How Monstrosity and Geography were used to Define the Other in Early Medieval Europe

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

My thesis deals with texts that are either often not investigated in their entirety or that have large portions of their narratives overlooked in favour of more traditionally popular sections. The stories and descriptions of monstrous races included in these texts, many of which are cornerstones of western myth – *cynocephali*, amazons, *cyclopes*, giants, dragons, etc. – were inherited by the Early Middle Ages from its Greco-Roman past and redeployed in response to shifting frontiers, both literally and metaphorically in order to make sense of their new world. My thesis is very much an inter-disciplinary study, making use of anthropological and literary theory concerning social identity and the conceptions of the fabulous, miraculous, and the monstrous and combines a close textual analysis of primary source material with a detailed reconstruction of the context in which these texts were created and transmitted. What was it about these particular texts that resulted in their widespread transmission? How were these descriptions of the monstrous used to define the other? How were these same descriptions used to define barbarian groups? Was there a geographical link between where these texts placed their monsters and real geographical frontiers? How were texts like this used to shape a Christian identity in such a way that it was distinct from a non-Christian one? These questions and others like them will lie at the heart of my thesis.

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Notes on Translations

Unless otherwise stated I have provided my own translations of the source material throughout this thesis. However, in a few cases, especially of very well-known and easily accessible sources such as St Augustine's' *City of God* and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* for example, I have elected to use the latest, or best, scholarly translations available. In a number of other instances, I either disagreed with the modern translation or an adequate translation was unavailable; in these cases, I have also chosen to translate the text myself. If the translation is not my own I have indicated this in the footnotes.

Abbreviations

BnF		Bibliothèque nationale de France
BSB		Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
CCM		*Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum*
CCSL		*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout, 1953- present)
CLA		E.A. Lowe, *Codices latini antiquiores: A palaeographical guide to Latin manuscripts prior to the ninth century, 11 vols. plus supplement* (Oxford, 1935-1971)
CLM		*Codices latini monacenses*
CSLM		*Clavis Scriptorum Latinorum Medii Aevi, Auctores Galliae, 735-987, vol. II, Alcuinus*, ed. Jullien Marie-Hélène and Françoise Perelman, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediavalis* (Turnhout, 1999)
MGH		*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*
	AA	*Auctores antiquissimi*, 15 vols. (Berlin, 1877-1919)
	Cap.	*Capitularia, Legum Sectio II, Capitularia regum francorum I*, ed. A. Boretius (Hanover, 1883)
	Epp.	*Epistolae karolini aevi III - VI* (Hanover, 1892-1939)
	Poet.	*Poetae latini aevi carolini*, ed. E. Dümmler, L. Traube, P. Von Winterfeld and K. Strecker, 4 vols. (Hanover, 1881-1899)
	SRG	*Scriptores rerum germanicum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, 78 vols. (Hanover, 1871-1987)
	SRL	*Scriptores regum langobardicarum et italicarum saec. VI–IX*, ed. G. Waitz (Hanover, 1878)

SRM	*Scriptores rerum merovingicarum*, ed. B. Krusche and W. Levison, 7 vols. (Hanover, 1885-1920)
SS	*Scriptores in folio*, 30 vols. (Hanover, 1824-1924)
ÖNB	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek
PL	*Patrologia Latina*, J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completes, series Latina, 221 vols.* (Paris, 1841-1864)
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*, J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completes, series graeca, 161 vols.* (Paris, 1857-1866)

Introduction

One of the meanings of the monstrous is that it leaves us without power, that it is precisely too powerful or in any case too threatening for the powers-that-be […] But the notion of the monster is rather difficult to deal with, to get a hold on, to stabilize. A monster may be obviously a composite figure of heterogeneous organisms that are grafted onto each other. This graft, this hybridisation, this composition that puts heterogeneous bodies together may be called a monster. This in fact happens in certain kinds of writing. At that moment, monstrosity may reveal or make one aware of what normality is. Faced with a monster, one may become aware of what the norm is and when this norm has a history – which is the case with discursive norms, philosophical norms, socio-cultural norms, they have a history – any appearance of monstrosity in this domain allows an analysis of the history of the norms. But to do that, one must conduct not only a theoretical analysis; one must produce what in fact looks like a discursive monster so that the analysis will be a practical effect, so that people will be forced to become aware of the history of normality.[1]

Hic sunt dracones! This simple indicative is often thought to be the standard warning written on the edges of many medieval *mappae mundi*. After all, as stated above, monsters are powerful and dangerous creatures, which ought to be avoided at all costs. Most people would be surprised, however, to discover that the phrase '*Hic sunt dracones*' does not actually appear on a single medieval map – anywhere! In fact, the phrase only appears on two Early Modern maps, both of which date from the first decade of the sixteenth century and are closely related to each other. The first of these is the Hunt-Lenox Globe dating from 1510, now housed in New York Public Library, which has the phrase written across the Eastern coast of Asia.[2] The second instance of this warning appears on a newly discovered globe, which quite curiously is painted on an ostrich shell, and purports to be from as early as 1504. There have been questions raised over the veracity of both the assertions about its date and over the authenticity of the globe itself. In

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[1] Elisabeth Weber, 'Passages - from Traumatism to Promise', in E. Weber (ed.), *Points - Interviews, 1974-1994* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 385-7.

[2] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 80.

addition to the questions concerning the dating, Missinne's desire to link the ostrich egg with the workshop of Leonardo da Vinci seems to be more wishful thinking than effective scholarship. Nonetheless, the artistic and geographic links between the two are striking and it is, therefore, not really surprising that the phrase appears on both.[3]

Despite the absence of this evocative phrase from *mappae mundi* produced during the Middle Ages, monsters did appear in medieval texts and on medieval maps. Medieval writers and artists did, in point of fact, spent a great deal of time thinking about, discussing, describing, carving, painting, drawing, and re-purposing classical tales of the monstrous throughout the entirety of the Middle Ages. For example, St Augustine discussed monsters in *City of God*, Isidore of Seville dedicated a large section of his *Etymologiae* to a discussion of monstrous races, even the seventh-century *Chronicle of Fredegar* resorted to using the monstrous when the author needed to explain the lineage of Merovech, the eponymous and semi-legendary founder of the Merovingian dynasty.[4] In his story, the Fredegar Chronicler tells us that Merovech's father was a five-horned sea monster that resembled a bull (*bestea Neptuni Quinotauri similis*).[5] Interestingly, the continuations of Fredegar compared Charles Martel to the Old Testament hero

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[3] Stefaan Missinne, 'A Newly Discovered Early Sixteenth-Century Globe Engraved on an Ostrich Egg: The Earliest Surviving Globe Showing the New World', in *The Portolan* 87 (2013), pp. 8-24. This is a very recent discovery and more work needs to be done on the globe before the claims surrounding its dating can be verified.

[4] Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei*, trans. by Henry Bettenson in *City of God* (London: Penguin, 1972), Book XVI, ch. 8, pp. 661-4, Book XXI, ch. 8, p. 982; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in S.A. Barney, *et al.* (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Book XI, ch. 3, pp. 243-46; Fredegar, *Chronica*, ed. and trans. by J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar: With its Continuations* (London: Nelson, 1960).

[5] *Chronicon*, in B. Krusch (ed.), *MGH SRM II* (Hanover: 1888), p. 95; '*Fertur, super litore maris aestatis tempore Chlodeo cum uxore resedens, meridine uxor ad mare labandum vadens, bestea Neptuni Quinotauri similis eam adpetisset. Cumque in continuo aut a bistea aut a viro fuisset concepta, peperit filium nomen Meroveum per co regis Francorum post vocantur Merohingii*' (It is reported that when Chlodio was staying on sea shore in the summer with his wife she went swimming at midday and in the sea a beast like the Quinotaur of Neptune sought her out. And, in due time, when she gave birth to a son called Merovech - after whom the kings of the Franks are called Merovingians – [it is unknown] whether he was conceived by the beast or by the man).

Joshua, which invited further comparisons of the Franks as the new Israelites.[6]

Medieval literature, in reality, is replete with tales and descriptions of monstrous races and creatures. Monsters such as Fredegar's Quinotaur, fill the pages (and margins), of courtly romances, poetry, histories, encyclopaedic works, geographical treatises, and even theological tracts. Monsters, it would seem, not only filled the pages of medieval literature but also the imaginations of the medieval person. Monsters also, perhaps in some sort of colonising move, burst forth from the pages of these medieval manuscripts to find permanently-petrified homes in the carvings and architecture of medieval buildings and churches. Even a quick glance at medieval church architecture or art will serve up depictions of hell, Satan, *cynocephali*, *sciapods,* dragons, griffins, giant serpents, and many other forms of monstrosity and demonic representations. The medieval person was, it seems, entranced and fascinated by the monstrous to such an extent that even the great church reformer and father of the crusades, Bernard of Clairvaux, allowed for a certain amount of monstrous extravagance in church architecture but had to wonder aloud at the reasons for their inclusion in the cloisters when he wrote:

> Let us allow this to be done in the church because, even if it is harmful to the vain and greedy, it is not such to the simple and devout. But in cloisters, where the brothers are reading, what is the point of this ridiculous monstrosity, this wonderfully deformed beauty, this misshapen shapeliness? What is the point of those unclean apes? What is the point of the fierce lions? What of the monstrous centaurs? Of the half-men? Of the spotted tigers? What of the fighting soldiers? Or the hunters blowing their horns? You may see one head under many bodies, and again many heads on one body. Here on a quadruped we see the tail of a serpent; there on a

[6] See also Mary Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 114-61; Paul Fouracre, 'The Long Shadow of the Merovingians', in J. Story (ed.), *Charlemagne: Empire and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 5-21, at p. 15. In recent years Rosamond McKitterick has raised questions concerning the dating of the continuation of Fredegar and therefore questions the dating of its composition. This affects the contemporary nature of the 751 story, see Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 140.

fish we see the head of a quadruped. There we find a beast that is horse up front and goat behind, here another that is horned animal in front and horse behind. In short, so many and so marvellous are the various shapes surrounding us that it is more pleasant to read the marble than the books, and to spend the whole day marvelling over these things rather than meditating on the law of God. Good Lord! If we aren't embarrassed by the silliness of it all, shouldn't we at least be disgusted by the expense?[7]

What of the creatures that do not have an apparent biblical *raison d'être* or cannot have their presence easily explained by allusions to the Revelations of St John? What are they doing there on the walls, cloisters, and roofs of churches? Why have they survived? There are, after all, thousands of examples of these creatures carved, etched, and painted onto medieval churches from the Holy Land to Norway which cannot be explained in this manner. The reasons why these were included in cloister architecture, I think, are obvious; people enjoyed 'marvelling over these things' (just like Bernard's monks) as much then as we do now, so much so, in fact, that the expense was, and remains, well justified.[8] Much like in the scene described above by Bernard, we too in the modern world sit transfixed and mesmerised by our own monstrous marvels. For Bernard though, it impeded and distracted them from their ultimate purpose, that is, a search for God. For the modern consumer of the monstrous, it allows us a sort of fetishistic approval of

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[7] Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum*, in J.L.C.H. Talbot and H.M. Rochais (eds.), *Sancti Bernardi opera* (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-77), pp. 106: '*Patiamur et haec fieri in ecclesia, quia etsi noxia sunt vanis et avaris, non tamen simplicibus et devotis. Ceterum in claustris, coram legentibus fratribus, quid facit illa ridicula monstruositas, mira quaedam deformis formositas, ac formosa deformitas? Quid ibi immundae simiae? Quid feri leones? Quid monstruosi centauri? Quid semihomines? Quid maculosae tigrides? Quid milites pugnantes? Quid venatores tubicinantes? Videas sub uno capite multa corpora, et rursus in uno corpore capita multa. Cernitur hinc in quadrupede cauda serpentis, illinc in pisce caput quadrupedis. Ibi bestia praefert equum, capram trahens retro dimidiam; hic cornutum animal equum gestat posterius. Tam multa denique, tamque mira diversarum formarum ubique varietas, ut magis legere libeat in marmoribus, quam in codicibus, totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando. Proh Deo! si non pudet ineptiarum, cur vel non piget expensarum?*'

[8] As an example of a well-justified expense, while I was writing this introduction an exhibition opened at The Roman National Museum at Palazzo Massimo in Rome titled 'Mostri, creature fantastiche della paura e del mito' (Monsters, fantastic creatures of fear and myth). Even in cash-strapped Rome there is financial justification for the monstrous. In fact, I suspect the exhibit is very popular and turns out to be a financial boon for the city.

our desire, *i.e.* it provides us an avenue for saying, thinking, and writing what we are not normally allowed to say, think, and write.[9] In the Middle Ages the quest for God was essentially an inward one even if, as in the case of the cloisters described above, this inward journey was done in a community of brothers or sisters rather than alone. Therefore anything that distracted from this inner quest was to be avoided, abstained from, and shunned; and there appears to be little doubt that, at least according to Bernard's interpretation, the apes, serpents, and fabulous beasts that Bernard was describing, were serving any other purpose than distraction.[10] However, throughout this thesis I hope to demonstrate that the monstrous was more than a textual distraction, more than a simple blunder in taste. Instead the monstrous was very often used not as an interruption but as a kind of rhetorically-effective short-hand that was easily recognisable because of both the ubiquity and simplicity of the monstrous.

We in the modern world have incorporated many of these same monstrous architectural elements into our own aesthetic sense of normal and proper architecture. Moreover, we live in a world where we are, it often seems, surrounded by monsters in literature, films, or video games that are obsessed with monsters, vampires, werewolves, or zombies, all of which can trace their origins back to medieval (or earlier) representations.[11] Despite the fact that we are surrounded by the monstrous, people are still surprised when forced to consider them on serious terms. When I am asked by people what my research is focused on I usually tell people that I look at monsters in early medieval literature. This extremely concise description of my thesis usually elicits one of two responses from people. Firstly, some people look at me with what I can only describe as a cross between pity and confusion and they usually say something like 'that's an

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[9] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), *passim* but esp. at pp. 5, 14, and 107-60.

[10] For a fuller discussion on this passage and great introduction to Cistercian architecture see Terryl Nancy Kinder, *Cistercian Europe: Architecture of Contemplation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), esp. at pp. 14-15; see also Mary J. Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) *passim* but esp. at pp. 15, and 66-9.

[11] I am thinking here especially about the gargoyles, serpents, and dragons, which are incorporated into many modern architectural façades.

interesting topic' or even the far shorter and much more damning 'hmm'. The second reaction I receive usually sees people launching into discussions about dragons, werewolves, vampires or ghosts and often ends with me having to defend medieval people's beliefs about the supernatural and stress that, no, I do not think most medieval people believed in monsters the way popular culture wants to depict them despite the seeming ubiquity of their use in medieval literature, on the edges of later medieval *mappae mundi*, or in the margins of countless manuscripts. This constant defence of the medieval thought-world has led me to consider the language of monstrosity and more specifically the definition of it. What is it about the monstrous that causes these reactions in people? Why does the modern world perceive medieval people in such a way? These are obviously very complex questions and, for the most part, we will have to leave the discussion of medievalisms for another day and another venue.[12] Instead we will look at the

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[12] There has been a great deal of work done in recent years concerning the role of medievalisms in the modern world. This list is far from exhaustive but is a good place to start: Paul Freedman and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Medievalisms Old and New: The Rediscovery of Alterity in North American Medieval Studies', in *The American Historical Review* 103(3) (1998), pp. 677-704; John M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Erin Felicia Labbie, *Lacan's Medievalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Anke Bernau and Bettina Bildhauer (eds.), *Medieval Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); Karl Fugelso (ed.), *Defining Medievalism(s)* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009); M.J. Toswell, 'The Tropes of Medievalism', in K. Fugelso (ed.), *Defining Medievalism(s)* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), pp. 68-76; Helen Young, 'Approaches to Medievalism: A Consideration of Taxonomy and Methodology through Fantasy Fiction', in *Parergon* 27(1) (2010), pp. 163-79; Clare A. Simmons, 'Re-Creating the Middle Ages', in A. Galloway (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michael Modarelli, 'The Struggle for Origins: Old English in Nineteenth-Century America', in *Modern Language Quarterly* 73(4) (2012), pp. 527-43; Daniel Gordon, 'The Voice of History within Sociology: Robert Nisbet on Structure, Change, and Autonomy', in *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 38(1) (2012), pp. 43-63; Martha Driver, 'Making Medievalism: Teaching the Middle Ages Through Film', in R.F. Yeager and T. Takamiya (eds.), *The Medieval Python* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 151-65; William J. Diebold, 'Medievalism', in *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012), pp. 247-56; Andrew B. R. Elliot (ed.), *The Return of the Epic Film: Genre, Aesthetics and History in the 21ˢᵗ Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014). The popularity of medievalisms in public dialogue is perhaps best witnessed by examining a new website that has recently been created, which is conveniently titled: www.publicmedievalist.com.

inherent ambiguity in the word monster or monstrous. After all, what is a monster? What is monstrous? At first glance it seems that the answer to both is obvious but like many definitions the more you think about it and the more deeply you ponder the implications of these definitions the more difficult and complex it becomes to define. Everyone, I think, would define the terms differently. Even I am inconsistent with my use of the term in everyday speech. For example, a monster can refer to mythical creatures such as the Minotaur, *cynocephali*, or the Loch Ness monster. Alternatively, it can be used as a synonym for evil, or insanity even, when describing modern-day war criminals, serial killers, or perpetrators of other vicious and heinous crimes. On the other hand, it can have positive connotations as well. Sports stars are often described as monsters when they perform well (so and so was a monster on the pitch today). Even children can be adoringly called little monsters (or not, depending on the day). Consequently, this has created difficulties concerning the definition of the monstrous and its ambiguity. When this thesis was first sketched out two years ago there was no space allotted for defining, discussing, or explaining what precisely being monstrous was because it seemed to be such an obvious thing but as you can see, from the few examples I have just provided, the definition is simply not self-explanatory. The monstrous is so pervasive in modern culture that it has almost become invisible. It is instead, to paraphrase the quotation from Derrida that opened this section, the monstrous, or perhaps more specifically, it is through the process of thinking, writing, reading, hearing – in short, experiencing – the monstrous that we learn what normality is, what the mundane is, what the quotidian is. Despite the ubiquity of monsters, beasts, and the grotesque in medieval writings, modern historians far too often still dismiss their inclusion in medieval or late antique texts as superstition, fantasy, or imagination-gone-awry.

Until very recently, and apart from a small number of works, often focusing on *Beowulf*, the study of the monstrous has almost exclusively been left to the art historian.[13] In a 1936 lecture on *Beowulf*, J.R.R. Tolkien famously said that 'monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste, they are essential,

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[13] See esp. Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness.' Tolkien was rightly criticising the tendency of historians in his day to disregard certain aspects of the poem, *i.e.* the monstrous elements of the text, in favour of other, more political and historical characteristics, because the monstrous elements did not fit a certain aesthetic conception of what they thought an historical (or poetic for that matter) text should be about. Historians, he said, were guilty of 'placing the unimportant things at the centre and the important on the outer edges.'[14] I hope to demonstrate throughout the remainder of this study that the monster was not only central to the way the medieval writer conceived the difference between human and non-human but that the monster was critical to how these same authors conceived the difference between Christian and pagan, between civilised people and barbarians, in short, between us and them literally, metaphorically, and geographically.

As in the modern world, the monstrous was so ubiquitous in medieval writings that modern witnesses to these texts still often ask whether the medieval person believed in monsters. As an alternative to recognising or admitting that the monstrous pervades the modern world just as much (perhaps even more so) as the medieval world, or allowing for literary explanations of the monstrous, many modern academics have instead felt the need to rationalise the monstrous, perhaps reminiscent of Derrida's warning about making them pets.[15] This approach has led to some modern academics even looking for scientific and rational explanations for the origins of the monstrous. For example, John Friedman asserted that *sciapods* were simply the result of a confused traveller to India, while Adrienne Mayor goes even further when she tries to explain the myths of griffins by resorting to the paleontological fossil record.[16] Although these scientific

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[14] J. R. R. Tolkien, 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics (1936)', in C. Tolkien (ed.), *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 5-48, at p. 5.

[15] Jacques Derrida, 'Some Statements and Truisms about Neologisms, Newisms, Postisms, Parasitisms, and other small Seismisms', in D. Carroll (ed.), *The States of "Theory": History, Art, and Critical Discourse* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 63-94, p. 80: 'Monsters cannot be announced. One cannot say: "here are our monsters", without immediately turning the monsters into pets.'

[16] John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge,

approaches are very much in vogue today, I am uncertain of their efficacy as attempted reconstructions of the historical past, or as useful explanations for the rhetoric and narratological usefulness of monstrosity. These scientific approaches to explaining the existence of monsters are, I think, asking the wrong set of questions. Whether a traveller was mistaken about a yogi or whether readers actually believed the tale is immaterial.[17] Rather, what can be investigated and answered is, what role these creatures played in the narrative in which they were contained or the artistic context in which they were depicted *vis-à-vis* the rhetoric of monstrosity. As I will argue, it is, in fact, the ambiguity and uncertainty that surrounds monsters and monstrosity that lay at the heart of their rhetorical effectiveness. To my mind the question that we should be asking ourselves (and the sources) is *why* monsters were created and used rather than asking *what* caused or influenced them to be created. To this end, it will become clear that monsters and monstrosity are simply another cultural construct used, and sometimes abused, as a means to understand the world and the creatures (humans included) which inhabit it. In their capacity as cultural constructs they serve a dual purpose, at once being a foil or mirror with which artists and writers are able to think aloud on the problems of humanity, but also being mutable, indefinable, and unclassifiable modes of thought. Said another way, it is their very inhumanity that makes them so effective as rhetorical devices for humanity. There are, after all, numerous things that exist beyond categorisation or exist in multiple categories simultaneously, whether in the realm of theology or philosophy.[18] Why not the monstrous?

MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 25. Although this remains a seminal work on the study into the monstrous races Friedman's attempt to explain the *Sciapod* as simply the observations of a confused traveller reads as an afterthought and is not at home in the rest of the work. See also Adrienne Mayor, *The First Fossil Hunters: Dinosaurs, Mammoths, and Myth in Greek and Roman Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), *passim* but especially in her first chapter titled *Gold-Guarding Griffins*, at pp. 15-53. In this somewhat fantastical study Mayor tries to explain the existence of mythical and folkloric creatures by claiming that they are simply paleontological remains such a *protoceratops*. Although her overall thesis is a tempting one, especially for my inner child, she ultimately fails to convince.

[17] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, p. 25.

[18] I am thinking here especially of apophatic philosophy and theology, both of which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Throughout the rest of this thesis we shall investigate the problems of monstrosity in a late antique and early medieval context, how the rhetoric of monstrosity was used in various descriptions of late antique and early medieval barbarians, and what role geography played in their construction. The thesis itself is broken into three chapters. The first chapter will present the theoretical framework that will be central to my thesis and will define any contentious terminology that I intend to use throughout the remainder of the work. In addition to providing a theoretical underpinning, this chapter will also place the remainder of thesis into its academic context by examining, summarising, and critiquing previous work on the subject while also investigating classical, late antique, and medieval ways of approaching the monstrous. This chapter will also lay out the distinctions between the marvellous and the fantastic in literature. It will explain exactly what 'monster theory' is and will help to contextualise the various interpretations of monstrosity in the texts under investigation. For example, should the monstrous tales in this work be viewed differently in the light of (post-)modern, post-colonial thought. Once I have sufficiently explained the way in which I intend to use and interpret the texts that I have chosen to explicate I shall begin to unpack the topics of geography and frontier. My research aims to use this theoretical underpinning in an attempt to read backwards what was being said in early medieval sources dealing with non-Christian topics and especially with non-Christian peoples, whether real or monstrous.

The second chapter serves a two-fold purpose. Firstly, it will provide an overview of the types of sources – both geographical and monstrous – that are extant and a discussion of some of the authors who wrote them. It will also offer not only descriptions of the tradition(s) of monstrous tales that were bequeathed to the early medieval west but will also include an explication of the trope of monstrosity and begin to unpack its myriad uses as a rhetorical device. Chapter 2 will also see a discussion on the transmission of what has become called the Plinian races from their Greek origin through their Roman (via Pliny the Elder) uses and eventually, their re-use by authors such as Isidore of Seville, Jordanes, and Paul the Deacon, and ultimately how these monster stories were used and altered by other authors

in the Early Middle Ages. Some of these texts include the *Liber monstrorum*, the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, Hrabanus Maurus' *De Universo*, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, and various tales of the Alexander the Great and his travels in the East, including the 'barbarian' histories and others.[19] Furthermore, I will also discuss late antique and early medieval conceptions and receptions of the monstrous and begin the process of interweaving these conceptions into more recognisable texts.

Having established the sources that I intend to use and theoretical framework with which I propose to interpret them in chapters two and one respectively, I shall begin to discuss the descriptions of the monstrous and barbarous 'peoples' which employ monstrous rhetoric in the third chapter. What message, for instance, was an author sending when their description of a people used language and rhetoric that can be termed monstrous? For example, what was Jordanes trying to convey about the Huns when he described them as a 'most savage race, which dwelt at first in the swamps, were a stunted, foul, and puny tribe and possessed no language save one that scarcely resembled human speech, if I may call it so … [They had] a sort of shapeless lump, not a head, with pinholes rather than eyes.'[20] In addition,

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[19] The latest edition and translation of the *liber monstrorum* can be found in *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus*, ed. and trans. by A. Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), pp. 254-316; for the latest edition and translation of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* see *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, ed. and trans. by M.W. Herren, *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); for the *De Universo* see Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 111 (Paris: 1852), cols. 9-614 and Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, trans. by P. Throop in *De Universo: The Peculiar Properties of Words and their Mystical Significance* (Charlotte, VT: MedievalMS, 2009); for Isodore's *Etymologiae* see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911) and for an English translation see Barney's Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*.

[20] Jordanes, *Getica*, in T. Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V* (Berlin: 1882), pp. 89-91: '*Genus hoc ferocissimum ediderunt, quae fuit primum inter paludes, minitum tetrum atque exile quasi hominum genus nec alia voce notum nisi quod humani sermonis imaginem adsignabat…velud quaedam, si dici fas est, informis offa, non facies, habensque magis puncta quam lumina.*' The translation is my own, however, see also Jordanes, *Getica*, trans. by C.C. Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary* (Princeton, NJ: Dodo Press, 1908), XXIV, p. 41.

they were said to have lived in marginal land and only accidentally discovered a path through the Maeotic Swamps when a couple of Hunnic hunters (the only skill they possessed) followed a deer into the Gothic lands. It was not even a sense of misguided valour or the intestinal fortitude that is so often used to describe early northern Europeans that led them out of their swampy homeland but rather it was empty stomachs, a much less heroic reason.[21] What was the author of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* doing when he used exactly the same language to describe both the Turks and *cynocephali*?[22] We will also look at a number of instances where other races, although monstrous in appearance, were not always monstrous in character.[23] Many of these races even possessed traits that were valued, especially by classical authors, such as living in communities, agriculture, a certain barbaric stoicism, even holding to an existence that had little use of money or materialism. Even the *cynocephali*, perhaps the most famous of the Plinian races, despite their monstrous appearance and diet, were depicted by one writer as living in villages and living off the land as herdsmen and farmers - a kind of simple and noble life.[24] Additionally, the Amazons, despite their long list of monstrous, anti-feminine, attributes are shown possessing at least some maternal instinct when they were said to have 'found Minotaur cubs in the wilds and nourished them and gently domesticated them' in one text.[25] These descriptions are especially interesting because, according to the Book of Genesis, the ability and desire to domesticate animals was proof of humanity.[26]

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[21] For a full discussion on this passage see below at pp. 169-74.

[22] For a fuller discussion see below at pp. 154-69; see also Jason R. Berg, '"Breasts of the North" and Other Apocalyptic Imagery in the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*', in V. Weiser (ed.), *Abendländische Apokalyptik: Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013), pp. 563-76, at pp. 570-3; Ian Wood, 'Aethicus Ister: An Exercise in Difference', in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds.), *Grenze und Differenz im Frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), pp. 197-208, *passim*.

[23] See below at pp. 154-69.

[24] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 26-9.

[25] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 156-7.

[26] Genesis 1:25-26.

Who and what an author chose to describe in monstrous language is very telling of the author's conception of that group or region. The third chapter will also investigate the connections between barbarism, history, and geography in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. History and geography themselves were closely related disciplines in late antiquity and the early middle ages, especially as a means to define frontiers. Oftentimes, on the edges of the frontiers lived monstrous and or barbaric peoples. This is, perhaps, best demonstrated by Orosius' *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, a text which eventually constituted one of the most important early medieval texts on geography. For an example of the power of a geographical description, one need only to look at the wildly differing descriptions of Britain given by Jordanes and by Bede. Both of these writers, it ought to be noted, used Orosius as a source, yet the outcome of the two descriptions could hardly be any more different. For Bede, Britain was a paradisiacal new Eden. While for Jordanes, Britain was the on the absolute edge of the world; a harsh and difficult place to live and only surpassed in its distance from the centre by the almost mythically-described Thule (Iceland?). Closely connected to the geographic description of a region was the depictions of the types of creatures or peoples that inhabit the lands. It was through this association between periphery and monstrosity that monsters (and occasionally 'barbarians') began to acquire familiar landscapes. Some of these descriptions and connections were already well established in antiquity while others were new.

These connections between geography, landscape, and monstrosity, although not always explicit are avenues for investigation into the worldview and geo-demographic outlook of these authors. If the manuscript contained miniatures the monsters are often placed into some form of recognisable landscape, which is more often than not rocky, barren, and generally marginal. This is perhaps nothing more than artistic license. I, however, think that it is more likely that these are residual images of the way in which these monsters were imagined in the medieval mind. For example, in a number of the Cotton manuscripts, the monsters are depicted either in rocky landscapes or in scenes that are reminiscent of jungles or barren landscapes. They are almost never depicted within cities or even within the view of cities or villages and are only depicted alongside humans as a means of

narrating the story or in some cases, the humans are depicted as food. Despite its obvious negative definition, the wilderness was often a place that Old Testament prophets withdrew, like Amos and Jeremiah. Notwithstanding the negative association of the wilderness or of marginal lands it must be pointed out that the earliest monastic communities were often in very liminal regions geographically. St Anthony, for example, withdrew to a set of mountains only to dwell in a cave; later Simeon Stylite placed himself a top a column in a desert. What were these people trying to accomplish with these moves to liminal regions? What can these conceptions of the world tell us about geographical depictions in other texts or on monstrous landscapes, either in text or in image? Said another way, could geographic descriptions or landscapes be used as a means to reinforce a long held belief or to reconsider old ones? For example, the author of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* talks of the *deserta Germania*. What is meant by that phrase? As stated above, Amazons can be both honoured and marginalised, sometimes in the same text. Clues to whether the reader is supposed to revile or revel are often left in the geographic description that accompanies these sections of the text. That is, they can both have virtue and vice, and depending on the geographical description that accompanies them one can determine which aspect the writer is emphasising.

Chapter One: Monster Theory

I.1: Introduction

Modern interest with the horrid, violent, and shocking, because of the invention of computer-generated imagery (CGI) and cinematic special effects, is more visually realistic than in the literature of the Middle Ages.[1] However, the motivation for the portrayal and depiction of the monstrous and terrible is the same for a modern person as it was for an ancient or medieval individual. It is both escapist and enthralling, but it also, and perhaps most importantly, allows us to eschew the other in a kind of monstrous abridgement by recalling and recollecting specific inhuman or monstrous traits and inscribing them on the other. The monstrous, after all, because of this pervasive fascination, was not restricted to a specific form of artistic representation or genre of medieval literature. It was everywhere and came in many forms and was not limited to a single time period. In fact, none other than the great Church Father himself, St Augustine, in the late-fourth century, noted this fascination with the monstrous when he wrote in his *Confessions*:

> And if those human calamities, whether ancient or fictitious myths, are presented so that the spectator is not pained, he departs scornful and critical; if, however, he feels pain, he remains attentive and weeps with joy.[2]

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[1] For a discussion on the extent to which modern film makers go to make authentically medieval films see Sarah Salih, 'Cinematic Authenticity-Effects and Medieval Art: A Paradox', in A. Bernau and B. Bildhauer (eds.), *Medieval Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 20-39; see also Driver, 'Making Medievalism'; Elliot, *The Return of the Epic Film.*

[2] The English translation is my own. However, a full English translation can be found in Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick in *Saint Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book III.ii.2, at p. 36. The Latin can be found in Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, in J.J. O'Donnell (ed.), *Augustine: Confessions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), Book III.ii.2: '*et si calamitates illae hominum, vel antiquae vel falsae, sic agantur ut qui spectat non doleat, abscedit inde fastidiens et reprehendens; si autem doleat, manet intentus et gaudens lacrimat.*'

The pain of the spectator that St Augustine was discussing here, I think, refers to more than a simple one-dimensional definition of pain. Instead, for St Augustine, the pain (*dolere*) of human calamities was a necessary step in the process of being attentive, in the process of feeling joy, in both human emotional and mental cognition. Given St Augustine's definition of what role the monstrous played in human understanding of Creation from *City of God*, it is not surprising then that they, *i.e.* monsters, fascinated him.[3] Another example of this attraction to the monstrous can be seen in a much later but equally popular source. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Trinculo, upon seeing Caliban lying on the ground and unable to decide if he is a man or fish, says:

> Were I in England now – as once I was – and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man; any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a droit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian.[4]

Although I have only chosen two widely known and recognisable examples here it is safe to say that humanity is fascinated by the horrible and has been so for centuries. The classical world dealt with the monstrous in its myths, literature, and geographic writings; the medieval world dealt with monstrous in the bible, in church architecture, art, and in its own literature and geographic texts; the early modern world dealt with the monstrous in the forms of witch trials, art, architecture, and again its own literature and geographic writings. The modern world is no different. One does not need to look for long in the newspapers, blogs, and magazines of today before coming across articles and editorials that are concerned with the glorification of violence, or violent people, in film, literature, television, and video games. Nevertheless, it is these same violent video games and films which consistently and constantly gross vast sums of money at the box

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[3] Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei*, trans. by Henry Bettenson in *City of God*, at pp. 661-4.

[4] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in D. Lindley (ed.), *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), II.ii.25-30.

office.[5] There must be a reason for this.

Cultures are inclined to consider themselves as unique, set apart, and superior from both contemporary cultures and religions that are not their own but also from the past; even from past versions of themselves or of their own culture. Or at least from 'certain' past version of themselves. After all, the past, and especially the Early Middle Ages, play a significant role in the way that many modern countries self-define.[6] The gladiatorial games of ancient Rome; the descriptions of the violent and disturbing deaths of early Christian martyrs in late antique Christian texts; medieval Christian church art, bestiaries, geographic texts, and histories; and the panic that ended in the burning of witches in the early modern period, are just a few precursors to our modern fascination with death, violence, and the monstrous. The common thread that runs through all of these is the scapegoating of an other. Gladiators, for example, were largely drawn from the mass of Roman slaves, criminals, or prisoners of war; Christian martyrs were killed because their religion was inherently other in the eyes of the pre-Constantinian Roman empire and medieval bestiaries, histories, and geographic texts abound with cautionary moral tales of the sinful, prideful, wicked, or heretical, illustrated in the guise of descriptions of beasts or monsters.[7] This scapegoating has been done throughout history and will unfortunately very likely continue. There appears, after all, to be a cultural (and economic) value attached to the othering of specific segments of society. It is on this cultural value of othering, specifically through references to the monstrous that interests us here.

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[5] For the latest work on the genre of Epic film see Elliot, *The Return of the Epic Film*; for a broader discussion of representations of the medieval in film see Bernau and Bildhauer, *Medieval Film*.

[6] A full list of the recent work on this subject would be very long. This is just a sample of the more easily accessible and widely available works on the subject. See Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), *passim*; Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (eds.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), *passim* but esp. see Matthew Innes' introduction to the volume at pp. 1-8; McKitterick, *History and Memory*, *passim*; Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), *passim*.

[7] Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1995), *passim*.

The writers of early medieval and late antique Europe used tales of the violent, the horrifying, and the monstrous as a means of both self-identification and liminalisation by placing the monstrous and the barbarous in marginal lands and endowing them with inhuman or non-Christian traits in order to define frontiers between them and us, whether literally or metaphorically. 'Monsters', says Joyce Lionarons, 'seem to call into question, to problematize [*sic*], the boundary between humans and other animals... [they] operate [as a] major locus of the experience of horror.'[8] The monstrous epitomise the difference between us and them by normalising and reifying the differences between the two. They are constructed, created, and re-used in order to be read as shorthand for scapegoating. When understood and interpreted in this way, these same references to the monstrous can be read as storehouses of early medieval conceptions of centre vs. periphery, fear, space, and geography. By reading them as such the historian can attempt to reconstruct the medieval boundaries between us and them. Jeffrey Cohen, in the introduction to his ground-breaking, if slightly dated, book on monster theory declared that 'the monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read.'[9] For Cohen, the monster *is* culture; it both houses and allows us to house our deepest fears (and desires) while simultaneously enabling identity formation, whether sexual, national, racial, psychological, economic, or religious. Said another way, the monster forces discourse upon us. It forces us to (re-)consider our own definitions of gender, sexuality, religion, geography, fear, and human knowledge. It invites us to re-evaluate our world view and how we have interpreted (or misinterpreted) it. In short, monsters constantly ask us why we have created them.[10] Anyone who researches the monstrous has been asked, often jokingly, whether monsters really exist or whether people in the past believed that they did. Cohen correctly, I think,

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[8] Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'From Monster to Martyr: The Old English Legend of Saint Christopher', in T.S. Jones and D.A. Sprunger (eds.), *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 167-82, at p. 171.

[9] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 4.

[10] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 20.

answered this question when he wrote that 'surely they must, for if they did not, how could we?'[11] What Cohen is saying in this rather opaque statement is that humanity, it seems, requires a scapegoat to project its insecurities and fears into, or a mirror in which to reflect its ugliness in; and it is the monstrous that provides this reflection. Monsters act as a sort of portrait of Dorian Gray if you will, in which we can store all the evil, improper, irreligious, counter-cultural, and hideous aspects of our society and culture so that the right, proper, lawful, and orthodox rules can exist. In short, they exist so that we can.

Monsters are imbued, in whatever cultural mode one wishes to describe, with the essence of both Us and Them. In order for Us to exist as a defined and identifiable group then monsters need to exist. This, I know, is a very platonic explanation but the metaphor fits. For Plato, reality was found in the world of Ideas, of which our world of Senses was a poor imitation. Our world was, as the analogy goes, but a shadow reflected on the wall of a cave. Monstrosity and ugliness then by this definition are imperfect reflections of perfect forms. Ugliness and monstrosity only exist in the world of Senses, *i.e.* the world inhabited by humans, as senses of imperfection; they do not actually exist in the world of Ideas. However, there is no denying that our world was/is full of these imperfect shadows of what was not monstrous and ugly. So what then are the idealised platonic forms of these imperfect reflections? They are rightness and correctness; beauty, colour, morality, ethics, and upon the arrival of Christianity, orthodox Christian beliefs. They are all the traits that make a moral and ethical Us worthy of emulation and are the adhesive that holds our cultural house of cards together. By extension, the monstrous houses the opposite.

If aesthetics teaches us that we ought to consider something beautiful not because if its inherent 'beautiness' but because we have been taught or conditioned to think of it as beautiful then where that does leave the monstrous? After all, how can one thing be easily defined without some sense of also having to define it in the negative. This is a thing but it is not like this other thing. Or said another way, an

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[11] Cohen, *Monster Theory*, p. 20.

apple is an edible red fruit with seeds inside. Well, so is a tomato. By thinking about an apple you are also unconsciously thinking about everything that is not an apple. So unless you want to always be creating laundry-lists of features and traits you will at some point need to use an identity short-hand. An apple is an edible red fruit with seeds inside but it is not a tomato makes the point but is clumsy. Having both linguistic and cultural abbreviations is much more succinct. This, albeit a flippant and quick example of how saying something is not something else, and being able to do so quickly and easily, is, I think, one of the major roles that the monstrous tales play in culture. These monstrous tales are shorthand. They are abbreviation. They are necessary. They are culture.

I.2: Post-Medieval Monstrous Studies

Although medieval and ancient sources occasionally dealt with defects from a medical standpoint it was rare to do so. However, by the early modern period this began to change. The sixteenth century, for example, saw the publication of the *Des Monstres et Prodiges* by Ambroise Paré, a French anatomist and battlefield surgeon. It opened, in a very medieval fashion, with chapters titled 'An Example of the Glory of God' and 'An Example of the Wrath of God' but quickly began to discuss other reasons for these defects such as environmental and hereditary factors.[12] The sixteenth century also saw the publication of Jakob Ruff's *De conceptu et generatione hominis, et iis quae circa hec potissimum consyderantur,* Arnaud Sorbin, Bishop of Nevers' *Tractatus de monstris, quae a temporibus Constantini hucusque ortum habuerunt*, and *Histoires prodigieuses, extraictes de plusieurs fameux autheurs* by Pierre Boaistuau to name only a few of the more medically-oriented explanations of the monstrous.[13] The common thread amongst

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[12] Ambroise Paré, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, in J.-F. Malgaigne (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes d'Ambroise Paré* (Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1840-41); for an English translation see Ambroise Paré, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, trans. by Janis L. Pallister in *On Monsters and Marvels* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[13] Jakob Rüff, *De conceptu et generatione hominis, et iis quae circa hec potissimum consyderantur* (Zurich: Christophorus Froschoverus, 1554); Bishop of Nevers Arnoud Sorbin, *Tractatus de monstris, quae a temporibus Constantini hucusque ortum habuerunt,*

these texts is the medicinal and rational approach to the explanation of monstrous births and defects. This progression towards the rational and medical continued in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

By the nineteenth century, the shift from the divine or theological explanation for the monstrous and prodigious towards the medical was all but complete.[14] The fascination with these monstrosities can trace itself back to the teratological collections of the early modern world. These collectors and investigators were curious about the anatomy of monstrous births and often approached the subject as medical professionals. Their studies usually focused on deformed foetuses and attempted to explain the reasons why these births, both human and animal, were occurring. However, this was not always the case. Teratology, in whatever epistemic role you want to assign it, deals with the non-human and monstrous, viewed traditionally as offshoots of medical curiosity or the study of physiology, whether human or not.[15] In fact, even Charles Darwin himself demonstrated a

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ac iis, quae circa eorum tempora mise acciderunt, ex historiarum, cum Graecarum, tum Latinarum testimoniis (Paris: Apud Hieronymum de Marnef, & Gulielmum Cavellat, 1570); Pierre Boaistuau, *Histoires prodigieuses, extraictes de plusieurs fameux autheurs, grecs & latins, sacrez & prophanes mises en nostre langue par* (Paris: Jacques Macé, 1567); see also Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in post-Reformation England* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Dudley Butler Wilson, *Signs and Portents: Monstrous Births from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[14] Johann Friedrich Meckel, *De duplicitate monstrosa commentarius* (Halle: Orphanotrophei, 1815); Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Philosophie anatomique: des monstruosités humaines, ouvrage contenant une classification des monstres; la description et la comparaison des principaux genres* (Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1818); Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire générale et particulière des anomalies de l'organisation chez l'homme et les animaux* (Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1857).

[15] For the latest work on post-human teratology see Patricia MacCormack, 'Posthuman Teratology', in A.S. Mittman and P.J. Dendle (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 293-309, *passim* but MacCormack's discussion on the definition of what she considers post-human is the most fruitful section of the article, at pp. 295-99. See also Karl Steel, 'Centaurs, Satyrs, and Cynocephali: Medieval Scholarly Teratology and the Question of the Human', in A.S. Mittman and P.J. Dendle (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 257-74; Lesley Kordecki, 'Losing the Monster and Recovering the Non-Human in Fable(d) Subjectivity', in L.A.J.R. Houwen (ed.), *Animals and the Symbolic in Medieval Art and Literature* (Groningen: Forsten, 1997),

fascination with teratological collections and studies at an early point in his career.[16] For people like Paré, Ruff, and even Darwin, monstrosity was a natural process to be viewed and studied rather than and independently produced phenomena.

The twentieth century's interest in the monstrous and marvellous began with Ernst Jentsch. In his 1906 essay titled '*Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen*', Jentsch sought to uncover the process by which a sane human mind experienced fear and terror and how the mind categorised and coped with that fear. In the essay he described a scenario in which, under normal environmental circumstances, no one is surprised that the sun rises every morning. After all we have been accustomed to the daily event since childhood. Is there anything more quintessentially quotidian than the sunrise? 'It is', wrote Jentsch, 'only when one deliberately removes such a problem from the usual way of looking at it – for the activity of understanding is accustomed to remain insensitive to such enigmas, as a consequence of the power of the habitual – that a particular feeling of uncertainty quite often presents itself.'[17] Said another way, when there is a cognitive break in the way one perceives something, even something as commonplace as the sunrise, there is the possibility of experiencing a feeling of uncertainty. The rising sun, as we know, does not depend on the sun's movement at all; rather it is contingent upon the rotation of the earth on its axis and the earth's orbit around the sun. When one conceives of the sunrise in this way it becomes much less certain. It removes the perceiver's humanity, or human experiential evidence, from the calculation. The sun will set and rise the same way it has for billions of years.[18] Another aspect

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pp. 25-37.

[16] Darwin possessed an annotated edition of Paré, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, in Malgaigne (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes d'Ambroise Paré*.

[17] Ernst Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny (1906)', in *Angelaki Journal of The Theoretical Humanities* 2 (1997), pp. 7-16, at p. 9.

[18] There has been a very interesting philosophical turn in the last few years which has attempted to remove human subjectivity from the ontological equation. This philosophical movement is usually referred to as Speculative Realism or Object Oriented Ontology, depending on who you ask, and although it remains a relatively minor player in mainstream philosophy it has a great many medievalists at its centre. Many, though not all, of these medieval academics research the monstrous, non-human, animal, or object and so it is not at all surprising that removing human subjectivity or objectivity from their

of Jentsch's argument revolved around the sense of uncertainty that one feels when seeing an inanimate object that appears to be lifelike or takes on lifelike characteristics. The example he provided was that of a child's doll that automatically opens its eyes. The small size and familiar nature of a doll does not in itself create any notable sense of the uncanny. However, a life-sized figure doing the same thing, performing complicated tasks, or that eerie feeling one gets when you look at lifelike wax models causes unease in some people. He concluded that the feeling of uncertainty had occurred when an inanimate object appears to be living or when a human being begins to act as an automaton. His argument centred on the assumption that one's desire for the intellectual mastery of their surrounding environment was strong and that:

> Intellectual certainty provides psychical shelter in the struggle for existence. However it [*i.e.* intellectual certainty] came to be, it signifies a defensive position against the assault of hostile forces, and the lack of such certainty is equivalent to lack of cover in the episodes of that never-ending war of the human and organic world for the sake of which the strongest and most impregnable bastions of science were erected.[19]

According to Jentsch, the uncanny, or more precisely the uneasy feelings we have when witnessing or experiencing the uncanny are a defensive mechanism against the unknown. As unnerving and unsettling as 'living' inanimate objects are, such as we find, in the Old English *Dream of the Rood*, a poem that relates the crucifixion of Christ from the perspective of the cross, they fail to be centres of 'pure culture' as Cohen described. Rather, these objects and descriptions of them are allegorical or poetical *topoi* that neither strike fear into one's mind nor do they automatically force us into a discourse concerning our identity, fears, or desires.

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epistemological notions of the world occurs regularly in their work. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects* (Washington, DC: Oliphaunt Books, 2012); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It's Like to be a Thing* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Bruce Holsinger, 'Object-Oriented Mythography', in *Minnesota Review* 80 (2013), pp. 119-30.

[19] Jentsch, 'On the Psychology of the Uncanny', p. 15.

A fuller definition was required.

Sigmund Freud, a contemporary of Jentsch, was also unsatisfied with Jentsch's classification of the uncanny. In a 1919 response essay titled '*Das Unheimliche*', Freud offered an alternative definition. In a uniquely Freudian manner, he was able to link the 'anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood' to 'that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.'[20] Freud continued by suggesting that uncanny effects are the result of repetition, instances when individuals retrace their steps, or in the apparent purposive ordering of otherwise random numbers.[21] He also argued, using a methodology that Isidore of Seville would have recognised and respected, that specific aspects of the uncanny can be discovered, and in turn explained, by a discussion of the etymology of the word itself.[22] Namely, Freud felt that the key to unlocking the meaning of a term lay in the language used to describe it. In the course of his argument he compared the adjective *unheimlich* (uncanny, eerie) with its root *heimlich* (hidden, in secret, lurking); also presumably with the overtone of *heim* = home, which itself has implications of hidden, secret, as being not public, but which is not necessarily threatening, hence the need to add '*un*' to create *unheimlich.* Using this etymological argument, he proposed that social taboos produced a feeling of not only pious veneration but also of horror and disgust. The assumption that what is hidden from the public eye must be dangerous or loathsome, especially if the concealed trait is sexual in nature, runs central to his argument. Although Freud and Jentsch disagreed on what exactly the root cause of the uncanny was (for Freud it was the hidden and secret nature of the experience and for Jentsch it was the uncertainty of surrounding the humanness of the event, object or experience) they both agreed that it functioned

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[20] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74), pp. 220, 231-3, at I.5 and II.12.

[21] Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, pp. 236-8, at II.18-20.

[22] For the Latin text see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*; For an English translation see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*.

in a dynamic of uncertainty, that is, the uncanny was to be found somewhere between the familiar and the unfamiliar. The ambiguity and difficult to define nature of the uncanny only added to its power.

The psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, a self-professed Freudian himself, recognised that something lay in this dynamic of uncertainty between the familiar and the unfamiliar and attempted to explain it. His explanation, though strictly speaking not a definition of the uncanny, does address the unfamiliar by attempting to explain the uncertainty that people feel when they are unable to analyse an anxiety. Lacan's answer to this familiarity in the unfamiliar was twofold. First, he developed the notion of the 'mirror stage' of human development and then coined the term *extimité*. Although Lacan, and his 'mirror stage' have had limited impact in the field of psychoanalysis in the English-speaking world, his works, especially his work on the 'mirror stage', have been widely used by literary critics as a means to explain the other/Other in relation to one's own identity.[23] For Lacan, the moment that a toddler recognises themself in the mirror as themself they, starting with their parents, begin to define the other in relation to that discovery. 'The mirror stage', wrote Lacan, 'is a phenomenon to which I assign a twofold value. In the first place, it has historical value as it marks a decisive turning-point in the mental development of the child. In the second place, it typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body image.'[24] The 'mirror stage' also has a symbolic dimension. This symbolic order is signified by the figure of the adult who is holding the child in front of the mirror. The moment that the child recognises themself they experience both a sense of mastery and jubilation. The sense of mastery is imagined while the sense of jubilation is depressive as the child recognises in its parent – someone very intimate to the child – a representation of the Other.[25] In a related concept, Lacanian psychoanalysis also

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[23] Dylan Evans, 'From Lacan to Darwin', in J. Gottschall and D.S. Wilson (eds.), *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), pp. 38-55, at pp. 38-9.

[24] Jacques Lacan, 'Some Reflections on the Ego', in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34(1) (1953), pp. 11-7, at p. 14.

[25] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (London: W. W. Norton, 2006).

speaks of *extimité*, or the extimacy which characterises the inassimilable. Despite its spelling, extimacy is neither contrary to nor the opposite of intimacy; rather Lacan defines it as the 'intimate other'. That is, it is something akin to the child being held in front of a mirror by its parent. In psychoanalysis, it would seem natural to place ourselves in the position of intimacy. Analysis, after all requires trust, restraint, and comfort, all three of which are synonymous with intimacy. However, the analyst can only, by definition, be exterior to the analysand's intimacy. The analyst cannot, despite their efforts, be anything more than an exterior interpreter of the intimate interior thoughts of the analysand. The analyst is exterior to the analysand's intimacy meaning that s/he is in a state of *extimité* in relation to the subject. However, both are present simultaneously. If extimacy is defined in this way then we can extend this classification to include the unconscious self, which is by definition, both intimate and exterior to our control. Extimacy, then, is like a parasite or a splinter in your finger, both external and internal to the body and to the self. In this sense, the extimacy of the subject is the other. This notion of an intimate alterity was already present in Late Antiquity. Unsurprisingly, it revolved around ones' relationship with God. For example, St Augustine, in his *Confessions*, speaks of such an intimate alterity when he wrote that God is 'more interior than my innermost and higher than my uppermost [being].'[26] It has also been commonplace, since at least the late eighteenth century, to read the subjects in Homeric writings as archaic versions of the modern self. Homer's subjects are slaves to honour and/or the cultural pressure associated with bringing shame on ones' self or family rather than the modern obsession with guilt, conscience, or will. They also lacked a single word to describe the unified self but rather, until Plato at least, were unable to convey anything other than an idea of unified selves.[27] The concept of intimate alterity can also be extended to define the relationships between Us and Them or within social groups. The other,

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[26] The English translation is my own. However, a full English trans. of *Confessions* can be found in Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick in *Saint Augustine: Confessions*, Book III.vi.11, at p. 42. The Latin can be found in Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, in O'Donnell (ed.), *Augustine: Confessions*, Bool III.vi.1: '*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*'.

[27] James I. Porter and Mark Buchan, 'Introduction', in *Helios: Special Issue - Before Subjectivity?: Lacan and the Classics* 31(1-2) (2004), pp. 1-19, at pp. 8-9.

therefore, can be intimate, known, a product of the unconscious, all the while maintaining a difference and distance from the self. This *extimité*, I think, is one of the key roles the monstrous plays in medieval (and modern) writing and thinking. Although not explicitly stated in this way, and certainly using different descriptive language, it is this type of intimate alterity that Edward Said discussed in his landmark work *Orientalism*. It is to that concept that we will now turn.

I.3: Orientalism

The investigation of the other as being represented in the uneven cultural, religious, economic, and philosophic exchange between European colonial powers and Asia, Africa, and the New World has produced a number of fruitful studies.[28] Two of the most influential of these studies were written by Edward Said and Stephen Greenblatt, both of whom, it should be noted, are literary critics and not historians. This does not, however, limit the value of these works for historians because both have produced helpful discourse and have opened up lines of inquiry that were inconceivable prior to the 1970s. Nevertheless, their works are somewhat historically narrow in scope, in that both of these authors have failed properly to place their works into a historical context.

Despite this criticism, Said's *Orientalism* has been the starting point for almost every investigation of the relationship between the West and the East since its publication in 1978.[29] Though Said's *Orientalism* is over three decades old, and his notions and arguments are in desperate need of revision, the epistemic

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[28] There are many others, however, the list would dominate this thesis so I have only listed the two that are most central to my own work. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); and Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978).

[29] See Ning Wang, 'Orientalism versus Occidentalism?', in *New Literary History* Volume 28(1) (1997), pp. 57-67; Philip Carl Salzman, 'Arab Culture and Postcolonial Theory', in *Israel Affairs* 13(4) (2007), pp. 837-43; Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007); Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said's Orientalism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007).

framework that his concept created and continues to create is central to my notions of identity, monstrosity, and geography. Whenever one approaches the work of Said, whether in admiration or aversion, it needs to be done with caution. I have attempted, as much as anyone is able, to approach his work, the works that his ideas inspired, and the works of those who were critical of him, without passing judgement on their internalised politics. However, his complex, and politically-charged views on Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East have meant that his work, perhaps more than any other scholar in the last three or four decades, was and continues to be, used, and occasionally abused, by scholars, thinkers, politicians, and writers whose own political views range from the benign to the radical.

In the work, Said argues that the Orient and the Occident mirror each other in a type of eternally self-defining and self-sustaining fiction. The concept of Orientalism expounded by Said provides the framework for, and the descriptive language used in, the systematic and continued discourse on and with the East. However, Said dealt poorly with the history of the Middle Ages. For him, the Middle Ages were both stagnant and textually and spatially closed off from direct involvement with the Orient which is, of course, patently untrue. Kathleen Biddick, in an essay on post-colonialism in the Middle Ages demonstrated that it was essentially Dante who gave Said his starting point for medieval Orientalism.[30] By choosing to start with Dante, Said had not only a distorted view on the history (and geography) of the Middle Ages but also a distorted conception of the temporality of the Middle Ages, while also excluding from his conception of Orientalism, the entirety of the Early Middle Ages and Late Antiquity. For Said, the Orient was defined by the Occident for the Occident but always as exterior to it or in a state of *extimité* with respect to the West. Orientalism, according to Said's conception, is a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' which produces a 'surrogate and even underground self'.[31] Said's tendency to see all contact between the East and the West in a binary discourse

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[30] Kathleen Biddick, 'Coming out of Exile: Dante on the Orient Express', in J.J. Cohen (ed.), *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 35-52, at p. 36.

[31] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

also led to a marginalisation of Africa in the relationship.[32] Furthermore, *Orientalism* has been criticised for its tendency to see everything through the lens of nineteenth and twentieth century Orientalism despite Said's attempt to include earlier epochs. For example, Said wrote that for a thousand years 'every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist and almost totally ethnocentric.'[33] A rather bold statement to say the least! Additionally, Aijaz Ahmad feels that the argument, or perhaps arguments, put forward in *Orientalism* were plural and incongruous. A concept of the Orient, he argued, has existed since the beginning of time *and* as a consequence of the colonisation of Egypt and the Levant in the eighteenth century.[34] Therefore, the teleological view of orientalism as a process which was largely defined during the European colonial expansion of the early modern and modern world is not only too simplistic, but also very short-sighted. After all, both the classical and medieval world had their own concepts of the East.

Though their notions of what the East was, *vis-à-vis* the West, were different, and perhaps incongruous, to the early modern ideas expounded by Said, there was very little room in his argument for the effect that these ancient and medieval notions had on the modern definition of the East. It has also been pointed out by post-colonialists that, despite desired absolutes such as 'Orient' and 'Occident', 'Norman' and 'English', 'Christian' and 'Jew', or 'Pagan' and 'Christian', it is simply impossible to define these groups as easily as one would wish.[35] Rather, it is at the frontiers and borders of these divisions, both literally and metaphorically, that one sees a process of hybridisation, which in turn makes defining such absolutes impossible.[36] Robert Young has observed that hybridity is a term that is itself difficult to define simply because it can mean different things to different

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[32] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation', in J.J. Cohen (ed.), *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (London: Macmillan, 2001), pp. 19-34, at pp. 19-20.

[33] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 204.

[34] Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literature* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 181.

[35] See below for a further discussion on this, pp. 131-7.

[36] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain: On Difficult Middles* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.

people at different times.[37] In addition, he writes that hybridity can have antithetical meanings, 'contrafusion and disjunction [...] as well as fusion and assimilation.'[38] Despite these criticisms, *Orientalism* has been fundamental in forming my perceptions of the discourse on the East.

The overworked cliché about history writing being the prerogative of the victors perhaps rings no truer than in the historiography of the New World. There is little doubt which side of this interaction (Europeans and Indigenous peoples of the Americas) fared better in the end. What is less certain though is what the intentions of both sides were from the outset. The complete and eventual domination of the indigenous peoples by Europeans is easily read back into the sources as the main goal of these expeditions but was that always the case?

Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions* [*sic*] has done a better job centring itself in the history of the time period he studies than Said's *Orientalism* but still ultimately failed the task at hand. However, where Greenblatt's treatment of the subject of colonisation really bears fruit is in what he calls the 'European discourse of wonder'.[39] By examining the marvellous in the writings of Mandeville, Columbus, Frobisher, and others Greenblatt attempted to make intelligible the 'European discourse of wonder' by focusing on the exchanges between a European culture and an alien one, especially at the point of first contact. In his

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[37] For another introduction to the problem of hybridity see Anjali Prabhu, *Hybridity: Limits, Transformations, Prospects* (Albany, NY: State University New York Press, 2007), *passim,* but esp. at pp. 1-18.

[38] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995). This quotation was taken from Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity*, p. 1. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, there is a difference between hybridity and metamorphosis and that both 'express different rhetorical strategies and different ontological visions'. She defines hybridity as the expression of the natural world, *i.e.* nature, essences, or substances encountered through paradox. In other words, it resists change. Metamorphosis, on the other hand express what she calls a 'labile world of flux and transformation, encountered through story.' In plainer terms, hybridity is static and metamorphosis is a process. Both can be categorised as change but in different ways. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2001), pp. 29-30.

[39] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, p. 132.

wonderfully titled fourth chapter, 'Kidnapping Language', Greenblatt discusses how the European colonisers who either accompanied Columbus in the vanguard of European colonists, or found themselves writing about the first contacts between Europeans and Indigenous populations, were influenced by texts of wonder and amazement produced by writers such as Mandeville.

With these texts firmly internalised, the new colonisers and authors could only then describe what they discovered using similar language.[40] For example, when Columbus had anchored off the coast of Trinidad and came into contact with an indigenous group he had not yet met, he wrote:

> They were well-proportioned and not negroes, but whiter than the others who have been seen in the Indies, and very graceful and with handsome bodies, and hair long and smooth, cut in the manner of Castile… They had their heads wrapped in scarves of cotton, worked elaborately and in colours, which, I believe, were almaizares… They wore another of these scarves round the body and covered themselves with them in place of drawers.[41]

This section of his diaries is rather telling and quite nicely demonstrates how Columbus' preconceived notions were poured into his descriptions of the unknown. However, it also demonstrates how he was able to use easily recognisable tropes and cultural references to make his point. Firstly, by drawing a comparison between the hairstyles of these new people and Castile it appears that, in his mind at least, there was something recognisably human and cultured in the appearance of these new people. Furthermore, by seeing something familiar in the head scarves of the inhabitants of Trinidad and naming them (incorrectly) as *almaizares* he was also placing these people into the long tradition of Marvels and Wonders. *Almaizares*, for example, were veils or scarves usually worn on the heads by the Moors in Spain. These head scarves also bore a strong resemblance to the turbans worn by East Indians in many illuminations in the books of both Mandeville and Marco Polo.[42] This attention to detail and trope is perhaps

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[40] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, pp. 86-118.
[41] Taken from Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, p. 86.
[42] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, p. 86.

because, as has been noted elsewhere, Columbus was more of an intense reader of signs than an astute observer.[43]

In a related and very compelling essay, Paul Freedman investigates the usefulness of the concept of the other on medieval culture by using two perceptions of the monstrous. His conclusion is that although the European representations of encounters with other peoples as imperialist is an attractive theory one must be careful not to mistake the politics of Imperialism that are so central to authors such as Said and Greenblatt with the process of cross cultural contact in the Early Middle Ages.[44] The early medieval age simply did not possess a conception of colonisation that these two theses require in order to be wholly tenable.[45] A more subtle and articulate reading of cross cultural contact and identification is needed. However, it is this recycling of the recognisable rhetoric of the East, the marvellous, and the unknown, when cross cultural contact is discussed that has formed my own opinions on the recycling of the rhetoric of monstrosity.

I.4: Anthropology of the Monstrous

How cross cultural contact is represented was the focus of one of the most influential anthropologists of the twentieth century. Perhaps it was just a coincidence of scholarship but Claude Lévi-Strauss was also no stranger to myth and monsters. The work of Lévi-Strauss, especially in his landmark works *Structural Anthropology* and *Tristes Tropiques*, focused on demonstrating that the naming of cultures as 'savage' or 'civilised' was a useless undertaking because both were so loaded with cultural bias that all they did was reinforce pre-existing

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[43] Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique*, trans. by Richard Howard in *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 14-50.

[44] For a similar approach see Peter Mason, 'Seduction from Afar: Europe's Inner Indians', in *Anthropos* 82(4/6) (1987), pp. 581-601.

[45] Paul Freedman, 'The Medieval Other: The Middle Ages as Other', in T.S. Jones and D.A. Sprunger (eds.), *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002), pp. 1-24.

stereotypes.[46] This is worth remembering when we discuss the notions of barbarism and geographic liminality later. In his 1962 study on *Totemism* Lévi-Strauss demonstrated that totemic beliefs and the rituals surrounding these beliefs ought to be treated as a series of sign systems, which represented something that they in fact were not.[47] In his next work, *The Savage Mind* he provided the burgeoning field of structural anthropology with a theoretical framework for understanding the intellectual systems of 'primitive' peoples.[48]

It was his great work *Mythologiques*, however, that was instrumental in mapping the structural transformations of the peoples indigenous to the Americas ranging from the Arctic Circle to the jungles of South America. The overwhelming theme of this work stressed that the goal of an anthropologist ought to consist of the search for the underlying structures of all human thought and activity. This is especially true in describing, understanding, and considering the myths and religions of various peoples, almost all of whom left no written accounts of their myth (which is, of course, a similar problem that early medievalists have when discussing certain groups). Lévi-Strauss sought to develop a theory of anthropology that used the system of structural linguistics made famous by Ferdinand de Saussure as a means to describe various cultures of the world. Because of his affinity for Saussurean structural linguistics, Lévi-Strauss saw culture as an interrelated set of symbolic communications. For him, one of the best preservers of this symbolic communication was myth. Nevertheless, in myth, he saw a paradox. On one hand, mythical stories preserved by cultures, either orally or in text, contained stories that were very difficult, if not impossible, to categorise. Myths were often so full of the fantastic and the unpredictable that the stories could appear, on the surface, to be arbitrary constructions with little or no

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[46] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie Structurale*, trans. by M. Layton in *Structural Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. by J. Weightman and D. Weightman in *Tristes Tropiques* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

[47] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le totemisme aujourd'hui*, trans. by R. Needham in *Totemism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

[48] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage*, trans. by in *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972); David Pace, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: The Bearer of Ashes* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 7.

underlining explanation for their construction. However, he also noted that there was a tendency for cultural myths from different cultures to contain elements that were surprisingly similar. This conclusion led him to write:

> On the one hand it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable relation can be found. With myth everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: If the content of myth is contingent [*i.e.* arbitrary], how are we to explain the fact that myths throughout the world are so similar?[49]

Despite the apparently arbitrary nature of myth, Lévi-Strauss set out to define a set of universal laws that would resolve this paradox. Individual myths, he thought, only appear to be unique but in fact are structured in a way that reduces 'apparently arbitrary data to some kind of order, and to attain a level at which a kind of necessity becomes apparent, underlying the illusions of liberty.'[50] According to Lévi-Strauss, myth was ultimately a mediator between oppositions - it was a bridge between two otherwise inexplicable phenomena. His famous example of the trickster in Native American myth mediating between life and death is often a starting point for his conception of this opposition. Another example that he used often was that of agriculture and hunting. Agriculture is concerned with producing life (until the harvest at least) while hunting is concerned with taking life. It is therefore, completely understandable, in this binary construction of reconciling opposites, that monsters are at home in his structure of myth. Monsters are, after all, mythic creatures that mediate between what it is to be human and what it is to be something other than human. They are used to identify Us (whether that 'Us' is defined in religious, geographic, political, or economic terms) in opposition to Them; the perfect mediation in a precise Lévi-Straussian sense.

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[49] Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Layton in *Structural Anthropology*, p. 208.

[50] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et le cuit*, trans. by J. Weightman and D. Weightman in *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 10.

When viewed in this light monsters, whether in literature or art, ought to be understood as not only liminal figures who are ill-defined and contain non-human characteristics but more importantly as go-betweens or facilitators, which assisted in the task of understanding, creating, and solving social contradictions and cultural formation. In the words of one literary critic, myth and the supernatural are 'merely a pretext to describe things they would never have dared mention in realistic terms.'[51] I would hasten to add that the monstrous performs precisely the same function. Satire, it must also be said, frequently performs a similar function. A quick read of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or *A Modest Proposal* perfectly demonstrates this desire to use the monstrous or unspeakable as a means to discuss what would otherwise not be stated. Throughout the remainder of this thesis we will see how this tradition of using the monstrous as narratological and rhetorical devices for discussing the un-discussable has a long history. Having now discussed the language of the monstrous we can turn our attention to the meaning of that language and how it was deployed in text.

I.5: Literary Analysis

Now that the language of the other and its relationship to geography, especially in the discourse on the East-West relationship, and myth have been investigated, we will now examine what can be garnered from the texts themselves. What were the authors doing, either explicitly or implicitly, when they included monsters and monstrous descriptions in their texts? The evidence available to early medievalists who study the monstrous is largely literary. Although, there are a small number of illuminated manuscripts from the early Middle Ages, the vast majority are from later than the time period I wish to focus on here. Therefore, I felt it was important to familiarise myself with some of the major thinkers of literary criticism who deal with the genre of the monstrous or fantastic.

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[51] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique*, trans. by R. Howard in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 158.

In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye devised a general view on the scope, principles, techniques, and theory of literary criticism. Frye's outlook on literary criticism consisted largely of classical system of modes, symbols, genres, and myths. According to Frye all literature is interconnected; it is both self-referential and coherent. Perhaps his work's most enduring addition to scholarship was the idea that literary studies ought to be taken as seriously as other sciences. 'If criticism exists', he declared, 'it must be an examination of literature in terms of conceptual framework derivable from an inductive survey of the literary field.'[52] This exclamation rings no more true than in the study of monstrous texts. In order to properly investigate literature in a scientific way Frye was adamant that critics needed to separate themselves from passing any value judgement on the work. Frye is also quite clear to make a distinction between synchronic and diachronic criticism. It is natural, he proclaims, for a critic to freeze a text; 'to ignore its movement in time and look at it as a completed pattern of words, with all its part existing simultaneously.'[53] Nonetheless, literature is not created from reality but rather from other literature. 'Poetry', he writes, 'can only be made out of other poems, novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself and is not shaped externally: the *forms* of literature can no more exist outside of literature than the forms of *sonata* and *fugue* and *rondo* can exist outside of music.'[54] Literature then, whether dealing with the monstrous or not is influenced by the literature that came before it and influences the literature that will come after it. This notion is central to my thesis. How late antique and medieval authors changed, adapted, or imported wholesale, tales, tropes, stories, and rhetoric from classical Rome and Greece will provide keys to their conceptions of geography and the shifting and difficult to define the other.

Tzvetan Todorov's book on the fantastic as a literary genre did a lot for the popularisation of the study and investigation of the fantastic in literature.[55] In his

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[52] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 7.

[53] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. by Howard in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, pp. 9-10.

[54] Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 96.

[55] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil,

work, he discussed in plain and easy to follow discourse his approach to the field of literary criticism beginning with definitions of three genres of literature that although related display differences in their purpose and deployment. The genre of the *marvellous*, according to Todorov, includes stories in which the characters accept the supernatural as explanation for the strange event that they have experienced or witnessed. Many medieval texts, especially within the hagiographic tradition, fall into this category. His second category was the *uncanny*. The *uncanny,* clearly reliant on the work of Jentsch, sees the characters rationalising the supernatural elements surrounding the events in question.[56] The *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville springs to mind as a medieval example of this type of approach. To be sure, Isidore places a great deal of the explanation of the odd and fantastic parts of his text at the feet of God, however, he also provides cases where a rational explanation trumps the supernatural. For example, in Book XI.iii.28 of the *Etymologiae*, Isidore explains that sometimes fabulous human monstrosities are told of which have been fabricated to help interpret the causes of things. By way of an example, he explained that the classical Greek story of the Gorgons (snake-headed women who could turn men to stone with a glance) was fabricated and that, in fact, the real story involved three sisters who shared a singular beauty, as if they had a single eye, and it was their shared beauty that would stun onlookers into silence as if they had been turned to stone.

Fantastic literature, the third genre Todorov focuses on, includes stories in which the characters vacillate between natural explanation and acceptance of the supernatural. The *fantastic*, he explained, consists of three basic elements. Firstly, it requires what he called a 'hesitation' in the reader. The text must force the reader to pause for a moment in order to choose whether to understand the events as natural or supernatural; it is that split second while the reader is deciding which explanation to trust that the moment of hesitation occurs. The second element can see the character experiencing the hesitation rather than the reader. Lastly, the reader has to be willing to decline allegorical or poetic interpretations of the

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1970).

[56] Not dissimilar to how Mayor and Friedman attempted to rationalise the monstrous. See above, pp. 8-9.

events. Todorov suggests that these three elements do not have to exist in every instance in order to qualify as *fantastic* literature, although more often than not all three are present in some form.[57]

In a world that can almost always be explained scientifically, we seldom come across scenarios that cannot be explained. However, when it happens 'the person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world they remain what they are; or else has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us.'[58] Todorov, a dedicated structuralist himself, also chose to show that the early formalists' approach to literature as a sum of its collective stylistic devices was replaced by the idea that a work is a collection of structural rules and devices which perform functions dependant on the system.[59] At the conclusion of his work on the fantastic in literature, Todorov re-asks the question he began his study with but in a slightly, although very importantly, different manner. He opened by asking 'what is the fantastic?' but decides that perhaps that is not a very useful question to be asking. In the end he decides that asking 'why is the fantastic?' is much more useful. The first deals with the function of the fantastic in literature and the second with its structure in that literature; it is the second question that my research will focus on. Why is the monstrous used when other, less problematic, narratological devices could have been used?

As segue between structure and function in literature we will address one of the most famous early speeches on the monstrous. J. R. R. Tolkien, in his 1936 lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, was resolute about the importance of reading *Beowulf* in its entirety, that is, he insisted that the fantastic parts of the

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[57] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. by Howard in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, p. 33.

[58] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. by Howard in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, p. 25.

[59] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, trans. by Howard in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, pp. 5-7.

poem needed to be included in any interpretation of the poem.[60] The main thrust of his lecture was to counteract the prevailing opinion of his day that *Beowulf*, as a poem, was guilty of 'placing the unimportant things at the centre and the important on the outer edges.'[61] He was critical of scholarship that attempted to distance the poem from its fantastic elements, especially that of Grendel and the dragon, in an attempt to use the poem solely as a source of Anglo-Saxon history. Tolkien argued that the amazing and fantastic elements of the poem, rather than being extraneous to the story, constituted important elements and were the key to unlocking the narrative. 'The monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste', wrote Tolkien, 'they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness.'[62]

For him *Beowulf* was a work of art and literature, not simply a historical document. An investigation of *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* demonstrates just how historical the discussion surrounding the text had become by the early decades of the twentieth century.[63] As an illustration of how rapidly the interest in this poem turned to political and historical interest, only need look at the first mentions of the text. The first ever mention is found in a letter dated 28 August 1700 by the English scholar George Hickes to his then assistant Humfrey Wanley: 'I can find nothing yet of Beowulph [*sic*].' As innocuous and banal a beginning as is possible. The second reference comes from a letter dated 28 August 1704 when Humfrey Wanley asked the Swedish scholar Erik Benzelius for help on the topic:

> Some years ago I found a Tract in the Cottonian Library (omitted in Dr Smiths Catalogue) written in Dano-Saxon Poetry, and describing some

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[60] Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics'.

[61] Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics', at p. 5. For a discussion of the problems of making sense of a literary work from a very different epoch, composed according to stylistic criteria that differ markedly from those in fashion today see John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), pp. 120-45.

[62] Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics', p. 5.

[63] T. A. Shippey and Andreas Haarder (eds.), *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1998). See also Andrew Scheil, 'The Historiographic Dimensions of Beowulf', in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 107(3) (2008), pp. 281-302.

> Wars between Beowulf a King of the Danes of the Family of the Scyldingi, and some of your Suedish Princes. Pray, Dear Sir, have you any Histories about such a King & such Wars? If you have, be pleas'd to let me have notice of it.

Although Wanley asks for 'Histories about such a King & such Wars' he does explicitly call the text poetry and even calls *Beowulf* a 'most noble' and 'outstanding example' of Anglo-Saxon poetry in his section of the 1705 published *Historico-Critical Catalogue of old Northern Books Extant in the Libraries of England, and also of many old Northern Codices Extant Elsewhere*. However, his endorsement of the poem as noble and outstanding found little traction in England and it was not long before the poem was being called 'rude' and 'barbaric' by critics. By 1800 the distaste for all things Anglo-Saxon was firmly rooted. In an 1802 publication the English antiquarian Joseph Ritson stated that the Anglo-Saxons were:

> for the most part, an ignorant and illiterate people, it wil [*sic*] be in vain to hope for proofs, among them, of genius, or original composition, at least, in their native tongue. In consequence, no romance has been yet discover'd in Saxon, but a prose translation allready notice'd [*sic*].[64]

It was this contemptuous approach towards Anglo-Saxon poetry broadly – and the *Beowulf* poem specifically – that Tolkien found himself fighting against. To appreciate fully the text as art the monstrous needed not only to be recognised as central to the narrative but lauded as essential and unique.

Despite the fact that the focus of his lecture was only the *Beowulf* poem, generations of scholars, literary, historical, or otherwise have benefited greatly from his discussion on the centrality of the monstrous in the poem. Tolkien urged scholarship to discuss the monstrous on its own terms and to ask why the author chose to include the monstrous elements in the first place. This process has culminated in recent years with scholars viewing the monsters as not only central to any narrative but also as 'pure culture' - an outcome that I believe Tolkien

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[64] Both of the above quotations can be found in Shippey and Haarder, *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 1-3.

would have found agreeable.[65] The desire of Tolkien to move the monstrous from the edge into the middle leads to some interesting thoughts on Mary Douglas and her conceptions of marginal and it is to the ideas of marginality that we will now turn.

I.6: Monstrous Body

All margins are dangerous, since it is at these margins that there is little structure and much pollution.[66] It is at these same margins, both literally and metaphorically, that the monstrous does its best work because it is seen as both symbolically impure and ritually powerful. Furthermore, Douglas stressed how marginalisation of people within groups often added potency to the ritual and rites of passage being performed. This, in turn, augmented the culture's anxiety about border pollution, about contamination from the outside, or about transferring between groups within a given population. For her, what occurred on the margins of society was a culture's way of dealing with 'matter out of place', *i.e.* with people, events, actions, contamination, or boundaries that were problematic or difficult for a specific group to deal with in 'normal' terms.[67] It was another avenue for a culture to discuss and contemplate the unthinkable. It also becomes apparent through the reading of her work that the body is the logical starting point for the organisation of primitive society. Douglas says:

> The Body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body.[68]

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[65] See the introduction, pp. 18 and 23.

[66] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 122.

[67] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 36, 41, and 165.

[68] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 116.

If the body is 'a symbol of society', and I think it is, then it is not at all surprising that descriptions of the monstrous often revolve around descriptions of the body, especially at points of boundary, for example, the eyes, mouth, nose, and anus.[69] I am here reminded of many of the early medieval descriptions of the monstrous that do just this. Jordanes, for example, used his description of the Huns' pinhole-shaped eyes as way to demonstrate their monstrous nature.[70] Likewise, the author of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius*, in a similar fashion, tells us that the sons of Japheth ate aborted foetuses, miscarriages, and occasionally the flesh of their dead.[71] The monstrous discourse used to describe what is 'out of place' or inhuman is easily recognised as both a reflection of the body and of society as a whole.[72]

Mikhail Bakhtin's argument, in his ground-breaking work on Rabelais, also saw in the grotesque a reflection of the symbolic function of the body. For Bakhtin, however, the symbolic power of the body did not extend to social systems as Douglas would have it but rather he saw the grotesque as an aesthetic system.[73] Bakhtin, in an argument reminiscent of Tolkien's *Monsters and the Critics*, argued that for centuries entire sections of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, were misunderstood at best and completely suppressed at worst because of their grotesque content and scatological obsession. In the works of Rabelais, Bakhtin

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[69] See also Margit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 51-3.

[70] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. 89-91.

[71] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, ed. and trans. by B. Garstad, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 96-7.

[72] For a very good discussion on the interactions between space and body see Enid Schildkroupt, 'Body Art as Visual Language', in *Anthro Notes* 22(2) (1999), pp. 1-8; Harald Kleinschmidt, 'Space, Body, Action: The Significance of Perceptions in the Study of the Environmental History of Early Medieval Europe', in *The Medieval History Journal* 3(2) (2000), pp. 175-221, esp. at pp. 194-211; Anirban Das, 'Suturing the Selves Past: The Body in Revolution', in S. Bhattacharjee and C.J. Thomas (eds.), *Society, Representation and Textuality: The Critical Interface* (London: Sage, 2013), pp. 63-77, esp. at pp. 66-9 and 71-3.

[73] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by H. Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), p. 317.

recognised the recurring themes of *carnival*, which he saw as a social institution and grotesque realism, and defined as a literary mode. For him *carnival*, was more than simply a collection of people, it was a whole; a socioeconomic organisation of social hierarchy. Bakhtin writes of the carnival that 'all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age.'[74] The grotesque was used to give a homogeneous identity to an otherwise disparate group. Furthermore, *carnival* and its 'free and familiar contact' were very closely related to the grotesque. For Bakhtin, the grotesque was connected to the body and its changes through eating, evacuation, and sex; it was a measuring device.[75] Rabelais then was using the grotesque as a means of defining what it was *not* to be monstrous, *not* to be other, *i.e.* an apophatic argument *for* humanity.

Building on the thorough, if somewhat dated work of Rudolf Wittkower, it was John Block Friedman's *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* that was the first concerted attempt in four decades to investigate the wealth of classical monsters on their own terms and not as a marginal aspect of a larger study.[76] According to Friedman's classification of the monstrous, monsters are placed into groups of coherent and similar races that existed in far-off geographical regions or in lands nearer by but deemed marginal; a classification that I believe is essentially correct and worth exploring in more detail. His tendency, however, to assume that there was a universal tradition which was adhered to by people as different as Arab cartographers and Irish monks, has limited the usefulness of his work and is a major point of departure for my own conceptions of the monstrous. Because of this somewhat monolithic and universal tradition Friedman's theory of the monstrous does not leave any room for change. For example, it does not explain why these far off geographical regions or lands

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[74] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by H. Iswolsky, p. 10.

[75] Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 303.

[76] Rudolf Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters', in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942), pp. 159-97; see also Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*.

in which the monstrous lived shifted and altered depending on the author's audience (and source material) or why the physical descriptions of these monstrous races changed over time.[77]

There is little doubt that the early medieval authors who used monstrous races in their accounts also viewed the north of Europe as the edge of the world, an area that, if not uninhabitable, was at the very least marginal.[78] One of the strategies of distinction that was used by these authors involved the careful rhetoricising and manipulating of geographic regions in which peoples, and monsters, existed.[79] Why would these authors intentionally alter the ancestral home of such a creature? One possible answer was that the monstrous were now considered nearby. The missionary world of the North was a strange place and much more exotic and unknown than the territories that used to border the Roman Empire. After all, apart from a few notable examples (Tacitus, Caesar, Jordanes) there was not only very little contact with these regions but also very little reliable literary output. Bede, for example, was still relying on Pliny, Orosius, and Jordanes for geographic knowledge of the island he lived on. The territories that Roman and Late Roman authors wrote about (*Germania*, Britain, North Africa) had, by the advent of the Early Middle Ages, become relatively well-known.

The North was to the missionaries of the Early Middle Ages what Scythia, or sub-Saharan Africa had been to many of the classical authors. This was a world that was changing and coming into contact with new cultures on a regular basis. It is perhaps not at all surprising that Gog and Magog, the unclean races, and apocalyptic biblical passages were being reproduced in missionary texts.[80]

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[77] See below, pp. 154-69.

[78] Berg, "'Breasts of the North'", pp. 8, 12-15. This will also be examined in greater detail below.

[79] I am here thinking of Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (eds.), *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), see esp. the introduction by Pohl, at pp. 1-16.

[80] Ian Wood, "'The Ends of the Earth': The Bible, Bibles, and the Other in Early Medieval Europe', in M. Vessey, *et al.* (eds.), *The Calling of the Nations: Exegesis, Ethnography, and Empire in a Biblical-Historic Present* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 200-16, esp. at p. 209.

Another explanation, and one that will be more fully discussed in later chapters, is that the monsters described were being used as a means to discuss what it was to be human; to be not monstrous. Though, I must stress that this, at least in the Early Middle Ages, was not as simple as defining humanity in the negative, after all, these same 'monstrous' groups were potential converts to Christianity so even a semblance of humanity was often, though not always, found in their descriptions.[81]

I.7: Classical Modes of Thought

Monstrous births, defects, and deformities were commented on, discussed, and explained in many different ways in numerous late antique and early medieval texts, ranging from theological treatises to geographic texts. Even though on the surface it appears that these references to monstrous births and deformities were wholly different in both form and function from more traditional tales of the monstrous, such as the *cynocephali* or Amazons, they were not. When monstrous births or deformities were mentioned in late antique and early medieval texts, the ancient authors were usually doing so either as a means to define and explain the existence of imperfection in God's creation or as examples of prodigious events which ought to be heeded. Said another way, these authors were using the rhetoric of monstrosity as a sounding board for normality.

David Williams, in his work on monstrous discourse in the Middle Ages, not only saw in Bakhtin's focus on the areas of threshold and boundary – the mouth, genitals, and limbs – a connection to the descriptions of deformity; it is, after all, these same areas of threshold in anthropomorphic beings that are often the scenes of deformity, but he also argues that the monstrous was usually used as a means to define humanity in the negative.[82] Williams, despite the difficult-to-understand

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[81] Both of these will be further explored in later chapters.

[82] David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Medieval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 109; see also Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*, pp. 51-4.

and complex nature of his book, does make a number of useful observations concerning the use of monstrous language in the discourse of medieval writers. However, his notion that the Pseudo-Dionysian *via negativa* can wholly explain this discourse, tends to cloud the book unnecessarily in unsubstantiated theories.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite was a Christian theologian, author, and philosopher of the late-fifth and early-sixth centuries. The author pseudonymously identified himself in his writings as 'Dionysios' and claimed to be none other than Dionysius the Areopagite, the Athenian convert of St Paul mentioned in the Book of Acts. The set of works that Pseudo-Dionysius wrote are collectively referred to as the *Corpus Areopagiticum* or *Corpus Dionysiacum* and though some texts of the collection are now lost the corpus remains quite extensive. In these works, Pseudo-Dionysius outlined his Neo-Platonic theological views on early Christianity. Because of the false attribution to the real Dionysius the Areopagite the corpus was widely read, discussed, and incorporated into later theologies. The popularity of these texts however began to wane in the West after the fifteenth-century discovery of the pseudonymous authorship of the writings. However, for our purposes, his notions surrounding *via negativa* are the ones that interest us. Negative, or apophatic, theology, at least in the Abrahamic religions, holds that the only way to discover or describe the truth of God or His divinity was through an exploration of what it is *not*, rather than through what it is. If the experience of the divine is ineffable then it stands that human beings cannot comprehend it except through abstraction, negation, and metaphor. Pseudo-Dionysius succinctly summarised this when he said:

> Thus do all the godly-wise, and interpreters of the secret inspiration, separate the holy of holies from the uninitiated and the unholy, to keep them undefined, and prefer the dissimilar description of holy things, so that Divine things should neither be easily reached by the profane, nor those who diligently contemplate the Divine imagery rest in the types as though they were true; and so Divine things should be honoured by the true negations, and by comparisons with the lowest things, which are diverse from their proper resemblance. There is then nothing absurd if they depict even the Heavenly Beings under incongruous dissimilar

similitudes, for causes aforesaid.[83]

Williams' view that it was essentially this Pseudo-Dionysian philosophy, as transmitted through John Scotus Eriugena, which could explain all medieval monstrous discourse, is, however, simply untenable in the Early Middle Ages.[84] Though both Dionysian philosophy and the works of Eriugena were important texts during the Early Middle Ages the impact that they had on conceiving the monstrous as *via negativa* is minimal. Dionysian philosophy did have a great influence on the writings of Thomas Aquinas – Dionysius the Areopagite was quoted more than 1700 times by Aquinas – and is better suited to the study of scholasticism in the twelfth century, however, that falls outside the scope of this work.[85] Although apophatic theology was discussed in very small circles in the Early Middle Ages it was really not until the arrival of Scholasticism in the twelfth century that the Neo-Platonic *via negativa* provided a realistic and viable alternative explanation to understanding the monstrous in theological terms.

Williams' arguments are at their strongest when, in a sentiment that recalls Todorov's 'hesitation', he demonstrates that when a reader is faced with a monstrous creature the reader is forced to not only pass judgement but is also forced to decide whether they believe the monstrous to be true.[86] In this work, Williams also claims to be focusing on the symbolic monster as opposed to the literal one, although he does leave room for the allegorical interpretation of literal monster tales, even if the tales are actually fabricated. This work also fails, I think, to explain the rhetorical effectiveness of using the monstrous as a means to define

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[83] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, trans. by John Parker in *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Alexandrine School* (London: J. Parker and Co., 1899), Book II.5.

[84] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, pp. 1-2, 23-4; 66-8; and esp. at 86-103. In addition, Williams' book itself is disappointingly put together with numerous poor quality images and a bibliography that is full of errors. For a full list of the defects of this book see John Block Friedman, 'Review of Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature by David Williams', in *Speculum* 74 (1999), pp. 1137-40.

[85] Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), *passim*. See also Brian Duignan, *Medieval Philosophy: From 500 to 1500 CE* (New York, NY: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2011), p. 30.

[86] See above, pp. 36-8; see also Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, p. 110.

actual peoples, something in which we shall focus a great deal in later chapters.

Despite all of this criticism, Williams' book does provide a great starting point for the philosophical and theological uses of monstrous discourse the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, one must always bear in mind that the monstrous is always subjective. For example, to Western observers, an African tribal mask with aesthetic proportions and values that are unfamiliar to their own conception of art or South American cave paintings depicting human sacrifice may be disconcerting or even frightening. Alternatively, a depiction of a bleeding and beaten Christ with a gaping spear wound in his side hanging from a cross with a bloody crown of thorns sitting upon his head is potentially just as off-putting to an observer not familiar with the iconography of the Christian West. Monstrosity requires context – not just negation – in order to be fully understood.[87] In fact, it is in the context, in the ambiguity, in the rhetoric of monstrosity that monstrous discourse obtains its potency. Both Friedman and Williams see an all-encompassing view of monsters in the middle ages, however, as I have shown this is simply not the case.[88]

The tradition of interpreting monsters in a Christian context, like many other interpretive traditions, can be traced back to the writings of St Augustine of Hippo. In fact, there is little in the world of critical theory that St Augustine did not get to first. The North African bishop discussed the monstrous in a number of his works. The contextualisation of monstrous descriptions was something that St Augustine was very aware of. For St Augustine, deformity and monstrosity were not only subjective categories but needed to be understood and framed in recognisable terms. This notion of recognition and reflection ran deeply throughout his works. In *City of God*, for example, he worked tirelessly to make clear to the reader that City of God was the only logical outcome when compared to the sinful and secular City of Man. In *Confessions,* his autobiographical work on his eventual

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[87] See below, pp. 138-40.

[88] Jeffrey Cohen alone sees seven different interpretive modes. See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses)', in J.J. Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3-25.

conversion to Christianity, he set up his earlier, non-Christian and Manichean life as the mirror with which to reflect, and in turn, contextualise his later conversion. Nevertheless, he most succinctly summarised this notion in his *On the Nature of Good*, when while discussing the beauty of the cosmos he wrote:

> But in all these things - whatever are small - are called contrary names by comparison with greater things; just as in the form of a man, because the beauty is greater, the beauty of the ape in comparison with man is called deformity. And the imprudent are deceived, as if the former is good, and the latter evil, nor do they regard in the body of the ape its own fashion, the equality of members on both sides, the agreement of parts, the protection of safety, and other things which it would be tedious to enumerate.[89]

In other works, St Augustine expanded on this view and made it clear that deformity, or more precisely a form that was misshapen when compared to *normal* humans, was a creature that not only warned against morally, physically, and religiously different thoughts, actions, and boundaries, but also physically 'showed' the effects of the moral and religious wretchedness also. Beyond these boundaries were the unintelligible, the inhuman, and the anti-Christian. Despite this negative view of the monstrous other, he was quick to make it clear that no matter how different in appearance a creature might be from normal human beings, a being that descended from human beings was human no matter how great the deformity. In fact, it was in their uniqueness and peculiarity that a person contributed to the beauty of the whole. For St Augustine then, the monstrous and the deformed inhabited a strange middle where the monstrous others were both bodily represented by their sins but also worthy of compassion, saving, and

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[89] '*Sed in his omnibus quaecumque parva sunt, in maiorum comparatione contrariis nominibus appellantur; sicut in hominis forma quia maior est pulchritudo, in eius comparatione simiae pulchritudo deformitas dicitur; et fallit imprudentes, tamquam illud sit bonum, et hoc malum; nec intendunt in corpore simiae modum proprium, parilitatem ex utroque latere membrorum, concordiam partium, incolumitatis custodiam, et caetera, quae persequi longum est.*'Augustine of Hippo, *De natura boni contra manichaeos*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 42 (Paris: 1841), cols. 551-72, this passage is from XIV at col. 555. The English translation is my own. However, a full English trans. can be found in Augustine of Hippo, *De natura boni contra manichaeos* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995; repr. from 1887), IV, pp. 353-53 (XIV).

contributed to the greatness and beauty of the human race. St Augustine wrote in his *City of God*:

There are accounts in pagan history of certain monstrous races of men. If these are to be believed, the question arises whether we are to suppose that they descended from the sons of Noah, or rather from that one man from whom they themselves derived. Some of those monsters are said to have only one eye, in the middle of their forehead; others have the soles of their feet turned backwards behind their legs; others have the characteristics of both sexes, the right breast being male and the left female, and in their intercourse they alternate between begetting and conceiving. Then there are men without mouths, who live only by inhaling through their nostrils; there are others whose height is only a cubit - the Greeks call them 'Pygmies', from their word for a cubit. We are told in another place that there are females who conceive at the age of five and do not live beyond their eighth year. There is also a story of a race who have a single leg attached to their feet; they cannot bend their knee, and yet have a remarkable turn of speed. They are called *Sciapods* ('shadow-feet') because in hot weather they lie on their backs on the ground and take shelter in the shade of their feet. There are some men without necks, and with their eyes in their shoulders; and other kinds of men or quasi-men portrayed in mosaic on the marine parade at Carthage, taken from books of 'curiosities', as we may call them.

What I am to say of the Cynocephali, whose dog's head and actual barking prove them to be animals rather than men? Now we are not bound to believe in the existence of the types of men which are described. But no faithful Christian should doubt that anyone who is born anywhere as a man - that is, a rational and mortal being - derives from that one first-created human being. And this is true, however extraordinary such a creature may appear to our senses in bodily shape, in colour, or motion, or utterance, or in any natural endowment, or part, or quality. However, it is clear what constitutes the persistent norm of nature in the majority and what, by its very rarity, constitutes a marvel.

Moreover, the explanation given for monstrous human births among us can also be applied to some of those monstrous races. For God is the creator of all, and he himself knows where and when any creature should be created or should have been created. He has the wisdom to weave the beauty of the whole design out of the constituent parts, in their likeness and diversity. The observer who cannot view the whole is offended by what seems the deformity of a part, since he does not know how it fits in, or how it is related to the reset. We know of cases of human beings born with more than five fingers or five toes. This is a comparatively trivial abnormality; and yet it would be utterly wrong for anyone to be fool enough to imagine that the Creator made a mistake in the number of

human fingers, although he may not know why the Creator so acted. So, even if a greater divergence from the norm should appear, he whose operations no one has the right to criticize [sic] knows what he is about.

… This assumes, of course, the truth of the stories about the divergent features of those races, and their great difference from one another and from us. The definition is important; for if we did not know that monkeys, long-tailed apes and chimpanzees are not men but animals, those natural historians who plume themselves on their collection of curiosities might pass them off on us as races of men, and get away with such nonsense. But if we assume that the subjects of those remarkable accounts are in fact men, it may be suggested that God decided to create some races in this way, so that we should not suppose that the wisdom with which he fashions the physical being of men has gone astray in the case of the monsters which are bound to be born among us of human parents; for that would be to regards the works of God's wisdom as the products of an imperfectly skilled craftsmen. If so, it ought not to seem incongruous that, just as there are some monstrosities within the various races of mankind, so within the whole human race there should be certain monstrous peoples.

I must therefore finish the discussion of this question with my tentative and cautious answer. The accounts of some of these races may be completely worthless; but if such peoples exist, then either they are not human; or, if human, they are descended from Adam.[90]

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[90] Because of this passage's usefulness as an epitome of Augustinian thought on the matter and because St Augustine's opinions on monstrosity were so influential throughout most of the Middle Ages I have elected to provide the passage almost in its entirety. The English trans. is taken from Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei*, trans. by Henry Bettenson in *City of God,* XVI.8 (pp. 661-4). The Latin is available in Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei*, in B. Dombart and A. Kalb (eds.), *CCSL 47-48* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), XVI.8: '*Quaeritur etiam, utrum ex filiis Noe uel potius ex illo uno homine, unde etiam ipsi extiterunt, propagata esse credendum sit quaedam monstrosa hominum genera, quae gentium narrat historia, sicut perhibentur quidam unum habere oculum in fronte media, quibusdam plantas uersas esse post crura, quibusdam utriusque sexus esse naturam et dextram mammam uirilem, sinistram muliebrem, uicibusque inter se coeundo et gignere et parere; aliis ora non esse eosque per nares tantummodo halitu uiuere, alios statura esse cubitales, quos Pygmaeos a cubito Graeci uocant, alibi quinquennes concipere feminas et octauum uitae annum non excedere. Item ferunt esse gentem, ubi singula crura in pedibus habent nec poplitem flectunt, et sunt mirabilis celeritatis; quos Sciopodas uocant, quod per aestum in terra iacentes resupini umbra se pedum protegant; quosdam sine ceruice oculos habentes in umeris, et cetera hominum uel quasi hominum genera, quae in maritima platea Carthaginis musiuo picta sunt, ex libris deprompta uelut curiosioris historiae. Quid dicam de Cynocephalis, quorum canina capita atque ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur? Sed omnia genera hominum, quae dicuntur esse, credere non est necesse. Verum quisquis uspiam nascitur homo, id est*

This passage, especially the closing two sentences, perfectly summarises St Augustine's beliefs on how monstrosity fit into creation. For him, it was as simple as not questioning God's motivations: *i.e.* God created everything even the things we are unable to comprehend and just as God allows human beings to be born with minor deformities (more than five fingers or toes for example) so he must have intended monsters to be created too. Later writers interpreted the complexities and *minutiae* of the monstrous in different ways of course. However, because of the ubiquity of Augustinian writings and manuscripts throughout the Latin West the Augustinian view became the crucial starting point for almost all discussions of the monstrous for centuries to come even if their view was a slightly altered version.[91] Another early Christian writer that had a major influence on the early medieval conception of monstrous interpretation was Isidore of Seville and it is to his most famous writing that we will now briefly turn.

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animal rationale mortale, quamlibet nostris inusitatam sensibus gerat corporis formam seu colorem siue motum siue sonum siue qualibet ui, qualibet parte, qualibet qualitate naturam: ex illo uno protoplasto originem ducere nullus fidelium dubitauerit. Apparet tamen quid in pluribus natura obtinuerit et quid sit ipsa raritate mirabile. Qualis autem ratio redditur de monstrosis apud nos hominum partubus, talis de monstrosis quibusdam gentibus reddi potest. Deus enim creator est omnium, qui ubi et quando creari quid oporteat uel oportuerit, ipse nouit, sciens uniuersitatis pulchritudinem quarum partium uel similitudine uel diuersitate contexat. Sed qui totum inspicere non potest, tamquam deformitate partis offenditur, quoniam cui congruat et quo referatur ignorat. Pluribus quam quinis digitis in manibus et pedibus nasci homines nouimus; et haec leuior est quam ulla distantia; sed tamen absit, ut quis ita desipiat, ut existimet in numero humanorum digitorum errasse Creatorem, quamuis nesciens cur hoc fecerit. Ita etsi maior diuersitas oriatur, scit ille quid egerit, cuius opera iuste nemo reprehendit....Nam et simias et cercopithecos et sphingas si nesciremus non homines esse, sed bestias, possent illi historici de sua curiositate gloriantes uelut gentes aliquas hominum nobis inpunita uanitate mentiri. Sed si homines sunt, de quibus illa mira conscripta sunt: quid, si propterea Deus uoluit etiam nonnullas gentes ita creare, ne in his monstris, quae apud nos oportet ex hominibus nasci, eius sapientiam, qua naturam fingit humanam, uelut artem cuiuspiam minus perfecti opificis, putaremus errasse? Non itaque nobis uideri debet absurdum, ut, quem ad modum in singulis qu ibus que gentibus quaedam monstra sunt hominum, ita in uniuerso genere humano quaedam monstra sint gentium. Quapropter ut istam quaestionem pedetemtim cauteque concludam: aut illa, quae talia de quibusdam gentibus scripta sunt, omnino nulla sunt; aut si sunt, homines non sunt; aut ex Adam sunt, si homines sunt.'

[91] See Valerie I. J. Flint, 'Monsters and the Antipodes in the Early Middle Ages and Enlightenment', in *Viator* 15 (1984), pp. 65-80, esp. at pp. 68-70.

I.8: Medieval Modes of Thought

Isidore of Seville, writing the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries is best known for his encyclopaedic masterpiece, the *Etymologiae*.[92] In this work, Isidore was attempting to create a *summa* of universal knowledge within a Christian context. In order to successfully complete his self-appointed task, it was necessary for him to reconcile the wealth of classical knowledge with a Christian world view. This, of course, meant that the host of classical monsters that were discussed by ancient authors including Herodotus, Ptolemy, Virgil, and Pliny to name only a few of the more well-known examples, had to be fitted into his Christian text in one way or another. We will talk more about Isidore later in this thesis, for now though, two very brief examples of his novel approach to the reconciliation of classical and medieval monstrosity will suffice.

Isidore's first approach at harmonising these two incongruous traditions was a passive one. Instead of trying to explain some of the more complex, complicated, and unbelievable stories, he determined that some of these stories were fabricated. That is not to say that he was denying their rhetorical potency, rather he emphasised the underlying message in their story at the expense of the subject matter. He saw that there was a need for these stories; an almost Lévi-Straussian belief in the structure of myth. In this manner he was able to say that some of the classical tales of monstrosity and deformity were simply made up as a way to tell his readers to understand these previous monstrous tales as a type of monstrous and moral didaction:

> Other fabulous human monstrosities are told of, which do not exist but are concocted to interpret the causes of things – like Geryon, the Spanish king fabled to have three bodies, for there were three brothers of such like minds that there was, so to speak, one soul in their three bodies. And there are the Gorgons, harlots with serpentine locks, who would turn anyone looking at them into stone, and who had only one eye which they would take turns using. But these were three sisters who had a single beauty, as

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[92] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*; for an English translation see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*.

if they had a single eye, who would so stun those beholding them that they were thought to turn them into stone.[93]

Isidore continued in this vein by listing a number of other monstrosities that can be easily explained as a misunderstanding or as allegorical representations of immoral traits. Sirens, according to Isidore, were not temptresses of the sea who lured sailors into shipwreck but rather harlots, who seduced passers-by into sin and destitution.[94] The reason that they were said to live in the sea was because of the association of Venus, the goddess of love, with the sea. Even Cerberus, the three-headed dog born of Echidna, herself a hybrid half-woman and half-serpent, and the giant Typhon, who guarded the underworld, could be explained by Isidore. In keeping with the etymological theme of the work and the allegorical readings he had already suggested for other similar monsters Isidore said that Cerberus' three heads represented the three ages of man in which death devours human beings, *i.e.* infancy, youth, and old age and that his Greek name was etymologically linked to the phrase 'flesh-eater'.[95]

A monstrous description then could be much more than simply a list of deformities and oddities. Monstrous discourse could also be instructive, pedagogic, edifying, or even cautionary. In short, not all of the tales of classical monsters were to be

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[93] I have elected to use Barney's excellent recent translation for most of my interpretation of the *Etymologiae*. In the couple of instances that I disagree with his translation I have made it clear in the footnote. See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Book XI.iii.28, at p. 245; For the Latin see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, Book XI.iii.28: '*Dicuntur autem et alia hominum fabulosa portenta, quae non sunt, sed ficta in causis rerum interpretantur, ut Geryonem Hispaniae regem triplici forma proditum. Fuerunt enim tres fratres tantae concordiae ut in tribus corporibus quasi una anima esset. Gorgones quoque meretrices crinitas serpentibus, quae aspicientes convertebant in lapides, habentes unum oculum quem invicem utebantur. Fuerunt autem tres sorores unius pulchritudinis, quasi unius oculi, quae ita spectatores suos stupescere faciebant ut vertere eos putarentur in lapides.*'
[94] William J. Travis, 'Of Sirens and Onocentaurs: A Romanesque Apocalypse at Montceaux-l'Etoile', in *Artibus et Historiae* 23(45) (2002), pp. 29-62, at p. 39.
[95] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Book XI.iii.28-39, at p. 245; see also John Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville: Truth from Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) for explications of the etymologies themselves see pp. 143-8.

believed as true according to Isidore. In a move that almost perfectly mirrored St Augustine's view on the role of classical education, authors, and poetry in the Christian world, Isidore suggested that certain tales and descriptions of the monstrous were to be read allegorically. This approach to the problem of classical works was not novel, however, by making special arrangements for the monstrous and by constantly resorting to his everything-can-be-explained-etymologically approach, he was able to retain and even increase the potency of these stories as rhetorical and pedagogic devices. After all, it would have been far simpler just to disregard the monstrosities that were spoken of in ancient texts. So he must have retained them for a reason.

As I will demonstrate through the remainder if this thesis, it is this approach to the monstrous, *i.e.* the maintaining – even emphasising – the rhetorical and pedagogical potency of these tales that allowed them to continue to be useful to late antique and early medieval authors as more than just archaising and classicising elements of a narrative.[96] In addition to being a useful and effective tool for authors easily to categorise groups and peoples, this approach to the monstrous and barbarous also allows us to bridge the chasm between a medieval Christian world view and the world described by classical authors such as Pliny.[97] Without this bridge between the two we are still stuck asking the same question: why did Christian authors include monstrous elements in their narratives when they did not easily fit into the Christian world view?

Though some monsters were creations of the Middle Ages, like Fredegar's Quinotaur, the vast majority were either adopted wholesale from the Greco-Roman pantheon of traditional monsters (often called the Plinian races), such as the *sciapods* and the *blemmyae*, or adopted and altered from the classical authors,

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[96] There was a long tradition of Late Roman classicising authors; for an investigation of this tendency see R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus* (Liverpool: Cairns, 1981), *passim*. See also Roger Scott, 'Chronicles Versus Classicizing History: Justinian's West and East', *Byzantine Chronicles and the Sixth Century* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 1-25.

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for instance the ever-changing *cynocephali*.[98] It is to these monsters and the monstrous language used to describe them and their geography that we will now turn.

I.9: Modern Modes of Thought

Modern scholarship concerning the monsters of the early Middle Ages has largely focused on the Plinian races, or the monstrous races, as John Friedman has called them.[99] In recent years too, a number of secondary works relating to the monsters of the *Beowulf* manuscript, the texts of Gerald of Wales, werewolves, and vampires and others have been undertaken.[100] It was, however, the Plinian races that saw the most attention, though seldom as the central focus of the study, with a few notable exceptions.[101] In fact, the monstrous races often appeared as marginal aspects of larger studies, as is too often the case with the history of the Early Middle Ages.[102] Michel Foucault was one such thinker. Though this is not the place to investigate Foucault's use of the Middle Ages as a foil for his philosophical musings it is obvious to any reader of his works that he did so.

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[98] We will talk a great deal more about *cynocephali* throughout the remainder if this thesis.
[99] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*.
[100] Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity*; Erica Fudge (ed.), *Renaissance Beasts: Of Animals, Humans, and other Wonderful Creatures* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*.
[101] Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics'; Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East'; Friedman, *The Monstrous Races* are the most prominent early works. Beginning in the 1990s there was a rise in both the quantity and quality of the work done on the monstrous, though still very few that focused on early medieval sources; see Marie Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*; Cohen, *Monster Theory*; Williams, *Deformed Discourse*; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 2002); Peter Dendle, 'Cryptozoology in the Medieval and Modern Worlds', in *Folklore* 117(2) (2006), pp. 190-206.
[102] The Early Middle Ages, far too often called the Dark Ages by these sometimes-historians, is usually used out of context to make a point about how bad it used to be. There are plenty of examples from politics, philosophy, and history. For example, see Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 88-92.

Instead we will now briefly turn to his use of the monstrous.

Foucault does not specifically mention Pliny in his discussion of abnormals (though he does quote him in his *History of Sexuality*).[103] However, he uses the monstrous as a pathway into a discussion on what he calls the 'great monster, the little masturbator, and the recalcitrant child'.[104] His first attempt at discussing the 'great monster' appears in a lecture dated 22 January, 1975 where he provided a detailed account of the shifting legal definitions of monstrosity. By way of this discussion he felt that monstrosity as a figure both what is outside of nature and outside of the law shifted from something that was not unnatural or a transgression towards eccentricity and 'deviation' from the norm.[105] Foucault emphasises that there was a move from this monstrousness as being beyond nature, to transgressive mixings, to understanding them as somewhere within the legal code if at the deviant or marginal ends.

This shift occurred, says Foucault, between about 1765 and the 1820s.[106] Given that this was precisely the same time medical discussions of deformity and monstrosity were becoming popular it is not surprising that he recognises a similar shift in the legalities of them.[107] His case study for this shift in the legal status of monstrosity and transgression were hermaphrodites. 'In the Classical Age' writes Foucault, 'a third type of monstrosity is privileged: hermaphrodites […] No doubt this should be examined more closely, but broadly speaking we can accept, or at least people will tell you, that from the Middle Ages to the sixteenth century, and until at least the start of the seventeenth century, hermaphrodites were considered to be monsters and were executed, burnt at the stake and their ashes thrown to the

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[103] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité'*, trans. by R. Hurley in *The History of Sexuality, vol 2: The Use of Pleasure* (London: Allen Lane, 1979), p. 17; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York, NY: Random House, 1986), pp. 48, 78-80, and 160-1.

[104] Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 291.

[105] Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, p. 73.

[106] Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, p. 74.

[107] See above, pp. 20-2.

winds.'[108] Since Pliny claimed to have first-hand knowledge of hermaphrodites it is perhaps odd that Foucault, who mentions the Plinian races in other works fails to mention him at this point, instead he simply follows up this rather broad and sweeping statement with the simple admonition: 'Suppose we accept this.'[109] As the argument goes, now that these transgressions were legally codified as monstrosity, monstrosity was now understood as a question of criminality, or of how much monstrousness stands in relation to criminality. Though the legal classification of a deviant as being a transgressive mixing may well have become reified in the thirty or so years on either side of the French Revolution it does not take into account the legal classifications of barbarian groups from Late Antiquity or the complicated legal position of Jews, and to a lesser extent Muslims, during the entirety of the European Middle Ages.

Though, strictly speaking, none of these groups comprises monsters *per se* it is clear that they were inhabiting a similar space, *i.e.* marginal, peripheral, and liminal. There has been extensive scholarly attention paid to the treatment of some of these groups, especially Jews, during the Middle Ages and how this negative treatment was so often associated with the de-humanisation and marginalisation of these groups. Less attention, however, has been paid to how these same rhetorical moves often led to the implicit or explicit monstrification of these same groups in the eyes, and texts, of their Christian counterparts.[110] In closing his 1975 lecture series on abnormals Foucault very briefly sets up the analysis of his next, and far more popular, topic of investigation of how deviancy, abnormality, and I would add monstrosity, threatened society. In *Society Must be Defended* he suggested, correctly I think, that because the abnormal was now legally codified, society now had to deal with these threats. More specifically, the law was tasked with dealing with threats to the body politic and to larger populations. It was this

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[108] Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, pp. 66-7.

[109] Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, p. 67. Pliny, in Book VII.iii tells us of cases where males turn into females which, he stresses, is 'no fable'. Furthermore, he claims to have personally met one Lucius Cossicius who turned into a man on his wedding day.

[110] This move to make 'out groups' monstrous is essential to my central argument and will be investigated in much fuller detail throughout the rest of thesis.

move that led to Psychiatry [*sic*], for example becoming 'the science of the biological protection of the species […] so as to become the general body for the defence of society against the dangers that undermine it from within.'[111] It is by understanding psychiatry in this manner that allowed the reader to see what Foucault means when he uses the term 'racism'. For Foucault, racism is not to be understood as 'traditional' or 'ethnic' racism but as an internal threat. 'It is a racism' says Foucault, 'whose function is not so much the prejudice or defence of one group against another as the detection of all those within a group who may be the carriers of a danger to it. It is an internal racism that permits the screening of every individual within a given society.'[112]

There is perhaps an element of this internal screening in the works of late antique and early medieval authors when they were discussing heretical groups or, especially in case of Roman writers during the Gothic, from their perspective at least, occupation of Italy, towards barbarians. After all, it is very difficult to distinguish between some Late Romans and their barbarian counterparts. Instead of distinguishing between these groups on the basis of ethnic, linguistic, or even religious grounds, many authors instead chose to turn these groups into monsters.[113]

I.10: Conclusions

For a number of decades now medievalists have been consistently and effectively changing the perceptions of the Middle Ages. What was once known as a 'Dark Age' is now more adroitly called Late Antiquity or the Early Middle Ages. This is in large part due to the historiographical movement initiated by Peter Brown and his followers. Though the Brown-moment occurred in the late 1970s his influence can still be seen in the scholarly output of today. Concepts that were colonised by Burckhardt in the name of the Italian Renaissance, such as the nation

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[111] Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, p. 316.

[112] Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, p. 317.

[113] See chapter 3.

state and the individual have been re-conquered through the work of medievalists and placed more properly into previous centuries. The individual, for example, can now be found in the twelfth century![114] However, one of the inevitable repercussions of this type of reinvestigation is that if one looks too hard they may also find attributes that are less appealing, more monstrous.

It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that upon further reflection the societies of the Middle Ages, in addition to preserving classical learning, and inventing the very institution that this thesis was written for, were also home to despicable acts of marginalisation, racism, sexism, and intolerance. As Judith Halberstam has shown, the monstrous gains its full potential when one realises that it has more than one signifier, that it represents multiple themes of alterity; that, 'within the history of embodied deviance, monsters always combine the markings of a plurality of differences even if certain forms of difference are eclipsed momentarily by others.'[115] It is in the descriptions of the fantastic, marvellous, and monstrous, when described against the backdrop of perceived norms, that the boundaries between the normal and abnormal, the correct and incorrect, Us and Them become the most vivid and recognisable. In this modern world in which more and more people are moving, migrating, and emigrating than ever before in the history of humanity there is no better time to discuss the role that spiritual, ideological, religious, and historiographical trends and traditions play in the cultural understanding of otherness and outsiders.[116]

The monster is complicated, convoluted and difficult to identify. However, the reasons for using the monstrous as a means of discourse are central to human nature. Monstrous descriptions are more than a collection of words; how a monster is described is not necessarily what they mean. Monsters and monstrous language is metaphor, it is euphemism. Thus when one reads a description of a monster

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[114] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1973).

[115] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

[116] Albrecht Classen, 'The Epistemological Function of Monsters in the Middle Ages', in *Rivista di Filosofia* 9 (2012), pp. 13-34.

such as the *cynocephali* there is more than simply a description of a creature, the description allows the author to question assumptions about, modesty, sinfulness, language, and geography without actually needing to spell the questions out.[117] In a way, these monstrous descriptions allow the author to think aloud about problems of humanity.

In order to understand fully the texts that I intend to explore in my thesis it is necessary to identify and engage with the scholarly inquiry that has preceded my investigation, not only to make clear where I have acquired the framework that my arguments will be constructed on, but also to identify any possible pitfalls. We began this exposition into monster theory by asking the question: how does the monster mean? In the end only part of this question can be answered without a more in depth investigation of additional secondary research, especially in the realms of frontier theory and identity formation but these lines of inquiry are outside the scope of the present work. Having now laid out a selection of theories, definitions, and modes of thought concerning the monstrous, the marginalised and the different I intend to use them as a means to discuss in depth early medieval conceptions of the monstrous and how these concepts related to geography. My research aims to use this theoretical underpinning in an attempt to read backwards what early medieval sources dealing with non-Christian topics and especially with non-Christian peoples were actually saying about their society's ideas of boundary, body, and religion. What did the description of monsters not only say about early medieval conceptions of the other but more central to my goals, what did it say about what it meant to be a Christian European? What identity did the authors of these texts try to capture?

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[117] See chapter 3.

Chapter Two: The Sources

We who have seen the whole earth, either as represented on maps and globes or as produced in satellite photographs, find it difficult to adopt the perspective of those who have not. The image of the floating blue and green sphere, with sharply defined oceans and continents, has been so thoroughly assimilated into our mind's eye as to become intuitive. However, the great majority of mankind has lived and died without ever glimpsing this image.[1]

II.1: Introduction

The inability to fully understand how a medieval person thought or experienced the world is something that we medievalists do not often talk about. After all, we in the modern world cannot unsee this image of the 'floating blue and green sphere', we can only *imagine* a world in which most people saw nothing but local landscapes for their entire lives and would only have had access to the geography of the wider world via text, image, or tale. This is made more difficult now that the 'Google Maps' age is upon us. With just a couple of mouse clicks we can access very detailed maps of almost any location on the planet. However, this inability to 'adopt the perspective of those who have not' seen this image goes much deeper than simply geography. We, in the modern world, can also not unsee our world complete with skyscrapers, we cannot unsee the magnificent seventeenth-century St Peter's basilica in Rome, and we cannot unsee the landscapes we view from a plane as we fly overhead. We have literally no idea what the average medieval person was thinking as they approached their local church or cathedral for the first time, or how they experienced their local landscape because we cannot recreate that experience, we can only guess at it.[2]

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[1] James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 8.

[2] Sam Turner and Bob Silvester (eds.), *Life in Medieval Landscapes: People and Places in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2011), *passim*. See also Karin Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes: A Study of Space and Identity in Three Marginal Areas of*

Of course, as historians we know that we do not have an unmitigated connection to the people or events we research but rather that we have to navigate these connections through intermediaries, whether those intermediaries come in the shape of architecture, manuscripts, artefacts, or carvings, etc. This is not intended as a kind of back-handed attack against the work of an historian; rather, it is for this exact reason that I think the work of the historian is so important. We spend countless hours doing our professional best to understand these people and their cultural artefacts. However, in the end our interpretations are just that, interpretations.

My intention is that by the end of this chapter the reader, if unable to conceive of the earth in the same way as someone who has not seen the image of the earth described above by Romm, can at least, even if for a moment, come to understand that the modern cultural and geographic tradition held by the West is itself only the latest in a long line of 'conceptions of the world' complete with the biases, inconsistencies, and agreed-upon geographic and cultural myths. The inconsistencies that the modern reader sees in late antique and early medieval geographies are not necessarily based solely on a lack of modern forms of scientific measurement and instead owe a great deal to the differing interpretative methods of peoples, regions, and times.[3] With that in mind, the purpose of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, having laid out the theoretical framework that I intend to use in the previous chapter, my aim here is to discuss the sources and authors that I have chosen to investigate – their advantages, pitfalls, and potential historiographical problems – in order to demonstrate to the reader that these sources allow the historian into the geographical and cultural mind-set of the author, even if only at a cursory level. Secondly, there will be an overarching theme of interconnectedness and rhetorical tradition that will become clearer

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Medieval Britain and Scandinavia (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003), *passim*.

[3] I am here thinking of the influence of the Mercator projection on the modern map, especially about what that projection does to people's perceptions of the Southern Hemisphere. For a fuller explanation of the impact of the Mercator projection, and others, on the modern world see Mark S. Monmonier, *Rhumb Lines and Map Wars: A Social History of the Mercator Projection* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

throughout this chapter. Said another way, no text is created in a vacuum and therefore has its own traditions, forms, and models that the author draws on to create their own text. Additionally, these connection and traditions are both self-referential and self-reliant on the traditions that came before.[4]

I will begin by providing an overview of the types of sources that are extant and, more importantly, I will offer a description of the tradition of monstrous tales that were bequeathed to the early medieval west. I intend to provide introductory information on the transmission of what has become called the Plinian races from their Greek origin through their Roman uses and eventually, their re-use by authors such as Isidore of Seville, Jordanes, and Paul the Deacon, and ultimately how these monstrous stories were used and altered by other authors in the Early Middle Ages. Some of these texts include the *Liber monstrorum*, the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, Hrabanus Maurus' *De Universo*, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, and various tales of Alexander the Great and his travels in the East, the 'barbarian' histories and others. These texts sometimes incorporated previous material wholesale and sometimes they chose to ignore certain elements and narrative details altogether. However, more often than not, the authors elected to take a middle path between imitation and originality.

This is not to say that these authors were incapable of creating their own texts, or that their new creations were themselves not original works and well thought out, instead they were writing in a time period and in a literary environment that emphasised the *auctoritas* and inherent value of ancient texts, whether classical Roman, and to a lesser extent Greek, and late antique Christian authors and texts. For that reason, these authors needed to incorporate these past texts into their new ones in order to imbue them with a sense of authority, whether temporal or Christian. For the most part, history and literature as they are conceived in the universities of the West, are ultimately the histories and literatures of the Christian

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[4] I am reminded of the quote by Northrop Frye from the introduction: 'Poetry can only be made out of other poems, novels out of other novels. Literature shapes itself and is not shaped externally: the *forms* of literature can no more exist outside of literature than the forms of sonata and fugue and rondo can exist outside of music'; Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 96.

West and can only be understood properly with this in mind. This is not to say that there were no historians before Christ – there were of course – however, almost all of those writers had their thoughts, philosophies, histories, and texts filtered through later Christian writers, either as copyists of manuscripts, or as source material for new texts. Even the texts and ideas that were transmitted by Jewish or Islamic writers usually reappeared in the West via Latin translations written by Christian writers.

For Christian writers of history there were three specific influences on their writing. Firstly, salvation was central to their conception of this world and the next. Moreover, for many writers this salvation was dependent on the Final Judgement, which in some instances was not only foretold but, for many writers, was imminent. For these writers then, the end of days was not simply a strange, nebulous, and difficult to understand book in the Bible, *i.e. The Revelation of St John,* but a real thing.[5] In short, the apocalypse needed to be dealt with and discussed. In many ways any investigation into apocalyptic traditions is bizarre and fraught with difficulty.[6] The obvious reason for this difficulty is that apocalyptic writings and apocalypticism more generally, quite illogically, are always-already at odds with their own temporality. That is, according to the traditions that these texts were incorporating, the end of times should have already arrived yet obviously had not.

Despite this apparent contradiction, human beings are seemingly fascinated by the subject of the end of times. Whether in the Bible (both Old and New Testaments), countless late antique or medieval tales of the final judgement, or in the latest Hollywood blockbuster it seems that the human race is preoccupied with predicting, depicting, and ultimately surviving the apocalypse. Writing, and re-writing the story of the end of the human race, it seems, is a shared human experience, which crosses the boundaries of time, geography, and culture. This is

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[5] Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 52.

[6] Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 33. See also Lorenzo DiTommaso, 'Apocalypses and Apocalypticism in Antiquity: (Part II)', in *Currents in Biblical Research* 5(3) (2007), pp. 367-432.

because the apocalyptic tradition is a mirror which allows the present, whenever that present is, to reflect back its anxieties about death, the end, and the infinitely unknown. However, despite its apparent functionality, and centrality in the mind of the medieval history writer, apocalyptic writing was never the dominant form of historical writing in the Judeo-Christian tradition; rather it was always just one option available for writers to explore. By following the precepts and preconditions of the apocalyptic form the writer provided the reader with a kind of interpretative model, a lens with which to see events.[7] It allowed authors an easily recognisable and transferable platform to think aloud on the problems of humanity and the world and how they saw themselves fitting in to both of these categories. Each time the apocalyptic tradition is encountered, because of previously unfulfilled traditions, the author is forced to incorporate and interpret a new form of precepts and ambitions. The author has to decide how they are going to deal with this earlier information and how they are going to present their new version of events. This approach is evident in a number of texts we will look at below.

The second influence on Christian writing was, of course, the language of transmission. Late antique and early medieval authors, no matter where they lived, almost all resided in a Latinate world. Whether the spoken language in the particular region in which a text was created was Latin, a post-Latin Early Romance, or a Germanic language (as in the case of the British Isles), Latin was still the *lingua franca* and almost all of the authors wrote in Latin. This inevitably leads to questions of Latin language training for the people who resided outside of the Latin speaking or post-Latin Early Romance speaking worlds. The classical writers, whose Latin language and training was, and still is in some circles, held in such high regard was incorporated into the Christian West. It was because of this need for Latin training in many regions of the West that classical authors remained relevant. After all, it was St Augustine, a former professor of rhetoric

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[7] For an interesting debate over the role that apocalypse and apocalyptic eschatology plays in the writing of history see Job Y. Jindo, 'On Myth and History in Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology', in *Vetus Testamentum* 55(3) (2005), pp. 412-5 and Lorenzo DiTommaso, 'History and Apocalyptic Eschatology: A Reply to J. Y. Jindo', in *Vetus Testamentum* 56(3) (2006), pp. 413-8.

himself, who cemented classical literature in Latin language training.

The Christian point of view, or more specifically, the Christian world view that the author wanted to portray in their text, was the third element of history writing.[8] For the time being suffice it to say that not all Christian texts were created equally and not all Christian texts were intended for the same audience. A text that was created on the periphery or with missionary objectives in mind was more likely, for example, to deal with conceptions of the pagan or the non-Christian other. On the other hand, a text that was written for the Christian centre and was intended as a liturgical or theological piece was far less likely to discuss the monstrous, the other, or non-Christians, and if these texts did deal with these concepts they almost always did so in abstract terms.[9] I am not arguing for an all-encompassing type of geographic determinism in Christian textual production, rather I am suggesting that geography, both of the internal narrative, the author, and of the intended audience was taken into consideration when a text was written. After all, by the seventh century there was a rich tradition of both late antique and early medieval geographic writings, many of which began to be incorporated into historical, theological, missionary, and poetic texts.

The texts that we are left with are, therefore, a kind of hybrid of previous traditions and original thoughts. These texts created difficult middles and raise many questions about authorial intent and textual audience that we will only have time to address in a cursory manner, however, it is well worth deeper investigation. These hybrid texts are difficult to describe for many reasons. Firstly, the middle is difficult to define and explain when in one is inhabiting it. The middle after all, by its very definition requires an outside-of-the-middle to exist, yet that outside-of-the-middle cannot always be seen from the middle. If you can imagine for a minute inhabiting the middle of a two-dimensional line. Because there is no horizon, when you are inhabiting this line you would not be able to determine

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[8] We will investigate this in more detail in chapter 3.

[9] For a very good example of this see Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans are Wrong and Christians are Right": Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*', in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001), pp. 79-111.

whether you are near one of the ends or exactly at the 50% point. Whether a text, piece of art, or a person it is impossible to define precisely where the middle point is when one is between two opposing points or traditions. Secondly, these difficult middles are strange, odd, sometimes impossible to inhabit because to inhabit them requires a sort of cognitive dissonance - a half way belief between here and there. How does one belong equally and without prejudice to two (or more) traditions without creating something wholly new? How can a text that is aimed at a Christian missionary audience also contain pagan, and or classical tales of monstrosity and not be considered something different from either of its constituent parts? Of course, this does not mean that every time a Gothic soldier spoke Latin or a Roman soldier wore trousers they were creating some sort of new, third type of identity, or that a text written by orthodox Christians utilising non-Orthodox source material was a third type of text. What it does mean, though, is that these middle grounds required mediation between, and recognition of, both traditions, which by definition meant that the holders and/or participators of this middle way were wholly aware of the impossibility of fooling, and/or, convincing everyone. This notion of performative, or rhetoricised, identity especially when relating to barbarism is something that is central to this thesis. After all, the authors of many of the texts we will look at had to know that their texts were somewhere between two traditions otherwise why would they have created them the way they did? Why did Jordanes attempt to give the Goths generally, and the Amals more specifically, a Roman-style history if not because he recognised the value in doing so? This idea is perhaps best summarised by Guy Halsall when he writes that: 'the Barbarian [*sic*] was a floating rhetorical category which could be deployed in different ways to support the argument being made at a given point, usually about Romans or Christians.'[10] Instead the inhabitants of these middles had to borrow and adapt traditions piecemeal from unorthodox traditions and texts.

This concept of difficult middles is something that all medievalists have to deal

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[10] Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 56. In fact, the whole notion of performative barbarism that is prevalent in this work is quite a compelling notion to me and I would like to investigate it in greater detail as part of a future project.

with on a regular basis, even if they are not aware that they are doing so. After all, the time period that we have chosen to study is not only seen as temporally 'in the middle' between the ancient and modern world but the people, culture, laws, religion, and in the case of this study, the literature of the time period is also all too often viewed as inhabiting a place somewhere 'in the middle', *i.e.*, it is imperfect, unformed, halfway complete. Said another way, the Middle Ages are quite literally somewhere between there and here and risk being misunderstood because of this.[11]

I hope that by the end of this project I will have added a little weight to the argument that demonstrating and conceiving of any time period as a singular, unchanged, and somehow half-formed epoch is not only incorrect but potentially dangerous. After all, many ill-formed nationalistic notions of the Middle Ages (especially the Early Middle Ages) are often used, even today, as a justification for laws, borders, hatred, discrimination, and war.[12] Yet, despite these complications, difficult middles occurred everywhere. In fact, without them, hybridisation does not exist. As will become evident, the source material that I have chosen to incorporate into this study regularly possesses this hybrid nature, not only in form but also in content. These texts are themselves both contributing to and products of these difficult middles. In many cases the texts themselves are imitating the content of the source material they have chosen to incorporate, i.e. they are somewhere in the middle. This concept of 'in the middle' has been

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[11] I first came to think of the Middle Ages as themselves imperfect in the eyes of most people after seeing a TED talk by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In the talk she discussed the problem of a single African story. 'The single story', she says, 'creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they aren't true, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. Accessed: 26, August, 2014 http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.

[12] Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, see esp. the first chapter, pp. 15-40. Another recent example of the misuse of the Middle Ages in modern politics can be seen in the recent House Bill 1580 that was put before the New Hampshire State legislature in 2013. The Bill demanded that: 'All members of the general court proposing bills and resolutions addressing individual rights or liberties shall include a direct quote from the *Magna Carta* which sets forth the article from which the individual right or liberty is derived.'
Accessed at: http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/01/04/397520/new-hampshire-gop-bill-mandates-that- laws-find-their-origin-in-1215-english-magna-carta/.

forwarded by Jeffrey J. Cohen in recent years as a means to write, think about, and conceive of the Middle Ages in a post-modern, especially post-colonial, world. Interpreting Early Medieval texts in this fashion can help to explain the differing identities of say, Bede's writings, for example. After all, Bede seems to simultaneously be writing about Angles, the English, Northumbrians, Christians, and post-Roman Britons. Navigating between these different identities is not always as simple as it might first seem.[13] In order to define the middle we need to begin at one of the ends and it is to the geographic traditions that eventually influenced the Early Middle Ages that we will now turn.

II.2: The Ancient Tradition

Ancient geography is a very interesting, if complicated and, at times, contradictory, discipline. The texts and images in question often argue for or against very abstract or obscure phrases, geographic terminology, or reference specific coastlines or mountain ranges instead of actually discussing the geographic merits of the evidence in question. This approach means that ancient geographic texts sometimes read as an exercise in toponymy, textual cartography, or map reading rather than as geography as we would define it today. However, if these very ancient geographic depictions are in fact geography (and at least some of them must be) then we are dealing with a very old tradition. In some instances these representations are tens of thousands of years old.[14]

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[13] See esp. the introduction in Cohen, *Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity*, pp. 1-10. See also the classic article Fred C. Robinson, 'Medieval, the Middle Ages', in *Speculum* 59(4) (1984), pp. 745-56, esp. at pp. 753-5 in which Robinson not only dissects the deeper meanings of the terms 'medieval' and 'Middle Ages' but also laments how those same terms are too often being used lazily to denote temporal or cultural otherness.

[14] Recently a very small stone (approx. 4.5 inches tall) was discovered in England that bears a striking resemblance to the coastline of Europe from about 1,000,000 years ago. The 'map' was found by an amateur archaeologist from Yorkshire and although the stone does contain an uncanny amount of detail on landmarks such as the Rivers Thames, Bytham, Medway, Rhine, Ems, Meuse, the straits of Gibraltar and strikingly accurate coastlines of France, Spain, England, and even Greenland, the pebble has not found any support amongst academics, who have thus far concluded that it is a geological coincidence rather than a product of human creation. See the somewhat oddly named

The oldest indisputable examples of cartography depict star patterns and other celestial bodies. These are verifiable because, in large part, the stars' positions in the night sky have changed little since the paintings were created. The best example of this is found in France's Lascaux cave and is dated to approximatively 18,500 years ago.[15] Another, more recent illustration comes from the Çatalhöyük wall painting in Anatolia, dated to the late-seventh millennium BC. However, there are debates about what exactly the artist meant to depict. For example, does the painting actually represent a Neolithic settlement in its Anatolian surroundings? Or are the 'rooftops' really just an abstract pattern born out of the artist's mind? Is the erupting volcano nothing more than a leopard skin?[16] There is also patchy geographic evidence from the Old Kingdom of Egypt (third millennium BC). The information, nevertheless, is inconsistent and, unsurprisingly, largely concerned the regions surrounding the Nile, which for the purposes of this study provided few valuable insights into European, or Eurasian geography.[17] The ancient geographic tradition is as confused and complicated as the descriptions of the world that the ancient authors provided. Much of the confusion and complication in these texts derives from the limited scientific methods to measure accurately geographical distances and bearings; however, the intermingling and interconnectedness of legend and geography also contributed to this confusion. Although the ability to accurately depict and describe Eurasian geography improved as we move from the ancient to the medieval world, this intermingling of legend and geography always remained, as we will see later.

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www.thefoundationofkingdavid.org for more information on the stone.

[15] It clearly shows both the Pleiades, sometimes called the Seven Sisters, which is a star cluster in the constellation Taurus and the Summer Triangle, a triangular star pattern visible in the northern hemisphere, connecting the three brightest stars in the constellations Aquila, Cygnus, and Lyra.

[16] Stephanie Meece, 'A Bird's Eye View -- of a Leopard's Spots: The Çatalhöyük "Map" and the Development of Cartographic Representation in Prehistory', in *Anatolian Studies* 56 (2006), pp. 1-16.

[17] One of the best introductions to ancient geography remains James Oliver Thomson, *History of Ancient Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948). For information on geography prior to the archaic Greek tradition see esp. pp. 4-43.

In Greek mythology there was a particularly strong connection between myth and geography. Hercules, for example, was tasked, as one of his twelve labours, with finding the red cattle of Geryon which lived on an island in the far west under the rays of the setting sun. The island, called Erythia, was in the distant Atlantic Ocean and Hercules, upon exiting the Mediterranean, supposedly set up the pillars that bear his name (Strait of Gibraltar). In another tale Hercules was asked to obtain the golden apples of the Hesperides. According to this tradition, the Hesperides were the daughters of Atlas and Hesperis and lived on another island in the extreme west of the Atlantic Ocean. Although there are kernels of geographic information contained within these myths they are notoriously difficult to get at and have largely been dismissed as untrustworthy because of their inclusions in these myths. The concept of an island earth surrounded on all sides by the River Ocean is first attested in the archaic Greek epics *Iliad* by Homer and *Shield of Herakles* by Hesiod. In both of these examples the earth is described as being round like a shield and surrounded on all sides by the River Ocean. The shield like description of the world became the standard depiction in the ancient world and there is evidence that this circular model was the inspiration for the sixth-century BC map produced by Anaximander.[18]

A somewhat more reliable geographical tradition began with Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and with the writings of Hesiod. Although there is still much debate concerning the authorship of these traditions, especially about when they came to be written down, it is certain that almost all classical authors would have read these texts as part of their education and often quoted the texts as source material for later tracts of their own. Even though, strictly speaking, these texts are concerned with the deeds and actions of the Greek heroic age and are not geographic texts *per se* they do contain substantial amounts of information concerning the layout of the world and the creatures that lived in it. Many of the monstrous creatures of the medieval West, for example, can trace their earliest

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[18] For an introduction to the tradition of early Greek geography see Romm, *The Edges of the Earth*, pp. 9-44 esp. at pp. 12-16. For information on early Greek exploration especially outside of the Strait of Gibraltar see the first chapter in Duane W. Roller, *Through the Pillars of Herakles: Greco-Roman Exploration of the Atlantic* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-21.

descriptions to the archaic Greek world and the epic tradition that the ancient Greeks so loved to reproduce. For instance, in both *Theogeny* and *Works and Days*, Hesiod combined the monstrous and geographic tradition when he tells us of the Gorgons who live beyond the famous Ocean in the farthest parts of the night (presumably far in the west), where you can hear the voices of the Hesperides singing. Homer's account of the return of Odysseus to his home country of Ithaca is also replete with information on both the monstrous inhabitants of the Mediterranean world and geographical layout of the lands in that world.

We arrive on slightly firmer ground in the centuries following the Homeric and Hesiodic traditions, though, there are still a number of historiographical problems that plague these traditions. For example, many of the ancient geographers' and explorers' stories have only survived in much later accounts. Take for example, the journey of Coleus of Samos who was the first documented Greek to travel from the Mediterranean into the Atlantic and to return safely, probably sometime around 630 BC. His journey, itself suspicious because of the unrealistic winds that blew him constantly east, were reminiscent of the tales of *Odysseus,* is only recorded by Herodotus (*c*. 484 BC - *c*. 425 BC) and therefore not available to be critiqued by modern historians or geographers, which of course leads to questions of authorship, authenticity, and textual transmission. The texts of later Greek geographers, such as Scylax of Caryanda (sixth-century BC), Anaximander (sixth-century BC), and Hecataeus of Miletus (*c*. 550 BC - *c*. 476 BC) share a similar fate, that is, they are only recorded in much later secondary sources such as Herodotus. In the case of Hecataeus of Miletus, his work only survives in 374 fragments, the vast majority of which only endured because of their inclusion in the *Ethnica* of Stephanus Byzantinus (sixth-century AD), which itself only survives in a few meagre fragments and in the form of an epitome written by an otherwise unknown writer named Hermolaus.[19]

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[19] For further information, see Steven of Byzantium, *Stephani Byzantii Ethnica*, in M. Billerbeck*, et al.* (eds.), *Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae Series Berolinensis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006); see also David Whitehead (ed.), *From Political Architecture to Stephanus Byzantius: Sources for the Ancient Greek Polis* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994).

One of the most famous of these Greek explorers was Pytheas of Massalia (*c*. 350 BC - *c*. 285 BC). Though his own writings, like almost all of the Greek explorers before him, are lost to us, instead, his adventures are recorded as a series of quotations, excerpts, and paraphrases by later geographers.[20] Most familiarly his writings survive in the works of Diodorus Siculus (*c*. 80 BC - *c*. 20 BC), Strabo (*c*. 63 BC - *c*. AD 24), and Pliny the Elder (AD 23 - 25 August, AD 79). In the *Geographica*, Strabo related how Pytheas discovered and circumnavigated the British Isles, set foot on the Orkneys, discovered the Baltic Sea, described the midnight sun, and may even have found the Outer Hebrides or possibly even Iceland (Thule). Nevertheless many later writers, including Strabo himself, questioned the veracity of Pytheas' journey based on his ability to finance such a voyage.[21] Despite Strabo and others' questioning the likelihood of the journey Pytheas' description of the midnight sun and, albeit inconclusive, numismatic evidence that the Romans had potentially been to the island of Iceland some five centuries before the Norse settlers of the ninth century, suggest that his journey was, at the very least, possible.[22]

A contemporary of Pytheas named Megasthenes (*c*. 350 BC - 290 BC), in his *Indika*, another text which survives in the later texts of other writers, looked east rather than west and north like Pytheas and described the lands, features, and peoples of India rather than those of Northern Europe. His account tells of a rich and fertile India full of skilled artisans, wealthy rulers, and large cities. India, also

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[20] For an introduction into the life of Pytheas and his voyage see Barry W. Cunliffe, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek* (London: Allen Lane, 2001).

[21] Strabo, *Geographica*, ed. and trans. by H.L. Jones, *The Geography of Strabo in Eight Volumes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917-32)*,* Book II.4.ii, at p. 401: 'in the first place, it is incredible that a private individual – and a poor man too – could have travelled such distances by sea and by land; and that, though Eratosthenes was wholly at a loss whether he should believe these stories, nevertheless he has believed Pytheas' account of Britain, and the regions about Gades, and of Iberia; but he says it is far better to believe Euhemerus, the Messenian, than Pytheas.'

[22] Davíð Bjarni Heiðarsson, *Roman Coins in Iceland: Roman Remnants or Viking Exotica,* BA Thesis, Háskóli Íslands (2010); see also Cunliffe, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek*, pp. 116-9; Pytheas of Massalia, *On the Ocean: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. by Christina Horst Roseman (Chicago, IL: Ares Publishers, 1994), *passim* but esp. at pp. 2, 24-6, 76-8, 131-2, 140-2, and 156-8.

possessed an abundant supply of food, clean water, and minerals (although strangely they obtained their gold through the actions of gold digging ants).[23] Curiously, Megasthenes tells us that the Indians claimed that Hercules, complete with club and lion's skin, was born in India before heading west into Greek territories (and legends).[24] Megasthenes also commented on the Indian caste system, which he describes as containing seven different groups. Although the system he describes is quite different from the modern system; it is likely that he had a first-hand knowledge of the system.[25]

However, for our purposes the most interesting aspects of this text are the descriptions of the beasts and monsters that are said to live in the mountains of India. These include something similar to a unicorn, a satyr-like beast, and many creatures that later got grouped into the so-called Plinian races. The most famous of these were the *cynocephali*, which according to Megasthenes, lived in the mountains of India, had the heads of dogs, vicious claws, powerful jaws, and wore the skins of animals as clothing. It was also said that they were incapable of speech and instead communicated by barking with each other. Said another way, the *cynocephali* of Megasthenes were fully monstrous. They possessed almost no human traits, except for, perhaps the necessity for clothing.[26] This was not always the case, and as we will see below the descriptions of the *cynocephali* changed a great deal over time. Megasthenes also talked of Tapbrobane, an island off the

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[23] Megasthenes, *Indika*, trans. by J. W. McCrindle in *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian* (Calcutta and Bombay: Thacker, 1877), pp. 30-174, Fragments XXV, *Strabo* XV I.35-36; XXXIX, *Strabo* XV.1.44.

[24] Megasthenes, *Indika*, trans. by J. W. McCrindle in *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Fragments I, *Diodorus Siculus* II.35.42; LVI, *Pliny* VI.21.8-23; LVI B, *Solinus* 52.6-17; LVIII, *Polyaenus Strategems* I.3.4.

[25] Megasthenes, *Indika*, trans. by J. W. McCrindle in *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Fragments I, *Diodorus Siculus* II.35.42; XXXIII, *Strabo* XV.1.39-41, 46-49; Charles E. Muntz, 'Diodorus Siculus and Megasthenes: A Reappraisal', in *Classical Philology* 107(1) (2012), pp. 21-37, at pp. 22-3; see also Truesdell S. Brown, 'The Reliability of Megasthenes', in *The American Journal of Philology* 76(1) (1955), pp. 18-33, at pp. 18-20.

[26] Megasthenes, *Indika*, trans. by J. W. McCrindle in *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Fragments XII, *Strabo* XV. i.37; XV, *Strabo* XV. i.56; XV B, *Aelian, Hist. Anim.* XVI.20.21; XXX, *Pliny* VII.ii.14-22.

south east coast of India, possibly modern day Sri Lanka.[27] This mention of Tapbrobane is particularly interesting because it was also the starting point of the ocean voyage of the titular philosopher Aethicus in the eighth-century *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister,* which we will discuss in greater detail throughout the remainder of this thesis.[28]

Although all the authors (and artefacts) I have just mentioned expressed an interest in the shape of the earth, its formative processes, mountain ranges, and the waters that were on the surface of the earth, it was with the birth of Eratosthenes of Kyrene that the discipline of geography really found its beginnings. Eratosthenes brought all these divergent interests together to form a cohesive discipline by using his own experiences and his exceptional knowledge of mathematics, geometry, and philosophy. Moreover, it is in the works of Eratosthenes that we first find the words geography and geographer.[29] Furthermore, it was Eratosthenes who first successfully calculated the circumference of the Earth and although there is a great deal of modern discussion on just how accurate his calculations were, some modern estimates claim that his calculations were only off by as little as 1.6%.[30]

Eratosthenes was born in the mid-280s BC (only forty years after the death of Alexander the Great), at a time of rapidly expanding geographic knowledge, in Kyrene (modern day Cyrene on the Northern Libyan coast). Kyrene, which was

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[27] Megasthenes, *Indika*, trans. by J. W. McCrindle in *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Fragments XVIII, *Pliny*, *Hist. Nat.* V1.24.1, Solinus 53.3; LVI, *Pliny Hist. Nat*. VI.21.8-23.

[28] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 24-5. See also below at pp. 154-69.

[29] Eratosthenes, *Geographika*, trans. by Duane W. Roller in *Eratosthenes' Geography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 9-10.

[30] Eratosthenes' calculations determined that the Earth was 25,000 miles in circumference at the equator. In actual fact the circumference is 24, 901 miles. See Edward Gulbekian, 'The Origin and Value of the Stadion Unit Used by Eratosthenes in the Third Century B.C', in *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 37(4) (1987), pp. 359-63; see also the exceptionally in-depth and well-researched MA thesis of Cameron Kenrick McPhail, *Reconstructing Eratosthenes' Map of the World: A Study in Source Analysis,* Master of Arts Thesis, University of Otago (2011), esp. at pp. 1-10, 19, and 57-60.

founded by Greek colonists in the seventh-century BC, by the time of Eratosthenes, had for centuries existed as a kind of crossroads of cultures - located halfway between Carthage and Egypt. It acted as a gateway to the North African interior for Greek merchants and traders. Interestingly, this 'life on the edge' of civilisation seems to have been a common trait of a number of ancient, late antique, and early medieval geographers.[31] After centuries of political instability in which Kyrene was sporadically occupied by Persian forces the region eventually was brought back into the Greek fold during the short life of Alexander the Great. Following the death of Alexander, the region fell to the control of his general Ptolemy. It was into this world that Eratosthenes was born. By the last half of the 260s he had travelled to Athens to study. As part of his studies he was exposed to the latest mathematical models and theorems, which both heavily influenced his later work. Although formal scholarly training in geography was impossible at this time, because the discipline had not yet been founded, Eratosthenes' world was still awash with new and ever-changing geographical data. However, the biggest change in the fortunes of both Eratosthenes and the burgeoning field of geography surround the events in Alexandria that eventually led to the founding of the famous library there and the subsequent appointment of Eratosthenes as its librarian. It was during his tenure as the head librarian that he penned his three-book *Geographika*.

By re-examining works from the previous three centuries and reconciling these texts with the vast amounts of new data that were available, largely, though not exclusively, because of the successes of Alexander in the previous century, Eratosthenes was able to create something new. Nevertheless, like all ancient Greek writers before and after him he largely focused on the *oikoumene*, *i.e.* the inhabited portions of the world. Despite all the advancements in geography in the decades after the appointment of Eratosthenes as librarian in Alexandria, Herodotean ethnography still held a high place in Greek scholarly thought. Yet, as is so often the case with these Hellenistic academic works, Eratosthenes' *Geographika* has not survived except in excerpts of other texts. In fact, it was

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[31] I am thinking of Eratosthenes, Pytheas of Massalia, the author of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, and to a lesser extent, Orosius.

Strabo's excellent summary, and harsh criticism of the text, that precipitated the eventual final disappearance of Eratosthenes' *Geographika*.[32]

The success of Eratosthenes, *vis-à-vis* the subject of geography notwithstanding, for most ancient Greek and Roman writers, geography was as much a form of narrative fiction as a scientific description of terrains or peoples. Even the more purely geographical texts such as the *Geographica* of Strabo, or Orosius' geographic introduction to his *Historiae adversus paganos* were essentially created from the sifting through of storehouses of previous travellers' accounts for titbits of useful information rather than a concerted and sustained study of geography on its own merits. One modern scholar has even accused one of these writers, Avienus, a fourth-century writer of the poem *Ora Maratima*, whose own approach to gathering of geographic knowledge was especially hodgepodge, of writing 'a paste-and scissors compilation using all the archaic sources that the author could muster.'[33]

Despite this seemingly haphazard approach to the sources, many of these same ancient and medieval authors did attempt to separate fact from fiction or retell certain events, that they would claim were believable, in a way that would be believable to their readers or at the very least in a way that would hold the readers' attention. Much like the hybrid literature discussed above, these authors' use of ancient and pre-Christian sources was done as a way to add *auctoritas* to their own texts and it is too simple of an explanation to brush aside this use of source material as unoriginal. However, for many of these authors there was still a very close relationship between the art of storytelling and geography. In fact, their own narratives' internal structure often relied on a very close association between the two. Many of these connections between literary geography and the narratives that contained them have become all but lost to the modern reader. They were not physically lost, of course, just lost in terms of literary importance. In point of fact,

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[32] For a fuller description of Eratosthenes and his work see Eratosthenes, *Geography*, trans. by Duane W. Roller in *Eratosthenes' Geography*, *passim* but esp. the first chapter, at pp. 1-40.

[33] Barry Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and its Peoples, 8000 BC - AD 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 303.

many modern students of these texts are often instructed to skip over the geographic 'digressions' and avoid getting concerned with the names of places, rivers, and winds in a misguided attempt to get the actual 'history' included in the texts.[34] This is an unfortunate trend and ought to be remedied.

Much like the monstrous elements in a great many medieval texts, these geographic 'digressions' or introductions were not included by accident or as an afterthought but were, instead, intentionally used and ought to be accounted for in any reading. I am not suggesting that everyone go out and learn all the names and locations of countless rivers, forests, valleys, and regions in these texts. Rather, I am suggesting that they simply treat these sections as part of the narrative framework and be wary of disregarding them as simple blunders of taste and function.[35]

What all of these examples demonstrate is that ancient geography was more of a literary genre than a descriptive or scientific one. All that could be discovered about the lands of the world were derived from someone's description of them. Often times the geographical descriptions were embedded in other works and sometimes these descriptions were difficult to separate from their original use. It was not until the second century AD that the study of geography began to take on an 'objective detachment which typifies our own approach to the sciences', as one modern historian has described it.[36]

Late antique and early medieval Europe have undergone a major reassessment in recent decades. Peter Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* from 1971 forced scholarship to reassess its views on the centuries between the heights of the Roman Empire in the second century to the establishment of the Catholic Frankish kingdoms of Gaul in the fifth and sixth centuries.[37] Before Brown the collected

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[34] Romm, *The Edges of the Earth*, p. 5.

[35] This is reminiscent of Tolkien's plea to include the monstrous elements of *Beowulf* in any interpretation of the poem; see Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics', p. 5.

[36] Romm, *The Edges of the Earth*, p. 5.

[37] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971).

works of late antique authors such as St Augustine, Ambrose, and Jerome, were still considered among the great literary works of the Western world. Writers such as Gregory of Tours, Boniface, Cassiodorus, and to a lesser extent, Bede, and Isidore, however, were seen as firmly 'medieval'. That is, they were portrayed as 'less than' at best or incapable of reproducing texts that were of the same quality as the ancient world or even the late antique canonical authors just mentioned at worst. Something, the argument went, had been lost during the intervening centuries between Cicero and Cassiodorus. However, this historiographical 'Brown-moment' was able to demonstrate that what actually happened was that the world view had simply changed and transformed instead of declined or stagnated. The patron-client relationship that was so central to the classical world view was replaced by numerous cults of saints; the decline from a Golden Age of Roman decadence narrative was replaced by one of cultural innovation and change.[38]

Authors after the fourth century were not reproducing quality Classical-style works, not because they were incapable of doing so but rather because they were part of a different world. Though they never described themselves in such terms, because an association to the classical world gave them and their works a certain *auctoritas*, these same people were creating and participating in the burgeoning late antique cultural world. Latin knowledge was not becoming poor; it was transforming into the Romance languages. Authors were no longer even attempting to reproduce 'Classical' works because their priorities had changed. This was thanks, in large part, to the introduction and development of late antique Christianity, and eventually monasticism, to the European world. This shift in priorities, away from clearly recognisable classical ones to more Christo-centred ones, was intentional. For example, in the case of North African writers at least, authors were no longer producing poetry in the classical model because they had different aims. That is, when they broke metre or used late antique instead of classical vocabulary, they were not producing 'bad' poetry, but instead were far more concerned with doctrinally correct Christian messages in their poems. Said

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[38] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

another way, maintaining a doctrinally correct Christian message was, to late antique poets, far more important than creating poems in correct classical metre. Instead, it was the Renaissance, pre-modern, and modern obsession with a sort of 'Ciceronian snapshot' of the Roman world that led to this notion of decay. As we will see below this transformation from classical to medieval epistemological priorities is also seen in the early medieval encyclopaedic works.

II.3: The Encyclopaedic Tradition

Like so many types of medieval literature the precedent for the encyclopaedia finds itself in the ancient world. Whether it was one of Aristotle's three books on animals (*De Partibus Animalium*, *De Generatione Animalium*, or *Historia Animalium* as they became known in Latin), Strabo's *Geographica* or Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* the need to collect and compile the knowledge of ancient writers was seen as an important task. Sometimes this knowledge was transmitted *in toto*, other times the knowledge was more fragmented, such as in glosses, marginalia, *florilegia*, and *miscellanea*. Although there is still extremely valuable, if tedious, work to be done cataloguing, organising, and tracing, the transmission of fragmentary knowledge in the medieval West, the present study is engaged with the fuller and more complete texts. That being said, it is sometimes very difficult to separate and distinguish between the two. Quotations from ancient or medieval authors which are reused by later authors in the course of their own texts often use exactly the same passages and quotations that are found in more fragmentary places.

For instance, Alcuin of York's *De rhetorica* and *De dialectica* had three short poems associated with them. The poems referred to as the *Qui rogo* and *Me lege* each acted as a kind of verse introduction to the *De rhetorica* and *De dialectica* respectively and are found in almost half of all extant manuscripts.[39] The third

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[39] For the *Qui rogo* see Alcuin, *De rhetorica*, ed. and trans. by Wilbur S. Howell, *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 66. For the *Me lege* poem see Alcuin, *De dialectica*, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 101 (Paris:

poem, a kind of admonitionary poem called *O vos,* was found only in the two earliest manuscripts but eventually became detached from these treatises and instead got connected to other manuscripts containing rhetorical or dialectical training.[40] One of these other manuscripts is none other than the famous *Codex Gigas,* or the Devil's book as it is colloquially called because of a large drawing of the devil on folio 290 r. Interestingly, this manuscript includes all three of the poems associated with Alcuin's *De rhetorica* and *De dialectica*.[41] Oddly though, this manuscript does not contain either of the two main texts of Alcuin, which may be part of the reason that it is not listed in the *CSLM* as containing any of the three poems connected to Alcuin's works on rhetoric and logic.[42] On folio 204 r., the first and last distichs of the *Qui rogo* poem are used as an introduction to Isidore's section on rhetoric in his *Etymologiae* with no mention of Alcuin being the author of the poem.[43] When presented in its compressed and altered format in the manuscript it removes any mention of Charlemagne or Alcuin but retains the sense that the study of rhetoric is important to anyone involved in 'civil questions'. Quite peculiarly, it maintains both Alcuin's request not to scorn a book so small and his motif about a small-bodied bee bringing the honey (of wisdom). The plea against dismissing such a small book is particularly unusual in this context for two reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, this poem was being used as an introduction to Isidore's rhetorical work, a book that is generally a much fuller and longer treatment on the subject than Alcuin's treatise. Secondly, it seems strange that a plea not to scorn a book so small is found in the largest extant medieval

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1851), cols. 949-50, at col. 951.

[40] Alcuin, *Carmina*, in E. Dümmler (ed.), *MGH Poet. I* (Berlin: 1888), pp. 160-351, at pp. 299-300; see also Max Ludwig Wolfram Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900* (London: Methuen, 1931; new edn, revised and reset in 1957), p. 338; Alcuin, *De dialectica*, in Migne (ed.), *PL* 101. See also Marie-Hélène Jullien and Françoise Perelman (eds.), *CSLM, Auctores Galliae, 735-987, vol. II, Alcuinus* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 94-5 for a list of manuscripts containing this poem.

[41] Stockholm Kungliga Bibliothek MS A 148.

[42] Jullien and Perelman, *CSLM, Auctores Galliae, 735-987, vol. II, Alcuinus*, pp. 94-95 fails to list the Codex Gigas. A catalogue description and access to digitised images of the manuscript are available at www.kb.se/codex-gigas/eng/, accessed 15 July 2014.

[43] Stockholm Kungliga Bibliothek MS A 148: '*Qui rogo civiles cupiat cognoscere mures / Haec praesepta legat, quae liber iste tenet / Heu tempnas modico lector pro corpore librum / Corpore praemodico mel tibi portat apis.*'

manuscript.

The other two poems, the *O vos* and the *Me lege*, were also used in odd ways in this codex. The two poems, which traditionally have very little in common with each other, were merged into a single poem that begins with the first four distichs of the *O vos* poem immediately followed by the *Me lege* poem in its entirety with no indication whatsoever that they were originally separate works or that they were not originally part of Isidore's *Etymologiae*. In fact, there is a note in the margin of the manuscript on folio 205 r. that reads '*Versus de dialectic*', indicating that it is a single poem on logic.[44] By retaining the first four distichs of the *O vos* poem, the copyist successfully preserved the overall theme of the poem, that is, its sense of urging young men to learn while still young because it will bring them honour and praise as old men. However, the connection between learning while young and the section on rhetoric from Isidore's *Etymologiae* is not explicit. The poem, in this context, was so far outside its literary circle that it was missed by the editors of the *CSLM*. There are, I am sure, hundreds, if not thousands of other fragmentary examples like this in medieval manuscripts that have yet to be catalogued. Let us now return to the *in toto*, or encyclopaedic transmission of late antique or early medieval knowledge.

Like the examples above, the medieval encyclopaedic tradition was something different. Isidore, Eriugena, and Hrabanus Maurus were not attempting to update Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, rather these authors, all Christian and all employed by the Church to some degree, were trying to produce a text that was both informative and edifying for their Christian readers. That is, the Christian message had to come through, it had to be a focal point, in fact, as we will see, it was the Christian message that provided not only the framework for the works but also organised the order in which topics, people, and events, were discussed. Bearing that in mind, we will now turn to the tradition.

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[44] A catalogue description and access to digitised images of the manuscript is available at http://www.kb.se/codex-gigas/eng/, accessed 12 July 2014.

II.3.1: Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*

Pliny the Elder holds a unique and important place in the history of Western scientific inquiry and his *Historia Naturalis* is a monument of encyclopaedic writing. It is equal parts literature and scientific treatise while maintaining a sort of child-like curiosity, and I do not mean this negatively, throughout the work. When reading this text it is evident that Pliny was genuinely interested in how the world worked. He was clearly an inquisitive person and given his investigative and exploratory personality, the story surrounding his unfortunate death is not at all surprising.[45] In the words of one modern writer: 'What Pliny is doing is taking us on a guided tour of the human imagination. An animal, whether real or imaginary, has a place of honor [*sic*] in the sphere of the imagination. As soon as it is named it takes on a dreamlike power, becoming an allegory, a symbol, and emblem.'[46] For Pliny everything possessed a cultural significance; animals, fire, lightning, rocks, or plants all had a deeper scientific meaning. Everything lived in a shared storehouse of symbols and allegory. These symbols, if one knows what to look for, can be investigated and studied for the inherent qualities that they possess. Every single aspect of the natural world, whether animate or inanimate, whether corporeal or incorporeal serve as markers in the human imagination. Despite these symbolic markers the *Historia Naturalis* was never intended purely as vessel for transmitting knowledge for its own sake. Rather it was collective knowledge given form for a purpose. It was created under specific circumstances, both political and social and if one looks hard enough traces of these political and

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[45] Pliny died on 25 August, AD 79 after he decided to sail across the bay of Naples to investigate the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius personally. His nephew recalled how his uncle's ship, as it approached the far shore began to be pummelled by volcanic debris. The helmsman begged him to turn the boat around but Pliny insisted on continuing on. Once they reached the shore his party decided to rest and eat. However, the falling ash forced an evacuation of the building they were stationed in. Once outside, Pliny was overcome by the poisonous gases and sat down. He was unable to stand his companions were unable to rescue him. When they returned a few days after the eruption had abated they found his body covered in ash and pumice but apparently suffering from no bodily injuries.

[46] Italo Calvino, *Una Pietra Sopra*, trans. by Patrick Creagh in *The Uses of Literature* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p. 329.

social circumstances can be found.[47]

I have included Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* under the sub-heading 'Encyclopaedic Tradition'; however, it should be pointed out that this text is not, strictly speaking, an encyclopaedia, at least not in the modern sense of the word. If an encyclopaedia is defined as a 'self contained [*sic*] book that encapsulates a total or universal body of knowledge, organising it in order to preserve it and make it accessible to a large audience', then this is not one.[48] Instead, this text contained a more political message of empire building than simply an organised listing of human knowledge. Despite this admonition, I have difficulty seeing this text as anything other than what Murphy is claiming it is not, so for the purposes of this study it will remain firmly in the encyclopaedia camp, even if tangentially. That is not to deny the 'political message of empire building' contained within the text as Murphy described it but rather it pushes that message, just temporarily, to the side to allow the reader to move forward and engage in dialogue with the vast amount of information contained within. After all, in the classical Roman vision of the world, the centre of all political legitimacy was defined by the ideals of the civic Roman male. This was central to the Plinian encyclopaedic tradition. Closeness to that core, or in contrast, distance from it, whether along axes of barbarism, femininity, animalism, or monstrosity, defined a relative political legitimacy in relation to the core. That nearness or distance was of course ultimately determined by those who controlled the imperial court, or who wrote the Christian texts under investigation here. Every text is political; every text has a certain amount of 'empire building' built into it implicitly or explicitly through its authorial bias.[49] Where the present study is most interested in is when Pliny begins to describe the people living on the fringes of geography or at the edges of nature. It is at these points throughout the text that the political dimensions of the work are most clearly seen and I think

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[47] Trevor Murphy, *Pliny the Elder's Natural History: The Empire in the Encyclopaedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 11. See also Jacob Isager, *Pliny on Art and Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 9-17.

[48] Murphy, *The Empire in the Encyclopaedia*, pp. 11-16.

[49] Thomas R. Laehn, *Pliny's Defense of Empire* (London: Routledge 2013), *passim* but esp. at pp. 57-90.

leads to some very interesting questions concerning conceptions of the other.[50]

What is also clear when one reads the *Historia Naturalis* is that it was not intended as a didactic text *per se*. Despite its modern resemblance to an encyclopaedia, it was always intended as a kind of inventory of Roman knowledge and power. By claiming to have the Emperor Titus as the supposed first reader and by setting it firmly into the network of literary elites, Pliny accomplished his task of both controlling knowledge and limiting it, which both are equally antithetical to teaching. The ethnographic sections, for example, although instructive and full of useful information are better read as a means of centring Rome by placing other people in the far reaches of the Roman world. No military tribune or provincial governor, for example, would have consulted the *Historia Naturalis* as a handbook on how to handle the people he was going to encounter whilst carrying out his duties on the frontiers. Rather, the *Historia Naturalis*, by describing these peoples in this fashion fixed them into the imagination of the Roman people thus allowing the Romans to both define themselves as being the central power in the world and by creating in the mind of the reader a conception of 'the farthest margin of human existence' in relation to Rome.

If then, by reading the *Historia Naturalis* in this way, one attempts to decipher what exactly the ultimate aim of the text was it becomes apparent that it was intended as a tool of demarcation rather than instruction. With this in mind, the index created by Pliny needs to be viewed in a different light.[51] It is the text's intention as a tool of demarcation that ultimately interests me. Many later medieval writers used Pliny as a source for describing geography or the natural world, so this notion of a centre vs. periphery binary that is apparent throughout the text would have almost certainly influenced later readers. This, of course, raises a number of very interesting questions, not all of which can be answered in this thesis. How, for example, did Pliny's conception of the world influence later writers and copiers of Pliny's text? Was Rome always at the centre or did this change? Finally, assuming Pliny's intentions with the text are all and good,

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[50] Murphy, *The Empire in the Encyclopaedia*, pp. 17-18.
[51] Murphy, *The Empire in the Encyclopaedia*, pp. 211-15.

nevertheless, the *Historia Naturalis* was a widely available text throughout the Middle Ages and it is doubtful that all the subsequent readers of the text read the text with this concept of demarcation in mind.

II.3.2: Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*

Isidore of Seville's works, especially his *Etymologiae*, comprised some of the most influential texts of the Early Middle Ages, though there is evidence that his works were, at least initially, not received well in some circles. It should also be noted that the *Etymologiae* was not the original title given to the work by Isidore himself. Rather, he titled it *Origines* and it was only after the eighth century that it began to be circulate under its far more recognisable title. The traditional Isidorean narrative goes something like this: Isidore himself was born *c*. 560 at about the same time that his parents were probably fleeing from Byzantine conquests in Cartagena.[52] His parents died while he was still quite young and he was brought up in the monastic school where his elder brother Leander was abbot.[53] Isidore was probably made Bishop of Seville sometime around the year 600 following the death of his brother.[54] Much like his elder brother, Isidore,

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[52] For the latest works on Isidore see Andrew H. Merrills, 'Comparative Histories: The Vandals, the Sueves and Isidore of Seville', in R. Corradini*, et al.* (eds.), *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2006), pp. 35-45; Henderson, *The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville*; Jamie Wood, *The Politics of Identity in Visigothic Spain: Religion and Power in the Histories of Isidore of Seville* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See also the introduction to the latest translation of the *Etymologiae* Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*.

[53] Pierre Riché, *Education et Culture dans l'Occident Barbare, VIe-VIIIe Siècles*, trans. by J.J. Contreni in *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, Sixth through Eighth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), p. 279.

[54] Wood, *Politics of Identity*, pp. 3-5; see also Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, p. 7; J. N. Hillgarth, *The Visigoths in History and Legend* (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009), p. 31; and Jacques Fontaine and P. Cazier, 'Qui a chasse de Carthaginoise Sévérianus et les siens? Observations sur l'histoire familiale d'Isidore de Séville', in C. Sánchez-Albornoz (ed.), *Estudios en Homenaje a Don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz ensus 90 años* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Historia de España, 1983), pp. 349-400.

probably through the prominence he gained as the Bishop of Seville, maintained close relationships with the Visigothic kings of Spain. In fact, he cultivated such a close relationship and personal friendship with King Sisebut that their shared intellectual interests appeared in his texts, and at least the opening sections of the *Etymologiae* were dedicated to Sisebut.[55] These intellectual interests, as described in the *Etymologiae*, according to the most recent editors of the text, 'were not novelty but authority, not originality but accessibility, not augmenting but preserving and transmitting knowledge.'[56]

Recently however, Michael Kelly has argued that the traditional historiographical narrative of Isidore's early popularity, his family's flight from Cartagena, and his friendship with King Sisebut need to be reassessed. Instead, Kelly suggests that Isidore's family fled Cartagena not because of Byzantine attacks on the city but rather because of Visigothic military operations in the region. After all, Isidore's father was the Byzantine-appointed governor of Cartagena and would have maintained very close ties to the imperial office in Constantinople. Moreover, both Isidore and his brother Leander were very close friends with the Licinianus, the bishop of Cartagena. Furthermore, Kelly maintains that Isidore was not really close friends with Sisebut at all and, in reality, Isidore was not particularly fond of him. The close relationship between the two men was something that was manufactured at a much later date. This relationship was concocted at about the turn of the eighth century, and beyond, when the historiography of Visigothic Spain had already become displaced and nostalgic. This was probably done in order to reconcile and unify various Christian narratives from otherwise disparate and contradictory notions of the (somewhat) recent Visigothic past. It was, after all, only the first half of the *Etymologiae* that was, in 619, dedicated to Sisebut shortly before he was poisoned. The remaining text was eventually re-dedicated

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[55] Wood, *Politics of Identity*, pp. 4-6, 56-9, and 70-5; see also Yitzhak Hen, 'A Visigothic King in Search of an Identity - *Sisebutus Gothorumgloriossisimus Princeps*', in R. Corradini, *et al.* (eds.), *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), pp. 89-99, see esp. pp. 90-2 for Sisebut's intellectual activities.

[56] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, pp. 10-11.

to Isidore's compatriot Braulio close to Isidore's death in 636. Whatever the circumstances for its creation were, there is no doubting the impact and importance that the *Etymologiae* had on the Christian West after the eighth century.[57]

Despite the fact that the *Etymologiae* were compiled using a collection of information from classical and late antique material, Isidore only very rarely mentions the names of his sources. The only exception to this is when he was dealing with the augmentation of arguments made by Jerome, especially when the text was dealing with Hebrew words. Perhaps this interest in engaging with Jerome's works came from Isidore's own basic level of Hebrew or perhaps it stemmed from the fact that Jerome was viewed as a great Christian source and Isidore felt that it would add to his explanation by having a Church Father support his argument.

Regardless of the reasons he had, it is apparent that although Isidore's information was coming from numerous sources he rarely felt obliged to inform the reader of their names or their works.[58] However, on the rare occasions that he was explicit in telling the reader where he got his information it was not always correct and he was often relaying information that was second-, or even third-hand.[59] Rather, it has been left to modern scholars, especially Jacques Fontaine in his monumental *Isidore de Seville et la culture classique dans l'Espagne wisigothique* from 1959, tirelessly to piece together a kind of *ex post facto* bibliography to the *Etymologiae*.[60] Because Isidore left little evidence as to his method of, or reason for, composition, excepting of course his short dedication to Sisebut, it remains unclear exactly what the purpose of the *Etymologiae* was. Apart from a few short

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[57] Michael J. Kelly, *Writing History, Narrating Fulfillment: The Isidore-Moment and the Struggle for the 'Before Now' in Late Antique and Early Medieval Hispania,* PhD Thesis, University of Leeds (2014).

[58] Wood, *Politics of Identity*, pp. 66-70.

[59] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, p. 13.

[60] Jacques Fontaine, *Isidore De Seville Et La Culture Classique Dans l'Espagne Wisigothique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1959).

indications that the he intended to treat 'what ought to be noted (*notandum*)' he provided little information about the purpose of the work.[61] After stating that the evidence for the purpose of the text is almost certainly found internally, Barney *et al.* go on to explain that Isidore's central role in the recent conversion of the Visigothic kings to Catholicism and his role as Bishop of Seville, a very important see in Spain, and because the biggest danger to Christians, at least as far as the Church was concerned at that time, the possibility of errors in reading and understanding may have been the chief impulse behind the text's creation. It is, after all, clear throughout that the text has a pastoral and pedagogical message.

With these reasons in mind, Barney concludes that 'Isidore's book constituted a little library for Christians without access to a rich store of books (it even incorporates a good deal from Isidore's own previous books) in order to furnish capable Christian minds.'[62] That said, could Isidore not also be doing what Pliny the Elder did? That is, using the *Etymologiae* not only as a storehouse of secular, Christian, and classical knowledge, but also as a kind of exemplar for empire building. After all, Visigothic Spain had seen its fair share of instability and dynastic turmoil in the decades leading up to the writing of this text. Moreover, his association to Sisebut, even if cursory, meant that his text was at the very least framed as a royally-approved manuscript.

The twenty books of the work were separated into two decades of ten books apiece. The second decade, in which most of the monstrous descriptions are included, has more of an 'encyclopaedic' tone to it then the first ten books. The first decade appears to have been arranged in a more haphazard way by incorporating three different organisational models.[63] It is clear from their organisation that Isidore did, however, have a grand scheme of human knowledge in mind. For example, in books XI-XVI, which, if they were published on their

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[61] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, p. 18.

[62] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, p. 19.

[63] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, pp. 19-20.

own, would be better titled *De rerum natura*, he organized his entries in a descending order down the chain of being (*scala naturae*). First he started with human beings then moved on to intelligent animals, then cosmic and earthly phenomena, the earth, and then earthly materials. If the sample size is stretched a little further Isidore's work actually descended down the chain of being from God, beginning in book V to earthly elements in book XVI. There is evidence that perhaps it was this chain of being that Hrabanus Maurus internalised when he read the text because in his *De rerum natura*, this chain of being dominated the work.[64] Additionally, the *Etymologiae* was so ubiquitous, that by the year 800 it was to be found in virtually every cultural and educational centre of Europe. In fact, more than 1000 manuscripts of this text survive from the Middle Ages. Many of the earliest manuscripts are housed in the monastic library of St Gall. The earliest of them was written in an Irish scribal hand perhaps as early as the middle of the seventh century (only a decade or two after Isidore composed the text).[65] Aldhelm, the famed Abbot of Malmesbury and later Bishop of Sherborne (d. 709), knew of Isidore's works and the Northumbrian scholar Bede (d. 735) extensively used the *Etymologiae* in his own works.[66]

The present study, however, is concerned with the later books of the *Etymologiae* in which Isidore discussed portents and monstrous creatures.[67] Isidore tells us in the *Etymologiae* that Varro described portents as 'beings that seem to have been born contrary to nature.'[68] He quickly qualifies this definition and firmly Christianises it by adding that the portents only *appear* to be contrary to nature but since everything was created by divine will then they must have been the will

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[64] Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 111; for an English translation see Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, trans. by Throop in *De Universo: The Peculiar Properties of Words and their Mystical Significance*.

[65] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, pp. 24-5.

[66] Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 130-8.

[67] See above for a fuller discussion on Isidore's use of the monstrous in the *Etymologiae*, pp. 32, and 82-3.

[68] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, p. 243.

of the Creator and therefore, not contrary to nature but contrary to ones' *understanding* of nature - this is a purely Augustinian view. 'Portents', he goes on to say, 'are also called signs, omens, and prodigies, because they are seen to portend and display, indicate and predict future events.'[69] That is, portents, according to Isidore, signify the unknown; they allow the viewer (or reader in this case) a means to think on the complications of life and humanity. This, I think, is where the monstrous in Isidore really begins to make sense. The monstrous, according to Isidore, are a guide, or a hint on how the reader should think of the world. If monsters were placed on this planet they were done so by God; therefore, God must have a reason for them being here even if we cannot comprehend what that reason is. Therefore, God had to have placed the monstrous on earth to show humans something. Much like God placed the monstrous on Earth as a way to show humanity certain things, the medieval writer, and dare I say the modern writer too, uses the monstrous as a tool for demonstration or pedagogy.

However, it is more complicated than that. In his section on portents in the *Etymologiae* Isidore cleverly laid out the difference between portents, prodigies, and omens. Interestingly, and quite fittingly I think, Barney *et al.* translated *monstrum*, from the verb *monstrare* (to show, point out, reveal, or teach) as omen, rather than as monster, in the latest translation of the *Etymologiae.* The entire passage is as follows:

> Portents are also called signs, omens, and prodigies, because they are seen to portend and display, indicate and predict future events. The term 'portent' (*portentum*) is said to be derived from foreshadowing (*portendere*), that is, from 'showing beforehand' (*praeostendere*). 'Signs' (*ostentum*), because they seem to show (*ostendere*) a future event. Prodigies (*prodigium*) are so called, because they 'speak hereafter' (*porro dicere*), that is, they predict the future. But omens (*monstrum*) derive their name from admonition (*monitus*), because in giving a sign they indicate (*demonstrare*) something, or else because they instantly show (*monstrare*) what may appear; and this is its proper meaning, even though it has frequently been corrupted by the improper use of writers.[70]

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[69] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, XI.ii.28-iii.2, p. 243.

[70] I have provided Barney's translation here because I think his use of 'omen' rather than

Isidore, in a strictly Augustinian fashion, stated that God, on some occasions, had indicated future events through the defects in some new-borns, and through the dreams of oracles.[71] However, he continued by saying that these monsters did not often live long; they died almost as soon as they were born. Therefore, according to Isidore, there is a clear difference between a 'portent' (*portentum*) and 'an unnatural being' (*portentuosus*). He makes certain to inform the reader that 'unnatural beings' exist and then explains a series of (mostly) birth defects. Such as dwarves, Pygmies, children with six fingers, misshapen heads, superfluous body parts, and occasionally two- or three-headed individuals. Although rare and perhaps difficult to explain through medieval and classical medical knowledge, these are not really, by modern standards, what one would call monstrous. However, if one understands portents and monsters by their connection to *monstrare* and one believes that both are put on earth by God either to show future events, or to warn us of dangerous virtues, traits, or regions, then the text fulfils its purpose. That is, rather than simply being a list of what appears to be a kind of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century teratological tradition of collecting the grotesque, the *Etymologiae* laid out a Christian framework that allows for a clearer understanding of the confusing world around us all.[72]

After covering portents and monsters Isidore then chose to move onto descriptions of 'others', as it is rather conveniently called in Barney's edition, who are

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'monster' is indicative of modern academic uncertainty about how the medieval mind conceived of monsters. For the Latin see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, Book XI.iii.2-iii.3: '*Portenta autem et ostenta, monstra atque prodigia ideo nuncupantur, quod portendere atque ostendere, monstrare ac praedicare aliqua futura videntur. Nam portenta dicta perhibent a portendendo, id est praeostendendo. Ostenta autem, quod ostendere quidquam futurum videantur. Prodigia, quod porro dicant, id est futura praedicant. Monstra vero a monitu dicta, quod aliquid significando demonstrent, sive quod statim monstrent quid appareat; et hoc proprietatis est, abusione tamen scriptorum plerumque corrumpitur.*'

[71] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Book XI.iii.4, at p. 244.

[72] David D. Gilmore, *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and all Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), pp. 52-4.

transformed in a part of the body.[73] In this category Isidore included Minotaurs (a race born out of bestial miscegenation) and those who have other animal features in addition to their human ones.[74] He also discussed beings whose features were in different positions, ears above their temples for example, or eyes in their chests or foreheads but otherwise were humanoid in appearance. Interestingly, Isidore did not include these creatures in the section about human deformity. This is possibly because he had internalised an Augustinian differentiation between fabricated monsters and humans that possess monstrous traits, *i.e.* monsters of myth and monsters that God created.[75] Finally, Isidore discussed people with untimely traits, that is, bearded children or premature white hair for example. Whatever his reasons for including this material, there is little doubt that his interpretations and explications of these monstrosities were influential. With that in mind, it is to one of the more unique and interesting re-uses of Isidore's work that we will now turn.

II.3.3: Hrabanus Maurus' *De Universo*

Hrabanus Maurus (*c*. AD 776 - AD 856) was a Frankish Benedictine monk, one time abbot of Fulda (822-842), and eventual archbishop of Mainz (847-856).[76] He is perhaps one of the best products of the Carolingian Renaissance and serves as an example of the quality, and type, of scholar that the Carolingian palace school was able to produce in the decades on either side of Charlemagne's death.[77]

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[73] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Book XI.iii.9-11, p. 244.

[74] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, in Barney, et al. (eds.), *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Book XI.iii.9, p. 244.

[75] See above at pp. 49-52.

[76] Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 9-10; for a review of some recent work on Hrabanus see Michel Aaij, 'Continental Business: Rabanus Maurus, the *Preceptor Germaniae*, on the 1150th Anniversary of his Death', in *The Heroic Age* 12 (2009); available at: www.heroicage.org/issues/12/cb.php.

[77] There are numerous questions, however, about the shape and form of the palace school. It is far more likely that, at least during the reign of Charlemagne, it was more of an abstract notion of a collection of like-minded scholars than an actual brick and mortar

Hrabanus entered Fulda as a boy and eventually rose to great prominence inside the monastery of Fulda and beyond.[78] He was ordained a deacon in 801 at Fulda and then sent to Tours to study under the great Carolingian scholar Alcuin of York. It was during his short stay at Tours that Hrabanus received the eponym Maurus from Alcuin supposedly in honour of Saint Maurus, a favourite disciple of Benedict of Nursia.[79] Hrabanus returned to Fulda after only a couple of years at Tours in order to assume control of the monastic school there. Under his guidance the school became one of the most productive centres of European learning and produced a number of notable figures including Walafrid Strabo, Otfrid of Weissenburg, and Lupus of Ferrières. Even Einhard, the biographer of Charlemagne, entrusted his son Wussin to Fulda while under the direction of Hrabanus.[80]

Hrabanus himself was an extremely prolific writer. He composed a number of scriptural commentaries on most of the Old Testament books and many of the New Testament ones. He wrote a sort of educational treatise on the handling of boys given to the care of a monastery called *De oblatione puerorum*.[81] This treatise was written in response to Gottschalk's desire to leave the monastic order

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school. For a discussion on this see Richard E. Sullivan, 'The Carolingian Age: Reflections on Its Place in the History of the Middle Ages', in *Speculum* 64 (1989), pp. 267-306, at p. 295; Claudio Leonardi, 'Alcuino e la Scuola Palatina: Le Ambizioni di una Cultura Unitaria', in *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull* 27 (1981), pp. 459-96; Giles Brown, 'Introduction: The Carolingian Renaissance', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1-51, at p. 31; John J. Contreni, 'The Carolingian Renaissance: Education and Literary Culture', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History, vol II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 709-57, at p. 713; M. M. Hildebrandt, *The External School in Carolingian Society* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); and John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), pp. 1-15.

[78] Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, pp.74-7.

[79] For information on the significance of nicknames in the Carolingian world see Mary Garrison, 'The Social World of Alcuin: Nicknames at York and the Carolingian Court', in L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds.), *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court* (Groningen: Forsten, 1998), pp. 59-79.

[80] Einhard, *Epistolae*, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 104 (Paris: 1851), cols. 509-38, at col. 519; see also Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, trans. by Throop in *De Universo: The Peculiar Properties of Words and their Mystical Significance*, pp. 8-11.

[81] Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, pp. 9-10, 83-6, and 156-61.

after he had been raised in the same manner.[82] Hrabanus also composed a treatise on Christian doctrine used for teaching clerics named *De institutione clericorum*.[83] In addition to his pedagogical, doctrinal, and theological works he also composed numerous poems, works on penance, vices and virtues, grammar, and degrees of consanguinity. However, it is his rearranging of Isidore's *Etymologiae* in order to create the completely unique *De universo* that interests the present study.[84] Another very notable difference between the *De universo* of Hrabanus Maurus and the *Etymologiae* of Isidore was that in the case of the *Etymologiae* Isidore mostly left allegorical interpretation out of his descriptions, whereas in the case of Hrabanus Maurus' work, they were everywhere. Isidore, was ultimately interested in the world via the words that we have given to things and he believed that an examination of these words can reveal a type of knowledge greater than the understanding of the word itself.

II.3.4: Johannes Scotus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*

Johannes Scotus Eriugena holds a special place in the history of scholarship in the Early Medieval West even if very little is known about the man himself. What we do know is that he was most likely a Scot, *i.e.* born in Ireland, he taught the Liberal Arts at the Carolingian court (rhetoric, logic, and grammar, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) and that he had a considerable knowledge of Greek, something that was very rare in Western Europe at this time.[85] It was his considerable knowledge of Greek that provided him with unprecedented access to

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[82] Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image*, pp. 77-91.

[83] Hrabanus Maurus, *De institutione clericorum*, in D. Zimpel (ed.), *De institutione clericorum - Über die Unterweisung der Geistlichen* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Stephanie Haarländer, *Rabanus Maurus zum Kennenlernen: Ein Lesebuch mit einer Einführung in sein Leben und Werk* (Mainz: Bischöfliches Ordinariat, 2006).

[84] For the Latin see Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo*, in J. P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 111; For an English translation see Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo*, trans. by Throop in *De Universo: The Peculiar Properties of Words and their Mystical Significance*.

[85] For a good introduction to Eriugena and his texts see the Foreword and Introduction in John Scotus Eriugena, *Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. by Mary Brennan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), pp. ix-xxix.

the Greek theological tradition. This is seen in his knowledge of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa, and his eventual, if somewhat imperfect translation of the works of the obscure Syrian Neo-Platonist Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite. Eriugena was a teacher turned philosopher who spent a great deal of the latter part of his life in the palace school at the court of Charles of the Bald, though there is still some debate as to exactly where that palace school was located.[86]

The difficulty in pinning down the location of the school is related to the itinerant nature of the courts of Carolingian kings at that time, which leads one to question the phrase palace school (*scola palatina*) if there was, in fact, no single palace.[87] Although I believe that the school was not a brick and mortar foundation but rather a loosely connected network of scholars and was driven by the personalities of those associated with the school there is no doubting the impact on learning that these scholars had on the late-eighth through to the ninth centuries. If there was a school, the most likely location is somewhere in Laon region of Picardy, perhaps even in Laon itself. Eriugena began teaching in this moving school beginning in 847 under the reign Charlemagne's grandson, Charles the Bald.[88] His Hellenophilia, language, script, and educational background were hallmarks of the Irish monastic influence in the region. In fact, Laon was the centre of an Irish colony of sorts in the latter decades of the ninth century. It was during these years that his translation of the Ps. Dionysian text (re-)introduced Neo-Platonic thought into the European West. It has even been said that it was Eriugena who 'reinvented the greater part of the theses of Neo-Platonism.'[89]

Eriugena's overall philosophy is best understood as an attempt to create a consistent, methodical, Christian Neo-Platonism from diverse but primarily Christian sources. Eriugena was especially gifted at identifying and outlining the

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[86] O'Meara, *Eriugena*, pp. 1-15.

[87] O'Meara, *Eriugena*, pp. 12-4.

[88] Dermot Moran, 'Eriugena, John Scottus', in T. Glick, S.J. Livesey and F. Wallis (eds.), *Medieval Science, Technology, and Medicine: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 161-4, at p. 161.

[89] J. Trouillard, 'Le Virtus gnostica selon Jean Scot Érigène', in *La Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 115 (1983), pp. 331-54, at p. 331.

fundamental intellectual framework of Neo-Platonic and Christina writers. He was able to do this by referencing a great many Greek Christian writers including Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus Confessor. Of course, he also referenced more familiar authorities (*auctores*) such as Cicero, Martianus Capella, St Augustine, and Boethius in his writings. Throughout his works he developed a highly original Neo-Platonic cosmology in which an 'unknown', and 'unknowable' God, who was beyond being and non-being, through a process of 'self-creation', proceeded from his divine 'darkness' or 'non-being' into the light of being. When understood this way, these causes proceed into their Created Effects, and as such were dependent upon, and will ultimately return, to the source of the causes, *i.e.* the Causes of Ideas of God. Nature then, according to Eriugena, was in constant dialogue with, and involved in a dynamic process of *exitus* and *reditus* with God. Furthermore, Nature was understood to be a *universitas rerum* and subsequently included all things that are and are not (*ea quae non sunt*).[90] It was this introduction (or reintroduction) of negative theology that we are most interested here.

The professions of Ps. Dionysius had a profound effect on Eriugena's own thinking. The difficulty that Eriugena saw in standard theological explanations was as follows: In affirmative theology, when attributes are ascribed to God it is because He is the cause of all things. However, it is difficult to reconcile that with a notion that God is also unknowable and transcendent (*superdeus deitas*). Furthermore, Ps. Dionysius, as seen in Eriugena's translation, says that God is the affirmation of all things, the negation of all things, and beyond all affirmation and denial.[91] In order to bridge this gap he eagerly adopted Dionysian concepts: *e.g.* the distinction between affirmative and negative theology, according to which negative statements about God (*e.g.* 'God is not good [in the way we understand goodness]') were 'more true', 'better', 'more apt' (*verior*), than affirmations (e.g. 'God is good'). It is through discovering what something, in this case God, is not

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[90] Dermot Moran, 'John Scottus Eriugena', in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2008).

[91] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *PL* 122 (Paris: 1853), cols. 1111-70, at col. 1121 c-d: '*omnium positio, omnium ablatio, super omnem positionem et ablationem inter se invicem.*'

that one comes to a truth about the subject in question. Moreover, since we are unable to know God directly, instead we are only able to gain any understanding of Him through His *theophaniai*, or divine appearances, the apophatic approach provided, otherwise unattainable, insight into one's knowledge of God.[92]

Given his love of all things Greek is not surprising that Eriugena entitled one of his greatest works the *Periphyseon* (Greek for On Nature of Things). In the work he endeavoured to include a collection of all things that are and all things that are not. As mentioned in the previous chapter, David Williams has tried to argue that apophatic theology, as deployed by Ps. Dionysius and Eriugena, influenced all medieval notions and conception of the relationship between humanity and the monstrous. There are, however, a couple of problems with his assertion. Firstly, and most importantly, it is quite clear that Eriugena's works, at least as far as his ideas on apophatic theology are concerned, had very little immediate impact on the scholarly thoughts of the ninth and tenth centuries and it was not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that his writings on negative theology were reassessed and gained any scholarly traction. Even in twelfth-century, this was done piecemeal. The *Periphyseon*, although mentioned and discussed by Hugh of Saint Victor, for example, was not really utilised until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries at all. Also, the *Periphyseon* eventually became linked with two heretical Paris theologians, David of Dinant and Amaury of Bene, which eventually led to its condemnation in both 1210 and 1215. Despite this, both Meister Eckhart of Hochheim (*c*. 1260 - *c*. 1328) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401 - 1464) were familiar with the text.[93] In fact, one scholar has even gone so far as to suggest that his (*i.e.* Eriugena's) cosmological speculations were too conceptually advanced for the philosophers and theologians in the Early Middle ages to understand.[94] Though I am unwilling to go that far, it is clear that his ideas were quite radical for the eighth and ninth centuries. However, the availability and transmission of manuscripts had a far more influential effect on the transmission of knowledge in the early

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[92] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *PG* 3 (Paris: 1857), cols. 586-996, at col. 869 c-d.

[93] Moran, 'Eriugena, John Scotus', p. 162.

[94] Moran, 'John Scottus Eriugena'.

medieval world, then scholastic aptitude. Secondly, even if Eriugena's apophatic philosophy was utilised by later writers to dialogue between humanity and monstrosity, what of the many writers before Eriugena who did not have access to the Neo-Platonic writings of the Areopagite? Were their notions of monstrosity somehow wholly different than those of later writers? If so, then the authors of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, or *Historia Naturalis*, the *Etymologiae,* or even the *Getica*, were somehow using the monstrous differently than say, the authors of *Beowulf*, or the *Liber monstrorum*, or even *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. As we will see below, this is simply not the case. In fact, the way the author of *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* utilised monstrosity has a lot more in common with Sir John Mandeville (or even Christopher Columbus, for that matter) than has previously been recognised.

II.3.5: *Liber monstrorum*

The surviving manuscript evidence for the anonymously composed *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus* is somewhat meagre. The text itself only survives, complete or in part, in five manuscripts all of which can be dated to the ninth or tenth centuries. Although the manuscript only survives in five manuscripts, there is evidence to suggest that it, at least initially, experienced a certain amount of popularity. For example, though the text was probably written in Britain, a now lost manuscript of the *Liber monstrorum* is referred to in the Bobbio library catalogue from the ninth century.[95] Additionally, as has been examined in some detail elsewhere, the author of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* probably knew the *Liber monstrorum* even possibly mistaking it for a work by the classical poet Lucan.[96]

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[95] Michael Lapidge, '*Beowulf*, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum* and Wessex', in *Studi Medievali* 23 (1982), pp. 151-91.

[96] Gregory Hays, '"Important if True": Lucan's Orpheus and Aethicus Ister ', in *Notes and Queries* 57(2) (2010), pp. 195-6; Richard Pollard, '"Lucan" and "Aethicus Ister"', in *Notes and Queries* 53(1) (2006), pp. 7-10. See also *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. xliii-xlv.

The text itself is a catalogue of some 120 different types of monsters split into three categories, which progress from the monsters most like humans to beasts and finally ending with descriptions of serpents.[97] Though the author of the text relied heavily on the descriptions provided by classical authors he usually made it clear that the texts could not be confirmed as true by reliable, *i.e.* Christian sources, they were to understood as problematic at best, potentially unbelievable at worst. Furthermore, the text was compiled in such a way as to force the reader into making decisions about the veracity of certain monstrous elements and creatures.[98] A great many of his sources are the obvious culprits of classical literature: Pliny, St Augustine, and Isidore, for example. However, the text in its entirety resists categorisation. It is too simple an explanation to call it a bestiary, or an encyclopaedia, or even a compendium. It is something entirely different, unique, and inimitable. Furthermore, the text was clearly written by an exceptionally clever author. Andy Orchard's investigation into the *Beowulf* manuscript noted the complex and learned rhetorical technique of the author's compilation, especially in the text's opening passages.[99]

The *Liber monstrorum* is replete with alliteration, clever wordplay (including a play on the words *monstrorum, monstrantur, demonstrat*).[100] The text even opens with a pun on the word *situs* (which can mean either *region*, or *filth*). Orchard calls the linguistic flourishes, and the authors' command of his sources a 'dazzling display of rhetorical pyrotechnics.'[101] Furthermore, the author's use of his sources as purveyors of knowledge prevents future readers from questioning the monstrous subject matter. For example, throughout the text the author resorts to using phrases such as 'they say', 'we read', or 'it is said' to buoy up the authority

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[97] Perhaps mirroring the Chain of Being as discussed above by St Augustine, Isidore, and Hrabanus Maurus.

[98] Todorov's moment(s) of hesitation spring to mind, see above at pp. 37-8. See also Brian McFadden, 'Authority and Discourse in the *Liber Monstrorum*', in *Neophilologus* 89(3) (2005), pp. 473-93, at pp. 473-4.

[99] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 87.

[100] '*uentus tuae postulationis a puppi precelsa pauidum inter marina praecipitasset monstra*' or '*ad hanc uastam gurgitis se uoraginem uergunt.*'

[101] For more examples of the author's cleverness see Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 89.

of the subject matter at hand.[102] In addition to St Augustine, Isidore, and Pliny (perhaps only via the previous two authors though) the author of the *Liber monstrorum* also used a great deal of information from the *Wonders of the East* and other Alexander matter to fill the gaps in his descriptions.[103] Furthermore, probably because of the author's use of material pertaining to Alexander the Great, India and the East are greatly represented.[104] Many of the fascinating beasts and monsters are said to have originated in India or on many occasions were even encountered by Alexander. In the end an authoritative, if not moral, east-looking message is delivered through the monstrous descriptions provided. In short, this is not a superstitious, simple, or easily explained text. It was composed by someone who was very learned, and had undertaken a great deal of Christian and Latin training.

II.4: Historical Sources

In both Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, the subjects of history and geography were closely related disciplines, especially as a means to define frontiers between peoples.[105] This close relationship is, perhaps, best

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[102] For a useful list on all the occasions in which the author resorts to these phrases see Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 90, n. 23.

[103] McFadden, 'Authority and Discourse', *passim* but esp. at pp. 481-4.

[104] For a discussion on the role of monstrosity in geography see Chet van Duzer, '*Hic Sunt Dracones*: The Geography and Cartography of Monsters', in A.S. Mittman and P.J. Dendle (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 387-435.

[105] See Andrew H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), *passim* for the best introduction to the topic. See also Natalia Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book: Geographical Knowledge in the Latin West ca. 400-1000* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), *passim* for a detailed account of the state of geographic knowledge in the Middle Ages, especially regarding biblical notions of space and geography. See also Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden (eds.), *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) for a more theoretical look at the connections between space, geography, and power. For a look at the relationship between geography and identity see this very useful collection of essays Altenberg, *Experiencing Landscapes: A Study of Space and Identity in Three Marginal Areas of Medieval Britain and Scandinavia*; Mayke de Jong, Francis

demonstrated by Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos*, a text which eventually constituted one of the most important early medieval texts on geography. It is Orosius' explicit connection between history and geography that is most important for the present study. By making explicit that it was necessary 'to describe the world itself which the human race inhabits' so that one 'may more easily obtain knowledge, not only of the events of their time, but also of their location' Orosius was making a statement regarding both disciplines; it was clear to him that a geographical knowledge of the world was essential to understand history fully.[106] This important correlation between geography and history was picked up on and followed by later historio-geographers such as Bede, Isidore, Jordanes, and others. There is even a sense of this connection in modern and early modern historiographical writing. Edward Gibbon himself, for example, spent a great deal of time discussing the geography of both the territories within the Roman Empire and the lands that bordered it. This relationship between landscape and history was later stretched to its furthest extent in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* by the late Fernand Braudel. In point of fact, these connections were stretched so far that Braudel had to stress that: 'It is worth repeating that history is not made by geographical features, but by the men who control or discover them.'[107] In a passage that echoes Orosius Braudel wrote:

> Events are the ephemera of history; they pass across its stage like fireflies, hardly glimpsed before they settle back into darkness and as often as not into oblivion. Every event, however brief, has to be sure a contribution to make, lights up some dark corner or even some wide vista of history. Nor is it only political history which benefits most, for every historical landscape - political, economic, social, even geographical - is illumined

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Theuws and Carine van Rhijn (eds.), *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) investigates the role that 'places of power' had in the creation of real power in the Early Middle Ages; see also Emily Albu, 'Imperial Geography and the Medieval Peutinger Map', in *Imago mundi* 37(2) (2005), pp. 136-48 for a look at how the Peutinger Map *may* have been used to promote Carolingian imperial authority.

[106] Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, trans. by A. Fear in *Seven Books of History Against Pagans* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 35.

[107] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditeranéen à l'époque de Philippe II, Vol. 1*, trans. by Siân Reynolds in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Vol. 1* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 225.

by the intermittent flare of the event.[108]

Much as Braudel felt that the history of age is best written when taking account of the slopes of the mountains and fields of the valleys in which the historical actors in question inhabited, a study of ancient writers and their related geographic texts provides modern historians with a great deal of information about how their authors conceived of geographical space, historical contingency, and how these two concepts were used as a means of defining frontier by placing the other, whether imagined or not, in regions outside the known world, often in barren landscapes or on marginal land. Throughout the remainder of this chapter I shall show just how close this knowledge of geography was tied to notions of correct, *i.e.* Christian living, monstrosity, barbarism, and otherness. As a brief introduction to the rhetorical power of a geographical description, one need only to look at the wildly different descriptions of Britain given by Jordanes and by Bede. Both of these writers used Orosius as a source, yet the outcome of the two descriptions could hardly be more different.

With the exception of Sallust's *Bellum Jugurthinum,* Julius Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, and *Historium Romana* of Appian, any geographical descriptions of the world were intermingled into the narrative and often done in a very cursory, even *post hoc* fashion.[109] In the case of both Julius Caesar and Sallust the geographical descriptions were provided so that the reader could better grasp the later and inevitable military tactics of conquest. In fact, the Latin term *Geographica*, derived from the Greek, only appears in two Latin texts, neither of which, strictly speaking, is very concerned with geography at all. These texts are Cicero's *Epistulae ad Atticum* and Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae*.[110]

The alternative word *Chorographia*, which appeared as the title to Pomponius

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[108] Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditeranéen à l'époque de Philippe II, Vol. 2*, trans. by Siân Reynolds in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, Vol. 2* (London: Collins, 1972), p. 901.

[109] Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 1-2.

[110] Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, pp. 8-10.

Mela's first-century work was hardly any more popular.[111] Additionally, the Greeks and the Romans had no specific term associated with the modern verb 'to explore'. The closest example, the Latin verb *explorare*, was connected to military activities and more specifically to information gathering, in fact *exploratores* were essentially spies sent into enemy territory to discover the whereabouts of enemy camps.[112] Rather, descriptions of the world circulated under a number of different, sometimes rather misleading, titles from the anonymous *Totius orbis diversarumque regionis situs* to the personified *Geometria* in Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*.[113] Martianus Capella, in his *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* writes that 'I am called Geometry because I have traversed and measured out the earth, and I could offer calculations and proofs for its shape, size, position, regions, and dimensions. There is no portion of the earth's surface that I could not describe from memory.'[114] Thus, according to the description given here by the personified liberal art Geometry, there was a correlation between the description of the earth's surface and the measurement of it. Distances between rivers, lakes, oceans, and mountains mattered. In other words, the actual features of the earth were connected to space and therefore also to the division of that space by actual geographic features or in the case of many of the monstrous texts borders and frontiers. There is, however, some debate over the originality of Martianus' geographic sections in the *De nuptiis* with some, Ritschl and Simon foremost amongst them, believing that Martianus was just continuing the Roman tradition first laid out by Marcus Terentius Varro.[115] William Stahl, who is also quite sceptical about the scientific elements in *De nuptiis* argued that Martianus simply filled out the seventh book of his work with

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[111] Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 19-20.

[112] Roller, *Through the Pillars of Herakles*, pp. xvi-xvii.

[113] Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, pp. 9-10; for the latest edition see Martianus Capella, *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii - Geometria*, in B. Ferré (ed.), *Les noces de Philologie et de Mercure. Tome VI. Livre VI. La géométrie. Collection des Universités de France* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007).

[114] Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis philologiae et mercurii*, in J.A. Willis (ed.), *Martianus Capella* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983), vi.588.

[115] Friedrich Ritschl, 'De M. Terentii Varronis Disciplinarum libris commentarius', in F. Ritschl (ed.), *Kleine philologische Schriften* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877), pp. 352-402, esp. at pp. 387-97; see also Manfred Simon, 'Zur Abhängigkeit spätrömischer Enzyklopädien der Artes Liberales von Varros Disciplinarum', in *Philologus* 110 (1966), pp. 88-101.

geographic information not because he had a particular interest in geography but because his two most prominent sources, Pliny and Solinus, had done so.[116] Whatever the reasons for the geographic interlude, the wedding guests eventually tire of the geographical information being relayed by Geometry and ask her to cease. Because the other Liberal Arts of Rhetoric, Dialectic, and Grammar were also asked to stop rambling on, it is probably safe to assume, as Lozovski does that this was not because of a negative fifth-century attitude towards Geography but rather a literary device. This was also the same conclusion that a number of ninth- and tenth-century scholars came to.[117] What is clear is that there simply was no standard, recognised method of writing geography in Antiquity or Late Antiquity and certainly no example of how geography ought to be integrated into historical writing. The geographical introduction of Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos* changed that.

II.4.1 Orosius

Almost everything we know about Orosius is limited to the years between 414 and 418 and even then we are left with a patchy and incomplete picture of the man. What we can say is that Orosius, most probably born in the Spanish provinces *c*. AD 385, was a young man at the time that Rome was sacked by Alaric in AD 410.[118] Sometime in the 410s Orosius travelled to North Africa to study

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[116] Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis philologiae, et Mercurii, et de septem artibus*, trans. by W.H. Stahl in *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1971), pp. 128-9. For a fuller discussion about this see also Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, pp. 23-5.

[117] Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, pp. 25-6; for recent work on the reception of Martianus Capella by Carolingian scholars see Sinéad O'Sullivan, 'Martianus Capella and the Carolingians: Some Observations Based on the Glosses on Books I–II from the Oldest Gloss Tradition on De nuptiis', in E. Mullins and D. Scully (eds.), *Listen, O Isles, unto me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in honour of Jennifer O'Reilly* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), pp. 28-38.

[118] Orosius' birth year can realistically be anywhere between *c*. 375 - 85. For the later date see Orosius, *Historiarum adversus pagano*, trans. by Fear in *Seven Books of History Against Pagans*, p. 2. For the earlier date see David Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 135-7.

under St Augustine. It was during his time under the tutelage of St Augustine that Orosius travelled to Palestine to spend some additional time learning under Jerome. While he was visiting Jerome, Orosius participated in a Synod that took place in Jerusalem in 415. The following year he returned to North Africa. However, at this point in his career he more or less disappears from the written record leading some to suggest that he died shortly after writing his *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem* in 418, perhaps in a shipwreck while attempting to cross from North Africa to Spain.[119]

Although his book is titled *Historiarum adversus paganos* and was commissioned by St Augustine in response to the attacks in Italy by Alaric, Orosius himself has a somewhat inconsistent opinion on barbarians. The barbarians are, of course, always negatively depicted if for no other reason than their paganism. However, Orosius is not too concerned with the problem of barbarian - Roman rapprochement. It has even been argued on the back of one particular passage that Orosius may even have been captured by Scottish (*i.e.* Irish) pirates and escaped captivity, which of course leads to questions about what exactly Orosius' personal thoughts on barbarians were.[120]

Despite Orosius' importance to both geography and history writing during the Early Middle Ages, modern scholarship has only recently begun to address the

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[119] Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, p. 137.

[120] Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet, *Orose: Histoire contre les païens* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990), pp. xi-xii; for the Latin see Book III.20.6-7: '*cum tamen, si quando de me ipso refero, ut ignotos primum barbaros uiderim, ut infestos declinauerim, ut dominantibus blanditus sim, ut infideles praecauerim, ut insidiantes subterfugerim, postremo ut persequentes in mari ac saxis spiculisque adpetentes, manibus etiam paene iam adprehendentes repentina nebula circumfusus euaserim, cunctos audientes me in lacrimas commoueri uelim et tacitus de non dolentibus doleam, reputans duritiae eorum, qui quod non sustinuere non credunt…*' An English translation of this passage can be found in Orosius, *Historiarum adversus pagano*, trans. by Fear in *Seven Books of History Against Pagans*, Book III.20.6-7, at p. 140: 'When I tell, if I may mention my own life, how I first saw barbarians from unknown lands, how I escaped from their hostility, flattered those in power, guarded myself against those I could not trust, outwitted those who lay in wait for me, and finally, how, when they pursued me by sea with their rocks and spears, and had almost laid hands upon men, I escaped them when I was covered by a fog which suddenly arose.'

connections between the two.[121] Although noting the important links between the genres, the most in-depth study of the geography of the *Historiarum adversus paganos* to date largely focused on the geographical introduction in isolation and failed to address the complex and important association between the two genres in other parts of the text.[122] This seems to be a very odd oversight because Orosius so clearly laid out his intentions in the opening lines of the text; to him there was a clear connection between the two. As Orosius himself stated in the introduction, he received the request to write the text from St Augustine as an answer to the growing opinion of the remaining pagans of the age that the sack of Rome was divine retribution for the City turning its back on the ancient gods.[123] Orosius wrote that:

> Therefore, I intended to speak of the period from the founding of the world to the founding of the City; then up to the Principate of Caesar and the birth of Christ, from which time the control of the world has remained under the power of the City, down to our time. Insofar as I shall be able to recall them, I think it necessary to disclose the conflicts of the human race and the world, as it were, through its various parts, burning with evils, set afire with the torch of greed viewing them as from a watchtower, so that first I shall describe the world itself which the human race inhabits, as it were divided by our ancestors into three parts and then established by regions and provinces, in order that when the locale of wars and the ravages of disease are described, all interested may more easily obtain knowledge, not only of the events of their time, but also of their location.[124]

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[121] See esp. Sylvia Tomasch and Sealy Gilles (eds.), *Text and Territory: Geographical Imagination in the European Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Merrills, *History and Geography*; Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*; Rhys Jones and Richard Phillips, 'Unsettling Geographical Horizons: Exploring Premodern and Non-European Imperialism', in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95(1) (2005), pp. 141-61; Duzer, '*Hic Sunt Dracones*'.

[122] Yves Janvier, *La géographie d'Orose* (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 1982), p. 137.

[123] Orosius, *Historiarum adversus pagano*, trans. by Fear in *Seven Books of History Against Pagans*, p. 31.

[124] Orosius, *Historiarum adversus pagano*, trans. by Fear in *Seven Books of History Against Pagans*, p. 35: '*Dicturus igitur ab orbe condito usque ad Vrbem conditam, dehinc usque ad Caesaris principatum natiuitatemque Christi ex quo sub potestate Vrbis orbis mansit imperium, uel etiam usque ad dies nostros, in quantum ad cognitionem uocare suffecero, conflictationes generis humani et ueluti per diuersas partes ardentem malis mundum face cupiditatis incensum e specula ostentaturus, neccessarium reor ut primum ipsum terrarum orbem quem inhabitat humanum genus sicut est e maioribus trifariam*

Orosius went on to show that humans had suffered throughout all of history and that when all of human history was viewed from a Christian perspective it became obvious that God had always punished the wicked and praised the faithful. Furthermore, by linking the history of the world with Rome he joined the stories of the world and of humanity to the story of physical earth and the story of institutions. With this he reaffirmed and strengthened Rome's role as the power-centre of the world; so succinctly summarised in the pithy phrase *sub potestate Urbis orbis mansit imperium*.[125] The real originality of this section of the text lies in its explicit separation of history and geography into distinct but equally necessary parts of the whole. Despite his insistence on separating them into different schools, Orosius maintained that history and geography worked very closely with each other and that in order to appreciate one the reader had to have an understanding of the other. Furthermore, the unique combination of history and geography, especially the geographical introduction that he produced became the gold-standard that many later writers used including Jordanes, Isidore, and Bede.

Orosius began his description of the world by referring to the tradition of collective sources as 'our ancestors' (*maiores nostri*). By doing so he added authority to his classical sources without actually having to mention them specifically and by implicating the reader in a collective 'our'. He continued by providing what eventually became the standard tripartite description of the world - Asia, Africa, and Europe. From the separation of the world into three regions he moved on to describe the provinces and regions in each with its major river, landmarks and cities. There is a possibility that his description was using the now lost work of Emperor Augustus' leading general Marcus Agrippa as a source for

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distributum, deinde regionibus prouinciisque determinatum, expediam; quo facilius, cum locales bellorum morborumque clades ostentabuntur, studiosi quique non solum rerum ac temporum sed etaim locorum scientiam consequantur.' See also Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, in Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet (ed.), *Orose: Histoires (Contre Les Païenes)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), Book I.14-17, at p. 12.

[125] Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, p. 70. On the pun *urbis orbis* in Latin literature see Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri septem*, trans. by Adolf Lippold in *Le storie contro i pagani* (Milan: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1976), p. 367.

these landmarks. In fact, some have attempted to reconstruct Agrippa's lost work by combing Orosius' geographical introduction with two other contemporary works.[126] The image that emerges from his description is a traditional representation, one that is timeless.[127] The text contained anachronisms and often did not explain the time period that he was describing. For example, Carthage could be referring to both the ancient city destroyed by the Roman Republic and the later re-founded and contemporary city of fifth-century North Africa.[128] Instead, his introduction continued the classical tradition of describing the world as if from a watchtower, an image that is best echoed in the passages concerning the Temptation of Christ in Matthew and Luke:

> And the devil led him into a high mountain and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And he said to him: 'To thee will I give all this power and the glory of them. For to me they are delivered: and to whom I will, I give them.[129]

This watchtower tradition was so pervasive that even until the later middle ages artistic representations of landscapes, especially landscapes that included cities or villages, were often created as if the image in question were being depicted from

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[126] Alfred Klotz, 'Beiträge zur Analyze des geographischen Kapitels in Geschichtswerk des Orosius', in A. Rzach (ed.), *Charisteria: Alois Rzach zum achtzigsten geburtstag dargebracht* (Reichenberg: Gebrüder Stiepel, 1930), pp. 120-30.

[127] For a discussion on the 'timeless' tradition of the writings of Orosius see Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 348.

[128] For anachronisms see Karl Müllenhof, *Ueber die Weltkarte und Chorographie des Kaiser Augustus* (Kiel: Druck von C.F. Mohr, 1856), pp. 13-15; Janvier, *La géographie d'Orose*, pp. 226-37.

[129] Luke 4: 5-6: '*et duxit illum diabolus et ostendit illi omnia regna orbis terrae in momento temporis et ait ei tibi dabo potestatem hanc universam et gloriam illorum quia mihi tradita sunt et cui volo do illa.*' See also a similar passage in ' Matthew 4: 5; 8-9: '*tunc adsumit eum diabolus in sanctam civitatem et statuit eum supra pinnaculum templi… iterum adsumit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum et dixit illi haec tibi omnia dabo si cadens adoraveris me*' (then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple...Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me).

a watchtower or from a high hill and not from directly above as a modern map would be drawn. There is perhaps another explanation too. Alcuin, in his *Interrogationes et responsiones in Genesim*, questioned the passage in Gen. 13:14, in which perambulation was required to lay claim to the Holy Land. In other words, for one to conceive of geographic space and then lay claim to it, one needed to see it personally:

> All the land which thou seest, I will give to thee, and to thy seed for ever [...] Arise and walk through the land in the length, and the breadth thereof: for I will give it to thee.[130]

By implication then, the land that Abraham could not see was not the Promised Land. If this reading of Genesis is extended into an early medieval context it can be said that the land which was unknown to Christianity was not part of the Promised Land. Therefore, by attempting to make the land outside the known world known the authors may have been attempting to colonise land for Christendom. What then of the monstrous? Oftentimes, especially on maps such as the Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, monstrous races and non-Christian peoples were placed on the edges of the world. Did the authors of these representations concede this territory to the monstrous? Consequently, if perambulation was required for ownership then it could be argued that in a sense these texts allowed a type of philosophical, or textual, perambulation of the regions in question. By thinking or writing about the areas in question they were brought into the fold so to speak. The text then (Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos*), by defining the limits of what is known and unknown, in a sense allowed the reader to 'walk to and see' the unknown territory and in a sense claim it for Christianity, or in the case of some texts, claim it for the monarch or the emperor.

Despite the influence that Orosius had on the development of the geographical introduction in medieval texts, the authors that utilised it as a model were not simply creating copies of Orosius' own work. Instead, all of the subsequent texts

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[130] '*Omnem terram quam conspicis tibi dabo et semini tuo usque in sempiternum* [...] *surge et perambula terram in longitudine et in latitudine sua quia tibi daturus sum eam.*'

used different geographical descriptions, emphasising certain elements while ignoring others, just as Orosius had done. The geographical introductions are as different as the texts themselves. The difference was that geographic knowledge was seen as necessary for understanding history.

II.4.2: Bede

Bede was a voracious reader and a prolific writer who wrote exclusively in Latin though his first language would have been a Northumbrian dialect of Old English. In fact, it is within Bede's writings that a Latin translation of the oldest Old English poem survives in the form of Caedmon's famous hymn in praise of Creation.[131] Bede was also a very up-to-date scholar and was well informed on contemporary events within and beyond Britain. There is even evidence that Bede had received an updated version of the *Liber Pontificalis* complete with information concerning the life of Pope Gregory II almost immediately.[132] Bede was a polymath in the fullest sense of the word and composed texts ranging from tracts on the reckoning of time to biblical exegesis and from works of history and geography to saints lives. It is not surprising then that the great fourteenth-century Italian poet Dante Alighieri had both Isidore and Bede standing side by side in paradise and praised them as those 'who in contemplation exceeded Man'.[133] Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, likely his most important and certainly his most widely read work, was written late in his life (AD 731) and quite clearly was meant to demonstrate that the English (*Angli*) were God's newest chosen people and to compare England, if not to Paradise, then perhaps to a sort of North Sea Holy Land.

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[131] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, trans. by B. Colgrave*, et al.* in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969; repr. in 2008), Book IV.24, at pp. 215-16.

[132] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. xxvi.

[133] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. by C.H. Sisson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Although Bede located paradise in the East just as Isidore and many other Christian writers had done before, Bede emphasised that because of the sins of humanity not only was the human race expelled from Paradise but that its location was no longer even remembered.[134] Even though Paradise was lost to humanity the English landscapes he described throughout the *Historia Ecclesiastica* were paradisiacal in nature and certainly led the reader to compare the bucolic English countryside to that of Paradise as described in the Book of Genesis.[135] This is not really surprising considering that one of his more prominent sources, especially for information on the English countryside, was Gildas' *De Excidio et conquestu britanniae*, a text whose central aim was to make clear that Britain had been a better place prior to its destruction by the Saxon invaders. However, Bede's geographic introduction has not always been viewed in such a positive manner. It has been described in the past as being nothing more than a setting for the narrative that is to follow - something akin to stage directions in a play. However, it has also been designated as a complicated allegorical representation of Bede's own world view.[136] The other geographical references in his other works are often similarly treated as somehow being separable and dissociable from the main text.[137] This has led to a lessening of Bede's geographic reputation.

A great deal of valuable information regarding the implications of his work can be garnered from the title, or rather titles, of the text itself. The now universally acknowledged *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* was but one of a number of titles that Bede himself called the text. Near the end of the work itself Bede referred to it as both *Haec de historia ecclesiastica Brittanarium et maxime gentis anglorum,* and *Historia ecclesiastica nostrae insulaeac gentis in libris V.*[138] Each

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[134] Bede, *Commentary on Genesis*, trans. by Calvin B Kendall in *Bede: On Genesis* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), Book II.288-93; Book III.383-86, (pp. 149 and 228).

[135] See Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, pp. 55-6.

[136] Bede's tale of the instant death of snakes in Ireland is one of the most often cited images from the *Historia Ecclesiastica*; see Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I.1, at pp. 19-21.

[137] Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 233.

[138] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in M. Lapidge (ed.), *Histoire Ecclésiastique du Peuple*

of these three titles leads the writer to conceive of the work in slightly different contexts and appears to prioritise different elements, whether geographic or otherwise. In the end, however, the title that was universally accepted was likely done as a conscious attempt to have this work placed into the long tradition of *Historia Ecclesiastica* that found their origins with Eusebius of Caesarea.[139] However, after making the, apparently conscious, decision to emulate the tradition laid out by Eusebius, Bede then made very little effort to place his text into that wider tradition. That is, the text is not so much a history of the church as it a story of Christian Britain in a wider sense and Northumbria in a narrower one. What Bede's text does so well is navigate the difficult-to-define waters between a parochial and universal history.[140]

Bede began his work unapologetically with an un-introduced or explained geographic introduction. 'Britain', he wrote, 'once called Albion, is an Island of the ocean and lies to the north-west, being opposite Germany, Gaul, and Spain, which form the greater part of Europe, though at a considerable distance from them.'[141] Perhaps Bede felt that the geographic introduction was so firmly placed into the genre of history that he did not need to 'ease' the reader in to his geographic discussion; or alternatively he simply adopted wholesale Gildas' model - a text that also failed to provide a segue into his own geographic introduction.[142] Either way, Bede assumed that the reader needed no introduction or preamble.

Apart from the geographic introduction of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede also composed a number of texts devoted to the physical geography of Scripture. The most in depth of these alternative geographic texts was the *De locis sanctis*, which

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Anglais - Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum (Paris: Cerf, 2005). Andy Merrills also briefly comments on these alternative titles for the text in Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 234.

[139] Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 235.

[140] Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 235.

[141] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 9.

[142] See above for information on how Orosius popularised the geographic introduction, pp. 106-10.

Bede refers to in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* itself.[143] The *De locis sanctis*, which was heavily indebted to a previous and similarly titled work of an Irish Abbot named Adomnán, compared biblical landscapes to historical ones. In both his commentary on Samuel and his *Retractio in actus apostolorum*, Bede appended rather extensive lists of place names to his works under the title *Nomina Locorum* in the Samuel text and *Nomina regionum* in his *Retractio*.[144] In many other works, such as his commentaries on Acts (*Expositio actuum apostolorum*) and Revelations (*Explanatio apocalypsis*), or in his *De Natura rerum*, he included a number of topographic or geographic digressions.[145] For Bede then, geography definitely had an Orosian-connection to understanding history.

II.4.3: Jordanes

Jordanes was no amateur writer and was well versed in the classical tradition. Throughout the *Getica*, for example, Jordanes was able to weave in many ancient tropes and traditions of historical writing that went back as far as Herodotus. Jordanes also, following the model that Orosius had popularised, opened his own text with a geographical introduction. In it he described the northern lands of the Goths, including perhaps the first ever mention of Seasonal Affective Disorder

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[143] Bede, *De locis sanctis*, in J. Fraipont (ed.), *CCSL* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1965); Bede, *De locis sanctis*, trans. by W. Trent Foley and Arthur G. Holder in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999); see also Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Calvin B Kendall in *Bede: On Genesis* for the geography of Paradise.

[144] Bede, *In primam partem Samuhelis libri III*, in D. Hurst (ed.), *CCSL* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1969); Bede, *Nomina regionum atque locorum de actibus apostolorum*, in M.L.W. Laistner (ed.), *CCSL* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983); Bede, *Retractio in actus apostolorum*, in M.L.W. Laistner (ed.), *CCSL* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983) for a translation of the *Retractio* see Bede, *Retractio in actus apostolorum*, trans. by Lawrence T. Martin in *Cistercian Studies Series, vol. CXVII* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989).

[145] Bede, *Expositio actuum apostolorum*, in M.L.W. Laistner (ed.), *CCSL* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983); for an English translation see Bede, *Expositio actuum apostolorum*, trans. by Lawrence T. Martin in *Cistercian Studies Series, vol. CXVII* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989); Bede, *Explanatio apocalypsis*, in J.P. Migne (ed.), *PL* XCIII (Paris: 1850); Bede, *De natura rerum*, in C.W. Jones (ed.), *CCSL* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975).

(SAD).[146] Jordanes, a sixth-century Roman bureaucrat, wrote his *De origine actibusque Getarum* as an epitome of the *Gothic History* of Cassiodorus the Italian statesman and founder of the great monastery at Vivarium sometime in AD 551/52. Like so many late antique or early medieval writers not much is known about Jordanes himself. What we do know can be summarised as such: Jordanes was a Christian of Germanic decent who was writing in Constantinople in the middle years of the sixth century and there are some questions surrounding whether or not he may have been a bishop. The *Getica*, as Jordanes' text is better known, was also written in rather typical late antique Latin, which until the second-half of the twentieth century, led to it being classed as an inferior text with little or no value to understanding the actual events in question.[147] Because of the eventual loss of Cassiodorus' – presumably far longer and far more in depth – investigation into the history of the Goths, Jordanes' version remains our earliest and best glimpse into the rise of the Gothic *gens*. Scholarship has exhausted itself on the question of exactly what relationship Jordanes' text had to the now lost Cassiodorus one. Although this scholarship has produced a number of fantastic results it does force one to ask why.[148] Why is modern scholarship not more focused on addressing the surviving Jordanes text than with trying to reconstruct, or postulate what the original text contained? What has been shown so far is that the Cassiodorus version of the *Gothic History* was an attempt to reconcile Romans

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[146] Jordanes writes 'In the Northern part of the island the race of the Adogit live, who are said to have continual light in the midsummer for forty days and nights, and who likewise have no clear light in the winter season for the same number of days and nights. By reason of this alteration of sorrow and joy they are like no other race in their sufferings and blessings. And why? Because during the longer days they see the sun returning to the east along the rim of the horizon but on the shorter days it is not thus seen.' See Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, ch. III, p. 5. Though this is not a definitive nor medically persuasive description it is telling. Having spent a winter in Iceland myself and having experienced the effects of a lack of sunlight it does strike me as well-informed.

[147] See Mierow's distaste for the quality of the Latin in Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, pp. 16-18.

[148] There is far too much scholarship on the subject to outline it here. For summaries see the bibliographies of Stefan Krautschick, *Cassiodor und die Politik seiner Zeit* (Bonn: Habelt, 1983); Merrills, *History and Geography*; and James J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979).

with the fact that many of them were now under direct rule of Gothic barbarians. By providing the Goths with a Roman-style history and by giving the Goths recognisably Roman virtues and customs Cassiodorus was not only trying to promote but to applaud the house of the Amali, a line of kings from whom Theodoric the Great was descended. In other words, Cassiodorus was trying to ameliorate any potential problems between the Gothic rulers and the Roman ruled.[149] Jordanes on the other hand appears to have had a different agenda entirely. The late Charles C. Mierow wanted to see in Jordanes' *Getica* a kind of union between the two great races of Romans and Goths - a sort of merging of two royal lines.[150]

One of the great oddities of the *Getica* is that it contains a great deal of detail concerning the regions and peoples of the Eurasian Steppes. Perhaps Jordanes had access to an unnamed source, perhaps he was lying about only having Cassiodorus' text for three days, or perhaps he made notes from either or both. A peculiar suggestion, but one that seems to me to be compelling, is that Jordanes had access to a map of some sorts.[151] Whatever explanation one wishes to believe for the abundance of detail and proper names in Jordanes' work, one should not forget that Jordanes was writing in sixth-century Constantinople and very likely had access to copies of most of the manuscripts he needed in the libraries. We will look at the descriptions of both the Huns and Goths as written by Jordanes below.

II.4.4: Classical tradition of linking geography and history

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[149] Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, pp. 15-6. See also Cassiodorus, *Variae*, ed. and trans. by S.J.B. Barnish, *Cassiodorus: Variae* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), Book IX.25.4-6.

[150] Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, p. 16. See also the comedic 'happy-ending' version as imagined by Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, pp. 82-4.

[151] Mommsen thought he may have had access to a map. See Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. xxxi-xxxv.

Although it was Orosius' *Historiarum adversus paganos* which had the greatest influence on geographical writings in the Early Middle Ages it should be noted that he was not the first to make this connection between history and geography; he was just the one who that popularised it.[152] For example, a great many classical and postclassical writers, many of whom were very well-known and also widely available throughout the libraries of the Early Middle Ages, also sought to justify the composition and study of geographical works. Both Cicero and St Augustine regarded an appreciation of the physical world as a natural counterpart to the understanding of the past. Cicero, for instance, suggested that each could help to explain human experience.[153] Not one to underplay the allegorical and rhetorical effectiveness of anything, St Augustine thought that an understanding of geography and toponymy were essential to understanding Scripture historically, which is of course the first of the four ways in which Scripture was to be understood.[154] Remember, it was St Augustine who 'commissioned' the *Historiarum adversus paganos* of Orosius. So, perhaps, Orosius' geographic introduction, though original, was not entirely unexpected, given St Augustine's notions of the usefulness of geography.[155]

Connected to the geography of a region is the depiction of the type of creatures or peoples that inhabit the lands. This connection leads to monsters beginning to acquire familiar landscapes, although it is not always made explicit in the texts describing them. If the manuscript contained miniatures the monsters were usually placed into some form of recognisable landscape, which was more often than not rocky, barren, and generally marginal. This is perhaps nothing more than artistic

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[152] See above for a short introduction to the history of geography in the classical world, pp. 70-8.

[153] Cicero, *De oratore*, II.15.63.

[154] Augustine of Hippo, *De doctrina christiana*, in R.P.H. Green (ed.), *Oxford Early Christian Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Book II.27, 29, and 39; see also Merrills, *History and Geography*, p. 242.

[155] Augustine of Hippo, *De doctrina christiana*, in Green (ed.), *Oxford Early Christian Texts*, II.27–9, pp. 54-6. On the classical view of geography and its association to history compare Lozovsky, *The Earth is Our Book*, pp. 10-14 and Thomas O'Loughlin, 'The Exegetical Purpose of Adomnan's *De locis sanctis*', in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 24 (1992), pp. 37-53, at pp. 40-1.

license, however instead I would argue that it was more likely a residual image of the way in which these monsters were imagined in the medieval mind. They are almost never depicted within cities or even within the view of cities or villages, and are only depicted alongside humans as a means of narrating the story or in some cases even, the humans are depicted as food. Despite its obvious negative definition, the wilderness was often a place to which Old Testament prophets withdrew, like Amos and Jeremiah. Notwithstanding the negative association of the wilderness or of marginal lands it must be pointed out that the earliest monastic communities were often in very liminal regions geographically.

II. 5: Conclusions

Although the inclusion of monstrous tales and descriptions in medieval literature is still often considered a textual weakness at best, superstitious at worst, by a great many modern historians and literary critics, the texts we have just looked have demonstrated that this is simply not the case. Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* was simultaneously an encyclopaedic collection of classical tales of the monstrous and a text that was central to the notions of Roman Imperial expansion and power. St Augustine's *City of God*, one of the greatest works of theological writings in the Christian tradition, contains sections on monstrosity and treats these sections with the same deference and critical approach to previous traditions that St Augustine was famous for. Just as *Beowulf* was at first disregarded as unworthy of study but is now considered a piece of epic poetry worthy of study amongst scholars of Old English, these other texts (or sections of texts) ought to be reassessed in the same fashion. Jordanes' sections on the Huns, Orosius' geographic introduction, and Paul the Deacon's *cynocephalic* army need to be studied not as oddities or outliers to more important sections of the text in question but as central and necessary sections of their narratives. After all, some of these manuscripts were amongst the most popular manuscripts in the Early Middle Ages and it would have been far simpler and, given the cost of manuscript production, far cheaper to not include these sections if they were not considered relevant.

Although it is approaching its fiftieth anniversary, *Purity and Danger* by Mary Douglas succinctly and effectively discussed, among other things, the usefulness of creating spaces where symbolic enactment could be framed and controlled. For her, these liminal spaces were used as framing mechanisms, mnemonic devices, and as a way to control human experience in a culturally recognisable way. Much like the opening lines of a fairy tale often set the tone for the narrative, these culturally specific framing cues allow people to navigate problematic areas, religions, sicknesses, etc. 'The marked off time or place', she wrote, 'alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated "Once upon a time" creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales.'[156] Throughout the preceding chapter I have shown that geography, or perhaps more specifically, geography's use as a rhetorical strategy and focusing mechanism, used the preconceived notions of liminal space, unnatural landscapes, or marginal land, as a kind of geographical 'once upon a time'. By doing so, late antique and early medieval authors were able to define not only the geographic space between Us and Them but also they created a kind of literary map of difference which saw the good, useful, and often biblically recognised landscapes occupied by Christian and the less than desirable or even dangerous lands as occupied by barbarian groups.

According to Andy Merrills this reliance on geography as a rhetorical strategy was central to the understanding of history. He writes: 'For Orosius, geographical imagery was chiefly representative and rhetorical, and geographical causality only relevant on the broadest possible level - in terms of the predestined spatial parameters of the mundane empires, for example.'[157]

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[156] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 64.
[157] Merrills, *History and Geography*, p, 68.

Chapter Three: Human Nature(s) in the Monstrous and the 'Othering' of Nations or the Invention of the Medieval Barbarian as Monstrous

> The Saxons are savage. The Franks are treacherous. The Gepids are ruthless. The Huns are lewd. In short, the life of all barbarian nations is corruption itself. Do you think their vices have the same guilt as ours? Is the lewdness of the Huns as blameworthy as ours? Is the perfidy of the Franks as reprehensible as ours? Is the drunkenness of the Alemannic as blameworthy as the drunkenness of Christians? Is the rapacity of the Alans as much to be condemned as the greed of Christians? What is stranger if a Hun or Gepid cheats, he who is completely ignorant of the crime of cheating? What will a Frank who lies do that is new, he who thinks perjury is a kind of word and not a crime![1]

III.1: Introduction

The above quotation from Salvian's *De gubernatione Dei*, written *paulo post* AD 439, is a pretty stark and telling commentary on the image of the barbarian in the mind of at least one Late Roman writer. This was not his only view of the barbarian. In Salvian's celebrated, if somewhat infamous, account of all the things that were wrong with fifth-century Roman society, he discussed at some length the various means of wielding political power and authority in the recently post-Roman (though they probably did not realise this yet) regions of Gaul. Many of

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[1] See Jeremiah F. O'Sullivan, *The Writings of Salvian the Presbyter* (New York, NY: Cima Publishing, 1947); for the Latin see Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei*, in G. Lagarrigue (ed.), *Salvien de Marseille: Oeuvres, vol II: Du gouvernement de Dieu* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1975), *De gub.dei* Book IV.14: '*Gens Saxonum fera est, Francorum infidelis, Gepidarum inhumana, Chunorum impudica; omnium denique gentium barbarorum vita, vitiositas. Sed numquid eumdem reatum habent illorum vitia quem nostra, numquid tam criminosa est Chunorum impudicitia quam nostra, numquid tam accusabilis Francorum perfidia quam nostra, aut tam reprehensibilis ebrietas Alani quam ebrietas Christiani, aut tam damnabilis rapacitas Albani quam rapacitas Christiani? Si fallat Chunus vel Gepida, quid mirum est, qui culpam penitus falsitatis ignorat? Si pejeret Francus, quid novi faciet, qui perjurium ipsum sermonis genus putat esse, non criminis*'?

the *curiales*, he claimed, were simply tyrants who, in the name of Rome, collected taxes but did so unjustly, unfairly, and in excess. By doing so, these newly powerful and occasionally non-Roman (at least in the traditional sense of the word) men created a relationship of dependency through their actions.[2] There is even some evidence to assume that it was these same actions that led to the increased activity of the Bagaudae.[3] Whether it was to the Bagaudae or to these newly arrived 'barbarian' leaders that these disenfranchised and over-taxed peoples of the former Roman provinces turned, it is clear, to Salvian at least, that the best option for the long term success of these regions lay in the hands (and swords) of these barbarian leaders.[4]

Even if Salvian did not blame these people for turning to outlaws or barbarians for protection – a move that probably had more to do with his need to comment on the ills of the Romans then with any actual opinion about the barbarians, as Tacitus had done centuries earlier – he still did not have a very high opinion of them. Salvian was not alone in his negative views of the various barbarian groups. Many early Christian writers held a similar viewpoint and had to come to grips with the same changes to the world view that Salvian was witnessing, *i.e.* the barbarian migrations into the Roman West.[5] For example, Orosius, who was forced to flee from Spain to North Africa sometime between 409 and 411 because of incursions into his homeland by the Suebi, wrote his *Historiarum adversus*

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[2] Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei*, in Lagarrigue (ed.), *Salvien de Marseille: Oeuvres, vol II: Du gouvernement de Dieu*, Book V.4.18.

[3] For the somewhat infamous, and Marxist, interpretation of the Bagaudae see E. A. Thompson, 'Peasant Revolts in Late Roman Gaul and Spain', in *Past and Present* 2 (1952), pp. 11-23. For a more recent, and oppositional view see Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985). See also John F. Drinkwater, 'The Bacaudae of Fifth-Century Gaul', in J.F. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds.), *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 208-17.

[4] Daniel De Decker, 'A quelles langues, contrées, religions, rattacher le mouvement social des Bagaudes', in *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 45(4) (2005), pp. 423-66; see also E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians: The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

[5] O'Sullivan, *The Writings of Salvian the Presbyter*, p. 114; see also Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, *passim* but esp. at pp. 56-7, 240-3, and 354.

paganos in response to a request from St Augustine after the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410.[6] St Augustine himself composed his own *City of God* following the same events.[7] Somewhat strangely, however, Orosius seems to show sympathy for the subjugated groups, especially on the fringes. He even lessened the barbarousness of the Scythians by claiming that they ended up the way they did because of constant contact with the Mediterranean empires.[8] The anonymous authors of both the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* also had to deal with groups of peoples that, though not usually defined as barbarians by traditional historiography, were still described using very similar rhetoric and language. Both the author of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* and the Latin translator – Petrus Monachos – of *Ps. Methodius* had a working knowledge of Greek (which was a rarity north of the Alps in the eighth century). Both were interested in describing events and peoples on the periphery and were themselves probably outsiders, and crucially, both of them had access to Greek texts that were otherwise not available in the rest of Europe at this time. It has even been suggested that Petrus Monachos was a sort of refugee from the East and perhaps had himself been forced to flee from Arab invaders, eventually ending up in Western Europe. While the author of the *Cosmographia* also has the philosopher Aethicus, who was probably the authorial voice, flee the destruction of his homeland.[9] Despite the occasional sympathy shown by Orosius and Salvian, for many writers, from Late Antiquity right up to the modern day, the barbarian problem, whether one explains it in terms of immigration, invasion, or transformation, holds a special place in their psyche and is even how many writers

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[6] Orosius, *Historiarum adversus pagano*, trans. by Fear in *Seven Books of History Against Pagans*, pp. 3-4. It was while Orosius was in North Africa that he met St Augustine.

[7] Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei*, in Dombart and Kalb (eds.), *CCSL 47-48*. For an English translation see, Augustine of Hippo, *De civitate dei*, trans. by Henry Bettenson in *City of God*.

[8] See Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 55-6.

[9] The author of the *Cosmographia* mentions that he and his family had to flee from Albania: Anonymous, *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 205-7. The *Ps. Methodius* translator was likely fleeing destruction in the East too: Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*.

define and conceive of changing populations.[10] As we will see in this chapter these descriptions were often quite effective and occasionally had lasting and damming effects. In fact, associations or comparisons to barbarians is still an effective xenophobic shorthand for many.

Despite the overwhelmingly large role that barbarians play in the history of Western thought and literature it is worth bearing in mind, however, that although the sometimes ubiquitous notion of the barbarian seems easily defined, the word 'barbarian' was seldom defined as such in classical works.[11] Rather one must infer the intended definition from the context in which it was used.[12] Throughout the remainder of this chapter I hope to demonstrate that the rhetorical tradition of classical and late antique writers' descriptions of monstrosity played a major role

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[10] See Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*; Giorgio Ausenda (ed.), *After Empire: Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1995); Thomas S. Burns, *Barbarians Within the Gates of Rome: A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, ca. 375-425 A.D* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); Emma Dench, *From Barbarians to New Men: Greek, Roman, and Modern Perceptions of Peoples from the Central Apennines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Hugh Elton, 'Defining Romans, Barbarians and the Roman Frontier', in R.W. Mathisen and H.S. Sivan (eds.), *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), pp. 126-35; Iain Ferris, 'Insignificant Others: Images of Barbarians on Military Art from Roman Britain', in S. Cottam, *et al.* (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Durham 1994* (Oxford: Oxbow, 1994), pp. 24-31; Patrick J. Geary, 'Barbarians and Ethnicity', *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 107-29; Andrew Gillett, *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians* (London: Macmillan, 2009); and many others.

[11] It is also particularly difficult to derive identities from grave goods alone. See, for example, Guy Halsall, 'The Viking Presence in England? The Burial Evidence Reconsidered', in D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards (eds.), *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 259-76; Shane McLeod, 'Warriors and Women: The Sex Ratio of Norse Migrants to Eastern England up to 900 AD', in *Early Medieval Europe* 19(3) (2011), pp. 332-53; Susanne Hakenbeck, 'Roman or Barbarian? Shifting Identities in Early Medieval Cemeteries in Bavaria', in *Post-Classical Archaeologies* 1 (2011), pp. 37-66.

[12] Tzvetan Todorov, *La peur des barbares: au-delà du choc des civilisations*, trans. by Andrew Brown in *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), pp. 14-16.

in the shaping of a negative barbarian image by early medieval writers.[13] To paraphrase the words of John Drinkwater, the barbarian threat, especially the Germanic-barbarian threat, was largely a Roman artefact used and designed to justify imperial presence on the frontiers and imperial policy closer to home. In effect, the Roman imperial elite were creating a terrorist-type bogey man to justify their political gains of power at home.[14] In a similar vein, Patrick Geary famously wrote that 'the Germanic world was perhaps the greatest and most enduring creation of Roman political and military genius.'[15] The monstrous was used to a similar affect.

Although ancient writers tended not to define the term barbarian in their works, Salvian was one of the few Late Roman writers who did, though in his case it was still a rather problematic and vague definition. For him there were two types of barbarians in the world: pagans and heretics.[16] That is, there were barbarians who had not yet converted to Christianity and those who had but chose to turn their back on Orthodox (*i.e.* Catholic) Christianity and chose to follow a different version from that of Salvian. Both of these were obviously defined by their individual relations to Christianity and this led to some interesting problems for writers, which will be discussed below. Therefore, when reading texts about the early medieval and late antique barbarian, context meant everything. Throughout the *De gubernatione Dei*, Salvian was thinking aloud on the barbarian problem as he saw it. In it he wrote:

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[13] For a discussion in the difficulties of defining the 'barbarian' see Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, trans. by Andrew Brown in *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*, *passim* but esp. at pp. 17-19.

[14] John F. Drinkwater, *The Alamanni and Rome 213-496 (Caracalla to Clovis)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), *passim* but I am thinking specifically of the quotation on p. 360: 'What I propose here is that, as far as the late Roman west is concerned, the 'Germanic threat' was an imperial artefact – an indispensable means of justifying the imperial presence and imperial policies, and of maintaining provincial loyalty to the Empire.'

[15] Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. vi.

[16] Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei*, in Lagarrigue (ed.), *Salvien de Marseille: Oeuvres, vol II: Du gouvernement de Dieu*, Book IV.13.

> If God does regard human affairs, someone may say, if he cares for us, loves and guides us, why does he allow us to be weaker and more miserable than all nations? Why does he suffer us to be conquered by the barbarians? Why does he permit us to be subject to the rule of our enemies? To answer very briefly, as I have already said, he suffers us to endure these trials because we deserve to endure them.[17]

According to Salvian, the answer to the barbarian question was a simple one: Christians suffered because they deserved it. The various barbarian groups were instruments of God sent into the various Christian communities to test and punish them for their sinful and vice-filled lives. The barbarians, according to Salvian, were an effective test for the Christians because their faults and flaws were easily recognised and serialised by the Late Roman authors. 'The barbarians', wrote Salvian, 'are unjust and we are also; they are avaricious and so are we; they are faithless and so are we; to sum up, the barbarians and ourselves are alike guilty of all evils and impurities.'[18] Said in another way, the barbarians were recognisable and definable through their human traits. Given this understanding of the role of barbarians in Salvian's Christian writings it is not surprising then that they, *i.e.* barbarians, acted as more of a rhetorical device than anything else (not unlike Tacitus had done centuries earlier with his *Germania*).[19] As we shall see throughout the rest of this chapter, the barbarian was often used in this manner. They were trotted out as examples of what happened when Christian or Roman virtues were abandoned and ignored, or when the author wanted to ensure that the reader was meant to think negatively about the barbarian group in question.

However, it was not always that simple. Occasionally the barbarian group in question occupied multiple worlds simultaneously in the Christian mind. Barbarians could be both a mirror through which Christian faults could be seen and a kind of invading force that was intent on destroying Rome - at least the

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[17] Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei*, in Lagarrigue (ed.), *Salvien de Marseille: Oeuvres, vol II: Du gouvernement de Dieu*, Book IV.12.

[18] Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei*, in Lagarrigue (ed.), *Salvien de Marseille: Oeuvres, vol II: Du gouvernement de Dieu*, Book IV.14.

[19] Tacitus, *Germania*, in J. B. Rives (ed.), *Tacitus: Germania* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

Rome that the writers in question recognised.[20] This interpretation is not new and I do not claim to be overturning any historiographical apple carts by discussing Salvian's view on barbarians. If barbarians were defined in terms that were recognisably Christian and human, what was an author to do if they really wanted to paint a negative picture of a specific barbarian group? I will propose throughout the rest of this chapter that when comparing Christians to barbarians was not the intention of the author, or when the author wanted to demonise the barbarians in their own right, these authors often resorted to monstrous language and rhetoric to do so. On those occasions, the writers shrewdly, and resourcefully chose to add monstrous elements to their descriptions of barbarians as a means to diminish or wash away their humanity. This was done because barbarians needed to fill both roles. They needed simultaneously to be human, *i.e.* have recognisably Christian traits for when they were used as a literary mirror for Christian virtues; and inhuman traits when they were being used as examples of the unknown and dangerous. In Lacanian terms they had be able to be both other and Other simultaneously but also have room, if required, for their future conversion to Orthodox Christianity.

III.2: Ancient Ethnography

The language used to describe various peoples in ancient ethnography was not very imaginative. In many ways, the descriptive categories were inherited from previous authors. In other words, the same features and traits are often seen in different groups of peoples. These same recycled points are too often used as moralising features to be accidental. For example, they were often described as being incapable of building temples, or made no images of their gods, or because

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[20] This is essentially the central argument in Hartog's great work on the subject. However, in the case of Hartog it was Herodotus' Greeks that played the central role and the non-Greek barbarian (often Scythians) who were the reflection François Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote: Essai sur la représentation de l'autre*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

of their belief of the immortality of their souls they fought fiercely and bravely.[21]
That said, these ethnographic descriptions need to be taken with a grain of salt and
are probably closer to ethnographic literature than to anything resembling
ethnography in any sort of modern anthropological sense of the word. If then, one
agrees that these ethnographies are not necessarily to be taken at face value, what
use are they? If, for example, the ethnographic works of Pliny are not to be
understood as studies in other peoples, what use are these sections of his works to
historians? I think the answer to that is perhaps quite a simple one. Since they
were not intended as being anything approaching a modern ethnographic work but
were rather used to shine a light on (usually) Roman virtues and vices, they should
be approached in a way that assumes that these texts are more useful in telling us
information about the writer (or Romans) than as containing anything approaching
anthropological information about the barbarian groups in question. So, with that
in mind, it is not at all surprising when Murphy divides the ethnographic sections
of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* into three broad categories: the first category was
used to explain the limits of Roman geography by emphasising the correlations
between centre and periphery; the second category was used to explain and
describe the extreme forms of the human body again in contrast to Roman
sensibilities; and the third case saw them used to describe economic behaviours
that defined Roman culture by contrasting them against the behaviours of others.
Said in plainer terms, the power of Rome underlay all aspects of the *Historia*

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[21] Herodotus attributed the lack of temples to the Scythians (*Histories* 4.59) and to the
Persians (*Histories* 1.131). While Tacitus attributed this trait to the Germans (*Germania*
9 and 43) and to the Jews (*Histories* 2.78). See Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by
Carolyn Dewald in *Oxford World's Classics - Herodotus: The Histories* (Oxford: Oxford
University Press, 2008); Tacitus, *Germania*, in J. B. Rives (ed.), *Tacitus: Germania*; and
Tacitus, *Historiae*, ed. and trans. by John Yardley and Anthony Barrett, *The Annals: The
Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
Herodotus and Pomponius Mela reference this trait in relation to the *Getae* (*Histories*
4.93-94, *De chorographia* 2.18; Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by Carolyn Dewald in
Oxford World's Classics - Herodotus: The Histories and Pomponius Mela, *De
chorographia*, trans. by Frank E. Romer in *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World*
(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998). While Strabo and Caesar tell us
that the Gauls believed this too (*Geographica* 4.197, *Gallic Wars* 6.14; Strabo,
Geographica, in Jones (ed.), *The Geography of Strabo in Eight Volumes*; Julius Caesar,
The Gallic and Civil Wars, in S. A. Handford and Jane F. Gardner (eds.), (London: Folio
Society, 2006).

Naturalis, even the sections describing non-Romans (*i.e.* barbarians), and in many ways was a means of drawing all things into the periphery of Rome, including the unknown, mysterious, or monstrous.

In order, therefore, for the barbarian to act as both a reflection of Rome and as themselves they often needed to be separated from their humanity. This was, as we will see in this chapter, often done with allusions to their monstrosity or occasionally with references to their geographic location. After all, 'the opposition between vice and virtue', writes Todorov, 'needs to be maintained, but cannot be confused with the distinction between "us" and "them"'.[22] In order to perform this bilateral function they needed to be different from Romans but not simply othered. 'In the old grand narratives of ancient and European history' writes Andrew Gillett, 'barbarians are leading characters in the stories of the fall of Rome (as destructive outsiders) and in the origins of Europe (as forebears) – Janus-like figures who both usher out the old world of antiquity and ring in the new world of the Middle Ages.'[23] The difficulties of the reality these authors faced inevitably collided with the neatness of the narrative they were trying to represent.[24] The Goths provide a good example of this binary and of this potential for confusion. The Goths, of the late fifth- and early sixth-century Italy could be both benevolent leaders, and great rulers, in the eyes of some Italian and Byzantine writers, but they could also be invaders, destroyers, and uncultured heathens to others.[25] That is, they could be monstrous interlopers while also possessing certain Christian virtues. This dual, sometime contradictory, nature of the assigned identity of many of the barbarian groups presented some authors with a problem.[26] How were these groups described

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[22] Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, trans. by Andrew Brown in *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*, p. 18.

[23] Andrew Gillett, 'The Mirror of Jordanes: Concepts of the Barbarian, Then and Now', in P. Rousseau and J. Raithel (eds.), *A Companion to Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 392-408, p. 392.

[24] This sentence is a paraphrase from Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 56: 'The messiness of reality inevitably collided with the neatness of theory.'

[25] I am thinking specifically about Theodoric the Great and his various representations.

[26] This was only ever a problem when these barbarian groups were defined or identified by outsiders, *i.e.* Romans, and almost never existed when these same groups self-defined.

when the author needed to be both specific and vague simultaneously? How were both the obverse and reverse sides of their identity to be reconciled? Let us now turn to the question of identity to try to answer this question.

III.2.1: The problem with 'barbarians'

Roman authors loved to compare the Romans to the barbarians and barbarians to monsters. Nevertheless, the difficulty that arose from the occasional duality of the barbarian's role in the narrative had to be mitigated and reconciled. Not only, for example, were the former Roman territories being controlled by Romans being slowly diminished in exchange for complex (sometimes not complex) arrangements between Rome and its barbarian neighbours but these same barbarian groups were beginning to influence late antique and early medieval politics and religion. This meant that in a great many cases these writers needed to walk a fine line. Plainly said, at least as far as the centre was concerned, Roman identity was a constitutional one, the barbarian one was fabricated.[27]

One approach adopted by many late antique and early medieval authors, when forced to wrestle with this duality, was to present the peoples in question as a series of their traits, rather than as a description of their political actions or historical influence; such as in the quotation from Salvian at the beginning of this chapter.[28] The Franks were treacherous; the Gepids were ruthless; the Huns were lewd, etc.[29] However, this reliance on using character traits (often individualised ones) to describe barbarians was not always the case. This approach was so popular that lists of desirable and undesirable traits were occasionally inserted into

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In fact, when these same groups self-defined it was often the Romans or Byzantines who were described in less than glowing terms.

[27] Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 63.

[28] See also Ralph W. Mathisen, 'Catalogues of Barbarians in Late Antiquity', in R.W. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (eds.), *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman world: Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 17-32

[29] See above, p. 121. See also O'Sullivan, *The Writings of Salvian the Presbyter*, Book IV.14.

manuscripts. Albeit a far from exhaustive list these traits included:

The Weaknesses of Peoples	The Good Aspects of Peoples
The jealousy of the Jews	The Hebrews' foresight
The perfidy of the Persians	The Persians' constancy
The evasiveness of the Egyptians	The Egyptians' ingenuity
The deceit of the Greeks	The Greeks' wisdom
The savagery of the Saracens	The Romans' dignity
The fickleness of the Chaldeans	The Lombards' liberality
The inconsistency of the Africans	The Goths' soberness
The gluttony of the Gauls	The Chaldeans' wisdom
The bragging of the Lombards	The Africans' wit
The cruelty of the Huns	The Gauls' steadfastness
The uncleanliness of the Sueves	The Franks' fortitude
The ferocity of the Franks	The Saxons' perseverance
The stupidity of the Saxons	The Gascons' agility
The indulgence of the Gascons	The Scots' faithfulness
The lustfulness of the Scots	The Picts' broadmindedness
The inebriation of the Spaniards	The Spaniards' cleverness
The harshness of the Picts	The Britons' hospitality
The wrath of the Britons	
The squalor of the Slavs [30]	

In many instances, the authors of these texts used far more oblique language in their descriptions and in other instances they resorted to using classical tropes about geography, monstrosity, and the representation of the other. Here we will be focusing on the monstrous language that was recycled by many authors and the role that geography played in the descriptions of these barbarian groups. Although I have chosen to treat these as separate elements it must be stressed that the connection between geography, history writing, and identity, is very complex and one should always remember that all three of these elements were often included in a single paragraph.[31]

If the barbarian group(s) in question needed to, for one reason or another, be

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[30] I have taken this list from Gillett, 'The Mirror of Jordanes', pp. 393-4. For the Latin see *De proprietatibus gentium*, in T. Mommsen (ed.), *MGH Auctores Antiquissimi XI* (Berlin: 1894), pp. 389-90.

[31] The most recent, and by the far the fullest account of the relationship between the first two of these can be found in Merrills, *History and Geography*.

presented as having desirable traits the writer could simply list the good along with the bad. For example, 'The Gothic nation', writes Salvian, 'is lying, but chaste; the Alans are unchaste, but they lie less. The Franks lie, but they are generous. The Saxons are savage in cruelty, but admirable in chastity.'[32] This allowed the writer a kind of escape route. Although from a few centuries earlier, the gold-standard of barbarians being used by Roman writers as reflections of Roman culture was Tacitus' *Germania*.[33] It is immediately clear when reading the text that the *Germania* of Tacitus is more a treatise on Roman decadence then an actual ethnographic description of the peoples east of the Rhine.[34] It is curious then that other texts, especially ones with monstrous elements are not considered in the same light.[35] Why do historians also consider texts of fantastical monsters and lands as doing anything other than the same thing? Instead, monsters or monstrous descriptions of peoples should be seen as at least capable of being used as reflections of either the decay of Christian ideals, or the supremacy of the Roman centre.

More often than not the barbarian was used, quite simply, as the perfect illustration of what was bad. In the images conjured by writers of the barbarians' languages, traits, and customs, Late Roman Christians could be shown correct virtues. Said another way, barbarians were pedagogically effective as a kind of *via negativa*, regardless of the time period in question.[36] They were, in the fullest and truest sense of the word, monsters, *i.e.* things that showed or taught (*cf. monstrare* in

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[32] Salvian of Marseilles, *De gubernatione Dei*, in Lagarrigue (ed.), *Salvien de Marseille: Oeuvres, vol II: Du gouvernement de Dieu*, Book VII.15.

[33] W. Beare, 'Tacitus on the Germans', in *Greece & Rome, Second Series* 11 (1964), pp. 64-76.

[34] Holly Haynes, *The History of Make-Believe: Tacitus on Imperial Rome* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 13-14; see also Ellen O'Gorman, 'No Place Like Rome: Identity and Difference in the *Germania* of Tacitus', in *Ramus* 22 (1993), pp. 135-54.

[35] This is precisely what Tolkien meant in his essay Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics'.

[36] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, *passim*. Williams argues throughout this book, that since Eriugena's translations of Ps. Dionysian works, monsters were used for this purpose. However, I wholly disagree with accepting this interpretation wholesale. See my discussion above, pp. 45-8.

Latin).[37] For Salvian and others like him the barbarian was more than simply a person from outside the Roman Empire; the barbarian was the bogey man, the barbarian was evil incarnate, the barbarian was everything that civilised Rome was not, the barbarian was an example of the worst parts of humanity, and they were coming to destroy Christianity. Barbarian wickedness, such as was found in the quotation that opened this chapter, was often contrasted against Christian or Roman virtues and their, *i.e.* the barbarians', characteristics, whether moral, ethical, visual, or even sartorial, were also contrasted with those of Christians. Moreover, as we will see below, these same barbarians were often compared to monsters too, both explicitly and implicitly. Difficulties arose, however, when many of these barbarian groups remained in the now former Roman provinces, prospered, and even began to set up successful successor kingdoms on their own right beginning in the late-fifth century.

What message was an author sending when they chose to describe a certain group using language and vocabulary that can only be termed monstrous? For example, what was Jordanes trying to convey about the Huns when he described them as a 'most savage race, which dwelt at first in the swamps, were a stunted, foul, and puny tribe and possessed no language save one that scarcely resembled human speech, if I may call it so… [They had] a sort of shapeless lump, not a head, with pinholes rather than eyes.'[38] In addition, they were said to have lived in marginal land only accidentally discovered a path through the Maeotic Swamp when a couple of hunters (the only skill they possessed) followed a deer into the Gothic lands. It was not even a sense of misguided valour or the intestinal fortitude that is so often used to describe early northern Europeans that led them out of their swampy homeland but rather empty stomachs, a pragmatic yet much less heroic

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[37] See above, p. 121, and 131.

[38] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. 89-91: '*Genus hoc ferocissimum ediderunt, quae fuit primum inter paludes, minitum tetrum atque exile quasi hominum genus nec alia voce notum nisi quod humani sermonis imaginem adsignabat… velud quaedam, si dici fas est, informis offa, non facies, habensque magis puncta quam lumina.*' The translation is my own, however, see also Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, chapter XXIV, at p. 41.

reason. Alternatively, what was Bede trying to get readers to think about when he wrongly described the Picts as coming from Scythia?[39] Finally, what message was the anonymous author of the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* conveying when they replaced the *cynocephali* with the Turks in the apocalyptic narrative that they constructed? Other races, although monstrous in appearance, were not always monstrous in character. A number of races possessed traits that were valued, especially by classical authors, such as living in communities without money or materialism. Even the *cynocephali*, despite their monstrous appearance and diet, were depicted as living in *villae* and living off the land as herdsmen and farmers - a kind of simple and noble life. The Amazons, despite their long list of monstrous, anti-feminine, attributes are shown possessing at least a sense of maternal instinct when they were said to have 'found Minotaur cubs in the wilds and nourished them and gently domesticated them' in one text.[40] According to the book of Genesis, the ability and desire to domesticate animals was proof of humanity.[41] Although, strictly speaking, there is no denying the humanity of the Amazons, the explicit mention of their nurturing and domesticating the Minotaurs is certainly noteworthy and at the very least implies a kind of affinity towards monstrosity. Who and what an author chooses to describe in monstrous language is very telling of the author's conception of that group or region. This, naturally, leads to questions concerning the humanity of *cynocephali* and the Amazons – which is precisely, I think, what these authors were intending.

Ralph Mathisen has recently written a very interesting piece on the cataloguing of

[39] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book X.1, p, 10. There is some evidence, quite surprisingly, that the Picts may have been circulating their Scythian origin story at court even before Bede wrote about it. See James E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), pp. 147, 224-5, and 238-42; James E. Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia to the Problem of the Picts: Thoughts on the Quest for Pictish Origins', in S.T. Driscoll, J. Geddes and M.A. Hall (eds.), *Pictish Progress: New Studies on Northern Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 15-43.

[40] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 154-7: '*In solitudinibus catolis minotauris inuenisse ac enutrisse mansueteque domasse*'.

[41] Genesis 1:25-26.

barbarians in Late Antiquity.[42] In this article he discusses the loss of individual identity of the barbarian groups and a kind of melding together of their traits into easily accessible and simplistic terms. After all, what is the point of a catalogue, if not to create a shortened version of the information available. Although Mathisen does not explicitly mention this example in his article, a great example of this loss of individuation, and the seeming gathering together of the vast groups of peoples into easily identifiable groups can be seen in Bede's description of the Pictish past, which will be explored in greater detail below. It is suffice to say, for now, that the individual 'Picts' and 'Irish' who constituted those two groups lost all but their collective identity in Bede's writings. 'Roman Imperialists' writes Geary, 'found it easier to deal with others as thought they were homogeneous ethnic peoples than to acknowledge that the 'other' could be as complex and fluid as Romans themselves.[43] Said another way, the need for plurality superseded any notion of individuality.

III.2.2: Centre vs periphery or the struggle for rhetorical domination

In all the rhetoric of Western superiority, be it political, religious, cultural, legal, racial, economic, linguistic, or scholastic, the people from the Middle East, Africa, the Eurasian Steppes and from Eastern Europe are almost always left on the outside looking in. All too often these peoples are treated even worse; they are vilified and set up as a type of straw man or model of what a civilisation is not. The success of early modern European voyages of discovery, which all too often ended in genocide, theft, and destruction, are rolled out as proof of the West's superiority.[44] However, as is slowly becoming clearer the West's superiority is as much a myth as the stories surrounding Jason and the Golden Fleece; it is a little lie that the West tells itself to justify its centuries of domination. This lie has been told for nearly two thousand years and unfortunately Late Antiquity and the Early

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[42] Mathisen, 'Catalogues of Barbarians'. For a list of similar articles see p. 31, n. 3.

[43] Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 57.

[44] I am intentionally not going to cite any of the works of Niall Ferguson because he is one of the worst offenders and does not need any more publicity. But his much promoted 'West is the best' mentality is essentially a summary of every one of his works.

Middle Ages are at the heart of its creation. Additionally, many of the earliest depictions of Steppe peoples and Eastern Europeans are stored in texts form this time period. The national myths that modern European countries hold so dear and are so closely tied to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of nationalism, the role of Early Medieval migrations, and the development of national linguistic traditions simply do not hold up under scrutiny. What I hope to demonstrate in what follows is that these earliest depictions of peoples were simply literary tropes or devices used by the authors to justify their own dominance or ignorance. These authors, many of whom had no first-hand knowledge of the peoples they were discussing used bestial and monstrous tropes to define the characteristics, morals, traits, and even appearances of the various peoples not because these peoples were actually believed to be monsters or even believed to be like monsters but because by doing so the authors could convey to the readers their own superiority. In some cases the peoples' monstrous nature was even meant to justify their extinction.[45] By making the other monstrous and then by also praising the narrative's hero for overcoming monsters the author is condoning even asking for someone to annihilate the monsters in order to become heroic. After all, killing monsters is what heroes did and many of the monster killing tales of the Middle Ages also found their origins in the Early Middle ages.[46]

III.2.3: How does the monstrous add meaning?

The monstrous is occasionally so far removed from the aesthetic of beauty or the notion of morally correct that its monstrosity seems apparent and easily identifiable. However, opinions change, preconditions for what is monstrous alter,

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[45] Something that has repeatedly been brought to bear on numerous marginal groups throughout the middle ages, pre-modern, and modern world, especially with regard to European Jewish populations.

[46] Deformity, monstrosity, and simply undesirable characteristics have long been used to define the other in negative terms. In extreme cases, these characteristic were used to define what it was to be born a criminal; see Caesare Lombroso, 1876 in Umberto Eco (ed.), *On Ugliness* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), pp. 260-2; see also Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. by Hurley in *The History of Sexuality, vol 2: The Use of Pleasure*, *passim.*

and certain aspects of what was once considered monstrous vary over time or fall out of fashion completely. In some cases, the monster can be sympathised with as an innocent victim of humanity's need to self-define – to assign identity – or in other cases can be used a means to question humanity itself. These problems are often exaggerated and emphasised on edges or borders of geography, society, religion, and narrative, which simultaneously demonstrate problems with such categorisations and also provide a means to explain it. At other times the monstrous is used to flip preconceptions and force the reader to re-think their own notions of right and wrong. For example, in the famous lines in *Beowulf* in which both Grendel and Beowulf are described as unwelcome invaders into the other's world. It is only Beowulf's central role as the hero that prevents the reader from condemning his actions as murderous or monstrous.[47]

These aesthetic (mis-)conceptions of monstrosity and normality blur the boundaries of categorisation itself. It is, as I have argued above, these seemingly contradictory capacities – the ubiquity and obfuscation of definition – that demands that monsters play such an important role in defining what it is to be human, *i.e.* not monstrous; but it has also allowed the monster to adapt and change its role throughout history, thus allowing them to survive and thrive today. If monsters and their *raison d'être* could be easily defined, their power over us would diminish. They would become nothing more than pigments on a page, curves in marble and stone, or letters on a manuscript; they would cease asking us why they were created in the first place.

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[47] For example, when comparing the language used to describe Grendel as he entered Herot with the language used to describe Beowulf when entered Grendel's layer it becomes apparent that context, setting, and timing can alter the concept of monstrosity – it becomes less light and dark. For a discussion on the heroes and villains in *Beowulf* see Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), pp. 169-202. For the Old English text see Anonymous, *Beowulf*, in R.D. Fulk, R.E. Bjork and J.D. Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008); compare esp. lines 710-38 with lines 1497-1528, pp. 26-7, 51-2. For three very different English translations see Anonymous, *Beowulf*, trans. by Seamus Heaney in *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (London: Faber, 1999); Anonymous, *Beowulf*, trans. by R. M. Liuzza in *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2000); Anonymous, *Beowulf*, trans. by Thomas Meyer in *Beowulf: A Translation* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum, 2012).

Monstrosity, like aesthetics, is subjective.[48] Something cream-coloured, for example, will look far whiter when compared to something brown. This same trick is applied to the psyche when humans compare themselves to monsters, *i.e.* humanity looks more human when compared to the inhuman. Monsters could be used to compare geographic regions, religions, genders, classes, morals; almost nothing was outside the scope of monstrous comparison. That is, everything could be described in monstrous terminology or using monstrous rhetoric. A great example of this subjective monstrosity is found in Frederic Brown's *Sentry* - one of the greatest science fiction short stories of the twentieth century:

> I was soaked to the skin and up to the eyes in mud and I was hungry and cold and I was fifty thousand light-years far from home. A foreign sun emitted an icy bluish light and the gravity, double what I was used to, made the slightest movement weary and painful. After some forty thousand years, this corner of the universe had not changed at all. It was very easy for the air force, with brilliant spacecrafts [*sic*] and superweapons [*sic*], but when one arrived there, it fell to the infantryman to take and hold the position, with blood, inch by inch. Like this bloody planet of a star we had not heard of it until we landed on it. And now it was holy ground because the enemy had come. The enemy, the other intelligent race everywhere in the galaxy... cruel, repulsive, hideous creatures, horrible monsters. The first contact had taken place in the centre of the galaxy, after the slow and difficult colonization of thousands of planets; and war broke out, immediately. They had begun to fire without trying to reach an agreement, a peaceful solution. And now, planet by planet, we had to fight tooth and nail. I was soaked to the skin and up to

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[48] Umberto Eco spends a great deal of time on this subject in Eco, *On Ugliness*, *passim*, but esp. at pp. 107-25. I am also reminded of Hegel's famous quotation on the subject: 'It may happen that whereas not every husband may find his wife beautiful, at least every young swain finds his sweetheart beautiful, indeed to the exclusion of all others; and if the subjective taste for this Beauty has no fixed rules, then we may consider this a good thing for both parties ... We often hear it said that a European Beauty would not please a Chinese, or even a Hottentot, insofar as the Chinese have a completely different concept of Beauty from the Negroes ... In fact, if we contemplate the works of art of these non-European peoples, the images of their deities, for example, images that have sprung from their fancy as sublime and worthy of veneration, they may strike us as the most hideous of idols. In the same way, just as the music of such peoples may strike us as a detestable racket, so in their turn will they consider our sculptures, pictures, and music as meaningless or ugly'; see also Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics*, trans. by T. M. Knox in *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, vol. I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 44-5.

the eyes in mud and I was hungry and cold; the day was livid, the wind was blowing so hard that it harmed my eyes. But the enemies were trying to infiltrate and all the positions were vital. I was alert, the gun ready. Fifty thousand light-years far from my mother country, fighting on a foreign world and I wondered if I could save my skin until I could go back to my homeland, my wife, my little daughter… Then I saw one of them creeping towards me. I aimed my weapon and opened fire on it. The enemy gave that strange horrible cry that all of them used to utter. Then a deathly silence. It was dead. The cry and the sight of the dead body made me shudder. In the course of time, many of us had become accustomed, took no notice of that; but not me. They were horrible disgusting creatures, with only two legs, two arms, two eyes, that sickening white skin and without scales![49]

I realise that a passage from a twentieth century science fiction short story might, at first glance, seem out of place in a thesis about the Early Middle Ages, however, I would suggest that the jarring perception of the seemingly out-of-place is precisely what the rhetoric of monstrosity was supposed to do in the texts that we have looked at. In the case of this short story, it is both the subject matter and the story itself – *i.e.* the subjectivity of the monstrous and the realisation that the story places the reader in the perspective of an alien – and the inclusion of the story itself, which are meant to be monstrous; be outside-the-centre. After all, many of the texts that we will look at in this chapter, and throughout the remainder of this thesis are either themselves marginalised because of their subject matter or marginalise sections of their own narrative for rhetorical advantage.

The *True History* of Lucian of Samosata, written sometime in the middle of the second century AD, is surely the first science fiction story and shares some similarities with Brown's short story. Lucian's *True History*, written in the peregrinatory style of Homer's *Odyssey*, sees the main characters (including Lucian himself) sail west from Pillars of Hercules until, after being blown off course for seventy-nine days, they arrive on an island that has wine-filled rivers and is home to giants. After leaving the island, the heroes are caught in a whirlwind and after some days trapped inside are eventually deposited on the

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[49] Frederic Brown, 'Sentry', in B. Yalow (ed.), *From These Ashes: The Complete Short SF of Fredric Brown* (Farmington, MA: NESFA Press, 2002), pp. 549-50.

moon. Upon their arrival on the moon they soon become involved in an interstellar war between the King of the Moon and the King of the Sun over the disputed colonisation of a place called the 'Morning Star'. As if that was not odd enough material for a second century narrative, the travelling band of unwitting heroes also encounter mushroom-stalk men, flying acorns with dog faces, and centaurs made of clouds. After returning to earth the travellers get trapped inside a 200-mile-long whale, encounter the heroes of the Trojan War, meet various mythical and semi-mythical creatures, and discover that Homer is being punished for all eternity for the lies he published in his *Histories*. The story abruptly ends when the companions eventually discover a new continent on the other side of Ocean. It is pretty clear that Lucian intended this text to be read as satire. He was trying to shed a light on the uncritical use and abuse of classical texts, complete with their strange creatures, and unbelievable geography. Instead he was arguing for a type of experiential approach to truth, *i.e.* if you have not seen it or heard it first-hand, then you need to question its veracity. This is an approach, I think, that sounds very modern! Interestingly, Lucian, who was from the former Armenian kingdom of Commagene, called himself a 'barbarian' throughout the text.[50]

The texts we just looked at are not medieval. However, they both either recounted events from the medieval past or contained conceptions of the subjectively monstrous that were very similar in style and approach to many of the medieval texts we shall look at below. By way of example we shall look at the way the *cynocephali* were described in a couple of medieval texts. The *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* has a very interesting and unique approach to the *cynocephali*. It is also a text that shares many of the same oddities and monsters as the texts we just looked at. In fact, the *Cosmographia* has even been called science fiction by its

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[50] For the text see Lucian of Samosata, *True History*, trans. by Paul Turner in *True History and Lucius or the Ass* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1958). For recent work on the text see S. C. Fredericks, 'Lucian's *True History* as SF', in *Science Fiction Studies* 3(1) (1976), pp. 49-60; Roy Arthur Swanson, 'The True, the False, and the Truly False: Lucian's Philosophical Science Fiction', in *Science Fiction Studies* 3(3) (1976); Aristoula Georgiadou and David H.J. Larmour, *Lucian's Science Fiction Novel True Histories: Interpretation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Greg Grewell, 'Colonizing the Universe: Science Fictions Then, Now, and in the (Imagined) Future', in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 55(2) (2001), pp. 25-47.

latest editor and translator.[51] Even a cursory examination of the depiction of the *cynocephali* in the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* demonstrates that they were conceived of as monstrous, liminal creatures, yet not entirely horrible. There is a sense, no matter how small, that even they contained certain non-monstrous characteristics, perhaps even human ones:

> He writes of Munitia, an island in the North, examining the *cynocephali*, in a very well-known investigation, [it is claimed that] they have the heads of dogs but they have their other limbs in human form; their hands and feet are like those of the rest of the human race. They are tall in stature; their appearance is ferocious; and monsters are unheard of among them. The peoples near to them call them *Cananei*, for their women do not bear much resemblance to them. They are a wicked race, which no history narrates save for this philosopher. And the people of *Germania*, especially those who administer taxes and their traders, affirm that they quite often engage in naval commerce with that island they call that race the *Cananei*. These same peoples travel around bare-legged, they treat their hair by smearing it with oil or fat, and give off a strong smell; they lead a most foul life. They eat the unlawful meat of quadrupeds - mice, moles and others. They have no proper buildings but tents; [they live] in wooded and secluded places, swamps and wetlands; [they have] numerous cattle and an abundant supply of sheep and birds. They are ignorant of God and worship demons and auguries; they have no king. They use tin rather than silver, saying it is brighter and softer than silver; indeed, it is not found in those regions but has to be brought from elsewhere; gold is found on their shores. But it [their shores] does not produce any fruits or vegetables; there is plenty of milk but little honey. All this the philosopher writes in his profane ways.[52]

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[51] Anonymous, *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, p. xi.

[52] For the Latin see *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 26-8: '*Munitiam insolam septentrionalem scribit. Homines cenocefalus nimis famosa indagatione scrutans capite canino habere similitudinem, reliqua membra humana specie, manus et pedes sicut reliqui hominum genus. Procere statura, truculenta specie, monstra quoque inaudita inter eos quos uicinae gentes circa eos "Cainaneos" appellant, nam feminae eorum non praeferunt tantum horum similitudinem. Gens scelerata, quam nulla historia narrat nisi hic philosophus. Et gentes Germaniae, maxime qui uectigalia exercent, et negotiatores eorum, hoc adfirmant quod in ea insola crebrius nauale conmercio prouehunt et gentem illam "Chananeos" uocitant. Idem gentiles nudatis cruribus incedunt, crines nutriunt oleo inlitas aut adipe fetore nimium reddentes, spurcissimam uitam ducentes. Inmundarum quatrupediarum inlicita comedent, mus et talpas et reliqua. Aedificia nulla condigna, trauis cum tentoriis filteratis utentes; siluestria loca et deuia, paludes et*

In this example, the *cynocephali* were imagined as neither wholly human nor wholly monstrous but rather as a sort of hybrid that possessed traits of both. They had the heads of dogs and broke the dietary laws of Leviticus by eating unlawful meat of unclean quadrupeds yet they wore clothes to cover their genitals which demonstrated that they possessed a modicum of modesty or perhaps even felt Adam and Eve's shame of nudity.[53] Furthermore, they practised limited agriculture, lived in *villae*, and even paid taxes.[54] Another example, even more laudatory of the human nature of the *cynocephali*, is seen in a missionary letter by Ratramnus of Corbie to Rimbert of Bremen.[55] In both of these instances, the monstrous was being used subjectively and as means to explore issues of human nature and what exactly makes a person human. Is it God that makes us human or is it society and culture? God created the *cynocephali* with the heads of dogs and forbade the eating of quadrupeds, but it is man who has to deal with issues of modesty and sustenance. How are these differing needs reconciled?

As we have seen above, the prevailing Christian answer to these questions was first laid out by St Augustine. That is, God created everything, and God's intentions are unknowable, so if there are monsters and strange creatures then God most have created them but for reasons that humanity is unable to understand.[56] Said another way, in the description of the *cynocephali* the modern historian can

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arundinosa; pecora nimium et auium copia ouiumque plurimarum. Ignorantes deum, demonia et auguria colentes, regem non habent. Stagno magis utuntur quam argento; molliorem et clariorem argentum dicunt stagnum; nam illarum partium non inuenitur, nisi illinc fuerit delatum aliunde; aurum inuenitur in litoribus eorum. Fruges non gignit nec holera; lactis copia multum, mel parum. Haec omnia idem philosophus profana mentione scribit.' For discussions on this specific passage see Wood, 'An Exercise in Difference'; Ian Wood, 'Categorising the *Cynocephali*', in R. Corradini, *et al.* (eds.), *Ego Trouble: Authors and Their Identities in the Early Middle Ages* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), pp. 125-36; Berg, '"Breasts of the North"', pp. 569-73.

[53] For a good summary of the subject see James David Velleman, 'The Genesis of Shame', in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30(1) (2001), pp. 27-52, *passim.*

[54] Wood, 'Categorising the *Cynocephali*', esp. at pp. 127-33.

[55] Ratramnus of Corbie, *Epistolae*, in E. Dümmler (ed.), *MGH Epp. VI* (Berlin: 1895), pp. 127-206, at pp. 156-7.

[56] See above, pp. 48-52.

hear an echo of a debate about what it was that made a Christian a Christian. In other cases, the debate concerning monstrous traits was more insidious. These traits could be physical, as in the case of the *cynocephali* or moral as in the case of Jews. Over time certain physical deformities became synonymous with moral ones. For example, by the later Middle Ages, Jews were often portrayed with boils, warts, and other deformities. On occasion they were even depicted with horns, cloven hoofs or tails and there were even some reports of Jews eating children and consuming their blood.[57] Bettina Bildhauer, in a very interesting chapter on the portrayal of Jews in the Middle Ages, has shown that Jews were conceived of as other in comparison to what she called the 'metaphorical body of Christendom' during the Middle Ages. In other words, they were both geographically liminal, as in the location of Gog and Magog on *mappae mundi*, and physically monstrous because of their desire for Christian blood and their supposed cannibalistic nature.[58]

In sticking with physical attributes of monstrosity and the role that these traits played in the othering of an out group, David Spurr has identified a rhetorical tradition in Western colonial writing in which 'non-Western peoples are essentially denied the power of language and are represented as mute or incoherent. They are denied a voice in the ordinary sense – not permitted to speak – and in a more radical sense – not recognized as capable of speech'.[59] In the *Indika* of Ctesias, for example, the *cynocephali* were located in India, lived in caves, and their only form of verbal communication sounded like the barking of dogs. Though, interestingly, the author makes it clear that the *cynocephali* were capable of using hand signals even though they were incapable of speech.[60] Does

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[57] Gary F. Jensen, *The Path of the Devil: Early Modern Witch Hunts* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 156. See also Andrew Colin Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200-1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 3-4, 49-53.

[58] Bettina Bildhauer, 'Blood, Jews and Monsters in Medieval Culture', in B. Bildhauer and R. Mills (eds.), *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 75-96, at pp. 76-80, 83-4.

[59] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 104.

[60] 'According to Ctesias, in these mountains live men who have the head of a dog. Their

this tell us anything about the author's conception of India, the people who live there, or the language(s) spoken there? It seems to me that it does. In the more favourable recounting of the *cynocephali* that is contained in the letter of Ratramnus of Corbie to Rimbert, Archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, the *cynocephali* were depicted as monstrous but with a certain level of humanity and civilisation.[61]

In the letter Ratramnus, a monk at the monastery of Corbie, answers a question from a, now lost, letter by Rimbert of Bremen concerning the nature of the *cynocephali* and whether they ought to be converted to Christianity if encountered.[62] The question at hand was not a flippant or superstitious question between a couple of unknown and minor figures of the time. Rather, this was a serious question, with real theological and missionary implications, between two of the brightest scholars in Northern Europe at the time.[63] Ratramnus, for his part, had access to the vast holdings in the Corbie library and was a very capable writer

clothes come from wild animals and they converse not with speech, but by howling like dogs, and this is how they understand each other. They have larger teeth than dogs and claws that are similar but longer and more rounded. They live in the mountains as far as the Indus River and they are black and very just, like the rest of the Indians with whom they associate. Since they understand what the other Indians say but cannot converse, they communicate by howling and making gestures with their hands and fingers like the deaf and mute. The Indians call them Kalystrioi which in Greek means *Cynocephaloi* ('Dog-Headed People'). They have 120,000 people in their tribe.' Translation taken from Ctesias, *Indika*, trans. by Andrew Nichols in *Ctesias: On India* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2011), § 37.

[61] Ratramnus of Corbie, *Epistolae*, in Dümmler (ed.), *MGH Epp. VI*, at pp. 155-7; see also Scott G. Bruce, 'Hagiography as Monstrous Ethnography: A Note on Ratramnus of Corbie's Letter Concerning the Conversion of the Cynocephali', in G.R. Wieland, C. Ruff and R.G. Arthur (eds.), *Insignis Sophia Arcator: Essays in Honour of Michael W. Herren on his 65th Birthday* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 45-56.

[62] Ratramnus of Corbie, *Epistolae*, in Dümmler (ed.), *MGH Epp. VI*, p. 155: '*Quaeritis enim, quid de Cenocephalis credere debeatis, videlicet utrum de Adae sint styrpe progeniti an bestiarum habent animas*.'

[63] Max Manitius (ed.), *Geschichte der Lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters, 3 vols* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1911-31), vol. I, pp. 412-7 (Ratramnus) and vol. I, pp. 705-7 (Rimbert). For an investigation into the missionary context of the letter see Ian Wood, 'Christians and Pagans in Ninth-Century Scandinavia', in B. Sawyer, P.H. Sawyer and I. Wood (eds.), *The Christianization of Scandinavia: Report of a Symposium Held at Kungälv* (Alingsaas: Viktoria Bokforlag, 1987), pp. 36-67, esp. at pp. 63-6.

and thinker.[64] His corpus included treatises on the Eucharist, predestination, the *filioque* question, and other topics. Furthermore he also reportedly had a close relationship with Charles the Bald.[65] Rimbert was one of St Anskar's protégés and followed him as archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen after Anskar's death in 865. In fact, Rimbert was the person responsible for penning the *vita* of St Anskar during his tenure as archbishop. St Anskar, occasionally referred to as the apostle of the North, was responsible for a great deal of early missionary work in the region so it is not at all surprising that one of his students, Rimbert, followed suit.[66] After stating that he had investigated the works at the great library in Corbie, and after he had met an associate of Rimbert and questioned him about the *cynocephali*, Ratramnus concluded that the *cynocephali* were not animals and instead were humans with rational minds and were, therefore, capable of being converted. This decision went against centuries of Christian writings that saw the *cynocephali* as either narrative fabrications, or as one of the monstrous races that God created for inexplicable and unknown reasons.[67] Another, more traditional, description of them can be found in Isidore's *Etymologiae*. In that text, Isidore restricts his description to the bare essentials when he says:

> They are called *cynocephali* because they have dogs' heads, and their barking reveals that they are nearer to beasts than humans. They originate in India.[68]

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[64] For a discussion on the library at Corbie see David Ganz, *Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990).

[65] On his role in the predestination debate see David Ganz, 'The Debate on Predestination', in M. Gibson and J. Nelson (eds.), *Charles the Bald, Court and Kingdom* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), pp. 283-301.

[66] For further information on St Anskar and his evangelization of the North see Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400-1050* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), pp. 123-41; see also James Palmer, 'Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* and Scandinavian Mission in the Ninth Century', in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55(2) (2004), pp. 235-56.

[67] See St Augustine's discussion of monsters above, pp. 48-52. For a discussion on Ratramnus' odd findings see Bruce, 'Hagiography as Monstrous Ethnography'.

[68] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, Book XI.iii.15: '*Cynocephali appellantur eo quod canina capita habeant, quosque ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur. Hi in India nascuntur.*'

Despite the brevity of Isidore's description, a medieval reader would have been able to deduce much from it. By describing the race as possessing dog-heads the reader would instantly be inclined to consider them as other. However, in Isidore's description, it is not the 'Dog-headedness' of the *cynocephali* but their barking, or lack of speech, that signals them as being 'nearer to beasts than humans'. After all, language is a central trait not only of civilisation but of humanity in the Christian tradition.[69] By telling the reader that the *cynocephali* was incapable of human speech he was not only othering them but also privileging speech as a human trait.

By using the various and variable descriptions of the *cynocephali* as a sort of case study into how monstrosity was used to alter pre-conceived notions of humanity and geography (think of the representations of India and the North) we will now turn our attention to more recognisable landscapes (at least in the Western tradition) and real peoples. What are we as readers supposed to think about peoples whose languages were described as incoherent, or as grunting? What are we supposed to think about peoples who practise human sacrifice or who do not see fit to build temples? What are we to think of peoples who live on the farthest edges of the known world?

III.3: Scythians

> Scythia is a land of *eremia*, a zone of *eschatia*, a deserted place and a frontier: one of the ends of the earth. It was here that Power and Might brought Prometheus, to be chained up by order of Zeus: 'Here we are on the soil of a distant land,' declares Power, 'journeying in the Scythian country, in a desert empty of human beings.'[70]

Scythia was the end of the earth for many classical and medieval writers. It was

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[69] I am thinking especially of the biblical story of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).

[70] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, p. 12. For the original French edition see François Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote: Essai sur la Représentation de l'Autre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

an ill-defined and confusing place, full of monsters, hordes of people (often on horseback), and strange religions. It was often described as laying in the far North; at other times it was in the East; and occasionally it was described as being both. Scythia extended from the edges of the known world to places that are untouched and unknown to humans. It was a place of un-cultivatable lands, lakes, mountains, uninhabitable forests, and the Maeotic Swamps.[71] By placing Scythia outside the *oikoumene*, classical writers and thinkers were making it clear that Scythia was to the Mediterranean core what frontier lands were to a classical Greek city, *i.e.* liminal.[72] It was the definition of *eschatia*.[73] This notion of Scythia as the geographic periphery in relation to the Mediterranean and European core remained a constant in late antique and early medieval writings.[74]

The Scythians, according to Herodotus, were a people with a conflicting and contradictory past. What is most probable is that the Scythians, like the Germanic tribes from the north and east of the Rhine-Danube frontier, were more likely a collection of like-minded and culturally similar groups of peoples from the Steppes rather than a cohesive people.[75] Perhaps they even originated from as far

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[71] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, pp. 12-33, but esp. at pp. 12-19.

[72] Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* and Herodotus' *Histories* are two of the more well-known early mentions of Scythia. In both instances it is a harsh place on the absolute edges of the earth.

[73] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, p. 13.

[74] Despite the popularity of the Herodotean model there are some questions over just how widely read he was. Andrew Gillett seems to think that most references to Herodotus were more akin to 'name dropping' then to actual citation. That said, it was a popular manuscript with some forty-six papyrus scrolls surviving from the Christian period alone. For more on this topic see Gillett, 'The Mirror of Jordanes', at pp. 406-8. Though it lies outside the scope of this project an investigation into the negative opinions still held today by many in the West concerning the Slavic peoples from Eastern Europe, and the people who live in the regions to the northeast of the Caucasus Mountains, and the area between the Black and Caspian Seas are almost certainly traceable to this narrative model of linking Scythia (and by extension the Steppes) to the periphery.

[75] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by Carolyn Dewald in *Oxford World's Classics - Herodotus: The Histories*, Book IV, 1-30, at pp. 235-46.

away as Mongolia.[76] This collective image of the Scythians as a single group of people lies at the very heart of the confusion surrounding not only the region as a whole but almost every single group that has originated from that region in the past 2500 years. After all, the Scythians were never a single people and seldom acted as a homogeneous collective. Rather, like the early Germanic groups, they were an assemblage of people whose goals and aspirations – often revolving around warfare or defence – occasionally overlapped so that they acted temporarily as a single unit. To outside observers they would have appeared to have been a single entity but they were, in fact, a collection of individual groups.[77] This confusion and misperception can be partly blamed on a paucity of information concerning the region but also on the Herodotean version of Scythia that was adopted by so many late antique and early medieval writers. It has even been suggested that Herodotus' Scythians were largely, if not entirely, a fictitious fabrication used entirely as a foil for the Greeks.[78] Though there is an element of believability in such an interpretation, by adopting a strictly literary analysis of the events at the expense of both historical and archaeological evidence concerning central Asia, it becomes clear that the veracity of at least some of Herodotus' claims are well-founded. That said, there has still been very little emphasis by modern historians on the Steppe region of central Asia.[79] Whatever one's understanding of Herodotus' writing, the effect that the *Histories* had on the Scythian trope is undeniable and has probably added more to the region's latter day misunderstanding and obfuscation then is usually credited to him.

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[76] Hyun Jin Kim, 'Herodotus' Scythians Viewed from a Central Asian Perspective: Its Historicity and Significance', in *Ancient West and East* 9 (2010), pp. 115-34, esp. at pp. 119-21.

[77] Kristian Kristiansen, *Europe Before History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 193.

[78] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, *passim*; see also Detlev Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots*, trans. by J.G. Howie in *Herodotus and His 'Sources': Citation, Invention and Narrative Art* (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1989), *passim*. For an opposite take see Kim, 'Herodotus' Scythians'. As usual with historical debate, I suspect the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

[79] Kim, 'Herodotus' Scythians', *passim* but esp. at pp. 115-7, 119, 125, and 129-30.

One of the effects of this trope is found in the naming of groups of people from the Steppes. It became a convention of classical and late antique authors to disregard or ignore the individual names of peoples from Scythia and group them all under the term Scythians.[80] Alternatively, when names of peoples were listed they were often recycled and reused from ancient lists. Moreover, once a name was added to the list it was rarely removed.[81] By combining these two stylistic conventions authors made it very difficult, if not impossible, for the readers of these ancient texts to garner any useful, let alone, accurate information on the region or the peoples in question. Despite this confusion, this ethnographic material was essential in the Greco-Roman historical tradition. Herodotus' narrative concerning military and political events in the ancient world, for example, was almost matched in length and detail by the verbose, confusing, and often disregarded as digressionary, descriptions of foreign lands and foreign peoples.[82]

Liebeschuetz does not believe that this tendency to refer the various groups collectively and incorrectly as Scythians was a literary convention, 'because', he writes, 'historians did not know that they were writing about a great variety of peoples'. Instead, he goes on to say 'they followed this convention because they preferred classical to contemporary proper names, perhaps sometimes motivated also by an arrogant disregard of discrimination, just as western Europeans used to refer to "Orientals."'[83] If this 'disregard of discrimination', as Liebeschuetz calls it, was motivated by arrogance, or simply was meant to emulate ancient writers but is not a literary convention then what is it? Curiously this statement, which to me seems to be a very contentious one, does not appear in the main text of the article but is buried in a footnote with one brief and truncated quotation from Orosius providing evidence for his statement. Given Mathisen's information

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[80] Kristiansen, *Europe Before History*, pp. 192-5.

[81] There was also a tradition of leaving barbarians on the list of names even when they no longer existed or were incorrectly added; see Mathisen, 'Catalogues of Barbarians', p. 31.

[82] Gillett, 'The Mirror of Jordanes', p. 399.

[83] J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, 'Making a Gothic History: Does the Getica of Jordanes Preserve Genuinely Gothic Traditions?', in *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4 (2011), pp. 185-216, at p. 200, n. 72.

about barbarian lists and the formulaic and repetitive nature of much of the Scythian information in these texts, it would seem that it must be a narrative convention. Whether one places Herodotus' writings into the literature or history camp it should be noted that even the father of history himself was undecided. After all, he never named his work '*The Histories*'; that was left to later generations to decide. However, he did name each of nine books after the nine Muses - perhaps tipping his hand a little in favour of the 'history as literature' game.

III.3.1 Herodotus' Scythians

Herodotus, you could say, was obsessed with the Scythians. Only the Greeks themselves, and the Egyptians, were given more coverage in his *Histories* than the Scythians. The Egyptian focus is not surprising, after all, the Egyptians were already an ancient culture even by Herodotus' time and were a focus of a great many other Greek writings. One would think that the Persians, with whom the Greeks had just concluded a long war, would be expected to take up much of the remaining pages of his work with their massive wealth, proud history, and culture. In addition, the Persians shared a love of the city (*polis*) much like the Greeks. However, it was a nomadic, and ill-defined people from the Steppes that garnered more of his attention. Why was this so? Hartog, posits that the Scythians, or more specifically, the depiction of the Scythians as not Greek, as the other *par excellence* was the reason for their popularity. Although, I sympathise with his interpretation of the *Histories* it seems too simple and too monolithic of a response if for no other reason than the Scythians as a people never really existed as such, at least not in the way that he (Herodotus) wanted them too.[84] The Eurasian Steppes are, after all, the largest single landmass on the planet and to posit that a single, socially coherent, even if disparate and nomadic, group came from there is stretching the limits of believability. Perhaps Herodotus knew this already. Perhaps he did not. Attempting to determine authorial intent is a fool's errand and

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[84] See Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), *passim*.

in the end the verisimilitude of the Herodotean narrative does not really matter.[85] What matters is how that narrative was transmitted, interpreted, and internalised. It is clear that the Scythians of Herodotus' works, whether based in historical fact or whether they were altogether ahistorical, are a rhetoricised other. They are a constructed group; even if there are some aspects of his story that are truthful, the overall veracity of his narrative is not taken into account nor required understanding the text. For Herodotus, the truthfulness of his Scythian *logos* was not in question because for him it did not matter. The Scythians were a literary trope, a foil for the heroic Greeks to play out against.

So, when Jordanes tells us that the Huns were descendants of unclean spirits who lived on the border lands between the Maeotic Swamps and only entered Scythia because Hunnic hunters followed a doe, are we meant actually to believe him or was he tapping into the well-worn Scythian trope?[86] Of course, the answer is not a simple one, not least because the image of Scythia that Jordanes paints is a much more amenable version than the standard Herodotean one, and the truth, as is most often the case when historical veracity is questioned, probably lies somewhere in the middle. However, given that Jordanes used Herodotus (possibly transmitted through other sources), Diodorus Siculus, Livy, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Dexippus and others as sources, it is safe to assume that he was either aware of this ancient historical writing trope, or at the very least he was influenced by its effectiveness.[87] Interestingly, Jordanes' own geographic description, or more accurately descriptions, of Scythia are confused and repetitive, which indicate that he was using the Scythian descriptions for narrative purposes.[88]

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[85] Hartog goes out of his way in the introduction to make it clear that he is not concerned with the veracity of the Scythian *logos*, rather he wants to read it as a narrative. See Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, pp, 3-11.

[86] Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, pp. 40-1.

[87] See Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. xxiii-xliv; see also Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 126.

[88] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, ch. V.31, XII.73-4; for a translation see Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes:*

III.3.2 Herodotus' monsters

Herodotus goes out of his way to add a monstrous origin for the Scythians to his text. Echidna, a young half-snake and half-woman creature, is, in one the Scythian origin stories, presented by Herodotus, a lover of Hercules and mother of the eponymous Scythian race. By doing so, Herodotus suggests that the Scythians were connected with a bygone age of gods and monsters.[89] Said another way, Herodotus, it seems, meant to ensure that the reader had a certain primitiveness in their mind when they read about the Scythians. When added to the vague and confusing geographic descriptions of Scythia, it is clear that both Scythia and the Scythians were meant to be the opposite of Greece and the Greeks; *i.e.* city and civilisation vs country and barbarism as literature. However, despite the obvious othering of the Scythians, modern archaeology has shown that, at least when it came to the burials of their kings, the Scythians, as depicted in the *Histories*, were relatively accurate.[90] It was not only Herodotus who used the Scythians in such a manner either. Aristophanes, for example, used the phrase 'Scythian wilderness' to describe a character as being a ferocious and friendless brute:

> How shocking that a man bowed with age like Thucydides should have
> perished, struggling in the clutches of that Scythian wilderness.[91]

This mixing of truth and marvel was not as strange to the ancient world as it is to us. Hesiod and Homer, after all, were widely read in the ancient world.[92] Even Herodotus writes that 'the origins of the gods, differentiating their names, honours, skills, and indicating their appearances,' was because of the work of these two poets.[93] What is clear in all of this is that Herodotus' Scythians,

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In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary. For a discussion on Jordanes' handling of Scythia see Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 155-62.

[89] Hartog, *Le Miroir d'Hérodote*, p. 25.

[90] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History,* p. 4.

[91] Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, lines 702-3.

[92] See Homer and Hesiod for example.

[93] Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by Carolyn Dewald in *Oxford World's Classics - Herodotus: The Histories*, Book II.53, at p. 117.

irrespective of their historical veracity, were useful and popular literary tropes in the ancient world and as we will see this was clearly a lesson that was well-learned.

III.4: Turks

Medieval and Early Modern representations of Turks, whether textual or visual, have hardly been flattering. If one looks at the depictions of Turks in the eighth-century *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, or in Viennese depictions of them following their ill-fated seventeenth-century siege of that city and the subsequent battle outside of Vienna, or in Icelandic writings that refer to the 1627 abduction of Icelanders from Grindavík, Austfirðir, and the Vestmannaeyjar by Moroccan and Algerian pirates that is collectively, and wrongly, called the Tyrkjaránið (the Turkish raid/invasion), there is a great deal of confusion and fear mongering about what a Turk actually looked like and where they might be from.[94]

The confusion surrounding the Turks and their geographic *loci* has been evident from their earliest representations. It is generally agreed that the Turkish people began their story in Central Asia/Siberia region sometime in the sixth-century BC and probably had, like so many other peoples from the Eurasian Steppes, lived a nomadic lifestyle for much of their early history. They very likely had economic contact with China from fairly early on and there is even some evidence that early Turks were related to the Xiongnu peoples of China, though that falls well outside the scope of this study, and is still a debated subject.[95] However, for our purposes a brief discussion on their earliest European or Middle Eastern endeavours will

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[94] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 26-8; Gunnar Karlsson, *Iceland's 1100 Years: The History of a Marginal Society* (London: Hurst, 2000), p. 143.

[95] There is some evidence that the ruling elite of the Xiongu wrote and possibly even spoke a form of proto-Turkic. See Craig Benjamin, *The Yuezhi: Origin, Migration and the Conquest of Northern Bactria* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 49; Hyun Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 176.

suffice. The Turks first appear in these regions in the mid-sixth century AD under the Göktürkic leadership of Khagan Bumin who, after an ill-fated attempt at pleasing the then-reigning Khagan by staging a pre-emptive attack against some the Rouran Khaganate's enemies, was publicly rebuked by the Khagan. After what Bumin considered a betrayal, he allied himself with the Wei dynasty of China and decided to face the Khagan in open battle. The battle took place in 552 and saw Bumin defeat the Rouran Khagan and thus begin his own khaganate. Unfortunately, however, his victory was short lived and he died only one year later. After his death his son and brother took control of the empire; his son in the traditional Turkish homelands in the East and his brother in the newly conquered Western portion of their territories. It was under this joint rule of his son and brother that the Göktürks eventually acquired control of the lucrative Silk Road and began to carve out a nomadic empire in the region.[96] During the reign of Ishtemi, the Turks saw that the Hephthalites (possibly the Avars) were conquered and driven west. It was these Hephthalites who a century earlier had driven the Kidarites into conflict with the Persians. News of these conflicts reached Byzantium, though unsurprisingly there is a great deal of confusion about who exactly these people were.[97] Eventually Ishtemi made a deal with the Sasanian Persians to begin fighting for them against the Hephthalites.[98] By 576 the Göktürks crossed the Bosporus and laid siege to the city of Chersonesus in the Crimean peninsula. Although the empire fell apart less than fifty years later due to civil war, the Turkish people, and perhaps more importantly the notion of 'the Turk' had implanted itself on the European psyche.[99] This (albeit very short) summary of highly complicated events does not do justice to the history of the early Turks but is here to provide some context to the earliest representations of

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[96] There are questions surrounding how exactly the rule was shared but the predominant view is that it was the son in the East who had the superior rule.

[97] Priscus for example believed that the Kidarites were a branch of the Huns.

[98] Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), pp. 79-84.

[99] Denis Sinor, 'The Establishment and Dissolution of the Türk Empire', in D. Sinor (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 285-316, at pp 297-8 and 301-5.

them in the West.[100] Interestingly, from the earliest mentions of the Turks in the West there has always been a close association between them and monstrosity. In fact, as early as the thirteenth century, for instance, Western literature portrayed Muslim soldiers as rapists, and by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the West was flooded with images of Turkish soldiers raping women and impaling babies in conquered lands.[101] Turcophobia, it seems, has existed for quite some time.[102]

III.4.1 Turks as monsters

One of the earliest representations of the Turks in Western literature is found in the eighth-century *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*. In the *Cosmographia*, we are told by the author that, for example, both the Turks and a peculiar species of bird with glowing feathers live in the North of Europe. 'They [the birds with glowing feathers] inhabit the Northern Ocean' writes the anonymous author, 'the regions of which are barbarous, unknown, and remote, in which the Turks dwell.'[103] Remarkably, it is the Turkish homeland's barbarous and remoteness that are used to describe where these fantastic birds dwell, not the other way around, as one would expect. As we will see below, the appearance of the Turks in this text produces a number of other interesting questions. Why, for example, did the author include the Turks as one of the unclean races? After all, the author's main source for this information was the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* and in the Methodian tradition the Turks are not explicitly named as one of the twenty-two

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[100] For a much fuller investigation see Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, *passim*. It is to these early descriptions of the Turks that we will now turn.

[101] Diane Wolfthal, *Images of Rape: The 'Heroic' Tradition and its Alternatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 78-9.

[102] There are far too many examples to list here but a quick Google search will turn up 1000s of images. One of the best examples of this is can be found on a Russian WWI propaganda poster that depicts a Russian soldier on horseback chasing down a cartoonish, almost deformed looking man in what is clearly and orientalised 'traditional' Turkish costume. His features are all exaggerated: massive bulging eyes, a comically large nose, his hands are shaped to look as if he is retracting claws.

[103] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, p. 31: '*Inhabitant enim oceanum borreum quorum finitima barbarica, inaudita et abdita, in qua Turchi inhabitant*'.

unclean races.[104] According to *Ps. Methodius*, Alexander the Great travelled around the whole world and ended up in the East at a sea called the *Regio Solis* (Region of the Sun).[105] It was here in the East, presumably in India or near to it, that Alexander first encountered the 'unclean races'. Alexander chose to enclose the unclean races behind the *Ubera Aquilonis* (Breasts of the North) after 'seeing their [*i.e.* the unclean races] impurity':[106]

> That is, all of them eat, like a beetle, every polluted and filthy thing, dogs, mice, snakes, dead flesh, abortions, embryonic bodies, which the womb, because of softening, had not yet formed a solid from a liquid or a structure made of any part of the limbs which might in form and figure produce an appearance or imitate a shape, and the miscarriages of animals, as well as every kind of unclean animal. They do not bury their dead, but often eat them. Alexander contemplated these things and, upon seeing the entirety of their abominable and evil deeds, fearing they would flow into the Holy Land and that they were seeking to contaminate with their most unjust pollutions, he zealously prayed to God. And issuing commands he gathered all of their wives, sons, and of course, their camps together. And he led them from the eastern land and drove them on until they came to the furthest reaches of the North and he enclosed them there. There is neither a way in nor a way out from east to west, through which one might be able to cross over or go into them. Then Alexander immediately called upon God, and the Lord God heard his prayer and commanded that two mountains, whose name is the 'Breasts of the North', were joined together, and they drew as close as twelve cubits to one another. And he constructed bronze gates and covered them with *asincitum*, so that if they should want to open them with iron they would not be able to, or to dissolve them with fire they would not prevail either, rather all the fire

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[104] The most recent edition and translation of this text, complete with a very valuable introduction is: Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*. See also *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, ed. and trans. by W.J. Aerts and G.A.A. Kortekaas, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: Die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen* (Louvain: Peeters, 1998).

[105] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Book VIII.3, at p. 96. For a discussion on the phrase *Regio Solis* see Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), pp. 15, 32, 83-8, 97, 101-2, and 109.

[106] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Book VIII.4-8, at pp. 96-9: '*inmunditiam videns.*'

would be extinguished immediately.[107]

After describing how Alexander blockaded the races behind the mountain pass, the author provides the reader with a list of the twenty-two 'unclean races'. The list includes a number of Judaic tribes, Gog and Magog, the Huns, the Alans, the Persians, and the 'man-eating' race of *cynocephali*. We will return to the enclosure

[107] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Book VIII.4-8, pp. 96-9: '*Commendebant enim hi omnes cantharo speciem omnem coinquinabilem vel spurcebilem, id est canes, mures, serpentes, morticinorum carnes, aborticia, informabilia corpora et ea, que in alvo necdum per leniamenta coaculata sunt vel ex aliqua parte membrorum producta conpago formam figmenti possit perficere vultum vel figuram expremere et haec iumentorum, necnon etiam et omnem speciem ferarum inmundarum. Mortuos autem nequaquam sepeliunt, sed sepe commedent eos. Haec vero universa contemplatus Alexander ab eis inmunditer et scleriter fieri, timens ne quando eant exilientes in terra sancta et illa contaminent a pollutis suis iniquissimis afectationibus, depraecatus est Deum inpensius. Et praecipiens congregavit eos omnes mulieresque eorum et filius et omnia scilicet castra illorum. Et eduxit eos de terra orientale et conclusit minans eos, donec introissent in finibus Aquilonis. Et non est introitus nec exitus ab Oriente usque in Occidentem, [quis] per quod <quis> possit ad eos transire vel introire. Continuo ergo supplicatus est Deum Alexander, et exaudivit eius obsecrationem et praecipit Dominus Deus duobus montibus, quibus est vocabulum 'Ubera Aquilonis', et adiuncti proximaverunt invicem usque ad duodecem cubitorom. Et constuxit portas aereas et superinduxit eas asincitum, ut, si voluerint eas patefacere in ferro, non possunt aut dissolvere per igne nec valeant utrumque, sed statim ignis omnis extinguiter.*' Opinion is split on what exactly the word *asincitum* means. Some think this fantastic material is an invention of *Ps. Methodius*, perhaps related to the Greek word asynchutos ('unalloyed'), others, however, suggest that it is either a made-up word or a Syriac word (tāsāqṭīs) derived from the Persian stem (s-kh-t), also found in Arabic, for 'hard, solid, or tough'. See W.J. Aerts, 'Alexander's Wondercoating', in R.I.A. Nip, *et al.* (eds.), *Media Latinitas: A Collection of Essays to Mark the Retirement of L. J. Engels* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 317-22. Although the Syriac derivation is not without problems. The Syriac copyists of the *Ps. Methodius* text 'did not seem to understand it, because they give many variations of the word in the manuscripts […] The same is with the Greek version of the text which knows numerous variants of similar incomprehensible terms.' The authors also mention that in the Arabic Alexander tradition the word is often translated as qiṭr or qaṭr (which means either brass, or some sort of resin, but either way it is etymologically connected with qiṭrān/qaṭirān - English tar. See E. J. van Donzel, Andrea B. Schmidt and Claudia Ott (eds.), *Gog and Magog in Early Eastern Christian and Islamic Sources: Sallam's Quest for Alexander's Wall* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 29-30, n. 43. See also Michael Herren, 'The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister: One More Latin Novel? ', in M.P.F. Pinheiro and S.J. Harrison (eds.), *Fictional Traces: Receptions of the Ancient Novel, Vol. 1* (Groningen: Barkhuis Publishing & Groningen University Library, 2011), pp. 33-54, at pp. 49-50.

narrative shortly but first an explanation of the Ps. Methodian source material will be helpful.

The *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* is an extremely odd text in function, context, and content. It is simultaneously apocalyptic yet not overtly theological; it is Jerusalem focused and originally written in a Syriac speaking region of Mesopotamia yet looks to the 'Last Roman Emperor' as a kind of salvific character who is responsible for the beginning of the end times; despite its focus on the Mediterranean Middle East it was very quickly, at least by medieval standards, available in a Greek translation in the Byzantine East and a Latin translation in the Early Medieval West. There is, however, a little confusion surrounding this text and its association to the *Cosmographia* as both a source of information and a narrative model.

The *Apocalypse*, or *Revelation of Ps. Methodius* as it is sometimes called, was wrongly attributed to Saint Methodius of Olympus (a Christian martyr of the early-fourth century) and was, as I alluded to above, originally written in Syriac.[108] The unknown author almost certainly wrote this text in response to the Islamic expansion into the Holy Land the establishment of the Umayyad caliphate based in Damascus during the last-third of the seventh century. The dating of this text uses both internal and external evidence and the argument goes something like this: the original Syriac text stated that, at the time of its composition, the Holy land was under the dominion of the Ishmaelites, which the anonymous author of the *Apocalypse* quite consistently called the Arabs. Their dominion was to last for 'ten weeks of years' or 70 years and they were in the last week of years at the time of writing.[109] If the period in question is understood to begin with the Hegira in

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[108] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, see esp. the introduction to the text at pp, vii-xxix. See also G. J. Reinink, 'Der edessenische "Pseudo-Methodius"', in *Byzantinsche Zeitschrift* 83 (1990), pp. 31-45; Marbury B. Ogle, 'Petrus Comestor, Methodius, and the Saracens', in *Speculum* 21 (1946), pp. 318-24; Andrew Palmer, Sebastian P. Brock and Robert G. Hoyland (eds.), *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), pp. 222-9.

[109] For a brief discussion on whether the term Ishmaelites would be recognised as referring to Muslims in the Frankish realms see Richard Pollard, 'One Other on Another: Petrus

622 then the tenth week of years falls between 685 and 692. However, if two further pieces of external evidence are considered the dating can be a little more precise then the seven-year span just proposed and can be more firmly placed in the years between about 688/89 and 691 quite convincingly. The first piece of evidence comes in the form of taxation changes to non-Muslim residents of the Holy Land that were made during the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik (who reigned from 685-705). It was during his reign, and probably in the years 688/89, that these taxes were first imposed on Christians in the Holy Land. Throughout these early years of the Umayyad caliphate, and in direct response to the taxation, a great many Christians began committing apostasy by turning their backs on Christianity and subsequently converting to Islam. The author of the *Apocalypse* interpreted this as the 'falling away' from the Church that the apostle Paul had foreseen and, according to him, *i.e.* the anonymous author of *Apocalypse*, this was one of the most detrimental effects of the Islamic conquest and signified the coming of the end of days. Secondly, it has been argued that the Jerusalem-centric focus of the work was in direct response to the building of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount also by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik in 691.[110]

The construction of the Dome of the Rock was supposed to signify the supplanting of Christian religious and political domination of Jerusalem by Islamic domination. However, considering how central the imminent destruction of the Arab dominion and the purification of Jerusalem by the incoming 'Last Roman Emperor' was in this particular story it has been proposed that the author wrote his text in direct opposition to the intended message the Dome of the Rock was supposed to convey.[111] At any rate, the text could certainly not have been composed any later than 694 when it began to serve as a source for other

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Monachus' *Revelationes* and Islam', in M. Cohen and J. Firnhaber-Baker (eds.), *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 25-42, at pp. 28-9.

[110] Reinink, 'Der edessenische "Pseudo-Methodius"', pp. 33-34; see also G. J. Reinink, 'Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam', in A. Cameron and L. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, I: Problems in the Literary Source Material* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 149-87.

[111] Reinink, 'Der edessenische "Pseudo-Methodius"', pp. 33-4.

apocalyptic texts, also written in Syriac. The Syriac version of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius*, therefore, was written sometime between 685 and 694 but most likely in immediate response to both the taxes levied against non-Muslims and the building of the Dome of the Rock in 691.[112]

Although the dating of the text is on firm ground, what we know of the author is not. About all that can be said about the author is that they probably originated from modern day Iraq (probably in the Mosul region), based on the reference to a Mount Seneagar in the text. In fact, not even the author's theological leanings can be discerned with any certainty, and although the Mosul region was a stronghold of Monophysites the *Apocalypse* itself does not adhere to a consistent Monophysite theology throughout the text. For example, the author clearly accorded the kingdom of Ethiopia (the most powerful Monophysite kingdom of the day) a very prominent place in the narrative, however, the overall authority of the 'Last Roman emperor' as a kind of saviour and bringer of redemption from the Ishmaelites was more in line with the Malachite Church, which itself adhered to the Chalcedonian creed.[113]

It has been suggested by some that this obfuscation of his own theology was intentional because the author of the text saw the rise of Islam and the incentives to commit apostasy created through the changes in taxation implement by 'Abd al-Malik as a far bigger risk to Christianity than any petty internecine feuding between Christianities.[114] I, however, am a little sceptical of this reading and would always urge readers to be reticent about placing too much emphasis on the unknowable intentions of any author. Perhaps the author was simply not a good theologian and never intended his message to have a theological duality. Perhaps, the source material that he was drawing from was not clear about its own

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[112] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, the introduction provided by Garstad was particularly useful here.

[113] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, pp. viii-ix.

[114] Reinink, 'Pseudo-Methodius: A Concept of History in Response to the Rise of Islam', pp. 149-87.

theological message. Or perhaps, he simply made a mistake. All we can safely say is that this text was first and foremost an apocalyptic vision of the end times and if there is anything that can be consistently said about apocalyptic texts is that they are seldom logical or rational. One only needs to read the *Revelation of St John* to see what I mean. The *Apocalypse* was no different. After all, this text tells us how Alexander the Great blockaded the 'unclean races' of the world behind two mountains that were called the 'Breasts of North' and that once the unclean races, which include the monsters such as the *cynocephali*, were safely behind the mountains Alexander prayed to God to have the mountains moved to within twelve feet of each other.[115] It would seem, that given the oddity of the tale and its apocalyptic nature, perhaps a couple of theological miscues were not important. What is certain though is that despite the text's popularity it was never considered to be an orthodox document of any particular branch of Christianity and this is almost certainly a direct result of its internal theological ambiguity.[116]

The Syriac version of the text, as I just mentioned, proved to be very popular and became a central source for further eschatological texts in both Armenia and the Arab-speaking world. Once it was translated into Greek, the Greek version of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* went on to become a cornerstone of the Byzantine apocalyptic tradition for centuries to come. In fact, nearly every subsequent apocalypse written in Greek borrowed its language, style, motif or thematic focus from this this text. The Slavonic apocalyptic tradition, which itself drew on Byzantine apocalyptic conventions, also incorporated some of the same motifs and at least two Old-Slavonic apocalypses (one from the eleventh and one perhaps as early as the ninth century) used *Ps. Methodius* as source material.[117] Extracts of the text even found their way into more historically minded texts such as the

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[115] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, p. 99.

[116] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, p. ix.

[117] See Samuel H. Cross, 'The Earliest Allusion in Slavic Literature to the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius', in *Speculum* 4 (1929), pp. 329-39; Francis Thomson, 'The Slavonic Translations of Pseudo-Methodius of Olympus' *Apocalypsis*', in A. Davidov (ed.), *Tărnovska knizhovna shkola* (Sofia: Bulgarskata Akademiia na Naukite, 1985), pp. 143-73.

Russian *Primary Chronicle* in the twelfth century.[118] As more proof of its popularity one only need to look at how many vernacular languages the text was translated into, including Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Middle English, and Armenian.[119] Very little is known about the circumstances that led to the Greek translation of the text and about all that can be safely said is that it was the Greek translation that served as the source for the Latin version of the text, which is the version that this study is particularly interested in because of its later use as a source for the *Cosmographia*.

The earliest manuscript of the Latin version of the *Apocalypse* dates to *c.* 727 and the dating of the Greek version therefore falls between 691 and 727.[120] The Latin version claims to be translated by a rather enigmatic monk called Peter. Much like the original author of the Syriac version, or the later Greek translator, very little is known about this Petrus Monachos. Based on some Merovingian Latin peculiarities, it has been suggested that Peter the monk was writing in an East-Frankish Latin dialect.[121] It has also been suggested that Peter the monk had some connections to the author of the *Cosmographia*, however, this is speculation and is based on very tenuous information.[122] That being said, I am partial to the notion of a connection between the two, even if it can never be proved to be true. We do know that both the author of the *Cosmographia* and the translator of the *Apocalypse* were almost certainly outsiders themselves and perhaps even products of the Frankish or even trans-Frankish periphery.[123] It has even been suggested by Ian Wood that the *Cosmographia* was written somewhere in or near to Bavaria

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[118] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, p. x.

[119] Tsvetelin Stepanov, 'From 'Steppe' to Christian Empire, and Back: Bulgaria between 800 And 1100', in F. Curta and R. Kovalev (eds.), *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 363-77, at p. 369.

[120] For information on all three linguistic versions of this text see David Thomas, *et al.* (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume I (600-900)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 163-71 (Syriac), 245-8 (Greek), 249-52 (Latin).

[121] Pollard, 'One Other on Another', p. 25.

[122] Anonymous, *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, in Aerts and Kortekaas (eds.), *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius: Die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen*, pp. 20-22 and 50-1.

[123] Pollard, 'One Other on Another', pp 38-41.

(which in the late-seventh and early-eighth centuries was itself on the Frankish periphery), though this is just a very educated guess, albeit one that I agree with.[124] To the best of my knowledge no one has ever claimed a direct authorial link between Petrus Monachos and the *Cosmographia*, and while I am not prepared to do that right now, I do not think it is outside the realm of possibility. After all, both the author of the *Cosmographia* and the translator of *Ps. Methodius* had a working knowledge of Greek (which was a rarity north of the Alps in the eighth century), both were interested in describing events and peoples on the periphery and were themselves probably outsiders, and crucially both of them had access to Greek texts that were otherwise not available in the rest of Europe at this time. It has even been suggested that Petrus Monachos was a sort of refugee from the East and perhaps had himself been forced to flee from Arab invaders, eventually ending up in Western Europe.[125] The author of the *Cosmographia* also has the philosopher Aethicus, who was probably the authorial voice, flee the destruction of his homeland.[126] Regardless of the potential connections between the authors of these two texts, what we do know is that in a span of just thirty-five years this text, that is the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius*, in a movement that mirrored and echoed the expansion of Islam around the Mediterranean world, went from being written beyond the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean to be translated into Greek, and then found its way into Vulgar Latin in on the edges of the Frankish dominion. All the while, the political turmoil of the age raged unabated.

My particular interest in this text is probably not a surprise given its subject matter and given that this project focuses on how early medieval and late antique authors used monsters and monstrosity as rhetorical models for their descriptions of actual peoples. It is often easy to read these ancient texts and skip over the seemingly

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[124] Wood, 'Categorising the *Cynocephali*', p. 126.

[125] Pollard, 'One Other on Another', p. 40. See also Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen: Pseudomethodius Adso und Die Tiburtinische Sibylle* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1898), p. 56; Michael Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600-899* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 102.

[126] Anonymous, *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. lxxv-lxxvi and at section 103b at pp. 204-7.

endless lists of peoples, some of whom have Biblical precedents, while others seem to be conjured from nothing. What of the real peoples on these lists? How are we supposed to interpret them? In the case of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* we can see an intentional and deliberate representation of the various peoples in the text and how these peoples were connected to the story of Gog and Magog. These peoples included the Arabs (though somewhat indirectly), Sarmatians, and Alans to name only a few of the 'unclean races' listed by the author. By naming these people as members of the armies of Gog and Magog and by placing them in the Alexandrian enclosure narrative, the author was directly connecting these peoples to the ancient Alexander Legend. The implications for understanding how certain peoples, especially the Turks, were depicted in this text, and this passage's subsequent alteration in the *Cosmographia* are very important. As a little side note, the popularity of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* was such that it was among one of the first apocalyptic texts ever printed and can be found in printed form from as early as 1470.[127] Also, during the Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, broadsheets of excerpts from the *Apocalypse* were printed and circulated in Vienna.[128] Interestingly, the Turks are only mentioned one time in the *Apocalypse* and it is not even a particularly damning passage:

> Therefore, at the destruction up of the kingdom of the Macedonians, or the Egyptians, the kingdom of the barbarians, that is, of the Turks and the Abares, clashed in arms with the kingdom of the Romans, and these were all swallowed up by it.[129]

Though it is just conjecture at this point, I wonder if the passages about the Turks were taken from the *Cosmographia* instead of the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius.* Either way, the Turk represented in seventeenth century Vienna had over 1000

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[127] Bernard McGinn, 'Portraying Antichrist in the Middle Ages', in W. Verbeke, D. Verhelst and A. Welkenhuysen (eds.), *The Use and Abuse of Eschatology in the Middle Ages* (Lueven: Lueven University Press, 1988), pp. 1-48, at p. 18, n. 77.

[128] Gabriel Moran, *Both Sides: The Story of Revelation* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2002), p. 64.

[129] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, Book X.5, at pp. 108-9: '*Concisione igitur Macedoniorum regnum sive Aegyptiorum conflixerunt armis adversus regnum Romanorum seu barbarorum regnum, id est Turcorum, et Abares, qui simul universi absorti ab eo sunt.*'

years of negative representations and stereotypes attached to it, which would have obviously affected the way they were portrayed regardless of the source material used.

The *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius*, like other apocalypses, represents the anxiety of the time. Readers really get a sense of immense change and the realness of actual geopolitical forces at play in this region of the world even if the events are told as part of the greater apocalyptic story-arc. The author discussed real problems that must have been occurring at the time of its composition, such as servitude, poverty, subjection, and exile. As the most recent translator says in his introduction: 'It is an existential anxiety inasmuch as the text itself demonstrates that individual identity was bound up with the stability of society of government.'[130] Perhaps there is something to the theory that Petrus Monachos was an outsider, because it would seem to me that if he was, this text, replete with tales of exile and destruction, would have struck a familiar cord with him.

The author of the *Cosmographia*, for the most part remained faithful to the Methodian description of enclosure and the Alexandrian events that surrounded it, though, they deviated from it in a couple of very interesting ways. The first, and perhaps the hardest to explain, is that they removed the *cynocephali* from the Alexandrian enclosure narrative entirely, as espoused by the author of the Ps. Methodius text. Although the *cynocephali* in the *Cosmographia* still 'eat the unlawful filth of quadrupeds - mice, moles and others' they are not explicitly stated as one of the 'unclean races' and appear, in many ways, to be more human than the Turks.[131] Curiously, the author also placed the *cynocephali* on an island in the North Sea rather than in their more traditional Indian homeland.[132] The place

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[130] Anonymous, *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, in Garstad (ed.), *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius and An Alexandrian World Chronicle*, p. xiii.

[131] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, p. 28: '*immundarum quatrupediarum inlicita comedebant, mus et talpas et reliqua.*'

[132] See Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, in W. M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, Book XI.3.15: '*Cynocephali appellantur eo quod canina capita habeant, quosque ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur. Hi in India nascuntur* (They are called *Cynocephali* because they

left vacant by the removal of the *cynocephali* from the enclosure narrative was filled by the Turks in Ps. Jerome's version of the events.

In the *Cosmographia*, the Turks are described in quite graphic detail, even resorting to the same language used by Ps. Methodius in describing the monstrous races which Alexander blockaded. In a type of curious wordplay, the author claimed that the Turks (*Turchus*) got their name from their truculent (*truculentus*) nature. Not only are the Turks reduced to being described as a truculent race but it becomes their eponymous trait according to Ps. Jerome. Furthermore, the author, only a couple of passages earlier, used the phrase 'truculent in appearance' in his description of the *cynocephali*, making the Turks essentially a twice-damned people.[133] He continues his description of the Turks by saying that 'they eat every kind of abomination: aborted human foetuses, the flesh of their young, draft animals and bears, vultures, curlews, kites and owls, bison, dogs and monkeys.'[134] The human nature of the Turks is further distorted by the fact that they are described as being 'deformed in stature' and that 'the people are disgraceful to an

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have dogs' heads, and their barking reveals that they are nearer to beasts than humans. They originate in India).' Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historia*, in K. Mayhoff (ed.), *C. Plini Secundi Naturalis historiae libri XXXVII* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1875-1906), Book VII.23: '*in multis autem montibus genus hominum capitibus caninis ferarum pellibus velari, pro voce latratum edere, unguibus armatum venatu et aucupio vesci*. (On many mountains, however, there are men with dog's heads who are covered in the skins of wild beasts; they bark instead of speak and live by hunting and fowling).' Although Pliny's description is a little ambiguous concerning the geography of their homeland this passage is included in a section that discusses many of the other wonders and marvels of India. Pliny names Megasthenes and Ctesias as his sources for this section, see above for a discussion on them, pp. 74-6, and 143-4.

[133] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, pp. 26-28, and 32. Compare the description of the *cynocephali*: *truculenta specie, monstra quoque inaudita inter eos*; *Gens scelerata*; *spurcissimam uitam ducentes*; *Ignorantes deum*, to the description of the Turks: *truculenta, a qua voce et nomen accepit, de stripe Gog et Magog*; *Gens ignominiosa et incognita, monstruoasa*; *Statura deforme, numquam lotus aquae*; *Diem festum nequaquam nisi mense Agusto mediante colere Saturnum* and it becomes clear that the author was making a deliberate association between the two.

[134] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, p. 32: '*Comedent enim uniuersa abominabilia et abortiua hominum, iuuenum carnes iumentorumque et ursorum, uultorum et choradrium ac miluorum, bubonum atque uisontium, canum et simiarum.*'

extent unknown – monstrous, idolatrous, debauching themselves in every sexual excess and whoredom, truculent, from which word they got their name; they are of the offspring of Gog and Magog.'[135] By using similar language and rhetoric and by placing the description of the Turks almost immediately following the description of the *cynocephali* the author intended the reader to recall the dog-headed race when reading this description in order to emphasise the inhuman, even monstrous traits, of the Turks. It has been posited that the language used to describe the Turks may also have been recognisable as referring to Saracens. Although, this argument is convincing and may very well be correct, it must be emphasized that there is no explicit mention of Saracens in the *Cosmographia* at all.[136] Moreover, the religious activities of the Turks are questioned when the author tells us that they 'they do not have feast days at all but rather worship Saturn in the middle of August […]. This people will wreak much destruction in the times of the Antichrist, and they will call upon that god of days.'[137]

By placing the Turks in the loosely defined but ultimately negative 'North', linking them to monstrous races, placing them in the enclosure narrative, and making the Turks descendants of Gog and Magog the author was explicitly placing the Turks in a Biblical tradition of monstrosity and implicating them in the end of days. If they are a monstrous race, eat unclean food, and worship Saturn they are, by necessity, placed into the *Book of Revelations* narrative.[138] This tradition of naming the Turks as one of the 'unclean races', which to the best of my knowledge first appears in the *Cosmographia*, persisted and is found in numerous later traditions concerning the 'unclean races' including the *Liber*

[135] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, p. 32: '*statura deforme*; *Gens ignominiosa et incognita, monstruosa, idolatria, fornicaria in cunctis stupris et lupanariis, truculenta, a qua et nomen accepit, de stirpe Gog et Magog.*'
[136] Pollard, 'One Other on Another', at p. 38.
[137] *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, in Herren (ed.), *The Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary*, p. 32: '*Diem festum nequaquam nisi mense Agusto mediante colere Saturnum […]. Quae gens Antechristi temporibus multam facient uastantionem, et eum deum dierum appallabunt.*'
[138] I am thinking here specifically of the descriptions of beasts and the role of Gog and Magog after the 1000-year imprisonment in Rev. 20:8.

Floridus of Lambert of St Omer and the *Roman de toute chevalrie* of Thomas of Kent.[139] It is precisely this sort of negative representation that has led to the relegation of 'the Turks and the Mongols to oblivion by attributing to them unbelievably primitive and bestial levels of cultural development and a comprehensive lack of any redeeming civilized features.'[140]

III.5: Huns

In the 150 years between about AD 300 AD and AD 450 a nomadic people from the Mongolian Steppes, most often called the Huns (though also referred to as Hiungnu, Hunas, Chionites, and occasionally Hephthalite and Kidarite Huns in the sources) played a major part in the collapse of four sedentary (and extremely powerful) empires. During this time period the Huns (or peoples closely related to them) helped to destroy the Jin Dynasty in China, the Guptas of India, the Eastern provinces of Sasanian Persia, and the Western Roman Empire.[141] This is not bad for a group of people who were, according to one of the earliest sources, incapable of human speech.[142]

Like the Turks the Huns have a semi-mythical and somewhat confusing origin.[143] The Hunnic story also began in the Mongolian steppes some centuries before Christ. There is very little information on their early years and although the theory has somewhat fallen into disfavour in the twentieth century there is evidence that the Huns were also related to the Xiongnu, which by extension makes them distant

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[139] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, pp. 75-100.

[140] Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, p. 4.

[141] Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, p. 5.

[142] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. 89-91: '*quasi hominum genus nec alia voce notum nisi quod humani sermonis imaginem adsignabat.*'

[143] For more details on the Huns see Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*; Peter Heather, 'The Huns and the End of the Roman Empire in Western Europe', in *English Historical Review* CX (1995), pp. 4-41; Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in their History and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

relatives (maybe) of the Turks.[144] Although this is not the place for a detailed investigation in to the ethnogenetic debate of the Huns, suffice it to say that we know very little about the pre-Christian origins of the Huns and the debates surrounding their origins have more to do, I would argue, with nineteenth- and twentieth-century history and politics then with actual Hunnic origins. All that can be safely assumed is that by the third or fourth centuries the word Hun referred to a prestigious and militarily powerful group of warriors from the Steppes.[145] Perhaps it is now time for historians to stop discussing the Huns as a people or a 'race' but rather begin to discuss them in terms of their occupation, *i.e.* elite mounted archers that could be from any number of ethnic groups and fight as a Hun.

Sometime *c*. AD 370, those groups that comprised the European Huns, having crossed the Volga, moved to subjugate the 'Alpidzuri, Alcildzuri, ltimari, Tuncarsi and Boisci' according to the Gothic historian Jordanes.[146] The Huns, under the leadership of their *rex Hunnorum*, Balamber crossed the Volga in the 360s and defeated the Alans and subjected their surviving members to Hunnic rule. Following this action, they then attacked the Greuthingi (Ostrogoths), eventually defeating them and adding their surviving numbers in to the Hunnic Empire. These events, or more precisely, how the events are described by Jordanes, prove to contain some really interesting elements for the debate on monstrosity.[147]

Procopius tells us that the Hephthalites were a people of 'Hunnic stock' though he hastens to add that they have lived separated from the Huns for a long time and that they had also been established in a goodly land. In addition, he says of the Hephthalites, that they are the only people among the Huns to have a white countenance.[148] There is evidence to suggest that the Hephthalites should be viewed as a collection of *ethnies* rather as a cohesive ethnic group – much like the

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[144] Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, pp. 3,5, and 10-16; see also Sinor, 'The Hun Period', at pp. 178-9.

[145] Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, p. 8.

[146] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 90.

[147] See below.

[148] Procopius, *De Bello Pers.*, 1. 3.

various Germanic groups we will look at shortly.[149] There has even been, in recent years, a move towards shifting the centre away from the Mediterranean and towards the Steppes.[150] The notion of placing the Steppes in the centre and China, India, the Middle East, and Europe on the periphery is a tempting one, however, it has yet to gain much traction and given that most published research on the topic is done by Anglo-American or Western European scholars it is unlikely that it will.

III.5.1: Huns as monsters

Jordanes tells us he wrote his *Getica* as an epitome of the now-lost *Gothic History* of Cassiodorus. The Italian statesman and founder of the great monastery at *Vivarium*, had written a twelve volume series on the *Origins and the Deeds of the Goths* that Jordanes had access to for a few days and wished to summarise it.[151] Like so many late antique or early medieval writers not much is known about Jordanes himself. What we do know can be summarised as such: Jordanes was a Christian of Germanic decent who was writing in Constantinople in the middle years of the sixth century and there are some questions concerning whether or not he may have been a bishop. The *Getica* itself was written in rather typical Late Antique Latin, which until the second half of the twentieth century led to it being classed as an inferior text with little or no value to understanding the actual events surrounding Gothic origins.[152] However, because of the loss of Cassiodorus' far longer and more in-depth investigation in to the history of the Goths, Jordanes' version remains one of our earliest and best glimpse into the rise of the Gothic *gens*. Because of this apparent connection between the texts, scholarship has

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[149] For an explanation of the Kidarite Huns see Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, p. 80.

[150] See Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, *passim*.

[151] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 54: '*super omne autem pondus, quod nec facultas eorundem librorum nobis datur, quatenus eius sensui inserviamus, sed, ut non mentiar, ad triduanam lectionem dispensatoris eius beneficio libros ipsos antehac relegi.*'

[152] Mierow disapproves of the quality of the Latin in the Jordanes text in Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, pp. 16-18.

exhausted itself on the question of exactly what relationship Jordanes' text had to the now lost Cassiodorus text, however, that is a question that is outside the scope of this study.[153] Instead we are interested in Jordanes' description of the Huns, irrespective of its connections to Cassiodorus.

Jordanes' description of the Huns is both complex and odd. According to the *Getica*, it was Filimer who, after discovering a series of witches within the population of the Goths (the text itself is a little vague about whether these witches were actually Gothic themselves or some sort of interlopers, the Latin says *in populo suo*), he, *i.e.* Filimer, ordered that they be banished to the wilderness.[154] These witches were eventually seduced by the *spiritus inmundi* who dwelt in the region and thus eventually gave birth to the Huns. A race, Jordanes says, that were a 'stunted, foul, and puny tribe, scarcely human, and having no language save one which bore slight resemblance to human speech.'[155] This savage (*saeva*) tribe settled in the far reaches of the Maeotic Swamps; the archetypal liminal space in classical and Late Roman writing if there ever was one.[156] Not only were the Huns inhabitants of a swampy wasteland but the only real skill that they possessed, according to Jordanes, was hunting.

Once the Hunnic population had grown in size the Huns began to disturb the peace of their neighbouring peoples with deceit and thievery.[157] However, Jordanes has

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[153] Arne Søby Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths: Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002), *passim*.

[154] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 89: '*repperit in populo suo quasdam magas mulieres, quas patrio sermone Haliurunnas is ipse cognominat, easque habens suspectas de medio sui proturbat longeque ab exercitu suo fugatas in solitudinem coegit errare.*'

[155] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. 89-91; '*Genus hoc ferocissimum ediderunt, quae fuit primum inter paludes, minitum tetrum atque exile quasi hominum genus nec alia voce notum nisi quod humani sermonis imaginem adsignabat… velud quaedam, si dici fas est, informis offa, non facies, habensque magis puncta quam lumina.*' The translation is my own, however, see also Jordanes, *The Gothic History*, trans. by Mierow in *The Gothic History of Jordanes: In English Version with an Introduction and a Commentary*, ch. XXIV, at p. 41.

[156] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 89: '*natio saeva.*'

[157] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 89: '*fraudibus et rapinis vicinarum gentium quiete conturbans.*'

the Huns enter the main narrative not because of some heroic deed, but rather it is their empty stomachs that eventually lead them out of their swampy homeland. After following a deer through the Maeotic Swamps a group of Hunnic hunters stumbled across the greener pastures of Scythia and reported this back to their leaders. The leaders decided to investigate and upon entering Scythia begin to exert their martial prowess and eventually defeated or chased away a number of Germanic groups before eventually ending up in the path of the Goths. It is at this point in the narrative that Jordanes describes the beastly, almost monstrous, appearance of the Huns. Jordanes tells us they were a:

> most savage race, which dwelt at first in the swamps, were a stunted, foul, and puny tribe and possessed no language save one that scarcely resembled human speech, if I may call it so… [Their] swarthy features inspired great fear, and their enemies fled in panic… [They had] a sort of shapeless lump, not a head, with pinholes rather than eyes… Though they live in the form of humans, they are beast-like savages.[158]

For Jordanes it was not simply enough to describe them in negative terms. He insisted on dehumanising them and obscuring their humanity by emphasising their lack of a recognizably human language and by drawing attention to the shape of their head and the smallness of their eyes. Language, after all, was something that separated the animal kingdom from humanity. When emphasising their closeness to animals, Jordanes, interestingly, does not use the term *bestia*, as one would expect, but rather he takes it further and uses the adjective *beluina* (beast-like, bestial) when making his description thus adding emphasis to the inhuman comparison of the Huns. Furthermore, Jordanes only used that term (*beluina*)

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[158] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, pp. 89-91: '*Genus hoc ferocissimum ediderunt, quae fuit primum inter paludes, minitum tetrum atque exile quasi hominum genus nec alia voce notum nisi quod humani sermonis imaginem adsignabat… vultus sui terrore nimium pavorem ingerentes, terribilitate fugabant, eo quod erat eis species pavenda nigridinis et velud quaedam, si dici fas est, informis offa, non facies, habensque magis puncta quam lumina. Quorum animi fiducia turvus prodet aspectus, qui etiam in pignora sua primo die nata desaeviunt…velud quaedam, si dici fas est, informis offa, non facies, habensque magis puncta quam lumina… Hi vero sub hominum figura vivunt beluina saevitia.*'

three times throughout the entire text and in the other two instances it is obvious that the reader is meant to make a comparison to actual beasts not to humans.

What is known is that the earliest depictions of the Huns were not flattering, showed a certain amount of geographic confusion, and seemed to treat the Huns (almost from the start) as a kind of bogeyman. Attila's role in the psyche of Western Europe when looked at this way is not at all surprising.[159] He was always going to be the 'bad guy'.

III.6: Goths

The history of the Goths is probably the most contested origin story of any early medieval group. Their history has been closely tied to various European nation's national history and have therefore been used and abused accordingly. The present study is not the place for a re-telling of the already well-trodden story of the ethnogenesis debate surrounding the Gothic *gens*. If one wants to investigate (or contribute) to that debate there is plenty of literature available.[160] For the purpose

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[159] Hugh Kennedy and John Keegan, *Mongols, Huns and Vikings: Nomads at War* (London: Cassell, 2002), pp. 23-56; Thomas J. Craughwell, *How the Barbarian Invasions Shaped the Modern World: The Vikings, Vandals, Huns, Mongols, Goths, and Tartars Who Razed the Old World and Formed the New* (Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds, 2008), pp. 50-65. Craughwell's book really is not all that scholarly but it is indicative of the role that that these bogeymen still play in the popular imagination of people today.

[160] This is a far from definitive list but as a good place to start see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, pp. 10-19, and 455-98; Andrew Gillett, 'Ethnogenesis: A Contested Model of Early Medieval Europe', in *History Compass* 4(2) (2006), pp. 241-60; Haijo Jan Westra, 'Frisians, Saxons, and Franks: Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Identity in Roman and Early Medieval Sources', in G.R. Wieland, C. Ruff and R.G. Arthur (eds.), *Insignis Sophia Arcator: Essays in Honour of Michael W. Herren on his 65th Birthday* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 28-44; Peter Hoppenbrouwers, 'Such Stuff as Peoples are Made of: Ethnogenesis and the Construction of Nationhood in Medieval Europe', in *The Medieval History Journal* 9 (2006), pp. 195-242; Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*; Herwig Wolfram*, et al.* (eds.), *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990); Florin Curta, 'Frontier Ethnogenesis in Late Antiquity: The Danube, the Tervingi, and the Slavs', in F. Curta (ed.), *Borders, Barriers, and Ethnogenesis: Frontiers in Late*

of this study we are more interested in the descriptions of the Goths as a people and less concerned about the veracity of these descriptions. Whether the first mention of the Gothic *gens* separating into two distinct groups – the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths – was made by Cassiodorus or Ablabius is not relevant here. Nor is the debate surrounding the pedigree of the Amal family. After all, the reason there is such debate over these issues concerning the origins of the Goths is because the source material that survives is problematic and does not tell the modern historian quite what they would like it to. Were Cassiodorus' now lost *Gothic History* found it would almost certainly help to put to bed many of these debates, but it is unlikely to come to light so, we will stick to the sources that we have, flawed as they may be.

Like the Turks and Huns above, the origins of the Gothic *gens* are murky. The history of the Goths is a confusing, complicated, and often contradictory story. Despite that, many historians have spent their careers arguing over the *minutiae* of the Gothic question. What we do know is that the Goths, having originally come from the Steppes, were, like many groups before and after, referred to incorrectly as Scythians. In fact, in one of the earliest references to them by the Roman historian Dexippus.[161] By the mid-third century the Goths should be recognised as a distinct people. They spoke a Germanic language that was distinct from the Thracian language that was spoken by the inhabitants of the Northern Greek peninsula.[162] They also had their own laws (*belagines*) that were unwritten, customary, and transmitted from generation to generation orally. Unfortunately, none of these laws has survived in their pure Gothic form. However, the Code of Euric and the Codes of the Visigothic kings of Hispania, although heavily influenced by later Roman legal traditions and the Latin language undoubtedly contain elements and traces of these customary laws and practices.[163] Although

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Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), pp. 173-204; Walter Pohl, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', in B.H.R.L.K. Little (ed.), *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 13-24.
[161] Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 28.
[162] Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 22-3.
[163] Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 196-7.

the Gothic armies that came into contact with the Roman armies in the late-fourth century shared an element of 'Gothicness' this should not be taken as evidence for political coherence. Jordanes' description of the Goths, however, does tend to clump the Goths together as a coherent (even though they later split into two) groups. However, the precise nature of Gothic identity will always remain a mystery. In fact, none of the Germanic *gentes* should be seen as monolithic entities. After all, it took the Franks a couple centuries of creative history writing to try to show their cohesive nature. Whether they were trying to convince themselves or others of their seeming cohesiveness is unclear.

Liebeschuetz, among others, takes Jordanes at face value when he says that he used old Gothic songs when constructing his history.[164] Although not all modern historians believe this 'core culture' (*Traditionskern*) argument, I am simply unable to see how there would not be a communal Gothic history that was translated to later generations without it. The existence of such a core culture should not be surprising, even if it has been doubted by some contemporary historians; after all, there is evidence that legal traditions, burial practices, and material culture survived the migration. Although many of the people who crossed into the Empire in the fourth century were Gothic it is obvious that they were not all Gothic. The Goths operated, as far as we can tell, infrequently, if ever, as a cohesive and singular-acting unit. Instead, like the other Germanic groups discussed, they were divided into smaller units that made their own decisions regarding internal politics, warring, raiding, and migration and seemed to only operate as anything near to a unified group on the rarest of occasion and usually under times of duress.[165] However, that did not stop authors from describing them in essentialist and unified terms.

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[164] Liebeschuetz, 'Making a Gothic History', p. 210.
[165] Liebeschuetz, 'Making a Gothic History', at p. 212.

III.6.1: Goths as monsters

In AD 376, after the Goths had defeated the Roman army at Adrianople and began to move into the Balkans, Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, tried to calm the population of the Northern Italian city by claiming that approaching Goths were the fulfilment of the prophet Ezekiel and the Goths, who were the vanguard of the army of Gog and Magog, would soon be destroyed in turn by God.[166] This is precisely the same message that Salvian was conveying in the opening to this chapter.[167] When Ambrose made the connection between the approaching barbarians and the Old Testament story of Ezekiel there was a clear and deliberate association of the approaching Gothic *gens* to the coming Apocalypse.[168] By overtly, and somewhat heavy-handedly, placing the Goths into his narrative of the end times, it was quite clear that Ambrose was asking the readers to associate the Goths with the 'unclean races' of the apocalyptic narrative. These 'unclean races', as we have seen above, were used repeatedly by authors as a quick and fast strategy of both othering a group and placing that group into the Christian apocalyptic narrative. Late antique, medieval, Renaissance, and modern writers have all used this tool with varying degrees of success.[169] Occasionally, however, this association backfired and authors were forced to reconsider and revise their descriptions. For example, following the Gothic army's annihilation of the Roman army at Adrianople, one of these revisions was required. In this instance, no less qualified and revered a writer than Jerome altered the story in order to associate the Goths with the infamous (and Heroic) *Getae* of the Scythian past. He did so on the false understanding of the similar sounding Goth-*Getae*; as it turns out this

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[166] Ambrose, *De Fide*, Book II, ch. 16: '*Gog iste Gothus est, quem iam uidemus exisse, de quo promittitur nobis futura uictoria dicente domino: Et praedabunt eos, qui depraedati eos fuerant, et despoliabunt eos, qui sibi spolia detraxerant, dicit dominus.*' See also Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 61 where Jordanes alludes to this identification, recalling that Josephus mentioned this is in his *Antiquities*; see Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, trans. by H.S.J. Thackeray in *Loeb Classical Library: Jewish Antiquities, Volume I* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), Book I.6.i.

[167] See above, 143, and 157-8.

[168] Thomas E. Kitchen, 'Apocalyptic Perceptions of the Roman Empire in the Fifth Century A.D.', in V. Weiser (ed.), *Abendländische Apokalyptik: Kompendium zur Genealogie der Endzeit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013), pp. 641-60.

[169] Berg, '"Breasts of the North"', pp. 563-4.

seemingly obvious etymological link is not true. However, this did not prevent Cassiodorus from recreating Jerome's etymological relationship (via Orosius). In effect what this means is that Jerome unwittingly ended up adding credence to the untrue link between the *Getae* and Goths in Jordanes.[170]

At the time of his apocalyptic comparison, Ambrose could not have known that the Gothic *gens* was less than a century away from a rather successful (if somewhat short-lived) Italian kingdom. The revision was left to later writers such as Jordanes to resuscitate the reputation of the Goths.[171]

Whether Jordanes' resuscitation was effective is debatable, however, his attempt was a determined one. He even resorted to that most ancient of Greek tropes, philosophy, *i.e.* that any civilisation worth its salt required philosophy. In a very telling passage Jordanes related how, for a short time at least, the Goths even studied philosophy and ethics:

> By teaching them physics he made them live naturally under laws of their own, which they possess in written form to this day, and which they call *belagines*. He made them skilled in reasoning beyond all other races and he gave them a thorough knowledge of astronomy. For a short time the Goths had leisure from warfare and could enjoy lessons in philosophy.[172]

The Goths, it turns out, could be both monstrous interlopers who were meant to lead the armies of Gog and Magog in a battle for the end of days and they could make astronomical calculations and study logic and rhetoric. It all depended on the narrative. It all depended on the message.

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[170] Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp. 28-9.

[171] Remember that Cassiodorus' *Getica* was a panegyric, so this fits the model.

[172] Jordanes, *Getica*, in Mommsen (ed.), *MGH AA V*, p. 74: '*qui cernens eorum animos sibi in omnibus oboedire et naturalem eos habere ingenium, omnem pene phylosophiam eos instruxit: erat namque huius rei magister peritus. Nam ethicam eos erudiens barbaricos mores conpescuit; fysicam tradens naturaliter propriis legibus vivere fecit, quas usque nunc conscriptas belagines nuncupant; logicam instruens rationis eos supra ceteras gentes fecit expertes; practicen ostendens in bonis actibus conversare suasit; theoreticen demonstrans signorum duodecem et per ea. planetarum cursus omnemque astronomiam contemplari edocuit.*'

As one final point, it has occasionally been asked whether Cassiodorus really believed that Gothic women were the Amazons of classical Greek writing. To my mind, that is the wrong question and seems immaterial and unprovable. The important question is: knowing that most people would not believe this section of the story, why did Cassiodorus, and then Jordanes, choose to include it? Again, it seems to me that the answer to this question is a somewhat simple, if often overlooked, one. They did so, because the monstrous connection to the classical Greek myth was a powerful trope. It has been noted that the Cassiodorean elements in Jordanes are almost always glowing, however, on occasion Jordanes provides unflattering even critical information about the Goths.[173]

III.7: Picts

The history of the Picts, probably more so, than any of the other peoples we looked at thus far has modern day political ramifications.[174] The Picts have a long history and have been attested in history writing from before the Roman conquest of Britain right through to the tenth century. Despite the length of their historical attestation much of the writing has been incorrect, incoherent or uninformed, which has left the Picts, or more precisely, the history of the Picts, in a rather precarious position. What we do know about them can be summarised as such: The Picts were a tribal confederation of peoples who lived in what is now Northern and Eastern Scotland from the late Iron Age until the Middle Ages. Their traditional homeland was north of the Firth of Forth and written sources about them survived from the Roman conquest of the British Isles until about the tenth

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[173] See Liebeschuetz, 'Making a Gothic History', p. 203; Cf. Cassiodorus, Chron. 1331, '*Theodericus . . . Odovacrem molientem sibi insidias interemit*' with Jordanes, *Romana,* 349, '*Theodericus Odoacrum in deditiones suscepit, deinde vero ac si suspectum Ravenna in palatio iugulans.*' See also Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths*, pp. 240-1.

[174] I am here thinking about the recent Scottish Independence vote and the furore over the *Asterix and the Picts* cartoon. See also Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain: From the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), *passim.*

century. They spoke a language that was likely related to the Brittonic language spoken by their neighbours to the South. Over time, the Picts are thought to have slowly merged with the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riata to form the Kingdom of Alba between the eighth and ninth centuries, possibly in response to Viking incursions. As the Kingdom of Alba expanded to include the Kingdoms of Strathclyde and Lothian, the Pictish identity was eventually incorporated by the collective identity of 'Scots'. This process was more or less complete by the tenth or eleventh centuries.[175] The first mention of the Latin *Picti* dates from a Panegyric written by Eumenius in AD 297. It is clear that Eumenius' *Picti* was meant to refer to painted or tattooed peopled (from the Latin, *pingere*, for 'to paint'). However, this was very likely an etymological accident.[176]

III.7.1: Picts as monsters

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* was meant to demonstrate that the English (*Angli*) were God's newest chosen people and to compare England, if not to Paradise, perhaps to a North Sea Holy Land. Like many writers before and after him, Bede relied heavily on what today we would probably term racial stereotypes for rhetorical purposes. The Frisians for example, were described as barbarians, and the Franks and Saxons were said to 'infest' the continental shores.[177] It is with this in mind that one must recall the very brief passage in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in which Bede first introduces his readers to the *Picti*. After briefly laying out the five languages that are spoken in Britain by the four groups of people he says inhabit the island, *i.e.*, the Britons, the Angles, the Irish, and the Picts, he mentions how the *Picti* arrived in Britain.[178] The *Picti*, he tells us, sailed out into the ocean

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[175] Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795*, *passim*. For a very brief but effective introduction see also Rab Houston, *Scotland: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. at pp. 5-6, 39-41, and 82.

[176] See Sally Foster, *Picts, Gaels and Scots: Early Historic Scotland* (London: Batsford, 1996), p. 11; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795*, p. 335.

[177] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I.6, at p, 15; and Book V.9, at p. 247.

[178] There has been a great deal written on the five languages of Britain in Bede. For the

from Scythia with just a few warships. Eventually their ships were blown west to Ireland. Upon their arrival there they asked the local inhabitants if they could settle in their lands but were denied. However, the Irish informed the *Picti* that there was space available in Britain and that if they (the *Picti*) ran into any resistance once in Britain they could count on the support of the Irish.[179] There are a couple of things worth discussing in greater detail from this passage. Firstly, Bede has the *Picti* come from Scythia, which according to classical tradition was a wilderness that produced beasts, monsters, and was largely unknown geographically.[180] The latest version of the Oxford World Classics translation of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* claims that this was probably simply an oversight on Bede's part adding that he probably just confused Scythia with Scandia.[181] Although this is a definite possibility, I would suggest that an alternative reason was to blame, *i.e.*, it was intentionally done by Bede. After all, a man as widely read and knowledgeable about geography as Bede was would simply not make this mistake. Rather, I think this was a deliberate attempt to give the *Picti* a dubious origin story.[182] After all, this is the place where all sorts of monstrous, unknown, and liminal people have been said to come from for centuries.

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latest work see Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, 'Of Bede's 'five languages and four nations': The Earliest Writing from Ireland, Scotland and Wales ', in C.E. Lees (ed.), *The New Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 99-119; Clare Stancliffe, 'British and Irish Contexts', in S. DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 69-83, esp. at pp. 69-72; Scott DeGregorio (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[179] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in Lapidge (ed.), *Histoire Ecclésiastique du Peuple Anglais - Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, Book I.1. See also Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I.1, at p. 11.

[180] See above, pp. 146-50.

[181] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 10, and 362.

[182] There is some evidence that the story of the Scythian origin of the Picts was already circulating in the Pictish court before Bede's inclusion of it, though the veracity of this tale is doubted by some. See Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795*, pp. 224, and 238-41; Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia to the Problem of the Picts: Thoughts on the Quest for Pictish Origins', *passim*.

The language used to describe various people in ancient ethnography was not always very original. Often, the descriptive categories were recycled and inherited from previous, usually classical authors.[183] In other words, the same features and traits are often seen in different peoples. These same recycled points were frequently used as moralising features, for example, 'they built no temples' or 'made no images of their gods', or because of 'their belief in the immortality of their souls' they fought fiercely and bravely. Herodotus, for example, attributed the lack of temples to the Scythians. The *Picti* certainly fit this liminal, unknown role for much of *Historia Ecclesiastica*, though, curiously, they are eventually redeemed by the end of the narrative.[184] Secondly, and very oddly, I think, the *Picti* and the Irish were both described in collective terms. What I mean by this, is that there was no reference to an individual king, or tribal leader of the *Picti* that led them from their homeland, and once they arrived in Ireland they did not request permission to settle from an Irish king or chieftain but rather 'the *Picti*' requested this from 'the Irish' as a whole. It is as if these two groups of peoples were not a collection of individuals but were rather an embodiment of their tribe (or race?). In fact, the Irish response to the *Picti* is given as direct speech, as if the entirety of the Irish people spoke with a single voice: 'We can give you some good advice as to what to do. We know another island not far from our own, in an easterly direction, which we often see in the distance on clear days. If you will go there, you can make settlement for yourselves; but if anyone resists you, make use of our help.'[185] It is this supplanting of individual identities or motives with a collective one that allows for these rhetorical devices of monstrosity to be most effective.

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[183] See discussion above about the lists that appeared in numerous medieval manuscripts, pp. 131.

[184] It has been suggested to me by Ian Wood that perhaps Bede's commentary on Samuel can help explain this redemption. As I write this sections, Ian Wood is working on an article outlining his thoughts on this topic.

[185] Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. by Colgrave, et al. in *Oxford World's Classics: The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I.1, at p. 11.

III.8: Franks and Lombards

Like all the other groups we have already looked at, the Franks and Lombards have somewhat complicated, pseudo-mythical origins. With the Franks, however, we are on much firmer ground given that they were the most successful and long-lasting of the migratory Germanic groups to enter Europe and have therefore not only produced a great deal of evidence concerning their own past but more importantly much of it has survived. I do not think that the Franks' obsession with their own origin was unique to them; after all, Jordanes even mentions hearing much of his own Gothic history from songs. What is unique to the Franks is the survival of many of these texts. In any case, if it has not been made clear to this point, the 'Germanic' barbarian groups that entered the Empire in the centuries before the collapse of the empire of the West should not be seen as a cohesive unit. There was no Gothic *gens* in the purest sense of the word, and there was no group that travelled into the empire as a cohesive unit. The Franks, likewise, should not be seen as a uniform or unified group of people but rather as a collection of various 'Germanic' groups such as the *Ampivarii*, *Bructeri*, *Chamavi*, and *Salii* to name only a few. The Frankish *gens*, it seems, came into being through a confederation of numerous peoples living along the lower Rhine and written about and described by earlier historians.[186] What there was instead was a shifting, liquid, and ill-defined group of Germanic people who shaped, and were shaped by, the groups they were slotted into. The Franks were no different. What the Franks did however, was construct for themselves a pre-history like none of the other groups. They not only connected themselves to the ancient Greek past by claiming Trojan ancestorship, but they also slotted themselves into biblical history by writing themselves in a way that made them appear to be the new Chosen People. But their most effective and lasting contribution to the history of the Middle Ages was their association and connection to the Roman past. This was done so effectively that by the time of Charlemagne it was common to refer to Aachen as *Nova Roma* and to refer to him as King David. Had the other Germanic groups, such as the Vandals, the Goths (Visigoths or Ostrogoths), the

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[186] Liebeschuetz, 'Making a Gothic History', p. 212.

Alans, the Lombards, or even the Huns survived the Middle Ages perhaps they would have been just as effective at creating a history for themselves. We do know that many of these groups certainly tried to do similar things with their own pasts. Recent work on Vandal North Africa, for example, has demonstrated that the former bread basket of the Roman Empire was far more culturally active then had previously been thought.[187]

In the case of the Lombards, monstrosity had a slightly different use. The *cynocephali* for instance, have had a very mutable existence in the works of classical authors. They have been described as living in caves in India, in small agricultural *villae* in Scandinavia, or even on the Isle of Man. There is even some evidence to suggest that that the *cynocephali* had a connection to Wodan and St Mercurius, at least amongst the Lombards.[188] That St Mercurius was a very important figure amongst the Lombard nobility is quite easily discerned from any reading of the literary output surrounding the translation of, and relics associated with, the saint. The relics of the great Byzantine military saint Mercurius were enshrined with much pomp and circumstance in the church of Santa Sofia in Benevento in the year 768 and it appear that Mercurius remained an important regional saint for centuries to come.[189] Arechis, the Duke, and later Prince of Benevento, it seemed, intended to make Mercurius the patron saint not only of Benevento but of the church of Santa Sofia, the Lombard court, and the Lombard people.[190] The cult of St Mercurius remained important in the region and in the

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[187] Mark Lewis Tizzoni, 'Dracontius and the Wider World: Cultural and Intellectual Interconnectedness in Late Fifth-Century Vandal North Africa', in *Networks and Neighbours* 2(1) (2014), pp. 96-117.

[188] Philip Shaw, *Uses of Wodan: The Development of his Cult and of Medieval Literary Responses to It,* PhD Thesis, University of Leeds (2002), at pp. 122-5.

[189] Arechis, *Sanctorum translationes Beneventi factae*, in G. Waitz (ed.), *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, Saec. VI-IX* (Hannover: 1878), pp. 573-82, at pp. 573-4 and 576-8; see also Paul Oldfield, *Sanctity and Pilgrimage in Medieval Southern Italy, 1000-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 113-7.

[190] '*Dominii eiusdem loci tutor et Urbis',* Arechis, *SRL*, in Waitz (ed.), *Scriptores Rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum, Saec. VI-IX*, p. 578: '*Ad tutelam Longobardi populi procurandam* [*Mercurius*] *Samniae principatus obtinet.*' See also Edmond Martène and Ursin Durand, *Veterum Scriptorum et Monumentorum, Historicorum, Dogmaticorum, Moralium, Amplissima Collectio* (Paris: Apud Montalant, 1724), col. 756: '*Effectusque*

twelfth century a relief was carved over the door to the church that pictured Christ, the Virgin, and St Mercurius.[191] It is probable then that Paul the Deacon, who was commissioned by Arechis to write his *Historia Romana* (and possibly his better known *Historia Langobardum*), had St Mercurius in mind when he wrote about the *cynocephali.* In the *Historia Langobardum*, Paul tells us that after winning a victory over the Vandals the Lombard army, in search of food and supplies, attempted to cross a pass into Mauringa only to find the pass blocked by a host of Assipitti (who may be Tacitus' Usipetes of the Lower Rhine region) and the Asabiden, who were the remnant of the Asen who failed to follow Odin into Scandinavia, or some other group.[192] Having been exhausted by the previous battle and being grossly outnumbered the Lombards instead chose to pretend that they had a host of *cynocephali* in their ranks. They spread this rumour amongst the camps of the opposing army. In order to add credence to their story they spread the tents in their own camp very wide and lit far more fires then were required by a host of their size. The ruse worked. Rather than fighting a pitched battle, which the Assipitti would surely have won, the Assipitti elected to have the outcome decided by a battle between champions. The Lombard champion, who incidentally only asked for freedom from slavery for his children, won the duel and thus the Lombard army was free to cross the pass to rest and resupply. It is possible that the *cynocephalic* assistance is in reference to a story that survives in some Eastern *vitae* of St Mercurius in which the saint was accompanied into battle with a pair

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est patronus Beneventani populi', Stéphane Binon, *Essai sur le cycle de saint Mercure, martyr de Dèce et meurtrier de l'empereur Julien*, (Paris: E. Leroux, 1937), p. 44.

[191] Thomas Forrest Kelly, *The Beneventan Chant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 12.

[192] Mauringa is mentioned by the Ravenna Cosmographer (Books I and II) and refers to somewhere in the Elbe river basin or possibly along the Eider River now in the German State of Schleswig-Holstein. In the Old English poem *Widsith*, which dates from the tenth century but relates events from the Age of Migrations, we are told that titular character is from the Myrging tribe ('*Him from Myrgingum | æþele onwocon*'), of the Suebi. There is also mention of the Lombards and a group called the '*Heaobeardna þrym*', which has also been suggested may be an alternate name for the Lombards, both of whom fought the Danes under the leadership of Hrothwulf and Hrothgar in a battle near Heorot. For a discussion on how *Widsith* fits into the tradition of Heroic Old English literature see Niles, *Homo Narrans*, pp. 120-45.

of companion *cynocephali.*[193]

II.9: Conclusions

> Moreover, despite the antagonism between the worlds of monsters and men, there is, as in the Passion of Saint Christopher and Judith in the same manuscript, something deeply human about the 'monsters'. All are given human attributes at some stage, and the poet even goes so far as to evoke our sympathy for their plight.[194]

Unlike barbarism, monstrosity, as a marker of identity, is not lost with inclusion in the in-group. That is, barbarians are almost always defined, in one way or another, as lacking civilisation so one can safely assume that once civilised (whatever that entails), these groups are no longer considered barbarian. Although there are problems with this paradigm. Barbarians 'performing' civility or vice versa, for example, make such a claim difficult to maintain.[195] However, with monstrosity no amount of civilising tendency or religious conversion can fully erase the monstrous nature. Monstrosity is usually an external category – *i.e.*, appearance based. A *cynocephalus*, for example, even if converted to Christianity, would still be monstrous; it would still have the head of a dog. Therefore, when an author uses monstrous rhetoric in conjunction with barbarous descriptions to describe a group of people, rather than barbarous language alone, it is done with intent. It is meant to last. It is meant to stigmatise. There is no coming back from it. The race is un-saveable, damned, and in extreme circumstances, an active member of the end of days. Just as the barbarian tag could shift and change, one minute being the noble savage the next being the uncivilised Cretan, so to were the definitions of the monstrous mutable. In one case it was being used as a typical Us vs. Them description, while in the next it could be used to question humanity. In the end, the question is not why the monstrous were used but rather why the

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[193] Friedman, *The Monstrous Races*, pp. 71-2.

[194] Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 29.

[195] See the Stilicho distich. See also Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, p. 56 where he discusses the problems of performative barbarism.

monstrous were used in this instance.

Ethnicity, whether linguistic, cultural, or pseudo-political, is a modern construct.[196] As Chris Wickham has so succinctly put it 'a man or a woman with a Lombard-style brooch is no more necessarily a Lombard than a family in Bradford with a Toyota is Japanese; artefacts are no secure guide to ethnicity.'[197] It is perhaps, only within the Roman Empire or more specifically the ethnographic, and I would add geographic, tradition associated with and created by a series of aristocratic and well-educated Greco-Roman writers that there was anything approaching a unified Germanic or barbarian identity. After all, most, if not all of the groups that later became called Goths, Franks, *Alemannii*, etc. were perfectly happy to fight amongst themselves before they ever got involved in fighting the Romans.

Group identities, especially when mixed with monstrous traits, were an effective way to limit both the humanity and the voice of the out-group. Whether it was Herodotus' clumping together of the Scythian tribes or Bede's universalising of the Irish when they were talking to the *Picti*, the effectiveness of these rhetorical strategies of distinction cannot be debated. Mathisen talks of the 'realness' or accuracy of Roman lists of barbarians when he mentioned the seeming lack of monstrous races in their catalogues. However, I wonder if the combination of a far better geographic knowledge (even if that knowledge was not always reflected in geographic writings) and the confounding of monstrous traits with barbarian groups, can explain the absence of monstrous races.[198] As Todorov so succinctly put it: 'the fear of barbarians is what risks making us barbarian. And we will commit a worse evil than that which we initially feared.'[199] The other is so in

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[196] Jelena Tošić, 'Migration, Identity, and Belonging: Anthropological Perspectives on a Multidisciplinary Field of Research', in M. Messer, R. Schroeder and R. Wodak (eds.), *Migrations: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Vienna: Springer, 2012), pp. 113-6.

[197] Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society 400-1000* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 68.

[198] See Mathisen, 'Catalogues of Barbarians', p. 19.

[199] Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians*, trans. by Andrew Brown in *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*, p. 6.

excess of anything you can understand, grasp or reduce.

Conclusion

This thesis has been deeply interested in exploring the late antique and early medieval canon – Jordanes, St Augustine, Orosius, Bede, and others – in a wholly different light. This was done through a historiographical (re-)contextualisation of these otherwise well-known and often-used sources so that their underutilized, and often disregarded, sections on geography and/or monstrosity were reinvestigated. Whether in their geographic, ethnographic, or monstrous sections almost all of these texts have provided us with novel and valuable insight into the early medieval thought-world, especially as concerns conceptions of geography, the other, and of the contrast between barbarism and civilisation. In Francois Hartog's *The Mirror of Herodotus* the great father of history is depicted as a kind of *Janus* faced author who was inadvertently describing the Greeks when he was actually describing the Scythians.[1] Despite its shortcomings, Hartog was able finally to break the 'liar or not' line of questioning that always surrounds Herodotean studies, instead the focus was put back onto the text itself. Now, this *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* stand is nothing new, however, the notion of this text being used as mirror to the other was. Herodotus, according to Hartog was 'at pains to translate 'others' into the terms of the knowledge shared by all Greeks, and which, in order to make credible these 'others' whom it is constructing, elaborates a whole rhetoric of 'otherness.'[2]

Although the vast majority of these texts – the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* and the *Apocalypse of Ps. Methodius* notwithstanding – are canonical texts, we have looked at them with a fresh light by focusing on portions of these texts that are oftentimes dismissed as digressions or flights of fancy, which, as the traditional viewpoint goes, detracted from the solid foundations of history or theology which these writers are known for. Instead, I have demonstrated that

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[1] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, p. xxiv. This is especially evident in the cover page he chose for the book.

[2] Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*, trans. by Janet Lloyd in *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*.

these monstrous digressions cannot, and should not, be excised from the texts in which they are found. They are a part of the whole, and must be studied as part of these authors' works.

With that in mind, it is worth restating that this thesis was ultimately concerned with monstrous rhetoric as applied to real peoples in real situations. In some ways, quite paradoxically, this thesis is not about monsters at all, but rather the application of monstrous rhetoric to barbarian groups. What has become clear throughout this project is that to date a great many scholars have ignored the geographical and/or ethnographic passages of most of the canonical writers of history and theology from the early medieval period. Others have noticed the passages, but brushed them off as mistakes, historical oddities, or fuzzy distractions from the proper history these texts can furnish. In this thesis, however, I have highlighted the use of monstrous ethnography in many of these texts, connecting them more firmly to other, so-called 'marginal' texts, such as the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister* and the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*. I have shown that the fantastic and monstrous geographies of these outlying texts are in fact, closely linked to the rhetoric of the monstrous in the seemingly more 'serious' historical writing of Orosius or Bede.

What has also become clear, I think, is that even the canonical writers of the late antique and early medieval period, such as Isidore, Jordanes, and St Augustine, used monstrous language frequently and deliberately as a way to further their narratives or as a way to express ideas they were loath to express in other terms. Monsters, and perhaps more accurately, monstrous barbarians, therefore, are far more central to early medieval historical writing than has previously been acknowledged. In part, this is because these writers were using images of the monstrous very differently from what we often imagine as classical monster-tales of the Middle Ages, such as *Beowulf* or the images of the *mappae mundi*. In particular, the rhetoric of monstrosity was used by these writers to influence, and sway their readers against real peoples, while the standard, late medieval view assumes that monsters and monstrosity were more abstract. Because marginal (barbaric) groups were systematically described and dismissed through the

rhetoric of monstrosity, the idea of monstrosity is thus intrinsically tied up in such issues as nationality, self-identity, and the construction of ethnicity and its limits. Monstrosity, by illustrating margins and difference, was a crucial element in the construction of borders of ethnicity and geography. This process of rhetoricising the other was re-purposed, whether intentionally or not, by so many early medieval writers when they wrote about the marginal peoples of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. In fact, this rhetoricising of the other was so effective that Columbus, in his descriptions of the New World and the inhabitants of it, resorted to the familiar rhetoric of Mandeville. What this rhetoric on change, hybridity, monstrousness, and metamorphosis forces the reader to consider is not actually the change itself but the contradiction - the difference. And this, after all, is the point of using monstrosity to define humanity. When late antique and early Christian writers used the other as a mirror with which to reflect their own questions of humanity, Christianity, and civility, it was the rhetoricised and reduced-to-a-monster other who suffered.

In the late antique period, the identity of the centre was shifting from a Roman-centred focus to something else. In essence, early medieval Europe was forming, with its own peculiarities, power struggles, and strategies of distinction. It is not surprising then that it is this period which would be so deeply interested in pinpointing the identity of the other, marking it with a monstrous vocabulary inherited from a longstanding Roman tradition of history writing, geography, and pseudo-ethnography.

If barbarian tribes and ethnic identity were the first obsession of early medieval writers, the Apocalypse was the second. Indeed, it is impossible to separate depictions of monstrosity in early medieval writings from thinking about the Apocalypse, and particularly the role of barbarians in the Apocalypse. It is no coincidence that monsters and monstrous language appear with the greatest frequency in works of apocalyptic literature, such as in the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, the *Apocalypse of Ps Methodius*, and to a lesser extent Bede and Orosius. Descriptions of the unclean races and the breasts of the North worked to tie both monsters and barbarians to the end of days.

The specific images and *topoi* of monsters and the monstrous remained surprisingly static over the centuries. Indeed, visual and textual depictions of monsters in the later middle ages were often indebted to these early medieval texts; the *Cosmographia of Aethicus Ister*, for instance, was one of the sources of the famous Hereford *Mappa Mundi*. At the same time, these images were (re-)deployed in strikingly different ways in different periods. Later medieval representations of monsters were, for the most part, not particularly concerned with the figure of the barbarian, or with efforts to draw close connections between the monster and the barbarian. And why should they be? By the tenth century, pagan barbarians were a thing of the past for many, if not most, Christian writers. But in the seventh and eighth centuries, they were very real and very close to hand.

The geographic origin of a particular *gens* was central to that group's understanding of its past. For Alcuin and Wulfstan, placing the origin of their respective *gens* on the continent was essential for their understanding of its heritage. For others such as Jordanes, Paul the Deacon, or Isidore, and even Bede, the pre-historical geographic origins of their *gens* was central to their contemporary place for them. In other words geography defined ethnography.[3] The connection between the naming of groups and the geography is so central to our world view that it is sometimes easy to miss. The Jutes came from Jutland, the Saxons from what is now Saxony and the Danes from Denmark. However, this can also go the other way. East-Anglia owes its name to the Angles who settled in that region following the departure of the Romans in the early fifth century. In fact, the name England itself is derived from the Angles. The Lombard region of Northern Italy derives its name from the Lombard invaders of the fifth and sixth centuries who were eventually able to carve out a rather successful, if short-lived, kingdom there. Burgundy and France are similarly named. Historians of the Early Middle Ages will often look at the names of these regions and explain, sometimes in excruciating detail, the events that led to such and such group leaving from or arriving in a particular region. However, the political and often nationalistic

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[3] Merrills, *History and Geography*, pp. 291-2.

reason why these regions acquired their names is seldom as simple as it looks at first glance. Modern day France, though deriving its name from the Franks, could just as easily be called by another name. Germany, which harks back to the ancient German *folk* of the Ancient and Late Roman times is called *Allemagne* in modern French. The Welsh, famously derive their name from the Old English word for outsider or foreigner. This is not flattering, but it has now come to mean something else to the modern Welsh. Although the Welsh independence movement has not achieved anything close to the same support that the recent Scottish independent movement had it is worth noting that the Welsh Separatist party has elected to use the name Plaid Cymru instead of the anglicized 'Wales'. These topics are, of course, extremely complicated and complex issues involving questions that lay far outside the scope of this study, however, I have elected touch briefly on them here to emphasize the connection between geography and history in the modern world.

Monstrosity was a useful rhetorical device. By likening the Huns to beasts, depicting their origins at the hands of witches and unclean spirits and by placing their original homeland in a swamp, Jordanes was asking the reader to vilify the Huns. By placing the Pictish origins in Scythia, Bede was essentially dehumanising and them putting them into that classical tradition of filthy, barbarian races from that region of the world at best. At worst, he was doing something similar to the author of the *Cosmographia* and asking the reader to turn them into monstrous races at best, we are meant to understand the *Picti* as savage barbarians awaiting conversion. By comparing a group of people to monsters or by subtly implying they are from a region of the world that contains monsters, the author is tapping into a well-trodden and effective rhetorical strategy of othering people by using recognisable and easily definable tropes.

I opened this thesis with a quotation from Derrida in which he himself proclaims that one cannot name or announce monsters without them becoming pets. The distant-yet-familiar that makes the monster so effective announces itself. I will close this thesis with another quotation, this time from the French writer Claude-Claire Kappler: 'If monsters appear in all civilizations, in all epochs, and in the thoughts of "normal" people as well the fantasies of neurotics, it is because

monsters perform a natural function.'[4] I hope that throughout this work I have made it clear not only that monsters and monstrosity perform natural functions but that these natural functions can also be powerful rhetorical devices for defining the difference between here and there, or us and them. Unfortunately, the same rhetoric continues today on both a small and a large scale.

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[4] Claude-Claire Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Payot, 1999).

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