
Mapping the Journey / Translating the World

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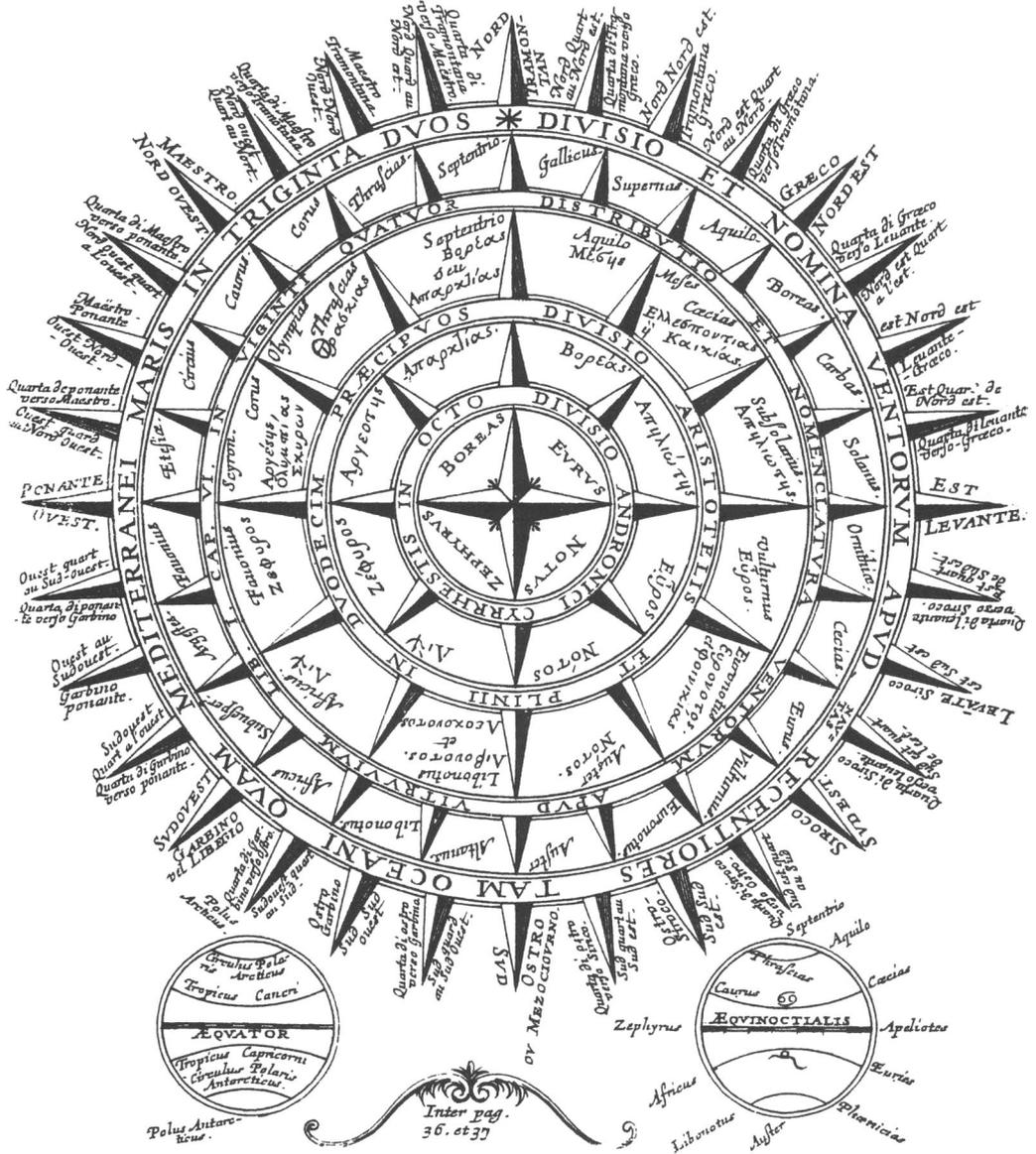
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VENTORVM ACCVRATA TABVLA SECVNDVM VETEREM ET NOVAM DISPOSITIONEM AC NOMEN-CLATVRAM.



Mapping the Journey / Translating the World ¹

A *cuarteta* by Antonio Machado, one of the most engaging and terse comments on travel in modern poetry, underscores some of the crucial elements of travel writing. A journey is a physical displacement that involves doing, viewing and thinking, the most fundamental human activities.

Al andar se hace camino
y al volver la vista atrás
se ve la senda que nunca
se ha de volver a pisar.²

Making a journey, looking at the path, returning home, and, eventually, talking or writing about it are the gnoseological operations that are at the foundation of travel narrative. The journey is not just a sequence of footsteps never to be imprinted again, but an object for the traveler's reflection. And writing one's journey it is just an attempt to re-create what one cannot regain, as in the well-known line by Yeats: "I sing what was lost," echoed by another famous line by Machado: "Yo canto lo que se pierde."

Almost half a century ago, Louis Marin stated that "le récit est un piège,"³ acknowledging the intrinsic impossibility of attaining objectivity in any narrative of human events. It is a fact that, as soon as writers sit, pen in hand, in front of a blank page, the infinite possibilities of journeys the blank page offers

1. Portions of this essay were read in 2002-2003 at the VIº Congreso internacional de caminería hispánica in Madrid; at the conference on "Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period" at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, AL; and as a seminar at Trinity College, Dublin, and the Università degli Studi di Catania.

A slightly different version of this essay will appear in the proceedings of the symposium of the Irish Royal Academy that was held in Galway, Ireland in November 2002.

2. Antonio Machado, "Proverbios y cantares," CXXXVI, 29.

3. *Le Récit est un piège* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1978).

transform them into literati, ready to reshape their story, to entertain and embellish the facts, losing track of what exactly has happened. As Marguerite de Navarre had emphasized four centuries before, most writings done by “gens de lettres” tend to favor “la beaulté de la rthorique,” befuddling “la vérité de l’histoire” (*Heptaméron*, Prologue). The elemental struggle of creative writing and the need to create a “narration héroïsante” (as Réal Ouellet called it) have led writers to reshape the world in a totally personal manner. Should one then look at other modes of description as more intrinsically objective than writing? Could drawings, photographs, and maps be better examples of objectivity?

The story of geographical displacements has been told through the ages in spoken and written words, alphabetical signs and sounds, conventions and signifiers that translate the experience of a physical reality for listeners and readers alike. Translating (from Latin, *transfere*⁴) implies transposing something (words, ideas, images) from somewhere into somewhere else, not just moving sentences from one language into another, but also physical realities into verbal utterances, as in Octavio Paz’s expression: “aprender a hablar es aprender a traducir.”⁵ This statement, naturally, covers any kind of utterance, from children’s cries of surprise to explorers’ attempts to explain the surrounding world to an audience which has never left home. A visitor from a far-away place, ignorant of the local language, needs the help of an interpreter to decipher sites, translate conversations, lead through labyrinthine situations. This intermediary, *cicerone* or dragoman, an ambiguous character in travel narrative, hated by the locals and suspicious to the traveler, is an essential facilitator who transfers notions and ideas from one culture to another. And travelers who return home become translators of some sort, mediators of a distant world for their listeners.

Physical entities can thus be transferred into the realm of spoken or written words or shaped into images and maps. Like words in traditional narrative, the language of cartography follows the classical definition “aliquid stat pro aliquo.” As the drawing an object indicates the concrete object itself, mapping a geographical entity implies that cartographers and readers have agreed to accept a complex set of conventions. The result underscores a specific relationship of an image with reality and will be subjected to the historical context that has produced it, its author’s idiosyncrasies, prejudices, lies, and political agenda.

4. In Romance languages, however, verbs like *tradurre*, *traduire*, *traducir* come from *trans-ducere*, that indicates the activity of conveying something across a body of water, and thus, metaphorically, from one language to another or from a reality to its verbal or graphic representation.. Etymologically, a metaphor (from the Greek *metaphorā*) is also a form of transferring a descriptive term from one object to another, different but analogous.

5. Octavio Paz. *Traducción: literatura y literalidad* (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1981): 7.

Maps have always been political tools,⁶ documenting conquered territories or areas to be taken from enemies, spying on adversaries and their wealth, particularly during the great explorations of the New World.⁷

In contemporary maps the size of typographic fonts indicates the status or size of a city, but early modern maps used other graphic symbols to signify to the reader the importance of a city, whether it was walled and fortified or just a defenseless market town, having a cathedral or a simple parish church.

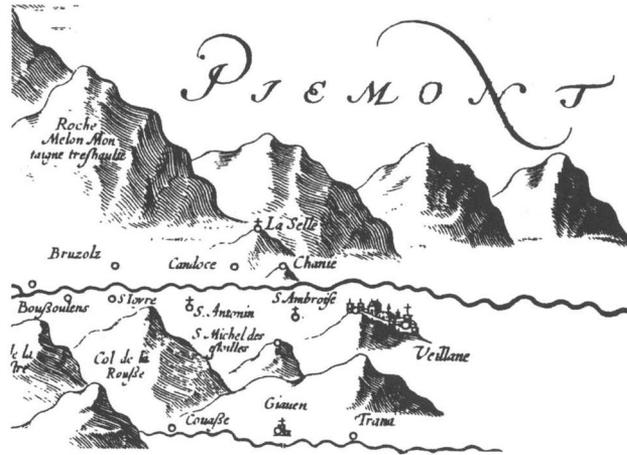


Fig. 1. A detail of *Sabaudiae Ducatus* by Jean de Boens (1617)

In some old maps, however, conventional symbols coexisted with visual images, as in this map of the well-traveled road from France to Italy through the mountains of Savoy between Chambéry and Turin. [Fig. 1] The main road of the Val di Susa follows the Dora Riparia from Bussoleno to Avigliana (*Villane*), but a parallel valley is also shown, from Coazza to Trana, along with the sketches of the mountain ridges of Rocciamelone and Colle La Russa. While a cross distinguishes market towns from simple hamlets, the town of Avigliana is indicated here by a picture of its church and palaces; the cartographer was more interested in the visual impact of his images than the correct scale of his map.

As transformations that aim at retaining many of the formal features of the original

6. Speaking on the strategic importance of visual observation and maps, Machiavelli suggested that the ruler should learn the basic notions of geographic strategy: “[...] e parte imparare la natura de’ siti e conoscere come surgono e monti, come imboccano le valle, come iacciono e piani, ed intendere la natura de’ fiumi e de’ paduli; e in questa porre grandissima cura” (*Principe*, XIV).

7. Returning to France after exploring the Mississippi Valley, Robert Cavelier de la Salle reported that this river emptied into the Gulf of Mexico near Matagorda Bay (now in Texas), “almost certainly falsifying its location to place it nearer the gold and silver of the Spanish colonies in order to increase the king’s interest in colonizing that area” (Vaughn L. Glasgow, ed., in *The sun King: Louis XIV and the New World*. New Orleans, LA: The Louisiana Museum Foundation, 1984: 318). Soon cartographers engraved maps based on La Salle’s account.

messages, translations cannot avoid losses and distortions, for all lexical and phonetic elements peculiar to the source may not be recreated in the target language. And, as far as pictures are concerned, rendering reality into images means constraining a three-dimensional reality into a two-dimensional image.

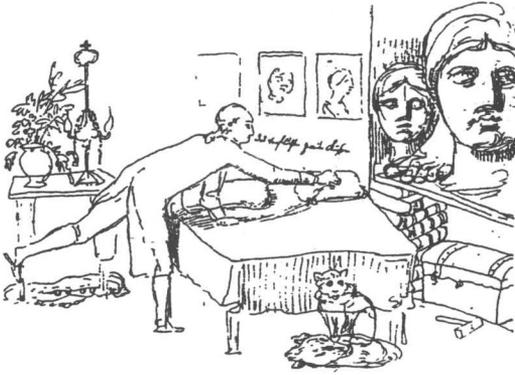


Fig. 2. "Das verfluchte Zweite Küssen" (Goethe in Rome)

More dramatically, any attempt to transfer and reducing a vast area of the globe onto a flat sheet cannot retain the curved status of the original. Therefore, distorted representations are normal in cartography. From Herodotus ("ópsis," sight) to Filippo Sassetti ("vedere, toccare e scrivere") to contemporary travelers and photographers, the most immediate experience of travel is a visual one. Eyesight, the most privileged of the human senses, was at the foundation of the Baconian and Galileian revolutions,

superseding even verbal interaction, particularly when travelers to far-away regions were ignorant of local languages. Explorers of new worlds were fond of including engravings of native people and wild animals in their maps or narratives⁸ to complement their verbal descriptions, since any comprehension of the whole experience of a vastly different "otherness" is just a synecdochic impression that does only partial justice to reality. The value of visual support to travelers was never so great as in the age of the Grand Tour, when foreign visitors to Italy admired her monuments, purchased valuable artwork, and had their portraits taken by local painters. Panini,⁹ Piranesi, Bellotto, Canaletto, and

8. Artists and scientists joined 18th-century expeditions to far away lands: Commerson embarked with Bougainville, Parkinson and Buchan with Captain Cook. Their function was to observe and record with graphic impartiality what would have been difficult to express verbally: flora, fauna, human customs. And painters documented the 1828 Champollion-Rosellini scientific mission to Egypt with a wealth of color drawings of hieroglyphs and frescoes as today's photographers routinely do for all geographic expeditions.

9. Giovanni Paolo Panini (1691-1765) produced numerous Roman "capricci," combining in his landscapes disparate monuments in imaginary compositions. They were sold to Grand Tour travelers and provided them with lasting mementos of their visit. See Gervase Jackson-Stops, *The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1985): 262-63.

the Dutch-born Vanvitelli became household names among the Grand Tourists.

Goethe, one of the most sensitive visitors to the Peninsula and also an accomplished draftsman, was escorted on his journey (1786-1787) by a number of artists who drew sketches of his favorite sites. His vision of Italy is conveyed to us, stereoscopically, through his words and more than 3,000 drawings¹⁰

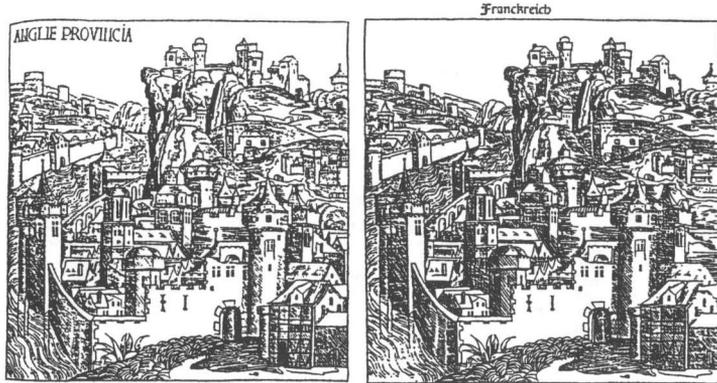


Fig. 3. The same woodcut in Schedel's *Liber cronicarum* (1493) illustrated England and France

that reveal his sharp power of observing (what Luigi Magnani calls “la disciplina del saper vedere,” in Femmel 16). There is a puzzling pen and ink drawing of Goethe, probably by Tischbein, showing the poet in his Roman apartment, arranging the pillows on his bed, muttering to himself “Das verfluchte zweite Küssen” (“This damned second pillow”!) under the watchful eye of his cat and the reproductions of some Roman statues [Fig. 2]. The German words, coming out of the poet’s mouth just as in a modern cartoon, imply something that is we do not know from Goethe’s journal. Peering at Goethe in his bedroom, wearing a dressing gown and fluffing his extra pillow in frustration, we wonder about new facets of Goethe’s Roman experience. Sometimes, however, a sketch is just an idealized image, without any realistic input, as in this fifteenth-century woodcut of a city [Fig. 3]; its author, Hartman Schedel, used it in the Latin version of the *Liber cronicarum* (*Nuremberg Chronicle*) under the caption “Angliae Provincia”

10. Goethe’s albums of sketches and the drawings by his friends, Tischbein and Kniep, are indispensable companions to his *Italienische Reise*. See Gerhard Femmel’s *Begleittext und Katalog zum Reprint von Goethes Reise-, Zerstreuungs- und Trostbüchlein* (Leipzig: Insel, 1985), 2 vol., and Wolfgang von Oettingen’s *Goethe und Tischbein* (Weimar: Goethe Gesellschaft, 1910), the source of Fig. 2; see also *Disegni di Goethe in Italia*, a cura di G. Femmel, intr. di L. Magnani (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1977). Among dozens of foreign artists who visited Italy, Edward Lear (1812-1888), the English nonsense poet, produced splendid lithographs for his *Illustrated Journals of a Landscape Painter in Southern Calabria* (London: Bentley, 1852), completing and documenting the narrative of his travels through southern Italy.

and in the German edition as “Frankreich.”¹¹

The image of a road as a geographic element that joins cities is closely tied

to the accounts of a journey and brings about a graphic conceptualization of an individual’s experience of time and space. [Fig. 4]

The stretch of the road from London to Dover and from Calais to Beauvais, with landmarks, toponyms, and daily stops, is both a description of a journey and a guide for travelers. Another striking example of this function is a sixth-century road atlas featuring distances between cities as well as overnight accommodations. We know it from a thirteenth-century copy that was once owned by Konrad Peutinger, a Renaissance German scholar (hence called “Tabula Peutingeriana”) [Fig. 5]. This large stretch of parchment (6.74m by 34cm) portrays the roads from the Iberian Peninsula to the Far East, stretched lengthwise, focusing on towns, inns and thermal springs,

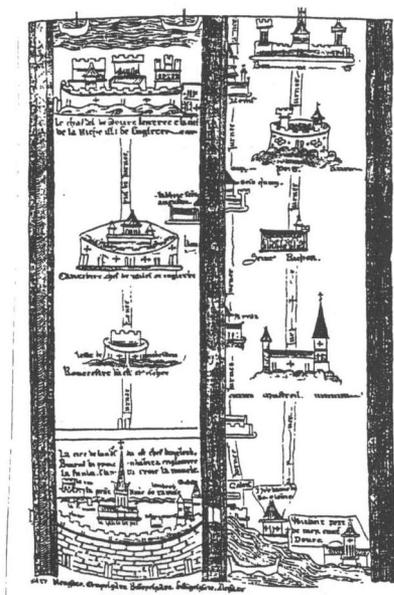


Fig. 4. The road from London to Dover (*left*) and from Calais to Beauvais (*right*) in Matthew Paris’s *Itinerary* (ca. 1525)

and unconcerned about seas and mountain ranges.

While a drawing of a stretch of road is a simple undertaking, a description of the region beyond the road requires advanced calculations and can only be produced by experienced geographers analyzing complex data. “Geographia,” the bigger picture, began to be distinguished from “chorographia,” the detailed representation of the space, and is intuitive in this woodcut from Peter Apian’s *Cosmographia* [Fig. 6]. The realm of the chorographic microcosm is often enriched by details of imaginary scenes, sea monsters, and wild beasts to emphasize the dangers of a voyage or even to hide the cartographers’ ignorance, as Jonathan

11. A grandiose canvas by Albrecht Altdorfer, the *Battle of Alexander at Issos* (1529, München, Alte Pinakothek), offers a rare aerial view of the Earth, evoking a geographer’s perception of a large section of our planet, including the curving of the horizon.

Swift mockingly wrote.¹² For often geographers confess their inability to fit their information on a map, “crowd[ing][...] part of the world which they do not know about, adding notes in the margin to the effect that beyond this lies nothing but sandy deserts full of wild beasts, unapproachable bogs, Scythian ice, or a frozen sea.”¹³ A curious model of Renaissance cartography is the *Isolario*, an atlas

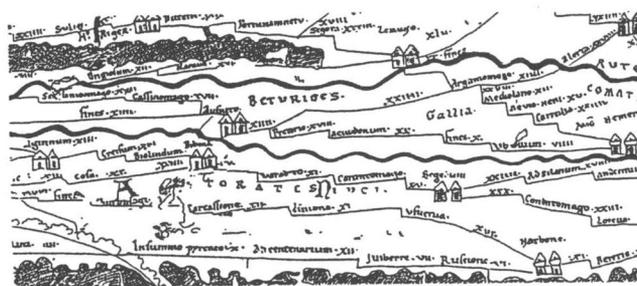


Fig. 5. A detail of southwestern Gaule in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* (from the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*)

of islands, based on “parceling” the world into small entities without any effort to determining their size or locating them on the globe (Lestringant 1991, 152).¹⁴ Islands are easily created by explorers and cartographers, given a self-sufficient status, viewed as enclosed in their own autonomy, allowed to take peculiar elements and to harbor utopias and dreams. A map in Benedetto Bordone’s *Isolario* of 1534 (fol. 70v) [Fig. 7] shows a large archipelago¹⁵ consisting of three major islands and three smaller archipelagoes, all oriented along the major winds (Maestro, Greco, Garbino, and Scirocco). Two of these islands are described as gendered (Imaugla and Inebila, inhabited, respectively, by men and women,

12. “So geographers, in Afric-maps, / With savage-pictures fill their gaps; / And o’er uninhabitable downs / Place elephants for want of towns” (“On Poetry: A Rhapsody,” 1: 177).

13. In John Dryden’s introduction of his translation of Plutarch’s *Life of Theseus*.

14. Islands are also hard to locate, apparently shifting their position on a map, easily forgotten or subject to cartographers’ whims. Fra Mauro, a 15th-century Venetian mapmaker, giving up all efforts of drawing some newly-found islands in his *mappamondo*, wrote on it, in the general area of the sea southeast of China: “In questo mar oriental sono molte insule grande e famose, le quali non ho posto, per non haver loco”; he repeated the same admission in the area of the Chinese Sea: “In questo mar sono molte insule, le quali non met[t]o, per non haver loco” (Placido Zurla, *Il mappamondo di Fra Mauro*. Venezia, 1806: 38).

15. The enormous distances between some of these groups of islands (820 miles from Inebila to Maniole, 400 miles from Maniole to Bazacata) show that Bordone has fitted in one drawing a host of disparate islands that would be improper to gather in one archipelago. Bordone’s knowledge of these entities and their location appears very sketchy.

a common topos in Renaissance cartography¹⁶); in two of the other islands (“*isole di satyri*”) men are said to be born with a tail; there is even an archipelago of nine small rocks made of lodestone (*Maniole*)¹⁷ that attract ferrous material from passing ships, pulling out their nails and shipwrecking them; finally, the only

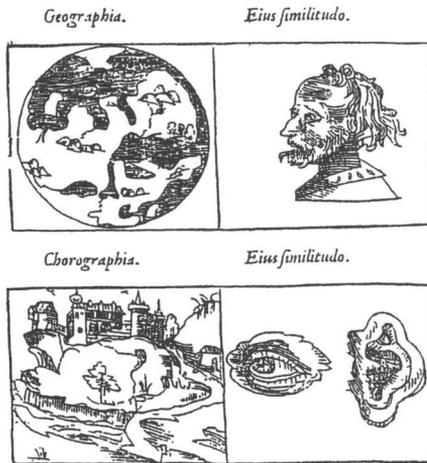


Fig. 6. From Petrus Apianus's *Cosmographia* (1524)

plausible island in this anonymous archipelago, Bazacata, has no peculiar properties other than the best pearls in the world. It is obvious that the information trickling down from the explorers to the cartographers could not be judged independently, and legendary, plausible, and real islands were juxtaposed with no effort to determine their location. By crumbling away the globe into small entities, the *Isolario* avoided also the *vexata quaestio* of establishing their exact location in the ocean, for in early modern cartography, islands were perceived as mysterious sites that were not easily accessible and could be reached only by sheer chance. In fact, until the middle of the eighteenth century, when accurate longitudinal coordinates were established, navigators would just “happen” onto islands.¹⁸ And, once they sailed away, it was practically impossible

16. See, *infra*, the discussion on the island of the Amazones, thought to be located near the island of California, according to the early Renaissance tendency to accumulate peculiar elements (“singularités,” as French cartographers called them) marking the geographical mythology of distant lands.

17. A 15th-century map (British Library, Harley MS 7182) sets this archipelago (*Maniolae insulae antropofagorum*) in the Arabian Sea (*Pelagus Indicus*), combining cannibals and lodestones, while it puts the *Satyrorum insulae* in the Bay of Bengal (Whitfield 12-13). Lestringant (1991, 121-124) discusses the description of this archipelago in André Thevet's *Cosmographie universelle*.

18. This “island syndrome” was particularly dramatic in establishing the cartography of the immense Pacific Ocean, where many islands were still vaguely located in 18th-century maps and kept moving about. A case in point is a map of 1771, in which the cartographer who described the voyage of de Bougainville around the world wrote that the position, and even the existence, of the Solomon Islands was not clear (“l'existence et la position sont douteuses,”

for them to return to these small dots lost in the immensity of the ocean. Antonio Pigafetta's description of Magellan's discovery of the so called "Isole infortunate" in the Pacific Ocean on January 24, 1521, shows the ambiguity of Renaissance geography, since he relied on inaccurate measurements of distances and only on latitudinal data: "due isolotte disabitate [...], lungi l'una dall'altra duecento leghe [...]; la prima sta in 15 gradi di latitudine all'australe, e l'altra in 9" (*Relazione del primo viaggio intorno al mondo*, 42). The enormous distance between them could not justify calling them an archipelago, but Sebastian Münster did it anyway in his 1550 *Cosmographia*, putting these "Insulae infortunatae" off the coast of Peru, probably for moral symmetry with the "Insulae fortunatae," the mythical Canary Islands.¹⁹ Locating islands in the

well-traveled waters of the North Atlantic should have been a much easier task than positioning newly-found islands in the Pacific Ocean, but sixteenth-century northern European cartography is nonetheless a froth of lies spread by "savants de cabinet" (Broc 132). Christian legends and pagan sagas influenced maps from Nicolò Zeno's *Atlas* of 1558 to a 1594 map of the North Atlantic by Jan van Doetecum, in which Iceland is mirrored by an imaginary island of Frisland, while a host of other imaginary rocks dot the ocean: the island of Buss, thought to be spotted by Frobisher in 1578 between Ireland and Greenland, the islands of St. Bernaldo, southeast of Greenland, St. Brendan, near Newfoundland, and other smaller islands (Estland, Icaria, Estoliland, Drogeo), accepted by cartographers as reliable as Mercator (1569) and Ortelius (1570). One of the

Whitfield 123).

19. See T. J. Cachey, Jr., *Le Isole Fortunate: appunti di storia letteraria italiana* (Rome: L'Erma, 1995).

ALCVNE Isole a queste per incietro per miglia cento uento, sono poste, tra quale vna u' è imaglia nominata, che solamete è da femine habitata, senza alchuno huomo, & nò molto da lei se dilonga incibila (una Isole così detta) altresì da huomini senza femine habitata, gli quali, nel mese di maggio, sopra l'Isole delle femine passano, & così per mesi tre con esse fanno dimora, & passato questo tempo tornano alla sua Isole, & quello che queste femine parturiscono, se è femina per loro la tengono, s'è maschio fanno lo accapo de anni tre all'Isole portare de gli huomini, & così queste Isole rari non mancano di gente. PER ostro à qite l'Isole dette maniole p miglia ottoceto uèi u' sono poste, nelle quali, se dicono esser la pietra calama, & che de di quindi nauigii fatti cò chioui di ferro passano, sono subito da quella pietra del nauigio fuori cuiti & in total modo i nauigii scòficati rimanédoli, somergono. Et p greco à queste u' è posta l'Isole detta baracata, distate miglia quatrocento, che de molte buone pete, habonda, & gli habitanti nani tutti nudi, alla quale per ostro, giace l'Isole di sayri, in cui gli huomini con la coda nascono, come appo nui i sayri li pingono, & tutte queste sono poste al primo parallelo uerso ostro.

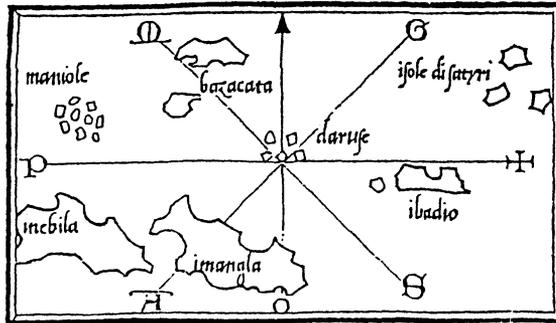


Fig. 7. Description and map from Bordone's *Isolario* (1534)

longest-lived cartographic fallacies of the North Atlantic, here shown in a 1513 map by Waldseemüller [Fig. 8], is the island of Brazil, off the western coast of Ireland, separated from its real double in South America and probably a remnant of the Plato's legendary Atlantis.



Fig. 8. The island of Brazil, west of Ireland (Hibernia), by Martin Waldseemüller (1513)

The well-charted waters of the Mediterranean were somewhat free of sea monsters,²⁰ for centuries of sailing created *portolani* that registered only pragmatic observations collected by real mariners. They were indispensable tools for sailors who had no tolerance for fiction or mythology, and accompanied pilots' books of the Mediterranean such as Alonso de Contreras's *Derrotero universal*, which followed a *terra terra* galley route from Cabo de São Vicente in Portugal and the strait of Gibraltar to the Italian peninsula, Greece, Turkey, and the North-African coast to Ceuta, offering a medley of geographical details of harbors, fresh water supplies, and dangers of people and places. Like

pilots' maps, Columbus's sketch of a stretch of the coast of Hispaniola [Fig. 9] left no room for subjective notations and unnecessary details. But accuracy, a *sine qua non* of cartography, was far from being an easily attainable goal. Many silences have accumulated through centuries of map making, and blank spaces of undomesticated regions were hidden by frightening animals as in Cornelius de Jode's territories of *Nova Guinea* [Fig. 10].

Maps have often been drawn according to mythical beliefs and political *parti-pris*.²¹ A well-known map drawn by German cartographers (Johannes Putsch,

20. Frank Lestringant has studied the myth of "Caloyeros," a dangerous island that appeared in many *Isolari* of the Mediterranean (Buondelmonti, delli Sonetti, Coronelli, Thevet, etc.). Although its location shifted to various locations, it represented a "spatial metonymy" and a "anthropomorphic metaphor" (1993, 36-41) of latent fears that pervaded Renaissance seafarers even in a "safe" sea.

21. A spherical Earth had already been conjectured by Greek astronomers and its circumference calculated by Eratosthenes in the 3rd century B.C., yet in medieval times European mapmakers still drew the Earth as a flat circle (the so-called "T-map") surrounded by the ocean, the top half representing Asia and the bottom divided in two parts, Europe and



Fig. 9. Columbus's sketch of the northwestern coast of Hispaniola

1537; Matthias Quad, 1587) and published in various editions of Münster's *Cosmographia*, portrayed Europe as a caring queen who nourished her subjects returning to her bosom after

conquering the world. Another map, *Leo Belgicus*, engraved by M. Eitzinger in 1588 and popular in Dutch cartography, mimicked the shape of the Low Countries as a proud lion, roaring against invaders.²² A thought-provoking female figure of *America* [Fig. 11] was engraved by Theodor Galle (ca. 1580) after a drawing by Jan van der Straet (1575). Amerigo Vespucci, the explorer after whom the New World was named,²³ is portrayed as having just landed. His ship is in the background and he is facing a naked woman lying on a hammock, her club leaning next to a tree. Standing straight and carrying a sword, an astrolabe and a cruciform staff with a banner (symbols of military might, scientific knowledge, and religious truth), Vespucci

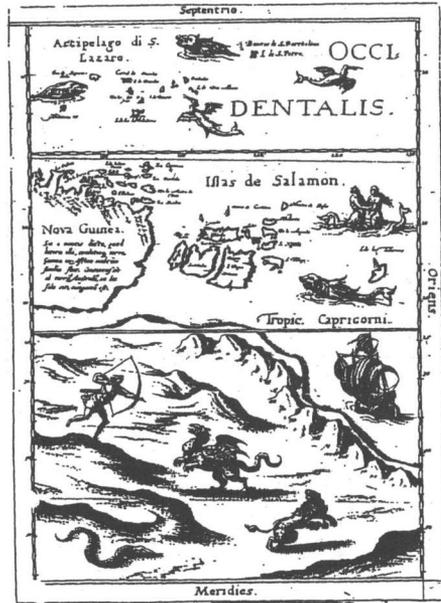


Fig. 10. Cornelius de Jode's Nova Guinea (Antwerp 1593)

Africa. Religious beliefs influenced this system, replacing scientific knowledge with preconceived formulas, suggesting either a rectangular Earth ("a quattuor plagis terræ," *Is* 11:12) or a circular one ("qui sedet super gyrum terræ," *Is* 40:22) with Jerusalem in the very middle of it ("in medio gentium posui," *Ez* 5:5). And, although a belief in the existence of the antipodes was at times considered heretical by some medieval authorities, Christian scholars like Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon accepted as fact the sphericity of the Earth.

22. H. A. M. Heijden, *Leo Belgicus: An Illustrated and Annotated Cart-bibliography* (Alphen aan de Rijn: Canaletto, 1990).

23. Martin Waldseemüller's map of 1507 assigned the name *America* to the new land he mistakenly believed discovered by Vespucci ("[America] ab eius nominis inventore dicta").



Fig. 11. *America*, drawn by J. van der Straet (Stradarius) and engraved by Th. Galle (ca. 1580)

gazes at her, surrounded by exotic flora and fauna. In the distance, a fire tended by natives suggests a primitive, yet not peaceful way of life, for they are roasting severed human body parts on a spit. [Fig. 11 a] Critics have underscored in this image a sequence of striking dichotomies: woman/ nature/passivity versus man/ technology/action. The rape of this woman has not yet taken place, but in hindsight we know that it is impending. The European male has conquered a new world, a gendered island, and has given her a feminine name (Monga 1996, 30). The naked (i.e., primitive) continent, inhabited by tribes unable to exploit their riches in a systematic manner, appears to Europeans as a land to be taken without legal or moral questions.

As sedentary travelers wrote preposterous narratives, stay-at-home cartographers drew maps, a process that Saint-Exupéry's self-centered geographer justified by emphasizing his own intellectual and social status ("le géographe est trop important pour flâner; il ne quitte pas son bureau"). The relationship between explorers and geographers is comparable to that between surgeons and medical doctors in the early modern period: practical vs. theoretical knowledge. Travel writers and travel liars insisted that their memoirs were written in the middle of the roaring elements, standing "en la chaise d'un navire, souz la leçon des

vents”²⁴ and not in the comfort of their study. But this is not a mutually exclusive categorization, for “a poynt, lyne, angle, or measure wrought in the fieldes and foule wether” should not clash with “operations framed in a well lighted house, upon a faire levell and smoothe table, the eye and hand hanging plumme over the worke, to be set down

upon angles, measures, & all other regards curiously taken and noted abroad.”²⁵ Giovanni Battista Ramusio was among the first editors of travel narrative to



Fig. 11a. Detail from Jan van der Straet’s *America*

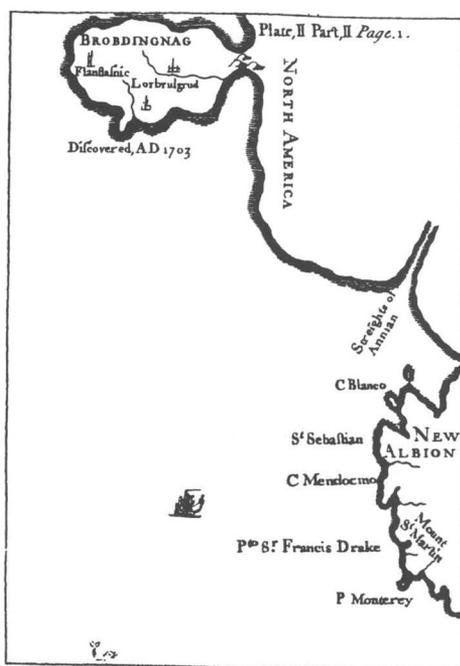


Fig. 12. A map of Brobdingnag (from Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*)

expose the shameful irresponsibility (“vergognosa audacia e temerità”) of cartographers who had put the northwestern passage in their charts (*Navigazioni di S. Caboto*, Pref., 2). The map of the Brobdingnag peninsula in the *Gulliver’s Travels* set Swift’s tale in the general area of the unexplored territory north of California, here anglicized as “New Albion,” near the mythical Straits of Anian that was thought to separate the American continent from Asia. [Fig. 12] Well-known toponyms like Mendocino, Monterey, and San Francisco (a political/religious slant connecting this city to Sir Francis Drake instead to the Mission de San Francisco de Asís) gave Swift’s map (and satire) a realistic valida-

24. André Thevet, *La Cosmographie universelle* (Paris: L’Huillier, 1575), 2: 907.

25. Radolph Agas, *A Preparative to Platting the Landes and Tenements for Surveigh* (London: Th. Scarlet, 1596): 4-5.

tion, setting his fictional peninsula in a geographic context that blended fiction with verifiable reality.

The cartography of the New World offers us striking aberrations. Some maps reported a non-existent internal sea at the latitude of Chesapeake Bay, stretching almost to the Pacific Ocean;²⁶ others located Marco Polo's 7448 islands just off the coast of California, but the most outrageous early modern hoax is the "island of California." Expecting to find an island they knew as California from a chivalric romance,²⁷ sixteenth-century explorers and geographers, anticipated a rich land where Queen Calafia was said to rule over a population of fierce, man-eating Amazons, somewhere along the northwestern coast of Mexico (and close to the Earthly Paradise!).²⁸ And it is not improbable that sixteenth-century Spanish explorers were affected by their readings. Witness an astonished Bernal Díaz del Castillo, entering the beautiful city of Mexico, remarking that

desde que vimos tantas ciudades y villas pobladas en el agua, y en tierra firme otras grandes poblaciones, y aquella calzada tan derecha y por nivel cómo iba a México, nos quedamos admirados y decíamos que parecía a las cosas

26. A letter by Verrazzano about his journey of discovery from Florida to Newfoundland (1523-1524) mentioned a narrow isthmus that was thought to separate the Atlantic from the sea of Cathay. Soon maps began to appear, showing a "Mare Indicum": Sebastian Münster gave this myth his authority and as late as 1651 John Farrer's map of Virginia stated that the Pacific shore was only a ten-day hike from the Atlantic.

27. *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, a romance by Garcí Ordóñez de Montalvo about the adventures of Esplandián, the son of Amadís of Gaul (also in Don Quijote's library), was a popular book, published in Seville in 1510. It helped to spread the myth of California in Spain: "Sabed que á la diestra mano de las Indias, muy llegada á la parte del Paraíso Terrenal, la cual fué poblada de mujeres negras, sín que algun varon entre ellas hubiese, que casi como las amazonas era su estilo de vivir. [...] Las suas armas eran todas de oro, y tambien la guarniciones de las bestias feras en que, de las haber amansado, cabalgaban. [...] En esta isla, California llamada, había muchos grifos, por la grande aspereza de la tierra y por las infinitas salvajinas que en ella habitaban. [...] Cualquiera varon que en la isla entrase, luego por ellas era muerto y comido"(ch. 157). This myth was so well accepted that even Columbus was convinced that his first voyage led him to the vicinity of the Earthly Paradise. A Florentine merchant, Francesco Carletti, who had been in Mexico in 1596, wrote about "il paese detto delle Californie, luoghi che sono nel continente della costiera dove è il predetto porto d'Acapulco. [...] È questa provincia abbondantissima di miniere d'oro e d'argento."(69-70).

28. A comparable situation occurred during the exploration of South America by Magellan, who named the southernmost region Patagonia, from a monster found by Primaleón, son of Palmerín de Oliva, of the homonymous romance (Salamanca, 1511), a book in Don Quixote's library, where it was found with *Palmerín de Ingalaterra*, translated from the Portuguese.

de incantésimo que cuentan en el libro de Amadís.²⁹

So, the general practice of naming a newly-discovered land after Iberian toponyms or religious eponyms could be set aside in favor of Spanish lore. In 1535 Hernán Cortés and his *conquistadores*, and later on Alarcón and Coronado, surveyed Baja California, failing to determine the shape of that region. It is probable that his obsession to find Calafia’s gold-laden island influenced Fray Antonio de la Ascen-



Fig. 13. *Audience de Guadalajara, Nouveau Mexique, Californie* by Nicolas Sanson d’Abbeville (Paris 1657) [Courtesy of the Glenn McLaughlin Collection]

sión, a Carmelite friar and amateur geographer who sailed with Sebastian Vizcaíno in 1602. He and the sailors in his party, tired of sailing north along the barren shores of the “Mar Vermejo” (today’s Gulf of Baja California), abandoned their exploration, declaring that California was an island. Contemporary scientific methods had not trickled down to individuals who still considered the *auctoritas* of books of chivalry more reliable than their own visual observation. Cervantes’s

29. Bernal Díaz de Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. Joaquín Ramírez Cabaña (México: Porrúa, 1977), ch. 87: 1: 260; see also ch. 151, when Díaz compared the numerous battles fought against the Mexicans (“y no los pongo por capítulos de lo que cada día hacíamos porque me pareció que era gran prolijidad, y era cosa para nunva acabar, y parecería a los libros de Amadís o Caballerías; [...] y lo diré más breve que pueda,” 2: 30).

old parish priest was not unjustified for using Montalvo's infamous book to start the bonfire of Don Quixote's library! At first, Hondius and Blaeu, the most reputable Dutch cartographers of the seventeenth century refused to join in the new trend, but eventually other of their *confrères*, including Nicolas Sanson, accepted the notion of the island of California³⁰ [Fig. 13], rapidly promoting it, thanks to the plausibility of the technical conventions of cartography. Only at the turn of that century a Jesuit explorer of the Sonora area, Fr. Eusebio Kino, brought this legend to an end, and finally, in 1722, Guillaume Delisle drew a better map of that area. The myth, however, proved hard to kill, and a royal edict by Ferdinand VI of Spain in 1747 forced that imaginary island to join the North-American continent, but California kept creeping into maps as an island. The last one was printed in Japan in 1865!³¹

In 1744 Jacques Cassini, an Italian cartographer at the court of France, drew a reasonably accurate map of France using trigonometric triangulations. Imperfections, however, were inevitable, for Cassini's instruments were too rudimentary to allow for precise computation of distance and angles.³² Jorge Luis Borges proposed the perfect, albeit surrealistic, solution to this conundrum in a short story disguised as a fragment of a seventeenth-century account of a description of an imaginary land:

En aquel imperio, el arte de la cartografía logró tal perfección que el mapa de una provincia ocupaba una ciudad, y el mapa del imperio toda una provincia. Con el tiempo, esos mapas desmesurados no satisficieron y los colegios de cartógrafos levantaron un mapa del imperio, que tenía el tamaño del imperio y coincidía puntualmente con él. Menos adictas al estudio de la cartografía, las generaciones siguientes entendieron que ese dilatado mapa era inútil y no sin empiedad lo relegaron a la inclemencia del sol y de los inviernos. En los desiertos del Oeste perduran despedazadas ruinas del mapa, habitadas por animales y por mendigos; en todo el país non hay otra reliquia de las disciplinas

30. Among the best known among them: Antonio de Herrera (1622), Abraham Goos (1624), Henry Briggs (1625), John Speed (1626), Jan Jansson (1636), Pieter Goos (1666), Nicolas Sanson (1667), Nicolaas Visscher (1680), Giovanni Rossi (1687), Frederick de Wit (1688), John Senex (1711), and H. de Leth (1740).

31. R. V. Tooley, *California as an Island*, in *Map Collectors' Circle*, no. 8 (London, 1964); Glenn McLaughlin and Nancy H. Mayo mention four maps published in Japan from 1796 to 1865 in which California is portrayed as an island (*The Mapping of California as an Island*. Saratoga: The California Map Society, 1995; Occasional Paper, no. 5: 105-106).

32. Cassini's map of France showed a much smaller territory than what it was believed to be, prompting Louis XV to complain that his geographer had caused him to lose more territory than a failed military campaign.

geográficas.³³

Borges's solution, however, reversed "the operative order of cartographic semiosis" (Klein 79) by implying that the best map is the most detailed one; he also exploded the fundamental referentiality of the map and its mimetic relationship with reality. Tongue in cheek, he set the remains of that "useless" and oversized map in a vague no man's land, avoiding any explanation of how it could have been moved there! This solution would mean the end of geography as a theoretical discipline, now reduced to a utopian device. Never one to let a good hunch go to waste, Umberto Eco playfully commented on Borges's text in an essay "Dell'impossibilità di costruire la carta dell'Impero 1 a 1,"³⁴ humorously outlining some of the "difficoltà pratiche e paradossi insormontabili" involved in making this "strumento semiotico, capace cioè di significare l'impero o permettere riferimenti all'impero specie in quei casi in cui l'impero non sia altrimenti percepibile." An impossible task, indeed, for this map would have to record also the presence and movements of people, including the occasional user of the map!

While postmodern critics of travel narrative have emphasized the hopelessness of dealing objectively with the description of facts, the accuracy of maps has improved dramatically with satellite photography and mapping processes obtained by automated technology that scans electronically the Earth's surface and converts it into visible images that record it with a degree of accuracy almost unthinkable a few decades ago. The new Space Oblique Mercator Projection (SOMP) based on a series of complex equations offers a more accurate cartography of the globe.³⁵ Microwave and infrared photographs that measure variations in spectral reflectance instead of the patterns of light of traditional pictures help us understand what is underground, with specific applications in archeology and geology, crop management and land conservation, analysis of continental drift and fault movements, monitoring of human pollution, global changes, and urban development, plus the usually secret array of intelligence gathering tools. Multilens cameras that can simultaneously photograph one section of the earth vertically

33. "El rigor en la ciencia," *El hacedor* (1960) in *Obras completas* (Barcelona: Emecé, 1989), 2: 225; the text had appeared in Borges's *Historia universal de la infamia* (1954). To transpose this concept into visual narrative, one could postulate a recording of a journey in which each day is documented by a 24-hour long video tape!

34. *Il secondo diario minimo* (Milan: Bompiani, 1992): 157-163.

35. For a recent example of modern mapmaking of the highest caliber, see in the *National Geographic* (May 2003) a digitalized map of Mount Everest, created from millions of data points collected by an aerial photography expedition. Offering enhanced shaded relief and elevation contours, it is the most detailed representation ever produced of the planet's highest mountain.

and an oblique one allow stereoscopic renditions of three-dimensional images in high resolution. Carrying out by proxy their exploration of the world, modern cartographers will never have to depend on lying explorers crossing high seas on fragile vessels. Earth maps have no more blank spaces left for the dreamy eyes of the children of the third-millennium, and the unknown has been removed to outer space. In fact, the latest expeditions to Mars show that we can map even areas on which human beings have not yet set foot! The major task of modern cartography involves the constant reassessing of ever-changing political borders according to the latest feuds among the denizens of this “aiuola che ci fa tanto feroci” (*Parad.* 22, 151), and we all feel somewhat akin to Cervantes’s *cortesanos* whose journeys were limited to their home library, “sin salir de sus aposentos ni de los umbrales de la corte, mirando un mapa, sin costarle blanca, ni padecer calor ni frío, hambre ni sed” (*Don Quijote*, II, VI)

At the outset of our inquiry, disappointed that our analysis of contemporary travel narrative had showed it as hopelessly entangled with fiction, we had hoped that maps, drawn according to the “vera scientia” of mathematics, as Benedetto Bordone wrote in his *Isolario*, could reveal an objective portrait of the world. Ironically, this was the same Bordone we saw drawing fictional islands next to perfectly real ones. If the solution of our conundrum is to let machines collect and analyze objective geographic data, excluding all human interventions in this process, we must not forget that machines and robots are driven by man-made software and must be interpreted by human beings prone to errors and confusion. And, while travel narrative continues to be entangled in postmodern subjectivity, cartography appears to have a better chance to become an objective representation of the geographic reality.

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