CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

> [H]owever simple maps may appear at first sight, on analysis they are almost certainly less than straightforward.[1]

When we think of medieval world maps, we imagine an artifact like the circular Hereford mappa mundi with its distinctively Christian worldview.[2] Centered on Jerusalem, it draws the viewer's eye up toward Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, then around lands occupied by wondrous creatures like the shape-changing marsok and Biblical figures like Lot's wife about to turn into a pillar of salt. The Peutinger map, by contrast, remains the sole medieval survival of an entirely different paradigm. It depicts most of the inhabited world (*orbis terrarum* in Latin; *oikoumene* in Greek) as known to the ancients, from Britain's southern coastline to the farthest reach of Alexander's conquests in India and the island of Sri Lanka, showing rivers, lakes, islands, and mountains while also naming regions and the peoples who once claimed the landscape. Onto this oddly elongated panorama the mapmaker has plotted the ancient Roman road network – some 70,000 Roman miles of roads – with hundreds of icons along the routes, depicting towns and baths, places to change horses and to find a meal or a bed for the night, with mileage from point to point marked in Roman numerals. In its broad outlines, as in nearly every detail, it presents itself as secular and Roman, assertively not a medieval Christian map.

Historians of cartography have long accepted this self-presentation at face value, viewing the medieval map as a copy of a Roman ancestor, effectively the only world map to survive from Roman antiquity and valuable primarily as a vehicle for speculation about a lamentably lost Roman original.[3] In the prevailing view, only a "copy" of an ancient map remains, imperfect "in its current debased state," to be mined for ancient data and studied for clues to its Roman context.[4]

Roman sources certainly supplied the map's contents, its place names, routes, and mileage. A late Roman map may even lie at the root of this one. Or it may not. The weight of scholarly opinion soundly favors an ancient archetype, and our mapmaker's model may have been one map in a line of succession from a Roman mapping tradition otherwise lost. On the other hand, Roman itinerary lists and geographical works might have supplied the data for a Carolingian mapmaker to draw upon when creating the prototype for this mapping tradition, as suggested in the following.

Whatever its origins, the surviving map deserves study in its own right, in its own medieval context. My primary aim then is not to contest theories that place an ancient Roman map at the beginning of a long line of transmission culminating in the Peutinger map, but to address the artifact we actually possess, first and foremost as a relic of its own time. Although our mapmaker had an earlier image before him as he worked, I will not call our map a copy of that earlier version. As we shall see, medieval mapmakers did not precisely duplicate another map. Even more significantly, they seem to have felt considerable freedom in their creative mapmaking. While our map therefore continues an older mapping tradition, its production speaks directly to its own contemporary concerns, deeply engaged in the cultural and political issues of its own day. This book attempts to recover that tradition and explore its relevance to the era of the Hohenstaufen emperors, when a mapmaker eschewed the predominant T-O model

of medieval Christian maps and troubled to make a large map of a lost Roman world.

The World of the Peutinger Map

The long twelfth century (ca. 1050–ca. 1229) was an age of restless movement. Pilgrims and merchants, ambassadors, and marauders crisscrossed Europe and the Mediterranean. Waves of crusading armies set out from the west and made their way to Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem. In Spain as in Palestine, mass expulsions and invasions turned townsfolk and farmers into refugees. The resulting physical and cultural collisions produced massacres and hatreds that persist into the present. These encounters also inspired an outpouring of work in science and literature, in jurisprudence, and in the arts – a corpus unprecedented in its diversity and geographical range. As much of this creative production suggests, the increased mobility accustomed western Europeans to imagine an expansive worldview, as they contested and sometimes controlled lands in the Levant and as remote as Edessa, between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. After Crusaders captured Acre and Tyre, western merchants kept these strongholds as trading centers, exchanging European textiles and weapons for Chinese silks and Indian spices. Nurtured in the new universities, in courts, and in cloisters, curious western minds sought to learn more about the peoples and lands they were rediscovering.

Cultural collisions of the long twelfth century may well have inspired the preservation of a fading and deteriorating map. At the end of that era, perhaps as late as 1220, a manuscript workshop in southern Germany – a region then known as greater Swabia – produced the map we call Peutinger's, modeling it on an older roll already missing its first leaf or leaves.[5] A set of eleven separate parchment sheets, once attached in a roll 671.7 centimeters wide by 33 centimeters high (about 22

feet by 1 foot), this beautifully colored artifact (MS Lat. 324) is now among the treasures of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, not far from where it was most likely created.

How can we explain the remarkable singularity of this extraordinary world map? As the long twelfth century came to a close, who had the resources and the motivation to reproduce an object that appears so antiquated and pagan and Roman? In the absence of external records, can evidence on the map itself lead us to the place, time, and purpose of the surviving map's creation? These are the questions at the center of this book.

The search for answers leads us to Roman roads, to a propaganda campaign between popes and emperors marked by a medieval battle of the maps, and into the competing worldviews that fashioned medieval maps. Ultimately it takes us to the ambitions and the travels of imperial agents and crusaders, whose experiences and longings this map reflects. The map, then, presents a window on the cultures that influenced its production, offering clues for interpreting its religious and cultural context. We begin with a brief description of the artifact itself and its history since it surfaced in 1508.

The Material Object

This map depicts the *oikoumene* known to the Romans, oriented essentially to the north and widened so that it is twenty-two times longer than it is high, its expanse imaginatively stretched like an east-west ribbon with a narrow Mediterranean running horizontally through much of it. The creator of this map used as his model an earlier map missing its first sheet or sheets, likely containing most of Britain, the Spanish peninsula, and western North Africa. The draftsman knew that his source had lost its westernmost territories.[6] At the left margin he omitted the finish of a water boundary or a heavy black line, demarcations that indicate the other borders. Instead, he drew red lines

for routes that led to the left margin, and presumably beyond. Along that vertical line he found some place names without their first letters, lost with the previous parchment sheet. Sometimes he seems to have reconstructed the missing section as best he could, and sometimes he reproduced only what he could read. So he has apparently created Baromaci (1A1), probably for the Caesaromagus of the Barrington Atlas (8H3), and written Roribis (1A1) for Durobriva. Also, in Britain, he wrote the clipped form Madvs (1A1) instead of Noviomagus, and Ridvmo (1A1) for Moridunum. We do not know whether our mapmaker's incomplete model was the damaged original, devised in such an unusual format by a cartographer of exceptional ingenuity, or the sole intermediary, or even just one in a line of mediators between our map and its prototype. The mystery of the map's transmission lies at the heart of the inquiry to follow.

The medieval mapmaker worked with eleven parchment sheets, glued together to form a long strip.[7] He began by sketching the green waters – the ocean confining the inhabited world as well as the seas, lakes, and rivers within it. The world he outlined extended from the small surviving section of Britain generally eastward through the Roman imperium and beyond, to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Italy, turned on its side and lengthened to fill one-third of the map's width, dominates this *orbis terrarum*. Many viewers have imagined that Rome occupied the center of the archetype when the western edge was intact.[8]

In the waterways our mapmaker included more than a hundred islands, and inland he next added either the larger city icons or the mountains. Then he drew the roads themselves in red ink, writing in black ink the distance figures from site to site along the route. Likely following his model, he included a surprisingly detailed collection of routes and place names while exhibiting a less-sure grasp of where they were in relation to one another or to coastlines or other geographical features. The

same artisan who did the drawing seems also to have written the names that identified towns and stopping places, rivers and open water, perhaps 90 regions and other geographical units as well as about 140 peoples, identifying close to 2,700 places in all.[9]

Along the way he filled his parchment with vibrant color, using black for coastlines and the approximately 140 mountain ranges, as well as for much of the writing; green for water; red for the top and bottom margins and for some names; and decorative brown and blue in the more than 550 vignettes, some of which also feature the other colors in his palette. In completing many of the details, he may well have worked on the individual sheets from left to right. In any case, he drew with great care through the eastern Mediterranean but with less surety farther east, where the lands were less familiar to him and where he seems to have hastened to finish his task.[10]

For nearly every aspect of the mapmaking process, we cannot tell how closely the artist conformed to his model or indeed how closely any versions in the line of transmission followed their respective models. We presume that the basic features of the surviving map mirror the prototype – the distinctive shape, the general choice of pictorial signs, the route network – but again we cannot be certain. Scholars have speculated, without reaching complete agreement, on the era that produced the original map. (More on this later.) They have come to a greater consensus in tentative conclusions about sources consulted by that first map's designer. Likely at the core lies a large collection of itineraries like the so-called *Antonine Itinerary*, listing the distance from one place on the road to the next.[11] The variety of case endings on the map's names retains its itinerary origins, where a place name might occur in the ablative case (indicating the place from which the imagined traveler came), the locative (the place where he or she was), or the accusative

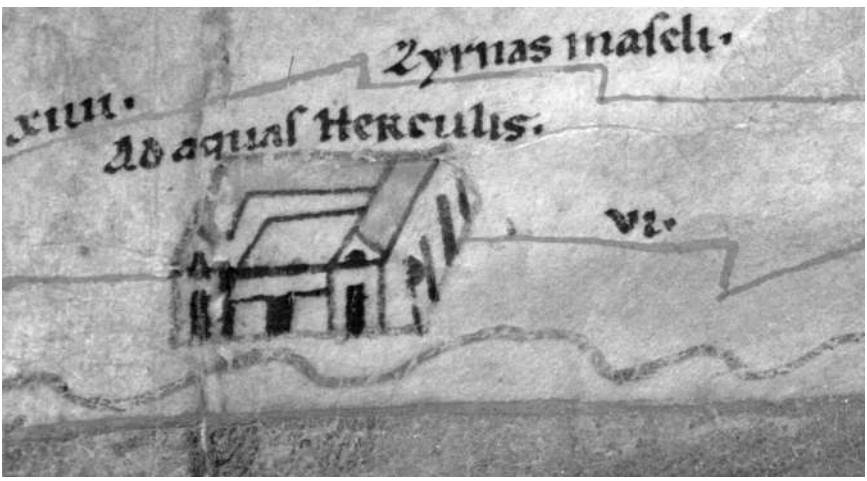

Figure 1.1 Ad aqvas Hercvlis, 3C1 on the Peutinger map.
Source: ÖNB/Vienna, *Tabula Peutingeriana*.

(the place to which his or her road headed). *Aquae* (baths or spas), for instance, appear rarely in the nominative case, but eleven times as ablative or locative *aqvis* (e.g., *Aqvis calidis*, 9B2) and five as *aqvas* (e.g., *Aqvas volaternas*, 3B2). Twice the map marks a bath symbol with "to the baths" (*Ad Aqvas casaris*, 3C4; *Ad aqvas Hercvlis*, 3C1, shown in Figure 1.1), as an itinerary might list them.

The mapmaker's failure to restore the nominative endings may be one sign that precision was not the mapmaker's goal. Alternatively, it may simply indicate his insecurity in identifying the nominative form. Modern readers of the map faced the same dilemma when they chose Oplontis, shown in Figure 1.2, for the name of a train station near Pompeii, from the map's Oplont[i]s (5C5), which surely has an ablative or a locative case ending.[12]

By compiling and comparing itinerary lists, the original mapmaker presumably figured the approximate relationship of one route to another, readily seeing where roads met. This was

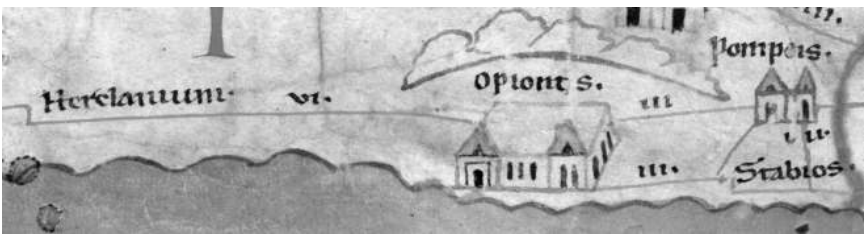

Figure 1.2 Oplont[.]s (5B5) A crease in the parchment conceals the missing letter "i." The pinhole below the vi. mileage marker indicates that the map was once hung on a wall or attached to a backing for display.

Source: ÖNB/Vienna, *Tabula Peutingeriana*. The database to Talbert, *Rome's World*, supplies this information.

doubtless easier to gauge for segments where he had confirming information, whether from personal experience or more frequently from geographical texts or even other maps. It is unclear how he selected the symbols that identify the types of stopping places along the roads. No surviving itinerary lists include such icons. Other documents the mapmaker may have consulted, however, do feature similar images. Manuals on the Roman land surveyors, the *agrimensores*, for instance, still survive, drawn together in various collections as early as the sixth century, some illustrated with boundary stones, roads and rivers, and walled towns resembling those on the Peutinger map.[13] Likewise, extant manuscripts of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a late Roman governmental register of civil and military officials, preserve geographically arranged insignia featuring *castella* (walled settlements and strongholds) and enthroned figures. A Carolingian manuscript of the *Notitia* also held itineraries and geographical works with pictorial symbols.[14] For an example, see Plate 1 which shows the insigne for Mesopotamia, with personifications at Figure 3.6. Collections such as that manuscript, lost in the sixteenth century, might have helped the mapmaker assemble his itinerary map, choose the icons, and decide which places to mark with a suitable vignette.

The map's geographical range encompasses, in its general outline, the territories that Romans traditionally included

in the *orbis terrarum*, as, for instance, contained in the first-century CE *Natural History* (Books 3–6) of Pliny the Elder, a work much admired and copied by the Carolingians.[15] Pliny's account begins with Spain but goes on to highlight Italy, "nursling and mother of all other lands," divinely chosen "to unite scattered empires" (3.39). Rome naturally attracts Pliny's particular attention. He even records the circumference of its walls and the mileage from the milestone in the Roman Forum to the city's thirty-seven gates before moving on to Sicily and other Mediterranean islands, Greece, and the Danube region, then doubling back to Britain, followed by North Africa and Egypt, the lands of the eastern Mediterranean, and those around the Black Sea and the Caspian. He offers a brief note on the Chinese before a long excursus on India, and particularly its rivers, recalling Alexander and following the reports of Alexander's surveyors, Diognetus and Baeton (6.60). Pliny presents a rather detailed view of Taprobane (now Sri Lanka, the island at the far eastern boundary of the Peutinger map), then returns to Babylon, Arabia, Red Sea harbors, and Ethiopia, concluding with islands of the African coast, as he cites another of Alexander's entourage, the historian Clitarchus. Pliny's interests range from physical geography – rivers, mountains, and islands – to mineral resources and fertility of the soil, the peoples in these lands, their cities, and their customs, history, and myths. His precise descriptions of topographic features and his distance measurements, such as when he reports various reckonings for the circumference of the Black Sea, would offer valuable guidance for a mapmaker. If that mapmaker wished to articulate imperial space, he would find his aims aligned with those of Pliny, whose "taxonomies subtly transform his account of the world into an account of the world as empire."[16] The *Natural History* found its way into the libraries of the great Carolingian monasteries, where it profoundly influenced medieval culture along with medieval conceptions of the earth and the cosmos. Pliny's work especially suited the Carolingian

fascination with the Roman Empire and its broader, imperial worldview.

The map's boundaries, then, make Roman sense when we consider the breadth of the world known to Romans like Pliny and his audience. Perhaps we can especially understand its restricted northern limits, reaching only southern Germany, and along much of the bottom border the North African coast nestled just south of the Mediterranean and within the Roman imperium. Even the disproportionate lengthening of this *oikoumene* seems logical for a Roman mind deeply fascinated with Britain and India as the exotic frontiers. About Britain we cannot really speak, because only a small bit of it appears on this map, lost already in its model. In 1898, Konrad Miller published his reconstruction of that lost section, an imaginative creation often reproduced as if genuinely a part of the medieval map.[17] Miller assumed that a single sheet had disappeared. Weber reasonably suggested a greater loss, perhaps three sheets, to include more islands to the west and north – Hibernia (Ireland), the Shetland or Faroe Islands, or even Iceland and ultima Thule, isle of shifting identity for the ancients – and to allow for a key to the map or (a poignantly tantalizing prospect) to name the author or explain his purpose.[18] Additional sheets on the left edge would also balance the detailed representation of the East while matching Roman fascination with Britain and India, the far corners of the world in Roman imagination. Although Miller's reconstruction serves as a reminder that the map's western routes once included lands farther west, this fanciful attachment cannot otherwise feature in a discussion of the medieval map.[19]

While its western end is missing, this map stretches far to the east, marking the end of Roman control with the notation *Are(a)e fines romanorvm*, "areas that are the Roman frontier," and beneath this, *fines exercitvs syriatic(a)e et commertivm Barbaror(vm)*, "limit of the army [based in] Syria and [place for] commercial exchange with the barbarians" (both