# Introduction
## Mapping medieval geographies

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> The discipline imprinted in a sequentially unfolding narrative predisposes the reader to think historically, making it difficult to see the text as a map, a geography of simultaneous relations and meanings that are tied together by a spatial rather than a temporal logic.[1]

In the early years of the fourteenth century an English minor lord by the name of Henry de Bray set down an account of those lands in Northamptonshire that belonged to his family. Descriptions of where these lands lay, what they were worth, as well as copies of charters relating to when they were acquired by the de Bray family, survive in two British Library manuscripts.[2] One manuscript, Cotton Nero C XII, differs slightly from the other, however, in that its second folio contains a description of the world followed by a list of all the counties of England.[3] Like contemporary *mappaemundi*, de Bray's 'descriptio mundi' follows a tripartite formula, dividing the world into three continents, relating their origins to the sons of Noah, and listing within each the provinces they comprise. Likewise, with the named English counties de Bray's approach is to group them geographically. Following a sequence that reveals a regional pattern and underlying spatial logic, he starts with the counties situated in southern England, then moves north, listing those of the Midlands and northern England, before turning southwards to his own region of England, ending with counties of the eastern lowlands. Orientating himself and his readers firstly to a 'world map' and then to a national geography, only then does de Bray set out to record his own particular localized geographies of Harlestone Manor with its fields and habitations.

Through its geographical contents and its spatial ordering de Bray's estate book reveals sensitivity both to space and scale, mapping his desire

[1] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 1.
[2] British Library (BL) MSS. Cotton Nero C xii; Lansdown 761.
[3] Dorothy Willis (ed. and tr.), *The Estate Book of Henry de Bray of Harlestone, Co. Northants (c.1289–1340)*, Camden Third Series 27 (London: Camden Society, 1916).

to place Harlestone and its lands and people within wider worlds, some familiar, others more distant. The folios in de Bray's Cotton Nero manuscript thus map myriad medieval geographies, both those personal to him, by being lived and experienced first-hand, and those that came from elsewhere, reflecting knowledge of certain geographical sources – now unknown – that he thought as worthy as the records of lands, charters and accounts. The essays contained in this volume echo de Bray's geographical encounters, ranging from those concerned with geographies of the wider world, through to more incidental geographies that similarly map out particular worlds within the world.

*Mapping Medieval Geographies* brings together the work of a group of scholars from different disciplines whose common interest lies in how the world was understood in the Middle Ages. Their contributions here provide a measure of the concern and current engagement of medievalists in ideas of space and place, maps and mappings, and geography and cartography, reflecting an ever increasing preoccupation with the spatial within contemporary humanities discourse.[4] The volume here, like de Bray's estate book, comprises two particular facets of 'medieval geography': providing, firstly, a sense of *geographical traditions* across the Middle Ages, in which essays in Part I map out intellectual and scholarly engagements with 'geography' as a subject, a field of enquiry, tracing chronologically the widespread transmission and circulation of geographical sources in the Latin West from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance; and then, secondly, focusing on *geographical imaginations*, essays in Part II deal with Arabic, Judaic and Latin and Orthodox Christian encounters with the geographical through subjectively experienced and embodied spatial practices, using images and texts to map out these 'imagined geographies'. There are connections to be made between 'traditions' and 'imaginations', for these two dimensions of medieval geographies existed not as discrete entities but as integrated views of the world, each influencing the other, as de Bray's account also reveals.

The complex and myriad nature of 'medieval geographies' is apparent in collections of essays published over the past decade or so, for example in Talbert and Unger's *Cartography in Antiquity in the Middle Ages*, which examines the relationship between medieval maps and texts, in Allen's *Eastward Bound*, an exploration of travel accounts linking eastern and western cultural traditions of the Middle Ages, and in those volumes that have considered imagined and material spaces and places, such as

[4] On the 'spatial turn' see Barney Warf and Santa Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Hanawalt and Kobialka's *Medieval Practices of Space*, and Tomasche and Gilles's *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages*.[5] Where *Mapping Medieval Geographies* differs from these previous studies is in its attempt to approach the subject by embedding the volume's content within contemporary geographical discourse. Indeed, 'geographical traditions' and 'geographical imaginations' are commonplace phrases in modern-day (Anglophone) geography and critical thought, thanks especially to the titles of two influential books by two key geographers, *The Geographical Tradition* by David Livingstone and *Geographical Imaginations* by Derek Gregory.[6] During the past two decades these two themes have been well explored by human geographers, by those concerned with geography's history and the trajectory of western geography as a 'contested enterprise', as well as by those interested in visual and textual representations of places, lands and landscapes, and what these reveal of past perceptions of the world.[7] These are themes addressed explicitly by the essays that make up the two parts of this book, and form the rationale for its structure and organization.

By taking both a temporal and a spatial approach to 'mapping' medieval geographies this volume aims to address the issue, identified by Edward Soja in his opening quotation, of how to combine the historical and the geographical without privileging one over the other. Although geographers often work historically, few have so far attempted to do what this volume does. Looking both at traditions of geography and at geographical imaginations in the Middle Ages, *Mapping Medieval Geographies* contributes not only towards our understanding of the medieval world but also offers insights that will benefit more generally those interested in the spatial and the geographical. These are concerns not just for geographers

[5] Richard J. A. Talbert and Richard W. Unger (eds.), *Cartography in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Fresh Perspectives, New Methods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (eds.), *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Rosamund Allen (ed.), *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers 1050–1550* (Manchester University Press, 2004); Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka (eds.), *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

[6] David Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

[7] For example, see Morag Bell, Robin Butlin and Mike Heffernan (eds.), *Geography and Imperialism, 1820–1940* (Manchester University Press, 1995); Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Denis Cosgrove, *Geography and Vision: Seeing, Imagining and Representing the World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008); Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives. Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

but for all those historians who have embraced the humanities' 'spatial turn', including medievalists from different specialisms and fields, a number of whom are contributing authors here. Collectively, their essays represent an interdisciplinary mapping of medieval geographies, covering a long temporal span as well as a broad geographical and multicultural compass, from the Byzantine and Arabic worlds of the Mediterranean through to Christian Europe. But in their individual *mappings* of medieval geographies, both literal and figurative, the volume's authors also seek self-consciously to reflect different, multi-disciplinary perspectives. Thus the volume itself is edited by a geographer, while its various contributors as historians of art, literature, science, geography and cartography, not only take as their focus different objects and objectives of historical (and geographical) enquiry but also employ scholarly approaches and apparatus that are constitutive of their own particular fields and specialisms.

Dividing between 'geographical traditions' and 'geographical imaginations' allows us to map from the volume's essays two distinctive emerging agendas among medievalists interested in the geographical and spatial, with, on the one hand, those concerned primarily with narrating histories and historiographies of medieval geography and cartography, and on the other, those concerned with understanding spatial relationships through exploring histories of spaces and places. Separating out *geographical traditions* from *geographical imaginations* allows us to explore those links and connections that ran between them. To help demonstrate this, what follows is in part a historiographical contextualization of the volume's essays, through the two themes they address, as well as an attempt to bridge these themes to show how the contributions and their contributors speak to one another. Taken together they provide a sense of the myriad geographies that permeated all aspects of cultural life in the Middle Ages, within the Latin West and beyond.

## Geographical traditions

What sources of geographical thought and knowledge circulated in and around Europe through the Middle Ages, and how was geography understood at the time, whether in the form of 'textual geographies', such as those descriptions of the world compiled by scholars in particular centres of learning, or through 'visual geographies', those maps and depictions of the terrestrial and celestial worlds that modern scholars for so long judged to be poor examples of cartography? The essays in this first half of the volume address these key questions, and by doing so

challenge myths that have dogged the study of medieval geographies and cartography for over a century.[8] Far from simply repeating geographical content derived from classical sources, or producing 'inaccurate' maps, those in the Middle Ages writing geography – regardless of whether they saw their work as geographical – created new geographies, reflecting the norms and values of their own age, while in various ways the cartographic forms that visualized the world were 'truthful' for the particular purposes the maps served.[9] So it is possible not only to expose the view that geography saw little study in medieval Europe but also to challenge the oft-repeated orthodoxy that the Middle Ages represents a geographic and cartographic lacuna in a western history of intellectual and scientific endeavour.

Ptolemy casts a long shadow over not just medieval geography but the Middle Ages generally, for there are still those who write of the modern 'discovery' of Ptolemy in the West, and bind this into a story about a new 'cartographic consciousness' through which the Old World 'discovered' the Americas.[10] Yet as some historians are now beginning to demonstrate, Ptolemy was neither 'lost' to the West in the Middle Ages nor was the Renaissance characterized by a switch from 'medieval' to 'modern' modes of cartographic and geographic representation; rather the revisionist history of medieval geography is decidedly more complex.[11] Knowing this is in part important in countering continued simplistic claims about the naïvety of geographical knowledge in the Middle Ages, and traditional western-orientated histories of science and discovery. It signals too that further detailed study of geography and cartography in the Middle Ages is required, revisiting medieval visual and textual geographical sources, including Ptolemaic ones. Here the work of Patrick Gautier Dalché and Margriet Hoogvliet, in particular, has undermined

[8] For example, see Raymond Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, vol. 2*: A History of Exploration and Geographical Science from the Close of the Ninth to the Middle of the Thirteenth Century (c.* ad *900–1260)* (London: Henry Frowde, 1901), 549–642. Cf. Natalia Lozovsky, 'Telling a new story of pre-modern geography: challenges and rewards', *Dialogues in Human Geography* 1 (2011), 178–82.

[9] See Keith D. Lilley, '*Quid sit mundus*? Making space for medieval geographies', *Dialogues in Human Geography* 1 (2011), 191–7.

[10] For the repeated orthodoxy, see Norman J. W. Thrower, *Maps and Civilization: Cartography in Culture and Society*, 3rd edn. (Chicago University Press, 2007), 58; John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping and the Geo-coded World* (London: Routledge, 2004), 96–9, who refers to a new 'cartographic consciousness' emerging in Renaissance Europe. See also Donald K. Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England: Re-writing the World in Marlowe, Spenser, Raleigh and Marvell* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 41–3.

[11] For a summary of such revisionist views, see Keith D. Lilley, 'Geography's medieval history: a neglected enterprise?', *Dialogues in Human Geography* 1(2011), 147–62.

the old order, revealing the ways in which Ptolemy was understood in the Middle Ages, in different spatial contexts, as well as demonstrating the assimilation of different geographical sources and traditions.[12] As an example of this, Hoogvliet uses a printed edition of Johann Reger's *Geographia* of 1486, pointing out how it included earlier works, such as Jean Germain's *La mappemonde spirituelle* of *c.* 1450, Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Naturale* of the thirteenth century, and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and *De natura rerum*, both *c.* 600.[13] Through exploring these 'geographical traditions', essays in the first half of this volume similarly examine this spectrum of textual and visual geographical sources in the Middle Ages, as well as locales of their production and consumption.

The work of Ptolemy is considered by Jesse Simon (Chapter 1), not as a source of 'mathematical geography', however, but as a source of the more descriptive 'chorography' that formed one of three constituent components in his *Geographia*, dealing with 'the form and character of localised spaces and places'.[14] Simon's essay examines the relationships between cartography and chorography in late antique contexts and in so doing explores the roots of traditions of later, medieval descriptions of regions and places, whether depicted in graphic or textual form.[15] This raises the issue of continuity in language and nomenclature, of whether the apparent absence of use of a particular word – of Greek origin in the case of 'geography' or 'chorography' – should be taken also to mean that likewise they failed to exist as ideas or concepts, for one of the reasons why 'geography' is assumed (wrongly) to have disappeared in the Latin West between Antiquity and the Renaissance is because of the apparent paucity of written sources that use this particular word. Caution is required here, however, since 'geography' was not quite as invisible in medieval texts as some have suggested. For example, Gautier Dalché points to a Latin translation of an Arabic astronomical text undertaken by Hermann of Carinthia, who, writing *c.* 1140 in southern France and Spain, inserted a 'textual *mappamundi*' and placed it 'under the patronage of those whom he calls *geographi*, that is to say those who draw up

[12] Patrick Gautier Dalché, 'The reception of Ptolemy's *Geography* (end of the fourteenth to beginning of the sixteenth century)', in *The History of Cartography*, vol. 3*: Cartography in the European Renaissance, Part 1*, David Woodward (ed.) (University of Chicago Press, 2007), 285–364; Patrick Gautier Dalché, *La Géographie de Ptolémée en Occident (IVe–XVIe siècle)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009); Margriet Hoogvliet, 'The medieval texts of the 1486 Ptolemy Edition by Johann Reger of Ulm', *Imago Mundi* 54 (2002), 7–18.
[13] Hoogvliet, '1486 Ptolemy Edition'.
[14] Denis Cosgrove, *Apollo's Eye: A Cartographic Genealogy of the Earth in the Western Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 103.
[15] Jesse Simon, ch. 1, this vol.

maps'.[16] Similarly, Natalia Lozovsky has shown that with ninth- and tenth-century manuscripts and glosses on late antique geographical and cosmographical sources, such as Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, 'Carolingian commentators usually explain the words *geographicus* and *geographia* by translating them from the Greek', and finds specific use of *geographia* in two manuscripts which explain, '*GEOGRAPHIA id est terrae scriptio*', both of them originating from important monastic centres in northern France, Auxerre and Cluny.[17]

Descriptions of the world, then, defined what 'geography' was to Latin authors and authorities in the West, and such examples confirm that the word 'geography' was not unknown to medieval scholars. However, geographical sources, whether visual depictions or textual descriptions of the world, also existed independently from specific usage in naming them as 'geography', and such sources circulated widely throughout the Middle Ages. The dominance of particular sources of geographical knowledge is a subject explored in Chapter 2 in Andrew Merrills's examination of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, 'arguably the most influential book, after the Bible, in the learned world of the Latin West for nearly a thousand years'.[18] The *Etymologies* assimilated geographical knowledge from earlier encyclopaedic works, and provided an accessible accumulation of these for medieval scholars, describing for them the wider cosmos and its parts, as well as the earth, its constituent continents and their provinces. Through giving information on lands and cities, and through the text's spatial ordering, the *Etymologies* presented a model for other *terrae scriptio* that came later. This is a point discussed by Merrills who, in building on his earlier study of early-medieval geographical authorities, examines the composition of the *Etymologies* and its sources, reminding us of the influences exerted by Isidore throughout the Middle Ages (as Reger's *Geographia* of 1486 demonstrates).[19] Merrills argues that in his geography in the *Etymologies* Isidore was 'presenting the world on its own terms'.[20]

[16] Patrick Gautier Dalché, 'Maps in words: The descriptive logic of medieval geography, from the eighth to the twelfth century', in *The Hereford World Map. Medieval World Maps and Their Context*, Paul D. A. Harvey (ed.) (London: The British Library, 2006), 223–42, at p. 230.
[17] Natalia Lozovsky, *'The Earth is Our Book'. Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400–1000* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 9, n. 5.
[18] Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and Oliver Berghof (eds. and trs.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.
[19] Andrew H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[20] Andy Merrills, ch. 2, this vol.

Some indication of how such authorities on geography were subsequently appropriated, interpreted and understood in monastic contexts is taken up by Natalia Lozovsky (Chapter 3) in her close study of codices and manuscripts belonging to the library of the monastery of St Gall, now in Switzerland. Here Lozovsky draws upon her earlier acclaimed study, *The Earth is Our Book*, but looks in more detail specifically at St Gall manuscripts with an aim to understand how the monastery's incumbents *read* geography.[21] This is a difficult task, but one made possible thanks to annotations and glosses that appear on a codex of Orosius' *History against the Pagans* (St Gall Stiftsbibliothek MS 621), in particular additions made, dating to the eleventh century, 'identified as that of Ekkehard IV (*c.* 980–1060)'.[22] The significance of these, for us, lies in Ekkehard's desire to add to the textual description of the Holy Land a visual depiction – a map – placed in the margins as an aid to comprehending this geographical description, while other textual amendments to Orosius in effect suggest an updating by Ekkehard to reflect contemporary geographical knowledge. Far from accepting uncritically his sources therefore, Ekkehard's additions and amendments show how geographies were being remade by scholars in centres of learning, not just in monasteries but elsewhere too, in Europe's nascent universities, for example.

Canonical sources of early medieval geography such as those examined by Merrills and Lozovsky also characterized later medieval scholarship too, reflected, for example, in the ways in which geographical knowledge was assimilated into textual and visual geographies of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Two essays address this enduring aspect of geographical traditions, one by Amanda Power (Chapter 4) on the cosmography of Roger Bacon, and one by Marcia Kupfer (Chapter 5) on the now lost but no less celebrated Ebstorf *mappamundi*. Both essays serve to reinforce the growing realization among historians of medieval geography and cartography that to divorce maps from texts is a mistake, and that instead 'maps in texts' and 'texts in maps' were mutually constitutive as descriptions and depictions of the world.[23] Thus with Roger Bacon, a theologian and natural philosopher in Oxford writing in the later thirteenth century, Power looks at 'the constitutive elements of the way in which Bacon imagined the cosmos, the world, and the

[21] Lozovsky, *'The Earth is Our Book'*. [22] Natalia Lozovsky, ch. 3, this vol.
[23] See Dalché, 'Maps in words'; Patrick Gautier Dalché, *La* Descriptio mappe mundi *de Hughes de Saint-Victor: Texte inedit avec introduction et commentaire* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1988); Peter Barber, 'The Evesham world map: a late medieval English view of god and the world', *Imago Mundi* 47 (1995), 13–33; Evelyn Edson, *Mapping Time and Space: How Medieval Mapmakers Viewed Their World* (London: British Library, 1997).

Church's role within it', which means looking at those written sources that influenced his thinking as well as the insights Bacon himself showed through his acute observations.[24] Looking at Bacon's writings this way yields again the complexities of defining the geographical in contemporary sources, yet for Bacon this clearly meant looking at the world graphically as well as textually, for as Power notes, in his *Opus maius* Bacon recognized when it came to trying to describe the world there were limits in 'verbal description alone' and that 'a map must be used to make them clear to our senses'.[25] To do so he seems to draw on Ptolemy's *Almagest*, translated into Latin in the twelfth century.

While Bacon's cosmography reveals an Oxford scholar viewing the world in Aristotelian terms, the Ebstorf *mappamundi* points instead to the continued importance of neo-Platonist thought in Christian theology and cosmography. Kupfer assesses this in her close reading of this world map of *c.* 1300, seeking to situate it both in its particular local, conventual setting (in Lower Saxony), as well as in its broader cosmological and doctrinal setting. Tracing through the image the unwritten influences that acted on its cartographic and visual content, but with an eye too on how the map was understood by those (women) who viewed it, Kupfer argues that the map's dual embodiment of the world and of Christ forges an indexical relationship between God above and humanity below, where 'The staring effigy reminds the novice to comport herself as if always under divine surveillance in accordance with the founding document of western monasticism, the Benedictine Rule'.[26] In creating geographical knowledge in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, once again, then, there is a mixing of the old and the new.

The two chapters on Roger Bacon and the Ebstorf *mappamundi* thus continue with themes developed in previous chapters, on the assimilation and reproduction of geographical knowledge, and on the influences exerted by the locales of production and consumption. These two dimensions of geographical traditions are explored further by the final chapters that make up the first half of the volume, where the focus moves chronologically forward in time to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to that period of European history typically seen as a transition from a pre- to post-Ptolemaic world, a so-called 'age of discovery'.[27] Chapters 6 and 7 by Meg Roland and Margaret Small immediately set a challenge to any such reductive views of geography and cartography in the later Middle Ages, and in this sense both provide support of those other historians of geography who have sought to undermine the modern

[24] Amanda Power, ch. 4, this vol.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Marcia Kupfer, ch. 5, this vol.
[27] See above, n. 10.

hubris that a sharp divide exists between the 'medieval' and 'modern'. In his monumental book *The Tropics of Empire*, Wey Gómez argues for such a reappraisal of cosmographical and geographical learning in the Columbian era and describes the cultural collision between the Old and New Worlds creating new geographical accounts alongside the old.[28] Here, Roland and Small explore similar connections, between print cultures and circuits of geography's dissemination, through their examination of the production and consumption of geographical knowledge in Tudor England and Renaissance Italy respectively.

Taking in not just maps but their relationships to texts, Roland and Small help to show again the persistence of earlier geographical knowledge within new arenas of learning and scholarship, as well as the continued duplicity of geography as a definable field of study, in some ways distinctive in content yet at the same time crossing into cognate areas such as cosmography and astronomy, just as it had in previous centuries. As Roland demonstrates, this is a period 'in which geographical thought and print culture productively co-developed, refashioning literary genres, geographic writing, and, eventually, cartography', as in England, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where English geographical thought circulated through print editions of Thomas Malory's Arthurian *Le Morte Darthur* (first printed in 1485), William Caxton's translation of *Mirrour of the World* (first printed in 1481), and editions of *The Kalender of Shepherds* and *The Compost of Ptholomeus* (each examined by Roland in her chapter).[29] In Italy at this same time, Ptolemaic geography was being assimilated too into new textual and visual geographies, but as Small's chapter on Giovanni Battista Ramusio's *Navigazioni e viaggi* shows, again the picture that emerges is far from a wholesale 'revolution', either in geography or in cartography. Between 1550 and 1559 in his compilation of *Navigazioni e viaggi*, Ramusio showed more interest in textual accounts of geography than with cartography, despite living in a world characterized now by many as one which saw 'the birth and growth of mapmaking',[30] and Small thus concludes that: 'he built up a geography that had more connection with Isidore, and his encyclopaedic coverage and careful systematic ordering, than with the post-Ptolemaic cosmographies of his own era'.[31]

What this long-established tradition of geography and cartography in medieval Europe reveals is an enduring spatial sensibility. The wider

[28] Nicholás Wey Gómez, *The Tropics of Empire: Why Columbus Sailed South to the Indies* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008).
[29] Meg Roland, ch. 6, this vol.
[30] Pickles, *History of Spaces*, 99.
[31] Margaret Small, ch. 7, this vol.