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Bethke, Daniel

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A close-up photograph of several bright yellow poppies in bloom. The central flower is in sharp focus, showing its four petals and numerous stamens. Other flowers are visible in the background, some in focus and some blurred, creating a sense of depth. The background is a clear blue sky.

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Sacred Simultaneity: The Hereford Mappa Mundi as a Zwischenform Between Bild and Diagram

*Daniel Bethke*¹

Introduction

In his *Parva Naturalia*, Aristotle made a crucial observation: the “picture painted on the panel is at once a picture and a portrait... In so far as we consider it in itself, it is an object of contemplation or a mental picture, but in so far as we consider it in relation to something else, e.g., as a likeness, it is also an aid to memory.”² Here, he uncovers two fundamental, and in his mind inseparable, purposes of visual art. First, a picture can be an autonomous object, existing for its own sake and inviting contemplation through form, color, and composition. In this sense, it is self-contained but also abstract, requiring no external reference to be appreciated. Second, a picture can serve as a likeness, a representation that derives its meaning from its relation to something beyond itself. Its function is thus that of a narrative. Aristotle’s insight highlights a tension at the core of visual representation between pure aesthetic presence and functional reference, i.e., between what an image is and what it does.

Andrea Worm refined this idea in her work *Geschichte und Weltordnung*, applying the term “diagram” to those autonomous, explanatory, schematic-like objects and “bild” (picture or image) to those with narrative function. She claims that during the late Medieval period, semantic openness became lost as diagrams became more concrete, which narrowed works of art exclusively toward the meaning or message that “is required in the sense of the narration.”³ Maps, timelines, and genealogical works that may have once been merely a set of circles and lines, for instance, slowly became “chain links, rings, and rods.”⁴

However, works of art did not all suddenly switch to become more “bild-like,” replete with artistic flourish and narrative function, overnight. The process was a “gradual progression” much like a Ship of Theseus, during which time one could encounter many works that delicately danced on the

¹ Daniel Bethke is a senior at Tufts University studying International Relations, German, and Medieval Studies. His chief historical interests include the Early Republic, Byzantium, and the Hussite Wars. The overarching focus of his research is how states use historical narratives, symbols, and language itself to solidify their legitimacy and construct a national identity. Besides studying these topics, he enjoys playing piano and accordion, swimming, and long walks.

² Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia: On Memory and Recollection*, trans. W.S. Hett (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1957), pp. 295-297.

³ Andrea Worm, *Geschichte und Weltordnung* (Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 2021), p. 303.

⁴ Worm, *Geschichte und Weltordnung*, p. 299.

Sacred Simultaneity: The Hereford Mappa Mundi as a Zwischenform Between Bild and Diagram

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Introduction

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⁴ Worm, *Geschichte und Weltordnung*, p. 299.

build-diagram boundary.⁵ A prime example of such a “zwischenform” (in-between form) is the Hereford Mappa Mundi. Dating to approximately 1300 CE, it is the largest extant medieval map, part of a series of other *mappae mundi* produced during its time, yet in many key ways diverging from contemporary “cartographic orthodoxy.” Analysis of the extent to which the Hereford map is a diagram, zwischenform, or bild must consider *inter alia* potential narrative functions in the theological, historical, patriarchal, and proto-nationalistic (essentially xenophobic here) realms. Because the map combines real topographical features with cherry-picked geographic and mythological distortions, promotes a one-tracked theologically-based view of life, and blatantly paints certain groups, like women or Scythians, as “others” in contrast to the divinely favored, the map is a prime example of a late-stage zwischenform that most strongly leans on bild features. However, one must not ignore the map’s plethora of characteristics one would normally associate with diagrams, e.g., its schematic, timeline-like organization of Christian chronology. It is, therefore, a blending of history, geography, and theology⁶ organized like a diagram and created with bild-like artistic flourish and narrative purposes.



Figure 1. Hereford Mappa Mundi

⁵ Denis Wood, “The Power of Maps,” *Scientific American*, 268:5 (1993): pp. 89-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24941480>.

⁶ David Woodward, “Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 75:4 (1985): p. 514.

Geographic Distortions and Theological Exhortations

Crucial in any study of the Hereford Mappa Mundi is acknowledgment of the fact that it was never intended for navigational purposes. Indeed, even setting aside its 158 cm by 133 cm size, the object would be of little help to lost travelers. This is because it is “above all a decorative map that belongs within the domain of art.”⁷ Its lack of measured distances proves that it was not meant to help with actual travel; distortions exist because the conceptual (i.e., promotion of narrative) overrode the practical (i.e., explanatory schematic) in the process of making the map.⁸ This is already a strong indicator of at least partial tendency toward *bild* status, but one must analyze further to form a more in-depth conception.

At first glance, the world is entirely unrecognizable, and many labels seem erroneously placed. Africa, for instance, is labelled as Europe and vice versa. Many scholars claim that this reversal was by design, and if so, this makes the reversal part of a broader narrative that pushes this *zwischenform* map closer toward being a *bild* than a diagram. As Marcia Kupfer wrote, the “Map’s performance... revolves around a commonplace Latin pun on cognate derivatives of the root *specio*, to see.”⁹ Mirror motifs, playing on the words *specula* (lookout from an elevated position) and *speculum* (mirror), were quite common during this time. They had also long been regarded as objects inviting self-contemplation. The map is therefore more of a “god’s-eye view” than anything a human could ever see.¹⁰ With the continental reversal, one sees the world from Christ’s perspective, reflected on a divine ocular surface, and one observes oneself in the process. In this, the map builds on long-standing conventions that sought to encode “Christ’s vision opposite us at the Second Coming.”¹¹ The mix-up between Africa and Europe thus compels viewers to reflect on the limitations of this ephemeral human life, on how they are merely mortal, and on how divine truth lies not in this world but in the next. This long-standing Christian idea harkens back to Paul’s meditation on the limitations of earthly life: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”¹²

If this distortion was indeed intentional and had the above purpose, it means that the map was intended to capture every creature’s life at all stages in a single image. Even the afterlife, represented by Hell, Heaven, and the word *MORS*, all outside of the well-inhabited circular Earth, is present. The map would accordingly become not just a *bild* with narrative function but rather a piece in which

⁷ Naomi Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm*, (Boydell Press, 2005), p. 133.

⁸ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, pp. 2-3.

⁹ Marcia Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map*, (Yale University Press, 2016), p. 8.

¹⁰ Kupfer, *Art and Optics*, p. 8.

¹¹ Kupfer, *Art and Optics*, p. 9.

¹² 1. Corinthians 13:12 (King James Bible).

multiple realities are simultaneously displayed, i.e., “vertical split” in Beate Fricke’s terminology.¹³ On the Hereford Mappa Mundi, this split places “pictorial emphasis on the internal experience” of all involved actors, thereby strengthening the bild-fitting narrative’s efficacy.¹⁴ The boundary between Africa and Europe may therefore be a threshold in Fricke’s sense, for it is the point where earthly perception collapses, and one can acknowledge the aforementioned “god’s-eye view.” Solidifying this point is the presence of a figure on horseback in the corner near the word “MORS” looking back at the life-bearing continents. Next to him are the words *passe avant*, or “go beyond.” He is just outside of the known, inhabited world. Now, he sees the world as it really is; in this world, the viewer sees only the reflection of God, but in the next, they will “go beyond” and see clearly with the divine. In any case, the narrative function is clear and stark, pushing the map closer toward the bild category.

The intentionality of the continental misrepresentations has been recently called into question, though, and if so, it severely diminishes the map’s potential narrative function. Paul D.A. Harvey has claimed the reversal was simply an error. The different lettering style between continent labels and other words on the map implies that another hand wrote them, and analysis of the map indicates these continent labels were indeed written much later than anything else.¹⁵ If one accepts this view, the motif of reflection collapses, and this part of the map’s bild-like narrative function withers away. No longer is it an artistic elaboration attempting to promote and represent a single normative worldview; rather, it becomes a plain, albeit inaccurate, assemblage of lines and curves that loosely represents real-world topography. In this sense, the map would become a diagram.

Another salient geographical distortion of the map is its cardinal orientation and the positioning of Jerusalem at the center. Although there were many such T-O maps during the time period, many, if not most, took other forms. In and immediately after the Crusades, however (1095-1272), the popularity of T-O maps shot up immensely as they became a means to convey a Christian message.¹⁶ Given that the cartographer chose to follow the T-O orientation and not, say, a zonal one, the intent of this artistic object is clear: advancing a Christian narrative, perhaps even implicitly justifying the Crusades as righteous odysseys to recover the Holy Land. This is a singular story, precisely as Worm’s bild would demand. Earth’s division into three parts (Europe, Asia, and Africa) also parallels the Biblical division of the world by Noah’s sons.¹⁷ Noah himself, near the center

¹³ Beate Fricke, “Presence Through Absence: Thresholds and Mimesis in Painting,” *Representations*, 130:1 (2015): p. 15.

¹⁴ Fricke, “Presence Through Absence,” p. 16.

¹⁵ Paul D.A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map*, (University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 11.

¹⁶ Woodward, “Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps,” pp. 515-516.

¹⁷ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “Reading the World: The Hereford Mappa Mundi,” *Australian and New Zealand Association of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 9:1 (1991): pp. 120-122.

and perched on top of Mount Ararat, is a rather conspicuous figure on the map. His presence is undeniably a visual tool used to aid Christian morality narratives. Yet once again, the fact that this event is portrayed simultaneously (less common among pure narrative portrayals) along a traceable curved line that chronicles Biblical history from the Garden of Eden to Judgement Day makes it at least partially adherent to the schematic characteristics of a diagram. Given that these are not cosynchronous phenomena, the object is arguably as much a timeline, and thus a diagram, as it is a map. Still, where Judgement Day is depicted, at the apex of the map, Christ stands noticeably. It is no coincidence that this is the easternmost point of the up (east was rendered up), the same direction from Hereford as Jerusalem. Where Christ stood, the sun rose. When transferring these facts to Worm's bild vs. diagram methodology, one can only conclude that in this way the map is both a bild and a diagram simultaneously. It is a pictorial, narrative-promoting bild, but it is largely organized as an explanatory, "scientific" diagram. This makes it a *zwischenform* to the highest degree.

The narrative that the map promotes is not just one of Christian virtue and superiority. Rather, it specifically elevates the Western Christian worldview, i.e., the opposite of Orthodox Christianity practiced in the Byzantine Empire since the Great Schism of 1066. Precisely for this reason, Constantinople is depicted as literally upside-down. Besides its inverted buildings, it is also notably smaller than Rome and even Hereford. The glory and might of Byzantium had significantly diminished since the Macedonian and Komnenoi Dynasties, but the city was still far more internationally significant and populated than Rome, and it had been for circa 800 years.¹⁸ Even in areas over which they had long lost control (e.g., Scythia), strong cultural influence remained. Especially in the context of soon-to-be-discussed xenophobic portrayals of barbaric Scythians, the portrayal of Constantinople as petty and upside-down (i.e., schismatic and heretical) is therefore crucial to the map's bild-like narrative function. This is true even though some of the negatively portrayed groups, e.g., the Scythians, were not contemporary with the map's creation; they lived on the steppes between roughly the ninth and second centuries BCE and, as such, are historical rather than contemporary references. In any case, the West, especially England, was home to the "real" Christians, who held the "true" interpretation of scripture. The East was home to the opposite. In true bild form, the map makes this known to its viewer.

Although antiquity remained a source of fascination and inspiration throughout the medieval period, this anti-Eastern sentiment may explain at least part of the prevalence of figures from antiquity. The makers of the map were conscious of their inheritance of antiquity and wanted to show it, at least insofar as it did not directly contradict Christian doctrine. For this reason, despite high total numbers for both, the rate of concepts associated with Biblical history is more than double that of antique

¹⁸ Adam Usk, *Chronicle*, ed. and trans., Sir Edward Maunde Thompson (Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 220.

history on the map;¹⁹ there was to be no confusion of narratives. Curiously, Augustus Caesar, whose son-in-law Agrippa made a now-lost map that was likely one of the Hereford Mappa Mundi's main sources,²⁰ is situated just below the British Isles on the map. This and Caesar's "13th-century appearance" have led many scholars to interpret "the map's Christianized depiction of a Roman emperor as a bold allusion to the supercession of imperial Rome by papal Rome."²¹ Not only does this deny that right and the implied authority therewith to Eastern Rome (Byzantium); it also solidifies the map's narrative of (Western) Christian supremacy in general by associating past power with present purity and correctness. Additionally, one must note that even when the map depicts Babylon (whose Tower of Babel is a dark edifice memorializing human arrogance and thereby also very fitting for the map's narrative-like implicit condemnation of the East), Rome, or other cities most famous for their antique and thus pagan histories, it does so within the physical circle of Christ's dominion.²² It thereby shows that "God is the one ruler of all ages, kingdoms, and places."²³ Thus, the map yet again fosters a bild-like narrative of the world, even if its means to that end are more schematic and better suited to a diagram. From topography to orientation to labeling, the map embraces features of both bild and diagram.

"Otherization" of Social Groups

Black-and-white portrayals of groups to which the map's creators and viewers principally belonged were not limited to just religious affiliation. The map also contains a plethora of proto-nationalistic and xenophobic elements that emphasize the "distant and strange," as it was designed to promote the previously analyzed underlying theological and political principles. Likewise, some scholars (e.g., Kline) have argued that the portrayal of women in the map follows a parallel path. By reflecting misogynistic medieval tendencies, except in portraying the Virgin Mary, the map reinforced contemporary gender norms. These depictions of demographic groups reveal key insights into the minds of the map's maker and their contemporary surroundings; more relevantly, however, the conscious choice to create the map in such ways exemplifies its narrative-focused bild tendencies more than any other part.

Besides the aforementioned geographical errors, one of the main reasons this map is so unrecognizable to the modern eye is that it contains an abundance of creatures. Going beyond the forty unique types of animals, both real and mythical, there are also fifty-three unique types of "strange

¹⁹ Jim Siebold, "The Hereford Mappamundi," My Old Maps, accessed March 1, 2025, p. 31.

²⁰ Siebold, "The Hereford Mappamundi," p. 9.

²¹ Debra Higgs Strickland, "Edward I, Exodus, and England on the Hereford World Map," *Speculum*, 93:2 (2018): p. 446.

²² Heng, "Inventions/Reinventions," p. 35.

²³ Wogan-Browne, "Reading the World," p. 124.

racés.”²⁴ The choice to place certain animals or monsters in certain regions was unquestionably deliberate, political, and narrative-based. This holds true even if they do not have an accompanying description, which was often the case: “with few exceptions... the animals are shown singly without narrative details.”²⁵ As will be shown below, this fact may diminish the extent to which the map is a bild, but even without explicit captions or descriptions, the beasts still serve an implicit narrative function through *their placement and distribution*.

In England and the western Mediterranean area, only the buffalo and genet are depicted, but the “rest of the world overflows with animal life” and descriptions of strange creatures.²⁶ Wales, for instance, is filled with “curious hybrids and monstrous peoples, ox-men and werewolves.”²⁷ One finds the brunt of these depictions in India, Ethiopia, and Scythia. There, covering nearly the whole of each region, are horse-hoofed men, people with meter-long ears, headless people, basilisks, satyrs, and more. These depictions were not some idiosyncratic conjuration of the cartographer. They are based quite faithfully on the work of Solinus, whose third-century works catalog the zoological marvels of the terrestrial periphery.²⁸ Solinus himself was merely one of many ancient and medieval geographers who were fascinated by the so-called “wonders of the east.” Indeed, a work by that exact name appeared in manuscripts like the Nowell Codex around 1100 or 1200, once again chronicling the fantastic creatures of exotic and unfamiliar lands. This contemporary context is crucial: “In the Middle Ages, nature was feared; the uncontrollable wilderness loomed frighteningly against the security of the enclosed.”²⁹ The chaos of the outside and unknown is starkly contrasted with attempts to build order through cities and churches in more familiar realms.

The most salient effect of these depiction choices is the strengthening of the map’s narrative function in the sense of Worm’s concept of bild. As mentioned, some of the images even come with accompanying descriptions. For instance, it is said of the Gangines of Ethiopia that “there is no friendship with them.”³⁰ In Scythia, one encounters the most brutal descriptions: “they love war; they drink the blood of enemies... to be devoid of experience of slaughtering is a disgrace.”³¹ By no means is it merely coincidental that nearly all of the monsters are placed not just at the unknown margins but

²⁴ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 144.

²⁵ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 111.

²⁶ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 109.

²⁷ Emily Dolmans, “England at the Edge of the World,” *Writing Regional Identities in Medieval England*, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 164.

²⁸ Rudolf Wittkower, “Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942): p. 174.

²⁹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 150.

³⁰ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 151.

³¹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 152.

specifically to Christ's left. On this side, too, is an angel that is repelling the damned, who are being led by a demon to the mouth of hell. For these beasts, therefore, "their deviation could be moralized as the function of sin."³² Jerusalem, central to the Christian order of contemporary life and the aesthetic order of the map, is depicted as the complete opposite of the chaotic, beast-filled surroundings. The "others" are impure and strange, but the true Christians are stable and correct. This contrast may also be a commentary on the afterlife and its inevitability, which is a Christian message. Just as the word MORS surrounds the map's figurative garden of life, so too does chaos surround order. There is a "remarkable fluidity" between the now and the eventual, between the real and the imagined.³³ Sooner or later, all must cross over. Regardless of how one interprets the depiction of beasts, even when factoring in this schematic principle of life and death and, therefore, a quasi-diagrammatic attribute, this element of the map seems to serve predominantly a narrative function. Its narrative clearly promotes the Western Christian worldview and way of life while denigrating and dismissing all others as improper.

As for why Scythia is so singled out for having uniquely evil inhabitants, the most likely explanation relates to Alexander the Great. As narrated by Solinus, in Scythia are the "sons of accursed Cain. The Lord closed these in by means of Alexander the Great: for an earthquake took place... at the time of the Antichrist they will break out and will carry persecution to the whole world."³⁴ Some scholars like Scott Westrem and Andrew Gow claim that this unclean race of cannibals was meant to portray the Jewish people, who were "defined as unclean and monstrous by virtue of the blood libel."³⁵ Furthermore, it may have even been more generally meant to "accommodate future fears," e.g. the rising power of the Ottoman Turks.³⁶ The Book of John Mandeville (circa 1360) corroborates this contemporary worldview, but scholars should be careful not to make rash assumptions. Figures across Late Antiquity and the Medieval Period from Augustine to Nicolaus of Lyra rejected the identification of Gog and Magog with any specific ethnic group.³⁷ Such an opinion was by no means universal.

In any case, the overwhelming narrative purpose of such a portrayal of Scythia and other regions is clear. Europe, and especially England, has fortifications, cathedrals, and cities. Outside of

³² Wogan-Browne, "Reading the World," p. 130.

³³ Janina Ramirez and Peter Frankopan, hosts, "Map of Constantinople & The Hereford Mappa Mundi," *Art Detective* (podcast), March 22, 2017, accessed 8 March 2025.

³⁴ A.O. Denisov, "Отображение Памяти Об Александре Македонском На Средневековых Картах," trans. Daniel Bethke, Lomonosov Moscow State University (2019), p. 260.

³⁵ Geraldine Heng, "Inventions/Reinventions," in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 35.

³⁶ Scott Westrem, "Against Gog and Magog," in *Text and Territory*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 71.

³⁷ Westrem, "Against Gog and Magog," p. 68.

Europe, one encounters fewer and fewer such markers of “civilization.” Geography becomes ethnography, and the observer is forced to see “Europe as the civilized territory of urban life—a web of cities—while global races swarm in other vectors of the world.”³⁸ For beasts, the map followed Solinus, but for less fantastic animals, it based most of its descriptions and portrayals on the medieval Bestiary, which often included moralizing Christian interpretations of each beast’s characteristics. For this reason, elephants are placed in the Garden of Eden on the map; they were thought to symbolize Adam and Eve. However, this does not apply to all fauna and flora on the map. In many cases, “[n]o linkage to the allegorical underpinnings of relationships between these images can be detected.”³⁹ The map in this way functions more than anything else like a non-narrative zoological “travel guide” that explains the traits of each animal, a diagram in Worm’s sense.⁴⁰ Because of this, narrative function in the map is certainly present but perhaps more limited than one may initially suppose. The absence of moralizing descriptions for most of the animals in the map was indeed “symptomatic of developments in the thirteenth century toward secularization”⁴¹ and therefore the removal of some bild-like narrative functions. Nonetheless, the Hereford Mappa Mundi leans most heavily toward being a bild in Worm’s sense, at least from a demographic perspective. Including the beast pictures and descriptions (not just “normal animals”) no longer offers “the contemplator in their abstraction a wide space for association”⁴² but rather drives the viewer toward a single, narrative-based, largely xenophobic medieval worldview. This holds true in the big picture, even if not every single creature can be clearly linked to some moral message.

There is, however, another view of these characteristics. Some scholars, such as Jim Siebold, have contextualized the map’s strong “otherization” within contemporary scientific thinking. This view rejects the “medieval ignorance” claim and sidesteps the “medieval xenophobia” claim. Noting that Europe is as full of monsters as everywhere else, Siebold states that medieval zonal theory was largely governed by “meteorological determinism.”⁴³ The Earth was said to be surrounded by a couple of extremely harsh climatic zones, whose environmental pressures exerted strong distortionary forces on anyone nearby. According to the common contemporary understanding, conditions in the extremities were strongly linked with the sustainability of human life. From this came the ideas of the monsters. According to this view, the map’s depiction of strange foreigners was not so much a “subconscious marginalization” as it was a reflection of the growing interest in the effect of climate on

³⁸ Heng, “Inventions/Reinventions,” p. 35.

³⁹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, pp. 100-101.

⁴¹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 11.

⁴² Worm, *Geschichte und Weltordnung*, p. 303.

⁴³ Siebold, “The Hereford Mappamundi,” p. 33.

population during the thirteenth century.⁴⁴ Additionally, the map was not so much promoting its own narrative as it was following the footsteps of a millennium-old tradition. Considering this fact, narrative function in the sense of Worm's bild is severely diminished. And indeed one could even argue that this contemporary understanding makes the map more diagram-like, as the monsters are essentially ornamented depictions of what were then conceived of as "scientific" phenomena. This portrayal lines up well with Matthew Edney's contention that cartography "is human-made and is the product of cultural and social forces."⁴⁵ J.B. Harley adds to this notion, stating that the cartographic process is inextricably linked with "values, such as those of ethnicity, politics, religion, or social class, and they are also embedded in the map-producing society at large."⁴⁶ Therefore, one cannot artificially separate the map and its surrounding contemporary cultural narrative.

As to why the monsters are found only outside England, scholars who reject the "subconscious marginalization" claim would respond that this is tautologically necessary; the viewers and makers of the map were English and therefore knew well that no such beings were in their vicinity. They could make no claims about foreign lands with such epistemological certainty. In any case, the narrative function collapses if one takes this view, for the map is no longer intentionally promoting a specific ethnic worldview. The ambiguity of interpretation, however, makes it a prime candidate for "zwischenform" status.

Another element of the map's depiction of foreign lands remains crucial to discuss. As previously elaborated, reflection and inversion are central motifs of the map. This is true both in the literal sense of the physical work (Africa and Europe) and in what it represents, i.e., the Christian worldview. The depiction of England as one of the only lands devoid of monsters and beasts ironically makes it a frontier and a margin. Normalcy, after all, is a majority condition. England has no monsters, encouraging people to "view themselves from the point of view of the Other and, in turn, see themselves as Other."⁴⁷ The whole map seems frozen at that pivotal point between life and death, order and chaos, and familiar and foreign. In Fricke's sense, perhaps the whole map itself is a threshold. Delicately and with intent, it thereby balances both bild and diagram across time, space, and reality itself.

Beyond other countries and ethnicities, the Hereford Mappa Mundi also approaches women in a particularly revealing and potentially narrative-functioning way. Debra Higgs Strickland wrote that a comprehensive interpretation finds "the Hereford Map's female iconography as a misogynist

⁴⁴ Siebold, "The Hereford Mappamundi," p. 33.

⁴⁵ Matthew Edney, *Cartography: The Ideal and its History*, (University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 228.

⁴⁶ J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica*, 26:2 (1989): p. 5.

⁴⁷ Dolmans, "England at the Edge of the World," p. 164.

worldview presented as a view of the world.”⁴⁸ The previously-discussed Tower of Babel is the largest architectural icon on the map, and it is no coincidence that it casts a shadow over four women: Eve, the siren, Lot’s wife, and Noah’s wife. These women, just by virtue of inclusion on the map, reveal a great deal. Each one is known chiefly by their relation to men, whether as a partner or as a temptress. In Eve’s case, the Biblical story of her creation from one of Adam’s ribs makes this relative quality literally true. These female figures all collectively “suggest that wifely disobedience was an especially troubling behavior because it directly challenged male authority and control.”⁴⁹

This depiction fosters a binary, manichean worldview. Either a woman is pure and virtuous like the Virgin Mary, or she is lascivious and immoral like those over whom Babel’s shadow ominously looms. The siren in particular occupies a position directly opposite the bare-breasted virgin, holding a mirror that again repeats the reflection motif. She is, “like Mary, a type of intercessor, but with privileged access not to God, but to the world, in which she enables viewers to locate themselves by inviting them to see their own reflections in her outward-turned mirror.”⁵⁰ Depicted in this way, she is a stand-in for sins like vanity and hedonism, from which every “true Christian” must abstain. Her position directly opposite the Virgin, and indeed the inclusion of all other women besides Mary, becomes part of the map’s norm-reinforcing “masculine vision.”⁵¹ In this realm, the map clearly leans more toward a bild than a diagram, and the intended objective narrative is clear. As Strickland wrote, “Hereford Map [w]as an active agent in the medieval economy of misogyny, in which patriarchal Christian theological and social agendas were mutually reinforced.”⁵² One must not overlook this component when analyzing the map.

Conclusion

The Hereford Mappa Mundi is far more than a simple medieval map; it is a sophisticated visual statement blending geography, theology, and ideology. As John Noble Wilford wrote, it “reflected Christian doctrine more than observed fact.”⁵³ Its primary function is thus narrative, aligning closely with Worm’s definition of a bild. The distortions of geography, the selective emphasis on Christian doctrine, and the stark moral delineations via “otherization” all indicate an intent to guide the viewer toward a singular worldview. The map was primarily intended as an instrument of cultural and

⁴⁸ Debra Higgs Strickland, “The Female Presence on the Hereford World Map,” *Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, 8 (2022): p. 6.

⁴⁹ Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 26.

⁵⁰ Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 27.

⁵¹ Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 36.

⁵² Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 7.

⁵³ John Noble Wilford, *The Mapmakers: The Story of the Great Pioneers in Cartography - From Antiquity to the Space Age*, (Pimlico, 2002), p. 40.

religious instruction rather than as an objective representation of space. After all, if not, there would have been no reason to write many of its descriptions in French (really Anglo-Norman). The creators clearly envisaged visitors beyond the clergy, for whom Latin alone would have sufficed, interacting with it.⁵⁴ At the same time, the map resists complete categorization. While it doubtlessly incorporates the above elements of a bild, it maintains several features one would expect in a diagram. In this sense, it serves as a “scientific” or philosophical tool, especially if one embraces Siebold’s “meteorological determinism” interpretation of the fauna and flora.

Ultimately, the Hereford Mappa Mundi is best understood as a *zwischenform*, a transitional object that straddles the boundary between map and narrative image. Jerry Brotton captured this idea of simultaneous narrative and schematic function best: the map “*shows* [diagram] und *narrates* [bild] the complete history from creation to salvation, a story that stretches from the beginning to the end of all time.”⁵⁵ In its fusion of past and present, sacred and secular, and bild and diagram, the Hereford Mappa Mundi offers a striking glimpse into the medieval mind, one that saw the world not as it was, but as it was desired to be.

⁵⁴ Harvey, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Jerry Brotton, *Die Geschichte der Welt in Zwölf Karten*, trans. Michael Mueller (C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2014). Original text: “Die Karte zeigt und erzählt die vollständige Geschichte von der Schöpfung bis zur Errettung, eine Geschichte, die vom Anfang bis zum Ende aller Zeit reicht.”

build-diagram boundary.⁵ A prime example of such a “zwischenform” (in-between form) is the Hereford Mappa Mundi. Dating to approximately 1300 CE, it is the largest extant medieval map, part of a series of other *mappae mundi* produced during its time, yet in many key ways diverging from contemporary “cartographic orthodoxy.” Analysis of the extent to which the Hereford map is a diagram, zwischenform, or bild must consider *inter alia* potential narrative functions in the theological, historical, patriarchal, and proto-nationalistic (essentially xenophobic here) realms. Because the map combines real topographical features with cherry-picked geographic and mythological distortions, promotes a one-tracked theologically-based view of life, and blatantly paints certain groups, like women or Scythians, as “others” in contrast to the divinely favored, the map is a prime example of a late-stage zwischenform that most strongly leans on bild features. However, one must not ignore the map’s plethora of characteristics one would normally associate with diagrams, e.g., its schematic, timeline-like organization of Christian chronology. It is, therefore, a blending of history, geography, and theology⁶ organized like a diagram and created with bild-like artistic flourish and narrative purposes.



Figure 1. Hereford Mappa Mundi

⁵ Denis Wood, “The Power of Maps,” *Scientific American*, 268:5 (1993): pp. 89-90. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24941480>.

⁶ David Woodward, “Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 75:4 (1985): p. 514.

Geographic Distortions and Theological Exhortations

Crucial in any study of the Hereford Mappa Mundi is acknowledgment of the fact that it was never intended for navigational purposes. Indeed, even setting aside its 158 cm by 133 cm size, the object would be of little help to lost travelers. This is because it is “above all a decorative map that belongs within the domain of art.”⁷ Its lack of measured distances proves that it was not meant to help with actual travel; distortions exist because the conceptual (i.e., promotion of narrative) overrode the practical (i.e., explanatory schematic) in the process of making the map.⁸ This is already a strong indicator of at least partial tendency toward *bild* status, but one must analyze further to form a more in-depth conception.

At first glance, the world is entirely unrecognizable, and many labels seem erroneously placed. Africa, for instance, is labelled as Europe and vice versa. Many scholars claim that this reversal was by design, and if so, this makes the reversal part of a broader narrative that pushes this *zwischenform* map closer toward being a *bild* than a diagram. As Marcia Kupfer wrote, the “Map’s performance... revolves around a commonplace Latin pun on cognate derivatives of the root *specio*, to see.”⁹ Mirror motifs, playing on the words *specula* (lookout from an elevated position) and *speculum* (mirror), were quite common during this time. They had also long been regarded as objects inviting self-contemplation. The map is therefore more of a “god’s-eye view” than anything a human could ever see.¹⁰ With the continental reversal, one sees the world from Christ’s perspective, reflected on a divine ocular surface, and one observes oneself in the process. In this, the map builds on long-standing conventions that sought to encode “Christ’s vision opposite us at the Second Coming.”¹¹ The mix-up between Africa and Europe thus compels viewers to reflect on the limitations of this ephemeral human life, on how they are merely mortal, and on how divine truth lies not in this world but in the next. This long-standing Christian idea harkens back to Paul’s meditation on the limitations of earthly life: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”¹²

If this distortion was indeed intentional and had the above purpose, it means that the map was intended to capture every creature’s life at all stages in a single image. Even the afterlife, represented by Hell, Heaven, and the word *MORS*, all outside of the well-inhabited circular Earth, is present. The map would accordingly become not just a *bild* with narrative function but rather a piece in which

⁷ Naomi Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm*, (Boydell Press, 2005), p. 133.

⁸ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, pp. 2-3.

⁹ Marcia Kupfer, *Art and Optics in the Hereford Map*, (Yale University Press, 2016), p. 8.

¹⁰ Kupfer, *Art and Optics*, p. 8.

¹¹ Kupfer, *Art and Optics*, p. 9.

¹² 1. Corinthians 13:12 (King James Bible).

multiple realities are simultaneously displayed, i.e., “vertical split” in Beate Fricke’s terminology.¹³ On the Hereford Mappa Mundi, this split places “pictorial emphasis on the internal experience” of all involved actors, thereby strengthening the bild-fitting narrative’s efficacy.¹⁴ The boundary between Africa and Europe may therefore be a threshold in Fricke’s sense, for it is the point where earthly perception collapses, and one can acknowledge the aforementioned “god’s-eye view.” Solidifying this point is the presence of a figure on horseback in the corner near the word “MORS” looking back at the life-bearing continents. Next to him are the words *passe avant*, or “go beyond.” He is just outside of the known, inhabited world. Now, he sees the world as it really is; in this world, the viewer sees only the reflection of God, but in the next, they will “go beyond” and see clearly with the divine. In any case, the narrative function is clear and stark, pushing the map closer toward the bild category.

The intentionality of the continental misrepresentations has been recently called into question, though, and if so, it severely diminishes the map’s potential narrative function. Paul D.A. Harvey has claimed the reversal was simply an error. The different lettering style between continent labels and other words on the map implies that another hand wrote them, and analysis of the map indicates these continent labels were indeed written much later than anything else.¹⁵ If one accepts this view, the motif of reflection collapses, and this part of the map’s bild-like narrative function withers away. No longer is it an artistic elaboration attempting to promote and represent a single normative worldview; rather, it becomes a plain, albeit inaccurate, assemblage of lines and curves that loosely represents real-world topography. In this sense, the map would become a diagram.

Another salient geographical distortion of the map is its cardinal orientation and the positioning of Jerusalem at the center. Although there were many such T-O maps during the time period, many, if not most, took other forms. In and immediately after the Crusades, however (1095-1272), the popularity of T-O maps shot up immensely as they became a means to convey a Christian message.¹⁶ Given that the cartographer chose to follow the T-O orientation and not, say, a zonal one, the intent of this artistic object is clear: advancing a Christian narrative, perhaps even implicitly justifying the Crusades as righteous odysseys to recover the Holy Land. This is a singular story, precisely as Worm’s bild would demand. Earth’s division into three parts (Europe, Asia, and Africa) also parallels the Biblical division of the world by Noah’s sons.¹⁷ Noah himself, near the center

¹³ Beate Fricke, “Presence Through Absence: Thresholds and Mimesis in Painting,” *Representations*, 130:1 (2015): p. 15.

¹⁴ Fricke, “Presence Through Absence,” p. 16.

¹⁵ Paul D.A. Harvey, *Mappa Mundi: The Hereford World Map*, (University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 11.

¹⁶ Woodward, “Reality, Symbolism, Time, and Space in Medieval World Maps,” pp. 515-516.

¹⁷ Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “Reading the World: The Hereford Mappa Mundi,” *Australian and New Zealand Association of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 9:1 (1991): pp. 120-122.

and perched on top of Mount Ararat, is a rather conspicuous figure on the map. His presence is undeniably a visual tool used to aid Christian morality narratives. Yet once again, the fact that this event is portrayed simultaneously (less common among pure narrative portrayals) along a traceable curved line that chronicles Biblical history from the Garden of Eden to Judgement Day makes it at least partially adherent to the schematic characteristics of a diagram. Given that these are not cosynchronous phenomena, the object is arguably as much a timeline, and thus a diagram, as it is a map. Still, where Judgement Day is depicted, at the apex of the map, Christ stands noticeably. It is no coincidence that this is the easternmost point of the up (east was rendered up), the same direction from Hereford as Jerusalem. Where Christ stood, the sun rose. When transferring these facts to Worm's bild vs. diagram methodology, one can only conclude that in this way the map is both a bild and a diagram simultaneously. It is a pictorial, narrative-promoting bild, but it is largely organized as an explanatory, "scientific" diagram. This makes it a *zwischenform* to the highest degree.

The narrative that the map promotes is not just one of Christian virtue and superiority. Rather, it specifically elevates the Western Christian worldview, i.e., the opposite of Orthodox Christianity practiced in the Byzantine Empire since the Great Schism of 1066. Precisely for this reason, Constantinople is depicted as literally upside-down. Besides its inverted buildings, it is also notably smaller than Rome and even Hereford. The glory and might of Byzantium had significantly diminished since the Macedonian and Komnenoi Dynasties, but the city was still far more internationally significant and populated than Rome, and it had been for circa 800 years.¹⁸ Even in areas over which they had long lost control (e.g., Scythia), strong cultural influence remained. Especially in the context of soon-to-be-discussed xenophobic portrayals of barbaric Scythians, the portrayal of Constantinople as petty and upside-down (i.e., schismatic and heretical) is therefore crucial to the map's bild-like narrative function. This is true even though some of the negatively portrayed groups, e.g., the Scythians, were not contemporary with the map's creation; they lived on the steppes between roughly the ninth and second centuries BCE and, as such, are historical rather than contemporary references. In any case, the West, especially England, was home to the "real" Christians, who held the "true" interpretation of scripture. The East was home to the opposite. In true bild form, the map makes this known to its viewer.

Although antiquity remained a source of fascination and inspiration throughout the medieval period, this anti-Eastern sentiment may explain at least part of the prevalence of figures from antiquity. The makers of the map were conscious of their inheritance of antiquity and wanted to show it, at least insofar as it did not directly contradict Christian doctrine. For this reason, despite high total numbers for both, the rate of concepts associated with Biblical history is more than double that of antique

¹⁸ Adam Usk, *Chronicle*, ed. and trans., Sir Edward Maunde Thompson (Oxford University Press, 1904), p. 220.

history on the map;¹⁹ there was to be no confusion of narratives. Curiously, Augustus Caesar, whose son-in-law Agrippa made a now-lost map that was likely one of the Hereford Mappa Mundi's main sources,²⁰ is situated just below the British Isles on the map. This and Caesar's "13th-century appearance" have led many scholars to interpret "the map's Christianized depiction of a Roman emperor as a bold allusion to the supercession of imperial Rome by papal Rome."²¹ Not only does this deny that right and the implied authority therewith to Eastern Rome (Byzantium); it also solidifies the map's narrative of (Western) Christian supremacy in general by associating past power with present purity and correctness. Additionally, one must note that even when the map depicts Babylon (whose Tower of Babel is a dark edifice memorializing human arrogance and thereby also very fitting for the map's narrative-like implicit condemnation of the East), Rome, or other cities most famous for their antique and thus pagan histories, it does so within the physical circle of Christ's dominion.²² It thereby shows that "God is the one ruler of all ages, kingdoms, and places."²³ Thus, the map yet again fosters a bild-like narrative of the world, even if its means to that end are more schematic and better suited to a diagram. From topography to orientation to labeling, the map embraces features of both bild and diagram.

"Otherization" of Social Groups

Black-and-white portrayals of groups to which the map's creators and viewers principally belonged were not limited to just religious affiliation. The map also contains a plethora of proto-nationalistic and xenophobic elements that emphasize the "distant and strange," as it was designed to promote the previously analyzed underlying theological and political principles. Likewise, some scholars (e.g., Kline) have argued that the portrayal of women in the map follows a parallel path. By reflecting misogynistic medieval tendencies, except in portraying the Virgin Mary, the map reinforced contemporary gender norms. These depictions of demographic groups reveal key insights into the minds of the map's maker and their contemporary surroundings; more relevantly, however, the conscious choice to create the map in such ways exemplifies its narrative-focused bild tendencies more than any other part.

Besides the aforementioned geographical errors, one of the main reasons this map is so unrecognizable to the modern eye is that it contains an abundance of creatures. Going beyond the forty unique types of animals, both real and mythical, there are also fifty-three unique types of "strange

¹⁹ Jim Siebold, "The Hereford Mappamundi," My Old Maps, accessed March 1, 2025, p. 31.

²⁰ Siebold, "The Hereford Mappamundi," p. 9.

²¹ Debra Higgs Strickland, "Edward I, Exodus, and England on the Hereford World Map," *Speculum*, 93:2 (2018): p. 446.

²² Heng, "Inventions/Reinventions," p. 35.

²³ Wogan-Browne, "Reading the World," p. 124.

racés.”²⁴ The choice to place certain animals or monsters in certain regions was unquestionably deliberate, political, and narrative-based. This holds true even if they do not have an accompanying description, which was often the case: “with few exceptions... the animals are shown singly without narrative details.”²⁵ As will be shown below, this fact may diminish the extent to which the map is a bild, but even without explicit captions or descriptions, the beasts still serve an implicit narrative function through *their placement and distribution*.

In England and the western Mediterranean area, only the buffalo and genet are depicted, but the “rest of the world overflows with animal life” and descriptions of strange creatures.²⁶ Wales, for instance, is filled with “curious hybrids and monstrous peoples, ox-men and werewolves.”²⁷ One finds the brunt of these depictions in India, Ethiopia, and Scythia. There, covering nearly the whole of each region, are horse-hoofed men, people with meter-long ears, headless people, basilisks, satyrs, and more. These depictions were not some idiosyncratic conjuration of the cartographer. They are based quite faithfully on the work of Solinus, whose third-century works catalog the zoological marvels of the terrestrial periphery.²⁸ Solinus himself was merely one of many ancient and medieval geographers who were fascinated by the so-called “wonders of the east.” Indeed, a work by that exact name appeared in manuscripts like the Nowell Codex around 1100 or 1200, once again chronicling the fantastic creatures of exotic and unfamiliar lands. This contemporary context is crucial: “In the Middle Ages, nature was feared; the uncontrollable wilderness loomed frighteningly against the security of the enclosed.”²⁹ The chaos of the outside and unknown is starkly contrasted with attempts to build order through cities and churches in more familiar realms.

The most salient effect of these depiction choices is the strengthening of the map’s narrative function in the sense of Worm’s concept of bild. As mentioned, some of the images even come with accompanying descriptions. For instance, it is said of the Gangines of Ethiopia that “there is no friendship with them.”³⁰ In Scythia, one encounters the most brutal descriptions: “they love war; they drink the blood of enemies... to be devoid of experience of slaughtering is a disgrace.”³¹ By no means is it merely coincidental that nearly all of the monsters are placed not just at the unknown margins but

²⁴ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 144.

²⁵ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 111.

²⁶ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 109.

²⁷ Emily Dolmans, “England at the Edge of the World,” *Writing Regional Identities in Medieval England*, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 164.

²⁸ Rudolf Wittkower, “Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942): p. 174.

²⁹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 150.

³⁰ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 151.

³¹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 152.

specifically to Christ's left. On this side, too, is an angel that is repelling the damned, who are being led by a demon to the mouth of hell. For these beasts, therefore, "their deviation could be moralized as the function of sin."³² Jerusalem, central to the Christian order of contemporary life and the aesthetic order of the map, is depicted as the complete opposite of the chaotic, beast-filled surroundings. The "others" are impure and strange, but the true Christians are stable and correct. This contrast may also be a commentary on the afterlife and its inevitability, which is a Christian message. Just as the word MORS surrounds the map's figurative garden of life, so too does chaos surround order. There is a "remarkable fluidity" between the now and the eventual, between the real and the imagined.³³ Sooner or later, all must cross over. Regardless of how one interprets the depiction of beasts, even when factoring in this schematic principle of life and death and, therefore, a quasi-diagrammatic attribute, this element of the map seems to serve predominantly a narrative function. Its narrative clearly promotes the Western Christian worldview and way of life while denigrating and dismissing all others as improper.

As for why Scythia is so singled out for having uniquely evil inhabitants, the most likely explanation relates to Alexander the Great. As narrated by Solinus, in Scythia are the "sons of accursed Cain. The Lord closed these in by means of Alexander the Great: for an earthquake took place... at the time of the Antichrist they will break out and will carry persecution to the whole world."³⁴ Some scholars like Scott Westrem and Andrew Gow claim that this unclean race of cannibals was meant to portray the Jewish people, who were "defined as unclean and monstrous by virtue of the blood libel."³⁵ Furthermore, it may have even been more generally meant to "accommodate future fears," e.g. the rising power of the Ottoman Turks.³⁶ The Book of John Mandeville (circa 1360) corroborates this contemporary worldview, but scholars should be careful not to make rash assumptions. Figures across Late Antiquity and the Medieval Period from Augustine to Nicolaus of Lyra rejected the identification of Gog and Magog with any specific ethnic group.³⁷ Such an opinion was by no means universal.

In any case, the overwhelming narrative purpose of such a portrayal of Scythia and other regions is clear. Europe, and especially England, has fortifications, cathedrals, and cities. Outside of

³² Wogan-Browne, "Reading the World," p. 130.

³³ Janina Ramirez and Peter Frankopan, hosts, "Map of Constantinople & The Hereford Mappa Mundi," *Art Detective* (podcast), March 22, 2017, accessed 8 March 2025.

³⁴ A.O. Denisov, "Отображение Памяти Об Александре Македонском На Средневековых Картах," trans. Daniel Bethke, Lomonosov Moscow State University (2019), p. 260.

³⁵ Geraldine Heng, "Inventions/Reinventions," in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 35.

³⁶ Scott Westrem, "Against Gog and Magog," in *Text and Territory*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 71.

³⁷ Westrem, "Against Gog and Magog," p. 68.

Europe, one encounters fewer and fewer such markers of “civilization.” Geography becomes ethnography, and the observer is forced to see “Europe as the civilized territory of urban life—a web of cities—while global races swarm in other vectors of the world.”³⁸ For beasts, the map followed Solinus, but for less fantastic animals, it based most of its descriptions and portrayals on the medieval Bestiary, which often included moralizing Christian interpretations of each beast’s characteristics. For this reason, elephants are placed in the Garden of Eden on the map; they were thought to symbolize Adam and Eve. However, this does not apply to all fauna and flora on the map. In many cases, “[n]o linkage to the allegorical underpinnings of relationships between these images can be detected.”³⁹ The map in this way functions more than anything else like a non-narrative zoological “travel guide” that explains the traits of each animal, a diagram in Worm’s sense.⁴⁰ Because of this, narrative function in the map is certainly present but perhaps more limited than one may initially suppose. The absence of moralizing descriptions for most of the animals in the map was indeed “symptomatic of developments in the thirteenth century toward secularization”⁴¹ and therefore the removal of some bild-like narrative functions. Nonetheless, the Hereford Mappa Mundi leans most heavily toward being a bild in Worm’s sense, at least from a demographic perspective. Including the beast pictures and descriptions (not just “normal animals”) no longer offers “the contemplator in their abstraction a wide space for association”⁴² but rather drives the viewer toward a single, narrative-based, largely xenophobic medieval worldview. This holds true in the big picture, even if not every single creature can be clearly linked to some moral message.

There is, however, another view of these characteristics. Some scholars, such as Jim Siebold, have contextualized the map’s strong “otherization” within contemporary scientific thinking. This view rejects the “medieval ignorance” claim and sidesteps the “medieval xenophobia” claim. Noting that Europe is as full of monsters as everywhere else, Siebold states that medieval zonal theory was largely governed by “meteorological determinism.”⁴³ The Earth was said to be surrounded by a couple of extremely harsh climatic zones, whose environmental pressures exerted strong distortionary forces on anyone nearby. According to the common contemporary understanding, conditions in the extremities were strongly linked with the sustainability of human life. From this came the ideas of the monsters. According to this view, the map’s depiction of strange foreigners was not so much a “subconscious marginalization” as it was a reflection of the growing interest in the effect of climate on

³⁸ Heng, “Inventions/Reinventions,” p. 35.

³⁹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, pp. 100-101.

⁴¹ Kline, *Maps of Medieval Thought*, p. 11.

⁴² Worm, *Geschichte und Weltordnung*, p. 303.

⁴³ Siebold, “The Hereford Mappamundi,” p. 33.

population during the thirteenth century.⁴⁴ Additionally, the map was not so much promoting its own narrative as it was following the footsteps of a millennium-old tradition. Considering this fact, narrative function in the sense of Worm's bild is severely diminished. And indeed one could even argue that this contemporary understanding makes the map more diagram-like, as the monsters are essentially ornamented depictions of what were then conceived of as "scientific" phenomena. This portrayal lines up well with Matthew Edney's contention that cartography "is human-made and is the product of cultural and social forces."⁴⁵ J.B. Harley adds to this notion, stating that the cartographic process is inextricably linked with "values, such as those of ethnicity, politics, religion, or social class, and they are also embedded in the map-producing society at large."⁴⁶ Therefore, one cannot artificially separate the map and its surrounding contemporary cultural narrative.

As to why the monsters are found only outside England, scholars who reject the "subconscious marginalization" claim would respond that this is tautologically necessary; the viewers and makers of the map were English and therefore knew well that no such beings were in their vicinity. They could make no claims about foreign lands with such epistemological certainty. In any case, the narrative function collapses if one takes this view, for the map is no longer intentionally promoting a specific ethnic worldview. The ambiguity of interpretation, however, makes it a prime candidate for "zwischenform" status.

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Beyond other countries and ethnicities, the Hereford Mappa Mundi also approaches women in a particularly revealing and potentially narrative-functioning way. Debra Higgs Strickland wrote that a comprehensive interpretation finds "the Hereford Map's female iconography as a misogynist

⁴⁴ Siebold, "The Hereford Mappamundi," p. 33.

⁴⁵ Matthew Edney, *Cartography: The Ideal and its History*, (University of Chicago Press, 2019), p. 228.

⁴⁶ J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica*, 26:2 (1989): p. 5.

⁴⁷ Dolmans, "England at the Edge of the World," p. 164.

worldview presented as a view of the world.”⁴⁸ The previously-discussed Tower of Babel is the largest architectural icon on the map, and it is no coincidence that it casts a shadow over four women: Eve, the siren, Lot’s wife, and Noah’s wife. These women, just by virtue of inclusion on the map, reveal a great deal. Each one is known chiefly by their relation to men, whether as a partner or as a temptress. In Eve’s case, the Biblical story of her creation from one of Adam’s ribs makes this relative quality literally true. These female figures all collectively “suggest that wifely disobedience was an especially troubling behavior because it directly challenged male authority and control.”⁴⁹

This depiction fosters a binary, manichean worldview. Either a woman is pure and virtuous like the Virgin Mary, or she is lascivious and immoral like those over whom Babel’s shadow ominously looms. The siren in particular occupies a position directly opposite the bare-breasted virgin, holding a mirror that again repeats the reflection motif. She is, “like Mary, a type of intercessor, but with privileged access not to God, but to the world, in which she enables viewers to locate themselves by inviting them to see their own reflections in her outward-turned mirror.”⁵⁰ Depicted in this way, she is a stand-in for sins like vanity and hedonism, from which every “true Christian” must abstain. Her position directly opposite the Virgin, and indeed the inclusion of all other women besides Mary, becomes part of the map’s norm-reinforcing “masculine vision.”⁵¹ In this realm, the map clearly leans more toward a bild than a diagram, and the intended objective narrative is clear. As Strickland wrote, “Hereford Map [w]as an active agent in the medieval economy of misogyny, in which patriarchal Christian theological and social agendas were mutually reinforced.”⁵² One must not overlook this component when analyzing the map.

Conclusion

The Hereford Mappa Mundi is far more than a simple medieval map; it is a sophisticated visual statement blending geography, theology, and ideology. As John Noble Wilford wrote, it “reflected Christian doctrine more than observed fact.”⁵³ Its primary function is thus narrative, aligning closely with Worm’s definition of a bild. The distortions of geography, the selective emphasis on Christian doctrine, and the stark moral delineations via “otherization” all indicate an intent to guide the viewer toward a singular worldview. The map was primarily intended as an instrument of cultural and

⁴⁸ Debra Higgs Strickland, “The Female Presence on the Hereford World Map,” *Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, 8 (2022): p. 6.

⁴⁹ Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 26.

⁵⁰ Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 27.

⁵¹ Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 36.

⁵² Strickland, “The Female Presence,” p. 7.

⁵³ John Noble Wilford, *The Mapmakers: The Story of the Great Pioneers in Cartography - From Antiquity to the Space Age*, (Pimlico, 2002), p. 40.

religious instruction rather than as an objective representation of space. After all, if not, there would have been no reason to write many of its descriptions in French (really Anglo-Norman). The creators clearly envisaged visitors beyond the clergy, for whom Latin alone would have sufficed, interacting with it.⁵⁴ At the same time, the map resists complete categorization. While it doubtlessly incorporates the above elements of a bild, it maintains several features one would expect in a diagram. In this sense, it serves as a “scientific” or philosophical tool, especially if one embraces Siebold’s “meteorological determinism” interpretation of the fauna and flora.

Ultimately, the Hereford Mappa Mundi is best understood as a *zwischenform*, a transitional object that straddles the boundary between map and narrative image. Jerry Brotton captured this idea of simultaneous narrative and schematic function best: the map “*shows* [diagram] und *narrates* [bild] the complete history from creation to salvation, a story that stretches from the beginning to the end of all time.”⁵⁵ In its fusion of past and present, sacred and secular, and bild and diagram, the Hereford Mappa Mundi offers a striking glimpse into the medieval mind, one that saw the world not as it was, but as it was desired to be.

⁵⁴ Harvey, *Mappa Mundi*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Jerry Brotton, *Die Geschichte der Welt in Zwölf Karten*, trans. Michael Mueller (C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2014). Original text: “Die Karte zeigt und erzählt die vollständige Geschichte von der Schöpfung bis zur Errettung, eine Geschichte, die vom Anfang bis zum Ende aller Zeit reicht.”