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“The light of simple veritie”: Mapping out Spenser’s Cosmography in “The Ruines of Time”

by Timothy Duffy

This essay argues that Edmund Spenser’s “The Ruines of Time” is, alongside its role as elegy and complaint, a cosmographic work that engages in what I call “spiritual mapping”—a cartographic process that combines anti-worldly discourse with a trans-historical representation of space. By considering Spenser’s poem alongside William Camden’s Britannia, this essay highlights the textual act of mapping present in both works in an attempt to reveal the influence of an international community of mapmakers, including the Familists, who provided a model for cosmographic work that highlighted spiritual and irenic interests alongside the technical practice of representing space.

The great forward movements of the Renaissance
all derive their vigour, their emotional impulse,
from looking backwards.

—Frances Yates¹

IN the 1560s, Edmund Spenser encountered Jan Van der Noot, a Flemish nobleman and Calvinist refugee in England and a distinguished member of the Anglo-Flemish and Anglo-Dutch community in London of thinkers, scientists, and artists. This community observed the bitter disputes of the Reformation and believed that by turning to cosmography—a field that included mapping, meteorology, historiography, and geography—they would be able to find union in

¹ Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

seeking out the complete image of the created world. Where theological disputation had caused division, the cosmographic image of all creation would create harmony. This essay will track the ways in which Spenser interacted with the cosmographic sciences in his poem "The Ruines of Time," published in his 1591 volume *Complaints*. By exploring the work of the one cosmographer Spenser explicitly mentions in the volume, William Camden, I will attempt to reveal how Spenser's poetry is able to participate in an act I label "spiritual mapping," a process in which cosmographic inquiry becomes interwoven in a text with visionary and anti-worldly turns to the divine and the transcendent. In exploring Spenser's relationship to the development of cosmography, I will underscore how some more recent theoretical considerations of the history and philosophy of science can help illuminate some of the strategies used by Renaissance poets and philosophers to render geographic space into literary and historical text.

In the European Renaissance, cartography and cosmographic writing were important discourses for humanistic and transnational inquiry. Maps spoke to the spiritual, intellectual, and political desires of early modern subjects, a quality inherent in the act of mapping itself. As Denis Wood writes in *The Power of Maps*: "maps give us . . . a reality that exceeds our vision, or reach, the span of our days, a reality we achieve no other way."² The purpose of cosmographic endeavor as a whole was not in the Renaissance simply to reconstruct as accurately as possible the contours of the earth but rather to frame the earth in such a way as to conform to the desires, whether spiritual, artistic, or scientific, of the viewer. Jean-Marc Besse, observing the diverse interests of the cosmographer, notes that "the world of cosmographers is, as we shall see it, caught up in a collection of groundings which are not especially or primarily geographic."³ Indeed, the major geographic accomplishments of the sixteenth century—Martin Waldseemüller's world map (1507), Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), Christopher Saxton's *Atlas* (1579), and William Camden's *Britannia* (1586)—have all been increasingly seen by critics as cultural artifacts embedded as much in the visionary and philosophical invention and exploration of space as they are in the empirical and scientific representation of geographic reality.⁴

² Wood and John Fels, *The Power of Maps* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992), 4–5.

³ Besse, *Les Grandeurs de la Terre* (Paris: ENS Editions, 2003), 35. Besse's remarks in the original French are "La terre des cosmographes est, comme nous le verrons, prise dans un ensemble de raisons qui ne sont pas spécialement ni d'abord géographiques."

⁴ For more on the cultural embeddedness of mapmaking, see Toby Lester, *The Fourth*

The concept of the world as the Book of Nature authored by God flourished as a compelling method of framing cosmographic work in the European Renaissance. As Eric Jorink remarks, "according to Calvin, man and the universe were created in honour of the Lord . . . the theologian often describes the cosmos as a 'beautiful work of art', a 'mirror' or a 'theatre.' God's essence is unfathomable, so that his godhead cannot be perceived by any of the human senses. But in each of his separate works God has inscribed indubitable signs of his glory."⁵ One then had to read the world and Nature as if it were "conceived as a collection of books which are entire and perfect."⁶ Ernst Robert Curtius reminds us that the concept of the world as a book "originated in pulpit eloquence, was then adopted by medieval mystico-philosophical speculation, and finally passed into common usage."⁷ In Spenser's youth in the 1560s, he would have encountered a community of Flemish and Dutch refugees some of whom, as victims of the oppression of Spain and the Inquisition during the Dutch revolt in the years following 1567, seemed to be looking for ways to transcend the harsh divisions between Protestant and Catholic. By turning back to the trope of a Book of Nature and of a theater of the world (a trope that unites Ortelius's atlas with Van der Noot's poetic emblem book *A Theatre for Worldlings*), there was hope that unity rather than division could be created.

J. A. van Dorsten in *The Radical Arts* notes how at the time when Flemish and Dutch refugees were entering England, a covert group, the Family of Love, was present in London and turning increasingly to cosmography: "Their conscience allowed them to observe outwardly the rites of any Church that happened to be in power, for they denied—and were always persecuting for denying—that the visible Church had any significance."⁸ This community, which included Ortelius and Van der Noot, began to distrust theology as a method for unifying Europe as it "had failed visibly to unite mankind in one indisputably 'true' perception of God's plan and the properties of His creature." Rather, they turned to cosmography that they believed "would achieve precisely that, thanks to its non-disputative method."⁹ When Van der Noot, a

Part of the World (London: Profile, 2009); as well as Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, trans. Tom Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁵ Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575–1715* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 45–46.

⁶ Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 322.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁸ Van Dorsten, *The Radical Arts* (Leiden: University Press, 1970), 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

man who lived among the Familists and was most likely one himself,¹⁰ asked a young Spenser to translate poems for his volume *A Theatre for Worldlings* in the last years of the 1560s, he would have also been providing Spenser with a window into the complicated matrix of spiritual, literary, and cosmographic work so central to the community.

Van der Noot would not, however, have been Spenser's sole introduction to Familism. The decades during which Spenser developed his poetic craft bore witness to the development, dissemination, and suppression of Familist spirituality. First recorded to be in England in 1561, the Familists grew enough in numbers to attract attention from the Elizabethan government. As Jean Dietz Moss comments, "By 1580 the establishment had become so alarmed by their growth—disciples being discovered even at court—that the Queen issued a proclamation condemning their works as heretical."¹¹ The Elizabethan response to the Familists seems to have slowed their growth and limited their visibility, but corners of England, especially East Anglia, "continued to be a stronghold for Familist activity"¹² well into the 1590s. "John Rogers, a prominent opponent of the Family of Love," Christopher Carter writes, "claimed in 1578 that 'there are in England, at least 1,000 in divers partes of this realm'" and that their numbers seemed to be growing by the day.¹³ Their outward conformity seems to have invited further paranoia and speculation. Yet it was exactly this outward conformity, this devotion to an "invisible world church" that attracted the Dutch mapmakers and philologists, Ortelius among them, to seek out Familism as a nonsectarian alternative to the Reformation divisions that were tearing their homeland apart. Ortelius believed deeply in the spiritual consequences of his mapmaking¹⁴ and would have imported that conviction directly to Camden during their meeting.

When Spenser wrote "The Ruines of Time" and saw it published, with or without his direct involvement, in 1591, he praised the work of Camden, calling him "the nourice of antiquity," and he connected Cam-

¹⁰ Ibid., 59. Van Dorsten believes that Van der Noot was a member of the Familists.

¹¹ Moss, "Variations on a Theme: The Family of Love in Renaissance England," *Renaissance Quarterly* 31 (1978): 188.

¹² Carter, "The Family of Love and Its Enemies," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 37 (2006): 658.

¹³ Ibid., 655.

¹⁴ See Giorgio Mangani, "Abraham Ortelius and the Hermetic Meaning of the Codiform Projection," *Imago Mundi* 50 (1998): 71–74. Mangani argues that Ortelius adapted the key Familist icon of the burning heart in his cordiform projections as well as highlighting the ways in which Ortelius protected political and religious refugees. Ortelius used Familist iconography in order to highlight the universal and transcendent aspects of his cartographic project in contrast with the sectarian divisions of Reformation Europe.

den's project to the work of visionary and antiquarian poetry. Just as mapping was a necessarily antiquarian gesture in the period—David Buisseret remarks that “by the late sixteenth century, the provision of maps had become inseparable from the textual editions of many classical works”¹⁵—so too was poetry seen to do important antiquarian and, therefore, geographic work. Spenser was writing poetry that dug into the ground with a spiritual goal, to map the Roman ruins present in Britain and to reach out to the divine and the eternal, eventually mapping out the spaces between heaven and earth. Many critical assessments of English Renaissance cosmography and antiquarian inquiry focus on humanist scholars' sense of the loss of antiquity and the ongoing difficulty of reconstructing the past (an anxiety that was exacerbated by the English dissolution of the monasteries).¹⁶ Similar readings have been applied to the poetry of Spenser, including “The Ruines of Time.” Huw Griffiths, exploring the relationship between Spenser and Camden, argues that Spenser's poem engages in an ongoing translation of Camden's geographic project in *Britannia*.¹⁷ He emphasizes Camden's participation in the rhetorical projects of sixteenth-century geography:

The new geographies of the sixteenth century are implicated in the process of translation and reformation that also frame Spenserian poetics. That Spenser could employ them in the production of his own space of the nation is not then a deliberate, ideologically informed misreading of a blank map of the nation. Rather, it is one intervention among others in the continuing interactions between politics and religion, literature and geography. To refer to these interactions as ‘translations’ is to highlight their status as figurative, inadequate to any idealized or discrete nation space.¹⁸

Griffiths's account of Spenser and Camden's relationship—two men in bordering discourses, confronted with the “ironies and inconsisten-

¹⁵ Buisseret, *The Mapmaker's Quest: Depicting New Worlds in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁶ For instance, see Andrew Escobedo's assertion that “the antiquary's emphasis on physical remains, the source of his capacity to know history, also represented his limitation. Even worse, many English historical writers felt that their nation treated its monuments especially poorly, as evidenced by the Reformation spoliation of the monastic libraries” (*Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004], 48–49).

¹⁷ Griffiths notes that his goal is “to place the new geographical and spatial understandings of the early modern period, one aspect of which was Camden's chorographical antiquarianism, within the contexts that might have informed the rhetoric of geographical representation” (“Translated Geographies: Edmund Spenser's ‘The Ruines of Time,’” *Early Modern Literary Studies: A Journal of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Literature* 4.2 [1998]: 26th paragraph [electronic pub.]).

¹⁸ Ibid.

cies that are present in the antiquarian project"¹⁹—moves us closer to a mutually informing understanding between geography and poetry, but "translation" between disciplines implies a division between sides that needs to be negotiated. The Anglo-Dutch culture that had informed the work of both Camden and Spenser rejected the need for translation between discourses, urging dynamic cooperation and referential discourse in its place. Spenser does not translate the act of mapping into poetry; instead, he attempts actually to map with poetry, following the spiritual and cosmographic aims at mapping that were so important to the communities of cosmographers in western Europe.

Camden's work, the way it was inspired, conceived, and completed, provides a model for cosmographic discourse that Spenser seems compelled to follow. Camden's credentials were impressive, and his methodologies came, in part, directly from Ortelius himself, as Camden writes,

Abraham Ortelius the worthy restorer of Ancient Geographie arriving heere in England above thirty foure yearres past, dealt earnestly with me that I would illustrate this ile of Britaine, or (as he said) that I would restore antiquity to Britain, and Britain to his antiquity; which was as I understood, that I would renew ancientrie, enlighten obscuritie, cleare doubts, and recalle home Veriti, by way of recovery, which the negligence of writers and credulitie of the common sort had in a manner proscribed and utterly banished from amongst us. A painfull matter I assure you, and more than difficult; wherein what toyle is to be taken, as no man thinketh, so no man beleeveth but he that hath made the triall.²⁰

Ortelius, as Van Dorsten notes, was among the members of the Family of Love interested in the spiritual dimensions of his geographic work.²¹ The project to illustrate Britain and to bring the Roman past of Britain into a reflexive relationship with its present day arises in Ortelius's and Camden's estimation of the way in which cosmography and anti-

¹⁹ Ibid., 1st paragraph. Griffiths uses this phrase to describe Camden's project in the *Britannia*, but Griffiths later admits that "To some extent, ['The Ruines of Time'] shares Camden's aims as he states them" (2).

²⁰ Camden, "To the Reader," in *Britannia* (London, 1610). This is the 1610 translation of Camden's work, faithful to the original but updating the amount of time passed since the encounter with Ortelius. Spenser, of course, would have known only the 1586 Latin edition. All future references to Camden's *Britannia* are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text by page.

²¹ On Ortelius's membership in the Family of Love, see Van Dorsten, *The Radical Arts*, 29. For proof of the spiritual dimensions of Ortelius's project, we can turn to Guillaume Postel's letter to him in 1579 in which he, as William Bouwsma recounts, "tried to persuade Ortelius to carry on his task of heralding the new age of Christian unity" (*Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510–1581)* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957], 29).

quarian inquiry are activated. Camden's work, as exhaustive and interdisciplinary a work as could be imagined at the time, engaged in a methodology as obsessed with gaining mastery over the British past as with the current scientific description of the land. Coming seven years after Saxton's atlas and around the time that Spenser would have been penning the first part of *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and the poems in his *Complaints* (1591), Camden's work emerges as an extended testament not only to modern cosmography's birth out of the new ages of art and classical philology, but to their continued and linked development.

His methodology in researching and composing the *Britannia* was impressively rigorous, blending history, philology, mathematics, and geography. His tone is particularly defensive on the range of his study as he requests his readers to note the extensive effort he put into his work:

Thus much give mee leave to say, that I have in no wise neglected such things as are most materiall to search, and sift out the Truth. I have attained to some skill of the most ancient, British and English-Saxon tongues: I have travailed over all England for the most part, I have conferred with most skillful observers in each country, I have studiously read over our owne countrie writers, old and new; all Greeke and Latine authors which have once made mention of Britaine. I have had conference with learned men in other parts of Christendome: I have been diligent in the Records of this Realm. I have looked into most Libraries, Registers, and memorials of Churches, Cities and Corporations, I have poored upon many as old Rowle, and Evidence: and produced their testimonie (as beyond all exception) when the cause required, in their very own words (although barbarous they be) that the honour of veritie might in no wise be impeached. ("To the Reader")

His self-conscious, intense inquiry spares no expense and respects no disciplinary boundaries. His exploration of the linguistic, historical, and archaeological dimensions of Britain attempts a visionary recasting of Britain's antiquarian past. In his treatment of St. Albans and its classical roots in Verolamium, a passage that will become very important for Spenser's later work, one finds an invitation to a sort of tour of St. Albans that, even in the very naming of the place, piles up the layers of the site's historical and multiple identities:

But returne we now to places more within the Country, and of greater antiquity. From Hertford twelve miles Westward stood VEROLAMIUM, a Citie in times paste very much renowned, and as greatly frequented, Tacitus calleth it VERULAMIUM . . . The Saxons named it Watlingha-certeth, of the famous highway Watling street . . . Neither has it as yet lost that ancient name, for commonly they

call it Verulam, although there remaineth nothing of it to be seene, beside the few remains of ruined walles, the checkered pavements, and peeces of Roman coine other whiles digged up there. It was situate upon the gentle descent or side of a hill Eastward, fenced about with passing strong walles, a double ram-pire and deepe trenches towards the south. (408)

This particular cosmography, textual, historical, and visually reconstructive, serves to give a history of the land itself, a history of the language associated with the land, a summary of the physical remnants of the lost city, and, finally and most importantly, a vision of what it would have looked like then—a mixture of past and present caught up in a wide array of different rulers, languages, and historical stages.

Britannia launches into visionary mapping, a method of writing and representing the natural world that is propelled by a desire to enhance and enrich the spatial insights of the reader/viewer. Beyond simply narrating history or representing the geographic coordinates of a location, Camden processes the layers, classical and modern, of British history, activating them in a textual experience that appears to unfold the layers simultaneously. Camden's remark that "there remaineth nothing of it to be seene" testifies to his use of a cosmography deeply invested in the production of textual visions of the land that do not depend on traditional physical remnants or markers. He admits early on in the *Britannia* that "many have found a defect in this worke that Mappes were not adjoined, which doe allure the eies by pleasant portraiture, and are the best directions in Geographically studies, especially when the light of learning is adjoined to the speechlesse delineations" ("To the Reader"). Camden's work clearly embraces a textual and visionary attempt at applying the "light of learning" to the consideration of Britain's antiquarian past, a light that illuminates the diverse elements that come together to form his reconstructions of British spaces. His (at times uncomfortable, but to Camden quite necessary) flexibility in the deployment of methods, sources, and skills emerges as the cornerstone of his cosmographic project:

To accomplish this worke the whole maine of my industrie hath beene employed for many yeares with a firme settled study of the truth, and sincere antique faithfulnessse to the glory of God and my countrie. I have done dishonour to no nation, have descanted upon no mans name, I have impaired no mans reputation, I have impeached no mans credit . . . Neither have I assumed upon my selfe persuasion of knowledge, but onely that I have beene desirous to know much. And so I right willingly acknowledge that I may erre much, neither will I sooth and smoth my errors. Who shooting all day long doth always hit the

marke? Many matters in these studies are raked under deceitful ashes. There may be some escapes from memorie, for who doth so comprehend particularities in the treasury of his memory that he can utter them at his pleasure? There may be mistakings in regard of my unskilfulnesse, for who is so skilful that struggling with Time in the foggie darke sea of Antiquity, may not run upon rockes? ("To the Reader")

Camden, driven by a devotion to both God and the act of reconstructing the history of his country, offers the full faculties of his mind and body to the task of reconstructing and synthesizing the history and geography of Britain. The major offering of his work, however, and an important offering in the cosmographic productions of the period, is its totalizing and universal view. What Camden's varied and diverse methodologies provide is an artful and enhanced visionary experience for the reader, allowing a view of Britain that is at once transhistorical and translingual, cataloguing the layered history of the British terrain into one collective textual view.

Camden's work participates in this project, seeking in the layers of the earth a greater access to both the classical past and a divine truth he believed was hidden within it. As I have already suggested, this work was framed as an offering "to the glory of God and my countrie." Cosmographic work and theological work blur together, and the Britain that Camden sought to bring to a full acquaintance with its own antiquity seems increasingly to summon up a multitude of faith traditions, languages, and fungible national borders. Far from being a spiritually neutral act, Camden's digging into the layers of the British past complicates the already vexed identity of English Protestantism. This was at least enough of a threat for Camden to feel he had to acknowledge these criticisms in his introduction:

There are certaine, as I heare who take it impatiently that I have mentioned some of the most famous Monasteries and their founders. I am sorry to heare it, and with their good favour will say thus much, They may take it as impatiently, and peradventure would have us forget that our ancestors were, and we are of the Christian profession when as there are not extant any other more conspicuous, and certaine Monuments of their piety, and zealous devotion towards God. Neither were there any other feed-gardens from whence Christian Religion, and good learning were propagated over this isle, howbeit in corrupt ages, some weeds grew out over ranckly. ("To the Reader")

Camden argues here for historical accuracy over political loyalty. The obvious point that Christianity was born in England out of Catholicism, a fact that a historical treatment of Britain cannot ignore, is itself a bold

admission in the climate of sixteenth-century England, a culture that was nervous about the artifacts of the Roman religion emerging out of the soil in which they had been buried.²² By revealing that the layers of the earth contain a foundational faith tradition united in a single divine origin that is not discernibly Protestant or Catholic,²³ a single “feed-garden,” Camden’s vision of England challenges sectarian and temporal boundaries between the Protestant and Catholic phases of England’s history. In illustrating this coherence so well, and in a text that combines historical, geographic, and philological discourse, Camden was signaling his intellectual debt to Ortelius, as well as to the Antwerp geographers, philosophers, and literary men who informed his community.

Britannia never loses sight of the spiritual consequences of its research. Indeed, the work sees no division between the mathematical tools it deploys, the philological research that attempts to reconstruct the past, and the narrative technique it uses to present its findings: all is united in its capacious methodology. This may seem like a quaint example of the work done in the early days of geographical study, prior to the growth of scientific practices of the Enlightenment. However, Camden’s project is not against empiricism;²⁴ it simply rejects the notion that empirical discourse needs to exclude discourses that are outside the current fashion of what counts as empirical. In this way, he antici-

²² As Eamon Duffy observes in his *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, such a digging up of all things Catholic occurred during the 1569 Northern Rebellion: “The part which the physical remnants of Catholicism might play in the reversal of Reformation was starkly revealed in the northern rising of 1569, when altars-stones and holy-water stoups were unearthed from middens and quarries where they had been concealed, and re-erected in Durham Cathedral and in a number of parish churches in the region” ([New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992], 583).

²³ Camden remarks for instance in describing England’s conversion to Christianity, “No sooner was the name of Christ preached, but the English presently with such fervent zeale and devotion consecrated themselves unto Christ, that they took incredible paines in propagating Christianitie, in celebrating divine service, performing all functions and duties of pietie, building Churches and endowing them with rich livings, so that there was not another region in all Christendome that could make reckening of more monasteries richly endowed . . . And like as Britaine was called of that prophane Porphyrie, a plenteous province of Tyrants; so England might truly be named, a most fruitfull lland of Saints” (137). Camden labels this section as “the Religion of the Englishmen” offering a foundational and historical Christianity that seems to reside more in the character of the English people than in imported and sectarian theological and liturgical customs.

²⁴ Of course the tools of empirical inquiry have their roots well before the Enlightenment, as Camden’s work, among others, reveals. The cultural rather than observational elements of his work, I contend, do not undermine the geographic quality of his work but rather enrich it for the needs of the western European intellectual community out of which his work emerged.

pates the work of many modern philosophers of science. For instance, Paul Feyerabend notes in *Against Method*,

A scientist who is interested in maximal empirical content, and who wants to understand as many aspects of a theory as possible, will adopt a pluralistic methodology, he will compare theories with other theories rather than with 'experience', 'data', or 'facts', and he will try to improve rather than discard the views that appear to lose in the competition.²⁵

A full scientific inquiry, Feyerabend and Camden would both agree, needs to take into account all available discourses on a subject, considering alternatives whenever possible. Camden creates a discourse in which "the whole history of a subject is utilized in the attempt to improve its most recent and most 'advanced' stage. The separation between the history of a science, its philosophy, and the science itself dissolves into thin air and so does the separation between science and non-science."²⁶ This important revelation, undoubtedly still controversial, underscores the blurring of disciplinary divisions that occurs in undertaking a major study of geographic and historical space. Camden's desire to be as thorough as possible and to reconstruct Britain in terms of its entire heritage, both linguistic and archaeological, necessitated and inspired exactly this blurring of fields—an act of cooperation, not translation, that reflected the interests of a particular intellectual community.²⁷

Camden had succeeded in this mission to the extent that Spenser, in his volume of poetry, *Complaints*, published five years after *Britannia* in 1591, refers to Camden as

²⁵ Feyerabend, *Against Method* (New York: Verso, 2010), 27.

²⁶ Ibid. The header of this section, on the same page, of his work is also quite relevant: "There is no idea, however ancient and absurd, that is not capable of improving our knowledge. The whole history of thought is absorbed into science and is used for improving every single theory. Nor is political interference rejected."

²⁷ John Dee provides an interesting case study for how the international community of scientists encouraged a transnational discourse that blurred the lines between what would traditionally be considered "science" and "non-science." In 1547, according to his "A briefe note and abstract" (MS Smith 96, in the Bodleian Library), Dee comments that he did a continental tour bringing him into contact with Gemma Frisius, Gerardus Mercator, Caspar Myricaeus, and Antonius Gogava, as well as others. The diversity of those he met—philologists, scientists, and philosophers—encouraged a holistic view of the natural sciences that encouraged free participation in many fields, as his reading suggests. Frances Yates notes that "The whole Renaissance is in this library [John Dee's] . . . It is a Renaissance without doctrinal ferocity" and "To Dee all is science, all is important, and the mysterious world of magic and science in which he moves is the world of the Elizabethan Renaissance" (*Theatre of the World* [London: Routledge, 1969], 12 and 17).

Cambden the nourice of antiquitie
 And lanterne unto late succeeding age,
 To see the light of simple veritie,
 Buried in ruines, through the great outrage
 Of her own people, led with warlike rage,
 Cambden, though time all monuments obscure,
 Yet thy just labours ever shall endure.²⁸

Spenser places Camden outside of the tumultuous politics of British history just as Ortelius had placed Camden outside the historical ignorance that plagued the "common sort" of England. The poem's praise casts Camden's project as an illuminating, transcendent, and learned visionary process back through time, accessing not simply the past but also the "light of simple veritie."

Spenser's poem, then, tried to continue Camden's illuminating work. Just as Camden was in pursuit of the light of truth buried in ruins, Spenser attempted in his poetic project to take up this same search. His "Ruines of Time," the first poem in the *Complaints* collection and the last written before the volume went to press, sought to engage in a similar act of visionary reconstruction of Britain's past. In the beginning of the poem, Spenser represents his own encounter with "the light of simple veritie, / Buried in ruines":

In chaunced me on day beside the shore
 Of silver streaming Thamesis to bee,
 Nigh where the goodly Verlame stood of yore,
 Of which there now remaines no memorie,
 Nor anie little moniment to see,
 By which the travailer, that fares that way,
 This once was she, may be warned to say.

(1-7)

Spenser's poet encounters an invisible space. There are no monuments to mark its location for travelers nor is there any other indicator of Verolamium's past presence in that spot, yet Spenser's wandering poet knows where he stands, informed most likely by his reading of Camden and his own visionary connection with the land. He discovers the spirit of Verolamium speaking to him. She claims,

²⁸ Spenser, *The Ruines of Time*, from *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), ll. 169-175. All subsequent quotations from *The Ruines of Time* are from this edition and will be cited parenthetically within the text by line.

I was that Citie, which the garland wore
 Of Britaines pride, delivered unto me
 By Romane Victors, which it wonne of yore;
 Though nought at all but ruines now I bee,
 And lye in my own ashes, as ye see:
 Verlame I was; what bootes it that I was,
 Sith now I am but weedes and wastfull gras?
 (36–42)

The voice of Verolamium presents Spenser's poet with an aspect of the historical past that speaks with a deep engagement with present ruins. In this sense, the poem operates in a similar cosmographic mode to that of Camden's *Britannia*: it presents a varied historical, spiritual, and spatial involvement in a transhistorical place in the British landscape.

Christian Jacob, underscoring the visionary aspects of cartography, writes that "maps and globes allow us to live a voyage reduced to the gaze, stripped of the ups and downs and chance occurrences, a voyage without the narrative, without pitfalls, without even the departure."²⁹ By Jacob's own generous definition of a map as a mediating process between real space and the creation of its simulacrum,³⁰ the sort of cosmographic writing produced by Camden and Spenser is included in this description. Tom Conley, whose own scholarship engages with that of Jacob, also addresses this proximity between the written word and the graphic map:

The virtual space of masterworks of cartography and literature in the early modern era was created from the vivid imagination of the authors and mapmakers who mixed, distorted, and extended inherited genres and modes of expression. Writers exploit the physical character of their media, and so do cartographers who experiment with modes and styles of projection and drawing.³¹

Spenser's poem, like Camden's prose chorography, worked together in the greater culture of European cosmography with visual mapmakers

²⁹ Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*, 333.

³⁰ Jacob notes that "A map is not a mimetic image, but an analogic image, the product of an abstraction that interprets the landscape and makes it intelligible by translating the profusion of what can be observed into a dynamic order of contiguities and relationships . . . Mapping is a speculative process in which the graphic mechanism attests to the symbolic violence inherent in every model, that is, to the transformation of real space into a figure ruled by laws of reason and abstraction, of the conquering appropriation of reality by means of its simulacrum" (*The Sovereign Map*, 23).

³¹ Conley, "Early Modern Literature and Cartography: An Overview," in *The History of Cartography: Part 1, Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3:403.

like Ortelius to expand and challenge received modes of expression and, most fundamentally, participated in an interdisciplinary community that sought to represent and explore space in its political, religious, and historical terms.

"The Ruines of Time" makes this connection between the political, the religious, and the historical when the spirit of Verolamium urges her interlocutors to look back in time in order to realize the vanity of worldliness:

Looke backe, who list, unto the former ages,
And call to count, what is of them become:
Where be those learned wits and antique Sages,
Which of all wisdom knew the perfect somme:
Where those great warriors, which did overcome
The world with conquest of their might and maine,
And made one meare of th'earth and of their raine?

(57–63)

The spirit performs both history and the moral lessons of history in applying the *ubi sunt* theme to a geographic and philosophic project: to declare that all human life and creation will eventually crumble and become part of the ruins of time. Spenser's poet, facing this spirit, is able to play a double role: as the interlocutor with the classical past he will activate a cultural memory tied to a geographic experience with the land while at the same time he will take on a prophetic and somewhat transcendental role, urging the reader to see beyond the ruins to the powerful and nonsectarian religious truth behind it. The absence of any physical remnants of wisdom urges the reader/viewer to supply, in facing the metaphysical representation of the ruined city, a meditative and intellectual experience of their own. There is a certainty to the Book of Nature: God created everything in it and everything in it will crumble and die.

Richard Helgerson has remarked on the proximity between poets and chorographers in the sixteenth century, while still arguing that not until Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* was there "a chorography that is also a poem."³² Yet, Spenser's "Ruines of Time" surely succeeds in this attempt. He "never lost touch," as Van Dorsten remarks, "with contemporary debate and topical issues, but continued to focus his art principally on universal abstractions of divine beauty, Platonic or

³² Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 139.

otherwise."³³ Spenser's poetry, to this end, oscillates between the universal and local engagements of both poetry and cosmography. This is why "The Ruines of Time," a poem dedicated to the Countess of Pembroke as part of "the seede of most entire love and humble affection unto that most brave Knight your noble brother deceased," Sir Philip Sidney, seems to always transcend its role as an elegy for Sidney. Even in the dedicatory epistle at the beginning Spenser seems to have a larger goal in mind: "I have conceived this small Poeme, intituled by a generall name of the worlds Ruines: yet specialie intended to the renowming of that noble race, from which both you and he sprong, and to the eternizing of some of the chiefe of them late deceased." To eulogize Sidney fully seems to be too local a matter for the greater goals of the poem's visionary engagement. Just as Camden had warned his readers that not all great families were going to be mentioned in his description of Britain ("To the Reader") Spenser's poem praises Sidney by making him a part of the landscape and by having praises be spoken by the land itself ("Dedication," 21–24)—by Verolamium, not Spenser, an omission the poem emphasizes: "Ne doth his Colin, careless Colin Cloute, / Care now his idle bagpipe up to raise" (225–26). Spenser's goal in the poem is to make Sidney a part of the landscape, of the geographic and historic layers of Britain, and most importantly, a treasure of that land that only an enhanced vision—the kind poetry and cosmography in the greatest forms can provide—can see and represent.

Critical discussions of "The Ruines of Time" have largely focused on either the poem's act of memorializing Sidney or the poem's attempt to offer poetry as a challenge to the ruined monuments of the British Roman past.³⁴ Anne Janowitz has argued that in Spenser's treatment of Camden "we see the claims for national history jostling for position against Christian claims for transcendence" and that "the poet does not finally make an opposition between poetry and empire, but maintains they are interdependent: poetry keeps empire alive by memorializing it, and so makes memorable the ruins which are the apparent subject-

³³ Van Dorsten, *The Radical Arts*, 80.

³⁴ See Rebecca Helfer, "Remembering Sidney, Remembering Spenser: The Art of Memory and *The Ruines of Time*," *Spenser Studies* (2007): 127–51. Helfer argues that "rather than repairing 'the ruines of time,' Spenser locates the immortality in ruin itself—in poetry's ruins—and the process of recollection" (128). Also see Anne Janowitz's *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* in which she argues that "the permanence of poetry in the face of historical decline roots national permanence within poetic continuity" ([Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990], 26).

matter of the poem.”³⁵ Empire, ruins, and the ruined body of Sidney himself are treated and absorbed into a cosmographic gaze—drawn into a project that wants to provide a visionary and totalizing experience, one that rejects sectarian identifications by emphasizing that any worldly institution will inevitably fall (“O vile worlds trust, that with such vaine illusion / Hath so wise men bewicht, and overkest / That they see not the way of their confusion” [456–58]) and only the anti-worldly divine endures. The poem offers a prophetic dialogue with the land that, in the Anglo-Dutch fashion of Camden’s project, treats the discussion of the land, containing the multitudes of lives and creations within it, as the true locus of spiritual discourse.

The spiritual disquisition of Spenser’s poem is deeply anti-worldly and anti-vainglorious. Spenser’s Verolamium cries out her “piteous plaint”: “And who so els that sits in highest seate / Of this worlds glorie, worshipped of all, / Ne feareth change of time, nor fortunes threate, / Let him behold the horrors of my fall” (470 and 463–66). Spenser’s work, like Familist philosophy, seems to reject proscriptions in favor of an ongoing and transcendent visionary experience. Spenser’s poet receives no clear, easily discernible message from Verolamium’s lament:

So inlie greeving in my groning brest,
And deepelie musing at her doubtfull speach,
Whose meaning much I labored foorth to wreste,
Being above my slender reasons reach;
At length by demonstration me to teach,
Before mine eyes strange sights presented were,
Like tragicke Pageants seeming to appeare.

(484–90)

Declarative pronouncements and clear interpretation, in the poem, are replaced by visionary encounter and emotion.

Spenser’s poet’s visions come in two stages. The first of these two, inspired as all the images are by Joachim Du Bellay’s *Les Antiquitez de Rome*, narrates a series of impressive structures that meet their end because of the shifting and uncertain circumstances of earthly life:

I saw an Image, all of massie gold,
Placed on high upon an altare faire,
That all, which did the same from farre beholde,
Might worship it, and fall on lowest staire.

(491–94)

³⁵ Janowitz, *England’s Ruins*, 28 and 27.

The link to idolatry is clear here: the image stands on the altar to be worshipped, and yet Spenser is not throwing the visual completely away. In the place of admiring a still image, Spenser offers the reader the awe of a moving spectacle: we see the image, resting on an altar "built of bricke clay" (499), eventually meet its fate:

Then downe it fell, and low in ashes lay,
Scorned of everie one, which by it went;
That I it seing, dearelie did lament.

(502–4)

The movement from high to low and from heaven to earth defines the spectacle of the entire poem: ruins' ability to speak historically, theologically, and poetically when activated in the visionary imagination. Ortellius, Camden, and others had hoped that representing the earth, as informed by antiquity as by their own original calculations and projections, would offer an awe-inspiring experience of creation and the unity of human life. So too Spenser's ruins perform a remarkably similar task. By taking on subject matter that historically defied clear sectarian markers, Spenser was able to participate in the Familist cause of theological transcendence through a visionary engagement with the universal conditions of the natural world.

That Spenser has theological implications in mind becomes clear by the second set of visions at the end of the poem. The last of these visions, a touching memorial to the dead Sidney's body, reveals how a consideration of the ashes of the earth and of the body can lead to a kind of transcendence of worldly things. Spenser sees a golden ark "which th'ashes seem'd of some great Prince to hold, / Enclosde therein for endless memorie / Of him, whom all the world did glorifie" (661–63). This image of glorified ruins, imbued with a prophetic vision and tied deeply to a sense of the earth as spiritual, sprawling, and united in its tie to mortality and decay, comes from the heart of Spenser's interactions with Familist cosmographic culture. A model for what poetry and cosmography—charged with the spiritual mission these fields often espoused in the sixteenth century—can do with ruins emerges in the end of Spenser's poet's vision. Mercury bears up the ark "with him above the skie, / And to those ashes gave a second life, / To live in heaven, where happiness is rife: / At which the earth did grieve exceedingly, / And I for dole was almost like to die" (668–72). Spenser's poem offers a sort of mapping of human decay and the distance between heaven and earth. Indeed, the poem emphasizes this distance when Spenser's

poet remarks that it “seemed the heavens with the earth did disagree / Whether should of those ashes keeper bee” (664–65). Spenser’s poem, through its engagement with the spirit of Verolamium, with the memory of the dead Sidney, and, finally, with the narrating of his ashes’ ascent to heaven, provides an anatomy and chorography of the human body and soul’s fate across time and space, across history and within the layers of the earth.

In drawing Spenser and Camden’s projects together, I want to close with Camden’s ending to *Britannia*, a passage that clearly is behind much of Spenser’s spatial and historical interests:

Nothing remaineth now, seeing my penne hath with much labour struggled and failed at length out of so many blind shelves and shallowed of the Ocean and craggy rocks of antiquity, save onely this, that as seamen were wont in old time, to present Neptune with their torne sailes, or some saved planks according to their vow, I also should consecrate some monument unto the Almighty and Most Gracious God, and to Venerable Antiquity: which now right willingly and of duty I vow, & God willing in convenient time I will performe & make good my vow. Meanwhile, I would have the reader to remember that I have in the work wrestled with that envious and ravenous enemy Time. (“British Lands,” 233)

Camden envisions his project as a historical and geographic tour of England, full of attempts, successes, and failures—panoramic in scope and mixed in results. Yet he offers his visions and his labors, as Spenser’s poet does at the end of the “Ruines of Time,” not as a certain gesture of achievement but as part of an ongoing process of dealing with the space of Britain and equally importantly, with “that envious and ravenous enemy Time.” The work’s goals have not yet all been met. The reader is left knowing that the project of geographic description contains within it the promise but not the execution of a spiritual monument. This act of gratitude is constructed solely in the imagination of the reader, leaving the reader with one final act of visionary reconstruction in honor of antiquity.

Bruno Latour, writing about this period, argues that “letters, mirrors, lenses, painted words, perspectives, inventories, illustrated children’s books, microscopes, and telescopes come together in this visual culture. All innovations are selected ‘to secretly see and without suspicion what is done far off in other places.’”³⁶ The philosophical climate of Reform-

³⁶ Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” in *Representation in Scientific Practice*, ed. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 31. The quotation at the end

mation Europe encouraged a select international intelligentsia, taking cues from home and overseas as well as from the heterodox expanses of their imaginations, to access the divine and antique by any philosophical, scientific, or literary means possible. The Familists, and the Anglo-Dutch and Franco-Fleming culture that engendered them, had captured a young Spenser's imagination, and in 1591, Spenser revisited that imagination right at the moment his grand romance-epic, *The Faerie Queene*, was published. The conciliatory and irenic nature of Spenser's poetics can too easily be lost in the idea of Spenser as the great Protestant poet of England, and a Spenser that, in Stephen Greenblatt's words, "worships power."³⁷ Spenser was never able to fully transcend his political and economic position: his great text on Ireland teems with frustration over both the country in which he finds himself and the country that sent him there. Yet, facing Camden's work, Spenser was able to reignite a voice that had helped launch his career and, in doing so, was able to engage with the great cosmographic revolution of the sixteenth century, drawing together discourses that, to those poets, mapmakers, cosmographers, and philologists involved in them, could never fully exist apart.

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³⁷ See Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 174. Greenblatt's work on book 2 of the *Faerie Queene* still dominates the critical discourse about Spenser's relationship to empire and his role as making colonial destruction "not a stain but a virtue" (187) in the Elizabethan colonial project.