Bountiful and Barren: Speculative (Re)presentations of Racial Capitalism in the Middle Ages

By

HILLARY CHERAMIE
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Approved:

Seeta Chaganti, Chair

Matthew Vernon

Mark Jerng

Joshua Clover

Committee in Charge

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Dissertation Abstract

"Bountiful and Barren: Speculative (Re)presentations of Racial Capitalism in the Middle Ages" examines how compendia, maps, and travel narratives from the Middle Ages strategically utilize speculation in the construction of racialized geographies. I argue that racialized geographies were consistently conscripted with the opportunity for the extraction of material wealth, and that the epistemological stabilization of these speculations demonstrates that the origins of racial capitalism exist in a deeper timescale than is commonly acknowledged. The recent reinvestigation of postcolonialism by medieval studies has incited much-needed conversations about race across the field, but little attention has been given to how the material conditions of racialism have been continuous over time – and how economic theory can help us to better understand the emergence of global colonialism from the Middle Ages as well as the centrality of speculation in modern racial capitalism. My study engages Marxism to interrogate economic history and accumulation while interrogating why the terms of Marxism have been so difficult to translate to the preindustrial Middle Ages. I argue that speculative writing practices – in both the past and the present – have embedded fictitious perspectives into the power relations of extraction, accumulation, and subjugation that are the necessary conditions for racial capitalism to develop and spread. My research demonstrates that medieval compendia, maps, and travel narratives are racializing technologies used by Latin Christendom to speculate and foreclose the future of colonialism and racial capitalism. My analysis details how knowledge was constructed and negotiated in these genres, and how speculative realities were refracted onto the materially fraught ambitions of Latin Christendom. This project traces racialized geographical knowledge as it stabilizes from the thirteenth century to the twentieth, beginning with Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor*. The first chapter, "Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*: Investment strategies for *deniers*, *precieuses pierres*, and *fin or*" analyzes the tripartite division and description of the world and the imposed juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty that compels the reader toward a literal cash-grab – Latini frames his *Tresor* as valuable information that should be invested in efforts that would lead to the accumulation of material value and wealth for the European elite. This chapter offers a clear frame of world-building as part of a cycle of speculation, investment, and foreclosure that would become the driving force of colonialism in the Early Modern period. In the second chapter, "Mandeville's Racializing Prism: Race, Time, and Speculation in *The Book of John Mandeville*," I argue that *The Book* (re)presents Latini's world of barrenness and bounty through the voice of the would-be traveler persona John Mandeville. The shift in genre from *compendia* to travel narrative heightens the material stakes of world-building by explicitly inviting readers to be writers, learners to be educators, everyone to be investors in the future of the world of Latin Christendom driven by colonialism. Scholars have dismissed *The Book* as plagiarized or have held it up as an example of benign multiculturalism – I posit that *The Book* served as a prism that triangulates race, geography, and wealth and through which future travelers would filter their accounts and experiences. Finally, the third chapter, "The Realm of Prester John: The Lost Horizon," identifies the effect of Mandeville's racializing prism on Columbus's *Letter* and the *Catalan Atlas*. These texts confirm Mandeville's speculation that there is space for a vastly wealthy, Eurocentric hegemony on the horizon.

Introduction

Many medieval and early modern poets preface their highly-wrought verse with a modesty topos, shifting authority to an unnamed someone or somewhere else while also entreating the reader to remain silent in their criticism. In medieval and early modern prose travel narratives, authors position their work with what I would characterize instead as an imperium topos: rather than shirking authority, these authors vigorously attest and reiterate the authenticity and authority of their claims while also entreating the reader to go out and bear witness to the authenticity of the text in the world, and to contribute to this discourse in writing if there remain any doubts. By means of its seemingly empirical support, the imperium topos usurps authority to create an unassailable empire of knowledge, relegating the reader as a subject that must remain silent unless supporting a materially imperial motive. John Mandeville does this to an extreme extent in the epilogue to *The Book of John Mandeville*, claiming that after his travels he showed his book "to the holy fader, the pope, … so that he, with his wise consayl wolde examine hit with diverse peple that beth in Rome" and address the concerns of men who "troweth noght but that they se with her owen eye."[1] Mandeville stakes his text as a matter proxy to theological dogma – to refute it would verge on the heretical – but addresses it to an audience of epistemological skeptics who would seem to distrust anything outside of experiential knowledge. The results of Mandeville's self-imposed inquest resulted in the Pope's declaration that "for certayn that all was soath that was therynne. … And therfore the holi fader, the pope, hath ratified and confermed my book in alle poyntes."[2] But the pope's ratification does not close the book, so to speak, on Mandeville's narrative because Mandeville still leaves the door open for future critics and

[1] John Mandeville, *The Book of John Mandeville*, ed. Tamarah Kohanski and C. David Benson (Medieval Institute Publications, 2007): 2838-2841.
[2] Ibid 2845 and 2847-2848.

contributors. He says that he has intentionally made his story incomplete by the omission of information: "Y wole say no more of mervayles that beth ther, so that other men that wendeth theder may fynde many nywe thynges to say, of whiche Y have noght tolde nother y-spoke."[3] Mandeville constructs the Truth of the world out there, beyond Western Europe, as a kind of Truth that is paradoxically both certain, ratified, and knowable but also perpetually new and unspoken. His imperious affect negotiates just enough space for the broad contours of his worldview to be replicated and only minimally amended or contradicted.

Mandeville's Truth-in-progress provides an ideological model for incorporating speculation into Latin Christendom's "discovery" of the world beyond Western Europe, and then (again paradoxically) imbues those speculations with an irrefutable authority. We might understand this concept in relation to modern mapping technologies like GIS. A Geographic Information System (GIS) is "a system that creates, manages, analyzes, and maps all types of data … [it] connects data to a map, integrating location data (where things are) with all types of descriptive information (what things are like there)."[4] Medieval maps and travel narratives share these traits with modern GIS – they not only described where things were, but they also told their audiences what things are like there as well as what *kinds* of *things* are "there." Medieval maps and travel narratives similarly pull information from a variety of sources and filter it through an interpretational prism to homogenize the ideology of the world image. One criticism of modern GIS that also applies to medieval maps and travel narratives is what Eric Sheppard calls "representational stabilization" and defines as "a process whereby the world becomes represented in a particular way."[5] For modern GIS the process of representational stabilization

[3] Ibid 2829-2832.
[4] "What is GIS?" *Esri*, accessed May 28, 2024, https://www.esri.com/en-us/what-is-gis/overview.
[5] Eric Sheppard, "Knowledge Production through Critical GIS: Genealogy and Prospects," *Cartographica* 40, no. 4 (2005): 8-9. Peter Bibby and Campbell define it as "the production of taken-for-granted boundaries and differentiated categorizations about spaces, characteristics, and

prioritizes Cartesian coordinates over a relational, lived spatial understanding and also prioritizes institutional databases as sources of spatial knowledge. Shepherd argues that the result is a map that is optimized for corporations or large state apparatuses and that alienates ordinary people from the land. Mandeville's imperium topos facilitates this kind of representational stabilization; the papal certification stabilizes his claims as reliable institutional knowledge, while his openness to amendment guarantees that (at least some aspects of) his text will be repurposed and represented again. In my analysis, I articulate representation as (re)presentation to draw attention to this stabilization as an iterative process. My analysis draws attention to the fact that not only are the representations of a geography or its description being stabilized, but that those correlated abstractions construct the world again and again until it concretizes into its own form of institutional knowledge.

"Bountiful and Barren: Speculative (Re)presentations of Racial Capitalism in the Middle Ages" examines how compendia, maps, and travel narratives from the Middle Ages strategically utilize speculation in the construction of racialized geographies. I argue that racialized geographies were consistently conscripted with the opportunity for the extraction of material wealth, and that the epistemological stabilization of these speculations demonstrates that certain operations necessary to the emergence of racial capitalism exist in a deeper timescale than is commonly acknowledged. The recent reinvestigation of postcolonialism by medieval studies has incited much-needed conversations about race across the field, but little attention has been given to how the material conditions of racialism have been continuous over time – and how economic theory can help us to better understand the emergence of global colonialism from the Middle

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boundaries across the Euclidean plane that go on to shape the application and impacts of GIS in practice" Peter Bibby and H Campbell "Geographic Information Systems and the Construction of Urban Form," in *ESRC The Future of Cities Conference* (1998), quoted in Eric Sheppard et al., "Geographies of the information society," *International Journal of Geographical Information Science* 13, no. 8 (1999): 804.

Ages as well as the centrality of speculation in modern racial capitalism. My study engages Marxism to examine how medieval authors framed the potential uses for accumulated wealth, but I also interrogate why the terms of Marxism have been so difficult to translate to the preindustrial Middle Ages.

Part of that difficulty stems from the modern retrospective analysis of capitalism, heavily influenced by industrialism in the concretization of capitalist modes of production, which significantly emphasizes how social and labor relations shifted under industrial capitalism. There are phenomena of capitalist ideations of labor in the Middle Ages, but (I don't see that) there is a discernible throughline to modernity. However, the medieval archive is fertile ground for interrogating the terms of how money can be a mechanism for value production, and how value production relies on the creation of racial difference. Ruth Wilson Gilmore states that "Capitalism requires inequality, and racism enshrines it. … So, all capitalism is racial from its beginning – which is to say capitalism that we have inherited, that is constantly producing and reproducing itself – and it will continue to depend on racial practice and racial hierarchy, no matter what."[6] Thus, my research centralizes the clear role of racialization in the speculative geography of the Middle Ages in order to ask questions about the relationship between race and wealth as a precursor to what would become race and value under capitalism in the eighteenth century.

In conducting this investigation, I argue that speculative writing practices – in both the past and the present – have embedded fictitious perspectives into the power relations of extraction, accumulation, and subjugation that are untrue at the same time that they are the necessary conditions for racial capitalism to develop and spread. My research demonstrates that

[6] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore," *Antipode Foundation* (2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI.

medieval compendia, maps, and travel narratives are racializing technologies used by Latin Christendom to speculate even as they foreclose any future except colonialism and racial capitalism. My analysis details how knowledge was constructed and negotiated in these genres, and how the resultant speculative realities were refracted onto the materially fraught ambitions of Latin Christendom.

The recent re-evaluation of the treatment of racialism in medieval literature has produced critical work that re-examines and reconstructs the medieval archive as a global one. Cord J. Whitaker, Nahir I. Otaño Gracia, and François-Xavier Fauvelle's *Speculum* Themed Issue: "Race, Race-Thinking, and Identity in the Global Middle Ages" and Sierra Lomuto's special issue of *boundary 2*: "The "Medieval" Undone: Imagining a New Global Past" are two excellent examples of this work. As Sierra Lomuto states in the introduction to her issue of *boundary 2*, "Medieval studies has not only propagated European history as white, cis-heteronormative, and Christian but also fostered an elite inaccessibility on the basis of esoteric specialization" – and it's going to take a lot of work and a lot of time to find and fill the gaps in the archive.[7] That effort is seriously compromised if the academy itself does not change, and if medieval studies maintains its antagonistic posture toward non-white scholars or subjects and continues to heap and funnel rewards and accolades toward white, affluent scholars and subjects kept deep within the tallest of ivory towers.

My approach to the Middle Ages has been shaped in the wake of the post-2016 turn toward the Global Middle Ages. On my first day as a Ph.D. student at UC Davis, in Seeta Chaganti's course "Genre before Genre," we discussed the Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rally that had occurred just one month prior and the ensuing discourse about what it means to study

[7] Sierra Lomuto, "Belle Da Costa Greene and the Undoing of 'Medieval' Studies," *boundary 2* 50, no. 3 (2023): 2.

the Middle Ages amidst a resurgence of white supremacy. In the years that followed, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives spread across some institutions, departments, and publications. But, as Rebecca De Souza recently argued, efforts toward diversification have broadly maintained the inherent Eurocentrism of "the English Department," when what the field needs is "disruptive decoloniality."[8] My project seeks to respond to Sierra Lomuto's call for "a process of undoing" by intervening in the contemporary discourse to untether identity politics from the epistemology of racialism in the Middle Ages.

This study combats a long history of medieval scholarship in which, as Cedric Robinson so aptly states in *Black Marxism*, "students of racism have happily reiterated the premise of a sort of mass psychology of chromatic trauma in which Europeans reactions to darker-skinned peoples are seen as natural."[9] The development of racialism was not born from total global ignorance, nor was it, as some have argued, from the pitiable position of some deep, psychological insecurity about size or peripherality (in the case of England in particular).[10] My approach to race in this project sees it as not merely chromatic, biological, geographical, or religious; I define race as a mode of dispossession that utilizes context to produce and (re)produce difference. Shifting and ongoingness are central to the construction of race, which is

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[8] Rebecca De Souza, "Are there limits to globalising the medieval?" *Postmedieval* 15 (2024): 271.
[9] Robinson, 67. Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000): 67.
[10] One such argument that contends that the position of England's peripherality as constitutive of their desire to conquer and reorient the world is Kathy Levezzo's *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community 1000-1534* (Cornell University Press, 2006). Lavezzo writes that for many "English cultural producers during the Middle Ages, geographic remoteness provided the means to articulate English national fantasy" (8). A similar argument is made by Asa Simon Mittman in *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (Routledge, 2006): "This self-imposed exile from all that was central to Christian belief [for the English] caused an anxiety to arise about their place on the earth, which was in turn viewed as a reflection of their place within God's divine plan. This may account for the unusually high number of world maps -- indeed, maps of any and all kinds -- surviving from medieval England. These maps, like our own modern maps, reveal more about their creators than they do about the regions they cover" (4-5).

why in this study I tend to gesture more toward "racialism" than "race."[11] Framing contexts as racializing focalizes the verb-presence of race as a mode of dispossession that is often material. My inflection of racialism is shaped by Jodi Melamed's definition of it as "a process that constitutes differential relations of human value and valuelessness according to specific material circumstances and geopolitical conditions while appearing to be (and being) a rationally inevitable normative system that merely sorts human beings into categories of difference."[12] My research demonstrates that in the Middle Ages, the rise of global maps and travel narratives creates an imperative to accumulate wealth via racialized dispossession as the path to economic domination – and that this is the foundation of Europe's position toward the "global."

Europe's colonial endeavors are founded upon this medieval construction of racialized dispossession as a means to the accumulation of wealth (and, eventually, value and capital). Drawing from Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson in the introduction to *Colonial Racial Capitalism*, I find it crucial, particularly for this study centered in the Middle Ages, to recognize that, "Racial Capitalism *is* colonial capitalism, especially where settler and imperial thefts of land, the production of hierarchies of global space, and the expropriation of labor occur by means of recursive processes that require possession and rights in order to produce dispossession and rightlessness."[13] This distinction from Cedric Robinson's study of racial capitalism in *Black Marxism* highlights how neither colonialism nor capitalism developed without first dispossessing indigenous peoples of their resources and lands. Alyosha

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[11] In "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality* (Routledge, 1992), Homi Bhabha contends that the fixity of racial difference as a paradoxical mode of representation: "it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" (18).

[12] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 2.

[13] Susan Koshy, et al., "Introduction," *Colonial Racial Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2022): 7. Emphasis in the original.

Goldstein defines Marx's formulation of "so-called primitive accumulation" as "The coerced incorporation of noncapitalist forms of life, land, and labor into capitalist social relations that separate people from the means of production."[14] The Middle Ages establishes racialism as the means for dispossessing people of their land and wealth by constructing racialized people as alien to Latin Christendom. It is once this kind of alienation proliferates on European soil that the European population is coerced into a capitalist relation. This is the premise of why diversity, equity, and inclusion are futile efforts on stolen land – so-called primitive accumulation and wealth are time series problems: the limitation of the timescale for justice excludes indigenous temporality. DEI efforts are ultimately born out of centuries-long efforts of dispossession to build the racial capitalist world that is only propelled forward by homogeneity, inequity, and exclusion.[15]

This study relies on medieval depictions of the world to understand the motives at play in the formation of global racial capitalism. In the tradition of the "Transition Debate" (the transition being from feudalism to capitalism), most arguments have taken as their starting point the assumption of the European feudal economy as insular, isolated, or closed; retorts to these arguments assert that there is a long history of a global economy.[16] However, given my study of

[14] Alyosha Goldstein, "'In the Constant Flux of Its Incessant Renewal': The Social Reproduction of Racial Capitalism and Settler Colonial Entitlement," *Colonial Racial Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2022): 66.

[15] David Harvey's "Accumulation by Dispossession," *The Anti-Capitalist Chronicles* (Pluto Press, 2020) provides a compelling history of the role of dispossession in accumulation outside of the traditional Marxist realm of production. Harvey argues that the 2008 housing crisis, as an example of accumulation by dispossession, "is not happening to create wage labor but to liberate spaces so capital can come in and rebuild in a certain area, re-gentrify through a strategy of accumulation through urbanization. When we look at something like this again it's accumulation by dispossession. People are dispossessed of their rights, of their access to good areas of the city to live in. They're forced out to live on the margins where maybe they have long commutes to get to work. And so again and again and again we will see evictions and expulsions going on" (123-124).

[16] R.H. Hilton, "Introduction," *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. T.H. Aston and C.H.E. Philpin (Cambridge University Press, 1987): 6-8; Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills argue in *The World System: Five hundred years or five thousand?* (Routledge, 1993) that "the "Rise of the West," including European hegemony and its

medieval world-making via compendia, maps, and travel narratives, I take as my starting point for understanding the transition from feudalism to capitalism that even if Europe's economy had not successfully entrenched itself into a global economy of its making, vast resources and time were dedicated to toggling models and means for doing so for centuries. Given that this project is not one invested in tracking and mapping history, I do not seek to identify when capitalism (recognizable to modernity) becomes the dominant mode of production in Europe. Despite this, this project draws much-needed attention to the Middle Ages as a materially and politically significant site for examining the role of racialism in the material and political presence of modern racial capitalism. I aim to recognize that the level of global dispossession and resultant accumulation (necessary for the development of capitalism) was profoundly motivated by European speculation in the Middle Ages about the economic possibilities it (re)presented in its racialized world-building texts.

The (re)presentational stabilization of speculation is a continuous feature of the world-building that happens in the process of map-making from the Middle Ages to modernity. Regardless of the reality that *The Book of John Mandeville* refers to, as a map of the world it must stake out global authority. In the words of J.B. Harley, all maps are inherently "authoritarian images".[17] The texts and maps that constitute the archive of this project are not the origin points of race or racialism or capital or capitalism or racial capitalism – they are part of a process that (re)produces previous knowledge, and in doing so contributes to the (re)presentational stabilization of racialism. In *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Glen Coulthard argues that capitalism is "a structure of domination

expansion and later transfer of the "New World" across the Atlantic, did not just constitute a new, modern world-capitalist system. This development also – and even more so – represented a new but continued development and hegemonic shift within an old world system" (9).

[17] J.B. Harley, "Deconstructing the map," *Cartographica* 26 (1989): 7.

predicated on dispossession" – racialism is the process that facilitates the dispossession and renders people and geographies as more or less valuable to capitalist endeavors; whether they can be, in the words of Nathon McClintock, "enslaved, exterminated, exploited, or assimilated."[18] This is why it is not at all sufficient to focus only on the influence of identity politics or representation in the medieval archive. It creates a gaping hole in the archive by ignoring the role of speculative world-building in the forces and relations of production.

My project follows a thread running through Cedric Robinson's analysis of the Middle Ages that he discusses at critical junctures but never quite identifies as a consistent theme: the role of fiction in the emergence of racial capitalism. My argument expands Robinson's claim by arguing that *speculative* fiction is critical in the emergence of racial capitalism. The authors of *Speculate This!* trace the etymology of "speculate" to the Sanskrit *spas* as the seed from which we get a variety of words denoting observation – notably, the Latin *speculum,* for mirror.[19] They argue that "the etymological links between sight and touch, clarity and obfuscation, turn us toward not only speculation as thought but also speculation as a pressing toward an apprehension of the unknown". When we think of speculating historically, this applies across all directions of time – speculation is an act that collapses the past, present, and future into a singular alternate reality. Speculation collapses time by apprehending the unknown future from the present and using the past to make that future knowable. The creation of a knowable future, even if it's not knowable in its entirety, creates a point in space that either attracts or repels world-makers. This point in space carries with it an imperative to either actualize it (foreclose it) or avoid it. Speculation has two "semantic-conceptual registers: cognitive and economic" – in the cognitive

[18] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014): 15; Nathan McClintock, "Urban agriculture, racial capitalism, and resistance in the settler-colonial city," *Geography Compass* (2018): 3.
[19] Uncertain Commons, *Speculate This!,* (Duke University Press, 2013): 8. Many of the Mandeville author's sources are compendia, which are also known as "speculum literature."

register it means to apprehend and form conjectures about, and thus to "look into the future so as to hypothesize." The etymological economic association does not appear until the seventeenth century, when the Latin *specio, specere* (to look) gives way to the word *specie* – money. With this addition, to speculate about the future is to invest in a particular future wherein the speculator, as an investor in the future, has a "hope of profit but with the risk of loss."[20] Speculation does not just theorize about or imagine the future, it invests in the future. I argue that, instead of dismissing medieval travel narratives and maps as "inaccurate," we should understand these texts as always in the process of (re)presenting the world via speculation and urging their audiences to invest in the future world-image they create. Reframing these texts as speculative creates an opening to read the ways in which racialism has been fabricated and invested in as an opportunity to accumulate wealth.

The application of economic speculation has implications and complications which need to be addressed upfront. The authors of *Speculate This!* (cautiously) classify speculation as a "modern technology," which they differentiate from ancient divination or the commercial insurance practices of third century BCE China, on the basis of the limitlessness of modern speculation. In the economic register, "modern" speculation is an operation that annexes the future, as "if nothing of the future could possibly escape valorization through either thought or money." One issue with this stance on speculation is that it tethers both globalization and finance capital to the emergence of modern capitalism. *Speculate This!* distinguishes between "firmative" and "affirmative" speculation. The kind of overdetermined, alternative future-foreclosing speculation that is described as "firmative" speculation for the authors is more aligned with modern economic structures – its formula is to "produce-exploit-foreclose." An

[20] Uncertain Commons 9.

example of the foreclosure of futures outside of those speculated about is, referenced above from Alyosha Golstein's definition of "so-called primitive accumulation," the forced incorporation of noncapitalist forms into capitalist social relations. That incorporation forecloses any future outside of capitalism. "Affirmative" speculation, on the other hand, "thrives by concerning itself with an uncertainty that must not be reduced to manageable certainties." The speculative fictions produced in the medieval period examined in this project are a combination of both "firmative" and "affirmative" speculation. They produce, exploit, and foreclose not despite an irreducible uncertainty, but because of that irreducible uncertainty. Speculation, then, is an act of investment based on self-reflection that produces, exploits, and forecloses only those futures that align the warped mirror image of the present with reality in another time.

The present-future, where we live now, is increasingly determined by the paradox of uneven development. Uneven development is speculated about in medieval world-building texts through the juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty. Before the material dispossession of Asia and Africa (and the Americas, once Western Europe learned of their existence), Latin Christendom dispossessed these geographies of history. Western Europeans consistently (re)presented Asia and Africa in paradoxical terms: in the most barren and harsh landscapes, past the point where any human or animal could live, there's always a kingdom that has unsurpassed wealth – palaces made of crystals, seas full of diamonds, gold in every crevice of the landscape. The difference between absolute barrenness and overwhelming bounty is framed as a point of intervention because most often what's barren (or what's missing) is white humanity, or the "right" (white) kind of humanity, and the wealth that is accumulated is not used to beget more value. What's barren in these landscapes is a sense of time or history. This perceived barrenness is always posed in stark juxtaposition to Western European history, with its lists of kings and

lords and popes and conquests. The emptying out of time creates a one-way path toward the future determined by the domination of Western Europe.

The corrective to paradoxical barrenness and bounty – Europe abounding in history but bereft of enough wealth to befit that history, and Asia and Africa bereft of history but abounding in too many riches for places with no historical significance – coalesced in the late Middle Ages into a powerful speculative fiction about a wealthy Latin Christian empire on the horizon, both the physical horizon and the temporal horizon: the Realm of Prester John. The speculation that this kind of empire exists in Asia or Africa suggests that future history is already foreclosed – a Western conqueror has both already conquered and will (again) conquer these geographies; domination is inevitable because the compulsion toward it assumes that it is already not just possible but underway. In *Black Marxism*, Robinson argues that the legend of the Realm of Prester John, the discovery of which is the climax in several manuscripts of *The Book*, was a central facet of shaping the Eurocentric world beginning in the twelfth century. The legend provided an "obfuse prism" for "Europe's scholars and their less learned coreligionists" to filter and obfuscate "the authenticity of every datum, every traveler's report, every intelligence of its [Europe's] foreign trade, every fable of its poets, and every phatic foible of its soldiery."[21] Robinson points to the shifting, diffracting qualities of the prism as an origin point "for the destruction of the African past" by Christian Europe.[22] The Realm of Prester John is just one of many places that the Mandeville author speculates there is space for white extractive empire. When searches for the realm of Prester John continually proved to be unproductive, the mark simply shifted: "Thus, when the miraculous kingdom could not be located in the desert and steppes of central Asia or even Cathay, it did not cease its fascination but was transferred to the

[21] Robinson 99.
[22] Ibid.

south beyond the upper Nile."[23] This sentiment is reiterated by Stuart Hall, who frames medieval texts like *The Book* as helping to "form the template through which the New World took shape in the European mind": he argues that "The conquistadors did not always find what they were looking for. But they tried to assimilate what they saw into the epistemic framework through which they looked."[24] This epistemic framework is Robinson's racializing prism.

The archive on which this project draws demonstrates world-building in multiple genres – the compendium, the travel narrative, the map, and the novel. The breadth of genres demonstrates the epistemological flexibility of speculative knowledge and its deep proliferation into Europe's sense of knowledge about the world. Nedda Mehdizadeh argues that European cosmographers "established a genre of knowledge production that formalized and authorized white, European ways of knowing based on their desires to encapsulate the world in its entirety."[25] Mehdizadeh calls these systems of knowledge production "ideological pathways" toward "imperial racial violence."[26] An ideological pathway, though, implies the existence of a linear and mainstream route toward a desired goal. My examination of world-building phenomena in multiple genres demonstrates the nonlinear development of speculative (re)presentation in world-building texts: speculative world-building *creates space* for the emergence of racial capitalism. The systematic epistemology of world-building in these genres constantly shifts authority: the compendium and the map have deep authority but are detached and impersonal, whereas the travel narrative and the novel reconstitute the knowledge of the compendium and the map into a singular authority that can be easily replicated with difference

[23] Ibid.
[24] Stuart Hall, "In but Not of Europe: Europe and Its Myths," *Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (Duke University Press, 2021): 382.
[25] Nedda Mehdizadeh, "Cosmography and/in the Academy: Authorizing the Ideological Pathways of Empire," *Exemplaria*, 35, no. 1 (2023): 66.
[26] Ibid 67.

by future travel narrators using the imperium topos.

This dissertation holds *The Book of John Mandeville* as its throughline because it spreads rumors of Prester John's realm to an unprecedented audience and is a critical node in the network of knowledge that eventually manifests racial capitalism. *The Book*'s unique reception history captures both the forces that made modernity and the forces that cordoned off the medieval to the backward, unknowable past. *The Book*, as demonstrated by the 300+ extant manuscripts in English, French, Latin, Czech, Danish, Irish, Italian, and Spanish, was widely circulated amongst medieval and early modern audiences. But then in the nineteenth century when critics confirmed that *The Book* was not based on a real traveler's experience and that Sir John Mandeville was a nom de plume, it fell so sharply out of favor that it was conscripted to senseless fabulation. The (controversial) composition of *The Book* is why I find it an important text to study – the Mandeville author (re)presents material from around twenty-five texts and consulted another ten beyond that. Rosemary Tzanaki's *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences* demonstrates the many changes that *The Book* underwent in the production of so many manuscripts – ultimately, Mandeville as the narrator ends up as a cipher for anyone to build their own world.[27] With *The Book* at the core of this study, I examine one of Mandeville's sources to witness how the information therein is shaped to facilitate further speculation. In a similar way, I examine texts and maps that were influenced by *The Book* and highlight that the tethering of racialism and wealth extraction are consistent in each text.

In the first chapter of this project, "Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor*: Investment Strategies for World-building," I argue that Latini urges the readers of his 13th-century

[27] In *Mandeville's Medieval Audiences: A Study on the Reception of* The Book of Sir John Mandeville *1371-1550* (Ashgate, 2003), Tzanaki writes that "The enigma of the knight's identity and intention quickly developed in its reception, into the enigma of the *Book*'s multiple texts, readings, and audiences" (11).

compendium *Li Livres dou Tresor* to invest (literally and metaphorically) in manifesting the Eurocentric and racialized vision of the world that he describes in his text map. I begin with the compendium because it is a genre that predates the travel narrative – and because Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* is one of the known sources of *The Book of John Mandeville*. In this chapter, I argue that Latini diverges from the compendium genre by instructing his audience to act upon and (re)produce the knowledge presented in his *Tresor,* not just to accumulate more wealth, but also to see that the compendium can be a wellspring from which future wealth can be geometrically generated (instead of linearly) and multiply the dividends of reader's investments in an unprecedented way. In other words, he makes clear that his text should have material consequences. Latini frames the three parts of the *Tresor* in terms of material wealth, with each section having a different use for investment or transactional purposes. The map of the world is *deniers* [cash money]; the instruction in ethics, virtue, and governance is *precieuses pierres* [precious stones]; and the instruction in rhetoric is *fin or* [fine gold]. The three parts of this *Tresor* provide the epistemological tools necessary for the domination of Latin Christendom and establish the groundwork for the sense of the inevitability of domination. The map of the world, constructed via the paradox of bounty and barrenness, offers sites for the extraction of material resources and racializes the entirety of the world beyond Europe. The instruction in ethics justifies individual profiteering, and the instruction in rhetoric renders Eurocentrism inevitable. Building on Giovanni Arrighi's theory of systemic cycles of accumulation, which argues that the long history of capitalism demonstrates alternating phases of material expansion and finance capital, this chapter investigates the role of speculative world-building in cycles of material speculation, investment, and foreclosure in the development and spread colonialism in the Early Modern period.

In the second chapter, "Mandeville's Racializing Prism: Race, Time, and Speculation in *The Book of John Mandeville*," I argue that *The Book* (re)presents Latini's world of barrenness and bounty through the voice of the would-be traveler persona John Mandeville. The shift in genre from compendium to travel narrative heightens the material stakes of world-building by explicitly inviting readers to be writers, learners to be educators, everyone to be investors in the future of the world of Latin Christendom driven by colonialism. Scholars have dismissed *The Book* as plagiarized or have held it up as an example of benign multiculturalism – I posit that *The Book* served as a prism (in Robinson's terms) that triangulates race, geography, and wealth and through which future travelers would filter their accounts and experiences. I also argue that rather than reading *The Book* as a lie or misinformed or merely imaginative, *The Book* should be categorized generically as medieval speculative fiction. Speculative fiction uses world-building strategies, based in contemporaneous reality, to extrapolate into unknown spaces of the future or the past. My examination of *The Book* through the critical discourse surrounding speculative fiction illuminates the ways in which both race and the accumulation of wealth have been constructed and proliferate based on speculation.

In chapter three, "The *Lost Horizon*: Prester John in Shangri-La," I examine the long afterlife of the tale of the Realm of Prester John from Mandeville to the modern day. I begin by demonstrating instances in which medieval speculative world-building gets incorporated into modern epistemology in the *Catalan Atlas* and then Christopher Columbus's 1493 *Epistola* to Ferdinand and Isabella. Both of these artifacts speculate about the existence of a Latin Christian kingdom somewhere in either Asia or Africa (or the Americas). This chapter provides a history of the proliferation of the tale of the Realm of Prester John, which even if by another name determined colonial intervention in Tibet into the nineteenth century. I argue that by the

twentieth century, even as the name of Prester John is largely forgotten to the non-medievalist Western imagination, James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* re-invigorates the speculation of the existence of a Latin Christian kingdom on the Eastern horizon in Tibet and uses the paradox of barrenness and bounty to articulate that space. Many people define Shangri-La as a kind of earthly paradise, and I demonstrate that for Western audiences even in the twentieth century the earthly paradise is one of global European hegemony. This chapter demonstrates the striking similarities between compiled medieval travel narratives like *The Book of John Mandeville* and *Lost Horizon*. Likewise, *Lost Horizon* employs racialism in tandem with speculation about modern capitalist opportunities in the East. Hilton casts the racialized local Tibetans, for instance, as consumers of Western products – in Shangri-La, the porcelain tubs are made in Ohio.[28]

Finally, in the conclusion to this project, "Google Mappaemundi," I argue that Google's map of the world reintroduces medieval speculative world-building into modern epistemology in a very entrenched and material way. I examine reviews of Shangri-La Hotel properties in Southeast Asia to demonstrate how the world beyond Europe is still constructed in terms of bounty and barrenness and proliferate the tale of the Realm of Prester John, and how racialization on world maps continues to drive racial capitalism in the modern era. Despite self-proclamations as the most accurate map of the world, I highlight that Google's removal of reviews of prisons, police stations, and military outposts, demonstrates how the barrenness and bounty that defined medieval maps and travel narratives persists at home as well as abroad. Prisons, police stations, and military outposts are institutions that scholars like Ruth Wilson

[28] James Hilton, *Lost Horizon* (Important Books, 2013): 37.

Gilmore identify as critical loci for the operations of racial capitalism.[29] The relative barrenness of data in non-Western places produces a map that is distorted by unbalanced input, and Western travelers seeking out Shangri-Las cast non-Western spaces as having an overabundance of indigenous or non-Western people hawking bountiful goods when those travelers would rather buy a sense of empty space and empty time over material goods.

Despite the enshittification of Google's products, Google's Map in many cases is a platform for restorative world-building.[30] Moira O'Shea and Masha Vlasova's research explores the relocation of a monument of Edward Colston that was dismantled by protesters in 2020 and thrown in the River Avon. The location of the statue was relocated on Google Maps and renamed as "the Drowned Slave Trader Edward Colston" – this move, O'Shea and Vlasova argue, brings them to "consider new ways of imagining how the past might be represented in a speculative future."[31] Projects like Queering the Map have created critical archives of marginalized voices in their last moments during the ongoing genocide in Palestine.[32] Speculative time-collapsing maps and travel narratives can produce and foreclose a post-capitalist future. In addition to the examples above, M. E. O'Brien and Eman Abdelhadi's *Everything for Everyone; An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052-2072* provides a model for speculative world-building that creates ideological pathways toward liberation from racialism, capitalism, and carceralism.[33]

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[29] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007): 11-14.
[30] Cory Doctorow coined the term "enshittification" in the essay "Tiktok's enshittification" *Pluralistic* (21 January 2023) as "a seemingly inevitable consequence arising from the combination of the ease of changing how a platform allocates value, combined with the nature of a "two sided market," where a platform sits between buyers and sellers, holding each hostage to the other, raking off an ever-larger share of the value that passes between them."
[31] Moira O'Shea and Masha Vlasova, "Fluid Objects: Speculations on Monumentality," *ASAP/Journal* 6, no. 2 (2021): 286.
[32] Emma Kirby et al., "Queering the Map: Stories of Love, Loss and (Be)Longing within a Digital Cartographic Archive," *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 6 (2021): 1043–60.
[33] M. E. O'Brien and Eman Abdelhadi, *Everything for Everyone; An Oral History of the New York Commune, 2052-2072* (Common Notions, 2022).

Chapter 1

Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor*: Investment Strategies for World-building

In 1253, a Flemish Franciscan named William of Rubruck was sent as a missionary to Mongolia by Louis IX. During this period, Pope Innocent IV also sends emissaries, like Simon of Saint-Quentin and John of Plano Carpini, to Mongolia and the Far East. The texts they produced documenting their travels are some of the earliest models of the travel narrative genre that would proliferate in the colonial period.[34] The travel narrative was the mode through which all of the lies and loopholes used to justify colonialism were sown. A hallmark feature of the genre is self-propagation: even if the mission (to discover, to convert, to colonize) fails in one instance, the author always provides incentive for future ventures and potential returns.[35] William of Rubruck provides many explicit examples of abundant unclaimed land rife with gold and an abundant and pliable population accustomed to exploitation. One example of this incentive is his description of the "Chinchins," whom he learns of when he asks after a Cathayan priest's very finely dyed vestment. The Chinchins, says the priest, are "creatures having in every respect a human form except that they do not bend their knees but walk hopping… [and] are but a cubit high and the whole of their small bodies is covered with hairs" who live in the "inaccessible caves" of the eastern district of Cathay.[36] Men hunt the Chinchins by setting up traps of mead among the rocks[37]. Once the Chinchins "assemble in vast numbers" and become so intoxicated

[34] See *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*, ed. Nandini Das and Tim Youngs (Cambridge University Press, 2019).
[35] Sharon Kinoshita, "Medieval Travel Writing (2): Beyond the Pilgrimage," *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (Cambridge University, 2019): 61.
[36] Willem Van Ruysbroeck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (Hackett, 2009): 202.
[37] William clarifies that "they have no wine as yet in Cathay, but are just beginning to plant vines; this drink, however, they make out of rice" (202).

that they fall asleep, the hunters "bind them hand and foot … [and] open a vein in their necks and from each one extract three or four drops of blood; then they let them go free." William is told that that blood "is most valuable for dyeing purple." The Chinchin dye might seem like a superfluous anecdote in the narrative of a missionary whose ostensible purpose is to spread the word of Christianity and convert souls – but there are glimpses of what will be racial capitalist contours in this anecdote. The physical description of the Chinchins depicts them as racialized humanoids – the ideal "human form" is assumed to be European, and their locked knees, tiny stature, and too-hairy bodies are implied as deviant. The racialism of the Chinchins functions as a mode of dispossession, deeply entrenched in the material circumstance of textile production and circulation. The blood of the Chinchins gains value through dispossession. Once the valuable blood is extracted, it adds more value to unfinished textiles as a dye. This anecdote from William of Rubruck provides an incentive for future ventures into Cathay, which even if seemingly barren (the "inaccessible caves") hold bountiful extractable valuable resources (the Chinchins are of "vast numbers").

The travel narratives produced from Western Europe during the late Middle Ages produce and (re)present a totalizing image of the world as paradoxically barren and bountiful. Janet Abu-Lughod characterizes medieval travel narratives, and the anecdote above in particular, as "filled with both inaccuracies and prejudices" – this is a reflection of the mainstream interpretation of the genre.[38] This basic approach has limited other interpretations of the genre by holding the genre to a rigid, modern standard and assuming the intent is to provide the reader (Louis IX) an accurate rendering of the topography of the Mongol empire or conduct an unbiased ethnographic study of Mongol culture. A significant purpose of this genre, particularly at a time

[38] Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (Oxford University Press, 1989): 161.

when intercontinental travel is extremely difficult and costly, is to make the traveler valuable to the reader as an informant (ideally both, though); the potential value of the traveler serves to secure renown and funding for future expeditions. However, what most fundamentally shapes the genre of medieval travel narratives – and explains the coupling of inaccuracies and prejudices – is the purpose of the travel itself: not to convert souls and expand latin Christendom spiritually, but to find extractable resources and dispossess foreign racialized populations to expand the global economic wealth and reach of latin Christendom.

In *The Long Twentieth Century*, Giovanni Arrighi writes that there was in the Middle Ages a "structural imbalance of European trade with the East [which] created strong incentives for European governments and businesses to seek ways and means, through trade or conquest, to retrieve the purchasing power that relentlessly drained from West to East."[39] We see this tension in William of Rubruck's first exchange with the Chan (Möngke Khan). William, via a (drunk) translator, asks the Chan for "leave to stay" in Cathay "to carry out the service of God on behalf of you, your wives and your children."[40] He says that his party has "neither gold nor silver nor precious stones which we could present" to the Chan. The Chan, (William thinks) misunderstanding his ask, replies: "Just as the sun spreads its rays in all directions, so my power and the power of Baatu is spread everywhere. Therefore we have no need of your gold or silver." Elsewhere in his description, William recounts tales of towns where the walls are made of silver[41] or countries with soil so laden with gold that anyone can just dig to find as much as they need,[42] so the Chan's dismissal of William's (misunderstood) offer may ring with condescension to him. Once the Chan has left and William and his fellow travelers are left with the Chan's

[39] Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (Verso, 2010): 36.
[40] Willem van Ruysbroeck 155.
[41] Ibid 144.
[42] Ibid 142.

secretaries and his interpreter, the Chan's party "began to ask a great many questions about the kingdom of France, whether there were many sheep and oxen and horses there, as if they were about to march in at once and take everything." This added insult nearly pushes William over the edge; he says, "I had to do great violence to myself to hide my indignation and anger, and I replied: 'There are many good things there, which you will see if it falls to your lot to go there.'"[43] William's reply demonstrates that he chafes at the relentless drain from West to East – his own expedition is part of the drain of people and resources going East – and that in addition to this deleterious flow, the secretaries threaten to "march in" and drain them for all their worth (mere sheep, oxen, horses).

Abu-Lughod cites "The Journey of William of Rubruck" as evidence of the "magnitude of Europe's ignorance of the east"; Rubruck's tale about the Chinchins illustrates his "gullibility," and chalks the Chinchin tale up to "the sense of humor of its [Cathay's] inhabitants."[44] But the existing narrative of European ignorance or gullibility producing racism is problematic in the way that it sidelines accountability and the material circumstances and consequences of European exploration. This false narrative of ignorant Europeans has forcefully held back scholarship about the role of race in the Middle Ages. William of Rubruck is well aware of Europe's peripheral economic power in comparison to the Mongol Empire. He implements racialism to counteract that economic power, and incentivizes the means by which the drain from West to East can be reversed.[45]

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[43] Ibid 156.
[44] Abu-Lughod 162.
[45] As many have noted, late medieval Flanders is a major hub of cloth production in Europe – which makes it seem like less of a coincidence that Rubruck reports back to Louis that there is valuable dye to be had in East Cathay. See John H.A. Munro, *Textiles, Towns and Trade: Essays in the Economic History of Late-Medieval England and the Low Countries* (Variorum, 1994) and Katherine Vestergard Penderson and Marie-Louise Nosch, *The Medieval Broadcloth: Changing Trends in Fashions, Manufacturing, and Consumption* (Oxbow Books, 2009). Rubruck's narrative is reproduced in Roger Bacon, *The 'Opus Majus' of Roger Bacon*, ed. John Henry Bridges (Minerva-Verlag, 1964) in 1267, and in Richard

This chapter explores how instrumental falsifications in medieval travel narratives and maps (re)presented the world beyond Europe as racialized and available for economic exploitation via extraction. I argue that these texts (re)present racialization alongside exploitative economic opportunity again and again, over centuries, creating a space for capitalism to emerge and for a eurocentric world image and economy to become the stable norm. Reframing these texts as speculative creates an opening to read the ways in which antagonizing racialized differences have been fabricated and invested in as an opportunity to create and accumulate wealth. Far from ignorant, Rubruck's account is one of many that speculates about valuable resources to be accessed in the East. It contributes to the (re)presentational stabilization of the East as a place where wealth can be accessed and workers exploited; the access to wealth is predicated on racialized difference, as shown in the grotesque picture painted of the "Chinchins" in East Cathay. In speculating about wealth to be had, Rubruck creates incentive for more resources to be invested in funding further trips to the East; which, as Hakluyt's extensive volume of travel narratives written by Englishmen demonstrates, they are. The practice of past scholarship has been to categorically dismiss these legends, tales, imaginations as examples of medieval ignorance. And, of course, taken literally, yes – medieval authors were wrong on many accounts about the "real" world beyond Europe. There are no real Chinchins in East Cathay, drunk on mead, whose blood is the source of a valuable dye. But if you consider the flexible and recursive nature of medieval epistemology, it becomes clear that even where medieval texts are most obviously "inaccurate", the contours still end up determining the convenient shape into which "reality" is shaped. In a sense, it is the blood (as a life force) of people in the East that

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Hakluyt's *The Principall Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, ed. R.A. Skelton and David B. Quinn (Cambridge University Press, 1965) circa 1600 – the latter of which was central to the English colonial project.

facilitates most of the textile finishing for the $2.4 trillion garment industry.[46]

This chapter relies on medieval depictions of the world to understand the phenomena at play in the formation of global racial capitalism. In the tradition of the "Transition Debate" (the transition being from feudalism to capitalism), many arguments have taken as their starting point the assumption of the European feudal economy as insular, isolated, or closed. However, the tradition of World Systems Analysis argues against this positioning and situates Europe and the emergence of capitalism within a larger regional and global set of relations.[47] Given my study of medieval world-making via compendia, maps, and travel narratives, I offer, as my starting point for understanding the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the point that even if Europe's economy had not successfully entrenched itself into a global economy of its own making, vast resources and time were dedicated to toggling models and means for doing so for centuries before. For example, Jairus Banaji compellingly argues that the late-medieval states of Venice and Genoa were "directly ruled by capitalist interests," a claim he draws from Marx's own attention to these figures in *Capital*.[48] When, however and whenever (the change in relationship from lord and tenant to employer and employee or from farming to industrial production in the 15th century or the 16th or the 17th) you like to think of it, capitalism (recognizable as such to modernity) becomes the dominant mode of production in Europe, both the forces and relations of production have been invariably shaped by European speculation about the potential for a global economy that it (re)presented in its medieval racialized world-building texts.

My starting point is derived from Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*. Robinson's indictment of Marxism is that its analysis is "founded on the presumptions that Europe itself had

[46] *The State of Fashion 2024: Riding Out the Storm*, ed. Imran Amed and Achim Berg (*The Business of Fashion* and McKinsey & Company, 2024): 2.
[47] See Immanuel M. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Vol. I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (University of California Press, 2011).
[48] Jairus Banaji, *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism* (Haymarket Books, 2020): 76.

produced, that the motive and material forces that generated the capitalist system were to be wholly located in what was a fictive historical entity" – a Europe that is a "closed system" unto itself.[49] This chapter will examine the production of the fictive historical entity of a closed Europe. Cedric Robinson, Fernand Braudel, Giovanni Arrighi, Jairus Banaji, and Janet Abu-Lughod, among others, have examined thirteenth century Italian city-states as critical for the transition into capitalism because in some regards it was the seed capital of the Italian city-states that funded the later enterprises that Marx identifies.[50] But in addition to this, their geographical location near the Mediterranean made them a conduit between the rest of Western Europe and the Mongol and Islamic empires that dominated the medieval global economy.

A crucial text emerging in this context, then, is Brunetto Latini's mid-thirteenth century compendium, *Li Livres dou Tresor*.[51] As a compendium, it is epistemological and instructional in nature, and Latini tells his reader in his introduction exactly how he intends that the knowledge that he offers be used, and to what ends. Brunetto Latini was a Florentine and a Guelph (a pro-Papal party backed by mostly wealthy merchant families, as opposed to the pro-Emperor Ghibellines whose backing families mostly made their wealth through agrarian means); as such, his offers a text that provides the world-view of someone who had high stakes in the economic, political, and social future of Florence and Italy and would have been deeply entrenched in these

[49] Robinson 3.
[50] Robinson, Arrighi, Banaji, and Abu-Lughod texts aforementioned. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Harper & Row, 1976).
[51] Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, par. P. Chabaille (Imprimerie Impériale, 1863). Latini provides two reasons in his introduction for writing his book in Old French instead of Italian: "Et se aucuns demandoit por quoi cist livres est escriz en romans, selonc le langage des Francois, puisque nos somes Ytaliens, je diroie que ce est por .ij. raisons: l'une, car nos somes en France; et l'autre porce que la parleure est plus delitable et plus commune à toutes gens" (3). [If anyone should ask why this book is written in Romance according to the usage of the French, even though we are Italian, I would say that there are two reasons: one, that we are in France; the other, that French is more pleasant and has more in common with all other languages] (2). All translations from the *Tresor* are by Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin in *The Book of the Treasure [Li Livres dou Tresor*] (Garland Publishing, 1993) unless otherwise noted. All citations are from Chabaille's Old French *Tresor*.

aspects of the period that so many scholars have found critical.[52] The eventual ascendance of the Guelphs over the Ghibellines leads to a Florentine state that in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries conducts its "first extensive financial deals" with Rome "on Rome's account, which included such "invisible exports as pilgrimages, indulgences, and dispensations."[53] When the Medicis took over Florence in 1434, the state made more than half of its revenue as Rome's banker.[54] Latini provides a multi-faceted European perspective because he wrote the *Tresor* while he was exiled in France – for some time in Bar Sur Aube (Champagne), where he would have seen the height of the Champagne Fairs that Braudel and Abu-Lughod argue are also critical to understanding the organization of the medieval global economy.[55] The *Tresor* is driven by his support of the role of the *podesta* (chief magistrate) in local governance, which would accommodate "the overlapping interests of Charles of Anjou, the papacy, and the Florentine Guelfs."[56] Brunetto was not a merchant himself, but was a notary, and as such would have been part of what Fernand Braudel sees as central to the development of capitalism in the Italian city-states: the "small group of well-informed men, kept in touch by an active correspondence, [who] controlled the entire network of exchanges in bills or specie, thus dominating the field of commercial speculation" at the international fairs that thrived across Europe in the thirteenth century.[57] It is the steady proliferation of intellectual pursuits in northern Italy that eventually led to Latini's *Tresor* and the scholastic tradition of his pupils, the most famous being poet Dante Alighieri.

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[52] Barrette and Baldwin, "Introduction," *The Book of the Treasure* by Brunetto Latini (Garland publishing, 1993): vii.
[53] Arrighi 98.
[54] Arrighi 110.
[55] Abu-Lughod 66.
[56] David Napolitano, "Adjusting the Mirror: A Political Remake of Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor*," *The Mirror in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: Specular Reflections*, ed. Nancy Frelick (Brepols Publishers, 2016): 95.
[57] Braudel 321.

Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* is a compendium (the most similar modern genre is the encyclopedia); the compendium genre promises to provide totalizing information either about a particular subject or about the entire world (Latini's does both, as will be discussed later). As far as theorization goes, because the compendium attempts to organize and present *all* knowledge, it uses speculation to theorize the gaps in knowledge – although, of course, these are only the gaps that it is itself aware of. A hallmark of the compendium genre is the rhetorical question, which subtly situates information as certain or uncertain and upends the reader's sense of assurance.[58] Latini's rhetorical question is "Que vois diroie jou?" [What can I say?][59] – we see this repeated throughout the history section of the compendium. The effects of this question are twofold: on one hand it signals to the reader that we've approached a gap in historical knowledge that needs to be speculated through but does so in such a way that lends an air of inevitability to the speculation that fulfills the gap (we're taking a leap of faith, over a chasm of the unknown, with the author; he offers his hand to guide us in this moment of an exposed threat of erasure); on the other hand it signals to the reader that this construction of history (all constructions of history) are a matter of rhetoric, as if the full question were "what can I say to convince you?" Whatever fills the gap must adhere to the existing epistemological structure of the larger project of the compendium, a genre whose intention is explicitly educational, particularly in the medieval context. Compendia rely on a unifying epistemological structure because the objective is to present knowledge, in the words of Giuseuppe Mazzotta, "as a completed, systematic, and global order."[60] Mazzotta explains the repetitiveness in the genre as a marker of this and argues that the

[58] Kinoshita refers to these as "emphatic formulae" ("I tell you," "you must know," "I would have you know") (56).
[59] Latini 97.
[60] Giuseppe Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 2014): 5. What I think is interesting about world-building in medieval compendia, contrary to Mazzotta's tethering of totality to the theological-symbolic universe, is that the aberrations from the known symbolic universe seem to have most grabbed readers' attention (see Tzanaki).

repetitive systemization makes possible "the representation of the totality and unity of knowledge" that aligns with a belief in the theological-symbolic universe of medieval epistemology.

There is an economic element of compendia as speculative fiction in the etymology of the term compendium, which in Latin means "profit" (or saving).[61] It is formed by the preposition *com-* (with/together) and the verb *pendere* (to weigh), and when combined form the second declension noun *compendo, compendis*, meaning to weigh things (coins) together or profit. If compendia are profit, then what is done with that profit? Mazzotta reminds us that "encyclopedias … are also called mirrors because, as Vincent says, mirrors induce speculation and imitation."[62] The compendium genre, then, demonstrates both the theoretical and economic registers of speculation that we have discussed thus far. It uses the mirror to theorize about itself across time – past, present, and future. The collective representation of that theory profits the reader. The genre, as a mirror, is intended to induce further speculation (in the portfolio that has been established in the text) and imitation. The reader invests the profit into future ventures which seek to create further profit in the same sector, in a similar manner. Medieval compendia demonstrate that there has been repeated investment and reinvestment in speculations of race and racialism as a means to profit, and investment and reinvestment in the establishment relations and institutions that rely on exploitation and dispossession as a means to profit. Latini is explicit about investment and profit as a means to the creation of a new kind of wealth, and tells us as much in the introduction to the *Tresor*, which will be discussed in the next section.

I. How to Invest this *Tresor*

[61] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "compendium (n.), Etymology," September 2023.
[62] Mazzotta 4-5.

The opening sentence of Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* grandly positions the rare value of the book: "*Cist livres est apelés Tresors*" [This book is called the *Treasure*].[63] What are the contents of this treasure trove? There are three different kinds of treasures, and Latini tells his reader not only what *kind* of value each type of treasure has but also to what ends he anticipates these treasures will be used. By value, I mean to invoke what Henderson calls "an imaginary that thrusts us, by means of logic and illogic, into the realm of future possibilities, of what is not (yet) practical." Value and speculation are always contingent on the world as it *is not* (yet). The most basic sense of value, George Henderson argues, represents the "round of activities through which societies produce and reproduce themselves, think themselves, feel themselves, change themselves, and alter the world in doing so."[64] Latini's text, as a compendium, produces his society as it reproduces the societies of the older texts that he has compiled.

Notable in Latini's text is his lack of interest in maintaining the status quo of the compendium genre as a static archive of knowledge. He (re)presents a compilation of old material, but rather than just continuing to "*amasser chose de grandisme vaillance*" [amass a thing of very great value/worth], he wants the wealth that his text creates to be invested by the lords of medieval Europe that are his audience in the future that he speculates.[65] Napolitano notes that he addresses his audience most consistently as "biau douz amis," and that the likely recipient

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[63] Latini 1. In "Italian Manuscripts in Exile: Bankers and Their Books," *Sweet New Style: Essays on Brunetto Latini, Dante Alighieri and Geoffrey Chaucer,* Umilta, accessed 29 May 2024, Julia Bolton Holloway contends that the title indicates that Latini's "text is sarcastic about wealth." This, Holloway claims, is a reference to the Pavian abbot Vallombrosa'a "Tesoro" and reflects issues that Charles of Anjou had experienced with opposition to high taxation rates and the general attempt of "Florentine bankers… to curb their client's insatiable lust for money" (Bolton Holloway). While I agree that elsewhere in the *Tresor* Latini is wary or hesitant about greed, his ultimate purpose is to argue that there is such a thing as ethical profitability. As a notary and educator to an elite merchant class, Latini's articulation of information as wealth seems logical in both analogous and literal interpretations.
[64] George Henderson, "Value," *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50*, ed. Jazeel, Tariq, et al. (Wiley, 2019): 271.
[65] Latini 1.

is thought to have been Davizzo della Tosa, Charles of Anjou (or someone close to him), or, according to David Napolitano, the general "urban elite of northern France."[66] Like all investments, this is meant not only to maintain wealth but also to use accumulated wealth to create surplus. If, as Robinson says, "capitalism was [not] a catastrophic revolution (negation) of feudalist social orders", then Latini's text shows us how old information can present new opportunities for the savvy feudal lord who only wishes to "increase his power and elevate his status."[67] The savvy investor speculates: he creates an image of the financial future that is based on the present that he sees in the mirror (*specula*).

Rather than rejecting feudal social orders, Latini suggests that the *podesta* should use old treasures of information to forge new methods of accumulation: the *podesta* should be open to new conditions of possibility and profit. What are the new conditions and possibilities offered by the times? There are many. For Latini and Florentines in particular, the struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellines (which is already a centuries-long struggle when the *Tresor* was written) meant alternating years of exile and power; after the Guelphs lost power in Florence at the battle of Montaperti Latini is exiled in France from 1261-1268, but the Guelphs regained Florence and the Ghibellines are banished. Latini returned from France to Tuscany in 1269 and had a successful career of 20 years in Florentine politics. Yet, in the next generation the Guelph party fractured into the Black Guelphs and White Guelphs (both parties supporting the papacy, but with the White Guelphs wanting less papal involvement in local politics); first, the Black Guelphs are exiled, then with the help of Pope Boniface VIII they regained power and exile the White Guelphs (Dante Alighieri, a student of Brunetto Latini, among them), then the White Guelphs

[66] David Napolitano, "Brunetto Latini's Politica: A Political Rewriting of Giovanni da Viterbo's *de regimine civitatum*," *Reti Medievali Rivista* 19, no. 1 (2018): 193.
[67] Robinson 10.

regained power with the help of a military campaign facilitated by Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII of luxembourg. Both Robinson and Arrighi suggest that continuous war-making efforts shaped the economies of the northern Italian city-states that came to be powerful players in European politics.[68] Robinson argues that the soldiers in these war-making efforts conscripted from "mercenaries and from marginal peoples and social strata" were more often than not migrant laborers.[69] At the same time, there is a decline in reliance on theology as governing logic, and a turn towards humanism that will determine the shape of the Renaissance and beyond.[70] Latini is a significant player in articulating and disseminating humanism. Robinson attributes this turn to centuries of feudal organization with the Christian Church at its center, "unmercifully exploit[ing] its human base, legitimating the brutality of the nobility, their secular kin, and sharing the profits from the labor of bound workers and a foreign trade more than eight centuries long" – and despite being a pro-papal Guelph, Latini does not shy away from this messy reality, but actually uses it as an opportunity to turn medieval epistemology towards classical philosophy.[71]

The historical context of the *Tresor* is one defined by mobility and mutability – of money, ideas, people, and power. Latini offers an investment model that accounts for the political mutability of thirteenth-century Florence (and Italy, and Europe) by theorizing an economic model that not only "nos enseigne noz gens et noz filz meismes à governer" [teaches us to govern our people and our very own sons] but in doing so also "nos enseigne à garder et acroistre noz possessions et nos heritages, et avoir mueble et chatel por despendre et por retenir quant leus et tens en vendra" [teaches us to protect and increase our possessions and our inheritance, and to

[68] Robinson 21-24 and Arrighi 96-99.
[69] Robinson 23.
[70] Cary J. Nederman, "Commercial Society and Republican Government in the Latin Middle Ages: The economic dimensions of Brunetto Latini's Republicanism," *Political Theory* 31, no. 5 (2003): 645.
[71] Robinson 98.

have movable goods and chattel to use or retain when the appropriate time and occasion for it will come].[72] The reference to "mueble et chatel" [movable goods and chattel] demonstrates that Latini is aware of the political and economic mutability at large – in an increasingly localized political structure and an increasingly trade-oriented economic structure, personal property, cash, and hard commodities could ensure long term profitability. Latini's audience would indeed have been of the "Mediterranean factors" who Robinson tells us succeed the ruling classes of feudal Europe: "merchants, traders, and bankers… [who] in turn spawned or defined the roles for those actors who supplied capital, technical, and scientific expertise, and administrative skills to the states that would lead the emergence of capitalist Europe."[73] As we will see, the construction of Latini's text provides instruction for each of the components necessary for the emergence of capitalist Europe – capital, technical, and scientific expertise (history and geography), and administrative skills (governance and rhetoric).

In a quite modern sense, Latini prioritizes information over more tangible "mueble et chatel" [movable goods and chattel] although the latter are obviously also quite important to his *Tresor*. To the savvy thirteenth-century speculator, the best method to increase wealth is first to equip oneself with information "selonc sa bone entencion" [according to his good intention], which, Latini anticipates, is "por acroistre son pooir et por essaucier son estat en guerre et en pais" [to increase his power and to elevate his social status in war and in peace].[74] Latini breaks down his text into three different types of wealth – history and geography are "deniers" [cash money]; instruction in ethics, virtue, and governance is "precieuses pierres" [precious stones]; and instruction in politics/rhetoric is "fin or" [fine gold]. Latini offers this compiled information,

[72] Latini 8.
[73] Robinson 98.
[74] Latini 1.

for the first time ever, in not just a vernacular language (Old French) but also quite efficiently. Every previously successful model medieval compendium took the mandate to compile *all* knowledge quite literally; texts like *Speculum Maius* or Isidore de Seville's *Etymologies* are massive texts that discuss hundreds of topics at great length.[75] These factors are significant because they emphasize Latini's intent for this information to be acted upon – he makes it as easy as possible for his reader, while still maintaining the authority of the genre. Latini offers his reader a *tresor* that is not meant to sit neatly tucked away in a monastic library, or in a throne room, or in a museum: he intends this treasure to be used. This treasure is not for the lord who wishes only to "amasser chose de grandisme vaillance … por son delit seulement*"* [amass a thing of very great value...for his pleasure alone] or for the sake of the perceived virtue of ostentatious wealth. Enough value has already been accumulated – now is a time for spending. Latini's construction of information capital for investment establishes the stakes for the speculative fiction that follows the introduction. This is the production of the future, the first step in the speculative process.

The first section of Latini's *Tresor* sets the stage on which the other two parts operate – it "traite del commencement dou siècle et de l'ancienneté des vielles estoires et des establissemenz dou monde, et de la nature de toutes choses en somme" [describes the beginning of the world, and the ancientness of the old histories, and the establishment of the world, and the nature of all things altogether]; he calls this "philosophie … theorique" [theoretical philosophy] – the way that I like to understand it is as an annotated map of the world, with a biblical and historical framing.[76] The other two parts, in contrast, are "practical philosophy." The first part of the text

[75] William of Rubruck mentions that on his travels, he tries to locate "monsters" mentioned by Isidore de Seville and Gaius Julius Solinus: "I enquired about the monsters or human freaks who are described by Idisore and Solinus, but was told that such things had never been sighted, which makes me very much doubt whether the story is true." "The Journey of William of Rubruck," 201.
[76] Latini 1.

functions most closely to other texts that we see in the medieval compendium genre. Latini describes this part of his text as being "come deniers contans por despendre toz jors en choses besoignables*"* [like cash money, to spend readily on necessary things].[77] However, Latini reminds us that cash money is not just used to purchase necessary goods but that it also serves a larger purpose, in that it offers a "meeneté entre les œvres des gens qui adrecast les uns contre les autres" [a relationship between the work of people who exchange with one another] – without cash money, and without this part of the text, "ne puet nus hom savoir des autres choses pleinement*"* [no man can fully know the other things].[78] Latini presents geographical information capital as money, which he frames as the means to possession – or, in this case, dispossession.

David Harvey argues that "Nothing is more basic to the functioning of capitalist society than the elemental transaction in which we acquire a certain quantity of use value in return for a certain sum of money."[79] Banaji highlights that money, as a mechanism for value distribution, is an important precondition for capitalism and is one reason to push back the analysis of the origins of capitalism to the Middle Ages: "Since capital presupposes money and emerges out of its circulation, the emergence of capitalism, conceived historically, presumes a necessary connection between these two sorts of 'forms.' In other words, the contrast between them cannot be a historical gap separating one from the other."[80] So, Latini's "deniers" [cash money] shapes what can be done with the other two types of treasure (precious stones and gold) which without the abstraction of functioning as cash money are just basic commodities and the circulation of these commodities are facilitated by the "deniers" [cash money].[81] The fact that Latini seems to

[77] Latini 1.
[78] Latini 2, emphasis mine.
[79] David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (Verso, 2006): 9.
[80] Banaji 3.
[81] Harvey 11.

be aware of these fundamental structures of value circulation and that he acknowledges as much on the first page of the *Tresor* demonstrates that the underlying epistemology of the text is operating in a space of capitalist preconditions. Harvey reminds us that an additional function of money is that it is "the social expression of value itself"; quoting Marx, he extrapolates that money makes it so that "The individual… carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket… [this power is] alienable without restriction or conditions … [the] private power of private persons."[82] In the world of Latini's speculative fiction, the measure of social value and power is rooted in the racialized difference that he establishes with his Eurocentric world map.

Given money's centrality to processes of exchange, I will take us back to Marx's general formula of capital and Arrighi's reframing of it as systemic cycles of accumulation so that we can properly understand the relationship between the three parts of this text in the distribution and circulation of wealth. In the capitalist form of circulation (M-C-M') unless a profit is made (') you begin and end with the same commodity (which would be C-M-C, wherein money is secondary to goods being exchanged for use value). We already know that Latini is interested in a circuit of exchange that yields a profit: the book is compiled for the lord "to increase his power and elevate his social status in war and in peace."[83] In the M-C-M' form of circulation, Harvey tells us, "the only possible motivation for putting money into circulation on a repeated basis is to obtain more of it at the end than was possessed at the beginning … a profit."[84] Latini intends for his "biax dous amis" [handsome gentle friends] to profit because they are "car tu en es bien

[82] Harvey, 12, quoting Karl Marx, *Grundisse*, (Penguin, 1973): 157, 110, and 132. Likewise, Koshy et al. contend that "Marx's so-called primitive accumulation carries with it a temporal and spatial teleology that assumes successive transformations of the means of production and political economies as necessary conditions of possibility. And even those necessary conditions of possibility rely on taken-for-granted assumptions about land and property as givens" (4).
[83] Latini 1.
[84] Harvey 13.

dignes selonc mon jugement" [indeed worthy of it in my [Latini's] judgment]; but in consideration of the larger audience and context, Latini says that theoretical philosophy (the first part of the book) is "comme d'une fontaine d'où maint ruissel issent qui courrent cà et là, si que li un boivent de l'un et li autre de l'autre; mais ce est diversement, car li un en boivent plus et li autre mains, sans estanchier la fontaine*"* [like from a fountain from which spill forth many rivulets flowing hither and yon such that some people drink from the one, and others from the other, but they drink also in different fashion, for some drink more and others less, without the fountain going dry].[85] With this we see that he is thinking of not just the initial exchange of this book as cash to be invested by one person to make a profit. There are a multitude of exchange scenarios in which, for example, someone might make a profit from the book and then turn around and throw the profit right back into circulation with other agents ("others from the other"). The first M, money, the fountain, according to Arrighi [means liquidity, flexibility, freedom of choice].[86] The investment in a commodity (C), is in contrast, a move towards "concreteness, rigidity, and a narrowing down or closing of options." Finally, profit (M') brings "*expanded* liquidity, flexibility, and freedom of choice."[87] Over time, Arrighi argues, there are long periods wherein whole economies are generally geared either towards material expansion and capital accumulation (M-C phase) or towards "financial rebirth and expansion" (C-M') phases.[88] Through the fountain analogy, we might understand the compilation and publication of the *Tresor* in terms of the M-C phase. Arrighi writes that in this phase "money capital sets in motion an increasing mass of commodities (including commoditized labor-power and gifts of

[85] Latini 2 and 3.
[86] Arrighi 5.
[87] Emphasis in the original.
[88] Arrighi 6. Arrighi focuses on specific northern Italian city-states or, later, European nations as capitalist agents either in a M-C phase or a C-M' phase.

nature)" and shows continuous change over time.[89] The CM' phase is in the future for Latini, wherein some do not drink directly from the fountain but instead must get the water from someone who has commoditized it as a gift of nature – "accumulation proceeds through financial deals" and the water from Latini's fountain are accumulated so that they can be reinvested in future goods with a more specifically targeted profit.[90] The variation in the source of the water, depending on the choices of the agent, is what makes this part of the process discontinuous over time.[91] To align this formula with world-building speculative fiction, the M-C phase is the production and exploitation of a future; the C-M' phase sees the exploitation of the future turn into the manifestation of that future. The information, cash money, of the first part of the *Tresor*, then, demonstrates the accumulation of information and produces a future to be exploited. The second and third parts of the book are the commodities that the cash affords us to invest in; this demonstrates a concretization of the future by providing specific methods and tools for exploiting the future.

The second part of the *Tresor* is a loose translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which in this part of the introduction Latini says "traite des vices et des vertuz" [treats the vices and virtues].[92] This part, Latini says, "est de precieuses pierres qui donent à home delit et vertu" [is made up of precious stones, which give man delight and virtue]. Whereas Latini goes into a bit of detail about what one is supposed to do with cash money, he leaves the purpose of precious stones as a matter of delight – a luxury.[93] These precious stones convey virtue to the beholder –

[89] Ibid.
[90] We will see an example of this exactly in the next chapter, which demonstrates how certain streams from Latini's fountain get reinvested in the *Book of Sir John Mandeville*, which has much more specific goals than the *Tresor*.
[91] Arrighi 8.
[92] Latini 2. Cary Nederman identifies that part of the second book also draws on *Moralium Dogma Philosophorum* (12th c) (647).
[93] Harvey notes that gold in certain instances has been the "universal equivalent" of exchange, which would make it a basic money commodity (11). However, because Latini does not seem interested in the

which is to say that wealth as demonstrated through luxury objects is thus ethical and virtuous. This is reinforced by the fact that he takes a text that is ostensibly about 'ethics' and uses it as a springboard to give a lesson in governance, which is actually a lesson in economics. To reinforce the suggestion that luxury objects are a matter of virtue, Latini tells us that: "car nus ne porroit vivre au monde ne bien ne honestement, ne profitier à soi ne as autres, se il ne governoit sa vie et adrecoit ses meurs selonc les vertus*"* [for no one could live well or honestly in this world, nor profit himself or others, if he did not govern his own life and correct his behavior according to the virtues] – here, we see morality and profit as interchangeable.[94] What else is curious about this section being described as precious stones is that precious stones are not native to Western Europe – precious stones, as we will see in the map of the world provided in the first part, for the most part come from the Far East.[95] If the second and third parts of the *Tresor* demonstrate concretization of an investment in the future, then two suggestions underlie the interpretation of Latini's text. Firstly, Europe needs to invest in the infrastructure of ethical, individual profit. This is a concerted move away from feudalism and towards capitalism: that he imagines that a *podesta* can facilitate this demonstrates that it is not a total rejection of feudalism. Secondly, Europe needs to invest in a eurocentric future, whereby Europe can stop the relentless drain "from West to East" and make itself the locus of accumulation.[96] In this second interpretation, it's important that Latini identifies ethical individual profit as precious stones because these particular luxury commodities are not endemic to Europe, Europe must invest in infrastructures that will produce European equivalents.

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potential exchange value of gold, and because gold is not the form that cash money takes at this point in European history, we will not treat it as money.

[94] Latini 8. Translation mine.

[95] See Brenda Deen Schildgen, "Wonders on the Border: Precious Stones in the Comedy," *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society*, no. 113 (1995): 131–150.

[96] Arrighi 36.

The European equivalent that Latini proposes, then, is white European virtue. These precious stones are what Robinson might call the "moral, ideological, and spiritual scaffold" of European societies, which "the architects of European consciousness" would identify as the justification for "the measure of mankind" being the European man.[97] The specific virtues that Latini identifies are prudence (l'escharboucle/ruby), temperance (safir/sapphire), courage (diamant/diamond), and justice (l'esmeraude/emerald). The cultivation of these virtues, for Latini, is the means to beget more wealth– this is the kind of future that his readers should invest in. like European precious stones, the dominance of European virtue is speculative fiction – the history that he provides in the first section of religious and political fractiousness across Europe demonstrates that Europe has not conducted itself with prudence, temperance, courage, or justice. As Robinson explores in great depth, feudal Europe was morally bankrupt, relied on exploitation of its human base, and was "rotting from within" (Robinson 98). Latini speculates a future wherein a Eurocentric moral economy is hegemonic.

Latini spends the least amount of time discussing what the value of his third treasure, "fin or"]"fine gold], is.[98] He defines the contents of this part of the *Tresor* as practical philosophy, and says that "quar si comme or sormonte toutes manieres de metaus, autressi est la science de bien parler et de governer gens plus noble de nul art dou monde" [just as gold surpasses all sorts of metals, so also is the science of speaking well [proper rhetoric] and governing a people more noble than any other in the world].[99] Napolitano details how this section translates Giovanni da Viterbo's *liber de regime civitatum* (1228-64), and that one of the primary changes Latini makes to the text is transforming its content from the Ghibelline perspective to the more

[97] Robinson 99.
[98] Latini 2.
[99] Ibid.

merchant-friendly Guelph perspective. Although gold can be mined in some parts of Europe, this continent has relied mostly on obtaining gold through either foreign trade or extraction – it is similar in this way to precious stones. The other investment to be made, along with the cultivation of virtue, is the cultivation of rhetoric. Like the precious stones, rhetoric is to have the effect of a shift towards a Eurocentric global economy. Latini cites Cicero as saying "qui cil a hautisme chose conquise qui de ce trespasse les hommes dont li homs trespasse les autres animaus trestous, ce est de parleure" [that he who surpasses other men in the same way other men surpass the animals has mastered a very lofty thing, that is, speech] – the mastery of rhetoric, measured by the European man of course, uplifts white Europeans as the only humans and constructs everyone else as inhuman, as animal.[100] We see this manifest over time in the emphasis on white civility as the driving force of colonialism.[101] Napolitano also tells us that this third section can be largely construed as "podesta literature … treatises on city government that were contrived to hold up a mirror of expected behavior to Italian city magistrates, a *specchio del podesta* – that is, an Italian, republican variant of the better known mirror for princes."[102]

This brings us back to the mirror, the first step of speculation. Latini speculates that his reader should invest in the cultivation of rhetoric, and because he does this in his citation of podesta literature he clearly means for the measure of rhetoric (and, thus, the human and civility) to be European man. The means of producing profit with rhetoric is instruction: he writes that "car sanz nature et sanz enseignement, ne la puet nus conquerre" [without nature [a natural inclination] and without instruction no man can master it] – this is Europe's civilizing global economy.[103] The centralizing of European commodities in the global economy of the thirteenth

[100] Latini 9.
[101] Although Latini does not reference da Viterbo's text directly, it is significant that the word 'civil' is rooted in 'civis' that we see the genitive plural of in da Viterbo's title.
[102] Napolitano (2016) 94.
[103] Latini 9.

century and the accompaniment of "cultural efflorescence" in literary pursuits, Abu-Lughod writes, are "not unrelated." The combination of "technological and the social innovations" as making up Latini's instructive speculative fiction produces wealth that was then "traded internationally [i.e., from West to East (& South)] to further intensify development" and invested in a Eurocentric future.[104]

The close introspection in the warped mirror is driven, in large part, by the perception of meager wealth in relation to a thirteenth-century global economy driven by pan-Eurasian trade – which northern Italy took part in, but only peripherally. Attempts to model the success of Middle Eastern or Chinese trade failed, in large part due to the religious ambitions of the Crusades. This is why Latini's introduction of humanism is so important. It provides a new driving force for greater individual success untethered to ambiguous projects like the mass conversion of souls. The introduction of European man as a treasure ensured that the draining would only ever go from West to East, since that particular product is made to be inimitable by design. And because precious stones become associated with virtue, in that whoever has them has virtue, there is still the opportunity for the incentive to get literal treasures from the East: in the words of Arrrighi, "Christopher Columbus stumbled on the Americas because he and his Castillian sponsors had treasures to retrieve in the East. Cheng Ho was not so lucky because there was no treasure to retrieve in the West."[105] Arrighi reiterates Braudel's claim that "Everywhere, from Egypt to Japan, we shall find genuine capitalists, wholesalers, the rentiers of trade, and their thousands of auxiliaries – the commission agents, brokers, money-changers and bankers. As for the techniques, possibilities or guarantees of exchange, any of these groups of merchants would stand comparison with its western equivalents … There were even, in medieval times, merchant

[104] Abu-Lughod 4.
[105] Arrighi 36.

kings in Cairo, Aden and the Persian Gulf ports."[106] Europe only became significantly economically involved in the medieval economy with the Crusades in the eleventh century. Robinson identifies that the Crusades had "both racial and economic resonances."[107] The sharp failure of the Crusades meant that for the Europeans with enough accumulated wealth to even try to figure out where to invest it, territorial expansion was momentarily out of the question. Robinson, Abu-Lughod, Braudel, and Arrighi all emphasize the importance of the Crusades in stimulating economic interest in the East, and the manifestation of this drive in Italian city-states showed that "even small territories could become huge containers of power by pursuing one-sidedly the accumulation of riches rather than the acquisition of territories and subject" or souls.[108]

II. The Map: Bountiful and Barren

The first part of the *Tresor*, which offers "*meeneté entre les œvres des gens qui adrecast les uns contre les autres*" "a relationship between the work of people who exchange with one another," begins its speculative world-building by claiming that God began the construction of the world with an image that exists outside of time:

> li sage dient que nostre sires Diex, qui est commencemens de toutes choses, fist et crea la monde et toutes autres choses en .iiij. manieres; car tout avant ot il en sa pensée l'image et la figure comment il feroit le monde et les autres choses, et ce ot il toz jors eternelment, si que cele pensée n'ot onques commencement. Et ceste ymagination est apelée mondes

[106] Arrighi 12. See Fernand Braudel, *The Perspective of the World* (Harper & Row, 1984).
[107] Robinson 89.
[108] Arrighi 40. Abu-Lughod writes that "The direct entreé to the riches of the East changed the role of the Italian merchant mariner cities from passive to active. The revival of the Champagne fairs in the twelfth century can be explained convincingly by both the enhanced demand for eastern goods stimulated by Crusades and, because of the strategic position of the Italians in coastal enclaves of the levant, the increased supplies of such goods they could now deliver" (110). Similarly, Robinson contends that "On Account of their logistical appetites, the Christian Crusades, beginning in the eleventh century against the Saracens in Jerusalem, brought to fruition the mercantile Italian city-states of the Middle Age" (89).

> arquetipes, ce est à dire mondes en semblance. [Sages say that our lord God, who is the beginning of all things, made and created the world and all other things in four manners, for first of all he had in his thought the image and figure of how he would make the world and other things, and this thought he had forever and eternally, so that it never had a beginning. This imagination is called World Archetype, that is to say, the semblance of the world].[109]

If God's "mondes arquetipes" [world archetype] begins with "l'image" [the image] of – an "ymagination" [imagination] – then all subsequent creations or re-creations of the world begin in a similar, speculative, way. This is true in a literal sense, since, as many scholars have noted, the attempt to represent in a single image the entire world is impossible because it requires you to occupy an impossible viewing position. Latini's reference to the image of the world archetype centralizes the map in his first section, without which it would be unclear where the rest of the information about history and the natural world occurs. Cary Nederman precedes me in identifying the contents of the first section as "speculative wisdom" – I contend that Latini's speculative knowledge builds a speculative world.[110]

Following brief discussions of the role of nature, evil, angels, the soul, and the establishment of law, Latini begins his long section on history by framing it as an inquiry that ultimately seeks to examine kings (the first of who he identifies as "li regnes des Assiriens premierement, et puis cil des Romains" [the kingdom of the Assyrians and then that of the Romans] because law (divine or human) "po vaut entre les homes, se il ne fust aucuns qui les peust constraindre à garder la loi" [is of little value among men unless there is someone who can make them obey it] – but, in order to get to kings and lords, he must begin with "les lignies dou

[109] Latini 11.
[110] Nederman 646.

premier home" [the lineage of the first man.][111] This is a trend that we see throughout the history section: even if Latini begins a new topic by discussing a non-European ruler, he always bookends the topic by making it relevant to Christian Europeans by mentioning either Jesus or Rome. The effect feels very 'all roads lead to Rome' – even if for a time Assyrians or Egyptians held power over the world, this has little significance other than as a means to an assumed end. The emptying out of non-European history, and the significant depth at which Latini delves into European history by comparison, is part of the process of (re)presentational stabilization. Powerful non-Europeans are represented as only ever existing in the past. The stabilization of the (re)presentation of non-Europeans as essentially irrelevant to either the past or the present. This fixing of places and stories in cultural media like maps, Graham & Zook write, "become[s] the basis for how we understand, produce, reproduce, enact, and reenact the places and cities that we live in" and that we will make for ourselves to live in in the future.[112] The compendium's generic tendency to list offers a uniquely clear repetitive fixing and stabilization of places, showing over and over again that the history of the world spirals toward Eurocentrism.

Latini uses a very small moment of instability – wherein using the mirror to construct a speculated past, there's a flash of an unrecognizable reality – to erase the history of the prophet Muhammad.[113] We only learn of the prophet Muhammad (in a single sentence) in a carefully situated section titled "Comment sainte Eglise essauca" [How Holy Church prospered].[114] In Latini's version of history, after Constantine and Justinian the church "cruit la force de sainte

[111] Latini 25-26.
[112] Mark Graham and Matthew Zook, "Augmented Realities and Uneven Geographies: Exploring the Geolinguistic Contours of the Web," *Environment and Planning* 45, no. 1 (2013): 77.
[113] Walter Benjamin, in "Theses on the Philosophy of History," writes: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. … For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255). Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (Shocken Books, 1969).
[114] Latini refers to Rome and the Holy Church interchangeably.

Eglise loing et près, et de cà mer et de là mer, jusque au tens Eracle" [grew near and far, on this side of the sea and the other, until the time of Heraclius]; after this,

> li Sarasin de Perse orent grant force contre les crestiens, et gasterent Jerusalem, et ardirent les eglises, et emporterent le fust de l croiz, et enmenerent le patriarche et mains autres en chaitivoison, jà soit ce qui à la fin Eracles meismes ala et ocist le roi de Perse, et ramena les prisoneriers et la croiz, et sozmist les Persanz à la loi de Rome. Puis i fu li mauvais preeschierres qui fu moines, qui ot non Sergius, li quels les retraist de la foi et les mist en mauvaise error. [The Saracens of Persia won great victories and had great military engagements against the Christians in Jerusalem … yet, in the end, Heraclius the emperor went and killed the king of Persia and brought back the prisoners and the Holy Cross, and subjected the Persians to the law of Rome. Afterwards, the evil preacher Mohammad, who was a monk, went there, and he led them away from the good faith and into grave error].[115]

Yet, after this concession of the momentary defeat of the Holy Church, Latini claims that it was God's will "que sainte Eglise essauca et crut de jor en jor" [that Holy Church increased in stature and grew day by day]. Ultimately, it is Charlemagne who seems to settle matters with the "Sarasin" [Saracens]: "Puis ot il maintes hautes victoires contre les Sarrazins et les enemis de sainte Eglise, et sosmist à sa seigneurie Alemaigne et Espaigne, et mains autres païs" [After that he [Charlemagne] won many victories against the Saracens and the enemies of the Holy Church, and he subjected his rule to Germany and Spain and many other countries].[116] This is the last reference to "Sarasins/Sarrazins" [Saracens] in his history (he does discuss them in the formal map section); in Latini's speculated history, Mohammad is nothing more than an "mauvais

[115] Latini 83.
[116] Ibid 85.

preeschierres*"* [evil preacher] and a "moines" [monk]; he is not described as a merchant. The speculative history that Latini writes is rooted in a past where any possibilities outside of European hegemony have been foreclosed.

It is only after giving this hollowed out, Eurocentric history that Latini, using that representational stabilization, speculates an image of the world to produce a Eurocentric future where race and wealth are co-conscripted. The "mondes arquetipes" [world archetype] that Latini uses for his map is the medieval standard, the T-O map.[117] The world is divided into three parts by Noah after the flood, "en tel maniere que Sem, li ainznez filz Noé, tint toute Asie la grant, Cham tint toute Aufrique, Japhet tint Europe" [so that Shem, the first born son of Noah, had all of Asia Major, Ham had all of Africa, and Japheth had Europe].[118] In terms of speculation, this could create an opening for another (unknown) region of the world. Latini's centering of the Mediterranean Sea also centers the warped reality of his world-mirror as an European and an Italian in particular:

> la grant mer qui ... dont cil qui vient par Espaigne en Ytaille et en Grece est graindres que li atres; et por ce est ele apelée la grant mer; et est apelée Miterreinne porce que ele vait par mileu de la terre jusque vers orient, et devise et depart les .iij. parties de la terre. [the great sea … which flows beside Spain and into Italy and Greece is greater than the others,

[117] See P.D.A. Harvey, *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and Their Context* (The British Library, 2006); P.D.A. Harvey, *Medieval Maps* (The British Library, 1991); George Kimble, *Geography in the Middle Ages* (Methuan, 1938); and David Woodward, "Medieval *Mappaemundi*," *The History of Cartography Vol. 1*, ed. JB Harley and David Woodward (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[118] Latini 29. This narrative is also standard, except for where Latini references a fourth son of Noah: "Et Noé engendra .i. Autre fil qui ot non Jonitus, qui tint la terre de l'Eritainne joste le flum de Eufrates, en Orient; et fu li premiers qui trova astronomie, et qui ordena la science dou cours des estoiles. Mais de lui se taist ore li contes, que plus n'en dira en cele partie;" [Noah fathered another son, whose name was Yonitus, who held the land of Eritania by the Euphrates river in the east. He was the first man to discover astronomy, and he gave order to the science of the movements of the stars. But our story will say no more of him here;] (29). The inclusion of Yonitus is very curious, especially since he is given a geographical allotment like the other brothers – and a historically significant region at that. Yet, Latini is true to his word and does not reference Yonitus again; nor does he discuss Yonitus's allotment of the map.

> and for this reason it is called the great sea; and others call it the Mediterranean because it is in the middle of the lands as far as the Orient and it divides and separates the three parts of the earth].[119]

The Mediterranean is the divider of lands and the divider of men; despite the history of three brothers that Latini gives, the sea "devise et depart" [divides and separates] them into unequal parts; he tells us that his own description of the world as three parts "mais ce ne'est mie à droit, porce qui lune partie n'est pas igal à l'autre; car Aeisie tient bien lune moitié de toute la terre" [is not accurate, because one part is not equal to the other, for Asia contains half of the whole of the earth].[120] His concession of inaccuracy reads an admission on his behalf that his material is indeed speculative – by producing an image of the world that is inherently separated, he forecloses a future wherein Europe can be truly separate from its counterparts. Latini's map creates an unevenly developed world geography by speculating that Asia and Africa are both simultaneously bountiful and barren – there is plenty of wealth to be found in the precious stones and metals there, but the geography is an impoverished and uninhabitable wilderness. This is a familiar process that we see in the making of modern history – the wealth of the present is predicated on the homogenous and empty time and place of the past. At the core of this is the production of racialized human difference – the people of Asia and Africa are differentiated by their skin color, cultural practices, or clothing, while the depiction of Europe is literally just a list of regions and the number of bishoprics therein.

Racialism in *Li Livres dou Tresor* (re)presents difference that is always shifting but ever-present in his geographical descriptions. Latini speculates in Asia that beyond Bactria there live "Antropofagi; une gent molt aspres et fieres" [the anthropophagi, a very cruel and ferocious

[119] Ibid 151-152.
[120] Ibid 152.

people] – the region that surrounds them is "toute est plaine de bestes sauvages si cruels qui on n'i puet pas aler. Et sachiez que cele male aventure avient par les grandismes jons qui sont sor la mer, que li Barbarin apelent Tabi" [filled with wild beasts so cruel that one cannot go there, and you should know that this evil state of affairs comes about because of the great summer which is up beside the sea, which the barbarians call Tabi].[121] The references to both barbarism and cannibalism have long histories in the production of racialized difference.[122] The Gambarides, the "derrain pueple qui sont en Ynde" [last people in India], are described as "de vert color" [of green color].[123] Latini also claims that "sachiez" [You should know] that the people of India in general "son graignor que nule gent" [are larger than any other people].[124] In unidentified places, or places without names, Latini speculates that

> Et sachiez que en Ynde et en celui païs là outre, a maintes diversitez de genz; car il i a tels qui ne vivent que de poissons, et tiex i a qui ocient lor peres avant qui il dechieent par viellesce ou par maladie; et si les manjuent, et ce est entre uels une chose de grant pité. Cil qui habitent au mont Niles ont les piez retors, ce est la plante desus, et ont en chascun pié .viiij. Doiz. Autres i a qui ont teste de chien, et li plusor n'ont chief; mais lor oilz sont en lor espaules. Unes autres gens i a qui maintenant qu'il naissent, lor chevol deviennent chenu et blanc, et en lor viellesce nercissent. li autre n'ont qui .i. oil et une jambe, et

[121] Ibid 158.
[122] Robinson discusses barbarism in particular. For the history of cannibalism and racialism see *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, Ed. Francis Barker et al. (Cambridge, 1998); William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford University Press, 1979); Asa Simon Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (Routledge, 2006). Latini only references barbarism in one other place in the introduction to the *Tresor*: " Dont la premiere est gramatique, qui est fondemenz et porte et entrée des autres sciences; ele nos enseigne à parler et à lire et à escrire à droit, sanz vice de barbarisme et de solæcisme." [Of these [arts and necessary trades in words] is grammar, which is the foundation and door and and entryway of other other disciplines; it teaches us to speak and write and read correctly, with no defect of barbarism or solecism] (8-9).
[123] Barrette and Baldwin translate this as "olive-skinned."
[124] Latini 158 & 160.

corrent trop durement. Et si i a femes qui portent enfant à .v. anz, mais ne vivent outre l'aage de .viiij. Anz. [You should know that in India and in the country beyond, there are many different types of people, for among them there are those who live only on fish, and others who kill their parents before they die of old age or disease, and they eat them, and this is for them a matter of great piety. Those who live on the Niles Mountain have their feet reversed, that is, the sole of the foot is on top, and each foot has eight toes. There are other people whose heads are like those of dogs, and others whose eyes are in their shoulders because they have no heads. There are other people whose hair becomes white and hoary as soon as they are born, and in old age it turns black. Others have only one eye, and still others only one leg, and there are women who carry their children for five years, but they do not live beyond the age of eight.][125]

This sundry variety of difference stands in stark contrast to the section on Europe – which, to reiterate, does not describe any people at all. We see in the anthropophagi near Bactria that some geographies are inherently associated with a sense of irredeemable evil. There are many places discussed (Scythia, Ponde, Arace, to name a few) without discussing the people who live there; but, there are very few people that are discussed without reference to racialized difference. In Africa, Latini tells us, "Encore i est la terre de Ethiope et des mons Athalans, où sont ls gens noirs comme meure, et por ce sont il apelé Mores, por la prochaineté dou soleil" [There also is the land of Ethiopia and Mount Atalans, where the people are as dark as mulberries (this is why they are called the Moors) because of the nearness of the sun].[126] Latini had never been to any of these places himself. If we read the *Tresor* as a speculative fiction, it demonstrates a consistent world-building archetype structured by racialism. Europeans speculated that ventures into Asia

[125] Ibid 159-160.
[126] Ibid 171.

or Africa would bring encounters with people that were recognizably and inherently different – whether that be because of skin color, or because of body shape and parts, or because they eat each other.

Along with establishing and (re)presenting stabilized racialized difference, Latini's speculative fiction of Asia and Africa locates seemingly unclaimed sources of wealth throughout both. The representation of the extractable resources there is predicated on difference; amongst these very different people there can be found many resources in great quantity. On the island of "Oprobaine" [Oprabanie] there are "home o grant plenté de pierres precieuses" [men with a great multitude of precious stones], and on the islands of "Eride et Argite … qui li plusor cuident que toute la terre soit or et argent" [Eride and Argite … there is such a great quantity of metal that the majority of people believe that the land is made of gold or silver].[127] In the latter example, the source of wealth *is* the geography. Latini takes care to tell his reader that "Et sachiez que en cele partie de la terre par là où li solaus lieve, naist li poivres" [You should know that in that part of the world [near the Caucasus Mountains], in the east, pepper is found].[128] There is even a rare red wool that results from "une fontaine de tel nature que se les berbiz en boivent, tout maintenant commencent à muer la colour de lor toison dedans la pel, et cele colour croist et maint, et l'autre colour, quant la toison est escreue, s'en vait o tout la toison" [a fountain of such a nature that if the sheep drink from it their fleece immediately begins to change color inside the skin; this color increases and grows, and the other color goes with the fleece when the fleece is shorn].[129] In Africa, "là sont les gens de Nasmasone et de Trogodite, et les gens des Amanz qui font lor maison de sel" [there live the people of Namaisone and Trogodite and the

[127] Ibid 159.
[128] Ibid 160. Paul Freedman's, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (Yale University Press, 2008) provides a compelling account of the material and cultural value of spices in the Middle Ages.
[129] Latini 154.

people of Amans, who make houses of salt].[130] The description of Trogodite, similar to Eride and Argite, constructs wealth in people's dwellings. The extraction of that resource would require the destruction of their homes. These resources, which Latini would have very likely been familiar with because of his proximity to several major pan-Eurasian trade hubs, are never discussed as being part of any particular kingdom or belonging to any particular king.[131] They appear rather as God-given and available for extraction.

In addition to specific resources, general, isolated bounty is consistent in the depiction of Asia; for example, "vers orient, est .i. lieus li plus plentureus de toutes choses qui soient sus terre. Et cil leus est apelez Direu" [Towards the east is a place which is the most bountiful of any which exists on earth, and this place is called Direum].[132] Latini, like many others before and after him in texts and maps, locates the "Paradis terrestre" [earthly paradise] in Asia (in India specifically): "où il a de toutes manieres de fust d'arbres et de pomes et de fruiz qui soient en terre" [in which there are all kinds of fruit and trees and apples].[133] Yet alongside such bounty Latini describes large swathes of uninhabitable land – like the area already referenced near Bactria, where the anthropophagi live.[134] In one of these uninhabitable areas, at the end of the

[130] Ibid 171.
[131] Other compendia, and travel narratives that draw on them (*The Book of John Mandeville*), do attribute particular commodities to Kings or Kingdoms – this is usually accompanied with increased or emphasized racialization.
[132] Latini 157.
[133] Ibid 161.
[134] The depiction of uninhabitable land comes to play a large role in colonial projects, as these places of *terra nullius* take on a quality of moral mismanagement, which only European civility can solve. There's almost a reference to this in Latini when he states in the last sentence on the section on Asia that "En cel païs a mains patriarches et arcevesques et evesques, selonc l'establissement de sainte Eglise, qui sont par conte .cxxxiij.; mais la force des Sarrazins mescreans en a une grant partie surprise, par cui la sainte loi Jhesu Crist ne puet estre coltivée." [In that country there are many patriarchs, archbishops and bishops, according to the establishment of the Holy Church, and these total 133, but the unbelieving Saracens overcame most of them by force, which is why the holy law of Jesus Christ cannot be *cultivated* there] (161). The reference to cultivation, which is very important to the construction of *terra nullius*, seems to imply that he may be thinking in this way – just in terms of spiritual cultivation instead of agricultural cultivation.

world, Latini finds an opportunity for trade. The conditions of that trade, however, are heavily influenced by racialism and demonstrates inevitably inequitable mercantilism.

Past the anthropophagi, "sont les gradismes solitudes et les terres deshabitées vers soleil levant. Aprés celui, et outre toutes habitaciones de gent, trovons nous tout avant homes qui sont apelé Sere, qui de fuelles et d'escorces d'arbres font une laine par force d'aigue, dont il font lor vestemenz" [there are great empty spaces and the uninhabited lands extending towards the east. After this, beyond all human habitation, we find men called Seirs, who with leaves and bark treated with water make a prickly wool with which they cover their body].[135] The impossibility of the geographical conditions lends to the speculative nature of this particular fiction – if there are men located past the point of "toutes habitaciones de gent" [all human habitation] are they fully human? The description goes on to state that

> sont amiable et paisible entr'eulz, et refusent compaignie d'autre gent. Mais li nostre marcheant passent .i. lor flum, et truevent sor la rive toute maniere de marcheandise qui là puet estre trovée; et sanz nul parlement, esgardent as oils le pris de chascune; et quant il l'ont veue, il enportent ce que il vuelent et laissent la vaillance au leu meisme. En ceste maniere vendent il lor marcheandise, ne des nostres ne vuelent ne po no molt. [They are humble and peaceful towards one another, and they avoid the company of other people; but our merchants go down one of their rivers and find near the shores all kinds of merchandise. Without any exchange of words, they determine the price by looking one another in the eyes and when they have seen what it is, they carry off what they want and leave something of value in that very place. In this way they sell their merchandise, and they do not want much from us.][136]

[135] Latini 158.
[136] Ibid.

The Seirs are "amiable et paisible entr'eulz" [humble and peaceful towards one another], yet they also "refusent compaignie d'autre gent" [avoid the company of other people]. This seems to imply that the "entr'eulz" [towards each other] may mean that they may be more antagonistic than just avoiding the company "d'autre gent" [of other people]. There's the question of whom "nostre marcheant" [our merchants] refers to – Florentine merchants? European merchants? Given that this is an impossible geography for anyone to inhabit, "nostre marcheant" [our merchants] going there at all occurs in a different spatial and temporal dimension – it is not in the past, present, or future. The silent determination of "pris" [price] amongst the Seirs themselves would seem to indicate that they are determining the "vaillance" [value]; this seems particularly true because of the statement that they take what they want is ordered before they leave "laissent la vaillance" [something of value] behind. But, in the last sentence, we learn that they do not seem to actually take much because "ne vuelent ne po no molt" [they do not want much].[137] The fact that the Seirs are said to be willing to "vendent" [sell] their merchandise, but for so little, reframes the inherent inequity of this "exchange."

Nederman's helpful analysis of Latini's interpretation of Aristotle suggests that Latini's focus on "how money fulfills the desires of exchanging parties" makes it so that in the *Tresor* "the equality of market justice … is somewhat subjective and contingent upon the satisfaction of the participants and the elimination of any potential for conflict."[138] If, as Nederman says, it is Latini's perspective that "money promotes the peace necessary for the marketplace," then the

[137] This exchange bears resemblance to "silent barter" – a trade practice common in ancient Africa, in particular the empire of Ghana, until 1500, according to Ralph A. Austen in "The Sources of Gold: Narratives, Technology, and Visual Culture from the Mande and Akan Worlds," *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa*, ed. Berzock Kathleen Bickford (Princeton University Press, 2019).

[138] Nederman 652. Nederman contrasts Latini's perspective in this with Aristotle – who was "concerned with establishing how money could express with mathematical precisions the relative demand-values of various commodities."

absence of money in this exchange (again, the only speculated trade possible) is supplanted by the fact that the knowledge of the Seirs *is* the money. Latini harnesses racialism to speculate a process that *looks* like trade but underlying it is a process of dispossession. He reminds us in the closing of this section what his ultimate goal is:

> Et por ce dit li maistres que la premiere partie de son Tresor est en deniers contans; et si comme les gens ne porroient pas achever lor besoignes ne lor marcheandises sanz monoie, tout autressi ne porroient il1 savoir la certaineté des humaines choses, se il ne seussent ce que ceste premiere partie devise. [For this reason the master says that the first part of his *Treasure* is like cash money, for just as people could not carry out their business or undertake commercial transactions without money, in the same way they could not know the certainty of human things if they did not know what this first part tells].[139]

If transactions are not possible without money, then "l acertaineté des" [the certainty of] of Eurocentric humanity is not knowable without his world map.

III. Europe's Precious Stones and Fine Gold

The first part of the *Tresor* fills the pockets of the audience with ready-to-spend cash money and produces a speculated future with great potential for the creation of wealth via dispossession. The second and third parts of the book provide the means to exploit that future. The first part is a phase of liquidity: it is unspent cash money. The second and third parts are the commodities that the cash affords us to invest in. The concretization of the future provides specific methods and tools for exploiting the future. Latini's map portrays a paradoxically

[139] Latini 254.

homogenous and empty world – the wealth of the extractable resources of Asia and Africa depends on differentiation, which is established through racialism. Latini creates the potential for exploitation and wealth accumulation by speculating that Europe can produce its own kind of wealth to be exported to Asia and Africa – its own precious stones and fine gold, which would stand in contrast to and devalue Asia and Africa's precious stones and precious metals.

On the surface, the second part of the *Tresor* reads as the most conventionally feudal of the three parts. When he reiterates the purpose of the second part at the beginning of the third part, he claims that it "demonstre assez bonement quels hom doit estre en moralité, et comment il doit vivre honestement et governer soit et sa maisnie et ses choses selonc la science de ethique et de iconomique" [shows very well what a man must do and what his moral character must be, and how he must live honestly and govern himself and his household and his belongings according to the sciences of ethics and economics].[140] Although he never refers to a particular feudal hierarchical structure, his general understanding of what is under a lord's purview is conventionally feudal. This is actually useful because it allows us to see what is continuous and discontinuous in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. If, as Robinson argues, "The development of capitalism can thus be seen as having been determined in form by the social and ideological composition of a civilization that had assumed its fundamental perspectives during feudalism," then Latini's adherence to some of the social and ideological conventions of feudal civilization demonstrates Robinson's argument in practice.[141]

Latini tells us directly that the second and third parts of the book are a matter of future practice – they are "practical philosophy," and the introduction to the second part aims to "enseigne à home quel chose il doit faire et quel non, et la raison por quoi l'en doit faire les unes

[140] Ibid 467.
[141] Robinson 24.

et les autres non" [teach man what he must do and what he must not do, and why he must do some things and not others].[142] Latini's recommended practice in the second book is rooted in virtue, which he defines as "uns habiz par volente qui par certe raison et determinée demore au mileu qui est solenc nos" [a state of character through will determined by certain reasons, and it resides in the middle [between two extremes, of either too much or too little] according to us].[143] If virtue "resides in the middle" and that middle is determined by "us," then Europe's central geographical position on Latini's map makes it virtuous. Latini consistently refers to a sense of the middle in relation to virtue, but as he explains it at the outset, virtue is determined through differentiation. Differentiation requires diversity (in geographies, in people, in resources). Latini instructs his reader that the metric for sorting through diversity is potential value: "mais de la diversité des choses convient il que li bien soient divers, selonc ce que chascune chose requiert son bien, qui est appropriez à sa fin, et entre tant de diversitez de bien, cil est trés mieudres de touz qui aquiert plus de bonté et de grignor valliance" [Of all the diversity of good things, the best good of all is the one which achieves the most goodness and the best value].[144] Latini cites Cicero as saying "que… bien, honeste et profit, sont si entremellé, que tout ce qui est bien est tenu profitable, et tout ce qui est honeste est tenu bien. Et de ce s'ensuit il1 que toute chose honeste est profitable" [that ... good and honesty and profit, are so intermingled that all that is good is considered to be profitable, and all that is honest is held to be good, and from this it follows that all honest things are profitable].[145] Goodness is inextricably aligned with profitability here, and vice versa, creating a compelling incentive to accumulate wealth.

The allegorical tresor of Latini's book presents money as the means to create equality, but

[142] Latini 254.
[143] Ibid 270.
[144] Ibid 335.
[145] Ibid 452.

Latini's world map is so grossly unequal and money only enshrines that inequality. Latini's practical philosophy of money is demonstrated using an example:

> Car li uns a mestier des choses à l'autre, si en recoit et li rent son guerredon et son paiement selonc la qualité de la chose, jusques à tant que il soient en droite meenneté entre eaus, ce est à dire se li fevres a une chose qui vaille .i. et li cordoanniers en a une qui vaille .ij. et li charpentiers en a une qui vaille .iij., et li uns ait mestier des choses à l'autre, il convient avoir entre eaus aucune igalité, si que eles torment à .i. mi qui soit igal entre eaus, et por ce furent denier trové premierement qui igalissent les choses qui desigaus estoient. Et deniers est autressi comme justice, sans ame, porce que li est .i. Mi par quoi les choses desiguas torrent à igalite. [if a man needs something another man has, he receives it and gives him his reward and his payment according to the quality of the thing, until there is just middle ground between them; that is to say, if the smith has something which is worth one and the cobbler has something which is worth two, and a carpenter has something which is worth three, and each needs things from the others, there must be some way of bringing about equality, because one is worth more than the other, so that they turn to the middle point, which is equality among them. It was for this reason that money was invented, because it brought equality to unequal things; money is like justice without a soul, because it is a middle ground through which unequal things become equal.][146]

Money brings "equality" to things that are "unequal" but it seems arbitrary that the smith's product is worth one, the cobbler's product worth two, and the carpenter's worth three.[147] What

[146] Ibid 295.

[147] In Chapter 1 of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, Trans. Ben Fowkes (Penguin, 1990), Marx also grapples with this contradiction from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: "he [Aristotle] states quite clearly that the money-form of the commodity is only a more developed aspect of the simple form of value, i.e. of the expression of the value of a commodity in some other commodity chosen at

determines “la qualité de la chose” [the quality of the thing] in strict fixed quantitative ratios? Latini claims that “deniers est autressi comme justice, sans ame” [money is like justice without a soul], by which I think he means that money is a totally neutral middle ground that does not distinguish between the cobbler and the carpenter. The soullessness of justice, of money, is what enshrines the inequality between the carpenter and the cobbler and presents it as neutral and naturalized when it is anything but. “Ame” is defined in the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1500*) in the figurative sense as the “principe qui anime une chose abstraite, qui lui donne vie” [Principle that animals an abstract thing, that gives it life].[148] The soulless justice of money assumes that there is no *animus* in material commodities, when in reality the value and quality of commodities does not exist without the human labor that goes into making them (labor value, or socially-necessary labor time) and the use that human beings get from that commodity (use value).[149] For Latini, the map is money, and Latini’s map is very unevenly developed. The framing of the map as money, and money as a neutral “middle ground,” frames Latini’s map as neutral because it is seemingly sans ame.

Nederman claims that Latini’s subtle revision of Cicero in the second part of the *Tresor*

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random, for he says: 5 beds = 1 house… is indistinguishable from 5 beds = a certain amount of money. He further sees that the value-relation which provides the framework for this expression of value itself requires that the house should be qualitatively equated with the bed, and that these things, being distinct to the senses, could not be compared with each other as commensurable magnitudes if they lacked this essential identity. ‘There can be no exchange,’ he says, ‘without equality, and no equality without commensurability’. Here, however, he falters, and abandons the further analysis of the form of value. … What is the homogeneous element, i.e. the common substance, which the house represents from the point of view of the bed, in the value expression for the bed? Such a thing, in truth, cannot exist, says Aristotle. But why not? Towards the bed, the house represents something equal, in so far as it represents what is really equal, both in the bed and the house. And that is – human labour” (151).

[148] *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, “ame” (n.2 fig.),” 2023.

[149] Marx delineates that “The value of labour-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labour-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this specific article. In so far as it has value, it represents no more than a definite quantity of the average social labour objectified in it.” (274). He defines use-value as “the usefulness of a thing… the physical body of the commodity itself… [that is] only realized in use or in consumption” (126).

introduces "a market-oriented principle according to which the common good is realized in a manner compatible with private advantage"; the "natural duty to care for other human beings" can be accomplished by taking care of oneself, ultimately benefits "the well-ruled… city."[150] This shift, away from community and towards the individual, marks a shift in social relations that is fundamental in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the *Tresor*, "cil qui est prodigues est mains mauvais qui li avers; car cil fait profit à mains homes" [the prodigal spender is less evil than a miser, for he brings profit to many]. As an investment strategy, Latini speculates that there is value in spending and differentiation.[151] Europe's own "precious stones" is a "practical philosophy" that relies on value produced from differentiation, makes racialism a necessity for profit, and casts the person that profits and creates profits for others (even if that process is inherently unequal) as virtuous. Having exploited the potential for profit and virtue by creating the "certain reasons" it requires to exist, Europe creates its own virtue.

Robinson argues in his introduction to the 2000 edition of *Black Marxism* that it is actually Aristotle who "provided the template" for race as the "epistemology, … ordering principle, … organizing structure, … moral authority, … economy of justice, commerce, and power" of domination.[152] The articulation of Aristotle's "uncompromising racial construct" is: "[T]he mass of mankind are evidently quite slavish in their tastes preferring a life suitable to beasts."[153] This "racial calculus," Robinson argues, is "reiterated and embellished" in the long history of European rulers, both clerical and secular. Latini's reiteration, part of his precious stones, is the claim that

[150] Nederman 650.
[151] Latini 285.
[152] Robinson xxxi.
[153] Ibid.

> Et des homes qui semblent estre de nature divine ou de nature de bestes en toutes choses sont po au monde. Mais cil qui vivent à loi de bestes habitent es extremitez de la terre qui poplée est; car en droit midi sont li Ethiopien, et pardevers septentrion sont li Esclavon. [People with divine nature or beastly nature in all things are not numerous in this world. Those who live according to the law of the beasts live at the end of the inhabited earth, for in the extreme south are the Ethiopians, and towards the north are the Slavs].[154]

What becomes more concrete here is that the racial calculus of differentiation is more explicitly geographical (with the references to "the extreme south" and "the north") and also more explicitly racialized (the implied opposite but sameness of Ethiopians and Slavs). Latini communicates this in a section of the text on "vices" (of which there are curiously only 3: malice, cruauté et luxure/malice, cruelty, and lust). If people at the extreme edges of the world are driven to vice, and thus have no future value or virtue, it follows that Latini's "precious stones" are determined in their value and clarity by race, and can only ever be fully possessed by Europeans.

Like Latini's precious stones, the fine gold can similarly only be possessed by Europeans – and this he is just as specific about.[155] He begins the section by citing Cicero as saying that, "au commencement li home vivoient à loi de bestes, sanz propres maisons et sanz connaissance de Dieu, parmi les bois et parmi les repostailles champestres, si que nus n'i gardoit mariage, nus ne conoissoit pere ne fil" [in the beginning men lived in isolated caves in the woods like animals, without a proper house and without the knowledge of God, paying no heed to marriage, and no one knew either father or son].[156] This articulation is very non-specific, but is so similarly

[154] Latini 305.
[155] Although, following the trend in the introduction, Latini does not elaborate the value of fine gold in his analogy. He doesn't reference gold at all in this part of the text.
[156] Ibid 469.

worded to his description in the first part of Ethiopians and Garemans that it erases any doubt that racialism underlies Latini's description of those without rhetoric: Et sachiez que la gent de Ethiope et de Gartemanz ne savent que est mariage, ainz ont entr'eulx femes communaus à touz, et por ce avient que nus ne conoist pere, se mere non, por quoi il sont apelé la mains noble gent dou monde" [You should know that the people of Ethiopia and Garemans do not know what marriage is, rather their wives are held in common, and for this reason they do not know who their father is, only their mother, for which reason they are called the least noble people in the world].[157] Latini claims that man emerges from his beastly condition only because of rhetoric: one day a "sages hom bien parlans, qui tant conseilla les autres et tant lor monstra la grandor de l'ome" [wise man spoke and counselled the others and showed them the greatness of man].[158] For Latini (via Cicero), rhetoric is the measure by which humanity is assessed; rhetoric is what differentiates man from beast; rhetoric is a mechanism of racializing. The fundamental function of rhetoric, Latini argues, is "por faire croice ce que on dit" [to make others believe what we say]. Thus, if rhetoric is applied by Latini in his racializing texts, and the lords that he instructs in both rhetoric and racialism apply Latini's philosophy in their governance, then the tradition of racialized (re)presentational stabilization proliferates.[159] More than that though, racialism becomes an epistemology; it is, Robinson argues, "the very values and traditions of consciousness through which the peoples of these ages [medieval, feudal, capitalist] came to understand their worlds and their experiences."[160] Latini's "fine gold" offers an incentive to invest in rhetoric to create political power. In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante's parting words to Brunetto Latini are: "ché 'n la menta m'é fitta, e or m'accora, / la cara e buona imagine paterna /

[157] Ibid 171.
[158] Ibid 469.
[159] Ibid 470.
[160] Robinson 66.

di voi quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora /m'insegnavate come l'uom s'etterna" [for in my memory is fixed, and now it weighs on / my heart, the dear, kind paternal image of you when, / in the world, from time to time, / you used to teach me how man makes himself eternal].[161]

Conclusion

> "The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable."
> *Walter Benjamin* [162]

In this chapter I have examined how the medieval production of speculative knowledge incentivizes the reader to invest in manifesting a world that resembles that speculation in order to profit from the uneven development of the world and uneven (re)distribution of resources and wealth. My analysis of Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* reveals how the medieval Italian Mediterranean merchant class were theorizing the changing social relations necessary for the rise of capitalism, and illuminates the central role of racialism in the process of the dispossession and wealth accumulation that were also necessary for the rise of capitalism. The totalizing and homogenizing qualities of the compendium genre facilitates speculative world-building as an epistemological strategy. Framing world-building maps as a kind of money in the figurative sense neutralizes and naturalizes the uneven development of the globe. Money in the literal sense becomes a conduit for this uneven development and devaluation of non-European geographies and racialization of non-European peoples. The paradoxical juxtaposition of the world beyond Europe as both barren and bountiful propels European colonizers toward the horizon to the East and the South for centuries. In the next chapter, I examine how John Mandeville continues Latini's speculative world-building project and (re)presents the globe in juxtaposed barrenness

[161] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Volume 1: Inferno,* ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford University Press, 1996): 15.82-86. It would be remiss of me to not mention that Dante finds Brunetto Latini with the sodomites in Hell in the *Inferno*.
[162] Benjamin 257.

and bounty. The fiscal incentive to invest in this speculative epistemology shifts in *The Book of John Mandeville* to the persona of an individual traveler, who compels his reader to exploit the wealth of the Far East for himself.

Chapter 2

Mandeville's Racializing Prism: Race, Time, and Speculation in *The Book of John Mandeville*

" [A] first class liar who related a lot of tall tales about countries he had never visited."
L.A. Vigneras [163]

"unveracious Maundevile"
Henry Yule [164]

"an accomplished forgery"
Iain Macleod Higgins [165]

Even after more than 600 years of circulation, the dishonesty of the author of *The Book of John Mandeville* remains central to its analysis. Many critical introductions to the text refer to the unknown author as a liar. Some instructors of Mandeville stage the revelation of the text's origin by waiting until the end of *The Book* to reveal that the whole thing was a lie – that not only do we not know who the Mandeville author was but also that the text itself plagiarizes other texts and (re)presents them as one man's real experiences.[166] Admittedly, the author brings this on himself with interspersed reassurances to the reader that he reports his own actual experiences traveling from St. Albans in England to the furthest reaches of the Far East. The Middle English text features a statement at its end that the Pope himself reviewed Mandeville's text for veracity, gilding it in papal authority.[167] The question, however, should not be about whether the

[163] L.A. Vigneras, "Introduction," *The Journal of Christopher Columbus,* by Christopher Columbus and Bartolomé de las Casas, Ed. L. A. Vigneras, Trans. Lionel Cecil Jane (Clarkson N. Potter, 1960): xx.
[164] Henry Yule, "Some Estimate of the Character of Polo and His Book," *The Book of Ser Marco Polo, the Venetian, Concerning the Kingdoms and Marvels of the East*, by Marco Polo, Tr. and Ed. Colonel Henry Yule (J. Murray, 1871): 109.
[165] Iain Macleod Higgins, "Introduction," *The Book of John Mandeville* with Related Texts by Sir John Mandeville, Trans. Iain Macleod Higgins (Hackett, 2011): x.
[166] Two key texts, Mary B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World*: *Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Cornell University Press, 1988) and Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), refer to *TBJM* as plagiarized.
[167] Mandeville 2838-2848.

Mandeville author lied to his audience and how that makes the audience feel about the text as a fact-fiction binary. We should be concerned with why *The Book* is held to an austere threshold of truthfulness when neither the authors of his sources nor the authors of his legacy are held to the same standard.

I argue that rather than reading *The Book* as a lie or misinformed or merely imaginative, *The Book* should be read as medieval speculative fiction. *The Book* uses world-building strategies, based in contemporaneous reality, to extrapolate into unknown spaces of the future or the past. The ambiguous motives and compiled content of *The Book* tempt readers to fit *The Book* into neat medieval genre containers – geography, pilgrimage, romance, history, or theology.[168] These categories are common features of world-building in speculative fiction. Geography defines the contours of the navigable world, and pilgrimage provides the means of navigation and imbues them with a deeper purpose. Romance lends narrative qualities, adventure, and entertainment. History lends authority and credibility, and tethers the speculative qualities to a sense of Truth and consequence rather than mere imagination. Iain Macleod Higgins enumerates the qualities of *The Book* as a "result of creativity and research …, of *speculation*, inference, and imagination as well as fact-gathering" – all common features of speculation.[169]As Christiane Deluz has argued since 1988, *The Book* is more an "image du monde" than it is a traveler's narrative – and one of the Mandeville author's strategies for building an image of the world is to speculate about far-flung places that may interest his audience.[170] The Mandeville author operates in "the climate of speculativeness" to create an image of the world in which Sir John Mandeville is a man of wonder whose success is to be

[168] Tzanaki 4.
[169] Higgins x. Emphasis mine.
[170] Christiane Deluz, *Le livre de Jehan de Mandeville : une "géographie" au XIVe siècle* (Institut d'études médiévales de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 1988).

sought after.[171] In this chapter, I examine how *The Book of John Mandeville* (re)presents his source material as a proto-capitalist speculative fiction that speculates about the riches to be extracted from the Far East and the inevitability, and rightfulness, of Latin Christian global dominion. He invites his readers to invest in furthering his world-building enterprise by both going out into the world to build (literally) the image he has created, and to amend and augment the text of *The Book* to fit what he speculates that they will find.

In *Black Marxism*, Robinson argues that the Realm of Prester John, whose discovery is the climax in several manuscripts of *The Book*, was a central facet of shaping the Eurocentric world beginning in the twelfth century. Robinson points to the shifting, diffracting qualities of the legend's prism as an origin point "for the destruction of the African past" by Christian Europe.[172] The Realm of Prester John is just one of many places that the Mandeville author speculates there is space for white, extractive, empire. When searches for the Realm of Prester John continually proved to be unproductive, the mark simply shifted: "Thus, when the miraculous kingdom could not be located in the desert and steppes of central Asia or even Cathay, it did not cease its fascination but was transferred to the south beyond the upper Nile."[173] This sentiment is reiterated by Stuart Hall, who frames medieval texts like *The Book* as helping to "form the template through which the New World took shape in the European mind": he argues that "The conquistadors did not always find what they were looking for. But they tried to assimilate what they saw into the epistemic framework through which they looked."[174] This

[171] Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Capitalism as a System* (Monthly Review Press, 1964): 33. Cox notes: "The heart of the capitalist ethos appears to be the climate of speculativeness in which the individual operates: it is in the involvements of this trait, as they manifest themselves in foreign economic relations particularly, that the fabulous magic of capitalism lies."
[172] Robinson 99.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Stuart Hall, "In but Not of Europe: Europe and Its Myths [2002/2003]," *Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (Duke University Press, 2021): 382.

epistemic framework is Robinson's racializing prism. However important the isolated figure of Prester John was, a large part of the dissemination of the legend was facilitated by its inclusion in *The Book* – which, as demonstrated by the 300+ extant manuscripts, circulated widely throughout Europe.

Thus, I will expand Robinson's claim that the legend of Prester John served as an "obfuse prism" to argue that *The Book of John Mandeville* served as a racializing prism that functioned to filter reality in such a way that diffracts resource and land appropriation, geography, and racialism onto the same plane, and as such has been formative in the wide-scale racializing enterprises that comprise modernity. A prism can be used both to produce *and* to analyze a spectrum. Mandeville's prism both reflects the wide scope of history that he's drawn from his sources and (re)produces it across the mappamundi of his own making. A prism, like a mirror, reflects light but it also shifts its path. A glass triangular prism disperses the light of a single ray of white light into a gradual array of its seven constituent colors. Because *The Book of John Mandeville* combines so many diverse narratives and points of knowledge into a single text, in this way it transforms what was a simple, reflective mirror (like that used in compendia or speculum literature) into a more complicated diffracting artifact: a prism. Rather than reflecting experiences in a single image, a clear ray of light, *The Book* diffracts the world into a multi-dimensional and diverse spectrum of reality. As Maxine Baca Zinn, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Michael A. Messner note in the introduction to *Gender Through the Prism of Difference*, the spectrum produced by a prism is "not an infinite, disorganized scatter of individual colors."[175] The difference that a prism produces is ordered, consistent, and distinct. One ramification of this is that, as noted above, the role of the Mandeville author in relation to

[175] Maxine Baca Zinn, et al., *Gender through the Prism of Difference* 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2005): 1.

The Book is unclear and his persona and motive are ever-shifting – both within a single manuscript, from chapter to chapter, and across the multilingual manuscript tradition. *The Book*'s prism does not reflect the perspective of a single person or entity because the Mandeville author is a cipher.

Like a lapidarist, the Mandeville author has shaped and refined the qualities of his many sources; he drew on around twenty-five texts and consulted another ten beyond that.[176] The variety of the genres of his sources is wide. Higgins enumerates them as: Accounts of the near (Biblical) East [six, mainly William of Boldensele's *Liber de quibusdam ultramarinis partibus* (*Book of Certain Regions beyond the Mediterranean,* 1336)], Accounts of the far (marvelous) East [three, mainly Odoric of Pordenone's *Relatio* (*Account*, 1330)], Scripture and its supplements [eight, mainly (Pseudo-William of Tripoli's *Tractatus de statu Sarracenorum* (*Treatise on the State of the Saracens*, after 1273)], Histories [eight, mainly Hayton of Armenia's *Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient* (*Flower of the Histories of the Land of the East*, 1307)], Encyclopedias (five), and Scientific treatises (three). Many of the Mandeville author's sources are compendia and thus have the reflective, mirror-like qualities explored in Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* and Beauvais' *Speculum Maius*. The Mandeville author uses the perspective of the solo adventurer to enhance and focus the mirroring aspects of the speculative epistemology that he draws on. What fashions *The Book* as a prism is what Higgins calls its "Mandevillean singularity": its all-encompassing yet singular (re)presentation of its sources allows for a uniquely wide range of interpretations and interpolations. Its capaciousness and speculativeness provide a tool for filtering expectations and experiences through a familiar and appealing framework for any would-be traveler-colonizer who puts them at the center of the epistemic

[176] Higgins 219 presents a list modified from Deluz 57-58.

universe.

The appeal of Mandeville's prism as a filter for would-be traveler-colonizers is that it provides a framework that triangulates race, geography, and wealth. This framework demonstrates that racialized violence emerges from otherwise neutral-seeming economic relations. Drawing from Susan Koshy, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson in the introduction to *Colonial Racial Capitalism*, I find it crucial, particularly for this study centered in the Middle Ages, to recognize that, "Racial Capitalism *is* colonial capitalism, especially where settler and imperial thefts of land, the production of hierarchies of global space, and the expropriation of labor occur by means of recursive processes that require possession and rights in order to produce dispossession and rightlessness."[177] This distinction from Robinson's study of racial capitalism in *Black Marxism* highlights how neither colonialism nor capitalism developed without first appropriating resources and lands from indigenous peoples. The Mandeville author explicitly connects race, geography, and wealth via dispossession in the prologue of *The Book*: "every good Christian who has the power and the means ought to take pains and do great work to conquer our above-mentioned and right inheritance [the Holy Land] and take it from the hands of the miscreants and appropriate it to us."[178] Good Christians are upheld relative to the "miscreants" of the Middle East, from whom a land "inheritance" should be violently appropriated from, by whatever means. Further, Mandeville imbues the Holy Land with more than just sentimental value: "Well ought the land to be delightful and fruitful that was watered and softened by the precious blood of Jesus Christ."[179] By deducing that the spiritual

[177] Koshy 7.
[178] Mandeville, Sir John, *The Book of John Mandeville with Related Texts,* ed. and trans. Iain Macleod Higgins (Hackett, 2011): 4. All citations of Mandeville in this chapter refer to the Higgins edition unless otherwise noted.
[179] Ibid.

value of the Holy Land also communicates a material value in its "fruitful"ness, Mandeville tethers an economic incentive to the racializing and conquering of the people of the Middle East.

This chapter begins with a survey and analysis of Mandevillean scholarship to demonstrate how the modern perception of time has warped and obfuscated the clear world-building facets of *The Book of John Mandeville*. The medieval particularity of the blended genres and sources of *The Book* is a substantial feature of its reception and epistemological influence. Part of that reception is that *The Book* has been relegated to premodern history, despite the fact that the features of *The Book* rendering it so unusual in the medieval canon are those very qualities that have carried through to modernity. I will posit that speculative fiction is a genre that can encapsulate *The Book*'s (re)presentation of historical information alongside speculative information to build a world image: a mappamundi. In *Racial Worldmaking*, Mark Jerng argues that "Genre and race should … be conceptualized as deeply interrelated ways of building-in knowledge of the world"; following this, my analysis of *The Book* as medieval speculative fiction demonstrates that, contrary to claims that the text is ambivalent towards the "diverse peoples" beyond the boundaries of the Holy Land, the perceived ambivalence demonstrates the nuanced strategies of racial worldmaking whereby race is integrated into the narrative world.[180] I will demonstrate how *The Book* actively encourages future readers, travelers, and makers of history to screen and strain their worldview using the Mandevillean parameters laid out therein. Along with inviting its readers to (re)produce racialism, *The Book* is the medium through which a sense of entitlement to native lands and their rich resources is tethered to the

[180] Mark C. Jerng, *Racial Worldmaking: the Power of Popular Fiction* (Fordham University Press, 2018): 1-2. Jerng defines racial worldmaking as "narrative and interpretive strategies that shape how readers notice race so as to build, anticipate, and organize the world. These strategies prompt us to notice race in unlikely sites and in unexpected ways. They locate race at the level of context, atmosphere, sequence, and narrative explanation – levels, that is, other than the biological representation of bodies or the social categorization of persons."

establishment of racialized difference. In doing so, *The Book* invites future readers, travelers, and makers of history to invest in the speculative (re)presentation of a mappamundi that propagates colonial racial capitalism.

I. Genre and Epistemology

One consistent word in Mandevillean scholarship of the last 60 years, perhaps as a palliative remedy to "liar," is "imaginative." In *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt delineates the degree to which the truth is imagined (made up) or is actively suppressed by the Mandeville author in comparison to later European voyagers to the New World. While Mandeville is a "steady liar," Stephen Greenblatt argues, his *Book* relies on its sources to imagine what it would be like to travel the world and the lie is that he said he actually did travel the world. In contrast, Columbus and his ilk, who really did travel the world, strategically manipulated, distorted, and outright suppressed the truth – little imagination in that.[181] The invocation of imagination carries with it the sense of a self-contained mental image, whereas lying implies an audience and circulation. While "lie" is overly dismissive, and kept Mandeville in the dustbin for centuries, "imaginative" is still similarly dismissive even if in a gentler way. Interpreting *The Book* as merely imaginative evacuates it of the intentional labor of its creation as well as its high stakes – a global Latin Christendom with access to *all* of the world's riches.

The interpretation of *The Book* as imaginative was an antidote to the allegations of lying and plagiarism, and a bid to reincorporate the text into the canon of English literature. This effort was catalyzed by Josephine Waters Bennett's *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (1954). Bennett argues that "Mandeville belongs, not to the history of exploration (though he has a larger

[181] Greenblatt 7.

place there than is commonly recognized today), but to the history of European literature" – more specifically, to "the history of imaginative literature."[182] What had been framed by past critics as lies, Bennett argues, are "wonderful tales" written by a "modest, reasonable, and tolerant man."[183] The value of *The Book*, for Bennett, is that it is imaginative: "He has selected and pruned and arranged. More important still, he has imagined. He knew how to secure that "willing suspension of disbelief" which is the foundation of all great fiction – in fact, of all imaginative literature."[184] Her rosy take on *The Book* assumes that imaginative literature is safe in its "place on the bookshelves of the young" – in doing so, Bennett indirectly characterizes Mandeville's medieval audiences as childlike.

This is at the heart of why I think that "imaginative" does not capture the Mandeville author's rhetorical strategy – *The Book* is a thoroughly researched endeavor, and medieval readers are more discerning than children. When children, or adults for children, "imagine" something, the appeal is based on what we don't know – but *The Book* relies heavily on established, accepted, and interdisciplinary knowledge. *The Book* was accepted and circulated, initially, because "Travelers, their minds conditioned by what they had read, often found the traditional wonders which they expected to find."[185] For those familiar with the sources that he drew on, the Mandevillle author's mappamundi hardly seems imaginative at all – as discussed in the previous chapter, the map in Latini's *Tresor* contains many descriptions of the diverse people that Mandeville claims to encounter, and the same applies to Isidore de Seville's *Etymologiae,* Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia*, and Beauvais' *Speculum Maius*. The reoccurring

[182] Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville* (Modern Language Association of America, 1954): 9, 1.
[183] Ibid 5.
[184] Ibid 2.
[185] Ibid 249.

descriptions of the people of the medieval tripartite/Noachid world, and of their customs, seem commonplace when considered as an archive.

Even though some of the places that the Mandeville author describes have not been identified as references to locales, most of what he describes does actually exist – but he is consistently economically motivated in his descriptions, even where he relies on speculation in lieu of experience. For example, his description of Damascus is bound with racial and economic consequences that are pertinent to contemporary social, economic, and political discourse about the Middle East:

> Damascus… is a very beautiful city, and most noble, and full of every kind of merchandise; and it is three days' journey from the sea and five from Jerusalem. But merchandise is taken there on camels, mules, horses, dromedaries, and on other animals, and the merchandise comes by the sea from India, Persia, Chaldea, Armenia, and from many other regions. … No other city can be compared to it with its beautiful gardens and beautiful pleasure spots.[186]

Along with providing a precise geography of Damascus, Mandeville provides incentive for his readers to go there for economic gain – the confluence of merchandise makes Damascus "beautiful" and "noble." Mandeville continues with a biblical anecdote to add a racial plane to the economic potential of Damascus – he rehearses that Damascus is the site of Saint Paul's conversion from Judaism: "There near Damascus he [Saint Paul] was converted, and after his conversion he remained in the city for three days without eating and without drinking, and during these three days he was ravished into Heaven and saw many of Our Lord's secrets."[187] Once Saint Paul converts his Jewish body to a (white-coded) Christian body, he ascends to paradise

[186] Mandeville 75.
[187] Ibid.

from Damascus. The fundamental goodness of Damascus is that it is a conduit for economic as well as physical and spiritual prosperity – but only for Latin Christians. *The Book* is a call to action and active participation in the making of that world. In the prologue, Mandeville tells his readers that "if we are true sons of God, we ought to reclaim the inheritance our Father left to us and wrest it from the hands of the foreigners."[188] Many have written about the first half of *The Book*, which describes a journey through the Holy Land, as a response to the failure of the Crusades and as an attempt to reinvigorate the Crusades.[189] The land should be "wrest" from the "hands" of "foreigners"; the Mandeville author calls his readers to physical action in their journey to and reclamation of the Holy Land and its physical bounties, and provides them with a genre and rhetoric to reiterate the call to action.

The call to action in world-making is more than just reclaiming the Holy Land – it is the stories and scripture that come with the land, and the possibilities opened up by living amongst deep history. The Mandeville author seeks to reshape the epistemological history of the Middle East, not only to reclaim the land but also to create a new historiography that excludes the existence of the history of Islamic empire. The stakes of what Mandeville argues must happen are Truth; if Christians fail to reclaim their physical inheritance (both land and history) they will not be "true sons of God." Though Greenblatt calls the Mandeville author a "steady liar," the Mandeville author readily welcomes the destabilization of his text by inviting readers to correct him. Which, the record shows, readers did enthusiastically. In closing the prologue, the Mandeville author writes,

Know that I should have put this writing into Latin so as to explain things more briefly,

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[188] Ibid 4.

[189] See Shirin A. Khanmohamadi, *In Light of Another's Word: European Ethnography in the Middle Ages* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013) and Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

> but because more [people] understand French better than Latin, I have put it into French so that everyone can understand it, and the knights and the lords and the other noble men who know no Latin, or a little, and who have been beyond the sea know and understand whether I speak the truth or not. And if I err in describing through not remembering or otherwise, they can amend and correct it, for things long since passed out of view get forgotten and human memory cannot retain or contain everything.[190]

This remarkable passage demonstrates a clear call to action from scribes, readers, and reproducers. *The Book*'s technique is creating an intraoperative text – he opens both the language and the content up to amendment. He invites readers to be collaborators in the creation and understanding of their own points of knowledge. In doing so, he transforms *The Book* from a singular, stable cultural artifact into an instrument of epistemological technology – a prism through which to filter any new information about the world.

Further, Mandeville speculates the timelessness of *The Book,* and makes it approachable and accessible to the ages by trying to explain things "briefly" and by writing it in the vernacular French "so that everyone can understand it." This quality it shares in common with one of its sources, Latini's *Tresor*.[191] The Truth that is constitutive of reality, for Mandeville, is relative, collaborative, and unstable – in short, reality is what you make of it. In this way, he undermines his own authority – but in doing so, he empowers his readers to establish and propagate their own authority. The Mandeville author leaves it up to them to determine whether or not he speaks the truth. Given the extensive, encyclopedic content of *The Book*, Truth is painted in broad strokes. The imperfect qualities of his text, he writes, are characteristic of all "human memory" – both in individual memory (the forgetfulness of "things long since passed out of view") as well

[190] Mandeville 6.
[191] Tzanaki 6.

as written record (given the briefness of his account, everything cannot be contained). This passage, its allusion to memory and time via forgetfulness, opens up reality to a sort of timelessness. The source of any "err" may be "through not remembering" (the past) or "otherwise" (future knowledge, yet to be established). In opening itself up to vast time, *The Book* posits unstable information without necessarily being didactic about it – it can speculate a path towards the foreclosure of future knowledge. Martin Camargo identifies that "It has been a longstanding topos to wonder at the credulity of so many generations of readers who found its amalgam of facts, half-truths, and outright fabrications more interesting, if not truer, than authentic eyewitness accounts of journeys to the East."[192] As the next section will demonstrate in greater detail, the Mandeville author instructs his audience to be anything but credulous – he invites them to go out into the world, wrest land from foreigners, and pen their own truths (and otherwise) alongside and between *The Book*.

II. Mandeville's Speculative Fiction

> "Who reads Sir Iohn de Mandevil his Travels, and his Sights,
> That wonders not? and wonder may, if all be true he wrights."
> *William Warner* (1592) [193]

The genre of speculative fiction captures the iterative and capacious essence of knowledge formation. Multimodal genres, like speculative fiction, have been deemed as decisively modern.[194] Through its speculative and fictional qualities, *The Book* subverts

[192] Martin Camargo, "The Book of John Mandeville and the Geography of Identity," *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations,* ed. Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (Medieval Institute Publications, 2002): 67.
[193] William Warner, *Albions England Or Historicall Map of the Same Island* (London, 1586): 269.
[194] Paul Smethurst takes this argument a step further, analyzing *The Book* as a postmodern development from Marco Polo's modern text: "The heterogeneous nature of the text, its questionable authorship, its geographical inconsistencies, and the fact that it cannot easily be classified as travel writing, prose fiction, or romance, give to it the quality of a postmodern text." Paul Smethurst, "The Journey from Modern to

teleological, modern progress by producing a text that reflects the past, the present, and the future in one. This subversion demonstrates that the linear progression toward modernity is a retrospective construction of time. The ongoingness of modern knowledge in progress is entangled with the past as it was or might have been fictionalized and the speculated future as it might be or how one hopes it comes to be – and yet, the fictionalized past and the speculated future have material consequences in the ongoing present.

Calling *The Book* merely imaginative or a lie are both accusations of failure – that it fails to represent reality, and is thus only imaginative, or that it fails to represent the truth, and is thus a lie. Writing about medieval mappaemundi, Asa Simon Mittman insists that "in dealing with such images [of the world], it is imperative that we do not confuse them with modern maps, or failed versions thereof. Medieval mapmaking was by no means a primitive version of our own, but rather a positive form of organizing space in a world in which signs are not tied to their referents and meanings are never final."[195] The Mandeville author fails only, perhaps, at being recognizably medieval and abiding by the laws of genre, laws which, as Derrida notes, must not be broken and by their very nature absolutely always are.[196] Rather than being a failed version of a medieval travel narrative or mappamundi, *The Book*, in its hundreds of iterations, succeeds in its goal of (re)presenting the power of Latin Christendom's world.

He accomplishes this goal by interweaving speculative knowledge (like where the Realm of Prester John might be) with stable, accepted knowledge (like how the Dead Sea is very salty). *The Book* invites readers to be writers, learners to be educators, everyone to be investors in the future of the world of Latin Christendom. Writing about nineteenth- and twentieth-century

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Postmodern in the Travels of Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo's Divisament dou Monde," *Postmodern Medievalisms*, ed. Richard J. Utz et al. (Brewer, 2005): 161.

[195] Mittman 27.

[196] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1980): 55–81.

science fiction, Mark Jerng identifies that "The kind of knowledge that is "built-in" [in sf] is knowledge not merely to compose the present but also to speculate on both past and future conditions."[197] *The Book* composes the present and speculates on both past and future conditions in several different ways. The structure of the book itself divides information in this way. The first 15 chapters of the book, which describe a journey through the Holy Land, speculate on past conditions. The Holy Land, in the memory of Latin Christendom, is the bedrock of Christian history; in the opening sentence of the prologue, the Mandeville author writes, "Since it is so that the land beyond the sea – that is, the Holy Land, which is called the Promised Land – is beyond all other lands the most excellent and the most worthy and lady and sovereign of all other lands, and was blessed and sanctified and consecrated by the precious body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ–".[198] The alignment of the "Holy Land" (present tense, but also timeless) with "the Promised Land" (past tense with future implication) is a move that speculates on the past (the time when the land was Jesus was born, lived, performed miracles, died and promised the land to the successors of Christianity) as well as the future (the land was promised in the past, to be reclaimed in the future; Mandeville suggests that his reader out to reclaim this land).

The section on the Holy Land, read as speculative fiction, reads like a time traveler's journey. There is a sense of present (and future) navigation, but the whole point of navigating the Holy Land is to have the experience of living in the past. Beside recounting many, many tales from the Bible, the Mandeville author also includes descriptions of places that once used to be in

[197] Jerng 13. Given that science fiction is now typically viewed as a subgenre of speculative fiction, I think it follows that the broad rules of speculative fiction (which I think this point is an example of) apply to science fiction, but that not all speculative fiction is very scientific. That being said, I think that there actually is a case for reading Mandeville as science fiction because it is explicitly scientific at times – some examples are the explanation of how diamonds form in chapter 17, his calculation of the earth's size and his pseudoscientific explanation of the globe's circumnavigability in chapter 20, or his description of the plant-animal hybrid vegetable lamb in chapter 29.
[198] Mandeville 3.

the Holy Land but no longer are. When describing the outset of his journey, instead of using the first person, the Mandeville author uses a vague third person with an implied future tense: "Now in the name of glorious God, whoever wants to go beyond the sea along many routes can go by sea and by land according to the regions he sets out from, many of which reach the same goal."[199] This narrative style is reminiscent of a narrator writing in the future to an audience in the past – guiding readers in their quest to the resultant position the narrator speaks from. The result of this is primarily that it feels vaguely instructional – the Mandeville author is telling "whoever wants to" how to get out into the world (just "beyond the sea") – in a way that speculates just how possible it would be for any man with the means to get out and start making his way to his destined end point. The narrative voice instructs the reader in achieving "goal"-oriented teleological navigation. Mandeville (the narrator) pulls his readers ever closer to the future that he already inhabits.

The Book's multi-temporal teleology is not *all* goal-oriented, though. As Mandeville states, there are "many routes" by which to go. Much of Mandeville's world-building happens by strategically positioning simple environmental descriptions (that makes his world feel real and lived-in) alongside descriptions that take on ideological significance. For example, when describing the natural features of the landscape of the route he lays out, Mandeville's narrator sounds like the description of a traveler in a romance: "This Danube River is a very large river. … so forcefully does it pour into the sea that the water keeps its freshness twenty leagues into the sea without mixing with the seawater."[200] This description feels laden with mystical consequences for the narrator, as is seen in romance, but (as we also see in romance) it ends up being an inconsequential observation: latent potential. Alongside the description of the Danube,

[199] Ibid 7.
[200] Ibid 7.

you get a description of a statue of Justinian as it used to be in the past:

> The most beautiful and most noble church in the world is there [Constantinople], the Church of Saint Sophia [Hagia Sophia]. In front of this church is the statue of the Emperor Justinian covered with gold, and he is on a horse, crowned; and he used to hold in his hand a round gilded apple, but it has long since fallen out. They say that this signifies that the emperor has lost a great part of his land and his lordship. … And many times some have thought to put the apple back in the hand. But it does not want to stay. This apple signifies the lordship that he had over the world, which is round. … This image stands on a marble pillar.[201]

The statue is described by the Mandeville author as it once was – with the apple in hand, in a time when Constantinople was the seat of a great empire. The ending of the passage's statement that "This image stands on a marble pillar" leaves the reader with the sense of an image that exists both in the past and in the present – Justinian with the apple in his hand and with an empty hand.

To return to Jerng, speculative fiction as a genre trains us in modal imagination.[202] The features and effects of time traversing and world traveling are parts of the Mandeville author's world-building exercise: he describes the world as it is, as it once was (and, perhaps, how that shapes the way it presently is), and how it might or ought to be. What is at stake in this particular example of world-building is its implication that the reader, perhaps one of many people who have "thought to put the apple back in the hand", will partake (in concrete and symbolic ways) in establishing a new era of Latin Christian hegemony.[203] Mandeville juxtaposes

[201] Ibid 8.
[202] Jerng 13.
[203] Mandeville 8.

Justinian's past loss of the Roman Empire alongside the incentive to "reclaim the inheritance" of the Holy Land for his reader. The entire section on the Holy Land reads in this way – the Justinian anecdote is just the first example that one encounters – a description for a future traveler of a place as it once was, as it traverses the past, present, and future in one timeline.

The speculation in the Holy Land section looks to the past to open a path toward a future with a determined, explicitly desired outcome: the reclamation of the Holy Land for Latin Christendom. This quality, I argue, is another way that *The Book* divides its speculations on the past and on the future. The first section, on the Holy Land, is "firmative" speculation; drawing from *Speculate This!*: "overdetermined, future-foreclosing speculation … aligned with modern economic structures – its formula is to produce-exploit-foreclose." While the second half of *The Book* on the Far East has qualities of firmative speculation as well, the first section is considerably more stable and overdetermined by deep history. In his description of Jerusalem, the Mandeville author returns to the premise of the prologue, a plea to reclaim the Holy Land:

> This country of Jerusalem has been in the hands of many different nations, and the country has often had to suffer for the sin of the people who dwell there; … for God does not allow traitorous peoples nor great sinners to rule for long in this Holy Land, be they Christians or other peoples. And now the misbelievers have held this land in their hands for the space of one hundred and forty years and more. But they will not hold it for long, if it please God.[204]

Although describing the past of the Holy Land (the ellipsis collapses a long list of the peoples and civilizations that have dwelled there), Mandeville speculates that the conditions of the past one hundred and forty years have no space in the future; and if that were indeed the case, it

[204] Ibid 45.

would bring a time from the past into the future (a time when Latin Christians rule over the Holy Land). This temporal entanglement makes a white, Latin Christian hegemony seem inevitable – that the interspersed Islamic empire is a historical aberration.

In the transition from the Holy Land to the "lands…beyond these boundaries," *The Book'*s function as a racializing prism becomes the driving force of the narrative. The transtemporal linear speculation of the first section on the Holy Land stands in contrast to the capacious speculations of the second half on the Far East – the Far East is not defined by what once was, is not bogged down by such a sense of reality, is not land to be *re*claimed (although I do think the Mandeville author suggests that the Far East can be claimed in the future). In the Far East, reality is what Mandeville makes it. Carolyn Dinshaw interprets this reality-making as a movement from West to East "toward and into more explicitly heterogeneous temporalities."[205] Where the narrative of the first section is entrenched in the past and in history (with, as mentioned, one very specific future in mind), the second section looks towards the future when it looks towards the East. If the first section produces firmative speculation, the second section produces "affirmative" speculation; this kind of speculation "thrives by concerning itself with an uncertainty that must not be reduced to manageable certainties."[206] Affirmative speculation thrives in the heterogeneous temporality of the Far East – the uncertainty of time (and space) lays out a fertile blank canvas to paint a sort of reality onto.

What is produced by speculation using the prism is scalable "diversity," which is concretized in the remainder of the book as a racializing hierarchical structure optimizing for potential material value. Paul Smethurst identifies the open-ended uncertainties of the Far East

[205] Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now?: Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time* (Duke University Press, 2012): 78.
[206] Uncertain Commons 72.

for the Mandeville author: in this section, he claims "Mandeville's tone is more reflective, and his East is more abstract, more textual and rhetorical. It is more real because it presents an idea of the East without fabricating a real journey. … [which] suggests a knowing manipulation of the material and its readers in which the account of the journey is secondary to the effects the narrative might induce in the audience."[207] The primary effect that the narrative might induce, I argue, is an idea of the East as potentially lucrative, and the people of the East as "diverse" (ultimately coded as Other, but without the totalizing implications of that term). The rhetorical qualities of the Mandeville author's description of the Far East are apparent from the outset:

> Since I have described for you and spoken above about the Holy Land and the countries nearby and the many ways to go into that land, … now it is time, if you like, to speak to you about the neighboring lands, the islands and the diverse animals and peoples beyond these boundaries. For in that country over there, there are many diverse countries and many great regions.[208]

Whereas the introduction to the route to the Holy Land is explicit and goal-oriented, the introduction to the section on the Far East has "diverse" and abstract outcomes. Rather than instructing the reader on how to achieve a particular goal, the author invites the reader to hear about (be spoken to about) beyond the boundaries of what is certain and conscripted.

In *The Book*, the Far East is a rich alternative reality that exists sometime in the future. *The Book* uses worldbuilding to describe the Far East less in a sense of a travel narrative or a pilgrimage model ("here's how to get from point A to point B"), but more in a sense of speculative fiction – he presents an *idea* of the Far East that readers can occupy and populate in the future, the means by which to do this is material resource extraction, stealing the land, and

[207] Smethurst 165.
[208] Mandeville 89.

cultural domination. This renders the land of the Far East, often cast in terms of uncertain geography, as what Macarena Gómez-Barris calls an "extractive zone" – a space wherein colonial racial capitalists extract not just resources but also destroy indigenous life and epistemologies. She identifies that "Before the colonial project could prosper, it had to render territories and peoples extractible, and it did so through a matrix of symbolic, physical, and representational violence."[209] The world-building in *The Book of John Mandeville* is an early step in rendering the territories of the Far East (the same zones that the colonizers of North and South America sought in their erroneous journeys) as zones for extraction. In contrast to the section on the Holy Land, the section on the Far East is totally evacuated of any sense of history. This historical gap is an emptying out of the past – a strategy of racialization and world-building that grants inevitable legitimacy to the white hegemonic future.

In addition to rendering the Far East as an extractive zone, the Mandeville author evacuates the history and epistemology of the people there and depicts them as possible sources for the extraction of surplus value via labor exploitation. He draws a clear connection between the exploitable labor of the local population and the creation of great wealth for their overseers. This is quite explicit in his description of Cathay:

> For it is not at all like over here, for the lords over there have the smallest number of people they can, and the Great Chan every day has a seemingly countless number of people at his expense. But one cannot even compare the arrangements, cost of provisions, decorum, or cleanliness to the manner over here. For all the common people eat without a cloth on their knees and they eat all kinds of meat and little bread, and after eating they

[209] Macarena Gómez-Barrios, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Duke University Press, 2017): 5.

clean their hands in their laps, and they eat only once a day. But the lord's state is very great, very rich, and very noble.[210]

Although this example might read as a description of the Great Chan's empire – the comparison in the first sentence ("it is not at all like over here") clarifies that the description of 'over there' has consequences and impacts "over here" (England, Western Europe).What Cathay seems to the outsider to have that Western Europe does not seem to (yet) is a low-maintenance, disposable labor force from which to extract more value. The Great Chan has a "countless number of people *at his expense*" – these are not people or citizens so much as they are an economic resource. The labor to be extracted from them is comparably limited – but it costs less to reproduce the workforce of Cathay's labor power, as they "eat only once a day."[211] Despite the poverty of the "common people", the *lord*'s state "is very great, very rich, and very noble" – that is to say, there is a small state class that thrives on the backs of its undernourished masses.

By juxtaposing history and a sense of deep past (in the Holy Land) alongside an indeterminate future that is rife with possibilities (in the Far East), and coupling the imperative to conquer a particular land with an invitation to hear about even *more* lands beyond that, the Mandeville author speculates that future travelers will go out and invest in and manifest a version of the world he has built for his readers both on the page and in real life. He has invited them to participate in further narrative construction, part of which he assumes will be bolstered by actual journeys to the Holy Land, the Far East beyond it, and wherever else may yet be undiscovered in circumnavigating the globe. We see this with the description of Cathay above in particular:

[210] Mandeville 133.
[211] Marx notes "The maintenance and reproduction of the working-class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. But the capitalist may safely leave its fulfillment to the laborer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation. All the capitalist cares for is to reduce the laborer's individual consumption as far as possible to what is strictly necessary" (711).

> Although some people will not want to believe me, and they will regard as a fiction any description made for them of this nobility of his [the Chan's] person and his estate and his court and the great multitude of people that he commands, nevertheless I will say something about him and about his people – the manner and the order – according to what I saw in party and many times. Those who want to may believe me if they please…for I well know that if anyone had been in that country over there….he would have heard so much said about him and his estate that he would readily believe me; and those that have been in that country and in the Great Chan's household know well whether I speak the truth."[212]

The matter of fact here is one of "belief," not reality – "if you *believe* this place *may* exist (it is possible for it to exist), go see for yourself." There is a clear call to action to would-be colonizers, in search of a labor force and riches unlike what is possible "over here."[213] What there is to see, and manifest, are the Chan's state and court in juxtaposition to the "great multitude of people he commands." The labor arrangements as described are as they are in Cathay, under the thumb of the Great Chan. But for those "over here," Mandeville tethers to this labor arrangement a "manner and order" of these "people." The "manner and order," as we will see, is a racializing prism. The speculative future, as shaped through the racializing prism in the second half of *The Book of John Mandeville*, is one in which Latin Christendom expands beyond even the Holy Land and comes to economically dominate the world and subjugate its people. The means of achieving this abstract goal is the tethering of racialization to economic opportunities.

[212] Mandeville 133-134.
[213] Eventually, this ideology permeates both at home (for Western Europeans) and abroad – industrial capitalism coincides with the height of colonization.

III. Mandeville's Racializing Prism

> We medievalists need to build our racial consciousness. We need to understand that race is not synonymous with ethnicity or culture, nor does it exclusively belong to a scientific discourse that postdates our premodern period of study. It does not begin and end with skin color or biological markers of difference. Race is a structural mode of codifying difference into an ideological system. It is malleable because its constitutive parts are themselves malleable. … We need to stop reading a text like *The Book of John Mandeville* as an example of medieval cross-cultural tolerance and a celebration of multicultural difference. If we acknowledge the antisemitic sentiment expressed in this text, which is the prevailing consensus, then we must immediately acknowledge the tolerance we do see (for example, with the Great Khan) as part of a more nuanced system of racial hierarchy.
>
> *Sierra Lomuto* [214]

Mandeville's racializing prism coordinates geographical wealth with the Noachid T-O map both to produce and to analyze past and future histories defined by the tethering of race to economic opportunity. The three faces of the prism represent Europe, Asia, & Africa.[215] Whether the three faces of the prism have the same surface area or not seems to shift with each iteration of the mappamundi. Some texts, like *The Book* and *Li Livres dou Tresor*, identify Asia as the largest part; likewise, a triangular prism can have one face that is larger than the others. The Mandeville author insists that each continent has an opposite, despite the fact that the earth has three parts and is round and circumnavigable:

> For you know that those who are in the place of the Antarctic are exactly foot against foot with those who lives beneath the Tramontane, just as we and those who live under us are foot against foot: for all the parts of the sea and land have their habitable and navigable opposites, and islands here as well as there. Know that according to what I can perceive

[214] Sierra Lomuto, "White Nationalism and the Ethics of Medieval Studies," *In the Middle* (2016) https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/12/white-nationalism-and-ethics-of.html.

[215] Africa is represented on the T-O map, but *The Book* never explicitly mentions it. That being said, as referenced from Robinson above, the Realm of Prester John is vaguely 'beyond' the edge of the known world, and ends up being a container for economic possibility. By the sixteenth century, it is commonly held that the Realm of Prester John is in Ethiopia. See Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Doubleday, 1972).

> and understand, the lands of Prester John, emperor of India, are under us. For in going from Scotland or England towards Jerusalem one is always climbing; for our land is in the low part of the earth to the west, and Prester John's Land is the low part of the earth to the east, and they have day there when we have night, and just the opposite: they have night when we have day. For the earth and the sea are of round form, as I told you above, and as one climbs on one side one descends on the other.[216]

Mandeville finds the Realm of Prester John to be equal and opposite to England (and Scotland), as if reflected in a mirror, despite the fact that Prester John's kingdom shares a border with the Great Chan's land. But if the world truly has three parts, there can never be equal opposites – each plane exists in acute relationship to the others, and the shape or surface area of one impacts the whole. What's consistent and congruous are the two triangular bases; in Mandeville's prism, these are race and value. The volume of the prism, the measure of the whole, three-dimensional world, depends primarily on the area of these two facets. Race and wealth, as with Europe, Asia, and Africa, have manipulable surface areas – just as race can be manipulated to take on a variety of meanings, the emergence of colonial racial capitalism demonstrates that wealth is also manipulable.

Mandeville's prism is a speculative tool that, as Robinson suggests, "originated from within the ruling class" to transmute "the world beyond Europe, "the Indies," into Eurocentric terms."[217] One of the guiding principles of Eurocentrism is economic domination. No matter the relative sizes or shapes of the three faces of the prism – Asia, Europe, and Africa – the two bases were determined by Europeans and would, as Robinson argues, "bend the very existence and being of other peoples into convenient shapes" in the same way that a prism takes one light

[216] Mandeville 113.
[217] Robinson 98.

source and bends it until it disperses into seven different colors on a spectrum. The values of these colors, and the degree of their differences, are determined by the underlying narrative of three primary colors – Shem, Ham, and Japheth.[218]

While the prism can exist on its own terms and be observed both as a three-dimensional object and as a two-dimensional shape, the (re)presentation of the prism as the world can be used as a racializing technology to establish difference. The prismatic shape of the world has been used as a tool to demonstrate racialized difference. The ray of white light that goes into the prism is, in a fundamental sense, the same as the spectrum of colors that is refracted through the prism. In a similar way, mappaemundi refract humans into a spectrum of diversity through a geographically determined prism. Mandeville's racializing prism, regardless of its relationship to real space, has had a legacy as a tool for world-building, world travel, and world destruction. *The Book* filters history through a prism built on a tripartite world map held together by racial difference and value. Part of the legacy of *The Book* is this tripartite differentiation – instead of Ham, Japeth, and Shem, the world is divided amongst core, peripheral, or semi-peripheral nations, or pre-modern, traditional, and modern societies.

The "diverse" world that the Mandeville author constructs in the Far East is one of profound racialized differences imbued with violent repercussions. Perhaps the invocation of "diversity" sets a benign tone for liberal readers, particularly in light of its contemporary tethering to DEI initiatives, or perhaps it is the lack of binary condemnation that characterizes the overtly racist travel narratives of the 18th and 19th centuries. Analyses that cast the description of the Far East as tolerant and generous misconstrue the production of racialization. An important difference between the Mandeville author and his imitators is that the Mandeville

[218] Ibid 99.

author not only describes his own experiences but also describes the entire world in a totalizing sense, comparable to the compendia from which he drew his evidence from. It's more than one man could possibly live and know. The consequence of this difference is that race is often an implied difference that is unstable and loosely defined. Mandeville does not provide a binary racializing structure; he builds his world into a spectrum of difference that is not always produced along the same axes of biological markers.

This strategy of racial worldmaking in speculative fiction texts in particular, Jerng elaborates, prompts "us to notice race in unlikely sites and in unexpected ways… [and] locates race at the level of context, atmosphere, sequence, and narrative explanation – levels, that is other than the biological representation of bodies or the social categorization of persons."[219] Centuries of readers did not recognize race in the context or narrative explanation of *The Book* because race, as Geraldine Heng elaborates, has been relegated to modernity: "Racial formation has been twinned with conditions of labor and capital in modernity such as plantation slavery and the slave trade, the rise of capitalism or bourgeois hegemony, or modern political formations such as the state and its apparatuses, nations and nationalisms, liberal politics, new discourses of class and social war, colonialism and imperialism, and globalism and transnational networks."[220] Relegating race to a modern construct, as well as capitalism and bourgeois hegemony, insists on a teleological progression of history that limits our ability to recognize racialism and how it functions in the contemporary world. Further, it is based on a misconstrual of an isolated medieval Europe that is, according to Cedric Robinson, a "fictive historical entity."[221] As demonstrated with the description of Cathay, there are clear economic motivations in

[219] Jerng 1-2.
[220] Heng 16.
[221] Robinson 4.

simultaneously establishing and exploring differences. Is it a coincidence, then, that one "fictive historical entity" – Sir John Mandeville – speculates the existence of a world built to accommodate his own existence? A world that he can navigate as an ordering and hegemonic force?

Mandeville's prism refracts and superimposes timelines to generate a world for his readers. Working against a "there-not there" model of race, Jerng links race and speculative genres to argue that racialization is part of the "generation of the world as an ongoing temporal unfolding… contingent, mobile and emergent, the accumulation and ordering of meaning over time."[222] Given its capacity to collapse, fold, and project time, speculative thinking plays a critical role in the embedding of race into actual and alternative realities. Jerng writes: "Race is actualized via our speculative modes of thought, precisely our capacity to envision what is possible in addition to what is actual and our anticipatory conjoining of a present moment with a future one."[223] The accumulation and ordering of meaning over time begins far in the past with the all-encompassing histories that Mandeville interpolates in his narrative, and continues into the future with his invitation to future travelers and readers to accumulate and order further meaning according to the structure that his mappamundi establishes. Mandeville, as shown above, invites his readers to verify his description of the "common people " of Cathay for themselves; but when, several pages later, he does get to describing the Tartars, he does so using contingent features which he layers accumulated meaning onto. The contingent features are their clothes ("The people of this country all wear wide clothes without fur trim and are dressed in purpure, in tartar, and gold clothes"), and their facial features ("All the tartars have small eyes

[222] Jerng 8.
[223] Ibid 26.

and not much of a beard and very sparse").[224] The attendant accumulated meaning of these features, which orders them into a racial and economic hierarchy, is that "They are false and treacherous and they keep none of their promises. They are a very hardy people and can endure much more pain and hardship than any other people."[225] His description of the Tartars demonstrates emergent racialism by providing a number of features by which to establish difference, and what the consequences of those differences are speculated to be – the claim that "they keep none of their promises" is explicitly speculative in its implication that if one were to go to Cathay and engage in a unilateral agreement with a Tartar, the promise of that agreement would be broken. Thus, the only conclusion for the prospective speculator seeking to make profit of Cathay's great and vast wealth is that Tartars are to be dominated and not negotiated with. Given that Tartars can endure great pain and hardship, Tartars are to be subjects and not partners. *The Book*'s speculative genre is an important step in the process of concretizing racialism into the narratives and maps and economic futures of European writers.

Although the Mandeville author delineates many different ways that embodiment takes shape, biological markers are secondary to the narrative explanation for the shape of the entire world. Mandeville (re)presents the racialized differences between the descendants of the sons of Noah in a genealogy identifying Nimrod, the grandson of Ham, as the origin of "diverse" peoples:

> the devils of Hell often came to sleep with women related to him [Nimrod] and engendered diverse monstrous peoples and disfigured peoples, some headless, some with large ears, some with one eye, some giants, some with horses' feet, and others with other deformed limbs, and from that generation of Cham have come the pagan people, and the

[224] Mandeville 147 & 150.
[225] Ibid 150.

diverse peoples that exist in the islands of the sea throughout all India.[226]

Whether headless, or giant, or cloven-hooved; whether in Cathay, or Galilee, or the island of Pytan that does not exist, the vague sense that "diverse monstrous peoples" – conflated with just "the pagan people" at large – must come from "the devils of Hell" and are always separate from the European plane of the prism occupied by white Christians. The means by which people can be racialized is diverse, but these discrete instances accumulate into an ordered meaning determined by the pursuit of domination. Thus, when, later, Mandeville author describes the Pytans who inhabit an isle of India as "of good color and beautiful shape…small as dwarves…[with] little capacity for reason, but are very simple and completely animal-like," in what many scholars might characterize as a benign, ethnographic description, he's already established a narrative explanation for them as a different and inferior race that being mixed with the blood of devils is irrevocably evil.[227]

In addition to this deeper narrative explanation of race, Mandeville also tracks the value of the land that other races live on. He says that the Pytans "neither cultivate nor work the land."[228] This description is an early seed of a critical operation of European colonization – the creation of *terra nullius* – "nobody's land." "The gaze of *terra nullius*," according to Gómez-Barris, normalized the violent removal of Indigenous people rendered nonexistent in their non-extractive relationship to the land.[229] The reference in *The Book* to the uncultivated land of the Pytans gestures towards a speculative future in which the land is appropriated from the Pytans, who do not need to cultivate (or live on) the land because they need nothing more than

[226] Ibid 134-135.
[227] Ibid 176.
[228] Ibid 176.
[229] Gómez-Barris 6.

apples for sniffing. The history of uncultivated lands available for occupation (re)presents histories of the past and future in geographical terms.

The incorporation of speculative fiction's generic features into the analysis of *The Book*, and in particular how acknowledging that incorporation reveals the embedding of race, is critical because even now *The Book* is being taught and read as a text that demonstrates racial tolerance. I've already noted the origin of the idea of a tolerant Mandeville in Josephine Waters Bennett's *The Rediscovery of Sir John Mandeville*: she describes Mandeville as "gentle and charitable toward the strange beliefs of the heathens, and even towards the 'heretics,' i.e., the Greeks, Nestorians, and other non-Roman Christian sects of whom he writes."[230] Bizarrely, Giles Milton sees Mandeville as an anticolonialist, whose "message of tolerance [is] central to the book's meaning," and was somehow misunderstood by colonizers who used his text as the basis for racial and economic discrimination in early Native American encounters.[231] Rebecca Fensome also sees Mandeville's "muddle-headed tolerance" as incompatible with colonial ideology.[232] In the new preface to the 2017 reprint of *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt calls Mandeville the "ethical hero" of his (Greenblatt's) book.[233] And while there is general agreement, regardless of the precise degree of benevolence they find in Mandeville, that *The Book* is consistently and aggressively antisemitic, this has the effect of making his racialization of other groups seem "tolerant" because they are less overtly racist. At the very least, teaching Mandeville as an example of medieval tolerance suggests that antisemitism is somehow separate from racist discourse. Further, it persists in only more deeply embedding racialism by insisting

[230] Bennett 5.
[231] Giles Milton, *The Riddle and the Knight : in Search of Sir John Mandeville* (Allison & Busby, 1996): 216.
[232] Rebecca Fensome, "Mandeville's Travels and Medieval Myths of Africa on the Early Modern English Stage," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 18, no. 1 (2006): 160.
[233] Greenblatt ix.

on a firm 'there-not there' binary that does not exist. Geraldine Heng identifies that the depiction of Saracens in *The Book* inherits "the cultural accumulation of centuries, the *Travels* merely – ingenious – makes use of an age-old understanding that lies, deceit, unbridled sexuality, and violence were the characteristics of Islam and its Prophet from the beginning."[234] The coupling of the (re)presentation of the past and speculations of the future in *The Book* creates a path forward for the accumulation of racialized differentiation and rhetoric as well as the continued resource extraction from stolen lands.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the role of *The Book of John Mandeville* in (re)presenting a medieval world shaped by Latin Christian hegemony. The Mandeville author's nuanced strategies of racialization demonstrate that Latin Christendom, even in its efforts for hegemony, is not homogeneous. Criticism of *The Book* has been overdetermined by linear, teleological time – the modern, accurate depiction of the world in contemporary maps demonstrates progress from the medieval, inaccurate depiction of the world. The homogenization of medieval Europe blankets our perception of the past with binaries. The imposition of a white-not white racial binary on the medieval past misconstrues the nuanced racializing structure undergirding the narrative of *The Book* for benign, haphazard multiculturalism. My analysis reveals that one of the reasons for this misinterpretation is the assumption that racializing factors can be separated from attendant material, economic consequences. *The Book* is not a solitary, stable text – its content is mined from a wide and diverse canon of knowledge (often errant from objective truth), and the vast extant of manuscripts show scribes, readers, and reproducers altering everything from minor geographical details to the entire tone of the narrative. Thus, I argue that *The Book* acts as a

[234] Heng 138.

prism – rather than contributing to history continuing along a straight line, *The Book* is a vessel for diffracting and filtering time and space. *The Book,* as a prism, is a (re)presentational technology that provides a model for racialized world-building. This ideological filter always construes a world that is racially determined and optimized to tether whiteness to entitlement to material resources and the accumulation of wealth.

Mandeville's racializing prism entangles time to develop a future determined by colonialism and racial capitalism by employing strategies of speculative fiction in his narrative. The embeddedness of speculation in *The Book* dictated its success in circulation. Sir John Mandeville is a man that emerges out of nowhere; his narrative begets itself. The author speculates the circumnavigation of the globe into existence. Speculation is entrenched in epistemology. But when speculation is employed in the pursuit of domination rather than Truth (as it is in *The Book*) and applied to the entire globe, it can be a tool for the unsustainable extraction of resources and uneven development and distribution of wealth – the consequences of which are felt in the bodies, stolen land, and stolen resources on which Western wealth and power is built.

Chapter 3

The *Lost Horizon*: Prester John in Shangri-La

From the twelfth century onward the speculated existence of Prester John's wealthy Christian realm in the Far East, preoccupied nearly every Western traveler to the East, or chronicler of the East. This preoccupation inhered in not only the Middle Ages but also early modernity and beyond. The letter of Prester John, which is one of the presumed sources of *The Book of John Mandeville*, was, according to Robert Silverberg's comprehensive tome *The Realm of Prester John*, "one of the most widely read documents of medieval times."[235] Silverberg identifies that nineteenth-century philologist Fredrich Zarnchek "located and compared nearly one hundred surviving manuscripts of the letter in its Latin text alone."[236] It was reproduced and (re)presented on many maps in many different locations throughout the 15th and 16th centuries as explorers tried, failed, and tried again to locate it in the Far East, or Northern Africa, or the Americas. The establishment of colonies and pilfering of land in pursuit of Prester John made so many realms into realities along the way. This chapter shifts from medieval studies into the study of medievalism by putting *The Book,* the *Catalan Atlas* and the 1493 letter of Christopher Columbus into conversation with James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*. This move illuminates the foundation that the medieval archive lays for the creation of spaces for racial capitalism. It does so by tracing the persistence of the Prester John myth as it is (re)presented in these texts.

I argue that the fabled Shangri-La is a modern iteration of the continued search for the Realm of Prester John. In this case, the twentieth-century Englishman is Hugh Conway, the

[235] Silverberg 41.
[236] Ibid.

foretold Western ruler. Shangri-La, first coined by James Hilton in *Lost Horizon,* is a mountain-nestled monastery in an inaccessible Tibet past all civilization. Hugh Conway, the novel's protagonist, describes it as "the loftiest and least hospitable part of the earth's surface, the Tibetan plateau, two miles high even in its lowest valleys, a vast, uninhabited, and largely unexplored region of windswept upland. Somewhere they were, in that forlorn country, marooned in far less comfort than on most desert islands."[237] A uniquely valuable geography past the point of all civilization is common to both Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* and *The Book of John Mandeville.* The geography of Shangri-La is similar to where Latini finds the Seirs: past the "great empty spaces and uninhabited lands extending toward the east. After this, beyond all human habitation."[238] In Mandeville's *Book*, the Realm of Prester John is "too far to travel to" because "men dread the long way and the great perils in the sea in those parts" (the peril of the sea is an iron-drawing adamant that sucks the iron nails right out of ships).[239] Medieval maps and travel accounts look to the unknown Eastern horizon as the land of opportunity. As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, this opportunity is an aporia formed from the paradoxical juxtaposition of a racialized geography that is both bountiful and barren.

Hugh Conway offers a Depression-era manifestation of the figure of the white, Western ruler in the East that the myth of Prester John promised, and Conway's whiteness is set in stark contrast to the blunt racialization of the Tibetan and East Asian characters in Shangri-La. Drawing a direct biological lineage from the premodern to 1933, Hilton's Conway character is cast as a direct descendent of the kind of colonizers that Mandeville inspired: "There was something rather Elizabethan about him – his casual versatility, his good looks, that effervescent

[237] Hilton 26.
[238] Latini 91.
[239] Mandeville 161.

combination of mental with physical abilities. Something a bit Philip-Sidney-ish. Our civilization doesn't often breed people like that nowadays."[240] The hint of premodern nostalgia for a "breed" of European man, the colonizer, demonstrates that this has become a trite stereotype by the twentieth century. Referring to Hugh Conway as a prized "breed" of "civilization" is an explicit statement of white supremacist nostalgia that is often invoked in discussions of the white Middle Ages.[241]

The "lost horizon" reveals itself to be the lost Realm of Prester John and an invigorated sense of potential in the East. Like the Realm it meant to be helmed by a European, Christian man. The extractive potential in the East remains the same from the Middle Ages by the twentieth century, but is inflected by a self-aware nostalgia for a simpler kind of white supremacy. Conway's role as a revered member of the British Consular Service puts him at the heart of Britain's modern neocolonial endeavors. Britain is so entrenched in foreign politics that during his last night in Baskul, amidst a revolution, he's routinely "destroying documents."[242] The fictional Baskul is a stand-in for Kabul, where the British Legation was established in 1919 following Afghanistan's independence – but the Legation was merely an neocolonial institution to convert colonial officers to diplomats.[243] Conway has been with the British Consular Service for ten years when he is kidnapped and taken to Shangri-La, and before that event there's little marvel or mystery on the Eastern horizon for Conway. He views his "vista of the past decade"

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[240] Hilton 6.
[241] Helen Young, "White Supremacists love the Middle Ages," *In the Middle* (2017), https://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/08/white-supremacists-love-middle-ages.html.
[242] Hilton 12. Baskul is thought to be a proxy for Afghanistan.
[243] Maximilian Drephal, *Afghanistan and the Coloniality of Diplomacy: The British Legation in Kabul, 1922–1948* (Springer International Publishing, 2019): 2. Drephal elaborates: "Colonial officers became diplomats, staffed the Legation and transferred colonialism's manifold asymmetries to Kabul, in essence recreating the colonial project en miniature in Kabul. As a twentieth century diplomatic presence in Kabul, the British Legation accumulated a pool of actionable instructions, sourcing knowledge from other colonial contexts in South Asia. It ensured the continuity between a corpus of nineteenth-century knowledge of Afghanistan and twentieth-century British diplomacy."

defined by being "Changeable … becoming rather unsettled; it had been his own meteorological summary during that time, as well as the world's." When he thinks of the locales where he's been stationed throughout his career – "Baskul, Pekin, Macao, and other places" – he feels it's been "equally pleasant, but not wholly satisfying." His ambivalence extends to where he might be sent – "Tokyo or Teheran, Manila or Muscat; people in his profession never knew what was coming."[244] The eponymous "lost horizon" is not simply Shangri-La itself; it is, more fully, the unknown horizon of opportunity in the East of medieval speculation.

Lost Horizon's big plot twist is that the High Lama who rules Shangri-La is actually the founding capuchin friar named Perrault from Luxembourg – who left from Pekin in 1719 "in search of any remnants of the Nestorian faith that might still be surviving in the hinterland."[245] Though not named explicitly, the "remnants of the Nestorian faith" are the remnants of Prester John's realm, believed in the Middle Ages to have been a Nestorian kingdom. Jacques de Vitry writes in his letters following his return from the fifth crusade that the Nestorians are "in the land of that most puissant Prince vulgarly called Prester John."[246] Robert Silverberg has identified that part of what perpetuated the myth of Prester John's realm is the rumor of Nestorian Christians in the East: "Beyond the Seljuk realm, everything dissolved, for a western European, into mist and myth. … In this epoch of geographical vagueness, the belief in Nestorian Christian kingdoms of the remote Orient came to glow like a brilliant beacon on the eastern horizon." Just as, according to Silverberg, the letter of Prester John grew by the fourteenth century to be "an extensive anthology of medieval fable, thickly encrusted with myth and marvel," the legend of Perrault's Shangri-La "grew into a rich and fantastic folklore – it was said that Perrault became a god, that

[244] Hilton 12.
[245] Ibid 69.
[246] Jacques de Vitry, *The History of Jerusalem A.D. 1180*, Trans. Aubrey Stewart, M.A. (London: 24 Hanover Square W., 1896): 77.

he worked miracles, and that on certain nights he flew to the summit of Karakal to hold a candle to the sky."[247] The legend of Prester John, as we've seen, eventually turns into Robinson's "racializing prism" obfuscating all future travel narratives and "discoveries" to triangulate racialism, geography, and wealth in calculating the potential for the extraction of material resources. The consequence of this obfuscation is the erasure of history in places where extraction was deemed possible and executed via racialized violence.

I want to identify an important distinction between *The Book* and *Lost Horizon*: *Lost Horizon* was published as a fictional novel (according to the book jacket, the "first paperback ever published") and *The Book of John Mandeville* circulated for centuries perceived as a nonfiction text prior to the concretizing of the fiction-nonfiction genre divide. However, the reification and commodification of genres over centuries seems to have had little effect on how people consume stories about far-away places. There are countless books, films, and blogs of travelers who in one breath acknowledge that they know that *Lost Horizon* is a fictional story and in the same breath are positive that it *must* exist and they *must* find it. *Lost Horizon* was, like *The Book*, a heavily researched endeavor that compiled multiple other people's travelogs and experiences into a single narrative.[248] But, in the end, that distinction did not change the appeal of seeking out the "real" *Lost Horizon*, just as people were not deterred from earnestly seeking out the Realm of Prester John or Mandeville's monsters – people seeking either Shangri-La or the Realm of Prester John were undoubtedly driven, first and foremost, by financial incentive. Too much is attributed to the gullibility of medieval audiences. Despite James Hilton himself never

[247] Silverberg 140 and Hilton 72.
[248] John Hammond, *Lost Horizon Companion: A Guide to the James Hilton Novel and Its Characters, Critical Reception, Film Adaptations and Place in Popular Culture* (McFarland & Co., 2008): 17. John Hammond, the founder of the James Hilton Society, notes that *Lost Horizon* was undoubtedly influenced by the many hours Hilton spent in the British Library reading about Tibetan history. Foremost among these sources is the work of American botanist and explorer Joseph Rock (1884-1962).

having been to Asia and publicly stating that *Lost Horizon* is merely an amalgamation of "tales and legends of the great missionary travelers who explored all Central Asia centuries ago," many, many people still travel to seek the "real" Shangri-La.[249]

The racialized appeal of Latin Christian rule in the east is, as shown in the previous chapters, coupled with economic incentive. Like Latini's Oprabanie or Eride and Argite, or Mandeville's Realm of Prester John, Hilton's Shangri-La is a resource-rich, extraction-ready, geography. Shangri-La is materially wealthy due to a gold mine. One of Conway's fellow companions, Barnard, seeks out the source of the gold and, in "a certain ecstasy", tells Conway: "There's tons of it–literally–in the valley. I was a mining engineer in my young days and I haven't forgotten what a reef looks like. Believe me, it's as rich as the Rand, and ten times easier to get at."[250] The economic incentive to extract from Shangri-La is stated forcefully by Barnard: it's *so* easy and there's *so* much opportunity that it's almost like generating riches out of thin air. The Rand that Barnard refers to is in South Africa and is the world's largest single-site gold refinery, established in 1920 in Germiston, also known as kwaDukathole. Many of the majority shareholding companies of Rand Refinery date back to colonial-era South Africa. This reference to a real gold mine in this fictional novel posits that Shangri-La is another point of resource extraction, creating a compelling incentive to invest in further global exploration. The two of the four of Conway's group who decide to stay in Shangri-La are Barnard, an American scammer on the run driven by ambitions of extraction and fiscal redemption, and Miss Brinklow, a British missionary driven by hopes of conversion. At the end of the world, Hilton (re)presents an

[249] Hammond, 92. Examples of Shangri-La seeking include but are not limited to Charles Allen, *The Search for Shangri-La: A Journey into Tibetan History* (Abacus, 2000); Michael Buckley, *Shangri-La: A Practical Guide to the Himalayan Dream* (Bradt Travel Guides, 2008); and *In Search of Myths and Heroes*, episode 2, "The Search for Shangri-La," written and presented by Michael Wood, Produced by Rebecca Dobbs (PBS, 2005).
[250] Hilton 99.

incentivizing juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty available for exploitation by anyone who can get there.

The most recent iteration of the search for the lost horizon of the Realm of Prester John comes in the form of the international Shangri-La hotel chain, the name of which was inspired by *Lost Horizon*. The creation and proliferation of the Shangri-La hotel chain demonstrates a transformative arc of knowledge over centuries from the eleventh-century rumors of Prester John's realm in the East to a titanic tourist corporation built upon the kind of extraction and colonialism that resulted from the eleventh-century speculations of wealth to be had in the East. Thirty-four years after the publication of *Lost Horizon*, a Malaysian business tycoon, known as the "Sugar King of Asia," opened his first "Shangri-La" hotel in Singapore. Although it was his in name, Kuok's hotel maintains the Western element of *Lost Horizon* via its management by the Western International Hotels. The majority of Kuok's wealth that seeded the growth of the Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts came from resource extraction companies – mainly via Wilmar international, the world's largest palm-oil refiner, and Perlis Plantations Berhad, founded as a sugar and flour milling business.[251] Shangri-La Hotels & Resorts now has 107 locations across the world, 94 of which are in Asia.[252] The travel narratives on Google Maps describing the Shangri-La hotels and the areas surrounding them (re)present the barrenness, bounty, and racialization that the maps of Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* and *The Book of John Mandeville*. Westerners still actively in pursuit of the Realm inscribe that pursuit of furthering racial capitalism onto Google's Map – both further stabilizing a construction of the Far East for exploitation and over determining the future as one driven by extractive racial capitalism.

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[251] Lee Kam Hing et al., "Robert Kuok: Family, Dialect, and State in the Making of a Malaysian Magnate," *Australian Economic History Review* 53, no. 3 (2013): 276.
[252] "Find your Shangri-La," Shangri-La Circle, accessed 30 May 2024, https://www.shangri-la.com/en/find-a-hotel/.

This chapter examines the afterlife of *The Book* through Cedric Robinson's racializing prism. John Wyatt Greenlee and Anna Fore Waymack argue that *The Book* "reveals itself as an avenue through which reader-users could abstract clusters and races of people into (literal) categorical containers for thought."[253] We see this materially through the use of woodblock prints that necessitate abstract visual categories so that shapes of people can be reused, thus lowering the labor and cost of bookmaking. Brigitte Buettner persuasively argues that book artists would often "recycle existing templates" for the figures in their manuscripts "for purely practical considerations, such as lowering production time and costs."[254] The consequence of these material choices over time is the (re)presentational stabilization of racialized stereotypes that became central to European world-building enterprises. The figure of Prester John on the *Catalan Atlas* is in a landscape shaped by the juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty. The historical context of the *Catalan Atlas* is a moment in transition toward the coming explosion of map-making in Western Europe. The maps produced from the 14th century to the 18th century fully embraced the myths and legends of their medieval sources, and then of the broader genre once it was established. The world depicted on medieval maps was heavily image-laden and portrayed detailed and varied narratives amidst cartographical or navigational signs and symbols.

The search for the Realm continued throughout the early modern era, although perhaps quenched by the colonization of the Americas for a few centuries. This search is re-invigorated with Hilton's *Lost Horizon* in 1933 – at a time when world war disenchants the Western powers of their authority and superiority, just as the crusades did at the time of the circulation of the letter. The foundation of the Shangri-La hotel capitalized on that search for the lost horizon, but

[253] John Wyatt Greenlee and Anna Fore Waymack, "Thinking Globally: Mandeville, Memory, and Mappaemundi," *The Medieval Globe* 4, no. 2 (Arc Humanities Press, 2018): 100.
[254] Brigitte Buettner, "Mineral Realism in the Global Thirteenth Century," *The Mineral and the Visual: Precious Stones in Medieval Secular Culture* (Penn State University Press, 2022): 170.

instead of a whole kingdom, westerners are given a place where they can feel at home as a westerner in the East – to feel like a king and be served like a king, even in a foreign and unfamiliar setting.

I. Finding the Realm the World Over

The "Letter of Prester John" that circulated in the twelfth century, addressed to Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180), describes the Realm as a utopia wealthy in both material resources and spiritual purity. The letter states that the Realm "abounds in gold and silver and precious stones, elephants, dromedaries, camels, and dogs. Our gentle hospitality receives all travelers from abroad and pilgrims. There are no poor among us. Neither thief nor plunderer is found among us … nor does avarice. There is no division among us. Our people abound in all kinds of wealth."[255] The reference to "gentle hospitality" toward "travelers from abroad and pilgrims" reads as an open invitation to Latin Christian audiences to find and visit the Realm. Indeed, the ending of the letter portrays that visitation as an inevitable reality: "But when you come to us, you will say that we are truly the lord of lords of the whole earth."[256] The statement of the country's geographical area and size following this makes it seem like it should be pretty easy to find the Realm: "In the meantime you should know this trifling fact, that our country extends in breadth for four months in one direction, indeed in the other direction no one knows how far our kingdom extends."[257] When these components of the letter get filtered through the racializing prism of *The Book of John Mandeville*, as shown in the previous chapter, the confluence of manipulable geography, abundant material resources, and a racializing component deeply incentivize quests for the Realm. This incentive is strengthened by the

[255] Keagan Brewer, *Prester John: The Legend and Its Sources* (Routledge, 2015): 67-92.
[256] Ibid 91.
[257] Ibid.

Mandeville author's imperious insistence on the authenticity of his *Book*, and his admonition in the preface that Latin Christendom has a God-given geographical claim on the East and a mandate to convert the souls of heathens wherever they may be found.

When Christopher Columbus, nearly 150 years after the writing of *The Book*, sails to the East looking for trade in spices and gold but ends up in the Americas instead, his perception and recounting of his experiences is filtered through the racializing prism of *The Book* and thus frames the Taíno people as a manifestation of John Mandeville's speculations. Thinking that he has "Insulis Indiæ supra Gagem inventis" [discovered Islands of India beyond the Ganges],[258] he writes in his 1493 letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain that "sunt admodum simplices ac bonæ fidei, et in omnibus quæ habent liberalissimi" [they are very simple and honest, and exceedingly liberal with all they have]."[259] The attention to the simple and exceedingly generous nature of the people he encounters at the end of the world fulfills his anticipation of the "gentle hospitality" of the people of the Realm but is clearly focused on the economic gain to be had at no cost. The Taíno never "roganti quod possidet inficiatur nemo, quin ipsi nos ad id poscendum invitant" [refusing any thing he may possess when he is asked for it, but on the contrary inviting us to ask them]."[260] Beyond merely having access to valuable material resources, the Taíno, to Columbus, seem not just amenable but also *eager* to give gold to him and his men.

But if in one breath Columbus seems to recognize the admirable, or even what he sees as Christian, qualities of the Taíno, in the next breath he (re)presents them in racialized terms because of those qualities. His letter details how they "give objects of great value for trifles, and

[258] Christopher Columbus, "Epistola Christoforo Colum," trans. Sephan Plannck, in "First Voyage of Columbus," *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus, with Other Original Documents, Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World,* ed. R.H. Major (Routledge, 2010): 1.
[259] Ibid 7.
[260] Ibid.

content themselves with very little or nothing in return" [dant quæque magna pro parvis, minima licet re nihilove contenti] – trading significant weights of gold for nails and straps.[261] He casts himself as a benevolent mediator, forbidding his men from doing such trading: "quod quia iniquum sane erat, vetui" [which I forbad as being unjust].[262] He's not driven by his conscience, though, but rather by his concern for the integrity of their perceived superiority and civilization. He writes that "Item arcuum, amphoræ, hydiæ, doliique fragmenta bombyci et auro tamquam bestiæ comparabant" [Thus they bartered, like beasts, cotton and gold for fragments of bows, glasses, bottles, and jars].[263] The racializing of the Taíno as "beasts" is directly tethered to the valuable resources they have *and* that their misapprehension of appropriate relative worth of their wares means that a traditional or meaningful trade relationship is impossible (or, perhaps, not necessary). He reiterates this juxtaposition again later in the letter:

> nec bene potui intelligere an habeant bona propria; vidi enim, quod unus habebat aliis impartiri, pæsertim dapes, obsonia et hujusmodi. Nullum apud eos monstrum reperi, ut plerique existimabant, sed homines magnæ reverentiæ atque beuignos. Nec sun nigri velut æthiopes: habent crines planos ac demissos [I could not clearly understand whether th epeople possess any private property, for I observed that one man had the charge of distributing various things to the rest, but especially meat and provisions and the like. I did not find, as some of us had expected, any cannibals amongst them, but on the contrary men of great deference and kindness. Neither are they black, like Ethiopians: their hair is smooth and straight].[264]

His reference to private property is very closely attended by his mention of monsters, as if to say

[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid 8.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid 13.

that monsters are so *because* of their lack of private property. Although he says that he has not found any monsters, his reference to monsters being what very many expected makes it very clear that Columbus is diligently tracking the speculations made about monsters in *The Book* and, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the speculation that at the end of the world where the monsters are there is also ample opportunity for the extraction of material resources, further facilitated by an absence of private property ideologies.

In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney identifies a paradox at the core of underdevelopment that I think explains the contradictory and incongruous statements of Columbus's letter. Columbus's description of the Taíno as beasts suggests that he's come to an underdeveloped civilization that the Spanish would look down upon, but his description of the resources and wealth of the Taíno suggests that the Spanish should usurp this land as quickly as possible. Walter Rodney states that:

> underdevelopment is a paradox. Many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor and parts that are not so well off in wealth of soil and sub-soil are enjoying the highest standards of living. When the capitalists from the developed parts of the world try to explain this paradox, they often make it sound as though there is something "God-given" about the situation.[265]

The capaciousness of a "God-given" situation accommodates so many historical paradoxes and innumerable injustices. John Mandeville ends *The Book* with an ecclesiastical invocation, and in some versions with the imperium topos vouching papal authority, that lends a God-givenness to his text and travels. Columbus, likewise, imperiously invokes God at the close of his letter:

> Igitur Rex et Regina, Principes, ac eorum regna felicissima, cunctæque aliæ

[265] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Verso, 2018): 25.

> Christianorum provinciæ, Salvatori Domino nostro Jesu Christo agamus gratias, qui tanta nos victoria munereque donavit. Celebrentur processiones, peragantur solemnia sacra, festâque fronde velentur delubra. Exsultet Christus in terris, quemadmodum in cœlis exsultat, quum tot populorum perditas antehac animas salvatum iri prævidet. Lætemur et nos, tum propter exaltationem nostræ fidei, tum propter rerum temporalium incrementa, quorum non solum Hispania, sed universa Christianitas est futura particeps. [Therefore let the king and queen, our princes and their most happy kingdoms, and all the other provinces of Christendom, render thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who has granted us so great a victory and such prosperity. Let processions be made, and sacred feasts be held, and temples be adorned with festive boughs. Let Christ rejoice on earth, adn as he rejoices in heaven in the prospect of the salvation of the souls of so many nations hitherto lost. Let us rejoice,a swell on the account of the exaltation of our raith, as on account of the increase of our temporal prosperity, of which not only Spain, but all of Christendom will be partakers].[266]

Columbus articulates that the Taíno, and their land, are literally given ("munereque donavit") by God to not just Spain but to the future of Christendom. The temporal sense of this closing rejoices in the prosperity that has already been gained and speculates that further prosperity will come for all of Christendom. The Mandeville author's framing provides what Rodney refers to as a capitalist logic, and Columbus takes it from the page to the shores of the Americas.

The paradoxical juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty in travel narratives and maps extends Rodney's paradox of underdevelopment. This juxtaposition appears in Latini's *Tresor*, Mandeville's *Book*, and Columbus' "Epistola." In his letter, Columbus states that the island he

[266] Columbus 17.

calls Juana is “fertilissimæ” [exceedingly fertile] and Hispana “diverso aromatis genere, auro metallisque abundat” [abounds in various kinds of species, gold and metals] – but they’re barren of structures recognizable to Columbus.[267] His men seem to find people, and lots of them, quite quickly but keep sailing up and down the coast “nulla tamen videos oppoda, municipiave in maritimis sita confinibus, præter aliquos vicos et prædia rustica” [seeing, however, no towns or populous places on the seat coast, but only a few detached houses and cottages].[268] The Taíno have no source of iron, but more than that they have no weapons whatsoever: “Carent hi omnes (ut supra dixi) quocumque genere ferri: carent et armis, utpote sibi ignotis, nee ad eas sunt apti, non propter corporis deformitatem (quum sint bene formati), sed quia sunt timidi ac pleni formidin” [None of them (as I have already said) are possessed of any iron, neither have they weapons, being unaquainted with, and indeed incompetent to use them, not from any deformity of body (for they are well formed), but because they are timid and full of fear].[269] The paradox of a place that is both barren and bountiful is the driving force of its appeal – and is the driving force behind extracting and redistributing that bounty to places that are not barren on a global scale, thus creating the paradox of underdevelopment.

Another shared quality between Mandeville’s *Book* and Columbus’s *Letter* that is quite similar to the “God-given” paradox is the sense of inevitability that speculation lends to these travel narratives. Columbus speculates that the Taíno “ut eos mihi facilius conciiarem, fierentque Christicolæ, et ut sint proni in amorem erga Regem, Reginam Principesque nostros, et universas gentes Hispaniæ, ac studeant perquirere et coacervare, eaque nobis tradere quibus ipsi affluunt et nos magnopere indigemus” [might conceive affection [for him], and more than that, might

[267] Ibid 4 and 6.
[268] Ibid 3.
[269] Ibid 6.

become Christians and be inclined to the love and service of their highness and of the whole Castilian nation, and strive to aid us and to give us of the things which they have in abundance and which are necessary to us].[270] The ordering of possibilities is very telling – a mini-exercise in world-building. Columbus uses a purpose clause to construct a purpose clause: the Taíno *might* like him. More importantly, they *might* even become Christians. What's even more important than that is that they *might* serve the Castilian nation. But what's the most important possibility of all? That they *might* "give us" their abundant gold – because, unlike for them, it is *necessary* for the Castilians. Regardless of whether the Taíno "give" them the gold, the stated necessity makes it clear that the Castilians intend to and will be able to extract the resources. This is reiterated forcefully in the close of the letter, in which Columbus speculates about the prosperity of *future* Spaniards and Christians.

The paradox of uneven development is shown in a highly visible form on Abraham Cresques' 1375 *Catalan Atlas*. Commissioned by King Peter IV of Aragon for the French King Charles V, the six panels of Cresques' map depicts both Northern Africa and the Sahara, the Middle East, and East Asia up to its eastern oceanic border quite predominantly. As a mapmaker based in Majorca, Cresques would have lived in a Mediterranean world between Western Europe and the Mongol and Islamic empires to the East – his map compiles information and perspectives that capture a snapshot of a multi-faceted worldview masterfully (re)presented as a stabilized, singular image and narrative.[271] The *Catalan Atlas* straddles the traditionally visually rich ornamentation of medieval mappaemundi and the compass-oriented mercator projections that

[270] Ibid 8.
[271] The inverted poles of the map, for example, suggest that he had seen Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Idrisi's *Tabula Rogeriana*, commissioned for King Roger II of Sicily. See David Abulafia, "Local Trade Networks in Medieval Sicily: The Evidence of Idrisi," *Shipping, Trade and Crusade in the Medieval Mediterranean: Studies in Honor of John Pryor,* eds. Ruthys Gertwagen, and Elizabeth Jeffreys (Taylor and Francis Group, 2012): 155.

would come to dominate mapmaking in the 16th century, eventually emptying world maps of any visual images besides landmasses and place names. However, the visual richness of the *Catalan Atlas* is not merely ornamentation – and the navigational aspects of it marries the economic incentive for travel to the means for actually getting around. Kathleen Bickford Berzock writes in *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa* that the *Catalan Atlas* "presents the world from the perspective of Aragon, emphasizing nautical navigation and harbors, as well as land routes, key political dynasties, and the location of resources."[272] Resources are shown throughout the map, but are particularly concentrated along the southern and eastern border edges of the map – to the far south east, all of the aqueous geography is riddled with nuggets of gold and precious gemstones. The inscription here reads: "En la mar de les Índies són illes 7548, dels quals no podem respondre assí les maravellozes cozas qui són en eles d'orr, d'ergent e d'espècies e de pedres precioses." [In the Indian Ocean [South China Sea] there are seven thousand five hundred and forty-eight islands, of which I cannot enumerate all the wonderful things that are found there, gold, silver, spices and precious stones.][273] The island of Trapobana occupies the bottom right corner of the *Catalan Atlas*, past the sea of resources; its description reads:

> La illa Trapobana. Aquesta és appellade per los tartres Magno Caulii derrera de orient. En aquesta illa ha gens de gran deferència de les altres. En alguns munts de aquesta illa ha hòmens de gran forma, ço és de XII coldes axi com a gigants e molt negres e no usants de rahó, abans menjen les hòmens blanchs e estranys si-ls poden aver. [The Island of Trapobana (Taprobana). By the Tartars it is called Great Gaulii and is the last island

[272] Kathleen Bickford, "Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: An Introduction" *Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa* (Princeton University Press, 2019): 25.
[273] Abraham Cresques and Jafuda Cresques, *Mapamundi: The Catalan Atlas of the Year 1375*, ed. and trans. Georges Grosjean (Abaris, 1978): 92.

> towards the east. On this island there are people who are very different from the rest of mankind. In some of the mountain-ranges on this island there are people of great size, as much as 12 ells, like giants, with very dark skins and without intelligence. They eat white men and [other] strangers, if they can catch them.][274]

Despite the richness of the water that surrounds Trapobana, the *Catalan Atlas* describes the island itself as racially perverse and morally or spiritually bereft: the people are "like giants," "very black and dim-witted." The cannibalism resultant of being merely apprehended demonstrates a barrenness of humanity that is particularly antagonistic to "white men" and "strangers" – as if any "white men" would not also inherently be foreign to this "last island" of the Orient. These are the kinds of "monsters" that Columbus said were "very expected" in his *Letter*, and we see here that the monsters exist at the end of the world amidst rich resources. The far East of the *Catalan Atlas* juxtaposes a geography barren of history (like in Brunetto Latini's *Tresor*) and abundant in resources populated by a people that, given their racialization and especially their cannibalism, would not be considered people even though they are called that here – burly, giant, black, cannibal giants fits quite neatly into ready-made racialized epistemology that was well entrenched in the Eurocentric world.

One of the key political dynasties identified on the *Catalan Atlas* is the Realm of Prester John, which appears not to the far East of the map as one might expect, but in the middle section toward the bottom next to the label "AFRICA." At the "ciutat de Núbia," the full inscription reads: "Aquest rey de Núbia està en guerra e armes [ab los] chrestians de Núbia qui són so[ts] la senyoria del enperador de Etiopia e de la terra de Preste Johan" [The King of Nubia is always at war and arms against the Christians of Nubia who are under the lordship of the emperor of

[274] Ibid.

Ethiopia and of the land of Prester John].[275] The appearance of Prester John in Africa, rather than Asia, and in Ethiopia in particular, places him in a much more familiar geography for Latin Christendom. Silverberg writes that "Men would look through the whole length of Asia for his glittering kingdom, and, not finding anything that corresponded to the legends of magnificence they had so often heard, they would hunt the land of Prester John in Africa as well."[276] Isidore de Seville's *Etymologiae* (c. 625), a source of *The Book* and thus the *Catalan Atlas,* references Ethiopia in his description of the world as begotten from Cush, one of the four sons of Ham.[277] Isidore, writing about the Garamantes (who he says are one of the three tribes of Ethiopia), says that the Garamantes the "'farthest,' because they are savage and remote from human fellowship."[278] Given that the writings of Isidore de Seville enjoyed thorough circulation and (re)presentation in Western epistemology, the placement of Prester John in Ethiopia positions him in a discordant position of both proximity and distance. Ethiopia is held in close epistemological proximity to the Western historian, but the chasm in "human fellowship" between Europe and Africa flings Prester John's kingdom far into the distance.

The shifting of Prester John to Africa from Asia still assimilates to the epistemological framework provided via the racializing prism, in which Prester John is *somewhere* with "divers" people, just beyond the current reach of Latin Christendom's grasp. It's comparably advantageous for Prester John to be amongst the Nubians and the famed figure of Mansa Musa, on the opposite side of Northern Africa. The realm of Prester John already has extractable resources inscribed into the speculation of its existence; the proximity to Mansa Musa doubles down on the foreclosing of wealth in Northern Africa: "Aquest senyor negre es appellat musse

[275] Ibid 78.
[276] Silververg 8.
[277] Isidore de Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen Barney (Cambridge University Press, 2005): 193.
[278] Ibid 199.

melly, senyor dels negres de Gineva. Aquest rey es lo pus rich el pus neoble senyor de tota esta partida per labondancia de lor lo qual se recull en la suua terra" [This black Lord is called Musse Melly and is the sovereign of the land of the negroes of Guinea. This king is the richest and noblest of the whole region, on account of the great quantity of gold that is found in his lands].[279] Even though the *Catalan Atlas* is not a Eurocentric representation of the world, it does (re)present the world into "Eurocentric terms" – optimizing for resource extraction, and inscribing racialism.[280]

Latin Christendom's interest and investment in developing the Eastern or African horizon, with the help of Prester John, shifted back and forth from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period as commercial opportunities were speculated about and emerged in the East or in Africa. As mentioned previously, the greatest area of visual resource concentration in the *Catalan Atlas* is in the far east of the map. Near the very end of Cathay there is a figure identified thus: "Açi senyorera lo rey Steve, christià. Açi és los cors de sent Thomàs apóstel. Mira per la cuitat Butifilis." [Here reigns King Stephen, who is a Christian. Here is [also buried] the body of St. Thomas, the Apostle. He is looking towards the town of Butifilis].[281] Robert Silverberg identifies the apocryphal account of St. Thomas, *Acts of Thomas*, as central to the origin and proliferation of the Prester John myth because it dated the presence of Christians in India back to the 4th century (even if Latin Christians had no concrete idea of where India could be).[282] The link between the St. Thomas Christians of India and Prester John persisted in several

[279] Cresques 63.
[280] Robinson: "The architects of European consciousness had begun the construction of that worldview that presumed the basic structure of other than European societies was at its foundation a European structure, that the moral, ideological, and spiritual scaffold of these societies was the same bottom structure discernable in capital European culture, that the measure of mankind was indeed the European" (99).
[281] Cresques 83.
[282] Silverberg 17-29.

early modern travel narratives as well. Edward Webbe's *Travels* (1590) tells that "From Damasco we went into the land of prester Iohn who is a Christian, and is called *Christien de Sentour*: that is, the Christian of the Gerdell."[283] Francis Rogers notes that in William of Boldensele's *Liber de quibusdam ultramarinis partibus et praecipue de Terra sancta* (1336), Boldensele associates "Christians of the Girdle" with Nestorians, Nubians, Ethiopians, and Prester John Indians (among others).[284] The tradition of locating Prester John in Northern Africa does not persist for long, though, and comprises a relatively small part of the tradition. Part of the reason for this may be that by the end of the fifteenth century, the travel to the African continent became much more feasible: Bartolomeu Dias sailed around the southern tip of the African continent in 1488, and by 1499 Vasco da Gama successfully made it to India via the Cape of Good Hope. It's curious that the Prester John legend never carried over to the Americas – perhaps once it became clear to Columbus, and Spain, that the Americas were not India they constructed the Americas as a totally new blank space to speculate about new legends of wealth.

One of the final iterations in the search for Prester John, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (after which he, in name, became a securely mythological figure), is the speculation that the Realm is in Tibet – difficult to find given the harsh mountainous terrain – and in some accounts, that Prester John is the Dalai Lama. Keagan Brewer identifies Arnold van den Berg (Arnoldus Montanus) as the first of writers who claim that Prester John may be in Tibet

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[283] Edward Webbe, *Edward Webbe, Chief Master Gunner, His Trauailes, 1590*, ed. Edward Arber (Alex Murray and Son, 1868): 24. On the Christians of the Girdle and Nestorians, see Henry L. Savage, ""Chrestiens de la Saincture"--A Friendly Rejoinder," *Modern Language Notes* 60, no. 3 (1945).

[284] Francis Rogers, *The Quest for Eastern Christians: Travels and Rumors in the Age of Discovery* (University of Minnesota Press, 1962): 25. The tradition continued well into the seventeenth century. Samuel Purchas' is skeptical of an Ethiopian Prester John in his *Pilgrimage* (1613), and finds it more likely that any called such in Northern Africa was merely a Christian Prince. He is more convinced by the long history of St. Thomas Christians in India: "Now for that *Presbyter Iohn* in India, I take him for some Christian King; for at that time there were many Christians, as appeareth by *Venetes* [i.e. Marco Polo], in manner dispersed throughout Asia: and some, called St. *Thomas* Christians, remaine in India to this day." Samuel Purchas, *Pilgrimage* (London, 1613): 559-60; reproduced in Brewer 236.

– even though Arnold never actually traveled beyond Europe.[285] In his 1671 *Atlas Chinensis*, compiled from travel accounts of members of the Dutch East India Company, Arnold writes that the city *Chingtu* (Chéngdū) "extends from the utmost Western Borders of the Province of *Suchuen* [Sìchuān], to *Prester Iohn*'s Countrey, or *Sifan*."[286] Brewer notes that *sifan* is the term *xīfāng* in modern Mandarin, which generally refers to 'the West' (U.S., Britain).[287] It's almost as if Prester John's country, Tibet, *is* the West, *xīfāng*. In *Embassy from the East-India Company* (1673), Johannes Nieuhof (a Dutch traveler who actually did go to China as well as Brazil and India) also identified Prester John in the Tibetan region: "Upon the other Provinces situated toward the South, joyn the Kingdoms of *Prester-Iohn, Geo*, (which by the *Chineses* are call'd by one common Name *Sifan*) as also *Tibet, Laos,* and *Mien*."[288] Tibet appears in Western travel narratives dating back to the twelfth century – like those of Benjamin of Tudela (c. 1165-1173), William of Rubruck (1253), and Odoric of Pordenone (c. 1318-1329) – but it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that Europeans were able successfully to venture far into the notoriously treacherous territory.[289]

When the Jesuit professor of philosophy and mathematics Philippe Avril suggested in his 1692 *Voyage en divers états d'Europe et d'Asie* that the Dalai-Lama and Prester John are one in the same person, Western Europeans had only recently become aware of the person of the Dalai-Lama at all; however, the idea that "Prester John" might be a titular designation rather than

[285] Brewer, 248.
[286] Arnoldus Montanus, *Atlas Chinensis*, trans. John Ogilby (London, 1671): 650; reproduced in Brewer 248.
[287] Brewer dismisses that somewhat as merely a reference to the west of Sìchuān (so, Tibet) – but I think given the long ties of Prester John to Latin Christendom, it's interesting that that term is applied here.
[288] Johannes Nieuhof, *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperor of China* (London, 1673): 7, 10, 12; reproduced in Brewer, 249.
[289] Brewer identifies Portuguese Jesuit António de Andrade as the first European to visit Tibet in 1625 (269).

a personal name had been circulating for centuries.[290] In his introduction to *Prester John: The Legend and its Sources*, Brewer argues that "by the thirteenth century, believing in the legend [of Prester John] was made easier by the important shift in the meaning of the term 'Prester John' from the name of a single man to the title for a line of kings, a vague description for any great Christian ruler who was uncovered as a result of European exploration."[291] Western Europeans speculate that Christianity is deeply geographically embedded wherever they might point to on the map. The speculation of Christian presence coexists with the erasure of the history of these geographies and indiscriminately casting the people in those geographies as racialized and their material resources as available for European extraction and use. Philippe Avril writes:

> Il paroît par tout ce que je viens de dire du Royaume de Tanchut que le Dalaé-Lama est sans contredit ce fameux Preste-Jean dont les Historiens ont écrit si diversement. En effet, puisqu'on ne peut appliquer plus juste à personne qu'à luy, tout ce que les différens Auteurs en ont dit, il est bien plus naturel de le reconnoître dans cette contrée de l'Asie où il a toûjours été, que de l'aller chercher dans l'Abyssinie, où il ne fut jamais. [It seems from all I've said of the Kingdom of Tanchut that the Dalai-Lama is without a doubt the famous Prester John about whom Historians have written so variously. In effect, since that title and what different authors have said of him, it's natural to recognize him in this Asian country where he has always been, than to seek him out in Abyssinia [Ethiopia] where he never was].[292]

The merging of Prester John and the Dalai-Lama certainly deflates the speculative power of the legend. This is particularly true in the dismissive way that Philippe Avril writes it, saying Prester

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[290] Brewer 26.
[291] Ibid 2.
[292] Philippe Avril, *Voyage en divers Etats d'Europe et d'Asie, entrepris pour découvrir un nouveau chemin à la Chine...* (C. Barbin, 1692): 184.

John "dont les Historiens ont écrit si diversement" as if to dismiss that long history and the material impact it had on the expansion of Latin Christendom. Philippe Avril acknowledges that "L'unique chose" [the only thing] that complicates his theory is that Prester John is supposed to be a Christian: "ce Prince & les peuples que luy obeïssoient autrefois étoient Chrêtiens, au lieu que le Païs, que est entre le Mogol & la Chine, se trouve maintenant rempli de Mahometans & d'Idolâtres" [this Prince [Prester John] and the people that obeyed him before were Christians, whereas the Country, that is between the the Mogul and China, is full of Mohammedans and of Idolaters].[293] The Nestorian traces of the Prester John are woven to varying degrees throughout the long written trail of the legend – some held their assessment to dogmatic standards and cast Prester John as a heretic (even if a wealthy one) while others gestured more broadly to "Christianity" and only fleetingly acknowledged the traces of Nestorianism that lingered in the regions of his supposed origin. The German botanist Johann Gottlieb Georgi furthered Avril's claim by speculating in his travel narrative *Russia, or a Compleat Historical Account of all the Nations which Compose that Empire* (1780) that "Prester John, the head of the Nestorian Church, and the Tibetan Dalai Lama were all the same person."[294] He attempts to settle all past and future accounts about Prester John: "It deserves to be remarked, that the old writers, whilst they take notice of the Nestorians and Prester John, say not a syllable of the Dalai Lama. But no sooner are they become acquainted with the Dalai Lama, than they cease all mention of Prester John and the Nestorians in Mongolia and Tibet."[295] Georgi notes that both the Dalai-Lama and Prester John are said to be immortal, but explains that away by noting that a new Dalai-Lama is the reincarnated soul of the previous Dalai-Lama in a new human body. The belief in immortality

[293] Avril 190.
[294] Johann Gottlieb, *Russia: or, A compleat historical account of all the nations which compose that empire* (London, 1780): xciii-ciii; reproduced in Brewer 267.
[295] Ibid.

aligns with what Latin Christendom believed about Prester John – that the soul of a Latin Christian man was present and powerful in the East and if not immortal at least reincarnate in his lineage.

Latin Christendom speculates in the twelfth century the existence of a vastly wealthy, Eurocentric hegemony in the East. For centuries, writes Silverberg, "the quest for the Realm of Prester John would become one of the great enterprises of the middle ages, a geographical adventure akin to the search for El Dorado, the King Solomon's mines, for the Fountain of Youth, for the Holy Grail, for the Seven Cities of Cibola, for the lost continent of Atlantis."[296] Whether any one person seeded and furthered that speculation as a redemption arc from the failed and failing Crusades or as a counterweight to the Islamic Golden Age did not matter in the end. Even if it was an ambitious goal, Popes and Kings and Emperors invested *heavily* in that speculation with an interminable stream of friars and scholars and missionaries and explorers and colonizers sent out to the East – and to the West and to the South – to foreclose the wealth, glory, and power that had been foretold. By the end of the eighteenth century, Western Europe monopolizes resource extraction and labor exploitation across wide swaths of the globe. It is at this point that the legend of Prester John outgrows its rhetorical potency only because the material potency of the legend has become embedded in economic reality. The rise and domination of Western empiricism as the only acceptable epistemology retrospectively casts and dismisses the speculation about Prester John as a folly of the Dark Ages while simultaneously reaping the benefits of that speculation and furthering the resultant project of racial capitalism.

But even if Prester John disappeared in name from travel narratives and maps, the whole canon of Western travel narratives and maps was based on worlds that he purportedly occupied:

[296] Silverberg 8.

the experience of the realm came to be expected of the regions he might have been found in. Even if in refutation, the (re)presentation of Prester John geographically affixed him. As geographers Mark Graham and Matthew Zook relate, "Fixings of places in names, stories, songs, books, newspapers, videos, and other cultural media matter because those stabilizations, in turn, become the basis for how we understand, produce, reproduce, enact, and reenact the places and cities that we live in."[297] So, when the twentieth century brings about another Dark Ages of sorts for Western Europe, perhaps it comes as no surprise that the legend of Prester John on the Eastern horizon resurfaces and persists until today.

II. Prester John in Shangri-La

While Hugh Conway is being taken over what he thinks might be the Kuen-Lun [Kunlun] mountain range as the hostage of an airplane hijacking, he notices that "there came over him, too, as he stared at that superb mountain, a glow of satisfaction that there were such places still left on earth, distant, inaccessible, as yet unhumanized."[298] Another hostage, Captain Charles Mallinson, does not gain any sense of satisfaction from their situation; he cries out "We're far past the frontier country by now, there aren't any tribes living around here. The only explanation I can think of is that the [pilot's] a raving lunatic. Would anybody except a lunatic fly into this sort of country?"[299] Conway, a well-educated Englishman, is invigorated by what to his companions is a frightful situation: that there are places still beyond the reach of Western colonization. The paradox, of course, is that he realizes these new geographical possibilities only as he himself enters that territory all the while "envisioning maps, calculating distances, estimating times and speeds" and imposing a colonizing logic on this "*yet* unhumanized"

[297] Graham and Zook 77.
[298] Hilton 22.
[299] Ibid 21.

splendor."[300] Conway envisions this place of seeming barrenness, past the edge of civilization, as the only place where there is opportunity left. The "inaccessible… yet unhumanized" destination? Shangri-La.

Tomoko Masuzawa persuasively argues that "If Shangri-La is utopian and possesses a measure of perfection, it is an *ideal colonial regime,*" and questions how it came to be that Hilton's clear colonial ideological construction of Shangri-La is erased from history and Shangri-La is primarily defined as "An earthly paradise, a place of retreat from the worries of modern civilization."[301] Masuzawa cites the 1979 definition of "Shangri-La" from *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary,* which contains two senses: the first is as paradise, but the second is as "2. (a) the mythical starting point of the bombing raid over Tokyo and other cities, April 18, 1942; (b) any secret starting place of bombing raids or other military operations: the term was first used in this sense by Franklin Roosevelt."[302] This dual definition demonstrates how, in the afterlife of *Lost Horizon*, the second definition of "Shangri-La" as a place of war-making is what makes the first sense of the definition not just possible but necessary. In *Shambhala: the fascinating truth behind the myth of Shangri-La*, Victoria LePage explores the etymological origins of the term "Shangri-La" from the Tibetan Buddhism's "Shambhala," which is a "hidden paradisial center of wisdom in the highlands of Central Asia."[303] This

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[300] Hilton 20.
[301] Tomoko Masuzawa, "From Empire to Utopia: The Effacement of Colonial Markings in *Lost Horizon*," *positions* 7, no. 2 (1999): 544; Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Shangri-La (n.)," (July 2023); Yiang Tian similarly persuasively argues that "Shangri-La is less an idealized utopia than an empire colonized by Westerners from the outside world, which symbolizes the political and imperial ambitions of the western colonizers in the 1930s." Ying Tian, "Shangri-La and the Imperial Imagination in James Hilton's Lost Horizon," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* (2023): 2.
[302] Masuzawa 543. Masuzawa also points out the 2. (b) definition refers to the place that is now called Camp David.
[303] Victoria LePage, *Shambhala: The Fascinating Truth Behind the Myth of Shangri-La* (Quest Books, 1996): ix. In *The Realm of Shambhala: A Complete Vision for Humanity's Perfection* (Shambhala, 2021), Shar Khentrul Jamphel Lodrö writes that Shambhala can also be defined as "a state of mind that can be cultivated through the practice of a spiritual place … the perfection of peace and harmony" (6-7).

etymological lineage demonstrates the manipulation of concepts of earthly paradises as means for invasion and colonization. In *The Book*, paradise neighbors the Realm of Prester John: "Beyond the land and the islands and the desert of Prester John's lordship in going straight towards the east, one finds nothing but mountains and large rocks … This desert and this dark place last from this side all the way to [the] Earthly Paradise … which is eastwards at the beginning of the earth."[304] Shangri-La, in Hilton's construction, effectively combines multiple ancient legends of paradise to a colonial incentive and reiterates the tradition of a far Eastern paradise seen as a place of opportunity for the West.

Like the Mandeville author's *The Book of John Mandeville*, Hilton's *Lost Horizon* uses *compilatio* and a compelling, yet removed, genteel narrator to great effect. Mandeville is a "knyght of Ingelond" whose authority rests on his experience having "ttravelide aboute in the worlde in many diverse contreis to se mervailes and customes of contreis and diversiteis of folkys and diverse shap of men and of beistis."[305] Mandeville does not merely travel, but his life is defined by the state of traveling: "for 34 yer he was in travelyng." Conway anticipates that he *will* become knighted for the evacuation of the white residents from Baskul amidst a revolution led by "anti-foreign agitators": "during those final difficult days before the evacuation he had behaved in a manner which (he reflected wryly) should earn him nothing less than a knighthood and a Henty school prize novel entitled *With Conway at Baskul*."[306] He's spent the last 10 years traveling the world, and like Mandeville it's Conway's self-presentation as a life-long traveler that lends credibility to his account of Shangri-La. Although I refute the claim of John Mandeville as a benign cultural relativist (see previous chapter), Hugh Conway is depicted as,

[304] Mandeville 179.
[305] Mandeville (Kohanski and Benson) 2-4.
[306] Hilton 42-43.

similarly, seemingly benign toward the non-English people he encounters: "Conway had no race or color prejudice, and it was an affectation for him to pretend, as he did sometimes in clubs and first-class railway carriages, that he set any particular store on the "whiteness" of a lobster-red face under a topee."[307] The reception history of *Lost Horizon* as both a novel and a film shows that audiences received Conway as an liberal enlightened gentleman even though Conway's experiences in Shangri-La from first to last are filtered through Eurocentric racialism. Upon meeting Chang, a senior figure in the lamasery at Shangri-La, we learn that Conway is "rather taken with this latest phenomenon, a Chinese who spoke perfect English and observed the social formalities of Bond Street, amidst the wilds of Tibet."[308] Alongside this patronizing assessment, Conway refers to Chang with a racial moniker: "the chinese."[309] Apart from Chang and the pilot, the only other non-white character with whom Conway interacts is Lo-Tsen, a woman at the monastery, in whom both Conway and Mallinson are romantically interested, to whom he also refers with a racist moniker: "the little Manchu."[310]

While no extensive study of Hilton's sources for *Lost Horizon* exists, we know that he conducted lengthy research at the British Library and that he was influenced by the work of American explorer Joseph Rock. Hilton also hides an easter egg in the book itself when describing the library at Shangri-La:

> Conway, during a rapid glance at some of the shelves, found much to astonish him; the world's best literature was there, … A section which interested him particularly was devoted to Tibetiana, if it might be so called; he noticed several rarities, among them the *Novo Descubrimento de grao catayo ou dos Regos de Tibet*, by Antonio de Andrada

[307] Ibid 48.
[308] Ibid 30.
[309] This happens in 26 instances.
[310] Ibid 57 – this happens in 9 instances.

(Lisbon, 1626); Athanasius Kircher's *China* (Antwerp, 1667); Thevenot's *Voyage à la Chine des Pères Grueber et d'Orville*; and Beligatti's *Relazione Inedita di un Viaggio al Tibet*.[311]

These are of course real travel accounts of early modern European travelers to Tibet, all of whom would have been compelled to their travels by the speculations of travelers of the late Middle Ages: Odoric of Pordenone, William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, Sir John Mandeville. Antonio de Andrada [António de Andrade] was a Portuguese Jesuit missionary who was the first to establish a Catholic mission in Tibet.[312] Andrade mentions searching for existing historical Christian communities in Tibet, but he does not mention Prester John by name in his letters.

Speculation about the realm of Prester John as a *Christian* empire established a node for the existence of an empire whose power comes from fiscal and spiritual domination in equal parts: a Christian empire that would rob the world and in doing so make it holy. Hilton's Shangri-La draws from the deep well of European world-building to reinvigorate an investment in Eastern colonization just as the Age of Imperialism threatened to crumble in the aftermath of the first World War. More than any of the other hostages, Conway finds solace in Shangri-La as, Barnard states, "The whole game's going to pieces" in Europe and America. Conway "felt it to be true of more than American banking and trust-company management. It fitted Baskul and Delhi and London, war-making and empire-building consulates and trade concessions and dinner

[311] Ibid 49.

[312] In "Captivating Readers: Middlebrow Aesthetics and James Hilton's *Lost Horizon,*" Jeffrey Mather writes: "Although Hilton used fictional names for real locations, the novel provocatively blurs elements of fantasy and realism by maintaining fidelity to historical and textual sources. There are references to specific geographical features such as Mt. Minya Konya, a mountain that was known during Hilton's time as being possibly higher than Mt. Everest (a claim made by the botanist and National Geographic photographer and writer Joseph Rock, who explored Yunnan Province extensively during the 1920s)." Jeffrey Mather, "Captivating Readers: Middlebrow Aesthetics and James Hilton's Lost Horizon," *CEA Critic* 79, no. 2 (2017): 235.

parties at Government House; there was a reek of dissolution over all that recollected world."[313] As it was when it began sending legions of men to the East with hopes of conquest in the twelfth century, Europe in 1930 is once again, as Cedric Robinson says, "rotting from within" and looking to the East for financial and spiritual resolve.[314] The spiritual inflection reframes resource extraction as, to return to Walter Rodney's articular, "God-given" wealth redistribution. The spiritual rot of the twentieth century Western Europe could only be resolved via financial triumph.

There are other resonances between *Lost Horizon* and the Prester John legend and medieval travel narratives. For example, the *Letter* of Prester John states: "If you wish to come to our domain, we will set you up as a great and worthy man of our house, and you will be able to enjoy our abundance, and if you wish to return, you will return enriched from these things, which abound in our lands."[315] Father Perrault's final act before he dies is to bequeath Shangri-La to Conway. He says, "I place in your hands, my son, the heritage and destiny of Shangri-La."[316] Even though Chang seems like he's the clear choice for succession, Perrault says he's been waiting for someone like Conway to arrive in Shangri-La. Perrault warns of a "storm" to come from which "There will be no safety by arms, no help from authority, no answer in science."[317] The storm that Perrault (and Hilton) anticipates is the second World War, but it's framed as part of a cyclical historical narrative; Conway states that, "A similar crash came once before, and then there were the Dark Ages lasting five hundred years." Perrault responds:

> The parallel is not quite exact. For those Dark Ages were not really so very dark—they were full of flickering lanterns, and even if the light had gone out of Europe altogether,

[313] Hilton 64.
[314] Robinson 98.
[315] Brewer 68.
[316] Hilton 101.
[317] Ibid 102.

> there were other rays, literally from China to Peru, at which it could have been rekindled. But the Dark Ages that are to come will cover the whole world in a single pall; there will be neither escape nor sanctuary, save such as are too secret to be found or too humble to be noticed.[318]

Hilton aligns Shangri-La with the Realm of Prester John here in its timelessness, and Conway taking the seat of the High Lama at Shangri-La ensures a bastion of Western power on the Eastern horizon as there was in the Middle Ages. Racial capitalism, of which colonialism is a kind, is insatiably driven by infinite growth; the intentional hiding of Shangri-La ensures that the horizon is indeed endless, and that the East holds infinite potential for growth for the West. It's been noted that "A dozen years after the supposed date when Prester John's letter began to circulate in Europe, Pope Alexander III made the first attempt on the part of a major European figure to open communication with the fabled oriental monarch."[319] When Father Perrault first settles in Shangri-La, he attempts to report back to his superiors of his success – after not hearing back for some time, he finally learns that "Some of his earlier messages, however, must have got through, and a doubt of his activities have been aroused, for in the year of 1769 a stranger brought a letter written twelve years before, summoning Perrault to Rome."[320]

All four of the hostages who end up in Shangri-La interpret their experience through a facet of the racializing prism, and together they represent the full spectrum of colonizing endeavors. Miss Roberta Brinklow, a missionary, regards Chang as "a heathen in his blindness" and her mind seems to be "full of hazy visions of native handicrafts, prayer-mat weaving, or

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[318] Ibid 102. This quote is nearly identical to the well-cited one from Janet Abu-Lughod referenced in the first chapter of this project: "If the lights went out in Europe [during the "Dark Ages], they were certainly still shining brightly in the Middle East" (ix).
[319] Silverberg 58.
[320] Hilton 70.

something picturesquely primitive."[321] Brinklow views the population of Shangri-La as reductive woodblock prints of native figures, ready-made souls for conversion. Mallinson similarly views the residents of Shangri-La as primitive and behaves indignantly throughout the novel – but he sees less opportunity for humanizing than Brinklow does, regarding Chang as though "through the bars of an imaginary cage."[322] The fourth hostage is Henry Barnard, whom Mallinson reveals to actually be Chalmers Bryant, an American investment banker on the run from the authorities in America and Europe for swindling millions of dollars. Barnard/Chalmers is unrepentant for his crimes, stating that he did it "Because they all wanted something for nothing and hadn't the brains to get it for themselves."[323] As mentioned previously, he immediately becomes obsessed with extracting the gold from Shangri-La; Chang comments that "Mr. Barnard would also like to convert us – into a limited liability company."[324] Shangri-La, for Barnard, is a revenue stream comparable to investment banking and he sees Shangri-La as another opportunity to redeem himself in the West and once again make something from nothing – regarding Shangri-La as *terra nullius*.

Hilton's portrayal of a Western bastion of power in the East suggests that in paradise, American capitalism has penetrated markets so deeply that it functions beyond known places on maps and is unimpeded by global logistics. Barnard's capitalist ethos recognizes the opportunity to make something from nothing. This is at the core of the paradox of underdevelopment and Eurocentric world-building that juxtaposes barrenness and bounty as prime grounds for extraction and exploitation. Tomoko Masuzawa identifies this juxtaposition as "paired extremes … height versus depth, dazzling light versus dismal darkness, transcendent wisdom versus utter

[321] Hilton 49.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Hilton 61.
[324] Hilton 100.

perdition" which ultimately represents colonial logic much more so than it represents any sort of geographical reality tying Shangri-La to Tibet or to Sichuan or to anywhere else.[325] Like the Realm of Prester John, Shangri-La has become a Western placeholder for parts *yet* uncolonized of the world – and for an operating logic of what it's like to be a Westerner in these kinds of spaces. In the words of Masuzawa, in the afterlife of *Lost Horizon*, Shangri-La is "a convenient and fortuitously poetic nomenclature for the whole complex of fantasies."[326] A key part of that fantasy, which I posit is a speculation and something that people invest money in actualizing, is the expansion of racial capitalism to even the furthest reaches of the globe from the West. This is clear immediately upon Conway's arrival in Shangri-La; he remarks, "The bath, for instance, in which he had recently luxuriated, had been of a delicate green porcelain, a product, according to inscription, of Akron, Ohio."[327] The appearance of a green porcelain bathtub from Ohio "past the frontier country … [where] there aren't any tribes living" inverts the location of material resources on the map. In the Middle Ages, Latin Christians sought to have a stronghold in the East to access gold and precious stones to extract – the extraction would be facilitated by racializing any local population as despot, savage, heathen, cannibal, or just simply not there. In *Lost Horizon*, the East no longer represents a place to extract resources from but has been inverted as a place to export manufactured goods to. That the manufactured good is a porcelain tub demonstrates the usurpation of a good long associated with the East – porcelain was developed during the Tang dynasty, 618-907 (Europe's Middle Ages). If Shangri-La is a kind of "nowhere" utopia, it presents a vast nothingness from which to make something.

Many others search for Shangri-La elsewhere.[328] Michael Wood's TV Mini-Series *In*

[325] Masuzawa 542.
[326] Ibid.
[327] Hilton 37.
[328] As with the legend of Prester John, the allure of Shangri-La has drawn hordes of Westerners to the East in the aftermath of Lost Horizon – even despite the fact that, unlike the legend of Prester John, it is an

Search of Myths and Heroes (2005) features an episode on "The Search for Shangri-La," which ends for him at the ruins of Tsaparang – once the capital of the 10th century kingdom of Guge in Western Tibet.[329] Laurence Brahm's travel narrative, *Searching for Shangri-La* (2004), documents his journey hitchhiking through Tibet and Yunnan Province; the prologue states its goal is to "document the 'lost horizon' before it is lost" due to "overdevelopment, careless tourism, and short-sightedness."[330] Charles Allen's *The Search for Shangri-La: A Journey into Tibetan History* chronicles a similar search with a television crew in 1999, which ends with him lamenting: "I shall always regret not making the extra effort and pushing on, but we had already run out of funds and time. I now believe that we reached only the outskirts of Kyunglung Nguklar and that the main city itself lies deeper within the valley. So for the time being at least, 'Shangri-La' – if that is really what it is – remains 'undiscovered' and unexplored."[331] The Australian author of the travel blog (identified only as @mutikonka), *In the Footsteps of Joseph Rock*, writes that he was inspired by the claim of a *National Geographic* article that "there were still areas of China that were most difficult to access and "whose inhabitants had defied western exploration."[332] He writes, in response to that, "I wanted to know more" and to specifically see

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absolute certainty that James Hilton fabricated the location of Shangri-La and an immortal Catholic ruler there. It is not an understatement to say that the nation of Tibet has been irrevocably changed by Hilton's "fictional" travel narrative. In 2001, the People's Republic of China, which annexed Tibet in 1950 and has unrightfully occupied the area ever since, re-named Zhongdian County in Diqing Prefecture, Yunnan Province "Shangri-La." A man named Xuan Ke, whose father had worked for Joseph Rock in the 1920s, told Chinese officials in 1994 that Diqing Prefecture was the reference for Rock and thus Hilton in *Lost Horizon*. In "Shangri-La: Messing with a Myth," the research of Russell Belk and Rosa Llamas demonstrates how the exploitation of the Shangri-La myth has had a detrimental, hollowing effect both cultural and economic on the local population – they argue it's part of the development of the "McDonaldization of the tourism [industry] in China," and "just another colony of commercial imperialism." Russell Belk and Rosa Llamas, "Shangri-La: Messing with a Myth," *Journal of Macromarketing* 31, no. 3 (2011): 258.

[329] Wood, "The Search for Shangri-La."

[330] Laurence J. Brahm, *Searching for Shangri-La: The Himalayan Notes Trilogy* (Ibis Press, 2017): 16.

[331] Allen 274.

[332] "Chapter 1. How it all started," *In the Footsteps of Joseph Rock*, September 16, 2018, https://www.josephrock.net/2010/12/chapter-1-how-it-all-started.html.

the places that Joseph Rock had traveled that "On modern maps … were just blank spaces – there was simply nothing there.[333]

Conclusion

The historical resonances across eight centuries between the Realm of Prester John and Shangri-La in James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* illuminates an arc from medieval speculative epistemology to modern material reality and illustrates that this arc shifts knowledge production into a multi-temporal dynamic: speculation is always extends both forward and backward, and is being cross-cut just as much in the Medieval as it is in the Modern period. The (re)presentation of Prester John's realm across time illustrates the shift that the arc produces in the spatial epistemology of barrenness and bounty. (Re)presentations of the Far East, inflected by the Prester John legend, shift from space that is speculated to be *so* bountiful that it compels the reader to extract its indigenous riches to a space is speculated to be *so* barren that it compels the reader to colonize this space and make it as thoroughly Westernized as possible.

The Prester John legends shows how European racialization accomplishes this simultaneously. The twelfth century "Letter of Prester John" juxtaposes the spiritual and material wealth of Prester John's Christian kingdom to the resource-barren surrounding landscape populated by the racialized figures of "wild men, horned men, faun satyrs and women of the same kind, pigmies, dog-headed men, giants whose height is forty cubits, one-eyed men, [and] cyclopes."[334] The letter closes with a universalizing metaphor: "If you can count the stars in heaven and the sand of the sea, then you can calculate the extent of our kingdom and our power."[335] This celestial metaphor depicts an insurmountably vast and multi-directional spatial

[333] The *National Geographic* article referred to is Joseph Rock, "Konka Risumgompa - Holy Mountains of the Outlaws," *National Geographic* LX, no. 1 (1931): 1-65; "Chapter 1. How It All Started." https://www.josephrock.net/2010/12/chapter-1-how-it-all-started.html
[334] Brewer 69.
[335] Ibid 92.

reign: it is as expansive as the sky above as well as the sand below. The abundance of stars and sand, though, is remarkable in its stark juxtaposition to the barrrenness of deep space and deep sea. The multi-temporal dimensions of Prester John's kingdom are evident: the letter is cross-cut in time between a kingdom that has clearly been established for a very long time and a kingdom that is on the horizon, in the future, given that Prester John seems aware that knowledge of the possibility of his kingdom's existence does not exist *yet*. Opportunity is opened up across space and time in the "Letter." Christopher Columbus's *Letter*, the *Catalan Atlas*, and *Lost Horizon* are all nodes along this arc that strategically (re)present racialism and the juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty to speculate about imperial and colonial possibilities across time: in seeking out realm speculated about in the past, travelers (re)present these realms into the expansive time and space of the future.

Conclusion: Google *Mappaemundi*

At some point in the process of conducting research for this project, I needed a refresher on Nestorianism. I opened a new tab in Google Chrome, and typed "Nestorianism" into the search bar. One of the factoids in the 'knowledge panel' was "Refute: How to refute Nestorianism." This feature brought into sharp focus something that at a distance I felt I knew to be true, but given the constant reshaping of the internet struggled to find a stable example of: that Google does not represent unbiased or objective information. Rather, it trends towards furthering a particular worldview. Because I am a user based in the United States, the dominant worldview shaping my search for knowledge is Latin Christendom. Google assumes that its users must take issue with the doctrine of Nestorianism and are looking to maintain an orthodox perspective. It's an astounding feat of time that Google is providing advice to its users in the year 2023 on how best to dispute a theological doctrine from 1,600 years ago – but it also completely flattens the complex history of Eastern Christianity, and casts "Nestorianism" as a totally defunct sect. Google launched knowledge panels in 2012 as one way of representing their larger 'knowledge graph,' "a system that understands facts and information about entities from materials shared across the web, as well as from open source and licensed databases."[336] The verb "understands" imposes human cognition onto a system, and shifts accountability away from Google while simultaneously claiming and enshrining authority on the search results page. The stated goal of the knowledge graph is "for our [Google's] systems to discover and surface publicly known, factual information when it's determined to be useful." Is refuting Nestorianism useful "factual information"? Google maintains its position of authority by strategic (re)presentational

[336] Danny Sullivan, "A reintroduction to our Knowledge Graph and knowledge panels," *Google: The Keyword*, 20 May 2020, https://blog.google/products/search/about-knowledge-graph-and-knowledge-panels/.

abstraction and stabilization.[337] The only clarity that Google provides to explain the presentation and ordering of search results is that "relevancy is determined by hundreds of factors, which could include information such as the user's location, language, and device (desktop or phone)."[338] The relevancy of user location, language, and device is abstracted on the search results page, and Google's method of cluster-driven indexing functions to stabilize information.

Google's Mappaemundi reintroduces illumination and images, annotations and marginalia, and *compilatio* into mapmaking. Google's "system" for (re)presenting source material mirrors medieval knowledge production in the way it claims authority while skirting accountability. Google's Search Engine Results Page (SERP) has added many features in the last ten years; what used to appear as a list of ranked web pages can now include (depending on what you're searching for) a featured snippet, a knowledge graph, an answer box, images, sponsored content, organic content, images, shopping results, and relevant queries ("people also search for"/PASF). These features claim authority more decisively by creating a sense of authorship that was absent in previous models of SERP that only listed information from other sources. This information sprawl also extends to Google Maps, which includes features like the Map Maker (2008),[339] Explore tab (2014), Google My Business (which allowed business owners to add

[337] Alex Mueller makes a similar argument in *Habitual Rhetoric: Digital Writing Before Digital Technology* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2023), which compares digital writing practices on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube) and Wikipedia to the rhetorical habits of handwritten manuscript culture in early medieval universities. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, an embodied disposition or structuring structure that shapes and is shaped by particular cultures, Mueller examines the ways that quotidian users write and interact in digital spaces. However, I argue that Google is distinct from the platforms that Mueller examines in its totalizing capaciousness and that Google provides space for user digital writing in a fundamentally different way than traditionally social media platforms do.
[338] "In-depth guide to how Google Search works," Google for Developers, last updated 22 April 2024, https://developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/how-search-works.
[339] The Map Maker function was fully integrated into Google Maps on March 31, 2017. "Google Map Maker has closed," Map Maker Help, accessed 2 June 2024, https://support.google.com/mapmaker/answer/7195127?hl=en.

photos and collect reviews) (2014), the Local Guides program (2015),[340] and Areas of interest.[341] All of these efforts are launched with cajoles of "Real people, real insights," "useful and reliable,"[342] "you're in control,"[343] and "the best match for your search."[344] The authenticity factor undergirding all of this is reiterated via new features like knowledge graphs, areas of interest, or local guides – little check marks that try to reassure the user that they're seeing the whole, unbiased picture. However, the rhetoric of reality and control directed at the user deflects accountability.

Google Maps is biased to facilitate the continuation of global racial capitalism and increase the disparity of uneven development. Google, like John Mandeville, solicits user feedback from its audience, but Google also still claims imperious authority, and User Generated Content (UGC) appears only within Google's existing epistemological framework. Each new feature rollout intensifies that drive and abstracts, creates, or conceals gaps being actively propagated in the archive.[345] Ruha Benjamin's groundbreaking *Race After Technology* enumerates the ways in which algorithmic tools "pose as objective, scientific, or progressive, too often reinforce racism and other forms of inequity."[346] These tools can never be objective

[340] Elizabeth Reid, "A look back at 15 years of mapping the world," Google: The Keyword, 6 February 2020, https://blog.google/products/maps/look-back-15-years-mapping-world/.
[341] Mark Li and Zhou Bailiang "Discover the action around you with the updated Google Maps," Google: The Keyword, 25 July 2016, https://blog.google/products/maps/discover-action-around-you-with-updated/.
[342] Andrew Lookingbill and Ethan Russell, "Beyond the Map: How we build the maps that power your apps and business," Google Maps Platform, 31 July 2019, https://cloud.google.com/blog/products/maps-platform/beyond-the-map-how-we-build-the-maps-that-power-your-apps-and-business.
[343] "Good Maps Timeline," Google Maps Help, accessed 2 June 2024, https://support.google.com/maps/answer/6258979.
[344] "Search locations on Google Maps," Google Maps Help, accessed 2 June 2024, https://support.google.com/maps/answer/3092445.
[345] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14.
[346] Ruha Benjamin, Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code (Polity, 2019): 2.

because they are created by people who are not objective.[347] If, as Benjamin insists, "Reality is something we create together," the Ground Truth[348] of Google Maps (the internal name for the master-map that integrates information from all data sources, facilitated by a collating software called "Atlas") is, so to speak, unevenly developed by those who have the access and means to contribute in a way that is recognized by the authority and production logic of Google.[349] Individual UGC may collectively create a digital reality, but Google's optimization for relevancy (re)presents that reality in a way that seeks to stabilize, rather than upend, what knowledge already exists. Peter Gentzel and Jeffrey Wimmer identify that the "production Logic of the Google Map is based on the availability of digital data and its surveillance capitalist filtration" – given that the most highly data-dense areas of data production and retention are in the West, this skews Google's Map toward representing only Western interests through a Western lens as people discuss and (re)present the places around them. This perspective is further sharpened to highlight and prioritize places for economic interactions. In the words of Jeremy Crampton, digital mapping in the neoliberal era functions to make "everything calculable and monetizable" and locate "new economic zones [that] are being colonized for value extraction", like vertical air space and ocean floor territories.[350]

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[347] See Safiya Noble's *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York University Press, 2018) and Cathy O'Neil's *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (Crown Publishers, 2016).
[348] Scott McQuire, "'One Map to Rule Them All? Google Maps as Digital Technical Object," *Communication and the Public* 4, no. 2 (2019): 154.
[349] Benjamin 2. Margath Walker and Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah's research notes the significance of this uneven development: "Places, data and voices are represented strongly in some areas and remain largely absent in others. The power/knowledge nexus can render a plethora of other variables and practices invisible." Margath Walker and Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah, "Map the gap: alternative visualizations of geographic knowledge production," *Geo: Geography and the Environment* 4, no. 2 (2017).
[350] Jeremy Crampton, "Digital mapping," *Understanding Spatial Media*, ed. Rob Kitchin et al. (SAGE publications, 2017): 42.

This dissertation illuminated the premodern construction of the preconditions for racial capitalism through world-building medieval compendia, maps, and travel narratives. Compilers, mapmakers, and travelers reinforced colonial imperatives by providing a tool for locating new extractive zones and platforming racist ideologies via the paradoxical juxtaposition of barrenness and bounty. (Re)presentation stabilization eventually embeds racial capitalism into mapmaking by creating increasingly abstract and authoritative images of the world that illustrate geography as lines and blank space without people. Benjamin identifies that "Far from coming upon a sinister story of racist programmers scheming in the dark corners of the web, we will find that the desire for objectivity, efficiency, profitability, and progress fuels the pursuit of technical fixes across many social arenas."[351] One technical fix supposedly in pursuit of objectivity and efficiency was the removal of images and anecdotes or marginalia from maps – evident in the contrast between, for example, Abraham Cresque's *Catalan Atlas* and Abraham Ortelius' *Typus Orbis Terrarum* (1570). The *Catalan Atlas* platforms racialism originating from Marco Polo and Prester John and (re)presents that by only featuring non-Western rulers or figures.[352] The *Typus Orbis Terrarum* removes those figures and inserts a large-text reassurance from Cicero to its Western audience at the bottom of the map: "Quid ei potest videri magnum in rebus humanis, cui aeternitas omnis, totiusque mundi nota sit magnitudo" [For what human things can seem important to a man who keeps all eternity before his eyes and knows the vastness of the world].[353] The abstraction of the world into a seemingly narrative-free and peopleless big-picture representation obfuscates the material impact of these places' inscription into a neat power

[351] Benjamin 7.
[352] For descriptions of figures on the Catalan Atlas, see Emmanuelle Vagnon, "Pluricultural Sources of the Catalan Atlas," *Cartography between Christian Europe and the Arabic-Islamic World: Divergent Traditions,* ed. Alfred Hiatt (Brill, 2021).
[353] Abraham Ortelius and Frans Hogenberg, *Typvs Orbis Terrarvm* (Antwerp: 1584), Map, Retrieved from Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/2017585795/>.

hierarchy. As Timothy Ström writes, "the more abstract the means of relating to others and to nature, the more the potential there is for exercising power at a distance."[354] Maps initially included racialized figures and economic speculations in order to propel expansion and domination. Once that opportunity was actualized, abstraction and erasure were introduced to mapmaking to facilitate and simplify ease of control of global networks of capitalism and violence. Abstraction and erasure have a material impact beyond uneven data development and distribution or archive.[355]

Google Maps' erasure of UGC from prisons works in tandem with carceral institutions to facilitate dispossession with spatial erasure. In a blog post titled "How Google Maps protects against fake content," Google Product Manager Christina Wichiencharoen assures map viewers that Google is "invested in making sure information is accurate and unhelpful content is removed."[356] What is defined as "unhelpful" content is dictated by Google's pecuniary interests and leans heavily toward business owners and people in power rather than optimizing for what is unhelpful for every-day users. One new strategy for achieving 'accuracy' introduced in November 2023 is the *removal* of information about places – "such as police stations and prisons" – that are the loci of local power and control. Gilmore reminds us that prisons are directly related to dispossession: "the justification for putting people behind bars rests on the premise that as a consequence of certain actions, some people should lose all freedom (which we can define in this instance as control over one's bodily habits, pastimes, relationships and

[354] Timothy Ström, "Journey to the Centre of the World: Google Maps and the Abstraction of Cybernetic Capitalism," *Cultural Geographies* 27, no. 4, (2020): 576.
[355] For example, Ström identifies that it is the very "same abstractions of GPS … [that] allow someone to 'check in' with Google Maps at a restaurant or on their smartphone or guide a 'smart-bomb' from a drone down onto a Pashtun wedding procession" (576).
[356] Cristina Wichiencharoen, "How Google Maps protects against fake content," Google: The Keyword, 22 November 2023, https://blog.google/products/maps/how-google-maps-protects-against-fake-content/.

mobility."[357] The incapacitation of people in prisons, Gilmore argues, "doesn't pretend to change anything about people except where they are. It is in a simpleminded way, then, a geographical solution that purports to solve social problems by extensively and repeatedly removing people from disordered, deindustrialized milieus and depositing them somewhere else."[358] Prisons iterate the overlap of the institutions of uneven development and racism. Google Maps' decision to claim total authority over the (re)presentation of prisons in only the most abstract sense.

Prior to this change, there were hundreds of reviews of, for example, the old Orleans Parish Prison at 2800 Gravier Street, detailing the injustices and abuse suffered by the inmates there including the abandonment of 650 prisoners in their cells during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The old Orleans Parish Prison remains on the map but devoid of the narrative context and history provided for other locations. The stated reason for this practice is to provide "longer-term protections for places where we [Google] have found user contributions to be consistently unhelpful, harmful, or off-topic." According to the 2021 "Orleans Parish Ethnic and Racial Disparity (ERD) Working Group Recommendation Report," "Black people were overrepresented in [the Orleans Parish] jail at a rate of 4.6 to 1 compared to white people."[359] Google Maps' protection of prisons, rather than advocacy for prisoner's voices, clearly highlights and underscores the manifestation of a worldview that exists to preserve racial capitalism. Along with police stations and prisons, this new policy includes "places that people go to without choice or places only accessible to people stationed or assigned there" – this speculates a future in which Google Maps only presents key places for maintaining Western control with

[357] Gilmore 11.
[358] Gilmore 14.
[359] Office of Criminal Justice Coordination and the Vera Institute of Justice, "Orleans Parish Ethnic and Racial Disparity (ERD) Working Group Recommendation Report," July 2021, https://nola.gov/nola/media/Criminal-Justice-Coordination/Ethnic-and-Racial-Disparity-Recommendation-Report-July-2021.pdf.

abstractions and pixels, and not only actively propagates the dissemination of power on the map but also actively silences the kinds of contestations of space that have been possible with Google Maps.[360]

The removal of reviews of prisons, police stations, and military outposts demonstrates how the barrenness and bounty that defined medieval maps and travel narratives persists in Google's Map. The relative barrenness of data in non-Western places produces a map distorted by unbalanced input. Western travelers seeking out Shangri-Las cast non-Western spaces as having an overabundance of indigenous or non-Western people hawking bountiful goods when those travelers would rather buy a sense of empty space and empty time over material goods. The expectations laid out in the narratives on Google Maps establish future expectations of travelers, The economic demand to meet those expectations concretizes Western norms and expectations into local practices. Chen Liu writes that "The sale, purchase, and use of different digital technologies can bring new cultural practices that lead to changes in consumer demand, consumption norms, and emergent issues of ethics, social relations, cultural politics, and power at the local level."[361] Some of the same places described as paradoxically barren and bountiful in *The Book of John Mandeville* are constructed in similar terms on Google Maps, according to the construction laid out above by Costa by which local inhabitants are erased or barren and the bounty is – like in Shangri-La – an abundance of material goods, now converted to commodities.

In the second half of *The Book of John Mandeville*, between a description of India and Cathay, lies an extended discussion of islands in what is now called the South China Sea – some of which seem identifiable (like Thalamassy/Paten, which could be Borneo since it's east of

[360] These kinds of reviews and other uses for protest organizing are a disappearing silver lining for what I otherwise see as a harmful technology.
[361] Chen Liu, "The Digitalisation of Consumption and Its Geographies," *Geography Compass* 17, no. 7 (2023): 3.

Sumatra and north of Java)[362] while others resist tethering to modern geography (like Caffoles or Tracoda).[363] The Philippines, although not recognizably mentioned by Mandeville, is in this same area – just north of the island of Malay is the small (2.98 square miles) island Boracay. The Shangri-La hotel group opened the 219-room resort Shangri-La Boracay in 2009. Described on the Shangri-La website as "thoughtfully designed with modern travelers in mind," the accommodations boast "enriching décor displaying traditional materials with authentic Filipino accents."[364] This description establishes the dominant aesthetic as modern, i.e., Western, and any Filipino aesthetic is merely an accent – this dynamic also extends to and characterizes guests' expectations of their experience at the Shangri-La Boracay. One reviewer says that "Location is like you are in [sic] a private island."[365] An Italian reviewer writes "Servizio di primo ordine, posizione strategica con due spiagge bianche ed il mare colore smeraldo" [First-rate service, strategic position with two white beaches and the emerald sea].[366] These reviews, which are typical of the well-liked resort (it has a 4.7 rating from 2,605 reviews), portray the Shangri-La as so private that it seems empty of people. The "mare colore smeraldo" is reminiscent of the

[362] Mandeville 117.
[363] Mandeville 120.
[364] "Rooms, Suites, & Villas," Shangri-La Boracay, accessed 2 June 2024, https://www.shangri-la.com/en/boracay/boracayresort/rooms-suites/.
[365] [Redacted], Review of Shangri-La Boracay, *Google Maps*, April 2024. My citational ethics here are driven by the serious considerations posed by Danah Boyd and Kate Crawford in "Critical Questions for Big Data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon." They write: ""There are also significant questions of truth, control, and power in Big Data Studies: researchers have the tools and the access, while social media users as a whole do not. Their data were created in highly context-sensitive spaces, and it's entirely possible that some users would not give permission for their data to be used elsewhere. Many are not aware of the multiplicity of agents and algorithms currently gathering and storing their data for future use. Researchers are rarely in a user's imagined audience. Users are not necessarily aware of all the multiple uses, profits, and other gains that come from information they have posted. Datamay be public (or semi-public) but this does not simplistically equate with full permission being given for all uses" (673). I am omitting the usernames of authors of UGC on Google Maps. Danah Boyd and Kate Crawford, "CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR BIG DATA: Provocations for a Cultural, Technological, and Scholarly Phenomenon," *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 5 (2012).
[366] [Redacted], Review of Shangri-La Boracay, *Google Maps*, February 2024; translated by Google as it appears on the review page.

jewel-laden image of the "Sea of the Indies" from the *Catalan Atlas.* The images contributed by reviewers show empty beaches, facilities, and vistas. Of course, this type of photography is typical of public websites. But in the larger discourse this should not be taken for granted if Google's Map is perceived as the most accurate, where are all the people? If nothing else, Boracay has been determined by the abundance of tourists in contemporary news. Boracay has been a popular destination for Western travelers since the 1970s, but tourism exploded to unsustainable levels in the last 20 years. By 2017, the tiny island was inundated by 2 million visitors in a single year. In 2018, President Rodrigo Duterte closed the island to visits for an environmental clean-up and rebrand and implemented a visitor cap to 19,215 tourists at a time.[367] Yet, in November 2023, the Malay Municipal Tourism Office announced that Boracay had hit 1.8 million visitors for the year.[368]

In Boracay, visitors provide abundant negative reviews of locations other than the Shangri-La. One reviewer writes: "In some days, perhaps this place could be pretty but the area we stayed had trash in [sic] the beachfront. It doesn't seem like maintenance is consistent. It also doesn't feel safe. As a popular tourist spot, there are a lot of hagglers who would try and invade your space to insist you buy their wares and services."[369] Many reviewers complain not just about the presence of vendors, but also about their prices: "Boracay is very [sic] overrated island on the Philippines. The white beach looks good, but it's overcrowded and you cannot relax there, too many annoying vendors. Excursions are way too overpriced, you can see everything by traveling on foot (Puka beach, diniwid beach, ruins of the Isla Boracay Hotel, crocodile island, snorkeling spots). Vendors increase price in [sic] several times for tourists, you feel

[367] Patrick Scott, "Can Boracay Beat Overtourism?" *New York Times* (online), 11 April 2023.
[368] Reymar Latoza, "Boracay hits 1.8M target tourist arrivals," *IMT News* (online), 18 November 2023.
[369] [Redacted], Review of Boracay, Malay, Philippines, *Google Maps*, October 2022.

discriminated."[370] This reviewer, interestingly, accompanied their text with images of pristine, empty beaches.

Google Maps UGC intersperses contemplation and direct addresses and hyperbolic imagery in a way that is reminiscent of *The Book of John Mandeville.* One reviewer states:

> Ich weiß nicht wo ich anfangen soll. Ich kann einfach nur jedem raten: meidet diese Insel. Es gibt absolut nichts was es nicht auch woanders gibt. Die Restaurants sind teuer, der Service schlecht. Die Strände sieht man kaum, da einfach so unheimlich viele Touristen dort lang laufen, dass man kaum Sand sieht. Die Insel wird bevölkert von asiatischen Reisegruppen in der Größe von 10 bis 30 Personen, die egal was sie machen einfach in einer unerträglichen Lautstärke tun. Man wird alle 2 Meter von Leuten angequatscht ob man eine Massage, etwas kaufen, unternehmen oder Essen will. Nein kennen diese Nervensägen fast nicht. Ich hab aufgehört mit zählen wie oft Leute versucht haben uns in Läden zu ziehen. Die Einheimischen versuchen einfach in jeder Sekunde die Touristen zu betrügen und so viel Geld wie möglich von denen abzutragen. Der absolute Horror! Wir sind nach diesem Aufenthalt einfach nur mega enttäuscht von diesem Land und den Leuten, dass wir sogar unseren Trip kurzerhand abgebrochen haben. Jeder der überlegt dort hin zu reisen: meidet diese Insel - besser noch - meidet dieses Land. [I don't know where to start. I can only advise everyone: avoid this island. There is absolutely nothing that cannot be found elsewhere. The restaurants are expensive and the service is bad. You hardly see the beaches, because there are so many tourists walking there that you hardly see any sand. The island is populated by Asian tour groups of 10 to 30 people, who no matter what they do, do it at an unbearable volume. People chatted up every 2 meters

[370] [Redacted], Review of Boracay, Malay, Philippines, *Google Maps*, November 2022.

> whether you wanted to have a massage, buy something, do something or eat. No, these nuisances almost don't know. I lost count of the number of times people tried to drag us into stores. The locals are just trying to cheat the tourists every second and take as much money from them as possible. The absolute horror! After this stay, we are just super disappointed with this country and the people that we even canceled our trip without further ado. Anyone considering going there: avoid this island - better yet - avoid this country].[371]

The metanarrative "Ich weiß nicht wo ich anfangen soll" [I don't know where to start] is similar to how Mandeville marks time and order in his narrative, marking the transition from a description of the Holy Land to the Far East by stating "now it is time, if you like, to speak to you about the neighboring lands" or remarking to the reader repeatedly "Now you ought to know."[372] Rather than performing objectivity, this reviewer (like the Mandeville author) engages directly with their audience and utilizes metanarrative as a sort of modesty topos, hemming and hawing to gesture toward how thoroughly they have considered their perspective and why it must be told. As with *The Book*, there's a brief commentary on some standard facts (for Mandeville, relative location and size; for the reviewer, the food and the service) before delving into a description of people. The racialization of the people, as in *The Book*, correlates to speculated economic incentive. The distinction between the "asiatischen reisegruppen" [asian tour groups] and "die Einheimischen" [the locals] does not matter because the former inhibits the reviewer's potential for private ownership of space and the latter tries to make a profit from the tourist when it (seemingly) should be the tourist making the profit off of the locals. In a different review, of a

[371] [Redacted], Review of Boracay, Malay, Philippines, *Google Maps*, January 2023; translation by Google.
[372] Mandeville 89 and 112.

hotel called the "RedDoorz Plus @ Secret Garden Boracay," the same reviewer asserts that: "Ich kann jeden bloß warnen: meidet diese Insel voller Verbrecher" [I can only warn everyone: avoid this island full of criminals].[373] Mandeville similarly discredits whole islands – always islands where there are no valuable material resources – like the unnamed island near Caffoles "where there are people of the most evil nature."[374]

The reviews that populate Google Maps both set expectations for future visitors and seek to shape the landscape. As Chen Liu writes, participating in digital geography is a process of prosumption, "an interrelated and interpenetrated process of online production and consumption … ubiquitous in many societies where the material and digital world increasingly blend." Via prosumption, netizens become "prosumers" because "online information is not simply consumed, but actively modified and/or re-/co-produced."[375] Google Maps actively encourages users to respond to or annotate their record with links like "edit the map," "add a missing place," "report review," or "feedback."[376] These functions echo Mandeville author's advice to readers in the prologue to *The Book*: "if I err in describing through not remembering or otherwise, they [readers] can amend and correct it."[377] This openness to amendment is accompanied by the semblance of a single knowledgeable perspective that obscures its source material – both Google Maps and *The Book* (re)present the mappamundi as accurate and exhaustive as if there were no heavy hand in shaping the discourse therein. The result is a seemingly agreed-upon reality that only concentrates power. The hyper-personalization of "For You" algorithms subtly pushes each user toward economic complicity in further concretizing the image cast by the racializing prism

[373] [Redacted]. Review of RedDoorz Plus @ Secret Garden Boracay, *Google Maps*, January 2023.
[374] Mandeville 120.
[375] Liu 4.
[376] Reports are categorized as off topic, spam, conflict of interest, profanity, bullying or harassment, discrimination or hate speech, personal information, or not helpful. "Report Review," *Google*, accessed 2 June 2024.
[377] Mandeville 6.

of Google Maps. The world is never just “For You.” Google’s mappaemundi, like its medieval predecessors, flattens the world into a spectrum of places available for profitable exploitation. Google’s mappamundi expresses what medieval predecessors had already accomplished centuries prior: a world flattened into a spectrum of places available for profitable exploitation.

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