A CRITICAL COMPANION TO ENGLISH MAPPAE MUNDI OF THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES

Edited by
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THE BOYDELL PRESS
THE VERCELLI MAP
(c. 1217)*
ASA SIMON MITTMAN

Resurget frater tuus. (Your brother will rise again.)
The Raising of Lazarus, John 11.23, Latin Vulgate

THE STATE OF THE MAP

The Vercelli Map, one of the largest maps to survive from the Middle Ages, has not received the attention it merits (Plate IV). This is likely the result of its very poor state of preservation, which has been a constant theme in what little has been published on it. There are several studies that make brief mention of the map, and a few studies focused on it. The most significant publication is Carlo F. Capellos's 1976 volume, Il mappamondo medioevale di Vercelli, 1191-1218, which includes a transcription of its inscriptions by region and an alphabetical gazetteer of toponyms. In essence, the Vercelli Map has been noticed in a number of studies of medieval geography and cartography, but there have not been any sustained discussions of it since Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken's 1990 essay. The Vercelli Map's scholarly neglect and the substantial conceptual transformations in the history of cartography since the 1990s makes this

* My thanks to Dan Terkla for inviting me to write this essay, and then for his voice of calm when I panicked about actually doing so.


2 See note 1.
map ripe for reappraisal; fortunately, recent technological developments make it newly available for examination.

The Lazarus Project, a multi-spectral imaging initiative, scans vellum and parchment with a series of wavelengths from ultraviolet through infrared to reveal texts and images that are not visible to the unaided viewer. The Vercelli Map was one of the first manuscripts to receive full imaging by the Lazarus Project, along with the more famous Vercelli Book, one of four manuscripts containing an extensive collection of Old English poetry. I have based my work here on the Lazarus images. They provide clearer views of the map and its contents than have been available since Carlo Errera noticed it early in the twentieth century, and perhaps an even clearer view than he had. The digital files are massive, and small-scale print reproductions cannot convey their utility and clarity. There are, though, areas of the map that are utterly lost, areas - especially Europe - where the damage is too extensive for the text to be recovered, even by this process, and others that remain stubbornly illegible.

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4 'Vercelli Book Project', Lazarus Project.
5 My thanks for the generosity of Timothy Leonard, Curator of Manuscripts and Rare Books at the Capitulary Library, Vercelli; Gregory Heyworth, Professor of English at the University of Rochester and Director of the Lazarus Project; and Chet Van Duzer, independent map scholar and member of the Lazarus Board of Directors, who first introduced me to the project.
6 Pixel dimensions: 18993 x 23061.
7 Capello, Il mappamondo.
8 Produced by stitching ultraviolet A light with visible light, using a recently developed technique.
9 Capello, Il mappamondo: 1442-1452.
10 Chekin, Northern Italian cartography...