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FORSCHUNGEN ZUR GESCHICHTE DES MITTELALTERS  
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# Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter

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## AETHICUS ISTER: AN EXERCISE IN DIFFERENCE

The *Cosmography* associated with "Aethicus Ister" purports to have been written by "Jerome", drawing on the work of an Istrian philosopher, the "Aethicus Ister" of the title. For reasons of clarity I shall go along with this claim, however fictional it may be, and call the author of the text which survives "Jerome".

The work begins with an account of the Creation, which turns into a discussion of the course of the sun, and of the extremities of the world, and this leads to an excursus on the island of Munitia and its inhabitants. The author then announces that he will exclude the peoples of the Old Testament and descriptions of idolatry, and instead embark on a survey *de artium plurimarum instrumenta*, which turns out to be a discussion of various northern peoples and their skills, culminating first in a description of the Turks and the role they will play in the Last Days, and second in a parallel account of Gog and Magog, who, like the Turks have been shut up in mountain fastnesses by Alexander the Great.<sup>1</sup> This is followed by a discussion of ship-building, and then by what is announced as a chapter *de insolis gentium plurimarumque artium*. The opening contents of the chapter, however, turn out to be an attack on heresy, paganism and Neo-Platonism, and a discussion of grammar and alphabets. Thereafter there is something like a geographical survey – although it is concerned in the first instance with Asia, Asia Minor and the Balkans (prompting the longest of many excursus on Alexander), rather than with any islands. It must, however, be said that the author has a habit of discussing large tracts of continental Europe and Asia as if they were islands, and that a discussion of the islands of the Mediterranean does follow. The author subsequently returns to the Balkans and Pannonia, which prompts an account of a war between Romulus and Francus, and a related lament over the state of Istria, ravaged in the war. "Jerome" then turns to those parts of the East and South which he has so far omitted, before concluding with a short chapter on winds, springs and a bizarre alphabet, which he transcribes.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly the text is in some sense fraudulent. The work of "Aethicus Ister" which "Jerome" claims to be following is unlikely to have been a single text. Indeed, it is clear that the sources of the *Cosmography* were diverse, although the Bible and Isidore of Seville provide the largest number of quotations hitherto identified.<sup>3</sup> Whether we can move from there to argue that "Jerome" simply invented "Aethicus Ister", and that there was no earlier compilation from which the author drew most or all the material which he ascribes to the Istrian philosopher, is, however, unclear. It should be noted that a Spanish or South Gallic manuscript of the eighth century, now in Albi,

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander's shutting up of Gog and Magog is common in eschatological writings, e. g. Pseudo-Methodius 8, SACKUR, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen*. On Gog and Magog as kings of the Huns in the Syrian Alexander legend, see *ibid.* 34; on Huns as Turks see below.

<sup>2</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia*, ed. PRINZ.

<sup>3</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 22–28, ed. PRINZ 319–328.

includes the geographical excursus of Book One, Chapter Two of Orosius' *History against the Pagans*, ascribing it to one "Aethicus".<sup>4</sup> Moreover, although an abridged Orosius was clearly not the main source for "Jerome", there is much that can be paralleled between the two texts. Both organise their geographical material in such a way that there is repetition and rather sudden lurches from one topic to another. Further, in the opening section of his *descriptio terrarum*, Orosius refers on a number of occasions to Alexander the Great. One might add that the classical hero had become a touchstone in cosmographical and prophetic works in the course of the seventh century;<sup>5</sup> the incorporation of his legend into "Jerome's" *Cosmography* can, thus, be set within an established intellectual and literary tradition. Finally, in the Albi manuscript the *descriptio* drawn from Orosius is linked to a list of winds: the subject of the winds recurs in "Jerome's" work on several occasions, notably in the final chapter.<sup>6</sup> It is not impossible, therefore, that there was a text of some sort ascribed, like the Albi *descriptio*, to "Aethicus", which provided "Jerome" with a framework on which to hang a whole succession of ideas and excursus.

Because of the curious nature of the *Cosmography* of "Aethicus Ister" it has been seen as a comic attack on Boniface, written by Virgil of Salzburg after the martyr's death.<sup>7</sup> There are more than enough indications to suggest that the work was written in the mid-eighth century, and it is clear from the manuscript survival that it was popular in Bavaria,<sup>8</sup> but there is little to support the identification of Virgil as author. Despite the bizarre language of the work, there is no philological case for it being written by an Irishman,<sup>9</sup> and although the dismissal of Ireland as an island of idiots could be an act of self-deprecating irony,<sup>10</sup> the comparative absence of comment on the British Isles in particular and western Europe in general suggests that "Jerome" was not interested in that part of the world. The identification of the work as being comic is equally problematic, despite the author's obvious delight in irony and in word games;<sup>11</sup> it begins as a religious text, with an admittedly eccentric account of the Creation, and includes several passages on the Last Days, which, like other eschatological writings of the period, incorporate an interpretation of the Alexander Romance, as has already been noted.<sup>12</sup> In considering the marvellous we should remember that it was thought to be an indication of the range of God's creation. And we should also note that in the High Middle Ages, at least, maps were considered appropriate as altar pieces, as at Hereford – and indeed that the Hereford Mappa Mundi seems to have used the *Cosmographia* of "Aethicus" as a source.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fraudulent claims of authorship, the *Cosmography* is not a work of comedy, but a study of the whole world, which has its parallels in other Christian cosmographies, prophetic writings and histories.

<sup>4</sup> *Descriptio terrarum* (Albi MS 29), ed. GLORIE 473–487.

<sup>5</sup> See REININK, Pseudo-Methodius 167, n. 73, for a useful comment and bibliography on the Alexander legend. See also Pseudo-Methodius, with the comments of SACKUR, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen* 26–39.

<sup>6</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 7, ed. PRINZ 242f.

<sup>7</sup> LÖWE, Salzburg als Zentrum literarischen Schaffens.

<sup>8</sup> For the manuscript tradition see Aethicus, *Cosmographia*, ed. PRINZ 55–67, on the implications of this see below.

<sup>9</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia*, ed. PRINZ 11.

<sup>10</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 1, ed. PRINZ 112f.

<sup>11</sup> c. f. Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 195. For another possible example of the use of irony to religious effect, see GOFFART, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* 112–234, on Gregory of Tours as ironist.

<sup>12</sup> E. g. Pseudo-Methodius, ed. SACKUR.

<sup>13</sup> HARVEY, *Mappa Mundi* 45ff., noting a borrowing from Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 182. For general consideration of the relationship between mapmaking and religion see now EDSON, *Mapping Time and Space*.

Traditional interpretations of "Jerome's" *Cosmography*, which have dwelt largely on the issue of authorship, have run into a series of intellectual impasses. More fruitful might be a post-modern approach of the type used by Stephen Greenblatt in his examination of Sir John de Mandeville's equally fraudulent *Travels*, which participates in the fiction set up by the author;<sup>14</sup> as we shall see de Mandeville offers some suggestive parallels for a reading of "Jerome". Indeed the *Cosmography* seems ideally suited to a post-modern approach, since the author appears actually to invite consideration of the fabricated nature of his text; the work constantly plays on the relationship between the author and his, possibly imaginary, source. The source ought to be an authenticating element in the text, but any such function is undercut by the fact that the name of supposed author, "Jerome", carries more authority than the name given to his supposed informant, the impersonal, and pagan "Aethicus Ister". Even an honest admission that much of the material came from Isidore would have given the author more credibility. "Jerome", however, may not be concerned to endow his source with credibility; on more than one occasion he questions its contents, and he claims to leave out information that is irrelevant or unbelievable.<sup>15</sup> In an odd way "Jerome" presents himself as more reliable than his source.

Despite the fraudulent nature of the text, it is nevertheless worth colluding with "Jerome" and his work, because the fiction itself may be informative, not least on such issues as the author's attitude towards the "Other". To examine this, I intend first to take the description of the inhabitants of the island of Munitia, then to consider descriptions of some of the other peoples to be found in the *Cosmography*, most notably the Turks, and finally to step back yet further, to consider the extent to which the work offers any fixed point against which the "Other" may be assessed, and what this implies about a textual community in which the *Cosmography* was read. Thus, I shall conclude with an examination of some of the meanings that the text might have had in eighth- and ninth-century Bavaria.

The inhabitants of the island of Munitia are described at the end of the author's initial account of the Creation, following his discussion of the course of the sun.<sup>16</sup> The latest editor has unhelpfully identified Munitia as follows: "Der Name sei keltischen Ursprungs (gaelisch monadt 'mons') und wohl mit Skandinavien gleichzusetzen."<sup>17</sup> Certainly material similar to that which follows is associated elsewhere with Scandinavia, but the name, coming at the end of a list of islands including the British Isles, looks suspiciously like Monabia, or the Isle of Man, which appears at the end of the equivalent list in Orosius' *descriptio*.<sup>18</sup>

"He writes about Munitia, an island in the North, revealing in a very well known investigation that the *Cynocephali* people have the likeness of a dog's head, 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; their appearance is ferocious; and monsters are unheard of among them. The peoples who are adjacent to them call them *Cananei* [i. e. male Canaanites], for their womenfolk do not bear much of a resemblance to them. (The *Cynocephali*) are an accursed nation,<sup>19</sup> which no history discusses except this philosopher. The people of *Germania*, especially those who administer taxes and their tradesmen,

<sup>14</sup> GREENBLATT, *Marvelous Possessions* 26–51.

<sup>15</sup> For Jerome's stated relationship with his source, see, for example, Aethicus, *Cosmographia*, ed. PRINZ 108, 151, 154, 159, 170, 173, 192, 211, 223.

<sup>16</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 1, ed. PRINZ 114 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia*, ed. PRINZ 114, n. 155.

<sup>18</sup> *Discriptio Terrarum* 39, ed. GLORIE 471.

<sup>19</sup> See Genesis 9, 25–27.

say that they quite often engage in sea-borne trade with that island, and that they regularly call that nation *Cananei*. These foreigners go about bare-legged; they dress their hair, by smearing it with oil or fat; they give off a very strong smell; they lead a life of a very uncivilised kind, eating unlawful meat of unclean quadrupeds, (namely) mice, moles and so forth. (They have) no proper buildings, but poles with stretched coverings made of felt; (they live) in wooded and out-of-the-way places, bogs and wet-lands; (they have) numerous cattle and a most abundant supply of birds and sheep. They know nothing of God, worshipping demons and auguries. They have no king; they make use of tin rather than silver, saying that tin is a softer and brighter (form of) silver; indeed it is not found in those regions, but has to be brought there from elsewhere. Gold is found on their shores; (their land) does not produce fruit nor vegetables; there is plenty of milk, but little honey. All this the philosopher describes in his non-Christian remarks.”<sup>20</sup>

There is much that can be said about this passage. Despite “Jerome’s” comment, *cynocephali* had been described by other writers.<sup>21</sup> At the very least, *cynocephali* could be found in Christian writings because St Christopher, *genere Canineorum*, was thought to have been one.<sup>22</sup> His dog’s head he seems to have gained because he was known to be from the land of Canaan, prompting a confusion between *caninus* and *Cananeus*. That “Jerome” was aware of traditions relating to Christopher is suggested by the fact that he dwells on the name *Cananeus*, “Canaanite”.<sup>23</sup> But there is a further possible context for the presence of *cynocephali* in early medieval writings: there are good reasons for thinking that Scandinavians and Slavs did wear dog-headed masks,<sup>24</sup> and that these lie behind the geographical association of the legend of the *cynocephali* with the Baltic region, where they are to be found in a letter of Ratramnus of Corbie to Rimbart of Hamburg-Bremen,<sup>25</sup> and in Bruno of Querfurt’s *Life of Adalbert of Prague*.<sup>26</sup>

There is, however, a broader issue than the unravelling of the *cynocephali* legend here. First, these are monstrous beings, so monstrous that their land has no monsters; being effectively (if, as we shall see, not quite completely) “Other” themselves, the *cynocephali* make impossible any distinction between the normal and the monstrous. They are savages, and their lack of civilisation is marked by their semi-nudity and their hair-oil, their poor housing, their paganism and their lack of honey. These criteria are interesting. True to his decision not to spoil his work with paganism, “Jerome” has made little of the demons and auguries of the *cynocephali*. Instead, he has given a list which can be related both to Late Antique views of culture (Sidonius Apollinaris was equally averse to hair oil)<sup>27</sup> and to Lévi-Strauss’ distinction between nature and culture. From an anthropological point of view they are neither entirely primitive nor entirely cultivated. It is symptomatic that in so far as they have an agriculture it is a pastoral one, not an arable one. In this, as in much else, it should be noted that “Jerome’s” account of the *cynoceph-*

<sup>20</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 1, ed. PRINZ 114 ff. *Profana* might more normally mean “ill-informed”, but “Jerome” does not seem to be commenting on the philosopher’s lack of knowledge in this instance.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, as representing the classical tradition, Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI, 3, 15, ed. LINDSAY: *Cynocephali appellantur eo quod canina capita habeant, quosque ipse latratus magis bestias quam homines confitetur*; XII, 2, 32: *Cynocephali et ipsi similes, sed facie ad modum canis; unde et noncupati*.

<sup>22</sup> *Passio Christopheri*, I, *Acta Sanctorum*, July (25th) VI, 146–149: the date of the *Passio* is unclear, but the dogheadedness of Christopher is already attested by the ninth-century writer, Ratramnus of Corbie: cf. WOOD, *Christians and Pagans* 66. The oldest ms of the *Passio*, however, is Würzburg, Univ.-Bibl. M. p. th. f. 28 from the second half of the eighth century.

<sup>23</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 1, ed. PRINZ 115.

<sup>24</sup> HÄGG, *Textilfunde* 69–72.

<sup>25</sup> Ratramnus, *Ep. to Rimbart*, ed. DÜMMLER 155 ff.; WOOD, *Christians and Pagans* 64 ff.

<sup>26</sup> Bruno, *Vita Adalberti* 25, ed. PERTZ 608; compare John Canaparius, *Vita Adalberti* 28, ed. PERTZ 593 f.

<sup>27</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, *Carm.* XII, 1, 6, ed. LOYEN 102 ff.

*hali* makes them less cultivated than does Ratramnus of Corbie a century later.<sup>28</sup> At the same time the *cynocephali* are worse than uncultivated; they are polluted; they eat unclean meat. And yet, for all their oddities, they are not completely beyond the pale; only their heads are unhuman – and since St Christopher was also a *cynocephalus*, one may guess that “Jerome” did not see this as being enough to exclude the *cynocephali* from the human race; they are indeed described as another *genus* of human. Further, they indulge in trade. They are thus a truly marginal people, neither “Familiar” nor “Other”.

The *cynocephali* are among the most marginal of “Jerome’s” human beings, but equivalent groups are to be found elsewhere in his *Cosmography*. One might have expected the minotaurs, who also had animal heads and human bodies, to have been exactly comparable; after all Orosius had commented very directly on their marginality: “I do not know whether I should more aptly call them wild men or human beasts.”<sup>29</sup> Further, one might have expected the minotaurs to have excited particular interest, since the Merovingian rulers of the Franks had claimed to be descended from a Quinotaur, a marine version of the same beast.<sup>30</sup> “Jerome” does indeed comment, but only in passing, on minotaurs being part animal and part human, and that they can scarcely be tamed.<sup>31</sup> He is, however, more interested in their martial ability. He writes that the Amazons “found minotaur cubs in the wilds, and brought them up and gently tamed them, and with them for the first time overcame the wedge-shaped formations of the enemy in battle. At first the minotaurs fighting in battle had even more strength than a legion of armed men.”<sup>32</sup> He then moves on to compare the minotaurs with centaurs.

The tamers of the minotaurs, the Amazons, are another marginal group who merit a long description, much, though not all, of which is drawn from Orosius:

“[The philosopher] speaks of the plain of Temiscerius, with its reputation for being very bloody from battle, of the Amazons, and their swiftness, on the borders of Scythia and of the aforementioned river Termodon. Two royal youths, the most outstanding and wise Plyinus and Solapesius, brought with them from Scythia a vast body of young people, consisting of their noble and energetic companions, and were slain cruelly [lit. by a cruel sword] near that aforementioned river and plain on the boundary of Scythia and the province of Pontic Cappadocia, having long devastated the neighbouring and adjacent regions as well as the inhabitants of the adjacent regions. Condemning the wives of the men to exile and frightful widowhood with impiety, they [i. e. their husbands’ killers] drove them from the confines of that region, from the Vafrian springs and the Lake of Murginacus, where the aforesaid river Murgincen divides into various streams, and they created the boundary of Scythia and made it into a vast wilderness.<sup>33</sup> In the southern part the crops are very healthy, but the peoples are weak. After the move to the south of Scythia these foreign Amazonian refugees settled down for a long time in that marshland as exiles. Indeed not long after, adopting a treacherous plan in their turn, after many weapons and new arms had been made skillfully, treacherously slaying the workmen, hired for pay at a humble level, and the skilled craftsmen, once their skills had been learned, they [the Amazons] prepared for battle. A new shield [made] of bitumen and the human blood of their own offspring was cunningly devised. After seducing their own children into sexual relations, killing the young males, [and]

<sup>28</sup> WOOD, *Christians and Pagans* 64 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Orosius I, 13, 2. Unlike “Jerome”, Orosius seems only to have known of the one, Cretan, minotaur. On the minotaur see also Isidore, *Etymologiae* XI, 3, 9 and 38.

<sup>30</sup> Fredegar III, 9, ed. KRUSCH 94 f.

<sup>31</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 160.

<sup>32</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 182.

<sup>33</sup> See below on Istria.

taking up arms, as <the philosopher> writes above, they killed the men who had survived, and incensed against the enemy with their own blood, pursued vengeance by the killing of their neighbours. Then, when peace had been made between them, they entered into indiscriminate matings; killing the boys, they preserved the girls, carefully nurturing and training them, they cauterized their right breasts, so that they should not be injured <by> being wounded by the shooting of arrows.”<sup>34</sup>

There follows an account of their history, which concludes with some comments on their weapons – weaponry and gadgets being something which consistently catches the eye of “Jerome”. “They used such fine and useful expertise of this kind at that time, <that> later the Scythians, Ionians, Cappadocians, *Germani* and the Trojans adopted similar weapons for use, <i. e.> spears, javelins and the famous sword.”<sup>35</sup> One is left to wonder whether these peoples, who by implication include the Franks, are in some way criticised by their association with the Amazons.

The Amazons are, of course, marginal because of their defiance of gender, but they are also made more marginal by being placed in a devastated landscape, which is one of the elements which “Jerome” adds to the account of Orosius. Such landscapes may have had some significance for the author, as we shall see in the case of Istria. But the marginality of the Amazons is also characterised by other odd details: for instance their combination of blood and bitumen. This combination is referred to elsewhere by “Jerome”, when he states that a mixture of bitumen and blood could never be cut by a sword.<sup>36</sup> Indeed bitumen is a substance that clearly fascinated the author, since he comments on it on a number of occasions.<sup>37</sup>

One of the references to bitumen in the *Cosmography* occurs in the description of the most marginal of all peoples, the Turks, who are related to Gog and Magog, with whom they will break out of their mountain retreats with the coming of Antichrist.<sup>38</sup> It is to them that we should now turn.

“<The Turks> are a people with a bad name, even <though> hardly known; a strange <people> given to worshipping images, engaging in every type of private and public debauchery; a truculent <people>, from which <characteristic> it has also got its name; <a people> of the stock of Gog and Magog. For they will eat all types of abominable things, even dead human foetuses, the flesh of youths, of young people, the flesh of baggage animals, of bears, of vultures and curlews and kites, of screech owls and bison, and of dogs and apes.<sup>39</sup> Of deformed stature, they never wash in water; they are totally ignorant of wine; they never use salt or corn. They have no festival day, except in the middle of August. They worship Saturn because in the days of Octavian Augustus they paid tax in the form of gold found on their shores, and then of their own accord, <but they did so> in the times of no previous or subsequent kings or emperors. Seeing that neighbouring regions also paid tax, they thought that a new god of days [or “god of gods”?] had been born, and in that month of August they gathered the whole body of their people together, on Taraconta, quite a large island in the sea of Oceanus; and they made a great heap held together with stones and bitumen, setting up enormous structures of remarkable size, with sewers underneath built of marble, the healing (?) spring of phyrra, and

<sup>34</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 178 ff. The passage is largely derived from Orosius, *Historia adversus Paganos* I, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 181 ff.

<sup>36</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 177 f.

<sup>37</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* pref., 4, 5, 6, ed. PRINZ: 93, 121, 127, 130, 131, 140, 148, 177, 179, 192, 238, 239.

<sup>38</sup> The eschatological role of Gog and Magog, of course, derives from the Bible: on its survival in De Mandeville, GREENBLATT, *Marvelous Possessions* 50.

<sup>39</sup> This list is essentially from Leviticus 11, 13–19.

they called it Morcholom in their language, that is the star of the gods, which they called Saturn through (etymological) derivation of the name. And they built a huge and well-defended city there called Taraconta. This people will work much destruction in the days of Antichrist and they will call him the god of days ["of gods"?]. Their stock with its most wicked seed is shut up behind the Caspian Gates. Indeed they have an appearance (which is) very filthy from grime; their hair is like that of a raven; (they have) the most revolting teeth; (they have) many camels of the type which Bactria bears, numerous of the fastest mules (faster than those of the Nabateans, the Ishmaelites and the Hircanians), the strongest of dogs, (more powerful) than any species, and so enormous that they kill lions, leopards and bears."<sup>40</sup>

The Turks are categorised as unspeakable in a variety of ways: their own physique, their personal hygiene, their eating habits, which involve all sorts of unclean meat, even their own animals, which defy normal categories, with racing mules and lion-killing dogs. Indeed, their eating habits are essentially those condemned in Leviticus;<sup>41</sup> they thus fall precisely into a traditional category of uncleanness, such as has been examined by social anthropologists.<sup>42</sup> Yet there is much more to put the Turks beyond the pale: they are destined to worship Antichrist. At this point the *Cosmography* comes particularly close to such prophetic writings as the Pseudo-Methodius.<sup>43</sup> The Turks thus have an eschatological function in the text quite different from other peoples.<sup>44</sup> Their association with Antichrist has already been foreshadowed by their religion, which is an awful perversion of Christianity. They only have one festival, which they instituted in the days of Augustus, indeed in the time of a tax-collection. Nothing could be a closer indication of the year of the Incarnation. But they celebrated in August, and they erected a monument which defies normal categories even more than their eating habits and their domestic animals: it is stone and bitumen, marble and slime.

By comparison the *cynocephali* are only marginally "Other"; they are not the agents of Antichrist. Indeed, they are not so much worse than their trading partners, the *Germani*, for "Jerome" follows his discussion of the *cynocephali* as follows:

"*Vafri, Fricontae, Murrini, Alapes, Turks, Alans, Meotae, Huns, Frisians, Danes, Vinnosi, Rifei, Olches*, whom the vulgar in those regions call *Orci* [i. e. "hell"]; peoples at a very low level of civilisation, who live the most unclean life of all the kingdoms of the earth, without God, law or institutions. And all the *pagi* of those regions are also known as *Germania*, because (they constitute) huge bodies, (are) huge nations, hardened by the most savage ways of life, quite unsubdued, bearing cold and hardship beyond all other nations. He (the philosopher) says that there are one hundred *pagi* among the very numerous habitable and uninhabitable islands, from the Rhine to the Ocean and the Maeotic marshes."<sup>45</sup>

The *Germani* are, therefore, little better than the *cynocephali*. They are almost as savage, and geographically they are as marginal as they could be, living in the lands between the habitable and the uninhabitable. The author's hostility to them is made all the clearer when one compares this description with Bede's famous, and not dissimilar,

<sup>40</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 4, ed. PRINZ 119ff., see also Avitus, *Carmen* 4, lin. 108–122, where the construction of the Tower of Babel involves bitumen.

<sup>41</sup> Leviticus 11, 13–19.

<sup>42</sup> On Leviticus, DOUGLAS, *Purity and Danger* 41–57; though it should be noted that, like most readers of the Bible, "Jerome" has not interpreted Leviticus along the lines which Douglas argues to have been the original meaning of the text.

<sup>43</sup> Pseudo-Methodius 8, ed. SACKUR 74f.

<sup>44</sup> By comparison, the list of peoples shut up by Alexander in the Pseudo-Methodius 8, is much longer and includes *cynocephali*.

<sup>45</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 2, ed. PRINZ 116f.



list of the continental peoples related to the Anglo-Saxons, whom Ecgbert wished to evangelise.

"He knew that there were very many peoples in Germany from whom the Angles and Saxons, who now live in Britain, derive their origin; hence even up to this day they are by a corruption called *Garmani* by their neighbours the Britons. Now these peoples are the Frisians, Rugians, Danes, Huns, Old Saxons, and *Bructeri*; there are also many other nations in the same land who are still practising heathen rites to whom this soldier in Christ proposed to go, after sailing round Britain, to try if he could deliver any of them from Satan and bring them to Christ."<sup>46</sup>

Despite Bede's concern with christianisation, or perhaps because of it, the paganism of the peoples of *Germania* is treated as a matter of fact, with no hostile descriptor. The peoples whom Ecgbert saw as being related to the Anglo-Saxons, and whom he wished to save, were seen by "Jerome", however, as marginal; they were only just less alien than the *cynocephali*, who were distinctly less "Other" than the Turks; though one might note that the *Cosmography*, perhaps inconsistently, includes the Turks among the peoples of *Germania*. This point may derive simply from the use of the name Turk, like Hun, to indicate a nomadic people,<sup>47</sup> and the Huns are among both the inhabitants of *Germania* listed in the *Cosmography* and the *Garmani* named by Bede. There is, however, a further complication, in that Fredegar, in his version of the Trojan story, had identified the Turks as being related to the Franks through their descent from Troth.<sup>48</sup> One is left to wonder what "Jerome's" description of the Turks is meant to imply about the Franks in view of all these associations.

The *Germani*, the *cynocephali* and the Turks take us further and further from the centre of "Jerome's" cosmographical standpoint. It is necessary to balance consideration of these peoples with a consideration of the centre itself. This, however, is remarkably difficult to define. It is as well to start with the negatives. Given the eschatological interests of the author, one might have expected Jerusalem to provide the centre of "Jerome's" cosmos, just as it is the heart of world of Pseudo-Methodius.<sup>49</sup> In fact it does not. The city is only mentioned twice: Alexander puts on various royal items, including objects from Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives;<sup>50</sup> and Jerusalem also receives one sentence of praise in the context of "Jerome's" final consideration of those areas of the East and South which had hitherto been omitted.<sup>51</sup> In his silence over Jerusalem "Jerome" is curiously close to the *discriptio terrarum* drawn from Orosius, which omits the city altogether. Although Rome is described as *magna*, it fares no better, meriting no more than two references.<sup>52</sup> The name Byzantium appears twice and that of Constantinople once, but without significant comment.<sup>53</sup> Of the great cities of the Ancient World, Athens alone receives some attention as a place of learning, visited by "Aethicus" in his five-year stay in Greece.<sup>54</sup> But although the city clearly attracted "Jerome's" attention, his emphasis on the city's philosophical tradition suggests that what interested him was its classical reputation.

The centre of "Jerome's" world could, in fact, be where an innocent reader of the work's title might expect it to be. That is Istria. This is the supposed homeland of "Aethi-

<sup>46</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* V, 9, trans. COLGRAVE.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. POHL, *The role of the steppe peoples in Eastern and Central Europe* 67 f.

<sup>48</sup> Fredegar III, 2, ed. KRUSCH 93.

<sup>49</sup> See REININK, *Pseudo-Methodius: a concept of history in response to the rise of Islam*.

<sup>50</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 209.

<sup>51</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 238.

<sup>52</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 153, 230.

<sup>53</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 192, 213, 241.

<sup>54</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 185, 193–196.

cus", and it may well be that "Jerome" wished his audience to understand that he came from there as well – it is by no means clear which sections of the text are meant to have been drawn from the source and which are to be read as "Jerome's" personal additions. Apart from allusions to "Aethicus" Istrian origins,<sup>55</sup> however, references to the region are distinctly unsettling. Istria is said to be known for its heretics, a probable reference to the Aquileian schism.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps more important, it is one of the scenes of the war between Romulus and Francus. As a result it was totally devastated, and remained so: "and up to the time of my birth what had long been cultivated was reduced to a wilderness."<sup>57</sup>

The war between Romulus and Francus is dealt with in one of the longest narrative excursus in the *Cosmography*. It begins with a strangely distorted version of early Roman history. King Numitor<sup>58</sup> oppressed Tuscany, Noricum, Istria and Albania, before his grandson Romulus rose up and killed him. Romulus then extended the city of Evandria, renaming it as Rome. Thereafter he embarked upon a series of wars of aggression, including a second bloodier war against Troy, whose royal family had survived in the persons of Francus and Vassus. These two then allied with the Albanians, but they were defeated, and driven into the *deserta Germaniae*, building a town called *Sichambria* in their barbaric language. Romulus meanwhile attacked Istria, Northern Italy and Gaul, before losing his strength and soul *iniquissime et indigne*.

This history deserves consideration. There may be some folk-memory of conflict between Franks and Byzantines in the Veneto.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps more important is the relationship of the story to that narrated in the seventh century by Fredegar, who presents the early Franks as being the Trojan followers of Francio, under whose leadership they first devastated Asia and then migrated to the land between the Danube and Rhine.<sup>60</sup> Between Fredegar and "Jerome", however, there is an enormous gulf. Francus and Vassus are no heroes in the *Cosmography*, and they will end their days in a *Germania* which, as we have seen, is distinctly "Other". By implication they are not much better than the *cy-nocephali*, the Turks, with whom, as we have seen, they seem to be associated, or the Amazons, from whom the *Germani* seem to have derived their weapons.<sup>61</sup> Romulus is no better; indeed, he is arguably the most tyrannical figure in the whole of "Jerome's" work. The story of Romulus and Francus thus places the *Cosmography* of "Aethicus Ister" emotionally in a milieu hostile both to Rome and to the Franks.<sup>62</sup> Some circles in Bavaria in the mid eighth century, who had been alienated by the rise of the Carolingians, would, of course, have espoused this hostility to the Franks<sup>63</sup> – so might Istria itself, but evidence for the attitudes held there is lacking.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* pref., ed. PRINZ 88; vgl. *ibid.* 6.

<sup>56</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 153. This passage, like the description of the ravaging of Istria, might indicate a sixth- or seventh-century origin for some of the material preserved in the text.

<sup>57</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 230–233.

<sup>58</sup> On Numitor, Orosius, *Historia adversus Paganos* II, 2, 3; *ibid.* 4, 2.

<sup>59</sup> On this see most recently, WOOD, *The Frontiers of Western Europe* 240–242.

<sup>60</sup> Fredegar III, 2, ed. KRUSCH 93; see also *Historia Daretis Frigii*, ed. KRUSCH 199. On the Trojan origins of the Franks see WOOD, *Defining the Franks* 50f.

<sup>61</sup> Aethicus, *Cosmographia* 6, ed. PRINZ 181f.

<sup>62</sup> I thus find myself unable to accept the view of PRINZ, *Die Cosmographie des Aethicus* 44–49, that it is likely to have been written "in einem zentralen Gebiet, das etwa vom mittleren oder nördlicheren Frankreich bis zum Bodenseegebiet reicht und das Zentrum von Pippins Machtentfaltung bildet". Prinz (49) himself notes the anti-Frankish tone of the work. It is worth adding that while Fredegar seems to have been hostile to the Merovingians, he was not hostile to the Franks in general.

<sup>63</sup> For relations between the early Carolingians and Bavaria in the mid eighth century, as presented in the *Annales Mettenses priores*, see WOOD, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* 288ff.

<sup>64</sup> Again one might question whether Istrian hostility to the Romans and Franks was not rooted in sixth-century conflicts.

Whether or not it was the homeland of the author of the *Cosmography* in reality, Istria provides the symbolic centre of the work. Yet, while it ought to be a "familiar" place, it is a desert. The forces that ought – at least from a modern perspective – to have been highly regarded by a Latin speaker of the mid eighth century, Rome and the Franks, are no more than thugs. "Jerome" surveys God's creation from a point of desolation, and what he sees around him is not the "Familiar" surrounded by the "Other", but the alien surrounded by the yet more alien. Like John de Mandeville, "Jerome" achieves a "perpetual displacement",<sup>65</sup> and he does so, despite the humour of his writing, in an infinitely more sombre way than the later traveller. This displacement, while it depends largely on the material presented by the author, is enhanced by the structure of the work: a series of descriptions of geographical circuits, none of which is complete. Greenblatt's discovery in de Mandeville of "a half-smile, embracing everything, laying claim to nothing ... linked to the inescapable errancy of language, an errancy that inscribes difference everywhere, not only at the margins but at the centre, not only in the other but in the self",<sup>66</sup> could serve for "Jerome" as well, except that it gives an impression which is ultimately too optimistic.

Read as an exercise in difference the *Cosmography* of "Aethicus Ister" becomes not an ironic criticism of Boniface's attitude towards cosmology, as has been suggested,<sup>67</sup> but a comment on the whole state of creation. The author's alienation may be that of a *peregrinus*, but it does not read like that of an Irishman on a *peregrinatio pro Christo*. It is too much of an indictment of the Frankish and Germanic world. Further, it is not the alienation of a *peregrinus* desirous of evangelising an alien people, as was Virgil;<sup>68</sup> the author's largely fulfilled intention of omitting any consideration of paganism hardly fits with the attitudes of a would-be missionary.

Whether or not the author came in fact from Istria hardly matters; the text represents itself as the text of a displaced person. In so far as the work might be tied down geographically, it is not in terms of authorship, but in terms of readership. And among the centres where the work was read one can certainly list Bavaria, as is clear from the manuscript evidence. Bernhard Bischoff ascribed one of the earliest manuscripts, now in Leipzig, to the scriptorium of Arbeo of Freising, although this attribution has been queried; another, now in Wolfenbüttel, he ascribed to the monastery of St Emmeram in Regensburg.<sup>69</sup> Winfried Stelzer discovered fragments of what may have been a yet earlier manuscript of the work in the Austrian monastery of Admont.<sup>70</sup> Of the other early manuscripts one may come from St Gallen and another from Murbach; this leaves only three more distant manuscripts which antedate the millenium: one from Tours, one from Brittany and one finally from St Augustine's Canterbury. Not only did Bischoff think that a manuscript of the *Cosmography* had been copied at Freising, he also detected what may be a verbal borrowing in Arbeo's *Vita Corbiniani*, although this identification has not convinced everyone by any means.<sup>71</sup> The work of Löwe and others might usefully be considered as identifying not the author, but a textual community which received the *Cosmography*.

In considering why the *Cosmography* should have had an audience in Bavaria, it is worth noting that its concern to define alien peoples would have made a great deal of

<sup>65</sup> GREENBLATT, *Marvelous Possessions* 48.

<sup>66</sup> GREENBLATT, *Marvelous Possessions* 50.

<sup>67</sup> LÖWE, *Salzburg als Zentrum literarischen Schaffens* 27.

<sup>68</sup> Most trenchantly summarised by WOLFRAM, *Virgil of St Peter's at Salzburg* 415–420.

<sup>69</sup> See the survey of Prinz in *Aethicus, Cosmographia*, ed. PRINZ 55–67.

<sup>70</sup> STELZER, *Alt-Salzbürger Fragment*.

<sup>71</sup> *Vita Haimhramni*, ed. BISCHOFF 87.

sense in a frontier region. Further, some of the peoples described in the *Cosmography* could have been equated with neighbours of the Bavarians. Admittedly there are no Slavs or Avars, and of course no Magyars in the work; but there are Turks.<sup>72</sup> Leaving aside the more curious associations of Franks and Turks made by Fredegar, late sixth- and early seventh-century Byzantine writings speak of Avars, Huns and Turks in the same breath.<sup>73</sup> By the eighth century, at the latest, the Turks had been identified as Avars in a Latin translation of the prophetic work of Pseudo-Methodius.<sup>74</sup> With its eschatological interests this is a text which has much in common with the *Cosmography* of "Aethicus Ister", and one version of it may even have been compiled in Bavaria,<sup>75</sup> thus sharing a textual community with the *Cosmography*. In the tenth century the word *Turchi* could be used to describe Magyars;<sup>76</sup> it was a term that could be used generally to describe peoples who originated in the steppes. The Turks could, therefore, serve as a representation (however fantastical) of peoples such as the Avars who originated on the steppes, and who continued to pose a threat to the Bavarians until Charlemagne's destruction of them around the year 796.

Looking as they did across a number of frontiers, Virgil or Arbeo could easily have found resonances in *Cosmography* of "Aethicus", despite the relative absence of religious comment.<sup>77</sup> The Cosmographer's account of lands to the south of Baltic would have seemed ominously plausible to Arbeo as he wrote down the tale of a pilgrim to the shrine of St Emmeram, who was captured by thieves and sold to some Franks, who then sold him on to a Thuringian who lived on the edge of pagan Saxon territory. There he worked as a carpenter for three years. Then one of his fellow workers died, leaving a very beautiful widow, but no children. His master told the Bavarian slave to marry her, but he refused on religious grounds, pointing out that he had left a wife at home. At this his master threatened to hand him over to the idolatrous Saxons; as a result he felt obliged to accept the woman, but he tried to persuade his new wife to abstain from sex. When she refused, he asked for three days abstinence. While the woman lay grumpily in bed, Emmeram appeared to the man in his sleep and urged him to flee, which he did, managing the return journey to Regensburg. Franks, Thuringians and Saxons all come off badly in this one story, as robbers, idolators and as observers of different marital practices.<sup>78</sup>

But potentially still greater was the ideological divide between Western Europe and the Slav lands.<sup>79</sup> This divide would have ensured a continuing relevance for the *Cosmography* in Bavarian circles. During the late ninth century the Churches of Salzburg and Freising, faced with Constantine, Methodius and a new Slavonic alphabet, would have found a particular relevance in "Jerome's" interests in letters. In short, regardless of whether a reader was interested in a description of the world in which everything was

<sup>72</sup> LÖWE, Salzburg als Zentrum literarischen Schaffens 38, 40.

<sup>73</sup> For Avars in conflict with Turks: Menander fr. 4, 2; 25, 2, ed. BLOCKLEY, with 252, n. 19 for identifications; for Avars under the Turks, Menander fr. 10, 1; 19, 1. Also for Hunnic tribes as Turks, Theophylact Simocatta I, 8, 15; III, 6, 9; IV, 6, 10, ed. WHITEY; and for Avars as Huns, Theophylact Simocatta I, 3, 2. I am indebted to Walter Pohl for advice on this issue.

<sup>74</sup> Pseudo-Methodius 10. On the date of the Latin version, which is determined by the manuscripts, SAKUR, Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen 56. For this and the following sentences I am indebted to Helmut Reimitz, who supplied me with information and references. In later Syrian tradition Turks and Arabs could be confused: see PALMER, The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles 178, n. 445.

<sup>75</sup> PRINZ, Frühe abendländische Aktualisierung 22.

<sup>76</sup> POHL, The role of the steppe peoples 68 f.

<sup>77</sup> LÖWE, Salzburg als Zentrum literarischen Schaffens 40.

<sup>78</sup> ARBEO, Vita Haimhrammi 37–43. The story itself, however is derived from Jerome's Vita Malchi.

<sup>79</sup> See also, WOOD, Missionaries and the Christian Frontier.

“Other” except Istria, which had been destroyed, the *Cosmography* of “Aethicus Ister” contains enough explorations of alien cultures to have been of continuing interest to all those who lived on an early medieval frontier.

Juxtaposition of known Bavarian audiences of “Jerome’s” *Cosmography* with information in the text allows us to hypothesise about what made the work relevant to a set of textual communities. This does not necessarily help us to understand the purpose of the author himself. Indeed, authorship and the context of the work’s composition remain elusive. But studies of attitudes within the work, undertaken from starting points which draw on modern theories of composition and on anthropological studies of reactions to the “Other”, may allow us to open up what is a substantial and indeed fascinating text, which has unfortunately become far too much the preserve of a hitherto insoluble debate over authorship.