of King Henry III, or perhaps his son, Edward I. We take up this version in chapter 6.

cloistered monks of St. Albans abbey, England. They made available for their perusal and scrutiny those distant lands, along with the stories and legends that made up the medieval sense of the world and its place in geographic and eschatological history. For those Benedictine monks, who were discouraged from traveling and who sought an ideal of stability in the cloister, these maps must have provided a wonderful opportunity to contemplate journeying through a distant world beyond their monastery's walls.

Stretched out across seven pages, these maps trace a route from London, through southeast England, to France, Italy, the city of Rome, and eventually to the Holy Land and the holy city of Jerusalem. Their strip-like format, their appended flaps [see figs. 4, 8], and their dynamic text-image interactions are fascinating elements of their codex design; they asked Matthew's brethren, as much as they do the present-day viewer, to handle, manipulate, and trace their motions across the surface of the world. The journey begins in the lower-left, at the city of London, from which depart two routes that mark out the length of time it takes to get to the next city – generally a day or *journée*, but sometimes a day and half, or just half a day. The routes continue up the page to the coast at Dover, a side route having veered off to the left, into the sea (*vers la Mar*), beyond the frame. The routes begin again in the next passage, at the coast of France in the towns of Calais and Wissant, and progress up the page, through their respective cities. This kind of motion, up the page, and then back down to the body and up again, tracing a capital “N,” continues for four pages. On the fifth page the reader encounters southern Italy [fig. 4]. Here the relatively straightforward design gives way to profusion and complexity as, for example, texts fill the space of southern Italy and the viewer encounters extra pieces of vellum that have been appended to the top and side of the recto folio. Both texts and these flaps extend the normal boundaries of the codex, and present the viewer with the possibility of changing the itinerary. By turning the flaps over the recto or verso of its page, or extending them out, the monk could reconfigure the spaces of Christian Europe, alter the routes, and refashion the meanings to be derived from them. The last two pages of the itinerary [figs. 5, 6] are filled with legends and descriptions of the Holy Land, in the midst of which, at the very end of the road, lies the ideal and highly charged geometric depiction of the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

Even in this simple reading, getting from London to the Holy City takes some doing. Although inaccurate and “unreliable” as far as modern maps go, nonetheless, it was precisely this sort of manipulation and movement, along with the interactive, even playful encounter they encourage, that I think Matthew Paris wished to create in these uniquely engaging materials. But the reader's movement through these maps was not just about satisfying a curiosity for travel, for there are qualities in their appreciation that borrowed from the contemporary uses and attitudes of devotional images, which were then coming to the fore both with the popularity of more private, meditative forms of devotional practices, as well as the flood of icons to hit the Latin West after its capture of Constantinople in

1204.<sup>2</sup> On the back of his only surviving *mappa mundi* [color plate 11], on what was originally the seventh folio (and therefore closely following the itineraries), Matthew painted in a close-up, monumental style three scenes of holy visages [color plate 111]. These images have a starkly frontal immediacy to them and suggest a psychological engagement in the stories to which they bear witness. In fact, in the lower right corner Matthew painted what is thought to be the earliest rendering of the Veronica icon in the Latin West, that sacred handkerchief with which Christ, on the way to his crucifixion, wiped the blood and sweat from his face, leaving a miraculous impression or portrait of himself. As we shall see in chapter 4, Matthew's *mappa mundi*, sharing the same folio as these devotional images, is very similar to his itineraries, for he designed this geographic rendering of western Europe so that it is "oriented" toward Jerusalem, and so made possible the same kind of imagined journey as his itinerary, inflected now with the devotional attitudes and practices that attended his rendering of the Veronica on the map's obverse.

## ❧ The artist

Matthew Paris was the main chronicler in the mid-thirteenth century at the rich and powerful Benedictine abbey of St. Albans, England.<sup>3</sup> With eighteen extant manuscripts by Matthew, or containing his work, we benefit from what Cynthia Hahn aptly described as an embarrassment of riches of both sources and contexts.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the focus of my exploration is made possible only because its foundations have been so ably laid by the previous scholars who have sifted through this wealth of materials. The groundbreaking work of the historian Richard Vaughan was based on detailed investigations into the materials and the contents of Matthew's manuscripts,

<sup>2</sup> See generally, and for further references, the work of Hans Belting: *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. M. Bartusis and R. Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1981), esp. pp. 25–6, and the appendix, "Western Art after 1204, the Importation of Relics and Icons," pp. 203–21; and *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 349–76.

<sup>3</sup> Beginning in the mid-twelfth century, St. Albans could be considered the premier Benedictine Abbey in all of England. For histories of the Abbey, see most recently, Michelle Still, *The Abbot and the Rule: Religious Life at St. Albans, 1290–1349* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Martin Henig and P. Lindley, eds., *Alban and St Albans: Roman and Medieval Architecture, Art and Archaeology* (Leeds: British Archaeological Association, 2001); Rodney M. Thomson, *Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey, 1066–1235* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982); Eileen Roberts, *The Hill of the Martyr: An Architectural History of St. Albans Abbey* (Dunstable: Book Castle, 1993); Robert Runcie, ed., *Cathedral and City: St. Albans Ancient and Modern* (London: Martyn Associates, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 283.

along with their rich intertextual references, to produce a magisterial synthesis of Matthew's opus.<sup>5</sup> Rodney Thomson worked with surviving book lists, inventories of the abbey's scriptoria, and intertextual references to manuscripts, and synthesized from these a catalogue of the books that were either held in the abbey's collection or were produced there in the period just prior to Matthew's *flourit*.<sup>6</sup> Suzanne Lewis's thorough study of the illustrations of Matthew Paris' *Chronica majora*, including his maps, provided a much-needed overview of Matthew's artistic achievements, and the sources and traditions upon which he drew.<sup>7</sup> Together these studies establish an invaluable foundation for further explorations into the more specific contexts of Matthew's maps, and the ideas and attitudes they generate.<sup>8</sup> Drawing on these more broadly conceived studies, and the rich contextual and intertextual fabric that they weave, we are equipped to move beyond questions of sources or origins to explore issues that lay at the very heart of medieval manuscript culture – the mental and physical habits of constructing and handling manuscripts and the ideas of time and space that those habits create and further mediate. This study is less a monograph on Matthew Paris' maps, though those of course define its central materials, so much as a case-study of how scholars of medieval manuscripts might begin to think about the very real and practical issues that confronted the users of what was, really, the most widely disseminated medium of monastic intellectual and visual culture – the manuscript codex. If we free ourselves from the manuscript stemma, which so often seems to presuppose a lost model or exemplar, providing some indirect account of authorial intent even as it eclipses the possibilities of inventiveness, then we can focus instead on larger and more fundamental issues and attitudes that shaped and gave expression to the monastic environment in general, issues such as: how did medieval intellectual culture understand ideas of space and time, ideas of place and the memories, institutional or personal, that could shape space into something palpably meaningful, and, perhaps most importantly, desirable? In the end, we shall see that issues and practices as common as handling a book, or turning its pages, become a rather complex affair invested with a great

<sup>5</sup> Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> Thomson, *Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey*.

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the "Chronica Majora"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> See also Michael Gaudio, "Matthew Paris and the Cartography of the Margins," *Gesta* 39 (2000): 50–7, which I understand was in press when my study on Matthew Paris' materials became available, Daniel K. Connolly, "Imagined Pilgrimage in the Itinerary Maps of Matthew Paris," *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999): 598–622; and Daniel K. Connolly, "Imagined Pilgrimage in Gothic Art: Maps, Manuscripts and Labyrinths" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1998). More recently, Katherine Breen, "Returning Home from Jerusalem: Matthew Paris's First Map of Britain in Its Manuscript Context," *Representations* 89 (2005): 59–93; while this last study does address some of the dynamics of the itineraries, it is more concerned with the map of Britain on the back of the 'Royal' version of the itineraries (BL Ms. Royal 14 c vii), the subject of chapter 6.

deal of meaning and value for those who resided in the cloistered world of medieval England.

Scholars who work on Matthew Paris' materials are quickly confronted by contradictory assessments of his achievements, both in his activities as an historian and as an artist. His history writing and artworks are seen on the one hand as traditional, avidly conservative, and, on the other hand, as innovative, sometimes even quirky. Matthew seems to have been of a very independent mind-frame, often critical of the king, and of the influence that foreigners exerted upon the royal court, and critical of the papacy and any incursions upon the privileges of St. Albans. His histories remain, however, one of the most widely consulted primary sources for scholars not only for the events they record, but also for the attendant attitudes, beliefs and opinions that inform his reportage.<sup>9</sup>

Criticism of the artwork of this somewhat enigmatic character has itself moved between polar opposites, from near hagiographic praise to more sober and increasingly severe assessments of his accomplishments. Some 150 years after his death, Thomas Walsingham (*d.* 1422), who himself had continued the project of Matthew's chronicle writing in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, wrote of Matthew Paris in his own *Gesta abbatum*:

At this time, too, flourished and died Dom Matthew Paris; monk of St Albans, and an eloquent and famous man full of innumerable virtues; a magnificent historian and chronicler; an excellent author (*dictator*), who frequently revolved in his heart the saying: "Laziness is the enemy of the soul," and whom widespread fame commended in remote parts where he had never been. Diligently compiling his chronicle from the earliest times up to the end of his life, he fully recorded the deeds of magnates, both lay and ecclesiastical, as well as various and wonderful events; and left for the notice of posterity a marvelous record of the past. He had such skill in the working (*sculpendo*) of gold and silver and other metal, and in painting pictures, that it is thought that there has been no equal to him since in the Latin world.<sup>10</sup>

While there is no evidence that Matthew worked in metals or sculpture of any kind, Walsingham does identify the key elements of Matthew's posthumous reputation, his prodigious output, compiling and recording various events and deeds, and his painting and illustrations of the same, all of

<sup>9</sup> His history writing takes a very personal tone in fact, with the events understood from his point of view, with all the biases that attend the avidly chauvinistic. See the assessments of Antonia Gransden, "Matthew Paris," in *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 356–80, and Björn Weiler, "Matthew Paris, Richard of Cornwall's Candidacy for the German Throne, and the Sicilian Business," *Journal of Medieval History* 26 (2000): 71–92.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 19–20, containing other notices and posthumous descriptions of his life, his brief travels to Norway (to reform an abbey there), the gifts he received and gave to St. Albans, and many of his illustrated works.



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