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**Mapping English onto the World: Vernacular Cartography in
*The Wonders of the East***

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Mapping English onto the World: Vernacular Cartography in
The Wonders of the East

by

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Report

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Dedication

This report is dedicated to my parents, for their unwavering love and support, and to J, for his patience, encouragement, and laughter these past two years.

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This project could not have reached its present state without the patience, encouragement, and thoughtful suggestions of my advisors, Mary Blockley and Daniel Birkholz. I am deeply grateful to have two such colorful examples of modern medieval scholarship in my life. Thanks go also to Julia Mickenberg, for her unique insights into picture books, and to Geraldine Heng, whose class inspired an early version of this project. Lastly, I would like to send my thanks to Carl Berkhout of the University of Arizona, who first encouraged me to study Anglo-Saxon many years ago.

Abstract

Mapping English onto the World: Vernacular Cartography in *The Wonders of the East*

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This report takes as its subject the Anglo-Saxon text of *The Wonders of the East*, a medieval *liber monstrum* which appears in three English manuscripts from the 11th and 12th centuries. It argues that *Wonders* is a uniquely English text, and that the use of the vernacular is an attempt to spread and validate English usage across various literary and scientific forms.

The first section examines briefly the relationships between the three manuscripts, then turns to one in particular, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v., for the remainder of the study. This first section will also detail the contents of each of the three manuscripts, and the various thematic and linguistic connections between them.

The second section turns to the text and illustrations of *Wonders*, and will consider the use and significance of distinctly “English” vocabulary in describing foreign monsters. It will show that the use of vernacular neologisms to describe foreign spaces

and monstrous creatures is an attempt to explore the potential uses of English, and was inspired by a political and cultural environment which encouraged the use of the vernacular in an attempt to grow a national identity.

The third section examines a brief passage describing the wondrous creatures known as the *donestre*, and will show examine the anxieties revealed in the naming and renaming of these creatures. It then explores the relationship between the visual representation and textual description of the *donestre*, and the implications of the discrepancies therein, to our understanding of the text.

The fourth section reads *The Wonders of the East* as a map. First, it unpacks the myriad potential meanings held within the medieval map; then, it examines the structural and thematic concerns of the text, and the ways in which those concerns work to literally map English onto the Eastern world.

My final section considers the implications of my reading of *Wonders*. It shows that this reading, by acknowledging for the first time, the distinct “Englishness” of the text, opens up *Wonders* to further study from a number of theoretical and disciplinary viewpoint.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	ix
List of Illustrations	x
Introduction.....	1
The Manuscripts.....	7
"Pæs læssan milgetæles"	14
"Pæt is mid us Donestre genemned"	26
"East ðanon"	32
Conclusions.....	36

List of Tables

Table 1: Compound neologisms in the Anglo-Saxon <i>Wonders of the East</i> , Cotton Tiberius B.v.....	22
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List of Illustrations

Illustration 1: The <i>healfhundinga</i> , Cotton Tiberius B.v, folio 80r.....	24
Illustration 2: The <i>donestre</i> , Cotton Tiberius B.v, folio 83v	28

Introduction

In the first act of William Shakespeare's *Othello*, the titular Moor, accused of employing "foul charms" in his courtship of Desdemona, defends himself before the Venetian Duke and court, insisting that "she loved me for the dangers I had passed" in the course of a military life.¹ He claims that the earliest stages of their relationship centered on a retelling of his worldly travels, of the

...antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch
heaven...
And of the cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline...²

This last "danger," the race of monstrous men known as the *blemmyae*, would have been immediately recognizable to Shakespeare's audience by description, if not necessarily by name; less than a decade before *Othello*'s first performance, Sir Walter Raleigh wrote of such headless wonders in his immensely popular travel narrative, *The Discovery of Guiana*.³ Even prior to Raleigh's writing, however, the *blemmyae* were popular figures of travel narratives from classical to early modern times, appearing in the works of Pliny the Elder, Augustine, Isidore of Seville, John Mandeville, and Marco Polo.

¹ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 77, 85.

² Ibid, 84.

³ Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana and the Journal of the Second Voyage thereto*, ed. Henry Morley (London, Paris, et.al: Cassell & Co., 1887), 106-108.

What is important here is not Shakespeare's familiarity with the conventional *mirabilia*, but rather his confidence in the idea that a thorough description of the world beyond Venice—and the boundless wonders that that world contains—would indeed be enough to seduce Desdemona, or any woman for that matter. (After all, upon hearing the story of Desdemona's seduction, the Duke concedes, "I think this tale would win my daughter too."⁴) Also significant is the obvious pleasure Shakespeare takes in the rich interplay of foreign and vernacular vocabulary in this description of the other, from French and Spanish (that is, Continental) words of place ("antres," "deserts," "quarries,") to Greek conceptual compounds ("Anthropophagi") and solidly Germanic concrete nouns ("rocks," "hills," "men.") Indeed, this wanton juxtaposition of vocabularies serves to presage the eventually wildly multicultural union of the Italian Desdemona with the Moorish Othello in Cyprus, besieged by the Turks. By using English words to describe these foreign landscapes, moreover, Shakespeare is simultaneously demystifying the Eastern world (how dangerous can these creatures be if we can call them "men"?) and extending the reach of the English tongue, and, by proxy, the English.

By the time of Shakespeare's writing, of course, this was a largely gratuitous exercise: the English colonial and mercantile projects of the early 17th century had ensured that the English tongue was well on its way to being an international language, and the English themselves were poised to become an Early Modern superpower, hardly in danger of attack from Eastern monsters, real or imaginary. But the patterns I have identified in this brief passage—the juxtaposition of vernacular and foreign terms, the use

⁴ Shakespeare, 85.

of distinctly Germanic terms to describe the exotic, and a faith in the seductive power of the East—appear in a number of earlier texts.⁵

This report will consider one such text⁶—the 11th century Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*, an early English book of monsters which includes among its marvels the *blemmyae* and Anthropophagi, described above. It will explore how and why English is used in that text in conjunction with and in opposition to “foreign” tongues, and how the material and social contexts in which *Wonders* appeared change our understanding of the text’s attitudes towards the East. This study will add to the already vibrant conversation surrounding *Wonders* by emphasizing the linguistic aspects of the text commonly ignored by critics, who have traditionally focused their studies on more general questions of theme. Some of these readings imagine an Anglo-Saxon audience which was threatened by the monstrous bodies being described: Dana Oswald, for example, argues that in the *Wonders*, “the Anglo-Saxon monster is figured as a permanent Other,” and that the monstrous body “cannot be reformed or redeemed.”⁷ Greta Austin, on the other hand, takes a significantly more generous view, arguing that, “the *Wonders* views Eastern peoples not with distaste, but rather with curiosity and an interest in hierarchical order,” and that the focus on monstrosity reflects a desire to “show the hierarchical spectrum of

⁵ For a particularly fascinating example, see lines 993 and following of Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Alliterative Morte Arthur* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994.)

⁶ By “text”, I mean the literary content of *The Wonders of The East*—the work itself, separated from its manuscript contexts and illustration cycles. I will use the word this way through this report.

⁷ Dana M. Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, Gender in the Middle Ages 5 (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 65.

those peoples to whom God offers grace.”⁸ These sorts of readings, grounded as they are in the relationship between the imagined audience and the Eastern wonders, necessarily ignore the textual and visual subtleties which this study will attempt to illuminate.

In exploring the use of the vernacular in general and distinctly “English” vocabulary in particular, I hope to show that *Wonders* attempts to find a place for English and *the* English among established Latin authorities in an ever-expanding world. Even the briefest glance at the texts held alongside *Wonders* in one manuscript⁹ reveals a curiosity about the limits of the English language and the English people: lists of Popes and Roman emperors are given with Anglo-Saxon glosses and marginal notes; a Latin metrical calendar includes the feasts of a number of native English saints; a complete text of Ælfric’s translation of Bede’s *De Temporibus Anni* appears with Latin headings; France is labeled “Suðbryttas” on the *mappamundi* which appears a few leaves away from *Wonders*. In these and many other instances, encyclopedic and physical geographies become linguistic geographies, writing the English tongue onto pre-existing historical and geographical knowledge. Nowhere is this obsession with the power of language clearer than in the Anglo-Saxon text of the *Wonders*, which, I hope to show, has much more to say about English and *the* English than it does Eastern wonders or the Eastern world, despite its title.

⁸ Greta Austin, “Marvelous Peoples or Marvelous Races? Race and the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*,” in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), 28.

⁹ London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v. For manuscript information, see pp 6-11 below.

I will begin my study of *The Wonders of the East* by examining the three early medieval English manuscripts in which it appears, and by clarifying my decision to focus this study on just one of the three: London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v. This first section will also detail the contents of each of the three manuscripts, and the various thematic and linguistic connections between them.

The second section of this study, “Pæs læssan milgetæles,” will turn to the text and illustrations of *Wonders*, and will consider the use and significance of distinctly “English” vocabulary in describing foreign wonders. It will show that the use of compound neologisms to describe physical spaces and foreign creatures is an attempt to explore the potential uses of English, and was inspired by a political and cultural environment which encouraged the use of the vernacular in an attempt to grow a national identity.

My third section, “Pæt is mid us Donestre genemned,” will examine a brief passage describing the wondrous creatures known as the *donestre*, and will show that the anxieties revealed in the naming and renaming of these creatures is found throughout the text. It will then explore the relationship between the visual representation and textual description of the *donestre*, and the implications of the discrepancies therein, to our understanding of the text.

The fourth section of this study, “East ðanon,” will read *The Wonders of the East* as a map. First, it will unpack the myriad potential meanings held within the medieval map; then, it will examine how the structure and thematic concerns of the text work to

literally map English onto the Eastern world. Finally, it will consider the implications of a cartographic reading to the criticism surrounding *Wonders*.

The final section of this study, somewhat hopefully titled “Conclusions,” will consider the implications of my reading of *The Wonders of the East*, sculpted as it is from the scraps of various theoretical frameworks. It will show that this reading, by acknowledging, perhaps for the first time, the distinct “Englishness” of the text, opens up *Wonders* to further study from a number of theoretical and disciplinary viewpoints.

The Manuscripts

There are three extant versions of the text now known as *The Wonders of the East*: London, British Library MS Cotton Vitellius A.x.v (hereafter referred to as “Vitellius”); London, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v (“Tiberius”); and Oxford Bodleian Library MS Bodley 614 (“Bodley”). Vitellius has *Wonders* only in Anglo-Saxon, Tiberius has Latin and Anglo-Saxon versions of the text, and Bodley has only the Latin. Each manuscript was copied in England, and each has illustrations accompanying *Wonders*. Although this report will focus on the Tiberius version of *Wonders*¹⁰, I want to consider briefly the circumstances in which all three manuscripts were produced, so that we might move towards an understanding of *why* they were produced, and what that says about *Wonders* as a product of Anglo-Saxon England.

The earliest of the three manuscripts is Vitellius, a compilation of two originally separate codices; N.R. Ker dates the older of the two codices to within 30 years of 1000 A.D.¹¹ *The Wonders of the East* appears in this second codex on folios 98v to 106v, between *The Life of St. Christopher* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. The most famous text in Vitellius, of course, is *Beowulf*, found on folios 132r to 201v; over half of the poem (to line 1939) is written in the same hand as *Wonders*. Historically, the majority of critical attention paid to *Wonders* has focused on this version, and specifically on the relationship between the various texts in Vitellius. The most common explanations for this complication of texts follow Kenneth Sisam’s suggestion that the manuscript might

¹⁰ See page 12-13 below.

¹¹ N.R. Ker, *A Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 279.

best be described as a “Liber de diversis monstribus, anglice”—an English book concerned with various sorts of monsters.¹² These sorts of readings, while certainly important in understanding *The Wonders of the East*, tend to ignore *Judith* and *St. Christopher*, which do not feature explicit examples of monstrosity, and as such cannot fully explain why the scribe or compiler chose to place these texts together in Vitellius. More recently, Kathryn Powell has characterized Vitellius as having “an interest in rulers and rulership, particularly in the ethical conflicts that arise in their interactions with foreign peoples as those rulers defend and expand their kingdoms.”¹³ This sort of reading is much more inclusive, and allows for a more historicized reading of each of the texts bound in Vitellius, although such studies rarely focus their close readings on any text other than *Beowulf*. Indeed, very few critical treatments of the Vitellius *Wonders* focus on anything but its relationship to its most famous neighbor. Although my focus in this report will be on the Tiberius *Wonders*, I hope that by making connections between the two English versions of the text, this report might begin to open up the very limited conversation surrounding the Vitellius *Wonders* as a discrete text outside of its manuscript context.

If little critical attention has been paid to the Vitellius *Wonders*, even less has been paid to the version found in Bodley. In his edition of the three versions of the text, M.R. James dates Bodley to the early 12th century—well after the production of

¹² Kenneth Sisam, “The Compilation of the *Beowulf* Manuscript,” in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), 96. For a similar reading, see Andy Orchard, “The *Beowulf*-Manuscript,” in *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1995).

¹³ Kathryn Powell, “Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the *Beowulf* Manuscript,” *The Review of English Studies* 57 (2006): 1-15, here 11.

Vitellius.¹⁴ Bodley is an outstanding example of Anglo-Latin scientific knowledge: the manuscript includes an illustrated calendar, computational tables, illustrated tracts on celestial bodies and the zodiac, short prose sections on comets, winds, shooting stars, and rainbows, and *Wonders of the East*, found on folios 36r to 51r.¹⁵ This manuscript is frequently used as evidence for a scientific reading of *Wonders*—critics such as Ann Knock note that the text’s inclusion in “quasi encyclopedic compilations” such as Bodley (and, as we shall see, Tiberius) suggests that the text was “generally seen as scientific.”¹⁶ Although such readings are helpful in answering general thematic questions about Bodley (and, as we shall see, can help to inform readings of *Wonders*), they rarely provide the sort of close reading of *Wonders* on the level of the word or sentence; again, it is here that I wish to intervene by studying *Wonders* both within its various manuscript contexts and as an independent literary text.

The third manuscript in which *Wonders* appears—and the manuscript on which this essay will center—is Tiberius. Ker dates the manuscript to within a few years of 1000 A.D., remarkably close to (but most likely later than) his dating of Vitellius.¹⁷ Although the exact provenance of the manuscript is still a mystery, Patrick McGurk has suggested that the manuscript was copied in Christ Church, Canterbury by a scribe from

¹⁴ M.R. James, *The Marvels of the East* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1929), 6.

¹⁵ For more on the Anglo-Saxon scientific worldview, see page 32-36 below.

¹⁶ Ann Knock, “Analysis of a Translator: the Old English *Wonders of the East*,” in *Alfred the Wise: Studies in Honor of Janet Bately on the Occasion of her Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Jane Roberts, et. al (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 121-126, here 121.

¹⁷ Ker, 225.

Winchester.¹⁸ The contents of the manuscript are thematically very similar to Bodley; included are Ælfric's translation of Bede's *De Temporibus Anni*, lists of popes, emperors, bishops, and English kings, computational tables for lunar and solar cycles, and scientific tracts concerning the sun, the moon, and the zodiac.¹⁹ Significantly, the majority of these items are given in Latin; only the Bede extracts, *Wonders*, the lists of rulers, and two small scribal notes are written in Anglo-Saxon.²⁰ The text is accompanied by elaborate illustrations in color, each of which is carefully framed.²¹ Nicholas Howe has famously read the manuscript as "a book of elsewhere," a collection of loosely related documents which "reveal a sustained engagement with the larger cultural implications of geography."²²

Much has been written about the relationship between the text and illustrations of the various manuscripts.²³ For the sake of my argument, the important facts—as outlined by Gibb in his 1977 variorum edition of *Wonders*—are as follows. First, that all four extant English copies of the text—two in Anglo-Saxon and two in Latin—descend from a single common ancestor in Latin, which was itself the descendent of a Continental text

¹⁸ Patrick McGurk, "Conclusions," in *An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 21, ed. P. McGurk (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1983) 107-109, here 109.

¹⁹ For a more detailed list of contents, see Paul Allen Gibb, "*The Wonders of the East: A Critical Edition and Commentary*" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1997), 6.

²⁰ One note, found at the end of the Latin computational tables, reads "god me helpe." The other, at the end of the Bede extract, reads "god helpe minum handum." See Kerr, 255.

²¹ The Vitellius and Bodley *Wonders* are also illustrated, but by a far less sophisticated hand.

²² Nicholas Howe, "Books of Elsewhere: Cotton Tiberius B.v. and Cotton Vitellius A.xv" in *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England: Essays in Cultural Geography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 151-194, here 154.

²³ For a thorough examination of *Wonders*' sources, and the relationship between the various versions of *Wonders*, see Patrick McGurk and Ann Knock, "The Marvels of the East," in McGurk, *Illustrated Miscellany*, especially 88-90.

known as *The Letter of Farasmanes to Hadrian*, which came into England from France.²⁴ Second, that neither Anglo-Saxon text descends from the other (that is, that they were produced independently of each other), and the two texts share a distant common ancestor which was not itself the original Anglo Saxon translation.²⁵ Finally, that the striking similarities between the illustrations accompanying the Bodley and Tiberius versions of *Wonders* suggests a common exemplar, which both illustrators followed closely, albeit with some small significant differences.²⁶

These observations have several practical implications. The independent production of two discrete Anglo-Saxon copies of *Wonders* within a century suggests that the Latin (or perhaps Old French) text was in circulation independently of its current manuscript neighbors (that is, without the scientific texts of Bodley), and that two separate manuscript compilers felt that the foreign text ought to be translated into the vernacular. Secondly, the differences between the Latin and Anglo-Saxon texts represent deliberate choices on the part of the translators to clarify or change the meaning of the Latin original for their English-literate audiences, and as such are worthy of close reading and philological study, a previously unattempted endeavor. Finally, knowledge of a common exemplar for the Bodley and Tiberius illustrations allows us to study the minute differences between those illustration cycles, and to consider the implications of those differences.

²⁴ Gibb, 14. For a discussion of the significance of this French transmission, see page XXX below.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gibb, 23.

It is important to pause here for a moment and consider the question of manuscript or compilation type, for whatever else these three manuscripts may have in common, they are most simply united by their status as miscellanies. In using this term, I follow John Scahill's understanding of the miscellany as a manuscript identified by "cohesion of some kind, which may either be external—directed towards some function—or internal, in which the relationship of the texts with each other and the shaping of the whole are factors."²⁷ Certainly each of the manuscripts described above fits these criteria; their primary differences then, as locations for the study of *Wonders*, lie in their unifying themes and the languages in which they are written. As I hinted above, I would like to argue that, as a unified miscellany, Tiberius is thematically situated between Vitellius—as Powell argues, concerned with interactions with and among foreign leaders—and Bodley, concerned, as Knock has shown, with aggregating knowledge of the outside world. Tiberius contains literary explorations of the monstrous, as in Vitellius, alongside the type of raw scientific and historical data seen in Bodley. In its simultaneous concern with "here" and "elsewhere," and in its mixed scientific, literary, political data, Tiberius acts as a sort of middle point between these two manuscripts, which otherwise would only have *Wonders* to connect them. Moreover, as a manuscript combining Latin and Anglo-Saxon texts, Tiberius falls linguistically between the purely Anglo-Saxon Vitellius and the purely Latin Bodley.²⁸ As we shall see, in its insistence on naming, renaming, measuring, and defining, *The Wonders of the East*

²⁷ John Scahill, "Trilingualism in Early Middle English Miscellanies: Languages and Literature," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 18-32, here 18.

²⁸ For more on the significance of Tiberius' multilingualism, see pages 14 and following below.

requires close attention to words and names—what better manuscript to study, then, than that which provides two distinct texts? The Tiberius illustrations, moreover, as the most elaborate of the three manuscripts, acts as a sort of third “language” which helps to clarify and complicate the meaning of the first two.

The Tiberius manuscript, then, is an ideal place to situate this study of *The Wonders of the East*. Let us turn now to the body of the text itself.

“Pæs læssan milgetæles”

For a book of monsters, the tone of *The Wonders of the East* is shockingly matter-of-fact to modern eyes. The text as we have it today is a far cry from the travel narratives of the later medieval and early modern periods. Mary Campbell has classified pre-Mandeville travel narratives into a number of distinct categories: “the eyewitness pilgrimage narratives, the Alexander romances and their spin-offs, the mercantile and missionary accounts of India and Cathay...[and] accounts of the Holy Land best termed guidebooks.”²⁹ Although *Wonders* incorporates many aspects of these literary subgenres (accounts of holy sites abroad, mentions of Alexander and his marvelous deeds, descriptions of the production of rare spices, etc.) it cannot truthfully be placed into any category. Bereft of a narrator and lacking plot entirely, *The Wonders of the East* can most easily be described as a catalogue of mildly interesting oddities, a list of strange people, places, and creatures found in the “East”—an all-encompassing space which the text of *Wonders* never really defines.³⁰ The text contains no narrative framework, relying instead on a number of cheerfully vague geographical references (such as “on the way to Babylonia” and “east from there”) and strangely precise spatial measurements to help situate the reader. It is, essentially, a compilation of 36 discrete passages which provide the reader with the location, appearance, and habits of the wonders, generally in frustratingly ambiguous terms. A typical passage reads:

Hascellentia hatte þæt land, þonne mon to Babilonia færð,
þæt is þonne pæs læssan milgetæles þe stadia hatte IX mila

²⁹ Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 127.

³⁰ A brief, ill-fated attempt to trace the directions given in *Wonders* onto a physical map has led me to the conclusion that the “mapping” done in this text is done in metaphorical, and not literal spaces, the most important of which is the imagined reach of the English language. For more, see pages 34 and following below.

lang and brad. Pæt bugeð to Meda rice. Pæt land is eallum godum gefylled. Deos stow næddran hafað. Pa næddran habbað twa heafda. Pæra Eagan scinað nihtes swa leohte swa blacern.³¹

[Hascellentia is the name of the country on the way to Babylonia that is in length and breadth nine of the lesser “mile-numbers” called stadia. It yields to the kingdom of the Medes. That land is filled with all good things. This place has serpents. The serpents have two heads. Their eyes shine at night as brightly as a lamp.]

These are interesting bits of information certainly, but one suspects that a medieval audience searching for the sort of action found in the travel subgenres listed above might be disappointed.

Indeed, it is this departure from the style of travel narrative Campbell describes that has led some scholars to suggest that this is an education, and not a recreational text.³² Ann Knock has argued that the Anglo-Saxon translator of *Wonders* “does not appear to have been aiming for literary excellence,” and claims that the text’s inclusion in “quasi encyclopedic compilations” such as Tiberius and Vitellius suggests that the text was “generally seen as scientific,”³³ and therefore excusably mediocre from a literary or poetic standpoint, especially when compared to other travel narratives. Knock is not alone in her reading of the text: many scholars agree that *Wonders* might have been (and subsequently, should now be) read as scientific fact, and not literature.

³¹ Gibb, 85-98, here 87. Gibb’s variorum edition of the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders* makes no attempt to correct the Anglo-Saxon translator’s departures from the Latin sources, and has therefore proved exceedingly useful. All subsequent Anglo-Saxon quotations are from Gibb; modern English translations are my own.

³² Certainly these terms were not as simply static for medieval readers as they are for modern eyes. These, however, are the terms used by critics today.

³³ Knock, 121.

Asa Mittman has gone so far as to say that, “it is very difficult to believe that such creatures were, for the Anglo-Saxons, ‘alien yet real,’ and yet we must.”³⁴ Mittman’s argument, that monsters were read as prodigies, placed on the Earth as a sign of God’s power to create all things, is repeated in the works of many modern scholars.³⁵ Without denying the value of these sorts of readings, I would like to suggest that we imagine an Anglo-Saxon readership which did *not* believe in the truth of *Wonders* or texts like it. After all, even Augustine admits in *The City of God* that “it is not necessary to believe in all the races of men which are said to exist” in order to appreciate God’s bounty.³⁶ I also submit that modern readings which imagine the East as the location of the monstrous cultural Other³⁷ project unfairly our own modern cultural prejudices, and that, as we shall see, the exotic orientalism of this text is proto-colonial only in its desire to encounter the East as a means of keeping up with the Latin West. Nor does this text displace English fears about the chaos and unpredictability of nature onto this distinctly foreign region in order to deny that chaos on English shores. Rather, as I will show below, it is deeply invested in exploring possibilities for connecting the East and West through language and study. All of this, in short, is to say that it is possible and indeed useful to read the *Wonders* outside of the context of Christian exegesis or Orientalist thought, both of which require an audience for which the monstrous is “alien yet real.” And indeed these

³⁴ Asa Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 66.

³⁵ See, for example, Naomi Reed Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001), 146 ff., and Howe, 172-173.

³⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (London: William Heinmann Ltd., 1965), 42.

³⁷ See, for example, Andrea Rossi-Reder, “Wonders of the Beast: India in Classical and Medieval Literature,” in *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), especially pp. 52-66.

readings are important to our understanding of Anglo-Saxon understandings of the monstrous scientific world in general and the monstrous East in particular.

I want to suggest that the literary judgments quoted above—the accusations of artlessness and lack of quality—are not an accurate representation of the English translator’s skills. Paul Allen Gibb has shown that the English text was “constructed using highly complex and rigid principles of organization,” including a near seamless movement from one “genre” of wonders to the next subtly related genre, which Gibb identifies as thematic concatenation.³⁸ His careful examination of the text reveals that “in most cases, the only times a given keyword or concept appears...it appears in two or more consecutive sections.”³⁹

The Wonders of the East, then, was clearly a text which the authorial figure took great pains to organize. I would argue that, far from simply “bad” literature, the staccato text of *Wonders* is, rather, deliberately simplistic as a political and rhetorical tool. The simplicity of the prose allows readers to explore the text on the level of the word even as they explore the world at large. F.G. Cassidy has described the Vitellius manuscript as “the plain everyday work of a good period, well suited for reading in a monastic library or cloister.”⁴⁰ Such a description may be equally applied to *Wonders*—it is a simplistic text, but by no means simple; it is a text meant to be studied.

³⁸ Gibb, 64.

³⁹ Ibid. Significantly, the major exception to this statement is the repetition of phrases like *pæs læssan milgetales* (“lesser mile-counters”—ten times in the text”) and *fotmæla lange* (“foot-miles long”—five times), which appear throughout the text, and represent, as we shall see, a significant departure from the Latin original.

⁴⁰ F.G. Cassidy, “Knowledge of *Beowulf* In Its Time,” *R.E.A.L.: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* 1 (1982): 1-12, here 11.

Consider for example the repetition of the phrases *þæs læssan milgetæles* (the lesser units of measurement, literally “mile tallies”) and *fotmæla lange* (literally, “foot-miles long”) repeated several times throughout the text. Although this repetition is admittedly aesthetically awkward—in the first section, for example, each term is repeated twice—it is nonetheless fascinating from a linguistic standpoint, especially when we consider the fact that no such repetition occurs in the Latin *Wonders*, nor indeed do these terms appear at all. In each instance where the Anglo-Saxon text reads *læssan milgetæles* or *micclan milgetæles* the Latin text reads either *stadia* or *leuuas*, respectively, assuming that the Latin-literate readers understand that the *stadia* are the lesser units of measure and the *leuuas* the greater. Gibb has identified these two terms as Greek and French; the French transmission of this second term is especially significant, considering the text’s Continental—possibly Carolingian—origin.

Certainly the effects of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance were deeply felt in the years preceding the production of *The Wonders of the East*. David Pratt has shown that the surge in vernacular literary production during and immediately following the reign of King Alfred was “informed by Carolingian trends” and argues that there was a broad “adaptation of Carolingian methods in Alfredian education.”⁴¹ The sheer scope of the vernacular material produced during Alfred’s reign is astonishing, and speaks to a felt need for learning in the vernacular which must have spread from the court to more “rural” centers of learning, such as Winchester or Canterbury, where Tiberius may have

⁴¹ David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 124-125.

been compiled. Certainly we can imagine an Anglo-Saxon literary environment in which translation into the vernacular of foreign—especially Carolingian—texts was encouraged. Alfred’s own translation of Orosius’ *Historiae Adversus Paganos*—which dealt specifically with the history, geography, and peoples of the Eastern world—would certainly have encouraged the production of vernacular translations of continental scientific texts. And indeed the act of translation seems to have weighed heavily on Alfred’s mind. In his famous preface to *Pastoral Care*, Alfred lists the names of his “helpers,” and gives a brief description of the process of translation: he says that he translated the Latin into Anglo-Saxon “hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete”—sometimes word by word, sometimes sense for sense.⁴² By placing his own literary efforts alongside his acknowledgement of Gregory’s original efforts, Alfred is highlighting the thematic continuity of the two texts, and validating translation as an important intellectual activity.

I also want to suggest that this formula, which he repeats (although not “word be worde”) in his prefaces to *The Dialogues* and *Boethius*⁴³, validates the usefulness of English as an international language—perhaps not yet international in its scope, but certainly in its ability to effectively describe the world (past, present, future; real and imagined) either “word be worde” or “andgit of andgiete.” And although there is admittedly a significant stretch of time between the death of Alfred in 899 to the

⁴² *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, ed. Henry Sweet, 2 vols., Early English Text Society 45 and 50 (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) 7.19-20, volume 2.

⁴³ For details, see Nicole Guenther Discenza, “The Old English *Bede* and the Construction of Anglo-Saxon Authority,” in *Anglo-Saxon England* 31, ed. Michael Lapidge, et. al, 13-76, especially 70-71.

production of the manuscripts containing the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders* in the early 11th century, I argue that this Alfredian push for translation into the vernacular had long-lasting effects, some of which can be seen in the text of *Wonders*.

The repeated use of the phrases *læssan milgetæles* and *micclan milgetæles* alongside the Continental terms *stadia* and *leuua* seems, then, entirely Alfredian. The Anglo-Saxon scribe, by providing these English terms in conjunction with Continental, is adding a new degree of specificity to the text for his English-literate audience, most of whom would have known the Continental terms. (Both appear in several Anglo-Latin gospels, and do not seem to have been entirely uncommon in English secular manuscripts.) If this clarification is unnecessary, that is, if his readers were Latin-literate, or at least aware of these Continental terms, then the repetition serves also as a linguistic exercise in translation and adaptation. Little wonder, then, that the terms the scribe is using to clarify the Latin are compound neologisms: *milgetæles* and its various paradigmatic forms appear exclusively in *The Wonders of the East*; *fotmæla* appears elsewhere, but *Wonders* marks its earliest extant appearance.⁴⁴ These novel compounds, made of common Anglo-Saxon words, would certainly have been intelligible to a literate Anglo-Saxon audience; nevertheless, this is a fascinating example of the birth of a word not merely out of necessity, but out of curiosity, and in direct opposition to an existing text. The translator might have simply used the terms *stadia* and *leuua*—he clearly chose to use those terms alongside Anglo-Saxon neologisms. This reflects the same sort of

⁴⁴ Significantly, the two other appearances are in Latin charters delineating the borders of lands bequeathed by the King to certain nobles; in these manuscripts, Anglo-Saxon compounds are quite literally framing Latin texts. For more, see P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968) 78-79, items 29 and 31.

vernacular pride I identified in Alfred’s prefaces—a firm belief in the ability of the vernacular to translate the sense of a text without translating word for word.

Significantly, *milgetæles* and *fotmæla* are nouns of space—by using them, the scribe is able to measure and contain the Eastern lands being described within the realm of English usage. This is certainly a political move, an attempt to demonstrate the power of this “new” language to describe the world beyond English shores. Indeed, by placing the Anglo-Saxon neologisms alongside Continental terms, the translator argues that Anglo-Saxon is as effective in describing and containing the Eastern world as the Latin authority figures. By including the Continental terms, he expresses a desire to work with, and not replace entirely, the established language of scientific knowledge. The repetition of these terms, then, far from an artless measure, reveals a determination to prove the worth of the English tongue in describing the physical world beyond England, and finds precedents in the works of Alfred, that great translator of Anglo-Saxon.

Nor are *milgetæles* and *fotmæla* the only compound neologisms unique to *Wonders*. Nine words—two of which are proper nouns—appear uniquely in *Wonders*. These neologisms are given with definitions, context, and citations in table 1 below. Of these nine terms, perhaps the most fascinating is *healfhundinga*. The Latin text of *Wonders* repeats the name for these creatures given in classical *mirabilia*—*cenocephali*, from the Greek words for “dog” and “head.” The Anglo-Saxon text, however, replaces the word *cenocephali* with *healfhundinga*, or “part dog”.⁴⁵ This substitution, like the

⁴⁵ Gibb, 88.

<i>Word</i>	<i>Literal meaning</i>	<i>Idiomatic translation</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Occurrences (section, line)</i>
milgetæles	mile-numbers	units of distance	Descriptions of the size of foreign lands.	□ 1.2 □ 2.4 □ 2.8 □ 5.2 □ 6.11 □ 17.2 □ 18.6 □ 19.3 □ 23.1
healfhundinga	half-dog	dog-headed man	Used in place of <i>cynocephali</i> to describe the conopoea	□ 7.1
fotmæla	foot-number	feet (measure of distance)	Description of the size of creatures and non-animal wonders.	□ 8.1 □ 16.2 □ 21.2 □ 24.2 □ 33.3
twylice	two-bodied	meaning unclear	A second name given for the <i>homodubii</i>	□ 8.2 □ 17.3
frihteras	Frightening?	Soothsayer (perhaps adapted from the verb <i>frihtan</i> , to terrify?)	A certain creature is described as resembling a <i>frihtera</i> from the waist down.	□ 20.1
“reosellices	three-wonderful	three	Description of the coloring of a human hybrid	□ 12.1
Huntigystran	hunter (feminized)	huntress	Term used to describe a race of women	□ 26.2
Donestre	?	Possibly <i>don</i> , “to do” + f. agent – <i>22ster</i> ?	Name given to a specific breed of monstrous creature.	□ 20.1

Table 1: Compound Neologisms in the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*

clarifications described above, is simultaneously a linguistic and political move. Linguistically, it demonstrates once again the ability of the Anglo-Saxon language to work alongside certain established terms (the Greek compound *conopoena* is given as the name of the wonder in both texts, and presumably appeared in the ancestral text) and to replace Latin terms. Significantly *healfhundinga* is no more precise than the Latin original; if anything, it is somewhat less precise, as the Tiberius illustration depicts a rather obviously human creature with the head of a dog (see illustration 1 below). Why, then, would the scribe include the less precise Anglo-Saxon term? The act of naming can be an act of domestication; Jack Goody has argued that by naming the foreign object, we are able to bring it back safely into the realm of the understood.⁴⁶ Certainly, in this reading, the act of providing two classical terms for these creatures renders them sufficiently domesticated; the inclusion of the Anglo-Saxon term, then, is a declaration that English (and the English) are as able to domesticate and contain the foreign as Latin (and Latin-speaking, perhaps religious, forces).

It is important to pause here for a moment and consider the significance of the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders* not simply as a translation, but as a translation alongside a Latin version of the same text. Although multilingual manuscripts were relatively common in the early middle ages, especially in the years following the Conquest and especially in England, very few manuscripts included side-by-side Latin and Anglo-Saxon versions of

⁴⁶ Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 134 ff.



Illustration 1: The *healfhundinga*, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v., folio 80r

the same text.⁴⁷ Indeed, in his study of manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon, Kerr lists fewer than twenty.⁴⁸ The Anglo-Saxon *Wonders*, then, as one of very few side-by-side translations, does not serve to “authorize” its Anglo-Saxon counterpart, as John Scahill has suggested⁴⁹, but rather acts as a springboard for the creative exploration of the potential of English. In adding to the original text and in substituting Anglo-Saxon terms for Latin, the scribe is able to demonstrate the effectiveness of English in describing and containing the Eastern world.

I submit that the previously-unnoticed uniqueness of these nouns of measurement and name allow us to think of *The Wonders of the East*—perhaps for the first time—as a text which is as concerned with “us” and our language as it is with “them” and their bodies, and indeed as a text which equates the use and misuse of language explicitly with the dangers of the East. For a clear example of this relationship, let us return once more to the text, to a wonder which seduces and destroys through the power of language.

⁴⁷ For a thorough examination of early medieval multilingual manuscripts, see Scahill, especially 20-24.

⁴⁸ Ker, 537. This count excludes glosses, however extensive they may be. It takes into consideration only those MSS with side by side translations of the same text.

⁴⁹ Scahill, 22.

“Þæt is mid us *Donestre* genemned”

Of the eighteen partially human wonders and monstrous races listed in the text, nearly half are in one way or another described in relation to their ability to speak or understand human (or Western human) speech. Certain *wildeor* flee when they hear a human voice; the *homodubii* are noted for their *liðlice stefne* (lovely voice); a race of kings who speak “barbarous tongues” are said to be the “worst men”.⁵⁰ Concerns about the use and misuse of familiar and foreign languages, in short, permeate the text.

Nowhere in the text, however, is language more important than in the brief section concerning the *donestre*, a race of human hybrids with knowledge of *eall mennisce gereord* (all human speech). Their description reads:

Donne is sum ealand on ðære Readan Sæ þær is moncynn þæt is mid us *Donestre* genemned. Þa syndon geweaxene swa frihteras fram ðan heafde oð ðone nafelan, and se oðer dæl byð mannes lice gelic, and hi cunnon eall mennisce gereord. Ðonne hi fremdes kynnes mann geseoð, þonne næmnað hi hine and his magas, cuðra manna naman, and mid leaslicum wordum hine beswicað and hine onfoð. And þænne, after þan, hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde, and þonne sittað and wepað ofer ðam heafde.⁵¹

[Then there is a certain island in the Red Sea where there is a race of men that is called *Donestre* among us. They are shaped frighteningly from the head down to the navel, and the rest resembles a man’s body. And they know all human speech. When they see a man of a foreign race, they address him and his kinsmen, and name his acquaintances, and with lying words they beguile him and seize him. And then, afterwards, they devour him all but the head, and then they sit and weep over the head.]

⁵⁰ Gibb, 87, 92, and 93 respectively.

⁵¹ Gibb, 93.

This emphasis on language—like the emphasis on naming described above—reveals a certain anxiety about the power of Western tongues in the East. For a monster to devour a human is to be expected—prior to this point in the text, three creatures are described as trying to eat human visitors. For a monster to talk to his human prey, however—to go so far as to call him by his name—is far from ordinary. The domesticating power of names evident in the description of the cynocephali has been turned on its head—we may call these creatures *donestre*⁵², but they know our names as well, and the names of our kin, and in that knowledge, they are able to domesticate and indeed devour us.

This is an undeniably threatening description, and the Latin text is equally disturbing. The illustration accompanying the text in Tiberius, however, is significantly more sympathetic. (See illustration 2 below.) The illustrations in Tiberius present three discrete scenes of human/*donestre* interaction. The first, taking up nearly the entire top half of the page, shows the *donestre* and the man in conversation, hands outstretched as if gesticulating. Although the *donestre* is much larger than the human, the human's position on a raised platform allows him to hold eye contact. While the western visitor's face seems calm, the *donestre*'s face—humanized in this instance despite his leonine mane—is visibly distressed. The second scene, in the lower right corner of the frame, shows the *donestre* – here with an elongated lion-like snout – bent over and devouring his human meal. One massive claw covers the human's face, as if

⁵² The origin of this word, which appears exclusively in *The Wonders of the East*, is unknown. One possibility, suggested to me by Dr. Mary Blockley of the University of Texas at Austin, is that it is a compound consisting of the infinitive verb *don*, “to do,” and the feminizing ending *-estre*, which J.R. Clark-Hall defines as “f. agent, as in witegestre, *prophetess*.”



Illustration 2: The *Donestre*, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius B.v., folio 83v.

the *donestre* cannot bear to look upon his prey. In the final of the three scenes, the *donestre* – with a humanized face once more – stares down at and weeps over the head of his prey.

In order to understand the significance of the disparity between text and illustrations, we must first consider the ways in which illustrations work to clarify or change the meaning of a text. In his exhaustive study of the intersection between words and pictures in illustrated books, Lawrence R. Sipe suggests a “semiotic theory of transmediation,”⁵³ a process by which the information gained from the text and the information gained from the illustrations are reconciled by constant movement on the part of the reader between the two parts of the “book.” His argument relies on an understanding of the “text” and the “illustrations” as distinct signifying systems. This is certainly the case for the Tiberius Wonders—the cycle to which the Tiberius illustrations belong was not produced for the Anglo-Saxon text from which this version of the *Wonders* descends⁵⁴ and in some cases, such as the *donestre*, described above, the illustrations provide significant departures from the text.⁵⁵

In order to concretize the theoretical aspects of his argument, Sipe considers one recto/verso spread of Maurice Sendak’s 1963 children’s picture book *Where the Wild Things Are*. He identifies a number of inconsistencies between text and picture in this spread:

⁵³ Lawrence R. Sipe, “How Picture Books Work: A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 29 (1988): 97-108, here 97.

⁵⁴ McGurk and Knock, 98.

⁵⁵ I am thinking here specifically of the description of the *donestre*—they are not described as leonine in the text, yet the illustrations clearly depict manes and snouts.

“The text reads, ‘they roared their terrible roars’; but the mouths of two of the wild things are tightly closed, and the other two don’t have their mouths open wide enough to make a terribly loud roar. The wild things are supposed to gnash their terrible teeth...but their teeth, being curved, are not so terrible.”⁵⁶

Similar inconsistencies appear time and time again in the *Tiberius Wonders*, most notably in the *healfhundinga* and *donestre* above. As with readers of *Where The Wilde Things Are*, readers of *Wonders* would be forced by these inconsistencies to “construct new connections and make modifications of [their] previous interpretations.”⁵⁷ Again, the constant movement between text and illustration changes our interpretation of the work as a whole. If we read the text before studying the illustration, then we understand at first glance that the seemingly innocent conversation depicted in the top half of the frame will end in violence, and are suspicious of the encounter throughout our study of the illustration. If we study the illustration first and then turn to the text, the *donestre*’s distress on seeing the corpse of his prey, inexplicable at first glance, is understood as regret, or perhaps even a sort of mourning, and we feel pity for the creature.

Wendy Steiner has argued that “the illustrated text is a *Gesamtkunstwerk*...a gesture toward semiotic repleteness, combining several kinds of sign types and having them comment on each other.”⁵⁸ The German compound *Gesamtkunstwerk*, from *gesamt*, “whole”, and *kunstwerk*, “work of art,” was first used by the philosopher K.F.E. Trahdorff in 1827, and was later adopted by Richard Wagner to describe the unifying potential of

⁵⁶ Sipe, 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 144.

opera to consolidate the visual (that is, static) and performative (that is, temporal) arts.⁵⁹ Certainly we see this same sort of consolidation in the illustrations accompanying the *Tiberius Wonders*, especially in the illustrated *donestre*, which depicts movement through time and space, and, as Steiner suggests, clarifies and comments on the meaning provided in the text. In order to understand how this illustrated clarification works alongside the linguistic clarifications, we must consider one more art form which can depict movement through space and time simultaneously: the map.

⁵⁹ Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 88 and following. Steiner provides an extended discussion of Wagner's use of the term on 144 of *Colors*.

“East ðanon”

Any study concerned with representations of the world outside English shores—and especially which takes as its primary text the Tiberius *Wonders of the East*—must necessarily include a discussion of maps. After all, the only extant world map from the Anglo-Saxon era is bound in Tiberius, fewer than 10 leaves from *Wonders*. Medieval cartography, quickly becoming a popular field of study, has dealt in recent years with changing definitions of what a map actually is, perhaps due in part to an increased discomfort with old definitions of medieval geographical knowledge. Natalia Lozovsky has noted that, “on the philosophical level, geographical and historical knowledge had to be related because the matters they described, place and time, were related,” and that “early medieval thought perceived place and time as two of the most fundamental terms describing the world and its existence.”⁶⁰ Certainly maps as we conceive of them today cannot effectively express space and time simultaneously. Could medieval maps do so? If so, which maps specifically?

These questions require a revision of our understanding of what the medieval map was, and modern scholars have provided no end of suggestions. In his discussion of “Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England,” Nicholas Howe describes medieval maps as “construct[s] or schema of knowledge about places and the directions that knowledge takes.”⁶¹ Naomi Reed Kline, on the other hand, describes the medieval map as a “‘picture’ of the world and also a ‘portrait’ of one’s own conception of the world...[an] abstract representation of the world not meant to help the viewer gauge distances in terms

⁶⁰ Natalia Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book: Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400-1000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 12-13.

⁶¹ Nicholas Howe, “An Angle on This Earth: Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 82 (2000): 3-28, here 6.

of actual travel.”⁶² Perhaps most significantly, Daniel Birkholz has written of the power of world maps to represent “a complex yet specifically oriented political position.”⁶³

The close relationship between maps and scientific, geographical, and historical/political texts is strengthened by the fact that, as Birkholz has shown, “most world maps were bound within manuscripts as illustrations accompanying texts including Orosius’ *Historia Adversum Paganos*, Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologia* and *De Natura Rerum*...Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon*, and others,” a list of texts which ought to include *The Wonders of the East*. Furthermore, many *mappamundi* include depictions or descriptions of the monstrous creatures and races described in *Wonders* and the texts mentioned above. The Tiberius map, for example, mentions the *cinocephales*—dog headed men described in section 7 of the text—and the *blemmyae*, mentioned above, appear as *blemmee* on the outermost edge of the late 13th century *mappamundi* of Hereford Cathedral.⁶⁴ These maps, then, can help to clarify the meaning of phrases like “east ðanon” and “sum stow is” by pointing to a physical location where wonders can be found. They can also, as is the case with the *blemmee* in the Hereford Cathedral map, provide small illustrations in order to help the reader visualize the monsters being described.

As we have seen above, the Tiberius *Wonders* is extensively and beautifully illustrated, and does not necessarily need a map to help clarify its meaning. However, an understanding of medieval maps as not merely visual objects, but rather as webs of deeply interconnected illustrations and texts which relay a combination of historical,

⁶² Kline, 2-3.

⁶³ Daniel Birkholz, *The Kings Two Maps: Cartography and Culture in Thirteenth-Century England*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture, vol. 22 (New York: Routledge, 2004), 114.

⁶⁴ Kline, 143. For the mapping of marvels and monstrous races, see especially 143-164.

geographical, political, and/or social information, allows us to think of *The Wonders of the East* as a map in its own right.

Certainly, as noted above, it cannot be practically used as a guide from England to the East, or indeed from one specific location to another. The frequent repetition of prepositions of direction (“east ðanon,” for example, appears three times, and “to” in the sense of “towards” is used six times) might nonetheless be read as attempting a sort of itinerary map, which, rather than providing specific directions from place to place, list stops along the way to a particular destination. Birkholz notes that itinerary maps are “elaborations, in greatly varying degree, of classical or medieval non-figural town-lists,” perhaps not wholly dissimilar to the itinerary of Archbishop Sigeric’s pilgrimage to Rome, which appears as a list of town names connected by various directional prepositions on folios 23v to 24r of Tiberius.⁶⁵ How might thinking about *The Wonders of the East* as a sort of literary map change our understanding of the text?

The most significant implication of reading the text as a map would be the extra importance given to the text’s vernacularity. By “writing” the map of *The Wonders of the East* in Anglo-Saxon—and not in Latin—our English translators were working against a long-standing tradition of Latin scientific thought. Natalia Lozovsky has noted that geographical knowledge in the middle ages was “built on the foundation created in antiquity, and, more specifically, in the roman world.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, “the names for this type of knowledge,” that is, for geography, studies of the marvelous races, and studies of animals, “and many of the contexts in which [these studies were] applied also represented the classical legacy.”⁶⁷ Birkholz’ argument, noted above, about the political power of

⁶⁵ Birkholz, 71.

⁶⁶ Lozovsky, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

maps is especially significant if we think of *Wonders* not only as a map, but as a map in the vernacular which takes as its source a largely Latinate tradition.

Read most simply as a vernacular itinerary map, *Wonders* describes a journey from an island full of *sceapa* (sheep) to an island full of *swearte menn* (black/evil/infamous men). Significantly, the *swearte menn* of the final passage are described as *nigris* in the Latin, a word that lacks the subtlety of *swearte*. The use of *swearte* then, and not the more straightforward color word *blæc* suggests a desire on the part of the English translator to clarify or change the meaning of the Latin original. Perhaps he wanted to emphasize the evil nature of these specific dark-skinned men, living as they do near a mountain of fire. Perhaps he wanted to suggest that these were a particularly well-known or infamous wonder. Regardless, that the map of the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East* begins and ends with brief descriptions describing relatively tame Eastern wonders using deliberately Anglicized language (*fotmæla* and *swearte*) is significant. By bookending his Eastern journey with Anglo-Saxon words, the English translator is claiming for the English tongue the ability to subtly and precisely describe the wonders of the scientific world. He is, quite literally, mapping English onto the world.

Conclusions

This study has shown, arguably for the first time, that *The Wonders of the East* is in many ways a distinctly English text. It was bound with two of the most important Anglo-Saxon artifacts—the Anglo-Saxon poetic masterpiece *Beowulf* in Vitellius and the only extant pre-Conquest *mappamundi* in Tiberius—both of which allow *Wonders* to be read in different and important ways. It was produced in an age when vernacular translations of classic geographical and scientific texts were encouraged by the King and his agents for the edification and empowerment of the English people. It was written in the language of education and of the common man, and as such is uniquely of its time, a time in which the vernacular was only beginning to be accepted as a valid way of transmitting and transforming information. It was produced, finally, in an England which saw itself, as Howe has suggested, as “an angle on the Earth,” an Earth which was best mapped not simply visually, but temporally and socially as well.

Certainly my reading of *The Wonders of the East* is not the only reading possible, and as interest in medieval cartography and representations of the East grows, I expect the discussion surrounding this deeply complicated text will grow as well. Nevertheless, I believe that by highlighting the Englishness of the text, I have opened up a new pathway of inquiry, and invite my fellow scholars to join me in discovering where, exactly, that pathway leads.

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