

3 Place and Space as Concepts Travelling through Time

*Qui comenza el mar scuro*¹

Cultural studies have greatly influenced the study of religion, stimulating the reception of theories and methods from other disciplines and widening the field of inquiry. As already mentioned in the previous chapters, overall, cultural studies have radically changed scholarly approaches to religion and the ways in which we address this phenomenon in the past and present. The attention to spatial practices that permeate culture and society are rooted in a series of academic debates that arose during the latter half of the 20th century, initiated by the work of the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre in the 1970s.²

In this stage of our imaginary journey, we reflect on the concepts of place and space, unravelling the intricate threads that link the history of religion with theoretical reflection upon religion. The aim of this chapter and those that follow is to set-out intertwining approaches to space as a general, abstract category, within which concepts of place are envisaged as a foundational lived dimension, perceived in manifold ways. For this purpose, we begin by exploring a selection of medieval and early modern sources that illustrate developments in concepts of space and place that occurred during this time.

1 »Here begins the dark sea«, Fra Mauro, *Mappamondo*, edition by Falchetta, 2006, 175 (*2).

2 An important impetus arose from *La production de l'espace*, published by the sociologist Henri Lefebvre in 1974 (*2000), who inspired, further inspiring works such as *Thirdspace, Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* by the geographer and urbanist Edward Soja published in 1996. Overviews of the development of approaches to space can be found in Crang / Thrift 2000; Döring / Thielmann 2008; Günzel 2009 and 2017; Kajatzke / Schroer 2012.

We will focus on representations of the world conceived as a divine creation, selecting images which offer a global view of the whole cosmos. The analysis of the chosen images highlights the intellectual transformations that took place in addressing spatial questions during this particular era of the European history of religion. There was a shift from a vision of space originating from divine creation to space as an abstraction of human experience and exploration.

After this journey through history, we will shift forward in time to explore contemporary approaches to current spatial practices, albeit rooted in the historical developments outlined in the present chapter. In order to link together these two approaches to space and place, namely, the analysis of religious-historical sources in the current chapter and the discussion of theoretical debates from the 20th and 21st centuries, discussed in the next chapter, we will begin with some epistemological observations. That is to say, before we consider some particular concepts of space, let us first take a step back, and ask: what are »concepts« from a cultural studies perspective and how do they illuminate research on shared places?

3.1 Concepts that travel

Cultural studies can be addressed as a research paradigm embracing various approaches, which, depending on the academic tradition and the period, are characterised by different emphases and concerns. Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, both scholars of English literature, argue that:

The plurality of approaches to the study of culture, including the differences between them, testifies to the fact that the study of culture is in itself very much a cultural practice. Cultural Studies, *Kulturwissenschaften*, the study of culture, *sciences humaines* are epistemological configurations constructed on disciplinary and local specialisation, and it is within regionally circumscribed epistemic communities that many of the key concepts for the study of cultures have been developed.³

3 Neumann / Nünning 2012, 2.

Nonetheless, despite the diversity of ways in which cultural studies are understood and practiced, there are common lines that enable us to chart the contours of this research paradigm more neatly. First of all, addressing culture as a subject for scholarly investigation has to do with political engagement tackling complex challenges in society in different phases of the 20th century. This is the main reason why cultural studies fostered fairly radical transformations of academic organisations and epistemological procedures. According to the sociologist Stuart Hall, cultural studies are a discursive formation deeply entangled with politics, which is its most distinguishing trait.⁴ He defines cultural studies as a commitment to:

[...] the question of a general theory which could, in a critical way, connect together in a critical reflection different domains of life, politics and theory, theory and practice, economic, political, ideological questions, and so on; the notion of critical knowledge itself and the production of critical knowledge as a practice.⁵

This opinion is shared by other scholars, including the historian Peter Burke and the English literature scholar Aleida Assmann, who also emphasise the interplay between cultural studies, politics and society. Assmann highlights that cultural studies arose from far-reaching transformations in society, which explains why this paradigm emerged in different places and in such variegated forms.⁶

Second, the entanglement between cultural studies and societal concerns is mirrored in the topics addressed: the role of language and of different modes of communication, the acknowledgement of heterogeneity and polysemy in meaning-making processes, the interdependency of representation and power, the role of symbols, which led to the broadening of canons of sources for scholarly investigation, including popular culture. The body and materiality became objects of academic research as well as gender and ethnicity. The role of social practices and their agencies moved to the centre of interest, as did the concepts of memory and of space. This sensitivity

4 Hall 2016.

5 Hall 2019a, 74.

6 Assmann 2008, 11–30; Burke 2019, 2: »The cultural turn is itself part of the cultural history of the last generation«.

towards history and memory as always being performed in a place, which is particularly relevant for this volume, reflects the entanglement between social challenges and cultural studies. The extension of space through digital media, human relationships with the natural environment, processes of globalisation, migration, urbanisation, segregation and gentrification are central questions of our time embedded within spatial practices that demand comprehensive analytical approaches and interpretative study.⁷

Self-reflexivity is a third aspect that can be traced among the various approaches within cultural studies. Thinking about the interaction between knowledge, politics and society implies a realisation that scholarly analysis of culture is a cultural practice in itself. As Neumann and Nünning put it:

The engagement with the theory and practice of cultural studies inevitably calls for self-reflexive research agendas, which can draw attention to the epistemological, cultural and political implications of the theories and concepts we endorse.⁸

Subject matter such as the history of culture, the concept of culture itself, of religion, media, symbol, performativity, memory, politics, body, materiality, or space are not based in a particular discipline but are debated across many fields. Accordingly, academic self-reflexivity leads to questioning of disciplinary delimitations, of being attentive to how disciplines and organisations developed historically, and how configurations of scholarly thinking and knowledge production undergo continuous change.⁹

This hermeneutical approach, which is typical for cultural analysis, has consequently demonstrated the necessity to foster inter- and transdisciplinarity as essential practices for tackling complex questions and enhancing self-reflexion. Emphasising the relevance of inter- and transdisciplinarity does not mean the annihilation of disciplinary investigation; on the contrary, the exchange between different fields dealing with these topics is an endorsement of these disciplines, since it fosters innovation and transforms

7 Assmann 2008, 153.

8 Neumann / Nünning 2012, 3.

9 Partey 2011, particularly 9–10.

the different fields of knowledge.¹⁰ The history of the study of religion well illustrates such dynamics. As an academic field, it arose at the intersection between the comparative study of languages and cultures, the study of specific literatures, as well as theology, history and other fields scrutinising societal issues past and present.¹¹

Acknowledging the interconnections between cultural studies, different disciplinary methodologies and society is paramount to explain how theoretical reflection about place and space unfolds. Space and place are fundamental aspects that permeate both scholarly and societal practices. The attempt to formulate concepts to capture spatial issues is deeply embedded in the history of culture and of religion, given that spatiality is such a basic and contested dimension of human life and organisation.

Like several key concepts in the humanities, space and place are best addressed as »travelling« concepts, a metaphor expressing the flexibility and adaptability of theoretical approaches that are exchanged between individual scholars, disciplines and fields, as well as across histories of ideas and disciplines.¹² As Mieke Bal points out:

Concepts are tools of intersubjectivity: they facilitate discussion on the basis of a common language. Mostly, they are considered abstract representations of an object. But, like all representations, they are neither simple nor adequate in themselves. They distort, unfix, and inflect the object.¹³

The present volume is inspired by this understanding of concepts focusing on displacements, exchanges, transformations as well as crossings of disciplinary boundaries, scholarly traditions and languages. In different places

10 On the question of defining disciplinarity, inter- and transdisciplinarity see e.g. Banse / Fleischer 2011; Mittelstrass 1996; Pezzoli-Olgiati 2020b.

11 Kippenberg 1997; Sharpe 1998; Tworuschka 2015; Waardenburg 1999. Stroumsa 2010 offers an illuminating contribution to the history of our field. He emphasises the continuity between intellectual curiosity for religion in the Enlightenment and the constitution of the field as an academic discipline in the second half of the 19th century.

12 Bal 2002, 22–55. The image of travel to describe transfers between disciplines and epochs has been used by Said 1983 and Clifford 1997. See also Neumann / Nünning 2012, 4–7; Frank 2009 and, applied to theories of religion, Tweed 2006 and van den Heever 2022.

13 Bal 2002, 22.

and at different times, concepts assume different meanings and convey different ideas. Concepts are best outlined as dynamic, multilayered tools for framing and conceptualising approaches in cultural analysis.

In the following pages, keeping in mind the metaphor of concepts that travel, we discuss »space« and »place«, as two concepts that are fundamental within cultural studies, yet have only recently been included in the study of religion, and are still establishing themselves in our discipline.¹⁴ In this book, we explore travelling concepts of space and place in two steps. As a first step, in the present chapter, we discuss selected representations of space and place in the transition from medieval Christian cosmology to early modern cartography. This period is very important to historically contextualise the way in which we conceive of space and place today.

The test cases show how the world, as a whole, was represented at a time when the exploration of the terrestrial globe and of the universe was radically changing human perception of the world. The discovery of other continents and trade routes, new approaches to the solar system and the universe, new debates in natural philosophy and later in natural sciences, as well as a new reception of theological and philosophical traditions, laid the foundations for addressing space and place as complex concepts for delineating an essential precondition for human life.

The selection of visual sources aims at illustrating a transformation in representing the world as an encompassing space. The first examples we discuss present images of creation in which it is conceived as a harmonic whole encompassing places that are existentially relevant for believers. These spatial representations are permeated by the history of salvation: the cosmos is the dimension in which a believer's life unfolds; it appears as an ordered entity in which past, present and future as well as individual life and behaviour are located. The case studies we analyse in this chapter show an increasing intellectual curiosity in merging together information about places and spaces derived from different traditions and sources of knowledge. These sources of knowledge include: Christian history of salvation, the reception of Biblical narratives and theological traditions, the reception of spatial theories from antiquity, speculation based on direct observation of the territory, navigation maps as well as written and oral travellers' reports. In early modern

14 For overviews see e.g. Gehlen 1995 and 1998; Gill 1998; Knott 2013; Park 1994.

time, these diverse approaches to creation could no longer be reproduced by a homogeneous, harmonic image of the world. The concepts of space and place became multilayered and complex; religious cosmologies presenting the world as a homogeneous spatial entity coexisted with approaches to space and place as objects of scrutiny. This transformation did not follow a linear timeline. This is the reason why the following examples are not discussed in a strictly chronological order. Instead, we follow different genres and typologies of representations of the word as a unity.

3.2 A retable reveals a Christian worldview: The Graner altarpiece in Regensburg

The altarpiece (or »retable«) reproduced in figure 4 depicts a late medieval representation of a Christian cosmos.¹⁵ The retable with bas-reliefs was donated by Elisabeth Englmayr († 1491) and her husband Sigmund Graner († 1484) from Regensburg, Germany, to the church Alte Kapelle in 1488 when Sigmund had already passed away.¹⁶ Today, it belongs to the collection of the History Museum of Regensburg. It is well preserved, although a few elements are missing. The reverse panels of the winged altarpiece, when closed, depict St. Simon and St. Bartholomew, the patron saints of the Graner family. When opened, the altarpiece reveals a complex network of places believers can visually enter while praying for the poor souls of the dead.¹⁷

In the central panel Christ appears as Judge seated on a rainbow,¹⁸ his feet are placed on the terrestrial globe. This upper panel depicts a scene unfolding in heaven: Mary and St. John intercede for the souls of the believers who kneel and pray on the left and the right (from the viewer's perspective) of Jesus Christ. The lower part of the panel offers a close-up view of what happens, meanwhile, on the terrestrial globe,¹⁹ the earthly dimension

15 For an introductory overview see e. g. Auffarth 2002; Dinzelbacher 2007; Jezler 1994, Kliege 1991; Minois 1991; Segal 2004; Vorgrimler 1994.

16 See also Halm 1922, 14.

17 For an analysis of the retable see Halm 1922; Jezler 1994, 190–191; Pezzoli-Olgiaiti 2014.

18 The rainbow is a typical element of the iconographic motif of Christ in Majesty (*maiestas domini*). See Kirschbaum 1971, 521–522; Schiller 1971, 233.

19 From an iconographic point of view, the globe merges different motifs (see Gerlach 1970). On the one hand, it refers to the orb, which was originally a symbol of Roman power (see



Fig. 4: A medieval Christian worldview encompassing the human world and otherworldly cosmic realms. Retable with bas-relief, 1488, 124 × 188 cm, Museen der Stadt Regensburg. On the lower edge: herr Sigmund graner Elizabeta sein hausfraw m cccc lxxxviii (Master Sigmund Graner Elizabeth his wife 1488).

human beings inhabit. The terrestrial globe is depicted according to a medieval T-O map and is placed in the geometrical centre of the panel (fig. 5).²⁰ On the right, Mary is represented for a second time as Virgin of Mercy, taking care of humanity in this terrestrial world: her outspread cloak shelters members of the clergy on the right and laypeople on the left. Beside her, St. Bartholomew stands with a knife as his attribute. His hand protects a woman that kneels and prays with her two young daughters standing before her. The coat of arms identifies her as Elizabeta, the donor of the retable, her name being painted on the lower edge of the altarpiece. In front of her, on the left side, Elizabeta's already deceased husband, Sigmund Graner, kneels holding a hat in his hands. He prays while St. Simon, with a saw as an attri-

Fillitz 1971); on the other hand, the T-O map depiction refers to medieval *mappae mundi* that represent the Earth as a surface divided into three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. In the Middle Ages, the Earth was conceived as being a sphere. See e.g. Brincken 2008b.

20 T-O map defines a particular type of map. See below footnote 62, page 67.



Fig. 5: Detail of the central panel representing the earthly globe as a T-O map.

bute, gently protects him. Elisabeth and Sigmund are ideal believers. Both are immersed in prayer and, the inscription tells us, have sponsored an altarpiece to visually express their piety and affection to Christ, Mary, the Saints, the church and the souls of the dead.

In the lower left-hand corner of the central panel, there is a contact zone between earthly and otherworldly places. Various medieval motifs referring to Christ as the Saviour are presented. The motifs include: the Risen Christ; Christ showing his healing wounds; Christ holding his own body as a host in his hand, and a *fons pietatis* – the fountain of mercy, that is represented as filled with Jesus' blood – with small tubes that carry the healing fluid to the poor souls in Purgatory, depicted below.

The smaller panels on the lateral and lower sides extend the topics addressed in the central part: they offer a panorama of what is going on in the world (in the four panels on the upper left and upper right parts of the retable) and in the underworld (in the lower four panels), in domains humans can not directly access but nevertheless experience by means of the visualisation the altarpiece provides. Above, on the left, a priest is celebrating Mass, consecrating a host and wine that are transformed into Christ's body and blood. A man (a layman or a cleric?) attends Mass and holds the priest's

gown in his hand. Immediately below, a wayfarer shares his coat with two destitute men he encounters on his journey. On the same level, on the right side, a wealthy man in red clothing gives food and drink to a pilgrim. In all three side panels an angel takes the most representative object of the scene: the host, a piece of the coat, and the pilgrim's saddlebag.

Finally, in the upper panel on the right, a praying scene unfolds. Two men are kneeling at the foot of the cross looking at Jesus Christ who has sacrificed his life for their sins. The pious man on the left side is modestly dressed and is immersed in contemplation. The other does not fold his hands properly, he is well dressed, wears an impeccable red coat, blue trousers and fashionable shoes. He is distracted and thinks of his business and properties, depicted behind him in a house. The house represents various vices (from top-left): a coffer (referring to avarice), a woman looking into a mirror (vanity), a couple making love in a bed (lust); a dining table (gluttony), and a store room with barrels (envy). In the final scene we see the man looking out of the door with his horse (pride). This panel contrasts a righteous and a dissolute way of praying, a motif that recurs in another representation (fig. 6), which facilitates the interpretation of this scene.²¹ In this panel, the angel transporting an object is not preserved, but, as we will see below, the missing messenger originally took the the rosary of the sincere believer.

Worldly life is depicted as a place of piety and devotion but also of free choice. Men and women can decide how to orientate their life. They may choose to help destitute and defenceless people, care for the souls of the dead in Purgatory, by praying and uniting themselves with the saints, Mary and Jesus Christ with fervent devotion, and attending the Mass or choose instead to dedicate themselves to earthly pleasures. Both ways are possible and indeed divide humanity into two groups: the former may expect to be saved at the end, whilst the latter will suffer eternal pain, as the lower register of the retable vividly shows.

21 Halm 1922, 17–18.



Fig. 6: Single-sheet printing representing the motifs of righteous and dissolute ways of praying. A devout, poorly dressed man with bushy hair and a wealthy man, impeccably clothed and with hair combed, pray at the foot of the cross. The prayers of the first are focused on the wounds of the crucified Christ. The rich man does not pray at all. Instead, he thinks of himself, admiring himself in a mirror (vanity), lying in bed with a woman (lust), eating and drinking fine food (gluttony), accumulating a fortune (avarice) and confronting himself with the wealth of others (envy). The comparison with the retable in Regensburg in figure 4 highlights small differences: in the altarpiece, the reference to envy extends into both rooms of the ground floor and the opulent house replaces the checked structure in the printing's list of vices. The printing is even more didactic in expressing the moral qualities of the two men, characterising them with a small angel and a devil as well as including lines to express what they are saying and thinking. Painted xylograph, 15th century, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

The two central lower panels depict Hell on the right and Purgatory on the left. The angels represented in the four earthly scenes discussed above here bring offerings to the poor souls who are undergoing purification for their sins in a prison-like construction. Three of them stretch their arms out of a window and grasp the objects which the angels are bringing which represent good deeds. A fourth receives the chalice with Christ's blood. This is the most effective offering: the angel guarding Purgatory opens the massive door and liberates this soul. No escape is possible from Hell, which is rep-

resented as a dark furnace. An angel and a corpulent black devil together oversee the realm of damnation.

The two panels on the lower register's outer wings cannot be clearly understood. On the left, the otherworldly, prisonlike building is empty, its door open, while on the other side, the massive cellar is closed; its door is secured with a massive iron chain. I personally think that these scenes anticipate the final judgment: the souls of the righteous have been raised to Paradise and therefore Purgatory is empty. On the opposite side, the Devil and the sinners are barred from Paradise, imprisoned in the sealed bottomless pit, which may refer to a second, definitive death. These scenes anticipate events at the end of time and therefore bring an eschatological perspective into the representation. It suggests a chronological order between the personal judgement individuals are afforded when they pass away and the definitive judgement at the end of time.²²

Overall, from a spatial perspective, the retable can be interpreted as a material representation of a worldview encompassing the terrestrial globe and the otherworldly domains human beings dwell in after passing away. The altarpiece focuses on exchanges between the different places. The mutual interactions among people and between humans and divine beings demonstrate a correspondence between the various places that composes the entire cosmos.

Furthermore, there is a strong link between the prayer scene in the middle of the altarpiece and what the viewer is expected to do in front of this image: to pray and sincerely immerse oneself into the depicted worldview. Consequently, the performance of looking locates the viewer within the religious worldview, it merges the cosmological representation with his or her life. The retable has a didactic function: it depicts how the world is composed, what places it encompasses and teaches believers how to behave in the world which they inhabit.²³ When it stands open, the winged altarpiece reveals a multilayered reality which was perceived on entering the church in which it was displayed. The retable materialises a revelation and offers a place for reflection about the human condition in this world, in the afterlife and at the end of time. Yet, this spatial representation is incomplete: by focusing on the

22 In my opinion, the representation of the two opposite lateral lower panels echo Revelation 20. See Halm 1922, 19, footnote 29. Jezler 1994, 190 interprets the lower panel on the left as a »Vorhölle«, and the place opposite on the right as Limbo. On the relationship between individual and end-time judgement see Jezler 1994, 13–26; Auffarth 2002, 151–198.

23 Halm 1922, 14.

mutual exchange between earthly life and the otherworldly domains of punishment and expectation, it implicitly suggests Paradise without depicting it.

3.3 A mirror provides individual orientation: The single-sheet printing *Spiegel der Vernunft*

A complete overview of all the cosmological places in a medieval worldview is presented in a single-sheet print from southern Germany, also produced in 1488 – the date is written in the middle of the image (fig. 7). It depicts a mirror, composed by portraying a circular reflecting surface in the middle and a frame around it. As the title *Spiegel der Vernunft* (*Mirror of Reason*) indicates,²⁴ it is meant for personal meditation, for reasoning about the world and the position of human beings in it.²⁵

In the centre, the viewer sees him- or herself, depicted as a pilgrim crossing a bridge, designed with a rising and then falling path, which represents human life. Under the wooden planks of the bridge are inscribed years, at five-year intervals, from 5 to 95, with 50 positioned at the central raised point of the bridge. The pilgrim walks upwards, moving toward the axis in the middle: the tablets on the pillar are not legible, but it is highly likely that the Golden Rule is written on them.²⁶ Above the two tablets, the cross is depicted. A devil pulls the pilgrim backwards, whilst an angel points at the two tablets. In the banner a prayer is written: »O Lord, thou know everything, have mercy upon me, thy will be done, help me to thee«.²⁷

24 For the origin and significance of the mirror in (book) titles from the 14th to the 18th century see Grabes 1973.

25 An edition of the text in the single-sheet printing is provided by Griesse 2011, 99–102.

26 This printing may have been used as the basis for an oil painting from 1766, which is still displayed in its original place, in the ossuary St. Michael in Oberägeri, Switzerland. In this adaption the inscriptions are translated into Latin. An analysis of the oil painting can be found in Fritz / Höpflinger / Knauss / Mäder / Pezzoli-Olgati 2018, 65 (fig. 28, in colour); Grünenfelder 1992 and 1999, 280–282; Odermatt-Bürgi 1984; Pezzoli-Olgati 2014, 112–116. The painting can be explored in a video: <https://www.kulturpunkte-zug.ch/orte/beinhaus-st-michael/aufruttelnde-bildtafel-im-beinhaus-st-michael> (accessed on 6 August 2025).

27 The original text reads »O her du wayß piß gnedig mir / Dein will gescheh, hilf mir zu dir.« Griesse 2011, 100. Translation into English by the author.



Fig. 7: *Spiegel der Vernunft*, painted xylograph, 1488, 40.4 × 29.1 cm, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

On the other side of the bridge, Death, a skeleton with a bow and arrow, is waiting. As soon as it shoots the arrow, the man will land in the grave under the bridge. Death is unpredictable: the clock, depicted above the skeletal figure, which was a widespread motif at this time, emphasises the transience of human life.²⁸

The short path of the pilgrim's life starts in this world, represented in the frame, on the left side of the bridge. Again, the contrasting motifs of a virtuous life and a life of vice, which we have already seen in the retable, recur: in the upper part, people are praying and working, in the lower part, divided by a wall, people are sitting on a huge table and enjoying themselves. On the opposite side, the first stage of otherworldly life is presented: Christ judges the dead according to their deeds. An angel directs them into Purgatory, Hell, or Paradise. In the lower part, the entrance to Hell is represented as a monstrous mouth, while Purgatory, above it, is drawn as a fountain containing the poor souls. In Paradise, in the upper part of the mirror frame, God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are depicted. Mary is interceding for the believers. The Trinity and Mary are visually linked to the *fons pietatis* from which Christ's blood flows into the chalice, which is located directly above the cross.

The different domains at the centre and in the frame of the mirror represent a medieval Christian image of the world with all the places that constitute it. As we have already observed in the retable of Regensburg, these domains are distinct, yet they are tied together: they are constitutive parts of the cosmos. The trinity is linked to human worldly life through the cross and Christ's blood of salvation, accessible through the Eucharist. The viewer can relate to the divine world by means of prayers and good deeds, and obviously, by looking at the mirror and meditating about what it reveals. In the frame of the mirror, angels address the reader directly, explaining the relevance of what the viewer is seeing for his or her life. The angel positioned between Paradise and Judgement says:

See, pilgrim, that your soul is formed after God.
You shall here repent and keep God's commandments.

28 The skull and the clock are iconographic references to the transience of human life and *vanitas* (futility). They often recur together. See Gsodam 1972; Günther 2011; Maurice 1972.

Hope and believe in him and so he will give you.
Grace here and after this time eternal life.²⁹

Between Judgment and Purgatory and Hell:

See, pilgrim, here you do not stay.
You must die and [go] to the last judgment.
And you don't know when, how, where and whereto afterwards.
Therefore prepare yourself at all times.³⁰

Between Hell and worldly life:

See, behind you pilgrim, that your body is made from earth.
And it will become earth again.
Will you not leave the sin here and avoid [it].
Then you must endure a great suffering.³¹

Eventually, between worldly life and Paradise:

See behind you, pilgrim, and think about.
What good God and your neighbour have done for you.
And also what you have done against them and is iniquitous.
Consider for what you are guilty.³²

29 »Sich über dich pilgrim dein sel ist gepildt nach got. / Du solt hye pues than und gancz halten seine gepot. / Hoffe ud glaub in yn so will er dir geben. / Hye gnad und nach diser zeyt das ewig leben.« Griese 2011, 100. Translation into English by the author.

30 »Sich für dich pilgrim hye plyebestu nicht. / Du must sterben und für das letzt gericht. / Vnd wayst nit wenn wie wo und wuhin darnach. / Darumb so schick dich darzu allzeyt und tag.« Griese 2011, 101. Translation into English by the author.

31 »Sich hinter dich pilgrim und dein leyb kumpt von erden. / Vnd er wirdt auch widerumb zu erden warden. / Wiltu hye die sünd nit lassen und meyden. / So muestu darumb auch grosse peyn leyden.« Griese 2011, 100. Translation into English by the author.

32 »Sich hinter dich pilgrim und gedenke doran. / Was guetz dir got und dein nächster hat gethan. / Auch wastu wider sy gethan hast und unrecht ist. / O bedencke wastu darumb zu than schuldig pist.« Griese 2011, 100. Translation into English by the author.

The worldview in the retable from Alte Kappelle in Regensburg and in this single-sheet printing each have different emphases but both relate to the same concept of space. In both images, the cosmos is depicted and conceived as a well ordered whole, with its characteristic worldly and otherworldly spheres and their mutual relationships. The representation of the cosmos has a direct relevance for the viewers/readers who are taught how to conduct a proper life and achieve eternal life in an eschatological future.

In these worldviews, the biography of the viewer and the cosmic order are merged; the descriptive and prescriptive significance of the depicted places are intertwined. Whereas the retable could only be seen in the church on (feast) days when the panels were opened, the single-sheet printing was intended for personal edification for lay people.³³ The mirror reveals its role as a mediator between the Trinity and the viewer/reader in the spiral banners in the upper parts of the sheet which represent the string for hanging it on an imaginary wall.³⁴

The three of us are one God and Lord over all the kindred,
therefore, pilgrim, look into the Mirror of Reason.
Whence you come, who you are and how you live, I ask,
where you must [go] and where you [will] stay forever.³⁵

Both images of a Christian worldview we have considered to this point offer insights into domains that cannot be explored during earthly life but only by means of (visual) representation. All the interconnected places shown in these images are relevant for the stability of the cosmos. However, the world, as humans experience it, is represented in light of salvation history, focusing on characters, behaviours and values for viewers/readers seeking to attain Paradise. In other images of the world, the territory that pious believers and sinners inhabit is explored more accurately, with a more explicit interest in a cartographical depiction. There is a focus on the features of creation, the

33 Griesse 2011, 102.

34 For an in-depth study of the motif of the mirror as a metaphor for reflection and revelation about the world see Jónsson 1995.

35 »Wir drey sind ein got und herr über alle geschlecht. / darum pillgram sich hie in den Spiegel der vernunft. / Wann kumstu Wer bistu und Wie lebstu frag ich. / Wo muestu hine und Wo bleipstu ewiglich.« Translation by the author.

place where human life unfolds and the places where Christ's incarnation, passion and resurrection took place, as the next example shows.

3.4 The limits of creation are explored: The timber ceiling in St. Martin, Zillis

The representation of a Christian cosmos on the ceiling in the church of St. Martin in Zillis takes us back to the 12th century. The village is located in the Swiss Alps on the road that leads to the Splügen Pass, which was a crucial north-south road at that time in the Middle Ages, as it connected what is today southern Germany, Austria and Switzerland to Chiavenna, Lake Como and Milan. Coming from the north, travellers had to cross the Viamala canyon on an exposed, dangerous passage over the river Rhine before reaching the valley where Zillis is situated, and then going on to tackle the steep road across the Alps.

The single nave building of St. Martin, which was the main church of the valley, is first mentioned in 803 and the ceiling is dated from the beginning of the 12th century.³⁶ This is a unique treasure, as it preserves the only known Romanesque timber ceiling with figurative representations in Europe. Equally remarkable is the excellent state of its preservation, the quality of the paintings and the fact that it can still be seen today in its original location (fig. 8). Unlike the frescos on the church walls, the ceiling survived iconoclastic interventions during the Reformation.³⁷ The style of painting is typical for northern Italy, which is not surprising in a village on a busy road, which functioned as a contact zone between different cultures.³⁸

The work is comprised of 153, almost square panels (approx. 90 × 90 cm), made of spruce wood boards, arranged in a rectangle of nine panels in width and seventeen panels in length.³⁹ The single panels can be slid into

36 Nay 2015, 29.

37 For detailed analysis of the ceiling see Nay 2015; Blanke 1994; Brugger-Koch 1981. Nay 2015, 19–28 offers a detailed reconstruction of the research history of this unique monument.

38 Brugger-Koch 1981; Nay 2015, 317–362.

39 153 may be a reference to the Gospel of John 21:11: »So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn.« In his homily on John 20:30–31 and 21:1–11, Augustine presents an intricate calculation in which he argues that 153 is to be understood as a symbolic number representing the whole Church and all Christians: »Not therefore



Fig. 8: Ceiling of the church of St. Martin, Zillis, as it appears today. The sequence of the scenes is based on the reconstruction made in 1940. The outer frame of panels represents the sea, while the internal panels are to be read from left to right and from east (above) to west (below). Rows 2 to 14 depict the life of Jesus, row 15 the life of St. Martin.

the decorated guides that fix them onto the ceiling.⁴⁰ The building, and consequently the image of the world in the ceiling, is oriented towards the east, (even though not perfectly), which corresponds to the usual orientation for a church, the rising sun shining through the choir being associated metaphorically with resurrection. The location of the scenes has been changed over the centuries and the original layout is still a matter of scholarly debate since major restoration works took place in 1938–1940. Since 1940 the ceiling is oriented in a reading direction in which each row is read from left to right, beginning in the eastern part. However, before 1938, the panels were possibly organised according to a different reading direction, according to a »S« shape, switching from left to right and vice versa. It is not possible to definitively reconstruct the original sequence. Nevertheless, details of the figural representation and ornamental elements suggest that the Gospel narratives played a central role in the order of the scenes.⁴¹

The rectangle encompasses a central field and a frame surrounding it. The whole composition comprises different iconographic programmes. The first and most extended sequence, made of 14 rows of panels, begins in the eastern edge (in fig. 8, above), and shows a *Vita Christi*. It is a detailed arrangement of motifs in the life of Christ with clear references to the Gospels.⁴² Strikingly, the representation ends with the scene of the *Crowning with Thorns*, and not, as many researchers expect, with the death on the cross or the resurrection.⁴³ The second iconographic programme, in the penultimate row of panels, is dedicated to the life of St. Martin.

are only one hundred and fifty-three saints signified as going to rise again to eternal life, but thousands of saints who belong to the grace of the Spirit [...]. Therefore, all who belong to this grace are represented by this number, that is, are figuratively signified.» Translation by Rettig 1995, 71. Many thanks to Sean Ryan for suggesting these references.

40 A drawing of the fixing system can be seen in Nay 2015, 61.

41 Brugger-Koch 1981, 23. Nay 2015 offers an accurate analysis of the different sequences that can be reconstructed before the restoration of 1938. Furthermore, he suggests convincing corrections, particularly for the marine part in the frame. In his monograph, three possible orders of the panels are visualised in four attached enlarged reproductions in colour.

42 Blanke 1994, 24–37 emphasises the unusually precise correspondence between text and image. He assumes that the production of the ceiling was influenced by the theological and biblical thought of Bernard of Clairvaux.

43 According to Blanke 1994, 19–24 and 126–127 kingship is the Leitmotif of this *Vita Christi*. Therefore, the iconographic programme ends with the motif of the *Crowning with Thorns*, a first – though mocking – reference to Christ's kingship. It results in an image of

The third programme consists in the representation of the sea that surrounds the life of Christ and of St. Martin. The orientation of these panels is different: they are not to be read from the eastern side to the western and from the left to the right, but they follow a central symmetry, the lower edges being directed outwards, forming a border that encircles the world. The fourth and last iconographic programme is composed by the angels, which today are placed in the bottom left and right corners.⁴⁴

The four parts of the ceiling are tightly connected with each other, and together they build a map of the world. The domain in the middle of the ceiling represents the earthly place where Jesus' human life unfolds. Earth is therefore identified with the dimension of incarnation. St. Martin's life can be interpreted as a local connection to Zillis: the saint, to whom the church is dedicated, represents an ideal, an *exemplum*, of a follower of Christ. The frame represents the limits of the world: the depiction of the sea and of the marine beings in it refers to the borders of the terrestrial world, while the angels are an anticipation of apocalyptic events at the end of time.

The composition is visually unified by a cross which extends over the whole length and width and is marked by a double frame around the central panels.⁴⁵ Along this line, the map in Zillis anticipates the theological and didactic aspects which we discussed before in the representations of the cosmos from the 15th century. The all-encompassing cross highlights that salvation history permeates all domains of the world.

In the present reconstruction of the ceiling, that is based on the restoration of 1938–40, the scene in the middle of the cross, the geometrical centre of the representation, depicts Christ's temptation by the devil as described in Matthew 4:8–11 (fig. 9). The devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour, promising him power over all this in exchange for worship. The parallel text in Luke 4:5 reads: »Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world«. From a theological perspective, this panel emphasises the righteousness of Christ's sovereignty – in opposition to the power of the

Jesus Christ as the humiliated and at the same time dignified saviour. Possibly, the crucifixion scene was depicted on the church's wall.

44 About the basic organisation of the iconographic programme of the ceiling all analyses converge. See Nay 2015; Brugger-Koch 1981, 24–25.

45 Blanke 1994, 20.

Fig. 9: Standing on a high mountain, the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, which Jesus refuses to accept from him. The small map in the lower centre of the panel represents the world in a circular form containing buildings with towers, circles (maybe places or coins?) and bowls (?). These elements, according to the biblical text, refer to the splendour and richness the devil is promising in exchange for worship. The items are depicted in a light colour on a black background.



devil – as the leitmotif of the ceiling. Furthermore, from a spatial perspective the scene expresses the very idea of the map itself: it provides an instant overview of the whole world, specifically over all the inhabited domains of the earth. Visually, this scene contains a map within a map.

Our aim in this chapter is to consider selected representations of medieval Christian cosmologies as visual conceptualisations of space and place. As part of this analysis, the ceiling in Zillis is particularly illuminating because it depicts a domain that belongs to the order of creation, even though it contains unusual animals and scary scenes. The sea represented in the frame is an earthly territory that lies far away, but not beyond the limits of a human lifetime.

The marine borders contain various motifs. First, there are depictions of hybrid sea creatures, painted as a combination of different animals: an elephant or a ram with a fish's tail (figs. 10–11). These composite beings, made of different parts of exotic animals, refer to different sources. On the one hand, they echo bestiaries, contemporary collections of indigenous animals, as well as exotic creatures and other beasts we would today consider as imaginary such as unicorns, griffins, or dragons. Such illuminated collections were very popular in the Middle Age and contain descriptions of the animals' features and information about their symbolic meaning with references to the Bible, and wider Christian tradition as well as fables. On the other hand, in the context of the ceiling, the hybrid creatures also refer to beings living in the deep abyss from various Old Testaments books as well as to beasts appearing in the Book of Revelation.⁴⁶

46 Different interpretations of the hybrid creatures can be found in: Blanke 1994, 44–47;



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Figs. 10 and 11: Hybrid creatures living in the water of the sea that surrounds the Earth.

Fig. 12: A hybrid creature, half human and half fish, plays a string instrument.

Furthermore, there are hybrid figures half human and half fish playing a string instrument. They resonate with representations of sirens (fig. 12), fascinating, irresistible creatures who lure humans into the marine abyss.⁴⁷

Third, there are scenes with characters interacting with each other, like a devil riding a fish (fig. 13), an Amazon feeding a hybrid being half hart and half fish (fig. 14) and a devil-fish who is about to eat a naked human on a spit (fig. 15) as well as other fighting scenes with hybrid creatures biting one another.

Brugger-Koch 1981, 30–32; Nay 2015, 293–295; Poeschel 1941, 13–14. About the recurrence and meanings of monster on maps see Mittman 2006, particularly 45–81. For an illustrated introduction to bestiaries see Morris 2019.

47 Brugger-Koch 1981, 32–24.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Figs. 13–15: Scenes unfolding in the frame of the map, which show the chaotic waters of the sea: a devil is riding a fish, while an Amazon feeds another hybrid creature, half hart and half fish. A being half devil and half fish eats a naked human on a spit.



Fig. 15

Finally, there are three panels – one is damaged – representing people on boats. The interpretation of these scenes is challenging: some scholars read them as references to biblical scenes, others add a symbolic layer of meaning alluding to trial and final judgment. In my opinion, these depictions could also refer to the sea as a place of human activity (fishing, trading) and exploration (figs. 16–17).⁴⁸ As is typical for visual communication, the representation is polysemic, allowing manifold meanings.

48 Brugger-Koch 1981, 41. Three of the five fish swimming in the sea are caught in the net. The depiction may refer, according to Blanke (1994, 144–146), to different New Testament texts. One possibility is to interpret the image according to the Gospel of John 21. Accordingly, the disciples are fishing in the sea and do not recognise the risen Christ. Only once



Fig. 16: Two men are fishing on a large boat.



Fig. 17: Two men are in a large sailing boat. One is holding an oar, the other a box. A third character, clothed in a different colour, speaks to them.⁴⁹

Overall, the sea is depicted as a place inhabited by ambiguous, uncontrollable creatures. The recurrence of demonic figures makes the danger lurking in these waters visible. Marc Antony Nay's reconstruction of the frame suggests a procession of hybrid beings led by the playing sirens. The frame is the most damaged part of the ceiling and several panels painted in 1938–40 are copies of other preserved panels. This part of the restoration work provides an artificial sense of symmetry in the frame which cannot be historically verified.⁵⁰

The ceiling in Zillis can be interpreted as a medieval world map, a *mapa mundi*, a genre that visualises in a single representation the whole cosmos as well as all knowledge about it.⁵¹ This particular map of the world as a

their net is full, do the disciples realise who is speaking to them. Others relate the scene to the final judgement as described in the Gospel of Matthew 13:47–50: »Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Some fishermen throw their net out in the lake and catch all kinds of fish. When the net is full, they pull it to shore and sit down to divide the fish: the good ones go into their buckets, the worthless ones are thrown away. It will be like this at the end of the age: the angels will go out and gather up the evil people from among the good and will throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will cry and grind their teeth.«

49 Blanke 1994, 146–147 and Brugger-Koch 1981, 39–40 assume a reference to Jonah 1:3. See Nay 2015, 296 for a critical assessment of the different assumptions.

50 Nay 2015, 308–316.

51 Brincken 2008d; Egel 2014, 66–72; Kliege 1991, 51; Woodward 1987.



Fig. 18: The angel in the northern corner of the ceiling at the eastern edge. The name of the northwind *Aquilo* is written close to its left wing (from the viewer's perspective).

rectangle combines the history of salvation with the depiction of the liminal zones around the world.⁵² The principal iconographic programme leads the viewer through the life of Jesus by means of precise references to the canonical gospels with elements from apocryphal traditions. The representation of the sea as a liminal, dangerous zone of uncontrollable forces reminds viewers of the extension of the territory humans inhabit and the dangerous zones at the very edge of creation.

As mentioned above, akin to the retable and the single-sheet printing, the map of the world in Zillis refers to salvation not only as a revelation that is received on Earth, in the place human beings inhabit, but also as a chronological timeline. Jesus Christ and St. Martin's lives in the past address the viewers in the present through their messages, whilst the angels in the corners announce an eschatological future at the end time. Only the two angels that are currently placed at the eastern edge of the map are original. In the opposite corners there are replicas produced in 1941.⁵³

⁵² Brincken 2008a, 22.

⁵³ Some scholars propose that the angels on the opposite edge were associated with winds from the east and the west, others conclude that only the two preserved angels belong to the original composition. See Poeschel 1942, 12–13; Brugger-Koch 1981, 41–44. Nay 2015, 291–310 suggests instead that there were only two angels representing both the winds and the cardinal points north and south. He argues that they were possibly placed closer to the central axis in the eastern edge of the ceiling.

The preserved angels are associated with winds through an inscription: in the north corner it reads *Auster*, in the opposite corner *Oliuqa* (for *Aquilo*), the name being written in reverse (fig. 18). The emphasis on A and O as well as the attributes of the angels echoes Revelation, were Alpha and Omega, the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet, a merism, alludes to Christ as the beginning and the end of time.⁵⁴ In Revelation 7:1–3 the angels are described as follows:

After this I [John, the protagonist of the book] saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds so that no wind should blow on the earth or the sea or against any tree. And I saw another angel coming up from the east with the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels to whom God had given the power to damage the earth and the sea. The angel said, »Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees, until we mark the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.«

The mighty angels in Zillis hold two wind instruments in their hands but they do not play them yet. They introduce a tension into the composition on a chronological level. Human life is transitory and may be jeopardised by temptation and monstrous creatures. The cosmological order is also transitory: as soon as the angels blow their horns, the end of time will unfold. By entering the church and looking at this *mappa mundi*, the viewers could (and can) grasp the relevance of Christ's revelation, passion and salvation, which permeates all territories of creation, and offers them hope of redemption in the secure domain they inhabit.

3.5 Creation is mapped in a prayer book: *The London Psalter Maps*

As already mentioned, *mappa mundi* is a medieval Latin term for world map. *Mappa* means cloth or banner, while *mundus* designates the world as

⁵⁴ Revelation 22:13: »I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.« See Blanke 1994, 141–142.

God's creation.⁵⁵ It is used as a denomination for a specific genre of overarching representations in a text-image combination.⁵⁶ *Mappae mundi* belong to medieval encyclopaedic collections of knowledge treating cosmological, natural, historical, theological and moral subjects.⁵⁷

The next example we will explore is a small full-page *mappa mundi* (17.1×12.8 cm) known as the *Psalter Map*, that is part of a manuscript produced in England in the second half of the 13th century.⁵⁸ Among other texts and images, this volume contains: a calendar, prayers, and various liturgical texts written in Anglo-Norman, French, and Latin.⁵⁹ This *mappa mundi* is part of a larger group of medieval world maps and shows features that are typical for maps of this period, such as the Hereford, the Sawley, or the Ebstorf map.⁶⁰ The world is represented twice, on the front (*recto*) and on the back (*verso*) of the same page. Folio 9 *recto* (r) depicts a detailed *mappa mundi* in colour with inscriptions providing names and information, as well as symbols such as small golden triangles for locating specific places (fig. 19). On folio 9 *verso* (v) the world map is reproduced in a schematic

55 Egel 2014, 64 refers to Isidore of Seville's definition in *Etymologiae* XIII, I »Mundus est coelum et terra, mare et quae in eis opera Dei. De quo dicitur (Ioh 1,10): »et mundus per eum factum est.« in the English translation by Barney / Lewis / Beach (2006, 271): »The world consists of the sky and the land, the sea and the creations of God within them. Whence it is said (John 1:10): »And the world was made by him.« Isidore of Seville's work merged a Christian world view with the reception of antique concepts and had a long-lasting influence on medieval *mappae mundi*. See also Jaynes 2018, 78–97.

56 *Mappae mundi* comprise both image (*pictura*) and text (*scriptura*). Kliege 1991, 51 writes »The mappa mundi as a simple schematic map was first of all a symbol for »the world«, and, given its size, offered very little space for geographical details and further historical information. In contrast, the extended form of the *mappa mundi*, which is documented particularly during the 11th–13th century, is characterised by a differentiated, geographical-cartographic design of the continents and comprehensive material on names based on the interaction between ancient, biblical, and contemporary information. For the design of the image the draftman's intention and talent were decisive, since he connected a multilayered, Christian symbolism with the *pictura*.« Translation from the German by the author. See also Brinken 2008c and 2008d; Edson 2007, 11–32; Egel 2014; 66–72; Schöller 2013 and 2015, 18–28 156–162; Woodward 1987.

57 *Mappa mundi* and *speculum* can both be considered as encyclopaedic genres. See Egel 2014, 63–72. On the origins of *mappa mundi* see also Uhden 1931.

58 The manuscript is preserved in the British Library (BL Add. MS 28681).

59 For a description of the manuscript see Schöller 2015, 37–38 and Brott 2018, 212.

60 For a general introduction to medieval cartography see Jaynes 2018; Kliege 1991; von Brinken 2008a and 2008d; Woodward 1987.

way (fig. 20). The placement of the two maps on each page and the size of the earthly circle correspond precisely.⁶¹ While f. 9 r. details the location of places such as monasteries, cities, regions, rivers, mountains and seas, f. 9 v. contains a diagram in a schematic T-O shape with a list of names: the Earth is depicted as a circle (O), whilst the T refers to the division of the continents: Asia (upper semicircle), Europe, on the left, and Africa on the right of the lower semicircle.⁶² Whereas f. 9 v. lists and classifies provinces and cities in the three parts of the world by means of written words, f. 9 r. locates places on the earthly surface by depicting and, in many cases, also naming them. Water fills the horizontal boundary dividing the continents in the middle of the map and the vertical separation between Europe and Africa in the lower semicircle. Like the timber ceiling in Zillis, the map is oriented towards the east. Here we focus only on a few elements of this detailed *mappa mundi* in order to grasp its general concept of space.⁶³

61 Reudenbach 1998 offers an illuminating analysis of the mutual relationship between f. 9 r. and 9 v.

62 According to Brincken 2008a, the designation »T-O« arises in the 14th century, as a reference to Leonardo Dati's verses from the poem *La sfera* (ca. 1422, edition Dati 1859, 9): »Un T dentro a un O montra il disegno / Come in tre parte fu diviso il mondo, / E la superiore è il maggior regno / Che quasi piglia la metà del tondo / ASIA chiamata: il gambo ritto è segno / Che parte il terzo nome del secondo / AFRICA dico da EUROPA: il mare / Mediterran tra esse in mezzo appare.« (»A T within an O shows the drawing / as in three parts the world has been divided/and the upper is the major realm / that takes almost half of the circle / called ASIA: the straight stem is the sign / that divides the third name from the second / AFRICA I say from EUROPE: the sea / Mediterranean between them appears.« Translation by the author. The T-O map type, inherited from antiquity, could be matched with the biblical tradition, associating Noah's sons Shem, Ham and Japheth respectively with Asia, Africa and Europe. See also Jaynes 2018; Kliege 1991; Schöller 2015.

63 For a detailed analysis of the *Psalter Map* see Reudenbach 1998; Edson 2007; Schöller 2015 (containing a critical edition and a translation into German), Brott 2018, Brott / Wacha 2022; Mittman / Crossely / Wacha / Brott / Foy 2022. An edition and translation of the inscriptions on the map into English can be found on <https://sims2.digitalmappa.org/36v> (accessed 6 August 2025).



Fig. 19: *Psalter World Map*, 13th century, 17.1 × 12.8 cm, BL Add. MS 28681, folio 9 recto.



Fig. 20: Psalter List Map, 13th century, 17.1 × 12.8 cm, BL Add. MS 28681, folio 9 verso.

The *mappa mundi* in f. 9 r. merges significant places in the history of salvation with details of the territory as well as information from ancient mythology and other sources.⁶⁴ This ordered compilation of different forms and sources of knowledge can be observed, for example, in the representation of the eastern parts of the world. The Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise, is placed on the far east (which corresponds to the upper part of the map). Within a circular frame that is well bounded – Eden is not accessible to human beings, even though, according to medieval tradition, it is located on Earth – there is a portrait of Eve and Adam, the two figures being divided by a tree with fruit. Five rivers flow out from a circular element, which recalls a reversed fountain, beneath the garden's wall. From the viewer's perspective, read from right to left they are: *phison*, *geon*, *tigris*, *euphrates*, *ganges fluuius*. The four rivers Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates from the creation narrative in Genesis 2:10–13 are complemented with *ganges fl.* (an abbreviation for *fluuius*). The rivers *phison*, *geon* and *tigris* flow into the Red Sea, highlighted in red (the strip where the seawater parted for the crossing of the Israelites according to the book of *Exodus* is highlighted), whilst *ganges fluuius* ends in a circular element.⁶⁵ To the right of Eden *arbor solis* and *arbor lune* (the tree of the Sun and the tree of the Moon) are depicted, which refers to an episode from the Alexander Romance. Beneath these trees, a golden triangle is explained as *are liberi erculus*). The medievalist Bettina Schöller, comparing this map inscription with other contemporary sources, interprets the inscription as referring to altars of Dionysos (*Liber Pater*) and Hercules, while the isolated inscription *columne* on the right side indicates the Pillars of Alexander, that mark the eastern end of Alexander the Great's kingdom.⁶⁶ Furthermore, alongside geographical names of cities, regions, rivers and seas *turris* (»tower«, meaning the tower of Babel) and *arca noe* (Noah's ark) are precisely located in the eastern part of the Earth. The east is represented as the place from which humanity originates and where the main early episodes of the history of salvation took place. In addition, the east is the site of the legendary expeditions of Alexander the Great and constitutes

64 Schöller 2015, 77–180.

65 Schöller 2015, 58 suggests that *ganges fluuius* may continue to run underground and join up with the *phison* there, since in medieval time the two rivers were often identified. This expedient may have been necessary to match biblical sources with geographical knowledge.

66 Schöller 2015, 60.

a territory that can be explored and geographically located. In this encyclopaedic map, Biblical narratives and religious worldviews, medieval romance literature as well as cartographic knowledge are harmoniously merged.

Jerusalem (*Ierusalem*) lies at the centre of the map, it is the omphalos of the world. It is pointed out by the largest inscription, which is encircled in gold and silver and framed by a red line. Jerusalem is a real city, one can visit on pilgrimage, the sacred place where the passion, death and resurrection of Christ took place.⁶⁷ The large golden circle around its name visually refers to the nimbus of Christ outside the earthly territory and echoes the description of the heavenly city of Revelation 21–22, alluding therefore to an eschatological event beyond human history. Just above Jerusalem, and slightly to the right, a mountain alludes to Jesus' temptation: *mons excelsus ubi deabolus statuit dominum* (»The highest mountain where the devil took the lord«, a reference to Matthew 4:8).⁶⁸ The tension between salvation and temptation reinforces the link to the Earthly Paradise: whereas Eve and Adam brought sin into the world, Christ sacrificed himself for its redemption. This tension recurs in all representations of the world we have analysed so far.

Africa, according to medieval map conventions, is located on the right-hand side of the map, in which the border with Asia is marked by the Nile (*nilus fl.*) – which corresponds to *geon* and is depicted several times on the map – flowing down towards Alexandria. North-African cities near the Mediterranean Sea are named, while the distant parts of the continent *terra arenosa et sterilis*, unproductive and sandy land, a reference to the Sahara Desert, are inhabited by hybrid, monstrous beings with human traits.

Europe, in the lower left side, is more detailed, with its major cities such as Rome, Paris or Cologne listed, and mountain chains like the Alps and rivers like the Danube named. Northern territories like *scocia* (Scotland), *norwegia* (Norway) or the mythical territory *iperboria* (Hyperborea) are placed within the ocean surrounding the earthly circle. This liminal domain is de-

67 Brott 2018, 220: »The placement of important pilgrimage destinations on the maps also speaks to the historical moment in which they were created. Jerusalem's central place is a reflection of the fundamental shift in the European worldview that correlates with the role of the Holy Land in a post-crusade religious landscape.« See also Brincken 2008e; Woodward 1987, 341.

68 The parallels between this inscription and the central panel in the ceiling in Zillis are striking, see above page 59–60. This is an additional argument in favour of the reliability of the reconstruction of the Zillis panels in 1938–1940.

limited as an outer circle in green and contains personifications of twelve winds, together with several islands, most of them unnamed. The four cardinal winds – *subsolanus*, *ventus septentrionalis*, *ventus zephirus*, *auster vel nothus* – are drawn bigger and in a lighter shade, whilst the eight winds in-between are smaller and in dark blue.⁶⁹

In both maps on f. 9, the creation as a whole, including the liminal parts beyond the African desert and the outer ocean, is represented as the body of Christ. Christ's representation extends outside the maps, with Eden and Jerusalem placed on a vertical axis, emphasizing the theological significance of this encyclopaedic map. According to these maps the territory which humans inhabit is the very place where Jesus's incarnation took place. From a theological perspective, these are the key elements of a Christian interpretation of the world: first the world was created, then sin came into it through Adam and Eve's behaviour, and eventually the passion and resurrection of Christ opens a new eschatological perspective on the New Jerusalem.⁷⁰

In f. 9 r. Jesus Christ is depicted with a nimbus, with a cross motif, in gold. Visually, as already mentioned above, the golden colour links him to Jerusalem. He holds in his left hand a globe with the T-O scheme, a miniature representation of the world, a motif we have already observed in the retablo of Regensburg. Christ's right hand is depicted in the gesture of blessing. Two mighty angels flank and worship him with censers, possibly a reference to (heavenly) liturgy. In f. 9 v. Jesus Christ holds the creation in his hands, flanked by four angels.⁷¹ His feet are depicted below the circle, they crush the head of two hybrid creatures, wyverns, alluding to demonic beings. In both maps, the creation is Christ's body, the circular form symbolising at the same time the Eucharistic host.⁷² This representation echoes apocalyptic imagery and motifs from the psalms, which coheres with the placement of these maps in relation to the overall character of the book.⁷³

69 For an in-depth analysis see Schöller 2015, 47–74.

70 Schöller 2015, 123–127: »In the Psalter map theoretical considerations about the divine order of the world become tangible within the space of human experience« (p. 126). Translation from the German by the author.

71 On f. 9 v. the divine figure may also be God, since the nimbus does not depict the cross. It may also be an identification of the two persons of the trinity, see Schöller, 2015, 214.

72 Brott 2018, 218.

73 On the intertextual relationship between the map, the whole manuscript and the Psalms see Reudenbach 1998.

From a cartographic perspective, there is an interest in locating places and tracing relationships between territorial landmarks, cities, and provinces. The comparison between the *World Map* and the *List Map* is meaningful: while f. 9 v. reproduces a perfect T-O scheme, f. 9 r. is influenced by this convention yet is more flexible, adapting the scheme to the forms of the shores and continents. The *Psalter Map* condenses in two images a detailed, encyclopaedic knowledge about the world, merging theological, geographical, literary, and historical sources. Places are located in order to fill the surface, there is no empty space.

A comparison of these differing cosmological representations, notably the ceiling in Zillis and the *London Psalter Map* highlights some significant common features. Both maps combine elements from different sources and domains of knowledge, merging them into a complete depiction of the creation as a whole, albeit in a complex unity. It is significant to note that both representations are directly related to religious practices: while in the church of St. Martin, the community gathers to celebrate the Eucharist, the *Psalter* book is a medium with information about prayer and liturgical practices.

Both convey a concept of space as having been created, composed by different places that are bounded in themselves, which are both accessible and yet can be explored through travel by viewing them in the context of worship and meditation.⁷⁴ The terrestrial territory in Zillis principally maps salvation history. Although the reference to the liminal zones of the world suggests an exploration of distant, chaotic domains, they nonetheless also remain part of the cosmos. In the *London Psalter Map* the territory is explored more in detail by means of a graphic and symbolic representation of geographical elements. Overall, visually, the figural representation of Christ extends outside the terrestrial circle, which anticipates an increasing difficulty in harmonising, in a single representation, theological, geographical, historical and literary knowledge about the world.

74 Brott 2018 explores the map in its relationship to the psalms the manuscript contains, analysing mutual references between the maps, the text of the Psalms and the miniatures in the capital letters. She concludes (p. 222): »The intertextual and intervisual relationships in this manuscript provide fertile ground for the reader-viewer to make exegetical connections and move through the text for cross-comparisons. The act of flipping between the text and images creates a spatialized experience, which is complemented by the presence of maps at the front of the manuscript«. On the interaction between text and map see Ryan 2023.

At this time, the representation of places and the conceptualisation of space becomes multilayered, as the tension between different approaches to faith, theological speculation and the extension in space which humans inhabit increases. The earthly territory where the incarnation and salvation took place, where human history unfolds and cultural exchanges take place, was increasingly being explored in detail. Including all known facts in a single representation of the world became a growing challenge, as the next extraordinary map illustrates.

3.6 A map of the world widens cartography: Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo*

Fra Mauro's world map was completed in Venice in 1460 in the Camaldolese monastery San Michele in Isola on an island in the Venetian lagoon (today, Venice's cemetery is located on the island). The *Mappamondo* was planned and produced by the monk and cartographer Fra Mauro, who worked for decades on this representation of the globe in which a broad and detailed knowledge is visualised in a striking text-image composition (fig. 21). Mauro's map is a unique document that visualises a turning point in the conceptualisation of space within the history of culture and religion in Europe. It is a monumental work in both size and significance. The almost square *Mappamondo* measures 223 × 233 cm; it contains a planisphere 193–196 cm in diameter encircled by a circular wooden frame. The planisphere is made of four parchment sheets glued onto a poplar panel comprised of three boards. The rectangular part is made of four boards of spruce wood; in the four corners cosmological and cartographical issues are addressed.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ There are several digital, interactive reproductions of Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo*. See e. g. <https://engineeringhistoricalmemory.com/FraMauro.php> or <https://mostre.museogalileo.it/framauro/en/introduction.html> (accessed on 6 August 2025). For an introduction and an edition of the map's inscriptions with commentary and an English translation see Falchetta 2006 and 2016; Cattaneo 2011. See also Egel 2014. The first facsimile edition is Gasparri Leporace 1956.



Fig. 21: Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo*, parchment on wood, ca. 1460, 223 × 233 cm, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

The map was completed in 1460, as a note on the back of the wooden panel reveals: »MCCCCLX a dì XXVI agosto fu chomplido questo lauor«. ⁷⁶ Scholars propose that Mauro began to draw the map in 1448.

There is little information about the biography of this monk, even though he was well known as a gifted cartographer. He probably entered the monastery of San Michele in 1409 as a *conversus*, an adult adhering to monastic vows, and spent his entire adult life there. It is understood that he died in

⁷⁶ »On August 26th 1460 this work has been completed.« Cattaneo 2011, 38 proposes that on this day the map was put on display in the sacristy of San Michele.

1459.⁷⁷ The details about the production of the *Mappamondo* are reconstructed from different historical documents. There is a scholarly consensus that whilst the map was fully planned and designed by Fra Mauro, nonetheless, many hands contributed to its realisation. The representation of the Earthly Paradise in the lower left corner is attributed to the painter Leonardo Bellini and was completed last, possibly after Mauro's death.⁷⁸

A further aspect makes the historical reconstruction challenging and controversial: it is not clear how many *Mappamondi* Fra Mauro produced. It is assumed that the world map was commissioned by Alfonso V, the King of Portugal but it is not possible to ascertain if the map preserved today in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice is a copy of the work sent to Portugal, or if it is the original map.⁷⁹ The *Mappamondo* was originally displayed in the Church of San Michele in Isola in 1460, and later moved into other rooms within the monastery, where it remained until 1810. At that time, the cloister was dismantled following the abolition of its religious order and, therefore, the map was handed over to the Marcian library in Venice which still owns it.⁸⁰

The *Mappamondo* is a refined visual depiction combining drawings and texts. It is made of precious materials such as gold and lapis lazuli powder (for the blue of the sea). The writing is in red and blue; some names are written in golden capital letters with a dark border. The map contains about three thousand inscriptions comprised of names or short texts in the Venetian vernacular.⁸¹ In the 15th century, Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo* was widely known.⁸² The map contains an astonishing amount of information about places, landscape features, and human activities, both in drawings and in texts. The map conveys an idea of the world as a known territory:

From a cosmographical point of view, the way in which Fra Mauro places his text on the *mappa mundi*, in synergy with hundreds of draw-

77 See e.g. Falchetta, 2016, 13–16.

78 For the reconstruction of Fra Mauro's biography and the dating of the production process see Cattaneo 2011, 33–46; Egel 2014, 33–39; Falchetta 2021.

79 The questions linked to the commission(s) and the number of copies is controversial. See Baumgärtner 1998; Cattaneo 2011, 33–74; Egel 2014, 33–39; Falchetta 2016, 23–58 and 2021, 14–17.

80 Falchetta 2016, 59–63.

81 On the language see Cattaneo 2011, 227–234.

82 See Cattaneo 2011, 46–74.

ings, reinforces and alludes to a representation of space in which the world is seen as completely knowable and inhabitable. The text, written all over the *mappa mundi*, contributes to the creation of a concept of terrestrial space that is completely knowable and human. For Fra Mauro the Earth, or better, all of the earth, is *oikumene*. Without necessarily reading the cartouches, but just looking at their placement, the ancient and modern spectator could plausibly perceive the fullness of the world.⁸³

The map is oriented southwards, locating Africa on the upper part, and, in the lower semicircle, Asia on the left and Europe in the right, which distinguishes it from medieval European *mappae mundi*. Yet, in Venice in the 15th century, an orientation towards the south was not uncommon; this may be explained by influence from Islamic cartographic conventions and/or by Venice's position towards the south in matters of travel as well as commercial and maritime expansion, as Cattaneo explains:

The orientation of the *mappa mundi* towards the south may also reflect the vision of the world that Fra Mauro had come to have as a participant in, and interpreter of, Venetian culture. Fra Mauro conceptualised and gave graphic form to the possibility of combining the circumnavigation of Africa with Arab, and possibly even Chinese, navigations in the »Seas of India« into a single immense route: from his cell in San Michele di Murano, Fra Mauro clearly oriented his intellectual and cultural interest in cosmography towards the south and south-east.⁸⁴

Besides the southwards orientation that differs from previous cartographic convention, Mauro's *Mappamondo* contains another distinctive trait that is striking from an epistemological perspective. In some cartouches he expresses his personal opinion and assesses the sources he consulted whilst preparing the map. The cartographer legitimates his considerations and discusses the different interpretations he has received in his research. This procedure permeates the map. By way of example, alluding to the traditional T-O

83 Cattaneo 2011, 90.

84 Cattaneo 2011, 88.

scheme of medieval *mappae mundi*, he comments on the general organisation of space in maps as follows:

Regarding the divisions of the world – that is, of Asia from Africa and of Europe from Asia – cosmographers and historiographers give various opinions. Of these one could discuss at length, but because it is boring to dwell on this controversy, I will make a brief note with their opinions and leave the prudent to decide which one they should hold as best. Some follow the Ancients – for example, Messala, the orator who wrote of the family of Octavian Augustus, and Pomponius Mela and those who followed him. They claim that it is the Nile which divides Asia from Africa and the Thanai Asia from Europe. Some claim that Ptolemy says that the chain of the Arabian Mountains, which lies to the side of Nubia and extends through Abassia and beyond southern Ethiopia, constitutes the division between Asia and Africa. Others – that is, the modern writers – observe that these divisions of Africa (either by the Nile or by those mountains) make Africa too small. They say that it is the Red Sea or Arabian Gulf that divides Africa from Asia. What is more, seeing that the river Edil, which flows into the Caspian Sea, runs from further northwards than the river Thanai, they say that it is this river Edil which better divides Europe from Asia. This latter opinion seems clearer and more evident; and there is less need for the sort of imaginary line that seems to be required by those who adopt the other divisions. However, I advise those who are looking at this work not to worry themselves too much about discussing this division, given that it is not very important. Let them opt for that which seems to them most reasonable and probable, both to the eye and to the intellect. None the less, I remind them that it is a praiseworthy thing to follow the authority of the most veracious.⁸⁵

This cartouche is significant in seeking to grasp the attitude toward space and place which emerges from this map. Fra Mauro receives controversial traditions about the location and the style of representing the continents. Although he judges the matter as of little importance, »materia tediosa«

85 *2489, translation by Falchetta 2006, 637–39.

(«boring subject matter»), he highlights different opinions asking the audience to take a position according to two criteria: »quanto l'occhio e quanto l'intelletto«, according to what can be seen and what can be understood.

In another cartouche the cartographer explains that a map can only be a means for approaching the complexity of the cosmic space, without being able to explain it adequately. The intellectual exploration of space is limited by the human condition. On the one hand, a person cannot explore all parts of creation by travelling through them, on the other hand, even an erudite cosmographer cannot completely understand, by means of reason alone, all the mysteries of God's work.⁸⁶ The map, nonetheless, remains helpful in reproducing and conceptualising space by means of drawings and inscriptions. Together with direct observation of the territory and the study of the scholarly traditions, the abstract representation of the map helps the readers figure out features of the earthly territory, the globe and the universe:

Note that throughout this work there are some green marks or some rows of small trees which serve to indicate the divisions and borders between provinces. But those who want to understand [these signs] well must have seen with their own eyes or else have read well. And they must have a good sense of proportions and the ability to interpret the drawing; otherwise, they will draw little fruit from these signs and will not be able to form a good idea of what they see depicted above.⁸⁷

In a further note, the target audience of the map are explicitly indicated. The author presents his map as an approach that deserves to be accessible to a broad audience, which explain the choice of Venetian instead of Latin:

In this work I have of necessity decided to use the modern names of common speech because, to tell the truth, if I had done otherwise only a few learned men would have understood me. However, even they cannot always reconcile what the auctores say and what is current practice.⁸⁸

86 *2193, Falchetta 2006, 575–577.

87 *2847, translation by Falchetta 2006, 703.

88 *2202, translation by Falchetta 2006, 577.

The map presents an accurate compilation of very different sources and, with them, worldviews. Discussing the controversial matter of the inhabitants of Africa, the author notes that the map relies on a long and accurate personal study of sources: »[...] Not because I want to contradict the authority of these men but because of the care I have taken in all these years in studying all possible information [...]«.⁸⁹

Different categories of sources inform the map: first, the cartographic tradition including the *mappae mundi*, nautical as well as regional maps; second, literary texts like Marco Polo's *Milione* (entire passages of this work are quoted in some cartouches), the fourth book of *De varietate fortunae* by the humanist Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), or an account of the explorations of the merchant Niccolò de' Conti (1395–1469) who travelled across Asia; third, the authoritative texts from the Christian tradition and the Bible and, fourth, most importantly in the 15th century, Ptolemy's *Geography* that had been recently rediscovered and influenced Fra Mauro not only in the choice of cartographic representation but also in his aim to address the task of providing a complete overview of the entire earthly space:⁹⁰

The cosmographers never agree on the number of provinces because they received different information; some give more, some give less. Therefore, I do not give my opinion; almost everywhere – except in the smallest places – I have annotated a »p« to indicate a province, but only to give a form to the description of regions and the diversity of peoples. But those who are not happy that more provinces are given than indicated by Ptolemy should accept the meaning – that is, of such and such a region or such and such a province. Here there are not all the names of provinces given by Ptolemy, who says there are 94. However, I recall that I have not been able to put everything, and not even to respect the names he uses, as they are different today. Yet I do think that, under different names, I have indicated all his provinces, and some that were not known to him. Similarly, there are various

89 *1043: »[...] non perhò che io voglio contradir a le autorità de tanti, ma per dir la diligenza ho habuta in inquirir tute le novità se à possudo investigar per molti anni [...]«, edition and translation by Falchetta 2006, 387–389.

90 For a detailed reconstruction of the sources see Baumgärtner 1998; Cattaneo 2011 and Falchetta 2006, 33–69.

opinions regarding the circumference of the Earth, but it is not possible to verify them. It is said that it is 22,500 or 24,000 miles, more or less, according to the different estimates and opinions, which are not very reliable because they have not been verified by experience. And even if some have repeatedly sailed in the southern and northern regions, they have not had time to measure, or even estimate, these distances, given that they navigated as events dictated and not to measure the navigation itself. So I leave to eternal God the measurement of his work, which only He can understand in full. [...] ⁹¹

Biblical and theological reflection remain important, given that some aspects of this map are still very much linked to medieval cartography. Yet, compared to the other maps we have explored above, the religious worldview assumes a different role. In this map, innovative procedures are applied. The experience of sailors and travellers becomes a fundamental factor in order to check the received tradition, as emerges from the last quotation.

The location of Jerusalem clearly illustrates this tendency. The city is not exactly in the middle of the planisphere (Babylon is located in the central position, *0920), yet Jerusalem is carefully highlighted by means of a large compass rose.

By latitude, Jerusalem is at the centre of the inhabited world; but by longitude, it is further west. However, as Europe is more [densely] populated, Jerusalem does appear to be at the centre [of the inhabited world] by longitude as well, if one takes into account not [geographical] space but the number of inhabitants. ⁹²

Jerusalem is depicted as a real place; a representative building (the church of the Holy Sepulchre) is used as a *pars pro toto* to represent the holy city. The author explains his decision to locate Jerusalem not in the centre, mediating between the expectations towards Jerusalem as the centre of the world in the light of salvation history and the necessity to adhere to a precise geographical concept.

91 *2828, translation by Falchetta 2006, 597–600.

92 *1011, translation by Falchetta 2006, 381.

The availability of new sources of information and speculative reflection based on travellers' experience and literature emerge also in the representation of Africa, which has radically changed compared to *mappae mundi* similar to the *London Psalter Map*. Fra Mauro had new information at his disposal, coming from explorations of the Atlantic coast of Africa and other accounts by contemporary travellers. He considered that the continent could be circumnavigable, as was later proved by Vasco da Gama at the end of the century.⁹³ About the controversy on the features of Africa's inhabitants, Fra Mauro notes:

Because there are many cosmographers and most learned men who write that in this Africa – and, above all, in the Mauritanias – there are human and animal monsters, I think it is necessary to give my opinion. [...] And in all these kingdoms of the negroes I have never found anyone who could give me information on what those men have written. Thus, not knowing anything, I cannot bear witness to anything; and I leave research in the matter to those who are curious about such things.⁹⁴

Despite reporting, cautiously, the assumption about the existence of hybrid monsters in Africa, Fra Mauro's distances himself from it, relying on oral

93 *0149: »[...] These men have drawn new navigation maps and have given names to rivers, gulfs, capes and ports, of which I have had a copy. So, if one wants to disagree with these men, who have seen with their own eyes, then there is all the more reason to dissent from and not believe those who have left writings on things they did not see with their own eyes but only believed to be the case. What is more, I have spoken with a person worthy of trust, who says that he sailed in an Indian ship caught in the fury of a tempest for 40 days out in the Sea of India, beyond the Cape of Soffala and the Green Islands towards west-southwest; and according to the astrologers who act as their guides, they had advanced almost 2,000 miles. Thus one can believe and confirm what is said by both these and those, and that they had therefore sailed 4,000 miles. In the third book of his Cosmography, Pomponius Mela says that a certain Eudossus, fleeing from Lathmin, king of Alexandria, sailed out of the Arabian Gulf and navigated through those southern regions until he arrived at Gades, which is the Strait of Gibraltar. One can therefore claim without any doubt that this southern and south-western part is navigable, and that the Sea of India is an ocean and not an inland sea. This is what is said by all those who sail this sea and live in those islands«, translation by Falchetta 2006, 211–213.

94 *1043, translation by Falchetta 2006, 387.

accounts by travellers and the conviction that the Earth is inhabited by humans everywhere.

In this chapter, only a few aspects of this huge and dense source can be addressed. Accordingly, we focus now on the liminal zones of the Earth. Eight winds are depicted by means of compass roses. In the waters on the external borders of the map there are many islands and different kinds of ships cross them. While in the regions beyond Africa most islands are unnamed and the water is generally designated as *oceanus*, on the external limits of Europe and, particularly, of Asia, many islands are carefully depicted and identified, whereas the seas are named with specific denominations. Japan appears for the first time on a European map as »Island of Cimpagu«.⁹⁵ The idea of an ocean surrounding the Earth is still there, nevertheless it is elaborated in light of contemporary knowledge, such that it now represents a known part of the earthly territory.

The Earth has become a sphere whose extension can be calculated.⁹⁶ The ocean entirely covers the side of the sphere that lies beyond the represented surface. It is a dangerous, dark domain. In the extreme southern part, near the compass rose on the top pointing at Austro, south, a cartouche reads: »Here begins the dark sea«.⁹⁷

Despite the accuracy in providing evidence based on sources that are considered as authoritative and reliable, knowledge derived from direct experience of the territory – either from literary travel accounts or from travel reports from people Fra Mauro possibly met in the cultural melting pot of Venice – tend to prevail.⁹⁸ Although references to places of theological relevance that are beyond human experience are not completely erased from this map, they are, nonetheless, displaced outside the circle.

In the corner between the map and the square frame of the work, crucial cosmological questions are addressed in image and text. In the upper left-hand corner, a geocentric cosmological system is depicted and commented on. On the opposite side, on the right, the link between lunar phases and tides, the material composition of the sublunar domains as well as the relationship between water and earth in the terrestrial globe are discussed, while,

95 *1334: »Ixola de cimpagu«, Falchetta 2006, 435.

96 See above *2828, footnote 91, page 81.

97 *2: »Qui comenza el mar scuro«, Falchetta 2006, 175. See also Vogel 2016.

98 Baumgärtner / Falchetta 2016.

on the lower right hand corner, a theory of elements and the question of habitability of the different zones of the planet are discussed.⁹⁹ Finally, on the lower left hand corner (in a north-easterly direction) the Garden Eden is depicted and the question of the location of the Earthly Paradise debated as follows (lines 1–6):

The Paradise of Delights does not only have a spiritual meaning; it is also a real place on the earth, as St. Augustine says in his *De Genesi* and in his book *De Civitate Dei*. This place is very far from all human settlements and knowledge; and according to the teachings of the holy doctor Bede, whose authority is also followed by the Master of the Sentences [Peter Lombard], it is to be found in the East. In his book *De natura loci*, Albertus Magnus also puts it in the East, beyond the circle of the equinox. In this Paradise was placed our first parent, Adam, in a state of innocence. And in the middle of Paradise there was a spring that waters it, and from which arise the four main great rivers. And God had planted it with two trees, one of which was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, bearing the fruit which God had ordered Adam not to eat. However, straying from that commandment, Adam did not obey and he ate the fruit. Hence, as well as the Good which he had already seen before, he also felt Evil, and he fell into the defects that are implicit in sin. And from this fact that tree has been called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The other tree is the Tree of Life, eating from which man could have nourished himself for a long time. In fact, if this had been his constant nourishment, man would have lived forever, as St. Augustine says in the book *De civitate Dei* and also *De diversis quaestionibus*.

Later in the text, Eden is linked to the history of salvation (lines 9–10):

This was so that Christ be the first to enter into the heavens and paradise of the blessed. And on the day of his Ascension, he showed men the way to get there, as had been predicted by the prophet Micaiah.

99 The texts are edited and translated in Falchetta 2006, 720–735.

Through his death, our redeemer earned for men entrance into the paradise of the blessed.

In the last section, the author addresses the controversial question of locating the rivers arising from Eden (lines 12b–13a):

As there are still many who wonder how it is possible that these four rivers, arising from that most remote place, should yet have sources that are very far from one another, I will answer with the words of St. Augustine's *De Genesi*: these rivers, whose sources are known to us, are linked by underground routes, running through many regions and then coming to surface in different places.

Fra Mauro argues, following authoritative theological positions, in favour of conceiving of Paradise as a real place on Earth («esser un luogo ne la terra situato»), located somewhere within the inaccessible dark sea. The enigma of the four rivers is solved in a similar manner to that which we observed on the *London Psalter Map* on f. 9 r., assuming an underground channel linking the waters of Eden to the known rivers of the Ganges, Tigris, Euphrates and Nile. Still, visually, this place of spiritual and geographical significance is placed outside the circle of known territories in a corner of the map. It is also interesting that, even though the text is ascribed to Fra Mauro, the depiction of Paradise is attributed to Leonardo Bellini. The representation of Eden is not realised by means of cartography but as a painting.¹⁰⁰

Fra Mauro's world map is an encyclopaedic compendium of various traditions, sources, opinions, and travel accounts, all of them accessible in the monastery of San Michele in Isola that was part of the vibrant fifteenth-century Venetian metropolis. On the map, the cartographer engages with cosmological, historical, philosophical, and theological questions, with the aid of cartographic and geographic knowledge and offers a synthesis expressing his personal opinion. This is a very interesting and novel feature of the *Mapamondo*. The monk comments on open questions and controversies in the first person singular, «io». The historian Nicolaus Andreas Egel emphasises

100 For an analysis of the painting and the question of attribution see Marcon 2006. About the whole representation including text and image see Cattaneo 2003 and 2011, 132–157.

Fra Mauro's critical reception of the knowledge he had access to. Manifold approaches, elaborated in different contexts and fields, coexisted and could no longer be merged into one harmonic worldview. Consequently, the cartographer reproduced the main arguments and reported his personal point of view.¹⁰¹ Compared to the maps we have considered so far, this is a striking element. »I« explicitly suggests the authority of the subject, but also the subjectivity of knowledge: the world map becomes a matter of scholarly opinion, and – despite the opulence of details, information and the quality of the drawings and the materials used – it is presented as a symbolic rendering¹⁰² of the still unexplored complexity of nature:

If someone finds incredible certain of the previously-unheard things which I have noted above, he should not submit them to the judgement of his own reason but rather list them amongst the secrets of Nature. We know only a small part of the innumerable things that Nature does, and those that we know by constant experience are not really held in consideration – even if they are admirable – whilst those which seem to us to be unusual we do not believe. This occurs because Nature goes beyond the human intellect; and those who do not have an elevated intellect cannot grasp even the things of constant experience, let alone those which are unusual. Thus, those who want to understand must first believe in order to then understand.¹⁰³

Fra Mauro's map is an excellent example to grasp the profound transformation in conceiving space and place that took place at this time and, certainly not by chance, in this very place. Venice was a political, economic, technological, scholarly and cultural centre stimulating innovation and attracting many people from very different parts of the world.¹⁰⁴ Overall, this map visualises not only how the world is from a cartographic point of view, but also how knowledge about space and places is produced, highlighting open

101 Baumgärtner 1998; Egel 2014, 107–185.

102 In many places on the map, Fra Mauro notes that it is not possible to represent everything, e.g. *594 »In this sea there are many islands that cannot be specially noted because of lack of space.«

103 *2193, Falchetta 2006, 575–577.

104 Cattaneo 2011.

questions and suggesting possible implementations by means of speculative approaches to nature and the territory.

In this dynamic early-modern society, theological approaches to the world coexist with the reading of an increasingly comprehensive range of ancient, medieval and contemporary sources and a direct observation of places. Unlike the maps discussed above, this work is not directly received within a religious practice, rather it addresses an audience seeking to scrutinise and understand the world, even though it is provided by a monk and displayed in a sacred site. In this respect, Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo* can be considered as a visualisation of the profound changes in exploring the territory as a fundamental dimension of creation and of human life, as the historical events and the geographic and scientific discoveries of the following decades and centuries demonstrate.¹⁰⁵ The worldviews become more complex and more detailed but also more fragmentary. All the established approaches to place can no longer be harmonised into one general depiction of a homogeneous terrestrial space.

3.7 Locating all places in an encompassing space

The five visual representations of the world discussed above differ in terms of genre, style, provenance, and time, although they all feature common traits. Placed in various contexts, they depict the cosmos as a comprehensive, ordered whole and stimulate the viewers to evoke places they cannot directly experience, either because they are far away or they are located beyond the limits of earthly life. The selected images elucidate trends and tensions in a crucial transitional period of the European history of religion. They mirror dynamics between medieval Christian cosmologies and emerging geographical knowledge in the early modern period at the dawn of the discovery of new territories and routes across the Atlantic and beyond the African desert.

105 Falchetta 2006, 55: »At this point it is clear that the task Fra Mauro has set himself is an ambitious one: by subjecting traditional knowledge – that of Classical Antiquity and that of the post-Classical cosmography – to such a critical reading, he hopes to redefine both the contents and nature of geographical knowledge, putting forward himself and his own world map as a synthesis of past and present knowledge.«

The Graner altarpiece in Regensburg from 1488 is, in some ways, a window that opens up a space encompassing places beyond the limits of human agency. The depiction of the cosmos focuses on the relationship between the earthly places in which human life unfolds and the afterlife domains. The representations of transcendent places of damnation and the places humans inhabit are connected through Christ's revelation and sacrifice and through the devotional practices of the believers. The orientation within this cosmological vision relies on religious practices that merge cosmic space and time with the biography of individuals. Looking at this depiction of the whole cosmos is a religious practice in itself that offers devotees orientation and opens up a possibility of salvation.

The *Mirror of Reason*, printed in the same year, has a similar function; it provides a complete depiction of the cosmos and precisely locates the earthly life of an individual. The mirror is an all-encompassing representation of all the places that comprise the cosmos and of the mutual relationships that link these places together. Again, cosmology and biography are intertwined; salvation history and individual behaviour merge, the inherent conceptualisations of space and time are intertwined. While the Graner retable was located in a church, a public place, the single print sheet of the *Mirror of Reason* addresses an individual in a private sphere. The mirror is both an object delineating this particular vision of the cosmos and a metaphor for reflection and meditation. This second image emphasises the location of the human being within cosmological space. This overview of the world comprised of earthly and transcendent places such as Paradise, Purgatory and Hell, and the transitional place of Judgment, is depicted from an anthropocentric perspective. Looking at the mirror, the devotee ponders his or her position in life, the afterlife and the history of salvation.

Like the altarpiece of Regensburg, the *Spiegel der Vernunft* reproduces the cosmos as a complete, encompassing space articulated in different places. The concept of cosmological space arises as an abstract idea from the materiality of the image whenever anybody looks at it. From the perspective of visual communication, the print and the retable allude to a concept of space as a well-defined entity containing all the depicted places. The two sources emphasise different cosmic domains, according to their function, location, and style. Being images, they have a specific agency, involving the viewers in a religious performance of looking, meditating, and praying.

Produced at the end of the 15th century, both representations reproduce medieval Christian worldviews and practices. The retablo depicts the globe as a T-O map, which refers to cartography as a form of encyclopaedic knowledge aiming at explaining the features of the earthly territory as well as praising creation. The *Mirror of Reason* addresses the individual in an everyday language and reveals a complete vision of the cosmos in a few square centimetres by means of a personal, religious practice.

The timber ceiling of Zillis brings us back into the 12th century and shows a different visual approach to space. The Earth is the very place where the history of salvation unfolds, with Christ's sacrifice at its core, and is the location of the life of St. Martin, who is an exemplum of an ideal believer. This place is framed by the ocean, a liminal place populated by demonic beings, hybrid creatures, as well as a place of certain human activities. The ceiling reveals a map that offers a visually and theologically complete description of relevant places that constitute the cosmos as a dimension of life, Christ's incarnation and redemption. By entering the church and looking towards heaven, the believers experience a vision of creation that extends beyond the limits of their everyday experience. As in the other images, space and time merge in a Christological concept of the world and history.

The *London Psalter Maps* from the late 13th century present two different forms of image-text composition in the genre of a medieval *mappa mundi*. Albeit with varying accentuations, both offer an encyclopaedic chart of the world which bring together theological and geographical knowledge. On a very small surface, the page of a codex, f. 9 r. condenses salvation history with a detailed depiction of explored and mythological places on Earth. The depiction of the three continents according to the T-O scheme, the location of cities, regions, rivers and mountains visually aims at locating salvation history within creation as the place humans inhabit. The comparison between the Graner retablo and the *London Psalter Maps* highlights the twofold representation of the terrestrial globe in the same image: the Earth is represented in both as a visual attribute of the figure of Christ with the T-O scheme dividing the continents, and as the place in which human life unfolds. While the former focuses on the relationship between human agency on Earth and transcendent cosmic places, the *mappae mundi* within the *London Psalter Maps* explore the features of God's creation by means of a compendium of knowledge from the different source of knowledge the author was familiar with.

Finally, Fra Mauro's *Mappamondo*, in the middle of the 15th century, illustrates a further development in European early modern cartography that still combines theological and cosmological knowledge based on the Bible and authoritative Christian authors but extends the range of sources to newly available ancient literature, other cartographic and geographical approaches, as well as information from written and oral descriptions of travel. Although theological issues continue to be addressed in this map, the religious worldview and the encyclopaedic depiction of the globe influenced by the direct observation of the earthly territory can no longer be represented in a single, homogeneous drawing. The wide surface of the map is not even broad enough to contain all the details and names the author knows. Still, the map depicts in its drawings a remarkable number of places that fill the hemisphere. At the same time, the text within the map explicitly addresses the impossibility of rendering in a single drawing the all-encompassing world, as it is a space whose vastness and complexity are the subject of philosophical speculation.

The sources discussed in this chapter are produced and displayed in religious places such as churches, monasteries or private rooms. The Earth is understood to be a divine creation, part of an ordered design in which human beings are addressed by divine revelation and respond to it with the appropriate attitude of faith and behaviour. All of the examples locate places and their relationship with each other and possible passages humans may use to reach them. In doing so, they allude to and reproduce concepts of space.

Space emerges as an abstract container of all depicted places, as the outcome of the divine act of creation, and as the result of human reasoning and knowledge, observation and speculation. Being visual sources, the selected case studies crystallise debates from the historical context in which they were produced. At different times and in different places, the approaches to space as a theological category and as a matter of human discovery and reconstruction are variegated and influenced by specific questions and concerns. Still, at this time, a worldview based on theological assumptions and on observation were still interrelated but increasingly distinguishable topics, as the question of the location of Eden illustrates.

Various ideas of what space and place may be, and of the relationship between places and space coexisted. Maps could depict all places that constitute the finite space of creation or visualise known places and allude to the

unknown territories beyond the possibilities of human discovery. Accordingly, in early modern times, the cosmic space, the features, rules and extension of the Earth and the universe became subject to intense exploration and speculation. Different questions led to different approaches and methodologies to explore places and scrutinise space. The lines between places that lie before and after the individual human biography, between the territory humans inhabit, experience and observe, and the transcendent places of religious narrations and worldviews were questioned, moved and contested. The Italian geographer Franco Farinelli sums up this crucial trend as follows:

It is precisely the disappearance of Paradise from maps during the modern period that shows the end of the awareness concerning the prophetic, or at least prognostic, nature of geographic images.¹⁰⁶

We have only discussed a few selected examples from a significant period that clearly illustrates how concepts are moulded and transformed over time. We did not present the sources in a chronological order since it is not appropriate to think of a homogeneous and linear transformation from medieval to early modern approaches. The selected sources convey various forms of interrelation between theologically founded worldviews, religious practices and observation of the earthly territory and speculation. All of them refer to Christianity as the dominant religious tradition and assume a geocentric idea of the universe. Still, the comparison between the different approaches taken in the selected sources crystallise different trends in conceiving space. They allow us to grasp the complex transformations from a vision of space as a container of all cosmological places to an idea of space as a puzzling concept for conceptualising, an extension that needs to be scrutinised and described by means of exploration and speculation.

106 Farinelli 2014, 40.

