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New World Discovery

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Abstract and Keywords

This article examines how English texts register expansive geographical encounters in the period up to the death of Elizabeth. Voyages of discovery and their accounts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have rarely been considered in the context of periodizing ideas of “medieval” and “early modern.” Though once such voyages are read not with the hindsight of the twenty-first century but from *within* the tradition of prior travel, the newness of the New World emerges as a modern construct with limited historical purchase. Texts and maps that verbalize voyages beyond the boundaries of what was known are situated as much in individual experience as in collective perspective; they are often more invested in their own reception than in measurable objects and dateable events.

Keywords: New World, America, discovery, geography, Atlantic, exploration, travel, medieval, early modern, England

Judging by the early names for America, medieval and Tudor writers often failed to recognize the New World as new or indeed single. Asia and Paradise, the Western Indies and the Fortunate Isles, Atlantis and Norumbega, Antillia and the elusive Isle of Brazil—all these and many more were applied to the Americas or parts thereof during the first two centuries after 1492. Even John Cabot’s (c.1451–1498) “new found land” of 1497 does not reveal whether the land was new or whether it was a newly found part of something old. Edmundo O’Gorman’s opinion on American discovery remains astute today: only what is known to exist in principle can be discovered; finding *ex nihilo* is invention.¹ When it eventually began to transpire that a fourth continent had to be invented, the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller (c.1470–1520) improvised with panache and creativity: on his two 1507 maps of the world he assigns the name “America” to what is now South America in the belief that the new land was first visited by the Florentine explorer Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512),² whose accounts were at the time outperforming in popularity those linked to Christopher Columbus (1450/51–1506). Waldseemüller’s eccentric choice implies that “America” was simply not important enough to be got right. The term gained momentum only during the second half of the sixteenth century, following Gerard Mercator’s (1512–1594) projections of 1538.³ The

spatial and narrative invention of the American continents remained an unfinished project well into the seventeenth century, despite the circumnavigations of Ferdinand Magellan (c.1480–1521) in 1519–1522 and Francis Drake (1540–96) in 1577–1580. Spain did not adopt the name “America” until 1758, and English writers, usually drawing on inferior, homemade cartography, continued to struggle with the name and the newness of the continents.⁴ John Dee (1527–1609), self-appointed cartographer and imperial ideologue to Elizabeth I, insisted as late as 1580 on the term “Atlantis” for the Americas, and in 1595, Walter Raleigh (1554–1618), having trusted Dee’s maps and advice during earlier attempts to colonize Virginia, went searching for El Dorado, a bizarre conflation of distorted Spanish reports of Muisca traditions and faint echoes of India’s famed gold.⁵

From a literary angle just about everything in the title of this article is open to scrutiny: arguably, the New World was not discovered but invented; there was not one new world but many, and most of them had been a part of Europe’s speculative geographies for centuries. Texts and maps that verbalize voyages beyond the boundaries of what was known are situated as much in individual experience as in collective perspective; they are therefore often more invested in their own reception than in measurable objects and dateable events. Rather than inventorying landfalls and sightings, this article is concerned with the ways in which English texts register expansive geographical encounters in the period up to the death of Elizabeth.

Periodization—the academic practice of segmenting the human past into thematic episodes—has come under sustained pressure since the 1960s. With much critical energy expended on questioning the transition from an allegedly irrational Middle Ages to supposedly enlightened proto-modernity, the former integrity of “Renaissance” or “early modernity” has long given way to slippage, so that the once formidable boundary of 1500 continues to shed its luster. Paradigms of continuity and change now vie for prestige whenever intellectual developments such as the Reformation or humanism happen to be under discussion, yet the practical circumstance of European ships having reached the Americas in the fifteenth century remains an inveterate period marker: “in the age of the Renaissance ... western Europeans rediscovered aspects of the classical past that stimulated radical new ideas about man’s place in the universe.... And this culminated in the opening of sea routes ... across the Atlantic to the West Indies.”⁶ When such voyages are read from *within* the tradition of prior travel and viewed *through* the eyes of contemporary narratives, “New World discovery” emerges as a modern construct with limited historical purchase. Modernity may still enjoy a colloquial refuge in the phrase “voyages of discovery,” but the roles these voyages assumed in literary history resist convenient periodization.

Worlds Apart: Asia, Africa, and America

Medieval Europeans inherited their ideas about geography from classical antiquity, as mediated by patristic writers, in particular Augustine (354–430) and his collaborator Orosius (c. 375– d. after 418). Both Augustine and Orosius read the physical world as a

book containing the history of salvation. Though paradoxically these two post-Roman writers were steeped in classical learning, their programmatic iconoclasm rejected most if not everything that was not Christian. Since Christianity was a relatively recent phenomenon, Augustine's and Orosius's sense of place was not only spatial, but also historical and promissory: their geography moralized the Christian conquest of a pagan past while pointing forward to the promise of the heavenly Jerusalem. The idea of moralizing history was not new—in his *Lives*, Plutarch (c. 46–120) does much the same for Roman Greece—but early Christian scholars writing in the Augustinian mold, such as the Visigothic bishop of Seville, Isidore (c. 560–636), infused the tripartite division of the world into Europe, Asia, and Africa (or Libya) with a temporal, and hence, moral dimension. The maps accompanying Isidore's foundational encyclopedic work *The Etymologies* (c. 615–630s) fixed in the minds of generations of readers the notion of three continents huddled around the Mediterranean in an otherwise menacing, all-encircling world ocean. Earth was spherical, largely made up of water, with landmasses forever placed beyond the reach of Europeans.⁷ Essentially, this was still a Roman universe, where the only familiar shores were those of the Mediterranean, which the Romans called “our sea,” or *mare nostrum* in Latin. All external seas—tributaries to the violent world ocean—were mythologized: the Pillars of Hercules guarded the transgressive passage to the open Atlantic; the North Sea of the barbarians was considered cruel and untamable; and the distant continental limits of Africa and Asia lay beyond imagination, denying access to mortals.

The speculative geography of premodern Christianity was underpinned by the enchanted pragmatism of a theology increasingly enamored of logical reasoning. Hence, all topography was causative. Augustinian, orthodox thought regarded the ocean as too vast to be crossed because God had placed it as a boundary to prevent humans from ever reaching Paradise, which for a long time was thought to occupy the eastern edge of Asia.⁸ For Augustine, this final geographical boundary was therefore also ethical:

And it would be too absurd to say that some men might have sailed from one side of the Earth to the other, arriving there having crossed the immense tract of the ocean.⁹

It was absurd not only because the ocean could not be crossed, but also because traveling to the Earthly Paradise would have meant traveling back in time. Similar arguments circulated in connection with the equator, which was deemed too hot to permit passage to and exploration of subequatorial Africa and, in some cases, the Antipodes—the surmised down-under and topsy-turvy world of the “unknown southern land,” the *terra australis incognita*, or simply “Australia.”¹⁰ This world was long known of and even thought by some to be inhabited by an inverted, upside-down civilization.

Christian Europe's deepest geographical fascination was not with the unknown Australian world or the presumed Atlantic island of Brazil but rather with Asia. The vastness of this continent became apparent only during the thirteenth-century voyages to China by Marco Polo (1254–1324) and a number of missions to the ancestral homeland of the Mongols by

John of Plano Carpini (d. 1252), Benedict the Pole (d. 1252), and William Rubruck (fl. 1249–1257).¹¹ John's outbound journey to Mongolia, begun in Lyons in April 1245, took more than fifteen months to complete, the return voyage another year.¹² Their accounts opened up the scope and nature of Asia to the European imagination as a categorically new world, or *mundus novus*. Variations of the phrase "new world" were frequently employed during these and other encounters with the Far East. For instance, in a letter to France's Louis IX, William Rubruck, who later became the first Westerner to write about Buddhist reincarnation, describes a group of Asians he encountered in the Crimea as coming from "some other world" (*quoddam aliud seculum*).¹³

John of Plano Carpini's account became particularly influential because parts of it had been copied by Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264) into his *Speculum historiale*, which, in turn, was often combined with Vincent's major work, the *Speculum maius* (written 1230–1260), one of the most widely copied encyclopedias in medieval Europe.¹⁴ The rapid proliferation of Asian travel narratives shows that the discovery of the Far East trumped any interest generated in the Americas during the fifty years after Columbus's first voyage (1492). Europe's ancient obsession with Asia was also fueled by echoes of Alexander the Great's (356–323 BCE) legendary conquest of India and the stores of gold believed to lie there, waiting to be monetized by consortia of Europe's merchants and their emboldened bankers. Geopolitics played its part, too: the sweeping conquest by Islamic polities of what used to be the Christian Mediterranean and Iberia forced Europe's leaders to look to the East for support. Some attempts led to the above missions to the Mongol Empire sent by Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254); others took a more imaginative shape, giving birth to the myth of Prester John, whose famed Far Eastern Christian realm was desperately trying to reconnect with European Christendom.

The anonymous *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (c. 1350–1360), originally written in England in Anglo-French, was one of the most widely read travel narratives in medieval and early modern Europe.¹⁵ Essentially an amalgamation of various actual sources (including John of Plano Carpini via the *Speculum historiale*), the work begins with a pilgrimage to Palestine before indulging in the wonders of the East, a dreamlike world populated by dog-headed people, apocryphal tribes, and abhorrent rituals. The narrator of *The Travels* retraces the steps of Alexander in India, visits the Mongol Empire, and eventually arrives at the court of the legendary Prester John. Here, *The Travels* draws on one of history's greatest hoaxes, *The Letter of Prester John* (c. 1165), written in the hope of forging a Christian alliance.¹⁶ Tucked away among the marvels of the Asian new world of *The Travels* is the extent to which the moral boundaries of the Augustinian worldview had come under pressure in the fourteenth century:

So I say truly that a man could go all round the world, above and below, and return to his own country, provide he has his health, good company, and a ship, as I said above. And all along the way he would find men, lands, islands, cities and towns, such as there are in those countries. For you know well that those men who live right under the Antarctic Pole are foot against foot to those who live right

below the Arctic Pole, just as we and those who live at our Antipodes are foot against foot.¹⁷

With more than three hundred surviving manuscripts in many European languages, in addition to countless printed copies, *The Travels* dwarfs all the actual accounts of Asian and Far Eastern exploration.¹⁸ In England the work gradually went into decline after Richard Hakluyt (1552–1616), who had printed the text in the first edition of his *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), removed *The Travels* from the second edition of his collection (1598–1600).

The ultimate prize located in the Far East was of course the Earthly Paradise, believed to shelter the Garden of Eden. Perhaps the most vivid encounter with this final, and first, frontier of the new world of Asia occurs in the Scots poem *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour* by Gilbert Hay (c. 1403– d. in or after 1456), written a generation before Columbus's first voyage, though revised posthumously in about 1499. After having been lifted by a supernatural tide to the barely visible top of a colossal wall, Alexander the Great finally surveys a stupendous vista of Paradise:

Than he beheld the regioun þat was fare,
And all the cuntre bakwart to the west;
And in þe sey on side his sicht he kest,
And saw the goldin crage þat stude it by,
Off massy gold schinand sa gloriously;
He saw the cirkill of Paradise about,
Quhilk closit is all with þe sey, withoutin dout,
All but ane threid þat ansueris to þe land
Quhare that the fludis foure ar out flowand.¹⁹

It is as if he were inspecting a life-sized world map, a *mappa mundi*, many of which portrayed Paradise as a circle or rectangle perched on the eastern end of Asia.²⁰ Out of thin air an angel presents Alexander with his tribute—an apple and the promise of a proud life cut short:

With that ane angell to the wall couth cum,
Said, "Alexander, here art þow richt welcum—
For thai tribute ane apill here I the gif;
And think that þow has schorte tyme for to liff,
And kepe it wele, quhan þow cummys hame, it wey—
It sall turne hewe quhat tyme þat þow be fey.
Thow sall nowther cum into þis place, na luke;
Fare wele," he said—with that his leif he take.²¹

Here, as in other instances of Augustinian geography, spatial hubris is checked by a moral boundary—in this case, an apple—as a tangible memento that the fallen humanity of the classical past could not enter Paradise for lack of a savior.

New Atlantic Worlds

For much of its early history, Atlantic exploration remained a literary domain. Although knowledge of the Scandinavian landfalls and possible settlements in North America does not appear to have reached Britain, an insular and originally Irish Christian tradition of sought ascetic experiences in the open sea. For religious recluses the Atlantic Ocean became a substitute for the desert of early Christian tradition. In their attempts to emulate the experience of the founder of Christian monasticism, the hermit Anthony (c. 251–356), who had spent some thirteen years in Egypt’s Nitrian Desert (now Wadi El Natrun), Irish monks sought what they called *heremum in oceano*—the desert in the ocean. Occasionally, these attempts led to the establishment of religious outposts, such as the monastery on the island of Iona in Scotland, founded by Columba (521–597).²² Some of these narratives shared common ancestors with pre-Christian accounts of being set adrift in the Atlantic, often with the result of discovering new islands. The best of these *immrama*, or “rowings about,” is the Latin *Voyage of St. Brendan*, written in Ireland in the late tenth century.²³ This text tells the story of the Irish abbot Brendan who desires to see Paradise and, together with a group of monks under his spiritual guidance, sails westward into the open sea, encountering marvels not unlike those reportedly found in Asia according to the Wonders of the East tradition and *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. In a tale that echoes some of the exploits associated with Odysseus’s legendary final voyage that took him past the Pillars of Hercules, Brendan reaches the Earthly Paradise, sometimes conflated with the Fortunate Isles. The twelfth-century Anglo-French adaptation by a certain Benedeit, *Le Voyage de Saint Brandan* (before 1118), elaborately restates Brendan’s arrival in the Earthly Paradise of the earlier Latin text in the terms of timeless perfection:

Avant en vait cil juvenceals,
 Par paraïs vait ovoec eals.
 De beals bois e de rivere
 Veient terre mult plenere;
 Gardins est la prairie,
 Qui tuzdis est beal flurie.
 Li flur süef mult i flairent,
 ...
 Esteit süef tuzdis i est,
 Li fruiz de arbres e de flurs prest,
 Bois repleniz de veneisun,
 E tut li flum de bon peisun.

[The young man moved forward, accompanying them through Paradise. They saw a very fertile land of beautiful woods and meadows; the meadows form a garden which is permanently in full bloom. The flowers there smell very sweet.... there is permanently pleasant summer there with fruit on the trees and flowers always in bloom. The woods are always full of game and there is good fish in all the rivers.]²⁴

Brendan's Fortunate Isles became an acknowledged Atlantic discovery in written sources. The late-thirteenth-century Hereford *mappa mundi*, the largest surviving medieval map of its kind, includes Brendan in its representation of the Fortunate Isles, placing them where other maps put the Canaries.²⁵ Six copies of the Anglo-French version of Brendan's voyage have reached us, while extant witnesses of the Latin voyage exceed 120. Versions exist in almost all European languages, and the condensed accounts of the voyage of Brendan continued to circulate in medieval and early modern England with certain branches of the *South English Legendary* tradition and in William Caxton's (1415-24-1492) printing of the *Golden Legend* (1483).

Other accounts of Atlantic encounters and discoveries reached England often indirectly. In his influential Latin *History of the Bishops of Hamburg-Bremen* Adam of Bremen (*fl.* late eleventh century) lists a number of Atlantic voyages, most spectacularly that of "certain noble men of Frisia" who sailed toward the northern Atlantic beyond Iceland, and "of a sudden ... fell into that numbing ocean's dark mist which could hardly be penetrated with the eyes. And, behold, the current of the fluctuating ocean whirled back to its mysterious fountainhead and with most furious impetuosity drew the unhappy sailors, who in their despair now thought only of death, on to chaos; this they say is the abysmal chasm."²⁶ Adam was the first to mention an island called Vinland, believed to lie somewhere in North America: "[King Sweyn Forkbeard of Sweden] spoke also of yet another island of the many found in that ocean. It is called Vinland because vines producing excellent wine grow wild there."²⁷ Adam's Vinland resonated through Scandinavian and European sources before it became the inspiration for the controversial Vinland map, one of the most notorious twentieth-century forgeries.²⁸ In the Western Hemisphere the map depicts Greenland and, where North America would be located, a larger island with two river inlets, one of which suggests the St. Lawrence River. The document first surfaced in 1957 and was thought to be a fifteenth-century map drawn on folios that had once belonged to a manuscript copy of Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*. After fifty years of heated controversy the map turned out to be a hoax when twentieth-century pigments were finally confirmed in the ink in 2008.²⁹

Yet one of the most influential medieval accounts of Atlantic geography, the lost fourteenth-century *Inventio Fortunata*, is a discovery still to be made. In a letter to John Dee, Gerard Mercator states that the work was written by a Franciscan friar and mathematician from Oxford and presented to Edward III.³⁰ Although copies of the *Inventio* are no longer extant—presumably because of limited circulation and use aboard ship—the contents can be partially reconstructed. The work supposedly gives an account of the friar's Atlantic voyage beyond Greenland in 1360, charting in some detail the northern Atlantic and the polar region.³¹ The *Inventio* was used by a number of writers, travelers, and cartographers, including the maker of the first globe, Martin Behaim (1459-1507), who refers to the work in his globe of 1492.³² Richard Hakluyt, relying on Dee, believed the author to have been the Oxford scholar Nicholas of Lynn (*fl.* fourteenth century), who enjoyed a reputation as a mathematician. Chaucer refers to Nicholas's *Kalendarium* in his treatise on the astrolabe (ll. 84-86), and Chaucer may very well allude to the friar in the character of the Oxford astronomer Nicholas in *The Miller's Tale*.³³

However, Nicholas of Lynn was a Carmelite and is not known to have traveled. A better identification might be a certain Franciscan called Hugh of Ireland, of whom John Bale writes that he traveled widely, was active in 1360, and once “wrote a certain journey in one volume.”³⁴

The *Inventio* belongs to a family of texts that enticed resourceful mariners to pursue the mythical islands of Brazil and Antillia—two parts of the Atlantic new world long known to speculative geography. Texts such as the *Inventio* both authorized and gained authority through the gradual assimilation of new Atlantic geographies in the form of the Portuguese and the Spanish (re)discoveries of Madeira (1418), the Cape Verde islands (1456), and the Azores (1431–1460)—the latter being some 850 miles (1,350 km) due west of Portugal, or almost 40 percent of the distance between Portugal and Newfoundland. In particular, the discovery of Madeira suggested to speculative cartographers that they could anticipate more such islands.³⁵ Throughout the fifteenth century, similar expeditions were undertaken from Bristol, the best known of which was John Cabot’s voyage to Newfoundland in 1497. There is good reason to believe that Bristol sailors had made previous attempts to reach new lands, mainly questing for the island of Brazil. Some of these mariners may even have attempted such voyages before Columbus first set out in 1492. The early English humanist and antiquarian William Worcester (1415–c.1483), author of *The Boke of Noblesse* and translator of Cicero, reports one such arduous attempt, dating from 1480, in his *Itineraries* covering the years 1477–1480:

1480. On 15 July the ship belonging to [blank] and John Jay junior, of 80 tons burthen, began a voyage from the port of Bristol at King Road to the Island of Brazil to the west of Ireland, ploughing the seas for [blank] and [blank] Lloyd was master of ship, the [most] competent seaman of the whole of England; news came to Bristol on Monday 18 September that the said ship had sailed the seas for about nine months, but had found no island and had been forced back by storms at sea to the port of [blank] in Ireland to rest the ship and the seamen.³⁶

There is no reason to mistrust William’s otherwise sober account. In this case, there is also a family link: one of the co-owners of the ship, John Jay the younger, was his nephew.³⁷

A second account of Bristol’s Atlantic expeditions is the so-called John Day letter, discovered only in 1956. Sent in 1497–1498 to the *Almirante Mayor* of Spain (most probably Columbus) by a certain John Day, an alias of the prominent London mercer Hugh Say, the letter tells of an otherwise unknown but unsuccessful voyage by John Cabot before 1497 and claims that, in an earlier expedition, Bristol sailors had discovered Brazil:

It is considered certain that the cape [Cape Breton in Newfoundland] of the said land was found and discovered in the past by the men from Bristol who found

“Brasil” as your Lordship well knows. It was called the Island of Brasil, and it is assumed and believed to the mainland that the men from Bristol found.³⁸

A learned traveler, the English writer speaks of two books that he promises to send to Columbus: a copy of the *Inventio Fortunata* and a book by Marco Polo. There are good grounds to believe that John Day/Hugh Say did not fabricate all of his claims. Columbus is indeed known to have possessed a copy of Marco Polo’s travels, which has survived with Columbus’s annotations in Seville’s Biblioteca Colombina.³⁹

In recent years, other evidence for Bristol voyages to the New World has to come light, some of which may have taken place before Cabot and perhaps even before Columbus. Robert Thorne the younger (1492–1532), who co-wrote *The Declaration of the Indies*, dispatched a letter from Seville in 1527 to the English ambassador in Spain, making the following claim:

This Inclynation or desire of [discover]ing I inherited from my father, which with an [other] Merchant of Brystow named hughe Elliot [were] the discoverers of the Newfound Landes, of the wh[ich] there is no doubt, (as now plainly appeareth) yf [the] mariners wolde then have been ruled and followed the[ir] Pilots mynde, the Land of the Indians from wh[ence] all the Gold commeth had bene ours: for all is one Coast, as by the Carde appeareth, and is afores[aid].⁴⁰

Despite his bitterness about England not being credited with having reached the New World first, Thorne’s missive reveals the same bookish preferment given to texts (“as by the Carde appeareth”) over experience.

Finds that are still more recent suggest that the archives may hold further surprises. Two documents chanced upon in the late 1970s but published only in 2010 appear to corroborate some of these claims. The first text, a butlerage account dated to 1500–1504, suggests that Robert Thorne Sr.’s partner Hugh Elliot had indeed sailed to Newfoundland, certainly on a later occasion when he was “sailing in 2 ships to the new found isle.”⁴¹ The second document is a note written by Henry VII between 1499 and 1500, in which the king asks his chancellor to suspend proceedings in the court of chancery against the Bristol merchant William Weston, who was in the process of organizing a voyage to the New World: “Soo it is that we entende that [Weston] shall shortly with goddes grace passe and saille for to serche and fynde if he can the new founde land.”⁴² Henry’s firm intervention goes some way to show that the fifteenth-century Atlantic was buzzing with westbound bookish traffic from the Severn Estuary to Andalusia.

The learned tradition of speculative geography from Augustine to the lost *Inventio fortunata* finds its practical application in Columbus’s account of landing during his third voyage (1498–1500) on what is now Trinidad. The following entry reveals his investments in speculative geography and prior narratives about the meaning of space:

I do not find, nor have ever found, writings by any Roman or Greek that identify with certainty the location of the earthly paradise in this world, nor have I seen it on any world map, yet by authority a place was assigned to it arbitrarily.... St Isidore and Bede and Strabo and the Master of the *Historia Scholastica* [Petrus Comestor] and St Ambrose and Duns Scotus and all the holy theologians agree that the earthly paradise was found in the east, etc.⁴³

He has just crossed Augustine's moral boundary of the impenetrable Atlantic, which separates not only the Old World from the New, but also the living from the deserving: "I believe that there is located the earthly paradise, where no man may come without the will of the divine."⁴⁴ Yet, while acknowledging the authority of the writers before him by basing his calculations on their observations, Columbus inserts himself into a long list of patristic and medieval writers who spoke with authority on the location of the Earthly Paradise, which he believes to have finally reached:

These are excellent clues of the earthly paradise, because the place matches the descriptions of the holy and sacred theologians. Likewise, the signs very much support this idea, for I never read nor knew of so much fresh water penetrating so far inland and so near salt water, and another strong proof is the extreme mildness of the climate.⁴⁵

In England, interest in these landfalls and voyages was partial and far from systematic. Not until the late sixteenth century were serious attempts made to settle in the "new found lands." Apparently, the texts that preceded these voyages were more significant than the reports that followed them.

New World Empires

For the first fifty years after Cabot's discovery of Newfoundland, the New World was rarely mentioned in England, just as no English attempts were made to colonize the territories in the West Atlantic.⁴⁶ This "general English indifference to the new geographical knowledge" and the corresponding lack of documented literary interest in the New World make for sobering reading.⁴⁷ In 1509, there appeared two English translations in prose and verse of Sebastian Brant's (1457-58-1521) remarkably successful *Ship of Fools* (1494). Alexander Barclay (c. 1484-1552) furnished the verse translation, and both texts may well contain the first references to the "new found land" in English. And yet these translations fail to update Brant's text with the information that has become widely available following Vespucci's travels. Instead, the new "londe and ground" inserts itself into existing speculative geographies of the Atlantic, which promise similar finds in the future:

For nowe of late hath large londe and grounde
Ben founde by maryners and crafty governours
The whiche londes were never knowen nor founde
Byfore our tyme by our predecessours

And here after shall by our successours
Parchaunce mo be founde wherein men dwell
Of whome we never before this same harde tell.⁴⁸

With a good deal of nonchalance, the interlude *Hick Scorer* (1513–1516) treats the New World as a country or region, not unlike Frisia or Flanders:

Imagination ... But out of what country come ye?

Hick Scorer: Sir, I have been in many a country, As in France, Ireland and in Spain, Portingale, Seville, also in Almain, Friesland, Flanders and in Bourgogne, Calabre, Pouille and Arrogogne, Brittany, Biscay and also in Gasgogne, Naples, Greece and in mids of Scotland, At Cape Saint Vincent and in the new found island.⁴⁹

And in the interlude *Good Order* (also known as *Old Christmas*), which was printed in 1533 but survives only as a fragment, Riot and Gluttony are banished to the “new founde land”:

Ryot: Alas Glotony what shall we than do

Glotonye: In fayth to the new founde land let vs go For in england there is no remedy⁵⁰

This is a no-place, not an exotic world but a forlorn outpost in the cold North Atlantic. These works do not testify to any noticeable interest in the New World or, for that matter, new worlds; they notice the latest additions to speculative geography in passing and with indifference. Perhaps it is indicative of the marginal status of the newly found lands that they appear mostly in plays and interludes, fleeting forms of literature that are embodied in the speech-act and often go undocumented.

The lawyer, playwright, and printer John Rastell (c. 1475–1536) is perhaps the most visible exception to this trend in the first half of the sixteenth century. In his play *The Four Elements* (1517–1518) Rastell breaks with English practice by deciding to use the term “America,” making him the first English writer to do so in the vernacular:

Loo, estwarde beyonde the great occyan
Here entereth the see callyd Mediterran,
Of two thousand myle of lengthe.
The Soudans contrey lyeth here by,
The great Turke on the north syde doth ly,

A man of merveylous strengthe.

This sayde north parte is callyd Europa,
And this south parte callyd Affrica,
This eest parte is callyd Ynde,
But this newe landys founde lately
Ben callyd America by cause only
Americus dyd furst them fynde.⁵¹

These lines are spoken by the character Experience who makes every effort to embed America in the existing worldview. Any exoticism is immediately assimilated by dint of America receiving its name from Amerigo (l. 840)—an assimilation that evokes the Trojan Brutus giving his name to Britain. There is nothing new worldly about Rastell's America. On the contrary, Experience makes sure that true geographical desire will focus on the East, on Jerusalem, India, and, of course, Prester John:

Loo, Jherusalem lyeth in this contrey,
And this beyonde is the Red See,
That Moyses maketh of mencyon.
This quarter is India Minor
And this quarter India Maior,
The lande of Prester Johnn.⁵²

Experience adds that the North remains to be explored ("Many other straunge regions ther be / And people that we not knowe," ll. 849–850), before imagining circumnavigation and speculating about the extent of the Pacific (ll. 853–864). If this perspective departs from the cursory treatment of the New World in English texts, it is probably because Rastell wrote this play in exchange for giving up on his own audacious voyage to America. In 1517 he organized an ill-fated expedition to the New World, setting out with two partners. This expensive episode in Rastell's life ended in a total fiasco: after many delays and frustrations, Rastell's crew abandoned him near Waterford in Ireland, where he spent the next two years.⁵³ He appears to have used the time to compose *The Four Elements*, which was published shortly after his return to London.

As the sixteenth century unfolded, England's race with Spain for European dominance quickly turned into a contest for global preeminence. Spain's expansion into the New World, sharpened by competition with Portugal, contributed to the perceived need in England for extending the island's sphere of influence into the Americas. From the 1550s onward John Dee emerged as the architect of England's Atlantic and imperial growth.⁵⁴ Dee was consulted by all major English explorers of the time: John Cabot's son, Sebastian (1481–1577), Richard Chancellor (d. 1556), Hugh Willoughby (d. c. 1554), Stephen Borough (1525–1584), Martin Frobisher (c. 1535–1594), and Francis Drake's half-brother Humphrey Gilbert (1537–1583). The 1570s saw Frobisher's three expeditions in search for the Northwest Passage (1576–1578) and Gilbert's 1583 voyage to claim Newfoundland. These enterprises marked a more sustained and committed English engagement with America. In particular, Gilbert's journey produced a new cartographic picture of the discovered lands that altered the English perception of the New World and,

by virtue of his seizing Newfoundland for the Crown, led to the creation of an overseas empire. Now it emerges that Dee provided the cartographic groundwork for Gilbert's expedition and that his 1580 map (entitled *Atlantidis, vulgariter Indiae Occidentalis nominatae*), with which Dee furnished the explorer, was a blueprint for colonization.⁵⁵ On its reverse the document reveals British claims to North America, from the voyages of the legendary King Arthur to Frobisher's recent expeditions.⁵⁶ Dee gives the following heading to this list: "A briefe Remembrance of Sondrye foreyne Regions, discovered, inhabited, and partlie Conquered by the Subjects of this Brytish Monarchie: And so [the] lawfull Tytle ... for the dewe Clayme, and just recovery of the same disclosed."⁵⁷ The items that follow are "Madoc, Arthur, St. Brendan, the Cabots, the Boroughs, and ... Martin Frobisher."⁵⁸ In fact, evidence suggests that Dee had the map drafted for Gilbert to realize England's claim to Norumbega (modern New England).⁵⁹ Dee developed his ideology of empire gradually over a twenty-year period, from his *General and Rare Memorials Pertaining to the Perfect Art of Navigation* (1577), the first part of his unfinished work on imperial expansion, to the manuscript treatise *Thalattokratia Brettanike* (British Sovereignty of the Sea) of 1597. Dee's maps and works became essential building bricks in subsequent English attempts to build a transatlantic empire.

Robert Cecil (1563–1612), secretary of state to Elizabeth and, later, James I and VI, oversaw England's rise to a transatlantic empire. It was for Cecil that Richard Hakluyt assembled and printed the most comprehensive collection of travel accounts and documents in English, the monumental *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, printed first in 1589 and reissued in the vastly expanded second edition of 1598–1600.⁶⁰ The *Principal Navigations* attempts to gather all of the known sea voyages and accounts of exploration to establish precedents for England's future conquests, gather information about the various new worlds of Asia and America, and document the coming into being of a maritime English empire. Given the latest research on Dee, Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* could be read as a comprehensive elaboration of the tally of prior claims listed on the reverse of Dee's 1580 map for Gilbert. Hakluyt gathers recent accounts and voyages by the Cabots, Willoughby, Frobisher, and Gilbert; early texts such as Ohthere's voyage to the White Sea; and spurious material on King Arthur, together with the complete *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*—the latter was dropped from the more soberly authoritative second edition. Although Asia plays a significant role in Hakluyt's collection—he prints copious material on the Muscovy Company's trade affairs and includes the Mongol voyages of John of Plano Carpini and William Rubruck—the focus of England's ambitions according to *The Principal Navigations* is the global scramble for the resources and territory of all continents. Hakluyt's America is part of an enlarged mercantilist world that reduces new geographies to political and economic opportunities.

Though Hakluyt's collection appears to have transformed Dee's ideological project of a transatlantic British Empire into a political project endorsed by Hakluyt's patron Cecil, not all late Elizabethan and Jacobean voyages and their accounts were equally committed to colonization. Magellan's and Drake's circumnavigations would appear to have confirmed a view of geography that is disenchanted, to invert Max Weber's term; yet

Raleigh's 1598 expedition to South America in search of a promised City of Gold reveals how little purchase modern ideas of periodization have on sixteenth-century England's public imagination. Everything Augustine had to say about circumnavigation—the total embrace of all known space and time—was directed against pagan Rome, just as Drake's ideological circumnavigation was directed against the Spaniards. Drake's feat and Raleigh's pursuit of the marvels of the New World were both attempted using the most sophisticated science and engineering available, but they were only incrementally, not fundamentally, different from the ideas put forward by the fourteenth-century narrator of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*: "had I had company and shipping that would have gone further, ... we should have seen all the roundness of the firmament."⁶¹ Hakluyt's meticulously curated collection articulates that it was not some intangible "spirit of the age" but the gradual arrival of the legal and administrative needs of a budding transatlantic empire that began to colonize the speculative geographies that had charted earlier courses for westward voyages.

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ Edmundo O'Gorman, *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), 9–47.

(²) Walter D. Mignolo, "Putting the Americas on the Map (Geography and the Colonization of Space)," *Colonial Latin American Review* 1 (1992): 25–63. On early modern cartography, see David Woodward, ed., *The History of Cartography*, vol. 3.1, *Cartography in the European Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

(³) John P. Snyder, "Map Projections in the Renaissance," in *The History of Cartography*, edited by David Woodward, vol. 3.1, pp. 365–380, *Cartography in the European Renaissance*.

(⁴) The first Spanish map to use the term "America" was the *Atlas* of Tomás López de Vargas Machuca, printed in Madrid in 1758 (Rainer Buschmann, *Iberian Visions of the Pacific Ocean, 1507–1899* [London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014], 73). On the underdeveloped nature of early English cartography, see Meg Roland, "'After Poyetes and Astronomers': English Geographical Thought and Early English Print," in *Mapping Medieval Geographies: Geographical Encounters in the Latin West and Beyond, 300–1600*, edited by Keith D. Lilley, pp. 127–151 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

(⁵) On Dee's Atlantis, Nate Probasco, "Cartography as a Tool of Colonization: Sir Humphrey Gilbert's 1583 Voyage to North America," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67 (2014): 429n13. The accounts of Raleigh's voyages are treated by Mary C. Fuller, *Voyages in Print: English Narratives of Travel to America, 1576–1624* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55–84.

(⁶) David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), 3.

(⁷) Stephen A. Barney et al., eds., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

(⁸) The shifting location of Paradise in early narratives and on maps is discussed by Alessandro Scafi, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth* (London: British Library, 2006).

(⁹) "Nimisque absurdum est, ut dicatur aliquos homines ex hac in illam partem, Oceani immensitate traiecta, nauigare ac peruenire potuisse," *De Civitate Dei*, edited by J. E. C. Welldon, vol. 2, p. 201 (London: SPCK, 1924). The translation is taken from *The City of God against the Pagans*, translated by R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 711.

(¹⁰) The authoritative treatment of premodern ideas of Australia is Alfred Hiatt, *Terra Incognita: Mapping the Antipodes before 1600* (London: British Library, 2008). See also Matthew Boyd Goldie, *The Idea of the Antipodes: Place, People, and Voices* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁽¹¹⁾ Gregory G. Guzman, "John of Plano Carpini (c.1188–1252)," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, pp. 307–309 (New York: Garland, 2000); Bolesław Szczęśniak, "The Mission of Giovanni de Plano Carpini and Benedict the Pole of Vratislavia to Halicz," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 7 (1956): 12–20; Anna Czarnowus, "The Mongols, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe: The *Mirabilia* Tradition in Benedict of Poland's *Historia Tartarorum* and John of Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum*," *Literature Compass* 11 (2014): 484–495; and Charles W. Connell, "William of Rubruck (c.1215? –c. 1270?)," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, edited by John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, pp. 646–648. Their accounts have been edited in Enrico Menestò and Claudio Leonardi, eds., *Storia dei Mongoli*, translated by Maria Cristiana Lungarotti (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1989), and Paolo Chiesa, ed., *Guglielmo di Rubruk: Viaggio in Mongolia* (Rome: Mondadori, 2011). Benedict's brief account is printed in Christopher Dawson, *The Mongol Mission: Narratives and Letters of the Franciscan Missionaries in Mongolia and China in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 79–84.

⁽¹²⁾ Guzman, "John of Plano Carpini."

⁽¹³⁾ Quoted from Scott D. Westrem, "From Worlde into Worlde," in *From Worlde into Worlde*, edited by Scott D. Westrem, p. xi (New York: Garland, 1991).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Gregory G. Guzman, "The Encyclopedist Vincent of Beauvais and His Mongol Extracts from John of Plano Carpini and Simon of Saint-Quentin," *Speculum* 49 (1974): 287–307.

⁽¹⁵⁾ *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, translated by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xiv.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The letter was ostensibly sent in 1165 to the Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenos (1118–1180), who forwarded it to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1122–1190). C. E. Nowell, "The Historical Prester John," *Speculum* 28 (1953): 435–445; Michael D. Uebel, "Prester John," in *Trade, Travel, and Exploration*, edited by John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, pp. 504–505.

⁽¹⁷⁾ *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, translated by C. W. R. D. Moseley (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 2005), 129.

⁽¹⁸⁾ *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, trans. Bale, xvii.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Gilbert Hay, *The Buik of King Alexander the Conquerour*, edited by John Cartwright, vol. 2, p. 177, ll. 16, 260–267 (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1986).

⁽²⁰⁾ Scafi, *Mapping Paradise*, passim.

⁽²¹⁾ Hay, *The Buik of King Alexander*, vol. 2, 178, ll. 16, 296–303.

⁽²²⁾ M.O. Anderson and A.O. Anderson, eds., *Adomnan's Life of Columba*, rev. ed. 1991 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961).

⁽²³⁾ David N. Dumville, "Echtrae and Immram: Some Problems of Definition," *Ériu* 27 (1976): 73–94. The Latin text has been edited by Carl Selmer, *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis: From Early Latin Manuscripts* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959) and translated by W. R. J. Barron and Glyn S. Burgess in *The Voyage of Saint Brendan: Representative Versions of the Legend in English Translation* (Exeter, U.K.: Exeter University Press, 2002).

⁽²⁴⁾ Benedeit, *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St. Brendan*, edited by E. G. R. Waters (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), ll 1,735–41 and 1,751–754. The translation is taken from Barron and Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*.

⁽²⁵⁾ Barron and Burgess, *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, 9.

⁽²⁶⁾ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, translated by Francis Tschan, repr. 2002 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 220.

⁽²⁷⁾ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, 219.

⁽²⁸⁾ R. A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston, and George Duncan Painter, *The Vinland Map and the Tartar Relation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1965).

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⁽³⁰⁾ E. G. R. Taylor, "A Letter Dated 1577 from Mercator to John Dee," *Imago Mundi* 13 (1956): 59.

⁽³¹⁾ Chet van Duzer, "The Mythic Geography of the Northern Polar Regions: *Inventio Fortunata* and Buddhist Cosmology," *Culturas Populares* 2 (2006): 8.

⁽³²⁾ David B. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America, 1481–1620* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 82–84. The content of the *Inventio Fortunata* is discussed by Duzer, "The Mythic Geography of the Northern Polar Regions," 8–12.

⁽³³⁾ For Chaucer's *Treatise of the Astrolabe* and *The Miller's Tale*, see Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). The connection between Nicholas of *The Miller's Tale* and Nicholas of Lynn has been frequently made but has failed to convince readers.

⁽³⁴⁾ Taylor, "A Letter Dated 1577," 67.

⁽³⁵⁾ Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 25.

⁽³⁶⁾ William Worcester, *Itineraries of William Worcestre*, edited by John Harvey, p. 309 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969).

⁽³⁷⁾ John Jay the elder was the second husband to William's sister Joan (*Itineraries of William Worcestre*, edited by John Harvey, 309).

⁽³⁸⁾ L. A. Vigneras, "The Cape Breton Landfall: 1494 or 1497: Note on a Letter from John Day," *Canadian Historical Review* 38 (1957): 228. On the letter, see Vigneras, "New Light on the 1497 Cabot Voyage to America," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 36 (1956): 503–506; Alwyn A. Ruddock, "John Day of Bristol and the English Voyages across the Atlantic before 1497," *Geographical Journal* 132 (1966): 225–233; David B. Quinn, "John Day and Columbus," *Geographical Journal* 133 (1967): 205–209; and Patrick McGrath, "Bristol and America, 1480–1631," in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480–1650*, edited by Kenneth Raymond Andrews, Nicholas Patrick Canny, and Paul Edward Hedley Hair, pp. 86–87 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1978).

⁽³⁹⁾ Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 106–107.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ James Alexander Williamson, ed., *The Cabot Voyages and Bristol Discovery under Henry VII*, Hakluyt Society, 2nd S. 120 (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 202.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Evan T. Jones, "Henry VII and the Bristol Expeditions to North America: The Condon Documents," *Historical Research* 83 (2010): 452.

⁽⁴²⁾ Jones, "Henry VII and the Bristol Expeditions," 447.

⁽⁴³⁾ *Christopher Columbus—Accounts and Letters of the Second, Third, and Fourth Voyages*, edited by Paolo Taviani, Consuelo Varela, Juan Gil, and Maria Conti, translated by Luciano F. Farina and Marc A. Beckwith, vol. 1, pp. 87–88 (Rome, 1994).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ *Christopher Columbus*, edited by Paolo Taviani et al., vol. 1, 88.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ *Christopher Columbus*, edited by Paolo Taviani et al., vol. 1, 88.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Some circumstantial evidence appears to point to a possible English settlement in Newfoundland, perhaps in or near Carbonear. See Evan T. Jones, "Alwyn Ruddock: 'John Cabot and the Discovery of America,'" *Historical Research* 81 (2008): 246–250.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Christian Zacher, "Travel and Geographical Writings," in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050–1500*, edited by Albert E. Hartung, vol. 7, p. 2235 (New Haven, Conn.: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1986). Zacher sums up late medieval travel writing in asserting that "virtually none of it reflects the enlarging horizons of contemporary continental geographers and travellers" (p. 2235). The standard work gathering premodern and early accounts of North America is David B. Quinn, *New American World: A Documentary History of America until 1612*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1979).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Quoted from Quinn, *New American World*, vol. 1, 129.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Ian Lancashire, ed., *Two Tudor Interludes: The Interlude of Youth, Hick Scorer* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1980), 184–185, ll. 307–315.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ *Old Christmas*, in *Collections*, edited by W. W. Greg, vol. 4, p. 37, ll. 75–77 (London: Oxford University Press for the Malone Society).

⁽⁵¹⁾ Richard Axton, ed., *Three Rastell Plays* (Cambridge, U.K.: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 51, ll. 829–840.

⁽⁵²⁾ Axton, ed., *Three Rastell Plays*, 51, ll. 841–846.

⁽⁵³⁾ Rastell's "voyage of discovery" is well documented because of the court case that ensued. The documents have been printed in Arthur William Reed, *Early Tudor Drama: Medwall, the Rastells, Heywood, and the More Circle* (London: Methuen, 1926), appendixes I and II. See also E. J. Devereux, *A Bibliography of John Rastell* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 9–10.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Ken MacMillan, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1576–1640* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 153–155.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Probasco, "Cartography as a Tool of Colonization," 429.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Probasco, "Cartography as a Tool of Colonization," 429.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ William H. Sherman, "Putting the British Seas on the Map: John Dee's Imperial Cartography," *Cartographica* 35 (1998): 4.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Sherman, "Putting the British Seas on the Map," 4.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Probasco, "Cartography as a Tool of Colonization," 430–431.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ On Hakluyt, see the recent collection Claire Jowitt and Daniel Carey, eds., *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe*, Hakluyt Society, e.s., 47 (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate and the Hakluyt Society, 2012). Carey and Jowitt are the general editors of the first critical edition of *The Principal Navigations*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press in fourteen volumes.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Moseley, trans., *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 128.

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