Introduction

The *Christian Topography* is the only extant Greek treatise both written and illustrated in the sixth century, albeit known only through later copies, which date from the ninth (Vaticanus gr. 699, hereafter Vat) and eleventh centuries (Sinaiticus gr. 1186, hereafter S, and Laurentianus Pluteus IX.28, hereafter L). Its importance must not be underestimated. Vestiges of late antique book illuminations are scarce and their attribution to a specific place and time is largely hypothetical. In the case of the *Christian Topography*, however, we know where, when and why it was created. Thus, if it can be demonstrated that the miniatures reflect those in the original codex, they give an unparalleled insight into late antique book illumination. Moreover, the *Christian Topography* shares a number of images with the middle Byzantine illustrated Octateuchs, for which a late antique archetype has been postulated. Consequently, examination of its miniatures can further our understanding of the origins of the Byzantine illustrated Bibles. The truly exceptional importance of the *Christian Topography* lies, however, in the unique relationship between the text and image in the treatise. The vast majority of known illustrated texts acquired images in the process of transmission, but in the *Christian Topography* pictures are an inherent part of the argument. Consequently, inasmuch as we can confirm that the extant miniatures reflect those in the sixth-century original, the treatise offers a unique insight into how the relationship between word and image was constructed, and how the different potential of these two media was understood. Finally, the *Christian Topography*, a treatise which combines Greek philosophy and Syriac exegesis, sheds light on intellectual exchange in late antiquity and illustrates how Christian authors strove to transform the heritage of classical geography and cosmography into a new, Christian image of the universe.

A polemic against the theory that the earth and the universe are spherical, the *Christian Topography* proposed a cosmology where the physical and the temporal structure of the world were determined by the function of the cosmos as a setting for the divine plan of salvation. The universe, based on the flat, rectangular earth, was covered by the vault of heaven, and divided by the firmament into two superimposed spaces, which corresponded to

two conditions of human existence – the earthly present and the heavenly future. The form of the cosmos was symbolically revealed in the structure of the tabernacle built by Moses, while the progression of humanity towards the heavenly condition was marked by patriarchs, prophets and saints, who in words and deeds confirmed the reality of the heavenly things to come. The cosmography and the discussion of the tabernacle as well as the catalogue of the Biblical figures are richly illustrated and there can be little doubt that at least some miniatures appeared already in the sixth-century original: the references in the text and even the sheer structure of the treatise make it clear that from the outset the *Christian Topography* was conceived as an illustrated work.

Until now the text and the miniatures of the *Christian Topography* have almost always been discussed separately. The detachment of the two was such that among the editions of the *Christian Topography*, only that prepared by Wanda Wolska-Conus includes miniatures, in the form of drawings, placed within the text.[1] Despite the problems such an omission causes to the logic of the text, other editions and translations at best provide reproductions of only a few selected pictures in separate plates.[2] By the same token, when miniatures are discussed, the text they accompany is rarely taken into consideration. Moreover, even publications which combine analysis of text and image tend to disregard the structure of the treatise, the place of the miniatures in the text, and the order of their appearance.[3] As a result, the unity of the work has been disrupted and our understanding of the treatise distorted.

In her analysis of the *Christian Topography*, Wolska-Conus focused on the text and inevitably gave only limited attention to the miniatures. Taking into consideration both the text and the miniatures, I focus on the illustrations as the key to further understanding the *Christian Topography*. Above all, I try to clarify why the author decided to illustrate his polemic and what was the function of the miniatures in his argument.

[1] Wolska-Conus, 1968, 1970, 1973. The same drawings are reproduced in the Italian translation of the first five books of the treatise, based on Wolska-Conus' edition prepared by Garzya, 1992.

[2] The first publication of the complete text, Montfaucon, 1706, was based on L and included miniatures in the form of etchings, gathered in separate plates. These plates are reproduced in the 1897 translation of the treatise by McCrindle. Winstedt, 1909 provides selected illustrations in plates gathered at the end of his edition. The German translation of the text, Schneider, 2010, almost entirely ignores the illustrations. I was not able to consult the modern Greek translation of the treatise, Kalaitzakes, 2007. For a description of all early editions of the text and its fragments see Wolska-Conus, 1968, 117–23.

[3] See, for example, Mouriki-Charalambous, 1970; Clark, 2008.

The fundamental difficulty in research on the *Christian Topography* is that we look at the sixth-century book through the spectrum of later copies, and we have to disentangle the original from the later additions.[4] As a preliminary step it is therefore necessary to clarify the relationship between the existing codices. Because we know that some alterations were introduced into the treatise already by the author himself in the subsequent sixth-century editions, I begin by clarifying the structure of the treatise and any such potential modifications. The scope of the *Christian Topography*, the reasons for writing it and the factors that determined its content as well as the form of presentations can only be understood in their proper historical context. Accordingly, before launching into the analysis of the treatise, I explore questions pertaining to its authorship, and the intellectual, religious and cultural context in which the *Christian Topography* was written. In discussing the *Christian Topography*, I follow the order and the internal division of the exposition. As a result the chapters are uneven in size, but this reflects the disposition of the illustrations and prevents giving the false impression that they are spread evenly throughout the text. Within the chapters, I discuss the miniatures in the order of their appearance in the manuscripts. This order is of importance, and if we disregard it, we ignore an inherent theatrical aspect of the book illumination, whereby the miniatures are not seen together but appear gradually one by one. Preserving this order, moreover, allows us to observe the author's ideas unfolding as the exposition progresses. For the text I use the edition of Wolska-Conus, following her numbering of paragraphs, even though she occasionally altered their order. When referring to the images, I number the miniatures of the *Christian Topography* in the form '*CT* 1' and the comparative illustrations, 'Figure 1'.

When examining the three Byzantine manuscripts of the *Christian Topography*, their illustrations, their text, and the relationship between them, I give only very limited attention to the style of the miniatures. This is because, although matters of style are of great interest in terms of the discussion of the preserved codices, their relevance for the research on the lost sixth-century codex is limited. Moreover, I do not take into consideration the testimony of the illustrated excerpts from the treatise in the *Physiologus* manuscript from

[4] The range of the problems related to gleaning the late antique original from a medieval copy has been very thoroughly discussed in the context of the Peutinger Table; see Talbert, 2010, 123–32. In the case of the *Christian Topography*, however, not only do we have the advantage of three copies, but also the close connection between the text and the illustrations often makes it easier to discern between the original and later changes.

Smyrna,[5] nor that of the Russian codices of the *Christian Topography*.[6] Their relationship with the three complete Byzantine manuscripts is problematic and, rather than clarify the problems inherent to the task I am posing here, they would bring in a whole set of new issues.

The treatise

The text of the *Christian Topography* is preceded by several preliminary passages: a Prayer and two Prologues; a Pinax (a list of contents) and a Hypothesis, of which only the last appears in all three manuscripts.[7] The Pinax and the Hypothesis make it clear that only the first five books belonged to the original edition, that only ten books belong to the *Christian Topography*, and that the two additional books appended at the end in S and L are not a part of the treatise.[8] The content of the treatise is divided as follows:

Book I. Against those who want to be Christians but believe, like pagans, that heaven is spherical. Here the author discusses the theories on the universe which he opposes, placing particular emphasis on their incompatibility with Christian belief. This book contains no illustrations.

Book II. According to the title, in this book the author presents Christian theories on the shape of the universe supported by evidence from Holy Scripture. In reality, however, this book is predominantly devoted to a discussion of geography, including information from Kosmas' journeys. The text is accompanied by illustrations, of which – as we shall

[5] Strzygowski, 1899; Bernabò, 1998.

[6] The oldest Slavonic manuscript dates to 1495, but scholars agree that the date of the Slavonic translation should be situated between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For the most recent discussion of the Slavonic manuscripts of the *Christian Topography* see Caudano, 2006, 12–14, and 56–8 for discussion of the scientific illustrations. For an earlier discussion of this subject see Rjedin, 1916; Jacobs, 1979; Ševčenko, 1981a, 326–30; Piotrovskaja, 1982, 2004; Golyshenko and Dubrovina, 1997.

[7] The prayer appears only in L; the first prologue in S and L; the second prologue only in L, while the Pinax appears in Vat and S. The authenticity of the prayer and the second prologue, preserved only in L, is a subject of debate; see Schneider, 2007. Both simply reiterate information contained elsewhere in the treatise. Because the first prologue refers to a miniature in Book VI (on the size of the sun) and to a miniature in Book IX (the movement of the stars), it was probably appended to the *Christian Topography* only when Book IX was incorporated into the work.

[8] In the Pinax, the titles of the first five books are followed by an explanation 'This is the book we call the *Christian Topography* encompassing the entire universe' (Ἔστω τοίνυν αὕτη ἡ βίβλος Χριστιανικὴ Τοπογραφία περιεκτικὴ παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου παρ' ἡμῶν ὠνομασμένη). Book VI is listed as *additional* (συνημμένος), while Book XI is described as *outside the book* (ἔξωθεν τῆς βίβλου). The Hypothesis provides a summary of the first five books.

see in the second chapter – most probably only two are original. Perhaps to emphasize that exposition of the author's own theories begins with this book, it opens with a prologue describing the circumstances in which the treatise was written, and providing the outline of the first five books.

Book III. According to its long title, this book demonstrates that the Holy Scripture is truthful, internally coherent, and that it shows the utility of the forms of the universe. In S and L a single illustration, showing Adam and Eve flanking the tree around which a serpent coils, accompanies the exposition.[9] It is not introduced in the text and in all probability has been added in the process of copying.[10] Likewise, an ornamental cross, placed between Books III and IV in Vat, is most likely a later addition.[11]

Book IV. A brief recapitulation and representation of the forms of the universe, this book contains very little text, and almost all the illustrations pertinent to the cosmography discussed in the treatise.

Book V. Description of the tabernacle, and harmony of the prophets and apostles. Unlike the preceding books, this one focuses on the Biblical narrative. The exposition clearly falls into two parts – commentary on Exodus and a catalogue of patriarchs, prophets and saints. Both of them are illustrated, but the text–image relationship is different in each and while in the first part of Book V images generally follow the text to which they pertain, in the second part they precede the exposition to which they are appended.

Book VI. On the size of the sun. As indicated in the opening paragraph, this book was added in response to criticism encountered by the treatise. The text is accompanied by two illustrations in Vat, four in S and three in L.

Book VII. A polemic against those who believe that heaven is not eternal. This book, as well as Book VIII, may have originally constituted independent publications. They have separate prologues with dedications, they both refer to the *Christian Topography* as to the other work by the same author, and Book VII specifically mentions it as consisting of six books.[12] Consequently, both must postdate the treatise and moreover Book VII must have been written after the second edition had been made. The text is accompanied by two illustrations in Vat and L, one in S.

[9] Sin. gr. 1186, fol. 59v; Laur. Plut. IX.28, fol. 83v. [10] Wolska-Conus, 1968, 182.
[11] Vat. gr. 699, fol. 38r. [12] VII:4; VIII:20.

Book VIII. A commentary on the *Canticle of Hezekiah*, accompanied by one miniature in Vat, two in S and L. Moreover, in S and L, a brief exposition on the cycle of the year is appended, along with an illustration, at the end of the book.

Book IX. On the movement of the stars. Although the text does not say anything to that effect, this book may constitute an excerpt from the author's treatise on the movement of the stars, which is mentioned in the Prologue.[13] The text is accompanied by one illustration.

Book X. Quotations from patristic works, employed by the author to corroborate theories discussed in his treatise. This book is significantly more extensive in S and L, where a series of paragraphs added at the end (X:42–75) contain Christological polemics, without parallels anywhere else in the *Christian Topography*.[14]

Of the books appended at the end in S and L, Book XI contains descriptions and representations of animals and plants of India, while Book XII contains excerpts from ancient authors, whose works are thought to confirm the antiquity of Holy Scripture.

References in the text appear to indicate that the author prepared at least three editions of the treatise, consisting respectively of five, six and ten books. The second edition may have simply involved appending Book VI to the treatise, but the third entailed preparation of a new copy, since it seems to have affected the structure of the original five books: The text is divided into a series of passages marked κείμενα (*text*) and παραγραφαὶ (*notes*).[15] This division has been variously explained, but since the author states that he annotated his text to explain certain points more fully, most scholars contend that the *notes* go back to him.[16] It has been suggested that at least some of them originally constituted marginal comments which in the process of copying were integrated into the text.[17] The main argument against the hypothesis that all *notes* originated in such a way is that most of them are simply too long and some of them are accompanied by illustrations.[18] However, the suggestion that the *Christian Topography* from the beginning consisted of alternating passages of the *text* and *notes* is unconvincing, as there is no pattern of such alternation and some books consist exclusively

[13] Wolska-Conus, 1968, 34 and 1973, 204. [14] X:42–75.

[15] They are variously named by translators: McCrindle, 1897: *Text* and *Notes*; Wolska-Conus, 1968, 1970, 1973: *Texte* and *Digression*; Garzya, 1992: *Testo* and *Margine*.

[16] Hypothesis, 9. The only one to contest this view is Schneider, 2010, 35–8. He suggested that the notes were added by Kosmas' friend, most probably a monk from the same monastery, who knew his theories well, but who nonetheless made some mistakes in their interpretation.

[17] Winstedt, 1909, 28. [18] For example, Book II:80 *note*; Book IV:17–25 *note*.

of *text*. Moreover, the passage explaining the function of the *notes* has clearly been added to the original text: it is appended after a quotation from Matthew 25:34 at the end of the reiteration of the content of the first five books in the Hypothesis. The same citation, promising the Kingdom of Heaven to righteous Christians, appears at the end of Book V. Undoubtedly, it was originally intended to conclude the Hypothesis just as the original corpus of the *Christian Topography* concluded with this quotation.[19] It seems likely that while preparing a new edition the author introduced *notes* to clarify some points in his theories and to tie the core of his treatise more closely to the newly appended books.[20] Importantly, this supposition seems to be confirmed by an overlap between many of the *notes* and the theories in Books VII–X.[21]

Stemma

The manuscripts of the *Christian Topography* fall into two families – that of Vat and that of S and L – with few major textual differences between them:

- In Vat the prophets are discussed in Book V (142–74) according to their order in the Septuagint. In L and S the prophets are considered in the chronological sequence, that is, one followed by Theodore of Mopsuestia and the exegetes of the school of Nisibis.[22] From the text it is clear that the original arrangement was that of Vat, and that the order of the paragraphs was altered in the other two manuscripts, resulting in some inconsistencies in the text.
- A miniature accompanying the exposition on John the Baptist in Vat (V:176), showing John next to Jesus, Mary, Elizabeth, Zachariah and medallions with busts of Simeon and the prophetess Anna, in S and L is replaced by a text discussing these figures.[23]

[19] Hypothesis, 8. V:254, though it is followed by a brief prayer of the author at V:255–7.
[20] Wolska-Conus believes that while some notes were introduced by Kosmas, others were added at a later stage of copying; see Wolska-Conus, 1968, 76–9.
[21] The concept of the education of angels through the creation: III:13 *note*, and *notes* 28–9, 30, 31–2, 36–8, 39, 40–2, 48, 49 / X:39; the Biblical reference to the extremities of heaven as argument against the theory that the universe is spherical: IV:5 *note* / X:31. The notes appended to Book VII seem to have the same function: VII:83 / II:7, III:54–5; VII:84 / II:20–1, IV:2, IV:4; VII:85 / II:17–18, IV:5; VII:86 / II:12–13, IV:6.
[22] Winstedt, 1909, 23–5; Wolska-Conus, 1968, 53–6. This order is also confirmed by the seventh-century *Paschal Chronicle*, which includes most of Kosmas' catalogue of Biblical figures (Mercati, 1906, 406–7).
[23] Wolska-Conus, 1970, 270–3. The text in S and L does not appear in the *Paschal Chronicle* (Mercati, 1906, 407–8).

- An exposition on the annual cycle of the month is appended, along with an illustration, to the end of Book VIII in S and L.[24]
- In S and L a long exposition with Christological polemic appears at the end of Book X, paragraphs 43–75. This text, directed against those who deny the humanity of Christ, names among 'their recent schismatic fathers' (τινος νέου ἀποσχίστου αὐτῶν πατρὸς, X:62) the Alexandrian bishops Timothy III (AD 517–35) and Theodosius (AD 536–66).
- Books XI and XII are added in S and L.

Some of the alternations reflected in S and L (the change in the order of the prophets; the text added to Book X) seem to result from a conscious revision, aimed at emphasizing a dyophysite theology and Biblical interpretation that ultimately derive from Theodore of Mopsuestia. Accordingly, it has been suggested that the copy from which S and L descend must have been created when the controversy regarding this theology was still vivid in Byzantium, that is, shortly after 553, by an editor who had access to previously unpublished notes of the author of the *Christian Topography*.[25] This hypothesis seems likely and the early date for the splitting of the stemma is of great significance for the discussion of the treatise, because miniatures which appear in Vat as well as in S and L most probably accompanied the text already before that date.

There is no question that the *Christian Topography* was illustrated from the outset, as the presence of the miniatures is clearly indicated by a variety of introductory passages referring to figures.[26] Yet, fundamental to any attempt at understanding the *Christian Topography* is establishing the extent to which the preserved pictures reflect the original illustration. In approaching this problem, the significance of the early date for the splitting of the stemma, so far largely overlooked by art historians, must not be underestimated. In the case of the miniatures which are the same in the codices of both branches of the stemma, we may be fairly certain that their iconography reflects that of the pictures in the sixth-century original. Naturally, the question is more complex in the case of illustrations preserved only in one branch. In considering these illustrations, a careful analysis of the text–image relationship, as well as of the relationship between various images, can

[24] IX:26–8.

[25] Winstedt, 1909, 25–6; Wolska, 1962, 160; Wolska-Conus, 1968, 56, 86. For discussion of the reception of the Council of 553, and the lack of any evidence of continuing controversy in the Greek and Latin environment, see Price, 2009, 100–1.

[26] For references to καταγραφή; διαγραφή σχῆμα, σκάριφος see Prologue 1–2; Hypothesis 5, 8; II:80; IV passim; V:13, 18, 19, 22, 32, 33, 46, 47, 55, 65, 66, 121, 139, 189, 248; VI:13, 33, 34; VII:71, 82, 88, 94; IX:6, 10, 26.

provide a clearer indication as to whether the picture belonged to the original set. As I hope to demonstrate, the *Christian Topography* was conceived as a highly coherent work. This coherence and the unity of argument, reinforced through a network of cross-references, both visual and textual, permits us to distinguish between the original shape of the treatise and the later additions.

1 The author and the context of the creation of the *Christian Topography*

1.1 The name of the author

The author of the *Christian Topography* does not reveal his name, merely calling himself 'a Christian' (Χριστιανός).[1] He remains anonymous to Photios, who describes the treatise as *A Book of a Christian, a Commentary on the Octateuch* (Χριστιανοῦ βίβλος ἑρμηνεία εἰς τὴν ὀκτάτευχον).[2] It is only in the eleventh century that the name Kosmas begins to appear: in L, the treatise is attributed to 'Kosmas the monk' (Κοσμᾶς μοναχός), but this name, inscribed at the beginning of Book I (fol. 20v) above a decorative band, seems to be added by a different hand.[3] Moreover, nothing in the text permits the supposition that the author was a monk.[4] Likewise in the eleventh century, the name 'Kosmas' accompanied by the epithet 'Indikopleustes' (Ἰνδικοπλεύστες) starts appearing in commentaries on the Psalms and Gospels, which quote the *Christian Topography*.[5] Although it has been suggested that it was invented by a later scribe in much the same way as the epithet 'Klimakos' was given to John, the author of the *Heavenly Ladder*,[6] in this case one would rather expect the author to be called 'Kosmikos'.[7] On the other hand the epithet 'Indikopleustes' (one who sailed to India) is otherwise attested only in the sixth century: employed by Olympiodoros as a common noun referring to those who sail to India,[8] it also appears in

[1] Pinax 3; V:257; VII:1; VII:96–7; VIII:31. In Vat, a short passage at the end of Book VII describes it as a work of a certain Χριστινός, but this name is clearly just a misspelling of the word Χριστιανός (Stornajolo, 1908, 10).
[2] Photios, *Bibliotheke* cod. 36.
[3] Wolska-Conus, 1968, 61.
[4] Without any justification from the text, some scholars have simply assumed that, after retiring from his mercantile career, Kosmas entered a monastery following in the footsteps of his friend Menas, who, as Kosmas writes in Book II:56, became a monk in Raithou (McCrindle, 1897, 8; Winstedt, 1909, 3; Cabrol and Leclercq, 1928, col. 821; Clark, 1953, 26; Jansma, 1959, 160; Parker, 2008, 103–4).
[5] Schonack, 1912; Wolska-Conus, 1968, 109–15.
[6] Fabricius, 1907, 603–17; Beazley, 1897, 277.
[7] Winstedt, 1909, 3; Preisigke, 1922, 183; Cabrol and Leclercq, 1928, col. 820.
[8] Olympiodoros, *Commentary on Aristotle's Meteora* 81.26; 163.3; Bowersock, 2013, 23.